

Discussion at a General Assembly of Soviet Composers

Andrei Zhdanov, Speech at a General Assembly of Soviet Composers. February 17, 1948

Comrades, the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) has decided to assemble a conference of Soviet musicians for the following reasons.

Recently the Central Committee took part in the social preview of the new opera by Comrade Muradeli, *Great Friendship*. You can well imagine with what attention and interest the Central Committee anticipated the very fact of the appearance of a new Soviet opera. Unfortunately, the hopes of the Central Committee were not justified. The opera *Great Friendship* turned out to be a failure.

What were, in the opinion of the Central Committee, the reasons, and what were the circumstances which led to the bankruptcy of this opera? What are the basic defects of this opera?

Speaking of the basic defects of the opera, one must first of all mention its music. In the music of this opera there is not a single memorable melody. The music does not reach the listener. It is not by accident that a rather considerable and sufficiently qualified audience, consisting of no fewer than five hundred people, did not respond during the performance to any part of the opera.

The music of the opera turned out to be very poor. The substitution of inharmonious and at the same time noisy improvisations for melody transformed the opera into a chaotic assortment of screeching sounds. The resources of the orchestra in the opera are utilized to a very limited extent. Throughout a major portion of the opera, the musical accompaniment consists of but a few instruments, and only once in a while, sometimes in the most unexpected places, the whole orchestra] ensemble enters in stormy, discordant, and often cacophonous interventions, getting on the nerves of the listener and violently perturbing his mood. This disharmony, this lack of correspondence between the music and the actions, moods, and events, represented on the stage in the course of the opera, produces a depressing effect. A drum intrudes on the most lyrical moments of intimate sentiments; on the other hand, in the scenes of fighting and excitement, when the action on the stage portrays heroic events, the music for some reason becomes soft and lyrical. This creates a break between the musical accompaniment and the moods which the artists are supposed to reflect on the stage.

Despite the fact that the opera treats a very interesting period, the epoch of the establishment of Soviet power in North Caucasus, with all the complexity of its multinational society, and the diversity of forms of class struggle, demanding an adequate picture of the eventful life of the nations of North Caucasus, the music of the opera is alien to the national art of the peoples of North Caucasus.

When Cossacks are on the stage (and they play an important role in the opera), their appearance is not signaled in the music or in the singing by anything characteristic of the Cossacks, of their songs and their music. The same is true in regard to the people of the mountains. If the action includes the dancing of a Lezghinka, its melody does not remind us of any popular rhythms of the Lezghinka. In his pursuit of originality, the composer introduces his own music for the Lezghinka, an unimpressive, tedious music, which is much poorer, much less attractive than the traditional popular music of the Lezghinka.

The pretense of originality permeates the entire score of the opera. The music produces, I should say, a stultifying impression on the listener. Some stanzas and scenes of a lyrical or semi-melodious nature, or those that pretend to be melodious, are suddenly interrupted by noise and shrieking in fortissimo, reminding us of the noise on a building lot, at the moment when excavators, stone crushers and cement mixers go into action. These noises, alien to the normal human ear, demoralize the listener.

A few words regarding the vocal part of the opera: choral, solo, and ensemble singing. Here, too, one must mention the poverty of the entire vocal line of the opera. They say that this opera has complex singing melodies. We do not find it so. The vocal part of the opera is poor, and cannot stand a critical comparison with that wealth of melody and breadth of range to which we are accustomed in the classical operas. In this opera the largest orchestral capacities of the Bolshoi Theater and the magnificent vocal abilities of its singers are left unused. This is a great error. It isn't right to bury the talents of the singers of the Bolshoi Theater, giving them the range of half an octave, or two thirds of an octave, when they can sing two octaves. One should not impoverish art, and this opera represents the impoverishment, the drying-up of art, musical as well as vocal art.

The Committee of the Fine Arts, and particularly its chairman Comrade Khrapchenko, holds the chief responsibility for this affair. He widely publicized the opera Great Friendship. More than that, even before the opera was reviewed and approved by listeners, it was announced for production in a number of cities, in Sverdlovsk, Riga, and Leningrad. In the Moscow Bolshoi Theater alone, according to the Committee's statement, six hundred thousand rubles were spent on its production.

This means that the Committee of the Fine Arts, having passed a bad opera for a good one, not only proved itself incompetent in the task of leadership in art, but demonstrated its irresponsibility in having induced the State to expend large sums of money without justification.

If the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) is not correct in defending the realistic direction and classical heritage in music, let it be said openly. It may be that the old musical norms have outlived their time; perhaps they should be rejected and be replaced by a new, more progressive direction. One must declare it openly, without biding in the corner, and without smuggling anti-democratic formalism in music as contraband under the

slogan of supposed devotion to the classics, and loyalty to the ideals of socialist realism. It is bad, it is not quite honest. One must be frank and declare outright whatever Soviet musicians have to say on this question. It would be dangerous, and downright fatal for the interest of the development of Soviet art, if the repudiation of the cultural heritage of the past, and the adoption of degraded music, were cloaked in a toga of supposedly genuine Soviet music. Here we must call things by their true names.

Declaration of Tikhon Khrennikov

The Central Committee of our Party in its Resolution of 10 February 1948 severely branded the anti-democratic formalistic tendencies in Soviet music. The immediate reason for the intervention of the supreme Party organs into musical affairs was the new opera *Great Friendship* by Muradeli, staged by the Bolshoi Theater of the USSR in the days of the thirtieth anniversary of the October Revolution.

It was established that repeated directives of the Party on the problems of art were not carried out by the majority of Soviet composers. All the conversations about “reconstruction,” about switching of composers to folkways, to realism, remained empty declarations. Almost all composers who worked in the field of large forms kept aloof from the people, and did not enjoy popularity with the broad audiences. The people knew only songs, marches and film music, but remained indifferent towards most symphonic and chamber music. Concerts in which Soviet symphonic novelties were performed were attended very poorly, whereas classical programs almost invariably filled the hall. Soviet people, in their letters to concert organizations and to the Radio Committee, often voiced their perplexity and at times their protests against the incomprehensible and complicated music of a number of Soviet composers.

The leading figures of our Party and the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) have frequently expressed themselves on the subject of Soviet art, directing its development along the path of Socialist realism, and cleansing it of harmful influences and alien ideology. Let us recall the words of V. I. Lenin on the tasks of Soviet art, his appeals in favor of a folk direction in art, his defense of Russian classical heritage against the assaults of the Association of Proletarian Culture; let us further recall the conferences of the Committee for Agitation and Propaganda at the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) on the problem of music, held in 1925 and 1929 at the peak of the activity of the Association for Contemporary Music; the Resolution of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) of 23 April 1932 regarding the reorientation of literary and artistic organizations; the articles in the newspaper *Pravda*, “Confusion Instead of Music,” and “Ballet Falsification” in 1936; the resolutions of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party in 1946 concerning the periodicals *Zvezda* and *Leningrad*, the film *Great Life*, and the repertory of the drama theaters. We cannot fail to mention the utterances of Comrade Zhdanov at the philosophical discussions of June 1947, and particularly the principal thesis of his

declaration: the thesis of the intransigent struggle for the purity of Soviet ideology as the most advanced and the most progressive in the world.

Among the directives of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) dealing with art, the Resolution on Muradeli's opera *Great Friendship* is particularly important for the destinies of Soviet music. This Resolution deals a decisive blow to the anti-democratic formalist movement which has spread in Soviet music. It administers a crushing blow to modernist art as a whole. At the same time this Resolution directs Soviet music onto the path of realism leading to the development and integration of the best traditions of musical classicism and musical art of the nations of the USSR, the path of truly democratic art, the creation of which the Soviet people expects from its composers.

The Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) points out in its Resolution that formalistic distortions and anti-democratic tendencies have found their fullest expression in the works of such composers as Shostakovich, Prokofiev, Khachaturian, Popov, Miaskovskii, Shebalin, and others. In the music of these composers we witness a revival of anti-realistic decadent influences calculated to destroy the principles of classical music. These tendencies are peculiar to the bourgeois movement of the era of imperialism: the rejection of melodiousness in music, neglect of vocal forms, infatuation with rhythmic and orchestral effects, the piling-up of noisy ear-splitting harmonies, intentional illogicality and unemotionality of music. All these tendencies lead in actual fact to the liquidation of music as one of the strongest expressions of human feelings and thoughts.

In Soviet music, particularly during the last three or four years, there has been increasingly noticeable a break between the listener and musical art. Indicative in this respect is the fiasco with the public of the majority of works written by Soviet composers in recent years: Muradeli's opera *Great Friendship*; Prokofiev's *Festive Poem*, his cantata *Blossom Forth the Mighty Land* and the *Sixth Symphony*; Miaskovskii's *Pathetic Overture* and the cantata *Kremlin at Night*; Shostakovich's *Poem of Fatherland*; Khachaturian's *Symphonie-Poeme*, and others.

In the music of the majority of Soviet composers there is noted an over-emphasis on purely abstract instrumental forms, not characteristic of the classical Russian movement in music, and a lack of interest in program music on concrete subjects of Soviet life. Exaggerated attention is given to chamber music written for a handful of connoisseurs, while ignoring such mass consumption forms as the opera.

The composers became engrossed in formalistic experimentation with artificially inflated and impracticable orchestral combinations (such as the inclusion of twenty-four trumpets in Khachaturian's *Symphonie-Poeme*, or the incredible scoring for sixteen double-basses, eight harps, four pianos, to the exclusion of the rest of the string instruments, in Prokofiev's *Ode on the End of War*). Such music could not be performed by any of the provincial orchestras; and the gala performances in the Moscow Philharmonic evoked nothing but bewilderment among the

listeners by the irrational use of orchestral sonorities, at times actually causing physical suffering. Musical instruments were not used in their natural medium. Thus, the piano was converted into a percussion instrument (as in the fist blows on the keyboard in Prokofiev's Sixth Sonata); the violin was transformed from a melodious, tender instrument into a grunting, percussive one. The clarity and logic of harmonic progressions were sacrificed in favor of intentional complexity of acoustical combinations; natural chords were turned into "timbre-sounds," into blots and ink spots of sound.

A peculiar writing in code, abstractness of the musical language, often reflected images and emotions alien to Soviet realistic art-expressionistic tenseness, neuroticism, escape into a region of abnormal, repulsive, and pathological phenomena. This defect is noticeable in many pages of Shostakovich's Eighth and Ninth Symphonies, and the Piano Sonatas of Prokofiev. One of the means of escape from reality was also the "neo-classical" tendency in the music of Shostakovich and his imitators, the resurrection of melodic turns and mannerisms of Bach, Handel, Hayden, and other composers, which were reproduced in a decadently distorted manner.

The musical art of the people and, above all, Russian folk songs were not favored by the aforementioned composers. When occasionally they turned toward folk melodies they arranged them in an overcomplex decadent manner alien to folk art (as in Popov's Third Symphony on Spanish Themes, and in some arrangements of Russian folk songs by Prokofiev).

All these creative faults are typical expressions of formalism.

Formalism is a revelation of emptiness and lack of ideas in art. The rejection of ideas in art leads to the preaching of "art for art's sake," to a cult of "pure" form, a cult of technical devices as a goal in itself, a hypertrophy of certain elements of the musical speech at the price of a loss of integrity and harmoniousness of art.

The Resolution of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) indicates that one of the traits of formalist music is the rejection of singing polyphony and a retreat towards a cerebral, dry, artificial counterpoint in the so-called linear style, or else the adoption of primitive unison writing.

The cultivation of form as a goal in art leads in the end to the disintegration of form itself and to the loss of high-quality professional mastery.

As Comrade Zhdanov has profoundly pointed out, the philosophical background of these views is subjective idealism. The artist imagines himself to be the appraiser and final judge of his art. He cares little about the listening human society. Personal caprice, a random whim, an extreme inconsiderateness, and the subjectivism of the isolated author are sharply contrasted with the requirements and expectations of his environment: "This is the way I feel, and I don't care what my listeners think about it.,

Comrade Zhdanov has said in this connection that if an artist does not expect to be understood by his contemporaries, it leads to desolation, to an impasse. If a true artist, says Comrade Zhdanov, finds that his work is not understood by the listeners, he must figure out first of all why he failed to please the people, why the people cannot understand him.

The theory and practice of formalism is a complete negation of democratic aspirations of the Russian classical composers and of the progressive representatives of music criticism. Great musicians of the past addressed their art to a contemporary audience, to their people, and not to their remote descendants.

Soviet composers of the formalistic persuasion ignored these progressive traditions of Russian classicism. It is not by accident that Comrade Zhdanov said to the composers-formalists present at the conference in the Central Committee: "One must admit that the landlord Glinka, the government clerk Serov and the member of nobility Stasov were more democratic than you are."

The anti-democratic formalistic direction of Soviet music is closely connected with the bourgeois decadent music of the contemporary West and the modernistic music of pre-revolutionary Russia.

The present musical art of western Europe and America reflects the universal dissolution and spiritual impoverishment of bourgeois culture. One cannot name a single composer of the West who is not infected with formalistic diseases, subjectivism and mysticism, and lack of ideological principles. The apostle of reactionary forces in bourgeois music, Igor Stravinsky, with equal impartiality writes a Catholic Mass in a stylized decadent style, or jazz pieces for the circus. The latest musical "genius" of contemporary France, Olivier Messiaen, writes mystical music on subjects from the Bible and medieval Catholic works. Contemporary operas of the German composers Hindemith, Krenek, Alban Berg, the Englishman Britten, the American Menotti, are a conglomeration of wild harmonies, far removed from natural human song. In this music there is frankly proclaimed a reversion to the primitive savage cultures of prehistoric society; eroticism is glorified along with psychopathology, sexual perversion, amorality and the shamelessness of the contemporary bourgeois heroes of the twentieth century.

In the well-known opera by Krenek, *Sprung uber den Schatten*, nearly all the characters are absolutely amoral individuals. In that opera there is even a special chorus of sexual psychopaths-masochists. In the opera by the German composer Max Brand, *Machinist Hopkins*, the principal characters are murderers and erotomaniacs. *Machinist Hopkins* himself is a vile fascist caricature of a leader in a workers' movement, and is represented as a lustful beast, a base exploiter of women.

In Hindemith's *Sancta Susanna* religious erotomania is portrayed with repulsive naturalism. Similar pathology characterizes the neurotic operas of Alban Berg, and, among recent operas, *The Medium* by Gian-Carlo Menotti which enjoys tremendous success with the bourgeois public

in America. The central character of this opera is a professional swindler, a woman spiritualist who suffers from alcoholism, and in addition is a murderess.

In Russian music formalistic ideas flourished particularly during the reaction after the Revolution of 1905. Among characteristic examples of decadent art in music are Stravinsky's *Le Sacre du Printemps*, Prokofiev's *Bugoon*, and a number of other works by these composers. The man who inspired and commissioned the majority of these works was Serge Diaghilev, one of the most prominent ideologists of Russian modernism.

Diaghilev was the organizer of a modernistic group of artists, known as "The World of Art." He urged artists and musicians to sever connections with the great realistic traditions of Russian art: "Down with the traditions of the Mighty Five, of Chaikovskii. They are obsolete and limited national phenomena; it is time to merge Russian art in a common European culture"-such was the frank and cynical slogan of Diaghilev and other representatives of the modernistic camp.

The modernist element in Russian music is the revelation of frank sycophancy before the Western music market, a desire to gain favor with the foreign audience, to titillate the nerves of the surfeited bourgeois listener-snob with exotic Russian "Asianism."

For Diaghilev's ballet in Paris, Stravinsky wrote *Petrushka*, *Le Sacre du Printemps*, *Les Noces*, the opera *Le Rossignol*, and Prokofiev wrote his ballet *The Bugoon*, and other works.

The principal goal of the composers of these works is to escape from the contemporary world of humanity into the world of abstraction. Stravinsky himself, in his article, "What I Wished to Express in *Le Sacre du Printemps*" (*Music*, monthly magazine, 1913), writes: "I evoke neither human joy nor human sadness; I move towards a greater abstraction."- His reversion to the images of "primordial earth" he explains by a desire to reflect "that fear which lives in every sensitive soul in contact with mysterious forces." This reversion to antediluvian barbaric images, the depiction of savagery and bestial instincts of a prehistoric man, of a Scythian, is found in some poems of the Russian writers of the bourgeois-modernistic type. In these poems, there is sounded an alarm before the "coming Ham," the plebeian who must come and destroy the beauty and the well-being of the bourgeois regime. In *Le Sacre du Printemps* Stravinsky expressed these moods in boisterous, chaotic, intentionally coarse, screaming sonorities. "Rhythm and motion, not the element of feeling, are the foundations of musical art," asserted Stravinsky. With Diaghilev's blessings Stravinsky uses, in *Petrushka* and *Les Noces*, some elements of Russian life to mock at Russian customs and to please the European spectator by the express emphasis on Russian "Asianism," crudity, animal instincts, sexual motives. Ancient folk strains are here grotesquely distorted, twisted, and are served as if reflected in a crooked mirror. These so-called "irony and grotesque" are in evidence also in Prokofiev's ballet *The Buffoon*, in which the "exoticism" of old Russian folkways is relished in a decadent manner. The musical language of this work is related to the above-named ballets of Stravinsky. The continuation of the same line of "Russian grotesque" is seen in Stravinsky's comic opera "after Pushkin," *Mavra*, written in

1922. From this opera there is a direct line to the two defective operas by Shostakovich, *The Nose* and *Lady Macbeth*.

Paralleling this line Stravinsky and other new composers of the West, such as Hindemith in Germany, launched in the 1920's a "new" slogan (actually it is closely connected with the first line): "Back to Bach!" This meant that in a number of works there were revived polyphonic devices mechanically transplanted from Bach. They were ornamented by "new" harmonies, transforming the whole thing into cacophony. This reversion to Bach led to the composition by Stravinsky of the so-called *Symphony of Psalms*, in which there are stridently combined the old Bach devices of polyphonic writing with the ear-splitting "contemporary" harmonies. The meaning of this mixture is well expressed in the composer's dedication of this *Symphony*: "Dedicated to the Almighty Lord and to the American Philharmonic Society."

The music of Soviet composers of the 1920's and 1930's offers numerous instances of formalistic tendencies in Soviet music: Shostakovich: opera *The Nose*, *Second Symphony*, *Third Symphony*; Prokofiev: the ballets *The Prodigal Son*, *On the Boristhenes*, *Pas dacier*, the opera *The Flaming Angel*, *Third Symphony*, *Fourth Symphony*, *Fifth Piano Concerto*, *Fifth Piano Sonata*; Mossolov: *Iron Foundry*, *Newspaper Advertisements*; Knipper: the opera *North Wind*, *Tales of a Porcelain Buddha*; Deshevov: the opera *Ice and Steel*; Miaskovskii: *Tenth Symphony*, *Thirteenth Symphony*, *Third Piano Sonata*, *Fourth Piano Sonata*; Feinberg: *Piano Sonatas*, *First Piano Concerto*; Shebalin: *Lenin Symphony*, *Second Symphony*; Popov: *First Symphony*; Liatoshinskii: *Second Symphony*, songs; Boelza: *First Symphony*, *Second Symphony*, songs; Polovinkin: *Telescopes for orchestra*, *Accidents for piano*; Litinskii: *Quartets and Sonatas*; Shcherbachev: *Third Symphony*, etc.

The formalistic element in music is particularly strong in the *Eighth Symphony*, the *Ninth Symphony*, and the *Second Piano Sonata* by Shostakovich; in the *Sixth Symphony*, the opera *War and Peace*, and a number of piano works by Prokofiev; in *Symphonie-Poeme* by Khachaturian; in the *Quartet and String Trio* by Shebalin, and in the *Third Symphony* by Popov. In Miaskovskii's music we find a one-sided preoccupation with instrumental music and a lack of interest for vocal and operatic music, which had a detrimental effect on the melodic idiom of his instrumental compositions, particularly the *Third Piano Sonata* and the *Fourth Piano Sonata*, written in the 1920's, but newly revised by the composer in recent years.

The influence of formalism is strongly felt in the creative work of young composers. The imitation of negative traits of the music by Shostakovich and Prokofiev, the infatuation with decadent thematics, exoticism and mysticism became almost a routine phenomenon in the creative output of the young generation of Soviet composers.

Formalistic distortions are also strongly reflected in the education of young composers in conservatories, particularly in the *Moscow Conservatory*. This is obviously connected with the fact that some composers mentioned in the *Resolution of the Central Committee of the All-*

Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) as representative of the formalistic movement (Shostakovich, Shebalin and Miaskovskii) are professors of the Moscow Conservatory, and Shebalin is its director.

The almost total contamination of young composers with the harmful influence of western music, the imitation of negative qualities of Soviet composers belonging to the formalist school, neglect of the traditions of musical classicism, particularly Russian classicism, and of the art of the nations of the USSR, testifies to the fact that the formalist movement plays a decisive role in the education of the young cadres of composers.

The Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) notes an altogether intolerable condition of Soviet music criticism. Our critics have lost the most important quality of Russian progressive criticism. They have ceased to fight for the high aspirations of art, for the ideals of realistic and democratic art.

The orientation towards Stravinsky as the most progressive phenomenon in contemporary music is found in the treatise of A. Ogolevets, *Introduction to Contemporary Musical Thought*. In essence the entire "theory" of A. Ogolevets is, objectively speaking, a theoretical support of formalism, and is an anti-Leninist and anti-Marxist work.

The musical departments of the periodical, *Soviet Art*, and other newspapers, and the monthly *SOVIET MUSIC* did not fight for the ideals of democratic art but lent their pages to apologists for the formalist movement. The Committee of Fine Arts has often shown the inclination to stifle even the most timid attempts to criticize the formalist movement. Thus, at the personal directive of Comrade Khrapchenko, chairman of the Committee of Fine Arts, critical articles about the Ninth Symphony of Shostakovich (among them an article by Keldysh strongly condemning this Symphony) were not allowed for publication in *SOVIET MUSIC*.

The policy of the Committee of Fine Arts, the Organizational Committee, and the Musical Fund, in the Section for Promotion and Propaganda of Soviet music, reflected above all the interests of the formalist school. Thus, the Musical Fund published the obviously fallacious formalistic compositions of the type of the Second Symphony of Boelza and the Fourth Symphony of Shostakovich, not to mention numerous editions of different versions of works by a narrow group of composers of the formalist school.

The Committee on Fine Arts did not take suitable measures toward the development of Soviet music in the realistic direction; it failed to promote the composition of operas, choral music, popular music for small orchestras, music for national instruments, vocal ensembles, etc. Commissions given to composers by the Committee of Fine Arts did not direct Soviet music along the correct path. The system of commissions: was basically a form of material security for the leading group of composers of the formalist school. The major part of State commissions for the year 1947 was taken up by abstract, textless, instrumental forms. Prokofiev alone received

eight commissions, among them one for the preparation of a “new” version of his Fourth Symphony derived from his ballet *The Prodigal Son*, which was condemned by Soviet society.

The decisive role in the Music Section of the Committee for Stalin Prizes was played by the same composers, representatives of the formalist movement. Some products of decadent art, which failed to find recognition with the general public, were nominated for a prize on the basis of a hearing by the narrow circle of specialists. Almost every new work by “leading” composers was automatically promoted as a prize work, year after year.

Soviet composers must reject as useless and harmful garbage all the relics of bourgeois formalism in musical art. They must understand that the creation of high-quality works in the domain of the opera, symphonic music, song-writing, choral and dance music, is possible only by following the principles of socialist realism.

Our duty is to mobilize all our creative strength and to give a worthy response, in the shortest possible time, to this appeal of our Party, to the appeal of our great leader Comrade STALIN.

Statement by Vano Muradeli

The Central Committee of our Party in its historic Revolution has subjected my opera *Great Friendship* to a just and severe criticism.

The Resolution establishes the fact that my opera is an anti-artistic composition, corrupt both from the musical and political standpoint. I fully agree with this absolutely correct evaluation of my opera.

A. A. Zhdanov, in his historic report to the General Assembly of Soviet Composers, exposed in clear terms the false formalistic tendencies in my opera *Great Friendship*.

The speech of Zhdanov will remain forever in my memory as an impassioned appeal to Soviet composers to serve our people with honesty and devotion, and to fight determinedly and unswervingly for the great ideals of building up Communist society in our country,

Addressing the Union of Soviet Composers, I wish to state the causes of my major creative errors. There are several reasons for my failure. I shall attempt to analyze them in full.

(1) Although I have been a convinced exponent of composition inspired by folk songs, I was unable to pursue this realistic path. Instead, attracted by false innovations, I have accepted the formalistic techniques of musical modernism.

(2) My isolation from other composers, which was a result of my “aristocratic” position in the Organizational Committee, deprived me of the opportunity of heeding their Bolshevik criticism, and receiving their professional advice.

(3) I have not made adequate study, and have not acquired sufficient professional knowledge of the operatic heritage of the great Russian and Western classics.

(4) Having been completely engrossed in the composition of my opera, I neglected to work on the improvement of my ideological political education.

(5) My over-confidence and self-complacency, my exaggerated preoccupation with professional activities, carelessness and haste, resulted in retarding the progress of my work.

(6) I failed to pay attention to the voice of the people and to their ideological and spiritual requirements. I lost the sense of true actuality and its vital imperatives. My opera *Great Friendship* failed to portray the life of the people, or its art, in any of its native phases. This shows that I have lost contact with the life of our people.

I grew up in the atmosphere of folk music. My first compositions hardly differed from simple songs of the people. In my later works—*Four Georgian Songs*, *Symphonic Dance*, and *Ten Heroic Songs*—I again turned for inspiration to these sources of people's music.

How could it have happened that I failed to introduce a single folk song in the score of my opera? It seems strange and almost incredible to me, and can be explained only as a manifestation of my inherent snobbishness. Apart from that, I did not possess sufficient mastery and craftsmanship for writing a large operatic work and building a music drama. In a number of places in my Opera I indulged in technical tricks to obtain novel effects. Thus my opera was deprived of natural feeling and logical development.

There is no justification for these techniques in my opera, for the absence of folk songs, for the over-elaborateness, and at times crudity of my musical language. All this deprives my opera of the sense of reality, leading me towards a false formalistic path.

I have before me a definite task, to realize fully and unequivocally the seriousness of my creative errors, and to correct these errors with ideological honesty in my future works. The Resolution of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) is a new and vivid manifestation of interest and solicitude shown by our Party for the destinies of Soviet socialist culture. This historic Resolution constitutes for Soviet composers a clear creative program presaging a mighty uplift of Soviet musical culture. I will try with all my heart to earn the right to continue my devoted service to our Soviet music.

Statement of Dmitrii Shostakovich

As we look back on the road traversed by our art, it becomes quite clear to us that every time that the Party corrects errors of a creative artist and points out the deviations in his work, or else severely condemns a certain tendency in Soviet art, it invariably brings beneficial results for Soviet art and for individual artists.

The directives of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) are inspired by the desire to raise the standard and the significance of art in the development of our Soviet society.

When in 1936 the central organ of our Party, Pravda, severely condemned my opera Lady Macbeth of the District of Mtsensk and pointed out my serious aberrations, my formalism, this creative failure affected me profoundly. I gave it a great deal of thought, trying hard to derive from it all the necessary lessons. It seemed to me that in the years following, my art began to develop in a new direction. I strove to provide an answer in my work to the great and stirring problems that faced the whole Soviet land, the whole Soviet people. It seemed to me that to a certain extent I managed to eradicate the pernicious elements pointed out in Pravda: the over-complication of the musical language, the elaboration of musical thought, etc.

This severe but just criticism by the Party made me study more intensely the works of the Russian classics and Russian national art. In that light I regarded my work on Mussorgskii's opera Boris Godunov when I worked on its orchestration and on its editing.

As I look back mentally at all I have written after Lady Macbeth, it seems to me that in my symphonic works and chamber music there appeared elements new to my art, which when developed should have given me the opportunity of finding a path to the heart of the Soviet people. However, this did not materialize. I now can clearly see that I overestimated the thoroughness of my artistic reconstruction; certain negative characteristics peculiar to my musical thought prevented me from making the turn that seemed to be indicated in a number of my works of recent years. I again deviated in the direction of formalism, and began to speak a language incomprehensible to the people.

Now, when the Party and our entire nation, speaking through the Resolution of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks), condemn this tendency in my music, I know that the Party is right; I know that the Party shows solicitude for Soviet art and for me as a Soviet composer.

All the resolutions of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) regarding the art of recent years, and particularly the Resolution of 10 February 1948 in regard to the opera Great Friendship, point out to Soviet artists that a tremendous national uplift is now taking place in our country, our great Soviet nation.

Some Soviet artists, and among them myself, attempted to give expression in their works to this great national uplift. But between my subjective intentions and objective results there was an appalling gap.

The absence, in my works, of the interpretation of folk art, that great spirit by which our people lives, has been with utmost clarity and definiteness pointed out by the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks).

I am deeply grateful for it and for all the criticism contained in the Resolution.

All the directives of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks), and in particular those that concern me personally, I accept as a stern but paternal solicitude for us, Soviet artists.

Work—arduous, creative, joyous work on new compositions which will find their path to the heart of the Soviet people, which will be understandable to the people, loved by them, and which will be organically connected with the people's art, developed and enriched by the great traditions of Russian classicism—this will be a fitting response to the Resolution of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks).

In my Poem of Fatherland I attempted to create a symphonic work infused with songfulness and melodiousness. It proved to be unsuccessful.

On the basis of the principles clearly given in the Resolution of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks), I shall try again and again to create symphonic works close to the spirit of the people from the standpoint of ideological subject matter, musical language and form.

I shall still more determinedly work on the musical depiction of the images of the heroic Soviet people.

I am now at work on the music for a cinema film, *Young Guard*, and I have begun an opera of the same title. I hope that in these compositions I shall partially achieve the aims of which I spoke here.

Some of my songs have attained a certain popularity among the people. Now, equipped with the directives of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks), I shall again and again try to create Soviet mass songs.

I have no doubt whatsoever that Soviet music is on the eve of a tremendous creative uplift. This uplift will develop on the basis of the realization in the art of Soviet composers of the wise and just directives of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks).

I appeal to all composers to bend their efforts to the task of the realization of this remarkable Resolution.

Statement of Aram Khachaturian

The Resolution of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) is the expression of the will of our people and fully reflects the opinion of the Soviet people regarding our music.

The Resolution of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) brings liberation to us, Soviet musicians. Indeed one feels as if we have thrown off the chains that have held us for many years. Despite my depressed moral state (for understandable reasons), I have a feeling of joy and satisfaction.

We feel easier, more free; there is before us a clear path, a road for Soviet music to pursue its swift progress. I see this path clearly, and I have only one desire, to correct by creative work all my previous errors.

How could it happen that I have come to formalism in my art? I made use of many folk songs, particularly my native Armenian songs. I have also used other national songs, Russian, Ukrainian, Georgian, Uzbek, Turkmenian, and Tartar songs. I wrote a number of compositions based on these songs.

I have always declared that I do not recognize non-melodic music; I have always maintained that melody is the foundation of musical composition. But despite the fact that I stood on these seemingly correct creative positions, I have committed formalistic errors.

I see two reasons for these errors. The first is my preoccupation with technique. I have often been reproached for my insufficient technical equipment. This was reflected in my consciousness. My desire to achieve a complete technical mastery imperceptibly resulted in an over-emphasis on technique, which is particularly evident in my *Symphonie-Poeme*.

I have reached formalism because of my cultivation of abstract technique.

When music critics and musicologists were telling me that it was about time for me to go beyond the national confines, to renounce the supposedly narrow stylistic direction of my music, I listened attentively to these ideas. I failed to repudiate these harmful creative positions in time. In recent years I have moved farther and farther away from my native Armenian element; I wanted to be cosmopolitan.

Andrei Andreevich Zhdanov in his statement at the meeting in the Central Committee of the Party said that internationalism in music can develop only on the basis of enrichment and flowering of national music, and not by erasing the national elements.

Creative errors and formalistic leanings in our music could not but influence my work in the Organizational Committee, which became a hotbed of formalism. It could not fight formalism with members who either fully or partly stood on formalistic positions, or else were sympathizers. As the principal leader of the Organizational Committee, I had every opportunity to inaugurate and lead the struggle with this phenomenon in music. But I failed to do so.

I turned out to be a poor leader, and my methods of work in the Organizational Committee were undemocratic. In recent years I stood aloof from our composers' life. Members of the Organizational Committee became "grands seigneurs" proud of their "creative achievements,"

and as a result found themselves generals without an army. Criticism and self-criticism in the Organizational Committee were stifled.

The Resolution of the Central Committee declares that the Organizational Committee maintained a suffocating atmosphere, devoid of all creative discussion. One of the chief reasons interfering with the work of the Organizational Committee was a lack of unity among its members. We were preoccupied with petty quarrels and our personal interrelations. We forgot that we were appointed to guide the Union of Soviet Composers, that we were expected to lead all other composers. Hypocritically paying compliments to one another, we, the members of the Organizational Committee, actually were highly antagonistic to each other.

I accept full responsibility for the unfavorable situation on the front of Soviet music, which was created as a result of the incorrect line in the domain of Soviet music, established by the Organizational Committee.

I wish to point out another very serious danger. I want to warn those comrades who, like myself, hoped that their music, which is not understood by the people today, will be understood by the future generations tomorrow. It is a fatal theory. In our country, millions of people, the entire Soviet nation, are now arbiters of music. What can be higher and nobler than writing music understandable to our people and to give joy by our creative art to millions?

I urge all Soviet composers, and above all, Shostakovich, Prokofiev, Shebalin, Popov, Miaskovskii, and Muradeli, to answer the stern but just Resolution of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) by a decisive reorientation of their musical views, and to prove by their artistic production the thoroughness and the sincerity of their reorientation.

Our principal task is now to unite on the basis of the Resolution of the Central Committee, to work as much as possible, and as well as possible, and to prove by deeds that Soviet composers are marching in the vanguard of victorious Soviet culture.

Letter from Prokofiev

The state of my health prevents me from attending the General Assembly of Soviet Composers. I therefore wish to express my ideas in regard to the Resolution of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) of 10 February 1948, in the present letter. I request that you read it at the Assembly if you find it expedient.

The Resolution of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party of 10 February 1948, has separated decayed tissue in the composers' creative production from the healthy part. No matter how painful it may be for many composers, myself included, I welcome the Resolution of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) which establishes the necessary conditions for the return to health of the whole organism of Soviet music. The Resolution is particularly important because it demonstrates that the formalist

movement is alien to the Soviet people, that it leads to impoverishment and decline of music. It points out with ultimate clarity the aims that Soviet composers must attain to be of the greatest service to the Soviet people.

As far as I am concerned, elements of formalism were peculiar to my music as long as fifteen or twenty years ago. Apparently the infection caught from contact with some western ideas. When formalistic errors in Shostakovich's opera *Lady Macbeth of the District of Mtsensk* were exposed by *Pravda*, I gave a great deal of thought to creative devices in my own music, and came to the conclusion that such a method of composition is faulty.

As a result, I began a search for a clearer and more meaningful language. In several of my subsequent works—*Alexander Nevskii*, *A Toast to Stalin*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Fifth Symphony*—I strove to free myself from elements of formalism and, it seems to me, succeeded to a certain degree. The existence of formalism in some of my works is probably explained by a certain self-complacency, an insufficient realization of the fact that it is completely unwanted by our people. The Resolution has shaken to the core the social consciousness of our composers, and it has become clear what type of music is needed by our people, and the ways of the eradication of the formalist disease have also become clear.

I have never questioned the importance of melody. I love melody, and I regard it as the most important element in music. I have worked on the improvement of its quality in my compositions for many years. To find a melody instantly understandable even to the uninitiated listener, and at the same time an original one, is the most difficult task for a composer. Here he is beset by a great multitude of dangers: he may fall into the trivial or the banal, or into the rehashing of something already written by him. In this respect, composition of complex melodies is much easier. It may also happen that a composer, fussing over his melody for a long time, and revising it, unwittingly makes it over-refined and complicated, and departs from simplicity. Undoubtedly, I fell into this trap, too, in the process of my work. One must be particularly vigilant to make sure that the melody retains its simplicity without becoming cheap, saccharine, or imitative. It is easy to say, but not so easy to accomplish. All my efforts will be henceforth concentrated to make these words not only a recipe, but to carry them out in my subsequent works.

I must admit that I, too, have indulged in atonality, but I also must say that I have felt an attraction towards tonal music for a considerable time, after I clearly realized that the construction of a musical work tonally is like erecting a building on a solid foundation, while a construction without tonality is like building on sand. Besides, tonal and diatonic music lends many more possibilities than atonal and chromatic music, which is evident from the impasse reached by Schoenberg and his disciples. In some of my works in recent years there are sporadic atonal moments. Without much sympathy, I nevertheless made use of this device, mainly for the sake of contrast, in order to bring tonal passages to the fore. In the future I hope to get rid of this mannerism.

In my operatic production I have been often criticized for the predominance of recitative over cantilena. I like the theater as such, and I believe that a person who attends the opera has a right to expect not only auditory, but also visual impressions; or else he would go to a concert and not to the opera. But every action on the stage is closely associated with recitative; on the other hand, cantilena induces a certain immobility on the stage. I recall the painful experience of watching the action in some of Wagner's operas, when during a whole act, lasting nearly an hour, not a single person moved on the stage. This fear of immobility prevented me from dwelling on cantilena too long. In connection with the Resolution, I thought over this problem with great care, and came to the conclusion that every operatic libretto has elements demanding the use of the recitative, while other elements imperatively require a treatment in the arioso style. But there are also sections (and these sections take up considerable space, adding up perhaps to one-half of the entire opera) which the composer may treat as he wishes, either as a recitative or as an arioso. Let us consider, for example, the scene of Tat'iana's letter from Eugene Onegin. It would have been quite simple to write most of it in the form of a recitative, but Chaikovskii preferred cantilena, and so made the letter scene into a sort of aria, which has this additional advantage that it is accompanied by stage action, giving satisfaction not only to the ear but also to the eye. This is the direction which I intend to take in my new opera on a contemporary Soviet subject, *A Tale of a Real Man* by Polevoi.

I am highly gratified that the Resolution has pointed out the desirability of polyphony, particularly in choral and ensemble singing. This is indeed an interesting task for a composer, promising a great pleasure to the listener. In my above-mentioned opera, I intend to introduce trios, duets, and contrapuntally developed choruses, for which I will make use of some interesting northern Russian folk songs. Lucid melody, and as far as possible, a simple harmonic language, are elements which I intend to use in my opera.

In conclusion, I should like to express my gratitude to our Party for the precise directives of the Resolution, which will help me in my search of a musical language, accessible and natural to our people, worthy of our people and of our great country.

Letter To Stalin

Dear Iosif Vissarionovich:

The composers and musicologists of the Soviet capital, assembled for the discussion of the historic Resolution of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) of 10 February 1948 regarding the opera by Muradeli, *Great Friendship*, send to you, our beloved leader and teacher, a warm salute and wishes for good health.

We are tremendously grateful to the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) and personally to you, dear Comrade Stalin, for the severe but profoundly just criticism of the present state of Soviet music, and for the interest which you and the Central

Committee of our Party have shown for the progress of Soviet music, and for us, Soviet musicians.

The conference of Soviet musicians with the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks), and particularly the speech of Comrade Zhdanov, and the Resolution of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) of 10 February 1948, are events of historical significance; the extraordinarily powerful, profound and precise analysis of the contemporary state of Soviet music, the clear directives for the elimination of defects in Soviet music give us inestimable help, a testimony of the great power and prophetic vision of the Communist Party.

We, composers and musicologists of the city of Moscow, recognize the complete justice of the Party's criticism of Soviet music, which is now freeing itself from the deadening impact of bourgeois-formalist routine, from the influence of decadence.

It is obvious to us that, having entered the path of formalistic pseudo-modernism, the representatives of the movement condemned in the Resolution of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) have disassociated themselves from folk music and song, have forgotten the musical language of their native land, have debased themselves to the point of subjecting their talents to models and dogmas of western European and American modernism. Confronted with the Soviet people, whose voice sounds in every line of the Resolution of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks), we admit that many of us have forgotten the great traditions of Russian musical realism. The words of the great genius, Glinka, who declared "Music is created by the people, and we, artists, only arrange it," have not found their adequate expression in the art of Soviet composers. As a result, the national element has been ignored in our operatic and symphonic production, and the fallacious "theory," subjectively idealistic in its essence, has been circulated to prove that broad masses of listeners are supposedly not "grown up" enough to understand contemporary music.

For us, Soviet musicians, it is all the more painful to realize that we have failed to draw correct and logical conclusions from the warnings that have been repeatedly sounded by our Party whenever Soviet music has deviated from its true realistic path. The articles, *Confusion Instead of Music* and *Ballet Falsification*, published in *Pravda* twelve years ago, the Resolutions of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) concerning the magazines *Zvezda* and *Leningrad*, and the motion picture *Great Love*, and the article, *Regarding the Repertory of Dramatic Theatres and Measures for Its Improvement*, were not followed, as it was with profound justice pointed out in the Resolution of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks), by any reorientation in Soviet music. Soviet composers and critics have failed to appreciate duly the timely and precise directives of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks), and so have caused the heaviest detriment to Soviet musical culture. Only their lack of contact with the life of the nation can account for the fact that our composers were unable to evaluate in full the colossal and unprecedented growth of

artistic tastes and requirements of the broad popular masses, and for that reason were unable to satisfy these tastes and requirements of the great Soviet people.

Your personal suggestions, dear Iosif Vissarionovich, regarding the task of building the Soviet classical opera, given by you in your talk with the composer Dzerzhinskii in connection with his opera, *Quiet Flows the Don*, remain a fighting program of our creative effort. We shall bend every effort to apply our knowledge and our artistic mastery and to produce vivid realistic music reflecting the life and struggles of the Soviet people.

The creative isolationism of composers must be ended once and for all. There is no place for bourgeois individualism in the musical art of a country where the artist is given every opportunity for a full development of his creative individuality, where he is surrounded with solicitude and care, of which the artists of bourgeois countries dare not even dream. In no country has a composer such an audience as in our land.

The Soviet artist is the servant of the people. This is the first conclusion that all Soviet composers and musicologists ought to make, and the creative art of every Soviet musician must be subordinated entirely to this lofty democratic principle.

Not for the snobs should sound our music, but for our whole great people.

We assure you, our beloved leader and teacher, that the appeals of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) addressed to us, Soviet musicians, will become a fighting program of our creative art. We shall give all our strength to the new and unparalleled great flowering of Soviet musical art.

We give to you and to the whole Soviet people a sworn pledge that we shall direct our work along the path of socialist realism, tirelessly laboring to create, in all musical forms, models worthy of our great epoch, striving to make our music beloved by the whole great Soviet people, so that the great ideas that inspire our nation in its universally historic deeds of valor shall find living and vivid expression in our art.

Long live the Lenin-Stalin people, the nation-worker, nation-victor that has earned the right for the most progressive socialist art in the world!

Long live the Lenin-Stalin Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks)!

Long live our leader and teacher, father of the nation, great STALIN!

The inscription in the score of Stravinsky's *Symphony of Psalms* reads: "Composed for the glory of God and dedicated to the Boston Symphony on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of its existence."

Source: Nicolas Slonimsky, ed., *Music since 1900* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1971), pp. 1362-1376.