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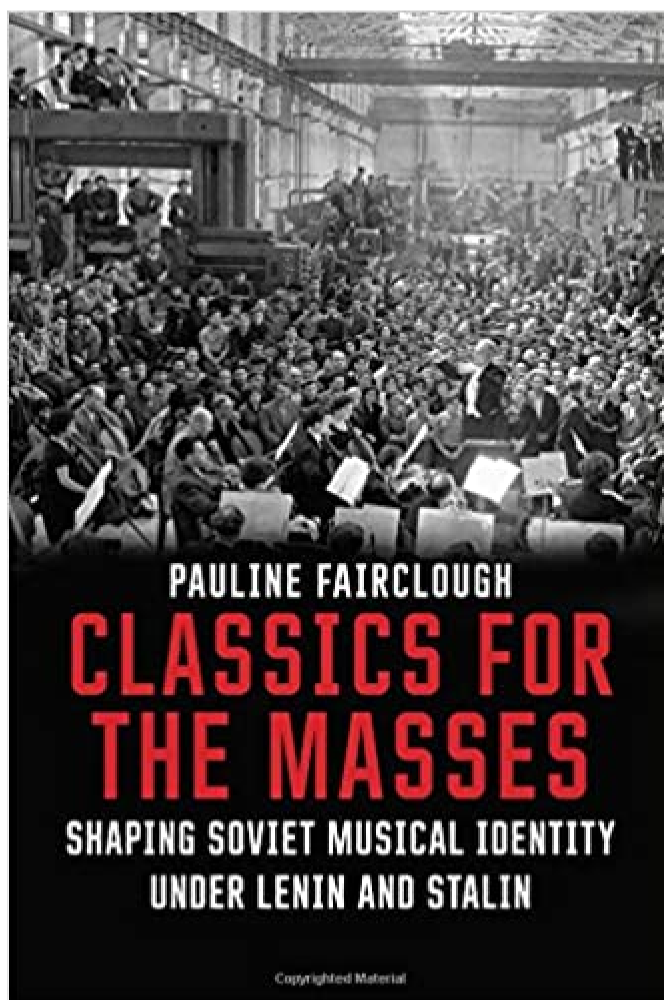
Classics For The Masses: Shaping Soviet Musical Identity Under Lenin And Stalin



Synopsis

Musicologist Pauline Fairclough explores the evolving role of music in shaping the cultural identity of the Soviet Union in a revelatory work that counters certain hitherto accepted views of an unbending, unchanging state policy of repression, censorship, and dissonance that existed in all areas of Soviet artistic endeavor. Newly opened archives from the Leninist and Stalinist eras have shed new light on Soviet concert life, demonstrating how the music of the past was used to help mold and deliver cultural policy, how Ã¢â ¬Å“undesirableÃ¢â ¬Â• repertoire was weeded out during the 1920s, and how Russian and non-Russian composers such as Mozart, Tchaikovsky, Wagner, Bach, and Rachmaninov were Ã¢â ¬Å“canonizedÃ¢â ¬Â• during different, distinct periods in Stalinist culture. FaircloughÃ¢â ¬â„¢s fascinating study of the ever-shifting Soviet musical-political landscape identifies 1937 as the start of a cultural Cold War, rather than occurring post-World War Two, as is often maintained, while documenting the efforts of musicians and bureaucrats during this period to keep musical channels open between Russia and the West.

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Customer Reviews

Ã¢â ¬Å“Noteworthy not only for opening another door into the Soviet music world but also for its subtle, informed analysis.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •Choice (Choice)Ã¢â ¬Å“These books give fuller, finer-grained and better-shaded accounts of Soviet policy ups and downs and their impact on musicians than any previous study.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •Richard Taruskin, TLS (Richard Taruskin TLS 2017-08-04)

Pauline Fairclough is senior lecturer in music, University of Bristol, United Kingdom, where her special interest is Soviet music and culture.

Pauline Fairclough, Senior Lecturer in Music at the University of Bristol, England, has chosen to research the music played in the Soviet Union during the period from the October 1917 Revolution through to the 1953 death of Stalin. For the most part, her information on programmes relates to the Moscow and Leningrad Philharmonia Orchestras and the Leningrad Capella Choir, but other cities and other groupings of musicians are sometimes mentioned. She has also looked extensively at official and other communications between those administering the music at various levels. The picture that emerges is at times surprising.Firstly, a lot of music was performed in the Soviet Union even during the hardest times ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â œ and whilst there was an intention to improve the minds of the masses through greater familiarity and knowledge of classical music (and, yes, audiences did sometimes exhibit boredom and restlessness), for the most part the intent went no further than that; music was not much used as propaganda or to mould new model Soviet citizens.Secondly, until the post-1945 clamp-down ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â œ definitely Stalin inspired ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â œ big name foreign musicians and conductors made regular tours of the Soviet Union, bringing with them quantities of new contemporary Western music, so that Soviet musicians, if not always audiences too, could familiarise themselves with it.And, until the last eight years before StalinÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s death, the freedom with which the orchestras and other musical ensembles were able to programme both Western music and Russian music from the pre-Revolutionary period, including intrinsically religious music, was quite remarkable.For all that, individual composers did move in and out of favour and sometimes that was for political reasons. At the end of her book, Fairclough writes, ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã ËœIf Soviet musical culture can be viewed as a ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã ËœmuseumÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢ ... it was one with very active curators, able deftly to replace Bach with Glinka, Wagner with Chaykovskiy and Stravinsky with Szymanowski as required.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢The ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã ËœcuratorsÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢ were mostly genuinely knowledgeable about the music and apparently keen to maintain as broad a repertoire as possible. Direct intervention by Stalin seems to have been minimal ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â œ although there were times when the political administrators and music critics and scholars seem to have sought to anticipate the mind of Stalin. But it still proved possible to celebrate TchaikovskyÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s centenary in 1940 by performing intellectual contortions with his biography (that he was a monarchist, maintained frequent contacts with foreign musicians and was a homosexual were all

suppressed). Similarly with a celebration of Rachmaninov in 1945 as a great patriot; ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã ËœHis love for the motherland was woken fully, as is well known, by the Patriotic War.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢ Being of an aristocratic family, Rachmaninov had fled Bolshevik Russia for Finland in December 1917, continuing on to the United States the following year. Conveniently for the 1945 propagandists, he had died in 1943.Verdi, Bach and Handel were all also safely dead. So it was possible to perform their sacred works ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â œ with librettos translated into Russian! ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â œ with explanations such as ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã ËœCatholic clerics did not originally receive [VerdiÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s Requiem] well and Verdi completely ignored all the ritual dogma of religion and avoided the Catholic churchÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢. Similar was written about Handel and his oratorios, and in the 1920s it was argued that religion was not especially important to Bach, or, if it was, he should not be blamed for failing to transcend the customs of his native culture. In the 1930s the line on Bach changed somewhat; then the religious content of his music was simply relegated to the background as historical context and nothing more.Wagner too was the subject of many verbal contortions, in his case mainly because of his association with German nationalism and fascism. As German nationalism rose in the 1920s and early 1930s, efforts were made to emphasise that the music of classic German composers ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â œ this especially included Beethoven ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â œ was irrevocably universal property, but by the later 1930s the particular associations of WagnerÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s works led to their not being much performed in the Soviet Union ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â œ until after the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact in August 1939. Then Eisenstein's Alexander Nevsky movie (1938) ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â œ it depicts the attempted 13th century invasion of Novgorod by the Teutonic Knights, repelled by the Prince of Novgorod, Alexander Nevsky ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â œ was withdrawn from distribution and the director charged with staging a new production of Die WalkÃƒÂ re. This was duly presented at the Bolshoi in November 1940, only to be withdrawn after the invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941. (Alexander Nevsky was reinstated and Eisenstein and three others awarded a Stalin Prize for it.)Fairclough gives her book structure by making a chronological progress through her chosen period. Along the way, though, she provides so much detail it becomes a vice as well as a virtue ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â œ it is often difficult to discern the wood amongst so many trees. For those not already familiar with the subject matter, passing reference (and only that) to other academics working in the field can be off-putting. Numbers of the composers, conductors and others she references are likely to be beyond the background knowledge of most ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã ËœgeneralÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢ readers. In this digital age, many of the unfamiliar names can at least be quickly researched, but for those not already familiar with most of the

musicians, and possibly also a good grounding in the history and politics of the Soviet Union under its first two dictators, the book will be far from easy reading.

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