

Music about War and Peace

Original article

УДК 784.6

DOI: 10.56620/2782-3598.2023.1.106-114



The History of one Song: Concerning Study of the Musical Heritage of the Soviet Period*

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Abstract. The article is devoted to David Tukhmanov's song *Victory Day* set to Vladimir Kharitonov's text, which became a symbol of the momentous victory of 1945 in the Great Patriotic War. Reconstructing the history of the development of this song, the author examines the mechanisms of the formation of the genre of the mass song. The article raises the problem range of applying various scholarly approaches for studying the musical heritage of the Soviet period. Examination is made of the sociocultural context of creating the song, as well as the performance aspect of its existence in the political and ideological discourse which formed in the 1960s and 1970s in Soviet society. Analysis is applied to the composition's musical and poetic text and the peculiarities of the genre-related features. The leading tendencies of the musical text are traced out: the interpenetration of the genres in the form of synthesis of the march and the tango; a rejection of the established canons of the mass song. It is highlighted that the poetic text corresponds to the conceptions of the composer and the poet: to create an artistic image which simultaneously combines in itself social cohesion and humanism in correspondence with the demand of society's movement towards civil consolidation. In his conclusions arrived upon in his article the author discloses the nature of the mechanism of the birth of the mass song and the means of its functioning and also outlines the facts which shows the topicality of the given type of mass culture at its present stage.

Keywords: mass song, musical culture of Russia, David Tukhmanov's song *Victory Day*, anthem, march, tango

For citation: Gloushakov Ya. V. The History of one Song: Concerning Study of the Musical Heritage of the Soviet Period. *Problemy muzykal'noi nauki / Music Scholarship*. 2023. No. 1, pp. 106–114. DOI: 10.56620/2782-3598.2023.1.106-114

* The article was prepared for the International Scientific Conference “Music Science in the Context of Culture. Musicology and the Challenges of the Information Age,” held at the Gnesin Russian Academy of Music on October 27–30, 2020 with the financial support of the Russian Foundation for Basic Research (RFBR), project No. 20-012-22033.

Translated by Dr. Anton Rovner.

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Acknowledgments: The reported study was funded by Russian Foundation for Basic Research (RFBR), project number 15-54-00013a(ф) “The Russian Mass Culture of the Middle of the 20th Century.”

Музыка о войне и мире

Научная статья

История одной песни: к изучению музыкального наследия советского периода

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Аннотация. Статья посвящена песне «День Победы» Давида Тухманова на слова Владимира Харитоновна, ставшей символом судьбоносной победы 1945 года в Великой Отечественной войне. Реконструируя историю рождения произведения, автор рассматривает механизмы формирования жанра массовой песни. В статье поднимается проблематика применения различных научных подходов к изучению музыкального наследия советского периода. Рассматривается социокультурный контекст создания песни, а также исполнительский аспект её бытования в политическом и идеологическом дискурсе, сложившемся в 1960–1970-е годы в советском обществе. Анализу подвергается музыкальный и поэтический текст произведения, особенности жанровых свойств. Прослеживаются ведущие тенденции музыкального текста: взаимопроникновение жанров в виде синтеза марша и танго; отказ от устоявшихся канонов массовой песни. Отмечается, что поэтический текст соответствует замыслу композитора и поэта: создать художественный образ, соединяющий в себе одновременно сплочённость и гуманизм в соответствии с запросом движения общества к гражданской консолидации. В выводах автор раскрывает природу механизма рождения массовой песни и способа её функционирования, а также приводит факты, показывающие актуальность данного вида массовой культуры на современном этапе.

Ключевые слова: массовая песня, музыкальная культура России, песня «День Победы» Давида Тухманова, гимн, марш, танго

Для цитирования: Глушаков Я. В. История одной песни: к изучению музыкального наследия советского периода // Проблемы музыкальной науки / Music Scholarship. 2023. № 1. С. 106–114. DOI: 10.56620/2782-3598.2023.1.106-114

Благодарности: Исследование выполнено при финансовой поддержке РФФИ в рамках научного проекта № 15-54-00013a(ф) «Отечественная массовая культура середины XX века».

Each year there are less and less veterans remaining with us, who are living witnesses of the relentless, blood-letting Great Patriotic War. At present, a special task is assigned to the current generation of the grandchildren and great-grandchildren of the victors — to preserve the memory of that time. One of the effectual paths of preservation of our historical heritage lies in the scholarly reconstruction of the key events of the Soviet period. The study of the phenomenon of the Soviet person and his derivatives: Soviet culture and the Soviet song makes it possible not only to preserve the memory indispensable for contemporary Russian society, as well as the societies of other countries, but also to understand, wherein lies the secret of the heroism and self-sacrifice unprecedented in history, what were the forces that made it possible to achieve of the much desired Victory, and why are the songs of the wartime years are still highly on demand by contemporary mass consciousness up till now.

At the present time researchers are interested both in the moral and the patriotic side of the genre of the mass song, [1; 2] as well as in the phenomenon of “Soviet-ness” (or the “Soviet phenomenon,” according to the English-language page), which unites the authors’ desire to show its uniqueness.¹ [3; 4] Researching the mechanisms of its functioning, the attempt is made to

understand, which instruments of natural or supra-national culture worked for its formation. As one of its hypotheses, the thesis is offered that “the Russian culture of the last two centuries is characterized by global ‘Slavic’ subject matter — the authors’ steadfast attention to the ideologemes of national priority and national originality.”² This idea also corresponds to the proposed musicological method of research of the Soviet popular song: its development is determined by historical continuance, as the result of which it becomes necessary to search for the sources of the genre-related specificity of the popular song in the folk music tradition (both the peasant and the urban varieties of folk music) and classical music.³

It must be noted that such scholarly views were characteristic for Soviet musicology in the mid-20th century, when the “folk character” (i.e., the presence of the intonational adherence to folk music) frequently presented the chief evaluation of the merit of a work of art. Moreover, in using this method of scholarly research, it is impossible to explain, why was it that the overwhelming amount of Soviet mass songs was written in the genres of the march and the waltz.

We shall examine one of the most well-known compositions performed during the time of festive events, first of all,

¹ See: Maevskaia I. V. *Zhanrovo-stilevye aspekty otechestvennoi estradnoi pesni vtoroi poloviny XX veka: dis. ... kand. iskusstvovedeniya 17.00.02 [Genre and Stylistic Aspects of Russian Pop Songs of the Second Half of the 20th Century: Dissertation for the Degree of Cand. Sci. (Arts)]*. Rostov-on-Don, 2020. 205 p.; Korolev K. M. *Poiski natsional'noi identichnosti v sovetskoj i postsovetskoj massovoi kul'ture: slavyanskii metasyuzhet v otechestvennom kul'turnom prostranstve [The Search for National Identity in Soviet and Post-Soviet Mass Culture: Slavic Metaplot in the Russian Cultural Space]*. St. Petersburg: Nestor-Istoriya, 2019. 373 p.; Norman M. *Naimark. Stalin and the Fate of Europe. The Postwar Struggle for Sovereignty*. Harvard University Press: Belknap Press, 2019. 368 p.

² Korolev K. M. Op. cit. P. 4.

³ Maevskaia I. V. Op. cit. P. 16.

celebrating *Victory Day* on May 9, 1945 — the song *Victory Day* by composer David Tukhmanov set to a text by Vladimir Kharitonov. Its popularity is proved by the data of a sociological survey: the text of the songs ranks the top five most famous poetic verses in Russia. The song was written for a competition which was announced by Gosteleradio [State Television and Radio] for the best song written in honor of the 30th anniversary of the end of the Great Patriotic War (1975).⁴

When reconstructing the history of the creation of this song from interviews with people involved with it, it may be asserted that the initiator of the participation in the composition was composer Tukhmanov and his wife — poet, songwriter and singer Tatiana Sashko, who became its first performer.

The History of Creation

It is noteworthy that the song was created thirty years after the end of the war. After all, it should be remembered that in the mid-1940s many outstanding composers and poets worked in the USSR, among them were Alexander Alexandrov, Matvey Blanter, Nikita Bogoslovsky, Isaak Dunayevsky, Konstantin Listov, Daniil and Dmitri Pokrass, Dmitri Shostakovich and others. Mikhail Isaakovsky's poem *Ogonek* [*The Fire Spark*] written to the music of an unknown composer, along with Bogoslovsky's *Temnaya noch'* [*In the Dark Night*] and Listov's *V zemlyanke* [*In the Dugout*] became virtually folk songs, reflecting the greatness of its spirit which

has not lost its humaneness in the harshest tribulations. All the most remarkable is the historical fact: immediately after the war, when it seemed that the anthem to the Victory was supposed to have been created, this essentially did not happen.

From the entire broad song output preserved in the archives of the Russian State Library, we were able to find only three songs composed at that time: Anatoly Novikov's *Pobeda!* [*Victory!*] (1945), the Yakut folk song *Den' Velikoi Pobedy* [*The Day of the Great Victory*] (1946), and Nikolai Dremlyuga *Den' Peremogi* [*Victory Day in Ukrainian*] (1947).

At a first glance, this paradoxical fact elicits the question: why did such an obvious occasion for artistic creativity did not appear within the range of vision of the composers of mass songs? However, this may be explained by the conditions of the development of this genre which emerged at that time. First, for the composer and the poets the war was not really over at that time — upon its termination, another most difficult struggle began for the reconstruction of the country and the creation of a potential for military defense capable of coping already with new cosmic and atomic threats. The characteristic feature of that time period — compulsory labor — is broadly reflected in the song output of this time period, a numerous amount of which is comprised of anthems to labor and songs about the struggle for peace. Second, the glorification of the victory of the people in the Great Patriotic War had an absolutely predetermined angle: the Soviet people won the war under the guidance

⁴ Syn avtora legendarnoi pesni Vladimira Kharitonova: "Den' Pobedy s udovol'stvиеm poyut dazhe nemtsy" [The Son of the Author of the Legendary Song Vladimir Kharitonov: "Victory Day Even the Germans Sing with Pleasure"]. *Komsomol'skaya Pravda* [Komsomolskaya Pravda]. 24.06.2010. URL: <https://www.kp.ru/daily/24512.4/662268/> (accessed: 28.02.2023).

of the great leader. The culmination of such a perspective was the movie *Padenie Berlina* [*The Fall of Berlin*] and the choral glorification of Stalin, grandiose in its scale, with which the filmstrip concludes (1949, the producer was Mikhail Chiaureli and the composer was Dmitri Shostakovich).

The composers returned to the war subject matter in the late 1950s. However, the dethronement of the cult of Stalin, the promulgation of the crimes of the state in relation to its citizens, the condemnation of the mass repressions, all of which took place during the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, also affected the composers of mass songs, as the creators of comprehensive Staliniana. The definition “blinded by power” addressed to them in Nikita Khrushchev’s secret report, caused the composers and the poets to search for new points of application and to turn once again to the subject matter of war, but already under a new angle: a dethronement of the heroic status of previously established images took place, while the poets’ and composers’ attention became focused on the inner world of the common person. A partial deconstruction of the previous approach towards the political and social mutual relations between the government and the citizens became reflected on the song material of the war subject matter of that time period — it is characterized by tortuous attempts to provide an answer to the question which began to haunt society: how could all of this have happened to us? A characteristic feature is expressed in the fact that the renunciation of the symbolism of the Stalin period also affected the symbol of victory — namely, the national anthem of the USSR, which first sounded out in a radio broadcast on January 1, 1944. For this reason, there were no widespread festivities commemorating the tenth anniversary of the Victory (1955):

we were not able to find not only any songs of a jubilee character dedicated to this date, but any kinds of ideological or elucidating agitation materials, either.

The search for materials devoted to Victory Day revealed the following regular pattern: the upwelling of publications of ideological character (art exhibitions, articles and conversations) concentrated around jubilee dates, beginning from 1965. They were addressed to lecturers and propagandists noted for holding conversations, reading lectures and presentations. The appearance of songs with such titles can be traced out only after 1975, i.e., only after the release of David Tukhmanov’s song *Victory Day*.

And still yet another moment, explaining the absence of compositions of such kind: the period from the mid-1950s to the 1970s is characterized by a transformation of the genre of the mass song which took place. The critical period in the history of the country was reflected in the genre nature of the mass song. The genre of the march was transformed in a serious manner. Literary texts which presented the authorial reflection in conjunction with a rejection of choral sonorities in favor of projection of solo voices enriched it, endowing with them with previously uncharacteristic traits; however, at the same time, a loss of its primary features of the genre of collective action took place. Moreover, for the first time in the history of the mass song, composers made use of the lullaby and the elegy as its matrix. The image of the song changed cardinally: the parameters of rhythm and timbre demonstrated themselves as the primary expressive force, instead of melody and harmony. The uncertainty and ambiguity of the political course of that time period reflected themselves on the sound of the songs: the frequent usage of the vibraphone by composers in their orchestrations and

arrangements made them heavy sounding and opalescent.

Thereby, by the early 1970s there emerged in society an unalterable demand for the appearance of a type of song which would rally all citizens together: both those who took part in the battles and worked in the defense factories and those who underwent the hardships of captivity, occupation, evacuation and political repressions, regardless of their sex, age and nationality. And such type of song did appear, indeed. Kharitonov and Tukhmanov were able to create such compositions which met all of these demands.

The Path Toward Recognition

It must be stated that this demand, which floated about in the air, was at odds with the ideological state machine, which, notwithstanding the professed repudiation of Stalinist principles, essentially preserved their essential features. The governmental clerks categorically rejected Kharitonov's and Tukhmanov's joint endeavor. According to the recollection of singer Lev Leshchenko, the recording of the song was submitted to the artistic council, on which this work aroused harsh criticism from its members: "such an eventful stratum, such a serious subject, while the music is sung by a woman; moreover, she sings light music in the vein of a foxtrot." Leshchenko notes that the battle-front veteran poet Kharitonov was able to write a colossal "Schlagwort" (German for "buzzword") — a "holiday with tears in the eyes," but the text of the song was also met

unfavorably by the members of the council; they deemed them to be hardly presentable for the subject of the song, for example, "how the coal ember melted in the fire." The song was met with miscomprehension, after which, according to the singer, it "was placed on the shelf" for a lengthy period of time.⁵

The first public performance of the song took place during Leshchenko's tour in the city Alma-Ata at a time coming close to the 30th anniversary of the Victory. According to the artist's recollection, after the song was performed, "something unbelievable was taking place in the hall: the entire hall virtually rose up. This was followed by stupefaction. And then tears. And then the cries of 'bravo' and a burst of applause."⁶ On May 9, 1975, the song sounded out on the television show *Ogonek* [*The Light Spark*] performed by opera singer Leonid Smetannikov.

The song achieved its nationwide popularity after it was performed by Leshchenko at a concert devoted to the Day of Militia on November 10, 1975, the televised broadcast of which was made by the First Channel of the Radio and Television of the Soviet Union. According to the singer, at the rehearsal he was able to show the underappreciated song to one of the deputy ministers responsible for the concert program, who was the person who suggested to end the concert with it.

A somewhat different version of the story of the emergence of the song *Victory Day* is described in *Nezavisimaya gazeta* [*Independent Newspaper*]:⁷ the song was

⁵ The history of the song is recounted by singer Lev Leshchenko in television program *Segodnya vecherom* [*Tonight*]. May 10, 2019. URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ib5NbbipmBA> (accessed: 30.09.2020).

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Krestnyi otets "Dnya Pobedy" [Godfather of *Victory Day*]. *Nezavisimaya gazeta* [*Independent Newspaper*]. 17.05.2002. URL: https://nvo.ng.ru/nvo/2002-05-17/9_victory.html (accessed: 28.02.2023).

supposedly performed for the first time in 1972 (!) at an audition of the “editorial board,” which at that time was headed by the chairman of the Moscow Section of the Composers’ Union Serafim Tulikov. As follows from the article, Tukhmanov “sat at the piano,” while his wife sang. It is also noteworthy that as early as 1974 the *Melodiya* record company released a LP record on which the song was recorded in performance by Vladimir Malchenko.⁸

Features of the Musical Style

A graduate of the Gnesins’ Music School, the Gnesins’ Music College and the Gnesins’ Institute, composer David Feodorovich Tukhmanov created a remarkable musical image. The initial adversaries of the song turned out to be right: the composer wrote an “incorrect” march. An “eluding” first beat (the punctured rhythm of a dotted eighth note and a sixteenth note + two eighth notes) at the very beginning, an absence of a pickup measure, and, most importantly — the characteristic suspension of the resolution of the scale degrees in the refrain endow the march with the features of the other genre, already pertaining to dance — the tango. Such a “diffusion of genres” endows the songs with a reminiscence of the lyrics from the years 1941–1945. And since, as we know, prior to the war the tango was a very popular genre in Europe

and in the USSR, it is possible that the song *Victory Day* by its style reminded the war veterans of their youth (it was particularly the dance genres — the waltz, the tango and the foxtrot — lay at the foundation of the most popular mass songs of the time of the Great Patriotic War).⁹ Similar thoughts are expressed by a friend of the poet Kharitonov, composer Vladimir Shainsky in one of his interviews: “The song [*Victory Day. — Ya. G.*] seemed to have turned back the track of time. And even though it was composed three decades after the war, it seems that the latter was won by us particularly because of it.”¹⁰ Could it be that particularly as the result of the tango element present in it, the song *Victory Day* sounds so authentic on the accordion?

Kharitonov’s poetical text bears resemblance to Bulat Okudzhava’s *Sentimental'nyi marsh* [*Sentimental March*]. It lacks all pathos, and there are no images of heroes in it: “we drew this day nearer as much as we could.” There is no mention of the enemy, nor of the battles of war; the poet outlines concisely the “miles” burnt up in the dust, symbolizing the path toward the Victory. There is also no personification of anybody based on age, sex or nationality. And, most importantly, the paradox noticed by everybody and emphasized by Leshchenko: the holiday with tears in the eyes.

⁸ The recording is preserved in the funds of the Russian State Library.

⁹ Gloushakov Ya. V. “O.K. Great Britain and the Russian Soviet Land!” *Nuzhno li miru boyat'sya sovetskikh pesen perioda Vtoroi mirovoi voiny: tsena Pobedy* [“O.K. Great Britain and the Russian Soviet Land!” Does the World Need to be Afraid of Soviet Songs of the Second World War: the Price of Victory]. *Muzykovedenie* [Musicology]. 2015. No. 7, pp. 10–16.

¹⁰ Lev Leshchenko: 30 let nazad *Den' Pobedy* khoteli zabrakovat' [Lev Leshchenko: 30 Years Ago they Wanted to Reject *Victory Day*]. *Komsomol'skaya Pravda* [Komsomolskaya Pravda]. 04.05.2005. URL: <https://www.kp.ru/daily/23506/39570/> (accessed: 28.02.2023).

Conclusion

Let us return to the problem range set at the beginning of the article. So where is it that the mass song has been derived: from the depths of the vernacular folk music, from out of classical music? Or from some kind of special Slavic path inherent to our people? The carried-out analysis makes it possible to come up with the conclusion: this type of song acquired its mass quality, when its genre-related features began to correspond to the existing practice of its time period.¹¹ In other words, the artistic union of Kharitonov and Tukhmanov created a composition which sounded out in resonance with the expectations of the Soviet people — their feeling of national dignity and pride had finally been satisfied. Each person had felt his or her involvement in the common Victory: both the generation which went through the war and the young people which have seen their fighting grandparents young and beautiful. And the price of Victory

became immeasurably higher because of this. The text of the beginning of the refrain became firmly imprinted into the people's consciousness, Tukhmanov's and Kharitonov's endeavor inspired numerous imitators, and there began appearing many songs with similar titles.

The forms of transmission of genre may be varied. [5] In 2020 (due to the epidemiological reasons familiar to everyone) all the mass events — the parade and the concerts timed towards the 75th anniversary of the Victory was cancelled. However, television and digital technologies came to the rescue: on May 9 it was particularly Tukhmanov's and Kharitonov's song which formed that consolidating link that rallied together the citizens who were compelled to stay at home. The flashmob set up by the federal television channel "Rossiya 1" aroused a response from the audiences: people sang the song *Victory Day* from windows and balconies from various regions of Russia.

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DOI: 10.24411/2076-4766-2020-14003

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Received / Поступила в редакцию: 26.01.2023

Revised / Одобрена после рецензирования: 15.02.2023

Accepted / Принята к публикации: 10.03.2023