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Scholarly and Academic-Methodological Activities of the Gnesins' State Musical Pedagogical Institute and the Political Events of the Second Half of the 1940s*

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Abstract. The focus of the article is the history of the Gnesins' Institute examined within the framework of the political events of the second half of the 1940s. The new institute was established during the difficult wartime period (1944) and after a few years turned out to be at the epicenter of the scholarly and cultural politics of the Soviet Union leading a struggle against “cosmopolitanism.” It was primarily the scholarly-methodological conception of the institute that became the target of criticism. Since the discipline of music acquired a high social status by the beginning of the researched period, musicologists were considered to be one of the most influential professional groups. The author of the article analyzes a number of archival documents, in particular, the transcript of the Open Session of the Artistic Council of the Institute, which took place on March 9 and 10, 1949. According to the present source, critical attacks were levied against the scholarly works and textbooks of Tamara Livanova, Valentin Ferman, Victor Berkov, Valntina Konen, Anatoly Butskoy, and Mikhail Pekelis. Analysis of the hystorical materials shows that the administration of this academic institution attempted to deflect the blow from the institute, while the faculty tried to counteract the Communist Party apparatus. Notwithstanding the demands of the leaders of the party organization of the institute, the researchers working in institute did not have their academic degrees taken away from them, nor were the condemned textbooks subjected to prohibition. At the same time, all the musicologists subjected to the “purge” were forced to leave Moscow. Having been dispersed throughout the entire country, they became the founders of regional academic schools.

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Культурное наследие в исторической оценке

Научная статья

Научная и научно-методическая деятельность Музыкально-педагогического института имени Гнесиных и политические события второй половины 1940-х годов**

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Аннотация. В центре внимания статьи — история Гнесинского института, рассматриваемая в ракурсе политических событий второй половины 1940-х годов. Новый институт был основан в тяжёлое военное время (1944) и спустя несколько лет оказался в эпицентре разрушительной научно-культурной политики Советского Союза, ведшей борьбу с космополитизмом. Мишенью критики стала в первую очередь научно-методическая концепция института. Поскольку музыкальная наука к началу исследуемого периода обрела высокий социальный статус, музыковеды считались одной из самых влиятельных профессиональных групп. Автор статьи анализирует ряд архивных документов, в частности стенограмму Открытого заседания Художественного совета института, которое проводилось 9 и 10 марта 1949 года. Согласно данному источнику, критическим нападкам подверглись научные труды и учебники Тамары Ливановой, Валентина Фермана, Виктора Беркова, Валентины Конен, Анатолия Буцкого, Михаила Пекелиса. Анализ исторических материалов показывает, что администрация вуза стремилась отвести удар от института, а со стороны педагогического коллектива отмечалось противодействие партийным органам. Несмотря на требования руководителей партийной организации института, исследователи, работающие в вузе, не были лишены учёных степеней, не попали под запрет и критикуемые учебники. Всё же подвергнувшиеся публичной «чистке» музыковеды вынуждены были уехать из Москвы. Рассредоточившись по всей стране, они стали основоположниками региональных научных школ.

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Ключевые слова: Государственный музыкально-педагогический институт имени Гнесиных, история российской музыкальной науки и образования, борьба с космополитизмом, идеологические кампании конца 1940-х, Валентина Конен, Тамара Ливанова, Михаил Пекелис

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On the Benefit and the Harm of Musicological Textbooks

The history of the Gnesins' Institute presents one of the most illustrative pages in the music history of the country, which has reflected both its achievements and the dramatic contradictions. Having been established during the difficult wartime years, the institute, along with other institutions created at that same time became a bright symbol of the constructive efforts of the Soviet government and one of the most productive educational institutions of a new type. [1] And only three or four years afterwards, it became involved in destructive political events, which presented a much greater danger for it than for the authoritative and the long established “old” musical higher educational institutions. Remarkable as it may seem, these cardinally opposite processes had a common reason: the scholarly methodical conception of the institute, which turned out to be at the epicenter of the priority interests of the state. Proclaiming it as the chief mission made it possible for Elena Fabianovna Gnesina in 1944 to establish the institute, and in 1948 — to perceive in full measure all the consequences of such a decision.

It seemed strange to imagine, how was it that the peaceful activity in creating textbooks, programs and methodologies could become the reason of political upheavals. It may be possible to try to find an answer to this question by remembering that unprecedented high status that Soviet scholarship, in particular, the musical and musical-pedagogical, obtained by the beginning of the period in question. The reinforcement of this status began approximately at the turn of the 1920s and the 1930s, as evidenced by archival documents of the newly opened musicological departments and sections — for example, at the Moscow Conservatory. [2] One of the eloquent testimonies may be found in the protocol of the Scholarly Research section of the First All-Russian Musical Conference (1929), which was organized under the direct supervisory control of People's Commissar Anatoly Vasilyevich Lunacharsky. The program report was entrusted to Boris Vladimirovich Asafiev, and the supplementary report — to Roman Ilyich Gruber¹. Both reports contained a fair share of remarkable phrases characterizing the role of musicology in the organization of Soviet musical culture. Thus, Asafiev asserted: “A musicologist

¹ As it frequently happened, instead of Asafiev, who could not stand giving public presentations, the report was read by Roman I. Gruber.

in the USSR is not an office scholar, but a musical activist, organizer and ideological director.”² Gruber continued this thought: “A musicologist should be a ‘consultant,’ a rational deputy of the state organs in the sphere of the realization of the musical policies.”³

In the course of time, the musicologists became one of the most influential professional groups. Their presence was very weighty, not only at academic events, but also during the discussions of the repertoires of musical theaters, the plans of musical publishing houses, awarding state premiums, etc. [3] Moreover, all of this had substantial material alimentation. In the summer of 1948, the written correspondence between the Committee for the Affairs of the Arts and the Council of Ministers of the USSR about the ascertaining of the norms of remuneration of the services of theater and musical critics, theater historians and musicologists “engaged by the artistic establishments for separate assignments.”⁴ By the decree of the Council of Ministers of the USSR, the tariffs of wages were established for each form of activity: viewing theater performances and listening

to concerts, written reviews, oral reports or lectures. A concert with an ensuing review “cost” from 200 to 300 rubles, a lecture — from 200 to 500, and a written review — from 150 to 250⁵. The honorarium for writing a textbook for the highest educational institutions comprised between 1500 and 2000 rubles for a print unit for 40,000 ens⁶. At the same time, according to the data of the Central Statistical Administration of the USSR, the average salary for industry in the selfsame year 1948 comprised 600 rubles.⁷

As it is well-known, the lengthy campaign of the struggle against cosmopolitanism started on February 11, 1948, when in the newspaper *Pravda* — the Edict of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Communist Party — was published “About Vano Muradeli’s Opera ‘The Great Friendship’.” [4] Another famous document — an editorial article published almost a year afterwards in the *Pravda* newspaper, — “Ob odnoi antipatrioticheskoi gruppe teatral'nykh kritikov” [“About One Antipatriotic Group of Theater Critics”] (January 28, 1949) — set off the start of the so-called “musicologists’ case.” [5] The campaign affected the activities

² The protocol of the session of the Scholarly Research Section of the First All-Russian Musical Conference from June 18, 1929. The Russian State Archive for Literature and Art (RSALA). Fund 645, List 1, Portfolio 335. P. 50.

³ Ibid. P. 52.

⁴ The Correspondence with the Council of Ministers of the USSR about the Payment of the Work of Theater and Music Critics, Theater Historians and Musicologists and for Other Questions. RSALA. Fund 962, List 3, Portfolio 1771. 36 p.

⁵ Ibid. P. 6.

⁶ The Edict of the Council of People’s Commissars of the RSFSR from July 12, 1944. No. 540 “About Authorial Honorariums.” *Pravovaya Rossiya* [Legalistic Russia].

URL: <https://www.consultant.ru/cons/cgi/online.cgi?req=doc&base=ESU&n=28529#m3RXoDUNL0IrdR9Y> (accessed: 21.05.2024).

⁷ *Sovetskaya zhizn'. 1945–1953 gg.: sbornik dokumentov* [Soviet Life. 1945–1953: a Compilation of Documents]. Comp. by E. Yu. Zubkova, L. P. Kosheleva. Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2003. 720 p.

of a number of institutions in which musicologists worked: the Committee for the Affairs of the Arts, the Composers' Union, and the journal *Sovetskaya muzyka* [*Soviet Music*]. [6]

In the ensuing articles and presentations, the names of the most “malevolent cosmopolitans” were published — they comprised eight musicologists: Mazel, Zhitomirsky, Belza, Ogolevets, Shlifshtein, Martynov, Shneyerson and Vainkop. Thereby, the struggle against cosmopolitanism began under the slogan of the struggle against the anti-patriot critics, however, very soon it was discovered that the main targets turned out to be not the critical works by musicologists published in newspapers and journals — these were practically not discussed, — but textbooks and dissertations.

**“The Musicologists' Case”
at the Gnesins' State
Musical-Pedagogical Institute**

None of the aforementioned “cosmopolitans” were listed as being on the faculty of the Gnesins' State Musical-Pedagogical Institute, with the exception of Lev Abramovich Mazel (Mazel worked in the institute part-time, without having left the Conservatory).

Nonetheless, in correspondence with the demands of the time, an open session of the Artistic Council was appointed, which lasted for an entire two days — on March 9 and 10, 1949. Only a year earlier, in connection with the Edict of 1948, a similar open party session took place, following the results of which Elena Gnesina sent the Committee for the Affairs of Arts an internal memorandum with a detailed account, having been able

not to list a single last name in it. Judging by the text of the memorandum, there were no concrete guilty persons in the institute, but only certain “elements of formalism” in the work, moreover, revealed in a timely manner and stigmatized with shame at the same time, at a Communist Party meeting. A number of realized and planned events was indicated, such as the revision of the program of the music of the peoples of the USSR, or the conference on the subject of the book “by Comrade Stalin *Anarchism and Socialism*” planned at the Music Theory Department.⁸

However, the most important things lay ahead. The preparation for the session of the Artistic Council of 1949 was accompanied by the appointment of reporters both from the number of professors and the number of students. The program report was assigned to the depict director for scholarly and tutorial work, Associate Professor Yuri Vladimirovich Muromtsev. Scholarly and academic-methodic works were designated as the targets; many of them had been developed outside of the Gnesins' Institute. These included such works as, for example: the dissertation for the degree of Dr.Sci. (Arts) written by Tamara Nikolayevna Livanova defended as far back as 1935 at the Moscow Conservatory; the dissertation for the degree of Cand.Sci. (Arts) written by Viktor Osipovich Berkov, defended during the period of evacuation in 1942 at the Saratov Conservatory; the dissertation for the degree of Dr.Sci. (Arts) written by Valentina Dzhozefovna Konen, defended in 1946 at the All-Union Scholarly Research Institute of Arts Studies affiliated with the Academy of Sciences

⁸ Report on the Tutorial-Methodological Work for the 1947–1948 Academic Year and the Materials for It. RSALA. Fund 2927, List 1, Portfolio 234. 175 p.

of the USSR; Anatoly Konstantinovich Butskoy's textbook *Struktura muzykal'nogo proizvedeniya: Teoreticheskie osnovy analiza muzykal'nykh proizvedenii* [*The Structure of a Musical Composition: the Theoretic Foundations of the Analysis of Musical Compositions*] (1948) and a few other works. All three music history textbooks written before the war, all written in 1940 — by Livanova, Valentin Eduardovich Ferman (authors) and Mikhail Samoylovich Pekelis (editor-compiler) — were also castigated.⁹

However, it is noteworthy that notwithstanding the evidently present political order for the condemnation of these and other scholarly and academic-methodological works, Muromtsev, who made his presentation first, exerted the greatest attention not to the musicologists of the Gnesins' Institute, but those who had already been noticed in the publications of the *Pravda*. At the same time, when speaking about the musicologists from the Gnesins' Institute Iosif Yakovlevich Ryzhkin, Boris Veniaminovich Levik and others, he limited himself to a “harsh condemnation” of their position of “non-interference.”¹⁰ This was a much lighter “case,” not incurring any consequences of a repressive character. Most likely,

the greatest castigation was inflicted on Konen's dissertation: here, a crucial role, of course, was played by the theme “Ocherki po istorii muzykal'noi kul'tury SShA” [“Essays on the Musical Culture of the USA”]; certain aspects of this research were included in the plan of the Institute's scholarly research work and were already implemented into the music history course curriculum. It is necessary to remember that Soviet musicologists turned to foreign music, especially in dissertations, exceedingly cautiously — the exceptions were only a few separate works about Bizet, Bach and Beethoven — and, as it turned out, this caution was not groundless. After the “cosmopolitan” campaign, the subject matter of foreign music, having turned out to be dangerous, was not renewed in dissertation works up to 1960.

Mirra Semyonovna Bruk, who spoke following Muromtsev, fulminated with criticism of the Artistic Council of the Moscow Conservatory, which awarded the degrees of Dr.Sci. (Arts) to Livanova and Mazel, and the Artistic Council of the All-Union Scholarly-Research Institute of Art Studies, which awarded a degree of Dr.Sci. (Arts) to Konen, and her opponents that gave reviews of acclaim.¹¹

⁹ What is meant here are the textbooks *Istoriya russkoi muzyki* [*History of Russian Music*] under the editorship of Mikhail Pekelis (1940), *Istoriya zapadnoevropeiskoi muzyki do 1789 goda* [*History of Western European Music Before 1789*] by Tamara Livanova (1940), *Istoriya novoi evropeiskoi muzyki ot Frantsuzskoi revolyutsii 1789 goda do Vagnera* [*History of New European Music from the French Revolution of 1789 to Wagner*] by Valentin Ferman (1940).

¹⁰ A presentation by Associate Director for Scholarly and Tutorial Work of the Gnesins' State Musical-Pedagogical Institute, Associate Professor Yuri Muromtsev on the open session of the Artistic Council of March 9, 1949 “Bor'ba za razгром antipatrioticheskoi gruppy muzykovedov-kosmopolitov i nashi zadachi” [“The Struggle for the Evisceration of the Group of Cosmopolitan Musicologists and Our Goals”]. RSALA. Fund 2927, List 1, Portfolio 44. P. 10.

¹¹ Stenograph No. 12 of the Open Session of the Artistic Council of the Institute Jointly with the Pedagogical Council of the Gnesins' Music College. March 9, 1949. RSALA. Fund 2927, List 1, Portfolio 44, pp. 34, 35, 36, 37.

It turned out that it was not only the Gnesins' Institute, but all the Soviet musicological institutions from year to year did nothing else that encouraged "cosmopolitan" research works. The dean of the History and Theory Department Ida Anatolyevna Margolina in her presentation supported this premise, suggesting to concentrate not on the new, but on the old textbooks and research works as being more "injurious".¹² This persistent reference to the "Pre-Gnesins' past and unwillingness to touch the present was present in many of the presentations and may have been evaluated as an attempt to avert the blows from the Institute.

Some of the presentations, even the rather lengthy ones, passed without mentions of any names at all. The student Levit especially distinguished himself, who by discoursing abstractly about cosmopolitanism in his presentation, deflected so painstakingly from mentioning concrete names, that a demand followed from the presidium to mention the "cosmopolitan" pedagogues by name. However, the dexterous student was able to avoid answering even such a direct request. And only Konstantin Konstantinovich Rosenschild, who was criticized in Muromtsev's report for his dissertation for the degree of Dr.Sci. (Arts) devoted to the Soviet formalist composers Prokofiev, Shostakovich and Myaskovsky (which was subsequently never defended), identified concisely two of the "cosmopolitans" of the Gnesins' Institute — Konen and

Pekelis. On this session, only the two of them were forced to renounce publicly their own "fallacies": Pekelis had to condemn his own textbook written a decade ago, and Konen — her dissertation. Boris Levik tried voluntarily to become the third victim: in the very beginning of his presentation he expressed his surprise that Muromtsev and the other reporters decided to spare him for some reason. He enumerated his "fallacies" meticulously, remembering that during Rosenschild's two-month long illness, he chaired the Music History Department and made numerous mistakes; how, having succumbed to the "hypnosis of authoritative names" he lavished praise on the composers of the formalist trend... It seemed that, having chosen this style of presentation, Levik somewhat softened the settings of the session.¹³

Pavel Gennadyevich Kozlov, who spoke afterwards, chose for his topic the activities of the higher educational institutions in the aspect of the interaction between scholarship and pedagogy. Not forgetting to pronounce certain "signal" terms, such as "historical and dialectic materialism," he essentially turned the meeting to the direction of discussing the new historical-stylistic harmony course.¹⁴ The topic was supported by Elena Vasilyevna Davydova, who subjected the then existent methodological manuals for solfeggio to exhaustive analysis.

Thereby, the discussion seemed to have been switched to a professional

¹² Stenograph No. 12 of the Open Session of the Artistic Council of the Institute Jointly with the Pedagogical Council of the Gnesins' Music College. March 9, 1949. RSALA. Fund 2927, List 1, Portfolio 44.

¹³ Stenograph No. 12 of the Open Session of the Artistic Council of the Institute Jointly with the Pedagogical Council of the Gnesins' Music College. March 10, 1949. RSALA. Fund 2927, List 1, Portfolio 45, pp. 10, 11.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 14–18.

channel. Student of the History and Theory Department Liudmila Atanova presented in defense of a more thorough study of foreign languages, taking refuge in the following argument: “Without any knowledge of even a single foreign language, we would not be able to judge foreign music. In order to struggle with an enemy, it is necessary to know what weapons he is using in his fight.”¹⁵ With this phrase, the young student used a well-known blind, when in the guise of “criticism of bourgeois theories” or “the struggle with the enemy” the possibility arose to study “bourgeois” languages and “bourgeois” culture.

From the texts of the presentations it also became possible to arrive at conclusions about certain nuances that were absent from the stenograph, but not omitted from the presentations of a number of reporters. One of such significant nuances was represented by the applause. They erupted during the most unfit moments — for example, during the presentations of Pekelis and Konen. The thesis that art is situated beyond politics, beyond the struggle of the part, offered by Konen as one of her recent “fallacies,” was met with standing ovation from the hall. The stenographer did not fixate this occurrence, however, it became conspicuous in the outraged speech of the representative of the Committee for the Affairs of the Arts Evgeny Evgenyevich Severin, who was present at the session. Having been discouraged by that support that the hall was endowing to the main culprits, he promised to carry out a serious purge in the Institute. One more important

semantic nuance was added by the responses made on the spot. For example, when the head of the Marxism-Leninism Department E. N. Melnik suggested to look over once more the defended dissertations and to deny the “cosmopolitan” musicologists their academic degrees, the students communicated from the spot in an untimely manner that at the department entrusted to her, the course of historic materialism was taught in an unqualified way and was not read to the final stage.

Notwithstanding the perceived resistance on the part of the faculty and student body, the text of the resolution, besides a condemnation of the activities of all the departments, dean’s offices and student groups, included a recommendation to relieve Margolina from her position of the dean of the History and Theory Department, Pekelis and Konen from their teaching positions and to extract all the textbooks acknowledged as being ideologically harmful from the libraries.

At the same time, the Music History Department scheduled a detailed discussion of Konen’s dissertation; Livanova’s “cosmopolitan” textbook *History of Western European Music before 1789* was listed as the next in the plan. However, Livanova did not wait for this session and left the Institute herself: her name is not mentioned in the subsequent protocols. Konen’s dissertation was subjected to a critical dissection on two sessions in a row — on March 24 and 31, 1949.¹⁶ Here especially noteworthy was the extensive presentation of Rosenschild, who a year earlier had already presented an over-30-page-long

¹⁵ Ibid. P. 28.

¹⁶ Stenograph of the session of the Music History Department of the Gnesins’ Musical-Pedagogical Institute on March 24, 1948. RSALA. Fund 2927, List 1, Portfolio 243. P. 3.

analysis of the published and defended dissertation of Butskoy from Leningrad, who was soon to be stripped of his academic degree and taken off his position as the dean of the Theory Department.¹⁷ Now the hard-hitting analysis was carried out in relation to the pedagogue of the selfsame department in the Institute discharged from her job by the decision of the Artistic Council. Unfortunately, one of the opponents on her defense was Igor Belza, who was placed in the first group of eight “cosmopolitan” musicologists, and this circumstance was noted in Rosenschild’s speech as a non-accidental, deliberate fact. Incidentally, the other acting figures also took a beating — the research advisor, corresponding member of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR Alexander Vyacheslavovich Ossovsky and the opponents — Livanova and the chairman of the Music Theory Department Sergei Sergeyevich Skrebkov. The work itself was characterized from the position of the “fallacies” and “untruths” inherent to it and meticulously enumerated, as well as the determinant influence of “racist conceptions.”

In comparison to this report, the position of the pedagogues of the department, which was also rather critical, seems, nonetheless, mild and intelligent: it is not by chance that Rosenschild unleashes his dissatisfaction on Levik, Skrebkov and the aspirant Iraida Smirnova, who, in all likelihood, did not say all the words that were necessary for endorsing the expected position.¹⁸

Also quite characteristic was the comment of the faculty member of the department

Victor Kelmanovich Fradkin, who observed the impossibility, considering the discussion of a dissertation of a Soviet musicologist — these words were emphasized by him, — to write in the resolution simply “Konen,” as it was done in Rosenschild’s redaction. It is noteworthy that the entire text of the stenograph was, indeed, corrected: throughout the whole text before Konen’s last name the letter “t” was added — “tovarishch Konen” [“Comrade Konen”].

After the end of all the events in Moscow, Pekelis left Moscow and moved to the city of Gorky, where he taught at the conservatory and chaired the Music History Department until 1955, then he returned to the Gnesins’ Institute and worked here until the end of his life. Konen was dismissed from her job immediately after the end of the Artistic Council in March 1949, and thereby she was spared from the repeated discussion of her dissertation. At the same time, she also left the Moscow Conservatory (for more detail about her life and her destiny, see: [7]).

In the selfsame year, 1949 the likewise dismissed Nikolai Feodorovich Orlov, the director of the Sverdlovsk Conservatory, was able to hire her. In 1952 Rosenschild was also dismissed, — albeit, after a certain period of time, he was once again hired to be on the faculty of the Institute. But this is already another, completely different story, requiring separate elucidation.

While completing recounting the story about the peculiarities of the “musicologists’ case” at the Gnesins’ Institute, it is important to note that, despite the numerous demands

¹⁷ About A. K. Butskoy’s work *Struktura muzykal'nogo proizvedeniya (teoreticheskie osnovy analiza muzykal'nykh proizvedenii)* [*The Structure of a Musical Composition (The Theoretic Foundations of the Analysis of Musical Compositions)*]. Muzgiz, 1948. RSALA. Fund 2927, List 1, Portfolio 681. 31 p.

¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 62, 63, 64, 65, 66.

on the part of the leaders of the Communist Party organization within the Institute, neither Konen, nor any other musical researcher from Gnesins' was stripped of his or her academic degree. Neither were the criticized textbooks subjected to prohibition.

In 1954 the third and final volume of *History of Russian Music* was published, edited by Pekelis — the textbook for which he was forced to repent publicly at the session of the Artistic Council on March 9, 1949. In 1982–1983 both volumes of Livanova's *History of Western*

European Music before 1789 were republished; in 2018 the book was reprinted once again by the “Planeta muzyki” publishing house. The musicologists who had been forced to leave Moscow became the founders of academic schools far beyond the confines of the city. The harsh wind of time swept them across the whole country, however, it was particularly this circumstance that had generated the unique phenomenon: the rooted system of musicology that was unified across the entire space of the Soviet Union. [8]

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