



Zbigniew Wojnowski* and Michel Abesser

Between Winning and Losing the Cultural Cold War – The Soviet Ministry of Culture and Musical Infrastructures During the Cold War

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Abstract: The article analyzes the Soviet Ministry of Culture in the late Soviet period as an agent facilitating the transfer of music within the socialist bloc and to the West. Conceptualizing Soviet musical infrastructures as an imperfect ensemble of state-run institutions for the production and distribution of music, the article focuses on three case studies to explore how the Ministry, as the organizer of “progressive Soviet musical culture,” navigated the ideological challenges of the Cold War era, the various practical tasks of global music markets, and its diverse audiences. By examining contractual agreements with Western record companies, the mechanisms of music distribution within the socialist bloc, and Soviet concert tours in the Global South, the article carves out the possibilities and limits of Soviet attempts to capitalize on their musical cultures both symbolically and economically.

Keywords: Soviet music; Soviet Ministry of Culture; concert organization; Cold War culture; musical infrastructures; socialist culture

This article focuses on the USSR Ministry of Culture as an agent of establishing and maintaining infrastructures of musical exchange with the capitalist West, the socialist bloc, and non-aligned countries during the Cold War. Examining Soviet entanglements with the global music industry, it considers musical infrastructures as networks of institutions that included record labels, concert agencies, and philharmonics which produced music; trade organizations in charge of importing and exporting cultural products in the Soviet Union and its partner countries which signed contractual agreements with each other; as well as other institutions that enabled the distribution of recorded and live music including stores, transport providers, hotels, and telecommunication networks. Our goal is to analyze how the

*Corresponding author: **Zbigniew Wojnowski**, University of Oxford, Oxford OX1 2JD, UK,
E-mail: zbigniew.wojnowski@history.ox.ac.uk

Michel Abesser, Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg, Freiburg 79098, Germany,
E-mail: Michel.abesser@geschichte.uni-freiburg.de

USSR Ministry of Culture coordinated these diverse institutions to facilitate the transfer of music across Soviet borders.

Many transnational studies of Cold War culture have focused on the micro-level reception of music on both sides of the Iron Curtain and macro-level political and ideological changes that affected music production, distribution, and consumption (Caute 2003; Hixson 1997). The meso-level institutions that fell under the auspices of the USSR Ministry of Culture have attracted less systematic scholarly attention (Kondrashina 2019). Yet it was they that planned, implemented, and oversaw the transfer of music across borders. Our focus on the meso level allows us to examine the goals, the evolution, and the effectiveness of Soviet cultural diplomacy in the Cold War. Exploring the agendas of mid-level bureaucrats who coordinated the import and export of music, we also move beyond conventional chronologies of the “Thaw” and “stagnation” which explain the evolution of Soviet cultural policy with reference to changing Communist Party leaders. While ideological interventions into cultural politics were common, our focus on infrastructures enables us to dive into notions of institutional learning, adaptation, and professionalization that evade these classical periodization schemes.

This article covers the period after the death of Stalin, which precipitated the intensification of international cultural exchange and coincided with the creation of the all-Soviet Ministry of Culture in March 1953. It ends in the early 1980s, when the mounting economic crisis and middling outcomes of Brezhnev-era foreign cultural policy encouraged Ministry of Culture officials to reevaluate their priorities. We examine Soviet musical connections with the capitalist West, socialist Eastern Europe, and “developing countries” in the Global South. These terms do not designate internally coherent “regions” or a set of identities. However, they do correspond to the system of classification which the USSR Ministry of Culture used to plan and assess its cultural exchange programs. As such, they help us identify distinct Soviet experiences and contemporary understandings of musical globalization.

As an agent of establishing transnational infrastructures of musical exchange, the USSR Ministry of Culture oversaw a cumbersome and experimental process of institutional change on three main levels (Beloshapka 2012). The Party’s jealous guardianship of culture as an ideological instrument fueled constant tensions with the Ministry over the goals, methods, and choice of partners for international exchange. Especially in the 1950s and early 1960s, when parts of the state apparatus were rebalanced for the demands of peaceful competition in culture, the Ministry further competed against other governmental departments to maintain and expand its competencies and budget. The institutional system of the Ministry itself also evolved to meet the increased demand for culture at home and to more effectively disseminate Soviet culture abroad. Faced with enormous challenges in the production of sound recordings and the organization of concerts, the Ministry created and

frequently reorganized such institutions as the record label Melodiia and the impresario agency Goskontsert.

The USSR Ministry of Culture navigated a long and contested process to achieve significant success in exporting music to the capitalist West. Our analysis builds on histories of transmission and reception that move beyond the study of one-directional, West-to-East musical transfers (Davenport 2009; Mikkonen, Parkkinnen, and Scott-Smith 2019; Mikkonen and Suutari 2020). Especially in the fields of classical music and ballet, the USSR won over large Western audiences, presenting itself as a more sophisticated space than the United States and the West in general (Herrala 2016; Saunders 2000; Tomoff 2015). While recent studies have illuminated the history of Soviet-Western concert exchanges, this article explores Soviet music in the Western record market (Kondrashina 2019). It shows that the Ministry presided over a slow process of creating stable links between Soviet and Western music infrastructures of recording, production, and distribution. Although this process exposed Soviet officials' conflicting understandings of "profit," "technical modernization," "prestige," and "protection," by the mid-1960s the Ministry established fruitful cooperation with Western record companies that allowed the Soviet Union to regain a certain amount of control over the circulation and commodification of its music abroad. The Ministry's acceptance of the Western system of contracts in the recording industry helped the USSR harvest the symbolic and economic fruits of its musicians' success on international stages.

The ideas and practices which the USSR Ministry of Culture developed in the context of musical exports to the capitalist West did not translate onto socialist soil. After 1945, the USSR mobilized culture to foster closer ties with its satellite states and to legitimize the Cold War division of Europe (Babiracki 2015). Yet Soviet contacts with Poland, its largest satellite state, illustrate that transnational infrastructures of recording, production, and distribution in Eastern Europe were weak. This had less to do with copyright issues that shaped the contours of Soviet-Western musical exchange and more with major infrastructural problems such as unreliable supply chains of vinyl and delayed construction of recording studios. Equally important, ideological factors – the Soviet view of music as a means to educate rather than simply to entertain "socialist" audiences, as well as the commitment to sell cultural products at low, government-controlled prices – limited the growth of transnational cultural networks in Eastern Europe. The USSR's attempts to cultivate transnational musical ties in the socialist bloc rested heavily on infrastructures of performance rather than recording. Cracking at the seams by the early 1980s, these infrastructures of performance nevertheless sustained the transfer of music across borders.

The institutions that formed the lynchpins of performance infrastructures linking musicians in the Soviet bloc were also responsible for cultivating musical ties

between the USSR and the Global South.¹ In contrast to other works that also move beyond the dominant accounts of the Cold War in Europe and North America (Betts and Vucetic 2022; Iandolo 2022; Kalinovsky 2020), we suggest that the USSR's attempts to extend its influences in the Global South were half-hearted and unsuccessful, at least in the sphere of culture. The Ministry did not establish a stable set of institutions, spaces, or practices that would merit the label of an “infrastructure” capable of sustaining Soviet cultural contacts beyond Europe and North America.

Our conclusions suggest that Western institutions such as private record labels and distribution channels played a fundamental role in helping the USSR spread its music across borders. We thus expand on Kirill Tomoff's argument about “the gradual but eventually systematic integration of the Soviet Union into the global legal and economic regime dominated by the United States” from the 1950s (Tomoff 2015, 178). In the absence of Western institutions, the Soviet Union struggled against infrastructural problems that thwarted the import and export of recorded music and, in the context of the Global South, placed important limits on the import and export of live music, too. Moreover, building on studies of mid-level professionals in other spheres of Soviet culture and mass media (Huxtable 2022; Roth-Ey 2011), the article suggests that the meso-level actors who form the center of our analysis increasingly sidelined the ideological functions of transnational musical exchange. Soviet cultural diplomacy worked when it also turned a profit. The USSR Ministry of Culture struggled to sustain stable networks of cultural exchange when it attempted to pursue loss-making activities in the name of presenting the USSR and its system in a positive light.

1 Western Europe and the United States

Despite many Western observers considering the Soviet music industry of the 1950s as one wheel in a seemingly potent propaganda machinery, it faced a variety of problems with control, productivity, and quality at home and abroad.² From the beginning of the Cold War, the Soviet side had only limited influence over how its music was circulated in the West (Tomoff 2011). As the country joined the Universal

1 Our notion of the Global South corresponds to what the Soviet Ministry of Culture defined as “developing countries.” It does not therefore encompass the Soviet republics of the Caucasus and Central Asia, which were integrated into the USSR's domestic infrastructures of recording and performance. For a discussion of music in Soviet Central Asia, see Levin 1996. Mongolia, which was integrated into the same networks of musical exchange as the Soviet satellite states of Eastern Europe, and China, where cultural relations followed distinct patterns due to the Sino-Soviet split, are not included in our discussion of the USSR's relations with the Global South.

2 “C. R. S. Audio Feedback,” *Billboard Magazine*, December 7, 1959.

Copyright Convention (UCC) of 1952 only in 1973, it depended on licensing agreements with Western companies like the Leeds Musical Cooperation, this being the sole agent for Soviet music in the U.S. and Canada after 1952.³ In this early stage of the Cold War, economic disputes over the payment of royalties could for political reasons be protracted. In 1952, the director of the American label Colosseum Records Bruno Ronty rejected financial claims from Leeds, arguing that “we will not pay royalties that go to a hostile state.”⁴

Domestically, the challenge of control over music production and distribution gained an even more severe character. Throughout the 1950s, Soviet authorities struggled to integrate record production into the Soviet cultural system of the 1950s, a system that Kiril Tomoff defined as an “interlocking set of institutions and discursive practices which produced, oversaw, and disseminated the artistic products created in the Soviet Union and organized, financed, and disciplined Soviet cultural practitioners” (Tomoff 2004, 158). In 1958, the Central Committee discussed an extensive report on record production and trade within the country and the socialist bloc.⁵ Its results demonstrated that the existing musical infrastructure of production facilities, recording studios, retail shops, and foreign trade institutions worked exclusively following the premises of economic rather than cultural policy. The increasing focus on consumer goods production after 1953 had several unintended side effects. While various factories and cooperatives across the country were profitably producing records of light music often without any control of their content, the Ministry of Foreign Trade also imported almost exclusively so-called light music from the People’s Democracies. The lack of new recordings of entertainment music fostered hundreds of reissues and illegal productions of tangos and romances from the 1920s and 30s often considered “backward and reactionary” (Gronow and Saunio 1999, 127). Yet political criticism in the report mostly focused on economic ministries and their institutions, which were blamed for the import and reproduction of jazz and pop songs from other socialist states and the drop in the production of folklore and classical music.⁶ The Soviet state was neither able to meet its population’s quantitative demand for music nor to establish its hierarchical cultural canon within record production. The envisaged measures to solve this situation (in which conservative party elites experienced the medium as subversive and potentially

3 “No More Duplicates? Leeds Tightens Up On Loose Russian Tape,” *Billboard Magazine*, August 23, 1952.

4 *Ibid.*

5 Ideological Commission of the Central Committee (hereafter CC) of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (hereafter CPSU), “On serious shortages in the repertoire of records,” April 10, 1958, *Afanas’eva/Afiani Ideologicheskie komissii CK KPSS. 1958–1964. Dokumenty*, Moscow 1998, 52–57.

6 On statistics for the production of records with classical music A. Morov, “O gramplastinke,” *Sovetskaya Muzyka* 1955, 2, 105–9, 106.

uncontrollable) aimed at establishing a cultural rather than economic primacy, a process that would continue until 1964, when the State founded Melodiia as the state company presiding over all its musical infrastructure, under the Ministry of Culture.

Besides the issue of control of records at home and abroad, the modernization of infrastructure remained a fundamental challenge for the “Soviet disc strategy.” Both production and recording facilities significantly expanded in the post-war period, especially in the republics of Central Asia, the Caucasus, and the Baltic region.⁷ This allowed for better accommodation and representation of the various non-Russian people. However, due to economic priorities, the anti-innovative character of the planned economy, and the Cold War technology embargos, the Soviet Union fell behind the revolution in recording technologies experienced in the West following 1945 (Abesser 2021; Garofalo 1999). Only slowly did the tape recorder, which had been further developed in Germany during the Second World War, and the transistor come into use in Soviet radio stations and recording studios as an energy-saving, more robust, and more efficient counterpart to tube technology. A crucial challenge for linking Soviet musical infrastructure to the West remained the replacement of older formats such as shellac records with modern formats such as vinyl LPs and the establishment of stereo recording and devices. The necessary and complex economic transformations of converting the raw material base and production processes and providing suitable equipment for consumers strained the planned economy; while informal rules of plan fulfillment inhibited the introduction of new production processes (Sanchez-Silbony 2010). The modernization gap existed not only between the Soviet Union and the West but also between the USSR and its satellite states (Popper 1991). Products of record companies such as Hungaroton from Hungary, Suprafon from the ČSSR, or Polskie Nagrańia from the Polish People’s Republic were considered superior both in quality and design.⁸ For Soviet interaction with the Western market, there was no way around cooperating with Berlin, Prague, and Warsaw both as partners and mediators.

Conditions for the reception of classical music from the Soviet Union in the 1950s were more favorable than before, for the newly introduced long-playing record made it possible to play longer classical compositions for the first time. For Western companies such as Columbia, EMI, or the German Teldec, this development was particularly important for the classical segment, which registered significant increases in profits. Within the cultural competition between the Soviet Union and the

7 In addition to the Aprelevskiy factories near Moscow, further production facilities were established in Tashkent (in 1945 on the basis of the evacuated factories from Noginsk), in Leningrad in 1948 (on the basis of the former German Farbik Tempo) and in Riga in 1950 (former Latvian Bellachord-Electro). New recording studios were set up in Moscow in 1957, in Riga in 1958 with branches in Tallinn and Vilnius, and in Leningrad in 1959.

8 G. Šneerson, “Recordings of the company Suprafon,” *Sovetskaya Muzyka*, 1959, 7, 155–57.

West, both sides agreed on the idea of music as a mostly non-verbal art form that seemed to cloak its links to politics, thus making it a powerful tool (Tomoff 2015, 6). However, while the United States held an advantage in the realm of pop and jazz, both the superior system of musical education and the (mostly) Russian classical heritage, already famous in the West, gave the Soviet Union a clear advantage in the realm of classical music. Furthermore, the contrast between the elevations of musical modernism as the Western signature of freedom in the Cold War contest and the audiences' persisting taste for Beethoven, Bach, and increasingly Rachmaninov, Skryabin, or Shostakovich played out in favor of Soviet musical diplomacy. In addition, as musical performance in comparison to composition seemed to be free of ideology, it certainly reflected positively on the Soviet educational system as well (Caute 2003, 397). Yet, to capitalize on the increased demand for Soviet interpretations on the Western market, access protectionist national markets, or overcome the technical backwardness, the Soviet side required proxies in the West. However, the question of the degree to which Soviet and Western musical infrastructures could and should be linked (at all) to increase the music's marketability abroad revealed an unexpected cleavage within the Soviet political and cultural elite. The leadership was divided between regarding the Soviet record as a mere trade product for a global market, whose mechanisms they were only then beginning to comprehend, and seeing it also as a medium, whose quality and sales would affect the country's reputation within the context of the Cold War. Institutional settings within state structures, such as the recording process which was subject to the Committee for Radio and Television until 1957, and the absence of the record as a medium from any document discussing propaganda, give us some indication about the record's indeterminate status.

The culmination of three concurrent developments in the second half of the 1950s set a profound debate over the character of these contracts in motion. After three years of political disorientation following Stalin's death in 1953, the Party aimed at a more consistent cultural policy and an increase in cultural control by state institutions. The cultural exchange between the blocks, first with Western European countries, and then with the United States, rapidly gained pace. In addition, Soviet exports were growing massively at this time, confronting planners and party officials with enormous challenges due to the concurrent economic reforms (Sanchez-Sibony 2014). These generated numerous institutional conflicts between ministries that required mediation. Among them, the Ministry of Culture became the most ardent proponent of close cooperation with Western cultural companies and institutions and acted as a mediator between Western actors, their inquiries and contract offers, and the Central Committee (Herrala 2016). Similarly, the Minister of Culture Nikolay Mikhailov addressed the Cultural Department of the Central Committee regarding an improved proposal for a long-term contract from EMI in April 1958. Two years

earlier, the first contract between the company and the Soviet side had included the sale of 41 h of classical recordings that helped EMI reposition itself on the European market towards new audiences after negotiating contracts with RCA and Victor as their main sources for American pop music had failed (Southhall 2009, 27–30).⁹ EMI, and in 1957 the German Telefunken, slowly moved into a position not only as a mediator of American popular music to Europe but also of Soviet classical music to the West (Clegg 2015, 248). EMI's new 1958 proposal to the ministry was customized to the Soviet needs at that time (convertible payment, new Western recording equipment). A second novelty was the suggested financial agreement for 10 LPs worth of recording. Instead of a single payment, the company offered the Soviet side a share of every record sold. In addressing the Central Committee, Mikhailov underlined the advantages of working with a global company that had “broad connections to the world market and is interested in a fast dissemination of its recordings.”¹⁰

Within the Central Committee, however, the opponents of economic cooperation in this area initially prevailed. In July of 1958, the Central Committee banned the hitherto common contractual practice of selling recordings and thus rejected Mikhailov's proposal.¹¹ Instead, it called for “the broadening of trade links with foreign companies by increasing exports ... and not through the production of records in the capitalist world.”¹² The previous practice, which attempted to compensate for poor quality and a lack of distribution structures through the participation of Western companies, was put to a halt. Thus, the Ministry of Culture missed an opportunity to carry out the urgently needed technical modernization of recording and production facilities without direct investment and long-term resource allocations through *Gosplan*.

To overcome problems of recording and distribution, the ministry opted for a strategy of attempting to add to its competencies areas that had earlier been the responsibility of other ministries. Mikhailov addressed the Central Committee in February 1959 and blamed the Committee for Radio and Television as the main culprit for the lack of audio research, modern equipment, and qualitative recordings.¹³ The minister adapted his argument to the new political realities that the Central Committee had created with the contract ban: the Committee's research institutes and laboratories were to blame for the “fiasco in the field of stereo sound,”

⁹ Russian State Archive for Contemporary History (hereafter RGANI) f. 5, op. 36, d. 104, l. 36, letter of the Cultural Department to the CC of the CPSU, December 10, 1959.

¹⁰ RGANI f. 5, op. 36, d. 70, l. 25.

¹¹ RGANI f. 5, op. 36, d. 70, l. 35, letter from the Cultural Department (hereafter CD) to the CC of the CPSU, August 15, 1958.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ RGANI f. 6, op. 36, d. 101, l. 6–11, letter from the Soviet ministry of Culture to the CD of the CC CPSU, February 28, 1959.

and the previous practice of selling tapes to the West meant that “companies are now making millions in profits from these recordings, while Soviet records are denied access to the market.”¹⁴ Six months later, the Central Committee’s Department of Culture rejected Mikhailov’s call for the pooling of powers under his ministry and made it clear that in this boom period of foreign trade, the Soviet Union should appear as a sovereign actor vis-à-vis the West.¹⁵ The minister’s pragmatic suggestion that Soviet records should be traded through the Czechoslovak trade network of the Artia company, which had branches and contacts in various Western countries, was rejected by the Central Committee because it would have “a negative effect on the prestige of Soviet foreign trade.”¹⁶

The situation caused similar power struggles between the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Foreign Trade. The successful negotiations of the former with Columbia and Hurok Artist for the U.S. tours of Oistrach and Richter encouraged Mikhailov to (unsuccessfully) demand the right to organize recordings of Soviet artists abroad and negotiations with foreign companies.¹⁷ The previous practice under the care of the Ministry of Foreign Trade, according to Mikhailov, was unsatisfactory because “their representatives do not have the necessary competence in musical-performing matters” and the “haphazard nature of the organization of recordings” led to the loss of significant financial resources.¹⁸

From the point of view of the Central Committee, this separation of authorities appeared to be the best guarantee of being able to select reliable partners who could guarantee economic profits and control over cultural production. Cases of violations of this principle were registered all the more closely. During his tour of the United States, the cellist Mstislav Rostropovich had signed a recording contract with Columbia Records, which from the point of view of the Central Committee, yielded an “unfavorable profit” for the Soviet side.¹⁹ Sviatoslav Richter, for example, had no experience in marketing and contracting in the Western market, and yet, between 1960 and 1964 he recorded 32 records with almost as many different companies, all without Moscow’s consent (Gronow and Saunio 1999, 128). The example of Richter also demonstrates the complexity of a music market slowly traversing the Iron Curtain. In May 1959, the Soviet Ministry of Culture and the People’s Republic of Poland reached an agreement that allowed Poland to record Richter’s concert (he was touring the country at this time). The recordings were supposed to “be used

14 Ibid.

15 RGANI f. 5, op. 36, d. 101, l. 12–13, letter from the CD to the CC of the CPSU, August 28, 1959.

16 Ibid.

17 RGANI f. 5, op. 36, d. 101, l. 12–13.

18 RGANI f. 5, op. 36, d. 101, l. 31, letter from the Soviet ministry of Culture to the CD of the CC CPSU, November 2, 1959.

19 RGANI f. 5, op. 35, d. 104, l. 45, letter from the CD to the CC of the CPSU, November 14, 1959.

within the boundaries of Poland.”²⁰ The Polish record company Polskie Nagrania recorded the concertos in cooperation with the West German Deutsche Grammophon Gesellschaft (DGG). However, DGG then began to distribute Richter’s concerto on LP in West Germany and to pay a share of the sale profits to the People’s Republic.

The attractiveness of recordings of Soviet musicians by foreign companies for the Soviet side increased. Despite the cost-intensive acquisition of new technology, the need to increase recording and improve its quality was commonly agreed on as the main obstacle for aggregate exports.²¹ Between 1959 and 1961, hardly any Soviet musicians were recorded in the All-Union Studio, while the number of recordings abroad increased sharply.²² Contrary to the commitments to modernization of the Soviet Union’s recording technology, this option seemed to achieve better results in the short term. It also relieved the financial burden on the Ministry of Culture, to which the studio was subordinate. The prohibition on financing new technology through the income from music sales abroad had only intensified the competition for necessary resources. The categorically negative attitude of the Central Committee towards new direct contracts with Western record companies forced the ministry to continue buying new technology at high cost from countries such as Denmark and the Federal Republic of Germany. At the same time, it expanded cooperation with the satellite states. The GDR, Poland, and Czechoslovakia not only had a technical edge in recording, production, and distribution structures but also established contacts with Western companies. Musical instruments also had to be purchased abroad because their production was insufficient. The Central Committee – as the moderator of ministerial initiatives for foreign products – regularly referred at first to “additional possibilities for purchasing ... in the countries of the people’s democracies.”²³ Apart from growing technical cooperation with Berlin and Prague, Soviet representatives used the GDR’s contacts to specialized West German firms for the “face-saving” indirect acquisition of modern technology.²⁴ Soviet foreign trade in the Cold War remained a matter of prestige, especially in the field of technology.

The rejection of direct contractual relations with Western record companies, however, is not only explained by prestige considerations but also by the political socialization of the decision-makers in the Central Committee who, by their ideological training in the 1930s, had labored under a peculiar understanding of the

20 RGANI f. 5, op. 36, d. 101, l. 49, letter from the Soviet Minister of Culture Mikhailov to the CC of the CPSU, December 24, 1959.

21 RGANI f. 5, op. 36, d. 135, l. 53–55, letter from the Deputy Minister of Foreign Trade S. Borisov to the CD of the CC CPSU, March 24, 1961.

22 *Ibid.*

23 RGANI f. 5, op. 36, d. 100, l. 12, letter from the CD to the CC of the CPSU regarding the possible extension of purchases of musical instruments, June 13, 1958.

24 RGANI f. 5, op. 36, d. 70, l. 40–41.

Western market as such (Hanson 2003, 84). According to this logic, the sale of tapes had led to one-sided enrichment and uncontrolled dissemination of Soviet music, which would now make market access more difficult (but not the quality of the recording and the record).²⁵ The decision to ban these contracts, however, did not solve the structural problem of the low material and aesthetic quality of Soviet records.²⁶ Barely 271,000 records out of 255 million (0.1 %) produced between 1957 and 1959 had been sold abroad, presumably to the socialist bloc, not the West.²⁷ The decision further threatened the Soviet Union's reputation as a reliable trading partner, as it made it effectively impossible to fulfill current contracts. Both the Ministry of Culture and of Foreign Trade clearly warned the Central Committee in 1959 that the export ban would curtail the activity of the Soviet foreign trade organization in Japan, France, the United States, and the Federal Republic of Germany because due to the poor quality and too long delivery times of records, no alternative existed for Western distributors.²⁸ In addition, the Soviet side risked costly violations of contracts with EMI, Telefunken, and Sinsekaj Records in Japan and negative press.²⁹

This situation finally led to a change in policy direction. In 1960, the practice of selling Soviet music on tape to Western licensees finally took hold. Mistakes from previous contracts could be avoided – the one-off lump sum payment for music was replaced by a model of continuous participation in sales profits. In turn, a monopoly contract with one company could be conceived as the solution to the glaring problem of protecting music rights instead of a model for exploitation. An offer from the Recording Artist Music Cooperation (RAMCO) in March 1960 stirred positive reactions.³⁰ The treaty model seemed to be able to reconcile the different positions within the leadership, as it allowed the sale of Soviet produced and records produced by the company based on Soviet tape recordings. The draft contract provided for the purchase of at least 60,000 Soviet records for 50,000 USD in the first year and 100,000 USD in the second year. With the purchase of the agreed quantity, RAMCO acquired the right to produce 25 record titles itself based on tape recordings in the first year,

25 RGANI f. 5, op. 36, d. 101, l. 28–29, letter from the CD to the CC of the CPSU, October 19, 1959.

26 RGANI f. 5, op. 36, d. 101, l. 12, letter from the CD to the CC of the CPSU, August 21, 1959.

27 RGANI f. 5, op. 36, d. 104, l. 46–48, letter from the CD to the CC of the CPSU, November 19, 1959 “About the unsatisfactory state regarding the decrees ‘Serious deficits in the repertoire and distribution of records in the country’ and ‘Extension of production and increase of record quality,’” l. 46.

28 RGANI f. 5, op. 36, d. 101, l. 27–28, letter from the Deputy Minister of Foreign Trade S. Borisov to the CD of the CC CPSU with a report on the critical situation of trade and distribution of Soviet music abroad, October 27, 1959.

29 Ibid.

30 RGANI f. 5, op. 36, d. 124, l. 77–78, letter from the Deputy Minister of Foreign Trade S. Borisov to the CD of the CC CPSU, March 11, 1960.

paying 1,000 USD for each new album and 6.5 percent of the retail price of each record produced to the soviet side. These arrangements promised significantly higher profits of 75,000 to 100,000 USD per year than any of the previous contracts with EMI, Leeds, or Telefunken. The indefinite contract with the RAMCO labels Artija and Parliament guaranteed the companies a distribution monopoly for Soviet music in the United States, Canada, and Great Britain.³¹ After two years of marathon negotiations, Jay Frankel, the director of RAMCO, was able to present a contract with a total volume of 2,500 recordings. Consumers got access to the desired recordings of Oistrakh and Rostropovich, but also Czechoslovakian, Hungarian, and Romanian recordings. In November 1965, the Soviet side concluded an extensive contract with the West German Ariola. The latter took over the complete catalog of classical Soviet music, the recording quality of which had been praised by the Western press.³² The release of 100 new record titles planned for the following year quintupled the company's classical program and made it the leading supplier of Russian and Soviet music in Europe. The sharp increase in sales over the next few years proved the economic potential of such classical music in the West and prompted the American company Capitol Records to negotiate a similar contract solution with the Soviet Union for the United States.³³

The USSR was a successful player in the West European and North American classical music scene. The extension of musical exchange from live to recorded music allowed the Ministry of Culture to build on the success of its international concert tours and reach Western living rooms. The increasing demand for high-quality classical music records on the Western market played into the Ministry's attempts to extend Soviet influences across ideological divides. Unlike the members of the Central Committee, whose political socialization in the isolated Soviet Union made them ideologically hostile to the Western market and its institutions, the representatives of the Ministry of Culture pursued a successful strategy of extending musical infrastructures to the West, drastically increasing the ideological reach of the Soviet project. While license agreements had a clear economic motivation for the Soviets, the success of classical music exchanges should not only be measured by sales numbers and convertible currency income. The export of classical music also helped promote an image of the USSR as a technologically advanced state. Significant modernization of Soviet recording facilities and processes in the 1950s and the 1960s substantiated its claim for the supremacy of its musicians and the sophistication of its acoustic technology. The importance of these symbolic gains is demonstrated by the

31 "Artia Label Makes Soviet Catalog Pact," *Billboard Magazine*, April 25, 1960.

32 "Ariola Gets Soviet Disk Firm's Product," *Billboard Magazine*, November 27, 1965.

33 Omar Anderson, "Melodiya Repertoire Pushing Ariola to All-Time Sales High," *Billboard Magazine*, December 24, 1966.

use of the phrase “Recorded by Melodiia in the U.S.S.R.” on EMI-Melodiia records and the increasing acknowledgment in the Western press of the Soviet successes of modernizing its recording facilities in the 1960s (Kondrashina 2019, 203). While Mikkonen rightly stresses the ideological motivation in distributing Soviet recordings to the West in the 1950s, it was the Ministry of Culture that shifted the Soviet internal debate towards a more intelligent consideration of economic factors to increase the country’s potential for extending musical infrastructures to the West (Mikkonen 2013).

2 Eastern Europe

The mid-1960s marked a milestone in expanding Soviet musical exports to the capitalist West. Soviet musical contacts in the socialist world also intensified between the 1950s and the 1970s, but they followed distinct paths and relied on a different set of institutions. Whereas the infrastructures that connected the cultural industries of the USSR and the West were primarily geared towards the export of Soviet music, contacts within the socialist camp took the form of cultural exchange. From the mid-1950s, reflecting “new practices of leisure and consumption developing across the Eastern bloc,” music facilitated the participation of “ordinary citizens” (as both artists and consumers) in attempts to foster transnational ties and to lend the Soviet bloc a greater degree of cultural coherence (Applebaum 2019, 10). In the absence of private record labels that made it possible for the USSR to export music to the West, Soviet bloc musical exchange relied on infrastructures of performance.

Record sales were severely restricted in the context of Soviet musical exchanges with Eastern Europe. On the Soviet side, the Ministry of Culture’s record label Melodiia arranged all imports and exports within the socialist camp through the *Mezhdunarodnaia kniga* agency. The Polish equivalent to *Mezhdunarodnaia kniga* was *Ars Polona*, itself part of the publishing cooperative *Prasa-Książka-Ruch* controlled by the Polish United Workers’ Party. *Ars Polona* imported foreign records and exported the production of *Polskie Nagrania*, the record label controlled by the Ministry of Culture and Arts in Warsaw. In the early 1970s, *Mezhdunarodnaia kniga* and *Ars Polona* exported 250,000 rubles worth of records to each other every year. Polish LPs were more expensive than the Soviet ones, so the actual number of Polish LPs exported to the USSR was smaller than the other way round. The USSR imported approximately 100 titles from *Ars Polona* annually, distributing them through a network of 17 stores across the USSR (most records were sold in Moscow, Leningrad, Kyiv, Sverdlovsk, and Riga), as well as at specially organized fairs. In the assessment of Party and government officials in Warsaw, this rigid and small-scale infrastructure for international trade and distribution meant that the demand for Polish music

in the USSR exceeded the supply, a situation exacerbated by the fact that a significant proportion of Polish LPs exported to the USSR were not music, but rather English language lessons.³⁴

Exporting more LPs was difficult partly because of the poor state of recording infrastructure. Polish reports from the 1980s reveal problems that had plagued the industry for decades, including perennial shortages of vinyl and good quality paper for album covers, a patchy distribution network, and inadequate production facilities, which meant that the period between recording an album and LP release lasted up to 18 months.³⁵ After the late 1970s, the Polish authorities hoped that this situation would be partly alleviated by the growth of Polish-Western joint venture companies which benefitted from new sources of capital investment, mostly from the Polish diaspora in North America. The joint venture record label Arston, for instance, produced some of the best-selling albums in Poland in the mid-1980s. It bought vinyl, paper, and material for cassette tapes outside the socialist camp, purchased licenses to release records by popular Western singers like Shakin' Stevens along with classical music by Chopin, and began to build new facilities to produce LPs. By 1985, Arston established contacts with *Mezhdunarodnaia kniga* (via *Ars Polona*), suggesting that Ministries of Culture and their agencies looked towards the capitalist West to salvage transnational infrastructures of recording and disseminating music even in the context of intra-bloc exchanges.³⁶

But there was a more fundamental problem, rooted in economic and ideological considerations, which limited the import and export of recorded music in the Soviet bloc: strict adherence to the principle of parity which prevented the Polish side from exploiting the reportedly high demand for Polish records in the USSR. *Ars Polona* could not increase exports to the USSR beyond the monetary value of the records which they imported from *Mezhdunarodnaia kniga*.³⁷ This was not acceptable for the Soviet side as it would incur losses in transferable rubles – a unit used exclusively for international transactions within the Comecon whose declared value reflected the outcomes of trade negotiations at the political level, bearing only an indirect relation to supply and demand or the pressures of international financial markets (Stone 1995). More to the point, because the declared value of products in transferable rubles did not correspond to their declared value in the “real” cash rubles used in retail transactions, *Mezhdunarodnaia kniga* would run serious risks in trying to compensate for its transferable ruble losses through increased income from the sale

34 Archiwum Akt Nowych, Warsaw (hereafter AAN), z. 1354, s. LVI, t. 608, “Stan informacji o kulturze polskiej w ZSRR;” AAN, z. 1354, s. LVI, t. 712, “Ocena przebiegu DKP w ZSRR.”

35 RGANI, f. 5, op. 89, d. 154, 15–16.

36 AAN, z. 1354, s. LVI, t. 1745, “Notatka dotycząca Przedsiębiorstwa Zagranicznego ARSTON.”

37 AAN, z. 1354, s. LVI, t. 706, “Ocena polsko-radzieckiej współpracy kulturalnej.”

of imported records. The fact that all Soviet retail prices (outside collective farm markets and the shadow economy) were determined by the central government reduced incentives for *Mezhdunarodnaia kniga* to increase the import of Polish records, even if they were in high demand (Ironsides 2021). For their part, *Ars Polona* was unwilling to increase the import of Soviet records as a path to raising exports. While Polish records exported to the USSR were mostly *Estrada* (a term that can loosely be translated as popular music), 70 per cent of *Melodiia* records exported to Poland consisted of classical music. Classical music was deemed more appropriate for the Soviet mission to educate audiences and to promote a positive image of the USSR as a sophisticated leader of world socialism (Tomoff 2015). At the same time, according to Polish officials, it simply did not sell as well as entertainment. *Ars Polona* was reluctant to step up imports lest it be left with unsold LPs, the costs of which it would have to cover from its budget.³⁸ In this way, the mechanisms of international trade in the Comecon, combined with the emphasis on making cultural products educational and cheap, limited the growth of transnational musical infrastructures of recording, production, and dissemination in the Soviet bloc.

Soviet musical contacts with the socialist countries of Eastern Europe relied primarily on infrastructures of performance. The bulk of Soviet-Polish musical exchanges were coordinated by professional concert agencies that fell under the auspices of the Ministries of Culture. Holding a monopoly on the import and export of live music, the Soviet *Goskontsert* and the Polish *Pagart* were the lynchpins of an infrastructure that sustained live music exchanges. This entailed overseeing the nitty-gritty of tour organization. *Goskontsert* and *Pagart* booked and paid for transport and hotels provided interpreters for artists on tour, and arranged food and medical care. As Wojnowski (2020) has argued elsewhere, infrastructural problems such as poor-quality sound equipment, shabby hotel rooms, or reliance on buses rather than airplanes to transport artists across the vast distances of the USSR were a major source of frustration among music professionals. Still, before the rise of *Solidarity* precipitated a major crisis in Soviet-Polish cultural relations in the early 1980s, *Pagart* boasted that its export artists sold millions of concert tickets in the USSR each year, and Soviet performers like Alla Pugacheva gained great popularity during tours of Poland. The import and export of live music continued along the well-trodden paths into the late 1980s, particularly in the context of the USSR's relations with its less troublesome allies like Bulgaria.³⁹ The relative dynamism of importing and exporting live rather than recorded music can be partly attributed to human malleability – infrastructural problems affected audience experience at concerts and

38 AAN, z. 1354, s. LVI, t. 1107, “Bilans Kontaktów Kulturalnych Polsko-Radzieckich.”

39 State Archive of the Russian Federation (GARF), f. A501, op. 3, d. 1257, 50–52.

artists' quality of life, but these obstacles were ultimately less insurmountable than the lack of vinyl or an unfinished production line for cassette tapes.

Goskontsert and Pagart fulfilled Ministry of Culture orders to stage government-approved programs of cultural exchange – the subsidies they received for this purpose did not reliably cover the costs, as the Ministries determined both the scope of the events and the size of the subsidy (Wojnowski 2020). Beyond these centrally assigned tasks, however, Goskontsert and Pagart enjoyed a degree of autonomy that provided incentives for intensifying concert exchanges. The concert agencies had more influence over the cultural and economic side of musical exchange than *Mezhdunarodnaia kniga* and *Ars Polona*. They selected performers for transnational musical exchange whose concerts they hoped to sell at a profit, signing contracts with them and their employers (city and republican-level concert agencies like *Moskontsert* or *Ukrkontsert* in the USSR, regional *Estrada* agencies in Poland, as well as philharmonics and theaters in both countries). Pagart and Goskontsert then agreed to exchange groups of artists with each other, usually sharing the costs of the tours – the hosting organization normally paid the artists' concert fees, a percentage of which would be claimed by the sending organization. The agencies further sold the imported concerts to venues in their respective countries. Each agency could thus turn a profit through both exports and imports of commercially successful concert programs. Increasing income in these ways affected profit margins and the size of bonus funds, career prospects, and – at the very least – helped the agencies balance the books after staging loss-making events at their governments' behest.

3 The Global South

Mirroring developments in socialist Eastern Europe, the post-Stalin era witnessed attempts to create a positive image of the Soviet Union and its system in countries emerging from colonial rule and, more broadly, in the non-aligned world. The Soviet authorities sponsored heavily controlled contacts between cultural (and even religious) elites in the USSR and what it called “developing countries,” as well as popularized Soviet film and literature abroad (Kirasirova 2011). Soviet enthusiasm for fostering closer ties with the Global South ebbed and flowed. Odd Arne Westad (2005) writes of a long period of uncertainty in Soviet Third World policy – a time of euphoric engagement between 1958 and 1962, followed by an era of doubts and disappointments up to the end of the 1960s, leading to a renewed activism from around 1970 onward. Contacts between the USSR and some formerly colonial countries flourished. For instance, especially before the 1960s, Egyptian musicians studied at conservatories in the USSR (as well as Europe), while Soviet and East European musicians staffed government-supported institutions in Egypt (El-Shawan

Castelo-Branco 2002). But Moscow also found that cultural hierarchies between the “first socialist state” and its supposedly junior partners in the Global South were sometimes overturned. For instance, while Indian cinema was remarkably popular in the USSR, Indian distributors were reluctant to import Soviet films (it seems they did so mostly to export their own movies, with the USSR insisting on the principle of trade parity). As Hollywood reached mass audiences on the subcontinent, Soviet officials in charge of export complained that Indian distributors made insufficient effort to promote cinema imported from the USSR (Rajagopalan 2008, 82). They were aware that Hollywood’s massive advertising apparatus (and the fact that American films did not have to be dubbed for urban audiences in many former British colonies) put them on the defensive in the cultural Cold War. Our analysis of Soviet musical exports suggests that the USSR did not develop institutions or networks to effectively counter the American cultural challenge in the Global South.

While it is difficult to prove the absence of something, it seems that the USSR Ministry of Culture and its subsidiary, *Mezhdunarodnaia kniga*, did not oversee the widespread import or export of recorded music beyond Europe and North America.⁴⁰ To be sure, this was sometimes due to strained relations with particular countries in the Global South. In the case of Iran, for example, the CPSU Central Committee closely oversaw the very limited trade in records lest it stir emotions around such sensitive issues as the relationship between Soviet and Iranian Azerbaijan. In 1981, with post-revolutionary Iran and the USSR in flux, the Party presided over the distribution of a mere 1,000 records of Azerbaijani folk music in Iran, which were to be distributed by *Mezhdunarodnaia kniga* and local branches of the Iranian-Soviet Friendship Society.⁴¹ Further afield, Soviet record sales and distribution were arranged on an *ad hoc* basis. During Soviet tours of Africa, for example, records were distributed after concerts arranged by Goskontsert, along with booklets about life in the USSR.⁴²

The USSR’s contacts with the Global South consisted predominantly of the export of Soviet live music, though artists from “developing countries” (and folk performers in particular) also played for Soviet audiences.⁴³ In the mid-1970s, Soviet cultural exports focused on countries with strong Marxist and/or pro-Soviet political forces. Soviet pop artists toured Guyana and Vietnam; they performed at trade fairs in Baghdad and Damascus. Moscow saw former Portuguese colonies in Africa, which had only recently gained independence, as a particularly fertile ground for spreading

⁴⁰ How accessible Western recordings of Soviet or Russian classical music were in different countries of the Global South would require further investigation.

⁴¹ RGANI, f. 89, op. 39, d. 6, 5–7.

⁴² Russian State Archive for Literature and Art (hereafter RGALI), f. 3162, op. 2, d. 760, 13–23.

⁴³ *Sovetskaia Estrada i Tsirk*, January 1981.

Soviet culture. In 1976, Soviet pop artists toured Angola, Mozambique, and Guinea-Bissau.⁴⁴ But Soviet tours did not exclusively focus on “friendly” regimes. A 1975 tour of the Middle East encompassed over 40 concerts in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Kuwait, Iran, North and South Yemen, and a two-week stint in the United Arab Emirates.⁴⁵ Concerts usually offered an opportunity to reach between several hundred and several thousand people. A four-month tour of West Africa in 1977 included over 70 concerts, which attracted approximately 110,000 people.⁴⁶

The USSR Ministry of Culture did not have a single formula for how to plan concerts in the Global South. The only common denominator was Goskontsert – the same agency that stood at the center of the infrastructures of performance in Eastern Europe. Here, too, Goskontsert oversaw the nitty-gritty organizational matters. But Soviet musical exchanges with Eastern Europe were underpinned by routine collaboration between Goskontsert, Pagart, and equivalent concert agencies across the socialist camp, as well as between the concert agencies and philharmonics, hotels, and transport providers who helped sustain multiple tours on an annual basis. In contrast, the organization of concert tours in the Global South relied on an assortment of partners and political patrons who varied from country to country. The Ministry of Culture planned most tours of Africa in close collaboration with Goskontsert, the Union of Soviet Friendship Societies that had branches around the world, Soviet embassies, and government officials in post-colonial states. Support from Soviet-friendly regimes was key to the success of the tours. In Guinea, one of the few African countries with which the USSR signed long-term agreements on cultural cooperation, President Sekou Toure attended Soviet concerts, arranged for them to be televised, lent Soviet artists an airplane to enable them to perform in provincial regions of Guinea, and hosted a reception for the group in his home province.⁴⁷ Non-governmental actors such as communist parties, socialist newspapers, and publishing houses played an important role in organizing tours in parts of the Middle East and Latin America. For example, Soviet pop artists participated in a festival celebrating the Mexican Communist Party newspaper *Oposición*. The Soviet side paid for flights to Mexico, while *Oposición* paid 800 USD per concert and covered the costs of transport from Mexico to Jamaica – this enabled the same group of artists to tour the Caribbean and parts of Central America after the concerts in Mexico.⁴⁸ At the same time, other tours of Latin America were organized in collaboration with private impresario agencies.⁴⁹

44 RGALI, f. 3162, op. 2, d. 412, 1–19.

45 RGALI, f. 3162, op. 2, d. 249, 27.

46 RGALI, f. 3162, op. 2, d. 760, 13–23.

47 RGALI, f. 3162, op. 2, d. 760, 13–23.

48 RGALI, f. 3162, op. 2, d. 1208, 15.

49 RGALI, f. 3162, op. 2, d. 1652, 19–23.

In contrast to Eastern Europe, the tours which Goskontsert organized in the Global South were almost exclusively loss-making, and the agency relied on Ministry of Culture subsidies to sustain its activities across Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and Latin America. The details of how tours were funded varied from country to country. In 1975, for example, when Goskontsert organized a two-and-a-half-month tour of Africa, they covered all the costs in Burundi, Gabon, Togo, and Equatorial Guinea. In Rwanda and Dahomey/Benin, the local governments covered the costs of hotel accommodation and transport, while in Zaire and Zambia, the hosts also paid the artists' *per diems*.⁵⁰ During a tour of Latin America, Soviet tour groups received 800 USD per concert in Mexico and the Dominican Republic, but they performed for free in several other countries.⁵¹

Music professionals were frustrated with the organization of international tours. Because the costs of non-commercial performances in the Global South ran high and because these tours took popular performers away from more commercially viable concerts at home and abroad,⁵² Soviet cultural events in Africa, Latin America, the Middle, and Asia often had to be postponed.⁵³ The non-commercial tours were plagued with mundane difficulties such as shortages of advertising material (only 200 posters were printed in each African country visited by a Soviet tour group in the mid-1970s).⁵⁴ Lost and damaged luggage was a frequent issue – in 1981, the band *Veselye Rebiata* had to cancel concerts in the USSR because their instruments got lost on the way back from Havana and, when finally recovered, were damaged beyond repair.⁵⁵ Political turbulence caused unexpected problems. When Soviet artists gave a series of concerts and a televised performance in the Central African Empire (as the Central African Republic was called in the late 1970s), their tour coincided with what the Soviet side defined as a “reactionary” position of the country's dictator Bokassa who, along with France and other Western states, supported anti-communist forces in neighboring Zaire. They still insisted that the concerts had a positive effect, helping to neutralize the effects of the political crisis and presenting the USSR as a champion of decolonization. The same group of artists had to then cancel concerts in Mali due to student protests in the country.⁵⁶

Commercial tours presented their own issues. One ill-fated tour of Latin America exemplifies how problems with communication, the costs of international travel, and bureaucratic hurdles hampered Goskontsert's cooperation with private impresario

50 RGALI, f. 3162, op. 2, d. 249, 4.

51 RGALI, f. 3162, op. 2, d. 1208, 15.

52 RGALI, f. 3162, op. 3, d. 29, 32.

53 RGALI, f. 3162, op. 2, d. 412, 1–19.

54 RGALI, f. 3162, op. 2, d. 249, 11.

55 RGALI, f. 3162, op. 2, d. 2246, 40, 43.

56 RGALI, f. 3162, op. 2, d. 760, 13–23.

agencies abroad. In 1978, Iosif Kobzon, known for his performances of patriotic Soviet songs, headed a group of artists earmarked for a two-and-a-half-month tour of Latin America. The group included the singer Zhanna Bichevskaja who performed folk-inspired songs to the accompaniment of the acoustic guitar, the large folk dancing group Kavkaz, and the Zaitseva sisters' pop duo. They were supposed to travel on a tour of Latin America organized by a Peruvian private impresario, Jorge Fernández, who acted as the intermediary between Goskontsert and other impresarios in Argentina, Bolivia, Ecuador, Colombia, Puerto Rico, and Panama. Fernández would pay the group 800 USD per concert, guaranteeing at least 50 concerts in total across 12 weeks – most of this hard currency profit would end up at Goskontsert, who would then pay the artists their salaries in rubles and *per diems* in dollars.

Soviet artists geared up to travel to Latin America several times. The tour was originally scheduled for March 1978, but at the last minute, it was postponed until September. On August 31, the group was still planning to fly to Lima a week later – but the tour was postponed again because Fernández had not been in touch for the previous few weeks to confirm the details. Goskontsert would not hear from him until September 21, when he suggested new dates in spring 1979. The departure was planned for March – several days before, the tour was moved to August because Brazilian visas had not been issued in time. The Soviet Ministry of Culture stepped in at this point, suggesting that Goskontsert send the artists to Peru anyway – further details and the necessary paperwork could be sorted out after the start of the tour. But Goskontsert deemed it too risky to send artists without signed contracts in place. They would need to spend 50,000 USD for the artists' *per diems* and potentially cover their hotel accommodation without guaranteed income for large chunks of the planned tour.

The planning was difficult partly because all communication took place over the telegraph – some of Fernández's correspondence was seemingly never received at Goskontsert, and the Peruvian impresario had to ask several times for Goskontsert to confirm the final make-up of the tour group. Advertising material and documents which Fernández needed to apply for work permits for the Soviet artists were sent by air – although there was a direct weekly flight from Moscow to Lima, Goskontsert sent some of the material with Air France via Paris, which resulted in documents being delayed or lost. Meanwhile, regular mail took nearly three weeks to reach Peru. The lack of effective communication created frustration both for Fernández in Lima and for Goskontsert in Moscow. Moving tour dates meant that some artists originally included in the group had to pull out due to prior commitments. This made it difficult for Fernández to produce advertising material or to pitch the program to other impresarios in Latin America (they were interested in folk music of the type represented by Bichevskaja, and not "lyrical" pop represented by her replacement Tamara Sorokina). Professionals at Goskontsert could not apply for visas because

Fernández had not provided them with the finalized tour dates or the list of impresario agencies who would host the Soviet group in each country. The tone of the communications was increasingly alarming— Fernández used the familiar “ty” in communications with senior leadership of Goskontsert, putting pressure on his Soviet partners to respond to his requests urgently (“please, Kokonin, I need this info now”).⁵⁷

The group finally departed for Lima on July 15, 1979, over a year after the tour was supposed to start, and they returned to Moscow on October 23. A direct intervention from the Soviet Ministry of Culture was key to getting the tour started – the Ministry contacted Fernández on the telephone. Because Fernández did not agree to increase the number of concerts, Goskontsert estimated that they would make a loss on the tour unless it was reclassified as a non-commercial event. This was a bureaucratic trick, which meant that Goskontsert could use rubles to pay for internal flights in Latin America (to be more precise, Goskontsert paid Aeroflot in rubles, and Aeroflot paid South American airlines in hard currency). Group members would not receive any honorarium for their concerts, but rather a 16-dollar *per diem* paid out by Fernández. The Peruvian impresario was suspicious about this sudden change in tactics, but the Ministry allayed his fears.

The tour was a disaster. The artists did not obtain visas for Brazil and got stuck in Argentina for nearly a month because, according to the group’s leader Iosif Kobzon, Soviet consular staff failed to help them get back to Peru and rebook their tickets from Lima back to Moscow. Official accounts indicated that the group did not play any concerts during this time, but Kobzon reported that some events were staged, suggesting perhaps that the artists pocketed hard currency without reporting the profits. On return to Moscow, some members of the group were caught smuggling products purchased in Latin America. Because the costs of living in Argentina were high, the *per diems* paid out by Fernández did not suffice, and Kobzon requested Goskontsert to wire the group an extra 10,000 USD. As a testament to the clout Kobzon had in Moscow, this money was sent with no questions asked. Goskontsert ended up paying over 7000 USD for the transport of the musicians’ equipment back to the USSR. Although the agency eventually recovered this money from Fernández, Soviet artists had to cancel concerts back in the USSR, which were scheduled soon after their return, because Aeroflot refused to release their equipment at Sheremetyevo airport until Goskontsert settled their accounts. Ultimately, a tour that was planned to make a modest profit brought very substantial losses for Goskontsert.⁵⁸

The history of this tour suggests that performances in the Global South were organized chaotically. This created poor work conditions for Soviet artists. The

57 RGALI, f. 3162, op. 2, d. 1208, 1–76; RGALI, f. 3162, op. 2, d. 1209, 1–94.

58 RGALI, f. 3162, op. 2, d. 1209, 69–70.

USSR's global music exports were frustrated by problems of communication, the costs of international transport, and bureaucratic hurdles involved in obtaining visas and work permits. The state of the Soviet economy was also a problem – tensions between Goskontsert and Aeroflot (and attempts by Goskontsert to shift the costs of the tour onto the airline) testified to the tense relationship between enterprises in Moscow. The apparent staging of unofficial concerts in Argentina showed that Soviet performers tried to bypass official institutions in planning their work.

The success of Soviet musical exports to the West was not replicated elsewhere. This was partly due to major infrastructural and economic problems which were especially stark when it came to exporting live music over vast distances to low-income countries. On a more fundamental level, Soviet musical exports beyond the West were frustrated by two overlapping problems: the USSR's ambiguous attitudes to entertainment and the Party's continuing interference in cultural production. While classical music was something of a comfort zone for the Soviet Ministry of Culture, the growth of global entertainment put the Ministry on the defensive. To be sure, new genres such as punk rock sparked an identity crisis on both sides of the Iron Curtain (Patton 2018). But the USSR was particularly ill-suited to adapt to the demands of late twentieth-century show business. Especially in the context of cultural exchange with Eastern Europe, it retained an ideological commitment to classical music as an expression of a "classless society" where ambitious forms of cultural production reached everyone. The music professionals we examine were keenly aware that Party-made cultural hierarchies of classical music and entertainment were out of line with audience demand, frustrating attempts to foster closer ties between the Soviet Union and its allies. They also knew that eclectic groups consisting of pop, folk, and classical performers which dominated exports to the Global South received inadequate attention and resources. But the Ministry did little to fix these issues – it was reluctant to experiment with established patterns of exchange with East European allies, and it treated exchanges with the Global South more as an ideological obligation to be shirked than a meaningful cultural or economic opportunity. The Party's ideological interference in the USSR's entanglement with Western partners was an obstacle to the establishment of musical infrastructures which the Ministry of Culture ultimately overcame. In contrast, ideology served as the main driving force for musical exchanges elsewhere, leaving the Ministry with less room to maneuver when problems occurred.

4 Conclusions

This history of the Soviet Ministry of Culture reveals that the contours of the cultural Cold War were shaped by meso-level actors who implemented musical exchange on

the ground and whose priorities did not neatly align with the agendas of the USSR's Communist Party leadership. Despite the spread of Soviet classical music in the West, the history of these meso-level actors suggests that the USSR remained on the defensive in the cultural Cold War.

Soviet musical infrastructures served practical and symbolic purposes. Within a political economy of socialist culture, they were an often fragile set of institutions that recruited and exhibited musicians, as well as recorded and distributed music in the Soviet bloc and beyond. Moreover, Soviet musical infrastructures were deeply intertwined with the symbolic discourses of the second half of the twentieth century. Both their content and their inner workings were subject to the highly polarized logic of Cold War spectatorship, whether from the perspective of the Party leadership in Moscow, Soviet partners across the world, or the public in the West, Eastern Europe, and non-aligned countries. This link between infrastructures and global and domestic political discourses, explored in other contributions to this forum, such as Friedemann Pestel's analysis of Herbert von Karajan, took on a particular character in the Soviet case. The aim of both promoting a unique, new, and superior form of music and at the same time divorcing the Soviet cultural industry and its actors from any capitalist practices created various frictions along the way, as the case of Richter clearly demonstrates. What would otherwise be regarded as mere organizational problems of music management abroad could be interpreted as a political and practical admission of systematic inferiority, at least according to the political standards of the orthodox faction within the Central Committee and Western journalists with a distinctly anti-Soviet stance. Our history of Soviet music exports echoes Thomas Irvine's and Christopher J. Smith's framing of "infrastructure" in this forum. What facilitated the export of Soviet records to the West, and what tied the USSR to its satellite states, was not an "unchanging physical grid." On the contrary, it was the fragility of Party controls over the Ministry of Culture and the embracing of uncertainty by meso-level actors in record labels and impresario agencies that fueled Soviet musical exports beyond the Iron Curtain. In the context of Soviet relations with its satellite states, infrastructures of recording and record distribution were ineffective largely due to their rigidity. In contrast, infrastructures of performance worked insofar as they allowed meso-level actors in impresario agencies to forge "fragile and contingent" human networks that had the potential to connect as well as to disconnect.

At the same time, a focus on Soviet musical exports to the Global South highlights the limits of "human networks" as infrastructures. Meso-level actors in impresario agencies sustained musical exchanges between the USSR and Eastern Europe, but the limits imposed by hard physical infrastructure (such as telephone lines or airplanes) proved more difficult to overcome when vast distances and higher costs came into play. On the global stage, the USSR failed to develop effective means to counter

American cultural influences. Neither could it compete against former imperial metropolises which, as Véronique Pouillard suggests in this forum, sustained clear power hierarchies as musical infrastructures established in the colonial era proved remarkably resilient. Beyond Europe, the USSR's lack of stable institutions and practices for exporting music worked against its cultural ambitions.

As György Péteri puts it with reference to East-Central Europe, the “rebellious project of socialism ... lost the race for modernity as it failed to assert its systemic exceptionalism by way of offering viable alternatives for everyday life” (2008, 937). Placing the USSR in the context of infrastructures of musical globalization corroborates this conclusion. Mid-level bureaucrats in impresario agencies and record labels managed by the Ministry of Culture sustained the import and export of music, but at the cost of undermining the idea of the USSR as an alternative type of “modernity” to the capitalist West. Overcoming ideological opposition and institutional opposition at home, the Ministry and its agencies ultimately adapted to Western notions of profit, technological modernization, and legal protection for culture. That cultural contacts in Eastern Europe continued to rely on the less sophisticated infrastructures of performance than infrastructures of recording suggests that promoting a “socialist culture” or a distinct identity for the Soviet bloc was not a priority for the Ministry. In the context of global music, the socialist camp was a “second world” even from the perspective of Moscow. Moreover, despite Soviet pretensions to the status of the leader of “world socialism,” music professionals who managed international cultural exchange under the auspices of the USSR Ministry of Culture focused primarily on Europe and North America. Cultural exchanges with non-Western countries which Khrushchev had famously identified as an important arena for Cold War competition (Westad 2005) were almost an afterthought.

The Soviet Union was far from a cultural superpower. Oscar Sanchez-Sibony (2023) shows that the USSR did not provide an economic alternative to capitalism on the global stage, but rather sought integration into Western-dominated economic structures. Likewise, in the world of global music, it formed part of cultural networks dominated by capitalist institutions from Western Europe and North America. Without the capitalist world, the USSR struggled to promote its culture and ideas across borders.

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