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ITALIAN OPERA IN STALIN'S SOVIET UNION[1]

In 1928, the seventeen-year-old Nazib Zhiganov attended a performance of Giuseppe Verdi's opera «Aida» in the Tatar capital of Kazan. Decades later, he would report that that performance established a dream: to write his own opera. Zhiganov would not just realize that dream but become one of the most dominant personalities in Tatarstan's musical life for almost the entirety of the Soviet period [31]. Zhiganov's recollection illustrates a fundamental point about the development of Soviet musical culture in the Stalin period. Namely, Italian opera provided an inspiration, a model that could be developed and adapted while the Soviets constructed a distinctive multinational musical culture, and a touchstone against which cultural development could be measured. There were, of course, other models as well. The most important was Russian music of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, especially Tchai-

[1] I would like to thank the participants at the Annual Conference of the Institute for Russian Music Studies, «Russian-Italian Musical Connections», Vipiteno, Italy, 11-13 July 2018 for their thoughtful feedback on an earlier version of this article, as well as Gaya Khmoyan for invaluable research assistance. Research support was provided by Fulbright-Hays and the Academic Senate of the University of California, Riverside.

kovsky, and other Western classics were also appropriated into the Soviet performance canon by the 1930s.[2] In the music sphere, the highest profile genre was opera, an enduring characteristic that makes Zhiganov's reference to «Aida» especially revealing.

Though Italian opera always played an important role in Soviet culture, this article addresses its place in Soviet musical life from the end of World War II through the beginning of the Cold War, a time during which the transition from wartime collaboration to Cold War competition was accompanied by an especially xenophobic anti-Western ideological turn at home, and a shift toward empire building in Eastern Europe was accompanied by a potentially contradictory expansion of international cultural exchange, eventually including with Western Europe and the United States. I analyze two discreet archival source bases to explore the dynamics of the role of Italian opera at this transformative moment. One source is box office data from the opera and ballet theaters in Moscow, Leningrad, and the Soviet Union's national republics. The other is bureaucratic correspondence relating to an effort to recruit Italian opera pedagogues for visiting appointments at the Moscow Conservatory.

Investigating the place of Italian opera in Soviet culture at this moment of particularly intense transformation helps shed light on how cultural officials and general audiences alike responded to potentially contradictory impulses. On the one hand, ideological xenophobia and Russophilism accompanied the

[2] Katerina Clark wrote the pioneering Anglophone study of Soviet cultural appropriation [11]; on appropriation in music programming, see especially [16].

domestic postwar disciplinary campaigns of the *Zhdanovshchina* and anti-cosmopolitanism.[3] On the other, the expansion of the Soviet cultural empire to Eastern Europe increased the potential for international cultural exchange.[4] Throughout the volatile postwar Stalin years, Italian opera was a consistent, popular staple of the Soviet opera performance repertoire. It provided stability against which the more visible and volatile pursuit of distinctively Soviet opera occurred. When that pursuit of Soviet opera seemed to be foundering, cultural officials turned to the Italian source in hopes of advancing Soviet opera performance capacity, but instead revealed their own insecurities and initial incapacity to engage successfully in cultural exchange with the West.

Constructing that argument with these sources allows an opportunity for reflection on the variable processes and actors involved in a study of cultural construction framed as international or transnational, on the sources required to analyze those processes, and on the silences these sorts of sources impose. This investigation is concerned with both the flows of cultural forms, influence, and modeling across nominally national borders as well as the people who traveled across those borders in order to facilitate the flows. Since border crossing is at the center of these phenomena, the project might be said to be a "transnational" investigation. Since the primary interlocutors on the Soviet side were operating in official capacities with authority derived from the state apparatus,

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[3] The literature on the postwar disciplinary campaigns is vast. On the Russophilic component, see especially [10]. On the set of campaigns in musical life, see especially [33, *95–214*]. On the crucial party intervention of 1948 in particular, see especially [1; 41; 3; 4].

[4] The classic Anglophone study of the Sovietization of Eastern European cultural institutions is [12]. For a few examples of the new cultural exchange potential, see [28; 37].

it could also be considered an "international" one.[5] Whatever the prefix before "national," the topic calls for a study of sources that shed light on people crossing borders and cultural forms appearing in different geographical spaces, while simultaneously reifying the category of "national" in order to transcend it. The two types of archival sources at the center of analysis here can provide insight into how Italian opera was programmed and received in the Soviet Union, though not why. They can explain Soviet officialdom's attitudes toward international recruitment of cadres and the activities they undertook to pursue it, as well as their perceptions of the obstacles they faced. However, these sources cannot remotely do justice to the Italian realities that may have supported or discouraged the Soviets' efforts. In the end, this is a story of Italian cultural influence in Soviet operatic life that illuminates just the Soviet side of that relationship. That Italian cultural influence proved so strong, however, challenges assumptions of Soviet insularity, even in the late Stalin years.

Italian Opera on the Soviet Stage: Programming in Opera and Ballet Theaters

The first type of archival source that helps us understand the place of Italian opera in the Soviet repertoire is one that may well be unique: box office

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[5] The distinction between "trans-" and "inter-" national takes on methodological significance within the larger context of studies of globalization, a common feature of which is preoccupation with processes through which the relationship between the universal (global) and specific (sometimes national, sometimes individual) were transformed from the late nineteenth century into the present day. Key theorists who have especially influenced my thinking are Arjun Appadurai, Anthony Giddens, Roland Robertson, and Saskia Sassen. See [9; 19; 30; 32]. For a call to study the transnational aspects of specifically Soviet modernity, see [13, *535-55*]. For the transnational constitution of Soviet culture in the 1930s, see [11; 14]. For a study of the contribution of Soviet music to globalization through Cold War cultural competition, see [36].

data aggregated from all of the Soviet Union's opera and ballet theaters by the Royalties Administration in the 1940s. This article analyzes data from 1945 through 1948, which encompasses nearly 34,000 performances of hundreds of different operas, from Moscow to Tashkent, Vil'nius to Baku, Kiev to Kazan.[6] In the archive, these data appear as simple entries in thick log books, sorted by administrative region, alphabetized by title, and totaled only by title across the entire Soviet Union. They appear to be the working documents that officials in the Royalties Administration used to help calculate royalties owed. I have since annotated them, identifying almost all of the titles, classifying them according to their genre (opera, ballet, and operetta), date of premier, and composer's nationality and professional affiliation. For the purposes of this article, I categorized them as "Russian Classics," "Western Classics," and "Other," a vast category that includes both Soviet efforts (including all of the critically important operas written by composers from the non-Russian republics) and non-Russian/non-Western classics. For example, Mykola Lysenko is "Ukrainian Classic," and pre-revolutionary Uzeyir Hadjibeyov is "Azerbaijani Classic" even though both were written in the Russian empire; whereas, any ballet premiered in the Russian Imperial Theaters in St. Petersburg was classified as "Russian Classic," regardless of the composer's nationality. The questions I asked of the data for this article are the following: what was the place of Italian opera in the Soviet repertoire; did it change over time, especially after the traumatic 1948 party intervention into Soviet musical life; and how did audiences — measured by their attendance patterns — react to it?

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[6] Unless otherwise indicated, all statistical data cited in this article are derived from analysis of the archival files [61; 62; 63; 64], referred to throughout as the "box office data."

The first finding is not surprising: Italian opera was an important part of Soviet musical life. The construction of Soviet culture depended on the appropriation of the classics of both pre-revolutionary Russia and the West, and Western culture was frequently used as both a foil and a benchmark against which to measure Soviet cultural development [11; 14; 36]. In the ideologically critical genre of opera, appropriated Italian classics were always especially prominent in the repertoire and in writing about it. Whenever a disciplinary campaign touched opera, Soviet critics broke out comparisons to the Italian operas that were such a mainstay of the repertoire. Just days after the infamous 1948 Central Committee resolution on the opera «Velikaia druzhba», for example, the critic Lev Nikulin took to the front page of the Soviet arts newspaper, Literaturnaia gazeta, to juxtapose the ecstatic praise with which Italian critics marked the 1908 production of Modest Mussorgsky's «Boris Godunov» at La Scala ("that citadel of Italian operatic art") with the deplorable state of Soviet opera forty years later as an introduction to his celebration of the ham-fisted party intervention [6]. A year later, an unsigned editorial in the same newspaper reimagined earlier Soviet use of Verdi as a measuring stick for Russian opera as evidence of the dastardly, nearly treasonous behavior of Soviet music critics. That unnamed author lambasted "cosmopolitan" critics for praising Tchaikovsky by saying that his music "was worthy to stand alongside the best musical-dramatic works of Wagner and Verdi." "To stand alongside" was not enough at the start of the anti-cosmopolitanism campaign in 1949: Tchaikovsky's genius had to stand alone [7]. But again, it was Verdi opera that provided the measuring stick, ironically repeating that which the critic deplored. Whether in long academic studies of opera dramaturgy or public discussions of

contemporary Soviet operatic development, Italian opera — and Verdi in particular — remained a constant counterpoint to the Russian classics.[7] But what about on stage?

Italian opera held a prominent, important place on the Soviet operatic stage. As Table 1 shows, the box office data demonstrate that that place was remarkably constant across the otherwise turbulent postwar 1940s. Of the nearly 34,000 performances covered by the data set, 26,000 (77 percent) were operas. The rest were ballets. Each year, between 101 and 133 different operas were performed in the Soviet Union, with opera titles accounting for an almost constant 70 percent of the repertoire. Table 2 shows that, of those titles, between one-quarter and one-fifth each year were either Russian Classics or Western Classics, so that together, the two comprised 44 percent of all operas performed between 1945 and 1948. What is striking is that of the almost exactly 26,000 performances of all operas across this time period, about 20,000 were either Russian or Western Classics. Table 3 shows that of those, more than half were Western Classics, a finding that flies in the face of at least my expectations that the Russian Classics would consistently displace both Western Classics and repertoire written by Soviet composers over the course of the ideological campaigns of the 1940s. In fact, in the face of a party intervention that stressed the value of the Russian Classics, those responsible for opera programming took refuge in what they apparently thought was the safe terrain of the Western Classics. Western Classics comprised 39 percent of the repertoire in 1945, 42 percent in 1946, and back to 39 percent in 1947, when operas by Moscow Composers' Union members skyrocketed to 7 percent of the repertoire. This shift may

[7] For the book-length academic study, see [2].

have been a result of opera programmers' attempts to comply with the 1946 calls for increased attention to contemporary Soviet reality.[8] But perhaps not. After all, it takes a long time to write, vet, and produce an opera. Repertoire just cannot turn on a dime unless it reverts to already-existing productions. And that is what seems to have happened in 1948, when operas by recently disciplined Muscovites plunged back to their typical 2 percent share and the Western Classics jumped to nearly half of all opera performances in the Soviet Union: 44 percent. Performances of the Russian Classics actually *dropped* over the same time period, though only very slightly, from a high of 37 percent share in 1946 to 35 percent in 1947 and 34 percent in 1948.

These shifts are all relatively minor; in fact, the total opera repertoire exhibits remarkable stability over this otherwise turbulent time period.[9] A closer examination of specific titles reveals both an engine of that stability and the remarkable place of Italian opera classics in providing it. On the one hand, Soviet operatic culture was strikingly diverse. Over one hundred different operas were performed in the Soviet Union each year, with national and regional variations in opera programming across the multinational Soviet state. On the other hand, it was dominated to a truly incredible degree by just a few individual operas. For each of the four years under consideration here, I examined the ten most performed operas. Seven operas stood out. Six appeared in the top ten all four years and the other appeared in the top five for three years running. In fact, three operas — a dominant trio comprised of «Evgenii Onegin», «La Traviata», and «Carmen» — appeared in the top five all four years.

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[8] Three Central Committee resolutions on literary journals, drama theaters, and film in August and September 1946 communicated this call. See [57; 58; 59].

[9] The same was not true of operetta, which underwent substantial changes in the same timeframe. See [34].

«Evgenii Onegin» was the most performed opera every year. «La Traviata» was second — every year. And «Carmen» was in the top five every year even though it occupied third place only once. So, the dominant trio are a Russian Classic, an Italian Classic, and a French Classic. Together, these three accounted for a staggering 20 percent of all opera performances in the Soviet Union from 1945 to 1948. In fact, 8 percent of all performances were «Evgenii Onegin», alone. The others in the top seven were also all Classics: Puccini's «Madame Butterfly», Verdi's «Rigoletto», Tchaikovsky's «Pikovaia dama», and Rossini's «Barber of Seville» (that is, Italian, Italian, Russian, and Italian). Together, those seven accounted for 38 percent of all opera performances, and the four Italian titles comprised 20 percent, almost exactly the same as the dominant trio. In 1948, the proportions remained the same, with extremely slight increases for both the dominant trio and the four Italian Classics to 21 percent each.

Of course, Tchaikovsky wrote many more operas than just «Evgenii Onegin», and Verdi wrote more than «Traviata» and «Rigoletto». When all of these two composers' other performed works are considered, their dominant position is even more striking. Seven different Tchaikovsky operas were performed each year, and their total performances accounted for between 12 and 15 percent of all performances. From 1946-48, seven Verdi operas were also performed each year (with six in 1945), and their total performances accounted for between 10 and 15 percent each year. Performances of operas by either Tchaikovsky or Verdi accounted for 28 percent of all operas performed in the Soviet Union's opera and ballet theaters in this time period.

Despite Verdi's status as the clear second-most-performed opera composer and as the presence of Puccini and Rossini in the top seven attest, Italian

opera in the Soviet Union did not start and end with Verdi. Table 4 shows that fourteen or fifteen different Italian operas were performed each year (about 12 percent of the total number of opera titles and more than half of the Western Classics), and Table 5 demonstrates that performances of those operas accounted for just less than three-quarters of Western Classic opera performances and more than a quarter of all opera performances. In 1948, Italian opera reached its peak for the period with 31.4 percent of all performances. As a share of all Western Classics, Italian opera started high (nearly 80 percent) and dropped over time, largely because of the increasing prominence of French opera, and especially Gounod's «Faust». In fact, the number of performances of French opera more than doubled from 1945 to 1948. But French opera never rivaled the place of just Verdi alone.

The Soviet opera repertoire, understood as what operas were available for audiences to experience on a nightly basis, was incredibly stable across this short time period of otherwise tumultuous upheaval in Soviet culture — including in ways that touched directly on opera. The appropriated classics — especially Italian classics and especially Verdi — occupy such a huge part of that repertoire that, along with the even less assailable Tchaikovsky, they provided a solid backbone of consistency against which the dramatic, fraught, sometimes traumatic pursuit of a distinctively Soviet, multinational opera played out. That dramatic struggle for Soviet operatic art is apparent in the box office data. Operas composed by Moscow Composers' Union members accounted for about 12 percent of all of the titles performed each year from 1945 to 1948. Those composed by "Others" (largely composers from the non-Russian republics) accounted for a nearly constant 44 percent (see Table 2). But the Muscovites provided only three percent of all opera performances, and the "Others" provided

just 20 percent (see Table 3). The average opera by a Muscovite composer enjoyed just fifteen performances. The average "other" did a bit better, with runs of about twenty-four per year. The average Western Classic had about 103 performances per year. That is still less than a tenth of the top seven, but the scale is clear. Soviet composers ran a lot of unsuccessful experiments.

Italian Opera and Soviet Audiences: Reception Practices

How did audiences respond to these patterns? To answer this question, I calculated the average box office receipts per performance, assuming that a higher box office average correlates to a larger audience, and that audience size is a reasonable measure of popularity. Variations in ticket prices obviously complicate the matter, so I compared box office averages across the entire Soviet Union (see Table 6) and then within each administrative unit. The results suggest that Soviet audiences consistently preferred the Russian Classics to all other forms of opera. The Western Classics were generally less popular, but very stable. The volatility in the repertoire was concentrated in the relatively fewer performances of operas written by Soviet composers. Within the Western Classic repertoire, a notable shift in relative popularity from the Italian to the French took place in 1947, possibly due to shifting programming at the theaters with the highest ticket prices in Moscow and Leningrad.

Within this general pattern, there are a couple of regional variations worth noting. First, the one region of the Soviet Union in which the Western Classics consistently outperformed the box office averages for opera overall was Central Asia. In fact, Table 7 shows that in two of the four years, the Western Classics were more popular at the box office than even the Russian Classics. The Soviet campaign to modernize (by Westernizing) Central Asian musical life

thus seems to have reached the opera-going audience, though the construction of a Central Asian cultural variant seems to have been less successful.[10] In Ukraine, on the other hand, Table 8 shows that despite a leap in popularity of the Russian Classics in 1948, the Russian Classics, the Western Classics, and Italian opera in particular all actually underperformed the box office averages for opera as a whole. French opera and a wide-ranging "other" category that performed very poorly in Central Asia actually earned the highest averages in Ukraine, a reflection of the popularity of both Ukrainian classics (especially Mykola Lysenko) and some new works by Soviet Ukrainian composers staged in Kiev, yet another data point that suggests the peculiarity of the Soviet Ukrainian experience, especially in the immediate postwar period.[11]

Finally, a word about how programming patterns might have affected popularity. In general, there was a rough reverse correlation between number of performances and box office averages. For example, in 1947 Moscow, «Evgenii Onegin» was performed 132 times to «Pikovaia dama»'s twenty-three. But «Pikovaia dama» earned a box-office average of 46,000 rubles per performance and «Onegin», just 20,000. Part of that difference is surely due to the Bolshoi Theater ticket price effect («Onegin» played in other, less prestigious and less pricey theaters as well as at the Bolshoi), but it is just one particularly striking example of a more general pattern. That pattern suggests that audiences could tire of long runs of the same repertoire, a phenomenon that likely suppressed the popularity of the relatively smaller number of titles that comprised the

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[10] On anti-cosmopolitanism in Central Asian, especially Uzbek, musical life, see [35, *212-40*]. On the particularities of cultural transformations in Soviet Central Asia more generally, see [8; 15; 21; 22; 23; 24; 26; 27].

[11] For Ukrainian-centered perspectives on Soviet history, see, for example [17; 29; 38; 39; 40].

Western Classic canon when compared to the larger number of Russian Classics. The one opera that seems to break that pattern is also the most performed Italian staple of the repertoire: «La Traviata». Despite being the second-most performed opera in the Soviet Union, «Traviata» consistently earned higher-than-average box office receipts, all across the Soviet Union. In fact, for the four-year period considered here, «Traviata» earned less than the box office average only in Moscow (98 percent) and far outperformed the average in both Leningrad (143 percent) and Central Asia (129 percent). If Italian opera more generally provided a solid backbone of opera programming in the postwar Soviet Union, «La Traviata» kept audiences coming to the opera house.

The box office data thus provide insights into one crucial aspect of the Soviet Union's cultural geography and the flows of cultural forms and people that generated it. They show that Italian opera played a crucial role in the repertoire of opera theaters under the strain of *Zhdanovshchina*. The Great Appropriation that Katerina Clark has written about so eloquently regarding the 1930s provided useful tools for cultural bureaucrats and artists alike in the postwar Stalin period [11]. The data also show that audiences in different national republics responded variously to the operas to which they had access. Unfortunately, box office data cannot tell us who was attending opera performances or why. Was it, for example, the already-Westernized component of the political and cultural elite in Central Asia that preferred Italian opera to new Uzbek efforts, or was it the broader cross-section of the population who were the targets of the ongoing Westernization campaigns? That question requires additional research, especially in more local sources.

Transnational Pursuits:
The Recruitment of Italian Opera Pedagogues

The box office data also cannot shed much light on what audiences thought of the opera they attended. Fortunately, the reactions of one important audience — cultural officials — is apparent through analysis of another type of archival source: the correspondence and reports produced by those officials. It turns out that what they heard in the postwar Soviet Union's opera theaters rarely satisfied these officials, who despaired not just about the seeming inability of Soviet composers to write masterpieces equivalent to either the Russian or the Western classics but also about the quality of the performances themselves. Those bureaucrats tasked with overseeing the transnational movement of the people actively involved in multinational — and in this case trans-imperial — cultural life undertook an ultimately failed effort to bring Italian opera pedagogues to the Moscow Conservatory as visiting faculty. In the postwar Soviet Union, there were very serious restrictions placed on the mobility of people either into or out of Soviet territory. At the same time, Soviet leaders were still driven by a universalist ideology and engaged in an effort to expand the Soviet Union's international influence. For such a society, examining the bureaucratic regulation of mobility is essential to understanding the processes and possibilities of transnational cultural flows and assessing how the Soviet Union engaged with the world beyond its borders.

The pursuit of Italian professors of operatic singing began in 1947. In the early summer of that year, the principle conductor of the Bolshoi Theater, Nikolai Golovanov, and the Director of the Moscow Conservatory, Vissarion Shebalin, were dispatched to Italy to investigate the possibility of inviting top

Italian vocal instructors to undertake three-year visiting appointments in Soviet conservatories. The trip did not succeed, but it was revealing in several areas. First, the decision to send the delegation on its mission in the first place reveals quiet insecurities within the Soviet bureaucratic elite about cultural development. These insecurities contradicted the otherwise strident claims of systemic superiority compared to the "decadent" capitalist West that Soviet ideologues sent rippling across Europe during this same period. Second, Golovanov's report about the trip, submitted on behalf of himself and Shebalin, reveals elite Soviet perceptions of their Italian counterparts' assumptions about the Soviet Union and their anxieties about the dynamics of the still-emerging Cold War. Finally, the mechanics of the trip revealed that in the early postwar 1940s, the insular Soviet bureaucracy was not yet as adept as it would eventually become at managing international travel and person-to-person cultural exchange.

Opera was a constant touchstone for measuring Soviet cultural accomplishment, whether as a lightning rod for party intervention into musical life (as it was in both 1936 and 1948), a showcase for investment in cultural development (as it was throughout the Soviet 1930s, especially in Central Asia), or as a paragon of the salutary results of that investment (as in the promotion of operas by composers based in the non-Russian republics).[12] Considering that this genre was such an important measuring stick, the stakes were high when it did not live up to expectations. In the postwar Soviet Union, it was definitely not meeting officials' expectations, either in the development of new Soviet

[12] On 1936, see [20; 5; 25]. On 1948, see fn. 3. On the crucial place of developing opera by and for non-Russian nationalities, see especially [18, *331–371*].

opera, as the intervention of 1948 made clear, or in the development of first rate vocal talent.[13] A paucity of top rate opera singers thus raised the disturbing possibility that Soviet cultural development as a whole was not as advanced as officials assumed it ought to be. The Golovanov-Shebalin mission was an attempt to remedy that problem by importing teachers from what many Soviets considered the pre-eminent operatic society in the world, Italy. If Soviet opera singing — and by extension, Soviet musical life, and by implication, Soviet cultural development — was subpar, who should be brought in to help raise the level but Italian vocal teachers. This effort to recruit the Italians began even before the party intervention in 1948. It was both a sign that Soviet officialdom already suspected that something about Soviet opera was amiss and an early effort to do something constructive about it.

The effort did not succeed, in part because of the hesitance of the Italians who were offered visiting appointments to accept them. All in all, the Soviets negotiated with seventeen teachers in Rome, Florence, Venice, and Milan. In Venice and Rome, they were accompanied by Aleksandr Akimovich Sanin, a former director of the Bolshoi Theater who had been living in emigration for three decades. In Milan, they were advised by the Russian emigre tenor Aleksandr Nikolaevich Veselovskii. Both guides reportedly provided invaluable information about musical life in those cities [53, *119*]. In his concluding report, Golovanov claimed that conditions for inviting Italian pedagogues to the Soviet

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[13] For a limited sample of the myriad examples of bureaucrats' concerns about the availability of high quality opera singers expressed in high-level party correspondence at exactly this time period, see [48] (in which the head of the Committee on Artistic Affairs requests that prominent male opera singers who have served for more than twenty-five years nevertheless not be permitted to retire because the Bol'shoi did not have the voices to replace them); and [55] (in which the bureaucrats cite the acute need for more coloratura sopranos at the Bol'shoi).

Union were generally not favorable. Blaming the reactionary press in Italy, he noted that throughout the Italian intelligentsia, there was fear verging on panic about the possibility of war between the United States and Soviet Union. Though war did not appear to be imminent, fear of it sharply limited those who would even consider a visiting appointment to "only the most brave." Even those brave few would only contemplate a single year's stay [53, *118*].

The negotiations were also inhibited by a fundamental misunderstanding of conditions in Moscow that appears to have surprised the Soviet dignitaries. Golovanov reported that some of the Italians had asked if they would be forced to join the Communist Party. Others, perhaps more surprisingly, wondered if they would have to wear their pants tucked into their boots. Such basic misunderstandings of Soviet cultural life put a point on Golovanov's more general complaint that the Soviet diplomatic mission and cultural exchange institutions (namely, VOKS) were utterly failing to provide relevant, accurate, and timely material to the Italian public. In fact, Golovanov articulated what was a common complaint of Soviet visitors across Europe in these early days: the materials that VOKS sent abroad were completely random, elicited virtually no interest in the target audiences, and even gave a flatly false impression of the direction of Soviet musical life. This failure was both absolute (producing false impressions of Soviet life) and comparative, for Great Britain and the United States were conducting much more successful propaganda in Italy, constantly sending fresh materials and new specialists. Golovanov considered this gap a profound shame since his visit convinced him that Italian musicians were both interested in and drawn to Soviet music and Soviet performers [53, *119*, *126—27*].

Perhaps the least surprising concerns raised by the Italians were those directed toward material conditions, from the weather to the standard of living. Nothing could be done about the weather, obviously, but Golovanov also struck a discouraged tone regarding the standard of living noting that, in fact, conditions were quite comfortable in Italy [53, *119*]. In addition to these general worries about the global politics of the moment and perceptions of the difficulties of life in the Soviet Union, the Italians also expressed a range of other reasons for declining — or limiting — the Soviet invitations. Some did so for purely business considerations: they had already agreed to appointments elsewhere (Turkey, for example), they were on tour in the Americas and did not wish to break off those engagements, or they could not leave their full-time teaching post during the academic year. For example, Rome Conservatory professor Gino Skoliari offered to give a series of master classes during the summer holiday — as he reportedly did habitually elsewhere in Europe — but would not abandon his students in Rome.[14] For others, the reasons to decline were much more personal. One attributed his refusal to his wife, who both feared war and was fundamentally ill disposed to the Soviet Union [53, *122*].

Despite all of these reasons to decline the Soviets' invitation, five Italian pedagogues did agree in principle to accept Soviet visiting appointments, four for a one-year position and one for the hoped-for three. That one, Milan-based Luigi Cantoni, was an outlier in other ways, as well. A member of the Italian communist party who had been repressed and tortured during the war, Cantoni himself suggested a three-year contract because he thought that it would give him time to show the results his teaching could achieve [53, *120—21*]. Another

[14] See [53, *121—22*]. For later but analogous difficulties faced by Moscow Conservatory professors balancing international touring and instructional obligations, see [33, *130–31*].

of those who agreed had actually been to the Soviet Union before: Rome- and Sienna- based lyric soprano Ines Tellini had toured Moscow and Leningrad in the 1930s and was willing to return for a year in the classroom [53, *119—20*]. As Skoliari's offer to conduct master classes suggests, many of these vocal instructors were part of an already internationally mobile group of world class musicians. Negotiations with Rome-based Luigi Ricci had to take place by letter since he had long been resident in Buenos Aires. Whatever the trade-offs regarding the weather, he agreed in principle to move from Argentina to the Soviet Union [53, *119*]. Only one of those who agreed seems to have raised concerns among the delegation. Carlo Galeffa was still performing and had only recently turned to teaching, so proven success as a pedagogue may have been a concern; however, apparently more problematical was the fact that he alone requested payment of the hard currency portion of his salary one year in advance [53, *120*].

The guarded objection to what the Soviet delegation seems to have considered Galeffa's overly material approach to the negotiations was just one of many pieces of evidence that the Soviets were not yet ready for the practical and material requirements of this early foray into the international marketplace of musical exchange. Galeffa's request for hard-currency payment in advance may have cost him a spot on the list of recommended appointments, but the most critical components of Golovanov's generally laconic report touched on communications between the delegation and Moscow. One of the most common and obviously predictable questions that the Italians asked was where they would go. That question had still not been answered when a clearly frustrated Golovanov penned his report: "A question that remains unclear is about the

distribution of these figures to cities in the Soviet Union since we never received an answer to the telegram inquiry we sent about this question" [53, *122*].

In fact, lack of clarity about the exact terms the Soviets were prepared to offer was a serious drag on whatever traction Golovanov and Shebalin could produce. When they left Moscow, the team had been told only that the maximum salary envisioned for the project would be 5500 rubles, half of which would be paid in hard currency (Italian lire). Golovanov reported that that maximum was only barely in line with norms in Europe and the Americas and should be a considered an absolute minimum below which anyone they invited simply would not agree. When their telegrams requesting clarification or change in terms were not answered, the Soviet professors complained that it was difficult for them to negotiate contracts without knowing even basic details about what Moscow would approve. Uncomfortable though it must have been to be offering minimally acceptable terms to prospective visitors who were poorly (in the eyes of the delegates) informed about Soviet musical life, doing so with just vague guidance from the outset and absolutely no response to questions that arose along the way was clearly worse. Indeed, the fact that their telegrams from the field went unanswered meant that Golovanov and Shebalin returned to Moscow with unfinished business, and Golovanov stressed that it would be deleterious to Soviet interests (and personally embarrassing – he wrote that it would be "elementary impoliteness") if they did not follow up quickly [53, *123—24*].

In the absence of instructions from Moscow, Golovanov and Shebalin did develop their own set of recommendations. Considering the hesitance of the Italian pedagogues, their general willingness to commit to just a single year, and their concerns about material conditions, the delegation suggested that it

was not an auspicious time to begin a robust exchange program that distributed Italian pedagogues to conservatories across the Soviet Union. At the same time, they thought that the benefits of "introducing the principles of the Italian school into the practice of our teaching" would be extremely beneficial and should not be delayed. So, Golovanov suggested inviting just the three most accomplished (of those who had agreed), just for a year (with the possibility of extension), and just to Moscow and Leningrad (or even just Moscow). And they also suggested that better terms and conditions would alleviate the Italians' concerns about standard of living. In fact, they had already requested permission to increase the portion of the salary to be paid in rubles to the level of a typical professor, to guarantee good ration cards, included housing on the government's account, to pay for transport both ways, and to provide two months of paid vacation [53, *123*].

If Golovanov and Shebalin sought to attract prominent musicians living in Italy to come to the Soviet Union, they succeeded on two counts: their guides to Italian musical life, Sanin and Veselovskii, both requested to return. Sanin's request was old and some form of approval had already been communicated to him. Golovanov requested that whatever red tape was holding up the final arrangements be cut and Sanin be allowed to return to the Soviet Union. After thirty years in emigration, Sanin reportedly wanted nothing more than to devote himself in his old age to working with Soviet youth.[15]

Golovanov's report about the delegation's negotiations reveals that even as early as 1947, the Soviets were preparing to enter into an already existing international musical arena of transnational concert tours, summer master

[15] See [52], an undated and unsigned memo that is clearly a follow-up to the report that immediately precedes it in the file.

classes, visiting teaching appointments, and elite salaries. They would eventually be remarkably successful participants in this arena, with concertizing musicians astounding critics and audiences alike and young phenoms absolutely dominating international music competitions [36]. But in 1947, they were not yet ready for primetime. Though the available records do not reveal whether or not Golovanov and Shebalin managed to avoid the embarrassment of simply not replying to their Italian counterparts, it is clear that the ultimate value of the visit within Soviet bureaucratic circles was to provide a more extensive, detailed, and realistic account of the state of musical life in Italy and of the comparative state of Soviet cultural exchange capacity. This conclusion fits a pattern according to which the Soviet Union's international cultural delegations, especially to East-Central Europe, in 1946-48 were primarily information-gathering efforts rather than serious efforts to impose (in Eastern Europe) or project (elsewhere) Soviet-style institutions or artistic norms. Indeed, this particular information gathering effort was much more about using Italian expertise to address a perceived Soviet weakness. But lack of communication and resources, coupled with a truly challenging geo-political moment, combined to reduce the effort to a single request for an invitation, ultimately denied. After reviewing Golovanov and Shebalin's recommendations, the Committee on Artistic Affairs requested permission to invite just Luigi Cantoni to the Moscow Conservatory for a three-year appointment with the improved terms proposed by the delegation. Sanin's return was apparently stuck in review by the Ministry of Internal Affairs, out of the control of the Committee on Artistic Affairs. And Veselovsky's case was referred back to the Soviet embassy in Italy [43]. In the end, Cantoni did not come to Moscow, and the effort to introduce the Italian

school into Soviet operatic singing pedagogy was at least temporarily abandoned.

Over the next few years, musical exchange between the Soviet Union and Italy was paltry. Just two Italian musicians (conductors Carlo Zecchi in 1950 and Willi Ferrero in 1951) came to the Soviet Union between 1945 and 1951, and no more Soviets traveled to Italy until 1951, when two separate groups of performers toured.[16] In 1950, La Scala arranged a major international competition and festival in honor of the fiftieth anniversary of Verdi's death. As part of the celebration, the Italians invited Soviet composers to participate in a competition for the "Giuseppe Verdi Prize" for best new opera composition, asked Sergei Prokofiev to serve on the jury, and suggested a direct collaboration between a Soviet opera house and La Scala.[17] The Committee on Artistic Affairs declined to participate both in the competition, noting that socialist realism was unlikely to be successful in an Italian composition competition, and in the collaboration with La Scala, essentially without comment.[18]

Then, in the Spring of 1952, the question of inviting the Italian opera pedagogues to the Soviet Union was suddenly resurrected, seemingly at high

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[16] See [45; 54; 67]. [54] is undated, but probably 31 Aug 1951. N.N. Bespalov was head of the VKI, and F. I. Kaloshin and N.E. Tverdokhlebov were his vice chairs.

[17] The invitation caused a flurry of communication between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Committee on Artistic Affairs, and VOKS. The key summary memos are [42; 51; 44]. A.V. Abramov was the acting head of the First European Department in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, P.I. Lebedev was the head of the Committee on Artistic Affairs, N.N. Bespalov was his vice chair, A. Ghiringhelli was the superintendent of La Scala, "Mr. Rogov" was Second Secretary of the Soviet Embassy in Italy, and L.D. Kislova was the head of VOKS.

[18] For the decision not to collaborate, see the laconic, "The Committee on Artistic Affairs considers collaboration between a Moscow theater and the theater La Scala inadvisable": [47]. For the decision not to compete, citing stylistic differences between socialist realism and Western norms, see [46].

levels of the Soviet arts oversight bureaucracy. In January 1952, the leadership of the Central Committee's Department of Literature and the Arts wrote to Georgii Malenkov to summarize the fizzled 1947 effort and recommend sending Director of the Moscow Conservatory, A. V. Sveshnikov, and Assistant Director of the Bolshoi Theater, V. Kil'chevskii back to Italy to revive the efforts, this time in hopes of attracting three or four leading vocal instructors for terms of not less than three years [56]. The Council of Ministers quickly jumped on the bandwagon, forwarding the memo to the Committee on Artistic Affairs and requesting that they report on the situation.[19] Together, the Vice Chair of the Committee on Artistic Affairs and the Minster of Foreign Affairs drafted a letter to the Soviet Ambassador to Italy ordering him in some detail to revive the effort.[20] Included with the draft, they also sent an accurate, but almost comical summary of Golovanov's 1947 report, referring, for example, to some of the Italians' perceptions of Soviet life as "wild" (the Italians' concern that they might be required to tuck their pant legs into their boots seems to have alarmed everyone on the Soviet side), and dismissing the "husband-pedagogues" who were influenced by their "wife-Catholics."[21] In the end, the earlier mission's failure was chalked up to the fact that the trip happened in June and July, after the active concert season had ended, and to "lack of clarity of the directive."[22] They would not make the latter mistake again. The draft telegram spells out the terms in careful detail, from length of the contract (three years, though an especially outstanding pedagogue might be allowed to commit to just one, with

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[19] See [65]. Smirtiukov was the head of the operations department of the Council of Ministers, literally pushing the paper from the party apparatus to the government one.
[20] See [49] and the draft: [50].
[21] See [60], which is undated but included with draft telegram, 18 Apr 1952.
[22] See [66], which is undated but included with draft telegram, 18 Apr 1952.

the right to extend for another two), to the nature of the academic year (540 instructional hours across ten months — with two months paid vacation), to compensation (6000 rubles a month, with 75 percent paid in rubles and the other 25 percent in US dollars, but with the possibility of overtime up to 4.5 instructional hours a day increasing that pay by an additional 50 percent), to accommodations (a well-outfitted three- to four-room apartment, complete with piano — in the context of the early 1950s, this is a very generous allotment). The Moscow Conservatory was even given permission to provide three months' pay in advance upon signing the contract. The Soviet ambassador was supposed to seek guidance from Italian Communist Party head and former Minister of Justice Palmiro Togliatti about how to conclude such an agreement, but Moscow's preference was to send a representative from the Moscow Conservatory before the end of the concert season and academic year [50; *44—45*]. On the one hand, the transformation from the 1947 effort is stunning. On the other, it should come as no surprise. Soviet cultural bureaucrats learned the lessons of the late 1940s quickly and began to act much more effectively, strategically, and profitably on the international stage, emerging internationally as a triumphant musical giant by the end of the 1950s. Unfortunately, the trail regarding this particular, early effort runs dry with the draft telegram. The initiative to bring Italian pedagogues for extended visiting appointments in Soviet conservatories does not appear to have been realized before Stalin's death. But the attempt, coupled with the constant prominence in the Soviet operatic repertoire of Italian opera, demonstrates that throughout the postwar Stalin period, Italian opera played a critical role in the development of the Soviet Union's highest profile musical genre.

Conclusion

The archival sources on which this article is based help us evaluate the distinction between the "international" and the "transnational" that is a key to the way scholars have come to analyze interactions that cross national borders or include multiple states, especially when those interactions are conceived of in a context of globalization. The case of the Soviet dignitaries and the Italian pedagogues suggests that that distinction may not be especially important in a Soviet context. Soviet society was essentially embedded in the state bureaucracy, with all institutions either juridically part of the state or subject to tight state controls.[23] The Golovanov-Shebalin mission to Italy is an instance in which two people who did not primarily think of themselves as state actors but as musicians utilized the, to them, unavoidable apparatus of the state to try to recruit other musicians — who could operate as private citizens outside their resident state's government institutions — to come to the Soviet Union. Though the actual recruitment failed, the effort shows that at this crucial moment of bombastic cultural expansion, Soviet officialdom paradoxically feared that the Soviet Union was culturally backward compared to the West and had not yet developed the institutionalized savvy to engage successfully outside the area of direct Soviet influence. Of course, that would change dramatically within a decade. Whether their sojourn was an example of trans- or inter-national mobility ultimately does not matter. That Soviet musicians and the officials of the government and party bureaucracies measured their cultural accomplishments against those of Italy and sought to engage Italian musicians when they found

[23] For discussion of the claim that the Soviet "state" was an arena that encompassed party, government, and even juridically distinct community organizations (obshchestvennye organizatsii) like the creative unions, see [33].

that measure wanting is critical evidence of Soviet engagement beyond the boundaries of a Soviet empire so often understood to have been wrapped in its own isolation.

The juxtaposition of the two possible modes of Italian operatic influence on Soviet musical life examined in this article also suggests some conclusions about the relationship between flows of cultural forms and cultural producers in the early postwar world. Even though the Italian pedagogues that cultural officials thought might resolve the problems with Soviet operatic performance culture did not visit the Soviet Union in the years covered here, Italian opera, in the form of canonical classics, still enlivened and stabilized the repertoire available to audiences across the Soviet Union. The appropriation of Italian models for presentation on Soviet stages and the resultant popularity of those models embedded the Soviet Union in an increasingly standardized and competitive global musical sphere, with primarily the Western Classics as a shared cultural heritage. It was a global musical sphere they would soon come dominate.

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APPENDIX

Table 1. Structure of Opera and Ballet Theater Repertoire, Titles and Performances

Year	Total Titles	Opera Titles	%% Op Titles	Ballet Titles	%% Ballet Titles	Total Perf	Opera Perf	%% Op Perf	Ballet Perf	%% Ballet Perf
1945	141	101	72%	40	28%	6714	5495	82%	1219	18%
1946	168	116	69%	52	31%	8158	6038	74%	2120	26%
1947	190	132	69%	58	31%	9100	7042	77%	2058	23%
1948	190	133	70%	57	30%	9587	7428	77%	2159	23%
Total	**689**	**482**	**70%**	**207**	**30%**	**33559**	**26003**	**77%**	**7556**	**23%**

Source. Data extracted from RGALI, f. 2452, op. 1, dd. 69, 76, 83, 89. Categorization and analysis by the author.

Table 2. Structure of Opera Repertoire, Titles

Year	Total	Russian Classics	RC %%	Western Classics	WC %%	Moscow Composers	MSSK %%	Others	Other %%
1945	101	25	25%	21	21%	10	10%	45	45%
1946	116	28	24%	27	23%	11	9%	50	43%
1947	132	28	21%	25	19%	20	15%	59	45%
1948	133	27	20%	32	24%	15	11%	59	44%
Total	**482**	**108**	22%	**105**	22%	**56**	12%	**213**	44%

Source. Data extracted from RGALI, f. 2452, op. 1, dd. 69, 76, 83, 89. Categorization and analysis by the author.

Table 3. Structure of Opera Repertoire, Performances

Year	Total	Russian Classics	RC %%	Western Classics	WC %%	Moscow Composers	MSSK %%	Others	Other %%
1945	5495	1986	36%	2165	39%	57	1%	1287	23%
1946	6038	2225	37%	2509	42%	144	2%	1160	19%
1947	7042	2485	35%	2727	39%	458	7%	1372	19%
1948	7428	2541	34%	3384	46%	179	2%	1324	18%
Total	**26003**	**9237**	**36%**	**10785**	**41%**	**838**	**3%**	**5143**	**20%**

Source. Data extracted from RGALI, f. 2452, op. 1, dd. 69, 76, 83, 89. Categorization and analysis by the author.

Table 4. Italian Opera in Context, Titles

Year	Total	Western Classics	Italian	% Italian	Italian %% of WC	French	% French	Fr %% WC	Germanic	% Germanic	G %% WC	Other
1945	101	21	14	13.9%	66.7%	5	5.0%	23.8%	2	2.0%	9.5%	0
1946	116	27	15	12.9%	55.6%	8	6.9%	29.6%	3	2.6%	11.1%	1
1947	132	25	15	11.4%	60.0%	6	4.5%	24.0%	3	2.3%	12.0%	1
1948	133	32	15	11.3%	46.9%	11	8.3%	34.4%	5	3.8%	15.6%	1
Total	**482**	**105**	**59**	**12.2%**	**56.2%**	**30**	**6.2%**	**28.6%**	**13**	**2.7%**	**12.4%**	**3**

Source. Data extracted from RGALI, f. 2452, op. 1, dd. 69, 76, 83, 89. Categorization and analysis by the author.

Table 5. Italian Opera in Context, Performances

Year	Total	Western Classics	Italian	% Italian	Italian %% of WC	French	% French	Fr %% WC	Germanic	% Germanic	Ger %% WC	Other	% Other	Other %% WC
1945	5495	2165	1705	31.0%	78.8%	438	8.0%	20.2%	22	0.4%	1.0%	0	0.0%	0.0%
1946	6038	2509	1870	31.0%	74.5%	577	9.6%	23.0%	54	0.9%	2.2%	8	0.1%	0.3%
1947	7042	2727	1918	27.2%	70.3%	724	10.3%	26.5%	73	1.0%	2.7%	12	0.2%	0.4%
1948	7428	3384	2335	31.4%	69.0%	933	12.6%	27.6%	77	1.0%	2.3%	39	0.5%	1.2%
Total	**26003**	**10785**	**7828**	**30.1%**	**72.6%**	**2672**	**10.3%**	**24.8%**	**226**	**0.9%**	**2.1%**	**59**	**0.2%**	**0.5%**

Source. Data extracted from RGALI, f. 2452, op. 1, dd. 69, 76, 83, 89. Categorization and analysis by the author.

Table 6. Reception of Opera Performed in the USSR (box office average, rubles)

Year	Total	Russian Classic	RC comp to Total	Western Classic	WC comp to Total	Moscow Composers	MSSK comp to Total	Other	Other comp to Total
1945	12389	15703	126.8%	12725	102.7%	12068	97.4%	6723	54.3%
1946	14021	13732	97.9%	10434	74.4%	14686	104.7%	22251	158.7%
1947	8467	11072	130.8%	7952	93.9%	9375	110.7%	4467	52.8%
1948	7006	9630	137.5%	6510	92.9%	4706	67.2%	3548	50.7%
Total	**10471**	**12534**	119.7%	**9405**	89.8%	**10209**	97.5%	**9247**	88.3%

Source. Data extracted from RGALI, f. 2452, op. 1, dd. 69, 76, 83, 89. Categorization and analysis by the author.

Table 7. Reception of Russian and Western Classic Opera, Central Asia (box office average)

Year	Overall Average	Western Classic Opera	WC as %% of Average	Italian Opera	Italian as %% of Average	Russian Classic Opera	RC as %% of Average
1945	6250	7027	112.4%	6469	103.5%	7320	117.1%
1946	5884	7593	129.0%	7692	130.7%	6965	118.4%
1947	3353	4996	149.0%	4509	134.5%	5551	165.6%
1948	3631	4615	127.1%	4810	132.5%	4395	121.0%
Total	**4780**	**6058**	**126.7%**	**5870**	**122.8%**	**6058**	**126.7%**

Source. Data extracted from RGALI, f. 2452, op. 1, dd. 69, 76, 83, 89. Categorization and analysis by the author.

Table 8. Reception of Russian and Western Classic Opera, Ukraine (box office average)

Year	Overall Average	Western Classic Opera	WC as %% of Average	Italian Opera	Italian as %% of Average	Russian Classic Opera	RC as %% of Average
1945	12494	12621	101.0%	12745	102.0%	11540	92.4%
1946	11471	11515	100.4%	11471	100.0%	9615	83.8%
1947	8543	8293	97.1%	7297	85.4%	8441	98.8%
1948	6723	6379	94.9%	5446	81.0%	7268	108.1%
Total	**9253**	**9098**	**98.3%**	**8496**	**91.8%**	**9083**	**98.2%**

Source. Data extracted from RGALI, f. 2452, op. 1, dd. 69, 76, 83, 89. Categorization and analysis by the author.