

===== *Shostakovich in memoriam* =====

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Shostakovich and Khrapchenko: On the Problem of “The Artist and Power”

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Abstract. The article is devoted to the history of the relationship between Dmitry Shostakovich and Mikhail Khrapchenko, Chairman of the All-Union Committee for Arts Affairs (VKDI) under the Council of People’s Commissars of the Soviet Union (1939–1948). This department was created in 1936 under the leadership of Platon Kerzhentsev. For Shostakovich, the initial period of interaction with VKDI turned out to be quite dramatic. The first major action of the VKDI was the publication of the article *Muddle Instead of Music* (*Pravda*, 28 January 1936),

directed against Shostakovich's opera *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*; this was shortly followed by another entitled *Ballet Falsehood (Pravda)*, 6 February 1936) that made accusations against the ballet *The Limpid Stream*. However, the appointment of Khrapchenko to the post of chairman of the VKDI in 1939 radically changed the position of Shostakovich, whose support by the new head of the department would benefit him greatly in the years to come. The article reconstructs the entire period of communication between Shostakovich and Khrapchenko based on archival documents, memoirs, letters and periodical press materials. The composer repeatedly turned to Khrapchenko for help and invariably received it in both creative and everyday matters. In 1948, Khrapchenko, like many other artists, became a victim of the anti-formalist campaign. On Stalin's orders, an audit was conducted of the financial costs of preparing the opera *The Great Friendship* by Vano Muradeli. Having been designated as responsible for the failure of the opera, Khrapchenko subsequently spent several years paying a large fine to the state. At the conference of Soviet music figures, which took place at the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks) from 11–13 January 1948 under the chairmanship of Andrei Zhdanov, many of those whom Khrapchenko had supported during his many years of work at the VKDI spoke out against him. The only one who spoke out in defence of Khrapchenko was Shostakovich. Until the end of his life, the composer maintained communication with Khrapchenko, who again held high positions in the 1960s and always responded to the composer's requests when he could.

Keywords: Dmitry Shostakovich, Michail Khrapchenko, Joseph Stalin, Alexey Zhdanov, All-Union Committee for Arts Affairs, the composer and power, Soviet music, symphony, anti-formalist campaign of 1948

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== Памяти Д. Д. Шостаковича ==

Научная статья

**Шостакович и Храпченко:
к проблеме «Художник и власть»**

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Аннотация. Статья посвящена истории взаимоотношений Д. Д. Шостаковича и М. Б. Храпченко, председателя Всесоюзного комитета по делам искусств (ВКДИ) при Совете народных комиссаров СССР (1939–1948). Это ведомство было создано в 1936 году под руководством П. М. Керженцева. Начальный период взаимодействия с ВКДИ оказался для Шостаковича весьма драматичным. Первой крупной акцией ВКДИ была публикация статьи «Сумбур вместо музыки» («Правда», 28 января 1936 года), направленная против оперы Шостаковича «Леди Макбет Мценского уезда»; за ней последовала еще одна — «Балетная фальшь» («Правда», 6 февраля 1936 года) с обвинениями против балета «Светлый ручей». Назначение в 1939 году Храпченко на должность председателя ВКДИ кардинально изменило положение Шостаковича, который на протяжении долгого времени в полной мере ощущал поддержку нового главы ведомства.

В статье на основе архивных документов, мемуаров, писем и материалов периодической печати реконструирован весь период общения Шостаковича и Храпченко. Композитор неоднократно обращался за помощью к председателю ВКДИ и неизменно получал ее как в творческих, так и в бытовых вопросах. В 1948 году Храпченко, как и многие деятели искусства, стал жертвой антиформалистической кампании. По указанию Сталина была проведена проверка денежных затрат на подготовку оперы «Великая дружба» В. И. Мурадели. Главным ответственным за неудачу оперы был назначен Храпченко, который затем в течение ряда лет выплачивал государству крупный штраф. На Совещании деятелей советской музыки, которое проходило в ЦК ВКП(б) 11–13 января 1948 года под председательством А. А. Жданова, против Храпченко выступили многие из тех, кого он поддерживал на протяжении долгих лет своей работы в ВКДИ. Единственным, кто встал на его защиту, был Шостакович. До конца жизни композитор поддерживал общение с Храпченко, который в 1960-е годы занимал высокие посты и всегда, когда мог, откликался на просьбы композитора.

Ключевые слова: Д. Д. Шостакович, М. Б. Храпченко, И. В. Сталин, А. А. Жданов, Всесоюзный комитет по делам искусств, композитор и власть, советская музыка, симфония, антиформалистическая кампании 1948 года

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Introduction

The problem of “the artist and power” has been raised repeatedly in relation to Dmitry Dmitriyevich Shostakovich (1906–1975). The scope of analysis is broad and meaningful, ranging from an academically precise history of the composer’s relationship with the Soviet regime (as seen in the works of Levon Hakobian (Akopyan) [1; 2]) to descriptions of an almost personal confrontation between creator and tyrant, exemplified in the provocative phrase of Solomon Volkov: *Shostakovich i Stalin: khudozhnik i tsar’* [*Shostakovich and Stalin. The Artist and the Tsar*] [3].

The present work sets out provide some clarification to the very concept of “power” by examining Shostakovich’s relationship with a government official of much smaller stature than Stalin, but also one who was much closer to the needs of artists. He we refer to the chairman of the All-Union Committee for Arts Affairs under the Council of People’s Commissars of the USSR, Mikhail Borisovich Khrapchenko (1904–1986), who was appointed to this position in April 1939 and removed in the wake of the anti-formalist campaign of 1948. Shostakovich, who maintained relations with him from 1938 onwards, always had the opportunity to turn to him for support as the head of a government department — effectively the People’s Commissar for the Arts (*Illustration 1*).

Khrapchenko: A Short Biography

In the scholarly and memoir sources, with a few exceptions, Khrapchenko’s activities are predominantly viewed in a negative light. It can even be said that since 1948, when the Chairman of the Committee was, as they say, dismissed from office with a bang, the assessment of his activities has scarcely been subject to revision. This is evidenced, for example, by such formulations found in contemporary literature as “hapless head of the government arts committee” or even “unprincipled shadow of power.” The author of the first definition (journalist Vyacheslav V. Ogryzko) belatedly gloats over the dismissal of Khrapchenko in the wake of the vilification of Muradeli’s opera *The Great Friendship*,¹ while the author of the second (the literary scholar Aleksander N. Arkhangelsky,

¹ Ogryzko, V. V. (2015, February 23) Forced defectors. *Literaturnaya Rossiya* [*Literary Russia*]: *Internet-portal*, (2012/11). (In Russ.). <https://litrossia.ru/item/5638-oldarchive/>



Illustration 1. Samuil A. Samosud, Dmitry D. Shostakovich, Mikhail B. Khrapchenko.
Photo from the family archive

who has been recognized as a foreign agent) finds fault with a critical statement about the “bad language” of Alexander Tvardovsky’s poem *Vasily Terkin* during its discussion for the Stalin Prize.² One gets the impression that the almost forgotten People’s Commissar must remain guilty for what is easily forgiven to many of his other comrades, who often made much harsher judgments and actions.

² Arkhangelsky, A. N. (2015) Pisatel’, Soyuz i Vojna [The Writer, the Union and War]. In T. M. Goryaeva, V. A. Antipina, Z. K. Vodopyanova, & T. V. Domracheva (Eds.), *“My predchuvstvovali polykhan’e...” Soyuz sovetskikh pisatelej SSSR v gody Velikoj Otechestvennoj vojny. Iyun’ 1941 — sentyabr’ 1945 g. Dokumenty i kommentarii* [“We had a premonition of the blaze...” Union of Soviet Writers of the USSR during the Great Patriotic War. June 1941 — September 1945 Documents and Comments]. (Vol. 2: In 2 books, Book 1, pp. 6–9). Publishing House “Politicheskaya Entsiklopediya” (ROSSPEN), pp. 7–8. (In Russ.).

The habit of negative evaluations is noticeable even in some more neutral contexts. Thus, in the publication of letters to Ivan Sollertinsky, the commentator (Liudmila Kovnatskaya) draws attention to the notes made by Shostakovich opposite the names of Valerian Pereverzev and Mikhail Khrapchenko. Here we refer to the six-volume edition of Gogol, which was published under the editorship of these literary scholars in 1937. The commentator suggests that with these notes Shostakovich was pointing out to his friend the striking dissimilarity of the fates of these literary scholars [4, p. 242].

This comment requires clarification, especially in the context of the preparation of the six-volume edition. Khrapchenko was the compiler and author of the introductory article, which is quite remarkable considering the difference in status between the venerable master Pereverzev and the novice scholar. Valerian Fyodorovich Pereverzev (1882–1968) was more than 20 years Khrapchenko's senior; as such, his "level" was closer to that of Anatoly Lunacharsky, Mikhail Bakhtin, and Boris Eikhenbaum — that is, the founders of Soviet literary theory and aesthetics. Nevertheless, the 30-year-old Khrapchenko was entrusted with becoming the main "driving force" of the publication; perhaps this was a sign of Pereverzev's foresight, who understood the meaning of the unfolding campaign against the old-guard intelligentsia. Just a year later (in 1938), Pereverzev was purged and sent into exile. The scholar was victimised precisely due to his status as a major figure, the founder of a scientific school. He was accused, according to the formulation of literary critic Mikhail Lifshitz, of "departing from Marxism towards Menshevism."³ In the same year of 1938, Lifshitz also attacked Khrapchenko,⁴ which, fortunately for him and Shostakovich, went without consequences.

Shostakovich hardly perceived the Chairman of the Committee on Arts as a literary scholar. In the eyes of his musician colleagues, Khrapchenko was, first and foremost, a government official — a status that carried no less risk than literary studies.⁵ It is no coincidence that one of the family's friends, recalling this period of Khrapchenko's activity, wrote: "A huge responsibility, daily intense work, where, he knew, one could not make a mistake. Cultural giants were falling all around — in the Party and in life. Every day people disappeared, acquaintances withdrew from work" [6, pp. 295–296].

³ Cit ex.: Lifshitz, M. A. (2012). *Stydlivaya sotsiologiya* [Shamefaced Sociology]. In *Nadoelo. V zashchitu obyknovennogo marksizma* [Fed Up. Defence of Ordinary Marxism] (pp. 375–376). *Iskusstvo-XXI vek*. (In Russ.).

⁴ Ibid., p. 369.

⁵ For more on the activities of Khrapchenko as chairman of the All-Union Committee for Arts Affairs (VKDI), see [5].

Before Khrapchenko's appointment, Shostakovich's relations with the All-Union Committee for Arts Affairs were quite tumultuous. The first chairman of the VKDI was the "Old Bolshevik" Platon Kerzhentsev. His name is associated both with the commencement of work on a large project to create a classical Soviet opera [7; 8], and with the unkind attention paid to Shostakovich, whose opera *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk (Katerina Izmailova)* fell victim to new political winds. It is enough to remember that the department itself was created on 17 January 1936, just 11 days before the appearance of the famous article *Muddle Instead of Music*. Shortly afterwards, a new article followed *Ballet Falsehood*, which was directed against Shostakovich's ballet *The Limpid Stream*.

A week after the *Lady Macbeth* debacle, Shostakovich came to see Kerzhentsev on his own initiative. The conversation left him in no doubt that from now on his work as a composer would be subject to strict state control. Leonid Maksimenkov, who researched into the events of 1936–1938 (the "Stalinist cultural revolution"), identifies five points of such control by the Committee for Artistic Affairs, according to which the composer was instructed to: (1) free himself from the influence of certain obliging critics, such as Ivan Sollertinsky, who encouraged the worst aspects of Shostakovich's work; (2) travel through the villages of the Soviet Union and record folk songs from Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, and Georgia; (3) select and harmonise one hundred of the best songs from those collected; (4) before composing any opera or ballet, submit the libretto for review to the Committee for Artistic Affairs. Finally, (5) when already in the process of working on a new opera or ballet, to test individual written parts in front of workers' and collective farm audiences [9, pp. 111–112].

This was Shostakovich's initial acquaintance with the newly formed department, which did not promise anything good for the composer and was to have the most direct influence on his future creative biography. As is well known, Shostakovich did not fulfil a single one of the five recommended points, instead choosing to act in a much more radical manner: the composer forever abandoned the writing of operas and ballets, thereby making the coordination of librettos and the approval of what was written in front of workers and collective farmers irrelevant.

In January 1938, Kerzhentsev was removed from his post and Alexei Ivanovich Nazarov, who had previously been in charge of the press department of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks), was appointed in his place.

A month later, 33-year-old Khrapchenko, who at that time was working as a senior research fellow at the Gorky Institute of World Literature, was approved as his deputy. It is unlikely that he came to the attention of the party leadership by accident. A planned change in policy in the field of culture was largely dictated by the authorities' desire to regain the trust of the artistic intelligentsia. The new Committee was formed of people who had just crossed the thirty-year mark. Many years later, Alexander Solodovnikov, one of Khrapchenko's deputies, wrote "We were young then," noting that the artists immediately felt the easing of the situation and accepted the new management team in a friendly and even fatherly manner [10].

By this time, Khrapchenko, despite his youth, already had a fairly solid track record. Among the most important milestones in his biography are teaching at the Department of Literature and Language at Voronezh University (1921–1931); then transferring to Moscow to the Institute of Literature and Art of the Communist Academy (1931–1933); heading a department at the Institute of Red Professors (IRP, 1936–1938) and serving as director of the Institute of Literature within the IRP.

Khrapchenko's greatest organisational achievement by 1938 was his participation in the development of the structure and programme of the newly created Literary Institute.⁶ In 1933, the main idea behind the initiative was to be embodied in two forms: scientific and educational. In the scientific mainstream, the Institute of World Literature of the USSR Academy of Sciences (IMLI) was established, and in the educational mainstream, the Evening Workers' Literary University was established, which three years later received its modern name the Gorky Institute of World Literature under which it would later become a renowned educational institution and a veritable forge of literary talent.

Among Khrapchenko's scientific achievements, it is worth mentioning, first of all, his curatorship (as deputy editor-in-chief) of the valuable academic series *Literary Heritage*, founded in 1934, as well as the preparation and publication in 1937 of the aforementioned 6-volume collected works of Nikolai Gogol.

⁶ Resolution of the Secretariat of the Organizing Committee of the Union of Writers of the USSR dated September 3, 1933 states: "Instruct the commission consisting of comrades Vs. Ivanov, Kirpotin, Yudin, Khrapchenko, Berezovsky, Zhuchkov to develop the issue of the structure and program of the Literary University." See Kurilov, A. S. (2015, February 23). Kak sozdavalsya Litinstitut [How the Literary Institute Was Created]. *Literaturnaya Rossiya* [Literary Russia]: Internet-portal, (2008/51). (In Russ.). <https://litrossia.ru/item/3212-oldarchive/>

It was about this edition that Shostakovich wrote to Ivan Sollertinsky from the Kuibyshev evacuation in November 1942: "...I kindly ask you to get the *Collected Works* in six volumes edited by N. S. Ashukin, V. F. Pereverzev (sic!) and M. B. Khrapchenko (sic!). Get Volume IV (State Publishing House 'Khudozhestvennaya Literatura.' Moscow, 1937). In this volume IV, look for page 343. It has the heading 'Excerpt from a Lost Drama.' I must honestly admit that I have never read from page 343 to page 348 inclusive. I have just read it and was completely amazed by the magnificence of these pages" [4, p. 242].

Let us pay attention to the importance of this statement. Shostakovich was one of the first to note what constituted the main content of Khrapchenko's activities as a scholarly editor and publisher of literary works. Thus, an important element of his professional principles was to ensure that collected works were published in their entirety, without any omissions. Many years later, already an academician, Khrapchenko would defend the publication of the original version of the book *Monuments of Medieval Latin Literature of the 10th–12th Centuries* (1970) with translations by Sergey S. Averintsev and Mikhail L. Gasparov, as well as the 17-volume *Complete Works* of Fyodor M. Dostoevsky (1972–1976) without cuts, having endured a long struggle with the ideological department of the Central Committee of the CPSU, fraught with unpredictable sanctions [11, p. 1129]. It is especially important to note Khrapchenko's pedantic attitude towards his own texts. This quality also gives reason to trust his diaries as valuable sources of almost lost information: the events described in them are presented, as a rule, in extreme detail, with many semantic nuances. Diary entries allow us to recreate a more accurate picture of some events that today seem established and even textbook. It is also worth mentioning that Khrapchenko, according to contemporaries, had an exceptional memory. Apparently, despite not recording requests and appeals, he never forgot anything, sometimes making entries in his diary with great accuracy even twenty days after the events described.

*Shostakovich and the New Chairman
of the Committee on Arts Affairs*

Nazarov's career in the Committee, which began in January 1938, turned out to be extremely short-lived. A few months following his appointment, he became seriously ill and even underwent a craniotomy during the summer.

This forced him to turn to the Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars, Vyacheslav Mikhailovich Molotov, with a request to "resolve the issue of his continued tenure as Chairman of the Committee." The request was granted, and on 1 April 1939, Khrapchenko was appointed acting chairman.

It was around this time that Khrapchenko and Shostakovich met in person. Judging by the subsequent correspondence, the circumstances of this acquaintance contributed to the establishment of rapid mutual understanding and trust. Thus, even during the period of Nazarov's illness, the Committee was approached by the Teatro dell'Opera di Roma with a request to provide the score of the opera *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* for production. In September, Khrapchenko, while still deputy chairman, received an order from the NKVD, which stated "the inexpediency of sending *Katerina Izmailova* to Italy as a work condemned for formalism" [12, p. 626]. Khrapchenko sent the letter to Moisei Abramovich Grinberg, head of the Main Music Department of the Committee. Shostakovich responded immediately: "On September 26, Comrade Greenberg informed me that in fascist Italy they wanted to stage my opera *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk*. I categorically object to the production of this work and ask that no materials be sent" [12, p. 626].⁷ This answer was not only politically impeccable, but also considerate towards the as-yet inexperienced chairman of the Committee, who, in the event of sending the score to Italy, would have to take on all the responsibility.

From that moment, creative contacts began, and a little later, correspondence developed which sheds light on certain events in Shostakovich's life after 1938. There is ample evidence attesting to Khrapchenko's special regard for Shostakovich, whom he undoubtedly considered the number one Soviet composer.

Perhaps the rapprochement and even ease of communication were also facilitated by Khrapchenko's special attitude towards Leningrad, the city where he later met his future wife Tamara Erastovna Tsytoich (*Illustration 2*). Tamara was the daughter of Erast Platonovich Tsytoich (1874–1942), an authoritative St. Petersburg scholar and teacher who, before the revolution, held the post of director of the Tsarskoye Selo Real College named after Emperor Nicholas II, where he taught physics and arithmetic (including to the Tsar's children).

⁷ Documentary evidence of this episode can be found in RGALI [Russian State Archive for Literature and Art] Fond 962. Inventory 10. Archival unit 30, p. 46.

The marriage turned out to be a happy one. The book of memoirs about Tamara Erastovna, published by the Moscow Conservatory Publishing House in 2020, illuminates some unknown pages of the life of this family, in which relationships with each other were permeated with constant mutual understanding and care. Everyday matters, significant experiences, and help with professional work were all shared between them. Throughout their lives, they supported other family members — parents, brothers, and sisters — loved their mutual friends, and assisted them in every way possible. One of Tsytovich's students, professor of the Moscow Conservatory Mikhail Aleksandrovich Saponov, recalls: "This wonderful couple was marked by divine happiness" [6, p. 283] (*Illustration 3*).



Illustration 2. M. B. Khrapchenko with his wife Tamara E. Tsytovich (1934).
Photo from the family archive

The only work of fiction written by Khrapchenko at the age of 28 sheds light on some personal circumstances of his life connected with Leningrad. The young writer chooses this city as the setting for his story, placing the Leningrad girl Zina at its centre; her image is present throughout the entire narrative. In fact, only two characters are depicted in detail: the protagonist and the girl to whom he speaks, with the whole story taking the form of an imagined conversation addressed to her from beginning to end.

After moving from Leningrad, Tamara Erastovna worked at the Museum of Musical Culture, and then at the Moscow Conservatory, where she subsequently headed the History of Foreign Music department for almost 30 years. Friends of the family noted with surprise that Mikhail Borisovich came to appreciate the music of Shostakovich more quickly than might have been expected — and, a little later, that of Prokofiev [11, p. 1124]. Undoubtedly, Tamara Erastovna,



Illustration 3. T. E. Tsytovich and M. B. Khrapchenko (1947).
Photo from the family archive

a musicologist of great erudition, played a decisive role in this. Later, in 1942, she collaborated with Shostakovich on the creation of the book *Soviet Music for 25 Years*. The composer headed the editorial board, while Tsytovich was the executive secretary and the author of one of the essays. In September, they sent Khrapchenko a letter with a detailed plan. The prospect for publication appeared to be solid, but for a number of reasons it did not take place.

Leningrad forever became an important part of the life of the People's Commissar. This would soon be revealed in the special attention paid to Leningrad musicians and to artists in general, as well as in Khrapchenko's personal presence during the evacuation of the State Hermitage collections in the first days of the war, and in sending parcels of vitamins to besieged Leningrad at every opportunity.

It was mainly thanks to his friend and reliable comrade Boris Ivanovich Zagursky, head of the Leningrad Department of Arts, who was in Leningrad throughout the blockade, that Khrapchenko understood the situation in the besieged city better than many. Thanks to his efforts and support from Nikolai Mikhailovich Shvernik, who headed the evacuation council under the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR, many artists, composers and actors were evacuated from Leningrad during the first weeks of the war and afterwards during the period of the blockade. With the support of the Committee, the first symphony concert was performed in Leningrad on 5 April 1942. Other significant events began to occur. The music school of the Petrogradsky district and the conservatory began their work. This was in conflict with the demands of the military leadership, which had ordered the removal of people not working for defence from the front-line city. Zagursky had to contact the Committee and Khrapchenko, who, in turn, contacted the Leningrad City Executive Committee and secured its consent [5, pp. 258–259]. Later, Zagursky wrote to Khrapchenko: "Thanks to the assistance of the Arts Committee, we were able to open classes at the conservatory. A music college began operating there, admitting one hundred students, as well as an advanced training group consisting of fifty people" [13, p. 71]. And although it was necessary to explain it to the military authorities later, the deed was done.

Among the pre-war projects of Shostakovich and Khrapchenko, one can highlight the preparation for the celebration of the 100th anniversary of the birth of Modest Mussorgsky in 1939 — Shostakovich then headed the anniversary organising committee — as well as work on the edition of *Boris Godunov*:

the composer dated the completion of the orchestration to 10 May 1940. It is also worth noting Shostakovich's participation in the Decade of Leningrad Art in May 1940: according to Maximilian Steinberg, Khrapchenko personally selected the repertoire, including the *Fifth Symphony* in the programme of the Leningrad Philharmonic [14, p. 126].

In Shostakovich's letters,⁸ addressed to Khrapchenko at the beginning of the war, the tone becomes noticeably more confidential. This is quite natural in light of the hardships and trials that befell the composer. Now it was necessary to worry not only about creative matters, but also about moving relatives from Leningrad to Kuibyshev, worry about feeding the family, how to get food coupons, about a country house for the children...

Thus, at the beginning of January 1942, Shostakovich wrote to Khrapchenko from Kuibyshev about the completion of the *Seventh Symphony* and requested financial assistance for his mother, Sofya Vasilievna. This was not the first such request. In November 1941, in a letter to Isaak Davidovich Glikman, the composer, reporting on his move to Kuibyshev, wrote: "We settled in the dormitory of the Bolshoi Theatre, and in early November, thanks to the efforts of M. B. Khrapchenko, we received a room. The room is good (22 metres), warm, cozy. This is how we live" [15, pp. 31–32].

Khrapchenko also supported his mother's request to move. In March, Sofya Vasilievna, together with her eldest daughter Maria Dmitriyevna and grandson Mitya, came to visit her son in Kuibyshev; in the same month, Shostakovich, having gone to Moscow for the capital's premiere of the *Seventh Symphony* and not finding Khrapchenko there, left him a new letter. In it, he requests transport for his father-in-law and mother-in-law, Vasily Vasilyevich and Sofya Mikhailovna Varzar, to Kuibyshev in a deluxe or first-class carriage; he also requests that he be moved from the poorly heated Metropol Hotel to the Moskva or National. The second request was fulfilled immediately; in any case, Sofia Mikhailovna Khentova mentions Shostakovich's stay only at the Moskva Hotel [16, p. 37]. The first one was also completed quite quickly: just 10 days later, on 31 March, the composer wrote to Glikman about the move of his father-in-law and mother-in-law as if it were a fait accompli [15, p. 42].

With the arrival of summer 1942, life for the large Shostakovich family, which had been relatively stable, became significantly more complicated. On 4 June,

⁸ Twelve letters from Shostakovich addressed to Khrapchenko were published by Vladimir V. Perkhin [12]. From here on, letters are quoted from this edition.

in a letter to Khrapchenko, Shostakovich asks for his children to be sent out of the city and provided with food, as well as for the extension of his family's ration books for essential goods and food. At the end of the letter, the composer states his desire to move to Moscow and asks Khrapchenko to make arrangements for him to be provided with an apartment.

Sure enough, Shostakovich's children were sent to dachas belonging to the Kuibyshev regional committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks), and Khrapchenko began to resolve the housing issue. It wasn't easy to find a suitable option. At first, he turned to Vasily P. Pronin, the Chairman of the Moscow City Executive Committee, but this did not bring positive results. Pronin offered the composer two rooms in different locations, which Shostakovich immediately reported to Khrapchenko as an unacceptable option [12, pp. 637–638]. Then (in March 1943) Khrapchenko addressed a letter to Molotov in which he gave the order to allocate Shostakovich an apartment on Kirov Street, 21 (currently Myasnitskaya Street). Although the composer assessed the apartment as “nasty” [15, p. 56], he lived in it until the spring of 1946, i.e. until Joseph Stalin and Lavrentiy Beria took direct part in his affairs [17].

Professor Vladimir Perkhin, a researcher and commentator on Khrapchenko's correspondence with artists, cites the following letter from Shostakovich addressed to Stalin: “Dear Joseph Vissarionovich, today I spoke on the telephone with Comrade L. P. Beria. He said that he spoke with you about my affairs, about which I wrote to him. Lavrenty Pavlovich told me that you were very sympathetic to my situation. All my affairs are going very well. In June I will receive a 5-room apartment. In July I will get a dacha in Kratovo and in addition I will receive 60,000 rubles for the furnishings. All this made me extremely happy” [12, p. 643]. The address of the new home was also determined: Mozhaiskoe Shosse, Building 37/45 (now Kutuzovsky Prospekt): Shostakovich lived in this apartment until 1962, later moving to Nezhdanova Street (Bryusov Lane).

In February 1943, already in Moscow, Shostakovich asked Khrapchenko for employment: the family did not have enough money. On May 17, the composer received the position of consultant on music issues in the Committee for Arts: Khrapchenko, by his order, assigned him a personal salary of 4,000 rubles, thus giving him the opportunity to engage only in creative work, as Shostakovich

had requested [12, p. 639]. At the beginning of May 1945, in connection with a new request to increase his salary to 12,000 rubles, which was probably quite difficult, Khrapchenko ordered that Shostakovich be awarded a letter of gratitude from the Committee for Arts in addition to the medal he had previously received “For Valiant Labour in the Great Patriotic War.” This provided significant benefits in terms of keeping expenses under control.

However, Shostakovich’s requests to Khrapchenko were not only for himself. In 1942, following the death of Boleslav Yavorsky, he wrote from Kuibyshev about the need to posthumously award the scholar the Stalin Prize for his work *Tvorcheskoe myshlenie russkikh kompozitorov ot Glinki do Skryabina* [*The Creative Thinking of Russian Composers from Glinka to Scriabin*]. In order to sort out the archive of the outstanding musicologist, he also requested that his student Sergei Protopopov be summoned to Moscow. The composer also asked for other people: the pianist and inventor Lev Weintraub, who needed to leave Ufa for Moscow; for the conductor Evgeny Akulov, whom the Bolshoi Theatre was evicting from his apartment to a small room; for the widow of the composer Igor Miklashevsky. All this speaks not only of the “restless conscience of the artist” as defined by Professor Perkhin [12, p. 641], but also of a special trusting attitude towards the Chairman of the Committee, who did not reject a single request from Shostakovich.

Participation in the Project to Create the USSR Anthem

Two major projects can be considered quite indicative in terms of Khrapchenko’s attitude towards Shostakovich: the creation of the USSR Anthem and his work in the Stalin Prize Committee, which Khrapchenko was a member of from the day the prize was founded in 1940 until his dismissal in 1948.

The competition to create an anthem was announced in 1943. Although this event might have seemed inappropriate in the context of the war, the “Internationale” began to seem increasingly “out of place” against the backdrop of the strengthening of allied relations between the USSR, the USA and Great Britain in the fight against Nazi Germany [18]. The need for a new anthem was also indicated by a number of internal events. After the victory in the Battle of Stalingrad and the Kursk Bulge, a number of orders were established: the Order of Victory and the Order of Glory, and somewhat earlier, the Orders of Alexander Nevsky, Alexander V. Suvorov and Mikhail I. Kutuzov [5, p. 398]. According to Perkhin, “this was a straightforward assertion

of continuity in the Russian historical process, prompted by the course of contemporary events” i.e., in contrast to those forces that counted the country’s history only from 1917 [19, p. 41].

Attention to national themes had its own characteristics. In the pre-war period, following the adoption of the 1936 Constitution, it manifested itself in the grandiose project of “Friendship of Peoples,” in which Khrapchenko was fully involved. Since his appointment, Decades of National Art were held regularly (twice a year), on an unprecedented scale and making a significant contribution to the formation of the all-Union multinational artistic canon. In this sense, one of Stalin’s table speeches, delivered at a reception in the Kremlin (22 April 1941) in honour of the Decade of Tajik Art, is noteworthy. In this speech he emphasised that “Lenin had priority in the formation of Soviet national policy, which transformed the ‘prison of nations’ — tsarist Russia — into the USSR, ‘a union of free nations’” [20, p. 324]. Even the lexical structure of this text is characteristic, anticipating the textual turns of the future main state song of the country (“Unbreakable Union of freeborn Republics...”).

In June 1943, with the participation of Khrapchenko, a meeting was held on the issues of the future anthem. The Chairman of the Committee was responsible for inviting poets and composers, as well as organising the listening of the prepared works. Among those invited were poets Demyan Bedny, Vasily I. Lebedev-Kumach, Mikhail A. Svetlov, Alexey A. Surkov; composers Matvey I. Blanter, Reinhold M. Glier, Ivan I. Dzerzhinsky, Isaak O. Dunaevsky, Dmitry B. Kabalevsky, Vano I. Muradeli, Aram I. Khachaturian, Tikhon N. Khrennikov, Yuri A. Shaporin, Vissarion Ya. Shebalin, Dmitry D. Shostakovich. In total, more than forty poets and one hundred sixty-five composers took part in the competition. The auditions, which took place in the Beethoven Hall of the Bolshoi Theatre on 17 July, as on 11 and 24 August, did not yield encouraging results. Finally, in September, the text version by Sergey V. Mikhalkov and Gabriel A. El-Registan was approved. The work process is reflected in sufficient detail in many publications, which provide an extensive body of documentary and memoir evidence. Among them, one can highlight those that speak of Khrapchenko’s special participation in the work of the poet Mikhail Isakovsky and the composers Sergey Prokofiev, Yuri Shaporin and Dmitry Shostakovich [12; 19; 21].

On 31 October 1943, members of the Politburo began listening to the different musical versions of the anthem by various authors together with the state commission.

The audition took place, like all subsequent ones, at the Bolshoi Theatre. The anthems were performed by the Red Banner Red Army Song and Dance Ensemble of the USSR. It was led by its creator, composer, professor of the Moscow State Tchaikovsky Conservatory, conductor Alexander V. Alexandrov.

Khrapchenko's diary also contains evidence of the progress of work.⁹ He notes that during the break, Stalin said that Shostakovich and Khachaturian (in collaboration) did the best, but, in his words, "the chorus didn't work out." Khrapchenko began to defend Shostakovich's anthem and talk about the composer's special talent: in addition to the joint anthem with Khachaturian, Shostakovich also composed his own anthem. Nevertheless, Stalin decided to use Alexandrov's anthem as a basis.

The second audition took place on 16 November. As Khrapchenko writes in his diary, Stalin seemed upset by the anthems he heard. He suddenly requested that the hymn "God Save the Tsar..." be performed, which he knew well. But then he immediately cancelled the request and ordered the English anthem. Then he asked for the Khachaturian — Shostakovich anthem. Voroshilov no longer knew how to calm Stalin, who had fallen into an extremely irritated state. We decided to listen to the list. The leader was dissatisfied with almost all the work. Only three works finally caught his attention — those by Alexandrov, Khachaturian — Shostakovich and the Georgian composer Iona Tuskiya.

Khrapchenko's diary entry also reflects an episode later described by Volkov in his *Testimony*. This concerns the orchestration of Alexandrov's anthem. Khrapchenko claims that Stalin was the first to point out the poor orchestration.

He declared that the orchestra sounded very bad and asked Shostakovich: "What do you think?"

Shostakovich replied: "There are a lot of drums. The anthem is basically instrumented correctly, but there are a lot of trumpets and drums. The orchestra thundered."

Aleksandrov immediately stated that it was not he who orchestrated it, but Knushevitsky. Khachaturian rather sarcastically made a remark about Knushevitsky being a very experienced musician and orchestrating well.

Stalin: "We need to orchestrate the anthem differently. Let the composers help orchestrate... And who is in charge of this matter, who oversees the orchestration, who orders the orchestration?" [5, pp. 410, 412].

⁹ From here on, the events are described based on Khrapchenko's diaries, first published in 2025 [5, pp. 406–429].

Khrapchenko writes that at that moment he was sure that Alexandrov would put everything on him.

However, everything turned out well; the composers came to the rescue. Shostakovich and Khachaturian stated: “Usually the composer himself orchestrates and should orchestrate.”

Voroshilov added: “It is believed that a real composer is one who can do everything himself.”

Stalin then turned to Alexandrov and asked sarcastically: “Tell me frankly, are you not good at this?”

Aleksandrov began to extricate himself: “I’ll take on the orchestration myself. I will do it” [5, p. 410].

However, he didn’t. At first, it was entrusted to the composer Sergei Vasilenko, but his version was also rejected. Then Khrapchenko turned to Dmitry Rogal-Levitsky, who was known for his mastery of orchestration. In his memoirs, Rogal-Levitsky also emphasises the confrontation that arose in the government between supporters of the Alexandrov and Khachaturian — Shostakovich anthems. He writes that Voroshilov called Alexandrov’s anthem a “lame horse” — every sixteenth made him feel like he was stumbling. But Stalin heard in it the majesty of a huge ship cutting through the waves, and was for this reason inclined toward this option. Alexandrov had high hopes for Rogal-Levitsky’s orchestration. This was probably the main intrigue of the final stage of the work.

Volkov, however, emphasises somewhat different points:

Stalin began asking Alexandrov why he had done such a poor arrangement of his song. Alexandrov had expected anything but this—a conversation with Stalin on orchestration. He was pulverized, confused, destroyed. You could see that he was bidding farewell not only to the anthem, but to his career and perhaps to something more. <...> Alexandrov made a base move. In an attempt to defend himself, he blamed the arranger. That was unworthy and low. The arranger could have lost his head as the result of such a conversation.

I saw that things could end badly; Stalin was interested in Alexandrov’s pathetic justifications. It was an unhealthy interest, the interest of a wolf in a lamb. Noticing the interest, Alexandrov began laying it on thicker. The poor arranger was being turned into a saboteur, who had purposely done a bad arrangement of Alexandrov’s song.

I couldn’t take any more. This vile spectacle could have meant a lot of trouble for the arranger, the man would have died for nothing. I couldn’t allow

that and said that the arranger in question was an excellent professional and added that it wasn't fair to take him to task [22, p. 262].

As can be seen from this description, Volkov embellished with speculation a simple and fairly short conversation in which Khrapchenko did not see anything dangerous, except for the possible shifting of blame onto himself. As it turned out, it was he who was tasked with finishing Alexandrov's anthem.

The last audition of the anthems took place on 15 December 1943. By this time, Mikhalkov and El-Registan, at Stalin's request, had reworked the text of the chorus. Four finalist anthems were listened to: the anthem of the Bolshevik Party by Alexandrov, then the anthem of Khachaturian — Shostakovich, Tuskiya's, and, finally, the new version of Khachaturian / Shostakovich and that of Alexandrov.

In Khrapchenko's diary, the episode is described as follows:

After the performance of the Bolshevik Party anthem, it became clear to me that this music would be accepted. The choir's performance was met with lively approval. Molotov made signs to me, showing how wonderful the choir sounded. The orchestral performance... also received a positive response, although not as lively. The music of Khachaturian — Shostakovich was listened to attentively, but coldly. Tuskiya once again stirred up a number of his comrades, and they were especially pleased with his masterful command of the orchestra. Beria was very pleased. But Stalin did not express any signs of approval [5, p. 415].

Khrapchenko's assumption turned out to be correct. Only Voroshilov defended the Shostakovich — Khachaturian anthem, but Stalin objected to him, saying: "In Alexandrov's anthem, one line is drawn from beginning to end. It is all one piece. It moves forward like a cruiser, cutting through the waves. Khachaturian-Shostakovich does not have this quality. They decorated the anthem, but there is no integrity" [5, p. 415].

Unexpectedly, Khrapchenko supported Voroshilov and began to object to Stalin, stating that "it will be very difficult for an ordinary person to sing Alexandrov's anthem." [5, p. 415]. Stalin responded quite serenely: "In what way is it difficult? There is nothing difficult about it." And he sang the first verse quite accurately. Those present were shocked by the attack of the Committee leader. Khrapchenko did not argue further.

Discussions in the Committee on Stalin Prizes

Another page in the relationship between Khrapchenko and Shostakovich is connected with the awarding of Stalin Prizes. As is known, Shostakovich was a five-time laureate of the Stalin Prize, being awarded the first-degree prize three times and the second-degree prize twice.

The decision to establish Stalin Prizes was made on 20 December 1939. The Resolution stated: “In commemoration of the sixtieth birthday of Comrade Joseph Vissarionovich Stalin, the Council of People’s Commissars of the USSR decrees: to establish 16 Stalin Prizes (in the amount of 100 thousand rubles each), awarded annually to figures in science and art for outstanding work.”¹⁰ The right to nominate candidates for the prize was granted to creative unions and organisations, as well as theatres, publishing houses and magazines. Then the nominated works were to be discussed by the Committee for Stalin Prizes, after which the proposals were sent to the Council of People’s Commissars of the USSR, where, with the participation of the Politburo, the results were personally approved by Stalin.

The emergence of such a form of encouragement as a prize for artistic achievements became a continuation of another form of cooperation between the authorities and artists. The annual summing up of the results brought Soviet art into a broad public space and established certain criteria that should be followed when creating new works. Khrapchenko noted in his diary that during discussions in the Kremlin, Stalin often inquired about how well a particular work was known to the public and how successful it was with them. In addition, he took into account the possible reaction of the Western intelligentsia. That is, at the first stage of the award’s existence, public resonance was considered the main criterion.

In May 1940, the composition of the Stalin Prize Committee was determined. It included 36 people, each of whom had considerable influence in their own field of creativity. The chairman was People’s Artist of the USSR Vladimir Ivanovich Nemirovich-Danchenko, and the deputies were Mikhail Sholokhov, Reinhold Glier and Aleksandr Dovzhenko. Khrapchenko was introduced to the committee as the head of the main department for arts affairs (*Illustration 4*).

¹⁰ Postanovlenie SNK SSSR ob uchrezhdenii premij imeni Stalina po literature [Resolution of the Council of People’s Commissars of the USSR on the establishment of Stalin Prizes for Literature]. (1940, February 2). *Pravda*, (32).

The first meeting of the Committee on Stalin Prizes in Literature and Art took place on 16 September 1940. From that day onwards (except during the evacuation period) all meetings were held in the lower foyer of the Moscow Art Academic Theatre building. The transcript was taken and signed by Olga Sergeevna Bokshanskaya, Nemirovich-Danchenko's personal secretary. The extremely detailed nature of the documents she prepared — letters, transcripts — gives them exceptional



Illustration 4. Meeting of the Committee on Stalin Prizes. Group of Soviet art figures.

Among them: Reinhold M. Glier, Vladimir I. Nemirovich-Danchenko, Ivan M. Moskvina, Alexander M. Gerasimov, Alexey N. Tolstoy, Alexander B. Goldenweiser, Nikolai Ya. Myaskovsky, Yuri A. Shaporin, Alexander V. Alexandrov, Vera I. Mukhina and others.

Copy of a photograph from 1940–1943. Russian National Museum of Music
(M. I. Glinka State Central Museum of Musical Culture
KP-4310/305. N-1513/V vsp).

historical value today. For that matter, Khrapchenko's diary entries are also distinguished by their pedantic detail.

At the first meeting, sections were formed. These were headed by Alexey N. Tolstoy (literature), Ivan M. Moskvina (theatre and cinema), Reinhold M. Gliere (music), and Igor E. Grabar (fine arts). Khrapchenko participated in all the Committee's discussions and reported the results at the Kremlin meetings, where not only works of literature and art were considered, but also scientific inventions (*Illustration 5*).



*Illustration 5. Dmitry Shostakovich at a meeting
of the Committee for the USSR Stalin Prizes in Literature and Art in the premises
of the Gorky Moscow Art Theatre of the USSR.
Next to him on the right is the sculptor Sergey Merkurov. Russian National Museum of
Music (M. I. Glinka State Central Museum of Musical Culture KP-6467/4. N-27355/2)*

The need to agree on approaches to discussing the prize required fundamental agreements. For this reason, the discussion revolved around the main definition: “outstanding work.” Sculptor Sergei Dmitriyevich Merkurov proposed the criterion of “that which does not cause controversy” as a means of determining which works should be considered worthy of the prize. Khrapchenko objected:

The term “magnificent work” becomes something of a bogeyman. Everyone begins to be “afraid of their own shadow” — the outstanding and the not-so-outstanding. Of course, the bar must be high. But it cannot be assumed that every year there will be epoch-making works. And the prize is annual. Therefore, to award a prize to a work that does not give rise to controversy dooms this enterprise to the fact that there will be no such prize. If a sculpture contains something that has a significant number of advantages, it can be awarded a prize despite any imperfections that may be evident. For we certainly will not have classically completed works every year.¹¹

It was Khrapchenko who proposed introducing prizes for graphic works, which made it possible to recognise the work of defence poster artists during the war years. He also defended the mass song; the proposal to include this genre in the list of nominees was put forward by Nikolai Mordvinov. The conversation was about the songs of Isaak Dunaevsky, about which Khrapchenko said: “Still, one cannot deny that for the people as a whole his work turned out to be very significant and useful. If we talk about the joy that the composer gave to the people, then a large share of this joy belongs to Dunaevsky. But it is impossible to forget about the joys of the people.”¹²

A new and very significant stage began in Khrapchenko’s professional activity. Participation in the discussion of annual awards in the field of literature and art not only introduced him to the diverse world of artistic creativity, but also allowed him to get closer to artists and better understand their interests, plans and hopes. In addition,

¹¹ Transcripts of the Plenum of the Committee for September 16, November 11, 13, 18, 21, 24, 26 and December 24, 1940. In *RGALI*. Fond 2073. Inventory 1. Archival Unit 1, pp. 89–90.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 156. For the same reason, in 1946 Khrapchenko proposed discussing the nomination of Leonid O. Utesov, Lidiya A. Ruslanova, Anna A. Redel and Mikhail M. Khrustalev — he had not forgotten what colossal authority these artists enjoyed during the war years and how they were awaited at the front. See Transcripts of the Plenum of the Committee for March 11, April 1, 3, 5, 6, 7, 11, 13, 14 and 18, 1946. In *RGALI*. Fond 2073. Inventory 1. Archival unit 16, pp. 229–230.

one cannot fail to note the enormous influence on the formation of Khrapchenko's personality that his close acquaintance with the outstanding people of his time had for him. Communication with Nemirovich-Danchenko had a particularly noticeable influence on him. Khrapchenko's diary entries describe in detail their many-hour conversations, the general tone of which is reminiscent of dialogues between a teacher and a student.

Based on the example of his outstanding mentor, Khrapchenko was increasingly encouraged to abandon opportunistic approaches to evaluating works. If, at the first meetings, he was one of the consistent proponents of the party line — insisting that the two main criteria for awarding the prize should be breadth of appeal and public resonance, thereby excluding works of the chamber genres — then within a year, under the influence of Nemirovich-Danchenko, he changed his position. In March 1941, Khrapchenko sent a letter to the government requesting differentiation of prizes in the field of musical art. Here, the discussion was about chamber music compositions. If his proposal had not been accepted, two works by Shostakovich would not have been included in the lists: the *Piano Quintet* (1941 prize) and the *Piano Trio* (1946 prize). It was Khrapchenko who defended the *Piano Quintet* at the meeting in the Kremlin.

To this day, some researchers tend to see something mysterious in the awarding of the prize to the *Quintet*. For example, Volkov asks the question: “What had attracted Stalin in the *Quintet*? Its political and ‘civic’ value must have seemed like zero to him then. Could he have been charmed by its neo-Bachian restraint, spiritual profundity, and impeccable craftsmanship?” [23, p. 140].

Indeed, such questions would have been entirely legitimate if the decisions about the award had been made personally by Stalin. However, the transcripts reveal a much more complex picture. The members of the Stalin Prize Committee, including Khrapchenko himself, were by no means silent extras. During the discussions, disputes and disagreements often arose. The names of some of the “committee members” (among them Khrapchenko appears more often than others) are still mentioned with resentment for not supporting and defending.

Of course, the lists of laureates were agreed upon with Stalin; indeed, there were also quite a few cases of categorical interference on his part. However, it also happened that he did not even get acquainted with the proposed work

(as was probably the case with Shostakovich's *Quintet*). Much here was decided by personal preferences — for example, Stalin was obliged to read literary works. As for instrumental music or works of art, judging by a number of indicators, these were not among his priority areas.

Khrapchenko's position was also neither unambiguous nor stable. Indeed, in February 1941 he defended Shostakovich's Piano *Quintet*, although before that he had advocated for the "breadth of sound and public resonance" of the nominated works. It is noteworthy that the *Quintet* still passed muster, despite Stalin's rather sceptical attitude. Contrary to Volkov's opinion, there was nothing special about this work that attracted the leader. During the discussion in the Kremlin, Stalin questioned the "public resonance" of the work, while Khrapchenko defended this "resonance." His diary entry for March 19, 1941 describes the episode as follows:

Stalin asks: Who has heard Shostakovich's *Quintet*?

Khrapchenko pointed at Poskrebyshhev.

Poskrebyshhev then stated that he had heard it and liked it. The music is simple and clear.

Stalin: Where was the *Quintet* performed?

Khrapchenko: It was performed in the Tchaikovsky Hall and in the Conservatory.

Stalin: It was probably performed for a small group?

Khrapchenko: No, there were about one and a half thousand people there.

In addition, the *Quintet* was broadcast on the radio.

(Stalin became noticeably irritated.)

Stalin: Do the broad masses know it?

Without waiting for an answer, Stalin began to find fault with the wording: How is it written here: "completed [fem.acc.] in 1940" or "completed [masc.acc.] in 1940"? What is important is not to say this, but whether this work is being shown and since when. It needs to be redone. (Silence). Why should we work for you?

(After some time, I formulated it. I read out...)

After a pause, Stalin asked the question again: Has the musical score of this work been published?

Khrapchenko: The score was published in a relatively small print run. There is no need for a large print run. This is a *quintet*, we don't have many *quintets* [5, p. 375].

When Khrapchenko said that only Poskrebyshhev heard the *Quintet*, he was being somewhat economical with the truth. According to Vadim Borisovsky, one

of the members of the Beethoven State Quartet, Poskrebyshev was not the only one familiar with Shostakovich's work. On November 25, 1940, a special rendition of the *Quintet* was performed for Khrapchenko in his office. In Borisovsky we read: "Urgent execution, for which: I. Shostakovich's departure to Tbilisi was cancelled; II. VI [D. Tsyganov] wanted by the Committee; III. V-la [V. Borisovsky] [found] at a string instrument factory; IV. Cello [S. Shirinsky] was removed from classes at the conservatory" [24, p. 50] (*Illustration 6*).

Shortly before this, on 12 November 1940, the *Quintet* was performed at the Moscow House of Composers for members of the music section of the Stalin Prize Committee. Borisovsky wrote in his diary: "At the insistence of A. B. Goldenweiser, the *Quintet* was repeated in full behind closed doors for members



*Illustration 6. Shostakovich with members of the Beethoven State Quartet.
Russian National Museum of Music.*

M. I. Glinka State Central Museum of Musical Culture KP-6389/19. N-8897

of the Committee (Goldenweiser, Samosud, Shaporin, Glier, Gadzhibekov); and on the 19th at the plenum of the Committee for Stalin Prizes. Finally, on November 23, 1940, the public premiere of the *Quintet* took place in the Small Hall of the Moscow Conservatory, performed by the Beethoven Quartet and the composer. Parts III and V of the *Quintet* were encores" [24, p. 49]. Before the New Year of 1941, the *Quintet* was performed five more times.

As a result, Shostakovich received the Stalin Prize, 1st degree, for this composition. It is noteworthy that in the article in the newspaper *Pravda* dedicated to the awards ceremony, Shostakovich's *Quintet* was the only work characterised precisely from the position of its "celebrity": "The first diplomas were received by composers — Yu. A. Shaporin, the composer of the symphony-cantata *On the Kulikovo Field*; A. V. Bogatyrev, the composer of the opera *In the Forests of Polesie*; and D. D. Shostakovich, the composer of the famous *Piano Quintet*."¹³ The information was received by *Pravda* from the Committee for Arts Affairs.

From that time on, Khrapchenko supported the Beethoven Quartet in every possible way. One episode that occurred at the beginning of the war can testify to his special attitude. According to the recollections of Borisovsky's widow, in the summer of 1941 the Beethoven Quartet almost perished during military exercises: three quartetists (with the exception of Vasiliy P. Shirinsky, who accompanied his family to evacuation at that time) enlisted in the militia. It was decided to test them in a 25 km march. At the beginning of the war, there was terrible heat in Moscow. On the first day, the musicians somehow walked these kilometres, and the next day, during another run, an emergency occurred: Vadim Borisovsky passed out. It took a long time to bring him back to his senses, and then he was taken to the commander. He immediately began calling the Committee for Arts, and when Khrapchenko learned about what had happened, he immediately ordered the musicians to be returned to Moscow. Thus, the quartet received an exemption, which, as it later turned out, saved the lives of its members. After returning to Moscow, the quartet were to perform 150 concerts at the front and in the navy during the war years [25, pp. 138–139]. Tragically, the rest of the Conservatory militia detachment — they called themselves the "Tchaikovsky Battalion" — perished in the Vyazma cauldron in October 1941.

¹³ Vручение дипломов деятелям искусства — лауреатам Сталинской премии [Presentation of Diplomas to Laureates of the Stalin Prize]. (1941, April 22). *Pravda*, (111).

Some aspects related to the success of Shostakovich's *Seventh Symphony* are also noteworthy. Many well-known sources claim that it was received with great enthusiasm almost everywhere, both by musicians and the general public. Wherever the *Symphony* was performed — in Kuibyshev, Moscow, Novosibirsk, Leningrad — eyewitness accounts were invariably enthusiastic. Valerian Mikhailovich Bogdanov-Berezovsky recalled that the preliminary listening, which took place in the presence of composers Yuri Kochurov and Gavriil Popov on 17 September 1941 — that is, before Shostakovich was evacuated from besieged Leningrad — took place in an atmosphere of intense attention, in complete silence, without a single remark. The only thing those present asked for was to repeat what had been played. That is, the impression from the *Symphony* directly at the moment of experiencing the tragic events of the war was genuinely powerful and even stunning.¹⁴

In Khrapchenko's Kuibyshev report, which took place on 2 February 1942 (that is, even before the premiere of the *Symphony*, which was being prepared for 5 March), he spoke of it as “a remarkable, truly outstanding work by the widely known and beloved composer Shostakovich. The *Seventh Symphony* will go down in the history of Soviet art and world art as a remarkable document of the era, as a work that is filled with our Soviet life and our struggle...”¹⁵ The *Symphony* will be mentioned several times throughout the report, but this is not the only important thing. The *Seventh Symphony* became a justification for supporting major works of art, which had been pushed into the background in the confusion of the first months of the war. This is clearly read in the words of Khrapchenko, spoken in the same speech: “Now the question is being raised about what kind of art is needed — large or small forms... Now, they say, there is no time for ‘War and Peace’. This is a wrong point of view. We need works that... generalise life, large-scale works that would reflect our era in a massive multifaceted form.”

These were not random words. The support for large-scale compositions, which Khrapchenko repeatedly proclaimed in his public appearances, gave rise to discontent among songwriters. Even the always friendly Dunaevsky, who was probably offended

¹⁴ Bogdanov-Berezovsky, V. M. (1971). *Dorogi iskusstva. Kniga pervaya* [Roads of Art. Book One]. Muzyka, pp. 243–245.

¹⁵ “Sovetskoe iskusstvo v Otechestvennoj vojne”. Doklad na obshchem sobranii rabotnikov iskusstva g. Kujbysheva. Stenogramma [“Soviet Art in the Patriotic War.” Report at the General Meeting of Art Workers of the City of Kuybyshev. Transcript]. In *RGALI*. Fond 2894. Inventory 1. Archival unit 8. 18 pages.

by the discussion of the 1940 prizes, wrote a letter to Khrapchenko in January 1941: “A mass song is deprived of the opportunity to compete for the most honourable prize, because in the opinion of the committee, an average *Symphony* will always be higher and more worthy than the best song, and perhaps only a dozen or so *Songs about the Motherland* can compare in their eyes with Shostakovich’s *Quintet*” [12, p. 581]. In 1944, the mass song was already under discussion for the Stalin Prize, but the irritation did not go away. The poet Alexei Aleksandrovich Surkov, speaking in September 1944 at the Union of Soviet Writers, asserted that the lack of attention to Soviet mass song could in no way be compensated for by the monumental symphonic works that were gaining strength:

Without the symphonic works of Shostakovich, Khachaturian and other symphonists, without large forms, folk music cannot exist, and, obviously, it determines the historical significance of music in the future. But take even Shostakovich’s *Seventh Symphony*. It was performed 5 times in Moscow, another 5 times in the suburbs, where there are large orchestras <...> Then it is put on the shelf in music libraries, and the people want bread... they want to sing themselves in the tragic moments of their lives, to sing themselves in the uplifting moments of their lives.¹⁶

It is noteworthy that the creators of mass song each time, for some reason, mentioned the work of Shostakovich as a counter example, although it was Shostakovich, being a member of the jury of the largest song competitions, who invariably supported the best of them, which entailed both increased prestige and material reward. Nevertheless, it is precisely with large-scale works that Khrapchenko connects the future activities of the Stalin Prize Committee. The *Seventh Symphony* greatly strengthened the position of the so-called “academicians,” as the Committee called the supporters of academic art.

In February 1942, even before the premiere of the *Symphony*, a preliminary meeting of the Committee for Stalin Prizes in Literature and Art took place in Kuibyshev, at which Shostakovich played the *Seventh Symphony* on the piano. Present were Alexey N. Tolstoy, Renhold M. Glier, Boris E. Khaikin and Mikhail B. Khrapchenko. And just two weeks later, on 19 February 1942, in Tbilisi, where Nemirovich-Danchenko was at the time, the *Seventh Symphony* was nominated for a first-degree prize, also before its first performance.

¹⁶ Stenogramma tvorcheskogo soveshchaniya na temu “Pesnya v dni Otechestvennoj vojny” [Transcript of a Creative Meeting on the Topic “Song during the Patriotic War”]. In *RGALI*. Fond 631. Inventory 15. Archival unit 681, pp. 30–31.

Almost all sources claim that it passed unanimously, without discussion. This is true, but only for discussion at the sectional meeting of the Stalin Prizes Committee. There, the question of awarding the first-degree prize was decided in literally two remarks.

19 February 1942, morning session

Nemirovich-Danchenko: Shostakovich. *Seventh Symphony*. Any comments?

Khrapchenko: In my opinion, there is no need to discuss it due to complete clarity.

Chiaureli: There were such enthusiastic reviews about this *Symphony* that there can be no doubt.¹⁷

At this point, Nemirovich-Danchenko announced a break and during the evening session they did not return to the *Seventh Symphony*.

The *Seventh Symphony* was discussed somewhat differently during the discussion in the Kremlin that took place on 10 April 1942. In addition to Stalin himself, G. M. Malenkov, A. A. Andreyev, V. M. Molotov, A. S. Shcherbakov, Voznesensky, Poskrebyshchev, Saburov, Tevosyan took part in the discussion.

Shcherbakov reported. Shostakovich's *Seventh Symphony* evoked the remark: "Is this the very work to which we were forced to award a prize last year?" [5, p. 377].

This turn of phrase is typical: "they forced him to award a prize": this is probably how Khrapchenko's persistent position in relation to the *Piano Quintet* was remembered. It is also characteristic that those present at the Kremlin meeting were rather cool in their response to the enthusiastic reaction that the *Symphony*, which had already been performed in Kuibyshev, played on the radio and noted in the central press as a major social and musical event, had evoked.

When asked about last year's work, Shcherbakov replied that it was a new work, adding: "It was overpraised, but it is a major work" [5, p. 377].

The common word of that time, "overpraised" was previously heard at a sectional meeting of the Stalin Prize Committee. However, this was not in reference to Shostakovich, but rather to Ivan Dzerzhinsky's opera, *Krov' naroda* [*The Blood of the People*].

¹⁷ Zasedanie Komiteta po Stalinskim premiyam v oblasti literatury i iskusstva [Meeting of the Committee on Stalin Prizes in Literature and Art]. February 19, 1942. In *RGALI*. Fond. 2073. Inventory 1. Archival unit 6, p. 44.

Nikolai Myaskovsky said about this opera: “The music there is pathetic... The apotheosis stands completely separately. The hero, the heroine, the Germans speak the same language.” Shaporin added: “In relation to this opera, one can say the same thing that Nemirovich-Danchenko said in relation to Korneychuk: it’s a shame that he was over-praised.”¹⁸ Shaporin is referring to Dzerzhinsky’s rise after Stalin approved the opera *Tikhij Don* [*Quiet Flows the Don*] — just as later happened with Alexander Korneychuk’s play *The Front* (1942), to which Stalin personally made edits. Khrapchenko later wrote that this artificially constructed play, which directly reflected the conflict between generations of commanders, was perceived by viewers by 1943 as an amusing comedy.¹⁹

After this remark by Shcherbakov, the *Seventh Symphony* was no longer discussed, but no support from above can be seen in the episode cited. Moreover, the awarding of the Stalin Prize to Shostakovich, which tended to be extremely favourable during the sectional discussions of the Stalin Prize Committee, was each time met with a rather casual attitude in the government. The texts of Khrapchenko’s transcripts and diary entries show that many government officials were noticeably irritated by Shostakovich. This is also evident from the recording made in 1944, when the *Eighth Symphony* and *Trio No. 2* were discussed.

The *Eighth Symphony* already evoked conflicting assessments at the sectional meeting. It was discussed twice — on 16 and 24 March 1944. Myaskovsky recommended it as a work that is recognised by everyone, despite different tastes. However, he was supported only by the artist Igor Grabar and the sculptor Vera Mukhina. Alexander Borisovich Goldenweiser found the *Eighth Symphony* “extremely pessimistic,” while nine of the eighteen members had never heard it. At Khrapchenko’s suggestion, the decision was postponed for a week.²⁰

¹⁸ Zasedanie Komiteta po Stalinskim premiyam v oblasti literatury i iskusstva [Meeting of the Committee on Stalin Prizes in Literature and Art]. In *RGALI*. Fond 2073. Inventory 1. Archival unit 6, p. 48.

¹⁹ Khrapchenko — Shcherbakovu o “postepennoe snyatii s repertuara p’esy ‘Front’ Korneychuka” 03.11.1943 [Khrapchenko to Shcherbakov about the “Gradual Removal of Korneychuk’s Play *The Front* from the Repertoire.” November 3, 1943]. (2005). In *Bol’shaya tsenzura: Pisateli i zhurnalisty v Strane Sovetov. 1917–1956* [*Great Censorship: Writers and Journalists in the Land of Soviets. 1917–1956*]. MFD; Materik, p. 542.

²⁰ Here and below, the transcript of the sectional meetings of the Committee on Stalin Prizes on 16 and 24 March 1944 is quoted: *RGALI*. Fond 2073. Inventory 1. Archival unit 9, pp. 140–226.

The next discussion was opened by Khrapchenko. Describing the *Eighth Symphony*, he said:

Probably, from the point of view of musical technique, this work contains enormous possibilities. But I approach this piece as an ordinary listener. I listened to it three times, and I have the impression that, in the *Eighth Symphony*, Shostakovich returns to themes that he had developed earlier. Here we see, as it seems to me, a deliberately complicated language... My feeling as a person who cannot be considered a connoisseur of music is that this is a piece that leads Shostakovich away from the path he took in the *Quintet* and the *Seventh Symphony*... I love Shostakovich very much, I highly value his talent, but I cannot help but say this, if I am honest in my statements...

I wanted to express one more thought: there are works whose assessment does not immediately become clear. Maybe the same will happen with the *Eighth Symphony*?

Khrapchenko was supported by many, including Ivan Moskvina, Solomon Mikhoels and Alexander Goldenweiser. Isaak Dunaevsky opined that the *Eighth Symphony* is “not a path that should be recommended” to young composers. Nevertheless, the *Symphony* was left on the voting list and even nominated for a second-degree prize. However, in any case, this turned out to be a year that the government decided not to award prizes. The resolution was expected in April 1945, but was not published, and a new selection was scheduled for the end of March. This may have been due to the political turbulence that arose in the run-up to victory, when many assessments were being hastily revised. The next cycle of meetings began on 3 April 1945. The Music Section of the Stalin Prize Committee returned to discuss both the *Eighth Symphony* and the newly presented *Trio* (*Illustration 7*).

When studying the archival documents, one cannot help but notice that by this time the main criterion for evaluating works had shifted from “public resonance” to “impact on the listener”: the criterion of a good work was seen in its ability to evoke an immediate and direct response. Both in newspaper articles and in public discussions, the somewhat sentimental rhetoric of the 1930s, when it was customary to quote letters from readers and listeners received by newspaper editors, was revived. A typical example is a letter from young pioneers addressed to Maxim Gorky: “We want books that will make us girls cry.”²¹ The image of a crying girl,

²¹ *Pervyj Vsesoyuznyj s'ezd sovetskikh pisatelej. Stenograficheskij otchet* [First All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers. Verbatim report]. (1934). Khudozhestvennaya literatura, p. 468.



*Illustration 7. Meeting of the Committee on Stalin Prizes.
Alexander E. Korneychuk, Mikhail B. Khrapchenko, Alexander B. Goldenweiser.
Russian National Museum of Music.
M. I. Glinka State Central Museum of Musical Culture
KP 316820/34. NF 110718 Ф 110718*

later transformed into a “crying listener” and adopted by music critics, would later appear more than once on the pages of Soviet newspapers and magazines as weighty evidence of the high quality of a composition.

This decided the fate of the Trio against the backdrop of the rejected *Eighth Symphony*. It should be emphasised that it was Khrapchenko, who had rejected the *Symphony* a year earlier, who most persistently recommended the *Trio* for the award of the Stalin Prize of the first degree. Elena Dvoskina, the publisher of the 1945 transcript fragment, believes that the best argument was the touching speech of Alexander Fadeyev. Indeed, the speech of the head of the Writers’ Union played the necessary role. At that time, the words found by Fadeyev turned out to be the most convincing:

“I am a person with a complete lack of musical education, but this work impressed me extremely, and I remained under its impression for a long time. Of everything we heard at the Committee, the strongest impression I had was from this *Trio*” [26, p. 91]. The word “impressed,” repeated three times throughout a short statement, and repeated by a professional writer who knows the immutable laws of literature well, largely decided the outcome of the matter.

However, one should also pay attention to the beginning of Fadeyev’s speech, when he said:

On the issue of Shostakovich, I support the point of view of Mikhail Borisovich that he should be awarded for the *Trio* and given first prize. I do not agree with Mordvinov that the *Trio* can be called a formalistic piece. It impresses a person who is very inexperienced in specific matters of music. This work simply captivates a person with a living soul. This is an outstanding work [26, p. 91].

In the end, the *Trio* received the award, but this time, too, the Kremlin meeting was not without controversy. Recording some significant moments of the discussion in his diary, Khrapchenko refers to the special opinion of Beria, who proposed removing the issue from discussion altogether, since “the material was not sent out, and no one had time to prepare.”

Next, Khrapchenko reproduces verbatim the dialogue between Stalin and Beria.

Stalin asked whether it was true that the question had not been prepared?

Beria insisted that the material must first be studied. His next line shows that it was not about the *Trio* at all. “Some comrades receive bonuses year after year. Here in art — every year Shostakovich, Khachaturian — Khachaturian, Shostakovich.”

Stalin asked Khrapchenko how many times the prize had been awarded to Shostakovich.

Khrapchenko replied that he had received it twice and was now presenting himself for the third time.

Stalin, addressing Beria: Well then, what do you want? Postpone?

Beria confirmed.

Stalin: If we simply take your statement into consideration, I hope that will satisfy you?

Beria objected.

Stalin: So, you are trying to postpone the discussion. And you categorically insist on your proposal. You are a desperate person.

Stalin addressed everyone: Well, how is it?
All supported the proposal to postpone [5, p. 382].

Thus, the decision to award the *Trio* in the Kremlin was made only at a repeat meeting.

Many facts indicate that no disagreements between Khrapchenko and Shostakovich became a reason for administrative pressure on the composer and that this was not a factor in the banning of his works (*Illustration 8*).

1946 saw the publication of the score of the *Eighth Symphony* by Muzgiz and its performance in Leningrad. The reaction to Shostakovich's letter, addressed to Vladimir Kemenov, the deputy chairman of the All-Union Society for Cultural



Illustration 8. From left to right: Tamara E. Tsytovich, Mikhail B. Khrapchenko, Dmitry D. Shostakovich (1943).

Family archive. Permission from Tatyana Valeryevna Khrapchenko, February 27, 2024

Relations with Foreign Countries, can also be considered confirmation of Khrapchenko's special position in relation to the composer. It contains a request for the performance of the *Eighth Symphony* at the Prague Spring festival. The letter was received by the office of the Committee on Arts Affairs. According to Perkhin, Khrapchenko's resolution implied agreement with the composer's demands [12, p. 643]. As a result, the *Eighth Symphony* was performed twice in Prague with great success by the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra under the direction of Yevgeny Mravinsky, just as the composer wanted. According to Grigory Shneerson, the ovation lasted more than thirty minutes.²²

The *Ninth Symphony* also caused consternation at the Stalin Prize Committee. Its discussion took place in the spring of 1946. Only Shaporin spoke in favour of the *Symphony*, characterising it as an entertaining grotesque symphony: "It was done with the brilliance and wit inherent to Shostakovich. Sounds good."²³ However, only Dunaevsky supported him:

The positive and enormous significance of the *9th Symphony* is that Shostakovich, as a legislator of symphonic "fashions," in this case poses a very important and necessary problem of a light genre symphony — extremely necessary, because if the master opens the way to a wonderful world, this riot of sounds, this extraordinary light and mischief, which make this work optimistic, deserves all attention. I am not a fan of Shostakovich's sound concept, but the piece makes a sunny impression.²⁴

Khrapchenko objected:

Symphony No. 9, in my opinion, is not one of Shostakovich's best works. It's masterfully written, but I don't feel it has much sparkle or depth. It seems to me that this work is rather of an intermediate nature. This is a work that the composer carried out during a break between major works, and there are no serious grounds for putting it forward.²⁵

As a result, the *Ninth Symphony* did not receive any prize. At the same time, Khrapchenko censored a critical article about it, which Yuri Keldysh had submitted for publication in the journal *Sovetskaya muzyka* [Soviet Music].

²² Shneerson, G. M. (1976). Zhizn' muzyki Shostakovicha za rubezhom [The Life of Shostakovich's Music Abroad]. In *D. Shostakovich. Stat'i i materialy* [D. Shostakovich. Articles and Materials]. Sovetskij kompozitor, pp. 246–247.

²³ RGALI. Fond 2073. Inventory 1. Archival unit 16, pp. 214–216.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

The chairman of the VKDI also prohibited the publication of a report on a meeting of the Union of Soviet Composers, which was being prepared in the same *Sovetskaya muzyka*, at which the supposedly intolerable situation in the field of criticism was discussed. He would be reminded of this later, at the height of the 1948 campaign. In his famous speech at a meeting of composers and musicologists in Moscow, Tikhon Khrennikov described Khrapchenko's position as "the suppression of even timid attempts to criticise the formalistic trend" [12, pp. 121–122].

The Years of Troubles

The events of 1948, which became tragic not only for many composers, but also for Khrapchenko, approached gradually. The Chairman of the Committee had already begun to feel growing discontent both from his colleagues and from the authorities. In 1945, a denunciation was written against him and his family. Vladimir Petrovich Kozlov points out that in this document "the only more or less real fact is the nationality of Khrapchenko's wife's relatives (Germans). Everything else is speculation and assumptions, on the basis of which Khrapchenko turns into almost a German spy, since he has the opportunity to see Stalin and then retell what he heard to his German relatives, who, by the way, live in another city."²⁶ The same period also saw the beginning of numerous reports by a Pyotr V. Fedotov, a 3rd-rank state security commissioner, which noted the "unsatisfactory leadership of the All-Union Committee for Arts in the general management of theatres," which led to a lag in dramaturgy, a slow development of directors and actors, and an unsatisfactory state of theatre criticism. In addition, Fedotov collected the opinions of actors, directors and other figures in the arts who discussed among themselves the crisis tendencies of the first post-war period.²⁷

One of the sources of dissatisfaction with Khrapchenko's activities was the position of Andrei Alexandrovich Zhdanov. In 1946, the Chairman of the Committee could have lost his position as a result of departmental reform. In March,

²⁶ Kozlov, V. A. (n.d.). Fenomen donosa (Po materialam fonda NKVD-MVD SSSR, khranyashchegosya v GA RF. 1944–1953 gg.) [The Phenomenon of Denunciation (Based on Materials from the NKVD-MVD USSR Collection, Stored in the State Archives of the Russian Federation. 1944–1953)]. In *Skepsis* [Magazine of Science and Social Criticism Skepsis]. Retrieved July 24, 2025, from https://skepsis.net/library/id_3810.html

²⁷ O deyatel'nosti teatrov [On the Activities of Theatres]. In *Central Archives of the FSB of Russia*. Fond 4. Inventory 3. File 390.

the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR was transformed into the Council of Ministers, the People's Commissariats into ministries, and the People's Commissars into ministers. However, Stalin then left Khrapchenko in office. But already in April, Zhdanov, speaking at a meeting on improving agitation and propaganda work, unleashed the full force of his irritation on Khrapchenko:

Comrade Stalin said that they are mocking the people, showing counts and princes, there is simply no concern for the people... In this regard, we must direct departmental newspapers that make criticism not in the interests of the people, not in the interests of the country in the broadest sense, but in the interests of Khrapchenko and his department... We must strengthen our control over Khrapchenko. Since we represent the interests of the people, we have the right to demand from Khrapchenko and the theatre directors that they stage two or three plays a year — they may stage them however they wish, but they must stage them [28, pp. 49–50].

Khrapchenko and the team of the Committee's employees were fully aware of what was happening, as evidenced by a number of publications in the newspaper *Sovetskoe iskusstvo* [*Soviet Art*], in which, with no less acuteness than in Zhdanov's speeches, the issues of dramaturgy, directing, acting in dramatic and musical theatres, as well as the situation in the field of musical and fine arts and criticism were raised. Probably, the reason for the irritation was something else: fatigue, the growing pressure of censorship, which could be associated with Khrapchenko's policies, since the power of the Committee Chairman at that time still seemed to be strong and unshakable. At the same time, one very important circumstance should be emphasised. At the meeting of directors and artistic directors of Moscow theatres, which took place in the Committee on September 11–12, 1946, not one of the speakers followed Zhdanov in criticising the leadership of the Committee. Whatever the artists said behind the scenes, whatever Pyotr Fedotov wrote down about them, none of them wanted to speak publicly or in print to condemn Khrapchenko.

However, anonymous complaints about Khrapchenko continued to come in; particular discontent was caused by his article *Rastsvet sovetskogo iskusstva* [*The Rise of Soviet Art*], published in the magazine *Ogonyok*.²⁸ It was so thorough, with such a wealth of details and specifics, that it might have seemed as though the chairman

²⁸ Khrapchenko, M. B. (1947). *Rastsvet sovetskogo iskusstva* [The Rise of Soviet Art]. *Ogonyok*, (45), 6–7.

of the Committee was summing things up and, upon leaving, bidding farewell. Indeed, so it soon transpired. In the article, which was destined to be Khrapchenko's last publication as Chairman of the Committee, he once again named the works of playwrights, artists, and composers in whose creation he was personally involved in one way or another, considering them the greatest achievements of an entire era. For the last time, he also expressed words of gratitude to Shostakovich, mentioning not only the laureate works — the *Piano Quintet*, *Trio* and *Seventh Symphony*, but also the *Fifth Symphony*.

In December, Khrapchenko suffered a setback with Vano Muradeli's opera *The Great Friendship*. This came as a surprise to the Committee. During the war years, fragments of this opera, then entitled *The Extraordinary Commissar*, had been broadcast on the radio, were popular with listeners, and did not cause the slightest discontent among the authorities. The singer Vladimir Bunchikov (who performed the role of the Commissar) recalled this when describing his work at All-Union Radio: "We learned the opera *The Extraordinary Commissar* quickly, and after a month and a half presented it to Muradeli... The author's text was read by Mikhail Tsarev." After the opera was broadcast, Vano Muradeli was so delighted that he joyfully invited all the participants of the production to his place for dinner..."²⁹

These recollections demonstrate that, up to a certain point, no one considered there to be anything particularly subversive in Muradeli's opera. Like some other works, it was swept up in the vortex of rapidly changing circumstances: it is no coincidence that twenty theatres were preparing the opera for the thirtieth anniversary of the October Revolution, and not a single one doubted its political reliability. The Committee repeatedly reported to the country's political leadership about work on the opera, and there was simply no "suddenly" that Zhdanov later spoke about loudly at the Conference of Soviet Music Figures (January 11–13, 1948).³⁰

At the same time, Stalin gave instructions to the Minister of Finance Arseny Zverev to conduct an audit of the financial costs of preparing what was now titled *The Great Friendship*. It was already clear that Khrapchenko had been chosen as the "scapegoat":

²⁹ Bunchikov, V. A. (n.d.). *Kogda dusha poet (Neizdannyye vospominaniya pevtsa)* [When the Soul Sings (Unpublished Memoirs of the Singer)]. In N. Kruzhkov. Virtual'naya Retro Fonoteka. Retrieved July 24, 2025, from <http://retrofonoteka.ru/pevets/bunchinech/bunchinech.htm>

³⁰ *Soveshchanie deyatelej sovetskoj muzyki v TsK VKP(b)* [Meeting of Soviet Music Figures in the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks)]. [Stenographic report]. (1948). Pravda.

at the aforementioned Conference, Zhdanov directly stated that “Khrapchenko bears the main responsibility for this matter.”³¹

Zhdanov’s position was supported, with varying degrees of firmness, by Tikhon Khrennikov, Aram Khachaturian, Dmitry Kabalevsky, as well as the musicologists Yury Keldysh and Izrail Nestev. Keldysh and Kabalevsky spoke about an episode related to the removal of a critical article about Shostakovich’s *Ninth Symphony* from the journal *Sovetskaya muzyka*.

The only one who spoke out in Khrapchenko’s defence was Shostakovich. “The composer could have taken advantage of the opportunity to settle scores with Khrapchenko, who criticised the *8th* and *9th Symphonies* at meetings of the Stalin Prize Committee,” notes Perkhin. “Perhaps this was the kind of ‘revenge’ Zhdanov was counting on. But he was met with moral nobility... After Shostakovich, Zhdanov ended the discussion, even preventing the remaining two registered speakers from making their statements...” [12, pp. 121–122].

In the few days that passed between the meeting and his dismissal, Khrapchenko hurried to complete the most urgent matters and signed several important orders — in particular, appointing the disgraced writer Valentin Petrovich Kataev, author of the banned play *Domik*, as deputy artistic director of the Moscow Satire Theatre.³² And already on 23 January, Zhdanov had ordered the collection of material resources from Khrapchenko. For several subsequent years, Khrapchenko paid money for the opera *The Great Friendship* as a penalty for the squandering of state funds, and, according to eyewitnesses, lived in a cramped apartment filled with books. The chairman of the Committee had acquired nothing during his 10 years in office.

Afterword

Few dared to maintain relations with the disgraced People’s Commissar. And indeed, the need to do so had disappeared. The letter from conductor Boris Khaikin (1948) is noteworthy in this sense: “Dear and respected Mikhail Borisovich! I am very sad that there is no reason to see you, but it is also very nice that I don’t have to ask you for anything (which is something to which both you and we are accustomed)”

³¹ Vstupitel’naya rech’ tovarishcha A. A. Zhdanova na soveshchanii deyatelej sovetskoj muzyki [Opening speech by comrade A. A. Zhdanov at a Meeting of Soviet Music Figures]. (1952). *Vystuplenie tovarishcha A. A. Zhdanova na soveshchanii deyatelej sovetskoj muzyki* [Speech by Comrade A. A. Zhdanov at a Meeting of Soviet Music Figures]. Gospolitizdat, p. 6.

³² RGALI. Fond 962. Inventory 3. Archival unit 1742, p. 22.

[12, p. 541]. At that time, rumours were spreading around Moscow from mouth to mouth that Stalin had shouted at Khrapchenko right in the lodge of the Bolshoi Theatre: “Do you think you are a professor? You are a swineherd!” According to Igor Vishnevetsky, the “swine” referred to the herd of contemporary art figures he protected [29, p. 586].

Soon Khrapchenko began to be called in for interrogations. His son Valery Mikhailovich later claimed that his father was saved by Beria’s arbitrary rule. Stalin, apparently having decided to remind his zealous assistant who was boss in the Kremlin, ordered him to leave Khrapchenko alone and stop the interrogations. But even after this, the Writers’ Union was afraid to give the seriously ill Khrapchenko even a ticket to the House of Creativity; for this, Fadeyev’s personal intervention was required.

Of the 126 figures from literature, theatre, music and fine arts who had once been in regular correspondence with Khrapchenko, only a few now remained. Shostakovich was one of them. Until the end of his life, he corresponded with Khrapchenko, congratulated him on holidays, and later on orders and titles. And, whenever the need arose, he felt able to ask for any help. Indeed, by the 1960s, Khrapchenko had again become an influential person, a high-ranking official of the USSR Academy of Sciences, holding high positions as academician-secretary and member of the Presidium of the Higher Attestation Commission. He continued to respond to all of the composer’s requests and probably never forgot how, in the most terrible moment of his life, Shostakovich was perhaps the only one who never renounced him.

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