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# Musical Legacies of State Socialism:

# Revisiting Narratives about Post-World War II Europe

Institute of Musicology of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts (SASA)

Department of Fine Arts and Music of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts

BASEES Study Group for Russian and East European Music (REEM)

Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Belgrade, 24–26 September 2015

Keynote speakers

Marina Frolova-Walker, Faculty of Music, University of Cambridge

Melita Milin, Institute of Musicology SASA, Belgrade

**CALL FOR PAPERS**

In this conference we seek to revisit the musical legacies of socialist countries in Europe in the period 1945−89. Our aim is go beyond the simplistic or reified readings of the impermeable Iron Curtain, and instead open up a discourse that will examine the mechanics of social engineering in the constructions of the Iron Curtain, with its implied symbolic borders and the politics of inside-outside, Eastern/Socialist–Western/Capitalist. Our aim is to examine the cultural programmes cultivated by the socialist states, the influence of socialist ideology on music in the West, and the present-day political and artistic re-appropriation of the socialist legacies.

We invite papers on various aspects of music and socialism, but we particularly welcome individual papers or panels that fall within these themes:

1. **Beyond the Iron Curtain**

We wish to revisit the notion of a fixed iron curtain, which was constructed in order to delineate the socialist states against the Western capitalist countries. The Hungarian historian György Péteri, who has developed the concept of a ‘nylon curtain’, argues that the state-socialist countries were not completely isolated from the West, and that it is debatable to what extent the authorities completely controlled all channels of communication. We wish to examine the various modes of communication between the communist and non-communist states, and explore the ways in which socialist countries may have been more open to Western influences than is frequently believed. In particular, we want to focus on various modes of information exchange, including radios, festivals, travel abroad and visits from Western artists.

1. **‘Socialist Music’ outside Zhdanovism**

Artistic output in communist states is usually labelled as socialist realist, defined by the criteria outlined in the infamous Zhdanov Doctrine. Whilst a significant body of music did follow the precepts of socialist realism, there were artists who also espoused modernist and avant-garde tendencies, although this was usually the case with particular states that used modernist tendencies in order to bolster the image of a ‘softer communism’ (i.e. Hungary, Yugoslavia). Yugoslavia in particular offers a unique case where even as early as 1948 – following the Tito-Stalin split – the Yugoslav cultural policymakers rapidly moved away from the central tenets of socialist realism. In this context, we wish to investigate both the political and stylistic implications of musics that rethink the notions of socialist realism and socialist music.

1. **The Impact of Official State Policies on Music Production**

In addition to the above topics, we also welcome proposals that reconsider the influence of official state politics on music production (including traditional, popular and art genres). We invite scholars to investigate the extent to which state policies have shaped the development of musical practices, and how such policies have either directed or derailed certain artistic practices at the level of style, technique and subject matter. We especially welcome comparative research that focuses on current scholarship in the fields of literary criticism and art history.

**4. 1968**

As Communist countries in Europe sought to impose the systems of state socialism (under the guise of Marxism), the totalitarian regimes in these countries often warped the original leftist vision (Leninism, Stalinism, Titoism, etc.). This dissatisfaction was felt across Europe, and in 1968 – the year of student protests in Paris, the Prague Spring, Maspok – the forces and the vision of the global Left were seminally reshaped. We wish to examine the role that different musics played in the re-appropriation of grassroots Marxism versus the totalitarian ideological morphing of the official Communist regimes in 1968 and its aftermath.

**5. Socialist Europe in the West**

While state socialism had been imposed in the Soviet Bloc and Yugoslavia, communist parties remained strong political factors in some post-War Western countries. Certain intellectuals, artists and musicians in Western Europe were greatly influenced by communism, an ideology that they either saw as embodied in state socialist countries, or which for them provided a vision of some kind of utopian future. We wish to examine how the ideas of communism and socialism influenced individuals and musical practices in the countries that fell outside official communist rules.

**6. Questioning Legacy and Backward Glances**

In the context of post-socialist transition and recent economic crises, many of the former communist states have witnessed a resurgence of politically engaged musical practices that question current neoliberal capitalist systems. We wish to go beyond the often trivialized and commodified treatment of nostalgia (i.e. Yugonostalgy, Ostalgie), and instead analyze the mechanics behind such processes, and how they often recycle what is seen as the musical legacies of state socialism.

We welcome original musicological and interdisciplinary research that deals with artistic, popular or traditional musical practices. The official language of the conference is English. Proposals (of no more than 400 words) for 20-minute papers and short biographical notes (of up to 200 words) should be sent both to Srđan Atanasovski (srdjanatanasovski@music.sanu.ac.rs) and Ivana Medić (dr.ivana.medic@gmail.com) by **15 February 2015** (the receipt of proposals will be acknowledged by e-mail). We also encourage panel proposals; please provide a short description of the session in addition to individual abstracts and biographical notes. Proposals will be reviewed by the conference committee and results will be announced by **15 March 2015**. A selection of papers will be considered for publication in the form of conference proceedings. Conference fee: 50 Euros (students are exempted). The Institute may be able to assist a number of foreign speakers by providing accommodation in Belgrade. This support will be available on a competitive basis and if you are interested in this option, please let us know when applying.

Conference Committee:

Dejan Despić, Fellow of the SASA

Dr. Marina Frolova-Walker

Dr. Ivana Medić

Dr. Melita Milin

Dr. Ana Petrov

Dr. Katy Romanou

Dr. Leon Stefanija

Dr. Danijela Špirić-Beard

Dr. Katarina Tomašević

Dr. Aleksandar Vasić

Dr. Patrick Zuk

Srđan Atanasovski