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Seekers of happiness : Jews and jazz in the Soviet Union

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Jazz conquered in the interwar period not only American and European, but also Soviet audiences. My article analyzes the contribution of Jewish musicians to jazz in the Soviet Union and the influence of klezmer music on Soviet jazz. Many Soviet Jewish musicians chose this genre, because jazz relies upon improvisation, as does klezmer music. Jewish composers, musicians, and actors broke cultural and political barriers and stereotypes, and made jazz the most popular music among Soviet audiences in the late 1920s-1940s. The secret of the transformation of the initial negative Soviet attitude toward jazz as 'bourgeois' 'Fat People's Music' (as Maxim Gorky originally called jazz) into an acceptable popular music genre was the talent of the Soviet Jewish jazz musicians and composers, as well as the pro-socialist content of some Soviet jazz songs and musicals.

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The Music of the Future: How Jazz Came to Russia

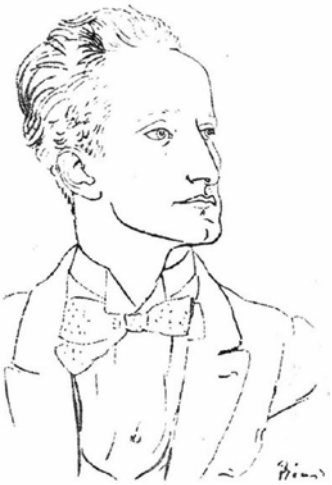

Figure 1. Valentin Parnakh by Pablo Picasso

Since the 1910s, American jazz bands performed with great success in Paris. In 1921 the Russian poet, translator, musician, dancer and choreographer Valentin Iakovlevich Parnakh (original last name Parnokh, 1891–1951) attended a performance of Louis Mitchell's band "Jazz Kings" in Paris. The performance of "Jazz Kings" made a great impression on Parnakh. He wrote several articles about jazz and decided to bring this new music genre to Russia (Batashev, 1972: 9).

Parnakh was born in the provincial Russian city Taganrog into a well-to-do Jewish family. His father, Yakov Solomonovich Parnokh, was the owner of a drug store and member of the city duma. The family was quite assimilated into Russian culture, but did not forget their Jewish heritage. According to a family legend, their ancestors fled to Eastern Europe, when all Jews were expelled from Spain in the late fifteenth century. Valentin Parnakh was interested in the historical roots of Jewish music. In parallel with his studies at the Historical-Philological Department of St. Petersburg University, Valentin studied music under the composer Mikhail Gnecin, who was a member of the Society for Jewish music (Pavlenko, 2010: 21–22).

After a few years of studies at the university, Valentin Parnakh traveled to France, Palestine, Egypt, Sicily and Spain. In 1915–1921 Parnakh lived in Paris, where he fit into the avant garde circles of poets, artists and actors. Parnakh created the Russian literary group "Chamber of Poets" in Paris, and published his poems, articles and translations in French avant garde journals. Valentin also performed as a dancer and actor (21–22).

In 1922 Parnakh returned to Russia and brought in his luggage a full set of the musical instruments for a jazz band. Valentin believed that jazz was the music of the future. S. Frederick Starr wrote, "In jazz, this ungainly poet

found a physical liberating rhythm that could make the common man an artist and, in the process, drive decadent classical ballet from the stage. This is how Parnakh saw his mission in Russia" (Starr, 1983: 44).

Parnakh soon created the first jazz band in the Soviet Union, which gave its first concert on Sunday October 1, 1922 at the State Institute of Theater Art in Moscow. There are various opinions about the concert. Starr rather sarcastically notes, that "Every shred of evidence suggests that the first jazz concert in Russia was an event better read about than heard" (46). But I. P. Pavlenko and Aleksei Batashev wrote that the jazz band performance was a great success with the audience. All tickets to the Parnakh jazz band concerts were sold out and the entire artistic elite of Moscow was in the audience. The innovative theatrical director Vsevolod Meyerhold, who was at the jazz band performance, immediately proposed that Parnakh perform with his jazz band in his theater play. The jazz band performed for three years at Meyerhold's Theater. The Soviet authorities also used the first jazz band for their propaganda purposes. Parnakh's group performed at the first All Union Exhibition of Agriculture in 1923 and for delegates of the Fifth Congress of the Communist International in Summer 1924 (Batashev, 1972: 12).

Parnakh left Meyerhold's Theater and Russia for Paris, where he lived in 1925–1931. Scholars can only guess why Parnakh left one of the most innovative theaters in Russia: some suggest that Parnakh lost his interest in jazz, others think that Meyerhold cooled off toward this musical genre.

Parnakh devoted his time in Paris to his literary work. He wrote poems, books and articles about poetry and dance. The American *Menorah Journal* published in 1926 Parnakh's letter about the contribution of Jews to modern Russian literature, where he discussed the works of Mikhail Gershenzon, Boris Pasternak, Osip Mandelstam and Pavel Antokolsky. Parnakh's book *Inquisition* was written in French. However, it was not published in France, but was translated and published in Russian under the title *Ispanskie i Portugal'skie poety, zhertvy inkvizitsii* (Spanish and Portugal Poets – Victims of the Inquisition) in 1934 (Shrayer, 2007: 12).

Parnakh returned to the Soviet Union in the end of 1931. He devoted most of his time to literary work, but he did not break completely with jazz and his stage performances. Parnakh played a small role as a jazz musician in the first Soviet musical comedy *Veselye Rebiata* (1934), which will be described further. Parnakh died in 1951. The role of the eccentric Parnakh as the forefather of Soviet jazz was not forgotten. His name is mentioned in several publications about Soviet jazz. The documentary film *Valentin Parnakh: Not Here and Not Now*, directed by Mikhail Basov, was made in Russia in 2011.

Professional Jazz in the Soviet Union

Several jazz bands appeared in Moscow and Leningrad in the second half of the 1920s, but the first professional jazz band was organized by Alexander Tsfasman.

Aleksander Naumovich Tsfasman was born into a Jewish family in the provincial city Aleksandrovsk (now Zaporizhia, Ukraine) in 1906. According to his family legend, their last name was derived from the Biblical city Safed (Tsfat in Hebrew) (Basin, 2007). Aleksander was an introvert and a very

cautious person (perhaps this helped him survive in Stalin's time). Thus he did not talk much about his childhood and youth. He did not leave any memoirs and the sources about his life are quite limited. Despite Tsfasman's great popularity, only one small book and a few articles were written about him and his jazz band.

Aleksandr acquired his love of music from his father. Naum was not a professional musician, he was a barber, but in his free time he played the violin. Aleksander began to play violin when he was seven years old, but two years later he switched to piano. Alexander studied at the Musical College in Nizhniy Novgorod, then at the Moscow Conservatory under the supervision of one of the best professors, Felix Blumenfeld. Everybody predicted that Aleksander would have a wonderful career as a prominent classical pianist, but he fell in love with jazz (Basin).

Figure 2. Album Cover: Alexander Tsfasman and his Jazz – Orchestra

The twenty-year-old student of the Moscow Conservatory Tsfasman organized the jazz band "AMA-jazz" (the abbreviation AMA stands for Association of Moscow Artists) in 1926. AMA-jazz, which gave its first concert in March 1927, soon became a very popular group (Basin). In 1928 AMA-jazz made its first recording and prepared the first jazz radio program in the Soviet Union (Basin; Batachev, 1972: 25). The band performed a classic jazz repertoire of Soviet and foreign composers, tangos and jazz compositions of Tsfasman. Aleksander was not only the leader of the jazz band, but also a jazz composer and a virtuoso pianist. The prima ballerina of the Bolshoi Theater, Maya Plisetskaya, who personally knew Tsfasman, expressed her regret that he had abandoned classical music for jazz (Golubev, 2006: 10).

None of the musicians who performed classical music in the Soviet Union had such popularity as Tsfasman's jazz band. The jazz band was renamed in 1930 into the "Moscow guys" and performed in the best music halls and theaters of Moscow and toured many cities of the Soviet Union. The jazz band performed many hits of the 1930s including the most popular song of the time *Ta ostatnia niedziela* (This Last Sunday; 1935) by Polish Jewish composer Jerzy Petersburski. This nostalgic tango with lyrics by Polish Jewish poet Zenon Friedwald (Zenon Frivald-Vardan, 1906, Lviv – 1976, Tel Aviv) describes the final meeting of former lovers just before they break up. The Russian version of the lyrics of the song *Utomlyonnoye solntse* (Weary Sun) was written by the Russian Jewish poet Iosif Al'vek (pseudonym of Pinkhus-Iosif

Figure 3. Jerzy Petersburski

Solomonovich Izrailévich, 1895–1943?). In Tsfasman's arrangement and his jazz band performance, the tango was so popular that it became a symbol of the peaceful pre-war life (Petersburski, 1932).

In 1939 Tsfasman became the head of the jazz orchestra of the All-Union Radio Committee (VRK) and served in this position until 1946, when the Cold War deprecation of jazz as "American secret audio weapons" began in the Soviet Union (Skorokhodov, 1986: 65; Golubev, 2006: 27; Batashev, 1972: 120). In 1939 the first jazz TV program was shown in which Tsfasman's jazz orchestra performed. TV had appeared just a year earlier in the Soviet Union (Golubev, 2006: 27–28).

Many jazz groups performed in the Soviet Union in the 1930s. Some of them had the word "jazz" in their title, as a very popular brand of the time, but did not actually play jazz. But there is no doubt that Tsfasman's jazz orchestra performed real jazz on a world class level.

How did he and the musicians of his orchestra survive Stalin's repressions? According to the memoirs of his musicians, Tsfasman was careful in his talk and knew what was allowed. Thus, one of his musicians recalled that the American Embassy in Moscow often invited Tsfasman, but he always asked for permission of the Soviet authorities before visiting the embassy (72).

The anti-Semitic author and publicist Vadim Kozhinov wrote that in the 1930s "it would have been easier to sign the order for the arrest of a marshal or a member of the Central Committee [of the Communist Party] than to arrest a musician from Tsfasman's jazz" (71) This is perhaps an exaggeration, but their popularity protected Tsfasman and his orchestra from political repression. It helped also that Stalin and other top ranked Soviet authorities seem to have enjoyed jazz.

During the Second World War, Tsfasman's jazz orchestra with the All-Union Radio Committee (VRK) was evacuated to Kuibyshev, where the Soviet government also was partially evacuated. In Spring 1942 Tsfasman's jazz orchestra performed on the front for Soviet warriors.

Tsfasman's jazz orchestra was the first in the Soviet Union to play George Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue,* on U.S. Independence Day on July 4, 1945 on the most prestigious Soviet stage – the Column Hall of the Kremlin (63). One of the musicians of Tsfasman's orchestra, E. Geiger, recalled

> We four times together performed *Rhapsody in Blue* in the Column Hall of Kremlin: the symphony orchestra and our jazz orchestra of the All-Union Radio Committee. Tsfasman played divine… He often after the war performed Gershwin in his concerts – "The Man I Love," and other melodies (63).

However, what was allowed in the Soviet Union in 1945 was not allowed in 1946: the Cold War began and jazz, as American music, was forbidden in the Soviet Union. On June 15, 1946 Tsfasman quit his work with the jazz orchestra of the All-Union Radio Committee "according to his own wishes," as stated in the official order (Skorokhodov, 2004: 33). But the musicians recalled that the real reason why Tsfasman abandoned his position was his conflict with the administration of the All-Union Radio Committee. Jazz had become forbidden music in the Soviet Union, but Tsfasman did not want to change the repertoire of his orchestra. After Tsfasman left the orchestra, it was, like other jazz orchestras in the Soviet Union, renamed as a Variety Orchestra,

Figure 4. Eddie Rosner

and its repertoire was adjusted to the new Soviet ideological requirements (Golubev, 2006: 66).

After Tsfasman left the jazz orchestra he continued to perform as a pianist and sometimes was even able to perform jazz music, sometime as a parody of the American lifestyle in a play or as demonstration of typical decadent American leisure time, as in the film "Meeting on the Elbe" (1949). The music for the film was composed by Dmitry Shostakovich and he insisted that it be performed by Tsfasman. It was pure jazz music of a "completely American style" (67–68). Shostakovich told Tsfasman that before he composed the music he listened to many Soviet and foreign jazz recordings. The collaboration of Shostakovich and Tsfasman continued thereafter. Thus, Tsfasman performed Shostakovich's music in the film "Unforgettable 1919" (68).

During the Khrushchev's Thaw, jazz was rehabilitated in the Soviet Union. In December 1956 Tsfasman again performed at the Column Hall of the Kremlin with his jubilee concert. In the 1950s-60s Tsfasman continued to compose jazz. He wrote "Intermezzo for Clarinet and Jazz Orchestra," which he dedicated to Benny Goodman, and Goodman included the "Intermezzo" in his repertoire (80). The "King of Swing" Benny Goodman performed to great acclaim in the Soviet Union in 1962.

Aleksander Tsfasman died from a heart attack on 20 February 1971, but he is not forgotten. Tsfasman's jazz performances are still broadcasting on radio, and they are available on recordings and CDs. Once, after a performance, Tsfasman said, "Jazz seems to have won" (62). Jazz music broke through all the Iron Curtains and Walls that were raised by the politicians. It was a universal language in which without translation all musicions and jazz admirers throughout the world could communicate.

Jerzy Petersburski, Eddie Rosner and the Belorussian State Jazz Orchestra

In the late 1930s, national jazz orchestras were created in the various Soviet republics, including the Belorussian State Jazz Orchestra. However, the two conductors Jerzy Petersburski and Eddie Rosner, and most of musicians of the Belorussian State Jazz Orchestra, were Polish Jews, who had fled from the Nazis to the Soviet occupied zone of Poland in 1939.

Petersburski was born to the well-known family of Jewish musicians Melodysta in Warsaw in 1897. After graduation from the Warsaw Conservatory, Petersburski continued his education in the Vienna Music Academy. In 1921 Peterburski returned to Poland and together with his cousin Artur Gold (1897 – died in 1943 in Treblinka) created an orchestra, which performed popular music in nightclubs. Jerzy played piano, his cousin Artur played violin. Peterburski debuted as a composer in Vienna, where he wrote music for Alexander Vertinsky, a renowned Russian emigrant poet and singer. Peterburski wrote many tangos, waltzes, foxtrots, music for films and two operettas. Many of his melodies became hits and were performed in many countries, including the tango *Ta ostatnia niedziela* (This Last Sunday).

Figure 5. Leonid Utesov

When the Second World War began Petersburski was mobilized into the Polish Army. After the country was overrun, he moved to the Soviet-occupied part of Poland. In the Soviet Union, he received citizenship and, under the new name Iurii Yakovlevich Petersburski, he continued his career and became the leader of the Belorussian State Jazz Orchestra with 25 musicians, most of whom were from Poland. In 1941 Peterburski joined the Polish Army of Władysław Anders, and with this Army he left Soviet Union in 1942. However, during his short association with the Belorussian State Jazz Orchestra, Peterburski wrote another hit *Sinii Platochek* (The Blue Shawl), which was sung by the Soviet star Klavdia Shul'zhenko. The song became "the folk war song," which was performed on radio and on the front countless times. In 1946–67 Petersburski lived and worked in Argentina. He continued to compose popular music, performed on the stage and radio, and was the director of the orchestra of Argentinian National Theater. However, after the death of his wife during the 1967 earthquake, Peterburski moved to Venezuela and next year returned to Poland. He died in Warsaw in 1979 (Utomlennoe solntse).

The leadership of the Belorussian State Jazz Orchestra was passed soon after its creation to Eddie Rosner. Eddie (Adolf) Rosner was born in Berlin in 1910 to a family of Polish Jews. He studied in the Berlin Conservatory and the High School of Music in Berlin. Originally, he studied violin, but when he fell in love with jazz he switched to trumpet. Eddie soon became one of

Figure 6. Leonid Utesov performing with his orchestra in Moscow on 9 May 1945

the best trumpeters in Europe. He played with several jazz bands in Berlin, but his successful musical career in Germany was interrupted when the Nazis came to power. Rosner fled to Poland, where he created his own jazz orchestra. The orchestra was very popular in Poland and was performed in other countries. Rosner fell in love with an actress of a Jewish theater, Ruth Kaminski, with whom he fled to the Soviet zone of occupation after the beginning of the Second World War (Basin, 1998).

When Rosner came to the Soviet Union his name was almost unknown in the country, but half a year later he became one of the major stars of popular music. The secret of his success was his great performance technique. Starr wrote, "What particularly stunned Soviet audiences was the full blooded and authentic jazz timbre of Rosner's brasses and sax section" (Starr, 1983: 195).

The musicians who performed in the Belorussian State Jazz Orchestra had been educated in the best conservatories of Europe. Most of them were Polish Jewish refugees. The magazine *Teatral'naia nedelia* wrote in 1940 that "three musicians formerly of Eddie Rosner's orchestra" and "unemployed musicians of Belostok and L'vov" perform in the Belorussian State Jazz Orchestra (Basin, 1998).

The Belorussian State Jazz Orchestra was established on the initiative of the First Secretary of the Belorussian Communist Party, Panteleimon Ponomarenko, who was a jazz fan. The patronage of Ponomarenko protected the orchestra musicians from political repression and provided a luxurious life for Eddie Rosner in the Soviet Union during the war.

Starr wrote that Rosner soon received the title "Honored Artist of the Belorussian Republic" and "he was soon receiving upwards of 100,000 rubles per year," when a worker had to survive on only 1500 rubles a year.

In 1940 Rosner was presented with a four-room apartment in the Moskva Hotel opposite the Kremlin, its salon outfitted with Afghan carpets, silk curtains, and a grand piano. Moreover, he was authorized to sweep by the guards at countless special stores where anything from mink coats to diamond broches could be purchased. It is doubtful that any jazz musician on the earth has ever been recompensed more generously within his society than Eddie Rosner in the Soviet Union during wartime (Starr, 1983: 199).

Ruth Kaminski reported that Rosner's jazz orchestra performed for Stalin in Sochi in the Spring of 1941. This was a very unusual concert because Rosner's orchestra played to an empty theater. Ruth Kaminski described this concert:

> Curtain time. The lights went on. The curtain rose. Before us was an empty theater. Only the closed curtain of the boxes at the sides of the stage indicated that this was not some ghastly joke (Kaminska, 1979:38–39).

Any performer—but especially a musical revue performer—needs a live audience. We spent two hours delivering jokes without getting a laugh, two hours singing songs and playing music followed by silence. When the

reverberations of our imposing brass and tympani sections finally subsided and the curtain rang down, there were no curtain calls. We left the theater in dispirited silence.

> None of us slept that night…
>
> At 6 a.m. the funeral atmosphere was shattered by the telephone's ring. We jumped. Our manager reached for it with a shaking hand…
>
> After he hung up, he remained silent, staring at the phone. Then he said softly, "I have been told the Boss [i.e. Stalin] liked the performance" (Kaminska, 1979: 38–39).

Starr wrote that "Rosner's mastery of jazz far surpassed Tsfasman's and his personality had none of the chilly aloofness of the Moscow conservatory graduate… Thus, the Rosner band became a kind of academy of jazz" (Starr, 1983: 201). Many musicians dreamt of performing in Rosner's orchestra. By January 1945, 53 musicians played in his orchestra, giving in the same year 229 concerts in the various cities of the Soviet Union (Basin, 1998). Rosner's Belorussian State Jazz Orchestra concerts were a tremendous success; all tickets were sold out in advance. But in 1946 the Cold War began and Rosner's orchestra came under attack in the Soviet press for its American repertoire. Rosner decided to leave the Soviet Union with his wife Ruth Kaminski and their child. This was not possible to do in a legal way. So Rosner gave a bribe of 20,000 rubles to some representative of the Polish commission for repatriation, who promised to help him to escape from the Soviet Union. But instead Rosner was arrested on 28 November 1946 in L'vov, where he came with wife and child in the hope of escaping to Poland. His wife was also arrested (Basin, 1998). Rosner's orchestra was liquidated after his arrest.

> Rosner spent eight years in Magadan concentration camp (Maglag), where he worked as the head of the Magadan Camp Theater. It seems that the director of the entire camp system in the East, Alexander Derevenko, liked music and he and his aide, Captain Ziger, personally selected Rosner for this position (Starr, 1983: 225).

After his release on 22 May 1954, Rosner returned to Moscow. He created a new orchestra during Khrushchev's Thaw. The new Rosner's band, created from young musicians, was a great success. But Rosner's never forgot or forgave his Maglag experience. He did not want to live any more in the Soviet Union. Starr wrote that Rosner submitted no fewer than eighty applications for permission to emigrate, but all were refused. Much later, during President Nixon's 1972 visit to Moscow, a visa was issued, and then only because Rosner entered the U.S. Embassy in Moscow disguised as an American tourist and pleaded for the ambassador to intervene with the Russians on his behalf. Rosner then settled once more in Berlin, where he died in 1976 (257).

The Odessan Jazz of Leonid Utesov

Leonid Utesov (born Lazar Weissbein) was a legend of Soviet popular music: singer, jazz band conductor, film and stage actor. Many of Utesov's musical hits had deep roots in Odessan Jewish culture. The image of the cheerful, quick-witted Odessan served him well as a comedic actor and as a singer of Odessan songs.

Utesov was born to a Jewish middle class family in Odessa in 1895. In his childhood, he took private violin lessons, but he never received a systematic musical education. Utesov's desire to become an actor and singer brought him into conflict with his parents, who wanted him to enter a "practical" profession. In 1909, at the age of fourteen, he ran away with Borodanov's traveling circus where he performed as a gymnast and athlete (Dmitriev, 1982: 18–21). Utesov then performed as an actor and singer with various wandering theater troupes. In the beginning of the 1920s he moved to Moscow and then to Leningrad to continue his career.

In 1928 Utesov traveled to Berlin and Paris, where he attended several performances by German jazz bands. Utesov wrote that he fell in love with jazz, which like klezmer music relied upon improvisation (Utesov, 2009: 144–145). In 1929 he formed one of the first Soviet jazz bands, *Tea-Jazz* (abbreviation for Theatrical Jazz) (MacFadyen, 2002: 120–121). The program for the band's first public performance, at Leningrad's Little Opera Theater on 8 March 1929, included the criminal underworld song "*S Odesskogo Kichmana*," as well as the Latin American song "Chiquita," and "jazz"-styled adaptations of several old Russian songs (Utesov, 2009: 271–272). While the audience was ecstatic, Starr said "Critical reaction was mixed. The journal *The Life of Art (Zhizn' iskusstva)* judged the performance a triumph, but applauded Utesov's cheerful humor

Figure 7. Isaac Dunaevsky

more than his music. The Association of Proletarian Musicians lost no time in branding Utesov's band and acts like his 'musical rubbish' and 'music from the era of the New Economic Policy" (Starr, 1983: 149).

Utesov's very popular Tea-Jazz band performed to large audiences throughout the Soviet Union. Its repertoire included adaptations of familiar Russian, Ukrainian and Jewish melodies. As Richard Stites has pointed out: "If urban jazzmen in the States adapted black music motifs to their art, their Soviet counterparts did the same thing with the materials at hand…. The strains of the Odessa Jewish wedding were never far away" (Stites, 1992: 75). In a musical skit recorded in 1966, Utesov humorously claimed that jazz was born in Odessa in the nineteenth century, among very talented (i.e. Jewish) musicians who played by ear. "I don't know which Odessan brought this music to America or when," he joked, "but somebody definitely did." (Utesov, 1966). According to Frederick Starr, Utesov's spoof was tailored to satisfy the humorless Soviet critics and bureaucrats who railed against foreign influences in Soviet music: "Not realizing that Utesov's boast was tongue-in-cheek, newspapers around the world took it as a particularly absurd example of Soviet bombast. Utesov's comic sally did not save Soviet jazz, but it at least helped to deflate the pressure against it" (Starr, 1983: 144–145).

Although Utesov did not really believe that jazz was born in Odessa, he did see parallels between American jazz bands and Odessa klezmer bands, which both played without written music and improvised during performances (Utesov, 2009: 144–145). Utesov and his jazz orchestra often adapted Odessa klezmer music, and rearranged Jewish motifs and rhythms for performance on "jazz" instruments (279–286). Among the Jewish songs reworked by Utesov's orchestra in the late 1920s-1930s were "*Svad'ba Shneersona*" ("Shneerson's Wedding"), *"Limonchiki"* ("The Little Lemons"), "*Bublichki"* ("Bagels"), *"Evreiskaia rapsodia"* ("Jewish Rhapsody"), *"Diadia Elia"* ("Uncle Elia"), "*Desiat' docherei"* ("Ten Daughters"), and "*Bubentsy*" ("The Little Bells"). As Jarrod Tanny has noted, the roots of Utesov's jazz music can be "traced back to southern Ukraine as much as to America" (Tanny, 2011: 113). This fusion of Odessa klezmer music and jazz created a new phenomenon, "Odessa Jazz" (Starr, 1983: 146).

Still, Jewish songs comprised only a part of Utesov's repertoire. The singer always played to the taste of wider audiences, and so he sang many Russian and Ukrainian songs. Thus, he also based his jazz music on Russian and Ukrainian folk melodies. In part, at least, this was a strategy to pacify critics in the Russian Association of Proletariat Musicians (RAPM), who had attacked Utesov's orchestra for spreading harmful foreign bourgeois influence. According to Starr, "Utesov, tired of being called 'one of our Americans' and 'a musical prostitute,' capitulated" (150). Anna Shternshis reports that Utesov asked his friend Isaak Dunaevsky to compose rhapsodies based on Russian and Ukrainian as well as Jewish melodic themes" (Shternshis, 2006: 178). These were featured in the 1931 musical program *Jazz na povorote* (*Jazz at the Crossroads*). Starr points out that "Dunaevsky made only the mildest use of jazz rhythms in these works of 1931, otherwise presenting the indigenous melodies unadorned," and that audiences showed little interest in the result (Starr, 1983: 150). In his 1939 memoir, Utesov explained that "the public was fascinated then by Western European jazz music," and gave a rather cold reception to this combination of jazz and folk music (Utesov, 1939: 124).

Some scholars have treated Utesov's Jewish songs as little more than tools of Soviet propaganda, because they criticize the Tsarist regime, and present Jews as better off under Soviet rule. This, however, is a serious oversimplification.

Figure 8. Dmitrii Shostakovich, Leonid Utesov and Isaac Dunaevsky

In their content, these songs represented the mentality of Soviet Jews in the 1920s and 1930s. "Jewish Rhapsody," for example, describes the luxury in which the Russian Tsar lived, but does so from the imaginative standpoint of a *shtetl* Jew. Lyricist Nikolai Erdman, a gentile, consulted Utesov closely while writing the song (Skorokhodov, 2007: 170–171). Composer Dunaevsky set the lyrics to a melody drawn from Hasidic tunes. The lyrics depict a conversation between a Jewish grandfather and his grandson:

Tell me, grandfather,
Oh, please tell me, please tell me,
Tell me, how did Tsar Nicholas live?
To tell you the truth,
Tsar Nicholas lived really well!
How did he drink tea?
He drank tea this way:
He took a large sugar head,[1]
Made a hole in it,
Then poured a glass of tea into the hole.
That is how Tsar Nicholas used to drink tea,
From a sugar head.
Tell me, grandfather, how did Tsar Nicholas sleep?
He slept like this:
They took a large room
And filled the room with swan's down.
Tsar Nicholas would lie on top and fall asleep.
And Cossacks stood around, fired cannons, and yelled,
"Quiet, there must be quiet! Tsar Nicholas is asleep!"
And that is how he slept through his entire reign
(Shternshis, 2006: 175–176).

1 An 18 or 36-pound block of lump sugar, cut into small cubes before being sold in stores.

In 1932 Utesov recorded this song in Russian and Yiddish. Originally the song included a final verse that referred to God's omnipresence and ended with the traditional Jewish blessing, "Next year in Jerusalem!" Gleb Skorokhodov claims that the editor of the recording insisted that this verse be cut from the song, because he feared it would draw the censors' wrath (Skorokhodov, 2007: 170–171). This is plausible, given that Utesov avoided censorship of other Jewish songs by cutting or changing religious references in the lyrics (Shternshis, 2006: 175–176).

Many of Utesov's songs were criticized by RAPM because their lyrics were not properly "proletarian" (Dmitriev, 1982: 105–106). Utesov was particularly fond of a genre of songs called "city romances," or Russian chanson that had been popular with Jewish and gentile audiences since the late nineteenth century. Soviet poet Samuil Marshak (1887–1964) described these as stylistically similar to folk ballads, with a plot that develops from stanza to stanza and describing the life of the song's protagonist (Skorokhodov, 2007: 231). Often, the central figures in these songs were "petty-bourgeois" urban types. The song "*Bublichki*" ("Bagels") is an example. It tells the sad story of a young women peddler who sells bagels: her father is an alcoholic, her mother is a cleaning woman, her sister is a loose woman, and her brother is a pickpocket. To survive, she must sell bagels on the street in the cold night (Geizer, 2008: 124–125).

RAPM and various Soviet critics often attacked Utesov's jazz orchestra for its alleged vulgar tastes, its propagation of western capitalist influences, and the absence of proletarian ideals in its lyrics. Critics claimed that "Utesov's jazz is a profanation of music!" "Jazz is pub entertainment," and "Utesov's jazz is prostitution in music" (Utesov, 2009: 280). In 1930 the journal *Za proletarskuiu muzyku* (*For Proletariat Music*) called Utesov's repertoire outrageous and demanded that orchestras such as his be "chased away from the Soviet *estrada*" (Kotliarchuk, 2011).

Utesov replied to his critics in the Odessan manner, thorough ironic humor. In 1931, Utesov recorded a humorous monologue "*Beseda s gramofonom*" ("Conversation with a Gramophone"), in which he pretended to repent his allegedly "outrageous" behavior. As demonstration of such behavior, he played snippets from his "reprehensible" hits, including "*S Odesskogo kichmana*," followed by ironic commentary. He concluded that it had long been necessary to "change the repertoire." As the recoding ended, the record itself could be heard begging Utesov "Switch me off, switch me off! I am finished!" (Utesov, 2009: 293). In 1932, Utesov included this monologue in his new jazz review, *Muzykal'nyi magazin* (*The Musical Store*).

Humor alone, though, could not protect Utesov or his favorite lyricist, Iakov Iadov, from their most bloodthirsty critics. In the 1920s several ultra-militant arts groups in the Soviet Union, such as RAPM, RAPP (*Rossiiskaia Associatstia Proletarskikh Pisatelei*, the Russian Association of Proletariat Writers) and the OSE (*Obshchestvo Sovetskoi Estrady,* the Society of Soviet Estrada) called for the liquidation of their "bourgeois" opponents. Anyone who did not share their principles was condemned as a class enemy, with primitive cultural tastes. In his memoirs, Utesov described members of RAPM as terribly ignorant and concluded that any dialogue with them was impossible (Utesov, 2009: 280–284).

To protect himself, Utesov looked for patronage from highly placed Soviet officials. In 1931, Utesov sought out Lazar Kaganovich, then the First Secretary of the Moscow Communist Party Committee. According to Starr, Kaganovich became a patron of jazz and of Utesov. In a widely-distributed brochure published in 1939, Kaganovich—who had added the Commissariat

for Railroads to his portfolio, authorized Utesov to write a booklet for railroad workers, "How to Organize Railway Ensembles of Song and Dance, and Jazz Orchestras" (Starr, 1983: 125–127, 150).

By then, the threat posed by RAPP and RAMP had long passed, since the Party ordered both groups liquidated in 1932. Stalin no longer needed the militant cultural radicals, who had insisted on continuing the Cultural Revolution (Fitzpatrick, 1992). In that year's new production, *The Musical Store*, Utesov presented an acidic parody of his critics and their call for "proletarian" music. Titled "A Meeting at the Railroad Depot," the piece included sounds of a train horn and the noise of working machines. In the middle of the performance, one of musicians pretended to weep. The other musicians stopped playing and asked him what was wrong.

I feel pity for the elephants, he replied.
Which elephants?
Those, he answered, whose ivory was used for the keys
of the piano on which
such rubbish is played (Utesov, 2009: 295).

The Musical Store was one of Utesov's greatest orchestral successes. Without the pressure of RAPM, he could return to his own interpretations of jazz rhythms and melodies, with the help of the composer Isaac Dunaevsky. Utesov later wrote that "The public was in an excited frenzy.... It was an explosion of a jazz-bomb" (297). Soviet authorities took advantage of the show's huge popular success: recordings of the Utesov orchestra could not be bought at regular musical stores, and were found only at *Torgsin* stores, where goods were sold for foreign currency, gold and jewels (Skorokhodov, 2007: 228–229).[2] Even Soviet critics bent to the show's great popularity, and *The Musical Store* generally received positive reviews in the Soviet press (Utesov, 2009: 296).

The popularity of Utesov and his orchestra increased even more after their performance in the first Soviet musical comedy, the 1934 film *Veselye Rebiata* (*Happy Guys*), based loosely on *The Musical Store* and featuring Utesov and his Tea-Jazz band. Utesov played the lead role, Kostia Potekhin (298–299).[3] Censors attempted to ban the movie on ideological grounds, as it echoed "bourgeois" American musicals. Starr noted that *Literaturnaia Gazeta* (*The Literary Newspaper*) called the film "a 'vulgar mistake' and a host of other critics attacked it as an unsuccessful experiment" (Starr, 1983: 153). The movie must have seemed a natural target, given that its screenwriters—Nikolai Erdman and Vladimir Mass—had been arrested during the filming in 1933. (Erdman was accused of writing anti-Soviet satirical poetry; Mass was arrested for his association with Erdman. Both men were sentenced to three years in Siberian exile.) Although their names had been removed from the film's credits before release, the story was well known in artistic and administrative circles (Freedman, 2011). Faced with this crisis, Boris Shumiatskii, Chairman of the Main Administration of the Film Industry, who had pushed for the making of the movie, sought help from a politically-influential Soviet luminary. He invited Maxim Gor'kii to watch the movie and give his opinion. Gor'kii liked the comedy, but proposed that its title be changed from *Jazz Comedy* to *Happy Guys*. He also suggested to Stalin that he watch the movie (Volkov).

2 *Torgsin* (an acronym of "trade with foreigners") hard-currency stores operated in the Soviet Union in from 1931 to 1936.

3 The name Potekhin was derived from Russian word *potekha*, a fun amusement.

According to Starr, "In March 1935 the Central Committee viewed the film at a closed screening in the Kremlin. Stalin apparently liked it, for on March 12, 1935, *Pravda* squelched the debate by offering its blessing to *Happy Guys* and printing a blistering attack on Utesov's critics" (Starr, 1983: 153).

The film was a tremendous success not only in the Soviet Union, but also abroad. It was released in the United States in 1935 with the title *Moscow Laughs*, and received very complimentary reviews. On 25 March 1935, *The New York Times* wrote,

> "When the Muscovites produce a film, which does not mention Dnieprostroy, ignores the class struggle and contains no hint of editorial Marxism, it immediately becomes one of the great events of the international cinema. The new Soviet jazz comedy at the Cameo, in its uniquely Russian blend of syncopated music and straightforward slapstick, is no more politically minded than a Laurel and Hardy picture" (Sennwald, 1935).

Happy Guys was the first in the series of escapist Soviet comedies made in the 1930s. Although it made no direct reference to Marxism or class struggle, the film was propagandist in its portrayal of Soviet life. In his review of the film, Charlie Chaplin wrote that "Before *Happy Guys,* Americans knew Dostoevsky's Russia. Now they have seen great progress in people's psychology. People laugh energetically and cheerfully. This is a great victory. This makes more propaganda than the evidence of shooting and speeches" (Salys, 2009: 71).

Utesov well understood this power of humor and satire, which he used in producing anti-Nazi propaganda during the Second World War. After the German invasion in summer 1941, as the Red Army retreated and city after city fell, Soviet singers abandoned their old repertoires and performed only patriotic and heroic songs. Utesov contemplated how to adjust the program of his jazz orchestra. In his memoir, he recalled asking himself,

> "But should I change [the repertoire]? Should I substitute all jolly and humorous songs with heroic and pathetic songs? Should I become serious, because now is not the time for jokes? Then I recalled the aphorism: "Laughter can kill." Whoever said that was a real sage. A satirical laugh really is a formidable weapon. And when do we most need a joke, if not in hard times?" (Utesov, 2009: 335).

Utesov's jolly and humorous songs in fact proved more popular among soldiers than did heroic works. During the war, Utesov and his jazz orchestra gave hundreds of concerts at the front. In his memoir, he claimed that commanders wrote to the authorities requesting that they "send us Utesov's jazz to lift the soldiers' spirits" (340). In addition to performing, Utesov and his jazz orchestra donated the proceeds from several concerts to pay for two fighter planes, which were dubbed *Happy Guys* (344).

During the Second World War, Utesov sang several satirical anti-Nazi songs based on popular Jewish melodies with Russian lyrics. In these songs Utesov was mocking the Nazis to prove that the war had not broken the spirit of the Jewish and Russian peoples. In addition to "*S Berlinskogo kichmana*" ("From the Berlin Slammer"), he sang an anti-Nazi song called "*Baron von*

der Pschik" ("Baron Zilch"). This was based on the Yiddish popular song "*Bei Mir Bistu Shein*" ("To Me You Are Beautiful"), from the American Yiddish musical *Men Ken Lebn Nor Men Lost Nisht* (known in English as *I Would If I Could*) by Jacob Jacobs and Solomon Secunda. Although the show had a short run, the song became an international Yiddish hit. In the Soviet Union in the 1930s, the orchestras of Aleksander Tsfasman and Iakov Skomorovskii had presented it as a folk song (Skorokhodov, 2007: 258). In the 1930s, Utesov refused to perform the song, perhaps in part because the writer Isaac Babel had told him a story about young gentiles in Moscow who put the melody to anti-Semitic lyrics about greedy Jews (259). In 1942, however, Utesov adapted this Jewish melody for anti-Nazi propaganda, with new Russian lyrics by the Leningrad poet Anatolii Fidrovskii.

Utesov's new version of the song satirized the life of an imagined Nazi, Baron von der Pschik, in occupied territory, who met a well-deserved fate. David MacFadyen has rendered the lyrics in English:

> "Baron von der Pschik had long desired and dreamed of tasting Russian pork fat [*shpik*]. He liked to be fashionable, wasn't at all shy, and started bragging about his feats beforehand. He screamed on the radio that he was already in Leningrad, on parade and eating pork fat. Said he was already eating and drinking, that a peasant was serving him beneath the spreading cranberry bushes. Baron von der Pschik forgot about Russian bayonets, which haven't lost the habit of knocking barons about. Gallant von der Pschik fell on those bayonets. German, not Russian, fat popped out! Straps come off the uniform; the swastika's broken up. Come on Baron, up you get on the bayonet! Baron von der Pschik, where's your chic now? There's nothing left of him! *Kaput! Good thing, too!"* (MacFadyen, 2002: 136).

Although this song was very popular among Russians, it had particular resonance with Jews. Baron von der Pschik, who dreamed of eating *tref*, pork fat, was turned into *tref* himself. Utesov's choice of Jewish melodies also sent Jews a special message. Censorship might prevent his using Yiddish words, but he could speak directly to Jews through the music. In her book *Soviet and Kosher*, Anna Shternshis described how her oral history subjects understood Utesov's great popularity among Soviet Jews. One respondent told Shternshis that he enjoyed Utesov music because he "recognized some of the old Yiddish melodies" in his songs, even when Utesov sang in Russian. He added, "not only Jews loved Utesov, everyone did. I just think Jews liked him more" (Shternshis, 2006: 173).

Utesov's use of popular Yiddish tunes for wartime propaganda may have inspired Jewish partisans to replace "officially-sanctioned" Russian lyrics in one of Utesov's popular patriotic songs with their own Yiddish lyrics. Utesov had first performed "*Terskaia pokhodnaia*" ("The Terek Marching Song") in the 1938 film *Syny trudovogo naroda* (*Sons of the Working People*). The Jewish Soviet composers Dimitrii and Daniil Pokrass, used the tune from a well-known Yiddish lullaby "*Oyfn Pripetchik*" in the melody of the song. The original Russian lyrics, by the poet Aleksei Surkov, talk about the Red Army's brave Cossacks. During the war, Jewish partisans used the melody from the song

for the partisan hymn "*Zog nit keymol*" ("Never Say," also known as "The Partisan Song" (Heartstrings). Hersh Glick (1921–1944), a prisoner in the Vilna ghetto, wrote the new Yiddish lyrics for the song (Glick, 1943; Flam).[4]

As David MacFadyen has explained, Utesov became even more popular during the war than before, and for his contributions to the war effort was awarded the Order of the Workers' Red Banner. "When it came to the Stalin Prize, however, the degree to which his extravagance could be officially recognized had reached its limit. Stalin crossed his name from the list of candidates, asking: 'What Utesov is that? The one who sings those ditties? But he hasn't got any kind of voice, it's all just wheezing!' (MacFadyen, 2001: 24–25). The problem, though, was not Utesov's voice, but Stalin's attitude toward Jews. Stalin's anti-Semitism had increased with age; while he had once admired Utesov's songs of the criminal underworld, he now considered the singer unworthy of praise.

Utesov avoided political repression, but the rise of state anti-Semitism and xenophobia in the Soviet Union in the late 1940s crippled his career and that of his orchestra. In the final version of his memoirs, Utesov described the impact of Cold War xenophobia on Soviet jazz:

> "Somebody decided that the amount of foreign music [in the USSR] had become catastrophic and threatened not only our taste, but all Russian folk and classical music. So they began to fight zealously for "purity" of repertoire. The Russian chorus was put above everything.... "Suspicious musical instruments" were removed from the orchestras. The orchestra repertoire was significantly reduced and the music created for orchestra became "heavier" and "faceless." They had nothing to perform. Instead of jolly, vivacious music, they had to perform grey and boring "between-genre" works" (Utesov, 2009: 365–369).

The anti-cosmopolitan campaign of the late 1940s and early 1950s spelled the doom of Utesov's jazz orchestra and Soviet jazz music. In 1947, Utesov's orchestra was renamed the RSFSR Variety Orchestra and forced to completely change its repertoire (Starr, 1983: 215). Moreover, the prohibition of Jewish culture meant that Utesov could no longer sing his Jewish songs. In his final memoir, Utesov recalled that he "was very upset, suffered, and tried to resist and defend jazz, the main love of my life.... Oh, jazz, jazz, my love, my triumph and my Golgotha" (Utesov, 2009: 370–371). Again, he tried to conduct this struggle through humor. In his 1963 book *I am from Moscow*, the defector Iurii Krotkov recalled a conversation with Utesov about an *Izvestia* article on "the harmful psychological influence" of jazz. *Izvestia* claimed that jazz was even harmful to animals, and cited the alarmed response of dolphins exposed to jazz from a loudspeaker on a Soviet ship. Krotkov writes that "Utesov looked at me with his old, ironic, somewhat pessimistic eyes, and answered: 'If I were allowed to, I would do a programme entitled "Not for Dolphins!" Or, before my concerts began, I would ask the audience: 'Are there any dolphins among you?'" (Krotkov, 1967: 5).

When, after Stalin's death, the anti-cosmopolitan campaign ended and Khrushchev initiated a cultural "thaw," Utesov wrote a long article in defense

4 Professor Seth Ward, University of Wyoming, kindly provided me with this information.

of jazz, "The Ship *Turgenev* and Light Music," published in *Literaturnaia Gazeta* on 19 January 1957. Utesov summarized in this article his struggle to save jazz in the Soviet Union:

"Many years I have fought for the existence of the *estrada* orchestra. The word jazz itself provoked fear among some hypocrites and adherents of the policy of "playing it safe." The words saxophone and accordion were almost associated with the word "capitalism." Performance of foreign popular music was considered a reprehensible mistake….

Light dance music, songs with dance rhythms, that can provoke—God forbid—"jazz emotions," made the administration of the Radio Committee tremble.… Monotony created boredom. And this caused serious harm to the art of popular song music….

We need a variety of orchestras, from the folk instrument orchestra to the jazz–orchestra…. More varied music! Vivid, jolly, better and more varied songs! (5)".

During the short period of political thaw, Utesov felt that he finally could tell the music bureaucrats what he thought of them. Jazz music already had begun to experience a revival in the Soviet Union. The radio program "Music USA," begun in 1955, played jazz melodies, and Soviet jazz bands multiplied (Starr, 1983: 244, 251). But the bureaucrats had not surrendered, and they continued to obstruct the work of singers and orchestras. Utesov's article may have been intended to pressure them to leave him and his orchestra alone.

Still, Utesov and his orchestra could perform jazz again. According to Krotkov, "Khrushchev, during a meeting with literary and artistic figures in March 1963, even cited a program by Utesov's orchestra as an example of cheerful, optimistic music. Immediately Utesov was transformed into a god; meetings with foreigners were arranged for him and he was publicized everywhere" (Krotkov, 1967: 4). Utesov privately complained that he was not free to play the music he really loved in public in the way that it should be played. In a conversation with Korsakov, he said,

"Do you think we don't know what jazz is? For ourselves, when we're alone, we play in a style that Benny Goodman would envy. Believe me, I'm not bragging: I know what I'm talking about. But for the public we play something different, something "lively." We are forced to pull our left ear with our right hand and our right ear with our left hand. We worked as, in ancient times, Comrade Aesop worked. So we composed a programme entitled "Jazz was Born in Odessa," and we show how it later moved to America and what became of it. We parody the Americans, and in the parodies we play real jazz melodies. It is a stunt. But what else can we do? What can we do when the censor doesn't allow us to breathe….

I am seventy, yes seventy, and I am still not allowed to read or see what I want. But you can't stifle music. Music is like a plague; it grows and spreads despite all sorts of

> repressive measures. It is heard on the radio in all parts of the world. You can never drown music. And even if you did, it would only become more fascinating than ever. And what is there to fear of music? There must be something, or they wouldn't try to suppress it" (5–6).

In the Soviet Union, as in Nazi Germany, ideological militants defined jazz as American, degenerate, and harmful (Kater, 1992: 29–51). Jewish jazz musicians were especially suspect not only in Nazi Germany, but also in the late Stalinist USSR, with its combination of Russian nationalism, xenophobia, and anti-Semitism. Although jazz was "rehabilitated" with the post-Stalin thaw, it still faced limits and restrictions of censorship. Moreover, despite the thaw, state anti-Semitism continued, in a latent form. Utesov therefore was a double suspect: a Jew and a jazzman, a world celebrity with a witty and sharp tongue, who exhibited extravagant and unpredictable behavior, and who lampooned the bureaucrats whenever possible. In 1963, the bureaucrats struck back, and denied Utesov permission to travel on a cultural tour to France. Utesov, insulted, wrote directly to Khrushchev:

> "I am a Soviet actor… sixty eight years old and I have been working for fifty years…. I am not upset that I won't see France, but the mistrust is killing me. What did I do? Many people know that I was supposed to go, and now they look at me as a suspicious person. This is very difficult…. I want that you tell me exactly why I deserve such mistrust" (Geizer, 2008: 215–216).

Matvei Geizer, who found this letter in Utesov's archive, said that it is unclear if he actually sent it to Khrushchev. Geizer could find no evidence that Khrushchev received the letter, and speculated that it ended up stuck in some lower level of the Soviet bureaucracy (215–216).

Whenever possible, Utesov sang Jewish songs for his friends in private and, when circumstances allowed, on stage. With his retirement in 1966, Utesov no longer had opportunities to sing Jewish songs and read Jewish stories on stage. Clearly, he enjoyed performing for audiences, and seized every chance to do so privately. Utesov read Babel's story to anyone who would listen at the *Peredelkino* resort for Soviet writers. He never broke his ties with Jewish culture. In his later years, Utesov refused to participate in Soviet anti-Zionist propaganda, and openly continued relations with Jewish friends who had decided to immigrate to Israel. In the last version of his memoirs, written in the 1970s—even more than in the previous two versions—he devoted great, loving attention to Jewish themes and his own Jewish life.

Historians continue to disagree as to whether Utesov should be considered a Jewish singer, and they debate the importance of his contributions to Jewish popular culture. I hold that Utesov did more than any other Soviet singer to popularize Jewish music and jazz among the masses. Jewish songs sang more than seventy years ago are still heard today at weddings and birthday parties in the former Soviet Union. Until the rise of state anti-Semitism in the Soviet Union in the late 1940s, Utesov and his jazz orchestra popularized a great number of Jewish songs and gave new life to old Jewish melodies through new jazz arrangements. This fusion of traditional Jewish klezmer music with jazz proved tremendously popular among young Soviet Jews in

the 1920s and 1930s, which explains why many Soviet Jews considered Utesov a "Jewish singer," even though he performed most of his songs in Russian.

The King of Soviet Light Music, Isaac Dunaevsky

The Soviet composer Isaac Dunaevsky wrote the music for many of Utesov's hits. Dunaevsky was born in 1900 in the provincial town Lokhvitsa, Poltava province of the Russian Empire. He grew up in a musical Jewish family: his grandfather was a cantor, his mother played the piano, and all five of his brothers became musicians. The Jewish melodies, which Dunaevsky heard from childhood, were incorporated into many of his songs. For example, the melody of "Jewish Rhapsody" by Dunaevsky was drawn from Hasidic tunes. Dunaevsky studied in the Kharkov gymnasium and the Kharkov Conservatory. He began his career in the Kharkov Russian Dramatic Theater as a violinist in the orchestra. Young and ambitious, Dunaevsky moved in 1924 to Moscow, where he worked as musical director of several theaters and in 1929 Dunaevsky moved to Leningrad, where he became a conductor of Music Hall (Chernov, 1961: 9). Dunaevsky composed melodies since the early 1920s. As was mentioned above, he wrote music for Utesov's performances *Jazz at the Crossroads* and *Musical Store* in the early 1930s. However, the great popularity to Dunaevsky as a composer was brought about by his music for the film-jazz comedy *Happy Guys* (Skorokhodov, 1986: 33). His *March of the Happy Guys* was sung by the entire country. The film was shown at the Venice Film Festival and in the US, and Dunaevsky's music was well known abroad in the 1930s-1950s.

Dunaevsky wrote music for many songs and films, and became one of the most renowned Soviet composers of light music. His music was performed in England, France, Poland and the US. A special program about Dunaevsky was broadcast from Moscow on US radio in 1937. French composer Michel Philippe-Gérard wrote that Dunaevsky's music is as "light and sparkling as glass of Champaign" (Skrynchenko, 2013).

Was Dunaevsky's music part of Soviet propaganda or did Soviet propaganda use Dunaevsky's talent for its purposes? Debates about this continue to the present. Dunaevsky composed melodies in different genres: jazz, blues, marches, musical improvisations based on the folk melodies, music to operas, operetta and ballet.

Before the Second World War Dunaevsky also composed Jewish melodies. He wrote the above mentioned *Jewish Rhapsody* for Utesov and music for the film *Iskateli shchastia* (Seekers of Happiness, 1936) about Jewish life in Birobidzhan. While the film had a rather primitive plot, the performance of the great actor Veniamin Zuskin and Dunaevsky's music made the film quite popular. But with the rise of state

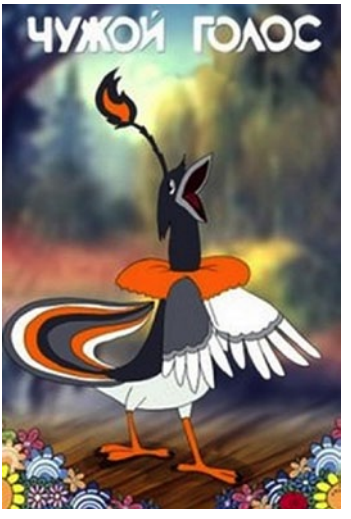

Figure 9. Soviet Animated Film Alien Voice, 1949

anti-Semitism in the Soviet Union after the Second World War, the film was not shown again until the advent of Perestroika. Today this film looks rather naïve and archaic. However, the music by Dunaevsky has outlived the movie. Dunaevsky used many Jewish folk melodies when he wrote his music for the film, including "Cry of Israel" in a clarinet performance. The most popular song from this film *The Fishermen's Song* was also recorded by Iakov Skomorovsky's jazz orchestra under the title *Evreiskaia komsomol'skaia* (Jewish Komsomol Song). In the beginning of this song, Dunaevsky used the Jewish folk song "Eiliolu" about the prophet Eliyahu, that Jews traditionally sang during the Passover Seder (Shafer, 2006: 4).

Dunaevsky wrote music for the most "Hollywood" Soviet musical "Circus" (1936, director Grigory Alexandrov). The plot of the movie was written by the renowned Soviet writers, Ilia Ilf, Evgenii Petrov, Valentin Kataev and Isaac Babel. According the plot, an American actress and circus artist Marion Dixon gave birth to a black baby and was persecuted by racists in the US. She came with her child to the Soviet Union, where she found no racial prejudice, only internationalism and love. The Soviet movie star Liubov' Orlova played Marion Dixon. She sang a number of songs in the musical composed by Dunaevsky (Saprykina, 2007). Several songs from the film became hits, and the opening melody from the *Song of the Motherland* became the official call sign of Soviet radio. The American singer Paul Robson included *Song of the Motherland* in his repertoire (Skrynchenko, 2013).

One of the Dunaevsky's songs *Lullaby* was sung in the film "Circus" by different actors in different languages: Russian, Ukrainian, Georgian and Yiddish. The verse in Yiddish was sung in the film by the Jewish actor and Director of State Jewish Theater (GOSET) Solomon Mikhoels. It was only a brief episode, but it was noticed by the public. Unfortunately, the policy of internationalism which was propagandized by the movie *Circus*, changed soon into a policy of Russian chauvinism and suppression of national cultures. Solomon Mikhoels was killed by order of Stalin on 12 January 1948. His murder was disguised as a traffic accident (Kostyrchenko, 2001: 388–395). Thereafter the episode with Mikhoels was cut from the movie. It was restored only many years later.

The episode in the movie "Circus" with Mikhoels singing in Yiddish was used to attack Dunaevsky during the anti-cosmopolitan campaign. Dunaevsky was accused of Jewish bourgeois nationalism, cosmopolitanism and servility to the West. The Soviet press denounced Dunaevsky's music. His colleagues and even some of Dunaevsky's friends denounced his compositions in the Union of Composers of the USSR. Perhaps the Dunaevsky's fate would be more tragic if the head of the Union of Composers, Russian composer Tikhon Khrennikov did not defend him. Khrennikov went to the Central Committee and told the main ideologist of the Soviet Union Andrei Zhdanov that Dunaevsky was "the first composer that brought music closer to the people" (Zelikman, 2015). Perhaps this persuaded Zhdanov and Dunaevsky was left alone. Dunaevsky truly believed that Khrennikov had saved his life. Dunaevsky told his sister Zinaida Osipovna, who called him from Poltava, "Ziniochka, I am unaccustomed to praying. However, if you have not lost this ability, please pray to our Jewish God for our Tikhon, I owe him my life and honor" (Zelikman).

Dunaevsky's son Maxim mentioned in his interview that his father was not arrested because the high Soviet authorities considered him a Soviet, but not specifically a Jewish composer. Many Jewish artists, writers, and composers who contributed in Yiddish culture were persecuted. But Dunaevsky composed

melodies for so many Russian songs and films that he gained a reputation as a leading Soviet composer. He had many fans and when he came to the street crowds of admirers surrounded him (Zelikman). So Dunaevsky's fame also protected him.

Although Dunaevsky was not arrested and persecuted, he was not able to fully realize his talent and compose the music that he liked. Dunaevsky dreamt of composing an opera "Rashel'", the libretto for which Mikhail Bulgakov wrote in 1938. The opera's libretto is based on Maupassant's story "Mademoiselle Fifi," written in 1882. The main character of the story, the French Jewish prostitute Rachel, killed a dandified Prussian officer nicknamed "Mademoiselle Fifi" during Franco-Prussian War, in retaliation for the humiliation of French women and France.

However, Dunaevsky did not finish his work on the opera either in the late 1930s, or after the war. Dunaevsky explained to his friend the impresario David Person, why he could not finish his work on the opera "Rashel'":

> The newspapers and radio continue to scream about the mythical "murderers in white robes". And in such a moment, you, David Mikhailovich, recommend me to "drop everything" and renew my work on the opera. Did you read Maupassant's story, on the plot of which Bulgakov wrote his libretto? You don't know that Rashel' is modified Rachel. I am now in a foul mood and I am afraid that I will write down something which would not express my real feelings to the memory of Bulgakov … I can say only one thing: if in 1939 I could be accused of an anti-Pact mood,[5] today I will be denounced as an agent of "Joint"[6] Will you be satisfied with such prospects for the composer Dunaevsky? Do you remember the splendid "Zhidovka" Halevy?[7] It was performed continuously in pre-revolutionary theaters. Can you imagine this "Zhidovka" on the modern Soviet stage? That's just it. And you say – "Rashel'" (Kostyrchenko, 2001: 551).

Dunaevsky's letter shows that the composer understood quite well what was going on in the country. Due to the rise of state anti-Semitism in the Soviet Union, Dunaevsky, like other Jewish composers and musicians, was not able to continue writing Jewish melodies after the Second World War.

But at the same time Dunaevsky accepted only a partial compromise with the Soviet regime. He never joined the Communist party in order to remain more independent. Dunaevsky refused to sign a letter to *Pravda*, composed on the order of Stalin, which denounced the "murderers in white robes" (Shafer, 2013). A cousin of Isaac Dunaevsky, Professor Lev Dunaevsky, was arrested during the Doctors' plot (Shafer). That might of course have raised questions about his connections with the composer, especially after Isaac Dunaevsky had also refused to sign the letter of denunciation.

5 Dunaevsky meant the Nazi-Soviet Pact signed on 23 August 1939.

6 American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), the Jewish humanitarian assistance organization. The members of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee and the Jewish doctors arrested during the fraudulent Doctors' Plot in 1953 were accused of being agents of Joint.

7 Opera "Zhidovka" (La Juive) by French composer Fromental Halévy was composed in 1835.

Dunaevsky was not arrested during the state anti-Semitic campaigns, but he was deprived of freedom in his composition of music. The continued stress and humiliation during late Stalinism did not let the composer realize his talent in its full dimension and undermined his health. In his last years Dunaevsky looked much older than his age. He died from a heart attack at the age of fifty-five on 25 July 1955.

Conclusion

In the 1920s – mid 1940s jazz dominated Soviet popular music. Soviet musical critics attacked jazz music as bourgeois, but without any success, due to the great popularity of the genre. Certainly Stalin's, and other Soviet leaders' interest in jazz protected the jazz musicians until the Cold War. However, during the anti-cosmopolitan campaign in the Soviet Union in the late 1940s-1953 jazz was forbidden as Western, American music. Only during Khrushchev's Thaw was the genre rehabilitated. But by then the Golden Age of jazz had already passed.

Jazz attracted Jewish musicians by the freedom of improvisation that was also traditional for klezmer music. Soviet Jewish composers and musicians often used Jewish folk song tunes and melodies in their jazz performances. Jazz broke all cultural barriers and became an international language for communication among jazz musicians and aficionados across the entire world. Jazz gave the Soviet people a taste of Western culture, which was otherwise forbidden. And jazz brought happiness to its admirers. Naum Shafer wrote in his article about the film *Seekers of Happiness* that Soviet Jews looked for happiness in the wrong time and in the wrong place (Shafer, 2006: 1). Unfortunately, Soviet Jews were unable to change either state policies or their country, but they could be happy by escaping into the wonderful world of jazz.

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