Blue Notes from the Underground: Jazz in the USSR

by

Brianna van Kan
Class of 2012

A thesis submitted to the
faculty of Wesleyan University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Degree of Bachelor of Arts
with Departmental Honors from the College of Letters
and with Departmental Honors in Russian Language and Literature and Music
Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my advisors, Susanne Fusso and Anthony Braxton, without whom I simply would not have a thesis. I would especially like to thank Susanne for her constant patience, and the freedom and encouragement she gave me.

I would also like to thank Laura Greene for her hospitality on the winter night in St. Petersburg that introduced me to my topic. I thank Robbie, Cathy, and Dani for the contagious energy that cemented the joy I have found in this project.

Finally, I wish to thank my friends and family for their constant support throughout this process, and for their forgiveness when I disappeared from their lives for weeks at a time.
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Introduction

A little over two years ago, in what had become an all too familiar predicament, I found myself wandering about apartment building courtyards, looking for the appropriate entrance. Luckily, it was a mild February night by St. Petersburg standards, and my puzzlement outside of the domofon intercom system was bearable. A friend arrived soon enough, and with our combined brainpower, found our way to our academic advisor’s apartment.

She had invited her advisees over for a night of movies, treats, and a reprieve from the difficulties of navigating Russian society for a night. I expected to watch a somewhat stuffy, serious film far above my language ability, but appreciated the hospitality all the same. I never could have guessed that this night would ultimately lead me to the capstone project of my undergraduate experience.

The film we watched that night was Valery Todorovsky’s Stiliagi, an energetic 2008 film reminiscent of Moulin Rouge! in style. Through vibrant color and lively music, it told the tale of a young Komsomol member, Mels (which stands for Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin) who falls in love, or at least fascination, with a bouffant-bearing beauty when raiding a secret party of the jazz-loving dissident stiliagi. His crush spurs him to try out the stiliaga lifestyle, and he becomes completely absorbed. We watch Mels and his new friends through arrests, a baby, and eight musical numbers, until the film concludes with a parade of stiliagi, hippies, rockers, punks, Goths, Rastafarians, and countless other music-based “alternative” groups marching triumphantly down what was then Gorky Street in celebration of their individuality.
This film was actually just shown in a few select Manhattan theaters this January. The New York Times’ review asked what now seems to me an appallingly ignorant question. “Who knows if anything remotely resembling the culture of ['Stiliagi'] really existed? It’s a musical, after all.” How easy it is to forget that this is the exact question that led me from the contemplative St. Petersburg metro ride home to this page.

The idea of such a powerful counterculture surrounding jazz fascinated me for several reasons. As a piano and clarinet player, I grew up with the opportunity, but perhaps not the pressure put on a saxophone player, to participate in jazz bands. I knew it was supposed to be addictive, passionate, and exciting. The version of jazz I knew, limited to recordings or performances of stationary players dressed in white dress shirts and cummerbunds, just came off as cold. I became somewhat averse to the form as an instrumentalist, but maintained curiosity as to how my sentiments could be so drastically different from those presented throughout history. Jazz could be many things, but I knew it should not be boring.

Watching Stiliagi not only informed me of the lengths to which passion for jazz had driven people, but made me crave an understanding of the music at its most seductive. My research immediately led me to S. Fredrick Starr’s 1983 book, Red and Hot: The Fate of Jazz in the Soviet Union.¹ The work is exceedingly thorough, and remains the major authority on jazz in the Soviet Union. Though the book was fulfilling, and often humorous, I was disappointed to find no trace of the seduction and heart of the film.

¹ My copy is the 1994 edition, which includes a chapter on the “final years” before the collapse of the Soviet Union. However, only the original text is relevant, as the body of my thesis only extends into the 1960s.
It turns out that the true story lies somewhere between the two.

The history of jazz in the USSR began long before the appearance of *stiliagi*. The opposition that this counterculture faced was the product of decades of indecision about the art form’s compatibility with Soviet ideology. Jazz and the USSR were born around roughly the same time, and grew up together with all the marks of a troubled sibling rivalry. As different as they ultimately might have been, the two seemed to be inescapably bound. They shared some similar traits and ideas, but owing to different developmental environments, organized their values and expressed them in extremely different ways.

As it turns out, the plight of jazz musicians and fans in the Soviet Union was as indicative of the nation’s own characteristics as it was of jazz’s appeals. In addition to the elusive “seduction” of jazz, the strength of the *stiliagi* dissidence is a result of Soviet mentalities and conditions. The fact that the Soviet government and Communist Party placed such absurdly severe restrictions on jazz highlights many of their insecurities, miscommunications, and ultimate shortcomings. Jazz faced criticism for its own sake, but it was also used as a tool of authoritative expression domestically and as a political statement internationally.

The story of Soviet jazz transcends its historical boundaries to offer insight into the influence of music as a social force. It is an ideal case study of the reasons why music is a power that is both deeply feared and followed. Jazz culture extends into the realms of dance and fashion, thus expanding the range of its application. Because of this, its impact is representative of the way in which the seemingly shallow facets of popular culture deeply and significantly reflect society.
For all its purely academic relevance, the life and struggle of Soviet jazz culture is also simply a great story. Though life was not as pretty as “Stiliagi” depicts, jazz culture actually did possess the sort of whimsicality that makes the film enjoyable. For instance, the pink and green painted bulldog of one wealthy stiliaga in the film is not a humorous exaggeration as I initially thought, but a reference to the actual dog of author Yulian Lyandres, who was a “star” of such stylish dissidents in his youth. What the film does not show is that Lyandres, and there are others like him, was poisoned by the KGB some years later. For Lyandres, it was a consequence of his writing, but for countless others, playing, possessing, or even admitting a fondness for jazz could lead to beatings, arrest, and even death. One feels inspired by the dedication of musicians and devoted fans like the stiliagi, but appalled by its necessity.

This work follows the trajectory of my own discovery and thought processes in relation to Soviet jazz. The first section will review the history, as primarily informed by Starr. This history is divided into a musical history and a political history. The separation allows for the clear formation of a picture of what musical exposure and knowledge was available to Soviet citizens, and what the government intended to do about it. The split is also somewhat useful symbolically. It prepares one for the realization that governmental treatment of jazz had little to do with its social and musical reality, but was rather concerned with its own ideological fears and infrastructural insecurities.

In the second section, I evaluate the perceived and actual threats posed by jazz. To do so, I examine the foundation of musical communities and identities as a means of understanding music’s power to first convey expression, and then unite
people around extramusical meaning, leading to the development of strong
nonmusical cultural characteristics, and finally inspiring action. I apply these
discoveries to jazz as a specific art form, and to its place in the Soviet context.
Inevitably, we see that jazz presents a case similar to an anecdote told by Josef
Škovorecký:

The consumptive clerk of a workingman’s insurance company…undergoes a
sudden metamorphosis to become a threat to closely guarded socialism. Why?
Because the visions in his Castle, his Trial, his Amerika are made up of too
little paper and too much real life.2 3

The bonds of musical communities, and jazz especially, rely on real life experiences
and the mentalities that direct them. It could be said that jazz was a threat because the
culture it inspired was made up of too little sound and too much life.

Finally, I set out to shed light on the true story of stiliagi, less spectacular than
the film, but with more sensitivity than Starr’s book, in which it is sometimes easy to
forget the reality of historical experience amidst the mass of detail. In addition to
presenting an interesting narrative, the phenomenon of stiliagi provides an even
narrower case study. I apply the discoveries made in the second section to the
counterculture’s particular context in order to admire its peculiarity, explain its
legacy, and depict its human reality.

I came into this thesis with no particular expertise in jazz theory, history, or
performance, but with a decent background in musical analysis. I hoped that this
outlook would help me replicate, in some small part, the experience of discovery of

2 Škovorecký, 4
3 Škovorecký is, of course, speaking about Kafka here, but does not mention him by name. Kafka’s
works were banned by the Soviet regime.
those about whom I write, while allowing me to go a step further in analyzing this process. In some ways, it has. I have found myself less able to evaluate the authentic representation of “true” American jazz in the music to which the Soviets had access, and yet have felt all the more determined to do so. Listening to hours of music in this quest was a delightful process of discovery, and it was easy to see how one could become absorbed by the music and not go to a Komsomol meeting, or, say, work on one’s thesis.

To some degree, though, the expectation of utilizing my ignorance of jazz, but background in music, was misguided. This became obvious as I began a comparative musical analysis. As a music student, it seemed only natural that analyzing melodic, harmonic and rhythmic structure, texture, timbre, and lyrics would be an illuminating study. After all, this seems to be strikingly absent in the majority of the literature I had read. Outside of vague references to syncopation, variations on traditional instrumental sounds, improvisation, and blue notes when speaking of jazz, and rhythmic and harmonic simplicity when speaking of Soviet music, there is little direct interaction with music. I planned to catalogue a range of characteristic features for a range of Soviet-produced popular music, and do the same for the music of jazz artists explicitly mentioned in my readings. Then, I would select one appropriately representative song of Soviet and jazz music respectively, and write a detailed comparison.

I spent a few hours listening to the mass songs of the Red Army Ensemble. I then spent a few more listening to The Original Dixieland Jazz Band, Jelly-Roll Morton, Fletcher Henderson, Paul Whiteman, Guy Lombardo, George Gershwin, Glenn Miller, Benny Goodman, Duke Ellington, Charlie Parker, Miles Davis, Dizzy
Gillespie, and countless others. The stark contrast was hopeful. In the Soviet music, I noted a solid preference for powerful soloists and full-bodied choirs singing in strong unison. Harmonies, used sparingly, are conventionally contrapuntal and rarely surpass two parts. Instrumental accompaniment is very sparse, generally also in unison with the melody, while low brass maintains a simple rhythmic pulse.

Harmonic phrases always terminate on the tonic. A single instrumental voice such as a clarinet or the upper ranges of an accordion provides the only touch of “femininity” and the only moving lines not in unison with melody. Several songs use two tempos, the soloist singing at a slower tempo with rubato, and the choir at a steady march.

Songs seem to employ the full range of a moderato tempo, rarely falling short or surpassing. Overall song structure is very repetitive, with repeated A sections, or at most, alternating A and B sections. Subject matter is very straightforward. Songs about war, sports, and the motherland all glorify the Soviet spirit and potential. Even in peacetime, nostalgic songs about war and revolution work to preserve wartime unity. Topics from the landing of the world’s first Arctic drifting station, to the Navy, exclaim of victory:

Upon the call of our leader we are ever victorious,
Fulfill what has been a dream!
Shine, the five-winged star of ours,
Beneath the very North Star!

-North Pole, 1937

We are leaving early in the morning.
And quietly is beating
The heart of the Red Navy man,
The Soviet flag is flapping in the wind….
Fear is unbeknown to Russians,
From victory to victory
Went the sailor since the glorious times of yore.

-Marine Song, 1939

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These qualities of vocal character, harmony, accompaniment, rhythm, tempo, structure, and lyrics were almost completely identical across the board.

With these qualities in mind, I looked to compare and contrast jazz. A problem was immediately evident. Vocal range spans from near-bass baritone to soprano, and character is indescribably variable. There are no “categories” for the voices of Rose Murphy, Louis Armstrong, or Ella Fitzgerald. Tempos range from largo to presto. Lyrics, if present at all, speak of love, dance, travel, and innumerable other topics. Meter is typically duple, with offbeat accents. While rhythmic patterns can be noted, solos often seem erratic, with flurries of notes that fall outside of metric restriction. Instrumental interaction sometimes takes the form of background support for soloists, sometimes playful polyphonically woven texture, other times call and response dialogue. Melodic resolutions to the tonic are often few and far between.

Then, there are characteristics of jazz music that seem to give it the most flavor. Innovation of instrumental sound alone adds great personality. All instruments are shown able to produce imitative sounds of things like animals, crying, and trains, while solos take on a remarkably vocal quality. Mumbling, screaming, and cooing are common. Jazz constantly greets one with peculiar moments, like the realization that an instrument has just “said” something “matter-of-factly.”

This rich musical variety would be fascinating to catalogue if the goal was merely to dissect jazz. However, it serves little use for specific comparison. Head-to-head points of discussion are few. True, if one points out that Soviet music is characterized by strength, one might then note jazz’s ability to be tender and light. Whereas Soviet music is rigidly structured and deliberate, jazz allows room to
wander. Generally, though, such diversity means that few singular traits generate a
critical mass of support. It is impossible to choose one fully representative exemplar
of “jazz.” So, we are left with vague references to varied instrumental sounds,
syncopation, blue notes, and improvisation for jazz, and rhythmic and harmonic
simplicity for Soviet popular music. Soviet music, by character, allows and even
welcomes these vast generalizations. For our purposes, jazz requires it. In itself, the
uselessness of deep musical analysis illustrates an important point. One appeal of
jazz was likely that there was such variety, when domestic Soviet music provided
consistence to the point of monotony.

Furthermore, such an analysis would inevitably be at best superfluous, and at
worst, hypocritical. If I am to argue that the appeal and influence of music lies in the
experiences of those who embrace it, I truly have no place analyzing the effect of its
features. In my world, jazz is accepted, often lauded, and a practically omnipresent
influence in the music around me. I had an acceptable reason, even a responsibility as
a musician, to want to discover jazz’s merits. Soviet musicians did not. It is difficult
to tell if the emotional and otherwise communicative expressions I perceive in jazz
music are relevant, or merely a result of my exposure to such conventions through
jazz’s influence on other music. Jazz may be “new” to me, but it is not exotic. In
fact, when listening to Russian mass songs, what was notably banal to Soviets is
charming and mysterious to me. Had it not been for its pronounced invariance, I
would barely have understood why such music did not fulfill public desire. I choose
to study Russian, after all. If it had been an option, perhaps stiliagi would have been
American Studies majors. I can and will make inferences about the draws of jazz and
Western culture, but in the end, the reasons some people risked their lives and
freedom for love of music, while others took the opposite stance, are rooted in supremely individual experience and taste.

I can fairly confidently infer a few things. The Soviet Union was built on an ideal of rationality and material realities. It is fair to intellectualize jazz in deciphering the Party’s concerns. After all, they attempted to do this themselves. To the Soviet regime, culture must always be accompanied by purpose. Just as appropriate music needed to serve an articulable function to exist, the Party needed reasons to forbid it. However, jazz lovers, by and large, made no argument. Whether analytical reasoning for their passion exists or not is practically irrelevant. In a nation where “objective” human reason and control held superstition, instinct, and individual experience in contempt, jazz was a thing to be felt, not thought. I have done my best to “think” about jazz when appropriate, and to analyze the legacy of jazz musicians in the Soviet Union. Beyond this, the greatest service I can do is to tell their story.
Chapter One

A Dual Approach to the History of Jazz in the Soviet Union

A chronology of jazz-related imports, events, decrees, and governmental feuds in the Soviet Union could more simply be laid out in timeline form than in a written chapter. This would be visually clear, space efficient, and allow the reader to more quickly bypass the tedium of the high school history class “list of facts” approach. Though there admittedly may be some such dryness in the following presentation, its written inclusion is indispensable. Primarily, it serves as a reminder that this work as a whole aims to deliver the story of a musical movement. The living organism of jazz culture must necessarily be conveyed narratively. Rather than forming a foundation upon which to build further analysis, a detailed chronology works as the skeleton that runs through this body and gives shape to its meaning. This written account allows the organizational flexibility needed to begin answering two integral and elementary questions: what do we even mean by “jazz” in this context, and how did “mainstream” culture develop so as to render jazz in opposition to it?

The first of these questions is a serious issue for the study of any genre of music, and especially jazz. Though attempts at succinct and relatively fixed definitions now exist in various works, even The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians notes that “jazz…was a fluid, unstable construct.”5 To the extent that it is impossible to authoritatively define “jazz” in an invariant sense, by looking
specifically at the musical package the USSR received through time, we can begin to formulate an idea of jazz to them. Furthermore, the way the government and society subsequently treated jazz guides the logistics of the movement, tests its conviction, and illuminates the issues the counterculture targets. Both investigations begin to answer a greater question of the work: Why jazz?

To the Soviets, Jazz was dance. It was sexuality. It was black. It was Jewish. It was American. It was decadence and commercialism, a mechanism of repression, or conversely, a triumph of the oppressed Negro proletariat. But in the Soviet Union itself, it was never entirely authentic. It was over-the-top Charleston-ing learned from theater. It was rushed, forced syncopation and the saxophone. It was mostly very white, “sweet,” big-band swing. Even with the recordings that made their way across the Atlantic, the USSR was almost entirely isolated from the American spring of music.

This limited authentic interaction with jazz and the still-developing Soviet ideology resulted in confused, vacillating policy. What else could jazz be? Could it be serious, orchestral music? Or was it just for rag-tag, gig-by-gig musicians? Was it the ridding of the anti-communal conductor in service of a team oriented presentation, or was it a dangerous combination of glorified soloist and unpredictable improvisation and harmony? Indecision prolonged its repression, and formed a basis for the hazy binary on which the culture and counterculture divided.

It is the central tasks of outlining jazz influences and developments, and their place in and against the Soviet mainstream that this chronology attempts to accomplish. First, the history of visiting artists, the development of homegrown

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artists, and the availability of recordings and films will be traced in search of a clearer delineation of “jazz.” Following this, a parallel timeline will be drawn of political response to and treatment of the new music.

A Note on Sources

When beginning a study of Soviet jazz, one work is seminal—S. Fredrick Starr’s *Red and Hot: The Fate of Jazz in the Soviet Union*. This book is impeccably researched and remarkably thorough. Starr strove to illuminate a history that was often only briefly referred to elsewhere. Accordingly, the majority of literature on the topic that followed, including this thesis, relies heavily on his work, particularly in this introductory chapter. Given the informational robustness of *Red and Hot*, this particular section is especially referential to Starr’s magnum opus. However, this work will ultimately use Starr’s research as a jumping point into deeper analysis rather than as a crutch.

Defining Jazz

This question will be addressed consistently throughout this project. However, a straightforward look at jazz events in the USSR, from formational trends and imports to Brezhnev’s thaw, will create a preliminary sketch of what jazz was to people in the Soviet Union. It is worth noting that this section will focus on jazz during the periods when it was allowed to exist, while the next will more explicitly delineate the gaps in that scheme.

The rise of industry in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries marked increasing urbanization, and with it, increased borrowing of Western music as the
relevance of folk music began to decline. Early silent cinema provided the perfect arena for the proliferation of foreign pop music, reproduced acceptably to match the cosmopolitan films. Ragtime and cakewalk music quickly took hold in urban Russia, largely fueled by fascination with exotica embodied by the black American. Northern enthusiasm for these new music forms was quickly realized in the 1918 formation of the Tallinn Murphy Band, a “quasi-jazz band” that was to achieve a good deal of success playing covers of American songs in Estonia over the next decade. Russia, on the other hand, with an inconvertible currency after World War I, faced dissolution of many international links. “Jazz,” labeled as such, was not introduced until 1922, and surprisingly, it was done by a native, Valentin Parnakh. Parnakh was not a musician, but had merely learned of jazz while abroad. He campaigned for jazz on a largely ideological level, viewing it as music that made the common man an artist. He supplemented these views with an actual ensemble. Parnakh’s Jazz Band was made up of a piano, banjo, drums, xylophone, and two violins. This band was a pale and inauthentic representation of the new genre. At most, the band’s jazz-like features were limited to syncopation and new percussive sounds.

In general, the 1920s were an experimental decade for Soviet music, and a limited one for jazz. Though the Russians had been quick to import ragtime, its jazz progeny did not take hold in the new Soviet Union as feverishly as it had in Western Europe. This is mainly due to limited and incomplete exposure. The first saxophone did not even appear publicly until 1924 in the hands of Alexei Kozlov’s quintet in

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6 Terry Bright, “Pop Music in the USSR,” Media Culture and Society, 8.3 (1986), 357.
8 Ibid., 43
Petrograd. By 1931, there would still be only three known saxophone players in Moscow.\(^9\) Vsevolod Meyerhold’s theatrical works and a tour by The Chocolate Kiddies in 1926 largely epitomize the perception of jazz in this period in. Meyerhold’s production of *The Magnanimous Cuckold* marked the first staging of a full jazz orchestra. His story of his next production, *The Trust D.E.*, posed a proletariat hero against some American fat cats, characterizing the latter with decadent outfits and cabaret-style “jazz” music. Rather than villainizing them as intended, Meyerhold made jazz and blacks exciting.\(^11\) On a similar note, *The Chocolate Kiddies*, a sort of “Negro Operetta,” left a much stronger visual than musical impact and tied jazz even more solidly to both dance and the exotic. The music itself favored the more symphonic, “sweet” interpretation of jazz pioneered by Paul Whiteman, developed, ironically, so that jazz could be taken “seriously” as music.\(^12\) During this time period, the USSR witnessed what would be its first and only performances by American jazz musicians for the next forty years. Sidney Bechet and Benny Peyton and the Jazz Kings’ tour of Russia represented its closest contact with “hot jazz.” For the most part, though, the twenties jazz interpretation was focused on the foxtrot and the Charleston, alcohol and marijuana, and the sexualized exotic. Despite the appearance of some genuinely American-informed bands such as Leopold Teplitsky’s,\(^13\) Starr maintains that the decade before Stalin’s reign had little to offer but “Bad jazz, ostentatious charlestoneing, and good food.”\(^14\)

\(^9\) Ibid, 47  
\(^{10}\) Ibid., 42  
\(^{11}\) Ibid., 50  
\(^{12}\) Ibid., 56  
\(^{13}\) Teplitsky had spent time traveling in the U.S.  
\(^{14}\) Starr, 59
The sharp, contrasting periods of jazz presence and absence that would mark the next thirty years are rooted in the following decade. The 1930s were a period of intense exclusion from directly authentic jazz influence. However, its homegrown presence experienced its strongest moments, sandwiched between periods of cautious and therefore restricted existence. The middle of the decade saw an explosion of jazz popularity and performance in hotels and films. What had mainly been a phenomenon of the former bourgeoisie in the 1920s now reached the working class and achieved true popularity. Films such as Happy Guys, Circus, and Volga, Volga! launched bandleaders such as vocalist Leonid Utesov and trumpeter Yakov Skomorovsky into relative fame. Performances were consistently sold out, and dancing in hotels lasted until the wee hours of the morning. Alexander Varlamov and his band not only performed in hotels, but made records as well. Pianist Alexander “Bob” Tsfasman, who had been one of the pioneers of jazz interest in the twenties, was by far the most technically gifted of the new stars and soon acquired great wealth as the king of Soviet big-band.\textsuperscript{15}

The label of “jazz” had, to some extent, become a ubiquitous advertising gimmick as a response to growing popularity, but this did not preclude the qualitative growth of the music. Though Skomorovsky’s music had rushed tempos, stiff syncopation stemming from a certain rigidness in its swung rhythms, and disastrous solos, it was considerably “hotter” than anything heard in the twenties. Singer Vera Dneprova, though hardly able to speak English, produced renditions of the Boswell Sisters’ songs with her Ladies Jazz Orchestra that were called “pretty damn good” by

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 114-116
American diplomats. This improvement in the new generation of Soviet jazzmen was informed by an influx of European jazz ensembles. At least seven bands toured between 1934 and 1936. While many of these were not met with particular success, Swedish and Dutch bands, along with acts like Weintraub’s Syncopators and Ziegler’s Jazz Revue not only performed the “hottest” jazz yet heard in the Soviet Union, but spent time playing and working with Soviet musicians.

On the other hand, instruments and music were still difficult to acquire. Most musicians learned about jazz arrangement and harmony through transcriptions from the few recordings they managed to attain. Since the best record collections were those that Soviet elite had gathered abroad, musicians’ access was not extensive. A rare exception to the limitations of private record collections was Sergei Kolbasev, who held “soirees” in his apartment as well as in other cities, playing and discussing the latest music in his private collection. Guests would relax and listen to the latest records of Benny Goodman, Fletcher Henderson, Duke Ellington, or Benny Carter. For the most part, though, the jazz of the thirties was hindered by its isolation from the United States. The jazz was no longer bad, but it was considerably out of date.

The Second World War may have breathed new life into jazz for all of the Allied forces, but for Soviet jazzmen, it was an absolute godsend. On one hand, wartime marches, mass songs, and folk nostalgia became incredibly popular, and Red Army jazz bands were required to play their fair share of these to meet the demand. On the other hand, the bands were able to openly listen to American jazz on shortwave radios for the first time, received chord charts for popular tunes, and

\[16\] Ibid., 110
\[17\] Ibid., 122
\[18\] Ibid., 119
interacted directly with American musicians. Moreover, wartime acted as a period of education in Western culture for the Soviet peasant soldier, planting a seed for the spread of jazz outside of city centers. As US financial and technological aid became clearly vital, Red Army soldiers became increasingly curious about America.\textsuperscript{19}

Away from the frontlines but still a result of the war, Jewish-Polish refugee Eddie Rosner, a former member of Weintraub’s Syncopators, found his way to Belorussia, where he and his band immediately began booking gigs in local cafes. Rosner quickly became a star. His band is considered the first fully competent jazz ensemble the USSR had seen. His sound was rich and powerful; Rosner was dubbed “the white Louis Armstrong” by Armstrong himself.\textsuperscript{20} His pastel suits, use of colored lighting, and electronic amplification were icing on the cake. He was asked to be the director of the State Jazz Orchestra of Belorussia, and took the post along with its exorbitant salary.

After the Red Army greeted VE day with vibrant jazz performances in Krakow, Prague, and other major cities, the fresh jazz fervor developed in wartime was quickly disappointed, but did not disappear. Success in World War II had led to the rapid formation of many small groups throughout Moscow. Leonid Utesov, famous in the 1930s, began planning a permanent jazz theater. Fellow thirties “star” Alexander Tsfasman and his radio committee orchestra made weekly jazz broadcasts, and was on his way to gaining directorship of a band at the Hermitage Theater.\textsuperscript{21} All these groups still had to dilute the quantity and quality of jazz numbers, but things looked hopeful nonetheless. New postwar xenophobia and the beginning of the Cold

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 191
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid. 198
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 206
War halted such visible progress, and Utesov and Tsfasman’s plans never came to fruition. However, underground, guided by secret listening to the Voices of America shortwave broadcast, jazz enthusiasts kept up with American music, and hundreds of amateur combos popped up in the 1950s. In this manner, Greg Gaut argues Soviet musicians managed to create their own bebop-like scene even before the thaw of the late fifties. The death of Stalin and the consequent “Thaw” saw the return of previously exiled musicians, such as Oleg Lundstrem, who led a revival of big band. From 1957 on, jazz entered a period of difficult, but uninterrupted accessibility. In 1962, Benny Goodman became the first American jazz musician to tour since 1926. In Moscow and Leningrad, Benny Goodman, Zoot Sims, Mel Lewis, and others participated in all-night jam sessions with the best Soviet players. By the early 1960s, an American scholar visiting the USSR noted that the general population was familiar with various forms of American jazz, citing Gershwin specifically.

Here, expanded access to jazz and the new presence of rock ‘n roll indicate the beginning of the convergence of Soviet and American ideas of jazz, and consequently, the beginning of an era in which Soviet musicians had the knowledge and support necessary to depart from mere reproduction and purposefully innovate. The varying forms of Soviet Jazz created through ethnic fusion and the avant garde marked the emergence of jazz as a near-mainstream cultural, rather than countercultural phenomenon.

23 Ibid., 64
A Political History

The appearance of Jazz in Western Europe and then Russia coincided almost exactly with the establishment of an entirely new government structure and ideology. The radical politics that governed Bolshevik, and later Communist Party policy demanded not only that internal civic and power structures be rearranged, but that popular mentality be reshaped to accommodate these changes fruitfully. The emergence of jazz in this highly charged revolutionary sphere meant that the fledgling government had to adjust itself not only to systematic creation and maintenance of cultural norms in general, but to a powerful new cultural phenomenon. This led to wide-ranging shifts in policy concerning the music, as officials and cultural arbitrators debated the methods by which to propagate and preserve Soviet principles within the populace. Sometimes, the Party’s attitude allowed some freedom for evolutionary growth of popular interest, and settled for highlighting the Soviet aspects of what emerged. At other times, policy was so strictly repressive as to mean death, or at least disappearance, for its challengers. This inconsistency in official position on jazz allowed enough loopholes for a robust seed to be planted and occasionally turn a leaf to sunlight, but also sufficed to block “authentic” jazz culture from reaching Soviet citizens. It was enough to leave the USSR far behind on Western culture, but within that, to forge a counterculture tailored specifically to the Soviet situation, speaking more to the values of jazz, music, and freedom than mere updated popularity could have.

The last years of the Russian Empire display a forgiving, if not wholly enthusiastic view towards the precursors of jazz. The orchestra of Tsar Nicholas II’s Volhynia Guards Regiment occasionally played two-steps and cakewalks. Prince
Felix Yusupov, though harboring a reputation as the “ill-bred harbinger of new social mores,” maintained a private orchestra that housed a six-man saxophone section, constituting the largest of its time in 1916 Europe. These examples, of course, represent a small and exclusive fraction of the population. The majority of Russians at this time would not have been exposed to such music. However, the severe highbrow-lowbrow dichotomy of aristocratic and peasant taste became muddled with the emergence of an industrial middle class. This new social group generally turned away from either extreme, and found a culturally empty space ready to be filled with truly popular entertainment.

Ragtime, a precursor to jazz, provided a timely contender for this void. As the general rigidity of moral standards declined, and the new musical culture spread beyond gypsy establishments and drinking gardens, the Bolsheviks sought to control the “lascivious” music, dancing, and exposure thereof. Centrotheater began to regulate Cabaret performances through licensing control in 1919. The Artistic Control Commission followed in 1920, regulating exposure by issuing concert permits. These early forms of control were easier to implement than to enforce, but were still symbolic of an important trait of Russian cultural life—in democracies, the controversy over jazz could be vicious, but it did not become law. Here, it could, and easily did.

The 1920s continued in this vein. Policy and attitude were markedly against jazz, but their influence was weak. After the Chocolate Kiddies performance in 1926, jazz was condemned as blatantly sexual and unwholesome by the Red Press. Newly formed societies such as the Russian Association of Proletarian Musicians (RAPM)

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25 Starr, 21
and Association of Contemporary Music (ASM)\textsuperscript{27} worked to generate acceptable music and shape public opinion through published criticism, but little of it stuck, and their contentions with each other presented a less than unified ideal to hold to.\textsuperscript{28} The New Economic Policy instated in 1921, which permitted a good deal of freedom for small business capitalism, also loosened government reigns on the cultural sphere, allowing popular fascination with exotica to feed. The Party also toyed with the idea that “jazz dances” such as the foxtrot and two-step could be a good way to control the free time of laborers.\textsuperscript{29}

This loose cultural control disappeared altogether with the rise of Stalin in 1928, and the first truly serious offensive against jazz was launched. A culture of fear caused by Stalin’s tactical use of terror instilled paranoid xenophobia as a norm, causing many to turn against the Western face of jazz. Artists, musicians included, were forced to join professional organizations that monitored access to public circulation and performance and determined appropriate style and content for their work.\textsuperscript{30} The RAPM experienced its peak as the dominant censorship body and determiner of public taste.\textsuperscript{31} Beyond general regulation, jazz followers faced serious penalties for expressing their support. The Leningrad Music Hall, which had previously supported jazz performances, was closed in 1928. A student could be expelled from school for admitting he or she liked jazz. One could be sent to jail for six months for playing, or merely listening to jazz.\textsuperscript{32} Such cases were not yet

\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., 41  
\textsuperscript{27} Acronyms are taken from the Russian.  
\textsuperscript{29} Starr, 47  
\textsuperscript{30} Gaut, 62  
\textsuperscript{31} Edmunds, 73  
\textsuperscript{32} Starr, 93-94
overwhelmingly common, but dangerously foreshadowed the lowest points of Stalin’s mercurial cultural policies.

By 1932, despite the RAPM’s efforts, no “Soviet” popular musical culture had arisen. The society was disbanded, one of the first of many signs of government resignation to the power and stubbornness of popular opinion.\(^{33}\) Jazz became a symbol of relaxation after the early fulfillment of Stalin’s first five-year plan, and the label began to pop up everywhere, even when no semblance of actual jazz existed. Without an update to policy concerning the music, it was briefly allowed to thrive. Lack of official word did not, however, indicate that jazz and its surrounding cultural implications were entirely accepted. From January all the way through December of 1936, the government newspaper, *Izvestiia*, and Party newspaper, *Pravda*, participated in a heated argument concerning jazz. *Pravda*, speaking in mild support of jazz, won this battle.\(^{34}\) This would appear to be a vital moment in Soviet jazz history. Official Party acceptance and even promotion of the music could only be the gateway to its growth. Unfortunately, this did not prove true.

Though the ideological battle between newspapers left the Party in clear dominance, its victory was not without concessions to the government. Party sponsorship of jazz took the form of the State Jazz Orchestra, which, regardless of hiring extremely talented musicians, performed cold, stiff music. This weak official approval was misleading and short-lived. The repertoires of smaller ensembles were carefully restricted. With the beginning of Stalin’s Great Terror in 1937, jazz was forced to take an even lower profile. Bands continued to rehearse, but did so cautiously, fearing that a member would leave rehearsal never to be seen again.

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\(^{33}\) Edmunds, 67
Many musicians were arrested, including the leader of the Moscow Radio Jazz 
Ensemble, Georgi Landsberg, pianist David Gegner, singer Vera Dneprova, and the 
USSR’s introduction to jazz, Valentin Parnakh. Officials who were fans or collectors 
of jazz were arrested as well, including Ivan Medved, Leningrad’s chief of secret 
police. It is somewhat unclear whether they were arrested directly for playing jazz, or 
whether jazz was a common factor of people likely to be arrested. Starr claims the 
latter, arguing that the official reasons for musicians’ arrests were often ties to 
foreigners rather than anything music-specific.\textsuperscript{35}

\textit{Pravda’s,} and therefore the Party’s guarded support of jazz meant that it could 
not disappear entirely, though. In one of the larger gestures of political jazz 
advancement, the State Jazz Orchestra was asked to personally present a concert to 
Stalin on New Years’ Eve of 1938. To the orchestra’s relief, Stalin generally 
approved, but when Valentina Batysheva sang “Katiusha,” a folk song, with a hint of a 
stylistically jazzy voice, Stalin “was seen to frown and look away…The signal had 
been given.”\textsuperscript{36} Jazz was alive, but had been emasculated. Through the compromise 
that came with hesitant state sponsorship, existing jazz pleased no one. It was still 
too Western to be deemed more than mildly acceptable by officials, and too 
pathetically tame to be enjoyed by jazz fans. That jazz was approved meant that 
where it was existed, it was invariably controlled. This arguably did more to harm its 
presence than censure ever had.

For the most part, jazz’s domestic low profile was to last for the next two 
decades. Though it was used within the army as an anti-fascist aid to the war effort,
with frontline orchestras bearing heroic names such as “Red Flag Baltic Fleet Jazz Orchestra,” the music continued to bury its head at home, with the exception of a brief victorious burst following V.E. day, and a more lasting but still minimal presence in more remote areas of the Soviet Union where officials were not so strict. It was the decade following victory that provided jazz its greatest opposition, and its greatest strength.

The rapid establishment of a new militancy in all cultural life by 1946 and the proliferation of the most extreme xenophobia the Soviet Union had ever seen led to the most direct and severe attack on jazz yet. As the Cold War began to set in, it became clear that Stalin had not always seen relations with the United States as stable or lasting in the same way Soviet citizens or even Americans may have. Rather than the confusion and bitterness at the alliance’s breakdown that initially guided much of popular dislike of Americans, Stalin was motivated by a clever but all-consuming paranoia. With the “Great Patriotic War” over, Stalin reinvigorated ideas of a bipolar world split by communism and capitalism, planning the creation of a Communist Information Bureau to spread ideas of communism throughout the dichotomous world. With the appearance of jazz clubs across Europe, some even “linking with one another as a kind of federation,” jazz, it seemed, was a mechanism on the United States’ part to do the same for capitalism. The Voice of America was viewed as a mouthpiece from abroad with the Moscow office of the United States Informational Services as its agent. 37 Jazz was clearly a direct assault on the Soviet Union and the Communist Party. So, the Party “retaliated,” backed by a new legion of staunchly conservative citizens.

37 Ibid., 208-209
For the first time, musicians were required to register an oath of allegiance to the Party, as writers and architects had done years earlier. *Pravda* and *Soviet Art* led the way for new published critics. While these mild attacks carried on publicly, the arrests began quietly. This time, the clear cause of arrest was jazz, with trumped up reasoning appearing only after musicians had been sent to the gulag. Musicians were rounded up in Moscow and other cities, sent to labor camps, or at best, banished to provincial towns. Jewish musicians suffered the worst of the brunt, with the rise of nativism and, consequently, anti-Semitism. Eddie Rosner was one such victim, arrested when trying to return to Poland with his family. He was told there would be no problem if he paid a bribe, and was arrested immediately for doing so. His wife and children were taken into custody on charges of conspiracy and insulting the fatherland.\(^{38}\) High-ranking musicians, such as Alexander Tsfasman, were not sent away, but were stripped of their posts and forced to abandon musical activity. The State Jazz Orchestra was ordered not to play jazz, and had its title changed to “State Variety Orchestra.” As the final nail in its coffin, public use of the word “dzhaz” was forbidden in 1948.\(^{39}\)

A Congress of Composers was held in both 1947 and 1948 to decide the trajectory of Soviet music. Highbrow symphonic music, especially that of formalists and modernists, was denounced on claims that “to [our symphonists] the [folk] song is something plebeian.”\(^{40}\) Composers such as Kabalevsky, Khachaturian, and Prokoviev, who had been wildly praised by the Party before, were now relegated to staunch disapproval. Predictably, conversation turned to the necessity of popular

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\(^{38}\) Ibid., 214  
\(^{39}\) Ibid., 215  
\(^{40}\) Ibid., 220
music, and finally, to jazz. Rather than utilizing ideological fine points to argue about its merits or vices, Starr instead reports the “rabid desire to exterminate”41. By 1949, every saxophone player in Moscow had been told to bring his identification papers and instrument to the state Variety Music Agency. The saxophones were confiscated, and any indication of their presence in Russian ensembles removed from the records. Wah-wah mutes, plucked strings, the lowering of tones to create blue notes, and vague quality of “playing drums with too much rhythm” were banned.42 Party aspirants in the Komsomol formed brigades to check all restaurants, theaters and dance halls for appropriate musical content.

Of course, direct action was not the only facet of Soviet policy that affected jazz culture. Closed borders, banned US products, mail searches, and the jamming of radio broadcasts made contact with authentic jazz very limited, and played as large a role in Russian artists’ lag behind the US progression of jazz to bop as specific limits placed on jazz.43 However, restrictions both direct and indirect, to some extent, were diminished by location. While officials and citizens in major Russian cities largely held true to the ideological battle against jazz, the opposition was weaker the farther one traveled from Moscow. For several musicians sent to labor camps, arrest was not a death sentence, but an unexpected breath of freedom. In a Siberian gulag, Eddie Rosner was able to form a band and even write new material44. Oleg Lundstrem, a successfully established Russian musician in Shanghai, returned to his homeland after VE day upon hearing that jazz was finally welcome there. He was greeted by a swift arrest, but managed to negotiate a move to Kazan rather than a labor camp, bringing

41 Ibid., 221
43 Starr, 233
in tow several of his band members. Whereas most exiled bands played to other prisoners, Lundstrem’s ensemble had the privilege of playing in public, to high-ranking local officials, and were even given lavish housing. The firm and progressive jazz scene in the Baltics, which had been established in independence, was virtually ignored and left to grow. While BBC and Voice of America broadcasts were jammed, fans in the Caucasus and Central Asia could tune into Radio Iran. Fans in the Baltics could listen to Scandinavian stations, Radio Luxembourg, or Dutch-Indonesian services. The availability of such materials to new artists and the continued development of established musicians like Lundstrem played a great role in jazz’s quick resurgence in the late fifties.\textsuperscript{45}

The postwar era is also noteworthy outside of strictly political influence. It is not necessarily accurate to speak of a jazz counterculture before this time period, as “culture” itself was either lacking, or at least not clearly diametrically opposed to the music and its surrounding ethos. After World War II, specific ideas of conduct, particularly for youth, appeared more organically than was seen before. Though supported by the Party, the “legion of Mrs. Grundy’s” that had been born and raised completely under Soviet ideology emerged brandishing whips against jazz did so without external motivation. These figures prominently held concert organizations and publishing houses accountable for the “upbringing of the populace.”\textsuperscript{46} The deteriorating ethic of youth was desperately combated by the Komsomol congress in 1949, proposing work quotas and other weak means of reeling in straying compatriots. With youth as the most heated subject of societal reform, it is no

\textsuperscript{44}Ian Carr, Digby Fairweather, and Brian Priestley, \textit{The Rough Guide to Jazz}, 3\textsuperscript{rd} ed. (London: Rough Guides, Ltd, 2004), 679.
\textsuperscript{45}Starr, 228
\textsuperscript{46}Starr, 221
surprise that the period’s most decisive counterculture was centered on youth. These youths, known as stiliagi, united around “Western” dress, dance styles, and language, with jazz as their beacon. At minimum, stiliagi were publicly spurned. Not infrequently, though, they were arrested and charged with parasitism, or rounded up to have their hair shaven and clothing cut up by government, or even Komsomol officials. Though far from the most talented, authentic jazzmen, the use of jazz as a cultural emblem provides a valuable insight into what jazz meant to Soviet devotees. The group also represents the culmination of cultural tension surrounding jazz before the onset of its greater permanent acceptance. For these reasons, stiliagi will be the subject of the final piece of analysis in this work.

Stalin’s death in 1953 saw the return of many musicians to Moscow, and an immediate outpouring of defense for the artistic features earlier condemned in jazz. Such criticism of Stalinist policy went unheard, as Stalin’s greatest supporters were still in office. However, confirming Party fears, the United States began to use jazz as a decidedly political weapon. American diplomats had witnessed the phenomenon of stiliagi and recognized within it the potential for influence that such popular broadcasts such as Leonard Feather’s “Jazz Club USA” on Voice of America had. The political uncertainty caused by Stalin’s death provided the perfect opportunity on which to capitalize. In 1955, per suggestion of ambassador Charles E. Bohlen, “Music USA” was launched, with amateur jazz fan Willis Conover as its voice. The program was tailored to Soviet youth, presented in slow English to help those who were learning. “Music USA” was infectiously popular.47 Through the program’s exposure, and the gradual loosening of Stalinist regimentation, pseudo-jazz combos

47 Ibid., 243
began to pop up all over the Soviet Union, especially in universities. Perhaps in final realization that they were powerless to undo the cultural infiltration of jazz, anti-jazz persecution was relaxed. The Kremlin lifted its official ban at the end of 1955. Yet, even with a start to abatement of official anti-jazz sentiments, jazz culture was a predominantly local experience for its participants. This changed in 1957, when Moscow played host to the sixth International Youth Festival.

Founded in 1945 to fight fascism, the World Federation of Democratic Youth held an international festival every two years to promote “peace and friendship.” The 1957 festival had the Soviet Union scrambling to put forth its best face in an attempt to show the participating 131 countries and 34,000 participants that it was a model society. The best musicians (including jazz players) were recruited to contend in the festival’s music competitions. *Stiliagi* were to be held at bay. “If they [the festival guests] were to be surrounded by thieves and *stiliagi*, then they would leave with a bad image of our country,” said a top organizer. Officially, the International Youth Festival was hailed as a success.

In truth, the festival was a success of sorts, but from an entirely opposite standpoint. What began as the ideal vehicle for somewhat underhanded international Soviet propaganda instead opened the USSR to mass permeation of Western culture. The Komsomol claimed that “the majority of Soviet youth quickly figured out the reactionary essence of bourgeois culture and art,” and that the festival merely “helped our youth better appreciate the beauty and national character of Soviet art.”

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Observations of the actual event would suggest otherwise. Newspapers reported crowds of *stiliagi* breaking through police cordons and crashing the gates of the jazz competition. Visitors also brought with them Western products, thoroughly replenishing the black market. Leading up to the festival, youth were told “to embrace foreign guests with love.” Vladislav Martinovich Zubok observed, “In a word, the Soviet regime brought foreign youth to Ivan and Masha with instructions for them to fall in love.” This was quite literally evidenced by widespread, and even relatively public, sexual encounters with foreigners. On a less explicit level, when the festival and its guests departed, they left behind an increased passion for Western culture, and a national, even global, jazz network.

The Moscow International Youth Festival marked a clear-cut change to the trajectory of Soviet Jazz. Jazz cafes for youth became legal and accepted. Though raids and baseless arrests continued through the 1960’s, the government did not issue any more policy specifically concerning jazz. Though the KGB and Komsomol continued to complain about the music, they also began an effort to understand it. In 1962, the state record monopoly, Melodiya, issued its first jazz records. Jazz began to be played on the radio, and criticism even reached greater levels of sophistication. A decade later, jazz made its way into the third edition of the authoritative and rigorously ideological *Great Soviet Encyclopedia*. The entry viewed jazz as a struggle between the commercial and the artistic, and in doing so, recognized its potential. In 1983, the film *Jazzmen* was released, mocking the restrictive policies of the early thirties. By the 1980s, the powers that be had largely

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51 Ibid., 103-106
53 Gaut, 64
let go of their antagonism towards jazz, and ironically, encouraged jazz festivals in
the Czech Republic, Estonia, and Russia to quell the rise of the newest cultural
threat—rock ‘n roll.

Conclusion: Beyond Starr

Starr’s factual research on the history of Soviet Jazz is clearly unparalleled,
and it is impossible not to rely on his work to some degree. While I would be hard
pressed to say Red and Hot is flawed, it is by no means complete. As a learned jazz
musician, Starr to some extent takes for granted the power and effect of jazz. While
he is careful to address the Party’s and its supporters’ words on the influence of the
music, he hardly questions it himself. My work aims to pose questions on this matter
at a deeper level—why jazz, or even a musical form in general, is able to pose a
political threat, and why it serves as the formational bond of group identity and
experience.

Furthermore, Starr’s writing seems occasionally hindered by the momentum
of chronology. Though full of anecdotes, “Red and Hot” largely fails to illustrate and
probe the depth and humanity of this repressed culture. Starr tells a story often laced
by humor and shock, but the tragedy and bravery displayed by Soviet jazzmen, and
the dark societal conditions that defined their existence, are often diluted by facts and
figures—told, but not felt.

There seems to be little information available about Soviet jazz culture that
Starr did not find. I can certainly not promise to say more than he did. I will,
however, attempt to digest the existing data first from a more theoretical standpoint,
and then from a more focused, analytical, and hopefully more sensitive perspective.
Now that the accessible music and reactionary policy have been outlined, the next
step is an investigation of the Party’s specific ideological fears, an examination of their potential theoretical bases, and an exploration of the very real unvoiced threats posed by jazz evident in the Party’s struggle to quell its spread and produce popular music of their own.
Chapter Two

Why Jazz? Evaluating the Threat of Music

In Plato’s *The Republic*, Socrates insists that the formation of a just society relies on proper education. Gymnastics instructs the body, while music shapes the soul. “Rhythm and harmony,” he declares, “find their way into the inward places of the soul, on which they mightily fasten.” To ensure that this education proceeds properly, censorship must be imposed. Socrates outlines complex rules for music, limiting appropriate harmonic modes to the few that do not inspire sadness, drunkenness, or indolence. Rhythm should be simple so as to prevent the instigation of fury, meanness, and wildness of passion. The use of the flute is deemed only appropriate for shepherds. Once suitable restrictions are found, they must be retained. After all, "any musical innovation is full of danger to the whole state and ought to be prohibited."

Music, in substance (i.e. matter, elemental form, not including purpose), is a collection of sound waves, vibrations transmitted from their source through some medium, perceived by our ears, and processed by our brains. Yet music, as we have seen, is also a power feared and restricted by governments, and a driving force for cultural resistance. Socrates’ guidelines revolved around the belief that, "When modes of music change, the fundamental laws of the state always change with them." Centuries later, music’s power to inspire personal and political change is still

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55 Ibid., 93
56 Ibid.
recognized, and still not thoroughly understood. The Navajo thought that the
“danger” of music lay in its supernatural powers, believing it to affect the forces
guiding the universe. Others attribute its great effect to sociology or neurology.
The consensus remains that somehow, within the temporal, harmonic, and timbral
choices made in the purposeful arrangement of sound, the human mind perceives
meaning, and often acts upon it.

In this section, I will examine some of the proposed theoretical reasoning
behind the influence of music on community and identity formation, and then apply it
to the specific case of jazz as related to articulated Soviet critiques throughout history.
First, it is necessary to realize that, though perceptively aural, music is essentially a
subjective construct that cannot stand outside the consciousness that defines it. As
such, the very nature of music is born out of mentalities and allows for no truly
objective reality. Music does not subsist through individual consciousness, however.
It relies on the tri-partite social scheme defined by composer, interpreter/performer,
and audience, making it not just individual, but necessarily social in conception.

Through a combination of the individual experience and music’s interpersonal
foundation, commonality is found and community standards are formed. The natural,
unintentional appearance of such standards illustrates the difficulty found in
deliberately communicating certain ideals—perception of such ideals requires a
shared experience of their themes. Meaning in music is rarely entirely crafted, but
instead, is revealed. Music is also overwhelmingly performance-based, even beyond
the explicit presentation of a musical product to an audience. Kinesics and other

58 Fabio Dasilva, Anthony J. Blasi, and David Dees, *The Sociology of Music* (City: Publisher, 1984), #.
codes of behavior are displayed in both musical presentation and accompanying lifestyle, naturally tying music to such cultural elements as dance and fashion.\textsuperscript{59}

Several of these factors played into the explicit claims made by Soviet authorities about music, from their attempts to create an appropriate Soviet musical style to their mixed praise and condemnation of jazz. Determining the root and validity of their concerns requires that we analyze the nature of jazz communities and musical conventions, how jazz music was learned and its disciples enculturated. Furthermore, we must place this in contrast to the goals and failures of Soviet-created music and culture. The discoveries and claims made here will extend beyond Soviet-expressed concerns to my own interpretations of jazz society and its conflicts with Soviet ideology.

\textbf{Musical Power: Community and Identity formation}

\textit{Social reality is embodied in individuals’ activities, musical and otherwise; and these activities constitute social reality.}

\textit{-The Sociology of Music, p. 1}

When speaking of the power of music, one often thinks of its relatively transient influence on the soul, or more simply put, its power to move and inspire. Beyond deep emotional \textit{listening} experience, this impact is related to the idea that \textit{creating} music is a form of self-expression. Although music undoubtedly plays on our heartstrings, the neurological and psychological factors involved in the momentary emotional experience of music is not the main type of “power” I wish to examine. Rather, I am interested in how these responses change \textit{behavior} on an

\textsuperscript{59}Marcia Herndon and Norma McLeod, \textit{Music as Culture} (City: Norwood Editions, 1979), #.
individual and eventually group level. The reasons a song may make a listener wish to stare forlornly out of a rain-spattered window are fascinating and mysterious. It is equally intriguing that the artist perhaps chose a certain tempo and melody, believing they would express his or her own experience of melancholy. Infinitely more peculiar, though, is the successful communication of these ideas and effective transference of mood from one individual to another. This exchange is the building block of music’s sociopolitical effectiveness.

The presence of musical representation in social upheaval, especially in the twentieth century, is significant. In more recent years, it is easy to overstate a connection to explicit cues, such as politically motivated lyrics and concert speeches. Literal expressions have little impact if they are not “accordant” with the music that backs them. Often, Jazz had no lyrics at all.

Music’s role in social movements has its root in the basic experience of writing, playing, and listening. This begins on an individual level of perception and learning, then extends to the formation of musical communities and norms. The musical experience then returns to the individual, in his or her performance of community standards. This process is somewhat cyclical and naturally expansive. The more individuals whose activities constitute a particular social reality, the stronger the influence of that reality is embodied in their actions.

To the fresh ears of a newborn, aural stimuli are initially overwhelming and indistinguishable—pure noise. Gradually, the brain separates certain stimuli, categorizing them by source, perhaps labeling them as speech or expression, and attaching them to meaning. Speech and expression are unique in that they are produced by other cognitive beings, and express variable and experiential
information. If we categorize sound by intentionality, music clearly falls in the realm of expression. Here sound is created purposefully, if not to convey conscious meaning, at least to present a certain formulated aesthetic morsel for listening. Even the latter assumes some level of mutual perception. This aesthetic perception generally relies on the already cultural categorical perception of pitch. In fact, although unfamiliar pitch systems can generally be learned, Marcia Herndon and Norma McLeod found that pitch information can be so firmly stored that “if… [foreign] pitches [one is trying to learn] are so different that accommodation is impossible, the listener may suffer some form of physiological discomfort. Migraine headache, diarrhea, stomach cramps, double vision or extreme muscle tension is common.”

This largely unconscious classification of sound is the first step in individual musical learning. Next, learning to play music follows many methods that are revelatory about individual interaction with music and its extramusical connections. While many musicians are taught by example and imitation, a certain element of almost all musical education relies on metaphor. “Certain movements which are necessary to the creation of the proper sound seemingly cannot be taught directly.” Teachers ask students to draw upon the imagination, for instance, “to conceive of the sound of his voice as a fountain, water flowing out of the hole…[or] to imagine that he is riding a motorcycle instead of playing a cello.” The effectiveness of such learning methods illustrates the mind’s willingness to connect sound and self to external, nonmusical objects. Instruments, likewise, are often personified, endowed

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60 Herndon and McLeod, 5.
61 Ibid., 58.
62 Ibid.
with qualities such as moodiness, impertinence, or sweetness. The question then
stands, whether in being able to make the connection between cello technique and
riding a motorcycle, playing the cello this way could impart the experiential and
attitudinal effects of riding a motorcycle.

The jump from individual perception to community formation lies in the same
sort of thinking as metaphorical learning. A student cannot conceive of sound as a
fountain if he has never witnessed a fountain. Plato expressed this by saying “we
recognize the reflection of letters in the water…only when we know the letters
themselves.”63 When musical identity remains isolated along personal experiential
lines, it fits into a continuum of overall identity and has no considerable effect.
However, when one takes up a musical role that is more social, music become
increasingly and inexorably tied to identity, as identity is tied to where (and with
whom) one leaves one’s mark.64

The social roles of music are mostly encompassed by the composer-
interpreter-audience relationship outlined at the beginning of the chapter. For any
meaningful bond to be established requires a level of common perception, and
therefore common experience. The commonality needed has a degree of depth and
specialization beyond typical communication.

Musical conduct is characterized by a greater disjuncture between intention
and result than other forms of conscious activity—e.g. language. In the case
of language, each symbol calls to mind a universal category or relationship, a
general meaning which is comprehended by any number of persons…Music
does not deal in such universals.65

63 Plato, 74
64 Dasilva, Blasi, and Dees, 33
65 Ibid., 7-8
This means that communal understandings of music and the bonds consequently formed are founded on more particular experience and mentality. Theodor Adorno hypothesized that different categories of people emerge in society because “the people in question experienced different life situations [and] organized routines of conduct which placed them in typically recognized categories. Musical tastes and practices fit in with the particular style of people’s lives.”

This specialization leads in two directions. On one hand, when music is employed in theatrical settings, it often must be more obviously “emotive,” drawing on conventions shared in many “musical languages.” On the other hand, extremely innovative music can embrace its limited “lexicon” to “invoke a stance of retreat from the social world, withdrawal, a counterculture.” These two situations are not mutually exclusive, but often represent two stages of musical development. Theatrical lack of subtlety requires sampling from already decently established musical languages. The exclusivity of innovation can often be associated with a musical community’s youth. Eventually, “when music or any other cultural form becomes a point of collective identity, an inherent conservatism is introduced into it. The composer is no longer free to use the total universe of sound combinations or to avoid clichés. Thus the traditionalism of patriotic music and innovativeness of art music may be seen as dialectically related aspects of the same process.” Such standardization allows the musical language to be drawn upon by those not explicitly in its community.

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66 Ibid., 67
67 Ibid., 37
68 Ibid., 95
Once these norms are introduced, the focus again returns to the individual with his new social reality. Though initiated into a certain musical community through shared personal perception, the individual still submits to the authority of form.\(^6^9\) He is enculturated, learning what he needs to know to “survive” within the group, and accepts these characteristics as true to himself.\(^7^0\) He now enters the world of role-playing, performing not only his music, but also the passions it represents.

Any type of culture boasts a level of “acting the part.” Music inevitably has a stronger connection to the performance of role, as music itself is a performed art. Live musical performance, by necessity is visual. The noticeable movements of trombonists, pianists, and drummers, for instance, are demands of playing their instruments, not style. However, even these movements become stylized as a consequence of group identity. Marcia Herndon notes:

> Music is not only highly patterned, but also staged. This implies that the pattern called music coincides with certain other aspects of behavior which, themselves have become patterned as a result. In some cases, this is called dance; in others, it is called costuming…The fact remains that whenever music occurs, some kinds of behavioral alterations…occur with it.\(^7^1\)

Onstage performances, rather than encompassing the only stylized and patterned behavior, are “isolatable segments” used to exhibit “encapsulations of [a musical] culture.” Language, attitude, dress, and movement of artists, though perhaps exaggerated in a show, are not entirely separable from their behavioral reality.

The final individualization of the social musical experience returns to the relationship between composer, interpreter, and listener. Regardless of shared

\(^6^9\) Dasilva, Blasi, and Dees, 10  
\(^7^0\) Herndon and McLeod, 58  
\(^7^1\) Ibid., 16
experiences or understandings, the intention of a composer cannot be perfectly conveyed. In performance, choices are necessarily made that reflect the will and consciousness of the performing artist. This can be accomplished through the interpretation of written music, or through the imitation of observed and dictated music. The latter situation is often the way that popular music is learned. Though these situations represent a form of “miscommunication,” such imperfection ensures that both parties contribute to the musical tradition, and highlight the way in which authentic music is necessarily created through the choices of participants. Fabio Dasilva, in describing the composition process and the necessity of viewing one’s potential product from the perspective of others such as the interpreter and audience, remarks, “It is the genius of humans that they are social even when they are alone.” Social unity and individual pluralism require each other in music.

While the overall development and execution of individual and group musical cultural identity initially seem somewhat abstract, their concrete relevance in relation to jazz gradually becomes apparent in analysis of the articulated and unarticulated concerns of Soviet authorities.

**Evaluating Articulated Concerns**

Let us return to the conditions of jazz in the Soviet Union. When reading the ideas about music and its control proposed in *The Republic*, it seems almost as if the work were written specifically about the Soviet government’s treatment of jazz and other “deviant” musical forms. In an eerie fulfillment of Plato’s work, the era following WWI saw great attempts at shaping mass attitudes from above. The

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72 Dasilva, Blasi, and Dees, 4
Bolsheviks, and eventually the Soviets were particularly resolute in their seventy-year-long ambitions to condition the populace through the instilling and control of an ideal popular culture. The birth of the USSR coincided with a great complication to these goals, though. The emergence of jazz, a truly popular fruit of America’s diversity and lack of broadly accepted folk culture or highbrow tradition, represented the complete opposite of top-down culture. While qualities of the music were in clear opposition to Soviet principles, its force of popular appeal was enticing when nothing the Party’s organs created succeeded.

From the introduction of music labeled as jazz in the 1920s to the decade following its complete interdiction in 1948, the dialogue on jazz revolved around two main issues: sexuality and vulgarity, and bourgeois implications. The first was primarily tied to the dancing associated with jazz music, though also often cited frenzied tempo and the music’s power of intoxication. The second dealt with the complexity of jazz’s racial history, commercialism, the decadence embodied both in musical quality and lifestyle, and finally, its obvious connection with the capitalist United States.

*The 1920s: Sexuality, Slavery, and Commercialism*

A steady trickle of mild ideological disapproval persisted throughout the twenties, laying a foundation for the outright attacks jazz faced with the end of the New Economic Policy and Stalin’s rise to power at the end of the decade. Criticism at this time was particularly centered on sexuality and dance for several reasons. First, when Valery Parnakh brought jazz to Russia, he did so with the view of it as a
proletarian dance music that allowed the common man to be an artist, with the potential to push decadent ballet from the stage. This idea had some sway, and some believed that the two-step and foxtrot could be a good way of organizing the free time of laborers.73

However, jazz’s history had more influence on its perception than Parnakh’s ideological connection. Jazz was a descendant of ragtime, which, in Russia, had largely found its home in gypsy drinking gardens. This connection to questionable social mores was aided by the fact that American authorities on jazz had themselves qualified the music and its surrounding culture as intoxicating and sexual, albeit without vilification. F. Scott Fitzgerald, who coined the term “jazz age,” famously declared, “the word jazz, in its progress toward respectability, has meant first sex, then dancing, then music. It is associated with a state of nervous stimulation, not unlike that of big cities behind the lines of war.”74 A newspaper from jazz’s birthplace, the New Orleans Times-Picayune, observed, “To uncertain natures, wild sound and meaningless noise have an exciting, almost an intoxicating effect, like crude colors and strong perfume, the sight of flesh or the sadistic pleasure in blood.”75 If the American contemporaries of jazz, who had witnessed its development directly, associated it with sexuality and other primitive urges, who could deny the connection?

Moral degeneration certainly stood as its own concern, but was also perceived as a consequence of bourgeois life. “Cause” and “effect” were compounded with the performance of “The Chocolate Kiddies” in 1926. The Red Press responded in fury

73 Starr, 47
75 Starr, 11
at its blatant sexuality, decrying jazz as unwholesome. Bandleader Sam Wooding did not help matters by claiming that jazz was a way to get by until he could “attain loftier aims.” Though the performance sparked fervent interest in jazz, its displayed sexuality and confirmed commerciality provided fuel for the Party’s growing tension with the music.

In 1928, revolutionary writer Maksim Gorky published an article in Pravda titled “On the Music of the Gross.” Though by no means an indefatigable supporter of Party ideals and was a victim of censorship himself currently living in Italy, Gorky’s stimulating words soon became a sort of anti-jazz Bible. He portrays jazz as the lascivious, animalistic, misogynistic, murderer of culture and destroyer of noble love. He places particular emphasis on the “swinging fleshy hips, thousand shuffling and stomping fleshy legs” of the “cynical” Charleston and Foxtrot. The Negro musicians, he supposes, “[are] probably laughing, seeing how their white overlords are evolving into primitives, from which the American Negros have progressed and progress yet further.” The prolific presence of “fat” presents an image of excess and decadence in American life. Gorky’s skillful use of language has a strong impact. If listening to jazz does not actually cause one to “involuntarily imagine that it is played by an orchestra of sexually-driven madmen, conducted by some sort of man-stallion, brandishing an enormous phallus,” reading Gorky’s article will. Yet however effectively written, the article in full reads like the bitter tirade of an old man whose quiet, contemplative night has been interrupted by the loud music of neighbors.

76 Ibid., 56
77 O muzyke tolstykh- literally translates to “On the music of the fat”
Gorky’s article set the stage for the Russian Association of Proletarian Musician’s (RAPM) definitive 1929 manifesto on the nature of music. The RAPM departed somewhat from moral criticism, instead furthering Gorky’s claims about jazz as stuck in a realm of being from which the “American Negro” had long progressed. In the March 1930 issue of their publication, *Za proletarskuyu muzyku* (For Proletarian Music), member Lev Lebedinskii explained,

American dance music comes to us from a country where slavery was, and still is, widely practiced, with all the spiritual degradation that goes with it [. . .] But America also has slavery among the whites. A vast mass of unemployed workers is concentrated in America's industrial cities…They have ceased to fight capitalism, and resigned themselves to their subhuman existence…where vice, narcotic drugs, and low gambling hold sway. Here, among these slaves of America, was born the new American dance music. It expresses the most loathsome characteristics of slavery, the mockery at one's own subhuman standard of living, at one's own degradation. American dance music is cultivated in the interests of capitalism. Its aim is to render the workers weak and submissive, to divert them from the task of rising and seizing the factories. The will of the masses to revolt is deflected by means of American dance music.80

The author claims that this capitalist control was extended to the foxtrot as well, claiming that it “subordinates the human body, the human will and thought to a mechanical movement.”81 The apparent contradiction between capitalist subordination of will and complete lack of self control in submission to base instincts was somewhat resolved by Commissar of Public Enlightenment Anatoly

79 Ibid.
81 Ibid.
Lunacharsky, who said that the foxtrot was “nothing less than the extreme mechanization of rhythm…pounding your will into a cutlet” until you submit to blatant eroticism. Jazz dances were a “narcotic to true human feelings.”

Assessing the validity of these claims is complicated. There is no question that dancing has erotic potential. The means by which this potential is gauged are less clear-cut. Perception of overt sexuality is often associated with ideas of primitiveness, whether the “savage” influence has sexual content or not. In the case of vernacular jazz dancing, this refers to the influence of “uncivilized” African tradition. While some African dances were used explicitly in the selection of mates, there is no indication that such dances influenced the Charleston, the Foxtrot, or any number of jazz dances. Beyond the feeble perception of savagery, the role of certain body parts, especially the hips, give credit to jazz dancing’s sexual potential. Dancing and sexuality share the same instrument—the body. Emphasis in dancing on the more explicitly sexually instrumental pelvic region shortens that connection. Partner dancing employs gender-specific roles and spotlights the male and female body. At most, it has been suggested that dancing can offer a level of symbolic sexual instruction and mating strategy. Perhaps more credibly, it incites sexual fantasy. This said, Soviet fears may have been warranted. However, each of these points is applicable in some degree to every kind of dance; the waltz, too, was once scandalous.

What these arguments fail to consider is the role jazz dancing plays in the jazz community. Dance falls into the musical roles of both interpreter and audience. Though Dasilva claims that dance is readily separable from musical social reality,
Duke Ellington disagreed: “Dancing is very important to people who play music with a beat. I think that people who don’t dance, or who never did dance, don’t really understand the beat….I know musicians who don’t and never did dance, and they have difficulty communicating.”\(^8^4\) In this sense, dance constitutes another method of learning music. Furthermore, in the same way that “applauding vigorously after the first movement of a string quartet [is] greeted by icy stares from all around the audience,”\(^8^5\) within the jazz social framework, dance is the “most correct” audience response. The partnership between dance and jazz music is founded on “similar aesthetic points of view and…a shared ‘idiomatic orientation.’”\(^8^6\) In the Soviet Union, personal experience would likely contribute to the greater appeal of jazz dance. Where much of life was controlled through collective planning, these dances emphasized “freewheeling improvisation and innovation…distinctive dynamism,…and delight in the surprised value of new, not completely anticipated discovery.”\(^8^7\) Where progress was the word of the times, the “relaxed and ebullient style of execution gives the impression, like the music, of the beat moving ‘inexorably ahead.’”\(^8^8\) Soviet concerns were somewhat justified, but by demonizing jazz’s origins rather than considering its current social context, such concerns largely missed the point.

If any true complaint could be made about jazz dancing for Soviet purposes, it is of its visual impact. The Bolsheviks shunned abstract art because they needed to

\(^8^5\) Dasilva, Blasi, and Dees, 35-36
\(^8^6\) Malone, 98
\(^8^7\) Ibid.
\(^8^8\) Ibid., 101
impose order, display that they could rebuild a shattered country. The evolution of popular jazz dances follows a decomposition of form that could have been similarly detrimental to the idea of “order.” From the waltz, to the foxtrot, to the Charleston, the strong partner frame relaxes, and then disappears, as does all readily apparent structure. Though the Charleston had specific steps, next to a waltz, it looked like the gallivanting of apes. If the party wanted to pick an ideological battle with the Charleston and other jazz dances, they could have made a strong case for its relation to structure and perceived order. The Charleston faced surprisingly less criticism for its display of chaos then for its debatable sexuality.

The argument of commercialism is similarly rooted in history and origin rather than actual social reality. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, employment for black Americans was limited, and entertainment became one of few feasible means of subsistence. The rise of Tin Pan Alley and the recording industry in general, as well as the theatrical connections of vaudeville, minstrelsy, and eventually jazz to the spectacular and commercially booming Broadway made popular music, including jazz, appear more “commercial” than any music that had come before it.

The circumstances of jazz’s market success, like the erotic potential of its associated dances, do not necessarily represent the mentality of its social reality, and are especially trivial in the Soviet situation. With improvisation and innovation at the heart of jazz, “job success was inversely related to artistic orientation; the better the job, the more commercial the setting. Thus, the artistic-minded performer would

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89 Starr, 7
have to forego the better jobs in order to concentrate on jazz playing.”

The most authentic jazz was produced where it could be least restrained. If public at all, this took place in obscure and dingy clubs. More socially relevant was the jam session, unpaid and after hours. The true norms of jazz were shaped and reinforced here, rather than onstage. 

In reality, the strict ideological limitations placed on music by the RAPM and other Party organs and later, the Union of Soviet Composers’ financial support of musicians who could successfully navigate these restrictions in a way commercialized the “official” music of the Party. Those who could figure out the formula of appropriate music were rewarded for it and consequently continued to produce music as a means of personal material wellbeing rather than for artistic or ideological purposes. “Serious composers were not averse to switching to ‘revolutionary thematics’ as a means for survival,” and “mediocre music was encouraged as long as it extolled the revolution.”

Artistic and expressive integrity were sacrificed for approval and subsistence, and in some cases, housing benefits and vacation opportunities.

Early arguments against jazz, focusing on sexuality and commerciality, have some validity in origin and potential. However, their determined concentration on origin rather than the social realities determined by the standards of jazz communities, Soviet context and its possible consequential mentality, display more of a will to vociferously establish firm ideological convictions than to actually prevent their breach.

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90 Dasilva, Blasi, and Dees, 50.
91 Ibid., 50
92 Kaemmer, 68.
The relaxation that accompanied the early completion of the first Five-Year Plan coincided with the rise to power of the Nazis in 1933. The Nazis’ official position against jazz led the Party to search for a way to support the musical form in order to remain thoroughly opposed to fascist ideals, conveniently allowing the resurgent popularity of jazz to fill the void left by the Soviets’ failure to establish truly popular entertainment. The primary task at hand was to make jazz proletarian. This was accomplished by forcibly distinguishing truly Negro, “hot” jazz from the increasingly white, “sweet” jazz of saloons and Tin Pan Alley, “devised by capitalist exploiters to lull the masses to sleep and stifle their growing class consciousness.”

Leningrad critic Mikhail Druskin supported the proletarian foundation of hot jazz by stating, “The jazz band has ethnographic roots among those peoples whose music most closely approaches the rhythm of labor.”

As Starr notes, this distinction is problematic. Disdain for the jazz of Tin Pan Alley fits the fear of behavior modification that would be elicited by the extreme performance roles of theatricality. However, “hot” jazz typically accompanied the sort of dancing that was still rejected. “Sweet” jazz like that of Paul Whiteman, though undeniably working harder for “acceptance” and wider commercial success, also better suited Soviet Puritan values.

93 Starr, 97
94 Ibid., 96
95 Ibid., 98.
Whether or not jazz is actually proletarian is a different question. The rhythm and metallic timbre of jazz, though generally decried as cacophonous or hysterical, was occasionally recognized as mirroring the noises of proletarian industry and railways. Jazz’s relation to authority is one of the more complex of its “political” determinations. Several types of jazz revolve around a repeated chord pattern and a singular melody that is passed between different instruments and elaborated upon through improvisation. This limits the role of the composer. On one hand, this process is defined by unpredictability and individual spotlighting. On the other hand, this melody transference can be viewed as collaborative, where the ensemble works together, guided by a central idea rather than the more or less inflexible will of a single authority. Even with the presence of constant solos, the sound of the ensemble is always greater than the sum of its parts. In the same vein, jazz could be seen as emancipation from the imposed authority of a conductor, the “overthrow of a symphonic boss who wields the baton without doing any actual playing himself.”\(^96\) The Soviet response to such theoretical collectivity mirrors its actual treatment of communality. Conductors were largely reinstated in “official” Soviet jazz bands when it was decided that “better results” could be achieved under conductors; ideals of equality in socialism were replaced by the belief that “unconditional obedience…identification with and dependence upon the leader is of paramount importance.”\(^97\)

One peculiar argument about jazz particularly highlighted the departure from whatever level of legitimate ethical motivation had existed in the Revolution to the

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\(^96\) Slonimsky, 2.

use of culture as a tool for leveraging authority. The newspaper battle between *Pravda* and *Izvestia* in 1936 resulted in Party and tentative Central Committee support, if not sponsorship, of jazz. Surprisingly, this debate had little to do with ideology. The “battle” began when musicians Berlin and Broun\(^98\) sent a letter to *Izvestia*, protesting that jazz, though it certainly had a right to exist, was taking up valuable space in good venues that could otherwise be occupied by legitimate artists due to the permission of “semi-literate administrators.” This mild complaint, which targeted nothing specific in the character of jazz other than its admitted levity, would likely have gone unnoticed had it not been for the attack on party administrators. This forced Party official Boris Shumiatsky to defend the popularity of jazz, and label its critics “petty bourgeois moralists.”

*Izvestia* responded by criticizing the infiltration of more state institutions by jazz. This expanded attack on the Party drew in the president of the Committee on Art Affairs, Platon Kerzhentsev. Kerzhentsev personally disliked popular music and had even played a significant role in closing popular jazz theaters, but was forced by the nature of his position to defend jazz. He argued that jazz was the working man’s music, and that though Americans may play a decadent form, this did not prevent Soviet musicians from “bringing out the full proletarian potential of the music.” He did not deny vulgarity in some jazz, but reminded readers that vulgarity could be found in classical music as well. It is ironic that what was a forced argument also happens to be one of the most perceptive. It is one of the few official Soviet responses that acknowledged the potential of jazz to be separated from its history and

\(^{98}\) No first names were provided.
take on different meaning when adopted by those for whom its appeal is based on
different life experience.

The debate devolved into increasingly ad hominem attacks until the editor of
Pravda became personally involved, stating that Izvestiia had made “clearly and
coarsely erroneous points” and was “cultivating bad morals.” If direct criticism of
Party actions had not been dangerous enough, Izvestiia did not confess error in the
face of Pravda’s reproach, but continued its crusade. Eventually, Pravda terminated
the argument by declaring Izvestiia’s positions as “against the line of the Party…in its
petty bourgeois fanaticism.” This sealed the fate of Izvestiia’s editorial staff, who
were purged weeks later. It also inadvertently extended approval of jazz. 99

Though jazz had briefly defied its bourgeois connotations, it could not escape
the moral question for long. The gradual emergence of a new moralism starting in
1935 100, including the reinstatement of the traditional family as the primary unit of
society and the abolishment of legal abortions, would once again bring jazz under fire
for its supposed moral degeneration. This attitude primed it for the focused
behavioral attacks it would face after World War II.

The Post-War Era: New Moralism and Political Infiltration

During the Second World War, Soviet bands proudly wore the label of jazz
abroad as an anti-Fascist statement. Soldiers interacted with American musicians,
and brought films and records home with them in victory. Upon V.E. day, it looked
as if jazz might be allowed to finally thrive unhindered. However, after World War

99 Starr, 163-169
II, the xenophobic aspect of jazz aversion reached its peak. Augmented moral concerns about the Western music’s ability to inspire “anti-soviet behavior...among youth” supplemented this fear. The appearance of jazz clubs across Europe “linking with one another as a kind of federation” spawned concern that through the Marshall Plan, the United States had launched an imperialistic attempt to politically and culturally absorb new territories. The USSR was particularly sensitive to such an idea in light of the need for political protection of its own recently acquired territories. This worry inspired an offensive against jazz led by Party secretary and cultural boss, Andrei Zhdanov. Proletarian traits were disregarded, aided by a timely coincidental article in the Journal of Soviet Music written by Paul Robeson, in which he claims that jazz “prostituted and ruthlessly perverted the genuine expression of folk life.” Viennese musicologist Karl Werner furthered support for Zhdanov’s cause, saying, “The musical language of American folk music and jazz not only are different, but they are opposed to each other in principle.” If presented with a defense of hot or sweet jazz categories, one could cite a Komsomol’skaya Pravda music critic’s assertion that “one cannot speak of styles in jazz...its ideational and artistic possibilities are too poor for that.”

With reinforced Platonic vigor, authorities maintained that music was key in the upbringing of the populace. “On the Music of the Gross” reappeared in public discourse, and partner dancing was condemned more forcefully than it had been in years. Jazz was hailed as “the place where vulgarity and banality flower.” It was perverted, decadent, base, lying, and degenerate. Aesthetically, it resembled “the

100 Ibid., 161
101 Ibid., 209
102 Ibid., 222
103 Ibid.
moaning in the throat of a camel,” “the hiccupping of a drunk,” and “music of the cannibals.”

In a Czechoslovakian performance to Soviet cultural advisors intended to show them “model” jazz pieces, an old choirmaster accompanying the advisors explained, “Now, take the trumpet. Such an optimistic-sounding instrument! And what do those jazz people do? They stuff something down its throat and right away it sounds despicable, whining, like a jungle cry!”

The combination of Cold War xenophobia and a fresh force of moralizing expanded jazz’s perceived threat beyond sexuality to all aspects of life and behavior, concentrated on youth. In order to combat the infectious phenomenon of Westernization, chords built on the tritone, vibrato, and blues notes were banned, while the use of “too much rhythm,” plucked strings, and mutes were suspicious links to parasitism, or worse, espionage. The above-stated criticisms and their accompanying control measures, incidentally, held uncanny parallels to the regulations instituted by Nazis a decade earlier. Then, Goebbels expressed disgust for the “ugly sounds of whining instruments.” He required that all dance music be of medium tempo that imparted a sense of discipline and moderation, as syncopation was a hysterical rhythmic trend characteristic of barbarians. Mutes, he believed, turned the “noble sound of brass instruments into a…yowl.”

The fear of jazz instilling Western behavior among youth was the most justifiable offense of jazz. This was more due to the vagueness of “Western behavior” than any astute observation or understanding of jazz or youth on the part of Soviet officials. Though the behavior of jazz-centered communities in the Soviet

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104 Ibid., 234
105 Škovorecký, 15
106 Ibid., 16
107 Starr, 216
Union was by no means identical to their American counterparts due to different personal histories and social context, adoption of a somewhat established musical community, as mentioned earlier, requires a degree of enculturation and submission to the standards and values of the form. Through partaking in the actions of a musical society, one embodies the characteristics of the society. The long established view of jazz as somewhat deviant necessitated a conscious decision to “become déclassé out of musical commitment.” This does not mean that engaging in jazz by default meant being involved in gambling, indulgence, and misogyny, or for a woman, lack of domesticity. Activities and behavior are too often used synonymously. Participation in a rich musical culture such as jazz does, however, cause rather than merely correlate with changes in use of language, dress, and body carriage. This will be discussed extensively in the last chapter. Whether musical social reality causes or merely releases ethical and attitudinal changes is more debatable.

_Evaluative Summary_

The periods of intense discussion about jazz surrounding the rise of Stalin in the 1920s, the rise of the Nazis in the 1930s, and the beginning of the Cold War in the 1940s highlight the Communist Party’s articulated perceptions about jazz and its place in Soviet ideology. Generally speaking, jazz was placed in opposition to the ideal Soviet consciousness. It was consistently described as decadently sexual and commercial. Though jazz experienced a brief period of consideration as a proletarian

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108 Škovorecký, 10
109 Dasilva, Blasi, and Dees, 48
art form, by the 1950s, the Soviet authorities viewed it as a totally vulgar tool of capitalist infiltration.

These concerns and observations were not altogether baseless. Sexuality was linked most specifically to dance, which harbors definite potential to elicit erotic thought. Jazz dancing’s pelvic movements strengthen this argument. Highlighting ties to “savage” African heritage, though commonly employed, is a weaker basis for argument. Criticism of commercialism also had valid foundation in the developmental history of jazz and its concurrence with the technological acceleration of the recording industry. The search for proletarian values focused on the more or less true relationship of the plight of African Americans to jazz’s conception. Eventually, the United States did use jazz as a political tool.

However, official Soviet positions often relied far more on the history and origins of jazz culture than attention to its social reality in local context. This is understandable, as established jazz community standards stood to be adopted rather than wholly redesigned. Yet in the oversight of particular Soviet mentalities, Soviet authorities missed the appeals and features of jazz that would allow them to more directly battle it, usefully harness it, or at very least, begin to understand it.

In the end, their explicit arguments were largely circular and minimally relevant. While these articulations may say little, the determined stance against jazz arguably says far more. Such prolonged resistance suggests that authorities and other devout Party supporters sensed something within jazz that was related to their values, but without attention to social realities, were unable to pinpoint the reasons jazz crept so persistently under their skin. When examined, the community values of jazz culture touch upon feared Soviet weakness in vital areas: multiplicity of social
experience, stasis or even backwardness rather than desired progression, and alternative and largely apolitical sources of authority. These unvoiced, and perhaps not fully conceived threats centered on the most potent binding forces of jazz.

**Ignoring Social Realities: Failures and Unnamed Threats**

At first glance, the statement, “[Under] Socialist Realism…the Party demanded that artists replace bourgeois cultural forms…with new proletarian culture”\(^{110}\) is a straightforward phrasing of a simple goal. However, it makes an important point. The Soviet approach to culture treated it as an object, to be manufactured, exchanged, or discarded. The Party primarily wanted to produce music that “serve[d] nonmusical purposes. Some works function as emblems, such as national anthems and theme songs. These indeed refer to things, allude… The composition hears for the listener. This is how popular music divests the listener of his spontaneity and promotes conditional reflexes.”\(^{111}\) Though evidently successful in many regards, the inevitable weakness of this mentality is visible in its inability to fill the popular music vacuum and the long-term survival of a rich jazz culture. Failure to recognize the complicated nature of musical identity and its reliance on personal history meant that the most direct threats posed by jazz were sensed and sometimes mentioned, but never targeted. Jazz, through style and community, represented a threat to Soviet insecurities regarding monoculture, progress, and authority.

The RAPM urged composers to embody the “rich, full blooded psychology” or the proletariat through inspiration of the “active and heroic sentiments” of the

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\(^{110}\) Gaut, 61.

\(^{111}\) Dasilva, Blasi, and Dees, 7-8
revolution. The problem with this demand was that few, if any, of the composers had a proletarian background. These compositions ended up being “either too simplistic and hack” or “too difficult and inaccessible.”\textsuperscript{112} Although member Lev Lebedinskii noticed this, and criticized organizations of composers for not seeking to attract members with actual proletarian background, the deficiencies he observed were still rooted in romantic images of the Revolution and proletariat through the assumption that music produced by proletarian composers \textit{would} reflect such richness and heroism.

Increased attention to the production of a monoculture through guidance of the official doctrine of “Socialist Realism,” instated in 1932, brought these issues to full force. Socialist Realism aimed to create art that was relevant and accessible to workers, and portrayed daily life in a realistic way that necessarily glorified the State and the Party and showed the building of communism. Stalin called it, "an art which is socialist in content and national in form."\textsuperscript{113} If this seems vague or confusing, that is because it was. Lengthy discussions at the meetings of the Union of Soviet Composers, and in the press, were dedicated to comprehending what the term meant for music. Composer Nikolai Myaskovsky lamented, “What that language should be, I do not know, and have no recipe for it. Neither Russian folk music nor our city songs can provide the material for the musical idiom of Socialist Realism.”\textsuperscript{114} Whereas visual art and literature could employ on literal images and descriptions of life, music had to depict such “realism” through sound.\textsuperscript{115} As discussed previously, the successful communication of aural ideas requires shared associations developed

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{Edmunds} Edmunds, 68
\bibitem{Slonimsky} Slonimsky, 6
\bibitem{Ibid} Ibid., 9
\bibitem{Kaemmer} Kaemmer, 187
\end{thebibliography}
through aural and life experience. The greatest success of Socialist Realism in music occurred through mass and patriotic songs during World War II, because the wartime psychology and common experience that united the populace could be *found* in the music, not because the music was successful in imposing it. Generally, the relative failure to promote Socialist Realism through music is a result of the fact that nobody had experienced the social *reality* that Socialist Realism tried to convey. Socialist Realism aimed to show an ideal, future reality. Regardless of the attempt to create a monoculture, people lived vastly different lives. The choice to impose one standard of artistic expression in official music rather than having focused options for various tastes meant that those who could not relate to it would simply find connections elsewhere.

Jazz provided an alternative for many. The very concept of an “alternative” is the base of the first unspoken threat it posed. Cultural models supply individuals with understandings of possible selves of what is “right” or “natural.” The formation of a deviant culture based on different taste and experience means that different tastes and experiences existed at all, and that jazz, rather than Socialist Realism, resonated with a sense of what was correct and natural for its disciples. This shattered the desirable illusion of Soviet unity. Jazz was an especially troublesome offender, as the nature of the music itself embodied multiplicity. Through muting horns, smearing and blaring notes, and a myriad of other innovative “perversions,” it took classic instruments and showed that they possessed countless undiscovered voices. Polyphony and departure from traditional harmony put an end to the illusion Adorno saw in tonal music, that “separate voices are part of an entity.” Jazz gave the impression of being
“aggressively anarchistic [and] individualistic.” Of course, in actuality, jazz requires an extremely cohesive group dynamic, and the sound of the ensemble is paramount. However, this dynamic is created by an array of voices whose individual character is never lost.

In fact, though the individualistic character of jazz posed its own symbolic threat, the group dynamic was ultimately more upsetting to Soviet order. The jazz ensemble in performance is its own society. It “evolves an expression, [and then] negotiates a social creation.” Offstage, this society remains a separate entity from dominant culture. In the introduction to this chapter, I displayed how a community and standards will form around any music type. The successful conveyance of nonmusical meaning through shared musical languages adds an element of exclusivity, or at least impenetrability, to any musical community. This was already a concern at the Congress of Soviet Composers held in April of 1948. There, the Party reprimanded symphonists for having “put up a steel curtain between the people and themselves” in the inaccessibility of their music.

Jazz, in essence, was worse, as exclusionary tendencies were visible not just in its music, but in its practices. The jam session epitomized cultural exclusivity. Odd hours isolated it from the typical social realm. The ideal freedom of “jamming” required participants to have an internalized knowledge of “standard” tunes. Miles Davis said, “Jazz requires that you know the instrument, the chords, and the tunes so you can forget them and just play.” The difficulty of acquiring this knowledge within Soviet restrictions augmented the air of self-imposed isolation, as well as

116 Starr, 10
117 Dasilva, Blasi, and Dees, 47
118 Starr, 220
intensifying the already necessary commitment that “must precede this distinctive learning process.” Add in unique community jargon, and the jazz community becomes a bona fide private club. Yet jazz was not elite or exclusionary in attitude. It was bright, convivial, and intoxicating. The only thing worse than an artistic community defined by specialized knowledge was one that welcomed a desire to join it.

This desirability itself was threatening. Starr claims that, because the economy of the early Soviet Union was backward compared to Germany or America, youth were searching for other ways to “catch up,” generally meaning they were particularly open to “fashions that captured the aura of modern life.” Youth and many soldiers who had been exposed to the West in World War II perceived life in the USSR as equally backward, a perception that worsened with increased cultural regulation. Jazz again presented a symbol of modern life, but not only because of its Western ties. The Party praised music that had a “clear expression…[and] direct drive,” believing that music should be an active constructive force in life rather than art for its own sake. Citizens’ mindsets should be split between remembering the glory of the past and looking toward the Utopian future, working to achieve constant progress. Jazz took the opposite approach. In a wash of sonic color, with one thousand different melodic directions to chase, artists and audience alike could choose to “express the passions of the present” or simply be lost in the moment. Meanwhile, the beat reminds all that the music is constantly moving forward. Jazz,

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120 Dasilva, Blasi, and Dees, 47
121 Starr, 29
122 Edmunds, 78
123 Starr, 12
both in its ties to the West and its musical qualities, exposed the stasis in Soviet society. The symbolic clarity and direction of ideal Soviet music could not make up for lack of these qualities elsewhere.

Beyond multiplicity, and beyond progressive appeal, the greatest threat of jazz was its relationship to authority beyond composer and conductor relationships. This was also the least acknowledgeable threat, as recognizing it would be an admission of weakness. Participating in any musical tradition requires some level of submission to a foreordained structure, even where improvisation is concerned.\(^{124}\) If culture, as anthropologist Ward Goodenough defines it, “consists of whatever one has to know or believe in order to operate in a manner acceptable to its members and to do so in whatever role they accept for themselves”,\(^{125}\) then the existence of musical cultures means the existence of an authority outside of the Party that defines what is acceptable not only in musical convention, but in values and conduct as well. Jazz, with its typically tight-knit community, stylized performance and accompanying lifestyle, provided a powerful contender of this sort of authority. It is no coincidence that Starr associates Soviet fear of jazz with “the new opiate of the masses,” a title originally given by Marx to religion.\(^{126}\)

Outside of having robust kinship, jazz defied a conventional sense of controllable order. Improvisation gave jazz an air not just of individuality, but unpredictability. Due both to the form’s youth and restricted availability, musicians learned to play and compose exclusively through intensive listening and dictation.\(^{127}\) This meant that performers had a direct personal role in what trends were emulated

\(^{124}\) Dasilva, Blasi, and Dees, 9
\(^{125}\) Herndon and Mcleod, 58
\(^{126}\) Starr, 93
and continued. It was also a sign of a constantly evolving art form, thereby making jazz even harder to pin down and combat. With the characteristic energy and speed of youth, jazz innovated at one pace ahead of its critics. The first “jazz” performance in the Soviet Union by Valery Parnakh’s band primarily introduced new, strange instrumental techniques, thus the perversion of instruments was attacked. Yet jazz as a form had already moved far beyond instrumental innovation to dancing, improvisation, and rhythmic innovation. By the time the Party had responded to these, jazz culture had come to encompass new fashion and language, and had carried its other innovations even further. Each time the government could establish an opinion on the existing aspects of jazz, jazz had produced something new to appraise. Even its instrumental “mascot,” the saxophone, embodied this speed; when youth were encouraged to pick up the slow-learned cello, they instead chose the addictive, quick-to-basic-proficiency saxophone.128 Perhaps most anomalously, for all its seemingly oppositional values, jazz culture did not explicitly attempt to sway audiences. Though they put themselves in various degrees of danger by persisting in participation, its followers never used it to invoke any sort of “underdog” status. Jazz was bewildering and volatile.

**Conclusion**

The unexpressed threats of jazz to the Soviet Union can be drawn from Josef Škovorecký’s poignant description: “Its essence is something far more elemental: an élan vital, a forceful vitality, an explosive creative energy.”129 Jazz was a living

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127 Herndon and Mcleod, 39. This was actually true even in the USA, but many Soviets were under the impression that formal jazz education existed abroad
128 Škovorecký 19
129 Ibid., 4
phenomenon, indefinable and uncontrollable, and bursting with a progressive, evolutionary vigor. Yet it was not political, or even particularly ideological. Škovorecký, who maintained his passion for jazz through both Nazi occupation and Soviet domination in Czechoslovakia, said, “What sort of political connotations? Leftist? Rightist? Classist? Nationalist? The vocabulary of ideologists and mountebanks doesn’t have a word for it. At the outset...jazz didn’t convey even a note of protest.”\footnote{Ibid., 3}

The special commitment necessary to learn the musical particularities, collaborative nature, and theatrically visible style made jazz a potent spring of musical community. Though the Party may have wanted it to be, jazz was not a threat by virtue of any message. It represented a lifestyle chosen and perpetuated not because of, but regardless of Soviet ideology and restrictions. Music, perhaps more than any other art form, is a vehicle for highlighting the limits of political power on personal experience: “While language communicates through allusions to universal ideas on one hand and to objects on the other, music has a different nature. It does not allude, but actualizes; it is an executant form of expression.”\footnote{Ibid., 3} The Party could not combat jazz in a duel of ideas or messages. Jazz’s appeal is based in subjectivity, and thereby had deeper roots than regulation could reach.

Jazz and its history could certainly be tied to sexuality, commercialism, decadent bourgeois lifestyles, and Western influence. Its appeal and effect were undoubtedly related to these qualities in some part. Yet such characteristics first, did not have to be adopted by jazz in the Soviet Union by default, and second, were unlikely to infect the mentality of the masses as the Party’s articulated concerns and
restrictions would imply. Jazz was not political. It was merely made so in order to
stand a fighting chance against it. It was either that, or admit that the experience and
mentalities of the Soviet people *naturally* vary from the prototype of the ideal Soviet
citizen, that Soviet life is unsatisfactory for some, that cultural forces have
competitive authority over way of life and that such forces are beyond the State’s
control.

131 Dasilva, Blasi, and Dees, 11
Chapter Three
Stiliagi

We are dealing here with fashion. Change would be a source of chaos and incomprehensibility if the social world were organized around fixed principles and meanings.  

Feelings toward jazz music varied greatly in force, from comparatively casual enjoyment, to religious fervor or utter revulsion. These feelings touched a range of people, from officials or elites, to average citizens and musicians. Yet nowhere was jazz more visible than in the countercultural youth phenomenon of the stiliagi—“visible” being the key word. “Stiliagi” was not a self-selected identification, but a derogatory label based on the group’s most prominent trait. Generally translated as “fashionistas,” “hipsters,” “style hunters” or “style apers,” the lexical breakdown of the word has only one focus—stil’, meaning “style.”

The adolescent who listens to energetic music, wears clothing that seems ridiculous to adults, dances provocatively (and changes into less appropriate clothing once inside the school dance), has parties while the parents are out, and prefers to “hang out” rather than work is a familiar enough picture. In the eyes of a modern American, a stiliaga could be any teenager. To the Communist Party, stiliagi were the embodiment of every fear they had harbored about jazz music. To the rockers, hippies, and punks that came after, they were heroes.

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132 Dasilva, Blasi, and Dees, 19
133 In order to cement the visual impression, I have included several Appendices of images related to this chapter at the end of the work.
134 -aga is a suffix common in expressively scornful, ironic, contemptuous, mocking, or jocular slang. For example, blatiaga means ‘criminal,’ and doxodiaga means ‘emaciated person.’ Source: Fredrick R. Patton, “Expressive Means in Russian Youth Slang,” American Association of Teachers of Slavic and
A stiliaga was first recognizable by his clothing and hairstyle, then by his dancing, and finally by his attitude and language. Although each of these elements took individual priority for some members, all were overwhelmingly characterized by the jazz that initiated and bound them. This section aims to paint a picture of jazz’s most notorious fans.

What Makes a Stiliaga

Stiliagi were first and foremost young people who, to the best of their ability, followed and copied elements of the lifestyle of Western youth. Their first noted appearance is marked in the year following the ban of jazz in 1948. Critical masses developed in Leningrad in Moscow, though stiliagi were not unheard of elsewhere. Stiliagi never cleanly ceased to exist, but were transformed and expanded to encompass the newer rock ‘n roll movement by the mid 1960s. The first stiliagi were children of the elite, whose parents’ money and position afforded them some access to jazz records and Western products. It has been suggested that Khrushchev’s own children, along with those of Andrei Gromyko, Minister of Foreign Affairs, and other prominent communists were the culture’s pioneers. Though these wealthy youth represented a small portion of the already small counterculture, stiliagi would be forever tied to these initiators. In the decade that followed, stiliagi would become unintentional revolutionaries—the “juvenile delinquents [who] won the Cold War.”

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East European Languages, 24.3 (1980), 270-282.

135 Christoph Neidhart, Russia’s Carnival: The Smells, Sights, and Sounds of Transition, (Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 49.

The first criterion for a stiliaga was his fashion. Famous jazz fusionist Alexei Kozlov, who was a stiliaga in youth, assured, “If [I] was not going to change my look, nobody would recognize [me] as one of their own.” The dominant image of a male stiliaga is that of a zoot-suited youth in platform shoes with a greasy pompadour, curl at the nape of the neck, and sideburns. This hairstyle imitated Johnny Weissmuller’s in the Tarzan series, especially Tarzan’s New York Adventure one of the more popular “war trophy” films. The stiliaga’s wide pants, long, baggy jacket, wide-brimmed hat and socks were bright, “bizarre colors—often green,” orange, canary, or checkered. Shirts were widely striped or black, shoes yellow or tan. In the absence of colorful material, bright white was the shade of choice, still a stark contrast to the drab cuts and hues that dominated typical Soviet dress. Some sources report slightly more homely though just as unconventional apparel, such as colorful knitted sweaters. Perhaps the signature piece of the early stiliaga was his tie—wide, colorful, and adorned with dragons, palm trees, monkeys, and bikini-clad women. This outfit earned stiliagi the other false English translation of “zoot-suiters.”

Fashion, however, implies ephemerality and currency. Accordingly, the apparel of stiliagi changed with time. Shock transitioned to elegance. The stiliaga became sleeker as the rest of Soviet clothing brightened up after Stalin’s death. The

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137 Not to be confused with Alexei Kozlov, the first saxophonist in Russia.
140 Ibid.
143 Neidhart, 49.
144 “Stiliagi. Otvazhnye Dendi Strany Sovetov” Be-In. 12 September 2006.
stiliaga of the mid-fifties wore extremely narrow, short pants with visible socks, skinny ties, and wide-shouldered jackets, carrying with him a cane umbrella.\textsuperscript{145} Of course, some old habits die hard; popular stiliaga summer wear centered on brightly floral Hawaiian shirts.\textsuperscript{146} Shoes, like ties before, became a trademark, with platform soles that could weigh up to two and a half kilograms.\textsuperscript{147}

The female stiliaga’s consistent trademark was her bright makeup, particularly lipstick. Her clothing was revealing, with slit skirts tightly formed around her hips.\textsuperscript{148} Her hair was coiffed into a bouffant a la Brigitte Bardot in Babette Goes to War. When weather permitted, she wore roman sandals. The stiliagi culture was largely male-dominated, and as such, the delineated characteristics of women are those most prominently associated with sexuality. In general, though, the female stiliaga did not have, or truly need, a clearly defined style. As Puritanical standards of appearance and virginity applied more heavily to women, “the smallest non-Soviet details in apparel and even minimal use of cosmetics was enough to be branded ‘stiliaga’ and investigated in a Komsomol meeting.”\textsuperscript{149}

After establishing oneself through fashion, the next marker of a stiliaga was dance. In an era when waltz and polka were deemed the appropriate dances for youth, stiliagi imitated American “dirty dances” such as the jitterbug, boogie-woogie, and the lindy hop.\textsuperscript{150} On a conservative day, they danced the foxtrot. When male partners outnumbered females, men would spin each other around the dance floor. Occasionally, even when the sexes were evenly matched, men would dance with each

\textsuperscript{145} Oleksandr Pahiria, “The Western Brand,” The Ukrainian Week, 2 February 2012.
\textsuperscript{146} Neidhart, 49
\textsuperscript{148} Field, 23
\textsuperscript{149} Be-In, (2006).
other to “show special skill and strength.” Several of the stiliagis’ dances were individual, though. While music could be heard via radio or recordings, dance had to been seen in order to be learned. As with many postwar cultural imports, soldiers brought a minimal knowledge of modern vernacular dance back with them, but this was not particularly influential. The dances in the few films displaying jazz that were available, such as that of the Nicholas Brothers in *Sun Valley Serenade,* were complex choreographed numbers with acrobatics and complicated tap, not easily transferrable to the everyday dance floor. In the absence of any true guidance, stiliagi invented their own dances from bits and pieces of exposure. The “Atomic,” “Canadian,” and “Triple-Hamburg” styles were homegrown approximations of Western dances. Teachers and parents would criticize the adolescents for looking like squirming fools. Kozlov admits that this was somewhat true, and that stiliagi relished the fact and even purposefully did such movements to spite them.

This sort of cheek leads to the final component of stiliaga categorization—attitude. This constituted the single most peculiar differentiation from the Soviet ideal. The stiliaga was a paradoxical creature to their compatriots. One moment, they were markedly taciturn and aloof, “head held high, the arrogant looking down the nose at others and a particular gait.” They walked slowly, “as if by accident showing off their fancy new clothes.” Their terse speech was marked by exclusive jargon that gave the impression of “differentness, toughness, and a vague

150 Zubok, 41
152 The word used here is *krivliat’sa,* which implies unnatural movement, facial grimaces, and disregard for propriety.
153 Kozlov.
foreignness.”\textsuperscript{156} They smoked Lucky Strikes and Camels, and had a pronounced penchant for “hanging out,” a completely alien concept of relaxation and idleness to their peers. In Moscow, \textit{Stiliagi} visibly displayed this leisure by spending large parts of the day milling about the section of Tverskaia Street (then “Gorky Street”) from Pushkin Square to the Gosplan USSR building, redubbed “Broadway.”\textsuperscript{157} In a sort of ritual, they would stroll from one end of the boulevard to the other, demonstrating themselves “to the city and the world” and “scanning their own kind.” They spend all night at “Kokteil Kholl,” an exclusive lounge that hosted celebrities and intelligentsia looking for a night of jazz and specialized drinks.\textsuperscript{158}

This signature coolness was sharply contrasted with not only loud apparel, loud gum-smacking, loud music, and raucous dancing, but also with occasional outspokenness and enjoyment of their perceived deviance. Starr reports, “One \textit{stiliaga}, hauled before a court in 1952 and charged with parasitism, defended himself by snatching a fly in his hand and calmly swallowing it. ‘I’m a mental case,’ he explained.”\textsuperscript{159}

Initially, \textit{stiliagi} did not even have an established cultural standard, but merely united around and welcomed any level of “Westernization.”\textsuperscript{160} This developed into a clear set of standards not only of behavior and dress, but language hailed as “the ability to speak modern.”\textsuperscript{161} This slang developed from a mixture of the jargon of Jewish and jazz musicians and russifying American words. \textit{Stiliagi} referred to each

\textsuperscript{155} Morochkin, 2009. Translation is mine.
\textsuperscript{157} Nevsky Prospekt was the equivalent in Leningrad.
\textsuperscript{158} Morochkin, (2009). Translations are mine.
\textsuperscript{159} Starr, 240
\textsuperscript{160} \textit{Be-In}, 2006.
\textsuperscript{161} Zubok, 170
other as *chuvaki* (dudes) and *chuvichi* (dudettes?). On the dance floor, they *batsali stilem* or merely *stilyali* (danced with style) with their *gerla* (girl). Their *shmotki* (threads) were composed of *trauzera* (trousers), *khetok* (hats), and *shuznia* (shoes). They got these *klous* (clothes) from *fartsovshiki* (black marketers) so as not to look like *zhloby* (slobs). They attended *kliyovy* (groovy) parties at their *khatakh* (pads), where they hung out with Bob, the *stiliaga* formerly known as Boris.162 163

Another distinct feature of the *stiliagi* “air” was their candor and commitment to the lifestyle. Even when ice-skating, they wore high topped skates that imitated their shoes.164 Sensual dancing was not confined to private parties, or even to disrupting official dances, but was done in the streets to jazz heard from a distant window165. This devil-may-care way of carrying oneself would have been threatening enough as a rebellious code of nonconformity in a society where reputation was prime. It was made inconceivably worse by the last pronounced element of the *stiliagi* persona—these youth were strikingly apolitical. While their peculiar behavior was intended to call attention to itself, it was not an explicit criticism of Stalinist or Soviet ideology. Although “some were vaguely aware of the rebellious implications of their stance against conformity and an official culture soaked in politics and ideology,” many could not form opinions on social or political questions.166 The key appeal and drive of *stiliagi* was that they were *cool*, not that they stood for something. That the source of this extreme ethos was a sort of authentic strength of private will rather than calculated opposition presented an unfamiliar force to be reckoned with.

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165 Ball, 186.
Stiliagi became infamous not because they were numerous or obviously influential, but because they represented new “strategies”\textsuperscript{167} for which the country was unprepared.

**Logistics of the Underground**

The boldness of stiliagi is noteworthy enough without consideration of the extreme restrictions placed on travel, foreign imports, and broadcasting. With these material limitations in place, the stiliagi become equally as impressive for their creativity. The few children of diplomats and other elite were able to obtain some authentic Western clothing, or at least products from fellow socialist countries like China. The outgoing managed to make useful contacts at pawnshops. The extremely daring acquainted themselves with foreigners, and offered to buy their suitcases and all personal belongings.\textsuperscript{168}

Others relied on what World War II trophies were available on the black market, or more extensively, what they could create on their own. When possible, stiliagi observed and copied the clothing worn by Western delegations.\textsuperscript{169} Although some “specialists” existed, many stiliagi tailored their own pants, or sewed entirely new ones out of tent cloth. Many added thicker soles to their own shoes, though these could also be commissioned at Armenian shoe repair shops. Ties were fashioned from any piece of bright cloth available, including window curtains. Some stiliagi even painted over existing ties, or covered them with clippings of American cigarette packaging. One stiliaga was even reported to have made his necktie out of exercise

\textsuperscript{166} Fürst (2006), 220.

\textsuperscript{167} “Represent” is a key word here. Stiliagi did not employ a “strategy” per se. Their rebellion was not deliberate protest. Society chose to see it this way, though.

\textsuperscript{168} Morochkin, (2009).

\textsuperscript{169} Fürst (2006), 219.
book covers.\textsuperscript{170} For those to whom chewing gum was unavailable, paraffin wax would do. Hair was styled with crude heated rods, often leaving stiliagi with signature neck burns.\textsuperscript{171} Since hairspray and gel were virtually nonexistent in the Soviet Union, hairstyles were fixed with sugary syrup concoctions.\textsuperscript{172}

More impressive than resourcefulness in manufacturing the material elements of fashion were the stiliagis’ efforts to hear jazz by any means. After all, music was the most desirable product of the West.\textsuperscript{173} Parties and concerts were arranged by word of mouth on Broadway, and Voice of America broadcasts were accessed by skilled manipulation of shortwave radios.\textsuperscript{174} The true musical legacy of the stiliagi, though, was not their live exposure to jazz, but their collection of it. In the 1930s, with the first intensive Stalinist restriction, access to actual Western, particularly American, records were limited to the poor taste of seamen who realized the value of such records on the black market, and Soviet officials and elite who were allowed to travel abroad. Some of the most impressive of these collections included those of NKVD head Ivan Medved (later purged) and son of a tsarist bureaucrat, Sergei Kolbasev. The latter had not only “the most comprehensive collection in the USSR,” but reproduced his albums and wire-recorded the limited jazz played on Leningrad radios. For the most part, black market products were poor quality jazz and were expensive, and collections of elites did not extend beyond their homes and friends. Kolbasev is a rare exception, as he arranged public jazz listening sessions and discussions in numerous cities.\textsuperscript{175}

\textsuperscript{170} Morochkin, (2009).
\textsuperscript{171} Russell, 286.
\textsuperscript{172} Yurchak, 171.
\textsuperscript{173} Zhuk, 65.
\textsuperscript{174} Fürst (2006), 219.
\textsuperscript{175} Starr, 120.
This overwhelmingly restricted access to authentic recordings had a noticeable effect on the quality of the music jazz ensembles of the period produced. The innovation associated with *stiliagi* in this regard is responsible for the qualitative and quantitative growth and innovation of jazz from its grudging acceptance in the late fifties, and later rock ‘n roll. Well before the heyday of samizdat, a medical student discovered that the emulsification on x-rays was suitable for sound reproduction. The material was perfect. Discarded X-rays were abundant and dirt cheap, and hospitals were glad to be rid of them. After rounding plates with scissors and pushing a hole through the center, either converted phonographs or personal recording system such as the “Voice-O-Graph” were used to record radio broadcasts and copy seven-inch records at 78 rpm.  

Recording quality was terrible, though the privileged few modern collectors often find that they have an intriguing sound:  

Where you’d normally hear the snap, crackle, and pop of vinyl beneath the familiar melody, instead you hear the strange whirr and hum that (as it turns out) X-ray film makes in a record player. What must have sounded degraded in 1956 now sounds enhanced—enriched, really, with the texture of history.

While x-ray plates were typically short-lived, they were relatively cheap. One man recalls stories of his father’s experience, claiming that he could purchase these records for a ruble and a half, about the same price as a 250ml bottle of vodka and “similar to the ‘lunch money’ given to husbands by their thrifty wives.” Rather than saving money to buy legitimate records from the black market, which may have cost five rubles minimum, one could simply skip lunch for a day and begin a collection. Up to 3,000,000 x-ray plate records may have been distributed by 1958. Men in

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176 Hixon, 116.
Leningrad who were arrested for their creation were reportedly sent to the Gulag for seven years.

One paid a price for the ease of creating such records, though. Instead of music, one would occasionally be greeted by a snide voice, asking, “So, thought you'd take a listen to the latest sounds, eh?” Artemy Troitsky describes what would follow as “a few choice epithets addressed to the fans of stylish rhythms.”

A personal recollection puts it less delicately, reporting hearing, “You want rock-n-roll? Fuck you, anti-soviet slime" followed by a few minutes of elaborate and flowering Russian cursing.

The idea of such records is prized today for clever innovation and a fascinating aesthetic. For stiliagi, they provided both cherished music and a moment of treasured individuality:

It was, probably, a special feeling, that purchase - to know that your chosen disc is one-time-only and totally unique, and even though on it is a thousand-time-recorded, well-known jazz [tune], no one else has this "design." The inveterate music fans does not even bother reading the pencil signatures in his collection - at once fixing the eye: "Coxofemeral? Ah, Gershwin! Eye socket – this is Haley, and somewhere in here was some kind of crooked bone - so that’s Ellington ... "

I saw, in my youth, a pair of such records in someone’s private collection. I vaguely remember my perplexity at the reverence with which they were stored - wrapped in a soft flannel and paper on top. Although, maybe this was just a repercussion of their eternal camoflauge in case of a search.

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These duplicates were called *roentgenizdat*, combining the word “roentgen” (x-ray), and “izdatel’stvo” (publishing). Given the stylishness of *stiliagi*, this term has an air of undesirable banality; this particular method of combining words is entirely conventional in Russian. The more characteristic reference to the recordings was not the term for albums themselves, but what was done with them. After all, jazz was not meant to sit on the shelf, or be stiff background music. Jazz was not contained in its object. For *stiliagi*, the important thing was not the *roentgenizdat* process or records that mattered, but the life you led with jazz at its center. Highlighting both the vitality of this counterculture and the grisly danger of their lifestyle, *stiliagi* gave their records a delightfully macabre title: *tanets na kostiakh*—dance on bones.

**Striking a Nerve**

At first, jazz may appear to be nothing but a hobby of *stiliagi*, only one of many dissident interests. Upon deeper consideration, it is a fully realized version of the threat—both declared and undeclared—that jazz posed against Soviet society. In many ways, it confirmed the most obvious fears about jazz. Casual sex was indeed a significant part of the culture. Kozlov goes into detail about this, describing how *stiliagi* would meet in their or their friends’ *khat* (“pads”) while parents were at the dacha, or even just at the theater, to engage in *protsessy* (“processes”).

Then, there was the usefulness of money in acquiring clothing, records, and getting into such lounges as *Kokteil Kholl*. Though the elite status of the parents of many *stiliagi* was not necessarily disdained, the transformation of this wealth to being
a means of actual acquisition rather than a symbol was a dangerous step towards commercialism. By disregarding public opinion through daily conduct and requiring money for products outside of need, stiliagi effectively discarded the Soviet system of true currency, where reputation and connections meant more than means. Style, too, became an end in itself, rather than playing a constructive role of “developing culturedness.” Furthermore, the new “art” of hanging out and diminished work ethic seemed decidedly bourgeois. As for the feared infiltration of Western culture, the stiliagi referred to themselves as shtatniki\textsuperscript{183} to leave no doubt in their desired Americanness. On top of adopting Western culture, they represented the accompanying feared loss of Russian tradition. They “knew all the latest Western dances but not the most famous works and figures of their own cultural heritage.”\textsuperscript{184} As such, stiliagi were harassed for taking advantage of hardworking parents, and were often labeled as American spies and informers.

Yet there is no reason to believe that any of this was a result of jazz. It is more likely that years of demonizing jazz for these cultural features, added to a natural desire or inclination toward them, formed an experiential basis for attraction to jazz as an arbiter of group identity. Novelist Vasily Aksyonov, a jazz enthusiast who wrote a considerable amount about stiliagi, said, “people who are exposed to [jazz] think about our country and this thinking of course, leads to many further investigations and expressions of interest.”\textsuperscript{185} Aksyonov’s claim that jazz naturally leads to thoughts of the USSR is founded on an experiential assumption. As

\textsuperscript{182} Kozlov.
\textsuperscript{183} Shtat means “state”, referring to the USA
simplistic as it may sound, the only reason to associate thoughts about the state of the Soviet Union upon hearing jazz is the experience of life in the USSR. Furthermore, jazz “represent[ed] superior progress that is imagined, economically, as a postindustrial society based on leisure, [that] politically protects the individual through rule of law, and culturally has an energy able to produce a torrent of new trends [to] fascinate and draw in young people.”186 Progress, perhaps only in ways that would matter most to adolescents, but progress nonetheless was represented by jazz in sharp contrast to Soviet life.

In general, jazz appealed simply to the social reality of youth, whether combating the bleakness of everyday life, or satisfying the urge to be “hip.” It united those who felt as if living in the Soviet Union was akin to being stuck inside on a sunny day, providing “a window into the outside world from the Stalinist stinking lair.”187 Though stiliagi could not “go outside,” they could bask in what sunlight permeated this window. Jazz was a “release from the structures of our minutely controlled everyday lives, of five-year plans, of historical materialism.”188

Then, of course, was the stiliagi defiance of control. Jazz alone was bad enough. Stiliagi took the musical suspension of awareness of life of the moment and extended it to an overwhelmingly visible lifestyle. Such visibility was a natural cultural development from jazz. The music’s inescapably visual performance, due to the shine of brass and noticeable movements necessary to play such instruments as drum set and slide trombone, as well as connections to theatrical roots, led its stylization and performance in life to be more exaggerated than other musical

187 Zubok, 41.
188 Hixson, 115.
disciplines. Even in a world of recordings, and perhaps actually more so due to
dependence on records, this stylization was imagined to mythic proportions, and role-
played accordingly. The wave of Western films that entered the USSR as war
trophies, particularly the aforementioned *Tarzan’s New York Adventure* and *Sun
Valley Serenade*, were a particular catalyst for youth, providing even clearer
inspiration. Komsomol agents led cleansing raids, during which they cut or ripped
the ties, pants, and hair of *stiliagi*, but the culture did not disappear. *Stiliagi* faced
constant verbal abuse, and were occasionally even beaten, but did not desist in their
way of life.

The persistence of this particular counterculture is rooted in its apoliticism.
Other dissident youth groups existed throughout the life of the *stiliagi*, but they were
almost solely political, and as such, competed head-to-head with the Party and lost.
*Stiliagi*, for the most part, were not consciously rebellious. They were just kids, who
“accepted Soviet realities as a given and just wanted to have fun.”¹⁸⁹ Youth of this
era were starved for identity as they found themselves caught between the
dominating, nationalistic myths of war and the terrible truths revealed in the Thaw.
Embracing jazz in wartime had been acceptable, and its stigmatization in the postwar
years was a source of confusion, not rebellion.

I have consistently argued that jazz developed a community around the type of
postwar mentalities described above. Valerii Shapovalov, in describing his brother’s
experience as a *stiliaga*, goes a step further. He maintains:

This vernal music appeared at a time when Soviet youth were in especially
critical need of a spiritual anchor and some new source of faith, hope, and
love. For its part, jazz became synonymous with *home*, in that young people

¹⁸⁹ Zubok, 41.
receive from jazz what they lacked in the outside world: sincerity, warmth and selfless support, [and] brotherhood of the like-minded.  

*Stiliagi* formed a sort of family, amidst which there was occasionally competition and quarrels, but if faced with danger, forgot their differences to defend one another.

This unity, of course, presented a threat to Soviet culture, as did the *stiliaga*’s conduct in general. This counterculture was especially worrisome in that it was primarily youth-based. “Youth” was a popular topic in the postwar Soviet Union, as the USSR viewed itself as a sort of “youth of the world.” Because of this, the younger generations denoted the highest stakes in the forging of the New Soviet Man. This necessitated a vociferous denunciation of *stiliagi*. They were called monkeys and canaries in the magazine *Krokodil*, which incidentally coined the term “*stiliaga*.” They were the constant subject of derision in comics. One skit drew the path from the jazz band, to the movie house, to the restaurant and then birth clinic, and from the dance floor to the courtroom and then prison. Though not penalized in the strictest fashion, as *stiliagi* were rarely arrested or exiled, they were tolerated with the sole purpose of being a thing to be scorned.

For all their attitude and legendized coolness, *stiliagi* were not superhuman, and were certainly not impervious to such attacks. Though depicted as throwing their lifestyle in the face of all society, *stiliagi* generally tried not to attract special attention when alone. They would often hide under coats on public transport to avoid getting beaten. They could not escape ridicule, though. There was always someone there to yell, “Look, they’ve grown out their hair! I’ll get them! Give me the machine gun!”

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190 Morochkin, (2009). Translation is mine.
191 Bidini, 79.
192 Stites, 138.
Stiliagi would remain silent in the face of taunts, which only provoked more. Shapovalov reports that eventually, old women would speak up, saying “Why are you bothering him? If that’s what he wants, then let him dress so!” Shapovalov views the stiliaga’s silence here as a purposeful provocation, saying “young people tend to be quite satisfied with having been the subject of discussion.” While this may have been true to a certain extent, I find it unlikely that such silence never resulted from discomfort or fear. After all, they would not “unfurl their peacock tails” until they were safe in a group on Broadway.  

There is no doubt that stiliagi were brave. Their actions were a “Slap in the face of public taste” at a time when this was “the most dangerous of all possible games.” As it turned out, this courage made them unintentional heroes. The anti-stiliagi press backfired, harboring increased interest in their lifestyle, and causing much criticism to devolve into the thinly veiled envy of those who were afraid to take the leap. Stiliagi were not heroes. They were, by and large, silly teenagers. If one does not consider their actions as purposeful protest, this is relatively clear.

Yet, as Škovorecký aptly noted “when the lives of individuals and communities are controlled by powers that themselves remain uncontrolled— …ideologists of dictatorships at either end of the spectrum-then creative energy becomes a protest.” Stiliagi did not intend to explicitly rebel, but did develop a style of rebellion. They showed that if one is patient for long enough, silent but firm in one’s lifestyle, someone will eventually say “If that’s what he wants, then let him 

196 Škovorecký, 4
dress so!” Stiliagi relished jazz for “its refusal to be pinned down, its improvisational nature,”¹⁹⁷ and through embodying this quality, emerged triumphant.

¹⁹⁷ Hixson, 115.
Conclusion

*What we play is life.*

-Louis Armstrong

The story of jazz in the Soviet Union is the tale, not so much of an art form, but of the people whose chose to tie their identities to it, and consequently felt them staunchly repressed. It is a story of struggle, perseverance, creativity, and triumph of the individual through its need for community and expression. Largely isolated from its spring, jazz musicians and fans in the Soviet Union took the scattered pieces of a fantasy and found within them the means to fashion a life.

That some form of jazz existed at all is remarkable. Outside of a single tour by Sidney Bechet and Benny Peyton and the Jazz Kings in 1926, the only American Jazz performance Soviet citizens would see was the Glenn Miller Band in the film *Sun Valley Serenade*, until Benny Goodman visited in 1962. Introduced by an enthusiastic but naive Russian whose conception of jazz was merely syncopation and innovative percussion sounds, Soviet jazz navigated its way through decades of censorship, prohibition, and worse, the dilution of official patronage for a few years in the late thirties. This is largely due to the influx of performances by European combos in the mid-thirties, and the World War II trophy records and films, Voice of America broadcasts and rich underground market of the late forties and fifties. Russian jazz culture somehow produced talented jazz musicians such as Alexander “Bob” Tsfasman, Leonid Utesov, Oleg Lundstrem, and Alexei Kozlov. Though never quite authentic or up-to-date, in the sixties, jazz culture emerged from its repression decently prepared to advance new and innovative forms of jazz, rather than

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being in desperate need of catch-up. Perhaps more significantly, the specifically developed countercultural character of jazz caused by its political treatment spoke volumes about the power of music and the flaws of Soviet society.

The strength and potential of the Soviet jazz counterculture to illuminate Soviet society lie in the formation of musical communities based on shared perception and developed understanding of a musical language. These perceptions have their roots in personal history; music cannot work through directly codified representation of ideas. The norms of musical communities are strengthened and perpetuated with more participants, or stronger experiential bonds, as participants then effectively embody what the music embodied to them. These perpetuated norms include musical standards, as well as a range of nonmusical characteristics from stylistic kinesics to values.

The fact that the Soviet regime largely ignored that individuals bond to music based on subjective experience rather than objective ideology, and then proceed to bond with others through the intermediary of said music, was partially responsible for their inability to fill the vacuum of truly popular music as well as their inability to stop the proliferation of jazz. The Party and its organs addressed jazz as a sexual, decadent, commercial, and American threat, afraid that it would impede the goals of their ideology in shaping the consciousness of a “New Soviet Man.” These fears were more grounded in history than in the social reality of jazz’s effect and appeal. In the brief periods in the mid-thirties and during World War II where jazz was supported, acceptance was transparently founded on the new decision that jazz was the proletarian art of American Negroes. In reality, the Party had merely manipulated its ideals to remain politically opposed to Fascists. Though government policy may
have had initially pure intentions, it grew to be an instrument of paranoid xenophobia, advertised opposition, and even an assertion of domestic political power.

Truly, jazz was threatening, but not for the reasons the Party thought, or at least articulated. Because the success of music in communicating ideas and forming communities relies on shared perceptions and personal history, the pervasive popularity of jazz demonstrated that different experiences exist, and that the Soviet mantra of unity was a pipedream. The official doctrine of Socialist Realism could never be unanimously successful, as it meant the communication of a romantic vision completely separated from livable reality. Furthermore, participating in a musical community means submitting to its conventions, thereby taking authority on what is “acceptable” from a nonpolitical entity. Jazz’s popularity reminded the government that taste, and the subjectivity that generates it, cannot be controlled.

Though jazz certainly “represented” some anti-Soviet principles, it also presented an alternate, and more successful, model for executing Soviet ideals such as group solidarity and progress. Soviet music, like its society, relies on the heavy use of unison to display cohesion. Jazz structure does not glorify the soloist at the expense of the collective, but instead highlights the individual while energetic ensemble support asserts, “This is a group, and it is still okay for the individual to stand out. Everyone will get his turn.” To establish progress, Soviet music, like its society, emphasizes solid resolve through vocal power and strong marches. The swung beat of jazz allows it to seem relaxed, while the use of pick-up notes consistently drives phrases to the next downbeat. The tug of war between the walking bass and syncopated or off beat accents says, “We will keep moving forward, inevitably, but hold on for just this second. Enjoy the moment.” Jazz, in both its
Americanism and musical qualities, dangerously suggests that progress can be attained through the supported strength of individuals, and that relaxation does not preclude drive.

Some people decided to push this jazz life model to the extreme. The appearance of stiliagi by 1949 seemed to be a realization of all Soviet fears concerning jazz. These youth were sexual, placed supreme value on material objects, and practically worshipped Western culture. They preferred “hanging out,” and the relaxation and occasional seclusion that come with it, to honest labor. They strove to be modern, following trends to the best of their ability.

Yet, for stiliagi, the individuality represented by deviation from societal norms was not a matter of self-glorification or deliberate rebellion, but of privacy and self-expression. A stiliaga told Komsomolskaya Pravda in 1950, “How I run my private life does not concern anyone else. One’s way of life is a private matter.” While brand-label authenticity was praised in Western attainments, the “material objects” stiliagi desired were often manufactured themselves. Rather than demonstrating consumerism driven by greed or decadence, stiliagi “heralded the advent of an individualistic, self-expressive approach to consumption.” Fashion, in addition to self-expression, was a measurable form of progress, or at least change in the banality of daily life.

“And of course,” remembers Alexander Kabakov, “jazz, jazz, jazz…” After discussing the acquisition of American trifles, clothing, and alcohol at length, this statement serves as an almost religious reminder. All of these objects were exciting, and likely present in the thoughts and short-term goals of stiliagi, “But jazz is for the

198 Neidhart, 49
Jazz was the rhythm and inspiration of stiliagis’ lives, the assumed progenitor of their allegiance. Accordingly, stiliagi left their legacy of quiet resistance to the generations of musical communities that followed. Many younger stiliagi not only influenced, but became revolutionary rockers in maturity.

Of course, stiliagi based their choices on images from a small number of films and magazines, dated dances reconciled with new music, and the images that formed behind closed eyes while listening to jazz. They strove for authenticity, but never achieved it, instead creating a unique caricature of their perceptions of Western society:

> With our instinct for individualism fostered at every instance by our collectivist society, with our hatred toward any form of affiliation…we were more American that the Americans themselves. And if America stands for the outer limit of the West, for where the West ends, we were, I must say, a couple of thousand miles off the West Coast. In the middle of the Pacific.  

Jazz-based community in the Soviet Union, from musicians to stiliagi, showed how a country full of individuals retained their individuality in the face of an authoritarian regime through, oddly enough, trying to be someone else. Jazz outlived the USSR, showing that popular culture can become an unstoppable force, because a populace is only as strong as the bound will of its individuals. Soviet ideology needed defendable values with demonstrable effects, relying on hope for a great future and nostalgia for

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199 Russell, 288
a glorious past to retain support. Music’s power lies in its evocation of life.

Reason is no more than reason, and it gives fulfillment only to a man’s reasoning capacity, while desires are a manifestation of the whole of life—I mean the whole of human life, both with its reason and with all its itches and scratches. And though our life in these manifestations will often turn out a pretty sorry mess, it is still life and not a mere extraction of square roots...What does reason know? It knows only what it has managed to learn, while human nature acts as a complete entity, with all that is in it, consciously or unconsciously, and though it may be wrong, it's nevertheless alive.²⁰²

With a musical bond forged by the unconscious imprints of life experience, jazzmen carried on, never allowing the flow of notes from their underground to cease until they reached the surface light.

Appendix A

Examples of *roentgenizdat*
Appendix B

“Monkeys”
— Look, what funny disguises!

"Look, what funny disguises!"
“Jungle Fire” tie

A “canary”
“Biography of one young man: He dresses exceptionally, dances well, behaves moderately, studies poorly”

“Dances between tables” (the signs at tables are variations on “workers needed”)
Appendix C

(Bottom) Stiliagi dance the twist
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**Appendix A:**

*(Top)* [http://bujhm.livejournal.com/381660.html](http://bujhm.livejournal.com/381660.html)


**Appendix B:**


**Appendix C:**

