‘FORMALISTIC FREAKS IN MUSIC’: ‘ILYA GOLOVIN’, SHOSTAKOVICH, AND ZHDANOVSHCHINA FOR THE MASSES

By Daniel Elphick*

The year 1948 is so significant for histories of Soviet music that at least one author has devoted an entire book to this year alone. In January 1948, Stalin and several members of the Central Committee attended a performance of Vano Muradeli’s opera The Great Friendship and blamed the work’s shortcomings on the Soviet musical establishment at large. Numerous composers were held responsible, but especially Shostakovich, Prokofiev, Khachaturian, Myaskovsky, Shebalin, and Popov. They were accused of ‘formalism’ and encouraged to apologize in front of large gatherings of their peers. The subsequent events forced Soviet composers to engage again with the doctrine of Socialist Realism, first laid out in 1932, and the reforms are frequently referred to as the ‘Zhdanovshchina’, after the Secretary of the Central Committee, Andrei Zhdanov.

The reforms were not limited to the year 1948, however, nor were they confined to music. The campaign to crack down on the arts went as far back as 1946 and lasted until the end of 1949. As in the 1936 anti-formalism campaign (initially targeted at Shostakovich), artists were instructed to foster a healthy atmosphere of feedback and criticism of themselves and of their peers. One consequence of this feedback was the self-policing of Soviet art, be it in painting, theatre, literature, dance, or music. Rather than simply being top-down instruction, the machinations of the Zhdanovshchina quickly became a mire of accusations from within as peers pursued grudges and sought professional advantage. There were several examples where artists in one art form used the example of another to exonerate themselves as sufficiently socialist realist: nowhere was this more explicit than in the production of a bizarre morality play from 1949, Ilya Golovin. The play imitates Shostakovich’s biography in the events of 1936, even down to the level of Shostakovich-style music in its incidental music, composed by Aram Khachaturian. While the play might strike modern readers as a cheap impersonation, I argue that a more nuanced contextual understanding reveals that it had broader objectives.

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1 E. S. Vlasova, 1948 god v sovetskoi muzïke (‘The Year 1948 in Soviet Music’) (Moscow, 2010).
3 The term can be translated as the ‘Zhdanov thing’ (or sometimes given as ‘affair’ or ‘business’); it is a pejorative phrase, echoing the ‘Yezhovshchina’ used to refer to the Great Terror of 1936–9.
than simply targeting Shostakovich: this included promoting the Zhdanovshchina to a mass audience, but also co-opting the wave of anti-Semitism that swept the USSR during the late-Stalinist era. The play’s author, Sergei Mikhalkov (1913–2009), was a party-line socialist realist and he would go on to be involved in high-level intrigue and duplicity. In this article I analyse the stage play Ilya Golovin in the context of the 1946–9 campaign, and offer a comparison with contemporaneous music by Shostakovich. The result offers a tantalizing insight into the wider motivations underpinning and surrounding the Zhdanovshchina itself and provides an important adjustment to the usual narrative of top-down policing of culture, instead showing that artists often policed the party line among their peers without evidence of direct external pressure.

1946 AND ALL THAT: THE ZHDANOV DOCTRINE

As Kees Boterbloem and others have observed, Zhdanov did not necessarily orchestrate the events named after him; in fact, they were almost certainly driven by Stalin. During the post-war period, Zhdanov was keen to please the Soviet leader and was willing to carry out just about any and all wishes. The reforms did not begin as a targeted campaign against intellectuals and the arts but as a consequence of the early Cold War. Stalin suffered a minor cardiac episode in the early autumn of 1945, so spent the rest of the year recuperating in Sochi. Once he returned to work in 1946, the Cold War began in earnest. The exclusion of the USSR from the Manhattan Project at the end of the Second World War spurred Stalin to invest huge resources into developing a Soviet atomic bomb, just at a moment when the country needed widespread economic support to recover from the devastating losses of the war. This led to the foundation of the Zhdanov doctrine, starting from the viewpoint that anything foreign (and especially American) was a bad influence and inherently un-Soviet. The instructed way for Soviet citizens to reject this influence was to celebrate nationalism and renew their engagement with socialism. Following Stalin’s famous Kremlin toast in August 1945, this was an explicitly Russian nationalism, sidelining all other nationalities and ethnicities within the USSR.

Large numbers of citizens joined the Soviet Communist Party after 1945, many of them veterans of the Red Army. While they had been enthusiastic supporters of the war effort, few of them were broadly educated in Marxist Leninism, as was usually expected of party members. The ‘Short Course’ book, first published in 1936, had been intended to be a mass-market instruction in not only the history of the Soviet Union, but also a crash course in the key writings of Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Stalin. Zhdanov, Malenkov, Molotov, and Stalin each recognized in 1946 that the Short Course had not achieved a wide enough readership, and relatively few of the new Party members had anything like an adequate political consciousness. When faced with how to deal with

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7 See Jonathan Brunstedt, ‘Stalin’s Toast: Victory and the Vagaries of Postwar Russocentrism’, in The Soviet Myth of World War II: Patriotic Memory and the Russian Question in the USSR (Cambridge, 2021), 35–71. Stalin’s Toast was his attempt to extend the national unity of the Great Patriotic War into the new Cold War era, though he attributed all of the significant achievements of the War to Russian citizens and minimized the sacrifices made by other ethnic groups.
this, the Central Committee (hereafter, CC) could have chosen to invest in public education or mass propaganda. Instead, it chose a different route altogether: to criticize and control the intelligentsia and cultural sector. 9

On 14 August 1946 the CC issued a decree that targeted two literary magazines, Zvezda and Leningrad. 10 Their supposed fault was in publishing works by Mikhail Zoshchenko and Anna Akhmatova. Both were accused of writing bourgeois and foreign-influenced literature. Scholars were also castigated for claiming that Soviet literature had been influenced by European authors, such as Dickens, Flaubert, and Byron. Aleksander Fadeev was appointed head of the Writers’ Union, and he led extensive reforms of the organization; Zoshchenko and Akhmatova’s books were removed from sale and taken out of library collections. 11 On 26 August the CC published a decree on the theatre repertory, particularly targeting the major theatres of Moscow and Leningrad. They were accused of focusing too much on nineteenth-century traditional plays and only rarely staging contemporary works that reflected Soviet life. 12 A third decree was published on 4 September against the Soviet film industry—a sector that had been utterly decimated by the war—focused on Lukov’s The Great Life (1939). 13 Sergei Eisenstein’s Ivan the Terrible: Part Two (1946) also came under criticism, especially for its stark contrast with the ‘positive’ image of Ivan IV in the Stalin prize-winning first instalment (1944), with Ivan’s downfall depicted through his use of secret police to do his bidding and control his rivals.

These first three interventions roughly ceased by the end of September 1946, marked by the repeated publication of Zhdanov’s initial article against Zvezda and Leningrad on the front page of Pravda, 21 September. For the rest of the year and into 1947, the CC focused on breaking ties with the West, exploiting fears among the Soviet population of another war: 14 The highest criticism was reserved for Soviet artists and critics who showed obvious enthusiasm for any Western cultural products or styles. Composers were instructed to observe and police themselves based on the literature, theatre, and film interventions of 1946 and 1947. This self-policing evidently failed from the CC’s perspective, as they came for musicians in early 1948. 15

The 1948 crackdown on music differed from the 1936 anti-formalism campaigns, best epitomized by the attack on Shostakovich in January that year. 16 Following the publication of several highly critical articles in Pravda, Shostakovich’s works were dropped from performance and he was dismissed from teaching positions. In the climate of the Great Terror, this was a dark time for Shostakovich. He was able to exonerate himself with his Fifth Symphony (1937), which was widely celebrated. In contrast to 1936, in 1948 the entire musical establishment was examined and found wanting, rather than a single figure. In a manner similar to literature, theatre, and film in 1946, the events of 1948 were just as wide-reaching for Soviet musicians, as not only were individuals explicitly

9 See Boterbloem, Life and Times of Andrei Zhdanov, 271.
11 Boterbloem, Life and Times of Andrei Zhdanov, 281.
14 George Kennan’s infamous ‘Long Telegram’ of 1946 reported this scaremongering back to the United States, shaping their foreign policy for the subsequent decades.
criticized and humiliated, but the wider community was instructed to follow the positive example of Socialist Realism. In modern discussions of Soviet music history, 1948 is understood as pivotal, but it is 1936 that is more often discussed in public-facing media, possibly as it was more personal to Shostakovich and with higher dramatic stakes, considering the Great Terror as a backdrop. In 1936, Shostakovich was undeniably the star Soviet composer, but in the years leading up to the attack, he had written several works that could be seen as more ‘experimental’ than could be accepted under Socialist Realism. He also enjoyed ongoing international fame as the author of the Seventh Symphony, the work that had briefly united the Allies through music in their efforts against the forces of Nazism; as one American author wrote in 1942, ‘by now it is almost unpatriotic not to like Dmitri Shostakovich’s Seventh Symphony’.

In 1948, a whole host of composers were criticized with differing reactions: it was perhaps cruellest to focus on Shostakovich, given his previous ordeal in the anti-formalism campaign. Prokofiev was also harshly censured, but he did not speak publicly to account for himself. Nikolai Myaskovsky, one of the most senior and respected of all Soviet musicians, was denounced as being the teacher of many of those now accused of formalism, by implication being the progenitor of all problems in Soviet music.

The crackdown did not conclude with Zhdanov’s death in August 1948. In 1949 musicologists were condemned even more stringently than composers had been, being grouped together with music critics as the instigators of formalism and promoters of Western-influenced music. Theatre artists may have been forgiven for thinking they had escaped the worst of the Zhdanov reforms, with relatively little high-profile criticism since the 1946 decrees. In 1949, this changed abruptly, as theatre and literature critics were accused of being contributors to the supposed rot that had penetrated all the Soviet arts, and a handful of plays written in 1949 betray the urgency that writers felt in responding to the renewed allegations of that year. One play stands out as at, least initially appearing to be, part of an attempt by writers, actors, and theatre critics to exonerate themselves at the expense of Soviet musicians. Sergei Mikhalkov’s Ilya Golovin is a revealing example of art under the Zhdanovshchina that questions widespread assumptions that artists of this time period either wrote ‘for the drawer’ or instead produced banal Socialist Realism. While the play is a barely veiled satire on Shostakovich himself, upon further inspection it reveals more than a cruel and mocking treatment of the events of 1936 and 1948. For the remainder of this article, I argue that Ilya Golovin should instead be viewed as a crucial example of Soviet artists struggling to cope with political intervention in their work while trying to formulate, meet, and exceed, the targets of Socialist Realism imposed on them from above.

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17 Simo Mikonnen has, however, argued that Shostakovich did not suffer particularly egregious consequences from the 1936 campaign. His works were not banned, and he was still receiving new commissions and performances relatively soon afterwards. See Simo Mikonen, “Muddle Instead of Music” in 1936: Cataclysm of Musical Administration’, in Pauline Fairclough (ed.), Shostakovich Studies 2 (Cambridge, 2010), 231–48.


20 On the phenomenon of writing ‘for the drawer’, see Fay, Shostakovich: A Life (Oxford, 2005), 169 and n. 16.
The French journalist Michael Gordey stayed in Moscow in the late 1940s and published a memoir on his experiences. In it, he reflected on a 1949 play so strange that the memory of it remained with him:

It is obvious that the subject of *Ilya Golovin* could not have made a work for theatre in any country whatever except the USSR. The very fact that such a play could hold tens of thousands of spectators enthralled for three hours deserves to be noted. I cannot imagine a theatre in Paris or New York devoting an evening to the exposition (even dramatized) of a conflict of doctrine in musical or pictorial art. It is interesting to remark that the Soviet regime is seeking to ‘educate’ the masses by making them consider these problems and by forcing them to think about such things as modernism, art for art’s sake, melody … It remains to be seen whether a play like *Ilya Golovin* establishes a loftier degree of culture than a vaudeville show or a love drama without any political content.\(^{21}\)

The depiction in mass media of socialist-realist views on music did not begin with such a play, however. Evgeny Dobrenko has traced the rise of satirical cartoons, films, and even novels that deployed similar narrative formats.\(^{22}\) Key examples from the post-war era include the film *Tale from the Siberia* (1947) and various cartoons in *Krokodil*. *Ilya Golovin* stands apart from these, however, in its apparent popularity, and its direct depiction of Shostakovich also marks it as a blatant object of propaganda. Gordey reflects further: ‘Shostakovich had nevertheless been exceedingly popular in Russia, even when his music was very “modernist”; but apparently the Soviet audience speedily forgets its past infatuations and accepts the party’s decree on art and music as unassailable truth.’\(^{23}\) The idea that Soviet audiences were quick to follow cultural instruction is perhaps not so surprising. Considering this was a population that had survived the Great Terror in the 1930s, they would be used to paying lip-service to just about any government proclamation. This does not necessarily account for such behaviour, however: Oleg Prokofiev, son of the composer, wrote that ‘it is difficult to imagine how the general public tacitly accepted this opinion’.\(^{24}\)

The play was written by Mikhalkov and performed at the prestigious Moscow Arts Theatre (MKhAT); music was provided by Khachaturian. Here is a summary of the plot, with commentary on resemblances to real-life persons and events given in footnotes:\(^{25}\)

The First Act is set in the dacha of the composer Ilya Golovin, outside Moscow (c.1949). It is a luxurious residence with a central mahogany table and grand paintings. It is Golovin’s name-day (i.e. 2 August). The main characters include his brother Stepan (a piano tuner), his second wife, Alevtina, and his children from his first marriage, Lisa (a singer) and Fedor (a painter).\(^{26}\) Golovin is misanthropic and refuses to visit a group of Pioneer scouts camped near the house. Lisa announces she will be performing in the premiere of the new opera by the up-and-coming composer Melnikov. Zalishaev,


\(^{23}\) Gordey, *Visa to Moscow*, 145.


\(^{26}\) Even Golovin’s children are a parallel to Shostakovich, with one daughter and one son; the second wife could, at a stretch, even be a reference to Shostakovich divorcing and then remarrying his first wife, Nina.
a music critic, enters and together with Golovin dismisses Melnikov’s opera. Golovin plays an extract from his Fourth Symphony at the piano; Zalishaev sings its praises. Fedor struggles to paint, only painting flowers and still lives. He and Lisa argue about the role of the artist. Their neighbour, Bazhov, enters and asks if anyone has seen the morning’s Pravda yet. On the second page, an article called ‘Formalist Freaks in Music’ has been published that criticizes Golovin’s music for being built from ‘ridiculous and false sound combinations’ (20). Golovin is furious, but Zalishaev leaves in a panic to return to Moscow. Act I finishes with Lisa’s insistence that the Pravda author is correct: ‘It had to happen. And it did’ (28).

Act II is in the same dacha, six months later. Friends and family have abandoned Golovin, who has been thrown into a deep depression. He switches on the radio to hear the ‘Voice of America’ broadcast his Fourth Symphony. Friends and family still arrive to visit; Bazhov mentions that a tank brigade is undertaking manoeuvres in the area. Enter General Roslyi, the head of the tank forces. Roslyi is starstruck to meet Golovin and recalls fond memories when his tank brigade would sing Golovin’s patriotic songs during the war. He suggests Golovin should write an opera, but Golovin refuses. Golovin goes into a long monologue of how he had tried but struggled to understand Golovin’s more recent works but concluded that his music was ‘not Russian’ (p. 44). Roslyi brings his troops into the dacha, and they sing Golovin’s wartime song. Moved to tears, Golovin leaves.

Act III, Golovin’s Moscow apartment. Golovin is a changed man with renewed optimism. When Stepan visits, Golovin explains how his epiphany resulted from sustained reading of Lenin and Stalin’s works and reflecting on the role of music during wartime.

27 Zalishaev serves as a representation of all music critics, but his actions resemble figures like Ivan Sollertinsky and Boris Asafiev. Sollertinsky had been one of Shostakovich’s closest friends and defenders during the 1936 affair and had also been instrumental in the promotion of international music in the early USSR. Asafiev, meanwhile, had also praised much of Shostakovich’s music in the early 1930s but underwent a rapid about-turn and went on to become the most respected musicologist and critic in the Soviet Union by the time of his death in Jan. 1949.

28 It was Shostakovich’s Fourth Symphony that was withdrawn shortly before performance. Golovin’s work is compared favorably to Paul Hindemith; Shostakovich had previously named Hindemith as one of his very favourite composers. See Roman Ilyich Gruber, ‘Responses of Shostakovich to a Questionnaire on the Psychology of the Creative Process’, in Laurel E. Fay (ed.), Shostakovich and His World (Princeton, 2004), 27–41; see also Ludmilla Kovanetskaya, ‘Yesche raz o khindemite shostakovicha’, in Olga Digonskaya and Ludmilla Kovnatskaya (eds.), Dmitriy Shostakovich: Issledovaniya i materiali, v. 4 (Moscow, 2012), 131–63.

29 A blatant paraphrase of the infamous ‘Muddle Instead of Music’ article condemning Shostakovich’s Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk; see Anon., ‘Sumbur vmesto muzïki’, Pravda, 28 Jan 1936, 3. Zhdanov’s speeches also frequently criticized composers for writing ‘false’ music; see Andrei A. Zhdanov (trans. unknown), Essays on Literature, Philosophy, and Music (New York, 1950), 82.

30 Given the anti-American and anti-foreign tenor of the Zhdanov reforms outlined above, the fact that it is an American broadcast that praises Golovin’s music is central to understanding his purported formalism. Violetta Gudkova summarizes the entire moral of the play as ‘what it is to have a truly Russian spirit that opposes alien foreign ways, the bourgeois West, and American soullessness’. See Violetta Gudkova, ‘“That Through Draft Gave Lots of People a Chill”: Anti-American Motifs in Soviet Playwriting (1946–1954)’, Russian Studies in Literature, 46/3 (2010), 11–50 at 27. The American radio broadcast is also a nod to the ‘Voice of America’, which broadcast Shostakovich’s Seventh Symphony during the war; radio broadcasts played a vital role in the dissemination of this symphony. The very fact that it is Golovin’s Fourth Symphony points to further parallels with Shostakovich: as mentioned above in n. 28, Shostakovich withdrew his own Fourth Symphony shortly before its 1936 premiere, after the fallout from the anti-formalism campaign. It was published in a four-hand piano reduction in 1946 and was harshly criticized in the 1948 talks.

31 This is another parallel with Shostakovich’s career, as he had written numerous wartime songs, including ‘Song of a Guard’s Division’, also known as ‘The Fearless Regiments are on the move’ (1941), ‘Invincible Red Army’ (1943), written together with Khachaturian, and several popular songs from the soundtrack to Molodaya Gvardiya (The Young Guard), from 1948.

32 Zhdanov explicitly condemned composers for not writing operas; see Zhdanov, Essays on Literature, Philosophy, and Music, 83–4.
Zalishaev enters and explains that Melnikov has now become leader of the Composers’ Union and released a report condemning music critics. Melnikov enters and immediately accuses Zalishaev of being a bad influence on Golovin. Zalishaev storms out. Golovin reveals to Melnikov his good news: he has completed his piano concerto. The triumphant work is played for almost four minutes, after which Golovin’s family members begin to return. The short final scene sees Golovin return from Paris, where he has attended a Peace Conference. Fedor has changed his painting practice to depict the tank corps. Golovin describes his delight at hearing 50,000 attendees applauding Stalin and declares his intention to write his Fifth Symphony. The play finishes with a chorus singing Golovin’s Tanker’s Song.

Dobrenko notes the resemblances between large parts of the text and Zhdanov’s speeches to Soviet composers, including certain turns of phrase. Zhdanov wrote that ‘[the formalist] trend substitutes music that is false, vulgar, and often simply pathological, for natural, beautiful, human music’ and that ‘any listener will tell you that the work of the Soviet composers of the formalistic trend is totally unlike classical music’. As will be shown below, Mikhalkov was not the only artist to incorporate allusion to and quotation from Zhdanov in his works. Shostakovich would do so, though with an entirely contrasting motivation—i.e. for parody. The play’s plot was only one aspect of its success; the main key to its apparent triumph was the major players involved in its production.

THE PRODUCTION

*Ilya Golovin* was staged at the Moscow Artists’ Academic Theatre (hereafter MKhAT), which was easily the most respected theatrical institution in Russia. It had been founded in 1898 by Konstantin Stanislavsky and Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko and had made its name in the early twentieth century with pioneering productions of Chekhov’s plays. It was here that Stanislavsky experimented with revolutionary approaches to naturalist drama, later dubbed ‘method acting’. Towards the end of his life, Stanislavsky himself came under official censure from the Soviet state in a manner that was similar to Shostakovich’s experiences in 1936. One of the consequences of the Zhdanov reforms was the closure of several theatres across Moscow, which resulted in dozens of highly esteemed actors all trying to find work on the main MKhAT stage. Despite its reputation, the Moscow Art Theatre (named the Gorky Moscow Art Theatre from 1932) was not immune to the criticisms of 1946 and 1949, and it too launched productions that toed the ideological line. Inna Solovyova writes that ‘there was a drive for plays which would give a correct—i.e., joyful, overblown—picture of Soviet life … the best theatres in Moscow were thrown open to them’. The production of *Ilya Golovin* brought one of the emerging leading lights of socialist realism to the theatre, Sergei Mikhalkov, who was already a celebrated writer by this point (though his legacy is contested today).

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33 This confirms that Melnikov represents Tikhon Khrennikov, the young composer with several operas to his name who was promoted to head of the Composers’ Union in 1948, a position from which he criticized and dismissed his colleagues, just as Melnikov does. Melnikov’s opera has parallels with Khrennikov’s *V Buryu* (Into the Storm) from 1939.

34 Shostakovich attended the March 1949 Peace Conference in New York, widely viewed as his public-service apology following his rehabilitation after the events of 1948. See Klefstad, ‘Shostakovich and the Peace Conference’. The play’s change of Peace Conference location to Paris aligns with the Zhdanov Doctrine stance of opposition to the United States.


Mikhalkov rose to fame chiefly for his children’s stories, which he worked on throughout his life. His greatest achievement by the time of the Zhdanov era was writing the lyrics for the Soviet National Anthem in 1943, when he was still a young writer with only a handful of works to his name. As Elena Prokhorova has observed, the choice of a young author was probably deliberate on Stalin’s part—‘someone who would owe everything personally to Stalin’. Mikhalkov would go on to rewrite the text of the anthem twice: once in the 1970s to remove references to Stalin, and again in the early 2000s to provide a new text for the Russian Federation. Mikhalkov also penned the epigraph for the Moscow Tomb of the Unknown Soldier: ‘Your name is unknown, your feat is immortal.’ When it came to the imposition of Socialist Realism, Mikhalkov was an author who was practically moulded by it. His first publications were in 1936, meaning that he did not have to adjust his writing approach or scruples to accommodate the aesthetic as others had to. There was a complex motivation behind Mikhalkov’s authorship of a morality play like Ilya Golovin that eagerly met the demand for socialist-realist propaganda. He excelled at expressing Stalinist morality and ideology in a simplified manner for children: who better to present it for adults?

Mikhalkov was by no means the only famous figure involved with Ilya Golovin. The uncontested star of the production was Vasily Toporkov, a protégé of Stanislavsky. Toporkov not only co-directed the production but also starred in the titular role, and it was arguably his depiction that salvaged the play from potential obscurity. One of Toporkov’s Soviet biographers discussed Ilya Golovin at some length, representing one of the few voices in the post-Stalin era to mention the play at all: ‘all of Toporkov’s best acting qualities froze and stiffened in this role; … a fierce enemy of the “everyday”,’ he played in Ilya Golovin a man without a distinctive feature, a person without a face, a man without personality. Toporkov himself wrote of his dislike for the post-Zhdanov wave of plays, including Ilya Golovin: ‘the biggest shortcoming of Mikhalkov’s Ilya Golovin is that its characters reveal themselves so immediately that the play ends in the second act!’ More surprisingly, Toporkov’s article was published in the summer of 1950, while Ilya Golovin was still on stage. Toporkov was immensely respected and yet with Ilya Golovin he was forced to stoop to ideological conformity similar to many actors of his generation. Modern critics have understood Toporkov’s involvement as a desperate attempt to exonerate himself under the circumstances.

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40 Ibid. 286.

41 Mikhailov’s other works around the time of Ilya Golovin include Ya khochu domoi (‘I want to go home’), a grim war tale for children. As late as 1952, Mikhalkov was still writing satirical plays that lampooned Stalinist targets, with the play Rak (‘Crawfish’), which depicts an inefficient bureaucrat. Ibid. 290.

42 M. Rogachevskiy, Vasily Osipovich Toporkov (Moscow, 1969), 221–2.


44 Toporkov was not the only actor to criticize the play publicly: N. Dorokhin, who played Bazhov in the MKhAT production, condemned Mikhalkov’s writing as full of ‘voids’. See N. Dorokhin, ‘Istochnik tvorchestva’ (‘Source of Creativity’), Literaturnaya gazeta, 25 Aug, 1951, 3.

Besides Toporkov and Mikhalkov, there was still one further artist with an esteemed reputation who participated in the production: Aram Khachaturian. The French visitor Gordey compared Khachaturian’s involvement to the infamous political show-trials and forced confessions of the 1930s. Khachaturian had himself been named during the 1948 crackdown, but he was doubly criticized during the Zhdanovshchina, not only for his music being ‘formalist’ but also because of his high position in the committee of the Composers’ Union. Khachaturian’s music was widely seen by critics and members of the Composers’ Union as being conformist and sufficiently socialist realist. After the 1948 resolutions, the musicologist Tamara Livanova went to considerable efforts to justify Khachaturian’s inclusion on Zhdanov’s list of formalists. Not only were Khachaturian’s works dropped from performance, he was also stripped of his position in the Composers’ Union—one that he had held for over ten years. He lamented the loss of his position and revealed that the experience made him consider leaving the profession altogether:

Those were tragic days. I gave eleven years of my life to the organization and leadership of the Composers’ Union. How we all waited for our Constituent Congress! And it was here at this time that I was clouted on the head so unjustly. My repenting speech at the First Congress was insincere. I was crushed, destroyed. I seriously considered changing professions.

It might seem tempting to conclude that Khachaturian’s music for Ilya Golovin was an attempt to redeem himself with the authorities, but this is not necessarily the case. By the end of 1948, he was on his way to rehabilitation, with agreed contracts for projects including the 1949 documentary Lenin and his hit suite The Battle of Stalingrad, for which he won a Stalin Prize. Khachaturian’s letters reveal that the prospect of a lucrative collaboration with the MKhAT represented an important lifeline after the events of 1948: ‘This year I will write two films, and music for the Moscow Art Theatre, the Suite “Battle of Stalingrad” and an overture. … In general, there are many proposals … It will be enough to say that I had Mikhalkov and Yanshin (from the Moscow Art Theatre) as collaborators. This play deals with musical events in our country in 1948.’ Khachaturian had written for MKhAT productions in the early 1940s and continued writing more after Ilya Golovin. He gave his music for the play an opus number (Op. 73), and he was pleased enough to write to a friend and tell them that his music was ‘accepted (please believe me, and do not think me a braggart) with a bang!’

Khachaturian’s music can be heard in a preserved and digitized stage recording from the MKhAT production in 1950. The recording is a fascinating document, particularly...
because it gives us the audiences’ reactions to the play. For instance, there is audible disapproval and tutting when Alevtina complains about the size of their Moscow apartment, saying ‘We are literally suffocating in our seventy metres!’; and incredulous laughter in response to Zalishayev’s extended appraisals of Golovin’s music. The recording not only documents these reactions and Toporkov’s masterful depiction of Golovin, but also Khachaturian’s music. The first piece heard in the play is actually a piano reduction of Rachmaninov’s ‘Spring Waters’, functioning as an initial positive role model and example of the Russian classics. The first significant contribution from Khachaturian is the extract from Golovin’s Fourth Symphony, first played in piano reduction by Golovin himself (subsequently heard in an orchestrated version on the radio in the second act). See Ex. 1.

This would have been a challenge to write, given the ideological climate: Golovin’s Fourth Symphony needed to function as a ‘bad example’ of formalism in the narrative of the play. Following the brief introduction, at bar 7 there is a dotted rhythm contrasting the registers of the piano. This is an alarmingly clear nod to the opening of Shostakovich’s Fifth Symphony (1937), with its similarly disjointed and dissonant opening exchanges with a double-dotted rhythm; the Golovin extract is a clear replica of Shostakovich’s orchestral works. (See Ex. 2). The reference to Shostakovich’s Fifth Symphony is somewhat contradictory, however, in that Shostakovich’s piece was understood as his response to ‘just criticism’, though critics have long debated whether or not the work can be understood as sufficiently socialist realist or not. While the opening of the symphony bears markers of ‘formalism’, the expressive and stylistic trajectory of the remainder of the piece suggests a journey not dissimilar to Golovin’s own. Accordingly, Shostakovich’s Fifth was a complicated model for Khachaturian to imitate; in practical terms, it would reasonably have been his best-known symphony besides his Seventh, and that work was intimately bound up with narratives of patriotism and courage, so was rather less suited to crude imitation for the purposes of illustrating the play’s plot.

Such blatant imitation allowed the audience clearly to recognize the allusion, and therefore understand the play’s broader message. Yusefovich claims that Khachaturian found composing this music to be ‘all but impossible …; instead, he composed music showing that Golovin’s formalism was only apparent and that he was actually a gifted composer’. Behind these words there may be allusion to Khachaturian’s friendship with Shostakovich. By 1949, the two were close friends, having collaborated on several


55 A write-up of the play’s production process reveals that the actor playing Stepan Golovin had actually improvised the inclusion of the Rachmaninov piece during rehearsals, demonstrating the use of Stanislavsky’s ‘method’ technique during production; Mikhalkov and Toporkov decided to include it. See N. M. Gorchakov, ‘Ilya Golovin – S.V. Mikhalkova’, in Anon., Ezhevodnik moskovskogo khudozhestvennoho teatra: 1949–1950 (Moscow, 1952), 440.
56 E. E. Smirnova was the pianist credited for the performance. She performed the extracts live on a second piano concealed onstage behind a screen: ibid.
57 For a full examination of this subtitle and how it came to be attached to Shostakovich’s Fifth Symphony, see Fay, Shostakovich: A Life, 102–3.
59 More subtly, from b. 17 of Ex. 1, there is also a nod to Shostakovich’s Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk District, in the Act III Scene 6 interlude—even down to the repetition of F–E pitches.
60 Yusefovich, Aram Khachaturyan, 194.

songs and even going on a family holiday together in 1943.\textsuperscript{61} It would presumably have been difficult for Khachaturian to write music that crudely imitated a close friend and one who had also been criticized just as harshly as himself during the Zhdanovshchina.

The other key musical passage is equally vital to the play’s plot: Golovin’s triumphant Piano Concerto. This is a much lengthier excerpt, playing for over four minutes in the stage recording. Here, the musical style harks back to the late-Romantic Russian tradition, including nods to Tchaikovsky, Rachmaninov, and Medtner (see Ex. 3). The Tchaikovsky influence is especially clear from the opening, with identical key, rhythms,

\textsuperscript{61} G. Schneerson, \textit{Aram Khachatryan}, trans. Xenia Danko, ed. Olga Shartse (Moscow, 1959), 57.
Ex. 2. Dmitri Shostakovich, Symphony No. 5, first movement, opening. © Copyright 1939 by Boosey & Hawkes Music Publishers Ltd. Reproduced by permission of Boosey & Hawkes Music Publishers Ltd

The counter-melody rhythm also echoes the first movement of Rachmaninov’s Second Piano Concerto. The kind of imitation by semi-quoting seen in Ex. 1 is repeated here, though with very different intentions; to make very clear allusions to a late-Romantic piano concerto tradition in order to show clearly that Golovin has redeemed himself by writing music that resumes this tradition. With such clear allusions it would be difficult for audiences to mistake what Khachaturian was trying to achieve; it may well have been this kind of echoing that Shostakovich was referring to when he later wrote that the play dealt with musical matters in a ‘superficial and dilettantish way’.63

Finally, there is the Tanker’s song (subsequently published as the ‘Song of Heroes’), which has clear nods to wartime songs like Aleksandrov’s ‘The Sacred War’ (1941). Judging from the stage recording, it was the best-received part of the entire production, and it was the only aspect of Khachaturian’s involvement with Ilya Golovin to be acknowledged in his wider output, as it was published in several editions of his songs. It was also the only musical element of the play to receive a clear live performance, since it was sung from the stage while other music was either mimed by actors while performed

62 Boris Izrael’evskiï, Muzïka v spektaklyakh moskovskogo kydõzhhestvennogo teatra (Moscow, 1965), 140.
63 D. Shostakovich, ‘Osoboya professiya’, Literaturnaya gazeta, 5 Oct. 1954, 1. See below for more on this key quote from Shostakovich.
64 It was published in vol. xxiv of Khachaturian’s collected works: Aram Khachaturyan, Sobranie sochineniy v dvadtsati chetverih tomyakh, xxiv (Moscow, 1986), 237–8. The foreword to the volume also lists that the song was published as a stand-alone publication in 1950 as well as in the 1971 edition of Khachaturian’s collected songs (ibid. 13).
Ex. 3. Khachaturian, ‘Golovin’s Piano Concerto’, opening

Ex. 4. Tchaikovsky, Piano Concerto No. 1, first movement, opening

by a concealed pianist or heard through the radio speaker. Several critics singled it out for special praise, including Army Marshall Kliment Voroshilov, who had been in the audience.\footnote{Izrailevsky, \\textit{Muzïka v spektaklyakh moskovskogo kydozhennogo teatra}, 140.} This element of real musical performance could subtly confirm the play’s message that Golovin is not rehabilitated by listening to critics (who instead send him into a depression), but through genuine communion with people. Khachaturian’s participation in the play should be understood not just as a humiliation, one of many during the Zhdanovshchina, but also the continuation of an artistic partnership with MKhAT. Khachaturian did not necessarily identify with the attempts to conform and to seek absolution that were most likely Mikhailov’s motivations for writing the play. Despite its ideologically correct aims, \\textit{Ilya Golovin}’s production process was not without obstacles, however.
The premiere performance took place on 6 November 1949; the Soviet press were relatively slow to release extended reviews. In private, however, official organs went rapidly into lengthy discussions. The Agitprop section of the CC met to discuss the play on 15 November, and they took the extraordinary step of summoning Mikhalkov and Toporkov before the release of their report so as to allow them to act as speedily as possible on any recommendations made. A detailed report was released on 26 November 1949 by the Agitprop committee:

The performance sharply exposes the anti-people nature of formalism, the harmfulness of cosmopolitan criticism, and shows the fruitful influence of party decisions on ideological issues on the development of Soviet art. Particularly successful in the performance are the scenes where the deep vital interest of the people in the fate of art is emphasized, the demands of the people for art are expressed.

At the same time, the report censured Mikhalkov harshly for being insufficiently ‘realist’ on the strength of Soviet music. The report’s authors singled out Melnikov as the character who should represent all that is positive in Soviet music but argued that he was instead portrayed as ‘pale and inexpressive’. They also criticized the younger characters in Ilya Golovin as ‘ideologically faceless’, especially Golovin’s children. The report went on to make select criticisms of Khachaturian’s score:

A significant place in the performance is occupied by music, by means of which the process of the restructuring of the main character-composer is revealed. The music for the performance, written by A. Khachaturian, is sharp and expressive in the first scenes, where Golovin’s formalistic delusions are discussed. The song was written very successfully, testifying to the vitality of using folk melodies as a foundational compositional principle for our composers. The music of the final scenes, which was supposed to show Golovin’s creative restructuring, succeeded to a lesser extent—it lacks breadth and melody, and it does not sufficiently reveal the new realistic character of Golovin’s music.

Their overwhelming criticism (and recommendation for future works) was that the play should have been reviewed and subjected to preliminary discussion before it went into rehearsal. The authors heavily condemned the Writers’ Union’s role in the play, saying that they had ‘repeated the mistakes that had taken place in the past’, with particular condemnation of their decision to publish the script in Novyi Mir when it should have been considered provisional. These criticisms were quickly acted upon, with a revised script that differs from the Novyi Mir version, including an expanded version of Zalishaev and Melnikov’s confrontation and the repetition of the Tanker’s Song at the very end of the play. Such alterations would mean little if they had not translated into a broadly popular audience reaction, however, and the Soviet popular press published overwhelmingly positive reviews.

66 The play was first performed in Leningrad, with the Moscow premiere on 7 November. Both productions featured Khachaturian’s music. See D. I. Zolotnitsky et al., Teatr i zhizn’ (Leningrad and Moscow, 1957), 411; also I. V. Golubovskiy, Muzïkal’niy leningrad: 1917–1957 (Leningrad, 1958), 344.
67 Such swift intervention aligned with the 1946 resolution on theatre, which called for less bureaucracy and faster processes for reviewing new plays.
69 Ibid.
70 Ibid.
Ilya Golovin was first announced in the Soviet press in Sovetskoye iskusstvo as part of the cultural celebrations for the 32nd anniversary of the October revolution. The first substantial review was published on 23 November in Novoe Russkoe Slovo. Crucially, for the first review of the play in print, it named Shostakovich as the obvious model for Golovin. It also bore the not-so-subtle title of ‘Fight against Cosmopolitanism in Theatre’. The reception of Ilya Golovin as a piece against ‘cosmopolitanism’ betrays its contexts and offers us more nuance in our understanding of the Zhdanovshchina and the significance of the play. While at first Ilya Golovin might seem a crude attack on Shostakovich or an attempt by artists in literature and theatre to exonerate themselves by depicting the criticized musicians, a careful reading of the social circumstances of this play will reveal that in its final version, its target was another proponent of ‘cosmopolitanism’ besides Shostakovich: the stereotypical ‘Jew’.

‘THE FIGHT AGAINST COSMOPOLITANISM IN THE THEATRE’
The 1949 campaigns against theatre primarily targeted critics. Many of the published articles accused critics of ‘cosmopolitanism’ and it was no coincidence that the named critics were almost all Jewish. The word ‘cosmopolitan’ was frequently combined with the adjective ‘rootless’. In line with the nationalist tone behind the Zhdanov doctrine, it was relatively simple to understand the term as referring to the anti-Semitic view that Jews did not have sufficient loyalty to the Soviet state, further complicated by the founding of the state of Israel in 1948. Anti-Semitism had increased in the post-war period, most notably marked by Stalin’s assassination of Solomon Mikhoels, whose murder had been framed to look like a car accident in January 1948. In the time of the Great Terror, no such elaborate staging would have been necessary. During the 1949 anti-cosmopolitan campaign, Mikhoels’s colleagues on the wartime ‘Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee’ organization were arrested, and Stalin’s own medical team was purged of Jewish staff. Frank Grüner has justifiably described the anti-cosmopolitan campaign as a ‘pogrom against the Soviet intellectual and cultural life’. The tone in the theatre press reached frightening levels, with one article titled ‘We will destroy the rootless cosmopolitan once and for all!’

Fadeev’s January 1949 Pravda article equated ‘cosmopolitanism’ with ‘anti-patriotism’. As he explained with a botanical metaphor, critics were ‘like those parasites in the vegetable world which gnaw the sprouts of healthy crops’.

73 Anon., ‘Bor’ba s kosmopolitanizmom v teatre’ (‘The Fight against Cosmopolitanism in the Theatre’), Novoe russkoe slovo, 23 Nov. 1949, 2.
77 Pavel Izmost’ev, ‘Do kontsa razgromim bezrodnykh kosmopolitov!’, Otzyvy (Moscow), no. 3 (1949), 184.
78 Fadeev, ‘Ob odnoi antipatrioticheskoi gruppe teatral’nykh kritikov’. Angelina Stepanova, Fadeev’s wife, played the part of Alevtina Golovina in the MKhAT production.
Jewish medical team of conspiracy to kill him. Again, the language of cosmopolitanism was used interchangeably with ‘anti-patriotic’. Theatre historians today recall the discussion without necessarily pointing out its anti-Semitism:

A merciless war was declared in science and art to ‘rootless cosmopolitans and insidious anti-patriots’. The talented scientists, doctors, writers, and composers became the victims of this war. Playwrights and theatres throughout the country were ordered to create a repertory of plays and performances dedicated to exposing the contemptible ‘low worshippers’. It was said that they attempted to undermine the foundations of Soviet life at the instigation of foreign spies.79

Bartoshevich’s mention of ‘foreign spies’ makes the link between anti-cosmopolitanism and the Cold War motivation behind the Zhdanov campaigns clear: the stereotype of the Jewish ‘citizen of nowhere’ had no allegiance to the Russo-nationalist ideological campaign of the early Cold War and was thus the object of hate and suspicion.

In addition to the phrase ‘cosmopolitan’ as a stand-in for the racist caricature of the anti-patriotic Jew, references to ‘Esperanto’ also featured heavily in wider public discourse during this time. Brigid O’Keeffe has shown how Esperanto, the utopian ‘universal language’ devised by L. L. Zamenhof in 1873, was viewed with misgiving in Russia as an attempt to obscure patriotism.80 In particular, over time this scepticism was combined with anti-Semitism to form the conspiracy that Esperanto was a project intended to reform the world via a Jewish universal language.81 While a discussion of ‘cosmopolitanism’ might have been too brazen a gesture even for Mikhalkov, ‘Esperanto’ does feature in Golovin: in one exchange, General Roslyi explicitly discusses the term in reference to Golovin’s music.

Roslyi: I would also like [music] to be universal, but first of all it should be deeply popular, and then, believe me, all of humanity will play and listen to it. And what you wrote is, forgive me, the Esperanto language. And I neither speak nor sing in Esperanto and I will not. I don’t understand it, Ilya Petrovich!

Golovin: Esperanto can be learned.

Roslyi: Why teach it? There are no such people either. This is his … these … how they … the rootless invented them.82

As Dobrenko observes, ‘this was a reference, as the 1949 viewer understood, to “rootless cosmopolitans”—more simply put, to Jews’.83 Bartoshevich recalled that the music critic character Zalishaev was presented as ‘cosmopolitan’ in the play, and that in the final act, he is ‘exposed and arrested’.84 This reveals the ultimate motivation behind the production of Il’ya Golovin: while Golovin is presented as something of a malefactor in the play, it is Zalishaev who is the ultimate antagonist, as confirmed by the cast photo of V. Volkov as the music critic.85 He has a distinctive frown, his arms are folded, and he wears an

80 Brigid O’Keeffe, Esperanto and Languages of Internationalism in Revolutionary Russia (London, 2021).
83 Dobrenko, Late Stalin: The Aesthetics of Politics, 272.
85 Gorchakov, Il’ya Golovin, 457. Zalishaev’s status as ‘cosmopolitan’ is prefigured by his praise for Golovin’s Fourth Symphony in the First Act, a work which Roslyi later describes as being ‘not Russian’. 
oversized suit with bow tie. All other photographed characters in Gorchakov’s chapter have an air of nobility, especially Golovin. It is only Zalishaev who looks distinctly villainous. The stage recording features laughter from the audience when Zalishaev attempts to defend himself in the final act, reinforcing his position as the ultimate villain of the piece. By the end of the play, Golovin is forgiven and absolved of his formalist trespasses, but it is Zalishaev who is humiliated and virtually exiled, as best represented in Melnikov’s attack in him in the final act:

Melnikov: No! You have not loved it! [i.e. Soviet music] It wasn’t love for it, was it, that made you raise a pandemonium around Golovin’s name, who has strayed from the path he was following, from the only path that leads to the heart of the people?! You grabbed him by the hand and started pushing him where our ideological enemies would applaud him. You tried to take him away from us, him, Golovin, who despite all the errors of his way is ours, not yours! But we won’t let you have him! And he won’t come to you on his own, either, because he is a Soviet man, a Soviet artist.86

This final tirade, inserted into the text only after the Agitprop review, reveals the primary motivation of the play. While Ilya Golovin required the crude caricature of Shostakovich, it is primarily used as a dramatic vehicle to depict the crushing of ‘cosmopolitan’ critics who present a bad influence on otherwise ‘healthy’ Soviet artists. In this light, we can easily read the play in the context of numerous artists trying to present themselves in the most positive light during the Zhdanovshchina, the most eager to learn from criticism.

More substantial reviews emerged in January of 1950, many acknowledging the play’s stance on the 1949 attacks against Jewish critics. V. Poltoratskiy, in a half-page spread in Izvestiia, understood Zalishaev himself to be a ‘cosmopolitan’, the first time that an author had made this depiction explicit.87 An even longer article was penned by V. Aleksandrovna for Novoe Russkoe Slovo that month, which featured a lengthy paragraph explaining the context of the 1948 reforms in music.88 All of the Soviet reviews praised the cast and, in particular, Toporkov’s depiction of Golovin. Gordey described how the Moscow audience around him seemed to enjoy the play, much to his own confusion.89

When the Stalin Prizes were announced in 1950, Mikhalkov was named for a 2nd-class prize for Ilya Golovin, along with his children’s play I Want to Go Home (also with music by Khachaturian). Marina Frolova-Walker has documented how the prize committee expressed concerns about the literary qualities of the play, but they agreed that its political content was worthy of celebration.90

The eventual fate of Ilya Golovin was to fall into obscurity, though that did not stop it from having sixty-three performances in total.91 Despite the mixed reception it received inside the Soviet Union, Ilya Golovin toured to at least five different cities in two countries. Stefan Weiss traces its reception in cities across Hungary and the DDR: Budapest, Berlin, Bautzen, Dresden, and Magdeburg.92

86 Translation from Dobrenko, Late Stalinism, 273.
89 Gordey, Visa to Moscow, 144.
90 Marina Frolova-Walker, Stalin’s Music Prize: Soviet Culture and Politics (New Haven, CT, 2016), 238.
91 A. M. Smelyanskogo, I. N. Solovevoy, and O. V. Evoshinoy (eds.), Moskovskiy khudozhestvennyy teatr: Sto let - Moscow Art Theatre: One Hundred Years, i (Moscow, 1998), 216.
including alternative titles (the Dresden production was named ‘The New Symphony’), and even different scripts, with the structure of the third act altered to reflect the feedback from the Agitbiuro. It was translated by Kurt Seeger as *Ilja Golowin und seine Wandlung* (‘Ilya Golovin and his Transformation’).  

The Budapest production was examined by Lóránt Péteri in his chapter “‘Soviet Music’ in Hungary: *Ilya Golovin* reaches Budapest’.  

The play was staged at the Madách Theatre in December 1950, though the performance was plagued by under-rehearsal. Hungarian composers recognized that the play was an instrument of Soviet power and organized a joint conference between the Composers’ Union and Drama and Cinema Association to discuss the work. They and the critics understood *Ilya Golovin* to carry an important message about the ramifications of the 1948 resolution, which had had relatively little impact in Hungary up to that point. The composer Pál Kadosa recognized Melnikov as Khrennikov, though he also commented that Golovin could be either Shostakovich or Khachaturian. Despite this high-profile critical attention outside the Soviet Union itself, the shelf-life of *Ilya Golovin* was fated to be short, and this is reflected in the broader critical literature of its creators. The far majority of sources on Mikhalkov do not mention the play, and it is not included in his later complete published works.

The one audience member we might be tempted to speculate about is Dmitri Shostakovich himself. He was certainly aware of the play; he mocked Mikhalkov’s childlike simplicity in a letter to Isaak Glikman. Shostakovich did, however, single out the play for criticism in 1954:

> Music is extremely rich and extremely popular, but there is virtually no decent literature about music and musicians … I am afraid I can say nothing complimentary about Sergei Mikhalkov’s play *Ilya Golovin* or about Osip Chorny’s *Snegin’s Opera*. In both works, the authors treat serious musical problems in an extremely superficial and dilettantish way.

Perhaps the simplest way to explore Shostakovich’s position on the Zhdanovshchina by the time of *Ilya Golovin* in 1949 is by briefly examining his own *Anti-Formalist Rayok*, one of the very few documents of any kind where he explicitly made clear his dislike of the reforms. While its date of composition is contested, and only one source dates any of the piece to the Zhdanovshchina era, it can still be understood as capturing Shostakovich’s feelings about the whole affair. It is a work of political satire and features some of Zhdanov’s words set verbatim for soloist and choir, accompanied by piano.

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93 Ibid.
95 Ibid. 155.
96 Ibid. 156.
97 Ibid.
98 The extensive secondary literature on Mikhalkov is a thing unto itself: see Prokhorova, ‘A Traditionalist in the Land of Innovators’, 286.
There are three ‘speakers’, based on Stalin, Zhdanov, and Dmitri Shepilov in turn. Shostakovich most likely assembled the text himself, including scatological wordplay on critics’ names. The complicated layers of meaning and contexts in the Rayok indicate that Shostakovich revisited the work several times during his career, including the entire third section: he cleverly set Dmitri Shepilov’s infamous mispronunciation of Rimsky-Korsakov’s name (Rimsky-Kor-SA-kov) to humorous effect, though the remainder of the third section is still a reworking of Zhdanov’s words. The score also comes with a satirical ‘preface’ from the publisher, including a fictional origin story that the manuscript had been found in a desk drawer, covered in excrement. The preface is perhaps a nod to Mikhail Zoshchenko’s short stories, some of which feature fictional origins and authors.

The Rayok stands in the long Russian tradition of satire and puppet ‘peep shows’, including Musorgsky’s own Rayok, which Shostakovich greatly admired. It is possible that Shostakovich considered preparing his Rayok for public performance in the early 1960s but was dissuaded after the negative reception of his Thirteenth Symphony. The Rayok parodies several different musical genres that were deemed to be desirable by cultural officials, including classical waltzes and a ‘Lezghinka’ dance.

Dvoikin: I’d like to declare that Caucasian operas require a real, legitimate Lezghinka, there must be a legitimate Lezghinka. …

It must be dashing, plain and folksy,
It must be obviously Caucasian,
It cannot fail to be authentic,
It simply has to be authentic,
It must be nothing but authentic.

The musical accompaniment here moves to a frantic oom-pah piano texture, with repeated tonic and dominant chord oscillations over and over again, serving as impression of a ‘bad’ Lezghinka. Manashir Yakubov observed that Shostakovich’s version quoted from an established Lezghinka melody: ‘the rich potential for parody and satire offered by this particular tune lies in the fact that it also enjoyed wide circulation as the accompaniment to a comic song of not entirely decent content’.

Amidst the parodies, one musical quotation is discreetly poignant. One of Zhdanov’s most damning phrases was to compare formalism to a ‘musical gas chamber’. Shostakovich sets this line to music, with the character sneering for comic effect. At bars 7–9 of Figure 20, the chorus laugh in response: the notes in the final laugh are a transposition of the ‘DSCH’ motif, well-established as Shostakovich’s personal cryptogram. Shostakovich’s use of his personal motif can be interpreted in different ways, but at the
very least it indicates the insertion of the composer himself into the musical narrative, if only for a short moment. Pushing the realms of interpretation, the motif could suggest the composer placing himself as witness to the ‘gas chamber’ line, or could even indicate remorse for his own participation in the public spectacle of the Zhdanovshchina. Whatever it may mean, as Yakubov poetically observed, ‘he who laughs last laughs longest’.

Putting to one side the continuing debate on the work’s origins and authorial intentions, Shostakovich’s *Rayok* is a fascinating document in that it indicates the composer’s very private reaction to the Zhdanovshchina: to mock Zhdanov and others for their nonsensical phrasing and musical illiteracy at the same time as criticizing other musicians who joined in the mass condemnation. In the *Rayok*, we see Shostakovich setting the events of the Zhdanovshchina on stage—a curious parallel to *Ilya Golovin*. The key difference between *Ilya Golovin* and the *Rayok* is that Shostakovich did so privately, playing the work for only a handful of close friends. As Laurel Fay writes, ‘if music was Shostakovich’s best refuge in times of crisis, ultimately it too would prove his best revenge’. The *Rayok* provides a moving contrast to *Ilya Golovin* in that through its crude humour, Shostakovich still preserved his dignity as an artist, even if only privately. In contrast, everyone involved in *Ilya Golovin* seemed to disown it as soon as they could: this extended even to Mikhalkov himself.

In 1957, in the climate of Khrushchev’s de-Stalinization, Mikhalkov appealed to Khrushchev directly to atone for his actions just a few years earlier. Leonid Maksimenkov uncovered the document amongst the millions declassified after the collapse of the Soviet Union. In his report, Mikhalkov refused individual fault but instead cited the wider establishment for their failure to point out his error:

> In 1949, I released maybe the wrong products. But how long can we remember? I wrote *Ilya Golovin*; I wrote honestly, because I believed that the Party called on us, the writers, to respond to the themes of the day … I went to the literary archive yesterday and looked up all the reviews. There wasn’t a single bad one of this play. Maybe it should have been criticized. But that criticism wasn’t there; they gave it the Stalin Prize. How much can I say—that I got the Stalin Prize illegally? As if I went to the Kremlin, opened the safe, took it from there and pinned it on myself and carried it out?

While this entreaty to Khrushchev ought to be read in the spirit of the Thaw and the relatively more open climate of public discussion about the Stalin era, Mikhalkov did show remorse later in his career. Decades later, he was interviewed by Feliks Medvedev on how he felt about the play and whether he expressed regret. He replied: ‘in a sense, the play was opportunistic, so to speak, written in the fresh wake of a tough, unjust ruling … its appearance on stage looked like a desire to please the party authorities. I’m sorry about that.’

Mikhalkov’s actions since 1949 had hardly been honourable; he was elected First Secretary of the Moscow branch of the Writers’ Union and in this role was involved in some of the most notorious campaigns against Soviet authors, including against Boris Pasternak in 1958 and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn in 1974. Mikhalkov even undertook spying work

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110 Yakubov, ‘Shostakovich’s *Anti-Formalist Rayok*’, 141.
for the KGB, informing on international diplomats when they visited Moscow.\textsuperscript{114} With all of this, it is telling that he still expressed regret about *Ilya Golovin*, and it was omitted altogether by his post-Stalin biographers. Mikhalkov’s significance has not faded since his death. He has been instrumental in Vladimir Putin’s construction of a modern-day Russia rooted in Soviet ideology. Putin personally asked Mikhalkov to update the national anthem for the Russian Federation and presented the author with a lifetime service medal on a live television broadcast in 2003. Prokhorova concludes: ‘[Mikhalkov] is a symbol of the twentieth century’s turbulent romance with state power, a romance that, judging by Putin’s ratings regardless of the facts, is far from over … The renewed project of empire building now under way in Russia guarantees that Mikhalkov—in spirit if not in body—will not disappear from the Russian cultural scene.’\textsuperscript{115} For better or worse, Mikhalkov continues to be central to Russian culture well into the third decade of the twenty-first century.

CONCLUSION

The Zhdanovshchina of 1946–9 still occasions intense curiosity from critics, scholars, and audiences in the twenty-first century, judging by how frequently it is mentioned in public discourse around the arts and the Soviet Union. While each of the state decrees addressed a different art form, it is most frequently the 1948 crackdown against music that is discussed at length, owing to the long timespan of the campaign that lasted well into the following year. Despite this, the Zhdanovshchina should be understood as part of a larger campaign to foster and harness Russian nationalism at the beginning of the Cold War. Just as composers and musicians turned against each other in their 1948 meetings, artists across different media pointed to other art forms in order to find subject matter for them to process the state interventions. While the play *Ilya Golovin* stands as a bizarre example of literature and theatre pointing to the supposed sins of music in the ideological campaign, I have shown how the play was arguably written very much with theatre critics still in mind, in response to the anti-cosmopolitan campaigns that were still ongoing in 1949. It was almost irrelevant what art form the hero of Mikhalkov’s play worked in.

While *Ilya Golovin* initially represented a success, this was largely performative: audiences agreeing with the justness of Agitprop decisions, artists scrambling to exonerate themselves in the service of Socialist Realism, and even the committee of the Stalin Prizes begrudgingly bestowing a prize in recognition of its political value. Every major collaborator on the play dropped just about any mention of it in their later work. In some cases, like Toporkov, they would hardly ever work again afterwards. In contrast to this humiliating spectacle, we should consider a work like Shostakovich’s *Anti-Formalist Rayok*. Shostakovich could privately vent his frustration through text and music, only to share it with a select group of friends. While he was clearly the intended figure behind the farce of *Ilya Golovin*, it was he who would have the last laugh overall. His *Rayok* was finally premiered in 1989 and his biting views on the Zhdanovshchina made public after his death. It is Shostakovich’s say on the Zhdanovshchina that has been remembered for prosperity, not Mikhalkov and the blatant ‘anti-cosmopolitanism’ of his play. *Ilya Golovin* is instructive for modern readers in that it provides an important corrective to the usual top-down picture of cultural policy during this era, and instead demonstrates that the policing of the party line also took place peer to peer, and in the case of *Golovin*, without direct pressure to do so.


\textsuperscript{115} Prokhorova, ‘A Traditionalist in the Land of Innovators’, 302.
ABSTRACT

Amidst all the art, literature, music, and theatre of the ‘Zhdanovshchina’ (the post-war Soviet intervention in arts policy), one play stands out: Sergei Mikhalkov’s *Ilya Golovin*. In this play, a leading Soviet composer is chastised for his formalism but sees the error of his ways and again writes music of sufficiently socialist character. *Ilya Golovin* is noteworthy not just because it presents a crude parody of Shostakovich and his music, but because it reveals the wider context of the ideological campaign against artists and shows us something of how different artists responded. In this article, I argue that *Ilya Golovin* is not simply a bizarre example of multiple artists toeing the ideological line; instead it reveals the uglier side of late Stalinism in the form of vehement anti-Semitism, as well as demonstrating the xenophobic Cold War patriotism that served as the ultimate motivation behind the Zhdanovshchina itself.