

“... because there is nothing symbolic in the described phenomenon”

Asafyev's Intonation Theory in the Early Soviet Union – Analytical Insights, Intellectual Contexts, and Semiotic Perspectives

Patrick Becker-Naydenov

Dieser Beitrag widmet sich der Position des russisch-sowjetischen Musikforschers Boris V. Asaf'ev¹ (1884–1949) in den europäischen musikwissenschaftlichen und -theoretischen Debatten der 1920er-Jahre. Auf der Basis ihrer Grundprinzipien (Kontrast und Wiederholung usw.) und analytischer Einsichten in Kadenzmodelle haben Kommentatoren im Westen Asaf'evs Intonationstheorie häufig als Fortsetzung der Energetik und des Dynamismus gesehen, wie ihn zu Beginn des 20. Jahrhunderts August Halm und vor allem Ernst Kurth begründet haben. Im Gegensatz zur gängigen Haltung untersucht dieser Beitrag einen Aspekt der Theorie Asaf'evs, der sich nicht nur fundamental von seinen vermeintlichen Vorgängern im Westen unterscheidet, sondern gleichermaßen ein originelles Beispiel von Asaf'evs Versuch darstellt, westliche Musikforschung und russisch-sowjetische Debatten miteinander zu verbinden. Dabei wird hier das Argument vertreten, dass Asaf'evs überraschende Ablehnung semiologischer Begrifflichkeit in den Schlussätzen des 1931 erschienenen ersten Bands der *Musikalischen Form als Prozess* gestattet, die Intonationstheorie als musikalische Semiotik neu zu fassen. Löst man sie erst einmal aus ihrer politischen (Selbst-)Instrumentalisierung im Stalinismus und interpretiert sie vor dem normativen Hintergrund russischer Musik im 19. Jahrhundert, dann erscheint Asaf'evs Arbeit als Verbindung musikwissenschaftlicher und psychologischer Diskurse mit linguistischen und literaturwissenschaftlichen Überlegungen. Dokumentiert sie so den wahrlich internationalen Geist der Debatten in den 1920er-Jahren und darüber hinaus, liegt die Bedeutung von Asaf'evs Lehre vor allem in der politischen Durchsetzung der Theorie als Modell kompositorischer Praxis in der Sowjetunion und ihrer weiteren globalen Einflussphäre seit dem Ende des Zweiten Weltkriegs.

This paper investigates the position of the Russian Boris V. Asafyev (1884–1949) in 1920s European musicology and music theory. Based on the underlying principles of Asafyev's intonation theory (“contrast and repetition,” etc.) and its analytical insights into cadence models, Western scholars have often read it as a continuation of the energeticism and dynamism proposed by August Halm and especially Ernst Kurth. In contrast to Western research, this contribution engages with an aspect of Asafyev's theory that not only differs profoundly from his more prominent predecessors but also presents an original insight, combining contemporary European discourses and Asafyev's understanding of Russian music history. Asafyev's surprising rejection of semiotic terminology in the final paragraphs of his 1931 book *Musical Form as a Process* allows us to reframe intonation theory as a contribution to musical semiology. Thus, cleansed from its political (self-)instrumentalization in the Stalinist period and interpreted against the normative background of nineteenth-century Russian music, Asafyev's work appears as a combination of discourses in musicology and psychology, as well as music and literary theory. Besides bearing witness to the truly international spirit of debates during the 1920s and beyond, its significance lies first and foremost in the political enforcement of Asafyev's theory as a cornerstone for compositional practice.

SCHLAGWORTE/KEYWORDS: Boris Asafyev; cultural-historical psychology; Kulturhistorische Psychologie; music and literature; music semiotics; Musik und Literatur; Musikalische Semiotik; nineteenth-century Russian opera; Russische Oper im 19. Jahrhundert

1 I follow German and English conventions when transliterating Cyrillic script by adapting DIN 1460 and ISO 9 respectively.

INTRODUCTION

Toward the end of his 1931 monograph *Musical Form as a Process*, the Russian musicologist Boris V. Asafyev (1884–1949) suddenly presents his readers with marginal notes seemingly unrelated to the previously straightforward argument:

‘Symbol,’ ‘symbolic,’ ‘symbolics’ – these are terms and epithets that distract thought away from concrete reality. Yet, here we see the process of manifesting musical images and the transformation of music into meaningful, living, and figurative speech. It seems to me that it would be right to reject the notion of “musical symbolics,” because there is nothing symbolic in the described phenomenon.²

In his English translation of Asafyev’s monograph, James Robert Tull has already complained about the book’s “final parts,” for they “are disconcerting and unsatisfactory in an organizational sense.”³ What is the reason for this anti-climactic nitpicking of terminological subtleties? Why derail a perfectly fine account of music history from the sixteenth-century dances of Pierre Phalèse to Richard Strauss’s “Dance of the Seven Veils” just to lecture an audience about their apparent lack of precision in using musicological categories? Apparently, then, whether the notion of “intonation” coincided “with other loaded

- 2 “Символ, символический, символика — термины и эпитеты, отвлекающие мысль в сторону от конкретной действительности. А между тем здесь перед нами как раз процесс конкретизации музыкальных образов и превращения музыки в полную значимости живую образную речь. Мне кажется, что правильным было бы решительно отказаться от понятия ‘музыкальная символика,’ потому что ничего символического в описываемом явлении нет.” Asafyev 1971, 208. Here and hereafter, all translations are mine if not indicated otherwise. I only translate full passages, not individual terms cited.
- 3 Tull 1976, 145. Tull’s argument that Asafyev’s opening remark would not refer to the entire book’s conclusion but only to the supplement’s conclusion (1976, 146) does not hold since the main text in Asafyev’s monograph foreshadows this turn toward symbolics in its second to last paragraph cited below. Furthermore, Asafyev does not only give reasons for omitting vocal and program music but rather argues for an inherent meaning of music independent of literary programs or underlying libretti. In short, Asafyev’s intonation theory posits the claim that music is meaningful even without the help of literature. Asafyev writes: “I did not, in my work, touch upon the opera, the *Lied* or other manifestations of vocal style. I made this omission consciously, for otherwise it would have been necessary to turn to the study of musical *semantics* (I prefer this concept, borrowed from linguistics, to the concept of ‘musical symbolism’), to the study of the genesis and crystallization of sound complexes linked with poetical images and ideas and their influence on musical formation, without which it is inconceivable to analyze forms of vocal music, for ‘pure’ music and its schemata cannot be abstracted from them any more than it is possible to study folk song motives without text, or text without motives, or to understand the essence of foreign opera without understanding the intonations of the language on the basis of which this opera grew. For the same reason, because of the impossibility of touching in detail on the problem of musical semantics, I have only barely touched on the area of program music.” “Не затронул я в своей работе ни оперы, ни *Lied* [German in the original, own emphasis], ни других проявлений вокального стиля. И сделал это сознательно. Тогда пришлось бы обратиться к исследованию музыкальной *семантики* (предпочитаю это заимствованное из языкознания понятие понятию ‘музыкальная символика’) — к изучению генезиса и кристаллизации звукокомплексов, связанных с поэтическими образами и идеями, и их влияния на музыкальное становление. Вне этого немислимо анализировать формы вокальной музыки, ибо нельзя абстрагировать из них ‘чистую’ музыку и ее схемы, как нельзя изучать в народной песне мотив без текста или текст без мотива или понять сущность иностранной оперы, не понимая интонаций языка, на основе которых эта опера выросла. По той же причине — из-за невозможности подробнее коснуться проблемы музыкальной семантики — я лишь едва-едва затронул область программной музыки.” Asafyev 1971, 178–179, translated in: Tull 1976, 502–503.

ideas such as code, *topos*, style topics, cue, sign or trope" is not insignificant.⁴ As shown by his commentary on nineteenth-century operatic vocal music, Asafyev seems to have had a much more precise and mutually exclusive concept of intonation in mind than current accounts of its general irrelevance and near-total synonymity suggest.

While, lately, Asafyev has generated considerable interest among researchers in the West focusing on his role in the institutionalization of Soviet musicology,⁵ the present contribution departs from his tirade against symbolics to investigate two related aspects: Firstly, this text clarifies Asafyev's understanding of symbolics in the broader framework of his intonation theory. Asafyev rejects symbolics because it is precisely his concept of "intonation" that functions as a symbol-like semiotic element. Secondly, this reappraisal of Asafyev's analytical apparatus takes place against the background of broader global – or rather: pan-European – discourses in musicology and music theory during the interwar period. Here, it is especially the notion of symbolics that both links and distinguishes Asafyev from Central European figures such as August Halm or Ernst Kurth. Thus, in contrast to the view commonly accepted by Western researchers, who often see Asafyev as something like the Marxist materialist *cul de sac* of Kurth's energeticism in the Soviet Union, clarifying Asafyev's notion of symbolics also helps clarifying his position in both Western as well as Soviet and pre-1917 Russian discourses.

Given the continuing skepticism among musicologists and music theorists in the West that follows persisting Cold War paradigms⁶ as much as it is justified by actual critique of Asafyev's work,⁷ it still seems necessary to justify the present reading. Why does it matter what Asafyev thought about symbolics? As this text demonstrates, Asafyev's thought was part and parcel of discourses among musicologists, music theorists, and music critics during the Interwar period. So far, musicologists and music theorists interested in the history of their discipline have mostly seen Asafyev as an infamous cultural demagogue (which he probably was) advancing an inhuman political regime's cultural politics. Nevertheless, what the numerous paraphrases of Asafyev as "influenced by Ernst Kurth" overlook, is precisely how political influence, discursive hegemony, and music theory play out in "the real world." Thus, the move beyond outdated paradigms proposed for musicological Cold War Studies⁸ can translate into a re-evaluation of Asafyev's thought for what it is: both musical semiotics and a variant of topic theory. Therefore, reading Asafyev today may very well enrich our current scholarly canon with a valuable and influential source, while also providing an interesting starting point for the rehabilitation of Asafyev's semiological perspectives in music studies.

However, why should musicologists today care about Asafyev's understanding of symbolics and his intonation theory? On a more general level, the route taken here helps to describe, compare, and normalize concepts of twentieth-century music research that are indeed critical precisely because they did not develop in isolation from each other. Furthermore, through Asafyev's prominent position in Stalinist music culture, his thought was not descriptively limited to musicological and music theoretical discourse. Instead, his work became a prescriptively binding theory, an object of study as well as an element

4 Titus 2016, 5.

5 Panteleeva 2019.

6 Taruskin 2009.

7 Riethmüller 1976.

8 Frolova-Walker 2018.

in music pedagogy providing practitioners with something resembling a compositional toolkit to produce music valuable in the aesthetic doctrine and institutional system of Socialist Realism.⁹ Thus, as demonstrated by film music research,¹⁰ expanding existing knowledge on Asafyev's theory is the groundwork to further knowledge about compositional poetics in the Soviet Union and its many emerging satellite states after the Second World War. By considering actors, sources, and discourses frequently overlooked among Western scholars, this examination of Asafyev's lasting influence beyond the Soviet Union (and beyond his own death in 1949) demonstrates the enormous international range of 1920s music theory. The historical evidence from post-Stalinist Russia¹¹ and across the Eastern bloc¹² suggests a considerable impact of Asafyev's intonation theory, which, in many ways, parallels Igor Sposobin's so-called "Brigadier" *Textbook of Harmony*¹³ (2 vols, 1937–1938) and its international "trails" of cultural transfer.¹⁴

THE LARGER ARGUMENT IN ASAFYEV'S *MUSICAL FORM AS PROCESS*

Although Dan Elphick recently published a comprehensive paper on Asafyev's thought¹⁵ and other scholars have begun to note the possibilities of intonation theory for twenty-first-century musicology,¹⁶ I will still briefly re-sketch the larger argument in his 1931 volume *Musical Form as Process* to lay the foundations for the following sections.

Asafyev draws from a notion of intonation that seems to have been familiar in Russia's musical culture as early as the 1850s.¹⁷ In contrast to Western notions that often refer to intonation as either the proper tuning of instruments and voices or as the historical phenomenon of medieval liturgical chant (the German encyclopedia *Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart* even goes so far as to explicitly ruling out any relevance for Asafyev's term, instead referring readers to the entry on the scholar himself¹⁸), *Musical Form as Process* defines "intonation" right from the start:

Music can be traced from intonations which are fixed in a given environment on the basis of directly practical purposes (signaling, primitive magic and medicine, etc.) to complicated sound combinations with a strict delimitation of their functions, which become the object of aesthetic enjoyment. [...] Classical forms are the result of prolonged social selection of the most stable and useful intonations.¹⁹

9 Doynov 2011.

10 Titus 2016.

11 Cairns 2013.

12 Jiránek 1967.

13 Sposobin et al. 1937–1938.

14 Schröder 2017.

15 Elphick 2021.

16 Khannanov 2018, Viljanen 2008.

17 Sydow-Saak 1984, 6–7.

18 Reimann and Sydow-Saak 2016.

19 "Практические потребности раздвигают свои рамки по мере развития культуры: от интонаций, закрепившихся в той или иной среде в силу непосредственно утилитарных целей (сигнализация, первобытная магия и медицина и т.д.), музыка восходит до сложных звуко сочетаний со строгим разграничением их функций — и становится объектом эстетического наслаждения [...]. Классические формы — итог длительного социального отбора наиболее устойчивых и полезных интонаций." Asafyev 1971, 22.

As this quote shows, Asafyev's intonation theory – at least officially – aspired to account for a broad range of auditory phenomena crossing the boundary of phenomena outside of composed classical music. While Asafyev's link between musical intonations and the societies in which they emerge might look like a reverence to a prevailing *Zeitgeist* in Soviet science, his most comprehensive description of “intonation” appears in the monograph's second supplement “Fundamentals of Musical Intonation”:

From this premise [*scil.* the recognition of music as the movement of sound], there inevitably arises the concept of *intonation* as the *actual* basis, or as the realization of sound, whether through hearing, the voice, or with the help of an instrument. Intonation does not merely signify the mechanical overcoming of the material resistance and is not merely the passive reproduction of visually projected notes. Thus, intonation is a factor of the highest degree of importance – the interpretation of sound and not simply the ascertainment of deviation from the norm of a proper temperament (the pure or impure presentation of sound). Without intoning and apart from intoning there is no music. The intonation of speech is the interpretation of sounds not musically fixed, not stabilized in *musical* spaces nor in the invariable relations of sounds which have become tones. Musical intonation is the interpretation of sounds already placed in a system of sound relations precisely fixed by the memory – a system of tones and tonalities.²⁰

At its core, an intonation is a semantically or emotionally charged unit in music.²¹ Furthermore, intonations are not restricted to textual analysis: Instead, Asafyev considers the performative aspect of sounding or performing music to contain qualities unreachable by merely analyzing a score.

Since intonations build on the idea of music as the movement of organized sound(s), this raises the question for an intonation's possible size or scope. In other words, how many sounds constitute a minimal working example of intonations? While they can be basic elements or rudimentary phrases as small as a single step between two tones, an individual sound such as Alexander Scriabin's famous mystic chord from his *Prométhée: Le Poème du feu* op. 60, or even an especially striking change of dynamics on just one tone such as the solo bassoon's opening C in Stravinsky's *Sacre du printemps*,²² in practice (as documented in Soviet scholarship), they are often larger units on the level of motives, themes, or entire episodes and passages. Thus, from a methodological perspective, context-informed segmentation of larger forms is still key when it comes to the analysis and interpretation of music according to intonation theory. Sometimes, it may make sense to interpret a unit as small as a motif of fourths as semantically meaningful “travel,” “journey,” or something similar (e.g., “Ging heut' Morgen über's Feld” in Gustav Mahler's *Songs of A Wayfarer*), while other instances would call for more rigorous hermeneutical

20 “Отсюда неизбежно возникает понятие *интонации* как *актуального* начала, как реализации звучания – внутренним ли слухом, или голосом, или с помощью инструмента. Интонация отнюдь не означает механического преодоления сопротивления материала и не является лишь пассивным воспроизведением зрительно проектируемых значков. Итак, интонация – перво-степенной важности фактор: *осмысление* звучания, а не простое констатирование отклонения от нормы (чистая или нечистая подача звука). Без интонирования и вне интонирования музыки нет. Интонация речевая – осмысление звучаний, музыкально не фиксированных, не стабилизировавшихся в *музыкальных* расстояниях или в постоянных отношениях звуков, ставших тонами. Интонация музыкальная – осмысление звучаний, уже сложившихся в систему точно зафиксированных памятью звукоотношений: тонов и тональностей.” Asafyev 1971, 198.

21 de la Motte-Haber 1985, 48.

22 Balter 1976, 315.

self-discipline (the horn's opening line of fourths in Schoenberg's first *Chamber Symphony* is no less meaningful to music historiography, yet interpreting it as some kind of expressionist *Wanderer Fantasy* would be absurd despite Schoenberg's obvious deconstruction of opening gestures well-established by Beethoven's overture to *King Stephen* op. 117 and other works).

Notably, Asafyev – and most of the scholarship his work prompted – found intonations on various structural levels of compositions and in different musical styles, making a clear definition of this notion extremely difficult. Famously, the Czech music scholar Jaroslav Jiránek exclaimed: “It is disappointing to seek a conclusive definition of Asafyev's term ‘intonation.’ The reason for this disappointment is not the lack of a definition offered by the author. Instead, *there are too many definitions.*”²³

Nevertheless, knowledge of a large corpus of scholarly contributions offers some evidence. The term “intonation” rarely appears in description of modernist or experimental music, e.g., it is unlikely that a Soviet author would read Scriabin's above-mentioned mystic chord as an intonation. From a purely analytical perspective that Soviet scholars would have judged as Formalist, this sound has a functional meaning for the composition. Yet, despite rudiments of a reception theory in Asafyev's thought, the semantic meaning of “Scriabin's mystic chord” is a phenomenon of public discourse rather than an intonation manifesting meaning precisely in the moment when it sounds.

Asafyev and other proponents of his theory most often employ the notion of “intonation” in conjunction with positive value judgments about common-practice-period or twentieth-century tonal music. Furthermore, it often appeared in ethnomusicological contexts or in those instances, where scholars discussed examples of music trying to imitate folkloric traditions. More precisely, Asafyev's intonation theory prompted some of the largest corpus-based musicological studies in musicological history with researchers in several Socialist bloc countries even using early computer technology to find particularly characteristic melodic formulas for a given folk music.²⁴ Thus, despite Sydow-Saak coming close to Asafyev's understanding of intonation, caution is advised when reading her definition:

Asafyev understands intonation as a composer's skill in capturing content in tones with a special focus on the dialectical process emerging from the tension between the music and extra-musical meaning. [...] Thus, manifesting a given content in music does not necessarily require – the imitation of – language or structural similarities between music and language. Instead, it is the organization of relatively fixed musical models that results in a virtually inexhaustible wealth of possibilities for the creation of intonations.²⁵

However, it is important to note the difference between the above-mentioned basic units of more “Formalist” approaches to music analysis and Asafyev's approach, for Asafyev thinks of intonations as equiprimordially charged with meaning. For example, the string section's rhythm after the opening chord of Beethoven's *Overture to Egmont* op. 84 (mm. 2–5) is not just a few bars of music whose meaning lies in the function it has for the work's overall form. Instead, for Asafyev – who even advised his readership in the second, posthumously published, 1947 volume of *Musical Form as Process* to “keep your

23 Jiránek 1963, 264 (emphasis added).

24 Timberlake 2020.

25 Sydow-Saak 1984, 8.

hands off musical analysis"²⁶ – these opening bars are a musical structure simultaneously charged with meaning since the sarabande dance rhythm signifies the Spanish in Goethe's play on the Eighty Years' War. For Asafyev, it was Friedrich Blume's PhD dissertation *Studies on the Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-Century Pre-History of the Orchestral Suite* (Studien zur Vorgeschichte der Orchestersuite im 15. und 16. Jahrhundert, completed in 1921, printed in 1925) that had proved how the earliest extant sources of European instrumental music showed its origin in medieval and Renaissance polyphonic dances as a "laboratory of instrumental melos."²⁷ A few hundred years later with Richard Strauss's "Dance of the Seven Veils" from *Salome*, Asafyev thought it possible to still discover music's inherent meaning through its inextricable link with corporeal motion: "The *cadence* is the intonation's most muscular sphere."²⁸ Since, following Kurth and the energeticists, Asafyev considered cadences as closing gestures to a phrase's motion, he recognizes their inevitable force on listeners:

Usually, the ear focusses on a motion's closing moments, whereat, so to say, the predominant cadential type drags the listener behind it. Furthermore, it proves absolutely unnecessary to emphasize or highlight a cadence's occurrence in any specific way: Instead, it is easy to imagine a listener having no idea about cadences, their composition, their forms, etc. In no case, however, could this listener escape a cadence's effect.²⁹

Drawing from contemporary musicological research on Strauss's treatment of cadential models,³⁰ Asafyev interprets the "Dance of the Seven Veils" as a varied succession of altered authentic cadences that lends the dance's first part "a character of inhibition and dependency."³¹ According to Asafyev, the varied, yet monotonous, repetition of a fixed cadence model acquires the suggestive force of a meaningful image manifesting oriental dance forms in Strauss's untexted music: The passage shows a "flexuous body with completely immobile feet that, as it were, cannot tear themselves away from the earth."³²

Followed to its logical conclusion and within the orthodoxy of Stalinist music culture, contemporary researchers confronted with music not as evidently meaningful were then only left with two options: Either they had not yet understood the meaning coming with a given musical structure or the phenomenon they were dealing with was not strictly musical. Since Asafyev's intonation theory aimed at a general level where "intonation" was to become the nature of music itself, it includes a rather explicit value judgment: Asafyev and his followers could declare those examples of music unapproachable by this theory as "non-music." Thus, as soon as the theory became institutionalized in the Soviet Union,

26 "[E]сли музыка не услышана – не надо браться за анализ." Asafyev 1971, 221.

27 Asafyev 1971, 148.

28 "Каданс – самая мускулистая сфера интонаций." Asafyev 1971, 94.

29 "Слух обычно сосредоточивается на моментах замыкания движения, и тот тип каданса, который превалирует, ведет слушателя за собою, причем для этого вовсе не нужно, чтобы каданс каклибо специфически подчеркивался. Слушатель может не иметь никакого представления о кадансах, их составе, их формах etc., но не подчиниться кадансам он не может." Asafyev 1971, 117.

30 Tenschert 1925–1926, cited in Asafyev 1971, 92–93.

31 Asafyev 1971, 117.

32 "Создается образ, характерный для восточного танца: извивающийся корпус и неподвижность ног, словно им не оторваться от земли." Asafyev 1971, 117.

a mere value judgment could translate into much more far-reaching consequences for individual works and their composers.

On the other hand, and as the following analysis will show in more detail, Asafyev's intonation theory made it possible to tie music back to language. This mode of interpretation included both the description of purely instrumental music where it resembled or accompanied vocal phrases and attempts to translate the experience of listening or analyzing music into language as demonstrated above with Asafyev's reading of Strauss's "Dance." Even today, "intonation" is a term frequently employed by literary critics and linguists describing the characteristics of speech prosody in different languages or among different speakers who might employ particular intonations to convey meaning. However, there is still no reliable investigation of Asafyev building on the term's history in (pre-) revolutionary Russia, where "the channels through which ideas travelled [...] were more heterogeneous than has previously been discussed,"³³ or of his indebtedness to contemporary Soviet discourses on "intonation," despite the role this term plays for eminent protagonists such as Mikhail M. Bakhtin.³⁴ Furthermore, Asafyev clearly did not limit the implications of intonation theory to meaning rooted in language. Instead, he saw emotion and affect at least as equal to meaning expressed through language, with some later researchers even discarding aspects of language-based meaning by referring to Asafyev's early work on Chaikovsky's *Eugen Onegin*.³⁵

Nevertheless, despite these uncertainties, Asafyev's intonation theory clearly draws from expressive aesthetics to develop a musical hermeneutics. Asafyev's outright rejection of music analysis mentioned above hides his life-long ambiguity toward these approaches and echoes the larger conflict between idealist and positivist attitudes in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Russian music discourse so aptly described by Olga Panteleeva in her dissertation.³⁶

In *Musical Form as Process*, then, Asafyev includes "intonation" in a larger overarching historical argument that begins with medieval plainchant as well as simple dance forms from the thirteenth-century *Roman de Rose* and ends with recent music by Paul Hindemith, Igor Stravinsky, or Richard Strauss. Yet, through music's connection with the society from which it emerges, Asafyev presents horizontal "incisions" regulating a synchronous "intonation sphere" that transcends the boundaries of high and popular art as well as different musical genres. It is precisely at this moment that Asafyev includes his curious side note against the use of symbolics when analyzing texted music:

Every era produces a certain number of 'symbolic' intonations (sound complexes) in opera, symphonic music, and *Lied*. These intonations emerge in constant sonic connection with poetic images and ideas, with concrete sensations (of the visual or the kinesthetic-motoric kind), or with the expression of affects and different emotional behaviors, i.e., they are linked in 'reciprocity.' Thus, the emerging extraordinarily firm associations are not inferior to the semantics of words in language-based thinking. A sound form [*scil.* sound *Gestalt*] (an intonation signifying a visible image or a concrete sensation) invokes the ideas linked to it.³⁷

33 Panteleeva 2019, 74.

34 Bakhtin 2008.

35 de la Motte-Haber 1976, 48.

36 Panteleeva 2015.

Since Asafyev explicitly summarizes these phenomena as “‘symbolic’ intonations,” why does he feel the need to immediately reject the use of symbolic terminology in the following paragraph? Who are those people or researchers using terms such as “symbol” in the way criticized by Asafyev?

ERNST KURTH IN ASAFYEV'S THEORY: RECEPTION AND DENIAL

The previous section has already highlighted some of the possible links between Asafyev and Ernst Kurth. For Asafyev, very much like for Kurth, music is built on motion. Furthermore, Asafyev could find common ground with Kurth on issues of contemporary music psychology as well as through the idea of an inherent meaning in music.

The obvious place to start is with Ernst Kurth's writings; these were well-known to Asafyev, who even supervised several Russian translations during the 1920s and 1930s.³⁸ Yet, Asafyev's indebtedness to Kurth remains an ambiguous point. On the one hand, Asafyev clearly builds on some of Kurth's contributions. Nevertheless, as Tull points out, Asafyev “appears to owe more to [Wilhelm] Ostwald's concept of ‘energetics’ than to Kurth's [...]. Although Asafyev employs Kurth's terminology [...] his usage differs considerably from the latter's.”³⁹ On the other hand, given that Soviet researchers sought to replace allegedly bourgeois music theory with Socialist approaches after the Russian Revolution,⁴⁰ some of Asafyev's remarks directed against Kurth seem more like overt ideological commentary than actual criticism.⁴¹ Later Soviet scholars preferred to highlight differences rather than similarities between the two thinkers.⁴² However, it is certainly true that “Kurth gives virtually no consideration to the aspect of music as a medium of communication,”⁴³ which then went on to become so important for Asafyev's intonation theory.

Nevertheless, the prominence of symbolics in Kurth's writings suggests that Asafyev developed his terminological notion in exchange with the ideas put forward by his colleague in the West. So, what did Kurth understand as symbolics in music?

As Luitgard Schader highlighted in her study of Kurth's *Foundations of Linear Counterpoint*, he likely first encountered the problem of musical symbols through his teacher Friedrich Jodl.⁴⁴ Born in Munich in 1849, Jodl was a philosopher and psychologist who had worked at the University of Vienna and had regularly given public lectures for non-

37 “Каждая эпоха вырабатывает и в оперном, и симфоническом, и романсом творчестве некую сумму ‘символических’ интонаций (звукокомплексов). Эти интонации возникают в постоянстве созвучания с поэтическими образами и идеями, или с конкретными ощущениями (зрительными, мускульно-моторными), или с выражением аффектов и различных эмоциональных состояний, т.е. во взаимном ‘сопутствовании’. Так образуются чрезвычайно прочные ассоциации, не уступающие смысловой словесной семантике. Звуковой образ — интонация, получившая значение зримого образа или конкретного ощущения, — вызывает сопутствующие ему представления.” Asafyev 1976, 562.

38 Schwarz 1983, 91.

39 Tull 1976, 574.

40 Fairclough 2016, 147.

41 Asafyev 1976, 246–247.

42 Mazel' 1957.

43 Tull 1976, 170.

44 Schader 2001, 94.

academic audiences since 1896, when Kurth moved to the city to study musicology there. In his *Textbook on Psychology*, Jodl sees musical symbolics as a result of attempts to rationalize differences in tone qualities through spatial metaphors:

For, in and of itself, there is no relation to spatial ideas in tone qualities: a high tone is not higher in space than a low tone; it is only higher on the scale by which we symbolically represent the qualitative differences of the tone series; it is different from the lower tone not by its position, but by its quality.⁴⁵

Kurth, in turn, introduces the term early on in his *œuvre*, with the 1920 *Romantic Harmony and its Crisis in Wagner's "Tristan"* devoting an entire chapter on "Sound as Symbol," thus echoing a generally growing interest in questions of musical symbolics around 1900 as documented by the research of Hermann Kretzschmar,⁴⁶ Arnold Schering⁴⁷ and Wilhelm Tappert.⁴⁸

As early as in his *Foundations of Linear Counterpoint*, Kurth agrees with Jodl stating that "common expressions for describing the musical *Satz* [...] as *vertical* and *horizontal* are simple analogues to the dimension of paper used for notating music. Such expressions are only symbols translating musical processes into the easier medium of geometry."⁴⁹ However, these symbols are never just ancillary theoretical terms in the absence of a better vocabulary: In Kurth's eyes, the "Gloria" movements from Johann Sebastian Bach's *Mass* in B Minor BWV 232 and his *Magnificat* show how the composer assigns meaning to elementary musical motions by essentially taking them as visualizations of the underlying text.⁵⁰

In his 1920 book on romantic harmony, Kurth heavily draws from contemporary empirical science⁵¹ and the philosopher Paul Häberlin's studies on symbolics in psychology and art⁵² to ascertain that all expressive phenomena are symbols or, rather, sensory images of expressions emanating from the soul.⁵³ However, Kurth argues music's original tendency to symbolize energetic movements at the intersection between nervous and mental systems took on a radical drive in the nineteenth century: Richard Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk* epitomized the romantic idea of an identical origin for all the individual arts.⁵⁴ It is precisely this shared heritage and the integration of expressive elements from different arts that ties music back to extra-musical meaning. For Kurth, Wagner has made it impossible to think of music as music alone.

While Kurth's detailed analysis of the first chord in Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* as a highly symbolical sound needs no reiteration here,⁵⁵ the relevance of this concept for Asafyev lies in his idea that the symbolic meaning of music is at the same time a manifes-

45 Jodl 1896, 301.

46 Kretzschmar 1911a, 1911b

47 Schering 1941.

48 Tappert 1890.

49 Kurth 1917, 58–59.

50 Kurth 1917, 216–217.

51 Tan 2013.

52 Häberlin 1916.

53 Kurth 1920, 10.

54 Kurth 1920, 35.

55 Kurth 1920, 79–88.

tation of psycho-physical energetic movements and the result of re-integrating different arts and media into the supposedly coherent whole of (post-) Wagnerian music drama. Thus, Asafyev's rejection of symbolic terminology – at least in part – appears to be directed against Kurth's understanding. He accepts Kurth's idea of music containing semantic meaning beyond mere literary programs, yet he rejects the historical argument Kurth uses to describe Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk* as reinstating a meaningful primordial unity. For Asafyev, then, meaningful music is neither an issue of distant pasts nor the result of the more recent Romantic imagination. Surprisingly, in the end, Asafyev is more Formalist than Kurth, with his argument seemingly contradicting readings that place him in a vulgar Marxist-Materialist corner. Music's meaning is guaranteed throughout all times and, furthermore, music alone is meaningful without ever needing the support of any other arts.

ASAFYEV'S RUSSIAN CONTEXTS

Before turning toward the, probably, most comprehensive development of Asafyev's semiology in his 1925 *Speech Intonation* (*Речевая интонация*) analysis of Dargomyzhky's opera *The Stone Guest*, it is best to investigate the closer surroundings of his discourse in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Russian debates. Although the wealth of statements concerning symbolics is numerous – if not unmanageable – in Russia at that time, this section will turn toward the important Russian Symbolist movement and their reception in early twentieth-century literary Formalism. In contrast to the recurring problem in Soviet-era scholarship of omitting influences that stemmed from pre-revolutionary or contemporary foreign thinkers outside Socialist frameworks, Asafyev's biographer Orlova confirms his engagement with these two positions, showing that he developed his intonation theory not in the nebulous realms of a ruling *Zeitgeist* but through consciously incorporating the positions of Bergson, Hegel, Lipps, and Cassirer, as well as Russian developments.⁵⁶

As Morrison showed in his study on *Russian Opera and the Symbolist Movement*, the late nineteenth century saw the emergence of two subsequent symbolist generations of “decadent” and “mystic” writers in Silver Age Russian literature, who – although closely collaborating – built on two different sources of inspiration: “whereas the first generation found inspiration in French Symbolism, the second looked to German [...] philosophers like Friedrich Nietzsche and Arthur Schopenhauer.”⁵⁷ While early Symbolist writers like Valeri Bryusov were much more interested in “sonorous word combinations” and “the

56 Orlova 1964, 1984; cf. Viljanen 2008, 505. Interestingly, Asafyev's rejection of symbolics is also a rejection of one of his intonation theory's important influences, Sergei V. Protopopov. Following the earlier work of Boleslav Yavorsky, in his 1930 *The Elements of Organizing Musical Speech*, Protopopov described symbols as the primary means of creating intonations: “Intonations emerging within a particular people or social class and acquiring a kind of general meaning are usually understood as symbols. Symbols are an active force for transmitting impressions through the time a process needs to take place. A sound-symbol becomes a constant factor in the relation between a process's schema and its realization in sound. It is possible to reveal an intonation's sense through examining either this sounding material's nature or its creative principles.” Protopopov 1930, 118, cit. and translated in Sydow-Saak: 1984, 8. However, as this quotation shows, Protopopov's understanding of symbolics is already equal to Asafyev's understanding of intonations as rooted semantic units.

57 Morrison 2019, 3.

clinking and tinkling of phonemes” than their successors,⁵⁸ Asafyev took his own roots in German Idealism and tried to transplant them back into those earlier first-generation understandings of Symbolism in Russia that had originally worked very well without them. However, as outdated as his move appears, Asafyev essentially managed to achieve a Russian naturalization of German Idealism, which then looked like a domestic Russian movement achieved by the close collaboration of opera and literature in the early second half of the nineteenth century. In so doing, how did Asafyev treat these different notions of Symbolism?

While “decadent Symbolists considered the symbol a device for suggestion and allusion,” and “the mystic Symbolists embraced the symbol as a means for disclosure and revelation,”⁵⁹ Asafyev combined both these notions of symbolics, arguing that musical symbols are suggestive and allude to meaning while, simultaneously, it is precisely a symbolic manifestation in music – in a sense, the musical symbol’s materiality – that serves as the basis for this music’s understanding. As the semiotician Juri Lotman from the Moscow-Tartu School of Semiotics would characterize the term much later, Asafyev thought of symbols like barges without anchors: “The symbol always entails something archaic.”⁶⁰ In contrast to reminiscences or quotations, symbols appear as largely independent semantic units characterized by an external exclusivity and an internal meaningfulness that sometimes points toward pre- or extra-literary areas beyond written cultures, an understanding that Asafyev would have likely shared with Lotman given the role he bestowed on (oral) popular and folk music practices. Thus, the symbolic “barge” becomes something like a ghost ship encountered on the high sea without offering clear signs of its exact origins. Instead, this ship carries with it memories of different cultural strata, thus tying together past, present, and – thinking about the Flying Dutchman as the exemplary ghost ship with its codified septennial cycle of return – possibly even the future. Since symbols remain relatively stable throughout their diachronous travel, their underlying mode of occurrence becomes repetition. They are simultaneously invariant vessels of meaning, allowing culture to remember itself, *and* witness nearly unnoticeable changes interacting with the cultural context in which they emerge: “[The symbol’s] invariant nature realizes itself in variants.”⁶¹

Appropriating the symbol, then, is doomed to fail, for it might appear at any given time, but it will necessarily vanish and re-appear later without a chance of capturing it. Thus, in a sense, Disney’s *Pirates of the Caribbean* is more faithful to the nature of the symbol as Lotman and Asafyev understood it than Richard Wagner’s early opera *The Flying Dutchman*. Whereas, in the third Disney film *At World’s End* (2007), Orlando Bloom as Will has to stab Davy Jones in his treasured heart in order to kill him and save his friends from dying, essentially forcing the hero to become the villain’s successor and taking on the curse as the ghost ship’s new captain, Wagner redeems the Dutchman precisely at his point of departure, when his love interest Senta throws herself off the cliff into the sea without accounting for a successor to the curse. Wagner denies his Flying Dutchman the symbolic return to the high sea, essentially replacing one curse with another: freed from an eternal existence at sea, it is now the redeemed captain, who is chained to the dull life at land from which Senta saw no other means of escaping but to jump into the sea. Yet, what happened to the Dutchman’s ship? From a symbolic standpoint, its sinking

58 Morrison 2019, 3.

59 Morrison 2019, 4.

60 Lotman 2017, 148. For a musicological approach that explicitly combines Asafyev and Lotman, cf. Gasparov 1975.

61 Lotman 2017, 149.

at the end of Wagner's opera is unconvincing and modern audiences know better: The symbol must repeat and return, but now it is the haunting image of the ghost ship without a captain responsible for the supernatural events onboard from Steve Beck's homonymous 2002 horror film. The attempted control and suppression of symbolic cultural memory – albeit temporarily successful – necessarily lead to it re-appearing with an unimaginable force.

Returning to Asafyev's reception of Russian Symbolism, names like Nietzsche and Schopenhauer disappear as explicitly mentioned sources from Asafyev's writings. Although their ideas loom large over his entire musicological output, their names are never to be revived again. Instead, Asafyev domesticates symbolism by cutting off its origins in Western Europe and by creating the monolith of a unified Russian symbolist movement built on meaningful semantic units open to academic inquiry, although such a unified movement did not exist in reality. As exemplified above through the image of a barge without anchor, Asafyev's main problem with the notion of "symbol" was its rootless, impossible-to-capture floating nature. Asafyev's reception of Kurth already showed that he did not reject the notion of meaningful musical symbolics. Instead, he rejected the idea that this meaning was impossible to pinpoint due to a symbol's archaic character. For Asafyev, the term "symbol" does not apply to meaningful appearances in opera, *Lied*, or other forms of nineteenth-century musical culture precisely because these instances of meaning in music are easy to trace back to the specific sociohistorical contexts from which they emerged.

Consequently, Asafyev's argument echoes the developments taken by the literary theory of Formalism that emerged around the mid-1910s and became subject to state oppression with the growing Stalinization of Soviet culture around 1930. While it originally aimed at the immanent structural analysis of literature strictly separating it from extra-literary "life," the 1920s saw an increasing turn toward resituating literature in broader contexts. Here, especially the so-called Prague School of Linguistics with famous members such as Roman Jakobson realized that literature is not tied to language. Instead, as the emerging art of cinema showed, literary structures such as narrative forms transcend language and word-based semiotic systems. Rightly seen as one of the origins of twentieth-century structuralism, the idea of focusing on the structure and function of literature seems to have necessarily led toward transcending the realm of literature itself once it became clear that traditional concepts could not grasp the full extent of what this research entailed.

As Erlich writes in his seminal study on *Russian Formalism*, toward the end of the 1920s, formalist literary critics had expanded their theory: For them, "poetics became more of an integral part of semiotics than a branch of linguistics."⁶² For example, Mukařovský, one of the leading figures in the Prague Circle sublated the aesthetic "isolationism" of early Formalism into the general semiotics first proposed by Saussure: "It is possible to discuss everything that concerns the artwork and its relationship to the world [...] on the basis of sign and meaning. Therefore, it is possible to regard aesthetics as part of a modern science of signs, i.e., a semasiology."⁶³ Thus, originally born out of the self-conscious theoretical and aesthetical reflections of Russian symbolism, formalism went above and beyond its initial focus on literature out of context, rediscovering literary structures in the outside world whose significance for analysis they initially had fervently denied.

62 Erlich 1987, 175.

63 Mukařovský 1946, 25.

These attempts to re-contextualize literary analysis allows one to regard Asafyev's rejection of symbolic terminology as a parallel development in slightly different political circumstances. He rejects the symbol's freely floating barge in favor of anchoring it in the concept of intonation. In contrast to a symbol's vague and sometimes terrifying archaic-ity, intonations are both meaningful and allow one to precisely identify their origin from a given context within history.⁶⁴

SPEECH INTONATION: ASAFYEV READS DARGOMYZHISKY'S THE STONE GUEST

Besides Asafyev's outlined reliance on earlier and contemporary discourses in musicology, music theory, and related disciplines, he also tried to ground his intonation theory in an analytical practice aimed at highlighting the distinctive musical side of semantic meaning. Most visibly, this attempt took place in Asafyev's 1925 study *Speech Intonation*, a fragmentary text extant as a typewritten document without music examples and in two autographs in Asafyev's archive. Originally intended as the second supplementary chapter to *Musical Form as Process*, Asafyev's text on speech intonations only first appeared in 1965 with the music examples added by the editor. As this section will show, the reason that Asafyev did not eventually include *Speech Intonation* in his published monograph lies precisely in his choice to analyze Dargomyzhsky's opera as a piece of texted music.

In contrast to Riethmüller,⁶⁵ who thought that Asafyev erroneously bases his idea of musical meanings on a Marxist theory of reflection, this fragmentary study builds its argument of music's meaningful origin in sociohistorical contexts on the concept of a continuum from speech to music. The work Asafyev chose to demonstrate this idea is Alexander Dargomyzhsky's unfinished opera *The Stone Guest*, the composer's last project during the final two years of his life until his death in 1869, leaving César Cui and Nikolay Rimsky-Korsakov to complete the composition for its 1872 premiere in St. Petersburg. In a letter to Lyubov Karmalina from 1866, Dargomyzhsky famously aimed to take Alexander Pushkin's original play and to turn it into a piece of music theater "without altering a single word."⁶⁶ Thus, Pushkin's adaptation of the literary subject of Don Juan seems to be a particularly potent material for Asafyev to ground his theoretical claims in analytical evidence.

64 It is interesting to consider the introduction of intonation as happening at the same time as actual sounds and music that had previously remained outside of history re-appeared in "musical discourse." The *Bruitism* of Luigi Russolo, many of the experiments from the 1920s Soviet avant-garde, and probably also some re-emerging early or even ancient music as indicated by Hermann Abert's PhD dissertation seem to correspond to Asafyev's intonation theory. Furthermore, if Asafyev's notion of "intonation" really is a device to reduce the complexity of its contemporary discourse and rationalize the haunting specter of auditory symbols into the academically approachable basic semantic units of intonations, does Asafyev not contribute to the increasing conservatism in the Soviet Union's culture that Dorothea Redepenning has recently written about (2020)? As mentioned above, Asafyev's theory does not exclude extra-musical sounds or noise *per se*. However, once intonation becomes a meaningful semantic unit anchored in specific sociohistorical contexts, it only allows for integrating those extra-musical entities bearing the mark of their origin. If the sound, noise, or music does not show traces of its origins, intonation theory must discard it.

65 Riethmüller 1976.

66 Dargomyzhsky 1922, 119.

In the introduction to the study, Asafyev argues that listening to everyday speech provides composers with material “closely related to inner life.”⁶⁷ Thus, using standard Western notation and the chromatic system without micro-tonality or any of the technological advancements such as Matthäus Hipp’s chronoscope well-available to interwar researchers and composers,⁶⁸ Asafyev thought it possible to notate speech. That composers such as Mussorgsky had indeed done so during the nineteenth century seemed to prove Asafyev’s approach. However, in what follows, Asafyev tries to present a full account of speech forms appearing in Dargomyzhsky’s opera, one which draws from the idea of relating melodic lines back to typical patterns of speech intonation through visualizing them (fig. 1).

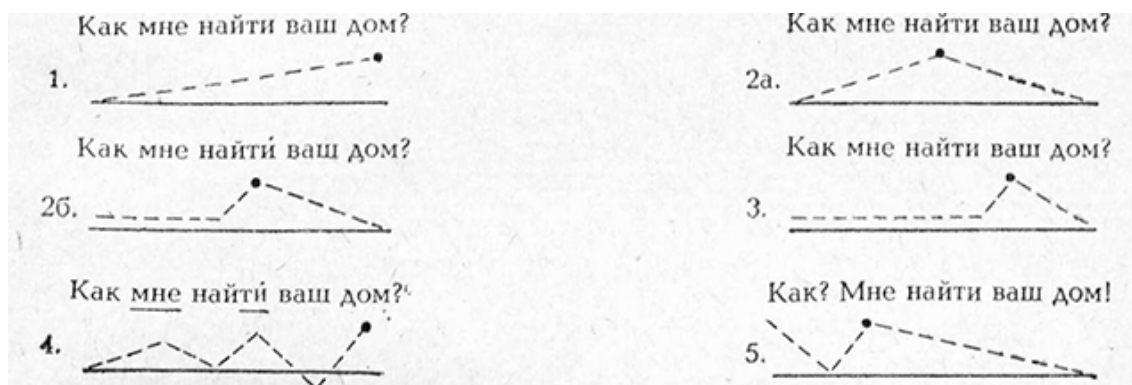


Figure 1: Boris Asafyev, *Rechevaya intonaciya*, p. 9. In Asafyev’s example, the question “How do I find your house?” (Kak mne nayti vash dom?) always remains the same on a graphical level. What differs, are the intonations used to utter the question.

In his remarks preceding this figure, Asafyev explains: “For example, usually an ascending line dominates in ‘question intonations.’”⁶⁹ However, as the example shows, the written word and phrase form cannot fully capture the possible semantic shifts through alternating speech intonation. Asafyev then goes on to present an entire catalogue of vocal lines from Dargomyzhsky’s operas, which he considers particularly close to real-life speech intonation. They are not intended as mere examples. Instead, as Asafyev remarks regarding the first printed vocal line from the opera, this collection of intonations is “typical” in that individual music examples are mere variants of general speech patterns in real life. Thus, Asafyev presents his readers with ten types of questions and four types of expressive utterances (the terminology follows Asafyev here):

67 Asafyev 1965, 7.

68 Wingfield 1992.

69 “Например, в вопросительной интонации обычно доминирует линия восхождения.” Asafyev 1965, 8–9.

a) An increase leading into a disintegration:

Дон - Жуан
Дон - на Анна де Сольва? Как? Супруга коман-
20
до - ра, у - би - то - го, .. не по - мно кем?

Example 1: Boris Asafyev, *Rehevaya intonaciya*, p. 10.

b) A pensive question:

Дон Карлос
56
Так ты е - го лю - би - ла?

Example 2: Boris Asafyev, *Rehevaya intonaciya*, p. 10.

c) A curious question (a short “chain” of questions):

Дон - Жуан
23
Так здесь по - хо - ро - ни - ли ко - ман - до - ра?
Лаура
74
От - ку - да ты? Дав - но ли здесь?

Example 3: Boris Asafyev, *Rehevaya intonaciya*, p. 10.

d) A curious question (an interrupted attempt without results):

Дон - Жуан
21
И не - дур - на?..
Дон - Жуан
147
Вы в ду - ше к не - му пи - та - е - те враж - ду?

Example 4: Boris Asafyev, *Rehevaya intonaciya*, p. 10.

e) A demanding question:

Дон - Жуан
Как ду - ма - ешь. у - знать ме - ня не -
Лепорелло
6
- льзя? Да, Дон-Жу - а - на му - ре - но при - звать!

Example 5: Boris Asafyev, *Rehevaya intonaciya*, p. 10.

f) A neutral question, which contains a mismatch between the verse's central accent and the highest point in the melodic line:



Example 5: Boris Asafyev, *Rechevaya intonaciya*, p. 11.

g) A surprised question followed by a disintegration:



Example 7: Boris Asafyev, *Rechevaya intonaciya*, p. 11.

h) An ironic question:



Example 8: Boris Asafyev, *Rechevaya intonaciya*, p. 11.

i) An ironically impudent question:



Example 9: Boris Asafyev, *Rechevaya intonaciya*, p. 11.

j) A question uttered in amazement, yet mixed with contempt:



Example 10: Boris Asafyev, *Rechevaya intonaciya*, p. 12.

Appearing without commentary in Asafyev's text, this catalogue of musical speech intonations raises some questions, especially concerning the exact relationship between the examples used and their archetypical abstract patterns. Clearly, in *Speech Intonation*, Asafyev is not concerned with the semantic meaning of untexted music. Instead, the examples printed above and below appear without orchestral or piano accompaniment. Furthermore, what holds them together is mainly their situatedness in an ongoing dialogue, i.e., their dramaturgical function. In the score itself, plenty of these examples appear without any accompaniment or come from recitative-like contexts with a single – sometimes prolonged – chord held underneath them. Thus, it seems impossible to account for a general compositional model behind the different emotionally laden intonations (not least because the number of examples is too small even for Asafyev's interpretation of a single work, since *The Stone Guest* contains 113 questions in total), although the chord progressions and voice leading often manifest plagal cadences, confirming their significance for the musical

topos of questions.⁷⁰ In short, then, it seems likely that Asafyev decided against including this study in the supplementary section of *Musical Form as Process* precisely because of his opera analysis. The catalogue of speech intonation would not only have supplemented the larger argument of the monograph mentioned in this paper's previous section but also contradicted Asafyev's wish to show the semantic meaning of music without seeking a refuge in text-based compositions such as Dargomyzhsky's opera.

Following this meticulous catalogue of question types in Dargomyzhsky's opera, Asafyev summarizes a number of additional passages in which he discovered instances of intonations that were especially laden with emotion.

a) Exclamations (delight, bafflement, fright, orders, calls, riposte, etc.)

The image displays a musical score for Boris Asafyev's *Rechevaya intonaciya*, featuring several examples of exclamations. The score is written in Russian and includes the following passages:

- Leporello** (measures 6-7): Таких, как он, така-я бездна!
- Дон-Жуан** (measures 79-80): Нет, после него-ворим!
- Дон-Жуан** (measures 7-8): А впрочем, я шко-гов Мадриде не боюсь!
- Дон-Жуан** (measure 18): О Лаура!
- Лепорелло** (measures 119-120): И слава богу! Чем дальше, тем лучше. Всех бы их, раз-
- Лепорелло** (measures 120-121): О-хота вам шутить, и с кем!
- Дон-Жуан** (measures 120-121): Ступай же!
- Лепорелло** (measures 120-121): Но...
- Дон-Жуан** (measures 120-121): Ступай!
- Дон-Жуан** (measures 82-83): Всё к лучшему...
- Дон-Жуан** (measures 148-149): Донна Анна, где твой кинжал? Вот грудь моя!
- Донна Анна** (measures 149-150): Дического, что вы?

Example 12: Boris Asafyev, *Rechevaya intonaciya*, p. 12–3.

70 Jeřulak 2001.

b) Enumerations:

Дон-Жуан

Чу-ду-ю при-ят-ность я на-хо-дил
ве-се-не-чель-ном вре-и

15

Лаура

в по-мерт-ве-лых губ-ках. Э-то стран-но
Как не-бо ти-хо, не-дви-жим теп-лый воз-дух.

61

Дон-Жуан

Ночь ли-мо-ном и лав-ром пах-нет.
Он ва-ми вы-бран был? Нет, мать мо-я ве-де-ла мне дать ру-ку дон Аль-ва-ру.

134

Донна Анна

Мы бы-ли бед-ны, дон Аль-вар бо-гат

Example 13: Boris Asafyev, *Rechevaya intonaciya*, p. 14.

c) An intonation with a narrative character (dream, memory):

Дон Карлос

Твой Дон-Жу-ан без-бож-ник и мер-тво-вец.
Ты ду-ра ты су-ма со-шел!

Poco più mosso
Лаура

Ты су-ма со-шел!
Дон Кар-лос, пе-ре-стань-те. Вы не на-у-ми-те, вы у ме-ня! Из-воль-те вый-ти вон!

68

Дон-Жуан

Так, я не мо-нах... у ва-ших ног про-ше-нья у-мо-ля-ю.

Allegro 95

Дон-Жуан

я у-бил су-пру-га тво-е-го.
И не жа-ле-ю о том. И нет рас-ка-я-нья во мне!

150

Example 14: Boris Asafyev, *Rechevaya intonaciya*, p. 15.

d) Sharp agitation (swearing, anger, shouting, confession):

Donna Anna
Где я? Где я?
Moderato 152
Ах... Ах... но... Ах... но...
Donna Anna
О - ставь ме - ня! Ты, ты
мне враг! Ты от - нял у ме -
154
- ня все, что я в жиз - ни...
Nataша
Allegro
По - стой! По - стой,
те - бе ска - зать хо - те - ла Не по - мню
Князь Наташа
что . При - по - мни Для те -
81
- бя на все го - то - ва... ах нет, не то!

Example 15: Boris Asafyev,
Rechevaya intonaciya, p. 16–7.

It is strange, yet in keeping with his analysis of vocal lines that Asafyev's examples for life-imitating speech intonations in Dargomyzhsky's opera *The Stone Guest* do not include the analysis of underlying harmonic progressions, although the existing scholarship on "questions" as a musical topic argues that it precisely builds on the plagal cadence with its characteristic.⁷¹ As mentioned above, a closer inspection reveals that many of the examples presented by Asafyev appear unaccompanied by any music, thus weakening their overall relevance for a better grasp of musical meaning.

However, as recent critical scholarship documents, Asafyev's choice of Dargomyzhsky's opera *The Stone Guest* as an example was by no means arbitrary nor was it without problems. Dissinger already noted that Dargomyzhsky does indeed alter some words from Pushkin's original⁷² – although, arguably, the alterations are minimal. Nevertheless, the work's allegedly experimental character of not employing standard operatic forms must not be taken at face value. The composer avoids simultaneous singing, instead trying to imitate spoken dialogue through uninterrupted syllabic exchange of text between the singers. Furthermore, the music underlines speech intonation by highlighting stressed syllables through pitch or meter, the *colla parte* doubling of vocal lines, the recitative-like use of individual accompanying chords, and some naturalistic tone painting of

71 Jeßulat 2001.

72 Dissinger 2001.

textual meaning such as Don Juan's vision of dim fog in exile or following Laura's description of rainy Paris in the first act's second scene.

As Richard Taruskin's studies of dialogic opera and discourses on musical realism in Dargomyzhsky's immediate surroundings have shown,⁷³ Mussorgsky had already gone beyond the supposedly accurate manifestation of speech intonation in *The Stone Guest*. This raises the question of why Asafyev used this example. Thus, it appears as if Asafyev's idea of a continuum between individual words, speech, and the melody of vocal lines is the result of rendering parts of Russia's operatic classical tradition universal. Through uncritically repeating the talking points of Mussorgsky, Stasov, and other members of the Mighty Handful circle in the 1860s and 1870s, Asafyev glorifies a compositional technique of treating the libretto that was already obsolete by the 1920s, when composers such as Béla Bartók and Leoš Janáček had already developed much more precise methods of notating both folk and art music than the surviving examples from late nineteenth-century Russia.

However, *The Stone Guest* being obsolete does not necessarily contradict Asafyev's position regarding the notions of "symbol" and "intonation." Instead, since the intonations used by Dargomyzhsky appear outdated from today's – and probably even already from Asafyev's – position, they highlight the fact that intonation theory is not dealing with symbolics, searching for timeless invariant forms of musical expression. Whereas the meaning of symbols lies only in their presence that does not allow one to question their origins, intonations are semantic musical units that become meaningful through their recognizable origin in particular socio-historical contexts. Bound to a particular composer's style, the speech intonations of *The Stone Guest* are anchored in Dargomyzhsky's time, without necessarily offering themselves as models that should eventually become compositional routine. What interests Asafyev is not so much that Russian as a language has altered little since Pushkin's and Dargomyzhsky's days, nor is it that later music seems much better suited to capture the intricacies of speech. Instead, musical intonations appear as historically limited manifestations of often-generalized emotional meaning that transcends sociohistorical environments. As de la Motte-Haber cautions, "[i]ntonations do not characterize acoustic phenomena but their mental correlates."⁷⁴ Asafyev's goal was not to judge intonations for their retrospective accurateness in imitating language, but to show how they were appropriate for expressing the semantic meaning conveyed in speech in the contexts from which they emerged.

CONCLUSION

Departing from a curious and seemingly unmediated remark of the Soviet musicologist Boris V. Asafyev in his seminal 1931 *Musical Form as a Process*, this paper has examined his understanding of symbolics within the larger context of his thought and contemporary debates in interwar Europe. Asafyev's anti-climactic rejection of semiotic terminology raises the question of how his intonation theory relates to theoretical positions and methodological approaches in academic research that aim at interpreting musical music.

73 Taruskin 1970 and 1981.

74 de la Motte-Haber 1976, 54–55.

While recent scholarship has seen a critical re-appraisal of Asafyev as one of the Soviet Union's leading figures in musicology despite his overtly opportune politics, this contribution has focused on examining Asafyev's theory, rather than showing him as an actor in the political landscape of early post-revolutionary Russia. The continuing erosion of outdated Cold War paradigms that had marginalized Soviet scholarship in the twentieth century and after the fall of the Berlin Wall allow us to re-frame Asafyev's intonation theory as an integration of Western or Central European and Russian discourses creating an interdisciplinary field that also included the empirical sciences. Thus, it is possible to challenge notions of Asafyev as a mere *cul de sac* of European debates as well as the idea that Soviet musicology developed in isolation from the outside world. Instead, Asafyev's unparalleled significance for Russian music culture and the exportation of his theory to the Soviet Union's broader sphere of influence after the Second World War call for further studies.

In this context, Asafyev's intonation theory acquired a politically legitimized position of power and went beyond a mere academic tool of analysis, instead turning into a guide for compositional practice. Once intonations appeared as presenting the essence of music, new works had to do little more than to strive toward forms accessible to intonation theory in order to fulfil the politically instrumentalized norm that came with it. As Haas demonstrates in his study, *Leningrad's Modernists*, through a close reading of cyclic thematicism in Shostakovich's First Symphony,⁷⁵ Asafyev's theory was "a simultaneous break with and expansion of Rimsky-Korsakovian pedagogical concepts."⁷⁶ Soviet composers consciously applied pedagogical concepts such as the "polystylistism" popularized by Alfred Schnittke in the second half of the twentieth century. These findings are supported by the research of film music scholars, several of whom have noted the distinct cinematographic quality of compositions from the former Soviet Union such as Shostakovich's opera *The Nose*,⁷⁷ turning the popular media of film and television into a veritable laboratory for composers to experiment with music tailored to a mass audience.⁷⁸

Furthermore, as Panteleeva writes, Asafyev's intonation theory "was one of the main reasons for the profound misunderstanding between Russian and Western scholars in the twentieth century," since "[t]oo much in Russian musicology was built on this site-specific theory."⁷⁹ From today's perspective, it basically seems impossible to escape Asafyev's influence in Russian scholarship, with the situation largely remaining unchanged since Taruskin first bemoaned it in the 1980s.⁸⁰ Concepts such as "intonation" or the notorious "*lad*" idea of musical modes that has recently received more attention⁸¹ still haunt post-Soviet scholarship. Yet, nothing seems more wrong than to merely explain away something that complicates a mutual understanding. What if these challenges are not obstacles to be overcome but essential to the theories at hand?

75 Haas 1998

76 Titus 2006, 32.

77 Morgan 1998.

78 Titus 2016.

79 Panteleeva 2015, 123.

80 Taruskin 2009.

81 Mende 2020, 449–485.

Scores

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© 2021 Patrick Becker-Naydenov (patrick.becker@uni-leipzig.de, ORCID iD: 0000-0002-1219-3888)

Universität Leipzig [Leipzig University]

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