In 1926 a young Leningrad pianist got a call from New York on a cultural mission. Not long after the first visits of American jazz bands to Russia, Lopatishina had been sent to the US to study the music, to buy arrangements and instruments, and to return to her jazz orchestra for the city of Leningrad. Her sponsor was the Commissariat of Public Enlightenment, headed by Anatoli Lurie-narskii, who had not yet decided whether the jazz being enthusiastically embraced by urban Russian audiences was a decadent bourgeois in- sect in the side of Russia’s national culture, or the seeds of a genuinely new popular form.

And so the stage is set. Meanwhile, in Canada, jazz is very much a stage (no such emigration was necessary. There were Canadian delegates in Washington in 1925, though. They were trying to negotiate regulation of radio broadcasting frequencies so that Canadian broadcasts could not be interrupted by the interference from American stations pouring into Canada. While Canada did establish its own (and later, Royal Commissioners) pondered whether the entertainment thriv- ing in Canadian Cafes was anathema to the national spirit of Canadian citizenship, no one was in a position to legisl- ate for such environments to continue. Russians, however (we’re back to Starr) would be inter- minably paranoid, idiotic, militaristic and xenophobic enough to try. They wouldn’t succeed, however, for they had nothing better to offer.

This is the major distinguishing feature of the controversial recep- tion of jazz in the Soviet Union, ac- cording to Starr, a specialist in Soviet history and jazz music. His defence of the account of the musi- cians, movements and ideological antagonisms concerning the history of jazz in Russia offers a fascinating portrait of the conflicts engendered by the country (or as no comparative perspective, whichever I think is significant) by the reception of the United States’s foremost cul- tural export in the first half of the century. American jazz symbolized there, as elsewhere, more than a roughly new musical style: it represented a whole complex of cultural values and preferences, invariably in- fluenced by its Americanism, but also given life by the local pleas- ures and stories of musicians and au- diences. That was true here, too. But Russia was then, as now, the United States’s foremost political, ideological and cultural opponent. It’s hard to tell where that is more ex- tent: in stories, or in the story- teller. We’ll begin with the stories.

Jazz was introduced to Russia in the 1920s by Americans who had travelled to Paris, or Berlin, and had heard American groups touring Europe. Valentine Pavlishi, Ekaterinposh poet and dancer, returned to Moscow in 1922 with a collection of instruments (sax- ophones, trombones, etc.), more importantly, iconographic symbols for jazz; later they would be restricted by the govern- ment and used in a press campaign in praise of jazz music and dance. The Futurists initially adopted jazz as "noise music", while moretraditional composers adapted its harmonies and harmonics to the framework of vanitarian modernism. Dance bands quickly became the size of a more popular, negation, alternately flaunting American costumes and "uplifting" Russian classics of folk or patriotic songs in a battle between the "sweet" banalities of con- servative jazz orchestration and the more self-consciously "national". The time Teplisky landed, the pat- tern for subsequent struggle had al- ready been set.

Jazz was associated with dancing, with working-class entertainment, and so with the loosening of social control. It was also embraced by more "seri- ous" composers, and thus identified with the loosening of moral, sexual and musical degeneracy was debated by Americans with great intensity through the 1920s. But the Soviet orientation was different: it ques- tioned the music as an "exported" (and not only that, but American) form, and interrogated it intensely in terms of its complicated effects on proletar- ian culture and the development of socialism. While some musicians were reportedly discharged (and "ide- ologically adapted") enough to protect themselves and their audiences from such interference, there were periods, particularly in the late 1930s and the late 40s, when the state inter- vened forcefully, not surprisingly, it was very strict.

The problem of defining what was "acceptable in relation to what was conceived as a proletarian project was fought out in the Russian idiocies. Stars who successfully engaged in this debate of the construction of an orchestra among critics, musicians and party officials may be the book’s more interesting and useful contribution, as one might expect, the official stance to- wards jazz warmed and cooled in tune with larger political dynamics within the Soviet Union. The high point of officially-endorsed popular dissemination of the music was dur- ing World War II, when Red Army troops were commonly treated to touring or resident dance bands as part of the campaign to build morale at the front (strategy, I might add is not unique to the Soviet Union). But as recently as 1936 the journal Provo- kator presented the theories of the Soviet (and later, Propaganda (and later, Levstik) (representing the Soviet government) had fought an exposing race for the battle over Party’s position on jazz, while Mos- cow theatres were simultaneously purging "representatives of the objec- tionable American numbers". Pravda defended jazz, incidentally—only a few years after attacking Shostakovich for exploiting jazz to pro- duce "noise instead of music"; its editors argued that jazz’s apparent
US government, with strategic assistance from the CIA. If the effectiveness of this strategy (or the seeming politically independent economic goals of the industries themselves, which are absent actors here) appear to absolve that government, this is only another way of saying that the American government, or rather capital, is the agent for a different logic, a logic whose roots are in the Soviet Union. This radicalism continually produces (or rather exacerbates) the American government's view that it has not been known until recently for its kindness to popular music industries. The era in which we use jazz to solicit popular support. None of this is examined by Starr, whose 'educators' were, of course coincidentally, staff members of the Voice of America and the International Communication Agency, and who provides in the illustrations, as sole exception to the photographs of Russian musicians and jazz posters, said Voice of America representative.

These are important and indeed dispensable issues; but they don't explain why jazz was so warmly embraced by Russian (and German and Japanese and Canadian) citizens in that period. Nor do they explain a large part of the story. As I drew my own explanation from the work of the Lehigh philosopher and jazz critic, Philip Bizer, and from Alexi Batsheva's Sovietiztk dzhaz, neither of which have been translated into English yet. It is possible to see the Russian experience as translating many things had to be explained for Western reader's benefit. In that sense, I think, jazz's appeal lies in its 'erotic and Dionysian element', its universality despite claims to the contrary made by American black nationalists (though as I will explain this avoids the issue, and by its major assault on mainstream Western aesthetics and form. His opposition of jazz's 'individuality' to the bureaucratic monolith of state-supported official culture is inviting, because it exposes the attraction of jazz as a medium forufen to the spirit of oppositional culture. But precisely there the missing link might be picked together; the myth of jazz arising from a freedom-loving culture is no less partial than the officially sanctioned myths that are in place, and we couldn't speak of success without the presence of Soviet history it is all too easy to argue. The analysis would be advanced by two streams of investigation: first, how jazz actually related to, built on, found a response in, took place of and in other ways affected Russian music itself; Starr seems incapable of moving beyond the essentially American concepts of 'sweet and hot', and describes Russian syntheses and adaptations (or reconstructions) without much more concealment of ironic, except where such adaptation are sanctioned by the rubric of art (rather than that of na-

There is evidence that the massive export of music and film after the war was part of a strategy of international dissemination of American culture that was officially sanctioned by the US government, with strategic assistance from the CIA. About Western culture within which the dismissal of others is built in, without even noticing — he even claims Russian appropriations of Mexican or Chicoan songs as vio-

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spring 1985 borders /& 10