Music, Longing and Belonging

Music, Longing and Belonging: Articulations of the Self and the Other in the Musical Realm

Edited by

Magdalena Waligórska

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INTRODUCTION

MUSIC AND THE BOUNDARIES OF (NON)BELONGING

MAGDALENA WALIGÓRSKA

In Tom Stoppard's *Every Good Boy Deserves Favour* (1978), the British playwright pushes the boundaries of genre to make a poignant commentary about music and identity. Combining Theatre of the Absurd with symphonic music (performed live by a full, on-stage orchestra), Stoppard's play suggests that music can both mirror the complexities of our inner selves and provoke alienation. Set in a Soviet psychiatric hospital and featuring two cellmates—a political dissident on a hunger strike and a mental patient under the delusion that he is conducting an orchestra—the play portrays collective musical practices as unable to imbue the members of a society undergoing atomisation with a lasting sense of social belonging. Even if Stoppard, in the words of one of his protagonists, proclaims that "we all have some musician in us" (Stoppard 1978, 17), music in his vision of the world fails as social glue.

Yet music is perhaps the medium most commonly instrumentalised in the service of the grand narratives that underpin collective identities. However, its ability to evoke human emotion is a double-edged sword. Musical experience can promote a sense of belonging and reinforce boundaries between social groups. It can also feed disaffection and create spaces of alterity.

With contributions from musicologists, ethnomusicologists, historians, sociologists, anthropologists and literary scholars, this book provides an interdisciplinary perspective on how different modes of musical sociability—from opera performances to collective singing and Internet fan communities—inspire "imagined communities" (Anderson 2006) that not only transcend national borders, but also challenge the boundaries between the collective self and the Other.

While the relationship between music and nationhood has been widely researched, few comparative and transnational studies on music and identity exist.[1] This collection of essays addresses this gap by exploring forms of musical belonging not bound by national identity. Music is shown to be a unique medium of desire, providing audiences with opportunities for manifold, fluid self-expression through the art of others. A second main focus is the negotiation of musical identity in the context of appropriation and displacement. A key argument emerging from the collection as a whole is that the medium not only channels an experience of belonging during social and political upheaval, but can also induce its opposite—non-belonging, detachment and dissent.

Although the relationship between music and identity-building has occupied generations of scholars, musicologists and sociologists are by no means agreed on how, if at all, music affects collective identity. Structuralist sociologists, for example, believed that artistic forms such as music were ritualized manners in the expression of group identities, and that preferences for a certain kind of music reflected ethnic background. Constructivists later reinterpreted this link between music and identity, with Bourdieu and de Certeau defining social performance as a practice in which meanings are generated and negotiated, and this analytical framework was widely adopted within musicology. No longer understood as an automatic reflection of the innermost self, music has been ascribed a role in the very shaping of the self.

Musicologist Martin Stokes has posited that music plays this role in identity building by providing the "means by which people recognize identities and places, and the boundaries that separate them" (Stokes 1994, 5). By stimulating collective memories and delimiting symbolic spaces, music "offers a sense of both self and others, of the subjective in the collective" (Frith 2004, 109-110). We can therefore conceive of music both as a sort of semiotic system that allows us to communicate our group affiliation to others and as a space within which this very affiliation can be created. Simon Frith notes that music "constructs our sense of identity through the direct experiences it offers the body, time and sociability, experiences which enable us to place ourselves in imaginary cultural narratives" (Frith 1996, 124). The fact that musical experience both encodes these "imaginary cultural narratives" and provides us with opportunities to perform our social identities in public renders music a particularly powerful medium of identity negotiation, such that, according to Stokes, "[t]he musical event ... evokes and organizes collective memories and present experiences of place with an intensity, power and simplicity *unmatched* by any other social activity" (Stokes 1994, 3, italics mine).

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[1] Notable exceptions include Stokes (1994); Bohlman (2004); Berger and Del Negro (2004); Frith (2004); Bohlman (2008).

The role of music in maintaining group boundaries lies also in the fact that it offers, as ethnomusicologist Philip V. Bohlman has put it, a "symbolic system to convey the exotic and the other" (Bohlman 2000, 189). Music "magnifies otherness" (ibid.) allowing us to either define our collective identity in opposition to the feared and despised Other or build the soundscape of our unity around positively regarded external models.

The roles played by music of the Other as a catalyst in the process of self-definition are shown to be complex and manifold in the following essays. Ana Sobral analyses the figure of "the Gypsy" in the music of Gogol Bordello, which becomes a surface onto which contemporary urban audiences can project their own visions of subversive cosmopolitan counterculture. Katharine Leiska's essay on the North as topos in German symphonic music shows that fascination with the Other in music can in fact marginalise the actual music of the Other. The role of the "imagined community of the North" in Germany's early twentieth century narrative of their own cultural superiority left no room for actual Scandinavian symphonic music itself. In Mario Dunkel's investigation of early jazz, the perception of "Otherness" in music is shown to be fluid and subject to constant negotiation. Today's musical Other may well prove to be tomorrow's mainstream.

Regardless of whether we understand music as reflecting our inner selves or in fact shaping it, transcultural music experience, in which one group appropriates the music of the other, poses a serious challenge to both the structuralist and constructivist models of the relationship between music and identity. The structuralist approach fails to explain which identity, if any, is expressed when members of one group perform the music of another. Following the constructivist model, on the other hand, every instance of musical appropriation would necessarily lead to bonding with the outgroup whose music we borrow and whose "imaginary cultural narrative" (Frith 1996, 124) we immerse ourselves in.

British sociomusicologist Simon Frith has countered these conceptual problems by suggesting that music can also generate non-identity, especially given the fact that one of the conditions of identification via music was the "experience of music as something which can be possessed" (Frith 2004, 41). But what happens when music cannot be truly "possessed" because it belongs to someone else? Eric Lott addresses this question in his study of blackface minstrel shows in the United States, finding that cross-racial impersonation was a site of very complex ethnic and class identification processes. He suggests that blackface shows performed by white actors, including by Irish immigrants, were a means of "displaced immigrant self-expression". Blending cultural elements originating both from the black community and other ethnic groups, the minstrel show was a genre through which white performers communicated their own values, anxieties and inter-ethnic solidarity or hostility. "The blackface performer", writes Lott, "is in effect a perfect metaphor for one's culture's ventriloquial self-expression through the art forms of someone else's" (Lott 1993, 92). Impersonating the Other in the musical realm proves a means of indirectly narrating the self, self-representation from behind a mask.

The tension between appropriated means of expression and the pre-existing identities of the performers/audiences is also the concern of Born and Hesmondhalgh, who propose a model of musically generated identities that is a synthesis of the structuralist and the constructivist approach. They propose that "[s]ociocultural identities are not simply constructed in music", but that "there are 'prior' identities that come to be embodied dynamically in musical cultures, which then also *form* the reproduction of those identities—no passive processes of reflection" (Born and Hesmondhalgh 2001, 31-2). Born and Hesmondhalgh introduce the ideal-typical distinction between uses of music that "prefigure" or "reproduce" already existing socio-cultural identities and "musically imagined communities", which are forms of barely imaginary identification. Cross-cultural music experience belongs in this framework to the realm of "desire" or "fantasy". Thanks to its hyperconnotative character, with its power to prompt emotional association, imaginary evocation and abstraction, music is a unique vehicle of cross-cultural longing. "Psychic tourism", fuelled by the exoticism inferred by the music of the Other is one example of this potential (ibid., 32). However, the latter is by no means an unambiguous phenomenon. It may be motivated by curiosity and pleasure-seeking, rather than a wish to partake in the culture of the other. Although Born and Hesmondhalgh do not exclude the possibility of musical tourism ultimately leading to a "real" identification, they do not explain how the tourist can merge with what they call the "ontologically prior" community (ibid., 36).

In an analysis of diasporic music, Negus and Roman-Velazquez are even more sceptical of the relationship between musical experience and identity formation. The authors argue that diasporic culture is not simply "carried" from one place to another but created anew in different locations and under new circumstances. Hence, ownership and authorship become complex issues, defying essentialist notions of ethnic music (i.e., as owned by one particular ethnic group). According to the authors, co-construction of diasporic music by artists from the outside of the diaspora calls for a "less determinist" approach to music and identity (Negus and Roman-Velazquez 2002, 138).

This point is underlined by several of the following essays. As Ana Sobral's essay on "gypsy punk" shows, diasporic music not only undergoes hybridization, as internationally successful bands blend elements of Roma music with other styles, but also risks appropriation as an aural metaphor of the liminal and the subversive in contexts far removed from the music's community of origin. This kind of instrumentalisation, argues Christina Taylor Gibson, is by no means a solely contemporary phenomenon. Analysing the popularity of Mexican folk music during the 1920s Mexican Vogue, when diasporic Mexican culture enjoyed widespread, mainstream popularity in the USA, she points out that Mexican *canciones* not only drew popular acclaim, but that outstanding musicians who were not Mexican themselves, such as Jascha Heifetz, began performing the genre. However, the context in which this co-creation of diasporic music by "outsiders" takes place is not always sentimental or nostalgic. As Ulrike Präger and Heidrun Friese demonstrate in their essays, labour and forced migration provide a particularly dynamic setting for musical appropriation. Präger, in her essay on the musical practice of Sudeten Germans expelled from Czechoslovakia after 1945, notes that music which, in the aftermath of forced migration, served as "anthem of imagined belonging", with time came to be appropriated by the host communities. Documenting the music of migrants from the Maghreb crossing the Mediterranean, Friese likewise shows how musical manifestos of group identity re-used and re-interpreted images of illegal immigration circulating in the European mass media. As both Friese and the essay of Ailbhe Kenny on virtual musical communities illustrate, new technological devices and modes of communication further extend the possibilities of consuming, participating in, and co-creating traditional folk genres.

Given the growing impact of hybridisation and the increasingly blurred boundaries of ethnic music, can we risk suggesting that ethnic music's power to generate a sense of belonging has diminished proportionally? "The labelling of people", warn Negus and Roman-Velazquez, "is not the same as the creative acts of those people" (ibid., 139). And participation in a collective musical practice does not always have to entail identification. Negus and Roman-Velazquez propose that the act of playing or listening to music might in fact be totally irrelevant to the identity of the participants. "Why should purchasing, listening to, or dancing with the same piece of music imply a profound sense of belonging to and participation in the creation of a scene, subculture, genre culture, or imagined community?”, the authors ask. Music can also instil “a clear lack of belonging”. As globalization accelerates appropriation and allows multiple interpretations of music, the consumption of music could just as easily generate “disaffiliation, ambivalence, ... [and] disengagement”. In some cases, music can even evoke anomie, a sensation of distance, estrangement and a feeling of not being part of the group who is “into” the music (ibid., 141-142).

The category “lack of belonging” coined by Negus and Roman-Velazquez begs the question of the degree to which “disaffiliation” and “anomie” are sustainable states. Would failure to fully identify with the music of the Others instead reinforce identification with one’s own group? Präger and Friese answer this question by showing how a perceived “lack of belonging” in a host society triggers the emergence of alternative “musically imagined communities”. Moreover, given the multidimensional character of an individual’s identity (which comprises not only national belonging, but categories like ethnicity, gender and class), can the feeling of detachment be ever complete? In other words, is it not possible that a given genre of music might evoke a sense of lack of belonging on one level (e.g. ethnicity), but at the same time offer channels for identification on other levels (e.g. class)? Kenny’s investigation into virtual platforms for music learning suggests that participants who do not identify with Irish folk music on the level of ethnicity develop other means of connecting to the cyber-community of musicians studied in the essay. In the light of postmodern definitions of identity as fluid and multiple, we may indeed need to allow for more nuanced relationships with music than only complete affiliation or disaffiliation.

Organization of the Book

The essays have been organized into four sections. The first section focuses on music as a realm of cultural appropriation. Here, the focus is on the fascination with, and instrumentalisation of, “otherness” in music as a tool of introspection. The second section examines the role of music in the development of supranational and transnational communities. In the third section, the focus is on diaspora and displacement, particularly the role of music in community-building prior to, during and following (forced) migration. Finally, the fourth section looks at music as a medium of negotiating gendered identities.

In the book’s opening section, Oksana Sarkisova analyses the resistance to and appropriation of “Western” models of consumer culture and popular entertainment in Soviet, Czech, and Hungarian musical films of the Cold War period, highlighting the paradoxical and somewhat self-contradictory attempts by "Eastern Bloc" music producers to compete with the unparalleled popularity of Western musicals and to exploit the genre as a medium for propaganda.

Ana Sobral, in a study of Manhattan punk band Gogol Bordello, also analyses the twentieth century schism between Europe's "East" and "West" through the prism of the contemporary transnational music scene. Focusing on the figure of Eugene Hütz, the charismatic Ukraine-born leader of Gogol Bordello, and analysing the allusions to Roma culture, migration and displacement in the band's oeuvre, she examines the appeal of minority/immigrant identities in global musical counterculture. The category of "cosmopolitan hero" that she convincingly proposes in her essay highlights the extent to which the persona of the immigrant musician constructed by bands like Gogol Bordello taps into the expectations, desires and cultural codes of Western audiences, who adopt the music of the Other as a "vehicle of oppositional thinking".

Focusing on Scandinavian symphonic music at the turn of the twentieth century, Katharine Leiska presents another crucial European construct of the Other—that of the North. Teasing out the ambiguities of Scandinavian symphonies portraying a mythical pan-Germanic past and examining the music's reception in Germany, she traces the emergence of a "Northern Other" that both inspired and challenged the hegemony of the German compositional tradition.

The second section investigates the role of music in the formation of supranational identities and musical communities that transcend national borders. Mario Dunkel's chapter examines pan-African aesthetics across two generations of jazz musicians, using the works of Duke Ellington and Charles Mingus as case studies. By comparing the treatment of race relations and African American identity in the works of the two musicians, Dunkel shows how the very different political and social backdrops to the struggle for racial equality during the Harlem Renaissance and the subsequent Civil Rights Movement influenced representations of political self-awareness and identity in jazz music.

Tal Soker addresses an equally charged political moment, examining the development of "Mediterranean Style" art music by Zionist musicians as part of a wider nation-building process in the years preceding and directly after the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948. Initially embracing "pan-Semitic syncretism", the musical style was intended to anchor the national identity of the aspirant state in the ancient heritage of the "East", albeit an "East" as envisaged from the European Orientalist perspective of immigrant composers. Soker traces the rise and ultimate decline of the musical style against the history of Israel, showing how it transformed in response to the fissures in the imagined collective identity exposed by the granting of official statehood and immigration by non-European Jews.

The focus of Ailbhe Kenny's essay is a contemporary transnational "musically imagined community", in the form of a commercial e-learning platform that provides online courses in Irish folk music. Kenny demonstrates how virtual musical communities reinvent the forms of participation in traditionally relatively hermetic communities of belonging. Analysing the emergence of new patterns of musically-mediated belonging accompanying the rise of new media, Kenny also points to the importance of spatial rootedness in negotiating the authority and authenticity of a virtual music school.

The medium of music, however, not only forges "imagined communities" that transcend nation-state borders, but also sustains group identity among the displaced and (forced) migrants. The essays collected in the third section of this book investigate how music articulates, alleviates and is fed by the experience of migration. Davide Ceriani looks at how performances of operas by Verdi and Franchetti at the New York Metropolitan Opera in the early twentieth century tapped into the Italian immigrant community's nostalgia for their country of origin and provided an outlet for public displays of ethnic pride. The popularity of the performances with both Italian immigrants and the wider community not only strengthened communal bonds within the USA's rapidly growing Italian diaspora, but conveyed a positive image of *italianità* to the American public.

Similarly, Christina Taylor Gibson demonstrates how the popularity of Mexican *canciones* among American urban audiences during the 1920s Mexican Vogue improved the nation's image of Mexico. The performances of *canciones* in the country's most prestigious concert venues boosted "musical nationalism" by gathering an enthusiastic audience of Latino immigrants and established musical representation of *mexicanidad* and Mexican folklore in the American mainstream.

Ulrike Präger examines the role music has played in the Sudeten-German community subsequent to their expulsion from Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia after the Second World War. Here, the categories of "diaspora", "home country" and "national belonging" prove particularly blurry. Analysing how music can encode nostalgia and loss of homeland, Präger takes a diachronic approach to pinpoint the ways in which diasporic music becomes reinvented over time to reflect the changing needs of the community, ongoing assimilation and altered political context.

But while music may be used to articulate a wish of return, it can also express the desire for escape. This collection's final section opens with an essay by Heidrun Friese on the music of unsanctioned immigration to Europe by young men from the Maghreb region, known as the *harga* movement. The movement's raï and rap music not only communicates group identity and dignity, but also serves as sonic protest against social, political and economic exclusion, while videos documenting and commemorating the harrowing journeys translate the experience into a self-assertion of (gendered) identity.

While Friese's chapter on raï music introduces us to the intersections between ethnic and gendered identity, Josephine Hoegaerts takes a closer look at music as a tool in the negotiation of masculinity and femininity, as demonstrated by the Belgian education system's approach to school excursions in the nineteenth century. Her analysis of the sing-alongs that were an essential component of these outings delineates how group singing served to instil and promote patriotism and traditional gender roles.

* *

The present volume, looking at musical activities in the context of appropriation and displacement, sheds light on music both as a semiotic system which encodes "imaginary cultural narratives" and as a social activity which enables its participants to negotiate their identities. Music as a "code" of communication not only provides a "language" that is recognizable within a group, but also constantly references the Other, be it as an object of admiration or one of criticism. Thus, for example, Gogol Bordello creates western music that looks to Roma culture for inspiration, while the *harga* movement creates its music videos as self-assertive manifestos which subversively re-use images of migration produced by Europeans. Exchange between the core and its margins, creative appropriation and translation thus define music's capacity as a semiotic system. As new technologies expand the modes of musical interaction and migration leaves a mark on ethnic music, enabling its co-creation by outgroup members, "musically imagined communities" become more transient and more contingent, but also less bound by national boundaries. So even if "we all have some musician in us", musical constellations in which we play are definitely not limited to a single (imaginary) orchestra.

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PART ONE

PERFORMING THE SELF, PERFORMING THE OTHER

CHAPTER ONE

SING WITH US, SPEND LIKE US! IMAGES OF CONSUMPTION IN EAST EUROPEAN MUSICAL FILMS DURING THE COLD WAR

OKSANA SARKISOVA

In 1925, avant-garde filmmaker Dziga Vertov compared the seductive pleasures of consumerism with the Soviet-style consumption of the industrializing economy, making an ironic address to an imaginary audience of Soviet small clerks and "bohemians" in his diary:

> Female underwear or a tractor? This is how we should have titled the film we are currently making. The necessity of the foreign trade monopoly can best be proven *ex adverso*. Were it not for the foreign state monopoly, then the habits, tastes and practices of bourgeoisie would penetrate through to us with top hats, bras, pornographic journals, perfume, make-up, foxtrot and the rest…What is more important to us? The foreign trade monopoly—to export what is most important for us and not to import useless things. Import of agricultural machines, tractors, presses, and instruments instead of monocles and condoms. (Vertov 1925, 87-88)

The opposition between pleasure and utility was to haunt the Soviet economy for the following 65 years (Fitzpatrick et al. 1991; Hessler 2004). During the Cold War era, the Soviet Union and its satellites struggled to contain the ideal of luxury with rational utilitarian design, while "Western" popular culture presented socialist subjects as suffering from consumerist deprivation. In 1957, the US film director Rouben Mamoulin exploited this imagery in his musical *Silk Stockings*, a remake of Ernst Lubitsch's acclaimed *Ninotchka* (1939), in which a drab and ascetic female Communist agent is seduced by Western consumer objects while on a mission in Paris. His film portrayed an ideologically polarized world in rich colours and using lavish choreography, with Fred Astaire and Cyd Charisse as adversaries drawn together under the irresistible spell of

French luxury goods. The piece, not surprisingly, outraged Soviet critics, who called it a “cheap, vulgar portrayal of Soviet tourists to Paris. Not only poorly dressed, they were even depicted as knowing nothing about ‘ordinary silk stockings’” (quoted in Gorsuch 2011, 168). The critic’s indignation reveals an important change underway in socialist societies: as competition with the “capitalist West” intensified, consumerist interests began coming to the fore.

Recent scholarship has challenged long-established views on everyday socialist culture as driven exclusively by “*need, command*, and *shortage*” (Crowley and Reid 2010, 9). David Crowley and Susan E. Reid argued that leisure and luxury did play an important role under Communism, both as “a privilege reserved for an elite which … maintained social hierarchies and relationships of domination; and … a safety valve or palliative that served to maintain the status quo” (ibid., 12-13). Mark Landsman, whose work focuses on the German Federal Republic, has noted the existence of “[t]he central tension … [which] arose from the confluence of an emerging, mass consumer society in the West and the crucial, destabilizing role of consumer dissatisfaction in the East” (Landsman 2005, 2). Studying the Cold War through the prism of consumption, thus, significantly reshapes our understanding of the period, which was marked not only by isolationism, but also by ongoing transfer and exchange between two adversary camps.

Cinema offers a rich ground for researching the entangled relationship of consumption and ideology and revisiting the Cold War cultural politics from new methodological perspectives. Studying the variants of mediatized consumption and consumers’ roles in cinema highlights both regional patterns and local contextual differences in visualizing socialist consumers. Re-evaluating *Silk Stockings*, film critic Robin Wood in 1975 claimed that the film’s straightforward ideological impulses are reinforced by an underlying assumption that “certain fundamental drives and needs … are not ideological but universal” (Altman 1981, 64). Cultural theorist Rick Altman sees in the musical “a repository for displaced consideration of actions and thoughts forbidden by society” (ibid., 197). Although he was referring specifically to Hollywood productions, Altman’s observation holds true more broadly. The musical’s double power to reinforce social models and offer subversive ideological alternatives renders it a fascinating resource for analyzing both dominant ideologies and the “place where that system may be threatened” (ibid., 197).

The US musical film emerged in the late 1920s—early 1930s, a rather late addition to film genres, and quickly became popular on both sides of the Atlantic as “a quintessential form of popular diversion in America and around the world" (Barrios 1995, 4). Although the Eastern bloc's cultural industry sought to differentiate its musicals from those of the West, the genre of musical film inherited and further amplified this inherent duality of Hollywood musicals. The often foregrounded motifs of material success and high living standard in "Western" musicals posed a serious challenge for Communist regimes, despite limited access to these and other foreign cultural products in Eastern European markets due to state control over the distribution (Shaw and Youngblood 2010; Castillo 2010). Party functionaries in charge of cultural affairs sought to appropriate all forms of artistic expression, including entertainment, while also subjecting them to ideological supervision. The Soviet Union had already developed an institutional infrastructure to control and censor "light entertainment" genres in the 1920s, and the model was later exported, with different degrees of success, throughout the Soviet bloc (Stites 1992; Vowinckel et al. 2012).

The role of the "soft power" of popular culture in the Cold War remains contested. Historian Walter Hixson argues that it was American "cultural infiltration" that made Soviet citizens aware of Western alternatives, leading to the eventual collapse of Communism (Hixson 1996). In contrast, Anne E. Gorsuch takes "a less triumphalist approach, emphasizing the importance of Soviet agency over Western, specifically American cultural penetration". In her analysis of Soviet tourism, she notes that:

> Soviet citizens did not learn about jazz only via illicit listening to radio broadcasts or from watching foreign movies: soft jazz served as the soundtrack to popular homegrown Soviet films. It was not only that 'Western' differences could be tolerated, but that some of these differences were made acceptably, and even officially, Soviet (Gorsuch 2011, 169).

Although contemporary research on socialist consumer culture shows an abundance and wide range of popular entertainment genres in Soviet-dominated Eastern Europe, functionaries repeatedly bemoaned the lack of "correct" socialist realist entertainment, especially comedies. In the immediate post-WWII context, the Soviet Minister of Cinematography, Ivan Bolshakov, wrote to the Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, Andrei Zhdanov, about the "insufficient number of comedies". "At present", he reported on January 8th 1948, "we have taken all steps towards increasing the number of comedies, attracting a broad circle of authors" (Bolshakov [n.d.]). In other words, to borrow a punchline from a popular 1950s Soviet musical film, "laughing was a serious matter".

The increasing attention given to this serious matter also had serious implications. Both the plots and the soundtracks of musical films were expected to follow to the ideal of "socialist" entertainment. Reviewing the Hungarian operetta, *The State Department Store* in 1952, at the height of Stalinism, Hungarian writer Béla Illés saw laughter itself as an ideological weapon:

> This comedy is a victory over aristocracy, victory over those who want to appropriate laughter in order to hinder progress, and we would like to forge a weapon from it [laughter] (quoted in János 1986, 6).

In the remainder of this chapter, I analyse the mediated representation of consumption in Eastern Europe during the 1950-60s, as portrayed in three popular musical films produced in the Soviet bloc: *The State Department Store* / *Állami Áruház* (Hungary, 1953), *A Girl with a Guitar* / *Devushka s gitaroi* (USSR, 1958) and *A Lady on the Rails* / *Dáma na kolejích* (Czechoslovakia, 1966). I look at how musical comedies addressed the mounting tensions of emerging mass consumer societies in Eastern Europe. Did Eastern European musical films compete with "Western" consumer culture? How was a specifically "socialist" consumer represented in film? What were the gender roles and expectations of socialist consumers? Could East European musical comedies offer attractive consumerist models that differed from those in Hollywood productions? I argue that popular musicals were not only indicative of the ongoing changes in social and economic policies, but helped shape socialist subjects' sensitivities to the matters of everyday consumption and offered a variety of gender roles to the viewers. From the 1950s onwards, musical films constituted an arena for Cold War cultural competition, while at the same time providing a space, in which questions of the expected patterns of socialist consumer behaviour were addressed.

The Joys of Consumption: *The State Department Store* (Hungary, 1953)

The State Department Store is based on a successful eponymous operetta directed by Éva Márkus and András Mikó, which premiered in Budapest in 1952. The film, directed by Viktor Gertler, with a script by Tibor Barabás and Szilárd Darvas, camera by Ottó Forgács, music by János Kerekes, lyrics by Szilárd Darvas and Iván Szenes, remained faithful to the original play, including only minor modifications. Gertler was an established director, who, after gaining experience in Austria, France, and

Germany, made a number of successful comedies in Hungary in the 1930s. Released in 1953, *The State Department Store* reached blockbuster status, with over 2.5 million viewers (Varga 2008, 81). The success of the film outlasted the 1952 theatre performance and made it included in the recent anthology of *303 Hungarian Films You Should See Before You Die* (Barotányi et al. 2007, 32).

In the script, traditional operetta elements are refashioned to meet the political requirements of the time. The casting played no small part in its success. Starring the pre-WWII stars Kálmán Latabár and Ida Turay, it established a sense of continuity with interwar commercial Hungarian releases. *The State Department Store* features Feri Kocsis (Miklós Gábor) as a fresh Communist graduate. Starting his job in a state department store, he is assigned to the women's clothing section, where he becomes involved in a dispute with the attractive young dress designer Ilonka (Zsuzsa Petress) about the season's dress designs. In a narrative aside, the men's and women's clothing sections enter a socialist sales competition, with the salesmen Dániel (Kálmán Latabár) and Klinkó (Tivadar Horváth) not only competing to make the most sales, but also to win the heart of their colleague Boriska (Ida Turay). Klinkó's pretentious ineptness is pitched against Dániel's talent as a salesman. Despite his manager Dancs' (Lajos Mányai) economizing policy, Feri introduces a new approach to clothes design and marketing, after which he is appointed the new manager. However, despite winning the respect of the store's oldest staff, he has to rally against the intrigue orchestrated by Dancs. Spreading gossip that a monetary reform is about to be introduced, he persuades his friends, all "wrecks of the old regime", to spend all their savings, which triggers a mass shopping frenzy. Even when it seems that perhaps the store, overrun with excited buyers, will sell out, Feri refuses to close the store, insisting that "the goods will arrive on time". The plot is resolved with the trucks delivering the goods, while police arrive to arrest the former manager and his "clique".

The setting of this unusual musical, the state department store, can be read as a microcosm of the new socialist society, in which a culture of mass consumption emerges with increasing prosperity and popular aspirations. The plot alludes to the late 1951 and early 1952 Hungarian "shopping panic" sparked by the leaking of information about the new forint bills and rumours about the possible devaluation of the currency (Anon. 1952a; Anon. 1952b; Anon. 1952c). The incident had exposed the public's distrust of the state-run economy and had further undermined the already shaky credibility of the socialist state. Reflecting the anxieties of Hungarian society, the musical also lauded the stability of peaceful everyday life, the reestablishment of continuity with pre-WWII values, and the unification of different social classes in an act of regulated and state-facilitated consumption.

Unusually for the Stalinist era and in stark contrast with the actual economic scarcity of the early 1950s, arguments about fashion and marketing drive the narrative. The personal conflict between Ilonka and Feri is about the design of women's dresses, which in Feri's opinion should be more decorative and attractive. In the film's conflict between the utilitarian and the decorative, the latter argument holds sway, shown by customers voting with their wallets. The conflict exemplifies the differing gender roles, as the seemingly emancipated female subordinates herself to the masculine authority of Feri as her boss and as a boyfriend. In the comic sales competition fusing the old approach to sales with new consumerism proves to be the ticket for success.

As if anticipating the demise of monumental and political Stalinist cinema, *The State Department Store* focused on the "scared, accused, and scolded petit-bourgeois who gained his 5 minutes of screen-time" (Kelecsényi 2003). As one film critic put it, the director produced a work that heralded the political changes to come:

> As if already at a January 1953 premiere he knew that only half a year later the country would change its prime minister and for a short time it would again be possible to think and do things for which earlier one would be punished (Kelecsényi 2003).

The soundtrack for the film was composed by János Kerekes, who worked with the well-known poets, humourists, and songwriters Szilárd Darvas and Iván Szenes, which ensured the popularity of the songs. For example, "My grandson will become a man", a lullaby sung by the department store's elderly accountant, reflected widespread hopes for a better life after the war and proved an instant hit (Veress 2005, 503).[1]

The plot of the film is a peculiar mix of late-Stalinist schematism and a (re)emerging interest in everyday life. The main narrative of both operettas and musical films—trouble in love—is replaced with a generational and class conflict between a young party cadre and an established bureaucrat, who is later revealed to be an enemy-in-disguise. No less important than the change of elites is the motif of the co-opting and reintegration of the old-regime petit-bourgeoisie, specialists and craftsmen willing to cooperate with the new regime socialist system, as demonstrated by the characters of Kálmán Latabár (Dániel) and Kamill Feleki (Glauziusz, the elderly accountant). In the context of late Stalinism, the motif of the enemy features prominently and contributes to an unexpected narrative twist in the last third of the film, in which a group of saboteurs and speculators, organized by the ousted director, attempt to disrupt the store's operation.

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[1] Kerekes took private music lessons with Leo Weiner and in 1933 graduated as conductor from the Berlin Hochschule für Musik. From 1936 to 1957 he was conductor at the Budapest Opera, after which he took a position as music editor at Hungarian TV.

The State Department Store was produced during a radical decline in film production in Hungary and other Eastern European countries. Between 1950 and 1952, Hungary's film industry produced 18 films, an exceptionally low number compared to the output of the previous two decades. Due to the scarcity of output, each newly released film came under close scrutiny. An anonymous editorial stating the position of the authorities was published in the leading daily *Szabad Nép* shortly after the premiere (February 5, 1953). The article suggested the film narrated "the struggle of self-conscious workers"—an interpretation that changed after the death of Stalin. Later reviews, in the Russian-language *Pravda* and in the Hungarian *Magyar Nemzet,* referred to it as "a film about so-called 'small people,' who are real people building a new life without noise and fuss" (quoted in Bujdosó 1986, 118).

The film's plot is riddled with unresolved internal contradictions: the department store management is supposed to simultaneously promote the "economizing" policy and expand in-house production of new fashion items; to increase sales while abandoning the "capitalist" assertive selling style. The director of the store faces his hardest challenge when the public, in the grip of mass hysteria, rushes to buy everything available in the store. Unrestrained shopping emerges both as a "socialist right" and an act of political treason. As response to the latter, the security police intervene, arresting Dancs and his friends for inciting the mass frenzy. The "alien clique" faces criminal charges for triggering the behaviour that the ideologically loyal masses are encouraged to indulge in. These contradictions remain unresolved in the film, just as they were unresolved within the socialist economy and ideology, which argued in favour of "rational consumption" while at the same time establishing the category of "luxury" goods (Merkel 2010).

Despite the unbridled consumption, presented as an indicator of the new political regime's health, the film is clearly "anti-capitalist". Yet while positioning the United States as an ideological enemy, the success of the film was due in no small part to Gertler's experience with Universal Studios and Germany's UFA (Universum Film AG) during the interwar period.[2] *The State Department Store* portrays true socialism as a reliable flow of goods and continuous consumption. This utopian vision is underscored by the background images of a rebuilt, intact post-WWII Budapest, using documentary texture and the highly selective footage to provide an idyllic setting and ensure the film's lasting appeal.

All Flags are Welcome: *A Girl with Guitar* (Soviet Union, 1958)

Vertov's manifesto on "rational" consumption, cited above, was adopted as official state policy during the early Soviet years, establishing long-term negative attitudes towards consumption and its visual representation in film. Sociologist Jukka Gronow points out the consistency of Stalin's economic policy, consolidated throughout the 1930s, which "did not waste precious foreign currency on the import of food or consumer goods" (Gronow 2003, 3), but sought to regulate the production of consumer goods and generate Soviet-style abundance domestically. As Catriona Kelly, Vadim Volkov, and later Jukka Gronow emphasized, early Soviet consumption culture was rooted in the concept of *kul'turnost'* (culturedness), which was actively promoted from the second half of the 1930s as a new socialist way of life (Kelly and Volkov 1998; Gronow 2003, 147). The concept of *kul'turnost'*, as Randall puts it:

> envisioned a modern, rational, and hygienic retail environment where employees provided consumers with attentive and friendly customer service, new retail amenities and services, creative displays, and a wide variety of goods (Randall 2008, 39).

Following the death of Stalin, countries in Eastern Europe began to actively increase international contacts and recruit supporters of socialism abroad. One of the paths to improving the image of socialism both in the region and beyond the Iron Curtain was to overcome the perception of economic backwardness and shortage of material goods along with permitting increasing openness and cross-border contacts. An example of this policy could be found in a popular 1958 Soviet musical film, *A Girl with a Guitar*, which sought to refashion the Soviet Union as a country abundant in products and culture by projecting the concept of *kul'turnost'* in the area of consumption.

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[2] It is interesting to note that after the death of Stalin Gertler went on to make one of the first films which clearly departed from the rigid socialist realist prescriptions marking the beginning of the de-Stalinization of cinema in Hungary.

The film's setting is Moscow's International Youth and Students' Festival in summer 1957, which was part of a policy of controlled openness, designed as a large-scale ideological investment to improve the international image of the Soviet regime (Richmond 2003; Koivunen 2011). The two-week festival was attended by 34,000 foreign and 60,000 Soviet delegates, and had a profound impact on Soviet society. As Yale Richmond puts it:

> [t]he tens of thousands of Soviet youth who attended the festival were infected with the youth styles of the West—jeans, jazz, boogie-woogie, rock and roll, and free speech—and the Soviet Union was never the same again (Richmond 2003, 11).

Featuring the young rising star Lyudmila Gurchenko, *A Girl with a Guitar* was the Soviet Union's tenth most popular film in 1958 and was viewed by over 31.9 million people. The film was directed by the veteran filmmaker Alexander Feinzimmer, who had studied with Vsevolod Pudovkin in the 1920s and had previously worked mainly on dramas and revolutionary biopics. In 1934, he had directed an early sound comedy, *Lieutenant Kizhe*, based on Yuri Tynianov's novel and accompanied by music composed by Sergei Prokofiev. *A Girl with a Guitar* capitalized on the earlier success of Gurchenko in *Carnival Night* /*Karnaval'naia noch*, directed by Eldar Riazanov in 1956. In the latter film, building on the pre-WWII tradition of musical comedies by Grigory Alexandrov, Riazanov cast the famous comedian Igor' Il'inskii, and presented Gurchenko as the "new Lyubov' Orlova", a Soviet musical comedy star of the 1930s. Paying homage to a popular musical comedy *Volga-Volga* (dir. Grigory Alexandrov, 1938), *Carnival Night* used the proven formula of a backstage musical, using the New Year concert preparations as a narrative frame and inserting numerous musical numbers. In the words of film scholar David MacFadyen, the premiere of this film in the immediate post-Stalinist context "christened this 'new period' and its novel attitudes to both song and happiness" (MacFadyen 2003, 52).

While both *Volga-Volga* and *Carnival Night* were biting satires on humourless Soviet bureaucrats, *A Girl with Guitar* centred on a young, gifted sales assistant. The script, written by Boris Laskin and Vladimir Poliakov, introduced an important new setting for the musical comedy: the music shop, presented as a space of both commerce and culture. The plot centres on the relationship between the sales assistant Tanya (Lyudmila Gurchenko) and young composer Korzhikov (Vladimir Gusev). The latter develops a more nuanced style of composition on the diplomatic advice of the cultivated young saleswoman Tanya. Meanwhile, the shop director