Between E and U: Alfred Schnittke, Popular Culture and Serious Music in Late Soviet Socialism (1968–1982)

by Boris Belge

Abstract

During the 1970s, highbrow and lowbrow forms of culture began to approach each other in the Soviet Union again. Alfred Schnittke, then one of the most famous Soviet composers, even proclaimed «bridging the gap» between both worlds as his life's goal. This essay contextualizes Schnittke's work and biography in a broader social and cultural development framework of late Socialism. I argue that during a short period in the 1970s, different groups and generations tried to get into contact with each other. As a main protagonist of this movement, Schnittke eventually gained reputation and success among a wide range of concertgoers.

Keywords: music, late socialism, highbrow culture, lowbrow culture, Alfred Schnittke.

Music is not only an acoustic phenomenon. It also has a social meaning, fostering bonds between different people grouping around common musical practices.[1] Music can be used to distinguish oneself from other social groups and practices. Accordingly, scholars often claim that "culture" is no single entity but divided into a "highbrow" and "lowbrow" form. The German language acknowledges this theory by splitting the musical world[2] into "E" (*ernst*, serious) and "U" (*Unterhaltung*, popular). Whereas "U" refers to music whose only purpose appears to be pleasure and distraction, "E"-music allegedly aims at "higher" values such as cultural knowledge and intellectual skills. Talking about "E" and "U" is a social operation, separating "higher" from "lower" cultural practices. This distinction emerged during the twentieth century all over Europe and several protagonists from the "E"-camp used it frequently.[3] Advocates of E-music as well as U-music had some good arguments on their side. U-music provided the cultural commodity for the masses who were not able to make sense of the often elitist compositions of Arnold Schoenberg, Anton Webern, Paul Hindemith and others. Although heavily criticized as dichotomous and simplistic, talking about "E" and "U" remains widespread in the cultural studies.

In the Russian Empire, musical education had been largely influenced by the German model and continued to be so during Soviet times.[4]

1 Christian Kaden, *Soziale Horizonte von Musik: Ein kommentiertes Lesebuch zur Musiksoziologie*, Kassel: Bärenreiter, 2006; Christopher Small, *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening*, Middleton, Ct.: Wesleyan University Press, 1998, pp. 130–144.

2 I use the term musical world as an analytical concept first described by H.S. Becker, Art Worlds, see. H.-J. Ziemer, *Die Moderne hören: Das Konzert als urbanes Forum 1890-1940*, Frankfurt am Main: Campus 2008, pp. 23–25.

3 Cf. Friedrich Geiger and Frank Hentschel, "Vorwort", *Zwischen "U" und "E": Grenzüberschreitungen in der Musik nach 1950*, eds. idem, Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2011, pp. 7–9 and the contributions by Tobias Janz (pp. 85–103) and Helmut Rösing (pp. 157–173) in the same volume. In Germany, especially after the Second World War, Theodor Adorno and his disciples were among the most important advocates of "E"-music. They insisted that modern music could help overcome the Nazi past. Among others: Frieder Reininghaus, "Das Neue kommt besonders vertrackt: Kohärenzen und Divergenzen zwischen politischen und ästhetischen Avantgarden", *Musikkulturen in der Revolte: Studien zu Rock, Avantgarde und Klassik im Umfeld von ‚1968'*, ed. Beate Kutschke, Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2008, pp. 25–39, here pp. 29–36. Theodor W. Adorno, "Vers une musique informelle", *Quasi una fantasia*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1963, pp. 365–437 and Theodor W. Adorno, *Einleitung in die Musiksoziologie: Zwölf theoretische Vorlesungen*, Reinbek (Hamburg): Rowohlt 1968.

4 The conservatory of Saint Petersburg was largely

Therefore, speaking of "E" and "U" was common practice in the Soviet music discourse. However, on the ideological level, Socialist Realism demanded the dissolution of "elitist" and "popular-decadent" conceptualizations of culture in favor of Soviet mass culture. Fighting "elitist" or "formalist" art was a Soviet reason of state. Socialist Realism, which became an authoritative doctrine in the 1930s, demanded composers and musicians to address their works to the masses. For them, formalism *(l'art pour l'art)* was the main enemy.[5] In theory, the difference between "E" and "U" ceased to exist after the establishment of Socialist Realism in the Soviet cultural sphere and was only attributed to the capitalist world.[6] Does it make sense then to speak of "E" and "U" when analyzing the Soviet musical world? It seems to be remarkably different from the musical world of federal Germany or France where the fierce distinction between "E" and "U" became even sharper in the course of the twentieth century. The "E/U"-distinction is a powerful tool when analyzing the practical level of Soviet music production. As we will see, the well-known disjunction between composers of "serious" classical music (symphonies, operas, chamber music) and composers of *estrada* (popular songs) often persisted, regardless of all efforts to abandon them. What is more, the taste of cultural elites never ceased to resemble typical bourgeois favors: They overtly favored classical music. The most important institution, i.e. the Composers' Union of the USSR *(Sojuz kompozitorov SSSR),* continued to have departments for both serious and popular music *(estrada),* but the asymmetry in the treatment of the two fractions is obvious.[7] Most of the official debates were concerned with problems of serious music. The publication practice of the union highlighted the persisting distinction between "E" and "U" as well. The official (academic) journal *Sovetskaia muzyka* (Soviet Music, 1933–1992) published articles on music history, music aesthetics, reviews of musical works, event announcements and much more. It addressed academic and musically educated readers who were familiar with musicological terminology. The journal's purpose was to communicate the current state of musical development and ideological demands to these people. In contrast, *Muzykal'naia zhizn'* (Music life, 1957 et seq.) which was published by the Composers' Union in cooperation with the Ministry of Culture, addressed a broader readership.[8] Established during the Thaw era the "critical-publicist, illustrated" journal tried to portray musical life in general. It was a direct response to the growing popularity of jazz and beat among young Soviet people and aimed at propagating the richness and diversity of classical music in an understandable way. We cannot ignore that there actually *were* two camps. The Soviet musical world of the 1950s and 1960s often was separated between composers of symphonies, chamber music and operas on the one side and composers of

dominated by German professors in the 19th century. Musical theory relied on the works of Adolph Marx, cf. Dorothea Redepenning, *Geschichte der russischen und der sowjetischen Musik*, Volume 1, Laaber: Laaber, 2008, p. 117.

5 On Socialist Realism in music see Marina Frolova-Walker, "The Glib, the Bland, and the Corny: An Aesthetic of Socialist Realism", *Music and Dictatorship in Europe and Latin America*, eds. Roberto Illiano et al., Turnhout: Brepols 2009, pp. 403–423. A common and widespread polemic against formalism is G[rigorii] Shneerson, *O muzyke zhivoi i mertvoi,* Moscow: Sovetskii kompozitor, 1964.

6 *Sovetskaia muzyka* even had its own section of articles analyzing and polemicizing the capitalist musical world which was called "Crisis of Bourgeois Music" (*Krizis burzhuasnoi muzyki*).

7 Kiril Tomoff, *Creative Union: The Professional Organization of Soviet Composers, 1939–1953*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006, p. 37.

8 Both the journal and newspaper were printed by the publishing house *Kompozitor*.

songs and *estrada* music on the other side.[9]

A common thesis holds that the distinction between "E" and "U" is a key phenomenon of urbanization and the emergence of elite and popular cultures which wanted to distinguish themselves using particular social and cultural practices.[10] According to systems theory, social systems tend to build subsystems with their own modes of operation.[11] In this specific case the two subsystems of high and low culture began to approach each other not in the heyday of Socialist Realism, but only in the 1970s. There was no more differentiation, but mutual interaction between different social groups, ideas, norms and practices. As the Soviet Union reached a historical peak in urbanization and industrialization, "E" and "U" were moving towards each other.

In order to elucidate the melting of "E" and "U" since the 1970s, I would like to refer to the biography and work of Alfred Schnittke (1934–98). He is widely considered to be one of the most renowned Russian composers after Dmitri Shostakovich among musical enthusiasts as well as academic experts.[12] Recent musicological research highlighted Schnittke's importance for the Soviet musical world of the 1970s and 1980s. His music and thought influenced many Soviet classical composers during the time of late socialism. Concerts including Schnittke's works guaranteed a large audience.[13] His biography is typical for a group of so-called "nonconformist" composers who were educated in the 1960s under the impression of the ongoing Thaw.[14] After graduating, they experienced setbacks and problems during the 1970s. These composers were neither overt dissidents nor fully integrated in the Soviet musical system. Instead, they lived under complex and often inconsistent circumstances: benefitting from state protectionism over the arts but opposing "official" cultural demands.[15] This group tried to build a musical world of its own which neither stood apart from official structures nor was completely integrated in them.[16]

Alfred Schnittke on popular music, popular music in Schnittke's works

For Alfred Schnittke, things were quite clear: The formal border between "E" and "U" was unproductive and it was the task of contem-

9 Ingo Grabowsky, "Motor der Verwestlichung: Das sowjetische Estrada-Lied 1950-1975", *Osteuropa 62 (4)*, 2012, pp. 21–35; Michel Abeßer, "Between Cultural Opening, Nostalgia and Isolation – Soviet Debates on Jazz between 1953 and 1964", *Jazz behind the Iron Curtain*, eds. Gertrud Pickhan and Rüdiger Ritter, Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2010, pp. 99–116. See also the article by Aimar Ventsel in this volume.

10 Friedrich Geiger and Frank Hentschel relate the usage of "E" und "U" to a tradition rooted in the twentieth century. Geiger and Hentschel, "Vorwort", pp. 7-8.

11 Frank Becker and Elke Reinhardt-Becker, *Systemtheorie: Eine Einführung für die Geschichts- und Kulturwissenschaften*, Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 2001, pp. 35–6.

12 Laurel E. Fay, "Alfred Schnittke: Shostakovich's Heir", *Upbeat for the Los Angeles Philharmonic 7 (3)*, 1990, pp. 8–9; Yulia Kreinin, "Alfred Schnittke as the Successor to Dmitri Shostakovich: To Be Yourself in Soviet Russia", *Schostakowitsch und die Folgen: Russische Musik zwischen Anpassung und Protest*, eds. Ernst Kuhn, Jascha Nemtsov and Andreas Wehrmeier, Berlin: Ernst Kuhn 2003, p. 161.

13 Peter John Schmelz, *Such Freedom, If Only Musical: Unofficial Soviet Music During the Thaw*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009, pp. 26–67.

14 Alfred Schnittke, Sofia Gubaidulina and Edison Denisov were later known as the "Moscow Troika", but usually composers such as Arvo Pärt or Valentin Silvestrov are also added to this group.

15 Schmelz, *Such Freedom, If Only Musical*, pp. 179–216; William Norbert Quillen, *After the End: New Music in Russia from Perestroika to the Present*, Berkeley, PhD University of California, 2010.

16 Gábor T. Rittersporn, Jan C. Behrends and Malte Rolf, "Open Spaces and Public Realm: Thoughts on the Public Sphere in Soviet-Type Systems", *Sphären von Öffentlichkeit in Gesellschaften sowjetischen Typs*, eds. idem, Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2003, pp. 423-453; Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005, pp. 126–158.

porary composers to bridge this gap. In an interview with Alexander Ivashkin, a longtime friend and musician, Schnittke said:
"It is one of my life's goals to bridge the gap between serious [E] and popular [U] music, and even if it breaks my neck."[17]
Schnittke was fully aware of the dangerous aspects of this approach: It could result in disregard by fans of rock and jazz and refusal as "trivial" or "banal" by his composer colleagues. But his fear was without cause: In fact his composition reflected a changed notion of culture that arose in late Soviet socialism.
During his life, Alfred Schnittke gave countless interviews and talks which are an illuminating source for his self-appropriation and the interpretation of his works. Alfred Schnittke and his colleagues were surrounded by a musical world in which classical music had already lost its hegemony as the dominant form of musical art. It also did so in the Soviet Union – not because of Socialist Realism, but because of newly emerging musical forms like jazz and especially rock.[18] Schnittke recognized the growing role of these developments when he stated that there was

[…] *again one different sphere which comes into the museum from the standard outside world – the quasi-jazz, all this rockform music –, I am not sure if all this is living at all* […].[19]

This quote is interesting because here Schnittke revealed his conception of "E" and "U." The "standard outside world" consisted of all everyday surrounding influences like popular music. On the contrary, classical music already became a "museum". Following Schnittke, this museum conserves and exhibits the past. In another interview, Schnittke seems to see his musical home, the world of classical music, as a fortress. Waves repeatedly pound against this fortress. They take parts of the stronghold with them, reshape it, but abate quickly as well. Schnittke thinks of jazz and operetta as two such waves:

Now we are dealing with the third wave [besides jazz and operetta]. It is also fading. Rock has its function, like jazz and operetta had, and so it will be in future times.[20]

In the following, Schnittke even pathologized rock music. Responding to Ivashkin's question, if rock music had something pathological to it, he said:

Yes, sure. Rock features many interesting things. However, I cannot watch these grimace-makers (Fratzenschneider) on television anymore who pretend to be in extremist situations. This has become almost unbearable.[21]

Schnittke apparently had severe problems with his attempts to link "E"- and "U"-music. He constantly refrained from defining his own place in Soviet music culture. His statements are full of inconsistencies. For him the "grimace-makers" were no serious members of the league of musicians. He strictly tried to

17 Alexander Iwaschkin, "'… und wenn es mir den Hals bricht': Zum Gedenken an Alfred Schnittke", *Musik-Texte: Zeitschrift für neue Musik 17*, 1999, pp. 27–8. My translations from German into English.
18 Sergei I. Zhuk, *Rock and Roll in the Rocket City: The West, Identity, and Ideology in Soviet Dniepropetrovsk, 1960–1985*, Washington: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2010; Timothy W. Ryback, *Rock Around the Bloc: A History of Rock Music in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1990; Michael E. Urban and Andrei Evdokimov, *Russia Gets the Blues: Music, Culture, and Community in Unsettled Times*, Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2004.
19 Alfred Schnittke, *Über das Leben und die Musik: Gespräche mit Alexander Iwaschkin*, Düsseldorf: Econ, 1998, p. 243.
20 Ibid., p. 244.
21 Ibid., p. 245.

distinguish himself from them. His statements emphasize the confusion and disorientation inside the classical musical world caused by new notions of popular culture such as rock and pop. However, composers born in the 1930s already lived during times in which popular music had an indisputable significance. If they did not want to be left behind new musical trends, they had to incorporate at least some new stylistic devices. This kind of composition could hope to reach a larger number of listeners.

A quick survey of Schnittke's works already reveals the influence of popular music styles and their importance. Both his first symphony and his piano concerto, belonging to the major genres of Schnittke's oeuvre, are riddled with jazz, rock and other *Gebrauchsmusik* (music for use). The composer used a technique he called "polystylism". Schnittke first used this term in October 1971. He then held a lecture at a meeting of the International Music Council, a sub-organization of UNESCO. The lecture was titled "Polystylistic tendencies in contemporary music".[22] Here, Schnittke explained how difficult it was to play the allusion game in contemporary composition:

[…] *it may be that the adoption of a polystylistic method reduces the absolute, non-associative value of the work, creating the danger of self-consciously striving for effect. There are also greater demands placed on the general cultural knowledge of the listener, who must be able to recognize the interplay of styles as something done deliberately*.

At the same time, Schnittke admitted indisputable benefits of this method:

But in spite of all the complications and possible dangers of the polystylistic method, its merits are now obvious. It widens the range of expressive possibilities, it allows for the integration of 'low' and 'high' styles, of the 'banal' and the 'recherche' – that is, it creates a wider musical world and a general democratization of style.[23]

According to Schnittke, polystylism allowed the incorporation of formerly neglected styles. Composing this way, these stylistic levels gained a new meaning. One example of this is Schnittke's Concerto Grosso No.1 (1977). According to Schnittke, it begins with a "banal" theme in thirds that imitates a children's song.[24] Rubbing seconds of the two solo violins then dissolve this theme. The main attraction of the concerto is concealed in the rondo's tango. On the one hand, this passage features typical elements of a tango, but it is alienated in instrumentation: a harpsichord plays the leading role, *the* venerable instrument of baroque masters like Handel or Bach. Schnittke deliberately merges several stylistic levels and musical languages. According to him, the intonated tango was his grandmother's favorite.[25] When writing about his work, Schnittke explained:

Every banal passage [...] *has a fatal function in this piece: it interrupts actually every development and triumphs also at the end. In our times where the most audacious and newest devices already seem blunted, the 'banal' gains in a confrontation in this way an expressiveness of a slightly demonic*

22 "Polistilisticheskie tendentsii v sovremmenoi muzyke". Earliest print: *Muzyka v SSSR* 2, 1988, pp. 22–24; Valentina Kholopova and Evgeniia Chigareva, *Al'fred Shnitke: Ocherk zhizni i tvorchestva*, Moskva: Sovetskii kompozitor, 1990, pp. 327–331; English translation: Alexander Ivashkin, *A Schnittke Reader*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002, pp. 87–91.

23 Ibid., p. 88.
24 Ivashkin, *A Schnittke Reader*, pp. 45–47.
25 Jürgen Köchel, *Alfred Schnittke zum 60. Geburtstag: Eine Festschrift*, Hamburg: Sikorski, 1994, p. 417.

kind. The 'banal' belongs to life and I do not think it is necessarily right that trivial music has been ignored and turned off for many years by the development of avant-garde music. However in my concerto grosso the 'banal' dominates in temporal, but not in spatial terms, but it works quasi from the outside interrupting and destroying. I would like to mention the tango as an example, or the sentimental song at the beginning which recurs again and again and at the end wrecks everything.[26]

Schnittke's quote is remarkable for several reasons. He himself uses the term "banal" for what is called popular music in this paper. For him, the "banal" is the unquestioned center of musical development. The composer does not want to disconnect it from serious music as was the case in the 1950s. Instead, Schnittke integrates the "banal" into the meta-form of the neo-classical:

So into the framework of a neoclassical concerto grosso I introduced some fragments not consonant with its general style, which had previously been fragments of cinema music […]. But all of these themes are perfectly consonant with each other […] and I take them completely seriously.[27]

However, there actually *is* an implicit judgment in Schnittke's quotes. He makes this clear in some of his statements. In his mind the "banal" was dangerous because of its simplicity and clichés leading to "paralyzed individuality".[28] Banal music was the "Faustian evil" that masked the true and good.[29] Schnittke used different styles as tools to express different feelings, situations etc. He shared this functionalist approach with many of his composer colleagues. "Banal", "popular music" had its place in Schnittke's music, but he had a certain hierarchy between the different styles in mind. His use of popular music therefore had its own agenda. It was the result of a theoretical and practical reflection of cultural practices.

"E", "U" and the *tret'e napravlenie* (third direction)

In the 1970s, "E" and "U" were no clearly distinguishable fractions anymore. Soviet cultural politics contributed to this by committing Soviet composers to write both academic and popular music. The Soviet state forcefully educated its citizens to become cultivated people and demanded its composers to contribute to this project. Even well-known composers of "serious" music like Dmitri Kabalevskii, Dmitri Shostakovich or Georgii Sviridov did not think of themselves as too important to serve "democratic" art and wrote popular music as well.[30] Additionally, the 1970s in the Soviet Union saw the rise of a "phenomenon [...], which crossed genres and styles of different levels".[31] One trigger was Andrew Lloyd Webber's rock opera *Jesus Christ Superstar*. Already in 1971, *magnitizdat* (tapes) copies of a Russian version of the musical circulated. Later, the news broadcast *Vremia* even used one of its themes as a fanfare.[32] Timothy Ryback holds that *Jesus Christ Superstar* was "every-

26 Ibid.
27 Ivashkin, *A Schnittke Reader*, pp. 45-6 (original: Dmitri I. Shul'gin, *Gody neizvestnosti Al'freda Shnitke: Besedy s kompozitorom*, Moskva: Delovaia liga, 1993, pp. 243–4).
28 Alfred Schnittke, *Über das Leben und die Musik*, p. 201.
29 Dorothea Redepenning, „Inszenierungen von 'Gut' und 'Böse' in Alfred Schnittkes Instrumentalmusik", *Alfred Schnittke: Analyse, Interpretation, Rezeption*, ed. Amrei Flechsig, Hildesheim: Olms, 2010, pp. 71–91.
30 Redepenning, *Geschichte der russischen und sowjetischen Musik*, Volume 2, Laaber: Laaber 2008, p. 699.
31 Ibid.
32 Ryback, *Rock Around the Bloc*, p. 241.

where" in the Soviet Union throughout the 1970s. According to Ryback, a whole hippie cult emerged around the rock opera. More tolerance towards popular styles seemed to arise among functionaries. In August 1973 the journal *Inostrannaia Literatura* (Foreign Literature) compared *Jesus Christ Superstar* with the works of Dostoevskii and Bulgakov and thereby raised it into the spheres of high culture.[33] Even Shostakovich saw one performance of the musical in 1972 in London and spoke well of it. Successively, more and more composers thought of daring to mingle rock and classical music. A whole series of rock operas respectively classical music with rock-styled passages emerged. This established a movement that is now described as the so-called *tret'e napravlenie* (third direction).[34] Peter Schmelz demonstrated how Aleksandr Zhurbin's rock opera *Orpheus and Eurydice* (*Orfei i Evredika*, first performance 1975) assumed a pioneering role. Until 1979 this work was performed over 800 times in the Soviet Union and celebrated frenetically. The newspaper *Iunost'* (Youth) covered the first performance including an enthusiastic review by Mikhail Provorov which also contributed to the immense success. But Zhurbin's opera was not the only one. Today, Aleksei Rybnikov's *Junos i Avos* is known even better, and many more could be mentioned.

Composers of "serious" music who saw themselves as being part of a long tradition starting with Palestrina and Bach could not escape this development. Schnittke himself never missed an opportunity to hear a recording of *Jesus Christ Superstar*.[35] He also asked Zhurbin to give him a short version of his opera. One example for the merging of rock and classical music is Schnittke's *Requiem* which was composed in 1974/1975.[36] It was written after the death of Schnittke's mother and marks a new step in the development of his use of forms. The requiem was written as stage music for Schiller's *Don Carlos* and shares all attributes of the "classic" catholic requiem. The small instrumental ensemble is boosted by an electric guitar and a drum set, both of which join the ensemble at the end of the Credo. This was a slight provocation: The Christian statement of faith which is performed in a classic choral set culminates in rockbeats. We have no evidence how the auditorium perceived this antinomy. However, Schnittke's biography clearly falsifies the hypothesis that he banalized or mocked Christian values. In the 1980s, Schnittke was baptized and became a member of the Catholic Church. He became part of a newly emerged religious movement in Soviet music and society.[37] His use of rock instruments was also influenced by his family life: His own son Andrei became a rock enthusiast early on and was a typical exponent of Yurchak's "Last Soviet Generation". Schnittke followed this development with interest and attention.[38]

The *tret'e napravlenie* was a very important part of Schnittke's life. On the aesthetic as well as on the biographic level, mutual interaction be-

33 Idem, pp. 149-50.
34 Levon Hakobian, *Music of the Soviet Age, 1917-1987*, Stockholm: Melos Music Literature, 1998, p. 314; Tamara Levaia, *Istoriia otechestvennoi muzyki vtoroi poloviny XX veka*, Sankt-Peterburg: Kompozitor, 2005, p. 202.
35 Peter Schmelz, "'Crucified on the Cross of Mass Culture': Late Soviet Genre Politics in Alexander Zhurbin's Rock Opera Orpheus and Eurydice", *Journal of Musicological Research* 28, 2009, pp. 61–87, here: p. 68. Schmelz recounts a story by Georgii Sviridov, *Muzyka kak sud'ba*, Moskva: Molodaia Gvardiia, 2002, p. 151.
36 Aleksandr V. Ivashkin, *Alfred Schnittke*, London: Phaidon, 1996, p. 34.
37 Natal'ia Gulianitskaia, *Poetika muzykal'noi kompozitsii: teoreticheskie aspekty russkoi duchovnoi muzyki XX veka*, Moskva: Iazyki slavianskoi kul'tury, 2002.
38 Andrei Schnittke collaborated with his father in several musical projects were Alfred Schnittke combined classical and rock elements. Ivashkin, *Alfred Schnittke*, p. 189.

tween rock and classical music occurred. The composer reflected this development several times and gave his opinion on it. Things were complicated: The statements mentioned above lead to the conclusion that Schnittke had a division in "high" and "low" cultural styles in his mind.

An analysis of Schnittke's composing techniques should not stop at this point. Put in its wider context, Schnittke's merging of "E" and "U" can serve as an apt topic for gaining new insights in late Soviet socialism.

Music history as social history: New spaces in late socialism

After Stalin's death, a growing absence of conflicts dominated the cultural system in the Soviet Union.[39] The militant battles against elitist and decadent culture of the Stalin era slowed down significantly. Ideological control, aesthetic demands and perception patterns had the chance to reconfigure in a remarkable way. Popular music became the main pacemaker of a new youth movement. The Seventh World Youth Festival in Moscow in 1957 initiated an unprecedented cultural exchange 'across the blocs'.[40] Since these days, jazz was accompanied by beat as a new musical wave. But telling 'parting-the-iron-curtain-stories' is not enough.[41] There was no simple transfer of western norms and practices to the Soviet Union. Instead, an individual culturally informed adoption took place. Socialist singers and groups were as famous and well-known as Bill Hailey. The most famous form of popular music, the *estrada,* oscillated between "'official' and 'lyrical'", between "Soviet" and "Western" styled songs.[42] For musicians as well as music functionaries, western-style jazz and *estrada* represented a free creative space which was less restricted and formalized in contrast to mass songs or classical music. In addition, composing jazz and *estrada* was very profitable: Jazz musician Oskar Strok for example earned twice as much per year as Tikhon Khrennikov, the chairman of the Composers' Union.[43]

Jazz and rock attracted musicians and composers because of their wide reach into Soviet society and the relative free space in which they were created. Demographic factors played a role, too. After the end of World War II, the Soviet Union witnessed a baby boom in which the number of births rose explosively from the 1950s to the 1960s.[44] Eastern socialist states therefore faced problems of youth and youth policy on a new qualitative level. Nikita Khrushchev called these young people "builders of communism" who were to overcome the old world. Because of that, issues of education and moral principles were on the agendas of party and state.[45] The path to large-scale repression and violence was closed

39 Dietrich Beyrau, *Intelligenz und Dissens: Die russischen Bildungsschichten in der Sowjetunion 1917–1985*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993, p. 156.
40 Kristin Roth-Ey, "'Loose girls' on the Loose? Sex, Propaganda and the 1957 Youth Festival", *Women in the Khrushchev Era*, ed. Melanie Ilic, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004, pp. 75–95; Juliane Fürst, "The Arrival of Spring? Changes and Continuities in Soviet Youth Culture and Policy between Stalin and Khrushchev", *The Dilemmas of De-Stalinization: Negotiating Cultural and Social Change in the Khrushchev Era*, ed. Polly Jones, London: Routledge, 2006, pp. 135–153.
41 Kristin J. Roth-Ey, *Moscow Prime Time: How the Soviet Union Built the Media Empire that Lost the Cultural Cold War*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011, p. 10.
42 Grabowksy, "Motor der Verwestlichung", p. 26.
43 Idem, p. 25.
44 Donald J. Raleigh, *Soviet baby boomers: An Oral History of Russia's Cold War Generation*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012; Juliane Fürst, *Stalin's Last Generation: Soviet Post-War Youth and the Emergence of Mature Socialism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.
45 Katharina Barbara Uhl, *Building Communism: The Young Communist League during the Soviet Thaw Period, 1953–1964*, DPhil Oxford, 2013; Fürst, "The Arrival of Spring?", pp. 135–153.

since the days of Khrushchev. Under Khrushchev and Leonid Brezhnev, cultural policies were dominated by moderate "laissez-faire". Although functionaries clung to the older discursive pattern such as Socialist Realism, they *de facto* allowed much wider free spaces. This offered musicians new possibilities.[46] Only under this precondition could composers of "serious" music lean towards popular music in the 1970s.

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This article demonstrated that there existed mutual interactions between "E" and "U" on the aesthetic level. One has to admit that it is a commonplace to talk about postmodern style-mixtures in the music of the 1970s,[47] but analyzing specific historical and biographic contexts nevertheless highlights new features of late Soviet socialism. "E" and "U" came closer in new formats like the rock opera. Both "E" and "U" were part of the living environment (*Lebenswelt*) of young people in the Soviet Union.[48] It was nothing special to absorb the "classic European heritage" of Mozart and Beethoven in piano lessons and at the same time to hear the riffs of Pink Floyd, Deep Purple and other rock bands at Komsomol parties.[49] The boundary between "E" and "U" became more blurred than before. Many elements of popular culture such as jazz improvisations became integrated parts of high culture – Schnittke's first symphony's second movement has a jazz improvisation in the middle.[50] At the same time, jazz musicians and rockers debated whether their musical styles should meet academic expectations and lamented the accompanying loss of spontaneity. The new concepts and practices of popular culture as well as *tret'e napravlenie* definitely challenged the existing discourse of Socialist Realism. However, the dominating medium in which this process took place was not the written form. Instead, we face a negotiation without words, an often silent adaption towards new demands in cultural production. Not all composers of the Brezhnev era walked over the bridge between "E" and "U." Composer Sofia Gubaidulina for example insisted on using only "serious" techniques in her compositions and focused on religious material for innovation.[51] Furthermore, the contact between classic and rock/jazz in the Soviet Union seems to be rather a rendezvous than a long-term union. In the days of Perestroika and after the fall of the Iron Curtain both camps again went their own ways. Schnittke for example moved to Hamburg where he was absorbed by the German classical music context. Compared to the Soviet musical world, the divide between "E" and "U" persisted much stronger in Germany. The phenome-

46 Cf. Boris Belge, "Zwischen Polystilistik und Sozrealismus: Die Schnittke-Rezeption in der Sowjetunion 1974–1981", *Postmoderne hinter dem Eisernen Vorhang: Werk und Rezeption Alfred Schnittkes im Kontext ost- und mitteleuropäischer Musikdiskurse*, eds. Stefan Weiss and Amrei Flechsig, Hildesheim: Olms 2013, pp. 155–169.

47 Alex Ross, *The Rest Is Noise: Listening to the Twentieth Century*, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007, pp. 515–558; Jörn-Peter Hiekel, "‚Postmoderne' im Musikdiskurs: Einige Einsichten und Ansichten", *Postmoderne hinter dem Eisernen Vorhang*, eds. Stefan Weiss and Amrei Flechsig, pp. 15–35.

48 Zhuk, *Rock and Roll in the Rocket City*.

49 Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever*, pp. 207-238. Many of the rock enthusiasts of the 1970s and 1980s probably had classical training in playing the violin or the piano.

50 Redepenning, *Geschichte der russischen und sowjetischen Musik*, Volume 2, pp. 689-90; Jean-Benoît Tremblay, "Alfred Schnittke and Musical Postmodernism: The First Symphony as Case Study", *Postmoderne hinter dem Eisernen Vorhang*, eds. Stefan Weiss and Amrei Flechsig, pp. 93–107.

51 Valentina N. Cholopova and Enzo Restagno, *Sofiia Gubaidulina: Monografiia*, Moskva: Kompozitor, 1996, pp. 99-106; Antony Copley, *Music and the Spiritual: Composers and Politics in the 20th Century*, London: Ziggurat Books, 2012; Michael Kurtz, *Sofia Gubaidulina: A Biography*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007.

non of Schnittke's polystylist music was absorbed by this divide. From now on, he was known again as a "classical" composer and avant-gardist only.[52]

Did Schnittke "break his neck" bridging the gap? Probably not. Against his own fears, Schnittke's ambitions constituted his long-lasting fame. In the 1990s, Schnittke was the most played twentieth-century Russian composer in Germany. Recordings of his works sold very well. His success was not only based on his indisputable tremendous compositional skills. Schnittke felt the *zeitgeist* and knew when to break with elitist musical styles like serialism. In doing so, he responded to an altered perceptional behavior in Soviet musical society. He also noticed the partial reconfiguration of Soviet music life after twenty years of intensive musical exchange between East and West. At the same time, ironically, Schnittke was in some ways a disciple of Soviet-style musical ideology. Although this sounds rather provocative, in contrast to western composers Schnit tke addressed his music to larger audiences, and in this spirit *massovost'* (music for a great audience) was not foreign to him. Of course Schnittke never would have called himself a socialist realist.[53] But it is this special concept of musical composition that so many people, especially in Germany missed. For them, Schnittke remained a composer of the "E"-fraction. It is definitely time to overcome this labeling.

About the author

Boris Belge is Lecturer at the University of Basel. He obtained his PhD in history at the University of Tuebingen where he worked as a research assistant. His dissertation *The Sound of Soviet Modernity: A Music and Social History of Late Socialism* was published in German in 2018 by Boehlau Verlag. Currently he is developing a postdoctoral project which examines ports as economic infrastructures in the Russian Empire.

52 Schnittke's life and work after the fall of the Soviet Union urgently needs further research. Cf. Amrei Flechsig, „Polyperspektivischer Unterricht: Alfred Schnittkes Wirken als Kompositionslehrer", *Postmoderne hinter dem Eisernen Vorhang*, eds. Stefan Weiss and Amrei Flechsig, pp. 139–155; R. Flender, „Al'fred Shnitke v Gamburge", *Al'fredu Shnitke posviashchaetsia,* Vypusk 4, eds. Alla Bogdanova and Elena Dolinskaia, Moskva: Kompozitor, 2004, pp. 107–109.

53 "Socialist Realism" was in fact more than a matter of taste. Especially for Schnittke's generation of composers it was also a code for detested interferences and annoyances in their compositional work.