
Music and Totalitarianism. Artificial Enthusiasm

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The combination of music and totalitarianism is particularly difficult to define. Music as an area of free and all-embracing expression by man is to come face to face with something of which the end result is derision of mankind in the extreme. It is difficult to comment on both these elements together with any academic objectivity emulating from the wonder of nature, the heavens, the mysteries of physics; neither is it possible to retain solidarity with mankind – Albert Einstein’s disgust for anyone who finds satisfaction in a parade marching past in time to the music is timeless. Neither are we motivated to ask God’s forgiveness for those who created concentration camps or gulags as they knew exactly what they were doing. Nor can we draw on Anglo-saxon stolidity which gave birth to various sciences whilst a wave of suffering engulfed the world. It is even doubtful whether amnesia, which brings humans down to the level of equipment destined for the scrap yard, will be a cure; if we no longer remember then we are just biding our time until the next catastrophe. On our continent we traditionally weave the subject matter announced above in the title into a strangely intimate dialogue between God and satan about Hiobe. Consequently totalitarianism – a ghastly test. As for music – it is as if nothing happened. After all, ‘functional’ music – for people could only regard *musica mundana* as having no function – for centuries has embellished the social structure everywhere: it resounds in praise of predecessors, tames rulers, including those in the upper echelons,

it is instrumental in an individual's moments of desperation and happiness, it is of help to persons condemned to death in their last moments and here the message it conveys reaches a wide audience.

Music seems 'transparent', neutral in the face of threat; can be used by anyone in any circumstances, for example, in the black humour of 'Mozart Days' in December 1941 in Kraków, when the whole world was in the grips of war. The iconography of the dance of death from olden times to the musical accompaniment of its skeletons is a subtle prefiguration (?) of concentration camp orchestras or music bands playing to a procession filing past to work from which not everyone would return. The use of music to conceal or to 'accompany' torture is extremely hideous (as for example, in Aleje Szucha in Warsaw under the German occupation). The 'norm' in the misalliance between music and totalitarianism would therefore be enthusiasm which had been artificially created and was faked, where the level of simulated vigorous activity simply depends on the shrewdness of those taking part. For history has never been short of people who lost their reason and sense of empathy, who succumbed to the hypnosis of fear, including composers prepared to offer their music as sacrifice to the beasts. One cannot think of this and remain calm, even post factum, or with any distance, unless we imagine that God might say: 'Think what you would do yourselves in my place'.

In essence, totalitarianism, with its centralization and lust for the glorification of power, unity and uniqueness of a nation, admiration for the leader and the roaring of the crowds, is at best, a perversion of the worship of God. Omnipresence – destroyed by surveillance of all types by the security services; deep compassion – destroyed by perversity depending on the context; a stable disposition – by usurping eternity; freedom of choice – by the iron hand of an impersonal system.

These are figures from theology, an echo of the anguish of the 20th century. However the burning question - purely human although somewhat woeful – still remains: where did and does all this continue to stem from? From a specific state of cultural ideology, from the psyche of society which feels itself under threat after the trauma of wars, revolutions, poverty and famine? From the much more deeply-rooted frightening economics in terms of hu-

man sacrifices (let us call to mind the ancient Celtic priestesses, slitting prisoners throats probably to the accompaniment of musical instruments and foretelling the future using their blood? (Gąsowski 1987: 57–61). Death in exchange for the disclosure and reversal of fate, death in exchange for equilibrium and prosperity, death of a good person so that a lesser person can jostle his way through life. The only variable is the tempo and scale of human ransom: from periodic sacrifice of individuals to the factory of slaughter. A sense of purpose for what happened to the victims is what our ancestors and future generations must provide; it is also to be found in God's rejection of the futility of death, however the trained human mind continues to stubbornly ask – why? All the more so, as the problem is relevant not only to Europe or merely limited to events in living memory.

However if we are willing to some degree to put our concern for the victims of totalitarianism into the hands of our Maker and regain some objectivity in our reflexions, the first signs point to a state of awareness in the human group. Totalitarianism is already a mature state and defined by name, it is the culmination of earlier specific changes in mental behaviour: above all when people no longer question themselves, when personality is 'corroded' by external forces as if the body lost its natural and intelligent quasi immune system, and psychology of the masses which was steered from elsewhere had begun to govern the decisions of individuals. Only then is a specific ideology implanted, or finds its own social medium. It is hard to place the 'blame' on inventors of megaphones, although it was they who in the 30's of the 20th century replaced rumours with the power of suggestion, making possible planning and central control of crowd events by a superior authority. Fetes, fairs, church fairs in small towns where wandering singers played were replaced with crowds celebrating to mark anniversaries of the raise to power, rallies of leaders. Instead of village spring pageants the crowds would flock to large towns or the capital (for example on 1 May). Music began to be used in a way the original performers or composers would never have dreamed of: as background noise, to excite the crowds, to disable a person's critical assessment of reality. The new world of technology, with two different diametrically opposed uses, encroached directly on the sphere of human

experience of sound, slowly creating the reality essential for centralization, so that it would have an effect.

Totalitarianism has an important statistical and demographic variable. The aspirations of small nations, small states in this area may, particularly from a distance, seem quite amusing, as in Bhutan for example. However the endeavours of great countries with large populations manifest themselves in scenarios of bodies reduced to pulp under caterpillar tracks of tanks because 'we are great in numbers'.

General education in the inter-war period was polarized and had its 'good and bad' sides. 'Community' education, 'work' education and 'induction' of particular songs in children as part of educational programs in Germany and the USSR in the 30's began to mould people just as one moulds and constructs a technical appliance destined only to carry out orders. The love of singing inherited from traditional customs, revived in state centres of power, first in the schools and then in armies, aimed at replacing the individual's own reflections with collective euphoria, to simplify the transfer of responsibility to the group or to a monster 'leader', to evoke joy as the fact that the party is thinking for the individual. It is a fact that schools in most of the European countries in the inter-war period wanted to make singing popular. It was known that spontaneous song in regional cultures, in particular in village communities, was on the wane because the nature of social bonds was changing from close local ties to artificially constructed ties. The intention was for song to bond the higher ranks of society, coerce the school community into thinking of themselves as 'sisters' and 'brothers', and in so doing, choirs would not only grace new establishments, but also new nations. When territorial changes (even minor ones such as the one at Spiš in 1939) took place, one of the first priorities was change of school songs and their language.

Before totalitarianism dragged the world into the World War II, it had already cast a shadow over music tradition amongst other things. Folk songs were set in marching tempo with 'livelier' melodies, both in schools and in the army, songs from the frontier territories were translated into 'their own' language, singing instructors were employed in the army so that all soldiers

could become drummers to the same rhythm. Old Varsovians remembered the stomp of shoes and lively song of the corrupted sons of Germany.

The essence of totalitarianism is also to strive to take control over all information channels and to take over control of all forms of communication between individuals while at the same time isolating the socio-political sphere from the outside world. Confiscation of radio receivers, installing loudspeakers on the streets and the ever present 'state radios' with stimulating music, today, in the age of mobile phones, seems, at best, laughable and embarrassing. However in its day, as part of the methodical activity, it posed a threat.

Certainly, in discussing the title of this paper, when considering the 'misalliance' of music and totalitarianism you should distinguish between the war and (relative) peacetime. With the passing of time, however, the connection between the cause and effect is more perceptible. The inter-war signs mainly include an acquiescence to or even a craving for national patronage, which also extended over the sphere of music. 'Chamber of the Musicians' in Germany, which received courteous comments from central European countries, was cited as an example of a regulated music profession, and was used as a tool of total control over the musical environment, also in the area of 'discrimination'. Ethnographic literature of that time in neighbouring countries gives recognition to Germany for reviving folk songs, dances, regional traditions (there was even a global term for this phenomenon, 'neo-renaissance' of folk culture). Researchers could never have dreamed that the aesthetic drill, 'song and dance groups' was a form of training for the lines of soldiers who would soon be firing shots from their rifles. In discussing the origins of folklore, the feeling of pleasure that its public presence gave, one forgot that by nature it is something intimate that is passed on to a maximum of two families and their circles of acquaintances at a wedding.

Totalitarian nations in the inter-war period also introduced 'festivals' into culture as part of their plan to organize a person's free time in order to control an individual's time outside work¹. It seemed that folklore festivals also

¹ From Cajler (1936: 394–403): 'There is one striking fact in this exhibition as in the whole congress. Namely at every stage it was stressed that the social welfare only started to develop when the national socialist party came to power and that before that time nothing had been done in this area. That same day in the municipal gasworks there was a workers' performance entitled 'Let machines and engines be silent'. The male and female workers performed their cultural repertoire of song,

in traditional democracies motivate positive international interaction. How many young people from various nations have danced in great concert halls, including young people from 'Soviet states', who at the European Festival in England in 1935 took people aback with 'new' folk costumes – denim overalls. How many songs sung by the crowds resounded to the heavens, people deriving pleasure from the crowd's intoxication which made them more susceptible to manipulation in a manner only foreseen by the political 'elite'.

However, if we asked (the venerable – even today) participants in the 'output' of the totalitarian nation about mass events, marches, exercises, dances and songs at stadia and on the streets, unfortunately the majority would have a favourable view. After all, in 1934 90% of Germans voted for Hitler, much post-Stalinist sentiment is still alive also in Russia and the former Soviet republics. You will always find many people for whom building a canal, building a mine, factory, manufacturing a car for the population is more important than the life of an individual (always someone else – not me). The response would not only be influenced by childhood and adolescence, but also – even though deceptive and reversible – the feeling of 'togetherness', the reflection of social ties, which in the 21 century, in conditions of total individualism, is sometimes clearly missing (even in discotheques where you are literally alone in a crowd or persistently forming a network of acquaintances on the internet).

Although the totalitarian country in principle has 'become extinct', the rebuilding of imperia and fanatical nationalism does not seem possible, and condoning physical extermination of humans for political or ethnic reasons is probably becoming a thing of the past, yet the remnants of that mentality will linger for a long time (unless there is a fuel, water or food shortage, in which case all the herd instincts typical for totalitarianism may re-emerge).

music and recitation. It was a serious performance from beginning to end with political significance as the speakers, of which there were several, stressed how great Germany was, the present prosperity, excellent organization of work, and all this is thanks to the Führer. In the evening in the Ufa cinema a performance took place entitled 'Peace of standards'. The performance was to emphasize Germany's trend towards peace and as wide an international fraternization as possible. In the next few days public concerts by army and workers' bands took place in various locations in Hamburg, sports shows by school children, the Hitlerjugend, army, workers, police, folk dances and appearances by folk groups of all nations taking part in the congress'.

Of what significance would the path which totalitarianism has taken – worship of a centralized state power (n.b. after the period of economic crisis at the turn of the 1920s/30s in Europe and USA) – be for music? Traditional, regional and local, peasant and folk music only found acceptance when performed for a collective audience and in the appropriate form and arrangement; the tradition of individuals passing on folklore, as it was referred to, was taken away from the general public. The physical extermination of hurdy-gurdy players in Soviet Ukraine in the late 30's demonstrates that what could not be subjected to control and subordinated under the system was to be destroyed. The German press of that time abounds in reports of festive celebrations – school concerts, numerous songs, stage productions etc, which took place under pompous slogans such as the one contained in the title 'Peace of standards'; then the result of this train of thought will lead to the 'Arbeit macht frei' of Auschwitz.

A composer had to belong to an organization and compose, as in the Stalinist era in the USRR it was an offence if he did not. The system of state commissions for works – undoubtedly a gangrene for any freedom of creativity, often produced, as Bulhakov would have put it, goods (fish) 'of dubious quality' – meant that a creator was dependant on the biological level only. If he managed to emigrate, his presence in his native country was deleted². Even if the reality in the totalitarian system was in fact much more complex and varied in relation to e.g. literary output (especially in the former ZSRR³), the oppressive net was never far away. Socialist 'reality', or the 'healthy' creativity in Nazism, tools from the distant past used to exact obedience, whose range includes mindless reproduction of behaviour, appear as a brutal incarnation of mass culture, irrespective of whether they are reduced to the lowest common denominator. The quality of inspiration in those creative programs can be likened to the charm of a set of instructions for implementing tech-

² In Poland you could at least voice your regret in a publication that a person 'was' a good composer, as Józef M. Chomiński commented in the 1st edition of *Formy muzyczne* (1955) about Andrzej Panufnik after he had the iron curtain.

³ The folklorists in this country nurtured the conviction that serious study should be devoted to a published anthology of folk songs from various states in the USRR in the Stalinist period with the exception of the first tributary works, composed to please the censors, as the 'perfect lie'. This opinion comes from E. Gippius.

nical equipment. The products of creative minds of that time are nowadays regarded as somewhat of an aberration, for example the two metre accordion or three metre dulcimers. In the sphere of musical creativity eulogies, those well paid mirages, seem to have been quite an elitist equivalent of artificial enthusiasm intended for general use.

Good quality music and musical culture, however, are amongst the essentials in German and Soviet collectivism. This was because of the conviction of the influence of the art of sound on social awareness. The arts were ranked using the criterion of how effective they were in creating a 'new' people (for Lenin, as we know, cinema was the highest ranking). All the same the high standing of music was rather inherited by totalitarianism and it was not totalitarianism that elevated it to that level. In Germany this occurred as a result of centuries of singing from the score, in the USSR frequently thanks to natural, instinctive musicality which survived in traditional cultures. Totalitarianism could however at any time take away this right to contact with music. Instead of listening to an opera from the latest model of gramophone or broadcasts of concerts from an excellent radio receiver *in einem gemütlichen Häuschen* what was dished out to the young Germans was death in extreme temperatures for example in Stalingrad. On visiting the camp at Majdanek in Lublin, looking at the noble facial features of the administrator of the German group of co-workers it is not difficult to imagine the metamorphosis of a music connoisseur into a torturer. Again, on another political arena, in the first proletariat nation, Dmitri Shostakovich when composing music often wondered at the back of his mind whether they would come for him at night or not, to take everything away from him. Zoltán Kodály sensed that this usurping i.e. giving and then taking away, which also applied to life, like other prerequisites of totalitarianism, stemmed from offending God. He approached the communist authorities in Hungary, stating that if they wanted to make people happy, they must give them something that cannot be taken away (clearly what he meant was introducing music education with an emphasis on multi-part singing; Kodály believed that this would produce a social bond of a higher order than that produced by the totalitarian culture of the masses). The appeal had a positive result in essence, in particular after

1956 when the trauma in the wake of the Budapest uprising had to be healed. Politicians of this sole redemptive communist party realized that you had to 'loosen the reigns' somewhat to retain power. And this was noticeable in relation to folklore. In Poland after the trauma of the events in December 1970 people were allowed to sing Christmas carols at reviews in community centres, despite the fact that that the latter had originally been created as a shining contrast to the gloomy churches.

In the first decade after World War II, when totalitarianism in central Eastern Europe took on a different, brighter hue, external manifestations of how the regional and ethnic traditions were kept up and were regarded were reminiscent of what occurred in Germany before the war. The same mustering up of crowds, stunning with colours, fluttering skirts, acrobatic figures in trousers. This is understandable in central Eastern Europe under the Soviets. These were crowds weary of the war with fears as to whether they would survive. They did not need to know that the best individuals were dying in underground prisons. The resettled people from the Eastern Borderlands were more aware of the latter, but they also tended to celebrate on arriving in the Reclaimed Land. The new authorities knew they had to organize events in order to obscure the reality of what was happening to political opponents. They knew well from the 1930s, that you could smother poverty with folklore, also giving the masses the impression of social advancement, because singing and showing effective *obrabotki* on the podium is something more than taking pleasure in poverty and frolicking on a mud floor. Stage managers ensured a flourish of false smiles. But behind this totalitarian roller – at least sung and danced – one became aware of the voice of the piper from Wielkopolska on the decelith recording playing and singing at a stadium after the end of the official harvest festival in 1948. 'I stand at your door Lord, and wait for your mercy....' In Wielkopolska where all matters were approached literally and to the point, serious consideration was given in 1946 to forming pipers' bands in the militia, i.e. communist police (in fact this was reminiscent of the 30's when regional instruments were introduced in the army). This did not happen, though not only because of the difficulty of agreeing on a common bourdon and scale in the windpipes which are a

very specific instrument. The combination of a militia man's truncheon with a folk instrument with European traditions proved impossible. It is worth adding that Poland's membership of the International Folk Music Council, an organization founded in England in 1947 was, despite efforts in the early 50's, blocked. Ministerial correspondence stated that 'Poland doesn't need that.' In turn, in Western Pomerania, according to archival research by Bogdan Matłowski, there were plans at the end of the 40's and beginning of the 50's to introduce a uniform folk costume for groups in the Szczecin province (*województwo*), a costume connected with Wileńszczyzna. And here the obstacle proved to be not only the actual diversity of the composition of the population of 'Nowa Wileńszczyzna', but also the principle that historical memory connected with the era of independent 2nd Polish Republic was to be erased.

The organizers' 'zest', change of names, founding of an organization, associations, song and dance groups, which took place under 'the watchful eye of the peoples authorities', ie. the control of a communist and socialist nation – all this was an attempt to control village cultural environments and to give credence to a people's nation, which 'cares about' 'progressiveness' of folklore. In turn, amongst town dwellers, the sentimental hit of the period of the bourgeoisie, rotten tango was to be ousted by the voice of a vigorous song of the masses with limited lyricism, which had been commissioned or selected in a contest between composers. Certainly, those great constructions of socialism, steelworks, factories etc. needed some sort of aesthetic flavouring. The language of propaganda, its vigour fuelled as a rule by a hate of the past and the subjectivity of man, had to be neutralized somehow through songs, such as 'Bridge to the left, bridge to the right.'

Today, if one were to attempt a 'virtual' history, which is popular nowadays, and ask whether in the conditions of a free Poland which would have had the models of western European democracies to hand, and indeed democratic after 1945, you could have conducted a Campaign for a Collection of Folklore Music (1950–54) funded from the state budget, the answer would have to be negative. Efforts in this area would probably have been broken down, distributed among specific centres (just as in the inter-war period),

striving (like today) for subsidies. It is true, we owe the financial basis of the Folklore Collecting Campaign (AZFM) and the priceless bank of sources of music and dialectological sources we have today more to the idea of nature conservation (state dignitaries were enthralled with the colourful folk costumes and flowers at mass events), than the intention to protect traditional culture. One of the reasons why the campaign was suspended was insufficient documentation of rebellious and revolutionary songs from the peasantry. What an important change and despite everything, humanitarian progress in comparison with the practices of the NKVD on the occupied Polish territories in 1939. When village meetings at that time were organized for the purpose of forming kolkhozes, people were encouraged to ask questions only so that the participants in the discussion, individuals singled out, could be arrested after the meeting (a clinical example of how totalitarianism functions is the cutting off of any ears of corn in a corn field which stick out as the corn must be of equal height). The toilets which were set up in wayside chapels are an example of the attitude at that time to local traditions, something that is mentioned with a sense of trauma by musicians from those regions.

Each posttotalitarian country seems to be all the wiser after wading through a period of utopian and criminal ideology, which thrived alongside the tactful indifference shown by the free world. Seemingly Albert Camus was justified in putting German and Soviet totalitarianism on an equal footing as regards three points:

1. shared contempt for the individual's human dignity;
2. analogous creation of isolated places of collective torment – Germany, in truth, did not murder prisoners of war in camps for officers, as the Soviets did with the Polish officers who were prisoners, but brought dishonour on themselves by the Holocaust;
3. shared high-pitched tones and emotions in their hypocrisy, eg. as to 'freedoms' or the future fortunes of mankind.

Comparison on the level of music and musical creativity will not however be justified, just as the history of a 12 year old is difficult to compare with the

experience of a 70 year old. The authors of MGG maintain that there is a lack at the end of the 20 century of a scientific and critical study on the creativity of German composers in the period 1933–1945 examined as a whole and individually. They are able to differentiate a few stances (Finscher, Jaschinski 1995: 1187): the positive stance of a few little known composers today, seeming to support the regime and themselves supported by it; the circumstance of internal migration (Karl A. Hartmann); and the situation where the political neutrality of creators did not influence their life situation in this period (Richard Strauss, Carl Orff, Werner Egk). Only one composer murdered in a concentration camp is mentioned - Viktor Ullmann. Perplexed muses fell silent, though, and from the twelve years of chauvinistic euphoria we are only to remember the prohibition of playing jazz and expressing social support for the regime through the German ethnic speciality – marching music.

In the Soviet world and its dominions not everything functioned in a totalitarian fashion, especially after 1956, as the free world, moved by its conscience, would want to see it in retrospect today. Above all, music and musical creativity, including local regional and ethnic traditions, in the Soviet block were remarkably successful in the compensational and therapeutic role they fulfilled: from dance, even if performed only on stage, through collective song in private company to the depth of the experiences of the most sensitive person, for example the aforementioned Dmitri Shostakovich, and also many outstanding composers in the former Soviet nation, who had to compose in particular conditions of isolation. Here let us name at least one of the representatives of the avant garde – Edison Denisov⁴.

⁴ In the volume *Duchowość Europy Środkowej i Wschodniej w muzyce końca XX wieku* (2004), there are two interesting reports from the second half of the 20th century on the general picture of music creativity in the former USRR. Levon Hakopian (2004) in a comprehensive article questions the simplified view of artistic culture in the former USRR as confrontation of the world of real socialism and the diametrically opposed creativity of dissidents. From the position of an insider he sees the complexity of conditions, transitional zones, a wide spectrum of the standpoint of various creators. He points out the fact that musicians in contrast to authors of literature did not lose their lives in the persecutions. In the creativity of many composers you could sense the dualism stemming from ancient religions – light encountering darkness. In the short historical outline the author discussed the fate of avant-garde personified by such persons as: Edison Denisov, Nikolai Karetnikov, Alemdar Karamanov, Alfred Schnittke, Sofia Gubaidulina, from Estonia – Arvo Pärt, from the Ukraine – Sergei Slonimski, Valentin Silvestrov, Leonid Grabovski, from Armenia – Tigran Mansurian. He stresses that the ideological resistance against avant-garde ceased in 1982. At the turn of the 20th

The range of shades of totalitarianism in countries under Soviet rule deserves a comparative monograph study of the functioning of cultures and musical life. And in this corrupt totalitarianism of the 20th century something remained of the automatic customs of the past, when musicians of a defeated or murdered king were engaged at the new court, instrumentalists were treated as spoils of war worthy of further exploitation, in order to increase the splendour of the victor. Ultimately music and musical creativity always escapes unscathed from political oppression, and in its deepest dimension helps to forge good out of evil. The elusive substance of music is both an infinitely variable and manifold reality. It cannot be overcome by any other, subsequent or possible, totalitarianism which has its sources and profiles more refined than dull thinking, craving for power and physical liquidation of the real opponent or one who has been created.

century, after abandoning the archaic polarization of the spirit and matter, the author perceives a crisis. An expression of this degradation is, amongst others, 'minimalism', this is by the way an example of divergence between the oriental and occidental interpretation; for in the west minimalism often has a meditational or prayer origins. Irina Nikolska (2004) discusses more by dissection the contemporary changes in musical creativity, as compared with artistic trends in literature, art and theatre. She describes the downfall of the myth of socialism and the myth of highest quality arts. In the decomposition of canons she considers that there is a 'deficiency of creative ideas' and the presence of commercialism even in the religious trend. On the other hand she emphasizes the permanence of the effect of the heroic ethos of Dmitri Shostakovich and the maintenance of a high level of symphonic creativity. It continues to contain philosophic and ethical nuances, which is evidence of a deep rooted connection between a musical work and religious systems.

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