Today is our final session. We’re going to consider still another cause for the neglect of classical masterpieces. The topic for today is politics and/or censorship. The specific case we will look at concerns the pressures within the Soviet Russian state that has led to the neglect of music by Soviet Russian composers. But the effect of politics on music has a long and interesting history, with well-documented cases going back at least as far as the eighth century. Consider, for example:

- Immediately after being elected Holy Roman Emperor in the year 800, Charlemagne demanded that every piece of music used by religious people (monks and nuns) must be in the Gregorian musical tradition and no other, under pain of death.

- Throughout the middle ages, the medieval church tried to ensure that religious people throughout Europe sang Gregorian chant in the manner prescribed by Rome, and in no other way. This monumental effort, which was not entirely successful, required an army of Roman-trained officials to travel, mostly on foot, to every church, monastery, and abbey in Christendom to instruct the religious on the correct method of singing and to weed out any “mistaken” or local variants that might have crept in, over time, to their singing.

But lest we think these are only petty church wars, we know of many examples in secular history as well:

- The political influence of Frederick the Great, King of Prussia from 1740 to 1768, amateur flautist and skillful composer, who performed the flute in public, frequently playing pieces he...
composed for the instrument, and who demanded that composers write for “his” instrument and rewarded them for doing so with patronage that included money, commissions, and court-sponsored positions and performances. In so doing, Frederick was only one in a long line of royalty before and after his time, who have rewarded composers and performers

- The ability of English Composer Benjamin Britten to live an openly gay life with his partner, the tenor Peter Pears, in a time and place where severe and well-enforced criminal laws against homosexuality existed. These laws were largely repealed in 1967, and in 1976 Britten was awarded a life peerage and was thereafter known as Baron Britten. He also was awarded OM (Order of Merit) and the CH, (Order of the Companions of Honor) founded by King George V as a reward for outstanding achievements in music.

- In the present day, the creation of positions of Composer in Residence or Performer in Residence to reward outstanding musicians. In 2013-2014, American composer Christopher Rause was the Composer of Residence of the New York Philharmonic, and as such received commissions to write new music which was performed and recorded by the orchestra, thus giving him the ability to have his music heard and known by a large audience of influential listeners and to command the attention of critics, news media, and recording executives.

THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTIONS

And now to the subject of music in the Soviet Union. The process by which the Russian Empire became the USSR involved several different stages, each of which affected composers, musicians, and audiences.
• 1917 - Parliament overthrows the Tsar; establishes a Provisional Government

• 1918 - Lenin and the Bolsheviks over-throws the Provisional Government; establishes a moderately liberal government that celebrates the proletariat (working class)

• 1918-1922 – Civil War between the Reds (Bolsheviks) and Whites (anti-Bolsheviks)

• 1923 – Reds declare victory; establish the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

**LENIN ON THE ARTS**

As in almost every aspect of life, Lenin himself set the tone for how all the arts, including music, were to be managed:

> “Every artist, everyone who considers himself an artist, has the right to create freely according to his ideal, independently of everything. However, we are Communists and we must not stand with folded hands and let chaos develop as it pleases. We must systemically guide this process and form its result.”

**MAP OF THE USSR**

**ETHNICITY IN THE SOVIET ERA**

Ethnicity also played a very important role in helping to determine whether or not a Soviet musician would succeed. The “Soviet Union” was a union of eleven ethnic regions. One of these, Russia, dominated politics and culture throughout the Soviet Era. Members of the Russian ethnic group enjoyed preferential treatment in every aspect of life. The three leading composers of the Soviet era, Prokofiev, Kabalevsky, and Shostakovich were ethnic Russians. Aram Khachaturian, and excellent composer who never attained an equal stature in the party or in culture, was Armenian. Joseph
Stalin was Georgian – only proving that ruthlessness and talent could on occasion could overcome ethnicity.

So, with this brief background, let’s examine how the Soviet party and its government actually manipulated access to classical music. The two cases we will look at in some detail are those of:

**DMITRY KABALEVSKY**

**DMITRY SHOSTAKOVICH**

**SIMILARITIES**
I chose these two composers because they shared many similarities:
• Near contemporaries (born two years apart)
• Russian ethnicity
• Highly gifted and productive
• Life-long Communist Party members
• Held high party and professional posts
• Music was popular with general public

DIFFERENCES
But they also had many important differences, which helped to shape their lives and their music:

• Childhood Experiences
• Personality
• Type of Music Written (Genres)
• Choices of Subject Matter
• Compositional Gifts

To understand what happened to these two composers in Soviet Russia, we have to discuss the single most important influence on Soviet musical life:
Joseph Stalin was a musical child. One of his teachers told him that, with a natural voice like his, he might have a great career as an opera singer. But young Joseph took a different path to glory.

**STALIN’S VISION OF SOVIET MUSIC**

As First Secretary of the Communist Party, Stalin interpreted Lenin’s pronouncement about the arts to mean that music is propaganda with three major roles to play:

- To celebrates the struggle and the triumph of the proletariat
- To glorifies the Soviet state
- To avoid the cult of personality.

Thus the two key characteristics that Soviet music must possess are:
1. it must either be based on folk music or be patriotic in nature

2. It should be easily understood by ordinary people.

Stalin took his role as cultural czar very personally, especially in regard to music. He attended a large number of musical events, especially opera and symphony concerts. He personally appointed teachers to key posts of the Moscow and Leningrad Conservatories. He saw it as his duty to control what is composed and performed, and by whom. He thus used his vast powers to reward and punish individual musicians.

SOVIET MUSIC MILESTONES
Joseph Stalin also was the prime mover of important events that influenced the lives of musicians collectively. For example:

- 1932 he created the Union of Soviet Composers

- 1934 he proclaimed an important policy document, “The Official Style of Soviet Culture,” which banned art that was unintelligible to the proletariat or counter-revolutionary

- 1936 he began “The Great Terror,” an internal purging of civilian and military leaders in all fields, during which many artists were purged, imprisoned, or killed

- 1940 – 45 he slightly relaxed censorship of the arts, in order to focus more of the state’s assets on the war effort

- 1945 to the end of his life in 1953, he again increased censorship in all the arts and used the full powers of the state to reward musicians who followed his policies and to punish those who did not.
With Stalin’s attitudes and policies in mind, let’s look now at the music of Dmitri Kabalevsky and Dmitri Shostakovich, and how the Soviet State responded to their music using the tools of censorship and propaganda.

**KABALEVSKY PIANO CONCERTO NO. 3**
To Joseph Stalin, Kabalevsky was the ideal Soviet musician. His music adhered to Stalin’s policies. He was a willing volunteer whenever Stalin needed a loyal and influential leader in any field of music. For example:

- When the Moscow Conservatory needed a new leader, Stalin appointed Kabalevsky to the post.

- When a Communist party report complained about the low quality of music education in Soviet schools, Stalin appointed Kabalevsky to look into the matter and to make recommendations for improving it. This lead to Kabalevsky’s lifelong interest in providing music for young children. Even today, the teaching pieces he wrote for piano students are unsurpassed in quality and effectiveness.

Here is a representative piece by Kabalevsky, his happy-go-lucky Piano Concerto No. 3, in a sparkling performance by the great Soviet pianist, Emil Gilels.

**SHOSTAKOVICH PIANO CONCERTO NO. 1**
Like Kabalevsky, Dmitri Shostakovich rose to prominence early and became a popular and highly admired composer in his early twenties. It is obvious that Joseph Stalin admired and respected Shostakovich, although he found this composer much more difficult to handle. For Shostakovich – a loyal, lifelong Communist Party member, had a difficult temperament and a penchant for writing pieces that stretched or broke completely the Stalinist vision of
what Soviet music should be. Whether this was done deliberately, as an act of protest or rebellion, or accidentally, is still unclear.

To further complicate matters, the music of Shostakovich was very popular with the Russian people - perhaps even more popular than was Kabalevsky’s sunnier, less challenging compositions. Thus, for Stalin, handling Shostakovich was a political problem.

Let’s listen to Shostakovich’s Piano Concerto No. 1, here in an energetic performance by Martha Argerich, with trumpet obbligato played by the great Daniel Guerrier.

**OPERA THEMES**

Kabalevsky was a prolific, energetic composer who wrote music in all the major genres: operas, symphonies, chamber music, piano pieces, and choral works. His opera, “Colas Breugnon,” is one of his most popular works, then and now. A comparison of its story with that of Shostakovich’s opera, “Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District, is revealing:

**COLAS BREUGNON**

- Jealousy
- Evil of wealthy class
- Purity of Proletariat
- Defeat of the wealthy
- Triumph of Proletariat

**LADY MACBETH**

- Unfaithfulness
- Seduction
- Rape
- Getting away with Murder
- Deceitfulness
OFFICIAL DENUNCIATIONS OF SHOSTAKOVICH

By the mid-1930’s Joseph Stalin had gained complete control of the Soviet government. He was increasingly appalled by the difficulties of governing this vast, diverse, and somewhat unruly state. Thus in 1936 he instituted a nationwide crackdown on dissidents and rule-breakers, which came to be known as the “Great Terror.” For the next four years a series of mass murders, deportations, and banishments were used to cleanse Soviet society of wrongdoing.

In the winter of 1937 Joseph Stalin attended a performance of Shostakovich’s immensely popular opera, “Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District.” Enraged by both the music and the story, Stalin walked out during the second act. The following day there appeared in Pravda, the influential daily newspaper of the Communist Party, a review of the opera entitled, “Muddle Instead of Music.” This article, commonly called the “First Denunciation,” called Lady Macbeth “formalist, coarse, primitive, and vulgar.” The result of the article was devastating to the career and to the psyche of 31-year-old Shostakovich, who feared for his life. By the following year, he had lost 75% of income and was refusing to show his compositions to anyone. Out of fear, many musicians refused to perform Shostakovich’s music, other Soviet composers shunned him, publishers refused to publish his music, music stores refused to sell it, and concert managers refused to let it be programmed.

Twelve years later, in 1948, a similar article - now referred to as “the Second Denunciation” – appeared in Pravda. This time Prokofiev and other composers, as well as Shostakovich, were singled out for criticism. The primary complaint this time was “formalism,” vague term the seemed to mean that these composers were too interested in the technical aspects of music and not interested enough in using music as propaganda. Again, public apologies were demanded – and received, works were banned, and composers were dismissed from teaching positions.

Since this was the second time Shostakovich had been publicly denounced in a dozen years, he took this denunciation particularly
hard. By nature, Shostakovich was a depressive, cynical person, who at this time was also grieving over the death of his beloved first wife. For several years after the second denunciation he seldom left his apartment, received no visitors, and took no part in public musical life. The few pieces he was able to write were carefully hidden in his apartment and never shown even to friends.

KABALEVSKY’S “THE COMEDIANS”
Now we’re going to listen to another pair of compositions by Kabalevsky and Shostakovich, alike in many ways. Both are suites of short orchestral pieces arranged by the composers from longer stage works. Both are among their most enduringly popular music. As for their differences – well, let’s listen.

In 1939 Kabalevsky wrote some incidental music to accompany the Moscow Children’s Theatre production of “The Inventor and the Comedians. The following year he published ten of these short pieces as a suite for orchestra.

“The Comedians” was an instant success. Sixty-five years later, it is still the most widely performed of Kabalevsky’s works. Let’s listen to some of it.

SHOSTAKOVICH’S “THE GOLDEN AGE”
In 1929 Shostakovich wrote a satirical ballet about how a traveling Soviet soccer team is seduced by contact with the decadent culture and politics of Western Europe. Here is a somewhat edgier topic than was Kabalevsky’s similar undertaking for a children’s play. Still, given the right treatment, this piece might have been politically correct, since the villains here are the evil west and the victims are the pure young Soviet athletes. Or maybe not. Let’s listen.

PROPAGANDA AND CENSORSHIP
So what was the effect of Stalin’s attempts to control Soviet music through propaganda and censorship? The short-term effect was
highly successful, for individual composers, even highly talented and popular ones such as Kabalevsky and Shostakovich were no match for the power of the Communist Party and the Soviet State.

- Dmitri Kabalevsky remained the single most celebrated and successful Soviet composer throughout his life. His works were published and performed throughout the world. He was rewarded with every major prize and award offered by the party and the government. His music was programmed by every important conductor, orchestra, and performing musician of his time.

- Dmitri Shostakovich remained a leading Soviet composer throughout his life, although ill health restricted his travels and public appearances after the mid-1960s. After the death of Joseph Stalin in 1953, Shostakovich seemed to reach a higher level of musical achievement and produced many of his greatest works in the remaining thirteen years of his life.

The long-term effects of Soviet propaganda and censorship are somewhat more difficult to assess. What different kinds of music might these two composers have created in a more accepting climate? What compositions might they have destroyed or decided not to write, as a result of Soviet policies? What other Soviet composers, known or unknown to us, might have flourished if they had not been restricted by Stalin’s policies? We may never know for sure.

But we do know one startling, surprising thing about the fate of Kabalevsky and Shostakovich. In the sixty-two years since the death of Joseph Stalin, the international reputations of these two composers have changed dramatically. Today Shostakovich is considered one of the supremely great composers of the 20th century, the one composer who best expressed the bitterness, anxiety and tortured energy of his time, while Kabalevsky and his
music are largely forgotten, except in the realm of music for children.

**COMPOSER CITATIONS ON ORCHESTRAL WEBSITES, 2014**

A brief summary of the citations of these two composers on the websites of major American symphony orchestras reveals the relative importance of their orchestral music at the present time.

**SHOSTAKOVICH: SYMPHONY NO. 10**

Let’s close this discussion Soviet music by [listening to the second movement of Shostakovich’s Symphony No.10](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=98888888888). This piece was completed in December, 1953, ten months after Stalin’s death. According to the controversial and perhaps unreliable co-author of his memoirs, Shostakovich is supposed to have said, “I did depict Stalin in my next symphony, the Tenth. I wrote it right after Stalin’s death and no one has yet guessed what the symphony is about. It’s about Stalin and the Stalin years. The second part, the scherzo, is a musical portrait of Stalin, roughly speaking. Of course, there are many other things in it, but that’s the basis.” Many Shostakovich scholars do not believe there is any reliable evidence to support this statement. But whether or not it is accurate, this piece is a great way to end our discussion of Soviet music.