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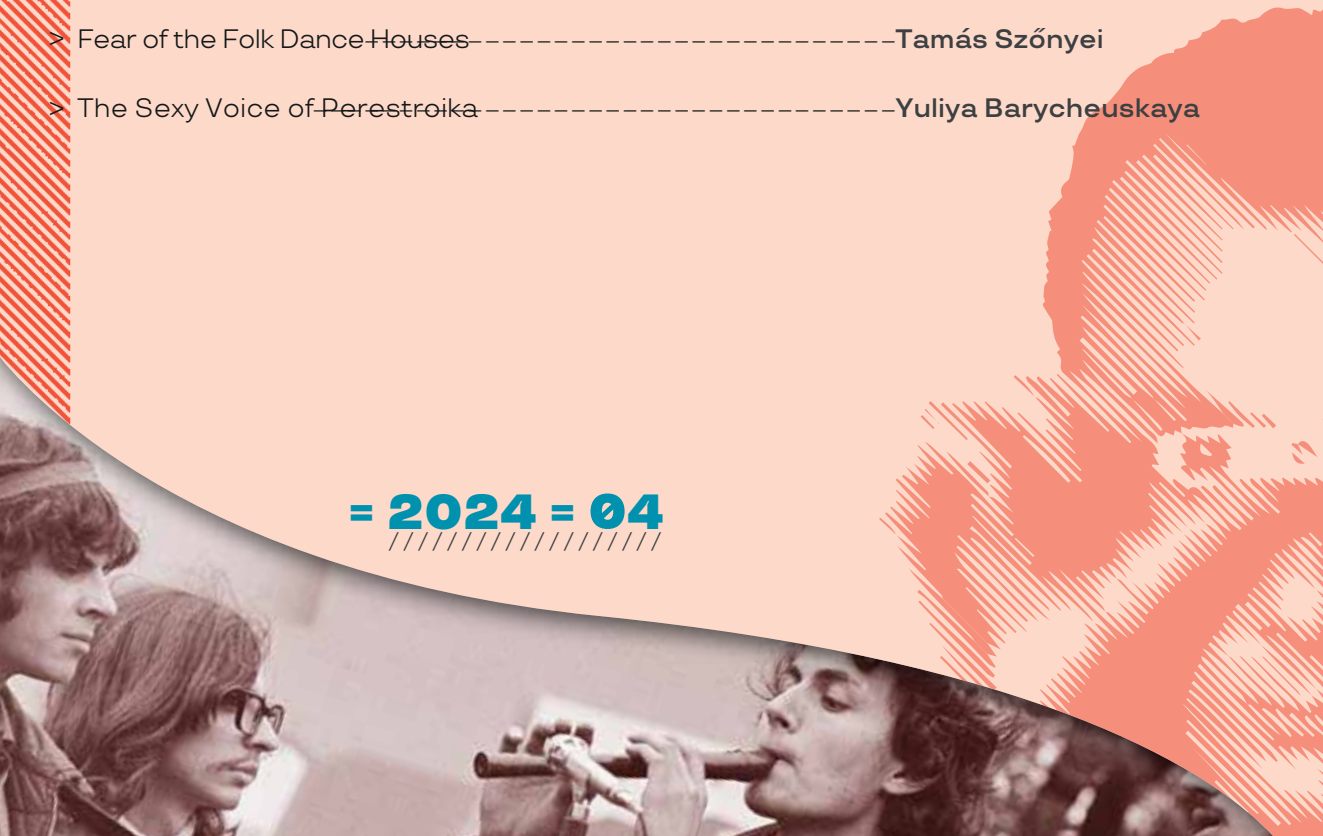

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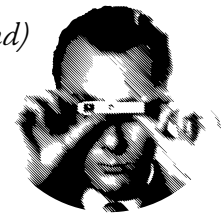

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Poland, 1974. Fortepan / Sándor Kereki

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= = = = Karolina Bittner =

/// Festivals of Songs in the Polish People's Republic

Abstract

As Communist rule established itself in Poland, its agents learned relatively quickly to appreciate the propagandic value of culture, including music. The authorities realized that popular music, and the pop song in particular, is an important medium of influence on society. The pop song became an integral tool in socialist propaganda, which manifested in how its repertory and content, as well as performers, were selected. Indeed/as a result, the list of criteria a pop star candidate had to fulfil was rather long.

In the Socialist nation, the pop song had an important role to play. It was intended to shape the society's imagination on life, work, and leisure. In this framework, not every song could become a hit, and not every performer could become a star. As a consequence of this cultural policy, the Polish musical stage saw the rise of a certain twofold division. Beside those performers in official circulation, a lot of new bands flourished and became very popular, especially among the youth.

This dual world of Polish pop culture hosted several dozen music festivals: from the Sopot International Song Festival and National Festival of Polish Song in Opole, to the Academic Youth Art Festival (FAMA) in Świnoujście and Jarocin Rock Festival, to a number of rock music revues all across the nation. Among these, there were two festivals with a very special propagandic task to fulfil: the Soviet Song Festival in Zielona Góra, and the Festival of the Soldiers' Song in Kołobrzeg.

In this article, I discuss the propagandic function of festivals and the role they played in the formation of Socialist society. Throughout its socio-political transformations, Communist Poland altered the way it employed pop music. But whoever headed the Polish United Workers' Party, the pop song remained an important tool for shaping the new mentality; as a result, festivals of songs were continuously used for formation of the new Socialist consciousness. I portray I therefore demonstrate here the meaning of pop music festivals in the context of the Polish Communist Era pop song, including music reviews.

The subject of my research is the relationship between the Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR) and four festivals of songs: the Sopot International Song Festival, the National Festival of Polish Song in Opole, the Soviet Song Festival in Zielona Góra, and the Festival of the Soldiers' Song in Kołobrzeg. These festivals started in the 1960s and were a very important tenet of cultural policy until the end of the Polish People's Republic. Indeed, during the 1970s they became part of the propaganda of success, while in the 1980s the Polish United Workers' Party used them to improve its image.

What were the main roles of these music festivals? How did they change from the 1960s to 1989? What was the level of censorship? Could anyone perform in Sopot or Opole? Finally, did the festivals of songs shape the musical tastes of Polish people? For the youth, the most important event was the Festival of Rock Musicians in Jarocin. What role did this specific festival play in Socialist cultural policy? This research is based on documents of the Department of Culture of the Polish United Workers' Party, documents of the Communist Security Service, newspapers, and audiovisual sources.

= = = The Sopot International Song Festival

The International Song Festival in Sopot was organized for the first time in 1961. Its initiator was Władysław Szpilman: composer, author of several hundred songs, and head of the popular music department of Polish Radio. For the first three years, the festival took place in the hall of the Gdańsk Shipyard, after which it relocated to the Forest Opera.

Sopot was intended to have a promotional function: it was to popularize Polish songs in Europe. In Sopot, alongside Polish singers there were also musical stars from the Eastern Bloc countries. In 1963, the third edition was won by Tamara Miansarowa from the USSR, who sang the song "May there always be sunshine" ("*Pust' vsegda budet solnce*"). Among the Polish winners of the festival were Maryla Rodowicz with "Margaret" ("*Małgośka*") in 1973, Urszula Sipińska with "*For this red flower*" ("*Po ten kwiat czerwony*")in 1968, Andrzej Dąbrowski with "*One step to falling in love*" ("*Do zakochania jeden krok*") in 1972, and the band Vox with their "*Banana song*" ("*Bananowy song*") in 1982. In 1977, the festival introduced the Intervision competition as part of the competition with the West. "They have the Eurovision, and we have the Intervision, or the People's Democracy Games. Strong representations - Vondračkova from Czechoslovakia, Rodowicz from Poland, in the following years Niemen, Pugaczowa, and once our winner, the second time a Russian, another time a Czech and la, la, la, la - the fun continues,"

recalls the singer Maryla Rodowicz in her autobiography.[1] In the Intervision competition, in addition to a Grand Prix competition, a Polish Song Contest was organized in which foreign performers presented their interpretations of Polish hits; the prize was the Amber Nightingale. Contest participants had to choose from a list of Polish songs. When preparing this set every year, the organizers did not take into account the style of the performers. The performers sang songs they didn't like, which affected the level of the entire concert. Thus, the promotion of Polish songs was not very good.

The Sopot Forest Opera featured stars from the Eastern Bloc, with occasional guest appearances by artists from the West. One of the reasons for the lack of interest from Western performers in the competition was the low honorarium. During the time of the Polish People's Republic, the following artists performed in Sopot: Boney M., Demis Roussos, Ałła Pugaczowa, Helena Vondračkova, Karel Gott, Farida, Henri Seroka, Gloria Gaynor, Drupi, Charles Aznavour, and Dream Express.

According to the assumptions of the Culture Department of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party, Sopot would play a promotional role for Polish pop music in the international arena. "Promotion is the slogan of the International Song Festival," claimed the director of the Department of Stage Art, from the Ministry of Culture and Art.[2] Yet already in the seventies this had become an empty slogan. The press frequently wrote about the lack of world stars and big hits.[3] Little-known artists, called by publicists the „third set", came to Sopot, which is why the event was perceived as amateurish in the West. Interest from foreign journalists and impresarios decreased. Ideas to transform the festival into a record fair came to nothing.

In the years 1982 and 1983, the festival did not take place due to martial law. The International Song Festival in Sopot, revived in 1984, was another example of so-called normalization. An event with an international character was needed by the party to enhance its image. A statement by the director of the Department of Theatre and Stage at the Ministry of Culture and Art leaves no doubt about the role of the Sopot festival: in his opinion, such an event "especially in Gdańsk was highly desirable, the participation of foreign artists would be another example of breaking the barriers and restrictions in cultural contacts used by some Western countries."[4]

1 = = Maryla Rodowicz, *Niech żyje bal* (Dom Wydawniczy Szczepan Szymański, 1992), 44.

2 = = AAN, The Culture Department of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party, sygn. LVI-1747, Information on the organization and course of MFP Sopot'87 from September 1987, prepared by Janusz Markowski, Director DSE, undated, 9.

3 = = JM, "Wychowanie muzyczne. Pofestiwalowa refleksja", *Jazz* no. 10 (1971): 14.

4 = = AAN, sygn. LVI-1782, XXI MFP Sopot 84. Official note regarding the organization and course of the festival prepared by Janusz Trzciński, director of the Department of Theatre and Stage, undated, 1.

In 1984, Charles Aznavour performed in Sopot, which the Ministry of Culture considered a great PR success of the festival; this was despite the fact that during his concert, which lasted well past midnight, a large part of the audience left the Forest Opera to catch the last electric train to the Tri-City.[5] The hit of this iteration of the festival was "Frontiera," performed by the Polish-Italian duo Halina Benedyk and Marco Antonelli.

In the second half of the 1980s, Sopot hosted the following artists: Shirley Bassey, Bonnie Tyler, Sabrina, and Kim Wilde. The party had ambitions for Sopot to become a festival of great international importance. The Sopot '89 Organizing Committee even called this event the MIDEM of Northern Europe,[6] "a bridge between Western and Eastern show business."[7] This opinion was, however, exaggerated. Significance of the Festival in Sopot were much lower than that of the MIDEM fair.

Still, even after 1989 the Sopot festival remained on the map of cultural events. In 1990, world stars performed at the Forest Opera, such as Whitney Houston, Marillion, Annie Lennox, and the Kelly Family.

= = = The National Festival of Polish Song in Opole

The National Festival of Polish Song in Opole was established in 1963 as a means of promoting Polish creativity and defending it against the flood of Western compositions. Therefore, only Polish compositions written by Polish composers and authors were allowed. The first festival constituted a triumph for satirical songs performed by the Student Satirical Theatre from Warsaw and Piwnica pod Baranami (The Cellar Under the Rams) from Krakow, as well as big-beat and jazz songs; at the same time, it was also a defeat for sentimental songs and mass songs. As a result, Polish pop music began to change. The Opole Festival also changed, allowing, among others, youth bands, which prompted both great enthusiasm among the youth and a wave of criticism among journalists.

The festival was created thanks to the initiative of Karol Musioł, chairman of the City National Council, and of two journalists from Program III of Polish Radio: Jerzy Grygolunas and Mateusz Święcicki. Musioł was also the initiator of the idea of building the Millennium Amphitheatre in Opole, where the festival takes place. During its first iteration, the publicist and music critic Jerzy Waldorff called Opole the "capital of Polish song," and it stayed that way. The festival has its own theme composed by Bogusław Klimczuk, which opens each festival concert.

5 = = AAN, sygn. LVI-1782, XXI MFP Sopot 84, 4.

6 = = MIDEM is a phonographic fair in Cannes, an event that has been taking place since 1967. It is attended by creators, producers, publishers, managers, and technicians from all over the world.

7 = = AAN, sygn. LVI-1749, The project of the organization of MFP Sopot'89 prepared by Jerzy Gruza and Wojciech Korzeniewski, August 29, 1988, 2.

The two most important events of the Opole festival are the premiere concert and the debut concert. The first presents new songs, while the second presents debuting artists. Many stars of Polish song began their careers in the Opole amphitheater. Since 1983, the main prize in the debut concert is Karolinka—the Anna Jantar Award, named in honor of the singer Anna Jantar, who died tragically in 1981. The festival launched a number of hits: "Carousel with Madonnas" ("*Karuzela z madonnami*"), "This World is Strange" ("*Dziwny jest ten* świat"), "On Foot to Summer" ("*Piechotą do lata*"), "You Will Return Here" ("*Powrócisz tu*"), "So Much Sun in the Whole City" ("*Tyle słońca w całym mieście*"), "Please Write" ("*Napisz proszę*"), and "Long Live the Ball" ("*Niech* żyje *bal*").

The concert that many Poles were waiting for, and that worried the authorities, was the cabaret show called "kabareton." Control over the song lyrics and s cripts of cabaret programs was carried out in two stages. First, all of the lyrics were presented for approval in Warsaw at the Main Office of Control of the Press, Publications and Performances. After this, the artists' performances in Opole were supervised by local censors, who were present both at rehearsals and during the festival concerts.

The August 1980 strikes and the creation of the Independent Self-Governing Trade Union "Solidarity" influenced culture, including song. Political cabaret, sketches, monologues, and songs portraying the realities of the time were very popular. The Opole '81 Festival was held under the banner of "Solidarity": in the lyrics, stage design, and announcers' words, there were many references to the situation in the country. Maciej Pietrzyk, Jan Pietrzak, Leszek Wójtowicz, Krystyna Prońko, Jacek Kaczmarski, Przemysław Gintrowski, the band Trzeci Oddech Kaczuchy all sang about everyday problems. A novelty was the award funded by "Solidarity": Maciej Pietrzyk received one for the "Song for my Daughter" ("*Piosenka dla córki*"). Krystyna Prońko received the journalists' award for "Psalm of Those Standing in Line" ("*Psalm stojących* w *kolejce*"), while Jan Pietrzak received the audience award for "Let Poland be Poland" ("Żeby *Polska była Polską*").

After a hiatus caused by martial law, the Opole Festival returned in 1983. Authorities, journalists, and also fans of the song all had many expectations for it. "For Centrala, the very fact that this year's festival will take place have a positive value, as a testimony that life in Poland continues and develops," noted publicist Daniel Passent[8]. Almost all of the top Polish artists appeared in Opole, but in the opinion of journalists and critics, this did not affect the quality of the songs presented. Rock triumphed, with performances by Republika, Perfect, Irek Dudek, Śmierć Kliniczna, Brak, Rezerwat, Lombard, Lady Pank, Bajm and the hard rock band Poziom 600. During the rock concert entitled "Music Will Enter Your Hearts," fragments of the films *Koncert* by Michał Tarkowski and *Jarocin'82* by

8 = = Daniel Passent, "Elektryfikacja plus epilepsja", *Polityka* no. 28 (1983): 16.

Paweł Karpiński were shown on a large screen. The first is a recording of the Rockowisko 1981 festival in Łódź, and the second is a recording of the festival in Jarocin—Poland's largest rock festival.

The press has repeatedly emphasized that Opole sets the trends in Polish song. A similar position was held by the Department of Culture of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party, but it went a step further, declaring that the Opole festival was to stimulate the development of song "that fulfills educational and entertainment functions well."[9] Looking at the songs presented, the entertainment functions dominated in Opole. Perhaps this explains why the festival in Opole remains the most important song festival in Poland. Since 2016, the history of this festival can be learned at the Museum of Polish Song in Opole.

= = = The Soviet Song Festival in Zielona Góra

The Festival of Soviet Song in Zielona Góra was first organized in 1965 by the Polish-Soviet Friendship Society, the Ministry of Culture and Art, the Radio and Television Committee, the Ministry of Education and Upbringing, and the Union of Polish Socialist Youth. It was the most mass amateur event, being preceded by eliminations in school clubs, village and district cultural centers, etc. Indeed, the festival was the largest competition for young talents in the country. Many later stars of the Polish stage appeared here: Majka Jeżowska, Małgorzata Ostrowska, Urszula, Michał Bajor, and Izabela Trojanowska. The main prizes were Golden, Silver and Bronze Samovars and a tour to the USSR. The Friendship Concert, alongside Polish pop stars, also featured two artists from the USSR, Ałła Pugaczowa and Żanna Biczewska. During the festival, there were also other cultural events dedicated to Polish-Soviet friendship: the Colors of Friendship festival (for children's song and dance ensembles), Soviet Literature Days, a Polish-Soviet painting plein-air workshop, and music record and book fairs. These activities emphasized the role of the festival as propaganda. No hits were launched in Zielona Góra. Young performers sang Soviet songs from a songbook prepared by the organizer. The choice was quite limited, and many songs were repeated. Ultimately, for many viewers and journalists, the festival was simply boring.

In 1968, the Soviet Song Festival made its debut on the television the small screen. Compared to the festivals in Opole and Sopot, it attracted little interest from the Culture Department of the Central Committee, and its assessment usually came down to praise of both its organizational and ideological attributes. On the one hand, this limited scrutiny could have resulted from the amateur nature of the festival, as it was the finale of a multi-stage vocal competition for young talents. The

9 = = AAN, sygn. LVI-1783, Assessment of the National Festival of Polish Song "Opole 1984", July 19, 1984, 2.

festival in Zielona Góra did not have the same influence on Polish pop music as the festivals in Opole and Sopot, or even in Jarocin. On the other hand, in the case of the Soviet Song Festival and the Soldier Song Festival, the party was not the main organizer, so perhaps this explains the restraint of the Polish United Workers' Party in its assessments of these festivals.

Since the beginning of the eighties, young people's interest in the eliminations for this festival has been decreasing. Popular vocalists refused to participate in concerts. The public's aversion to the Soviet Song Festival, identified with communist propaganda, has increased. According to information from the Security Service, „Solidarity" in Zielona Góra intended to prevent the festival from taking place in 1981 and demanded the disclosure of the costs of this festival. The festival was not cancelled during the martial law, but the level of security was increased.[10] Several hundred officers maintained order in the city, and 200 in the amphitheater. The journalists were previously vetted by the Security Service. The Security Service did not interfere in the substantive course of the festival.

In 1989, the final Soviet Song Festival took place. With the fall of Communist power, the event glorifying Polish-Soviet friendship was of no interest to anyone. Many artists who had debuted in Zielona Góra removed this fact from their biographies. This and other festivals, like the Soldier Song Festival in Kołobrzeg (see below), were called "cursed festivals."[11] In 2008, the Russian Song Festival was organized, but after several editions it was suspended. Changing the name from Soviet to Russian did not help popularize the festival. It was still identified with the propaganda of the Polish People's Republic.

= = = The Soldiers' Song Festival in Kołobrzeg

The Soldiers' Song Festival in Kołobrzeg has been organized under this name since 1968. A year earlier, the Festival of Soldier Music and Song took place in Połczyn-Zdrój, the following year the event was organized simultaneously in Połczyn-Zdrój and Kołobrzeg, and from 1969 until 1989 it was held without interruption only in Kołobrzeg. The festival included competitions for the best soldiers' song and the best marching song (awarded with Gold and Silver Rings), a competition for the best amateur singers, and units representing each district and type of armed forces. In addition to concerts, the festival offered viewers shows, and from 1982 on, shows for children.

In the 1960s, youth bands played in Kołobrzeg: Skaldowie, Niebiesko-Czarni, Czerwono-Czarni, Breakout, and No To Co. In the 1970s, popular singers began

10 = = Krzysztof Brzechczyn, "Wokół 'piosenki'. Festiwal Piosenki Radzieckiej w latach 1982–1984 w Zielonej Górze w perspektywie bezpieki," in *W służbie władzy czy społeczeństwa. Wybrane problemy rozwoju kultury i nauki na Środkowym Nadodrzu w latach 1945–1989* (Pro Libris, 2012), 111–121.

11 = = Bartosz Żurawiecki, *Festiwale wyklęte* (Krytyka Polityczna, 2019).

to perform there—Maryla Rodowicz, Anna Jantar, Katarzyna Sobczyk, Halina Frąckowiak, Zdzisława Sośnicka, Teresa Tutinas, Irena Jarocka, Krzysztof Krawczyk, Jacek Lech, and Bogusław Mec—as well as the bands 2+1, Happy End, and Trubadurzy. During this period, the festival's programming was expanded by introducing a concert of military bands from the Eastern Bloc. In the 1980s, most famous singers boycotted the festival. As a result, a group of artists who could be called the pillars of this festival performed in the amphitheater. They were Pisarek, Nina Urbano, Irena Woźniacka, Iwona Niedzielska, Elżbieta Jagiełło, Adam Zwierz, Krzysztof Cwynar, Bogdan Czyżewski, Adam Wojdak, Roman Gerczak, Ryszard Arning, and Rudolf Poledniok, as well as the actors Andrzej Szajewski, Wiktor Zatwarski, Józef Nowak, and Wojciech Siemion.

In 1971, it was decided that two decision-making centres for the festival should be established: an organizational section in Kołobrzeg and a programme-artistic section in Warsaw. The first was headed by the chairman of the Presidium of the Municipal National Council in Kołobrzeg; the second was composed of the artistic director of the festival and representatives of the party, the ministry and the Radio and Television Committee, and Colonel Władysław Czuba from the Main Political Board of the Polish Army[12]. The transfer to Warsaw of the centre deciding on the programme and performers was an example of centralizing cultural policy. The festival occupied a key place in the work plans for each year. In terms of repertoire, it was expected to celebrate anniversaries such as the end of the World War II or anniversaries of the Polish People's Republic[13]. An example of propaganda was references to the current political situation. In 1983, it was recommended to emphasize support for the party's and government's policies, as well as "criticism of illnesses, anomalies and social evil." Organizers were to "[e]nrich the festival with content resulting from the forty-ninth anniversary of the establishment of the Polish People's Army."[14]

The festival presented over a thousand new soldiers' songs over its thirty years of existence. Every year, dozens of songs were submitted to the soldier song competition. Composers were invited to participate according to the distribution list. The competition was organized in two categories: military marching song and stage song with a military theme.[15] Each participant in the competition could

12 = = AP, sygn. 983, KW PZPR, Materials concerning FPŻ in Kołobrzeg and Połczyn-Zdrój 1967-1975. Report of the Organizational Office of FPŻ Kołobrzeg 1972, undated, 1.

13 = = On the rules of the soldier song competition, see Karolina Bittner, *Piosenka w służbie propagandy. Festiwal Piosenki Żołnierskiej w Kołobrzegu 1968–1989* (IPN, 2016), 118–121.

14 = = AMON, sygn. 344/92/721, Stage bands, orchestras, monuments, medals 2 January 1982—31 December 1982. Information on the course of central artistic events held in 1982, November 13, 1982, 334.

15 = = AMON, sygn. 344/92/721, 240.

submit any number of pieces, but they had to be premiere recordings (i.e., previously unpublished or performed). Composers and lyricists could also create authorial partnerships with a person who did not receive an invitation from the Polish Army Board. The conditions for accepting a piece of work into the competition was that it be submitted anonymously and signed with "an emblem of your choice."[16] The songs selected by the jury were then assigned to singers and bands.[17]

These soldiers' songs entertained on the one hand, and educated on the other. However, the festival launched few hits: "When the Song Went to the Army" ("*Gdy piosenka szła do wojska*"), "Polish Military Cap" ("*Rogatywka*"), "Don't Be Sorry, Girl's Heart" ("*Nie* żałujcie *serca dziewczyny*"), "It's Good for Him" ("*Takiemu to dobrze*"), "Podhale Rifleman" ("*Strzelec podhalański*"), "Tell Me, Homeland" ("*Opowiedz mi ojczyzno*"), "Red Sun" ("*Czerwone słoneczko*"), "We Are the Army" ("*Myśmy są wojsko*"), and "When Poland Gives Us the Order" ("*Gdy Polska da nam rozkaz*"). The lattermost became a symbol of the festival. Namely, in 1981, it was performed in the amphitheater by Adam Zwierz, but with the text changed without the consent and knowledge of the author. In the original, the author of the text, Lech Konopiński, wrote, „We will join the army, / To look our enemies in the face boldly." The festival viewers, however, heard, „We will join the army, / To defend socialism together."

In view of the socio-political situation in the country, this was a very clear voice of support for the authorities of the Polish People's Republic. Moreover, in 1981, the entire festival constituted an expression of support for the Polish People's Army and the Polish United Workers' Party. The lyrics of the songs repeatedly declared gratitude to the soldiers, emphasizing that the army was needed and could be trusted.

In July 1990, the Polish People's Republic was no more. There was also no need for a soldier's song related to the anniversaries of the past period: the building of the People's Republic of Poland, the triumphs of the Polish People's Army, or friendship with the Soviet Union. In the information of the Press Office of the Ministry of National Defense from 1990, it was written: "due to the emerging critical voices regarding the saturation of the then editions of the festival with ideological and propaganda content, the management of the ministry decided to withdraw from organizing the festival."[18] The Kołobrzeg authorities organized several more iterations, but without success. The last time the soldier song festival took place was in 1997.

16 = = AMON, sygn. 237/91/151, GZP WP ZKiO, Outgoing correspondence, 2 January 1969. 31 December 1969; 237/91/151, Regulations for a song on a military theme, 1969, 11.

17 = = AMON, sygn. 237/91/155, GZP WP ZKiO correspondence received on 24 October 1969—31 December 1969; Regulations of the National Soldier Song Festival Kołobrzeg 1970—draft, 124.

18 = = "Festiwal zdjęty z afisza", *Kulisy Kołobrzeskie* no. 5 (1998): 8.

= = = The Festival of Rock Musicians in Jarocin

In the 1970s, the Greater Poland Youth Rhythms (*Wielkopolskie Rytmy Młodych*) took place in Jarocin, which in 1980 was transformed into the National Review of Young Generation Music. This is how the history of the largest rock festival in Poland began. In 1983, the name was changed to the Festival of Rock Musicians. Jarocin became the rock capital of Poland. Every year, thousands of rock fans came from all over the country to see their idols: TSA, Republika, Brygada Kryzys, and Armia. A small stage was reserved for debutants; in this way, the bands Dezerter, Moskwa, and T.Love started their careers in Jarocin. Representatives of many subcultures—punk, metal, and reggae—met in Jarocin as well. For them, the festival was an oasis of freedom. In reality, however, the rock festival was just like any other: controlled by censorship and spied on by the security apparatus.

A characteristic element of the Jarocin festival was a forest of tape recorders above the heads of the audience, on which fans recorded the performances of their idols. Often, this was the only way to obtain recordings of these artists. "Recording albums with bands presented in Jarocin would be too great an honor for them. [...] This music is mostly just crap—lyrically and musically," stated the program director of Polish Recordings,[19] who summed up the issue of not recording tapes from Jarocin concerts with a simple "rock music lovers will record them themselves."[20] In turn, the director of the Wifon record label claimed that the cassettes with music from Jarocin would not be distributed in sufficient numbers to guarantee a profit.[21] Considering the number of young people listening to rock, this statement is surprising. Many rock bands published their cassettes at home and sold them at concerts, including the Jarocin festival. From their accounts, we know that the interest in cassettes was enormous. The T.Love group released two cassettes in this way: *Our Bubelon* (*Nasz Bubelon*) in 1984 and *The Boors Are Coming* (*Chamy idą*) in 1985, of which they sold about five thousand in three years.

The party's attitude towards the Jarocin festival was ambiguous. Their acceptance of such a large gathering of young people is explained by researchers with the safety valve theory. In this way, the authorities sought to prevent young people from contacting the political opposition. The security apparatus spied on the participants and performers of the festival to see if they were promoting anti-communist content, including distributing leaflets. According to the Culture Department of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party, the Rock Musicians' Festival in Jarocin was very controversial and criminogenic, as it was the site for thefts, robberies, and drug addiction; moreover, in 1985, attempts at political

19 = = M. Kwiatkowski, "Rock spod korca", *Odrodzenie* no. 34 (1986): 11.

20 = = M. Kwiatkowski, "Rock spod korca", *Odrodzenie* no. 34 (1986): 11.

21 = = M. Kwiatkowski, "Rock spod korca", *Odrodzenie* no. 34 (1986): 11.

provocations and active influence of the church were recorded in Jarocin.[22] At Jarocin '85, leaflets boycotting military service were thrown out twice. The remedy for the above-mentioned phenomena was supposed to be greater involvement of the provincial authorities in Kalisz and of both the Union of Socialist Polish Youth and the Polish Scouting Association.

The Jarocin festival has permanently entered the history of Polish rock music. For several summer days, it constituted a veritable city: a state, where one could manifest one's rebellion against the system. And only the presence of officers of the Citizens' Militia and the Security Service reminded attendees that behind the fence surrounding the Jarocin stadium, there was a different reality, from which it would be possible to escape again only in a year.

In the second half of the 1980s, divisions among the festival audience grew stronger year by year, especially among the conflicting subcultures of punks and skinheads. Fights erupted between them, and the press wrote more about the riots than the music. As a result, after 1989 the reluctance of the Jarocin residents towards the festival grew.

The festival in Jarocin was last held in 1994. That edition went down in history not because of its music, but because of the fighting and riots. "They beat in Jarocin," the press reported: „Five policemen were injured out of 400 taking part in the action, five ambulances were sent there [...] the police used tear gas, shops and cars parked on the Holy Spirit Street were damaged."[23] The festival was revived only in 2005.

= = = The role of song festivals

The boom in song festivals in Poland in the 1960s was connected to a demographic boom of young people eager for entertainment. Festivals were supposed to regulate, stimulate, direct, and influence the market in a more or less intrusive way. However, the obsession with festivals led to a decrease in their rank and significance. They ceased to be a celebration of song and became an ordinary concert.

The locations where the flagship song festivals were held are not accidental. The choice of the Western and Northern Territories, which were the main element of propaganda in the 1940s, may indicate a desire to emphasize the economic, social, and cultural cohesion of these areas with the rest of Poland.[24] That is why organizing the Polish Song Festival in the "Piast" Opole or the International Song Festival in Sopot, a city with pre-war multicultural traditions, was a conscious

22 = = AAN, sygn. LVI-1781, Assessment and conclusions resulting from the course of the 1985 song festivals, September 24, 1985, 1.

23 = = "Bili w Jarocinie", *Głos Wielkopolski* no. 181 (1994): 1.

24 = = About musical life in the Western and Northern Lands, see Bogdan M. Jankowski and Michał Misiorny, *Muzyka i życie muzyczne na Ziemiach Zachodnich i Północnych 1945–1965* (Wyd. Poznańskie 1968): 199–227.

decision. Similarly, in the case of Zielona Góra with Soviet songs and Kołobrzeg with soldiers' songs, one can find many references to the history of these cities.

The form of institutionalization of popular music were song festivals. Their program, repertoire, and selection of performers were subject to control by the government, or more precisely, the Communist party. It was the party that set the directions of cultural policy, and the Ministry of Culture and Art and cultural institutions implemented this policy.

Song festivals best illustrate the institutionalization and centralization of the entertainment industry in the Polish People's Republic. Unlike phonography, they operated within a framework strictly defined by the authorities. A report on the preparations for the festivals was sent to the highest party authorities, i.e., the first secretary of the Central Committee[25]. The representatives of the organizing office had to gain the approval of several institutions for trips to other song festivals in Europe: the Polish Artistic Agency "Pagart," the Office of Cultural Cooperation with Foreign Countries at the Ministry of Culture and Art, and the Department of Culture of the Central Committee of the Party. However, the final decision was made by the party. In January 1964, "Pagart" planned, in connection with the preparations for the next festival in Sopot, to send Ludwik Klekow, secretary of the International Song Festival, to the festival in San Remo so that he could familiarize himself with the experiences of another festival. The Culture Department of the Central Committee did not agree to this, arguing that "our experiences are sufficient."[26]

Song festivals were not only planned in detail but also assessed by the Culture Department of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party, both in terms of organization and repertoire. There could be no question of randomness. They reflected the socio-political situation of the country, often serving to divert public attention from the actions of the authorities. In 1971, a plan was even made to use the festival in Sopot to improve Poland's image in the world after December 1970.[27] The festival office received several applications from foreign companies and television stations interested in recording the Sopot '71 festival. Two were selected: Austrian television, which wanted to send a thirty-person crew with equipment for magnetic recording in color and to make the recorded film available to televisions in Germany and Switzerland, and the English company Telebiuro, which planned to film selected fragments of the festival, then edit them with photos of Gdańsk,

25 = = AAN, sygn. 237/XVIII-194, Information about the 3rd MFP, August 9, 1963, 42–45.

26 = = AAN, sygn. 237/XVIII/214, Letter from the Head of Department II of the Office of Cultural Cooperation with Foreign Countries of the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage to the Department of Culture of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party, November 14, 1963, handwritten note, 186.

27 = = AAN, sygn. LVI-612, Note on the possibility of popularizing the 1971 Sopot Festival in the world, May 4, 1971, 1.

and also provide the star: jazz singer Nancy Wilson.[28] The Radio and Television Committee decided that the English proposal was against the interests of Polish television, and the Austrians were asked to only provide the equipment that the Polish crew would operate. In terms of improving the image of the government after December 1970, the participation of stage stars in the Soldier Song Festival in Kołobrzeg in 1971—the first after Edward Gierek took power—should be considered. The performers were Maryla Rodowicz with the song "Drafting into the Army" ("*Powołanie*"), Halina Frąckowiak with the ABC group "The Army Has Been Singing Since Morning" (*Wojsko od rana* śpiewa), the bands 2+1 with "I Won't Be So Stupid Again" ("*Już nie będę taki głupi*") and Trubadurzy with "No Dad, No Mom" ("*Nie ma taty, nie ma mamy*"). Never again did so many such popular performers appear at this festival.

In 1981, the festival in Opole was held under the banner of "Solidarity," and artists identified with this movement appeared on stage: Jacek Kaczmarski, Przemysław Gintrowski, Maciej Pietrzyk, Jan Pietrzak, and Leszek Wójtowicz. In turn, during martial law, only the Soldier Song Festival in Kołobrzeg, the Soviet Song Festival in Zielona Góra, and rock festivals were held: the Young Generation Musicians Festival in Jarocin and the National Meetings with Blues "Rawa Blues" in Katowice. The former were intended to create the illusion of public support for the Polish People's Army, the authorities of the Polish People's Republic and the USSR; the latter were a manifestation of the instrumental treatment of popular music by the communist authorities. This is particularly visible in the example of "Rawa Blues." In 1982, the concerts were moved from clubs to large halls in Katowice, Sosnowiec, Jastrzębie Zdrój, and Dąbrowa Górnicza, accompanied by film screenings and lectures. It was nothing like those of previous years, and the performers did not like these changes.[29]

Song festivals were included in the programs of celebrations of subsequent anniversaries of the Polish People's Republic, and their organizers were expected to feature works affirming the achievements of the People's Republic of Poland and the Polish United Workers' Party. The leading ones in this respect were the Festival of Soldiers' Songs in Kołobrzeg, the Festival of Soviet Song in Zielona Góra, and the Festival of Engaged Song in Katowice. Events such as the fortieth anniversary of the Polish People's Republic or the flight of Mirosław Hermaszewski had to appear in the repertoire of the above-mentioned festivals. However, similar tasks were set for the festival in Opole. In 1966, the Millennium Concert was organized in Opole, with the participation of the period instrument ensemble Fistulatores et Tubicinatores Varsavienses. In 1969, the KFPP in Opole began the concert *On the*

28 = = AAN, sygn. LVI-612.

29 = = This is as recollected by Józef Skrzek of the band SBB, cited in Marcin Babko, *Irek Dudek Ziuta blues* (In Rock, 2008): 92.

Right a Bridge, on the Left a Bridge, referring to the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Polish People's Republic; in addition to the title song, it also featured "Beloved Country" and "For This Red Flower." In 1984, according to the Department of Culture of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party in Opole, there was no affirmation of the achievements of the forty years of the Polish People's Republic.[30] The Festival of Soviet Song in Zielona Góra was cited as an example of a proper celebration of this anniversary. The festival featured performances by Sława Przybylska, Renata Danel, Bogdana Zagórska, Iwona Niedzielska, Bajm, Gang Marcela, Banda i Wanda, and Filia Włodara. The festival organizers were particularly proud of the participation of Bajm, Banda i Wanda, and Gang Marcela, as this had "significant political and artistic significance in the environment of artists and stage activists, and constituted a kind of breach."[31] This was important because since the beginning of the eighties, young people's interest in the eliminations for this festival had been decreasing. In addition, the participation of stars guaranteed ticket sales. In the evaluation of the festival, it was suggested that in the future, additional incentives be introduced in the form of prizes for committed songs, related to specific anniversaries and events.[32] "Further efforts are needed to control the repertoire," we read in the conclusions.[33] In practice, this meant increased broadcasting of Soviet songs in the media, especially in programs for children and young people, the publication of new collections of these songs, more numerous recordings, and the publication of songs in the weeklies "Land of Councils" ("Kraj Rad") and "Friendship." For 1985, it was recommended that the programs of the festivals of songs commemorating the fortieth anniversary of the "victory over fascism" and the fortieth anniversary of the "return of the Western Lands" be included."[34]

= = = Festivals under supervision

Song festivals were a major logistical event for the authorities. They attracted thousands of people eager for music and a chance to meet their favorite artist. Moreover, during periods of socio-political crises, they created an opportunity to contest the system, both for performers and the audience. Hence, it was necessary to properly secure both the amphitheater and the material intended for broadcast on television.

30 = = AAN, sygn. LVI-1783, Assessment of the National Festival of Polish Song "Opole 1984", July 19, 1984, 1.

31 = = AAN, sygn. LVI-1736, Assessment of the 23rd competition and the 20th Zielona Góra FPR'84, Warszawa, April 1984, 10.

32 = = AAN, sygn. LVI-1736, 21.

33 = = AAN, sygn. LVI-1736, 22.

34 = = AAN, sygn. LVI-1783, Informational note on the meeting organized by the Culture Department of the Central Committee on December 12, 1984 regarding song festivals in Sopot, Opole, Mrągowo and Jazz Jamboree in Warsaw, December 12, 1984, 2.

The security plans for these song festivals were broadly similar and included a two-pronged approach of preventing political activities and hooligan misbehavior.[35] Festivals usually had their own Security Services, which were responsible for ticket control, seating arrangements in the amphitheater, and eliminating fake entry tickets or performers' entry cards. These services cooperated with the Citizens' Militia, whose tasks included ensuring security in the amphitheater and in the festival city, securing road and pedestrian traffic, safeguarding festival participants against theft, catering establishments reserved for festival participants, protecting equipment in the amphitheater and festival decorations located in the city, and eliminating the "local criminal element."[36] In addition, officers of the Security Service were engaged to counteract "hostile political activity"; they acted on the basis of directives from the relevant departments of the Ministry of Internal Affairs.[37] The scale of security for individual concerts was determined by who was performing. For example, based on rehearsals for the Opole festival in the 1970s, the following conclusions were drawn: "adults want to get to Irena Santor's recitals or wait for hours around the amphitheater. Therefore, we can assume that peace and order will reign at the performances. On the contrary, a lot of 'youth who don't shout' come to Maryla Rodowicz's rehearsals, who start noise and confusion."[38]

At the festival in Sopot, special interest was shown to citizens of Western countries. As part of preventive measures both in the preparatory period for the festival and during the event, the Citizens' Militia conducted reconnaissance of the gold and foreign currency traders' environment and their contacts with foreigners, as well as observed foreigners' accommodations "in order to establish their social and commercial contacts."[39] In 1973, the Security Service carried out an operational control of the German Federal Republic (fourteen people), Dutch (ten people), French (eight people) and Belgian (eight people) teams. The aim of these activities was to identify foreigners "taking advantage of their stay at the Festival for purposes that are detrimental to the interests of the Polish State or violating the applicable legal order," to reveal Poles who "use the above international event to establish contacts for hostile purposes," and to obtain information on

35 = = Brzechczyn, "Wokół 'piosenki'," 112-19; Bittner, *Piosenka w służbie*, 50–52; Lesiakowski, Perzyna, and Toborek, *Jarocin w obiektywie*.

36 = = AIPN BU, sygn. 1510/335, Diploma thesis entitled: Preparation of the Citizens' Militia to secure the FPP in Opole, Part-time Master's Degree Studies. Academy of Internal Affairs Institute of Public Order Warsaw 1978, 23.

37 = = AIPN BU, sygn. 1510/335, 24.

38 = = AIPN BU, sygn. 1510/335, 26-27.

39 = = AIPN BU, sygn. 1510/926, J. Nasiadko. Organization of the security of the MFP event in Sopot, master's thesis Part-time Master's Degree Studies. Academy of Internal Affairs Institute of Public Order Warsaw 1980, 85.

attempts to disrupt the festival through political and/or hooligan activities.[40] Operational activities revealed hostile activity by, among others, a journalist from the Erfen weekly "Bild am Sonntag" and a manager from the Netherlands; the latter asked a soldier on guard in front of a military unit in Gdańsk about a gas station.[41] Negative comments from festival participants about the course of the event and the jury's results were noted; for example, Belgian singer Henri Seroka "in the presence of other foreigners commented on the fact that he was not awarded the prize this year, preferring performers from the socialist camp."[42] In 1974, the "operational focus" was on the representatives of the Federal Republic of Germany, Great Britain, the Netherlands, and the USA.[43] The aim was to identify foreigners who, under the pretext of the festival, showed interest in matters unrelated to the event, as well as Poles trying to establish contacts with foreigners for hostile or personal purposes. The Security Service assessed the behavior of the Polish performers very negatively; according to them, performers used the festival "to seek excitement and entertainment. They drink a lot of alcohol and strive for maximum excess. [...] During the Festival, entire families with children and even dogs live in the „Grand Hotel."[44]

In the 1980s, public aversion to festivals in Zielona Góra and Kołobrzeg, identified with communist propaganda, increased. According to information from the Security Service, "Solidarity" in Zielona Góra intended to prevent the Soviet Song Festival in 1981. Solidarity demanded the disclosure of the costs of this festival, claiming that Poland could not afford such an event.[45] In February 1986, the Security Service noted the existence of an illegal youth group in Kołobrzeg, led by Jacek Borcz. The group planned to disrupt the course of the 1986 Soldier Song Festival by using tear gas and explosives in the amphitheater, as well as distributing leaflets in the units of the Polish People's Army stationed in Kołobrzeg.[46] These were supposed to be leaflets signed by the Freedom and Peace Movement,

40 = = AIPN Gd, sygn. 0046/350/20, Information on the results of operational control of participants of the XIII MFP in Sopot, September 8, 1973, prepared by Capt. W. Raniewicz, 293-94.

41 = = AIPN Gd, sygn. 0046/350/20, 297.

42 = = AIPN Gd, sygn. 0046/350/20, 300.

43 = = AIPN Gd, sygn. 0046/362 t. 29, Analysis of materials obtained during operational security of the XIV MFP, August 31, 1974, 3.

44 = = AIPN Gd, sygn. 0046/362 t. 29, 15.

45 = = AIPN BU, sygn. 0365/66 t. 3, Information from Department III of the Ministry of Internal Affairs regarding the socio-political situation in the country. Information regarding attempts by the MKZ "S" in Zielona Góra to interfere in the organization of this year's FPR, May 22, 1981, 38.

46 = = AIPN Sz, sygn. 00105/496, WUSW in Koszalin Emergency Department crypt. Kaktus, Operational report no. 25/86, February 18, 1986, 5.

which is why all contacts between Borcz and the Freedom and Peace Movement were monitored.[47] As a result of the actions of the Security Service, no distribution took place.[48] The following year, according to the Voivodeship Office of Internal Affairs in Gdańsk, activists of the Freedom and Peace Movement intended to come to Kołobrzeg to disrupt the festival. In fact, there was no record of their presence in Kołobrzeg during the event, nor of any actions by members of the Freedom and Peace Movement.[49] In 1988, members of the Freedom and Peace Movement had a more specific plan: a group of several dozen people were to enter the audience to ridicule the performers and the songs they were performing with their attire and behavior.[50] On July 4, 1988, four members of the Freedom and Peace Movement from Gdańsk, including Krzysztof Goliński and Klaudiusz Wesołek, came to Kołobrzeg, bringing with them one hundred and thirty copies of a poster, a stencil with unknown content, and paints. The poster they left behind, in A4 format, showed the head of the singer with a grenade in his mouth and the words "Kołobrzeg'88 Soldier's Song Festival." During their three-day stay in Kołobrzeg, the members of the Freedom and Peace Movement took several dozen photos of the amphitheater. Their visit was closely supervised, including by two secret collaborators nicknamed "Paszka" and "Amadeo." The aforementioned posters were seized by the Security Service.[51]

The level of surveillance of the rock festival in Jarocin was high, as recalled by many musicians, such as Tomasz Budzyński from the band Armia.[52] In the operational security plan for the Jarocin '86 Rock Musicians' Festival, the main goal was set to "Identify any harmful acts of a political nature."[53] The operational materials of the security apparatus concerning the course and organization of the Jarocin festival contain a lot of information about the opposition activities of rock performers and fans. The censored materials include, among others, publications

47 = = On the Freedom and Peace Movement, see: Anna Smółka-Gnauck, *Między wolnością a pokojem: zarys historii Ruchu "Wolność i Pokój"* (IPN, 2012); *WiPnięci: uczestnicy ruchu Wolność i Pokój o sobie* (Stowarzyszenie Wolnego Słowa, 2014); *and Maciej Wiśniewski, Ruch "Wolność i Pokój" w Szczecinie w latach 1985–1992* (Europejskie Centrum Solidarności, 2014).

48 = = AIPN Sz, sygn. 00105/496, WUSW in Koszalin Emergency Department crypt. Kaktus, Operational report no. 25/86, Supplementary report no.104/86, July 17, 1986, 12.

49 = = AIPN Sz, sygn. 00105/496, WUSW in Koszalin Emergency Department crypt. Kaktus, Operational report no. 25/86, Supplementary report no.100/87, July 14, 1987, 23.

50 = = AIPN Sz, sygn. 00105/496, WUSW in Koszalin Emergency Department crypt. Kaktus, Operational report no. 25/86, Supplementary report no. 78/88, June 9, 1988, 40.

51 = = AIPN Sz, sygn. 00105/496, WUSW in Koszalin Emergency Department crypt. Kaktus, Operational report no. 25/86, Supplementary report no. 96/88, July 19, 1988, 42.

52 = = Testimony of Tomasz Budzyński in Mikolaj Lizut, *PRL—punk rock later* (Sic!, 2003), 73.

53 = = FMR Jarocin ,86 Operational Security Plan, cited in Lesiakowski, Perzyna, and Toborek, *Jarocin w obiektywie,* 135.

and the content of bands' performances[54] and leaflets signed by the Alternative Society Movement.[55] Leaflet campaigns, selling posters with a satirical depiction of Lenin, and even stamping a seal with a drawing of a dragon devouring a sheep and the inscription "Jaruzelski—the Wawel Dragon," in the light of the services' report, only gave the festival "a certain flavor and color"[56]. An important element of observing the Jarocin festival was to identify youth subcultures and their possible contacts with opposition organizations. The music presented at the Jarocin festival was outside the sphere of interest of the security apparatus.

= = = Festivals and television

In the 1970s, song festival rebroadcasts were one of the most important entertainment programs. The form of supervision over song festivals was rationed television broadcasting. Only some festival concerts were broadcast; the rest were presented at a later date and usually in a reduced version, e.g., the festival in Opole in 1986.[57] This was a form of censorship, but it was partly due to the limitations of broadcasting time. Most Poles watched festivals on television, so their form was subordinated to the rules of the television program. Therefore, the task of stimulating and promoting good songs was relegated to the background, because the priority was the visual spectacle of the festival concert. In 1972, the Opole festival hosted twelve concerts and recitals, but television showed only four of them. In 1973, Opole was broadcast with a one-day delay and only in fragments. The television broadcast therefore had little in common with Polish popular music. In 1979, the Boney M. band performed at the Sopot festival and sang the song "Rasputin." Television broadcast the concert a day later, cutting the song. In June 1980 in Opole, the Tey cabaret presented the program "Store Backroom" ("*S tyłu sklepu*"). It was not shown on television until October 1980.

Control over the festival's television coverage served to eliminate undesirable behavior by performers and audiences, and it allowed for the creation of a beautiful, joyful, colorful world of song, to the rhythm of which the audience swayed in amphitheaters in Opole, Sopot, Kołobrzeg, and Zielona Góra. This festival illusion was intended to distract attention from social, political, and economic issues.

Retransmissions of festival concerts were also subject to the rigors of the television program in terms of the performer's attire. The order for on-stage attire

54 = = Lesiakowski, Perzyna, and Toborek, *Jarocin w obiektywie,* 135.

55 = = Note on the arrest of a leaflet distributor during the FMR Jarocin ,85, cited in Lesiakowski, Perzyna, and Toborek, *Jarocin w obiektywie,* 129.

56 = = Report from the XX FMR Jarocin ,89, cited in Lesiakowski, Perzyna, and Toborek, Jarocin w obiektywie, 203.

57 = = AAN, sygn. LVI-1748, Assessment of the XXIII KFPP Opole'86 dated 21 October 1986, prepared by the KW PZPR in Opole, 2.

of August 10, 1966 specified that such attire consisted of black trousers, a black elastic turtleneck, and gaiters.[58] The party appealed for the enforcement of these regulations. "Strengthen and consistently enforce the requirements for ensembles and soloists appearing in the TV program in terms of their artistic level and personal appearance (clothing, hair, etc.). Ensembles and soloists who do not meet or comply with these requirements may not appear in the TV program," stated the Culture Department of the Central Committee.[59]

Particular attention was paid to the long hair of members of big-beat bands. In connection with the festival in Opole in 1968, the slogan "Not the hair, but the voice" was promoted.[60] Tadeusz Nalepa from the band Breakout had to tie his hair up so that the band could perform at the festival in Opole. On the other hand, it was absurd that having a certificate of employment as a musician in a stage band allowed having long hair. It was treated as an element of the stage image. Thanks to this loophole, some hippies avoided having their hair cut.[61]

= = = Why do we need song festivals?

In the People's Republic of Poland, song festivals were assigned a role that was inadequate to their artistic value. The number of articles about Opole or Sopot had no bearing on the level of the songs presented, and the numerous critical voices about songs, often winners of festival competitions, fell on deaf ears. The publicist Krzysztof T. Toeplitz rightly noted that "in normal societies, song festivals are appropriate topics for people from the entertainment industry, boarders and domestic help, and I have never heard in Italy, France or America, anyone seriously discussing, for example, the festival in San Remo."[62] In the Polish People's Republic, on the other hand, one could read about song festivals in almost every periodical. They were also an important element of the cultural policy of the Polish United Workers' Party, which was eagerly pursued during the so-called Polish months.

The abundance of song festivals did not go hand in hand with their quality. Song festivals were often treated solely as an element of summer entertainment. Summer song festivals were therefore a part of not only the entertainment industry, but also the tourism industry—and sometimes with a predominance of the latter. In terms of song promotion, the festivals left much to be desired. Opole was a "

58 = = Dariusz Michalski, *Trzysta tysięcy gitar nam gra, czyli historia polskiej muzyki rozrywkowej (lata 1958–1973)* (Iskry, 2014), 186.

59 = = AAN, sygn. 237/XVIII-308, Note on the Polish Radio Music Program and the Polish Song Festival in Opole, July 15, 1970, 159.

60 = = Tracz, *Hippiesi*, 179.

61 = = Tracz, *Hippiesi*, 185.

62 = = J. Neuberg, "Festiwal, czyli gra pozorów," *Opole*, no. 10, (1977): 30.

factory of illusions for the audience," Kołobrzeg was less popular than expected, and Sopot was subordinated to television broadcasting. Festivals were avoided by big stars of the stage, partly because they were afraid of comparisons and because it was difficult to break through among the many festival events. In turn, the lack of the biggest celebrities resulted in smaller audiences. Moreover, with the development of mass media, the role of festivals in promoting young talents decreased. An expensive, several-day song marathon lost out to a television revue, recital, or show-type spectacle. Festivals stopped promoting music; they became a vanity fair, a social gathering, a tangle of interests, a fashion show.

Song festivals, especially those for amateurs such as the Festival of Soviet Song in Zielona Góra, did not fulfill the role of promoting young talents. They failed to promote the songs. "Over time, they became an end in themselves instead of a means of stimulating the development of Polish song; they were only a review of the state of possessions," noted the 1982 report on the state of the stage.[63]

= = = Conclusions

The influence of the Polish United Workers' Party on popular music was definitely weaker than that of the communist parties in the USSR and other countries of the bloc. But the actions of the Polish People's Republic authorities were not as restrictive as those of the Soviet Union. This can be seen in many areas of the entertainment industry. Opening the phonographic market to Polish companies, as well as tolerating illegal production of audio postcards and audio cassettes, was a defeat for the state monopoly in this area: a defeat that the party admitted to by accepting the broadcasting of songs released by private phonographic companies on the radio.

Artists performed in official concerts, and in the circulation organized by state institutions, they were subject to censorship—but this was not enough. The authorities managed to institutionalize entertainment, but they did not take control over the repertoire. On the one hand, the nationalization of publishing houses, editorial offices, galleries, etc., gave the Polish United Workers' Party control over culture, but supervision alone was not enough to create the taste of Poles. Songs that did not necessarily follow the party's guidelines gained popularity. Two songs from 1981 are an example of this: "When Poland Will Give Us an Order" ("*Gdy Polska da nam rozkaz*") from the Soldiers' Song Festival in Kołobrzeg and "Let Poland Be Poland" ("Żeby *Polska była Polską*") from the Polish Song Festival in Opole. Poles, contrary to the party's expectations, chose the latter song. They sang it during strikes, and after martial law was introduced on December 13, 1981, this song became one of the most important protest songs.

In addition, the multitude of cultural institutions and the dispersion of the decision-making process introduced chaos into the system, effectively reducing its

63 = = AAN, sygn. LVI-1783, Report on the state of the stage, May 1982, 7.

effectiveness. In terms of staging, there was also a dispersion of responsibility; no one felt responsible for entertainment, and statements such as "I didn't see the program, so I don't know what they showed there" were not isolated.[64] In the history of song festivals, we can find frequent absences of responsible parties: for the lack of hits, e.g., the festival in Kołobrzeg, or for the appearance of an anti-state song at the festival in Opole, approved by the provincial censorship office without the knowledge of the central office.

After the Third Plenum of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party in 1955, Jerzy Putrament, a writer and publicist, stated that "we can prevent the publication of bad works, but we cannot order the creation of good works."[65] Administrative control of creativity—i.e., imposing the content of novels, films or songs—was impossible. Despite this, the authorities made attempts to control creativity, such as through competitions for a song on a specific topic, but the effects of these did not occupy a significant place in popular culture. Among the plebiscites for musical hits from the Polish People's Republic, we will not find songs written on the occasion of, for example, the fortieth anniversary of the Polish People's Republic, nor will we find soldiers' songs.

Controlling culture largely came down to administration. Various events, reviews, and competitions were organized, creating the appearance of the effectiveness of the Polish United Workers' Party's influence in the area of mass culture. Imposing themes resulted in dualism; alongside mass, Soviet, soldier, and engaged songs, there were ordinary pop songs. This raises questions about the possibilities of controlling culture, which Włodzimierz Sokorski, the Minister of Culture and Art in the 1950s, himself questioned. The degree of politicization of pop music was much weaker than, for example, literature. This was the result of the weak influence of the government apparatus on the musical environment and the lack of involvement of authors and composers in implementing the cultural guidelines of the party, which the Department of Culture of the Central Committee considered its failure: first in the mid-fifties, and again in the last decade of the Polish People's Republic. Attempts made in the second half of the eighties to establish a new body for entertainment arts, composed of party members representing organizations and institutions involved in entertainment activities instead of the previous non-party artists, were a de facto admission by the Culture Department of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party of a mistaken policy towards entertainment music.

64 = = AAN, sygn. 237/XVIII/192, Comment on the Nine Best Program, November 15, 1962.

65 = = Włodzimierz Kaczocha, *Polityka kulturalna PPR–PZPR. Zarys problematyki polityki kulturalnej w okrsie 1942–1977* (Centralny Ośrodek Metodyki Upowszechniania Kultury, 1981), 99.

The four main song festivals discussed here were one of the most important events in the entertainment calendar. Festivals in Opole and Sopot in the '60s and '70s attracted popular performers and crowds of the audience. People were waiting not only for new hits, but also for the creations of singers. It was at the festival in Opole that Halina Frąckowiak appeared in a mini skirt, and in Sopot Maryla Rodowicz launched the famous banana skirt (*bananówa*). The year 1989 reaffirmed the importance of song festivals. The organizers had to adapt to a new political and economic reality. On the one hand, new sources of financing had to be sought, while on the other, a change in their formula was necessary. Only the festivals in Opole and Sopot succeeded. Kołobrzeg and Zielona Góra, burdened with propaganda functions, did not survive the confrontation with the free market. Their example shows that the military and Soviet songs promoted at the request of the authorities simply did not appeal to the taste of Poles. In this area, as elsewhere, the party suffered a defeat.

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/// Fear of the Folk Dance Houses:

State Security Surveillance of the Magyar Nóta Scene and the Hungarian Folk Music Revival in the 1970s[1]

Abstract

In the early 1970s, following in the footsteps of great twentieth-century Hungarian composers Béla Bartók and Zoltán Kodály, young musicians rediscovered, relearned, and handed down to their generation the treasures of traditional Hungarian folk culture: music and dance. The principal homes of this modern urban folk revival were the folk dancing houses. Here, young communities formed around the pioneering bands that regularly travelled to neighboring countries—particularly Romania, home to a million-strong Hungarian minority—to learn musical practices and collect original music and dances from the villages. While the press in Hungary greeted this grassroots movement with sympathy, the authorities watched this subculture with suspicion, seeing the dance houses as hotbeds of nationalism because the people gathering there worried about the rights of the Hungarian minority living under constant threat in Romania. According to the political police, this attitude—especially if coupled with the so-called *magyarkodás*, i.e., an exaggerated show up of Hungarianness—went against the official policy of socialist internationalism. The article discusses how state security tried to disrupt the folk revival movement led by groups like Sebő, Muzsikás and Vízöntő.

Halászás (Fishing): in state security parlance, it meant randomly selecting items from a large mass of mail. A private letter, confiscated during such an inspection in

1 = = Excerpt from Tamás Szőnyei, *Popular Music and the Secret Service in Hungary 1945–1990* (Routledge, forthcoming).

1976, led to a year-and-a-half-long confidential investigation against a sixty-six-year-old retired man. An ardent fan of the genre of *Magyar nóta,* Károly Szénási lamented in this letter to a friend that several old Hungarian towns now belonged to other countries and that the nation had degenerated under the socialist system. Since the nineteenth century, *Magyar nóta* has been an enduringly popular genre of folkish songs, whose composers—unlike those in the genre of folk music—are usually known. *Magyar nóta,* traditionally accompanied by Gipsy bands, provides singalongs to drink and dance, and it expresses much: personal or political emotions, love and joy, sorrow and pain, patriotism or chauvinism.[2] Szénási organized *Magyar nóta* events in Békés County in the southern part of Hungary, and only this music relieved his sorrow, at least temporarily. Since he had urged his friend to burn the letter, the political police could not use it in an open procedure because doing so would have exposed their interception. But following this "fishing" operation, they initiated targeted checks of his correspondence and instructed informants to discover whether his pain at the truncation of Hungary and the suppression of national feelings had led him to commit a political crime. Did his *Magyar nóta* nights aim to spread nationalism in addition to providing entertainment? The documents from the confidential investigation show that the secret police, in the name of combating nationalism, devoted a great deal of energy to uncovering actions that now seem completely innocuous. His case unfolds in a 160-page dossier entitled "Jutasi."[3]

After 1963, the political or secret police—in other words, the state security or state security service—was officially called the Main Directorate III within the Ministry of the Interior. One of its units, Directorate III/III, was responsible for domestic counterintelligence. Within its organization, separate departments handled church affairs, youth, culture, political opposition, and individuals deemed socially dangerous. Popular music-related cases—including the ones described here—typically fell under the purview of domestic counterintelligence. Its ultimate goal was to defend and preserve the system based on the monopolistic power of the ruling communist party. Following party directives, it employed a network of covert informants and technical surveillance methods to gather information and, whenever any activity deemed dangerous was detected, to intervene; this in turn disrupted those circles—including music lovers and bands—considered hostile to the system. This explains why the secret police took action in the music-related cases described below.

2 = = Lynn M. Hooker, "From Café to Stage to Museum: The Transformation of the Gypsy Music Industry in 20th Century Hungary," *Hungarian Studies* vol. 29, nos. 1–2 (2015): 121–34.

3 = = ÁBTL 3.1.5. O-16942 "Jutasi" The story under the next subheading is based upon the documents in this object dossier between December 1976 and May 1978.

Károly Szénási studied in a military school and, during the Second World War, he fought was on the Soviet front.[4] Later, he served in the logistics branch of the Hungarian People's Army *(Magyar Néphadsereg)* until his retirement in 1967, in the course of which he earned several medals. He lived in Békéscsaba, a medium-sized town near the Romanian border. The two informants assigned to him were slightly younger, but still over fifty, ensuring that a generation gap would not cause problems in gaining his trust. The person code-named "Kiss István" filled over 600 pages with his reports between 1959 and 1981. For his part, "Forgács Béla" amassed about 550 pages from 1967 to 1985. Both reported mainly on Békés County cultural life, including accounts of one another.[5] "Kiss István" ran the local film library, while "Forgács Béla" was a librarian and a photographer, who thus could be present at a wide range of events without attracting attention.[6]

"Kiss István" organized cultural events, so it was his task to learn about Szénási's *Magyar nóta* evenings. He discovered that Szénási attended the *Magyar Nóta* Collectors Club's yearly meetings in the ironworker union's Csili Cultural Centre (officially named *Pesterzsébeti Vasas Művelődési Otthon)* in Budapest. "Forgács Béla" lived near the targeted individual and was involved in folk literature, folk customs and music, so he gained his trust as a fellow collector. He reported that Károly Szénási collected songs in three large, red booklets, containing about 3,000 items of sheet music as well as a list of composers and lyricists. He was in correspondence, among others, with Dezső Nótás Nagy, a composer and retired school principal living in Miskolc, but he had pen pals in neighboring countries as well.[7] According to "Kiss István," Szénási "lamented" over the lost territories and the ethnic Hungarians living over the borders, as well as over the fact that the youth preferred beat music over *Magyar nóta.* The informant once saw Szénási dressed in a festive attire while watching a *nóta* show on TV, as if he were in a concert hall, with the "reverence" of "a priest at mass."

"Kiss István" reported that Szénási had written letters to the music editors and the deputy president of Hungarian Radio, in which he complained about the marginalization of *Magyar nóta.* The informant handed the letters over to the case officer, who placed copies of them in the file. Based on his own measurements, Szénási provided figures to prove that the airtime of *Magyar nóta* had di-

4 = = Károly Szénási (1912–1984).

5 = = Since code names in quotation marks are not real names, I adhere to Hungarian conventions: giving the family name first, followed by the personal name. This is as opposed to real names, where I follow international conventions.

6 = = According to ÁBTL 2.2.2. "Network registry of the state security's secret collaborators," the code names "Kiss István" and "Forgács Béla" correspond to László Horváth and Ferenc Balogh, respectively.

7 = = Dezső Nótás Nagy (1903–1979).

minished compared to that of beat music, and he followed these up with "provocative" questions. "Are the kitschy music products imported from America not harmful to the morals of the youth? Or are these shows representing the true socialist culture? Are *Magyar nóta* and folk songs just so unnecessarily bad? If they persecute *Magyar nóta,* why is it used to please foreign delegations and guests and not beat music?" On behalf of thousands of nóta-loving people, he asked for an increase in the airtime of *nóta* during the day instead of late at night. He also had an odd request: that they eliminate the "unnecessary and long" clarinet solos.

The issue of the clarinet solos could have been the point where the secret police interrupted their investigation. But they went ahead. They came into possession of a petition sent by Dezső Nótás Nagy, mentioned above, to the Music Fund of the Hungarian People's Republic in defense of the *Magyar nóta* genre. It totaled nine typed pages—thirty-eight separate points—all in the name of *nóta*-lovers. They also learned that elderly nóta-lovers were collecting signatures to strengthen their demands, which were addressed to the *Magyar Nóta és Műdal Bizottság* (Committee for Folkish Songs) and *Zeneműkiadó* (Editio Musica). State security did not consider this correspondence illegal. However, they deemed the collection of signatures and the organization of social gatherings of *nóta*-lovers to be "stirring up nationalism," especially because Károly Szénási had already disclosed his "anti-Soviet and nationalist leanings" to the informants.

So, they continued to monitor him until his Achilles' heel was found. Although he organized only three or four *nóta* nights a year—purely out of devotion to the genre, and without earning any income from it—he did not have a license to do so. Just as Al Capone, the Chicago mafia boss of the Prohibition Era, was put behind bars for tax evasion, in 1978 Károly Szénási was summoned before the police on the pretext of unlicensed *nóta* nights. Of course, prison was not a real threat. However, the proceedings themselves must have been a shock; he was questioned about his "politically objectionable" views expressed in the intercepted letter, and even the addressee was also interrogated. Several of his acquaintances were subjected to "educational" talks in their homes by the police. Károly Szénási was cautioned to prevent him from committing a future offence. The venues in Békés County where he staged *nóta* music nights were notified that he had no license to do so, and the county council's department of culture was asked to step up their control over the organization of such shows.[8]

= = = Problems with Nationalism

The secret police investigated and disrupted the activities of the retired *nóta*-lover as part of the fight against nationalism, in accordance with the 1970 Order

8 = = Local councils responsible for local public services, including health, education, culture, etc., were under party control and closely connected with the local police bodies.

No. 0022 of the Minister of the Interior, which defined the tasks of the state security services in cultural life.[9] The experiences of implementing this order were examined three years later. According to the results of the examinations, in 1972 they filed for action in 120 cases against 250 persons, mainly for incitement against the regime on so-called nationalist grounds. In 1973, around ninety individuals belonged to the nationalist category. They were all under "close control" due to suspected hostile activities.[10]

Following a 1971 party decision to pass legislation on youth, the Minister of the Interior issued a directive on the tasks of state security in youth protection. According to this 1973 document, nationalism was exerting considerable influence on youth, spurring them to illicit demonstrations. Consequently, the main task became prevention. Hostile elements had to be detected in universities, colleges, high schools, and "legal, semi-legal and illegal youth clubs," where state security considered it necessary to strengthen its operational position by increasing the number of informers.[11]

The phenomenon of nationalism influencing youth and emerging in the clubs meant that, besides beat and rock, state security now had to monitor folk music, too. In the early '70s, following in the footsteps of great twentieth-century composers like Béla Bartók, Zoltán Kodály and other folklorists who made field recordings of peasant music, young musicians rediscovered, relearned, and handed down to their own generation the treasures of traditional Hungarian folk culture, music and dance.[12] The principal sites of this modern urban folk revival were the folk dance houses. Here, young communities formed around the pioneering bands that regularly travelled to neighboring countries—particularly to Transylvania in Romania, with its 1.5 million-strong ethnic Hungarian minority—to learn musical practices and collect original music and dances from the villages. The press in Hungary greeted this grassroots movement with sympathy. However, the authorities watched this subculture with suspicion, seeing the *táncház* (dance house) as a hotbed of nationalism because people gathering there cared about the rights of Hungarian minorities under constant threat in Romania and the Slovakian part of Czechoslovakia. According to the secret police, it constituted jingoism and *magyarkodás* (an exaggerated show of Hungarianness), which went against the official policy of socialist internationalism.

9 = = ÁBTL 4.2. 10-21/22/1970. Order No. 0022 of the Minister of the Interior, September 25, 1970.

10 = = ÁBTL 1.11.1. 45-13-4/1973. Report on the implementation of Ministerial Order No 0022/1970 on the tasks of operational work against hostile activities in the cultural field, March 13, 1973.

11 = = ÁBTL 4.2. 10-22/16/1973. Directive of the Minister of the Interior, July 4, 1973.

12 = = Béla Bartók (1881–1945); Zoltán Kodály (1882–1967).

The folk music revival started with a television talent contest in 1969–70. Although Ferenc Sebő and Béla Halmos, a duo of students from the university of technology, did not make it to the finals, Halmos won a prize as a solo singer.[13] After graduation, music became their profession. They set classical and contemporary poems to music and were invited to the Twenty-Fifth Theatre, while Sebő played a modern-day bard with a guitar in feature films as well.[14] The Sebő-Halmos ensemble held the first dance house with four folk dance groups in the club of a Budapest bookshop. A "professional" event without an audience, this Saturday evening in May 1972 marked a milestone of the modern urban folk revival; it introduced the notion of dance house, borrowed from the Hungarian community in the village of Szék in Transylvania (Sic in Romanian), as a pure alternative to the fiery folklore shows aimed at entertaining tourists. Historically, dance houses offered space and time for unmarried young men and women to meet and dance. Their revival thus meant the survival of this tradition and the expression of national identity.[15]

In November 1972, the agent code-named "Tatár Imre" was tasked with listening to a lecture on the prehistory of the Hungarians at the Institute of Folk Art in Budapest. He guessed that most of the audience were young intellectuals, seemingly knowing each other and being passionate about the subject. Poet and publicist Sándor Csoóri took active part in the debate: warning that folk traditions were in danger, calling their preservation crucial, and emphasizing the

13 = = Ferenc Sebő (1947–); Béla Halmos (1946–2013).

14 = = Még kér a nép [The People Still Ask], directed by Miklós Jancsó (1971) https://filmio.hu/film/meg-ker-a-nep-11136965; Fotográfia [Photography], directed by Pál Zolnay (1972) https://filmio.hu/film/fotografia-10833006

15 = = Jenő Széll, ed., *Húzzad, húzzad, muzsikásom… A hangszeres népzene feltámadása [Play it, Play it, my Musician… The revival of instrumental folk music]* (Múzsák, 198); András Bankó, *Muzsikás évtizedek (életmorzsalékok és sorstöredékek) [Muzsikás Decades (Fragments of Life and Fate)]* (Kós Károly Alapítvány, 1994); Simon Broughton, "A Musical Mother Tongue. Hungary's Magyar and Gipsy Traditions," in *World Music: The Rough Guide*, ed. Simon Broughton, Mark Ellingham, David Muddyman, and Richard Trillo (Rough Guides Ltd., 1994); Béla Halmos, "The Táncház Movement," *Hungarian Heritage* vol. 1, nos. 1–2 (2000): 29–40; György Martin, "Discovering Szék," *Hungarian Heritage* vol. 2, nos. 1–2 (2001): 31–40; László Távolodó Marton, *Érintés (Világzeném) [Touch (My World Music)]* (Etnofon, 2001), 209–270; Ferenc Sebő, ed., *A táncház sajtója. Válogatás a korai évekből 1968–1972 [Dance House in the Press. A Selection of the Early Years 1968–1972]* (Hagyományok Háza, 2007); Balázs Balogh and Ágnes Fülemüle, "Cultural Alternatives, Youth and Grassroots Resistance in Socialist Hungary—The Folk Dance and Music Revival," *Hungarian Studies* vol. 22, nos. 1–2 (2008): 41–60; Béla Jávorszky, *A magyar folk története. Népzene, táncház, világzene [The History of Hungarian Folk: Folk Music, Dance House, World Music]* (Kossuth, 2013); Colin Quigley, "The Hungarian Dance House Movement and Revival of Transylvanian String Bands," in *The Oxford Handbook of Music Revival*, ed. Caroline Bithell and Juniper Hill (Oxford University Press, 2014).

importance of freedom of thought and expression.[16] Plunging into political activities in the '70s, Csoóri became a target of surveillance. He was present at the birth of the Budapest dance houses and was also close to the folk revival due to family reasons, his wife being a folk singer and his son a founding member of the Muzsikás ensemble. The handler of "Tatár Imre" assessed that, although the efforts to "save" folk culture were acceptable, „nationalist sentiments were systematically aroused" and the 150- to 180-strong audience was susceptible to them.[17]

Another informant, code-named "Vitéz," was also dispatched to the same event by the same state security officer. "Vitéz" had taken part in the 1956 uprising and had subsequently given information about his fellow prisoners. Following his release, he filled some 3,000 pages from 1962 to 1980. A psychologist, he could inspire confidence in himself and thus form an opinion about the personality of his targets. Upon visiting several events, he noted the audience was passionately interested in folk traditions. He made friends with the main organizer, József Zelnik, a university student who revealed his plans, and a young folk singer, Laura Faragó, one of the 1970 TV contest winners who enhanced the emotional impact of poetry readings by singing folk ballads.[18] "Vitéz" stressed the necessity of preventing the movement from unfolding and suggested monitoring the organizers, the audience, and the performers.[19]

State security took pains to prevent the spread of the folk revival, the new dance houses, and programs of (particularly Transylvanian) folk culture in clubs because of their inherent oppositional stance. "Chauvinist, nationalist gatherings are taking place under the guise of folk dancing," reported "Hutter Antal" in the summer of 1973. According to him, the Sebő-Halmos ensemble called the dance house the "only way to oppose."[20] However, observing the folk revival and the dance houses was only the immediate goal. It was not the music or dancing that interested state security, but the people formulating ideas with alternatives to the official political line of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party *(Magyar Szocialista*

16 = = ÁBTL 3.1.2. M-41618, 198–200, report, November 20, 1972. Sándor Csoóri (1930–2016).

17 = = In the secret services, handlers were—and still are—the case officers responsible for managing agents (in other words, informants, sources, or network individuals) in clandestine operations. It was—and is—their task to study prospective recruits and then train them, determine their assignments and behavioral line, keep them under control, and double-check the information furnished by them.

18 = = József Zelnik (1949–); Laura Faragó (1949–).

19 = = ÁBTL 3.1.2. M-39112/3, 247–257, 272–274 and 301–302, reports of February 15 and 19, March 1, and April 28, 1973. According to the ÁBTL 2.2.2. Network registry, the code name corresponds to János Virágh.

20 = = ÁBTL 3.1.2. M-37604, 177, July 5, 1973. According to the ÁBTL 2.2.2. Network registry, the code name refers to András Herczeg. Recruited in 1959 while in prison at the age of 24, he provided information on inmates, including prominent '56ers. Released in 1963, he filled two volumes with reports until 1978.

Munkáspárt). The longer-term plan was to get close to the middle-aged intellectuals, writers, filmmakers, historians, journal editors, and university professors interested in folk culture—i.e., the leading figures of the nationalist opposition—through these young folk enthusiasts. By penetrating the center of this circle through informers, they aimed to prevent the spread of nationalist ideology and its development into political activity such as the revival of the *népi-nemzeti* (folkish, populist, nationalist or *Narodnik* in Russian) movement, which had played a significant role in twentieth-century Hungarian cultural and political history.[21]

"Kárpáti Emese" informed on the changes to the line-ups of seminal folk ensembles Orfeo, Vízöntő, and Kolinda and the successful Belgian and French tour of the latter.[22] These groups were seeking new directions, with their own compositions turning towards the sounds of the neighboring countries and the Balkans; indeed, they were thus playing world music years before the term was even coined. Evaluating a 1972 report by "Kárpáti Emese," the handler (i.e., the contact officer) noted that the members of the Orfeo theatre and music groups were under surveillance in the *Közösség* and *Subások* cases. *"Közösség"* ("Community") were left-wing artists experimenting with a communal lifestyle. *Suba* is an ancient Hungarian garment: a wide sheepskin coat, in which shepherds out in the fields did not freeze, even in winter. Thus, *"Subások"* refers to "Those Wearing Sheepskin Coats." These words were how state security codenamed the confidential investigation against the luminaries of the so-called populist-nationalist intelligentsia. The resulting observational material of the so-called nationalist opposition between 1973 and 1989 runs to 1,500 pages in the five volumes of the operational dossier.[23]

In 1977, state security once again assessed the implementation of the 1970 Ministerial Order No. 0022. They established that attacks from nationalist political platforms had particularly intensified after 1974. The nationalist opposition described the Party's cultural policy as anti-national; in response, rather than internationalism they sought to nourish a "counter-culture" aimed at cultivating

21 = = Gyula Borbándi, *A magyar népi mozgalom története [The History of the Hungarian Populist Movement]* (Püski, 1983); István Papp, *A magyar népi mozgalom története 1920–1990 [The History of the Hungarian Populist Movement 1920–1990].* Jaffa, 2012.

22 = = ÁBTL 3.1.2. M-38310, 92–93, 102–103, 129–130 and 138–141, reports of September 27, 1973, January 18, 1974, and February 6 and March 26, 1976. The reports listed Kiss Ferenc, Jr., János Vas, Ágnes Zsigmondi, Ágnes Kamondy, Iván Lantos, and Péter Dabasi as band members. According to the ÁBTL 2.2.2. Network registry, the codename corresponds to draughtsman Erzsébet Szászai, recruited in 1971 at the age of 21.

23 = = Tamás Szőnyei, *Titkos írás. Állambiztonsági szolgálat és irodalmi élet 1956–1990 1–2 [Secret Writing: State Security Service and Literary Life 1956–1990, vol. 1–2],* vol. 2 (Noran Könyvesház, 2012), 551–728; ÁBTL 3.1.5. O-19783/1–5. The main target of the file was literary historian Mihály Ilia (1934–), professor at the University of Szeged and one-time editor of a journal, *Tiszatáj.*

Hungarian national traditions, sometimes with an anti-Semitic tinge and indirectly linked to the idea of border revision.[24] The interest in folk art did not automatically go hand in hand with anti-Semitism, but the fact is that it has surfaced from time to time in Hungary.

= = = Without Chair and Piano

In May 1973, fresh recruit "Segesvári Zsolt" was dispatched to the dance house at the House of Culture *(Fővárosi Művelődési Ház,* FMH*)* to look around and, if required for further visits, become a club member. On the second occasion—the last before the summer break—there was a large crowd; instruction in the form of circle dancing was offered, while the Sebő-Halmos ensemble performed on stage. During the intermission, a photographer projected slides, commenting on the carved wooden buildings and wedding dances in Transylvania. Afterwards, another band played, and the audience sang along and danced until 10 pm. The informant reported a friendly atmosphere, with no political comments. In June, he was sent to the Kassák Club—named after avant-garde giant Lajos Kassák—but there, too, it was summer break.[25]

The folk revival gained momentum in 1973–74. Though Sebő and Halmos spent half a year in Japan playing in a restaurant, new bands formed in Budapest (including Muzsikás), dance houses started (in FMH, Kassák), and several clubs offered folk music and poems set to music. Ten years earlier, beat music spread like wildfire in clubs like those mentioned, playing a pivotal role in the life of youth communities by providing a public space for culture and entertainment.[26] Now, it was the folk scene that state security had to watch out for. The differences between the two genres lay not only in sound volume and crowd size (with folk being essentially acoustic and appealing to a narrower audience), but also that folk constituted a risk factor due to its supposed nationalism and association with older intellectuals. Thus, several informants were dispatched to venues with folk music, foremost of which was the Kassák Club, hosted by the Sebő-Halmos ensemble. As it was located in the Zugló district, state security christened their case "Zuglói."

24 = = ÁBTL 1.11.1. 45-13-3/1977. Assessing the implementation of Ministerial Order No 0022/1970 on the operational tasks against hostile activities in the cultural field, March 15, 1977.

25 = = ÁBTL 3.1.2. M-37911, 11–16 and 25–29, reports of May 21, 23, and 29 and June 27, 1973. According to the ÁBTL 2.2.2. Network registry, the real name of "Segesvári Zsolt" was István Sárosi. He was studying at a maritime vocational school when he was recruited in 1973 at the age of 19, based on politically-compromising data. Lajos Kassák (1887–1967).

26 = = For the historical role and current fate of local cultural and community centers in Budapest, see Andreas Fogarasi, *Kultur und Freizeit [Culture and Leisure]: Hungarian Pavilion, Giardini di Castello, Venice, 52nd International Art Exhibition, La Biennale di Venezia*, ed. Katalin Timár (Walther König, 2007).

Another regular venue was the Bem Club. It opened in 1966 on the ground floor of a former aristocratic family palace on the Bem quay, named after a Polish general of the 1848–49 war of independence. The club's legendary status was established by bands such as Kex, Mini, Sakk-Matt, Syrius and Tolcsvay, all of them securing their place in Hungarian rock history during the late 1960s and the 1970s. In September 1974, Ferenc Sebő gave a lecture there on folk tradition. Informant "Forgó" was often sent to houses of culture, so it was just one of his many tasks between 1971 and 1985. According to his report, Sebő saw folk arts as a basis from which, by rejecting mysticism and nostalgia, a modern art form could be created in music that would even address the issues of the day.[27] In October, "Pier" had to go to the Kassák Club for a Sebő-Halmos evening. The informant struggled to describe the music and the dances; nevertheless, his handler, a lieutenant, was satisfied with his approximations. The lieutenant's superior, a major, sternly stated, "We are not interested in the style of music, but in the words coming with it"—namely, the political opinions.[28]

In December 1974, "Liliom" and "Tompa" were sent to the Kassák. Their accounts confirmed and complemented each other. Both reported a discussion with a literary history professor after the dance. Christmas was approaching, yet "Liliom" was surprised to hear traditional church carols and witness a nativity play. She was also surprised to notice how many people "worshipped Transylvania." The handler noted that neither the carol *"Mennyből az angyal"* ("Angel from Heaven") nor the nativity play were in accordance with official cultural policy.[29]

The "Zuglói" case does not have a file in the ÁBTL archives. If an object dossier existed, it would contain evaluations of information, operational plans, and photos taken at the Sebő dance house. Without it, we can only reconstruct the story from work dossiers of informants and recollections—as fragmentary a source base as can be imagined. In February 1975, "Tompa" and "Firenze"—the latter recruited specifically for the "Zuglói" case—met conspiratorially in an apartment to identify individual persons in photos. They could identify some of the club members and guests by name, while others they knew only by sight. For instance, they could determine that some were members of a folk dance group, while others were present at every event; this group took part in discussions in the library,

27 = = ÁBTL 3.1.2. M-40723, 127–129, report of September 26, 1974. According to the ÁBTL 2.2.2. Network registry, the code name refers to draughtsman István Fülöp, recruited in 1971 at the age of 20.

28 = = ÁBTL 3.1.2. M-37720, 270–274, report of October 31, 1974. According to the ÁBTL 2.2.2. Network registry, the code name corresponds to technical editor Péter Scheer, who collaborated with state security between 1969 and 1978.

29 = = ÁBTL 3.1.2. M-36931, 106–109, report of January 13, 1975. ÁBTL 3.1.2. M-36848, 24–28, reports of December 23, 1974 and January 17, 1975.

while those knew the musicians personally, and so forth.[30] Even incomplete information like this could be valuable.

"Gyapjas" noted that beyond the entertainment, many were attracted by the "unspoken" nationalist nature of the program at the Kassák. In March 1975, he gave a detailed account: it featured short films about folk traditions, a discussion with an architect, dancing to the Sebő ensemble, poems set to music, and a tale in dialogue form, harking back to the sixteenth and seventeenth when Hungary had for 150 years belonged to the Ottoman Empire. The informant summarized the tale as follows: A Turkish bey entered a Hungarian baker's shop, asked for bread, and ate his fill. He wanted to sit down, but there was no chair. The baker explained that Turkish soldiers had taken away the chair and the cushion. Finally, the baker bade farewell to the bey, telling him, "If you find the ground hard here, you should sit on a soft divan at home." The audience understood the symbolism and welcomed it with loud applause.[31] Another informant, "Segesvári Zsolt," also described the tale, adding that it always had great success.[32] The tale's unspoken message was one of resentment against occupiers—a clear reference to the Soviets.

In January 1975, "Tompa" bought a membership card and, being a rock singer himself, became acquainted with two Sebő members. In February, "Liliom" reported that her gynecologist held sexual education courses for young people at the Kassák Club. In the report, she wrote verbatim: "sex club."[33] In the light of subsequent events, this probably proved a practical tip-off for state security. In May 1975, "Tompa," "Segesvári Zsolt," and "Firenze" reported that Sándor Csoóri was present and had shown a radio play from tape, its text written by himself after a Transylvanian folk ballad with a Sebő soundtrack. It did not have a political message. "Tompa" was invited to the club's end-of-season meeting to discuss current problems. The case officer briefed the informant on what to

30 = = ÁBTL 3.1.2. M-36848, 35, report of February 20, 1975; ÁBTL 3.1.2. M-37517, 20–21, report of February 18, 1975. According to the Network registry, the first codename refers to singer Ferenc Gerdesits, recruited in 1973 at the age of 26, while the latter codename hides Zsuzsanna Takács, who worked as a clerk at the municipal council when she was recruited in 1975, at the age of 21.

31 = = ÁBTL 3.1.2. M-40827, 5–15, reports of December 11, 1974 and March 12, 1975. According to the Network registry, the code name is that of driver Károly Kaposvári, recruited in 1973 at the age of 19. According to the report, Sándor Weöres wrote the poem, though it was in fact written by Károly Tamkó Sirató. It was easy to confuse them because the Sebő-Halmos ensemble also set Weöres' words to music, and both poets wrote many children's poems.

32 = = ÁBTL 3.1.2. M-37911, 107–111, reports of May 12 and 22, 1975.

33 = = ÁBTL 3.1.2. M-36931, 110–111, report of February 11, 1975. "Tompa" became acquainted with Béla Halmos and Gergely Koltay. The latter would later form another folk band, Kormorán.

pay attention to and planned to give him a portable wireless radio transmitter. But "Tompa" skipped the meeting due to other commitments, so he could not secretly broadcast (indeed, perhaps he did not want to). He did say, however, that fewer people attended the closing night than before.[34]

The decrease in the number of visitors pleased state security, who perceived it as the result of their own actions that would create difficulties for the Sebő ensemble's dance house. However, it reopened in September 1975 with exhibitions, lectures, music, and dance. Singer Márta Sebestyén joined the band, but—according to several informants—the atmosphere had changed.[35] For state security, this showed the impact of their actions: the so-called realization of operation "Zuglói." Diligently frequenting the Kassák, "Firenze" disclosed that the autumn season opened without a speech. A club member told "Tompa" that "certain people" attributed a nationalist character to the folk movement and thus to the activities of the Sebő ensemble. According to the state security officers, the lack of an opening speech was the consequence of their "disruptive measures," while "certain people" referred to the police.

While attending folk events, "Rigai András" revealed that he had met a girl at the Kassák who was an active member of the club. In the course of studying ethnology at ELTE University, she had been on a collecting trip in Transylvania. Since she knew all the important figures in the club, the case officer hoped that through her, "Rigai András" might get close to Csoóri and his circle. However, there is no trace in the work dossier of this state security dream ever coming true. Yet, he did report in November 1975 that a night had been cancelled because the Sebő ensemble performed at the FMH gala in celebration of the Bartók Dance Ensemble having received the European prize for cultivating and disseminating folk culture. "Rigai András" saw the girl home and then quoted her as saying that their club set out with pure intentions to cultivate folk traditions, but that "official organs" were watching them in fear of nationalist tendencies. At the end of the spring season, they had even feared the club would be banned; this did not happen, however, and on the contrary, they had received an award. "'Sebő' refrains from any manifestation that could be associated with nationalism," she said. According to the handler, this cautiousness proved the "disruptive effect" of their measures, showing specifically that word had spread that several club members were being subjected to "warning" talks by the police.[36] When I interviewed Ferenc Sebő, he told me that parents of those summoned to the police got scared and asked him

34 = = ÁBTL 3.1.2. M-37517, 33–36, report of May 14, 1975; ÁBTL 3.1.2. M-36848, 43–44, reports of May 14 and 29, 1975.

35 = = Márta Sebestyén (1957–).

36 = = ÁBTL 3.1.2. M-39472, 15–18 and 22, reports of October 25 and November 14, 1975. The real name of the informant was József Kökösi, whose activity is documented in two volumes totaling 480 pages.

what was going on because they understood that someone had reported that youngsters allegedly had sex under the piano in the Kassák Club.

Let us pause here for a moment to recall that the informant codenamed "Liliom" had made mention of a "sex club" in February 1975. She may have given state security the idea of fabricating a "legend" of alleged copulation to justify the summoning. The police aimed to prevent the spread of nationalism by making them afraid of frequenting the club. Ferenc Sebő asked Iván Vitányi for help.[37] Director of the *Népművelési Intézet* (Institute of People's Education), Vitányi had been involved in the folk dance movement since the '40s, studying and collecting music and writing studies. As someone open to new phenomena in youth culture including beat music, he welcomed the folk revival with an enthusiastic essay recalling his own youth.[38] When Sebő approached him, Vitányi invited György Aczél—the party politician overseeing cultural matters for over three decades after 1956—to the Kassák Club. They did not announce the visit in advance. According to "Firenze," their visit took place on March 21, 1975, though she could not provide details.[39]

According to Ferenc Sebő, Aczél dropped in on a packed event and saw the uplifting mood among the youngsters, mostly in jeans, who were participating in the folk dances. "How come they're not in folk attire?" he asked. "They're not fake peasants, Comrade Aczél," Sebő replied, adding that the dance they were doing was "like rock and roll, only better." A year later, when Ferenc Sebő and Béla Halmos received a Trade Unions award, Aczél approached Sebő in Parliament. "I hear they're persecuting the Sebő ensemble," he said jokingly. "We're not being persecuted, it's just that some stupid agents report that the young people at the Kassák Club are f***ing under the piano, even though you could see there was only an upright piano there with no room under," the musician replied. "Comrade Sebő, I can't stand behind every policeman," the politician retorted. From then on, they were left alone.[40]

The first LP (1975) and this award (1976) were signs that the Sebő ensemble was gaining recognition. However, this did not mean state security had stopped monitoring the dance house scene. In September 1975, "Tatár Imre" reported on a high-spirited Muzsikás gig in a jam-packed downtown basement, where at least sixty percent of the music originated from Transylvania, according to the informant's estimate. In November, while hitchhiking at a petrol station, he met a young folk musician driving a wine-red Wartburg. (Besides the iconic Trabant, this was

37 = = Iván Vitányi (1925–2021).

38 = = Iván Vitányi, "Gondolatok a táncházban" ["Thoughts in the Dance House"]. *Élet és Irodalom*, December 23, 1972.

39 = = ÁBTL 3.1.2. M-37517, 33–36, report of May 14, 1975. György Aczél (1917–1991).

40 = = The interview with Ferenc Sebő was conducted on October 12, 2004.

the less-emblematic East-German-built car.) The handler showed the informant photographs, and they established that he had got the ride from Dániel Hamar, a founding member of Muzsikás.[41] From then on, Hamar was regarded as a candidate recruit to the network of informants and was given the code name "Hegedűs" ("Fiddler") without his knowledge. "Tatár Imre" was tasked with studying him. The informant was to try to land a performing opportunity as a folk singer with the help of Hamar, but they did not get that far. However, when they next met at the FMH dance house bar, Hamar talked about their collecting trips to Transylvania and complained that Muzsikás played for half the money of the Sebő ensemble. "Tatár Imre" then offered his help at the ORI concert agency *(Országos Rendező Iroda,* National Concert Organizing Bureau) to raise their fee. The informant had to make friends with Sándor Csoóri, Jr. as well and obtain an invitation to one of their gigs in the countryside.[42] His other task was to ascertain the relationship between the Muzsikás and Sebő ensembles and strengthen their rivalry, if possible. He tried to achieve it by telling Hamar and Csoóri that the Sebő ensemble was to receive an award. They knew about it already; it was deserved and "a step forward for folk culture," they said. Nevertheless, there was some envy among them because Muzsikás, though just as capable as the Sebő ensemble, was earning less, according to the report.[43]

The Muzsikás part ended here in the work dossier of "Tatár Imre." According to the network records in the archives, Dániel Hamar was not recruited as an informant. In 1977, Muzsikás released their first LP. Béla Halmos quit the Sebő ensemble to concentrate on teaching and researching folk music rather than playing live, and two other Sebő members, Péter Éri and Márta Sebestyén joined Muzsikás.[44] "Gyapjas" and "Rigai András" furnished information on Muzsikás gigs, which featured large crowds learning folk dances. State security officers were pleased to see that no political discussions took place, and thus felt no need for further action.[45] They felt that by harassing the audience of the Kassák Club, they had achieved their goal: no more *"Narodnik"* tendencies observed in the dance houses. Yet they could not rest easy.

In 1979, Directorate III/III of the Ministry of the Interior, responsible for domestic counterintelligence, compiled a report on nationalist-based hostile activities. The thirty-three-page paper pointed out that the nationalist opposition was seeking to gain positions in the field of culture and was "tendentiously" using the fad of folk art and folk traditions to win over young people. With a significant

41 = = Dániel Hamar (1951–).

42 = = Sándor Csoóri, Jr. (1956–).

43 = = ÁBTL 3.1.2. M-41618/3, 170, 185–188, 196–198, 201–202, 208 and 229, reports of September 30 and December 9 and 22, 1975, and of January 20 and 26 and March 2, 1976.

44 = = Besides Dániel Hamar and Sándor Csoóri, Jr., the third founding member of Muzsikás was Mihály Sipos, although "Tatár Imre" did not name him.

45 = = ÁBTL 3.1.2. M-40827, 241–245, report of May 17, 1978. ÁBTL 3.1.2. M-39472, 189, report of January 9, 1979.

part of the living traditions found in Transylvania, the opposition could highlight the "injustice" of the existing borders. Almost forty percent of the information on the activities of "hostile nationalist" groups came from the secret network.[46] While this state security summary report considered the interest in folk art a hostile activity, the 1980 documents by the Communist Youth Association *(Kommunista Ifjúsági Szövetség, KISZ)* described the dance house movement as beneficial and worthy of support.[47] In the coordinate system of cultural policy,[48] dance house was never banned or prohibited—"only" placed under surveillance. It belonged to the tolerated/permitted category and even received official support and promotion from time to time—as highlighted in the first National Dance House Festival in the Budapest Sports Hall in 1982, which would become an annual event.

= = = Epilogue: Before the Last Hour

Besides the Sebő ensemble and Muzsikás, two or three other bands occasionally appear in dance-house-related state security documents. However, the scene was constantly expanding. A host of new groups emerged, not only exploring the authentic music of the other peoples living in Hungary (South Slavs, the Roma, Jews, Bulgarians or Greeks), but also mixing other (Balkan, Turkish or Middle Eastern) influences and inspiring rock and jazz musicians. A long list could be compiled of outstanding artists, many of whom were or still are distinguished guests at world music festivals.

After 1976, Kolinda toured Western Europe for years, with albums released by Hexagone, Pan Records, and Celluloid. The '80s and '90s brought about the international success of Muzsikás, with albums released by Munich Records and Hannibal Records. Muzsikás opened up a treasure trove of Hungarian folk music to the world, unearthed the lost Jewish music of Transylvania, and recorded an album of melodies collected by Béla Bartók. As a solo artist, their former singer Márta Sebestyén rose to star status through the rock opera *Stephen the King* and her songs for the Oscar-winning *The English Patient.*[49] Muzsikás and Márta

46 = = ÁBTL 1.11.1. 45-13/16/1979. Experiences of hostile activities on the basis of a nationalist platform. The effectiveness of our countermeasures and our further tasks, October 4, 1979.

47 = = MNL OL M-KS 288/22/1980/52. Discussion paper on the state of the amateur art movement, October 1980 and Resolution on some topical issues of youth entertainment, January 1980.

48 = = *About this term: Sándor Révész, Aczél és korunk [Aczél and our Era]* (Sík, 1997), 144–184., 193–265; Melinda Kalmár, *Történelmi galaxisok vonzásában. Magyarország és a szovjetrendszer 1945–1990 [In the Pull of the Historical Galaxies: Hungary and the Soviet System 1945–1990]* (Osiris, 2014), 251–285; 354–370.

49 = = *The English Patient*, directed by Anthony Minghella (1996) https://videa.hu/videok/film-animacio/az-_ngol-b_teg-movie233.-drama-romantikus-08TcYz8F1MSadRoM; *István a király [Stephen the King]*, written by Levente Szörényi and János Bródy, directed by Gábor Koltay (1983) https://videa.hu/videok/film-animacio/istvan-a-kiraly_1983-film-animacio-oLEWoeBa5bktlYrg

Sebestyén played the WOMAD Festival in 1991, and Muzsikás won the WOMEX world music award in 2008.[50]

The Hungarian folk music movement has been racing against time ever since the early 1900s field works of Bartók and Kodály. The key issue has been to seek out elderly "data providers": the genuine sources of the authentic music and dance traditions from the times when they were alive. That is why the '60s and '70s collectors set out so determinedly to preserve the music on tape and the dances on film. The Hungarian Academy of Sciences and the Institute of Folk Art also played a role in the scientific research and preservation of the collected material and in making it accessible. After the political transition, the latter became the Hungarian Heritage House *(Hagyományok Háza),* where Béla Halmos established a Dance House Archive *(Táncház Archívum).* Ferenc Sebő became the art director of the Hungarian State Folk Ensemble *(Magyar Állami Népi Együttes)* and later the professional director of the Heritage House. Thanks to them and their predecessors, pundits, peers and followers, folklorists and ethnomusicologists, collectors, choreographers, and, of course, the musicians and dancers who resurrected and revived the traditions, the *táncház* (dance house) method as a Hungarian model for the transmission of intangible cultural heritage was inscribed on the UNESCO List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2011.[51]

In Budapest, not far from the former FMH (no longer standing), Fonó, a folk and world music venue, opened in 1995 and founded an independent record label of the same name. It was the second one on the scene after Etnofon, founded by Ferenc Kiss (Kolinda, Vízöntő) in 1992.[52] The most ambitious Fonó project between 1997 and 2001 was *Utolsó óra* (Last Hour). Unlike their predecessors who made field recordings, they invited village musicians from Hungary and neighboring countries to Budapest. Over a hundred string bands worked in their studio, and in addition to hundreds of hours of high-quality recordings, gigs were also organized for them. Nearly seventy CDs of these recordings have been released. Now, their only enemies were time and money—not state security.

50 = = For the award of Muzsikás, see "Muzsikas Folk Music of Hungary," Muzsikás, http://www.muzsikasband.com/en and "Womex review—Sevilla/ Spain 2008—WOMEX," WOMEX, https://www.womex.com/virtual/sonic_pages_vienna/news/womex_review_sevilla

51 = = "UNESCO—Táncház method: a Hungarian model for the transmission of intangible cultural heritage," UNESCO World Heritage, https://ich.unesco.org/en/BSP/tanchaz-method-a-hungarian-model-for-the-transmission-of-intangible-cultural-heritage-00515.

52 = = The four-CD album, Vetettem gyöngyöt. Világzene Magyarországon 1972–2006 [I Sowed Pearls. Hungarian World Music 1972–2006] (Etnofon Records, 2007), offers valuable liner notes and a wide selection of music. Ferenc Kiss (1954–2024).

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M-38310 "Kárpáti Emese"
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Hungarian Record Production Company, quality control. 1970. Fortepan

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Dance House Movement, Folk Revival Movement, Kádár-era, Magyar nóta

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= = = = Bence Csatári =

/// Concessions and Loss of Power:

The History of the Hungarian Record Producing Company in the 1980s

Abstract

Whether we are talking about domestic record publishing or cultural life, the HRME has remained in a key monopoly position since 1951. By marketing Hungarian musical artists in the socialist bloc, and by domestically releasing pop albums regardless of the artists' socialist or capitalist background, they fulfilled an important "bridging" role. Evidently, all of this came to fruition after extensive diligent censorship, harming creative freedom and the right of a significant and culturally inclined portion of society to consume art. Thus, the engagement of the Hungarian pop record culture on an international scale became nothing more than proof of a fake, Kádár-era cultural policy trope.

This article examines how the publishing politics of the record enterprise adapted to the single-party state's "double authority," as well as to the intentions of the Central Committee (KB) Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (MSZMP) Central Committee (KB), the Department of Science, Education, and Culture (TKKO), and lastly the Ministry of Culture's Department of Music and Dance Arts. How much did the enterprise comply with the intentions of these institutions – or alternatively, did it have any discretion or a potential to tactically modify them? Furthermore, I present the connection between the function of the Central Committee (KB) of the Hungarian Young Communist League (KISZ) and the publishing politics of the HRME. I build my observations from the ground up in my text, including recollections from artists that released LPs. All of this evidence reveals the methods which the HRME used to meet the expectations of cultural policies founded on communist ideology – which ironically decided which records could be released or how they should be modified according to the profit each would bring.

Additionally, I showcase how the HRME changed its publishing policies step by step from the beginning of the eighties. This entailed the partial publication of previously banned bands, developing new organizational structures, as well as establishing private recording studios by investing capital from musicians.

I pay special attention to the HRME's loss of monopoly based on a 1986 press law, which led to the regime change starting off in the record industry, even before it had affected the political sphere. Furthermore, I discuss the how the two leading figures of HRME, Jenő Bors and Péter Erdős, began losing their power and influence—the former suddenly, and the latter gradually.

= = = Ambivalent Processes at the Company and in Hungarian Cultural Politics

In the history of the Hungarian Record Producing Company (*Magyar Hanglemezgyártó Vállalat*, MHV),[1] in line with its previously pursued pragmatic stop-go policy, the 1980s in particular were about cautious retreats and concessions. These concessions were made to pop rock musicians and to the market participants emerging at the end of the decade, though there were still artists who, metaphorically speaking, were never allowed to cross the Company's threshold. Accordingly, in the 1980s, the Kádár system's stance towards pop music became, if possible, even more ambivalent than before, a change best measured by the operation of its institutional framework. By the beginning of the decade, the system had either integrated or eliminated music groups that still presented a serious conundrum at the end of the 1970s.[2]

The political system's increasingly lenient stance produced an intellectual trend among musicians that party leadership opposed most thoroughly. Because they raised their voices against the party-state so vehemently, going as far as to use crude and obscene language, many of them were even successfully labeled as racist. Most of these accusations were based on disinformation, but the state managed to deceive the wider public by spreading a series of misbeliefs through the media and creating urban legends, such as members of the band Beatrice grounding up

1 = = The Hungarian Record Producing Company *(Magyar Hanglemezgyártó Vállalat,* MHV) was established in accordance with Decision No. 206/1951 of May 24 by the Popular Economic Council via the merger of several smaller private record publishers. The MHV thus acquired a monopoly and maintained its dominant position almost to the very end of the party-state era. MNL OL XIX-A-19-b, 28. d. 206/1951; Founding Regulation of the MHV, May 24, 1951. MNL OL, M-KS 288. f. 33/1962, 9. ő. e. 181–95. The Agitation and Propaganda Committee on the MHV, 1962.

2 = = Among the "black sheep," Hobo Blues Band's first album was approved for release in September 1980, followed a year later by P. Mobil's first album, while the third group, Beatrice announced its disbandment on August 22, 1981. Bence Csatári, "A Kádár-rendszer könnyűzenei politikája" (PhD diss., Eötvös Loránd University, Faculty of Humanities, Doctoral School of History, 2008), 281.

a live chicken on stage, or László Földes (Hobo) drinking blood at concerts. Similarly, by the middle of the 1980s, they managed to convince the public – including a large portion of its rock loving youth – that the name of the band CPg was an acronym for "Cigány Pusztító Gépezet/Galeri" ["Contraption/Crew that Purges Gypsies"]. This was a complete lie, since their name actually stood for "Coitus/Come on Punk Group."[3] However, it was completely true that this band wrote openly anti-communist song lyrics, which drew the ire of those in power.

According to party-state logic, it was not enough for the National Office of Production (*Országos Rendező Iroda*, ORI)[4] or other production organs to revoke the operating licenses of offending musicians: they retorted by bringing these cases to court and giving prison sentences to young adults and even to teenage musicians under 18, whose ideological views were far from comprehensive or fixed. Among the bands prosecuted by the state—CPg, Mos-oi, Közellenség, Auróra—only Mos-oi could be considered racist, but they merely received a suspended prison sentence, while a good number of anti-communist musicians were imprisoned.[5] This illustrates well the stance of the late Kádár era, which feared not racism, but anti-communism most of all. It is not surprising that the punk and skinhead bands that managed to stay on the music scene remained the subject of agent reports until 1989.[6]

From a different perspective, the power structures of the 1980s also adopted a more human façade than before. More than once, guided by a sincere or apparently sincere impulse, part of the political elite directly inquired about the pop musicians they had approved. Among other factors, this was due to the fact that on November 1, 1982, the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (*Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt,* MSZMP) issued a decision in favor of the political thaw in which it promoted a stronger relationship

3 = = On the fate and banning of CPg, see Tibor Takács, *Botrányt akarunk! – Rágalmak a CPg és a magyar punkmozgalom ellen* (Jaffa, 2021).

4 = = As the legal successor of the State Concert and Variety Show Directorate, the National Office of Production was a Hungarian monopoly company in charge of organizing concerts between 1958 and 1991. As a censorship institute, it issued operating licenses to musicians who passed the required examinations, and it also established their performance fees. Based on skill, musicians were sorted into the categories A, B, C, and D, which also determined their salaries. The Office organized concerts for contracted musicians, and it was also responsible for approving concerts booked by musicians. Bence Csatári, "Az ORI története," Fons, (2008): 51–80.

5 = = János Sebők, *Rock a vasfüggöny mögött* (GM és Társai, 2002), 340–54.

6 = = ÁBTL 3.1.5. O-19799/1-2; ÁBTL, 3.1.9. V-164155/1-2. Beyond work, object, and investigation dossiers, we have also found internal affairs network reports on CPg in the Daily Operative Information Reports (Napi Operatív Információs Jelentések, NOIJ): ÁBTL 2.7.1. III/III-146, August 25, 1983; ÁBTL 2.7.1. BRFK-79, May 25, 1984; ÁBTL 2.7.1. III/III-100, May 28, 1984.

between leading politicians and artists.[7] However, this might have also been motivated by considerations of exercising greater party-state influence on the arts. To give an example of what this decision produced, Secretary György Aczél of the Central Committee of the MSZMP and First Secretary György Fejti of the Central Committee of the Hungarian Young Communist League (*Kommunista Ifjúsági Szövetség*, KISZ) attended the First Meeting of Young Artists. This was a three-day event held in Budapest at the Sports Arena and the Circular Arena, where János Bródy also performed on July 23, 1983.[8] Meanwhile, the pop music productions of the United States and Great Britain became increasingly more accessible. In 1982, the Hungarian public could attend the screening of the 1969 London Hyde Park Show featuring the Rolling Stones,[9] though we must add that Polish rock fans were allowed to see the Rolling Stones not only on screen, but live and as early as 1967.[10]

The process discussed above showed signs of increasing acceleration. Only a year prior, it would have been unheard of that at the rock festival in Tata,[11] music insiders in Hungary were officially allowed for the first time to watch the concert film *Woodstock*.[12] This might have been an early manifestation of the aforementioned November 1, 1982 decision issued by the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the MSZMP. Foreign celebrities now began to frequent the Budapest Sports Arena more often, and Hungarian bands were seemingly more frequently in international circulation. This included their contribution to Live Aid in 1985, during which the public could listen to all the leading Hungarian pop music artists for two days in a row.[13] On September 6, 1988, the Hungarian pop music scene stood up once again, not for a starving Africa this time, but for human rights with clear political undertones. The party organs continued to support

7 = = Henrik Vass, ed., *A Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt határozatai és dokumentumai 1980–1985* (Kossuth, 1988), 414–17.

8 = = MTVA-MTI, July 23, 1983.

9 = = ÁBTL, 3.1.2. M-41343. February 5, 1982. "Dalos" Report by "Dalos" [code name] on pop music life.

10 = = "Tényleg vodkával fizették ki a Rolling Stonest Varsóban?," Koncert.hu, June 7, 2018, accessed November 8, 2024, https://www.koncert.hu/hirek/-/tenyleg-vodkaval-fizettek-ki-a-rolling-stonest-varsoban-/.

11 = = A detailed account has since been published on the meeting between Hungarian leadership and the pop musicians. See Lajos Boros et al., eds., *Könnyűműfaj '81 – Popzene és környéke egy tanácskozás tükrében* (A KISZ Budapesti Bizottsága Politikai Képzési Központjának kiadványa, 1981).

12 = = Interview with András Muzsay, one of the musicians of the Demanders of Urban Music movement *(Városi Zenét Akarók,* VÁZA), October 8, 2006.

13 = = The event series received serious press attention and was discussed by various daily newspapers; see *Ifjúkommunista,* vol. XXIX, no. 12, 1985: 35–39. The entire event was broadcasted live by Radio Petőfi, one of the stations of Hungarian Radio, and in January 1986, Hungarian Television broadcasted a series of hour-long compilations of the event.

them because officially, their demonstrations were against colonization and the oppression of minorities. Yet everyone knew that if one read between the lines, their ideas also comprehended the democratic deficits of the states of the Eastern Bloc.[14] On the previous day at the youth political rally held in Debrecen, several thousand young people attended the performance of János Bródy and others in front of Déri Museum, where they demanded the strengthening of progressive political and social processes—an earnest of what was to come. The Hungarian concert in the worldwide tour Human Rights Now!, organized for the fortieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, was staged at the People's Stadium and featured performers such as Sting, Bruce Springsteen, Peter Gabriel, Tracy Chapman, Youssoi N'Dour, János Bródy, and Hobo Blues Band. The political weight of the rally and the winds of change are evident from the fact that the main sponsor of the event was János Berecz, a member of the Political Committee of the MSZMP and a secretary of the Central Committee, who also exchanged a few words with Bródy on the occasion.[15]

Another aspect of the shift in Hungarian pop music policy was a more lenient stance towards expressions of national sentiment. The rock opera *István, a király* [Steven, the King] brought these sentiments to the widest audience possible: not only was it released as a double album, but it also achieved profound success with its nationwide concert tour.[16] This premiere reintroduced the playing of the Hungarian National Anthem at non-official state events,[17] which had not been previously endorsed by the party-state. Gábor Koltay's words from 1985 echoed not only the significant impact of the rock opera on public thinking, but also the increasingly more positive attitude of the party-state towards rock music:[18]

14 = = Tibor Seifert, ed., *Magyar történeti kronológia 1971–1990* (Ikva, 1994), 118.

15 = = MTVA-MTI Fotóarchivuma, September 6, 1988. Inscription on the back of János Bródy's photograph.

16 = = For a long time, Hungarian party leadership remained ambivalent towards the premiere scheduled for August 18, 1983, as it had both supporters and opponents among the secretaries of the Central Committee. According to certain memoirs, Mátyás Szűrös, a secretary for external affairs appointed only a month before the premiere, opposed the rock opera the longest. Interview with Iván Gál, director of the Office of Youth Production *(Ifjúsági Rendező Iroda)* and short-term director of National Office of Production, June 26, 2005.

17 = = Feró Nagy, *Boldog szép napok* (Nagyferó Produkció 2005), 160–61.

18 = = One particular piece of evidence is the information report submitted in May 1986 by Minister of Education Béla Köpeczi to the Agitation and Propaganda Committee of the Central Committee of the MSZMP on the substantive and organizational issues of entertainment and entertaining, prepared for their upcoming session of June 24, 1986. MNL OL, M-KS 288. f. 41/1986, 469. ő. e. 15–16. Information report by Minister of Education Béla Köpeczi for the Agitation and Propaganda Committee of the Central Committee of the MSZMP on the substantial and organizational issues of entertainment and entertaining, May 1986. For a detailed analysis, see Bence Csatári, "Köpeczi Béla 1986-os jelentése a hazai könnyűzenei élet helyzetéről," Archivnet.hu, Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár, https://archivnet.hu/kopeczi-bela-1986-os-jelentese-a-hazai-konnyuzenei-elet-helyzeterol, accessed November 8, 2024.

"[T]his production could only be realized thanks to the liberality and good will of the official party and state organs and institutions. You see, the total budget amounted to twenty million forints, of which we only had a coverage of eleven or twelve million forints."[19]

Another form of (indirect) financial support by the state was the 1983 abolition of the "kitsch tax,"[20] which was a discriminative measure adversely affecting pop music.[21]). This opened the way for persons not employed by a production office to organize performances for a fee, effectively becoming the competitors of the National Office of Production.

Under the political regime, the institutions monopolizing pop music during the Kádár era always had to keep two important factors in mind: compliance with communist ideology, and profit-orientedness. However, serving two masters did not always bring satisfactory results; sometimes the ideology suffered, and other times profits could not be maximized, and though the latter never incurred retaliations, the former did. The pressure to comply with the abovementioned criteria occasionally led to failure, and generally speaking, much depended on the character or sympathy of the decision-makers, who could bring profits but could also cause deficits. Regardless, a certain pro-capitalist attitude, hitherto alien to the system, had completely permeated the Hungarian pop music scene. Music artists obviously earned more than the average citizen, and at the same time operated as "micro-enterprises" because they themselves created the conditions for making music and therefore had to spend more than average on their instruments and appearance. They also managed themselves, which was equally unusual or rather forbidden in the Kádár era. The same applied to pop music state institutions: although they also had to comply with the criteria set by the planned economy,

19 = = Artisjus Archives *(Artisjus Irattár,* hereafter AI), Jogi Osztály 'Legal Department', 39043. István, a király. Letter by Gábor Koltay addressed to the Management of the Office of Authors' Rights, February 1, 1985.

20 = = Order No. 6/1971 (XII. 17) signed by László Orbán, the First Deputy of the Minister of Education, was issued to establish the income tax of persons engaged in liberal professions, and it introduced a classification of certain branches of the arts. Section 2 of the Order did not include the activities of dance music composition, dance song lyric-writing, and dance music performance in the category of "socially valuable arts," and it therefore established a higher tax rate for these than for similar arts, which caused a great uproar among pop musicians. *Magyar Közlöny,* vol. XXVI, no. 95, December 17, 1971: 1054.

21 = = Decision No. 45/1983 (XI. 20.) of the Council of Ministers on general income tax ended the negative discrimination towards composers and performers of pop music, which had been in effect since 1971. We could argue that another positive change was Paragraph 1 of Section 47 of Decision No. 19/1983 (VI. 15.) of the Council of Ministers granting greater freedom of production organization by repealing previous restrictions, in particular Points c and d of Section 156 of Government Decree No. 17/1968 (IV. 14.) *Magyar Közlöny,* vol. XXIII, no. 31, April 14, 1968: 350–54. *Magyar Közlöny,* vol. XXXVIII, no. 52, November 20, 1983: 863–66.

due to the particularities of the genre, they could only achieve partial compliance, and by their nature, they could not circumvent the presence of market regulators. This fact became increasingly more obvious over time, which is why these institutions, including the National Office of Production and the MHV, sought more and more to comply with the laws of commercialization. The latter repeatedly attempted to reform their operation in multiple ways so as to protect their dominant position in the market, and it was not their fault that their hopes for success were not justified. In the 1980s, the increasingly lax state hierarchy loosened the reins of the MHV until, to complete the metaphor, it tossed the reins aside with the coming of the political system change and basically left a socialist corporation that had seen better days to its fate. In the following, we shall elaborate on this process in greater detail.

= = = Structural Reorganization and Technical Developments at the MHV

Wherever possible, the party-state attempted to appoint reliable party functionaries to leading positions in pop music institutions, in which roles they were in charge of promoting ideologically impregnable works.[22] From February 15, 1965 until 1989, the MHV was directed by Jenő Bors,[23] and from the time of Péter Erdős' recruitment on January 1, 1968, pop music record publishing became increasingly—and from the 1970s, very obviously—governed by his personal taste and ideological convictions.[24]

One sign of the winds of cultural political change was the fact that from 1983, the MHV was divided into two editorial boards, though it still maintained its monopoly.[25]

22 = = Interview with László Benkő, the keyboardist of Omega, February 8, 2016.

23 = = MNL OL, XIX-I-4-c, 70. d. 129088-VI-1964. Review of the MHV by the Ministry of Education, March and April, 1964.

24 = = On account of his participation in the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, Péter Erdős received an eighteen-month prison sentence in March 1957 and was passed over for a long time afterwards in consequence. Eventually he was employed among others by Artisjus. On January 1, 1968, he joined the record publishing company, where he was second-in-command below director Jenő Bors and considered by many as the one actually in charge of pop music record publishing. Judit Acsay, *Hogyan készül a popmenedzser? – Erdős Péterrel beszélget Acsay Judit* (Unió, 1990), 138, 155, 161, and 166.

25 = = The management of the MHV had considered reform at least two years beforehand. In his letter dated October 23, 1981 and addressed to the Department of Science, Education and Culture of the Central Committee of the MSZMP, Jenő Bors wrote, "In our pop music activities, we must execute reforms in the direction of decentralization, democratization, and garnering the support of our contributors with firmness and by setting aside all bureaucratic obstacles, just as we have done before. However, our reforms must be carried out in the areas we have designated and not the areas our 'critics' have chosen." MNL OL, M-KS 288. f. 36/1981, 20. ő. e. 6–7. Jenő Bors' letter addressed to András Rátki of the Department of Science, Education and Culture of the Central Committee of the MSZMP on account of press attacks on the MHV, October 23, 1981.

The first editorial board founded two labels: Start, which espoused new musical styles and the debut of new music groups, and Favorit, which curated the recordings of already established music groups and solo artists. According to Jenő Bors, the second editorial board housed the labels Bravo and Pepita: the former to promote outstanding performances, and the latter to endorse traditional music categories. Bors made this announcement on August 2, 1983 at the press conference held for the opening of the Company's new studio in Törökbálint,[26] with the declared objective that these somewhat competing labels would create even better quality productions and thus increase the Company's revenue. However, there was a considerable overlap between the newly established categories, since it was difficult, or at the very least highly subjective, to determine whether the MHV considered a performer as "merely" established—in which case they were promoted by Favorit—or if their performance had become outstanding enough to assign them to Bravo. Add to this the fact that the newly published discs were often inconsistently labeled,[27] and we may say that the spirit of competition (though not in the market economic sense, since the MHV had maintained its monopoly) manifested unevenly in the business policy of the MHV. Additionally, the system of criteria described above was not necessarily the sole arbiter of which golden egg-laying goose was assigned to which coop. The competition between the MHV labels was further reinforced by Bors' announcement that the labels would have equal budgets in 1983, but moving forward, their performance and record sales would decide what share an editorial board or label would receive from the MHV budget. This was not at all characteristic of the party-state's methods—think only of the state endorsement of giant socialist corporations that "produced" nothing but waste and losses. Promoting competition between the labels was an explicitly profit-oriented step that sometimes involved personal attacks, such as Bors and Erdős teaming up to turn label directors against each other over the fate of a given record release.

Beyond the four new record labels described above, a sort of "parallel state" was established under the name Professional Management Office (*Pro Menedzseriroda*), which not only chaperoned the Neoton Família music group, but which in 1983 also set the goal of marketing an additional ten to fifteen bands. It had the advantage of Péter Erdős' influence and social capital, as well as of existing in a physically separate space; the office was located in District VI in Damjanich

26 = = "New pop music recording studio," *Népszabadság,* August 3, 1983, 9; Judit N. Kósa, "Állami hanggyár," Népszabadság online, accessed November 8, 2024, http://nol.hu/kultura/allami-hanggyar-1624869.

27 = = One striking example is the first and last album of Slamó Band, which was credited to the band of István Slamovits, the former solo guitarist of Edda. The disc released by the label Bravo on June 3, 1985 contained nothing but schematic and unimaginative songs, and not even the fact that they invited Feró Nagy as a guest singer could give it any real interest. Its failure directly resulted in the disbandment of Slamó Band in 1986.

Street, while the other labels were situated at the established headquarters under No. 1 Vörösmarty Square, in the socialist-realistic building mockingly called "the Messed Up Palace." Despite these advantages, the management gradually lost its influence, and by the advent of the political system change, the office was only one among many, especially if we take into account that the MHV had already established a department primarily in charge of jazz music, which managed the label Krém.[28]

By the mid-1980s, there were eight pop music distribution labels at the MHV,[29] the publishing activities of which were based on another explicitly capitalist enterprise in the form of private studios producing recordings for them. These studios did contractual work for the MHV, thereby partly establishing capitalist relations within the micro-environment of the pop music scene and contributing to the production of an ever-increasing volume of records. Their partly capitalistic nature can be explained by the fact that the studios were privately owned, but they all received their orders from a single monopoly.[30]

One of the private studios was Studio Phoenix (*Főnix Stúdió*); it was owned by recording engineer János Bohus, who set up a studio at his house in District XVIII, Pestlőrinc (today called Pestszentlőrinc), and it was initially less well equipped than the sound studio of the MHV under No. 47 Rottenbiller Street. The first recording at Studio Phoenix was the first album of Bojtorján titled *Csavargódal*, and according to the members of the band, they were allowed to spend more working hours there—260 in total—and in a more familial atmosphere than if they had been admitted to the official studio of the MHV. Intially Péter Erdős made no explicit promises to release the recordings, but at the same time, he put his "conductor general," Levente Szörényi, in charge of music direction, trusting

28 = = This label was directed by Sándor Benkó, the founder of Benkó Dixieland Band. http://www.allmusic.hu/index.php?SID=&oldal=eloadolista&h_id=1029 and https://info.bmc.hu/index.php?node=artists&table=CD&id=2858 (accessed September 1, 2024.) They preceded every other label by releasing an album as early as 1982.

29 = = The 1986 revision of the MHV by the Ministry of Culture mentioned the label GONG, which was in charge of meeting real demands by importing Western hits to Hungary. According to them, "Domestic demands are for the immediate release of new music material from the West. However, this largely depends on the willingness of license sharers, and especially on the currency options of the company. It has been established that in the last period, products published under the label GONG have made a significant amount of pop music hits accessible to customers." MNL OL, XIX-I-9-pp, 57. d. '1981 Audit of the MHV'. From 1986, these seven labels were supplemented by the label Profil, which primarily specialized in pop music products and published the albums of Neoton Família, Dolly Roll, Erika Zoltán, Pa-Dö-Dö, Rezső Soltész, Gábor Ihász, and Dr. Beat, among others. Discogs, "Profil," Discogs, accessed November 8, 2024, https://www.discogs.com/label/33789-Profil?page=1.

30 = = For more on the economic profit-oriented ethos of the Kádár era, see Attila Antal, *Chicago a Dimitrov téren – Neoliberalizmus és a Kádár-rendszer* (Napvilág, 2021).

that his routine and talent would ensure the quality required. In the end, Erdős was so pleased by the quality of the recordings that he released the album, which soon became a gold record. He also offered the band an exclusive contract that granted performance royalties for the members of Bojtorján, which was not only unusual in the party-state era, but a first among the states of the Eastern Bloc. This was not typical communist procedure, since artists on the east side of the Iron Curtain were not indulged with extra financial opportunities. Yet the exclusive contract did allow the MHV to step up as the guardian of socialist morals and reject certain musical endeavors on that account.[31]

Another, more important private studio was owned by the band Omega; it started its operations in 1980. By that time, Omega had reached such high standards in recording that it seemed expedient to establish a permanent Omega studio that could even be rented out to other bands. Due to the low capacity of the MHV studio in Rottenbiller Street, these bands would have been forced to wait for a long time, if they were given a chance at all. Instead, they could now use Omega's studio and release their albums in the foreseeable future. According to János Kóbor, the singer and front man of Omega:

Considering the antecedents, it seemed expedient for us to take this step, but beyond the studio space, we also upgraded the sound equipment to a level that met every requirement of the period. We could thus rent it out to anyone, and they were happy to use hitherto unknown Western technology at their concerts. Even before this, we were pretty much forced to get our own studio, because from the second half of the 1970s, we never had enough time while staying in Hungary to record a complete album at the studio of the MHV. So instead we made our own recordings, and this gave us enormous freedom. After the German recordings, we could do the Hungarian voiceovers, the special effects and the master recording as well. We had been doing this ever since our English album Time Robber came out in 1977, but by 1980, we had a stable, rentable studio in Hungary, which we had erected in the yard of my house in Hűvösvölgy. We then moved it in 1989 to Törökbálint, when we took over the old Studio Hungaroton. The first recording there was Rock and roll party by Hungaria, but a great many people came to us, and by then the MHV was glad because they saw us as a helping hand, since their goal was also to publish as many records as possible. On the other hand, by letting us do our own thing, they were basically compensating us for not letting us go to a bigger global company in the past. This is how we received Hungaria and others, including Hobo Blues Band, Laci Komár, LGT, Karthago, P. Mobil, and KFT. This high demand was a good thing for us, since we usually only needed our own studio

31 = = It was in reference to the latter that Péter Erdős halted work on Bojtorján's Christmas single, then chose to approve their album in 1984. Interview with Győző Kemény, the front man of Bojtorján, January 18, 2018.

for an extended time once a year, and in the remaining time, new bands could come in.[32]

Omega purchased their Western equipment using the revenue from their Western tours and with both the permission of the International Concert Directorate and the cooperation of state corporations such as Metrimpex, the Interag Foreign Trade Company, and the Atomic Research Institute of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.[33]

Despite competing with Omega, the MHV wanted to remain at the forefront of studio development, especially once it realized that the conditions at its studio in Rottenbiller Street were not optimal for advancement, and that better conditions were indispensable for creating more revenue. In accordance with the noise ordinance in effect, the studio in Rottenbiller Street could not be used after 8 pm, as contemporary soundproofing was not sufficient to avert conflict with the residents. For these reasons, they supplemented their activities in Rottenbiller Street by setting up a studio in the former Ráczug Castle in Törökbálint and equipping it with state-of-the-art equipment, mostly procured from the United States and financed with foreign currency and loans. This was a great show of their growing entrepreneurial spirit, since they were willing to implement technological developments in the hopes of creating more revenue even at the cost of taking out loans; indeed, they sank forty-four million Hungarian forints into renovating the castle they rented from the local state farm so they could have their recording equipment running night and day. Before this, recording engineer Ferenc Dobó must have scouted sound studios in London to find the most suitable equipment for the MHV: the MCI sound mixer, which they then purchased from the United States. "Nearly three thousand controls, over a thousand LED and signal lights, and thirty-four electronic scale measuring devices—all wrapped in a remarkably elegant form," he said of the equipment, which was truly state-of-the-art in that period.[34]

32 = = Interview with János Kóbor, June 3, 2019.

33 = = Interview with János Kóbor, June 3, 2019. The monopoly organization also known as the Foreign Impresario Office became the International Concert Directorate (Nemzetközi Koncert Igazgatóság, NKI) on July 1, 1960, but it only started its independent activities on January 1, 1961. In music circles, its name was shortened to "Interkoncert." It engaged in both classical and pop music activities, bringing foreign productions to Hungary and sending Hungarian performers abroad, with wildly fluctuating efficiency depending on the circumstances. At the beginning of 1988, they lost their monopoly to the softening of the Kádár system but still continued their activities even after the political system change. For more details about the organization, see Bence Csatári, "Amikor csak egyetlen sztárfotóra tellett – Az Interkoncert könnyűzenei koncerttevékenysége," in *"Keletről jön a legújabb rockszenzáció!" – A magyar könnyűzene külföldi jelenléte a Kádár-korszakban,* ed. Tímea Murzsa (Hangfoglaló Program Könyvek, 2018).

34 = = Judit N. Kósa, "Állami hanggyár," *Népszabadság* online, accessed November 8, 2024, http://nol.hu/kultura/allami-hanggyar-1624869.

= = = Market Economic Influences on Record Releases

In the 1980s, many of the measures implemented by the MHV were clearly influenced by taking into account such fundamental factors of the market economy as utilitarianism. For this reason, the change in the political system did not bring much change to the field of record publishing in Hungary, at least in the economic sense. The Company's publishing policy took care to only lend its power to those who supported the party-state's cultural policy or who at least were not hostile towards it, or to those who were able to convince the MHV coryphes of their loyalty. But even beyond this, one sign of the thaw was that most of the bands previously barred from publishing, such as P. Mobil, Hobo Blues Band, A. E. Bizottság, and a few alternative bands, were finally given the opportunity to publish their albums.[35]

It is interesting to note that due to taking market factors into account in propaganda, classical music was pushed into the background and had its allocated budget decreased between 1978 and 1980. Meanwhile, pop music received more money for advertising: in 1978, the budget was only 2.3 million, but by 1980, it had grown to 3.7 million Hungarian forints. This tendency continued towards the change of the regime, and pop musicians received more and more performer royalties as well; between 1984 and 1985, classical music performer royalties increased only by 21.1 percent, while in the entertainment category, this figure was 51.4 percent. This increase correlated with recording times, in which pop music achieved an increase of 38.8 percent between 1984 and 1985.[36]

The economic situation of the Company can be illustrated by the fact that, in the period following the installation of the factory in Dorog at the end of 1976,

35 = = Jenő Bors reported on this to the Department of Science, Education and Culture of the Central Committee of the MSZMP on October 23, 1981. He claimed that "[W]herever we gave in to political extortion, we always got the short end of the stick, and whenever we stood our ground, intentions of demagogy and disturbance were forced into retreat. We stood our ground on the issue of Beatrice, and Beatrice disbanded. After some hesitation, we stood our ground on the issue of Kopaszkutya, and [Hobo Blues Band] chose to cooperate with us and work on a new and acceptable album. At the pop music meeting in Tata [the Tata Forum], Deputy Minister Dezső Tóth clearly drew the line by saying that politically and ideologically hostile, hateful and wild groups who perform without a license have no place in youth entertainment, and mentioned URH, Bizottság, and Kontroll Csoport by name. The pop music insiders present agreed to this, and distanced themselves from such adventurous endeavors." MNL OL, M-KS 288. f. 36/1981, 20. ő. e. 2–3. Jenő Bors' letter addressed to András Rátki of the Department of Science, Education and Culture of the Central Committee of the MSZMP on account of press attacks on the MHV, October 23, 1981.

36 = = The Ministry attempted to assist the MHV by boosting the publishing of the less profitable classical music records via premium objectives and directed financial aid from the Cultural Fund, but in light of the above, it is clear that these measures were not quite sufficient. MNL OL, XIX-I-9-pp, 57. d. 'Documents of the Report on the 1986 Comprehensive Supervisory Examination of the MHV'.

the MHV was initially unable to take full advantage of its capacity. This allowed albums of less cultural political importance to be published, and it also explains why political leadership allowed the Company to wage-pressure the companies of capitalist states such as Canada or Portugal. As consumer choices increased, the MHV was driven by financial utilitarianism to maintain a retail network, since rural distribution was less successful in the stores of Könyvért and ÁFÉSZ due to the inefficiency of the incentive schemes in place.[37] Here the shift towards paying attention to market factors is also evident, as is the fact that in order to increase efficiency, the state allowed the MHV to establish various corporate economic working communities, the vast majority of which worked on weekends and public holidays, or went abroad in increasing numbers to scout export opportunities. In the wake of these changes, the contingencies of socialist record distribution were gradually decreased. By 1986, only one third of imported records were made in socialist countries, with half of these coming from the Soviet Union.[38]

The winds of change and the MHV's greater esteem for popular culture are clear from the fact that in the mid-1980s, the MHV increased the fees of pop music performers more than the fees of classical music performers, and it did so of its own volition. The fact that they were not following higher orders is proved by the fact that in its 1986 comprehensive supervisory examination, the Ministry of Culture criticized the MHV for paying significantly above average frees to several pop music bands. The latter included the bands Bikini and V'Moto-Rock,[39] and according to the figures of the report, their recording costs were double compared to those of Neoton Família. They also criticized the fact that Pál Gábor, the recording director of Delhusa Gjon, stayed at the Duna Intercontinental Hotel, which in that period cost an enormous amount of money (almost 100,000 Hungarian forints). Other bones of contention included Attila Horváth, a lyric writer for Lajos Som's new band Senator, who received 10,000 forints for "coaching" when his name did not appear in the list of artists. In the thawing political system, however, the MHV entered into an exclusive contract with forty-six pop and rock musicians despite these condemnations; the contract granted these artists special

37 = = MNL OL, XIX-I-9-pp, 57. d. '1981 Audit of the MHV'.

38 = = MNL OL, XIX-I-9-pp, 57. d. 'Documents of the Report on the 1986 Comprehensive Supervisory Examination of the MHV'.

39 = = As late as the mid-1980s, the MHV continued to hound certain music artists and these two bands in particular over their album cover designs. One side of the album cover for *Garázskijárat* by V'Moto-Rock featured a globe showing the map of the US, which immediately had to be changed to a map of the Soviet Union, and the officials of the MHV instructed graphic designer Gábor Kapusi to incorporate large red surfaces when designing Bikini's next album cover. The softening of the political system is evident from the fact that despite the implementation of none of these guidelines, in 1987, the album cover of *Mondd el* by Bikini won an award in the design category. *Kultúrház*. MTV1, June 24, 2005.

treatment in return for producing more profit. Based on *performer* royalties paid in 1985—royalties paid per record were called mechanical royalties –, the top five were all pop musicians, with the top spot awarded to Péter Wolf and the rest to the members of Neoton Família (Éva Csepregi, Ádám Végvári, György Jakab, and László Pásztor).[40]

While the MHV switched to almost capitalist methods, as late as 1986 it was forced to jump through the hoops of the Ministry of Culture. Only half of the management consisted of party members, and yet the supervising Ministry heaped almost absurd praises on their cadre policies. This can be attributed to the softening of the system, along with the fact that the local party organ, the union, the socialist brigade meetings, the youth parliament, and the newly established art council of the MHV (an advisory board which included pop musicians) were all considered the custodians of "corporate democracy" by the Ministry, which believed that these forums allowed every worker to stay informed on the most important developments. The Ministry particularly highlighted the institution of collective agreements and the "confidential board," which convened once or twice a year to discuss the most important issues at the Company as presented by the director, and the appointment of artists and performers to the arts council. On April 24, 1987, Jenő Bors made an explicit promise to the supervising Ministry that they would curb the fees paid to pop musicians; accordingly, on June 23, 1987, they put publishing worker Péter Rákosi in charge of closely auditing producer accounts.[41]

In spite of making gestures to appease the government, on August 28, 1987, Jenő Bors criticized State Secretary of Education Antal Stark and Deputy Minister György Vajda for the fact that the MHV's obligatory contribution to the Cultural Fund had increased every year since its introduction in 1968, and yet they never received as much as they had contributed. In 1972, their contribution was 5.5 million Hungarian forints, and by 1986, most likely due to taking market economic factors into account, it had increased to 70 million—yet their state support for 1987 did not even cover their classical music costs. The introduction of new taxes also chafed the MHV, because while they were placed in a favorable profit tax bracket, they were also subjected to production levies. In Bors' estimation, this made their situation less favorable than that of an average industrial company.[42]

40 = = MNL OL, XIX-I-9-pp, 57. d. 'Documents of the Report on the 1986 Comprehensive Supervisory Examination of the MHV'.

41 = = MNL OL, XIX-I-9-pp, 57. d. 'Documents of the Report on the 1986 Comprehensive Supervisory Examination of the MHV'.

42 = = On November 9, 1982, the Political Committee issued a statement on the economic regulation of cultural activities, which posited that state sponsorship was determined by the combined factors of success and artistic value produced. Their language use suggested the consideration of financial interests, but in practice,

Jenő Bors' account from 1987 can be read as a report on the MHV's social and economic well-being, in which their diminishing trade with socialist countries was mentioned as a circumstance that threatened them with scandal on behalf of the "friendly" states (i.e., countries of the Soviet Bloc), which complained about the decreasing volume of Hungarian record exports. The economic crisis arising from the gradual collapse of the system became an undeniable fact to the MHV, which took urgent measures to remedy its losses while also acknowledging that they could not expect more state support; they feared that this meant they would not even be able to supply Hungarians beyond the border with Hungarian records. In light of these facts, the executive director of the MHV requested as a compromise that for five years starting from 1988, they would receive half of their present contribution as cultural support in exchange for improving their classical music publishing efforts.[43]

= = = The Loss of the MHV's Monopoly and the Systemic Transformation

Beyond its economic difficulties, an even more drastic development for the MHV was the loss of its monopoly, which was announced on September 1, 1986 by the newly introduced press decree.[44] In accordance with this decree, Hungarian Television, Hungarian Radio, Mafilm, and any organizations with a special license would have the right to publish records and cassettes, which basically opened the floodgates of systemic change in the field of pop music. At the time, this pluralism was not yet fully realized because the license required was issued by the Ministry of Culture, which meant that the party-state could prevent the publishing of undesirable music products if it chose.[45] The first album in the Kádár regime that

they still refused to support successful pop music productions. Moreover, they stated that they had to raise the price of pop music products to support the other arts (and yet they also set the goal of evening out the price of tickets). Vass, *"A Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt,"* 418–25.

43 = = MNL OL, XIX-I-9-n, 11. d. 1. t. 'Music Department, 1987.' Jenő Bors' letter to State Secretary Antal Stark of the Ministry of Education and to Deputy Minister György Vajda, August 28, 1987.

44 = = Decree No. 2/1986 (IX. 1.) of the President of the Information Office of the Council of Ministers on local radio and television shows. *Magyar Közlöny,* vol. XLI, no. 36, September 1, 1986: 974–76. Decision No. 29/1986 (IX. 1.) of the Ministry of Culture on the licensing of certain press products and the display of imprints. *Magyar Közlöny,* vol. XLI, no. 36, September 1, 1986: 953–63.

45 = = The Association of Hungarian Music Artists also spoke out against the monopoly of the MHV. In 1987, the Association demanded a completely free record market. AI, 'Documents of the Legal Department'. 'Presidential Session of the Association of Hungarian Music Artists, November 12, 1987.' In its decision issued on April 21, 1987, the Political Committee noted that the Association opposed the Agitation and Propaganda Committee on this issue. Vass, *"A Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt,"* 328.

was not published by the MHV was the children's album *Biztatás* by Judit Pogány and the music group Tükör, which was released in 1987 by the Mini-Coop Corporation.[46] The second album, which was definitely in the pop music category, was *Pro Pátria* by the music group Profán, released by Hungaropop.[47] The third album, also released in 1987, was *Magyar Mise* composed by Béla and László Tolcsvay and produced by the Budapest Arts Week and Open Air Theater (*Budapesti Művészeti Hetek és Szabadtéri Színpadok*) organized by Gábor Koltay.[48] In all three cases, the organizations received their publishing licenses from the Ministry of Culture.

In his letter dated May 10, 1988, Gábor Koltay thanked Deputy Minister György Vajda for the opportunity to produce an album and also mentioned that his new production, the rock opera *A költő visszatér* [Return of the Poet] would be released through the MHV, stating that under the changing circumstances, the time was not yet favorable for private distribution. Another issue was crediting performers Miklós Varga and Gyula Deák Bill on the album, since they had signed an exclusive contract with the MHV and thus needed the Company's approval for other recordings. Since Koltay was well aware of the MHV's influence in record publishing, he made a fair proposal to Bors: they would prepare the recordings and hand them over free of charge (meaning that the costs of the sound studio and the recording fees of the artists would have been borne by the Budapest Arts Week and Open Air Theater), and they would also contribute to marketing, since having good press was in their mutual interest. Essentially, the MHV only needed to press the records. Koltay's gallant gesture was prompted on the one hand by the MHV's aloof business policy towards him, and on the other hand by the fact that they would have had to do the recordings anyway because the performance was mostly lip-synced at the Open Air Theater on Margaret Island. In his letter, he mentioned his fear to György Vajda that many party-state leaders might consider his directorial work as "flag-waving" business products. This was one of the reasons why he believed that the rock opera written by Géza Páskándi and the music group Kormorán could not be produced without the Ministry's help and advocacy, despite the increasing demands of the public.[49] No amount of ministerial advocacy

46 = = Discogs, "Pogány Judit & Tükör Együttes – Biztatás," Discogs, accessed November 8, 2024, https://www.discogs.com/release/6667459-Pog%C3%A1ny-Judit-T%C3%BCk%C3%B6r-Egy%C3%BCttes-Biztat%C3%A1s.

47 = = Discogs, "Profán – Pro Pátria," Discogs, accessed November 8, 2024, https://www.discogs.com/release/2911879-Prof%C3%A1n-Pro-P%C3%A1tria.

48 = = Discogs, "Tolcsvay László*, Tolcsvay Béla – Magyar Mise," Discogs, accessed November 8, 2024, https://www.discogs.com/release/3958014-Tolcsvay-L%C3%A1szl-%C3%B3-Tolcsvay-B%C3%A9la-Magyar-Mise.

49 = = MNL OL, XIX-I-9-n, 17. d. 4. t. 'Music Department.' Open letter by Jenő Bors addressing accusations leveled at the MHV, November 8, 1988.

helped Koltay's cause at the MHV, however, and in the end the rock opera was produced by the privately owned Ring Publishing Company.[50] Another proof of the thawing of the political system was that by the end of the 1980s, Budapest Arts Week teamed up with the Céh Arts and Research Society and the cassette-producing Polimer Company to produce and distribute rock wedding banquet records completely independently of the MHV.[51]

The difficulties of private publishing were also discussed with regard to the budgetary control of the Rock Theater in March 1989. According to their report, *Jesus Christ Superstar* was released in 1986 by the MHV under their label Pepita,[52] but they were only going to pay the members of the Theater if they sold over 30,000 records. As they were unable to sell that many, Mátyás Várkonyi's theatrical company effectively closed at a loss. This is a good indicator of the fall of Hungarian living standards as well as the MHV's vague attitude towards the clerical theme of the rock opera, which was banned in 1972 and otherwise would likely have been a profound success.[53] In contrast, in 1988 the Rock Theater released the album of *Les Miserables* by way of Hungarian Radio under the label Radioton,[54] and the contributors offered to do the recordings for free, meaning they were paid exclusively from the profits of the record sales. By these means of distribution, the album eventually managed to fetch a profit.[55]

The MHV's gradually-lessening influence on the Hungarian record publishing market is perfectly illustrated by the fact that on November 8, 1988, Jenő Bors issued an open letter to protest against the rock magazine *Polip* founded in 1988, an unspecified show on Hungarian Television, and the radio show *Ötödik sebesség*. According to him, these media products leveled unfounded accusations, such as corruption and mismanagement, at the MHV.[56] The criticisms mentioned

50 = = Discogs, "Kormorán / Páskándi* – A Költő Visszatér – Rockopera," Discogs, accessed November 8, 2024, https://www.discogs.com/release/7537503-Kormor%C3%A1n-P%C3%A1sk%C3%A1ndi-A-K%C3%B6lt%C5%91-Visszat%C3%A9r-Rockopera.

51 = = Béla Jávorszky and János Sebők, *A magyarock története 2* (Népszabadság könyvek, 2006), 283.

52 = = Discogs, "Rock Színház – Jézus Krisztus Szupersztár," Discogs, accessed November 8, 2024, https://www.discogs.com/release/1730978-Andrew-Lloyd-Webber-and-Tim-Rice-J%C3%A9zus-Krisztus-Szupersztár-Jesus-Christ-Superstar.

53 = = Bence Csatári, *Az ész a fontos, nem a haj* (Jaffa, 2015), 142–44.

54 = = Discogs, "Alain Boublil, Claude-Michel Schönberg, Herbert Kretzmer – Les Misérables: A Nyomorultak," Discogs, accessed November 8, 2024, https://www.discogs.com/release/1731095-Alain-Boublil-Claude-Michel-Sch%C3%B6nberg-Herbert-Kretzmer-Les-Mis%C3%A9rables-A-Nyomorultak.

55 = = MNL OL, XIX-I-9-pp, 95. d. 'Audit of the 1988 Budget of Rock Theater.'

56 = = MNL OL, XIX-I-9-n, 17. d. 4. t. 'Music and Dance. Deputy Minister György Vajda, 1988.' Open letter by Jenő Bors addressing accusations leveled at the MHV, November 8, 1988.

by Bors were obviously made in the spirit of Glasnost as popularized by Gorbachev: enabled by freedom of the press, an increasing number of harsh criticisms were published in the media about the anomalies of public life. According to Bors, the emerging competition forced them to spend more on commercials, which is why they strengthened the activities of their Advertising Committee, which was contracted by Hungarian Television to produce video clips. This was because Hungarian Television only accepted paid commercials but offered an opportunity for indirect advertisement through its broadcast of video clips.

By 1988, the eight record labels of the MHV all operated on separate advertising budgets, which they were relatively free to use as they saw fit; the only restriction was that they had to spend the money on promoting performers and building consumer anticipation. In spite of this, within a few years the average number of albums sold fell by 36 percent and by 1988, the number of singles sold fell by 45 percent, and only the number of cassettes sold increased by 10 percent. The MHV attempted to counterbalance this—and for a while succeeded—by publishing more types of products than previously. They were the ones to introduce CDs to Hungary by importing the necessary materials through their business partners in the US and Western Europe.[57]

Jenő Bors seized the opportunity in his 1988 open letter to give a retrospective of the decades-long operation of the MHV. Regarding their achievements, he emphasized that they had raised the number of pop music records from 50,000 to 300,000 and had been the first among the record publishers of the Comecon States to introduce performer fees based on record sales—which by then had been a decades-old practice in the democratic world. He attributed the Company's difficult situation to that of Hungary by mentioning inflation, the fall of living standards, increasing costs, and competition. Bors went so far as to make a rock historical statement in his open letter when he partially acknowledged the Company's responsibility for refusing to work with certain music groups. He mentioned no names but must have meant Beatrice and the representatives of the alternative music scene; at the same time, he suggested that in the West there were also bands that did not get the publicity they needed. Bors' explanations are not always sound, since unlike the Western world, he and Péter Erdős made their decisions based not only on revenue but also on ideological grounds. Nevertheless, Bors tried to preserve the appearance of the legitimacy of their publishing policy by saying, "[u]nder the dominant political circumstances, we worked in good faith and with conviction and did not point fingers at the higher-ups if we had to make decisions

57 = = The first CD was produced in Hungary in 1988 courtesy of the MHV, which released the compilation album *Platina* by Omega. Discogs, "Omega (5) – Platina 1977 – 1987," Discogs, accessed November 8, 2024, https://www.discogs.com/release/4375620-Omega-Platina-1977-1987.

that were unpopular or inconvenient to some."[58]At the same time, in his retrospective of the Company's past operations, he sought to cover for the Company by claiming that

[w]e have done everything to transcend limitations within reason [...] We were the first among the Hungarian institutions to endorse beat music at a time when Hungarian Radio still refused to acknowledge contemporary changes in style and fashion for years to come. We defended [the album] Jelbeszéd at a time when others banned it, when [the band] urged us to stand our ground against the tides, but we did not let it interfere with our federal obligations. We supported every brave and outspoken trend that took into account the priority of the social contract and social peace, but we refused to propagate anti-social attitudes that have led to skinhead movements in the present day.[59]

Regarding the near future, the attitude of the executive director of the MHV could be considered open-minded—by his own admission at least—and at the same time suggested uncertainty at the newly emerging political constellation: "The vast majority of the managers and workers of Hungaroton are strongly committed to expansion and are searching for economic and political ways of expansion together with Hungary."[60]

Regardless of Jenő Bors' intentions, by the end of 1988 the monopoly of the MHV had been so thoroughly undone that the rights and means to publish records were not only granted to the above mentioned institutions, but to private companies as well. One of the early birds, Ring Records, even came into indirect conflict with the MHV, which tried to prevent the private distribution of *Szerencsekerék* (the first album of Tátrai Band[61] to be released in 1987) by issuing a circular letter to record stores and forbidding them from receiving the discs.[62] However, the MHV was no longer able to stop the process, and private record companies of all shapes and sizes began to spring up like mushrooms. In 1988, there were nine-

58 = = MNL OL XIX-I-9-n 17. d. 4. t. Open letter by Jenő Bors addressing accusations leveled at the MHV, November 8, 1988.

59 = = MNL OL XIX-I-9-n 17. d. 4. t. Open letter by Jenő Bors addressing accusations leveled at the MHV, November 8, 1988.

60 = = MNL OL, XIX-I-9-n, 17. d. 4. t. 'Music and Dance. Deputy Minister György Vajda, 1988.' Open letter by Jenő Bors addressing accusations leveled at the MHV, November 8, 1988.

61 = = Music Internet Hungary, "Tátrai Band," Music.hu, accessed November 8, 2024, http://www.music.hu/eloadok/315/tatrai_band; Tátrai Band, "Tátrai Band - Szerencsekerék (1987)," September 2, 2012, video, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GBGgnGfGO20; Discogs, "Tátrai* – Szerencsekerék," Discogs, accessed November 8, 2024, https://www.discogs.com/release/3557546-T%C3%A1trai-Szerencseker%C3%A9k.

62 = = Sándor Kiss, *Tátrai Band – Az első tíz év* (T. B. Bt., 1998) 52–53.

teen private companies, which together released a total of seventy-two pop music albums.

In 1988, Feró Nagy and Beatrice (reunited in 1987) managed to make a deal with Ring Records to release an album, which immediately became a double album. Feró Nagy, who had been much maligned in the Kádár era, began negotiations with the MHV—but in a move that was faithful to the history and spirit of the band, he ditched the MHV for Ring Records and its director Péter Bálint. At the next management board meeting of the MHV, in which they were supposed to discuss which songs to allow or reject, Jenő Bors announced, "Gentlemen, Feró Nagy has deserted us!" (People no longer addressed each other as "comrade" in 1988.) These developments were especially spicy because Nagy had already received an advance of 200,000 Hungarian forints and Beatrice's album was still on the MHV's agenda with the list of songs almost finalized. In spite of this, Péter Erdős reacted by saying that it was worth paying 200,000 forints to get Feró Nagy out of the MHV's hair.[63] To this day Feró Nagy maintains that it was during an interview with Erdős (which was only published well after the political system change)[64] that he finally realized that the MHV was leading Beatrice on and had never intended for it to publish its own album.[65] (In 1980 they were only allowed to publish a joint album with LGT and Omega, featuring songs from their concert at the Small Stadium.)[66] Of course, when forming our own judgement of the event, we cannot ignore the idea that Nagy might have been making excuses for himself by believing—and trying to convince the public—that as late as 1988, he would have never been able to release an album through the MHV and thus had to choose Ring Records. Let us also not ignore the possibility that he and Beatrice might have been able, in the midst of a considerably thawing dictatorship, to release an independent album; after all, his former band Bikini was allowed to release two albums in 1983[67] and 1984,[68] and he was also allowed to record and publish the

63 = = Interview with Lajos Boros, the CEO of the MHV brand, September 17, 2015.

64 = = https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5nVDvw1XKAw accessed July 2, 2024. In the film, the author of this study also spoke of his research on the operation of pop music institutions in the Kádár era. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mam4-m9JQCQ.

65 = = The front man of Beatrice expressed the same opinion during his podium talk with the author held at Theater Madách on October 8, 2018. https://www.koncert.hu/koncert/beszelgetes-nagy-feroval-oktober08-30259 accessed June 2, 2024.

66 = = https://www.discogs.com/composition/4012cbdb-07c4-4ec6-82d9-8ced2018d8ed-Jerik%C3%B3 accessed July 2, 2024.

67 = = *Hova lett…* by Nagy Feró, Bikini. MK 17761. Discogs, "Nagy Feró És A Bikini* – Hova Lett…," Discogs, accessed November 8, 2024, https://www.discogs.com/release/2848010-Nagy-Fer%C3%B3-%C3%89s-A-Bikini-Hova-Lett.

68 = = *XX. századi híradó* by Bikini. SLPM 17847. Discogs, "Bikini (3) – XX. Századi Híradó," Discogs, accessed November 8, 2024, https://www.discogs.com/release/2701762-Bikini-XX-Sz%C3%A1zadi-H%C3%ADrad%C3%B3.

rock opera *Hamlet*.[69] Regardless, though it made a successful debut, Ring Records eventually went bankrupt despite releasing songs by Tátrai Band and Beatrice and publishing the album *Tiltott gyümölcs*, which contained the previously banned songs of Hobo Blues Band. They simply could not keep up with their competition because, according to the official interpretation of events, they mostly engaged with niche music artists who did not draw a sufficiently large crowd and therefore had to cease operations in 1989.

Beyond Ring Records, the political transition swiftly ushered in a host of other small, privately owned record companies, whose greatest challenge was that the discs had to be produced by the MHV. Since they lacked not only the equipment to produce discs but also the capital to purchase the raw materials required, they had to limit themselves to publishing and distribution. The first private company to produce its own material was the Hungaropop Cultural Publishing and Service Company, but they were not the actual producers. It was Nívó Kft., founded in 1989 by awning and plastic manufacturer István Horváth, which used its own raw materials, the hardboard factory in Mohács, and molding equipment purchased from Yugoslavia to produce the albums *A szabadság vándora* by Ferenc Demjén[70] and *Ébresztő* by MHV (Menyhárt, Homonyik & Vikidál).[71] The resulting vinyl records were blue in color and created quite a stir, which led to their being banned in the summer of 1989. According to the Trade Quality Control Institute, the records were banned because they contained substances classified as harmful to health. Mean-spirited rumors have it that the MHV had a hand in the matter in an effort to protect its already-lost monopoly, as a result of which Nívó Kft. went bankrupt.[72] Nevertheless, even small companies were able to reproduce cassettes, which meant that they were not only able to compete with each other, but in theory that they had the means to challenge the MHV as well.

Beyond the companies discussed above, a fair number of the newly-emerging small publishers proved to be short-lived as well. For instance, the small cooperative Holdex, which started out in 1987 by publishing the cassettes of Karcsi Kadlott and went on to sponsor the talent show *Csillag születik*, eventually closed down. Proton Publishers proved a little more fortunate, since entrepreneur Ernő Enyedi decided to reallocate Holdex's revenue to it, and by this means it was able to draw most of the

69 = = *Hamlet* by Nagy Feró. SLPM 37028. Discogs, "Nagy Feró – Hamlet," Discogs, accessed November 8, 2024, https://www.discogs.com/release/3990502-Nagy-Fer%C3%B3-Hamlet.

70 = = Discogs, "Demjén Ferenc – A Szabadság Vándora," Discogs, accessed November 8, 2024, https://www.discogs.com/release/3960198-Demj%C3%A9n-Ferenc-A-Szabads%C3%A1g-V%C3%A1ndora.

71 = = Discogs, "MHV (2) – Ébresztő," Discogs, accessed November 8, 2024, https://www.discogs.com/release/1202899-MHV-%C3%89breszt%C5%91.

72 = = Jávorszky and Sebők, *A magyarock története 2*, 283.

big names in pop music such as Ferenc Demjén, Gyula Vikidál, Sándor Homonyik, Miklós Varga, Edda Művek, Első Emelet, Pál Utcai Fiúk, and Európa Kiadó. They only started losing steam in 1992 with the rise of multinational corporations and later had to carry on with fewer market shares under the new name Python. In March 1989, György Vadász, the president of the baking cooperative Rákóczi, announced that they considered branching out into record publishing—which is how Rákóczi's publishers took on R-GO, Moho Sapiens, A.D. Stúdió, Tátrai Band, Zorán, and Judith Szűcs—but they also fell behind in the vicious competition sparked by the multinational corporations.

Beyond the companies mentioned above, several other small publishers specializing in niche music were founded at the dawn or in the course of the political transition including Nagyferó Produkció, Fekete Lyuk Hangja, and Trottel Records.[73] A unique moment in rock history was the small construction cooperative Stabil stepping up in 1989 as the main sponsor of the Stabil International Country Music Festival. The president of the company had formerly been a musician; he was the percussionist of the Silvers music group. At the time, his company was on the rise with commissions in Algeria, Austria, and West Germany, and in addition to construction work, they also began to dabble in record and cassette publishing. Their first product was the album *Fohász a szerelemért* by the Marcellina PJT in 1988, which sold a decent number of records, but in spite of this, they did not leave a strong impression in later years.[74] In the years 1990 and 1991, based on the experiences of the previous years, new record publishers emerged to replace the old ones; and with the sole exception of MHV-Hungaroton, these were themselves replaced by the multinational record publishers forcing their way into Hungary. These included Magneoton, Quint, MMC, Zebra, Craft Records, Records Express, and Rózsa Records, among others.[75]

It seems a strange twist of fate that Péter Erdős did not live to see the regime change, as he died on February 21, 1990, a month before the first free elections took place. As for Jenő Bors, the political changes had no favorable impact on his career: on July 16, 1990, he received notice of his immediate dismissal by Prime Minister József Antall's government. This hurried measure was due to the fact that Electric

73 = = Jávorszky and Sebők, *A magyarock története 2*, 284–88.

74 = = Bence Csatári, *Vigyázz magadra, fiam! – A Bojtorján együttes krónikája* (Nemzeti Emlékezet Bizottsága, 2018), 205. The first album of the Marcellina PJT was officially credited to Szimultán Rt., in which Stabil had an interest. See Discogs, "Marcellina – Fohász A Szerelemért," Discogs, accessed November 8, 2024, https://www.discogs.com/release/4339742-Marcellina-Foh%C3%A1sz-A-Szerelem%C3%A9rt. In 1988, Szimultán Rt. was planning to release the album Édes élet by KFT at Christmas, but the distribution issues overwhelmed the company and resulted in its bankruptcy.

75 = = Jávorszky and Sebők, *A magyarock története 2*, 289–92.

and Musical Industries (EMI) Ltd. wished to purchase the MHV at their estimated price of one billion Hungarian forints, and Antall's government dismissed Bors in order to prevent the signing of their carefully prepared and detailed contract. In Bors' place they appointed organist István Ella as the new director of the MHV, knowing he had no business sense at all. On July 24, 1990, a total of sixty-five musicians wrote a letter of protest to the Prime Minister on behalf of the music profession, but to no avail. In an evident effort to sabotage the purchase of the MHV, the newly appointed management asked for a price that the EMI group naturally declined. At this time, the Company was on the brink of bankruptcy; their coffers were empty, they had amassed tax arrears amounting to 50 million forints, and they were fast approaching the deadline for repaying the bank loans they had taken out on the disc factory and warehouse in Dorog, which amounted to approximately 100 million forints. The MHV's situation was further exacerbated by the fact that it could not compete with the onslaught of records coming in from the West, and it also found it difficult to compete with Hungarian companies. In the wake of this crisis, they dismissed editors-in-chief Imre Wilpert and Lajos Boros, then appointed László Benkő as the head of the pop editorial board of Hungaroton, who thus inherited only a medium-sized company from his predecessor.[76]

Even after the political transition, Jenő Bors' life was full of surprises—though upon consideration, what he did was quite natural. After his dismissal from the MHV, he founded Quint Record Publishers in the summer of 1990 for a chance to test himself in the market economy. In the course of his work there, he came to acknowledge that for the sake of profit, it was worth contracting musicians whom he had categorically rejected in the past. One of the most striking examples is Feró Nagy, known in Hungary as the "Cockroach of the Nation" (*Nemzet csótánya*) and his band Beatrice, whose LP *Utálom az egész XX. századot* was published by Quint in 1991.[77]

In the field of Hungarian record publishing, the political and economic transition ended with the introduction of multinational corporations. Among the privately owned Hungarian companies, MMC Records directed by László Hegedűs was at the forefront of distributing international releases, as they signed a contract with the publishers Warner Music and Polygram (later Universal Music) in the summer of 1990. At the end of 1990, BMG opened its office in Hungary in order to sell licenses. In 1991, Warner Music purchased Magneoton and Polygram purchased MMC Records. In 1992, the EMI purchased Jenő Bors' company Quint Publishers,

76 = = Jávorszky and Sebők, *A magyarock története 2*, 288–89.

77 = = Discogs, "Beatrice (6) – Utálom Az Egész XX. Századot," Discogs, accessed November 8, 2024, https://www.discogs.com/release/3666603-Beatrice-Ut%C3%A1lom-Az-Eg%C3%A9sz-XX-Sz%C3%A1zadot.

and Sony Music started up its own independent company.[78] In this manner, the five "major" global record publishers were fully established in Hungary, and another period had come to an end in the history of Hungarian record publishing.

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Keywords
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cultural policy, Hungarian Record Producing Company, Kádár-era, National Office of Production

János Kilián is the guitarist of the punk band Modell "S", 1982.

Fortepan / Tamás Urbán

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= = = = Yuliya Barycheuskaya =

/// The Sexy Voice of Perestroika:

The Intersection of Rock Music, Politics, and Sexuality in the songs of Nautilus Pompilius

Abstract

This article explores the cultural and political significance of the Soviet rock band Nautilus Pompilius, situating their work within the broader socio-political and cultural shifts of late Soviet Sverdlovsk. Emerging from the vibrant local rock scene, the band distinguished itself by blending socio-political critique with themes of love, sexuality, and human connection, capturing the emotional complexities of Perestroika. Using frameworks such as *spatialization*, *cognitive modeling*, and *conceptual blending*, this study examines the metaphorical language and implicit socio-political meanings in Nautilus's oeuvre. Through an analysis of selected songs, "Bound by One Chain," "Striptease," and "I Wanna Be with You," the article reveals how the band's lyrical hero—shaped by the interplay of poet Ilya Kormiltsev's intellectual depth and frontman Vyacheslav Butusov's enigmatic performance—navigated the quest for personal and collective agency, the erosion of socialist ideals, and evolving gender and sexual norms.

In the 1980s, the landscape of Soviet rock was essentially split between two distinct poles: Moscow/Leningrad and the Urals. Former Sverdlovsk, today's Yekaterinburg—the largest city in Ural, though barely known in the West—played an important role in the social and political life of the late Soviet Union. Despite its location thousands of miles from the capital, it was not a peripheral, passive, or inert urban area. On the contrary, it was home to some of the key figures of perestroika and the 1990s, all of whom inarguably shaped Russia in their respective spheres: Boris Yeltsin, the first president of the Russian Federation, Alexey Balabanov, a cult

film director, Ilya Kormiltsev, a celebrated rock poet, and a pleiad of rock bands that included Urfin Juice, Chaif, and Nautilus Pompilius. The paths of these politicians, intellectuals, and creatives crossed organically in the cityscape and led to disparate outcomes in politics and the arts. Pondering the latter in his memoirs, Kormiltsev remarked philosophically, "Besides rational social history, there is also the story of mystical revelations."[1] To determine what falls into the realm of history and what into that of mysticism, this article takes a closer look at the musical culture that developed in Sverdlovsk during the 1980s, and specifically at Nautilus Pompilius, who led the music charts of perestroika.

Unlike many of its contemporaries who eschewed personal topics, Nau, as fans often referred to Nautilus Pompilius, layered love and sexuality with political critique in a way that mirrored and shaped public sentiment. This article will begin by exploring the cultural context of their rise and then proceed to the lyrical and thematic depth of their work. Through an analysis of selected songs, and drawing on frameworks such as spatialization, cognitive modeling, and conceptual blending, it will examine the ways in which the band used musical and lyrical techniques to evoke intimate emotional responses while embedding subversive messages. These methodologies provide a lens for understanding how Nautilus navigated censorship, reflected societal tensions, and connected with audiences on an intensely personal level.

The study relies heavily on Ilya Kormiltsev's memoirs and publicistic writings as primary sources, focusing on his insights into the band's creative processes, cultural environment, and societal critiques. By tapping into his poetry, the article illuminates the lyrical sophistication that underpinned Nautilus' music, emphasizing how Kormiltsev's words captured the emotional and intellectual complexities of perestroika.

= = = The Cultural Context of Soviet Rock and the Scene in Sverdlovsk

To understand the distinctive role Nautilus Pompilius played, it is essential to first survey the cultural and political context of the Soviet rock scene in the 1980s. Due to unofficial self-publishing entities known as *samizdat* and *magnitizdat*, even peripheral areas of the USSR were never far removed from the influence of the alternative facts and trends penetrating the Soviet empire from the West. Alexei Yurchak observes that *magnitizdat* played a pivotal role in establishing Western rock music as the dominant, albeit unofficial, cultural force among Soviet youth in the 1970s. Bootleg Western music and broadcasts from Voice of America sparked a cultural shift, inspiring new forms of creativity among youth. By the late 1970s, this cul-

1 = = Ilya Kormiltsev, *Velikoye rok-n-roll'noye naduvatel'stvo-2*, Agentstvo politicheskikh novostey, June 20, 2006, Part 1, https://www.apn.ru/index.php?do=authors&author-=392.

tural ferment had led to the rapid growth of a vibrant local rock scene that became a defining feature of the era's nonconformist artistic expression.[2]

According to Kormiltsev, the rock community in Sverdlovsk was most deeply affected by Led Zeppelin. The lyricist regarded the British quartet as the quintessential band of the 1970s, embodying the hopes, aspirations, and tensions of their generation while breaking away from the values of the previous era.[3] He likely sought to emulate this vision by shaping Nautilus Pompilius into a Soviet counterpart for the transformative perestroika period.

Like many incipient musicians of that era, the members of Nautilus Pompilius first met at a college club—one of the many organizations at Soviet universities that catered to a wide range of interests and activities. These clubs nurtured creativity, fostered well-rounded development, and built lasting friendships among their members. Since young musicians practiced on the property of local universities, the institutions often asked them to use their talent for the benefit of local communities, inviting them to perform at receptions and dispatching them to entertain students during mandatory agricultural labor. By providing space, resources, and even built-in audiences, state-funded institutions inadvertently supported the development of rockers' performance skills. Paradoxically, the very establishment that sought to regulate culture ended up legitimizing and fostering what was considered a non-official cultural sphere.

The state's cultural gatekeepers, including members of Komsomol, were not immune to the desires of youth. Like their peers, they wanted to have fun and enjoy both trendy music and the culture associated with it. Rockers, in turn, were willing to collaborate with sympathizers from the state apparatus. As Yurchak contends, "nonofficial culture depended on the ability of its producers to manipulate the official sphere," and party officials often failed to enforce stringent censorship because they "did not care to check."[4] He recounts how several rock concerts organized in Leningrad by Komsomol in the early 1980s were officially presented as "Komsomol cultural-mass activities."[5] Such events, he explains, were made possible through elaborate strategies of pretense employed by both the producers of nonofficial culture and local Komsomol activists.

In 1983, the Sverdlovsk Komsomol organized a rock seminar—today remembered as a massive state-funded party—that was both overflowing with liquor and attended by the region's most progressive and trend-setting crowd. Few partici-

2 = = Alexei Yurchak, "Gagarin and the Rave Kids: Transforming Power, Identity, and Aesthetics in Post-Soviet Nightlife," in *Consuming Russia: Popular Culture, Sex, and Society Since Gorbachev,* edited by Adele Marie Barker (Duke University Press, 1999): 83.

3 = = Ilya Kormiltsev, "Ot avtora," *Vzlot i padeniye svEntsovogo dirizhablya* (Vestnik, 1997).

4 = = Yurchak, "Gagarin and the Rave Kids," 84.

5 = = Yurchak, "Gagarin and the Rave Kids," 84.

pants approached the lectures and speeches in a state of sobriety. Groups for evening jams were formed ad hoc; whoever was still capable of playing and singing simply joined forces on stage.[6] Despite its chaotic nature, the seminar proved invaluable to networking, sharing records, discovering local projects, and fostering connections among the region's musicians.

Kormiltsev recounts an incident that occurred in the summer of 1982, while he was collaborating with Urfin Juice. In the process of trying to record higher-quality copies of their recent album, the artists learned about the existence of two foreign record players in the city. One belonged to Andrey, a member of the rock community, and the other to his girlfriend Tatiana. During one of the evenings Kormiltsev spent with Andrey in a kitchen-type recording studio in Tatiana's apartment, her father popped in for a drink. He proposed a toast to the two youths, proclaiming "you will be very useful to us in the future."[7] Had Tatiana's father been a typical industrial worker, in retrospect, this friendly tribute would not have led to any controversy. But industrial workers typically did not own foreign record players. The man was evidently someone of importance who had access to resources inaccessible to most of his townsmen. Indeed, he was no other than Boris Yeltsin, a high-ranking local party official at the time, whose daughter was one of the youngsters fascinated by trendy underground culture.[8]

Yeltsin became favorably disposed towards Russian rock, at least from a bureaucratic perspective; indeed, he even backed the establishment of an official rock club in Sverdlovsk in 1986, complete with a public venue and state funding.[9] This move undeniably contributed to the growth of rock culture in the region. However, as Kormiltsev later argued, this support was less an act of charity than a calculated investment by a member of the rising political elite, for Yeltsin and his allies transformed "the rage of poets" into a political commodity that served their struggle for power.[10] Responding to later criticism that accused Russian rock of being complicit in the destruction of the Soviet empire, Kormiltsev admitted, "we

6 = = Ilya Kormiltsev, "Pantykin i 'Pereezd'," *Dostovernoye opisaniye zhizni i prevrashcheniy NAUTILUSa iz POMPILIUSa*, https://royallib.com/read/kormiltsev_ilya/dostovernoe_opisanie_gizni_i_prevrashcheniy_NAUTILUSa_iz_POMPILIUSa.html#0.

7 = = Kormiltsev, *Rok-n-roll'noye naduvatel'stvo-2*, Part 1.

8 = = Kormiltsev, *Rok-n-roll'noye naduvatel'stvo-2*, Part 1.

9 = = Kirill Smolentsev, "Gde zarozhdalsya rok. Turisticheskiy marshrut po mestam Sverdlovskogo rok-kluba [Where rock was born. Tourist route around the Sverdlovsk rock club]," AiF Ural, October 5, 2020, https://ural.aif.ru/culture/kak_zarozhdalsya_rok_turisticheskiy_marshrut_po_mestam_sverdlovskogo_rok-kluba.See also Dmitriy Karasyuk, *Sverdlovskaya rok-entsiklopediya. "Ritm, kotoriy my..."* (Kabinetniy Ucheniy, 2016).

10 = = Kormiltsev, *Rok-n-roll'noye naduvatel'stvo-2*, Part 1.

were too naïve to understand that the future belongs to those who possess the monopoly on the interpretation of the present."[11]

Nevertheless, the cultural paradox of Komsomol's tacit support for Soviet rock as well as Boris Yeltsin's role in legitimizing underground music in Sverdlovsk created the conditions in which Nautilus Pompilius could thrive. Within this environment, the band developed its unique lyrical voice. Embodying "the rage of poets" against the loss of ideals and the hypocrisy of a society turning to bourgeois values,[12] Kormiltsev channeled his youthful non-conformism and philosophical outlook into penning lyrics that resonated deeply with his generation. As Nautilus Pompilius gained popularity, Kormiltsev himself went from being a kitchen poet to the poet of the stadium. Nautilus resounded from kitchen windows and dimly-lit porches across Russian cities and small towns, striking an emotional chord with its fellow countrymen navigating the complexities of change.

= = = Balancing Pop and Protest

The Soviet rock community and its die-hard followers, often characterized by their preference for edgier and more rebellious musical expressions, were somewhat skeptical of Nautilus Pompilius. Their dubiousness stemmed from the band's romanticism and musical style, which at times bore a resemblance to pop music—a genre not traditionally associated with the countercultural ethos of rock.

Artemiy Troitsky, who wrote the first history of Russian rock in the 1980s, identified the fundamental differences between Soviet and Western rock music. In Russian rock, he claimed, the emphasis lay on the lyrics since access to the modern equipment needed to produce a contemporary rock sound, such as electric guitars and keyboards, was limited. Moreover, the lack of a commercial music industry meant that musicians could not legally charge for their work before perestroika began easing restrictions on capitalist enterprise. Such constraints eliminated demand for danceable tunes and shifted the focus to the expression of ideas through lyrics. The texts of Russian rock songs thus became more sophisticated than those of Western ones, both stylistically and linguistically, resembling 'serious' academic poetry and maintaining a strong connection to the Russian literary tradition.[13]

Another notable difference, Troitsky claims, lay in the themes of the songs. Until the 1980s, Soviet rock bands avoided singing about love. As references to sex

11 = = Kormiltsev, *Rok-n-roll'noye naduvatel'stvo-2*, Part 1.

12 = = Kormiltsev, *Rok-n-roll'noye naduvatel'stvo-2*, Part 1.

13 = = Artemy Troitsky, *Back in the USSR: The True Story of Rock in Russia* (Faber and Faber, 1988), 40. See also Thomas Pond, „Soviet Rock Lyrics: Words That Matter," *Popular Music and Society* 16, no. 3 (1992): 87–102, and Yngvar B. Steinholt, „You Can't Rid a Song of Its Words: Notes on the Hegemony of Lyrics in Russian Rock Songs," *Popular Music* 22, no. 1 (2003): 89–108.

were regarded as completely off-limits, priority was granted to socio-ethical and philosophical subjects, such as humans' lack of empathy, social passivity, conformity, and lack of faith. Lyrics could also express social commentary and satire.[14] Despite its lyrical sophistication, however, Nautilus Pompilius broke with this tradition as it skillfully merged sociopolitical rhetoric with sexually suggestive meanings. The band harnessed emotion and sexuality to foster a sense of intimacy between the singer and listener, and to elevate public sociopolitical discourse to a deeply personal level.

Scholars such as A. V. Pugachova, E. A. Selezova, E. V. Isaeva, and E. A. Kozitskaya, whose works were consulted for this study, have analyzed Kormiltsev's poetry and Nau's lyrics from cultural and linguistic perspectives. However, for the most part, their contributions overlook the historical context in which these songs were produced. While Pugachova acknowledges a contemporary linguistic shift in focus from the internal structure of language to its relationship with other spheres of human activity, and admits that the meaning of words should be explored through cross-disciplinary analysis, she and the other scholars referenced here stop short of integrating historical analysis into their work.[15] One should also note that a song is not limited to its lyrics; it is composed equally of music and performance, which can convey nuances beyond language and add layers of meaning or create spaces that shape interpretation.

= = = Artistic Identity and the Lyrical Hero

One point of agreement among the aforementioned scholars is that the lyrical hero in Nau's oeuvre is a constant—a complex yet consistent figure. The songs present this character as a straight male and socially engaged citizen. However, what previous scholarship has yet to explore is the reciprocity between this fictional figure and the band's repertoire, and the way in which the interplay of the two shaped the interpretation of the meanings embedded in their songs. This article addresses that gap by examining the dynamic relationship between the lyrical hero and the artistic choices of Nautilus Pompilius in the hope of offering a more nuanced understanding of their work.

The lyrical hero of Nau's songs was shaped by the contrasting personalities of Ilya Kormiltsev, the poet, and Vyacheslav Butusov, the frontman. A politically- and socially-conscious philosopher, Kormiltsev expressed his views in poetic meta-

14 = = Troitsky, *Back in the USSR*, 42–43. See also Yu. A. Chumakova, „Kontseptsiya lyubvi v poeticheskom tvorchestve rok-muzykantov," *Russkaya rok-poeziya: tekst i kontekst* (Ekaterinburg: Tver State University, 1999).

15 = = A. V. Pugachova, „Yaderno-periferiynoye stroyeniye semanticheskogo polya, zhenshchina' v poezii I. Kormiltseva," *Visnyk Dnipropetrovskoho Universytetu, Series: Movoznaustvo* 18, no. 16 (2010): 287.

phor, while Butusov assumed the guise of an apolitical musician.[16] When pressed about the meaning or sociopolitical implications of their songs during interviews, Butusov often avoided direct answers. He offered vague replies, turned his responses into anecdotes, diminished the significance of the songs, trivialized the creative process that went into them, or delegated all responsibility for them to Kormiltsev:

Then he [Kormiltsev] was bringing texts in batches, flames were dancing in his eyes, [he was] all worked up from that figurative anger, a kind of anarchist-regicide. It felt as though he had bombs against the existing system in all his pockets. It was a reaction to the environment in which all of us were in then. And we [musicians] generally existed as a separate independent cell, and Ilya was the only connection with the outside world.[17]

Kormiltsev lacked the gift to deliver his messages in ways that Butusov was physically and vocally capable of doing. The former recalled how the band's frontman had a nearly universal appeal, captivating audiences of all ages—from grandmothers to granddaughters—and that Nau's music was played so frequently that countless cassette tapes had gotten totally worn out.[18] Seemingly reserved and endowed with aristocratic facial features and deep piercing eyes, Butusov had a breathy masculine voice that created a sense of intimacy between performer and listener. He appeared to audiences as a regular guy in town—as someone living in a local apartment block, going to college, drinking liquor in the courtyard, and chasing girls—and not as a strange Western "*metalist*," a spooky-looking fan of heavy-metal rock. This interplay between Kormiltsev's intellectual depth and Butusov's performative ambiguity further shaped the lyrical hero, reflecting the band's complex relationship with their audience and their era.

= = = Sound, Space, and Emotion

The spatial location in which a song is recorded or performed may add another layer of meaning or strengthen the theme within a musical or lyrical context.[19] Analyzing selected Nau's songs, this essay draws on the work of Allan F. Moore, Patricia Schmidt, and Ruth Dockwray, particularly their research on sound placement analysis and the theory of cognitive modeling, which includes concepts such as image schemata and conceptual blending. According to this framework, spatial aspects

16 = = E. A. Selezova, „Albom Razluka (1986) 'Nautilus Pompilius': liricheskiy sub'yekt i obraz ispolnitelya," *Russkaya rok-poeziya: tekst i kontekst* 12 (2011): 156.

17 = = Aleksandr Ustinov and Valeriy Zhuk, „Vyacheslav Butusov o sobstvennyh pesnyah" [Vyacheslav Butusov about his own songs], Fuzz 7/8 (July–August 1999), http://naunaunau.narod.ru/articles/0511-butusov-o-pesnyh/.

18 = = Kormiltsev, "Vmesto Vvedeniya," *Dostovernoye opisaniye*.

19 = = Allan F. Moore, Patricia Schmidt, and Ruth Dockwray, „A Hermeneutics of Spatialization for Recorded Song," *Twentieth-Century Music* 6, no. 1 (2009): 83.

of interpersonal and environmental relationships in recorded songs emerge from the interplay between the listener, the persona, and the personic environment, as well as from the social, public, or intimate distances between them.

Nau skillfully used spatialization in their recordings and performances to foster intimacy and evoke specific emotional responses from listeners. The album *Razluka* (1986), which shot the band to fame, opens with the Russian folk song of the same name—a tune traditionally sung during cozy domestic gatherings *(zastoliya),* where, after a number of vodka shots, people traditionally entertain themselves with song. The band recorded this opening track during such a gathering in the apartment of film director Aleksey Balabanov. This recording choice allowed Nau to build instant rapport with audiences across the country, evoking the familiar setting of a kitchen—a space often associated with intimate discussions of public and private matters in Soviet households.

Moore, Schmidt, and Dockwray provide a compelling framework for analyzing the metaphors and implicit messages in songs relying on two concepts in cognitive theory: *image schema*, that is, "a patterned way-of-knowing developed in our bodily experience of our world and translatable from one sense-domain to another," and *conceptual blending*.[20] These ideas align with Daniel Levitin and Mark Johnson's conceptualization of schemata. As Levitin argues, schemata "frame our understanding; they're the system into which we place the elements and interpretation of an aesthetic object."[21] Johnson, in turn, suggests that schemata allow for abstract thought and the creation of metaphors that can be defined only in relation to certain domains.[22] According to Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner, conceptual blending is an unconscious mental operation that occurs when "partial structures from two separate domains [*mental spaces*] are integrated into a single structure with emergent properties within a third domain."[23]

These cognitive methodologies provide valuable tools for analyzing the metaphors and implicit ideas embedded in the songs of the 1980s: a period that, while more liberal than previous decades, still left critics of the regime navigating the risks of censorship. Artists had to adopt creative strategies to exercise freedom of speech, often layering political messages within less conspicuous forms of artistic expression. Rather than delivering overt critiques that might draw the ire of state watchdogs, Kormiltsev opted for poetry that invited multiple interpretations. Resonating with this approach, Butusov responded to questions about the innuendos in Nau's songs in his characteristically evasive manner:

20 = = Moore et al., "A Hermeneutics of Spatialization," 84.

21 = = Moore et al., "A Hermeneutics of Spatialization," 85.

22 = = Moore et al., "A Hermeneutics of Spatialization," 84–85.

23 = = Moore et al., "A Hermeneutics of Spatialization," 111.

I am satisfied with such kind of poetry, texts that lack specificity [*konkretnosti*]. The mood is created [by the poetry], which gives way to emotions, associations. Everybody finds in these something of their own.[24]

Nautilus' songs often employed spatial and cognitive techniques to bridge the gap between public and private experiences. By embedding political metaphors within carefully constructed environments, the band transformed their music into a multidimensional commentary on personal and societal struggles. This approach is evident in songs like "Bound by One Chain," "Striptease," "I Wanna Be with You," and "Bat".

This study also draws on Stephen Amico's insights into normative Russian masculinity and his claim that the construction of gender in Russian culture evolved in response to socio-historical changes and Western influence. Although patriarchal control was central to social stability in the Soviet Union, the enactment of masculinity was not unproblematic. Many men sought outlets in informal groups, while others attempted to assert their power through aggressive masculinity, domestic tyranny, or a retreat from familial responsibilities.[25]

= = = Masculinity, Restraint, and the Collective Struggle

The challenges of masculinity are a recurring theme in many of Nautilus' songs, including "*Skovannye odnoy tsepyu*" ["Bound by One Chain"], which became one of the cultural symbols of perestroika. The song speaks about the alienation, economic struggles, and monotonous daily life of Soviet citizens who felt "bound by one chain." It exemplifies Kormiltsev's use of conceptual blending as he integrated the elements from different domains to create new, emergent meanings within his lyrics. Through its exploration of the personal and societal constraints faced by the lyrical hero, the song echoes themes of restrained masculinity and the limitations of individual agency, while highlighting the pervasive sense of social and political stagnation that characterized the era:

[Verse 1]
Mutual responsibility smears like soot,
I take someone's hand and feel the elbow,
I'm searching for someone's eyes and feel the look
Where the butt is above the head,
After the red sunrise follows the pink sunset.

[Chorus]
Bound by one chain
Chained by one aim,

24 = = Selezova, „Albom Razluka (1986)," 156–157.

25 = = Stephen Amico, *"Blue Notes: Gay Men and Popular Music in Contemporary Urban Russia"* (Ph.D. diss., The City University of New York, 2007): 14-15.

Bound by one chain,
Chained by one...

[Verse 2]
Here joints are sluggish and spaces huge,
Here structures were crushed to assemble columns,
Some words are for kitchens, others for streets,
Eagles are traded for broiler chickens.
And I pose even kissing, in alignment with...

[Chorus]

[Verse 3]
You can believe, having a lack of faith,
You can do, doing nothing.
The poor pray, praying for
Their guaranteed poverty.
Here you can play to yourself on the tube
But it does not matter how you play as you are playing retreat.
And if there are those who come to you,
There are those who will come after you.
Also...

[Chorus]

[Verse 4]
Here women are looking for something but find only old age,
Here the measure of work is fatigue,
Here there are no villains in offices made of leather,
Here the first looks at the last,
And no less than the last, might be tired of being...

[Chorus][26]

The song became emblematic in its depiction of an authoritarian society that functions in the manner of an assembly line, codifying and controlling each aspect of its citizens' behavior. It is also economically ineffective ("you can do, doing nothing") and ideologically outdated ("you can believe, having a lack of faith"). The lyrical

26 = = The lyrics analyzed in this study were translated by the author. The original Russian lyrics can be accessed at https://genius.com/.

hero feels isolated ("I take someone's hand and feel the elbow/I'm searching for someone's eyes and feel the look"), restrained in both public and private ("I pose, even kissing, in alignment with... bound by one chain"), but his feelings are shared by many of his compatriots ("here the first looks at the last/and no less than the last might be tired of being bound"). The chain, a recurring motif, operates on both a literal and metaphorical level, representing not only physical and emotional constraints but also the ideological bonds that tie citizens to an outdated system. The chorus references "aim," [*'tsel'*] but the term remains undefined and open to multiple interpretations. It could allude to the popular Soviet slogan "Our Goal is Communism!"—once a powerful motivational phrase and a shared cultural code that required no explanation. However, in the society depicted in the song, the phrase seems to have lost its potency, functioning merely as a hollow buzzword.

In a 1988 interview with *Yunnost* [Youth] magazine, Kormiltsev explained the meanings of "chain" and "aim" as follows:

... this is a composition about today which differs from yesterday due to a greater awareness that some changes in our life are hindered by factors not so much external as internal. Here it's not so much about someone being chained, but about some kind of involuntary fraternity between those who are at one end of this chain and those who are at the other.

Today there are fewer illusions regarding the idea of an allegedly "harmful" layer [in society] eliminating which would be enough for everything to go as it should. It has become obvious that neither beautiful words nor even new laws will save us by themselves if society does not mature to implement them. [27]

Resonating with the new lyrical and musical style of its album *Razluka* [Separation] (1986), through which "*Skovannye odnoy tsepyu*" became a hit, Nau arrived a t its signature stage image. The look of the performers, previously animated and clown-like, changed to quasi-militaristic, manifesting bodily constraints that ran counter to the free spirit and free speech embedded in their songs.[28]

= = = Sexuality and Political Protest

Nautilus' exploration of gender dynamics and sexual liberation often served as a vehicle for broader sociopolitical critique. The 1980s saw the conflation of two major phenomena that came out of the closet and into the streets: political criticism and sexuality. Breaking with the Soviet rock tradition, Nau skillfully intertwined romantic and sexual imagery with reflections on sociopolitical issues. Kormiltsev pushed the limits of traditional views on sex by incorporating into his lyrics elements like

27 = = Interview with Ilya Kormiltsev, *Yunnost'* [Youth], no. 6 (1988). Excerpt available in Tvoe Vremya [Your Time], http://www.ytime.com.ua/ru/50/1334.

28 = = Kormiltsev, "Premiera Pesni," *Dostovernoye opisaniye*.

public striptease, role play, and fantasies of bondage and domination, intensifying the provocative nature of the band's songs.

Much like Tsoi and his band Kino, Kormiltsev and Nautilus Pompilius were concerned about the threat of nuclear war during a time of heightened geopolitical tension and the lack of consensus on the arms race between the two superpowers. The song "Striptease"—included in the socio-politically charged album *Knyaz' Tishiny* [Prince of Silence] (1989)—reflects the anxieties of the era, capturing the ambivalence to the political situation and the collective fear of catastrophe. The composition emerges from the intersection of sexual and political liberation, nudging listeners to take a bold stand against militarism and apathetic world leaders. Within the context of sociopolitical protest, it explores how masculinity is intertwined with political power and examines the role of femininity within this dynamic:

[Verse 1]
Butchers drank the sea of beer,
Butchers gobbled up the piles of bacon,
Butchers fucked the whole city,
This is not enough for them, this not enough.
And when, when the storm is coming,
They look where to place their chairs
To see how the Antarctic tornado
Tears apart and throws up our hands and loins.

[Chorus 1]
Hey! Strip naked!
Go out into the streets
And I will suppress my jealousy
If that is needed in this case.
Strip naked! Hey!
Let them be surprised,
Let's pretend that they do not see you
But they will never forget,
Their thoughts will invade your body.
Undress!

[Verse 2]
We started morning with vodka,
We ended coming in bed at night.
And it is difficult, it is difficult to hide in the shadows
And to be silent and wise.
The bony children of the desert

Knocking on doors and asking for leftovers.
The country is dying like an ancient reptile
With a new virus in its cells.

[Chorus 2]
Hey! Strip naked!
Go out into the streets
And I will suppress my jealousy
If that is needed in this case.
Strip naked! Hey!
Be offensively sober,
For they like the drunken and mad
Who call for empathy.
Their thoughts will invade your body.
Undress!

[Outro, two times]
They like striptease,
They will get striptease.[29]

The music has a hostile and militaristic vibe with a leading drum theme and an intense guitar section at the end. The verses are performed solo by the front man, while the choruses and outro are supported by the backing vocalist; the voice projects in each chorus and shifts slightly to the background in the verses. This creates the sense that the details in the verses are reserved for private conversation, while the message of the choruses and outro is directed at the public.

The woman[30] is encouraged by her partner to transgress the social control of the "butchers" by appearing undressed in public and violating the frame in which her naked body is meant to operate (private space). The transgression is to be performed in the name of the greater good for all and for starving children. In the given context, female sexuality remains contained within a hetero-normative culture: the woman is the one who takes action, yet her body is *allowed* to speak, to inhabit the public space in which the voice of her man cannot be heard. The lyrical hero sacrifices his male ego, suppressing jealousy to gain political power. He restores his agency by seizing control of the sexual fantasies of power-wielding "butchers."

29 = = Russian lyrics are available at https://genius.com/.

30 = = Several adjectives in the original Russian lyrics indicate the female gender of the addressee, as Russian grammar requires adjectives that modify animate objects to be gender-specific.

The female body could be interpreted as a metaphor for the body of the nation, since the song calls on citizens to step out of private spaces—ones in which they are used to criticizing the government—and into the streets in order to save their country and, potentially, the world. The image of the "butchers" gives rise to several possible interpretations. One is that they refer to pathetic bureaucrats—on both sides of the Iron Curtain—who are concerned only with their own pleasure and with maintaining an order that does not disrupt their personal comfort. In the lyrical hero's view, these degraded politicians have come to the point where they are neither taking action to save the country from the "virus" that is preparing to kill it, nor taking measures to protect people from the coming storm. People come to understand that they are the ones who will suffer the consequences, while the "butchers" observe death and suffering from a safely distant space.

= = = Loss and Longing

Kormiltsev's disillusionment with late Soviet society comes through intensely in "*Ya hochu byt' s toboy*" ["I Wanna Be with You"]. The song is usually regarded as one of the most iconic romantic compositions of the 1980s. It was also included in the aforementioned album *Knyaz' Tishiny*, where it seemingly stood apart from the other tracks. The song is deeply romantic, with no explicitly political references or critiques of the social order; it portrays the lyrical hero in his attempt to break through the existing reality as he searches for something or someone dear to him.

Nau was both lauded and criticized for "I Wanna Be with You." Part of their fanbase embraced the song for its emotional capacity and unique ability to articulate painful attachment to an object of love. The other part rejected it as overly romantic and melancholic—qualities often attributed to pop music or Soviet èstrada. Responding to a question from a reader of "*Ural'skiy sledopyt*" [Ural Pathfinder] in 1988, Butusov elaborated on the song's meaning:

Love is often understood as an attitude of one particular person to another—Vasya to Lyuba—but the concept is much broader; it encompasses not only a "human-human" connection, but others as well: "human-phenomenon," "human-symbol," and finally, "human-life." I don't know how it happened that in the mentioned song the center of gravity shifted to the theme of love in the narrow sense. Apparently, "love" is a wretched theme in modern *èstrada* if people perceive our [song] only in a straightforward manner. Or, perhaps not everything worked out for us, although the task was broader: an attempt through love and emotions to express a general attitude toward life. Vague? Well, it means that I can't speak clearly about love.[31]

31 = = "Otvety V. Butusova i I. Kormiltseva na pis'ma chitateley" [Responses by V. Butusov and I. Kormiltsev to readers' letters], *Uralskiy sledopyt* [Ural Pathfinder], no. 12 (1988), https://naunaunau.narod.ru/articles/0161-ural-sledopyt-1988/

This comment invites a more careful analysis, beginning with the lyrics:

[Verse 1]
I was trying to move forward from love,
I was taking a sharp razor and wounding myself.
I was hiding in the basement, I was cutting
Leather belts that strapped down a weak chest.

[Chorus 1]
I want to be with you,
I want to be with you,
I want to be with you so much,
I want to be with you
And I'll be with you.

[pre-Verse]
I'm in a room with the white ceiling,
With the right for hope.
I'm in a room with the view of lights,
With faith in love.

[Verse 2]
Your name became different long ago,
Eyes lost their color forever.
A drunken doctor told me you weren't anymore,
A fireman gave me a paper
That your home burned down.

[Chorus 2]
But I want to be with you,
I want to be with you,
I want to be with you so much,
I want to be with you
And I'll be with you.

[Pre-Verse]
I'm in a room with the white ceiling,
With the right for hope.
I'm in a room with the view of lights,
With faith in love.

[Verse 3]
I was breaking glass as if it was chocolate in my hand,
I was cutting those fingers, for they couldn't touch you.
I was staring in those faces and couldn't forgive them
That they didn't have you but could live.

[Chorus 2]

[Pre-Verse, 2 times][32]

Verse 1 portrays the lyrical hero exploring pain in his attempt to break away from love. Chorus 1 reveals his desire to remain in a relationship with the object of his love. The Pre-Verse describes the present physical space of the lyrical hero and his state of mind within it. Verse 2 presents the antagonism between the inner world of the lyrical hero and the other world in which he exists and socializes. Chorus 2 exacerbates this antagonism through its insistence on reconciling desire with reality. In the Pre-Verse that follows, the tension wanes, only to be replaced by the strongest wave of disagreement with reality, which is expressed in Verse 3 and Chorus 2, and which, in turn, diminishes by the end of the song through the repetition of the Pre-Verse. The verbs in the verses are in the past tense, while those in the choruses and pre-verses are in the present tense, thus constituting a past/present binary and a distinction between acts observed in retrospect and the inertia of the present. The latter may be caused by the lack of empathy and support from the social environment: people simply live their lives, and the presence or absence of the object of love does not change their course in the way that it changed that of the lyrical hero.

The structure of the lyrics is enhanced by the spatial aspects of its delivery. Prefacing the story, a saxophone solo opens the scene and is supported in the background by the keyboard, guitar, and drums, which set the rhythm of the song. It is then replaced by the breathy, nearly whispering voice of Butusov, singing in higher octaves, stretching his words, and thus creating an impression of an intimate space shared by the performer and listener. The music helps center the voice, emphasizing its masculine character but also creating a sense of dismay. The sound of the bass drum is audibly diminished by drum plates, while the keyboard projects with the lower octaves. The leading keyboard theme in the pre-verse transitions to a radical change in sound at the beginning of Verse 2, disrupting the intimate ambiance. The voice gets stronger, at times nearly breaking into screams as it attempts to outdo the music, which stops shadowing the voice and gives way to a wider scope of instruments: a more extensive range of drums and string instruments, a bass guitar, and a stronger keyboard. The Pre-Verse following Chorus 2 reduces the tension and briefly returns the spotlight back to the solo saxophone. Verse 3 and the

32 = = The original Russian lyrics are available at https://genius.com/.

reiteration of Chorus 2 play out with the same tension as Verse 2 and the preceding Chorus 2. In the concluding repetition of the pre-verse, the voice joins the saxophone for the first time, metaphorically uniting the object of love and the lyrical hero, which until this point have existed in separate realms of reality.

The concept of enclosed space—the "basement" and "room with the white ceiling"—was not new to Nautilus. Examining the band's preceding album, *Razluka* (1986), Selezova notes that in the opening song, "*Eta muzyka budet vechnoy*" ["This Music Will Be Eternal"], the lyrical hero is presented alone in the enclosed space of a room with a radio on a table; the music coming from the radio, however, expands the space and provides a sense of connectedness to the outside world, which the lyrical hero recreates through his senses and imagination.[33] In this same manner, the "room with the view on lights" in "I Wanna Be with You" offers a sense of connectedness to the world lost during the search for the object of love. The lyrical hero is consumed by pain and frustration, but still burns with hope and faith. Nonetheless, the change in the given circumstances seems unattainable despite all his attempts.

The song was commonly assumed to be about love to a woman and suicidal ideations. In her textual analysis of the lyrics, Isaeva assumes that the object of love or the "addressee" of "I Wanna Be with You" is a woman who has died, and that Verse 1 communicates suicidal attempts inspired by the narrator's desire to reconcile with her. She acknowledges that the text contains no explicit mention of death, but she claims that it occurs allegorically in Verse 2. While conflict between the lyrical hero and a feminine addressee or social environment is common in Nautilus' songs, Isaeva suggests that in this case the separation from the woman leads to the loss of self; the state of being "without you" is the equivalent to the absence of freedom, and, for this reason, the lyrical hero aims to destroy the metaphorical ties binding his weak chest.[34]

Like some other of Nautilus' compositions, „I Wanna Be with You" contains explicitly sexual and violent innuendos. The lyrical hero is searching for an outlet for his unconsummated desire and emotional pain, transgressing sexual norms through acts associated with sado-masochism and self-harm that involve a "sharp razor," "leather belts that [are] strapped down a weak chest," "hiding in the basement," and "breaking glass as if it was chocolate in a hand." The object of love does not, in fact, have a shape in the lyrics: neither its gender nor any features that could define its physical nature are specified in the text. Does she/he/it exist at all? On the one hand, the lyrical hero is embodied in the experience of physical pain. On the other, the personification of the object of love appears fleetingly in the words of a drunken doctor, and in the lyrical hero's reflections on the change in the name and

33 = = Selezova, "Albom *Razluka*," 158.

34 = = E. V. Isaeva, "'Ya hochu byt'...': apologiya smerti? apologiya lyubvi? v tekste gruppy 'Nautilus-Pompilius'," *Russkaya rock-poeziya: text i kontekst* 12 (2011): 163-165.

eyes that have "lost their color forever." The physical space that was once occupied by the object of his love is now merely reduced to a piece of paper offered him by a fireman.

"I Wanna Be with You" showcases Nau's ability to evoke emotional depth through cognitive modeling. As Levitin suggests, schemata—patterns of understanding derived from sensory and emotional experiences—frame how audiences interpret art. In this song, the interplay of past and present tense, the shifting dynamics of the vocal performance, and the spatial imagery of the "room with the white ceiling" create a layered narrative of longing and loss. By mapping personal grief onto broader societal disillusionment, the song resonates with listeners navigating both private heartbreak and collective despair.

It is also entirely plausible to interpret the song as a sociopolitical commentary, in which the object of love represents the never-attained utopian ideal of a communist state. Despite the fact that the Soviets were actively engaged in the construction of communism, arguably such grand ideas lost their potency at the moment when love could be purchased with a pair of jeans. The lyrical hero as idealist is mourning this irreplaceable loss, while the majority of his fellow citizens have not even noticed what has disappeared from their lives. Some, like the drunken doctor (educated, intellectual), remember that it once existed but is no more, and some, like the fireman, can point to where it existed on paper (in multiple books on Marxist-Leninist theory). The lyrical hero, however, is the one who is lost without it. He feels bound to these utopian ideas, and though the bonds are painful, any freedom without them is unimaginable. The lyrical hero resists the world that is indifferent to the loss. He is shocked by those who do not share his feelings, but hope remains that one day he might reconnect with the world outside his room with the white ceiling.

A similar motif, centered on a profound sense of loss, appears in the song "*Letuchaya mysh*" ["Bat"] from the album *Chuzhaya Zemlya* (1992). Here, the lyrical hero mourns the departure of a female mythical creature ("witch or angel," "light or darkness") who took his soul away like a "shining stone in powerless claws" and whose absence has left him spiritually desolate. Desperate and unable to bear life without her, the lyrical hero pleads for the creature to return before his life spirals into madness ("if you don't come back, I'll find out how madness takes over"). However, the song's stark lines warn that the window of opportunity to restore order is fleeting:

If you are late even for a moment,
The glass shatters like ice, and on the floor falls
A grey man, and the stone in claws
Becomes grey lead, and you fall powerless,
Crashing your wings, near the dead face.[35]

35 = = The original Russian lyrics are available at https://genius.com/.

Both, "I Wanna Be with You" and "Bat" focus on an elusive object of love or ideal that shapes the lyrical hero's existential struggles. In "I Wanna Be with You" the hero's yearning is laced with self-destructive imagery—razors, leather belts, and broken glass—underscoring his profound frustration with a reality devoid of connection or meaning. Similarly, "Bat" employs metaphors of flight, claws, and shattered glass to convey a sense of irreparable loss and the fragility of hope.

Whereas "I Wanna Be with You" situates the hero within a physical space of isolation—a "room with a white ceiling"—that offers glimpses of light and hope, "Bat" projects the hero's anguish outward, into the mythic and cosmic realm. All the same, the songs share an overarching tension between despair and resilience, revealing the complex interplay of personal and societal struggles.

In much the same way as the previously discussed songs, "Bat's" lyrics lend themselves to political interpretation. Its vivid imagery captures not only personal grief, but also conveys a deeper, social lamentation over the disintegration of an ideal or the irrevocable loss of something transcendent. The departure of the mythical creature can be interpreted as the loss of the utopian ideals that underpinned Soviet society: the promise of communism that remained unfulfilled despite decades of effort. Her role as both a nurturing and destructive force encapsulates the contradictions of Soviet socialism: an ideology that inspired hope yet faltered under its own contradictions and excesses. The image of shattered glass and "grey lead" signals the irreversible descent into despair, both personal and collective, should the mythical creature not return. The fleeting window for redemption or transformation resonates with the broader sociopolitical atmosphere of the late Soviet Union, in which the possibility of meaningful change appeared both tantalizing and fleeting.

As evident from the analyses of the songs offered here, Kormiltsev's critique often aimed less at the ideology of socialism and more at the flawed ways it was implemented in the late Soviet Union. Yet, he also showed no particular affection for capitalism. His ambivalence toward the impact of a market economy on social relations gradually evolved into open resentment, a sentiment that became increasingly evident in Nau's repertoire of the 1990s.

= = = Reflections on a Socialist Anti-Utopia

Throughout its existence, Nautilus captured and reflected the collective sentiments of the final generation of Soviets. Emerging organically from the masses and developing within state-controlled spaces, the band's messages were inevitably shaped by its environment. Its dual focus on intimate and social concerns offers a foundation for understanding the band's enduring legacy. Nautilus Pompilius was a cultural phenomenon that encapsulated the hopes, frustrations, and contradictions of a generation living through perestroika. Its music resonated with audiences on multiple levels, provoking thought, evoking emotion, and offering solace to those disillusioned with the erosion of socialist ideology.

Unlike the other bands of the 1980s, Nautilus rejected the Soviet aversion to physical pleasure and embraced the Western politicization of sexuality. In Nau's repertoire, pleasure and suffering come across as both deeply personal and profoundly political experiences, with emotions leveraged to advance broader societal critiques. Nevertheless, the band's perspective on gender roles and behaviors adhered to a conservative framework—one rooted in heteronormative patriarchy, in which men attempted to retain control over the female body. That adherence underscores the complexities of its position: simultaneously progressive and conservative, rebellious yet grounded in familiar structures.

Ultimately, Nautilus Pompilius' legacy lies in its ability to hold a mirror to late Soviet socialism, exposing its cracks while exploring the human longing for freedom, intimacy, and meaning. As Kozitskaya notes, the band inverted classical cultural tropes and imagery to create what some perceive as an "anti-world." [36] This article, however, argues that Nau did not construct an alternative realm but rather held a mirror to its time, revealing a socialist anti-utopia in which personal crises and political dysfunction were inseparably intertwined.

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36 = = E. A. Kozitskaya, „Retseptsiya tradicionnyh kul'turnyh mifov, 'Vechnyh obrazov' i syuzhetov v sovremennoy russkoy rok-poezii (na materiale tekstov gruppy 'Nautilus Pompilius')", *Russkaya Rock-poeziya: Text i Kontekst* 3 (2000): 192.

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Keywords

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Gender and Sexuality, Nautilus Pompilius, Perestroika Culture, Socio-Political Protest, Soviet Rock

= Book Review =

The wreckage of WM-21 Falcon F.261 close reconnaissance aircraft. The plane crashed on 24 April 1941, Croatia, Borovo.

Fortepan / Csaba Varga dr.

Betekintő 18. évf. 4. sz. 103–111. o.
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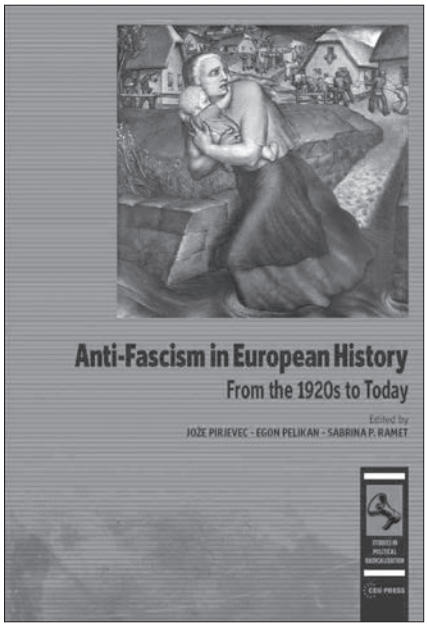
/// Nándor Pócs

=== Regional Perspectives on a World Phenomenon

/// A BOOKREVIEW ON

Pirjevec, Jože, Egon Pelikan, and Sabrina P. Ramet, eds.
Anti-Fascism in European History: From the 1920s to Today.

Central European University Press, 2023. pp. 300.



The last global idea was probably anti-fascism. It has been the founding idea of many international organizations, of which the United Nations is the most important. Today, this idea's proponents may perhaps be a little disappointed and despondent. Although, after Rwanda and Srebrenica, even the most optimistic cannot honestly believe that the UN can truly prevent wars and genocide, and these practical failures may indeed reflect on the idea, the idea itself remains one of man's greatest historical achievements. Now more than ever, that there must be a global organization above national institutions and authorities, subordinate to higher considerations; it must protect people who are considered aliens by national communities and who are thus excluded from their rights as citizens, and it must also protect countries threatened by those stronger than themselves. One of the main ideological components of anti-fascism, drawn from the experience of the Second World War, was thus the assumption of *universal citizenship*, which was never easy to put into practice and is not easy now. As our resources dwindle and the number of places in the world

where we can live a decent life diminishes, the organizations that make citizenship rights universally available to all are becoming less and less important. We are increasingly unwilling to share the basic legal conditions for access to prosperity—namely, citizenship—with *anyone*. And this means that all around the world, the light of anti-fascism is, inevitably, flickering out.

Alarmed acknowledgement of this crisis is also reflected in the foreword to *Anti-Fascism in European History: From the 1920s to Today*, published in 2023. The reordering of the world, to which this global consensus seems to be falling victim, has prompted some scholars to explore the diversity of anti-fascism—its passive and active forms, and its common language across national borders—in a major volume of studies. Beyond this, the basic aim of the volume is not to capture the global essence of anti-fascism. As such, it reflects trends in Central and Eastern European anti-fascism research over the last thirty years, which aim to understand national, non-communist anti-fascists; a field of research that should be treated with caution in a region prone to chauvinist populism, but which is nevertheless of the utmost importance. The fact that the subject has not fallen into the wrong hands is assured by the editors, who are also well versed in international academic research. Perhaps the best known of these is Sabrina Petra Ramet, who, although a US citizen, after completing her military service spent decades in the South Slav states and wrote several books, mainly on the break-up of socialist Yugoslavia. Jože Pirjevec is a researcher of Slovenian-Italian relations: a historian whose life is the main research agenda. Pirjevec was born with an Italian name in 1940 and was himself, along with his family, a victim of the harsh Italianization of Slovenians in Trieste and the Trieste area. Like Pirjevec, Egon Pelikan, head of the Institute of History at the Research Centre in Koper, is researching the history of Slovenes in Italy, mainly publishing on church history.

As the name of the editors suggests, the book's geographical focus is the South Slavic region, especially the Slovene-inhabited areas. Although the volume contains studies on Slovak, German, and even Finnish and Danish aspects that are fascinating in their own right, these only help to contextualize the subject. Thus, it is primarily the Slovenian anti-fascist movements that provide a comprehensive picture. The studies in the first chapter, which present historical anti-fascism—i.e., the anti-fascist struggle of Slovenes under Italian and Nazi rule—become multi-layered stories when read in conjunction with the writings of Božo Repe and Vida Rožac Darovec, which examine the history of Slovene anti-fascist memorials and, in particular, their post-Yugoslav reception. Although Slovenian anti-fascism never became a cultural meme similar to the French or Italian (or more recently Polish and Ukrainian) resistance, nor was it as widespread as these movements, the TIGR movement, which is also frequently mentioned in the volume, was a pioneer of European anti-fascism. The Slovenian (and partly Croatian) movement, which fought for the liberation of Trieste, Istria, Gorizia, and Rijeka (or more precisely, their

annexation to Yugoslavia), was liberal, Christian socialist and church-based. As it did not reject violent forms of resistance, many political assassinations can be attributed to its name. The TIGR is a good example of the fact that, contrary to popular belief, Balkan anti-fascism was not exclusively leftist or communist.

The editorial foreword and the afterword by the British fascism expert Nigel Copsey, to which I would like to add some reflections, are based on the idea that, like fascism, anti-fascism is also a diverse phenomenon. Indeed, just as several rival fascisms could coexist within one country—see, for example, the Croatian Ustaša and the Yugoslav ORJUNA—this was also the case with the forces of anti-fascism. Such was the situation in Volhynia around 1943, when local Czechs, Ukrainians, and Poles, organized into ethnically and politically divided units, fought brutal battles not only against the Germans but also against each other and the Soviets. Yet, in the face of more and more recent research, the overarching concepts that form the subject of these studies seem to be falling apart. Simultaneously, such regionally focused research almost immediately raises the question of how smaller groups were connected to the larger ones. To resolve this, of course, we need to know: who is an anti-fascist, and what is anti-fascism?

Theoretically, we can attempt to answer this question in two ways. One is to treat anti-fascism in a reactive and non-autonomous sense: i.e., to include only those among the anti-fascists whom historical fascism has named as its enemies. The formula thus seems simple, based on the definitions of fascism by Roger Griffin and Emilio Gentile, quoted in the preface: the modern left with Marxist roots (social democrats, communists) and, of course, the Jews. They are natural-born, *ab ovo* anti-fascists, since by their existence and worldview they are inherently opposed to the class-denying and/or racist outlook of fascism. Fascism treated them as enemies even when it was temporarily forced to make tactical concessions to them. The other methodology is based on the autonomous nature of anti-fascism, i.e., its transcendence of historical fascism. According to this perspective, there must be something in anti-fascism that links Marxist-rooted anti-fascism with the bourgeois and ecclesiastical anti-fascists whom communist practice otherwise sought to annihilate. This would imply that anti-fascism was not a tactical-reactive ideology, but an autonomous idea rooted in the Enlightenment, which was able to transcend the most fundamental contradictions of modernity: namely, the opposition between socialism and capitalism, and between the scientific and the religious worldviews. If we accept this, then we also claim that anti-fascism existed not only after fascism, but before it, perhaps even from time immemorial. Thus this idea, rooted in human universality, was ultimately unleashed by none other than fascism, based on the irrational cult of death.

Neither the editors nor Copsey has taken a firm stance in favor of either methodology, so we can say that the volume, while raising important questions, remains methodologically and contextually truncated. Their uncertainty is, of course,

unsurprising. After all, it is hardly possible to claim that anti-fascism is the supreme universal ideal of the *innocents of modernity* without a tingle running down one's spine. Considering the last eighty years, it is not easy to give anti-fascism Christian epithets. We should write and speak about anti-fascism (or, even more difficult, *believe* in it) in such a way as to know that the idea is daily subverted and subordinated to tactical considerations. Of course, it is obvious that the actions of individual anti-fascist resisters should not necessarily be deduced from the power politics and trickery of the Soviet Union or its Western allies, and that the weight of all this cannot be compared, for example, with the unimaginable sacrifices made by the Soviet people. Still, anti-fascism can only be defined by taking into account its individual, local, and strategic aspects.

We know well that the anti-fascist people's front launched at the Seventh Congress of the Comintern—which suddenly required the communists, who had hitherto accused the Social Democrats of social fascism, to suspend the revolution—was a purely tactical move. The conclusion of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact was also a tactical move, not to mention the fact that Soviet-style regimes have always exhibited certain features of historical fascism (collective stigmatization, imperialism, political violence, etc.), and in some cases have even rehabilitated the fascist past (see, for example, the example of Ceausescu's Romania, which partially rehabilitated the Iron Guard). These features remained so strong and durable that they were able to undermine the anti-fascist legitimacy of the entire socialist bloc. And as the Slovenian studies in this volume show, these fascist tendencies of Soviet-style regimes included systematic stigmatization and persecution of non-communist anti-fascists and a tendency to exclude them from the memory of the resistance. Catholics, monarchists, and social democrats, who here in Central Europe had fought against fascism and/or the fascist occupier in at least as great numbers as communists did, were tried and briefly imprisoned on charges of fascism after 1945. Indeed, the fact that non-Communist anti-fascists were not free to tell their own stories until the 1990s was precisely because of their former allies, the Communists. The situation was quite different on the western side of the Iron Curtain, where in the countries with the most significant anti-fascist traditions (i.e., France and Italy), communists were able to retain their organizations and were not erased from the memory of the resistance.

It is perhaps no coincidence that Copsey's epilogue, featuring a quote from Hemingway ("Are you a communist? No, I am an anti-fascist"), is most concerned with freeing the understanding of anti-fascism from the simplistic equation of anti-fascist = communist; indeed, otherwise we would not understand the universality of anti-fascism. Such simplifications, which still strongly dominate not only public but also academic discourse in East-Central Europe, are understandable considering the grievances suffered. However, if the only standard of anti-fascism is the communists' considerations of power politics, then we must say (as many do) that the

idea of anti-fascism failed along with the socialist experiment. This opens up the possibility of rehabilitating individuals and groups labeled as fascist, which would not be a heretical idea at all. But by rejecting the *universal* standard of anti-fascism, such simplifications necessarily open the way to so-called "revisionism": the rehabilitation of obscure elements.

This volume is also largely about anti-fascists who fall outside the framework of Marxist-style anti-fascism. Their placement in the big picture is not easy because they were not first and foremost historical enemies of fascism, but of communism. The studies of Gianfranco Cresciani and Egon Pelikan make it quite clear that the Catholic groups that defended the rights of the Slovenian minorities in Gorizia opposed Italian fascism not necessarily because it was fascist, but because Mussolini's regime (also) sought to assimilate Slovenes. In addition, the Slovenian Catholic clergy who remained in royal Yugoslavia after the First World War proved very cooperative during the Nazi occupation, so it can be said that it is not Catholicism alone that makes one anti-fascist. Nor, of course, do the authors mean to imply that Catholicism does not inevitably lead to anti-fascism, as this would not be true; see the joint study by Sabrina Petra Ramet and Christine M. Hassenstab on the White Rose movement in Munich. Hans and Sophie Scholl's main intellectual sources were prominent Christian thinkers (St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Augustine, John Henry Newman), on whose basis the war against the tyrant was justified, although they rejected violent resistance. The question then is why such contradictions existed in attitudes towards fascism within the same communities of thought, and why some non-leftist anti-fascists ultimately chose the path of resistance while others chose passivity or cooperation? Comparative studies of regional anti-fascisms can play an important role in answering this question. This is one of the reasons why it is painful that none of the essays in this volume seek to present a broader picture of the anti-fascisms of the Balkans and Central and Eastern Europe, or to compare them. At this point, it is perhaps not useless to mention the Hungarian situation, which in many aspects is exceptional.

According to recent Hungarian research (Ákos Bartha), the groups involved in armed resistance and their leaders themselves shared the ethnicist-chauvinist ideological consensus of the Horthy regime, and a large portion of them were right-wing radicals. They did not oppose the Hungarian National Socialists (and especially the Arrow Cross Party) for being fascist and anti-Semitic, nor even for being willing to cooperate more closely with the Germans, but because they did not consider the latter to be Hungarians in sense of national character. They considered these National Socialists to be poorly assimilated pseudo-Hungarians—alien to Hungarian characteristics and using their Hungarianness only for political window-dressing—and thus they doubted the Hungarianness of the National Socialists using the same arguments they used against the Jews. These convictions were shared by the non-armed anti-fascists, including a significant part of the bourgeois and

populist intelligentsia, and it can be said that, with the exception of the communists and the social democrats (few of whom were involved in the resistance), the consensus among Hungarian anti-fascist forces was based mainly on the Hungarian National Socialists' supposed lack of Hungarianness. Therefore, this means that the Hungarian anti-fascists did not reject the repressive practices of fascism but rather the *alien* nature of its representatives. It follows that the image of legitimate power held by non-left anti-fascists was based on ethno-racial backgrounds, and not on various legal-philosophical-political abstractions.

The problems of alienness and Hungarian anti-fascism were so intertwined that the issue was even not settled after the Second World War. Although the Hungarian Communist Party did its best to present itself as the flagship of the Hungarian (armed) resistance and used this idea as one of its main tools for legitimation (in line with the tendencies described in the volume), as mentioned above, Hungarian anti-fascism had weak Marxist roots. The contradictions only really came to a head when, at the end of the 1940s, the so-called Muscovites—the circle of Mátyás Rákosi, Ernő Gerő, József Révai and Mihály Farkas—had come to the brink of power. As is well known, the term muscovite refers not only to uncritical imitators of the Stalinist model, but also to communists who were not in Hungary during the Second World War, but in Moscow. Thus, the rule of the Muscovites created narrative contradictions with the central party's efforts to make space for the communists in Hungarian historical memory through communist-dominated anti-fascism. As a result, once the communists had successfully defeated their political opponents and were able to exclude them from the pantheon of Hungarian resistance, legitimate Hungarian anti-fascism became *alien*. It is not a coincidence that the liberalization of the regime from the 1960s on was accompanied by the gradual return of previously excluded actors (even some extreme right-wing figures) to the official memory of the resistance, partly in order to augment the legitimacy of the system with autochthonous (i.e., non-alien) elements of Hungarian anti-fascism. The research, study, and inclusion of the autochthonous actors of Hungarian anti-fascism in the public sphere has continued ever since, and these have become so predominant that the history of left-wing resistance with Marxist roots is not researched today at all.

All in all, the case of the Hungarian anti-fascists also demonstrates that an understanding of anti-fascism's multifaceted nature does not necessarily lead us to a more precise definition of the characteristics of universal anti-fascism. Philosophy is probably the most appropriate tool for this. The search for an essence beyond class, blood, and national culture, though not easy, is not worth giving up. *Anti-Fascism in European History* is a regional experiment, which hopefully will be followed by others like it.

Prisoners of war (Serbian soldiers) marching from Baranyavár towards Pélmonostor, with the sugar factory in the background, Croatia, 1941.

Fortepan / Tivadar Lissák

Keywords

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Anti-fascism, Hungarianness, Second World War, Yugoslavia

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Members of the Kolinda ensemble, foreground: Ágnes Zsigmondi, Ágnes Kamondy, Dóra Kováts, background: Iván Lantos, Péter Dabasi, János Balázs. 1976. Fortepan / Tamás Urbán