

Prokofiev's Soviet Operas

Prokofiev considered himself to be primarily a composer of opera, and his return to Russia in the mid 1930s was partially motivated by the goal to renew his activity in this genre. His Soviet career coincided with the height of the Stalin era, when official interest and involvement in opera increased, leading to demands for nationalism and heroism to be represented on the stage in order to promote the Soviet Union and the Stalinist regime. Drawing on a wealth of primary source materials and engaging with recent scholarship in Slavonic studies, this book investigates encounters between Prokofiev's late operas and the aesthetics of socialist realism, contemporary culture (including literature, film, and theatre), political ideology, and the obstacles of bureaucratic interventions and historical events. This contextual approach is interwoven with critical interpretations of the operas in their original versions, providing a new account of their stylistic and formal features and connections to operatic traditions.

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Note on Terminology and Transliteration

A note of clarification is required in relation to the terminology used for act divisions. I have translated *kartina*, usually rendered as ‘scene’, instead as ‘tableau’, and the smaller division, *stsena*, as ‘scene’. ‘Tableau’ is of course also French for ‘scene’ as it is commonly understood in the musicological literature (especially on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century opera), usually corresponding to the second definition of ‘scene’ given in *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*: ‘any part of an opera in a single location’.¹ Prokofiev’s use of *stsena*, meanwhile, tends to follow *New Grove*’s third definition of ‘scene’: ‘A portion of an act during which the characters on the stage remain unchanged’. These translations should avoid potential ambiguity or confusion, while also providing a more logical match with Prokofiev’s unique structural arrangements, based as they are around rapid stage action.

The system of transliteration I have employed is that of Gerald Abraham, as described in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. Stanley Sadie, vol. 1 (London: Macmillan, 1980), xvi–xvii. The Russian letter ы is rendered as *ï*, the letter я as *ya*, and the letter ю as *yu*. The letter e at the beginning of a word, after vowels, and after hard or soft signs is transliterated as *ye*, and otherwise as *e*. Hard and soft signs are retained. Exceptions have been made in the use of the surname suffix *-sky* (rather than *-skiy*), common spellings of familiar names (‘Prokofiev’ and ‘Tchaikovsky’ instead of ‘Prokof’yev’ and ‘Chaykovskiy’), and the omission of soft signs from the names of characters in the operas and other dramatic works. In the bibliographic citations, the transliteration is strict.

Abbreviations of Archives

RGALI (Rossiyskiy gosudarstvenniy arkhiv literaturı i iskusstva) –
 Russian State Archive of Literature and Art, Moscow
 RNB (Rossiyskaya natsional’naya biblioteka) – Russian National Library,
 St Petersburg

¹ Julian Budden, ‘Scene’, in *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, ed. Stanley Sadie (London: Macmillan, 1992).

VMOMKG (Vserossiyskoye muzeynoye ob"yedineniye muzikal'noy kul'turi imeni M. I. Glinki) – All-Russian Consortium of Museums of Musical Culture, formerly GTsMMK (Gosudarstvenniy tsentral'niy muzey muzikal'noy kul'turi imeni M. I. Glinki) – The Central State Glinka Museum of Musical Culture, Moscow