Conflicts of Soviet Ideology in Sergei Prokofiev's Film Score for Ivan the Terrible

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2014

Recommended Citation
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Conflicts of Soviet Ideology in Sergei Prokofiev’s Film Score for *Ivan the Terrible*

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree at the City College of the City University of New York
Master of Arts in Musicology

May 2014
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Introduction

Prokofiev’s Homecoming

In 1936, after twenty years lived abroad, Sergei Prokofiev made the pivotal decision to return to his native Russia permanently and pursue a living as an artist under the watchful eye of the Soviet Union. Attracted by the promise of steady work and a guarantee that he would still be able to travel throughout the West, Prokofiev returned to his homeland with the expectation that the change of address would have little effect on his creative output. Simon Morrison, in his biography of Prokofiev, writes, “The regime needed celebrities, and he was lured into becoming one of them on the promise that nothing would change in his international career and that Moscow would simply replace Paris as the center of his operations.” These promises soon proved false, as it became clear that artists in the Soviet Union held a unique place, straddling the line between cultural figure and political tool.

The year of Prokofiev’s return coincided with the advent of Soviet sound cinema. Film proved vital to Prokofiev’s career, setting him on a trajectory that would lead to early success and eventual collision with the Soviet authorities. Morrison writes, “His greatest initial Soviet success would come in the realm of cinema.” Prokofiev’s work in film serves as a map, charting the course of his Soviet career from his return to the U.S.S.R. and attempts at repatriation, his rise to favor within the Soviet cultural bureaus, and his eventual fall from grace and inevitable censure.

2 Stephen P. Hill, “A Qualitative View of Soviet Cinema,” Cinema Journal, 11, no. 2 (Spring, 1972), 18-25. According to Hill, sound films first appeared in the USSR in 1930, but it took several years for the number of sound films released each year to catch up with and overtake the number of silent films. The two types remained in circulation side by side for several years. Silent films disappeared from the Soviet screen in 1936.
3 Morrison, The People’s Artist, 23.
Throughout this period of constant upheaval, Prokofiev struggled to establish himself as a Soviet composer, constantly grappling with all possible connotations of what that meant. His artistic output during this time included all major genres of classical music. Praise and adulation alternated with censure and public reprimand. While all of his works were subject to close examination by the cultural authorities, Prokofiev’s work in film provides a particularly interesting context in which to explore the conflicts between politics and art under Stalin. Film held a special place in Soviet culture, and Prokofiev, as one of the regime’s celebrity artists, did too. The various ebbs and flows of his Soviet career can be traced through his work in films, eight in all, culminating in the two films which marked both his greatest artistic and political successes, as well his ultimate downfall—that is, his collaboration with the director Sergei Eisenstein on *Ivan the Terrible Parts I and II*.

The two films met with starkly contrasting reactions from the Party leaders: Part I, released in January 1945, received the highest possible accolades granted in the Soviet Union, the Stalin Prize, First Class, awarded to both Eisenstein and Prokofiev. Part II, due for release only a few months later, was banned by the censorship boards, and received direct criticism from Stalin, effectively ruining both artists’ careers.

This paper explores the ways in which Prokofiev’s music for *Ivan the Terrible Parts I and II* contributed to the Soviet political establishment’s reactions to the films. A great deal of scholarly literature explores what in the two films changed so as to elicit such a drastic shift in Stalin’s reaction to Part II, but comparatively little attention is given to what changed in the music. The question once asked brings to light some interesting complexities within the film score. In fact, much of the music from Part I
returns in Part II, due to the leitmotivic structure of the score. As the various leitmotifs develop throughout the course of the film, so does the viewer’s perception of these themes and the objects or characters with which they are associated. Part I deals primarily with Ivan’s outward heroics—his coronation and wedding feast, his military victories; throughout he is portrayed as strong, valiant and unrelenting in securing a great and unified Russia. The music supports these themes, further underlining the frankly patriotic bent of the film. Part II turns inward, examining Ivan’s motives and the early psychological traumas experienced by the young tsar which set him on the path to ruthless tyranny. The music again supports these themes, but the emphasis is now on psychological and moral motivations. Since the Ivan films were openly billed as an allegory of Stalin, this was dangerous territory for the two artists to tread.

This paper deals primarily with the music; it is not an analysis of the film or Eisenstein’s theories themselves, though some discussion of these subjects is required for creating a context in which to understand how the music works in tandem with the visuals. Furthermore, this paper does not attempt to discuss every musical cue in the films, or every appearance of specific themes or leitmotifs, but rather is limited to only those themes or occurrences that have some bearing on the films’ political reception.

The historical progress of the creation of the films, from Eisenstein’s first sketches for the script, through their final release is a complicated and circuitous tale. Much of the script, film, and music wound up on the cutting room floor. Again, this paper is not concerned with the portions of the score cut from the final version of the film (though much of it is included in the scholarly edition of the published score⁴), but is

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confined to a consideration of the film as the censors, Soviet public, and most importantly, Stalin himself saw it. Taking these matters as the parameters of this discussion, I compare the Party writings on cultural policy and specific Party statements on the films and draw out those moments in the score that adhere to or violate those policies. Through harmonic analysis, I consider how the music works in tandem with the visual elements of the specific scenes.

Chapter 1 outlines the cultural and political context in which Prokofiev lived and worked in the Soviet Union, and gives a brief overview of each of his film projects. Chapter 2 turns to look closely at the music for Part I, and how it contributed to the film’s political and commercial success. Chapter 3 examines the music for Part II, and its contribution to Stalin’s negative reaction to the film. Tracing the interplay between critical reception and art in this manner, the Ivan films serve as a case study of how Party involvement in specific creative projects created conflicts between politics and the creative output of artists living in the Soviet Union under Stalin.

Prokofiev’s manuscripts, rather than an exact rendering or transcription of the film score; it includes most cues in their unedited form and some music not included in the final released versions of the films.
Chapter 1 – Historical Background

The Development of Soviet Cultural Policy

The role of the artist in the Soviet Union was inextricably couched in a political context. Composers were viewed as civil servants, tasked with creating art in service to the state. Marina Frolova-Walker writes,

Since the creation of music was regarded as much the same as any industrial process, composers, as ‘culture-workers’ were expected to serve the state, often as members of a collective. They were accorded specific tasks by the Party, which in general followed the much-trumpeted ‘unanimous Soviet public opinion on musical issues’ of Sovetskaya muzika [Soviet Music, the primary musicological journal of the Soviet Union].

Prokofiev left Russia in 1918, shortly after the brief but violent revolution in 1917 and before the newly formed Soviet government had fully taken form. He spent the next twenty years traveling throughout the west, living mostly in Paris and briefly in America. During his absence from Russia, the Soviet government reorganized all aspects of civilian life from housing to occupation to production to industry. As Simon Morrison explains, “Under Stalin, art was wrested away from the guidance of a communal consensus and placed in the hands of particular individuals, the chairmen of the Committee on Arts Affairs, who wielded great power over the artists under their control. The definitions of the good, the moral, and the just had bureaucratic origins.” Artists of all disciplines were organized into the various “proletarian unions” as they were called. The musicians’ union, the Russian Association of Proletarian Musicians, formed in 1924 and set the standards for acceptable music composition and performance. Many

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2 Morrison, People’s Artist, 186.
musicians found these guidelines set by the RAPM highly restrictive and somewhat arbitrary.

In 1932, the proletariat organizations were disbanded and replaced by the government-appointed Soviet artists’ unions, including the Union of Soviet Composers. Artists in all genres hoped the new unions would result in renewed artistic freedom, but in reality the new organizations allowed the government to keep a closer watch on the activities of artists and provided a mechanism for delivering censure to artists who strayed outside the dictates of acceptable Soviet art.³

Several events which greatly affected the activities of Soviet musicians, primarily in the form of systematized attacks on prominent composers, followed this rearrangement of artists’ professional organizations. The introduction of the term “Socialist Realism” in 1934 coincided with the formation of the writers’ union, which looked to the writings of Maxim Gorky as the prototype of Socialist Realism.⁴ In January of the following year, the Conference of Film Workers adopted Socialist Realism as the obligatory method for Soviet cinema, and Socialist Realism became the yardstick by which all artistic works were measured.⁵ Any artists whose works did not meet the requisites of Socialist Realism at best suffered public censure and professional disgrace, and at worst imprisonment, or even in some cases, execution.

The first public condemnation to affect the Soviet music world appeared in 1936 in response to Dmitri Shostakovich’s opera Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District. This critique, in the form of an unsigned editorial published in the main cultural newspaper of

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⁴ Morrison, *People’s Artist*, 24.
the Soviet Union, Pravda, accused Shostakovich of various acts of formalism and of total disregard for the accepted artistic standards. (The article had no byline, but it is widely believed that the it was written by Stalin.) The document had far-reaching effects on the music community as a whole, and served as a model for future similar critiques.  

The year 1934 also saw renewed efforts to codify the responsibilities of artistic censors, particularly in the realm of film. According to Valery S. Golovskoy, the publication in that year of a resolution by the Central Repertory Committee spelled out the restrictive functions of censorship, forbidding public performances and distribution of theatrical and musical presentations, motion pictures, and phonograph records that contain agitation propaganda directed against the Soviet authorities and the dictatorship of the proletariat; that divulge state secrets; that arouse national and religious fanaticism; that are of a mystical nature or of a pornographic character; that lack the proper ideological stance; or that are antiartistic in nature….Thus along with such obvious considerations as divulging state secrets, or pornography, there are also such vague formulations as “lack of the proper ideological stance” and the even vaguer “antiartistic” works. This created a legal basis for direct interference in the artistic process.  

With these specifications, Party censors now had guidelines, vague though they were, by which to judge artistic works and either promote or obstruct their propagation.

World War II brought a period of relative creative freedom, as official attention turned elsewhere. Historian Harlow Robinson describes the comparatively relaxed atmosphere during this period: “Composers, writers, and artists shared in the optimism. The more relaxed artistic-intellectual atmosphere of the war years, and a renewed sense of cultural solidarity, led them to believe—mistakenly—that the fearful nights of the pre-

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6 Morrison, People’s Artist, 40-41.  
War purges were behind them, that the security of victory would allow Stalin and his commissioners to ease their control over art and artists.9 Almost immediately after the war’s end this attitude reversed, and censorship was applied with renewed scrutiny.

Following the appointment of Andrei Zhdanov to the post of director of cultural policy in 1946, the atmosphere changed yet again, but in a manner that greatly baffled many artists. Zhdanov brought to the position years of apprenticeship under Stalin, including direct involvement in the Great Purges, and instituted some of the strictest and most devastating restrictions on the arts yet experienced. As the U.S.S.R.’s place in the world changed from Western ally to isolationist nuclear power, many subjects and themes which were promoted during the war, now led to censure and rebuke. This period of cultural policy subsequently came to be known as *zhdanovschina*.10 Acting as Stalin’s mouthpiece, Zhdanov delivered numerous crushing blows to established artists in all fields, ushering Soviet culture into the Cold War.

Against this backdrop, Soviet artists, Prokofiev and Eisenstein among them, carried on as best they could, attempting to anticipate the cultural authorities’ whims, sometimes succeeding, but more often failing. As so much cultural policy was based on the personal tastes of those in power, particularly Stalin, artists soon learned which genres and styles were safe. Film was one such genre.

*Film in the Soviet Union*

Film held a special position among art forms in the Soviet Union. Soviet cinema developed in tandem with Soviet culture, and is closely bound up in the history of the

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founding of the Soviet Union. Ian Christie writes, “While Soviet cinema became an industry during the 1930s, it also became a mass medium of entertainment, instruction and persuasion for the Soviet population.”11 Film was considered the ultimate socialist art form due to its mass appeal and accessibility and its potential as a tool for Soviet propaganda. Peter Kenez writes, “The Bolsheviks considered film to be an excellent instrument for bringing their message to the people, and they intended to use it, more than any other medium of art, for creating the ‘new socialist man’.”12

However, this mass appeal also meant heightened scrutiny. The Party establishment saw the immense power film had to reach a wide audience, and therefore strove to maintain ultimate control over the distribution channels. As Kenez explains, “The politicians set up extraordinarily complex control mechanisms because they were absolutely certain that cinema possessed great power. Problems in film-making were treated as issues of the greatest significance and many of the top leaders, including Stalin himself, were not too busy to devote their attention to films.”13 All films had to meet the approval of the Soviet cultural authorities in order to receive a license for general release, or else languish in the archives of the state film production company, Mosfilm.

Composers, too, were aware of film’s broad reach, an aspect which attracted them to the form. Robinson writes, “Writing film scores appealed to Prokofiev in part because so many people would hear them. Like Lenin, who called film ‘the most important art,’ Prokofiev, along with many other Soviet composers, was intrigued by the enormous

13 Ibid., 62.
potential of cinema as a mass medium.”\textsuperscript{14} Stalin himself was an avid fan of film and held private viewings in his residence on a regular basis.\textsuperscript{15} This, too, made film composing a smart choice for composers seeking the approval of the General Secretary, but also made them more vulnerable should he take offense to any of their work in the medium.

At its most basic level, composing for film provided a very fundamental necessity—paying work. Morrison writes of Prokofiev’s work in films, “[T]he composer took on the bulk of his work out of a practical need to support his wife and sons, who were living in dangerous and uncertain conditions in Moscow.”\textsuperscript{16} Many Russian composers of classical music worked in film, which distinguished the Soviet film industry from that of Hollywood, where there was an ideological divide between the so-called “high-brow” art of concert music and the “low-brow” popular or mass arts. Harlow Robinson writes of the Soviet film music scene, “In fact, ‘serious’ composers have played an unusually important role in the Soviet film tradition, and have collaborated with filmmakers since the earliest days of the Soviet film industry. Prokofiev’s colleague Shostakovich would eventually write music for more than thirty films (both silent and sound), and Aram Khachaturian for more than fifteen.”\textsuperscript{17} Prokofiev and his colleagues brought distinction to the art form.

Aside from the practical reasons for working in film, film music afforded composers creative opportunities not found in standard concert or chamber music. Film scores, by their nature, would be recorded and preserved, made immediately available to a mass, even worldwide, audience. The prospect of working with recorded sound allowed

\textsuperscript{14} Robinson, \textit{Prokofiev}, 279.
\textsuperscript{16} Simon Morrison, \textit{People’s Artist}, 188.
\textsuperscript{17} Robinson, \textit{Prokofiev}, 279.
for musical experimentation that could not be achieved in live performance. In recording the soundtracks for *Lieutenant Kizhe* and *Alexander Nevsky*, Prokofiev experimented with the qualities (or lack thereof) of definition and fidelity, and essentially used them to his advantage to create sound effects not otherwise achievable in live performance.\(^{18}\)

Because music held such a high place within Soviet culture on its own, its importance within the realm of film was widely recognized by Soviet directors and filmmakers. Harlow Robinson points out that,

> The special role that music has played in the history of Soviet cinema also came about because a number of pioneer Soviet film directors—above all, Sergei Eisenstein—possessed a high degree of musical sophistication. They conceived of the role of music in film in new and highly theoretical terms. Their intellectual approach to the film score as an art in its own right, and their willingness to respect the composer as a collaborator on equal terms, led ‘serious’ composers to view film music as a worthwhile and unique genre.\(^{19}\)

In particular, Prokofiev found his collaborations with the director Sergei Eisenstein offered especially fertile creative soil. Kevin Bartig writes of their collaborations,

> “Eisenstein’s projects captured Prokofiev’s attention as an artist, and helped him achieve the goal that had sparked the imagination of so many composers of the twentieth century: harnessing the art of music to the new visual medium that came to dominate the century.”\(^{20}\)

Composers found another very practical reason for working in film: It kept them alive. In an age when purges and executions were the favored method for dispensing with dissenters, it seemed safest to stick to art forms Stalin was known to enjoy. Eisenstein’s life and career is one example of an artist whose life was spared because of his films. A

\(^{18}\) Bartig, “Red Screen,” 152
\(^{19}\) Robinson, *Prokofiev*, 279.
number of his films had been censored or shut down altogether—most notably his *Behzin Meadow*, for which he was accused of “ideological poverty”\(^\text{21}\) —yet he continued to receive commissions, and more importantly, live. Leonid Kozlov indicates that the commercial and political success of *Alexander Nevsky* may well have saved Eisenstein’s life.\(^\text{22}\) Similarly Solomon Volkov proposes that Shostakovich’s work on the score for the film *Counterplan* saved the composer’s life following the public criticism of his opera *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*. Shostakovich’s music for the film included a song, “The Morning Meets us with Coolness,” which enjoyed nationwide and even international popularity as “the first Soviet hit song to come from the movies.”\(^\text{23}\) Shortly after the film’s release, the poet who wrote the lyrics for the song, Kornilov, was arrested on charges of creating anti-Soviet artistic works and was executed. The song, however, endured, as did Shostakovich. He remained on constantly shifting professional and political ground, but he nonetheless remained. Volkov attributes this preservation of his life to Stalin’s favorable view toward the song and Shostakovich’s work in other films.\(^\text{24}\)

Prokofiev’s situation was equally unstable, but he, too, continued to receive commissions and provide for his family. Commenting on the political importance of the official reaction to *Alexander Nevsky*, released in 1938 at the start of World War II, Robinson writes, “Nevsky came at a crucial moment for Prokofiev, when Soviet artists were literally under the gun to produce work that promoted the appropriate ideological line. Its success helps to explain why he [Prokofiev] and Eisenstein would be spared in


\(^{24}\) Ibid., 131-135.
the purges that were already engulfing so many others around them.”25 Not every project proved to be the most artistically satisfying or challenging, but working in film provided a practical means by which one could earn a living and demonstrate loyalty to the Soviet cause.

“Socialist Realism” and the Soviet Aesthetic

The definition of good Soviet art was a constantly moving target. Morrison explains, “For elite artists living under Stalin, official approbation tended to alternate with official condemnation…Vacillations in cultural policies affected their careers, but so, too, did disputes within the cultural agencies, miscommunications between those agencies and other tiers of government, and personal rivalries.”26 Prokofiev and his colleagues could never be certain if a work would receive praise or cause offense.

Following the formation of the artists unions in 1932, Socialist Realism became the expected method for all art, while “formalism” stood as its dreaded opposite. Though the terms themselves lacked any absolute definition, they gave the government-appointed union leaders a rubric by which to assess artistic output. In other words, the individuals who comprised the Committee on Arts Affairs generally set the standard for what was considered acceptable based on their own personal preferences. Anything found to be particularly dissonant or atonal was denounced and labeled as “formalism.” Much emphasis was placed on the virtues of accessibility, simplicity, and mass appeal. Musicologist Boris Schwarz identifies the primary musical genres that were most conducive to the aesthetics of Socialist Realism as, “genres that were able to convey

25 Robinson, Prokofiev, 357.
26 Morrison, People’s Artist, 296.
‘concrete images’—opera, song, oratorio, and cantata, and instrumental program music.”

He does not mention film music, but its ability to convey concrete images makes it a viable candidate as well. He goes on to note, “In January of 1936...Stalin formulated three criteria for the Soviet opera [again, applicable to film scores as well]: 1) socialist subjects, 2) realistic musical language, and 3) the new, positive hero as representative of the new socialist age.”

The exact definition of Socialist Realism was never stated in explicit terms, and all artists seeking to work within the confines of this idiom found themselves without any practical guidelines. This was of course by design; the vague terminology allowed the Party to continually change and adapt the parameters of Socialist Realism to suit their present purposes. The end result was that artists stumbled blindly through the maze of Party double speak, never sure whether their work would please or offend, constantly torn between the desire to feed their creative urges vs. remaining within the favor of the Party officials. This was far from the nurturing environment of creative freedom Prokofiev had been promised on his return to the Soviet Union.

Avoiding formalism proved to be equally difficult. “Formalism,” like “Socialist realism,” lacked a concrete definition, and the term was loosely applied to any artwork which caused offense. Nicolas Slonimsky, in his article “The Changing Style of Soviet Music,” defines formalism as: “adherence to formulas of modern music. Linear counterpoint, dissonant harmony, syncopated rhythm, tricky orchestration, special instrumental effects, atonality, and the twelve-tone technique, were the specific formulas condemned as formalistic.”

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Prokofiev’s embrace of simplicity and clarity in his compositional style—a style he termed “new simplicity”—met the dictates of Soviet aesthetics just so and shielded him from criticism early on. This style, with its emphasis on simple melodies, clarity, and traditional tonal harmonies, fell easily in line with Soviet ideology. Morrison explains, “From [the mid-1920s] forward, Prokofiev’s scores became more tuneful and their intended effect more uplifting....He would soon realize that the creation of art that dissolved ambiguities and contradictions, that invoked a realm beyond the intellect, was not only central to his personal beliefs but also to Soviet aesthetics.”

According to Robinson, Prokofiev’s desire to fully explore this new style contributed to his decision to return to the U.S.S.R. Robinson writes, “Prokofiev would only succeed in creating the ‘new simplicity’ which he was seeking in the Soviet musical environment. There, his natural impulse would find reinforcement; in Moscow, composers were encouraged to write music that was accessible, simple, and melodic. The results would be some of his greatest compositions—Lt. Kizhe, Romeo and Juliet, the Second Violin Concerto…. Ultimately, it was his desire to compose in a more simplified style that led him to return to the U.S.S.R.”

Furthermore, this style was particularly conducive to film scoring. Writing in this vein, Prokofiev produced accessible music; pairing that music with films served as a vehicle to deliver his music to the widest possible audience. Prokofiev, already a celebrity due to his time in the West, added an element of distinction to the films he worked on, and could attract large audiences.

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30 Robinson, *Prokofiev*, 266.
With the advent of World War II, a new trend in Soviet cultural policy arose: the reconceptualization of historic figures to serve patriotic purposes. During the 1930s, Stalin developed a predilection for revisionist history—that is, using the arts as a means for reinterpreting sordid elements of the Russian historical past in a new, favorable light. Bartig writes, “The Stalinist evocation of history in public media, speeches, art, music, and large civic celebrations had a direct powerful connection with the Soviet worldview; a mighty and impregnable Russia extending backward in time was a mirror image of the real state extending forward in time.” Prokofiev would attempt to achieve this in a number of the projects he worked on as a Soviet composer, most notably the films *Alexander Nevsky* and *Ivan the Terrible Parts I & II*.

*Prokofiev’s Work in Film*

Prokofiev wrote scores for eight films in all, each of which served some propagandistic function. His first foray into the world of film came in 1934, two years before his return to Russia, with the film *Lieutenant Kizhe*. This was his first Soviet commissioned project, and served in many ways to prepare the way for his return. Directed by Aleksandr Faintsimmer, the film parodies the inefficiencies of Tsarist bureaucracy. The story’s satirical tone resonated with Prokofiev’s own sarcastic and dry sense of humor, characteristics which he was particularly adept at expressing musically. It was a moderate success, and an excellent platform in which to express his “new simplicity”: The score is noted for its accessible melodies, transparent orchestration and even its slight hint of irony.

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The music from this film went on to live a very successful life of its own in the form of a suite, which Prokofiev crafted that same year, and remains one of his most popular works today. Robinson writes of his work on *Kizhe*, “Prokofiev’s unqualified critical and popular success…was very important for him in establishing a Soviet persona. It must also have reinforced his belief that he belonged in Russia. While working on the film, he had been very aware of how important it was for him to create something that proved his ability to convey Soviet reality and the Soviet aesthetic in his music.”\(^{34}\) *Kizhe* also provided Prokofiev with his first experience with the Soviet censorship mechanism. Morrison notes that prior to its release, the film underwent revision according to changes mandated by “a government commission dedicated to the correction of ideological deficiencies in Soviet cinema.”\(^{35}\) None of the changes affected the music, but it did delay the film’s release.

Prokofiev’s next venture into film coincided with his return to Russia in 1937 and the Pushkin Jubilee celebration. Soviet artists of all genres were encouraged to participate by taking on Pushkin-related subjects in their work, and Prokofiev, keen to garner accolades from his new audience and government, eagerly accepted three Pushkin commissions. Among them was another film score, that for the proposed Mikhail Romm film, *The Queen of Spades*, based on a Pushkin short story. For various reasons, none of these works actually saw the light of day, and *Queen of Spades* holds an interesting place within Prokofiev’s *oeuvre*. Prokofiev completed the score, but due to a reorganization of the Soviet film oversight committee, the film itself never got made, leaving it, in Kevin

\(^{34}\) Ibid.

\(^{35}\) Simon Morrison, *People’s Artist*, 21-22.
Bartig’s words, “a score without a film.” Despite the fact that no film resulted from the project, Prokofiev’s involvement in it was, to a degree, politically motivated, allowing for a smooth homecoming.

Prokofiev now really needed a sure thing, a project that would capture the attention of his Soviet audience, meet the approval of his Soviet benefactors, and simultaneously achieve artistic and commercial success. His next film project offered exactly such an opportunity: Alexander Nevsky, the story of the thirteenth century prince of Novgorod, who defeated the invading Teutonic (German) army. The writer and director Sergei Eisenstein received the commission for the film from the Soviet government, and invited Prokofiev to collaborate. Little was actually known about this medieval prince, which gave Eisenstein ample artistic license to add plenty of patriotic allegory and give the film a clear propagandistic slant.

Eisenstein, too, had his own political motivations for taking on the project. His career had come to a standstill following the political disaster of his last project, Bezhin Meadow for which he had been publicly reprimanded. He desperately needed work, not only for financial reasons, but also for professional and political salvation. As for Prokofiev, since his return to the U.S.S.R., he had yet to have a truly smashing success, either artistically or, more importantly, commercially. He needed the money, but more crucially, he needed to make a statement that would truly capture the attention of the Party leaders, his professional benefactors. Russell Merritt writes, “Thus for Prokofiev as for Eisenstein, Nevsky became a critical test, a vehicle that provided both men the chance to rehabilitate themselves. They accepted the project knowing full well that Stalin was

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taking a personal interest in it…and Eisenstein in particular was under the constant supervision of Soviet bureaucrats to make certain his film was politically reliable.”³⁸ Each artist saw the project as an opportunity for redemption.

Prokofiev and Eisenstein made an ideal match. They came from similar backgrounds, including time lived abroad and a need to re-ingratiate themselves with the Soviet authorities. They both saw their art as the means for accomplishing this goal. According to Robinson, “By the mid-1930s, both artists were searching in their respective media for an appropriately ‘popular’ and ‘Soviet’ style that would satisfy the demands of the official cultural establishment but still retain artistic integrity.”³⁹ Nevsky proved to be the perfect agent, its subject matter pleasing to the party authorities, even Stalin himself. It was the first successful film for Eisenstein after a long string of failures; for Prokofiev, it was his first product of, as Robinson puts it, “unambiguously successful ‘nationalistic’ music.”⁴⁰

In Nevsky, Prokofiev showed his adeptness at navigating the line between Socialist Realism and formalism. Throughout the film, the music depicting the Russians is characterized by simple, sonorous harmonies, and clear diatonic melodies; though he never directly quotes folk songs in the score, Prokofiev succeeded in capturing the essence of the Russian folk idiom in his music. By contrast, the German crusading knights are depicted in harsh brassy timbres and discordant harmonies.⁴¹ Prokofiev even describes using the shortcomings of Soviet sound recording equipment to intentionally

³⁹ Robinson, Prokofiev, 348.
⁴⁰ Ibid., 350.
distort the timbres of the trumpets during the recording of the sound track.\textsuperscript{42} These effects, separated from the narrative context, would surely have been labelled as formalism; however, Prokofiev’s use of this music to depict the Germans is clearly done ironically. The effect heightens the parallels between the 13\textsuperscript{th} century Russians defending their lands against the invading Germans, and the 20\textsuperscript{th} century Soviets defending their land against Hitler’s armies. With this contrast, Prokofiev properly achieved the balance between the proper use of Socialist Realism and an ironic use of formalism.

Seizing on the same entrepreneurial instincts that had given his music for \textit{Lieutenant Kizhe} a life outside of the movie theater, Prokofiev crafted a cantata from the score for \textit{Nevsky} in 1939. As noted previously, cantata was an ideal instrument for Soviet realism, and the \textit{Alexander Nevsky Cantata}, made up of songs heard throughout the film, ensured Prokofiev’s further success. He at last achieved the artistic success his return to the U.S.S.R. had promised to bring about.

Political timing again lent a hand in ensuring the success of the film and the safety of its creators: The film’s release coincided with Russia’s entry into World War II. During this time in the Soviet Union, as Morrison puts it, “The creation of anti-German art became the moral obligation of Soviet artists.”\textsuperscript{43} Prokofiev was, for the moment, safe in the eyes of the authorities. Morrison reports that, “Prokofiev’s extravagant score for the film demonstrated that he was, as Stalin purportedly said to Eisenstein, ‘a good Bolshevik after all.’”\textsuperscript{44} Both the film score and the cantata were awarded a Stalin Prize in 1941, and Prokofiev gained the first marks of approval from the government authorities, an acceptance he would aim to further and solidify during the war years ahead.

\textsuperscript{42} See Bartig, \textit{Red Screen}, 150-154.
\textsuperscript{43} Morrison, \textit{People’s Artist}, 233.
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid.
Party leaders viewed music as an important and effective propaganda tool for maintaining morale both at home and at the front during the war.\textsuperscript{45} Film, with its wide distribution, proved equally crucial to the mobilization efforts.\textsuperscript{46} Much of the success of *Alexander Nevsky*, both the film and the cantata, resulted from its usefulness as a propaganda tool and for its uplifting patriotic themes. The director, too, recognized the propagandistic potential his film possessed. Eisenstein describes *Alexander Nevsky* as an “effective patriotic weapon,” and an object to be hurled, “like a grenade into the face of the aggressor.”\textsuperscript{47}

In the years during the war, Prokofiev worked on several patriotically-aligned films, meant to serve as a sort of rallying cry for the Russian people. These films, all but unknown today, include *Kotovsky*, *Partisans in the Ukrainian Steppe*, *Lermontov*, and *Tonya*. Prokofiev’s score for *Tonya* perhaps represents his most extended efforts to gain Soviet approval through the medium, and also therefore his least artistically realized. Morrison notes, “Prokofiev wrote the music of course, but it sounds like a poor copy of him. It suggests a composer seeking to limit his range of effects, to become, as it were, impersonal.”\textsuperscript{48} With these films, it becomes evident that an overemphasis on purely political motives caused Prokofiev’s artistic vision to suffer; he struggled in his art to serve both political and artistic ends equally, and whenever one began to take prominence, the other inevitably suffered.

However, Prokofiev’s greatest work in film still lay ahead of him. In 1941, he and Eisenstein embarked on another monumental collaboration, *Ivan the Terrible*, a biopic of

\textsuperscript{46} Brandenberger, *National Bolshevism*, 156.
\textsuperscript{47} Eisenstein, “P-R-K-F-V,” in *Notes of Film Director*, (New York: Dover Publications, 1970), 41-42.
\textsuperscript{48} Morrison, *People’s Artist*, 201.
the 16th century first Tsar of Russia. The struggle between art and politics would reach its zenith here: Though the work would mark Prokofiev’s and Eisenstein’s greatest achievement in the realm of cinema, it would also open both of them up to the greatest criticism yet faced in their careers, a blow from which neither of them ever fully recovered. It is to these films that this paper now turns.
Chapter 2 – “Ivan the Terrible Part I”: The Artists Praised

Tsar Ivan IV: History Re-envisioned

Eisenstein received the commission to create a film based on the life of Tsar Ivan IV directly from Stalin, delivered via Zhdanov, in January 1941. Following the success of their previous collaboration on Alexander Nevsky, Eisenstein sought another opportunity to work with Prokofiev. Prokofiev quickly signed on to the project, commencing work in 1942. Over the course of the next three years, the script, score, and scope of the project underwent numerous changes, consuming both artists and carrying numerous artistic, political and even physical consequences.

The years immediately preceding and during World War II saw a marked shift toward the celebration and cultification of prominent figures of Russia’s past, such as Peter the Great, Alexander Nevsky, and Tsar Ivan IV. This move away from the socialist tenets of a classless collective stemmed primarily from a need to rally widespread support for the war effort. Looking to Russia’s past heroes—particularly those recognized for their efforts to unify the Slavic peoples under a single Russian state—served as a metaphor for the current times. As such, Alexander Nevsky and Ivan the Terrible provided excellent subjects for artists seeking to gain Stalin’s favor, provided their artistic treatments aligned with party ideology.

Stalin saw in Ivan his political forerunner: Recognized for uniting the Russian states into a single political entity, many of Ivan’s accomplishments bear comparison to twentieth century communism. As tsar, Ivan established a centralized Russia, liquidated

1 Bartig, “Red Screen,” 238.
2 Morrison, People’s Artist, 185.
3 For more, see Brandenberger, National Bolshevism; and Kevin M. F. Platt and David Brandenberger, “Terribly Romantic, Terribly Progressive, or Terribly Tragic: Rehabilitating Ivan IV under I.V. Stalin,” Russian Review, 58, no. 4 (Oct., 1999).
feudal fragmentation, and redistributed farm land to the peasantry. (This last act especially foreshadows Stalin’s collectivization of farms in the 1930s.) Military, economic, and political triumphs alternated with military failures and acts of tyranny and terror. As implied by the commission of the film from above, Eisenstein’s task was to draw attention to Ivan’s (and by extension, Stalin’s) victories, while minimizing, or ignoring completely, his failings.

Kristin Thompson identifies the two prominent views of the historical Tsar Ivan IV in circulation at that time: that of Ivan as a madman, and that of Ivan as a cruel but rational ruler upholding the needs of the Russian state above all else. The Stalin administration hoped to eradicate the first view, declaring it invalid on the basis it was perpetuated by Ivan’s enemies immediately following his death. Stalin, taking advantage of historical remove, instead promoted a view of Ivan as a progressive figure for his era. In order to ensure that this positive view of Ivan took hold within the culture, Stalin initiated a campaign in the late 1930s to rehabilitate the historical image of Ivan, going even so far as to literally rewrite the history books.

Several artists took on the subject of Ivan in their work; the resulting products included a play by A.N Tolstoy, a novel by V.I. Kostylev, and Eisenstein’s films. In each of these works, the mythical, romanticized image of the pro-Socialist, pro-Stalinist took precedence over historical accuracy. Eisenstein, therefore, needed to create a representation of Ivan that held to the current Stalinist view, that painted a parallel

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4 Thompson, “Ivan the Terrible,” 33, 35.
5 Platt and Brandenberger, “Terribly Romantic,” 637. The authors describe how Stalin, in reading a manuscript of Shestakov’s textbook, Short Course on the History of the USSR in 1937, came across a reproduction of a painting of Ivan murdering his own son, and crossed it out. It was later excluded from the published textbook. Shestakov rewrote additional portions of the textbook to bring it more in line with the Stalinist view of Ivan. See 637.
6 Ibid., 639.
The Eiseinstein-Prokofiev Collaboration

Prokofiev and Eiseinstein shared a collaborative partnership unique among film directors and composers. Each saw the other as an equal partner in the films they created, and each shared fully in the creative work of bringing the film to the screen. They shared a warm personal friendship as well as a mutually respectful professional relationship, as evidenced in their written correspondence and each artist’s essays on their collaborative projects. Eiseinstein, well-educated and knowledgeable of all forms of art, had a great appreciation for music, and conceived of filmic composition in musical terms. The editors to the scholarly edition of the published film score note, “The operatic character of Prokofiev’s film music for Ivan the Terrible—particularly in Part I, but also in some of the episodes in Part II—is certainly intentional…and was probably inspired by Eiseinstein’s script.”7 In 1940, a year before commencing on Ivan, Eiseinstein directed a production of Wagner’s Die Walküre at the Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow.8 When in 1939 the arrest of director Vsevolod Meyerhold (who had been something of a mentor to both Eiseinstein and Prokofiev) left Prokofiev’s opera Semyon Kotko without a director, Prokofiev hoped Eiseinstein would be appointed to take over the position.9

As a result of their shared view of the importance of the music to the film, Prokofiev and Eiseinstein benefitted from a mutually supportive collaborative method.

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8 Morrison, People’s Artist, 236.
9 Harlow Robinson, ed. Selected Letters of Sergei Prokofiev (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1998), 212. See also Morrison, People’s Artist, 100.
From his earliest sketches for the film scenario, Eisenstein included detailed descriptions of the role and types of music needed for the film.¹⁰ Once filming was underway, their method of working took one of three forms: Prokofiev composed music for completed and fully edited lengths of film; Prokofiev wrote music for an as yet un-filmed portion based on the description in the scenario; or the two worked in tandem, Prokofiev composing music based on an image or collection of images, and Eisenstein editing and splicing those images based on the rhythms and moods created by the music. Eisenstein wrote of this latter approach, “As a rule, Prokofiev and I bargain long and earnestly over ‘which is to be the first’: whether he should write music for unedited pieces of representation which would then be edited accordingly, or I should complete the montage of a scene first and have music afterwards. This is because the first has a more difficult task to solve: he must determine the rhythmic course of the scene.”¹¹

Over the course of his career, Eisenstein developed his rather elaborate theory of montage. His previous films, particularly Alexander Nevsky, served as laboratories for him to test and further refine those theories. His theory goes one step beyond Wagner’s philosophy of Gesamtkunstwerk, claiming film as the ultimate art form in which all the visual, dramatic, musical, and performing arts combine into a cohesive whole. Indeed, Eisenstein describes his theory of montage in musical terms, using words such as “polyphony” and “visual counterpoint” to describe the simultaneous lines of activity that combine to convey a film’s narrative. Those lines include the narrative itself, but also the particular combination and ordering of the individual images, the various visual effects of lighting, staging, movement, all working in counterpoint with the score. These multiple

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layers combine and work together to create an overall sensory experience which is greater than the sum of its individual parts, or rather what Eisenstein calls a “super structure” working both horizontally (i.e. linearly, from shot to shot) and vertically (i.e. simultaneously, from one sensory perception to the other, sight, sound, etc.).

Of the working of these elements together, Eisenstein writes, “The general course of the montage was an uninterrupted interweaving of these diverse themes into one unified movement. Each montage-piece had a double responsibility—to build the total line as well as to continue the movement within each of the contributory themes.”

In Ivan, he achieves the culmination of the development of these theories.

Their collaboration allowed Eisenstein the opportunity to put his theory into practice and continue refining and honing his ideas. Marie Seton, in her biography of Eisenstein, writes, “Through close collaboration with Prokofiev, he was able to evolve new lines of theoretical thought which advanced his true interests.” Equally, Prokofiev found his work on Eisenstein’s films to be among his most artistically rewarding projects. Gallez writes of their partnership, “Prokofiev did not write for films unless he believed his music indeed would play a creative role—that is, integrate with the film structure, not merely accompany.”

Alexander Nevsky especially served as a launching point for further development and execution of these theories. In describing the specific relationship between the visuals and the music with regards to Prokofiev’s music for the “Battle on the Ice” scene from that film, Eisenstein writes, “…[W]e find a complete correspondence between the movement of the music and the movement of the eye over the

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13 Ibid., 76.
lines of the plastic composition. In other words, the same motion lies at the base of both the musical and the plastic structures….The plastic element movement and the musical movement coincide here, with a maximum of descriptiveness.”\textsuperscript{16} In accordance with this aesthetic philosophy, music shares equal credit in the storytelling, enhancing the audiences’ experience of the visual elements. But with shared credit comes shared responsibility: While Prokofiev may share in the filmmaker’s artistic triumphs, he is also fully complicit in the perpetration of any ideological transgressions. When Part I came up for accolades, Prokofiev received those same praises. When Part II came up for censure, Prokofiev fell under the same disapproving eye.

Following negative audience reception of several new works in the late 1920s, Prokofiev reoriented his compositional approach so as to emphasize accessibility in all of his music. This was not so much a change in style as it was a harkening back to earlier works; his Symphony No. 1, “Classical Symphony” (1916), makes use of classical forms and textures imbued with twentieth century harmonic language. This renewed emphasis on accessibility served him well in the mass-consumed medium of film. Lieutenant Kizhe offered Prokofiev his first opportunity to test this new style on a mass audience;\textsuperscript{17} his later collaborations with Eisenstein allowed him the opportunity to continue refining it and exploiting it to its fullest potential.

Prokofiev coined the term “new simplicity” in a diary entry dated May 2-5, 1933: “[W]hat is needed now is to create for the masses in a manner that allows the music to remain good. My previous, melodic pieces and my search for a ‘new simplicity’ have

\textsuperscript{16} Eisenstein, \textit{Film Sense}, 178-179. Italics in the original. For a full analysis of the interaction between music and visual content in these scenes, see pages 174-216.

\textsuperscript{17} Bartig, “Red Screen,” 40.
prepared me well for this task.” Prokofiev further expanded upon this idea in an essay titled “The Paths of Soviet Music,” which was published November 16, 1934 in the Soviet cultural newspaper, *Izvestiya*: “I believe the type of music needed is what one might call ‘light-serious’ or ‘serious-light’ music. It is by no means easy to find the right idiom for such music. It should be primarily melodious, and the melody would be clear and simple without, however, becoming repetitive or trivial.” With these goals in mind, Prokofiev shed the heavy orchestration typical of the music of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in favor of lighter of textures and clarity. This worked well in film, and particularly within the context of Eisenstein’s montage theories, where music works in tandem with the other elements, rather than as the sole source of conveyance.

One other coincidental commonality came to bear on their shared artistic goals: Each artist had met Walt Disney on separate visits to Hollywood in the 1930s. They had both been impressed by Disney’s ability to achieve such perfect unity between action, particularly movement, and music in his animated films. Robinson writes of Prokofiev’s encounter with *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves* that he and Disney shared “a fascination with technology and the possibilities of recorded sound…” For Eisenstein’s part, he was struck by Disney’s innovative approach to translating pre-existing music into a concrete image, as in his animated short *Silly Symphony*. In his writings, Eisenstein refers to Disney as a “genius” and “unsurpassed master.” In his essay on color and film, Eisenstein writes, “Disney’s most interesting—most valuable—contribution has been his skill at superimposing the ‘drawing’ of a melody on top of a graphic drawing. In live action cinema, what is difficult is teasing out the line of the composition from the real

18 Quoted in Simon Morrison, *People’s Artist*, 14.
19 Quoted in Ibid., 25.
Eisenstein and Prokofiev hoped to overcome this difficulty in their live-action films.

Having established an understanding of their shared goals and artistic vision, this paper now turns to examine how that vision worked itself out in the Ivan the Terrible films. Part I primarily aligned itself with the proper ideals of film aesthetic under Stalin, while Part II in many ways collided with these same notions.

Ivan the Terrible, Part I

Part I begins with Ivan’s coronation as Tsar, during which his various enemies are introduced. Chief among them is his aunt Efrosynia who covets the throne for her feeble-minded son, Vladimir. Following his wedding to Anastasia, Ivan leads his army to war against the Khanate of Kazan. He returns home, but falls victim to the treachery of his political rivals. Anastasia is poisoned by Efrosynia and dies; Ivan is left with no one for council and leaves Moscow in a retreat to the countryside. The film ends with the Russian people coming to Ivan to beg him to return to Moscow. He declares that he now rules a united and powerful Russia at the wish of the people.

The music for Part I underscores this depiction of Ivan as a powerful, victorious and righteous ruler. Ivan is characterized by two contrasting leitmotifs, one depicting his military strength and courage, and the other depicting him as a regal, majestic ruler. (A third leitmotif is applied to Ivan in Part II and will be discussed in detail in the following chapter.) The use of leitmotif in the film constantly reinforces the “good”—i.e. militarily strong, rightful—aspects of Ivan’s rule. Meanwhile, themes depicting the treachery of his

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enemies work in contrast to the Ivan themes to further bolster the impression of a man striving to overcome opposition and impediments to ensuring the security of his state.

The first of the Ivan leitmotifs opens the film as an overture (Example 2.1). A brass fanfare sounds above runs in the strings while an image of billowing clouds of smoke fills the screen. This theme, which Eisenstein titled “A Storm Approaches,” represents Ivan’s power and strength. It returns throughout the film to underscore moments of military victory and heroism. As the credits finish, a text card appears to introduce the film while the overture plays again:

This is a film about a man who was the first to unite our country in the 16th century; a Prince of Moscow who created a single and powerful state from a hodgepodge of divided and self-seeking principalities; a warlord who heralded the military glory of our Motherland throughout the Orient and the Occident; the first ruler who, in order to reach these great goals, had crowned himself Tsar of All the Russians.

From the outset, Ivan appears as a hero whose deeds are justified by their service to the greater good. The “Storm Approaches” theme, by its association with his military and political victories, reinforces this representation each time it returns throughout the film.

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22 This image, looped here so that the clouds of smoke roll continuously as the credits appear superimposed over the image, is taken from a later scene in which Ivan defeats the Tatars in his first military victory.
This theme meets with all the requirements of Socialist Realism in portraying Ivan as a historical hero: The march-like figure and instrumentation invokes an impression of militaristic bravado. Melodically, the theme is easily identifiable and direct, built primarily on stepwise motion, with horns and trumpets in unison over scalar flourishes in the strings. Harmonically, the picture is somewhat less certain. Though notated in the key of B flat major, this tonality is never established definitively. Morrison points out that the substitution of E natural for E flat implies the Lydian mode. Bartig writes, “Rather than commanding firm, resolute support from the orchestra, the visceral exhilaration of full brass and the whirlwind of the violin’s figuration are paired with a capricious and volatile harmonic accompaniment....Ivan is at once heroic and unpredictable.” Hints of chromaticism lurk behind the wall of sound created by the brass, in the same way hints of disloyalty and treachery lurk behind the actions of Ivan’s close friends and advisors.

This theme lays the foundation for the music that will follow in the film: Much of the rest of the soundtrack is either derived from this theme, or set off against it, used to characterize Ivan and those around him. According to Morrison, “echoes, paraphrases, and transformations of the theme...permeate the soundtrack.” The additional two Ivan leitmotifs derive from this theme, and further draw out aspects of his character.

Prokofiev makes use of “new simplicity” in Ivan’s second leitmotif, in which the “Storm Approaches” theme is transformed to a more serene, lyrical setting (Example 2.2). The extroverted brassy fanfare is now transformed to a gently contoured line in the upper winds, over undulating accompaniment in the strings. In measure five, the horn and

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25 Morrison, People’s Artist, 238.
27 Morrison, People’s Artist, 238.
trumpet “Storm Approaches” motif from the overture enters in the low brass, now at a slower tempo and in counterpoint to the upper woodwind line. All traces of harmonic ambiguity are gone; the cue is firmly rooted in the key of A major.

This second Ivan theme denotes his noble and regal attributes, asserting the representation of Ivan as the rightful ruler of Russia. Heard during the battle of Kazan, this theme creates stark contrast against the chaos and activity of battle, and depicts Ivan as a calming presence, assured of his destiny as the true ruler of a united Russia. Just before the attack on the Tatars, the Russians set up camp on the Kazan Steppes, preparing for battle. Ivan steps to the opening of his tent to survey his army spread out across the field below him. The sparseness of the music matches the carefully crafted visuals: Ivan stands at the top of a hill just under the spire of his tent, as his army snakes its way down the slope in a single-file line. Two of the soldiers, Alexei Basmanov and his son Fedor, admire Ivan as he stands atop the hill. Alexei says, “Look, Fedor, my son, the Tsar of the whole Russia.” Fedor gazes at Ivan and exclaims, “The Tsar!” Together the score and visuals create an image of a singularly powerful man at the pinnacle of his achievements about to embark on the first defining event of his political career.
An earlier occurrence of this theme adds another dimension to Ivan’s character. During Ivan’s wedding feast, his two close friends, Andrei Kurbsky and Fyodor Kolychev show signs of conflicted feelings. Kolychev is concerned by Ivan’s amassing of power and fears that his personal ambitions will prevent him from being a just ruler. Kurbsky, is in love with Anastasia and is pained to see her marry his best friend. The two men stand on either side of Ivan, Kolychev asking permission to take up the monastic life, and Kurbsky casting glances of longing toward Anastasia. The “regal” Ivan theme enters as Ivan comes to understand that being in a position of power will mean isolation from his friends. He accepts this burden, recognizing that his calling will come with many struggles and personal sacrifices, all for the sake of the good of Russia. He embraces Kolychev and says, “Pray for us sinners.” These two themes taken together present the two sides of Ivan as portrayed in the film: Ivan the man (that is, imbued with humanity), and Ivan the all-powerful creator of a unified Russia.

As in *Alexander Nevsky*, songs permeate the score. The songs draw on a variety of sources, both liturgical and folk settings. The potential for mass appeal and accessibility made songs a favorite tool of Soviet film composers. As noted in chapter one, Stalin was especially attuned to the use of song in films, and showed a preference for films which included songs. 28 Eisenstein, aware of this, indicated in his thematic plan where he wanted Prokofiev to provide original songs to be sung by specific characters. For each, he notes, “A hit that everyone can sing.” 29 In other words, give the audience something they can hum on their way out of the theater. The inclusion of song in the film also left often the possibility for Prokofiev to create a cantata or oratorio, in the same way he did for

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Nevsky, which may well have been at the back of his mind. The political fallout following the release of Part II in 1946 and his own deteriorating health at that time prevented him from doing so.  

The themes depicting Ivan create a stark contrast to the themes depicting the treachery of those around him. In general, these musical cues make use of heavy dissonance, chromaticism, and agitated rhythmic figures. For example, when Kurbsky tortures the Tatar prisoners against Ivan’s wishes, the oboe, English horn, and E flat clarinet play a figure of repeated tritone leaps over an A in the cellos and octave Bs in the viola and violins (the interval of a major second). As in Nevsky, the ironic use of formalist language represents the enemies of the state, setting them apart from Ivan musically and ideologically.

All of these elements culminate in the final moments of the film when the Muscovites come to beseech Ivan to return to his throne and rule over them again. The visuals here echo those from the earlier scene of Ivan at his tent: Ivan, seen in profile stands on the ramparts of his fortress looking out over the field where his subjects have gathered, snaking away across the plain in a long line. The people sing a hymn, “Oh Return,” and the “Storm Approaches” theme returns as Ivan surveys his dominion. Ivan recognizes his responsibility to the Russian state and agrees to return. The film ends on a final, uplifting chord as Ivan reclaims his position as the rightful ruler.

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30 Nelly Kravetz, “An Unknown Ivan the Terrible Oratorio,” *Three Oranges*, 19 (May 2010), 4. Kravetz indicates that Prokofiev likely intended to create a suite, and offers possible reasons for his failure to do so, the political climate and his failing health chief among them. Though Prokofiev himself never completed such a project, Abram Stasevich, who had been the conductor for the recording of the Ivan sound tracks, constructed one shortly after the composer’s death. Several years later, Christopher Palmer made his own separate arrangement in the style of a cantata. See Christopher Palmer, “Prokofiev, Eisenstein and Ivan,” *The Musical Times*, 132, No. 1778 (Apr., 1991), 179-181. Kravetz, in her article, documents a recently discovered score for an Ivan oratorio arranged by the composer’s assistant, Levon Atovmian.
Critical Reception

Parts I and II were filmed, edited, and compiled in tandem. Numerous delays in the production scheduled—including Prokofiev’s own repeated delays of the completion of score—led Eisenstein to divide the films into three parts rather than two, resulting in a major rearranging of the content and structure of the films. As a result, Part I was front loaded with the depiction of the “heroic Ivan”, while Part II primarily concerned a close examination of the “human Ivan”. Eisenstein intended to release Parts I and II within a few months of each other and then resume work on the revamped Part III.\textsuperscript{31}

He submitted both films together to the Committee on Cinema Affairs (the KDK) for approval on August 19, 1944. The censors responded with a series of edits required for release, the most notable being the removal of the Prologue, depicting Ivan’s childhood, from Part I. Eisenstein followed the “advice” of the committee and removed the Prologue from Part I, reinstating it instead as a flashback in Part II, further strengthening the introspective, psychological mood of the second film.

Part I was approved and cleared for release by the KDK in November, and opened in theaters on January 16, 1945.\textsuperscript{32} At Stalin’s personal insistence, Eisenstein and Prokofiev both received First Class Stalin Prizes, the highest accolade awarded for artistic works in the U.S.S.R.\textsuperscript{33} The prizes were announced on January 26, 1946, a week before Eisenstein completed his edits to Part II. Within the span of just those few days,

\textsuperscript{31} Bartig, “Red Screen,” 243.
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., 247. It is interesting to note that the film was originally submitted to the censorship board without its soundtrack, as Prokofiev had not finished writing it yet. The call for edits was based on a viewing of the film \textit{without} the music. It wasn’t until a second viewing of the films in November, following Eisenstein’s edits, that the KDK heard the soundtrack. Their quick move to release the film after that second viewing indicates that there was nothing in the soundtrack to cause offense. Their hesitation over the second part indicates that any reservations they may have had after their initial viewing had now escalated.
\textsuperscript{33} Kozlov, “The Artist and the Shadow of Ivan,” 126. Kozlov notes that in fact \textit{Ivan} had been excluded from that year’s prize nominations and it was at Stalin’s insistence that the film’s creators received the awards. The actor Nikolai Cherkasov who played Ivan also won the award that year.
Eisenstein’s and Prokofiev’s standing as cultural celebrities would change irrevocably.

An altogether different fate awaited this second part of the trilogy.
Chapter 3 – “Ivan the Terrible Part II”: The Artists Rebuked

The Post-war Shift in Ideology

Eisenstein planned to release Part II a within a few months, hoping the success of the first film would extend to the second. The third installment, not yet begun, would follow within a year or so, depending on how quickly production could resume. Unfortunately, this was not to be. Eisenstein could not have foreseen how the end of World War II would drastically re-structure the artistic and political landscape within the Soviet Union, and the devastating impact this would have on his work.

The end of the war brought about a major shift in the Soviet Union’s place in the world. Attention formerly directed toward the war effort now turned inward, falling with renewed scrutiny on cultural output and how such products would be viewed by the West. A detectable shift in cultural policy occurred: Brandenberger writes,

…[W]ork was needed to add nuance to the canonical interpretations of leading tsarist-era state-builders like Ivan the Terrible and Peter the Great[…]…Wartime historical narratives had apparently gone too far in their indiscriminate idealization of tsarist heroes, neglecting the merits of class analysis and the Marxist historical dialectic….In these years cultural producers frequently ran afoul of ideological authorities for promoting themes that had been fashionable throughout the war.¹

Ivan the Terrible Part II embodied this shift; the very material that had won Eisenstein and Prokofiev the highest praise of cultural authorities now opened them to severe criticism and professional ruin.

If Part I tells the story of Ivan’s outward acts to secure his power, Part II explores the inner turmoil of a ruler beset by doubts and troubles. The plot follows a sequence of betrayals by, and subsequent executions of, Ivan’s various enemies. In the final climactic

¹ Brandenberger, National Bolshevism, 185-186.
scene, Efrosynia is tricked into instigating the murder of her own son, Vladimir, an innocent bystander in the power struggles of those around him.

Following a private viewing, Stalin ordered the film suppressed. The official condemnation was published in a resolution by the Central Committee for Cultural Affairs in September 1946. The resolution, one of the sweeping rebukes released under zhdanovschina between 1946 and 1948, takes aim specifically at the film *The Great Life*, but included pointed criticism of several of the industry’s prominent directors:

The fact is that many skilled cinematographers, film-makers, directors and scriptwriters treat their obligations flippantly and irresponsibly, and do not work conscientiously on making films. The chief shortcoming in their films is their failure to study the subject that they have undertaken. Thus…[t]he director Sergei Eisentein, in Part Two of *Ivan the Terrible*, has revealed his ignorance in his portrayal of historical facts, by representing this progressive army of Ivan the Terrible’s oprichniki [his personal body guards] as a gang of degenerates akin to the American Ku-Klux-Klan; and Ivan the Terrible, a strong-willed man of character, as a man of weak will and character, not unlike Hamlet.

Though the resolution does not specifically reference the music in *Ivan*, comment is made regarding the use of music in *The Great Life*: “The songs introduced in the film (music by Nikita Bogoslavsky, words by A. Fatyanov and V. Agatov) are shot throughout with melancholy and are alien to the Soviet people.” Party cultural authorities were paying attention to the music in films and understood its importance in affecting audiences. More so, these comments demonstrate that there was a right and wrong approach to film scoring.

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2 Kozlov, “The Artist in the Shadow of Ivan,” 126. Kozlov gives the exact date of the screening as March 2, 1946, a mere 35 days after Part I had been awarded the Stalin Prize.
4 Ibid., 296.
Prokofiev, spared from initial criticism following the film’s release, came under fire two years later in the resolution of 1948 condemning the activities of musicians and composers. The 1948 resolution condemns what it identifies as “anti-artistic” works and the “anti-socialist formalist trend” running rampant in Soviet music:

The trend has found its fullest expression in the works of such composers as comrades D. Shostakovich, S. Prokofiev, A. Khachaturian, V. Shebalin, G. Popov, and N. Miaskovsky, whose music displays most strikingly these formalist perversions and undemocratic tendencies so alien to the Soviet people and their artistic tastes. This music is characterized by the negation of the chief principals of classical music, by the preaching of atonality, dissonance and disharmony, all of which are supposedly signs of “progress” and “innovation” in the development of musical form. These composers reject the essential foundations of the musical work, such as melody; instead they take delight in chaotic and neurotic sonorities, turning music into cacophony, an anarchic piling-up of sounds.5

The 1948 resolution goes on to tie the present activities of composers to those of previously censured artists by way of mention of the previous resolutions: “And yet no reconstruction has taken place in Soviet music, in spite of these warnings, and contrary to the directions given by the Central Committee in the following resolutions: ‘On the Journals Zvezda and Leningrad’, ‘On the Film the The Great Life’, and ‘On the Repertoire of the Drama Theatres and How It Can Be Improved.’”6 In other words, though the public condemnation of musicians came two years later than those of the other artistic disciplines, composers should have seen the earlier resolutions as guidelines for modifying their own artistic output and bringing it in line with Party views. Prokofiev,

6 Ibid.
remembering the disastrous blow the 1946 resolution dealt to Ivan Part II, here receives a double measure of criticism.

The rather vivid descriptions used to describe both the film and Prokofiev’s music draw out specific images and moments from the film—in particular, the use of the terms “chaotic,” “neurotic,” “cacophony,” “gang of degenerates,” and the references to the Ku Klux Klan, and Hamlet. The following section of the paper offers a study of those specific scenes.

“Death of Glinskaya”: Introduction of the “Madness Theme”

Part II opens with a short montage recapping the major plot points of the first film, underscored by the overture, reminding viewers of Ivan’s mighty deeds and military victories. The scene cuts to the Polish court, where Kurbsky betrays Ivan by pledging loyalty to King Sigismund of Poland. Prokofiev is at his satirical best in this scene, during which is heard an endlessly looping Polonaise. Ivan is not physically present in the scene, but the characters are aware of him on a subconscious level: When a page from Moscow appears with a message from the Tsar, the Polonaise ends abruptly, interrupted by the powerful return of the “Storm Approaches” theme.

The “Storm Approaches” theme continues into the next scene, bridging the transition from Poland to the Moscow court where Ivan confronts the scheming Boyars. Vowing to exterminate them, he announces the formation of his bodyguards of loyal citizens, the oprichniki. Fyodor Kolychev, now the monk Filipp, returns at that moment to decry Ivan’s cruel methods and pleads with him to disband the oprichniki. Ivan, overjoyed at the return of his friend, withdraws to a private chamber. The two men
continue their conversation. Ivan defends his actions, and lapses into a memory of his childhood. A montage of brief scenes and musical cues follows, outlining the major events of Ivan’s early years. The scene dissolves to the image of billowing smoke from the overture of Part I as time reverses; the image reminds viewers of the overture and the introduction of the “Storm Approaches” theme. Here a new theme accompanies the image, a jocular melody played in the E flat clarinet over staccato strings.

This new theme continues as Ivan’s memories of childhood play out on the screen. The image dissolves to a close up of Ivan as a child, crouching in a corner in a dimly lit corridor. Off screen a woman screams and then appears in a doorway; she is Ivan’s mother, who has been poisoned by the boyars. She falls to the ground and crawls to where Ivan crouches and pleads with him to “Beware poison. Beware the boyars.” She dies and the boyars carry her away. The picture fades to black, and then fades in to a close up of adult Ivan who continues to narrate for Fyodor how the boyars took advantage of his youth and set him up as a puppet ruler. The “regal” theme from Part I enters as the scene dissolves back to young Ivan entering the court. Ivan stands before his throne while two rival boyars on either side make decrees in his name, each vying for their own interests. The boyars fall to arguing, and Ivan, seated now, his legs too short for his feet to reach the floor, looks on in wide-eyed innocence as the boyar Shuisky announces that Moscow will enter into a treaty with the Livonians (Poland). The boyars all kneel in obeisance to Ivan and the “Storm Approaches” theme returns. Ivan’s first decree as grand prince of Moscow is confirmed. Returning to his private chambers with the two bickering boyars, Ivan silences them both by claiming that neither of their treaties will stand; Moscow will pay taxes to no one. He accuses the boyars of treachery and of
killing his mother and orders Shuisky arrested. The boyars are dragged off, and Ivan, alone in his room draws himself up and decides that he alone will rule Russia, he will be Tsar.

Eisenstein establishes an important piece of Ivan’s personal history with this sequence, citing this childhood experience as the root of his determination and dedication to ruling his country by any means necessary. The music confirms this association: The appearance of the two earlier Ivan themes reminds the viewer that this child grows up to become the great and powerful ruler depicted in the first film. A subtle change in tone from Part I may also be detected here. Aside from the psychological exploration, this scene offers an example of the type of audiovisual paradox that comes to define Part II. Bartig refers to this as a “harmony of opposites;” he writes, “The presence of the heroic and lyrical themes in the flashback, beyond extolling a profound audiovisual irony, connects the heroic, patriotic events of Part I (namely the nationalistic expansion of Russian territory) with a devastating emotion: Ivan’s hatred of the Boyar’s.”  

A third facet of Ivan’s character comes to light in this sequence, represented by the shrill melody heard at the death of his mother (Example 3.1). This is the third of the three primary Ivan leitmotifs, joining the “Storm Approaches” and “regal” themes. Thinly scored for strings, percussion, and E flat clarinet, the theme resembles an erratic march. The low strings play a continuous ostinato-like figure, tracing an arpeggiated half-diminished triad built on F flat. Built on the intervals of a minor third, triton, and major seventh, this figure creates a harmonically ambiguous foundation, over which the E flat clarinet wails away on a highly chromatic melody in its upper register. The melody

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7 Bartig, “Red Screen,” 266.
ascends first by half-steps and then in expanding intervals to a high concert E flat in a distorted transformation of the “Storm Approaches” theme.


This theme recurs with increasing frequency throughout Part II, and with each recurrence strengthens the association with Ivan’s growing paranoia, which has its roots in this traumatic event. The constant repetitive character of the theme—both of the accompanimental and melodic figures, and the recurrence of the theme itself throughout the film—could indeed be described as “neurotic,” the very quality of which Prokofiev was accused in the 1948 resolution. This theme eventually eclipses the other two Ivan themes almost entirely by the end of the film.
This section comprises the edited version of the Prologue originally intended for Part I. Its removal to Part II takes on greater significance when the full meaning of these scenes is considered. With these scenes, Eisenstein reveals Ivan’s basest motives for his most heinous acts; in light of this, he cannot be considered to be acting rationally. The neurotic qualities of this third theme further emphasize this message and strengthen the connections between this set of scenes and later scenes in which the theme is heard.

There is one occurrence of this theme in Part I, during the banquet for Ivan and Anastasia’s wedding. A riot breaks out in the city of Moscow and the citizens burst in on the wedding banquet. A madman raves that Ivan has been cursed by Anastasia’s family, and the peasant Malyuta warns the other citizens that Ivan is dangerous. Ivan silences the crowd and declares that traitors will be executed by beheading. The third Ivan theme swells up behind Ivan’s words. The camera cuts to a close-up of Malyuta; he drags his finger across his throat in a slicing motion in tandem with the ascent of the line in the E flat clarinet. With the prologue sequence removed from the beginning of Part I, the full significance of this theme does not come to bear on this scene. It is not until the theme forges the connection between Glinskaya’s murder and Ivan’s increasingly cruel acts in Part II that its association with his growing madness becomes evident.

The association between this “madness” theme and execution in Part I foreshadows a more striking appearance of the theme in Part II. In his first direct act of retribution against those who betray him, Ivan accuses three boyars, relatives of Kolychev, of treason and sentences them to beheading. Rather than carry out the execution himself, Ivan assigns the task to Malyuta. Malyuta, now one of Ivan’s trusted advisors, reads the traitors’ sentence and carries out the execution. The “madness” theme
plays in constant repetition as the men are dragged into the hall and made to kneel on the floor. In a motion echoing his earlier gesture of his finger drawn across his throat, Malyuta raises his sword above his head with the rising clarinet line, bringing it down in a swift motion synchronized with a cymbal crash and racing sixteenth-note figure in the strings. The clarinet melody begins again when Ivan enters, but as he approaches the slain bodies, the music changes suddenly to a solemn hymn sung by an unseen choir. Ivan crosses himself over the bodies, suddenly penitent and remorseful, his vacillating moods mirrored by the abrupt change in the music. As he comes to stand upright again, he gestures wildly with one hand and exclaims, “Too few!” Bartig writes of this repeating cue, “In these…scenes, music is an agent of temporal distortion, opening up fissures in which Eisenstein offers suggestions that Ivan may be horrified by his own actions—or not.” In other words, this is not a portrait of a well-balanced individual.

This preponderance of psychological introspection creates the primary ideological problem in the film. Prokofiev had attempted to illustrate mental illness in music before, notably in his incidental music to Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* (note his previous acquaintance with that play), and in his score for the film *The Queen of Spades*. For *Hamlet*, Prokofiev composed four songs to accompany Ophelia’s descent into madness. According to Morrison, the director, Radlov, “asked Prokofiev to append a postlude to the second of the songs, during which Ophelia would begin to dance erratically.” Similarly, Romm’s treatment of Pushkin’s story, *The Queen of Spades*, cast the lead character as a schizophrenic. In both cases, the accompaniment for these scenes required careful

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8 Ibid., 272. Bartig, in his analysis, refers to this theme as the “poisoning theme” linking it to the deaths of Glinskaya and Anastasia.
9 Simon Morrison, *People’s Artist*, 83.
10 Ibid., 135.
handling, as any depiction of madness or irrationality risked encroaching upon the margins of formalism. Zhdanov implied as much in his spoken criticism of Prokofiev’s music at the January 1948 meeting of the composers’ union: “Bad, disharmonious music undoubtedly has a bad effect on a man’s psycho-physiological activity.”11 As Part II proceeds, the earlier two Ivan themes—“Storm Approaches” and the “regal” themes—recur less often, eclipsed by this new theme, while Ivan the Madman eclipses Ivan the Powerful and Ivan the Rightful Ruler. Prokofiev’s all too accurate depiction of that journey into madness in Part II surely crossed into formalist territory.

The Furnace Play

In a later scene, the Muscovites gather at the cathedral for a performance of the Furnace Play, an enactment of the Biblical story of the prophets Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego who were thrown into a furnace by the Babylonian emperor, Nebuchadnezzar. The scene begins with a young boy asking his mother what the play means. Efrosynia steps forward and tells the boy the story of the “pagan tsar Nebuchadnezzar” and the angel who saves the three men from death. A choir introduces the play as three young boys portraying the prophets sing of their innocence. Two actors dressed as clowns, portraying the Babylonians, pronounce their sentence: execution by fire. The boys appear on a pyre while the clowns set a fire beneath them.

Ivan’s boisterous laughter from offstage interrupts the play. The camera cuts to Ivan and his oprichniki in an antechamber, Ivan laughing at Malyuta’s story of how Efrosynia chased him from her room in the previous scene. Fedor reminds Ivan that it was Efrosynia who poisoned Anastasia. Ivan, not yet fully convinced of Fedor’s

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11 Quoted in Robinson, Prokofiev, 472.
accusation, silences him and warns his acolytes not to bring any harm to any member of Ivan’s family, including Efrosynia.

The “Storm Approaches” theme ushers Ivan and his men into the cathedral. Filipp enters from the opposite end and he and Ivan meet in the center. The last note of the trumpet fanfare fades, and the three boys resume their telling of the story of the Fiery Furnace. Ivan listens carefully, glancing warily over his shoulder at the boyars gathered around him. He approaches Filipp and bows in a posture of humility. Filipp again accuses Ivan of unjust cruelty and the two men argue. The scene alternates between their angry outbursts and the song of the three boys, the camera zooming in on close-ups of their youthful faces. The boys’ singing eventually dies away as the commotion in the middle of the cathedral commands the onlookers’ attention. Filipp calls Ivan a modern day Nebuchadnezzar and claims that an “angel with a sword” will deliver the people of Russia from his tyrannical rule. Ivan silences Filipp and refuses to relent. The harsh clarinet melody of the “madness” theme rises behind their argument as Ivan and Filipp stand eye to eye. Ivan spins wildly to look out at the crowd as the young boy asks his mother, “Mother, is that the terrible pagan tsar?” The child points at Ivan and laughs. The madness theme continues underneath the commotion. Ivan draws himself up menacingly in time with the cymbal crash and entrance of the brass; his eyes fall on Efrosynia who looks away, unable to meet his gaze. Ivan realizes now that she is indeed guilty of Anastasia’s death. His eyes open to this betrayal by his own family member, Ivan declares that he will now take up the mantle the boyars have given him: “From now on I will be like you call me. I will be Ivan the Terrible.”
This scene teems with musical and filmic elements which link directly to Stalin’s critique of the film as published in the 1946 resolution. The trio of boys sings the play’s text, set homophonically in parallel thirds and unaccompanied.\textsuperscript{12} The stripped-down, incantatory style of the song makes the words unmistakably clear, both to the audience within the film, and the omniscient audience watching the film, of which Stalin was a part. Here again Prokofiev and Eisenstein employ Socialist Realism, with simple, declamatory text setting, unadorned accompaniment, and direct conveyance of the message of the scene. However, Socialist Realism works to antithetical ends: Rather than show Ivan as an uncontested hero, he questions his motivations, appearing to waver with doubt, appearing as Stalin put it, “Hamlet-like.”

As a result, Ivan swings manically from exuberant glee, marked by his boisterous laughter, to humble penitence before Filipp, and finally stricken with paranoia when he perceives Efrosynia’s guilt. The musical montage created by the alternating leitmotifs reflects his constantly changing mood: The music cuts from the “Song of the Innocents” to the first interruption by the “Storm Approaches” theme, back to the “Song of the Innocents,” to the “madness” theme, resulting in the same type of paradoxical juxtaposition created during the flashback sequence.

In an exemplary realization of Eisenstein’s montage theory, the various elements of the scene work on multiple levels, most notably the placement of the furnace play at

\textsuperscript{12} The setting of the text as it appears in the film may not actually be Prokofiev’s original music. Various sources consulted are ambiguous on this point: The full score includes two contrasting versions of the text setting, both similarly set, but to different melodies. Of the two, the one that actually appears in the film is included in the full score as an appendix, indicating its inclusion as something of an afterthought. The preface to the full score notes that this version of the song was not contained in the manuscript source of the film and its origins are uncertain. See Rakhmanova, “Preface,” \textit{Ivan the Terrible}, Prokofiev, 27. Bartig notes that Eisenstein used a traditional Orthodox chant tune in place of Prokofiev’s composed setting (see Bartig, “Red Screen,” 267.) Nonetheless, the music in this scene takes on a pivotal role in the unfolding of the narrative, and whether or not this specific cue was by Prokofiev himself, it interacts with the other music in the scene in significant ways. The text itself is drawn from liturgical sources.
the center of the conflict. Eisenstein makes use here of the “play within a play” motif, a theatrical device found in the plays of William Shakespeare and his contemporaries. In Shakespearean drama, the “play within a play” is used as a mirror to expose the central villain’s crimes both to himself and the other characters, making it an excellent socialist realist device. The most well-known example of this is from *Hamlet*, the very play Stalin references in his critique of the film. In *Ivan*, the inner play draws clear parallels between the Biblical ruler and Ivan, accusing Ivan of committing atrocities on par with Nebuchadnezzar. However, the scene works on another level—that is, to strengthen the parallel being drawn between the historical Ivan and his contemporary double, Stalin. By drawing together these multiple lines of narrative—a narrative “super structure”—Eisenstein in effect creates a play within a play within a play: Nebuchadnezzar (innermost play) as a metaphor for Ivan (middle-ground play) as a metaphor for Stalin (outermost play or reality).

As for the visuals, Eisenstein commits another indiscretion. Upon their entrance into the cathedral, Ivan and his *oprichniki* are dressed in long black robes with tall pointed hoods. As they enter, the folds of their robes and deep hoods conceal their identities so that they appear as a faceless stream of bodies—an image that immediately conjures representations of the Ku Klux Klan. (The fact that they wear black robes as opposed to the KKK’s white did not constitute enough dissimilarity for Stalin’s taste. Following the publication of the 1946 resolution, Eisenstein and the actor who played Ivan, Nikolai Cherkasov, met privately with Stalin, Zhdanov, and Molotov to discuss the film. Stalin stated his displeasure over the representation of the *oprichniki*: “You make the *oprichniki* look like the Ku Klux Klan.” Eisenstein replied, “They wear white
headgear; ours wore black.” Molotov answered, “That does not constitute a difference in principal.”

These elements, when taken together, constitute the bulk of Stalin’s complaint about the film, particularly the references to the Ku Klux Klan and Hamlet. Unlike the proper use of Socialist Realism in Part I, here this device is put to use towards improper ends: that of showing Ivan, and his contemporary double, Stalin, as tyrants. The music supports this depiction, fully implicating Prokofiev along with Eisenstein. Together, the two artists created a visual and aural counterpoint that could only incite Stalin’s anger.

Song of the Beaver

Following the Furnace play, the boyars and Filipp retire to Efrosynia’s chambers and hatch a plan to assassinate Ivan, and put Vladimir on the throne in his place. After the plan is set, the others leave and Efrosynia and Vladimir are alone. Vladimir asks his mother why she is pushing him to take power, saying that he prefers to live in peace. To comfort him, Efrosynia takes Vladimir in her arms and sings him a lullaby—an exceedingly strange lullaby that fails to comfort him, but instead terrifies him further.

Efrosynia sings of a black beaver that washes itself in a river, but becomes dirtier the more it washes. The entire scene is shot in close-up of Efrosynia’s face, her eyes darting from side to side as she narrates the beaver’s actions, the visuals adding to the sense of disquiet. At the end of the song, hunters kill the beaver and use his pelt to make a cloak for, as Efrosynia sings, “Tsar Vladimir.” At these words, Vladimir tears himself from Efrosynia’s arms with a shriek. What was meant to serve as a soothing lullaby

14 Lyrics translated in Bartig, Red Screen, 274.
instead leaves him terrified and the audience disoriented. This disorientation results from a number of musical events which occur during the transformation of the song from lullaby to mad scene.

Vladimir Lugovsky, the lyricist, based the text on a Russian folksong. Prokofiev begins by setting the text in a manner resembling a folksong—strophically, with an uncomplicated melodic contour—but as the song progresses, and Efrosynia sinks further into madness, the song likewise loses its grounding. Simon Morrison describes the song as a narration of Efrosynia’s “mental journey.” He writes, “The performance begins as a recitation of long-known verses and ends in near-demented improvisation.” Prokofiev traces Efrosynia’s descent into this delusional reverie with increasing tension and dissonance, while the strophic form of the song slowly comes unraveled. Eisenstein intended for the song to carry a heavy psychological subtext, in which the music expresses what is happening beyond the visual representations: “…[T]he music corresponds to the moods, not to the actions; to the thoughts, not to the actions; to the subtext, not to the actions….The whole emphasis was on how music worked at revealing the thoughts, and so on, at a different level—while having the outward appearance of a lullaby.” The music achieves this through a number of harmonic and formal subversions that disrupt the music’s expected unfolding, techniques that likely caused offense to official ears.

Harmonically, the song lacks secure footing, passing through a number of keys via unconventional means, often shifting from one tonal center to another mid-phrase.

15 Morrison, People’s Artist, 237.
17 Ibid., 329.
Prokofiev, with his signature modulatory move of “displaced tonality,” shifts from one key to another by way of half- and whole-steps, undulating from B minor, to G minor, through A flat minor, back to B minor at the start of the second strophe, to A minor (by way of the relative major D), G sharp minor, and finally ending in A minor, a whole step below where it began. Slonimsky describes how Prokofiev makes use of this device: “A particularly interesting device is the use of displaced tonality, wherein a sudden cadence shifts the key chromatically a semitone up or down.” Slonimsky uses a passage from *Peter and the Wolf* to demonstrate how “an ascending C major scale shifts to C sharp minor by equating the tonic C to B sharp.” The same technique is at work throughout the “Beaver Song,” but to very different effect. In his previous works, such as *Peter and the Wolf*, and also his music for *Lieutenant Kije* and his Symphony No. 1, Prokofiev uses this trick to humorous effect, as a sort of modulatory sleight of hand: The listener expects a melody to progress within the established key (or in the case of his Symphony No. 1, according to the precepts of sonata form) but instead a “wrong” note from a nearby tonality is substituted, subverting expectations in an often amusing way. In the “Beaver Song” this same technique produces rather different results, creating a sense of disorientation and foreboding.

The song begins in B minor, but moves quickly to G minor with the substitution of B flat for B natural in measure 9. Even the G minor established here is modally inflected by the substitution of flat 6 (E flat) in measure 11. In measure 14, Prokofiev winds his way through two measures of A flat harmonic minor, arriving back in B minor in measure 16, using the note G as a sort of pivot point: G’s function shifts from tonic to

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19 Ibid., 242.
leading tone, and then resolves not to A flat, but down a half-step to F sharp, the dominant of the B minor chord on the downbeat of measure 16 (Example 3.2).

**Example 3.2:** “Song of the Beaver” mm 13-18. [Source: Prokofiev, *Ivan the Terrible*, Op. 116, 168.]

This return to the home key coincides with the start of the second verse, but this is only a passing structural landmark. The strophic form dissolves after this point; the remaining verses unfold formlessly, in a through-composed setting, and the tonal transformations become even more minute.

A common feature of these two scenes is their explicit use of diegetic music (that is, music occurring within the film world, rather than a soundtrack that occurs externally). The texts for each of these scenes and the presence of music were written into the script. Part I contains some diegetic music, primarily in the scenes depicting ceremony, such as Ivan’s coronation and wedding. Even in these cases, though, the music tends to straddle
the divide between diegetic and non-diegetic: The music occurs within the film world, but its source is not visually evident and the characters do not engage with the music. In both the Furnace Play and lullaby scenes, the characters interact directly with the music. The external audience too, therefore, responds to these musical events differently than to the other music in the films. The audience’s own awareness of the music in these scenes is heightened, and elicits closer attention to the words and music and what it reveals about the characters. The music in these scenes moves the narrative forward, and cannot be separated from the viewers’ experience. In Part II, diegetic music takes on an extremely prominent role, first with the above two scenes, and then finally in the film’s culminating climax, which is explored next.

Dance of the Oprichniki

Part II culminates with a grand banquet scene, during which Ivan realizes the boyar’s are plotting to kill him. In order to foil their plan, Ivan tricks Vladimir into taking his place in the procession to the cathedral, and in an ironic reversal of roles, Vladimir is killed in Ivan’s place. In the banquet scene, which Morrison describes as a “frenzied, soul-less bacchanalia,” the oprichniki indeed appear as a band of degenerates, drinking, dancing, and engaging in undisciplined revelry. The music is deliberately chaotic and frenzied; in the published full score the first of the two dance numbers is titled “Chaotic Dance.”

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20 The conceit of mistaken identities is another Shakespearean device, also found in Hamlet: Hamlet, realizing the threat on his life, arranges for Rosenkrantz and Guildenstern to die at the hands of his would-be assassins.

21 Morrison, People’s Artist, 238.
This scene is in many ways a culmination, both of the stories of the two films, but also of Eisenstein’s work and working out of his theories, and his collaboration with Prokofiev. The scene is shot in color—Eisenstein’s only work with color film (though his writings suggest he hoped to do more, and even planned to shoot all of Part III in color)—and the color adds an additional text to the montage super structure. Eisenstein notes in his essay on these sequences that the music was composed first, and the action choreographed to that music and later edited to fit the score. The music, which is therefore the driving force behind the unfolding of the narrative, creates an atmosphere of disorder and mockery. No character, even Ivan, is spared from ridicule.

Gallez describes the music for this scene as “Prokofiev’s rollicking, bumptious music, a psychological diversion from the impending doom of the pretender, Vladimir. In this powerful, foreboding sequence, Eisenstein brilliantly choreographed the action Prokofiev’s pre-scored music.” Three distinct musical cues accompany the action, with some interjections of earlier themes at key moments. The first two and most prominent cues are the “Chaotic Dance” and “Orderly Dance,” during which the oprichniki dance wildly, leaping, spinning, and eventually tumble into an enormous dog pile on the floor. These two cues repeat throughout the scene, underscoring moments of dialog in which the music becomes less prominent. Midway through the scene, the two dances are interrupted by the “Song of the Oprichniki,” a satire on the boyars’ desperate grasp on their fading feudal power, sung by Fedor and a supporting chorus of oprichniki.

As the unrestrained merry-making continues around them, Ivan sits at the center of the action, and confides to Vladimir that he is lonely and has no friends. Vladimir

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22 For more on Eisenstein’s theories on the use of color in film montage, see his “On Music and Color.”
laughs at Ivan’s sorrow and tells him he is wrong, that he, Vladimir, is his friend. Despite all that has happened, Ivan remains loyal to his blood relatives, reprimanding Basmanov for interfering as Ivan embraces Vladimir. “You Basmanovs,” Ivan commands, putting an arm around Vladimir’s shoulders, “should know your place.” Ivan again appears weak, his loyalties torn between the only remaining family he has, and the makeshift surrogate family created by the crude but devoted oprichniki. Eisenstein describes how the music changes the mood of the scene from one of seriousness to mockery: “The theme of the argument [between Ivan and Basmanov] proceeds utterly magnificently, like a war theme, an oprichnik theme. Then it undergoes an ironic change; that is, the musical imagery is repeated in a mocking resolution: the fourth couplet has no words and the Russian theme is resolved with three saxophones.”25 The mockery envelopes all three characters: Basmanov for his childish jealousy, Vladimir in his simple-mindedness, and Ivan in his blindness to the danger so close at hand.

Following Fedor’s song, Ivan notices a servant, Pyotr, seated by the door, and realizes he was sent as an agent by Efrosynia to assassinate him. A cue from the earlier flashback scenes cuts in on dance themes: “Shuisky and the Keepers of the Hounds,” the leitmotif depicting the treachery of the boyars, reveals the boyars’ plot on Ivan’s life. Vladimir, inebriated and naïve, unwittingly lets slip the information about Efrosinia’s plot, confirming Ivan’s suspicions. Ivan commands Vladimir to prove his loyalty by dressing in the royal regalia. Vladimir allows himself to be dressed in Ivan’s ceremonial robes and crown; here, the “Song of the Oprichniki” returns in an instrumental version, now mocking Vladimir in this false coronation. Vladimir, amused as the oprichniki bow to him, plays along willingly.

The scene ends abruptly when Ivan hears the ringing of the cathedral bells. Leaping to his feet, he demands that the oprichniki “stop this sinful play” and proceed to the cathedral for vespers. Vladimir, still dressed in the royal regalia, leads the oprichniki to the cathedral. The oprichniki, wearing in their black robes and pointed hoods again, follow in procession behind him. Somber music swells up underneath the scene, an unseen chorus—or perhaps the oprichniki—moans a wordless tune. The image of the oprichniki as the KKK amplifies; the camera, instead of focusing on the oprichniki directly, follows their shadows projected against the wall of the cathedral. They each carry a lighted candle, so that the shadows appear to carry torches as they file along behind the guileless Vladimir.

Vladimir pauses in the middle of the cathedral, and Pyotr, mistaking him for the Tsar, stabs him in the back. Vladimir cries out; a crash of cymbals and shrieking strings echo his cry and trace the arc of his fall to the floor. Efrosynia rushes onto the scene proclaiming the triumph of her assassination plot. Her joy is short-lived; turning, she sees Ivan enter the cathedral and approach her. She invokes Hamlet once again when, thinking Ivan is a ghost, she reaches out to touch him. Realizing it is indeed Ivan, she looks at the body at her feet and the awful reality dawns on her. Falling to her knees and taking Vladimir’s lifeless body in her arms, she intones the last stanza of the “Song of the Beaver” her face frozen in shock and stupefaction. Vladimir’s body is dragged away. She continues singing aimlessly, the last shred of her grip on reality gone.

Ivan at last succeeds in foiling the plots of the boyars and stamping out the treachery of his enemies. But this time, Ivan’s entrance into the cathedral is not heralded by one of his leitmotifs, signifying his victory. Instead, muted strings continue the earlier
moaning tune, lamenting Vladimir’s death. Eisenstein perhaps misses an opportunity here: Had Ivan’s entrance instead been underscored by either the “Storm Approaches” theme or the “regal” theme (the latter probably better suited to the mood of the scene), Eisenstein could have reasserted Ivan’s rightful position as ruler, justifying Vladimir’s death as necessary to the protection of Russian unity. But instead attention is drawn to the tragedy of Vladimir’s murder and Ivan’s remorse over the tragic deed. In the final moment of the scene, Ivan genuflects before the altar, clearly pained by Vladimir’s death. The oprichniki surround him, singing the words of their oath of loyalty, but Ivan is too caught in his own grief to partake in the patriotic pledge. The scene closes on the image of Ivan as a man bent by the weight of sorrow, and by Socialist Realist terms, weak and ineffectual.

In perhaps a last effort to salvage the image of Ivan as a strong and determined ruler, Eisenstein attached an epilogue to the film. Ivan, again seated on his throne, reasserts his right to the Russian throne, claiming that his deeds are in the best interest of a strong and united Russia. The long awaited “Storm Approaches” theme, not heard since the flashback scenes, at last returns. But it is too late. The film cannot be salvaged.

Political Fallout

The suppression of Part II effectively ruined Eisenstein’s career and severely damaged Prokofiev’s. Overwhelmed by the exertion of the long labors devoted to the project, Eisenstein suffered a heart attack on February 4, 1946, the day that he completed final edits to Part II.26 That evening, he attended a party to celebrate his receipt of the Stalin Prize but ended the night in the hospital. His fragile condition compounded by the

26 Seton, *Eisenstein*, 446.
added stress of the publication of the 1946 resolution, he never fully recovered. In Prokofiev’s life as well, time seemed to take on a poetic view of fate. His own health started to fray in the mid-1940s as he suffered from headaches and dizzy spells.\(^{27}\) These spells made it increasingly difficult for him to work and his productivity gradually decreased. Prokofiev never composed for film again. He continued to write music in the hopes of pleasing the authorities, but never regained the ascendancy he attained in the late 1930s. The few projects he completed after Ivan, particularly his operas War and Peace and A Story of a Real Man, received further criticism from the cultural authorities. The publication of the 1948 resolution, condemning his “anti-artistic” tendencies, coincided with his receipt of the news that Eisenstein, at the age of 50, had died of a second heart attack. In a final twist of fate, Prokofiev died on March 5, 1953, the same day the news of Stalin’s death was announced.\(^{28}\)

Remnants of Part III of the trilogy exist in Eisenstein’s sketches and scenario, and a small amount of footage made during the filming of Parts I and II. The final scenes in the scenario depict Ivan’s (fictional) defeat of the Livonians and his success in gaining access to the Baltic Sea. The score was to include a fourth variation of the Ivan motif.\(^{29}\) Part III, had it been realized, may well have contained the needed ingredients to restore the two artists’ standing with their political benefactors. Instead, Part II languished on the shelves at Mosfilm, while the two artists languished in what remained of their careers and lives. Finally, in 1958, Part II was released, all the salacious and controversial content left

\(^{27}\) Morrison, People’s Artist, 252.
\(^{28}\) Ibid., 387.
\(^{29}\) Ibid., 239.
whole, to wide acclaim. For all of its ideological failings, the film’s artistic value garnered recognition and success for its two creators, even after their deaths.

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Conclusion – Art Cannot Serve Two Gods

Much scholarly debate surrounds the question of whether or not Eisenstein and Prokofiev thoroughly grasped the full implications of the film they had produced. Was the film intended as a subversive exposé on the horrors of tyranny, an allegorical illustration of “Stalin the Terrible”? Or were the two artists somehow blind to their errors, somehow deluded into thinking their approach would not offend their great patron? Kevin Platt and David Brandenberger posit that Eisenstein may not have fully contemplated ahead of embarking on the project just how dangerous a task he had been assigned. They write: “It may be that, in the tradition of earlier treatments of Ivan or in pursuit of purely artistic goals, artists like Tolstoi and Eisenstein adopted the genre without full consideration of its allegorical implications for the present.”¹ These questions are widely debated and well beyond the scope of this paper.² But one thing can be ascertained when looking at Ivan the Terrible as a work of art which sought to serve political ends: In attempting to strike a balance between fulfilling their artistic vision and toeing the ideological line, Eisenstein and Prokofiev failed at both. Such a task could not be accomplished.

Leonid Kozlov points to the fundamental conflict that arose when artists attempted to fulfill the dictates of Soviet ideology in their works: “The Bolsheviks wanted artistically worthwhile, commercially successful and politically correct films. It turned out that these requirements pointed in different directions and no director could possibly satisfy them all.”³ Eisenstein tried to bring his personal aesthetic views in line with

² For more on this, see Kristin Thompson, “Ivan the Terrible,” and Kozlov, “Artist and the Shadow of Ivan.”
with those of the Party. In his response to the 1946 resolution, he wrote, “The resolution of the Central Committee reminds us with new force that Soviet art has been given one of the most honorable places in the decisive struggle of ideology of our country against the seductive ideology of the bourgeois world. Everything we do must be subordinated to the tasks of this struggle.” For Prokofiev, his own views were diametrically opposed to Stalinist objectives. Morrison writes,

Even when he assigned his melodies to odious political texts, even when he transferred them from one score to another, they retained, in his view, their divine essence. This notion altogether counters the principle, essential to Soviet aesthetics, that music could be tailored to support specific political agendas. The original, nonrepresentational status of the musical gestures seems to have mattered as much or more to Prokofiev than the context in which it was performed or published.\(^4\)

The two simply could not meet on equal turf. Art cannot serve two gods.

As for Prokofiev, his work in film resulted in both his most commercially successful works, as in *Lieutenant Kizhe* and *Alexander Nevsky* and their derivatives, and, as in *Ivan the Terrible*, his greatest missteps in the eyes of the Stalinist regime. The paramount product of the Eisenstein-Prokofiev collaboration became the unfortunate victim of the severe and unpredictable fluctuations of Soviet cultural policy. In a life marked by irony and paradox, the genre that led Prokofiev to his greatest successes was also the source of his eventual downfall.

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\(^5\) Morrison, *People’s Artist*, 5.
Bibliography


