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# Jazz and Soviet censorship: The example of late-Stalinist Estonia

## *Introduction*

One of the peculiarities of the Soviet state was its concern with justifying state control of cultural production concurrently with its compulsion to promote that production's independence. The idea that the complete liberation of social, cultural and personal life must be manifested through total party control over social, cultural and personal life was, according to Aleksei Yurchak, a Soviet paradox.<sup>1</sup> All forms of intellectual, scientific, and artistic practice served mainly as propaganda and educational channels for shaping peoples' consciousness to match the Soviet mentality. Therefore, the main purpose of Soviet cultural politics was the effective propagation of Marxist-Leninist ideology in order to form a politically homogeneous population loyal to the communist regime. The ideology-driven politics of the regime was implemented by a complicated system of cultural regulation and surveillance.

In this article, I examine how censorship as a mode of surveillance influenced jazz during late-Stalinist<sup>2</sup> Estonia. My argument is that censorship existed in three forms: as a practice of journalistic editing; as repertoire censorship; and as self-censorship.

Late-Stalinism was a dynamic and contradictory period in Estonian jazz history, when the official status of the music changed from a highly prized musical form during the postwar era to the status of *musica non grata* in 1950. In the immediate postwar period, jazz symbolized victory and friendship with the allies, but over the course of Soviet ideological campaigns, the music became the target of Soviet ideological attacks against the entire Western world and its values. This period, known in Estonian history as Sovietisation and in Soviet history as late Stalinism, was marked by extensive social changes in Estonia. On the one hand, the Soviet occupation regime worked throughout this era to establish its power basis. On the other hand, late Stalinism is known as a time of intensifying ideological pressure that, for creative intelligence, meant the tightening of creative freedom permitted under the ideological doctrine of Zhdanovshchina.

- 1 Aleksei Yurchak, *Everything was forever, until it was no more* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 40.
- 2 Late Stalinism is neatly framed by the Soviet victory in WWII on 9 May 1945 and the day of Stalin's death on 5 March 1953.

I begin by briefly outlining the concept of censorship and defining its meaning in the current context. The following three case studies are examples of how censorship operated in the context of jazz culture. First, I look at censorship as a journalistic practice based on Valter Ojakäär's<sup>3</sup> autobiographical notes. I then provide an example of an edited text after closely reading Ojakäär's 1949 article *Tänapäeva Ameerika džässimuusikast* ("On present day American jazz music") and examine the biographical details of a Soviet-era censor.

Additional examples are based on oral interview material and the records from a meeting of the State Philharmonic and explore the modes of censorship applied to musical collectives and their repertoires. Finally, I discuss self-censorship – or the self-inflicted restriction of free expression – by presenting the almanac of the Estonian jazz group Swing Club.

Jazz studies beyond American borders is definitely not a monolithic field but consists of several territories based on certain common denominators such as a local nation state, linguistic space, geographical territory or social formation. For example, research on British jazz<sup>4</sup> is well developed with extensive historiographical and professional networks. Although national jazz histories tend not to reach international readership because of language barriers, several works on national jazz scenes are available currently in English.<sup>5</sup> An early theorisation of diasporic jazz in general was Bruce Johnson's 2002 essay "The Jazz Diaspora".<sup>6</sup> In the German-speaking world there is a long scholarly tradition of jazz studies.<sup>7</sup>

A research field framed by a particular social formation is the body of studies on jazz in the former Eastern bloc. This area of jazz studies is relatively undeveloped, defined primarily by one collection of articles and conference panels. The first attempt to gather together the scholars interested in jazz in former socialist societies was the Warsaw conference "Jazz Behind the Iron Curtain" in 2008.<sup>8</sup>

3 Valter Ojakäär was an Estonian jazz historian and publicist whose radio broadcasts, television programmes and journalistic writings, appearing in numerous journals and newspapers, introduced and interpreted jazz to a wide audience beginning in the late 1950s. Ojakäär's most significant contribution to Estonian cultural history is his four-volume series of books on Estonian popular music history.

4 See, for instance, the monographs: Catherine Tackley, *The Evolution of Jazz in Britain, 1880–1935* (London: Ashgate, 2005); George McKay, *Circular Breathing: The Cultural Politics of Jazz in Britain* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005).

5 See for instance Matthew F. Jordan, *Le Jazz: Jazz and French Cultural Identity* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2010); Bruce Johnson, *The Oxford Companion to Australian Jazz* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1987); Colin Nettelbeck, *Dancing with De Beauvoir: Jazz and the French* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2004); Taylor E. Atkins, *Blue Nippon: Authenticating Jazz in Japan* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000). Recent studies on European jazz include the anthology Luca Cerchiari, Laurent Cugny & Franz Kerschbaumer, *Eurojazzland: jazz and European Sources, Dynamics and Contexts* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2012).

6 Bruce Johnson, "The Jazz Diaspora," in *The Cambridge Companion to Jazz*, eds. Mervyn Cooke and David Horn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 33–54.

7 Wolfram Knauer, *Jazz und Komposition* (Hofheim: Darmstädter Beiträge zur Jazzforschung, 1992).

8 Based on the presentations of the conference, the organisers published the collection of articles: Gerthrud Pickhan & Rüdiger Ritter *Jazz Behind the Iron Curtain* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2010).

Written in the native language, Estonian jazz historiography has been seeking its symbolic place and identity primarily in national territory.<sup>9</sup> As a predominantly non-professionalised discourse, qualifying as a history of heritage, its main contribution has been the collection and preservation of data. The man whose efforts created the discourse of Estonian jazz history is Valter Ojakäär. His four volume series (2000; 2003; 2008; 2010), based on the memories of the author and his personal contacts with the musicians, is the most important document of Estonian jazz history. The focus of the author is on historical data about musical collectives and participants in the jazz scene. Because of its precise detail and abundant descriptions of musicians' everyday lives, Ojakäär's series is an invaluable source for those, such as myself, investigating the history from a scholarly perspective. The only dissertation on Estonian jazz is Tiit Lauk's *Jazz in Estonia in 1918-1945* (2008) the aim of which is to investigate how jazz reached Estonian cultural space.

As a scholarly subject, Soviet jazz has unfortunately attracted relatively little interest, with few recent scholarly publications. The only extensive monograph on jazz in the Soviet Union available to an English-speaking readership is still *Red & Hot: The Fate of Jazz in the Soviet Union* by Frederick S. Starr (1983). The first monograph on jazz in the Soviet Union was Aleksei Batachev's *Sovetskii dzhaz*<sup>10</sup> published in 1972. An important figure in popularising jazz in USSR/Russia is Vladimir Feiertag.<sup>11</sup> Other authors in the field include Gaut,<sup>12</sup> Lücke,<sup>13</sup> Minor,<sup>14</sup> Feigin,<sup>15</sup> Beličenko,<sup>16</sup> Konen.<sup>17</sup>

### *Censorship – a concept*

Censorship is a broad, multi-faceted concept that has been applied to many social, political, and cultural contexts in numerous ways for various reasons during different eras. The wide-ranging meaning of the term is the reason why the encyclopedia on censorship, for instance, provides no concrete definition of the concept, but instead

- 9 The two articles on Estonian jazz available to wider readership are Valter Ojakäär, "Jazz in Estland. Hoffnungen und Wirklichkeit," in *Jazz in Europa*, ed. Wolfram Knauer (Hofheim: Taunus, 1993), 95-105; Tiit Lauk, "Estonian Jazz Before and Behind the 'Iron Curtain'", in *Jazz Behind the Iron Curtain*, eds. Gertrud Pickhan and Rüdiger Ritter, (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2010), 35-56.
- 10 Aleksei Batachev, *Sovetskij dzhaz*. (Moskva: Muzyka, 1972). Aleksei Batachev (b. 1934) is a Russian jazz critic, historian and populariser of jazz.
- 11 Besides monographs and numerous articles, he is the author of the first comprehensive guide to Russian jazz articles: Vladimir Feiertag, *Dzhaz v Rossii: kratkii entsiklopedicheski spravochnik*. (Saint Petersburg, Russia: Skifia, 2009).
- 12 Greg Gaut, "Soviet jazz: transforming American music," in *Jazz in Mind: Essays on the History and Meaning of Jazz*, eds. Reginald T. Bruckner & Steven Weiland (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1991), 60-82.
- 13 Martin Lücke, *Jazz im Totalitarismus: eine komparative Analyse des politisch motivierten Umgangs mit dem Jazz während der Zeit des Nationalsozialismus und des Stalinismus* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2004).
- 14 William Minor, *Unzipped Souls: A Jazz Journey Through the Soviet Union*. (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1995).
- 15 Leonard Feigin, *Russian Jazz: New Identity* (New York: Quartet Books, 1985).
- 16 Sergei Belichenko, "Otechestvennyj dzhaz kak institut kultury," *Observatoriâ kultury*, 3 (2006): 47-53.
- 17 Vera Konen, *. Puti amerikanskoi muzyki* (Moskva: Sovetskii kompozitor, 1977).

rests upon the assumption that censorship involves a variety of processes, both “formal and informal, overt and covert, conscious and unconscious, by which restrictions are imposed on the collection, display, dissemination, and exchange of information, opinions, ideas, and imaginative expression.”<sup>18</sup>

Nevertheless, several scholars have tried to formulate the concept. Martin Cloonan claims that censorship is “the process by which an agent (or agents) attempts to, and/or succeeds in, significantly altering and/or curtailing the freedom of expression of another agent with a view to limiting the likely audience for that expression.”<sup>19</sup> He distinguishes between two common elements in definitions of censorship: people or organisations doing something to other people and/or to an art form, and people limiting themselves.<sup>20</sup> The latter is deemed self-censorship. Marie Korpe, Ole Reitov, and Martin Cloonan define censorship as a form of cultural and intended mass behavioural control.<sup>21</sup> In the musical field, censorship can target musical systems (e.g., musical intervals, rhythms), associated texts (i.e., song lyrics), musical instruments, musicians, performances, performance contexts, individual musical works, and musical genres.<sup>22</sup> The implementers of censorship include, they claim, a wide range of institutions, such as governments, mass media, religious authorities, industries, business firms, school systems, retailers, musical groups, parents, and even individual musicians. Matthew Bunn, however, criticises this “liberal conception of censorship,” which sees censorship as external, coercive and repressive, implemented by authoritative social actors, and instead introduces the New Censorship Theory. In his view, the New Censorship Theory “recasts censorship from a negative repressive force, concerned only with prohibiting, silencing, and erasing, to a productive force that created new forms of discourse, new forms of communication, and a new genre of speech.”<sup>23</sup>

Censorship in the Soviet Union comprised much broader dimensions than previously thought: it was an all-embracing system of ideological control by a single-party state over the entire public, political and cultural life, and it formed the pillar of the Soviet system of surveillance. Soviet power tried to maintain absolute control over every aspect of life in society. Censorship, as a part of the propaganda establishment, played the role of prohibiting agency, and provided political and manipulative functions aimed at controlling society and its individuals.<sup>24</sup> The ideological doctrine of Soviet power validated the operational rules of censorship. Gorjajeva calls Soviet type of

18 Derek Jones, *Censorship: a world encyclopedia* (New York: Routledge, 2003), xii.

19 Martin Cloonan, “Call That Censorship? Problem of Definition,” in *Policing pop*, ed. Martin Cloonan and Reebee Garofalo (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2003), 15.

20 Martin Cloonan, “What is musical censorship? Towards a better understanding of the term,” in *Shoot the singer! Music censorship today*, ed. Marie Korpe (London, New York: Zed books, 2004), 3.

21 Marie Korpe, Ole Reitov, and Martin Cloonan “Music censorship from Plato to the present,” in *Music and Manipulation: On the Social Uses and Social Control of Music*, ed. Steven Brown, Ulrik Volgsten (New York, Oxford: Berghahn books, 2006), 240.

22 Ibid.

23 Mathew Bunn, “Reimagining repression: new censorship theory and after,” *History and Theory* 54 (2015): 29.

24 Tatjana Gorjajeva, *Politicheskaja tesnura v SSSR 1917-1991* (Moskva: Rosspen, 2009), 8.

copyright a political censorship: a system of actions for serving and ensuring the interests of power.<sup>25</sup> For Gorjajeva, a more suitable concept for describing Soviet censorship is *vsetsenzura* (total censorship). The term *vsetsenzura* blends the ideological power of the system with the politics and political system of the society, the monopolisation of all spheres of cultural life, and the elimination of dissidence.<sup>26</sup>

Summarising the nature of Soviet censorship, Tiiu Kreegipuu<sup>27</sup> identifies three specific features: the high level of secrecy; the enduring inflexibility of censorship; and the extensiveness of the censorship. In addition to various printed publications, this censorship affected artistic performances, cinema screenings, art exhibitions, and more. Veskimägi<sup>28</sup> calls Soviet censorship a permanent censorship because it influenced not only printed production but also all public media: radio; newspapers; and journals.

Censorship was implemented by several institutions and administrative units. The "brain" of Soviet censorship was the communist party, and its security institutions,<sup>29</sup> which wielded decisive power over the correctness or incorrectness of information. Censoring activities of the party functioned on three levels.<sup>30</sup> The level of decisions and documents encompassed regulation, or direct and indirect hints for following correct ideological line, whereas the institutional level encompassed the network of institutions involved in censoring.<sup>31</sup> On the local Estonian level, the main executive unit of censorship was the Department of Propaganda and Agitation of the Estonian Communist Party Central Committee. The main tasks of this institution were the leadership of Marxist-Leninist education, agitation for implementing party, and government decisions and control over the print media. The central executive institutions of censorship were Glavlit (the Main Directorate of Literature and Publishing Houses) and the Glavrepertkom (Central Committee on Repertoires) both of which had subordinate local units in every Soviet republic. Finally, censorship functioned at the level of individuals, representatives of various stages of party hierarchy who implemented the "everyday" censorship.

To summarise, censorship, as applied in the current study, can be understood in the sense of a "liberal conception of censorship", as a state system exercising multi-level control over creative output in the Soviet Union. The agency of censorship in the Soviet Union was the Communist Party that implemented its ideological control through complex mechanisms of governance.

25 Gorjajeva, *Polititšeskaja tsenzura*, 11.

26 Gorjajeva, *Polititšeskaja tsenzura*, 9.

27 Tiiu Kreegipuu, "The ambivalent role of the Estonian press in the implementation of the Soviet project" (PhD diss., University of Tartu, 2011), 14.

28 Kalju Veskimägi, *Nõukogude unelaadne elu: tsensuur Eesti NSV-s ja tema peremehed* (Tallinn: Tallinna Raamatutrukikoda, 1996), 9.

29 Epp Lauk, 1999. "The Practice of Soviet Censorship in the Press: The Case of Estonia," *Nordicom Information* 21 (1999), 30.

30 Tiiu Kreegipuu, "Parteilisest tsensuurist Nõukogude Eestis," *Methis* 5 (2011), 28.

31 Kreegipuu, "Parteilisest tsensuurist," 33-34.

### *Censorship and journalism*

Journalism served as an ideological weapon in Soviet society and as the main instrument for party propaganda machinery to implement its goals. The entire spectrum of purposes of journalistic practice, whether informational, regulatory, educational, or entertaining, fell under the purview of ideology. Journalism lacked its own identity, serving solely as a manipulated object in the hands of the Soviet system.<sup>32</sup> As a pillar of the regime, journalism was subjected to the rigid mechanism of state control. The main organs responsible for regulating the print media were party and censorship.

In his work *Sirp ja Saksofon* (Sickle and saxophone), Estonian jazz historian Valter Ojakäär describes how the procedure of censorship functioned in the form of article editing. As Ojakäär recalls in his book,<sup>33</sup> the editors of *Sirp ja Vasar* (Sickle and Hammer) received Ojakäär's article *Tänapäeva Ameerika džässmuusikast*<sup>34</sup> in the form of a reader's letter that attempted to introduce briefly the inception of jazz and its growth since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. After a long silence, Ojakäär received an invitation from the newspaper's editor, Aron Tamarkin, to discuss publishing procedures of the article. First, Tamarkin explained that in its current form, the article was unsuitable for print. "I was aware of it and suggested leaving the article unpublished,"<sup>35</sup> was Ojakäär's comment on Tamarkin's complaint. Although Ojakäär first refused to make changes to the text, he later accepted the idea as a result of Tamarkin's persuasion. The editing procedure lasted several hours, however, and resulted in extensive changes to the text, which, according to the author, contained "more negative critique than relevant discussion. I gave up finally and added Spike Jones' witty musical parodies as examples of the dark side of jazz even though they had nothing to do with jazz." The final sentence, which stated that: "Modern American jazz music is a vivid reflection of the condescending mentality of American bourgeois society and its rapid approach to decline," was not the work of Ojakäär. This led the author to suggest publishing the article under Tamarkin's own name, since the article contains more of the editor's ideas than of Ojakäär's. But Tamarkin refused because, as a member of the editorial staff, he was not permitted to author the article. According to Ojakäär's final, somewhat ironic, conclusion: "After finishing the editing, I went home and enjoyed American jazz.... My friends expressed their reception of the article in two ways: some sneered, some were displeased!" However, Ojakäär interpreted the entire process of editing as beneficial to his future career as a journalist. He concluded: "As an inexperienced journalist, I learnt from Tamarkin how to embellish a journalistic text."

Historically, one can distinguish between two types of censorship in print production: preventive or preliminary; and repressive or penal.<sup>36</sup> Ojakäär's example repre-

32 Tiiu Kreegipuu, "Nõukogude kultuuripoliitika printsiibid ja rakendused Eesti NSV-s aastatel 1944-1954 kirjanduse ja trükiajakirjanduse näitel" (Master's Thesis, 2005), 45.

33 Valter Ojakäär, *Sirp ja saksofon* (Tallinn: Kirjastus Ilo, 2008), 335-336.

34 Valter Ojakäär, "Tänapäeva Ameerika džässmuusikast," *Sirp ja Vasar*, August 20, 1949, 10.

35 All the translations from Estonian to English in the text are mine.

36 Veskimägi, "Nõukogude unelaadne elu," 9.

sented the preventive censorship that was the most common method of revising publications. Tamarkin's careful preliminary editing radically changed the piece initially submitted; ideologically more appropriate, Soviet-style utterances replaced the author's original lines. The newly revised text demonstrated few similarities to the original one and was almost unrecognisable to Ojakäär: "Reading now the text published under my name, I can recognise only about 25 per cent of what I wrote originally. The article was written before the attack against all that was Western began. Even at that time, I was still spurred by the naïve hope of illuminating the real essence of jazz for a wider audience."<sup>37</sup>

The individuals actually undertaking examinations of texts played a crucial role in the censoring process. According to Soviet norms, censors had to be party functionaries. Maarja Lõhmus presents the three most important characteristics of a proper Soviet censor: (1) the controller had to be experienced in the role; (2) he had to be skilled at performing certain functions, such as determining possible meanings and interpretations of the texts; (3) and by directing these meanings, the controller was to minimize negative reactions to propaganda.<sup>38</sup> Autobiographical notes by Aron Tamarkin<sup>39</sup> reveal insights about his life and career, and provide an example of a censor working under the Soviet regime. His handwritten biography indicates that Aron Tamarkin was born in a family of Jewish teachers in 1915. His educational background consisted of basic education at Tallinn's Jewish Gymnasium, piano studies at Tallinn's Conservatory (1920-1936), and one year of attendance in economics courses at the University of Tartu. His collaboration with the Soviet regime began under the Soviet occupation of Estonia in 1941 and continued again after returning from his Soviet military service in 1944. His ideological education consisted of the Night University of Marxism-Leninism at Plehhanov's Institute of the National Economy (1943); he was also a candidate of the Communist Party from 1944 and joined the organisation in 1949. Tamarkin's record book includes notes about his work as chief of the Committee on the Arts (1944-1948), head of the music department of the cultural newspaper *Sirp ja Vasar* (1948-1959), and director of the museum of Theatre and Music (1959-1969). His professional affiliations also included memberships of the Estonian Society of Journalists, the critics' section of the Theatre Society, and the artistic council of the State Philharmonic.

As an illustration to censored Soviet style jazz-related journalistic texts, I will discuss further Ojakäär's article *Tänapäeva Ameerika džässmuusikast*.<sup>40</sup> This article can be considered a response to the third Stalinist campaign in January 1949. During late Stalinism, three extensive political campaigns aimed to regulate cultural affairs: the assault against two literary magazines *Zvezda* and *Leningrad* in 1946, the decision about

37 Ojakäär, *Sirp ja Saksofon*, 335.

38 Maarja Lõhmus, *Transformation of Public Text in Totalitarian System: A Socio-Semiotic Study of Soviet Censorship Practices in Estonian Radio in the 1980s*. (PhD diss., University of Turku, 2002), 56. Accessed March 20, 2011 <http://www.hot.ee/loehmus/Kirja.PDF>

39 Autobiographical notes of Aron Tamarkin, Estonian Museum of Theatre and Music, M12-1.

40 Valter Ojakäär, "Tänapäeva Ameerika džässmuusikast," *Sirp ja Vasar*, 20 August 1949, 10.

Vano Muradeli's opera *Great Friendship* in 1948, and the campaign against cosmopolitanism in 1949. As demonstrated elsewhere,<sup>41</sup> these campaigns directly paralleled the publication of jazz-related articles in *Sirp ja Vasar*: each article can be interpreted as a successive reaction to the promulgation of a new decree. The third Stalinist campaign in 1949 bore the ideological motto "struggle against cosmopolitanism." In Soviet vocabulary, cosmopolitans were intellectuals accused of harbouring pro-Western sympathies and lacking patriotism. The anti-cosmopolitan crusade signalled an important shift in the "attack discourse" on culture; the notion of anti-cosmopolitanism had now replaced formalism as a favourite term for describing inappropriate cultural products during the "Great Friendship."<sup>42</sup> Comparing formalism and anti-cosmopolitanism, Tomoff concluded that, "whereas formalism was dangerous because of its inherent dependence on Western modes of artistic experimentation, cosmopolitanism actually praised unhealthy foreign influence. The danger of cosmopolitanism was precisely that it was antipatriotic and glorified the West."<sup>43</sup>

Jazz, as an American cultural form, was ideologically unacceptable and therefore became the perfect object of attacks against cosmopolitanism and the Western world. In the Soviet Union, the assault on the West generally focused on three key areas.<sup>44</sup> The first area railed against the economic and racial exploitation of capitalist life. The Soviet press often focused on the pitiful lives of workers, racial inequality, and the lynching and oppression of African-Americans. The workers and ethnic minorities of capitalist societies were represented as honest victims of the system they lived under. The second major target of Soviet propagandists was capitalist democracy, and the third line of attack emphasised the soulless, economically driven nature of capitalist society, where everything was for sale and where people were motivated only by money and lived a life fueled by gambling and sleeping pills.

Ojakäär's writing in *Sirp ja Vasar* from 1949 conveys the Soviet anti-American rhetoric of the time – the text is laden with assaults on American lifestyle, its values and culture, and it denigrates American 'barbaric entertainment' and the "declining mentality of American bourgeois society." The introduction of the article places jazz in American musical culture and disparages its "prosperity":

In present-day American musical life, it is jazz that has the biggest say. More than half of radio broadcasts consist of jazz music, record industries fling millions of jazz music records and concert halls are more and more at the disposal of jazz orchestras. It is the brightest example of the "prosperity" of American musical culture.

As mentioned before, the goal of the article was to provide an overview of jazz history, but the story of jazz as told from the Soviet perspective was full of anti-American and

41 Heli Reimann, "Late-Stalinist ideological campaigns and the rupture of jazz: 'jazz-talk' in the Soviet Estonian cultural newspaper *Sirp ja Vasar*," *Popular Music* 33 (2014), 509–529.

42 Kirill Tomoff, *Creative union: the professional organization of Soviet composers, 1939-1953* (London: Cornell University Press, 2006), 154.

43 Tomoff, *Creative Union*, 152.

44 Timothy Johnston, *Being Soviet: Rumour and Everyday Life under Stalin. 1939-1953*. (London: Oxford University Press, 2011), 171-172.



anti-capitalist propaganda. However, describing the inception of jazz more sympathetically as the spread of "sad-sounding Negro-songs, called blues, in the lower course of the Mississippi" instead casts an anti-capitalist pallor on the further development of jazz and its commercial "gentrifying" aspects:

The jazz rhythm-based saloon dances, which emerged among whites, opened grandiose possibilities for business-men to make money with this new style of music. Step by step the whites tore from blacks their monopoly on jazz music and developed from it, during the last thirty years, the music, which is with pride called by American apologists the clearest expression of American art.

The next target of verbal assault became the lyrics of vocal jazz. The utopian message of jazz songs was deemed deserving of "the interests of American monopolists," who aimed to intoxicate the consciousness of the people with illusions of the "happy" and "fairy-tale life" of Hawaiians and other colonised countries. The passage concludes as follows: "It is clear, that jazz music has lost its essential values and headed to the external sensual effects and aspirations."

The appearance of swing in the mid-1930s is considered according to the article a great sensation in jazz music history; Benny Goodman was the first bandleader to use 'this original swinging rhythm which all jazz orchestras immediately imitated.' But the "swing up" tradition was blamed for its corrupting effect on classical masterpieces:

The masterpieces of Brahms, Bach, Tchaikovsky and Grieg were ruthlessly harnessed by jazz. For increasing the appetite for jazz among people, it became necessary to feed them familiar melodies from classical music. This barbaric "entertainment" continues until today, in spite of the fact that swing has given way to other styles.

As the next style in the historical sequence of jazz, bebop was reportedly named after the Negro jargon word for heavy exaltation and offered "senseless combinations of sounds and rhythms with wordless empty babbling." Historically, however, the term bebop has several etymologies, the most prominent of which is an onomatopoeic imitation of a characteristic quick two-note phrase that lead instruments played together to introduce a solo or end a song, followed by Latin American bandleaders' cries of "Arriba! Arriba!" to encourage their bands.

Progressive jazz, which appeared in 1947, is described in a formalist manner as music "missing melody line, tonality and even rhythm." Stan Kenton's progressive jazz and musical innovations spurred condemnation:

The most sensational pieces of progressive jazz were Kenton's "Concerto To End All Concertos," "Artistry In Percussion" and "This is My Theme," where the soloist June Cristle chants an inarticulate rhymeless and metreless poem about broken window glass and the beat of a thousand marching feet, about the "senseless echo in the distance." All this is accompanied by the occasional cries of nine brass instruments and distracting plunks on drums.

The article also makes reference to Igor Stravinsky's *Ebony Concerto*, written for Woody Herman and his First Herd in 1945. This highly celebrated work from Stravinsky's neo-classical period for clarinet and jazz band, which Stravinsky himself called a "jazz concerto grosso with a blues slow movement," was written shortly after the end of World War II and represents the composer's deepening immersion into the world of commercial music after his emigration to America in 1940. Ojakäär's article characterises Stravinsky as an "apostle of decadence" who composed for Herman's orchestra a purely "formalistic" piece. The reception of the performance of the concerto at Carnegie Hall was reportedly cool despite the massive promotion and Stravinsky's own participation as a conductor.

The next passages highlight the money-centeredness of American society by stating that: "The yardstick of music in America, as it is for other arts, is the dollar. Soloists and orchestras are evaluated by the sums of money their performances can generate. This is why several serious, talented artists such as Lily Pons and Oscar Levant have turned to the better-paid field of jazz and decadent light music."

Descriptions of jazz pieces in Ojakäär's article tend to focus more on non-musical aspects than on the music itself. For instance, the magnetic effect of jazz is said to have the same effects as alarm clock ringing, police whistles and breaking glassware. The next section of the article is dedicated to American jazz artist Skim Galliard, known in late 1930s and early 1940s America as a musician who entertained his audiences with comic spoofs, irreverent parodies, ethnic humour, and songs verging on the nonsensical. He had a knack for writing song titles that could tease a smile—such as "Banana Skins Are Falling" or "Serenade to a Poodle"—and staged subversive performances that blended hard-swinging jazz, humorous chatter, and imaginative comic language invented by Galliard.<sup>45</sup> In Ojakäär's article, Galliard, spelled incorrectly as Slim Caillard, was said to have written "The avocado seed soup symphony," a piece described as "a ten-minute musical bacchanale consisting of the senseless babbling of three singers accompanied by piano, guitar and bass." Audiences were said to have been captivated by musicians "under the influence of a drug made from the marihuana plant." The section ends with the conclusion that: "In general, senselessness and total mental emptiness are features of jazz music. What should one think of music with titles such as "Mop, Mop," "Blop, Bah," "Pom Pom," "Grip an axe, Max," "Don't beat your wife with a spade," etc?"

The penultimate paragraph of the article offers the typical Soviet-style construct of the black-versus-white paradigm. Even though black and white musicians often performed together in jazz orchestras, the 'colour line' had not disappeared. The article later declared that: "Negroes can have seats only in the last row. Some Negro musicians can be great favourites of the audiences, but beyond the stage, they are humiliated like any other black."

45 Garrett, C.H. 2012. 'The humor of jazz', in *Jazz/Not Jazz: The Music Heritage and its Boundaries*, ed. D. Ake, C. Garrett and D. Goldmark (Berkeley, CA, University of California Press), pp. 49–69 (Garrett 2013 p. 57)

*Censoring the music*

With no fixed meaning, a piece of music is difficult to subject to any censoring method. Since a repertoire list of the titles of pieces was the only certain meaningful unit for censors to assess, the primary method for imposing control over the music became the censoring of concert programmes. Both professional and amateur jazz collectives had to submit their programme lists for censoring. The programmes of the state-owned *Eesti riikliku filharmoonia jazzorkester* (the Jazz Orchestra of the Estonian State Philharmonic [JOESP]), for instance, even had to pass two programme-censoring procedures. The first stage of inspection took place at the local level in Tallinn in front of the special committee, usually comprising musically incompetent party officials, while the second stage was conducted in Leningrad by the higher all-union level of censorship officials.<sup>46</sup>

The fact that music was difficult for party bureaucrats to police left more room for musicians' creativity. As Tomoff notes, "Composers and musicians could use their privileged access to the interpretation of this abstract art form to ensure that they always had some manoeuvrability, that they perceived their agency."<sup>47</sup> One of the "manoeuvring" strategies for the musicians was to manipulate the titles of their pieces. Oleg Sapozhnin<sup>48</sup> recalled that his father always added some "bait" to the programme list. This 'bait' meant the purposeful inclusion in the list of certain pieces with obviously inappropriate titles for their expected exclusion. This strategy helped to retain the desired repertoire in the programme, since censors could not eliminate all the pieces. Another example demonstrates how some "cosmetic" changes helped to keep a piece in the repertoire list. For instance, the jazz piece entitled "Night in the big city," which made obvious reference to New York, remained in the programme after replacing it with the politically more acceptable title "Night in the Negro village."<sup>49</sup>

Submitting concert programmes for inspection was compulsory not only for professional collectives, but for all amateur ones too. The process took place before a special committee at the People's Commissariat for Education. Treufeldt's recollection of the inspection of one restaurant group's repertoire shows how the officials' incompetence could lead to absurd situations.

The violinist Boris Kuurman took his repertoire list to the Commissariat. Because Chief Comrade Tamarkin was not there, two women reviewed the list. While Valgre and Strauss were considered appropriate, the potpourri from the operetta Victoria and her Hussar drew suspicious. While Victoria was an acceptable name, Hussar was crossed out as something militant. Kuurman, in perplexity, wanted to ask where Victoria ends and Hussar starts in the piece, but Tamarkin entered the room and confirmed the list by stamping it. Now Kuurman had a signed and stamped paper where Victoria was allowed and Hussar forbidden.<sup>50</sup>

46 Heino Pedusaar, *Boba: mees kui orkester* (Tallinn: Infotrükk, 2000), 101.

47 Tomoff, *Creative Union*, 5.

48 Author's interview with Oleg Sapozhnin. 23 Apr 2014.

49 Heino Pedusaar, *Boba*, 102.

50 Author's interview with Udo Treufeldt 17 Oct 2013.

The mechanism of control in Soviet society was a multi-staged system involving, in addition to previously discussed preventive modes of censorship, "follow-up" methods of inspection also. Not only was the economy highly planned, but cultural life was also organised on the basis of strict planning. The following section describes an example of this "follow-up" controlling procedure – a meeting at the Estonian Philharmonic regarding the fulfillment of the 1946 year plan. This event, on 11th November, was recorded in a 28-page plan of protocol.<sup>51</sup> As the record indicates, the meeting took place in a highly formal manner in which participants had to follow a certain agenda and use a particular speaking formula to demonstrate their polemical skills, to raise important questions, to resolve controversy and to formulate decisions. One of the peculiarities of Soviet society was its high degree of ritualisation. Some of those rituals were, as Kojevnikov<sup>52</sup> calls them, cultural games – rituals of *diskussia* (disputation) and *kritika i samokritika* (criticism and self-criticism). The overview of the report focuses on the materials related to the JOESP, one of the four collectives on the payroll of the Estonian Philharmonic.

The meeting opened with a report on the fulfillment of the annual plan by Comrade Valgma. First, the report stated that the male choir gave 108 concerts instead of the planned 136. The JOESP happened to be the next collective whose concert data were slated for analysis. According to the annual plan, the orchestra had to give 174 concerts, but performed on only 87 occasions instead, which meant that 87 concerts went unperformed and, as a result, the organization lost 552,800 rubles of potential revenue. Later, Valgma poses a critical question about the reasons why the plan went unfulfilled. Valgma then replies to his own question: "We all know – that it is the lack of the repertoire," and continues: "For four months, the jazz orchestra has not been travelling, but just preparing for a new programme. Yet there is still no new programme." The orchestra, however, performed nine concerts in Tallinn earning 7,500 rubles.

The next section of the protocol is titled "Negotiations." The first speaker, Vladimir Sapozhnin, conductor of the JOESP, tries to explain the ineffectiveness of the JOESP's activity. The main problem seems to be its repertoire: the new concert programme prepared was declared inappropriate, but the lack of repertoire prevented them from preparing another one:

I must admit that several musicians have left the orchestra. We have a new collective. We rehearse and prepare a new repertoire, but we don't know what will happen next. Everybody says we will have a new repertoire again, but when we will receive it nobody knows. We just composed a new programme, but now need another one. Yes, we disagree with the programme and complained to the Philharmonic and the Committee on the Arts.

The critical notes of the following speakers concern, for instance, the poor quality of the musical instruments, the poor travelling conditions and accommodation, the lack

51 The protocol is preserved at the Estonian Theatre and Music Museum, MO 276-4.

52 Aleksander Kojevnikov, "Games of Stalinist democracy: Ideological discussions in Soviet sciences," in *Stalinism: New Directions*, ed. Sheila Fitzpatrick (London, New York: Routledge, 2000), 149.

of discipline regarding alcohol abuse, the poor rehearsal conditions, the inadequate administrative working conditions, and missed symphony orchestra, chamber music and concert lectures.

Comrade Aron Tamarkin, member of the artistic council of the State Philharmonic and a representative of the Committee on the Arts, opens his talk with self-critical notes. By reflecting on the complaints of previous speakers, he admits to the Committee on the Arts' fault in the situation that has occurred: "The Committee on the Arts remained a bystander for too long by just observing the state of affairs at the Philharmonic." Talking about the jazz orchestra, Tamarkin recognises the 'sad' state of the orchestra and analyses the reasons why the situation occurred:

We can make reprimands and look for culprits, but it is clear that we need to revise the jazz orchestra's repertoire as a result of historical decisions by the Central Committee, which decided that this repertoire is 100 per cent unsuitable. Why? Because it contains too much American jazz music. The original Estonian repertoire should be more extensive than during the first inspection. This was the direction given to jazz<sup>53</sup>, but it is difficult to find a quick solution.

Tamarkin's talk continues with suggestions on composing a programme: he recommends building the programme according to the principle of mixing pieces of Western and Estonian origin instead of dedicating the first part of the concert to a Western repertoire and the second to an Estonian one. The next sentence relates how the JOESP performed with an unapproved programme, but unfortunately it is unclear who gave permission to do that. Tamarkin, however, ends on an optimistic note by stating that the search for a new repertoire will definitely lead to success.

In response to his speech, Tamarkin is asked the following question: "Are you sure the jazz orchestra's new programme will be as successful as the previous one?" His reply is cautious: he is unsure, but recommends that the orchestra not lose time and start touring with its current programme, during which time the orchestra can create a new repertoire.

In short, the reason for the demagogical discussions around the JOESP was its lack of an approved repertoire. The resolution of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party of 14 August 1946 necessitated the changes in repertoire. This resolution was an attack on two literary magazines, *Zvezda* and *Leningrad*, which were blamed for publishing supposedly apolitical, individualistic, "bourgeois" works of the satirist Mikhail Zoshchenko and the poet Anna Akhmatova. This decree was not only directed against the aforementioned writers, but announced the beginning of an extensive anti-Western campaign that saw jazz as a representative of American ideology. The protocol of the meeting at the Estonian Philharmonic is significant because it marks the historical point where low political tolerance of jazz changed attitudes towards the music.

53 The word jazz marked both the musical style and the orchestra in Soviet discourse.

### *Self-censorship*

Self-censorship, a self-imposed restriction of free expression, has most often been associated with patterns of behaviour necessitated by authoritarian regimes. In the light of the regime's missing tolerance of criticism and the reinforcement of its control with varying degrees of punishment, people who celebrated the virtues of their rulers were obviously safeguarding their professional careers and indeed their very survival.<sup>54</sup>

Self-censorship was pervasive and extremely powerful in Soviet society. People had to decide whether to compromise, to write just for themselves or to take a risk and engage in dissident activity. Often the creative intelligentsia made compromises between ideology driven norms and their own artistic aims. Even though nobody could foresee whether their artwork would ever reach their intended audiences or what form and content their artwork would take after surviving the censorship process, the artists were often wary of their own works and, to calm their anxiety, would conform their art to ideological norms.<sup>55</sup> Both the creative intelligentsia and their audiences were familiar with the unwritten rules of the game known as Soviet censorship, and tried to regulate their own agency and social behaviour in the public sphere in accordance with the requirements of censorship. The functions of self-censorship in Soviet society differed from those in democratic societies where self-censorship translates information passing between sources and receivers.<sup>56</sup>

The writings of the almanac of the Estonian jazz group Swing Club (SC) provide an excellent example of self-censorship.<sup>57</sup> This unique document's 223 pages, written between 1947 and 1950, offer insight into a wide range of issues in different formats.<sup>58</sup> It contains writings on the group's day-to-day business, mail correspondence between the musicians, lists of the band's repertoire and advanced aesthetic contemplations, the latter categorised as jazz criticism. The main purposes for writing the almanac were to theorise about jazz and to popularise knowledge about the music. Reading the almanac may somewhat confuse the reader, however, since the general mode of expression and formal structure of the texts demonstrated an apparent similarity to public texts of official, highly ideological political discourse. Some of the language contained an incisive critique of the West, especially of American values, and employed particularly direct slogan-like Soviet rhetoric. Some of the writings adhered to a format typical of the Soviet mode of discussion and featured many critiques and self-criticism as well as arguments both for and against. One possible explanation for this Soviet-minded manner of expression is that self-censorship was the way in which SC members masked their real views and adopted a "red" vocabulary. The act of self-censoring is understandable in light of the envi-

54 Derek Jones, *Censorship: a world encyclopedia* (London, Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2001), 2188.

55 Gorjajeva, *Polititšeskaja tesnzura*, 135.

56 Gorjajeva, *Polititšeskaja tesnzura*, 136.

57 The Swing Club Almanac, preserved at the Estonian Theatre and Music Museum.

58 For further information about the almanac see Heli Raimann, "Down with bebop--viva swing! Swing Club and the meaning of jazz in late 1940s Estonia," *Jazz Research Journal*. 4.2 (2010), 95-122.

ronment in which the almanac was written: the anti-jazz politics of the late-Stalinist era. Most probably it was fear of the regime that induced musicians to censor their own written expression. On the other hand, musicians believed that fitting jazz into Soviet paradigms would help maintain jazz's position in the cultural arena. For instance, claims that bebop was uncompromisingly stagnant, demolishing all that is authentic and valuable in jazz with its "thrilling" American ethos of rushing and by "classising" swing, were part of musicians' attempts to make jazz resonate with the principles of Soviet musical standards.<sup>59</sup> Therefore, the Soviet-style verbal "acrobatics" became just one manoeuvring technique for fighting for the music's survival under Stalinism.

### Conclusions

The peculiarity of Soviet censorship was its all-encompassing nature; Gorjajeva called it *vsetsenzura*, a vast controlling mechanism permeating all of society. The all-pervasive harshness of state censorship has become a symbol of the repressiveness of Soviet power. Culture as a carrier of powerful influence to the minds and motivation of the masses was controlled by two methods: the repression of ideologically inappropriate cultural artefacts; and facilitation of the creation of works that authorities believed would help build socialism.<sup>60</sup> During the late-Stalinist era, jazz as a cultural form representing American values and mentality experienced probably the severest repressions in its entire history in the Soviet Union.

In this article, the anti-jazz acts of Soviet censorship have been investigated on the basis of three case studies. The example of censorship as a journalistic editing practice between the censor and the author, Valter Ojakäär, took the form of a one-on-one meeting. Because of the changing ideological rule, Ojakäär's article, submitted some time earlier, failed to meet the demands of the era and, accordingly, had to be rewritten. However, Ojakäär's somewhat humorous story indicates that the procedure may even have proved beneficial to him as a neophyte journalist. Aron Tamarkin represents a fine description of the identity of an actual Soviet-era censor. Though a party functionary, Tamarkin nevertheless possessed an advanced musical education and therefore had sufficient proficiency to hold his position as an editor of musical texts. Descriptions of Tamarkin's activities also appeared in a second case study where he, as chief of the Committee on the Arts and a member of the artistic council of the State Philharmonic, participated in the meeting of the State Philharmonic. Speculation over the reasons for Tamarkin's active collaboration with the Soviets leads to the detail in his work history that his sister was a resident in Israel. In the Soviet era, having relatives living abroad could be sufficient cause for serious repression. Co-operation with the regime was the tool people often embraced to expiate their "guilt."

59 *Swing Club Almanac: "Ameerika muusikaline elutunnetus"* [Musical life of America], 21-22.

60 Brian Kassof, *Glavlit*, "Ideological Censorship and Russian-Language Book Publishing," *The Russian Review* 74 (2015), 70.

Censorship is often intertwined with propaganda, two major methods authoritarian regimes employ to manipulate a society.<sup>61</sup> Ojakäär's censored article extensively described the vocabulary of the anti-American anti-jazz propaganda of the period. Verbal attacks were levelled against the American mentality and capitalist way of life – especially its racial exploitation, oppressivesoullessness, and focus on money. Criticism focused on non-musical aspects such as the lyrics of vocal jazz, the destructive influence of swing on classical masterpieces, and the titles of the pieces. In his discussions about the effect of Soviet propaganda on jazz music, Yurchak says that the extensive post-war anti-West propaganda failed to remove America and the West from the symbolic arena of Soviet life. Western and American culture became more, rather than less, important in the symbols and cultural world of late-Stalinism.<sup>62</sup> Jazz, however, gradually, if only temporarily, disappeared from public cultural life as a result of anti-jazz actions.

A second type of case study provides examples of repertoire censorship. Censorship procedures focused predominantly on the programme list, and the titles of the pieces were elements that determined the music's ideological correctness or incorrectness. The example based on the protocols of the meeting of the State Philharmonic offered a glimpse of the highly ritualised act of "follow-up" control. The participants' talk raised critical issues about the activity of the entire Philharmonic, including the state of the JOESP, whose repertoire happened to be inappropriate in light of a recent ideological decree.

A final example interpreted the Soviet-style mode of expression in the Swing Club Almanac as an act of self-censorship. Musicians internalised Soviet-style patterns of expression primarily for the purpose of self-preservation under conditions where jazz experiences gradually reduced political authorities' tolerance of jazz music.

It is important to point out the significance of the temporal aspect of these examples of censorship: the cases presented here highlight important turning points in Estonian jazz history. The protocol of the State Philharmonic marked the beginning in 1946 of the jazz-inimical period, which led finally to the disbanding of the JOESP in 1948. Ojakäär's article, in turn, recorded the moment before jazz vanished from the public cultural arena in 1949.

Therefore, according to the examples presented, the main methods of censorship included journalistic editing, inspection of the repertoire lists, administrative "follow-up" control and self-censorship.

Censorship was definitely the most direct executive mode of holding control over culture in Soviet Union. However, the entire system of surveillance was more extensive including several indirect ideological methods of controlling the culture and affecting peoples' consciousness. The other methods for accomplishment of ideological prescriptions of the communist party during late-Stalinism were the doctrine of Socialist

61 Marie Korpe, Ole Reitov, and Martin Cloonan "Music censorship from Plato to the present," in *Music and Manipulation: On the Social Uses and Social Control of Music*, ed. Steven Brown, Ulrik Volgsten (New York, Oxford: Berghahn books, 2006), 239.

62 Aleksei Yurchak, *Everything was forever*, 185.



Realism, ideological decrees of Zhdanovshchina, and the highly regulated state mechanism of governance that itself was a complex hierarchical system.<sup>63</sup>

The applied censorship practices were, however, unable to affect the musical qualities of jazz. It was the discourse of jazz that was censored in the example of journalistic text editing. Repertoire censoring concerned only external attributes of the music since the titles of the pieces were only meaningful units for inspection. Although calls were made to Sovietise jazz, the features of Sovietised jazz remained undefined. Therefore, censorship took place only on a surface level and had no ability to reach the level of music itself.

Jazz was an object of attack from the hands of censors not only in the Soviet Union; censorship was part of the tactics of suppression also in another totalitarian regime – that of National Socialism in Nazi Germany. The music was censored since, as an art form born on foreign soil and presided over by Negroes and Jews, it could have no place in the culture of a “master race.”<sup>64</sup> Theodor Adorno claimed that in Nazi Germany and in the Soviet Union, the same musical pieces were forbidden, albeit for totally different reasons. For Adorno, the fact that the Soviets denounced as “bourgeois decadence” the music that the Nazis called “cultural bolshevism” was an indication that the stigma political structures impose on musical structures has little to do with the music or its content.<sup>65</sup> As this study demonstrates, the reason why Soviet ideology and state power, as the two principal agents of censorship, attempted to suppress jazz as an unwanted form of musical expression had little to do with the music itself, but rather the values and lifestyle that the music represented. Jazz, first of all, communicated a system of meanings incompatible with the framework of the contemporary Soviet ideological paradigm. Thus, the censored aspect lay beyond the music itself.

63 For further information see Heli Reimann, *Jazz in Soviet Estonia from 1944 to 1953: meanings, spaces and paradoxes*. (<https://helda.helsinki.fi/bitstream/handle/10138/157762/jazzinso.pdf?sequence=1>, 2015.)

64 Look for instance Michael H. Kater “Different Drummers: Jazz in the Culture of Nazi Germany.” (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

65 Theodor W. Adorno, *Dissonanzen. Musik in der verwalteten Welt*, Göttingen, in *Music as a parallel power structure*, ed. Alekna Barber-Kersovan and Marie Korpe, *Shoot the singer!: music censorship today*, (London, New York: Zed books, 2004).