Orchestrating Engagement:

Popular Reception of Socialist-Realist Music in East Germany and Poland

Contrary to the common notion of the stalinist era in Central Europe as uniformly gray and harsh, surprisingly varied and rich musical offerings greeted the populations of East Germany and Poland. To be sure, some of these works were ponderous odes to Stalin himself, but such crudely political works mixed with other examples of socialist-realism composition like lively mass songs and engaging symphonies based on folk music. In this pre-television era dominated by radio the public loudspeaker, and mass events, a musical world emerged that was influenced by the party, but responsive to audiences and marked by compositional skill and creativity.

This paper will examine the complicated but fascinating question of how the ordinary citizens of these two countries received and perceived the new socialist music culture from the late 1940s to the mid-1950s—the era of high stalinism and the apogee of party control. The East German Socialist Unity Party, or SED, as well as its counterpart, the Polish United Workers’ Party (PZPR), worked closely with composers to create socialist-realism music, and then these politicized compositions were disseminated through festivals, concerts in both the city and the countryside, and amateur musical group activity. Millions of citizens interacted/engaged with this music, and this paper will argue
that the “music of the new socialist era” was a negotiated project. Ordinary citizens of all social classes influenced musical production, as party officials, working with composers, made compromises to comply with audience taste. Maximal goals of a thoroughly stalinized socialist-realist concert life were not realized, but a politicized music was created and performed for the East German and Polish population.

**The Political Power of Music**

Cultural officials accorded music an exceptional power to shape people, and this belief motivated East German SED members who felt that: “music is one of the few forces that, on a large scale and with nearly unlimited possibilities, seizes and influences all people,”¹ and considered “music an important factor in the formation of man’s consciousness. Music can affect man’s character in an ennobling, but also brutalizing manner.”² A desire to harness this supposedly special power runs like a red thread through SED policy statements during the early 1950s. Often, music was supposed to “strengthen the ideological consciousness of people”³ and be used as “a means to move the masses and shape consciousness for the building of socialism.”⁴

No less exalted claims were made for music in Poland. Deputy Culture Minister Włodzimierz Sokorski and communist musicologist Zofia Lissa filled their speeches to composers with exhortations to “shape life,”⁵ and “educate the new person.”⁶ Sokorski related his beliefs about art and music at a major conference: “art is a colossal factor in

---

¹ SAPMO-BArch, DY-30, IV 2/9.06/284, “Über die Entwicklung der Musikkultur der DDR,” p. 76.
² BArch, DR-1, 6203, “Aufgaben und Arbeitsrichtlinien der Fachkommission Musik,” 2 June 1951.
³ BArch, DR-1, 8, “Die Schwerpunktaufgaben der HA Musik,” 11 April 1953.
⁴ BArch, DR-1, 6191, Quartalsplan III/53, 16 May 1953.
⁵ ZKP, 12/5, p. 45.
⁶ ZKP 12/5, p. 24.
the shaping of man...it is today a powerful element in the formation of the political and ideological aspects of the nation.”

Mindful of this power, party officials regularly exhorted composers to reach out to the “masses” and help in the process of creating the “new person” of the age. Nearly all responded, and young composers here especially led the way: André Asriel in East Germany spent time with tractor drivers and discussed with them the kind of music they preferred; Guenther Kochan did the same in factories; their youthful Polish counterpart Tadeusz Baird worked closely with students. Many East German composers followed Kochan’s example and signed contracts to cooperate with the workers of a particular factory. Polish composers were less active in reaching out to the working class, but did engage in occasional discussions with audiences more generally.

A wealth of music resulted from this interaction among communist ideology, cultural officials, composers, and society. Towering figures of 20th-century music like Witold Lutosławski and Hanns Eisler composed symphonies, cantatas, and politicized mass songs during this period. Lesser-known composers contributed thousands of works of both popular and serious music, even as officials disbursed large sums of state money to bring the works of past composers to the factory floor and countryside.

Music Festivals

A key forum where the society encountered both newer and older works was the music festival. Cultural officials worked with composers and music lovers to organize festivals both small and large as a means to influence the population through the presentation of socialist-realist music as well as approved music from the past. Such

music festivals were to “develop people’s consciousness in a progressive sense” and “affect the consciousness and feelings of millions of people and make a decisive contribution to the re-shaping of our world.” Concertgoers shaped the music produced for and at the festivals by directly giving their input and reactions, and also more generally through attendance—or lack thereof.

In the GDR, the party took over a rich festival landscape of long tradition and great diversity. It continued many town-based festivals and pushed them to include more music in accordance with the party agenda. It also created new, prestigious centralized festivals, the first of which took place in 1952 in conjunction with a meeting of the East German Composers’ Union. This week-long festival included one concert featuring contemporary mass songs and larger vocal works at the Bergmann-Borsig factory, where workers greeted the music eagerly. A delegation from the factory subsequently came to the Union Congress meeting and expressed enthusiasm for the new, socialist-realist music, calling for “a good, lively light music, a useful music that will help working people to relax after fulfilling the plan.”

Such attempts to reach out to the broader population intensified after the uprising of June 17, 1953, which took both composers and the party by surprise. Just before the next major festival, linked to the 1954 Composers’ Union conference, cultural officials stated: “The point is not to present our contemporary musical production in the form of interesting concerts that display today’s ‘sound,’ but rather to prove how composers and

10 BArch, DR-1/6128, “Diese Musik verstehen auch wir!: Ein Rückblick auf die „Festtage zeitgenössischer Musik,“” (no citation).
musicologists are fulfilling their societal mission as ‘engineers of the human soul.’”\(^\text{12}\)

The organizers Union-sponsored 1954 Festival therefore made a great effort to invite workers to the various concerts, and indeed encouraged composers to meet with ordinary audience members after the concerts. At one such discussion, after a concert of contemporary works, female workers from a Leipzig factory were pleased with an Ottmar Gerster symphony, considered one of the model socialist-realist works, but called the first two works: “Dreadful! Horrible!”\(^\text{13}\) Most of the other audience members also seemed to enjoy the Gerster, but the other works came under heavy criticism. One piece sounded to a female listener like “children pounding on the piano,” and other audience members said “it gave me nothing” or “there was no heart and soul in it.”\(^\text{14}\) One official claimed that most audience members disliked the works and regretted buying tickets.\(^\text{15}\) Another Congress participant criticized all the works but Gerster’s, saying they were technically good, but “not from the heart...they will never appeal to the workers, never!”\(^\text{16}\) Another noted that a large portion of the audience left after the first half.\(^\text{17}\) Audience members clearly had strong reactions to these contemporary works and made them known to composers and party officials.

This interaction between ordinary citizens and composers reached its peak at this 1954 festival with the appearance at a Union Congress session of two men from the nearby Leuna factory. They had attended a different concert with a number of their fellows; this program consisted of contemporary works by both younger and older GDR

\(^{12}\) SAPMO-BArch, DY-30, IV 2/9.06/281.
\(^{13}\) “Furchtbar! Entsetzlich!” Ibid, p. 294. which included Günter Raphael’s *Sinfonia breve* (1949), Rudolf Wagner-Régeny’s Suite from the opera *Persische Episode* (1951), Helmut Riethmüller’s *Divertimento* for Piano and Horns, and Ottmar Gerster’s Symphony #2 (*Thüringische*, 1953)
\(^{14}\) Ibid, p. 297.
\(^{15}\) Ibid., p. 308-310.
\(^{16}\) Ibid., p. 301.
\(^{17}\) Ibid., p. 302.
composers. Metalworker Otto Schnell expressed his disappointment with the concert in unvarnished and sarcastic terms, and called on composers to “introduce the workers to music”\textsuperscript{18} and “create music which the broad masses can tolerate.”\textsuperscript{19} He encouraged composers to write music that would be a moving experience upon first hearing, such as Tchaikovsky’s Fifth Symphony; as with a bar offering bad sausage, he said colorfully, he and his comrades would not return for a repeat of an unpleasant experience.\textsuperscript{20}

Schnell’s colleague Horst Irrgang, choral director at the factory, reported on the lively and lengthy post-concert discussion he had organized among workers, musicians, and composers. Irrgang described the active musical life at the factory, and urged the composers present to write for and make contact with the workers. He further called on composers to help explain their new works during a performance.

East German cultural officials and the Composers’ Union leadership organized these contacts between composers and workers and made this a main theme of these festivals in the first half of the 1950s. Audience members enjoyed some of the musical works and disliked others; composers took their reactions seriously, and discussed how to more effectively write for this audience.

In Poland in the first half of the 1950s, the party helped organize two massive festivals that lasted months and blanketed the country. For the first Festival of Polish Music in 1951, officials mobilized both composers and a wide section of the population in support of its broader political aims. Party officials encouraged composers to create mass songs and other popular music in order to provide appropriate party-approved music

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., p. 336.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., p. 339. including Max Dehnert’s \textit{Heiteres Vorspiel für Orchester} (1949), Paul Kurzbach’s \textit{Divertimento für kleines Orchester} (1954), Dieter Nowka’s \textit{Konzert für Oboe und Orchester}, Jean Kurt Forest’s Three Arias from the opera \textit{Patrioten} (1951), and Max Butting’s Sixth Symphony (1945).
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., p. 338.
to Polish society, and they responded with over 300 new works. The great majority of composers praised this popular aspect of the festival: Witold Lutosławski lauded the inclusion of the large number of amateur groups; other composers declared the festival an important aspect of “our cultural politics,” and asserted that the Festival showed how composers had reached out to the “broad masses of listeners.” Attendance was quite high at these hundred of concerts, which stretched over a period of eight months and included a final stage of competition between over 2000 amateur groups. This significant involvement by individuals as performers and audience members was a testament to broad interest in a spectacle of this size as well as to composer interest and cooperation.

At the time of the first Festival in 1951, the party was pushing composers to write for the “masses.” During the second, four years later, composers wrote more as they desired, and in a sense were trying to bring the masses to them. By the mid-1950s, Polish composers had achieved much more autonomy from political control than their counterparts in East Germany. Efforts were still made to convince composers to back the party’s program more fully: communist musicologist Stefan Jarociński charged that composers’ isolation from society and lack of political engagement had produced indifference among potential audiences, and another critic accused composers of not reaching out to the population through discussions and meetings. Nonetheless, many concerts at the 1955 Festival were sold out, and organizers estimated the overall

---

21 “Express rozmawia z czołowymi laureatami nagród FMP,” Express Wieczorny, no. 9 (10 January 1952), in ZKP, 12/121.
22 Henryk Swolkień, “Rok 1951 w muzyce polskiej,” Głos pracy, no. 16, (18 January 1952), in ZKP, 12/121.
23 ZKP, 12/8, p. 28; Czesław Głubiński, “Po II Festiwalu Muzyki Polskiej,” Głos Robotniczy, no. 140 (14 June 1955), in ZKP, 12/125.
attendance at 60-70% of capacity, which was deemed fairly respectable if not spectacular for these concerts of mostly contemporary music.  

**Concerts in City and Countryside**

Outside of the festival context, many other concerts took place throughout East Germany and Poland—and these, too, exhibited significant signs of party involvement and audience engagement. The leading institution for organizing these concerts in each country was a monopolistic state concert agency, which organized all manner of events, from special concerts given by major orchestras like Leipzig’s Gewandhaus orchestra or the Warsaw Philharmonic, to small dance productions or recitals, with audiences ranging in size from a handful to many thousands. Such concerts sometimes took place in formal concert halls, but far more often in factory clubhouses or small venues out in the countryside. The more conventional of these concerts, discussed first, were only partially successful, prompting a search for a new kind of mixed concert that was politically appropriate and also appealed to broad audiences.

Despite protests from concertgoers, the East German concert agency included a high percentage of contemporary music in their programs. Of the musical events, half were devoted to *Volksmusik* and half to serious music, and the latter was to be broken into 50% of past masters, 25% of music from the USSR and Soviet bloc countries, and

---

24 Baird, “II FMP,” p. 35. Baird also mentioned a fair amount of disagreement about the level of attendance, as some composers felt it had been poor. He noted that several foreign guests were quite impressed with the audience size. (Ibid., pp. 36-38); Artur Malawski blamed the weak works selected for some of the concerts, while Piotr Perkowski said that more popular, non-contemporary works should have been included in some of the programs. (Jerzy Hordyński, “Z Krakowskimi Kompozytorami—o muzyce,” *Życie literackie*, no. 26 (26 June 1955), in ZKP, 12/125.)

25 *Deutsche Veranstaltungsdienst* to 1952, then *Deutsche Konzert- und Gastspieldirektion* (DKGD).
25% contemporary music from all over the world, but mostly the GDR. The concert agency made a sustained push to reach this 25% quota for contemporary music, and indeed to exceed it. By 1957, of the 114 programs played by soloists, 71% contained at least one work by a contemporary composer.

This drive for more serious, contemporary works met with conflicting responses from concert-goers. Lighter programs, like the Volkslieder and contemporary songs received frequent and positive feedback from audiences. More serious programs often received negative reactions from audiences, but the concert agency’s central authorities remained firm. In 1953, local cultural officials complained that people were less interested in contemporary works because they preferred lighter music and disliked works that were considered too difficult or demanding. Nonetheless, in 1957 the agency’s leadership was still pursuing the same policy: “Despite protests from the audience, we will not lower the current number of contemporary works.” This hard line produced an unsurprising reaction from audiences—they often avoided such events. One cultural functionary from Neubrandenburg reported that people stayed away from concerts advertised as chamber or orchestral music; a 1956 Berlin newspaper article described the not untypical situation of a chamber music concert with an audience of ten. The central administrators of the concert agency faced the intractable dilemma of balancing demanding and politicized programs with the desires of the population, and

28 BArch, DR-1, 273, “DKGD Zentrale,” 12 October 1957. Of the 76 programs by musicians from the GDR, 63% had programs that contained at least one work by a GDR composer.
30 BArch, DR-1, 279, letter from Rat des Bezirkes, Leipzig, 31 January 1953.
31 BArch, DR-1, 272, letter from Fox, DKGD to MfK, 30 April 1957.
33 Eberhard Schmidt, “Künstler auf Reisen,” Berliner Zeitung, no. 29 (3 February 1956), in BArch, DR-1, 279.
furthermore the programming policy developed in the agency’s main offices proved to be at times quite divorced from concert reality out in the provinces. Local officials often did not follow the tough official line, and in defiance of central control, organized less-demanding or less-politicized, but more entertaining, concerts so as to attract audiences.

Poland’s monopolistic concert agency, called Artos, also sought to introduce audiences to “serious” music. In didactic concerts with names like “Polish Music in its Historical Development” and “Travels along the Musical Score,” the party presented the great works of the Polish canon to new listeners. Perhaps even more frequently played than Polish masters were the traditional German classical composers, now defined as representatives of a progressive German political-cultural tradition. Typical concerts included one featuring Beethoven in a cycle entitled “Composer Profiles,” or series of concerts related to a composer anniversary. Other common programs included “An Evening of…” structured around a certain genre of music like the waltz, aria, or sonata.” Composers that received special attention in the typical year of 1954 were Wieniawski, Mussorgsky, Tchaikovsky, Bach, Schubert, and Mozart.

These works, however, were not necessarily those that the Polish audiences most appreciated. A 1952 internal analysis of the popularity of Artos’ programs found that the best-attended were those that included opera arias, especially those by Moniuszko, Verdi, Bizet and Puccini. Recitals by well-known performers came a close second; least popular were chamber-music concerts. The key factor overall seemed to be melody—music of a

---

34 AAN, Artos 105.
36 AAN, Artos 57, p. 33.
lyrical nature, from light music to Soviet composers, was strongly favored by audiences.  

Artos thus responded initially by attempting to satisfy the perceived desire for melody through offerings of more operatic music, and developed concerts of opera and operetta arias, especially those of Verdi and Puccini. Another popular program focused exclusively on nineteenth century French composers like Massenet, Halevy and Meyerbeer. Most concerts, however, consisted of mixtures of the usual Italian and German classics, with perhaps a bit more Russian and Czech pieces than might be expected. Artos administrators pushed for more Polish, Russian, and Soviet selections in these programs, but appear to have had only limited success. The audiences desired more traditional music, and local authorities in large measure acquiesced. Artos used two traveling operatic troupes in the early 1950s: “Janek” attracted sold-out venues on a regular basis (here again, central administrators constantly desired to make the programs more ideologically appropriate, with mixed success), and “Pajacy” got underway by 1954.  

Also very popular but ideologically suspect were operettas; they were quite problematic for Artos, as it disapproved of their often frivolous and “bourgeois” subject matter, while the public enjoyed them greatly. Artos attempted to control the productions of popular Viennese operettas as well as to encourage the production of new,
ideologically appropriate ones. It granted a license for a company to produce Franz Lehar’s *The Land of Smiles* in 1953, but found the production to be “ill-prepared and on a low artistic level.” That the operetta nonetheless achieved great success and unusually full performance halls prompted *Artos* to focus on better and more appropriate operetta productions. *Artos*’ success at changing operetta programming was at best limited, as *The Land of Smiles* was still being poorly produced in 1955. Another problematic example is that of Paul Abraham’s 1930 operetta *Victoria and her Hussar*. Cultural officials deplored the libretto, and criticized the orchestra, ballet and chorus, but noted that the audience was highly appreciative and asked for encores. The desires of the population trumped the political demands of the party, as many politically inappropriate operettas played to full houses around Poland.

**Musical Revues**

In both countries, a compromise solution for musical programming that was both entertaining and passed ideological muster gradually emerged. The *Estradenkonzert* or *impreza estradowa*, a sort of lightly politicized revue that combined song, instrumental music, and spoken word in a staged variety show became increasingly popular to both officials and audiences alike. A narrator or emcee linked the songs and sketches together and played a crucial role in communicating the political message. The idea was to produce a party-approved, cabaret-like performance that would combine light

---

43 AAN, Artos, 79, 16 April 1954.
44 AAN, Artos, 40, p. 97.
46 AAN, MKiS, CZIE 18, 19 October 1955.
entertainment with an ideological message in an attempt to attract, entertain, and politically educate large numbers of workers and peasants.

In East Germany, cultural officials developed this type of event in order to introduce the “merriment” that audiences so desired without sacrificing the pedagogical and political goals of the party. Ideologically useful programs were to be free of the usual entertainment tax, and included concerts with music from: the “progressive cultural patrimony,” both national and foreign; contemporary compositions, both native and from the Soviet Union and People’s Democracies; and dance and light programs, including cabaret, that had been approved by officials from the concert agency. The tax itself was viewed as a means to “limit and overcome” musical performances that the party wanted to stamp out.

Audience reactions to these concerts appear to have been mixed. There are many reports of successful concerts, as for instance one in Drewitz that produced a lively discussion with the workers in the audience as well as calls for more such programs. On the other hand, an early, Estraden-like concert entitled “A Trip around the World in Song” came in for heavy criticism by one reviewer. She called the program poorly organized, with an operetta aria stuck in the middle of a number of songs related to liberation struggles. The performers were, in her view, wretched, and the ideological

---

48 BArch, DR-1, 6178, Abschrift von Abschrift, Uszkoreit, HA Musik zu DKG, 21 November 1953. Also here are many letters where tax-free status is requested and often denied when officials felt that “the cultural level of the working people [was not being] lifted.” (Ibid., letter 17 February 1954.)
49 BArch, DR-1, 6201, “Bericht über die Instrukteureinsatz am 27.1.53 beim Rat des Bezirkes Cottbus, Abteilung Kunst.”
message of the evening muddled at best. Organizers for clubhouses out in the countryside also criticized “Love, Laughter and Music” (a two-hour program with two emcees, an accordion duo, and a comic) for being poorly put together, inappropriate for their audiences, and lacking good content.

In Poland, Artos similarly grappled with the problem of creating and producing quality imprezy estradowe throughout this period. Officials proved able to identify what was not acceptable, but had a very difficult time developing appropriate programs themselves. In 1950, an Artos inspector heavily criticized two widely-seen performances in this new genre, “Summer Humor” and “Laughs above the Norm,” for being “typical examples of a petty-bourgeois revue and of a very low standard,” code for banal entertainment that did not politically edify. One standard estradowa program included a Paderewski minuet, a Russian song, several contemporary Polish mass songs, and a handful of political sketches; another consisted of a welcoming song followed by the reading of a newspaper article on politics and a few stale jokes, then two Soviet songs, a political sketch, two contemporary songs, a political poem and feuilleton, then a final song by the entire ensemble. Throughout the performance, the emcee aimed to provide lively comments and jokes with a political edge. Common ideological themes included friendship with the Soviet Union, the building of communism, reconstruction of the

---

53 AAN, Artos, 48, p. 18.
country, and peace.\textsuperscript{54} Artos also translated songs from the Soviet Union and the other people’s democracies to provide material for these programs.\textsuperscript{55}

An early example of this initiative took place in conjunction with a large-scale series of concerts all over Poland linked to the “Month of Polish-Russian Friendship” in the late 1940s, which started each year on October 7 and culminated with commemorations of the Russian Revolution on November 7. Concerts unsurprisingly featured a good deal of Russian, Soviet and Polish music.\textsuperscript{56} In one area of Silesia during the following year’s celebrations, Artos organized 96 events consisting mostly of Polish and Russian songs, and attracted some 50,000 people. According to the local party authorities there, the programs had an “appropriate ideological and artistic level,” were attended with “great respect and enthusiasm,” and were greeted with “lively applause.”\textsuperscript{57} The governmental authorities in Silesia complained, however, that the concerts were a success almost in spite of themselves, as Artos exhibited “weak control” as well as “incompetence and a lack of initiative.”\textsuperscript{58} In the Kraków region, Artos seemed to do a better job, as the local administrators praised it for organizing 248 concerts, largely in factories and workplaces. Over 100,000 spectators in the area heard Soviet songs and other music, and excepting one case of an “undisciplined audience,” officials reported enthusiastic responses and a “political-propaganda” success.\textsuperscript{59} Around Szczecin, almost 15,000 agricultural workers responded “quite warmly” to concerts of Soviet music, but the local government administrators were somewhat critical of the performances of the

\textsuperscript{54} AAN, Artos, 56, p. 21.
\textsuperscript{55} AAN, Artos, 59, p. 1, 3, 4, 10.
\textsuperscript{56} AAN, MKiS, DTA, 476, p. 20ff.
\textsuperscript{57} AAN, KC PZPR, 237/XVIII-26, p. 57.
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., p. 61.
usual, overplayed Soviet repertoire.\textsuperscript{60} \textit{Artos} also provided musical entertainment for the wave of celebrations linked to the unification of the two workers’ parties in December 1948. As a result of its 164 concerts for over 100,000 concertgoers, officials could claim “the arts were reaching the shop floors and the hearts of workers.”\textsuperscript{61} \textit{Artos} reported the overwhelmingly positive reactions of some audience members: “heartfelt,” “a pleasant experience,” “excellent.”\textsuperscript{62} And yet, because all of these reports come from party officials, it is hard to determine if the concerts were as successful as these comments suggest. Indisputably, however, \textit{Artos} organized numerous concerts of party-approved music that were attended and perhaps even enjoyed by hundreds of thousands of Polish workers and peasants.

Throughout the first half of the 1950s, Artos officials struggled to square the circle of the ideologically appropriate, entertaining event. A typical medley of songs and texts for the countryside, “Give Us a Happy Face” (\textit{Prosimy o przyjemny wyraz twarzy}), also met with significant criticism by central inspectors due its lack of political punch. In one review, the mix of Polish and Russian songs leaned too far towards the latter, thus potentially boring the audience, and the texts did not adequately engage the political problems of the day. The inspectors characterized the texts to songs like “The Wasters of Raw Materials” (\textit{Brakoroby}), “Teddy-Boy” (\textit{Bikiniarz}), and “The Drunk and the Swine” (\textit{Pijak i świnia}) as dealing with political issues unimportant to a rural audience. A song asking citizens to subordinate love to work was recommended for deletion, as the party had simply realized that such exhortations were simply too far from reality.\textsuperscript{63} A 1953

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{60} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 69.
\bibitem{61} \textit{AAN, KC PZPR, 237/XVIII-86}, p. 146.
\bibitem{62} \textit{Ibid.}
\bibitem{63} \textit{Ibid.}
\end{thebibliography}
inspection of the regional office in Lublin produced criticism of “A Common Story” (Zwykła historia), a production made up of fourteen songs and sketches. The material was sent by the central office in Warsaw, but was called inappropriate for the rural audiences in this eastern region. One song, “On Bureaucracy” was labeled of poor quality, as well as being implausible and irrelevant to the countryside. Another about the advance of women, as well as “The Apartment Speculator,” were also criticized for being far from the concerns of this rural region’s audiences, and the latter was even called “yesterday’s problem.” In general, the program was deemed politically inappropriate.64

Such negative examples were legion. The development of appropriate programs remained a considerable problem for Artos, and it received massive criticism from within and without for its activities in this area. A spate of evaluations in 1953 heavily criticized these performances for “thoughtless and conception-less medleys” and advised Artos to “withdraw programs devoid of ideals, which are harmful due to their low standard and lack of appropriate content.”65 Another inspector excoriated these imprezy estradowe for their poor organization and muddled ideological content, while another described them as rife with “serious political blunders, vulgar and insipid jokes…cheap sentimentalism, and artistic and literary mediocrity.”66 All too frequently, the music was “shrill and chaotic, the performers “lacked taste,” the program was “haphazard” or “hopelessly stupid,” and the overall impression of the performance was “devoid of artistic experience and has not the slightest reason to exist” or was even a “total mistake.”67

64 Ibid., pp. 35-57.
65 AAN, KC PZPR, 237/XVIII-26, p. 2.
66 Ibid., “Notatka w sprawie repertuaru Artosu,” p. 118.
With performances such as these, the audience was unsurprisingly often small and bored. An extreme but not untypical report described the concert-goers as “90% hooligans...who smoked cigarettes, conversed, laughed, and made loud and rude comments to the performers.” One event for workers moved the inspector to write: “My impression of the entirety was unbelievably unpleasant and sad...the [song] texts in most cases were nonsensical, pornographic, and had a destructive effect on the taste of this new audience. The performance was ideologically and artistically harmful.”

By 1954, six years after Artos was founded, it continued to be criticized for using stale material, having low artistic standards, and employing non-ideological programs that focused on love stories or human foibles and were badly put together.

A few of these inspection reports did credit Artos with some progress since its early days, but the praise was faint and only positive in its relative context. By the mid-1950s, party cultural officials noted that improvements had been made, and audiences did at times also react positively to Artos’ programs. One performance in a small town outside Krakow was applauded with cries of “long live Krakow’s Artos!” In another, the audience reacted in a lively manner and sang along, and further asked that the ensemble return more frequently. Perhaps the most positive reaction took place in Silesia, where the ensemble was rewarded with “a hurricane of applause” from spectators who especially appreciated a Czech foxtrot, a Brahms waltz, and, interestingly, a mass song by East German composer Hanns Eisler. Such responses were nonetheless

---

68 Ibid., p. 125.
69 AAN, Artos, 56, p. 1.
70 AAN, KC PZPR, 237/XVIII-110, p. 122.
71 Ibid., p. 21.
72 AAN, Artos 75, p. 9.
73 Ibid., p. 39.
relatively infrequent. Jazz began to be included in programs in the mid-1950s, and these proved to be popular and successful with audiences.\textsuperscript{74}

These staged revues represented the zenith of the stalinist concert, as an event that attempted to edify politically and also entertain. Party officials worked with composers to create this new music, and actively sought the input of the population. In both countries, audiences tolerated and even appreciated music with a political tinge, as long as it was melodic and preferably combined with lighter music. When officials tried to maintain a harder line, audiences stayed away or complained, forcing cultural officials to adapt, moderate, or abandon their attempts to influence the music world ideologically.

\textbf{Conclusion}

In all areas of the musical landscape, the parties sought to place their ideological stamp on concerts both large and small. In both Poland and East Germany during the first postwar decade, nearly all composers cooperated in the project to create a new music for the emerging socialist society. Officials and composers were attentive to the desires of the population and sought to develop concerts and music that would both entertain and politically educate.

Audiences reacted to this new music with enthusiasm, interest, curiosity, and distaste, and did on the whole help to shape this programming even as they were influenced by it through attendance at festivals and other concerts. Individuals interacted with both this new music as well as approved music from the past, and involved themselves in the formation of their musical milieu. A vibrant and diverse musical landscape emerged during this period, as concerts of politicized mass songs or

\textsuperscript{74} AAN, Artos, 40, see throughout file.
ideologically-themed cantatas competed with more traditional symphonic concerts and evenings of folk music or popular song. The hybrid form of the stage revue was even capacious enough to include each of these genres of music, as great masters and socialist-realist contemporary music jostled with crowd-pleasing opera arias and popular music that merely aimed to please.

The SED in East Germany proved to be much more successful in realizing its aims. It could count on a larger cohort of sympathetic composers and a more disciplined and committed party base, as well as a more modernized and musically sophisticated society accustomed to attending concerts regularly. In Poland, a weaker party exerted less influence on a more skeptical group of composers, and confronted a population more leery of a Russian-inspired political program.

After the mid-1950s, the experiences of the two countries diverged significantly. The SED in East Germany continued, in a relatively more flexible manner, to push composers for socialist-realist music and to organize concerts marked by its political vision. In Poland, however, the weaker PZPR largely gave up in its attempt to influence the musical world, both high and low. Polish composers increasingly organized their professional lives without input from cultural officials, and Artos died a quiet death as the PZPR allowed the popular music milieu to develop without much interference. Polish jazz developed largely unhindered, as did an emerging rock music scene; in East Germany, the SED frequently intervened to favor officially sanctioned music. In the stalinist era, however, the two countries were quite similar in that audiences contributed to the shaping of the musical world in concert with party officials and composers.