

A Song Helps Us Live

The Narrative Function of Music in Soviet Musical Film



Thesis

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Introduction

During the reign of Joseph Stalin, especially during the 1930s, cinema was one of the most, if not the most popular form of entertainment in the Soviet Union. Within cinema, the genre that drew most Russians to the theater was the musical film.¹ This genre of Soviet cinema was dominated by two directors: Grigori Alexandrov and Ivan Pyriev. Alexandrov's and Pyriev's films shared as much similarities as differences. Film scholars such as Trudy Anderson and Richard Taylor have explored a great many of these in their work already, such as the similar plotpoint of the love triangle, the importance of Moscow in Alexandrov's films and the glorification of the collective farms (*kolkhoz*) in Pyriev's.² In fact, introductory articles on the Soviet musical - such as Taylor's entry in *The International Film Musical* - focus almost exclusively on these directors. Though many aspects of Alexandrov's and Pyriev's films have been featured in Western scholarship, there have so far been no comparative studies on the actual use of music in these musicals. This thesis is essentially an attempt to fill this gap. I am most interested in the question of how the musical content serves the narrative, especially the often unsubtle stalinist socialist subtext which is present in each of these films, and in which manner(s) this might differ between Alexandrov and Pyriev.

Three films will feature in this thesis: Alexandrov's 1934 film *Jolly Fellows* and his 1938 film *Volga-Volga!*, and Pyriev's 1939 film *Tractor-Drivers*. Of each of these films, I have selected the following songs to analyse in depth: from *Jolly Fellows*, 'The Jolly Fellows March', which features prominently on both the very beginning and the very end of the film; from *Volga-Volga!*, 'Song of the Volga', which features heavily throughout the film in a diegetic manner, being central to the plot; and from *Tractor-Drivers*, 'Three Tankists' and 'Thundering with Fire', both performed multiple times at different points in the film, and thus in different contexts.

In chapter 1, I will sketch the Soviet popular culture and the forceful politics behind it, both in the 1930s and the preceding decade. In chapter 2, I will give my findings on Alexandrov's films, whereas chapter 3 will focus on Pyriev's *Tractor-Drivers*. Hereafter follows a conclusion in which I will hope to answer my main question: *How does music, in the musical films of Grigori Alexandrov and Ivan Pyriev, function to serve the (ideological) narrative of the film and how do they compare?*

¹ Stites, Richard. *Russian Popular Culture: Entertainment and Society since 1900*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1992): 92.

² For a comprehensive overview of Alexandrov's and Pyriev's careers and the 1930s Soviet musical film in general, see Trudy Anderson's 'Why Soviet Musicals?' (*Discourse* 17:3, 1995). For more on the love triangle and other tropes, see Richard Taylor's entry on the Soviet musical in *The International Film Musical* (2012). For more detail on Pyriev's *kolkhoz* musical style, see Taylor's 'Singing on the Steppes' (*Slavic Review* 58:1, 1999).

Chapter 1 Soviet Film and (Popular) Culture, 1917-1939

To understand the films about to be discussed, it is important to understand the culture the films were made in. Culture in the Soviet Union was, contrary to popular culture, diverse and subject to many changes, especially in the pre-WWII era. In this chapter, I shall dive into the (popular) culture of these early days of the Soviet Union, roughly from the end of the Civil War (1917-1921) up until the signing of the Defensive Pact with Nazi-Germany in 1939; I will also succinctly describe how and when film came to the Soviet Union.

1.1 Film Comes to Russia

The cinema first came to Russia in the form of the cinematograph, the famous Lumière brothers' invention. In May 1896 it was first shown to the Russian public in the interval of an operetta performance in Saint Petersburg. In July of the same year, at the annual Nizhny Novgorod Fair, the newfound art showed its miracles to an audience featuring the novelist Maxim Gorky, who shared this newfound wonder in a local gazette the following day:

“Yesterday I was in the kingdom of shadows. If only you knew how strange it is to be there. There are no sounds, no colours. There, everything (...) is tinted in grey monotone (...). This is not life but the the shadow of life and this is not movement but the shadow of movement. (...) The shadow [the cinematograph] produced was so unusual, so original and complex, that I can hardly convey it in all its nuances but I can attempt to convey its essence. (...) Suddenly there is a click, everything vanishes and a railway train appears on the screen. It darts like an arrow straight towards you - watch out! It seems as though it is about to rush into the darkness where you are sitting and reduce you to a mangled sack of skin, full of crumpled flesh and splintered bones, and destroy this hall and this building, so full of wine, women, music and vice, and transform it into fragments and into dust. But this, too, is merely a train of shadows.”³

From 1907, Russian film studios were erected and broke the dominance of French firms after the outbreak of World War I, which hindered the import of the film reels. Not all Russians were as enamoured with the new French invention as Gorky was. The playwright Leonid Andreyev

³ Gorky, Maxim. “The Lumière Cinematograph (Extracts)”. Translated by Richard Taylor. From: *The Film Factory: Russian and Soviet Cinema in Documents 1896-1939*. Ed.: Richard Taylor and Ian Christie. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul (1988): 25-26.

wrote in particular of the “great mistrust and even scorn” the cinematograph had to endure from the “upper echelons” of Russian society.⁴ Tsar Nicholas II called the cinema “an empty, totally useless and even harmful form of entertainment”. Early enthusiasts such as Andreyev, Vsevolod Meyerhold and Lev Kuleshov, discussed cinema either as an artform - mostly in its relation to theater and how it could either complement or replace on-stage drama - or as an educational tool and wished for it to be taken more seriously.⁵

After the October Revolution, cinema was indeed taken more seriously, in particular by the new Soviet authorities. This newfound governmental interest did not occur overnight, mostly because, to put it bluntly, the new government, in facing civil war and diverse other and often associated issues, had more important business to attend to. Even so, Lenin nationalized the cinema in 1919.⁶ That same year, Anatoly Lunacharsky, head of the People’s Commissariat for Enlightenment (‘Narodnyy komissariat prosveshcheniya’, better known under the portmanteau of Narkompros) and responsible for Education, published an article in which he claimed “the main task of cinema” to be “that of propaganda”.⁷ Before the nationalization, the main task of the cinema was to entertain, in ways seen by the authorities as “trashy, decadent and obscene (...) with their motifs of light comedy, melodrama, affluent social life, and sordid crime and sex”.⁸ However, the (still silent) cinema as a medium was an effective way to spread a revolutionary message within a nation of multiple languages and widespread illiteracy.⁹

1.2 The USSR’s Roaring ‘20s

Following the Civil War, the Soviet Union was left barely intact; the economy, especially, was in shambles. This prompted Lenin to instigate a new economic policy (fittingly called the New Economic Policy) which allowed for the privatization of retail in 1921. This led to old forms of popular culture to reappear, even ‘bourgeois’ forms of entertainment and consumption such as gypsy music, caviar and champagne; these were consumed mostly by a thriving merchant class who would later be called ‘NEP-men’. The Soviet government did not necessarily approve of this side-effect of the necessary evil that was the NEP. Thus, they responded through promoting a “proletarian morality, based on a mutual respect and equality of the sexes; atheism rooted in science; a spirit of collective comradeship; and a veritable cult of technology and the

⁴ Andreyev, Leonid. “First Letter of Theatre (Extracts)”. Translated by Richard Taylor. From: *The Film Factory*, etc.: 27.

⁵ Taylor and Christie, *The Film Factory*, 19-22.

⁶ Taylor and Christie, *The Film Factory*, 22.

⁷ Lunacharsky, Anatoly. “The Tasks of the State Cinema in the RSFSR.” From: *The Film Factory*, etc.: 47.

⁸ Stites, *Russian Popular Culture*, 54.

⁹ Suny, Ronald Grigor. *The Soviet Experiment: Russia, the USSR, and the Successor States*. 2nd edition. New York: Oxford University Press (2010): 222-223.

machine.”¹⁰

The two largest forces aside from the government who rejected the NEP-era popular culture were Proletkult (a portmanteau of ‘proletarskaya kultura’, proletarian culture) and the avant-garde. Proletkult was a large organization during the Civil War; in 1920, their membership reached as high half a million people. Their cultural ideology was a potpourri of high culture (internally propagated by the prewar elitist members), revolutionary proletarian culture (propagated by the strict Leftist Bolshevik members) and whatever else the actual workers wanted. This lack of a central thought to their ideology caused much internal debate and eventually led to their disbandment before the Civil War was even over. Even so, some of their former members would still be active in a less massive form; thus, their overall message still had an influence on the ‘proletarian’ view on culture, which would not go away as quickly as Proletkult itself.¹¹ A musical example of the proletarian ideology is the genre of ‘factory songs’, “pure” political songs with lyrics about foreign enemies and lazy factory workers, set to music stripped of all folk elements.¹² Since most citizens preferred ‘light’ melodies¹³, however, these songs barely reached mass popularity.¹⁴ The gap between these light melodies and proletarian content was bridged by composers of the so-called ‘new socialist life’ genre (‘novyi byt’), who wrote catchy melodies to socialist lyrics. Many of them would go on to enjoy great popularity in the the 1930s, when this kind of music became the norm. Among these composers were the Pokrass brothers, songwriters for the film *Tractor-Drivers*.¹⁵

The artistic avant-garde was made up of mostly dedicated revolutionaries and socialists whose intent was to reach a mass audience with their new styles of art, e.g. futurist poetry and constructivist theater, while wanting to be able to express themselves aesthetically in a revolutionary idiom. Most experimental artists detested the popular culture of the time; one of the few things they had in common with the proletarians. Their own works were equally reviled or at least not liked very much by most of the general public.¹⁶

Soviet films were almost exclusively produced by the avant-garde. The avant-garde filmmakers in charge of the new cinema (the most well-known of abroad is Alexandrov’s and Pyriev’s mentor, Sergei Eisenstein) were revolutionary not only in subject matter (see Eisenstein’s classics *Battleship Potemkin* and *October*), but also in cinematic technique, spearheading developments in the use of montage and mise-en-scène. Unfortunately for

¹⁰ Stites, *Russian Popular Culture*, 40.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.: 48.

¹³ E.g. music based on folk melodies, gypsy music and jazz.

¹⁴ Stites, *Russian Popular Culture*, 47.

¹⁵ Ibid.: 46.

¹⁶ Ibid.: 39-40.

Eisenstein et al, these revolutionary aspects of the new cinema failed to appease the masses, rather in want and need of entertainment above anything else, just as cinema had often provided before the revolution. Soviet private studios and imported American films proved to be stiff competition for the avant-garde. Eisenstein simply could not compete with Charlie Chaplin.¹⁷

In the end, the Soviet Union had produced 1,172 films during the 1920s. The country was not yet filled with film fanatics, though. Compared to the United States, where in 1928 combined ticket sales would average 100 million per week, Soviet public enthusiasm was lacking, with a total of 300 million tickets sold during the same year. Especially the rural parts of the USSR lacked a film culture, both through a lack of relatable themes and stories in the films themselves as a variety of technical issues with showing films in more remote areas.¹⁸

1.3 Culture Under Stalin, 1928-1939

NEP was “an era of uneasy coexistence and constant struggle (...) over what constituted culture and popular culture”.¹⁹ As the decade neared its end, these cultural wars would be all but won by the proletarians. They had gained the support of the party, which began promoting a policy that “emphasized class war against the party’s enemies, the end of favors to the bourgeois specialists and the (...) interests of the proletarians”, as Ronald Suny describes it. These “enemies” Suny speaks of ranged from nonconformist intellectuals and scientist to powerful people within the party itself, many of them confidants of Lenin, who had died in 1924. Many of them, now labeled the ‘right wing’ of the communist party, opposed Stalin’s accelerated collectivization and industrialization processes with no regards to the well-being of the peasantry. Lunacharsky and his closest associates at Narkompros were among those stripped of their power.²⁰

The proletarians organized themselves according to their profession; for instance, writers could become a member of RAPP (‘Rossiyskaya Assotsiatsiya Proletarskikh Pisateley’, or Russian Association of Proletarian Writers) and musicians of RAPM (‘Rossiyskaya Assotsiatsiya Proletarskikh Muzykantov’, or Russian Association of Proletarian Musicians’). However, their rhetoric would soon oppose party lines. In the first Five Year Plan (1928-1932), Stalin and associates had envisioned artists and writers - especially writers - as creators of positive socialist role models, fictional heroes in utopian worlds who could inspire the common worker. These writers held to other values, exposing corruption and criticizing bureaucracy

¹⁷ Ibid.: 55-56.

¹⁸ Stites, *Russian Popular Culture*, 66.

¹⁹ Ibid.: 40-41.

²⁰ Suny, *The Soviet Experiment*, 227.

within the party.²¹

On April 23, 1932, Stalin put forth a resolution to reshape arts and literature to more suit his earlier vision, as part of the second Five Year Plan (1932-1936). Since a famine broke out in 1931, sowing discontent among young workers especially, Stalin needed positive arts now more than ever. RAPP, RAPM and all other proletarian organizations were disbanded and replaced with unions, one for each branch of the arts. Each union contained a communist faction with a direct link to the party. Though gaining membership to these unions was voluntary in theory, the political climate made it impossible for any artist not to. However, since the proletarians iron grip had finally loosened, there was little resistance to the resolution.

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Thus, the period that is now known as the Cultural Revolution (1928-32) had come to an end. It was followed by a period of relative liberalism and optimism. This dovetailed with a new elite being filled with people from lower classes, replacing the intelligentsia purged from party ranks during the Cultural Revolution. This new elite was fond of status symbols: this not only included high-end pens and cigarettes, but also old high culture. As a result, they canonized classical music and realistic theatre. They also helped fashion a new ‘mass culture’, described by Richard Stites as “accessible to all, politically impeccable and bearing some of the solemn hallmarks of high culture.”²³ The newfound freedom could be experienced throughout the arts. In classical music, contemporary Western repertoire by such composers as Schoenberg, Honegger, Berg and Milhaud was performed regularly by the Leningrad Philharmonic between 1932 and 1936, while the music by Berg and Schoenberg was forbidden in Germany at that time.²⁴ The period 1932-1936 would later also be known as the Red Jazz Age; jazz was being played at restaurants and foxtrot lessons were given at factories throughout the country.²⁵

The first sound film made in the USSR was *Plan for Great Works* (‘Plan velikikh rabot’, 1930), a documentary series by Abram Room on the first Five Year Plan.²⁶ The arrival of the sound film coincided with the appointment of Boris Shumyatsky as industrial administrator to a renewed, centralized film industry. His task was to really ‘industrialize’ the industry; i.e., to treat it like any other industry, such as the steel industry, a policy which fit the second Five Year Plan’s main goal of developing heavy industry. This did not necessarily made

²¹ Ibid.: 292.

²² Schwarz, Boris. *Music and Musical Life in Soviet Russia: enlarged edition, 1917-1982*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press (1983): 109-10.

²³ Stites, *Russian Popular Culture*, 65.

²⁴ Fairclough, Pauline. *Classics for the Masses: Shaping Soviet Musical Identity under Lenin and Stalin*. New Haven: Yale University Press (2016): 112-113.

²⁵ Starr, S. Frederick. *Red and Hot: the Fate of Jazz in the Soviet Union 1917-1991*, 2nd edition. New York: Limelight Editions (1994): 111.

²⁶ Leyda, Jay. *Kino: A History of the Russian and Soviet Film*, 3rd edition. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press (1983): 280.

Shumyatsky a popular figure among Soviet filmmakers. According to Jay Leyda, an American avant-garde filmmaker who studied under Eisenstein in this period, “Shumyatsky’s ignorance of the nature of art and the psychology of artists may have recommended him for the new job.”²⁷ Shumyatsky tried to achieve his task through establishing a “Soviet Hollywood” on the shores of the Black Sea, reaching centralization through isolation. If things had gone Shumyatsky’s way, this self-envisioned utopia would have been the fertile grounds to an impressive 350 movies per year. However, Shumyatsky would not last long enough for this to happen. Ironically, because he managed to churn out a movie about Lenin for the twentieth anniversary of the October Revolution (1937) in an impressive three months, questions arose as to why films had not been produced at this rate before. Subsequently, Shumyatsky was denounced in Pravda on January 9, 1938, and removed from his post not long thereafter; allegedly, many Soviet filmmakers threw house parties the same day the Pravda article came out.²⁸

During Shumyatsky’s tenure, the first three of Alexandrov’s musical films were made, *Jolly Fellows* and *Volga-Volga!* among them. According to Richard Stites, these films “perfectly embodied the official theme of joyful life and sunny optimism.”²⁹

With the removal of Shumyatsky, the structure of the Soviet cinema industry was overhauled. A Committee on Cinema Affairs was formed. Headed by Semyon Dukelsky, they were directly responsible to Narkompros. The committee had a division dedicated to writing screenplays, that were distributed to groups of actors and technician on a regular basis; for instance, the screenplay for Ivan Pyriev’s *Tractor-Drivers* (1939) was written by Ukrainian screenwriter Yevgeny Pomeschchikov without much input from Pyriev himself. These screenplays were subject to heavy scrutiny and filmmakers were not allowed to alter them in any way without permission.³⁰

This decision to strengthen governmental control over dovetailed with the curtailing of freedoms in other arts and overall life in the Soviet Union. In arts, the starting point can be defined as August 1934, when Andrei Zhdanov, who had replaced Lunacharsky, spoke at the first convention of the Writer’s Union:

“Comrade Stalin has called our writers engineers of humans souls. What does this mean? (...) it means knowing life so as to be able to depict it truthfully in works of art, (...) to depict reality in its revolutionary development. (...) The truthfulness and historical

²⁷ Leyda, *Kino*, 278.

²⁸ Ibid.: 339-40.

²⁹ Stites, *Russian Popular Culture*, 88.

³⁰ Leyda, *Kino*, 341-342.

concreteness of the artistic portrayal should be combined with the ideological remoulding and education of the toiling people in the spirit of socialism. This method (...) is what we call the method of socialist realism.”³¹

Socialist realism was to become the implemented top-down artistic ideal until the Gorbachev era (though from Khrushchev onward, control was lessened).³² Life had to be portrayed as positive, at least life in a Stalinist socialist future. Stories in both film and literature relied on folkloric heroes, often soldiers and workers, reaching consciousness through conflict with obstructionists, sometimes under the tutelage of a mentor providing socialist moral guidance.³³ The “realism” part of socialist realism meant that art should be comprehensible to the common citizen; not necessarily, and often not at all, did realism mean a realistic portrayal of the present. Because of this, the Stalinist government denounced experimental and avant-garde art.³⁴ The term formalism was used to describe everything deemed too Western, modern or in any other sense too deviant from socialist realism.³⁵ The popular genre of jazz was among these. The gap was filled by ‘mass’ songs, with accessible melodies and positive, uplifting lyrics. The “acknowledged master” of the genre was Isaak Dunayevsky, who would also write songs in this idiom for musical films like *Jolly Fellows* and *Volga-Volga!*³⁶

The mythical storytelling in socialist realism was instrumental in the shaping of Stalin’s cult of personality. Stalin was seen as the hero of the Soviet Union, with special focus on his achievements in the industrialization of the country, who had risen up from poverty to godlike status.³⁷ A good example of how far-reaching Stalin’s cult was can be found in the public’s reaction to the Great Terror, a series of political witch hunts and executions between 1936 and 1938; a staggering number of 681.692 people were executed in the 1937-38 period alone.³⁸ Though Stalin was ultimately responsible for most of these killings, most citizens blamed the head of secret police, Nikolai Jzhov.³⁹

³¹ Barker, Adele Marie and Bruce Grant. *The Russia Reader: History, Culture, Politics*. Durham and London: Duke University Press (2010): 414.

³² Barker and Grant, *The Russia Reader*, 414.

³³ Stites, *Russian Popular Culture*, 67.

³⁴ Suny, *The Soviet Experiment*, 293.

³⁵ Schwarz, *Music and Musical Life in Soviet Russia*, 115.

³⁶ Stites, *Russian Popular Culture*, 76.

³⁷ *Ibid.*: 66.

³⁸ Suny, *The Soviet Experiment*, 287.

³⁹ Schwarz, *Music and Musical Life in Soviet Russia*, 138.

Chapter 2 Alexandrov's *Jolly Fellows* and *Volga-Volga!*

In this chapter, I will take a close look at the music in Grigori Alexandrov's films *Jolly Fellows* (1934) and *Volga-Volga!* (1938). An important theme in both of these films is the move from a rural setting to the paradise that is Moscow, leading the main characters to find happiness and enlightenment; indeed, in nearly all of Alexandrov's musicals the main characters move from the Soviet periphery to happier lives in the capital.⁴⁰ Through my analyses of what I argue to be the most important songs in each movie, either by its multitude of occurrences throughout the film ('March of the Jolly Fellows' is featured three times) or by its place in the narrative ('Song of the Volga' is presented as the main character's original composition and eventually becomes the winning song of the song contest in Moscow), I argue that this move from periphery to center, as part of the development of the main characters, is reflected in the films' music. Other significant musical occurrences, such as the role of classical music or the eventual propagandic nature of the lyrics, will be noted as well.

2.1 *Jolly Fellows*

Jolly Fellows, also often referred to as *Jazz Film*, *Happy-Go-Lucky Fellows* and other "various jolly titles"⁴¹ outside of Russia, was Grigori Alexandrov's first musical film and the film that established his place in the Soviet film industry.⁴² The plot centers around a shepherd (played by Leonid Utyosov), who is mistaken for a famous conductor by a young bourgeois lady (played by Maria Strelkova) and invited over to a social gathering at her house that evening. As soon as the shepherd's true identity is unveiled in the form of his herd rampaging through the luxurious beach villa, the lady turns him away. This prompts him towards Moscow, seeking fame as a jazz musician, which he eventually achieves. In the end he also finds love; not with the lady, but with her maid Anyulka (played by Lyubov Orlova), who joins him onstage in the Bolshoi Theater at the end of the film.

2.1.1 'The March of the Jolly Fellows'

⁴⁰ Taylor, Richard. "Soviet Union". From: *The International Film Musical*. Ed.: Corey Creekmur and Linda Mokdad. Edinburgh : Edinburgh University Press, 2012: 113-114.

⁴¹ Leyda, *Kino*, 308.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 307.

The ‘March of the Jolly Fellows’ is the first song featured in the film [02:33-07:12].⁴³ It is a march in 2/4 time, played at an average tempo of 112 bpm (except for the rubato intro). Its form is reminiscent of American music, being basically an A-A-B-A form.⁴⁴ The song starts with two non-diegetic, most likely muted, brass instruments playing an allusion to the main melody in thirds (figure 1). This short section’s instrumentation, slow tempo and flexible sense of time provide it with a pastoral quality, which signifies to the audience that the scene is set in an idyllic rural environment. However, the final two beats of this section deviate from this by way of moving no more than a semitone, moving away from the key to a slightly jarring effect. One might say it sounds somewhat “jazzy”. This might be an early hint towards the basic plot of the film: a shepherd from a pastoral environment moves to Moscow and becomes a famous jazz musician.

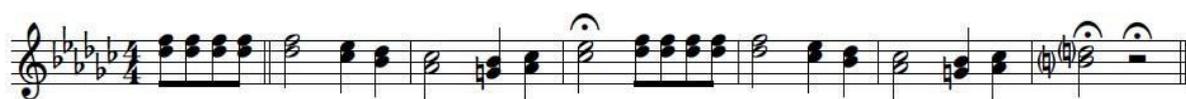


figure 1: ‘March of the Jolly Fellows’, pastoral intro⁴⁵

Indeed, as this ensemble plays, the camera cuts from close-up of a sign saying “Clear Springs”, to an establishment shot showing the sign posted on top of an arch somewhere in the Russian countryside [2:34-2:51]. The sound of these ‘horns’ slowly dies out as a wooden gate in center frame is opened by two peasant boys, revealing behind it the main character played by Utyosov. Utyosov starts playing the main melody of the song on his shepherd’s flute, in the key of G-flat major; the actual instrument heard is probably a piccolo. After the first phrase, one of the boys joins in with a flute of his own - which is probably also actually performed on a piccolo - doubling Utyosov’s melody a third below. After another phrase, a second boy plays a countermelody in call-response fashion, also on a flute of some kind, an octave below the range of the first two flutes (figure 2). Leading into the B-section, a balalaika starts playing accompanying chords and the shepherds start walking forward.⁴⁶ After this B-section and the concluding A-section, the final two sections are repeated, with two accordion players joining the group. These musicians are joined by a non-diegetic marching band from this moment on, providing the tune with brass and woodwind (perhaps even saxophones) fanfare [2:51-3:43].

⁴³ Timestamp: 0:02:33 - 0:07:12.

⁴⁴ A couple of times throughout the song, the B-section and final A-section are repeated once more before repeating the form as a whole. However, since this doesn’t happen every time and since the lyrics fit the A-A-B-A form, I argue A-A-B-A is indeed the form the song is structured around.

⁴⁵ All transcriptions are by the author.

⁴⁶ For the sake of clarity I should mention that I did notice the actor portraying the balalaika player had started playing sometime before the instrument is actually heard. This editorial mistake, perhaps, is however not relevant to this research.

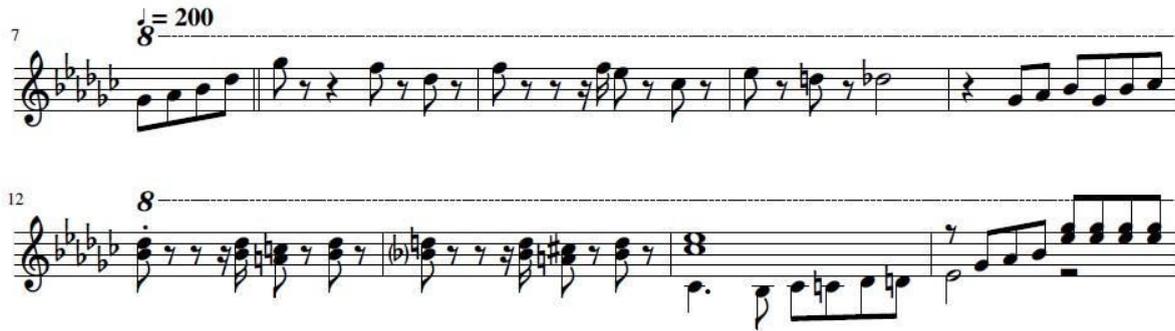


figure 2: 'March of the Jolly Fellows', first flute parts

The diegetic instruments used in this particular section are signifiers of the rural setting, just as the horns in the intro were. However, the musical material itself is not per se; it is situated in some sort of middle ground between folk and jazz. The staccato rhythms in the flutes seem well suited for a shepherd's music, but the chromaticism in the melody and the call-and-response interactions between the two soprano flutes and the single alto flute hint at jazz. This does not come as a surprise, since Dunayevsky was an acknowledged master of blending genres.⁴⁷

Hereafter, the song transitions from G-flat major to E-flat major, perhaps to accommodate Utyosov's vocal range [3:43-3:51]. The staccato rhythms and ornamental notes are foregone, in favor of a more straightforward lyrical melody. There is also less chromaticism to be found in the melody from now on. The transcription of this part, in which Utyosov sings the first verse and refrain (figure 3), shows the 32-bar structure of the song. This shows the close link between this film's musical identity and the musical identity of American (film) music of this time, since 32-bar AABA-form was the form employed by American songwriters in all forms of popular music from this time.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Stites, "Russian popular culture", 77.

⁴⁸ Giddins, Gary en Scott DeVeaux. *Jazz*, 2nd edition. New York: Norton, 2015: 28-29.



figure 3: 'March of the Jolly Fellows', main theme

The song's lyrics are as follows:

- A A happy song makes your heart feel light,
 And never makes you bored,
- A They love songs in the villages,
 And in the cities,
- B *A song helps us live,
 It calls out like a friend,*
- A *If you sing your way through life,
 You'll never lose your way.*
- A We sing and laugh like children,
 Through unending struggle and toil,
- A This is how we're born,
 We'll never give up,

*B A song helps us live,
 It calls out like a friend,
A If you sing your way through life,
 You'll never lose your way.⁴⁹*

At first glance, the song's subject matter is singing itself. The marching rhythm and tempo serve to highlight a sense of movement and momentum which can be found in the way the scene is filmed: this one-shot take of a constant walk from left to right [3:10-7:04]. The lyrics contain some fighting words in "we will never give up", which, combined with the song's march-like quality, could be a promotion of militarism. The use of the first-person plural "we" throughout the second verse shows a strong focus on 'the group'. Since this film was released near the end of the first Five Year Plan, this focus on forward movement and unity among the townspeople could very well be a propagandic promotion of this radical change in Soviet ideology. This sense of unity through song is musically expressed through the use of a women's chorus and driven home even more strongly by adding a children's chorus at the very end [7:06-7:12].



Figure 4: The shepherd sings and marches.

At the end of the film, the march is reprised twice. As the protagonist's jazz band arrives at the Bolshoi, they discover that the rain they had to travel through has made their instruments unplayable.

⁴⁹ All English-language lyrics and quotes used in this thesis are taken from the movies' subtitles as provided on Mosfilm's YouTube channel, unless stated otherwise.

The former shepherd decides they will have to make do with their voices; an *a cappella* male chorus rendition of the march it is! This version of the song is set in common 4/4-meter and is sung in a high tempo of approximately 240 beats per minute. The eighth notes are sung in a “swing” manner (with a slightly delayed timing) - even though this is barely audible at such a high tempo - and syncopations occur often. The song only cycles through the A-A-B-A form once, though the final two sections are repeated, as they were often in the first version. As mentioned, the instrumentation is mainly a male vocal chorus, though from the start of the song a piano is also heard and at some point the drummer plays a short break on a crash cymbal [1:17:04-1:18:13].

Swing ♩ = 240

The musical score consists of three staves. The top staff is labeled 'Soloist' and is in a bass clef. The bottom two staves are labeled 'Chorus' and are in treble and bass clefs respectively. The key signature has three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat) and the time signature is 4/4. The tempo is marked 'Swing ♩ = 240'. The Soloist part has a rest for the first two bars, then enters in the third bar with a series of eighth notes and quarter notes. The Chorus part provides harmonic support with chords and some melodic lines.

figure 5: ‘March of the Jolly Fellows’, swing version, first four bars

Before the start of the A-A-B-A cycle the band sings an extended intro, similar to a verse in American musical song.⁵⁰ In this intro the chorus and piano sing and play a chord progression before a soloist answers with a seemingly improvised riff (see the first occurrence in figure 5). After three instances of this, the chorus slows down the tempo dramatically with a *ritardando*, resting *fermata* on a dominant seventh chord. Over this seventh chord, one of the band members sings a high-pitched riff in half time (120 beats per minute), mimicking the sound of a muted trumpet [1:17:19-1:17:24].

⁵⁰ Giddins, Gary en Scott DeVeaux. *Jazz*, 2nd edition. New York: Norton, 2015: 28.



figure 6: Utyosov mimics a trombone slide in the a capella version of the march.

This short reprise of the song is intended primarily as a comedic moment; the nasal interpretations of trumpets and interspersed non-musical gags⁵¹ attest to this. However, it also shows the musical identity of the shepherd as having become fully urbanized. Gone are the flutes and accordions and the marching metre and tempo in favor of swinging eighths, honky-tonk piano and (mimicked as they might be) muted solo trumpets. Utyosov seems to have fully embraced jazz as his new musical idiom.



figure 7: The camera moves away from the stage in the final shot of the film

At the very end of the film [1:26:24-1:30:10], the song is finally reprised in a style very reminiscent of

⁵¹ An example of this is one of the band members kissing another on the forehead.

its original performance. The marching tempo is back, and Utyosov's band is even supplemented with a squadron of what seem to be sailors forming a tuba marching band. In this segment, both Utyosov and Orlova literally march down two sets of stairs, followed by the jazz band and the marching band respectively. They are later joined by the Bolshoi string orchestra (heard but not seen, though their conductor is shown) and show girls who form a chorus. This version of the song continues as the camera moves away from the stage and out of the Bolshoi (dolly) to end the film on an establishment shot on the theater.⁵²

2.1.2 Classical Music in *Jolly Fellows*

Classical music plays almost as big a role as jazz in the film, though it is cast in a much more negative light, or at least its listeners are. The shepherd's initial love-interest and her mother, beach villa-dwelling members of the bourgeoisie and arguably the villains of the film, are classical music enthusiasts: they are shown to be admirers of the famous conductor with whom they confuse Utyosov's character. Three scenes in particular are interesting to mention here.

The first of these scenes takes place one month after the events in the countryside, as the shepherd finds himself in Moscow. He manages to get himself on the stage of a theater, as he is once again mistaken for a conductor [55:13-58:07]. The orchestra plays Franz Liszt's *Hungarian Rhapsody No. 2* under his horrible direction.⁵³ This entire segment is making fun of classical music and its bourgeois enthusiasts. First, this is prevalent in the exaggerated way in which the shepherd conducts. He stretches his arms and the orchestra plays a staccato note; he runs up and down the stairs and the orchestra play the piece at a ridiculously fast tempo. Since he is so bad at it, at first seemingly unaware he is conducting, Liszt's piece sounds more like a pastiche than a faithful rendition. Second, the orchestra the shepherd conducts is of ridiculous proportions; five harps on stage left and five piano's on stage right seem to parody the frivolous nature a communist society might prescribe to classical music. Finally, one bourgeois onlooker (sharing a box with the bourgeois ladies), remarks on the spectacle as it being "a curious interpretation". This musical ignorance overtly pokes fun at snobbery.

The same ignorance of music is shown in the first exchange between the shepherd and the bourgeois lady [16:29-18:43]. As the shepherd gets out of the water, the lady, who was waiting for

⁵² This final version does not necessarily contradict my earlier claims of the music signifying a move away from the periphery to Moscow. In fact, it is simply a bombastic musical finale. The adding of tubas, a very loud chorus and having both the male and female lead singing verses solo is a musical example of a happy ending. As we have seen in earlier versions of the song, the movement away from the countryside to Moscow is still very much present in *Jolly Fellows*' music.

⁵³ Coincidentally, this humorous rendition of Liszt's piece predates the famous Warner Bros.' *Rhapsody Rabbit* and Hanna-Barbera's *The Cat Concerto* cartoons by twelve and thirteen years respectively.

“him”, i.e. the conductor, strikes up a conversation about him and her admiration for him. Before they start talking about the “scientists”, “bureaucrats” and “Dutch ladies” who supposedly live with the conductor, the lady shows her ignorance by seemingly not knowing the name of arguably the most famous composer of all time:

LADY: And what are you going to play now?
SHEPHERD: I’ll rework some Beethoven.
LADY: Who?
SHEPHERD: Beethoven.
LADY: How I envy him!

In another scene, the lady is shown performing vocal exercises [1:08:35-1:09:40]. Her voice is crass and unpleasant, especially as she fails in reaching the high notes. After each failed high note, she takes an egg from a plate on the piano, cracks it on the nose of a bust of Mozart and eats its contents raw. The maid is shown working in the same room and getting increasingly more annoyed. After an intermediate scene the lady takes one final egg from the plate and angrily smashes it on the bust, which is already incredibly dirty. The maid’s patience runs out and she sings the cursed high note in beautiful fashion. The lady’s mother enters the room, saying: “Lena! The eggs worked! Now they’ll take you at the Bolshoi!” [1:10:43-1:11:47].

In all of these seemingly throwaway comedic scenes, classical music is shown as beloved but not at all understood by an arrogant middle class. This is reflected in the bourgeois gentleman’s inability to recognize a bad performance of a piece of classical music, the young lady’s denied ignorance concerning Beethoven and her literal soiling of Mozart’s image.

2.2 *Volga-Volga!*

Four years after *Jolly Fellows* - and two years after another musical hit, 1936’s *Circus* - Alexandrov wrote and directed *Volga-Volga!*. This film focuses on the inhabitants of a village on the banks of the Volga; they are summoned by the government to Moscow to take part in a talent show. The town overseer, a staunch bureaucrat (played by the “experienced Meyerhold comedian”⁵⁴ Igor Ilinsky), has no interest in the project. After two factions of amateur musicians – classical musicians, led by the accountant and male lead Alyosha (played by Andrey Tutyshkin); and folk musicians, led by the postwoman and female lead Strelka⁵⁵ (played by Orlova) - compete for his approval, the classical

⁵⁴ Leyda, *Kino*, 342.

⁵⁵ Strelka is a Russian word, meaning “little arrow”. It is a diminutive of *strela*, “arrow”. The name references her profession as a postwoman, indicating she delivers her letters swiftly.

musicians are taken to Moscow. The folk musicians do not take this sitting down and set to their own voyage to the capitol. In the end, the village musicians overcome their differences and together decide to play a song composed by the postwoman. They win the competition, a feat only made possible by their willingness to stand up to the bureaucrat.

2.2.1 ‘Song of the Volga’

The ‘Song of the Volga’ is the song written by Strelka, a fact she keeps to herself through attributing it to her non-existent colleague Dunya Petrovka. The song is first introduced as part of a discussion between Strelka and Alyosha about music, with Alyosha mocking Strelka for implying a postwoman like herself could be a good composer. She proceeds to say that indeed, her friend and colleague Dunya composed a song and that Alyosha should “hear first, laugh later” [09:30-10:16].

This version of the song is less than a minute long and consists of only one cycle of its form, a 16-bar A-A’-B-B’ with the A segments being verses and the B segments a chorus where the text is concerned. The melody itself is not incredibly remarkable: written in E major, it often rests on chord tones of the tonic at the end of most phrases; there is little chromaticism, in fact, the only note outside of the main key is an added leading note to the fifth note of the scale (m. 7); and the ambitus of the chorus makes it easy to sing along to. In short, it works well as the main theme for a musical film (figure 8).

figure 8: ‘Song of the Volga’, main theme.

Orlova's Strelka sings this melody in a determined 140 beats per minute as she accompanies herself with an accordion [10:23-10:56]. She plays the accompanying chords on the backbeat in a staccato manner and doubles her song melody with the accordion's keyboard (figure 9). This instrumentation shows the melody's connection to folk music and the social position of Strelka in this point of the film: a musically unrecognized postwoman, alone with her accordion.



figure 9: 'Song of the Volga', example of accordion accompaniment.

The song's lyrics at this point are as follows:

- A Many a song has been sung about the Volga,
But the best one is yet to be sung.
- A That would fly across our Mother Volga,
In the bright rays of our Soviet sun.
- B O Volga, so beautiful,
Like [the] sea, you are full and plentiful
- B Like life you are free and bountiful,
You are wide, deep and powerful.

These lyrics are more overtly Soviet propaganda than the lyrics to 'March of the Jolly Fellows'. Orlova singing of "the bright rays of our Soviet sun" and the "free and bountiful" life that is supposedly lived basking in the glow of those bright rays show a socialist realist near-future many Soviet citizen could only dream of. In the lyrics to this song, Orlova promises them this future.

Hereafter, the song is reprised often, but the first time this happens is at an hour into the film [1:00:29-1:03:01]. At this point, truce talks about performing in Moscow between Strelka and Alyosha have turned sour after Alyosha criticizes Strelka's decision to present 'Song of the Volga' in Moscow. This version of the song is more emotional and introspective than the straightforward original. It is set in a much slower tempo and accompanied by violin solo, a string section with harp. The chorus remains in common time, but the verses are set in 6/8. This has the effect that the verses

are more pensive and reflective, where the chorus provides a glimmer of hope for the future of Strelka's relationship with Alyosha.



figure 10: Strelka doubts her song.

This effect is exploited further by Orlova's performance, smiling as she sings the chorus and frowning as she sings the verses. The verses are interspersed by Orlova reciting monologue about how Alyosha might be right about the banality of the song (figure 8). This lends this version something bittersweet: bitter in that the song might not be as good as Strelka thought, but sweet in the hope of reconciliation with the male love interest.

Hereafter, the song only gets played more and more often by different people in the film, often featuring new lyrics - instead of the original verse - celebrating the Soviet utopia (see table 1 for a complete overview). First, two of the folk musicians, a bearded baritone singer and a small boy playing the piano, are shown rehearsing for the contest [1:06:40-1:07:57]. The singer has added some lyrics of his own: "We have moved many a mount and a river / our dreams are all a-coming true / And our Volga now free forever / carries ships to our Moscow". The boy then plays the chorus solo, improvising with fast arpeggio's: the song is being made into a showpiece.

Immediately hereafter, Strelka introduces the classical musicians to the piece [1:07:58-1:09:04]. She also introduced new lyrics: "Sing a ringing and cheerful song / That would show how strong we are / May it reach the bright golden sun / May it reach every person's heart". The musicians play along in accompaniment; violins take the main melody for the first half of the chorus, a pianist plays chords and an oboe and clarinet play cadenza's in the second half, playing off of Orlova's singing. After she sing the final note an octave higher than in the original version (E4 to E5), the classical musicians decide to notate, arrange and perform the music. Strelka sings another run

through the cycle, this time with the original lyrics [1:09:45-1:10:41]. Non-diegetic instruments - a harp and a large string section - are added this time, and Orlova substitutes the final note in the melody for a B5. The final notes Orlova sings in this scene almost literally show Strelka's lifted spirit as her song is recognized as a worthwhile piece of art.

As the notated sheet music gets lost in a storm and found by many people, these people bring their own arrangements of the song to the contest. Thus, the song is known and loved everywhere. After first seeing this as a setback, the villagers soon find that the popularity of the song wins their village, and more importantly Strelka (by then confident enough to claim authorship of the song), the grand prize. Throughout these new interpretations, new lyrics are also interspersed. The most interesting new verse, however, is the one sung by Strelka at the contest: "Many a song has been sung about the Volga / All were mirthless in the minor key / It was anguish that spawned those melodies / Now it's joy and happiness and glee". This verse establishes the song's role in the Soviet utopia shown in the film: the Soviet people sing in the major key, for life is good. This is a departure from *Jolly Fellows*, which featured lyrics such as "through unending struggle and toil", and "we'll never give up". 'Song of the Volga' signifies the end of the struggle.

2.2.2 Classical vs. Folk: a Musical Feud

Central to the plot of *Volga-Volga!* is a musical feud between the small village's amateur classical musicians and folk musicians. Led by the main characters Alyosha and Strelka respectively, these factions are representative for a battle central to Soviet propaganda: the bourgeoisie versus the proletariat. An example of this is shown in the nature of the daily jobs these musicians labor in: Strelka is a postwoman, a job also glorified in Pyriev's *Traktor-Drivers*, and Alyosha is an accountant.⁵⁶

Classical music is once again portrayed as a music of arrogance. Alyosha is convinced of the beauty of classical music, and therefore the banality of the folk musicians' music, including 'Song of the Volga'. Instead, he is shown admiring Wagner, playing the tuba part of 'The Death of Isolde' for a very bored Strelka at the beginning of the film [6:32-8:29]. In a later scene, the orchestra is shown rehearsing Schubert's third of the *Six Musical Moments* on the ferry taking them to Moscow, with Alyosha conducting. When something goes wrong, he stops the orchestra and produces an abacus which he uses to calculate where exactly the problem lies [41:53-42:47]. Not only does this portray classical music as an overly calculated, perhaps dishonest genre of music; the choice of German composers could be a jab at Germany itself, as the Soviet-German relations were troubled at this point

⁵⁶ Many other folk musicians have similar working lives, such as water carrier or waiter, on top of which the town itself is known for its production of balalaikas. Other than Alyosha, the careers of the classical musicians are unclear.

in time.⁵⁷

Eventually, the two factions join forces in performing the ‘Song of the Volga’. This shows the classical musicians finding “redemption”, so to speak, realizing the beauty of Russian folk music and therefore of Russia. The bureaucrat is shown to be the true antagonist, a blubbering fool with only the desire to better himself. In part, this is shown through his ignorance of (classical) music; namely, him claiming in front of an audience to personally know “Schulbert” [1:22:17].

Table 1: each time ‘Song of the Volga’ is featured (in order of appearance)				
#	Timestamp	Performer(s)	Added lyrics	Instruments, either diegetic or not (n.d.)
1	10:23 - 10:56	Strelka performs for Alyosha	N/A	voice; accordion.
2	1:00:29 - 1:03:01	Strelka reflects on the song and her relationship with Alyosha	Original lyrics, but added monologue: “Why does [Alyosha] think it’s no good?” and “Pride aside, if I take another view of it, it’s really bad. I shouldn’t have hurt [Alyosha’s] feelings.”	voice; harp (n.d.); strings (n.d.).
3	1:06:40 - 1:07:57	Two amateur folk musicians (a young boy pianist and a man)	“We have moved many a mount and a river / our dreams are all	voice; piano.

⁵⁷ Suny, Ronald G. *The Soviet Experiment*, 2nd edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011: 323-28.

			a-coming true / And our Volga now free forever / carries ships to our Moscow”	
4	1:07:58 - 1:07:57	Strelka and classical musicians	“Sing a ringing and cheerful song / That would show how strong we are / May it reach the bright golden sun / May it reach every person’s heart”	voice; violins; oboe; clarinet; piano.
5	1:09:45 - 1:10:41	“	N/A	voice; violins; oboe; clarinet; piano; harp (n.d.); extra strings (n.d.).
6	1:14:40 - 1:14:56	chorus of villagers directed by Alyosha	N/A	mixed chorus; piano (n.d.).
7	1:17:34 - 1:18:03	military men on boat	“Let our enemies, like hungry wild [coyotes] / Prowl daily ‘bout our frontier / They will never get to the Volga / Nor	male chorus; brass band.

			drink water from that river”	
8	1:18:06 - 1:18:23	musicians on far-off boat	N/A	mixed chorus; string orchestra.
9	1:18:27 - 1:19:28	medley of different competing groups (only heard, not shown, one brass band being the exception)	N/A	2 jazz bands; 2 brass bands; balalaika ensemble; women’s chorus; xylophone; ondes martenot.
10	1:23:18 - 1:23:24 1:24:17 - 1:24:28	The young boy from earlier	N/A	piano.
11	1:23:27 - 1:24:16	radio broadcast of violin and harp	N/A	violin; harp.
12	1:31:28 - 1:31:43	offstage brass band	N/A	brass band.
13	1:32:29 - 1:33:25	Strelka performs at the competition	“Many a song has been sung about the Volga / All were mirthless in the minor key / It was anguish that spawned those melodies / Now it’s joy and happiness and glee”	voice; strings (n.d.).
14	1:33:28 - 1:34:17	orchestral arrangement by young boy	N/A	small orchestra.

15	1:34:17 - 1:36:02	jazzy arrangement underscoring physical comedy	N/A	jazz band (partly diegetic).
16	1:36:41 - 1:37:10	chorus and orchestra from the original village	“We dispersed every dark thundercloud / Spring has come to our dear Motherland / Like the Volga, our life is full-blooded / And the free life will never end.”	mixed chorus; orchestra.
17	1:37:38 - 1:37:59	see: #15	see: #15	see: #15
18	1:39:46 - 1:40:18	Reprise of the chorus by the actors after breaking the fourth wall	N/A	mixed chorus; orchestra (n.d.).

Chapter 3 Pyriev's *Tractor-Drivers*

3.1 The Kolkhoz Musical

Ivan Pyriev's career can be mirrored to Alexandrov's in two ways. First, both had their start in film under Eisenstein, appearing in the director's first short film *Glumov's Diary* (*Dvevnik glumova*, 1923).⁵⁸ Second, both directors' films usually featured the same female star (Marina Ladygina for Pyriev, Lyubov Orlova for Alexandrov) and the directors both eventually married their respective stars.⁵⁹ Beyond this, Pyriev's career and subsequent films greatly differ from Alexandrov's. After being banned by the production company Mosfilm for reasons yet unknown - Eisenstein might have had something to do with it, but this was never proven - Pyriev was invited to Kiev by the studio director of Ukrainfilm. It was here in Kiev that he made his first kolkhoz musical, *The Wedding Bride* (*Bogotaia nevesta*, 1938).⁶⁰

The kolkhoz musical is a genre of Pyriev's own invention, most well-known for the fact its action is always set on a collective farm (the Russian word for such a farm being "kolkhoz"). The plot usually follows a specific set of tropes. The story features a love triangle, usually between two men and one woman (ideally played by Ladygina). The main conflict consists of "a light-hearted contest between good and evil, or at least wrongheadedness"; often this extends into the love triangle, one of the vying men exuding evil/wrongheadedness and the other good (the latter would, of course, get the girl). The development of this formulaic plot is often delayed by misunderstandings between the parts of the love triangle. Lastly, the most important trope for our purposes, the kolkhoz musical features a lot of songs which are closely tied to the action.⁶¹

This chapter concerns one of these kolkhoz musicals: 1939's *Tractor-Drivers* (*Traktoristy*). In the same article where Richard Taylor argues that in Alexandrov's films can be found a movement from the lacking periphery to a glorified center, he also argues that Pyriev's films on the other hand remain heavily anchored in that periphery and that the periphery is glorified. In the Alexandrov analyses, I argued that the movement and the character development related to that movement is reflected in the musical composition. In this chapter, I will similarly argue that Taylor's findings are corroborated in the film's musical content. However, I will also argue that the recurring songs I

⁵⁸ Richard Taylor mentions Pyriev's involvement in "Singing on the Steppes for Stalin: Ivan Pyr'ev and the Kolkhoz Musical in Soviet Cinema" (*Slavic Review*, Vol. 58, No. 1 [Spring, 1999], 148). Alexandrov is listed in the casting on the film's webpage on the Internet Movie Database.

⁵⁹ Taylor, "Singing on the Steppes for Stalin", 147.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 149.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 150.

discuss reflect change and movement in one of the characters.

3.2 *Tractor-Drivers*

Tractor-Drivers takes place on a collective farm on the Ukrainian steppes. Klim Yarko (played by Nikolai Kryuchkov), a recent veteran looking for a new purpose in life, sets out to these steppes in an effort to meet tractor-driver Maryana Bazhan (played by Marina Ladygina), whose photo on the front page of Pravda caught his eye. He eventually meets her by coming to her rescue after a motorcycle accident, both fixing the motorcycle and tending to her wounds. Before this meeting, Maryana's friend and underperforming worker Nazar Duma (played by Boris Andreyev) is shown falsely announcing his engagement to Maryana in front of the collective farm in an attempt to discourage any unwanted male attention which might be directed at her. This leads to some misunderstandings as Nazar confronts Klim, prompting the former Red Army tankist to leave immediately; Maryana and the kolkhoz overseer eventually catch up to him and convince him to stay. Nazar remains slightly jealous, but Klim quickly earns the respect of the other tractor-drivers through his skills as a mechanic, even becoming the foreman. On a day of plowing, Klim and his men find a WWI-era German helmet in the dirt. From here, the plot takes a turn: Klim convinces the tractor-drivers to form a tank unit with him in anticipation of future German offences, teaching them defence with the tractors substituting for tanks. A military song boosts morale, and Nazar's improved efforts lead to him reaching the front page of Pravda. Klim eventually confesses his love to Maryana. The final scene shows their wedding reception, where all attendees reprise the military song with the three parts of the love triangle singing the verses solo, warning the Germans they "don't need a span of foreign soil, but [they] won't yield an inch of [their] own".

Unlike the previously analyzed Alexandrov films, *Tractor-Drivers* does not feature one song that really stands out and is featured over and over again. Instead, this film features two songs that are played multiple times: 'Three Tankists' and 'Thundering With Fire', both written by the Pokrass brothers. The songs are similar in lyric and melody. One song is featured at the start of the movie, the other is featured at the very end. These compositions are equally important in the narrative, so it makes sense to discuss both. Another, more compelling argument is that the songs are an important reflection of the characters and their development.

3.2.1 'Three Tankists'

'Three Tankists' is a ballad in B flat minor and common time. The song consists of a repeated eight-bar melody, with the final four bars repeated during each cycle. This first song is first heard at

the very start of the movie, played over the opening credits in a tempo of 132 bpm [0:11-1:53]. The intro consists of an accordion playing a melodic embellishment of the final four bars of the melody and repeating it, thus foreshadowing the form of the verse. During the repeated melody the accordion is joined by an orchestra of strings, percussion and woodwinds (arranged by Isaak Dunayevsky) [0:11-0:25]. Hereafter four verses are sung by a solo male singer, with two other men joining him in repeating the final four bars of the melody unisono. They are accompanied by the accordion and the orchestra, most prominently by the accordion.



Figure 11: The first shot after the credits end, showing Klim singing his final verse.

After the first three verses, the credits end and the action moves to the inside of a moving train; the solo singer is revealed to be Klim, accompanying himself on the accordion as he sings the final verse. From this moment on, the orchestra has stopped playing; the only sounds are the accordion and his voice [1:32-1:45]. Similarly, the camera cuts from a medium-shot of Klim to a wider shot of the entire compartment showing all three men who were singing the song just before they start singing their parts [1:46]. As the song ends with the accordion playing a sixteenth-note scale downwards (A \flat 4-B \flat 3), the sound of the train riding the tracks slowly fades in [1:53-1:54]. It must be said that gradually moving the song from a non-diegetic to a diegetic status is a clever way of letting the audience know of the importance of music in the film.



Figure 12: The second shot of Tractor-Drivers shows the three tankmen finishing their song.

The lyrics to ‘Three Tankists’ tell the story of three Russian tankmen killing Japanese soldiers (referred to as samurai) trying to cross the border. The first three verses are left out in the opening credits, but are sung by Klim in a later scene.

On the border the clouds are grim,
The land is harshly silent.
Near the steep shores of the Amur river
Sentinels of our country stand on guard.

A barrier to the enemy is erected
There, brave and strong.
The armored strike battalion is placed,
At the borders of the Far-Eastern lands.

There they live, and my song can testify to it,
Like an inviolable family.
Three tankmen, three merry friends,
The crew of the combat machine.

The grasses were covered with dew,

The mists enveloped the taiga.
That was the night that samurais
Decided to cross the border [at the river].

But the intelligence was right,
And the orders sounded
For the armored percussion battalion
To move across the Far-Eastern lands.

The tanks sped up, raising the wind,
The thundering armor advanced.
And the samurai fell down
Before the onslaught of steel and fire

So all enemies, and my song can testify to this,
Were destroyed in the fiery attack
By three tankists, three merry friends,
The crew of the combat machine.⁶²

It is no coincidence the antagonist of this song is the Japanese. *Tractor-Drivers* was first released in July 1939 amid a series of border conflicts between Japan and the Soviet Union between May and September of that very same year. The militaristic nature of the lyrics is translated musically in the orchestration, featuring a muted trumpet playing a countermelody and a very present snare drum in the second verse. These instruments might also be musical translations of the lyrics being sung in that verse specifically, the trumpet signifying the “sounding” of the orders for the armored percussion battalion to move, and the snare drum signifying the armored percussion battalion commencing activity. Thus, much like was the case in Alexandrov’s *Jolly Fellows*, the instrumentation tells something about the character; Klim and his two friends are military men, defenders of the homeland.

⁶² Again, all lyrics mentioned in this analysis are straight from the subtitles on MosFilm’s Youtube channel. Exceptions in this case is the first two lines of “Tri Tankista”, translated by the author, and the adding of “at the river” in the line “That night the samurai decided to cross the border [at the river]”.



Figure 13: 'Three Tankists', melody.

When the song returns later in the film [29:05-31:54], Klimt sings the full version on his own, accompanied by nothing else but his own accordion. The kolkhoz women to whom he sings the song by the warmth of a campfire do not sing along as he repeats the final line of each verse, in contrast to Klim's tankist friends at the beginning of the film. The women are very much engaged, showing signs of distress as the Klim sings about the samurai crossing the border [30:40-30:43] and happiness as he sings about those samurai being defeated by the tankists [31:19-31:21]. Immediately after Klim finishes the song, the kolkhoz's overseer Kirill Petrovich arrives. He asks in a friendly manner who "the singer" is and after telling Klim there is work for him as a mechanic and joking about a little, he asks Klim to sit with him and listen as the women sing a traditional Ukrainian song. The men proceed to nod to each other in approval as the women sing. The song fades out over shots of the kolkhoz's fields in twilight.

The exchange of musical performances in this scene shows how Klim is accepted into the kolkhoz. He is, at this stage, still a stranger from the other side of the Soviet Union. By performing 'Three Tankists' he introduces himself musically to the women as a military man. By performing the Ukrainian song the women in turn signify their own identity through song; not only their identity as Ukrainian natives, but also their identity as a rural people. This scene also shows the genderedness of folk identity in the 1930s Soviet Union: non-performative rural choral singing was a female activity and men much like Klim usually sung in the army and would take the songs they had learned there home.⁶³

Most importantly in understanding the underlying propagandic narrative of *Tractor-Drivers*, this scene shows the development of a certain relationship between the characters Klim and Petrovich which was very common in 1930s socialist realist fiction: that of a young, energetic, somewhat individualistic leader and a wise mentor who is closely tied to the Communist Party and its cause. Richard Stites traces this back to the 1923 film *Chapaev*, the titular hero of which is "folkloric", "part of the male bonding but wiser (...) than his men", who "embodies a style (...) of independent

⁶³ Olsen, Laura J. "A Unified National Style: Folklore Performance in the Soviet Context". From *Performing Russia: Folk Revival and Russian Identity* (Routledge, 2004): 40.

command based on (...) the personal bond of trust with his own men” and is “the irrepressible spontaneity that must be suppressed by party consciousness”; suppressed, of course, by his commissar, “the instrument of the party and of central power, the mentor who harnesses the energy of the steppe warrior to the cause of Bolshevism.”⁶⁴ This relationship shows its first signs here, but is much more developed and important to the plot by the time the next song I will discuss here has come to the fore.



Figure 14: The women listen in awe to Klim's ballad.



Figure 15: Klim Yarko and Kirill Petrovich enjoy a Ukrainian folk song.

⁶⁴ Stites, Richard. *Russian Popular Culture*, 45.

3.2.2 'Thundering With Fire'

'Thundering With Fire' is, much like 'Three Tankists', a composition in B flat minor and common time. The melody is sixteen measures long, divided into a verse and a chorus melody of eight measures both. Where 'Three Tankists' and 'Thundering With Fire' differ most, is in their lyrical content: 'Three Tankists' concerns Soviet soldiers having dealt with a past military threat, 'Thundering With Fire' concerns the existential threat of future foreign aggression. These subjects are linked to the film's sudden shift in narrative as the tractor drivers find the aforementioned WWI-era German helmet; suddenly, the focus is on the danger of Nazi-German aggression. This lays bare that *Tractor-Drivers* is essentially a propaganda piece agitating against the Axis powers.⁶⁵ 'Thundering With Fire', featuring a total of three times (four if the use of its melody in an instrumental interlude is counted) in the film's final twenty minutes, is the soundtrack to this anti-German propaganda.

The first time this melody is heard in the film, it is played as part of incidental music over a montage of footage of tanks rampaging through (what seems to be) a taiga landscape [1:03:47-1:04:39]. As was the case in the orchestral arrangement of 'Three Tankists' heard during the opening credits, brass and percussion are prominent: trumpets feature heavily, even playing the melody at one point, and a snare drum supports the rhythm throughout. Played at a high tempo of 184 bpm, with the sharp brass melodies being supported by battering percussion and nearly hysterical string arpeggio's, the orchestra matches the rapid movement of the tanks, supporting their portrayal as instruments of destruction and military might. A counterpoint line in the bass adds to the unrest (figure 17).

⁶⁵ During the 1930s, German-Soviet relations were very tense. In the year before *Tractor-Drivers* was released, Germany annexed Austria and threatened to do the same to Czechoslovakia, edging closer to Soviet borders. Eventually, not long after *Tractor-Drivers* was indeed released, the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact was signed and German-Soviet clashes were effectively postponed. (Sunny, , *The Soviet Experiment*, 324-327).



Figure 16: A tank rampages on the taiga.



Figure 17: A fragment from the incidental music, citing ‘Thundering With Fire’ in the melody.

Hereafter, Klim is shown delivering a speech to the farm’s male workers about the role of the tank in battle [1:04:39-1:05:15]. After a short interluding scene with Maryana reading aloud from a book about tanks and tankmen, the scene with Klim and his men is continued, featuring the first full rendition of ‘Thundering With Fire’ [1:06:08-1:08:21]. Again, it is played in B flat minor, this time at a tempo of 120-123 bpm. As was the case with both renditions of ‘Three Tankists’, the instrumentation in this scene is sparse and fully diegetic: male voices and two accordions, with Klim singing the verses solo and the other men (seventeen total) singing the chorus unisono or rhythmically reciting the words to no particular melody.⁶⁶ During the scene, the members of this worker’s chorus (and an instrumentalist) sit or stand stationary, looking at each other or Klim. Klim himself moves about in front of the chorus, gesticulating and looking the workers in the eye often while singing his verses; he is thus portrayed as a teacher, leader and mentor to the chorus singers. The very fact he

⁶⁶ E.g.: [1:07:58-1:08:02].

“takes the lead” in the singing of the song is in itself a musical reflection of the Klim character’s establishment as a leader of these men; the call-response nature of the song’s form (Klim “calling” to arms in his verses, the chorus responding with fervor) also shows this leader-follower relationship.

The lyrics are as follows:

Our armor’s fast and our tanks are fast
And our people are full of courage.
Soviet tankmen are aligned in formation,
The sons of their great Motherland.

Thundering with fire, gleaming with their steel,
The machines will move in their furious march
When comrade Stalin sends us into battle,
And the first marshal leads us into it!

Let the enemy, hiding in ambush, remember,
We’re aware, we’re watching him.
We don’t need a span of foreign soil,
but we won’t yield an inch of our own!

Thundering with fire, gleaming with their steel,
The machines will move in their furious march
When the day of trial strikes,
our Fatherland will send us into battle!

And if the hardened enemy comes upon us,
He will be beaten everywhere,
When our drivers press their starters,
And across the woods, hills and streams,

Thundering with fire, gleaming with their steel,
The machines will move in their furious march
When comrade Stalin sends us into battle,
And the first marshal leads us into it!

Much like ‘Three Tankists’, ‘Thundering With Fire’ is a war song. The great difference is the temporal tense in which the lyrics are set. ‘Three Tankists’ is about past military glories, experienced by Klim; ‘Thundering With Fire’ is about the military glories yet to come, in an almost inevitable clash with the Germans. Interestingly, this is the first set of lyrics covered in this thesis where Stalin is mentioned so overtly, and not only as the one who will send the men into battle: “steel” is a codeword for Stalin.⁶⁷ “Thundering with fire, gleaming with their steel / The machines will move in their furious march” posits the war-machine as Stalin’s war machine: Stalin is the Soviet army, Stalin is the motherland.



Figure 18: Klim and his men sing the song. The second accordion player has his back to the camera.

⁶⁷ Taylor, “Singing on the Steppes for Stalin”, 149.

Verse

The image displays a musical score for the song 'Thundering With Fire' in 4/4 time, featuring a key signature of three flats (B-flat minor). The score is divided into two main sections: the Verse and the Chorus. The Verse begins at measure 1 and ends at measure 8. The Chorus begins at measure 10 and ends at measure 14. The notation includes treble clefs, a key signature of three flats, and a 4/4 time signature. The melody consists of eighth and quarter notes, with some rests and dynamic markings.

Chorus

Figure 19: 'Thundering With Fire', complete melody as sung by Klim.

The second complete performance of the song is featured in the following scene [1:08:22-1:10:22]. Its tempo is equal to the rendition in the previous scene, but the key has changed from B flat minor to C sharp minor. This time, it is sung by Nazar Duma, the “redeemable evil” part of the kolkhoz love triangle. Seemingly inspired by Klim’s passionate speech and song, he drives his tractor over clouds of smoke and through fields of wheat, as two companions rake the plowed harvest and join Nazar in the chorus. The constant forward movement to the right side of the screen is very similar to the opening scene of *Jolly Fellows*, in which Utyosov sang his march. Indeed, this version of ‘Thundering With Fire’ is very much a march. Its completely non-diegetic instrumentation features such earlier-mentioned military band instruments such as trumpets, woodwinds and a snare drum. During the intro, the snare drum⁶⁸, bass instruments and woodwinds play a staccato quarter-note beat underneath the trumpet melody (figure 21). Nazar Duma’s melody is doubled by strings throughout. During the verses the snare is silent, but during the choruses it plays with slightly complexer rhythms than the quarter-note ostinato of the intro (figure 22). This neigh-hysterical drum part reflects the jubilant nature of the chorus.

Nazar Duma has his own verse in this version:

⁶⁸ Technically, every third note of the snare drum part is a drum roll. However, these rhythmic trills effectively functions as musical ornamentation; thus, describing this a quarter-note pattern or quarter-note ostinato is accurate.

The labor of our plants and fields
Will be defended, we'll protect our country
With the strike force of our guns,
With our speed and our fire power!

This verse shows Klim Yarko's positive influence on Nazar Duma. The tractor-driver has taken the tankist's message of defending the home country and interpreted it within the context of his own identity, i.e.: his identity as a farmer, who labors on the fields. This idea of enlightenment and, to use Taylor's terminology, the redeeming of Nazar's evil (laziness) through a mentor's doing is musically reflected in the arrangement; whereas Klim's sober version can be seen as the ideological seed being planted, Nazar's jubilant and bombastic version is the flower growing from that seed. It can even be said that the key change from B flat minor to C sharp minor reflects the function of the song "elevating" Nazar. Directly after this scene, Klim praises Nazar Duma for his work ethic and the tractor-driver even makes it to the front page of *Pravda* for his work ethic, like Maryana had accomplished at the beginning of the film [1:10:23-1:12:38].



Figure 20: Nazar Duma on the tractor.

Figure 21: 'Thundering With Fire', intro from Nazar Duma's version.

Figure 22: 'Thundering With Fire', chorus (excerpt) from Nazar Duma's version, melody and snare drum.

The third and final time 'Thundering With Fire' is sung in in the very final scene of the film, at Klim and Maryana's wedding reception. The song is preceded by a speech from Klim's mentor Kirill Petrovich, spelling out the core message of the film:

“(…) You’ve come from good roots, lads. You’re the scions of our Motherland’s working flesh, that drove the aristocracy to Warsaw, that taught the Germans their lesson and with their own blood won the power, land and Socialism. Be worthy of your fathers! Don’t let anyone destroy your happiness. Fight and kick anyone who dares to invade your land. Work, children! So that your Motherland blossoms like a garden in spring. Live on, lads, and multiply. Be merry, may mosquitos ram you [laughter]. But every minute be ready to stand up to your enemy! Be ready to move to tanks from your tractors (…)
[1:19:11-1:20:25].

During the speech, the camera slowly pans away from Kirill Petrovich (standing next to a seated Klim) to show the complete crowd, sitting at tables carrying an amount of food no actual collective farm would possess. After the speech, the wedding guests rise their drinks and the non-diegetic orchestra starts playing ‘Thundering With Fire’ [1:20:26]. The intro is dominated by trumpets playing a military-style figure, used previously in the tank montage [1:04:12-1:04:18]. These are supported by percussion (cymbals and snare) and pizzicato strings. The verses, however, are dominated by the sound of an accordion (discounting the voices). So, the instrumentation in this version of the song is a synthesis of the two previous instrumentations. This synthesis reflects the harmonious nature of the wedding scene, the final scene in the film in which all previous conflicts between the characters have been resolved. This is also apparent from the choice of vocalists singing the verses: Nazar Duma takes the first (“The labor of our plants and fields” etc.), Maryana the second (“Let the enemy, hiding in ambush, remember,” etc.) and Klim the third (“And if the hardened enemy comes upon us” etc.). Thus, the classic kolkhoz love triangle is shown to be resolved. During his verse, Nazar Duma looks at the camera; through this he breaks the fourth wall in a non-overt way, hammering the message home.

This scene could be compared to the final scene in *Volga-Volga!*, where the final message is overtly (more so than in *Tractor-Drivers*, it must be said) stated to the audience and the characters, having resolved their conflicts, end their song by locking arms, marching together against “red tapists” and “rubbish” [1:38:13-1:40:26].



Figure 23: Kirill Petrovich speeches.



Figure 24: 'Thundering With Fire', intro (excerpt) from wedding scene, featuring trumpet figure in the melody.

Conclusion

Music serves a great narrative function in both the films by Grigori Alexandrov and the one film by Ivan Pyriev. This occurs akin to Richard Taylor's hypothesis of the move from periphery to center (Moscow) in Alexandrov's narratives and the contrasting glorification of said periphery in Pyriev's film. Additionally, the films' songs and their arrangements serve personal narratives, i.e. character development, as well as ideological narratives, e.g. the glory of the Soviet state, the despicability of snobbishness, the heroics of hard labor and the danger Nazi-Germany poses.

In *Jolly Fellows*, the character of the shepherd starts the film by singing his march in a very straight, 'mass song'-like manner to a very traditional and rural accompaniment of balalaika's, flutes and accordions. While in Moscow, he revisits this same march twice: once as a swinging a cappella jazz tune, signifying his change of profession and his character growth; and once in a bombastic 'mass song' arrangement, his newfound love by his side, signifying, simply, a happy end. The lyrics to 'March of the Jolly Fellows' promote group unity among the Soviet peoples. In *Volga-Volga!*, Strelka's composition has a humble, rural, folkish start in this world, sung only by Strelka herself to the accompaniment of an accordion. As the film progresses, the song is reimagined a total of seventeen times, most of these being very short. The most important are: #2, wherein Strelka doubts her own composition while singing it to a non-diegetic accompaniment of harp and strings and she eventually finds hope for restoring her good relationship with Alyosha; #4-5, in which Strelka sings the song to the classical musicians, who recognize her song as a worthwhile expression of art, prompting Strelka to end the song on a high B5 to express her jubilation to this fact; and finally, #13, in which Strelka sings the song herself, a cappella, with new lyrics alluding to the end of the proletarian struggle. This theme of 'end to the proletarian struggle' is present throughout the film and the various lyrics to 'Song of the Volga' (#13, #16), as well as the glorification of Soviet strength (#4) and military might (#7).⁶⁹

Classical music also plays an important part in the narrative of both Alexandrov films. It is shown as a music of arrogant and snobbish, even bourgeois people. However, this is not necessarily shown as related to the character's love of classical music itself, but rather their ignorance of and disrespect for the genre as they flaunt it. In *Jolly Fellows*, this is shown through the bourgeois lady's ignorance to the person of Beethoven and her soiling of the Mozart bust with eggs, as well as the bourgeois box's reaction to the shepherd's "curious interpretation" of Liszt's second *Hungarian Rhapsody*. The film *Volga-Volga!* revolves around a rivalry between proletarian folk musicians and slightly bourgeois classical musicians, the latter of which gain the approval of the bureaucrat

⁶⁹ See Table 1 (pg. 24-27) for all performances of the song throughout the film.

antagonist before they redeem themselves by siding with the proletarians. The character Alyosha is disdainful to all musical genres except classical before this; his calculated, emotionless approach to music is made clear in the scene with the abacus. The bureaucrat's arrogance in flaunting with classical music despite his ignorance of it is made clear in him claiming to personally know "Schulbert".

In Pyriev's *Tractor-Drivers*, two songs are sung or played multiple times: 'Three Tankists' and 'Thundering with Fire'. 'Three Tankists' is first featured at the start of the film, when it is sung by Klim and his two fellow tankists. The song is sung over the credits in an arrangement featuring non-diegetic strings and military-style brass and percussion, showing Klim, the protagonist, to be a military man. The lyrics boast of the Soviet military might in recent a recent campaign against the Japanese. The second time the song features, Klim sings this song to the kolkhoz women to introduce himself to the group, showing his soldier identity; the women reply with a Ukrainian folk song, showing their national identity. 'Thundering with Fire' is first played as part of an instrumental orchestral section set to images of rampaging tanks, showing Soviet military might. In the first rendition, Klim is shown to come into his own as the (military) leader of the kolkhoz men. Hereafter, Nazar Duma, Klim's antagonist in the kolkhoz love triangle, is singing the song whilst working hard on his tractor. This shows his character development from a lazy worker jealous of Klim's affection for Maryana to a heroic hard worker whose increased production takes him to the front page of *Pravda*; a development which shows an important step in the resolving of the love triangle as well as the 'movement within the periphery' as described by Taylor. The heroics of the Nazar Duma character, as well as the comparison between the tractor he is driving and the tank he may have to ride one day, are reflected in the arrangement, featuring trumpets and percussion. The third and final time 'Thundering with Fire' is performed, all three members of the love triangle sing a verse at the wedding of Klim and Maryana, warning the Germans and other potential enemies once and for all of the military might and of Stalin and his Soviet peoples.

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