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Music and Cultural Opposition

Introduction

Music has always been both an aesthetic and a political phenomenon, but its political character seems especially pronounced during the period of Socialism in Europe and in the Cold War more generally. Although it was politicized and used for political purposes on both sides of the Iron Curtain, music was more obviously controlled, censored, and even forbidden in totalitarian states. This overt control did much to lend certain kinds of music the status of oppositional culture, for citizens' involvement with that which was banned or monitored by the authorities could constitute, in itself, a form of dissent.

Any introduction to music during the socialist period in Eastern Europe must foreground the difficulty of summarizing the topic. This difficulty stems from three broad factors: the diversity of music in the period; the diversity of approaches to studying the music of the period; and, finally, the lack of uniformity among different regions, including differences among the various political regimes' relations to culture, and changes over time even within individual countries. This introduction considers these factors in more detail and then outlines the main genres of music in the period. The two case studies that follow—on classical music in Poland and on jazz and alternative culture in Czechoslovakia—illustrate the diversity noted in this introduction and dispel some common myths about the period.¹

Existing research on this period has favored specific genres and styles: classical music and jazz have been studied extensively in relation to Cold War cultural policies, and rock music and other alternative forms of youth music have been examined from sociological or ethnological perspectives that place them within distinct subcultures.² Indeed, it is these very genres—classical music, jazz, and related alternative cultures—that constitute the case studies that follow in this chapter. But many other kinds of music were important avenues of dissent in socialist countries and are essential to the construction of a more detailed picture of music in the period. In addition to classical mu-

1 There were, of course, classical music and jazz in all socialist countries, but the case studies' focus on these genres in these countries is justifiable: in Poland, it was classical music that helped the country become a unique link between East and West in the Cold War; in Czechoslovakia, again uniquely, jazz became an umbrella term for opposition across multiple arts.

2 A recent annotated bibliography on this topic that includes both sides of the Iron Curtain can be found in Oxford Bibliographies: see Schmelz, "Cold War Music."

sic, jazz, rock, and other alternative musics, then, one must also consider pop and modern folk music, music used in churches and religious communities, and traditional music and folklore. All of these genres are outlined below.

If the diversity of genres is one obstacle that hinders a comprehensive understanding of music in the period, the diversity of approaches to the study of music further complicates the topic. To understand the ways in which music may have functioned as cultural dissent, one must obviously examine the social context of each musical genre in question: this includes the study of music's relation to official and non-official institutional structures, its use and status among different social groups, its presence in journalistic discourse of the time, and its characterization in official documents and archival collections. But music can also be examined within its own music-historical context: one can study the technical features of the works and repertory that acquired importance in the period, as well as the traditions and practices of which these were a part. One need not study one context to the exclusion of the other, of course; it is not a question of "either/or." Rather, a combination of approaches extending beyond the binary suggested here can yield the greatest insights. For one must acknowledge that the study of music during Socialism involves realms that seemingly had little to do with music: for example, music could be found across multiple departments within a regime's cultural apparatus, including radio, television, film, education, sport, as well as, of course, in music departments. And what was banned in one department may have been tolerated in another. The fact that music was not (and is not) a discrete entity but rather a network of practices—not to mention that it is essentially intangible—necessitates such consideration of the multiple contexts in which it operated.

The outline of musical genres below is neither comprehensive nor detailed: the diversity of practices within individual genres, the geographical size of Eastern Europe, and the length of the socialist period all frustrate any concise summary. These genre descriptions serve only as a general overview; divergent examples can always be found. For this reason, the two case studies that follow are especially insightful. They provide specific examples of individual musical practices in particular locations at particular times. Only such specificity can fashion a nuanced picture of music and cultural dissent in socialist countries, for it is not infrequently true that individual case studies challenge the myths and clichés of music under communist regimes. The first case study, on classical music in Poland, provides one example: although many composers were excluded from concert life because of their personal styles, political concern for the threat of classical music diminished after 1956; shortly after, Poland became known for hosting one of the leading festivals of avant-garde music in the world, the Warsaw Autumn Festival of Contemporary Music, and several Polish avant-garde composers achieved international fame. Modernist and avant-garde compositional techniques were also prac-

ticed in other countries under communist rule, and socialist realism was hardly the only approach to newly composed music.³

Classical music: In classical music, opposition to communism and socialist realism often overlapped with opposition to national traditions or conservative styles, so that one must be careful to determine precisely what the object of opposition was. In such cases, opposition could also resemble a generational conflict of young composers against old—both for artistic freedom and for aesthetic prestige. Aesthetics was closely linked to politics in this period, despite any claims of classical music's supposed aesthetic autonomy and notwithstanding the fact that links between the two were sometimes ignored or purposefully obscured.⁴ Indeed, whereas socialist realism in the East knew itself to be political, the ideal of aesthetic autonomy that was dominant among postwar modernist composers in the West believed itself apolitical. But it was not, of course: modernist art was also a part of the battle of political ideologies in the Cold War like its counterpart socialist realism.⁵ One must therefore ask to what extent composers in socialist countries, when they adopted techniques and styles from the West, adopted or recognized also the ideological implications of those techniques and styles. Finally, it must be noted that much classical music was widely perceived as official culture due to government support of classical concert repertoire, opera, ballet, and (the generally more conservative) living native composers. Thus, opposition to classical music itself was a form cultural dissent in the period.

Jazz music: Jazz music originated in the United States, but it also played an essential role in American cultural diplomacy after World War II.⁶ One must therefore compare what jazz meant to musicians and listeners in socialist countries with the social context of jazz in its native land and its image and role in US cultural diplomacy. Generally speaking, the official attitude toward

3 Research by Laura Silverberg on the German Democratic Republic (GDR, or East Germany), for example, shows that support for modernist compositional techniques came from socialists and party members; see Silverberg, "Between Dissonance and Dissidence." Peter Schmelz has done extensive research on modernist practices among composers in the USSR; see Schmelz, *Such Freedom*.

4 On the other hand, one collection underscores the fact that some composers believed that none of the competing aesthetics of the period were given preferential treatment by the authorities; see COURAGE Registry, s.v. "Srđan Hofman's Music Collection", by Zeljka Oparnica, 2017. Accessed: October 09, 2018.

5 The political implications of modernist compositional practices is an area of research that has received a lot of attention in recent musicological literature. A useful overview of recent work can be found in Schmelz, "Cold War Music."

6 Book-length studies of the use of jazz in cultural diplomacy include: von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows up the World*, and Davenport, *Jazz Diplomacy*. For a study looking specifically at Dave Brubeck's 1958 tour of the USSR see Crist, "Jazz as Democracy?" For a recent book on jazz in Europe more generally see: Wasserberger, *Jazz in Europe*.

jazz in socialist countries changed over time—from prohibition to acceptance—and this allowed the emergence of jazz subcultures located in “quasi-official” clubs.⁷ But jazz also inspired independent and alternative cultural activities such as the Prague-based Jazz Section [Jazzová sekce] association, which is examined in detail in the second case study below. As the author of that study notes, the Prague-based Jazz Section “was the most active platform for free and independent culture during the period of ‘normalization’ in Czechoslovakia,” and his study provides insight into the relation between musical practices, socialist authorities, and citizens’ cultural dissent at the time.

Pop and modern folk music: The pop music industry was active in all socialist countries, but it was carefully controlled by government authorities.⁸ Influential styles and groups from the West, such as “rock and roll” and The Beatles, were initially underground and had illegal status. The influence of The Beatles, in particular, is hard to overstate: according to one observer, “they destroyed communism. More than Gorbachev, by the way, they changed the Soviet Union.”⁹ But The Beatles and other groups were later incorporated, mostly in diluted forms, into the socialist mainstream. Critical views on life under socialist regimes were expressed through song texts and musical styles in a variety of alternative pop music genres. The critical folk music inspired by Bob Dylan and Vladimir Vysotsky, for example, played a significant role in socialist countries. The songs of iconic figures such as Czech émigré Karel Kryl, though not published or broadcast in local media, reached a wide audience through illicit tape recordings and broadcasts on Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty.

Rock and other alternative music: A robust spirit of protest, one that mixed both political opposition and generational conflict, can be found in rock, heavy metal, punk, and other genres of alternative youth music. These genres were often forbidden, were generally not promoted, or were only occasionally tolerated in a restricted form in the East. Such music served as a vehicle for many forms of dissent among younger people; for this reason, it is also discussed in the chapter on “Youth Subcultures” in this handbook. But it is very much a part of the story of *music* as oppositional culture during socialism. Punk, in particular, is a genre that was seen as being especially subversive and is represented in several collections.¹⁰

7 A notable exception to this can be seen in Romania, where the official rejection of jazz lasted until the 1980s; see COURAGE Registry, s.v. “Cornel Chiriac and Fans of Alternative Music Ad-hoc Collection at CNSAS”, by Manuela Marin and Cristina Petrescu, 2018. Accessed: October 09, 2018.

8 For a general overview see Ryback, *Rock Around the Bloc*.

9 See Heßler, “Das Politische,” 207.

10 See, for example, the COURAGE Registry, s.v. “Polish Punk Collection by Anna Dąbrowska-Lyons”, by Xawery Stanczyk, 2017. Accessed: August 17, 2018.; and the COURAGE Registry,

Music in church and religious communities: Churches and religious communities were centers of cultural opposition *sui generis*, and the practice of liturgical music was subject to monitoring and persecution, especially for those of the lay community involved in it. Contemporary Christian music, which boomed after the Second Vatican Council, is the most important paraliturgical genre of the period. The composition, performance, and reception of this music in (not only Catholic) religious communities was a part of their alternative culture. Archive collections document the smuggling from abroad of songbooks and other materials not approved by the authorities, and their dissemination throughout the communities.¹¹

Traditional music and folklore: These were present in most socialist countries, but they generally did not offer space for opposition because they were made, following the Soviet model, as an instrument of official cultural policy and representation. Indeed, traditional music and folklore provide an example of the concrete effects of Socialism on musical genres: the arrangements of folklore material for symphony orchestras is one example of the appropriation and institutionalization of folk material by the ruling authorities. On the other hand, there are examples of the mixture of folklore with Western music, as in the *Noroc* Vocal-Instrumental Ensemble in Moldovian SSR, which was seen by authorities as “subversive” and therefore dissolved.¹² Additionally, the traditional music and folklore of ethnic minorities could acquire the status of oppositional culture: in the Baltic lands of the USSR and among the Hungarians in Romania and Slovakia, for example, cultural activities including music and folklore were inseparably linked with political opposition and national resistance.¹³

Classical Music in Poland

Following the Second World War, and in particular as a result of the material losses associated with German Occupation, the destruction of the Warsaw Uprising, and the human migration that resulted from redrawn borders and forced displacement, classical music in Poland needed to be rebuilt and reorganized. As the capital’s avenues and monuments were reconstructed brick-

s.v. “Black Hole Underground Club. Nagy, Gyula Private Collection”, by István Pál Ádám, 2018. Accessed: August 17, 2018. (forthcoming).

11 COURAGE Registry, s.v. “Brethren of Unity Baptists”, by Yvetta Kajanová, 2018. Accessed August 17, 2018. (forthcoming).

12 COURAGE Registry, s.v. “Noroc Collection at AOSPR Moldova”, by Andrei Cusco, and Cristina Petrescu, 2018. Accessed August 17, 2018. (forthcoming).

13 COURAGE Registry, s.v. “Folk Dance House Archives”, by Gabriella Vámos and Katalin Juhász, 2018. Accessed: October 08, 2018. (forthcoming).

by-brick, the major institutions of the interwar were reconstituted. Already in 1945 the Music Department of the Polish Radio was reestablished, with classical pianist Władysław Szpilman at the helm of the Light Music Division. The Polish Music Publishers (*Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne*, PWM) were founded by musicologist Tadeusz Ochlewski in Cracow, confirming the importance of Poland's two large cities for the dissemination and promotion of classical and popular music through state-funded channels. Across the country, orchestras were reformed, newly established, and reimagined. The new Cracow Philharmonic Orchestra bridged music historical chasms by performing wartime compositions by Grażyna Bacewicz and Roman Palester at a new music festival in 1945. The National Philharmonic—despite the destruction of its hall, the reconstruction of which was only completed in 1955—began performing again in Warsaw, but the radio's preeminent ensemble, the Great Symphony Orchestra of the Polish Radio, was relocated to Katowice, where it remains into the twenty-first century.¹⁴

Classical music's most powerful institution of the Cold War, the Polish Composers' Union (*Związek Kompozytorów Polskich*, ZKP) was founded as part of the efforts to organize the new state: it received pride of place in the capital's rebuilt Old Town, next to other artists' unions and within walking distance of the Ministry of Culture and Art.¹⁵ Since its founding ZKP has functioned simultaneously as: a mediating site between the state and its members; a library and information portal, combined with its own extensive archives to form the Polish Music Information Center in 2001; and a driving force for the contemporary music scene, which I will describe in detail below. During the Stalinist years, the major power brokers of the classical music scene were musicologists and music critics who had built their careers and musical tastes through robust debates around modernism and musical progress in the 1920s and 1930s. Across the pages of the news media, on the waves of the radio, at meetings behind closed doors, and through conferences that included the composers and performers whose activities were under scrutiny, they interfaced with party ideology and wrestled to formulate a vision for the stakes of classical music that would keep it prominent in Polish culture.¹⁶ The classical music world of the People's Republic of Poland as they imagined it was to respond to the historical and contemporary importance of Frederic Chopin for Polish national identity as well as the nebulous framework of socialist realism.

This period of shifting institutional politics and rapid development would eventually be best remembered for the many intrusions on compositional and artistic freedom made through censorship, the real material scarcity (of paper, instruments, food, technology, housing, and employment), and

14 Thomas, *Polish Music*.

15 Tompkins, *Composing the Party Line*.

16 Vest, "Educating Audiences."

the unpredictable scrutiny applied to travel requests. Many composers and musicians were excluded from concert life for their musical styles, but also for their personal and professional networks or as a result of the draconian whimsy of those in control. Some composers, such as Roman Palester, chose to remain abroad and live in exile rather than suffer the roadblocks put in place by boards of officials and colleagues working for the state. Others, like Andrzej Panufnik, fled communism for ideological reasons, despite their relative celebrity and success.¹⁷ They were struck from ZKP's member list, but also criticized by some of those opposing communism for betraying their nation. On the other side of the Iron Curtain, both Panufnik and Palester worked at radio stations (the BBC and Radio Free Europe, respectively) that interrogated the realities of state socialism. Palester's regular radio essays on musical life in Poland and among émigré communities over the next two decades, available in the Polish-language section's physical archives, discussed cultural politics and aesthetic questions as much as they did individual events.

Classical music was most politically vulnerable during Stalinism. There would not be another wave of displacement with such an impact on the classical music community until the anti-Semitic campaigns of 1968 and the imposition of martial law in 1981, though consistently some chose to live and work abroad for personal and financial reasons without articulating political opposition. In fact, during the 1970s and 1980s when nearly the whole gamut of artists—sculptors, filmmakers, playwrights, actors, novelists, poets, documentary journalists, etc.—was formulating the cultural agenda of the opposition to state socialism, the musicians who spoke out would focus their contributions on Stalinism in order to warn younger generations that music, too, was vulnerable to the state apparatus.¹⁸ At the Congress of Polish Culture sponsored and celebrated by the independent trade union known as Solidarity on the eve of the declaration of martial law in 1981, the preeminent composer Witold Lutosławski recalled his explorations of modernist compositional techniques in private and between the lines of the incidental music, popular songs, and folk-music inspired compositions he created for the radio's airwaves and ensembles in the immediate postwar years through the Thaw, the relaxation of cultural regulations following Stalin's death through 1956. He implied, but did not state explicitly, that classical music—indeed musical life more broadly—had enjoyed an exceptional position across the arts in communist Poland and across the Warsaw Pact more generally after this early clamp-down came to an end. Indeed, Poland's contemporary music scene enjoyed visible state support and promotion that put Warsaw on the map as an important meeting site between Soviet-bloc composers and their colleagues in Yu-

17 Tompkins, "Composing for and with the Party"; Wejs-Milewska, "Roman Palester's 'The Marysas Conflict'."

18 Bohlman, "Lutosławski's Political Refrains."

goslavia, Latin America, western Europe, and North America—and to some extent East Asia and India.

At the Warsaw Autumn Festival of Contemporary Music, which was founded in 1956 and held annually from 1958 except during martial law, new works across avant-garde agendas were performed, scores were exchanged and deposited, friendships and artistic collaborations were formed over long wine receptions, and the Polish intelligentsia filled the city's concert halls, cheering and booing musical experimentation and new music technologies.¹⁹ Likewise, composers and performers were given passports to travel and participated in international exchanges, working always in transnational networks. Classical orchestras, opera companies, soloists and chamber ensembles enjoyed less mobility than composers as they were routed more often along cultural diplomacy exchange routes to the east. But they, too, received support and were put in the spotlight, for example at one crown jewel of the competition circuit, the International Frederic Chopin Piano Competition, which attracted the world's top pianists while celebrating the importance of Poland's most celebrated musical figure. Occasionally, foreign musicians would boycott these concerts and festivals in response to geopolitical flashpoints.

In other words, after 1956, in debates within the Party's Central Committee, ZKP, and among artists outside of official forums, a political concern for classical music's political threat fell away as did the dreams of socialist realism. Music's presumed lack of semantic meaning shaped a logic that would generally keep scores and concert programs off the Censorship Bureau's desks throughout the remaining 34 years of the People's Republic.²⁰ Before the 1980s, musicians lost employment for refusing to trumpet the Party line only on a few occasions. Instead, it was music critics and radio personalities like Stefan Kisielewski, Piotr Wierzbicki, and Zygmunt Mycielski, who, as members of the Union of Polish Writers, underwent the most scrutiny and censorship, the details of which are held in their now-published personal diaries. Many critics would end up representing the interests of the music community in the late 1970s and 1980s as a result of this consistent manipulation of their words in print. Others were vulnerable for reasons independent of their work: the anti-Semitic campaign in 1968 resulted in several musicologists losing their university posts. Their students would continue to learn at seminars held out of their homes, developing a scholarly community that would be echoed on a much larger scale by the networks of the Flying University, a covert series of seminars in Poland's university towns that explicitly had an anti-government agenda from 1977 until 1981.

The composers Henryk Mikołaj Górecki, Witold Lutosławski, and Krzysztof Penderecki in particular achieved international acclaim as a result

¹⁹ Jakelski, *Making New Music*.

²⁰ Bohlman, "Where I Cannot Roam."

of the support for music. The archives of the Polish Radio and the National Audiovisual Institute, including its online portal (“Ninateka”) contain invaluable interviews, work commentary, and historical recordings of this trio and their composer colleagues. The ZKP was also able to maintain its own archive outside the control of both the Ministry of Culture and Art and the Communist Party: the recordings, scores, and books it holds are a witness to the international exchange it facilitated and a nearly complete record of new music making in the People’s Republic; these holdings also track important debates about contemporary life that include strong critiques of state socialism, for example in the transcripts of the union’s general meetings. Regrettably the archives of Polish Radio’s Experimental Studio (1957–85), a hotbed for electronic and electroacoustic composition in the Eastern Bloc, were diffused into private hands in the early twenty-first century. However, a network of artists and musicians, primarily through the Bólt Label, have begun remastering and releasing these audio materials to make them accessible. Across these sounding archives, national symbols (patriotic songs as well as stories derived from nineteenth-century nationalist texts) and the importance of the Roman Catholic faith are audible, revealing that despite their relative artistic freedom and repeated proclamation that music and politics are chalk and cheese, some artists turned to their craft to write counter to the history celebrated in official narratives and to cultivate musical languages steeped in personal faith in a secularized everyday. As musical subcultures like the blues, sung poetry, and cabaret offered musicians the opportunity to shape community out of shared oppositional politics, the Early Music scene in particular—in part because of its historicist bent—became associated with countercultural attitudes that rejected socialist modernity in the 1960s and early 1970s.

The mobilization of the opposition to state socialism through the final 12 years of the Cold War, with the 1977 formation of the Workers’ Defence Committee (KOR), the 1978 election of Pope John Paul II, and, finally, the successful legalization of the Solidarity Independent Trade Union, also called musicians to action, though few were in vocal leadership positions.²¹ Many took part in events as personal favours to friends or as private citizens. The music critic Tadeusz Kaczyński formed the Traugutt Philharmonia, a mixed student and professional ensemble that explicitly aligned itself with the opposition, performing historical reviews in unofficial spaces, such as churches and private homes. The special collections of the University of Warsaw Library contain a record of his organizing; these are housed in the Music Department as well as in the Ephemera Department, the latter of which has materials related to student life in the capital. State-supported ensembles formed their own subdivisions of the Solidarity Union: most often these took action by organizing informal concerts to collect aid for political prisoners. Their surveillance

21 Bohlman, “Solidarity.”

files are held among those of the Security Service (SB) at the Institute of National Memory (IPN), but also in these institutions' own historical records.

Through the decade's euphoric highs and violent lows, composers indicated their allegiances with commemorative dedications and by signing open letters to be published in official press and in second circulation (*drugi obieg*).²² The Warsaw-based Committee on Independent Culture published the journal *Independent Culture* (Kultura Niezależna), the unofficial periodical that paid the most heed to musical performances and labor issues. Given the relative stylistic freedom they experienced, classical musicians found means beyond the score to articulate dissent. Performers took to the stage in Solidarity – the Baltic Opera, for example, performed a concert at the Lenin Shipyards during the occupational strikes in the 1980s that led to Solidarity, but they also stood down in acts of solidarity. When martial law was declared in 1981, screen and stage actors spearheaded a boycott of state media and stages: soprano Stefania Woytowicz and violinist Wanda Wilkomirska explicitly took part. Many others—like Witold Lutosławski, who also was an active conductor—simply did not perform. Even though they did not officially articulate this recusal as a boycott, it was embraced as such in oppositional circles. Lutosławski, for example, was a member of the Culture Council of the new government immediately (and admittedly briefly) upon its formation by Tadeusz Mazowiecki.

The most powerful evidence of the importance of classical music for the opposition is not in the biographies of its authors and musicians, but in its consistent presence across the sound archives at the European Solidarity Centre, Radio Free Europe, and the KARTA organization, suggesting the importance of classical music and musicians at large-scale events organized by the opposition. Art music repertory flanked Radio Solidarity broadcasts, was integrated into documentary reportages released on Second Circulation cassette labels, and accompanied the theater productions recorded on portable personal recorders. Many personal testimonies of protest culture and diaries by members of the opposition reveal individuals listening to it to pass the time and inspire them. Together these practices portray an oppositional field in which classical music, as a core value within Central European notions of culture, gave political work a broader context and human ethics.

The Prague Jazz Section, 1971–1987

During its existence from 1971 to 1987, the Jazz Section, a voluntary, independent and open amateur organization within the Association of the Musicians of the Czech Socialist Republic, was the most active platform for free

22 Bylander, "Responses to Adversity."

and independent culture in the period of normalization in Czechoslovakia.²³ For the public, the Jazz Section became a representative of non-conformist behavior, and a symbol of resistance against the repressions of the government apparatus of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia and its Central Committee. As an organizing and contact center, the Jazz Section remained standing on a legal basis as long as it could and played a decisive role in disseminating alternative culture to the public.²⁴

Although public administration bodies tightened their control over official cultural events after 1968, the Jazz Section was born and obtained a legal status thanks to a short-term relaxation and the slow formation of rules at the turn of the 1960s and 1970s. Officers came and went at the posts in the Ministry of Interior Affairs of the Czech Socialist Republic, and their competence covered the registration of voluntary cultural organizations in a period of massive organizational change in a gradually “normalizing” society. That is one reason why, two years after the submission of a proposal by jazz enthusiasts led by Karel Šrp, they managed to legally register the jazz association in 1971. But it was not constituted in the autonomous form that was intended: The Ministry of Interior Affairs affiliated the new organization to the already existing Musicians’ Association of the Czech Socialist Republic.

Another significant reason for the approval of the jazz organization was the status of jazz music in Czechoslovakia: compared to rock and the emerging beat music (with their rebellious and non-conformist attitude), the more cultivated jazz drew on its dance and entertainment function from the 1930s and, at the turn of the 1960s and 1970s, a so-called third trend—a synthesis of jazz and classical music—started to form (its prominent exponents were Czech composers Pavel Blatný and Alexej Fried). The free-jazz avantgarde attracted only a small circle of enthusiasts, while the emergence of the jazz-rock revolution with its much larger influence on young audiences from the mid-1970s relaxed conventions and led to the formation of open platforms only later.

In the years 1974 to 1982, the Jazz Section organized eleven annual festivals, the Prague Jazz Days, of which nine took place officially and the last two were prohibited by the Cultural Inspector of the National Committee of Prague (in the case of the 11th Prague Jazz Days, they managed to illegally organize at least so-called “non-public rehearsals” of the foreign participants for a part of the audience). The event included not only professional jazz ensembles but also experimental and avant-garde bands, often formed by amateurs or musicians who did not hold the official permits issued by the Cultur-

23 All publications of the Jazz Section can be found in the collections of the Libri prohibiti in Prague, including the COURAGE Registry, s.v. “Czech Samizdat Collection at Libri Prohibiti”, by Michaela Kůželová, 2017. Accessed: October 08, 2018.

24 For more about alternative culture during the period of “normalization” see: Alan, *Alternative Culture*. For more about Jazz Section beginnings in Bugge, see: Motyčka, “Normalization.”

al Committee. The festival became an open platform for diverse musical genres and forms: from traditional and modern jazz up to jazz rock, alternative rock, experimental music, punk rock, and happenings. From the 2nd year of the Prague Jazz Days (1975) onwards, the festival incorporated not only traditional (*ragtime and boogie-woogie*) and modern (*bebop and free jazz*) program blocks, but also a *Jazz Rock Workshop* led by Karel Srp despite the critical attitude of the older generation of traditional jazzmen in the Jazz Section Committee.²⁵ The official jazz scene did not take part in the preparations of the later Prague Jazz Days because the orientation of the event had moved beyond the scope of their interests. Despite the isolation of the Czechoslovak musical scene, the *Jazz Rock Workshop* managed to react to trends in Europe and reflect them since, with respect to Party ideology, instrumental jazz rock did not appear as problematic to cultural inspectors as the songs of rock bands with their more or less subversive lyrics. This was one of the reasons why a number of jazz rock bands were formed in the mid-1970s, with uniform means of expression and uniform electric sound.

The Prague Jazz Days also presented artistic novelties that were impermissible at other public forums and blurred the boundaries between the professional and the amateur scene, such as the happenings arranged by multi-instrumentalist Jiří Stivín (*First, Spring, Second, Third*, with children riding kick scooters on the stage, or *Biophysical Organ*, with activists blowing into bottles tuned by water, etc.). A lot of the experiments within the festival were based on parody in contrast to the serious performances by jazz rock musicians who, enjoying the status of professional artists, looked down on amateurs. Stivín, a professional regularly collaborating with the management of the Jazz Section, criticized the direction of the festival for its close connection to alternative culture. The number of groups whose expression was an alternative to the uniformity of jazz rock grew yearly. These included Stehlík, formed by guitarist Pavel Richter, and Kilhets, formed by drummer Petr Křečan (the groups' names imply their relatedness: Kilhets is the reverse of Stehlík). While the music of Stehlík was characterized by the timbre and formal articulation of art rock, the principle of spontaneous improvisation applied by the more radical Kilhets came close to the aesthetics of free jazz.²⁶ The structured and unstructured noise fields in the Kilhets productions at the Prague Jazz Days stunned the audience with a ferocity of emotions, and the band members were further unrestrained due to their performance in masks

25 Recordings from the Prague Jazz Days (March 1975) were released on the LP *Jazzrocková Dílna* (Jazzrock Workshop), Panton 1976 and some studio recordings of groups connected with the Jazz Section and the festival on LP *Jazzrocková Dílna 2* (Jazz Q, Impuls, Energit), Panton 1977. Karel Srp was an employee of the Panton record label and music publishing house. More about musical style development on Prague Jazz Days in Motyčka, "The Jazz-Section."

26 Kilhets live recordings are available on a five-CD box set released as a 30th anniversary edition by Black Point 2008; booklet with photographs and study by Czech composer of contemporary classical and experimental music Petr Kofroň.

(much like the American band the Residents). “One of the basic attributes of the communist regime was the suppression of free thinking [...]—an absolute absence of a mechanism for how to deal with non-conformity and how to institutionalize innovations,” recalls Mikoláš Chadima, one of the actors in *Kil-hets*. “In this sense, the regime was timidly, even ludicrously, conservative. Everything new was suspicious, as if it was hiding an unknown, oblique, unpredictable and, essentially, inimical threat.”²⁷ This just-emerging alternative culture, with its emphasis on the spontaneous activities of amateurs and semi-professionals, was viewed negatively by the government officials working at the district cultural centers. They had to approve all the elements of the cultural productions, from posters, dramaturgy, compering, up to the precise list of compositions and the lyrics of the songs, which the organizers had to submit on behalf of the institute to the cultural committee for opinion. Therefore, a lot of musicians switched to instrumental jazz rock from the mid-1970s onwards to avoid the complications connected with the approval of the lyrics.

A breakthrough work performed at the Prague Jazz Days was the rock operetta called *Milá čtyř viselců* (The Sweetheart of Four Hanged Men) in 1977 by the band *Extempore* and the improvisational theatre company *Paskvil*; this performance pointed to a shift in the Jazz Section from jazz rock toward an open artistic platform clearly influenced by Frank Zappa. A naturalistic story of the life of soldiers during the Thirty Years’ War was accompanied by rhythmically and expressively multilayered musical planes, with a parody of the realities of “normalization” in Czechoslovakia. The promotional materials presented the performance as a jazz rock opera, though the members of *Extempore* distanced themselves from this genre because they regarded the form of Czech jazz rock as a spiritless pose of musical craftsmen who had no opinion of their own. *Extempore*, with its leader Jaroslav Jeroným Neduha (after 1979 its leader became Mikoláš Chadima), presented itself at the festival in subsequent years too. But at the turn of the 1970s and 1980s, it became one of the so-called “banned bands” and the organizers tried to keep their performances secret until the very last moment.²⁸

The uniqueness of the organizing and publishing activities of the Jazz Section laid in the fact that they provided a platform for various novel artistic directions (experimental, psychedelic, minimal, conceptual, world, ethno), for overlaps between music and visual arts, and for the dramatic nature of their musical productions. These things were suppressed by communist cultural doctrines and relegated to the position of the unpermitted, or even officially prohibited, underground. There was a distinctive tension between the underground represented by radicals who made no effort to perform publicly with the permission of the authorities (*The Plastic People of the Universe*, DG 307,

27 Mikoláš Chadima in an interview with Peter Motyčka (July 2008), in Motyčka, “The Jazz-Section.”

28 More about banned alternative groups in Chadima, *Alternativa*.

Aktual, Umělá hmota, etc.) and the alternative scene (Extempore, Švehlík, Kihets, Žabí hlen, etc.) at the events organized by the Jazz Section. In spite of their shared interests and common enemy, communication between these two worlds was poor. The underground, which was a strictly closed community, even scowled at the Jazz Section and, because the latter tried to legalize their events, regarded it as a kind of collaborator; however, the Jazz Section was also a part of the concerts of musicians who did not have official permission to perform, and it published its own material “semilegally” (justifying such with the claim that it was exclusively for the internal needs of its members—even if it was often printed in thousands of copies).²⁹ In their repeated efforts to ban the activities of the Jazz Section, the authorities pointed out the diversity of their activities unconnected with jazz and music. In this sense, the Jazz Section represented a set of various cultures which had no place in “normalization,” and one of its most significant achievements lay in its contribution to maintaining continuity with global developments: with the jazz rock revolution and the alternative conceptual dramatic programs of the mid-1970s, with punk rock in the early 1980s, and with new wave or minimal music in the mid-1980s.

In 1972, the Jazz Section began its extensive publishing activities by publishing the *Jazz* bulletin for its members. This bulletin documents the Jazz Section’s role as an important mediator of modern artistic movements: while its first issues were dedicated exclusively to jazz, and local jazz artists appeared on their covers, from number 15 (December 1975) onward, the portraits of jazzmen were replaced by non-figurative and abstract sketches by Joska Skalník, a graphic artist closely connected to the Jazz Section. In its last issues, the contents also included articles on the profiles and music of Frank Zappa, the Velvet Underground, the Grateful Dead, Captain Beefheart, the Residents, David Bowie, Devo, Kraftwerk, Phil Manzanera, This Heat, the Woodstock Festival, and the dramatic experiments of Robert S. Wilson. In addition, studies appeared on futurism, minimalism, and Andy Warhol, and a regular column, “Rock Poetry,” brought translations of the lyrics of Tom Waits, the Sex Pistols, and Pink Floyd. The last double-issue, *Jazz 27/28*, was to be printed in July 1980 but appeared only in 1982 due to repressions, and contained the graphic score of *Composition 1960#9* by minimalist composer La Monte Young.

From January 1980, not only books on music but also books on philosophy, modern art and theater, as well as publications on antifascist subjects appeared as part of the *Jazzpetit* series. Another series, *Situace* [Situation] dealt with contemporaneous Czechoslovak visual arts and authors who did not have a chance to present themselves officially. In this way, the Jazz Section brought artistic developments to the generation of the 1970s and 1980s that they would have otherwise discovered, given the realities of the era, only dec-

²⁹ For example, the number of copies of Bohumil Hrabal’s officially banned novel *I served the King of England* in the Jazz Section edition *Jazzpetit* was about 5000.

ades later. These included not only the above-mentioned jazz rock, performance art, happenings, minimal and conceptual art, but also dramatic experiments (the illegal performance of the Living Theatre in October 1980), musical theatre (public listening to Philip Glass and Robert Wilson's opera *Einstein on the Beach* as part of the 9th Prague Jazz Days in 1979), film (a screening of *Easy Rider* directed by Dennis Hopper as part of the 5th Prague Jazz Days in 1977). Some of the jazz musicians raised objections that, despite its intense publishing activities (and the very title of the *Jazzpetit* series), the Jazz Section had not published a single book on jazz. The only exception was a reprint of the first Czech-language book on jazz: *Jazz* by composer Emil František Burian, originally released 1928 in Prague, and the short essay, *Kronika jazzu* (The chronicle of jazz), which figured among the selected works of French writer and jazz publicist Boris Vian (*Boris Vian*, supplement to the *Jazz* bulletin for the internal needs of its members published in 1981). Entries on selected jazz musicians and groups, mainly at the crossroads between jazz and rock (Miles Davis, Weather Report, Terje Rypdal), figured in the three-volume *Rock 2000* (1982–1984) dictionary compiled by publicist Josef Vlček. In fact, there were several books dealing with jazz published by official state publishing houses from the mid-1960s onwards, mainly written by local authors.

Chairman Karel Srp emphasized several times that, in its beginnings, the Jazz Section was a “completely orthodox jazz organization.” It was transformed into the nucleus of Czech alternative culture, creating a free platform for arts and ideas, only in the late 1970s. In January 1978, the Jazz Section became a member of the International Jazz Federation of the International Music Council of UNESCO, and its representatives made use of this international acceptance at the time of the first repressions at the turn of the 1970s and 1980s. It was thanks to its connectedness to international structures in the subsequent period (on July 20, 1984, the Ministry of Interior suspended the activities of the Association of the Musicians of the Czech Socialist Republic and, through that, also the Jazz Section; the organizing and publishing activities of this period were classified in subsequent legal proceedings as illegal business activities) that the Jazz Section managed to organize several petitions in support of its persecuted members and cultural events at international forums, and foreign observers and journalists participated in its legal proceedings (including even the representatives of Amnesty International, for the first time in Eastern Europe). However, by that time, the Jazz Section had become an important platform of freedom in “normalized” Czechoslovakia and, with the help of the legal options available at the time, it managed to prevent persecution by government bodies quite successfully. It also managed to resist external pressure until the open legal proceeding against its leaders in 1986–1988.³⁰

30 For more about persecutions and trial with Jazz Section members see: Tomek, “Akce Jazz.” See also the books of Jazz Section members: Srp, *Výjimečné stavy*, and Kouřil, *Jazzová sekce*. There was also an exhibition: Ritter, *Ein schmaler Grat*.

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