Journal of the Royal Musical Association, 150.1, 71–106
doi:10.1017/rma.2024.35

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Music History, the Practice Turn, and Maria Yudina's Journey through the Soviet 'Thaw', 1959–63

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Abstract This article develops an approach to music history that centres performers and their artistic work, drawing on insights from musical performance studies. It responds to criticisms of the practice turn and builds on recent scholarship on Soviet music to contextualize the life of pianist Maria Yudina in the years 1959–63, in which she dedicated herself (at great cost) to new, avant-garde music. Case studies include Yudina's key role in performing the first Soviet twelve-tone composition in 1961 — Andrei Volkonsky's *Musica Stricta: Fantasia Ricercata* — and her advocacy of Igor Stravinsky in the build-up to his homecoming in 1962.

I

The setting is a lavish, high-ceilinged, wood-panelled study in a Russian dacha near the town of Kuntsevo, close to Moscow. Evening has fallen, and a moustachioed man in black knee-high boots and a large grey overcoat removes a freshly pressed record from its paper sleeve. He opens his record player, sets his new disc in motion, and the opening bars of Mozart's Piano Concerto no. 23 in A major, K. 488, begin to sound. With a relaxed smile, he starts unbuttoning his overcoat, but quickly notices something unusual on the rug: a handwritten note, addressed to him, had unexpectedly slipped out of the record sleeve. Leaning on his desk for support, he bends to retrieve it. Straightening himself, he reads: 'Joseph Vissarionovich Stalin, you have betrayed our nation and destroyed its people. I pray for your end and ask the Lord to forgive you. Tyrant.' Stalin bursts into laughter, but soon his laughter turns to panic. His eyes widen. His hand desperately clutches the desk. Gasping for air, he collapses face-first onto the floor of his study and dies of a brain haemorrhage, while his two bodyguards stand motionlessly outside, too fearful for their own lives to investigate the sudden bang.

This is the story of how the pianist Maria Yudina inadvertently killed Joseph Stalin. It was her interpretation of Mozart's concerto that accompanied his demise, and it was she who penned the note lambasting his dictatorship. It is a scene taken not from the history books but from Armando Iannucci's 2017 lampooning black comedy *The Death of*

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Stalin.[1] As a fictional film, it makes no claims to complete historical accuracy, and Yudina's role in the affairs leading up to and following Stalin's death are grossly exaggerated: in the film, Yudina's father and brother have been killed under Stalin's regime, she is on personal terms with Nikita Khrushchev, she plays at Stalin's funeral, and her note becomes wrapped up in the political machinations that ensue in the power vacuum left by the dictator's death. All of these plot points, and the idea that Yudina had any role in Stalin's death, have no basis in actual historical evidence. Indeed, the separation of fact from fiction in Yudina's legacy has never been clean, something Elizabeth Wilson has probed in her recent illuminating biography of the pianist.[2]

Instead, Yudina's role in Iannucci's comedy, however dramatized, prompts larger questions about the visibility of performers in histories of classical music. In a Soviet context, we might immediately wonder about the many paths that performers took in their attempts to navigate confusing and at times contradictory expectations in musical life, both under and after Stalin's reign. I am also thinking more generally than that, because the history of music in the Soviet Union, as it is usually told, is no different to most histories of classical music, which, in the words of Nicholas Cook, 'are really histories of composition'.[3] I will return to the many ways in which this point needs to be nuanced for much recent excellent work in Soviet music history. But for current musicology — a discipline in which the practice turn is nothing new and in which actor-network approaches have refigured the scope of historical research — this plea might seem outdated, even regressive. Georgina Born has pointed to limitations in the practice turn, arguing that the musicological 'concern with performance can be a way of addressing the social in music without really addressing it'.[4] In Born's diagnosis, musicologists such as Cook looked to ethnomusicology for a model of 'a non-essentialist, non-notation-focused socio-cultural analytics of music'. But her vision was — is — more ambitious: for her, a cross-disciplinary social-theoretical stance makes possible 'a macro-social analytics of music, bringing to the fore the large-scale political, economic, institutional and cultural processes that condition musical experience', whereas the ethnomusicological model can (but does not necessarily) 'fall back on overly micro-social, social-interactionist conceptions of musical practice'.[5]

Similar broadening horizons occupy music history.[6] 'Whatever music might be,' writes Benjamin Piekut, 'it clearly relies on many things that are not music, and therefore we should conceive of it as a set of relations among distinct materials and

[1] The scene in question can, at the time of writing, be watched on YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6MwgC9ew-vU> [accessed 1 June 2023].

[2] For a lengthier dissection of the mythology surrounding Yudina and Stalin, see Elizabeth Wilson, *Playing with Fire: The Story of Maria Yudina, Pianist in Stalin's Russia* (Yale University Press, 2022), pp. 300–05. Wilson's book is the first biography of Yudina in English, and as such is an immense step forward in our understanding of the pianist's life.

[3] Nicholas Cook, *Beyond the Score: Music as Performance* (Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 3.

[4] Georgina Born, 'For a Relational Musicology: Music and Interdisciplinarity, Beyond the Practice Turn', *Journal of the Royal Musical Association*, 135.2 (2010), pp. 205–43 (pp. 231–32).

[5] Ibid, p. 219.

[6] Born's model is powered chiefly by the forces of sociology and anthropology, though history retains an important if relatively marginal place.

https://doi.org/10.1017/rma.2024.35 Published online by Cambridge University Press

events that have been translated to work together.'[7] Drawing chiefly from Bruno Latour, Piekut adopts actor-network theory (ANT) and underscores the importance of casting the historical net widely: 'By not deciding ahead of time what we are going to find in the world, we allow entanglements to emerge in all of their messiness.'[8] That is how he configures experimentalism, for instance, positioning it as 'a network produced through the combined labour of composers, performers, audiences, patrons, critics, journalists, scholars, venues, publications, scores, technologies, media, a particular means of distribution, and the continuing effects of race, gender, class, and nation'.[9] Similar to Born (who is not an actor-network 'theorist'), Piekut envisages an ANT approach to history as one that can move beyond the practice turn, the latter of which he explains through Carolyn Abbate's rallying call for a form of music studies that centres the drastic sensation of musical performance.[10] 'Although music's drastic qualities lie beyond texts,' Piekut argues, 'a more expansive understanding of performance would complicate the isolatibility of the ineffable moment of musical performance.'[11] What this promises is a leap to a fully relational, emphatically social, and explosively distributed form of music history, one in which performance features among any number of other activities and materials that enliven musical networks.

A relational musicology would appear to have moved well beyond the need either to rethink the place of performers or attenuate the imposing figure of the 'composer-hero', to use Born's words.[12] More than this, its sprawling agential scope makes the dualism of my initial musings seem hopelessly narrow, but I have two points to make to support what follows in this article. The first is that the practice turn — certainly of the Abbatean kind — has had relatively little impact on most music histories, which remain primarily concerned with composers. This is true, for instance, of Soviet music history, even recent examples of which are based around compositional practice, or the lives of composers, or the reception of particular musical compositions. And the second is that ANT approaches, in their move towards an ever-more-totalizing and empirically enriched construction of history, line performance up in a much longer list of actors and circumstances in a way that necessarily evacuates some of the gains of the practice turn in their move beyond it. I should stress Piekut's own sensitivity to the contributions of performers in his work on experimentalism (David Tudor, Charlotte Moorman), though it is important that the terms of engagement there were at least in principle conditioned by a dismantling of traditional notions of composerly authority.[13]

[7] Benjamin Piekut, 'Actor-Networks in Music History: Clarifications and Critiques', *Twentieth-Century Music*, 11.2 (2014), pp. 191–215 (p. 192).
[8] Ibid, p. 199.
[9] Ibid.
[10] Carolyn Abbate, 'Music — Drastic or Gnostic?', *Critical Inquiry*, 30.3 (2004), pp. 505–36.
[11] Piekut, 'Actor-Networks in Music History', p. 202.
[12] Georgina Born, 'On Musical Mediation: Ontology, Technology and Creativity', *Twentieth-Century Music*, 2.1 (2005), pp. 7–36 (p. 26).
[13] Benjamin Piekut, *Experimentalism Otherwise: The New York Avant-Garde and Its Limits* (University of California Press, 2011). As Piekut points out, wiping the slate clean of such notions of authority and hierarchy is an often-cited imperative of the experimentalist project, but that does not mean it was a straightforward feature of 'actually existing experimentalism', to use his phrase (p. 8). With

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Retaining the gains of the practice turn may be more vital in contexts where such notions are more secure.

That is my intention in this article, the goal being to permit sustained attention to the work undertaken by a performer like Yudina — soon to return as this article's protagonist — to make music happen. The simplicity of the word 'work' here massively belies the activities, time commitment, energy, and persistence necessarily involved in performing contemporary music in the Soviet 'Thaw', an arena in which she was central. I intend to highlight both the untrivial administrative labour required (such as sourcing scores and liaising with composers) and the specifically artistic demands and decisions bound up in actual acts of musical performance. The former I access chiefly through Yudina's bountiful correspondence with key Soviet and international figures in these years.[14] The latter are more evasive, both ontologically and evidentially. But they are key components to studying performers in ways that do not perpetuate by now well-critiqued and yet remarkably resilient conceptions of musical performance as an iterative process, an act of presenting something that is, in

John Cage, for example, the dynamic varied considerably depending on the performer. Cage's reliance on David Tudor for his piano works resulted in a kind of distributed authorship between the two, though ironically in such a way that called into question the very indeterminacy of Cage's compositions (precisely because Tudor's approach predictably fulfilled the composer's aesthetic expectations). As Piekut puts it, 'it wasn't simply that "something" would happen; it was that the "right" thing happened, without exception' (p. 57). On the other hand, Charlotte Moorman's evolving performances of Cage's *26′1.1499″* increasingly broke from what Cage wanted, leading the composer to refer to it in a letter to the double bassist Bertram Turetzky as 'the one Charlotte Moorman has been murdering all along' (p. 149). Yet key here is that Moorman continued to plough her own furrow with the work in the 1960s anyway, and so once again, 'creative authorship was distributed in practice, even if it was still nominally retained by the "composer" in the discourse of creativity that operated in this world' (p. 149).

[14] A key resource here is *Maria Youdina — Pierre Souvtchinsky: Correspondance et documents (1959–1970)*, ed. by Jean-Pierre Collot (Contrechamps Éditions, 2020). Collot's publication contains a large amount of Yudina's correspondence from the last decade of her life and, as such, has been indispensable to my research. As the title suggests, it consists for the most part of exchanges between Yudina and Pierre Souvtchinsky, a Russian émigré who was close friends with Stravinsky and heavily involved in the promotion of new music in Paris during these years. Many other important contemporary figures crop up in this correspondence — including Stravinsky, Karlheinz Stockhausen, Pierre Boulez, Olivier Messiaen, Theodor Adorno, Fred Prieberg, and Arvo Pärt — and Collot includes other testimonies, essays, and letters that are very valuable for understanding this period in Yudina's life. My use of this volume is, in a sense, linguistically cumbersome: Collot has translated these letters into French, which I in turn have translated into English. This has required particularly sensitive handling of the documents it reproduces, and I have (in certain cases) consulted with Collot personally in order to clarify that important meanings have not been obscured by multiple layers of translation. In each reference to this volume, I include the letter date and relevant correspondents either in the main body of the text or in the accompanying footnote. I also refer throughout this article to a collection of letters, edited by Tamara Levitz and translated by Philipp Penka and Alexandra Grabarchuk, which traces the correspondence between Yudina, Souvtchinsky, and Stravinsky in advance of the latter's return to the Soviet Union for his eightieth birthday celebrations in September 1962. See Tamara Levitz, Philipp Penka, and Alexandra Grabarchuk, 'Stravinsky's Cold War: Letters about the Composer's Return to Russia, 1960–1963', in *Stravinsky and his World,* ed. by Tamara Levitz (Princeton University Press, 2013), pp. 273–317. In many of her letters, Yudina was exuberant in her use of punctuation and underlining to add emphasis and vigour to her writing: unless otherwise specified, all underlining, italics, extra punctuations, and capitalizations are her own as transferred into print by Collot and/or Levitz, Penka, and Grabarchuk.

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substance, supposedly already there. For a history inclusive of performers, then, this means more than the recognition of their agency, and should, I argue, include a more active troubling of what Cook has called the paradigm of reproduction.[15] I share Piekut's aim for 'a more expansive understanding of performance', but I am perhaps approaching it from a different (hopefully complementary) perspective.

What might it mean to try to refocus the intense palpability of musical performance and channel this through history? For a start, it would require paying attention to what John Rink straightforwardly refers to as 'the work of the performer', the purpose of which 'must surely be *not* to reproduce the music, but rather to create it as if from scratch'.[16] This applies to all classical performance, but is perhaps especially recognizable in the domain of contemporary music, when compositions are often performed or heard for the first time. Anthony Gritten clarifies what is at stake by thinking through performance in McKenzian terms — as a challenge, namely 'to enact this world as a performer, to cause transformations to happen, and to be part of the transformations'.[17] But Gritten also sharpens our sense of the nature of this work by calling attention to both 'disciplinary exercises' — in short, 'all effortful activities that help the performer to come to terms with what the [musical] work requires for its performance' — and the process of 'ripening', which characterizes the qualitatively different type of 'energetic expenditure' involved in the aesthetic event of music performance.[18] (He is thinking here of private practice and live performance respectively.) His reflections conjure images of bodily exigency, and I will return to them in my conclusion. Framed like this, there is nothing automatic about performing, nor in how performances come to happen. 'Musical sounds', as Abbate reminds us, 'are made by labor.'[19]

We can access Yudina's artistic practice through her recordings, which form important components of both my case studies. Yet recordings themselves are no guarantor of such access, and I attempt here to fulfil Mine Doğantan-Dack's wish that recordings 'be recognised not merely as documents of performances that took place in some specific time and place, in one or several takes, but also as documents of the performer's musical voice and expert knowledge'.[20] We must listen to recordings, but also listen through them. This requires the 'virtues of close listening' that Daniel Leech-Wilkinson has advocated, the corrective empirical supports that Cook has emphasized, and sensitivity to the kind of document any particular recording is.[21] And in considering Yudina's

[15] Cook, *Beyond the Score*, pp. 3–4.
[16] John Rink, 'The Work of the Performer', in *Virtual Works — Actual Things*, ed. by Paulo de Assis (Leuven University Press, 2018), pp. 89–114 (p. 112).
[17] Anthony Gritten, 'Daring to Perform', *Performance Paradigm*, 17 (2022), pp. 181–92 (p. 182).
[18] Ibid., pp. 183 and 188.
[19] Abbate, 'Music — Drastic or Gnostic?', p. 505.
[20] Mine Doğantan-Dack, 'Recording the Performer's Voice', in *Recorded Music: Philosophical and Critical Reflections*, ed. by Mine Doğantan-Dack (Middlesex University Press, 2008), pp. 292–313 (p. 299).
[21] Daniel Leech-Wilkinson, *The Changing Sound of Music: Approaches to Studying Recorded Musical Performances* (CHARM, 2009), Chapter 8, paras. 20–21; Cook, *Beyond the Score*, p. 143. Cook has in mind the danger that 'people hear what they expect, or want, to hear', a problem that 'can be cut through only by means of empirical approaches'.

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correspondence and recordings together, my line of thinking picks up on one of Born and Andrew Barry's criticisms of Latourian ANT: its empiricism does not, they argue, attend to the slippery relationship between discourse and practice (whereas such attention is, they contend, one of the strengths of anthropological ethnography). Simply put, 'what occurs in practice and what humans say or write about this are not identical'.[22] I will argue here that performance studies can invigorate a model of music history that probes the relations between discourse and practice.

I said I would come back to Soviet music history, which acts as a stomping ground of sorts in which I put these larger aims to work with Yudina. As Boris Schwarz put it several decades ago, 'composers speak on behalf of all Soviet music': they constitute 'the creative élite among musicians' whose 'privileged position has been preserved, and even enlarged, in the Soviet Union'.[23] Performers, he tells us, were excluded from the Union of Composers and thus have traditionally occupied a lower, less prestigious cultural rung.[24] His history reflects that hierarchy, and Patrick Zuk reminds us of just how influential Schwarz's work has been: it 'has not only shaped our view of the period, but also established the terms of engagement for much subsequent scholarship'.[25]

Performers have not been wholly neglected, but they have existed on the margins, as Daniel Barolsky would put it.[26] For when it comes to the many ways in which *composers* navigated confusing and at times contradictory expectations in Soviet musical life, there is no shortage of illuminating research. Studies of Yudina's one-time classmate Dmitri Shostakovich, to pick the obvious example, are a case in point: his life has been painstakingly investigated and furiously debated since Solomon Volkov's now widely discredited memoir of the composer.[27] But the point also goes for studies with a broader purview than individual musicians. Much research of this kind has been concerned with rethinking the legacy left by Schwarz and contesting some of its historiographical imprints, especially the notion that the Soviet regime implemented a top-down, long-term, coherent policy of socialist realist 'regimentation' of musical life from 1932 onwards.[28] Zuk writes:

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22 Georgina Born and Andrew Barry, 'Music, Mediation Theories and Actor-Network Theory', *Contemporary Music Review*, 37.5–6 (2018), pp. 443–87 (pp. 465–67).

23 Boris Schwarz, *Music and Musical Life in Soviet Russia: Enlarged Edition, 1917–1981* (Indiana University Press, 1983), p. xii.

24 Ibid.

25 Patrick Zuk, 'Nikolay Myaskovsky and the "Regimentation" of Soviet Composition: A Reassessment', *Journal of Musicology*, 31.3 (2014), pp. 354–93 (p. 355).

26 Daniel Barolsky, 'Performers and Performances as Music History: Moving Away from the Margins', in *The Norton Guide to Teaching Music History*, ed. by Matthew C. Balensuela (Norton, 2019), pp. 159–71.

27 This debate can be traced through Solomon Volkov, *Testimony: The Memoirs of Dmitri Shostakovich*, trans. by Antonina W. Bouis (H. Hamilton, 1979); Laurel Fay, 'Shostakovich versus Volkov: Whose Testimony?', *The Russian Review*, 39.4 (1980), pp. 484–93; Ian MacDonald, *The New Shostakovich* (Fourth Estate, 1990); Richard Taruskin, 'Public Lies and Unspeakable Truth: Interpreting Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony', in *Shostakovich Studies*, ed. by David Fanning (Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 17–56; Allan B. Ho and Dmitry Feofanov, *Shostakovich Reconsidered* (Toccata, 1998); *A Shostakovich Casebook*, ed. by Malcolm H. Brown (Indiana University Press, 2004).

28 Zuk, 'Nikolay Myaskovsky', p. 355.

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> There is, moreover, a dearth of evidence to indicate that systematic attempts were made to coerce composers to write in any particular fashion, even if music couched in certain kinds of modernist idioms (such as dodecaphony) stood no chance of being published or performed for several decades.[29]

By the same token, many have sought to nuance our understanding of what musical life in the Soviet Union was actually like. Marina Frolova-Walker's groundbreaking study of the Stalin Prize, for instance, traces the evolution of socialist realist musical values; as she puts it, since 'the Stalin Prize jurors avowedly attempted to shape the Socialist Realist artistic canon, we are able to see from their discussions not only *which works were awarded* but also *why*'.[30] Peter J. Schmelz uses the anthropologist Alexei Yurchak's concept of *vnye* (literally, 'outside') to conceptualize the ambiguous place that new music held under the tenures of Nikita Khrushchev and Leonid Brezhnev.[31] And Pauline Fairclough's pioneering work on the performance history of the Moscow and Leningrad Philharmonic orchestras during Stalin's rule has persuasively recast our understanding of the kind of music that Soviet audiences were exposed to. In particular, she has challenged 'the easy assumption that, after 1932, concert life in the years of High Stalinism constituted two decades of anti-Western, anti-modern, provincial and dull music-making dominated by socialist realism'.[32] The upshot is that official Soviet musical values were emergent rather than predetermined, and composers navigated a much less prescriptive aesthetic terrain than has often been assumed to be the case.

So far, performers have been largely incidental to this line of rethinking — though not entirely absent. Frolova-Walker includes an insightful chapter on performers and the Stalin Prize, while Schmelz's book, though at heart a history of the generation of Soviet composers who came of age after World War II, pays testament to many of the performers (including Yudina) who played post-war new music.[33] Similarly, as Fairclough's work is underpinned by reception studies, there is an obvious sense in which she engages directly with performance, but with a view to accessing how various composers and compositional styles, both contemporary and historical, were valued at the time. As Frolova-Walker notes, 'reception studies are still most often focused on particular works, as in traditional musicology', even if the concept of the musical work is refigured as 'something mutable, subject to reinterpretation in each society that receives' it.[34] These are observations, not criticisms, and one of the purposes of this article is to stake out a space in which performers are centred in these discussions.

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[29] Ibid.

[30] Marina Frolova-Walker, *Stalin's Music Prize: Soviet Culture and Politics* (Yale University Press, 2016), p. 6.

[31] Peter J. Schmelz, *Such Freedom, If Only Musical: Unofficial Soviet Music during the Thaw* (Oxford University Press, 2009). Schmelz draws this term from Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton University Press, 2006).

[32] Pauline Fairclough, *Classics for the Masses: Shaping Soviet Musical Identity under Lenin and Stalin* (Yale University Press, 2016), p. 10.

[33] Frolova-Walker, *Stalin's Music Prize*, pp. 202–21; Schmelz, *Such Freedom*, pp. 179–215.

[34] Marina Frolova-Walker, 'Music History with Love? The Hits, the Cults and the Snobs', *Muzikologija*, 27 (2019), pp. 71–91 (p. 72). It is important to note that Frolova-Walker's work here is an

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What renders this somewhat more pressing is that Soviet performers, as Maria Razumovskaya has pointed out, have tended to be studied 'as strategic commodities in the USSR's wider propaganda machine', if at all.[35] Such research is vital, of course, but what of performers as creative agents who were crucial to making contemporary music happen and implicated should certain works, composers, or styles suddenly fall into disfavour? There was, in this respect, a particular bravery to performers who opted to interpret and showcase contemporary music of any kind (whether western or Soviet), given the existence of a well-trodden lineage of 'safe' repertoire. After all, performers 'often found themselves in more direct confrontation with authorities' than composers did, as Schmelz reminds us.[36] Such performers are remembered and researched far less readily than the composers whose music they played. There are, of course, important biographical studies of some Russian performers, but these (as with most performer biographies) have 'long stood outside the musicological arena', to borrow Christopher Wiley and Paul Watt's phrase.[37]

Razumovskaya's work on Heinrich Neuhaus is an important recent precedent. Neuhaus was by no means entirely compliant with Soviet cultural impositions: he continued to perform Nikolai Medtner's music after it was banned in the 1930s and was openly critical of Soviet music composed under the banner of socialist realism.[38] As Razumovskaya has shown, he suffered grave consequences for the latter position in particular in 1941–42, when he was accused of anti-Soviet agitation, for which he was eventually convicted and expelled to one of the USSR's restricted areas for more than two years.[39] Yet Neuhaus's interest in new music did not extend to the more culturally off-limits repertoire of western modernism. As Razumovskaya notes, his stances 'never seemed to cause [him] any significant political repercussions', at least relative to the height of the Stalinist purges in the 1930s.[40] Yudina on the other hand was among the most ardent supporters and performers of avant-garde music in the Soviet Union. This support, coupled with her unwillingness to subdue her Russian Orthodox faith, led her

example of a listening-centred study based around performers, specifically the cult following that grew up around two popular Russian tenors, Ivan Kozlovsky and Sergei Lemeshev.

35 Maria Razumovskaya, '"I wish for my life's roses to have fewer thorns": Heinrich Neuhaus and Alternative Narratives of Selfhood in Soviet Russia', *Journal of the Royal Musical Association*, 144.2 (2019), pp. 363–95 (p. 364). See, for instance, Kiril Tomoff, *Virtuosi Abroad: Soviet Music and Imperial Competition during the Early Cold War, 1945–1958* (Cornell University Press, 2015).

36 Schmelz, *Such Freedom*, p. 182.

37 Christopher Wiley and Paul Watt, 'Musical Biography in the Musicological Arena', *Journal of Musicological Research*, 38.3–4 (2019), p. 187. Biographies of Russian performers include Elizabeth Wilson, *Rostropovich: The Musical Life of the Great Cellist, Teacher and Legend* (Ivan R. Dee, 2008). More recent additions include Maria Razumovskaya, *Heinrich Neuhaus: A Life beyond Music* (University of Rochester Press, 2018) and the already cited Wilson, *Playing with Fire.*

38 Razumovskaya, *Heinrich Neuhaus*, p. 174.

39 Ibid., pp. 74–80. Neuhaus's sentence was lifted only on 7 October 1944, at which point he returned to Moscow.

40 Ibid., p. 174. It may not be irrelevant in this respect that Neuhaus at times aligned himself with official positions, such as in the denunciation of Shostakovich for his *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* in 1936. Razumovskaya interprets this as 'indicative of the limitations of [Neuhaus's] personal taste rather than any political agendas' (p. 69).

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to a position of deep marginalization in an atheistic state where 'formalism' in contemporary music was treated with official disapproval.

In what follows, I explore the years 1959–63 in Yudina's life, tracing her fervent dedication to new music and how this came at great personal and professional cost. I first examine Yudina's preparation for, premiere, and subsequent performances of the first Soviet twelve-tone composition, Andrei Volkonsky's *Musica Stricta: Fantasia Ricercata*, in 1960–61. Second, I investigate Yudina's advocacy of Igor Stravinsky and his music through her recordings of his piano works and her involvement in his repatriation in September 1962. I then conclude with Yudina's visit to the Khabarovsk School of Music in March 1963, offering some thoughts both on what her experiences can tell us about performing in the Soviet cultural 'Thaw' and the wider music-historical implications of my study.

The 'Thaw' is the backdrop for this episode in Yudina's life. The last five years of Stalin's reign were conditioned, from a musical perspective, by Andrei Zhdanov's 1948 'Resolution on Music of the Central Committee of the Soviet Union', which chiefly condemned six Soviet composers (Sergei Prokofiev, Dmitri Shostakovich, Aram Khachaturian, Nikolai Myaskovsky, Vissarion Shebalin, and Gavriil Popov) for their 'formalist' music. Their careers 'were badly dented, their music no longer to be heard on concert platforms or seen at the printing presses, and their teaching positions lost or restricted'.[41] From that point onwards, too, musicologists 'had to avoid all mention of Western influences on Russian music'.[42] Fairclough has argued that 'Russian musical life was never again as limited as it was between 1948 and 1953', pointing out that

> compared with the dazzling internationalism of the late 1920s and the mid-1930s, Leningrad and Moscow Philharmonia programmes in the late Stalin era are marked by a dull conservatism, an extreme anti-western attitude towards most twentieth-century art, and a firm entrenchment of older western and Russian classics.[43]

For Yudina, as Wilson remarks, 'much was contradictory and paradoxical in those years'.[44] As a performer, she was closely associated with formalist tendencies, and she was barred from performing in Moscow for two years after Zhdanov's resolution.[45] But shortly after this ban was lifted, Yudina was asked to travel to Leipzig and East Berlin as a member of a large Soviet delegation for a festival celebrating the two-hundredth anniversary of J. S. Bach's death in 1950 — one of the rare occasions upon which she was permitted to leave the Soviet Union.[46] At the same time, *Zhdanovshchina* was also a much broader public campaign against 'rootless cosmopolitanism', a vector for what

41 Frolova-Walker, *Stalin's Music Prize*, p. 226.
42 Marina Frolova-Walker, *Russian Music and Nationalism: From Glinka to Stalin* (Yale University Press, 2007), p. 347.
43 Fairclough, *Classics for the Masses*, p. 215.
44 Wilson, *Playing with Fire*, p. 210.
45 For instance, she regularly performed Prokofiev's Piano Sonata no. 8 in B♭ major, op. 84, and Shostakovich's Piano Sonata no. 2 in B minor, op. 61, before their ban in 1948; ibid., p. 206.
46 Ibid., p. 210. Yudina also went abroad, to Poland, in September 1954, though these are the only two prominent examples of her successfully doing so (pp. 223–24).

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Frolova-Walker has called a 'thinly veiled anti-Semitism'.[47] Yudina, a Jewish woman whose real musical sympathies lay with the 'formalist' tendencies of Western Europe's avant-garde composers, was an obvious target, and her dismissal from the Moscow Conservatory in 1951 on the dubious grounds of lacking students is a conspicuous manifestation of this kind of discrimination.[48]

Stalin died in 1953 and was succeeded by Khrushchev, whose reign ushered in the Soviet 'Thaw'. His defining moment in power was perhaps his 'Secret Speech' in February 1956, in which the new leader acknowledged and denounced the horrors of his predecessor's era. The 'Thaw' is typically associated with the totality of Khrushchev's tenure, lasting from 1953 to his removal in October 1964, but as with the Stalin years, this designation can misleadingly suggest a kind of top-down coherence to cultural policy at that time. Schmelz is more specific than that: he has argued that due to 'a general resistance to change within the system, the restrictive atmosphere provoked by the 1948 resolution persisted well into the next decade'.[49] Rather, it was 'during the late 1950s and early 1960s' that something 'more critical and oppositional, however qualified, was possible', even more so than in later years of the Thaw.[50] This period is bookended by the 1958 Declaration of the Central Committee on one side and the 'Meeting of Party and Government Leaders with Writers and Artists' on 8 March 1963 on the other. Schmelz calls the former the 'real watershed moment for music', which finally 'amended and canceled' the 1948 resolution, while the latter saw Khrushchev denounce 'cacophony in music' in a direct attack on twelve-tone techniques.[51]

I mentioned that Schmelz uses the Russian word *vnye* to characterize the ambiguity and 'outsideness' of the unofficial musical circles that sprang up and began to explore 'formalist' compositions in this period. 'This music was criticized throughout the 1960s because it did not fulfil official socialist realist requirements,' writes Schmelz, 'yet it was not, strictly speaking, illegal to perform it.'[52] He elaborates:

> After the May 1958 declaration that revoked the 1948 resolution, a broader range of works by Soviet composers became available. This restoration of the musical past was the true beginning of the Thaw in music, as it also allowed more pieces by a wider range of domestic and foreign composers to be heard […] The works of the leading European modernists, the scores of Schoenberg and other composers of serial music, continued to be officially condemned and their access restricted into the 1960s, but, like the outlawed literature, they were available through a variety of other channels, from official Soviet sources to visiting foreign musicians and composers.[53]

Yudina had played the music of the likes of Arnold Schoenberg, Paul Hindemith, and Igor Stravinsky in the 1920s and 30s, but it was from the late 1950s onwards in

[47] Frolova-Walker, *Russian Music and Nationalism*, p. 347.
[48] Wilson, *Playing with Fire*, p. 215.
[49] Schmelz, *Such Freedom*, p. 17.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Ibid., pp. 27 and 5.
[52] Ibid., p. 15.
[53] Ibid., pp. 40–41.

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particular that she intensified her commitment to new music.[54] In 1958, she began to record much more twentieth-century music than she had previously, reflecting her newly sharpening musical priorities.[55] And in 1959, she connected with Pierre Souvtchinsky, an acolyte of Stravinsky with whom she built up a rich and wide-ranging correspondence from September onwards.[56] She was put in touch with Souvtchinsky by Boris Pasternak, and through Souvtchinsky she learned more about, acquired the scores of, and personally contacted many western composers around the turn of the 1960s. Their correspondence was especially frequent until 1963, and it was through these exchanges that many of Yudina's aesthetic values were elaborated, negotiated, and shaped. 'I will say (and I have gradually come to this conclusion)', wrote Yudina to Souvtchinsky on 27 May 1960, 'that music which is old (and still immense, like Schubert, Mozart and so on) is no longer "ours", as Stockhausen put it; I can play it, but I only want to explore new or little-taken routes…'.[57]

This rhetoric reverberates through her other letters in this period. It undergirds her correspondence with Stravinsky and is a feature of her exchanges with like-minded composers in the Soviet Union. In a letter to Volkonsky of 22–23 December 1960, Yudina wrote that she was playing the music of 'Stravinsky, Hindemith, [Ernst] Krenek *at all costs*' and was desperately trying to keep up with developments in serialism, mentioning Pierre Boulez, Karlheinz Stockhausen, and Olivier Messiaen by name.[58] And months later, she wrote to Arvo Pärt:

> I must admit that even the greatest of old music is nothing more than a museum to me […] but to play among the people and for the people can be done only in the language and tension of this era, and if it involves the music of your compatriots, even better.[59]

All of this is to say that the period that Schmelz identifies as of greatest possibility for those with 'formalist' tendencies was that within which Yudina was most active as a performer of contemporary and avant-garde music. And because Yudina was so determined to perform new music up to and including the likes of Messiaen, Boulez,

[54] Wilson notes some of Yudina's performances of Stravinsky, Hindemith, and Schoenberg in the 1920s and 30s, though she was not alone in performing this music; *Playing with Fire*, pp. 77 and 93–94.

[55] In 1958–59 alone, Yudina recorded some of the chamber music of Hindemith and Arthur Honegger, as well as Nikolai Medtner's Sonata-Elegie, op. 11 no. 2, Yuri Shaporin's Piano Sonata no. 2, op. 7, Kazimierz Serocki's Suite of Preludes, and Paul Danblon's Piano Concerto. See Collot's discography of Yudina's work at <https://www.jeanpierrecollot.eu/project-maria-yudina/discography-of-maria-yudina/> [accessed 1 June 2023].

[56] Letter from Maria Yudina to Pierre Souvtchinsky, 16 September 1959 (*Maria Youdina*, ed. by Collot, pp. 34–43).

[57] Letter from Yudina to Souvtchinsky, 27 May 1960 (ibid., pp. 186–89 (p. 188)). To give just one example of another typical declaration of this type, she said to Souvtchinsky in a later letter that she would play only 'the best and the most innovative' new music; see the letter from Yudina to Marianna and Pierre Souvtchinsky, 6 August 1961 (ibid., pp. 321–33 (pp. 332–33)). In subsequent footnotes, I refer to Pierre and Marianna as 'the Souvtchinskys' when addressed collectively.

[58] Letter from Yudina to Volkonsky, 22–23 December 1960 (ibid., pp. 259–61 (pp. 259–60)).

[59] Letter from Yudina to Pärt, 30 October 1961 (ibid., pp. 352–56 (p. 355)).

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and Stockhausen, she is exceptionally useful for exploring the limits of *vnye* for performers in this volatile period.

II

I begin in earnest with Yudina's first letter to Souvtchinsky, of 16 September 1959. 'With the humility of an elderly person who doesn't have long to live', Yudina wrote, 'I beg you to send me certain new works — I should say — scores', naming compositions by Stravinsky, Boulez, Anton Webern, and Bohuslav Martinů and offering to pay Souvtchinsky 'whatever the amount' they would cost.[60] On 21 September, Souvtchinsky replied enthusiastically, providing Yudina with the addresses of Messiaen, Boulez, and Stockhausen so that she could write to them personally.[61] He followed this up with a package on 30 September containing 'the scores of Boulez and Stockhausen', promising to send on 'the music of Stravinsky, Webern and Messiaen' in due course.[62] A new musical vista thus opened up for Yudina, though the transferral of this music was not straightforward, and she immediately worried for its secure passage. Writing to Souvtchinsky on 10 October, she noted that she had not yet received the music: 'If the package of music by Boulez does not arrive, this will mean that it will be necessary to avoid sending anything by post from now on, and to privilege more *favourable* options.'[63] Yudina was thankful when the package arrived a few days later, but evidently the vagaries of international post weighed on her mind.[64]

Yudina was eager to convey her enthusiasm for these western composers, but she was equally concerned with highlighting some of the achievements of Soviet composers, particularly the young Andrei Volkonsky.[65] As might be expected of a close friend of Stravinsky, however, Souvtchinsky was dismissive of Soviet music, though he was not familiar with the young Volkonsky.[66] Yudina singled him out for praise: 'He is very talented and extraordinarily cultured […] Among the young and relatively young, no one else, I believe, comes to mind.'[67] And no doubt eager to inform Souvtchinsky that

[60] Letter from Yudina to Souvtchinsky, 16 September 1959 (ibid., pp. 34–43 (pp. 36–38)).
[61] Letter from Souvtchinsky to Yudina, 21 September 1959 (ibid., pp. 43–48). See also, for instance, Yudina's letters to Messiaen, 15 December 1959 (p. 100); to Boulez, 17 December 1960 (p. 254); and to Stockhausen, 1 August 1961 (pp. 320–21).
[62] Letter from Souvtchinsky to Yudina, 30 September 1959 (ibid., p. 57).
[63] Letter from Yudina to Souvtchinsky, 10 October 1959 (ibid., pp. 57–65 (p. 61)).
[64] Letter from Yudina to Souvtchinsky, 19 October 1959 (ibid., pp. 65–71 (p. 65)).
[65] 'Apart from Shostakovich and Prokofiev, most of whose works I have played, I am now systematically learning the music of Andrei Volkonsky'; letter from Yudina to Souvtchinsky, 16 September 1959 (ibid., pp. 34–43 (p. 35)).
[66] 'It has become unbearable for me', wrote Souvtchinsky, 'to see Soviet music fall into this impasse of terrifying provincialism, bad taste and incompetence!'; letter from Souvtchinsky to Yudina, 21 September 1959 (ibid., pp. 43–48 (p. 43)). Of Prokofiev, Souvtchinsky wrote that his 'allergy to culture' had done 'a huge amount of wrong, to others as well as himself' (p. 44). He tellingly avoided mentioning Shostakovich in his initial reply, but referred to his 'mediocrity' a year later; see his letter to Yudina, 12 September 1960 (pp. 217–20 (p. 217)).
[67] Letter from Yudina to Souvtchinsky, 19 October 1959 (ibid., pp. 65–71 (pp. 69–70)). Yudina expressed similar sentiments to Arvo Pärt: 'Here in Russia, among my compatriots, there is only

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Soviet composition could keep up with western developments, she informed him that Volkonsky was 'currently writing twelve-tone music'.[68]

Yudina, then, saw Volkonsky as a herald of sorts for a new era of Soviet avant-garde music, and his *Musica Stricta: Fantasia Ricercata* for solo piano 'is usually acknowledged as the first Soviet twelve-tone composition'.[69] Volkonsky composed the work in 1956–57 and subsequently dedicated it to Yudina, and though he performed it himself for a small affair in late 1957 or early 1958, it was Yudina who gave the public premiere in the Gnessin Institute on 6 May 1961 — an event that Schmelz designates as the beginning of 'postwar Soviet New Music'.[70] Yudina is thus inextricably bound up with this beginning, and *Musica Stricta* is a key example of the great efforts incumbent on her as a performer to make new music happen, her creative authority over that music, and the repercussions she faced for performing it.

As the three-year gap between Volkonsky's completion of the manuscript and Yudina's first performance indicates, securing an official premiere proved difficult. In a letter to Pierre and Marianna Souvtchinsky written from 13 to 19 March 1961, Yudina informed them that the first performance was scheduled for 26 March.[71] But we know from Yudina's first letter to Souvtchinsky that she had been learning Volkonsky's music 'systematically' since before September 1959, and this no doubt included *Musica Stricta.* As well as this, Yudina had clearly held the score in her possession for some time: 'Don't blame me for disappearing with your marvellous manuscript!' she wrote to Volkonsky on 22–23 December 1960.[72] She certainly hoped to perform it on a planned trip to Paris, as a prospective set of programmes in her letter to Souvtchinsky of 10 March 1960 indicates.[73] It is telling that Yudina was seeking at this stage to debut Volkonsky's work in France; if she had been trying to perform *Musica Stricta* in Moscow or Leningrad up until that point, her efforts had clearly been frustrated. Ultimately, the Parisian route met the same fate: after corresponding with the composer André Jolivet, whose Concerto for Piano she was invited to perform there, Yudina was denied permission to travel.[74] She told Volkonsky:

Volkonsky and nobody else… All the others have already withered'; letter from Yudina to Pärt, 30 October 1961 (ibid., pp. 352–56 (p. 354)).

68 Letter from Yudina to Souvtchinsky, 19 October 1959 (ibid., pp. 65–71 (pp. 69–70)). There was of course nothing new about Schoenberg's twelve-tone method in the West at this point.

69 Schmelz, *Such Freedom*, p. 81.

70 Ibid., pp. 89–90.

71 Letter from Yudina to the Souvtchinskys, 13/16/19 March 1961 (*Maria Youdina*, ed. by Collot, pp. 293–304 (pp. 295–96)).

72 Letter from Yudina to Volkonsky, 22–23 December 1960 (ibid., pp. 259–61 (p. 259)).

73 Letter from Yudina to Souvtchinsky, 10 March 1960 (ibid., pp. 130–36 (p. 134)).

74 In June 1960, Jolivet confirmed with Yudina that her performance had been scheduled for 29 January 1961; see his letter to Yudina, 8 June 1960 (ibid., pp. 196–97). Over the rest of the year, Yudina and Jolivet corresponded regularly as the composer sought to secure permission for Yudina to travel via the French Embassy in Moscow, but to no avail. Yudina held out hope of making it to Paris, but she was never granted permission. See various letters between Yudina and Jolivet, 8 August 1960 (pp. 214–15); 16 October 1960 (p. 231); 12 November 1960 (p. 238); 6 December 1960 (p. 253). See also Christine Jolivet-Erlih, 'Jolivet and the USSR', in *André Jolivet: Music, Art and Literature*, ed. by Caroline Rae (Routledge, 2019), pp. 217–51 (p. 224).

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> I was intending to play this work [*Musica Stricta*] in France, because besides performing Jolivet's *Concerto* I was invited to give two programmes of my choice on the radio. […] Three weeks ago it became apparent that our Minister had cancelled my trip. I rang Paris — they intend to 'attack again', but for now everything still belongs to the 'world of the uncertain and the unresolved'!![75]

No doubt the delay also stemmed from other difficulties Yudina was encountering at the time. In the same letter to Volkonsky, she wrote about the obstacles she was facing to rehearse the twelve-tone and serialist repertoire she wanted to work on:

> As for Boulez and Stockhausen, I don't have time to learn them for the moment, nor even to look at them. I don't even have time to sleep, because as soon as a good new work for two pianos presents itself, we have to rehearse by night, because, as you know, I've been dismissed from the [Gnessin] 'Institute' precisely because of the new music […] so we rehearse in different settings and at crazy hours.[76]

Yudina, as she mentions here, was sacked from her professorship at the Gnessin Institute on 1 July 1960, in large part because of her commitment to new music.[77]

Programming *Musica Stricta* — or any new music — seemed necessarily to invite struggle. In a letter to the German musicologist Fred Prieberg of 21 January 1962, Yudina informed him of how she went about curating her programmes when requested to give concerts: 'I always say: "it's like this, and this alone!", and I remind them that "I have dedicated my life to contemporary music" and, thank God, in 80% of cases I get my way!'[78] Given that the choice of repertoire was negotiated between concert organizers and performers, the burden inevitably fell on the latter to advocate for the living composer in question. The larger point is the effort involved here: between smuggling in scores of western composers, trying and failing to go abroad to perform, negotiating with official Soviet venues to secure permissions, and rehearsing at inconvenient times, Yudina faced considerable difficulty in bringing this music to the stage.

Then there is the work of performing. It might seem curious that Yudina would end up premiering *Musica Stricta* in the very institution that had recently let her go, but as Wilson notes, Yudina's dismissal 'had been orchestrated by the Ministry of Culture' against the wishes of Yuri Murmantsev, the director of the Gnessin Institute.[79] And so, on 6 May 1961, in a recital which also consisted of Bach, Hindemith, and Bartók, the premiere of *Musica Stricta* finally took place. Yudina performed it twice after the interval to an audience that was deeply curious and enthusiastic about the prospect of this new music.[80] Several subsequent performances quickly followed, including in Leningrad at the Concert Hall at the Finland Station on 11 May and at the Leningrad

[75] Letter from Yudina to Volkonsky, 22–23 December 1960 (*Maria Youdina*, ed. by Collot, pp. 259–61 (p. 259)). As Collot notes (p. 260 n. 2), Yudina's final phrase (in quotation marks) is an allusion to the work of the controversial Russian writer and philosopher Vassily Rozanov.
[76] Ibid., p. 260.
[77] See Wilson, *Playing with Fire*, pp. 247–49.
[78] Letter from Yudina to Fred Prieberg, 21 January 1962 (*Maria Youdina*, ed. by Collot, pp. 388–90 (p. 389)).
[79] Wilson, *Playing with Fire*, p. 248.
[80] Schmelz, *Such Freedom*, pp. 91–92.

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House of Composers on 12 May. As Schmelz has pointed out, *Musica Stricta* was disguised on the programme at the second Leningrad concert, identified only as 'Fantasia'.[81] Perhaps inevitably, the work began to pick up negative reviews, as in *Sovetskaya muzïka* in July 1961.[82] But Yudina continued to perform it alongside other contemporary music by the likes of Stravinsky, Hindemith, and Witold Lutosławski.

A live recording has recently been released of Yudina performing this work on an unspecified date in 1961 at the Scriabin Museum, and this of course opens up a crucial window onto her musical contributions.[83] I examine here her approach in the opening of the first movement of *Musica Stricta*, the first eight bars of which appear in Example 1. The tempo marking of ♩ = 80–92 leaves room for flexibility, but Yudina's approach is much looser than this: she begins more slowly and varies the tempo freely, rushing in bars 2 and 7 and speeding up considerably in bar 5. The only marked tempo increase on the first page is at bar 8, but here Yudina continues to speed through the 'a Tempo' marking in bar 9. Figure 1 gives a bird's-eye view of her tempo in the first sixteen bars, alongside Volkonsky's relevant markings. As well as simply verifying the fluctuations, it also confirms something else that we hear: that there is no trace of Volkonsky's suggested tempo in her interpretation, which instead meanders around the region of 40–70 bpm, never settling. Something similar could be said of Yudina's dynamics: at bars 5, 7, and 13, for instance, she ignores Volkonsky's directions, playing loudly rather than attending to the subtleties of his hairpins and *p* and *mp* markings. This seems to be true of Yudina's other performances too: Schmelz has documented (through eyewitness accounts of the first public *Musica Stricta* performance) how Yudina 'took liberties with [Volkonsky's] dynamic markings' and that even the composer commented 'on the numerous wrong notes in her performance'.[84]

There is, in other words, nothing neutral about Yudina's performance here: her lurching tempos and jagged dynamics bounce the listener from one extreme to another in what comes across as an especially provocative interpretation of Volkonsky's score, one perhaps intending to shock or astonish those in attendance. This requires some qualification, not least because I am to an extent describing aspects of Yudina's interpretation that are more general hallmarks of how she liked to perform: powerful dynamics, a heavy touch, and fluctuating tempos can be found on many of her recordings (especially of live performances). She was a notoriously idiosyncratic pianist, but the circumstances here are important. First is the very fact that she was performing Volkonsky's work at all, rather than, say, something by Beethoven. Second is the

[81] Ibid., p. 92.
[82] Ibid., p. 95.
[83] In September 2019, Melodiya released the first instalment of 'Maria Yudina — Grand Collection', a six-volume set of the pianist's recordings marking the 120th anniversary of Yudina's birth. The fifth volume, dedicated to twentieth-century music, made her recording of Volkonsky's *Musica Stricta* publicly available for the first time. It is now widely available on streaming services and is accessible on YouTube at the time of writing (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2kn5GNR94Xs> [accessed 16 May 2023]). As with other 'live recordings' of Yudina's performances that are available online and on record, the sound quality is far from ideal, and it was not recorded with the intention of commercial release.
[84] Schmelz, *Such Freedom*, p. 95 n. 80.

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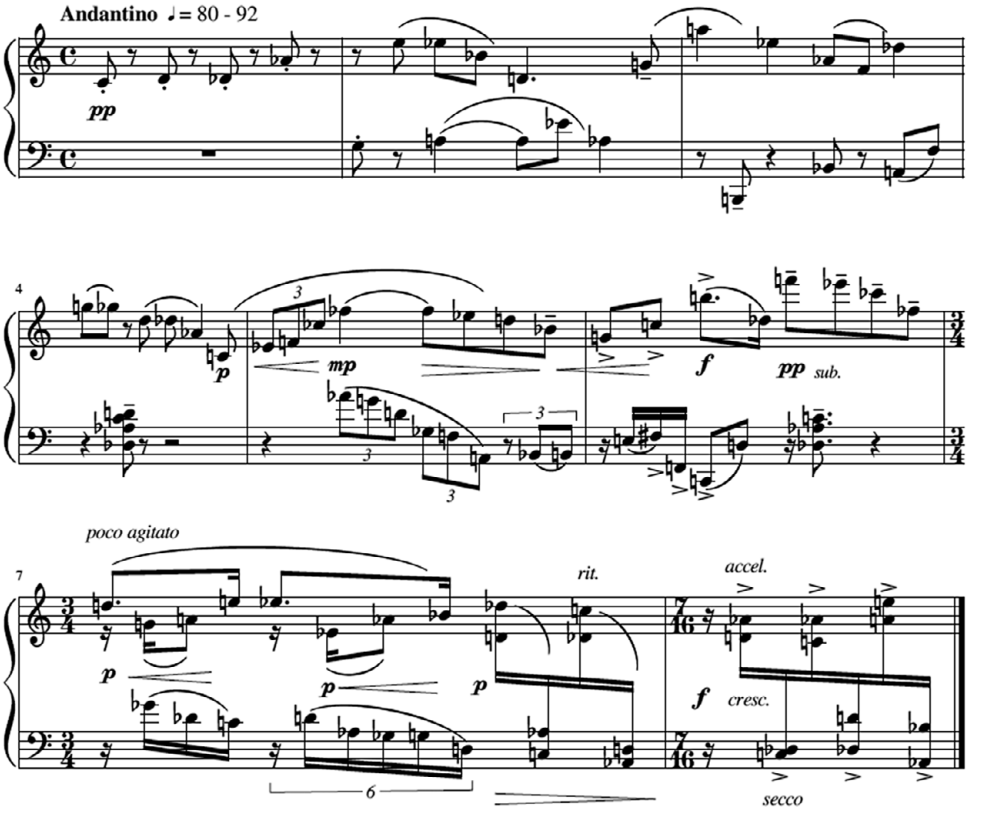
Example 1. The first movement of Volkonsky's *Musica Stricta*, bars 1–8. © M.P. Belaieff Musikverlag. Reproduced by permission. All rights reserved.



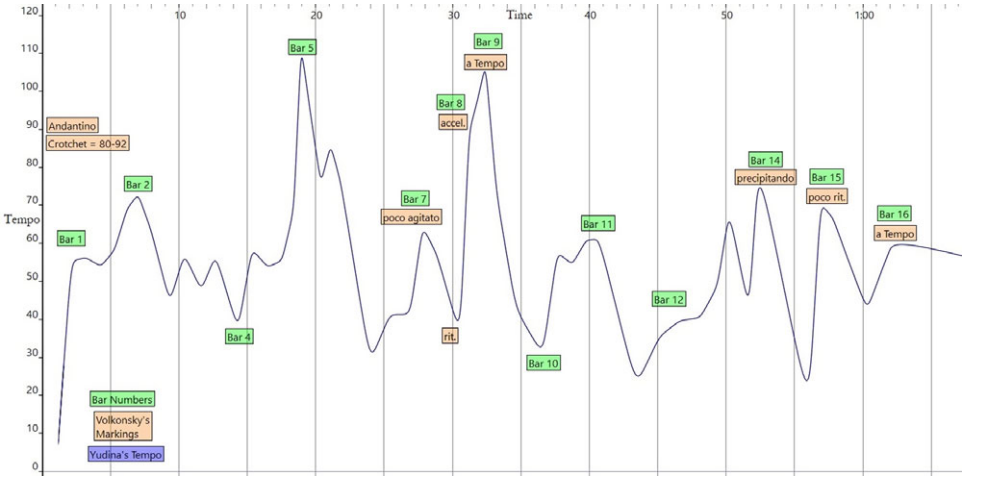


Figure 1. Representation of Yudina's performance of the first movement of *Musica Stricta*, bars 1–16.

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venue: the Scriabin Museum, as Schmelz notes, for many years 'fell "outside" — *vnye* — official jurisdiction due to the laxity of those ostensibly responsible for its oversight'.[85] Schmelz here is referring to the electronic music studio that was founded in 1966, but Yudina's performances of Webern and Volkonsky there indicate that it functioned as an outside space before that. In such a venue, Yudina's interpretative approach takes on a particularly exciting flavour. Third, Yudina had a habit of reading the out-of-favour poetry of Boris Pasternak and Nikolai Zabolotsky at her recitals, including those at the Scriabin Museum.[86] As she revealed to the Souvtchinskys, she would read these 'at the end of her concerts as a kind of "encore"':

> Lots of listeners are very happy and approve; lots are 'horrified' because 'it is not done'… But I intend to work the ground and establish the right, or at least the possibility, to break down the barriers facing soloists… We'll see.[87]

To dramatically read such poetry was thus intentionally provocative in ways that politically intensified her musical performances.

But there is a fourth reason, one that requires a little more explanation but which sets my argument against a larger empirical backdrop. Yudina's interpretation of *Musica Stricta* noticeably breaks from the kind of performance tradition that came to represent the aesthetics of the post-war avant-garde and the Darmstadt School in particular. This aesthetic, as Cook has shown, is exemplified by the recording history of Anton Webern's Piano Variations, op. 27. Though this work was composed in 1935–36 and published in 1937, the intervention of World War II meant that it was not established as part of the concert repertoire until the 1950s — a context which, as Cook says, was 'very different in its aesthetic assumptions and performance practices from those of pre-war Vienna'.[88] It was then that quite a different image of Webern was consolidated by the Darmstadt avant-garde, one which championed 'a highly selective, scriptist, even fundamentalist appropriation of Webern's music'.[89] There were nevertheless those who argued that this idea of Webern was a wrong-headed reimagining, chief among them the pianist Peter Stadlen, who was coached by Webern when the composer was still alive and whose 1948 recording captures a pre-war, or perhaps pre-Darmstadt, conception of Webern performance.

Cook builds on Miriam Quick's observation that there were 'in the late 1940s, 50s and 60s […] not one but two Webern performance styles: the Viennese tradition and the avant-garde "Darmstadt" practice'.[90] He shows there to be considerable continuity between these styles, but broadly confirms the existence of two separate camps before their eventual convergence towards the end of the 1960s. The pre-war style was characterized by 'slow tempos, the rather disjointed B section […] and the noticeably

[85] Ibid., p. 201.
[86] Wilson notes, for instance, that Yudina read both Pasternak and Zabolotsky at her recitals at the Scriabin Museum on 28 November and 17 December 1961; *Playing with Fire*, p. 259.
[87] Letter from Yudina to the Souvtchinskys, 26 December 1961 (*Maria Youdina*, ed. by Collot, pp. 377–81 (p. 380)).
[88] Nicholas Cook, 'Inventing Tradition: Webern's Piano Variations in Early Recordings', *Music Analysis*, 36.2 (2017), pp. 163–215 (p. 163).
[89] Ibid., p. 176.
[90] Ibid., pp. 189–91.

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more tranquil playing of the A2 section', whereas pianists in the Darmstadt style shared certain common features — such as fast tempos and what Cook calls a 'quality of understatement' — but on the whole are best described as having 'distanced themselves from the overtly expressive playing inherited from the pre-war years'.[91] (The first movement is in a straightforward ternary shape: A^1BA^2.)

All of this matters because Yudina often programmed Webern's Piano Variations alongside *Musica Stricta* at these recitals. Her exposure to his music came in early 1960, when she had the chance to listen to a record with Volkonsky.[92] As she wrote to Souvtchinsky in March 1960:

> And now most importantly: lately, I managed to listen to a number of works by Anton Webern on record, in good condition, with a music lover passionate about this composer. We listened to everything once up until his Op. 16 (the *Concerto* which you sent me, thanks!) starting at the beginning, and we intend to continue with the rest soon. Piotr Petrovitch [Souvtchinsky]! For a few days, I was fascinated, shaken, devastated and resuscitated all at the same time. It seemed to me that the music had arisen in my heart like a spring, a key, a path towards Eternity…[93]

Which record was she listening to? Collot has identified it as a Columbia Masterworks release from 1957 containing the complete music of Webern under the direction of Robert Craft. Among the tracks listed is Leonard Stein's 1954 recording of the Piano Variations, a significant inclusion given that, as Cook put it, his performance 'is generally seen as epitomising Darmstadt literalism'.[94] But Yudina's interpretation of the Piano Variations is nothing like Stein's. Overall, her performance is a slow one (clocking in at 2 minutes 4 seconds), her middle section reaches larger extremes in comparison to the outer material, and her interpretation of A^2 is more subdued than A^1, especially in the respective opening bars.[95] Instead, the range of general characteristics that Cook describes of the Stadlen tradition maps onto Yudina's performance.[96]

[91] Ibid., pp. 189 and 186.

[92] Glenn Gould famously performed the Piano Variations at concerts in Moscow and Leningrad in 1957, but Yudina was not in attendance; see Wilson, *Playing with Fire*, p. 232. Nevertheless, Yudina claimed an affinity with Gould, whom she felt 'very close to'; see her letter to Tatiana Kamendrovskaya, 11 January 1961 (*Maria Youdina*, ed. by Collot, pp. 269–75 (p. 271)).

[93] Letter from Yudina to Souvtchinsky, 10 March 1960 (ibid., pp. 130–36 (p. 131)). As Collot notes (p. 134 n. 3), Yudina mixes up her opus numbers here; no doubt she means to refer to Webern's op. 24, which is his Concerto. Op. 16 is Webern's Five Canons (1924). Yudina does not name the 'music lover' in question here, but I am inferring that the person is Volkonsky, whom she mentions in a previous letter as possessing 'all of Webern's oeuvre on disc'; see her letter to Souvtchinsky, 10 November 1959 (pp. 79–83 (p. 82)).

[94] Cook, 'Inventing Tradition', p. 181. Collot provides the matrix number for this record, K4L-232, through which the specific set of discs in question can be identified. They are listed on the website Discogs, which not only identifies the track list, but also the performers featured (<https://www.discogs.com/Anton-Webern-Under-The-Direction-Of-Robert-Craft-The-Complete-Music-Recorded-Under-The-Direction-Of-/release/3995894> [accessed 16 May 2023]).

[95] Like her performance of *Musica Stricta*, Yudina's recording of the Piano Variations became commercially available only as part of Melodiya's 'Maria Yudina — Grand Collection', meaning it was unavailable to Cook for his larger analysis. It is now widely available on streaming services.

[96] Data, graphic visualizations, Sonic Visualiser files, and recordings for these two different approaches to the Piano Variations can be accessed through Cook's online project (<https://www.mus.cam.ac.uk/research/shadows-of-meaning/overview> [accessed 16 May 2023]).

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A simple explanation would be that Yudina, as a pianist of an older generation to Stein, embodied a pre-war performance style. But she also espoused the values of modernist discourse in relation to new music — most clearly, as we shall see, in connection with Stravinsky — and was certainly capable of performing in a more expressively frugal manner. Not all of her recordings traverse such extremes. And so the difference between Yudina and, say, Glenn Gould (who performed the Piano Variations in Moscow in 1957) was not just that they were pianists from different generations — one vitalist, the other geometrical, as Richard Taruskin might have put it — but that to perform Webern in Russia meant different things to them and their respective audiences.[97] The composer Boris Tishchenko, who heard both Gould and Yudina perform in these years, put it like this: 'Maria Venyaminovna also played Webern's Variations — here one could talk of "perpendiculars" — Gould's performances were transparent and crystal-clear — Yudina's active and protesting!'[98] This certainly chimes with Yudina's professed attempts 'to break down the barriers' in reading Pasternak and Zabolotsky at her recitals.

Repercussions lay in wait. On 19 November 1961, Yudina performed both *Musica Stricta* and the Piano Variations in the Small Hall of the Leningrad Philharmonia, a venue staunchly within the realm of officialdom in a city that was 'not as open as […] Moscow in the post-Stalin years'.[99] Recalling the event in 1970, not long before she died, Yudina wrote:

> When the public ostensibly refused to leave at the end of my concert in the Glinka Small Hall, and I had already come back several times to play encores, I returned to the stage once again and… everyone was still seated!! 'What, you're still here?' — I ask; and then they all start clapping! So, I tell them: 'In that case, I'm going to read you some poetry'. […] I read 'Yesterday Reflecting upon Death' by Zabolotsky and 'Lessons of English' by Pasternak, and another burst of applause ensued. But the stupidity and vengeful spirit of someone in the audience earned me a ban on giving concerts in Leningrad.[100]

Even if we allow for a certain amount of retrospective embellishment in her account, what is certain is that Yudina's performance earned her a permanent ban from the Leningrad Philharmonia — she did not perform in concert there again.[101] In that sense, Yudina's Volkonsky and Webern were *verifiably* provocative, because at least someone in the audience that night reported her performance to the authorities. This pays testament to her precarity as a performer: encores were a common means of pushing boundaries in ways that went undetected, but one displeased individual held

[97] Richard Taruskin, 'The Pastness of the Present and the Presence of the Past', in *Authenticity and Early Music*, ed. by Nicholas Kenyon (Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 137–208.
[98] Quoted in Wilson, *Playing with Fire*, pp. 250–51.
[99] Schmelz, *Such Freedom*, pp. 197–98.
[100] Maria Yudina, 'Final Concerts in Leningrad', 21 October 1970 (*Maria Youdina*, ed. by Collot, p. 392 n. 3). This quote is taken from an extract that Collot reproduces from one of Yudina's final texts, written less than a month before she died.
[101] Schmelz, *Such Freedom*, pp. 92–94. Yudina did, however, subsequently perform elsewhere in Leningrad (*Maria Youdina*, ed. by Collot, p. 392 n. 3).

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the power to reassert those boundaries retrospectively.[102] While Yudina succeeded in giving a few further performances of *Musica Stricta* after 19 November, from 1962 Volkonsky's music became — in the composer's own words — 'definitely banned'.[103]

III

Yudina valued Volkonsky highly among young Soviet composers in particular, but in her mind Stravinsky's musical achievements ranked above all others in the twentieth century. She spoke of him with an almost religious sense of devotion, one which grew as she began receiving his scores, performing his music more regularly, and corresponding with him directly. This devotion culminated in (and was forever ruptured during) Stravinsky's historic return to Russia to mark his eightieth birthday in September 1962, an event to which Yudina made important contributions that have only recently been acknowledged.[104] It was Souvtchinsky who provided the link between them: as Tamara Levitz notes, the correspondence between these three figures 'documents Stravinsky's first tentative contact with Soviet colleagues during the Thaw' in what would culminate in his first return to Russia 'after almost half a century'.[105]

Stravinsky's music featured heavily on Yudina's list of requests from Souvtchinsky in her first letter to him of 16 September 1959, in which she asked for the scores of his Piano Sonata, Elegy for Solo Viola, and the Concerto for Piano and Wind Instruments.[106] On 30 September, Souvtchinsky replied that he would soon send on the requested scores and that he had passed Yudina's kind words on to the composer, adding that Stravinsky 'reacted warmly and showed great interest in [Yudina's] letter'.[107] Thus began a huge influx of Stravinsky's music into the Soviet Union via these channels, though not always successfully: that same month, Stravinsky sent Yudina a package of his scores from London, but their non-arrival became apparent only when Souvtchinsky asked Yudina why she hadn't yet acknowledged them: 'I have

[102] The pianist Alexei Lubimov told Schmelz that 'he would frequently list one concert program and then change it at the very last minute by announcing a new program from the stage, or perform a "normal" program and then play more "avant-garde" pieces as encores'; Schmelz, *Such Freedom*, p. 192.

[103] Volkonsky wrote to Yudina in January 1962 asking her to perform *Musica Stricta* again at the premiere of his newer work *Suite of Mirrors*, which she did in Moscow in February; see the letter from Volkonsky to Yudina, January 1962 (*Maria Youdina*, ed. by Collot, pp. 390–92 (p. 390)). Yudina told Souvtchinsky that she performed *Musica Stricta* in Moscow on 9 February, for which see her letter to Souvtchinsky, 14–28 February (ibid., pp. 401–07 (p. 404)). In the same letter, she ominously told Souvtchinsky that Volkonsky had enemies (p. 405). Yudina then performed *Musica Stricta* at least once more, a month later in the Large Hall of the Lviv Conservatory on 22 February (Schmelz, *Such Freedom*, p. 96). Volkonsky claimed in an interview in 1974 that 'from 1962 [he] was definitely banned'. Schmelz points to a few known anomalies, but concludes that certainly 'by the late 1960s, despite very rare exceptions, Volkonsky's music ceased to be performed', and he subsequently moved into the world of early music; ibid., pp. 127–28.

[104] For instance, by Levitz, Penka, and Grabarchuk in 'Stravinsky's Cold War', and by Wilson in *Playing with Fire* (pp. 252–68).

[105] Ibid., pp. 278–79.

[106] Letter from Yudina to Souvtchinsky, 16 September 1959 (*Maria Youdina*, ed. by Collot, pp. 34–43 (p. 38)).

[107] Letter from Souvtchinsky to Yudina, 30 September 1959 (ibid., p. 57).

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just received a letter from Stravinsky. He is very surprised (and worried) not to have received confirmation from you that the scores he sent from London in September arrived safely.'[108] She telegrammed Stravinsky on 19 February 1960 to inform him of the bad news that the scores had never reached her.[109] Souvtchinsky resolved to ask Stravinsky that the composer should send him any and all scores, which Souvtchinsky would then pass on to Yudina himself.[110] This happened very quickly: 'I just received 28 (!) scores', Souvtchinsky wrote to Stravinsky on 22 April 1960, 'which I will start sending to Yudina.'[111]

Right from the beginning of Yudina's correspondence with Souvtchinsky, then, he and Stravinsky made concerted efforts to export the latter's music into the Soviet Union for Yudina to distribute and perform. Yet such an activity was by no means a safe one for Yudina, even in the 'Thaw', and it contributed directly to her dismissal from the Gnessin Institute in the summer of that year. One of those who denounced her, the music theorist Pavel Kozlov, claimed that 'her propaganda of composers of an evidently anti-Soviet nature, such as Jolivet and Stravinsky, is completely out of place in a musical-pedagogical Institute'.[112] So performing Stravinsky was certainly a risk, though one that Yudina gladly shouldered. In a letter from 29 April 1960, she told him that 'before you, I turn into a shy schoolgirl', and that 'the very thought of being in contact with you seemed to me […] inconceivable, and this feeling has not left me for a long time'.[113] Quite simply, she considered Stravinsky to be a genius. Scanning her lengthy letters to him, virtually at random, reveals quotations like the following:

> If I were without arms, without legs, without eyes, like many victims of war, if I were subjected to the strict discipline of a remote monastery, if for the good of future generations, I suffered in a burning desert or in icy lands, then no doubt I would have experienced something that is inaccessible to you, but it is not so, and I cannot help but remain silent, I who am only your pupil![114]

In the same letter, Yudina raised an even more tantalizing prospect with Stravinsky: 'I desperately want you to come and visit us [in the Soviet Union].'[115] Thus the seeds for Stravinsky's repatriation were sown, at least in the composer's mind. Yudina brought it up with Souvtchinsky too, and both men seemed to see Yudina as the key figure through which to rehabilitate Stravinsky's reputation in his homeland, both

[108] Letter from Souvtchinsky to Yudina, 1 February 1960 (ibid., pp. 118–19 (p. 118)).
[109] Telegram from Yudina to Stravinsky, 19 February 1960 (ibid., p. 126).
[110] Letter from Souvtchinsky to Yudina, 3 March 1960 (ibid., pp. 126–29 (p. 127)).
[111] Letter from Souvtchinsky to Stravinsky, 22 April 1960 (Levitz, Penka, and Grabarchuk, 'Stravinsky's Cold War', pp. 279–80 (p. 279)).
[112] Quoted in Wilson, *Playing with Fire*, p. 248.
[113] Letter from Yudina to Stravinsky, 29 April 1960 (*Maria Youdina*, ed. by Collot, pp. 171–74 (p. 171)).
[114] Ibid., p. 172.
[115] Ibid. The idea for Stravinsky's return seemed to emerge first during Leonard Bernstein's visit to Russia in the autumn of 1959 (p. 171).

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by performing his music and lobbying for his return. As Souvtchinsky put it to Stravinsky, 'Perhaps M. V. Yudina's appearance is providential.'[116] At least at this stage, both men were as unaware of Yudina's unfavourable position in the Soviet musical scene as they were of 'the courage she displayed in disseminating his music', as Levitz puts it.[117]

Yudina frequently updated Stravinsky on her performances of his compositions and sent him programmes of her concerts, telling him, 'I strive to play your works as often and as well as possible, to make them known to others.'[118] But relations also became strained. He disappointed Yudina by informing her that he wouldn't make the trip in 1961, and she became exasperated with his unhelpful pronouncements upon Soviet musical life.[119] In an interview with the *Washington Post* in December 1960, Stravinsky spoke very critically of music in the Soviet Union:

> They're bad. Poor Shostakovich, the most talented, is just trembling all his life. Russia is a very conservative and old country for music. It was new just before the Soviets. Under Lenin they invited me. I couldn't go. Stalin never invited me.[120]

His negative remarks were reported in *Sovetskaya kul'tura* in February 1961, and Yudina wrote to Souvtchinsky to demand an explanation:

> About two or three weeks ago, it was reported in *Sovetskaya kul'tura* that Igor Fyodorovich had made extremely negative comments about us, the Soviet Union, that he declared that 'over there, there is no culture or cultured people, neither in music, in interpretation, in choreography, or in anything'. […] I can't be certain whether or not Stravinsky truly said this […] [but] if it turns out after all that I. F. said something of this sort, then why, why?![121]

As well as finding these comments offensive — after all, she valued much contemporary Soviet composition and was in many ways proudly nationalist — Yudina felt them to be fundamentally detrimental to securing the composer's official return, and she didn't know how to proceed.[122] Tensions rose further in Souvtchinsky's response. He informed Yudina that, when it came to Stravinsky's disagreements with Soviet composers, he was entirely on his side.[123] But more critically, he gave Yudina a musical command of sorts:

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[116] Letter from Souvtchinsky to Stravinsky, 22 April 1960 (Levitz, Penka, and Grabarchuk, 'Stravinsky's Cold War', pp. 279–80 (p. 280)).
[117] Ibid., p. 279.
[118] Letter from Yudina to Stravinsky, 28 November 1960 (*Maria Youdina*, ed. by Collot, pp. 245–47 (p. 245)).
[119] 'I would love to come and see you this year,' wrote Stravinsky to Yudina, 'but this won't be possible because I have too many prior commitments'; letter from Stravinsky to Yudina, 16 January 1961 (ibid., p. 278).
[120] Quoted in Levitz, Penka, and Grabarchuk, 'Stravinsky's Cold War', p. 280.
[121] Letter from Yudina to the Souvtchinskys, 13/16/19 March 1961 (*Maria Youdina*, ed. by Collot, pp. 293–304 (p. 297)).
[122] 'I don't know right now how to broach this question with I. F., perhaps it's preferable to not speak of it; at the moment, I haven't decided'; ibid., p. 298. As she reminded Souvtchinsky, 'But the goal — it is to bring our great I. F. closer to us, to his compatriots.'
[123] Letter from Souvtchinsky to Yudina, 27 March 1961 (ibid., pp. 305–10 (p. 307)).

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> This is why it is necessary and indispensable, whatever happens, that you don't stop playing Stravinsky throughout Russia. Writing to I. F., or involving him in polemical discussions, makes no sense; that would be bad. What matters is the playing, the playing, the playing. […] Writing to him in general terms is something to be avoided. We must be grateful and only grateful to him, and we must rejoice in the fact that we live at the same time as him on this Earth.[124]

In other words: don't talk, just play. This is a crucial intervention, one which sets into relief the one-sided dynamic to Souvtchinsky's and Stravinsky's relations with Yudina. Yudina's counsel is dismissed, and she emerges more conspicuously as a useful outlet for the composer's work.

At the same time, Yudina was preparing to record Stravinsky's music. Unsurprisingly, her adulation was matched by an anxiety to do justice to his music in performance, and her letters indicate that her sense of responsibility was especially acute in the studio. Telling in this respect is the protracted process through which she recorded his Piano Sonata and his Serenade in A major. Though Stravinsky composed these works in the 1920s, Yudina received a copy of the score of the Sonata from Souvtchinsky only in December 1959 and, it seems, started learning the Serenade around November of the following year.[125] As we shall see, she wouldn't begin putting them on tape until the end of 1961.

On 13 July 1961 — just under a month after Stravinsky's formal invitation to the Soviet Union — Yudina wrote to the directors of Melodiya's recording studios to complain about their facilities, citing external noise, poor hygiene conditions, and subpar instruments:

> Both of the instruments were practically out of tune. At a pinch, they could be used for pieces with pedal, which would conceal their complete lack of timbre. Impossible to record Stravinsky in these conditions, because the music is transparent, in some places the music is only written for two voices, the defects of the instrument are glaring, the nonexistent timbre doesn't help, in particular in the *Sonata*, but in large part as well in the *Serenade*.[126]

Yudina used these reasons as excuses not to record the Sonata and Serenade in the summer, but her dissatisfaction with the studio conditions was not the whole truth behind the postponement. Almost a month later, on 6 August, she informed Souvtchinsky that she was encountering phrasing problems with both compositions and

[124] Ibid.

[125] As Yudina wrote to Souvtchinsky on 16 September 1959, 'for some strange reason, I didn't know about [the Sonata]' until recently, noting that it had been omitted from lists of Stravinsky's published works that she had consulted (ibid., pp. 34–43 (pp. 37–38)). Souvtchinsky subsequently sent Yudina a copy of the Sonata; letter from Souvtchinsky to Yudina, 4 December 1959 (ibid., pp. 83–86 (p. 83)). Yudina informed Souvtchinsky in a letter of 18 November 1960 that she was learning the Serenade (ibid., pp. 239–42 (p. 242)). She probably knew this work from her youth — the musicologist and pianist Mikhail Druskin gave the Soviet premiere in the 1920s — but according to Wilson, Yudina gave the first Soviet performance of the work since the late 1920s on 25 December 1960 (*Playing with Fire*, pp. 77 and 252).

[126] Letter from Yudina to the directors of Melodiya's recording studios, 13 July 1961 (*Maria Youdina*, ed. by Collot, pp. 318–21 (p. 318)).

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that she desperately sought clarification from the composer.[127] In other words, she was grappling with specifically musical questions.

Yudina's letters indicate how heavily this burden of interpretation weighed on her mind. On 13 September, she attempted to bypass Souvtchinsky by sending a telegram directly to Stravinsky in Helsinki:

> Please let me know your address for September and October so that I can write a detailed letter to you because, among many other things, I must bother you with questions related to the performance of the *Sonata* and the *Serenade* because I have to make this recording and I wish to play exclusively following your conception.[128]

Her telegram missed Stravinsky by about three hours, and an increasingly agitated Yudina wrote to Souvtchinsky to implore him to pass on her original message to the composer.[129] She also asked them to send her 'the places where he will be staying and the dates' so that she could write to him afterwards.[130] At the start of December, Yudina still had yet to record the Sonata, but she mentioned to Prieberg that the recording session was imminent.[131] And on 26 December, she informed the Souvtchinskys that she had 'just recorded [the Serenade], but without having been able to exchange questions and answers with Stravinsky, I simply had to record it in 1961, and I waited until the very last minute, or rather, the studio waited for me!'[132]

Perhaps Yudina was compelled to record these works by the end of 1961 at the very latest and did her best to stall until she could incorporate Stravinsky's thoughts. The answers she desperately sought never materialized, and on 30 April 1962 Yudina attempted to address these worries to the composer:

> I will not share with you *my* conception of [the Serenade], but you should know that I have forged my own interpretation (yes, I allowed myself!!) beyond that which you may have said about it… I play it, it seems, in a rigorous way. It wasn't possible to wait any longer for your advice or postpone the recording date, you were on tour for too long.[133]

[127] 'It is essential for me to clarify phrasing problems in the *Serenade* and the *Sonata*', Yudina wrote to Souvtchinsky. 'I must record them soon, it should have already been done in the summer, but I postponed the date due to uncertainties related to the text and also because, in the summer, it was impossible to record in stereo for technical reasons'; letter from Yudina to the Souvtchinskys, 6 August 1961 (ibid., pp. 321–33 (p. 329)).

[128] Telegram from Yudina to Stravinsky, 13 September 1961 (ibid., pp. 338–39).

[129] 'I am enclosing the text of my telegram on a separate sheet and ask you to send it on'; letter from Yudina to the Souvtchinskys, 20 September 1961 (ibid., pp. 339–45 (p. 340)).

[130] Ibid., pp. 340–41.

[131] 'I must now record the *Sonata* (1924) and the *Serenade* (1925) by Stravinsky'; letter from Yudina to Prieberg, 4 December 1961 (ibid., pp. 367–74 (p. 370)).

[132] Ibid., p. 378. Yudina does not mention the Sonata explicitly, but both pieces appeared on the same disc and were recorded close together if not in the same session.

[133] Letter from Yudina to Stravinsky, 30 April 1962 (ibid., pp. 431–40 (p. 438)). There are two things to note about this letter. The first is that Svetlana Savenko believes it is misdated, and is in fact the letter that Stravinsky deems 'hysterical' and forwards to Souvtchinsky on 12 April (Levitz, Penka, and Grabarchuk, 'Stravinsky's Cold War', pp. 293 and 315 n. 118). It therefore possibly dates from late March or early April. The second is that the accurate translation of 'rigorous' here is crucial. Collot (in personal correspondence) has shared with me that Yudina's exact words to Stravinsky are: 'As it

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Yudina is hedging here. On the one hand, she describes her interpretation as 'rigorous', a quality she elsewhere associated with the composer and which resonates with Stravinsky's outspoken, ethically charged demands that performers of his music be 'executants' rather than 'interpreters'.[134] On the other, she is anticipating and attempting to excuse any aspects of her recording that might not be to his liking. Both of these currents run through her subsequent correspondence about these works, as when she discovered that there were printing errors in the scores she had been using. 'Alas, I didn't get the chance to correct the printing errors in Stravinsky', she wrote to the Souvtchinskys. 'I hope that they won't disfigure his thinking too much. I absolutely do not understand how, with his demand, his rigour and his sense of detail that he let slip such misprints and why the editors don't have more control.'[135]

There is an obvious discourse of fidelity at play, but the point worth emphasizing is just how laborious this burden of fidelity was: Yudina negotiated with Melodiya, postponed recording sessions, and wrote repeatedly to both Stravinsky and Souvtchinsky with her musical concerns, all in the name of this faithfulness. One could argue that the drawn-out nature of this process was self-inflicted, but that would be to underestimate the sheer aesthetic — or perhaps ethical, to follow Stravinsky's philosophy — importance of getting things right.

What does 'rigour' sound like? Unlike her live performance of *Musica Stricta*, here textual accuracy and attention to musical details emerge as much more important considerations for Yudina. Especially striking about her recording of the Piano Sonata is her care with Stravinsky's spectrum of articulation markings, which vary widely, change frequently between phrases, and differ between right and left hands in many passages. But across both works, Yudina's use of tempo is especially instructive, even though she admitted to playing faster than indicated.[136] Figure 2 contains passages from four movements — two from the Sonata, two from the Serenade — that are representative of Yudina's approach to tempo more generally in these recordings. They are as follows: bars 41–95 of the first movement of the Sonata (in green); bars 1–51 of the third movement of the Sonata (in blue); bars 54–129 of the Serenade's Rondoletto (in purple); and the first thirty bars of the Serenade's Cadenza (in red). Each of these movements is predominantly in 2/4, and this is what makes them especially useful to compare. Having said that, Stravinsky changes time signature frequently, which is why I have chosen the passages in question: they are *largely* characterized by 2/4, with

seems, I play rigorously' (Как кажется, играю строго) and that 'строго' translates somewhere in-between severely and rigorously.

[134] Stravinsky had been expounding his notorious views on performers for decades, though they receive sustained attention in Igor Stravinsky, *Poetics of Music in the Form of Six Lessons* (Harvard University Press, 1942). See also Nicholas Cook, 'Stravinsky Conducts Stravinsky', in *The Cambridge Companion to Stravinsky*, ed. by Jonathan Cross (Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 176–91 (esp. pp. 177–80).

[135] Letter from Yudina to the Souvtchinskys, 5–15 June 1962 (*Maria Youdina*, ed. by Collot, pp. 457–63 (p. 458)).

[136] 'The Concerto is really successful… the Sonata and the Serenade as well; the only thing is that I took quite quick tempos, faster than those indicated'; ibid., p. 460.

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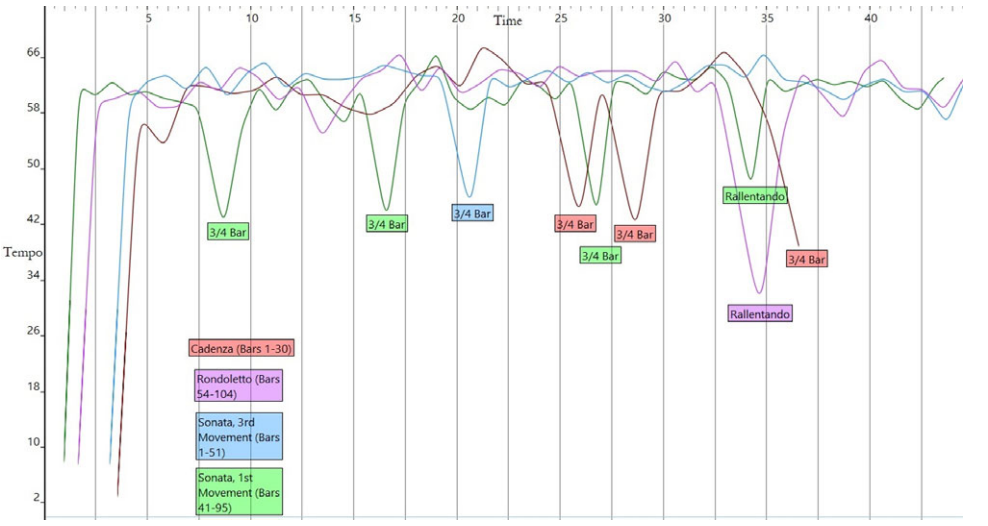

Figure 2. Combined graph of Yudina's tempos in selected passages of her Stravinsky recordings.

occasional, momentary diversions into other time signatures, which I have flagged in the graph.[137]

The fundamental point is quite a simple one: not only is Yudina's approach to tempo remarkably strict and consistent, but there is effectively a common bar-length pulse of around 60 bpm. (The only moments of serious deviation from this in the graph are those in which the time signature changes, but Yudina's actual tempo does not waver.) This is a signal marker of her self-proclaimed 'rigorous way' of playing Stravinsky, itself the result of several months of creative hard work and indeed hand-wringing over the correct way to perform this music. That backdrop is especially revealing given Yudina's idiosyncrasy as an interpreter. Her Stravinskian efforts here are quite different from those involved in her loose tempos and jagged dynamics in *Musica Stricta*, something we can make sense of at least in part through the drastically opposing contexts in which the recordings were made. Her *Musica Stricta* captures a live performance, at a private affair, unintended for commercial or public release, and unedited after the fact — in

[137] Another important consideration is my decision to measure Yudina's tempo by bar rather than by beat. The latter would have visually simplified the changes in time signature in some cases where there remained a common rhythmic denominator, such as the crotchet (for instance, to and from 2/4 and 3/4). However, other awkward time signatures (3/8, 5/8, 5/16) complicated this approach. More important than that was the fact that beat-level data accentuated momentary rhythmic quirks in Yudina's playing that obscured the aural consistency of what the listener hears (or at least what I hear). The principle here is analogous to using 'smoothed' rather than original data to bring out trends that might otherwise be swamped by an oversaturation of temporal information. This is a technique that has been employed elsewhere in performance analysis; see Nicholas Cook, 'Methods for Analysing Recordings', in *The Cambridge Companion to Recorded Music*, ed. by Nicholas Cook and others (Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 221–45 (esp. pp. 236–38). Readers of the print version of this article can view Figure 2 in colour to better distinguish between the performances by consulting the online version.

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other words, a 'true' live recording, if such a claim can be made. Her Stravinsky recordings were made in the studio, with its by then sophisticated editorial capacities, intended for stereo LP release in advance of the composer's return to Russia and fashioned with the burdens of durability (and hence posterity) and fidelity in mind. It is worth remembering that both sets of recordings were made at most a matter of months apart in 1961: the intimacy of the Scriabin Museum afforded the flagrancy of Yudina's *Musica Stricta*, while the controlled atmosphere of the recording studio made room for her disciplined Stravinskian tempos. We have moved, in other words, from provocation to rigour, the processes behind both of which involving considerable musical efforts, if in very different ways.

In June 1961 — not long before Yudina's complaint to Melodiya about their recording conditions — Tikhon Khrennikov, the head of the Union of Composers, travelled to the United States to attend the first International Los Angeles Music Festival. Here, he proposed to Stravinsky that he celebrate his eightieth birthday in Russia.[138] After this, Souvtchinsky slowly began to realize just how precarious Yudina's position in the Soviet Union really was. On 12 March 1962, he pressed her on this issue with respect to Stravinsky's return:

> From your last letter I see that you have fairly 'complicated' relations with the Composers' Union. This fact worries me for two reasons: 1) Won't you get in trouble when I. F. S. comes to visit; and 2) How will you 'share' him (that is, I. F.) between you, his friends, and the officials? For he is invited, unless I am mistaken, specifically by the 'Soviet Composers Union'? Write me about this.[139]

Around this point, Yudina's place in the entire enterprise of Stravinsky's repatriation begins to become much more peripheral. By February 1962, Stravinsky had had a change of heart, asserting to Souvtchinsky that he would refuse to go to the Soviet Union, referring to the Union of Composers as *mrakobesi* (obscurantists).[140] Souvtchinsky — whose exchanges with Stravinsky appear increasingly sycophantic — agrees with him, asking:

> Is it really worth it for you, you in particular, to begin to argue and debate with all of these *mrakobesi* and all of these fools?—— Of course, I believe and know that an entire generation of musicians is expecting you there, but—— let them figure things out themselves and find their own way. When a real musician finally appears in the Soviet Union, he should come visit you, despite all obstacles.[141]

Souvtchinsky does not specify what kind of musician he has in mind, but the implication is that Yudina — as a woman and a performer, rather than a male composer — is not worth the trouble of dealing with the Soviet officials. Stravinsky, however, reverses his decision, writing back that 'it seems that I will nevertheless have to make an

[138] Levitz, Penka, and Grabarchuk, 'Stravinsky's Cold War', p. 281.
[139] Letter from Souvtchinsky to Yudina, 12 March 1962 (ibid., pp. 292–93 (p. 293)).
[140] *Mrakobesi* literally means 'demons of darkness'. Levitz explains that it was a 'popular derogatory term used in the Soviet Union to disparage political reactionaries and religious fanatics'. Letter from Stravinsky to Souvtchinsky, 14 February 1961 (ibid., pp. 289 and 313 n. 88).
[141] Letter from Souvtchinsky to Stravinsky, 21 February 1962 (ibid., p. 290). See also note 14.

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appearance there' and that 'if I don't go, I will upset many (which I don't want), for whom my appearance there is essential (and not just desirable — Yudina)'.[142]

Stravinsky's reasons for visiting the Soviet Union, then, were ultimately much more about pleasing officials than meeting Yudina and younger Soviet composers. And yet Souvtchinsky continues to play a double game, telling Yudina on 26 March 1962: 'Apparently, thanks to you, he has taken to heart the importance of this visit; he speaks of you in the best terms.'[143] But this is the same Stravinsky who, only weeks later, wrote to Souvtchinsky,

> I'm sending you this hysterical, 25-page letter by dear Yudina. Once again, I'm simply becoming afraid to travel there. I fear that I have neither enough strength nor nerves to bear this mixture of *admiration*, *provincialism*, *and* 'cultural exchanges' with Western Marxists.[144]

In less than a year, the prospect of linking up with Yudina had become, for Stravinsky, more of a repellent than an incentive.

This exposes the exploitative logic, whether intentional or not, underpinning Souvtchinsky's and Stravinsky's relations with Yudina. She was always more important as a means of promoting Stravinsky. And when it became clear that she held far less official sway than they initially thought, she remained effective as a devoted performer of his music, even if such devotion came at her own professional cost, as we have already seen regarding the Gnessin Institute. It also came at great financial cost: as well as regularly performing his music, Yudina painstakingly curated and personally funded the 'Stravinskyana' exhibition, hosted at the Leningrad House of Composers during his visit.[145]

By the time of Stravinsky's return to the Soviet Union, between 21 September and 11 October 1962, Yudina had become an afterthought. As Levitz puts it, she 'fell through the cracks' of the composer's visit, and as neither 'Stravinsky's close friend, nor a valued male competitor, nor an official representative of the state', she was 'excluded from Stravinsky's social calendar'.[146] His visit to the 'Stravinskyana' exhibit on 4 October was her one chance to interact with him substantially, though the structured nature of the guided walk through the House of Composers no doubt inhibited any form of intimate or free-flowing conversation.[147] Otherwise, Yudina

[142] Letter from Stravinsky to Souvtchinsky, 17 March 1962 (ibid., p. 293).
[143] Letter from Souvtchinsky to Yudina, 26 March 1962 (*Maria Youdina*, ed. by Collot, p. 414). Levitz makes this observation too, though this particular letter from Souvtchinsky to Yudina is not included in her selection; see Levitz, Penka, and Grabarchuk, 'Stravinsky's Cold War', p. 315 n. 117.
[144] Letter from Stravinsky to Souvtchinsky, 12 April 1962 (ibid., pp. 293–94 (p. 293)).
[145] For more on Yudina's 'Stravinskyana' exhibition, see Wilson, *Playing with Fire*, pp. 261–65.
[146] Levitz, Penka, and Grabarchuk, 'Stravinsky's Cold War', p. 300.
[147] Robert Craft recalled it as 'Yudina's night of glory', in which she escorted Stravinsky through the exhibit and subsequently listened to a performance of his Octet with him. His recollections of Yudina are full of needless ridicule, such as his comparison of Yudina to 'Bach without his wig'; see Igor Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Dialogues and a Diary 1963* (Faber & Faber, 1968), pp. 298–99. Yudina never warmed to Craft and took to calling him a 'walking number', and subsequently 'Number-Craft', in her correspondence, presumably a gesture towards what she felt to be his cold and abstract nature; letter from Yudina to the Souvtchinskys, 28 November 1962 (*Maria Youdina*, ed. by Collot,

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appears to have barely spent time with him.[148] She was devastated; she wrote to the Souvtchinskys directly after his visit to complain that Stravinsky

> was surrounded by a multi-person entourage the barbed wire of which was impossible to penetrate; add to this countless paparazzi, reporters, and also simply onlookers insolently barging in (to rehearsals), pseudo-artists, insolent musicians with stupid things to say, ladies of various ages with bouquets; the main thing is that I was in Leningrad almost the whole time preparing the exhibit, and when he was there himself— I was feverishly learning the Septet.[149]

Yudina had several activities planned for herself and Stravinsky, which included visits to Zagorsk, the Rublev and Scriabin museums in Moscow, and tea with her and Lina Prokofiev, but as she put it, 'Everything I planned didn't work out.'[150]

The wound festered over time as Stravinsky grew more distant from Yudina and his trip faded into the past, resulting in an emotional outpouring following her unreturned telephone call to him when he left for Milan with Vera Stravinsky and Robert Craft. It is worth reproducing large extracts of her letter to the Souvtchinskys of 22 July 1963 that detail this change of heart:

> *About I. F.*—— Perhaps the only correct way of living is: 'not to get offended'—— But it is impossible *not to be upset*—— I phoned Milan twice, at the Hotel Continental. At first I was told: 'We are expecting them, but they haven't arrived yet' (June 18); the second time: 'They have arrived but are rehearsing' (June 19); then I sent a telegram letter (because of the cheaper price), those take *twenty-four hours, no longer*, that was on the 20 or 21st [of June]. It was not returned to me—— that means *they received it*—— In it were congratulations, respects, and kisses *to all three*, a request for a 'little message' and my new address— all very detailed —— Until now he (I. F.) has always answered me.
>
> […]
>
> —— So, he 'exchanged' me with those who are at the helm—— I did everything that was possible and impossible—— and am no longer needed and, ergo, can be disregarded. When something like this happens to another, one can talk a lot; when it happens to oneself, one can only step aside and be silent—— To be honest, there were analogous touches when he was here, too, but I looked at them 'over the barriers,' but now I have somehow—— lost all desire—— no one should have to *aufbinden* one's friendship and one's—— understanding——[151]

On further reflection, Yudina told Souvtchinsky that her heart had 'grown cold' towards Stravinsky, concluding that 'by small, successive touches, his perspicacity and his "experience" allowed him to understand what my official situation really was here…

pp. 496–505 (p. 503)). According to Collot, it was Souvtchinsky who first dubbed him 'Number-Craft' (p. 505 n. 19).

[148] Yudina does note that Stravinsky once sent for her for lunch in Leningrad, but she was unsatisfied, noting that she 'did not succeed in steering the conversation onto more substantial tracks'; letter from Yudina to the Souvtchinskys, October 1962 (Levitz, Penka, and Grabarchuk, 'Stravinsky's Cold War', pp. 300–02 (p. 301)).

[149] Ibid., p. 300.

[150] Ibid., p. 301.

[151] Letter from Yudina to the Souvtchinskys, 22 July 1963 (ibid., pp. 306–07 (p. 306)).

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and yet he decided… to stay outside of it all… to keep his distance from me… given the situation, a genius of another calibre might have had precisely the opposite reaction!!'[152]

Yudina's fate was a particularly cruel one: her advocacy for Stravinsky, whose music she so faithfully and regularly performed, played no small part in her cultural ostracization and the repercussions she felt. And yet it was precisely because of her outsider status that the composer avoided spending any meaningful time with her. Once her initial utility for spreading his music was exhausted, and it became clear that she held no sway in the official musical circles of Khrennikov and Co., she was easily dispensed with — though her previous adoration for Stravinsky was not enough to blind her to the manner in which she was treated, as her later exchanges with Souvtchinsky make clear. The fallout Yudina experienced, while hardly the result of a maliciously designed plot by Stravinsky and Souvtchinsky to use and then exclude her, was certainly afforded by the combined musical and gendered hierarchy that animated their thinking: as a woman and a performer, she was always secondary, not only to the Union of Composers, but to the wider network of contemporary composition more generally — both of which, it hardly requires saying, were male-dominated. Yudina may not have understood this episode in those terms, but she felt its effects to the point of embitterment and disillusion — though by September 1963, in those last exchanges with Souvtchinsky about Stravinsky's visit, Yudina was reeling from another setback.

IV

The story of what could be called Yudina's avant-garde years came to an abrupt end in 1963. In late February, she flew to Khabarovsk in southeast Russia for a series of appearances, performing Beethoven's 'Emperor' Concerto on 24 February and giving a solo recital three days later, which consisted of works by Prokofiev, Shostakovich, Hindemith, and Stravinsky.[153] As part of this trip, Yudina was invited to the Khabarovsk School of Music, an occasion which proved catastrophic for her career: it resulted in her denunciation in an open letter intended for the Soviet newspaper *Izvestia*, signed by the faculty of the school on 7 March 1963 and spearheaded by Comrade Mirsky, the Director.[154] The accusations towards Yudina were several: first, that although she had been invited to give a recital at the faculty, she began by announcing categorically to a packed hall 'that she would not play and

[152] Letter from Yudina to the Souvtchinskys, 24–29 September 1963 (*Maria Youdina*, ed. by Collot, pp. 581–85 (pp. 582–83)). Souvtchinsky was either ignorant of just how profoundly the entire episode affected Yudina or tried to gaslight her into reversing her decision. 'Igor Fyodorovitch has already, in two letters, expressed his surprise that you have stopped corresponding with him', he wrote. 'Really, dear Maria Veniaminovna, why do you no longer write to him? I don't know what this correspondence consisted of, but I bitterly deplore this interruption, for Igor Fyodorovitch and for you. Is it possible that you blame I. F. for something? But there is *no point* in feeling outraged…'; letter from Souvtchinsky to Yudina, 16 February/9 April 1963 (ibid., pp. 546–49 (p. 546)).

[153] Ibid., p. 768.

[154] Letter from the Faculty of the Khabarovsk School of Music to the Editor of *Izvestia*, 7 March 1963 (ibid., pp. 535–41). All subsequent unreferenced quotations come from the body of this letter.

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would only speak', a decision that allegedly shocked those in attendance; second, that Yudina spoke 'with enthusiasm of foreign composers like Berg, Hindemith, Schoenberg, Stravinsky' but did not have 'a single kind word to say about Soviet music', with the exception of Volkonsky; third, that Yudina presented her 'extremely subjective' views on contemporary music as 'indisputable'; fourth, that she openly disparaged the music of Rachmaninoff; and fifth, that she requested permission 'to read three poems that turned out to be by Pasternak'.

What all of this amounted to was a condemnation on the basis of typical socialist realist logic: the letter described the Khabarovsk School as supportive of 'art for the people — in the name of the people' and 'united towards one main objective: to instil in the student a love of REALISTIC ART'. Yudina's purported goal, by contrast, was to distance the youth 'from the realistic positions of contemporary Soviet art'. But Mirsky delivered this accusation by throwing the gauntlet down to the authorities, in two ways. First, he suggested that the cultural 'Thaw' of the last few years had gone too far: 'at the present time,' the letter concludes, 'when the ideological struggle is becoming increasingly acute, when the enemies of communism are not afraid to spend billions to surreptitiously deploy their strategy of propagating bourgeois ideology — Soviet music propaganda cannot be left to chance.' But second, and more tellingly, he also pointed out that the more remote parts of Russia, such as the Far East, did not benefit from the same kind of musical enrichment as Moscow, Leningrad, or cities abroad. Mentioning the likes of Richter, Oistrakh, and Gilels, he asked, 'Is it not strange that these musicians, who play all over the world and regularly fly over Khabarovsk, do not allow the Far-East to benefit from their art?'

What is really going on in this letter, then, has much more to do with larger domestic tensions around artistic provision in east and west Russia than with a single musical event. Since the mid-1950s, it was widely felt that leading Soviet artists found international touring to be 'far preferable to tramping about the far reaches of the Soviet Union', as Kiril Tomoff puts it.[155] Seen in this light, Mirsky's letter was an opportunistic backlash, and the scapegoat was to be Yudina. Though the letter was not published in *Izvestia*, a copy was sent to Alexander Kholodilin, the head of the music division of the Committee for Artistic Affairs in the Ministry of Culture.[156] He wrote to Yudina requesting more information, and on 17 May 1963 she replied, rebutting several of the original letter's claims, but was unsuccessful in clearing her name.[157] Kholodilin handed her an indefinite ban on all public concert performances, a devastating outcome that placed enormous musical and financial restrictions on her.[158]

[155] Tomoff, *Virtuosi Abroad*, p. 131.

[156] Letter from the Faculty of the Khabarovsk School of Music, p. 541 n. 1. For more information on Kholodilin, see Laurel Fay, *Shostakovich: A Life* (Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 176 and 371.

[157] Letter from Yudina to Kholodilin, 17 May 1963 (*Maria Youdina*, ed. by Collot, pp. 541–45).

[158] To Marianna Souvtchinsky, Yudina wrote: 'Reading between the lines of your message, Marianna, I realise (or guess) that for you both the situation is not easy either, materially speaking… for me-.-.-.-.-.-.- it's a disaster… the move has put me in terrible debt; and it is precisely at this moment that, unexpectedly, I've been deprived of many sources of income…'; letter from Yudina to the Souvtchinskys, 22 July 1963 (ibid., pp. 569–76 (p. 571)). As the quote suggests, Yudina had recently

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In the end, the ban lasted for three years, far longer than she could have initially envisaged.[159] She never recovered her sustained focus on contemporary music.

Of the many documents that Yudina deposited in the Russian National Library in St Petersburg, there is one letter that Volkonsky sent to her in January 1962 that is especially illuminating. In fact, it is not the letter itself but a note that Yudina attached to it, which she wrote in 1965 and explicitly intended for posterity. In it, she addressed both her dismissal from the Gnessin Institute in 1960 and the performance of *Musica Stricta* which led to her ban from the Leningrad Philharmonia, but given the year, we know that Yudina wrote it from the wilderness of her larger concertizing ban that came on the back of the Khabarovsk denunciation. Speaking of Volkonsky's precarious position as a composer around the time of *Musica Stricta*, Yudina wrote that 'today, thankfully, everything is back in order… Not for me, however… Since this date, and also since I read two poems in concert as an encore [on 19 November 1961] […] my concert activity has been stopped.'[160] 'Everybody loses,' she lamented, 'both she who is rejected, and society.' It is in its conclusion a blistering indictment of how she was treated, and particularly of her colleagues at Gnessin, though she could equally have spoken of the faculty at Khabarovsk or indeed of Stravinsky. But couched in the middle of her note is a simple plea:

> that this fact [of her injustice], or rather the recollection of this fact, should also be transferred to the Manuscripts Department of the Russian National Library, because it is not so much a question of an event in my personal biography, as one 'of cultural history'.[161]

I wish to conclude in the spirit of Yudina's plea, both in relation to the Soviet context and in more general terms. In the Soviet 'Thaw', performers who chose to experiment with new music, western or otherwise, voluntarily accepted unusually demanding responsibilities to bring such music to life while also putting themselves in a position of vulnerability. From Leningrad to Khabarovsk, Yudina's journey in the 'Thaw' bears this out. Her championing of *Musica Stricta* and her commitment to Stravinsky's music required extraordinary efforts stretching across several years. Here, the usually mundane administrative practicalities of acquiring scores and booking venues became struggles in their own right. And that she suffered materially is borne out by the bare facts of her dismissal from the Gnessin Institute in 1960, her exclusion from the Leningrad Philharmonia in 1961, and her more general concertizing ban from the Ministry of Culture in 1963. In the final decade of her life, after almost forty years as a

moved to a new apartment on Rostovskaya Embankment across the river from the Kyiv station; see Wilson, *Playing with Fire*, p. 271.

[159] In late 1966, Yudina wrote to the Souvtchinskys to inform them that the ban had been lifted: 'Someone, for whatever reason, somehow, has lifted the "disgrace"'; letter from Yudina to the Souvtchinskys, November 1966 (*Maria Youdina*, ed. by Collot, pp. 651–52 (p. 651)). In those three years, Yudina's music-making had been restricted to recordings — of which she made several in that time, though of considerably 'safer' repertoire than she had played in 1959–63 — and to private affairs for which she was not paid.

[160] Note appended by Yudina to Volkonsky's letter to her, January 1962 (ibid., pp. 390–92 (p. 391)).

[161] Ibid.

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professor in various institutions, she was left without a stable academic post, having been made redundant on dubious grounds for the third time in her career. She was subsequently deprived of her other main possible source of income on the official concert circuit.[162]

Yudina's experiences also highlight the sheer unpredictability of the repercussions that performers could face for pushing the boundaries of what was musically permissible. Her Leningrad Philharmonia ban for performing *Musica Stricta* and reciting poetry exemplifies this in the respect that she had already performed the work multiple times with no pushback. And the repatriation of Stravinsky speaks to a kind of inversion of these conditions, in the sense that her loud advocacy of the composer's music became acceptable only because it changed in tandem with the official national position. But the Khabarovsk denunciation is the clearest example of this: here, Mirsky politically leveraged her appearance at the School of Music to fashion a sense of his institution's nationalist commitment, all as a precursor to condemning the cultural authorities' neglect of Russia's Far East. Perhaps even more than this, the Khabarovsk denunciation is a strong testament to the primacy of discourse over practice in the distribution of punishment: Yudina received a devastating ban not on the basis of performing contemporary western music, but of talking about it.

Clearly, Yudina existed at one end of the spectrum of persecution. Yet it is equally clear that there existed no fixed yardstick by which musical intransigence would be measured; rather, severe consequences arose from a confluence of circumstances largely out of the individual's control and explicable only in hindsight. There is nothing groundbreaking about this observation; it is built upon the ways in which Frolova-Walker, Fairclough, Zuk, and Schmelz have rethought Soviet musical life. But as a complement to compositional practice and reception, Yudina is an especially useful case study for thinking through the limits of musical performance during the 'Thaw' in this way, precisely because she so consistently sought those limits and was so inconsistently reprimanded for doing so.

At the same time, there is more at stake here than the Soviet 'Thaw'. I mapped out some of the broader discussion around the practice turn and music history at the beginning of this article, and the Stravinsky episode I have charted is a useful pivot in this respect, for two reasons. The first is because of how it spotlights gender. On his visit, Stravinsky's Soviet entourage was made up exclusively of valued male counterparts from the Union of Composers, and a similar gendered dynamic conditions the make-up of Yudina's correspondents from 1959 to 1963 (Souvtchinsky, Stravinsky, Messiaen, Boulez, Volkonsky, Stockhausen, Xenakis, to name only some). Yudina seems virtually unique as a woman moving in heavily male-dominated modernist musical circles, but this seems like a function of music history's male compositional biases as much as anything else, and recent work by scholars including Laura Hamer,

[162] It is worth mentioning that Yudina had twice previously been made redundant on dubious grounds: from the Leningrad Conservatory in 1930 for her religious beliefs and from the Moscow Conservatory in 1951 (at the height of the anti-Semitic 'anti-cosmopolitan' campaigns); see Wilson, *Playing with Fire*, pp. 94 and 215.

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Rhiannon Matthias, Matthew Head, Susan Wollenberg, Joe Davies, and Natasha Loges has tried to correct for some of the gendered erasure that has taken place.[163]

More often than not, it seems, such historical recovery prioritizes composers, and that points towards the other reason that the Stravinsky episode is useful: his views on performers. Years before Khrennikov met Stravinsky in Los Angeles and the prospect of his return to Russia became a serious one, it was Yudina who did the composer's bidding by playing his music in a country in which it remained outside the approved parameters of socialist realism. Yet this very bidding — the kind that came with its own risks — was not enough for Yudina to place herself on an equal footing with official Soviet composers when the émigré made his celebrated return. It was, in other words, a double-edged sword, but there is more to it than that. On the one hand, there is a power dynamic playing out in Yudina's fraught role of rehabilitating the émigré's reputation, but on the other, it is well documented that Stravinsky's musical philosophy — including his views on performers — has exerted a wider, long-lasting influence on delimited notions of agency and reproduction in the performance of classical music. Taruskin went as far as to argue that 'all truly modern musical performance […] essentially treats the music performed as if it were composed — or at least performed — by Stravinsky', and Gritten has more recently claimed that 'it remains fair to say that the discourse of western classical music performance is in large part a Stravinskyian discourse'.[164] And Stravinsky, of course, was only one of a larger roster of turn-of-the-century composers and musical thinkers to espouse such views, to which we could add Schoenberg, Adorno, Schenker, Ravel, and Hindemith for starters.[165]

This kind of thinking is not just a feature of twentieth-century musical values; it is entangled with the evolution of musicology itself and continues to be reproduced in music historiography. As Cook pointed out over twenty years ago,

[163] *The Cambridge Companion to Women in Music since 1900*, ed. by Laura Hamer (Cambridge University Press, 2021); *The Routledge Handbook of Women's Work in Music*, ed. by Rhiannon Mathias (Routledge, 2021); *The Cambridge Companion to Women Composers*, ed. by Matthew Head and Susan Wollenberg (Cambridge University Press, 2024). Joe Davies and Natasha Loges organized a conference entitled 'Women at the Piano, 1848–1970' that took place in March 2023 at the University of California, Irvine, out of which an edited collection entitled *Global Perspectives on Women Pianists* is forthcoming with Boydell & Brewer. For recent work on another pianist working in the context of avant-garde music, see Peter Asimov and Christopher Brent Murray, 'Yvonne Loriod and the Practice of Analytical Memory', *Music Analysis*, Early View (2024), doi:10.1111/musa.12235 [accessed 2 December 2024]

[164] Taruskin, 'The Pastness of the Present', p. 166; Gritten, 'Daring to Perform', p. 181.

[165] Cook has recounted Schoenberg's views on performers at length (see *Beyond the Score*, pp. 14–18) and elsewhere quotes Ravel's desire for his music to be 'played' rather than 'interpreted' ('Stravinsky Conducts Stravinsky', p. 178). Hindemith left no uncertainty about his views on performers: 'Even if performers of any kind — singers, players, conductors — were actually the demigods that many of them want us to think they are and some of them believe themselves to be, in reality they are, in respect to the current that flows from the composer's brain to the listener's mind, nothing but an intermediate station, a road-side stop, a transformer house, and their duty is to pass along what they received from the generating mind'; see Paul Hindemith, *A Composer's World: Horizons and Limitations* (Anchor Books, Doubleday & Company, 1961), p. 43.

> getting away from a model of history which takes its bearings from composers and their works — from a conception of music that makes it more like a document than an event, and from a conception of authorship that sees it as driving the historical process — is easier said than done.[166]

At the same time, this rethinking requires more than a change in our emphasis as historians: the marginalization of performers has gone hand in hand with a configuration of their musical work as a rather limited form of reproduction instead of the kind of creation from scratch, as Rink put it, that performance necessarily involves. 'Between the score as a script, the musical work as a virtual construct, and us,' urges Abbate, 'there lies a huge phenomenal explosion, a performance that demands effort and expense and recruits human participants, takes up time, and leaves people drained or tired or elated or relieved.'[167] It would be possible to revisit music history with a keen eye on the role of performers but with an understanding of musical performance that silences Abbate's explosion — that, in other words, is still conditioned by the paradigm of reproduction that has been so deeply challenged by the field of musical performance studies. For that matter, I might add that the existence of 'performance studies' as a separate scholarly ecosystem within music studies could easily serve to foster this tendency.

This means that what initially seems like a single issue is in fact two separate, overlapping issues, and that is why I have traced Yudina's specifically musical work while also exploring her role in the Soviet 'Thaw'. I used empirical data to make sense of her approaches to Volkonsky and Stravinsky, and I discussed these in terms of provocation and rigour respectively — in other words, hermeneutically. But I could equally have used Gritten's terms to add definition to the laboriousness of these processes. The freewheeling energy of Yudina's *Musica Stricta* reveals the indeterminacy at the core of her playing: we hear her pushing the performance in unplanned directions (even if that very unplannedness was perhaps itself the plan). It is, in Gritten's words, the process of ripening, of the performer coming into her own in the aesthetic act.[168] Likewise, the remarkable stringency across her Stravinsky recordings bears all the traits of Gritten's disciplinary exercises, from 'being able physically to execute embodied actions that result in the required sounds' to 'understanding expressive, stylistic, and structural aspects of the work' and her 'willingness to engage in dialogue with other interested parties about the music'.[169] Gritten applies this term to the practice room, but it is equally useful in this instance for thinking about how Yudina disciplined herself in the recording studio in conjunction with her sound engineer, Valentin Skoblo.[170]

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[166] Nicholas Cook with Anthony Pople, 'Introduction: Trajectories of Twentieth-Century Music', in *The Cambridge History of Twentieth-Century Music*, ed. by Nicholas Cook and Anthony Pople (Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 1–17 (p. 13).
[167] Abbate, 'Music — Drastic or Gnostic?', p. 533.
[168] Gritten, 'Daring to Perform', p. 188.
[169] Ibid., p. 183.
[170] There are several valuable testimonies left by Skoblo on working with Yudina included in Collot's volume. See, for instance, *Maria Youdina*, ed. by Collot, pp. 319, 697, and 736.

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My modest intervention approaches nothing of Born's ambitions towards 'an always impossible analytical totality', and perhaps Abbate would consign my contribution to the pile of writing on musical performance that 'misses a mark not so easy to define'.[171] But for history? The usual platitudes — that 'no scholar can include every actor in a historical account', that the important question concerns the assumptions that underpin the selectivity of any study — will be of less import than the reminder that there is much more at stake in intellectually turning towards practice than a simple shift in recognition or emphasis.[172] To stay with that composer/performer dualism for one final moment, if only as we jettison it: it is now all too apparent that to write the history of western music from the perspective of performers but without its composers would be futile. Upholding the inverse of this principle as a historical goal could be a useful starting point for checking composer-centric impulses, especially when the work of performers is documented (somehow). But that is all it is: a starting point, an invitation to peer onto only as much of music history's performative underbelly as we actively stretch our necks to see.

[171] Born, 'For a Relational Musicology', p. 224; Abbate, 'Music — Drastic or Gnostic?', p. 508.
[172] Piekut, 'Actor-Networks in Music History', p. 210.

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