
Special Section Introduction: Light from an Extinct Star: Music and Technology in the Former Soviet Union

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Light from an Extinct Star: Music and Technology in the Former Soviet Union

Just as Columbus opened America to Europe, *Leonardo* has attempted to open aspects of the former Soviet Union to its readers. However, in this case, the new access is actually the transmission of a farewell, a message that reaches readers as the light of an extinct star reaches earth.

The last issue of *Leonardo* (Volume 27, Number 5) was devoted entirely to articles on art, science and technology from the former Soviet Union. Over years of preparation spanning the breakup of the Soviet Union, the volume of materials outgrew the limits of the special issue, and a decision was made to publish the articles on music separately in this special section.

There are only four articles in this section, and they cannot provide a complete picture of the processes that new technologies introduced to the musical culture of the former Soviet Union. However, while the collection is incomplete, it does serve as striking evidence of a situation that has now been erased from our former country's musical landscape. It also records some of the contributions this country made to solving problems in the arts, sciences and technology.

The section begins with an article on Lithuanian composer M.K. Čiurlionis, pioneer of "musical painting," who possessed a unique combination of musical and artistic talents. We believe him to be one of the predecessors—along with Scriabin and Kandinsky—of a new synthesis of music and the visual arts. Since the leading expert in Čiurlionis, Vitautas Landsbergis, entered politics and climbed to the presidency in the newly independent Lithuania, the relay-race baton in the field of research on Čiurlionis was taken over by Russian musicologist V. Fedotov, who lives in Petrozavodsk, the capital of the Republic of Karelia. The fact that Fedotov took over from Landsbergis illustrates one of the unquestionable achievements of the Soviet period—internationalism. The national situation in the Soviet Republics was once similar to the "melting pot" in the United States. It will be a pity if the breakup of the Union results in a loss of this achievement.

S. Kreichi's article reports on experimentation in the field of electronic music. Kreichi is Czech by origin and lives in Moscow. He is educated in both technology and music. He has written extensively on Russian inventor Y. Murzin and has also developed uses for the synthesizer that Murzin invented: first as a tool for music composition, and later—with the advent of Kreichi's work at Moscow State University—as a technical aid for investigations in the field of experimental phonetics (speech synthesizing, investigations of the language of dolphins, and so on). Both developmental directions are in decay now due to a lack of interest, and a unique instrument waits for its place in the museum of electronic music yet to be created.

Ukrainian V. Ulianich is a composer who lives in Moscow and is involved in introducing the computer into musical creativity. Experiments and investigations in computers and music began during the last years of the Soviet Union's existence. Laboratories and electronic music departments opened in conservatories in Leningrad, Kiev, Novosibirsk and Sverdlovsk. The All-Union Electronic Music Association was formed by composers using computers to create music. All-Union conferences were held many times in Tallinn, the capital of Estonia. I was once again invited to take part in last year's conference, but did not attend: getting an Estonian visa turned out to be a more complicated procedure than obtaining an American one.

Musical psychology is presented in an article by lecturer L. Grigoryan, from Armenia (one of the Transcaucasian states), who was formerly a professor at the Conservatory of Yerevan (the capital of Armenia). He has been involved for many years in developing the use of color visualization as a method of musical instruction. Grigoryan sent me a short article in 1991, after which I lost every connection with him due to the war. My letters were returned marked "no communication by mail is available." I later found him in Moscow, which was flooded by refugees from the long-suffering southern republics, whose leaders had interpreted freedom as the possibility of shooting one's neighbor. But the refugee's life in Moscow is not so sweet either. L. Grigoryan disappeared again. It was only

after a long search that I discovered he was living in Madrid, and was finally able to forward correspondence concerning publication of his article. This relocation pattern may not appear strange to a citizen of the Western world. But, in this case, it is a trajectory of tragedy.

The debris from the breakup of the Soviet Union has not always fallen in its proper place, and some have experienced pain as a result. One cannot obtain freedom for free. We are coming to understand that life is not over and that there are more possibilities for making art now, although this understanding is often accompanied by nostalgia for the comparatively Victorian Brezhnev era. The creative friendship of all "Soviet" researchers and artists will also last, despite new borders and customs. The Soviet Union does not exist anymore, but the union of our souls remains.

This parade of internationalism would not be complete without a description of myself. I am Tatar by nationality. Many people do not know that such a nation exists and have no concept of it until one mentions Genghis Khan. Kazan, the capital of the Republic of Tatarstan, is often assumed to be a town somewhere in Siberia. In fact, it is situated on the banks of the Volga, not far from Moscow.

The group that I represent, the SKB "Prometei"—named in honor of the light-musical composition *Prometheus*, by Russian composer Scriabin—has been working in Kazan for over 30 years. Ten of our all-union "Light-Music" conferences and festivals have been held in Kazan. "Prometei" produced a performance of *Prometheus* that incorporated light for the first time in the Soviet Union in 1962. The groups' fields of interest have multiplied since then, and include many other new technologically based arts. (*Leonardo* has often informed its readers about our work in these fields.) Our group has now been transformed into a Scientific and Research Institute of Experimental Aesthetics associated with the Academy of Sciences of Tatarstan and Kazan State Technical University.

After the success of our experiment with the Special Issue and this musical extension of it, we have now begun discussing the possibility of compiling an annual collection of articles, which we would publish through the Academy of Sciences of Tatarstan. My hope is that, if its readers display interest in such Promethean issues, we can also think up further forms of collaboration with *Leonardo*.

BULAT M. GALEYEV
Leonardo International Co-Editor

Editor's Note: Levon Grigoryan is now living in Munich (as of August 1994).

A Message of Congratulations

We consider *Leonardo's* publication of the special issue "Prometheus: Art, Science and Technology in the Former Soviet Union," prepared by our Kazan scientists and artists in cooperation with the *Leonardo* editorial staff, to be a momentous event. Before our very eyes, a small group of students keen on Scriabin's *Light Symphony* ideas grew into a scientific team, which first became an All-Union Center and has now been transformed officially into the Scientific and Research Institute for Experimental Aesthetics "Prometei," attached to the Academy of Sciences of Tatarstan and the Kazan State Technical University (KGTU), named after A.N. Tupolev. We hope that creative contacts between the "Prometei" team and *Leonardo* become stronger, perhaps even including possible publication of such joint editions annually. We send our hearty congratulations on this unique example of international cooperation under global *perestroika* conditions and our greetings to *Leonardo* readers in all countries of the world.

M. KH. KHASANOV
President of the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Tatarstan