

Mikkonen, Simo (University of Jyväskylä, FI) & Winzenburg, John (Hong Kong Baptist University) & Yang, Hon-Lun (Hong Kong Baptist University)

Commentator: Björn Heile

Panel 1b / Wednesday June 1, 4:30–6:30 pm

The Intersection of Diaspora and Cosmopolitanism: Russian Émigré Musicians' Contribution to Cosmopolitan Shanghai in the Inter-war Years

In the 1930s and 1940s, Shanghai grew into a metropolis recognized for its importance in the development of Chinese new music with a Western-format. Shanghai had also become a major Russian diasporic community, home for tens of thousands of refugees, which formed the largest non-Chinese population in the city. Russian émigré musicians played an important role in the city's cosmopolitan cultural life and were instrumental in shaping Chinese musical modernity.

This panel examines the intersection of diaspora and cosmopolitanism, examining how the Russian community contributed to important layers of relationships between its Russian and Chinese communities. Through analysis of music organizations, musicians, musical activities, and music compositions, it will demonstrate how Shanghai served as a rare, early microcosm for the East-West musical interaction that has since occurred on a larger scale as a result of globalization. Such can be viewed as a form of cosmopolitanism.

The proposed papers will discuss the following topics: 1) the formation of the Shanghai Russian diaspora and its émigrés' contribution to cosmopolitan Shanghai through the production of ballet and operetta as well as other theatrical works that for them was not only cosmopolitan but also identity defining; 2) the intricate relationship between the Russian community and the Shanghai Municipal Orchestra, the politics of programming Russian works in cosmopolitan Shanghai; and 3) the experimental attempts illustrated by Alexander Tcherepnin and Aaron Avshalomov that paved the way for further development of Chinese new music.

Shanghai's Russian musical intelligentsia, 1919–1949: Russian culture in a cosmopolitan context

Simo Mikkonen, University of Jyväskylä

The majority of Russian emigration that escaped Russia in 1917–1922 headed west. Russians were a major artistic and cultural force in interwar Europe from Paris to Prague to Berlin. Russian emigration to China, however, has not received proper attention in literature, even if its influence was by no means of lesser importance. While Russians formed the biggest non-Asian nationality in Shanghai, little research exists on this community and its impact. This is a major lack for several reasons. Firstly, the influx of Russians transformed the cityscape making it a major artistic center in the whole Far East. Secondly, Russian pedagogues, composers, and musicians had an influence on Chinese classical musical tradition. Thirdly, Shanghai's tens of thousands of Russians form an interesting community to study, existing in a city with several million inhabitants.

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Shanghai Russians came to dominate the artistic scene especially in the 1930s and through WWII. Yet, instead of one community, Russians were far from united and there were several features dividing the community into smaller units. In addition to national and political lines, one factor was attitude towards Russia and Russian culture. Many in the artistic community had a cosmopolitan outlook, mingling both, with other Europeans and Chinese, while others aimed at preserving what they considered to be genuine Russian culture, free from Bolshevist influences. Despite political differences, Russians effectively established Shanghai's first opera, ballet and operetta that remained active throughout the 1930s and 1940s. Audiences of these establishments were distinctively cosmopolitan. In their repertory, however, Russians mixed cosmopolitan repertory with traditional Russian works.

This paper uses primarily numerous Russian language newspapers and magazines published by Shanghai Russians, mixing them with some personal archival collections. Its aim is to present an overview of Russian activities in Shanghai's developing and cosmopolitan arts scene.

Diaspora and Cosmopolitanism: the Programming Politics of the Shanghai Municipal Orchestra's Russian Concerts

Hon-Lun Yang, Hong Kong Baptist University

Emigration is a complex and multi-faceted phenomenon for both the émigré community as well as the emigre's adopted country. This is no doubt the case with the more than 30,000 Russians landed in Shanghai since the early 1920s who formed a diaspora in semi-colonial Shanghai. As the experience of any diaspora prior and after, music played an important role in how the émigrés maintained a sense of self-identity and communal cohesion. But at the same time, music also helped such a group reach out to other communities. In that regard, the Russian refugee musicians in Shanghai were no doubt crucial in defining cosmopolitan Shanghai, a city of 'worldliness,' co-inhibited by an array of international residents, one receptive to all forms of innovations and experimentations.

While Russian musicians contributed to Shanghai's musical scene in many different ways, this paper focuses on their connections to the prestigious Shanghai Municipal Orchestra (hereafter the SMO), the first professional orchestra in China and the best in Asia, and also an icon of Shanghai's cosmopolitanism. While Russians made up more than half of SMO's members at any time after the mid-1920s, a good number of the SMO concerts featured Russian soloists and Russian compositions. Through tracing the trajectory of such events in a span of two decades by looking into the orchestra's concert programs, meeting minutes, concert payment records, and the conductor and other administrative personnel's internal communications, etc. as well as concert reviews in Russian, English, and Chinese newspapers, this paper will examine the politics behind such concerts. It will argue that beyond the facile cosmopolitan claims, one is not to

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overlook the importance of political-economy, particularly how high-brow ideals of cosmopolitanism were intertwined with low-brow politics of pragmatism compounded by race and class issues.

“Eurasian” and “Almost Chinese”: The Musical Experiments of Alexander Tcherepnin and Aaron Avshalomov

John Winzenburg, Hong Kong Baptist University

Alexander Tcherepnin and Aaron Avshalomov, though both Russian, came from widely divergent backgrounds and did not typify the majority of Shanghai’s Russian community of the 1930s. Tcherepnin was an internationally renowned composer-pianist from St. Petersburg. Avshalomov grew up in a Jewish merchant family along the Siberian-Chinese border. However, both became well known for their experimental Chinese-Western musical compositions, which were enhanced by their close interaction with Chinese artists.

Tcherepnin’s international stature inspired younger Chinese students of Western music. His connections with influential members of the Shanghai community and his involvement in a seminal Chinese composition competition for Chinese students at the National Conservatory in 1935 served as vehicles for promoting his mainly piano compositions featuring Chinese characteristics. Aaron Avshalomov’s network centering on the Shanghai Municipal Orchestra and his profound friendship with leading Chinese intellectuals and musicians played a crucial part in his musical transculturation. His cultivation of hybrid symphonic compositions and stage works served as models of debate in the question of musical-dramatic reform and anticipated compositional trends of the global era.

This paper compares the creative approaches and effects on modern Chinese music by the two composers. I argue that Tcherepnin and Avshalomov together had a lasting impact in Shanghai and beyond as a result of their high-profile performances and the unusually close relationships they forged with Chinese musicians during their China sojourns. Though their efforts contrasted in terms of genres, media, and performer networks, they both pursued, with some degree of success, a similar cultural-aesthetic goal: the development of a new form of Chinese music through the selective blending of Chinese and Western musical styles.

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Simo Mikkonen is Research Fellow of the Academy of Finland and an adjunct professor of Russian history at the Department of History and Ethnology, University of Jyväskylä, Finland. His primary research interests include the cultural, international and transnational relations of the Soviet Union, with particular emphasis on artistic networks. He has also conducted studies about the Russian emigration. He has previously published the monograph *State Composers and the Red Courtiers. Music, Ideology and Politics in the Soviet 1930s* (Mellenpress 2009), edited the volume *Beyond the Curtain: Entangled Histories of Cold War Europe* (Berghahn, 2015), and *Music, Art and Diplomacy. East-West Cultural Interactions and the Cold War* (forthcoming, Ashgate, 2016). He has also authored several articles and chapters, including “Exploiting the Exiles: The Soviet Emigration in US Cold War Strategy”, *Journal of Cold War Studies* (Summer 2012) and “Winning Hearts and Minds? Soviet Musical Intelligentsia in the Struggle Against the US During the Early Cold War”, in *Twentieth Century Music and Politics* (Ashgate 2013).

John Winzenburg is an associate professor of music at Hong Kong Baptist University, where he conducts the Cantoria Hong Kong and the HKBU Choir. His international publications include *Perspectives of New Music*, Palgrave Macmillan, *Twentieth-Century China*, *Asian Music*, CHIME, and the *Journal of the Central Conservatory of Music*. Winzenburg is also the editor of the Edition Peters anthology *Half Moon Rising: Choral Music from Mainland China, Hong Kong, Singapore and Taiwan*.

Hon-Lun Yang is Professor of Music at Hong Kong Baptist University. Her research interest focuses on East-West musical encounters and musical transnationalism. She is the author of over 30 articles in such journals as *Asian Music* (2010), *International Review of Aesthetics and Sociology of Music* (2011), etc. and books chapters in titles such as *Music and Protests in 1968* (Cambridge University Press, 2013), *Music and Politics* (Ashgate 2013), etc. She has just finished co-edited a volume with Michael Saffle entitled *East-West Musical Encounters* (University of Michigan Press) and is currently working on a tri-author book (with Simo Mikkonen and John Winzenburg) on Russian musicians in Shanghai.