

How Can Music Be Socialist Realist?



Yuri Pimenov et al., The Sports Parade, 1939



Isaak Dunaevsky's music to Circus (1936 film by Grigory Aleksandrov)

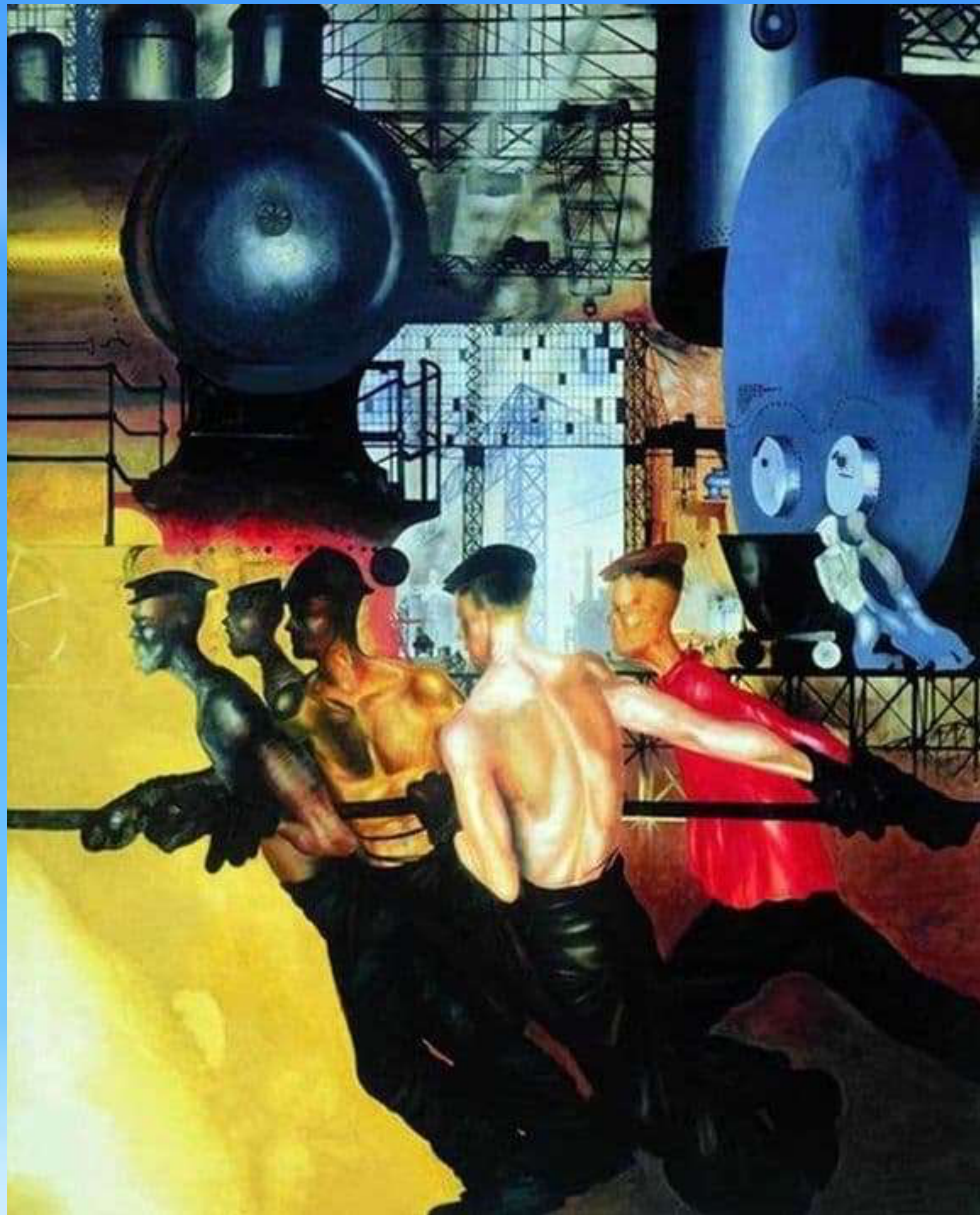
**‘I DON’T KNOW ANOTHER COUNTRY
WHERE ONE CAN BREATHE AS FREELY AS
HERE...’**

- **Wasn't Socialist Realism just a power game?**
- **Why denigrate perfectly nice pieces of music by using this label?**
- **Similar music was written at the same time in other parts of the world, so why use a special term?**
- **Let's forget Socialist Realism like a bad dream**





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Let There Be Heavy Industry, 1927



New Moscow, 1937



Morning Shopping, 1951

From the Yuri Pimenov Exhibition Catalogue (2021)

WERE THE REASONS FOR THIS TURNAROUND ENTIRELY PERSONAL?

PERHAPS NOT - [WE SHOULD KEEP IN MIND] VARIOUS NEW AESTHETIC TRENDS, THE "ZEITGEIST", THE UNAVOIDABLE ARRIVAL AND ESTABLISHMENT OF ALTERNATIVE IDEAS, WHICH NO ARTIST COULD IGNORE. IT HAS BEEN OBSERVED THAT ARTISTIC DEVELOPMENTS [IN RUSSIA] COINCIDED, ON THE WHOLE, WITH DEVELOPMENTS IN EUROPEAN CULTURE. FOR THE ARTIST, TUNING INTO A NEW SENSIBILITY WHICH IS "IN THE AIR", AND TRANSFORMING IT INTO AN IMAGE, IS AN IMPERATIVE BEYOND EXPLANATION, SOMETHING THAT IS ALMOST IRRATIONAL.

- proletarian realism (Lunacharsky in 1906, in relation to literature)
- social realism (Lunacharsky in 1907, in relation to literature and particularly Maxim Gorky)
- new social realism (Lunacharsky in the 1920s, in relation to the visual arts)
- **socialist realism** (not proletarian, not communist – devised by Stalin in conversation with Ivan Gronskey, early May 1932)

history of the term

- **socialist realism** used first time in the press 23 May 1932
- Gronskey: We must pose the problem of method, but not in an abstract manner: it is not that a writer has to pass a course in dialectical materialism first before he can write. Our principal demand is that the writers write the truth, and truthfully reflect our reality, which is itself dialectical. Therefore the main method of Soviet literature is the method of **socialist realism**.
- Officially promulgated at the First Congress of Soviet Writers in August 1934

history of the term



Тов. И. М. Гронский

обстановке, о чем свидетельствуют пере-хлестывания «На литпосту» в отноше-нии Кольцова, Григорьева и др. Оратор критикует также доклад т. Кирилова в той части, где докладчик подвергал кри-тике последние номера «На литпосту», считая, что эта критика была недоста-точной.

— Что достигается тем поворотом, ко-торый произвела партия? Прежде всего, он должен включить коммунистов, рас-ширить их влияние на все слои писа-тельства. Коммунисты должны повести за собой всех писателей, помогая им, бережно к ним относясь, критикуя, но не командуя. Основная же задача — выращивать кадры, обеспечить все ус-ловия для этого роста, для подлинного творчества.

— До последнего времени очень много писалось деклараций, много разговари-вали о методах, но разговаривали схо-ластически, абстрактно. Было очень мно-го группочек, но мало теоре-тического соревнования. А надо боль-ше заниматься литературой, твор-чеством. Вопрос о методе нужно ставить не абстрактно, не подходить к этому де-лу так, что писатель должен сначала пройти курсы по диалектическому ма-териализму, а потом уже писать. Ос-новное требование, которое мы пред'яв-ляем к писателям, — пишите правду, правдиво изображайте нашу действи-тельность, которая сама диалектична. Поэтому основным методом советской литературы является метод социалисти-ческого реализма.

but in music?



A. Samokhvalov, *The Appassionata (Builders of Communism)*, 1967

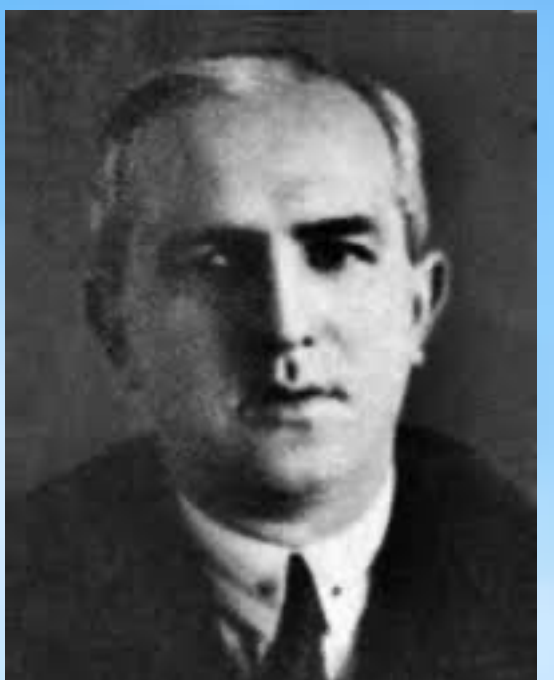
- A number of articles came out in 1933-34, proposing solutions for how to apply Socialist Realism to music

but in music?

- The first and possibly most important of them was by Bolesław Przybyszewski
- Talks about socialist realism as style as well as “method”
- “In comparison with realism in literature and the other arts, music is greatly restricted in its ability to represent reality”: represents types rather than concrete, unique phenomena
- “Socialist realist music must be programmatic in the broadest sense of the word”
- The concept of “musical image” (based on the Marxist “theory of reflection”, where consciousness reflects the material world in “images”)
- Calls to study the “realist” music of the past, which includes almost everything
- Includes folk music and folk-based art music in the category of most obvious realism

Boleslav Pshibyshevskiy, “K voprosu o sotsialisticheskom realizme v muzyke: neskol’ko tezisov”, *Sovetskoye iskusstvo* (26 May 1933), 2.

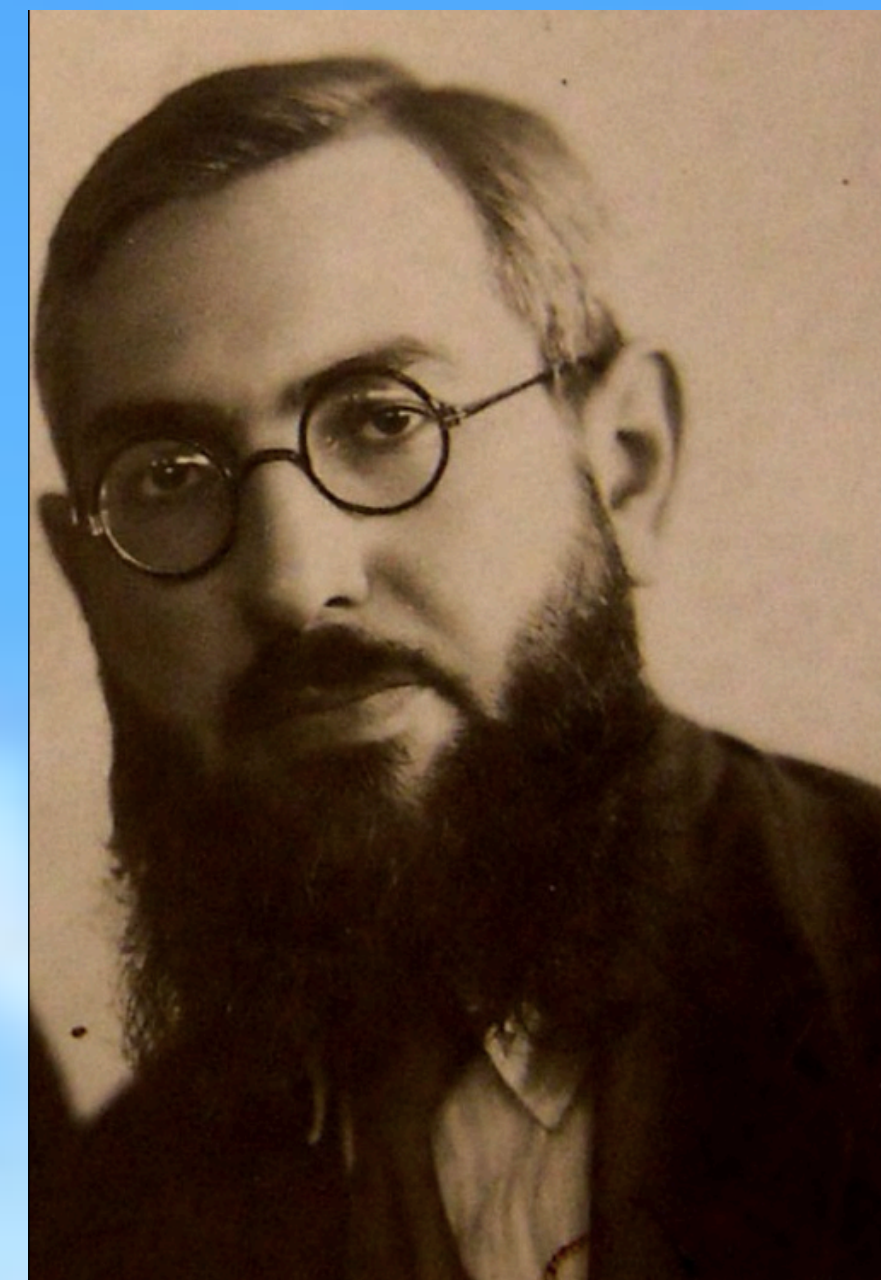
but in music?



- Another important theoretical article was “On Realism in Music” by Roman Gruber
- Suggests that Engels’s idea of the “typical” in realism can be applied to music: the most “typical” melodies which we may perceive as banal (Schubert, Bizet, Verdi) are in fact realistic
- Suggests that absolute/pure music can potentially be more useful, as it can convey class ideology to the listener a more subtle way

R.I. Gruber, “O realizme v muzyke”, Sovetskaya Muzyka, No. 6 (1934)

but in music?



- From Andrei Zhdanov's speech
- Subject matter, images, language to be derived from contemporary Soviet life
- Literature should be optimistic in essence (as belonging to the progressive class)
- Not "objective reality", but "reality in its revolutionary development"
- Not afraid of the charge of being "tendentious": always political
- Revolutionary romanticism should be a component: supreme spirit of heroic deeds and magnificent future prospects

congress of soviet writers

- From Andrei Zhdanov's speech
- Technique/skill are extremely important, the quality of the work needs to be there
- There is a need to select all the best that has been created in this sphere by all previous epochs.

congress of soviet writers



ТЕХНИКА-
МОЛОДЕЖИ 9
1952
ЖУРНАЛ ЦКВЛКСМ

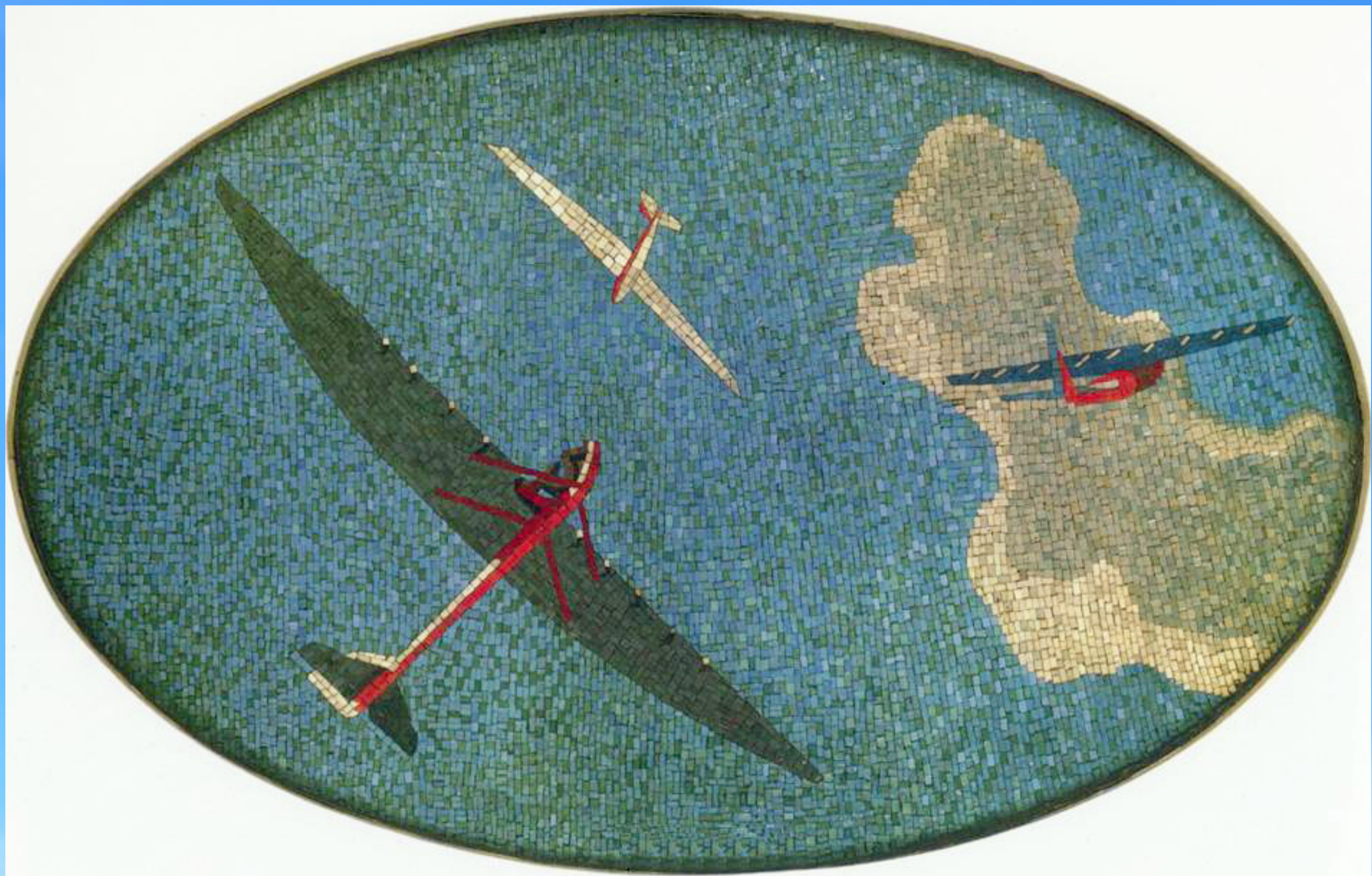
Palace of Soviets as envisioned in 1932



Neo-Renaissance architecture of the Soviet canals



Neo-Renaissance architecture of the Soviet canals



Alexander Deineka's mosaics, the Mayakovskaya station of the Moscow metro



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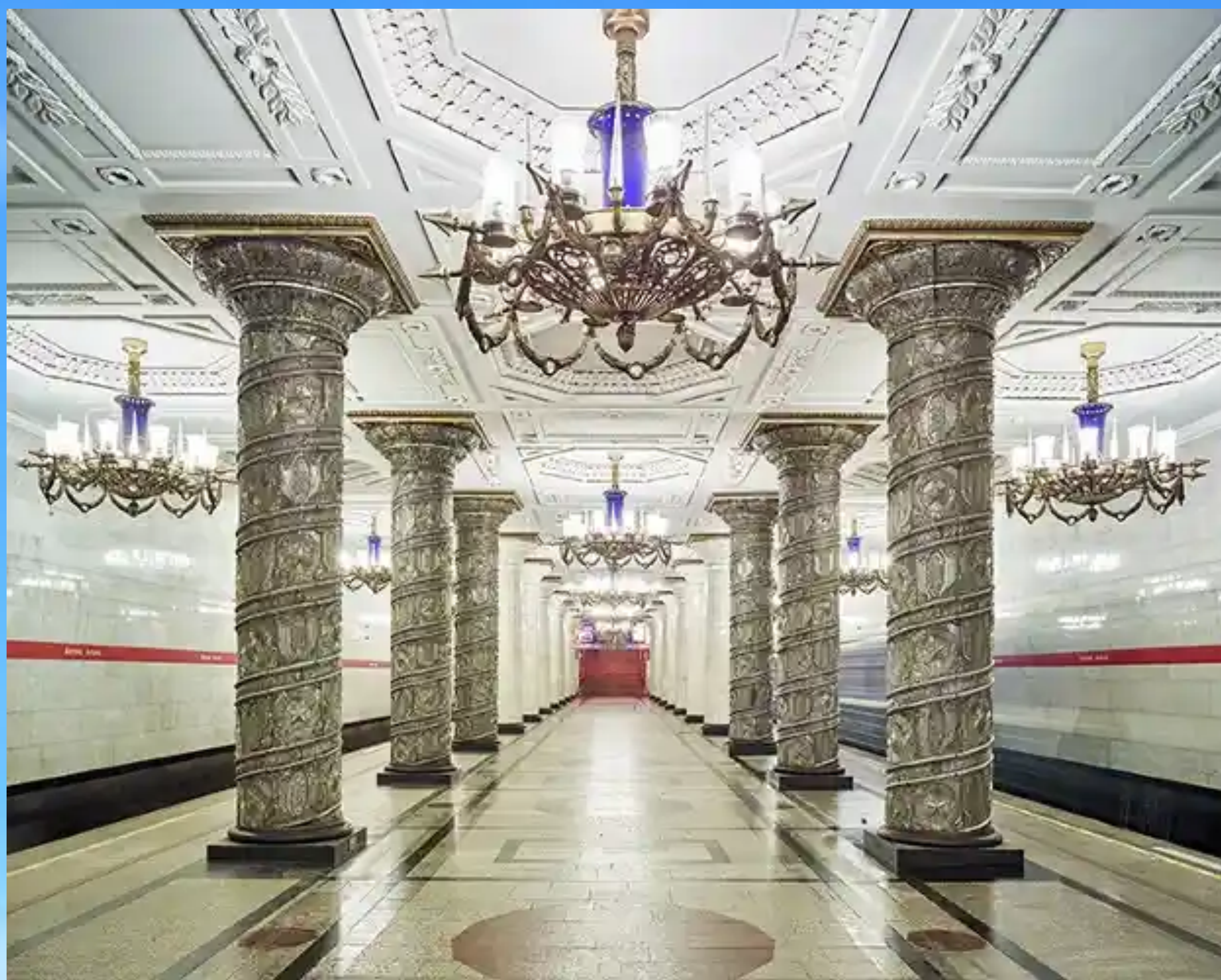


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Sverdlov Square (Teatralnaya) metro station in Moscow, 1938



Porcelain figures on the ceiling of Teatralnaya station



Avtovo station in Leningrad/St Petersburg (1955)



Alexander Gerasimov, Stalin and Voroshilov in the Kremlin (1938)

- Conservative forms, eclectic styles (Romantics, Russian classics with a bit of modernisation)
- Neoclassicism - as long it is more “classical” than “modernist”
- Optimistic endings
- Virtuosity, especially concertos
- Folk materials, as long as they are not presented in a modernist way
- “Organic” development rather than montage - sign of “quality” composition
- The presence of a narrative

musical socialist realism?



Lev Knipper

Symphony No. 4, “Song of the Komsomol Fighter” (1933)



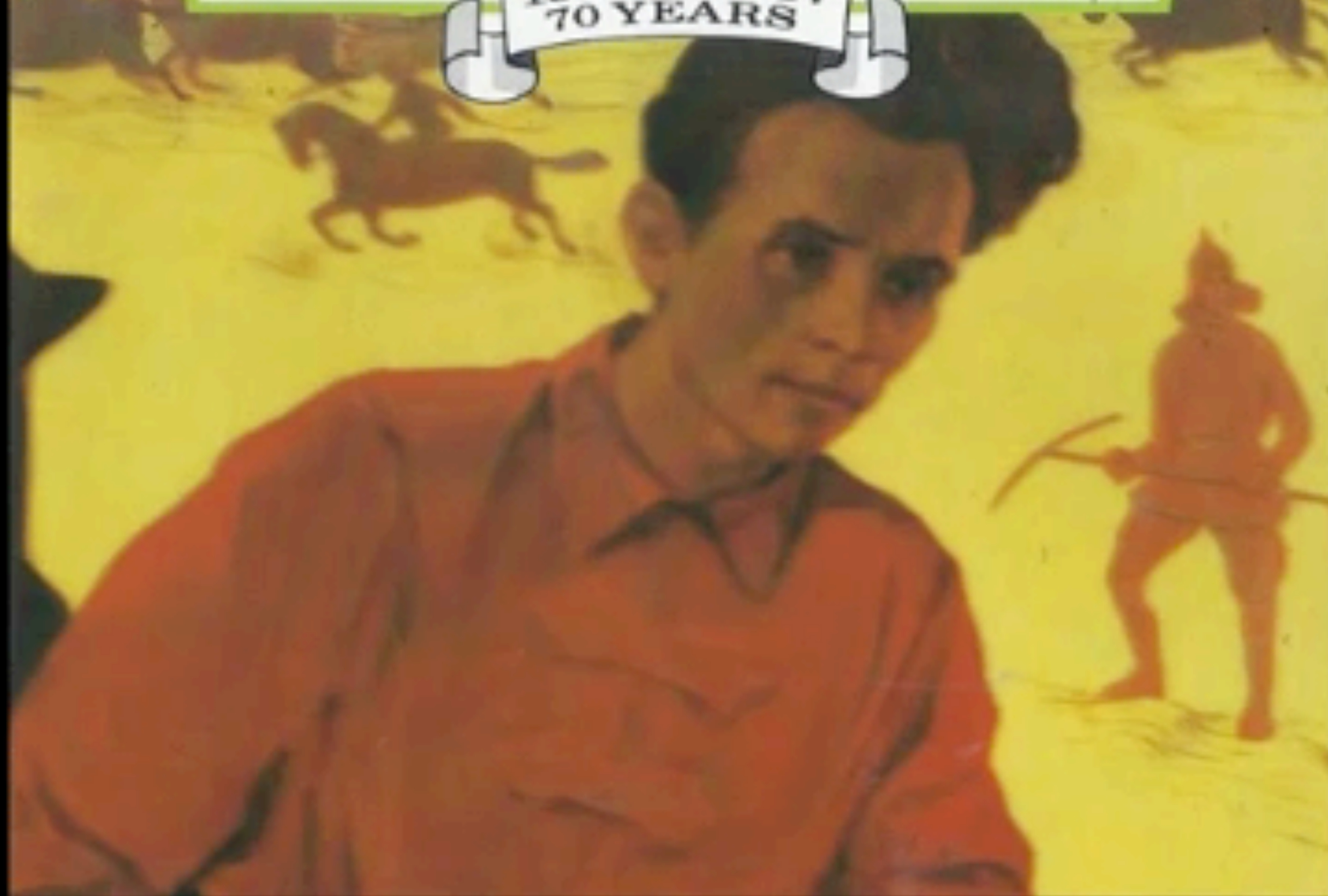
Paul Robeson sings Meadowlands

OLYMPIA

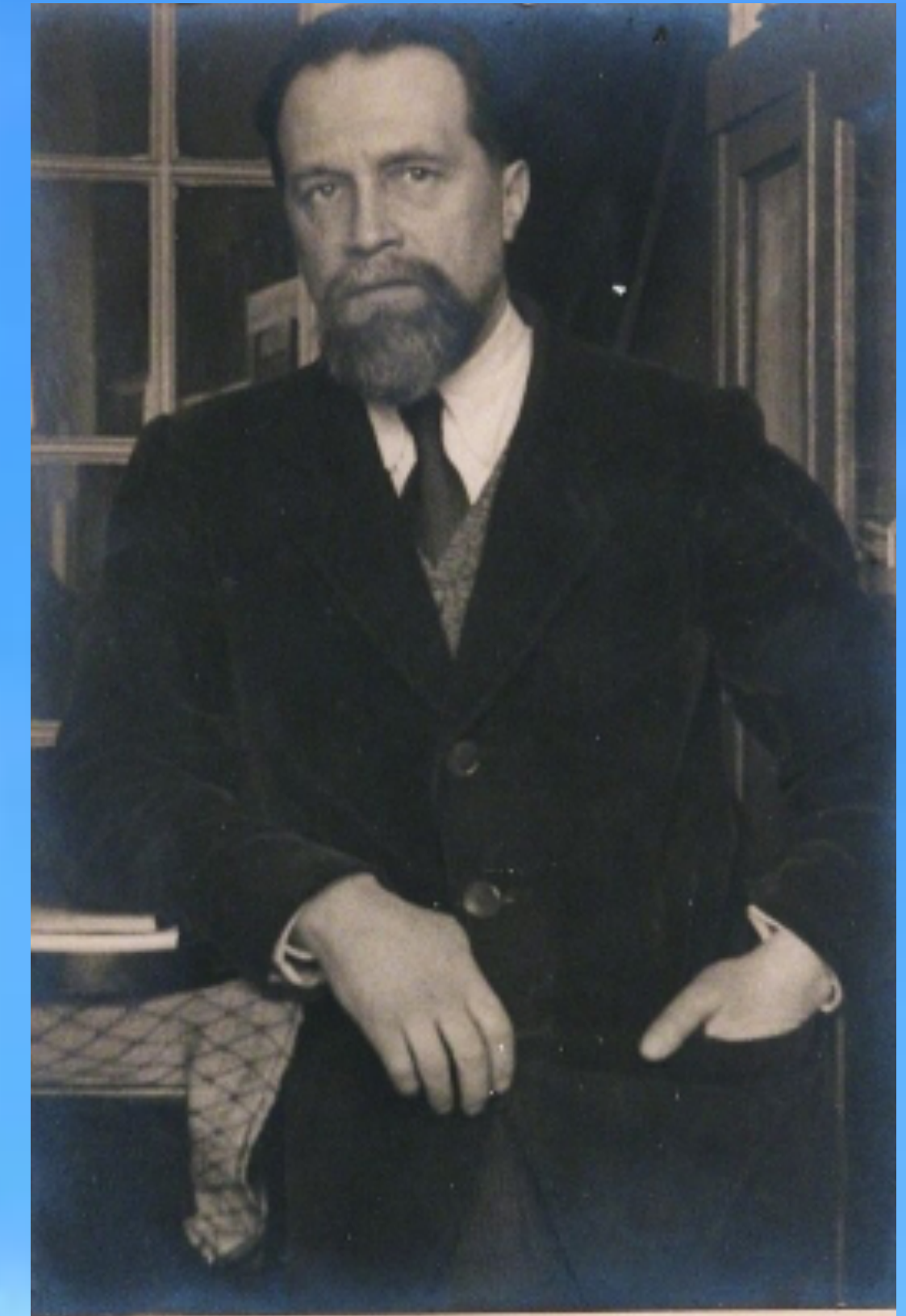
GLIERE · KNIPPER

GLIERE "THE RED POPPY"
BOLSHOI THEATRE ORCHESTRA, Y. FAYER
KNIPPER SYMPHONY NO. 4 OP. 41
SOLOISTS AND MOSCOW S.O. V. DUDAROVA

1917-1987
70 YEARS



Symphony No. 12 (1931)



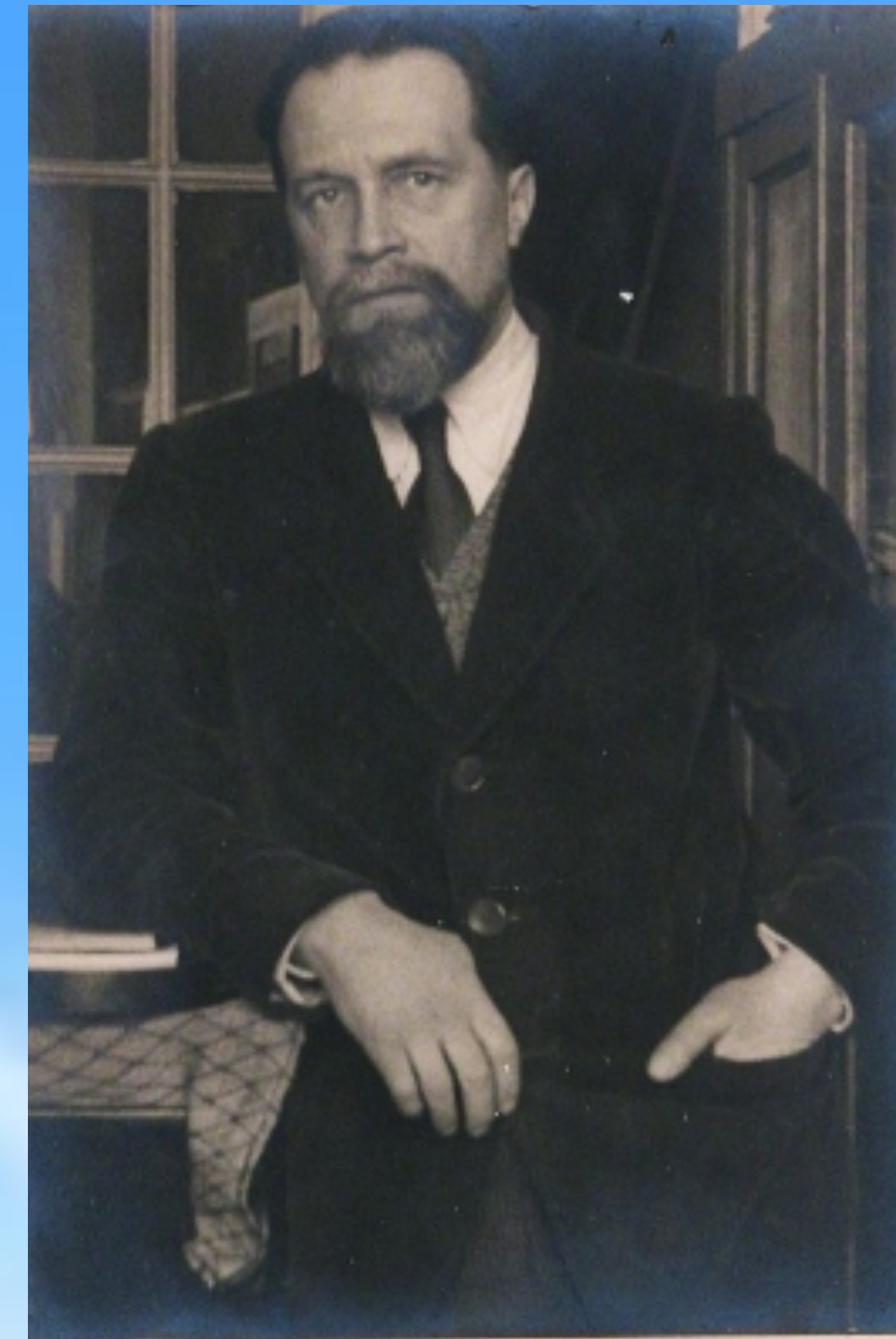
Nikolai Myaskovsky



N.YA. [MYASKOVSKY'S INITIALS], WHAT WOULD YOU THINK OF A TOPIC LIKE THIS FOR YOUR SYMPHONY?

SOWING THE SEED.

THE NEW MEN COME OUT TO FIGHT NATURE, NOT JUST AS INDIVIDUALS, BUT NOW AS A COLLECTIVE, AND THEIR ATTITUDE TO NATURE IS ALSO DIFFERENT. YOU COULD BUILD A SYMPHONY OUT OF THIS: FROM THE SUFFERINGS OF ENDLESS TOIL THROUGH TO A JOYFUL AND INSPIRED COLLECTIVE CONSTRUCTION. THIS, IN MY OPINION, IS A GREAT TOPIC.



Симфония № 12 Symphonie

1.

H. MSJKOBCKHИ
N. MIASKOWSKY *op. 35*

Andante

Fl. Piccolo

Flauti 1. 2.

Oboi 1. 2.

Cor. Inglese

Clar. 1. 2.
in B

Clar. Basso

Fagotti 1. 2.

Trombe 1. 2.
in B

3.

Cori in F
1. 2.

3. 4.

Tromboni 1. 2.

Tromb. 3
e Tuba

Timpani

Triangolo

Tamb. mill.

Piatti

Gr. Cassa

Andante

Violini I.

Violini II

Viola

V. Celli

C. Bassi

Presto agitato. (Allegro)

Fl. Piccolo.

Flauti 1.2.

Oboi 1.2.

Cor. Ingi.

Clarineti in B \flat 1.2.

Clarinetto Basso in B \flat .

Fagotti 1.2.

1. Trombe in B

2. 3.

1. 2. 3. 4. Cori in F

1. 2. Tromboni 1.2.

3. 4. Tuba.

Timpani.

Piatti.

Cassa e Tam-tam

Presto agitato. (Allegro)

Violini I.

Violini II.

Viole.

V. Celli.

C-Bassi.

Allegro festivo e maestoso

più pesante

Fl. Picc.
Fl. 1.2.
Ob. 1.2.
C. Ingl.
Cl. 1.2.
in B
Cl. Basso
Fag. 1.2.



Tr. in B
1.2.
3.
Cor. in F
1.2.
3.4.
Tromb. 1.2.
3 e Tuba



Timp.
Pia.lli
Gr. Cassa
e Triang.



Allegro festivo e maestoso

più pesante

V. ni I
V. ni II
Viola
V. Celli
C. Bassi



Musical score for the first system, featuring multiple staves for strings, woodwinds, and brass. The score includes dynamic markings such as *p* (piano) and *f* (forte). The notation is dense, with many notes and rests across the staves.

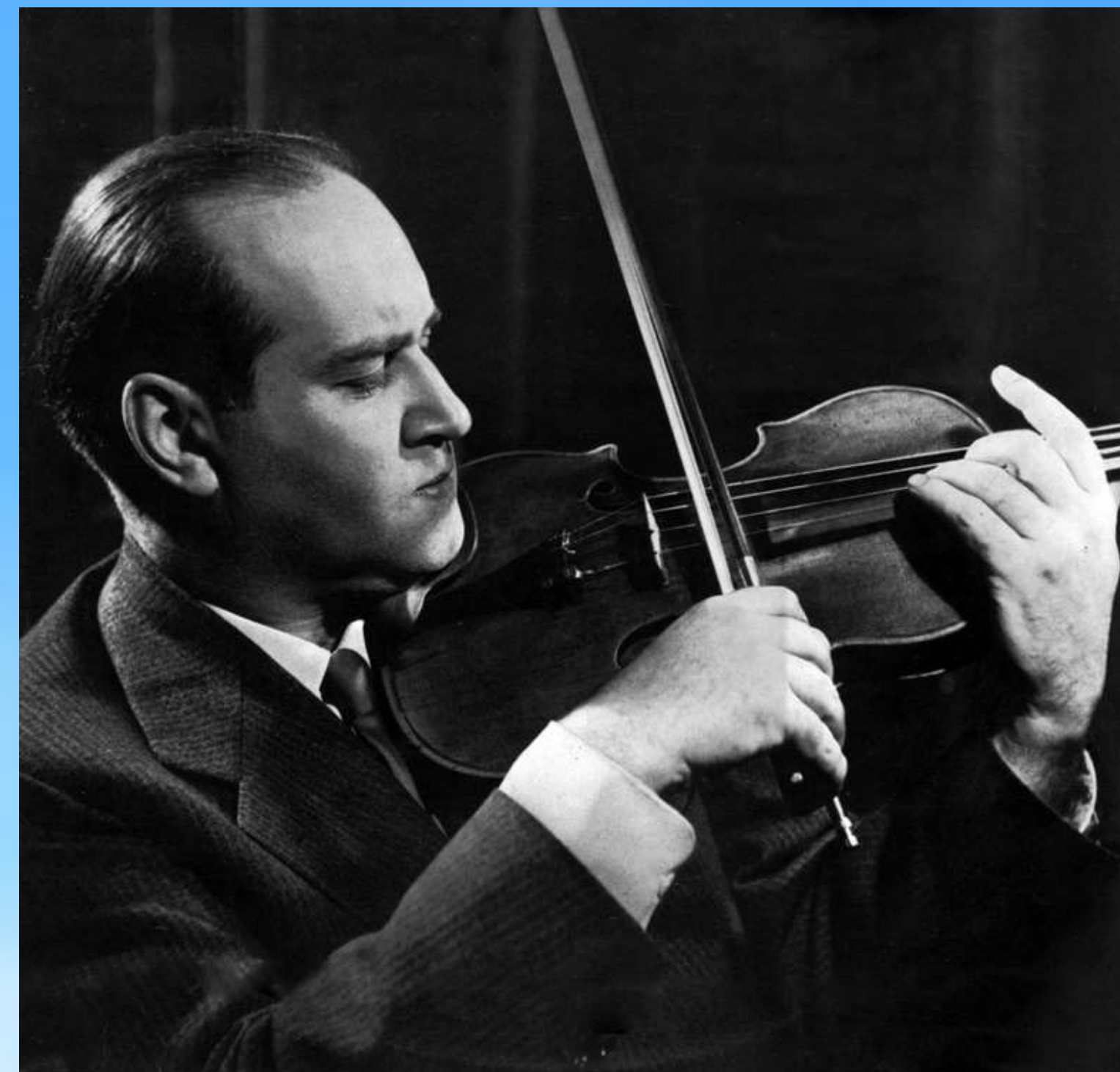
[55] *A doppio meno presto (ma sempre Vivo)*

Musical score for the second system, continuing the piece with a tempo change. The score includes dynamic markings such as *f* (forte). The notation is dense, with many notes and rests across the staves.

Khachaturian, Violin Concerto (1940)

David Oistrakh (violin)

Aram Khachaturian (conductor)



Aram Khachaturian, Trio for clarinet, violin and piano (1932)

1. Andante con dolore, con molto espressione

2. Allegro

3. Moderato

Performed by

Madeleine Morris (clarinet)

Jeremy Weinstein (violin)

Mark Zang (piano)

