

## ПРЕЗЕНТАЦИИ



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## Music and literature at the time of Soviet Union

*Quaderni di Musica/Realtà, 2016. LIM editore*

If the name of Ivan Ivanovich Sollertinsky (1902-1944) is known to non-Russians at all, it is probably because they have encountered it in connection with Dmitriy Shostakovich. The two men became acquainted in the late 1920s and remained close friends until Sollertinsky's premature death—an event which the composer experienced as a profound loss, depriving him of not only of an intellectually stimulating companion who had exerted a decisive influence on his artistic development, but also of a unfailingly loyal source of encouragement and moral support. The vignettes of Sollertinsky that feature in writings on Shostakovich are unforgettably vivid, evoking a larger-than-life figure possessed of enormous vitality and remarkable gifts. Like many of his distinguished contemporaries, his rise to eminence was facilitated by the extensive reorganisation of his native country's musical life during the early years of the Bolshevik regime, which opened up new professional opportunities for young people of ability. Having arrived penniless in

the former capital at the age of 19, he enrolled in the philological faculty of Petrograd University in 1922 to study Hispanic philology and literature. The young man's voracious appetite for knowledge, keen intelligence, and extraordinarily retentive memory made an indelible impression on everyone with whom he came into contact: before he had even graduated he was recruited to a post in the Department of Theatre History at the recently-founded Russian Institute for the History of the Arts (RIII), a prestigious interdisciplinary research centre. The young man's erudition soon became legendary: he was reputed to have mastered over two dozen foreign languages and to have acquired an encyclopaedic knowledge of European literature, philosophy, and sundry other disciplines. No doubt the reminiscences of his contemporaries are not altogether free from exaggerations and colourful embellishments, for some of the anecdotes about Sollertinsky that have come down to us stretch credibility somewhat, but that he was a man of quite exceptional ability is beyond question.

His professors' hopes that he would pursue an academic career were to be disappointed, however. Within a short time of arriving in Petrograd, Sollertinsky discovered what proved to be his enduring passions for the remainder of his short life—music and the ballet. In spite of having no formal training in either, he quickly developed a sympathetic appreciation and extensive technical knowledge of both that earned him the respect of their professional exponents. In doing so, he also discovered his true *métier*—as a public intellectual who placed his extensive learning and communicative skills at the service of introducing fine music to a wider listenership. Musical journalism and lecturing increasingly consumed more of his energies, and in 1929 Sollertinsky decided to resign from RIII to take up a position with the Leningrad Philharmonic as programming consultant and overseer of what would nowadays be called its 'outreach activities' [*attività di sensibilizzazione*]*—*performances and music appreciation workshops held in factories, schools, worker's clubs, and similar venues. In recent decades, it has become fashionable in certain quarters to deride such enterprises for being motivated by a dubious cultural paternalism, but criticisms of Sollertinsky on these grounds would be misplaced: there can be no doubt of the sincerity of his conviction that the new proletarian audiences should not be treated with condescension, but assisted in every way possible to discover the enjoyment and enrichment that could be derived from encountering the West's great musical heritage. His tireless work greatly enlivened the city's musical life and brought him national renown. Not only did the Philharmonic's repertory become notably more adventurous under his influence, featuring much new music by Soviet and Western composers, but his captivating pre-concert talks became immensely popular and played no small part in boosting attendance. As the 1930s progressed,

Sollertinsky became a prominent contributor to Soviet public discourse on musical and artistic questions, zealously seeking to maintain high standards and to stimulate innovation.

In spite of his significance, publications on Sollertinsky remain few in number, even in Russian. This neglect is not as surprising as it may seem. At the time of Sollertinsky's death, little of his work was conveniently accessible, since most of it had appeared in newspapers, periodicals, and other, more ephemeral media. The maintenance of interest in his work was largely thanks to the devoted efforts of Mikhail Druskin, who oversaw the publication of four collections of his friend's writings. The first of these, a slim volume entitled *I. I. Sollertinskiy: Izbranniye stat'i o muzike* [*I. I. Sollertinsky: Selected Articles on Music*], came out in 1946, but another ten years passed before the appearance of its successor: the oppressive climate of the late Stalinist period was unfavourable for research on a figure whose advocacy of Shostakovich's opera *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* and of Western representatives of musical modernism had caused him to be derided as a 'bard of formalism' in 1936. Both collections were issued in small print runs, however, and quickly became bibliographical rarities. It was consequently not until the mid 1970s, thirty years after his death, that a portion of his output became more readily available to a new readership. To date, the sole account of Sollertinsky's life and work remains the study by his daughter-in-law Lyudmila Mikheyeva-Sollertinskaya, *I. I. Sollertinskiy: Zhizn'i naslediy* [*Sollertinsky: Life and Legacy*], which was published in 1988. Useful and informative though this volume is, it is by no means comprehensive: as its author explained, the task of collating information about Sollertinsky's career was made considerably more difficult by the destruction of a considerable quantity of his personal papers during the siege of Leningrad. Moreover, the book suffers from limitations common to many Soviet biographies, especially in its avoidance of contentious or sensitive subjects.

Very little of Sollertinsky's work has been translated, which has appreciably hindered the growth of interest in his work outside Russia. This circumstance makes the appearance of the present volume all the more welcome. A few general remarks might help to orient readers in approaching its contents, especially if they are unfamiliar with Soviet writings on music from this period. Although it is customary in Russian-language reference works to refer to Sollertinsky as a *muzikoved*, or musicologist, this characterisation is rather misleading. Sollertinsky was not a 'musicologist' in a similar mould to Guido Adler or Hermann Abert: he did not undertake original investigations or make a major theoretical contribution of any kind. The essays and articles collected here could not be described as 'musicological' *sensu stricto*, if we understand the term to designate the scholarly study of music based on intellectually

disciplined, critical modes of enquiry and procedures of research. Rather, they represent for the most part a continuation of a Russian tradition of belletristic writing on music that originated in the nineteenth century, with figures such as Stasov and Larosh being notable representatives of the genre, and which addresses an educated, but non-specialist audience. Sollertinsky's overriding aim was generally practical and didactic—to foster appreciation of the musical works under discussion. Whether writing about compositions of previous historical epochs or those of recent date, he underlined the ways in which the artistic outlooks of their creators and their import [*significato*] resonated with the concerns of Soviet listeners and were directly relevant to their experience. If Sollertinsky is at times guilty of tendentiousness, especially in his recourse to inventing what Marina Frolova-Walker has described as 'phantom programmes' to explain the supposed 'ideological content' of instrumental works (his essay on Shostakovich's Seventh Symphony is a notable case in point), then this only lends these writings additional interest from the contemporary reader's perspective, for they are very much of their time and place. This tendency notwithstanding, they also contain much that is genuinely insightful and of enduring interest to students of Soviet culture, especially if they wish to understand how discourse on music came to be increasingly shaped by ideological influences after the imposition of Socialist Realism as an official creative aesthetic in 1932. Samuel Manzoni's translations succeed to an impressive degree in capturing the tone of the originals, and he has performed an immensely valuable service in making some of Sollertinsky's work available to an Italoophone readership for the first time.

**Summary:** the present book is the first attempts to restore the reception of Sollertinsky's criticism, which include not only the first Italian translation, but also the first translation in any languages of a wide selection of writings on the history and ideological underpinnings of Western and Soviet symphonism, opera, theatre and literature during the decade 1932-1942. The book's introduction (*The heritage of Ivan Ivanovich Sollertinsky*) provides a brief history of Sollertinsky's research activity and explores the ideological and philosophic approach of his criticism. These topical issues covered not only cognitive areas also cross-national and interdisciplinary perspective. Selected papers from descriptive as well as from theoretical point of view dealt with fundamental approaches in Soviet interpretation, with questions of field work and field research, music and policy, nationalism, realism, and so forth represented.

The first paper (*Historical types of symphonic dramaturgy*) offers an overview between the most substantial differences in the symphonic language during the Stalinism era. An historical survey that travel through

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again the creative process of authors like Mozart, Berlioz, Mahler to name a few and focusing the attention on the significance of “beethovenianism” in music where the author introduce the “dialogical-shakespearean” and “monological-byronian” typologies to examine the music of the past. To follow two scripts about Shakespeare (*Shakespeare in the World Music* and *The Shakespeare’s Hamlet and the European ‘hamletism’*), interesting to understand the strictly connection between music and literature. The fourth paper (*The symphonies of Brahms*) analyzes the symphony No. 2, 3 and 4 using a rich and intense methodology that get together Flemish painting, Magyar tradition and musicology. The next papers (*Ivan Susanin*, *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*, *Quite flows the Don*) are orientated in the opera’s language and working on the Soviet interpretation about Glinka’s heritage and the renewed languages of Shostakovich and Dzerzhinsky respectively in they most important and controversial works. The paper on *Gustav Mahler* is a long digression about the life and legacy of the Austrian composer whereas *Sollertinsky’s discussion on Soviet symphonism*, represent the stenograph used by the author during the Congress of Soviet Composers in 1935. The last one contribute is a brief description about the *VII symphony of Shostakovich* for the *premiere* in Novosibirsk.

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