



## Music for the Revolution: Musicians and Power in Early Soviet Russia

By Amy Nelson

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**Music for the Revolution: Musicians and Power in Early Soviet Russia** By Amy Nelson

Mention twentieth-century Russian music, and the names of three "giants"—Igor Stravinsky, Sergei Prokofiev, and Dmitrii Shostakovich—immediately come to mind. Yet during the turbulent decade following the Bolshevik Revolution, Stravinsky and Prokofiev lived abroad and Shostakovich was just finishing his conservatory training. While the fame of these great musicians is widely recognized, little is known about the creative challenges and political struggles that engrossed musicians in Soviet Russia during the crucial years after 1917. *Music for the Revolution* examines musicians' responses to Soviet power and reveals the conditions under which a distinctively Soviet musical culture emerged in the early thirties.

Given the dramatic repression of intellectual freedom and creativity in Stalinist Russia, the twenties often seem to be merely a prelude to Totalitarianism in artistic life. Yet this was the decade in which the creative intelligentsia defined its relationship with the Soviet regime and the aesthetic foundations for socialist realism were laid down. In their efforts to deal with the political challenges of the Revolution, musicians grappled with an array of issues affecting musical education, professional identity, and the administration of musical life, as well as the embrace of certain creative platforms and the rejection of others. Nelson shows how debates about these issues unfolded in the context of broader concerns about artistic modernism and elitism, as well as the more expansive goals and censorial authority of Soviet authorities.

*Music for the Revolution* shows how the musical community helped shape the musical culture of Stalinism and extends the interpretive frameworks of Soviet culture presented in recent scholarship to an area of artistic creativity often overlooked by historians. It should be broadly important to those interested in Soviet history, the cultural roots of Stalinism, Russian and Soviet music, and the place of music and the arts in revolutionary change.

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### Editorial Review

#### Review

*“Music for the Revolution* is a gripping account of one of the great cultural struggles in early Soviet Russia. Written by a professional historian and trained musician, the book offers a grand synthesis marked by great erudition, superb research, and fair-minded judgment.”

—Richard Stites, Georgetown University

“This unusual and fascinating book was written by an associate professor of history at Virginia Tech who is also a trained musician. Thoroughly documented, with 940 footnotes, the volume truly represents a labor of love.”

—Richard F. Staar, *Mediterranean Quarterly*

“Nelson has done a remarkable job of untangling the chaotic institutional, social, and musical terrain associated with what we have long considered a brief but fertile period of radical experimentation, virulent polemics, and lost opportunities in Soviet musical history. . . . One of the book’s strengths is the detailed explanations and typologies that it provides of the diversity of early Soviet musical life. . . . Nelson marshals extensive data from archives, memoirs, and a thorough reading of the press to support her contentions, and her fresh perspective illuminates several intriguing processes, including the importance of informal networks.”

—Kiril Tomoff, *Russian Review*

“*Music for the Revolution: Musicians and Power in Early Soviet Russia* deserves a wide readership. It can be strongly recommended not only to those interested in Soviet musical history but as well to anyone with an interest in the history, culture, and politics of the Soviet Union in general.”

—Neil Edmunds, *Journal of Modern History*

“Not only for the specialists in music, this thorough and well-researched volume should be of interest to scholars interested in Soviet history, Russian and Soviet music, and cultural politics.”

—Jennifer Ryan Tishler, *Slavic and East European Journal*

“*Music for the Revolution* makes an important contribution to the historical scholarship on the early Soviet period. It should find a wide readership among scholars and students interested in these subjects as well as those investigating the dynamics of Soviet development in the 1920s in general.”

—Sharon A. Kowalsky, Texas A&M University-Commerce, author of *The NEP Era: Soviet Russia, 1921–1928*

“Amy Nelson’s important monograph tackles the Soviet musical establishment head-on and is an innovative model of sustained analytical engagement with music as a historical source.”

—Karen Petrone, *American Historical Review*

#### About the Author

Amy Nelson is Associate Professor of History at Virginia Tech.

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