Final Report Guidelines

TITLE VIII RESEARCH SCHOLAR PROGRAM
TITLE VIII COMBINED RESEARCH AND LANGUAGE TRAINING PROGRAM

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Sounding Socialist, Sounding Modern: Music, Technology, and Everyday Life in the Soviet Union, 1956-1975

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Research Abstract:

My dissertation explores how music and sound helped to construct Soviet identity during the Cold War. I argue that the Soviet government strategically deployed sound and music within a broader politics of "socialist modernity"—that is, a socialist alternative to capitalist models of cultural and technological development. Officials believed sound was a foundational material in promoting socialism in two ways: first, it was an ideal medium through which to reinvigorate the utopian underpinnings of Marxist-Leninism after Stalin; and second, it was instrumental in distinguishing Soviet socialism from Western capitalism: socialism ought to sound different from capitalism. Through archival research, musical analysis, historical sound studies, and interviews, I present a model for rethinking aesthetic modernism in the late socialist context. In doing so, I reintroduce the Soviet Union into broader discourses of musical modernism, invention, and the "new" in twentieth-century music history.

Research Goals:

I had proposed a research period of roughly four months to be spent in Russia. I planned to spend mid-May, June, and July in the state archives in Moscow. When they close for the holidays in early August, I had hoped to use the Polytechnic Museum for three weeks before traveling to the Prometheus Institute in Kazan for one week at the end of the month, to then return to Moscow at the beginning of September for any additional research and to use the Russian State Library. Due to various mishaps in the archives—including a fire that rendered RGALI out of commission for most of the summer—I had to change many of my plans.

With the exception of many sources at RGALI that were rendered unavailable due to repairs after the fire in June, I found many very helpful sources at RGANI, GARF, and the Russian State Library. Some of my search was largely targeted: at GARF, for example, I looked into the Brussels World's Fair and the promotion of state-sponsored electronic musical instruments. Other moments of research were more far-reaching: in tracking down various magazines and periodicals at the Russian State Library, I discovered sources that while outside the scope of my dissertation will prove indispensable as I move forward with my career and future research projects.

The additional research I conducted with Title VIII support will enable me to complete my dissertation in time for a defense in March 2020 and graduation in May 2020. I intend to share my research with colleagues at conferences for the duration of my graduate study and to turn my dissertation into a book for wider publication shortly after finishing.

Research Activities:

With my Title VIII research grant, I was able to return to Moscow to both tie up loose ends at archives I'd already visited as well as to use RGANI, which was closed for construction for the entirety of my previous visit. At RGANI, I primarily used f. 5. These documents helped to illuminate the high-level interactions between politicians and bureaucrats that revolved around sound and music. They also provided invaluable insight into the ideological and political motivations behind events like the Brussels World's Fair, in 1958, and stagings of American musical theatre productions like *Oklahoma* in Moscow. I also used f. 70 at RGANI. While these sources are perhaps a bit more big-picture—that is, from the perspective of the highest echelons of government—than best suits my project, they have provided valuable context for my more microhistorical case studies. They will also prove very useful for when I revise my dissertation into a book, which will require some expansion and broader perspectives.

Although I intended to make a follow-up research trip to Kazan to revisit the Prometheus Institute, various scheduling conflicts did not allow for it. Although I previously visited in 2018, they were still in the process of cataloguing materials and many of their items were in storage or transit. Fortunately, I was able to conduct an interview with the head of the institute, Anastasiia Maksimovna, which will greatly inform my final chapter. Anastasiia also demonstrated an electronic color-music device that the Institute had recently restored; I was able to attain footage of this device, which will prove invaluable as I move ahead with conference presentations and research publications.

I was also able to speak to Andrei Smirnov at the Moscow Conservatory, Levon Hakobian at the State Research Institute (GII), and Aleksandra Kolesnik at the Higher School of Economics. I was fortunate to have a wide network of support (both scholarly and logistical) for the duration of my visit. These colleagues provided essential information and guidance, and conversations with them greatly shaped the course of my research.

At GARF, I was able to dive into the archival holdings for the Brussels World's Fair in 1958. The Soviet exhibition was impressive and, coming right after the launch of Sputnik, a chance for the country to demonstrate its technological and scientific prowess. Indeed, though the Soviet pavilion had been in the works since 1955, Sputnik's launch prompted a massive and rapid restructuring of plans so as to foreground the satellite. EXPO 58 portrayed the Soviet Union as a modern, forward-thinking country who could keep up with its capitalist (i.e., American) counterparts. The materials I found in this collection were fascinating and included logistical planning, brochures from the exhibit, and coverage in the foreign press. There were four stated goals to the Soviet exposition: to show that the USSR was a socialist, multinational, peace-loving state; to display industrial and agricultural farming; to promote the advances in socialist culture; and to demonstrate the quality of living for the Soviet people (GARF f. 9470, op. 1, d. 1, l. 7). And yet, on a more pragmatic level, the exposition represented an opportunity for commercial and material advances—a chance for the country to market its goods to other socialist, non-aligned and friendly capitalist countries. Exhibition comment books also proved entertaining and instructive. Some contained little more than generic praise: "Hello to the Soviet Union!" or "Glory to Russia." Others were decidedly less celebratory; many remarked on the Soviet invasion of Hungary and Poznań that had taken place just two years prior. The more

pragmatic attendees took to creating their own dialogues in the comment books: after one writer exclaimed "We won't forget Hungary," another asked pointedly, "And Little Rock?" A Sputnik "truther" even made an appearance to question the country's successes in the cosmos (GARF f. 9470, op. 1, d. 18, ll. 89-102).

At the Russian State Library, I was able to access a wealth of magazines, periodicals, and scientific literature from the 1960s and '70s. Magazines like *Smena*, *Iunii tekhnik*, and *Tekhnika—molodezhi* were especially helpful, as they provided insight into how electronic musical instruments—and, indeed, advances in audio technology more broadly—were marketed to teens and young adults in popular venues. Other more specialized magazines, like *Problemy kibernetiki* ("Problems of Cybernetics") and *Tekhnicheskaia estetika* ("Technical esthetics") show how specialists were grappling with scientific problems behind the scenes as well as the ideological forces at play in the development of musical technology. The Music Division of the Russian State Library (housed at Dom Pashkova) also proved essential in my research. They have the entire run of important periodicals like *Sovetskaia muzyka* and *Muzykal'naia zhizn'*, which allowed me to trace trends in reception and cultural values. Their collection of sheet music, too, was invaluable, and I was able to access several scores and recordings not available in the United States.

Important Research Findings:

My research period helped to solidify my previous findings as well as to suggest new pathways forward and future avenues of inquiry. In particular, I strengthened my understanding of the historical foundations of my project, which takes place in the post-Stalin era, with insight

into earlier attempts at curating sound in the Soviet Union. There are three primary fields of inquiry to which my research, enabled by Title VIII, allows me to contribute: historical sound studies, music during the Cold War, and the study of everyday life in the Soviet Union.

First, following work by historians of sound, I position both music and sound as formative components of late socialist identity. Sound makes for a slippery historical source, and often those who use it do so in the service of visual, logocentric, and social narratives. Mark Smith, however, has convincingly argued that sound history allows for "new storylines" to emerge. It also helped to shape political regimes and social categories. Claire Shaw, for example, has studied how notions of "deaf" and "deafness" in the Soviet Union shaped state politics and marginal communities. Her work, however, focuses largely on discourses parallel to sound—or, rather, the absence thereof—rather than sonic experience. It is in search of the latter that I "listen" to Soviet history during the Thaw and beyond so as to hear new historical networks, social connections, and sensory cultures. In so doing, I hope to move beyond what Martin Jay has called the "scopic regime of modernity" to instead explore the ways modernity was sonically constructed. Sound, I argue, was as important in the construction of socialist modernity as was the visual.

Second, I contribute to studies of music during the Cold War by exploring the ways the Soviet state mobilized sound and technology in the service of promoting socialism worldwide. Musicologists have long characterized a divide between Western experimentalism and Soviet socialist realism. Electronic music thus became linked to Cold War aesthetic morals: on one side, the avant-garde represented the freedom and possibility of Western capitalism; on the other, tradition became a stand-in for Russian "backwardness." Even narratives that seek to destabilize

the binary between the West and the Soviet Union still rely on and reaffirm its existence. My research instead demonstrates that the official Soviet musical apparatus did in fact encourage electronic music and a certain sort of experimentalism, but within the parameters of a broader socialist ideology and modernism.

Finally, I contribute to a growing body of scholarship that examines the way ordinary people experienced the Soviet project through cultural works. The post-Stalin era, as historian Kristin Roth-Ey has noted, saw an enormous rise in the prevalence of official "mass culture" (or *masskul't* in Russian). Rather than seek edification only through the highest forms of art (in music, of course, this being the symphony) as they did during Stalinism, Soviet officials turned to popular forms of art and music to present socialist ideology to the masses. Mass culture, after all, was only as effective as it was attractive. One had to watch and listen in order to learn.

In turn, my five case studies address different elements of these three fields of inquiry. After an introduction in which I outline relevant historical debates and introduce my argument, Chapter 1 explores official state approaches to electronic music in the mid-to-late 1950s and early 1960s. Following an order from the Ministry of Culture in 1956, engineers and inventors were tasked with building instruments that could sound, as one ordinary listener wrote, "like the country that gave the world Sputnik." Focusing on the Ekvodin, a multi-voice synthesizer with a keyboard for easy performance, I argue that the Soviet government cultivated a specific politics of timbre through the creation of state-sponsored electronic music ensembles (FIGURES 1 and 2). This chapter also explores two "misfires" in early official electronic music. First, the "Eliston," an electronic keyboard that was rejected by the Ministry of Culture for a "lack of novelty," illuminates official values in technological production and innovation at the time. And

second, Alfred Schnittke's *Poem about Space* (1960), a composition for orchestra and electronic instruments that was panned for its "old-fashioned formalism," uncovers the political relationship between timbre, modernism, and socialist realist composition.

Chapter 2 examines how changes in apartment design, private domestic spaces, and consumer goods—key elements of Khrushchev's modernizing project—manifested in music. Staging the process of moving from the communal apartment to private housing, Shostakovich's only operetta, *Moskva—Cheremushki* (1959), provides a case study to explore the ways that composers staged both the imaginaries and realities of life during the Thaw (FIGURE 3). In turn, the operetta's reception in both the formal and popular press traces the successfulness of this mission. Moreover, by analyzing debates in the Composers' Union and musical press, I show how composers, critics and musicologists used *Moskva—Cheremushki* to position the genre of operetta between "high" and "low" styles of art as a sort of Soviet "middlebrow." Its immediacy and use of both serious and light musical styles, they believed, made it the ideal genre for transmitting the "everyday" [*byt*] of socialist modernity.

Chapter 3 takes a media historical approach to explore the ideological and material considerations behind music as it appeared in three media forms in the 1960s and early 1970s: radio, gramophone records, and television. Following debates in the Composers' Union, Ministry of Culture, and All-Union Radio and Television, I argue that relaxed cultural practices during the Thaw and increasingly decentralized networks of dissemination posed a threat to officials concerned with cultivating a specific taste and *kul'turnost'* ("culturedness") among Soviet listeners. At the same time, however, the technological potentialities of these media presented a valuable opportunity to bring the "sounds of modernity" to the nation through improvements in

fidelity, stereophonic sound, and recording practices. Ultimately, this chapter augments our understanding of socialist realism as a musical and discursive concept to show how multiple sonic elements—not just compositional techniques—worked together to make music "sound socialist."

Chapter 4 explores noise abatement practices in the 1960s and 1970s to trace a narrative of socialist modernity that ran parallel to those that have thus far privileged the visual and material. Using newspaper articles, archival materials, and published accounts, I show that although many people were pleased with the material products of Khrushchev's reforms, they were deeply troubled by their noisiness. Instigated by an upsurge in urban development, scientists and medical professionals began to lobby for greater state involvement in noise abatement and hearing protections. This responsibility to the health of the masses, they suggested, differentiated the Soviet Union from "uncaring" capitalist countries. By positioning themselves as the most attuned to hearing loss among their populace, researchers and bureaucrats used noise abatement to showcase the superiority of socialist healthcare and science on the global stage. At the same time, however, the so-called "War on Noise" [*bor'ba s shumom*], waged in the pages of newspapers, provided an inroad for greater civic engagement with the Soviet soundscape. Perturbed by the sounds of radios, televisions, and gramophone players, commentators and "silence advocates" created a kind of sonic *kul'turnost'*: an ethics and etiquette around sound that promoted Lenin as person-example in the sonic experience of late socialism.

In Chapter 5 I explore attempts to create color-music [*svetomuzyka*] and light-music [*tsvetomuzyka*] at the Moscow Experimental Studio for Electronic Music and the Prometheus

Institute in Kazan. Following cybernetic theories of human-machine interaction and psychology, engineers searched for a way to use music, sound, and light to influence emotions and decision making—a Soviet *gesamtkunstwerk* for the Cold War (FIGURE 4). Under the auspices of scientific research, however, engineers put on public performances of otherwise forbidden pieces like Edgar Varèse's *Poème électronique* (1958) and Pierre Boulez's *Structures Ia* (1952). By positioning music within broader networks of scientific research and Cold War technology, I demonstrate how experimental music existed not only in "unofficial" spheres, but also in official state institutions. Moreover, I show how bureaucrats sought to militarize music as part of the global Cold War. In contrast, however, engineers at these institutions exploited their distance from aesthetic organizations and artistic unions to engage in provocative avant-garde performance practices.

Policy Implications and Recommendations:

Though the Cold War ended in 1991, recent geopolitical developments show that its repercussions are still being felt in various parts of the world. As Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 and rising strains among former Soviet countries suggest, multiple state actors are negotiating—and renegotiating—power voids and spheres of influence that are bygones from the Cold War era. Recently, these international tensions have taken center stage—figuratively and literally—as protests of Valery Gergiev and Anna Netrebko at the Metropolitan Opera, the controversy over Pussy Riot, and the Mariinsky Orchestra's recent performance at the ruins at Palmyra in Syria demonstrate. As such, there is as great a need as ever for increased mutual understanding, improved methods for cultural exchange, and more nuanced relationships with allies abroad. Current geopolitical tensions, however, did not arise out of nowhere, and in order

to fully address contemporary dilemmas, it is necessary to better comprehend the Cold War history that still persists to this day.

My research contributes to this mutual understanding through a study of musical technology, cross-cultural engagement, and international politics in the Soviet Union from 1960-1990. As Danielle Fosler-Lussier has convincingly argued, music was strategically deployed by both sides during the Cold War as "soft power" — as a way for countries to reinforce their global dominance through cultural, rather than militaristic means. This was particularly important in the Soviet Union during the Thaw, when Khrushchev sought to reassert the utopian cultural underpinnings of ideal socialism through universally appreciated art, music, and theatre. Musical technology was especially potent in this projection of international dominance, given its inherent connection to technologies of "hard power," such as the space race or nuclear arms. Indeed, later in his life, Leon Theremin, the inventor of the electromagnetic musical instrument that bears his name, was tasked by the Soviet government with coming up with one of the first passive listening devices—an eavesdropping technology that was eventually planted in the American Embassy in Moscow in 1945. What we can learn from how music functioned as an instrument of diplomacy can provide valuable insight into how it is deployed today for political purposes.

More broadly, however, a nuanced understanding of how ordinary Soviet citizens negotiated their position within structural confines and frameworks can provide an example for today's political contexts. Music, while deployed by the Soviet government to project soft power, could provide a source of comfort, individuality, and even protest for people in their everyday lives. Listening to BBC broadcasts on radios gave people insight into events abroad, and sharing Western artists such as The Beatles or Pink Floyd with their peers helped to

encourage mutual understanding between both sides of the Cold War. Indeed, in my own experience, I remember quite vividly when my host mother in St. Petersburg—a 75-year-old woman from the Soviet Union—bonded with me over her favorite Michael Jackson song. Music has been an instrument of both international and interpersonal diplomacy and understanding, and the more we understand how that has functioned in the past, the clearer a picture we can have about the present.

My policy recommendations are thus to continue to support cultural and scientific exchange between the United States and Russia, both by sending American citizens there *and* by facilitating Russian visitors to the United States. Literacy in the language, culture, and history should also be taken into account when staffing various State Department and other government offices devoted to Russia. A focus only on contemporary politics among employees fails to consider the enduring effects of history and cultural differences at play.

Co-Curricular Activity:

I met with several scholars over the course of my time in Moscow. Most of these were based at Moscow's Higher School of Economics, which sponsored my visa and research. At HSE, I gave a public lecture called "Sound and Identity in Stalin's Gulag" as a part of their Center for the Study of Contemporary Culture. This opportunity was valuable both for me and the center: I received constructive feedback on my research and also built lasting connections with faculty as well as members of Memorial and the Gulag History Museum. I look forward to developing these relationships in the future and hope to share them in a digital humanities project, "Sounding the Gulag," which is currently in the early planning stages.

I also worked with scholars at the State Institute of Art (GII). Communications with Levon Hakobian and Svetlana Savenko, both musicologists, proved invaluable in shaping my research and archival goals. Hakobian in particular provided a wealth of information and constructive feedback on my work. I benefitted greatly from his expertise in experimental and avant-garde music of the late Soviet era.

Finally, I was able to continue my ongoing collaboration with Ianina Prudenko, an art theorist and culturologist from Taras Shevchenko University (Kiev) based in Moscow. Ianina recently published a book (Garage Press) on cybernetic art in the Soviet Union, and our discussions about electronic music and cybernetics have been invaluable in shaping my own approach. I envision further collaborations with Ianina, including hopefully inviting her to my (US) university for either a guest lecture or residency. She also introduced me to several members of the contemporary Russian sound art scene, which has strengthened my connection with Moscow's musicians and artists.

Conclusions:

Taken together, the five chapters of my dissertation amplify the ruptures, continuities, successes, and pitfalls of everyday life during late socialism. By considering the ways that ordinary people *heard* the Soviet project, I augment and complicate historical accounts of socialism as a lived experience that have thus far privileged the visual and material. Moreover, turning away from Western capitalism to explore the sonic experience of socialism allows for a more diverse and multifaceted appreciation of the ways sound shapes identity (and vice versa).

In turn, we gain a better understanding of the social, cultural, and political sensory experiences of the Cold War—and, indeed, the twentieth century more broadly.

Plans for Future Research Agenda/ Presentations and Publications:

I have already begun to present some of the material I gathered on my research trip at conferences in the United States and abroad. Information from my first chapter, which includes the sources on the Brussels World's Fair, makes up the bulk of my presentation at the national meeting of the American Musicological Society. Various radio and television programs as well as 1960s literature on stereophonic sound comprise my third chapter, of which I am presenting a part at the annual meeting of the Association for Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies. I was also able to access important collections of Gulag folklore and songs, which while not directly in my dissertation, have helped me prepare an article on sound, music, and everyday life in the Soviet labor camps for submission. Primarily, though, I intend to use the research I gathered on my trip to help expand my dissertation into a book for publication with a scholarly press.

Figures:

FIGURE 1: Diagram of Ekvodin, from L. Volkov-Lannit, "Poiushchie mashiny" ["Singing Machines"], *Iunii tekhnik* **[***Young Technician***] 3 (1959), 49.**
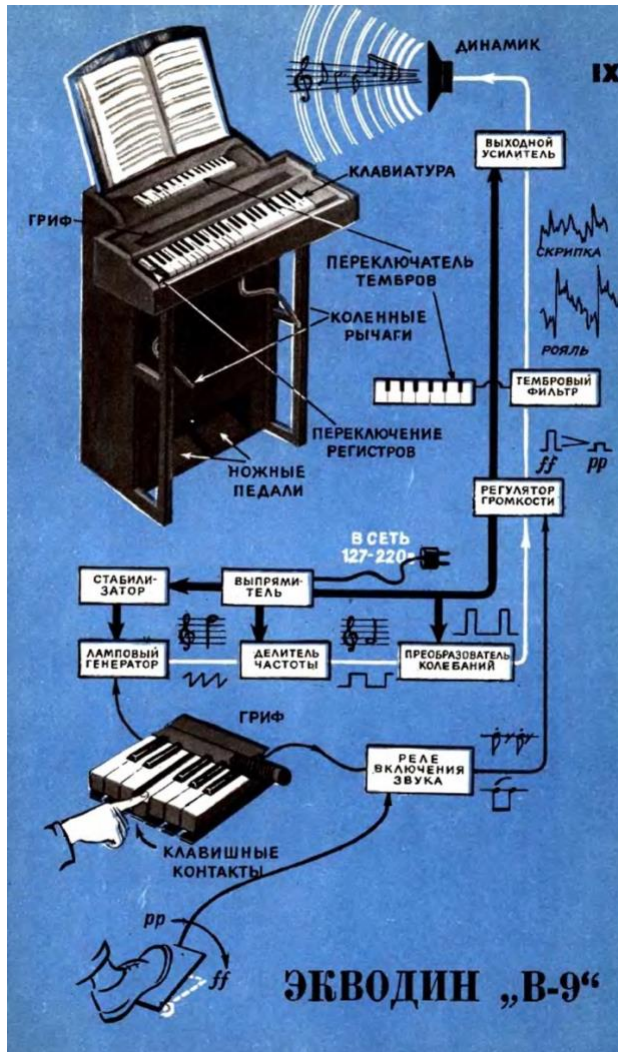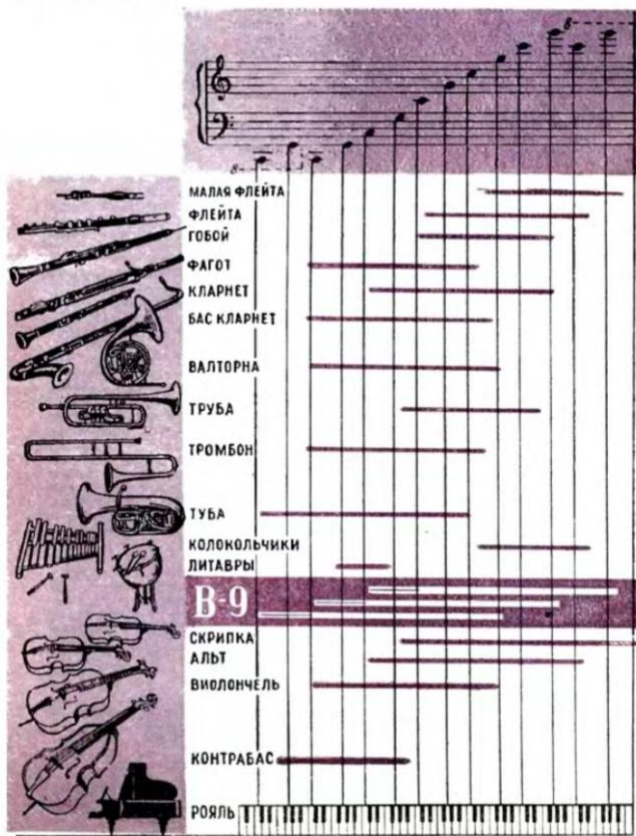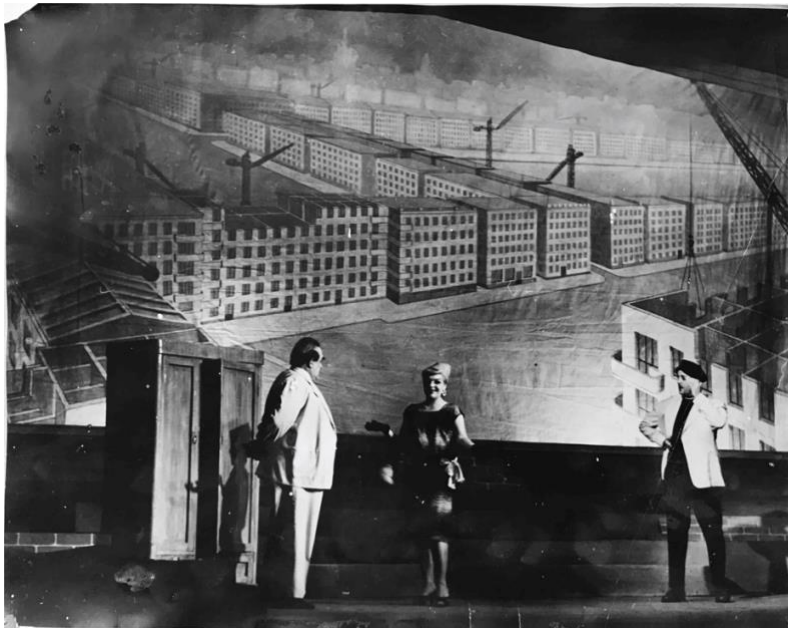
FIGURE 2: Range of Ekvodin V-9 (highlighted as "B-9" in purple), from L. Volkov-Lannit, "Poiushchie mashiny," *Iunii tekhnik* 3 (1959), 48.
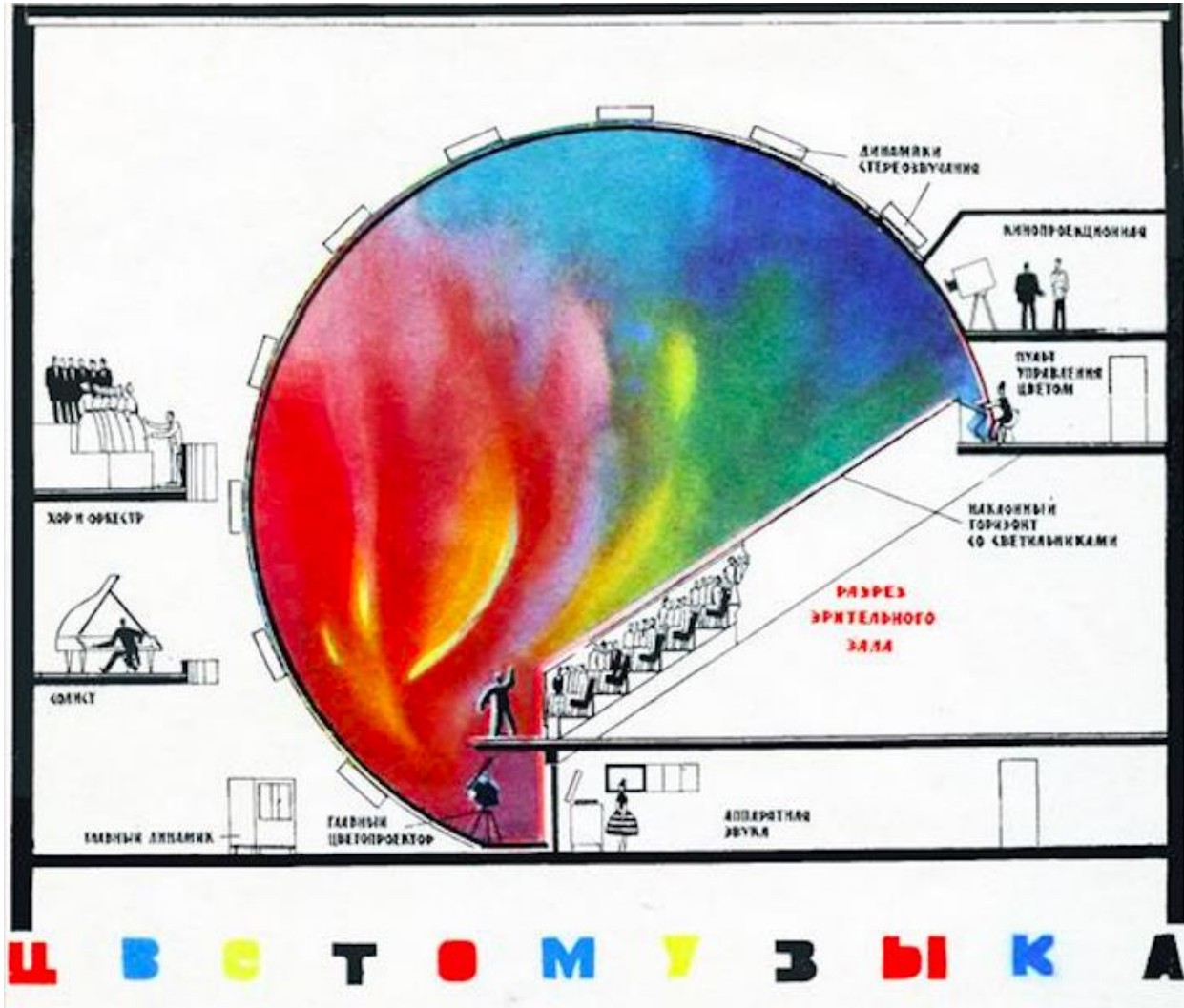
FIGURE 3: Original production of *Moscow—Cheremushki* at the Moscow Operetta Theatre (RGALI f. 654, op. 4, d. 1296)

FIGURE 4: Proposed color-musical concert hall, from *Tekhnika–molodezhi* [*Technology and Youth*] 10 (1965), 36.

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Nauka i zhizn'
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Radio
Smena
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