To my family, especially my sister Tina and my husband Jim.
All of you believed in me throughout this long process.
And
To all those who, through song, bring light into the darkest of places.

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Acknowledgments

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Suzanne Ament

Introduction

In June 1941, a few days after the Germans attacked the USSR, the Red Army ensemble set out for the Belorussian train station to provide music for the newly recruited soldiers. As they played one newly minted song, the recruits spontaneously stood, doffed their caps, and somberly, some with tears, created the de facto anthem of the war. "Sviashchennaia voina" (The sacred war) was to become a symbol of resistance, courage, and unity in the face of the cruel enemy. A year later, a young singer who had spontaneously switched songs in the midst of her performance, feeling that something "dear" was needed, stood frozen with fear as her director showed her his fist from offstage. But then a voice from the audience of wounded soldiers requested, "Comrade artist, please sing that song again." The new, somewhat controversial song "V zemlianke" (In the dugout) had passed muster.

In Leningrad, the theater of musical comedy remained in the city and was active for the entire 900-day blockade. Even when regular shows had to stop for lack of electricity, transportation, and food, some artists still performed patronage work. Later, the future opera star Galina Vishnevskaia wrangled a reassignment from Kronshtadt to Leningrad in order to spend all of her free time in theaters and concerts, as this buoyed her spirits. Soldiers risked life and limb in no-man's-land to collect flowers for visiting singers. The singers and artists gave special performances for badly wounded men, sometimes holding their hands or their heads in their laps. Artists felt that this work was the most important contribution they had ever made—in fact, the high point of their careers. A lyrical, melodic tune sung to a simple guitar accompaniment, "Temnaia noch'" (The dark night) raced across the country by film to become one of the most popular of the war songs, reassuring those at the front and those at home that they were loved and important.

All of these stories illustrate the importance of song in the victorious war effort, but more importantly they show how the songs helped preserve a sense of humanity in the face of unimaginable cruelty and horror. The nation, young

and old, soldier and civilian, Communist and non-Communist, could identify with and draw strength from this music. What's more, the songs lasted beyond the war as a legacy of that time when human needs, individual effort, and collective unity superseded Communist party ideals, politics, and rhetoric to come to the aid of those who were sacrificing at home and at the front and give them what they needed. Even subsequent generations see this legacy not only as a memoir of the war but also as a symbol of their identity and relation to that past.

This book is the story of these songs and the men and women who created them, performed them, and heard them. It is a collection, compilation, analysis, and synthesis of information about the songs and their function in society during World War II in the Soviet Union. The goal is to create a broad picture, a wide-angle snapshot for the reader that incorporates the songs, their creators and performers, the audience, and the system that worked to distribute and publicize them. This picture in itself contributes to a better understanding of an aspect of Soviet wartime experience little known in the West. In addition, it provides the basis for probing into broader, more abstract issues in several areas.

First is the interaction of culture with politics and political ideology, or how the official Soviet institutions—government, Party, and military—worked with and were affected by individual initiative as seen through creativity, personal preference and desire, and universal human needs. During any crisis period, there are actions and reactions on an official level that take the form of policies, orders, laws, and the like, as well as grassroots responses to the crisis itself and to official reactions. By understanding how songs affected both the official policies and systems and how they touched individuals, as well as the reverse—that is, how systems and individuals actively chose to integrate songs at different times for different reasons—we can better understand how the official USSR and the general citizenry shaped both political and popular culture, and how these two forces interacted with and shaped each other.

Second, for society to function, a balance must be maintained between the two forces of collective and individual need: (1) society's organization, protection, and maintenance of order, and (2) a personal, individual need for expression, creativity, spirituality, and nurturing. The first cannot exist in a positive sense if the latter is not allowed to exist freely. In the end, it is the individuals, with all of their spirit, knowledge, and initiative, who form and staff the systems to organize society. This relationship, however balanced or unbalanced, always exists in a society. In a crisis period, however, or a period of great change, such as the Second World War, the similarities and dichotomies between them are more strikingly marked, and the balance can shift. Studying these shifts in the

relationship between control and initiative in periods of stress not only can aid our understanding of the distribution during crisis but can shed light on the preexisting distribution in more seemingly stable periods.

World War II—or the "Great Patriotic War," as it is known in Soviet historical literature—was a crisis period for the USSR that had tremendous effects, then and subsequently, on the natural, technical, physical, and human resources of the nation. Both the official state apparatus and the grassroots citizenry agreed that this was a profound crisis—a level of agreement that rarely occurred in Soviet society. Initial conservative estimates placed the death toll at around twenty million; as archives have opened, those estimates have risen. Vast territories, mainly in the developed western regions, fell under German occupation for lengthy periods of time. Other areas were trampled, bombed, and destroyed several times over as armies fought for control. Large numbers of the population migrated eastward, either fleeing the fighting, evacuating along with the factories and plants that were dismantled and carried eastward to Siberia, or forcibly resettled due ostensibly to fears of their disloyalty to the USSR and potential fraternization and collaboration with the enemy. The city of Leningrad was held in a stranglehold during the heroic but devastating 900-day siege. Many other cities, including Kiev and Sevastopol, fell and were subsequently retaken—often, as in the case of Stalingrad, with fearsome, lengthy fighting. There were fronts in every direction, including the Far East, where the Soviet Pacific Fleet was engaged against Japan. Women, children, and the elderly took over jobs left vacant by the working-age men who were recruited. Nearly a million women took active combat roles. Shortages and rationing appeared in all areas of the economy to different degrees, depending on the given stage of the war and the territory. In short, society was completely disrupted for one targeted goal: the defense against and the defeat and destruction of the Axis forces. And no one was left untouched by this vast process.

Things were no different in the sphere of culture. Theaters were evacuated; musicians left the philharmonics, theaters, conservatories, and academies to fight. Museums, historic sites, and works of art were imperiled and often destroyed. And yet the arts did not die; in fact, they flourished. Symphonies, posters, plays, poetry, films, and a great many songs were produced in this trying period. Although existing official systems in the area of culture did remain intact and basically in control during the war, they were forced to take into account more of the personal and individual needs of the artists and their audiences. This in itself helped maintain morale and spirit, which was one of the main goals of the cultural war effort. The song genre was particularly flexible and

thus became a yardstick of how people were feeling, what their needs were and how official circles could meet those desires. Such relative freedom, along with a unity of purpose—to defeat the enemy—led to genuine creativity and real responses from the audience. Although Stalinist/Communist ideology was still present in many forms, it took a back seat to other ideals, both in official propaganda and in the minds of citizens. These new ideals included family, feelings of loyalty for homeland, the need to relax, the spiritual nature of human beings, and even religion when the Orthodox church was given more official recognition by the state.

Another reason for the importance of song during the war is the prominent place of music in Russian/Soviet culture. Music has always had power in human culture generally. Around the world it has often been used both as a weapon and as a remedy. On the one hand, leaders can manipulate music as a tool to inspire people to follow their cause or achieve seemingly unattainable goals. Songs are adept at expressing patriotism, nationalism, and other common wartime sentiments. On the other hand, music can calm the oppressed and soothe the suffering of humankind. Song has held a prominent place in the lives of the Russian people in their popular culture, from barge hauler songs on the Volga River, to sewing circle songs in peasant villages, to the drawing room "romances" of the French-speaking elite in the pre-Revolutionary period, to dance hall songs, *chastushki* (sung limericks), and early film soundtracks in the Soviet period. The political use of music was no less significant in military songs, prison songs (precursors to the Revolutionary songs), and the Revolutionary and Civil War songs. The massive publications of "official" songs and *chastushki* in the 1930s, no matter how bad they were, were used for political ends. With the rise of the Soviet Gulag (labor camp) system, a new song genre appeared: *blatnye pesni* (criminal underworld songs), which used its own "criminal" language, depicted the realities of the camps, and lasted through the end of the USSR.

A more recent example of the use of song in both a political and popular sense was seen in the events leading to the attempted coup of October 1993. Supporters of Khasbulatov and Rutskoi in the Parliament building sang World War II songs to rally themselves and to symbolize their "patriotism." Politically, the songs fit a patriotic theme of defense against an enemy—in this case, the Russian president—and of "true loyalty" to their nation and homeland. In popular terms, these songs remained the favorites of the elderly who were supporting the end of reform; even more important, though, the songs symbolized the people's determination to fight against all odds for what they believed in—something they had done fifty years before with a successful outcome.

Anyone who has visited the USSR/Russia knows that Russians are far from shy about singing in their own lives. People celebrate happy occasions, laugh at themselves and their society, and pour out their hopes, fears, and sorrows in music. The national popularity of the bard poets Bulat Okudzhava and Vladimir Vysotskii, in addition to that of numerous other modern poets/songsters, attests to this phenomenon.

By examining the four-year period of song creation and performance during a severe crisis, this book helps illuminate the central role of music in Russian life. The spiritual (or emotional) side of music and its importance is perhaps the most difficult to define, but it also plays a tremendously important role in understanding individuals' need for music and the effect that music has on them. It is interesting to note here that, although the USSR was officially atheistic, stressing rationalism over anything of a spiritual nature, the wartime participants, in their memoirs, interviews, stenograms of meetings during the war, and even official newspaper articles, frequently mentioned the "spirituality" of songs and their effect on the soul. They also talked about the different emotions that songs elicited from them: how music brought tears on one occasion, laughter on another, and courage to carry out acts of war in still other cases. Songs served a multiplicity of functions, addressing both the sociopolitical needs of the society and the spiritual and emotional needs of individuals—if not simultaneously, then at least in parallel. This complexity has baffled thinkers and audiences alike over time and can be understood only by realizing both the physical and emotional properties of this art form. As Abdul Baha explained it:

> In short, Melodies, although they are material, are connected with the spiritual; therefore, they produce a great effect. . . . All these feelings can be caused by voice and music. For through the nerves, it moves and stirs the spirit. . . . Whatever is in the heart of man, melody moves and awakens. For instance, if there be love in the heart, through melody it will increase until its intensity can scarcely be borne. But if bad thoughts are in the heart, such as hatred, it will increase and multiply.[1]

1 *Compilation of Compilations*, vol. 2, prepared by The Universal House of Justice (Mona Vale, Australia: Bahá'í Publications, 1991), 79, quoting from *A Brief Account of My Visit to Acca* (Chicago: Bahá'í Publishing Society, 1905), 11–14.

Song contained a power and a flexibility that forced those working with it as policymakers or creators to face its dual components: its concrete form of melody and lyric as well as its psychological and spiritual impact on listeners. Song also created emotional bonds between audiences and performers, song creators and soldiers, and civilians and the military. Recent research has also shown that music can have an actual physiological effect on the human body and its physical functioning. Heart rate, blood pressure, and other bodily functions can be directly affected by music. Music also triggers memories, good and bad, and between the mental and physical reactions may reactivate feelings and the physical state of being experienced with that music in an earlier period. The wartime participants' experiences give evidence to the truth of this statement.

Song was particularly powerful in wartime culture for several reasons. Because it is made up of both melody and lyric, multiple messages can be given and received through even one song. The basic messages were to inspire action and loyalty, and to remind people that life was worth living and that there truly were better times ahead. Both music and lyrics are extremely flexible; people could learn of the heroic deeds of someone like pilot Captain Gastello in one moment, listen to a lyrical love letter home the next, then hear a snappy satirical parody of the Germans. In the course of about ten minutes, an audience could have experienced feelings of loyalty, patriotism, nostalgia, sadness at being far from home, joy at knowing there is a home, and hatred toward the enemy expressed in vicious biting humor.

People could also have an active part in songs. They could sing them as they marched or change lyrics to suit their own situations. They could even write their own new songs. The broad spectrum of possibilities for both creation and enjoyment meant that song made its way into most facets of life more easily than other genres of music.

Songs were also particularly well-suited for wartime needs because they could be performed in a wide variety of settings, with any number of people listening or singing. Unlike symphonies, operas, or multipart musical works, songs could be performed by as few as one person and as many as a huge choir. New tunes could be learned by ear from recordings or song leaders as well as from sheet music or melodies published in newspapers. Learners did not have to be musically literate or even print-literate to participate in singing. Instrumental accompaniment was not even necessary in many settings. No props were needed, although songs could be elaborately staged with multiple harmonies, costumes, lighting, and sets when possible. Judging from the sources, both extremes of performance genres brought equal pleasure to the

audiences. Of course, it is impossible and incorrect to generalize from specific individuals that everyone always reacted in the same way, or even that everyone reacted to given songs. But it is clear that music did have an effect on individuals and groups in myriad situations.

This book, based on the author's doctoral dissertation, is a synthesis of three main areas of research: (1) compilation of the newly created wartime songs and their histories, (2) study of the systems of political control over music production and distribution, and (3) investigation of popular attitudes about song and grassroots participation during the war and song as a legacy from the war era. Song here is narrowly defined as a melodic tune with a text. It does not include operatic arias, cantatas, or vocal cycles in larger classical works. Occasionally such pieces may have gained stand-alone popularity, but song here refers to specifically composed short works. The thematic chapters integrate these main topics in the following sequence.

Chapter 1 examines the variety of songs present during the war, concentrating on those that were created during that four-year period. Chapter 2 examines the creators of the songs. Understanding their educational and professional backgrounds as well as their common links as artists in personal, artistic, and political spheres helps explain why they wrote the songs they did. Also of interest are the issues and debates concerning the various professional creative unions and the conditions facing amateur songwriters. Chapter 3 depicts the complex relationship between government, Party, and military organizations concerned with the control, creation, and distribution of songs. Some attention is given to international relations concerning the arts as well as censorship. Chapter 4 examines the roles of books, music, and periodical publishers, record and film studios, and radio in disseminating the newly created war songs. Analysis covers the range of and reaction to each medium as well as the weaknesses of each, given the severe wartime conditions. Chapter 5 addresses the different kinds of artistic brigades and performance situations and depicts the conditions and concerns the performers had to endure during their work. It also attempts to quantify the numbers of brigades, performing artists, and concerts given at the front and at the rear. Chapter 6 makes use of oral history interviews and memoirs to better understand the role of song in the day-to-day lives of average people, including soldiers, children, and workers. This chapter also considers the broader questions of what the songs symbolized both for individuals and for society during the war and afterward. Chapter 7 examines why the songs lasted and describes their legacy for individuals and the nation alike.

Throughout the chapters the translations of titles and the excerpts from lyrics are the author's translation, unless otherwise noted. Definitions and translations of terms as well as song and film titles are set in parentheses after at least the first mention. Song titles are also listed in the appendix. The transliteration system used is the method preferred by the Library of Congress. The sources used in this research vary widely in type and quality. Sources in English on this topic are few but valuable. However, in some works the topic of war songs has been treated more indirectly as a tangential component of jazz, guitar poetry, popular culture, or classical music. Some recent valuable works help to interpret the history of the Composers' Union and other aspects of the project here.

This project is the first full-length treatment in English focusing specifically on Soviet World War II songs and the culture and politics surrounding them. The published monographs in Russian cover a wide range of subjects, including biographies of poets, composers, and performers, treatises on the musicological aspects of war songs, and collections of song texts with commentary. Many of these books are written more for the popular reader than for the scholar and thus do not include footnotes, sources, or bibliographies. However, some Academy of Science publications and several conscientious authors provide a solid base of scholarship by which to judge the other works. P. F. Lebedev and Iu. E. Biriukov—two authors who have spent years of painstaking scholarship reconstructing the histories of the creation, publication, and performance of the individual songs and their many variants—must be noted here. Their published works and their personal consultations with the author in Moscow were invaluable.

The primary sources from the period—namely, newspapers and archival material—have provided many valuable details, and have generated even more as-yet-unanswered questions. To be explicit, newspapers published the texts and scores of songs, concert reviews, and programs, as well as articles containing information on "official" ideology. Yet complete runs of newspapers from the war years are impossible to obtain. Even if an issue is extant, the pages often are torn or smudged beyond readability. In addition, time and other logistical constraints have made it impossible to see even close to all the extant runs of any given paper for this project. Rather, information was gathered from a cross section of the existing available copies of many different papers, including central and front newspapers. Thus, it is not possible to develop any definitive final conclusions or statistical analyses based on songs in newspapers, because the corpus is just too vast. Similarly, the archival material at the Central Archive of Literature and Art in Moscow provided some intact sets of minutes, but generally this information was also spotty. Thus, questions raised in one or another plenum, commission,

or letter may not be answered in the later documents, which appear to be missing. This is not to say that the extant information is not extremely useful. It is simply a caveat to the reader to recognize the incomplete body of sources.

The oral history interviews collected for this project in New York and Moscow provide personal experience and point of view on a very broad topic. The subjects interviewed ranged in age from four to thirty years old at the beginning of the war, with varying involvement in music; they were composers, poets, performers, schoolchildren, soldiers, and workers during the war. Again, this entire set of eighteen formal interviews, with numerous other shorter comments, can in no way even begin to be considered a broad selection, given the millions of war participants. However, each individual interview tells a basically complete story as defined and limited by memory and the passage of roughly half a century. In every case, the emotions are manifested as if the events had occurred just last year. In this way, the interviews add personality and fill the gaps left by the other sources, which often stress the societal and the collective mood concerning the songs. All of the sources together provide a body of data with which to analyze the three major areas of research given above. The picture that is painted is a variegated patchwork of experience, emotion, knowledge, hard work, and sacrifice. There are still many gaps that may never be filled because of the passage of time, the disintegration of paper, and the inevitable mortality of the wartime participants. Yet the story that can be told contributes an interesting perspective to the understanding of Russian history, its political and popular culture, and its cultural heritage as shown both in the attitudes toward the songs and in the songs themselves.

The approach taken here to address this multifaceted topic is one of parallel perspectives. Each chapter concentrates on a different facet of the world that both contained and shaped song as a political and social phenomenon during the war. The songs are always present at the core of each segment, so some overlap is unavoidable. Other methods, such as a purely chronological approach, could have been used to examine the material, which might then have lent itself more easily to comparative analysis of the various segments. Yet, especially because little has been written in English, this snapshot approach allows for all the stories to stand more firmly on their own and to be linked directly with the songs that established the basis for their being. The author is fully aware that other angles to this topic could have and still should be taken. One area that particularly deserves a closer look is the Communist Party ideology concerning song as propaganda. As for the use of a more traditional "top down" analysis, some readers may find

this lacking to some degree. Yet this "song up" approach has never been taken and, in the author's opinion, provides a better feel for the culture of the time.

Another area deliberately excluded from this research is the study of *chastushki*, which were definitely present in both the political and popular cultures of the war. The exclusion was arbitrary because of the difficulty of finding the popular rather than political versions, because work has already been done in this area in the West, and because of personal preference. The work concentrates on the full songs, which are usually much more melodic than the repetitious set tunes for the verses. Yet much satire was produced in the form of limericks; thus, examples of satire are scarcer in this work than in the wartime concerts.

Another caveat to the reader is that this book concentrates on Russian song. This is a product of the sources found mainly in central Soviet archives and in the Russian language. In addition to well-developed and broadly represented national cultures, such as Ukrainian and Georgian, to name but two, the USSR was comprised of well over a hundred ethnic minority groups, many with their own written language and culture. This also includes minorities who use the Russian language for their musical expression, such as Jewish music (some of which may have been in Yiddish), prison camp music, and minorities using Russian rather than their own native language or orthography. Information about these groups and their participation in song creation and performance, and official policies during the war toward such nationally colored songwriting, is presented when available, but there is much room for further research and interpretation in the area of policy toward an existence of non-Russian wartime songs. The relaxation of nationality policy during the war may have allowed more acceptance of non-Russian publications and broader participation of ethnic minorities in the area of song production and performance. It is my hope that this book will serve as additional motivation for such studies to be undertaken and published.

Another note to the reader concerns the lack of musical notation, or recorded examples of music in this book. This is a history of the wartime song in culture rather than a musicological study. In addition, the prevalence of Soviet wartime songs available on the internet will allow for readers to search on their own for songs that interest them.

The vast body of songs created in the four years that the USSR was at war is stunning in its size, its diversity, and the long-lasting popularity of many of the songs. In fact, the author was led to this topic by the songs themselves being sung by friends who were not even born at the time of the war, yet who sang

these "songs of the military years" with love and sometimes tears. Therefore, this work begins with a chapter dedicated to the songs themselves—for, ultimately, it is the songs that are the center. They were the inspiration for this scholar; they were the goal of every committee and commission that dealt with the creation of music during the war; they were the lifeblood and spirit of their poet and composer creators; and they were the solace, comfort, and respite for those who listened to them in live concerts, on the radio, or on record disks. It is these songs that release the emotions and bring back the memories, both good and bad, of friends and of a war they wish never to see repeated. And when those who survived those years of war are no longer on this earth, it will be the songs that remain as a legacy—a symbol of their pain, joy, struggle, and victory.