

Dmitri Kabalevsky and His Second Piano Concerto in G Minor, Op. 23

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis is divided into a biographical part on Dmitri Kabalevsky's life and an analytical part of the first movement of his Second Piano Concerto in G minor, Op. 23. This thesis aims to reveal unexplored aspects of Dmitri Kabalevsky's life such as his non-pedagogical compositions, career, relation with his contemporaries, the Soviet government and Socialist Realism. The biographical part draws from secondary sources such as *Soviet Composers and The Development of Soviet Music* by Stanley D. Krebs, and *Music and Musical Life in Soviet Russia* by Boris Schwarz, and also Russian source *Kratkij Očerok žizni i tvorčestva D. B. Kabalevskogo* by Kabalevsky's daughter, Marija Kabalevsky. The latter offers valuable academic sources which are previous not available in English. Based on it, important findings in the biographical part include the composer's unrecorded one-movement Piano Concerto and unrecorded Stalin Prize. This section also reveals political factors behind the success of Kabalevsky's opera *Colas Breugnon*, Op. 24, his reception vicissitude related to his devotion to Soviet government, and Kabalevsky's approach to reflect Socialist Realism principles in untexted music. Kabalevsky's compositional stages, his escapement from the 1948 denouncement, and his public figure to the West are also presented. In addition, Kabalevsky uses structural and tonal deformations of sonata form to depict a heroic story in his Second Piano Concerto in G minor, Op. 23. The analytical section employs James Hepokoski's and Warren Darcy's sonata theory to demonstrate how Kabalevsky uses sonata form to express the

ideals of Socialist Realism.

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## Chapter I: Introduction

The Soviet composer, performer, and music educator Dmitri Kabalevsky (1904–87) is known primarily for his music for children. His contributions to the field of music education include his revision of the music syllabus used at Soviet schools, and pedagogical music and books such as *A Story of Three Whales and Many Other Things*, which became “models and practical examples for [Soviet] teachers to use in their classrooms,” according to musicologist David Forrest.<sup>1</sup> However, while scholars consistently recognized Kabalevsky’s achievements in music education, other aspects of his life and work—his concert music, relationship with the Soviet government and his contemporaries, and role as a public figure—rarely receive careful attention. Notably, there is no full-scale biography of Kabalevsky in English, and most studies of him focus solely on his children’s collections.

This essay seeks to introduce Kabalevsky’s working environment and connect his changing compositional style to the context of the Soviet Union through analysis of the first movement of his Second Piano Concerto in G minor, Op. 23 (1935, rev. 1973). To this end, the essay will be divided into biographical and analytical sections. The biographical section, Chapter 2, starts with an overview Kabalevsky’s family background, music education, and early career as a music educator. This is followed by a survey of his

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<sup>1</sup> David Forrest, "Dmitri Borisovich Kabalevsky, 1904-1987." *International Journal of Music Education* (August 2004):151.

progress as a composer, identifying his compositional periods, stylistic features, and important works. Kabalevsky's career is then contextualized by discussing his relations with the Soviet government and his contemporaries. This section will also discuss the specific historical context in which Kabalevsky's Second Piano Concerto in G minor was composed, addressing Socialist Realism, Soviet attitudes towards Western music, and aspects of modernism.

The analytical section, Chapter 3, is divided into three parts, and will concentrate on the first movement of Kabalevsky's Second Piano Concerto in G minor, Op. 23, a piece which deserves far more scholarly attention than it has thus far received. The first analytical part introduces the concerto with an overview of its style, genesis, 1973 revision, and formal structure. The second part offers a formal analysis and discusses the primary musical components of the first movement. Structural analysis grounded in sonata theory, as propounded by James Hepokoski and Warren Darcy in *Elements of Sonata Theory*, demonstrates Kabalevsky's use and manipulation of the archetypal sonata form;<sup>2</sup> further examination will illuminate how this approach to sonata form allowed the concerto to be heard as aligning with a Socialist-Realist narrative. The first movement of Op. 23 conspicuously elides some of the conventions of sonata form; for example, the key of the secondary theme is "wrong" and the recapitulation non-resolving. Hepokoski and Darcy consider these non-conventional practices "deformations;" furthermore, they

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<sup>2</sup> James Hepokoski and Warren Darcy, *Elements of Sonata Theory: Norms, Types and Deformations in the Late-Eighteenth Century Sonata* (New York: Oxford University press, 2011), 9-22.



argue that composers use sonata deformations for expressive purposes that demand analytical investigation. The sonata types present in the movement—Types 2 and 5—will be outlined in this part.

Kabalevsky's use of, and approach to, sonata form suggests the difficulties faced by composers in the Soviet Union, especially during Josef Stalin's premiership (1924–1953). Like many other Russian composers during the Soviet era, Kabalevsky adjusted his compositional styles to contemporary political realities. The official condemnation of Western European musical trends—such as atonality and serialism—in favor of Socialist Realism often led composers to revert to musical conservatism, at least on the surface. Kabalevsky accordingly seems to eschew many modernistic trends; but, upon close inspection, his works reveal a distinct embrace of contemporary musical devices, within a more traditional frame. In the Second Piano Concerto, the devices discussed include localized tonal centers, inter-textuality, motivic quotation, topics, and metric dissonance. Furthermore, motivic quotations in the concerto offer insight to Kabalevsky's compositional influences.

The scholarly literature on Kabalevsky is scant. Most scholars continue to associate Kabalevsky primarily with his pedagogical output, and consequently disregard thorough examination of his compositional devices, style, and techniques. There are a few articles devoted to his life and work in general, but these are not substantial. The highlight of the available literature is a 14-page biography, in English, written by David

Forrest in 1974, which summarizes Kabalevsky's life and career.<sup>3</sup> To outline and fill in details of Kabalevsky's life, career, and legacy, I therefore will largely consult secondary sources and Kabalevsky's own writings.

Contextualizing Kabalevsky's compositional career and styles requires an understanding of the politics of the Soviet Union and its ramifications for artists both in terms of accepted styles and techniques, and personal constraints on artists. *Soviet Composers and The Development of Soviet Music* by Stanley D. Krebs,<sup>4</sup> and *Music and Musical Life in Soviet Russia* by Boris Schwarz,<sup>5</sup> illuminate the position of Soviet composers and their artistic prerogatives. As noted above, Hepokoski's and Darcy's *Elements of Sonata Theory* is key to reading and understanding the principles of sonata form and deformations that arise in the formal analysis.

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<sup>3</sup> David Forrest, "Dmitri Borisovich Kabalevsky, 1904-1987." *International Journal of Music Education* (August 2004):151.

<sup>4</sup> Stanley D. Krebs, *Soviet Composers and the Development of Soviet Music* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1970), 234.

<sup>5</sup> Boris Schwarz, *Music and Musical Life in Soviet Russia, 1917-1970* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1972), 120-1.

## Chapter II: Dmitry Kabalevsky

Dmitry Borisovich Kabalevsky was born in St. Petersburg on December 30, 1904. His mother, Nadezhda Kabalevskaya, was a housewife; his father, Boris Klavdievich Kabalevsky, a mathematician and a state insurance specialist.<sup>6</sup> Kabalevsky was “exposed to the liberal, ‘expressive’ education favored for sons of such families,” with music, poetry, and sports part of his basic education.<sup>7</sup> By the age of five, he was able to improvise on the piano.<sup>8</sup>

After his family moved to Moscow in 1918, Kabalevsky’s interest in music led him to attend the Scriabin Institute (Moscow Regional Base Music College), where he studied with Vasily Selivanov. Although he adopted Scriabin’s Romantic tendencies in his compositions, Kabalevsky wrote to his sister that “[I] do not understand anything about Scriabin’s music,” and “many of Scriabin’s works are outside of my musical taste.”<sup>9</sup> Because his father wanted him to pursue a career in economics or mathematics, Kabalevsky entered the Engels Socio-Economic Science Institute in 1922, although there is no accessible record about his completion of the study in this institute. However, he

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<sup>6</sup> Suehee Alicia Pae, “Glière, Myaskovsky, Prokofiev, Shebalin, Kabalevsky, and Denisov-Twentieth-Century Composers in a Time of Upheaval” (DMA diss., University of Maryland, 2001), 38.

<sup>7</sup> Stanley D. Krebs, *Soviet Composers and the Development of Soviet Music* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1970), 234.

<sup>8</sup> Tatjana Frumkis, introduction to *Dmitri Kabalevsky* (Hamburg: Sikorski Musikverlage, 2018), 8.

<sup>9</sup> Musikfreunde Heidelberg, *Biografie von Dmitri Kabalewski* (Sandhausen: Musikfreunde Heidelberg, n.d.), 2 (“von dieser Musik nichts verstand,” “außerhalb seiner musikalischen Neigungen”), all translations by the author, unless otherwise indicated.

continued to study with Selivanov and play piano for silent movies, and by 1925, Kabalevsky had persuaded his father to let him enter the Moscow Conservatory.<sup>10</sup>

At the Moscow Conservatory, Kabalevsky studied the piano with Alexander Goldenweiser and composition with Georgy Catoire, and later Nikolai Myaskovsky. Kabalevsky was a prolific composer, writing 26 works during his Conservatory studies and competing for the Lenin Memory Prize for composition; he also joined two composers' associations, the Production Collective of Student Composers and the Association for Contemporary Music.<sup>11</sup> Kabalevsky took considerable interest in music education as well, teaching in a government school from 1925 to 1926 and giving piano lessons to younger Conservatory students during his second year.<sup>12</sup> In 1932, he became a senior lecturer of music theory and composition at Moscow Conservatory, and a full-time professor in 1939.<sup>13</sup>

In addition to his pedagogical works, Kabalevsky's compositional output of concert pieces is extensive, including six operas, five cantatas, four symphonies, seven instrumental concertos, two string quartets, one hundred and fifty songs, thirteen film scores, and plenty of piano concert pieces.<sup>14</sup> His musical style tends towards lyricism, symmetrical structure and well-organized sequences; although he favors favored

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<sup>10</sup> Krebs, 234.

<sup>11</sup> Krebs, 235-6.

<sup>12</sup> Gerald Abraham, *Eight Soviet Composers* (London: Oxford University Press, 1943), 70.

<sup>13</sup> Dina Grigor'yevna Daragan, "Kabalevsky, Dmitry Borisovich," *Grove Music Online*, <http://www.grovemusic.com/> (accessed April 30, 2021).

<sup>14</sup> Maria Kabalevskaya, foreword to *Dmitri Kabalevsky*, 5.

nineteenth-century conventional diatonicism and chromaticism, prominent techniques include juxtaposition of modal scales and major-minor scales in the same passage, and metrical dissonance between solo and accompaniment parts.<sup>15</sup>

### **Early works (1925–1930s)**

The 26 works Kabalevsky composed while attending Moscow Conservatory achieved only a lukewarm reception. These include *Three Preludes*, Op. 1 (1925); First Piano Sonata, Op. 6 (1927); First String Quartet, Op. 8 (1928); and First Piano Concerto, Op. 9 (1928).

The First Piano Concerto in A minor, op. 9, influenced by Sergei Prokofiev's Third Piano Concerto, was composed in 1928, and is generally considered Kabalevsky's first large-scale work. Kabalevsky claimed to have composed the string part of the second movement in a dream, three days before its premier. Critics described the concerto as "[an] immature attempt [at composing in a large-scale genre]."<sup>16</sup> Accordingly, like most of his other early works, the concerto was not published. However, the published First Piano Concerto, Op. 9 was probably not the first piano concerto that Kabalevsky composed: in 1923, Kabalevsky presented a one-movement piano concerto to Selivanov

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<sup>15</sup> Krebs, 238.

<sup>16</sup> Krebs, 235.

at the Scriabin Institute.<sup>17</sup> To date, it is unknown whether or not the 1923 concerto has any relationship to the 1928 concerto.

### **Mature works and career milestones (1930s–1940s)**

Kabalevsky looked toward Dmitri Shostakovich as a model for his career from the 1920s to the 1930s. His conservatory compositions were regarded as an “answer” to Shostakovich’s works; Symphonies No. 1 in C sharp minor (1932), No. 2 in C minor (1934), and No. 3 (1933) were emulations of certain Shostakovich works.<sup>18</sup> Yet, as intended the official denouncement of Shostakovich in 1936 alarmed other composers, including Kabalevsky, into rigorously following Stalin’s official aesthetic standards. The harsh Communist Party criticism of Shostakovich’s *Lady Macbeth of the Mtensk District* (1934) led Kabalevsky to more proactively Social Realist compositions, such as his opera *Colas Breugnon*, Op. 24 (1936–8).

Kabalevsky’s subsequent works of the 1930s–40s were well-received throughout and beyond the Soviet Union. The Second Symphony (1934) brought him national fame; following its success, his previously published Piano Sonatina in C major, Op. 13 (1932) and *Colas Breugnon* brought his international renown. The former work showcased his craftsmanship, while the latter demonstrated his mature ability to compose in large-scale

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<sup>17</sup> In 1923, Kabalevsky presented a one-movement piano concerto to Selivanov at the Scriabin Institute; it is unknown whether or not this piece has any connection to Op. 9. Marija Kabalevskaya, *Kratkij Očerok žizni i tvorčestva D. B. Kabalevskogo*, 7.

<sup>18</sup> Richard Whitehouse, liner notes to *Kabalevsky: Piano Concertos Nos. 1 and 2*, In-Ju Bang and Russian Philharmonic Orchestra, Naxos 8. 557683, CD, 2006; Krebs, 280.

genres. The suite *The Comedians*, Op. 26 (1940)—incidental music, based on the children’s play *The Inventor and the Comedians* (1939)—proved a career milestone. Indeed, this suite was so successful that the New York Times eulogized Kabalevsky as “the Russian who composed *The Comedians*” after his death in 1987.<sup>19</sup>

### **Departure from composing (1950s–onward)**

Kabalevsky’s compositional output dropped rapidly beginning in the 1950s, and never again matched his early pace. His publications of this period were mainly rearrangements or revisions of earlier compositions, and new editions of earlier children’s works. This was mainly due to his assumption of various functions at the Ministry of Culture, where he dedicated his efforts to political activities and the Soviet music education system. For example, he regularly wrote articles for domestic and foreign newspapers, and traveled overseas to appear on foreign television shows touting the advancement of Soviet aesthetics with fluent English and French.<sup>20</sup> To many international observers, Kabalevsky thereby “became the image of the Soviet musical figure.”<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Tim Page, “Dmitri Kabalevsky, Russian Who Composed ‘Comedians’,” *New York Times*, February 18, 1987.

<sup>20</sup> Frumkis, 8-9.

<sup>21</sup> Krebs, 255-6.

## Kabalevsky and Socialist Realism

Kabalevsky's embrace of Socialist Realism cannot be considered separately from the government-approved status of the aesthetic. Kabalevsky's success as a composer (1930s–40s) and international representative of Soviet music (1950s–70s) display his political savvy in the context of the Soviet Union. In the U.S.S.R. at the time, public figures—no matter how famous, well-loved, or important to society—faced significant challenges in securing and maintaining official approval. While many of Kabalevsky's prominent colleagues, such as Shostakovich and Aram Khachaturian, were publicly denounced by Stalin's regime (in 1936 and 1948, respectively), Kabalevsky was never officially censured by the government.<sup>22</sup> This was primarily due to Kabalevsky's adherence to the Soviet aesthetic principle of Socialist Realism, which emerged in the 1930s.

Socialist Realism involves reflecting the “positive and rich life” of everyday people in the Soviet Union.<sup>23</sup> Compositions deemed experimental or overly influenced by Central and Western European music were considered the “wrong-direction,” described as “formalism,” and would be denounced, because of their perceived inaccessibility to mass audiences.<sup>24</sup> Kabalevsky proactively grounded his works in

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<sup>22</sup> Boris Schwarz, *Music and Musical Life in Soviet Russia, 1917-1970* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1972), 120-1.

<sup>23</sup> Schwarz, 132-4.

<sup>24</sup> Schwarz, 114-5.



Socialist Realism since the 1930s, most explicitly in his opera *Colas Breugnon* (1938).<sup>25</sup>

In 1936, as part of a revision of the Socialist Realism doctrine, Party officials announced, in a message to the Composers' Union, that opera provided the most suitable musical vehicle for showcasing Soviet life. As a result, Kabalevsky moved away from non-programmatic concert music.<sup>26</sup> The plot and musical content of *Colas Breugnon* likewise satisfied official demands: based on Romain Roland's novel of the same name, the libretto stressed the social conflict between the craftsman and the patron-duke;<sup>27</sup> the music combined French folk tunes and traditional Russian folk songs, reflecting the alliance between the Soviet Union and France signed in 1935.<sup>28</sup> The success *Colas Breugnon* in turn proved Kabalevsky's facility for creating works within the strictures of Socialist Realism.

Kabalevsky also followed official artistic policy beyond his compositional efforts, acting as a willing promoter and spokesman for Socialist Realism. In 1940, he became the chief editor of *Sovetskaya muzyka*, the vehicle for political propaganda in the musical world. The journal was put out by the Composers' Union, but openly declared fealty to the Soviet government; the journal's editorial policy stated that "the cultural policy dictated by the Party's Central Committee cannot be questioned."<sup>29</sup> Additionally, the

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<sup>25</sup> Daniel Jaffé, *Historical Dictionary of Russian Music* (Blue Ridge Summit: Scarecrow Press, 2012), 167-8.

<sup>26</sup> Krebs, 236-9; Schwarz, 111.

<sup>27</sup> Schwarz, 149, 123.

<sup>28</sup> Schwarz, 115-6.

<sup>29</sup> Schwarz, 113-4.

journal informed musicians of new cultural policies and denounced “wrongly oriented” works or composers.<sup>30</sup>

Furthermore, Kabalevsky’s attitude to European and American music was firmly in line with Soviet policy—highly critical. He dismissed jazz music in the United State as “no longer good,” called Western European experimental compositional models such as dodecaphony “chaotic” and “illogical,” and spoke of young composers in the United States as poorly trained.<sup>31</sup> Such expressions of disdain towards Western music were part of “a collective opinion [of the Soviet composers and the authority] expressed in the words of an individual critic.”<sup>32</sup> The Composers’ Union’s subsequently adopted the attitude: all Western-style music was deemed “extremism” and Soviet composers warned against moving in this “wrong direction.”<sup>33</sup> After Kabalevsky’s tour to the United States in 1958, he, Khachaturian, and Tikhon Khrennikov set up a system of censorship in the Union of Soviet Composer to prevent young Soviet composers to “move in the direction of dodecaphony or any other advanced musical experimentation practiced in the West.”<sup>34</sup>

Nonetheless, Kabalevsky’s public embrace of Socialist Realism and the Stalinist ideology in his music did not shield him from government disapproval. “Ideological falsehood” in the opera *The Taras Family*, Op. 47, aroused official ire in a 1948

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<sup>30</sup> Schwarz, 149; 124. The famous 1936 denunciation of Shostakovich’s *Lady Macbeth* was published in this journal.

<sup>31</sup> Dmitri Kabalevsky, “A Russian Traveler’s View of American Music,” *Music Educators Journal* 49 (November-December 1962): 71-2; Schwarz, 322, 297.

<sup>32</sup> Schwarz, 320.

<sup>33</sup> Schwarz, 328.

<sup>34</sup> Schwarz, 309-23.

denunciation draft, with the Central Committee of the Communist Party describing Kabalevsky as “one of the guiltiest figures of formalism” alongside Kabalevsky’s teacher, Nikolai Myaskovsky, and Shostakovich.<sup>35</sup> Kabalevsky quickly took steps to mollify the Party. First, Kabalevsky showed his repentance at the first All-Union Congress of Soviet Composers in April, promising that he would revise his “problematic” opera.<sup>36</sup> Second, in a letter to Myaskovsky, Kabalevsky begged him to apologize to Stalin, because Kabalevsky was “terrified at the possibility of being compromised by association”<sup>37</sup> There was also a rumor that Kabalevsky’s wife, who had a close relationship with government security organizations, negotiated with the government.<sup>38</sup> Ultimately, Andrei Zhdanov, the leader of the Soviet Communist Party at the time, removed Kabalevsky’s name from the denunciation before its publication.<sup>39</sup> Kabalevsky therefore was never officially condemned by the government; indeed, his revision of *The Taras Family* won a Stalin Prize in 1951.<sup>40</sup>

Kabalevsky also received Stalin Prizes in 1946, for the Second String Quartet, and in 1949, for the Violin Concerto. Although English sources do not confirm this, the composer’s daughter, Maria Kabalevsky, states that the Third Piano Concerto was

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<sup>35</sup> Marija Kabalevskaya, *Kratkij Očerok žizni i tvorčestva D. B. Kabalevskogo*, ed. Tatyana Vedineeva (Moscow: Moscow City University, 2008), 18-9.

<sup>36</sup> Marija Kabalevskaya, *Kratkij Očerok žizni i tvorčestva D. B. Kabalevskogo*, 18-9.

<sup>37</sup> Partrick Zuk, “Nikolay Myaskovsky and the Events of 1948,” *Music & Letters* 93 (February 2012): 78-9.

<sup>38</sup> Zuk, 79.

<sup>39</sup> Jaffé, 167.

<sup>40</sup> Krebs, 233.

awarded a Stalin Prize a few years after its publication.<sup>41</sup> Despite the vicissitudes of 1948, the Stalin Prize for *The Taras Family* in 1951 was an indicator of official approval, and Kabalevsky maintained his relations with the government as he moved away from composition since the 1950s. In 1952, he became the Secretary of the Board of the Union of Soviet Composers, and in 1960 was a representative of UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization), where his main function involved imposing official influence over composers' output.

In conclusion, Kabalevsky's political activities plainly reveal his devotion to the Soviet government, and his administrative positions in associations such as the Union of Soviet Composer or the UNESCO apparently indicate his embracement of authority-approved music style—Socialist Realism.

Conceived at precisely the point when Socialist Realism doctrines were undergoing significant revisions, the Second Piano Concerto in G minor reflected the composer's devotion to Socialist Realism. The next chapter, chapter III, gives a formal and narrative analysis to reveal Kabalevsky's approach to employ Socialist Realism in non-text music.

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<sup>41</sup> Marija Kabalevskaya, *Kratkij Očerk žizni i tvorčestva D. B. Kabalevskogo*, 20.

### Chapter III: Second Piano Concerto in G minor, Op. 23

Kabalevsky's Second Piano Concerto in G minor, Op. 23 was composed in 1935, and was premiered in Moscow on May 12<sup>th</sup>, 1936, by Moscow Philharmonic Orchestra with Grigori Ginzburg as the soloist. Soviet critics noted that "an enormous distance separates this talented composition from the unripe, student like, completely eclectic First [Piano] Concerto."<sup>42</sup> The influence from Prokofiev's Second Piano Concerto in G minor, op. 16 on Kabalevsky's compositional mode is evident in this concerto's key choices, musical texture, and prolonged cadenza.

Although it has generally been regarded as "Kabalevsky's best work," in the West, its long-term reception was colored by the Cold War.<sup>43</sup> The concerto's American premiere on May 9th, 1943, by the NBC Symphony with Leo Smit as the soloist, was successful, but later U.S. performances demonstrated antipathy towards the composer, by then a public face of Soviet music.<sup>44</sup> A performance in Boston on May 31st, 1960, with Ozan Marsh as the soloist and Arthur Fiedler conducting the Boston Symphony, was harshly reviewed, with music critic Harold Rogers finding that "[Kabalevsky's writing] is not profound, neither does it revel in sheer frivolity."<sup>45</sup> A standard assessment considers the concerto "so-so music," with Kabalevsky tagged as "a poorman's [*sic*]Prokofiev" in

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<sup>42</sup> Abraham, 72-3.

<sup>43</sup> Abraham, 70.

<sup>44</sup> Sikorski Musikverlage, *Dmitri Kabalevsky* (Hamburg: Sikorski Musikverlage, 2018), 31.

<sup>45</sup> Harold Rogers, "Marsh Plays New Version of Second Piano Concerto," *Christian Science Monitor* (June 1, 1960): 7.

the West.<sup>46</sup> This assessment has remained standard: even as Mark Koldys criticized the concerto as “too derivative of Prokofiev,” Hansen Lawrence states that it “never reaches the [Prokofiev’s] depth of expression or [Khachaturian’s] melodic fluency and vibrant idiom.”<sup>47</sup>

Such statements may have some value, but they openly reflect Cold War-era hostility towards presumably uncritical Soviet subjects. Regardless of its connection with Socialist Realism and the persistent shadow of Prokofiev’s influence, the concerto exemplifies Kabalevsky’s masterful dialogue with form and genre. Unlike his opera *Colas Breugnon*, op. 24, in which the libretto and the text can directly convey ideological message, Kabalevsky uses forms and compositional devices such as binary oppositions and metric dissonance to narrate a heroic story: the protagonist earns his/her final victory after a long battle with adversity.

To be able to reveal the relation between Kabalevsky’s compositional devices and this Socialist Realist story, this chapter thereby presents a formal analysis of the concerto’s first movement, serving as a foundation of the narrative analysis in the next chapter.

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<sup>46</sup> Hansen, 109; Alalexandria Vodarsky-Shiraeff, *Russian Composers and Musicians: A Biographical Dictionary* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1969), 297.

<sup>47</sup> Mark Koldys, “Kabalevsky: Piano Concertos, all; Rhapsody; Fantasy in F Minor,” *American Record Guide* 76 (January-February 2013): 106; Hanse, 110.

## **Analytical Approach**

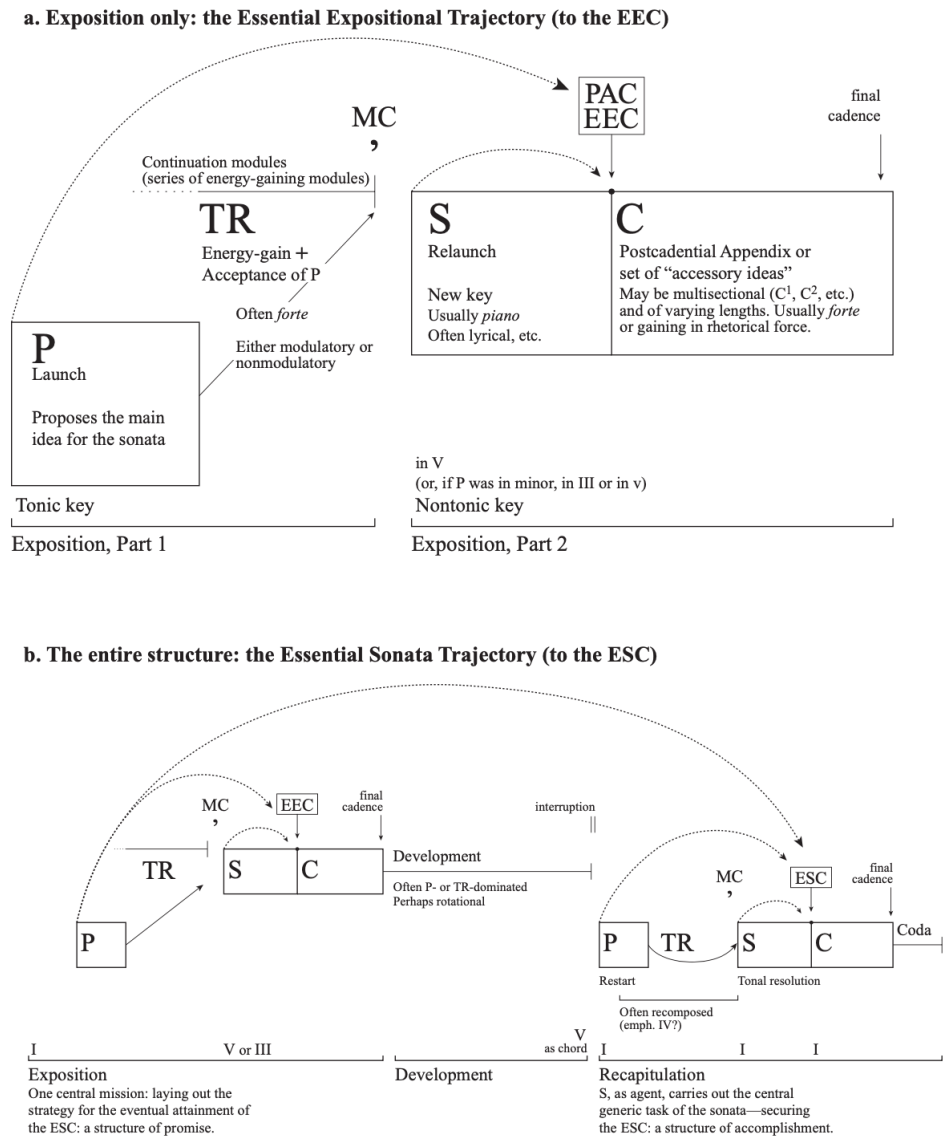
The foundation of the following analysis is sonata theory, developed by Hepokoski and Darcy. Sonata theory holds that the generic task (or “Essential Sonata Trajectory”) of the sonata form is to resolve the harmonic tension presented in the exposition. In a normative sonata structure, the exposition presents two themes—the primary theme in the tonic key and the secondary theme in a contrasting key, such as the dominant or relative major—and the recapitulation restates both themes in the tonic key. Sonata form “promises” this resolution, which is “accomplished” at the Essential Structural Closure (ESC), the conclusion of the recapitulated secondary theme in the tonic key.<sup>48</sup> Figure 3.1 shows the layout of the generic task in a normative sonata form.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Hepokoski and Darcy, 14-22.

<sup>49</sup> Hepokoski and Darcy, 17.

**Figure 3.1:** Normative sonata structure



Hepokoski and Darcy refer to sonata form as an abstract, culturally established paradigm which helps composers and listeners interact dialogically. It also provides a common tool for narrative analysis because of its formal trajectory: the accomplishment of sonata form’s generic task analogous to the protagonist’s success in overcoming an



obstacle or achieving a goal; accordingly, failure to achieve the ESC represents the failure of the protagonist.<sup>50</sup>

While the normative sonata form has been a basis for theoretical analysis since the 1800s, sonata theory goes farther by exploring “deviations” from this archetype, shedding light on non-normative structures commonly found in sonata form works. Even from its earliest standardization, composers departed from the normative sonata form for artistic purposes; these departures generally fall into clear patterns of “deformation.” Critically, such deformations are intentional and meant to be understood as manipulations of sonata form; therefore, they invite hermeneutic and narrative analysis.<sup>51</sup> Hepokoski and Darcy identify five common sonata types established in the Classical Era, each of which is subject to deformations, particularly as the Romantic Era progressed.

Applying sonata theory to formal analysis of twentieth-century music is complicated by the enormous changes to compositional norms since the Classical Era, and the decreasing likelihood of such changes becoming referentially standardized since the late Romantic. However, sonata structures, both normative and deformed, are clearly present in much post-Romantic music, just as the term “sonata” has endured to mean a Classically structured solo or small chamber work. The principal issue in extending sonata theory-based analysis to compositions of the twentieth century and beyond is related to tonality, specifically the central role of the perfect authentic cadence. Sonata

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<sup>50</sup> Hepokoski and Darcy, 9-11, 251-4.

<sup>51</sup> Hepokoski and Darcy, 251-4.

theory relies on functional harmony: the first perfect authentic cadence in the primary theme indicates the end of P-theme and the beginning of the transition (TR); the first perfect authentic cadence that is not followed by the secondary theme (S) is the Essential Expositional Closure (EEC), dividing the S-zone and closing zone (C-zone); the perfect authentic cadence in the recapitulatory S-zone provides the Essential Structural Closure (ESC), representing the structural accomplishment. As such, sonata theory cannot be strictly applied to compositions that do not operate according to functional tonality.

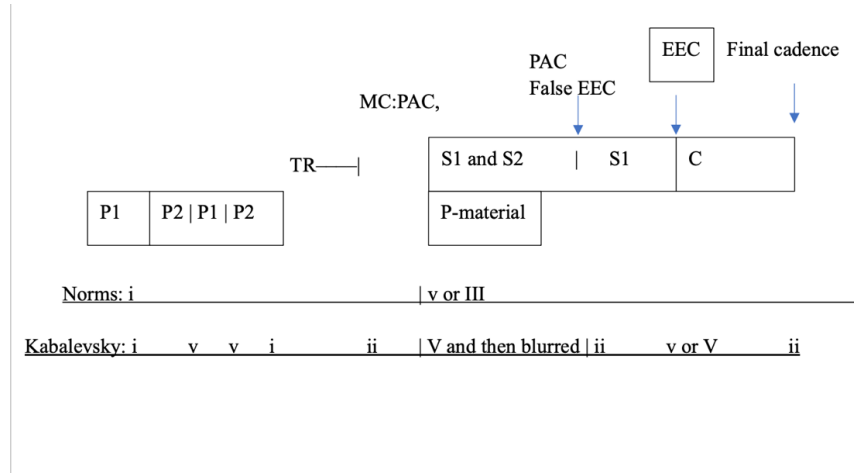
Kabalevsky's Second Piano Concerto in G minor does not adhere to Classically-oriented functional tonality. The juxtaposition of minor-major mode and modal scales in the same passage and frequent, prolonged ambiguous key areas do away with the possibility of clear tonic-contrasting key-tonic narratives. Nonetheless, the Second Piano Concerto engages with many sonata form norms, including the use of some degree of functional harmony and sonata types established in the Classical-Romantic tradition. Just as significantly, Kabalevsky's manipulation of sonata norms can be understood as a narrative tool, in his case for the purpose of articulating aesthetics following Socialist Realism. The following presents a formal analysis detailing the sonata structure of the concerto, and a narrative analysis addressing how that structure relates to principles of Socialist Realism.

### **Formal Analysis**

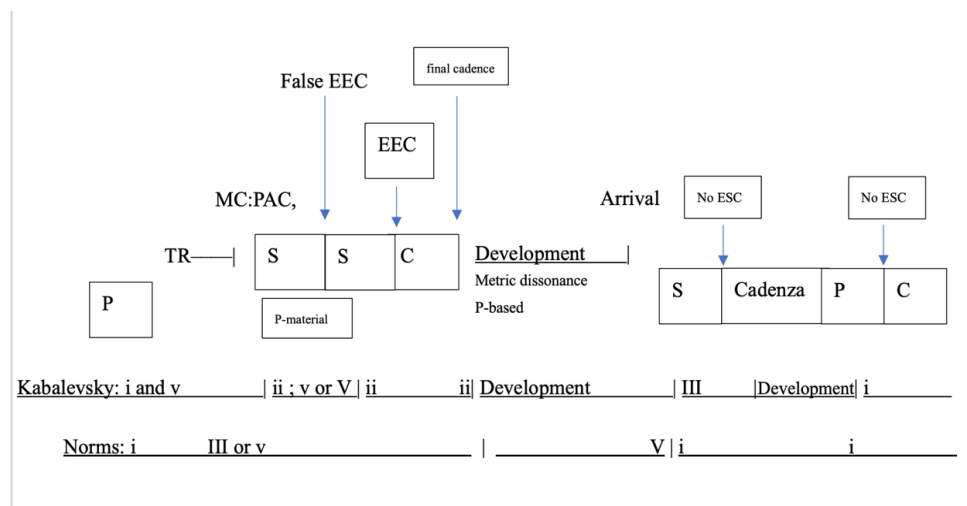
Figures 3.2 and 3.3 show the structural layout of the first movement of

Kabalevsky's Second Piano Concerto in G minor. Kabalevsky's tonal plan clearly does not follow the normative archetype.

**Figure 3.2:** Sonata structure of the exposition



**Figure 3.3:** Sonata structure of the first movement



Speaking strictly, the exposition fails to achieve the main generic goal of a

minor-mode exposition, securing the EEC with a satisfactory III:PAC or v:PAC.<sup>52</sup> The conventional keys for the secondary theme would be either B-flat major (relative major key) or D minor (dominant minor key). Kabalevsky's S begins in D major (V/i), followed by constant modulation until A minor (ii/i)—the key of the TR going into S—is reached. Likewise, the recapitulation (where S is in the relative major) is non-resolving, in terms of the conflict presented in the exposition.

This lack of resolution is emphasized by S preceding P in the recapitulation. Sometimes referred to as “reverse recapitulation,” the return of S without P (the attempt to reach the ESC without recapitulating P) produces a Type 2 sonata. In Type 2, the narrative is fulfilled, or fails, according to the action of S, and is followed by the closing zone. In those Type 2 structures which appear to “reverse” S and P, the S-zone is recapitulated, while P-material follows either as an extension of the S-zone or as part of the C-zone; the P-zone is never recapitulated in Type 2. The first movement of Kabalevsky's Third Piano Concerto in D major, Op. 50, is also a Type 2 sonata. And Chopin also employed similar “reverse recapitulation” in the first movement of his Third Piano Sonata in B minor, op. 58.

Despite the absence of strict tonal structures, Kabalevsky clearly uses a kind of functional tonality within his Type 2 form. For instance, in the exposition, perfect authentic cadences occur in mm. 56–7, mm. 91–2, and mm. 111–2; in the development, there is a 19-measure dominant pedal (mm. 199–217) leading to a perfect authentic

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<sup>52</sup> Hepokoski and Darcy, 177-80.

cadence in B-flat major; and both the expositional and recapitulatory C-zones contain a repetitive dominant-tonic bass motion (respectively, in mm. 112–9 and mm. 293–300). Therefore, despite the modal elements, chromaticism, and non-traditional key relations, Kabalevsky's tonal practices are functional, and his tonal and structural deformations are intentional. It follows that the failure of the generic sonata task—a radical deformation—should be read as a powerful expressive statement.<sup>53</sup>

Smaller-scale deformations are present throughout the first movement, and the binary primary and secondary themes produce the most analytical complications. The very identification of the larger rotations and themes is difficult at first glance, as Kabalevsky does not follow the normative sonata tonal plan. For example, the solo plays new material in C minor in mm. 33 which has an energetic character executed by the rhythmic pattern, articulation and marcato marking; this contrasts with the lyrical character of P (mm. 2–5), and therefore could be mistaken for S. However, S cannot begin before the medial caesura, usually presented as HC or PAC.<sup>54</sup> Instead, the Neapolitan sixth moves directly to the tonic of C minor (mm. 32–33). Therefore, the material in mm. 33 is P2, not S. This kind of structure is associated with the Type 5 sonata, used to describe the multiple, altered, and sequential presentations of thematic material common to concertos.

Kabalevsky's use of the Neapolitan sixth chord (Phrygian II) as a key area is

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<sup>53</sup> Hepokoski and Darcy, 178; 245–54.

<sup>54</sup> Hepokoski and Darcy, 117–24.

significant as well. In most eighteenth- and nineteenth-century music, a Neapolitan sixth precedes an authentic cadence, functioning as a predominant chord. However, Kabalevsky avoids the dominant chord between Neapolitan sixth and tonic, delaying the perfect authentic cadence. The eighth-note rest referred to in mm. 32–33 is exemplary: by delaying the perfect authentic cadence, Kabalevsky builds up the harmonic conflict. This type of using Neapolitan sixth chord has its precedence in late Romantic music such as Johannes Brahms’s piano sonatas.

Kabalevsky delays the first perfect authentic cadence to the MC, mm. 57. A short secondary theme (S1) in A minor appears in mm. 57–60, followed by a lyrical S2 in D major in mm. 60–8. The next perfect authentic cadence occurs in m. 92; this initially suggests the EEC, but is immediately followed by more S2-material. This perfect authentic cadence thereby can be interpreted as a “fake EEC.” The S-zone is also complicated by the interlacing of S1 and S2 (in the piano) with P1-material (in the orchestra).

According to Hepokoski and Darcy, if the EEC is evaded, postponed, or attenuated—“if the S-theme is having difficulties to attain the EEC”—the P-material “can intervene to take control of the drive to the PAC.”<sup>55</sup> The coexistence of the primary and secondary thematic material, and the failure to attain EEC in the S-zone, create structural and harmonic tension. Ultimately, the EEC is achieved in mm. 112 with a PAC in D major. The key area of the C-zone swings between D major and D minor, and ends in A

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<sup>55</sup> Hepokoski and Darcy, 140–1.

minor.

There is no standard pathway for a development section, although, in this movement, the dominant prolongation through mm. 199–217 shows its genesis in normative sonata form. The recapitulation starts in mm. 217, followed by a prolonged solo cadenza in mm. 228–70. This cadenza serves as the recapitulatory TR, connecting the development section to the return of the S-zone. It also provides many motivic and textural quotations from Prokofiev's Second Piano Concerto in G minor, Op. 16. The most obvious quotations occur in mm. 233–41, where the slow-paced ascending melody is accompanied by a faster, register-crossing texture; and in mm. 251–59, where the melody is written in the exact same rhythmic and accompanying pattern as Prokofiev's cadenza.

The recapitulation omits the P-zone, moving instead directly to the TR/cadenza, and from there to the S1 theme—S2 is also omitted in the recapitulation. S1 appears in a non-tonic key, B-flat major (III/i). According to Hepokoski and Darcy, the major-mode recapitulatory S in a minor-mode sonata implies that “positive outcome is in the offing.”<sup>56</sup> The recapitulatory S2 is appropriately major, but fails to achieve an ESC in the correct key. This failure is emphasized by the return, in the piano, of P1 and P2 material in the tonic minor. The PAC signaling the ESC does not appear until the recapitulatory C-zone; therefore, neither the S-zone fails to resolve.

Hepokoski and Darcy consider the failure to achieve ESC a strong expressive

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<sup>56</sup> Hepokoski and Darcy, 177-80; 313.

gesture because it defers the expected cadential and tonal closure for the movement into a coda, beyond the sonata-space. In addition, the eventual tonal resolution provides “a disillusioned lamenting of the absence of closure in the proper structural space.”<sup>57</sup>

Many occurrences of the perfect authentic cadence in mm. 293–304 reinforce this too-late victory; and when the movement ends in G minor in mm. 310, the perfect authentic cadence is avoided again, leaving even the tonic key less certain than it could be.

### **Narrative Analysis**

As the first movement of Kabalevsky’s Second Piano Concerto in G minor fails to accomplish its generic task, it seems that the first movement depicts a tragedy. However, tragedy in literature or music was limited according to in Soviet principles: a final resolution (or positive ending of the plot in literature) is crucial, allowing “the Socialist-Realist narrative to do its task of explaining present hardship as a necessary step towards future utopia.”<sup>58</sup>

The document from Andrey Zhdanov’s 1934 meeting was published in Pravda, listing desirable and unacceptable qualities of Soviet music.<sup>59</sup> The unacceptable qualities include pessimism and the doubt, while desirable qualities include optimism and the depiction of revolutionary development. Pravda also gave the official definition of

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<sup>57</sup> Hepokoski and Darcy, 245–6.

<sup>58</sup> Kuhn, 12; Clark, 108-110.

<sup>59</sup> Kuhn, 8.



## Socialist Realism:

Socialist Realism, the basic method of Soviet artistic literature and literary criticism, demands truthfulness from the artist and a historically concrete portrayal of reality in its revolutionary development. Under these conditions, truthfulness and historical concreteness of artistic portrayal ought to be combined with the task of the ideological remaking and education of the working people in the spirit of socialism.<sup>60</sup>

Yet it was by no means obvious how the literary method of Socialist Realism can be applied to abstract music. Following Katerina Clark's argument that the rhetorical shape of a Socialist Realism trajectory could be paralleled in artworks, the harmonic tension and non-resolving nature of the sonata form in the first movement—and the ultimate resolution in the final portion of the concerto—signify the trials faced by the proletariat protagonist and their ultimate triumph in the Socialist Realism plot.<sup>61</sup> Indeed, Kabalevsky's negative conclusion for the first movement seems intentional: the first movement's tonal resolution is delayed until the third and final movement, which ends in G major. Therefore, the Second Piano Concerto's tonal resolution from G minor to G major reflects a heroic journey through adversity to dramatic triumph.

The archetypal sonata form provides a replacement for explicit text through its own narrative trajectory; the accomplishment of the sonata form's generic task is analogous to the accomplishment of the protagonist. In the Second Piano Concerto, the

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<sup>60</sup> Jeffrey Brooks, *Thank You, Comrade Stalin! Soviet Public Culture from Revolution to Cold War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 108.

<sup>61</sup> Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History As Ritual* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 108.

narrative trajectory of the first movement suggests the twists and turns in of protagonist's journey to the destination. Kabalevsky's primary tools for creating this narrative are sonata deformations and binary oppositions, such as major-minor mode, orchestra-soloist, norms-deformation; the relationships and developments between or within these binary oppositions produce narrative drive.

Narrative analysis is not meant to determine and fix a "correct" interpretation, but to "find an interpretive flair that startles pieces awake as historical and cultural statements."<sup>62</sup> The signifiers in the first movement can hold different meanings. For example, cultural historian Sheila Fitzpatrick finds that "Socialist Realism was an attempt to create a narrative to explain the grim reality of Soviet daily life in the early 1930s" and "present life as it was 'becoming' or ought to be, rather than life as it was."<sup>63</sup> In this reading, the promised tonal resolution of the essential sonata trajectory signifies the Soviet expectation of a utopian future, while the deformations signify war, disaster, or the West-as-enemy.

Another possible interpretation comes from a list of government-approved novels in the 1930s, most of which trace a hero's evolution from bad qualities such as self-centeredness or individualism, through adversity, to collectivism and communism.<sup>64</sup> Here, the deformations can be seen as the hardships that the hero faces in overcoming

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<sup>62</sup> Hepokoski and Darcy, 253.

<sup>63</sup> Judith Kuhn, *Shostakovich in Dialogue: Form, Imagery and Ideas in Quartets 1-7* (London: Routledge, 2016), 3-5.

<sup>64</sup> Clark, 7-8; 15-24.

their shortcomings, with the delayed final tonal resolution in the third movement representing the hero's. In the following analysis, generic terms such as "imaginary enemy" and "protagonist" will be used to avoid the impression of a fixed narrative interpretation.

**Exposition (mm. 1–135).** The tonal and structural deformations of the exposition evoke the conflict between the protagonist and the imaginary enemy. According to concerto traditions, the soloist is the protagonist; in this case, the orchestra can represent the imaginary enemy. The solo begins the concerto with the P1 theme in G minor, introducing and emphasizing the initial key through a broken-chord figure and scale texture. The orchestra occasionally plays enharmonic chords (mm. 1–7), then interrupts the first perfect authentic cadence in m. 7. The stable key area from mm. 8–17 contains figurations implying the protagonist's struggle: in mm. 11–13, the piano's descending melody with dotted rhythm produces a staggering gesture; a descending texture in sixteenth-notes is a falling gesture.

The piano restates P1 in the tonic, mm. 17–20, indicating the protagonist's re-adjustment of the journey. However, the orchestra plays a Neapolitan sixth chord in m. 32 that does not proceed to the dominant, preventing the solo from attaining its first PAC. In addition, the orchestra leads the key area to C minor, or iv/i. This tonal deformation executed by the orchestra signifies the imaginary enemy's trickery in distracting the protagonist from their path.

At m. 43, the orchestra plays P1 in C minor; taking the accidentals and unstable key area of mm. 37–43 into account, the imaginary enemy’s restatement of P1 in this “wrong” key attempts to persuade the protagonist that they have arrived the correct destination. The f-sharp in m. 46 indicates the protagonist’s attempt to return to the tonic key, while the accidentals of mm. 47–49 confirm their failure to do so.

The orchestra continues to interrupt or mislead the solo’s progress throughout the exposition. In m. 54, the orchestra plays P1. The first three notes imply the key of B-flat major, which is one of the expected S keys for minor mode sonata form; however, this immediately modulates to A minor, confirmed by the first PAC of the exposition. The Locrian mode of mm. 57–60 adds an exotic flavor to the music, but also depicts the unfamiliar and bizarre environment that the protagonist is facing. The modal confusion then dominates S2 in the solo, moving from D major (m. 60) to D-Mixolydian (mm. 62–63), G-Mixolydian (m. 64), A-Locrian (mm. 65–66) and D-Dorian (mm. 66–67).

While these modes resemble two of the keys expected in the essential sonata trajectory—G minor (i) and D minor (v)—none of them are “correct.” There is no well-established or developed tonal center. This prolonged instability may be read two ways: as signifying that the marooned protagonist is obliged to seek whatever consolation can be found; or that the imaginary enemy is trying to convince the protagonist that the sonata destination (generic task) has been reached. The same harmonic insecurity dominates the C-zone (mm. 112–132), where the orchestra swings between D major and D minor. The ornamented, descending viola line in mm. 115 and 117 is a laughing

gesture—the imaginary enemy is ridiculing the protagonist.

The postponed EEC, and interlaced orchestral P1 theme and S themes in the S-zone, are another gesture of the imaginary enemy trying to establish its victory, with the orchestral P1 theme at m. 83 controlling the drive to the EEC.<sup>65</sup> The false EEC in m. 91 and rapid ascending piano line in mm. 93 and 95 indicate the protagonist's attempts to escape, and the eventual EEC in A minor (m. 112) a final failure of that effort.

**Development (mm. 135-216).** As noted earlier, the archetypal sonata development does not have standard norms or key relations. Kabalevsky instead uses metric dissonance to evoke drama. The piano material is based on P2, although it does not adopt the theme's melodic or intervallic features. Instead, it extends the rhythmic pattern of P2, in a very subtle way. P2 is triplet figure in 4/4 meter while the developmental piano material, mm. 135-68, uses eighth-notes in 3/4 meter, the accents and dynamic density change the perceptible pulse of the new material from triple to duple; three successive eighth-notes are therefore heard as a beam of triplets in 6/8, instead of 3/4. The orchestra, mm. 135-68, plays strictly in 3/4 meter, creating a perceptible triple pulse. Therefore, Kabalevsky forms a metric dissonance between the piano and the orchestra.

As the goal of the orchestra is to lock the solo into the triple meter, while the solo insists on duple, the metric dissonance within the solo represents the protagonist's

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<sup>65</sup> Hepokoski and Darcy, 140–1.

vacillation between meters, and the metric dissonance between the orchestra and solo is the conflict between the protagonist and invisible enemy. The resolution of the metric dissonance accordingly implies the end of the conflict. This is played out in mm. 139–42. The piano begins in duple but is interrupted and affected by the orchestra's triple pulse; notation changes in m. 141 indicate that the solo failed to insist on its duple pulse. The piano's restatement of duple pulse in mm. 149 is a second attempt to escape which climaxes in m. 169, where the solo returns to triple pulse through the end of the development section, m. 199. Because the perceptible pulse of the solo matches its written pulse, the orchestra seems to have won this battle.

However, Kabalevsky's treatment of this resolution is deceptive. Even though the solo is in 3/4 in mm. 199–217, rests in the piano part create a new rhythmic layer: 2/4 meter. The 2/4 in mm. 201 and 204 enables the orchestra to sync the downbeat every three measures, even as the perceptible pulse in the piano is still duple. This suggests that the protagonist is only pretending to give in to the enemy, while still looking for a chance to escape. Therefore, the metrical reconciliation is dishonest, and the conflict has not truly been resolved.

**Recapitulation (mm. 217-310).** The orchestra plays S2 in B-flat major (III/i) and modulates to A minor (ii/i), mm. 217-27. The key (the orchestral arrival in the “promised” key), and the trumpet call (as a victory horn) in mm. 223 and 225, signifies the orchestral victory and the protagonist’s adversity. And the dynamic drops from fortissimo to pianissimo. The whole orchestral S2 passage evokes a scene that the imaginary enemy is cheering and leaving the battlefield.

The long cadenza which follows, mm. 228–70, could be interpreted as the recovery and the revenge of the protagonist. It starts *Andante con moto* in the lowest register of the piano, and is a non-stop crescendo from *mf* to *fff*; the melody is a quarter-note figure (mm. 228–32), which develops through rhythmic crescendo and a 3-against-2 effect, mm. 237–240, creating tension and the drive to release it. The P1 material, *poco sostenuto*, is played against the triplet rhythmic pattern of P2, mm. 251–259, forming a gesture of struggling onwards under a great burden. Finally, the burst into *piu mosso* in m. 268 represents the anger of the protagonist and their sudden push to regain control.

According to sonata theory, a non-resolving recapitulation brings the essential sonata trajectory to a negative close. However, while the recapitulatory S-zone indicates the victory of the imaginary enemy, the failure of the ESC using P-material suggests the protagonist’s rejection of the enemy’s non-resolving “reconciliation.” Likewise, the plagal cadence closing the first movement suggests rejection, implying that this is not the real ending of the story – and that there is still a chance for the protagonist to triumph.

This narrative does ultimately play out as the third movement ends with G major, realizing the structural accomplishment of the first movement. Therefore, the narrative outcome is ultimately positive: despite the hardship the protagonist suffered, they never gave up on reorientation to the correct path. This reflects the optimism deemed necessary for Soviet Socialist Realism; the protagonist's delayed final victory not only makes the full narrative more dramatic, but responds to the demand for "heroic" and "revolutionary development" in Zhdanov's 1934 document. As such, Kabalevsky's treatment of sonata form—with deformations, use of binary oppositions, and intentional delay of tonal resolution—contributes to the application of Socialist Realism in untexted music.



## Conclusion

This essay, in addition to revealing Kabalevsky's approach to embracing Socialist Realism in his orchestral music, also addresses several underexplored aspects of Kabalevsky's life and work: the political factors underlying the success of his opera *Colas Breugnon*, op. 24, his unrecorded Stalin Prize, and the existence of his one-movement piano concerto prior to his First Piano Concerto. The first of these was supported by the examination of Kabalevsky's compositional path and political events in the 1930s; the latter two were based on Russian bibliographies written by his daughter, Maria Kabalevsky, which were rarely translated into English.

Most significantly, this essay makes critical connections between events and compositions often viewed in isolation because of the paucity of research into his music outside the pieces he wrote for children. Understanding the political factors underlying, for instance, the composition of his opera *Colas Breugnon*, op. 24, illuminates Kabalevsky's career transition from composition to music education in the 1950s was more than a perceived dwindling of musical talent. This heightened awareness of Kabalevsky's social, political, and musical contexts in turn provides necessary background for a study of his piano concerto.

Kabalevsky is more than a children's composer, and his musical legacy should be examined far beyond the scope of these educational works. His career is also a highly valuable source for understanding the full context of musical life and events occurring in

the Soviet Union, particularly during the Stalin era. While the lack of substantial attention to Kabalevsky in academic literature is tied to a lack of post-Soviet era interest in “non-progressive” composers—as opposed to perennial targets of controversy such as Shostakovich—exploring Kabalevsky’s life and works offers a key to broadening scholarly perspective on Soviet artists of all ideological perspectives. Finally, by contributing to a detailed, subtle portrait of Kabalevsky, the research about Kabalevsky will further acquaint musicians and audiences with the strengths of his art.

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