INSTITUTO
UNIVERSITÁRIO
DE LISBOA

# Music as a soft power tool: Western music events in the Soviet Union during the Cold War

Francisco Soares Rosa dos Santos

*Master*'s Degree in International Studies

Supervisor:
PhD. Luís Nuno Rodrigues. Full Professor,
ISCTE- Instituto Universitário de Lisboa

September, 2025

SOCIOLOGIA
E POLÍTICAS PÚBLICAS

Department of History

# Music as a soft power tool: Western music events In the Soviet Union during the Cold War

Francisco Soares Rosa dos Santos

*Master*'s Degree in International Studies

Supervisor:
PhD. Luís Nuno Rodrigues, Full
Professor, ISCTE - Instituto Universitário
de Lisboa

September, 2025

## Aknowledgements

I would like to thank everyone who made this thesis possible.

I want to thank my family for encouraging me to choose a topic that aligns with what I love most in life, and that I could relate to my field of study, and for always giving me the strength to never even consider giving up.

And to my supervisor, with whom I had the pleasure and fortune of sharing this journey, for always being present and helping me with whatever I needed along the way.

## Abstract

This dissertation explores music as a Cold War instrument of *soft power*, and in particular, how Western music exerted its cultural and political influence over the Soviet Union. It contends that music broke its conventional function as amusement to become a subversive vehicle in culture that redefined attitudes, framed generations, and delegitimized the ideological power of the Communist state.

The research begins with an examination of the *soft power* theory and the broader context of Cold War cultural diplomacy, proceeding to examine how various genres of music were given meaning through time and how the Soviet government attempted to fight the popularity of Western music by censoring it, propagandizing against it, and promoting officially approved alternatives. Tracking the path of Western music in the USSR - first through illegal underground circuits and subsequently through formally sanctioned public performances - the work demonstrates how music, and specifically rock, was used as a vehicle of cultural exchange and transformed into an arena for expressing desires for freedom and authenticity.

With a cultural and historical argument grounded in secondary sources, the thesis demonstrates that Western music had an influence that extended beyond cultural interest. Rock progressively eroded censorship boundaries, exposed the limitations of state authority over the arts, and contributed to discrediting the Soviet Union's ideological legitimacy. The research outlines the potential of culture, and music specifically, to serve as a tool of political transformation in times of ideological struggle.

**Keywords:** Soft Power – Cultural Diplomacy – Cold War – Music from the West – Soviet Union – Western rock

## Resumo

Esta dissertação explora a música como um instrumento de *soft power* na Guerra Fria e, em particular, como a música ocidental exerceu a sua influência cultural e política sobre a União Soviética. Defende que a música rompeu com a sua função convencional de entretenimento para se tornar um veículo subversivo na cultura, redefinindo atitudes, moldando gerações e ilegitimando o poder ideológico do Estado comunista.

A investigação começa com uma examinação da teoria do *soft power* e do contexto mais amplo da diplomacia cultural da Guerra Fria, examinando como vários géneros musicais ganharam significado ao longo do tempo e como o governo Soviético tentou combater a popularidade da música ocidental censurando-a, fazendo propaganda contra ela e promovendo alternativas oficialmente aprovadas. Rastreando o percurso da música ocidental na URSS – primeiro através de circuitos clandestinos ilegais e, mais tarde, através de apresentações públicas formalmente sancionadas – a obra demonstra como a música, e especificamente o rock, foi utilizada como veículo de intercâmbio cultural e transformada numa arena para expressar desejos de liberdade e autenticidade.

Com um argumento cultural e histórico fundamentado em fontes secundárias, a tese demonstra que a música ocidental teve uma influência que se estendeu para além do interesse cultural. O rock erodiu progressivamente os limites da censura, expôs as limitações da autoridade estatal sobre as artes e contribuiu para desacreditar a legitimidade ideológica da União Soviética. A investigação destaca o potencial da cultura, e da música em particular, para servir como ferramenta de transformação política em tempos de conflito ideológico.



**Palavras – chave: Soft power – Diplomacia cultural – Guerra Fria – Música do Ocidente – União Soviética – Rock ocidental**

# Table of contents

## Introduction

The Cold War, lasting from the end of World War II to the Soviet Union's dissolution and collapse in 1991, was mostly known for the geopolitical tension between the two superpowers involved, the United States of America and the Soviet Union (that had two completely different perspectives on the world). But the Cold War was also about culture and ideology: each side viewed their own ideologies as the best (the western capitalist model adopted by the USA and the socialist communist system adopted by the USSR), believing that their political, economic and social model, based on their political convictions, was the only legitimate path for the future of humanity to thrive.

It is crucial to briefly recognize the key features that distinguished the Cold War beyond ideology in order to completely comprehend the larger context in which this cultural conflict took place: instead of using direct military force against each other, the United States and the Soviet Union engaged in a number of indirect conflicts, also referred to as proxy wars, in places like Korea, Vietnam, Afghanistan, and portions of Africa and Latin America. In an effort to increase their worldwide influence, each superpower backed rival groups in these wars. Also, the establishment of political and military alliances, such as the Warsaw Pact in the East and NATO in the West, was another aspect of the Cold War that solidified the division between the two blocs. And, although this thesis does not specifically address these geopolitical and military aspects, it's important to briefly address and mention them for context, to be able to comprehend why cultural diplomacy and *soft power* emerged as such potent instruments during this time, particularly in non-military spheres like music and the arts where ideological influence could be expanded without direct conflict.

As already stated, the reason for this work is that the Cold War was not only about geopolitical interest, but rather about cultural diplomatic appeal: influence through culture (*soft power*, concept that will be extensively explained in chapter II) became an extension of both countries' foreign policy strategies, with different cultural aspects such as cinema, literature, art, dance and (the one that I will delve deeper into) music, serving as a tool to promote each political system's values and, especially, to influence people's "hearts and minds" all around the globe. Examples to sustain this idea are *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters* by Frances Stonor Saunders (2000); *Music in America's Cold War Diplomacy by Danielle Fosler-Lussier* (2015); *Jazz Diplomacy: Promoting America in the Cold War* Era by Lisa E. Davenport (2009).

This cultural battle was dealt differently when comparing the two opposite sides: the United States promoted freedom of expression and creativity (very notable in its cultural agenda) as key points of its democratic values, using Hollywood films, for example (not always with the intent of being anti-Soviet propaganda) as cultural vehicles for Western values – an intelligent idea since movies are an attraction that moves many people; literature was another cultural weapon on the United States' arsenal: authors like Faulkner and Hemingway were hugely relevant in the West and that popularity went on to the East, as these authors' books were widely translated – again, using this cultural approach to globally influence other nations of Western ideologies and beliefs; art, through exhibitions, was displayed in Europe to showcase United States' expression of freedom and creativity, through renowned artists like Jackson Pollock, with its abstract expressionists paintings. The Soviet Union, on the other hand, was more interested in discipline and seriousness, as their *soft power* tools passed through ballet and classical music, sending Bolshoi Ballet on worldwide tours and boasting about their classical composers like Tchaikovsky with the intent of promoting their supposed superiority; also, in films and documentaries, the Soviets showcased their achievements, especially in sports, science and industry, successful sectors for the Soviet Union. So, while both hegemonic states used media and arts as forms of influence, their style of approach in these matters was different, also because of their differing ideologies. A great example of this on the Soviet's side is the paper by Boris Belge named "From Peace to Freedom. How Classical Music Became Political in the Soviet Union, 1964–1982" (2013); on the Western side, *Music in America's Cold War Diplomacy* by Danielle Fosler-Lussier (2015).

Another crucial aspect to emphasize is the asymmetry of cultural influence between the two blocs: while both the United States and the Soviet Union seek to spread their values through cultural diplomacy, the openness of Western media and the popularity of American culture abroad gave the US a distinct advantage. From popular, worldwide brands, to jazz records and to Hollywood blockbusters, American cultural products became highly desirable symbols of modernity, individuality, and freedom, which wildly contrasted with Soviet culture, that, despite its rich classical tradition, still struggled to generate the same global enthusiasm and sympathy, particularly among younger audiences (game changer for the U.S., as American culture deeply resonated with the Soviet youth) in the East and non-aligned countries. This imbalance turned Western music into not just entertainment, but into a form of ideological aspiration, that, above all, meant freedom (Falk, 2011).

Music was one of the ways that both sides found in order to express their ideologies, with the main objectives being the influence of other nations but also using it as a provocatory message to the other side, without having to enter in any kind military conflict (what is called hard power). While the United States were more creative and radiated freedom, the Soviet Union was stricter and characterized by its discipline. Jazz and rock were the main music genres used by the United States that ultimately led to a worldwide appeal and consequent influence, with the Soviet youth being one of the key groups that was most reached out by the power of Western music. On the other hand, the Soviet Union used mostly classical music and opera, showcasing their controlled display of talent, that didn't resonate as much with the global audience, as it wasn't as easy to appreciate as jazz, popular for its uplifting mood, African-American origins and creativity, and rock, that had freedom, rebellion and individuality at the core of its themes, while still sounding energetic (Belge, 2013; O'Rourke, 2019).

The Cold War was therefore characterized by this broad network of indirect and symbolic battles - education, tourism, radio, propaganda, and especially culture, were as (or more) important and effective as the actual constant threat of hard power rivalry between the two. Music, when compared with the other cultural aspects, stood out because of its emotional immediacy and mass appeal - unlike academic arguments or political speeches, music could reach the listener on a visceral level, planting ideas of freedom, rebellion, or identity without openly challenging the other side's authority, per say. David Brubeck, regarding the first time he played behind the Iron Curtain on Poland when he was just 10 years old (which was the first of any American jazz band) said for TIME Magazine: "It was uplifting and heartbreaking at the same time", "Our whole era of propaganda and demonization just evaporated in seconds". His father would often address the Polish crowds, saying "No dictatorship can tolerate jazz". "It is the first sign of a return to freedom" (Perrigo, 2017). This was particularly effective in authoritarian contexts, where official censorship was widespread but could not fully prevent the emergence of countercultural spaces, (as happened in the Soviet Union and in the Eastern Bloc), as bootlegged (unauthorized recordings, distributed illegally) tapes from the West were constantly arriving at the Soviet Union, slowly changing the Soviet youth mentality towards recognizing and accepting the Western music and overall culture (Stonor Saunders, 2000).

Regarding the justification of the thesis topic, I believe this topic is not only interesting but also very helpful in understanding *soft power* as a whole during the Cold War while focusing specifically on the role that music had in attenuating the tensions that were built and maintained during all those years. As this thesis belongs to the International Studies master's degree and

my absolute passion is music, I wanted to come up with an idea that would mix the two but, at the same time, was interesting still, regarding the contributions to the Cold War's cultural side and to *soft power* in specific, as it's a concept that I find very riveting. I believe that I did that - creating a balance between international/historic affairs and music, thus contributing to the research not only in international studies but also in music and its role in historic times, as this one is.

As I will prove throughout my thesis, Western musical diffusion to the Soviet Union played a huge role in attenuating tensions between the two superpowers, acting as tools of *soft power* and cultural diplomacy. For instance, Soviet youth gradually began to embrace the sound of Western rock and jazz, which fostered a shift in their mindset. As previously mentioned, Western music symbolized freedom and creativity - qualities that stood in stark contrast to the rigid, ideologically narrow worldview they had grown up with but were increasingly disillusioned by. Moreover, the youth factor must be highlighted as the Cold War took place during a time of massive demographic change, with youth culture emerging as a powerful and visible force in the West - and later, in the East as well. In the Soviet Union, younger generations increasingly felt disconnected from the rigid ideology of the regime, so for many of them, Western music served not only as an escape, but also as a form of cultural resistance, a way of expressing disillusionment and imagining alternative identities. The Beatles, in this initial phase, were fundamental to this Soviet way of thinking, as journalist Ed Vulliamy remembers Leslie Woodhead saying, in her book How the Beatles Rocked the Kremlin: The Untold Story of a Noisy Revolution: "It was also the right music at the right time. There had been this moment of Gagarin in space, the possibility that the Soviets may even win the cold war. Then it just fell to bits, and in the fear and disappointment, and as they said themselves: they 'needed the vitamins', and the vitamins were provided by the Beatles' music." (Vulliamy, 2013). Pavel Palazchenko, Gorbachev's English interpreter, explains it best: "We knew their songs by heart… In the dusky years of the Brezhnev regime they were not only a source of musical relief. They helped us create a world of our own, a world different from the dull and senseless ideological liturgy that increasingly reminded one of Stalinism… The Beatles were our quiet way of rejecting "the system" while conforming to most of its demands." (Richmond, 2005, p.359). This generational dynamic gave music an even deeper political function, as it fostered internal fractures within the Soviet social fabric.

Regarding the research problem and guiding questions, this thesis is primarily driven by the following central question: "How and when did Western music events influence Soviet society

and its perceptions of the West?" This question reflects the core objective of the study - to understand the cultural and ideological impact that Western musical performances had behind the Iron Curtain. Closely connected to this, two secondary guiding questions help to shape the broader analysis:

- "How did Soviet authorities react to these events, and what were their censorship strategies?"
- "What role did different musical genres — such as jazz, folk, rock, and heavy metal — play in the broader ideological battle of the Cold War?"

These three questions collectively form the backbone of the research, ensuring a balance between the study of music as a cultural form and its significance within the field of international relations. It is essential not only to explore the message and symbolism conveyed by these musical genres, but also to assess how they were received by different segments of Soviet society - from the government to the general public - and what this revealed about the limits of Soviet control over cultural expression.

Moreover, by investigating the strategies of censorship and the state's attempts to manage or suppress these influences, the thesis will also reflect on how those strategies often proved ineffective or counterproductive, ultimately allowing Western music to infiltrate and resonate with Soviet audiences. Still, at the heart of the research remains the main question: how, and to what extent, did Western music events alter perceptions, inspire cultural shifts, and challenge ideological boundaries within the Soviet Union? The arrival of Western music in the USSR, whether via smuggled records, foreign radio broadcasts, or officially approved concerts, also exposed the limitations of the Soviet regime's cultural control - even when authorities tried to censor these events, the very presence of Western music undermined official narratives about the West being decadent, dangerous, or inferior. On the contrary – they were hugely successful, especially among the younger generation, due to its energetic and spontaneous approach. Seeing a Western rock band perform in the Soviet Union was deeply meaningful to the public as it showed that, even though political divisions remained, culture was beginning to cross those boundaries. A perfect example of this is the Moscow Music Peace Festival, that, although in 1989 (thus two years before the USSR's dissolution), still showcased the happiness of the

Soviets and the connection they had grown with the Western music and its musicians, as iconic bands told years later. [1]

Concerning the structure of the thesis, it will go as follows: chapter I (present chapter) for the introduction and methodology, briefly explaining what the central theme of the thesis is and what methods and sources will be used to achieve the conclusions; chapter II, dealing with the two primary concepts that lay the foundation for this thesis to exist in the first place: the concepts of *soft power* (developed by Joseph Nye) and *cultural Cold War*; chapter III regards the different musical genres, their diffusion, reception and post censorship by the Soviet government; chapter IV delves into rock and heavy metal (the primary genres of my thesis), its development and meaning, both to the West and to the East and how they helped take down the Soviet regime. Chapter V is the last one, where I will state my conclusions regarding the impact of music on the Cold War, its long and lasting impact on the USSR and the contribution of my thesis to the field works that I previously mentioned.

The research employs a qualitative, interpretive approach to examine Western music events' cultural and political significance in the Soviet Union during the Cold War. The source base is peer-reviewed, scholarly work, contemporary Western journalism appearing in newspapers and magazines, and edited audio-visual materials like documentaries and podcasts. Podcasts and documentaries are taken to be mediated testimonies that aggregate interviews and archival footage; where they provide first-person testimony, these are treated critically as secondary representation. The media aspect is subjected to close reading and discourse analysis in attempts to map out recurring themes - freedom, resistance, modernity, and ideological contestation - and to sketch convergences and divergences between Western and Soviet/Eastern narratives. Scholarly literature offers historical background and theoretical frameworks (*soft power*, cultural diplomacy, reception), enabling correlation across sources and a historically informed interpretation**.** Together, these sources aim to provide a comprehensive understanding of how Western music operated as a tool of *soft power* and cultural influence in the Soviet sphere. Musical acts like the Elton John tour in 1979 (the first pop rock artist in the USSR), the Uriah Heep concert in 1987, the Monsters Of Rock festival in 1989 and the Moscow Music Peace Festival in 1991 are the biggest musical events I am analyzing. The soviets' reception, the artists reactions, interviews from the time will take place in my thesis; articles like "There will be rock" (Von Faust, 2016); "Rocking in the Free World: Popular Music and the Politics of

[1] Citations from members of these bands will appear throughout the thesis.

Freedom in Postwar America." (Nicholas Tochka, 2023) and books so essential like the ones mentioned above by Frances Stonor Saunders and Danielle Fosler-Lussier; Podcasts like The Cold War Vault, where John McEuen is interviewed regarding his tour with the Nitty Gritty Dirt band in the Soviet Union in 1977, one of the first rock acts to step foot on the Soviet soil and documentaries like "To Russia… with Elton John", all of which will be analyzed later on.

From a methodological perspective, the interdisciplinary nature of this research allows it to draw on approaches from history, political science, cultural studies, and musicology. This is especially useful when analyzing how abstract political concepts like *soft power* are translated into concrete cultural practices, like the western music events that ultimately affected the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc (that will be explained thoroughly during the thesis), pulling the scale towards the West. Understanding the influence of music on public sentiment, for instance, requires a combination of reception studies (testimonies and audience reactions), and historical context, as well as, of course (and this constitutes the majority of the thesis) academic and scientific articles, from specialists in this theme – whether it is historians, musicologists, specialists in international relations and so on. This cross-disciplinary method elevates the interpretation of music as both a form of cultural production and a political tool, which is exactly the approaches that I'm looking for when studying this theme. Ultimately, music itself proved to be a force that challenged the Communist regime. Very few phenomena demonstrate the political influence of culture better than how Western music helped weaken the Soviet system legitimacy.

Lastly, this study admits the limitations of its sources, especially when discussing the Soviet context. Numerous testimonies are retrospective, and access to Soviet archives is still very limited. Many books and magazines from that era are locked or only available in Russian, which is obviously different from what occurs in the West. Nevertheless, a strong and insightful narrative regarding the impact of Western music during the Cold War can be created by concentrating on a variety of sources, including press articles, visual media and testimonies from the time.

## Chapter II: Concepts of Soft Power and Cultural Cold War

One cannot begin to discuss *soft power* without referencing the scholar that conceptualized it: Joseph S. Nye. University Distinguished Service Professor, Emeritus and former Dean of the Harvard's Kennedy School of Government, the late Joseph Nye was Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs, Chair of the National Intelligence Council, and Deputy Under Secretary of State for Security Assistance, Science and Technology. Author of thirteen books and over a hundred and fifty articles in professional and policy journals, Nye has left a great mark on the field on International Studies and Political Science, being named by the Foreign Policy magazine (for whom he wrote his first paper conceptualizing *soft power*), in 2011, as one of the top 100 Global Thinkers. Joseph S. Nye died on the 6th of May of 2025 and will forever be recognized as "the father of soft power" [2] (U.S. Department Of State; Harvard Kennedy School).

Although Joseph Nye formally introduced the term *soft power* in 1990, the underlying idea had long been in practice. Throughout the Cold War, both the United States and the Soviet Union employed cultural tools - from music and cinema to education and media, projecting influence beyond their borders. What Nye did was to theoretically frame this kind of influence as a form of power distinct from military or economic coercion, very much known until then. Therefore, it is both accurate and analytically useful to apply the concept of *soft power* retroactively to Cold War-era cultural diplomacy, especially when analysing how the United States used music as a means of attraction and ideological persuasion.

Joseph Nye first explained the concept in a 1990 article on the *Journal Of Foreign Policy* and in his book *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power*, later expanding and refining it in the book *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*. The definition of power is no longer mostly characterized by military power and conquest, as it was in earlier eras (up to the Cold War, actually) and that "proof of power lies not in resources but in the ability to change the behaviour of states." (Nye, 1990, p.155), which basically marks the sketch of the *soft power* explanation, as it distances itself from the already known and common *hard power*, continuing this idea by saying that the critical question for the United States is not whether it will maintain or even have more military resources, but if it will be capable of manipulating other states' political environment. Nye came up with the idea of *soft power* just

[2] Information found on the website of the U.S. Department Of State on the section of Joseph S. Nye's biography; also on the website of Harvard Kennedy School, in the profile of Joseph S. Nye.

at the conclusion of the Cold War, when the United States was securing its role as the world's only superpower. It was thus in itself not merely an analytical framework but also something of a political program for the use of American hegemony in the novel post-bipolar world. By emphasizing culture, ideology, and institutions as principal sources of influence, Nye outlined a picture of how the United States could be the world's leader despite the declining acceptability of relying upon old-style "hard power". Thus, the concept responded to both the academic challenge of explaining power in a changing world and the strategic need to legitimize American dominance in the decades that followed (Nye, 1990, p.167).

Nye doesn't defend the state's direct limitation or the purposeful decrease of hard power towards other countries, which would mean a diminishing of economic pressure (economic sanctions, conditioning of economic help) as well as the use or the threat of military power. He affirms that, in the 1990's, hard power is not as useful as it used to be, meaning that there is an actual limitation of how far hard power can take a country, but this limitation is self-imposed over time, not by the government's hand (Nye, 1990, p.168).

The political scientist also states that, in a traditional sense, all states ensure (or at least try to convince the citizens of that idea) the common citizen's security based on a military approach: there was always an intervention force that, in people's minds, was the symbol of security. But, says Nye, new dimensions of security must be considered beyond the military kind, as national security nowadays is much more complex than it was years before, underlining the importance of "instruments such as communications, organizational and institutional skills and manipulation of interdependence" (Nye, 1990, p.158), even if military power remains the ultimate form of power in general. Military power that, in a way, is also *soft power* in the sense that, for instance, the United States (which are the focus of this article and one of my thesis's focuses) are (or were, in the 1990's) the main distributor of military resources to Europe and Japan, which makes an instant *soft power* situation as *soft power* needs a relationship to exist and, while the United States can guarantee these countries' security (in a traditional, military way, as said before), their relationship will be healthy, meaning that the United States, even if unconsciously, will have a sort of influence over Japan and Europe, manipulating their governance context to its advantage, thus thriving with the usage of *soft power* (Nye, 1990, p.157).

Nye defends that the great powers during that time were beginning to lose their capability of advantage over others using the traditional sense of hard power through military resources and

that small states and private actors, in many points, were starting to catch up. The author identifies five trends (starting on page 160 in "Soft Power" by Nye, 1990) that have contributed to this diffusion of power: economic interdependence, transnational actors, nationalism in weak states, the spread of technology and changing political issues. Regarding economic interdependence, Nye argues that the technological improvements of communication and transportation ultimately led to a progressive lack of control from states over the flow of information, ideas and values – (three of the major factors of influence from both the United States and the Soviet Union) satellite television, fiber-optic cables and the overall expanse of telecommunications allowed cultural content to circulate widely and at a rapid pace, even in authoritarian and closed regimes like the Soviet Union, making the power in this new global environment not only military but, above all, through influence, in the ability to shape the preferences of others through attraction.

As Nye notes, "if a state can make its power seem legitimate in the eyes of others, it will encounter less resistance to its wishes." which makes total sense in the context of the Cold War, specifically in the case of the Soviet Union, where Western cultural products had a deep influence on youth audiences, as they were feeling more and more alienated from the severe Soviet regime, characterized by rigid cultural and ideological norms imposed by the state (Nye, 1990, p. 167).

Nye then highlights the growing role of transnational actors such as multinational corporations, media networks and international NGOS, whose influence transcends physical borders, thus making it rather difficult for governments to control and contain. These are actors that, more than ever, play a major role in shaping global public opinion and circulating cultural values (like both superpowers ideology), specially through the diffusion of music, cinema and consumer products, which was evident in the way that Western culture breached the Iron Curtain, despite of the attempts of the Soviet Union to undermine and ban Western ideology and products.

The third trend is the rise of nationalism in weak states, that, in the topic of my thesis is extremely relevant as *soft power*, in this case, can be specifically powerful and effective, as it offers a different perspective (regarding the ideological model) in contrast to what other populations are accustomed to, thus being especially influential, as these populations are often disappointed with their own government (the case of the Soviet Union, especially with the Soviet youth): Western cultural symbols, including popular music and films often served as

indirect expressions of disapproval or resistance in the Eastern Bloc. The rise of nationalism in weak states is, therefore, crucial to understand the following disagreement that so many times happens within the country, carried out by the people living under the government that they don't agree with, which can lead to an openness that, otherwise (without the influence of *soft power*) wouldn't take place, as these people, already frustrated with their own country's state, start to become influenced by the Western culture.

In fourth comes the spread of technology (especially in communication and media) that, with its arrival, transformed the way influence is not only projected but also received, as radio, television, and satellite communication allowed for a direct transmission of cultural messages across borders. These tools, boosted by an improvement in technology, enabled both sides to try and attract the rest of the world towards their ideology, manipulating and influencing them, not only from a political point of view but also cultural: a more disciplined and strict form of culture from the Soviet Union, characterized by classical music, ballet, and literature, and a more innovative, relaxed and energetic form of culture by the West, using rock and jazz, but, above all, picturing their lifestyle filled with freedom, that was rather appealing to the Soviets, especially for the younger generations.

The fifth and last trend that Nye mentions concerns the changing nature of political issues, where he states that traditional concerns, such as territorial security, began to share importance with new global challenges, including human rights, environmental protection, and cultural identity, with cultural identity playing a significant role. As a result, the ability of a country to gain universal support by advocating for shared values or culturally appealing symbols has progressively gained more strategic significance in this context.

These five trends, as envisioned by Joseph Nye, are of utmost importance in understanding why *soft power* has emerged as a necessary and powerful form of global influence – they constitute the motifs that make *soft power* increasingly essential with each passing day. In the specific context of the cultural cold war, they clarify how the cultural appeal of the West - particularly through its music that radiated freedom – gained unexpected (at the time) political weight while functioning outside traditional diplomatic channels and helping to gradually reshape ideological perceptions behind the Iron Curtain, within the Eastern Bloc.

This aspect of power, "which occurs when one country gets other countries to want what it wants" (Nye, 1990, p.166) might be called "co-optive", as they are easily persuaded and influenced to (in this case) want the same as the influencing country, which is hugely contrasting

with the traditional sense of power – hard and commanding, ordering others to do what it wants. This ability to influence what other countries wish to tends to be connected to intangible power resources, such as culture, ideologies, and institutions, making it as important as hard power. As Nye said, "if a state can make its power seem legitimate in the eyes of others, it will encounter less resistance to its wishes" which makes total sense in the context of the Cold War, specifically in the case of the Soviet Union, where Western cultural products had a deep influence on youth audiences, as they were feeling more and more alienated from the severe Soviet regime, characterized by rigid cultural and ideological norms imposed by the state. As stated before, this form of power is not new – power through influence has been around since the beginning of days, it just didn't have a name: Nye affirms that, in the early post war period, the Soviet Union profited from such resources, with theories like the "myth of inevitability", the Soviet belief that communism was inevitably going to prevail over capitalism, greatly challenged and criticized by Nye, saying that history is not governed by inevitability but rather by legitimacy, credibility, and attraction. In this sense, *soft power* becomes more relevant than ideology alone, particularly when cultural tools such as music resonate more deeply with foreign publics than abstract political doctrines (Nye, 1990, p. 167).

The United States, more than any country, have a unique way of influencing other countries: American popular culture, from sports jackets with the name of American colleges (very influential among the Japanese youth) to south American countries like Nicaragua broadcasting American shows on television and Chinese students using a symbol based on the Statue Of Liberty for the 1989 uprisings (that ended up being a massacre on Tiananmen Square) and even to the Soviet youth using the branded American blue jeans and listening to their recordings (Nye, 1990, p.169). However, the same didn't happen the other way around: Soviet ideology, products or television shows didn't reach as nearly as far as Western ones, thus not having as much influence on the rest of the world, like the United States had.

Nye deepens these thoughts on his 2018 article "Soft Power and Public Diplomacy Revisited", stating that *soft power* is the ability of influencing others through attraction and persuasion instead of coercion, like the traditional hard power does. Public diplomacy becomes more and more crucial as it came to light during the Cold War and gets more important each day as the world gets more connected, as it works by changing the opinion of a person and not by the money that is spent on military power.

The *soft power* of a country, argues Nye, rests not on the possession of a country, but rather on three resources: "its culture (in places where it is attractive to others); its political values (when it lives up to them at home and abroad); and its foreign policies (when they are seen as legitimate and having moral authority.)" (Nye, 2018, p.8).

The constantly improving evolving access to information is also addressed by the author, as, according to him, a revolution in information occurred, which, obviously enough, makes the traditional hard power lose efficiency and relevance while making *soft power* as powerful as ever, as communications nowadays are more instant than they have ever been, meaning that its diffusion is gradually (but at a solid pace) increasing.

The author affirms that credibility is what distinguishes *soft power* from propaganda. As much of it is generated from the society itself and not by the government (thus, not fully controlling it), *soft power* is what people want it to be, meaning that if the civil society or the government spread lies or manipulate, that credibility (that is the fuel of *soft power*) is lost and the influence that country had on others is lost as well.

Public diplomacy is referred to as a tool of *soft power*, described as a set of practices governments use to better communicate with foreign audiences, with the main goal of influencing their perspectives, as Nye explains, continuing by saying that public diplomacy is a mean to produce the end that is *soft power*, before expressing three main dimensions of public diplomacy that Mark Leonard, a British political scientist identified: "The first and most immediate dimension is daily communication, which involves explaining the context of domestic and foreign policy decisions."; "The second dimension is strategic communication, which develops a set of simple themes, much as a political or advertising campaign does. "A third dimension of public diplomacy has a longer time horizon and involves the development of lasting relationships with key individuals over many years through scholarships, exchanges, training, seminars, conferences and access to media channels" (Nye, 2018, p.12-13).

One of the most interesting things in this article, compared to Nye's original one from 1990 is that in this one he specifically uses the Cold War as a case study for *soft power*, gathering information for all these years. The author delves into the core of my thesis: the United States of America prevailed not only because of its economic and military power (even because they did not engage in any confrontation), but, above all, because of its culture, freedom, and values that, ultimately, appealed to people in the Eastern Bloc. Western music, fashion, education and media undermined Soviet ideology subtly and progressively, to a point where the Soviet youth

fully embraced the Western ways, as it presented alternative lifestyles and worldviews that were more appealing. The Berlin Wall, according to Nye, fell more to ideas than to weapons: "The Berlin Wall collapsed not under an artillery barrage, but from hammers and bulldozers wielded by people whose minds had been affected by ideas that had penetrated the Iron Curtain over the preceding decades." (Nye, 2018, p.8), arguing that *soft power* helped exposing the weaknesses of authoritarian regimes whose attempts at censorship and isolation ultimately failed to suppress the flow of attractive foreign influences – the main one being the U.S.

A key strength of democratic societies, Nye states, is the ability that they have of generating *soft power* from the bottom up through media, art, cinema, universities, and music – genuine and effective sources that end up being more attractive because they're not perceived as state propaganda, unlike the Soviet Union. Cultural exports to the Eastern Bloc and to the Soviet Union itself, like Hollywood films, pop, jazz, and rock music, created an image of freedom that appealed greatly to people behind the Iron Curtain, working as tools of influence (Nye, 2018, p.16).

Another one of the updates that Nye makes to his former 1990 article about *soft power* is the rise of the non-state actors and the recognition of the change in information – changes that help *soft power* gain more and more relevance each day that goes by as non-state actors, like influencers, NGO's and artists have even more power that they had in 1990, as information spreads faster than ever in this digital era, thus shaping peoples' and countries' perspectives about something relatively easily, surpassing the power that governments have in influencing and manipulating others ideas (Nye, 2018, p.10). This makes *soft power* both more available and harder to control: more available as, with the internet, many people can just spread information and try to influence others way more easily that years ago when it didn't exist, and harder to control because everyone can come across it and consume it, even if the information that is being spread is false, which Nye calls "sharp power" – a new concept that he believes authoritarian regimes use, characterized by manipulative and coercive tactics like disinformation and media control. He warns, however, underlining that sharp power is not a version of *soft power*, but a version of power, in general, as it lacks credibility, legitimacy, and long-term attraction, core characteristics of soft *power* (Nye, 2018, p.17).

*Soft power*, finishes Nye, will matter more each day, as the world is constantly changing into a more rapid and diverse way of spreading information, meaning that successful nations will be the ones that will be able to combine attraction with strategic communication and understand

the value of credibility, openness and cultural influence, thus maintaining a balanced form of influence.

This "revisited" exploration of the concept of *soft power* by Nye really adds relevance for my thesis: it reinforces why music and cultural events overall are important in international relations, proving a solid theoretical correlation between the concepts of *soft power* and cultural diplomacy, as the author sets the Cold War as a key historical moment when *soft power* was crucial to win the "hearts and minds" of people behind the Iron Curtain, thus incredibly pertinent to my thesis, specifically regarding the topic on the Soviet's reception of Western music.

Another crucial concept that helps explain and solidify my thesis is the concept of "Cultural Cold War", and to understand it, we will utilize the book *Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters* (also known as *Who Paid the Piper*?). This is a deeply researched book by the renowned British historian and journalist Frances Stonor Saunders that uncovers the cultural strategies carried out by the CIA and the U.S. government during the Cold War to promote American values and ideology, revealing how culture – literature, arts, cinema, intellectual journals and music specifically were turned into a weapon to be used in the ideological warfare that was going on between the United States and the Soviet Union, under the guise of promoting freedom, creativity and democracy.

As we've seen Joseph S. Nye affirm in his articles above, so does Saunders defend from 1940's onward: the Cold War was not only fought with pollical and military strategies, but also through a vast cultural offensive - at the heart of this cultural campaign was The Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF) that was funded and directed by the CIA, with the main objective of countering the Soviet cultural propaganda and to assert the moral and ideological dominance and superiority of the West for the world to see, as the author states: "Its mission was to nudge the intelligentsia of western Europe away from its lingering fascination with Marxism and Communism towards a view more accommodating of 'the American way" (Stonor Saunders, 2000, p.1). The CIA directly invested in diverse sectors of culture: financed the translation and publication of books so that they would be able to reach the Eastern Bloc culturally, supported art exhibitions, promoted and sponsored concerts and intellectual lectures and magazines in order to spread the American ideology as widely as it could, thus making the Cultural Cold War a far reaching weapon that could influence global public opinion in all different cultural aspects.

One of the key strategies was to align prominent intellectuals with American ideological goals - writers, poets, and philosophers were covertly funded or promoted, often without their knowledge, to serve as cultural ambassadors. Saunders discusses how cultural figures like Arthur Koestler (Stonor Saunders, 2000, p.1), George Orwell (Stonor Saunders, 2000, p.6) and Ignazio Silone (Stonor Saunders, 2000, p.14), among others like Ernest Hemingway were central to this effort, with their anti-Communist works widely circulated through CIA-backed channels.

However, this process was riddled with contradictions: The U.S. government, while promoting freedom, simultaneously manipulated cultural production and debate: “To what degree was it admissible for another state to covertly intervene in the fundamental processes of organic intellectual growth, of free debate and the uninhibited flow of ideas?”, “The CIA’s engagement in cultural warfare raises other troubling questions. Did financial aid distort the process by which intellectuals and their ideas were advanced? Were people selected for their positions, rather than on the basis of intellectual merit?” (Stonor Saunders, 2000, p.3). For example, the CIA supported modernist and abstract art not only for its aesthetic value but because it symbolized freedom and individuality, contrasting with the Soviet cultural repression: “Where Dondero saw in Abstract Expressionism evidence of a Communist conspiracy, America’s cultural mandarins detected a contrary virtue; for them, it spoke to a specifically anti-Communist ideology, the ideology of freedom, of free enterprise. Non-figurative and politically silent, it was the very antithesis to socialist realism. It was precisely the kind of art the Soviets loved to hate.” (Stonor Saunders, 2000, p.161). This strategic use of culture was accompanied by censorship, blacklists, and the marginalization of voices not aligned with U.S. ideological interests.

Although the book focuses less on music than on literature and the visual arts, it offers essential context for understanding music’s role within the cultural Cold War. The U.S. used jazz concerts as part of its diplomatic efforts - sending black artists on international tours to demonstrate the energy and racial inclusiveness of American society, making these cultural missions also intended to appeal to audiences disillusioned with the Soviets’ conformity and repression.

A major theme in Saunders’ work is the moral ambiguity of U.S. cultural diplomacy: while promoting liberal democratic ideals, the CIA also manipulated artists, intellectuals, and institutions, raising questions about the authenticity of the very freedom it claimed to defend. The U.S. became, in effect, a Ministry of Culture, operating with considerable secrecy and little

accountability. Despite the success of many of these operations in influencing public perception, the long-term ethical consequences were significant: the exposure of CIA funding in the late 1960s damaged the credibility of the intellectual community, revealing that even culture had been instrumentalized as a weapon in the geopolitical contest (Stonor Saunders, 2000).

Saunders' book is essential for understanding the mechanisms and impact of cultural diplomacy during the Cold War, providing detailed examples of how art, literature, and music were mobilized for ideological purposes and supports the argument that Western music was part of a broader strategy of *soft power*, laying the foundation for understanding how and why culture, and particularly Western forms like jazz and rock resonated with audiences behind the Iron Curtain and became tools of resistance and transformation.

The third and final academic work incorporated in this chapter is Danielle Fosler-Lussier's 2015 book, *Music in America's Cold War Diplomacy*. In this work, the author explores the strategic use of music as a tool of *soft power* during the Cold War, with a particular emphasis on the U.S. State Department's Cultural Presentations Program. Fosler-Lussier illustrates how music functioned not only as a representation of American cultural values but also as a means to sway foreign audiences, thereby complementing the arguments made in Stonor Saunders' book.

Fosler-Lussier defends that music was not merely a supplementary aspect of diplomacy - instead, it served as a vital instrument if used correctly as an instrument of *soft power*. Through concerts abroad, the U.S. aimed to project an image of cultural sophistication, democracy, modernity, and superiority. These tours featured a variety of musical genres, including classical music, jazz, avant-garde experimental works, and eventually popular music, each targeting different audiences. The State Department carefully selected artists to align with political objectives. In the earlier years, classical music often symbolized prestige and artistic achievement, connecting the U.S. to European standards of high culture. Over time, jazz, performed by African Americans, emerged as a powerful metaphor for racial progress and freedom, despite the complex and contradictory realities faced within the United States. George E. Pitts, from the African American press, stated, "Jazz is a product of a free soul, and any freedom, as such, does not go well in the Soviet Union, which has tight controls on everything." (Fosler-Lussier, 2015, p.86).

One of the primary concerns of the book is the importance of cultural diplomacy in the context of ideological competition with the Soviet Union. U.S. policymakers believed that promoting "free" and pluralistic artistic expression would highlight a favourable contrast to the more state-

controlled cultural environment of the USSR. As noted, “Cultural diplomacy was always an uncomfortable mix of information propaganda [...] and a gentler, high-minded vision of mutuality and respect, regarded as separate from politics.” Furthermore, “music and other attractions were among the assets that should be deployed to bring the world around to America’s point of view” (Fosler-Lussier, 2015, p.11).

One of the most significant aspects of the book is its focus on how music is received by audiences: the author examines the international public's response to musical encounters, which often diverged from the original intentions behind the music. For example, while jazz was meant to symbolize racial harmony, some foreign critics highlighted the racial conflicts that plagued the United States. Nevertheless, music consistently fosters emotional connections, which is its biggest weapon. Fosler-Lussier shows that, even when political messages failed to resonate, music’s universal emotional experiences humanized those perceived as "enemies" and simplified Cold War narratives, ultimately thawing political tensions between both superpowers (Fosler-Lussier, 2015, p.135).

Fosler-Lussier concludes by saying that the Cultural Presentations Program left behind a complex yet significant legacy, demonstrating how the power of music can be a bridge between cultures, while also revealing how it can serve as a disguise for existing power dynamics. Knowing this, it is evident that the Cold War was not fought solely on the geopolitical or military front. As Joseph Nye explained, *soft power* emerged as a central dimension of international strategy, making culture a key weapon in this ideological battlefield. The United States leveraged cultural products such as music, literature, and cinema not only to promote its values abroad, but also to undermine the legitimacy of the Soviet system by offering alternative models of freedom, creativity, and individualism.

Frances Stonor Saunders complements this narrative by exposing the extent to which U.S. cultural diplomacy was covertly supported by intelligence agencies such as the CIA, particularly through operations like the Congress for Cultural Freedom. Its aim remained the same: to prevail in the "battle of hearts and minds" and prove the Western model of democracy superior without deploying military force. This "cultural Cold War" was not an incidental phenomenon in global politics – it was deeply rooted in strategic thinking.

The previous analysis provides the theoretical and historical context for the current thesis. In examining how Western music breached into the Soviet Union, we more fully understand the use of *soft power* in practice, its impact on audiences behind the Iron Curtain, and the role of

cultural expression as a tool of ideological influence. Music, instead of being simply a benign source of entertainment, was an important agent of change, human bonding, and social struggle during one of the most volatile and polarized periods of the 20th century.

The next chapter moves from the general theory of culture and *soft power* to specific ways various musical genres influenced Cold War dynamics within the USSR. By examining the chronological development of jazz, the folk revival, Soviet classical traditions, and rock, we will observe how each genre mirrored - and sometimes heightened - the ideological struggle. This historical overview prepares us to understand how music shifted from merely a cultural artifact to an active force that challenged the Soviet state's control over its society.

## Chapter 3: Genres, diffusion, reception and censorship

This chapter is the start of the illustration of why music was so important in the Cold War, and how it was one of the most effective tools of *soft power* throughout the era. The structure of this chapter follows the timeline of the Cold War itself. It begins with jazz, which in the 1950s was touted by the United States as a symbol of democracy and racial inclusivity, and move on to folk in the 1960s, when the irony of using protest music for cultural diplomacy becomes clear. It then examines the Soviet emphasis on classical music, which yielded a competing narrative founded on symphonism and socialist realism, before coming to the 1970s and 1980s, when rock became both a mass youth culture and the target of censorship. The aim is not to talk about and explain the different genres but rather to reveal how culture was a strategic front. Music was never neutral: it was co-opted, reinterpreted, and at times resisted by listeners, and in every instance, it served to define the larger ideological clash of East and West. The chapter will thus illustrate how various genres, in various contexts, served as quiet but determining tools of influence during the Cold War.

Throughout the Cold War, music transcended its role of entertainment to a superior level of relevance, becoming an ideological and diplomatic weapon. Both the United States and the Soviet Union recognized how powerful culture could be, and music was at the front line of this cultural warfare, emerging as one of the primary forms of communication, capable of crossing borders, languages and, above all, ideologies. As both superpowers competed for influence, music emerged as a powerful tool to win hearts and minds worldwide, thus gaining strategic advantage over their rival. In this context, the United States largely succeeded, as its music was more appealing and attractive to a significant portion of Soviet society. This music symbolized not just creativity but also the freedom and looseness that people had been longing for, especially as they grew weary of the Soviet authoritarian regime.

Music became a primary strategic tool in the United States' *soft power* efforts: musical tours took place all over the world (including to the Eastern Bloc) carried out by the State Department as representatives of American freedom, creativity and diversity. (Fosler-Lussier, 2015). Jazz was probably the most important genre until rock was considered big – it was often performed by African American artists, which showed the rest of the world (specially the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc countries) that a free and diverse society was better than the dictatorship under the Communist Party in the Soviet Union, even if, in reality, racial tensions were very real and persisted in the United States. Later, folk, that was directly associated with

environmental political protest and anti-war (specially from ’55 to ’75, during the Vietnam War) and rock, which radiated creativity and looseness, characteristics so appealing to the youth in the Eastern Bloc as they weren’t accustomed to it, became, along with jazz, the trinity of western music genres regarding the cultural narrative that the United States have been built in order to become more and more appealing to the outside world, greatly contrasting with the Soviet Union’s rigidity and censorship (Fosler-Lussier, 2015, p.84-86).

Music has an affective power and that is its biggest strength, as it can influence people´s perspectives and shape their minds: it created emotional experiences that deeply vibrated with audiences, sometimes more effective than political rhetoric. In countries where political speech featuring ideological arguments and formal ways of diplomacy didn’t work, music was there to cultivate curiosity, admiration or even distaste, operating through different registers: formal concerts (when these were legally approved in the Soviet Union), that was the way that resonated the most with the Soviet audience and especially the soviet youth as they had been growing listening to these major western artists, so when they could finally see them live, it was this burst of emotions; broadcasts and bootlegs also were quite popular within this cultural exchange journey, which ultimately contributed to diverse ways of cultural influence (Fosler-Lussier, 2015).

**Jazz as an instrument of soft power**

“Nonetheless, the reading of jazz as embodying democracy first gained prominence in public discourse in the 1950s, when Americans were seeking to differentiate themselves in all possible ways from the undemocratic politics of the Soviet Union…”, says Fosler-Lussier on jazz as an expression of democracy and freedom (Fosler-Lussier, 2015, p.84). “Still, the idea of jazz as democratic gained currency in postwar Germany, where jazz had been forbidden under National Socialism” says the author, regarding the emergence of the genre in Germany, continuing by citing Olaf Hudtwalcker, president of Hot Club in Frankfurt: “a jam session is a miniature democracy. Every instrument is on its own without any prescribed music it has to follow. The only binding element is toleration and consideration for the other players. And every instrument is equal.” (Fosler-Lussier, 2015, p.85). Marshall Sterns, founder of the Institute of Jazz Studies, affirmed, in 1951, when talking to the press in the United States: “It’s democratic in its origin. It’s democratic in its performance. No wonder the Russians are nervous about it.”, ideas that echoed throughout the years, as they were repeated by various jazz musicians and critics, as well as journalists like the influential George E. Pitts that, talking for the African American

press in the Pittsburgh Courier stated “freedom of individual expression”, noting that “Jazz is a product of a free soul, and any freedom as such does not go well in the Soviet Union, with such tight controls on everything.”. This idea of jazz as a democratic and peace-making genre stuck over the years as “black and white musicians often played together in the touring bands allowed this idea of “democratic” jazz to embody a particularly egalitarian form of ethnic inclusiveness.” (Fosler-Lussier, 2015, p.86), passing on this idea to the rest of the world (but mainly to the Soviet Union) that the United States are ethnically inclusive.

“The U.S. State Department co-opted jazz, hoping to both combat the international image of racism in the U.S. and promote American consumerism abroad by breaching the Soviet’s ideological blockade,” says Patrick O’Rourke, aligning with what Fosler-Lussier affirmed in her 2015 book. Voice of America (VOA), probably the largest American broadcasting network, founded in 1942, “began broadcasting seventy-nine days after the bombing of Pearl Harbor.” (O’Rourke, 2019, p.1). Its programming included world news, anti-communist propaganda, and “music shows like Willis Conover’s Jazz Hour and Leonard Feather’s Jazz Club USA” (O’Rourke, 2019, p.1) aimed at countering international perceptions of American race relations, hence the focus on jazz, which was mainly performed and composed by Black Americans. Meanwhile, the Soviet Union did its part: “the Soviet government purposefully perpetuated American racism through their own anti-capitalist propaganda filled with images of the lynching of black Americans” (O’Rourke, 2019, p.2). VOA responded - both as a defensive move and to counter Soviet propaganda - by broadcasting jazz and news about civil rights movements. The Soviet youth were much more interested in jazz’s sound and the freedom it represented than in Western news about racism in the U.S.: “the reality was that jazz exports were much more effective in selling a lifestyle of individuality than dispelling images of racism in the United States” (O’Rourke, 2019, p.2).

According to CIA reports, the Soviets had been trying to block the signals of Voice Of America for years but the reality is that a lot of the Soviet youth grew up listening to their broadcasts, as the author states: “Jazz continued to garner popularity abroad. Many Soviet youths of the post-war generation grew up listening to VOA broadcasts. According to CIA reports, the Soviets had been attempting to block the signals of Voice of America and Radio Free Europe Broadcasts. To Soviet youths, jazz music granted a sense of individuality and self-expression”. The younger generation who was more serious into counterculture was called “stilyiagi”, rebels that “grew up outside of the pressures of Stalinism and did not identify with the state like their parents' generation had.”. These younglings were not satisfied with their own artists like Leonid Utesov

and Gershwin (that played openly during times of censorship) but still not quite like the westerns: "… broadcasts of western artists presented a more exotic, dangerous rebellion" that ultimately were more attractive (O'Rourke, 2019, p.15).

It is also extremely interesting and relevant to mention that there was a dichotomous notion within the Western countries that separated "us" (the West) from "them" (the East): "Democratic countries of the West, often referred to as "us," implement public diplomacy, whereas non-democratic countries, such as Nazi Germany during World War II or the Soviet Union and her satellites during the Cold War, simply spread propaganda", as Rüdiger Ritter explains, saying that the main difference was that Nazi Germany and State Socialist countries actually used this propaganda language officially, as he continues by stating that, in the Soviet Union, there was this term called "agitprop" meaning agitation and propaganda, central words in the persuasion strategy since the beginning of the state (Ritter, 2018).

When talking about music (and specifically jazz) as a superior form of public diplomacy, Ritter says: "The government's idea was not to entertain some scattered jazz aficionados, but to create a serious basis for a revolution through the promotion of jazz music, which reached a wider audience than diplomatic speeches and political rhetoric" (Ritter, 2018, p.97). The author, reiterating what Fosler-Lussier and O'Rourke have affirmed, said that "the propagation of jazz was intended to demonstrate that the US did not only produce a better music and culture, but that it also had a superior political and economic system. Jazz music was supposed to accomplish what aggressive rhetorical strategies seemingly could not achieve: to win the hearts of the youth, to alienate them from communism, and to encourage them to actively oppose the Soviet Union." (Ritter, 2018, p.98).

Jazz became, more than political speeches or broadcasts of Western lifestyle, the catalyst for the Soviets to seek alternative beliefs beyond the socialism defended by the Soviet Union. In the meantime, the Soviets became increasingly aware of this menace: "For the US government, jazz became the most important musical genre to persuade Eastern Bloc inhabitants of US values, and for the Stalinist rulers jazz was regarded as dangerous. Despite these differences, both political administrations regarded jazz as a crucial means in the competition to convince people in the Eastern Bloc of their system's superiority" (Ritter, 2018, p.99). Both superpowers adopted different strategies regarding this matter: the US administration started to promote jazz, and the Soviets tried to censorship it, limiting people's access to it. Both sides formulated goals - "while the US administration intended to use jazz in order to spread the political message of

freedom, equality, and democracy, the Soviet administration wanted to cut off their population from any Western influences." (Ritter, 2018, p.99), but neither side succeeded completely, as "neither was the jazz propagation of the US the beginning of a strong movement demanding American freedom and democracy in the Eastern Bloc, nor did the governments of the USSR and their satellites succeed in totally preventing the public's contact with jazz.", which opened up space for rock to come up as the dethroner of jazz, at least in the sense of influencing the younger generations, as it "occupied the hearts of young people" and became "the music of the youth", making rock the primary genre used in cultural diplomacy that actually worked, in the 1960's (Ritter, 2018, p.100).

With the Khruschev thaw (mid 50's to 60's, when censorship and repression were relaxed due to Khruschev's policies of de-Stalinization), both the US and State Socialist countries used jazz to promote their ideologies in eastern Europe: The US pushed jazz as a symbol of American freedom and creativity while the East tried to co-opt it into their own systems despite its foreign roots, which didn't work out as well as they would like it too, as the majority of jazz appreciators tend to enjoy more Western jazz (the original) that the Eastern one (Ritter, 2018, p.99). Despite efforts of both superpowers to use jazz to promote their ideologies in Eastern Europe, there were some limits in their persuasion strategies: in the US, racial inequality meant a credibility issue as African Americans still faced public discrimination, so using an African American face representing jazz (that symbolized democracy) was a contradiction: "A constant problem of the US administration with their implementation of persuasion strategies with jazz was the need to deal with discrimination against African American citizens confronted by the Civil Rights Movement" (Ritter, 2018, p.109). On the Soviet Union's side, the lack of total control clashed with the appeal of Western cultural forms: even when jazz was accepted, there were always ideological gatekeepers who associated (and rightfully so) jazz with Capitalism, which led to the Soviet authorities starting to prefer letting Western artists in, so they had full control over them and over the Soviet audience: "As a consequence, any attempts to open Soviet and State Socialist cultural life towards forms of culture coming from abroad automatically entailed an ideological threat" (Ritter, 2018, p. 107).

Jazz was truly seen as a unifier genre, as Davenport states: "American policy makers responded by increasingly endorsing the notion of "jazzocracy" - a democratic country unified racially and politically through the arts and jazz - to implement the policy of cultural containment." (Davenport, 2009, p.84). Russian writer Vasily Aksyonov described what draws people to jazz, "Perhaps for the same reason the Communists (and the Nazis before them) hated it. For its

refusal to be pinned down, its improvisatory nature. Living as we did in a totalitarian society, we needed relief from the strictures of our minutely controlled everyday lives, of the five-year plans, of historical materialism. In Eastern Europe, jazz became more than music; it took on an ideology or, rather an anti-ideology. Jazz was a rendezvous with freedom." (Clark, 2015, p.15). Joaichim-Ernst Behrendt observed in 1953 that jazz was highly volatile in communist Europe, stating: "For the second time in fifteen years, there are people in central Europe who live in constant fear for their lives simply because they like to hear or play jazz…," (Clark, 2015, p.14).

From 1961 to 1966, when jazz has fully reached the Soviet Union, there was a real and genuine identification from the Soviets regarding the genre: "Soviet musicians identified with American jazz musicians stylistically as artists and regarded them foremost as international symbols of creativity and freedom - the issue of race had become less important than the cultural and ideological impulses that Soviet and American musicians shared." ( Davenport, 2009, p. 125), sentiment that was completely mirrored on the Soviet fans during the Western jazz tours behind the Iron Curtain, as the reactions to some subgenres like bepop, modern jazz and free jazz, styles not officially promoted by U.S. authorities due to their "radical" overtones were so praised: "During the tour, many Soviet fans even expressed a desire to hear renditions of the modern jazz avant-garde" (Davenport, 2009, p. 119).

The Soviet state alternated between controlling, tolerating, and even appropriating it, as the Soviets, as said above, tried to emulate Western jazz, claiming it as their own cultural property: "… Leonid Osipovich Utyosov, a noted jazz advocate and one of the best-known and wealthiest jazz men in the Soviet Union, admired jazz to such an extent that he claimed that Russians in Odessa, not blacks in New Orleans, had invented jazz." (Davenport, 2009, p. 127). Davenport also highlights the ironic development of this "nationalized" form of jazz, as the Soviets found the original Western jazz decadent but wanted to try their own luck on a new, Soviet version of the genre: "Soviet jazz scholars increasingly embraced the artistic and intellectual fervor that reinforced the idea of jazz as Soviet cultural property."; "Utyosov's sentiments reflected an ardent Soviet desire to define a distinct Russian, rather than an American, form of modern jazz." (Davenport, 2009, p. 125).

The genre appealed to Soviets (to the youth, above all) not only for its aesthetic value and energetic sonority but mainly because it was a form of ideological and cultural resistance: "Soviet musicians identified with American jazz musicians stylistically as artists and regarded them foremost as international symbols of creativity and freedom - the issue of race had become

less important than the cultural and ideological impulses that Soviet and American musicians shared" (Davenport, 2009, p. 125).

While jazz was designed by the US as a mere *soft power* tool to combat communism, it ended up touching Soviet audiences in unexpected ways: a symbol of freedom, improvisation and resistance (mainly because of its African-American origins) became a disruptive force on its own: "Most important, jazz diplomacy illuminated the unequivocal limitations of a democracy in the conduct of foreign affairs. At a time when the struggle for freedom at home and abroad continued to shape international culture and politics, the development of jazz and world events had a profound influence on the evolution of American democracy." (Davenport, 2009, p. 149).

Its international appeal, especially among the Soviet youth, is undeniable: "Jazz and the influx of American culture contributed to the Soviet Union's loss of cultural and political credibility among the Soviet people" (Davenport, 2009, p. 148). Jazz, among Western cultural products, was one of the most powerful on corroding the ideological authority of the USSR, which helped to reduce tensions between the two superpowers: "The appropriation of black cultural products thereby played a critical role in the lessening of Cold War tensions and gave significant impetus to what Walter Hixson characterizes as 'parting the curtain", (Davenport, 2009, p. 148) finishing by saying that jazz was not just a genre of music but also represented a cultural bridge that outlasted politics, highlighting its symbolic value: "Jazz was not only an American and African American cultural product, but it was also, in the eyes of many cultures of the world, a global music." (Davenport, 2009, p. 149).

## The role of folk's protest music

Folk music didn't play a role as big as jazz which was the primary music genre coming out of the United States (and consequently the most supported one) but it sure played a significant one: while less pervasive than its jazz (and later) rock incarnations, folk music was used by American cultural institutions and diplomatic organizations to convey a representation of American identity that focused on democratic diversity, grassroots authenticity, and nonviolent cooperation.

The State Department's Cultural Presentations program included folk music not because of, but in spite of its radical nature (as it as a genre of protest and discontent with America at the time). The State Department eventually favoured performers who combined Seeger-style folk music with an international repertoire and a sophisticated performance style, as represented by Bill Crofut and Steve Addiss (Fosler-Lussier, 2015, p.155). This system permitted diplomats to

send out a refined and ideologically coherent representation of American folklore, one that "embodied a hybrid of folk authenticity and cosmopolitan polish," celebrating tolerance and diversity over disagreement (Fosler-Lussier, 2015, p. 131-132). Significantly, the deployment of folk in Cold War diplomacy was a delicate balancing act: it needed to appear authentic and embedded in people's traditions, while also being free of the genre's increasingly politicized domestic associations. However, the genre's association with protest made it diplomatically sensitive: university officials and diplomats were sometimes hesitant to host folk musicians with political reputations, though some artists emphasizing peace and solidarity were still welcomed (Fosler-Lussier, 2015, p.132-133).

This reappropriation of folk music as a vehicle for *soft power* illustrates its role as an unstated ideological tool: depicting the United States not simply as a land of freedom, but as a place where its popular musical forms can represent democratic ideals on the global stage. Stephen I. Moore contributes to this narrative by examining how Cold War politics influenced the development of folk music, intended for both domestic consumption and foreign export. Moore argues that what emerged in the late 1950s and early 1960s as "popular folk" - exemplified by groups like the Kingston Trio - reflected and helped to underpin the values of Cold War containment: whiteness, suburban respectability, consumerism, and a depoliticized version of Americana. (Moore, 2014, p.7-24). In this way, folk music became part of the cultural repertoire together with jazz and rock - not as a contradictory element, but instead as a managed and carefully chosen expression that communicated American resilience through cultural togetherness (Moore. 2014, p.290).

This dynamic is well in line with the thesis advanced by Stonor Saunders, as the author explains the CIA's far-reaching and secret efforts to finance and promote American cultural works overseas - including literature, visual art, and music as part of its ideological battle with the Soviet Union. Though jazz was more in the public eye, the principles she describes apply equally well to folk arts. The intention, according to Saunders, was to present an image of America as a nation of tolerant, diverse, and artistically vibrant people, directly contrary to the repressive characteristics of the USSR (Stonor Saunders, 2000, p.1-4). The cultural programs, both overt and covert, were not intended merely to export culture but to export ideology in the guise of culture, as the author says: "It operated a sophisticated, substantially endowed cultural front... for the West, in the name of freedom of expression."; "A vast arsenal of cultural weapons: journals, books, conferences, seminars, art exhibitions, concerts, awards..." (Stonor Saunders, 2000, p.1).

This underscores the notion that those perceived as "apolitical", having been commercialized and sanitized for mass appeal, were all part of a broader *soft power* strategy: in promoting American folk music, which was often managed and shaped by Cold War politics, the United States sought to win hearts and minds - not only by highlighting notions of liberty and creativity but also by demonstrating that its cultural tradition was aligned with ideas of modernity, social progress, and individual expression. While folk music did not have the same level of international exposure or spectacle as jazz or rock, it was equally saturated with ideological significance: its use as a cultural instrument of the Cold War was strategically designed to be listened to in the context of American diversity, freedom, and contemporary advancement, helping to enhance the United States' democratic and humanitarian reputation and to subtly address Soviet accusations of American racial and cultural contradictions.

**Soviet's response: classical music**

Regarding the Soviet Cold War cultural diplomacy, classical music was one of the most effective tools: its special status as a "universal language" made it possible to present it as being ideologically neutral despite its intrinsic political implications. Instrumental music, characterized by its lack of a strong verbal component, seems to be free-standing from politics unlike literature and hence is most suitable for transnational circulation and consumption by various audiences across ideological boundaries (Mikkonen, Scott-Smith, Parkkinen, 2019, p.194-195).

The recordings of Soviet classical music were "the most successful, widely distributed and lasting legacy of Soviet musical diplomacy" (Mikkonen, Scott-Smith, Parkkinen, 2019, p.195). Not only were they circulated but also carefully chosen as "products of prestige," designed to demonstrate the technical and interpretative pre-eminence of Soviet musicianship. In the early years of the Cold War, recordings were sometimes made available "at a low price," not in hopes of reaping economic benefits, but merely to achieve ideological objectives (Mikkonen, Scott-Smith, Parkkinen, 2019, p.196). The goal was not so much to disseminate communism but to use cultural influence to render the Soviet Union less threatening and to present it in a more positive way (Mikkonen, Scott-Smith, Parkkinen, 2019, p.196). One of the most significant areas of complexity was the control the Soviet state had over who could record and what could be released. Only ideologically reliable performers were permitted to record on Melodiya (a big recording company during the Cold War): politically aligned ones or those whose reputations made them objectionable were prohibited, even if they were skilled.

In spite of the tight control, the musical exchange was not entirely one-sided. In the mid-1970s, Melodiya started to release licenses for Western music as well. The Soviet record label put out records of well-known performers such as Leonard Bernstein, Miles Davis, the Beatles, and even Cliff Richard. This implies that although the government tried to maintain firm control over cultural products, market pressures and enormous Soviet consumers' demand compelled the occasional opening of the gates of the USSR to Western music (Mikkonen, Scott-Smith, Parkkinen, 2019, p.199). Soviet classical music became increasingly politicized from the post-Stalin period through the Brezhnev era, especially as it became entangled in the ideological dynamics of the Cold War (Belge, 2013). In the immediate aftermath of Stalin's death in 1953, Soviet composers experienced a significant relaxation of ideological oversight. Music, due to its perceived abstraction and difficulty of interpretation, enjoyed a degree of protection that other art forms like literature and film did not. It was "difficult, if not impossible, to distinguish official from unofficial music," unless the work had a provocative title or text (Belge, 2013. p.80).

As the 1970s progressed, the rhetoric of artistic freedom collided more directly with Cold War politics. In the West, especially in the Federal Republic of Germany, avant-garde music was promoted as a symbol of liberal values and artistic autonomy. Institutions such as the Darmstadt Summer Courses became centers for experimental music, while Soviet cultural policy continued to advocate for socialist realism and symphonism. Serialism, embraced by composers like Boulez and Stockhausen, was seen as a form of liberation from both market demands and political orthodoxy (Belge, 2013, p.286-287). In contrast, the USSR continued to value composers like Mahler, Shostakovich, and Myaskovsky - figures seen as both ideologically safe and musically substantial (Belge, 2013, p.284).

By the 1980s, the concept of "freedom" had taken on multiple meanings. For composers like Schnittke and Denisov, freedom meant not just the absence of censorship, but also insulation from market pressures - an artistic space neither dictated by ideology nor determined by popular demand. This was distinct from the Western liberal model of freedom, and yet increasingly resonant with it. These different notions of freedom - political, social, artistic - interacted in unpredictable ways, often leading to unexpected alliances and misinterpretations across the Cold War divide (Belge, 2013, p. 294-296).

Soviet classical music, under the Cold War, was highly politicized, not so much because of its own political message, but because of the prevailing ideological environment. With Stalin's

death, a window was left open for composers to seek a third kind of "freedom": artistic freedom, that is, outside of the liberal and egalitarian notions of freedom most commonly attributed to the Cold War blocs (Belge, 2013, p.280). While there existed some room in the Khrushchev Thaw for greater experimentation and external influence, classical music soon became entangled in the Cold War's symbolic battle for peace and freedom. The Soviet Union presented itself as a defender of world peace, commissioning works such as Shostakovich's Song of the Forests. Meanwhile, the West, through organizations like the Congress for Cultural Freedom, sponsored avant-garde and serialist composers as embodiments of liberal artistic freedom (Belge, 2013, p.287). This led Western commentators to interpret the pursuit of aesthetic independence by composers such as Alfred Schnittke and Edison Denisov as political disaffection: "What composers understood as a search for artistic autonomy was understood by Western scholars and publicists as a search for political freedom" (Belge, 2013, p.296). Yet music was also a realm of contested expression in which unofficial or nonconformist composers created "niches of freedom" within the Soviet system, despite the ideological pressure and institutional control to which they were subject (Belge, 2013, p.294). Classical music, therefore, is not just a simple instrument of propaganda or resistance, but a dynamic and ambivalent cultural medium forged in the Cold War tensions on both sides of the Iron Curtain.

**When it all changed: rock in the Soviet Union**

The development of rock music from a Western influence to an indispensable tool for expressing emotional, social, and political life for Soviet youth is a belief that many authors and scholars have presented in their work. The argument is that the trajectory of Soviet rock is not simply a case of rebellion against totalitarianism, but rather a complex narrative about the active creation of cultural identity under the conditions of oppression and ideological disintegration (Pappa, 2014, p.1-5). Let us look at the historical context: the Cold War promoted parallel yet different youth subcultures in the Eastern and Western blocs. In the West, youth enjoyed a wider range of expressive freedom in the form of countercultural movements, protest music, and individualism, while their Soviet counterparts lived under a regime marked by widespread censorship and ideological strictness. Both, however, discovered a common "means of self-expression" in the idiom of rock music (Pappa, 2014, p.3). In the Soviet situation, this term took on a special meaning, as rock became associated with authenticity, independence, and even resistance.

Rock music, in Western cultures, emerged in the 1950s through a fusion of the rhythm and blues, country, and folk genres, subsequently becoming a means of cultural and social protest.

During the 1960s and 1970s, it came to be linked with authenticity values, political criticism, and individual expression. For the majority of the youth, "rock music was one of the most important cultural elements to express their feelings and to essentially criticize their societies" (Pappa, 2014, p.10).

Rock music found its way into the Soviet Union unofficially, and quite frequently illegally. Early Soviet rock bands largely emulated Western styles of music and performed cover versions using homemade equipment. In the 1970s, genuine Soviet rock began to emerge, characterized by bands writing music in Russian and incorporating local themes in their lyrics: "The first Russian rock bands were formed in the mid-1960s from an imitation of Western pop culture. They played mainly cover versions of songs by the Beatles on home-made equipment and sang in English as best as they could. Bass guitars were made by stringing acoustic guitars with piano strings. Amplifiers were modified home stereo units or were created by students of electronic engineering. Most of the Soviet bloc's oldest groups began their careers imitating the four-man Western groups." (Pappa, 2014, p.36).

The Soviet government, recognizing the disruptive potential of rock music, tried to control it. This was primarily done through government-sanctioned "VIA" (Vocal-Instrumental Ensemble) bands, which were subjected to heavy censorship and ideological neutrality. These bands, however, failed to appeal to the Soviet youth. Pappa contends that "Their stage appearances were strictly regulated by "artistic committees" consisting of Party officials, ideological guardians and censors" (Pappa, 2014, p.37). This sterile atmosphere gave rise to an underground rock movement, particularly in cities such as Moscow and Leningrad.

The "unofficial" or underground rock phenomenon constituted a scene of authenticity and counterculture, where its governing principles were those of genuineness, creativity, and emotional sincerity, with lyrics being key in this regard. "They reflected all the unique relationship between musicians and audience and the feelings of solidarity and collectivity which were essentially developed in Western rock music." (Pappa, 2014, p.47).

Rock lyrics dealt with subjects of everyday alienation, social hypocrisy, and existential fear. They also used coded language and slang terms, such as tusovka (referring to a meeting or social group), vrub (which means to understand something deeply), and steb (a form of ironic satire), thus constituting a cultural vocabulary unique to the Soviet youth. Soviet officials were not inactive. Rock music was perceived as dangerous, for it was "the inner needs of a whole generation" (Pappa, 2014, p.3).

There were some bands that were banned, concerts were broken up, and musicians were harassed. But strangely enough, as the authorities even more repressed the rock music, it also became more legitimized as a vehicle of sincere expression. "Rock and roll dominated young people's lives and essentially characterized a whole period" (Pappa, 2014, p.58).

A watershed was that of Mikhail Gorbachev (1985–1991), specifically within the background of his perestroika (restructuring) and glasnost (openness) efforts. These reforms created a relaxation of censorship, which resulted in a blossoming of cultural energy. Gorbachev's regime provided space for both official and unofficial youth groups to form, thereby offering unprecedented opportunity for non-state cultural activity, such as rock music (Pappa, 2014, p.31). This was the period when such organizations as the Moscow Rock Laboratory were established, which allowed formerly underground groups to register officially and perform in public without interference from the authorities (Pappa, 2014, p.45).

In this freer atmosphere, rock music was a "glasnost of youth music" (Pappa, 2014, p.45). Concerts attracted thousands, albums were recorded and sold (legally and illegally), and musicians achieved a level of fame. But with increased legitimacy came doubts regarding authenticity: some regarded legalization as stifling the subversive potential of the genre. Nevertheless, to many, it was an awakening to culture and a legitimation of youth's emotional and social existence. Rock music in the Soviet Union was far more than an imitation of Western dissent. It was a phenomenon deeply rooted in local culture, reflecting the psychological, emotional, and social needs of a generation under considerable stress: "The evolution of rock and roll music within the Soviet Union over time has particular relevance because it is a window into the way that a particular type of music can be utilized as a means of expression for youth" (Pappa, 2014, p.57).

This chapter demonstrates that music was never a minor element of the Cold War. It served as a key tool for winning hearts and minds through official diplomacy, secret circulation, or audience-led improvisation. Music was ideologically significant just because it transcended borders, touched chords of emotion, and spoke in both political and personal modes of address. The following discussion, therefore, reveals the ambivalence of *soft power* in music: it was potentially a piece of propaganda, but it brought forth unintended meanings with it; it did its part to advance official agendas, but it enabled its listeners to reinterpret, resist, or alter that to which it was subjected. Far from being a background score to the Cold War, music was one of its battlefields.

In the next chapter, focus will move from musical genres to actual historical events. Following the presentation on how jazz, folk, classical, and rock represented opposing ideals of freedom and identity during the Cold War era, we will move on to explore how these processes manifested in specific interactions and performances within the Soviet Union. Based on a study of Western music performances held inside the USSR, it would be possible to grasp not just the construction of cultural diplomacy but also its reception, opposition, and reinterpretation by Soviet people themselves. Music was not only exported as diplomacy but also reimagined by its listeners, who often transformed cultural imports into forms of identity and resistance. This dual movement — projection and reception — is what the next chapter will explore in detail.

## Chapter 4: Western rock and its impact on the Soviet Union

The chapter addresses the coming of Western musical acts to the Soviet Union and the reception of these by Soviet leaders and audiences alike. While prior chapters may have studied the use of genres as emblems of *soft power* abstractly, here the focus is on particular contact: concerts and festivals that brought Western entertainers directly into the Soviet cultural sphere. These offer us informative case studies on how music may have traversed the Iron Curtain and transgressed the ideological borders of the Cold War.

Particular focus will be on the role of Western rock and 1980s heavy metal, when festivals like the Moscow Music Peace Festival and the Monsters of Rock became cultural phenomena. These festivals were something more than mere entertainment: they stretched the limits of state censorship, widened the spheres of collective action, and revealed the growing divergence between the official Soviet narrative and the Soviet youth's ambitions.

The aim of the chapter is dual. Firstly, to examine the manner in which Soviet officials tried to manage, suppress, or reinterpret the existence of Western music, frequently reverting to propaganda, disinformation, or highly controlled performance frameworks. Secondly, to examine how audiences themselves experienced and reimpressed these encounters, making of rock a type of authenticity and unity that had political undertones. When tracing these meetings historically, it becomes apparent that Western music within the Soviet Union amounted to something more than a cultural curiosity: it became a stage on which the erosion of Communist legitimacy played out.

During the later decades of the Cold War, Western rock music penetrated the Soviet Union's institutions of culture and politics in a way that no other form of art could. What had started out in the 1970s as a trickle of illicitly trafficked records and tapes had culminated in massive state-organized festivals towards the end of the 1980s that drew hundreds of thousands of young Soviets. These festivals served as a barometer of both cultural appeal and political strategy, reflecting the state's shifting stance as it evolved from repression and propaganda to a period of cautious tolerance, ultimately embracing acceptance. Therefore, the history of Western cultural activity in the USSR is central to understanding how culture - specifically, rock music - served as a tool of *soft power* and was a key destabilizer in the ideological struggle, and consequently, in the fall of Soviet communism. Andras Simonyi, former Hungarian ambassador who led a rock band in Budapest during the Cold War said, regarding this: “When we were listening to the radio, we were part of the free world, if only for a few moments, whether the system we

lived under liked it or not. Rock and Roll, culturally speaking, was a decisive element in loosening up communist societies and bringing them closer to a world of freedom. Rock is not a commercial success…rock is a cultural success. You have kept millions going. You have kept millions and millions hoping. You have warmed up the hearts of many millions of people behind the Iron Curtain. The message went through the airwaves and through the Iron Curtain, it went through the Berlin Wall. It was a bridge.", in a talk titled "How Rock Music Helped Bring Down the Iron Curtain" at the Rock 'n Roll Hall of Fame in Cleveland, 2003 (Richmond, 2005, p.359-360).

**The first contact with rock**

The Sixth World Youth Festival, held in Moscow, in July of 1957 is cited as being the musical event that started the propagation of Western culture on the Soviet soil, specially influencing the Soviet youth. The festival, including Western artists from various countries, presented a different musical trend to the Soviet youth, including their first contact with rock n' roll, at a time when rock wasn't even that big in the United States, as jazz dominated (Von Faust, 2014, p.6). This shows that rock had more than time to penetrate in the Soviet Union and, consequently, for the Soviet youth to be accustomed to it, to like it, and then to love it so much that Western bands and artists became favourites in the 70's and 80's, when rock really became a colossal cultural trend. The Party officials, seeing the sociocultural change with their own eyes, began to call for patrols and raids, with the goal of apprehending the "immoral behavior" of the youth for listening and attending to these Western events, that the Soviet Union considered deviant behavior. The Soviet media, at this time, was also actively engaged in the negative coverage of Western influence (Von Faust, 2014, p.6). In a New York Times article from 1958, journalist Max Frankel said that "The average Russian not only hates Rock and Roll, he doesn't know what it is…The official (Russian) line incessantly lumps rock 'n' roll with abstract art and other aspects of Western culture which, according to the Kremlin, debase human beings to the point where they become incompetent cogs in the capitalist machine". (Clark, 2015, p.18). According to history professor Sergei Zhuk, however, "…rock-and-roll music became the most important component of Westernization for an entire way of life, especially for urban youth. According to contemporaries, rock music shaped the behavior, tastes, and ideas of Soviet youth during the 1960s (Clark, 2015, p.18).

**60's and The Beatles**

The decade of the 1960s was one of the most important ones in the Soviet rock scene, and the sole reason for that was the popularity of the Liverpool-born band The Beatles, which became a phenomenon, launching rock into the international music industry. What caught the attention of the Soviet youth in the first place was the band's rebellious nature, as the 1968 hit "Revolution" demonstrates: "You say you want a revolution, well, you know, we all want to change the world. You tell me that it's evolution, well, you know, we all want to change the world." As Alexey S. Kozlov, a youngling identified as a stilyiagi, said: "I felt blissful and invincible. All the depression and fear ingrained over the years disappeared. I understood that everything other than The Beatles had been oppression." Besides the attraction of rebellion, The Beatles also were very melodic in their musical compositions, what Russian critic Artemy Troitsky explained to be central to their success in Soviet soil: "The Beatles had melodies, and for the Russian ear this is mandatory.", as the traditional Soviet music consisted of a mix between classical and folk music, two genres with rhythm and melodies (Vespieren, 2017, p.14).

**First rock musical events**

By 1975, the Helsinki Final act was signed by thirty-five different nations with the objective of promoting cooperation in the European community and limit the effects of the Cold War. This accord would end up being the culmination of a gradual effort by both the Soviet Union and the West in terms of improving communication and its success also reflected on rock music. To honor this, Melodiya secured licenses for some Western rock and pop artists, thus officializing some of the artists that the Soviet youth already have been listening to through bootlegged tapes. In the late 70's, Goskoncert, the country's official promoting agency, managed to Party-approved Western performers like Boney M. in 1975, Cliff Richards in 1976, Elton John in 1979 and The Nitty Gritty Dirt Band in 1977 (Von Faust, 2014, p.7). Nitty Gritty Dirt Band that would become the first country rock band ever to step foot in Soviet soil, as founding member John McEuen told firsthand in the podcast "The Cold War Vault" (Kinney, 2021). McEuen, remembering the tour in this conversation, shares something "he'll never forget": a few hours after rehearsing in an hotel, they went to their dressing room and heard a recording of the songs they had just played, next to their dressing room. When McEuen approached the men playing to say that they weren't very good, that they were just "playing around", the Soviet musician said: "In your music, we hear the freedom of America", indicating the Soviet

repression and lust for Western culture (Kinney, 2021). However, these bands did not satisfy the countercultural youth, as they were longing for heavier, more revolutionary and disruptive bands, that would only be allowed in the Soviet Union about a decade later, which forced the youth to continue to develop ways to listen to their favourite Western music, was it whether through contraband networks, swap-meet exchanges or clandestine transactions (Vespieren, 2017, p.23).

In 1979, Elton John performed eight concerts in the Soviet Union, in Leningrad and Moscow, between 21st and 28th of May, becoming the first Western pop rock act to do so (Binyon, 1979). Although Artemy Troitskyi said it was “not real rock music – just Elton behind a white Steinway with Ray Cooper on percussion”, it was still the first big Western live show experienced by them, and highly appreciated, as Elton John told the Washington Post: "I'm knocked out, this has to be my biggest achievement as an artist. These people don't have any records, and yet they reacted like that. I'm at a loss for words." (The Washington Post, 1979). John said young Russians were "starved" for Western rock 'n' roll music: "Maybe this is the start," he said for an interview with The Washington Post in 1979. He was not wrong, as this tour became a symbol of the thawing of the tensions between the two superpowers, hence demonstrating that rock music could penetrate the Soviet Union (and be greatly enjoyed), setting the stage for future western concerts to be held, equating to the extremely desire that the Soviet citizens, and especially the youth had to hear western music. It should be noted once again that the only means for these people to know and hear Elton John was through expensive bootlegged cassettes, as the Soviet Union, despite the thawing of the hostility in that time, did not sell official Western music records, which categorically shows the desire of the Soviet youth to belong to the Western world and to be independent from the clutches of the repressive Soviet government.

**Soviet censorship, Gorbachev’s glasnost and the Moscow Music Peace Festival**

In the start of the 80’s, the Soviet Union was going through some changes that, ultimately, would be one of the reasons for its dissolution in 1991. The Soviet youth had increasingly diverse interests and were growing tired of the regime they lived under, which eventually shifted their interests towards Western culture, a significant social development in the Soviet Union (Von Faust, 2014, p.5). Nikita Khruschev, during that time, was doing everything in his power to supress, control and even eradicate Western music from entering the Soviet Union and from being disseminated, but the Soviet youth would find different ways to listen to their favourite Western rock artists: “For decades the Soviet government tried to seal off its people inside a

cultural iron curtain. Western radio broadcasts were jammed. Western rock music was banned, and records were confiscated at the border. But the music and the message always seeped through.", as British journalist Mike Walker said (Von Faust, 2014, p.6).

The quest for authentic Western identity played a key role in shaping the self-perception of millions of young Soviet consumers of Western cultural products. These individuals sought to identify solely with the West, which by the late 1970s had become disconnected from Soviet Ukrainian culture as an ideal. In their minds, official Soviet Ukrainian culture embodied all the most conservative, backward, and anti-Western traits in their lives. By embracing the genuine West as part of their identity, they distanced themselves from the official Soviet version of their ethnic identity. Engaging with Western pop music, including rock enthusiasts and young Komsomol members involved in the disco scene, helped shape their understanding of human rights, which became central to their self-image. Over time, these new cultural pursuits and preferences fostered fresh values and demands for cultural consumption, gradually replacing and transforming traditional Soviet values and Communist ideological practices among ordinary Komsomol members and the young Komsomol elite of the 1980s (Zhuk, 2011, p.159).

During that decade, Western rock - particularly heavy metal - was among the most publicly disclosed but politically loaded cultural exports to the Soviet Union. Underground imitation of Western sounds during the earlier decades has now become a dominant cultural force that both resonated and clashed with the ideological mission of the Soviets. In his book on Soviet heavy metal, Boris Von Faust argues that the genre was not just a cultural or psychological force, but also a political one. It shaped the worldview of Soviet youth and posed a challenge to Communist rule (Von Faust, 2016, pp. 1-5).

Soviet press, though officially controlled by Glavlit (the state secret protection and censorship agency of the Soviet Union), was never completely monolithic since different media organs reflected different levels of openness. Magazines such as Rovesnik, Smena, Yunost', and Moskovskii Komsomolets began to shift from overtly confrontational to increasingly liberated news on Western music in the early 1980s. Rovesnik's August 1982 edition featuring rock acts like Alice Cooper, AC/DC and Queen have disappeared overnight from newsstands, their library counterparts having their pages excised for use as wall decor in underground sound-copy houses (Von Faust, 2016, p. 379). This mainstream popularity was at odds with revived political conservativism. Konstantin Chernenko's elevation to the Politburo in 1982 foreshadowed repression: rock was branded ideological poison, scapegoated as exploiting the "youthful psychology" of corrupting Soviet society (Von Faust, 2016, p. 380). Campaigns of

censorship intensified, and independent media were urged to downplay coverage or report on it critically.

Propaganda during this time was a mixture of distortion and moral panics. Bands were condemned with vile accusations in the press. Komsomolskaya Pravda labeled Kiss as ugly and degenerate: "Originality? No - ugliness!" (Von Faust, 2016, p. 382). Leningradskii Universitet misinterpreted violent Dead Kennedys' lyrics and credited them to AC/DC as a killer of children (Von Faust, 2016, p. 380). Sobesednik misinterpreted Metallica's protest against the death penalty song, "Ride the Lightning," as an anthem for intoxication and made-up lyrics in favor of its argument (Von Faust, 2016, p. 381). Psychiatric justification added another depth: Sovetskaya Rossia bore the psychiatrist's quote at the university comparing heavy metal's psychological effect to drug addiction. But youth media like Rovesnik challenged this thesis, running refutations by medical professionals calling such statements "deeply unscientific and far-fetched" (Von Faust, 2016, p. 382). War over rock thus persisted – in the underground clubs as much as on the pages of the Soviet media and magazines.

In one of the worse cases of misinformation on the part of the Soviet Union, the Leningrad newspaper “Leningradskyi Universitet” (Leningrad University) wrongly attributed shocking lyrics to AC/DC (whom they classified as a punk rock band, even if they aren’t) regarding killing babies, citing the following verse: “I kill children I love to see them die. I kill children and makes their mothers cry, I want to hear them scream, I feed them poisoned candy.”. Obviously, after investigating it, it was found out that these lyrics were an exaggeration of Alice Cooper’s lyrics of both “Dead Babies” and “I Love The Dead” that, despite possibly being characterized as violent lyrics, were nowhere near these manufactured ones by the Soviet Union and, as if that wasn’t enough, the lyrics don’t have absolutely nothing to do with the Soviet Union. In a similar case of misinformation and manipulation of Western rock lyrics, Alexander Naloev, writer and anti-rock, wrote for Sobesednik (Russian newspaper) that the song “Blood Of My Enemies” by power metal band “Manowar” includes the lyrics “kill the Russians by dozens, by hundreds, by thousands”, being that that line doesn’t exist on the actual song, as it in reality deals with Viking mythology thematics (Von Faust, 2014, p.16).

The climax, if you will, of the misinformation of the West by the Soviet Union came in January 10, 1985, when one of the most notorious ban lists was created by the All-Union Leninist Young Communist League in October of 1984. One can read (translated): “The following is an approximate list of foreign music groups or artists whose repertoires contain ideologically

harmful compositions."; "This information is recommended for the purpose of intensifying control over the activities of dicotheques."; "This information must be also provided to all VIA (vocal instrument ensembles) and youth discotheques in the region". This list included bands like Black Sabbath (violence, religious obscurantism), Scorpions (violence), Pink Floyd (Interfering the foreign policy of the USSR (Afganistan), Iron Maiden (violence), Judas Priest (anticommunism, racism), AC/DC (neofascism, violence), Van Halen (originally written "Ban Halen" as anti-Soviet for no reason at all, among dozens of others, which shows the obsession that the Soviet Union had of illegitimate the West and their artists (Von Faust, 2014, p.26). This is additionally interesting because, as we now know, just four years later, in 1989, Moscow Music Peace Festival took place with more than 100.000 in attendance, being Scorpions one of the bands participating, which is evidence that the glasnost and perestroika carried out by Gorbachev were successful.

This censorship and repression didn't stop: Komsomol activists inspected suspicious discotheques (as they sometimes would put Western rock on), raided clandestine recording studios, prohibited the publishing of independent fanzines [3] , dispersed meetings where record swapping would take place and forbid unofficial rock concerts. People who were even slightly involved in any of these activities would suffer extreme consequences, very much disproportionate to their actions: students would be expelled from schools and universities, and adults from work. Detention, imprisonment and psychiatry sessions were among the most common ways of punishment. For musicians who were banned, unauthorized music distributors and organizers of unofficial musical events, the penalty was even worse: those who managed to avoid jail were hospitalized in mental facilities where they were administered medication used to treat schizophrenia (Von Faust, 2014, p.28). However, even when things couldn't feel darker for the rebels, they kept going, finding different ways of smuggling records, producing fanzines, putting Western music in discotheques and organizing illegal concerts, resisting until things would get brighter, which they did, starting on March 10 of the same year, when Mikhael Gorbachev was elected the new Central Committee Chairman, after the passing of Konstantin Chernenko. One of the main ideas that Gorbachev wanted to put into motion was the loosening of censorship, and in late 1985, Glavlit, the Main Administration for Literary and Publishing Affairs, received instructions to cede more authority to the executive officers regarding the publications, which led to a freedom and control never seen before by the media. A reflection of this social and cultural changes is made by British reporter Martin Walker: "The successive

[3] Magazines made by fans.

cultural revolutions have at last produced a leadership in the Kremlin which is not tarred by the old evils of Stalinism, and which is educated, reform-minded and not frightened by the future as represented by its own increasingly assertive young people. And with the men in the Kremlin giving their approval, the rest of the vast state machine slowly starts to move and learn to tolerate." (Von Faust, 2014, p.33).

The liberalization of the Soviet media was not an easy process as many elements of the Soviet society and press resisted to Gorbachev's reform of "Glasnost", favouring the old Leninist traditional values. Nevertheless, with time, these traditionalists started to lose space and importance in the media establishment, and Rovesnik and Pravda, the most important youth magazine and the official Communist Party newspaper, respectively, progressively became more open and liberal towards Western culture (Von Faust, 2014, p.36).

The coming of Mikhail Gorbachev, with his reforming of glasnost and perestroika, also opened the doors wider. These reforms eased censorship and created space for new cultural expression. In 1986, Joanna Stingray, a Los Angeles singer that had come to the Soviet Union in 1984, released an album called "Red Wave" that featured Kino, Alisa, Strange Games and Aquarium, Soviet groups that were considered unofficial by the Soviet record label Melodiya, prior to the Gorbachev thaw. The LP helped end the Kremlin's censorship of rock when Gorbachev asked: "Why is it that such albums come out in America, but not here?" (Bennetts, 2021). This was the first official rock collaboration between artists from both the United States and the Soviet Union, providing yet another example of rock music transcending the Iron Curtain, just three years before the Moscow Peace Festival. Aquarium was officially recognized by the Soviet Union for the album's success in the United States, and, according to Louise Branson, journalist for The Sunday Times: "The authorities in Leningrad recently turned over a 6,500-seat sports stadium to one of the most talented groups, Aquarium, for eight nights…Kino, Alisa and Strange Games, are also being invited to perform at the officially sanctioned events", so instead of punishing Soviet artists for playing Western music and communicating with the West, they actually were rewarded, representing a change on the relationship between the East and the West: rock became a symbol of the openness the Soviet Union aimed for under glasnost and perestroika (Vespieren, 2017, p.29).

Magazine readers' letters, however, exposed the actual size of rock's popularity: When the 80's decade was coming to an end, rock music, without opposition from the traditionalists, finally breached the Soviet Union at full force, proven by the media ties that would be made between

the West and the Soviet Union. In 1987, Gorbachev and his wife received Yoko Ono, John Lennon's widow, stating their appreciation for Lennon and adding that "John should have been here", which, according to historian Timothy Ryback meant that "… the head of the Soviet state - symbolically allied himself with the forces of rock and roll", sending an international message of not only acceptance but also invitation, regarding Western rock music, formerly prohibited (Von Faust, 2014, p.46). Following this episode and the general reform policies, the Soviet media gradually started to cover more Western rock acts with the goal of regaining youth audience, so in 1987, Rovesnik did an article on Ozzy Osbourne, one of the biggest rockstars ever, praising his talent, once despised and ignored, described as a substance-abusing talentless lunatic. In July of 1987, Rovesnik created a segment that got them a lot of young readers: RER - Rovesnik's Rock Encyclopedia, a monthly installment that got published over the course of several years and only covered foreign acts, ranging in terms of genre from blues rock to heavy metal, satisfying all readers. Rovesnik became globally known and managed to interview, in the next few years, bands like the mighty Iron Maiden, Metallica, and Ronnie James Dio, as well as writing articles on them (Von Faust, 2014, p.47).

In December of 1987, the first heavy rock act finally took place in Soviet soil, with British band Uriah Heep selling out ten nights in Moscow's Olympic Sports Complex, with police authorities interfering in the crowd, trying to pacify the frenetic Soviet youth, watching a Western rock act for the first time ever. In 1988, however, Germany's Scorpions also sold out ten nights, entertaining around 350000 Soviet fans, with articles describing the crowd as animated and lively, which contrasts with what was said about Uriah Heep's tour just one year earlier. In 1989 came the absolute official approval of Western heavy music, as Moscow hosted the colossal two-day Moscow Music Peace Festival at the Olympic Arena in August, portrayed by the Western press as the Soviet Woodstock. Thought of as a drug and alcohol prevention event and featuring the most popular Western heavy rock acts at the time, it was the first musical event of that magnitude in the Soviet Union, praised by the Soviet youth for being a sign of openness and democratization of the Soviet Union (Von Faust, 2014, p.50). The festival saw Bon Jovi, Scorpions, Ozzy Osbourne, and other top acts at Luzhniki Stadium, attracting crowds of over 100,000. The two-day festival contained acts like Skid Row, Cinderella and Bon Jovi, headlining the first night, and Motley Crue, Ozzy Osbourne, Scorpions, and Gorky Park headlining the second, making Gorky Park (Moscow) the only band that didn't come from the West, which demonstrates the improved relationship between the two superpowers and the acceptance of Soviet rock by the government. This idea of peace and communication was

reflected in the art of the festival: the event poster featured a bald eagle (representing America) grabbing the hammer and sickle (symbol of communism) in its talons, suggesting a cooperative relationship between both ideologies – the liberal and democratic ideals of American freedom and the communist ideals of the Soviet Union. On the eagle's back can also be seen a peace sign (Vespieren, 2017, p.31). The celebration led Scorpions leader Klaus Mein to write the hit anthem "Wind of Change," an expression of the optimism that swept across Eastern European citizens as the communist restrictions were finally relaxed. Later that autumn, when peaceful East German protesters called for the Berlin Wall to be opened up, Gorbachev did not act to prevent them, justifying: "If the Soviet Union wished, there would have been nothing of the sort (the fall of the Wall) and no reunification of Germany. But what would have ensued? A catastrophe or World War Three." The fall of the Berlin Wall marked the end of the Cold War, and Scorpions' "Wind of Change," as narrated on their website, "became the anthem to glasnost and perestroika, providing the soundtrack to the opening of the Iron Curtain, the fall of Communism and the end of the Cold War." (Clark, 2015, p.46). Staged with the help of Western promoters and sanctioned by Soviet officials, the festival was broadcast to the globe as evidence of coordination. To Western audiences, the event sealed the achievement of cultural diplomacy, proving rock had conquered not only Soviet youth but the Soviet stage itself. It was a gamble for the Soviet leaders: by approving the event, they were attempting to redirect the energy of the young people into one of international unity, presenting the event as an act of peace, not insurrection. That the leaders approved such a massive concert turned out to be evidence of how far the state had moved away from its previous campaigns of repression: rock was no longer an external presence on the fringe of resistance to the state that needed to be overturned, but an internal force that needed to be controlled. As sixteen-year-old Olga Sizoua said: "This is a happy day. It's not just the music, but the things that are happening in our country. We see change.", referring to the gradual opening of the Soviet society, from being completely isolated to accepting and welcoming foreign culture (Clark, 2015, p.31-32).

With the Soviet society gradually advancing towards democratization, the number of institutions and press to reject the Leninist ideology start to increase and consequently embrace the youth counterculture that would guarantee an important engagement in the global cultural movement, ensuring that the prohibition of rock in Soviet soil had finally ended.

**The impact of music and Monsters of Rock**

If more proof was needed, this odyssey ultimately reached its symbolic conclusion on September 28 of 1991, when almost a million Soviet fans gathered at the Tushino Airfield just outside of Moscow for the Monsters of Rock festival, featuring massive bands like Metallica, for what would be their biggest concert ever, with sources to say there was an estimated attendance of 1.6 million fans, and ACDC, another giant of the genre (Von Faust, 2014, p.52). Before going up on stage, Brian Johnson, frontman of the British hard rock act, explained to the Associated Press: "Opera and ballet did not cut the ice in the Cold War years. They used to exchange opera and ballet and circus companies, but it takes rock n' roll to make no more Cold War." (Clark, 2015, p.28). The festival was organized with the intention of rewarding the Soviet youth for making a stand against the failed coup d'état attempt, in August of the same year, when extremists of the Communist Party tried to take control of the country by force and the youth, in response, took the streets in protests, doing their best to ensure that the country would not return to this imperative, strict version of Communism. Less than three months after the success of the Monsters of Rock festival, the Soviet Union was dissolved on 26 December 1991.

The Western concerts of the 1980s and early 1990 - the Uriah Heep show, the Scorpions, Moscow Music Peace Festival, and the Monsters of Rock then became milestones in Soviet cultural history. They reveal how Western music entered Soviet society and even the Cold War's symbolic center. These concerts were the end result of decades of underground dissemination, press wars, propaganda battles, and rebellion among youths. They showed that rock was becoming an identity language and communion language, a vehicle through which the hopes and frustrations of Soviet youth could be given voice, and a *soft power* tool wielded, either knowingly or unknowingly, with incredible impact by the West.

The sight of that many Soviet youths and young adults dancing to Western heavy metal music was not just the penetration of a music genre, but the shattering of ideological fault lines that had defined the Cold War. Music, which had been strictly policed as an ideological threat, was now the carrier of the feeling of freedom. The scale and passion of the concerts were a cultural liberation - it was not Western cultural triumphalism, it was the shattering of the Soviet ideological grip and the promise of the cultural liberation that would characterize the post-Soviet era.

In the long run, the influence of these events was monumental. They had shown the limits of censorship, revealed underlying public appetite for cultural freedom, and eroded the ideological

power of the regime. Rock music did not overthrow the Soviet Union, but it helped significantly to delegitimize its cultural power and provide the youth with a powerful symbol of alternative values.

The paradox of Soviet cultural policy was that its efforts to suppress rock music - through bans, propaganda, and psychiatric pathologization - had the unwitting side effect of politicizing it. By depicting rock as dangerous, the authorities turned it into a symbol of resistance and authenticity. As historians like Timothy Ryback have noted, rock "upset Marxist-Leninist assumptions about the state's ability to dominate its subjects." (Von Faust, 2016, p.391). Others, like Václav Havel, a former Czech statesman, and Sabrina Ramet, an American journalist, argued that repression politicized rock by pushing it underground, where it was rebellion. Rock's interpretation, in this way, was not just musical but highly political: it embodied the limits of Soviet power and the aspirations of a generation for liberty and authenticity.

By the time Elton John, subsequently AC/DC, Metallica, and Bon Jovi toured enormous Soviet crowds, Western music had arrived within the generational consciousness of the young. These events were not a matter of entertainment alone, they were spaces upon which the legitimacy of the regime was eroded in sound, spectacle, and shared sentiment. They demonstrated the boundaries of censorship, the independence of audiences, and the strength of culture as a *soft power* force to remold political imaginations.

The study of such musical encounters also points to a pervasive argument of this thesis: that music was not a peripheral feature of the Cold War, but a central force in the struggle for hearts and minds. Jazz, folk, classical, and rock each revealed different aspects of influence and resistance representative of Western cultural diplomacy's flexibility as well as the creativity of Soviet audiences. But rock, with its mass audience and its inimitable energy, challenged Soviet ideological hegemony more theatrically than any other.

As will be discussed in the following chapter, the significance of these musical engagements lies not only in their explicit influence upon Soviet youth or policy, but in what they reveal about the Cold War more broadly. The conflict between East and West was waged as much in the realm of culture as politics or commerce. Music was an arena of ideas, a space in which values of authenticity, freedom, and identity were contested, negotiated, and redefined. Far from being merely a cultural sideline to the Cold War, the history of Western musical events in the Soviet Union is an essential key to understanding how cultural diplomacy, *soft power*, and popular reception facilitated the eventual collapse of the Soviet system.

## Conclusion

Music in the Cold War was not just entertainment or cultural decoration. As this thesis shows, it became a battleground where the Soviet Union and the West fought for control of hearts and minds. From post-war jazz diplomacy to the dominance of rock explosion of the 1970s and 1980s, Western music served as a powerful *soft power* resource in the Cold War ideological competition. It started as cultural exchange but eventually grew into political influence that weakened Soviet control and shaped its people's aspirations.

One recurring theme throughout the chapters is that the main Cold War confrontation was more about the responses of the Soviet government than about the music itself. The Kremlin's changing strategy - ranging from repression and suppression to cautious acceptance and, ultimately, last-minute liberalization - supports the idea that Western music conflicted with Soviet society not through explicit propaganda but because of the social meanings audiences attached to it. Jazz, initially accepted as urbane and ideologically "neutral," was later suspected for its Western connections. Folk music, especially the American protest tradition exemplified by artists like Bob Dylan, reinforced ideas of freedom and resistance on a larger scale. But it was rock - and eventually heavy metal - that most directly challenged the ideological boundaries of the Soviet cultural sphere. Leslie Woodhead, author of *How the Beatles Rocked the Kremlin* (2013), quoted Russian writer and critic Art Troitsky saying, "In the big bad West they've had whole huge institutions that spent millions of dollars trying to undermine the Soviet system. And I'm sure the impact of all those stupid Cold War institutions has been much, much smaller than the impact of the Beatles.". Additionally, Journalist Ed Vulliamy cites Mikhail Safonov from the Institute of Russian History, stating, "Beatlemania washed away the foundations of Soviet society," and Russian musician Sasha Lipnitsky, adding, "The Beatles brought us the idea of democracy. For many of us, it was the first hole in the Iron Curtain," underlining The Beatles' influence on Soviet culture and politics (Clark, 2015, p.24).

Unraveling the history of Western music performances in the Soviet Union - from early state-authorized tours to bootleg tape exchanges and culminating in massive late-Cold-War concerts like the 1989 Moscow Music Peace Festival and the 1991 Monsters of Rock - reveals how live concerts became moments of cultural diplomacy. The concerts showcased the strength of Western popular culture and the challenges faced by Soviet authorities in controlling it. Official reactions - ranging from Glavlit censorship to efforts to promote "acceptable" Vocal-Instrumental Ensembles - illustrate how far the state viewed music as a tool of ideological control. Moreover, suppression had the effect of politicizing the music further, transforming

what was once personal artistic or emotional expression for many young people into an underground symbol of resistance. In a 1984 article, New York Times journalist Tom Wicker noted, “Nothing crosses Cold War barriers more effectively than music. That's why a group of rock-loving youths in East Berlin recently stopped Philipp Jenniger on the street to thank him for an agreement allowing Western recordings to be legally imported and sold in East Germany. Prior to this, disks and cassettes from the West had to be smuggled into East Germany and sold illegally… Mr. Jenniger, a West German Chancellery state secretary, said the agreement was a "small step" toward improving relations between the two Germanys, which had once been as rigid and cold as the Iron Curtain itself.” (Clark, 2015, p.32).

This argument emphasizes that Western music's influence was significantly augmented by Soviet citizens themselves. Young rock enthusiasts, musicians, and even sympathetic magazine editors like Rovesnik or Yunost' pursued, taped, and shared Western music consciously. By forming underground rock clubs in Moscow and Leningrad, cassette tapes made at home, and samizdat-style lyric sheets, they established what Boris Belge refers to as "niches of freedom" in the tightly controlled society. While the state tried to dominate official culture, it could not prevent the informal networks through which such music and its accompanying values from circulating. Polish songwriter Andrzej Mogielnicki explained the influence of music behind the Iron Curtain in the 2009 documentary Beats of Freedom, stating: “From the very beginning, rock music was more than just words or songs. It initially reflected a dissatisfaction with the world around us and later motivated people to take action and seek change.” (Clark, 2015, p.30). The convergence of Western soft-power efforts with Soviet grassroots enthusiasm was responsible for dismantling Communist ideology's attempt to monopolize meaning over public life.

The musical rivalry of the Cold War was more than a battle between Soviet repression and Western freedom. As Chapter 3 with traditional music showed, many Soviet composers wished to be artistically independent of Western market forces and Party-imposed socialist realism. For Schnittke or Denisov and fellow composers, "freedom" would often mean freedom from political intrusiveness and marketplace pressures - a spirit close to the counterculture spirit of Western rock. These nuances warn us against interpreting all musical interaction as mere propaganda; instead, they suggest that music is a space where competing visions of freedom, modernity, and authenticity meet.

Finally, this thesis holds that Western influence on Soviet sonic culture throughout the later Cold War period eroded the cultural legitimacy of the Communist project itself. Particularly, rock concerts were mass rituals in which Soviet youth enjoyed sociability, expressiveness, and a cosmopolitan sense of community that contrasted with the narrow image of socialist collectivity. By the late 1980s, when the Scorpions sang of winds of change in Moscow, the message was unambiguous: rock music was not entertainment - it was a symbol of the promise of a different political future. As Vaclav Havel and scholars such as Sabrina Ramet explained, repression had inadvertently politicized the genre; when Gorbachev's glasnost was in progress, following Western music had become a mark of embracing reform and openness. Andras Simonyi, a Hungarian economist, diplomat, and ex-Ambassador to the United States explained, “I do believe today, what the satellite and VHS was for the '80s and what the Internet is today, was rock and roll and rock music in the '60s and the early '70s. It was about sending a strong message of freedom through the Berlin Wall to us who were living behind the Iron Curtain.” (Clark, 2015, p.19).

Evidence thus supports the broad argument that during the Cold War, *soft power* was not only being exercised through official channels like diplomacy and broadcasting but also through spontaneous and emotional connections created through music. The connections were highly resistant to ideological censorship. Whereas Soviet authorities might stifle lyrics, censor concerts, or criticize foreign bands in the press, they were unable to stop a tune heard off a smuggled cassette from providing a feeling of identity and belonging. The struggle over the meaning of rock music therefore became an important front line in the international battle of geopolitics. Music played a vital role in both U.S. and Soviet *soft power* strategies and cultural exchanges. Musicians and fans used it to build connections, promote peace, and support nuclear disarmament. It's important to recognize the efforts of both governments to regulate music and its messages, especially if future producers and listeners want to freely express their opinions and encourage positive change.

In light of these findings, it is certain that Western musical activity in the USSR's past is central to understanding the conclusion of the Cold War. It shows how an apolitical culture can gain enormous political influence by representing different identities and conceptions of freedom. Moreover, this underlines the consideration that ideological regimes can be undermined by economic downturns or diplomatic setbacks, but also by their inability to fulfil the emotional and aesthetic desires of citizens. In this sense, music is not merely a secondary accompaniment to history, but a causal force within it.

Future research could expand this work beyond the Soviet context by comparing similar cultural influences in other closed regimes or examining how modern authoritarian governments restrict or limit foreign musical influences on the internet. Currently, the Soviet example demonstrates that cultural production, particularly popular music, is a key arena of political conflict. The USSR experienced the rise of heavy rock and large festival crowds in the 1980s, which did not topple the government immediately but helped reveal contradictions within its ideological cover. Few phenomena better illustrate the explosive effects of *soft power* than the Cold War soundscape conflict.

## Bibliographical references


Belge, B. (2013). From Peace to Freedom: How Classical Music Became Political in the Soviet Union, 1964−1982. Ab Imperio, 2013(2), 279–297.

Bennetts, M. (2021). Joanna Stingray, the California girl who rocked Russia and spread the word. The Times. https://www.thetimes.com/world/russia-ukraine-war/article/the-california-girl-who-rocked-russia-pfgfvtqmb

Binyon, M. (1979). Elton John: In Russia With Love. The Washington Post. 13/06/2025. https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/lifestyle/1979/05/30/elton-john-in-russia-with-love/975d363e-9440-4c25-a55b-6ea734c10b6e/

Clark, S. M. (2015). Soothing the Savage Beast: Music in the Cultural Cold War, 1945-1991 [Thesis]. State University of New York.

Clement, D., & La Frenais, I. (Directors). (1979). To Russia... With Elton [Documentary].

Davenport, L. E. (2009). Jazz Diplomacy: Promoting America in the Cold War Era. University Press of Mississippi.

Falk, A. J. (2011). Upstaging the Cold War: American Dissent and Cultural Diplomacy, 1940–1960. University of Massachusetts Press.

Fosler-Lussier, D. (2015). Music in America's Cold War Diplomacy: Vol. California Studies in 20th-Century Music (1st ed.). University of California Press.

Kinney, D. (2021). An Interview with John McEuen (49) [Broadcast].

Mikkonen, S., Scott-Smit, G., & Parkkinen, J. V. (2019). Entangled East and West: Cultural Diplomacy and Artistic Interaction during the Cold War (Vol. 4). De Gruyter Brill.

Moore, S. I. (2024). Modern Folk: The Folk Revival and American Cold War Culture, 1958 – 1965 [Dissertation]. University of California.

Nye, Jr., J. S. (1990). Soft Power. Foreign Policy, 80, 153–171.

Nye, Jr., J. S. (2019). Soft Power and Public Diplomacy Revisited. The Hague Journal of Diplomacy, 14, 7–20.

O'Rourke, P. (2019). Jazz behind the Iron Curtain. A Journal of Historical Inquiry, 46, 1–16.

Pappa, A. (2014). Rock and Roll's Impact on Soviet Youth in the Cold War (1970-1991) [Thesis]. Utrecht University.

Perrigo, B. (2017). How the U.S. Used Jazz as a Cold War Secret Weapon. Time Magazine.

Richmond, Y. (2005). Cultural Exchange and The Cold War: How the West Won. The Polish Review, 50(3), 355–360.

Ritter, R. (2018). Between Propaganda and Public Diplomacy Jazz in the Cold War. Popular Music and Public Diplomacy, 95–116.

Saunders, F. S. (2000). Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters" (1st ed.). The New Press.

The Washington Post. (1979). Elton John Rocks Russia. The Washington Post. https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/lifestyle/1979/05/23/elton-john-rocks-russia/e8a13643-a4f2-4713-989d-ecd9e53dc12f/

Tockhta, N. (2023). Rocking in the Free World. Oxford University Press.

U.S. Department of State. (n.d.). BIOGRAPHY: Joseph S. Nye. U.S. Department of State. https://2009-2017.state.gov/s/p/fapb/185594.htm

Verspieren, V. (2017). Rock 'n' Roll in the Soviet Union 1955-1991: Reflections of a Divided Society [Dissertation]. University of Portland.

Von Faust, B. (2014). Banned in the USSR: Counterculture, State Media, and Public Opinion During the Soviet Union's Final Decade [Dissertation]. Rutgers University.

Von Faust, B. (2016). Let there be rock: 'Western' heavy metal in Soviet press and public opinion during the Soviet Union's final decade. Metal Music Studies, 2(3), 377–393.

Vulliamy, E. (2013). For young Soviets, the Beatles were a first, mutinous rip in the iron curtain. The Guardian. https://www.theguardian.com/music/2013/apr/20/beatles-soviet-union-first-rip-iron-curtain

Zhuk, S. (2011). 'Fascist Music from the West': Anti-Rock Campaigns, Problems of National Identity and Human Rights in the 'Closed City' of Soviet Ukraine, 1975-1984. In Popular Music and Human Rights (pp. 147–159). Ashgate Publishing.