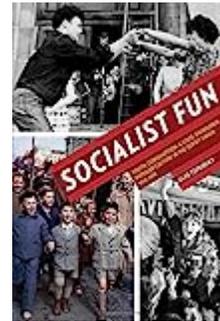


Gleb Tsipursky. *Socialist Fun: Youth, Consumption, and State-Sponsored Popular Culture in the Soviet Union, 1945–1970.* Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2016. Illustrations. 384 pp. \$29.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8229-6396-7; ISBN 978-0-8229-8125-1.



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Gleb Tsipursky's volume offers a timely and detailed analysis of grassroots entertainment in the Soviet Union from the late Stalin era to the early Brezhnev period (1945-70). The book focuses on the activities of the cultural institutions sponsored by the regime that offered blue and white collar workers, especially youth, various ways to spend their leisure time. Tsipursky deals with the Soviet government's changing outlook on what constituted constructive and useful leisure. As he rightfully argues, this detailed analysis of leisure is important for understanding the overall ideology of the Soviet regime and especially the construction of difference between Soviet and Western entertainment.

The book mainly deals with the years conventionally called "Khrushchev's Thaw" (1953-64), usually seen in both academic and popular sources as a time of relative relaxation of the strict division between the Soviet Union and the West. It is believed that during the thaw, Western styles of music and entertainment influenced Soviet life to a larger degree than ever before since the revolution and that these influences helped to provide fertile ground for Mikhael Gorbachev's perestroika later in the century. During this period, the Soviet Union attempted to determine acceptable standards regarding leisure. Thus, Tsipursky's primary contribution to the scholarship on

the Soviet Union's cultural history is his nuanced analysis of the thaw's limits of allowable Western influences.

The book concentrates on a particular type of cultural institution—the club (*dom kul'tury*)—a place for socialization of Soviet youth. Most officially sanctioned clubs offered lectures on subjects related to Socialism along with more open-ended entertainment, such as musical performances and dances. In the 1960s, the Soviet government also opened youth cafés where young people had an opportunity to socialize while drinking nonalcoholic beverages. Similar to clubs, cafés promoted socializing with a purpose, for example, staging concerts or cultural and political debates. Tsipursky shows that during the period that he discusses these clubs and cafés were sites where popular initiatives and government-sponsored and centralized ideas collided and coexisted.

One of the most interesting ideas of this volume is the complicated relationship that the state formed with grassroots initiatives. While the 1917 Revolution was presented as coming from the masses, cultural life after the revolution was a combination of proletarian undertakings and government-initiated programs. It was the responsibility of the state to ensure that ideological tenets were preserved in these popular initiatives. Therefore,

for example, while young people often wanted to play jazz, state cadres insisted on state-sponsored concerts of classical music. This book documents the attempts by average young people to play and perform musical genres that they liked and various obstacles they had to overcome. The main focus of the research is on the jazz and later light rock music that was popular in the Soviet Union during that time but was only intermittently and partially supported by the state. While the book occasionally draws on other examples—such as theater, clubs based on non-musical interests, and literary gatherings—music constitutes the lion's share of the discussion and almost all of the informants of the author were amateur musicians.

Another significant point that Tsipursky makes is the fact that most youth successfully functioned in two different realms: in official entertainment and in the prohibited or discouraged cultural initiatives, such as playing jazz. Interestingly, while mentioning potential repercussions of disobeying the regime, such as being fired from one's place of work, the author never mentions any examples of actual punishment, which suggests that many of the prohibitions were not enforced or were implemented rather unwillingly. Nevertheless, importantly, the book notes that most young people navigated between the realm of innovation and risk and the realm of allowable, if uninteresting, entertainment constantly and with ease. Thus, Tsipursky shows that openly rebellious groups—such as *stilyagi* (literally Stylish people),

and groups of mainly children of functionaries who had more influence and resources to buy clothes that closely resembled what was worn by young people in the West and who were interested in prohibited musical trends, belonged to different social classes and were overall a very small minority.

Consisting of eight chapters, an introduction, and a conclusion, the book also includes about one hundred pages of footnotes and a bibliography. This unusual depth of research, which focuses mainly on Moscow and Saratov but also occasionally on other venues, sometimes as far as Baku, shows that the tendencies discussed were popular and important not only for the capital city and the large metropolis of Leningrad but also for smaller Soviet cities and towns. At the same time, Tsipursky explains that during the more conservative waves, for example, during the last years of Stalin's rule, being on the periphery meant having slightly more intellectual and cultural freedom.

Overall, the book represents an invaluable resource for cultural studies students who are interested in the Soviet period. Perhaps the most important statement of the book is in his first sentence of the introduction: "Socialist fun was a serious business" (p. 221). By demonstrating that Soviet leisure was a structured series of ideologically informed educational activities, Tsipursky makes the case for the importance of such a narrowly focused micro case for cultural studies and history of culture and political and social sciences.

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