East European Film Bulletin

ESSAY

Singing Dichotomies

Grigorii Aleksandrov's *Jolly Fellows* (*Vesëlye rebiata*, 1934) and the Structural Principles of Film Musicals

VOL. 110 (DECEMBER 2020) BY IRA ÖSTERBERG

Mosfilm's *Jolly Fellows* (1934) is often considered the first film musical made in the Soviet Union. A lesser-known Ukrainian countryside musical film, *The Accordion* (1934), was released slightly earlier, but the sheer magnitude of the Mosfilm production as well as its immediate and immense popularity upon release, ensured that *Jolly Fellows* captured the limelight and stayed in it, outshining the competition right from the start. According to a well-cited legend, it was Stalin himself who commissioned the film, as he requested that Soviet filmmakers produce a Hollywood-style musical comedy in the early 1930s – something that would entertain and give joy to the masses.[1] As it happened, Stalin pronounced this wish in the presence of Sergeï Eisenstein's longtime assistant and close companion, Grigorii Aleksandrov, who decided to take up the challenge. Aleksandrov had collaborated with Eisenstein in practically all of his films of the 1920s: in *Strike* (1924) he is credited as scriptwriter and actor, in *Battleship Potëmkin* (1925) as actor, in *October* (1927) as scriptwriter.

The leading role in *Jolly Fellows* was secured early on for singer and entertainer Leonid Utësov, who was already a big star with his jazz ensemble. The film was essentially built around his existing stage persona and a comedy show that he used to perform with his orchestra.[2] Utësov's performance in the film would nevertheless be overshadowed by musical theater actress Liubov Orlova, who was propelled to stardom with the release of the film. Director Aleksandrov eventually married her and together they continued to make hugely popular film musicals throughout the Stalin period: *The Circus* (1936), *Volga-Volga* (1938), *The Radiant Path* (1940) and *Spring* (1947). These films comprise the most beloved core works of Soviet cinema from the first half of the 20th century even today.

Even though *Jolly Fellows* was essentially made upon request, it also encountered difficulties in its production phase as well as upon its reception.

The musical, as a film genre, and jazz as a music genre, were both considered overly American and bourgeois. The film had to go through certain changes that affected the cohesion of the final product, but it nevertheless became a huge success with Soviet audiences upon release. Despite its popular success, the press criticized the film for its lack of a proper plot and for imitating second-rate Hollywood revues.[3] The film was well-received in the West though, where audiences were mainly astonished by how a country of seriousness and rigid ideology could produce something so joyous and delightful.[4] This view is also established in the titles that the film received among its foreign distribution: it was retitled “Moscow Laughs”, and sometimes even “The World is Laughing”.

Rimgaila Salys has provided an extensive account of *Jolly Fellows*’ production phases and reception, as well as an analysis of the film’s music and its syntactic and semantic elements.[5] Salys partly bases her analysis on Rick Altman’s influential description of the structure of American musical film.[6] In this essay I wish to provide further analysis of the relationship of the film’s structural principles and Altman’s theory, and will thus provide a complementary – and at times alternative – reading of the film. I also wish to connect the film to the early Soviet cinema’s fundamental notions of placement of songs and what comprises a “film musical”.

Early singing in Soviet film and “supradiegesis”

It is rather striking that *Jolly Fellows* came out only three years after the official launch of sound cinema in the Soviet film industry. Furthermore, from the perspective of film music, it is quite intriguing how many of the first ventures into film sound involved the presentation of a song and the act of an actor singing in synchrony with moving lips. This pertains, for example, to the American film *Jazz Singer* (1927), which was one of the most famous and successful early sound endeavors. *Jazz Singer* was also the film that, according to Valérie Pozner, “made the transition to sound a reality” for Soviet film audiences.[7]

However, in early discussions of Soviet film musicals, the inclusion of songs on film was considered a negative phenomenon with strong connotations of the West, commerciality, and bourgeois tastes.[8] Film music theoreticians Korganov and Frolov point out that the introduction of sound finally gave the film characters the opportunity not just to speak but also to sing.[9] According to them, American cinema immediately began using diegetic songs as an attraction or a gimmick, and this led to the invention of the musical. Furthermore, they state that Sergeï Eisenstein, Vsevolod Pudovkin and Grigorii Aleksandrov authored their famous “Statement on Sound” to oppose such usage of “schlagers” or popular songs as advertisements.[10]

Despite the suspicions raised about the value that song may bring to a film, the first Soviet film that was released with full-fledged sound also featured several songs sung by characters in the film. *The Road to Life* (1931), directed by Nikolai Ekk, is a film about juvenile delinquents who are offered an alternative to imprisonment by getting involved in the creation of a workers' commune. Its songs, composed by Jakov Stolljarov, were based on the traditional motifs of so-called "criminal songs" ("*blatnaia pesnia*"), which describe the hard life of the underworld, of prisoners, criminals, and orphans on the street. The songs are often sung collectively by several of the young characters, without accompaniment, and thus appear as a realistic self-expression of the characters. Despite the songs' prevalence, there is something about the serious topic of the film itself, the somber atmosphere of the songs, and the realistic mode of their presentation that result in the film never really being discussed as a musical.[11]

Korganov and Frolov describe one of the main film music strategies from the 1930s onward for Soviet film as the "realistic method" ("*bytovoi metod*"), in which diegetic songs arise from realistic, everyday surroundings.[12] The songs' primary functions are character description and the illustration of social differences. According to them, such films are, nevertheless, different from "film-musicals" or musical comedies. Similarly, film music historian Tatiana Egorova states that, from the 1930s onwards, popular songs were featured in all film genres in Soviet cinema, not just in musical comedies.[13] This clearly indicates that there was a difference between ordinary films that feature songs and film musicals, so that the latter cannot be identified simply by the presence of songs or film characters singing them.

One way of looking at the difference is by taking Rick Altman's concepts of audio dissolve and supradiegesis into account.[14] For Altman, the main defining element of a film musical is the device of audio dissolve, the transition of the music from diegetic realism into the realm of non-diegetic fantasy. This transition of the music is typically accompanied by the transformation and transition of other elements, such as the setting and the characters' appearance. Together these transformed elements form another level in the narration that Altman calls "supradiegesis". Film music narratologist Guido Heldt has summarized Altman's concept as a level that exists beyond the realistic surroundings, a utopian and transcendental space of emotional intensity and performative virtuosity.[15] Essentially, it is a narrative technique that liberates the narration from constraints of realism and justifies (or rather resolves the narration from the burden of justifying) the characters singing so much.

Therefore, even though song was first seen as a foreign element in film, and a commercial gimmick opposed to serious artistic expression, it soon became "normalized" within the Soviet context. In fact, diegetic performances of realistic songs in realistic settings with authentic on-screen accompaniment

became prevalent in many films of the Soviet era. What remained, however, was the notion of the "unreal" as a foreign element brought in by the "supradiegesis" entailed by musicals in Altman's understanding. Lavish performances to non-diegetic accompaniment with an accent on performativity can be identified as the very things that differentiate *Jolly Fellows* from its contemporaries – other early Soviet "song films". Thus, the difference between a film-musical and a film that is not a musical lies not in the singing itself, but in the extent to which the film narration brings in the element of the "fantastic" to the singing.

Jolly Fellows and the American models

In his comprehensive account of American film musicals, Rick Altman provided a structural division of the genre into three subgenres: the fairytale musical, the show musical and the folk musical.[16] According to Altman, the subgenre is determined mainly by the main location of the action and the thematic that arises from the chosen narrative space. Fairytale musicals take place in mythical and exotic, closed communities; show musicals are set in modern urban environments; and folk musicals are set in the idealized American past or historical countryside. Alternatively, David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson provide a similar, yet simpler division of musicals into two subgenres: straight musicals and backstage musicals.[17] The first of the two focuses on the romantic storyline, whereas the latter depicts the musicians' hard work towards success.

The most distinctive feature of *Jolly Fellows*' narrative structure is its rather blunt division into two separate and narratively different segments. The first part takes place in the countryside, while the second part takes place in the big city of Moscow. Both sections take a different approach to their use of music, and the characteristics of the songs themselves are different. In the countryside, the song performances arise as if naturally by themselves, without realistic motivation, and with non-diegetic musical accompaniment. Whereas in the city, the music is created by the fictional jazz orchestra's repetitions and performances, therefore providing a diegetic source for the music. Also, the focus of the storyline shifts with the change in location: in the countryside, the main dramatic focus is on the development of the romance between the main couple (Utësov and Orlova), whereas the latter part in Moscow focuses on the attempts of the male main character (Utësov) and his jazz orchestra to perform on stage at the Bolshoi theater. In the city, the romance is left as a sideline, which finds fulfilment only in connection and in addition to the musical endeavors.

The locations in *Jolly Fellows* can, therefore, be seen as utilizing all three "subgenre locations" of Altman's theory: the first section's idyllic countryside represents the folk musical's location, but from the point of view of the bourgeoisie, it is only an exotic resort of the fairytale musicals. At the same

time, the first segment fits into Bordwell and Thompson's description of the "straight musical" with a romantic focus. The second part of *Jolly Fellows*, set in the urban environment and on the stage of a large theater, is equivalent to both Altman's show musical and Bordwell and Thompson's backstage musical. Therefore, *Jolly Fellows* may appear to lack coherence not just because of the rather unmotivated change in location. There are also the shifts in the style and motivation of the performances and in the main focus of the story that go along with the change in setting. Essentially, the film's subgenre identifiers change in the middle of the film. This shift creates a sense of incoherence, but it also enables the film to use the full spectrum of all the different approaches and conventional elements of the musical genre: from the not-so-realistic love songs in the moonlight, to humorous orchestral rehearsals gone wrong. *Jolly Fellows* is essentially all the possible American musical genres in one.

Jolly Fellows' formal relationship with Western cinema does not need to be speculated upon in hindsight; on the contrary, the film is very open and self-reflexive about its foreign role models. The fact that American films serve as its main source of inspiration – and simultaneously as its main point of opposition – becomes evident even in the film's opening credits. The credits begin not by listing Russian names, but the names of American film stars: "Charlie Chaplin, Harold Lloyd and Buster Keaton…." Then the text continues: "…will not be performing in this film. Instead the film will present: Leonid Utësov, Liubov Orlova…" Therefore, the opening credits introduce the main starting point of the whole film: to present something that the audience is usually accustomed to seeing only in foreign, American films, and to do so in a "Russian/Soviet" way with domestic actors. The established, foreign idols are simultaneously placed as a starting point and discarded right from the start. They are replaced with domestic actors – whose purpose is to be themselves, not imitate Americans. Emulation and opposition, parallelism and juxtaposition go hand in hand.

Rimgaila Salys has offered a detailed analysis of the formal similarities between the Soviet film's individual gags and the comedy styles of Chaplin, Lloyd, Keaton, and others.[18] For the purposes of this essay, it is sufficient to highlight three important claims about the film based on acknowledging this intertextual allegiance. First, that the film itself claims American comedy as its main source of inspiration – not American musicals per se. It is in fact anachronistic to apply the full scale of Altman's theory to *Jolly Fellows*, as many of the films Altman used for his theoretical synthesis are much more recent. Therefore, it could be argued that some of the structural similarities are more a matter of simultaneous development rather than direct emulation and cultural adaptation.

The second important claim related to the American intertextual material – and this really needs to be emphasized separately – is that all the comedies that are referred to in this context are *silent* comedies. The use of silent cinema as

a point of contrast and departure is a recurring theme throughout the film. In an early scene, the main character, the shepherd Kostia Potehin (played by Utësov), conducts a roll call for his heterogeneous herd. As he calls out the names of all the different animals of the farm, the animals are shown in a corresponding close-up and each respond with their own natural sounds. This gag is, therefore, partially based on displaying the magic of sound synchronized with image.

The third claim is that the source of formal opposition to *Jolly Fellows* was not merely American cinema, but also previously established, domestic film forms. The popular Soviet comedies of the 1920s were typically seen as direct imitations or emulations of the American comedies by the popular actors already mentioned.[19] Therefore, in this sense, the juxtaposition is not created merely between Soviet (Russian) – American, but also between the Soviet film tradition of the 1920s and the new cinematic era of the 1930s. Overall, the dichotomies at play on this level are: American – Soviet (Russian); silent film – sound film; 1920s' Soviet comedy – 1930s' Soviet comedy; emulation – innovation.

There is one additional source of influence, especially with regard to the film's use of music, and that is animated film. Director Aleksandrov accompanied Sergeï Eisenstein on his famous trip to the United States in 1929-1932, where they reportedly visited the Walt Disney studios. Some of the visual tricks of *Jolly Fellows* make use of animation, in particular in the opening credits and intertitles, but the deeper influence of Disney shorts can be seen and felt in some of the musical numbers and more generally in their use of music.[20] Aleksandrov was particularly impressed with the Disney technique of recording the music first, and then animating the characters' movement to correspond seamlessly. The fluent and flowing "mickeymousing" – the coordination of natural movement with music – is in certain scenes more emblematic of *Jolly Fellows*' musical performances than choreographed dance routines are. This connection between Aleksandrov's film and cartoons acts as one more case in point about the overall focus of the film on the joy of synchronized sound in general.

The countryside segment and music as "natural"

The main body of the film begins with an elaborate and skillful camera pan that lasts five minutes altogether, with only a couple of cuts masked within the sequence to make it seem like a single five-minute-long shot. Accompanied by non-diegetic music, the first image shows the gates of a farm opening up and the main character Kostia Potehin entering the frame. At this point the music stops, and after a short pause Potehin plays a small melody with his shepherd's flute and starts walking forward, with the farm animals following behind him. A group of children joins them, and with their home-made instruments they seem

to produce the orchestral music that begins to accompany Potehin. When Potehin begins to sing, the audio dissolve is finalized: the children are left out of the shot and the music is replaced entirely by a non-diegetic orchestra.

The song that Potehin sings, “March of the Jolly Fellows”, verbalizes the main ideological message of the film: the lyrics describe the differences between the countryside and the city, but then conclude that joyous singing unites all of the Soviet Union into one proud and brave nation. The march idiom, naturally, indicates that the main focus of the film is not on romantic leisurely intrigue, but on a more serious and meaningful, even heroic, thematic. Overall, in the songs of *Jolly Fellows,* the composer Isaak Dunaevsky developed a unique mixture of march, folk and jazz elements, the result being a kind of “urban folk song” that would become the signature of his songs and Aleksandrov’s films.

It is surprising and even disappointing, however, that the synchronization between the lyrics and Potehin’s lip movement is completely off. This failure to present truly synchronized singing in the very first scene results from the fact that Vasilii Lebedev-Kumach was hired to rewrite the song lyrics after the first scene had already been shot – the new lyrics were then re-recorded by Utësov and subsequently placed over the finished scene.[21] This unintentional asynchrony causes a strange effect, as the music is simultaneously very carefully synchronized with Potehin’s movements: he dances on the beams of a bridge, drums with wooden sticks on a fence and on clay pots.

In the opening scene, the music and especially song is connected with nature, animals, and ordinary farm workers. Song arises naturally from the ordinary people. A contrast is created when Potehin ends his roll call of the animals and his German music teacher enters the scene to reprimand him: “That was not playing!” The teacher insists that Potehin should play the violin instead. Obediently, Potehin grabs the violin and plays a melody that he reads off from birds sitting on the telephone lines like notes on the staff of musical notation. This works as ultimate proof that, for Potehin, true music is something that is born naturally and arises from nature itself. Classical music, on the other hand, is something that needs to be taught, and thus represents artificiality and foreign influence.

Classical music is further imbued with notions of elitism and superficiality through the bourgeois mother and her tone-deaf daughter, who have arrived from the city to spend their vacation in the countryside. The daughter, Elena (Mariia Strelkova), takes a liking to Potehin, but only because she mistakes him for a famous conductor from Paraguay, Kosta Fraskini. As a female character, Elena is contrasted with her maid, a peasant girl, Aniuta (Liubov Orlova), who possesses a beautiful singing voice and is secretly in love with Potehin. Aniuta sings the love song “Heart” (“*Serdtse*”) about her unrequited love and the pain of not knowing how things will turn out. Her performance is intercut with images of Potehin walking towards the mansion to attend a soiree organized by

Elena and her mother. Potehin is accompanied by the farm animals, who obediently follow him and whose diegetic noises are heard through the non-diegetic music. Therefore, singing is once more organically united with the animals and the countryside. To accentuate the contrast between the two women even further, the bourgeois Elena dislikes Aniuta's singing and orders her to stop: "Keep in mind, that I'm the one with the voice." "But I also have a voice," Aniuta replies mournfully. The peasant working woman represents the true, natural gift of song and music, and is the one with musicality, whereas the bourgeois women are associated with foreignness and urbanity, the lack of any musical talent, and an elitist yet empty admiration of "high culture".

Just like Potehin and Aniuta, the farm animals represent a "truer", more genuine form of existence. They follow Potehin to the bourgeois home during the soiree, but Potehin has them wait outside for his return. While the audience waits for the revelation of Potehin's true identity – in fact, he is not Fraskini, but an ordinary shepherd – the tension is building as to when the party guests notice the herd of animals waiting in the front lawn. The animals placed in the yard outside symbolize Potehin's true character, the symbol of his inner being, and it is of course music that reveals this. The party guests ask the conductor to play something, and to everyone's surprise Potehin grabs his shepherd's flute and plays a little melody. As the animals outside hear the familiar music, they go wild and begin smashing into the building through the doors and windows. They break the fancy furniture and devour the festive food whilst energetic, non-diegetic instrumental music mickeymouses their movements. In this tiny revolution, initiated by a simple melody, the inherent and implicit power of the peasants manifests itself in the animals that destroy the shallow façade of the bourgeois idyll. It is a significant scene, especially considering that George Orwell's classic novel, *Animal Farm*, would only go on to depict a similar theme more than a decade later, in 1945.

After the mayhem of the animal scene, a more serene sequence follows, in which both Potehin and Aniuta sing a song about the heart in parallel scenes. In this sequence, their feelings are not yet matching. Potehin sings his song, "So many beautiful girls" ("*Kak mnogo devushek khoroshikh*") as a serenade to Elena – the first line can be seen as an ironic commentary on the duplication of the female character in the film, and on the fact that at this point Potehin himself is oblivious to which woman is worthy of all this adoration. As a sign of him singing to the wrong woman, the branch of the tree he sits on finally breaks, and he falls flat on the ground – an embarrassing moment that ends his song. After Potehin leaves, Aniuta enters the same location and reiterates her song about the heart, now sitting on the ground: "Heart in my chest / is beating like a bird / and I want to know / what lies ahead".[22] According to Salys, these consecutive singing performances reflect Altman's idea about the musical structure being based on static male-female parallels instead of linear progression.[23]

The city segment and music as "staged"

The second part of the film takes place in Moscow. With the change in location, romantic intrigue is set aside. The focus is now on practicing and perfecting an unfinished musical performance and presenting it on stage. The second part opens with a scene in a music hall (there is no Russian word for it; it is named "*miuzik holl*"), where Kostia Potehin arrives to hear the real Kosta Fraskini conduct Franz Liszt's "Hungarian rhapsody". On the billboard it is stated that this is an *"original'naia traktovka*" ("original rendering/interpretation") of the piece, and this statement acts as a foreshadowing element – in Russian the word for "original" also means "strange" and "peculiar".

Inevitably, as the result of several misunderstandings, Potehin is again mistaken for Fraskini, and he ends up on stage. Fraskini aka Potehin stands on top of a large staircase, with the orchestra placed on both sides. Uneasy, he attempts to adjust his attire, and the orchestra interprets this gesture as a direction to play. The orchestra mickeymouses Potehin's every movement, and continues playing the rhapsody note by note, movement by movement. It is a moment of strong self-irony and reflection of music-image interaction, where the film character literally becomes the conductor and the orchestra reacts to his every movement – whether he scratches his head, stumbles upon a stair, or adjusts his sleeve. At the same time, the scene takes a high culture classical piece and lowers it to "mere" background accompaniment for a comedy routine. This radical juxtaposition and self-irony results in one of the most creative scenes of the entire film. According to one interpretation, this scene was the very thing that the cultural minister of the Soviet Union saw as unacceptable: he demanded that the film should be banned because it butchered Liszt.[24]

In Moscow, Potehin ends up becoming the leader of a jazz orchestra called "Friendship" ("*Druzhba*"), who have been promised a chance to perform at the Bolshoi theater. The rehearsals, and the aspiration to get on stage to perform their music for a live audience, becomes the focus of the second part of the film. Another famous, self-reflective music-and-image gag is the orchestra's rehearsal scene, which ends up becoming a grand battle. The musical piece begins as diegetic music played by the band members, but the music simply goes on without interruption even though, for some unexplained reason, the musicians start a fight amongst themselves, beating each other with the instruments instead of playing them. Thus, the music becomes non-diegetic background music that again mickeymouses the actions and movements of the characters. The act of fighting also creates music by itself: the musical instruments are used as instruments for violence, as a head is beaten against piano keys, which creates an accompaniment that perfectly fits the rhythm and melody of the non-diegetic music. Similarly, the leg of a fainting man accidentally toots the horn as the sign for the music to finally end. The

uncontrollable behavior of the orchestra members without their leader also parallels the animals going frantic in the first part of the film.

The boys of the orchestra and the farm animals are juxtaposed and equated throughout the film. The opening titles present an animated cow, which uses its tail to draw the title of the film. The title is followed by an explanation that the "jolly fellows" are the members of Leonid Utësov's jazz orchestra. This juxtaposition also foreshadows the forthcoming structural division between the countryside and the city: the animals are only present in the first part of the film, with Potehin fulfilling the role of the shepherd, whereas the orchestra boys are only present in the second part, with Potehin now in the role of their band leader. Potehin acts as the connecting factor between the two parts, the two locations, and the two juxtaposed groups.

The grand finale of the film presents the jazz orchestra's appearance at the Bolshoi theater. The orchestra boys are still bruised and beaten after their grand musical feud, and their instruments have been rendered unusable by the pouring rainstorm outside. Therefore, they end up performing their jazz piece a capella, with each member of the orchestra voicing the sounds of their instruments. This again acts as a parallel to the farm animals at the beginning, and the roll call where each animal showcased its unique sound. As a sign of solidarity, however, the members of the classical orchestra, who have been hidden in the orchestra pit until now, hand over their instruments to the jazz orchestra. A symbolic transition from "high" culture to "low" culture takes place, or rather, the "low" culture is now elevated and allowed to assume the position previously occupied by "high" culture.

At this moment, Aniuta steps out from the shadows and takes center stage. She has been evicted from the bourgeois household because of her enviable singing ability and she now joins the group. This signals a shift from the instrumental jazz music that has dominated the urban segment so far to Dunaevskii's urban folk songs in the final medley. With all these other symbolic transitions, an audio dissolve transforms the music from emanating strictly onstage and hence diegeticically, to coming from beyond – thus being an instance of the supradiegetic.[25] The jazz orchestra and classical orchestra now play, united. There is also a visual transition to further accentuate the passage from realistic depiction to the realm of fantasy: the stage is suddenly equipped with fancy decorations, numerous musicians, and dancing chorus girls in tutus.

It is not only the venue that undergoes a transformation, as Aniuta suddenly changes from her wet and ragged clothing into the outfit of a glamorous, curly-haired beauty queen; her amazing ballgown is completed by a decorative top hat. The top hat is typically seen as a reference to Marlene Dietrich, whom both Orlova and Aleksandrov deeply admired.[26] It may also be a reference to Fred Astaire, whose top hat had become emblematic of the American musical format.[27] The fact that the hat is placed on Orlova's head, and not Utësov's, is

an interesting side point. It may say something about the more equal gender roles prevalent in Soviet cinema when compared with Hollywood musicals. It also singles out the person who is set to be the real superstar of the film.

The finale of the film consists of four songs performed as a continuous medley. As the singing begins, the romance motif that has so far been “on the shelf” in the urban segment is finally brought back to the forefront, as Aniuta sings her “Heart” song for the third time, and this is followed by Potehin reiterating his “So Many Beautiful Girls”. After this they finally unite in song, singing the refrain from Potehin’s song: “Oh heart, be still / Oh heart, it is wonderful to live / Oh heart, be just the way you are / Thank you heart for knowing how to love!” This singing in unison signals that the two are finally united, and the romantic storyline is fulfilled. After the love motif is completed, the third song that enters the finale is the humorous song “Tiukh-tiukh”. The main couple is joined by an older gentleman who has appeared only as a side character so far. It is a reminder that the focus of the film does not revolve around a male-female dichotomy, and this song acts as a segue from the intimacy of the love songs. The lyrics of this song bring together the story so far, but also act as a distancing factor, “You fell in love / Met the wrong woman / got upset, looked around / and found beauty […]”. The general lesson to be learned from this is: “Anyone can go wrong / […] we can learn from our mistakes”. This song stands out in its humorous and carefree style: the sensitivity and pathos of the previous two songs is left behind, and now the singers and the musicians get to fool around, have fun, dance, and play their hearts out.

The medley climaxes in the reiteration of “The March of Jolly Fellows”, the opening performance of the film. This brings the story full circle and thus creates cohesion between the two separate segments. In the lyrics, the song places itself as the most essential factor in that nation’s identity building. According to Salys, this song is the only explicitly ideological element of the film, even though a song about the importance of singing makes sense for a musical in any context[28] – as, according to Altman’s theory, the (American) film musical essentially “constitutes an apology”, a justification for its importance and existence.[29] In the end, everyone joins in the singing of the march, and the camera starts pulling back from the stage. First it reveals the row of seats in the theater, then the people seated in the hall, and for the first time we witness the performers from the perspective of the theater audience – the actual audience merges with the diegetic audience within the film. Then the camera pulls further back, exits the theater, and reveals the parade entrance of the Bolshoi theater, a movement that signifies a transition from the singular to the representative, from uniqueness to generalization. With a fanfare, the film ends on this shot.

Synthesis or subversion – Musicals as ideology

According to Rick Altman, the fundamental structural principles of the American film musical are deeply imbued with ideology. The Hollywood musical is built around the tension between the opposite sexes: instead of narrative development, the focus is on static parallels between the male and female characters.[30] The gender divide conceals a secondary, ideological juxtaposition, which at its core is the apologetic opposition between work and leisure, business and entertainment. The marriage of the two extremes, seemingly incompatible opposites, takes place symbolically through actual marriage, the unison of the main couple at the end of the film.[31]

In *Jolly Fellows*, there is a similar tension around the romantic narrative between the male and female characters – take the way how Aniuta secretly loves Potehin, and how it is only a question of time before he discovers where his true feelings lie. Even the duplication of the main characters in the secondary characters is a feature of this kind of dichotomic narrative in Altman's musicals.

The ideological conflict is also articulated with the help of clearly identifiable binary oppositions. Classical music represents foreignness, artificiality, elitism and the urban environment, all presented as negative elements in contrast with Dunaevskii's songs and music, which represent the countryside, naturalness, ordinariness – something that is "ours" and everyone's. The binary oppositions at play are: musicality – lack of musicality; countryside – city; workers – bourgeoisie; Russianness – foreignness; naturality – artificiality. They are all placed under the main oppositional pair: the juxtaposition between high and low, elitist culture and people's culture. This oppositional positioning is also embodied in the way the main characters, shepherd Kostia Potehin and maid Aniuta, are reduplicated in the secondary characters, conductor Kosta Fraskini and bourgeois Elena. As representatives of the upper classes and high culture, the doubles provide a strong contrast to the main characters and emphasize the latter's function as representatives of the working class and of ordinary people.

The fact that the ideological conflict lies in the opposition of different forms of culture, in particular of different forms of music, is a characteristic of the musical strategies of Soviet cinema, which continues right up until the *perestroika* of the 1980s.[32] Essentially, music functions as a marker of ideology and worldview. The whole narrative development of *Jolly Fellows* portrays the journey of one song, the peasants' march from the countryside, into the city and its decorative theater stages. In a sense, the genuine, organic, "*narodnyi*" singing of the people surpasses and supersedes the elitist, European, classical repertoire, and the folk song finally receives its proper place on the grandest and most respected stage of the Soviet Union.

Even though *Jolly Fellows* complies with the dualist structural principle presented by Altman as pertaining to American musicals, the difference lies in

how the conflict is embodied and how it is resolved. Unlike in Altman's model, despite the romantic focus, Potehin and Aniuta do not represent oppositional characteristics. They are both from the working class, they both have genuine and organic musical talent, and thus they are on the same side of the dichotomy. In that sense, they are one from the beginning. The ideological conflict is, therefore, not embodied or personified in the male-female dichotomy. Rather, the conflict is embodied in the decision that the male character needs to make over two women. The two women represent certain types of music, which in turn represent certain political ideologies and worldviews – Elena represents classical music, which in turn represents capitalism, and Aniuta represents people's music, and Communism. Only by choosing Aniuta does Potehin enable the singing of the March at the Bolshoi theater. This slight shift in how the different values are represented, has important consequences for the way the conflict can be resolved. Potehin must choose either Elena or Aniuta. Bourgeois culture and working culture cannot coexist, as folk art becomes the new high art. There is only one correct alternative and it must triumph over the wrong and false one completely. Synthesis or compromise is not an option.

According to Altman, the American narrative of a gender conflict leading to romance and marriage hides beneath its surface, as a secondary problematic, an effort to establish and maintain a certain cultural ideology. The musical must end in marriage, the fundamental building block of American capitalist ideology, as it symbolizes the synthesis of seemingly oppositional elements. The main argument in the end is that entertainment is good because it makes for good business. Such an argument would of course be impossible or at least completely irrelevant in the Soviet context. Therefore, the ideological nuances are shifted, and the idea of synthesis is replaced with subversion – either intentionally or intuitively. Thus, in the case of *Jolly Fellows*, the Soviet musical's ideological conflict is explicit, rather than being hidden underneath romantic notions of marriage, as is the case in its American counterparts. Furthermore, the main difference between the logic of the American musical and *Jolly Fellows* is that, as the conflict is not gendered, it need not and cannot be resolved through a compromise: the conflict is resolved by subverting the other half of the dichotomy altogether.

References

1. Cf. Razzakov, F. (2008). Gibel' sovetskogo kino 1. Intrigi i spory 1918-1972. Moscow: Eksmo, 55; Musskii, I. A. (2007). 100 velikikh otechestvennykh kinofilmov. Moscow: Veche, 67; Salys, R. (2009). The Musical Comedy Films of Grigorii Aleksandrov: Laughing Matters. Bristol & Chicago: Intellect, 24.
2. Salys 2009, 26.

3. Salys 2009, 65.
4. Musskii 2007, 73. This is also something that the domestic press criticized. Salys (2009, 34) quotes sources commenting that it is not time for laughter yet in the Soviet Union.
5. Salys 2009.
6. Altman, R. (1987). The American Film Musical. Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
7. Pozner, V. (2014). “To Catch Up and Overtake Hollywood: Early Talking Pictures in the Soviet Union,’’ in Lilya Kaganovsky and Masha Salazkina (eds), Sound, Speech, Music in Soviet and Post-Soviet Cinema, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, p 61.
8. Österberg, I. (2018). What is that Song? Aleksej Balabanov’s “Brother” and Rock as Film Music in Russian Cinema: Doctoral dissertation, University of Helsinki, [Online]. Retrieved 1 September, 2020, from: http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-951-51-4125-5, 62-63.
9. Korganov, T. and Frolov, I. (1964). Kino i muzyka. Muzyka v dramaturgii fil’ma. Moscow: Iskusstvo, 66-67.
10. Korganov and Frolov 1964, 67-68. The famous statement entitled simply “Zaiavka’’ (“Statement’’) was published in 1928 and in it the three filmmakers oppose the introduction of sound on film for the mere purpose of creating “realistic’’ soundscapes. For sound to become an important artistic device in filmmaking, they think it needs to be used asynchronically, not for realistic rendering. The text can be read at: http://lib.ru/CINEMA/kinolit/EJZENSHTEJN/s_budushchee_zvukovoj_filxmy.txt (Retrieved October 25, 2020).
11. Österberg 2018, 64-66.
12. Korganov and Frolov 1964, 70-71.
13. Egorova, T. K. (1997). Soviet Film Music. An Historical Survey. Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 32.
14. Cf. Altman 1987, 67-74.
15. Heldt, G. (2013). Music and Levels of Narration in Film. Steps Across the Border. Bristol & Chicago: Intellect, 137-138.
16. Altman 1987, 124-127.
17. Bordwell, D. & Thompson, K. (2008). Film Art. An Introduction. (8th Edition). Boston etc.: MacGraw-Hill, 33.
18. Cf. Salys 2009, 78-79.
19. Cf. Razzakov 2008, 54.
20. Salys 2009, 86.
21. Salys 2009, 56.
22. “So Many Beautiful Girls’’ is also known by the name “Heart’’ (“Serdtse’’) or “Thank you, heart’’ (“Spasibo, serdtse’’), making it easy to confuse it with the other love song of the film, also known as “Heart’’. The latter song is also known by the name “Aniuta’s song’’.
23. Salys 2009, 90.
24. Musskii 2007, 72.
25. Altman 1987, 69.

26. Salys 2009, 92.
27. Bordwell & Thompson 2008, 334.
28. Salys 2009, 73, 98.
29. Altman 1987, 51.
30. Altman 1987, 20.
31. Altman 1987, 45-46.
32. Österberg 2018.