


In his third, but earliest (historically) of three volumes on the nature of Russian popular song and its role in understanding the Soviet project, David MacFadyen boldly claims that his analysis of the genre "beg[s] a total reconsideration of Soviet culture" (Songs, p. 270). He certainly asks readers to approach this one-hundred year history in a unique way by first reading the volumes that cover 1955 through 2000 and then tackling the volume that addresses 1900 to 1955. But does the theoretical, anti-linear argument justify his fundamental contention?

MacFadyen begins his story in *Red Stars* and covers roughly the era 1955 to 1991. He argues that "the nature of fame in Russia after the mid-1950s allowed these songs to create change. They helped to alter Soviet society, all within the restrictive framework that financed, supported, and propagated them." (*Red Songs*, p. x, emphasis his) Not bound by conventional timelines, however, his treatment of seven of the most popular performers often includes considerable discussion of the 1990s, because these stars continued to entertain Russian and foreign audiences. Most chapters are devoted to one or two individuals. This strategy makes some sense given the focus on lichnost', a term that in this context means both "star" and that star's "personality." (p. 33) Superstar Alla Pugacheva is familiar to scholarly readers, but others, including Edita P'ekha, Iosif Kobzon, Irina Ponarovskykaia, Sofiaia Rotaru, Lev Leshchenko, and Valerii Leont'iev are less well known. They championed variety (estrada) songs that were not associated with jazz, rock, or bard music.

By examining their performances, song choices and the public popularity that validated them, MacFadyen traces two key trends: the growing importance of the way that songs were performed and the evolving content that emphasized either a civic or lyric
concerti. Although it would be tempting to equate these categories with public and private, MacFadyen shows that even civic songs moved away from a specifically Soviet ideological message to a patriotism that was grounded in enduring personal relationships rather than in political priorities. At the same time, the most popular lyrical songs also were not wholly private. Beginning during the Thaw, Robert Rozhdestvenskii’s songs in particular satisfied state authorities and simultaneously raised the theme of “the troubling responsibility of self-realization, increasingly independent from ideology.” (p. 46) After the Thaw, audiences responded most strongly to the work of Il'ia Reznik, who often wrote for Pugacheva.

Along with changes in content, new approaches to performance arose, and teatrallizatsiia, as this phenomenon was called, was most easily adopted for lyrical songs. Stars’ popularity was based on the emotional connection, especially in concert, between the performer and individual listeners. On one level, this development reveals the growing importance of the visuals: shows evolved from static performers who moved little on stage to the big spectacles of Pugacheva. This trend had its roots prior to the Thaw, especially in the sometimes wacky jazz performances of Leonid Utesov. On another level, this change in presentation also represented a new relationship between the singer and the song. Kobzon, for example, presented a single personality and his songs conformed to it; Pugacheva, who was roughly a decade younger, altered her persona to correspond to diverse songs. By the 1980s, according to MacFadyen, audience preferences rather than the state were dictating repertoire, and spectators preferred songs that emphasized the personal significance inherent in both grand historical events and everyday life. He admits that Soviet leaders also enjoyed these singers, but he does not seem to think that they played a key role in determining the production of this music.

The perestroika era created new challenges for artists even as state oversight dissolved. MacFadyen develops these issues in the second volume Estrada?! This work is organized thematically, and the results are more satisfying to this reviewer because he more successfully demonstrates how estrada performances undermined the Soviet project. The eleven performers discussed here did so not merely because they continued to focus on private relevance for spectators. From the mid-1980s both songs themselves and performers’ approaches to repertoires and spectacle reveal a non-linear understanding of time which subverted the materialist, ideological emphasis on the march of history and the movement toward communism. This “folding” was reflected in songs by the overlap of the “past” or “future” with the “present” in a way that blurred conventional notions of time. In short, popular songs were timeless in their orientation. Performers also embraced the growing importance of novelty and change without any obvious direction, which further challenged linear ideologies. In this environment performers and spectators now understood personality as a staged, ongoing process of “becoming,” and this openness to the variety of options at any moment in time creates an affirmative “YES!” to whatever life holds at the moment. (Estrada?!, p. 128) The lyric remained crucial as private, emotional ties provided an alternative to both socialism and capitalism. MacFadyen’s discussion of Old Songs about What Matters, the three television musicals, neatly shows how estrada songs had a greater staying power that “outlasted” political ideologies. (p. 136) In light of