After 1917 musicians were subject to extreme pressure from the state to follow aesthetic standards determined by the government. State control over musicians was extended by Stalin in 1932 with the formation of the Union of Soviet Composers. This was a regulatory body whose mandate was to direct all musical activity for the government’s own political purposes. One result was that all Soviet composers were compelled to follow very specific regulations concerning the types of music they produced.

This book traces how pre-Revolutionary Russian music culture was transformed into Soviet music culture over a fifteen-year period, and describes the attitudes of the intelligentsia to having their lives and careers Sovietized during this period. The book includes a chronology of political and musical events, year-by-year, that were have been divided into fifteen sections. Each section has translated articles and reviews, and in the introduction to each year the authors do an exemplary job of illuminating the intellectual and political context of the documents. The events examined took place in Moscow and Petrograd and reflect the main tensions and trends that emerged in the process of shaping a Soviet identity in music.

These fifteen years are divided into three periods: 1917-1922, 1923-1928 and 1929-1932, which were dominated by the Civil War, NEP, and the First Five Year Plan. For every stage, the relevant documents have been compiled and are accompanied by a detailed commentary. The compiled documents begin with the October 1917 revolution and end with the establishment of the Composers’ Union in 1932, and follow the tumultuous development of musical life in this period.

Each section opens with a short introduction, and is followed by an essay that puts the documents into the context of the events and developments of the the time period in question. Following the
essay a number of translated articles from various publications are given.

In the first period, the authors assert that published criticisms concerning the shortcomings in musical life outweighed the number of writings about music itself. During the second period, that of NEP, the rivalry between the Association for Contemporary Music (ACM) and the Russian Association of Proletarian Musicians (RAPM) is examined and shown to be essentially a competition for funds between two organizations that appear to have had no other source of conflict. In the discussion of the final period, the period of the First Five-Year Plan, the authors demonstrate that the RAPM was unable to impose complete control over the Soviet music, despite the widespread perception of RAPM’s dominance in music in this time.

The documents presented in this book help to increase understanding of the role and place of music in the period under examination, and constitute a valuable source for both students and specialists of Soviet history and music. In addition, this work has much material that would be of interest to readers with any degree of interest in music, cultural politics, or politics in general.

*Ayse Dietrich - Professor, Part-time, at Middle East Technical University, Department of History. Editor and the founder of the International Journal of Russian Studies e-mail: editor@ijors.net, dayse@metu.edu.tr, dietrichayse@yahoo.com