

## **A Tale of Two Cinemas: *Zashchitniki* (*Guardians*, 2017) and Music for the New Russian Superhero Film**

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### **Abstract:**

The film *Zashchitniki* (*Guardians*, 2017), directed by the Russian-Armenian filmmaker Sarik Andreasyan, is a remarkably obvious and intentional nod to the Hollywood Marvel and DC franchises not only in title and narrative, but also in overall style. An action film with the superhero-team approach was only recently broached with the film *Guardians*. Likely because the superhero genre is new, because music is still ignored by film critics and scholars, and because these critics may not be experts in music, there is no language or interest from the general media for discussion of musical details. In terms of the film's production, distribution, and reception, it is clear that *Guardians* was intended to be and was received as another exemplar, however negative, of post-Soviet Russian nationalism and transnationalism. As the first Russian superhero kinokomik, it exemplifies a Russian nationalism that reminds too much of the Soviet past for many audiences. It could be described as international in form, Russian in content.

**Keywords:** *Zashchitniki* | Russian film music | superhero film music | post-Soviet Russian film

### **Book Chapter:**

Since the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, a post-Soviet cinema culture has emerged and has been redefined in a new international context. By the end of the 1990s, Hollywood films were consistently imported and shown in local theaters in major cities, including St. Petersburg and Moscow; subsequently, semblances to those Hollywood films started to appear in new Russian films. This response to Hollywood has continued through the 2000s, and one recent development has been the homegrown action superhero film. The film *Zashchitniki* (*Guardians*, 2017), directed by the Russian-Armenian filmmaker Sarik Andreasyan, is a remarkably obvious and intentional nod to the Hollywood Marvel and DC franchises not only in title and narrative, but also in overall style.<sup>1</sup> The plot concerns a handful of everyday multi-ethnic (or in its clear evocation of things Soviet, multi-national) super-humans from the cold war, each with their own superpower. Pulled out of retirement, the current government (presumably the Russian Federation) asks these heroes to defend the motherland against another Russian superhuman, a former government-employed scientist. With visual tropes, CGI, and sound effects that appear to

be drawn from the Hollywood stock, the film has the look of a Marvel or DC comic film blended together with Russian themes, language, and attitude.

*Guardians* is a unique transnational action film with a substantial score that reveals the complexity of transnational relations and national identity politics in cinema and music between Russia and the West, and past and present. The music follows standard practice in current Hollywood action film as it does Soviet and post-Soviet practices. It borrows from Hollywood tropes but attempts to infuse them with a specifically and intentionally national character. Nationalism is clearly evident in various ways: potential Orientalism, for instance, peers through in ways reminiscent of Soviet cultural politics, particularly in regard to the evocation of the old Soviet catchphrase “national in form, socialist in content,” in scenes where ethnically different characters such as the Kazakh hero Khan or the Armenian Ler strut their unique powers. Nationalism is also evident in the representations of the other two Russian characters, and the collective team hero. In terms of reception, this contemporary rebranding of nationalism fared badly. Russian-speaking audiences considered the film a flop, yet the international exportation of it proved remarkably profitable. Frequent complaints of it being too much like Hollywood to be Russian (despite having been directed and produced by an internationally recognized Russian-Armenian filmmaker) bring to the surface ideas of proper Russian-ness, or, hearkening back to Soviet times, *natsional’nost’* (national/ethnic identity) and *narodnost’* (folk-ness) in filmmaking and scoring. In other words, the film was designed to meet the expectations and criteria of a new Russian nationalism and travel beyond local audiences, to be transnational; but instead it was met with domestic hostility and international curiosity.

An analysis of audiovisual narrative in terms of the national and of Andreasyan’s attempts at the transnational, along with its Russian- and English-language reception, reveals the distinctive positioning of current Russian cinema within the dominant-Hollywood global cinema; this positioning is reminiscent of the cultural revolution (late 1920s to early 1930s), when Soviet Russia was searching for an identity in its film and music, which, with respect to film, involved pulling away from Western, often American imports and finding a unique Soviet cinematic identity. The 2010s revisits this crisis in cinema, bringing to the foreground issues of identity and reception particularly in response to American influence, while exploiting American styles/genres under the banner of nationalism. In an effort on the part of the filmmakers of *Guardians* to be current and international, film/music creation and reception reveal that old national tropes still abound, as do lingering audiovisual perceptions about the Other, whether from a Russian or Western stance.

### **The Post-Soviet Blockbuster Action Film**

In the mid-1990s, Russia emerged with its own post-Soviet film culture, just as mainstream American films were being imported at a faster rate. Soon enough, there emerged a tension between imported cinema, primarily of the American mainstream and blockbuster variety, and the homegrown Russian film. In some ways, this sort of tension echoes the late 1920s and early 1930s, when the importation of foreign films (American and German) was discontinued, and making a proper Soviet film, however defined, was enforced. The Russia after the fall of the Soviet Union needed to find its bearings, especially in the midst of a flood of American cultural

products, both wanted and unwanted. This importation of American commodities challenged, and still challenges, the ever-changing idea of Russian identity.

Attempts to define what is Russian, and what is a Russian national identity has been a continuous project for hundreds of years, in history and philosophy as well as in culture and the arts. Scholarship on these issues of identity have primarily focused on the Soviet period; significantly less work has been done on (trans- or intra-)nationalism since the 1980s and 1990s. This is partly the result of current identity politics: how one identifies as Russian or from another Soviet state under the Soviet regime; and how one identifies after 1991. Needless to say, identity politics of the post-Soviet period is a complex area that deserves more attention than can be granted here, and cannot be resolved in one chapter.<sup>2</sup> Yet, it needs to be recognized that this subject is fraught with complexities that necessarily intersect with this discussion of film and music.

Film and its music has been mired in the politics of the state before, during, and after the existence of the Soviet Union, and has been an integral part of discussions of nationalism, trans- and intra-nationalism, and socialism between film workers and the various levels of state bureaucracy. During late Stalinism, the leader himself recited the phrase “national in form, socialist in content” as an insistent benchmark that was intended to characterize cultural products as well as behaviors.<sup>3</sup> Alongside this oft-recited statement, concepts such as *natsional’nost’* and *narodnost’*, among many others, coexisted as slippery nomenclature signifying and emphasizing nation-ness, ethnicity, and folk-ness under the totality of the Soviet state. The state was a larger system that subsumed multiethnic groups and nations. For the purposes of this chapter, the terms nationalism and transnationalism are used with the understanding (1) of that complex history; (2) that identities are mediated, changing, and multiply determined; (3) that there exists a fluidity between the Soviet and the post-Soviet; and (4) that the post-Soviet era in regard to cinema and its music has yet to be as fully discussed in the English-language literature as much as the Soviet era has been.

Post-Soviet filmmaking in terms of approach, genre, and content unsurprisingly continued elements of the Soviet past, while embracing a new identity. In the Soviet past, particularly under Stalinism, films about the hero/ine, war, and historical figures abounded; similar types persisted after the Stalin era and into late socialism with renewed perspectives and critiques of that past. Comedies also reappeared in full after the Thaw, as did literary adaptations; and the rise of the auteur dominated the 1960s and 1970s in the Soviet Union as in the West (think: Andrey Tarkovsky, Larisa Shepit’ko).<sup>4</sup> After 1991, war and historical films took on a different approach, while other genres and approaches still persisted; yet little has been written about Russian cinema during the 1980s–90s through today.<sup>5</sup>

The influx of American cinema has complicated the situation. Russian directors have, similar to Soviet directors, responded to this new internationalism with their own takes on the genres and techniques coming from the West. The rise of the Russian blockbuster film (*blokbaster*) is one example. As one of the three categories of Russian cinema today (art-house, mainstream, and blockbuster), the American blockbuster was imported in late 1990s and early 2000s. In response to reclaiming the industry from foreign dominance and from poverty (again, echoes of the early cultural revolution), Russian directors and studios took on the task of blending Hollywood blockbusters with native interests. In this new *blokbaster* era, critics and audiences began to

question the philosophy and art behind this sort of merging of style, form, content, technique, and overall approach. Nina Tsyrukun, an influential critic and scholar, described Russian films that use “American cultural ideologies” as “cross[ing] an American donkey with a [Russian] horse.”<sup>6</sup> Filmmakers, too, such as Timur Bekmambetov, director of the wildly successful Russian films *Night Watch* (2004), *Day Watch* (2006), and the American releases *Wanted* (2008) and *Abraham Lincoln: Vampire Hunter* (2012), clearly were attempting a merger of philosophies, tastes, and narrative with style, form, and genre. Bekmambetov stated in reference to *Night Watch*, prior to its release, that “we know how to use American film language with a Russian accent to tell a Russian story.”<sup>7</sup> Such testimonies and critiques do support questions of nationalism in terms of content and form, again channeling the ghost of the old Stalinist catchphrase, “national in form, socialist in content.” The Russian blockbuster clearly is a genre based on mixing philosophies and style/form/genre that offers a quickly digestible story, and is frequently occupied with the balance between good and evil. This kind of storytelling is endemic to hero stories broadly, as it is to the recent Hollywood explosion of Marvel/DC comic-based melodramas.

The hero trope has its own history in pre-revolutionary Russia and beyond. The hero idea predated the Soviet period, and flourished in nineteenth-century literature and politics. The positive hero trope abounded during the Soviet era, and plenty of war and historical films approached the hero story with socialist realism in mind; the Stalinist and post-Stalinist versions of the national hero were symbiotic with contemporaneous cultural politics.<sup>8</sup> Some post-Soviet blockbusters, such as those by Bekmambetov and Fyodor Bondarchuk, contained action and superhumans as part of their storytelling, but they were generically defined as science-fiction or fantasy. An action film with the superhero-team approach was only recently broached with the film *Guardians*.

In the context of the *blokbaster*, *Guardians* continues the line of Russian films that blends various elements of the American and Russian action film. Often, the Russian blockbuster is defined by budget and popularity at the box office, in addition to the elements of style, form, content, and other less categorizable traits.<sup>9</sup> When only considering the box office success, *Guardians* would be difficult to categorize as a blockbuster given its domestic failure, and relative success overseas; but in 2017, it is possible that the borrowing of American format and production fused with Russian sensibility appears to at least complement, if not supersede, the importance of box office success as a defining feature of the genre.

### **Russian *Guardians***

The story of *Guardians* centers on the recruiting of four superhumans to save the (Russian-speaking) world from technological doom at the hands of the former scientist turned superhuman, August Kuratov. After going into hiding following their service to the (Soviet) state during the cold war (having fought the implied enemy, the US), the four Soviet lab-made superhumans—Arsus, Khan, Ler(nik), and Ksenia—establish alternative lives in various regions of the Russian Federation and former Soviet states.<sup>10</sup> Meanwhile, a military experiment involving new spider-like soldier robots is interrupted by the villain Kuratov. He destroys the experiment and takes over their technology. The Russian government responds by reestablishing the cold war mission “Patriot” and reassembling the fab four to combat Kuratov under the

supervision of Major Yelena Larina.<sup>11</sup> When Major Larina then travels to recruit Ler from Armenia and Arsus from Siberia, while Ler recruits Khan from Kazakhstan, the film introduces each of their super talents: Ler can move earth and rock, Khan can move like the wind with scythes in hand, and Arsus is a powerful bear-man hybrid. After they assemble, the men travel together to find Ksenia at the Moscow circus, where she displays her talent to merge with and become water. Ksenia is encouraged by the men to visit the Major, and agrees to work with the team to re-form “Patriot” and fight Kuratov, even though she has lost her memory. The group then assembles to fight (Figure 10.1) but fails to capture Kuratov before he manages to commandeer a former Soviet satellite called “The Hammer.” In an extensive and unironic explanation, the Major and other military personnel relay that the old satellite was a response to Reagan and his Star Wars program, which is implied as having happened long ago. Meanwhile, various vignettes of each of the four characters’ personal lives and aspirations are revealed in confession to the Major, each of which usually centers around discussions of love (between Arsus and Ksenia) or family (with Ler’s deceased child and Khan’s deceased brother). In the final fight scenes, Kuratov manages to transport his clones and military instruments to Moscow where he overtakes a tower and repurposes it as an antenna that will operate the satellite and thusly control the world’s access to technology. He almost succeeds completely; but at the very last moment, a lost scientist from Kuratov’s lab reappears and provides the important detail about the team’s ability to form a united weapon when they bind together. They do so as a collective hero, and Kuratov is defeated. “Patriot,” and the (Russian) people, win. The final scene of the film shows them going their separate ways, claiming that the world is not ready for them; the Major then reveals that they are not alone. After the initial credits and a hip hop song associated with the film, a brief coda is shown (again, taking a cue from Hollywood Marvel/DC films) showing the Major escaping a van, and thusly opening up the possibility of a sequel.

**FIGURE 10.1 IS OMITTED FROM THIS FORMATTED DOCUMENT**

**FIGURE 10.1.** *Zashchitniki* (*Guardians*, 2017): The “Patriot” group re-formed.

The style, cinematography, and representation of the film responds to Russian *blokbaster* and Hollywood Marvel/DC films, which is apparent in the use of CGI, stylized costuming to emphasize the heroes’ power, and of course, the overall expense needed for such a film. Dissimilar to Hollywood comic-based films, the editing for *Guardians* is slower, and the film is shorter. Some quick cuts between scenes do occasionally appear; they are abrupt and move through the story swiftly. Instead of edits that kinetically and viscerally force the viewer to feel the action as seen in some Marvel/DC films, the overall editing style is slower, and the shot type primarily medium or long. Close-ups (CU) are reserved for instances of montage, or emphasizing the male gaze, such as when the camera tracks in CU on Ksenia’s torso and breasts, but not face, when she dons her new costume; a kind of tracking/CU that failed to be done for the male characters, who are often viewed in medium shot aside from CUs of their faces. This sort of objectification of women’s bodies, especially partitioned from their faces, has a long history in the European, American, and Russian visual arts, and is continued here. Generally, editing style stands out as specific to this film, while elements of visual style and mise-en-scène point to Hollywood influences.

No doubt masculinity is also on display throughout the film, as are representations of ethnicity, and the emphasis on the collective hero. The Finno-Ugric Russian men, Kuratov (Figure 10.2a)

and Arsus (Figure 10.2b), are blond, blue-eyed and from the Russian center as they are big and overmuscled. Brawn is mostly their trait, with the exception of Kuratov also being the failed *intelligent* scientist-genius.<sup>12</sup> Arsus is a changeable being; literally part animal, but not just any animal. He is a brown bear: a creature that is symbolic of Russia both within and outside the homeland. Kuratov is so muscular he is grotesque, with veins popping out of his shirtless body (all a result of the lab explosion); while Arsus is the troubled, sensitive one who fears being stuck in “full bear mode” for the rest of his life. The other two central male characters, Ler (Figure 10.2c) and Khan (Figure 10.2d), are smaller and represented differently. They appear as average build and are marked as ethnically particular through appearance (dark-featured, weapons, costuming, music) and behavior. Ler is a quiet and contemplative hermit, while Khan is a scythe-wielding, small-statured man who speaks mostly in wise aphorisms that can be read to represent his Asiatic difference, echoing older pre-Soviet and Soviet Orientalism. Both characters are certainly Othered, but in accordance with older Soviet *natsional’nost’*—their ethnicity makes them an important part of a national (now Russian, formerly Soviet-Stalinist) collective, in this case, represented by the superhero team, one that is ultimately overseen by the Major and “Patriot.”

**FIGURE 10.2 IS OMITTED FROM THIS FORMATTED DOCUMENT**

**FIGURE 10.2.** *Zashchitniki* (*Guardians*, 2017): Representations of masculinity and ethnicity: (a) Kuratov; (b) Arsus; (c) Ler; (d) Khan.

### **Music to *Guardians***

Film music in the Soviet and post-Soviet eras has its own histories, one that has yet to be fully written. Although there have been a few English-language publications that have attempted to address sound and music in Russian film today, post-Soviet writings on music and cinema are otherwise lacking, especially in comparison with what is written on cinema alone.<sup>13</sup> Such has been the trend over the course of the twentieth century in the Soviet Union and beyond. It was only in the late 1940s that film music as an independent genre was taken seriously by critics and the State, even though it had been practiced since the turn of the century.<sup>14</sup> Specially composed scores became the rule in the late 1920s, decades before film music gained greater attention, and the musicians chosen for these scores were often trained at the local conservatories. Composers such as Dmitry Shostakovich, Sergey Prokofiev, Isaak Dunayevsky, Aram Khachaturian, Sofya Gubaidulina, Alfred Schnittke, Rodion Shchedrin, and others who wrote both popular music and for the concert hall but who are currently less known to Western audiences continued to fill the rosters of film composers for state studios up through the end of the Soviet period.<sup>15</sup> After the fall of the Soviet Union, a variety of composers from conservatory or elsewhere flooded the scene. Several score types currently persist from the Soviet period, including song scores, symphonic scores, and scoring specific to genre (comedies, action films, cartoons, and so forth).

Historically, there has been a symbiotic relationship, at least in terms of perception and reception, between Hollywood and the Soviet Union for the entirety of sound-on-film production. In the 1930s, certain practitioners and bureaucrats were particularly interested in learning from Hollywood. Among these figures was the head of the state studios, Boris Shumyatsky, whose term ended when he was executed in 1938.<sup>16</sup> The fluid reception and response to Hollywood therefore has been long-standing, and pre-dates the post-Soviet period.

Film scoring in the post-Soviet cinema ostensibly continued this relationship, as it has with film categories such as the Russian *blokbaster*.

The score to *Guardians* follows a mix of these historical examples, both from the Soviet period and Hollywood. The composer for the film, Georgy Zheryakov, is conservatory-trained with a list of film and video game credits.<sup>17</sup> Typical of many twenty-first century composers, he has a website replete with his accomplishments and co-collaborators.<sup>18</sup> For the score to *Guardians*, Zheryakov worked with Baltic Sound Production, and its orchestra, directors, and sound engineers. The film director/producers also hired Moscow pop/blues singer and former participant in the Russian version of *The Voice*, Yulia Tereshchenko, to sing the theme song “Guardians.” She does so in slightly Russian-accented English while accompanied by the Baltic Symphony Orchestra.<sup>19</sup> Two other artists—Yelena Temnikova, a singer and fashion designer, and Russian hip hop artist ST (Aleksandr Stepanov)—performed another song, “Crazy Russian” (in Russian), which follows a pop/hip hop style, and appears at the end of the film.<sup>20</sup> The song alternates between the “Guardians” theme song melody, sung by Temnikova, and a hip hop number sung by ST. The music video released with the film—yet another way this film follows Hollywood practice—builds on the theme of the film, where Temnikova and ST are transformed into superhumans by Soviet scientists, with each of them singing from a female (Ksenia) or male (Arsus) perspective. Both songs are somewhat integrated into the score, which uses instrumental tropes and recurring motives throughout as well. In terms of music design, the *Guardians* score refers to song scores and art-music orchestral scores of the Soviet past, while using popular genres such as hip hop and blues/pop presently fashionable in post-Soviet Russian popular music, fused with an elaborate orchestral score written by a conservatory-trained composer.

In addition to the two songs commissioned for the film, there are several orchestral cues that narrate people and ideas throughout the film, as seen in Table 10.1.<sup>21</sup> “Crazy Russian” has little involvement in the score, with only hints at the very end of the film; it appears to be used primarily for marketing. “Guardians” (“The game is on . . .”), however, plays a greater role throughout the score. The song is lyrical, sung in a bluesy-jazz portamento for which Tereshchenko is known, and has an unusually wide range that challenges the singer’s limited ability. It is introduced into the film as a kind of overture, playing over stock footage of the cold war, and images of the lab where the superhumans were created. The song is orchestral in its initial appearance; and appears in the piano during the scene where the team fights Kuratov for the first time, followed by another orchestral statement of the tune. The initial piano statement aligns with the appearance of Ksenia becoming part of the rain, a sort of delicate aural rendering of the rain and her character at once. “The game is on . . .” makes its final appearance over the end credits. Ultimately, it both bookends the film and acts as the film’s thesis—it functions as a representation of the superhero team as a collective. This approach—having a song bookend and act as the film’s thesis—first appeared in Soviet filmmaking as early as 1932 in Shostakovich’s score to the film *Counterplan (Vstrechniy)*, again referencing a period of similar cultural identity crisis.<sup>22</sup> Certainly, creating a song to operate in this way has its counterpart in older Hollywood cinema as well, and is found in current Marvel/DC films.

The orchestral cues act as clear representations of the characters throughout the film, with one cue in particular (Cue A in Table 10.1) that operates structurally as well as representationally. Cues A, A’, A’’ are all related to Kuratov, the mad scientist, and are malleable and varied

throughout the film; Cue B is associated with Ler; Cue C appears with Khan; Cue D, also somewhat variable, appears with Arsus; Cue E is associated with Ksenia, and fails to recur unlike the other motives; and Cue G, an inversion of the Cue A variants, appears at the end of the film when the Guardians start to win the fight. Finally, Cue F represents the unity of the group, and personal relationships with family and friends.

**TABLE 10.1.** Music Cues for *Zashchitniki (Guardians, 2017)*

Scene/Action	Music Cue
Introduction, stock footage of cold war, title frame	<i>Guardians</i> theme song (“Game is on...”) voice and orchestral accompaniment and interludes; Song integrated into orchestra
Military demonstration	Orchestral, Cue A
Introduction of Patriot	Orchestral (Cue A to kinetic strings)
Armenia, introduction of Ler(nik)	Orchestral; religious/Ler (Cue B)
Mention of Kuratov by Major	Cue A’ (octaves, percussion)
Kazakhstan, introduction of Khan	Percussive; mouth harp; Ler meets Khan (Cue A’; Cue C; Cue B)
Siberian forest, introduction of Arsus	Orchestral, tremolo (Cue D)
Moscow Circus, introduction of Ksenia	Static vocal-orchestral (Cue E)
Transition, Kuratov	Cue A” (new variation)
Ksenia agrees to join Guardians	Cue F (orchestral w/piano)
Guardians first fight with Kuratov; Ksenia is frozen, the men except Ler fall; Ler takes on Kuratov alone; they are eventually captured	Heavy chords, kinetic strings; <i>Guardians</i> theme in piano & orchestra; hint of Cue C; Cue A & B mixed & in alteration
Invasion of Moscow; News reports	Orchestra (Cue A”); kinetic lower strings; piano chords; wordless chorus cadence
Kuratov at tower; Kills General	Cue A (developed)
Ler and Major	Cue B (wordless chorus); Solo <i>duduk</i> ; Solo cello
Transition	Heavy chords (remnant of Cue A)
Professor at lab with Major	Kinetic scoring under speech
Rescue	Kinetic lower strings under speech
Kuratov’s machines head to Moscow	Cue A
Arsus confession with Major	Cue F
Kuratov kills professor; Kuratov on tower	Cue A (unfolded); Cue A (sound bridge)
Cold war discussions and “The Hammer”	Orchestra; Cue A hints; Khan, orchestra
Khan confession with Major	Cue F
New suits	Orchestra; Rock cue
Transition	Cue A
Guardians take on Kuratov (scene complex); Ksenia takes down tower	Pastiche: Cues A, A”, D, and Cue F interspersed; Cue G (inversion of Cue A)
Final (energy ball) takedown (scene complex)	Cue A’; Cue F; hint of Cue B (wordless chorus); (ends with Cue F as sound bridge)
Final scene, Guardians scatter	Cue F
Credits (start)	Hip hop beat, no vocals
Coda (opening for sequel); remaining credits	<i>Guardians</i> theme song; Cue F

Cue A is first introduced with Kuratov interrupting the military exercise, where drone/robots are introduced at a military base. It consists of two parts: pounding percussion and heavily accented octaves, and a repeating four-note motif, as indicated in Example 10.1. The octaves are played by metallic, loud bleating brass, and sound quite harsh when compared with the other cues. Part





Kuratov's attempt at world dominance, its inversion (Cue G), and appearance with the Guardians/Kuratov battles at the end of the film suggests that the musical idea is more about the battle between good and evil than just specific characters. When musically reinforced with Cue G, Cue A eventually signifies that good (i.e., the Guardians) wins out in the end.

In comparison with the representation of good and evil in Cue A and its variants, the cues for the Guardians and their relationships are musically diverse and ethnically specific. The first of these character-specific cues, Cue B, is used for Ler's introductory scene, where he is seen finishing prayer at the famous Khor Virap monastery in Armenia. Including an Armenian character is likely no accident: the director is Armenian, and there has been a long history of associating Armenians with the land and earth. As the Major appears just after Ler has finished prayer, Cue B continues until he acknowledges that she is no threat to him. The cue musically consists of wordless choir and heavy string accompaniment, thusly symbolizing generalized religious tropes without specifically referring to any regional style, Russian Orthodox or otherwise. As shown in Table 10.1, the cue appears three more times in the film (though at other moments in fragments), and only when Ler is alone: when he meets Khan to recruit for team, his cue is heard just before Khan's; when he takes on Kuratov by himself; and when he is injured, and confesses the loss of and love for his daughter. The wordless chorus recurs throughout the score when the team is fighting together, but here it is buried in the orchestral texture and part of a larger trope that emphasizes the Guardians as collective heroes. The first full reappearance of Cue B signals his presence acousmatically (he is finally seen a few seconds later, when Khan sees him, matching our POV). The second full cue returns when he fights Kuratov alone, and is defeated, ending with Kuratov breaking his back. The third full statement of the cue is heard during his confession to the Major, where it is used to signify his Otherness (already heard in the previous instances) as well as his grief for his lost daughter. To make this sound more ethnically separate than the other cues, a solo *duduk*, a double-reed woodwind instrument native to Armenia and associated with sadness and longing in many cultures, is heard in complement with his cue. The solo *duduk* is followed by a plaintive solo cello line, yet another trope for sadness in Western and cinematic musical constructs. The whole scene emphasizes Ler's humanity as expressed through the loss of his family, and is the first of many scenes for each character that establish their humanity outside of their superhero personae.

Cue C is reserved for Khan, and first appears when he is introduced in an uncontextualized fight in the Dry Aral Sea in Kazakhstan, further reinforcing his Otherness through his positioning in another notable historical place. The musical texture of this scene is sparse, with a primarily percussive accompaniment and that of Cue C, a mouth harp; although the cue is quietly mixed in the sound design, the distinctive timbre allows it to be prominently audible. Mouth harp is used in many regions of the world, including Kazakhstan. In its usage here, it signifies Khan's difference, operating as Orientalist. The mouth harp is heard several times throughout his introduction scene, where he tears through cars and people with his scythes; and once more buried in the texture (unlike the foregrounding of Ler's cue) during the Guardians' first team-fight scene against Kuratov. Similar to Ler's, Khan's cue acts as a symbol of his difference, of belonging to the Kazakh periphery instead of the Russian center, as was the case during the time of the Soviet Union when these characters' representative countries were both Soviet republics. The logic of *natsional'nost'*—the idea that all ethnicities from the republics and their identities were subsumed under the Soviet whole—persists in *Guardians* under the surface of the idea of

the collective team Russian hero, despite the fact that Kazakhstan and Armenia are presently independent nation-states.

Cues D and E, representing Arsus and Ksenia, are featured less prominently in the score. Cue F, by contrast, represents the unity of the group while simultaneously emphasizing an implied relationship between Ksenia and Arsus as the de facto alpha leaders of the group. Cue D is first heard with the introduction of Arsus, who the Major locates in the famed Putorana Plateau of Siberia. Its initial appearance contains tremolo and rolling strings with a loud orchestral burst of high brass and wordless choir as Arsus breaks through the wall of the cabin. As shown in Table 10.1, the gesture of loud brass with wordless choir is heard during the team's fight scenes, roughly synced with his involvement, especially when he wields his machine gun or morphs into a bear-human. Cue E, for Ksenia, only appears once, when she is introduced while performing at the Moscow circus and demonstrates her ability to morph into water. Her theme features a full orchestra reminiscent of some late nineteenth-century practice (that is, a practice that avoids common practice IV-V-I cadences). In complement to other moments that de-emphasize her individual agency, this music never reappears, and she is instead associated with the collectivity of Cue F, suggesting that her identity is fluid and less individual than Ler's and Khan's. Cue F is heard more frequently than many of the individual Guardians' cues, and appears to represent unity and love. Romantic in style and usually scored for orchestra and piano, this theme is heard continually after Ksenia joins the team. It is a softer theme that codes romance and tenderness, and generally it is heard in the aftermath of the team battles, and in individual scenes where Arsus and Khan confess their worries to the Major, who acts as their therapist—in this way, a woman takes on the emotional labor of counseling in addition to being the project leader. It also appears when Arsus expresses concern over being stuck in "full bear mode" and when Khan confesses to killing his brother. This theme is also featured when the team binds together into an energy ball, which is the way they defeat Kuratov as a team; and in the final scene when Ksenia confesses that she remembers her relationship with Arsus just before they disperse, thusly confirming the alpha characters' implied romantic connection, and cementing the idea that they are the de facto leaders of the group. In sum, Cue F represents their collective bond. It has secondary import as a romance cue for Ksenia and Arsus, but ultimately it signifies the unity of group, their humanity, and their affection for each other.

The songs and the original orchestral cues for *Guardians* overtly reflect post-Soviet Russian nationalism and transnationalism. Similar to the visual tropes borrowed from current Hollywood films such as *The Avengers* (2012) and *Guardians of the Galaxy* (2014), the music builds on historical methods, tropes, and ideologies, both Western and Soviet/Russian. The use of a theme song sung by a Moscow pop/jazz singer that plays on the title of the film ("Guardians"), the use of a hip hop song to market the film, and a score that relies heavily on driving percussion and brass are all practices of contemporary Hollywood blockbuster production, complementing the recall of Soviet/Russian practice in the representation of ethnicity through instrumentation and style; all the while engaging a Soviet past and a transnational present. The orchestral cues specifically either reflect current compositional practices (Cue A's heavy chords and percussion or the use of loud brass for hyper-masculinity), or build on older tropes of Orientalism common to pre-Soviet Russian and Soviet music (Ler as religious figure as heard in choir and strings, and Khan as sparsely mediated through mouth harp). The melodrama of Cue F refers to past film traditions of tenderness, femininity, and the interpersonal relationship of the collective while

simultaneously directly coding the feminine throughout the film—it is no coincidence that as this cue sounds, Ksenia flirtatiously quips, “And I also make good borsch.” Implicitly referenced throughout, Ksenia’s musical character is either part of whole (Cue F) or otherwise forgotten (Cue E), suggesting that her female presence and femininity are subservient to the patriarchal whole—another trait that was common in Stalinist filmmaking, where heroines, even if extraordinary, would still ultimately submit to the patriarchal State and/or death.<sup>23</sup> These cues are either layered or presented in pastiche to aurally demonstrate the individual characters that comprise the collective hero—an idea that hearkens back to the Soviet era, primarily war and historical films; such earlier films used layering techniques to illustrate characters binding together.<sup>24</sup> It also rebrands the Soviet idea of *natsional’nost’* as a current Russian nationalism, where difference is accepted as long as the Russian center/state is still the central and dominant force (remember that Ksenia and Arsus are the Alpha characters). Taken altogether, borrowings from American blockbuster cinema enmeshed with the Soviet cinematic past create a film and score that represents a current Russian identity based in part on nostalgia, and an identity that is clearly conversant with transnational trends and cognizant of its complex history.

## Reception

The reception for *Guardians* took an interesting turn both domestically and abroad, and resulted in a negative reception in Russia, and tepid or positive reception elsewhere. Chatter for the film prior to its release began in 2016, with various media and the release of the film’s trailer nationally and abroad. It was clear from the beginning that Andreasyan was intending for this film to have a wide international reach particularly into Eastern Europe, China, and parts of Southeast Asia. The 2016 online buzz in both press and social media fueled interest in the film, advertising it (presumably without the blessing of the director) as a Russian response to the American Marvel/DC comic franchises. In an interview, Andreasyan tried to correct the record insisting firmly that he was not responding to *The Avengers*, or trying to make a Marvel/DC film.<sup>25</sup> He was an art-house film director prior to his turn to the *blokbaster*/mainstream; he consciously made this turn away from art-house cinema because he believed it was no longer profitable.<sup>26</sup> With American comic films (*kinokomiki*, in Russian) being huge box office hits in Russia and generally overshadowing domestic film sales, it is no surprise that Andreasyan would use the formula of the American superhero blockbuster, and produce this homegrown version of the *kinokomik* as part of his rejection of independent cinema.<sup>27</sup> Despite his attempts to correct the press, critics in 2016 both abroad and in Russia insisted on reading the trailer as a cold war redux with an American accent: the British media made comparisons with Putin, likening the leader to the shirtless/pantsless bear, whereas other non-Russian media immediately recognized the film as a homegrown response to the American comic film brand.

The film was released in Russia, Eastern Europe, and select Asian countries on February 23, 2017, the national holiday in Russia known as the Defender of the Fatherland Day. The release date was no accident: the directors intentionally aligned the film’s release with the holiday. Perhaps because this release strategy felt forced and manipulative to film critics, the Russian press was extraordinarily brutal. Attacking all angles of the filmmaking—story/scenario, characters, acting, style, nationalism, editing, and directing—these critics, from the average blog to legitimate press and scholars, angrily condemned the film for its blatant cold war approach and embarrassing representation of Russian nationalism.<sup>28</sup> Some described the film as “dubious,”

“Stalinist,” and “disgusting” in reference to the film’s ideology; it was clear that the *natsional’nost’* referenced in the film, which was intended to be nostalgic and nationalist, was instead received by critics and scholars as manipulative and Stalinist in a culture where extreme and divisive views of the state currently prevail.<sup>29</sup> Others wrote sarcastic reviews also calling it cheap and an American knockoff, or a sad version of *The Avengers*, finishing with statements such as “not even a bear with a machine gun can save it.”<sup>30</sup> Some others tried to be more generous in their reviews, citing the film’s issues but stating that there was potential in creating the homegrown Russian superhero film, even with the campy and racist characterization of the heroes (Armenians as land-loving; Kazakhs as nomads; the Ukrainian female as a water-loving *Rusalka* from a port city; and the Russian bear as national symbol).<sup>31</sup> Even with concessions to the filmmakers’ attempts to bring in aspects of Russian culture that would be less controversial, the majority of the reviews were overwhelmingly negative, which stands in relief to the hyper-capitalism and nostalgic Stalinism that currently pulses through some subsets of Russian society today. As one American Slavic professor wrote in his English-language review of *Guardians*, in summary of Russian press, “Russian critics of *Guardians*—unanimous in their utter contempt for an ill-conceived, badly-made, inanely-executed piece of corporate dreck—were unsparing, many of them clearly taking perverse relish in their hatchet jobs.”<sup>32</sup>

By the end of 2017, the film had been written up multiple times in Russian press and online blogs as the worst film of 2017, clearing only 262.8 million rubles for that year (roughly 4.38 million dollars in 2017), and leaving the studio in debt to the Cinema Foundation (Fond Kino).<sup>33</sup> Fond Kino eventually sued the producers of *Guardians*, along with other film producers, for the remainder of the loan that they owed.<sup>34</sup> Surprisingly, the film’s international success overshadowed the domestic failure, grossing 1.5 times the ticket sales and viewership in Russia, allowing the film’s producers to pay back the loan, and resume work on the film’s sequel.<sup>35</sup> This international support was mostly in Europe and Asia; the US only saw a DVD release of the film in late 2017.<sup>36</sup> The meager American (and some European) reception was equally dismissive, though many enjoyed the film as an “artefact” or as a campy, silly adaptation of American films.<sup>37</sup> Major American newspapers such as the *New York Times* or *Chicago Tribune* failed to acknowledge the film, which hints at its substandard status, or to the fact that it did not receive a theatrical release. Seeking and having been given financial assistance from China, the producers are now working on a sequel to the film, and intend to eventually complete a trilogy, building a Russian franchise on the idea of Russian superheroes in the same spirit as the American franchises.<sup>38</sup>

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the music or sound design is ignored in the reviews from Russian- or English-speaking media surveyed here. The songs, particularly “Crazy Russian,” were mentioned, but only without further comment. No one discussed the sound effects, musical score, or even mentioned the composer. This lack of attention to film sound and music in reviews is again reminiscent of early Soviet film practice starting in the 1920s: it took almost two decades, until the late 1940s, before the general press would attend to music as a necessary component of filmmaking.<sup>39</sup> Likely because the superhero genre is new, because music is still ignored by film critics and scholars, and because these critics may not be experts in music, there is no language or interest from the general media for discussion of musical details. This neglect of film music and sound, together with other aspects of this film’s creation that harkens back to Stalinist practice, suggests a cultural identity crisis. A crisis that, despite film critics’ focus on

image and word, certainly also involves sound and music despite the significant lack of attention in press and scholarship.

### ***Guardians as a New Russian Superhero Blockbuster***

In terms of the film's production, distribution, and reception, it is clear that *Guardians* was intended to be and was received as another exemplar, however negative, of post-Soviet Russian nationalism and transnationalism. Echoing the Soviet past through stylistic and ideological reference to *natsional'nost'* and *narodnost'*, while relying on international distribution, state funding, and features from the current Russian *blockbuster*, the film attempts a Russian response to the hegemony of American *kinokomiki* in Russian theaters. The music is part of this response to all pasts and places: it borrows from the music-historical Soviet past, in terms of form and style (song theses, recurring motifs) while referring to current American action film in its kinetic force and mix of musical types (song and orchestral scoring). As before, during the Soviet Union, cinema is internationally conversant, as is its music; *Guardians* appears to continue that relationship. As the first Russian superhero *kinokomik*, it exemplifies a Russian nationalism that reminds too much of the Soviet past for many audiences. It could be described as international in form, Russian in content. How this franchising *kinokomik* approach to Russian cinema persists has yet to be determined. It is clear, however, that audiences are tuned to the nuances of such cultural politics; and that perceptions of the Russian and Western Other abound in the creation and reception of Russian audiovisual media.

### **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> *Zashchitniki* also has been translated into English as *Defenders* as well as *Guardians*.

<sup>2</sup> For a recent discussion of identity politics and the post-Soviet state, see Mark Bassin and Catriona Kelly, *Soviet and Post-Soviet Identities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), Introduction.

<sup>3</sup> This commonly-invoked phrase was coined early in the Soviet era, and was used to assert the primacy of Russian ideas over the peripheral republics. As these republics were folded into the USSR, this idea became more important.

<sup>4</sup> The Thaw was a period that began with Stalin's death in 1953 and continued through the mid-1960s where the restrictions on the arts and culture were loosened, and the individual became valued alongside productivity. The period was named after the 1954 novel *The Thaw* by Ilya Ehrenburg. For a basic overview of the period, see Susan Constanzo, *Encyclopedia of Russian History*, edited by James R. Millar, Vol. 4 (New York: Macmillan Reference USA, 2004), 1535–36.

<sup>5</sup> See for example, Vida Johnson, "Russia After the Thaw," in Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (ed.), *The Oxford History of World Cinema* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 640–50.

<sup>6</sup> Nina Tsyrukun, "Zhivye i mertvye: O rossiiskikh fil'makh—championakh prokata," [The Living and Dead: About Russian Box Office Hits] *Iskusstvo kino* [Art of Cinema] 2, <http://old.kinoart.ru/archive/2012/02/box-office-champions>. Accessed March 6, 2018. Quoted in Dawn Seckler and Stephen M. Norris, "The *Blockbuster*: How Russian Cinema Learned to Love Hollywood," in Birgit Beumers (ed.), *A Companion to Russian Cinema* (Chichester, West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons, 2016), 241.

<sup>7</sup> Seckler and Norris, "The *Blockbuster*," 246. See also Stephen M. Norris, *Blockbuster History in the New Russia: Movies, Memory, and Patriotism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012).

<sup>8</sup> For more on the definition of the positive hero, see Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1981).

<sup>9</sup> Clark, *The Soviet Novel*. See also Maria Bezenkova and Xenia Leontyeva, "The Global and National in Post-Soviet Cinema (2004–2012)," in Birgit Beumers (ed.), *A Companion to Russian Cinema* (Chichester, West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons, 2016), 253–75.

<sup>10</sup> Media announcements that predated the film often said that the story was set in the late cold war, but the film refers occasionally to the Russian Federation, at least it does so in the English overdub. Overall, the sense of period, and therefore type of government, is unclear throughout the film but implies current times.

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<sup>11</sup> In some ways, the overall narrative can be read to subtly reference the advent of electricity throughout the early Soviet Union, advocated by Lenin. Here, a superhero attempts to take modern access to technology away from the masses, while the superheroes defend it on behalf of the people.

<sup>12</sup> *Intelligent* here is pronounced with a hard “g,” and roughly translates as “intellectual.”

<sup>13</sup> The only recent essay on sound and music in post-Soviet cinema was written by a Slavacist. See Lilya Kaganovsky, “Russian Rock on Soviet Bones,” in Lilya Kaganovsky and Masha Salazkina (eds.), *Sound, Speech, Music in Soviet and Post-Soviet Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014), 252–72. Most film music histories fail to go beyond Shostakovich and Prokofiev. See, for example, Mervyn Cooke, *A History of Film Music* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

<sup>14</sup> See Joan Titus, *Dmitry Shostakovich and Music for Stalinist Cinema*, forthcoming.

<sup>15</sup> For writings on specific modernist and avant-garde composers who turned to cinema, see Joan Titus “Experimentalism and the ‘Mainstream’ in the Early Film Scores of Gavriil Popov and Vladimir Shcherbachyov,” in Jeremy Barham (ed.), *The Routledge Companion to Global Film Music in the Early Sound Era* (New York: Routledge Press), forthcoming; idem, “Shostakovich, Arnshtam, and the Sound of the Cinematic Soviet Heroine,” in Michael Baumgartner and Ewelina Boczkowska (eds.), *Music in European Cinema*, Vol. 2 (New York: Routledge Press), forthcoming; and idem, *The Early Film Music of Dmitry Shostakovich* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016). One book recently has emerged addressing film sound from a nonmusical perspective. See Lilya Kaganovsky, *The Voice of Technology: Soviet Cinema’s Transition to Sound, 1928–1935* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2018).

<sup>16</sup> There are several histories of Soviet filmmaking, many of which discuss Shumyatsky’s role. These include writings by Jamie Miller, Denise Youngblood, Richard Stites, Richard Taylor, and Peter Kenez, to name a few.

<sup>17</sup> His first name is also transliterated as Georgiy.

<sup>18</sup> For Zheryakov’s professional website, see <https://www.georgy-zheryakov.ru>.

<sup>19</sup> According to the film’s credits, the authors and performers of “Guardians,” are Yulia Tereshchenko, Oleg Tsoy, Roman Vishnevsky, Artashes Andreasyan for music; Oleg Tsoy and Kseniya Vinogradova for Lyrics; with Alim Zairov, Yulia Pereyma, and Georgy Zheryakov.

<sup>20</sup> According to the film’s credits, the authors and performers of “Crazy Russian” are Temnikova and ST; Artashes Andreasyan, Oleg Tsoy, Viktor Popleev for music; and Aleksandr Stepanov for lyrics. See for the full video <https://youtu.be/Z-6GiHP1wM> (in Russian).

<sup>21</sup> Table 10.1 is based the score as heard on the international DVD version of the film distributed after the domestic release in 2016. The following analysis is based on this version: *Guardians*, DVD, directed by Sarik Andreasyan (Los Angeles, Shout! Factory, LLC marketed for Enjoy Movies, LLC, 2017).

<sup>22</sup> See Titus, *The Early Film Music of Dmitry Shostakovich*, Chapter 5.

<sup>23</sup> For more on the heroine in Stalinist filmmaking and scoring, see Titus, “Shostakovich, Arnshtam, and the Sound of the Cinematic Soviet Heroine,” and Titus, *The Early Film Music of Dmitry Shostakovich*, Chapter 7.

<sup>24</sup> One example of a cold war film and score that used this approach would be *Meeting on Elbe* (1949), scored by Shostakovich. See Titus, *Dmitry Shostakovich and Music for Stalinist Cinema*.

<sup>25</sup> RIA Novosti, “Sarik Andreasyan: Gollivud ubil nezavisimyi kinematograf” [Sarik Andreasyan: Hollywood Killed the Independent Cinema] RIA.ru (March 31, 2016), <https://ria.ru/20160331/1400356836.html>.

<sup>26</sup> Novosti, “Sarik Andreasyan.”

<sup>27</sup> “Rossiyskiye supergeroi srazhayutsya za sovyetskoye pravitel’stvo v trailere fil’m ‘Zashchitniki,’” [Russian Superheroes Fighting for the Soviet Government in the Trailer for the Film *Guardians*] *Inosmi.ru* (August 25, 2016), <https://inosmi.ru/social/20160825/237637866.html>.

<sup>28</sup> Alexey Litovchenko, “Oslik, Suslik, Andreasyan” [Donkey, Gopher, Andreasyan] *Rossiyskaya gazeta* (February 24, 2017), <https://rg.ru/2017/02/24/zashchitnikisarika-andreasiana-naskolko-eto-ploho.html>.

<sup>29</sup> “Zashchitniki: Blokbuster s lishney khromosomoy” [*Guardians*: Blockbuster with an Extra Chromosome] *Kino-teatr.ru* (February 24, 2017), <https://www.kino-teatr.ru/kino/art/pr/4645/>.

<sup>30</sup> Yaroslav Gafner, “Fantasticheski unilaya chetverka. Fil’m ‘Zashchitniki’” [The Fantastic Sad Four. The Film *Guardians*] *Igromania.ru* (February 24, 2017), [https://www.igromania.ru/article/28749/Fantasticheski\\_unilaya\\_chetverka\\_Film\\_Zaschitniki.html](https://www.igromania.ru/article/28749/Fantasticheski_unilaya_chetverka_Film_Zaschitniki.html); Anastasia Kuznetsova, “‘Medved’ snimayet shtani’: Zriteli osvitali fil’m ‘Zashchitniki’” [“The Bear Takes off His Pants”: The Audience Booed the Film *Guardians*] *Yuzhniy federal’niy* (February 25, 2017), <http://u-f.ru/news/showbusiness/u21/2017/02/25/238078>.

<sup>31</sup> Karina Iskandarova, “Razgrom ‘Zashchitnikov.’ Kak SMI reagiruyut na rossiyskiy fil’m o supergeroyakh” [The Defeat of the *Guardians*. How the Media Reacts to the Russian Film about Superheroes] *Argumenti i fakti* (March 6, 2017),

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[http://www.aif.ru/culture/movie/razgrom\\_zashchitnikov\\_kak\\_smi\\_reagiruyut\\_na\\_rossiyskiy\\_film\\_o\\_supergeroyah](http://www.aif.ru/culture/movie/razgrom_zashchitnikov_kak_smi_reagiruyut_na_rossiyskiy_film_o_supergeroyah); Timofey Sundukov, "Fil'm 'Zashchitniki': nash otvet Marvel i DC" [The *Guardians* Film: Our Answer to Marvel and DC] *Irkutsk Onlayn* (February 27, 2017), <https://www.irk.ru/afisha/reviews/20170227/defenders/>.

<sup>32</sup> José Alaniz, "Film Review: Sarik Andreasian's *Guardians* (2016)," *NYU Jordan Center for the Advanced Study of Russia* (November 7, 2017), <http://jordandrussiacenter.org/news/film-review-sarik-andreasians-guardians-2016/#.XH7VIJNKjsE>.

<sup>33</sup> Ksenia Boletskaya, "Fond kino trebuyet 51 mil rubley u prodyuserov fil'ma 'Zashchitniki'" [The Cinema Foundation Requires 51 Million Rubles from the Producers of the Film *Guardians*] *Vedomosti* ( July 5, 2017), <https://www.vedomosti.ru/technology/articles/2017/07/05/710979-fond-kino>; RIA Novosti, "Samiy khudshiy fil'm: Kakiye kartini poslednikh let razocharovali zriteley" [The Worst Movie: Which Pictures of Recent Years Have Disappointed Audiences] *Ria.ru* (November 28, 2017), [https://ria.ru/20171128/1509765632.html?referrer\\_block=index\\_daynews3\\_1](https://ria.ru/20171128/1509765632.html?referrer_block=index_daynews3_1).

<sup>34</sup> *Lenta-Kultura*, "Fond kino potreboval 51 million rubley u prodyuserov 'Zashchitnikov'" [Cinema Foundation Demanded 51 Million Rubles From the Producers of *Guardians*] *Lenta.ru* ( July 5, 2017), <https://lenta.ru/news/2017/07/05/zashitniki/>.

<sup>35</sup> Ksenia Boletskaya, "Sozdateli fil'ma 'Zashchitniki' bol'she ne bankroti" [The Creators of the Film *Guardians* Are No Longer Bankrupt] *Vedomosti* (August 22, 2017), <https://www.vedomosti.ru/technology/articles/2017/08/22/730567-enjoy-movies>.

<sup>36</sup> Eric Francisco, "Insane Russian Superhero Film Is Getting a U.S. Release," *Inverse.com* (June 27, 2017), <https://www.inverse.com/article/33470-guardians-movie-russian-superhero-bluray-shout-factory>.

<sup>37</sup> Scott Gladstein, "I Got to See Russian Avengers ('Guardians')," *Medium* (July 25, 2017), <https://medium.com/@scottgladstein/i-got-to-see-russian-avengers-guardians-review-ef4cc6b10ba4>; Ard Vijn, "Imagine 2017 Review: Guardians," *Screenanarchy.com* (April 16, 2017), <https://screenanarchy.com/2017/04/imagine-2017-guardiansreview.html>.

<sup>38</sup> "Kitay primet uchastiye v s'emkakh vtoroy serii rossiyskogo fil'ma 'Zashchitniki'" [China Will Take Part in the Filming of the Second Series of the Russian Film *Guardians*] *Tass.ru* (May 31, 2016), <https://tass.ru/kultura/3328019>.

<sup>39</sup> See Titus, *The Early Film Music of Dmitry Shostakovich*, and *Dmitry Shostakovich and Music for Stalinist Cinema* for discussion of how film music reception changed starting in the late 1920s and through the early 1950s.