

English Abstract

'You have conquered us!' The arts in Finnish-Soviet relations 1944–1960

At the core of this book is the lively cultural exchange between Finland and the Soviet Union that began with armistice between the two countries in autumn 1944. From January 1945, Finland was practically flooded with high-profile Soviet artists and artistic troupes. For two months, Finland received prestigious artists paid for by the Soviet Union. Suddenly, in April, the influx came to naught. For a year, there was not a single Soviet artist visiting Finland. In mid-March 1945 Finland had the first free elections in war-going Europe. They were followed by whole Europe, particularly in the Soviet Union, since the large Communist Party of Finland was allowed to nominate candidates for the first time. The book reveals, how each Finnish election during the next decade saw a high amount of Soviet artistic visits.

From the early 1950s onwards, the nature of Finnish-Soviet exchanges began to change. Thus far, the exchange had really been a one-way street, with Soviet Union choosing what it sent to Finland, not allowing Finns to perform in the Soviet Union. Since, selected Finns were allowed tours in the Soviet Union, even if imbalance continued through the Soviet era. At the same time, Soviet officials began cooperating with Finnish professional organizations. For the first decade, exchanges took place solely through the Communist-leaning Finnish-Soviet Society. From 1955, Finnish National Opera and Ballet became a key partner for the Soviet Union. The Finnish Opera received high-profile soloists from the Soviet Union, but also trainers and choreographers that deepened the co-operation and made it possible to Finns to perform in the Soviet Union. Finland also drew international interest as it featured Soviet stars rarely performing in capitalist West.

In addition to Finnish Opera, several Finnish orchestras began to feature top Soviet musicians from 1954 onwards. There had been ad hoc performances before, but requests for certain soloists to perform on a certain date had so far come to naught. Since 1954, performances became regular. When comparing exchanges of the latter part of the

1950s to the first decade after the war, attempts to directly influence elections were given up. Instead, the new target groups were concert going audiences and non-workers, who were generally averse to the Soviet Union. The main objective, winning over foreign populations with the help of arts and culture, did not change, but the strategy experienced major changes.

This book focuses on exchanges in music and dance for several reasons. In literature and fine arts, as well as in theatre there was little exchange activity before the 1960s. Literature was translated, but rarely involved traveling or much interaction between people. Music and dance spearheaded exchanges until the 1960s. The one art form that was important is left out from this book, namely cinema. Soviet films were widely sent to Finland and there were even joint film projects in the 1950s. These activities were separate from other artistic activity. It had its own organization and people taking care of its everyday practicalities. For the sake of work economy, film is only shortly touched on in this book.

In Finnish-Soviet cultural exchange, the Soviet state was very active with official Finland being mostly passive until the end of the 1950s. Finland allowed Soviet cultural operations in Finland mostly because it wanted to avoid more obviously political and thus dangerous measures. Communists were kept out of the government since 1948 and cultural exchange with the Soviet Union was mostly considered to belong to Finnish-Soviet Society. Only from the 1950s onwards did the Finnish government become increasingly interested in controlling and influencing exchanges. This led to first Soviet-Finnish agreement on cultural exchanges in 1960, and to the establishment of Finnish governmental committee on cultural exchanges with the Soviet Union in 1963.

Throughout the Soviet era, Finland's cultural connections to the Soviet Union were not paralleled by any capitalist democracy. Another major difference was that Finland came up with a governmental agreement on cultural exchanges with the Soviet Union rather late, years behind France, Great Britain and even the United States. Yet, the agreement mostly confirmed the existing state of affairs, securing Finnish government funding for cultural exchanges, rather than being a game-changer.