

Chapter Six

The Music of We the Living

By Michael S. Berliner

We the Living is like no other Ayn Rand novel. It takes place amid actual historical events and ones that are essential to the story. As she wrote in her 1959 foreword to *We the Living*, it is

as near to an autobiography as I will ever write. It is not an autobiography in the literal, but only in the intellectual, sense. The plot is invented; the background is not. . . . The particulars of Kira's story were not mine. . . . The specific events of Kira's life were not mine; her ideas, her convictions, her values were and are.
(xvii)

In theme and content, *We the Living* is a novel about the individual versus the state, but in background, it is very definitely a novel about Soviet Russia; scores of events and places are real, drawn from the times and from Ayn Rand's own life.

During her lifetime, she said very little about those years, concealing her birth name (Alisa Rosenbaum) from even her closest friends. It wasn't until after her death in 1982 that a study of her papers and other effects (now residing in the Ayn Rand Archives) revealed the autobiographical elements in *We the Living*, details of which are explored elsewhere in this volume. One aspect that merits special attention is music. The approximately seventy musical references, most drawn from her life, give *We the Living* a distinctly musical aura.

At the age of nine, Ayn Rand decided to become a writer, and she devoted her life to that activity—once calling herself “a writing engine.”¹ She produced screenplays, theatrical plays, short stories, best-selling novels, and books on technical philosophy. But music played a very important role in her life. On a 1937 biographical entry in *Leading Women of America*, she listed “music” as her only “recreation.”² And in the late 1950s, she prepared what she called “My Musical Biography,” a list of the seventeen songs from 1911 to 1959 that were her favorite ones at various ages.³ After moving to America in 1926, she began acquiring a collection of phonograph records, of which about 100 albums and 140 singles (mostly 78 rpm) have survived. The collection contains primarily classical, operetta, and what she termed “tiddlywink” music. The latter is fast-paced, lighthearted, popular music primarily from the early part of the twentieth century and exemplified by such tunes as “Get Out and Get Under” (1913) and “Canadian Capers” (1915).

It was tiddlywink music that, she often said, best exemplified her “sense of life,” a term which she defined as “a preconceptual equivalent of metaphysics, an emotional, subconsciously integrated appraisal of man and of existence.”⁴ Unlike other art forms, she explained, “music is experienced as if it had the power to reach man's emotions directly.”⁵ This explains the importance of music in general and its role in conveying the atmosphere of a particular scene in

her fiction. Music evokes a wealth of subconscious material, including “images, actions, scenes, actual or imaginary experiences.”

The process is wordless, directed, in effect, by the equivalent of the words: “I would feel this way if . . .” if I were in a beautiful garden on a spring morning . . . if I were dancing in a great, brilliant ballroom . . . if I were seeing the person I love . . . if I were on the barricades. . . .⁶

That is why music is used throughout *We the Living*; it conveys (to those who know the music) the emotion of the scene and the emotion of the events in the lives of the characters.

Music can also convey the sense of life of a whole culture, and it did for the young Alisa Rosenbaum. She was born in mystical Mother Russia, which underwent the Bolshevik Revolution when she was twelve years old. Despising both cultures (she once described Russia as “an accidental cesspool of civilization”⁷), music became her door to Western civilization, to a world that ought to be.

Describing one of her earliest experiences with music, at a Finnish summer resort, she said:

We spent practically every day either on the beach or in the park. And that is a very happy memory as far as I’m concerned, because it was my introduction to music. They had this military band playing in the park, all day long almost. And that’s when I discovered all my early favorites, from the age of six or earlier.⁸

Of her musical tastes at the age of seven, she said:

In music I would always be in trouble with all the adults. All the older people thought that I had a very uncultured taste, because what I liked was what today is the tiddlywink [music] and military marches. And it’s in this music that I would pick out things at first hearing and decide: it’s mine or it isn’t. . . . I remember the first record players that ever came to Petrograd. One of the first was one my grandmother bought. So that in our family or our circle, that was the great foreign innovation. She had an enormous pile of records, and they were predominantly operas or lighter classics, not symphonies. I would literally run out of the room and pout when they played other kinds of music, like tragic opera or Russian songs.⁹

With that as a background, let us now turn to the music of *We the Living*. The dozens of musical mentions in the novel comprise a wide range of classical, popular, and folk music, jazz bands, fox trots, and gypsy love songs. But the specific music mentioned by Ayn Rand is worthy of special attention.

NON-RUSSIAN MUSIC

Die Bajadere

Shortly before Leo's departure for the sanitarium to treat his tuberculosis, he and Kira attended an operetta, *Die Bajadere*, by Emmerich Kálmán. It had been advertised, wrote Rand, as "the latest sensation of Vienna, Berlin and Paris." It was

the most wanton operetta from over there, from *abroad*. It was like a glance straight through the snow and the flags, through the border, into the heart of that other world. There were colored lights, and spangles, and crystal goblets, and a real foreign bar with a dull glass archway where a green light moved slowly upward, preceding every entrance—a real foreign elevator. There were women in shimmering satin from a place where fashions existed, and people dancing a funny foreign dance called "Shimmy," and a woman who did not sing, but barked words out, spitting them contemptuously at the audience, in a flat, hoarse voice that trailed suddenly into a husky moan—and a music that laughed defiantly, panting, gasping, hitting one's throat and breath, an impudent drunken music, like the "Song of Broken Glass," a promise that existed somewhere, that *was*, that could be. (208)

This same operetta makes a later appearance, when Kira and Andrei dance to its fox-trots at the roof garden of the European Hotel (275–76).

Ayn Rand and her sister Nora attended operettas at the Mikhailovsky Theater on Nevsky Prospekt, but the references to *Bajadere* have a deeper biographical significance: they are Rand's homage to a genre and to a particular operetta whose importance to her cannot be overestimated. Operetta was, in fact, a psychological lifesaver.

At the age of sixteen, Ayn Rand found what she called a "spiritual escape" from Soviet Russia. That escape was the world of Viennese operetta. "Here is the way in which I discovered operettas," she recalled.

The theaters—some were private, some were semi-private—were enormously expensive that showed foreign operettas, and I couldn't even dream of attending them. But the three state theaters presented operas and ballet. One of the three [the Mikhailovsky] put on lighter operas and some classical operettas. They had four balconies, and the back row of the fourth balcony, which was about ten seats, was very cheap and hard to get. They opened the box office for each week's performances on Saturday at ten o'clock. I made it a point to get up at five in the morning to be at that theater at six, and I waited for three hours, first in the street for an hour and then in the unheated lobby—and you know what Russian winters are. By ten o'clock there would be lines around the block waiting for all the cheap seats. For my first two years of college [at Petrograd State University], I was there every Saturday, and every time I would be either first or second. The money for it came from what my parents gave me for tramway tickets for the university. I would walk the three miles to the university to save the money and spend it on operas and operettas. Verdi was the first opera I saw.¹⁰ And the whole spectacle of that sort of glamorous, medieval existence, the productions were still of the pre-

revolutionary days, so the sets and costumes were marvelous. And to see that after coming in from a Soviet reality, that was worse than anything. It's precisely for that sense of life that I worked that hard to get into that theater. Then I discovered operettas. They began by doing certain classical operettas of the nineteenth century and ended up by doing some [Franz] Lehar, which was unprecedented in a serious, academic theater. That was my first great art passion. That really saved my life. It was the most marvelous, benevolent universe, a shot in the arm, practically narcotic. Only it wasn't narcotic in the sense of escape, because it was the one positive fuel that I could have. My sense of life was kept going on that. A life-saving transfusion.¹¹

From one unnamed operetta she described a scene that epitomized the West:

There was one scene where they had some kind of ballroom and a huge window showing the lighted street. They do it with transparencies, black backdrop with the lights cut out so that the lights shone from behind. It was a very good imitation of a foreign city, which was all lights. That was more important to me than Nietzsche and the whole university. That set something in my sense of life. My love for city streets, city lights, skyscrapers, it was all that category. That category of value, and that's what I expected from abroad. . . . What it all meant to me, I don't have to repeat. You can see it from *We the Living*. . . . That was the world I had to reach.¹²

After she graduated from college in 1924, she could afford to attend the private theater, and it was here that she discovered the composer who was to become her favorite operetta composer; in fact, in a 1936 publicity questionnaire for Macmillan Publishing Company, she listed him as her favorite composer overall: Emmerich Kálmán (Kálmán Imre in his native Hungary).¹³ Kálmán, along with Franz Lehar, were the preeminent composers of Viennese operetta. Born in Siófok, Hungary, in 1882, Kálmán

received an excellent musical education at the Budapest Academy of Music, where his fellow students included [Bela] Bartok and [Zoltan] Kodaly. As a young man he wrote music criticism for a Budapest paper and tried to establish himself as a serious composer. The popularity of his humorous cabaret songs, however, prompted his friends to urge him to try his hand at operetta.¹⁴

Kálmán soon moved to Vienna, where his first major work *Der Ziguenerprimas (The Gypsy Virtuoso)* opened in 1912. Then came his biggest hits, *Die Csardasfurstin (The Gypsy Princess)* in 1915, *Die Bajadere* in 1921, *Grafin Mariza (Countess Maritza)* in 1924, and *Die Zirkusprinzessin (The Circus Princess)* in 1926. After the Anschluss, and despite being offered honorary Aryan status by Hitler, Kalman moved to America and became an American citizen. He ultimately moved to Paris, where he died in 1953.

Kálmán's operettas, particularly *The Gypsy Princess* and *Countess Maritza*, are still performed in America and widely throughout Europe. A week-long Kálmán Festival was held in 2002 at the Budapest Operetta Theater, whose resident company is generally recognized as the world's leading performers of Viennese operetta. The festival included a rare performance of *Die Bajadere*, which had received its first complete American performance four years earlier at the Ohio Light Opera—although an adaptation renamed *The Yankee Princess* had a short run on

Broadway in 1922.¹⁵ After being ignored for decades, *Die Bajadere* has undergone something of a revival in Europe, highlighted by new productions in Budapest (2009) and Baden bei Wien (2010) with the former aired on Hungarian television. Like all the great Kálmán operettas, *Die Bajadere* is replete with lush melodies, from operatic to music hall to gypsy. One can well understand that this was Ayn Rand's favorite operetta.¹⁶ The operetta tells of the romance between an Indian prince and an operetta star, whom he sees starring as a Bajadere or Indian dancer. It is during a nightclub scene with supporting characters that the "Shimmy" song is performed. A wildly popular dance during the flapper period of the 1920s, the shimmy inspired a Kálmán piece that has achieved a life well beyond its place in *Die Bajadere*. It is often interpolated into performances and recordings of other Kálmán operettas. As Yvonne Kálmán, the composer's daughter, put it: "The Shimmy song travels well."¹⁷

"Song of Broken Glass"

This is a particularly intriguing inclusion because it is the only fictional piece of music in the novel and—as a consequence—has elicited considerable curiosity as to its origins.

There are seven mentions of this song in the novel, and it is clear that it represents an ideal: promise, benevolence, an image of life as it ought to be. For Kira, it evoked the West—the spirit of a free, productive society, which stood in stark contrast to the grayness and horror of life in Soviet Russia.

The first two mentions of the "Song of Broken Glass" describe the music and thereby convey its importance. In the first, Ayn Rand is describing Kira—probably a young Kira—as she sits on a hill above the city, gazing at a casino below and thinking about her life and goals. The casino orchestra played

gay, sparkling tunes from musical comedies. . . . [These tunes] had a significance for Kira that no one else ever attached to them. She heard in them a profound joy of life, so profound that they could be as light as a dancer's feet. . . . And because she felt a profound rebellion against the weighty, the tragic, the solemn, Kira had a solemn reverence for those songs of defiant gaiety. . . .

She had selected one song as her, Kira's, own: it was from an old operetta and was called "The Song of Broken Glass." It had been introduced by a famous beauty of Vienna. There had been a balustrade on the stage, overlooking a drop with the twinkling lights of a big city, and a row of crystal goblets lined along the balustrade. The beauty sang the number and one by one, lightly, hardly touching them, kicked the crystal goblets and sent them flying in tingling, glittering splinters—around the tight, sheer stockings on the most beautiful legs in Europe.

There were sharp little blows in the music, and waves of quick, fine notes that burst and rolled like the thin, clear ringing of broken glass. There were slow notes, as if the cords of the violins trembled in hesitation, tense with the fullness of sound, taking a few measured steps before the leap into the explosion of laughter. (50–51)

Then, just a few pages later, Kira is walking through the "dead city" when she hears a gramophone playing the "Song of Broken Glass." It now seems more like the song of what might have been:

It was the song of a nameless hope that frightened her, for it promised so much, and she could not tell what it promised; she could not even say that it was a promise; it was an emotion, almost of pain, that went through her whole body.

Quick, fine notes exploded, as if the trembling chords could not hold them, as if a pair of defiant legs were kicking crystal goblets. And, in the gaps of ragged clouds above, the dark sky was sprinkled with a luminous powder that looked like splinters of broken glass. (60)

Later, Kira is walking with Leo, who is imagining life outside of Soviet Russia. “Over there,” he tells Kira, there are automobiles, boulevards, lights, champagne, radios, jazz bands. Whispers Kira: “like the ‘Song of Broken Glass’” (120).

She is reminded of the song again when she dances with Leo (156) and when she hears the “Shimmy” song in *Die Bajadere* (208). And late in the novel, at a nightclub with Andrei, she asks him to request that the orchestra play the “Song of Broken Glass.” Responding to his concern about her looking so sad while listening to “the gayest music he had ever heard,” she replies:

It’s something I liked . . . long ago . . . when I was a child. . . . Andrei, did you ever feel as if something had been promised to you in your childhood, and you look at yourself and you think “I didn’t know, then, that this is what would happen to me”—and it’s strange, and funny, and a little sad? (277)

Fittingly, the promise and the tragedy of that song follow Kira to the end. As she lay dying in the snow,

she heard a song, a tune now loud enough to be a human sound, a song as a last battle-march. It was not a funeral dirge, it was not a hymn, it was not a prayer. It was a tune from an old operetta, the “Song of Broken Glass.”

Little notes of music trembled in hesitation, and burst, and rolled in quick, fine waves, like the thin, clear ringing of glass. Little notes leaped and exploded and laughed, laughed with a full, unconditional, consummate joy.

She did not know whether she was singing. Perhaps she was only hearing the music somewhere.

But the music had been a promise; a promise at the dawn of her life. That which had been promised then, could not be denied to her now. (463)

The “Song of Broken Glass” remains until the end the emotional equivalent of Kira’s life and of the West—but now it is a life that will end too soon and a West that she will never reach.

What is the source of this song? Various candidates have been offered over the years. Acquaintances of Ayn Rand have reported her telling them that it was based on “Mucki aus Amerika,” a lively song written in 1919 by Viennese operetta composer Robert Stolz; “Mucki” was also Ayn Rand’s 1923 entry in her “Musical Biography.” Musician Duane Eddy reports that Miss Rand told him that “Will O’ the Wisp” by Herbert Küster was the song that “best represented ‘Song of Broken Glass,’”¹⁸ but that would have to have been a later assessment by her, since “Will O’ the Wisp” (“Irrlicht”) wasn’t copyrighted until 1934, after *We the Living* was written.¹⁹ The most likely candidate for a song that inspired her is the “Shimmy” song from *Die Bajadere*, with its spirit of defiance and a series of “quick fine notes” that “burst” and sound like someone kicking crystal goblets. However, Ayn Rand is on record as denying that any one song

is the basis for the “Song of Broken Glass”: “What I had in mind for it was my kind of tiddly-wink music, as an abstraction of that. . . . I used one particular record at the time as inspiration, but I never held it literally as that song, but only as the prototype. And that [was the] Drdla serenade”²⁰ (i.e., the Serenade for Violin and Piano no. 1, by Franz Drdla). And once, during a question period following a lecture I attended, when she was asked whether “Song of Broken Glass” was based on anything in particular, she answered “no.”

“Destiny Waltz”

This music is played on the piano by Lydia. Rand describes it as “slow and soft; it stopped for a breathless second once in a while and swung into rhythm again, slowly, rocking a little, as if expecting soft, billowing satin skirts to murmur gently in answer, in a ball-room such as did not exist any longer” (157). Composed in 1912 by Sydney Baynes, “Destiny Waltz” was the “Musical Biography” entry for the seventeen-year-old Ayn Rand in 1922. It gained renown as the theme music for the popular radio soap opera *One Man’s Family*.

RUSSIAN MUSIC²¹

“The Internationale”

Not surprisingly, for a novel set in Soviet Russia, “The Internationale” is mentioned more than any other piece of music, a total of twelve times. Originally a French Communist march, it was written to celebrate the Paris Commune of 1871. The music was by Pierre Degeyter, and the lyrics by Eugene Pothier, a member of the First International. The song was adopted by the Bolsheviks as the official anthem of the revolution after the 1917 revolution, but was dropped by Stalin in 1941 when the Soviets turned away from internationalism in favor of “socialism in one country.”

In the novel, it is first mentioned as an accompaniment to the raising of the red banner upon the final Communist victory in 1921 (22). It is also mentioned as the Communist students’ answer to the singing by non-Communist students of “Days of Our Life” (aka “Swift as the Waves”) at a student council election meeting at the Technological Institute (73). At this point, Rand provides a lengthy description of the melody:

[I]n the magnificent goblet of the music, the words were not intoxicating as wine; they were not terrifying as blood; they were gray as dish water.

But the music was like the marching of thousands of feet, measured and steady, like drums beaten by unvarying, unhurried hands. The music was like the feet of soldiers marching into the dawn that is to see their battle and their victory; as if the song rose from under the soldiers’ feet, with the dust of the road, as if the soldiers’ feet played it upon the earth.

The tune sang a promise, calmly, with the calm of an immeasurable strength, and then, tense with a restrained, but uncontrollable ecstasy, the notes rose, trembling, repeating themselves, too rapt to be held still, like arms raised and waving in the sweep of banners.

It was a hymn with the force of a march, a march with the majesty of a hymn. It was the song of soldiers bearing sacred banners and of priests carrying swords. It was an anthem to the sanctity of strength. (73–74)

After noting that the “Internationale” is “the first beautiful thing I’ve noticed about the revolution,” Kira provides her estimate of the piece: “When all this is over, when the traces of the revolution are disinfected from history—what a glorious funeral march this will make!” (74).

In addition to being played at important events, for example, the visit of a British Trade Union delegation and Andrei’s funeral, it also appears as a reminder that the Bolsheviks are always there: it is even heard being played on a piano just before Kira and Andrei make love (248).

“The Days of Our Life” (aka “Swift as the Waves”)

Mentioned once, as sung at the end of the election meeting of the university student council, “Days of Our Life” was described by Ayn Rand as

an old drinking song grown to the dignity of a students’ anthem; a slow, mournful tune with an artificial gaiety in the roll of its spiritless notes, born long before the revolution in the stuffy rooms where unshaved men and mannish women discussed philosophy and with forced bravado drank cheap vodka to the futility of life. (73)

One version of this pre-Soviet student song begins:

Swift as the waves
Are the days of our lives
If you die, you won’t arise
To join your friends’ merriment.
So pour me a toast-cup,
Dear friend,
God only knows what
Will become of us.²²

“God Save the Czar”

The unofficial Russian Imperial anthem, it was composed in 1833 by Alexei Lvov (the Czar’s personal composer), with lyrics by Vasili Zhukovsky. It had been commissioned by Czar Nicholas I and first performed on December 6, 1833. It is still famous because of its use by Tchaikovsky near the conclusion of his *1812 Overture*.

It has one appearance in the novel: Leo (who was not a Czarist) derisively whistles it in the face of a Communist who calls him “comrade” at a pre-1917 secret meeting of young revolutionaries (138).

“The Fire of Moscow”

Composed by A. A. Gairabetov, this is a song about Napoleon’s defeat in Russia. It was played on the gramophone by Marisha Lavrova and Victor Dunaev, both Communists (180). Here is one of its verses (in the voice of Napoleon):

All the battalions that I called up
Will perish here in the snow,
Our bones will turn to dust in the fields
Without burial or coffins.²³

“Your Fingers Smell of Incense”

As part of the entertainment at a party she gave, Vava Milovskaia “sang a song about a dead lady whose fingers smelt of incense” (159). This was an actual song, entitled “Your Fingers Smell of Incense.” Composed by Alexander Vertinsky in 1916, it was dedicated to the Russian silent film legend Vera Kholodnaya. A song that can best be characterized as a lament, the chorus is:

Your fingers smell of incense,
Sadness slumbers in your eyelashes.
Now you no longer need anything,
Now you no longer feel sorry for anyone.²⁴

“You Fell as a Victim”

The Red funeral march, this dates from c. 1883 and was played at all important funerals, including that of Lenin and of the fictional Andrei Taganov in *We the Living*. In a 1997 review of Giya Kancheli’s “Light Sorrow/Mourned by the Wind,” *Gramophone* magazine referred to “You Fell as a Victim” as “the famous Russian revolutionary lament.”²⁵ “Many years ago,” wrote Rand in *We the Living*,

in secret cellars hidden from the eyes of the Czar’s gendarmes, on the frozen roads of Siberian prison camps, a song had been born to the memory of those who had fallen in the fight for freedom. It was sung in muffled, breathless whispers to the clanking of chains, in honor of nameless heroes. It traveled down dark sidelanes; it had no author, and no copy of it had ever been printed. The Revolution brought it into every music store window and into the roar of every band that followed a Communist to his grave. The Revolution brought the “Internationale” to its living and “You fell as a victim” to its dead. It became the official dirge of the new republic. . . . The music began with the majesty of that hopelessness which is beyond the need of hope. It mounted to an ecstatic cry, which was not joy nor sorrow, but a military salute. It fell, breaking into a pitiless tenderness, the reverent tenderness that honors a warrior without tears. It was a resonant smile of sorrow. (431–32)

The song begins:

You fell as a victim in a fateful fight

Of devoted love to the people.
You gave all you could for them,
For their life, honor and freedom.
At times you had languished in damp prisons,
Your enemies, tormentors, having long ago passed
Their merciless judgment on you.
So you walked, clanking your fetters.²⁶

The lyrics (apparently translated by Miss Rand) in *We the Living*:

You fell as a victim
In our fateful fight,
A victim of endless devotion.
You gave all you had to the people you loved,
Your honor, your life and your freedom. (431)

And then a further verse (also from the novel):

The tyrant shall fall and the people shall rise,
Sublime, almighty, unchained!
So farewell, our brother,
You've gallantly made
Your noble and valiant journey! (432)

“Song of the Little Apple”

Although mentioned in only two places, this song is one of the most evocative in the novel. Also known as “The Apple,” the lyrics have had many variants, presumably to fit any situation. The melody is a well-known Russian gypsy folk tune that was used for “The Russian Sailor’s Dance” by Reinhold Gliere in his ballet *The Red Poppy* (1927). Its first appearance in *We the Living* is early in the book, when Kira hears it on the train the Argounov family was taking from the Crimea back to Petrograd. It was sung by a soldier accompanying himself on the accordion.

No one could tell whether his song was gay or sad, a joke or an immortal monument; it was the first song of the revolution, risen from nowhere, gay, reckless, bitter, impudent, sung by millions of voices, echoing against train roofs, and village roads, and dark city pavements, some voices laughing, some voices wailing, a people laughing at its own sorrow, the song of the revolution, written on no banner, but in every weary throat, the “Song of the Little Apple.” . . . No one knew what the little apple was; but everyone understood. (26)

It was also sung “softly, monotonously” by a young boy on the train taking Irina and Sasha to a Siberian prison camp (350, 352). The message of the song and its use in these scenes seems to be that of inevitability and resignation.

The lyrics of the first stanza in *We the Living* are:

Hey, little apple,
Where are you rolling?

If you fall into German paws,
You'll never come back. (26)

Another variant is:

Hey, little apple
Green on one side
A Kolchak is not allowed
To go across the Urals.²⁷

“John Gray”

“Historians,” wrote Ayn Rand,

will write of the “Internationale” as the great anthem of the revolution. But the cities of the revolution had their own hymn. In days to come, the men of Petrograd will remember those years of hunger and struggle and hope—to the convulsive rhythm of “John Gray.” It was called a fox-trot. It had a tune and a rhythm such as those of the new dances far across the border, abroad. It had very foreign lyrics about a very foreign John Gray whose sweetheart Kitty spurned his love for fear of having children, as she told him plainly. Petrograd had known sweeping epidemics of cholera; it had known epidemics of typhus, which were worse; the worst of its epidemics was that of “John Gray.” (155)

And she describes that epidemic, a song played and sung at school recesses, while standing in line at stores, at dances, after Marxist lectures. And the meaning was obvious: “Its gaiety was sad; its abrupt rhythm was hysterical; its frivolity was a plea, a moan for that which existed somewhere, forever out of reach. Through winter nights red flags whistled in the snowdrifts and the city prayed hopelessly with the short, sharp notes of ‘John Gray’” (156). The song is mentioned throughout the book, played on the piano or on the gramophone as a haunting reminder of what cannot be. “It flung brief, blunt notes out into space, as if tearing them off the strings before they were ripe, hiding the gap of an uncapturable gaiety under a convulsive rhythm” (368).

There are no standard lyrics to this song, with various—though similar—stories being told about John Gray. In one version, the first stanza reads:

In a faraway southern land
Where blizzards do not blow
There once was a handsome man
John Gray, the cowboy,
John Gray, strong and rakish
As tall as Hercules
As brave as Don Quixote.²⁸

The *We the Living* version (possibly translated by Ayn Rand) begins:

John Gray was brave and daring
Kitty was very pretty.

Wildly, John fell in love with Kitty.
Passion's hard to restrain
He made his feelings plain,
But Kat said "No" to that! (156)

CLASSICAL MUSIC

Ayn Rand did not "learn to like" classical music until she came to America and began hearing it on the radio: "It took me quite a long time, that is, listening very often and repeatedly before I would begin to really hear or properly appreciate the classical music"—by which she meant concertos and symphonies.²⁹ By 1936, she had become a fan of Ev Suffens' classical music program on WEVD in New York City,³⁰ but classical music had already found its way into the manuscript for *We the Living*, completed in March 1934.

Of particular importance were the operas of Giuseppe Verdi and the piano music of Frederic Chopin. Chopin is played (usually by Kira's cousin Lydia), at various events in the novel, as it was played often by Rand's sister Natasha during Ayn Rand's childhood and teenage years in Russia.³¹ Although it was Chopin's "Butterfly Etude" that was a particular Rand favorite (it was the 1917 listing on her "Musical Biography"), it was his "Dog's Waltz" (more commonly known as the "Minute Waltz") that received mention in the novel (180). Lydia also played Bach and Tchaikovsky, whose *Sleeping Beauty* and *Swan Lake* ballets are also mentioned (146, 189, 446).

Verdi played a special role in Ayn Rand's musical life, and provides the right note on which to end a study of the music in *We the Living*. One of his operas, as we have seen, was the first opera she saw in Petrograd, in 1921. Just as it did in her life, opera in the novel represents one of the few vestiges of luxury and glamour in the USSR. Kira's Uncle Vasili put it this way: "Yes, old classics are still the best. In those days, they had culture, and moral values, and . . . and integrity" (214). In the novel are mentions of *Aida* (194) and *La Traviata* (214–15), specifically the first act Prelude (misnamed by her as the "Overture"), which was Ayn Rand's 1912 entry in her "Musical Biography."

But it was *Rigoletto* that came in for special mention. Kira and Andrei attend a performance at the Mikhailovsky Theater, which

smelt of old velvet, marble and moth balls. Four balconies rose high to a huge chandelier of crystal chains that threw little rainbows on the distant ceiling. Five years of revolution had not touched the theater's solemn grandeur; they had left but one sign: the Imperial eagle was removed from over the huge central box which had belonged to the royal family. (96)

Here is Rand describing the opening of the opera:

And when the curtain went up and music rose in the dark, silent shaft of the theater, growing, swelling, thundering against walls that could not hold it, something stopped in Kira's throat and she opened her mouth to take a breath. Beyond the walls were linseed-oil wicks, men waiting in line for tramways, red flags and the dictatorship of the proletariat. On the stage, under the marble columns of an Italian palace, women waved their hands softly, gracefully, like reeds in the waves of music, long velvet trains rustled under a blinding light and,

young, carefree, drunk on the light and the music, the Duke of Mantua sang the challenge of youth and laughter³² to gray, weary, cringing faces in the darkness, faces that would forget, for a while, the hour and the day and the century. (97)

To Kira and to Ayn Rand, that was the glamorous, pre-revolutionary spectacle.

CONCLUSION

Although music played a significant role in Ayn Rand's first novel, *We the Living*, it did not play such a role in her two major novels, *The Fountainhead* and *Atlas Shrugged*. In *The Fountainhead*, there are references to the Rachmaninoff Second Piano Concerto and the Tchaikovsky First Piano Concerto. And one of the minor characters in *Atlas Shrugged* is a composer, whose views on "The Nature of an Artist" are reprinted in *For the New Intellectual*.³³ But it was in her planned—but never written—novel (tentatively entitled "To Lorne Dieterling") that music would once again achieve a dominant role, one well beyond that in *We the Living*.

The story was to feature a dancer, and the "real essence" of the story would be musical: "the universe of my 'tiddlywink' music, of the 'Traviata Overture' and 'Simple Confessions,' of my sense of life."³⁴ In fact, according to her working notes, she would "build the whole novel" on the *La Traviata* prelude.³⁵

The notes for "To Lorne Dieterling" were written over an eight-year period, from November 30, 1957, to January 2, 1966, but the project never got beyond those notes. In a 1977 answer to a question about her lack of fiction writing in the previous twenty years, Ayn Rand replied: "I don't like to write historical fiction or fantasies, and it is impossible to write about heroic characters, or a romantic story, in today's setting. The world is in such a low state that I could not bear to put it in fiction. . . . If I don't write another novel, that would be the reason. Look around you."³⁶ Like the "Song of Broken Glass," her projected novel would be only a promise, as she turned her attention to writing and developing the philosophy that makes possible the ideal man.

NOTES

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1. David Harriman, ed., *Journals of Ayn Rand* (New York: Dutton, 1997), 48.
 2. See form accompanying June 26, 1937, letter to editor Virginia Tompkins, Ayn Rand Archives.
 3. "My Musical Biography," Ayn Rand Archives.
 4. "Philosophy and Sense of Life," in Ayn Rand, *The Romantic Manifesto: A Philosophy of Literature*, revised edition (New York: Signet, 1975), 25.
 5. Ayn Rand, "Art and Cognition," in *Romantic Manifesto*, 50.
 6. Rand, "Art and Cognition," 51.
 7. Biographical interviews (Ayn Rand Archives).
 8. Biographical interviews (Ayn Rand Archives).
 9. Biographical interviews (Ayn Rand Archives).
 10. Probably *Rigoletto*.
 11. Biographical interviews (Ayn Rand Archives).
 12. Biographical interviews (Ayn Rand Archives).

13. Ayn Rand Archives.
14. Michael Miller, program notes for the Ohio Light Opera production of *Die Bajadere*, 1998.
15. Richard Traubner, *Operetta* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 267.
16. Personal communication from Leonard Peikoff.
17. Personal communication.
18. See the Duane Eddy interview in Scott McConnell, *100 Voices: An Oral History of Ayn Rand* (New York: New American Library, 2010), 366.
19. See Friedrich Hofmeister, *Hofmeisters Handbuch der Musikliteratur*, 1934–40 (Leipzig, 1943).
20. Biographical interviews (Ayn Rand Archives).
21. I would like to thank Professor Robert A. Rothstein, University of Massachusetts, for providing the lyrics and music for most of the Russian songs discussed in this chapter and for the prior point that all of these songs were, unlike the “Song of Broken Glass,” real and not fictional.
22. Russian lyrics translated by Dina Garmong, from *Chanson des etudiant #3206* (Northern League publishers, n.d.).
23. Russian lyrics translated by Dina Garmong, from *A Collection of War Songs of the Russian Imperial Army and the Civil War Period* (Chicago: no publisher information, 1969).
24. Russian lyrics translated by Dina Garmong, from *Songs of the Russian People*, A. Ivanov, ed. (Leningrad: State Musical Publishing House, 1948).
25. See www.iclassics.com.
26. Russian lyrics translated by Dina Garmong, from a book of Vertinsky songs published by the Center of Song of the Soviet Culture Reserve, Moscow, 1990.
27. “Kolchak” refers to Aleksandr Vailiyevich Kolchak, an anti-Bolshevik admiral, executed by the Bolsheviks in 1920. Lyrics translated from the Russian by Dina Garmong, from A. Ivanov, ed., *Songs of the Russian People* (Leningrad: State Musical Publishing House, 1948).
28. Russian lyrics translated by Dina Garmong, from *Songs: Ships Entered Our Harbor* (Moscow: Omega, Denis Alpha, 1995).
29. Biographical interviews (Ayn Rand Archives).
30. Michael S. Berliner, ed., *Letters of Ayn Rand* (New York: Dutton, 1995), 26.
31. Biographical interviews (Ayn Rand Archives).
32. The aria referred to is “Questa o Quella.”
33. Ayn Rand, *For the New Intellectual* (New York: Random House, 1961; Signet paperback edition, 1963).
34. Harriman, *Journals*, 710. “Simple Confessions” was composed in 1878 by Francois Thome and titled (in French) “Simple Aveu,” and was Ayn Rand’s 1924 entry in her “Musical Biography.”
35. Harriman, *Journals*, 712.
36. Question period following Ayn Rand’s 1977 Ford Hall Forum talk, “Global Balkanization,” in Boston.