

Shostakovich's First Film Score: Politics and Symphonism

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ABSTRACT – This article proposes a detailed historical-analytical analysis of the score for the film *The New Babylon*, composed by Dmitri Shostakovich. It explores how Shostakovich made use of a wide range of musical techniques to highlight the visual, emotional and narrative aspects of film production, thus illustrating an innovative approach to film music composition. The analysis focuses on the creative side, highlighting how the composer subtly incorporated various recurring musical motifs and fragments to emphasize the evolution of the characters' actions and emotions. It also explores how diegetic music was used to strengthen the synchronization between sound and image, thus highlighting the composer's concern for the coherence and impact of the soundtrack. In addition, the article examines the political and social context of the time in which the film was made, analysing the first critical reactions and the subsequent significance of this work in the history of cinema. This exhaustive approach reveals the importance of the film's soundtrack not only in the landscape of film music but also in the wider cultural and social context of the time. Thus, the work represents an essential contribution to the understanding and appreciation of the evolution of film music and its influence on the artistic and cultural landscape.

Keywords: Dmitri Shostakovich, *The New Babylon*, politics, film music, musical analysis.

1 Historical context

Globally, the 1920s represented the heyday of silent cinema, while in Russia, during the same period, filmmakers were venturing into sound recording experiments. In 1929, at the crossroads of two eras – given that this film marked a significant transition between the silent film era and the beginnings of sound film in the Soviet Union – directors Grigori Kozintsev¹ and Leonid Trauberg² made a film called *The New Babylon*.

They had known each other for some time and had already directed six films before the *New Babylon* was made. In 1921, in St. Petersburg (then known as Petrograd), they founded *The Factory of the Eccentric Actor* (FEKS), a group that combined the training of actors with collective artistic production in theatre and film. This group consisted of a faithful circle of disciples, many of whom remained with Kozintsev and Trauberg throughout their careers. Among them are designer Evgeny Enei and actors Sergei Gerasimov, Elena Kuzmina and Piotr Sobolevski, with whom they collaborated on the making of the film *The New Babylon*. The FEKS group perceived eccentricism as a new direction within the avant-garde, which sought to carve itself a distinct place between Futurism, Surrealism and Dada.

At the same time, the 1928 changes in Soviet film policy had a huge impact on the film. The first party conference on cinematography which included all indications was held in March 1928. It restricted the directions in which film policy had to evolve, requiring films to be profitable, entertaining and socialist in character, while maintaining intelligible accessibility to millions of people.

The New Babylon is regarded as one of the best Soviet silent films³. For Kozintsev and Trauberg, it was the fruit of their work in early cinema because, following it, just two years later, they released their first sound film, *Alone* (1931).

Dmitri Shostakovich joined the film project when the film was fully completed. He was hired following that party conference demanding that highly qualified musicians be used for film scoring. At that time, Shostakovich was considered a new star; he was young and his career was booming. His early experience in the world of cinema

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¹ During his long career in Soviet cinema, Shostakovich worked with director Grigori Kozintsev on one-third of his films. Kozintsev is regarded as one of the most important directors in the Soviet Union, his films being internationally acclaimed as classical works in the art of cinema, representative for their artistic value and profound meaning. Holder of both national prizes, such as the "Lenin" Prize, and international prizes, such as the Special Prize of the 1964 Venice International Film Festival, Kozintsev is also the author of a historical and theoretical monograph entitled *The Deep Screen* (1971), and of the study *The Space Tragedy*, published posthumously, in 1973.

² Leonid Trauberg was a Russian film director, screenwriter and teacher, born into a family of bourgeois intellectuals. He studied at the Comic Opera Theatre in Odessa, founded his own theatre and worked as a journalist. In Rollberg, *Historical Dictionary of Russian and Soviet Cinema*, 701.

³ Semeniuk, "Союз новаторов, или Как рождался 'Новый Вавилон' Козинцева – Трауберга – Шостаковича".

was a determining factor in his choice by the *Sovkino* studio, given that Shostakovich had been working as a pianist in cinema theatres since 1922. The importance of this moment can hardly be underestimated because the composer had to work with a material in which the directors' ideas had already been put into practice. Directors Grigori Kozintsev and Leonid Trauberg had been working on the film *The New Babylon* since February 1928. Although it premiered on March 18, 1929, it was only on December 28, 1928, that Shostakovich signed the contract for the composition of the film's music. The composer had only eleven weeks to compose ninety minutes of music. The film represented a turning point in the career of the then-very young composer. It was the first and only silent film in his creative biography, marking the beginning of a long journey into the world of film music composition.

In terms of form, the directors sought to craft a soundtrack that would run continuously from the beginning to the end of the film, thus allowing the music to be heard throughout the entire screening. This practice was quite common in early cinema.

Instead, Shostakovich approached the musical content completely differently from the practices of the time. Symphonic in conception in terms of fluidity and theme, Shostakovich sought a deeper commitment of music to the image than what he thought was expressed in the accompaniment of silent films⁴.

In parallel, he was writing music for Vladimir Maiakovsky's play, *The Bedbug* [*Klop*], staged at the "Meyerhold" Theatre in Moscow. While commuting between Moscow and Petersburg, Trauberg noted that Shostakovich had completed the music score in just two weeks⁵. It was expected that the play's music would share certain musical elements with the film's music, including musical quotations and self-quotations, regardless of the length of time the score composition required.

Shostakovich faced a major technical challenge during the film's editing. Although he completed the score quickly, the need to make changes as the scenes were being edited forced him to redo many sections in an extremely short time frame. This left its mark on the occasional illegibility of the notes, additional lines and other signs⁶. As Leonid Trauberg put it in the preface to the score, "the greatest obstacle for the composer was the editing of the film, which proved to be complex and confusing in many respects. The action was constantly jumping from one place to another, the montage pieces (frames) were so short that they flashed in front of the spectator's eyes"⁷.

The work was met with a certain resistance from the musicians, due to the complex level of the musical language, which exceeded their capabilities. According to the composer's own words, "orchestras in most cinemas are of more or less inferior quality"⁸. Oftentimes musicians, either out of their inability to perform the work or out of fear of alienating the audience, preferred instead to perform various potpourris of established works⁹.

The premiere of the film was planned to coincide with the festivities marking the anniversary of the formation of the Paris Commune. With a great political charge and relatively avant-garde music, the film created a great echo in the contemporary world of that time. The press was divided, and many critics condemned his temporally and spatially confusing style, suspecting that it would baffle the masses watching this film¹⁰. Shostakovich later confessed:

Films have generally meant nothing but trouble for me, beginning with my first one, *New Babylon*. I'm not talking about the so-called artistic side. That's another story and a sad one, but my troubles on the political side began with *New Babylon*. No one remembers this anymore, and now the film is considered a Soviet classic and has a wonderful reputation abroad. But when it was first shown, KIM¹¹ interfered. KIM leaders decided that *New Babylon* was counter-revolutionary. Things could have ended very badly, and I was only in my early twenties then.¹²

A week before the film's premiere, Shostakovich wrote an article entitled *About the Music to the "New Babylon"*, in which he strongly criticized the standards of film music: "It is time to take cinema music properly in hand, to get rid of sloppy unartistic vamping and thoroughly clean the Augean stables. The only solution is to write special music for each film"¹³.

⁴ Titus, *The Early Film Music of Dmitry Shostakovich*, 15.

⁵ Riley, *Dmitri Shostakovich*, 7.

⁶ According to Mark Fitz-Gerald, the conductor of the first world recording of the entire suite (see Fitz-Gerald *et al.*, "Music for the Film *New Babylon*").

⁷ Shostakovich, *Suite from Music to the Film New Babylon*, op. 17, 1976.

⁸ Shostakovich, "О музыке к 'Новому Вавилону'", 3.

⁹ Kozintsev, *Глубокий Экран*, 152.

¹⁰ Kozintsev, *Глубокий Экран*, 152.

¹¹ KIM or The Communist International of Youth [Коммунистический интернационал молодёжи] represented the youth division of the Committee.

¹² Volkov, *Testimony: The Memoirs of Dmitri Shostakovich*, 150-151.

¹³ Our translation from Shostakovich's article, "О музыке к 'Новому Вавилону'", 3.

This inaugural article opened a crucial debate on the role of music in Soviet film. At that time, only very few composers devoted themselves to this musical genre, and most of those who did were constrained by financial limitations¹⁴. This article marked a première in several ways: it was the first essay on film music written by a world-famous composer in Soviet Russia¹⁵; it was Shostakovich's first attempt to express his ideas about sound and moving image through writing; and it was the first significant text to analyse the collaboration between director(s) and composer in the making of the film. In this article, Shostakovich formulated and discussed several principles in response to the lack of unity and content in the culture of film music, which he called *khaltura*¹⁶. He also condemned the lack of interest in music and its inability to truly convey what was happening on the screen.

Shostakovich's symphonic approach allowed him to create a composition in which themes and certain musical sections develop in a programmatic manner, similar to the works of the late 19th century. At the same time, independently of Shostakovich, Kozintsev takes a "symphonic" approach to the film:

The episodes were shaped into a tumult of feelings and thoughts, like parts of a visual symphony. Each of them stood out particularly for its emotional intensity and distinct rhythm. The menacing *Scherzo* of the collapse of the Second Empire; the slow and disturbing *Andante* (The Siege of Paris); the joyful theme of liberation (The Commune); the stormy melody of the confrontation; the closing requiem. Thus, the authentic ideas of the concept gradually took shape. But the film was not interested in *allegro* and *andante*. It had its own rhythm: sixteen mental images, conveyed in a flash, projected with the same speed on a square canvas screen, imitating life.¹⁷

Even though Kozintsev's musical concept of the symphony as a film refers more to the dramatic tone of the work, it resonates with Shostakovich's approach to the idea of film music as a symphony. He makes use of various musical quotations, including period dances (waltz, cancan), songs by Offenbach and popular songs of the French Revolution, including *La Marseillaise*, *Ça ira* and *La Carmagnole*¹⁸.

2 Musical analysis of the score of the film *The New Babylon*

The film *The New Babylon* is a drama in eight parts – each one corresponding to one reel of the film. However, the suite, *i. e.* the 1976 *Sovetskii Kompozitor* version edited by Rozhdestvensky¹⁹, is structured in six parts: *War*, *Paris*, *The Siege of Paris*, *Operetta*, *Paris Has Stood for Centuries* and *Versailles*. Shostakovich composed it for a small orchestral apparatus (12-14 musicians), due to the spatial limits of the cinema halls of the time. A special aspect of the film is that the music does not start with the opening credits but with the actual unfolding of the film.

The first part, *War*, is about the Franco-Prussian war, and the first intertitle is "Death to the Prussians". In terms of timbre, the 17-bar introduction fits perfectly. First, we hear the brass instruments (horns, trumpets, trombones) in dotted rhythms and triplets, reminiscent of the military calls. The music has a playful character, and the rhythmically repetitive melodic line played by the trumpet features descending chromaticisms.

¹⁴ For example, at that time, Shostakovich had received the generous remuneration of 2000 roubles, representing about 15 months' average salary in Riley, *Dmitri Shostakovich*, 7.

¹⁵ Titus, "Shostakovich as Film Music Theorist", 249.

¹⁶ Халтура [*Khaltura*] is defined in the dictionary as: "1. botchery, shoddy work; potboiler 2. undeclared work, spare-time job" (our translation from Bolocan, *Dicționar Rus-Român*, 664).

¹⁷ Kozintsev, *Глубокий Экран*, 160.

¹⁸ Shostakovich, "О музыке к 'Новому Вавилону'", 3.

¹⁹ Gennady Rozhdestvensky (1931-2018) was a Russian-born conductor who won the "People's Artist Award" in 1976. With a rich career, the soloists he regularly worked with during the Soviet Union era included David Oistrakh, Sviatoslav Richter and Mstislav Rostropovich. In 2016, Rozhdestvensky won the seventh international "Shostakovich" award for his contribution to the composer's works.

The image shows a musical score for section A of the Suite from Music to the Film New Babylon, War. It features five staves: Cor. I, Tr-ba, Tr-ne, Timp, and Archi (pizz.). The Cor. I part has a melodic line with a 'pola' marking. The Archi part is marked 'pizz.' and features a rhythmic pattern. The Tr-ba, Tr-ne, and Timp parts provide harmonic and rhythmic support.

Ex. 1. Suite from Music to the Film *New Babylon, War*, the main melodic line in section A, *Sovetskii kompozitor*, bb. 12-26.

In terms of form, the entire part consists of 4 distinct musical sections that appear alternately: ABCBDBA.

Section	Intertitle	Timing	Visual details
A	Train station	01:12	Parisians encourage their troops in the fight against the Prussians. This section also includes the theatrical play <i>War</i> – where an orchestra appears on the screen.
B	New Babylon Department Store	02:53	Crowds of customers, ladies flocking to buy parasols and fans (bourgeois objects).
C	The Manager	03:31	The manager is introduced by the intertitle bearing the actor's name: David Gutman. He sits at the table wearing a top hat, a cane and a large napkin tied around his neck (exaggerated features).
B	New Babylon Department Store	03:45	Antithetically, the shop workers (seamstresses, carpenters and laundresses) appear.
D	Saleswoman Louise	06:20	Louise is introduced by the intertitle bearing the actress's name: Elena Kuzmina. Saleswoman Louise receives the invitation to the ball.
B	New Babylon Department Store	08:13	After the intertitle "General sale", women fighting over different clothes and the oppressed proletarians appear.
A	Train Station	09:25	Intertitle "Let them bleed".

Table 1. D. Shostakovič, Suite from Music to the Film *New Babylon, War* (form)

The entire part has a symmetrical structure both musically and visually, beginning and ending with section A. Joan Titus calls these sections musical "blocks" and concludes that they were specifically designed to emulate the alternation of the visual segments that illustrate characters or locations²⁰. This part is about the two central characters of the action: saleswoman Louise in antithesis with the bourgeois manager of the store and the two locations: *the train station* and *the New Babylon Department Store*.

The visual emphasis on antitheses is musically illustrated with particular clarity. Both *Train Station* and *New Babylon Department Store* have the musical features of a gallop. Both sections are in binary meter with offbeat rhythms, and both are in the same key of C major. Given that in 1929 Shostakovich was also composing the music for Vladimir Mayakovsky's theatrical play *The Bedbug* [*Klop*], the section resembles almost exactly the third part of the play, *Gallop*, with slight differences in the introductory section. However, unlike the cheerful ethos of these two aforementioned sections, *Manager* and *Saleswoman Louise* have a languid, heavily chromatic sound. In terms of timbre, the contrast is achieved by moving the melodic line from the brass instruments, mainly the trumpet, to the strings and woodwinds, more exactly to the violin and clarinet. On a secondary level, both visually and musically a parallel is drawn between the customers and the workers of the store, that is, between the bourgeois class and the proletarians.

From an epic perspective, the second part opens after the intertitle "Paris". In terms of composition, this section is a heavily satirized waltz that turns into the grotesque with the ascending semitones in the trumpet (bb. 17, 19, 25) and the glissandos in the trombone (bb. 79, 80, 81). At 11:17, the title of the song "We All Need

²⁰ Titus, "Silents, Sound, and Modernism in Dmitry Shostakovich's Score to *The New Babylon*", 43.

Love” appears on the screen, sung by Kozintsev’s wife, Sofia Magarill, and Shostakovich quotes the melody (in the same key of E Major) of the *entr’acte* of Act 2 from Jaques Offenbach’s *La belle Hélène*. The musical motif is gradually revealed starting from bar 93 (one can hear that perfect fourth leap in the trombone, followed by the theme’s chromaticism), while the actual musical line starts at the upbeat to bar 103, in the violins (ex. 2). Meanwhile, on the screen, Louise meets the manager at the ball and joins him at the table.

Ex. 2. *Suite from Music to the Film New Babylon, Paris*, quotation from *La belle Hélène*, *Sovetskii kompozitor*, bb. 97-112.

The members of the bourgeoisie are depicted in a hedonistic light, most of them as drunken couples, who for a more grotesque effect have a large age difference. Musically, these grotesque elements are transposed in the score through descending glissandos in the trombone (bb. 153, 155).

In this part, Shostakovich also quotes the *Can-can* from Offenbach’s *Orpheus in the Underworld*. This time, the melody is changed grotesquely in order to criticize the bourgeoisie and, inherently, everything related to it. Shostakovich used the *Can-can* also because on the screen the two directors had chosen it as a representative dance of the upper class and moral depravity, and, according to his own words:

When composing music to *Babylon*, I was guided least of all by the principle of mandatory illustration of every shot. Mainly, I began from the principal shot in each sequence of shots.

For example, at the end of the second part, the primary moment is the attack of the German cavalry on Paris. Although the specific moment of the German cavalry ends with a deserted restaurant, there is total silence. As to the music, although the cavalry is no longer shown on the screen, it continues to remind the viewer of the impending menacing force.²¹

Visually, the cavalry is presented in a dark and contrasting light, meant to create an intimidating and inaccessible atmosphere. Musically, Shostakovich opts for a gallop, at a fast tempo. In the end, only one man remains on the screen, dancing oblivious to the impending danger as the cabaret curtain is lowered.

Part 3 starts at 20:42 and is introduced by the intertitle “The Siege of Paris”. The opening of the part reminds of a monothematic fugue through the polyphonic presentation of *dux* – in the cello and *comes* at the perfect fourth (b. 6) – in the viola and subsequently in the bassoon (b. 16).

²¹ Shostakovich, “О музыке к ‘Новому Вавилону’”, 3.

The image shows a page of a musical score for a film score. It is titled 'Suite from Music to the Film New Babylon, The Siege of Paris, Sovetskii kompozitor, bb. 1-8.' The score is marked 'Largo'. The instruments listed are Flauto, Oboe, Clarinetto (B), Timpani, Viole, Violoncelli, Timp., and V-c. The Violoncelli part has a 'Dux' marking and a measure number '112' in a box. The Viola part has a 'Comes' marking.

Ex. 3. Suite from Music to the Film New Babylon, The Siege of Paris, Sovetskii kompozitor, bb. 1-8.

Based on this musical motif, the entire Part 3 paints a gloomy atmosphere, with a very dark musical timbre. Woodwinds and strings are predominantly used here – especially the cello and viola. Shostakovich wrote it in 2/4 time, tending to emphasize each beat, often with homophonic moments. Thus, he alludes to the rhythmic ticking of a clock and manages to evoke the slow passage of time in that difficult period of famine. As for the epic unfolding of the action, in this sequence, Jean and Louise meet for the first time when he, exhausted and battle-wearied, arrives at her home. This is also when one can hear for the first time a quotation from *La Marseillaise* in the bassoon, when the boy announces that “There are placards saying they have capitulated!”

The image shows a page of a musical score for a film score. It is titled 'Suite from Music to the Film New Babylon, The Siege of Paris, Sovetskii kompozitor, bb. 159-161.' The instruments listed are Jag., Cor., Fag., V-c., and C-c. The C-c. part has 'pizz.' and 'arco' markings.

Ex. 4. Suite from Music to the Film New Babylon, The Siege of Paris, Sovetskii kompozitor, bb. 159-161.

This quotation was used at this point with an obvious purpose: the musical role of *La Marseillaise* is to represent victory. Shostakovich slips in, in a minor key, a heavily distorted fragment from the beginning of this great French song. *La Marseillaise* appears once more in this part, this time in the trumpet, heavily transformed in bars 204-209.

Part 4, entitled *Operetta*, begins when the intertitle “On the morning of 18th March” appears on the screen at 32:47. The operetta rehearsals are in full swing as the French prepare to face the Prussians. Shostakovich described this part in his article: “An interesting method is used in the Fourth Part. There is a rehearsal of the operetta. The music plays a rather well-known exercise by Hanon, which takes on different nuances in relation to the action. Sometimes it has a cheerful mood, sometimes boring, sometimes terrifying”²².

Shostakovich used this variational approach to the exercises of Charles Louis Hanon throughout this entire part. As he himself confessed, he adapted those quotations, which were taken from *The Virtuoso Pianist* exercise book, to the mood he wanted to convey. For example, in the opening of the part, Shostakovich uses the first exercise from *The Virtuoso Pianist*, which is based on ascending and descending fifths. According to Joan Titus, the musical section between bars 44-54, introduced by the intertitle “People dance at a rehearsal”, features rhythms, intervals and a melodic contour similar to Hanon’s exercises number 2 and 3, and also *Chanson*

²² Shostakovich, “О музыке к ‘Новому Вавилону’”, 3.

d'Oreste from *La belle Hélène*²³. Also here, Shostakovich interpolates a quotation from the song *Ça ira*. The purpose of using it is to illustrate the Communards' efforts to win the soldiers to their side. A very interesting element is that in bar 50, the tonal centre moves a minor third up, namely from C to E flat. This tonal shift also corresponds to the fact that the action on the screen moves to the officer who smiles at the soldiers preparing the cannon (ex. 5).

Ex. 5. Suite from Music to the Film *New Babylon*, Operetta, *Sovetskii kompozitor*, bb. 43-51.

The character of the music changes completely after the women give the soldiers milk to drink and the intertitle “What great guys! What handsome guys!” appears. (37:00). The melodic line, passed from the bassoon to the flute, becomes much more playful and cheerful both due to the timbre and the tempo change in *Più mosso* in *Allegro* at bar 113. But, as the action progresses, the original ethos of the part returns abruptly with the women denouncing the soldiers for protecting the Second Empire. As the soldiers' resistance weakens, the rehearsal of the operetta also takes an unfortunate course. After these events, *La Carmagnole* can be heard for the first time in the brass instruments, which give it a military character. The part ends with the soldiers trudging through the mud towards Versailles.

In Part 5, which is homonymous with the opening intertitle “Paris has stood for centuries” (46:35), the proletariat works happily for the Commune to the tunes of the various revolutionary songs. On the screen, we see pictures of Paris, which Kozintsev and Trauberg had filmed when they went to visit it²⁴.

The first revolutionary song quoted by Shostakovich in this part is *La Carmagnole* at bar 77 (ex. 6), followed by the melody of *La Marseillaise*, which is strategically placed at bar 210²⁵ (ex. 7).

²³ Titus, “Silents, Sound, and Modernism in Dmitry Shostakovich's Score to *The New Babylon*”, 46.

²⁴ Kozintsev, *Глубокий Экран*, 159.

²⁵ According to the film edition, restored after the DSCH – whose music was conducted by Frank Strobel, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4K9KK1AANp0&t=3394s>, accessed 5 November 2023, 1 minute and 56 seconds of music (between 52:46 and 54:42) are missing from the *Sovetskii kompozitor* edition.

Ex. 6. Suite from Music to the Film *New Babylon, Paris has stood for centuries*, *Sovetskii kompozitor*, bb. 77-80.

This song appears as the bourgeoisie withdraws to Versailles to escape the Prussian attack. An actress, previously featured in *Operetta*, begins to sing along with the crowd, accompanied by the orchestra. At this point, the music becomes diegetic – even though the film is silent, the sound is produced by the characters as part of the action of the film. This adaptation of *La Marseillaise* emphasizes the spirit of the times and is a commonly used technique in silent films²⁶. The full lyrics of *La Marseillaise* appear on the screen through intertitles. However, a few bars later the melody of *La Marseillaise* (in the horn) is juxtaposed with that of the *Can-can* (in the violins).

Ex. 7. Suite from Music to the Film *New Babylon, Paris has stood for centuries*, *Sovetskii kompozitor*, bb. 210-213.

Thus, in the *Sovetskii kompozitor* edition, parts number 6, 7 and 8 of the film appear as an individual part, *Versailles*. In Part 6 of the film, as the Commune's leaders begin to lose hope, Louise is forced to steal from the New Babylon department store various items that could be useful to her cause. During a break in the fighting, a high-ranking communist adviser approaches a piano (which is part of a barricade) and plays Tchaikovsky's *Old French Song* from the *Children's Album*, op. 39; this is the second moment of diegetic music in the film. Shostakovich faithfully reproduces Tchaikovsky's melodic line, but changes the accompaniment, while also adding an original 8-bar phrase at the end, closing on the dominant.

²⁶ Titus, *The Early Film Music of Dmitry Shostakovich*, 25.

The end is tragic as the Commune is defeated, and Jean will have to dig Louise's grave. The last text on the screen is "*Vive la Commune*", and, for the last time, one can hear *La Carmagnole* – the musical symbol of the revolutionaries. The music ends on an unresolved chord, perhaps suggesting that this is but a temporary defeat²⁷.

Conclusions

Shostakovich wanted to maintain a musical continuity that he associated with the symphony as a genre. The result was a musical form built from various materials reflecting the film's action, ethos, montage, character development, and emotional content. To maintain this musical continuity, Shostakovich resorted to recurring musical motifs.

At the same time, *The New Babylon* adopts a mosaic-like approach, which integrates symphonic iterations of the melodies and dance rhythms of the time, including fragments of folk and revolutionary songs. The purpose of this approach is to create a coherent relationship between the visual and auditory aspects while exploring the symbolic meaning of music. Thus, for example, *La Marseillaise* and the Can-can become strongly associated with the defeat of the Commune, as well as with the bourgeoisie and its corruption and depravity. On the other hand, the French revolutionary songs such as *Ça ira* and *La Carmagnole* are quoted in relation to the revolutionary Commune, throughout the entire film. They are used in antithesis to *La Marseillaise*, and this idea of opposition is clearly outlined in the fight scenes featured in the final parts, when Shostakovich chooses to juxtapose the two themes: *La Marseillaise* and *La Carmagnole*. Shostakovich makes reference to Wagnerian leitmotifs, using music from various periods which globally represented the core of his music for this film.

Shostakovich played a significant role in this film, despite being strongly criticized by both the authorities and the press of the time for his avant-garde orientation. He confessed that although he had not sought to accurately reproduce what was happening on the screen, he had been deeply influenced by the visual elements. This was due either to the difficulty in perfectly synchronizing music and images, a task practically impossible at the time, or to his broader approach, based on a profound and meaningful musical discourse. However, proof of his desire to synchronize music and images is the two fragments of diegetic music. These represent the key to making quality film music, which he himself invokes in his article *About the Music to the "New Babylon"*: it is absolutely imperative that the orchestra and the conductor closely follow the composer's instructions.

This score, along with his article, represents a first foray into a new genre that emerged in the film industry. At the time of its appearance, it was criticized for formalism, and Shostakovich was "reprimanded for insolence and accused of ignorance in matters of orchestration"²⁸. However, according to Kozintsev: "There were such contradictory aspects to the soundtrack that the reviews seemed to exclude each other for political reasons"²⁹. Despite the echoes of its release, the film was soon forgotten. It was Ghenadii Rojdestvenski who, in the early 1970s, rediscovered the work in the State archives and printed it at the *Sovetskii kompozitor* publishing house, in 1976.

The story, inspired by Karl Marx's *The Civil War in France*, is certainly one of great political impact. In this epic approach, directors Kozintsev and Trauberg set out to provide a favourable image of the proletariat, and the choice of Shostakovich as a composer for this project was also politically motivated. However, despite the proletarian overtones, the film can be considered a true gem of Russian silent cinema. The fact that it was heavily criticized at the time only shows that these young people in the film industry, members of the FEKS, had an avant-garde vision.

Shostakovich's music reflects the influence of his stage works, and, for example, according to Tatiana Egorova, most of the musical techniques used in the film had already been used by Shostakovich in his 1928 opera *The Nose*³⁰. This suggests that Shostakovich took this genre seriously and, despite the lack of sufficient time to thoroughly edit the final material, he managed to create a music that was eclectic and well-structured enough to become memorable in the history of cinema.

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²⁷ Fitz-Gerald *et al.*, "Music for the film *New Babylon* (1929)".

²⁸ Kozintsev, *Глубокий Экран*, 152.

²⁹ Kozintsev, *Глубокий Экран*, 152.

³⁰ Egorova, *Soviet Film Music*, 8.

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