



<https://doi.org/10.48417/technolang.2026.02.09>

Research article

The Microphone as a Medium of Authenticity in Soviet *Estrada* Song

Arsenii Nikonov (✉) 

HSE University, Staraya Basmannaya Ulitsa, 21/4, Moscow, 105066, Russia

nikonov.a@hse.ru

Abstract

This article focuses on the notion of authenticity as a characteristic of a specific vocal technique that has its own specificity in relation to *Estrada* song. The significance of vocal authenticity in the Soviet context is shaped by cultural, technological, and ideological factors functioning within specific historical circumstances. As a case study, the article examines debates surrounding the “small” and “whispering” voice in singing practice during the 1950s and 1960s, based on which the changing configuration of relations between voice and text is traced. Despite the aspiration of Soviet institutional criticism to preserve the previous characteristics of the singing voice and its representational function, formed during the period of Socialist Realism, the development of microphone technology and sound-recording practices contributed to the establishment of a different logic of vocal statement, within which authenticity begins to be understood not as a reflection of an already existing reality but as an effect of its constitution. In this context, *Estrada* song, detaching itself from cinematic plots, operetta narratives, and stable character types, during the Thaw period increasingly articulates the connection between the voice materiality and the stage persona through the category of sincerity. The article is situated at the intersection of voice theory, media studies, and studies of cultural policy and addresses the heterogeneous sources of the origin of the *Estrada* genre in urban forms of entertainment culture and its subsequent formation as a specific system of late Soviet production, as a result of which song product becomes “popular” not so much through the expansion of audience reach as through the organization of a feedback loop between performers and listeners and a reorientation toward economic value and what could compete with “Western” musical genres during the Cold War.

Keywords: Voice; Technologies; Authenticity; Soviet *Estrada*; Stage persona; Popular culture; Cold War

Citation: Nikonov, A. (2026). The Microphone as a Medium of Authenticity in Soviet *Estrada* Song. *Technology and Language*, 7(2), 104-117. <https://doi.org/10.48417/technolang.2026.02.09>



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УДК 130.2: 621.395.61

<https://doi.org/10.48417/technolang.2026.02.09>

Научная статья

Микрофон как медиум аутентичности в советской эстрадной песне

Арсений Семёнович Никонов (✉) 

Национальный исследовательский университет “Высшая школа экономики”,
ул. Старая Басманная, д. 21/4, Москва, 105066, Россия

nikonov.a@hse.ru

Аннотация

В фокусе данной статьи находится понятие аутентичности как установки и характеристики определенного способа звукоизвлечения, имеющего собственную специфику в эстрадной песне. Значение голосовой аутентичности в советском контексте формируется в зависимости от культурных, технологических и идеологических факторов, реализующих свою действенность в конкретных исторических обстоятельствах. В качестве кейс-стади рассматриваются дискуссии о “маленьком” и “шепчущем” голосе в певческой практике 1950–1960-х годов, на основе которых прослеживается изменчивая конфигурация отношений между голосом и текстом. Несмотря на стремление советской критики сохранить прежние характеристики певческого голоса и его репрезентативную функцию, закрепленную в период социалистического реализма, развитие микрофонной техники и практик звукозаписи способствовало утверждению иной логики вокального высказывания, в рамках которой аутентичность начинает пониматься не как отражение уже существующей реальности, а как эффект ее конституирования. В этом контексте эстрадная песня, освобождаясь от привязки к кинематографическим сюжетам, опереточным нарративам и устойчивым типажам, в оттепельное время все в большей степени артикулирует связь между материально обусловленным голосом и сценической персоной через категорию искренности. Статья находится на пересечении теории голоса, медиаисследований и исследований культурной политики и обращается к гетерогенным источникам происхождения эстрадного жанра из городских форм развлекательной культуры и его последующему оформлению в качестве специфической системы позднесоветского производства, в результате чего песенная продукция становится “популярной” не столько за счет расширения охвата аудитории, сколько благодаря организации петли обратной связи между исполнителями и слушателями и переориентации на то, что могло конкурировать с “западными” музыкальными жанрами во время Холодной войны и быть прибыльным.

Ключевые слова: Голос; Технологии; Аутентичность; Советская эстрада; Сценическая персона; Популярная культура; Холодная война

Для цитирования: Nikonov, A. The Microphone as a Medium of Authenticity in Soviet Estrada Song // Technology and Language. 2026. № 7(2). P. 104-117. <https://doi.org/10.48417/technolang.2026.02.09>



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INTRODUCTION

In the 1950s, Soviet society entered a period of diverse, contradictory, but nevertheless tangible transformations. Modernization reforms, the broad implementation of scientific and technological breakthroughs, the high speed of urbanization and housing construction, the emergence of mass consumption, and a partial democratization of public space started to shape the new contours of reality. At the same time, the arts (McCallum, 2020; Reid, 1999), cinema (Bulgakova, 2012; Oukaderova & Usoltsev, 2023), and literature (Prokhorov, 2007, pp. 83–85) from the mid-1950s to the 1960s did more than reflect those shifting contours; they became terrains for staging reality. And yet, Soviet cultural production was marked by continuations and ruptures with pre-established genre conventions and techniques. These processes did not unfold in the mere search for a renewal of artistic language, as they tested the boundaries between what still most clearly belonged to the canon of Socialist Realism and what provided a form for “sincerity” that became the most prominent term in the vocabulary of the so-called Thaw (Rutten, 2017, pp. 182–184). However, the question of how this transition manifested itself in voice remains largely unclear. Meanwhile, it was precisely the technologically mediated voice that became one of the sites where the contemporary vocabulary was negotiated and literally performed. Not only was it the voice norm on the public broadcast or in the movies that changed, it was also the voice in *Estrada* song that became one of the major authentication agents of the Thaw – no less power-driven, but, as was assumed, much more sincere as the “last successful Soviet mobilization project” (Mikhailin, 2019, p. 196).

Contemporary popular music studies encompass the full diversity of the music that could be, with the application of various criteria, conceptualized as “popular.” The difficulty in our case, however, lies in the fact that the predominantly English vocabulary of “popular” music studies does not include the term *Estrada* which circulated within a specific semantic field in the USSR and countries of the socialist bloc. As a researcher of Polish *Estrada* Eva Mazierska has shown, reconciling these two terms is not only possible but may also have considerable heuristic potential (2023, pp. 4–13). If we speak of Soviet *Estrada* as an artistic genre, it acquired its aesthetic and institutional form in the attempts of early Soviet cultural policy to overcome “ideologically empty” urban entertainment of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. This form of entertainment could be traced back to music halls, artistic cabarets, or café-concerts, as well as to the methods of constructing divertissement programs or variety shows. Although *Estrada* emerged early on in a distinctly different artistic sphere of various “small” stage forms – circus performances, satire, dance, and song – it cannot be described as a monolithic entity, since each of the stage forms was shaped by often contradictory and divergent political, economic, and ideological relationships. These nevertheless converged within a shared institutional framework that assigned them functions ranging from the organization of leisure and “ideological entertainment” to the provision of “cultural service to the masses”; not to mention their context-specific configurations within the various Soviet Republics. We turn to one of the genres of *Estrada* – *Estrada* song. Despite having existed prior to the mid-1950s, it was precisely during the late Soviet period that it began to take shape as an



increasingly autonomous cultural product with its own communicative logic, uniting a ramified and multi-tiered concert and touring network, recording, and media institutions, and guiding the practices of writers, composers, and performers.

Authenticity is probably one of the main assumptions that permeates the perception of popular music and constitutes the value of specific genres (Barker & Taylor, 2007). In relation to voice, however, the aspect of its truthfulness is complicated by the fact that it is often regarded as an expression of an always-already-given idiosyncratic “I.” This kind of representation is fueled largely by the proximity of the voice to the body, which for centuries has been creating the illusion of the speaker’s immediate presence and reinforcing the mythology that the voice – in both everyday and artistic practice – provides access to the “essence” of a person (Schlichter, 2011, pp. 36–40). Similarly, Oksana Bulgakova notes that “the radical rejection of the skilled professional voice (as unnatural, mechanical, or insincere) has become an obsessive topic [...] in Russian culture,” saturating the musical imagination of the 20th century (2015, p. 4). Nevertheless, this article approaches the authenticity of the *Estrada* voice in the mid-1950s–1960s not as a natural vocal property, but rather as an aesthetic notion which, shaped by diverse forces, could serve as the key to a better explication of how those forces become significant in a particular cultural context.

To operationalize this premise, we refer to John Potter’s concept of “authoritative style” as a form of vocal performance that at a specific historical moment achieves a hegemonic position in relation to other styles, setting the “natural” and “correct” norm for the voice practice. According to Potter, changes in voice conventions as well as the parameters of its authenticity are linked to the “logocentric articulation” of musical style; or in the way voice relates to word (Potter, 2006, p. 193). By integrating media-technological perspective into Potter’s model, this article conceptualizes “authoritative style” as a historically situated dispositif in which vocal technique, textual intelligibility, and technological affordances produce regimes of vocal authenticity. This brings us to the question of how the relationship between the voice and the word was articulated from within Stalinist Socialist Realism as truthful (*pravdivyj*), and how it was subsequently rearticulated, paving the way for a vocal style that became authentic as sincere (*iskrennij*) in different technological, political, and ideological conditions.

VOICE AS A VESSEL FOR TEXT

The regime of the written text in the Soviet Union received acute political significance when avant-garde orality of the 1920s was reoriented toward Socialist Realism literacy in the 1930s (Murashov, 2000, pp. 599–600). Such a shift manifested itself, on the one hand, in the fundamental dominance of the written word and linguistification of society (Groys, 2006/2009, pp. 1–32) and, on the other hand, in the marginalization of the voice to the status of an “appendage” to the letter (Dolar, 2006, pp. 117–119). While Socialist Realism began to proliferate in the 1930s primarily in the field of literature and only later expanded to all arts and aesthetics in general, the voice-text nexus became the crucial expressive tool in music. The singing voice, occupying an ambiguous position between linguistic articulation and sonic materiality, posed a danger



to the authority of the text from within the esthetic-political canon. This was due to the ability of the voice to shift attention away from the controlled procedures of writing. It did so through the audible traces of the body, through timbre with individually recognized overtones, or through accents that would refer to an artist's background. From this perspective, the task of securing the word as a political medium extended well beyond control over the content, as could be assumed from the censoring practice of Glavrepertkom¹ which was issuing permits for the *Estrada* repertoire during a limited period with the song lyrics attached to each of the submitted requests.

In order to eliminate the space for probable polysemy and to posit an *as if* equality of text and voice, the gap between the letter and the condition of its vocal actualization should be minimal. Strategically available tools for Socialist Realism became “classical traditions in terms of voice training, harmony, melody, and intonation” (Goyowi, 2006, p. 25). Even though one of the main genres in the 1930s was *mass* song, the normativity of *individual* voice within Socialist Realism was developed in the context of the classical (realist) repertoire: oratorios, cantatas, (song) operas, works by Bach and Handel, as well as Soviet romances. This does not mean, however, that the voice, finding itself within the official aesthetic paradigm, lost its autonomy and, as such, became meaningless. On the contrary, the written word had to be orally articulated in a certain way, “naturally” (Pravda, 1936) and “expressively” (Groman, 1939, p. 76), implying the “unnatural” that was at odds with the realization of meaning. The performer also had to be located ethically, tasked to cultivate the understanding of the “intentions of the composer” and possession of “high technique of word and voice,” conveying the “inner” meaning of the work and interpreting it unambiguously (Nekrasova, 1939, p. 52). Moreover, the voice discipline was regarded as a vocal-pedagogical principle corresponding to “the laws of the development of the singer and his voice in specific historical (social) conditions” (Aspelund, 1952, p. 4), in fact linking a certain singing technique and scientifically grounded knowledge about voice use to the dominant social class, on whose behalf the party exercised its power, and bringing vocal-artistic practice, discipline, and discourse on culturedness (*kulturnost*) within a single ideological framework.

At the same time, the authoritative style was the result not only of institutional and ideological efforts to cultivate the normativity of voice in relation to the text, replacing the history of its social production, but also of the mediation through available technologies. In the 1930s, the practice of sound recording in the Soviet Union put performers at a distance from the microphone, which in combination with optical recording captured only a limited frequency range and gave the voice an electric echo. As a result of these limitations, a standard of “slightly slowed tempo, melodic cadences, high sound based on light vowels and avoiding problematic sibilants” (Bulgakova, 2015, p. 365) became established, contributing to the better intelligibility of the recorded voice and minimizing divergences from the written text to the best possible degree. This voice

¹ Initially Glavrepertkom (Main Repertoire Committee) was part of Narkompros (The People's Commissariat for Education) which was subsequently renamed and incorporated into the All-Union Committee for the Arts under the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR. In relation to *Estrada*, Glavrepertkom was given authority to review all individual repertory and, for example, that of concert brigades.



norm could be found intermedially in Stalinist soundscape, be it cinema or radio broadcasting. With regards to the singing practice, however, it acquired the status of the authoritative style, when the “big” and “loud” voice as *aesthetic* qualities of the sound – in fact, the result of the technological deployment within the classical (realist) vocal repertoire – was assigned a *political* function of the respectful attitude towards the written word.

Nevertheless, the voice on *Estrada* was not marginalized by the establishment of authoritative conventions. The “classical” sound and its *as if* ideal voice-text juncture did not become the basis for a full-fledged system of voice censorship either in the 1930s or during WWII. Instead, the discourse on “raising the level” of the arts and leveling the differences between the so-called “low” and “high” arts became particularly important. Concert practices of *Estrada* singers like Vadim Kozin, Isabella Yuryeva, Tamara Tsereteli, Ekaterina Yurovskaya, Keto Dzhaparidze, Klavdia Shulzhenko, Leonid Utesov, and Lydia Ruslanova – to name a few – were not banned. On the contrary, the common trait of *Estrada* performance was the incorporation of stylistic sources bound to urban romance, folk songs, and jazz (Raku, 2009, p. 191) with their own distinct vocal esthetics.² During this time, the authoritative style operated rather as a normative horizon, setting a standard against which any difference could be measured, and in relation to which the political-aesthetic demands could be either approximated or strategically distanced.

It was only in the late 1940s and early 1950s that vocal conventions alternative to what was audibly recognized as classical (realist) were marginalized. As Birgit Menzel writes, during a meeting at the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party in 1948, “a conflict emerged not only between different musical directions, but also between ‘serious’ classical and ‘popular’ entertainment music” (2000, p. 992), while two years earlier it had been reiterated that “the printed word sounds stronger than the pronounced word” (Babichenko, 1994, p. 199). Thus, in the late Stalinist cultural landscape, *Estrada* music found itself on this side of Zhdanov’s demands for the restoration of the classical heritage and solidification of the aesthetic categories developed in relation to it, when the sound of the academically schooled voice became the “natural” way for *as if* uncontradictory articulation of the meaning of the text. This had repercussions also in repertoire policy with a disproportionate dominance on vinyl of the classical repertoire (Gershzon, 2024, p. 146). Meanwhile, performers oriented towards “beautiful” and “powerful” sound production were systematically replenishing the new “singing class,” dominating the spectrum of increasingly less audible variants of the non-authoritative.

EMBODIED VOICE AND THE AUTHENTICITY OF THE FLESH

From its very outset, the Soviet cultural policy regarded voice as an object of its control. Nevertheless, it was not until the mid-1950s that judgments about *Estrada* voice

² This was on condition that the singers were employed by Mosestrada, Lengosestrada or regional philharmonics inscribed into the mechanisms of cultural policy that also curated the recording decision-making. For selected playlist with *Estrada* songs of the 1930s to 1950s with various stylistic elements see <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLTjuddYgJQTJWdocEFjuVvdHj5GTzq50Y>



became a topic of critical discussion in its own right, acquiring an alarmist tone which remained pronounced throughout the 1960s. In addition to dissatisfaction with singers on stage “who moan languidly into the microphone, distorting song melodies with their careless ‘patter’ (*govorkom*)” (Lemeshev, 1961, p. 35), journals highlighted the synonymy of the “microphone voice” and “voicelessness” (*bezgolos’jem*) (Petrov, 1966, p. 6). Textbooks on the *Estrada* genre published at the time pointed to the craze for “whispering into the microphone,” that is, “singing without a voice,” as a symptom of a lack of proper training in producing a beautiful and powerful sound “without any orthopedic devices” (Morozov, 1967, p. 23). During the meeting of the Ideological Commission of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1964, similar opinions were expressed about the lack of “close attention to the word” among microphone singers, whereas the calls to resist “attempts of anti-musical whisperers (*sheptunov*) to gain a monopoly on Estrada and at the microphone” became increasingly clear (Afanasyeva, 1998, pp. 513–514). Thus, this set of statements, differentiated in terms of power distribution, registers a shift in vocal sound while simultaneously attempting to preserve its normativity by reproducing ideologically charged categories.

These attempts were confronted with the differently unfolding reality of the voice, which was staged by new means and the methods of sound recording undergoing a radical transformation in the mid-1950s. The mass production of tape recorders and magnetic tape that was inspired by cultural policy (Lovell, 2015, p. 167) improved the quality of the recordings. Together with microphones that were capable of picking up and amplifying lower frequencies, they transformed the notion of the audible not only in the concert halls which were equipped with more diversified microphones, but also in the new sound recording studios, expanding their capacities above all at The State House of Sound Recordings. These studios were making magnetic tape audio recordings for broadcasting and for the “Melodiya” label that was solely responsible for vinyl replication since 1964.

In relation to the voice pitch, these changes made it technically possible for “close-ups” with a quieter sound and individual vocal characteristics such as pronunciation, intonation, and timbre that conveyed “signs of flesh” (Bulgakova, 2015, p. 480). Even though the voice always bears an index of the physical-organic context (Kolesch, 2003, p. 276), taken from the prism of historically conditioned mediatization (Baron et al., 2021, pp. 2–3), a “disembodied voice” nonetheless can exist in that its materiality renders to be non-obvious and transparent. This appears when the characteristics of the voice produced by the lungs, larynx, and lips are not recognized and actualized as signs of the individual body with the history of its social formation but are instead foreshadowed by the cultural intelligibility of “high technique of word and voice.” With new recording technologies, voices became more bound to their material sources, not pointing to the abstract notion of professionalism and vocal beauty but working as vehicles for the social imagination. Not only did the voice become a more independent layer of the song; its material



specificity and transformation from a mere vessel of the text into an autonomous artistic medium became increasingly perceptible on *Estrada* exemplified by the emergence of new distinct “individual” performance styles, be it the foreign accent of Edita Piekha or the “crooning” of Mark Bernes that, despite its appearance in a movie a decade earlier, became a common place for many singers particularly in late 1950s.

In this regard, the “microphone craze” had a larger context tied to the establishment of a new cohort on *Estrada*, when artists with little formal training from amateur venues – usually young female singers – were recruited by male “producers” like orchestra directors Eddie Rosner or Oleg Lundstrem, or given “promotion” by those immediately connected to the song production processes. In contrast, male *Estrada* singers more often than not would be part-time workers (*sovmestitely*) from cinema and opera who were also compensating for the inconsistent attempts to organize a system of talent acquisition, whereas drama actors were thought to be better in “appreciating the significance of words than singers” (Pakhmutova, 1961, p. 87). Recruiting was one of the main practical issues running like a common thread through the discussions about *Estrada* as a state-organized enterprise that sought to increase its appeal at a time of competition with popular music from “the West” that started to reach the Soviet listener through different channels. In response, *Estrada* cultural production turned to selected Western styles, genres, rhythms, and sonic aesthetics, with this reception marking a shift from the previous sources of musical citation. All this contributed to “the decomposition of the ‘classical’ timbre-acoustic and song-intonational unity of the Soviet world” (Ganzha, 2014, p. 62) and provoked concerns that were merely a reaction to a different sound quality, as it was new parameters of authenticity that questioned the authoritative style.

Moreover, the authenticity of the voice was invoked not only by a closer bind between voice and body, but also by a transformation in the very reality of the voice or, more precisely, in its realism. Whereas voice recording had previously been understood primarily as a means of capturing its reality, that is, reproducing how *Estrada* singing would sound in a live performance, the spread of technologies such as the microphone and magnetic tape displaced the “natural” vocal sound and its associated parameters of pitch. What had been required to fill both the concert venue and the song itself, now took on technologically fabricated sonic forms. The emergence of recording studios and the profession of the sound engineer (Gaklin, 1961) marked a transition from the realism of performance to a fabricated reality in which the voice could be modulated, edited, cut, and reassembled, layered across multiple tracks, and enhanced through reverberation and spatial effects. The advent of stereophonic sound in the late 1950s further transformed the perception of the song’s acoustic space by constructing its spatiality and positioning the voice within it. Despite the concerns of proponents of “natural” voice, technologically produced artificiality gradually came to be associated with a new form of authenticity: not with the truthfulness of immediate performance, but with the performance of immediacy. These modes did not replace one another; rather, they formed a field of possibilities for stating the voice with new technologies that were used differently by



singers that started to perform on *Estrada* before³ and after the mid-1950s⁴, which nevertheless does not form a clear-cut divide of vocal aesthetics and performance practices.

The effect of vocal intimacy, along with the voice’s “quiet” and “whispering” qualities, also registered gendered scripts characteristic on the one hand of the “crisis of masculinity” and the “preoccupation with men’s vulnerability” in popular culture of the 1960s (Dumančić, 2021, p. 12). It was characteristic on the other hand of the moral-ethical politics governing female behavior that was establishing particular links between appearance and identity (Gradszkova, 2007, p. 153). We would add that it was characteristic also of a use of voice that was framed within culturally accepted models of feminine modesty and restraint. In this sense, the authenticity of the voice was not a universal category; rather, it existed within a cultural context and the expectations regarding the newly formed connection between the bodily indexes of the voice and the external gender-specific manifestations that had to be signified – which included those related to fashion as it became increasingly important with television concerts and a widening *Estrada* iconography in magazines or on vinyl covers.

CONCLUSION

Even though the previously established realist relationship between the written word and voice were rearticulated in practice, on the discursive level the forces of Socialist Realism continued to operate through multiple agents of cultural politics. In an attempt to preserve the vocal norm, they referred to stable categories, associating certain sounds with discourse both about “mastery” of a voice that did not need technical support as well as about the respectful treatment of the written word. In contrast, whereas “small” microphone voices were deemed incompatible with the lyrics of Soviet writers as they demanded “big” and “expressive” gestures. A similar logic was fueling discussions about Soviet art in general, seeking to stabilize artistic norms in a transformative situation that Evgeny Dobrenko described as one in which “Socialist Realism was dying longer than it lived” (2025, p. 134). In fact, the preoccupation with *Estrada* voice was lingering up until the late 1960s, whereas later cultural politics found other, more tangible, ways of preserving Socialist Realism in Soviet popular music, institutionally as well as

³ Singers such as Nina Dorda, Kapitolina Lazarenko, Gelena Velikanova, Irina Brzhevskaya, and Klavdiya Shulzhenko were established *Estrada* soloist with individual concerts. This privilege was reserved for performers whose level of mastery had received institutional recognition. More often than not they relied on a comparatively unmodulated vocal sound. The same can be noted for performers associated with the folk genre, such as Lyudmila Zykina, Olga Voronets, and Ekaterina Shavrina: <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLTjuddYgJQTKjwRTaSc1WJQsXZUveZMjB>

⁴ Voices of younger performers such as Maya Kristalinskaya, Edita Piekha, Tamara Miansarova, Lidiya Klement, and Larisa Mondrus tended to be more processed and marked by a wider range of echo effects, reflecting the influence of the numerous artistic collaborations through which new *Estrada* fashions were shaped: <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLTjuddYgJQTKiDSi3G-fruCzMGwoavQB>



thematically (Zhurkova, 2025, p. 197). In fact, the tradition of vocal production techniques, “voice training,” and work on vocal delivery maintained its continuity in various ways. Wherever it was possible this continuity was upheld within specific music schools and under the guidance of particular masters. This is evident in the late Soviet era, especially in the turn to Soviet choral music or musical theater, whose representatives not only preserved the experience of the past but also participated in the mentoring of new *Estrada* stars.

Technologically mediated voices on *Estrada* departed from the predominantly representational logic confined to text towards a performative one, allowing the fabrication of authenticity in a way that did not reflect an already existing reality, but produced it within a horizon of cultural intelligibility. Sincerity, as a modality of authenticity, in this sense became possible as a cultural technology within the context of ideological transformations during the Thaw and for staging its emotional regime. Accordingly, the apparent emergence of a new vocal “authenticity” should not be understood as the expression of inner truth or sincerity. Instead, it resulted from the intersection of technological mediation, disciplinary techniques, and discursive expectations that produced authenticity on *Estrada* as an effect that could be recognized, circulated, and legitimated within Soviet popular culture. It is not assumed that the voices were in a way “liberated” from the authoritative style or that the new way of vocal appearance was a rebellion against it, as long as we remain in the framework of a state-sponsored popular culture. On the contrary, vocal performance, retaining its institutional embeddedness, acquired the ability to actualize an individualized presence and thus participate in the formation of new regimes of cultural recognition. This effect drew an invisible yet highly perceptible line between the former authoritative style, transferred into different forms, and the voice that gradually was saturating the communicative logic of the mainstream well beyond the Thaw.

This logic shaped *Estrada* song into a more autonomous cultural product, whereas the sociability of the voice – rooted in its specific materiality – provided the capacity to generate recognition, attachment, and response. Not only did it contribute to what later would become an *Estrada* stardom system, but also in the context of expanding mass culture facilitated the creation of a culturally recognizable stage persona. In the late Soviet context, it merged with the necessity of having a personality (*lichnost'*) with a parallel existence in the expanding media circuits – the press, visual production, rumors – extending the presence of the performer beyond the stage and creating new forms of proximity. In this sense, *Estrada* becomes “popular” by expanding its audience coverage and by organizing a feedback loop between performers and listeners. All in all, during the mid-1950s to 1960s, *Estrada* music underwent a complex transition from a mass genre to a popular one, linked to the reorientation of socialist production toward what was considered lovable, listenable and, ultimately, profitable.



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СВЕДЕНИЯ ОБ АВТОРЕ / THE AUTHOR

Никонов Арсений Семёнович
nikonov.a@hse.ru
ORCID 0009-0003-8978-965X

Arsenii Nikonov
nikonov.a@hse.ru
ORCID 0009-0003-8978-965X

Статья поступила 21 февраля 2026
одобрена после рецензирования 18 мая 2026
принята к публикации 10 июня 2026

Received: 21 February 2026
Revised: 18 May 2026
Accepted: 10 June 2026