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The First Performances and Concerts of the Soviet Theatre in the Fronts of the Civil War in Late 1918

## Abstract

The article reveals as yet little-studied problem of organizing performances and concerts in celebration of the first anniversary of the October Revolution on the fronts of the Civil War in November-December 1918. The author identifies reasons why this topic has fallen out of the sphere of scientific interest of national and foreign historians. The key reason springs from great enthusiasm for studying urban Soviet celebrations of October Revolution anniversaries, May Day demonstrations, etc., which allows to reveal the aims of Soviet leadership in using holidays to legitimize the new state and to enhance their prestige, as well as to throw light on the shaping

of masses to be not an independent actor in the celebrations, but an obedient performer of the festivities scriptwriters' and directors' will. Meanwhile, the study of the issue allows not only to shed light on the early period of organizing cultural and educational work within the ranks of the Workers 'and Peasants' Red Army, but also to reveal some features and difficulties of early Soviet holiday culture as an element of the emerging Soviet ideology and a means of interaction between the state apparatus and the population. The source base for the article has been provided by the archival fond of the People's Commissariat for Education of the RSFSR (fond A-2306) stored in the State Archive of the Russian Federation (GARF) and by the archival fond of the All-Russian Bureau of Military Commissars (fond 8) from the Russian State Military Archive (RFVA). Particular emphasis is placed on the analysis of the scope of concerts and performances; the article reveals theater troupes' reasons for choosing their repertoire and difficulties they faced when conducting concerts and performances. The author gives examples of organization and design of performances and concerts; these often included an opening speech followed by revolutionary songs and appeals, dramatic as well as satirical. Moreover, the author assesses the contents of concerts and performances and specifics of their execution by certain artists and troupe directors as reflected in their reports and explanatory notes and also in certificates and commendations from military and civilian institutions that hosted performers. The article ends in representation of main results of performances and concerts in Soviet military units and formations, comments of soldiers and their commanders on professionalism of the actors and importance of organizing these cultural events. It is suggested that the campaign to commemorate the October Revolution on the lines was a major factor in the formation of systematic cultural, educational, and ideological work in the Red Army.

### Keywords

Archive, historical sources, performances, concerts, holiday, October revolution, actors, front, Narkompros, Civil War in Russia.

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