

“A Singing Peasant”: An Historical Look at National Identity in Russian Music

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Introduction: 1991

On 19 August 1991, Russian tanks moved into the center of Moscow.¹ International telephone connections failed, and, during the three days that followed, Russians living abroad were glued to their transistors, trying to glean any snippet of information coming out of Moscow. But there was no news. The leaders of the coup made a so-called “Declaration of the Soviet Leadership” on state radio and television, after which only music was broadcast.² The repertoire may have been forgotten by some during the *perestroika* years, but was firmly installed in the memory of those who had grown up in Stalin’s era. There were choral songs in the pseudo-folk style developed by Vladimir Zakharov for the Pyatnitsky Choir (or, to give it its full name, *Gosudarstvenny Russky narodny khor imeni Pyatnitskogo*—“The Russian State Folk Choir Named after M.E. Pyatnitsky”). Never broadcast during the post-Brezhnev years, they were shaken free of mothballs and, in all probability, were intended to guarantee the survival of the Central Radio’s decision makers, should the leaders of the coup ever come to political power. Many tapes had been banned and destroyed by Moscow Radio, especially those recorded by émigré musicians like Cyril Kondrashin or Maxim Shostakovich, but not these. Somebody had made sure that they were carefully preserved, and they awaited their hour, of being taken out from under the wraps. In fact, the music broadcast was a clear indication of the fear felt by the radio officials, and their readiness to capitulate before the coup—which had, in fact, been anticipated by many from the late 1980s on, and which, perhaps, had a chance of succeeding.

The specific musical repertoire of Stalin’s Moscow belonged to the realm of “official” music, generally ignored by traditional musicology as being irrelevant both to art music and folklore, and even to popular music. “The contradiction of state/folk in the name of these choruses is telling,” noted Margarita Mazo.³ This simulated genre of *state* rather than *folk* music was not only underestimated, but instinctively avoided, being artistically poor and socially disagreeable. Yet, the repertoire has deep roots, and is deep-seated in the formation of a national identity in Russia during the last three centuries.

¹ The present article includes material from the author’s paper, “The Conflict between Nationalistic and Pluralistic Traditions in Russian Musical Narratives,” delivered at the Sixth Conference of the International Society for the Study of European Ideas (ISSEI, 16-21 August 1998, Haifa University: *Twentieth Century European Narratives: Tradition and Innovation*), and published in the CD ROM proceedings of the conference.

² Russian television also died. *The Swan Lake* was played in an endless loop.

³ Margarita Mazo, “The Present and the Unpredictable Past: Music and Musical Life of St. Petersburg and Moscow Since the 1960s,” *International Journal of Musicology* 5 (1996): 375. The entire article (pp. 371-400) is highly relevant to the present discourse.

The Complexity of the Russian Identity

The Russian identity is defined by the multiplicity of its ethnic and cultural sources. These include the Slavic tribes ruled by the Varangian princes, who established themselves in the Khazarian city of Kiev, only to surrender to the Greek Orthodox missionaries in the hope of receiving Byzantine political protection (which never materialized, as the Tartar-Mongol yoke so clearly showed). This pro-Byzantine step deprived Kievan Rus', and later Muscovy, of their place in the European community for many centuries. Russia's rulers helplessly watched the immense dispersion of power of the Russian Orthodox Church within the country, and the stream of Russian gold flowing to Byzantium.⁴ The fatal error became obvious with the fall of the Byzantine Empire in the fifteenth century. From then on, two interconnected processes—of Westernization and of secularization (release from Constantinople and the Church's financial supremacy)—developed in Russia, with varying degrees of success, until the irreversible results of the eighteenth century.

It is not surprising that two equally strong Russian identities were formed, long before Peter I (reigned 1689-1725). The first rested on the old pro-Byzantine values, and the second on secular and pro-European principles. Their coexistence was and still is a complex and dramatic rivalry, in which neither side has much chance of winning. So much has been said on this issue by historians and philosophers, that some of the following paragraphs should be regarded merely as general points of departure to various thoughts on Russian music.

During the last three centuries, this split in the Russian social consciousness could have been neutralized and diminished much more successfully, had it not been powerfully augmented by the existence of two capitals, Moscow and St. Petersburg.⁵ The foundation of St. Petersburg (at various historical periods, also known as Leningrad and Petrograd), which in every way was Russia's most European city, could not remove the Muscovite tradition from Russian culture—even when the politically pro-Byzantine route was no longer a factor. The constant conflict between these two cities became the symbol of two worldviews,⁶ and led to continuous tension within the Russian culture and value system.

Neither of the traditions was often seen as a pure reflection of its worldview—as, for instance, the argument between the Slavophiles and the Westernizers in the 1840s-'50s. Mostly, they tended to merge into each individual consciousness, both reflecting and causing this essential split in the Russian people. Russian national identity was largely dichotomous: looking backward to the pro-Byzantine, Greek Orthodox past, and looking ahead to the pro-Western secular future. The specific ratio between the two in each particular “present” always varies. Seeking a simple answer

⁴ In the 1430s, Grand Duke Vasily II succeeded in changing the order, and submitting metropolitan Moscow to secular rather than the previous patriarchal power. He did it *de facto*, without asking permission from Constantinople. Nikolai M. Nikolsky, *Istoria russkoy tserkvi* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo politicheskoy literatury; 3rd edn., 1983), 109.

⁵ Being distant from the western border, Moscow's only connection to Europe was by bad roads. Its geopolitical location was oriented on connections with the East, and did not allow it to function fully as the capital of a state desiring interaction with Western Europe. Peter I saw no other way but to establish a new, Western-oriented center. In fact, the first to realize this was Ivan IV (The Terrible), but Peter I was the one who solved the problem.

⁶ See for example Sydney Monas, “St Petersburg and Moscow as Cultural Symbols,” in *Art and Culture in Nineteenth-Century Russia*, ed. Theofanis George Stavrou (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983), 26-39.

is, therefore, pointless. I would argue that this controversy is not “the central dilemma of Russian identity,”⁷ but an immanent duality that should be accepted. The manifestations of this duality can be traced also both in earlier and later epochs; even the Schism of the seventeenth-eighteenth centuries had this duality as one of its basic rationales.

Russian history constitutes an alternation of reactionary and more liberal periods that (not always directly, but still) reflects the fluctuations between these two worldviews. At least from the seventeenth century on, every century reveals the same cycles. They begin in the '60s (of the seventeenth, eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries), which was always a period of liberal reforms and receptivity to the West (“thaws”). Those “thaws,” however, always came long after the historical need for them, and only served to hone the perpetual internal Russian discord. These periods were followed by a complex mix of reactions, socioeconomic achievements, wars and crises that again led to Russian winter-long reactionary periods that lasted into the middle of the following century—to be followed by a new “thaw.” If there is one thing that is certain, it is that nationalism, in a vast array of manifestations and doctrines (“official,” “reactionary,” “radical imperial,” “radical interethnic,” “moderate,” “liberal,” “civil,” “constructive,” “destructive” (Berdiaev), “blindly-instinctive,” “spiritual” (Il’in), “post-Communist” and others),⁸ is always an issue in Russian life. The different types of nationalism can also disagree between themselves, even when their doctrines are quite similar—as in Nicholas I’s “official nationality” and the Slavophiles’ principles.⁹ The dominant factors differed at various times, of course, over the centuries, but all the above types of nationalism were always present. During the “thaws,” for example, liberal nationalism dominated, whereas, during periods of reaction, it was reactionary nationalism that had the upper hand. All nationalistic elements, therefore, should be taken into consideration when Russian cultural identities are being discussed.

Construction of a National Identity and State Policy in Music

The necessity to construct a national identity emerged with the maturing of the Russian Empire and the beginning of Russia’s integration into the European community, i.e. from the time of Peter I.¹⁰ The task initially demanded a thorough study of the nation’s history. By the 1760s, most of the basic sources had been found and studied. The unlikable truth, pointing to the Varangian origins of the Rus’ian princes, and evidence that pre-Petrine Rus’ had been less civilized than Western Europe of the same time (also stated by scholars of German origin—G.F. Mueller and A.L. Schloezer), insulted national pride. M.V. Lomonosov, the Russian academician, poet and otherwise candid scholar of the natural sciences, was by no means ready to

⁷ Elena Hellberg-Hirn, *Soil and Soul: the Symbolic World of Russianness* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 1998), 48.

⁸ For a typology of Russian nationalism see for example, Alexey Fedorovich Zorin, “Russian Nationalism as Socio-political Phenomenon of Post-Soviet period,” abstract of the Ph.D. dissertation online (in Russian): http://www.bashedu.ru/autoreferat/aref2007_27.doc

⁹ Nicholas V. Riasanovski, *Russian Identities: A Historical Survey* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 154.

¹⁰ While the connections with the West in previous centuries, and especially the seventeenth, should not be underestimated, Peter I so radically developed them in every field that the beginning of Russia’s integration into the European community can indeed be related to his epoch.

accept these facts. His objection was strong enough to prevent the historical facts from receiving official recognition. By the end of the century, however, mostly due to Catherine II's diplomacy, a certain compromise had been achieved: the Norman origins of the Rus'ian early rulers was recognized, while pre-Petrine Russian culture had become mythologized.¹¹ Pro-Byzantine and pro-Western worldviews came to a certain concord.

In the process of forming an identity, the individual emulates a chosen ideal. He tries to compensate (truly or in his imagination) for the lacking features. When a society is forming its identity, it compares itself with cultural and political centers. All the eighteenth-century centers were to be found in Western Europe. What did Russia lack in comparison to them?

Firstly, it lacked a cultural legacy that creditably could be compared to the Western one. In order to achieve such a legacy, all the forces of the Russian Enlightenment gathered. Scholars, literati, and publishers worked hard throughout the 1760s-'90s to make a national cultural legacy available to the public. Initiatives from such opposite poles as the enlightened idealism of the Moscow mystic Freemason Nikolai Novikov and Empress Catherine II met to create Russia's cultural history. While Novikov inspired Mikhail Chulkov and others to collect Russian folklore, Catherine was relentlessly pressing Princess Dashkoff to establish the *Rossiyskaya Akademia*, together with N. Lvov, G. Derzhavin, Prince M. Shcherbatov, I. Boltin, Count A.I. Musin-Pushkin and others, to generate studies and publications on Russian language and literature.

Secondly, and this was—and remains—an insurmountable hurdle, Russia was not a member of the big West European family. The feudal, agrarian reality, together with the Greek Orthodox tradition and Cyrillic alphabet, has always segregated Russia from the West. Even today, this Byzantine legacy continues to contribute to the Russian duality. The problem with such a duality is that, when it exists within an individual, let's say a great artist who is open to both traditions equally, like Pushkin, Tolstoy, or Tchaikovsky, it can obviously be an advantage. However, when it is manifested in the extreme, and divides society, one side can become a manipulative tool suppressing the other.

The political leadership's concern regarding the creation of a Russian national identity, or, in a broader context, being able to govern its nation more successfully, inevitably led to the enactment of policy as a defensive tool. Such policy, with its system of censorship, bans and prohibitions, had affected musical life in Russia from the earliest existence of the nation. Pagan songs and rituals were persecuted in Kievan Rus' by the Church from the eleventh-twelfth centuries, until the official abolition of the entire institution of national minstrelsy (*Skomorokhi*) in mid-seventeenth-century Muscovy by Peter I's father, Tsar Alexei Mikhaylovich.¹²

¹¹ For a detailed account of eighteenth-century historiography see Hans J. Rogger, *National Consciousness in Eighteenth Century Russia* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press; 2nd edn., 1969), Chapter V, "The Uses of History," 86-252. See also James Cracraft, *The Petrine Revolution in Russian Culture* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004), Introduction: Historiography, 1-12.

¹² Remarkably, however, pagan folklore was not eradicated; it continues to survive until today (although ghettoized in remote and isolated village communities), thereby symbolizing, in the Russian culture, the indestructibility of the Russian Self. See more about the coexistence of pagan and Christian beliefs in Russian folklore in M. Mazo, "'We Don't Summon Spring in the Summer': Traditional Music and Beliefs of the Contemporary Russian Village." In *Christianity and the Arts in Russia*, ed. William Brumfield and M. Velimirovich (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 73-94.

Musical instruments are forbidden in the Greek Orthodox Church. This circumstance, coupled with the abolition of the minstrelsy, prevented the existence of an instrumental art-music tradition in Russia prior to the secularization of the state. As a result, Russia lost centuries in the development of an instrumental music repertoire. The gap between Russian and West European music was only closed in the nineteenth century, with Tchaikovsky's advent on the scene.

Even such a technical matter as musical notation was censured once because of the considered possibility of secret codes being concealed within; and this happened as late as the nineteenth century.¹³ Policy in Russia in the Soviet era dictated more musical prohibitions than during the entire history of the state. In various periods between 1917 and 1991, overt and covert bans related to the technique of dodecaphony, the composers of the New Viennese School, Mahler, Richard Strauss, Stravinsky, Rachmaninoff, Shostakovich, jazz, Russian church and paraliturgical music, Jewish music, songs of certain singers and songwriters, rock music, songs of Russian emigrants, and so on. The last seventeen years have been the first period when culture in general, and music in particular, have existed autonomously.

The thousand-year history of prohibitions in Russian music from 988 to 1991 is a fascinating topic to research. It is quite obvious, however, that these prohibitions mainly targeted the pro-European tradition.

Musical Icons of Russian National Identity

Not all composers are willing to express their national identity through the use of a national idiom. This does not mean that their identity cannot express itself through other means, even unknowingly—a classic example is Scriabin, as demonstrated by Taruskin.¹⁴ Those art-music composers who do seek to express their national identity through a musical idiom—both in Russia and in other East European countries—usually address one or two of the cultural super-icons: folklore or/and religious chant. These two icons are generally recognized as being of ancient origin, thus confirming their authenticity in the public eye. They can be recognized by the audience, thus revealing the composer's intention to identify himself with his nation. Both icons have received various interpretations. The waves of general interest in them reflect the fluctuations in history, politics, and public consciousness.

On the other hand, not only is it *unnecessary*, but it is also *insufficient*, to make use of these icons in order to be a national composer. Indeed, for example, what about Beethoven's "Razumovsky" quartets, Op. 59? A thorough investigation needs to be made, not in seeking out icons that have or have not been used by composers, but, rather, in an extramusical context, and in the almost impalpable problem of organicism in elaborating folk or national chant idioms. While I can't claim to contribute to an understanding of the latter problems, I do offer some aspects of these super-icons worthy of discussion.

¹³ Nicholas V. Riasanovsky, *Russian Identities...*, 148.

¹⁴ See the chapter "Scriabin and the Superhuman: A Millennial Essay," in Richard Taruskin, *Defining Russia Musically: Historical and Hermeneutical Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 308-59.

Folk Song

The first recognition of folk song as a symbol of national identity can be traced to the late 1730s, when individual attempts were made by foreign musicians (Reinhardt Keiser, Domenico Dall'Oglio and Luigi Madonis) to compose instrumental pieces on Russian themes. The next milestone, in 1754, was the court production of a Russian-text opera (by A. Sumarokov, with music by the Italian F. Araja, and performed by Russian singers). However, the first massive effort to create a national identity through music was made only in the era of Catherine II. The great Empress established a policy of official nationalism (not merely as a manipulative tool to govern Russian society, but also to justify her imperialism). This effectively also served the Russian rulers who succeeded her (cf. the similar “official nationality of Nicholas I”) for another two centuries, as can clearly be seen today. She saw a special significance in developing cultural symbols of nationalism. Hence, her musical policy in general and her operatic libretti in particular convey an obviously nationalistic drift, inspiring folklore-oriented music scores.

By the end of Catherine’s reign, the folk song and the visual image of a contented singing peasant were considered to be the finest symbols of a peaceful state, prosperous under her wise reign. These figures appeared not only on the opera stages, but in the engraved titles of folk song collections, and were also reflected in salon repertoires. Russian song with variations was the prevailing genre in early Russian instrumental music (late eighteenth century). Everyone knew that these symbols were imaginary, and did little to reflect the gloomy reality, but the Empress had little choice. Her idealistic attempts to improve the social order with respect to the natural rights of all men (the Legislative Commission of 1767) only led to a barely contained peasant uprising (the Pugachev Rebellion) in 1768-74. The French Revolution of 1789 only convinced her of the necessity to strengthen her ideological efforts.

Remarkably, “toward the end of the eighteenth century, the gentry intelligentsia discovered the peasant as a repository of virtues lacking both in the West and in the Westernized elite of Russia.”¹⁵ Idealization of the Russian peasant developed from two directions: from Catherine’s policy and from the revolutionary wing of the Russian Enlightenment (Radishchev and his milieu), united by the general ideas of the Enlightenment era (mostly German and French). (This should not surprise us, considering that both belonged to the same intellectual camp; cf. Nicholas Riasanovsky¹⁶). Both flattered the peasantry: the first—to justify serfdom, the second to convince society of the necessity for emancipation. The first created a myth of prosperity, the second—an object of sympathy.

Late eighteenth-century Russian opera (comic, as it was) and collections of folk songs greatly contributed to the creation of this cultural icon—a singing peasant. The Empress’s encouragement of these endeavors is transparent. Her most favored house composer was Vasily Pashkevich, whom she especially appreciated for his skillful “state/folk” operatic style.¹⁷ Her *chamber guslist*,¹⁸ Vasily Trutovsky, and her

¹⁵ Robert C. Williams, *Russia Imagined: Art, Culture, and National Identity, 1840-1995* (New York: Peter Lang, 1999), 5.

¹⁶ Nicholas V. Riasanovsky, *Russian Identities...*, 165.

¹⁷ Contrary to Stalin’s “state/folk” composers like Vladimir Zakharov or Ivan Dzerzhinsky, who were ignored by Soviet musicologists, Pashkevich was a highly respected subject of research as a representative of pre-nineteenth century nationalist orientation. However, more objective research, dissociated from official Soviet nationalistic bias, conducted by Evangeline Vassiliades, showed that

court consultant in the humanities, Nikolai Lvov, gathered the first ethnographically-oriented collections.¹⁹ Generally speaking, the relatively large number of eighteenth-century collections (including those without music) established a cornerstone of national identity for Russia—then and far into the nineteenth century.

Many genres were presented in these collections. Although the difference between rural and urban folklore had already been perceived and formulated, the principal demarcation between them had barely been touched upon. This was natural, since the folk population in the young city of St. Petersburg had not yet become transformed into a purely urban sector, and the folk population of Moscow was always close to the numerous noble estates of the Moscow environs. At this time, outdoor singing by the folk was a constant element of the urban soundscape. Yet, there was a telling exception with regard to folklore genres. Ivan Khandoshkin included the words *starinnye rysskie* (ancient Rus’ian) and not *rossiiskie* (in the modern sense of Russian) songs in the title of his violin variations cycle in 1783, the same year that *The Russian Academy* was opened. Some of these songs were not ancient Rus’ian at all, but quite modern Ukrainian, but the extramusical reference was what mattered.²⁰

Thus a pro-Byzantine, or, more precisely, a pre-Byzantine identity attempted to express itself in music—or at least in the extramusical device of definition. Indeed, at that period, intellectuals of the Russian Enlightenment (N. Lvov, Princess E. Dashkoff) realized how strong the presence of pagan elements was in Russian folklore.²¹ A high regard for pre-Christian pagan folklore went together with the cult of Ancient Greek mythology. The contemporaneous supposition that Rus’ian (that of the “northern peoples”) folklore was of more ancient origin than that of the Greeks, was a seductive hypothesis for Russians.²² As Walicki noted, Catherine herself maintained theories that anticipated Pan-Slavism.²³

This pagan Rus’ian symbol of the peasant, therefore, received an absolute value, which, in turn, ensured its survival for the epochs that followed as a universal cultural symbol of Russianness for thinkers of various persuasions, and for politicians of different orientations. It also explains the continued significance of this symbol,

Pashkevich was far from being the most significant creator of Russian expression in late eighteenth-century orchestral music. See Evangeline Vassiliades, “Overture and Symphony in Eighteenth-Century Russia” (New York University, 1977), Ph.D. dissertation.

¹⁸ A chamber guslist is a court chamber musician, who plays a *gusli*, an ancient Russian folk instrument.

¹⁹ Mikhail Lobanov, “Trutovsky,” in *Muzikal’ny Peterburg: XVIII vek, entsiklopedichesky slovar*, 5 vols., ed. Anna L. Porfirieva (St Petersburg: Rossiyskiy Institut Istorii Iskusstv, 1997–2002); “Kompozitor,” Vol. 3, 1999, pp. 170-74; Victor Lapin, “Rukopisnaya versia ‘Sobrania’ Lvova—Pracha (Eshche raz k istorii legendarnogo sbornika),” in *Iz fondov Kabinetu rukopisey Rossiyskogo Instituta Istorii Iskusstv*, ed. G.V. Kopytova (St. Petersburg: Rossiyskiy Institut Istorii Iskusstv, 2003), Vol. 2, pp. 32-52.

²⁰ See Boris Volman, *Russkie pechatnye noty XVIII veka* (Eighteenth-Century Russian Music Publications) (Leningrad: Muzgiz, 1957), 74; Anne Mischakoff, *Khandoshkin and the Beginning of Russian String Music* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press; 2nd edn., 1983), 21-22; Marina Ritzarev, *Eighteenth-century Russian Music* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2006), 195-99.

²¹ Margarita Mazo, Preface to *A Collection of Russian Folk Songs by Nikolai Lvov and Ivan Prach*, ed. Malcolm Hamrick Brown (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1987), 79-82. Martha and Catherine Wilmot, *The Russian Journals of Martha and Catherine Wilmot*, ed. The Marchioness of Londonderry and H.M. Hyde (London: Macmillan and Co., 1934).

²² Mazo, 1987, 79.

²³ Andrzej Walicki, *A History of Russian Thought: From the Enlightenment to Marxism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 7.

remarkably *after* the 1861 Emancipation, when flirtation with folklore was no longer needed by the autocracy or the dissidents for political purposes. The symbol then shifted from the political dimension to that required by the Russian intelligentsia's ethical and aesthetic quest—and was musically established in the trademark language made familiar by the classical works of *Moguchaya Kuchka* (*The Mighty Five*).²⁴

The influence of the symbol continued to flourish in the twentieth century, when pan-Slavism and Eurasianism arose, and anthropological research attracted broad cultural interest in pagan societies. Ancient Eurasian and Scythian images began to haunt the imaginations of Stravinsky, Rachmaninoff (abandoned ballet project) and Prokofiev. “The new folklore wave” of the 1960s, including Lucian Prigozhin, Sergei Slonimsky, Boris Tishchenko, Valery Gavrilin, Nikolai Sidelnikov, Rodion Shchedrin and others of their contemporaries, revived *The Five's* cult of Russian village folklore, naturally modifying it by means of all possible modern compositional techniques. The new generation itself went to the village folk to collect inspirations and folklore. Their twentieth-century ears heard its microtones, and considered the previous “well-tempered” style of its elaboration to be non-organic. They ambitiously thought that only they knew how to penetrate the ingenious spirit of the national soul without distorting the authenticity of the folklore. Interestingly, they proved and confirmed what Robert Ridenour had defined as a symbiotic association between nationalism and modernism, rooted in the *Kuchka* ideology and practice.²⁵ They even applied themselves to a study of contemporary Western music (forbidden in the official curricula of Soviet conservatories during the 1950s), as did the *Kuchka*, studying Berlioz and Liszt.²⁶

The Split

So far, we have discussed folklore between the 1760s to the 1960s. What happened midway, in the 1860s, was a recognition of the dramatic split of folklore into its rural and urban elements. Indeed, the nineteenth-century environments of both capitals produced sounds as different from those of the eighteenth century, as the twentieth-century sounds differed from those of the nineteenth. The lower classes had become urbanized. Accordingly, their music became increasingly influenced by the popular genres. Naturally, as Marina Frolova-Walker formulates,

the most important reassessment occurred in the 1860s, when the rural/urban opposition arose (and, coordinated with this, old/new, Russian/westernized, pure/contaminated, and modal/tonal); the only body of peasant songs worthy of representing the Russian national identity, as defined by Slavophile doctrines, came to be those of supposedly pre-Petrine origin.²⁷

²⁴ In detail on this topic see Malcolm Hamrick Brown, “Native Song and National Consciousness in Nineteenth-Century Russian Music,” in *Art and Culture in Nineteenth-Century Russia*, ed. Theofanis George Stavrou (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983), 57-84.

²⁵ Robert C. Ridenour, *Nationalism, Modernism, and Personal Rivalry in Nineteenth-Century Russian Music* (UMI Research Press, 1981).

²⁶ Sergei Slonimsky, “Balakirev—pedagog,” in *Sovetskaya muzyka* 4 (1990): 9-12.

²⁷ Marina Frolova-Walker, “‘National in Form, Socialist in Content’: Musical Nation-Building in the Soviet Republics,” in *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 51:3 (1998): 343.

The new hierarchy in musical ideology that was constructed in the nineteenth-twentieth centuries, therefore, was still based on the eighteenth-century concept of national identity—a singing peasant. During the hundred years between the two “thaws” of the ’60s—in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—peasant folklore was increasingly promoted, to the point of deification. This can probably be explained by the contemporary Slavophile dominance, and also by the fact that stereotypical binary thinking posited that urban folklore had been thrust aside merely for being different. I don’t believe that those who nurtured the concept of the angelically pure Russian soul represented by rural folklore, would seriously deprive the growing national urban sector (represented by urban song) of its ethical value. Indeed, how would he prove its inferiority?

While the collection of rural folklore proliferated, forcing ethnographers to penetrate ever deeper into Russia as the peasant population shrank, urban folklore remained neglected and marginalized. Even if collections of urban songs existed (and such collections are unknown to me until recent decades, and even they are without music),²⁸ historiographically they had never been in the musical education curricula and were not included in the national treasures of Russian culture. The entire gamut of Russian, Gypsy and hybrid “cruel” romances, guitar ballads, repertoires of singers-songwriters, limericks, etc., is outside the mainstream of ethnomusicological research and cultural respect. This was not solely a Russian convention. By East European consensus, this sphere has been silently bestowed with negative connotations.²⁹ Despite resting on Rousseauesque and Herderian beliefs in rural authenticity and urban “corruption,” this association was best voiced by Bela Bartók in the early twentieth century.

Yet, in its practice, Russian art music does not directly reflect this view. While some nationalistically attuned composers excelled in the cultivation of rural folklore, the urban song and dance attracted composers of no less significance, such as Glinka, Anton Rubinstein and Tchaikovsky. No one dares to question Glinka-Tchaikovsky’s Russianness (Rubinstein is mostly avoided because of nationalistic prejudices).³⁰ But no one rushes to justify the Russianness of Russian urban romance.

The vague and endlessly complex concept of *national* includes no less, if no more, extramusical than musical symbols. To be closer to reality, I would suggest studying the more palpable concept of *vernacular*, which is a more basic element of *national*. In the following, I shall present my version of the *vernacular* within the musical concept.

²⁸ The following reference was suggested by my colleague Izaly Zemtsovsky, to whom I am grateful. There are no publications entitled “urban songs,” but there are various publications of urban songs that include songs of Russian workers, students, prisoners or the so-called “cruel” romances. There are numerous popular collections like “Pesni i romansy russkikh poetov” (Rozanov, Gusev, etc.), musical anthologies “Akh, eti chernye glaza!” or “Gori, gori, moia zvezda!” (collected by Svetlana Pyiankova [Smolensk, 2004]), songbook with music collected by L. Moiseeva (Moscow, 1996), songbooks without music, like limericks, collected by Svetlana Adon’eva and a grandiose compendium, *Sovremenny gorodskoy folklore*, ed. Sergei Nekliudov (Moskva: Rossiysky Gosudarstvenny Gumanitarny Universitet, 2003).

²⁹ I thank my Croatian colleague Zdenka Weber for this notion, shared with me at the fruitful session of the Sixth ISSEI conference in Haifa, 1998.

³⁰ M. Frolova-Walker interestingly accounts for the lack of interest in Rubinstein in Russian historiography as resulting from his German orientation in compositional principles. See her “Against Germanic Reasoning: The Search for a Russian Style of Musical Argumentation,” in *Musical Construction of Nationalism: Essays on the History and Ideology of European Musical Culture 1800-1945*, ed. Harry White and Michael Murphy (Cork University Press, 2001), 104-22.

What is “Vernacular” in Music?

Vernacular (in this case also *national*) in music, as well as in other cultural symbolic systems, is a relative concept that can be reduced to “vernacular/national is what people think is such.”³¹ It includes their knowledge of the origins of one *objêt d’art* (symbol) or another, but this knowledge is more traditional (culturally or politically constructed) than scientific. While the scientific knowledge is always subject to change, the traditional knowledge remains steadfast. The cultural borrowings revealed by scholars are most reluctantly recognized by the broad public, which abhors the demythologization of its values (again, symbols). Elena Hellberg-Hirn opens her book on the symbolic world of Russianness with the following words:

The tsar and the samovar, the icon and the axe, the onion-shaped church dome, a *troika* speeding through an endless steppe—the list of stereotyped images that convey the idea of Russianness is long, but in the end it says more about the image-makers than about Russia and the Russians.³²

Yet, all the symbols mentioned above, with the possible exception of *troika*, are rooted in other cultures. Even *samovar*, known in Western culture as a purely Russian artifact/word (see the *Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology*), has a much more interesting history. While it is true, phonetically, that it coincides perfectly with the Russian words *samo* (it/self) and *var* (boiling), it is also a calque from the ancient Latin word *authepsa* indicating a machine used for boiling.³³ Moreover, most central and west Asian cultures have similar words for the same artifact, with connected semantic significations of its elements. For example, in Persian, the word could be interpreted similarly—but the opposite way around: as *samo* (boiling on a low flame) and *var* (self). Just to add to the historical confusion, it is believed that the first samovar was brought to Russia from Holland by Peter the Great himself.³⁴

There are folktales, folkways, gods, artifacts, crafts, songs and entire repertoires shared by different peoples, each of which considers them their own. An individual perceives as vernacular music the entire soundscape of his early years. He learns this somehow from his education and/or indoor music-making. How is he supposed to know what is authentic for his community and what has been recently (or even currently) borrowed? For the carriers of a culture it is sufficient to have received these symbols from the previous generation, which makes them authentic, “ours.” Vernacular as a base for national, therefore, is not only what is inherited (*was* ours), but what is adopted (*became* ours) because we identify ourselves with it. National is

³¹ See more on this subject in my articles, “The Augmented Second, Chagall’s Silhouettes and the Six-Pointed Star,” in *Musica Judaica* 18 (5766/2005-06): 43-69 and, forthcoming, “Toward the Concept of Vernacular in Music,” in *Jews and Their Musical Experiences*, ed. E. Avitsur, M. Ritzarev, E. Seroussi (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press).

³² Elena Hellberg-Hirn, *Soil and Soul...*, 6.

³³ See Maks Fasmer, *Etimologicheskyy slovar’ russkogo yazyka* (Moscow: Progress, 1987), Vol. 3, 553.

³⁴ See Hellberg-Hirn, 159.

often more than the merely geographical, but rather a *historico-geographical* concept.³⁵

To distinguish between these two major subcategories of the vernacular in music—the first inherited from previous generations, and the second recently borrowed—I suggest subdividing them into *phylo-vernacular* and *onto-vernacular*. The terms allude to phylogenesis and ontogenesis, respectively. *Phylo-vernacular* can be applied to a corpus of musical folklore maintained by a certain rural community and associated with its language, rituals, way of life and landscape. The tradition is oral, and there is no separation between performer and audience. It is resistant to influences from the outside, and remains unchangeable throughout the generations. The term *onto-vernacular* refers to folklore maintained by an urban population, and implies an ongoing process of interaction between the initial corpus and popular music, openness to influences and borrowings, a separation from ritual, a distance between performer and audience, and the development of written folklore. By definition, it is changeable.

What is not often realized is that both subcategories can be interchangeable, although not symmetrically. When village songs move to the city, they lose their connection with ritual, with community, sometimes even with language. Purists are usually upset to hear them “corrupted”; but this is the most natural and common process of conversion of the *phylo-vernacular* into the *onto-vernacular*. There can also be a reverse process, although the only example known to me is that of the corpus of *onto-vernacular* modern urban Russian songs (including, for example, Blanter’s “Katyusha” and Dunaevsky’s film-songs), which took on a typically *phylo-vernacular* existence in Israel, where they were translated into Hebrew and sung chorally by the rural kibbutz communes.³⁶ They acquired such attributes of the *phylo-vernacular* as variability, contrafactums, etc.

While the *phylo-vernacular* can easily be shown as authentic, the *onto-vernacular* cannot, remaining in the category of something secondary, inferior and suspiciously dubious. While the first symbolizes an ethically irreproachable primordial national character, the second is perceived as being unreliable and lacking cultural stamina. Who decides, however, that the second is worse? Well, Rousseau did. Radishchev did too, for different reasons, but with the same purpose of idealizing the rustic character. Remarkably, the idea gave a highly powerful creative impulse to contemporary composer Sergei Slonimsky, who wrote one symphony after another (from the late 1950s to the mid-1980s) in order to present the “purity” of folk pentatonic images in opposition to the “corruptness” symbolized by popular urban dances and jazz.³⁷ Nikolai Karetnikov (in *Mystery*, 1971) and Alfred Schnittke (in *History of Doctor Faustus*, 1982-83), though in other contexts, similarly used the tango genre as a *topoi* of evil.³⁸

What has been very important for all types of Russian nationalism in every epoch is not only the setting of village against city, but also the promotion of *singing*, the vocal expression, characteristic of Russian folklore as opposite to *playing* instrumental music. But Russian musical folklore was not always vocal. And Rimsky-

³⁵ On national identity as a historical phenomenon see E. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780 – Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge University Press, 1990).

³⁶ Had such a phenomena occurred on Russian soil, it would have been a dream come true for the Slavophiles of the 1840s—as well as for Georgy Sviridov in the 1960s.

³⁷ The composer continued writing symphonies, with a special intenseness in 2003-04.

³⁸ See Marina Rytsareva, *Sergei Slonimsky* (Leningrad: Sovetsky Kompozitor, 1991); Valentina Kholopova & Evgenia Chigareva, *Alfred Schnittke* (Moscow: Sovetsky Kompozitor, 1990), 193-96.

Korsakov's *Sadko* is a wonderful example, celebrating Russian pre-Christian instrumental folklore. Russian folklore became mostly vocal following the ban by the Church and State, which exiled the *skhomorokhi* and destroyed their instruments. Although the *gusli* survived until the eighteenth century and the *balalaika* is still used (though not without artificial effects), it does not change the principal setting: vocal against instrumental, song against dance, old against new and, finally, national against foreign. This refers not only to nationalism but goes further back to the medieval Greek Orthodox campaign against paganism from inside the country and the "Latin heresy" from outside (probably, partly, because of the Catholic Church's use of musical instruments). In general, the entire approach is somewhat pro-Byzantine oriented.

Religious Chant and its Becoming an Icon

Church music, or, more precisely, ancient chant, is the second super-icon of Russian national identity. Eighteenth-century art music in Russia completely ignored chant as a possible cultural symbol of the nation. The chant remained firmly within church music practice, although the styles of its settings changed, reflecting the gradual Westernization of Russian musical mentality throughout the seventeenth-eighteenth centuries.³⁹ Remarkably, the late-eighteenth-century harmonic choral style of chant-setting appeared to be a turning point in the work of the leading Russian composer of church music, Dmitry Bortniansky (1751-1825). During his early period (1770s-'80s), Bortniansky set the chant in a Westernized manner, using functional harmony, but, in the time of Alexander I, he began to stress the modal elements. (Eventually, in the nineteenth century, he was criticized for the first and praised for the second.) At least two related reasons could have caused Bortniansky's shift. The first was the Emperor's own interest in mysticism (from 1813 on, and increasing by 1819), strengthened by the influence of Count Alexei Kirillovich Razumovsky (not Andrei Kirillovich, Beethoven's patron), the most clerical Minister of Education in Russia (1810-16, who introduced theology as a major discipline in all the educational institutions). The second, of course, was the early Romantic period, which radically opposed enlightened atheism or Deism, and played a significant role in idealizing medieval Christianity. Bortniansky's new trend gained momentum, but still in the framework of church music.

Glinka, in 1856, seems to have been the first to consider the idea of using Russian chant in art music blended with the Western polyphonic tradition; he did not live to see the realization of this concept, dying a few months later.⁴⁰ It is also very unlikely that his intention was secular art music, but rather church or paraliturgical music—to which we will return.

³⁹ Marina Ritzarev, "Chant and Polyphony in Russia: Historical Aspects," in *The Dr Martinelli Music Collection* (KU Leuven, University Archives); *Musical Life in Collegiate Churches in the Low Countries and Europe; Chant and Polyphony, the Yearbook of Alamire Foundation* 4, ed. Bruno Bouckaert and Eugeen Schreurs (Belgium, Leuven: Musicpublishers Alamire, 2002), 357-68.

⁴⁰ "I am almost convinced that the western Fugue can be united with the *conditions of our music* through the bonds of legal matrimony." According to the context, in all probability he was referring to religious chant (M.I. Glinka to K.A. Bulgakov, Berlin, 3/15 November 1856, in Mikhail Glinka, *Literaturnye proizvedeniya i perepiska, Polnoe sobranie sochineniy*, comp. and ed. A.S. Rozanov, [Moscow: Muzyka, 1977], Vol. 2 b, 180).

There were two circumstances in the nineteenth century that stimulated research into Russian church music and led to discussion on preserving its legacy. Over the course of many centuries, the ancient Byzantine chant, implanted in Russia in the eleventh-twelfth centuries, underwent profound changes in its monody. These changes resulted from its interaction with folklore, the variability inevitable in such a vast country, the influence of polyphony, and Ukrainization, etc.—not to mention the dramatic history of polyphony in Russian church music.

Nineteenth-century Russian nationalists (mainly Alexei Fedorovich Lvov, Director of the Imperial Court Cappella, supported by prominent Slavophile, Prince Vladimir Odoevsky), perceiving it as “corruption,” initiated a campaign for research and publication of the original sources. In all probability, they were not aware at that time of Patriarch Nikon’s similar attempts to unify and print the chant two centuries earlier (Nikon’s reforms were one of the decisive factors behind the Russian Schism, *Raskol*).⁴¹ Lvov failed, but did stimulate a fruitful discussion from which there eventually developed a serious field of research conducted by authoritative scholars, the first of whom was the priest Dmitry Razumovsky.⁴²

The second circumstance was the anonymous publication in 1878 of the “Project for Printing Ancient Russian *Kryuki* Chants, Considered in Two Main Contexts: Old Believers’ Churches and Great Russian Churches.” The topic of this publication, which was ascribed to Bortniansky, also attracted the interest of musicians.

While scholars had always known that the chant was Byzantine in origin, and not Russian, because of its long presence on Russian soil the general population believed that it was Russian. This, of course, reflected the success of Nicholas I’s doctrine, uniting Orthodoxy, autocracy and nationality in a homogeneous worldview that was intended to dominate nineteenth-century Russian society. In any culture, the old borrowed/implanted symbols obtain citizenship by right of age—even gods in Ancient Greece adapted from Asia Minor or Egypt. All the ancient symbols become a part of the nation, regardless of their origin.

Since the changes that occurred in the chant over the course of time resembled the process of transforming the *phylo-vernacular* into the *onto-vernacular* in folklore, a similar purist approach was shaped: the ancient chant was endowed with an absolute value while the later one—liturgical, and especially paraliturgical, music—was always subject to critique.⁴³ The latter, however, did begin to serve as a cultural icon in nineteenth-century Russian music (Musorgsky, Tchaikovsky).

It was only at the beginning of the twentieth century, that Rachmaninoff revealed the great potential of chant for art-music and creatively applied it in his oeuvre, though not without consulting Alexander Kastalsky, the composer and leading authority in the chant and chant/folklore interaction. Interrupted by Stalin’s “cultural revolution,” the trend was picked up only in the 1960s, by the same generation that developed the “new folklore wave.” The gradual liberation of Russian church art from Soviet censorship encouraged the composers’ creativity, and ancient chant (whose authenticity had been confirmed by scholars) was amalgamated with modern techniques, in parallel with the rural folklore. Thus both super-icons of Russian

⁴¹ This project of the 1650s had been completed by the Synod in 1772.

⁴² Alexander S. Belonenko, “Is istorii russkoy muzykal’noy textologii,” in *Problemy russkoy muzykal’noy textologii (po pamyatnikam russkoy khorovoy muzyki XII–XVIII vekov)* (Leningrad: Gosudarstvennaya konservatoriya, Gosudarstvennyy Institut teatra, muzyki i kinematografii, 1983), 173–94.

⁴³ Glinka, Odoevsky, Serov, and Tchaikovsky all left evidence of this.

national identity, in their celebrated *phylo-vernacular* purity, worked together in the late twentieth century. This somehow constituted an “unofficial nationalism” of the 1960-’80s, with its overtones of belated protest against the “cultural revolution” that had deprived modern Russian culture of natural creative processes.⁴⁴ On a larger historical scale, it can be viewed as one of the neo-Romantic expressions of Western culture: the “new folklore wave” was far from being an exclusively Russian phenomenon.

Icons and Nation

Russian composers probably believe that these icons symbolize the spiritual core of their nation. They do not realize that these symbols have little to do with their nation today. Indeed, “icons” in Russian sense serve them as a religious tool in their belief system.

There is no nation without history. But there is no history without change. Nations change. The dynamics of this change vary, perhaps, in different periods. To symbolize these changes by the use of museumized thousand-year-old icons is no less an abstract glass-beads game than, say, dodecaphony. I permit myself to hypothesize about the possible reasons for this obvious and well-known predilection of Russian composers to use these icons.

Music has always served two main, sometimes synthesized, functions—social manipulation (first and foremost through religious rituals)⁴⁵ and secular entertainment (both popular and elitist). By the late eighteenth to early nineteenth centuries, Christian paraliturgical music, both in Western Europe and in Russia, had reached the status of secularized high art music. In Europe, this continues uninterrupted despite the general secularization of European society following the Enlightenment era. Cherubini, Beethoven, Rossini, Mendelssohn, Berlioz, Schubert, Dvořák, Massenet, Liszt, Brahms, Verdi, Fauré, Satie, Penderecki, Lloyd Webber (the list is very long, including many composers who are less known today) contributed to this repertoire.

In Russia, however, it was different. In the first half of the nineteenth century, for various reasons, national religious music was marginalized from art music, and strictly ghettoized in its function as church liturgy.⁴⁶ As a result, nineteenth-century Russian composers did not write paraliturgical music, with the exception of Anton Rubinstein, who wrote his oratorios and sacred operas from 1858-93, and a few works by other composers.

⁴⁴ See the above-mentioned article by Mazo, “The Present and the Unpredictable Past...; Marina Ritzarev, “Sergei Slonimsky and Russian ‘Unofficial Nationalism’ of 1960-80s,” in *Schostakovitsch und die Folgen: Russische Music zwischen Anpassung und Protest* (Shostakovich and the Consequences: Russian Music Between Adaptation and Protest), ed. E. Kuhn, J. Nemtsov and A. Wehrmeyer (Studia slavica musicologica, Bd. 32) (Berlin: Verlag Ernst Kuhn, 2003), 187-210; Elena Dubinets, “Music in Exile: Russian Émigré Composers and Their Search for National Identity,” in *Slavonica* 13/1 (April 2007): 57-67.

⁴⁵ See the material from the international conference: *Music and Manipulation: On The Social Uses and Social Control of Music* (Karolinska Institutet, in cooperation with the Swedish Artists and Musicians Interests Organization (SAMI). Stockholm, 17-19 September 1999. <http://www.sami.se/manipulation/>

⁴⁶ The paraliturgical genre of spiritual concerto that developed intensively in Russia from the mid-seventeenth century ceased to exist with the end of Alexandrian era. See Marina Ritzarev, *Eighteenth-century Russian Music*.

According to the context of Glinka's correspondence in his later years, he could well have gone this path had he lived longer—or had he studied counterpoint earlier. In this case, Glinka could have been the first; the genre would have been blessed as a national classical element, and its development would have continued in the work of the next generation. (But then, in the 1860s, counterpoint in all probability would also have been refined and the glorious *Moguchaya Kuchka* [*The Mighty Five*], whose lack of training was sublimated into populist ideology, would not have needed to exist.)

Beethoven addressed Mozart's fugue in 1823;⁴⁷ Rimsky-Korsakov became a student of counterpoint in 1872; Tchaikovsky, who was fortunate to have been brought up within the German curricula introduced by Anton Rubinstein, nevertheless went on to perfect himself in this genre as late as 1892.⁴⁸

Glinka's belated decision to study counterpoint with Siegfried Dehn was connected neither with his operatic nor with his symphonic skills. He must have needed it for serious paraliturgical choral compositions. As to precisely which kind of composition—the only thing we know for sure is Alexander Serov's comment in Glinka's Obituary.⁴⁹ Glinka planned to apply counterpoint style to Russian Orthodox *a cappella* compositions,⁵⁰ which he had begun to write earlier while working at the Imperial Court Cappella, and which were distinguished neither by skillful texture nor individuality. It seems likely that the idea came to him when he realized the similarity between the medieval modes and the modality of Russian chant. Accordingly, if Western counterpoint was based on Gregorian monody, why not apply it also to Russian Orthodox chant?⁵¹ It should not be excluded, however, that writing in the grand oratorio genre of Western tradition could also have been his vision. His letters of his later years never fail to mention his fascinating experiences with Bach's *Mass* B minor, Handel's *Messiah*, Cherubini's *Requiem* and others.

It was in the same mid-1850s that both Rubinstein and Glinka closely observed oratorical music and studied the old musical forms. Fiery Rubinstein was in his twenties, having been trained by Siegfried Dehn in counterpoint while in his teens, a decade earlier. He effortlessly visited the leading composers, and attended oratorical performances throughout Europe. At the same time, indolent, obese and in ill-health, Glinka was in his fifties. With great difficulty, he decided to go to Berlin to study with the same Dehn, often complaining how hard it was for the canons and medieval modes to yield to his command.⁵² It appeared, thus, that Rubinstein was the first and, indeed, the only composer to write oratorical music during the Golden Age of Russian

⁴⁷ Bathia Churgin, "Beethoven and Mozart's Requiem; *Addenda*," in *Mozart in Context*, special issue of *Min-Ad: Israel Studies in Musicology Online*, ed. Adena Portowitz. Vol. 6/II, December 2006.

⁴⁸ Thomas Kohlhase and Polina Vajdman, "Critical Report to Petr Il'ič Čajkovskij," New Edition of the Complete Works, Series II: *Orchestral Works*, Volume 39a: Symphony No 6 in B Minor *Pathétique* Op. 74 (ČW27) Autograph Draft, Facsimile, Volume 39b.

⁴⁹ Alexander Serov, "Mikhail Ivanovich Glinka, Nekrologichesky ocherk," in A.N. Serov, *Stat' I o muzyke* (Moscow: Muzyka, 1987), Vol. 3, 19-28.

⁵⁰ As mentioned, for example, in his letter to N. Kukolnik of 23 June/5 July 1856, Berlin; in Mikhail Glinka, *Literaturnye proizvedeniya i perepiska*, 139.

⁵¹ See quotation in footnote 39.

⁵² Glinka to K.A. Bulgakov, Berlin, 27 June/9 July 1856. "Together with Dehn, I fight church modes and canons of various kinds. It is a difficult matter, but extremely fascinating, and, God willing, quite helpful for Russian music," *ibid.*, 140.

music, only much later to be followed by Sergei Taneev through Tchaikovsky—Rubinstein’s pupil and Taneev’s teacher.

As opposed to Glinka, Rubinstein was not idolized as a composer, and was not generally liked by his native fellow-composers. He did, however, enjoy the understanding of Liszt (who successfully conducted his *The Lost Paradise* in Weimar in 1858). It is possible, therefore, that Rubinstein’s predilection for the oratorio and sacred opera genres, in addition to his learned style, merely “compromised” them in the eyes of the *Kuchka* members (who, lacking the technique of counterpoint, couldn’t even dream of such accomplishments). Independent Alexander Serov, on the other hand, wrote the opera *Judith* (1861-63) and several choral spiritual compositions—a *cappella* with emphasis on medieval modes. He seems to have picked up both genres from Rubinstein endeavors and Glinka’s intentions.⁵³

What the famous nineteenth-century Russian composers (Glinka, Rimsky-Korsakov, Tchaikovsky) composed was liturgical music for church services. Their liturgies, however, are far from being the strongest compositions in their legacies. Their modest *a cappella* pieces (musical instruments were still banned in the Church) provided too narrow a framework for those who were thirsty for major forms and huge symphonic sound. Besides, as a reaction to Italianized late-eighteenth-century paraliturgical music, like their German colleagues they consensually nurtured sacral austerity and simplicity of expression.

Most Russian composers, thus, sought other divinities to serve. If it could not be Christian, they chose pre-Christian Russianness. It is suggested here that nationalism in Russian music, in addition to reflecting national identity, political background, or being a part of romantic aesthetics, became an ideology that somehow filled the niche of religion in nineteenth-century Russian society.⁵⁴ *Nationality*, with a *singing peasant* as its primary symbol, became the highest value, leaving *Orthodoxy* like *autocracy* only as a formal attribute. A peasant was not Catherinian (the mythic symbol of prosperity) of course, nor even Radishchevian (the object of empathy), but was, rather, even more consecrated—the worshipped icon of national identity.

There was an additional reason why religious music had been marginalized in nineteenth-century Russia. From at least the eighteenth century, Russian society had been essentially secular. Peter I had taken care that the main church establishment was constituted from among the secular cadres. Baptism, the occasional observance of rituals and attending church services had (and still has) little to do with deep Christian beliefs among the majority of Russian society. Nineteenth-century Russian legacy offers considerable evidence of this. As Vissarion Belinsky wrote:

The basis of religiosity is pietism, reverence, and fear of God. But the Russian utters the name of God while scratching his backside. About icon he says: When necessary, pray to it; otherwise, use it to cover a pot. Look carefully and you will see that by nature it is a deeply atheistic people with a lot of superstitions, but no traces of religiosity.⁵⁵

⁵³ In the late 1850s, Vladimir Stasov also experienced a certain interest in the medieval modes, seeing in them a stimulus for the modernization of musical language (Yu. Keldysh, L. Korabelnikova, E. Levashev and V. Romanova, *Istoriya russkoy muzyki* [Moscow: Muzyka, 1989], Vol. 6, 143).

⁵⁴ For a broader view on nationalism replacing religion and autocracy, see Nicholas V. Riasanovsky, *Russian Identities: A Historical Survey* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 209-210.

⁵⁵ Vissarion Belinsky, Letter to Gogol in 1847. Quoted from Elena Hellberg-Hirn, 94.

An example of the above can be found, for instance, in an in-depth reading of Tchaikovsky's *Diaries*. A profound atheist, Prince Alexander N. Golitsyn, when asked by young Emperor Alexander I, in 1803, to head a Ministry of the Holy Synod as overprocurator, found it embarrassing and impossible to commit himself to this service. When he finally gave up, he did it "with truly pagan piety."⁵⁶ (While this may seem to contradict Alexander I's growing religious mysticism mentioned above, it does reflect the Emperor's own controversial fusion of the Enlightenment era inertia and the coming nineteenth-century reaction, as expressed in his enigmatic behavior and policy.)

In the nineteenth century (after Catherine II's final successful maneuver, with the secularization of the Church lands), the Russian Orthodox Church was no longer a threat to Russian secular power. While state ceremonies in Catherine's time were still adorned with major religious forms, like choral concertos, this was no longer necessary in the nineteenth century.

Liturgical music was locked into the churches, while major paraliturgical oratorios, masses and requiems by Western composers were performed in Russian Philharmonic Society concerts. During 1801-24, the residents of St. Petersburg could listen to oratorios and masses by Hayden, Mozart, Cherubini, Handel and Beethoven. It was precisely and exclusively, Western spiritual music (or oratorios on biblical texts, with the orchestra, like those by Rubinstein) that were allowed to be performed in the concerts. Orthodox ecclesiastic music could not be "offended" by performance outside the Church. Paradoxically, the same status reigned during the Soviet period, gradually waning from the '60s on, but for the opposite reason. While Western music, with its little understood Latin texts, did not convey a threat of religious propaganda and was related to the world classics, Russian religious music with its Orthodox texts was considered as such a threat, similar, for example, to the *Marseillaise* for Catherine II.

Rubinstein's oratorios, though a public success, could not outplay Stasov's voice in historiography. Secularized nationalism, symbolized by pagan folklore, evicted an entire type of high music, associated in the Western world with the major genres of mass and oratorio that existed alongside opera. In other words, the nineteenth-century Russian ideology rehabilitated and idolized the eighteenth-century fixation on a *singing peasant*; it excommunicated the *singing and dancing urban citizen*, and disregarded both types *crossing themselves in front of the icon*.

But official music did not disregard the latter. Lvov's national anthem, *God Save the Tsar* (1833), is characterized by the broad use of modal harmonies that, although following the English *God Save the King* (practiced in Russia since 1813, from 1816 with the words by Zhukovsky and Pushkin—*Molitva russkogo naroda*), still unmistakably points to the church music super-icon.⁵⁷ It is hardly a coincidence that Glinka did the same, three years later, in his choral hymn *Slav'sya*, which concluded *A Life for the Tsar* (1836). Glinka was not Lvov, however, and he managed to enrich it with such connotations as Russian peasant folk song (in the eighteenth-century court version), and perhaps acclamations of *Hallelujah* from Handel's *Messiah* and Beethoven's *Freude, schöner Götterfunken* from *The Ninth*.

To summarize this moment in history of official Russian music: the stylistic difference between the secular polonaise, *Grom pobedy razdavaisya* by Joseph

⁵⁶ See Nikol'sky, 206.

⁵⁷ The creation of a Russian official anthem in the nineteenth century is discussed in Marina Frolova-Walker, "Music of the Soul?," in *National Identity in Russian Culture*, ed. Simon Franklin and Emma Widdis (Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 116-31.

Kozlovsky, which served as state anthem from Catherine's time (1790), and Lvov's anthem *God Save the Tsar* reflected the changes between the secularity of the Age of Reason and the religious inclinations of the Romantic era. The church-music super-icon of Russian identity began to work in the most effective media of official music.

Between Moscow and Leningrad

In the *Kuchka* manner, which eventually acquired status as the St. Petersburg School when Rimsky-Korsakov joined the staff of the Conservatory, nationalism and modernism complemented each other, and continued to do so after the 1917 Revolution. Then, nationalism was replaced by patriotism and Communism in the nation's ideology, but this did not affect its relationship to modern expression and its Western origins. In post-revolutionary Moscow, however, the values were dramatically torn apart. For part of the musicians the Western tradition was seen as a vice, while nationalism/patriotism/Communism received connotations different from those of the St. Petersburg tradition.

What triggered this change was the moving the capital of Soviet Russia from Petrograd (St. Petersburg) to Moscow in 1918, at the end of World War I, as a security measure. For whatever reason it happened, it brought new conflict to the more-or-less balanced relationship that had been achieved between the two traditions. Similar to the cruelty with which Peter I had uprooted the dissent of the Muscovite aristocracy who wanted the capital restored to Moscow, Stalin uprooted (far more bloodily) the supposed opposition in Leningrad. In 1934, he instigated the assassination of a Leningrad party leader, Sergei Kirov. Following World War II, in 1949, Stalin fabricated the so-called *Leningradskoe delo* against the Leningrad party elite, condemning—among other issues—their attempt to return the capital to Leningrad, exploiting the opportunity to purge the elite Leningrad intelligentsia.

Acquiring the status of capital encouraged the Muscovite population to support the new regime. An enormous apparatus of state and party functionaries and officials was formed from among the population of Moscow. The latter, despite having a strong proletariat sector, was still dominated by merchants and clergy. This was in contrast to the enlightened and well-organized St. Petersburg proletariat and intelligentsia, who had actually carried out the revolution and inherited the idealistic spirit of the pre-Revolutionary democratic movement.

It was natural in this context that the *Association of Proletarian Musicians* (APM and RAPM, abbreviated from the Russian *Rossiyskaya assotsiatsia proletarskikh muzykantov*), consisting of barely-educated musicians-Communists, was founded (in 1923) in Moscow, although it had branches in other centers too, including St. Petersburg. At the same time, most of the members of the *Association of Contemporary Music* (ACM I or ASM, abbreviated from the Russian *Assotsiatsia sovremennoy muzyki*),⁵⁸ whose goal was to counterbalance the aggression from the semi-professional members of APM, hailed from Leningrad. Among its members were Asafiev, Myaskovsky, Feinberg, Steinberg, Kabalevsky, Shostakovich, and many other serious and well-educated musicians; among the Muscovite members were such figures as Roslavets, Mosolov). ACM I, however, was founded in Moscow

⁵⁸ The addition of a "I" to its name is a recent necessity, since there is also a ACP II, founded by Edison Denisov in 1990; see Elena Dubinets, "Music in Exile..." 4.

in 1924, as a result of the new hierarchy and the great efforts of the highly prominent Moscow critic, Vladimir Derzhanovsky.

The APM members, protected by the new Communist bureaucracy, made every possible effort to limit and neutralize the activities of the ACM I. Using their connections, they blocked subsidization of ACM I concerts and publication of its journals. The ACM I was also a constant victim of ideological pressure. The dramatic struggle for existence of the ACM I is movingly described in Derzhanovsky's letters to Prokofiev during the 1920s.⁵⁹

The disbanding of both organizations in 1932, and their forced unification into one Composers' Union of the USSR, led to friction and confrontation between the two worldviews: conservative/nationalistic/Communitic on the part of the APM, and modernized/Westernized/Communitic on part of the ACM I. Further events showed that the modern and Western-oriented culture, represented mostly by Leningrad musicians, suited Stalin much less than the grass-root Slavophilic ones.

From 1935 to 1948, Shostakovich was the main exposed target. Prokofiev, who had returned in 1933 with an international reputation, was almost untouchable—except that his *Igrok* could not be staged by Meyerhold at the Bolshoi Theatre (no explanation was given, but it was probably because Meyerhold was already being persecuted); in 1946, Prokofiev's ex-wife was arrested. Second-echelon composers, however, felt few restrictions in using the modern style. Mahler was not yet prohibited, and was widely played by the Leningrad Philharmonic. Musicologists experienced no censorial pressure when writing about the non-Russian origins of certain genres and instruments. (Later, the ironically coined principle "Russia—motherland of elephants" became requisite in the humanities, and even in the natural sciences.) Generally, Western-oriented culture felt quite secure—until 1948.

The infamous Decree of 1948, without mentioning the APM or ACM I, meticulously targeted former ACM I members, thereby fully legitimizing and authorizing the ideology and practice of the APM. It was obvious who had been criticized and why, and who had been encouraged. While, from 1940-46, a former ACM I member, Dmitry Kabalevsky had been the editor-in-chief of the journal *Sovetskaya muzyka*, in 1948, Marian Koval, a former APM member, was appointed to this position.

The similarity between the Stalin-Zhdanov cultural policy and that of another reactionary regime a hundred years earlier is obvious and well-known. The classical maxim of Count Sergei Uvarov (Minister of Education during the reign of Nicholas I)—*orthodoxy, autocracy, nationality*—demanded only the replacement of *orthodoxy* with *Communism* (which, in fact, can be regarded as a religion, and is endowed with all the attributes of a religion⁶⁰), and of *autocracy* with Stalin's creed. As an "absolute value" in hypocritical statements made both by Nicholas I and Stalin, *nationality* remained intact. It is worth noting that although *orthodoxy* and *autocracy* seem separate concepts, they are actually united by the "theocratic absolutism... indistinguishable from [autocrat's] religious identity."⁶¹ No less tight is the link between *orthodoxy* and *nationality*, with both referring to their union in antiquity and authenticity. Stalin's formula of an ideal Communist culture, "national in form,

⁵⁹ Central Museum of Musical Culture, Moscow.

⁶⁰ See the chapter on "Marxism" in John Bowker, *Problems of Suffering in Religions of the World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970).

⁶¹ See Michael Rywkin, "Russia and the Former Soviet Union," in *Encyclopedia of Nationalism*, (San Francisco, 2000), Vol. I, 655.

socialist in content,” was therefore a version of Uvarov’s formula of the ideal education and upbringing.

Unlike Nicholas I with Uvarov, for whom only Glinka and Alexei Lvov were acceptable in music, Stalin and Zhdanov had Shostakovich (the Soviet counterpart of Glinka—who failed, however, to write *A Life for the General Secretary*) and the exceptionally talented Alexander Alexandrov for anthems, not to mention the entire huge Composers’ Union. Interestingly, in composing the Soviet anthem in 1943, one of the most beautiful state anthems it should be noted, Alexandrov reproduced an important feature of Lvov’s *God Save the Tsar* (1833)—the broad use of modal harmonies. Alexandrov’s anthem is an affluent and concentrated semantic hybrid, with distinct features from hymns of both Lvov and Glinka, as well as of the *Internationale*.⁶²

Peasant Song and Religious Chant Icons in Soviet Russia

The doctrines of both Nicholas-Uvarov and Stalin-Zhdanov were embedded in Catherine’s *official nationalism*. Catherine’s ideal cultural image of a “singing peasant” (more correctly, a “happy singing peasant”) turned into a “happy singing *kolkhoznik*-tractorist” in Stalin’s ideology. This image was reflected in films, visual arts, the Pyatnitsky choir repertoire, and even in fact that Nikolai Myaskovsky was recommended to write the *Kolkhoznaya* symphony (*The Twelfth*, 1931-32, to glorify the collectivization of agriculture, a process that totally shattered Soviet agricultural economics). Stalinism had evidently promoted a nationalistically primitive official style, making an iconic image of a “happy singing peasant” a cultural symbol of the “cultural revolution,” while the peasants of the *kolhozy* suffered no less—if no more—than the serfs described by Radishchev and later anti-serfdom literature. At least pre-Revolutionary Russians were not subjected to genocide, like the seven million Ukrainian peasants who starved to death in the man-made grain famine of 1932-33.

The ancient Russian religious chant was regarded as an apparently dangerous cultural and political symbol, which could easily serve as a banner for those opposed to the Communist regime. It was banned, and replaced by Communist hymnography. Underground, however, like any other forbidden symbol, it maintained and reinforced its power. Khrushchev’s “thaw” gradually decreased the prohibitions both on pro-Western orientation and Russian religious music, opening up the possibilities of re-establishing ways of expressing national identity. However, unlike the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when this means of expression had served secular composers as a cultural icon, the late 1960s witnessed chant becoming an arena where a new/old reactionary nationalism attempted to elevate it to an ideological level. The main spokesman of this trend was Georgy Sviridov.

In 1968, Sviridov was elected to replace Shostakovich as Chief of the RSFSR Composers’ Union Board. A former student of Shostakovich, with a charismatic personality and partial to modern music, Sviridov turned to the nationalist agenda and used his new position decisively to carry out his principles. Uniting a considerable

⁶² The creation of this anthem is discussed in Boris Gasparov, *Five Operas and a Symphony: Word and Music in Russian Culture* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005), Epilogue, “Prima la musica, dopo le parole; Musical Genealogy of a National Anthem,” 209-18.

number of like-minded colleagues, he remarkably tried to convey a pro-Byzantine leaning: not in his work—his personal compositions were written in a commercially successful, pleasant and light urban style (provoking malicious rage in the national-modernists, for whom any urban reference remained an evil)—but in his endeavors to make it a political agenda. This provoked strong opposition from some of the younger representatives of the “new folklore wave,” who eventually elected their own leader, Rodion Shchedrin.⁶³ The abandoned Sviridov stopped functioning within the framework of the Composers’ Union, but not in the promotion of his idea. He continued quietly, without publicity, and not in Moscow but in Leningrad, where his notions found more fertile soil.

In the 1970s, the Leningrad party administration was noticeably more conservative than the relatively liberal Muscovite one. Its conservatism was probably due to its provincial insecurity on the one hand, and the mass Jewish emigration on the other (in the context of the time, emigration was a sign of poor ideological work on the parts of the party hacks). In addition, the young creative intelligentsia of Leningrad had revealed itself too openly in the ’60s, thinking that everything was now permitted; it was not (e.g. Joseph Brodsky’s exile, and the numerous bans on Slonimsky’s compositions). The reaction was unmistakable and swift, although there still remained a few places in the city (like the Little Hall of the Philharmonic) where concerts of “leftist” composers (both from Moscow and Leningrad) took place.

The general authoritarian atmosphere had its effect on the Leningrad Conservatory. Its administration, after failing to fire a number of venerable Jewish professors (the campaign was blocked by the well-organized non-Jewish staff), decided to make the Conservatory a stronghold of nationalism. Behind the process stood Sviridov, who arranged the appointment of Vladislav Chenushenko, a choir conductor and an enthusiast of Russian religious music, as rector, and Alexander Belonenko, a specialist in ancient Russian paleography and Sviridov’s nephew, as vice rector. Studies in Russian church music were greatly encouraged, and proliferated; indeed, a joke circulated among the students and staff that the students would soon be obliged to translate Bach’s *Well-Tempered Clavier* into ancient Russian neums (*kryuki*).

The problem, however, was not the neums, because by this time Russian chant enjoyed wide currency in the hands of both the Muscovite Westernizer-modernist, Alfred Schnittke, and the Leningrad nationalist-modernist Sergei Slonimsky, for whom it served as the icon of his “unofficial nationalism.” The dangerous outcome of Sviridov-inspired policy was that, in the 1980s, the Conservatory became the headquarters of the anti-Semitic society *Pamyat’*, and later of the Leningrader fascists. This significantly contributed to the political climate, permitting the overt sale of *Mein Kampf* on Leningrad’s streets during the critical early 1990s.

Epilogue

With the 1991 dissolution of the Soviet Union, the Russian Church experienced freedom. Church singing could be heard everywhere. Religious chant ceased to be a forbidden symbol. Those Soviet composers who had derived their inspiration from the

⁶³ The above paragraph is an interpretive account as retold to me in the late 1980s by Sergei Slonimsky.

necessity of charging their music with subtext, lost their interest in it to a certain degree. The new Russian peasantry, emancipated from the serfdom of the *kolkhozy*, was no longer the object of special idealistic empathy. The generally liberal stance toward culture maintained by Russian leadership today serves to neutralize the nationalistic trends in the arts (though not in politics, where they are on the upsurge). Russian intellectuals enjoy sufficient freedom not to seek a niche of nationalism as the sublimation of social constraints. Both icons, therefore, seem to work now at a much lower volume than in Soviet times, making way for previously ignored contemporary musical realities, as Dubinets effectively shows.⁶⁴ As for “music for masses,” it remains only to hope that the relapse into broadcasting pseudo-folk and pseudo-happy music, signifying the readiness of society at the time of the 1991 coup to accept the restoration of a totalitarian regime, will remain merely a brief episode; and that the sound of this symbol, dissociated from its historical context, will eventually lose its semantic meaning.

It is nice to believe that, by analyzing symbols, we can understand deeper sociopolitical trends. But, since the same symptoms can indicate different diseases, these same symbols may serve different worldviews or political forces, as with Beethoven in Nazi Germany. In Russia, without delving too deeply, we can see that, while Boris Yeltsin tried to establish Glinka’s *Slav’sya* as an official Russian State anthem in 1991-93, thereby celebrating Russia’s liberation from the Soviet Communist legacy, the Orthodox educational portal on the Russian Internet today celebrates it as an unofficial Russian dynastic anthem, symbolizing the glorious Russian tradition of *orthodoxy, autocracy, nationality*.

⁶⁴ Elena Dubinets, “Music in Exile...,” 65-66.