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0521590973 - Russians on Russian Music, 1880-1917: An Anthology
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Russians on Russian music, 1880–1917

This second anthology of Russian writing on Russian music begins in 1880 (where the first volume concluded) and ends in 1917. It brings for the first time to an English-speaking readership the thoughts of leading Russian music critics as they react to the Russian music new to them, during a period when all aspects of musical life were developing rapidly. Music criticism had become more sure-footed, if no less opinionated. These reviews demonstrate greater awareness both of music history and of contemporary music abroad. The period covers the late careers of Tchaikovsky and Rimsky-Korsakov as well as late works of Borodin and Balakirev, and the emergence of Musorgsky's compositions. Works by the intervening generation, including Arensky, Glazunov and Lyadov, are also reviewed and the book concludes with coverage of works by the Moscow School, including Medtner, Rachmaninoff and Skryabin and the early compositions of Stravinsky and Prokofiev.

Stuart Campbell is Honorary Senior Research Fellow in the Department of Music and at the Institute for Central and East European Studies, University of Glasgow. He is author of *V. F. Odoevsky and the Formation of Russian Musical Taste in the Nineteenth Century* (1989) and editor and translator of *Russians on Russian Music, 1830–1880* (1994).

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PREFACE

All dates are given in accordance with the Julian calendar, sometimes known as 'Old Style'. To convert them to the Gregorian calendar used in the West, and after 1918 in Russia too, twelve days must be added in the nineteenth century and thirteen in the twentieth century. In a limited number of cases, such as the first performance of a Russian composition abroad, dates are given in both forms. In footnotes, 'Author's note' refers to the original author of the item, and 'Editor's note' refers to the editor of the publication in which the article appeared for the first time. Other interventions are the work of the editor and translator of this volume.

Several colleagues have drawn my attention to worthwhile material, suggested topics to which I had given inadequate notice, or proposed items I had not discovered for myself. I acknowledge gratefully the advice in these various ways of Alexander Belonenko and Georgy Abramovsky of the St Petersburg Conservatoire, and Marina Rakhmanova of the State Central Museum for Musical Culture named after M. I. Glinka in Moscow. For making available newspapers and periodicals, republications in book form and music scores, I gladly thank the librarians of the Russian State Library in Moscow, the State Institute for the Study of the Arts in Moscow, the Russian National Library in St Petersburg, the St Petersburg Conservatoire, the Tchaikovsky House-Museum at Klin, Helsinki University Library and the British Library.

For shedding light in specific dark corners of several texts, I thank: Dr Laura Martin, of the Department of German, and Dr Stephen Rawles, of the Humanities Advanced Technology and Information Institute, both in the University of Glasgow; and Fr. Alexander, priest of the Orthodox Community of St Nicholas, Dunblane.

For helping a poor foreigner understand especially arcane mysteries in their native tongue, I thank my wife Svetlana Zvereva, and stepson Georgy; without the knowledge and resourcefulness of my other stepson Gleb in the field of computing, this book would have been even longer in the making.

Stuart Campbell
25 August 2002

INTRODUCTION

The aims of this book are, firstly, to give a sample of the first Russian critical responses to compositions important to us which were composed, or in some cases first heard, between 1880 and 1917; and, secondly, to represent the work of critics whose work was influential at the time and retains its interest – most likely because it shows insight into the composers’ styles or the climate of thought at the time.

The arts in Russia blossomed luxuriantly in the years between 1880 and 1917. That period contained the Silver Age of Russian poetry, with a current of Symbolism stimulating other new waves. The ‘great experiment’ in the fine arts was carried out in those years, with neo-Russian styles existing cheek by jowl with local manifestations of the international phenomenon of *Art nouveau*.

By comparison with the years between 1830 and 1880, covered in the volume entitled *Russians on Russian Music* published by Cambridge University Press in 1994, this later period is richer in composers and compositions which hold their place in the international repertory. Such standard fare of the concert and recording worlds as substantial parts of the output of Tchaikovsky and Rimsky-Korsakov, the larger portion of the work of Rachmaninoff, and the early work of Stravinsky and Prokofiev originated at this time and must be given their due. All the compositions of Lyadov, Skryabin and Taneyev, and by far the greatest bulk of Glazunov’s were likewise created during these years. *Prince Igor* and *Khovanshchina* were staged for the first time, after their composers’ deaths. Many other composers had their say, and if their voice has not proved so strong as those of the composers mentioned, their level of technical proficiency bears witness to developments in musical life between the two periods.

New concert promoters appeared. Besides the Russian Musical Society and the Free School of Music, series of concerts linked with the names of entrepreneurial individuals took place: Belyayev (from 1885) and Ziloti (1903–13) (in St Petersburg) and Koussevitzky (from 1908) (in Moscow). Evenings of Contemporary Music were held in St Petersburg (1901–12) and

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in Moscow from 1909. The Kerzins organized a Circle of Lovers of Russian Music (1896–1912) in Moscow. The Moscow Philharmonic Society had promoted concerts since 1883.

Some of the senior generation of critics continued their work – Cui, Laroche and Stasov. A new cadre of reliable chroniclers – Kashkin, Kruglikov and Engel’ – appeared. A lively younger generation with a broad educational background emerged in the persons of Karatigin and Asaf’yev, whose work was to continue into the Soviet period. The wealth of material, both musical and critical, has made decisions about priorities more acute. Thus, Vladimir Stasov has been progressively excised from the contents; while this is a matter for regret, the consolation is that his earlier opinions are comparatively familiar and accessible, and he did not diverge markedly from them later.

In the realm of composition, the most striking phenomenon is its blossoming not only in the newer capital, St Petersburg, but also in Moscow, the historic capital. During the reign of Alexander III (1881–94), confidence in Russian values and traditions increased, and the work of artists reflected this new-found self-assurance. Wealthy, assertive Muscovite businessmen (Mamontov, Morozov, Tret’yakov) turned into generous patrons of the arts, established art collections and inaugurated a private opera company. The founding of the music publisher M. P. Belaieff (Belyayev) was a sign of the same thing: a dynamic capitalist, accustomed to having things his own way, fell in love with the compositions of Glazunov and invested massively in schemes, including publishing, to support them and, by extension, the work of other Russian composers. Koussevitzky inaugurated the high-minded publisher Edition Russe de Musique in Moscow in 1909. Musical development was facilitated at about the same time by the abrogation of imperial monopolies in the fields of church music and opera theatres. This administrative change led to radical diversification in these fields, setting them free from detailed control by the Ministry of the Imperial Court and from the bureaucratic and political intrigue of St Petersburg. The Court Kapella and the Directorate of the Imperial Theatres remained influential, powerful and well-resourced institutions, but their stranglehold was broken. The Moscow Private Opera Company opened in 1885. It redressed an earlier bias against Russian operas – the company summoned into existence most of Rimsky-Korsakov’s operas – and initiated the idea of drawing great painters into designing for the operatic stage, anticipating Diaghilev’s later achievements. No matter that the standard of execution (both musical and artistic) was variable – a new era had begun. The Moscow Synodal Choir, along with the Synodal School of Church Music (as reformed in 1886) with which it was intimately linked, brought fresh lustre to the ancient chants of the Cathedral of the Dormition in the Kremlin where they sang, and Kastal’sky forged a

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new choral style built on those chants and the practices of Russian folksong; the best-known example from within this 'New Direction' is Rachmaninoff's *All-Night Vigil*.

Rachmaninoff represents a further current in Russian music of this time. If earlier great Russian performers had been celebrated only at home – with the exception of Anton Rubinstein, at this period they started to become familiar abroad as well. The singer Chaliapin, the pianists Rachmaninoff, Safonov and Ziloti, and the conductors Koussevitzky and Safonov can trace the beginning of their fame abroad to the years before 1917; after that date, they were followed into the world's concert halls by an increasing number of Russian musicians. Besides such international stars, Russia was served by a further corps of superbly trained performers whose fame was more local but who nonetheless enhanced the nation's musical life materially. It is regrettable that, for reasons of space, I have felt obliged to exclude most discussions of performers from the texts which follow.

It was in this period that the work of Russian composers began to flood into the rest of the world. Tchaikovsky's success in territories where German and English were spoken was rapid, especially after his death, while Borodin, Rimsky-Korsakov and Musorgsky fared better in the lands of *Francophonie* with orchestral music arriving in advance of theatre music. This process was established before Diaghilev gave it fresh impetus, beginning in 1907. By that time, Russian art could show her neighbours a wealth of creativity – not in music alone, but in ballet, opera, stage design, etc. And with Diaghilev, Russia's new music leapt across the frontiers of her empire. At first, the repertory comprised works created in and for Russia, albeit with a new coat of paint applied for the export market. Later, with the works of Stravinsky, Russian music began to be brought into being for Europe (with the early ballets) and even in Europe, before it started to enter the mainstream of music of the Western tradition. Our present subject is the reception of Russian music in Russia, and so the reaction to it abroad is not represented here. At the same time, the ways in which the West encountered it, especially the idiosyncratic selection and the unchronological sequence, continues to affect attitudes towards it.

Because there was more music to write about, more music worth writing about, and the music was better written about, there is a greater emphasis on composers and compositions than in the earlier volume. Correspondingly, less attention is paid here than in the previous volume to questions of the organization and infrastructure of musical life. The arrangement of chapters in broadly chronological sequence used for the first volume has been abandoned, as for this period it would demand too much interweaving of topics. Instead, the main division is by composer or group of composers. While this

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principle gives a tidier result, it means, for example, that Skryabin looms large in both Chapters 5 and 6, as a representative of Moscow and of modern tendencies respectively. In some of the earlier texts the old battle between proponents of Tchaikovsky, on the one hand, and the ‘Mighty Handful’, on the other, is prolonged. Discussion about the benefits brought by conservatoires subsided as they co-opted members of camps formerly opposed (e.g. Rimsky-Korsakov in 1871) and subsequently won over even Cui to much of their way of thinking. Controversy about Wagner and his ideals continued, in a better informed climate after 1889 when *The Ring* was first produced in Russia, even if old prejudices did not fall away entirely; indeed the frequency with which Wagner’s name is cited is striking. Among the older generation of critics, one reads statements opinionated to the same degree as before – for example, when Cui writes about the ‘meaningless recitatives in Mozart’s *Don Giovanni*’ (Chapter 2 (b)), or Laroche refers to Bayreuthomanes as ‘people who sit patiently for four hours in the dark listening to recitatives’ (Chapter 4 (b)); such observations amuse us, but it is not clear that that was the authors’ intention. Awareness of the work of Debussy, Reger, Schoenberg and Richard Strauss informs the discussion of newer Russian compositions, though we may still find entertainment in Karatigin’s enthusiasm for the compositions of Roger-Ducasse, or Asaf’yev’s evaluation of a Russian composer who has vanished beneath the horizon even more completely than Roger-Ducasse – Miklashevsky. It is, however, for the general angle of vision at which critics viewed contemporary music, as well as for those many instances when they enrich our own understanding, that we read their work nowadays, rather than to calculate the proportion of assessments which coincide (or not) with our own.

While the search for material has been extensive, there are some topics which could justifiably have been represented more fully. These topics include: how Russians regarded Diaghilev’s Parisian ventures; Rachmaninoff’s *All-Night Vigil*; the lesser composers whose names do no more than flit across a page (e.g. Kalinnikov and Stanchinsky). Some important critics are not represented at all (e.g. Sabaneyev and Findeyzen). However, constraints of space meant that compromises were inevitable if the volume was to offer in-depth discussion while simultaneously aiming to cover comprehensively a territory where music was diversifying and pluralizing rapidly.

SOURCES

The following abbreviations identify the collections from which texts reissued since their original publication between 1880 and 1917 have been drawn. In all other cases, texts have been taken from their original place of publication.

- Cui = Ts. A. Kyui: *Izbranniye stat'i* ('Selected Articles') (Leningrad, 1952)
 Engel' = Yu. D. Engel': *Glazami sovremennika. Izbranniye stat'i o russkoy muzike 1898-1918* ('Through a Contemporary's Eyes: Selected Articles about Russian Music') (Moscow, 1971)
 Karatigin = V. G. Karatigin: *Izbranniye stat'i* ('Selected Articles') (Moscow and Leningrad, 1965)
 Kashkin/Tchaikovsky = N. D. Kashkin: *Izbranniye stat'i o P. I. Chaykovskom* ('Selected Articles about P. I. Tchaikovsky') (Moscow, 1954)
 Kolomiitsev = V. Kolomiitsev: *Stat'i i p is'ma* ('Articles and Letters') (Leningrad, 1971)
 Konyus = G. E. Konyus 1862-1933. *Materiali, vosp ominaniya, p is'ma* ('Materials, Reminiscences, Letters') (Moscow, 1988)
 Laroche 2 = G. A. Larosh: *Izbranniye stat'i* ('Selected Articles'), vol. 2 [P. I. Tchaikovsky] (Leningrad, 1975)
 Laroche 3 = ditto, vol. 3 [Opera and opera theatre] (Leningrad, 1976)
 Laroche 4 = ditto, vol. 4 [Symphonic and chamber-instrumental music] (Leningrad, 1977)
 Myaskovsky = N. Ya. Myaskovsky. *Sobraniye materialov* ('Collection of Materials'), vols. 1-2, second edition (Moscow, 1964)
 Ossovsky = A. V. Ossovsky: *Muzikal'no-kriticheskiye stat'i (1894-1912)* ('Music-Critical Articles') (Leningrad, 1971)
 Rozenov = E. K. Rozenov: *Stat'i o muzike* ('Articles about Music') (Moscow, 1982)
 Stasov 4 = V. V. Stasov: *Stat'i o muzike* ('Articles about Music'), vol. 4 (1887-1893) (Moscow, 1978)