

# B. V. Asaf'yev's Significance and Role in the "Restoration of the Authentic Musorgsky"\*

Nadezhda Teterina

Department of Academic Music Editions

State Institute for Art Studies

Moscow, Russia

E-mail: nad\_teterina@mail.ru

**Abstract**—The significance and role of B. V. Asaf'yev in the "restoration of the authentic Musorgsky" still has to be clarified. Asaf'yev initiated the production of *Boris Godunov* in the "original version" at the Leningrad State Academic Theatre of Opera and Ballet (the premi ère took place on 16 February 1928), prepared for publication the author's full score of *Boris Godunov*, orchestrated the opera *Khovanshchina*, published a number of scholarly essays and critical articles. The activities of P. A. Lamm and B. V. Asaf'yev in 1924–31 were of fundamental significance for restoring Musorgsky's authentic music texts.

**Keywords**—M. Musorgsky; *Boris Godunov*; *Khovanshchina*; B. Asaf'yev; P. Lamm; N. Rimsky-Korsakov

## I. INTRODUCTION

The significance and role of Boris Vladimirovich Asaf'yev in the artistic and scholarly endeavour known as "restoration of the authentic Musorgsky" has always been regarded as secondary and supplementary in relation to the organizational and scholarly activities of Pavel Aleksandrovich Lamm as the chief editor, publishing supervisor, specialist in source studies and textual criticism.

This generally accepted opinion, indeed, is corroborated by Asaf'yev's well-known major publications of 1927–28, such as "*Boris Godunov* and its 'versions' in the light of sociological problem" or the collection of articles "On the Reconstruction of Musorgsky's *Boris Godunov*" [1].

On the other hand, the established views and stereotypes will be largely corrected if we take into account numerous historical facts, publications in the newspapers and journals of the second half of the 1920-s, and unpublished archival materials.

## II. THE DECISION TO PRODUCE THE OPERA *BORIS GODUNOV* AT THE LENINGRAD STATE ACADEMIC THEATRE OF OPERA AND BALLET

Asaf'yev and Lamm began corresponding in the summer of 1921. Their active exchange of letters continued until the spring of 1931, with a peak in 1926–28, when the process of "restoring the authentic Musorgsky" entered its decisive stage resulting in two events of exceptional importance: the publication of the *Klavierauszug* of the opera *Boris Godunov* in Lamm's scholarly edition [2] and the premi ère of *Boris Godunov* at the Leningrad State Academic Theatre of Opera and Ballet (GATOB, the former Mariinsky Theatre, known also as Akopera) on 16 February 1928.

The complex problem of a new production of *Boris Godunov* in the author's version, that is, the problem of replacing N. A. Rimsky-Korsakov's edition with Musorgsky's original, was raised by Asaf'yev four years before the premi ère. As early as 1924, Asaf'yev, who was the theatre's consultant, proposed to stage the opera with the forces the Opera Studio attached to GATOB. His idea came to nothing, though he stated that "our Vinogradov's studio nevertheless decided to learn *Boris* in its primary form" [3].

The next landmark event in the opera's history occurred two years later.

The audition of *Boris Godunov* in Lamm's edition took place at the session of GATOB's Artistic Council on 19 November 1926. Asaf'yev was invited to convince the committee of the necessity to stage the "original version". During the session, he delivered a powerful speech, in which his own conclusions were interspersed with Lamm's comments and ideas.

Those present at the session included the chief manager of the State Academic Theatres of RSFSR I. V. Ekskuzovich, the head of the opera troupe, theatre director V. P. Shkafer, the theatre's chief conductor V. A. Dranishnikov, as well as V. A. Brender, V. R. Rappoport and A. M. Zhitomirsky.

Nowadays, it can seem strange that the outstanding Russian musicologist had to devise an extensive system of historical and logical arguments — mentioning, in particular, the refusal of the Imperial Theatres to stage the "revolutionary" and "populist" opera, which was allegedly

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unwelcome to the reactionary Tsarist regime — in order to persuade the artistic council that it was important to give preference to Musorgsky's original music text and dramaturgic conception. In the 1920s, however, the question of priority of one of the versions (the original one) over the other (Rimsky-Korsakov's) was resolved only for a narrow circle of music historians, while the majority of musicians — conductors, singers, vocal coaches — and especially theatre administrators perceived the choice of the original version as audacious and risky.

Let us quote several excerpts from Asaf'yev's speech recorded in the session's typescript minutes: "Historically and socially, the question of reviving *Boris Godunov* is of prime importance. The committee has to carefully consider all the pros and cons to avoid the situation of the previous opera committee, which rejected *Boris* twice, in 1870 and 1873. First of all, it is necessary to separate Musorgsky's *Boris Godunov* from Rimsky-Korsakov's edition of the same opera, which was extremely important for its time. <...> The point is that Rimsky-Korsakov's edition follows mainly the author's piano-vocal score of 1874, which was already a result of major remake done for different reasons, under the pressure of the epoch that could not evaluate and accept Musorgsky's work in full. <...> And as soon as Musorgsky's original idea is opened to us, our habitual view of *Boris Godunov* changes completely, giving way to a giant and mighty panorama of real people's drama instead of a personal tragedy of the parvenu Tsar. <...> The restored *Boris* is such a grandiose and profound theatrical problem, that only those theatre-related people who are not mature enough to understand the principles of contemporary theatre, the idea of opera as theatrical conception, and the opera form as such, can remain indifferent and cold with regard to the great tasks posed by Musorgsky's dramaturgy to any serious opera theatre" [4].

Following Asaf'yev's speech, Lamm took the floor to relate the story of the remakes of *Boris*, to report about his scholarly work "on the restoration of Musorgsky's original concept" and about the "discovery of extant sheets of the full score". He showed new music materials, prepared for the publication of the opera's piano-vocal score. The artistic council unanimously voted in favour of the author's version of the opera. The theatre's administration, too, supported the idea: "Because of the undisputable merits of the initial conception of Musorgsky's opera *Boris Godunov* <...> it is fully desirable to realize the opera's revival, planned for the coming season of 1927–28, in accordance with the restored author's version. The committee specially underlines this version's great social importance, since during Musorgsky's lifetime the opera had to undergo cuts of the scenes truthfully depicting the people's discontent and the growth of revolt" [5].

Two and a half weeks later a short note (unsigned), informing about the session at GATOB and the decision to stage the author's version of the opera appeared in the evening issue of the Leningrad newspaper *Krasnaya gazeta* ("Red Newspaper") under the title "Musorgsky or Rimsky-Korsakov? Production of the authentic *Boris Godunov*" [6].

It is worth noting that the decision was made exclusively on the basis of the available materials of the *Klavierauszug*. Lamm did not present any excerpts from the opera's orchestral score, let alone the complete score. The work on restoring the author's orchestration had yet to begin.

### III. JOURNALS AND NEWSPAPERS ABOUT THE NEW PRODUCTION OF THE OPERA

From 7 December 1926 to 16 February 1928 (the morning before the premi re), the information about the future performance appeared in seventeen journals and newspapers. Nine articles, constituting the major and the most important part of this information, were published in *Krasnaya gazeta*, four publications appeared in *Zhizn' iskusstva* ("Art Life"), and four ones — in *Rabochiy i teatr* ("Worker and Theatre"). The articles by Asaf'yev, signed under his pen-name Igor' Glebov, are especially notable for their broad approach, convincing argumentation and unconditional confidence in the necessity of "restoring the authentic Musorgsky". Interesting statements about the future performance were made by the members of the production team — conductor Vladimir Dranishnikov, director Sergey Radlov and stage designer Vladimir Dmitriev.

The set of three brilliant essays by Asaf'yev, symbolically entitled "Towards New Shores", "Before the premi re of *Boris Godunov*" and "Struggling for Musorgsky" (published 5, 10, 14 February 1928), has never been reproduced since its first publication.

All the three texts are united by several common topics and conclusions. The leading ideas are: critique and refutation of the legend about Musorgsky's "illiteracy", demonstration of differences between the original version and Rimsky-Korsakov's arrangement, evaluation of new excerpts and scenes restored by Lamm.

"In other arts, it would seem na ve and ridiculous to struggle for the right of the works by great artists of the past — works, which are still of burning actuality — to be presented in their authentic form, even if this concerns drafts and sketches.

As regards music — and, for some reason, as regards Musorgsky — this right is persistently denied. <...> In reactionary musical circles, under the guise of flattering love for Musorgsky (for it is a shame to scorn Musorgsky when his music has been recognized in the West!), the opinions that are offensive to his memory are emphasized with special care. Those who belong to those circles would like to destroy his manuscripts or to hide them in archives rather than to allow the composer to speak for himself not only to scholars, but to all" [7].

The context for the next article, written in the genre of "review-description", was provided by the necessity to prove the superiority of the "original Musorgsky" over Rimsky-Korsakov's edition. Retelling the opera's plot, but shifting the dramaturgic accents, Asaf'yev presents his own conception of the opera ("the people and the Tsar that is imposed on them").

In the essay "Struggling for Musorgsky", published two days before the premi re, Asaf'yev displays an especially negative attitude towards N. A. and A. N. Rimsky-Korsakov, as well as towards their influential supporters. He even goes as far as to employ the term "sophist" and to define the practice of posthumous remakes of musical works as a "provincial relic" that was characteristic of the pre-revolutionary Russian society. Be that as it may, his principal task was, undoubtedly, to put an end to the psychological inertia of perceiving *Boris Godunov* as a kind of sumptuous French-style "grand op ra". This style, according to Asaf'yev, had nothing to do with Musorgsky's original.

The new production aroused huge interest. *Krasnaya gazeta* informed that "the dress rehearsal of *Boris Godunov* will be closed and will take place on 14 February. Though one week still remains before the beginning of the performances, more than 90 per cent of places have already been sold, despite the fact that the prices for the first performance are increased" [8].

The performance's extant poster gives an idea about the production team (director S. E. Radlov, conductor V.A.Dranishnikov, sets, props and costumes designed by V.V.Dmitriev, chorus master V. S. Maratov, choreographer V.I. Vaynonen), as well as about the sequence of the opera's ten tableaux: "1<sup>st</sup> tableau. Novodevichiy Convent. 2nd tableau. Kremlin. 3rd tableau. A Cell in the Chudov Monastery. 4th tableau. An Inn on the Lithuanian Border. 5th tableau. Boris's Palace. 6th tableau. Marina's Chamber. 7th tableau. Fountains. 8th tableau. Square in front of Vasiliiy the Blessed. 9th tableau. The Faceted Palace. 10th tableau. Krom' [9].

In the text of the poster, there is only one phrase mentioning that Musorgsky's opera is given in its "primary version". Lamm's and Asaf'yev's surnames are missing — though it was just Asaf'yev who played the key role in preparing the author's full score for performance and subsequent publication [10].

Among 32 texts by authoritative musicians and critics (including V. Muzalevsky, V. Bogdanov-Berezovsky, V.Belyayev, A. Glazunov, A. Verkhotursky, M. Shteynberg (Steinberg), E. Braudo, N. Malko), published shortly after the premi re — from 17 February to May 1928 — nine large-scale essays are Asaf'yev's. Two of them are in foreign languages — Polish and German.

Here is the full list of publications:

- *Igor' Glebov*. Boris Godunov. Article 1 [11];
- *Igor' Glebov*. Boris Godunov. Article 2 [12];
- *Igor' Glebov*. Musical absolutism and its faces [13];
- *Igor' Glebov*. Controversies on Boris Godunov. Part 2 [14];
- *Zhitomirskiy A., Asaf'yev B., Dranishnikov V.* Controversies on Boris Godunov. Part 1 [15];
- Unsigned [*Asaf'yev B. V.*] Editor's Note [Answer to A. K. Glazunov] [16];

- *Igor Glebov*. The first production of "Boris Godunov" in an authentic edition. Echoes of the premiere in the press [17];
- *Igor' Glebov*. Musorgsky's *Boris Godunov* [Leningrad Akopera] [18];
- *Igor Glebov*. Original "Boris Godunov" in Leningrad [19].

It is worth noting that during the same time, before and after the premi re, Lamm neither wrote nor published anything [20]. The responsibilities of reviewer were completely taken over by Asaf'yev. "He was tireless in his agitation on behalf of the authentic Musorgsky" [21].

#### IV. CONCLUSION

The seven-year period in the life of Asaf'yev (1924–1931), when he, apart from working in the domain of musical journalism, took over such great conceptual tasks as the edition of the orchestral score of *Boris Godunov* and the instrumentation of *Khovanshchina*, can be divided into four principal stages. It must be acknowledged that his efforts as editor and orchestrator of Musorgsky's major operas were not appreciated by Russian musicologists and, perhaps surprisingly, were not reflected in the scholarly works by Asaf'yev himself. It can be stated also that as regards the practical knowledge of orchestral texture, orchestral styles and the palette of instrumental colours — in short, as regards the art of orchestration — Asaf'yev considerably surpassed Lamm.

The *first stage* of the mentioned period (1924–1926) was marked first of all by Asaf'yev's initiative to produce *Boris Godunov* at GATOB. His role was, undoubtedly, fundamental in both organizational and public aspects. This is confirmed by Asaf'yev's letter to Ossovsky of 29 December 1927: "As regards public activities, who is more courageous in theatre, if not me? Take the examples: Salome — Oranges — Wozzeck — Boris, etc. I was able to clear the way for all this without being afraid of censure, wasn't I?" [22]. The cases in question are the productions of *Salome* by R. Strauss (1924), *Love for Three Oranges* by S. Prokofiev (1926), *Wozzeck* by A. Berg (1927) and *Boris Godunov* by M. Musorgsky (1928).

The *second stage* (1926–1928) began shortly before and ended shortly after the premi re. During that time, Asaf'yev published in newspapers and journals 12 articles and reviews signed under his real surname and under his pen-name Igor' Glebov. His publications of those years include also four items from the ground-breaking collection of articles "On the Reconstruction of Musorgsky's *Boris Godunov*" timed to the GATOB premi re: first, "An essay in the justification of the nature and character of Musorgsky's oeuvre"; second, "Why Musorgsky's *Boris Godunov* should be performed in its authentic form?"; third, "Musorgsky's opera orchestra"; 4. "Conception of musical dramaturgy in the opera *Boris Godunov* by Musorgsky".

The *third stage* (1927–1928) was related to the editorial work on Musorgsky's orchestral score. For the first time

Lamm expressed his wish to engage Asaf'yev in the edition of the full score as early as 1924. The work on the music text, however, did not begin before the decision was made to accept *Boris Godunov* for performance. The opera's lithographed full score was issued by the State Music Publishing House (Muzgiz) in January 1928. Boris Asaf'yev and Pavel Lamm were mentioned on the title page as co-editors.

The *fourth stage* (1927–1931) was related to Asaf'yev's work on the orchestration of *Khovanshchina*. The scoring was based on Lamm's *Klavierauszug*. The full score in five volumes (double holograph by Asaf'yev and Lamm) is stored in Asaf'yev's fund at the Russian State Archive of Literature and Arts (RGALI) (Fund 2658. Inventory 1. Storage units 105–109). A remark on the title page reads: "Orchestrated by B. Asaf'yev. Editor-in-Chief P. Lamm". The score remains unpublished; the opera in the edition of Lamm and Asaf'yev was never performed [23].

The *final stage* began after World War II as a new period of scholarly and editorial work; in terms of practice and organization, however, it was an epilogue. In 1946–47, Lamm — either on his own initiative or at the suggestion of the publishing house — made attempts to embark on a new edition of Musorgsky's Complete Works in 16 volumes [24]. His manuscript outline plan included the full score of *Khovanshchina* in Asaf'yev's orchestration.

In January 1949, however, Asaf'yev died after a long illness, and Lamm died two years later, in 1951.

Russian specialists in the field of source studies, as well as Russian publishing houses, proved to be professionally unprepared to continue their work on the same level of academic and music editorship. As a result, the creative work on Musorgsky's operatic heritage was continued by composers, conductors and theatre directors rather than by scholars.

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