

The Connotations of “Russian” in Music of Foreign Composers on “a Russian Theme”

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Abstract—“Russian” seems to foreign composers very diverse in meaning. It is treated as designation of the state and is identified with the Russian Federation, it is interpreted as display of public and private life of the Russian acquiring “ethnographic” meaning, and it is consumed as concentrated in Orthodox religion and is marked as “confessional”. Among the means of attribution of “Russian”, the most reliable is the clarifying and explaining program title and citation of specific musical material of both folklore and authors, functioning in society as nameless folklore. A review of numerous examples of the implementation of the “Russian theme” by foreign composers in their music shows sufficient flexibility, and vagueness of the geographical and ethnic boundaries of the “Russian”.

Keywords: *Russian theme, foreign composers, Russian folk song*

I. INTRODUCTION

The issue identified in the title of the article is not idle. This question is pointed in our country when we discover a constant insurmountable distance between the self-identification of Russians and the way Russia is perceived abroad. However, it did not arise today. Historians who have studied the reports of foreigners and who visited Russia in the distant past prove this. This question is discussed not only in the field of politics, psychology (“mysterious Russian soul”), culture (say, Russia’s historical mission, Russia’s achievements in literature and arts and its contribution to the process of formation of global culture), but also music.

A large body of research on the work of foreign musicians, which has developed in recent years, allowed us to think about the representation of our homeland in musical works [1], [2] etc. and Russian-European cultural interactions [3], [4], which greatly enriched the fundamental works of the past [5]. While presenting very valuable materials, these publications are not aimed at the issue to which this work is devoted: *how musicians belonging to other national cultures understand “Russian”*. Most informative for us in this regard are the works of foreigners with the declared “Russian” theme, as a rule, with “speaking” program (verbal) names with a wide coverage of opuses

written in different genres (“purely musical” and “synthetic” - vocal and choral, musical and theatrical).

II. “RUSSIAN” AS AN IDEA

Thinking about how “Russian” is understood by representatives of other national cultures, it is logical to move away from those ideas that were put forward and shared by Russian society (within the framework of this publication it is hardly advisable to enter into a debate on the substance of these ideas). One such was the idea of “Moscow – the third Rome”, expressed in the 16th century, which proclaimed Moscow as the successor to the Roman Empire, carrying the unity of secular and spiritual, which claimed Moscow as the world center of Orthodoxy. The previous idea was replaced during the reign of Nikolai I by the state ideology formulated in the concept of “Orthodoxy - Autocracy – People” by S.S. Uvarov.

Ideological “self-determination” permeated the lives of Russians, and it could not go unnoticed by representatives of other cultures. However, it would be unjustified to believe that each component of the ideological formula directly materialized in their musical work. We think it would be more appropriate to consider each individual ideological message as a connection of many different facets of life. They were the focus of the attention of foreign composers. In an attempt to generalize the multicolored vision and artistic imprinting of “Russian” by “strangers”, we will highlight such conceptual statuses of Russia as its *statehood, public and private life of the Russian, religiousness*. We will make sure of their heuristic energy, turning to musical (mainly program), verbal-musical (vocal and choir) and musical-theatrical creativity of foreign masters.

III. “RUSSIAN” AS CREATIVE TASK OF COMPOSER

At first glance, foreigners easily captured cultural and political trends of Russian society and made in full compliance with them.

To start with, in the consciousness of a foreign musician there was an image of Russia as another, peculiar **state**. In

this case, "Russian" is identified with "the Russian Federation".

Easily recognizable markers of the state are geographical names: Russia, its rivers (Néwa, Wolga, Don, Dwina, Tschussowaja), its capitals (Moscou/Moskwa/Mosca; St. Pétersburg, Petrograd, Leningrad with the suburbs of Pawlowsk, Peterhof, Gatschina, Oranienbaum), its regions (Crimée/Krymée; Siberia), and its cities (Nishnij Nowgorod, Stalingrad, Odessa, Vologda, Voronezh, Kalouga, Smolensk, Pskov, Livadia, Aloupka). Toponyms can be tied to some event (military actions), and can arise as labels of the author's personal fate - his trips and stays in certain areas of Russia (in numerous musical "Memories of...").

It can be seen from the music of past centuries that Europeans were clearly aware of Russia's specific geographical position - the North. This is evidenced, for example, by "entertainments for young people based on favorite Russian songs" called "Flowers of the North" op. 103 (1852) by German composer and pianist Ferdinand Beyer (1803 - 1863); Russian "Songs of the North" op. 88 b by French virtuoso pianist and composer Alexandre Édouard Gorla (1823 - 1860); "Six Northern Songs Without Words" for the cittern (1861) by German guitarist, citternist, singer and composer Adam Darr (1811 - 1866), among them No. 1 and 2 are Russians. German 19th-century composer and conductor Carl Emanuel Bach composed many salon plays related to the places he visited. His legacy includes a fantasy on the Russian melodies *Nordisches Bouquet* (1896) and *Nordische Quadrille* based on Russian songs of op. 183. It is only natural that "North" is specified in the European's representations by its natural phenomena - such as "Siberian blizzard" (*Siberian Snowstorm*) and *Toundra*. It is symptomatic that the more multinational "South" differs from the native Russian "North" - such as the Danish composer, conductor and pianist Victor Emanuel Bendix (1851 - 1926), who completed Symphony No. 2 "Summer Sounds of Southern Russia" *D-dur* op. 20 for orchestra (1887-88) by the Ukrainian dancing theme.

Foreign musicians, who witnessed the fateful historical events during their lives, perceived Russia as a state. Their creativity turns into a kind of musical "diary" or musical "archive," according to whose "documents" we learn about Napoleon's invasion of Russia and his expulsion, about the victory of Russian weapons in the Russian-Turkish wars, the feats of Russian seafarers in the Far East, the intense battles of World War II and other battles. In their opuses, foreign musicians immortalized *Sébastopol*, *Navarin*, *Oczakow*, *Inkermann*, *Cronstadt*, and *Port-Arthur*. *Suworow*, *Skobelev*, *Malakoff*, *Potemkin* and other historical characters representing the glorious history of our country took an honorary place in their play-dedications.

Russia as a state opens up with another side in many plays by Western composers, timed to such events of Russian (and in fact – international) significance as coronation. Foreign (especially courtiers who served the royal or imperial crown) musicians were in a hurry to attest their faithful feelings to a variety of pathos "solemn

marches," polonaise, waltz, etc. Long and vitiated names of such opuses usually contain not only the name of the event itself (coronation, arrival of the monarch or heir with a visit to the European country, birthday or funeral), but also precise indication of regalia and "gifted" status, and other facts (*Ihrer Majestät Elisabeth Alexiewna Kaiserin aller Russen, Sa Majesté l'Empereur de toutes les Russies Alexandre Nicolaievicz*), the date of event (as, for example, in "The Triumphal March of the Allied Troops after the Capture of Leipzig, composed for piano and dedicated to the great mother of the world liberator to Her Majesty Empress Maria Fedorovna by W. von Aumann, a former adjutant of the Commander-in-Chief of the Russian Army in Persia" (1814) died in 1815 in St. Petersburg, Wilhelm Fridrich Johann von Aumann).

In the operas of past the carriers of state power are Russian tsars and emperors: Ivan Grozny, Lzhedmitriy I, Peter I, Catherine II. In Soviet times, glorious odes, cantatas, oratorio, and songs were dedicated to Stalin, the personality, accumulating in itself all state power in our country.

Finally, we will add that Kremlin is a constant symbol of power both in pre-revolutionary Russia and during the years of Soviet power.

A creative personality, open to the knowledge of nonnative culture, always observes what is happening next to it in everyday reality. And it opens up another aspect of the national - **public and private life of a person**. Foreign musicians, who visited Russia for a short time or lived in it for a long time, could not ignore what surrounded them, mainly here they were looking for true, rooted, specifically Russian. Thus "Russian" was identified with "ethnographic".

It should be said that "ethnographism" or excessive availability of ethnographic features, descriptions and details was not at all a product of creative search for an individual creator. It aroused as a marked aesthetic trend in the Russian society itself (Pushkin's fairy tales stylized "under the old age", picturesque portraits of "young ladies of the Smolny Institute" in peasant suits and scenes from peasant life on the paintings of artists). It also touched on foreign musicians, whose ethnographic sometimes bordered on exotic. To convey "local color", "character"- such creative task was set by them many times. We can recall numerous suite cycles of "characteristic" plays (*Pièces caractéristiques*) of different nations - Scottish, German, Hungarian, Polish, among which, as a rule, the place was found also for *Danse russe*, *Chanson russe*, plays *À la Russe*.

The spectrum of signs of such "Russian" is large. It is made up of reliable lexical markers - words from Russian lexicon (*bajuschki baju*, *douchinka/dushenka*, *Czar*, *Czarine*, *Tsarewna*, *isba*, *briska*, *muzhichek*, *samovar*, *matrioshka*, *sarafan*, *vodka*) and Russian proper names (*Alyosha*, *Antonida*, *Ivan*, *Katinka*, *Katioucha*, *Lida*, *Lisinka*, *Luba*, *Marfa*, *Maroussia*, *Nadeshda*, *Nadia*, *Natalia*, *Natasha*, *Nikita*, *Olga*, *Olenka*, *Prascovia*, *Sacha*, *Tatiana*, *Zinaide*; *Iwanowna*, *Fedorowna*, *Petrovich*; *Romanow*). They are abundantly scattered among the titles of program plays, and are found in opera libretto. The long French tradition of

painting of portraits of beautiful ladies was continued by the "gallery" of "Moscovites".

Since in snowy "northern" Russia it was impossible to do without sled, in music "Troika" and "Russian sledding mail" teared along at great speed, "Russian sledding" (*Russian Slahert Ligh Rant*) gave laughter and joy.

Foreign musicians were fascinated even by the Russian fairy tale ("Vasilisa Beautiful" of modern German composer and rock musician Erik Kross, set in 2000 at Märchenmusik Theater in Zittau).

A reliable and convincing "Russian" was opened to the foreigner through a folk song. Of course, the very fact of its presence in an opera or program instrumental play has already contributed to the formation of a "local color". Such a role was given to the popular songs *Kalinka*, "*Dubinushka*" ("*Hey, Ukhnem*"), "I will come out on the river" and less famous: "Snow is drifting along the street", and *Kolyada*. The ethnographical significance, the paramount value of folklore song is proved by the fact that some widely known author's melodies lost the names of their creators and were advertised by Western European colleagues as a "Russian folk song". Such fate was suffered by *Rusische Volkshymne* ("God save the Tsar!") by Alexey Lvov with the text of Vasilij Zhukovsky, which often appeared unnamed or with the indication "Russian folk song", as well as romances – the "business cards" of the "Russian" in the 19th century: "Red Sarafan" by Alexander Varlamov, "Nightingale" by Alexander Alabiev, "Tell her" by Princess Elizabeth Kochubei.

To be fair, however, it should be said that many musicians showed a much deeper interest in the Russian folk song. It is evidenced by the purposeful work of collecting songs in the natural environment in which they existed. In addition to the collection by N.A. Lvov and I. Prach [6] famous in Europe, huge work on collecting and recording the Russian songs was done, for example, by Julius Napoleon Wilhelm Hartevelde (1859 - 1927), the Swede by origin, who in 1906 undertook travel across Siberia to collect and publish prison and galley folklore, and who later published the collection "1812. 35 Russian and French songs, marches, dances, etc. of the era of Napoleon I's invasion of Russia in 1812" for the men's choir. The edition "Russian folk songs: collected and put for one piano" (publ. until 1875) published in the mid-19th century by German composer, conductor and piano teacher Christian Louis Heinrich Köhler (1820 - 1886) included 194 tunes. Sincere professional interest in specifically "Russian" passes through in numerous arrangements of samples of Russian folklore: more than 100 arrangements (1869) are made by the Russian pianist, composer, publisher of German origin Moritz (Matvey) Bernard (1794 - 1871); "Folk Sounds" (1878) by composer and pianist Peter Nicolai von Wilm (1834 - 1911) includes 150 of Russian and gypsy folk songs, etc.

The dance genres showed themselves curiously. On the one hand, traditional ethnic Russian dances heard and seen by foreigners – *Trepak*, *Kozáček*, *Kamarinskaya* - came to the podium, which was natural and logical. On the other

hand, there were dances with symbiotic names reflecting the geopolitical status of Russia, which included Poland and Ukraine at a certain historical stage: *Mazurka russe*, *Polonaise russe*, *Russian Krakoviak*, *Russian gopak*, *Gopak* (*Russian dance*) (play by English Arnold Vach, written in 1912). Both the program and the music itself here send a signal of national-style ambiguity. On the third, there was a paradoxical intersection of very distanced cultures that involuntarily caused analogy to the known expression by A.S.Griboedov from "Woe from Wit" "Mix of French with Nizhny Novgorod": *Gigue russe* (of the Frenchman Etienne Caillette de L'Hervilliers, 1889), *Gavotte russe* (*Marousia-Gavotte* of the Frenchman Alexandre Clément Léon Joseph Luigini, 1897), *Russischer Apachentanz* (of the German-speaking composer Reinhard Pfarr, record of 1987). The motives of such "hybrids" (experiment in the field of style of national culture, musical present of Western European culture to Russian, in the case of *Gavotte russe*, symbolization of friendship between Russia and France - the topic, by the way, relevant at the end of the 19th century) remain obscure.

Finally, the musical component of the Russian man's life - the singing and dancing man - was provided by using appropriate musical instruments, constantly imitated in plays on the "Russian" theme. As iconic, *Balalaika*, *Garmoshka*, *Bells*, *Jingle bells* stood out.

Certainly, the religious (Orthodox) component of the Russian world was displayed to the least extent in the musical opuses of foreign specialists, and this is not surprising. Obviously, the mentality of foreigners was affected by the influence of other previously (in life) formed Catholic or Protestant religious (perhaps atheistic) values. Probably, the "closed," intimate nature of religious experiences manifested itself. Nevertheless, Orthodoxy as an integral part of the life of the Russian has still found its imprinting, and is interpreted at the same time "confessional" by adherents of other religions as the equivalent of "Russian". We refer to this, for example, opera stories (especially of the 18th century), in which spiritual persons and church rituals brought "local color".

We will pay tribute to Dmitry Bortnyansky's chant "Vesper Anthem" (although the authorship of Bortnyansky has not been finally confirmed). John Andrew Stevenson (1761 - 1833) addressed it and made an arrangement for a vocal quartet (or mixed chorus) with piano with T. Moore's English text *Hark! The Vesper Hymn is Stealing*, in which Hymn became widely known in Europe and was arranged by many other musicians for other performance compositions (Henry Rowley Bishop, Jean-Baptiste Duvernoy, Franz König, Carl Lafite, Ferdinand Ries) or was put as the basis for variations (Thomas Aptommas, Augusta Garrett Browne, Charles B. Grobe, James Pethel, Carl Reinecke, William H. Swan).

We will give another, almost exceptional example - the work of the English composer of the 20th century John Tavener (1944 - 2013). He was pushed to the traditions of Orthodoxy by some life circumstances – marriage (though

not prolonged) with Orthodox Greek, temporary residence in Greece and the study of Eastern Christianity, creative alliance with Russian-born nun Fekla, christening in 1977 at the age of thirty-three (in Christianity called "the age of Christ") by Metropolitan Antony Surozhsky (Bloom). During the extremely significant and fruitful twenty-year Orthodox period, J. Tavener composed such a serious canonical Orthodox religious cycle of *Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom* (1977) for mixed choir a cappella, *The Grateful Akathist* (1987) for choir and symphony orchestra, opera *Mary of Egypt* (1991) [7].

Not limited to the external, ritual attributes of Orthodox culture, the composer is immersed in its foundations, mastering the ancient znamenny chant - the main kind of ancient Russian divine singing, which especially made himself known in the song for the mixed choir *Funeral Ikos* (1981). Although the musician subsequently sought wider spiritual guidance in other religions (in the Gospel, texts of American Indians, Sufis, Hindus, followers of Islam), Russian spiritual tradition left an indelible mark in Tavener's mind, which was printed in large, significant for composer operas of the central period of his creativity.

It is not difficult to note that Orthodox culture has long been captured very depthless and even (in the case of D. Bortnyansky's "Vesper Anthem") indirectly. Deeper penetration into the religious aspect of Russian life, involving the study and creative reproduction of musical traditions, became possible quite late, only in the second half of the 20th century (by efforts of John Tavener, Arvo Pärt).

IV. ETHNIC BOUNDARIES OF THE CONCEPT OF "RUSSIAN"

The review of foreign music, which embodies the concept of "Russian," reveals a very important circumstance: some blur, mobility, ambiguity of the key concept. It makes itself known when "Russian" is closely in contact (and even interpenetrated) with some other pronounced national. The symbiotic message comes from such titles of plays as *Bohemien Russe*, *Russisches Zigeunerlied*. Certainly, Gypsy culture blends in well with the life of the Russian man. However, we see a tendency to equalize, identify, and annihilate national specificity when Ferenc Liszt (1811 - 1886) amalgamates "Nightingale" by A. Alabiev and "Gypsy Song" ("You will not believe how nice you are") by P. Bulakhov in "Two Russian melodies" for piano (1842), or when the title "Gypsy" is interpreted by using subtitle "Russian melody for piano" op. 27 (before 1852) by composer and pianist Charles (Karl) Lewy (1823 - 1883).

This trend is much more obvious with close contact between "Russian" and "Ukrainian". It is clearly declared by the full name of the work of Ernest Vančura (Arnošt Vančura, 1750 - 1802), the Czech by the origin: "Russian Symphony on Ukrainian Topics". English and German theologian and philologist Benjamin Beresford (1750 - 1819), who served as a priest in Moscow for some time, collected and published collections of German, Scottish and Russian songs with English texts, considering it possible to call one of them *The Russian Troubadour (A Collection of Ukrainian and Other*

National Melodies, 1816), obviously based on Ukraine's geopolitical status of the time as part of Russia. The author of the play *Kolomeika* for violin and piano op. 10 (1851) Polish violinist and composer Stanisław Serwaczyński (1781 - 1859) could not help but know the Ukrainian origin of his chosen genre, and yet it is accompanied by a clarifying comment "brilliant fantasy on Russian national motives". The same can be said of Czech classical guitarist and composer Štěpán Rak, born in Zakarpatye in 1945, who nevertheless named one of plays *Ruska Dumka*; Its Ukrainian-Polish genre genesis is backed by intonations of Ukrainian folklore.

The song *Schöne Minka* occupied a peculiar place on the ethnographic map of Eurasia. Its roots go to Ukrainian culture: the author of the song "Iihav kozak za Dunaj" is considered to be Semen Klimovsky, Kazak from Zaporozhye. The song soon won Russia and then Poland and neighboring countries. The Napoleonic Wars exported it to France. In Austria and Germany, a new German text by poet K. Tigde, where the heroine's name was Minka and the song was named *Schöne Minka, ich muss scheiden*, provided its popularity.

It is important that in Europe and even beyond it, the song was identified unambiguously – as Russian. This is confirmed, for example, by the Nine Variations on Russian Song (*Schöne Minka*) (1814-15) op. 37/40 by Carl Maria von Weber (1786 - 1826); and by Ten varied themes for piano op. 107 (1817-18) by Ludwig van Beethoven (1770 - 1827) where at No. 3 "The Little Russian song", and at No. 7 "Russian song" (*Schöne Minka*) appear. The play *Postcards from Russia* by American composer and arranger Carrie Lane Gruselle is built on this melody.

It is not difficult to see that the understanding of "Russian" was quite consistent with historical and geographical reality, ethnic identity was related to the geographical boundaries of Russia at a certain stage of its historical evolution. Therefore, since the Russian Empire of the late 18th and 19th centuries included Ukraine and Poland, composers at that time could call Ukrainian or Polish as Russian. Obviously, for this reason, the composer and pianist from the Netherlands Josef Ascher (1829 - 1869) considered it permissible to publish in 1857 the caprice-mazurka "Russian Peasant Dance" (or "Polish Dance") op. 55. But the Polish dance for piano *Volga* op. 36 printed in Sydney by Claude Dufault; 1877 - 1934) looks rather curious.

The headlines of numerous instrumental plays "Kazaki" (*Kosakenritt*), which do not contain certain national identification, are symptomatic. Awareness of the history of the Kazaks – the genetic pluralism of the Kazak community and the large geographical prevalence in the territory of the Russian Empire – will not allow them to be related to any certain (say, Russian) national culture.

The indistinguishable, unclear nature of "Russian" becomes obvious in another plan - when considering it from the point of view of cultural and psychological identification: how is Russian perceived and understood as such by the European "ear". Our observations show that "audible" does

not necessarily coincide with "true." We will give some examples to that.

In 1776 - 1784, Giovanni Paisiello (1741 - 1816), who came from Italy, set the tone for the musical life of St. Petersburg. He was composer and Capellmeister of Empress Catherine the Second and music teacher of Grand Princess Maria Fedorovna. His stay in Russia affected his work, in particular the two-act opera "Love with Obstacles, or Miller" on the libretto of J. Palomba (*L'amor contrastato, ossia La molinara*), set in Naples in Teatro dei Fiorentini after the composer left Russia in 1788. The Russian national song "Is it not for that we could find the sorrow in love" was put in a basis of the aria of the main heroine *Nel cor più non mi sento* ("In the heart I do not feel triumph of youth any more") from the II action (in other version of the opera – the duet). (In the 19th chapter of the novel "Nov" I.S. Turgenev describes performance of this song by spouses – older persons Fomushka and Fimushka Subochevs and provides its text: "Is it not for that we could find the sorrow in love that the gods gave us a heart capable of loving?"). The aria was so much loved in Europe that dozens of composers (among them were so eminent as Giovanni Bottesini, Ludwig van Beethoven, Niccolò Paganini) made its arrangements, transformed into their fantasies, variations and other plays. However, in no case (as in Paisiello) does the note text indicate its Russian origin, from which it can be assumed that its Russian roots were not known to Europeans.

Similar happened to the music of another Italian - Gioachino Rossini (1792 - 1868), who in the most popular opera "The Barber of Seville" quoted melodies of Russian folk songs "You come, my cow, home" and "Ah, why the garden would be fenced". But judging by research and critical articles about the work, no one perceived them as ethnographic documents.

It should be recognized that a certain "deafness" in the national attribution of music is inherent not only to Western European musicians in relation to Russian culture. This phenomenon is much more common and more complicated. It is sufficient to say that it also extends into the field of national self-identification. It seemed that Alexey Lvov clearly saw the task of the state scale, saying in his "Notes" about the writing of the anthem of Russia: "This task seemed very difficult to me when I recalled the majestic English anthem "God, save the King!", the original anthem of the French and the merciful anthem of Austria. For a while, this thought roamed in my head. I felt the need to write the majestic, strong, sensitive anthem, understandable for all, having the imprint of nationality, fit for the church, fit for the troops, fit for the people, from scientist to illiterate" [8]. However, this noble goal was not appreciated – a large expert of Russian culture V.V. Stasov, characterizing the creative activity of A. Lvov, wrote that neither the anthem nor the soul of the author "have anything national" [9] ^{p.143}.

Finally, concluding our review, we add that the verbal indication of something Russian can be purely conditional, in no way related to the music itself. And this phenomenon is

very common in the array of "Russian" opuses of foreign composers.

V. CONCLUSION

Thus, it turned out that foreign musicians perceive "Russian" as a very diverse concept. It opens as a designation of the state. Even more attractive is the layer in which the life of the Russian is viewed. Significantly (though justifiably) inferior to them is another aspect of Russian - accumulated in religion.

The implementation of "Russian" is facilitated by the arsenal of means and techniques, among which there is a marked clarification and explanation of the role of the program title and the citation of specific musical material (folklore, which has gained great European fame of the authors).

The review revealed that the "Russian" itself as an archetypal musical and artistic concept is very vague, its geographical and ethnic boundaries blurred. Already this has to ask: is it possible, with a rather wide scope of signs of Russian, and the dynamism of the artistic concept itself, to talk about the depth of its understanding by foreign musicians? Do they have a "national code" – "national-cultural DNA" of the Russian?

The above said makes certain that the designation of the problem – a "Russian" theme in the music of foreign composers (which, in fact, this publication discusses) – is clearly not enough. It will require further deep development, in which it will be necessary both to search for data on the circumstances of the creation and performance of compositions in a wide historical and cultural context, and to analyze carefully the music itself.

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