

# *Not Russian Enough*

The Negotiation of Nationalism in  
Nineteenth-Century Russian Opera

RUTGER HELMERS

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**Not Russian Enough: The Negotiation of Nationalism in  
Nineteenth-Century Russian Opera**

Niet Russisch genoeg: nationalisme en de  
negentiende-eeuwse Russische operapraktijk  
(met een samenvatting in het Nederlands)

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## *Preface*

**T**HIS DISSERTATION is about the complex and contested relation between the art of opera and national thought in nineteenth-century Russia. More than once, when telling people about the subject of my research, I have been confronted with the question: ‘Why Russian music? What is your special connection with Russia?’ Some seemed surprised to find that there was none, that I had neither lived in Russia nor had any Russian grandparents or distant Russian cousins that might explain my interests. By now, of course, I do have a special connection with Russia, but it has been the result of, rather than the reason for, my scholarly engagement with the country’s musical past. I have always been glad that there was no such motivation, feeling that it would somehow devalue the intrinsic interest of Russian music and its history if only Russians and people with Russian family cared about it.

Having no prior ties to Russia, nor, I must admit, a particular predilection for Russian opera, I more or less had to stumble upon the subject. This happened during my master’s, when I ended up at the University of Cambridge studying with Marina Frolova-Walker as an Erasmus student in the spring of 2006. My main musicological interests so far had been nineteenth-century music and nationalism; by the time I returned home, Russian music, and opera in particular, had become a permanent fascination.

My late attraction to Russian culture meant that I had to devote a large part of my first year as a Ph. D. candidate to the study of the Russian language, and then had to develop my reading proficiency along the way. I hope that, after

four years of study, my knowledge of Russian culture and the Russian language will prove to be sufficient—even if it inevitably falls short of that of native Russians—and that any shortcomings on this account are compensated by the fresh perspectives and critical distance allowed by my outsider’s position. I have tried to make this dissertation accessible and stimulating for those who are already familiar with the history of Russian opera as well as for those with an interest in music, opera, or cultural history who do not yet have a particular affinity with the repertoire I have studied. I hope I have been able to communicate my enthusiasm in the pages that follow.

### *Acknowledgements*

Howard Becker began his study *Art Worlds* with an anecdote about the English novelist Anthony Trollope, who claimed to owe his success above anyone else to the old groom who dutifully woke him up and served him coffee every morning, and thus contributed to the writer’s steady literary production. It is just one example to illustrate how most human endeavour, even the seemingly most solitary, is dependent on the support and cooperation of others, and this applies to scholars as much as artists.

The present work, too, has been the outcome of a collective effort, and obviously so, as my reliance on the work of previous authors is extensively documented in the footnotes and bibliography. My debts to others, however, run much deeper and wider than that. There are many people and institutes to whom I owe a more personal gratitude, and there are a number of them who, other than Trollope’s groom, I should not like to remain anonymous.

My first words of thanks should of course go to my supervisors Emile Wennekes and Marina Frolova-Walker, without whom I would never have embarked on this project, let alone have completed it. Even though Russia is located somewhere on the fringes of Emile’s broad range of interests, he has been unfailingly supportive of my work, especially during the final stages, when—without exaggeration—he was available day and night. His observations and suggestions were always an incentive to further explorations, and his faith in the project and my abilities have given me the confidence to continue along the chosen path. Marina’s expertise in the field of Russian music, meanwhile, has been both indispensable and inspiring. Although we have inevitably worked at some remove from each other ever since I returned to Utrecht after my semester in Cambridge in 2006, she has continued to offer her support from across the Channel whenever it was needed, and the many

ideas and comments she generously shared with me—whether through e-mail, phone, or in person in Cambridge, Utrecht, or a pub in Durham—have greatly shaped my own thoughts on the subject.

I would like to thank the Institute for History and Culture (ogc) at Utrecht University, which graciously funded my research and offered a hospitable working environment; as well as my fellow-musicologists at the department of Media and Culture Studies (mcw), who provided the disciplinary framework for my studies, and gave me the much-appreciated opportunity to acquire some teaching experience. A number of other institutes have also contributed greatly to my research and my life as a doctoral student: my graduate school, the Huizinga Institute for Cultural History, where I met many kindred spirits working in other historical disciplines than my own, and which offered me an unforgettable introduction to the city of St Petersburg in the Cultural Transfer study trip; the Russian National Library and the Russian Institute for the History of the Arts (RIH), where I have acquired the majority of my source materials; and the Netherlands Institute in St Petersburg (NIP), who offered warm and friendly local support for my visits to Russia in many ways.

I would also like to express my gratitude to the following individuals for a variety reasons: my principal teacher of the Russian language, Alla Peeters-Podgaevskaja, for equipping me with all the skills required for finding my way around St Petersburg and reading my Russian sources; Joost van Gemert of the Utrecht University Library, for being so kind to acquire several hard-to-obtain and expensive sources for me; Katya Chernyakova and Olga Panteleyeva, who may not even remember, but who brought me my first set of photocopies from St Petersburg; Roger Parker, who, like Marina, inspired me during my stay in Cambridge in 2006 and helped me on several other occasions; and the members of my assessment committee, professors Louis Grijp, Karl Kügle, Joep Leerssen, Francis Maes, and Richard Taruskin, who were all so kind to invest their precious time to study and evaluate my manuscript.

I am also grateful to my roommates and/or coffee-drinking companions at the ogc, Bart, Maarten, Harm, Alastair, Jacco, Jörg, Matjaž, whose company made life as an 'aio' so much more bearable; my fellow-members of the intervision group, Auke, Claartje, Feike, Koen, and Marjolijn, for our not-so-frequent, not-so-structured but highly enjoyable sessions of mutual mental support; and various friends outside the ivory tower of humanities research, particularly Joris and his wife Anna, and Menno, whose humour and wonderful company have reminded me throughout the years that there is much more to life than scholarship and classical music alone.

Finally, I am blessed with my family, who have not only offered their

unconditional sympathy and mental support, as families ideally do, but who also happen to be unusually well-equipped to actually advise and assist me in the process of writing my thesis. Helmer and Inge, my brother and sister-in-law, have led the way by obtaining doctoral degrees in their own cultural-historical disciplines, and together we have established the family tradition of editing each other's manuscripts in the final stages. All of us have relied extensively on my mother's impeccable feeling for the English language, and on my father's willingness to put up with all the feverish scholarly activity under his roof. I cannot adequately express how grateful I am to all of them for being so incredibly supportive of my musicological activities.

This also applies, of course, to my Anna, who deserves the little place of honour at the end of this section. Not only did she patiently endure my working habits during the final phase of the project, she participated wholeheartedly in the family editing business, and stayed up with me till five in the morning if necessary. Regardless of the inevitable bouts of stress and despair that accompany the writing of a doctoral thesis, she has never failed to make me feel like one of the luckiest men on the globe.

### *Preliminary Notes*

A number of practical decisions made in the writing of this thesis will have to be accounted for.

**DATES.** Before the Revolution, Russia kept time according to the Julian or 'Old Style' calendar, which in the nineteenth century was 12 days behind the Gregorian or 'New Style' calendar used in Western Europe, and, after the leap day in February 1900, 13 days. In general, the dates in this thesis are given according to the local calendar, i. e. in the Old Style for events in pre-Revolutionary Russia, and in the New Style for events that took place elsewhere, in which case they are accompanied by the abbreviation *ns*. In case of correspondence across the border, both the Old and New Style dates are given, separated by a slash. Dates separated by a dash indicate date ranges, and are used, among other things, for letters that have been written over the course of several days.

**TRANSLITERATION.** The transliteration of Russian words and names from the Cyrillic will always remain a compromise between the precision and consistency of the transliteration, the readability in the target language, and the reader's familiarity with the system used. I have relied on the system used

by *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*.<sup>1</sup> The most distinctive feature of this system is that the Cyrillic ы is rendered as i, which allows й to be rendered as y without needless ambiguity or confusion. Following the *New Grove*, the awkward-looking ending -iy in masculine proper names has been replaced by a simple -y (e. g. Yevgeny and Yury rather than Yevgeniy and Yuriy; and Rimsky rather than Rimskiy) in both the English text and the references in order to improve readability. For some well-known names exceptions have been made in order to use the form most familiar to present-day readers of English (e. g. Tchaikovsky rather than Chaykovsky, Diaghilev rather than Dyagilev). Strict transliteration has been maintained in Russian titles within the references and bibliography. As regards pre-Revolutionary orthography in these titles, I have removed all terminal hard signs and rendered old characters such as ъ, ѝ, and ѣ as their modern equivalents, but—unable to resist some of the archaic charm—I have maintained all other obsolete forms such as the affixes -ago, -iya and -oyu.

TRANSLATION. Translations are mine unless otherwise indicated. In a number of cases, I have referred to existing translations along with the original, to be of service to those who read Russian as well as those who do not. In the case of letters, diaries, and similarly dated materials, I have indicated the date in the reference, so that the reader may consult any of the relevant editions, both Russian and translated. Though this is primarily an interpretative study, a number of quotations—particularly reviews—may not have appeared previously in Russian editions or secondary sources. For a much larger number of materials I quote, there may not yet be an existing translation, and I hope that opening up these sources to the non-Russian reader adds to the value of the present study.

IDENTIFICATION. Nineteenth-century books and articles do not always clearly state the author: many texts were published anonymously, under a pseudonym, or only by the author's initials. For the identification of such authors, I have relied extensively on secondary sources.<sup>2</sup> In nineteenth-century cases for which there is no doubt as to the identity of the author, I have silently supplied incomplete or missing first names and patronymics, and

<sup>1</sup> See Stanley Sadie and John Tyrrell (eds.), *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd edn., 29 vols. (London: Macmillan, 2001), vol. 1, pp. xx–xxi.

<sup>2</sup> The most consulted bibliographies are: Grigory Borisovich Bernandt and Izrail Markovich Yampol'sky, *Kto pisal o muzike: bio-bibliograficheskiy slovar' muzikal'nikh kritikov i lits, pisavshikh o muzike v dorevol'yutsionnoy Rossii i SSSR*, 4 vols. (Moscow: Sovetskiy kompozitor, 1971–1989); Tamara Nikolayevna Livanova, *Muzikal'naya bibliografiya russkoy periodicheskoy pechati XIX veka*, 6 vols. (Moscow: Muzgiz, 1960–1979).

I have done the same for modern Russian publications that give only initials with the surname. Pseudonyms or anonymous texts have been indicated as such in the references and bibliography.

SCORES AND MUSICAL EXAMPLES. For my study of the scores and the musical examples of this dissertation, I have employed both pre-Revolutionary scores and modern scholarly ones.<sup>3</sup> The use of a nineteenth-century edition was a particular necessity in the case of *A Life for the Tsar*, which in its official Soviet scholarly edition contains the ideologically adapted libretto by Sergey Gorodetsky (1939) instead of the original text. The music examples have frequently been assembled from both vocal and full scores; in general I have preferred clarity over faithfulness to the original register and scoring. Bar numbers refer to the composers' respective complete editions, except in the case of *Judith*, for which no such edition is available.

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<sup>3</sup> For the four case studies, I have employed: Mikhail Ivanovich Glinka, *Zhizn' za Tsarya: Bol'shaya opera v 4-kh deystviyakh c épilogom*, full score, ed. Mily Alekseyevich Balakirev and Sergey Mikhaylovich Lyapunov (Moscow: Jurgenson, 1896; rpt. Elibron Classics, 2007); id., *Polnoye sobraniye sochineniy*, ed. Tamara Nikolayevna Livanova et al., 18 vols. (Moscow: Muzika, 1959–1965); Aleksandr Nikolayevich Serov, *Yudif': opera v pyati deystviyakh*, vocal score, ed. Andrey Mikhaylovich Yevgen'yev and Georgy Ottonovich Dütsch (Moscow: Gutheil, [1885]; rpt. Elibron Classics, n. d.); Pyotr Il'yich Tchaikovsky, *Orleanskaya deva: opera v 4 deystviyakh (6 kartin)*, vocal score (Moscow: Jurgenson, [1899]; rpt. Elibron Classics, 2007); id., *Polnoye sobraniye sochineniy*, ed. Boris Vladimirovich Asaf'yev et al., 62 vols. (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoye muzikal'noye izdatel'stvo, 1946–1979); Nikolay Andreyevich Rimsky-Korsakov, *La Fiancée du Tzar*, vocal score, ed. A. N. Schaeffer, trans. A. Komaroff (Leipzig: Belyayev, [1905]); id., *Polnoye sobraniye sochineniy*, 50 vols. (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoye muzikal'noye izdatel'stvo, 1946–1970).

## Abbreviations

- СНЛРР Pyotr Il'yich Tchaikovsky, *Polnoye sobraniye sochineniy: literaturniye proizvedeniya i perepiska*, ed. Boris Vladimirovich Asaf'yev et al., 17 vols. (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoye muzikal'noye izdatel'stvo, 1953–1981).
- СНТ Pyotr Il'yich Tchaikovsky and Sergey Ivanovich Taneyev, *Pis'ma*, ed. Vladimir Aleksandrovich Zhdanov (Moscow: Goskul'tprosvetizdat, 1951).
- СНVM Pyotr Il'yich Tchaikovsky and Nadezhda Filaretovna von Meck, *Perepiska*, ed. Vladimir Aleksandrovich Zhdanov and Nikolay Timofeyevich Zhegin, 3 vols. (Moscow: Zakharov, 2004).
- СНYU Pyotr Il'yich Tchaikovsky, *Perepiska s P. I. Yurgensonom*, ed. Vladimir Aleksandrovich Zhdanov and Nikolay Timofeyevich Zhegin, 2 vols. (Moscow: Muzgiz, 1938–1952).
- GLM Aleksandra Anatol'yevna Orlova, *Glinka's Life in Music: A Chronicle*, trans. Richard Hoops (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1988).
- GLPP Mikhail Ivanovich Glinka, *Polnoye sobraniye sochineniy: literaturniye proizvedeniya i perepiska*, ed. Anastasiya Sergeevna Lyapunova and Aleksandr Semyonovich Rozanov, 2 vols. (Moscow: Muzika, 1973–1975).
- GM Mikhail Ivanovich Glinka, *Memoirs*, trans. Richard B. Mudge (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1963).

- GVS Aleksandra Anatol'yevna Orlova (ed.), *Glinka v vospominaniyakh sovremennikov* (Moscow: Muzgiz, 1955).
- OMLN Vladimir Fyodorovich Odoyevsky, *Muzikal'no-literaturnoye naslediye*, ed. Grigory Borisovich Bernandt (Moscow: Muzgiz, 1956).
- RLPP Nikolay Andreyevich Rimsky-Korsakov, *Polnoye sobraniye sochine-niy: literaturniye proizvedeniya i perepiska*, ed. Boris Vladimirovich Asaf'yev, Aleksandr Vyacheslavovich Ossovsky, Vladimir Nikolayevich Rimsky-Korsakov et al., 8 vols. (Moscow: Muzgiz, 1955–1982).
- RMML Nikolay Andreyevich Rimsky-Korsakov, *My Musical Life*, ed. Carl van Vechten, trans. Judah A. Joffe (London: Secker, 1924).
- RRM1 James Stuart Campbell (ed.), *Russians on Russian Music, 1830–1880: An Anthology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).
- RYAB Nikolay Andreyevich Rimsky-Korsakov, *Perepiska s V. V. Yastrebtsev'im i V. I. Bel'skim*, ed. Lyudmila Grigor'yevna Barsova (St Petersburg, 2004).
- SESM Aleksandr Nikolayevich Serov, *Stat'i o muzike*, ed. Vladimir Vasil'yevich Protopopov, 7 vols., *Russkaya klassicheskaya muzikal'naya kritika* (Moscow: Muzika, 1984–1990).
- SESt Aleksandr Nikolayevich Serov, 'Pis'ma k V. V. i D. V. Stasovim', ed. Abram Akimovich Gozenpud and Vera Al'fonsovna Obram, in Mikhail Pavlovich Alekseyev et al. (eds.), *Muzikal'noye nasledstvo: sborniki po istorii muzikal'noy kul'turi sssr*, 4 vols. (Moscow: Muzika, 1961–1976), vol. 1, pp. 65–312; vol. 2, pp. 44–267; vol. 3, pp. 27–207.

No matter how hard we try, we will never leave the European garden, for fate has decided that our acorn fell on ground cultivated before us by Europeans; it planted its roots there long ago and deeply, and now you and I do not have the strength to pull it out.

—Pyotr Il'yich Tchaikovsky (1880)



## INTRODUCTION

# *The Part and the Whole*

Why does the term ‘Russian music’ imply something more special than just music that happens to have been composed in Russia and by Russians, and is simply part and parcel of the music throughout the world at large? The reply is that Russian music, and especially the best nineteenth-century Russian music, has strongly marked national features which do make it something special and apart.

—Michel-Dimitri Calvocoressi (1944)<sup>1</sup>

RUSSIAN MUSIC has long been considered something special. The words of the critic and musicologist Michel-Dimitri Calvocoressi quoted above reflect this belief, widespread among audiences, musicians, critics and scholars alike; a belief eagerly stimulated and exploited in the marketing of this music outside Russia and one which continues to contribute to its appeal to Western audiences to this day.

It is a belief partly founded on historical reality. The nineteenth century was the century of nationalism, and Russian musicians were among the many who, encouraged by national thought, were searching for ways to distinguish themselves from the internationally dominant styles of German, French, and

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<sup>1</sup> Michel-Dimitri Calvocoressi, *A Survey of Russian Music* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1944), p. 11.

Italian music. They did so with remarkable success: a number of nineteenth-century Russian composers have acquired considerable international fame with pieces competent listeners all over the world will confidently point out as ‘Russian’.

Still, the attitude so neatly encapsulated in catechetical fashion by Calvocoressi gives rise to some serious problems. If ‘Russian music’ refers to something other than just music composed in Russia or by Russians, what about the music composed in Russia by Russians that does *not* exhibit ‘strongly marked national features’ and therefore does *not* belong to this ‘special and apart’ group? It has been a very common response either to ignore or to downplay the significance of this music, even to denounce it.

Such a treatment of Russian music, which privileges difference over similarity, and emphasizes uniqueness rather than puts it into perspective, is part of a long and rich history.<sup>2</sup> It is an example of what cultural and literary historian Joep Leerssen has described as national particularism or, more broadly, as cultural essentialism: the tendency to see the character or individuality of nations, or any other group, particularly ‘in those aspects in which they differ most from others’.<sup>3</sup> This approach tends to pass over the similarities between these groups as well as the differences within these groups, and consequently, as Leerssen observes, it does not meet any scholarly standards for comparison, and leads to exoticism and distorting simplification.

For the present-day scholar who wishes to avoid this pitfall, it is a considerable complication that cultural essentialism was part and parcel of nineteenth-

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<sup>2</sup> To cite just one example regarding Russia, this is what the seventeenth-century traveller Samuel Collins observed: ‘The Russians are a People who differ from all other Nations of the world, in most of their Actions’; and ‘The mode of men and women, rich and poor, are all one, all over the Empire, from the highest to the lowest, and their Language one, yea and Religion too, which certainly must hugely tend to their peace and preservation’ (Samuel Collins, *The Present State of Russia: in a Letter to a Friend at London* [London: John Winter, 1671], rpt. as Marshall Poe [ed.], *Early Exploration of Russia*, 12 vols. [London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003], vol. 1, pp. 66–7).

<sup>3</sup> The notion of national particularism is coined in Joep Leerssen, *Nationaal denken in Europa: een cultuurhistorische schets* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1999), pp. 41, 43n; and it is treated somewhat differently in the English translation *National Thought in Europe: A Cultural History* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006), p. 74, from which I have taken the phrase quoted above. The term cultural essentialism applies to more kinds of groups, and has received a more thorough treatment in id., ‘The Downward Pull of Cultural Essentialism’, in Michael Wintle (ed.), *Image Into Identity: Constructing and Assigning Identity in a Culture of Modernity*, *Studia Imagologica* 11 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006), pp. 31–52. One of Leerssen’s definitions of the term is: to assume that ‘differences between cultures are more meaningful than similarities between cultures, and also more meaningful than differences within a given culture’ (ibid., p. 36), which is almost identical to his definition of particularism.

century national thought. The habit of discussing Russian music in terms of its ‘Russianness’—a certain quality that individuals or cultural products were believed to possess or express in various degrees—was all too common in the nineteenth-century itself. Take for instance the music critic Herman Laroche (1845–1904), who broached the subject of Russianness in his reminiscences of Tchaikovsky even though he felt Tchaikovsky’s competitors Mily Balakirev and Nikolay Rimsky-Korsakov were ‘much more decidedly Russian’; when he asked whether his deceased friend Tchaikovsky might be called a ‘pure Russian soul’, the answer had to be no: ‘this would mean taking the part for the whole’.<sup>4</sup>

Laroche inadvertently pointed out a central problem in all attempts, by both contemporary critics and subsequent generations of scholars, to discuss art in terms of its supposed national character. No Russian composer of art music could ever produce ‘purely’ Russian music, if only for the simple circumstance that, whether they were writing operas, orchestral works, or piano pieces, they were working in genres with long and complicated genealogies that did not have their origins on Russian soil. As the outcome of a long sequence of cultural borrowings and exchanges, Russian music culture is—to use a term now current in academic literature—hybrid. Even though it has become an all-too-common caveat, it remains important to bear in mind that this is ultimately something Russian music has in common with all culture.<sup>5</sup> Cultural purity is an illusion, and it depends on, as Laroche happened to put it very accurately, taking the part for the whole.

The search for such purity tends to reduce whatever is not considered to be authentically Russian to the status of dross. There is no point, however, in regarding any of the practices Russian composers shared with their Western-

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<sup>4</sup>Herman Avgustovich Laroche, ‘Vospominaniya o P. I. Chaykovskom’ (1893), in id., *Izbranniye stat’i*, ed. Abram Akimovich Gozenpud, 5 vols., *Russkaya klassicheskaya muzikal’naya kritika* (Leningrad: Muzika, 1974–1978), p. 174.

<sup>5</sup>See Peter Burke, *Cultural Hybridity* (Cambridge: Polity, 2009), p. vi, who quotes no less than three authorities making roughly the same claim: ‘All cultures are the result of a mishmash’ (Claude Lévi-Strauss and Didier Eribon, *Conversations with Claude Lévi-Strauss*, trans. Paula Wissing [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991], pp. 152–3); ‘The history of all cultures is the history of cultural borrowing’ (Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* [New York: Vintage, 1994], p. 217); and: ‘today, all cultures are border cultures’ (Néstor García Canclini, *Hybrid Cultures: Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity*, trans. Christopher L. Chiappari and Silvia L. López [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005], p. 261). In the field of Russian music, it has also been put as follows: ‘Nothing exists in its own terms only; nothing, at least since the expulsion of Eden, is truly autochthonous’ (Richard Taruskin, *Defining Russia Musically: Historical and Hermeneutical Essays* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997], p. 43).

European colleagues as any less natural or authentic for Russians than for Western Europeans, as has often happened in Western music criticism.<sup>6</sup> To do so indicates either an essentialist notion of Russian nature or an undue belief in origins, which considers cultural practices as the permanent and exclusive property of the group from which it is thought to originate. As Edward Said argued, ‘culture is never just a matter of ownership’, and the notion that ‘only the original proponents of an idea can understand and use it’ is extremely limiting.<sup>7</sup> This mode of reasoning, however, is deceptively close to widely held convictions within the artistic world concerning originality and intellectual ownership, and this is why judgements about the authenticity of Russian music can easily be couched in the language of aesthetics. The problem is that when such notions are applied to larger entities like cultures or nations instead of individual artists, it gives rise to double standards that would consider, for instance, a Russian or French composer emulating a Beethoven symphony derivative and not true to himself, while a German doing the same would be acting as the great composer’s rightful heir. Consequently, one should not rely on a notion like Russianness in deciding what is wheat and what is chaff in the work of Russian composers. Modern scholarship should steer clear of applying such criteria, and rather try to understand how they functioned within the culture under investigation instead.

The relation between music and nationalism posed a problem in nineteenth-century Russia just as it poses a problem for music historiography. The tendency to value the native over the foreign was an obvious part of nineteenth-century culture, but it should not be regarded as a matter of course. Nationalism never reigned absolute. The wish to develop an authentic and distinctive national style of music interacted with existing practices, principles, tastes. As a result, the criteria for what the music of Russian composers should be like were, more often than not, contested.

This dissertation will address the problem of nationalism in music by studying four Russian operas that, in various ways, have been deemed ‘not Russian enough’ in modern historiography: *A Life for the Tsar* (1836) by Mikhail Glinka, *Judith* (1863) by Aleksandr Serov, *The Maid of Orléans* (1881) by Pyotr Tchaikovsky, and *The Tsar’s Bride* (1899) by Nikolay Rimsky-Kor-

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<sup>6</sup> Tchaikovsky biographer David Brown, for example, went so far as to write that Tchaikovsky had ‘a Russian mind forced to find its expression through techniques and forms that had been evolved by generations of alien Western creators, and this being so, it would be unreasonable to expect stylistic consistency or uniform quality’ (David Brown, *Tchaikovsky: A Biographical and Critical Study*, 4 vols. [London: Gollancz, 1978–1991], vol. 4, p. 10).

<sup>7</sup> Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p. 217.

sakov. Each of these operas may be considered a borderline case, two of them due to their non-Russian subject matter, and the other two due to their conspicuous use of Western operatic conventions. It is through such borderline cases that I would like to examine how nationalism was negotiated in the nineteenth-century music world. Rather than formulating my own verdict as regards the Russianness of these operas, I will analyse how the use of Western conventions and non-Russian subject matter related to the nationalist desire to cultivate a distinctive national style from the perspective of the composers and their contemporaries. I shall propose an approach that acknowledges the fact that the Russian repertoire contains elements that were and are recognized as distinctively Russian, but at the same time takes into account that the perception of Russianness was constructed, unstable, and subject to continuous negotiation.

Opera is well suited to study the complicated relation between music and nationalism. Although other forms of music and music theatre, such as the symphony and ballet, were gaining importance in the nineteenth century, opera generally continued to be regarded as the most prestigious and most public musical genre. This made opera particularly relevant to the project of national self-definition, and arguably even better suited to the task than spoken theatre, thanks to the powerful possibility of representing the nation as a unity through the chorus.<sup>8</sup> At the same time, the opera world was thoroughly international and globalized. Before the outbreak of World War I, the international circuit of singers and repertoire extended from Buenos Aires to Shanghai. It was, therefore, simultaneously the most international and the most national of musical genres.<sup>9</sup>

It is this duality which I will explore in this thesis. On the one hand, I will examine how each of the four case studies related to both contemporary and later notions of what Russian opera was supposed to be. On the other, it will show how Russian opera was in many ways, *pace* Calvocoressi, part and parcel of the world of opera at large.

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<sup>8</sup> James Parakilas, 'Political Representation and the Chorus in Nineteenth-Century Opera', *Nineteenth-Century Music* 16/2 (1992), p. 184.

<sup>9</sup> This contradictory quality of opera has been noted before, e. g. by Craig Calhoun, Foreword, in Victoria Johnson, Jane Fulcher and Thomas Ertman (eds.), *Opera and Society in France and Italy from Monteverdi to Bourdieu* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. xxv.

*Russia and the West*

Western art music and opera were among the many imports that came to Russia in the course of the eighteenth century. The art of opera was introduced in Russia as a court entertainment during the rule of Empress Anna, Peter the Great's niece, whose reign is known particularly for the prominent presence of foreigners in her entourage. The first permanent opera company in the country, an Italian troupe led by Francesco Araja, was established at her court in 1735–36, and Araja's post was continued by a chain of distinguished successors. It took several decades before the first talented locals, trained as apprentices of the Italian chapel master or by actual study on the Italian peninsula, would offer their musical services as court composers under the strict command of Catherine the Great. The composers of this generation produced the first recognizably local examples of music theatre in the *Singspiel* genre: comedies with mostly simple, but sometimes quite elaborate music, sung in the local vernacular and often containing local folk or folk-like music to reflect the low birth of its characters. Nonetheless, there is no arguing against the fact that the music of this first cohort of Russian and Russia-based professionals, as well as that of the noble music dilettantes who came into prominence in the early decades of the nineteenth century, was firmly based on the styles and conventions then current in Western Europe.

The development of national thought in Russia was largely the direct result of the same increased contact with Western Europe that followed upon Peter the Great's westernizing reforms in the early eighteenth century. In part, Russian national thought developed in opposition to such phenomena as the eager adoption of Western fashions and the French language by the gentry in the later eighteenth century. In general, however, the relation of Russian nationalism to the West cannot be understood simply as rejection. As the Western mores and cultural forms gained more widespread acceptance and the familiarity with life in Western Europe grew—particularly after many young Russians had been stationed abroad in the aftermath of the Napoleonic Wars—the sense of backwardness of Russian society vis-à-vis Western Europe became increasingly pronounced, and functioned as a catalyst in the development of a national identity. It is a familiar irony that many features of nineteenth-century Russian nationalism were based on the imported work of German thinkers such as Herder, Schelling, and Hegel, who had attempted to cope with their own sense of backwardness of the German-speaking lands compared to France, and offered valuable moral and philosophical support

for the Russians.<sup>10</sup> In the discussion on the nature of Russian identity as it developed since the eighteenth century, the habit inherited from Peter the Great of following Western trends became a recurrent source of dispute in intellectual circles. To put it simply, there were two options: one could accept the Petrine legacy, whether grudgingly or eagerly; or one could fight it and try to undo it. Of course, the reversal of history was never a real option, but the desire to undo or rethink the many practices imported from the West has been strong at various moments of Russia's intellectual history, most famously so among the Slavophiles of the 1840s.

A difference of opinion between the young Muscovite pianist and composer Sergey Taneyev (1856–1915) and his former teacher Tchaikovsky may illustrate the way in which these two tendencies were reflected in the thinking on music, and how the fact that Russian art music was the consequence of eighteenth-century import, and therefore a hybrid, still posed a problem as late as 1879–80. At this early point in his career—and this may come as a surprise to those familiar with his reputation as an academic and cosmopolitan composer—Taneyev touted the uniqueness of Russian culture and advocated the cultivation of Russian folk music.<sup>11</sup> He made the grim observation in one of his notebooks that 'European forms are alien to us, and we do not have our own. *We do not have a national music.*'<sup>12</sup> Previous attempts by Russian

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<sup>10</sup>This is by necessity a very brief sketch of all these developments. For studies of the development of Russian identity in relation to the West, see e.g. Iver B. Neumann, *Russia and the Idea of Europe: A Study in Identity and International Relations* (London: Routledge, 1996); or Nicholas V. Riasanovsky, *Russian Identities: A Historical Survey* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). Hans Rogger, *National Consciousness in Eighteenth-Century Russia*, Russian Research Center Studies 38 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1960), though half a century old, remains a valuable study of the development of national thought in the eighteenth century. Liah Greenfeld gives central importance to feelings of backwardness and *ressentiment* in the evolution of Russian nationalism and assigns little importance to nineteenth-century developments and hence to the role of German Romanticism, claiming that all ingredients of Russian national identity were essentially in place by 1800 (Liah Greenfeld, *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity* [Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992], pp. 189–274).

<sup>11</sup>The views Taneyev expressed at this time contrast considerably with his later behaviour. He argued that all viable art (including Renaissance polyphony and the music of Bach) was founded on folk traditions, and, as a counterexample, claimed that medieval authors who had used Latin instead of their vernacular tongues had not produced anything of permanent value. He would himself become an Esperanto enthusiast. See the letter to Tchaikovsky, 25 July/6 August 1880; Pyotr Il'yich Tchaikovsky and Sergey Ivanovich Taneyev, *Pis'ma*, ed. Vladimir Aleksandrovich Zhdanov (Moscow: Goskul'tprosvetizdat, 1951) (henceforth cited as ChT), pp. 54–5.

<sup>12</sup>Vasily Vasil'yevich Yakovlev, 'Dva otrivka iz zapisnoy knizhki S. I. Taneyeva', in Kon-

musicians, even Glinka and Tchaikovsky, he wrote, had led to nothing more than ‘mechanical mixing’ of folk music with ‘forms alien to it’. He saw no other option than to go back to Russian folk songs to develop everything else—counterpoint, instrumental forms—anew from there, in analogy to the history of Western music of the past centuries. When Tchaikovsky learned of Taneyev’s ideas, he was much alarmed, and feared that his talented pupil might be turning into something of a ‘Slavophile Don Quixote’. If Russia was unable to produce any lasting creative contribution in music under the current conditions, he argued, ‘we will hardly correct that defect by returning to antiquity, and one would surely have to go very far, in order to get away from Europe.’<sup>13</sup>

Taneyev referred to Russian music as a tree, a common metaphor in nationalist theorizing.<sup>14</sup> A tree, after all, is rooted in the soil—a central symbol of national thought—and even if it grows out into a wide number of branches, the entire organism springs from the roots, and none of the branches will ever establish contact with those of the neighbouring trees. Tchaikovsky objected to the fact that Taneyev discussed European music as one single tree, like the Russian one. He countered that he would rather compare Europe to ‘a whole garden’: ‘Why do you completely arbitrarily allow only the Russian folk-music element to be a distinctly growing individuum, and place all the others combined into one tree?’, and concluded:

[W]e will never leave the European garden, no matter how hard we try, for fate has decided that our acorn fell on ground cultivated before us by Europeans; it planted its roots there long ago and deeply, and now you and I do not have the strength to pull it out. [...] In general, in composition as well as in music education, we must care for only one thing: *that it is good*, and we should not in the least be concerned that we are Russians, and therefore have to do *something special*, distinct

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stantin Alekseyevich Kuznetsov (ed.), *Sergey Ivanovich Taneyev: lichnost', tvorchestvo i dokumenti yego zhizni. K 10-tiletiyu so dnya yego smerti, 1915–1925*, Istoriya russkoy muziki v issledovaniyakh i materialakh 2 (Moscow: Muzsektor, 1925), p. 74. Emphasis original.

<sup>13</sup> Letter to Taneyev, 1 August 1880; Pyotr Il'yich Tchaikovsky, *Polnoye sobraniye sochineniy: literaturniye proizvedeniya i perepiska*, ed. Boris Vladimirovich Asaf'yev et al., 17 vols. (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoye muzikal'noye izdatel'stvo, 1953–1981) (henceforth cited as CHLPP), vol. 9, pp. 223–4; CHT, p. 57.

<sup>14</sup> Letter to Tchaikovsky, 25 July/6 August 1880; CHT, pp. 54–5. For the tree as a symbol in national thought, see e. g. Liisa H. Malkki, ‘National Geographic: The Rooting of Peoples and the Territorialization of National Identity Among Scholars and Refugees’, *Cultural Anthropology* 7/1 (Feb. 1992), pp. 27–8, 38n7.

from the Western European [practice].<sup>15</sup>

Although the tree metaphor had become considerably confused, Tchaikovsky's reply was as perceptive as it was pragmatic. He realized that even pre-Petrine folk song and church chant were inevitably westernized, cast into Western notation and adapted by modern musicians trained in Western music, and that the kind of purity Taneyev sought would be impossible to obtain. He did express his hope that Russian folk music would 'introduce a *new current* in music', but accepted and acknowledged the European legacy as part of his trade.<sup>16</sup>

The different perspectives of Taneyev and Tchaikovsky serve to illustrate one central problem of Russian nationalism in music: it cannot simply be understood in terms of difference from the West. It is probably due to a combination of factors—Russia's position on the Eastern border of Europe, the size and power of its empire, the Russians' sense of exclusion—that Russian nationalism could take two forms: Russia could be regarded as part of the West, as a member of the European family of nations, or it could be seen as an alternative to it, possibly at the head of some larger coalition, for instance in union with other Slavs. The question of how nationalism relates to musical style completely depends on which aspects of Western music are considered specifically 'Western', i. e. foreign, and which are considered universal, and therefore legitimate and authentic attributes of Russian music. Meanwhile, 'the West'—or 'Europe', for that matter—is hardly a monolithical unity. As the historian and last U. S. ambassador to the Soviet Union Jack Matlock has emphasized, both these concepts can be defined to either include or exclude Russia, which is why discussions in these terms 'can result only in circular reasoning, not enlightenment about reality.'<sup>17</sup>

People have always been selective about which practices are significant for their identity, and which are not. Many inventions are adopted silently, without question, some are embraced as particularly useful or meaningful for the own group, while others may be fiercely rejected.<sup>18</sup> Whether one considers

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<sup>15</sup> Letter to Taneyev, 15–24 August 1880; CHLPP, vol. 9, pp. 239–40; CHT, p. 62. Emphasis original.

<sup>16</sup> CHLPP, vol. 9, p. 241; CHT, p. 62. Emphasis original.

<sup>17</sup> Jack F. Matlock, Jr., 'Russia, Europe, and "Western Civilization"', in Catherine Evtuhov and Stephen Kotkin (eds.), *The Cultural Gradient: The Transmission of Ideas in Europe, 1789–1991* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), p. 235.

<sup>18</sup> Diffusion theory has produced two somewhat ungainly, but potentially clarifying concepts, 'hyper-difference' and 'over-likeness', for analysing these phenomena. As Henk te Velde has defined these terms, hyper-difference describes the common situation in which 'the fact

something new as essentially foreign or as an innovation for everybody's benefit is wholly a matter of perspective. Since the distinction between what is Russian and what is not is to a large extent arbitrary, historians should be wary of making such distinctions themselves without taking the perspectives of the historical actors into account.

### *The Russian Opera World*

During the nineteenth century there were numerous proposals that, like Taneyev's, aimed to purge Russian music of its Western influences, but none of these were ever fully embraced in musical practice. Clearly, it was much easier to proclaim or envision one's national music as something distinctive or independent from that of other nations than to realize anything of the kind on the stage or in the concert hall. In order to understand why radical nationalist thought had only a limited influence on actual musical life, particularly opera, and how the tensions between nationalism and international operatic practice were played out, it is necessary to understand how national thought can be situated in the Russian opera world.

By the term 'opera world' I mean something similar to what Howard Becker has described by the term *art world*: the entire network of people and institutions participating in the production of art.<sup>19</sup> Opera is an expensive art form that involves many artists and other personnel, and requires an audience large enough to sustain and legitimize its existence. It is a collaborative enterprise in which the final result, as well as its success, does not depend on the composer alone. This study, to be sure, is not a sociological study like Becker's, but in order to come to a proper historical understanding and to overcome biased or anachronistic viewpoints, it is necessary to keep a broad view of the processes that determined how operas were composed and produced.

An opera composer had to take a great number of things into account, including—but not limited to—the identity and capacities of the theatre and performers, the taste of the audience, and the opinion of the critics. Not all of the parties involved were equally adjusted and committed to the work of local composers or the notion of national music. The desire to pursue a distinctive

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that [an] innovation was foreign was used as an argument to dismiss it or at least doubt its legitimacy.' Over-likeness, on the other hand, is the 'citing [of] foreign models as if they were especially suited to your own national situation' (Henk te Velde, 'Political Transfer: An Introduction', *European Review of History* 12/2 [2005], p. 209).

<sup>19</sup>Howard S. Becker, *Art Worlds* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), pp. x, 34–9.

national style was therefore always negotiated, and had to compete with other practical and aesthetic concerns. Since a large number of people and factors could influence the success or failure of a performance, all composers had to strike a balance between originality and innovation on the one hand, and the many conventions that paved the way to a smooth production and reception of the opera. Hence, the way the opera world functioned encouraged composers to stay reasonably close to what was already familiar, and for most of the nineteenth century this would have been, primarily, the conventions of the Italian and French repertoire. This placed limits on the development of a national style, and these must be taken into account. Any mode of analysis that consistently focuses on manifestations of nationalism while ignoring or rejecting the rest will not only run the risk of being procrustean, but will also fail to answer an important question, namely: what was actually affected by nationalism, and what was not.

One crucial actor in the opera world that simply could not be ignored by a nineteenth-century Russian composer was the state. The most prestigious stages of the country were managed by the Imperial Theatre Directorate, which answered to the Ministry of the Imperial Court. Unlike today, both Moscow and St Petersburg had a Bolshoy (*bol'shoy teatr*, meaning 'grand theatre') which housed most of the performances of opera and ballet in the two capitals. Between 1843 and 1882, the Russian state held an effective monopoly on theatrical performances in the two capitals, making access to the Imperial stages a *sine qua non* for an aspiring opera composer.<sup>20</sup> Under Nicholas I, St Petersburg began to make its mark as an operatic centre of global importance when a permanent Italian Opera troupe was established in 1843–44, for which many expensive stars of international renown were attracted, such as Giovanni Battista Rubini, Pauline Viardot, and Antonio Tamburini. This change did not only spell the end for the capital's other foreign-language company, the German Opera, it also left the Russian Opera underfunded, faced with uneven competition, and—as the Bolshoy soon became the exclusive province of the Italian company—without permanent housing until the opening of the Mariinsky Theatre in 1860. The government's partiality mirrored the preferences of the upper class in these days. From their perspective, it was perfectly possible to regard the establishment of the Italian Opera as a matter of national pride, for as the journalist and novelist Faddey Bulgarin,

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<sup>20</sup> For a brief history of the instatement and abolition of the monopoly, and a discussion of possible motivations for the various relevant decrees, see Murray Frame, "Freedom of the Theatres": The Abolition of the Russian Imperial Theatre Monopoly', *Slavonic and East European Review* 83/2 (Apr. 2005), pp. 254–89.

a paid agent of the government, argued: ‘without an Italian troupe it would always seem as if something was lacking in the capital of the foremost empire in the world!’<sup>21</sup> The fortunes of the Russian Opera company directly affected the local composers. Only on rare occasions did a composer of Russian birth succeed in having a work performed by the Italian company, and most composers were thus denied access to the most prestigious stage and some of the most accomplished performers in their own country.<sup>22</sup> In addition, Russian composers rarely succeeded in having an opera staged abroad during their own lifetime, despite numerous efforts. Within Russia, reasonable alternatives to the Imperial Theatres came into existence only after the abolition of the state monopoly under Alexander III, making it possible for Rimsky-Korsakov, for instance, to turn to a private company after his *Sadko* had been rejected by the Theatre Directorate in 1897.

The main distinction between the Russian and Italian Opera companies was in principle that of the language in which the operas were staged. Predictably, the number of Italian works performed by the Russian troupe dropped dramatically after the arrival of the Italian competition, but, like the Italian company, the Russian Opera regularly performed French and, occasionally, German repertoire in translation. Thus the performers and visitors of the Russian Opera were familiar with many international operatic styles and were involved in more than just the work of local composers. Consequently, it was always important for composers to be competitive within the international repertoire, even if they only aimed at a national audience. After all, the audience could opt to visit productions of foreign works, just as the theatre management could choose not to have a Russian work performed at all. All the composers discussed in this thesis were very much aware of the developments in music elsewhere in Europe through reviews, scores, and performances they attended either in Russia or abroad. In fact, not being aware what was going on abroad was considered a serious shortcoming. The composer and critic César Cui (1835–1918) complained of Italian opera that it had ‘surrounded itself with some kind of Chinese wall’ and did ‘not want to know what [was] going on outside it’; the Italians were ‘completely satisfied with self-congratulation’ and consequently did not have a clue of contemporary standards of harmony

<sup>21</sup> Cited from Abram Akimovich Gozenpud, *Russkiy operniy teatr XIX-go veka*, 3 vols. (Leningrad: Muzika, 1969–1973), vol. 1, p. 184.

<sup>22</sup> Exceptions were Aleksey L’vov’s *Bianca e Gualtiero*, performed three times in 1844–45 and Feofil Tolstoy’s *Il Biricchino di Parigi*, performed three times in 1848–49 (A. I. Vol’f, *Khronika peterburgskikh teatrov, s kontsa 1826 do nachala 1855 goda*, 2 vols. [St Petersburg: tip. R. Golike, 1877], vol. 2, pp. 114, 148).

and development.<sup>23</sup> One may assume that the role of nationalism in music was never about breaking free of the West completely—not even in Taneyev’s unrealized project; it was about recognition, both abroad and at home.

Nineteenth-century Russian musicians generally conceived of Western traditions in terms of national schools and most of them were inclined to subscribe to the desirability of having a Russian national school as well. A national school, however, is not the same—or need not be the same—as a national style. The notion of a national school suggests a degree of authority, a wide acceptance by the public, and a pedigree of musicians that can provide a sense of continuity and unity. All of these had to be acquired by more than the mere dint of distinctive music.

The most famous group of composers seeking to represent the Russian musical output of their generation was the so-called New Russian School, the circle nowadays known as the *Moguchaya kuchka*, or, in its most common English translation, ‘The Mighty Handful’.<sup>24</sup> This circle formed around the pianist-composer Mily Balakirev (1837–1910) and the critic and art historian Vladimir Stasov (1824–1906) in the late 1850s and early 1860s. It included the composers César Cui, Modest Musorgsky, Nikolay Rimsky-Korsakov, and Aleksandr Borodin, and with the exception of Cui, all of these composers are among the most famous nineteenth-century proponents of Russian style. None of them, however, ever put into practice anything as radical as the project envisioned by Taneyev. Though sometimes referred to simply as ‘the nationalists’ in older literature, it should not be assumed that the cultivation of a national style was their sole or even their primary concern.

The notion of a national school suggests a kind of competition between nations. In the letter to Taneyev discussed above, Tchaikovsky expressed the hope that the ‘tree’ of Russian music would ‘not be as feeble as the English one, as sickly and colourless as the Spanish one, but that, on the contrary, it will be comparable in size and beauty to the German, Italian, and French ones.’<sup>25</sup> As should be clear from the description of the Russian opera world above, this competition with other national schools was much more than just a matter of honour; improving the status of Russian opera

<sup>23</sup> César Antonovich Cui, ‘Operniy sezon v Peterburge’ (1864), in id., *Izbranniye stat’i*, ed. Izrail’ Lazarevich Gusin (Leningrad: Muzgiz, 1952), p. 32.

<sup>24</sup> Throughout this thesis, I will use the Russian name *Kuchka* for Balakirev’s circle, as well as the terms *kuchkism* and *kuchkist* to refer to their aesthetic. For further explanation on these terms, see Richard Taruskin, ‘What is a Kuchka?’, in id., *Musorgsky: Eight Essays and an Epilogue* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), pp. xxxiii–xxxiv.

<sup>25</sup> Letter to Taneyev, 15–24 August 1880; CHLPP, vol. 9, p. 239; ChT, p. 62.

would serve the collective interests of Russian composers. As the various oeuvres of Russian composers show, however, no unified approach ever materialized, since there were various ways to compete with the Western operatic repertoire. One could break with many of the Western conventions and attempt to be as distinct from other musical traditions as possible, but one could also challenge the Italians, French or Germans at their own game, and possibly expect that national character would manifest itself anyway. This is why I would like to characterize the cultivation of a recognizably Russian style as ‘national distinction’, a term chosen to indicate that this process could work in two ways: by choosing to cultivate a national style, a composer contributed to the distinction of the music of his nation, and by the same means distinguished himself within the opera world of his own country. If successful, such music could strike a sympathetic chord with the Russian audience, presenting something recognizably ‘their own’ within the international tradition of opera. In order to achieve this, however, the listeners would have to be convinced of two things: that this particular music did indeed represent the Russian nation in a distinctive way, and that it did not fall short of the musical and dramatic qualities expected for the genre of opera in general.

The very idea of competition required a set of aesthetic values more widely applicable than Russianness to allow for comparison with foreign operas. This was necessary not only for an opera to be recognized as a serious and competent work of art by foreigners, but also—and this was a much more pressing concern—to be recognized as such by one’s fellow-countrymen.

For a group like the Kuchka, who advocated change and who, initially, did not occupy prominent official positions in musical life, it was crucial to make itself heard in the press and demonstrate how their works fulfilled artistic demands where others failed. They did so through the writings of Stasov and Cui, and the aesthetic they proclaimed was an aesthetic of realism. This is a category open to many interpretations, particularly in music, where its meaning is far from evident.<sup>26</sup> Nonetheless, it was an important element in operatic discourse which fueled and legitimized change. Under the banner of ‘truth’, realism could be invoked to favour the characteristic or the singular over existing notions of the beautiful. In criticism, it provided the easiest grounds on which one could challenge the dramaturgical and musical conventions of Italian and French opera, which, though not without function,

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<sup>26</sup> For a more detailed discussion of the notion of realism as understood by the Kuchka, see Chapter Four.

could be criticized for being ‘unrealistic’ or artificial. As the case studies in this thesis will confirm, it were such arguments rather than mere Russianness that were generally the Kuchka’s yardstick for evaluating works by other composers.

Even though national thought pervaded nineteenth-century society and was inevitably part of the Russian opera world, it was never a matter of: the more authentically Russian and the less reliant on Western models, the better. Since the success of any operatic enterprise depended on collaboration and had to be won through competition, nationalism always had to be negotiated, and one was not always best served by being different.

### *The Historiographical Legacy*

The historiography of nineteenth-century Russian music—of which the study of opera has always been a major part—has been a remarkable one. In Russia, several paradigm shifts were prompted by the changes in political life. The 1917 Revolution and the establishment of the Soviet Union formed a first conspicuous break with the past, which called the status of musical legacy of the Tsarist age in the new communist society into question. A second important change occurred in the 1930s, when Stalin began to take a serious interest in music and opera, and when it was eventually decided that the cultivation of *ruskaya opernaya klassika*, the nineteenth-century Russian opera classics, effectively removed the need for an authentically Soviet form of music theatre.<sup>27</sup> In 1939, a version of Glinka’s *A Life for the Tsar* purged from its monarchist libretto was enthusiastically embraced by the Party and reinstated as the traditional season opener. The celebrations of the Tchaikovsky centennial in 1940 also marked a decided return to tradition, and proved that the once politically problematic bourgeois composer was officially rehabilitated as a national hero. A vast number of publications was subsequently dedicated to the study of nineteenth-century Russian music and opera, and an impressive amount of archival work was performed by Soviet scholars from the 1950s onwards. Although the usefulness of these older source editions is sometimes limited because of the censorship applied to matters of ideology, sexuality and profanity,<sup>28</sup> they were of vital importance to foreign scholars, for whom

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<sup>27</sup> See Marina Frolova-Walker, ‘The Soviet Opera Project: Ivan Dzerzhinsky vs. *Ivan Susanin*’, *Cambridge Opera Journal* 18/2 (2006), pp. 200–7, 212–5.

<sup>28</sup> The matter of sexuality has been a prominent factor in the reception of Tchaikovsky. Many of the resulting misunderstandings have been cleared up by the painstaking work

access to Soviet archives was severely restricted, and continue to be valuable resources to this day. The interpretative work of Soviet scholars suffered much more from the demands of the state, which required the officially sanctioned national composers to be geniuses, proto-revolutionaries, and patriots. The histories of Russian and Western music, moreover, were generally treated as separate and independent. Russian music, as Marina Frolova-Walker has explained it, ‘was regarded as a separate tree, firmly planted in Russian soil. It had its own, internal network of references and its own value system’. Hence, Russian historical musicologists generally specialized in either Russian or ‘foreign’ music.<sup>29</sup>

Predictably, much less importance was accorded to Russian music in Western scholarship. In the central narrative of Western music historiography, especially in the ‘long’ nineteenth century, prime importance was accorded mostly to German-speaking composers—from Mozart and Haydn, through Beethoven, Brahms, and Wagner, to Schoenberg. Italian and French composers could not be left out, particularly because of their undeniable presence in the field of opera, but they frequently played a secondary role.<sup>30</sup> Composers from other countries than these three were further marginalized, and research into these ‘peripheral’ musics was often performed within national frameworks, as convenient but less prestigious sub-fields that contributed little to the grand narrative of the discipline of musicology as a whole.

To a certain extent, Western and Soviet scholarship of Russian music shared the same problem—or advantage, if one is committed to a nationalist agenda—associated with national historiography in general: if only for

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of Alexander Poznansky (see in particular *Tchaikovsky: The Quest for the Inner Man* [New York: Schirmer, 1991]; and *Tchaikovsky's Last Days: A Documentary Study* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1996]). New publications have by now supplemented the existing Soviet editions (see Galina Ivanovna Belonovich and Polina Yefimovna Vaydman [eds.], *P. I. Chaykovskiy, 1840–1893: Almanakh*, 2 vols. [Moscow: Mir i kul'tura, 1995], vol. 1: *Zabitoye i novoye: vospominaniya sovremennikov, novye materialy i dokumenty*; Polina Yefimovna Vaydman [ed.], *Neizvestnyy Chaykovskiy* [Moscow: Jurgenson, 2009]).

<sup>29</sup> Marina Frolova-Walker, *Russian Music and Nationalism from Glinka to Stalin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), pp. vii–viii. See also Richard Taruskin, ‘Some Thoughts on the History and Historiography of Russian Music’, *Journal of Musicology* 3/3 (1984), pp. 330–1.

<sup>30</sup> Lorenzo Bianconi and Giovanni Pestelli have criticized the German historiographical tradition, which formed the basis of modern historiography, for representing the history of opera as a teleological narrative of the various developments that led to Wagner’s music drama, which ‘reduced the great composers of the past to the rank of “precursors”’, and marginalized traditions that did not partake in this lineage, such as nineteenth-century Italian opera (Lorenzo Bianconi and Giorgio Pestelli [eds.], *The History of Italian Opera*, 6 vols. [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998–], vol. 4: *Opera Production and Its Resources*, pp. xi–xii).

the sake of a narrative, they favoured diachronic relations between various generations of one nationality over the synchronic ties with contemporaries elsewhere.<sup>31</sup> Based on the conviction that the development of a distinctive ‘national school’ was the most important musical achievement of nineteenth-century Russian music, historians and critics have developed the habit of approaching this repertoire with the question ‘How Russian is it?’ in mind as a measure of its significance. Many of the ideas of both twentieth-century Western musicology and Soviet historiography on what music could really count as national and what not, were derived from the partisan writings of the Kuchka’s advocate and ideologue Vladimir Stasov. The main difference between Western and Soviet scholarship was that the Soviet agenda was nationalist, whereas the Western stance is better described as particularist and essentialist.<sup>32</sup> Much more than their Soviet colleagues, who had little choice but to accept the Russianness of canonical composers as an article of faith, Western scholars were prone to insist on—if not to fetishize—the uniqueness of an exotic Russian culture.

There have been some notable exceptions to this trend. As early as 1914, the critic Ernest Newman questioned the notion of a ‘nation’ in any other than a geographical or political sense, and protested vehemently against the tendency of his contemporaries to presume the homogeneity of Russian culture, to emphasize nature over nurture, and to see Russian operas on ancient Russian subjects as ‘national’—unlike English operas on English subjects, which were, of course, ‘historical’.<sup>33</sup> But in spite of protests like Newman’s, the tendencies

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<sup>31</sup> This problem is addressed by a growing amount of literature in cultural history and theory that is interested in the dynamics and interaction between cultures through such notions as transfer, hybridity, and mobility. Examples of studies that advocate and illustrate such concepts are Michel Espagne and Michael Werner (eds.), *Transferts: les relations interculturelles dans l’espace franco-allemand, XVIII<sup>e</sup> et XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: Éditions Recherches sur les Civilisations, 1988); Evtuhov and Kotkin (eds.), *The Cultural Gradient*; Steven Greenblatt et al., *Cultural Mobility: A Manifesto* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010). For a recent overview of the flowering terminology and literature, see Burke, *Cultural Hybridity*. Recently, the notion of cultural transfer has been advanced in the field of opera studies by Mark Everist and Annegret Fauser (eds.), *Stage Music and Cultural Transfer: Paris, 1830–1914* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

<sup>32</sup> With the term essentialism, I mean here principally, but not only, the notion of cultural essentialism as put forward by Leerssen. Essentialism in the more strictly defined sense of the explanation of culture by means of physical factors like biology, climate, or landscape is a tendency that has also cropped up every now and then in scholarly literature on Russian music. For the relation between these two notions, see Leerssen, ‘The Downward Pull of Cultural Essentialism’, pp. 33–4.

<sup>33</sup> Ernest Newman, ‘Russian Opera and Russian “Nationalism”’, *Musical Times*, 1 Aug. 1914,

of cultural essentialism in the study of Russian music persisted for most of the century.<sup>34</sup>

Thus, Russian composers were moved to a realm where other rules applied, separated from the history of music proper and guaranteed as second-rate—a position which has justifiably been compared to a ghetto.<sup>35</sup> A clear illustration of this can be seen in the habit of comprehensive music histories to consign the discussion of Russian music to separate sections dedicated to ‘national musics’ or ‘nationalism’, a fate it shared with the music of other regions considered peripheral, such as Bohemia, Hungary, Scandinavia, or Spain.<sup>36</sup> Composers who did not advertise their national identity or their difference from the Western mainstream, could easily end up being marginal in both the general and the national sections.<sup>37</sup>

The notion of ‘nationalism’ in this mode of historiography was frequently equated to the manifestations of ‘Russianness’ in the sense of stylistic deviations from an implicit norm rather than as ideology. To understand nationalism in music solely in terms of stylistic difference from a mainstream is extremely problematic, however, because it dissociates music from its role in society and because it may lead one to accept that mainstream as ‘universal’ and hence not nationalist. It could result in a respectable handbook, the *Harvard Dictionary of Music*, making such ridiculous claims as ‘the nationalist movement is practically nonexistent in Germany, nor has there been much of one in France’ and ‘by about 1930 the nationalist movement had lost its impact nearly everywhere in the world’.<sup>38</sup>

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no. 858, pp. 505–8.

<sup>34</sup> The attitude described here applies, in varying degrees, to many prominent anglophone writers on Russian music from the early twentieth century to the 1980s, such as Rosa Newmarch, Montagu Montagu-Nathan, Michel-Dmitri Calvocoressi, Gerald Abraham, Gerald Seaman, and David Brown.

<sup>35</sup> Taruskin, ‘Some Thoughts’, pp. 326, 327n18; id., *Defining Russia Musically*, p. xvii.

<sup>36</sup> Clear examples of this historiographical approach are e. g. Alfred Einstein, *Music in the Romantic Era* (New York: Norton, 1947) and Leon Plantinga, *Romantic Music: A History of Musical Style in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (New York: Norton, 1984).

<sup>37</sup> A particularly telling victim of such a treatment is Tchaikovsky, who has been marginalized despite being among the most performed nineteenth-century composers. See Taruskin, ‘Some Thoughts’, pp. 324–5 for a discussion of the treatment accorded to Tchaikovsky in the well-known textbook by Donald Jay Grout, *A History of Western Music*, rev. edn. (London: Dent, 1973). Common exceptions to the double bind mechanism in Western historiography are Chopin and Liszt, who were accepted into the mainstream even though they frequently showcased their respective Polish and Hungarian identities.

<sup>38</sup> ‘Nationalism’, in Willi Apel (ed.), *Harvard Dictionary of Music*, 2nd edn. (London: Heinemann Educational, 1970), pp. 564–5.

It has been the formidable, but rewarding task of both Russian and non-Russian musicologists of the last two decades or so to remedy the many shortcomings of these previous paradigms. Much has changed since the collapse of the Soviet Union and the many changes associated with the advent of 'New musicology' in Anglo-American scholarship. Richard Taruskin in particular has relentlessly criticized the older Western approach to Russian music in his many publications on the subject since the 1980s, and his work has gained such prominence that we may assume that the study of Russian music has taken a definitive turn away from the tendencies of cultural essentialism.<sup>39</sup> The range of scholarly interests in Russian music history has broadened accordingly, and the connections between Russian and Western musical traditions are beginning to attract more attention.<sup>40</sup>

This is not to say that the traditional approach of Soviet and Western music historiography does not still leave its marks on the state of research on Russian music. Having been studied within a national frame of reference for so long, the many connections between Russian and Western European opera were still largely unexplored in the 1990s. As early as 1982, Roland John Wiley signalled a lack of scholarly interest in foreign influences on Russian composers, particularly in the field of opera.<sup>41</sup> Mary Woodside's attempt to chart the Western models for Glinka's *Ruslan and Lyudmila* in 1987 was a rare response to this lacuna in opera research.<sup>42</sup> It is only recently that the interaction between Russian opera and the Italian and French repertoire has

<sup>39</sup> See, in particular, Taruskin, 'Some Thoughts'; id., *Defining Russia Musically*.

<sup>40</sup> In Russian musicology this trend can be illustrated most clearly by a series of volumes on international musical relations, which include: Valery Vasil'yevich Smirnov (ed.), *Russko-frantsuzskiy muzikal'niye svyazi: sbornik nauchnikh statey* (St Petersburg: Sanktpeterburgskaya Gosudarstvennaya Konservatoriya im. N. A. Rimskogo-Korsakova, 2003); Alla Konstantinovna Kyonigsberg (ed.), *Russko-ital'yanskiye muzikal'niye svyazi: sbornik statey* (St Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo Politekhnicheskogo Universiteta, 2004); Alla Konstantinovna Kyonigsberg (ed.), *Russko-nemetskiye muzikal'niye svyazi: sbornik statey* (St Petersburg: Sanktpeterburgskaya Gosudarstvennaya Konservatoriya im. N. A. Rimskogo-Korsakova, 2006).

<sup>41</sup> Roland John Wiley, 'The Tribulations of Nationalist Composers: A Speculation Concerning Borrowed Music in *Khovanshchina*', in Malcolm Hamrick Brown and Roland John Wiley (eds.), *Musorgsky: In Memoriam, 1881–1981* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1982), pp. 163–77. Wiley noted that scholars were generally happy to lower their methodological guard where it concerned borrowings by Russian composers. The indebtedness of the Kuchka to Liszt and Berlioz was a subject already broached by Gerald Abraham, and Wiley observed that 'it is extremely curious that we have admitted composers of instrumental music to the sphere of influence while excluding composers of opera, when by practical measure opera, and not instrumental music, was the mark of success in Russia for composers of the time' (p. 168).

<sup>42</sup> Mary Helen Sault Woodside, 'Western Models for a Russian opera: Glinka's *Ruslan and Ludmilla*', 2 vols., Ph. D. thesis (University of Chicago, 1987).

received more sustained attention.<sup>43</sup> All of these studies show how Russian operas can—and should—fit into the larger picture of European music theatre. In 2003, Marina Frolova-Walker emphasized that musicology was only at the beginning of a thorough reinterpretation of the history of Russian opera in this respect, a task that could not have been achieved overnight.<sup>44</sup>

Another, parallel development in the research of Russian music has been the improved understanding of nationalism in the field of Russian music research, replacing the old fascination for Russianness with an interest in nationalism proper, with all its myths and implications in politics and identity. A particular landmark in this respect is Frolova-Walker's book-length account of how Russian music and nationalism have been historically intertwined.<sup>45</sup> The significance of such research has been twofold. It has shown, on the one hand, how nationalism has guided the work of composers and librettists, demonstrating that some of the distinctive characteristics of Russian music are not an unmediated reflection of Russian nature or culture, but an active construction. On the other hand, it has unmasked numerous nationalist myths in music discourse, warning us not to take nineteenth-century claims regarding Russianness as simple statements of fact, and showing how the belief in the Russianness of Russian music was cultivated in the nineteenth century.

Each of the above approaches has offered powerful correctives to the latter-day preoccupation with the Russianness of Russian music, yet their results tend in different directions, since all are inclined to focus on the most telling manifestations of their subjects. Studies of nationalism show how time and time again, national thought influenced the work of composers and critics,

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<sup>43</sup> See e. g. 'Ital'yanshchina' in Taruskin, *Defining Russia Musically*, pp. 186–235; Marina Romanovna Cherkashina, 'Meyerbeer und die russische Oper des 19. Jahrhunderts', in Sieghart Döhring and Arnold Jacobshagen (eds.), *Meyerbeer und das europäische Musiktheater*, Thurnauer Schriften zum Musiktheater 16 (Laaber: Laaber, 1998), pp. 442–57; Marina Frolova-Walker, 'Grand Opera in Russia: Fragments of an Unwritten History', in David Charlton (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Grand Opera* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 344–65; Yelena Mikhaylovna Petrushanskaya, *Mikhail Glinka i Italiya: zagadki zhizni i tvorchestva* (Moscow: Klassika-XXI, 2009); Daniil Zavlunov, 'M. I. Glinka's *A Life for the Tsar* (1836): An Historical and Analytic-Theoretical Study', Ph.D. thesis (Princeton University, 2010).

<sup>44</sup> Frolova-Walker, 'Grand Opera in Russia', p. 345.

<sup>45</sup> Id., *Russian Music and Nationalism*. See also Taruskin, *Defining Russia Musically*, esp. pp. 113–151. The understanding of the role of nationalism in nineteenth-century music in general has developed greatly in recent decades. For an overview, see e. g. id., 'Nationalism', in Sadie and Tyrrell (eds.), *New Grove/2*, vol. 17, pp. 689–706; or Jim Samson, 'Nations and Nationalisms', in id. (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Nineteenth-Century Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 568–600.

leaving the impression that nationalism shaped musical life, thought, and style to a considerable extent. Other studies of Russian opera, by contrast, are reluctant to deal with the tainted notion of Russianness or do not deal with nationalism at all.<sup>46</sup> As a result, we are faced with two distinct revisionist accounts of Russian music, which are at times difficult to reconcile and do not lead to a coherent understanding of the role of nationalism in the Russian opera world.

This thesis will explore the middle ground between these two tendencies by studying operas not as manifestations of nationalism, nor as examples of the use of Western convention in Russia, but as works that were, potentially, not Russian enough. I hope such an approach, which foregrounds the tense relation between the desire for a national style and the continuing use of Western models, will help to put the role of nationalism in the Russian opera world into better perspective.

### *Russianness Redefined*

I believe the best way to treat the phenomenon of Russianness in Russian music—as well as its opposite, non-Russianness or ‘foreignness’—is as a form of signification, that is: as certain meanings that cannot simply be equated to authorial intention, that are not in any objective way present in the contents of the score, but do not have to be regarded as the complete invention of listeners or polemicists either. As in any of the most simple models of communication, I will take at least the sender, the medium, and the recipient into account—but, as should be clear from the previous section on the opera world, this is already a simplification, since there are usually multiple authors involved in the production of one opera. The communication of meaning in this model is unstable: it depends on the background of the recipient, it may not be a matter of consensus, and it may change over time. The study of reception, therefore, is crucial for the historian’s understanding of the meanings a work carried in any given context. This is particularly so in the case of music, since music has never had any widely accepted, codified lexicon of meaning; but as any literary or theatre scholar will hopefully agree, it can be just as true for the seemingly less ambiguous elements of libretto and staging.

The musical ambiguities in the scores extend even to the least contested sign of Russianness: the use of folk elements. As Carl Dahlhaus argued,

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<sup>46</sup> See e. g.: Marina Ritzarev, *Eighteenth-Century Russian Music* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006); Zavlunov, ‘*A Life for the Tsar*’.

since traditions of folk music are more commonly regional than national practices, their ‘national’ character should not be taken for granted. In the eighteenth century, moreover, folk music was generally understood as an indication of class rather than nation—it was a ‘vertical’ marker rather than a ‘horizontal’ one. This was a model that was never completely replaced by the new, national reading of folk music, and folk music continued to evoke the life of the lower classes or the countryside. Finally, many of the more generalized techniques to produce a folk-like effect in art music—the use of drones, open fifths, diatonic melody, the avoidance of full cadences—functioned above all as contrasts to the norms of art music, and could be—and were, in fact—used in similar ways to suggest the folk music of many different European nations. Dahlhaus therefore concluded that the answer to questions of authenticity and nationality in music cannot be resolved on the basis of its melodic, harmonic or rhythmic substance, but depends on some consensus by its recipients.<sup>47</sup> By the same token, the Western conventions used in Russian opera were problematic with regard to the desire for a national style only insofar as they were recognized and considered incommensurate with a Russian idiom.<sup>48</sup> Russianness, therefore, should not be ascribed or denied directly on the basis of such notions as difference, similarity, or origins. Though these concepts may play a considerable role in the communication of Russianness, they do not translate into it directly, but depend on the significance and meaning attached to them by the recipients.

The signification of Russianness through music could be predictable and reliable only if accompanied by additional information to guide the inter-

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<sup>47</sup> Carl Dahlhaus, ‘Nationalism and Music’, in id., *Between Romanticism and Modernism*, trans. Mary Whittall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), p. 95.

<sup>48</sup> At a time when Rimsky-Korsakov was obviously disillusioned with nationalist mythologies, he claimed that the art of writing in a Russian style consisted *entirely* of removing from the general, European language of music those elements that were too reminiscent of other countries. As an example he sang to his interviewer a cadential formula, which he found too reminiscent of Italian music, and which would therefore be inappropriate; but when all such things were eliminated, Rimsky argued, he could write freely, and nothing would stop the result from being appropriately Russian music. The same was true for all other national styles. See Pavel Alekseyevich Karasyov, ‘Besedi s Nikolayem Andreyevichem Rimskim-Korsakovim’, *Russkaya muzikal’naya gazeta*, 12 July 1908, no. 49, col. 1120; the interview was reprinted as part of the more extended memoirs of id., ‘Rimskiy-Korsakov, Vruble’ i Zabela-Vruble’ (po lichnim vospominaniyam)’, in Aleksey Ivanovich Kandinsky (ed.), *Nikolay Andreyevich Rimskiy-Korsakov: k 150-letiyu so dnya rozhdeniya i 90-letiyu so dnya smerti. Sbornik statey* (Moscow: Moskovskaya gosudarstvennaya konservatoriya im. P. I. Chaykovskogo, 2000), p. 155. The passage about Rimsky’s method of exclusion is translated in English and discussed in Frolova-Walker, *Russian Music and Nationalism*, pp. 207–8.

pretation, which I shall call keys. 'Keys' are those things that help a listener decide whether a certain passage of music denotes Russianness—or, if more ingrained, sounds Russian—and what this is supposed to mean. If used widely and habitually, they could also be called interpretative conventions. There could be keys provided within the score—for instance by the situation in the libretto—but also outside it: by precedents in other pieces of music, by analogy with other art forms, by textual explanations of this or similar music, or by more general ideas regarding national character. The list is potentially endless, and more often than not, one presumes, the interpretation depended on a combination of several such keys.

Given the right circumstances, an able composer could exploit these keys, and provide his music with national associations that were real enough for listeners sufficiently familiar with them. But the composer was never in full control, since there was no way to ensure that the audience employed those keys he counted on. Not only were the backgrounds of various groups of listeners considerably diverse, new keys would be added after the moment of composition in the form of stagings, performances, new compositions, criticism, scholarship, and so on.

The communication of Russianness through music, to conclude, is a complex process, and the methodological implication is that there is a strong intertextual component in the understanding of any opera. Unlike an older mode of musicology that tended to discount the 'extra-musical', I would like to treat operas as part of broader culture, and keep an open eye to as many relevant aspects of the context as possible. The core materials for my research have been the scores of the four selected operas, the relevant writings of their composers such as correspondences and memoirs, and contemporary reviews. From there on I have explored related texts and scores that make up the institutional, musical and cultural context of the operas. In the analyses of the operas themselves, I have focused primarily on the scores, i. e. the text and music of the operas, paying attention to the performances and stagings only where they seemed of particular importance. This has primarily been a pragmatic decision, since the details of performance and staging changed from occasion to occasion and information about them is sometimes hard to obtain.

### *The Four Case Studies*

More than a hundred operas received their first performance on one of the major stages of St Petersburg and Moscow in the period between 1830 and 1900.<sup>49</sup> I have not attempted to deal with this entire repertoire. Given the many complications related to inquiries into Russianness outlined above, I choose to tread carefully rather than to aspire to a sweeping overview. Hence, I have selected four case studies that illustrate the various relevant issues at different times.

As stated above, each of these operas may be regarded as a borderline case that could or could not be considered Russian enough. All four selected operas are obvious hybrids, drawing from several distinct traditions, and all have been described as eclectic. Consequently, these operas challenge notions of Russianness founded on difference and origins, and are suitable candidates to investigate the negotiation of nationalism in the Russian opera world.

The purpose of each of these case studies is twofold. Since I have focused on the use of Western conventions and non-Russian subject matter, elements that have been disregarded in traditional historiography, each chapter makes a contribution to the study of these individual operas. On a more general scale, I seek to contribute to the understanding of nineteenth-century Russian culture as well as the functioning of national thought and national distinction in the internationalized world of opera.

Glinka's *A Life for the Tsar*, with its reputation as a foundational work of Russian music, has attracted ample attention in modern scholarship. The lack of serious studies into Glinka's relations with Italian opera, however, is conspicuous; so conspicuous, in fact, that two other scholars have undertaken important independent studies simultaneously with mine. I only got to know the findings of Yelena Petrushanskaya and Daniil Zavlunov after my research on *A Life for the Tsar* had already been published. Their studies are significant and welcome contributions to the field of Glinka studies, but since my research was not based on their work and their conclusions do not warrant major revisions, I will only make occasional reference to them.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> I have derived this estimate from the works listed by Grigory Borisovich Bernandt, *Slovar' oper* (Moscow: Sovetskiy Kompozitor, 1962). The actual number depends on how one defines opera, i. e. whether one includes all types of vaudevilles and pot-pourris, whether one wishes to include foreign languages and foreign composers; whether performances at private meetings are still counted as premieres; whether reworkings of older works are counted as new ones, etc. Rather than trying to establish an elaborate list of criteria, I have kept to a cautious lower estimate.

<sup>50</sup> Petrushanskaya, *Mikhail Glinka i Italiya*; Zavlunov, 'A Life for the Tsar'; Rutger Helmers,

As for Aleksandr Serov's *Judith*, original research by Western scholars has been rare indeed—the only notable exceptions being a study of Serov's operas by Gerald Abraham, and the much more extensive treatment by Richard Taruskin in his study *Opera and Drama in Russia as Preached and Practiced in the 1860s*, which focuses on operatic theory.<sup>51</sup> The attention for *The Maid of Orléans* has generally been limited to publications aiming at comprehensiveness, such as Tchaikovsky monographs, Russian music histories, and encyclopedias.<sup>52</sup> In Western literature, the same is true for *The Tsar's Bride*; in the Russian language there are a number of dedicated but traditional studies.<sup>53</sup>

The appearance of Glinka's *A Life for the Tsar* in 1836 is traditionally considered the moment Russian music came to its own—and I have bowed to that tradition by making this opera my first case study. The libretto of *A Life for the Tsar* was explicitly nationalist, yet its score draws greatly on contemporary Italian conventions. The focus in the relevant chapter is mostly on the analysis of the score, particularly formal conventions of the contemporary Italian composers Donizetti and Bellini. The analysis shows,

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“It Just Reeks of Italianism”: Traces of Italian Opera in *A Life for the Tsar*, *Music & Letters* 92/3 (2010), pp. 376–405.

<sup>51</sup> Gerald Abraham, ‘The Operas of Serov’, in Jack Westrup (ed.), *Essays Presented to Egon Wellesz* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1966), pp. 171–83; Richard Taruskin, *Opera and Drama in Russia as Preached and Practiced in the 1860s* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1981), pp. 33–248. In earlier studies, scholars seem to have been content to base themselves on existing Russian accounts without first-hand knowledge; see e. g. Rosa Newmarch, *The Russian Opera* (London: E. P. Dutton, 1914); Michel-Dimitri Calvocoressi and Gerald Abraham, *Masters of Russian Music* (London: Pelican, 1936); Calvocoressi, *A Survey of Russian Music*.

<sup>52</sup> Some scholars have felt that this opera ‘seems to cry out for interpretation as a psychological autopsy’, and a small number of studies relating it to Tchaikovsky's sexuality and family situation form an exception to the claim above. See Henry Zajackowski, ‘Tchaikovsky: The Missing Piece of the Jigsaw Puzzle’, *Musical Times* 131/1767 (1990), pp. 238–42; id., ‘On Čajkovskij's Psychopathology and Its Relationship with His Creativity’, in Thomas Kohlhase (ed.), *Internationales Čajkovskij-Symposium, Tübingen 1993: Bericht, Čajkovskij-Studien 1* (Mainz: Schott, 1995), pp. 307–28; and Leslie Kearney, ‘Tchaikovsky Androgyne: *The Maid of Orléans*’, in ead. (ed.), *Tchaikovsky and His World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), p. 239, from which the quoted passage has been taken. A psychological approach was also encouraged by Richard Taruskin, ‘Tchaikovsky, Pyotr Il'yich’, in Stanley Sadie (ed.), *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, 4 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1992), vol. 4, p. 663.

<sup>53</sup> See e. g.: Yevgeny Yakovlevich Ratser, ‘*Tsarskaya nevesta*: nekotoriye osnovniye voprosi kompozitorskogo masterstva i muzikal'noy dramaturgii’, Ph. D. thesis (Moscow: Moskovskaya gosudarstvennaya konservatoriya im. P. I. Chaykovskogo, 1955); Anatoly Aleksandrovich Solovtsov, ‘*Tsarskaya nevesta*’ *N. A. Rimskogo-Korsakova*, 3rd edn. (Moscow: Muzika, 1980); V. Bakulin, ‘Leytmotivnaya i intonatsionnaya dramaturgiya v opere Rimskogo-Korsakova *Tsarskaya nevesta*’, in Yury Nikolayevich Tyulin (ed.), *Voprosi opernoy dramaturgii* (Moscow: Muzika, 1975), pp. 274–314.

among other things, which conventions were adopted and which were not, and also, particularly in the case of Susanin's final scene, that the Italian influences have not necessarily hindered its reception as 'Russian'.

The two central chapters focus on the question what the implications of having a non-Russian subject could be. In Chapter Two, devoted to Aleksandr Serov's *Judith*, I will analyse local colour both as aesthetic ideal and as a central feature of this opera, and raise the question how a work with a biblical subject fitted into the national discourse of the Russian opera world: should it be Russian or should it be 'realistic' in terms of local colour? Frolova-Walker has recently argued that much of the Russianness that is often ascribed to nationalism or national character can be profitably studied as a form of local colour, and that nineteenth-century composers generally understood it as such.<sup>54</sup> Using the reception of *Judith*, in which one critic raised the rare complaint that the opera was lacking in Russianness while others sought to prove the contrary, I will show the confusion which the relation between Russianness and local colour could produce in case of a non-Russian subject.

The analysis applied to the case of *Judith* is continued to some extent in Chapter Three, which deals with Tchaikovsky's *The Maid of Orléans*. This opera had a French subject, derived from the German playwright Schiller. I will show that this choice of subject and the adherence to grand opera conventions can be understood in the light of Tchaikovsky's struggle for recognition as an opera composer. More than any of the others, this chapter takes issue with twentieth-century historiography; I will argue that the presence in the score of stylistic elements previously recognized as Russian can improve our understanding of the significance and meaning of such elements in other scores of this period.

The fourth and final chapter revolves around Rimsky-Korsakov's *The Tsar's Bride*, written more than six decades after Glinka's *A Life for the Tsar*, at a time when the cultivation of a national idiom was beginning to lose its appeal among Russian composers. Rimsky-Korsakov had been a member of the Kuchka, but once he had accepted a position as professor at the St Petersburg conservatory in 1871, he became more and more preoccupied with technical competence. In his late career, he moved away from and lost faith in musical nationalism. This chapter will show how, at the turn of the century, his dissatisfaction with kuchkist realism and contemporary developments in the West made him turn to tradition. Around this time, Rimsky-Korsakov

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<sup>54</sup> Marina Frolova-Walker, 'A Ukrainian Tune in Medieval France: Perceptions of Nationalism and Local Color in Russian Opera', *Nineteenth-Century Music* 35/2 (2011), pp. 115–31.

rediscovered Mozart and Italian opera, and began to emphasize Glinka's use of forms and his melodiousness as his main qualities. As a result, *The Tsar's Bride* defies and redefines existing kuchkist notions of Russian national opera.

Hence, I have taken two operas on Russian subjects which drew extensively on existing operatic conventions and were clearly informed by developments abroad; and two operas on non-Russian subjects, which I have placed in the light of the discussion about Russian national style. By including these seemingly distinct types of works I hope to emphasize that they were in fact part of the same history.

The four chapters do not aspire to form a self-contained narrative. As my research has been, in a sense, a plea for the diversity in the Russian opera world, it is not my intention to fashion an alternative narrative to replace the traditional one. Instead, the four case studies make explicit the connections between Russia and Western Europe and illuminate the place of such connections in the Russian society of their time. Our increased awareness of such relations may make it even more difficult ever to understand or relate the history of Russian opera comprehensively, but it will, in the end, prevent us from mistaking the part for the whole.



## *A Life for the Tsar*

‘WHY WAS *A Life for the Tsar* recognized as a good opera, and Glinka as a notable Russian composer?’ a certain ‘M. S.’ asked the readers of the *St Petersburg Gazette* of 16 March 1866. To anyone familiar with the conventional image of *A Life for the Tsar* as the cornerstone of the Russian national canon, the reasons given by the author may seem quite surprising:

First, because of the patriotic subject; secondly (and even more so), for everything in the opera that was weak. One only has to recall which places in the opera always made the greatest impression. Only everything that was concert-like, Italian, sentimental, and whiny [*plak-sivīy*] was acknowledged as beautiful and original (for instance, the trio ‘Ne tomi, rodimīy’, the arias of Vanya, Antonida, and similar pieces that contain only negative qualities); these things have always pleased more than anything else, general attention was fixed only on them, and it is to them the opera owes its great success. [...] The admiration for *A Life for the Tsar* was no more than admiration for the usual Italian singing, slightly adapted to Russian tastes.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Vladimir Vasil’evich Stasov, ‘Verit’ li? (Pis’mo k psevdonimu: tri zvyozdochki)’ (1866), in id., *Izbrannīye sochineniya*, ed. Yelena Dmitriyevna Stasov, Mariya Pavlovna Blinova and Pyotr Trifonovich Shchipunov, 3 vols. (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1952), p. 145.

The author of this passage was none other than Vladimir Stasov, who is known first and foremost as a tireless advocate of Glinka and the Mighty Handful. Of course, one should be aware that this article was part of an ongoing polemic between Stasov and Aleksandr Serov about the relative merits of Glinka's first and second operas,<sup>2</sup> and in the same pages Stasov scorns the audiences and critics who were a bit too enthusiastic about Serov's latest opera *Rogneda*. One might therefore suspect that *A Life for the Tsar* served only as a foil to make his point, and that Stasov would have sanctioned the myth that *A Life for the Tsar* was 'purely Russian',<sup>3</sup> had he not wanted to transfer this special status to Glinka's other opera *Ruslan and Lyudmila*.

But Stasov's critical treatment of *A Life for the Tsar* and its audience was more than just expedient. He was quite consistent in his partial rejection of the opera in all his writing about Glinka,<sup>4</sup> and in this he resembled the composer himself, who had accused the music critic Feofil Tolstoy of preferring *A Life for the Tsar* over *Ruslan* only because of the earlier opera's 'traces of *italienische tralala*'.<sup>5</sup> It also corresponds with current musicological views of the opera. Richard Taruskin has argued that the 'old bromide that Glinka liberated Russian music by turning away from the West has it just backwards', explaining the success of Glinka's operas through their 'viability on the world stage' instead.<sup>6</sup> The knowledge and first-hand experience the composer had

<sup>2</sup> See Richard Taruskin, 'Glinka's Ambiguous Legacy and the Birth Pangs of Russian Opera', *Nineteenth-Century Music* 1/2 (1977), pp. 142–62.

<sup>3</sup> This was proclaimed, for instance, in Yanuary Neverov's review of the opera, printed soon after the premiere: 'The important thing is that [Glinka's] opera is a purely Russian, national, native work' (*proizvedeniye chisto russkoye, narodnoye, rodnoye*). In this account, contrary to Stasov's, the audience 'understood the composer, or, perhaps it is better to say that they were instinctively enthralled by his great talent' (Yanuary Mikhailovich Neverov, 'O novoy opere g. Glinki: *Zhizn' za Tsarya*' [1836], in Tamara Nikolayevna Livanova and Vladimir Vasil'yevich Protopopov, *Glinka: tvorcheskiy put'*, 2 vols. [Moscow: Gosudarstvennoye muzikal'noye izdatel'stvo, 1955], vol. 2, p. 212); trans. in James Stuart Campbell (ed.), *Russians on Russian Music, 1830–1880: An Anthology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) (henceforth cited as RRM1), p. 1.

<sup>4</sup> See Vladimir Vasil'yevich Stasov, 'Mikhail Ivanovich Glinka' (1857), in id., *Stat'i o muzike*, ed. Vladimir Vasil'yevich Protopopov, 5 vols., *Russkaya klassicheskaya muzikal'naya kritika* (Moscow: Muzika, 1974–1980), vol. 1, p. 231; and id., 'Iskusstvo XIX veka' (1901), in id., *Izbranniye sochineniya*, vol. 3, p. 719.

<sup>5</sup> Feofil Matveyevich Tolstoy, 'Po povodu *Zapisok* M. I. Glinki' (1871), in Aleksandra Anatol'yevna Orlova (ed.), *Glinka v vospominaniyakh sovremennikov* (Moscow: Muzgiz, 1955) (henceforth cited as GVS), pp. 111–2.

<sup>6</sup> Richard Taruskin, *Defining Russia Musically: Historical and Hermeneutical Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), pp. 42–3. See also Marina Frolova-Walker, *Russian Music and Nationalism from Glinka to Stalin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), pp. 91–104, for

acquired during his three-year stay in Italy just prior to the composition of *A Life for the Tsar* could have made no small contribution to this. Thanks to the increasingly critical stance towards nationalism in both music and musicology in the last decades, it is nowadays almost a truism to state that ‘in formal and stylistic terms *A Life for the Tsar* was very much an Italian opera’.<sup>7</sup>

Until recently,<sup>8</sup> little effort was been made to study Glinka’s work in the context of contemporary Italian opera—a circumstance that is doubtless a consequence of the long-standing tendency of scholars of Russian music to focus their attention on the composer’s contributions to the development of a national idiom.<sup>9</sup> The question of how much Glinka actually relied on

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a recent assessment of what *A Life for the Tsar*’s contribution on the ‘world stage’ might have been.

<sup>7</sup> Richard Taruskin, ‘Glinka, Mikhail Ivanovich’, in Stanley Sadie (ed.), *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, 4 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1992), vol. 2, p. 448.

<sup>8</sup> As I have mentioned in the introduction, some important recent research has been performed simultaneously with the present study. Yelena Petrushanskaya (*Mikhail Glinka i Italiya: zagadki zhizni i tvorchestva* [Moscow: Klassika-xxi, 2009]) has performed invaluable archival work regarding Glinka’s life in Italy, and also devotes a chapter to Glinka’s operas—particularly with reference to Rossini. Daniil Zavlunov (‘M. I. Glinka’s *A Life for the Tsar* (1836): An Historical and Analytic-Theoretical Study’, Ph. D. thesis [Princeton University, 2010]) gives a far more extensive and detailed analysis of the score of *A Life for the Tsar* than I was able to within the present scope. I have decided to keep my analysis largely as published in Helmers, “‘It Just Reeks of Italianism’”, with only minor changes, though I will occasionally refer to the work of the above scholars in my footnotes.

<sup>9</sup> This preference was more pronounced among Western scholars than among their Soviet colleagues. Gerald Abraham discussed the influence of Italian opera in terms of ‘foreign matter’ that mingled with the ‘pure metal’ of Russian folk music and regretted that ‘Glinka never entirely threw off this weakening influence’ (Gerald Abraham, *Studies in Russian Music* [London: Reeves, 1936; rpt. 1968], p. 37). The tendency to avoid the subject of foreign influence altogether has led to such discussions of *A Life for the Tsar* as the one in Gerald R. Seaman, *History of Russian Music: From Its Origins to Dargomyzhsky* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1967), pp. 168–77, which is devoted almost exclusively to Glinka’s use of folksongs and folksong idiom, thus practically ignoring any relation between Glinka’s work and opera as practised in Western Europe. Boris Asaf’yev did not discuss the influence of Italian opera on *A Life for the Tsar* in his Glinka monograph; he was more inclined to consider the influence of Mozart and Cherubini (Boris Vladimirovich Asaf’yev, *Glinka*, 2nd edn. [Moscow: Muzgiz, 1950], pp. 14, 19–21, 34, 130, 302–9). The biographies by David Brown (*Mikhail Glinka: A Biographical and Critical Study* [London: Oxford University Press, 1974], p. 111) and Ol’ga Yevgen’yevna Levashyova (*Mikhail Ivanovich Glinka*, 2 vols. [Moscow: Muzika, 1987–1988], vol. 1, pp. 264, 292–3) are good examples of studies that acknowledge the influence of *bel canto* opera but do not elaborate on it. Taruskin did point out some Italianate numbers and features in Glinka’s operas, but limited the treatment of *A Life for the Tsar* to the influence of Westernized arrangements of the *protiyazhnaya pesnya* (Taruskin, *Defining Russia Musically*, pp. 227–8). The suggestion made by the émigré musicologist Vladimir Féderov in the late 1950s to undertake something

Italian models is significant, however, not only in order to understand Glinka's own personal style and development, but also to put his works in a larger European context and to obtain a nuanced view of the construction of Russian national music and his role therein. In this chapter, therefore, I shall discuss the relation of Glinka's first opera, *A Life for the Tsar*, to Italian *bel canto* opera in some depth.<sup>10</sup>

Marina Ritzarev, a specialist in eighteenth-century Russian music with experience of the 'problem' of Italian influence, has identified where attempts to address such questions have usually failed when considering Glinka's predecessors: 'The moment one tries to analyze stylistic features in order to separate the borrowed from the native (or what had become native by the eighteenth century), one becomes trapped either in exaggerated nationalistic pretensions or in a total rejection of native elements, throwing out the baby with the bath water.'<sup>11</sup> I think it should be possible, however, to steer a careful middle course without falling into either of these two extremes. Without wishing to deny the difficulties involved, I would argue that the analysis of stylistic features is precisely what has long been lacking in the case of Glinka, and a balanced consideration of these features should allow one to avoid the reductive outcomes Ritzarev rightly wishes to steer clear of: the essentially national and the essentially foreign. Moreover, I wish to make no a priori judgements as to what constitutes the baby and what constitutes the bath water for Glinka. The rhetoric used by Glinka and Stasov in their statements cited above relies on and perpetuates a familiar myth: that Italian opera

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similar to the current investigation is a notable exception: 'A very detailed comparative analysis of Glinka's entire pre-Italian oeuvre [...], of his Italian production [...], and of all Glinka's compositions that precede and surround his masterpiece, *Ivan Susanin*, will end the controversies and tell us definitively what is the debt of nineteenth-century Russian music to Italian music, and, consequently, to M. I. Glinka's voyage to Italy' ('Le voyage de M. I. Glinka en Italie', *Collectanea Historiae Musicae* 2 [1957], p. 192).

<sup>10</sup> Glinka's second opera, *Ruslan and Lyudmila* (1842), also contains much that is Italianate and can be subjected to a similar analysis. Pieces obviously indebted to Italian style in *Ruslan* are Lyudmila's cavatina, the Finn-Ratmir duet, and the quintet of the Act V finale. Glinka does draw on a greater diversity of resources in his second opera and the study of its style is complicated by intentionally foreign characters: the often noted Italian patter style of Farlaf's Act II *buffo* aria marks him as one of the 'others' of the exotic cast, as was noted by contemporary observers ('O\*\*\*', 'Ruslan i Lyudmila. Opera M. I. Glinki', *Sovetskaya muzika*, 1957, no. 2, pp. 67–71; Osip Ivanovich Senkovsky, 'Opera in St Petersburg: *Ruslan and Lyudmila*' [1842], in *RRM*1, pp. 13–27). See Mary Helen Sault Woodside, 'Western Models for a Russian opera: Glinka's *Ruslan and Ludmilla*', 2 vols., Ph.D. thesis (University of Chicago, 1987), vol. 2, pp. 271–366; and Marina Frolova-Walker, 'On *Ruslan* and Russianness', *Cambridge Opera Journal* 9/1 (1997), pp. 21–45.

<sup>11</sup> Marina Ritzarev, *Eighteenth-Century Russian Music* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), p. 2.

is generally devoid of any musical value while at the same time everything Italianate—whether despite or because of this fundamental defect—is somehow always popular with the general public. This was a trope often employed by those of other nationalities or musical creeds who opposed the Italian hegemony in nineteenth-century musical theatre, and understandably so, but it continued to exert its influence well into the twentieth century. Thus, of all genres and repertoires Glinka drew from, Italian *bel canto* opera was the least likely to inspire positive interest. Most evidence suggests, however—the composer’s derisive comments about ‘Italianism’ notwithstanding—that the operas of Rossini, Donizetti, and Bellini were useful models for Glinka, and the easy dismissal of their influence in much of the Glinka literature is therefore not very helpful.

### *Glinka’s Changing Attitude to Italian Music*

In her 1987 Glinka monograph, Ol’ga Levashyova criticized the ‘one-sided and somewhat prejudiced treatment’ of Glinka’s stay in Italy from 1830 to 1833, and noted that the existing biographies often anachronistically applied the ‘anti-Italian’ comments made by Glinka in the 1850s to ‘a considerably earlier time’.<sup>12</sup> A classical example of this approach is that of Stasov, who wrote that Glinka ‘stopped believing, like everyone else did back then, in the musicality of Italy. He didn’t learn anything there, except perhaps some ability to control the voice’.<sup>13</sup> He supported these claims by quoting—without reference—from Glinka’s *Memoirs*. These recollections, written down by the composer from 1854 onwards, cannot be taken as a reliable source for establishing his earlier opinions of Italian opera. About his time in Petersburg in the 1820s, for instance, Glinka wrote that ‘the Italian songsters were not then inundating the capitals of Europe like corsairs’ and that he ‘was glad there were none of them in Petersburg and that the operatic repertoire was therefore a varied one’.<sup>14</sup> This is obviously a projection of his later experiences and preferences onto this earlier period, for at the time Glinka took advantage of every opportunity to improve his knowledge of Italian opera. He took singing

<sup>12</sup> Levashyova, *Glinka*, vol. 1, p. 177.

<sup>13</sup> Stasov, ‘Iskusstvo XIX veka’, p. 718.

<sup>14</sup> Mikhail Ivanovich Glinka, *Polnoye sobraniye sochineniy: literaturniye proizvedeniya i perepiska*, ed. Anastasiya Sergeyevna Lyapunova and Aleksandr Semyonovich Rozanov, 2 vols. (Moscow: Muzika, 1973–1975) (henceforth cited as GLPP), vol. 1, p. 219; trans. id., *Memoirs*, trans. Richard B. Mudge (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1963) (henceforth cited as GM), p. 18.

lessons in 1824–25, which soon allowed him to entertain his acquaintances ‘with apt performances of scenes from *opera buffa*’,<sup>15</sup> he studied the Italian language, and when an Italian troupe did arrive in St Petersburg in 1828, he took composition lessons with their coach.

In the spring of 1830, ostensibly to improve his health, Glinka left for Italy to round off his artistic education, like many of his contemporaries and predecessors.<sup>16</sup> In Milan, where he spent most of his time, he could enjoy Italian opera at its best. In the winter of 1830–31, the Teatro Carcano had managed to contract not only Donizetti and Bellini as composers, but a formidable cast of singers as well. Through his friend Yevgeny Shterich, Glinka could make use of the box owned by the Russian ambassador to the Sardinian court, and in his description of the opening night, the premiere of Donizetti’s *Anna Bolena*, he remembered how ‘there seemed something magical about it’:

Rubini, Pasta (who played Anne Boleyn with distinction, especially in the last scene), Galli, Orlandi, etc., all had parts. And since from our front box one could not miss the very softest *sotto voce*, in which, incidentally Rubini did not at that time indulge to the absurd degree he did later on, I was wallowing in rapture, all the more so since I was not then indifferent to *virtuosité*, as I am now.

Glinka’s excitement about Bellini’s *La sonnambula*, given at the very end of the same season, was even greater.

Despite the fact that it was presented late and regardless of the envious and the ill-wishers, this opera did make a tremendous impression. In the few performances given before the theatre closed, Pasta and Rubini sang with the most evident enthusiasm to support their favourite conductor; in the second act the singers themselves wept and carried their audience along with them, so that in the happy days of carnival, tears were continually being wiped away in the boxes and parquet alike. Embracing Shterich in the Ambassador’s box, I, too, shed tears of emotion and ecstasy.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Aleksandra Anatol'yevna Orlova, *Glinka’s Life in Music: A Chronicle*, trans. Richard Hoops (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1988) (henceforth cited as GLM), pp. 32, 33.

<sup>16</sup> Glinka met Berlioz and Mendelssohn while he was in Italy; some years earlier, he might have met Meyerbeer there. Prominent eighteenth-century Russian composers like Maksim Berezovsky (1745–77), Dmitry Bortnyansky (1751–1825), and Yevstigney Fomin (1761–1801) had also spent several years studying in Italy.

<sup>17</sup> GLPP, vol. 1, pp. 245–6; trans. GM, pp. 60–1.

His enthusiasm for opera, in some cases combined with the attention of one or the other attractive young lady, incited Glinka to write a number of brilliant instrumental pieces based on operatic themes, all by Bellini and Donizetti.<sup>18</sup> In addition, he published two vocal pieces with an Italian text: the romance *Il desiderio* and the aria *L'iniquo voto*, of which the latter in particular allows us to see to what extent he had already mastered the style and forms of Italian opera. Another composition with an Italian text was intended for performance on the stage of La Scala.<sup>19</sup> In October 1832, the soprano Adelaide Tosi had asked Glinka to write an aria for insertion into Donizetti's *Fausta*, and he produced something 'very much in the style of Bellini', which he thought would be quite successful. He did not agree with Tosi about which part of her vocal range was best, however, and consequently, the prima donna was not at all pleased with the composition. After failing to convince her, the irritated composer gave up, and according to the memoirs, decided he had had enough of 'these pretensions' and 'took an oath never again to write for Italian prima donnas.'<sup>20</sup>

Such were the situations one had to deal with on this highly competitive circuit, and incidents like these must have convinced Glinka that a career

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<sup>18</sup> These pieces, all published by Giovanni Ricordi, were: a *Rondino brillante* for piano based on a modified version of Romeo's 'La tremenda ultrice spada' from *I Capuleti e i Montecchi*; a set of piano variations on Tebaldo's cabaletta 'L'amo tanto, e m'è sì cara' from the same opera, using the accompanying cantabile as an andante interpolation; *Variazioni brillante* for piano on 'Nel veder tua constanza' from *Anna Bolena*; an *Impromptu en gallop* for piano four hands based on the barcarole from Donizetti's *L'elisir d'amore*. Most ambitious are the *Serenade on themes from 'Anna Bolena'* (dedicated to Emilia Branca, Felice Romani's future wife), and the *Divertimento brillante* on themes from *La Sonnambula*, both set for a sextet and both using multiple themes from throughout the operas.

<sup>19</sup> *L'iniquo voto* has often been identified with the 'cavatina *Beatrice di Tenda*' that Glinka mentions in his *Memoirs* (GLPP, vol. 1, p. 257; GM, p. 78), but this remains a moot question. Yelena Petrushanskaya discusses the possibility that this aria is the same as either the aria for *Beatrice di Tenda* or the aria for Tosi in *Faust* (Petrushanskaya, *Mikhail Glinka i Italiya*, pp. 194–8, 276–7).

<sup>20</sup> GLPP, vol. 1, p. 256; trans. GM, p. 77. Glinka only mentions Tosi's last name, and the way she has been referred to by her surname only in much of the literature is telling about the former state of research (see e. g. Brown, *Glinka*, pp. 62, 340; GLPP, vol. 1, p. 460; GLM, pp. 82, 809; or GM, p. 263). She could be identified as the well-known singer Adelaide Tosi (1800–1859) simply by consulting some studies of Italian opera (see Carlo Gatti, *Il teatro alla Scala: nella storia e nell'arte, 1778–1963* [Milan: Ricordi, 1964], vol. 2, pp. 37, 343; William Ashbrook, *Donizetti* [London: Cassell, 1965], p. 420; id., *Donizetti and His Operas* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982], 71, 620n); Tosi appeared in the Milan premiere of *Fausta* on 26 December, and instead of Glinka's aria she performed as an insert 'Perchè mi dica ancora' from Donizetti's *Il castello di Kenilworth*, transposed and furnished with a new text. Petrushanskaya's research confirms these findings (Petrushanskaya, *Mikhail Glinka i Italiya*, pp. 150–2, 194).

writing Italian opera in Italy was not something to which he aspired. Indeed, he famously wrote that by the time he left for Berlin in the summer of 1833, he had realized he ‘could not become an Italian’ and that ‘longing for home led me, step by step, to think of composing like a Russian’.<sup>21</sup>

This gradual distancing from Italian opera may not have been purely the result of his experiences on the Italian peninsula—some of his acquaintances would have welcomed this development and may well have stimulated it. Two people in particular come to mind, both of whom were in close contact with Glinka shortly after his stay in Italy.

The first was the German music theorist and antiquarian Siegfried Dehn, Glinka’s teacher in Berlin in 1833–34, who, as the composer tells us, ‘not only brought order to my knowledge but to my ideas about art in general’.<sup>22</sup> The other was Prince Vladimir Odoyevsky (1803–1869), a far more aggressive detractor of Italian opera for whom, as Stuart Campbell has put it, ‘Bellini, Donizetti and Verdi represented a *ne plus ultra* of bad music’—a view the Prince often aired in print.<sup>23</sup> Glinka had first met Odoyevsky in 1826, and after he had returned from his sojourn in Italy and Germany and started composing his opera, the two became very close. Odoyevsky mediated between Glinka and potential librettists Vasily Zhukovsky and Vladimir Sollogub, he took great interest in Glinka’s progress during *A Life for the Tsar’s* composition, and even made several suggestions about the music, some of which have found their way into the final score.<sup>24</sup> It is not unlikely that the two also exchanged opinions on Italian opera.

What ultimately set the seal on Glinka’s rejection of the Italians was the

<sup>21</sup> GLPP, vol. 1, p. 260; trans. GM, p. 83.

<sup>22</sup> GLPP, vol. 1, p. 262; trans. GLM, p. 91. Although it would not be surprising if some scepticism regarding the merits of contemporary Italian opera would have been among ‘ideas about art’ he passed on to Glinka, it is not easy to substantiate this picture of Dehn with any printed sources or the few available studies. Dehn’s critical output is mostly devoted to subjects and repertoire more to his taste. There is some evidence that confirms Dehn’s disapproval of the vogue for Italian opera, but he only expressed his dislike of contemporary Italian composers mildly. In an article on Rossini’s *Stabat mater*, for instance, he noted that ‘the hand of the master composer [...] is nowhere to be found’, but he thought that its publication was nevertheless of interest, and he was even kind enough to point out to German publishers a mass composed by the Italian that had not yet been printed (Siegfried Wilhelm Dehn, ‘Stabat mater [...] par G. Rossini’, *Cécilia* 21 [1842], pp. 90–2).

<sup>23</sup> James Stuart Campbell, *V. F. Odoyevsky and the Formation of Russian Musical Taste in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Garland, 1989), p. 249. For another discussion of Odoyevsky’s view of Italian opera, see David Lowe, ‘Vladimir Odoevskii as Opera Critic’, *Slavic Review* 42/2 (1982), pp. 306–15.

<sup>24</sup> See e. g. GLM, pp. 39, 103–6, 116.

success of the government-supported Italian Opera in Petersburg. When the Italian company consisting of celebrities such as Rubini, Pauline Viardot, and Giuseppe Tamburini was contracted by the Imperial Theatre Directorate in 1843, it inaugurated what has been called a 'Golden Age of Italian Opera',<sup>25</sup> and the subsequent neglect of Russian operas and the far from supportive policies of the Imperial Theatre Directorate were capable of turning any views of *bel canto* opera a Russian composer may have had into resentment.<sup>26</sup> Glinka went through the frustrating experiences of seeing a scheduled benefit performance of *A Life for the Tsar* cancelled in the season of 1848–49 because of the authorities' untimely decision to ban Russian operas from the Italian theatre, and of witnessing the appalling conditions under which his opera was being performed by the Russian company in the early 1850s.<sup>27</sup> Meanwhile, interest in Glinka's new opera *Ruslan and Lyudmila*—which had not been well received because of its dramatic peculiarities, its relative musical complexity, and its less conspicuously patriotic subject—had subsided soon after the appearance of the Italian Opera.<sup>28</sup> It was in the midst of these adversities that the critic Feofil Tolstoy (1809–1881), known to his contemporaries by his *nom de plume* Rostislav, had insisted on his preference for *A Life for the Tsar* over *Ruslan and Lyudmila* in front of Glinka—thus provoking the composer's accusation, mentioned above, that this was only because of *A Life for the Tsar's*

<sup>25</sup> V. A. Bernatsky, 'Iz zolotogo veka ital'yanskoy operi v Peterburge', *Russkaya starina* 47/10 (1916), pp. 17–24; 47/11, pp. 276–83; 47/12, pp. 434–56; Julie A. Buckler, *The Literary Lorgnette: Attending Opera in Imperial Russia* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2000), pp. 6, 38.

<sup>26</sup> See 'Ital'yanshchina' in Taruskin, *Defining Russia Musically*, pp. 186–235, for a discussion of the Italian Opera in Petersburg and its reception. It is worth noting that the situation Glinka encountered abroad was not all that different, for an Italian opera craze was raging all over Europe. In a letter written to his mother from Madrid (24 April 1846 NS), he was forced to admit that 'because all the audience's attention is on the Italians, I will not be able to perform my pieces in the theatre now' (GLPP, vol. 2a, p. 270; trans. GLM, p. 471).

<sup>27</sup> Glinka's sister Lyudmila recalled that the costumes and sets of *A Life for the Tsar* 'had not been updated at all' since the premiere in 1836 and that 'the things the orchestra manufactured, the tempos that were taken, were awful!' (GLM, p. 581).

<sup>28</sup> *Ruslan* did receive over thirty performances in its first year, which, as Franz Liszt rightly remarked, was not at all bad (GLPP, vol. 1, p. 311; trans. GM, p. 175); and as no new pieces were being staged, it could remain in the repertoire for a few more years. The number of performances of the Russian Opera, however, dropped dramatically as soon the Italians arrived: between the season of 1842–43 and 1843–44, when the Italians began to give over 60 performances of Italian operas per season, the total number of opera performances by the Russian company was reduced to less than one third, from 87 to 28 (A. I. Vol'f, *Khronika peterburgskikh teatrov, s kontsa 1826 do nachala 1855 goda*, 2 vols. [St Petersburg: tip. R. Golike, 1877], vol. 1, pp. 94–130). The Russian troupe was ultimately sent away to Moscow in 1846.

‘traces of *italienische tralala*’.<sup>29</sup> The extant documentation of Glinka’s attitude towards Italian opera in the period between his return to Russia and the arrival of the Italians—the period in which he wrote both of his operas—is rather contradictory. If we accept the anecdote published nearly half a century later by Anna Vorob’yova, the contralto who created the role of Vanya, Glinka’s aversion would seem to be complete by the time the premiere of *A Life for the Tsar* was approaching. Vorob’yova recalled that, during their first meeting at the home of Mariya Stepanova—who created the role of Antonida—the composer declared himself an enemy of Italian music. ‘At every step in it I hear insincerity,’ he supposedly said, supporting this by emphasizing that he had not attended a single opera since he returned to Petersburg, ‘even though I know that you recently put on *Semiramide* very successfully.’<sup>30</sup> The composer Aleksandr Dargomizhsky (1813–1869), however, who met Glinka in 1835 and with whom he soon became very close, noted in his reminiscences that he could not understand Glinka’s ‘passion for Italian music’ at the time when ‘*A Life for the Tsar* was already half-written.’<sup>31</sup> Indeed, it was not unusual to find Glinka singing ‘Rubini’s part’ (that is, the role of Gualterio) in the finale of Bellini’s *Il pirata* in the winter of 1834–35 or ‘Una furtiva lagrima’ in 1838.<sup>32</sup> Aleksandr Serov first met Glinka some five years later and recalled that ‘Glinka often made fun of Rossini, Bellini, and Donizetti, calling their music *flowery*, although at that time (in 1841 and 1842) he did not yet fully express his deep contempt for the Italian masters of the opera business to me’.<sup>33</sup> In A. I. Vol’f’s chronicle of the Petersburg stage we find a passage that suggests Glinka had not actually changed that much in the decade since he had ‘wallowed in rapture’ in Milan. Vol’f claimed that when Rubini and

<sup>29</sup> Tolstoy, ‘Po povodu *Zapisok* M. I. Glinki’, pp. 111–2. Unfortunately, it cannot be established from Tolstoy’s recollections when this conversation took place (more than once, possibly, since Tolstoy uses the verb form *govarival*, ‘used to say’). The language in which Glinka expressed himself may of course have some significance with regard to the sources of his rejection of Italian opera.

<sup>30</sup> Anna Yakovlevna Petrova-Vorob’yova, ‘K 500-tomy predstavleniyu *Zhizni za Tsarya*’ (1880), in GVS, p. 170; trans. GLM, pp. 127–8. Brown offers an intriguing alternative reason for Glinka’s absence at *Semiramide*: he may have been anxious to compromise his independence by listening to other operas while writing his own (Brown, *Glinka*, 289n).

<sup>31</sup> Aleksandr Sergeevich Dargomizhsky, ‘*Iz Kratkoy biograficheskoy zapiski*’ (1866), in GVS, p. 165; trans. Brown, *Glinka*, p. 78. Dargomizhsky dated his first meeting with Glinka to 1833, which cannot be accurate since Glinka only returned to Russia in April 1834. The dating in 1835 (GLM, pp. 107–8) is based on the fact that he mentions that Glinka was already engaged.

<sup>32</sup> GLPP, vol. 1, p. 267; trans. GM, p. 95; GLM, p. 217.

<sup>33</sup> Aleksandr Nikolayevich Serov, *Vospominaniya o Mikhaile Ivanoviche Glinke*, ed. Vladimir Vasil’yevich Protopopov (Leningrad: Muzika, 1984), p. 18; GVS, p. 79.

Viardot ‘moved everyone to tears’ with their performances of *La sonnambula* in Russia, the ‘connoisseurs of music, *not even excluding Glinka himself*, were no less carried away than the high society dilettantes.’<sup>34</sup> Glinka claimed in his memoirs that it was in the same winter of 1843–44, after the star cast of the Italian Opera had given a poor performance of *Don Giovanni* in which ‘all the principal roles were murdered’, that he ‘then and there took a dislike to Italian “songbirds” and to fashionable Italian music’.<sup>35</sup>

### *The Italianisms of ‘A Life for the Tsar’*

*A Life for the Tsar* carries the unusual generic label ‘patriotic heroic-tragic opera’, and is the story of Ivan Susanin: a peasant who, in the turmoil surrounding the succession of the Russian throne in the early seventeenth century, sacrifices his life when leading astray a band of Polish soldiers that seeks to capture the newly elected Tsar Mikhail Romanov. The frustrated response of Glinka’s competitor Aleksey Verstovsky notwithstanding—he rejected the text written by Baron Yegor Rozen by proclaiming that ‘the time of Italian librettos is past’<sup>36</sup>—the treatment of the subject matter in *A Life for the Tsar* is most unlike that of contemporary Italian opera.<sup>37</sup> Many Italian plots of the 1830s were of the type referred to by George Bernard Shaw in his clichéd quip that opera was the story of a soprano and a tenor who want to sleep together, and a baritone who tries to prevent them from doing so. Only the first act of *A Life for the Tsar* more or less conforms to this stereotype: the tenor Bogdan Sobinin returns from the battlefield intending to marry his beloved Antonida, a soprano, but Antonida’s father, the bass Ivan Susanin,

<sup>34</sup> Vol’f, *Khronika, 1826–1855*, vol. 1, p. 107; trans. Taruskin, *Defining Russia Musically*, p. 199. Emphasis added.

<sup>35</sup> GLPP, vol. 1, p. 313; trans. GM, p. 180. Even if we are not disturbed by the glaring difference between Vol’f’s and Glinka’s description, Glinka’s claim should not be taken at face value. When he heard in 1845 that Viardot, Rubini, and Tamburini were performing his trio ‘Ne tomi, rodimiĭ’ from *A Life for the Tsar* in Petersburg while he was in Paris, he wrote—with no sarcasm intended, it seems—that he was delighted to hear that his music had been performed ‘by the most outstanding talents of Europe’ (letter to P. A. Barteneva, 21 May 1845 NS; GLPP, vol. 2a, p. 217). Serov also noted that ‘it was impossible to get used to Glinka’s paradoxical opinions’ on the singers of the Italian opera (Serov, *Vospominaniya o Mikhaile Ivanoviche Glinke*, p. 38; GVS, p. 96).

<sup>36</sup> Letter from Verstovsky to Odoyevsky, late December 1836, cited in Aleksandra Anatol’yevna Orlova, *M. I. Glinka: letopis’ zhizni i tvorchestva* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoye muzikal’noye izdatel’stvo, 1952), p. 125; trans. GLM, p. 149.

<sup>37</sup> See also the comments by Petrushanskaya, *Mikhail Glinka i Italiya*, p. 279.

forbids the wedding as long as the country is still in turmoil and without a legitimate ruler. Shaw's story ends here, since Sobinin can tell Susanin of the Russian victories and that a new Tsar is already being chosen, and the family can rejoice. In the remainder of the opera, there is no conflict to be found amongst the Russian characters, and in fact this harmony was never seriously threatened in the first act either, since Susanin had promised Sobinin that 'To another my daughter / I will never give, / Your wife she shall be!'<sup>38</sup> The fact that the Russians are united is of course part of the political message of *A Life for the Tsar* and it seems that this message overrode the dramatic conventions of the time, and certainly those of Italian opera. The love interest serves as a symbol of the union between Russia and their new Tsar and shows little of the two lovers' individual passions.<sup>39</sup> The English musicologist Gerald Abraham once remarked that it was 'as obviously manufactured as the same element in popular detective fiction'.<sup>40</sup> Even in French grand opera, with its preference for tableaux of large crowds, there is usually more attention for conflicts between individuals than in *A Life for the Tsar*, and the love stories are made more interesting by such familiar tricks as placing the lovers in opposing camps.

SO WHERE do we find the traces of Italian opera in *A Life for the Tsar*? It is interesting to note how Glinka, well aware of international traditions, supplied most of the music in his autograph of *A Life for the Tsar* with Italian captions, such as 'Scena, terzetto e Coro', 'Recitativo e duetto', 'Romanza', etc. The few Russian headings he used, presumably where he did not have a ready Italian label, were given precisely to those numbers that have been cited innumerable times as Glinka's most 'Russian' achievements: the orphan's song (*Pesnya siroti*), the bridal chorus (*Zhenskiy khor*, 'female chorus'), Susanin's scene in the forest in Act IV (*Stsena Susanina*), and the 'Slav'sya' chorus (*Poslednyaya stsena*, 'last scene').<sup>41</sup>

If this suggests a clear-cut division between Russian and Italianate numbers, it was not perceived as such. In a review that appeared in the *Moscow Observer* two weeks after the premiere in St Petersburg, the writer Yanuary Neverov saw Glinka's achievement precisely in the fact that his opera was not

<sup>38</sup> Here and elsewhere I use the translation by Pamela Davidson for SONY Classical CD 46487 (1991).

<sup>39</sup> The oarsmen's chorus in Act I hints at this metaphor as Sobinin steps out of the boat: 'The bride is waiting for the betrothed; And Rus' also calls for her bridegroom!'

<sup>40</sup> Abraham, *Studies in Russian Music*, p. 7.

<sup>41</sup> See the preface of Mikhail Ivanovich Glinka, *Polnoye sobraniye sochineniy*, ed. Tamara Nikolayevna Livanova et al., 18 vols. (Moscow: Muzika, 1959–1965), vol. 12, p. xiii.

such ‘an arbitrary mixture of arias, duets and trios in all styles and from all countries’ as the works of Aleksey Verstovsky, whose admittedly ‘charming Russian motives’, Neverov claimed, were ‘joined together by German choruses and quartets and Italian recitatives’.<sup>42</sup> There are various reasons why such accusations were not raised against Glinka. To begin with, as Aleksandr Serov argued in 1859, motivic links throughout the opera lend *A Life for the Tsar* an impression of ‘organic unity’.<sup>43</sup> Moreover, Glinka only made sparing use of the ‘Italian recitative’ Neverov found in Verstovsky’s opera’s, often employing more regular melodies sung in tempo for his dialogues, sometimes folk-like as in Susanin’s entrance, which is supposedly based on an actual coachman’s song.<sup>44</sup> Finally, there is the melodic style of the arias and ensembles, which Glinka also infused with characteristics of Russian genres such as the domestic romance and folksong arrangements. In the 1830s, these styles were firmly established in Russia, and Glinka had not been the first to apply them in opera, but the consistency and pervasiveness of their application is noteworthy. Their use complicates the question of how Glinka’s experience with contemporary Italian opera affected his melodic style, since these genres had themselves already been influenced by European opera.<sup>45</sup> In general, Glinka’s melodies can best be understood as mixtures of various overlapping styles, some tending more to one end of the spectrum, some more to the other. Rather than searching for a ‘purely’ Russian style, Glinka exploited the overlaps between styles to reconcile Russianness with the operatic standards of the day.

The andante of Antonida’s cavatina (Ex. 1) is an interesting illustration of this. Its melismas produce a sufficiently virtuosic showpiece for a soprano entrance, but the movement also maintains a strong affinity with the Russian *protyazhnaya* (melismatic, ‘drawn-out’) folksong as it was understood in the Russian drawing room through its use of irregular groupings of bars, cadential terminations by embellished falling fourths or fifths, and the free interplay of relative major and minor keys.<sup>46</sup> The origins and meaning of such stylistic elements are not without ambiguities. The scalar descent of a fifth found

<sup>42</sup> Neverov, ‘O novoy opere g. Glinki: *Zhizn’ za Tsarya*’, p. 213; trans. RRM1, p. 6.

<sup>43</sup> Aleksandr Nikolayevich Serov, ‘Opiti tekhnicheskoy kritiki nad muzikoyu M. I. Glinki’ (1859), in id., *Stat’i o muzike*, ed. Vladimir Vasil’evich Protopopov, 7 vols., *Russkaya klassicheskaya muzikal’naya kritika* (Moscow: Muzika, 1984–1990) (henceforth cited as SeSM), vol. 4, pp. 186–92; trans. in RRM1, pp. 94–104.

<sup>44</sup> GLPP, vol. 1, pp. 270–1; trans. GM, p. 101.

<sup>45</sup> See Frolova-Walker, *Russian Music and Nationalism*, pp. 76–84.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 79–82; Taruskin, *Defining Russia Musically*, p. 29. For an extensive discussion of tonal ‘mutability’ in Glinka’s opera, see Zavlunov, ‘*A Life for the Tsar*’, pp. 421–67.

ANTONIDA:



*p*  
V pol - - e v po - le chis - to - ye glya - zhu,  
a tempo  
poco rit.  
v dal' po re - ke rod - noy, o - - - chi der - zhu.

Ex. 1: Act I, Antonida's cavatina, opening phrases.

at the end of the first phrase of Antonida's cavatina, for instance, has been interpreted as a touch of Russianness since it is a common folk song ending,<sup>47</sup> but such endings, although not very common, can also be found in certain florid Rossinian melodies. The ending of Antonida's first phrase carried no strong associations with Italy, however, and thus it was to be preferred over some others that did.

It seems, for instance, that Glinka consciously avoided the stock ending shown in Ex. 2, which occurs with great frequency in Italian operas as well as in Glinka's own Italian songs and arias, though not in his operas. Thus, even if the melodies of *A Life for the Tsar* do not always strike the Western ear as particularly Russian, tangible similarities with contemporary Italian melodies are also rare. They can be found, as will be shown below, but one should be careful not to classify Glinka's melodies as 'Italian' merely on the basis of an occasional high C or *fioritura* passage.

OF COURSE, melodies alone do not yet make an opera, not even an Italian one. Finding a musico-dramatic structure that suited the 'national' melodic content was one of the crucial challenges for all composers who wished to write a distinctively national opera. Feofil Tolstoy praised Glinka for his success in 'clothing our national melodies in artistic forms', while Stasov ridiculed this notion, claiming that it amounted to nothing other than 'simply forcing Russian or pseudo-Russian motives into the form of Italian arias, duets, trios, etc., and when that had been done, [...] everyone was satisfied, and went into ecstasies over this genuinely national music.'<sup>48</sup> Stasov's remark contains more than a grain of truth, for, as Richard Taruskin rightly observed, the forms of Glinka's music for *A Life for the Tsar* show the composer's extensive use of

<sup>47</sup> See e. g. Brown, *Glinka*, p. 118.

<sup>48</sup> Stasov, 'Verit' li?', p. 145.

a) *Il desiderio*

[Andante mosso]  
semplice ma con molto anima

Oh, se tu fos-si me - co sul-la barchetta bru - na,

The musical notation for 'Il desiderio' is in treble clef, 2/4 time, with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The melody consists of quarter and eighth notes, with a fermata over the final note 'na'.

b) *L'iniquo voto*

[Larghetto]

Pron-to giun-ga il fa - tal — mo - men - to,

The musical notation for 'L'iniquo voto' is in treble clef, 3/8 time, with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#). The melody features a long note with a fermata, followed by a series of eighth notes.

c) *A ignobil core* (unfinished aria)

Allegro moderato

Miei prodi, giu-ra-te se - guirmi al ci-men - to,

The musical notation for 'A ignobil core' is in bass clef, 3/4 time, with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#). The melody consists of quarter and eighth notes.

Ex. 2: A phrase-ending cliché as applied by Glinka (bracketed).

the formal conventions that constitute the so-called ‘Code Rossini’.<sup>49</sup>

The influence of the formal structures of Italian opera on Glinka’s music is easier to study than the impact of Italian melody. Owing to Italian opera’s strong reliance on conventions, it is possible to define a ‘normal practice’ for its formal procedures—indeed this has already been done in some detail by scholars in this field.<sup>50</sup> The influence of this practice, moreover, is likely to be direct, without the interference of other genres. The distinctive forms of Italian opera exerted less influence on the Russian tradition of songs and romances than its melodic style, as the former served dramatic purposes, which were only of limited use in a domestic setting. Certainly, some of these Italian forms can also be found in French grand opera, mainly due to Rossini’s influence. Here, however—as opposed to the Russian salon genres—we can safely assume that Glinka had more first-hand experience with the Italian repertoire.

We can find several large multi-movement pieces in *A Life for the Tsar* that are well-suited for studying the impact of Glinka’s mastery of the Code

<sup>49</sup> Taruskin, *Defining Russia Musically*, p. 66. The term ‘Code Rossini’—a reference to the ‘Code Napoléon’ that had similarly spread throughout Europe—was coined by Julian Budden, *The Operas of Verdi*, 3 vols. (London: Cassell, 1973), vol. 1, p. 12.

<sup>50</sup> See e. g. *ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 12–4; Harold S. Powers, “La solita forma” and “The Uses of Convention”, *Acta Musicologica* 59/1 (1987), pp. 65–90; Scott L. Balthazar, “The Primo Ottocento Duet and the Transformation of the Rossinian Code”, *Journal of Musicology* 7/4 (1989), pp. 471–97.

Rossini on his first opera: the two-tempo cavatina for Antonida, the trio, the duet, the quartet, the Act III finale, and Vanya's aria in Act IV.

The first piece to consider is the number in Act III that César Cui termed Susanin and Vanya's 'appallingly bad duet',<sup>51</sup> the form of which was also criticized by the composer himself in his later years. Glinka's remarks were reported by Feofil Tolstoy, who had published an analysis of *A Life for the Tsar* in 1854 and later recalled how Glinka had responded when he had read it to him. Glinka, who thought little of Rostislav's musical understanding, was not impressed: he criticized Tolstoy for having overlooked 'the very things that ought to be pointed out as useful warnings for other Russian composers'.<sup>52</sup> 'For example,' he asked, 'why did you not say that you shouldn't introduce an Italian *cabaletta* into the Russian style, as at "Menya ti na Rusi"?' Rostislav objected that its melody was 'permeated by the Russian spirit', but this did not satisfy the older Glinka at all, because the form of the piece remained Italianate. 'Is it possible,' he continued, 'that a man such as Susanin would conceive of repeating word for word, just a fifth lower, the naive effusions of the orphan Vanya? Why didn't you point out the inappropriateness of the *coda* of the same duet, for it just reeks of Italianism [*ital'yanshchina*]! Do you understand?'<sup>53</sup>

It is no coincidence that Glinka aimed his self-criticism at the second half of this duet. The preceding *grave*, in which Susanin and Vanya dream of the latter's future as a brave soldier, is a slow lyrical section of rather martial colour—initially accompanied by brass and timpani only—and its style is far removed from that of typical Italian cantabiles. Only the fact that the repeat of its theme is initially set in parallel sixths may remind one of Italian procedures. The *allegro vivace*, 'Menya ti na Rusi vozleleyal' ('You have brought me up in Rus') resembles Italian forms more closely, and does indeed fit the description of a normal duet *cabaletta*: an *allegro* in which the melody is sung by each of

<sup>51</sup> César Antonovich Cui, 'Muzikal'naya letopis'. *Yudif* g. Serova [...] (1865), in id., *Muzikal'no-kriticheskiye stat'i*, ed. Andrey Nikolayevich Rimsky-Korsakov (Petrograd: Muzikal'niy sovremennik, 1918), vol. 1, p. 188; trans. RRM1, p. 148.

<sup>52</sup> For Glinka's opinion of Tolstoy and his article, see the letter to Konstantin Bulgakov, 8 June 1855 (GLPP, vol. 2b, p. 77; trans. GLM, p. 648), in which he wrote: 'I never considered Rostislav a serious musician. His critique did not only convince me to think otherwise but clearly pointed out that his views on music have remained just as superficial as they've always been.'

<sup>53</sup> Tolstoy, 'Po povodu *Zapisok* M. I. Glinki', p. 116; my own translation based on GLM, p. 648. Glinka, or Tolstoy, referred to a specific line of the *coda* ('Na velikoye nam delo tol'ko put' nam ukazhi'), which corresponds to its beginning ('Do velikogo do dela tol'ko put' nam ukazhi') at m. 240 in the score (see Ex. 4 below).

VANYA:

Menya ti na Rusi voz-le - leyal, ya v dolgu pred Tsaryom Go - su - da - rem! Zaplatit' posta-ra-yus',

E: I I vi ii vi

zaplatit' mo-yei sluzhboy. Pust' pridoyt poskorey, mo-yo vremya, mo-ya sluzh - ba!

ii vi I I<sup>6</sup> (iv D<sub>4</sub><sup>6</sup> V<sub>4</sub><sup>7</sup>) vi

Structural markings: A, A', B, coda

Ex. 3: Act III, theme of the *allegro vivace* of the Susanin-Vanya duet.

the singers successively, and after a ritornello the melody will be heard again with the two voices combined. The twenty-bar theme is first stated by Vanya, then repeated by Susanin a fifth below, and after an interruption of eighteen bars, it is repeated *a due* in its entirety.

The theme itself (Ex. 3) hardly sounds like the average Italian melody, but it does have a structure very familiar to students of Italian opera, which has been referred to as the mid-century standard lyric form. This form was first noted by Friedrich Lippmann as a favourite of Bellini; later studies have refined his description and revealed that, when allowing for some minor variations, it underlies many Italian opera melodies written in the second quarter of the nineteenth century.<sup>54</sup> The structure can be described as  $A_4A'_4B_2B'_2A''_4$  or  $A_4A'_4B_2B'_2C_4$ , in which, for the typical double quatrain of Italian librettos, two lines of poetry are set to four bars of music.<sup>55</sup> The opening 'thematic block'  $A_4A'_4$  that accompanies the first stanza of poetry forms a period of an antecedent and a consequent phrase, each of which can usually be subdivided into two-bar subphrases.  $A'$  tends to have a stronger ending than  $A$ , although

<sup>54</sup> See Friedrich Lippmann, *Vincenzo Bellini und die italienische Opera seria seiner Zeit*, *Analecta Musicologica* 6 (Cologne: Böhlau, 1969), pp. 102, 139; Scott L. Balthazar, 'Rossini and the Development of the Mid-Century Lyric Form', *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 41/1 (1988), pp. 102–25; Steven Huebner, 'Lyric Form in Ottocento Opera', *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 117/1 (1992), pp. 123–47.

<sup>55</sup> In these and the following descriptions of form, I have followed the system employed by Joseph Kerman and Scott Balthazar, in which  $A$  stands for opening phrases,  $B$  for medial phrases and  $C$  for closing phrases, although  $A$  usually replaces  $C$  when the initial theme returns. A prime denotes a variation of a previous statement and the subscripts denote the number of bars in each phrase. Balthazar, 'Rossini and the Development of the Mid-Century Lyric Form', 104n; Joseph Kerman, 'Lyric Form and Flexibility in *Simon Boccanegra*', *Studi Verdiani* 1 (1982), pp. 48–9.

this does not necessarily imply that the second phrase ends on the tonic. It could also be concluded on the dominant, or—as Donizetti liked to do—a mediant. Steven Huebner estimates that about three quarters of the melodies of Donizetti, Bellini and early Verdi begin with such an  $A_4A'_4$  period.<sup>56</sup> The *B* section fulfils the role of development in the melody, however limited that may be. It is part of the melody furthest from the tonic and is divided into two halves of two bars each. These two halves are often similar in rhythm—some are just repeats with minor variations or in sequence. After or during *B*, the harmony returns to the tonic. The closing section could be a reprise of *A* or new material. These first sixteen bars could be followed by an extended coda. In its most concise form, it is associated primarily with Bellini, and it can generally be encountered most often in the solo statements of ensembles.<sup>57</sup>

As Ex. 3 shows, the theme of Glinka's duet cabaletta has many of these features. When compared to the Italian lyric form, the most remarkable aspect of the solo statements of this melody—the *a due* repeat is perfectly normal in this respect—is that it ends on the relative minor instead of the tonic. This modulation is not at all required for preparing the move to Susanin's restatement of the theme in his register a fifth below, and it would seem, therefore, that Glinka is avoiding a straightforward dominant–tonic relationship. The technique of treating the relative minor as an equivalent to the tonic is one of Glinka's favourite ploys, which may have its origins in arrangements of Russian folk songs, where multiple modal centres could be supplied with cadences.<sup>58</sup> Except for this touch of 'Russianness', the form of 'Menya ti na Rusi', which can be denoted as  $A_4A'_4B_2B'_2A_4$  plus a four-bar coda, matches the Italian type quite well.

In order to understand what prompted Glinka's comments on the coda of the duet, it is useful to recall how pieces ended in *primo ottocento* opera. According to the Rossinian conventions, a cabaletta is followed by a series of vocal cadences, which are usually set to a higher tempo than the cabaletta and decrease in length, thus producing a 'gradual bridge between the thematic statement and the rapid-fire concluding cadences.'<sup>59</sup> In Rossini's operas, each of these cadences is usually repeated; the post-Rossini generation generally preferred the expansion rather than the further contraction of the ultimate cadence, but the other repetitions occurred so often that Italian composers

<sup>56</sup> Huebner, 'Lyric Form in Ottocento Opera', p. 124.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 126.

<sup>58</sup> See e. g. Frolova-Walker, 'On *Ruslan* and Russianness', pp. 24–6.

<sup>59</sup> Philip Gossett, *Anna Bolena and the Artistic Maturity of Gaetano Donizetti* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985), pp. 62–3.

frequently did not bother to write them out in full but simply added repeat signs for the longer ones.

Glinka, like his contemporaries, was well aware of this convention, and he applied it on several occasions.<sup>60</sup> The endings of Antonida's rondo, the trio, the Susanin-Vanya duet, and Vanya's aria at the monastery gates from *A Life for the Tsar* all roughly resemble the Rossinian design, with repeated cadences, decreasing in length, but with the ultimate cadence expanded. The similarity is least apparent in the cadences of Antonida's cavatina, which are of relatively modest dimensions. The effect is stronger in the three other pieces, which also have a faster tempo than the preceding cabaletta; the conclusion of the trio even speeds up twice.

This, of course, does not yet explain why Glinka singled out the cadences of the duet for censure, and one could speculate that, in addition to form, there were a few other aspects that prompted his outburst against Tolstoy. These include the orchestral *tutti* chords on the rhythm  $\text{♪♪♪♪|♪}$  in the first cadences after the cabaletta repeat (see Ex. 4). Gestures like these can be found in abundance in Italian opera scores, although they are usually employed in more dynamic situations. When they are used in a lyrical context, the effect is similar, and there is at least one instance to be found where the similarity is very striking indeed. In Adina's aria 'Prendi per me sei libero' in Donizetti's *L'elisir d'amore*, the chords are used at the exact same position and with the same function: they appear immediately after the repeat of the virtuosic cabaletta 'Il mio rigor dimentica' and their descending bass moves the harmony from the tonic to the relative minor, just as in Glinka's duet (see Ex. 5). In both numbers, the cadences are repeated in full after the music examples given. A final resemblance to Italian opera can be found in the short instrumental coda, which is related to the accompanimental figures heard in the sections preceding the *grave* and connecting the *grave* and the *allegro vivace*—a familiar unifying device in Italian opera. With its insistent dotted rhythm, this little march illustrates Vanya's and Susanin's willingness to defend their country and Tsar. It is not unlike Italian opera marches, as may be seen from comparing it to the March of the Druids in Act I of *Norma* (see Ex. 6), who, incidentally, are just as eager to fight for their country as the young Vanya.

LITTLE WONDER then, that the older Glinka, who now rejected Italian opera if

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<sup>60</sup> In his Italian aria *L'iniquo voto*, for instance, Glinka added a small succession of cadences in *più stretto* tempo after the repeat of the cabaletta theme ( $2 \times 6 + 1 \approx 3$ ), casually applying, like his Italian colleagues, repeat signs for the first six-bar cadence.

VANYA: *ff* A ne vo - - in, ne vo - in! *più mosso* Do ve - li - ko - *f*

SUSANIN: *ff* E - zhe - des - no, e - zhe chast - no! *più mosso* Do ve - li - ko - *f*

243 go do de - - la tol' - ko put' mne u - ka - zhi! Tak i

go do de - - la tol' - ko put' nam u - ka - zhi! Tak i

250 si - la po - dos - pe - la, Kre - post' te - la i du - shi!

si - la po - dos - pe - la, Kre - post' te - la i du - shi!

Ob. *p* *f* *p* *f*

Trb. *p* *f*

*p* Str. *ff* tutti Hn.

Ex. 4: *A Life for the Tsar*, Act III, cadence of the *allegro vivace* in the Susanin-Vanya duet, mm. 237–256.

ADINA:

amor — ti giu - ro e - terno a - mor; il mio rigor dimen - tica; ti giu - ro eterno a -

mor — e - ter - no e - ter - no a - mor; Non m'ingan - no il dot - tor.

NEMORINO:

Ex. 5: *L'elisir d'amore*, Act II, cadence of Adina's cabaletta 'Il mio rigor dimentica'.

a. *Norma*, Act I, banda music from Pollione's cavatina

b. *A Life for the Tsar*, Act III, Susanin-Vanya duet, mm. 286–290

Ex. 6: March themes in *Norma* and *A Life for the Tsar* (voices not shown).

only as a matter of principle, regarded his own duet as an unmotivated and indefensible application of Italian procedures. Yet one could argue that the trio that concludes Act I is even more indebted to Italian opera than the duet. This, however, was a piece in which the composer could take more pride: its sophisticated slow movement 'Ne tomi rodimiy', at any rate, was appreciated by contemporaries as widely differing in outlook as Glinka's teacher Siegfried Dehn, the admiring young Balakirev, and the celebrated trio of Rubini, Viardot and Tamburini, who performed it in 1845.<sup>61</sup> Not only was the Code Rossini applied to better effect in the trio than in the duet, the dramatic situation, which centres on the two lovers and their postponed wedding, may have been considered more suitable for Italianate treatment.

The sequence and internal design of the movements of the trio, its sense of drama, as well as the character of the melodies and accompaniments are all not too far removed from Italian examples, and the function of each movement is clearly articulated. It begins with a short recitative in which Sobinin, who has just arrived on the scene, greets his love Antonida but is interrupted by Susanin who immediately inquires after the news from the front. Sobinin relates, with a good dose of bravado, how the Russians led by Prince Pozharsky have saved Moscow from the Polish and Lithuanian troops. Glinka sets Sobinin's narrative *a tempo*, with a regular melody in a form somewhat akin to the lyric form discussed above ( $A_2A'_2B_2A_2$ ) thus keeping the amount of ordinary recitative to a minimum.

Sobinin's story is followed by a *moderato assai* with chorus in F major, in which each of the characters has a different concern, and a different melodic characterization: Susanin sings that the time is not yet ripe for rejoicing and Antonida, seeing the expression on her father's face, asks him what is wrong. In the meanwhile Sobinin continues to brag about the past battle, with the chorus. This style of writing, in which the singers seem to perform in happy disregard of each other with a distinct melodic line, is of course familiar from Italian opera, although it is worth noting that in Italian opera this style of counterpoint is usually reserved for the main lyric movements, whereas this passage seems to be subordinate to what follows.

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<sup>61</sup> Glinka showed the scores of his operas to Dehn in the summer of 1844 and he recorded that 'Dehn was extremely satisfied with my tercet from *A Life for the Tsar*' (GLM, p. 414). Balakirev made it the core of his *Fantasia on themes from 'A Life for the Tsar'*, which was first published in 1899, but was largely finished in 1855. He 'had the impertinence to play the transcription of the trio "Ne tomi, rodimiy" for Glinka himself', which pleased Glinka very much; see Edward Garden, *Balakirev: A Critical Study of his Life and Music* (London: Faber, 1967), p. 147.

SOBININ! A

Ne tomi ro-di-miy, ne krushi me-nya! Ne temni na-pras-no do-ro-go-go dnya!

b: i V i III i v (iv D<sub>4</sub><sup>♯</sup> V) v

B A''' Fl.

Ne svodi na go-re chas svidan'ya s vami, da skore-ye vi-day mne zhenu mo-yu!

III iv V i D<sub>4</sub><sup>♯</sup> V<sup>7</sup> D<sub>4</sub><sup>♯</sup> V<sup>7</sup> i

Ex. 7: Act I, theme of the andante of the trio.

It was customary for a *pezzo concertato*, the slow lyric section of a *primo ottocento* ensemble, to be occasioned by some sort of surprise. This was one of the comic opera conventions to be adopted in serious opera early in the nineteenth century and it became widespread through the works of Rossini. In Glinka's trio this is also the case, although Sobinin is the only one struck dumb here. When he finally realizes that Susanin will not allow the wedding—how this happens is not clear from the score, and modern stage directions usually make Antonida whisper something into Sobinin's ear—he interrupts the rejoicing chorus in mid-sentence. 'What?' he exclaims, 'Will there really be no wedding? It was for the wedding that I came home!'

Even after the variety of material that preceded it, the following andante 'Ne tomi, rodimiy' ('Do not torment me, my dear') is clearly marked as the first main lyric section of the trio: a change of time and key signature, a bar of accompaniment before Sobinin's entry, and of course, the instruction to sing *cantabile con anima*. Like 'Menya ti' from the duet, the theme of this movement (Ex. 7) approximates the Italian standard lyric form. The most remarkable deviation from common Italian practice in 'Ne tomi' is the fact that *A'* ends on a minor dominant harmony. Most of its other characteristics match the Italian type exactly: the melody even contains some of the subtle features frequently found in Italian operas like the relatively strong melismatic ending on *A'* and the disruption of the bipartite structure of *A* in *A''* as a manner of emphasizing closure,<sup>62</sup> here realized by the high F on the second syllable of the word 'viday'. The text consists of eight lines of verse set with two bars for each line, which is similar to the customary Italian setting of double quatrains. (Elsewhere in the opera, similarities with Italian stanzaic structure are rare, which may be the result of both the different language used

<sup>62</sup> Balthazar, 'Rossini and the Development of the Mid-Century Lyric Form', p. 106.

and the remarkable conditions under which the libretto had to be written, with much music composed in advance.)<sup>63</sup>

The andante is set in the form of a false canon, or *falso canone*, as was common in Italian opera in the slow movements of an ensemble or finale—adding the voices one by one will often result naturally in something resembling a canon. Glinka's canon is more complex than most contemporary Italian examples, however: its counterpoint is not simplified by a preponderance of parallel thirds and sixths, and imitation is introduced not only by the entries of the theme, but at the level of a single bar as well. Still, a precedent for Glinka's approach can be found in the slow movement of the Act I finale of *La sonnambula*, 'D'un pensiero e d'un accento'. Though formally marked as a 'quintetto', the piece approximates the structure of a canonic trio. Amina sings the theme of eight bars of  $\frac{1}{2}$  metre (which equates to Glinka's sixteen bars of  $\frac{3}{8}$ ), and it is repeated in full by Elvino, while Amina gives a free imitation of his line after one half bar. After a two-bar interruption, the canon proceeds with Lisa and Teresa singing the theme in parallel sixths and Elvino taking up Amina's countersubject. Glinka had a special liking for this piece: his friend Bulgakov recalled that among the 'favourite pieces' sung by Glinka in the winter of 1839–40—a few years after the premiere of *A Life for the Tsar*—was "Voglio il ciel" from *La sonnambula*.<sup>64</sup> 'Voglia il cielo che il duol ch'io sento' is the text of the tenor part (Elvino) of 'D'un pensiero', which Glinka may have performed in some solo arrangement. Even if this does not demonstrate that Glinka necessarily modelled his 'Ne tomi' on this particular Bellini finale, it does show that he did not stray too far from the procedures applied by Italian composers when they were writing in a more polyphonic style.<sup>65</sup>

<sup>63</sup> Glinka recalled that Baron Yegor Rozen, who had been chosen as the librettist for *A Life for the Tsar* after Vasily Zhukovsky had withdrawn, had no easy task. The composer's imagination 'ran ahead of the industrious German'; 'not only had most of the themes been set down, but the pieces had also been developed, and it was up to him to fit his words to the music, which sometimes demanded the most singular meters' (GLPP, vol. 1, p. 267; trans. GM, pp. 95–6).

<sup>64</sup> Konstantin Aleksandrovich Bulgakov, 'Zametki o M. I. Glinke', in GVS, p. 232; trans. GLM, p. 241. After mentioning these two pieces, Bulgakov added in parentheses: 'I really don't know why'. Perhaps he was just as puzzled by Glinka's continuing 'passion for Italian music' as Dargomizhsky was.

<sup>65</sup> It certainly did not pass unnoticed by César Cui, who observed that 'Ne tomi rodimiĭ' was 'an andante modeled on the trios of Rossini—the three voices enter with the same theme successively' (César Antonovich Cui, *La Musique en Russie* [Paris: Sandoz & Fischbacher, 1880; rpt. 1974], p. 25). See also Octave Fouque, *Michel Ivanovitch Glinka: d'après ses mémoires et sa correspondance* (Paris: Heugel, 1880), p. 32, who wrote: 'It is a piece designed in the Italian form, i. e. the three characters expose in turns the motif, on which is superposed bit by bit a series of counterpoints and vocalises.' Fouque, however, rather overstates the matter by claiming that

a.) *La sonnambula*, Act I, cabaletta theme from Amina's cavatina

Allegro vivace  
AMINA:

So - vra il sen la man mi po - sa, pal - pi - tar, bal - zar, bal - zar lo sen - ti:

b.) *A Life for the Tsar*, Act I, theme of the trio allegro

Allegro  
SOBININ:

Pos - le bit - vi mo - lo - dets - koy za - slu - zhi - li mi Tsar - ya!

Ex. 8: Melodic similarities between *A Life for the Tsar* and Bellini's *La sonnambula*.

After the andante, the father of the bride continues his discussion with Sobinin. This dialogue, functioning as *materia di mezzo*,<sup>66</sup> begins as one of the rare passages of *secco*-style recitative in the opera, in which Sobinin tells Susanin of the rumours that the grand council will elect Mikhail Romanov as the new Tsar, which removes most of Susanin's worries. This triggers the *stretta*, the rapid concluding section of the trio. This allegro has a typical cabaletta accompaniment of pizzicato strings on each of the four beats and its theme is exceptional in that it sounds like an actual Italian opera melody.

Ex. 8 shows Glinka's theme together with that of the cabaletta of Amina's cavatina 'Sovra il sen la man mi posa' from *La sonnambula*. Both themes start on the third scale degree and end their first phrase on a dominant by means of a falling fourth; the use of turns in both melodies makes the similarity even more striking. Glinka's theme may well have been inspired by Amina's cabaletta, since the melody also features prominently in the *Divertimento brillante on themes from 'La sonnambula'* he had written in Italy in 1832. The allegro as a whole has a form that roughly recalls that of a cabaletta, with a full repeat after a choral interruption, and the movement concludes, as noted above, with a Rossinian series of accelerating cadences.

in all ensembles 'the manner of Donizetti and Bellini is hardly modified' and that 'one could almost say that the first act of *A Life for the Tsar* has nothing Russian but the scenery.'

<sup>66</sup>I follow William Ashbrook in using the term *materia di mezzo* as a substitute for the normal *tempo di mezzo* in cases where more than one tempo separates the first from the second lyric section; see Ashbrook, *Donizetti and His Operas*, pp. 248, 678.

## *Liberties*

Now that the extent to which Glinka relied on Italian models has been established, it is worth emphasizing that his procedures were not always so faithful to those of his Italian contemporaries as the above discussion of the trio and the duet cabaletta suggest. This can be seen, for instance, in the Act III finale. This ‘monumental finale’ is one of the pieces singled out by Richard Taruskin as an example of Glinka’s ‘mastery of the “Code Rossini”’,<sup>67</sup> but I would like to point out instead how this piece differs significantly from Italian conventions. To be sure, the dramatic situation—Sobinin is determined to rescue Susanin, while Antonida has little hope of seeing her father again and worries for her lover—would be suitable for an Italian-style treatment, and Glinka’s approach does indeed follow Italian models at one level. As befits the closing of an act, the finale is prepared by a couple of pieces connected to it—the wedding chorus and Antonida’s romance—and begins with a chorus, a continuation of the overture’s first theme. From the Italian point of view, the core of the finale would be the duet for Antonida and Sobinin that follows, consisting of a *larghetto*, an interruption by a female chorus, and a *vivace*. Within this framework, however, Glinka could stray far from any well-trodden paths.

The *larghetto* adheres roughly to Italian norms: the same melody sung by each of the characters, first separately and eventually together, mostly in thirds and sixths, although—as in the Susanin-Vanya duet—not strictly at parallel intervals. Glinka’s harmony and irregular phrase lengths, however, show the liberties he took with his Italian models. Sobinin’s theme is nine bars long and ends on the supertonic; Antonida’s highly varied response—which is recognizable as a variation mainly thanks to the oboe that accompanies her—is one bar shorter and ends on the minor dominant. This is a procedure that few Italian composers would have contemplated. In the *vivace*, Glinka goes even further. The movement starts with Sobinin exclaiming that he and the other peasants are ready to fight the Poles. It is set to a bright A major melody accompanied by pizzicato strings, which signals the arrival of a cabaletta-like movement. The mood changes, however, when Sobinin has to say goodbye to his worried fiancée. The music keeps modulating and never settles into a clear-cut thematic statement. The metre changes halfway the movement, as does the key signature a few bars later. This latter change indicates that the movement will eventually settle on A minor, hence taking the opposite course—major to minor—to the one Italian movements generally

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<sup>67</sup>Taruskin, *Defining Russia Musically*, p. 66.

followed. After the last cadence of the *vivace* it is, significantly, the chorus of peasants assembled to search for Susanin that concludes the finale, and the two soloists no longer have a role to play. Antonida is consoled by a chorus of maidens, and has no text herself. To claim that this piece demonstrates Glinka's 'mastery of the Code Rossini', therefore, is saying either too much or too little, for here the composer has either failed to conform to many of the Italian conventions, or he has purposely rejected them.

IT SEEMS that Glinka gave more attention to large-scale harmonic movement in his operas than his Italian contemporaries usually did, and the major-to-minor trajectory of the Act III finale shows that he did not always follow the solutions offered by the majority of Italian arias and ensembles. It is interesting to note in this regard that the andantes of some arias and duets end in a different key than the one in which they begin, making them harmonically open-ended.

In the Susanin–Vanya duet, for instance, the *grave* ends with a full cadence in the dominant B flat major, and five additional lines over a B flat pedal for Susanin prepare for the return of E flat major in the cabaletta (see Ex. 9). The set of flourishes *a due* that set in after the repeat of the *grave* theme, mostly in parallel thirds and sixths, are exactly what one would have expected following the Italian conventions, and mask the fact that, by moving to the dominant, this passage forms an interesting departure from the Italian *solite forme*.<sup>68</sup> Something similar can be found at the end of the *larghetto* in the Act III finale: after its theme has been stated *a due*, it seamlessly continues in a vein that resembles vocal cadences, but these only briefly touch the tonic A minor in

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<sup>68</sup> As a conclusion of the *grave*, the cadences should have ended on the tonic; Julian Budden even states that 'the significant feature of all andante designs is that they are tonally static' (Budden, *Verdi*, vol. 1, p. 15). It is impossible to explain the passage as a kinetic section similar to a *tempo di mezzo*, moreover, since there is no clearly articulated change in texture at the beginning of the passage shown in Ex. 9, and, more importantly, a *tempo di mezzo* is never a stretch of flourishes in parallel intervals since this cannot move the situation forward in the way the familiar dialogues or external intrusions do. The transition does remind one of the older type of two-tempo solo aria without a *tempo di mezzo*, in which the first tempo could be connected directly to the second by means of a dominant. The understated ending of the main cantabile section and a subsequent transition in parallel intervals would have been an unusual procedure for a duet, however. It is worth remarking, finally, that Susanin's solo phrases (m. 151–160), can be related to *tempo di mezzo* conventions by virtue of its orchestral accompaniment, which is similar to that in the coda (compare Exx. 6b and 9) and the *allegro moderato* that precedes the *grave* and that functions like an Italian *tempo d'attacco*. It was a common strategy in Italian opera to unify the scene by using related material in the orchestra in the sections surrounding the lyric movements in order to unify the scene, whereas this material was normally unrelated to that of the lyric movements themselves; see e. g. Gossett, *Anna Bolena*, p. 47; Lippmann, *Bellini*, p. 87.

VAN *con forza*  
 Ni - kog - da ne ot - stu - plyu, ne ot - stu - plyu! Ste - nu vra - zhi - yu slo -  
 SUS  
 Bez kor - ĭ - sti be - zo lzhi, ti be - zo lzhi! V krep - koy pra - vde pos - lu -  
 mlyu, vraga slo - mlyu! Bez kor - ĭ - sti be - zo lzhi, v krepkoy pravde, v krepkoy  
 zhi, ti po - slu - zhi! Bez kor - ĭ - sti be - zo lzhi, v krepkoy pravde, v krepkoy  
 pra - vde po - slu - zhu! V krep - koy pra - vde po - slu - zhu!  
 pra - vde po - slu - zhi! V krep - koy pra - vde po - slu - zhi! Tak, moy Van - ya, v dobriy

Ex. 9: Act III, transition at the end of the *grave* of the Susanin-Vanya duet, mm. 134–162.

first inversion and then plunge into F sharp minor, the key of the *tempo di mezzo* chorus. Later, in *Ruslan and Lyudmila*, Glinka would use the same technique in Lyudmila's cavatina, which starts in G major but ends on an F $\sharp$  major chord.

By ending these slow movements in a different key than the one in which

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chas, znat', po - ra - du - yesh' ti nas, ti Tsaryu zapla - tish' dolg, kog-da

Fl.

Cl.

Ob.

Bsn.

158

vstu - pish' v Tsar - skiy polk! Ti nas po - ra - duyesh'!

Cl.

Ex. 9 (Continued).

they started, Glinka made their endings less conclusive; they are not complete in themselves and the harmony necessitates the continuation of the scene (this is especially true for cases such as these, with  $I \rightarrow V$  and  $i \rightarrow \sharp vi$ , and much less so for the more traditional  $i \rightarrow I$  or  $i \rightarrow III$  trajectories, which were also used frequently in Italian opera). It seems that the increased sense of musical continuity produced by such transitions was experienced as a novelty by the Petersburg audience. Vladimir Odoyevsky claimed in one of his reviews of *A Life for the Tsar* that 'in Glinka's opera the music continues without a break,' and he reported how 'consequently at the first performance the applause of the audience drowned out the best parts of the opera, thus losing half of the work.'<sup>69</sup>

<sup>69</sup> Vladimir Fyodorovich Odoyevsky, 'Vtoroye pis'mo k lyubitelyu muziki ob opere Glinki, *Zhizn' za tsarya, ili Susanin'* (1836), in id., *Muzikal'no-literaturnoye naslediyey*, ed. Grigory Borisovich Bernandt (Moscow: Muzgiz, 1956) (henceforth cited as OMLN), p. 120; trans. RRM1, pp. 9–10. Being an enthusiastic advocate of the work and even an active participant in its creation, Odoyevsky rather overstates the matter. *A Life for the Tsar* was still a traditional number opera and, as was shown above, made use of the established Rossinian cadential procedures to bring its set pieces to conclusion. Thus, Glinka did not completely avoid in his opera 'those prescribed phrases with which every Italian piece seems obliged to finish [...]

Philip Gossett has introduced a useful distinction between ‘kinetic’ and ‘static’ sections in Italian opera forms. The *tempo di mezzo* and *tempo d’attacco* belong to the first category, in which there is action or development of emotional positions; in the second category (andante or cabaletta, *pezzo concertato* or *stretta*), situations are contemplated.<sup>70</sup> The harmonically dynamic andantes discussed above—and the transition in the duet in particular—tend to weaken this distinction; it is interesting to note how it is further undermined by the dramaturgy of individual set pieces in *A Life for the Tsar*. Once we turn our attention, for instance, to the dramatic aspects of the three fast movements in *A Life for the Tsar* that have a clear middle section and a repeat and that might thus be compared to Italian cabalettas—the allegro of the Act I trio, the *allegro vivace* of the Susanin–Vanya duet, and the *allegro moderato* of Vanya’s Act IV aria—they all turn out to be quite remarkable.

Consider, for instance, the middle section of the Susanin–Vanya duet *allegro vivace*. Although cabalettas are normally static movements, their middle sections may also be considered kinetic in a way: real progress at these moments in Italian opera is rare, since cabaletta texts are usually repeated, but they do provide an occasion for some interaction, either amongst the characters themselves, or between the characters and the world outside. In his duet, Glinka does follow a design often used by Rossini, but his middle section consists of more or less parallel flourishes, whereas the Rossinian model was intended to allow for a *parlante* exchange between the characters. Like the transition between the *grave* and *allegro moderato*, it is harmonically more dynamic, and dramatically more static than Italian examples.<sup>71</sup>

If we also take note of the words, we notice that large-scale text repeats are quite rare in *A Life for the Tsar*. They cannot be found in the *stretta* of the trio or the *allegro vivace* of the duet, nor in Antonida’s rondo or in Sobinin’s Act IV aria. This also tells us something about the notions of drama held by Glinka and his librettist, Yegor Rozen, and about their attitude towards the singers, as the new texts gave them less freedom to improvise during the repeats than they would have had in an Italian opera. It is also worth remarking that some

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from which the audience knows it is time to start applauding,’ although he may have regretted this later in life.

<sup>70</sup> Philip Gossett, ‘The “Candeur Virginal” of *Tancredi*’, *Musical Times* 112 (1971), p. 327.

<sup>71</sup> Glinka organized his material as  $3 \times 4$  bars followed by a short continuation, a form frequently employed by Rossini. Gossett has noted that most of the middle sections in *Semiramide* start with such a four-bar orchestral theme repeated three times, although this happens especially when they do not modulate (Gossett, *Anna Bolena*, pp. 62–3). Glinka, characteristically, shifts everything down a third halfway the third statement, so that it touches the relative minor and does not end on the expected dominant for the repeat.

of the texts provided for the lyric movements are not really static. Antonida's Romance in Act III, for instance, matches its generic title quite well musically, but it looks more like dialogue in the libretto; for this reason, some scholars have referred to it as a 'romance-account' (*romans-rasskaz*).<sup>72</sup> On the other hand, it is only once—in the Act I trio—that Glinka and his librettists made use of the possibility to have dialogue during a *tempo di mezzo*. In the Act III finale and Vanya's aria, they preferred a choral interruption, and in the Act III quartet we find a prayer in which the four soloists act like a chorus, only framed by a minimal introduction by Susanin ('My heart is full of joy! / Let us thank God!') and an even briefer motivation for the following *vivace* ('But it's getting late!').<sup>73</sup>

The *allegro moderato* of the aria for Vanya that was added to Act IV in 1837 may serve to illustrate some of these peculiarities. Musically it follows the Italian cabaletta design rather well, but dramatically it is by no means a textbook application of the Rossinian forms. The text shown in Ex. 10, written for the occasion by Glinka's literary friend Nestor Kukol'nik, could have served as a text for a full cabaletta: first Vanya sings a stanza in which he warns the Tsar's servants for the approaching Poles, then there is some interaction with the chorus, and finally the first stanza is repeated. In fact, this is only the text of what one might call the 'theme' of the cabaletta, for after this follows a brief choral middle section in a different tempo in which the servants demand to hear Vanya's message for the Tsar. During a full repeat of the theme, Vanya narrates what had happened, and it is only during the final section of the full repeat that the servants tell Vanya that they are preparing to leave. Thus, we find in the course of this musically static repeat, not just a new text, but the dramatic resolution of the scene. We may conclude, therefore, that, although Glinka did follow the framework of the Italian multimovement forms musically, he and his librettists repeatedly ignored the dramatic purposes for which these forms had been designed, and Gossett's description of Rossini's designs as a sequence of alternating kinetic and static sections hardly applies to some of *A Life for the Tsar's* set pieces.

<sup>72</sup> Livanova and Protopopov, *Glinka*, vol. 1, p. 245.

<sup>73</sup> Incidentally, collective prayers are quite uncommon in Italian opera, and can be more easily related to French traditions. The Italian *preghiera* was usually a solo movement and therefore an unlikely candidate for a *tempo di mezzo*. See Julian Budden and Stanley Sadie, 'Preghiera', in Sadie (ed.), *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, vol. 3, p. 1090.

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VANYA Zazhigayte ogni, Vi sedlayte koney, Sobiraytesya v put' Slugi Tsarskiye! A ne to na zare K vami nagryanet beda!	VANYA Light the fires, Saddle your horses, Make ready for the road, Royal servants! Or else at dawn Misfortune will come your way!
KHOR Chto sluchilos'?	CHORUS What happened?
VANYA Vragi u vorot stoyat!	VANYA The enemy is at the gates!
KHOR Kak? Vragi u vorot?	CHORUS What? The enemy at the gates?
VANYA Net! Ne vremya teper' Vam rasskazivat'. Ya Tsaryu rasskazhu Vesti chyornīye...	VANYA No! There's no time To tell you all about it. I'll take the bad news To the Tsar...
Vi zh sedlayte koney, Zazhigayte ogni, Sobiraytesya v put' Slugi Tsarskiye. Sobiraytesya v put' Slugi Tsarskiye.	You saddle your horses, Light the fires, Make ready for the road, Royal servants. Make ready for the road, Royal servants.

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Ex. 10: The first lines of the *allegro moderato* of Vanya's aria in Act IV.

## Reminiscences

There is one dramatic lesson, however, that Glinka may have picked up from Italian opera and that concerns the very core of his Russian-patriotic drama, the last scene in Act IV. This scene, as Glinka recalled in his memoirs, immediately ‘impressed itself strongly on [his] imagination’ after Vasily Zhukovsky suggested to him the subject of Ivan Susanin in the winter of 1834–35, and starting from there, soon, ‘as if by an act of magic, the plan of the whole opera was suddenly formed.’<sup>74</sup> In this scene, the hero finds himself alone in the forest with his Polish captors, and, in the words of Odoyevsky, ‘struggling inwardly between feelings of sacred duty, love for the Tsar and his homeland and memories of his daughter, his adopted son and of a happy family, Susanin’s song rises to a style of supreme tragedy.’<sup>75</sup> The scene has little to do with the procedures normally associated with Italian opera, and Glinka eschews the conventions of the *rondò finale* in which one of the principals—typically the soprano heroine—gets the honour of singing, with the support of the chorus and other soloists, the final solo aria including a flashy cabaletta to conclude the opera.<sup>76</sup> Nonetheless, I would like to draw attention to an opera that ends exactly according to these conventions.<sup>77</sup>

In *La sonnambula*, in the recitative just before the famous cantabile ‘Ah!

<sup>74</sup> GLPP, vol. 1, pp. 266, 267; trans. GM, pp. 94, 95.

<sup>75</sup> Odoyevsky, ‘Vtoroye pis’mo’, p. 124; trans. RRM1, p. 12.

<sup>76</sup> In a very clever analysis, Daniil Zavlunov manages to detect in Susanin’s scene some vestiges of the Italian *rondò finale* complex, but in a radically altered form. In his analysis, the *scena* follows (!) the adagio; after which we find not only a *tempo di mezzo* but also an entire orchestral movement (the storm); and then a ‘cabaletta’ that incorporates an ‘enormous, eleven-phrase, tonally-open, monothematic period’ based on the andante, transforming it into a kinetic movement with a ternary form (Zavlunov, ‘A Life for the Tsar’, pp. 163–225, esp. p. 215). Instructive as these observations are, I do not agree with Zavlunov that they constitute ‘the opposite’ of what I have previously argued: the transformations he suggests are so fundamental that the difference between eschewing the conventions of the Italian *rondò finale*, and camouflaging them by ‘continuously remolding the constituent parts’ and ‘expanding each movement to unprecedented proportions’ (ibid., p. 164) is, in my opinion, minimal.

<sup>77</sup> Zavlunov argues that Susanin’s reminiscences are modelled on the final scene in Donizetti’s *Anna Bolena* (Act II, no. 11), which is indeed another interesting candidate (ibid., p. 186). Both these scenes may be considered to be ‘mad scenes’ (see Jonas Barish, ‘Madness, Hallucination, and Sleepwalking’, in David Rosen and Andrew Porter [eds.], *Verdi’s ‘Macbeth’: A Sourcebook* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press], pp. 149–55), and since Donizetti’s scene for Anne Boleyn is quite similar in its use of reminiscences to Amina’s sleepwalking scene in *La sonnambula*, Zavlunov’s observations strengthen the more general point that Susanin’s scene is related to Italian models.

**Andante sostenuto**

Cl.

**Recitativo**  
AMINA:

L'anel-lo mio... l'anello... ei me, l'ha tolto... Ma no più ra-pir-mil'immagin su-a.

**Andante**

Fl. *p*

**Recitativo**

Scul - ta el - la è qui, qui... nel

**Larghetto**

Fl. & Cl.

pet - to.

**Recitativo**

Nè te, d'eterno affetto tenero pegno, o fior... nè te per dei... Ancor ti bacio, an-cor ti

ba - cio... ma... i - na - ri - di - to se - i

EX. 11: *La sonnambula*, Act II, Amina's recitative.

non credea mirarti' and the subsequent denouement, the somnambulist Amina dreams about the unfortunate events of the day before. The orchestra recalls several themes from the opera, and after each theme, the sleepwalking heroine makes these recollections explicit in her recitative. She begins as in an earlier dream in Act I by imagining the marriage ceremony in the church ('Al tempio ei move...'), and three more orchestral themes (shown in Ex. 11) recall the wedding ring ('L'anello mio... l'anello... / Ei me l'ha tolto.'). The love duet ('Ma non può rapirmi / l'immagin sua... Sculta ella è qui, nel petto.'). and the flowers that her lover Elvino gave her ('Nè te, d'eterno affetto tenero pagno, o fior, nè te perdei...'). Now compare this to Susantin's scene in Act IV (Ex. 12). Alone with the Poles in the forest, he also thinks of the happy expectations he cherished such a short while before, but which have unexpectedly been shattered. Several themes from the opera are recalled, as shown in Table 1, referring to the wedding preparations and the members of his family. As Exx. 11 and 12 show, Glinka's melodic approach to recitative does make the two scenes sound rather different, and one could argue that any similarity between the two did not have to spoil the Odoyevsky's impression that Glinka succeeded in 'preserving its Russian character in all its purity.'<sup>78</sup> Glinka's scene is also more expansive, and he outdoes his Italian colleague by recalling twice as many themes, employing the vocal line as well as the orchestra. Still, I would like to stress that in both dramatic function and realization this scene and Amina's scene from *La sonnambula* are remarkably alike. Both use the same method of reminding the audience of the happier times portrayed in the earlier acts as the isolated protagonists emotionally recall all they have lost, a dialogue between the singer and the orchestra—most prominently the woodwinds—summarizing various themes of the opera before the plot can come to its conclusion.<sup>79</sup>

Given the passage from the memoirs about the 'tremendous impression' Act II of *La sonnambula* had made on Glinka in the Carcano theatre in 1831, it is hardly necessary to add that Bellini's scene was probably firmly imprinted in Glinka's mind, and therefore it may not be too far-fetched to suggest that the strategy used there may have served Glinka—consciously or not—as a model for his scene in the forest. If this was the case, it was an influence of an Italian opera on *A Life for the Tsar* that has little to do with stereotyped

<sup>78</sup> Odoyevsky, 'Vtoroye pis'mo', p. 124; trans. RRM1, p. 12.

<sup>79</sup> It seems that the main function of various set pieces in Act I and especially the first half of Act III was not to mark important stages in the progress of the action, but to provide a contrast to the tragic conclusion, and themes that could be recalled in the forest scene. This explains their quite static—and at times saccharine—dramatic content.

Con moto

cl.

pp

fl.

68

SUSANIN:  
Recitativo

Davno li s sem'yeyu svokey ya teshilsya schast'yem de - tey, gotovil prazdnik, prazdnik svadebniy.

Vivace

p

va. + bn.

fl.

ob. mp

dim.

pp

f

a tempo

p

I vot, o - chu - til - sya da - le - che ot vsekh, v glu - shi ne - pro -

93

ritenuto

khod - nikh bo - lot i le - sov, vo t'me ne - po - god - noy, na pit - ke vra - gov!

p

100

a tempo

p

fl.

ritardando

cantabile

parlando

ritenuto assai

Moyo de - tishche An - to - nidushka, ti chuyala gibel' moyu, s ri dan'yem menya ot pu - sti - la!

Ex. 12: *A Life for the Tsar*, Act IV, Susanin's scene, mm. 62–115.

<i>mm.</i>	<i>part</i>	<i>theme recalled</i>	<i>text</i>
62–67	orch:	Quartet Act III, andante	'I was preparing for a celebration, / a wedding celebration...'
78–87	orch:	Quartet Act III, vivace	
100–09	orch:	Cavatina Antonida, rondo	
			'My child / Dear Antonida!'
116–20	orch:	Scene with Poles, Act III	'Grass should not overgrow your path / A daughter's path to her father's home!'
136–40	orch:	Trio Act I, allegro	
141–53	Su:	Trio Act I, scena (Sobinin)	'To thee, good man, / I entrust my child.'
154–87	orch	Orphan's Song, Act III	'I also have a little bird, /
	& Su:		my Vanya, my son!'

TABLE 1: Reminiscence themes in Susanin's recitative, Act IV.

Italianisms<sup>80</sup> and that is of particular significance for our appreciation of the relation between Glinka and his Italian contemporaries. For surely, this is no sign of a weakening influence nor a concession to popular fashion—the scene has been widely praised, not least by critics that preferred to focus on the identifiably Russian elements in the opera.<sup>81</sup> It is an intriguing example of the things that may be uncovered when actually turning to the Italian scores instead of referring only to a few well-known general characteristics of the repertoire.

## Conclusion

All in all, we can conclude that Glinka's stay in Italy had been an important formative phase in his artistic life and, although he may have started professing his dislike for Italian music and 'songbirds' soon after his return to Russia, his operas show how much he continued to rely on his knowledge of the Italian repertoire in his work as a dramatic composer. The influence

<sup>80</sup> It is worth noting that, as Richard Taruskin rightly claims, the use of reminiscence themes was still considered 'a "French" device' in the 1830s (Taruskin, 'Glinka', p. 448).

<sup>81</sup> Gerald Seaman, for instance, considered the way the themes were 'ingeniously referred to in the orchestral accompaniment' a 'brilliant touch' (Seaman, *History of Russian Music*, p. 177); David Brown claimed that 'the novelty of this procedure was too much for the first audiences' (Brown, *Glinka*, p. 133), which of course may still ring true, since *La sonnambula* (translated as *Nevesta-lunatik*) was only first performed in St Petersburg by the Russian Opera in 1837, and, in addition, Glinka's procedure was much expanded, and its effect maximalized.

of *primo ottocento* opera can be seen most obviously from the fact that the conventional sequence of tempi appears to have been applied to the arias and ensembles in both *A Life for the Tsar* and *Ruslan* as a matter of course. But Glinka was more than just a passive recipient. In the individual movements of *A Life for the Tsar* we can find a large variety of different relationships to Italian opera: the use of Italian forms to organize melodies and harmonies of a different style, the use of Italianate textures in unconventional formal contexts, strong deviations from Italian points of departure, and at times the complete disregard of Italian conventions. It is clear that referring to Glinka's relation with Italian opera only in passing cannot possibly do justice to the important—and increasingly problematic—role it played in both his life and his work.

At times we may sense some of the tension that resulted from Glinka's command of Italian techniques, and the vocal charm and elevated tone they could offer on the one hand, and the desire to maintain a proper distance from a style he considered to be at odds with the Russian national character he wished to portray on the other. In general, however, the traces of Italian opera we find in *A Life for the Tsar* had undergone such a thorough process of appropriation and adaptation that we should think twice before we call them foreign. Nor should we think of Italian and Russian styles and methods as being mutually exclusive. The parallels between Susanin's scene in the forest and Bellini's *La sonnambula* illustrate that Italian operas may have served as examples and sources of inspiration in many different ways, including aspects that were not considered typically Italian and that did not compromise any sense of Russianness. And there, perhaps, is the key to an interpretation of Glinka's first opera that resists the nineteenth-century rhetoric that reduces the admittedly conventionalized tradition of Italian opera to a straw man made of empty vocal virtuosity, devoid of musical invention and dramatic interest. Only this will allow us to acknowledge the mixed origins of *A Life for the Tsar* without having to share in Glinka's and Stasov's embarrassment.

## CHAPTER TWO

# *Judith*

ALEKSANDR SEROV's reputation as a composer rests almost exclusively on his three operas: *Judith* (1863), *Rogneda* (1865), and *The Power of the Fiend* (1871). Insignificant as these compositions may now seem in both the contemporary musical world and the history of music at large, Serov's operas played a prominent role in the Russian society of his time. The first two were among the most successful Russian works of the mid-nineteenth century: *Rogneda* was an unparalleled success at the box-office, while *Judith* proved to be Serov's most substantial claim to the esteem of contemporary critics and fellow-musicians. In an obituary published shortly after Serov's death in 1871, Herman Laroche argued that:

*Judith* belongs to the still small group of Russian musical works that could and should be praised without regard to the youth of our people, to the poverty of our musical education, in short, to the various 'mitigating circumstances' of our culture; for an evaluation of our *Judith* we have no need for such considerations, for this is the kind of opera that would be a pride to the musical literature of any of the Western nations.<sup>1</sup>

Serov had made his mark in musical circles as a progressive critic and relentless polemicist, and Laroche had been among the flock of curious conserva-

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<sup>1</sup> Herman Avgustovich Laroche, 'Zametka ob A. N. Serove', *Sovremennaya letopis'*, 15 Feb. 1871, no. 6, p. 7.

tory students that formed around him in the early 1860s. Nikolay Findeyzen observed that, after Anton Rubinstein, the director of the Russian Musical Society and the St Petersburg conservatory, ‘Serov was without doubt *the most remarkable, interesting and characteristic musical figure* of St Petersburg in the sixties.’<sup>2</sup> Both Laroche and his fellow student Tchaikovsky were sufficiently impressed by *Judith* to keep a high opinion of the opera throughout their lives.<sup>3</sup> Friend and foe alike agreed that Serov’s first opera was the most significant Russian composition for the stage since Glinka’s two operas and Aleksandr Dargomizhsky’s *Rusalka* (1856), and in time it could be canonized simply as ‘the fourth important Russian opera’.<sup>4</sup> In Russia, *Judith* would continue to be performed intermittently throughout the nineteenth century, with various revivals in the final decades, until it ultimately disappeared from the stage in the twentieth century. Notwithstanding its good reputation in Russia and the high opinion of critics like Laroche, the opera never made an impression in the West. *Judith* did not receive more than a concert performance of the Chorus of Odalisques at the 1878 Paris World Exhibition and five stagings of the ‘Orgy and finale’ (Act IV) by Diaghilev’s troupe in June 1909.

Richard Taruskin has claimed that ‘Serov was in all artistic respects an internationalist’ at the time when he wrote *Judith*.<sup>5</sup> Insofar as this refers to Serov’s interest in a wide range of Western composers, this international orientation was only sensible given the limited number of competitive works by his fellow Russians. Apart from Glinka (who had died in 1857), Dargomizhsky, and Anton Rubinstein, few of his countrymen could possibly have served as

<sup>2</sup> Nikolay Fyodorovich Findeyzen, ‘Aleksandr Nikolayevich Serov: ocherk yego zhizni i muzikal’noy deyatel’nosti’, *Yezhegodnik imperatorskikh teatrov*, 1897–1898, pr. 3, p. 81. Emphasis original.

<sup>3</sup> For Tchaikovsky’s view on *Judith*, see his letter to Von Meck, 7 March 1878; Pyotr Il’yich Tchaikovsky and Nadezhda Filaretovna von Meck, *Perepiska*, ed. Vladimir Aleksandrovich Zhdanov and Nikolay Timofeyevich Zhegin, 3 vols. (Moscow: Zakharov, 2004) (henceforth cited as ЧНМ), vol. 1, pp. 279–81; and the interview by ‘G. B.’ [Grigory Anatol’yevich Blokh], ‘Beseda s P. I. Chaykovskim’, *Peterburgskaya zhizn’* 3/2 (12 November 1892), p. 17, in which Tchaikovsky mentions *Judith* as one of his favourite operas as late as 1892.

<sup>4</sup> See e. g. Mikhail Samoylovich Pekelis, ‘A. N. Serov—kompozitor’, *Sovetskoye iskusstvo*, 26 Jan. 1938, no. 10, p. 2; or Aleksandr Moiseyevich Stupel’, *Aleksandr Nikolayevich Serov (1820–1871): populyarnaya monografiya*, 2nd edn. (Leningrad: Muzika, 1981), p. 80. Even Musorgsky, who was highly critical of Serov’s abilities, conceded that ‘in any case, *Judith* is the first seriously handled opera on the Russian stage since *Rusalka*’ (Letter to Balakirev, 10 June 1863; Modest Petrovich Musorgsky, *Pis’ma*, ed. Yevgeniya Mikhaylovna Gordeyeva, 2nd edn. [Moscow: Muzika, 1984], p. 45).

<sup>5</sup> Richard Taruskin, *Opera and Drama in Russia as Preached and Practiced in the 1860s* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1981), p. 45.

models; it would have been practically impossible at this time to conceive of Russian music as a self-contained universe.

Serov's choice of subject matter, too, can be understood as an indication of his 'internationalism'. The opera dramatized the apocryphal Book of Judith, which tells the story of the widow Judith who decapitated the Assyrian general Holofernes, and thereby saved the Jewish city of Bethulia. As the composer himself recognized, this subject was practically neutral in terms of nationality, and could in principle count on recognition in the entire Western world, unlike *A Life for the Tsar* and *Rusalka*, which Serov thought 'too strongly tied to the soil'.<sup>6</sup> In addition, the subject situated Serov's opera in an international context because it inevitably invited comparison to a number of well-known works set in biblical times, such as Méhul's *Joseph* (1807), Rossini's *Mosè in Egitto* (1818), and Verdi's *Nabucco* (1842). Serov had high hopes for the international success of his opera. Even before the Russian premiere took place, he was making plans for productions in Western Europe—Vienna in particular. His efforts, however, came to nothing, partly because the Russian composer did not receive the support he had hoped for from his Western contacts Richard Wagner, Franz Liszt, and Pauline Viardot.<sup>7</sup>

As a result of its international orientation, *Judith* sits uneasily in the standard narrative of Russian music. Georgy Abramovsky, the author of the most recent extensive study of Serov's works, argues that since 'the character of the subject did not predispose towards a national manner of writing, it was more natural to turn to European traditions'.<sup>8</sup> In order to prevent his readers from thinking that Serov's adherence to 'European tradition' would render him unpatriotic or rootless, Abramovsky ensures us that it is 'important that, having oriented himself on Western traditions, the composer could combine them with the "Glinkian" and thus did not lose touch with his native soil'.<sup>9</sup> In addition, Abramovsky detected 'plagal and natural mode inflections' in the opening section of the final chorus 'Mī pobedili' (no. 25),

<sup>6</sup> Letter to Varvara Zhukova, 8 September 1862; Aleksandr Nikolayevich Serov, 'Pis'ma k V. Zhukovoy', ed. Georgy Yakovlevich Èdel'man, *Sovetskaya muzika*, 1954, no. 8, p. 71.

<sup>7</sup> See the letters to Zhukova of 27 April, 3 July and 8 September 1862; (*ibid.*, pp. 67, 69, 71); and the letters to Mavromikhali of 25 July and 29 August 1862; *id.*, 'Ocherki o muzike v pis'makh k Dm. i V. V. Stasovim i M. P. Anastas'yevoy', ed. Vladimir Vasil'yevich Stasov, *Russkaya starina* 21/1 (Jan. 1878), p. 168–169, 170. See also Georgy Konstantinovich Abramovsky, *Opernoye tvorchestvo Aleksandra Nikolayevicha Serova* (St Petersburg: Kanon, 1998), pp. 56–7.

<sup>8</sup> Abramovsky, *Opernoye tvorchestvo Aleksandra Nikolayevicha Serova*, p. 63.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 69–70. Abramovsky does concede that Glinka's music, too, had been influenced by Bach, Handel, Gluck, Cherubini, Mozart, and Beethoven—but in his case it had been 'absorbed' and 'refracted by the prism of his mighty talent'—i. e.: naturalized.

which supposedly imparts ‘Russian colour’ to the otherwise ‘impersonal fanfare or march formulas’.<sup>10</sup> Abramovsky’s struggle to justify Serov’s choices exemplifies the problems of a mode of historiography that considers ‘Western-European’ and Russian music as two independent, parallel, and equal branches of music history.

The central focus of this chapter will be the position of a work like *Judith*, with its non-Russian subject and international orientation, in the Russian opera world of the 1860s. A lot has been written about how nationalist thought informed works that espouse an overtly national style. Rather less is known about how nationalism related to works that lacked easily recognizable national elements, even though—one would think—the reception of such works may have been affected by national thought as well. It is precisely because of its non-Russian subject that the case of *Judith* reveals the contradictory demands of national thought in the opera world. The notion of a national manner of composing could become problematic in an opera like *Judith*, because it could be considered to be at odds with the increasingly important demand for observing ‘local colour’—or more precisely, in the case of this opera, ‘group colour’—an aesthetic demand that is itself related to national thought. Below, it will be shown how *Judith* was situated in its local and international contexts, how group colour was one of the opera’s central issues, and how, despite its author’s internationalism, it became the subject of a debate on the nature of Russian national opera.

### *Serov the Cosmopolitan*

Although I have characterized Serov as an internationalist above, this does not mean that his artistic views were uninfluenced by national thought. The composer theorized at length about such topics as the specific properties of Slavic music and the requirements for a Russian national opera.<sup>11</sup> He regarded national music, however, as a prestigious *genre* at most: he never considered the cultivation of national music or subject matter the exclusive and central

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 76.

<sup>11</sup> See Aleksandr Nikolayevich Serov, ‘*Rusalka*: opera A. S. Dargomīzhskogo’ (1856), in *id.*, *Stat’i o muzike*, ed. Vladimir Vasil’evich Protopopov, 7 vols., *Russkaya klassicheskaya muzikal’naya kritika* (Moscow: Muzika, 1984–1990) (henceforth cited as *SeSM*), vol. 2b, pp. 69–72; and the letter to Stasov, 18–20 April 1842; *id.*, ‘Pis’ma k V. V. i D. V. Stasovim’ ed. Abram Akimovich Gozenpud and Vera Al’fonsovna Ogram, in Mikhail Pavlovich Alekseyev et al. (eds.), *Muzikal’noye nasledstvo: sborniki po istorii muzikal’noy kul’turi sssr*, 4 vols. (Moscow: Muzika, 1961–1976) (henceforth cited as *SeSt*), vol. 1, pp. 171–3.

mission of the artist. ‘What would we gain by such exclusive national-ness [*narodnost*]?’ he wrote in one of his early expositions on the subject. ‘A genius *has* to be a *cosmopolitan* and only pay some *tribute* to his nation by expressing lofty poetical feelings of love for his fatherland!’<sup>12</sup> He mentioned Shakespeare and Liszt as examples: they had paid their dues with their Henrys and Hungarian marches—and were then relieved of further obligation. The international aspects of *Judith*, therefore, could co-exist with his views on national art.

It should be added that, while the subject matter was not Russian, *Judith* was not necessarily irrelevant to Russian nationalist discourse. Soviet scholars under Stalin, wishing to explain the relevance of a biblical story for the Russian nation and Russian class struggle, predictably pointed out that *Judith* was ‘a drama permeated with the high *patriotic idea* of duty to the motherland, a victory in the name of the people’.<sup>13</sup> Since the subject is indeed overtly patriotic, these claims should not be dismissed out of hand. It may not be a coincidence that the final word of the opera, shouted by all on stage with varying degrees of emphasis is *narod*—‘the people’. This appeal to duty and the nation offers one way of understanding how the subject of *Judith* could have been relevant for nineteenth-century audiences. In fact, as Soviet scholars have not failed to mention, the performances of the play *Giuditta* by Paolo Giacometti that inspired Serov to compose his opera, had also caught the attention of one of Serov’s more radical contemporaries, Nikolay Chernishevsky. Chernishevsky referred to Judith’s sacrifice of her chaste reputation as a great act of civic responsibility, which served ‘the general good’ regardless of the ruling norms of ‘all so-called noble people’, and his use of the Judith story shows its political potential in the nineteenth century.<sup>14</sup> It does seem far-fetched, however, to claim, as Georgy Khubov did, that it was

<sup>12</sup> Letter to Stasov, 18–20 April 1842; SESt, vol. 1, p. 171. Emphasis original.

<sup>13</sup> Georgy Nikitich Khubov, *Zhizn’ A. Serova* (Moscow: Muzgiz, 1950), p. 98.

<sup>14</sup> Nikolay Gavrilovich Chernishevsky, ‘Bibliografiya. Politiko-ekonomicheskiye pis’ma k prezidentu Amerikanskikh Soyedinyonnikh Shtatov. G. K. Kère. Perevod s angliyskogo’ (1861), in id., *Polnoye sobraniye sochineniy*, ed. Valery Yakovlevich Kirpotin et al., 15 vols. (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoye izdatel’stvo khudozhestvennoy literatury, 1939–1951), vol. 7, p. 922. Chernishevsky made these comments in his famous ‘book review’ of Henry Charles Carey’s *Letters to the President* (1858), which he managed to use as an outlet for some of his political ideas. His message about *Giuditta* was quoted by Lenin on multiple occasions: ‘The path of history is not paved like the Nevsky Prospekt [...]. Whoever is afraid of being covered with dust or soiling his boots, should not occupy himself with public activity. It is a charitable occupation, when you actually think about the benefit of people, but is it not a completely tidy occupation’ (ibid., p. 922).

the patriotic aspect ‘above all that explains the success of Serov’s opera with the broader audience.’<sup>15</sup> The same holds for readings of *Judith* as a vehicle for revolutionary sentiments. Abram Gozenpud’s suggestion that Holofernes’ ‘savage individualism and his thirst for power’ was a depiction of ‘the ruler and conquerer of the nineteenth century’ rather than ‘a reconstruction of an ancient oriental ruler’ is not very enlightening because it simply imposes a Soviet perspective on a pre-Revolutionary opera.<sup>16</sup> The same reasoning could be applied to a whole plethora of Romantic operas that can be understood as advocating patriotism and portraying the struggle against tyranny in a rather similar manner, and therefore adds little to our understanding of *Judith* in particular.

Boris Asaf’yev offered a political reading of the opera that does draw on a specific feature of Judith’s story and a specific Russian context. He argued that the appeal of the subject of *Judith* was related to the torturous, eleven-month siege of Sevastopol during the Crimean War (1854–1855).<sup>17</sup> Although Asaf’yev made his comment in a rather tendentious article entitled ‘The Patriotic Idea in Russian Music’ published during World War II, the connection is quite compelling. A similar argument has been made for the poem *Judith* by Lev Mey, which was written at the very end of the Crimean War in 1855.<sup>18</sup> For Serov, who had worked for several years as a civil servant in the Crimean capital Simferopol before the war, the association must have been particularly poignant. The composer had actually visited Sevastopol as late as October 1853, the month the Ottomans declared war and the French and English fleets were already assembled in the Aegean Sea.<sup>19</sup> Although *Judith* is certainly no straightforward allegory of historical events—no Russian widow managed to save Sevastopol, after all—the subject matter of a chosen people emerging victorious after a siege was likely to evoke a special resonance at the time.

<sup>15</sup> Khubov, *Zhizn’ A. Serova*, p. 98.

<sup>16</sup> Abram Akimovich Gozenpud, *Russkiy operniy teatr XIX-go veka*, 3 vols. (Leningrad: Muzika, 1969–1973), vol. 2, p. 65.

<sup>17</sup> Boris Vladimirovich Asaf’yev, ‘Patrioticheskaya ideya v russkoy muzike’ (1942), in id., *Izbranniye trudi*, 5 vols. (Moscow: Akademiya nauk SSSR, 1952–1957), vol. 5, p. 40.

<sup>18</sup> See Kseniya Konstantinovna Bukhmeyer, ‘L. A. Mey’, in Lev Aleksandrovich Mey, *Izbranniye proizvedeniya*, ed. Kseniya Konstantinovna Bukhmeyer, Biblioteka poeta (Leningrad: Sovetskiy pisatel’, 1972), p. 31. Although Bukhmeyer does not specify the reasons for her topical reading of Mey’s *Judith*, and the poem does not appear to contain any explicit references to the recent events, the militant conclusion of the poem and the date of appearance lend additional support for Asaf’yev’s suggestion regarding Serov’s opera.

<sup>19</sup> See the letter to Dmitry Stasov, 22 October 1853, sent from Sevastopol; SESt, vol. 3, pp. 170–4.

Still, this kind of patriotism, although it is easily incorporated into nationalist ideology, cannot simply be equated to it. *Judith's* patriotism is of a rather universal kind. Bearing no intrinsic relation to the Russian nation, it could appeal to any other national audience in a similar manner. As such, it suited Serov's ambitions to stage his opera abroad.

AT FIRST, Serov did not even intend *Judith* to be a Russian work. As mentioned above, the idea to compose an opera on the subject came to him during a performance of Giacometti's Italian play *Giuditta*, which served as a vehicle for the star actress Adelaide Ristori, who visited St Petersburg in the winter of 1860–61. In a frequently-quoted passage of his reminiscences, Konstantin Zvantsov relates how he mentioned during the entr'acte that Holofernes' orgy would be quite something for an opera finale, and how Serov embraced this suggestion wholeheartedly: 'Of course!! And I will immediately write the opera *Judith* with all the more pleasure, because I have always liked the legends and characters of the Old Testament!'<sup>20</sup> Serov hoped to secure the participation of the Italian prima donna Emma La Grua, in order to have his work performed by the Italian Opera at her benefit performance. This choice may be surprising to anyone familiar with the high-minded ideals of operatic dramaturgy Serov espoused as a music critic, which frequently made him take a critical stance towards Italian opera. In response to much-publicized premiere of Verdi's *La Forza del Destino* (1862) in St Petersburg, for instance, Serov complained about the many conventions in Italian opera that offended common sense and led to the 'reign of nonsense on the stage'.<sup>21</sup> Taruskin has rightly remarked, however, that 'it would perhaps be unwise to draw too many conclusions about the nature of [Serov's] operatic conception from the language in which he thought to cast it'.<sup>22</sup>

Since the Italian Opera was also by far the best-funded institution, Serov's decision to compose his *Judith* for that stage was not so strange. His choice, moreover, seems to conform to a certain institutional logic with regard to his

<sup>20</sup> Konstantin Ivanovich Zvantsov, 'Aleksandr Nikolayevich Serov v 1857–1871 gg.: vospomnaniye o nyom i yego pis'ma', *Russkaya starina* 59/8 (Aug. 1888), p. 381.

<sup>21</sup> Aleksandr Nikolayevich Serov, 'Verdi i yego novaya opera' (1862), in *SESM*, vol. 5, pp. 280–1.

<sup>22</sup> Taruskin, *Opera and Drama in Russia*, p. 45. Somewhat inconsistently, Taruskin later remarked that some roudades in *Judith's* canticle (Act V) were the remnants of the version for La Grua (*ibid.*, p. 75n105). It should either be concluded that there was in fact a relation between the musical style and the intended stage and performers, which was only natural in the operatic practice of the day; or that the embellishments at this place were not objectionable to Serov.

subject matter. Since the time of Glinka, the majority of the operas composed for the Russian Opera, and certainly the best known ones, had been on Russian subject matter. Although it was not unheard of for Russian composers to write operas on non-Russian subjects, these were normally intended for other stages than that of the Russian Opera. Anton Rubinstein, for instance, wrote several operas on non-Russian subjects, but his operas for the Russian stage (at this date *The Battle of Kulikovo* and *Fomka the Fool*) were all on Russian subjects.

In the end, nothing came of Serov's ambitions. La Grua declined to sing the part after Serov showed her the scene he had composed for her (which would later become Act V). Eventually, more than a year after he had finished his scene for the Italian prima donna, he turned to his young friend Konstantin Zvantsov, who had some talent for translation, to 'transplant' the Italian libretto of this scene 'to Russian soil'—and only then did he begin to contemplate the rest of the opera.<sup>23</sup>

With hindsight, the fact that *Judith* was presented to the Russian Opera company was not all that unfortunate for Serov. As we have seen in Chapter One, Russian opera had been treated as a second-rate art form by the theatre authorities ever since the establishment of the permanent Italian Opera in St Petersburg in the 1840s. The Italian company was considered a major detractor to Russian singers, composers and anyone who supported the cause of Russian national opera. Verdi had received no less than 60,000 gold francs from the Imperial Theatres for his *La Forza del Destino*, a fact which caused quite a bit of bad blood among Russian composers and their supporters, since native artists had to content themselves with considerably less generous payments. Yet the nadir in the fortunes of the Russian Opera was already in the past: since 1860 the Russian company performed in the new Mariinsky Theatre, and public and critical opinion were becoming increasingly favourable for the Russian troupe. In fact, the Italian Opera and its principal repertoire suffered a noticeable decline in popularity during the 1860s, which was partly due to the fact that the lead singers in this period were no longer as exciting as, for example, Giovanni Battista Rubini had been in the 1840s.<sup>24</sup> Yet, as Robert William Oldani has argued, it can also be attributed to the sentiments of patriotism which 'deflected public interest away from foreign productions—and intensified interest in native work'.<sup>25</sup> This sentiment

<sup>23</sup> Letter to Zvantsov, 19 May 1862; Zvantsov, 'Serov', no. 9, p. 653.

<sup>24</sup> The potential of individual stars to attract public interest is shown by the renewed craze for the Italian Opera produced by appearance of the soprano Adelina Patti in 1869.

<sup>25</sup> Robert William Oldani, 'Sing Me Some Glinka or Dargomyzhsky', *History of European*

was certainly a factor in the reception of *Judith*. Many reviewers took pride in the fact that the opera was composed by a Russian. Serov's literary friend Apollon Grigor'yev was very outspoken about this: 'we are nationalists in art [...]. For us, Russian opera and the Russian Opera troupe are matters of prime importance; matters destined, perhaps, to triumph over all foreign competition.'<sup>26</sup>

The capacities of the Russian company, however, still could not match those of the Italian Opera. Serov repeatedly complained about the management's 'avarice', which in his calculations had spent a meagre 3,000 rubles (or even 1,500, according to another letter) on the sets and costumes, as a result of which 'the choristers were dressed in rags and the dances were staged miserably.'<sup>27</sup> Serov complained that 'the "Italian"' (Verdi) was given 80,000, while 'to a Russian, who would be most satisfied for his staging with a *tenth* of that, [...] they can give "almost nothing"' [...] Why, for what, and for how long will we still have this "justice"?'<sup>28</sup>

In contrast to Serov's own misgivings, reviewers give the impression that the staging was considered to be satisfactory. Mavriky Rappaport, one of Serov's supporters, praised the Theatre Directorate for its 'warm assistance of a Russian composer' and its efforts 'to support the new opera with a meticulous staging'. He praised the director Count Aleksandr Borkh for 'his sympathy for the native, all the more because until now one has consistently given preference to the foreign element.'<sup>29</sup> It may well be that such praise for the management was primarily a way of encouraging the new director to make further investments in the Russian opera. Apollon Grigor'yev concluded

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*Ideas* 16/4–6 (1993), p. 718.

<sup>26</sup> 'Red.' [Apollon Aleksandrovich Grigor'yev], 'Teatral'niy i muzikal'niy vestnik. Yeshchyo neskol'ko slov po povodu predstavleniya *Yudifi*', *Yakor*, 7 Sept. 1863, no. 27, p. 525.

<sup>27</sup> Letter to Fyodorov, 12 July 1863 (Aleksandr Petrov, 'Iz proshlogo. "V kazyonnikh kleshchakh": Neopublikovanniye pis'ma kompozitora A. N. Serova', *Sovetskoye iskusstvo*, 11 Sept. 1934, no. 42, p. 3); and letter to Zvantsov, 23 May 1863 (Zvantsov, 'Serov', no. 9, p. 658).

<sup>28</sup> Letter to Fyodorov, quoted from Abramovsky, *Opernoye tvorchestvo Aleksandra Nikolayevicha Serova*, p. 46. See also Serov, 'Verdi i yego novaya opera', pp. 277–8, 286, where Serov makes the same point, and where the 80,000 is the sum of the 20,000 allegedly paid to Verdi and the 60,000 allegedly spent on the staging of his opera. As a result of his jealousy about dealings of the Imperial Theatres with Verdi, Serov was often led to hyperbole. Oldani has remarked that Serov consistently overestimated Verdi's fee in his writings by about 30% by representing Verdi's fee of 60,000 gold francs as 20,000 rubles (Oldani, 'Sing Me Some Glinka or Dargomyzhsky', p. 716).

<sup>29</sup> 'M. R.' [Mavriky Yakimovich Rappaport], 'Teatral'naya letopis', *Sin otechestva*, 20 May 1863, no. 120, p. 929. Rappaport had been the editor of the journal *Muzika i teatr* (1856–1860), for which Serov had been a regular contributor.

his review on a more cynical note: ‘everything that could be done for the *Russian Opera* has been done. One cannot require that there was a luxury here as for some *Forza del destino* or other.’<sup>30</sup>

The kind of sympathy for Serov discussed thus far was motivated primarily by the nationality of the composer rather than by the Russianness of his opera. The influence of Richard Wagner and Giacomo Meyerbeer, or at least the suspicion thereof, plays an important part in the reception of *Judith* and the debate on its credibility as a Russian opera. It is necessary, therefore, to briefly investigate Serov’s contradictory relation to these two German-born composers.

AT THE TIME *Judith* was premiered, Serov had already acquired notoriety as a supporter of Wagner. Wagner had visited St Petersburg in 1863, shortly before the premiere of *Judith*, and Serov’s admiration and support had been visible to all. Understandably, the audience of *Judith* were listening for evidence of his Wagnerian convictions—and this gave rise to a lot of confusion. Some claimed that they immediately recognized the ‘imitator of Wagner’ and referred to, for instance, the instrumentation, the frequent modulations, the level of dissonance, the importance of the orchestra, and the tendency towards continuous forms.<sup>31</sup> The literary critic Aleksey Veselovsky wrote that Serov was ‘wholly under the influence of the Wagnerian style’ when he wrote *Judith*, and that the composer had ‘created a work kindred in spirit and many particulars to the form and style of *Tannhäuser* and *Lohengrin*.’<sup>32</sup> Others were surprised to find so little of Wagner in the score of *Judith*. Grigor’yev wrote that it was ‘comparable least of all to the work of Wagner—it is rather closer, if one insists on an approximation, to Meyerbeer’.<sup>33</sup> The controversy persisted long enough

<sup>30</sup> ‘Red.’ [Apollon Aleksandrovich Grigor’yev], ‘Yudif’, opera v pyati aktakh A. N. Serova (posle pervago predstavleniya 16 maya), *Yakor’*, 25 May 1863, no. 12, p. 224. Emphasis original.

<sup>31</sup> See e.g. [Anon.], ‘Opera Yudif’, muzika Serova’, *Illyustrirovanniy listok*, 8/71 (2 June 1863), p. 511; id., ‘Vsednevnyaya zhizn’. Yudif’, opera v pyati deystviyakh, slova i muzika A. N. Serova [...], *Golos*, 19 May 1863, no. 123, p. 477; ‘É.’ [Maximilian Erlanger], ‘Yudif’, opera Serova’, *Antrakt*, 21–22 Sept. 1865, no. 113, pp. 2–3; no. 114, p. 3; ‘Rostislav’ [Feofil Matveyevich Tolstoy], ‘Alexandre Sérow’, *Journal de St-Pétersbourg*, 30 Jan. 1871, no. 24, p. 1; id., ‘Aleksandr Nikolayevich Serov, 1820–1871. Vospominaniya’, *Russkaya starina* 9/2 (1 Feb. 1874), pp. 346, 368; Letter Turgenev to Pauline Viardot, 6–7 January 1864; Ivan Sergeyevich Turgenev, *Polnoye sobraniye sochineniy i pisem: pis’ma*, ed. Mikhail Pavlovich Alekseyev et al., 18 vols. (Moscow: Nauka, 1982–), vol. 5, p. 246.

<sup>32</sup> Aleksey Nikolayevich Veselovsky, ‘Vospominaniye ob A. N. Serove’, *Beseda* 1/2 (Feb. 1871), pp. 324–44.

<sup>33</sup> Grigor’yev, ‘Yudif’’, pp. 222–3. See also Rappaport, ‘Teatral’naya letopis’, p. 931. Stasov also wrote that Serov belonged to Meyerbeer’s ‘school’, ‘although, I think he and the public,

to warrant an article by the music critic Mikhail Ivanov entitled ‘Aleksandr Serov: Was he a Meyerbeerist, a Wagnerian, or an independent creator?’ more than thirty years after *Judith*’s premiere.<sup>34</sup> Modern scholars, who have the advantage of being much more familiar with Wagner’s music than Serov’s Russian contemporaries, all agree with Ivanov that the specific influence of Wagner’s music on *Judith* is limited at most—even if Serov’s interpretation of Wagner’s theories was important in his compositional process.<sup>35</sup> Serov himself, too, acknowledged the difference from Wagner’s works, and wrote that ‘both in terms of its subject (simple and coarse in essence) and in terms of the style I created, my *Judith* is incomparably easier to understand than Wagner’s works.’<sup>36</sup>

The relation to Meyerbeer is more or less the opposite, and surely more complex. Serov had briefly been a great lover of Meyerbeer when he was young, and he passionately defended his admiration in his correspondence with Stasov. He called Meyerbeer ‘*le favori de mon âme*’, and the reason, significantly, was because he transcended nationality. ‘*En musique on doit être cosmopolite*’, Serov maintained, and Meyerbeer represented this ideal because his music was neither German nor Italian, but a synthesis of these two supposed opposites. Meyerbeer had founded nothing less than ‘a new school in music, a school of the nineteenth century, an *eclectic* school, which by its very nature stands higher than *the two* that have been brought together in it; it, like *tous les êtres chéris de la nature*, took *all the best things* from its *parents*, and therefore has surpassed them in genuine beauty.’<sup>37</sup>

Serov maintained this cosmopolitan outlook up to the time of *Judith*’s composition, and continued to argue that a Russian composer should never forget to look abroad.<sup>38</sup> It did not take very long, however, before Meyerbeer

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too, would probably be prepared to disavow this’ (letter to Balakirev, 17 May 1863; Vladimir Vasil’evich Stasov and Mily Alekseyevich Balakirev, *Perepiska*, ed. Anastasiya Sergeevna Lyapunova, 2 vols. [Moscow: Muzika, 1970–1971], vol. 1, p. 206).

<sup>34</sup> Mikhail Mikhaylovich Ivanov, ‘Serov—bil li on meyerberistom, vagneriantsem ili samostoyatel’nim tvortsom?’, *Yezhegodnik imperatorskikh teatrov*, 1894–95, pr. 3, pp. 121–36.

<sup>35</sup> Taruskin, *Opera and Drama in Russia*, pp. 58–65; Abramovsky, *Opernoye tvorchestvo Aleksandra Nikolayevicha Serova*, pp. 67–8; Yury Vsevolodovich Keldish, ‘Opernoye tvorchestvo A. N. Serova’, in id. (ed.), *Istoriya russkoy muziki*, 10 vols. (Moscow: Muzika, 1989), vol. 6: *50–60-e godi XIX veka*, p. 147; Gerald Abraham, ‘The Operas of Serov’, in Jack Westrup (ed.), *Essays Presented to Egon Wellesz* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1966), p. 176.

<sup>36</sup> Letter to Zhukova, 8 September 1862; Serov, ‘Pis’ma k V. Zhukovoy’, p. 71. See also the letter to Mavromikhali, 25 July 1862; id., ‘Ocherki o muzike v pis’makh k Dm. i V. V. Stasovim i M. P. Anastas’yevoy’, vol. 21, p. 168.

<sup>37</sup> Letter to Stasov, 17 March 1841; SESt, vol. 1, pp. 107–8. Emphasis original.

<sup>38</sup> In 1859, as before, he held that ‘genuine artists are always eclectics by nature’ (Aleksandr

toppled off his pedestal. It is clear from Serov's recollections of his first meeting with Mikhail Glinka in early 1842, less than a year after the letter mentioned above, that this encounter must have made a strong impression. According to Serov, Glinka's general verdict on Meyerbeer was concise: 'I do not respect charlatans'. 'Back then I did not know how to reconcile Glinka's verdict with the wealth of beauty that had been created by Meyerbeer', Serov wrote. 'The opinion of such an artist like Glinka must have its foundation; there is no arguing—but agreeing completely, I thought, was impossible.'<sup>39</sup> Soon enough, Serov not only thought Glinka's verdict completely justified, but he also added some venom of his own, referring to Meyerbeer as a 'charlatan Jew' (*zhid-sharlatan*).<sup>40</sup>

He had already cast serious doubts on Meyerbeer some months before the influential meeting with Glinka, however, and here, too, it had an unmistakably anti-Semitic tone.<sup>41</sup> Like all extended musical works, he confessed, Meyerbeer's operas contained some passages of uninspired, mechanical composition. This could be forgiven—'one cannot *always* be inspired'—but unlike other composers, Meyerbeer had attempted to disguise it in a 'genuinely Jewish and subtle' fashion, to have people take this uninspired work as 'a genuine word of the soul' by means of 'some illicit magic'. And he had almost succeeded, too, for one would sooner recognize the falseness of this music 'through some *negative* feeling or instinct than you will find it with an assiduous analysis.'<sup>42</sup>

Serov's anti-Semitism, though a not uncommon phenomenon at that time, is rather curious, since his own maternal grandfather Karl Gablits (or Hablitzl) was Jewish. According to Vladimir Stasov, when he had just heard about

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Nikolayevich Serov, 'Opera i yeyo noveysheye napravleniye v Germanii: kriticheskiy ètyud' [1859], in *SESM*, vol. 4, p. 14). At the same time, he argued that the Russians, 'the youngest brothers of the European family, are obliged to do justice to everything that is good among our older brothers, obliged to understand the beauties of a civilization that is not our own [*nerodnoy*], yet accessible and sympathetic, like all that is genuinely human [*chelovechestvennoye*]' (*ibid.*, p. 8).

<sup>39</sup> *Id.*, *Vospominaniya o Mikhaile Ivanoviche Glinke*, ed. Vladimir Vasil'yevich Protopopov (Leningrad: Muzika, 1984), p. 18.

<sup>40</sup> Letter to Stasov, 27 October 1846; Vladimir Sergeevich Baskin, *A. N. Serov (Biograficheskiy ocherk)*, *Russkiye kompozitori 3* (Moscow: Jurgenson, 1890), p. 28. The offensive term is suppressed in *SESt*, vol. 2, p. 141.

<sup>41</sup> Abramovsky, who writes that it was 'no coincidence that the first harsh judgements of Meyerbeer appear in the very same letter of 15 March 1842', seems to suggest that the meeting with Glinka was indeed the decisive turning point (Abramovsky, *Opernoye tvorchestvo Aleksandra Nikolayevicha Serova*, p. 8).

<sup>42</sup> Letter to Stasov, 2 September 1841; *SESt*, vol. 1, p. 142. Emphasis original.

his Jewish roots in the early 1840s, Serov celebrated his descent of what he held to be ‘a most gifted and talented people’.<sup>43</sup> In private conversations, Serov liked to attribute his artistic abilities to his Jewish blood, but in his writing the composer-critic just as often tended to the opposite: he frequently expressed himself in overtly anti-Semitic terms in his correspondence and penned one of the most profoundly anti-Semitic sallies against Rubinstein in the contemporary press.<sup>44</sup> The composer’s ambivalent attitude towards the Jewish people is neatly expressed by his choice of words. The Russian language knows two equivalents for the word ‘Jew’: *yevrey* and *zhid*. The former was associated with the biblical characters of Serov’s opera, and like many of his contemporaries, the composer reserved it for positive or neutral expressions. For his derogatory statements about modern Jews like Rubinstein and Meyerbeer, he employed the pejorative *zhid*, which had acquired more and more of a negative connotation in the course of the nineteenth century.<sup>45</sup>

Serov’s attacks on Meyerbeer in the press were not explicitly anti-Semite, but they were relentless. He continuously questioned Meyerbeer’s sincerity, as in the letter discussed above, and claimed that ‘Meyerbeer does not write music, he really “composes” it, that is, he puts together, glues together various scraps’;<sup>46</sup> that Meyerbeer had ‘sacrificed the lofty goals of art for the amusement of the corrupted taste of the masses’ and had thus turned himself into a ‘virtuoso acrobat’;<sup>47</sup> that ‘whoever sincerely, really loves music—let’s

<sup>43</sup> Vladimir Vasil'yevich Stasov, ‘Iz vospominaniy “Uchilishche pravovedeniya sorok let tomu nazad”, 1836–1842’ (1880), in id., *Stat'i o muzike*, ed. Vladimir Vasil'yevich Protopopov, 5 vols., *Russkaya klassicheskaya muzikal'naya kritika* (Moscow: Muzika, 1974–1980), vol. 3, p. 29. Stasov thought it necessary to stress the good state of service of Serov’s grandfather (Hablitzl had been the vice-governor of Crimea and an important associate of Potyomkin) and added that Serov ‘did not have even a shade’ of the ‘bad tendencies’ of the Jewish character.

<sup>44</sup> See Marina Frolova-Walker, ‘The Disowning of Anton Rubinstein’, in Ernst Kuhn, Jascha Nemtsov and Andreas Wehrmeyer (eds.), *‘Samuel’ Goldenberg und ‘Schmuyle’: jüdisches und Antisemitisches in der russischen Musikkultur. Ein internationales Symposium*, *Studia Slavica Musicologica* 27 (Berlin: Kuhn, 2003), pp. 26–7.

<sup>45</sup> See John D. Klier, ‘*Zhid*: Biography of a Russian Epithet’, *Slavonic and East European Review* 60/1 (1982). In the 1880 edition of Vladimir Dahl’s dictionary, the only meaning of the word *zhid* given is that of a ‘miser’ (*skupoy, skryapa, koristniy skupets*). Only in later editions was it added explicitly that it was an insulting and ‘outdated’ alternative to *yevrey* (see Vladimir Ivanovich Dahl, *Tolkovoy slovar' zhivogo velikorusskago yazika*, ed. Ivan Aleksandrovich Baudouin de Courtenay, 3rd edn., 4 vols. [St Petersburg: M. O. Vol'f, 1903], vol. 1, p. 1315).

<sup>46</sup> Aleksandr Nikolayevich Serov, ‘Yeshchyo o Severnoy zvezde Meyerbera’ (1856), in *SESM*, vol. 2a, p. 177.

<sup>47</sup> Id., ‘Polemika: otvet Yu. K. Arnol'du’ (1856), in *SESM*, vol. 2a, p. 273. See also id., ‘Yeshchyo o Severnoy zvezde Meyerbera’, p. 180.

say that of Beethoven—cannot sincerely, really love Meyerbeer’;<sup>48</sup> and finally, that the conventional five-act French grand opera, with ‘its marvellous sets and machinery and the indispensable ballet’ was ‘a real five-headed monster, which must soon disappear from the face of the earth, like the plesiosaurs and pterodactyls’.<sup>49</sup> Serov surely saw the irony in the fact that his own opera would eventually have five acts: ‘five acts—*Grand opéra en forme en 5 actes, avec deux divertissements!*—according to the recipe of *Robert, La Juive, Les Huguenots!* Precisely: whatever you *mock* you will end up doing yourself!’<sup>50</sup> He was probably not aware of the even greater irony that between 1854 and 1858, Meyerbeer and Scribe had actually been working on a grand opera *Judith*—in three acts.<sup>51</sup>

It is important to note that Serov’s artistic views had not changed as much since the early 1840s as the fierceness of his attacks might suggest. He continued to value many of the qualities he had previously praised in Meyerbeer’s scores. His ambivalence was expressed most clearly in a letter to Stasov of 1846, in which he speculated that Glinka ‘probably never hated this [...] as I hate him now from the bottom of my heart (although I would be very pleased to rummage in his scores some day).’<sup>52</sup> Indeed, when Serov allowed himself to list Meyerbeer’s positive qualities in 1859, these turned out to be genuine merits and they were all very relevant to *Judith*. Like before, he maintained that ‘Meyerbeer excellently employed everything that existed before him’. He praised, amongst other things, Meyerbeer’s advances in the field of orchestration, and—significantly, as we shall see—thought that ‘the use of church forms’ gave some of Meyerbeer’s scenes ‘an unusual seriousness, even grandeur’.<sup>53</sup> Most importantly, Meyerbeer had lifted ‘the musical depiction of the epoch and location to a level much more significant than in *La Mulette [di Portici]*, [*Guillaume*] *Tell*, maybe even further than in Weber’s operas’. As I will show below, this aspect of Meyerbeer’s achievement was to be of particular importance for *Judith*.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 160.

<sup>49</sup> Franz Liszt, ‘*Robert Skriba i Meyerbera*’ (1856), trans. Aleksandr Nikolayevich Serov, in *SESM*, vol. 2a, 125*n*.

<sup>50</sup> Serov, ‘*Pis’ma k V. Zhukovoy*’, p. 70. Emphasis original.

<sup>51</sup> Robert Ignatius Letellier, *An Introduction to the Dramatic Works of Giacomo Meyerbeer: Operas, Ballets, Cantatas, Plays* (Hampshire: Aldershot, 2008), p. 160.

<sup>52</sup> Letter to Stasov, 21–28 March 1846; *SEST*, vol. 2, p. 68. The elided passage is obviously an insult censored by the editors.

<sup>53</sup> Serov, ‘*Opera i yeyo noveysheye napravleniye v Germanii*’, pp. 21–2.

### *Long-Buried Nationalities*

Biblical subjects were hardly fashionable in mid-nineteenth century opera. When Serov revealed he was working on a biblical subject, Dmitry Lobanov, one of his young admirers, remarked that it would be hard to get the audience interested in a subject from the Holy Script. In response, Serov showed Lobanov an engraving depicting Judith and Holofernes, and asked: 'do you really think, *carissimo discipule*, that there is no pleasure in resurrecting and seeing resurrected these perished and long-buried nationalities [*narodnosti*]?' Then the composer went over to his harmonium to play some of his ideas to Lobanov. The latter identified the music, as he had feared, as 'church style'. 'What is this, a mass?' he exclaimed. Serov, however, insisted that his work really was an opera, 'because Act III and Act IV will have different music; do you realize what a contrast this will produce?' Lobanov was struck by the music Serov had conceived for the Assyrians, and was soon convinced of the value of Serov's 'grandiose scenes of heathen and Hebrew life [*bit*] with all their staggering effects.'<sup>54</sup>

This recollection is telling as it suggests to what extent the musical characterization of the opera's two camps, the Hebrews and the Assyrians, was a central concern. Lobanov, in any case, was won over by the characterization of the Assyrians, not by any dramatic moment in the plot. Moreover, his quotation of Serov's words, if accurate, has the interesting implication that the portrayal of 'nationalities' took precedence over the portrayal of individual characters and dramatic development. Little wonder, then, that Serov's opera tended towards relatively static displays such as choruses, dances and diegetic songs, which made him seem closer to Meyerbeer than to Wagner, but which were the accepted means of characterizing a people.

Serov's general conception was much like that of Glinka in *A Life for the Tsar*: *Judith* also focused on two opposing groups, like Glinka's Poles and Russians, each with their own styles. And as Abram Gozenpud pointed out, there are some additional parallels: the first and last acts do little more than frame the action; one group (the Hebrews/Russians) is portrayed primarily by vocal means, with an important role for the chorus, whereas the other (the Assyrians/Poles) is depicted primarily by the orchestra, in particular by their dances; all the crucial events of the plot occur in the central acts; and the concluding scenes are grand epilogues, celebrating the victory in the manner

<sup>54</sup>Dmitry Ivanovich Lobanov, *Aleksandr Nikolayevich Serov i yego sovremenniki* (St Petersburg: tip. Departement udelov, 1889), pp. 22–3.

of an oratorio.<sup>55</sup> One could add to this the obvious point that both operas are about an invasion thwarted by the bravery of a single hero. Taruskin went so far as to characterize *Judith*'s scenario as a 'de-Russified *Life for the Tsar*'.<sup>56</sup> On the other hand, the scenario also has much in common with a later opera like Saint-Saëns's *Samson et Dalila* (1877). Especially to those familiar with Ralph Locke's discussion of the orientalism in this opera, it will appear on closer analysis that Serov's work is an interesting precursor to Saint-Saëns's.<sup>57</sup>

WHEN LOBANOV first heard Serov play sketches from the Assyrian music in *Judith*, it immediately made a profound impression:

I listened in raptures to the still clumsy, unpolished sketch of music, which carried me far beyond the borders of the new world, into that ancient, forgotten and lost world that is often called the decrepit, but sometimes [also] the mighty Orient. The type of music was so close to historical truth that it seemed to me as if there had been no other music in this age than that which I was listening to now.<sup>58</sup>

The oriental music Serov wrote for the Assyrians was among the prime attractions of the opera, as was attested by practically every review of it. Hence, *Judith* may be ranked among the more successful Russian instances of the trend of biblical orientalism. As a result of the tendency to view the orient as essentially unchanged or static, it had become more and more common in the visual arts to equate the world of the bible with the imagined Middle East, and to apply knowledge of contemporary Islamic culture as authenticating detail in depictions of more ancient times.<sup>59</sup> Serov regarded such touches of local colour as a great stride forward from the older mode of representation in which these characters were frequently depicted as if they were contemporary Westerners. In his writings, he made repeated reference to the French painter Horace Vernet (1789–1863), who had been a pioneer of biblical orientalism in

<sup>55</sup> Abram Akimovich Gozenpud, 'Opernoye tvorchestvo A. N. Serova', *Sovetskaya muzika*, 1971, no. 7, p. 94.

<sup>56</sup> Taruskin, *Opera and Drama in Russia*, p. 73n86.

<sup>57</sup> Ralph P. Locke, 'Constructing the Oriental "Other": Saint-Saëns's *Samson et Dalila*', *Cambridge Opera Journal* 3/3 (1991), pp. 261–302.

<sup>58</sup> Lobanov, *Aleksandr Nikolayevich Serov i yego sovremenniki*, p. 23.

<sup>59</sup> See Malcolm Warner, 'The Question of Faith: Orientalism, Christianity and Islam', in MaryAnne Stevens (ed.), *The Orientalists: Delacroix to Matisse. European Painters in North Africa and the Near East* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1984), pp. 32–9; Frederick N. Bohrer, 'Inventing Assyria: Exoticism and Reception in Nineteenth-Century England and France', in Steven W. Holloway (ed.), *Orientalism, Assyriology and the Bible* (Sheffield: Phoenix Press, 2007), pp. 228–32.

the 1830s, and it could be speculated that the image Serov showed to Lobanov was in fact Vernet's *Judith and Holofernes*. As early as 1841, Serov tried to convince Stasov of 'the superiority of the present trend of (historical) painting', praising in particular Vernet's *Rebecca at the Well* and *Judith and Holofernes*, which both represented the new trend of locating biblical subjects explicitly in the Middle East:

From the first glance you will be transported to sultry Palestine and to these remote times; all those people come to life before your eyes, and you do not doubt that *if* they ever existed, they would be just like that. And what is such a kind of *truth* if not the highest goal of art?<sup>60</sup>

Serov's praise for Vernet's supposed realism and faithfulness in details served as part of a passionate defence of Meyerbeerian opera. Although Meyerbeer would soon be discarded, Serov's contempt for 'the previous reign of anachronisms and conventional, fashionable dresses or routine draping' and his praise for the new 'striving towards historical truth, towards faithfulness in costumes and local colour' would continue unabated.<sup>61</sup>

The ancient Assyrians were doubly removed from nineteenth-century Europeans. For ages, everything that was known about ancient Assyria and Babylonia had come from the sources of its historical antagonists: the Bible and the accounts of classical antiquity. Consequently, they were distinguished from other orientals, if at all, primarily because their negative properties were further emphasized. In the words of Frederick Bohrer, an art historian specialized in the subject, 'Mesopotamia was taken as a cautionary tale, a site of sloth, sin, violence, and transgression: the West's first great "Other".'<sup>62</sup> The 1840s and 50s, however, had seen the first major archaeological discoveries of the Assyrian civilization, as well as the deciphering of their cuneiform script. *Nineveh and its Remains* (1849), the report of archaeologist Austen Henry Layard on his discovery of the ancient Assyrian capital, became one of the great bestsellers of its time, and the fascination for the Assyrian culture

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<sup>60</sup> Letter to Stasov, 21 April 1841; SESt, vol. 1, p. 118. For later references to Vernet in Serov's writings as a representative of orientalism and local colour, see Serov, '*Rusalka*', pp. 68–9; and id., 'Obozreniye kontsertov za proshlyu nedelyu' (1856), in SESt, vol. 2a, p. 211.

<sup>61</sup> Id., 'Nibelungov persten': muzikal'no-dramaticheskaya poema Rikharda Vagnera (Ocherk, posvyashchayemiy gonitelyam Vagnera kak poeta)' (1863), in SESt, vol. 6, p. 40.

<sup>62</sup> Bohrer, 'Inventing Assyria', p. 226. In this article, Bohrer discusses amongst other things, Eugène Delacroix's famous painting *The Death of Sardanapalus* (1827), which is a perfect illustration of Assyria as a site of violence, lust, and tyranny (ibid., pp. 230–4).

could surely add to the appeal of a subject like *Judith*.<sup>63</sup> Serov was well aware of this. Shortly before the premiere of his opera, he hailed the discoveries of ‘the Assyrian culture with its astounding monuments of Nineveh’ in an essay on Wagner’s *Ring*—for lack of another occasion—and rejoiced that such archaeological findings could help to improve artistic representations. The composer argued that ‘the study of the Orient in all its uniqueness and its millennial immobility has shed new light on the monuments of Hebrew literature’, making ‘the biblical stories so familiar to everybody’ appear ‘before the poet as something new and eternally beautiful in its undistorted form.’<sup>64</sup> The seeming contradiction in valuing the new and specific knowledge of this lost civilization while maintaining that nothing had changed in the Orient, was apparently lost on him.

All the above remarks about historical truth notwithstanding, Serov’s portrayal of the Assyrians was of course, more than anything else, an orientalist fantasy, especially in his music, since there were no historical sources whatsoever regarding the music culture of the Assyrians. It was as Laroche recognized in a review of Anton Rubinstein’s later biblical work *Der Thurm zu Babel*: ‘In what, then, does Serov’s masterly characterization of the Assyrian people consist? Obviously in one thing only: the composer has successfully reproduced *our* subjective idea of the Assyrians.’<sup>65</sup>

Musically, Serov drew on existing tropes of a generalized orient, and he must have felt this to be wholly justified, for he was convinced that there was little difference between various non-Western musics. Serov argued in one of his reviews that the similarity between two melodies in Glinka’s *Ruslan* and Félicien David’s *Le Désert* (1844)—which then represented the state-of-the-art of French musical depictions of the orient—demonstrated ‘to what

<sup>63</sup> An earlier response to this fresh interest in the Assyrians may have been Julio Alary’s *Sardanapale* (1852), an Italian opera based on Byron, premiered at the St Petersburg Bol’shoy theatre at Giovanni Mario’s benefit performance (Grigory Borisovich Bernandt, *Slovar’ oper* [Moscow: Sovetskiy Kompozitor, 1962], pp. 259–60). In a similar way Méhul’s *Joseph* had profited from the—much stronger—craze for Egyptian antiquities following Napoleon’s campaign there (M. Elizabeth C. Bartlet, ‘Joseph’, in Stanley Sadie [ed.], *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, 4 vols. [London: Macmillan, 1992], vol. 2, p. 920).

<sup>64</sup> Serov, ‘Nibelungov persten’, p. 40.

<sup>65</sup> Herman Avgustovich Laroche, ‘Bibliografiya. Sochineniya A. G. Rubinshteyna. [...] iv. *Der Thurm zu Babel*. Geistliche Oper in einem Aufzuge.’ (1873–1874), in id., *Muzikal’no-kriticheskiye stat’i* (St Petersburg: Bessel, 1894), p. 120. Laroche even held that ‘genuine historical and geographical melodies may well turn out to be aesthetically false’, i. e. they might not suit the preconceptions of the listeners and are therefore less effective (p. 121). See Richard Taruskin, *Defining Russia Musically: Historical and Hermeneutical Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), pp. 156–8, for a discussion of ‘verisimilitude’ and ‘artistic truth’ in orientalism.

extent oriental melodies are almost or wholly the same in the entire Orient': 'One composer recorded this motif from nature [!], in Egypt, while the other received it from the Caucasus.'<sup>66</sup>

As regards oriental music in Russia in the 1860s, Glinka's *Ruslan and Lyudmila* was the score to beat. To his loyal supporter and benefactress Mariya Mavromikhali—who was of Greek descent and therefore taken to have special insight in these matters—Serov wrote the following about one of the first numbers written for the opera, the Chorus of Odalisques: 'As an oriental woman, you will appreciate better than others the local colour I placed in these few and seemingly simple notes. Others try to convince me that this is more "harem-like" than all the oriental in *Ruslan*.'<sup>67</sup> Stasov, on the other hand, went out of his way to explain to Balakirev why Holofernes' March was less genuinely oriental than—and therefore inferior to—Glinka's March of Chernomor.<sup>68</sup>

In *Judith*, the Assyrians are marked as orientals and distinguished from the Israelites by several musical means, which stand out most in the many decorative numbers Serov inserted in Acts III and IV. The most prominent is surely the use of the flattened sixth degree in the major mode. It should be noted that, strictly speaking, this flattened sixth is not the exclusive property of the Assyrians, but in the Hebrew music it generally occurs as part of cadential formulas, whereas in the Assyrian music it is often present as a constitutive element of the themes and has a propensity to form more unusual augmented and half-diminished harmonies (see Ex. 13).

We also find this flattened sixth in the Chorus of Odalisques and the Dance of the Two Almahs (see Exx. 14 and 15; note its expressive use in m. 31 of Ex. 14). These two pieces are of particular interest: they form a counterpart to the brutality and wild feasting of Holofernes and his men, and introduce an element of languor and eroticism. They are part of a particular orientalist trope, that of the seductive East, and in these two numbers—especially the latter—we encounter the whole panoply of devices listed by Taruskin in his essay on Russian orientalism: the use of a pedal (initially, at least); the timbre of the cor anglais (the melody shown in Ex. 14 is first introduced by this instrument); the little embellishments or melismas in the melody, with the particularly telling use of chromaticism and syncopation in Ex. 15; gentle

<sup>66</sup> Serov, 'Obozreniye kontsertov za proshlyuyu nedelyu', p. 210.

<sup>67</sup> Letter to Mavromikhali, 10 September 1861; id., 'Ocherki o muzike v pis'makh k Dm. i V. V. Stasovim i M. P. Anastas'yevoy', vol. 21, p. 164.

<sup>68</sup> Letter to Balakirev, 27 July–15 August 1863; Stasov and Balakirev, *Perepiska*, vol. 1, pp. 216–8.

a) Chorus of Odalisques and Dances (first dance), Act III, mm. 66–69

*Allegro vivace*

b) Holofernes' March, Act III, no. 12

*Tempo di marcia*

c) The orgy motif in Act IV, no. 16, mm. 38–39.

*Allegro assai, con molto fuoco*

d) Bacchanalian Dance of the Odalisques, Act IV, no. 17a, mm. 5–8.

[Moderato]

Ex. 13: The flattened sixth degree in *Judith's* Assyrian music.

[Andante grazioso]  
1ST ODALISQUE:

Na re - ke na Ye - fra - te go-rya - cho soln-tse

hp.

29 gre-yet! Chud-niy kray! Net stra - ni nam mi - ley Va - vi - lo - na!

Ex. 14: Chorus of Odalisques, Act 3, no. 10, mm. 25–33.

undulations in the accompaniment (esp. Ex. 14); and a middle voice moving chromatically from  $\hat{5}$  to  $\hat{6}$  to  $\hat{6}$  and back.<sup>69</sup> And if this music did not work its seductive charms, the odalisques spell out with unusual explicitness the delights they have on offer: ‘the oriental night breathes desire [*nega*] [...] My dear! Come, the night is dark, I am alone, a feast awaits you under the golden tent.’

It is important to note that the pious Judith displays none of the alluring charm of Holofernes’ odalisques and almahs. Even though it is one of the basic facts of the story that it is she who does the seducing, she captivates the Assyrian men by her looks and good character alone. (Tellingly, Holofernes does engage in the sensuous music of his female entourage: once Judith

<sup>69</sup> Taruskin, ‘Entoiling the Falconet’ in Taruskin, *Defining Russia Musically*, pp. 152–85. Taruskin did not draw on *Judith* in this essay because ‘biblical orientalism, while very prominent and telling, [is] not particularly relevant to *Prince Igor*’ (ibid., p. 155). Several authors have suggested, however, that Serov’s biblical orientalism was in fact an important step in the development between *Ruslan* and *Prince Igor*. See e. g. Gozenpud, ‘Opernoye tvorchestvo A. N. Serova’, p. 95; and Abramovsky, *Opernoye tvorchestvo Aleksandra Nikolayevicha Serova*, p. 73 for the possible influences of Serov on *Prince Igor*. Rimsky-Korsakov also took the music for the Assyrians in *Judith* for the ‘prototype’—albeit an inferior one—of Borodin’s Polovtsian music (see *Reminiscences of Rimsky-Korsakov*, ed. and trans. Florence Jonas [New York: Columbia University Press, 1985], p. 417 [23 September 1907]).

[Andante quasi Allegro]

Ex. 15: Dance of the Two Almahs, Act 4, no. 17b, mm. 3-9.

promises to stay with him, the enebriated general is unable to hide his oriental passions and cites the melody of the almahs.) It is because the protagonist is a woman—whose actions run counter to operatic role models, or indeed, any traditional female role model—that *Judith* is a remarkable exception among other orientalist plots. Unlike the usual male heroes, as in *Ruslan* and many other operas,<sup>70</sup> she cannot be tempted by the alluring oriental women she encounters in her quest.

The biblical account, of course, also does not offer much of a pretext for Holofernes to sport a harem and belly-dancers with his field army, but there are various other ways to account for the representation of the Assyrians in *Judith*. First, it suited existing stereotypes and preconceptions about orientals and the Assyrians in particular. By emphasizing their debauchery in addition to their cruelty, the Assyrians were, like other orientals, ‘marked for justified conquest’.<sup>71</sup> This, of course, had various cultural and political implications for the audience’s relation vis-à-vis contemporary ‘orientals’, but it served a dramatic point, too. Stressing the depravity of the Assyrians helped to justify

<sup>70</sup> See Locke, ‘Constructing the Oriental “Other”’, p. 263, for a sketch of the ‘paradigmatic plot’ of orientalist opera.

<sup>71</sup> Taruskin, *Defining Russia Musically*, p. 176.

Judith's actions, for killing the enemy general while he is sleeping it off might not have been considered a particularly noble deed if the adversary had been more respectable. Finally, one could argue that the odalisques and almahs were there simply for the pleasure of the contemporary Russian audience, who not only had a fascination for the Near-East, but who would also allow such sensuousness only in oriental characters.<sup>72</sup> The score, therefore, reproduced a familiar orientalist ambivalence: while it is clear that the sympathy of the viewers should go to the Hebrews, the music of the Assyrians may have been the more alluring. In any case, Serov seems to have succeeded in two important aims: transporting the listener to the Orient where the story was supposed to have taken place, and giving a distinct characterization of one of the two main groups of his opera.

THE ENTIRE DRAMATURGY of *Judith* revolves around the contrast between the Hebrews and the Assyrians. This was reflected not only in the music, but in the make-up and costumes as well. 'Why have they made [Holofernes] a mulatto?' one critical reviewer wondered after the premiere. 'If the Hebrews are white, then their neighbours the Assyrians were, too.'<sup>73</sup> Like Vernet's painting of *Judith and Holofernes*, Serov's opera appears to avoid the most radical conclusion of biblical orientalism: namely that, since the biblical Israelites, too, lived in 'sultry Palestine', they would have to be no less oriental than their enemies.

For the musical portrayal of the Hebrews, particularly the extended choruses of Acts I and V, Serov drew on the long tradition of sacred choral music

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<sup>72</sup> The women also participated in some of the wild dances, and this was cause for some controversy, in particular the solo part for Holofernes' favourite, an 'Ethiopian or negro' performed by the dancer Zhebelyova. Serov's wife Valentina thought that her dark make-up 'harmonized captivatingly with the movements full of life and fire' (Valentina Semyonovna Serova, 'Yubileyniy god A. N. Serova', *Bayan*, 15 Jan. 1889, no. 2, p. 11). Lobanov also seemed to enjoy the 'whirlwind of furious, passionate dances' and Zhebelyova's 'burning hot caresses and the wild dance with the tambourine' (Dmitry Ivanovich Lobanov, 'Yudif', opera A. N. Serova', *Illyustratsiya*, 30 May–13 June 1863, no. 272, p. 339). A more conservative standpoint was represented by Feofil Tolstoy, who stated that 'of course, it is much more pleasing for the eyes to see a white dancer'. When in later performances the dark tights and make-up were removed, this only seemed to make things worse, because 'the wild movements proper to a negro, such as tapping a tambourine and other things with the knees and elbows, do not correspond with the gestures everyone has the right to expect from a gracious woman' ('Rostislav' [Feofil Matveyevich Tolstoy], 'Yudif', opera v pyati aktakh, soch. g Serova', *Severnaya pchela*, 5–12 June 1863, no. 154, p. 706).

<sup>73</sup> [Anon.], 'Opera *Yudif*', muzika Serova', *Illyustrirovanniy listok*, 8/72 (9 June 1863), pp. 520.

ranging from Handel to Mendelssohn.<sup>74</sup> This was a conventional approach: previous operas on biblical subjects such as *Joseph*, *Mosè*, and *Nabucco* also referred to traditions of sacred music through their use of counterpoint or references to existing religious works, even if this was—as in the case of *Nabucco*—little more than a polite nod in that direction.<sup>75</sup> Since the location is no longer the defining factor for the musical style, it might be useful to introduce the concept of ‘group colour’ instead: a mode of writing, recognizable through a range of stylistic devices—not necessarily applied pervasively—used to identify and characterize a certain group within the drama.<sup>76</sup>

In an essay devoted to the subject of the portrayal of Jews (both biblical and modern) by nineteenth-century Russian composers, many of whom, like Serov, were prone to anti-Semitism, Taruskin concludes that identification with a Jewish character or persona in their settings generally ‘inhabited whatever urge [composers] may have felt to exoticize them’. Moreover, since the Assyrians in *Judith* already represented the ‘exotic’ element of the score, ‘the Hebrews became the ‘self’ in the self/other dichotomy, and their style remained unmarked (save perhaps by a mild Mendelssohnian Protestantism)’.<sup>77</sup>

This reasoning has its merits: Judith, as the protagonist of the story, has the main claim on the audience’s sympathy and identification; it is she, too, who makes the most extensive use of conventionally operatic, and therefore, presumably ‘unmarked’ arioso. The notion of an ‘unmarked’ music, however, may be problematic if taken too literally, because the significance of stylistic means is very dependent on the perception of the audience and the context within the opera, oeuvre, or genre. Serov’s music for the Hebrews, with its many potential associations with the archaic, the serious, or the religious, is far from such connotative neutrality. Feofil Tolstoy, for one, thought that Act I as a whole was ‘vividly marked by local colour.’<sup>78</sup> Lobanov wrote that it was

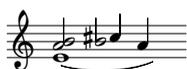
<sup>74</sup> See Abramovsky, *Opernoye tvorchestvo Aleksandra Nikolayevicha Serova*, pp. 63–6, who discusses passages from Handel’s *Messiah* and *Judas Maccabaeus*, Bach’s Mass in B minor, and Mozart’s and Cherubini’s Requiems as possible prototypes.

<sup>75</sup> See Bartlet, ‘Joseph’, p. 921; Richard Osborne, ‘Mosè in Egitto’, in Sadie (ed.), *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, vol. 3, p. 479; Julian Budden, *The Operas of Verdi*, 3 vols. (London: Cassell, 1973), vol. 1, p. 100.

<sup>76</sup> In the nineteenth century, the term ‘local colour’ was generally used indiscriminately for the characterization of place, time, or groups onstage.

<sup>77</sup> Richard Taruskin, ‘*Yevreyi and Zhidy: A Memoir, A Survey, and a Plea*’ (2005), in id., *On Russian Music* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), pp. 197, 198. See also id., ‘Christian Themes in Russian Opera: A Millennial Essay’, *Cambridge Opera Journal* 2/1 (1990), p. 86, where it is already argued that the music of Serov’s Hebrews ‘sounds like everybody else’s Christians, because the composer had to reserve the usual Jewish colours for the Assyrians’.

<sup>78</sup> ‘Rostislav’ [Feofil Matveyevich Tolstoy], ‘Neskol’ko slov o pervoy predstavlenii operi



Ex. 16: Musorgsky's 'organ seconds', as in his manuscript.

hard to decide 'which of the two nationalities [Serov] presents on the stage captured his imagination more': the Assyrians or 'the *Hebrews*, with their codex of religious laws that has remained unchanged over the centuries'.<sup>79</sup> Not only were the styles Serov applied to the Hebrews perceived as a distinctive colouring; as Lobanov's remark shows, it could also be considered very suitable as a national characterization.

It was a relatively safe choice, based on the conventional reading of the Old Testament as a prefiguration of Christianity and of Western civilization. This reading, which had informed the Westernized portrayals of Judith and other Old Testamentary Hebrews in pre-Romantic paintings, encouraged composers to continue the use of Western or Christian idioms for the biblical Israelites. With regard to *Samson et Dalila*, which also has its share of fugal and modal writing for the Hebrews, Ralph Locke has argued that this adherence to tradition was conditioned by more than just stylistic convention: 'given the increasingly anti-Semitic outlook of educated Europeans in the late nineteenth century, it may be that an Old Testament story could *only* be acceptable if presented in a Christian, i. e. "universal", light'.<sup>80</sup>

Not everyone agreed with Tolstoy and Lobanov on the appropriateness of Serov's characterization, however. Musorgsky even argued squarely against the reasoning suggested by Locke. 'It is time to stop turning the Hebrews into Christians or to *catholicize* them', he proclaimed in the lengthy review of *Judith* he sent to Balakirev. He complained maliciously about *Judith's* 'musical anachronisms', identifying what he called 'catholic organ seconds' (see Ex. 16)—which are actually not easy to locate in Serov's score—arguing that 'one should not *thrust* [*napikhivat*'] these sweet seconds upon Hebrew spiritualism, because in the way they have been used by Serov they carry the exclusive physiognomy of chorale, organ parts. Mendelssohn was satisfied with the catholic chorale in *Athalie* ("Natalka")—but that is Mendelssohn, and he is a slave to routine, but Serov, the worshipper of *Zukunft's Musik* [sic],

*Yudif'*, *Severnaya pchela*, 19 May 1863, no. 131, p. 525.

<sup>79</sup> Lobanov, 'Yudif', opera A. N. Serova', no. 272, p. 339. Emphasis original.

<sup>80</sup> Locke, 'Constructing the Oriental "Other"', p. 274.

also went there—*why?*<sup>81</sup> The increasingly strict demands for the application of characteristic and verisimilar group colour, together with Musorgsky's views on the nature of the Hebrews,<sup>82</sup> put the time-honoured traditions of portraying Old Testamentary characters under pressure. Regardless of its validity, Locke's argument for adhering to these traditions did not make a biblical work based on them any less vulnerable to criticism.

It seems that the Kuchka as a whole agreed that the Hebrews were supposed to have a distinct characterization. César Cui's 1865 review of *Judith* provided another interesting testimony. Cui claimed that some of the archaic style of Serov's Hebrews derived from Glinka's so-called *Hebrew Song* (*Yevreyskaya pesnya*), a popular recital piece which was originally part of his incidental music to Nestor Kukul'nik's *Prince Kholm'sky*.<sup>83</sup> He may have taken this suggestion from Stasov, for whom the very fact that Avra's song (Act II, no. 6) was marked by Serov as a 'Hebrew battle song' was enough reason to suggest a parallel with Glinka.<sup>84</sup> Like Musorgsky, Cui objected to the alleged imitation of organ music, but he took Stasov's suggestion in earnest, and claimed that Serov had drawn from the *Hebrew Song* in order 'to outline more graphically the national identities of the Hebrews and Babylonians'.<sup>85</sup>

In Kukul'nik's historical drama, this rather militant song about the 'day of return' was performed by the innocent Jewish girl Rakhil, who, along with the Russian population of Pskov, was facing the threat of the Livonian Knights. Glinka set it to music using an almost purely diatonic harmony without a leading tone, which of course perfectly matched Serov's intention to write

<sup>81</sup> Letter to Balakirev, 10 June 1863; Musorgsky, *Pis'ma*, p. 50. Emphasis original.

<sup>82</sup> Musorgsky's letter contains more than a hint of anti-Semitism, referring to Serov's Hebrews as 'foxes' (*stuchki*) and complaining that 'Piter's eminent Jews [rendered *yevrei* by the Soviet editors] Leszetycki, Jacob Rubinstein and co. are in raptures' (*ibid.*, p. 50). Teodor Leszetycki (1830–1915) was a Polish pianist teaching at the St Petersburg Conservatory; 'Jacob' Rubinstein is of course none other than Anton Grigor'yevich.

<sup>83</sup> César Antonovich Cui, 'Muzikal'naya letopis'. *Yudif'* g. Serova [...] (1865), in *id.*, *Muzikal'no-kriticheskiye stat'i*, ed. Andrey Nikolayevich Rimsky-Korsakov (Petrograd: Muzikal'niy sovremennik, 1918), vol. 1, p. 185; trans. James Stuart Campbell (ed.), *Russians on Russian Music, 1830–1880: An Anthology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) (henceforth cited as RRM1), pp. 147–8.

<sup>84</sup> 'Here you have the beginning of the aria of the maid Avra', Stasov wrote sarcastically to Balakirev, 'her Hebrew song, which of course, we are obliged to take for a highly talented counterpart to Rakhil's song "S gornikh stran"' (letter to Balakirev, 27 July–15 August 1863; Stasov and Balakirev, *Perepiska*, vol. 1, p. 215).

<sup>85</sup> Cui, 'Yudif'', p. 185; trans. RRM1, p. 147. The observations about the *Hebrew Song* have continued to resurface in later commentaries on *Judith*. In Gozenpud, *Russkiy operniy teatr XIX-go veka*, vol. 2, p. 71, remarkably, it is mentioned as part of 'the Russian tradition in the portrayal of the Orient'.

**Allegro moderato**

S gor-nikh stran pal tu-man na do - li - ni

5 i po-kril ryad mo-gil Pa - le - sti - ni. Prakh ot-tsov zhdyot ve-kov

8 ob - nov - len' - ya, no - chi ten' sme - nit den' voz - vra - shchen' - ya!

Ex. 17: Glinka, *Hebrew Song*, mm. 1–11.

in ‘church style’. Glinka’s emphasis on relatively unusual combinations such as the third degree (C major) and the minor dominant (E minor), however, do give the song a distinctive sound (see Ex. 17). It is clear why Cui drew the parallel with *Judith*, for these features are indeed also present in the two passages he pointed out in Achior’s narrative (Act I, no. 3) and Avra’s song (Act II, no. 6). In the former (Ex. 18a), the similarity may simply be ascribed to Serov’s modal chorale writing;<sup>86</sup> in the latter the semblance to Glinka’s song is more striking because it involves practically the same chords, C major,

<sup>86</sup> Laroche considered this passage an ‘imitation of the so-called ‘strict style’ (Herman Avgustovich Laroche, ‘Muzikal’niye ocherki. *Yudif*’, opera v pyati deystviyakh. Slova i muzika A. N. Serova (benefis g-zhi Abarinovoy, 8-go noyabrya)’, *Golos*, 13 Nov. 1874, no. 314, p. 2).

## a) Achior's narrative, Act I, no. 3, mm. 96–122.

ACHIOR: **[Andante tranquillo]**

Ikh Bog ne - zrim dlya smert - nikh, Tvo - rets i Tsar' ze - mli,

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O - ni na - rod iz - bran - niy, po - kor - niy lish' Ye - mu.

## b) Avra's 'Hebrew battle song', Act II, no. 6, mm. 90–93.

AVRA: **ff [Allegro]**

i ge - ro - yev I - u - de - i

Ex. 18: Characterization of the Hebrews in *Judith*.

E minor and A minor, and a similar structure: a sequence built on alternating chords (Ex. 18b). Like Avra's song, Achior's words in the relevant passage are significant in the definition of the Hebrew identity in the opera: 'Their God is invisible to mortals, the Creator and Lord of the world. They are the chosen people, obedient to Him alone.'<sup>87</sup>

The very assumption of Stasov and Cui that the model for Serov's portrayal of the biblical people of Israel would have to be found in another

<sup>87</sup> This melody and harmony are repeated by Judith in Act III, no. 14, when she recounts Achior's arrival in Bethulia, with his words: 'Your sword would not strike the Hebrew people, if Israel had remained true to Jehova.'

portrayal of Jews in a ‘Hebrew song’—and particularly one with a medieval, i. e. non-biblical setting—is significant. It shows—like Musorgsky’s complaints discussed above—that the biblical Hebrews were expected to be endowed with a distinct, characteristic style consistent with other portrayals of this ethnic or religious group. Serov did actually offer a characterization that went beyond a more generalized religiosity or archaism in Avra’s song, which happens to be the only piece of diegetic music for the Hebrews and is therefore of special significance for their group colour. It is sung at Judith’s request, and its text may be regarded as a paraphrase of the eulogy of Yael in the biblical Song of Deborah.<sup>88</sup> Compared to the other Hebrew music, the song stands out as an essay of primitivism: its melody is curiously angular and crude, the accompaniment is often in unison with the melody, and there is a bold juxtaposition of Phrygian and major modes (see Ex. 19). In the introductory opening motive (mm. 59–62), in which the tonic is firmly established by a pedal, the alterations suggest what is called the Phrygian dominant mode—a mode with a flattened second and sixth, but a major third (note that this scale combined the major third with flattened sixth, which is elsewhere the mark of the Assyrians).<sup>89</sup> These alterations suddenly give way to a plain E major in m. 63. Later on, there is an equally remarkable switch from E major to the Phrygian mode (or C major, depending on where one perceives the tonic) at m. 87, and back again at m. 93.

Serov’s characterization in Avra’s song, then, goes well beyond anything that could reasonably be called ‘church style’, and is certainly a far cry from ‘mild Mendelssohnian protestantism’. Feofil Tolstoy wrote that ‘the course of harmony, the orchestration, and even the very idea of this legend is extremely peculiar’.<sup>90</sup> Lobanov thought its ‘original design and capricious melody’ were ‘really framed by some ancient, defunct nationality [*otzhivshaya narodnost’*]’.<sup>91</sup> A later reviewer listed Avra’s song among the ‘pages of oriental music’ and ascribed to her the same ‘savage vigour’ as to Holofernes.<sup>92</sup> But, presumably because it was so idiosyncratic, several reviewers were inclined to see this

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<sup>88</sup> Book of Judges 5. Yael, it may be worth reminding, was Judith’s forerunner in many respects: she drove a pin through the head of the enemy captain Sisera while he was asleep in her tent.

<sup>89</sup> The Phrygian dominant mode, incidentally, is also known as the ‘Jewish’ or *Ahava Rabbah* scale for its use in Jewish liturgy; I have no evidence, however, that the mode as such carried any special significance for Serov or his Russian contemporaries.

<sup>90</sup> Tolstoy, ‘*Yudif’*’, no. 149, p. 685.

<sup>91</sup> Lobanov, ‘*Yudif’*’, opera A. N. Serova’, no. 271, p. 327.

<sup>92</sup> ‘V. P.’ [Platon L’vovich Vaksel], ‘Chronique musicale. Opéra-russe: Reprise de la *Judith* de Sérov [...]’, *Journal de St-Petersbourg*, 27 Oct. 1889, no. 286, p. 1.

**Allegro**  
*War song of the Hebrews*

64 *pesante* *sfz* *riten.*

70 *AVRA:* *f*  
 Go - ri, de - bri i do - li - ni Za - vu - lo - na torzhestvom o - gla - sheni; go - ri,

77  
 de - bri i do - li - ni Za - vu - lo - na torzhestvom o - gla - sheni, torzhestvom o -

Ex. 19: First strophe of Avra's 'Hebrew War Song', Act II, no. 6, mm. 59–106.

83

gla-sheni! Vsyo Ya - i - li sla - vit im - ya, sla - vit im - ya

89

*ff*

i ge - ro - yev I - u - de - i sla - vyat,

*ff*

94

sla - vyat ne - bo i zem - lya,

100

slavyat ne-bo i zem - lya!

Ex. 19 (Continued).

song as ‘characteristic’; that is, as typical rather than as the exception. Laroche argued that Avra represented ‘the *mass* of Hebrew women with their naive faith, fanaticism, love for the fatherland and disgust for the *foul* heathens’.<sup>93</sup> It was the result of this and other experimental passages in the score, rather than the Mendelssohnian style, that the conservative reviewer of the journal *Illyustrirovanniy listok* complained: ‘Maybe Mr Serov did truthfully express the musicality of the Jews 600 years BC, but if that is the case we would rather hear something that is not true but good.’<sup>94</sup>

It may be concluded that group colour was a vital issue in both the composition and the reception of the opera. Serov’s pious, ancient Hebrews, while not as exotic as the Assyrians, did receive a characterization as a group, both through the use of ‘church style’ and through the more idiosyncratic traits of Avra’s song. The main bone of contention among the critics was whether Serov’s choices were appropriate or not; the premise that these geographically and temporally distant peoples required a characteristic musical style suited to their identity appears to have been virtually undisputed. The question remained whether this demand for group colour, which itself was rooted in the belief in the distinctive character of nations, could be combined with the nationalist demand for a distinctive Russian style of composition.

### ‘*Judith*’ and Russianness

The fate of *Judith* in Moscow was not as happy as it was in St Petersburg. When it was finally performed on 15 September 1865, after the opera had been performed with success in St Petersburg for more than two years, the Moscow production was widely considered a failure. ‘Poor *Judith* fell through before the Muscovites!’ Serov wrote to Mavromikhali. ‘They did not understand anything of the opera. Many ascribe this fiasco to the fact that the opera was staged without me (in the fall I was occupied in Petersburg with the staging of *Rogneda*), but I ascribe it directly to the opera’s seriousness and Moscow’s lack of development in this regard.’<sup>95</sup>

In the first negative Moscow reviews, *Judith* was described as an imitation of Wagner; it was tiring, and lacking in melody.<sup>96</sup> The complaint that

<sup>93</sup> Laroche, ‘Muzikal’niye ocherki. *Yudif*’, opera v pyati deystviyakh. Slova i muzika A. N. Serova (benefis g-zhi Abarinovoy, 8-go noyabrya), p. 2. Emphasis original.

<sup>94</sup> [Anon.], ‘Opera *Yudif*’, muzika Serova’, *Illyustrirovanniy listok*, 8/71 (2 June 1863), p. 511.

<sup>95</sup> Letter to Mavromikhali, 11 January–1 February 1866; Serov, ‘Ocherki o muzike v pis’makh k Dm. i V. V. Stasovim i M. P. Anastas’yevoy’, vol. 21, p. 175.

<sup>96</sup> See e. g. Erlanger, ‘*Yudif*’, opera Serova’, no. 113, p. 3; no. 114, p. 3.

appeared in the *Sovremennaya letopis'*, a supplement to the influential newspaper *Moskovskiye vedomosti*, was surely the most remarkable: 'This Russian opera by a Russian composer did not bring forth any Russian sounds, as we are used to from, for example, the immortal works of our Glinka.'<sup>97</sup> This phrase has often been quoted as an object of ridicule. I would argue, however, that given the confusion and disagreement *Judith* raised, it is of too much interest to discard it straight away. This remark illustrates how, in certain quarters at least, the issue of *Judith*'s Russianness did matter.

THE REVIEW in the *Sovremennaya letopis'* was written by a certain 'Ts—v', who can be identified as Prince Nikolay Tsertelev (1790–1869), an ethnographer who earned a modest place in history for being the first to publish a collection of Ukrainian folk songs in 1819.<sup>98</sup> Being involved in this Herderian project, Tsertelev had already expounded in the 1820s that Russian writers should pay less attention to foreign literature and more to native folk songs, since 'folk song contains many traits of that originality that distinguishes the poetry of one nation from another' and because 'a Russian has to be a *Russian* writer'.<sup>99</sup> It seems that his remark about the lack of Russianness in *Judith* was at least partly prompted by the supposed influence of Wagner, for it was immediately followed by the observation that 'from the first notes of the overture until the last notes of the finale, we heard as it were excerpts from *Tannhäuser*, *Lohengrin*, etc.'<sup>100</sup> The remark formed a central part of his criticism, for in his conclusion, Tsertelev returned to the point that 'being a learned musician is still not enough to write an opera; [...] the audience did not at all

<sup>97</sup> 'K. Ts—v' [Nikolay Aleksandrovich Tsertelev], 'Dva slova po povodu predstavleniya *Yudifi*', *Sovremennaya letopis'*, Sept. 1865, no. 35, p. 10.

<sup>98</sup> The article was signed as 'K. Ts—v'. The author is identified in Odoyevsky's diaries as 'Tsertelev'; Marina Rakhmanova and Ol'ga Kuzina, the editors of these diaries, have consequently made the attribution to Nikolay Andreyevich (Vladimir Fyodorovich Odoyevsky, *Dnevnik, perepiska, material'i: k 200-letiyu so dnya rozhdeniya*, ed. Marina Pavlovna Rakhmanova [Moscow: Gosudarstvenniy tsentral'niy muzey muzikal'noy kul'turi im. M. I. Glinki, 2005], pp. 148, 282n353). The 'K.' in the signature refers to Tsertelev's title of prince (*knyaz'*), which was not uncommon; Odoyevsky, for example, occasionally signed his articles as 'K. V. F. O—iy' or 'K. V. O.' Abramovsky has identified the author as 'D. Tsertelev' (Abramovsky, *Opernoye tvorchestvo Aleksandra Nikolayevicha Serova*, p. 55); if this is meant to refer to Nikolay Andreyevich's son, the poet and philosopher Dmitry Nikolayevich, it is clearly a mistake, since he was only 13 years old when this article appeared.

<sup>99</sup> *Knyaz'* Tsertelev [Nikolay Aleksandrovich Tsertelev], 'O narodnikh stikhotvorennykh (pis'mo k g-nu Maksimovichu)', *Vestnik Yevropi*, June 1827, no. 12, pp. 272–3. Emphasis added. The relevant passage is cited in Aleksandr Nikolayevich Pipin, *Istoriya russkoy étnografii*, 4 vols. (St Petersburg: tip. M. M. Stasyulevich, 1890–1892), vol. 3, p. 15.

<sup>100</sup> Tsertelev, 'Dva slova po povodu predstavleniya *Yudifi*', p. 10.

acknowledge it as a *Russian* opera just because of its Russian libretto'.<sup>101</sup> If these complaints lead one to assume that this critic simply preferred to see native Russian things above all else, this is only half a truth: he argued that 'given the opera's limited success, one can only regret the sum spent on it, especially if one takes into account that with only a little extra one might have staged Meyerbeer's *L'Africaine*, about which neither the audience, nor the theatre administration would have anything to regret.'<sup>102</sup> This reasoning suggests a double standard: Russian composers were to write music with a Russian sound, while there were no such restrictions for foreign composers. Hence the works of native and foreign composers would be judged by different criteria and the latter would tend to have the upper hand.

Needless to say, not everyone agreed with Tsertelev. The writer and critic Andrey Dmitriyev thought the complaint about Russianness was 'strange to the point of naïveté' and countered:

What does Mr Ts—v want? You cannot introduce *Downstream along Mother Volga* [*Vniz po matushke po Volge*] or *Vanka fell in love with Tanka* [*Van'ka Tan'ku polyubil*] here, can you? What would Mr Ts—v say if the German composer Meyerbeer had introduced the German aria *Mein lieber Augustin* into his *Les Huguenots*?<sup>103</sup>

Effective though it may be in terms of rhetoric, Dmitriyev's response also proves to be quite problematic. Tsertelev never mentioned existing Russian songs in his review; Dmitriyev simply equates this with the notion of Russianness, either because he automatically made this association, because he was aware of Tsertelev's identity, or simply for the sake of rhetoric. In addition, Dmitriyev's reasoning seems to imply that Russianness—or Germanness—was only called for when it suited the situation onstage. In effect, therefore, Dmitriyev is at odds with a lot of nationalist theorizing: he gives priority to the correct use of local or group colour and seems to have little feeling for the notion of a Russian school whose every note breathes Russianness.

SEROV REALIZED that staging an opera on a non-Russian subject would be problematic for a certain segment of his audience, and may in fact have anticipated something like Tsertelev's reaction. In August 1864, about a year before the

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>103</sup> Andrey Mikhaylovich Dmitriyev, 'Ob ispolnenii i postanovke operi *Yudif*', *Antrakt*, 24 Sept. 1865, no. 116, pp. 3–4. In fact, Meyerbeer did famously use the German chorale *Ein fester Burg* for the characterization of his Huguenots, although the point of this quotation was hardly an assertion of the composer's own Germanness.

Moscow premiere, the composer turned to his Moscow acquaintance Prince Vladimir Odoyevsky, inquiring after a promised article on the subject of his 'Hebrew widow'. He wrote that despite the success in St Petersburg, an article by the Prince would be very helpful to smooth the reception of his opera: 'given the *seriousness* and the *non-Russianness* [*ne-russkost'*] of the subject of my first opera, one would have to spell out everything to the Muscovites, so that they will not relate to my work as something completely—outrageous.'<sup>104</sup>

Odoyevsky had actually begun writing an article immediately after he had seen *Judith* in St Petersburg on 6 January 1864. An unfinished manuscript ('The 18th Performance of *Judith*') was given the same date as this performance. A second, seemingly complete manuscript ('Will we hear *Judith* in Moscow?') is undated, but can be related to the diary entry of 26 October 1864, when Odoyevsky 'completed the dictation of an article on *Judith*'.<sup>105</sup> Unless Odoyevsky ever wrote a third article, this last manuscript must have been the response to Serov's request to explain to the Muscovites what they needed to know to appreciate his serious effort on a non-Russian subject. For unknown reasons, this second text also remained unpublished, but since Odoyevsky did refer to *Judith* in similar wordings in more than one later publication, his ideas are worth discussing in some detail.<sup>106</sup> Complaining that the opera had

<sup>104</sup> Letter Serov to Odoyevsky, 21 August/2 September 1864; Nikolay Fyodorovich Findeyzen (ed.), 'Iz perepiski kn. V. F. Odoyevskago: Pis'ma A. F. L'vova i A. N. Serova', *Muzikal'naya starina* 4 (1907), p. 132. Although it is not possible to point out a single decisive reason for *Judith*'s failure in Moscow, and I do not have detailed data on the composition of the Moscow opera audience in the mid-1860s, the Muscovites could be expected to put greater stock in 'Russianness'. In contrast to St Petersburg, the old capital Moscow had the reputation and self-image as the authentic 'heart' of the Russian nation and the bearer of Russian traditions and customs. Odoyevsky, too, propagated this image: Moscow, he wrote in a review of *Rogneda*, 'strongly upholds everything national [*narodnoye*], is always prepared for all support to the causes of the fatherland'; it was 'the *nursery* of Russian enlightenment, the *focus* of all national activity'. With these characterizations he contrasted the Moscow opera audience to the inhabitants of St Petersburg, who were raised on Italian 'milk' (Vladimir Fyodorovich Odoyevsky, '*Rogneda* i drugaya novaya opera Serova v yego kontserte 10 marta, v voskresen'ye v bol'shom teatre' [1868], in id., *Muzikal'no-literaturnoye naslediyе*, ed. Grigory Borisovich Bernandt [Moscow: Muzgiz, 1956] [henceforth cited as OMLN], p. 341; emphasis original). The different images and mentalities of Moscow and St Petersburg have attracted much comment; see e.g. Sidney Monas, 'St Petersburg and Moscow as Cultural Symbols', in Theofanis George Stavrou (ed.), *Art and Culture in Nineteenth-Century Russia* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983); and Orlando Figes, *Natasha's Dance: A Cultural History of Russia* (London: Allen Lane, 2002), pp. 150–7, 171–5.

<sup>105</sup> Odoyevsky, *Dnevnik, perepiska, materiali*, pp. 108, 125.

<sup>106</sup> See id., 'Russkaya i tak nazivayemaya obshchaya muzika' (1867), in OMLN, pp. 319, 329–30; id., 'Mirskaya pesnya, napisannaya na vosem' glasov kryukami s kinovarnimi pometami'

not yet been staged in Moscow ('as if we are in Beijing'), Odoyevsky claimed more or less the opposite of what Tsertelev would later do:

Its subject is Hebrew, like Méhul's *Joseph*, and therefore outside Russian history and outside Russian ways, but at the same time a living Russian spirit [*dukha*] flows through all its music. You will not detect this spirit [*struya*] in any individual melody, but involuntarily you will notice in this music something indigenous, sympathetic, which is absent in the music of foreigners; you will sense original, Russian art, sprouted from native roots [*neprivivnoye*].<sup>107</sup>

In fact, Odoyevsky had already made a similar claim in the earlier, unfinished draft, where he had suggested that this manifestation of national character 'it seems, happened involuntarily to the composer (and that is all the better), for the subject and place of action of the opera cannot have aroused in the composer the deliberate desire to imbue it with Russian character, as for example, in *Ivan Susanin*, *Ruslan*, and so on.'<sup>108</sup>

It was not a problem that the opera was about Biblical times; for Odoyevsky there was a kind of Russianness that transcended subject matter. In one of his later writings (in 1871) he dwelled on the possibility of perceiving 'a Russian mood in an Italian *canzonetta* by Glinka or a French romance by Dargomizhsky'. This Russianness did not revolve around 'physically transplanting' folk tunes, nor was it simply granted by birth—some Russian composers, particularly Aleksandr Varlamov, got it wrong and managed to turn a Russian song into 'banal Italian chatter'.<sup>109</sup>

Odoyevsky did not present *Judith* as a difficult work; on the contrary, he claimed it was 'accessible to all, it gives everyone what they can take: it will attract the lovers of music with a wealth of musical content, and the rest of the audience with its native spirit [*struya*]'.<sup>110</sup> The distinction here between the musically educated and the ordinary Russian audience is clear. Russianness was not so much a requirement for informed music lovers, who would be able to appreciate the opera anyway, but it was essential for the appreciation of

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(1871), in OMLN, p. 372n.

<sup>107</sup> Id., 'Uslishim mi operu *Yudif'* v Moskve?' (1864), in OMLN, p. 287.

<sup>108</sup> Id., '18-e predstavleniye *Yudifi*—operi A. N. Serova (Otrivok iz pis'ma v Moskvu)' (1864), in OMLN, p. 286.

<sup>109</sup> Id., 'Mirskaya pesnya', pp. 372–3.

<sup>110</sup> Id., 'Uslishim mi operu *Yudif'* v Moskve?', p. 290.

the less musically enlightened. *Judith* produced its effect 'on all classes of the public' and could thus 'contribute to the graceful element in the people'.<sup>111</sup>

Odoyevsky shrouded his claims about the Russianness of *Judith* in vague language. He referred to its 'sober, yet bright' character, 'the originality of its melodies' and a certain 'Russian phrase structure'. At one point it is 'almost imperceptible, but present'; elsewhere, it is clear and 'noticeable even to simple dilettantes'.<sup>112</sup>

Fortunately, some years after the Moscow premiere of *Judith*, Odoyevsky did give away the key to understand his reaction to *Judith*, with a 'hint' which would 'probably be sufficient for musician readers'. The critical proof for Serov's Russianness was that 'in the melodies of our composer, *diatonicism* predominates almost continuously; in his melodies one rarely encounters accidental sharps and flats not belonging to the key signature'.<sup>113</sup>

The faux modal character Serov had given to some of his music happened to coincide with the ideals for Russian music that Odoyevsky had developed in the previous years. In 1863, the year *Judith* was premiered in St Petersburg, Odoyevsky had been busy defining what he thought was Russian in Russian music and formulating his principles for appropriate settings of folk song. Most important were the absence of melodic leaps larger than a fifth, avoiding the dominant seventh chord, and an observance of diatonicism that was as strict as possible.<sup>114</sup> In the same article in which he revealed the secret of *Judith*'s Russianness, Odoyevsky demanded the 'reign of diatonicism' in Russian music and entreated Russian composers to avoid 'precisely that which is at the very centre of Western theories and is called a correct or perfect

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 287. Such an edifying element was completely absent, of course, in the popular Italian arias ('macaroni'), which Odoyevsky presented as essentially alien and detrimental to Russian music and Russian nature: 'The spread of Italian cavatinas among the people can only have one result: killing the virginal force of our folk music, that is, murdering our artistic element, which has now only begun to develop through the works of Glinka, Dargomizhsky and, of late, Serov' (*ibid.*, p. 288).

<sup>112</sup> *Id.*, '18-e predstavleniye *Yudifi*', p. 286; *id.*, 'Russkaya i tak nazivayemaya obshchaya muzika', p. 319; *id.*, 'Mirskaya pesnya', p. 372*n*. Soviet commentators were not inclined to scrutinize this mystification, and simply quoted Odoyevsky with approval. See e. g. Gozenpud, *Russkiy operniy teatr XIX-go veka*, vol. 2, pp. 66–7; and the remarks by Abramovsky quoted on p. 69.

<sup>113</sup> Odoyevsky, 'Russkaya i tak nazivayemaya obshchaya muzika', p. 329. Odoyevsky had already made a remark about *Judith*'s diatonicism to Turgenev, who was sitting behind him in the same box when he heard the opera for the first time (Letter Turgenev to Pauline Viardot 6–7 January 1864; Turgenev, vol. 5, p. 246.).

<sup>114</sup> 'Starinnaya pesnya' (1863), in OMLN, pp. 253–4; 'Pis'mo kn. V. F. Odoyevskogo k izdatelyu ob iskonnoy velikoruskoy muzike' (1863), in OMLN, pp. 282–5.

cadence'.<sup>115</sup>

Serov, to be sure, did not refrain from accidentals, seventh chords, melodic leaps, or cadences in *Judith*, but since his melodies rarely displayed Italianate embellishment and his music for the Hebrews did at times have a modal character, his score sufficiently approximated Odoyevsky's ideals. The purpose of modality in the music for the ancient Hebrews and that in Odoyevsky's theorizing of a pristine Russian music are related, of course: in both cases modality served as something characteristic that could be distinguished from modern, Western music.

FEOFIL TOLSTOY recalled that one day, Serov had explained to him why he had not taken a Russian subject for his first opera—which suggests that this was something in need of explanation. Serov claimed he 'did not wish to follow in Glinka's footsteps'.<sup>116</sup> As I have shown above, he actually did follow in Glinka's footsteps in several ways; but he deviated from *A Life for the Tsar* significantly in that his subject was not Russian and that he did not have to give his first opera any specific Russian colouring. Apparently it was more important for Serov to distinguish himself from Glinka than to compose a distinctively Russian opera.

Many others felt, however, especially after *Judith* had proven to be a success in St Petersburg, that Serov should attempt to compose a national work. After insistent entreaties from his wife and Grigor'yev,<sup>117</sup> and as soon as he had figured out an alternative for Glinka's Russian style, Serov began working on *Rogneda*, an opera with a Russian subject and an obvious attempt at a 'Russian' sound. This, he felt, would suit the Moscow audience: 'I have some right to hope that after my second opera—with a subject and music closer to the "national" [*natsional'niy*—I'll have more luck with the audience than with *Judith*', he wrote to Odoyevsky.<sup>118</sup> His expectations did not deceive him: *Rogneda* was a huge success, completely eclipsing *Judith*, both in St Petersburg and in Moscow.

That an opera on a Russian subject was ultimately what was expected of a Russian composer, can be perceived from the practically teleological way in

<sup>115</sup> Id., 'Russkaya i tak nazivayemaya obshchaya muzika', p. 327.

<sup>116</sup> Tolstoy, 'Serov', p. 368.

<sup>117</sup> See Valentina Semyonovna Bergmann-Serova, *Serovi, Aleksandr Nikolayevich i Valentin Aleksandrovich* (St Petersburg: Shipovnik, 1914), pp. 86–7. Liszt, too, advised Serov somewhat condescendingly after a quick glance through the score of *Judith* to 'do something more in the national sphere, and leave the Jews alone' (letter to Odoyevsky, 21 August/2 September 1864; Findeyzen, 'Iz perepiski kn. V. F. Odoyevskago', p. 132; emphasis original).

<sup>118</sup> Letter Serov to Odoyevsky, 4 December 1864; OMLN, p. 612.

which Serov's second opera was sometimes presented. In his obituary of the composer, Veselovsky mentioned in passing that *Judith* was 'written, by the way, on a subject not from Russian life' as a means to move on to *Rogneda*, which was presented as the natural next thing to do for Serov:

Having tried his powers on a work from foreign life, he—remaining a Russian in heart and soul despite all his attraction to the West and his proximity to the German school—turned to ancient Russian history finally winning over those too, who had still remained indifferent to his talent.<sup>119</sup>

For those who continued to believe in the viability of *Judith*, Odoyevsky's project of showing *Judith*'s Russianness remained relevant, and it was taken up, somewhat surprisingly, by Laroche. In 1878, Laroche had still suggested that 'among all of our operas (apart from the works of Rubinstein), *Judith* is perhaps the most cosmopolitan; there is much less that is Russian in it than there is German in *Lohengrin* or *The Flying Dutchman*'.<sup>120</sup> In 1889, his support for *Judith* acquired a new streak of fanaticism, and he penned down a lengthy plea in favour of *Judith*, not *The Power of the Fiend* or the popular *Rogneda*, as Serov's most Russian work.

He began by reasoning that 'no vocal or programmatic music that wishes to portray Assyria or Judea, will ever be an *adequate* representation of Judea and Assyria; even in the most accurate and characteristic portrayals of the ancient world, you will find, besides the ancient world, the surroundings in which the composer works'.<sup>121</sup> By then equating these 'surroundings' with the native or the national, Laroche transformed this innocuous observation into a more disputable nationalist claim. He said that, in spite of its debt to Wagner, *Judith* was 'undoubtedly Russian music', because of the dominant influence of Glinka, as well as 'a certain tendency towards diatonicism—and diatonicism

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<sup>119</sup> Veselovsky, 'Vospominaniye ob A. N. Serove', p. 337. Sergey Bazunov argued similarly: 'Having taken for his first work a subject from foreign life, Serov had the happy idea of taking as the theme for his second opera an ancient Russian closer to our sentiment' (*Aleksandr Nikolayevich Serov: yego zhizn' i muzikal'naya deyatel'nost'* [St Petersburg: F. Pavlenkov, 1893], pp. 70–1).

<sup>120</sup> Herman Avgustovich Laroche, 'Muzikal'niye ocherki. *Sen-mars* Sh. Guno na ital'yanskoy stsene. *Min'ona* i B. Énn. *Vozobnovlyonnaya Yudif'* na russkoy stsene. Dva slova po povodu pervogo predstavleniya *Karmen*' (1878), in id., *Izbranniye stat'i*, ed. Abram Akimovich Gozenpud, 5 vols., *Russkaya klassicheskaya muzikal'naya kritika* (Leningrad: Muzika, 1974–1978), vol. 3, p. 237.

<sup>121</sup> Id., 'O Yudifi Serova', *Moskovskiy vedomosti*, 7–8 Sept. 1889, no. 248, p. 4.

[Andante tranquillo]  
 ACHIOR:

V sudbe svo-yey narod yev-reyev ta - in - stvennim shchitom khranim!

Ex. 20: An ‘error’ in the prosody, pointed out by Feofil Tolstoy.

is one of the truest signs of the Russian element in music.<sup>122</sup> His argument, therefore, was completely in line with Odoyevsky’s. But unlike Odoyevsky, who had heartily supported *Rogneda*, Laroche considered it highly unfortunate that Serov had shed the influence of Glinka in favour of Verstovsky’s in his second opera, and had replaced diatonicism by the mundane, ‘anti-national’ minor scale.

Also unlike Odoyevsky, Laroche managed to ascribe to Serov some awareness of the Russianness of *Judith*—which is rather surprising given the failure, in his eyes, of *Rogneda* and *The Power of the Fiend*. The evidence Laroche presented for this was decidedly shaky. In 1863, after *Judith*’s premiere, Feofil Tolstoy had pointed out that in certain parts of the score, the musical accents did not match the stress of the words (see Ex. 20, where the stress should be on the second syllable of the word *taínstvennim*).<sup>123</sup> Serov was very annoyed about this—all the more so, presumably, because in this instance Tolstoy was right—and went out of his way to demonstrate that his declamation was in fact correct and Russian.<sup>124</sup> Laroche now quoted one of Serov’s comments on this discussion as: ‘It seems to me that, since I wrote it, *it will be much more Russian*’, and took it as a statement of considerable wisdom. ‘Speaking about this place in his work,’ Laroche emphasized, ‘he does not take recourse to fables, he does not say that his declamation is Assyrian or ancient-Hebrew, but remembers well that he is Russian and that he can write nothing but

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., no. 248, p. 5 Laroche had already used diatonicism as a measure for Russianness in his study ‘Glinka and His Significance for the History of Music’ (1867), where he had claimed emphatically that ‘the music of *Ruslan*, even where it portrays non-Russian nationalities and portrays them with perfection, does not cease to be Russian music’ (id., ‘Glinka i yego znachenije v istorii muziki’, *Russkij vestnik* 71/10 [Oct. 1867], p. 563).

<sup>123</sup> Tolstoy, ‘Yudif’’, no. 147, p. 678.

<sup>124</sup> ‘I go out of my mind and even have fits’, Serov responded to Tolstoy, ‘when people [...] pretend I do not know the “prosody” of my own mother tongue! Mr Director of the Russian Conservatory may not know Russian prosody, jabbering and writing as he does in three or four languages with equal incompetence (since all these languages are foreign to him), but a Russian composer who has written the text of his opera himself should at least know the prosody of his own language’ (letter to Feofil Tolstoy, 7 June 1863; printed in id., ‘Serov’, pp. 363–4; and *SESM*, vol. 6, p. 26).

Russian music.<sup>125</sup>

One might expect that if Serov subscribed to any of Odoevsky's and Laroche's ideas, he would have objected to Tsertelev's review that the music of his first opera *was* Russian. But he did not. Writing to Odoevsky after the Moscow premiere, Serov responded in much the same vein as Dmitriyev. Twisting Tsertelev's words into the complaint that the opera did not contain 'a single *Russian melody*' (emphasis original), the composer wrote in feigned bewilderment: 'in *Judith* of all things! Among the ancient Hebrews and Assyrians!!!'<sup>126</sup>

### Conclusion

The above discussion of *Judith*'s reception reveals the confusion, or at least a lack of consensus, as to how one should approach a Russian opera on a biblical, and therefore, non-Russian subject. While the nationalist notion of a local tradition of composition, a national school, stipulated that there should be something distinctively and pervasively Russian about the work of a Russian composer, the notion of local or group colour required that the identity of the groups onstage would be given a style that was as characteristic as possible. To put it into the terms used by Laroche, one had to take into consideration the nationality of the 'object' as well as the nationality of the 'subject'. Although it is certainly not inconceivable that a work could fulfil these two conditions at the same time according to certain criteria, the confusion is understandable. There was no practical way of distinguishing between a reference to the identity of the groups onstage and one to the composer's identity, and while such a distinction can surely be made in theory, in practice, given the many ambiguities of musical meaning, it was bound to lead to disagreement and to allow for rhetorical manipulation.

Tsertelelev's complaint that *Judith* was lacking in Russianness shows that the emancipation of a Russian style and the emancipation of the Russian composer could well be conflicting goals. Not surprisingly, such an explicit demand for Russian style for a non-Russian subject was a rare occurrence: since it placed strictures on the possible styles and subjects a Russian composer could use, it was unlikely to be adopted by those who had a stake in musical

<sup>125</sup> Laroche, 'O *Yudifi* Serova', no. 248, p. 4.

<sup>126</sup> Letter to Odoevsky, 6 January 1867; Findeyzen, 'Iz perepiski kn. V. F. Odoevskago', p. 138. See also the letter to Mavromikhali, 11 January–1 February 1866, where Serov made a similar comment (Serov, 'Ocherki o muzike v pis'makh k Dm. i V. V. Stasovim i M. P. Anastas'evoy', vol. 21, p. 175).

life. The demand for the appropriate application of local colour, moreover—an ideal associated with nothing less than artistic or historical truth—appears to have carried more weight, and was more readily applied as a criterion in music criticism. The kuchkists Musorgsky and Cui—who were themselves interested in foreign subjects at this time—criticized the choice of subject only with respect to its dramatic potential, and limited their judgement of Serov's style largely to a critique of his appropriateness of group colour and characterization. As we have seen, satisfying these requirements was already challenging enough.

There is little evidence that the composer wanted his *Judith* to sound Russian. On the contrary, his initial intention to write his opera in Italian, his arguments for believing in the viability of his opera abroad, as well as his response to Tsertelev, suggest that Serov was hardly concerned with national distinction in *Judith*. Still, there can be little doubt that nationalism did affect the preferences of the Russian critics and audiences, and these could not but affect the choices made by Russian composers as well. National thought generally operated in more subtle and less outspoken ways than Tsertelev's rejection, and many simply seem to have taken a lesser view of operas on non-Russian subjects tacitly. This is suggested, for instance, by Serov's expectation that the Moscow audience would prefer national subject and style, and by the later reviews that suggest that it was a natural move for Serov to want to write a national opera after *Judith*. Rather than being the stuff of ridicule, Tsertelev's statements expressed a sentiment that was widespread and they were problematic primarily for exposing the contradictory tendencies within the nineteenth-century opera world.

As we have seen, however, nationalism did not only work against operas with a non-Russian subject, for nationalist rhetoric could also be invoked to give them the benefit of the doubt. The ideas put forward by Odoyevsky and Laroche were not so different from Tsertelev's. They, too, believed that Russian composers should write operas that sounded Russian, and they also believed that composers could fail at this as well. The best argument to oppose a nationalist bias, apparently, was a nationalist argument.

It is of great value to the historian that, in their attempts to prove the Russianness of *Judith*, Odoyevsky and Laroche provide us with the keys by which they interpreted the music of *Judith* as Russian. The question of whether Serov's modal passages are to be heard as Hebrew music, Russian music, ancient music, religious music, or whatever else, is something that cannot be decided on basis of the score alone. It is clear, however, that while the composer seemed content to forgo Russianness in favour of local

colour, and what he considered historical truth, his supporters Odoyevsky and Laroche wanted to have their cake, and eat it, too. While their emphasis on diatonicism as a key to identify Russianness is ultimately unconvincing in the case of *Judith* since it could be, and was, at the same time related to its local or group colour, it does reveal their struggle to include operas on non-Russian subjects within their idea of a Russian national school.

The other argument for *Judith*'s Russianness put forward by Laroche was the influence of Glinka, which, as we have seen, was considerable. While the Russianness of Glinka's operas themselves could well be a cause for dispute when put to scrutiny, Glinka's influence on a work by another composer was often considered enough to vouch for its Russianness. It is important to note, however, that the similarities between Glinka and Serov, such as the opposition of two nations, the oratorio-like conclusion of *A Life for the Tsar*, and the oriental and Hebrew characterizations, were all features that did not root in folk music or any other pre-Petrine Russian sources. Glinka's influence shows that Serov responded to the local Russian context, and in this respect *Judith* can be considered part of a Russian 'school'. Yet Serov's relation to Glinka did not entail any primordial or essential Russianness, which explains the need for *Judith*'s apologists to rely on diatonicism or 'Russian declamation'. If these attempts to ascribe something more fundamentally Russian to *Judith* are dismissed as mystifications, one could even argue that the similarities between *Judith* and *A Life for the Tsar* reveal the opposite: that there is little fundamental difference between Serov's group colour for the Hebrews and Assyrians and Glinka's portrayal of Russians and Poles.

*Judith* showed that it was definitely possible to have a degree of success with an opera on a non-Russian subject, and as such, it provided a potentially important precedent. The reception of Serov's opera, however, did not lead to any definitive solution to the problematic relation between group colour and national Russian style. Attempts to point out the Russianness of works on non-Russian subjects, as well as the association of diatonicism with Russianness, were to be recurring tendencies in the history of Russian opera. We have seen how this left traces practically up to the present day, in the discussion of *Judith* by Abramovsky, where Glinka, Russian colour, and modality are still invoked to justify Serov's work.<sup>127</sup> We shall also encounter them in the next chapter, dealing with another Russian opera on a non-Russian subject: Tchaikovsky's *The Maid of Orléans*.

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<sup>127</sup> See Abramovsky's comments quoted on p. 69 above.



## *The Maid of Orléans*

IT WAS AFTER browsing through a collection of Vasily Zhukovsky's works containing the translation of Friedrich Schiller's *Die Jungfrau von Orleans*, that Pyotr Il'yich Tchaikovsky decided to write a work on the subject of Joan of Arc, a subject which he thought had 'a marvellous potential for music'.<sup>1</sup> The subject had attracted composers at least since the eighteenth century, and the first half of the nineteenth had seen operas by Michele Carafa, Nicola Vaccai, Giovanni Paccini, William Balfe, and most famously, Giuseppe Verdi. More recent operas on the subject were those of Gilbert Duprez, the celebrated tenor, and Auguste Mermet, staged in Paris in 1865 and 1876 respectively.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, Tchaikovsky thought that the subject had not yet been exhausted: he found Verdi's *Giovanna d'Arco* (1845) 'extremely bad'

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Von Meck, 21 November/3 December 1878; Pyotr Il'yich Tchaikovsky, *Polnoye sobraniye sochineniy: literaturniye proizvedeniya i perepiska*, ed. Boris Vladimirovich Asaf'yev et al., 17 vols. (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoye muzikal'noye izdatel'stvo, 1953–1981) (henceforth cited as CHLPP), vol. 7, p. 467; or Pyotr Il'yich Tchaikovsky and Nadezhda Filaretovna von Meck, *Perepiska*, ed. Vladimir Aleksandrovich Zhdanov and Nikolay Timofeyevich Zhegin, 3 vols. (Moscow: Zakharov, 2004) (henceforth cited as CHVM), vol. 1, p. 535.

<sup>2</sup> This summary is far from comprehensive; for more extensive lists of operas, see e.g. Charles H. Parsons (ed.), *The Mellen Opera Reference Index*, 23 vols. (Lewiston, N. Y.: Mellen, 1966–), vol. 9, p. 69 or Alla Konstantinovna Kyonigsberg, 'Chaykovskiy i Verdi', in Zivar Makhmudovna Guseynova (ed.), *P. I. Chaykovskiy: naslediyе*, 2 vols. (St Petersburg: Sanktpeterburgskaya Gosudarstvennaya Konservatoriya im. N. A. Rimskogo-Korsakova, 2000), vol. 2, p. 179. The subject also inspired works in a variety of other genres such as songs by Rossini

and knew that Mermet's *Jeanne d'Arc*, which had been presented with much ceremony as the first original production at the new Opéra Garnier, had failed to hold the stage. Tchaikovsky did keep an interest in these two works, though, for he seemed to recall that Mermet's 'clever and scenic libretto was much praised' and that Verdi's would be 'useful to compare with the French one.'<sup>3</sup> The composer collected 'an entire little library' on Joan of Arc—including an edition of Henri Wallon's sumptuously illustrated monograph, given to him by his benefactress Nadezhda von Meck; Jules Barbier's play, for which Gounod had written incidental music in 1873; and Jules Michelet's historical study—and went to work.<sup>4</sup>

On 22 February 1879, only three months after the first idea of writing the opera had occurred to him, Tchaikovsky could report to his brother Modest that he had finished the composition of the vocal score.<sup>5</sup> After having spent much more time on orchestration, correction, revision, and lobbying, Tchaikovsky's sixth opera, *The Maid of Orléans*, was premiered at the Mariinsky Theatre on 13 February 1881. The first performance was a great success with the audience and the composer was called out no less than twenty-four times.<sup>6</sup> The critics, however, were less enthralled. One anonymous reviewer observed that 'many scenes are very successful, although in broad outlines they repeat the effects of *Le Prophète*, *La Juive* and other operas.'<sup>7</sup> A truly devastating verdict came from the pen of César Cui:

It seems to me that the author, deeply hurt by the insignificant success of the operas he has produced, tried to please the audience in his new work in whichever way he could. For this he gave up his individuality and began to copy the public's favourites, adapting himself to their

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and Liszt, an overture by Ignaz Moscheles, a symphony by Alfred Holmes, a symphonic poem by Moritz Moszkowski, a piano sonata by William Sterndale Bennett, and so on.

<sup>3</sup> Letter to Von Meck, 21 November/3 December 1878; CHLPP, vol. 7, p. 467.

<sup>4</sup> Henri Alexandre Wallon, *Jeanne d'Arc*, 3rd edn. (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1877). Michelet's study of Joan of Arc first appeared as the fifth volume of his *Histoire de France* (1841), and was subsequently published separately in many editions.

<sup>5</sup> Letter to Modest Il'yich, 22 February/6 March 1879; CHLPP, vol. 8, p. 129.

<sup>6</sup> See the telegram to Nadezhda von Meck of 15 February 1881 and the subsequent letter of the 16th; CHVM, vol. 2, pp. 1166, 1168.

<sup>7</sup> [Anon.], 'Letopis' iskusstv, teatra i muziki', *Vsemirnaya illyustratsiya*, 21 Feb. 1881, no. 632, p. 151. Konstantin Galler claimed practically the same in the daily *Novosti i Birzhevaya gazeta*: 'the majority of the successful scenic effects are no more than repetitions of procedures we have already known for a long time from other operas' (Konstantin Petrovich Galler, 'Teatr i muzika. *Orleanskaya Deva* opera P. I. Chaykovskago. Benefis È. F. Napravnika', *Novosti i birzhevaya gazeta*, 15 Feb. 1881, no. 43, p. 3).

tastes. This picture of the gifted composer sucking up to the audience and humiliating himself for their favour is a depressing one.<sup>8</sup>

The bad press was only one of the many adversities. To begin with, *The Maid* was produced in a period of severe economizing in the history of the Russian Opera, which has become associated with the name of Baron Karl Küster (1821–1893), the director of the Imperial Theatres between 1875 and 1881.<sup>9</sup> As the reviewer of the newspaper *Molva* complained, Küster's administration did 'no more than endure Russian opera and Russian art in general'.<sup>10</sup> The first run of *The Maid* also happened to coincide with a pivotal moment in Russian history. Tsar Alexander II was assassinated on 1 March 1881, which made the theatre season come to a sudden halt when Tchaikovsky's new opera had seen only three performances. Finally, there was a problem with the lead: the only suitable candidate was Mariya Kamenskaya, a mezzo who managed to perform the demanding soprano part of Joan of Arc with remarkable success, but who was soon forbidden to sing the role for fear of ruining her voice. By the time the score had been adapted to her proper mezzo-soprano range in the autumn of 1882, performances still had to be postponed because Kamenskaya was not well.<sup>11</sup> By the start of the 1884–85 season, the opera had been performed but sixteen times.<sup>12</sup>

*The Maid of Orléans* has gone into history as a failure, despite its initial public success and the high hopes Tchaikovsky had set on it. Some months before the premiere, the composer had written to Von Meck that he did not consider *The Maid* 'the finest or the most heartfelt of all my works, but *it*

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<sup>8</sup>\*\*\* [César Antonovich Cui], 'Muzikal'nīya zametki. *Orleanskaya Deva*, opera g. Chaykovskago', *Golos*, 19 Feb. 1881, no. 50, p. 2.

<sup>9</sup>Unsurprisingly, Küster was very unpopular amongst artists and critics alike; see e.g. A. I. Vol'f, *Khronika peterburgskikh teatrov, s kontsa 1855 do nachala 1881 goda* (St Petersburg: tip. R. Golike, 1884), p. 6; Eduard Nápravnik, *Avtobiograficheskiye, tvorcheskiye materialī*, ed. Larisa Mikhaylovna Kutateladze and Yury Vsevolodovich Keldish (Leningrad: Muzgiz, 1959), p. 41.

<sup>10</sup>[Anon.], 'Teatr i muzika', *Molva*, 15 Feb. 1881, no. 46, p. 3. See also Vol'f, *Khronika, 1855–1881*, p. 6.

<sup>11</sup>The trouble with the part of Joan is extensively documented in Tchaikovsky's correspondence with Jurgenson, Nápravnik, and Von Meck. See Pyotr Il'yich Tchaikovsky, *Perepiska s P. I. Yurgensonom*, ed. Vladimir Aleksandrovich Zhdanov and Nikolay Timofeyevich Zhegin, 2 vols. (Moscow: Muzgiz, 1938–1952) (henceforth cited as CHYU), vol. 1, pp. 226, 232, 262, 266; Nápravnik, *Avtobiograficheskiye, tvorcheskiye materialī*, pp. 120–4; CHVM, vol. 2, p. 1268.

<sup>12</sup>Grigory Savel'yevich Dombayev (ed.), *Tvorchestvo P. I. Chaykovskogo v materialakh i dokumentakh* (Moscow: Muzgiz, 1958), p. 114.

*seems to me* that it is this very work that can make me popular.<sup>13</sup>

With this comment, Tchaikovsky seems to confirm Cui's suspicions, and some other frequently quoted remarks raise further doubts about the sincerity of his opera. Most famous in this respect is the letter he wrote to his former student Sergey Taneyev three years earlier, in January 1878, after he had subjected the first act of *Yevgeny Onegin* to Taneyev's criticism. Here, Tchaikovsky claimed that he had composed his *Onegin* 'caring little whether there would be movement or effects'. Making some scathing comments about Meyerbeer's *L'Africaine* and Verdi's *Aida*, he emphasized that he needed his opera characters to be 'living beings' he could understand and identify with, which would not be the case with 'an Egyptian princess, a pharaoh, or some crazy Nubian woman'. What he really needed, he claimed, was a libretto that had 'no kings, queens, no popular uprisings, no battles, no marches—in short, none of the things that are the attributes of *grand opéra*.'<sup>14</sup> Before the year was over, however, Tchaikovsky composed an opera that contains virtually all the attributes of grand opera mentioned here: lacking only the popular uprisings, *The Maid of Orléans* has kings, queens, battles, marches—and more.

The opera was put in an even more unfavourable light by a letter written by Tchaikovsky fourteen years later, at the time when he was preparing *Iolanta*, a one-act opera based on a medieval parable by the Danish poet Henrik Hertz. Here Tchaikovsky objected to a would-be librettist: 'I generally avoid foreign subjects, since I know and understand only the Russian man, the Russian girl and woman. Medieval dukes, knights and ladies capture my imagination, but not my heart; and where the heart is not touched—there cannot be music.'<sup>15</sup>

Given such statements by the composer himself, it is hardly surprising that twentieth-century critics have shown little sympathy for *The Maid of Orléans*. The opera has received its share of coverage in anglophone scholarship, mostly as an unavoidable part of Tchaikovsky monographs and comprehensive histories of Russian music, but with a heavy dose of censure for being—among other things—commercial, insincere, conventional, derivative, eclectic, and cosmopolitan. *The Maid* clearly did not suit a main narrative of Russian music

<sup>13</sup> Letter to Von Meck, 12–15 July 1880; CHLPP, vol. 9, p. 188; CHVM, vol. 2, p. 1047. Emphasis original.

<sup>14</sup> Letter to Taneyev, 2/14 January 1878; CHLPP, vol. 7, pp. 21–2; Pyotr Il'yich Tchaikovsky and Sergey Ivanovich Taneyev, *Pis'ma*, ed. Vladimir Aleksandrovich Zhdanov (Moscow: Goskul'tprosvetizdat, 1951) (henceforth cited as CHT), pp. 23–4.

<sup>15</sup> Letter to Aleksandr Filippovich Fedotov, 21 February 1892; Pyotr Il'yich Tchaikovsky, *Izbranniye pis'ma*, ed. Natal'ya Nikolayevna Sin'kovskaya (Moscow: Muzika, 2002), p. 316.

in which Russianness was touted as a mark of authenticity, and the association with Meyerbeerian grand opera did the rest. John Warrack thought *The Maid* showed every sign of this ‘most pervasive but treacherous of all nineteenth-century operatic influences’.<sup>16</sup> David Brown speculated that Tchaikovsky had been guided by ‘less admirable commercial considerations’ and concluded that:

*The Maid* is a work of effects without causes—or, at least, without causes offering adequate justification for the noisy sound edifices which Tchaikovsky so readily fabricated. Any listener who searches for deeper resonances, for those vastly varied, subtler sounds which reflect with truth the variety and richness within human emotion and behaviour—that is, any listener who comes to *The Maid* from *Onegin*—must quickly sense how hollow so much of it is.<sup>17</sup>

In their evaluation of *The Maid*, these two authors reproduced all the common strictures against grand opera, including the associations with commercialism and Wagner’s catchphrase ‘effects without causes’.<sup>18</sup> As Anselm Gerhard has observed, ‘there has probably not been a single music-lover, critic or composer who has remained wholly unaffected by the influence of such (prejudicial) judgements’.<sup>19</sup> It is essential, though, to try to set such judgements aside in order to allow for a more historical—and perhaps more sympathetic—understanding.

It is not my intention to put the case of *The Maid of Orléans* up for retrial here and attempt a full-scale aesthetic reappraisal. Rather, I shall attempt to clarify Tchaikovsky’s motivations for writing an opera on Schiller’s *Jungfrau von Orleans* and offer a fresh examination of the work’s relation to French grand opera. I will conclude by considering how *The Maid*’s French subject

<sup>16</sup> John Warrack, *Tchaikovsky* (London: Hamilton, 1973), p. 158.

<sup>17</sup> David Brown, *Tchaikovsky: A Biographical and Critical Study*, 4 vols. (London: Gollancz, 1978–1991), vol. 3, p. 61.

<sup>18</sup> The phrase ‘effects without causes’ originates with *Opera and Drama* (Richard Wagner, ‘Oper und Drama’ [1852], in id., *Gesammelte Schriften und Dichtungen*, ed. Hans von Wolzogen, 4th edn., 10 vols. [Leipzig: Siegel, 1907], vol. 3, p. 301), where Wagner condemned Meyerbeer’s operas by claiming that they were based on mere ‘effect’ (*Effekt* in German). Trying to dissociate this word from its counterpart ‘cause’, he made a distinction that does not translate easily into English between the almost synonymous ‘*Wirkung*’ and ‘*Effekt*’, and defined the latter as ‘*Wirkung ohne Ursache*’, an ‘effect without cause’. As an example, Wagner referred to the conclusion of Act III of *Le Prophète*.

<sup>19</sup> Anselm Gerhard, *The Urbanization of Opera: Music Theatre in Paris in the Nineteenth Century*, trans. Mary Whittall (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 2.

matter has affected its reception, and suggest the particular interest of *The Maid* for our understanding of the perception of Russianness.

### *The Requirements of the Operatic Stage*

In his *Defining Russia Musically*, Richard Taruskin has given an impassioned defence against the air of condescension with which Tchaikovsky's artistic attitudes have often been discussed. He argues that Tchaikovsky subscribed to a pre-Romantic notion of the artist's calling, which placed emphasis on the beautiful and the pleasing, and sought community with its audience.<sup>20</sup> The opposition against these values, Taruskin explains, arose within the ranks of the German Romantics, who cultivated the ideal of the idiosyncratic, independent artist-hero who disregards the audience for the sake of his art and writes for the future. The aim to please the audience would become an increasingly suspect motivation in music criticism, associated with the 'popular', the 'commercial', or—since the twentieth century—'kitsch'. Tchaikovsky has been stigmatized by such pejoratives, whereas they have been suppressed, for example, in the case of Mozart, a 'classical' and German composer. The older ideals persisted for a large part of the nineteenth century, especially in France and Italy, and Taruskin argues that, together with Verdi, Tchaikovsky was the most eminent late nineteenth-century representative of this predominantly 'Franco-Italianate line'.<sup>21</sup>

Opera had a special place in this aesthetic, as is made clear by Tchaikovsky in a letter to Von Meck: 'opera and only opera brings you closer to people, connects you with the real public, makes you the property not just of small separate circles, but—in favourable conditions—of the entire nation.'<sup>22</sup> Not surprisingly, this line was often quoted approvingly by Soviet critics, but it

<sup>20</sup> Richard Taruskin, *Defining Russia Musically: Historical and Hermeneutical Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), pp. 239–307.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 250, 306–7. Tchaikovsky's emphasis on 'beauty' has often been attributed to an Italian influence. Rosa Newmarch provided a telling example of this tendency in 1914, by claiming that Tchaikovsky 'never ceased to blend with the characteristic melody of his country an echo of the sensuous beauty of the South', and that this caused him to be 'separated from the nationalists'. 'This reflection of what was gracious and ideally beautiful in Italian music', Newmarch argued, 'is undoubtedly one of the secrets of Tchaikovsky's great popularity with the public.' Inevitably, this popularity and sensuous beauty involved a degree of bad conscience. 'It is a concession to human weakness of which we gladly avail ourselves; although, as moderns, we have graduated in a less sensuous school, we are willing to worship the old gods of melody under a new name' (Rosa Newmarch, *The Russian Opera* [London: E. P. Dutton, 1914], p. 335).

<sup>22</sup> Letter to Von Meck, 27 September 1885; CHLPP, vol. 13, p. 159; CHVM, vol. 3, p. 1737.

is clear that the ‘nation’ Tchaikovsky strove to reach was a collective clearly circumscribed by divisions of class and education. While he considered it ‘a natural tendency to broaden the circle of one’s listeners’, he emphatically denied that he would ever lower himself to ‘the base requirements of the masses’: opera subjects were supposed to have ‘artistic worth’ and composers should not be ‘chasing after external effects’.<sup>23</sup> Tchaikovsky accused both Verdi and Meyerbeer of giving in to such base requirements at certain points in their careers. Of the former, he wrote that he ‘thought with sadness of the deadly influence the aesthetically undemanding masses of the Italian public had exercised on Verdi’.<sup>24</sup> Meyerbeer, he wrote, ‘combined in himself a richly gifted musician with a slavish servant of the whims of the—aesthetically speaking—crude masses. This cult of the ignorant instincts of the French boulevard audience led him away from the true path of the creative genius.’<sup>25</sup> Again, Tchaikovsky seems to share the principles—or at least the rhetoric—of the critics of grand opera. His view of Meyerbeer, however, was not as negative as the above quotation and his letter to Taneyev might suggest. Tchaikovsky’s criticism was aimed particularly at *L’Africaine*, in which he felt Meyerbeer had made unprecedented ‘sacrifices to the altar of ignorance’; generally speaking, however, he thought the German composer ‘a great master in the choice of his operatic subjects’ and openly admired some of his other works, particularly *Les Huguenots* and *Le Prophète*.<sup>26</sup> In his brief activity as a music critic, he praised the former as ‘one of the most beautiful operas of all the lyric repertoire’, and concluded that ‘this excellent music is dear not only to the professional musician, but also to any somewhat educated dilettante.’<sup>27</sup> This was precisely what Tchaikovsky himself aspired to in the genre of opera.

Many have suggested that Tchaikovsky was aiming for international fame with *The Maid of Orléans*, particularly in Paris. ‘The work is so deliberately French,’ Gerald Abraham reasoned, ‘so completely conceived in terms of the Paris Grand Opéra and its great crowd effects, that it is not unkind to assume that the secret motive controlling its inception and execution was the

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Pyotr Il’yich Tchaikovsky, ‘Ital’yanskaya opera. Kvartetniye seansi russkogo muzikal’nogo obshchestva’ (1872), in id., *Muzikal’no-kriticheskiye stat’i*, ed. Vasily Vasil’yevich Yakovlev, 4th edn. (Leningrad: Muzika, 1986), pp. 63–4.

<sup>25</sup> Id., ‘Ital’yanskaya opera. *Afrikanka. Trubadur* [...]’ (1872), in id., *Muzikal’no-kriticheskiye stat’i*, pp. 54–5.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., pp. 54–5; id., ‘Russkaya i ital’yanskaya operi’ (1875), in id., *Muzikal’no-kriticheskiye stat’i*, p. 231.

<sup>27</sup> Id., ‘Shestoye sobraniye Russkikh muzikal’nogo obshchestva. Ital’yanskaya opera. Kvartetniye seans’ (1873), in id., *Muzikal’no-kriticheskiye stat’i*, pp. 99–100.

hope of a great operatic triumph in Western Europe'.<sup>28</sup> Although there is no reason why Tchaikovsky should not have been interested in having his works performed abroad, one must not jump to the conclusion that the composer had the specific aim of reaching foreign audiences merely on the basis of *The Maid's* French subject and its affinity with grand opera. Tchaikovsky's new subject may well have been 'likely to have a far greater appeal to a non-Russian audience than any he had previously treated', as David Brown put it, or at least, the composer and his Russian contemporaries would probably have expected this to be the case.<sup>29</sup> But the opera's proximity to grand opera was just as likely to be an important asset with the St Petersburg audience. Meyerbeer was as esteemed and popular in Russia as anywhere in Europe and, in fact, this popularity may have lasted longer in Russia than anywhere else.<sup>30</sup> Although we have seen a certain preference for national subject matter and treatment in the case of Serov's operas in Moscow in the 1860s, the situation may well have been different for audiences in either St Petersburg or Moscow a decade and a half later. The insinuations Cui made in his review at least suggest that he felt *The Maid* was well designed to please the Mariinsky audience, and a failure at the Russian premiere, to be sure, would not have made the adoption on foreign stages any more likely.

Rather than a direct attempt at success abroad, *The Maid of Orléans* should be understood as a bid for recognition as an opera composer in general, in Russia as much as anywhere. As Cui already alluded to, Tchaikovsky's previous operas had not been received very well by the Russian audience and critics. The composer had to cope with the frequently voiced judgement that he was a symphonist by nature, and that he had no talent for opera. *The Maid* became a sincere attempt for Tchaikovsky to deal with these criticisms, and

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<sup>28</sup> Gerald Abraham, 'Tchaikovsky's Operas', in id., *Slavonic and Romantic Music: Essays and Studies* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1968), p. 153. See also Warrack, *Tchaikovsky*, p. 158; Brown, *Tchaikovsky*, vol. 3, pp. 49–50; Marina Frolova-Walker, 'Grand Opera in Russia: Fragments of an Unwritten History', in David Charlton (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Grand Opera* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 359; Henry Zajaczkowski, *An Introduction to Tchaikovsky's Operas* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2005), p. 46.

<sup>29</sup> Brown, *Tchaikovsky*, vol. 3, pp. 49–50. Compare Serov's expectations for *Judith* (p. 69) and Jāzeps Vītols's expectations for *The Tsar's Bride* (p. 209).

<sup>30</sup> In 1897, Tchaikovsky's pupil Nikolay Kashkin complained that Meyerbeer's position in the Moscow repertoire was disproportionately large: 'while in France itself, not to mention Germany, Meyerbeer's star has already long waned, it is still shining brightly among us' ('N. Dmitriyev' [Nikolay Dmitriyevich Kashkin], *Imperatorskaya opernaya stsena v Moskve* [Moscow: tip. Universitetskaya, 1897], p. 27). While Kashkin was somewhat overstating his case, it is true that Meyerbeer's operas continued to be part of the Moscow and St Petersburg fixed repertoire well into the twentieth century.

to write an opera that would meet contemporary standards for a genuinely 'operatic style'.

From the present-day perspective, Tchaikovsky's choice for *The Maid of Orléans* after *Yevgeny Onegin* may appear surprising, since *Onegin* has proven to be one of Tchaikovsky's most popular and enduring masterpieces, whereas *The Maid* is usually considered a flawed work at the least and, with the exception of certain fragments, has rarely been performed since its premiere. The general view has been to consider *Onegin* as part of the natural course of events, and *The Maid* as some aberration caused by a lapse of judgement on the composer's part. From Tchaikovsky's own perspective at the time he wrote these works, however, it was rather the other way around.

Tchaikovsky's remonstrations about his distaste for grand opera subjects in his letter to Taneyev quoted above should not be taken at face value, since they were made in defence of *Onegin* and intended to ward off criticism. Tchaikovsky showed himself fully aware of the problems with this most personal and intimate work, and in fact his protest conceded much more than Taneyev ever criticized.<sup>31</sup> Tchaikovsky inferred from Taneyev's words that his opera was not theatrical (*stsenichna*), and pretended not to care about this: 'It is a fact that I don't have a gift for theatricality; [...] if my passion for the subject of *Onegin* testifies to my limitations, my thickheadedness, to my ignorance and unfamiliarity with the requirements of the stage, then that is a pity—but at least whatever I have written *literally* poured out of me, and was not fabricated, not strained.'<sup>32</sup> Tchaikovsky immediately recognized the consequences, however. *Onegin*, he felt, was 'an opera without a future'. He placed the blame, first of all, not on himself, not on the audience, but on the conditions of the Russian Imperial Theatres, which, with all their stilted routine, would not be able to perform it properly.<sup>33</sup> Thus, as is well known, Tchaikovsky had *Onegin* staged by Conservatory students, and it seemed to have little prospect of being performed anywhere but in small private

<sup>31</sup> In his letter of 4 December 1877, Taneyev merely stated that he did 'not wholly like' the libretto, because there was little action, especially in the first scene (CHT, p. 22).

<sup>32</sup> Letter to Taneyev, 2/14 January 1878; CHLPP, vol. 7, pp. 22–3; CHT, p. 23. Emphasis original.

<sup>33</sup> 'The bureaucratic mindset [*kazyonshchina*], the routine of our major stages, the non-sensical stagings, the system of keeping veterans, giving no access to the young—all this makes my opera almost impossible on the stage' (CHLPP, vol. 7, p. 22). To Taneyev, Tchaikovsky claimed that he would actually try to prevent a Mariinsky production if he could. When *Onegin* was about to be performed at the Bolshoy in Moscow, Tchaikovsky claimed instead that he had decided he 'would not hinder its performance if people from the theatre world took the initiative' (Letter to Von Meck, 27 November 1880; CHLPP, vol. 9, p. 320).

productions.<sup>34</sup>

Acknowledging the lack of theatricality in *Onegin* and holding up his beloved *Carmen* as a successful example, Tchaikovsky lamented to Taneyev: 'If I only knew more literature of all kinds, I would, of course, have found something that suited my tastes and that was theatrical at the same time.'<sup>35</sup> When he decided on *The Maid of Orléans* some months later, we can only assume that this subject suited his taste even if it did involve 'kings and marches'.

At the time he wrote *The Maid*, Tchaikovsky himself emphasized the distinction between operatic music on the one hand, and symphonic or chamber writing on the other. He proclaimed that 'opera should always be the most broadly accessible of all kinds of music'.<sup>36</sup> Of his previous attempts, *Vakula the Smith* (1876), the closest he ever came to writing a kuchkist opera, now served as the primary example how *not* to write opera. Its orchestra, Tchaikovsky agreed with the critics, was too massive and overshadowed the voices; there was too much detail, and it lacked a sense of measure. He adapted the style of *The Maid* accordingly.<sup>37</sup> He obviously felt he had done the best he could in *The Maid of Orléans*, and proudly announced to Modest that 'if this opera will not be a *chef d'œuvre* in general, then it will most likely be *my chef d'œuvre!* The simplicity of the style is absolute, and the form is clear; in a word, a complete contrast to *Vakula*.<sup>38</sup>

In addition, Tchaikovsky underscored that 'when composing an opera, the author must continuously keep the stage in mind, i. e. he has to remember

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<sup>34</sup> Tchaikovsky considered it 'a great folly' when Jurgenson wanted to publish *Onegin's* full score in 1880 (letter to Karl Albrecht, 24 June 1880; CHLPP, vol. 9, p. 160). As late as in 1884, when the interest in *Onegin* was growing steadily and the Mariinsky was giving successful performances, he still felt it was 'better not to rejoice too soon', and expressed his surprise, since he 'never expected that this opera would be so liked by the masses' (letter to Praskov'ya Vladimirovna, 3/15 November 1884; Pyotr Il'yich Tchaikovsky, *Letters to His Family: An Autobiography*, ed. Percy M. Young, trans. Galina von Meck [New York: Cooper Square, 2000], p. 315).

<sup>35</sup> Letter to Taneyev, 2/14 January 1878; CHLPP, vol. 7, p. 21; CHT, p. 23.

<sup>36</sup> Letter to Von Meck, 23 January/4 February 1879; CHLPP, vol. 8, p. 67; CHVM, vol. 2, p. 649.

<sup>37</sup> Eduard Nápravník stressed exactly these points in the brief review he wrote for the application procedure of *The Maid* for the Imperial Theatres (Nápravník, *Avtobiograficheskiye, tvorcheskiye materialy*, p. 64). Many reviewers, however, continued to present Tchaikovsky as an inveterate symphonist; see in particular Pavel Semyonovich Makarov, '[*Orleanskaya deva*]', *Birzheviye vedomosti*, 17 Feb. 1881, no. 123, p. 741; and Konstantin Petrovich Galler, '*Orleanskaya Deva*, opera v 4-kh deystviyakh P. I. Chaykovskago', *Vsemirnaya illyustratsiya*, 15 Jan. 1883, no. 731, p. 55.

<sup>38</sup> Letter to Modest Il'yich, 16/28 January 1879; CHLPP, vol. 8, p. 48; also Tchaikovsky, *Letters to His Family*, p. 203.

that the theatre requires not only melodies and harmonies, but also *action*; that he should not abuse the attention of the listener, who came not only *to listen, but also to watch*.<sup>39</sup> He did admit that *Onegin* was ‘far more closely allied to my individual temperament’, but that *The Maid of Orléans* had been written ‘with more consideration for the scenic and musical effects’, and this, he added in a complete reversal of his earlier claims expressed to Taneyev, ‘is the most important thing in opera!’<sup>40</sup>

Thus, in his search for a generally acceptable operatic style, Tchaikovsky began to stress aspects that were characteristic for French grand opera, and which were Meyerbeer’s recognized specialty. This should hardly be surprising: some fifteen years after the premiere of *The Maid*, Nikolay Rimsky-Korsakov still complained that Russian audiences and critics tended to dismiss as ‘nonoperatic’ any work that did not conform to the standards set by Meyerbeer and Verdi.<sup>41</sup> Tchaikovsky felt he had finally met the operatic ideals of simplicity and theatricality, and boasted to Von Meck that: ‘if it turns out that *The Maid* still doesn’t meet the requirements of operatic style—then it will be clear to me that those who claim that I am by nature a symphonist who should not care about the stage, are right. Then I will refrain from a new attempt at writing an opera forever.’<sup>42</sup>

### *Schiller, ‘The Maid’, and Grand Opera Dramaturgy*

Many critics, modern as well as contemporary, have drawn attention to similarities between *The Maid of Orléans* and other works belonging to the genre of grand opera. Although *The Maid* is routinely referred to as a ‘Meyerbeerian’ opera, most of the references to Meyerbeer in the literature on Tchaikovsky’s opera concern dramatic or scenic situations rather than music. The only notable exception is the similarity between the Agnès–Charles duettino and the famous Valentine–Raoul duet from Act IV of *Les Huguenots* (see Ex. 21). Especially the G flat major key and the tremolo strings that Tchaikovsky’s theme shared with Meyerbeer’s celebrated love duet, suggest that this was

<sup>39</sup> Letter to Von Meck, 12 October 1879; CHLPP, vol. 8, pp. 390–1; CHVM, vol. 2, p. 880. Emphasis original.

<sup>40</sup> Letter to Von Meck, 14/26 July 1880; CHLPP, vol. 9, p. 188; CHVM, vol. 2, p. 1048.

<sup>41</sup> Vasily Vasil’yevich Yastrebtsev, *Reminiscences of Rimsky-Korsakov*, ed. and trans. Florence Jonas (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), p. 153 (entry for 9 April 1896).

<sup>42</sup> Letter to Von Meck, 27–28 November/9–10 December 1879; CHLPP, vol. 8, pp. 445–6; CHVM, vol. 2, p. 922.

a) *Les Huguenots*, Act IV, Grand duo (no. 24)

Andante amoroso (♩ = 60)  
très doux

RAOUL:

Tu l'as dit: oui tu m'ai - mes!

Dans ma nuit quelle é-toi-le a bril - lé?

EX. 21: Meyerbeerian 'influence' in *The Maid of Orléans*.

not so much an 'influence' as an intentional reference.<sup>43</sup>

By naming Meyerbeer as the main representative of grand opera, as I have done so far, I have obscured the vital role played by one of the other key architects of the genre: librettist Eugène Scribe. Many of the features considered typical of the genre—the colourful historical settings, the visual spectacle, the conflicts and massive tableaux—were only effective if carefully motivated and prepared in the plot and dramaturgical structure.

In the literature on *The Maid*, various operas with parallel scenes or comparable effects have been suggested as potential models for Tchaikovsky's opera. Besides *Les Huguenots* and *Le Prophète*, two Scribe–Meyerbeer collaborations, these include works by other composers which situate *The Maid* consistently in the genre of grand opera: Halévy's *La Juive*, Gounod's *Faust*,

<sup>43</sup>It was understood as such by Cui, who argued that the likeness was so obvious—'a similar theme, the same key, metre, the same alternating repetition of phrases'—that it had to be considered a 'successful parody' (Cui, 'Orléanskaya Deva', p. 2). See also Abraham, 'Tchaikovsky's Operas', p. 153; Brown, *Tchaikovsky*, vol. 3, p. 53; Roland John Wiley, *Tchaikovsky, The Master Musicians* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 226–7.

b) *The Maid of Orléans*, Act II, Agnès–Charles duettino (no. 13), mm. 136–144

AGNÈS: *Lento con anima*  
*a mezza voce*

Akh, s toboy i beds - tviya ra - dostno prinyat' go - to - va ya

CHARLES: *a mezza voce*

Akh, s toboy i beds - tvi - ya radostno primu ya.

141 *cresc.*  
*a piena voce* *ff*

Tron i vlast' lyu - bov' mo - ya za - me - nit'!

*a piena voce*  
*cresc.* *ff*

Tron i vlast', o angel moy, za - me - nit' nezhna - ya lyu - bov' tvoya!

EX. 21 (Continued).

Verdi's *Don Carlos* and *Aida*, Rubinstein's *Nero* and *Die Maccabäer*.<sup>44</sup> These suggestions are often lacking in specificity, however. If, for instance, *La Juive*

<sup>44</sup> See e. g. Frolova-Walker, 'Grand Opera in Russia', p. 358; Richard Taruskin, 'Maid of Orléans, The', in Stanley Sadie (ed.), *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, 4 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1992), vol. 3, p. 153; Roland John Wiley, 'The Tribulations of Nationalist Composers: A Speculation Concerning Borrowed Music in *Khovanshchina*', in Malcolm Hamrick Brown and Roland John Wiley (eds.), *Musorgsky: In Memoriam, 1881–1981* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1982), 172n7; id., *Tchaikovsky*, pp. 226–7. For similar observations by contemporaries, see Yuly Dmitriyevich Èngel', 'Orléanskaya deva' (1899), in id., *Glazami sovremennika: izbranniye stat'i o russkoy muzike, 1898–1918*, ed. Iosif Filippovich Kunin (Moscow: Sovetskiy kompozitor, 1971), pp. 47–8; Vladimir Sergeyevich Baskin, *P. I. Chaykovskiy: ocherk yego deyatel'nosti*, Russkiye kompozitori 4 (St Petersburg: A. F. Marks, 1895), pp. 66–7; [Anon.], 'Letopis' iskusstv, teatra i muziki', *Vsemirnaya illyustratsiya*, 21 Feb. 1881, no. 632, p. 151.

is put forward as a model for *The Maid* because it contains a procession, then so does *Aida*; if it is noted that *Aida* contains an execution at the end, so does *La Juive*. Such rough similarities, therefore, only show that the plot draws on certain existing scene types, and hence they indicate a certain degree of conventionality. Any claims about specific models can only be made after a more detailed investigation of the libretto. As I will show, the role of Schiller has been insufficiently taken into account; many of the much maligned ‘effects’ in *The Maid of Orléans* found their cause in *Die Jungfrau von Orleans*—they were no mere ‘external effects’, but were motivated by its literary source.

Schiller’s *Die Jungfrau von Orleans* was a timely choice of subject for Tchaikovsky. Schiller was unusually popular among the Russian intelligentsia, to the point that Dostoyevsky claimed the work of the German poet had gone ‘into the flesh and blood of Russian society’.<sup>45</sup> Zhukovsky’s translation of *Die Jungfrau von Orleans* (1817–1821), however, had never been performed due to the contingencies of Russian censorship, and the permission for its performance in the dramatic theatres had just been granted in January 1878.<sup>46</sup>

By taking Schiller’s romantic tragedy as his primary source, Tchaikovsky chose a literary prototype no less venerable than Pushkin’s *Yevgeny Onegin*, albeit a notoriously controversial one. Throughout the course of its existence, Schiller’s play has been criticized, among other things, for its flagrant deviation from the historical record—Joan dies gloriously on the battlefield rather than on the stakes—and for its portrayal of the title character as a merciless, practically inhuman executor of God’s will. Tchaikovsky, too, did not feel comfortable with these aspects, and made a few fundamental changes: he expanded Joan’s encounter with the enemy soldier Lionel into a full-fledged love

<sup>45</sup> Fyodor Mikhaylovich Dostoyevsky, ‘Knizhnost’ i gramotnost’: stat’ya pervaya’ (1861), in id., *Polnoye sobraniye sochineniy*, ed. Vasily Grigor’yevich Bazanov et al., 30 vols. (Leningrad: Nauka, 1972–1990), vol. 19, p. 17. On Schiller reception in Russia, see Dmitry Ivanovich Chizhevsky, ‘Shiller v Rossii’, *Noviy zhurnal* 45 (1956), pp. 109–35; Martin E. Malia, ‘Schiller and the Early Russian Left’, *Harvard Slavic Studies* 4: *Russian Thought and Politics* (1957), pp. 169–200; Edmund Kostka, ‘The Vogue of Schiller in Russia and in the Soviet Union’, *The German Quarterly* 36/1 (1963), pp. 2–13; Tomáš Glanc, ‘Der russische Nationaldichter Schiller: Problematisierung der kulturellen Wechselseitigkeit und des Konzepts der Nationalliteratur’, in Alice Stašková (ed.), *Friedrich Schiller und Europa: Ästhetik, Politik, Geschichte*, Beiträge zur neueren Literaturgeschichte 238 (Heidelberg: Winter, 2007), pp. 275–83.

<sup>46</sup> Lyubov’ Nikolayevna Kiselyova, ‘*Orleanskaya deva* Zhukovskogo kak natsional’naya tragediya’, in Roman Grigor’yevich Leybov (ed.), *Istoriya i istoriosofiya v literaturnom prelomenii*, *Studia Russica Helsingiensia et Tartuensia* 8 (Tartu: Tartu Ülikooli Kirjastus, 2002), pp. 134–62. The permission given in 1878 had been requested by the actress Mariya Yermolova for a benefit performance, which never came about. With Yermolova in the title role, the play was finally performed for the first time in its entirety in 1884 and became a huge success.

affair and replaced Schiller's ending by a historically more correct conclusion based mostly on Barbier.<sup>47</sup>

When Tchaikovsky began to work on *The Maid*, he already had some experience with the techniques Scribe and other librettists had developed for the Parisian stage. Richard Taruskin has pointed out that Tchaikovsky's earlier opera *The Oprichnik*, for which the composer wrote his own libretto, was in fact 'the first deliberate and principled attempt' to introduce these methods of libretto-writing into a Russian opera.<sup>48</sup> Despite his familiarity with Scribe's structural methods, the writing of the libretto for *The Maid* cost Tchaikovsky an unusual amount of effort and pains.<sup>49</sup> He claimed, however, that he knew no one who could write him an adequate libretto and did not want to order it from 'some expensive hack'.<sup>50</sup>

It should be noted that, initially, Tchaikovsky wanted to acquire the libretto of Auguste Mermet's *Jeanne d'Arc* 'at all costs'—and went all the way to Paris to obtain it. Schiller's play contained over thirty characters and many secondary episodes, and required a thorough reworking. Tchaikovsky wanted to know 'how a Frenchman—who are always gifted with a feeling for the stage—went about this.'<sup>51</sup> It is tempting to think that the composer was still looking for some French examples after Mermet's libretto turned out to be a disappointment; during the same stay he expressed a desire to hear 'one of the old operas of the Paris repertoire: *Les Huguenots*, *La Juive*, *Le Prophète!* As if by intention, they do not give any of these.'<sup>52</sup>

Most new text was written for choruses and formal ensembles. Significant parts of the first three acts were taken straight from Schiller, either literally or

<sup>47</sup> 'There is much I like about Schiller', Tchaikovsky wrote to his brother, 'but I must admit that I find the way he despises historical facts a bit embarrassing [*smushchayet menyal*]' (Letter to Modest, 10/22 December 1878; CHLPP, vol. 7, p. 526). See also the letter to Modest Il'yich, 17/29 January 1879; CHLPP, vol. 8, p. 47.

<sup>48</sup> Richard Taruskin, 'The Present in the Past: Russian Opera and Russian Historiography, circa 1870', in id., *Musorgsky: Eight Essays and an Epilogue* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 136.

<sup>49</sup> See the letter to Von Meck, 3/15 January 1879: 'The more I apply myself to the musical composition willingly and with pleasure, the more trouble the literary part gives me. [...] The number of syllables, feet, and particularly the *rhythm*, in those places where you have to make rhythmic verses against your will—all of this makes it very difficult and tiresome for me' (CHLPP, vol. 8, p. 19; CHVM, vol. 2, p. 625).

<sup>50</sup> Letter to Von Meck, 15/27 January 1879; CHLPP, vol. 8, pp. 45–6; CHVM, vol. 2, p. 639.

<sup>51</sup> Letter to Von Meck, 6/18 December 1878; CHLPP, vol. 7, p. 517; CHVM, vol. 1, p. 586.

<sup>52</sup> Letter to Von Meck, 24 December 1878/5 January 1879; CHLPP, vol. 7, p. 565; CHVM, vol. 1, p. 615.

as brief summaries of longer stretches of text.<sup>53</sup> Act II, where Joan meets the Dauphin Charles at his court in Chinon, opens with a chorus of minstrels and the customary *divertissement* as in Mermet's *Jeanne d'Arc*, though it is worth noting that this entertainment also finds some motivation in Schiller's Act I.<sup>54</sup>

In Act III, scene 1, Joan suddenly falls in love with the enemy soldier Lionel when the moon hits his face after she has defeated and disarmed him in combat. This scene is largely the same as in Schiller, except that Lionel is changed into a Burgundian.<sup>55</sup> In Schiller, the affair between Joan and Lionel was limited to this encounter in battle, a brief episode after which Lionel returned to the English side. Tchaikovsky hugely increased the weight of the love affair by adding a final tryst between Joan and Lionel at the beginning of Act IV, which was wholly the composer's invention. At the final chord of this duet, the English invaders enter the stage, kill Lionel and capture Joan. For the conclusion of the opera, Joan's execution by the English in Rouen, Tchaikovsky relied in many particulars on the final scene of Barbier's play (Act V, scene 9).<sup>56</sup>

Conforming to the conventions of grand opera, Tchaikovsky supplied each act with a climactic tableau with large crowds onstage. In Act I, the climax is achieved in the majestic, tuneful hymn—a trio with chorus; the finale of Act II is scored for quintet with chorus, and the finale of Act III manages

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<sup>53</sup> For a more extensive comparison of Tchaikovsky's libretto to Schiller's tragedy, see Alfonsina Janés, 'Die Jungfrau von Orleans: Čajkovskij und Schiller', *Mitteilungen der Tschaikowsky-Gesellschaft* 13 (2006), pp. 131–43.

<sup>54</sup> See Vasily Andreyevich Zhukovsky, 'Orléanskaya deva: dramatičeskaya počéma', in id., *Sobraniye sočineniy*, ed. Irina Mikhaylovna Semyonko and Valentin Petrovich Petrushkov, 4 vols. (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaya literatura, 1959–1960), vol. 3, pp. 21, 22, where Charles praises the singing ambassadors sent to him by René d'Anjou, while Dunois complains that the Dauphin is: 'surrounded by clowns and troubadours'.

<sup>55</sup> Lionel assumed some of the characteristics of Philip the Good, Duke of Burgundy, who in Schiller's drama—like Lionel in the opera—reverts to the camp of Charles after his encounter with Joan. Thus Tchaikovsky condensed three such battles in Schiller—with Montgomery, Philip, and Lionel—into one.

<sup>56</sup> The details include: the mute friar supporting Joan; the passage in which Joan asks for a crucifix—which had to be cut for the censor—and is given an improvised cross of sticks; the taunt of the soldiers (who assume the role of Barbier's Brown) throwing wood on the fire saying 'here's our gift to you' and their cries 'The fire! The fire!'; and finally, the Latin phrase of the monks, 'Orate pro ea' (Jules Barbier, *Jeanne d'Arc: drame en cinq actes, en vers avec chœurs par P.-J. Barbier; musique de Ch. Gounod* [Paris: Lévy, 1874]). Tchaikovsky may well have known that Charles Gounod had written the incidental music for Barbier's play, which also included this entire final scene. After the play, which was first published in 1869, had been premiered with music in 1873, Gounod's name was indicated on the title page of subsequent editions.

to surpass this with a septet with chorus. In the final scene, Tchaikovsky employed a chorus with no less than four different divisions: a chorus of angels (sopranos), a chorus of monks (tenors), a chorus of soldiers (basses), and a chorus of citizens (full chorus). Tchaikovsky also allowed for some rather conventional forms. The Joan–Lionel love duet, for instance, has a traditional multimovement Rossinian layout: first an *andantino* for the two lovers; then a *tempo di mezzo* in which trumpets announce the impending arrival of the English; and finally an *allegro vivace* culminating in *più mosso* cadences. Tchaikovsky's septet in Act III was also traditionally cast as an *adagio*, a *tempo di mezzo*, and a choral *stretta* with a fugal middle section.<sup>57</sup> Still, *The Maid* is hardly a well-made libretto in the Scribian sense. The amount of intrigue is limited, there are few 'strong' situations, and the central events of the plot are not as carefully prepared as in Scribe's best libretti. Cui even went so far as to designate the opera as 'a series of lyric scenes'.<sup>58</sup>

In order to appreciate the extent to which Tchaikovsky's plot and dramaturgy resembled any specific grand opera, it is worth examining in detail Act III, scene 2, which revolves around the coronation of Charles VII and the public accusation of Joan by her father Thibaut. More so than any other in the opera, this scene justifies the reputation of *The Maid* as a grand opera in the manner of Scribe and Meyerbeer, owing to its visual splendour, dramatic confrontation, and mounting tension culminating in a vast motionless dramatic tableau. While he was working on the orchestration of the opera, Tchaikovsky explained to Von Meck that designing a scene that employed such forces was a formidable challenge.

I am now working on a very difficult place in the opera, namely the second scene of Act III. If you recall, dear friend, this is the place where on the square in Reims in front of the cathedral occurs the most powerful, tragic moment in the fate of my heroine, i. e. when from the height of her glory and honour she suddenly falls and becomes the object of persecution. Here there are large choral masses, a multitude of characters and strong dramatic movement. Every moment you have

<sup>57</sup> This last movement of the septet was later cut at the behest of Nápravník; see Tchaikovsky's letter to Nápravník, 9 December 1880; CHLPP, vol. 9, p. 328. Lucinde Braun, who attributed the form of Tchaikovsky's ensemble without *stretta* to Verdi's influence, was obviously not aware of this cut (Lucinde Braun, 'Das "pezzo concertato" in Čajkovskijs Opern', *Mitteilungen der Tschaikowsky-Gesellschaft* 6 [1999], pp. 17–26). The deleted *allegro* can be found in Pyotr Il'yich Tchaikovsky, *Polnoye sobraniye sochineniy*, ed. Boris Vladimirovich Asaf'yev et al., 62 vols. (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoye muzikal'noye izdatel'stvo, 1946–1979), vol. 5: *Orleanskaya deva*, pp. 405–49.

<sup>58</sup> Cui, 'Orleanskaya Deva', p. 2.

to think about the various difficulties which both the librettist and the composer would like to handle as well as possible. I have to strain all my powers, and as a result I am very tired every evening. [...] Yes! writing a complex, grand opera is no easy matter [...].<sup>59</sup>

In his 1895 study of Tchaikovsky, Vladimir Baskin noted that the coronation scene of *The Maid*, 'in its scenic situation, brings to mind the similar one in Meyerbeer's *Le Prophète*'.<sup>60</sup> Recently, Marina Frolova-Walker has suggested that *Le Prophète* may have served as a model for Tchaikovsky's plot as a whole. She observes that the characters and plot show many similarities when Joan is seen as a counterpart to the prophet John of Leiden, and Joan's father Thibaut as Fidès—an inversion of the sexes which need not be surprising given that the main character is a warrior maid. The entire dramatic structure of *The Maid*, she argues, would be similar to that of *Le Prophète* with Acts I and II conflated.<sup>61</sup> Crucial in this argument—since it is the most specific—is the similarity with the coronation scene.

This scene of *Le Prophète*, in which the prophet John of Leiden is crowned 'King of Jerusalem' in Münster Cathedral, was famous for being 'one of the most magnificent in the whole range of spectacular opera', as one nineteenth-century commentator put it: '*Le Prophète* is worth seeing for the coronation scene alone'.<sup>62</sup> It was among Meyerbeer's most admired scenes. While Tchaikovsky was writing his *Maid*, the St Petersburg weekly *Niva* voiced the widespread opinion that even though Meyerbeer had made too many 'concessions to the masses' and thus had written some '*morceaux* of the most dubious properties', the coronation scene of *Le Prophète* was to be counted among those parts of Meyerbeer's output 'which can be regarded as paragons of operatic music and which testify to the composer's genius'.<sup>63</sup>

There are several striking similarities between Tchaikovsky's scene and that of *Le Prophète*, not only in terms of the scenic situation, but in terms of the plot and the musical treatment as well (see Table 2 for reference). Like *Le Prophète*—and *La Juive* before it—Tchaikovsky's coronation scene contains a

<sup>59</sup> Letter to Von Meck, 17 July 1879; CHLPP, vol. 8, p. 290; CHVM, vol. 2, p. 789. The term Tchaikovsky uses in the last quoted sentence, '*bol'shaya opera*' could refer to the specific trend of grand opera that originated in the Paris Opéra, but it could also mean simply a big or large-scale work.

<sup>60</sup> Baskin, *P. I. Chaykovskiy*, p. 66.

<sup>61</sup> Frolova-Walker, 'Grand Opera in Russia', p. 358.

<sup>62</sup> Henry Sutherland Edwards, *The Lyrical Drama: Essays on Subjects, Composers & Executants of Modern Opera*, 2 vols. (London: Allen, 1881), vol. 1, pp. 258, 259.

<sup>63</sup> [Anon.], 'Dzhakomo Meyerber. Ocherk', *Niva* 10/48 (1879), p. 959.

*Le Prophète, Act 4*

*Scene 1: A square in Münster*

No. 21 Entr'acte & chorus of citizens

No. 22 F is begging on the streets and believes J is killed by the Prophet.

No. 23 F encounters B; duo; B vows revenge.

*Scene 2: Inside Münster cathedral*

No. 24 Coronation march (w/ onstage brass); procession goes backstage.

No. 25(a) Prayer (backstage ensemble w/ chorus);

F (w/ organ) curses the Prophet

(b) Chorus (w/ children): 'There he is, the Prophet King'; procession returns.

F recognizes J: 'My son!'; chorus: 'Her son?'

(c) Couplets: F claims to be J's mother.

J declares her mad; general consternation; ensemble.

(d) J miraculously 'cures' F.

Ensemble; J leaves with entourage.

F recalls B's mission.

TABLE 2: The coronation scenes in *Le Prophète* (B = Berthe; F = Fidès; J = John) and *The Maid of Orléans* (C = Cardinal; D = Dunois; J = Joan; K = Charles; L = Lionel; R = Raimond; T = Thibaut).

*The Maid of Orléans, Act 3*

*Scene 2: A square in front of Reims cathedral*

No. 18 Coronation march (w/ onstage brass); chorus: 'Long live the King, long live the Maid'; procession goes into the cathedral.

No. 19 Scene (w/ organ): T wishes to save J's soul by force; R urges him to leave her; duettino.

No. 20 Prayer (backstage chorus w/ onstage brass); procession returns; chorus: 'Long live the King'; K addresses the people.

T steps forward. J recognizes him: 'O God, my father!'; chorus: 'Her father!'

T accuses J;

general consternation; ensemble.

D, T, C question J; J remains silent; thunder-strokes.

[Ensemble]; all abandon the stage.

[D tells J she is free to leave]; J sends L away.

procession accompanied by a grand march (no. 24), and the score prescribes no less solemn visual spectacle than these Parisian operas, calling for onstage musicians, children, a variety of military and ecclesiastic representatives, regalia, and of course the new King under a baldachin carried by barons.<sup>64</sup> Although Meyerbeer's scene takes place inside a cathedral and Tchaikovsky's in front of one, the actual coronation in both operas takes place offstage. Meyerbeer exploited this as an opportunity to create a musical divided into foreground, visible and invisible background, which was remarkable in its time.<sup>65</sup> The coronation march, for instance, makes use of antiphonal effects between an onstage band and the orchestra, and in the subsequent number (no. 25a), the audience can hear an offstage choir singing a Latin prayer and an organ playing, while John's mother, Fidès, remains in the foreground during the ceremony. Tchaikovsky's scene likewise employs an onstage military band and an offstage chorus and organ that sound from within the cathedral. The use of the organ in the opera was significant. It was pioneered in *Robert le diable*, another Meyerbeer–Scribe collaboration, and retained its mixed association of the holy and the demonic in later applications, like most famously Gounod's *Faust*.<sup>66</sup> In *Le Prophète*, Fidès curses the prophet (no. 24a) over the sounds of the organ. In *The Maid*, the organ accompanies the duettino for Thibaut and Raymond (no. 19), in which Thibaut speaks of the deceit that has blinded everyone and expresses his intention to rescue his daughter's soul from the clutches of hell, even if this would mean killing her.

This brings us to the similarities in the plots. While the Thibaut–Raymond duettino is connected to Fidès's curse through the organ, it also parallels to some extent the duet for Fidès and Berthe (no. 23) in the scene preceding Meyerbeer's coronation march, taking place on a square in Münster. In both

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<sup>64</sup> Klaus Niemöller has noted the particular propensity for visual spectacle in church scenes in nineteenth-century opera, and points out, amongst others, the wedding ceremonies in Auber's *La Muette de Portici*, Donizetti's *La Favorite*, and Wagner's *Lohengrin* (Klaus Wolfgang Niemöller, 'Die kirchliche Szene', in Heinz Becker [ed.], *Die Couleur Locale in der Oper des 19. Jahrhunderts*, Studien zur Musikgeschichte des 19. Jahrhunderts 42 [Regensburg: Bosse, 1976], p. 348).

<sup>65</sup> Robert Ignatius Letellier, *An Introduction to the Dramatic Works of Giacomo Meyerbeer: Operas, Ballets, Cantatas, Plays* (Hampshire: Aldershot, 2008), p. 154.

<sup>66</sup> For a brief discussion of the use of the organ in nineteenth-century opera, see Niemöller, 'Die kirchliche Szene', pp. 351–3, 361. That the use of this instrument was associated with Meyerbeer's work is suggested by a remark made in the late 1860s by Aleksandr Serov, who characterized one of his own opera subjects as containing 'a ball, a battle, [...] a church organ, gunfire, and all the trappings à la Meyerbeer' (Letter to O. A. Novikova, quoted in Abram Akimovich Gozenpud, 'Opernoye tvorchestvo A. N. Serova', *Sovetskaya muzika*, 1971, no. 7, p. 98).

cases we see a parent and a lover who have been left behind by the protagonist in the first act, and who now reappear in a new city discussing the intention to bring down the protagonist—although it must be noted that at this point in *Le Prophète* Fidès and Berthe are not yet aware that their John is the Prophet. After the coronations in both operas, the new monarch returns to the stage, and the mother and father reveal themselves. Since John claims to be the son of God, and Charles VII has just asked Joan whether she has descended from the heavens, the appearance of their parents causes some confusion ('Her son?'/ 'Her father!'). Thibaut and Fidès identify themselves with similar wordings ('I am alas that poor woman. . .'/ 'Yes, the sad, unhappy father has come. . .') and publicly denounce their children so as to expose their heavenly mission as deceit. In both cases, their intervention is seen as madness, and the chorus does not know what or whom to believe. The general consternation, of course, leads to a grand *morceau d'ensemble* with chorus. In *The Maid*, the confusion turns into outright panic when Joan is questioned and the heavens answer in her place with loud strokes of thunder. It is at this place in Tchaikovsky's septet that *The Maid* finally takes a different course than *Le Prophète*: Joan is abandoned by her people, while John pulls off a final victory by 'curing' Fidès of her madness.

Faced with so much evidence, we may conclude that the parallels between the scenes of *The Maid* and *Le Prophète* amount to more than mere coincidence. But before we can accept *Le Prophète* as a model for Tchaikovsky's scene, it is essential first to take the role of Schiller's play in all of this into account. Many of the details discussed above were actually taken almost directly from Schiller's Act IV. The text for Tchaikovsky's scene was largely taken from Zhukovsky's translation of scenes 6, 8, 10, and 11.<sup>67</sup> The composer's only substantial additions were the texts for the opening chorus (no. 18), the chorus from within the church (beginning of no. 20), the two set pieces that contain simultaneous singing (the Thibaut–Raimond duettino in no. 19 and the septet in no. 20), and the few concluding lines of the scene in which Joan sends Lionel away; and all of these are quite irrelevant for the comparison to *Le Prophète*. The coronation march, the organ inside the church, and the backstage trumpets, on the other hand, can all be found in Schiller and provided convenient cues for the composer.<sup>68</sup> Even Tchaikovsky's stage instructions detailing the

<sup>67</sup> Tchaikovsky only eliminated the two scenes with Joan's sisters (scenes 7 and 9), in which Joan resolves to return to Domrémy. Before the septet's *allegro vivo* was cut, it also included part of Duchatel's words in Schiller's Act IV, scene 13, sung by Charles.

<sup>68</sup> Schiller's stage instructions in scene 7 call for trumpets and kettle-drums heard from within the church, and in scene 9 Joan complains: 'the organ / like thunder torments my ear'

procession were taken almost literally from Zhukovsky's translation. Not for nothing did Thomas Mann call *Die Jungfrau von Orleans* a 'word opera'.<sup>69</sup> The presence of ceremonial mass scenes like Charles's coronation, the supernatural elements, the frequent references to music and instructions for musical accompaniment: all give the play a distinct resemblance to Romantic opera.<sup>70</sup>

It has been argued in Meyerbeer scholarship that Schiller's play also served as a model for *Le Prophète*, particularly for the coronation scene, and this explains a lot.<sup>71</sup> It is known, in any case, that both Meyerbeer and Scribe made a note of the title of Schiller's play during their work on *Le Prophète*.<sup>72</sup> Obviously, Scribe treated the elements of Schiller's play much more freely and pragmatically than Tchaikovsky, as was his habit. Indeed, as Karin Pendle informs us, 'it was never Scribe's practice to take over a play, a novel, or even a theme intact from another source for use in a libretto'.<sup>73</sup> Yet the many similarities in both detail and general situation outlined above, suggest that

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(Zhukovsky, 'Orleanskaya deva', pp. 116, 118).

<sup>69</sup> Thomas Mann, 'Versuch über Schiller' (1955), in id., *Gesammelte Werke*, 14 vols. (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1960–1974), vol. 9, p. 915.

<sup>70</sup> See Ethery Inasaridse, *Schiller und die italienische Oper: das Schillerdrama als Libretto des Belcanto*, Europäische Hochschulschriften 1130 (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1989), pp. 122–5. This author even discerns recitative and aria structures in Schiller's text.

<sup>71</sup> Alan Armstrong, 'Meyerbeer's *Le Prophète*: A History of Its Composition and Early Performances', 4 vols., Ph.D. thesis (Ann Arbor: Ohio State University, 1990), vol. 1, pp. 18–22; Robert Ignatius Letellier, *The Operas of Giacomo Meyerbeer* (Madison, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2006), pp. 188–9.

<sup>72</sup> Meyerbeer, who knew Schiller's play well, made the connection between the two works on an empty page of his diary, where he contemplated several aspects of the coronation scene in *Le Prophète* (see note 74 below) and concluded: 'Read W. Scott's *Old Mortality* and *Die Jungfrau von Orleans*' (Giacomo Meyerbeer, *Briefwechsel und Tagebücher*, ed. Heinz Becker et al., 8 vols. [Berlin: De Gruyter, 1960–2006], vol. 3, p. 170). Scribe made a similar note in his papers (see Armstrong, 'Meyerbeer's *Le Prophète*', vol. 1, p. 15).

<sup>73</sup> Karin Pendle, *Eugène Scribe and French Opera of the Nineteenth Century*, Studies in Musicology 6 (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1979), p. 473. Scribe drew from a range of literary and historical sources for *Le Prophète*, most importantly Voltaire's *Essai sur les mœurs et l'esprit des nations* (1756), and probably also Walter Scott's *Old Mortality* (1816), Carl Franz van der Velde's novel *Die Wiedertäufer* (1825) and Jules Michelet's *Mémoires de Luther* (1835) (Armstrong, 'Meyerbeer's *Le Prophète*', vol. 1, pp. 6–9, 16–8; Letellier, *The Operas of Giacomo Meyerbeer*, p. 183). It has been suggested that Scribe also employed Russian models. Following the suggestion by Henry Sutherland Edwards that the subject of *Le Prophète* was 'borrowed partly from the history of John of Leyden, and partly, indeed principally, from that of the false Demetrius, who, when he had raised himself to the throne of Russia, was confronted with his humbly-born mother' (Edwards, *The Lyrical Drama*, vol. 1, p. 257), Pendle added in her monograph that writings on the subject would have been readily available to Scribe, and suggested that even Pushkin's *Boris Godunov* could have been among his readings (Pendle, *Eugène Scribe and French Opera of the Nineteenth Century*, 565n11).

Schiller's coronation scene served as a fertile source of ideas and effects for *Le Prophète*.

This makes the relation between *The Maid* and *Le Prophète*—and the genre of French grand opera as a whole—considerably more complicated than has previously been recognized. The similarities between these two operas—the coronation scenes in particular—were not merely accidental, for Tchaikovsky knew Meyerbeer's operas all too well, and it is certainly possible that *Le Prophète* was in the back of his mind while he was composing *The Maid*. Yet they did not arise because Tchaikovsky had wanted to imitate *Le Prophète*. In *Die Jungfrau von Orleans*, he had found a subject that was lofty in terms of content and theatrical in the manner of grand opera at the same time, and this doubtlessly formed part of his attraction to the subject. The composer observed the dramaturgical conventions of French grand opera, and the subject could hardly have been better suited to it.

More so than Scribe and Meyerbeer, Tchaikovsky was inclined to be faithful to both his literary source and the historical record, and in the case of Schiller's play, this inevitably posed a problem. Not only was he impelled to replace Schiller's blatantly unhistorical ending while staying close to this source in most that came before; he was also prompted to compose a scene—the coronation—that had already been used in one of the most famous operas of his time. And the spectacular scenes that formed the part and parcel of grand opera—marches, impending battles, executions—relied on a precarious balance between originality and convention. Meyerbeer himself was concerned about the similarity between the coronation scene in *Le Prophète* and the procession of King Sigismund in Act I of *La Juive*, and considered changing it for this reason.<sup>74</sup> Auguste Mermet, even though he had turned the coronation in Reims into a glorious conclusion of his opera without confrontation or denunciation, was also accused in the press of having produced 'an inevitable but blatant copy of Act IV of *Le Prophète*.'<sup>75</sup> Tchaikovsky's faithfulness to Schiller would seem to exempt him of all charges of imitating any one of Scribe's scenarios. Ironically, because the Frenchman had previously tapped from the same source, it made his opera seem all the more derivative.

<sup>74</sup> 'The coronation ceremony itself performed on the steps of the cathedral itself is more piquant than the coronation procession, which has too much in common with the *cortège* of *La Juive*' (Meyerbeer, *Briefwechsel und Tagebücher*, vol. 3, p. 170).

<sup>75</sup> Adolphe Jullien, 'Théâtre National de l'Opéra: *Jeanne d'Arc*', *Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris* 43/15 (9 Apr. 1876), p. 114.

### *Whose Music Is It?*

It is hard to believe that Tchaikovsky actually felt able only to write music for situations he knew personally and sympathized with, as he wrote in his letter to Taneyev about *Onegin* quoted at the beginning of this chapter. The very number of major works he wrote on foreign subjects alone bears this out: besides the operas *The Maid of Orléans* and *Iolanta*, one only has to think of famous works like the ballets *The Sleeping Beauty* and *The Nutcracker* or the orchestral fantasies *Romeo and Juliet* and *Francesca di Rimini*. Tchaikovsky's insistence on personal experience has led to the all-too-easy conclusion that he 'simply had not been touched by the characters' of *The Maid* and 'had been driven to dramatic formulae' as a result.<sup>76</sup> Yet even if his interest was focused rather exclusively on its title heroine, it is patently untrue that Tchaikovsky was untouched by his subject. He reported to Von Meck about the feverish pace in which he was working ('so many ideas stream into one's head that there is no room for them and you begin to despair about your own human impotence') and how he was moved after reading Wallon's *Jeanne d'Arc* ('I became so sorry and hurt for all humankind that I felt truly shattered'). Initially, at least, as the composer himself claimed, the problem was not that there was a lack of inspiration, but that there was too much.<sup>77</sup>

In his letter to Taneyev, Tchaikovsky espoused a very pronounced view on local colour, which might offer a better explanation of why he felt more attracted to *Onegin* than a subject like *Aida*. Speaking of the characters that inhabit the world of Verdi's opera, he surmised that these people 'must have expressed their feelings completely in their own manner, unlike ours.' He felt that his music, which he noted was steeped in 'Schumannism, Wagnerism, Chopinism, Glinkism, Berliozism' and 'all sorts of the newest *isms*' would be inappropriate for the depiction of ancient Egyptians. It would 'relate to the characters of *Aida*,' he wrote 'like the elegant, gallant speech of Racine's heroes, who address each other with *vous*, relates to the notion of the real Orestes, the real Andromachus and so on. That would be a *lie*. And I find this lie offensive.'<sup>78</sup>

<sup>76</sup> Brown, *Tchaikovsky*, vol. 3, p. 61.

<sup>77</sup> Letter to Von Meck, 10/22 December 1878; CHLPP, vol. 7, p. 524. See also the letter to Modest of the same date: 'Modya! The last days were full of inspirational fever! I have started *The Maid of Orléans* and you cannot imagine how difficult it is. Difficult not because of lack of inspiration but, on the contrary, because the pressure was too great' (CHLPP, vol. 7, p. 525; trans. Tchaikovsky, *Letters to His Family*, p. 184).

<sup>78</sup> Letter to Taneyev, 2/14 January 1878; CHLPP, vol. 7, p. 21; CHT, p. 23. Emphasis original.

It should be noted that such lies are in fact inevitable: any opera requires a considerable suspension of disbelief and the use of geographically or temporally remote subjects will result in a difference in degree at worst. Whether Tchaikovsky recognized this or not, he was enough of a pragmatist not to have his ideas deter him from writing music on such remote subjects. As a matter of fact, he had been actively searching for them in the 1870s. In 1874, he wrote to Modest that he 'would give a lot to have a good libretto from foreign history';<sup>79</sup> and in 1875, the year *Aida* was first performed in St Petersburg, he encouraged Konstantin Shilovsky, the future co-librettist of *Onegin*, to keep looking for a suitable Egyptian subject.<sup>80</sup>

In the final section of this chapter, I will examine—as I have done in the case of Serov's *Judith*—how contemporary and later critics have construed the relation between Russianness and the non-Russian subject of *The Maid of Orléans*. More generally, I will consider the relation between the musical style of the composer and the identity of his characters. Rather than treating the discrepancies between Tchaikovsky's style and the time and place of Joan of Arc as a shortcoming, I will suggest how they may improve our understanding of the perception of Russianness in Tchaikovsky's time.

THERE IS as yet little consensus in the scholarly literature as to what effect Tchaikovsky's turn to a medieval French subject had on his musical style. Some, like Marina Frolova-Walker, maintain that the music of *The Maid* was written 'within the boundaries of Tchaikovsky's mature style'.<sup>81</sup> Gerald Abraham, on the other hand, claimed that the opera contained 'little that even bears the stamp of Tchaikovsky's musical personality', and Henry Zajaczkowski even reckons that the composer consciously sacrificed 'most of his unique melodic powers' in order to arrive at a 'remarkably cosmopolitan' idiom.<sup>82</sup>

Those who maintain that the style of *The Maid* was not Tchaikovsky's own have obviously struggled to specify in which style the opera was written.

<sup>79</sup> Letter to Modest Il'yich, 29 October 1874; CHLPP, vol. 5, p. 372; also Tchaikovsky, *Letters to His Family*, p. 89.

<sup>80</sup> It is worth noting that the composer had rejected Shilovsky's latest libretto *The Reluctant Queen* because he felt the Egyptians in it smacked of 'commonly used theatrical and particularly ballet kings, royal daughters, etc.': and not because he rejected Egyptian subjects or kings per se (letter to Konstantin Shilovsky, 1875 (undated); CHLPP, vol. 5, p. 429). Tchaikovsky suggested 'Joseph and the Pharaoh, or something of the sort' as a subject to Shilovsky, and the latter turned to Joseph's son, Ephraim, for the subject of a new libretto, which Tchaikovsky did consider for a while but eventually rejected as well.

<sup>81</sup> Frolova-Walker, 'Grand Opera in Russia', p. 358.

<sup>82</sup> Abraham, 'Tchaikovsky's Operas', p. 153; Zajaczkowski, *An Introduction to Tchaikovsky's Operas*, p. 46.

A wide range of musical influences has been suggested, which, when taken together, give the impression that this opera was a veritable hotchpotch of influences. Critics have identified reminiscences of Mozart, Mendelssohn, Chopin, and Verdi, and even could not resist pointing out a passage by Elgar (the A flat Symphony, premiered in 1908!).<sup>83</sup> Striking as some of these similarities may be, it is hard to tell whether the number of such observations reflects an actual property of Tchaikovsky's score or that it reflects above all the interests of the people who have identified them.<sup>84</sup> Without any musical or dramatic motivation attached to these observations, the only critical point in citing them would be to prove that Tchaikovsky's opera was either derivative, Western, or both. The implication that the work was derivative *because* it was Western is just around the corner, and indeed, it has been suggested that the snatches of Mozart and Chopin were 'unwittingly recalled by Tchaikovsky in his general concern to look westward in *The Maid*'.<sup>85</sup>

As in the case of Serov's *Judith*, then, the fact that Tchaikovsky wrote an opera on a foreign subject placed him in a vulnerable position. If there would be nothing Russian about the music, this might be construed as a betrayal of Tchaikovsky's national identity; but if something specifically Russian would be detected, it could be considered inappropriate in terms of local colour. While the former issue was a major occupation of twentieth-century Western critics, it seems that the composer himself was more concerned about the latter.

Nadezhda von Meck, who was naturally one of the first to hear the new opera—and she had none other than young Claude Debussy play the score for her on the piano—admitted that she was worried that something of the Russian character she normally found in Tchaikovsky's works would also be present in *The Maid*. She wrote to the composer that she had been 'afraid that if some such trait, unnoticed by yourself, would end up in your French opera, those French scoundrels would be all too happy to trumpet this and ridicule it.' She was relieved to find these concerns to be unfounded, and Tchaikovsky replied that he found it 'pleasant in the highest degree' that she had not heard any 'Russianisms' in it. 'I feared that and tried very much to be as *objective* as

<sup>83</sup> Abraham, 'Tchaikovsky's Operas', p. 153; Brown, *Tchaikovsky*, vol. 3, pp. 45–54; Wiley, 'The Tribulations of Nationalist Composers', 172n7. See also id., *Tchaikovsky*, pp. 226–7.

<sup>84</sup> It must be noted that several contemporary reviews also mentioned the 'abundance of reminiscences' in *The Maid*. See Cui, 'Orleanskaya Deva'; Galler, 'Teatr i muzika. Orleanskaya Deva opera P. I. Chaykovskago. Benefis È. F. Napravnika', p. 3; [Anon.], 'Izyashchniia iskusstva. Tiflisskiy teatr', *Kavkaz*, 12 Dec. 1886, no. 329, p. 3.

<sup>85</sup> Zajaczkowski, *An Introduction to Tchaikovsky's Operas*, p. 47.

possible in this opera,' he wrote.<sup>86</sup>

As far as I am aware, none of the reviews during Tchaikovsky's lifetime complained of any inappropriate Russian features in the score, and neither did any one of them complain, in the manner of Tsertelev's criticism of *Judith*, that either the subject or the music of *The Maid* was wanting in Russian character.<sup>87</sup> One could say that the Russianness of *The Maid of Orléans* was simply not much of an issue at the time of its premiere.

Eventually, however, the dreaded Russianisms did come to play a role in the discourse about *The Maid of Orléans*, and one of the first to trumpet them was one of Tchaikovsky's younger contemporaries, Vsevolod Cheshikhin. Cheshikhin wrote in his history of Russian opera that 'Tchaikovsky was not completely in his element in *The Maid of Orléans*': 'Just as it was difficult for Rubinstein to become a national-Russian composer through his music,' Cheshikhin argued, 'for Tchaikovsky, after *Yevgeny Onegin*, it was hard to tear himself away from his musical nationalism!' To stave his claim, he pointed out two 'curious things': that the Chorus of Minstrels in Act II 'even though it was taken from a collection of ancient French songs, somehow smacks of the Little-Russian *dumka*'; and Agnès's arioso in the same act was also 'not devoid of Russian character'.<sup>88</sup>

It is worth noting that Cheshikhin uses these 'Russianisms' to argue

<sup>86</sup> Letter from Von Meck to Tchaikovsky, 8/20 October 1880; CHVM, vol. 2, p. 1107; and Tchaikovsky's reply, 14–16 October 1880; CHLPP, vol. 9, p. 299; CHVM, vol. 2, p. 1114. Emphasis original.

<sup>87</sup> I base these claims on the following corpus of nineteenth-century reviews: [Anon.], 'Teatral'niya zametki', *Golos*, 15 Feb. 1881, no. 46, p. 3; Cui, 'Orleanskaya Deva'; [Anon.], 'Letopis' iskusstv, teatra i muziki'; id., 'Teatr i muzika'; 'V. P.' [Platon L'vovich Vaksel'], 'Chronique musicale. Opéra-russe: *La Pucelle d'Orléans*, opéra en 4 actes et 6 tableaux, d'après Schiller et Joukovsky, musique de M. P. Tchaïkovsky [...]', *Journal de St-Petersbourg*, 13 Mar. 1881, no. 74, pp. 1–2; Makarov, '[Orleanskaya deva]'; [Anon.], 'Orleanskaya deva. Op. g. Chaykovskago', *Sufl'yor*, 15 Feb. 1881, no. 14, p. 3; Galler, 'Teatr i muzika. Orleanskaya Deva opera P. I. Chaykovskago. Benefis É. F. Napravnik'; id., 'Orleanskaya Deva, opera v 4-kh deystviyakh P. I. Chaykovskago'; Joseph Lewensson, 'Biographisches. Peter Tschaikowsky', *Musikalisches Wochenblatt* 14/14 (29 Mar. 1883), pp. 175–6; 14/15 (5 Apr. 1883), pp. 186–7; [Nikolay Mikhaylovich Lisovsky], 'Vchera i segodnya (Dnevnik Zritel'ya)', *Zritel'*, 9 Jan. 1883, no. 6, p. 3; 'L. Batorin' [Nikolay Mikhaylovich Lisovsky], 'Imperatorskiy operniy teatr. Orleanskaya deva: Opera v 4-kh d., P. I. Chaykovskago', *Teatr*, 22 Jan. 1883, no. 4, pp. 1–3; [Anon.], 'Izyashchniya iskusstva. Tiflisskiy teatr'; Nikolay Dmitriyevich Kashkin, 'Orleanskaya deva Chaykovskogo na stsene chastnoy operi', in id., *Izbranniye stat'i o P. I. Chaykovskom*, ed. Semyon Isaakovich Shlifshiteyn, *Russkaya klassicheskaya muzikal'naya kritika* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoye muzikal'noye izdatel'stvo, 1954), pp. 80–4; Ėngel', 'Orleanskaya deva'.

<sup>88</sup> Vsevolod Yevgrafovich Cheshikhin, *Istoriya russkoy operi s 1674 po 1903 g.*, 2nd edn. (Moscow: Jurgenson, 1905), p. 326.

that Tchaikovsky was ‘not in his element’ in *The Maid*. Like Von Meck and Tchaikovsky himself, he considers them as flaws rather than virtues in an opera on a non-Russian subject, and this is the complete opposite view as held by Odoyevsky, Laroche, and, implicitly, Tsertelev, as discussed in the previous chapter.

The logic evinced by Cheshikhin, Von Meck, and Tchaikovsky, was to recur in *The Maid*’s historiography. Evidently influenced by Cheshikhin, Rosa Newmarch, one of the first English advocates of Russian music, cited the same examples of the Chorus of Minstrels and Agnès’s arioso to reproach Tchaikovsky for his ‘incongruous lapses into the Russian style’;<sup>89</sup> Gerald Abraham pointed out a recitative in which ‘the French King lapses into an unmistakably Russian accent’;<sup>90</sup> David Brown followed Cheshikhin and Newmarch by claiming that ‘Tchaikovsky could not completely silence his national voice’ in the Minstrel’s Chorus, and agreed with Abraham that the opening chorus ‘places the locale not in France but Russia’—though he was willing to forgive this ‘geographical ineptitude’.<sup>91</sup>

Brown lists the ‘Russianisms’ he found in *The Maid* among the ‘positive things’ in the score, thus conforming to a mode of historiography that set high store on Russianness as a touchstone of authenticity.<sup>92</sup> But unlike their Soviet colleagues, who were just as eager to point out national features in Tchaikovsky’s music, the Western authors quoted above simultaneously presented the Russian elements they found as faults in terms of local colour, as ‘lapses’, ‘accents’, or ‘geographical ineptitudes’ that simply could not be suppressed.<sup>93</sup> Rather than vindicating the work as a whole, these Russian

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<sup>89</sup> Newmarch, *The Russian Opera*, p. 350. I thank the observation about the similarity of these two passages to Marina Frolova-Walker’s keynote lecture given at the ‘Non-Nationalist’ Russian Opera Symposium in Leeds on 17 November 2010, now published as ‘A Ukrainian Tune in Medieval France: Perceptions of Nationalism and Local Color in Russian Opera’, *Nineteenth-Century Music* 35/2 (2011), pp. 115–31. Not only does Newmarch mention the same examples as Cheshikhin, she also makes the same mistake, referring to Charles VI instead of Charles VII. If she was plagiarizing Cheshikhin, however, she did so poorly, for she ignores Cheshikhin’s remark about Tchaikovsky’s French source for the Minstrel Song and simply suggests that Tchaikovsky used ‘a folk-song of Malo-Russian origin’.

<sup>90</sup> Abraham, ‘Tchaikovsky’s Operas’, 149n.

<sup>91</sup> Brown, *Tchaikovsky*, vol. 3, p. 51.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid. Gerald Abraham tellingly prefaced his discussion of *The Maid of Orléans* lamenting the loss of ‘a strong national flavour’ at this point in Tchaikovsky’s oeuvre, which before had ‘never failed to heighten its charm’ (Abraham, ‘Tchaikovsky’s Operas’, p. 149).

<sup>93</sup> According to Soviet doctrine, a canonized hero like Tchaikovsky could not be anything but national. ‘Tchaikovsky remains a national Russian composer in *The Maid of Orléans*,’ Vladimir Protopopov and Nadezhda Tumanina stressed, ‘just as Pushkin, in his Little Tragedies—in

elements in *The Maid* served merely as a reminder that a Russian composer was better off staying with Russian subjects, where they would be considered more appropriate and could be used to their full potential.

Some of the Russianisms detected in *The Maid* are indicative of the critics' preoccupation with Russianness rather than anything else. A telling example of this is the Chorus of Minstrels at the rise of the curtain in Act II mentioned by Cheshikhin, Newmarch and Brown. In fact, the chorus is the most obvious reference to the medieval French setting in the opera, because Tchaikovsky employed a French melody, *Mes belles amourettes*, which he had taken from a collection of 'ancient' music, and had previously used as the 'Mélodie antique française' (no. 16) in his *Children's Album*.<sup>94</sup> The description given by the reviewer of the *Journal de St-Petersbourg* must have been precisely the response the composer had aimed for:

[The chorus has] a theme that so well characterizes the ancient French music that we would be tempted to believe that the composer profited for his writing from an authentic song from the time of Valois. This piece was much applauded among us; in Paris, it would be all the rage.<sup>95</sup>

But the song could also evoke other associations. In 1895, the music critic Vladimir Baskin remarked that 'strangely enough, the motif of this piece is very close to Little-Russian melodies', and he may thus have prompted the later comment by Cheshikhin.<sup>96</sup> His observation, however, does not carry more authority than that of Pavel Makarov, who thought the melody was reminiscent of Stanisław Moniuszko's song *Prząśniczka* ('The Spinning-Wheel').<sup>97</sup> The

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*The Stone Guest, The Miserly Knight, Mozart and Salieri*—remained a national Russian poet' (Vladimir Vasil'yevich Protopopov and Nadezhda Vasil'yevna Tumanina, *Opernoye tvorchestvo Chaykovskogo* [Moscow: Akademiya nauk sssr, 1957], p. 168).

<sup>94</sup> Tchaikovsky presumably took this melody from the first volume of Jean-Baptiste Weckerlin's *Echos du temps passé* (first published 1853–1857), a collection containing mostly French pieces, ranging from Adam de la Halle to Rameau (see Pyotr Il'yich Tchaikovsky, *New Edition of the Complete Works*, ed. Thomas Kohlhasse, 76 vols. (Moscow: Muzika, 1993–), vol. 69b: *Piano Works, 1875–1878*, p. 336). In the undated reprint that I have at my disposal, Weckerlin states in a brief introduction to the piece that he had taken this anonymous *brunette* from Christophe Ballard's early eighteenth-century collection (*Brunetes ou petits airs tendres*, 2 vols. [Paris: n. p., 1704], vol. 2, p. 145). See Wekerlin, J. B. [Jean-Baptiste Weckerlin], *Échos du temps passé: Recueil de chansons, noëls, madrigaux, brunettes, [...] etc. du XII<sup>me</sup> au XVIII<sup>me</sup> siècle*, nouvelle édition (Paris: A. Durand, n. d.), vol. 1, p. 73. This was presumably also Tchaikovsky's main source of information about the melody's provenance.

<sup>95</sup> Vaksel', 'La Pucelle d'Orléans', p. 1.

<sup>96</sup> Baskin, *P. I. Chaykovskiy*, p. 64.

<sup>97</sup> Makarov, '[Orleanskaya deva]', p. 742.

most likely reason that this chorus has repeatedly been labelled as ‘Russian’ is because it has a modal melody, and because Tchaikovsky’s treatment of it, unsurprisingly, has some things in common with the way he would have arranged Russian modal melodies. As we have seen in the previous chapter, modality or diatonicism was understood to be a quintessential element of Russian folksong, and through theorizing like Odoyevsky’s, it was an important indicator of Russianness in art music as well. Strictly speaking, therefore, for whoever subscribed to such theories, Tchaikovsky’s score allows for a reading of the Chorus Minstrels as ‘Russian’. Nonetheless, to stress the Russianness over the reference to medieval France while one is aware of the melody’s provenance and purpose, is to wilfully miss the point.

In order for a Russian opera on a non-Russian subject to stand a fair chance, at least two things are required: first, that the listener does not use Russianness as a normative criterion;<sup>98</sup> and secondly, that he or she is willing and able to consider any devices that belong to contemporary Russian musical practice as neutral devices within the musical universe of the opera.

This latter condition is usually taken for granted when we hear Italian traits in *Aida* or *Falstaff*, which can be understood as Verdi’s composing habits without distracting us from the subject. This mode of listening requires the existence, in theory at least, of a distinction between local colour and local practice: not all musical characteristics of an opera refer to the identity of the characters onstage, just as not all of the music in an opera can be taken as a reflection of identity of the composer. The importance of this distinction for Tchaikovsky’s opera can be illustrated by the Chorus of Maidens that opens the opera (see Ex. 22). As Abraham and Brown have noted, its style exhibits certain features commonly associated with Glinka: particularly the accompaniment with—initially, at least—a pedal and a chromatic middle voice. But does this ‘place the locale in Russia’? Is it not just as suitable to convey something pastoral or rural? Even if the style of the opening chorus was derived from Glinka and somehow rooted in Russia, it still does not have to signify ‘Russia’ in terms of local colour. That would depend entirely on the listener, and there is little evidence that listeners of *The Maid* did so in the 1880s. If we take Tchaikovsky and Von Meck at their word, we may infer from their correspondence that they apparently did not perceive the style of this chorus as a salient marker of Russianness.

Rather than qualifying these Russian elements themselves as problematic, it is more fruitful to concentrate on the problems they present to the music

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<sup>98</sup> See e. g. Taruskin, *Defining Russia Musically*, p. xvii.

[Moderato]  
*p*

Poka na nebe ne pogas yeshchyo posledniy luch dennitsi,

*p*

Ex. 22: Chorus of Maidens, no. 1, mm. 9–12.

historian. It would be a mistake to simply ignore them, for they can provide us with some insight into the meaning and significance attributed to these stylistic means at the time, and offer an opportunity to reconsider what we know or think we know about the way they functioned in works with Russian subjects. Indeed, when read in this way, *The Maid of Orléans* has certain implications for our understanding of its predecessor, *Yevgeny Onegin*. I would like to demonstrate this using one stylistic feature: *sektovost'*, or 'sixthness'.

THE TERM *sektovost'* was coined by Russian musicologists to indicate a certain prominence of the sixth in the melodic structure, sometimes as an open interval, sometimes filled out as part of the scale. It referred to a general phenomenon in nineteenth-century music that was not exclusively Russian, but which did play a particularly conspicuous role in the genre of the Russian domestic romance in the first decades of the nineteenth century, as exemplified by such well-known song-writers of the 1820s as Aleksandr Varlamov and Aleksandr Alyab'yev.<sup>99</sup> The most archetypal manifestation of *sektovost'* in the Russian domestic romance was an upward leap of a sixth from the fifth to the third scale degree followed by an embellished or step-wise descent, as it happens in Varlamov's well-known song *Krasniy sarafan* (Ex. 23), but many other varieties occur as well.

<sup>99</sup> See Boris Vladimirovich Asaf'yev, 'Yevgeniy Onegin: liricheskiye stseni P. I. Chaykovskogo (opit intonatsionnogo analiza stilya i muzikal'noy dramaturgii)' (1944), in id., *Izbrannyye trudi*, 5 vols. (Moscow: Akademiya nauk SSSR, 1952–1957), vol. 2, pp. 92–5; Vera Andreyevna Vasina-Grossman, *Russkiy klassicheskiy romans XIX veka* (Moscow: Akademiya nauk SSSR, 1956), p. 26.

[Moderately fast] (♩ = 80)



Ne shey ti mne, matushka, krasniy sarafan, ne vkhodi, ro-di-maya, popustu v iz''yan.

Ex. 23: Aleksandr Varlamov, *Krasniy sarafan* (1832).

a) *Yevgeny Onegin*, Act I, Letter scene (no. 9)

TAT'YANA: *animated, with force and passion*



Puskay po-gibnul ya no prezhd'

b) *Yevgeny Onegin*, Act II, scene 2, Lensky's aria (no. 17)

LENSKY: *a piena voce*



Chto den' gryadushchiy mne go-to-vit?

Ex. 24: *Sekstovost'* in *Yevgeny Onegin*.

Boris Asaf'yev noted in his monograph on *Yevgeny Onegin* that this opera was full of *sektovost'*. He distinguished two basic types: the one with a predominantly ascending, diatonic motion, expressing 'hope, or a bold step into the unknown' (Ex. 24a); the other, the most important of the two, the descending minor sixth, the epitome of which is Lensky's phrase 'What does the new day have in store for me?' that has become known as the 'Lensky sixth': a scalar descent from the third degree to the fifth of E minor, with an added leading tone below (Ex. 24b).<sup>100</sup>

Drawing from Asaf'yev's study, Richard Taruskin has used this opera's affinity with the romance genre to argue against two common presumptions in Western Tchaikovsky criticism: first, that the national features of his style were unconsciously, instinctively or even genetically determined; and secondly, that Tchaikovsky's style was generally lacking in 'Russianness'. He argues that it was 'cunning insight' rather than instinct which allowed Tchaikovsky to write *Yevgeny Onegin* 'in an idiom intensely redolent of the domestic, theatrical and ballroom music of its time and place—its, not his—and in so doing he situates it, just as Pushkin situates the literary prototype, in the

<sup>100</sup> Asaf'yev, 'Yevgeniy Onegin', pp. 94–5. For further examples, see Taruskin, *Defining Russia Musically*, p. 57.

a) Varlamov, *Na zare tī yeyo ne budi*

Not very fast (♩ = 100)  
*p*

Na za-re tī ye-yo ne bu - di,      na za-re o-na slad-ko tak spit;

The musical notation is a single staff in 3/8 time, marked 'Not very fast' with a quarter note equal to 100 beats per minute. It begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The melody consists of eighth and quarter notes, with some rests. Brackets above the staff group the notes into phrases corresponding to the lyrics.

## b) Act II, Agnès's arioso (no. 13)

AGNÈS: *Andante*  
*p*

Yesli si-li tebe ne da - no smīt's otchizni pyatno pono-sheniy,

The musical notation is a single staff in 6/8 time, marked 'Andante'. It begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The melody features a prominent rising scalar sixth followed by a descent, which is noted as a central motif in the text. Brackets above the staff group the notes into phrases corresponding to the lyrics.

Ex. 25: Comparison of the themes of Agnès's arioso with Varlamov's *Na zare tī yeyo ne budi*.

years 1819–1825'.<sup>101</sup> The matter becomes more complicated, however, when it is taken into account that the score of *The Maid* also has a number of things in common with the romance genre, particularly *sekstovost'*, the feature that Taruskin singles out in his analysis of *Onegin*.

The first critic to make a connection between *The Maid* and the romance genre was César Cui, who noted in his review that the forms of the opera's arias and duets were 'of a petty, romance sort' (*melkoromansniya*) and that Agnès Sorel's arioso 'Yesli sili tebe ne dano' in Act II was 'written on the theme of' Varlamov's successful romance *Na zare tī yeyo ne budi*.<sup>102</sup> The similarities between Tchaikovsky's theme for Agnès in *The Maid* and that of Varlamov (Ex. 25) may appear rather superficial, even if it is noted that in both pieces, all phrases are variations of the first, with basically the same rhythm. But the opera's arioso does resonate with the genre of Varlamov's romance in several ways, including its rhythmic simplicity, its uncomplicated form, the unobtrusive chordal accompaniment, and, especially, the pervasive *sekstovost'* of its melody. This affinity with the romance genre, one would suppose on the basis of Asaf'yev's and Taruskin's analyses, may well have been the reason why it was brought forward by Cheshikhin as Russian. The *sekstovost'*, however, is something this arioso shares with much of the score.

The rising scalar sixth followed by a descent to a third below, as it occurs in Agnès's arioso, functions as a central motif in *The Maid*, although it is

<sup>101</sup> Taruskin, *Defining Russia Musically*, p. 52.

<sup>102</sup> Cui, 'Orleanskaya Deva', p. 3. Cui erroneously referred to the song as 'Na zare tī menya ne budi'.

not clear whether it carries any leitmotivic connotation. It appears for the first time in Act I when Joan reassures the panicking crowd (Ex. 26a), and is most emphatically stated in the middle section of her aria ‘Prostitute vi, kholmī’ (Ex. 26b), a phrase that has been compared to Chopin’s A major Polonaise.<sup>103</sup> Protopopov and Tumanina have identified it as a particularly important motive for Joan, but its use is far from limited to her part alone.<sup>104</sup> Occasionally it pops up quite unexpectedly, as in Charles’s coronation speech (Ex. 26c), where it is curiously set apart by rests (‘I thank you for your loyalty – and love’), or in an extended form in Thibaut’s subsequent confrontation of Joan (Ex. 26d).

Thus, while in *Onegin* the emphasis was mostly on the descending sixth, the ascending interval, particularly from the fifth to the third degree of the scale or chord, plays a central role in *The Maid*. Many other important themes begin with a rising sixth in some form or other. Apart from Agnès’s arioso, striking instances are the Act I trio (no. 2) and the allegro of the first Joan–Lionel duet (see Exx. 27a and b).<sup>105</sup> In addition, the sixth is well-represented in the recitatives. Agnès’s first words upon re-entering the stage before her arioso can serve as a striking example (Ex. 27c). The character that displays the most ‘sixthiness’ in his speech, however, is Charles; his coronation speech is truly littered with the interval (Exx. 26c and 27d).

*The Maid of Orléans*, therefore, has more in common with *Yevgeny Onegin* than has generally been recognized, and this has several important implications. To begin with, Cheshikhin’s remark about the Russian nature of Agnès’s arioso constitutes compelling support for Taruskin’s claim that the style of the domestic romance was closely associated with a certain context, a context Cheshikhin simply identifies with ‘Russia’. It should be noted, however, that Cheshikhin made this comment more than twenty years after the premiere of *The Maid*. Unlike the opera’s early audiences, this author was thoroughly familiar with *Yevgeny Onegin*, and the stylistic similarities between the Agnès’s arioso and this popular opera may well have strengthened the association he made between the style Tchaikovsky employed and a Russian setting. Given his stated intention to be ‘objective’, it is unlikely that this was what the composer had wanted to evoke in *The Maid*. On the other hand, the associations with the romance genre may well be considered suitable for the arioso’s sentimental message—but only as long as one is not inclined to find

<sup>103</sup> Brown, *Tchaikovsky*, vol. 3, p. 45.

<sup>104</sup> Protopopov and Tumanina, *Opernoye tvorchestvo Chaykovskogo*, p. 173.

<sup>105</sup> See also the angels’ theme (no. 8 and 15), the Act II Finale (no. 16), and the second Joan–Lionel duet (no. 22).

## a) Act I, no. 5: Joan addresses the people

**Moderato**  
 JOAN: *inspired*

*f*  
 Spa-si-tel' zhiv, gryadyot, gryadyot on v sile, mo-gu-chiy vrug padyot pod Orle-a-nom,

## b) Act I, Joan's aria (no. 7), middle section

JOAN: *ff*

Tak vishneye naznachilo izbran'ye,

## c) Act III, scene 2, finale (no. 20): Charles address the people

CHARLES: **Andante ma non troppo**

Narod moy dobriy! Bla-go-daryu za vernost' i lyubov'.

## d) Act III, scene 2, finale (no. 20): Thibaut's confrontation of Joan

THIBAUT: *to Joan*  
**Moderato assai**

*p*  
 Ot i-me-ni gre-mya-shcha-go tam Bo-ga, te - bya ya vo-pro-sha-yu: ot-ve-  
 chay, ska-zhi, chto ti ne-vin-na, v kle-ve-te i-zo-bli-chi ot - tsa!

Ex. 26: The rising sixth and descending third as a central motif in *The Maid of Orléans*.

these associations jarring in the mouth of Charles VII's mistress because of the genre's Russian and decidedly modern provenance.<sup>106</sup>

This leaves us with the problem that the *sektovost'* of *The Maid* comprises much more than Agnès's arioso alone. It is clear that the reasoning Taruskin applies to *Onegin* cannot be transferred to *The Maid* without some serious complications. The relation between local colour and personal style, after all, is altogether different: the idiom of the romance is hardly redolent of Joan of Arc's time and place, and will have to be accounted for in some other way. Since it is applied in such different situations, one is drawn to the conclusion—

<sup>106</sup> Agnès's message for the Dauphin in the arioso can be summarized as: 'if life is treating you hard, don't forget that I will always be there to love and comfort you'.



which Taruskin sought to avoid in his analysis—that the manner of writing in *Onegin* was as much Tchaikovsky's own as it was attuned to Pushkin's subject. Where everything seems to fit perfectly together in *Onegin*, *The Maid* raises doubts, in retrospect, whether Tchaikovsky used his sixths with as much discrimination as Taruskin suggests. How reliable is the notion of *sektovost'* as an analytical and hermeneutical tool in opera if it is used for such diverse operatic subjects? To what extent can a stylistic trait be neutral or unmarked in one context and significant in the other? Once again, Tchaikovsky seems to have gotten everything wrong that he got right in *Onegin*, and leaves us to grapple with these questions.

### Conclusion

It is clear why Tchaikovsky thought it disadvantageous to compose for medieval kings or Nubian princesses. Such subjects would necessarily lack the accurate correspondence between time, place and idiom which he had been able to create in *Onegin*. Obviously, this was not a sufficient reason for him to refrain from ancient or foreign subject matter altogether, and since his French or Italian colleagues would not refrain from them either, we might as well be more lenient to Tchaikovsky, and absolve his poor *Maid* from some of her sins.

Schiller's *Jungfrau von Orleans* offered some of the theatricality of grand opera that Tchaikovsky himself found wanting in *Onegin* and this must have been a decided asset of the subject for him. It was surely unfortunate that the play suited this purpose to such an extent that, once turned into an opera, it seemed derived from Scribe and Meyerbeer. But once it is recognized that Tchaikovsky's debt was primarily to Schiller, the long chase after the specific Western operas from which Tchaikovsky may have drawn his dramatic ideas, may finally be put to rest.

In terms of spectacle, a notion so closely associated with grand opera, the premiere of *The Maid of Orléans* could not impress. The staging carried 'the typical signs of the recent stagings': 'threadbare sets and ditto costumes'.<sup>107</sup> According to one reviewer, the coronation scene gave the impression 'that the population of Reims at the time was very, very small, just about as large as fits into the cathedral to watch the coronation'.<sup>108</sup> 'If only the King's throne had

<sup>107</sup> [Anon.], 'Teatral'niya zametki', *Golos*, 15 Feb. 1881, no. 46, p. 3.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*

been gilded and covered with some new velvet,' another critic lamented.<sup>109</sup> The scene turned out to be one of the least successful parts of the premiere. According to the composer, 'the march and the scene as a whole were staged so miserly, untidily and pathetically that nothing else was to be expected.'<sup>110</sup>

*The Maid of Orléans* was the last opera to be produced under these lamentable circumstances. After the death of Alexander II shortly after the premiere, the new Tsar Alexander III and his new Minister of the Court Count Vorontsov-Dashkov had all important staff in the Imperial Theatres replaced, including the despised Baron Küster.<sup>111</sup> Suddenly many things improved for the Russian Opera. 'As if with a wave of his baton, the age-old slavery and the humbling conditions for both the art and its representatives vanished', Nápravnik recalled.<sup>112</sup> The many changes for the better under the new director Ivan Vsevolozhsky came just too late for *The Maid*. It was most frustrating for Tchaikovsky to learn in 1882 that the Theatre Directorate now spent 30,000 rubles on the staging of Rimsky-Korsakov's *Snow Maiden*, while the previous management 'didn't spend a kopeck on *The Maid of Orléans*'.<sup>113</sup> Of the subsequent productions, neither the composer's international début at the Provisional Theatre in Prague in 1882, nor the opera's revival by Savva Mamontov's Private Opera in Moscow in 1899 could offer anything close to the resources required for an adequate staging. It is certainly ironic that an opera that has been so criticized for its proximity to French grand opera, was not granted the opportunity to have the almost proverbial grand opera spectacle contribute to its success.

The response to the foreign subject of *The Maid* stands in clear contrast to what we have seen in the previous chapter. Before Cheshikhin's comments in the early twentieth century, I have found no judgements of *The Maid*'s Russianness, whether positively or negatively. This difference with the recep-

<sup>109</sup> [Anon.], 'Teatr i muzika', *Molva*, 15 Feb. 1881, no. 46, p. 3.

<sup>110</sup> Letter to Von Meck, 16 February 1881; CHVM, vol. 2, p. 1168.

<sup>111</sup> Both Küster and his superior, Minister of the Imperial Court Aleksandr Adlerberg, were removed from office in the summer of 1881. The official reason for Küster's discharge as stated in the Imperial Theatre Yearbooks was poor health ([Anon.], 'Nekrologi. Kister, baron Karl Karlovich', *Yezhegodnik imperatorskikh teatrov*, 1893–1894, pp. 453–6), but it has been insinuated that Küster was relieved on less honorable grounds (see the reminiscences of Vladimir Pogozhev, cited in Abram Akimovich Gozenpud, *Russkiy operniy teatr XIX-go veka*, 3 vols. [Leningrad: Muzika, 1969–1973], vol. 3, p. 21).

<sup>112</sup> Nápravnik, *Avtobiograficheskiye, tvorcheskkiye materialy*, p. 42.

<sup>113</sup> Letter to Jurgenson, 4/16 January 1882; CHYU, vol. 1, p. 226. Tchaikovsky had himself written the incidental music to Ostrovsky's *The Snow Maiden* in 1873, which made the support for Rimsky's new opera even more painful.

tion of *Judith* is not easy to explain. Since both Tsertelev's and Odoyevsky's responses to Serov's opera were isolated occurrences in the 1860s, it is impossible to assign any statistical relevance to the absence of such comments a decade and a half later. It is not, in any case, simply a matter of chronology: Laroche's championing of the Russianness of *Judith*, after all, was published in 1889, and he would make similar claims about Tchaikovsky's *Sleeping Beauty* in 1890.<sup>114</sup>

Tchaikovsky's remark to Von Meck that he had aimed for 'objectivity' in his opera, and had actually tried to avoid 'Russianisms', constitutes the most explicit evidence imaginable that Russianness was not generally considered a necessary element of an opera on a non-Russian subject. One way of explaining the fact that people have nonetheless detected certain Russian elements in *The Maid*, would be the essentialist argument that Tchaikovsky simply could not help himself. Above I have suggested how these 'Russianisms' may be used instead as an opening to rethink some of the things we have learnt to think of as typically Russian. Contemporary reception again proves to be essential for understanding the meaning of such elements of style. Neither the combination of a tonic pedal with middle-voice chromaticism in the manner of Glinka, nor the stylistic features of the Russian domestic romance were considered problematic as 'geographical ineptitudes' by the reviewers of the opera's premiere. The interpretation of these elements hinges on a distinction between what was local practice and what functioned as local colour. Such a fine, but crucial distinction in musical meaning does not have to be stable or universally shared—as is borne out by different conclusions drawn by Tchaikovsky and Von Meck on the one hand, and Cheshikhin on the other. But the opportunity to explore such a distinction is particularly valuable in the case of Russia, where the canonic opera repertoire consists almost exclusively of Russian subjects, and where the notion of a national school is closely tied up with national subject matter. In Russian operas on Russian subjects, the distinction between typically Russian elements used for the portrayal of the characters onstage and those used for their own sake is inevitably blurred.

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<sup>114</sup> 'The music [of *The Sleeping Beauty*] suits the costumes and the characters completely; they have a French shade, but at the same time it smells of Russia. [...] The matter is not at all in the local colour—which is beautifully observed—but in a much more general and profound element than colour; in the inner structure of the music, principally in the fundamental element of melody' (Herman Avgustovich Laroche, 'Muzikal'noye pis'mo iz Peterburga po povodu *Spyashchey krasavitsi*, baleta M. Petipa, muzika P. Chaykovskogo' [1890], in id., *Izbrannīye stat'i*, ed. Abram Akimovich Gozenpud, 5 vols., *Russkaya klassicheskaya muzikal'naya kritika* [Leningrad: Muzika, 1974–1978], vol. 2, p. 143).

Russian works on non-Russian subjects can therefore play an important role in our understanding the dynamics between music and national identity. They can offer a nuanced view of the links people perceive between music and nation, links the works on national subject matter can only confirm, and never deny.

#### CHAPTER FOUR

## *The Tsar's Bride*

FOR MOST OF THE twentieth century, the reception of Rimsky-Korsakov's ninth opera *The Tsar's Bride* (1899) has shown a wide difference between Russia on the one hand, and Western Europe and America on the other. In Russia, the opera continues to be one of the more popular works in the operatic canon and has commonly been regarded as one of Rimsky-Korsakov's great achievements. In the West it has often been met with indifference, incomprehension or condemnation, even if individual numbers such as Marfa's aria in Act IV could on occasion be praised as lavishly as Ernest Newman did when he called it 'one of the purest and profoundest expressions of purely melodic ecstasy in the whole of music'.<sup>1</sup>

Surely Russian pride for the national musical heritage can partly explain the difference in appreciation between East and West, but it also appears that the opera has been approached with different sets of critical values. One of the fundamental differences has to do with the Russianness of Rimsky's work. In a series of lectures on national opera still during Rimsky's lifetime, Rosa Newmarch called *The Tsar's Bride* 'more distinctly of the Italian melodic school than any other of his works.'<sup>2</sup> Montagu Montagu-Nathan, in his classic

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Gerald Abraham, 'The Tsar's Bride', in id., *Studies in Russian Music* (London: Reeves, 1936; rpt. 1968), p. 256.

<sup>2</sup> Rosa Newmarch, 'The Development of National Opera in Russia: Rimsky-Korsakov', *Proceedings of the Musical Association* 31 (1905), p. 120. In Chapter Three, I have noted that

study of the history of Russian music, agreed: ‘the subject, of course, is purely national, but the treatment in general is of a kind which savours of Mozart and of the Italian manner’. He considered *The Tsar’s Bride* the only work ‘in which, musically speaking, the composer comes West’ and pointed out the chorus-work as an illustration of ‘the “occidental” quality of the score’. Montagu-Nathan thought the greater public had been ‘betrayed’ by the opera’s enthusiastic reception after its premiere in Moscow, and concluded that ‘a combination of Russian subject and Italian manner must still have been at even so late a date the approved ingredients of operatic success.’<sup>3</sup>

Meanwhile, the Russian opera historian Vsevolod Cheshikhin held that Rimsky never ‘went as far as Bellini’s sugariness and melodic regression’ and claimed that ‘there is so much “Russianness” [*russkost*] in the melodic manner that the listener will rejoice that he is Russian, or, more precisely, rejoice that “Russianness” can be so attractive and interesting!’<sup>4</sup> Some forty years later, during the upsurge of Russian patriotism caused by the Nazi invasion in World War II, Boris Asaf’yev developed his nationalist notion of folk ‘songfulness’ (*pesennost’*) as the ‘heart of Russian music’, and found that *The Tsar’s Bride* suited this ideal very well.<sup>5</sup> Praising its ‘rich, Russian, and emotionally saturated melodiousness’ (*napevnost’*, basically a synonym of *pesennost’*), Asaf’yev wrote that he knew no better way to describe the melodic style of *The Tsar’s Bride* than with the Russian words ‘*napev*’, ‘*napevat*’, ‘*napevnost*’, which of course was ‘most unlike the glitter of Italian *bel canto*’. For Asaf’yev, *The Tsar’s Bride* was ‘one of Rimsky-Korsakov’s greatest dramatic achievements’, ‘a tragically coloured hymn to the ethical beauty of the Russian female soul’.<sup>6</sup>

The views of Asaf’yev’s Western contemporaries Michel-Dimitri Calvo-

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Newmarch associated ‘sensuous’ beauty, grace, and melodiousness in Tchaikovsky with Italian music (p. 116n21). Her claim about the ‘Italian melodic school’ above, therefore, perhaps only implies that she found such features in *The Tsar’s Bride* as well.

<sup>3</sup> Montagu Montagu-Nathan, *A History of Russian Music*, 2nd edn. (New York: Scribner, 1918), pp. 212–3.

<sup>4</sup> Vsevolod Yevgrafovich Cheshikhin, *Istoriya russkoy operi s 1674 po 1903 g.*, 2nd edn. (Moscow: Jurgenson, 1905), pp. 436, 446.

<sup>5</sup> For a brief critique of Asaf’yev’s ideas, see Marina Frolova-Walker, *Russian Music and Nationalism from Glinka to Stalin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), pp. 262–4.

<sup>6</sup> Boris Vladimirovich Asaf’yev, *Nikolay Andreyevich Rimskiy-Korsakov* (Moscow: Muzgiz, 1944), pp. 34, 61–3. Asaf’yev insisted that Rimsky’s use of melody was unlike that of the Italians on several other occasions; see e.g. Igor’ Glebov [Boris Vladimirovich Asaf’yev], ‘*Tsarskaya nevesta*, opera Rimskogo-Korsakova (k prem’yere v Kharkovskom GATObE)’, in ‘Slushal i smotrel *Tsarskuyu nevestu...*’, ed. and trans. A. Chepalov, *Muzikal’naya zhizn’*, 1990, no. 23, p. 25; id., ‘Nikolay Andreyevich Rimskiy-Korsakov: k stoletiyu so dnya rozhdeniya’ (1944), in id., *Izbrannyye trudi*, 5 vols. (Moscow: Akademiya nauk SSSR, 1952–1957), vol. 3, p. 232.

coressi and Gerald Abraham could hardly have been more different.<sup>7</sup> Calvocoressi concluded that *The Tsar's Bride* 'adheres to all the conventions of Western grand opera' and counted the opera among Rimsky's most eclectic works, which—in Calvocoressi's view—also happened to be the weakest.<sup>8</sup> For Abraham, *The Tsar's Bride* was neither Russian nor dramatic: he thought it 'more than a little suggestive of Bizet-with-a-Russian-accent'<sup>9</sup> and complained that the beauty of 'one or two outstanding passages' in the score served only 'to emphasize the insipidity of the music as a whole'.<sup>10</sup> Abraham suggested that, as the opera was written with such fluency in such a short time, its music could be considered 'improvised' and free from 'self-conscious nationalism', and therefore as a sample of Rimsky-Korsakov's 'natural musical thought'. Since he stuck to the usual search for Russianness as his primary means of analysis, however, his conclusions were nearly the opposite: here Abraham asserted that, unlike in 'fairy-tale or village legend', Rimsky 'had hardly any opportunity to be himself' in *The Tsar's Bride*.<sup>11</sup> Abraham's curious line of reasoning is a fine illustration of a typical Western response to Russian music as pointed out by Richard Taruskin: 'without an exotic group identity a Russian composer can possess no identity at all; without a collective folkloristic or oriental mask he is "faceless"'.<sup>12</sup> No surprise that Abraham considered *The*

<sup>7</sup> There were some exceptions to the generally negative response in non-Russian publications in the first half of the twentieth century. Nikolai Gilse van der Pals, in his German-language survey of Rimsky-Korsakov's operas, simply did not pay much attention to the question whether the 'synthesis of old and new, national and Western-European operatic elements' in *The Tsar's Bride* was good or bad (Nikolai Gilse van der Pals, *N. A. Rimsky-Korssakow: Opernschaffen nebst Skizze über Leben und Wirken* [Paris: Bessel, 1929; rpt. 1977], pp. 355–98; see also the earlier dissertation: *N. A. Rimsky-Korssakow* [Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1914], pp. 58–63). Carl van Vechten, the editor of the 1924 English translation of Rimsky's memoirs, put up one of the rare Western defences of the Russianness of Rimsky's opera, but, tellingly, could do no more than appeal to its popularity in Russia (Nikolay Andreyevich Rimsky-Korsakov, *My Musical Life*, ed. Carl van Vechten, trans. Judah A. Joffe [London: Secker, 1924] [henceforth cited as RMML], 316n).

<sup>8</sup> Michel-Dimitri Calvocoressi, *A Survey of Russian Music* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1944), p. 64; the other works accused of eclecticism were *Servilia* and *Pan Voyevoda*, Rimsky's two operas on non-Russian subjects, and the Third Symphony.

<sup>9</sup> Gerald Abraham, *Rimsky-Korsakov: A Short Biography* (London: Duckworth, 1945), p. 107; the same passage can also be found in Michel-Dimitri Calvocoressi and Gerald Abraham, *Masters of Russian Music* (London: Pelican, 1936), p. 406

<sup>10</sup> Abraham, 'The Tsar's Bride', p. 256.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 251–3, 259.

<sup>12</sup> Richard Taruskin, *Defining Russia Musically: Historical and Hermeneutical Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), p. 49.

*Tsar's Bride* 'a mournful decline from *Sadko*'.<sup>13</sup>

Marina Frolova-Walker has recently argued that *The Tsar's Bride* is a turning point in Rimsky's career that marks his rejection of (or liberation from) the principles of the *Kuchka*.<sup>14</sup> Since the works of the Mighty Handful have often been taken as the very definition of what makes Russian music Russian, this implies that the lack of appreciation by Western critics was the result of a deliberate effort by the composer. This is also true of another aspect of *The Tsar's Bride* that has hampered critical appreciation in the West: its 'demonstrative traditionalism'.<sup>15</sup> This traditionalism made it difficult for music historians to deal with the work, since it made it irrelevant to the general narratives of modernist historiography, where 'progress' is a *sine qua non*. To this it should be added that the narratives of modernist historiography have focused more on some, mostly technical, innovations than on others—the expansion of tonality, the 'emancipation' of dissonance, the striving for a *Gesamtkunstwerk*, to name some—none of which can be ascribed to *The Tsar's Bride*, and which, as we will see below, Rimsky avoided on purpose. Rimsky's efforts to improve his skills in lyricism and ensemble writing did little to redeem his work in the eyes of his Western critics. Again, we see a divergence between Western and Russian views, since Soviet musicologists were expected to uphold the values of the Russian classics rather than to portray modernism as the desirable and inevitable outcome of nineteenth-century developments.<sup>16</sup> It is only since musicologists have begun to subject these Soviet, modernist, and romantic nationalist narratives and ideologies to revision and deconstruction that more nuanced discussions about the opera have appeared, which suggests that the gap between native and foreign assessments may eventually be bridged.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Abraham, *Rimsky-Korsakov*, p. 107; also Calvocoressi and Abraham, *Masters of Russian Music*, p. 406.

<sup>14</sup> Frolova-Walker, *Russian Music and Nationalism*, pp. 204–8.

<sup>15</sup> Richard Taruskin, 'The *Tsar's Bride*', in Stanley Sadie (ed.), *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, 4 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1992), vol. 4, p. 832.

<sup>16</sup> See e. g. the following pronouncement, written under the impression of the infamous 1948 resolution against formalism: 'The progressive historical significance of *The Tsar's Bride* stands out with particular clarity against the decline [*razlozheniye*] of Western-European bourgeois art, against the background of the degeneration of Western-European opera in the beginning of the 20th century' (Viktor Vladimirovich Vanslov, '*Tsarskaya nevesta*' *N. Rimskogo-Korsakova*, putevoditeli po russkoy muzike [Moscow: Gosudarstvennoye muzikal'noye izdatel'stvo, 1950], p. 39). This view, incidentally, is not so far from Rimsky's own perspective, as we shall see.

<sup>17</sup> See Frolova-Walker, *Russian Music and Nationalism*, pp. 204–8; Taruskin, 'The *Tsar's Bride*'; id., 'The Case for Rimsky-Korsakov' (1992), in id., *On Russian Music* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), p. 174; Sigrid Neef, *Die Opern Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakows*, Musik

Rimsky-Korsakov expressed the hope that 'in time this opera will have much greater importance in the history of Russian music than it is thought to have today by musicians, who are bewildered by its old-fashioned form'.<sup>18</sup> Although some progress has certainly been made, these wishes are yet to be fulfilled. Even Stephen Muir, in his dissertation that aimed specifically to create understanding and sympathy for Rimsky's relatively neglected works written between *Sadko* (1897) and *Kitezha* (1905), calls the 'conventional forms and traditional technical procedures' in *The Tsar's Bride* 'merely a skeletal framework upon which some of his most lyrically-inspired music was placed'.<sup>19</sup> Such an interpretation cannot sufficiently explain the considerable importance the composer assigned to this opera within his oeuvre, or the determination with which he defended his methods and choices. In this chapter I will sketch some long-term developments as well as the specific contexts of the late 1890s that motivated the composition of this work which occupies such a remarkable position in its composer's output. These hitherto understudied contexts will help to clarify Rimsky's turn to traditional and Western operatic forms and means, and show how *The Tsar's Bride* was in fact very much involved in the contemporary advance of modernism. They will also allow us to better understand the composer when he stressed that: 'It didn't just happen fortuitously. Not at all.'<sup>20</sup>

### *The Surprises of 'The Tsar's Bride'*

*The Tsar's Bride* was written in the summer of 1898 and was premiered by the Moscow Private Opera on 22 October 1899. It was the first full-scale opera Rimsky had written for this opera enterprise led and funded by the railway tycoon Savva Mamontov since *Sadko* had been rejected by the St Petersburg Imperial Theatres in the fall of 1897 and had found its way to Mamontov. The part of Marfa, the main protagonist, was given to the soprano Nadezhda Zabela-Vrubel', who had impressed Rimsky-Korsakov in the role of the Swan Princess Volkhova in *Sadko*. Rimsky had written the part of Marfa with Zabela in mind, and had insisted that he would only consent to the performance with Mamontov's company if the cast included Zabela, who was in a serious

konkret 18 (Berlin: Kuhn, 2008), pp. 201–26.

<sup>18</sup> Vasily Vasil'yevich Yastrebtsev, *Reminiscences of Rimsky-Korsakov*, ed. and trans. Florence Jonas (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), p. 258 (entry for 9 May 1900).

<sup>19</sup> Stephen Muir, 'The Operas of N. A. Rimsky-Korsakov from 1897 to 1904', Ph. D. thesis (University of Birmingham, 2000), p. 105.

<sup>20</sup> Yastrebtsev, *Reminiscences*, p. 259 (entry for 15 May 1900).

conflict with the director at the time.<sup>21</sup> The opera premiered in a time of crisis: Mamontov had been arrested for embezzlement in his railway affairs just before the opening of the season, and the future of the opera enterprise he had founded had become insecure. As the major new production of the season, the success of *The Tsar's Bride* helped to bring in enough revenue for the company to survive as an opera society independent of its founder.<sup>22</sup>

Most contemporaries shared the impression that *The Tsar's Bride* was an opera without precedent in Rimsky's oeuvre. Many found, like Yuly Ängel', that the opera represented 'some revolution in the composer's operatic views and sympathies'.<sup>23</sup> Nikolay Kashkin, a one-time colleague of Tchaikovsky at the Moscow conservatory, assigned historic significance to *The Tsar's Bride* as 'a very strong, original appearance in music, which will, perhaps, exert a great influence on composers of the next generation.'<sup>24</sup>

TO SOME EXTENT, the change perceived by contemporaries in Rimsky-Korsakov's operatic output can be explained by the choice of subject. *The Tsar's Bride* was his first full-scale opera since *The Maid of Pskov*, his first dramatic work, to take place in a historical Russian setting. The five operas he had composed after that were based on either mythological or fantastic themes, which was why the composer was regarded by many as a specialist in these domains. Rimsky had actually begun to work on other kinds of subject matter in the next two one-act operas *Mozart and Salieri* and *Boyarinya Vera Sheloga* (The Noblewoman Vera Sheloga) written in the year before *The Tsar's Bride*, which had both been premiered by Mamontov's Private Opera in 1898. To contemporary observers, however, it was not so obvious that these two short operas reflected a change in interests. They were small-scale works, and both could be seen as dealing with the past rather than setting a new course for Rimsky's work. *Mozart and Salieri* was dedicated to the memory of Dargomizhsky and was seen as a tribute to Dargomizhsky's experimental opera *The Stone Guest* (1872). Rimsky had drawn his libretto from the same set of four short plays, Pushkin's so-called Little Tragedies, as Dargomizhsky,

<sup>21</sup> Letters to Mamontov, 12 and 20 May 1899; Vasily Aleksandrovich Kiselyov (ed.), *Nikolay Andreyevich Rimskiy-Korsakov: sbornik dokumentov* (Moscow: Muzgiz, 1951), pp. 127, 129.

<sup>22</sup> Mikhail Ippolitov-Ivanov, *Meine Erinnerungen an 50 Jahre russischer Musik*, trans. Bärbel Bruder, *Music konkret* 6 (Berlin: Kuhn, 1993), pp. 165–6.

<sup>23</sup> Cited from Aleksandra Anatol'yevna Orlova (ed.), *Stranitsi zhizni N. A. Rimskogo-Korsakova: letopis' zhizni i tvorchestva*, 4 vols. (Leningrad: Muzika, 1969–1973), vol. 3, pp. 192–3.

<sup>24</sup> Nikolay Dmitriyevich Kashkin, 'Tsarskaya nevesta: opera v 3 deystviyakh N. A. Rimskogo-Korsakova', *Moskovskiy vedomosti*, 22 Oct. 1899, no. 291, p. 3.

and like the latter, he set Pushkin's text almost verbatim and to continuous, lyrical recitative. *Vera Sheloga* had originally been conceived as an addition to *The Maid of Pskov* but had now been rewritten as an independent opera: it was as much a revision as it was a new work.

With *The Tsar's Bride*, Rimsky-Korsakov returned to the work of Lev Aleksandrovich Mey (1822–1862), who had provided him with the subject matter for *The Maid of Pskov* and *Vera Sheloga*. The work of this poet runs like a thread through Rimsky-Korsakov's career: in 1900–1901 Rimsky was to compose an opera based on Mey's *Servilia*, with a dedication to the memory of its author. Thus he had set all of Mey's modest dramatic output to music and had made Mey responsible for the subjects of no less than four out of his fifteen operas, if we count *Vera Sheloga* as an independent work. To Gerald Abraham, Rimsky-Korsakov's 'lifelong attachment to such a fourth-rate dramatist as Mey' was absolutely 'incomprehensible, for in each case, except *The Maid of Pskov*, Mey inspired his weakest operas.'<sup>25</sup> Actually, Rimsky was not alone in his interest in Mey. Many of Mey's poems and translations were set as songs not only by Rimsky-Korsakov, but also by Tchaikovsky, Musorgsky, Balakirev, Borodin, and others. And even if Balakirev had called Mey a 'terrible quasi-poet' in 1857,<sup>26</sup> he had been in touch with the poet about an opera libretto in the early 1860s, although the collaboration the Kuchka's leader had hoped for did not materialize.<sup>27</sup> In 1867, five years after Mey's untimely death, Balakirev suggested the subject of *The Tsar's Bride* to Borodin, just as he and Musorgsky would convince Rimsky to write *The Maid of Pskov* in the year thereafter. Borodin eventually discarded *The Tsar's Bride* in favour of *Prince Igor*, only, according to Balakirev, 'because it has no Oriental element'.<sup>28</sup> Since then,

<sup>25</sup> Calvocoressi and Abraham, *Masters of Russian Music*, pp. 407–8; also in Abraham, *Rimsky-Korsakov*, p. 109

<sup>26</sup> Letter to N. L. Zatkevich, 19 February 1857; Mily Alekseyevich Balakirev, *Mily Alekseyevich Balakirev: zhizn' i tvorchestvo v pis'makh i dokumentakh*, ed. Iosif Filippovich Kunin (Moscow: Sovetskiy Kompositor, 1967), pp. 26–7.

<sup>27</sup> Balakirev's friend Pyotr Boborikin had suggested in 1860 that Mey might write a libretto for him (Anastasiya Sergeevna Lyapunova et al. [eds.], *Mily Alekseyevich Balakirev: letopis' zhizni i tvorchestva* [Leningrad: Muzika, 1967], pp. 58–9), but Boborikin claims that, in the end, the poet 'only took the "advances" with him, and in the end wrote nothing' (Abram Akimovich Gozenpud, 'Neosushchestvlyonniy operniy zamisel', in Ėmiliya Lazarevna Frid, Yuly Anatol'yevich Kremlyov and Anastasiya Sergeevna Lyapunova [eds.], *Mily Alekseyevich Balakirev: issledovaniya i stat'i* [Leningrad: Gosudarstvennoye muzikal'noye izdatel'stvo, 1961], pp. 362–3).

<sup>28</sup> Letter from Balakirev to Grigory Timofeyev, 20 March 1900; Yuly Anatol'yevich Kremlyov and Ėmiliya Lazarevna Frid (eds.), *Mily Alekseyevich Balakirev: vospominaniya i pis'ma* (Leningrad: Gosudarstvennoye muzikal'noye izdatel'stvo, 1962), p. 279. Borodin did sketch

Rimsky had repeatedly considered setting Mey's play to music and suggested both *The Tsar's Bride* and *Servilia* as libretti for his students' exercises.<sup>29</sup>

One aspect of Mey's work that may have attracted the attention of the Kuchka was the poet's great interest in ancient Russian history, customs and folklore: in his day he was considered a specialist in everyday folk (*bitoviye*) characterizations.<sup>30</sup> At the time he wrote *The Tsar's Bride*, Mey was a frequent visitor of the conservative historian Mikhail Pogodin, where he could share his interests with this host and his circle, which included prominent Slavophiles as Aleksey Khomyakov and the brothers Ivan and Pyotr Kireyevsky. After *The Tsar's Bride* was published in 1849 in Pogodin's journal *Moskvityanin*, Mey would soon join the journal's so-called *molodaya redaktsiya* ('young editors'), which included Aleksandr Ostrovsky and Apollon Grigor'yev, and for a while became closely associated with these writers.

The method used by Mey to produce and justify his historical dramas was to insert a fictional account into the lacunae of the historical record, an approach that, according to Grigor'yev, resulted in 'an unnatural hybrid of grandiose historical and comparably meagre, made-up content: a very clumsy transfer of the Walter Scott novel into drama'.<sup>31</sup> In a commentary appended

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some music for *The Tsar's Bride*, and it has been suggested that Yaroslavna's Dream and the Chorus of Khans were derived from material for the aborted project (Robert William Oldani, 'Borodin, Aleksandr Porfir'yevich', in Sadie [ed.], *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, vol. 1, pp. 560-1).

<sup>29</sup> Ippolitov-Ivanov, *Meine Erinnerungen an 50 Jahre russischer Musik*, p. 65.

<sup>30</sup> Apart from his two dramas on Russian history, Mey wrote several poems (*bilini*, stories, songs) in folkloric style, and made a modern Russian verse translation of *The Host of Prince Igor*, the medieval epic that served as the subject matter of Borodin's great unfinished opus. Nowadays, both the poet and his work are largely forgotten, and there is very little secondary literature about Mey and his work. As far as I know, there are no serious independent monographs or studies of him. Histories of nineteenth-century literature and theatre devote at most a few lines to him, and therefore most accessible information is contained in the essays attached to editions of his works. I have consulted Pyotr Vasil'yevich Bikov, 'L. A. Mey: kritiko-biograficheskiy ocherk', in Lev Aleksandrovich Mey, *Polnoye sobraniye sochineniy*, ed. Pyotr Vasil'yevich Bikov, 4th edn., 2 vols. (St Petersburg: Marks, 1911), vol. 1, pp. 5-40; Vladimir Alekseyevich Pyast, 'Poëziya Meya', in id. (ed.), *L. A. Mey i yego poëziya* (St Petersburg: Parfenon, 1922), pp. 3-24; Solomon Abramovich Reyser, 'Poëziya Meya', in Lev Aleksandrovich Mey, *Stikhotvoreniya*, ed. Solomon Abramovich Reyser, 2nd edn., Biblioteka poeta (Leningrad: Sovetskiy pisatel', 1951), pp. 5-37; Georgy Mikhaylovich Fridlender, 'Poëziya Meya', in Lev Aleksandrovich Mey, *Izbranniye proizvedeniya*, ed. Nina Nikolayeva Petrunina, 3rd edn., Biblioteka poeta (Leningrad: Sovetskiy pisatel', 1962), pp. 5-61; and Kseniya Konstantinovna Bukhmeyer, 'L. A. Mey', in Lev Aleksandrovich Mey, *Izbranniye proizvedeniya*, ed. Kseniya Konstantinovna Bukhmeyer, Biblioteka poeta (Leningrad: Sovetskiy pisatel', 1972), pp. 1-45.

<sup>31</sup> Apollon Aleksandrovich Grigor'yev, 'Yavleniya sovremennoy literatury propushchen-

to *The Tsar's Bride*, Mey quotes an extensive passage from Nikolay Karamzin's *History of the Russian State*, which served as the 'historical canvas':

[Tsar Ivan] had long been looking for a third wife. The raid of the Khan [Devlet I Giray, who reached and set fire to Moscow in 1571] interrupted this matter; as soon as the danger subsided, the Tsar took the matter up again. Brides from all cities were assembled in the Sloboda, nobles as well as commoners, totalling over two thousand. Each was personally introduced to him. At first he selected twenty-four, and then twelve, who had to be examined by the doctor and nurses; he compared them on basis of their beauty, pleasantness and intelligence; and finally he preferred to all others Marfa Vasil'yevna Sobakina, the daughter of a Novgorod merchant, and at the same time also selected Yevdokia Bogdanovich Saburova as a bride for the eldest Tsarevich. [...] But the Tsar's bride became ill, began to grow thin, withered away; it was said that she had been *corrupted* by villains, enemies of Ivan's family happiness. [...] [T]he evil slanderer doctor Yelisey Bomelius [...] suggested that the Tsar should use poison to exterminate the evil-doers and concocted, as we are told, a harmful potion with such craft that those poisoned by it, would die at the predetermined minute. Thus Ivan sentenced one of his favourites, Grigory Gryaznoy [...]. In the mean time the Tsar married (20 October [1572]) the sick Marfa [...] but the wedding celebrations ended with a funeral: Marfa died on November 13th, either as an actual victim of human evil, or only as the one unfortunately responsible for the punishment of the innocent.<sup>32</sup>

As in *The Maid of Pskov*, Mey fills in the gaps in the historical record with a plot that might serve as an explanation of the events. In this case it is a rather complicated love intrigue. At the beginning of the opera, the boyar Gryaznoy is in love with Marfa, the future Tsarina, but at this point she is already engaged to Ivan Likov, a childhood friend. Gryaznoy decides to turn to the Tsar's physician Bomelius for a love potion that could help win her affection. Their conversation, however, is overheard by Gryaznoy's mistress Lyubasha, who, struck by jealousy and despair, orders a terrible slow poison from the same Bomelius, which she intends for her rival. Lyubasha's beauty, in turn, has caught the eye of the notorious doctor and he demands her love

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nīya nashey kritikoy: II. *Pskovityanka*, drama L. Meya', *Vremya*, Apr. 1861, no. 4, p. 130; see also Bukhmeyer, 'L. A. Mey', p. 37.

<sup>32</sup>Mey, *Polnoye sobraniye sochineniy*, vol. 2, p. 308. Emphasis taken from Nikolay Mikhailovich Karamzin, *Istoriya gosudarstva rossiyskogo*, ed. Pyotr Nikolayevich Polevoy, 12 vols. (St Petersburg: Yevdokimov, 1892; rpt. 1969), vol. 9, pp. 118–9; not indicated in Mey. Mey made several cuts in Karamzin's text; several notable omissions concern the failures and misbehaviour of Ivan and his retinue.

in exchange for the potion; in the end she yields. Just as Gryaznoy has made Marfa drink a cup of mead containing Bomelius's powder, the oprichnik Malyuta enters and notifies everyone that the Tsar has selected Marfa as his bride. In the last act we see the ill Marfa in the Tsar's palace. She loses her senses when she hears that Likov was blamed for her condition and executed. She retreats into incoherent, happy recollections, believing that all that had happened was just a bad dream; she addresses Gryaznoy as if he was her fiancé Ivan. Gryaznoy, overwhelmed by this sight, confesses his deeds to the stupified bystanders. Then Lyubasha storms in and tells Gryaznoy about the poison, which he, unsuspectingly, had put in Marfa's drink himself. Gryaznoy kills Lyubasha, begs Marfa for forgiveness, and is carried away by the guards. Although some Soviet commentators ascribed serious, even risky, political themes to the play,<sup>33</sup> it can only be concluded that Mey generally tended to avoid extremes, in aesthetics as well as in politics. Grigor'yev wrote that he had only rarely encountered a poet with 'such a wealth of fantasy, such strength, beauty of expression, such a full command of words and forms', but cited the revolutionary Georg Herwegh as an emphatic advice to his fellow poet:

Oh, choose a banner, and I am satisfied,  
even if it be another one than mine.<sup>34</sup>

We can see that Mey was no full-blooded Slavophile from a passage in *The Tsar's Bride* that would become Likov's arioso in Act I, scene 2 of the opera, in which Likov tells about his experiences abroad. In Mey's play, he praises the Westerners for their appetite for work and for knowing their place in society; in the opera, the praise for knowing one's station was replaced by a more progressive virtue, namely, not locking up their wives like the Russians did. In both cases, the conclusion—followed by a collective 'amen'—is as follows:

Let us praise our Tsar,  
for he cares for us like a father  
and wants us to learn  
good things from the foreigners.

<sup>33</sup>Georgy Fridlender, for instance, claimed the play depicted the 'conflict between autocratic power and the fate of common, ordinary people' (Fridlender, 'Poëziya Mey'a', p. 31).

<sup>34</sup>Apollon Aleksandrovich Grigor'yev, 'Russkaya izyashchnaya literatura v 1852 godu' (1852), in id., *Literatur'naya kritika*, ed. Boris Fyodorovich Yegorov (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaya literatura, 1967), pp. 108–9. The original lines of the Herwegh's 1842 poem 'Die Partei' ('O wählt ein Banner, und ich bin zufrieden, / Ob's auch ein andres denn das meine sei.') were addressed to his colleague Ferdinand Freiligrath.

This is more or less the opposite of Slavophile thinking and more like the official standpoint. This may have been in line with Pogodin's views, who took a similar middling position.<sup>35</sup>

IT WOULD SEEM that many of the things that had made the subject of *The Maid of Pskov* attractive to Rimsky in the 1860s were lacking in *The Tsar's Bride*, even though these operas deal with the same historical period. His first opera had offered the opportunity to offer a psychological depiction of Ivan the Terrible in the manner of *Boris Godunov*, to take a position in the debate about Ivan's role in history, and to compose music for a realistic mass scene in the tumultuous Pskovian citizens' assembly, the *veche*.<sup>36</sup> All this potential was present in the *The Tsar's Bride* only in diluted form, if at all. Eventually, the part of Ivan in *The Tsar's Bride* even became a mute role. Rimsky's librettist Tyumenev had been working on a scene in which the Tsar selected his bride, and his young friend Bel'sky was pleading for its inclusion, but in the end the composer decided not to make the historical figure of Ivan more pronounced.<sup>37</sup> It may well be that the censor played a

<sup>35</sup> Nicholas Riasanovsky has argued that, though Pogodin shared many of the Slavophile views and interests, his devotion to Peter the Great and his reforms constituted a fundamental difference between his outlook and that of the Slavophiles. Consequently, Pogodin placed more emphasis on autocratic government, venerated Karamzin, and was more inclined to see Russian culture as a synthesis of West and East (Nicholas V. Riasanovsky, 'Pogodin and Ševyrëv in Russian Intellectual History', *Harvard Slavic Studies* 4: *Russian Thought and Politics* [1957], pp. 149–67). These views were generally reflected in Pogodin's journal *Moskvityanin*, and are much closer to the content of *The Tsar's Bride* than those of the Slavophiles. Incidentally, Pogodin's claims published in 1874 that 'we have a different climate from the West, a different landscape, a different temperament, character, [...] everything different' (ibid., p. 156), resemble Marfa's words in Mey's play, which became the beginning of Likov's aria: 'Everything is different, the people as well as the country'.

<sup>36</sup> See Richard Taruskin, 'The Present in the Past: Russian Opera and Russian Historiography, circa 1870', in id., *Musorgsky: Eight Essays and an Epilogue* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), pp. 157–73.

<sup>37</sup> Bel'sky argued that 'a scene with the inspection of the brides would strengthen the scenic interest of the drama terribly; [...] and the appearance of Ivan the Terrible (from a new angle) would make this opera fit into that cycle on Ivan's personality, the idea of which, as you will recall, you once developed' (letter to Rimsky; Nikolay Andreyevich Rimsky-Korsakov, *Perepiska s V. V. Yastrebsev'im i V. I. Bel'skim*, ed. Lyudmila Grigor'yevna Barsova [St Petersburg, 2004] [henceforth cited as RYAB], p. 262). Rimsky simply replied that he could not agree 'with your thought regarding the relevance of the Tsar's viewing of the brides' (letter to Bel'sky, 20 August 1898; RYAB, p. 266). On 30 August 1898, however, Rimsky was still considering the scene and making suggestions to Tyumenev; see Il'ya Fyodorovich Tyumenev, 'Vospominaniya o N. A. Rimskom-Korsakove' (1924), in Moisey Osipovich Yankovsky et al. (eds.), *Rimskiy-Korsakov: issledovaniya, materialy, pis'ma*, 2 vols., Muzikal'noye nasledstvo (Moscow: Akademiya nauk

part in this decision, since censorship under Nicholas II was strict.<sup>38</sup> In this sense, the difference between Rimsky's two Ivan operas mirrors the difference between Mey's plays, whose *Maid of Pskov*—like Rimsky's—was written under the relatively liberal reign of Alexander II, whereas his earlier play *The Tsar's Bride* had been published in 1849, when the Russian press was fettered by the 'censorship terror' Nicholas I had imposed in reaction to the revolutionary movements that swept through Western Europe.<sup>39</sup> This does not mean, of course, that Rimsky's choice for Mey's subject instead of equally harmless fairytale and myth was not an aesthetic choice as well.

The most striking aspect of the subject is how the complex love intrigue, the strong passions, and the demise of the female protagonist of *The Tsar's Bride* resemble the traditional stuff of opera. This is emphasized by its subtitle: after having given his latest six stage works the colourful subtitles 'spring fairytale', 'magical opera-ballet', 'carol come-to-life', 'opera-bilina', 'dramatic scenes', and 'musico-dramatic prologue', *The Tsar's Bride* was Rimsky's first work since his first two essays in dramatic composition that he labelled simply as 'opera'.

The mad scene, the opera's lyrical and dramatical high-point, is by far the most striking of the operatic conventions we encounter in *The Tsar's Bride* and draws on a long tradition of comparable scenes in—particularly Italian—opera. The immediate cause for Marfa to lose her mind is the news that Gryaznoy has executed Ivan Likov. The poison, therefore, is only a secondary factor, which makes her one in a line of many heroines that suffer from madness caused by thwarted love, and her scene shares many characteristics with famous characters such as Lucia in Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor* and Elvira from Bellini's *I puritani*.<sup>40</sup>

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SSSR, 1953–1954), vol. 2, p. 215; or Nikolay Andreyevich Rimsky-Korsakov, *Polnoye sobraniye sochineniy: literaturniye proizvedeniya i perepiska*, ed. Boris Vladimirovich Asaf'yev, Aleksandr Vyacheslavovich Ossovsky, Vladimir Nikolayevich Rimsky-Korsakov et al., 8 vols. (Moscow: Muzgiz, 1955–1982) (henceforth cited as RLPP), vol. 7, p. 119.

<sup>38</sup> Boris Mikhaylovich Yarustovsky, *Die Dramaturgie der klassischen russischen Oper: die Arbeit der klassischen russischen Komponisten an der Oper*, trans. Elisabeth Riedt (Berlin: Henschel, 1957), p. 69, claims that the bridal selection scene was left out because of the censor; Taruskin seems to share this suspicion (Richard Taruskin, 'Christian Themes in Russian Opera: A Millennial Essay', *Cambridge Opera Journal* 2/1 [1990], 84n).

<sup>39</sup> See e. g. Daniel Balmuth, 'The Origins of the Tsarist Epoch of Censorship Terror', *American Slavic and East European Review* 19/4 (Dec. 1960), pp. 497–520.

<sup>40</sup> See Sieghart Döhring, 'Die Wahnsinnszene', in Heinz Becker (ed.), *Die Couleur Locale in der Oper des 19. Jahrhunderts*, Studien zur Musikgeschichte des 19. Jahrhunderts 42 (Regensburg: Bosse, 1976), p. 285.

Like Elvira and Lucia, Marfa retreats in pastoral reverie, an innocent world, an idyllic happiness she once possessed, or hoped to possess. It is typical for these scenes that the heroines never just go mad in private, but have to display their madness to an astonished chorus of onlookers.<sup>41</sup> The madwomen, however fail to 'take in their surrounding or the identity of the bystanders, who crowd around them with expressions of horror and sympathy', as Jonas Barish has observed. 'The eyes of the protagonists are open, but their sense is shut.'<sup>42</sup> The result is that the women talk to people without knowing who they are, their laments and pitiable delusions 'thrown in the distorted face of whoever caused the break.'<sup>43</sup> This is what befalls Grigory Gryaznoy when Marfa tells him about her 'dreams':

Today I dreamed that Gryaznoy  
 Came to my chambers from the Tsar  
 And said that he had stabbed you to death! (*She laughs*)  
 For in this dream  
 such nonsense happened...  
 Gryaznoy still bragged  
 and begged me to remember his loyal service.  
 What a fine best man!  
 To pride himself in front of the bride,  
 that he has killed her fiancé...<sup>44</sup>

Like his Italian counterparts, Gryaznoy immediately repents.<sup>45</sup>

The similarities do not stop here. Even though the operatic madwomen retreat into a pastoral or nostalgic fantasy, their behaviour is not without whims and abrupt shifts of moods. Elvira suddenly wants to dance with whom she perceives to be her father (actually it is her suitor Riccardo); Marfa all at once wants to play tag with Gryaznoy, in whom she sees her Ivan. And of course, Elvira and Lucia imagine the marriage ceremony with the young man

<sup>41</sup> As Catherine Clément observed in her study of perishing operatic heroines, 'there are others everywhere, always others to witness' (Catherine Clément, *Opera, or the Undoing of Women*, trans. Betsy Wing [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988], p. 91).

<sup>42</sup> Jonas Barish, 'Madness, Hallucination, and Sleepwalking', in David Rosen and Andrew Porter (eds.), *Verdi's 'Macbeth': A Sourcebook* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 151.

<sup>43</sup> Clément, *Opera, or the Undoing of Women*, p. 91.

<sup>44</sup> Mey, *Polnoye sobraniye sochineniy*, vol. 2, p. 52.

<sup>45</sup> Riccardo and Giorgio in *I puritani* exclaim: 'Ah! Her pain becomes mine, my heart is breaking!'; Gryaznoy confesses that he has falsely accused Likov and somewhat later says: 'I can't bear it! Take me, Malyuta, / Bring me before the terrible judgement' (*ibid.*, vol. 2, pp. 52, 55).

they love; Marfa suggests the same by mentioning the crowns used in Russian marriage ritual to her 'Vanyushka':

Look: that cloud over there is just like a crown!  
The same will be held over you and me...<sup>46</sup>

Mey's portrayal of Marfa's madness, therefore, seems perfectly adapted to operatic tradition, and is much more like Donizetti and Cammerano's Lucia than Walter Scott's original character Lucy.<sup>47</sup> Given these detailed correspondences, it is interesting to speculate whether Mey himself was perhaps influenced by operatic convention or was interested in an operatic adaptation of his work. The play was after all written in the heyday of Italian opera in Russia.

The theory and practice of opera, however, had changed tremendously since Mey had written his play, and the traditional romantic opera plots had been criticized and contested by Serov, the Kuchka, and Wagner, amongst others. The resemblances to conventional opera plots must have been more than apparent to Rimsky, and his assignment of voices—a soprano heroine, her tenor lover, and a jealous baritone who disturbs their happiness—only adds to our perception of Mey's characters as operatic types. The subject may have suggested the traditional operatic treatment the composer would ultimately give to it, or conversely, it may have suited the traditional opera he wished to write.

THE NEW CHOICE OF SUBJECT went hand in hand with a new kind of musico-dramatic realization. Among the most prominent unusual features of *The Tsar's Bride* commented on by the contemporary press were, next to the abandonment of fantastic or mythical content: the emphasis on solo and ensemble singing, a striving for 'simplicity', and a return to 'old forms'.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., vol. 2, p. 55.

<sup>47</sup> Unlike the serene, aestheticized opera scenes, Scott's novel stressed the shocking aspects of the situation: 'they found the unfortunate girl seated, or rather couched like a hare upon its form—her head-gear dishevelled; her night-clothes torn and dabbled with blood—her eyes glazed and her features convulsed into a wild paroxysm of insanity. When she saw herself discovered, she gibbered, made mouths, and pointed at them with her bloody fingers, with the frantic gestures of an exulting demoniac. [...] The unhappy bride was overpowered, not without the use of some force' (Walter Scott, *Waverley Novels: The Bride of Lammermoor* [Edinburgh: T. C. & E. C. Jack, 1901], pp. 482–3).

<sup>48</sup> For a complaint about the new choice in subject matter, see e.g. 'Vox', 'Teatr i muzika. Chastnaya opera. *Tsarskaya nevesta*, opera N. A. Rimskago-Korsakova', *Russkoye slovo*, 23 Oct. 1899, no. 293, p. 3. The point about 'simplicity' was already advertised by Yuly Engel on the

Curiously, only Rimsky's fellow kuchkist César Cui seemed wilfully blind to the changes perceived by most others. Cui did notice a 'striving for more broad melodicity, almost continuous arioso, and simultaneous singing', but he did not think this a very significant change for Rimsky-Korsakov. He found above all 'his usual merits and shortcomings' and concluded that *The Tsar's Bride* was 'an original, purely "Korsakovian" opera, permeated with his individuality, permeated with the soul of the Russian people, but it contains nothing not already familiar from his previous operas.'<sup>49</sup> Cui's response, however, was the exception rather than the rule.

Some reviewers saw the emphasis on singing and the return of rounded forms as a break with kuchkism. One reviewer considered it 'from the perspective of the author, a step towards the conscious renunciation of the most cherished principles of the New Russian School'.<sup>50</sup> Others contrasted Rimsky's 'stylistic return to an older type of opera' with Wagner.<sup>51</sup> Nikolay Kashkin published a review in which he defended this stylistic move, contrasting both the rounded forms as well as the prominence of the solo singers as viable alternatives to Wagnerism:

There exist excellent examples of musical drama, but along with it, opera in the older sense, though made up-to-date by all the newest achievements of the musical art, has an equal right to exist. *The Tsar's Bride* is an example of just such an updated opera. The composer has succeeded in bringing musical form into agreement with truthful expression of the dramatic situations and individual, powerful moments. In musical drama in the Wagnerian sense, all inner motives for action, the portrayal of the state of the acting characters and so on, are entrusted to the orchestra, which has primary importance in this respect.

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day of the premiere; see Orlova (ed.), *Stranitsi zhizni N. A. Rimskogo-Korsakova*, vol. 3, p. 190. See also Yuly Dmitriyevich Ėngel', 'Rimskiy-Korsakov, *Tsarskaya nevesta*' (1899), in id., *V opere: sbornik statey ob operakh i baletakh* (Moscow: Jurgenson, 1911), p. 191; id., '[*Tsarskaya nevesta v chastnoy opere*]' (1899), in id., *Glazami sovremennika: izbranniye stat'i o russkoy muzike, 1898–1918*, ed. Iosif Filippovich Kunin (Moscow: Sovetskiiy kompozitor, 1971), p. 56.

<sup>49</sup> César Antonovich Cui, 'Debyut Khar'kovskoy operi: *Tsarskaya nevesta* N. A. Rimskogo-Korsakova', *Novosti i birzhevaya gazeta*, 4 Mar. 1900, no. 63, p. 3.

<sup>50</sup> Ė. M. Rozenov, '*Tsarskaya nevesta v chastnoy opere*', *Novosti dnya*, 25 Oct. 1899, no. 5897; cited from RLPP, vol. 8b, p. 99n. Others wrote that 'seen from the outside it is a complete betrayal of the legacy of the "New Russian school"' (Vyacheslav Gavrilovich Karatigin, 'Rimskiy-Korsakov', *Yezhegodnik imperatorskikh teatrov*, 1909, p. 65) and that demanding musicians should 'forget a thing or two' about this legacy before they could appreciate the opera (Ivan Vasil'yevich Lipayev, '*Tsarskaya nevesta: novaya opera* N. A. Rimskogo-Korsakova', *Russkaya muzikal'naya gazeta*, 7 Nov. 1899, no. 45, col. 1129).

<sup>51</sup> 'Vox', '*Tsarskaya nevesta*', p. 3.

N. A. Rimsky-Korsakov attempts to return full supremacy to the other performers and entrusts them the expression of the most important moments and moods.<sup>52</sup>

It is clear that these new trends in Rimsky's work were the subject of some controversy. Some, like Kashkin, hailed it as a promising new beginning. Others, who had never appreciated the previous operas, could see it as a decisive change for the better; to the conservative newspaper *Novoye Vremya*, for instance, it seemed that 'Mr Rimsky-Korsakov has finally returned to the path of healthy operatic requirements.'<sup>53</sup> But then there were also several critics who considered *The Tsar's Bride* Rimsky's weakest opera.<sup>54</sup> Especially to the fans and admirers of his older music and convictions, the composer's 'new path' may well have been a regrettable development. Therefore, although Rimsky's opera was on the whole received enthusiastically by critics and audiences alike, the work was most poorly received by his closest peers.

Even the composer's wife Nadezhda Nikolayevna, herself an excellent musician, was very critical of her husband's latest work.<sup>55</sup> She wrote to her son Andrey after the success of *The Tsar's Bride* that she found it 'not only much lower than *Sadko*, but the most unsuccessful of papa's operas in general.' She was not very fond of Mey's drama, she wrote, and neither was she satisfied with the libretto. She also did not 'sympathize with the return to the old operatic forms in the style of *A Life for the Tsar*' and held that, 'even if one allows these forms, they will have to be redeemed, at least, by excellent music, compelling one to forget about the lack of movement, but there is nothing of the kind.' The composer himself, however, seemed 'incredibly satisfied, as is everyone in his circle, if they are sincere at least.'<sup>56</sup>

<sup>52</sup> Kashkin, 'Tsarskaya nevesta: opera v 3 deystviyakh N. A. Rimskogo-Korsakova', p. 3.

<sup>53</sup> [Anon.], 'Teatr i muzika', *Novoye Vremya*, 28 Oct. 1899, no. 8502, p. 4.

<sup>54</sup> See e.g.: 'Vox', 'Tsarskaya nevesta', p. 3; 'V.', 'Teatr i muzika', *Novoye Vremya*, 4 Mar. 1900, no. 8627, p. 4; Grigory Nikolayevich Timofeyev, 'Dve noviya russkiya operi: I. Tsarskaya nevesta Rimskago-Korsakova', *Russkiy vestnik* 268 (July 1900), p. 196. Rimsky's response to Timofeyev was recorded by Yastrebtsev: 'the man heaped praise upon praise and, in the end, all this praise amounted to nothing but empty words, since in his opinion, *The Tsar's Bride* doesn't measure up to my other operas, and this just isn't true' (Yastrebtsev, *Reminiscences*, p. 264 [entry for 7 September 1900]).

<sup>55</sup> It has been suggested that this was in part motivated by a jealous suspicion that Rimsky's lyricism was inspired by an interest in Zabela that went further than her voice and skill alone (see e.g. Frolova-Walker, *Russian Music and Nationalism*, 370n80).

<sup>56</sup> Letter from Nadezhda Nikolayevna to Andrey Nikolayevich Rimsky-Korsakov, 24 October 1899; quoted from Orlova (ed.), *Stranitsi zhizni N. A. Rimskogo-Korsakova*, vol. 3, pp. 193-4.

Nadezhda's doubts about her husband's acquaintances were not unfounded. Yastrebtsev reports that the members of the Belyayev circle did not care much for *The Tsar's Bride*, with Belyayev in the lead, and Glazunov, never an opera enthusiast, thought Rimsky had already reached the point of cliché with *Christmas Eve*.<sup>57</sup> Stasov, too, did not think much of the opera. As much as he valued Zabela as a singer, he could not be moved by Marfa's aria.<sup>58</sup> All he ever published about the opera were a few lines in his essay *Art of the Nineteenth Century* in which he claimed that Rimsky had presented the world two opposite examples: *Mozart and Salieri* representing the new, free art, and *The Tsar's Bride* representing the old, chained by convention—the 'zenith' and 'nadir'.<sup>59</sup> Balakirev told Yastrebtsev that he only liked Marfa's final aria, and it took him a while before he could bring himself to go and see the opera at the Mariinsky.<sup>60</sup> Yastrebtsev himself, whose primary interest was generally with piquant harmonies and details of instrumentation, also lacked his usual enthusiasm.<sup>61</sup> Rimsky admitted to Zabela that he hardly spoke about *The Tsar's Bride* to Yastrebtsev.<sup>62</sup> Meanwhile, Yastrebtsev wrote in his diary: 'I'm convinced that Nikolay Andreyevich exaggerates the musical importance of this opera without realizing it. He thinks that everyone else is wrong. When I asked him point blank which is better—*The Tsar's Bride* or *The Snow Maiden*—he declared, not without irritation, that he is not going to give his opinion on the subject, that this is his secret (!) but that I should not think that his opinion is simple'.<sup>63</sup>

<sup>57</sup> Yastrebtsev, *Reminiscences*, p. 259 (entry for 9 and 15 May 1900).

<sup>58</sup> Moisey Osipovich Yankovskiy, 'Stasov i Rimskiy-Korsakov', in Yankovskiy et al. (eds.), *Rimskiy-Korsakov: issledovaniya, materialy, pis'ma*, vol. 1, p. 393; Nikolay Andreyevich Rimsky-Korsakov, *Perepiska s N. I. Zabeloy-Vrubel'*, ed. Lyudmila Grigor'yevna Barsova (Moscow: Kompozitor, 2008), p. 29.

<sup>59</sup> Vladimir Vasil'yevich Stasov, 'Iskusstvo XIX veka' (1901), in id., *Izbrannyye sochineniya*, ed. Yelena Dmitriyevna Stasov, Mariya Pavlovna Blinova and Pyotr Trifonovich Shchipunov, 3 vols. (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1952), vol. 3, p. 736.

<sup>60</sup> Yastrebtsev, *Reminiscences*, pp. 259, 303 (entries for 15 May 1900 and 4 January 1902).

<sup>61</sup> According to Rimsky's student Ossovsky, Yastrebtsev's strong response to harmony and timbre was balanced by 'an extremely weak sense of melody and rhythm' (Aleksandr Vyacheslavovich Ossovsky, 'N. A. Rimskiy-Korsakov: khudozhnik mislitel', in id., *Vospominaniya, issledovaniya*, ed. Valery Vasil'yevich Smirnov and Yuly Anatol'yevich Kremlyov [Leningrad: Muzika, 1968], p. 337). See also Richard Taruskin, 'Chernomor to Kashchei: Harmonic Sorcery; or, Stravinsky's "Angle"', *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 38/1 (1985), p. 106.

<sup>62</sup> Rimsky-Korsakov, *Perepiska s N. I. Zabeloy-Vrubel'*, p. 179.

<sup>63</sup> Yastrebtsev, *Reminiscences*, p. 264.

### *Breaking with the Past*

It is unlikely that Rimsky-Korsakov was much surprised by the negative responses to *The Tsar's Bride* in his circle. In a little poem, written to Bel'sky in the summer of 1898 to congratulate him on his name day and invite him to come and listen to the opera in progress, the composer already anticipated some of the criticism his new work might provoke.

It has *Andante, Moderato, Presto*,  
Ensembles, arias, recitatives,  
Melodies, chords, leitmotifs.  
There's also dramatic falsehood,  
and plenty of musical truth as well.<sup>64</sup>

'Truth' had been the watchword of the progressives who propagated realism in the 1860. Vladimir Stasov, the main ideologue of the Kuchka, was a lifelong proponent of realism in art, and remained faithful to the ideals he had himself expounded. Inspired by Chernishevsky's notorious thesis *The Aesthetic Relations of Art to Reality* (1855) that had sparked the discussion that dominated the cultural debate in the following decade and a half, the realists held that art should be measured by its intellectual or social content rather than its mere beauty.<sup>65</sup> This is why Stasov ascribed so much importance to the role of the chorus in Russian opera, which easily lent itself as an embodiment of the people, the *narod*, and why he was proud about the fact that Russian artists had love only come in second place in their works.<sup>66</sup> Of course, realism is more easily identified in literature or painting than in music, but opera did have its own ideals of 'dramatic truth', fervently pursued by the Kuchka and Aleksandr Dargomizhsky in *The Stone Guest*, and promoted with even

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<sup>64</sup> Letter to Bel'sky, 13 July 1898; RYAB, p. 258. Rimsky appended a footnote to this passage, which reads: 'The words *falsehood* and *truth*, and even *dramatic* and *musical* can be exchanged. That depends on one's point of view on operatic music' (emphasis original).

<sup>65</sup> Chernishevsky had claimed: 'for a fully developed intellect there is only the true, and no such thing as beauty' (Charles A. Moser, *Aesthetics as Nightmare: Russian Literary Theory, 1855–1870* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989]). For Stasov's attitude towards Chernishevsky, see Yuri Olkhovsky, *Vladimir Stasov and Russian National Culture* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1983), pp. 37–8, 139–41.

<sup>66</sup> See e.g. Vladimir Vasil'yevich Stasov, 'Shalyapin v Peterburge' (1903), in Yelena Andreyevna Grosheva (ed.), *Fyodor Ivanovich Shalyapin*, 3rd edn., 3 vols. (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1976–1979), vol. 3: *Stat'i i viskazivaniya*, pp. 13, 15. In this article (written in praise of Chaliapin!), Stasov wrote: 'What is the most important and remarkable in Russian operas, what is the most essential in them? Choruses; they are above all else; they are the beginning, end and crown to everything'.

more fervour by Stasov.<sup>67</sup> From this perspective, the kuchkists objected to such things as the use of simultaneous singing and rounded forms, as Rimsky himself had done when he was still firmly under Stasov's influence. Take, for instance, the following passage from Rimsky's 1869 review of Nápravník's opera *Nizhegorodtsi*, written by the twenty-four year old composer at the request of César Cui, who had shrewdly passed on the task of judging the prominent conductor's composition to his young fellow-kuchkist:

Formal duets, trios, quartets, choruses, all with thoroughly defined endings, often thoroughly contrary to common sense, linked by the insertion of recitatives—that is the format in which most of the operas that exist in the world are written. The text of each number is itself written in such a way as to allow the music to achieve the most uncomplicated 'symphonic' form. From this proceed those numberless and senseless repetitions of lines and individual words. From this proceeds the librettists striving to write such a text that several characters might sing it at the same time, with only the pronouns changed. 'How I love you!' sings she. 'How you love me!' exclaims he at the same time. 'How she loves him!' accompanies the chorus. [...] By now it has become impossible to write operas in such forms. We now demand a fully rational text and the total solidarity of text and music. If one gives every number in an opera a discrete, rounded, and uncomplicated symphonic form, with symmetrical layout of sections and repetitions, this goal cannot be achieved.<sup>68</sup>

After *The Maid of Pskov*, however, Rimsky soon began to explore a kind of 'solidarity of music and text' that did not require him to do away with repetition and symmetry. By writing operas that involved myth, folklore and fantasy, the composer sidestepped many of the questions of operatic realism. He assigned a prominent position to ancient folk rituals and beliefs in his operas, which made folk song the most appropriate basis for their musical style.

<sup>67</sup>Dargomizhsky had famously insisted on 'truth' in a letter to Lyubov' Karmalina of 9 December 1857, in which he complained about the Petersburg audiences who only wanted 'melodies flattering to the ear'. Stasov repeatedly quoted this letter, and wrote that it was 'in keeping with the demands of common sense and operatic realism' that *The Stone Guest* consisted 'entirely of declamatory recitative, of musical speech which pours forth from the lips of the characters in an irregular, unsymmetrical stream just as it does in everyday conversation and in drama' (Vladimir Vasil'yevich Stasov, 'Nasha muzika za posledniye 25 let' [1883], in id., *Stat'i o muzike*, ed. Vladimir Vasil'yevich Protopopov, 5 vols., Russkaya klassicheskaya muzikal'naya kritika [Moscow: Muzika, 1974–1980], vol. 3, pp. 153–4, 156); trans. id., *Selected Essays on Music*, trans. Florence Jonas (London: Barnie & Rockliff, 1968), pp. 78–9.

<sup>68</sup>RLPP, vol. 1, pp. 14–5; trans. Taruskin, *Musorgsky*, pp. 160–1.

*May Night* (1880), his first opera in this direction, was neatly subdivided into separate numbers, including duets and trios. *Sadko* (1897), a myth about the ancient trade centre of Novgorod, could count on Stasov's special sympathy because it suited the notion of 'epic opera', an ideal the Kuchka's ideologue had espoused in his defence of *Ruslan*, and which had little to do with the kind of 'dramatic truth' explored by Dargomizhsky and Musorgsky. Rimsky was not the only kuchkist to do away with Dargomizhskian realism: Borodin also had ignored the complaints of his comrades, and had written straightforward arias and duets for *Prince Igor*, an opera that could also be excused on the basis of its epic character.<sup>69</sup>

With *Mozart and Salieri*, *Vera Sheloga* and *The Tsar's Bride*, Rimsky suddenly returned to subjects that, in Lev Mey's words, 'might have happened'.<sup>70</sup> The first of these, *Mozart and Salieri*, was met by Stasov with great excitement since it was an apparent return to the kind of operatic realism of *The Stone Guest*. *The Tsar's Bride*, on the other hand, had none of the redeeming features of either his folk-fantastic works, the epic *Prince Igor* and *Sadko*, or *Mozart and Salieri*. It seemed rather to return to the type of opera the Kuchka had originally opposed: the role of the chorus is hardly prominent, there is certainly no powerful portrayal of the masses, and—at the surface, at least—most of the action seems to revolve around the complicated love intrigue and its individual victims.<sup>71</sup>

By this time, however, the composer had long secured his position in Russian musical life and was no longer dependent on Stasov's approval. In fact, Rimsky himself consistently downplayed the importance of *Mozart and Salieri* as a return to Dargomizhskian realism.<sup>72</sup> Stasov's enthusiasm for his

<sup>69</sup> See Borodin's letter to Lyubov' Karmalina, 1 June 1876; 'in my outlook on operatic matters I've always been at variance with many of my friends. A purely recitative style has always gone against my instincts and my character. I'm drawn to song and cantilena, not to recitative, although, according to the opinions of knowledgeable people, I'm not too bad at the latter. Besides that, I'm drawn to forms that are more closed, more rounded, grander scaled. [...] The voices must be foremost, the orchestra secondary' (Oldani, 'Borodin', p. 561).

<sup>70</sup> Mey, *Polnoye sobraniye sochineniy*, vol. 2, pp. 308, 311.

<sup>71</sup> The composer acknowledged the relative inconsequence of the chorus, writing to his son that it 'is not the centre of gravity of the opera, as you know' (Letter to Andrey Nikolayevich, 20 October 1899; Nikolay Andreyevich Rimsky-Korsakov, 'Iz neopublikovannikh dokumentov: pis'ma k sinu Andreyu', ed. Èl'za Èduardovna Yazovitskaya and Abram Akimovich Gozenpud, *Sovetskaya muzika*, 1958, no. 6, p. 67).

<sup>72</sup> To Bel'sky he wrote: 'This type of music (or opera) is exceptional and undesirable in great quantities, and I feel little for it; but I wrote this thing from the desire to learn [...]. Why are you not rejoicing that I wrote many romances? Why aren't you rejoicing that I wrote the *Świtezianka* cantata? Is recitative arioso in the manner of *The Stone Guest* really more desirable

two recent operas *Sadko* and *Mozart and Salieri*, therefore, only concealed how far the Kuchka's old advocate and its youngest member had grown apart since the 1860s.

EVER SINCE THE OPPOSITION to Rubinstein's Conservatory, Stasov had been an advocate of autodidacticism, and had touted the experimental, independent approach of the Balakirev circle as the desirable alternative to the 'German' conservatory model. In his large essay 'Twenty-Five Years of Russian Art' (1882–83), he regretted, for instance, the 'inauspicious influence' that conservatory training had had on Tchaikovsky, whose vocal works were all deemed to be 'devoid of creative sincerity and inspiration, as a result of indiscriminate, constant, limitless overproductivity and little self-criticism.'<sup>73</sup> This was contrasted, of course, to the Mighty Handful:

Beginning with Glinka, all the best Russian musicians have been very skeptical of book learning and have never approached it with the servility and the superstitious reverence with which it is approached to this day in many parts of Europe. [...] Such an attitude toward 'received wisdom', so esteemed by other schools, has saved the Russian school from creating pedantic or routine works—these simply do not exist in the New Russian School.<sup>74</sup>

By the time Stasov wrote the article, this was already an anachronism: Rimsky-Korsakov had joined the Conservatory staff in 1871. Embarrassed by his limited theoretical knowledge and technique in his new capacity as professor, he had soon turned himself into 'one of its best and possibly its very best *pupil*', as he wrote in his memoirs.<sup>75</sup> In the summer of 1875 he humbly offered Tchaikovsky a sample of the sixty-something fugue and choral exercises he had written that summer alone. What he wanted to achieve with all this studying, among other things, was something he admired in Tchaikovsky: facility—or indeed, routine—in composition. To young Semyon Kruglikov, who wanted to dedicate himself to music, Rimsky gave the following warning:

you should not disdain harmony and counterpoint and develop a good technique and clean voice-leading, where all of us, that is, I myself,

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then genuine, good, free music?' (Letter to Bel'sky, 18 August 1897; RYAB, p. 255.)

<sup>73</sup> Stasov, *Stat'i o muzike*, vol. 3, p. 193.

<sup>74</sup> Id., 'Nasha muzika za posledniye 25 let', pp. 146–7; trans. Richard Taruskin, *Stravinsky and the Russian Traditions: A Biography of the Works Through Mavra*, 2 vols. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), vol. 1, p. 24; also in Stasov, *Selected Essays on Music*, pp. 70–1.

<sup>75</sup> RLPP, vol. 1, pp. 70–1; trans. RMML, p. 103.

Borodin, Balakirev, [Balakirev's student] Blaraberg, and especially Cui and Musorgsky did disdain these things. I think I realized this in time and forced myself to work. Balakirev writes too little because of his insufficient technique, Borodin with difficulty, Cui carelessly, and Musorgsky sloppily and often ridiculously; [...] this constitutes the extremely regrettable specialty of the Russian school.<sup>76</sup>

Equipped with his new theoretical knowledge and technical experience, Rimsky began to revise all of his earlier works, feeling that his technique had been grossly inadequate at the time he had written them, and more than once—as most famously with Musorgsky's *Boris Godunov*—he extended this honour to the works of his fellow composers.

In the mid-1880s, Rimsky-Korsakov became part of a new circle of Russian musicians, which was in some respects a successor of the Balakirev circle, but on the whole, breathed an entirely different atmosphere.<sup>77</sup> The circle formed around Mitrofan Belyayev, the famous maecenas of Russian music, who began to organize regular 'Quartet Fridays', established his prestigious publishing house in Leipzig in 1885, initiated the Russian Symphony Concert series in the same year, and shortly thereafter began to award annual prizes to native compositions. The musical interests and tastes of the new circle were considerably broader than those of the Mighty Handful, reaching 'back as far as Palestrina' and including Wagner, and the emphasis was more on chamber and symphonic music than on opera and artsong.<sup>78</sup> Balakirev never felt like joining these new gatherings and Cui soon fell out with the host, so after Borodin's death in 1887, Rimsky was the senior composer of this circle. In its initial form it also included Lyadov, Glazunov, the conductor Georgy Dütsch, the brothers Felix and Sigismund Blumenfeld, and it was later joined by Rimsky's students Nikolay Sokolov, Konstantin Antipov and Jāzeps Vītols, and others. By the time Lyadov and Glazunov took up important positions at the Conservatory, the Belyayev circle had effectively become, as Richard Taruskin has persuasively argued, a music guild: an establishment that controlled everything from musical education and composition, to publication and performance, recruiting its new members from the talented students of the senior members.<sup>79</sup> Much to Cui's disgust, this establishment encouraged

<sup>76</sup> Letter to Kruglikov, 9 October 1880; RLPP, vol. 8a, p. 53.

<sup>77</sup> This, and the preceding paragraphs are much indebted to Taruskin, *Stravinsky*, vol. 1, pp. 23–75, which traces the changes in the last decades of the nineteenth century brought about by art patronage and professionalization.

<sup>78</sup> RLPP, vol. 1, p. 163; trans. RMML, p. 242.

<sup>79</sup> Taruskin, *Stravinsky*, vol. 1, p. 56.

young composers to produce faithful imitations of the examples set by the previous generation of Russian composers, flawless in terms of technique but lacking their originality.<sup>80</sup>

IT WAS IN THE MIDDLE of an artistic as well as a personal crisis in 1891 that Rimsky-Korsakov expressed his dissatisfaction with recent work of the Belyayev circle, including his own *Mlada*, and concluded that 'the main product of the Russian school is not music, but cold and cerebral composition.' He contrasted their works with that of Beethoven, Chopin, Glinka, 'and (just imagine)—the Italians, with the Sextet from *Lucia* and the Quartet from *Rigoletto*, with all their melodies. There you'll really find some life. "La donna è mobile" is music, while Glazunov is merely technique and convention'.<sup>81</sup>

The mention of Donizetti and Verdi, former arch-enemies of the Kuchka, is worth noting. Since the government-sponsored Italian Opera company in St Petersburg had been disbanded under Alexander III, Rimsky could afford to leave the old aesthetic trenches. While in the Kuchka days Italian opera had been condemned as conventional, commercial, calculated and therefore artificial, it could now be seen as quite the opposite: something passionate, direct and authentic if a bit naive.<sup>82</sup> Now that Italian opera was no longer the towering presence it used to be, the Belyayevites could view it with nostalgia. One evening at Rimsky's home in 1893, Yastrebtsev witnessed a conversation between Lyadov, Glazunov, Belyayev, and the host on the topic of Italian opera. 'How surprised (perhaps even indignant!) the followers of the New Russian School would have been', Yastrebtsev wrote, 'to hear their idols unanimously extol Verdi and Rimsky-Korsakov praise Donizetti, particularly *Lucia*! In the view of Nikolai Andreyevich, Donizetti was not only extremely gifted;

<sup>80</sup> César Antonovich Cui, 'Itogi russkikh simfonicheskikh kontsertov: otsi i deti' (1888), in id., *Izbranniye stat'i*, ed. Izrail' Lazarevich Gusin (Leningrad: Muzgiz, 1952), pp. 381–6; see also Taruskin, *Stravinsky*, vol. 1, pp. 52–4.

<sup>81</sup> Letter to Nadezhda Nikolayevna, 21 August 1891; Nikolay Andreyevich Rimsky-Korsakov, 'Izbranniye pis'ma N. A. Rimskogo-Korskova k N. N. Rimskoy-Korskove' ed. Vladimir Nikolaevich Rimsky-Korsakov, in Yankovsky et al. (eds.), *Rimskiy-Korsakov: issledovaniya, materialy, pis'ma*, vol. 2, p. 61. The composer's disillusion may well have been influenced by the adversities in his private life. He lost both his mother and his baby Slavchik in the second half of 1891. His little daughter Masha had fallen seriously ill; she would die in the summer of 1893.

<sup>82</sup> The stereotypes of Italian music display the same phenomenon Joep Leerssen has noted with regard to stereotypes of national character: 'as current stereotypes are found inadequate, they are not so much cancelled and forgotten as giving rise to their very opposite' (Joep Leerssen, 'The Rhetoric of National Character: A Programmatic Survey', *Poetics Today* 21/2 [2000], p. 278).

his style of composing had a special elegance which set him apart from the others.<sup>83</sup>

These changes in sympathies were accompanied by a gradual change in Rimsky's views on melody and singing, which may be traced back as far as 1880: in hindsight, Rimsky saw the influence of Bellini and Donizetti on his own *Snegurochka*, pointing out 'the high notes at the end' and remarking that he would never have 'risked such a step before.'<sup>84</sup> In the original circle of the Kuchka, however, whose high-minded ideals had taken shape largely in opposition to Italian opera, not only vocal virtuosity, but the cultivation of melody in general was looked upon with suspicion. César Cui had claimed in one of his first essays in music criticism—directed against the Italians, of course—that of the three elements that made up musical thought (melody, harmony and rhythm), harmony was by far the most important. Melodies, Cui argued 'are all composed of the same twelve notes; all the possible different successions of these notes have been exhausted long ago'. Hence, 'creating a new melody is impossible; the saviour will have to be found in harmony and development'.<sup>85</sup> Some thirty years later, Rimsky observed that Stasov still 'recoils from the word *melody* like a devil from incense'.<sup>86</sup>

Rimsky made a decisive break with this attitude while working on his opera *Christmas Eve* in 1894. Yastrebtsev found the composer—who had just quit smoking—in a 'depressed and irritable' state, lamenting that 'only lyrical music is good', that 'the rest is nothing but trickery', but that lyricism was just what he lacked.<sup>87</sup> One of the results of this crisis for the project he was working on, would be a fresh interest in melodic embellishment. '[W]hat an amazing wealth of timbres lies hidden in any good human voice!' the composer exclaimed one month later.

You know, according to our [the Kuchka's] code, the primary prerequisite of genuinely good music was an absence of fioritura; only in works of an Oriental character, such as Konchakovna's cavatina, *Georgian Song* and *Hebrew Song*, etc., was this kind of 'virtuosity' permitted. However, here it was given an odd, fantastic cast. As for me, I love this virtuosity when it is not an insipid collection of sounds but a fast melody of beautiful, original design as, for example, in Chopin. [...] In my new

<sup>83</sup> Yastrebtsev, *Reminiscences*, p. 47 (entry for 9 May 1893).

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 290 (entry for 6 August 1901).

<sup>85</sup> César Antonovich Cui, 'Operniy sezon v Peterburge' (1864), in *id.*, *Izbrannīye stat'i*, p. 32.

<sup>86</sup> Letter to Kruglikov, 25 November 1897; RLPP, vol. 8b, p. 26. The phrase is almost identical to the formulation in his later letter of 19 February 1898, cited below on p. 186.

<sup>87</sup> Yastrebtsev, *Reminiscences*, p. 75 (entry for 2 May 1894).

a.) *Christmas Eve*, Act II, Oksana's aria, mm. 10–17

OXSANA: *dolce*

Chto lyu - dyam vzdu - ma - los' ras - sla - vit' chto kho - ro -

sha ya, chto kho - ro - sha, chto

*a piacere*  
kra - - - she me - nya net?

b.) *The Tsar's Bride*, Act II, Marfa's aria, mm. 63–72

MARFA: *leggieramente*

Akh, \_\_\_\_\_ akh! \_\_\_\_\_ akh, \_\_\_\_\_ akh!

Ex. 28: Melismatic writing in Rimsky-Korsakov's operas.

opera, I'm giving the coloratura an important place, in Oksana's part. Let anyone who likes denounce me—I'll still do it.<sup>88</sup>

An example of the coloratura writing for Oksana can be seen in Ex. 28a, where not only the sheer amount of melismas is notable, but also its use on an insignificant word as the conjunction 'chto' ('that'). In *The Tsar's Bride*, Rimsky also felt free to write melismatic passages—although not as opulent as Oksana's—as can be seen in Ex. 28b.

A final turning point in the composer's attitude towards the human voice was the summer of 1897, which he said 'played a significant role in my life, for from that year on, I began to give much more attention to singers.'<sup>89</sup> In retrospect, Rimsky concluded about *Mlada*, *Christmas Eve*, and *Sadko* that 'though they have a splendid ring in singing, the melodies are nevertheless of instrumental origin in the majority of cases.' Now, the Four Songs, op. 39 on texts by Alexey Tolstoy, had suddenly 'turned out purely vocal with me, that is it became such at its very birth with but mere hints of harmony and

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 83 (entry for 5 June 1894).

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 285 (entry for 22 April 1901).

accompaniment'.<sup>90</sup> In that summer and the following year, in an outburst of activity, Rimsky produced over forty songs, some duets, and the one-act operas *Mozart and Salieri* and *Vera Sheloga*. All of these, the composer claimed, served 'as preparatory studies, as it were, for *The Tsar's Bride*'.<sup>91</sup> The discovery of Nadezhda Zabela, in whose voice Rimsky found the ideal lyrical soprano for his works, only added to his eagerness to write for the voice. In his memoirs, Rimsky wrote that he had aimed at a style that was 'cantilena *par excellence*' in *The Tsar's Bride*, and he recorded with pride that the opera 'proved to have been written for strictly defined voices and most gratefully for the singers in addition.'<sup>92</sup>

Rimsky's new interest in singing proved to be a rather fundamental shift in priorities. Bel'sky made a distinction between 'characteristic' ('genre [*bitoviye*], fantastic, archaic, Russian national, oriental, etc.') and 'universal' scenes in his early feedback on *The Tsar's Bride*.<sup>93</sup> The former had made Rimsky-Korsakov's reputation as a composer of national opera, and had occupied centre stage in his dramatic works—even in *Christmas Eve*, where Gogol's subject did not necessarily call for such a treatment. Now, Rimsky's interest in melody led him to state his preference for the new 'universal' lyricism over the 'characteristic'. The composer thought Bel'sky made the mistake to associate colour exclusively with harmony and rhythmic wealth with uncommon metres.

If you follow attentively my themes of lyrical character, you might find more colour in them than in the genre [*bitoviye*] and archaic scenes: their extent is much broader, i. e. they take a greater number of high and low notes, are more rich in jumps and twists, and are quite without doubt richer in rhythm, even though they fit into an unchanging double or triple metre.<sup>94</sup>

After all this, it will no longer come as a surprise that Rimsky confessed to his wife he felt 'attracted most of all by *singing*' at this time in his career, 'and

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<sup>90</sup> RLPP, vol. 1, pp. 205–6; trans. RMML, pp. 307, 310. This new manner was important enough for the composer to offer vocal writing as an important criterion for the periodization of his own oeuvre, counting *Sadko* as the last opera of the '*Mlada* period' and considering his later fairy-tale opera *Tsar Saltan* closer to *The Tsar's Bride* (Yastrebtsev, *Reminiscences*, p. 285 [entry for 22 April 1901]).

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 259 (entry for 15 May 1900).

<sup>92</sup> RLPP, vol. 1, p. 210; trans. RMML, pp. 314–5.

<sup>93</sup> Letter to Rimsky, 8 August 1898; RYAB, p. 260.

<sup>94</sup> Letter to Bel'sky, 20 August 1898; RYAB, p. 265.

very little by *truth*.<sup>95</sup> While still finding basically the same shortcomings in Italian opera that Cui had found four decades before—poverty of harmony, counterpoint, and modulations—Rimsky's remarks to Semyon Kruglikov after writing *Servilia* in 1902 contrast revealingly with the views of his fellow kuchkist:

Regarding *Italianism* [*Ital'yanshchina*], it will continue to be regretted that in Russian this word sounds as a reproach if not as abuse. [...] Italian melody is so singable that we often call melodiousness and vocality [*pevuchest' i vokal'nost'*] an Italianism regardless of the actual melody. There is no question that many banalities can be found with the Italians, but after all there is enough of that with the French and Germans, too. We should take the good things from the Italians, just as we take them from the Germans and from others.<sup>96</sup>

RIMSKY TOOK ANOTHER STEP in *The Tsar's Bride* that was an obvious break with his Kuchka past. The composer turned to what Richard Taruskin has called 'the worst of all operatic *bêtes noires* for the adherents of the radical operatic realism of the nineteenth century', namely the kind of ensemble writing he had denounced in his own old review of Nápravnik's *Nizhegorodtsi*.<sup>97</sup> The conclusion of the elaborate sextet in Act III speaks for itself:

MARFA:	God grant us happiness and love, God grant!
LĪKOV:	God grant us happiness and love, God grant, God grant us, God grant!
GRYAZNOY:	God grant you a long life in happiness and in love, a long life God grant you, God grant!
SABUROVA:	God grant you accord and love!
SOBAKIN:	God grant you accord and love, God grant!
CHORUS:	Accord and love to you!

In his memoirs, Rimsky left no doubt that this was just what he had aimed for: 'vocal ensembles, genuine, finished, and not at all in the form of any casual and fleeting linking of voices with others, as dictated by the present

<sup>95</sup> Letter to Nadezhda Nikolayevna, 15 October 1900; Rimsky-Korsakov, 'Izbranniye pis'ma N. A. Rimskogo-Korskova k N. N. Rimskoy-Korsakove', p. 88. Emphasis original.

<sup>96</sup> Quoted from Andrey Nikolayevich Rimsky-Korsakov, *N. A. Rimskiy-Korsakov: zhizn' i tvorchestvo*, 5 vols. (Moscow: Muzgiz, 1933–1946), vol. 5, p. 38. Emphasis original.

<sup>97</sup> Richard Taruskin, 'Tone, Style and Form in Prokofiev's Soviet Operas: Some Preliminary Observations', in *Music and Drama*, Studies in the History of Music 2 (New York: Broude, 1988), p. 234.

day requirements of quasi-dramatic truth, according to which two or more persons are not supposed to talk simultaneously.<sup>98</sup> No doubt Bel'sky, one of the first to hear the music of the new opera, was aware that such ensembles would be considered old-fashioned, but wrote approvingly to the composer that *The Tsar's Bride* had 'an absolutely original physiognomy' because there were no 'loud and long' ensembles at the end of each act.<sup>99</sup> Rimsky replied that his ensembles did not require any such justifications. 'If there are none that end an act, that is an accident', he wrote. 'I even regret that there are none, that would have been better.'<sup>100</sup> In a fascinating interview with Pavel Karasyov held in 1900,<sup>101</sup> Rimsky openly objected to the arguments used by the advocates of 'dramatic truth' who prohibited ensembles and rounded numbers, arguing that on the same grounds they should prohibit the chorus as well: 'who has ever heard a mass of people speak the same words at the same moment to the same rhythm?' Thus, he argued, composers only limited themselves, 'depriving music of its most powerful expressive means: melody and counterpoint.'<sup>102</sup>

In the same conversation, Rimsky claimed that even in his Kuchka days he had been 'no (complete) adherent of that absolute truth' and added that he 'had also been attracted to rounded forms back then', pointing out their presence in *The Maid of Pskov*. Surprisingly, he mentions the *veche* scene, one of his most famous mass scenes, which had once been 'the most specifically

<sup>98</sup> RLPP, vol. 1, p. 210; trans. RMML, pp. 314–5.

<sup>99</sup> Letter from Bel'sky to Rimsky-Korsakov, 8 August 1898; RYAB, p. 261.

<sup>100</sup> Letter to Bel'sky, 20 August 1898; RYAB, p. 265.

<sup>101</sup> Parts of this interview were first published shortly after Rimsky's death in 1908 as Pavel Alekseyevich Karasyov, 'Besedi s Nikolayem Andreyevichem Rimskim-Korsakovim', *Russkaya muzikal'naya gazeta*, 12 July 1908, no. 49, cols. 1112–22. Recently, it was reprinted as part of a longer set of reminiscences under the title 'Rimskiy-Korsakov, Vrubel' i Zabela-Vrubel' (po lichnim vospominaniyam)', in Aleksey Ivanovich Kandinsky (ed.), *Nikolay Andreyevich Rimskiy-Korsakov: k 150-letiyu so dnya rozhdeniya i 90-letiyu so dnya smerti. Sbornik statey* (Moscow: Moskovskaya gosudarstvennaya konservatoriya im. P. I. Chaykovskogo, 2000), pp. 146–69. There has been some confusion in the dating of the conversation. Richard Taruskin has situated the conversation in the late 1880s (Taruskin, *Stravinsky*, vol. 1, p. 64) and Marina Frolova-Walker equated the date of the interview with the publication year 1908 (Frolova-Walker, *Russian Music and Nationalism*, p. 207). In both publications of the interview, however, the author clearly describes that the conversation in question took place in the morning of 17 October 1900 (see cols. 1113–4 in the 1908, and pp. 150–1 in the 2000 version). Karasyov (1879–1958) had met Rimsky on 12 October at the Vrubel's, and after a concert on 16 October he approached the composer, asking him for some time to ask a few questions about his music. Karasyov had to convince the composer that he was not a journalist before the latter consented to meet him the next morning. This explains why the interview was only published after Rimsky's death.

<sup>102</sup> Karasyov, 'Rimskiy-Korsakov, Vrubel' i Zabela-Vrubel', p. 153.

kuchkist music yet written for public consumption',<sup>103</sup> as one of his 'blunders from the dramatic point of view', calling it 'too rounded, too orderly'. Rimsky's willingness to pierce the myths of dramatic truth in his own kuchkist composition is worth noting, as is his pretense that nothing had changed since then: 'for some reason *The Maid of Pskov* was praised then, but they hold the roundedness of *The Tsar's Bride* against it'.<sup>104</sup> Of course, it is perfectly clear why people responded differently: some rounded forms notwithstanding, *The Maid of Pskov* had been a daring attempt in the pursuit of 'dramatic truth' in the early 1870s; how could *The Tsar's Bride* ever be considered the same in the late 1890s? Rimsky knew this, of course, but he was no longer interested in being progressive in terms of form. When making the same point that *The Tsar's Bride* was no 'step backwards' in terms of form on another occasion, he revealed that it was no step forward either: 'I never made any steps backward, but I didn't want to go into any *narrow culs-de-sac*'.<sup>105</sup>

If the dramatic structure and the use of ensembles were not yet sufficient testimony to the break with his Kuchka past, there are also other telling details in the score of *The Tsar's Bride* that go beyond or plainly against cherished principles of kuchkism. Who would not be surprised to hear a band of *oprichniki* perform a neat '*Fughetta a 3 voci*', as it is explicitly labelled in the score? For the kuchkists, who used to consider fugues as the epitome of German academicism, it was a form best avoided, certainly given the situation and the character of those on stage in *The Tsar's Bride*.

Rimsky was remarkably liberal in his treatment of folk music. For example, the only authentic folk tune in the score, the famous *Slava* tune that had been used by Beethoven in his second 'Razumovsky' Quartet and by Musorgsky in *Boris Godunov*, amongst others, is not approached with the usual reverence for such an *objet trouvé*: it is given in both major and minor versions, and 'tortured into duple time'—as Gerald Abraham put it—in the prelude to Act III. Another interesting illustration can be found in the 'Yar khmel' ('The Hops') dance chorus in Act I that is performed by singers and dancers called in by Gryaznoy to entertain his guests. Such a diegetic folk performance, a very common phenomenon in Russian opera, is a most convenient setting to display a faithful reproduction of folk style since the amount of dramatic

<sup>103</sup> Taruskin, *Musorgsky*, p. 159.

<sup>104</sup> Karasyov, 'Rimskiy-Korsakov, Vruble' i Zabela-Vruble', pp. 152–3.

<sup>105</sup> Letter to Boleslav Kalenský, 15/18 December 1902; Igor' Fyodorovich Bělza (ed.), *Iz istorii russko-cheshskikh muzikal'nikh svyazey*, 2 vols. (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoye muzikal'noye izdatel'stvo, 1955–1956), vol. 1: *Perepiska M. A. Balakireva i N. A. Rimskogo-Korsakova s Boleslavom Kalenskim*, p. 86.

**Più mosso.** (♩ = 152)  
*p*

Moy milen'kiy bu - det, Goryushka u budet, Goryushka u - bu - det, vesel'i pri - budet,  
 Moy mi - len' -kiy bu - det, Oy!\_ Moy mi - len' -kiy bu - det, Oy!\_  
 Moy mi - len' -kiy bu - det, Oy! Moy mi - len' -kiy bu - det, Oy!

Moy mi - len' -kiy bu - det, Oy! Moy mi - len' -kiy bu - det, Oy!

Ex. 29: Act I, scene 3, 'Yar khmel' chorus, mm. 190–197. Chorus only.

considerations that could call for the use of modern operatic techniques are minimal. Its text is surely suitable for the purpose. But, as Marina Frolova-Walker has argued, Rimsky dropped 'all his Kuchka pretensions to knowledge of authentic peasant music, and instead produced a conventional pastoral scene very similar to its counterpart in Act I of *Eugene Onegin*'.<sup>106</sup> The harmonization of the opening theme, with its  $\hat{5}-\hat{5}\sharp-\hat{6}$  movement in the tenor voice over a pedal bass, does recall a characteristic technique that has attracted quite some attention in Russian music studies, and which Frolova-Walker recently dubbed the 'Kuchka pattern'.<sup>107</sup> Rimsky's chorus, however, has an elaborate tonal plan somewhat reminiscent of a sonata form, and contains a development section with frequent modulation and added counterpoint. The structure can easily be perceived by the listener, as important structural moments like the return of the first subject and the return of the second subject as an accelerated coda are underscored by emphatic  $V^7 \rightarrow I$  resolutions. This coda (shown in Ex. 29) may serve as an example of a style of choral writing in which the members of the chorus sing their notes on the beats with rests in between, as a chordal accompaniment. Such a style of singing is neither a realistic rendering of the text, nor a faithful reflection of folk style, but a very common device in opera. Balakirev is said to have complained that this chorus

<sup>106</sup> Frolova-Walker, *Russian Music and Nationalism*, p. 205.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 141–2. The full 'pattern' is defined as a chromatic movement back and forth  $\hat{5}-\hat{5}\sharp-\hat{6}-\hat{6}\flat-\hat{5}$ ; here Rimsky only writes  $\hat{5}-\hat{5}\sharp-\hat{6}-(\hat{3})-\hat{5}$ .

Ex. 30: Act I, scene 3, 'Yar khmel' chorus, mm. 158–173. Voices omitted.

had been taken in its entirety from Liszt's Second Hungarian Rhapsody.<sup>108</sup> Although this may simply have been a jibe at Rimsky, hinting at the piece's lack of authenticity, it is worth remarking that the two compositions do indeed share some features: both are constructed on various folk-like motifs in various tempi, interchange parallel major and minor keys, and make ample use of dominant pedals. The latter two features can be seen in the passage shown in Ex. 30, where we find an instrumental melody that could well have been used in the Lisztian showpiece due to its simple periodic structure and appoggiaturas. To use all the above devices was to defy most of the ideals the Balakirev circle ever had for reproducing folk style. Rimsky, apparently, preferred thrust, variety and movement over established kuchkist practice.

### *Breaking with the Future*

During the preparations for the premiere in Moscow, Rimsky wrote to his wife that the people from his circle were making 'an unforgivable mistake' by assigning *The Tsar's Bride* the last place amongst his operas just 'because it did not observe the ideals of the *Kuchka*'. He revealed the high hopes he had set on his new work: 'I would be delighted if it would turn out that *The Tsar's Bride* definitively tore up that web in which we have been caught in new operatic music'. He refused to see it as a mere retreat from contemporary developments, and added: 'believe me, it doesn't sound old-fashioned at all,

<sup>108</sup> Yastrebtsev, *Reminiscences*, p. 259 (entry for 15 May 1900).

but very new.<sup>109</sup> Nadezhda could not be convinced, however, and almost exactly a year later, we still find Rimsky persisting and making the same case: ‘*The Tsar’s Bride* represents a bright and frank turn to singing, and therefore it is not [a step] backwards, but forwards, and if this turn does not bring the operatic art further, then opera will perish in the same swamp in which it has begun to be ensnared, notwithstanding all the talented attempts at *truth*, which are only partly useful for the art.’<sup>110</sup>

It is clear that *The Tsar’s Bride* was written in what Rimsky perceived as a time of crisis. This sentiment fits into a broader cultural phenomenon. The late 1890s and early 1900s, the time in which Rimsky wrote his last operas, were a period of general anxiety. ‘Decadence’ (*dekadentstvo*) was a buzzword, indicative of the spirit of *fin-de-siècle* pessimism. It was a vague label that could be applied to any suspect modern trend, and was more or less interchangeable with terms like ‘decline’ (*upadok*) or ‘degeneracy’ (*virozhdeniye*).<sup>111</sup> Uncertainties about the future of the arts were widespread. Max Nordau’s famous *Entartung* (1892), in which all sorts of contemporary artistic trends were analysed as symptoms of a widespread social disease, had been published in two Russian translations in 1894 and both had already gone through their second edition in 1896. Lev Tolstoy, too, was shocked by the latest trends in literature and music, and drew the radical conclusion that ‘the communication of feelings’ rather than ‘beauty’ should become the principal touchstone for good art in his controversial *What is Art?*, published in the year *The Tsar’s Bride* was written. Rimsky-Korsakov was not the first composer to voice concerns about the future of his art. Anton Rubinstein, for instance, had ended his *Music and its Masters* in 1892 wondering: ‘Won’t the “*Götterdämmerung*” set in for the *musical art*?!’<sup>112</sup> and César Cui agreed

<sup>109</sup> Letter to Nadezhda Nikolayevna, 19 October 1899; Rimsky-Korsakov, ‘Izbranniye pis’ma N. A. Rimskogo-Korskova k N. N. Rimskoy-Korsakove’, p. 76. Emphasis original.

<sup>110</sup> Letter to Nadezhda Nikolayevna, 18 October 1900; *ibid.*, p. 91. Emphasis original.

<sup>111</sup> The notion of ‘decadence’ goes back much further, but it was only in the second half of the nineteenth century that the concept of a ‘style of decadence’ and the derivative ‘decadent’ to indicate a person would gain currency (see Matei Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernism: Modernism, Avant-Garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism*, 2nd edn. [Durham: Durham University Press, 1987], pp. 151–78). Unlike in France, where the term ‘decadence’ could be used as a slogan rather than an insult, in Russia the connotation was negative without exception (Olga Haldey, ‘Savva Mamontov, Serge Diaghilev, and a Rocky Path to Modernism’, *Journal of Musicology* 22/4 [2005], p. 571).

<sup>112</sup> Anton Grigor’evich Rubinstein, ‘Razgovor o muzike (Muzika i yeyo mastera)’ (1892), in *id.*, *Literaturnoye naslediyeye*, ed. Lev Aronovich Barenboym, 3 vols. (Moscow: Muzika, 1983), vol. 1, p. 162. Emphasis original.

that music was 'going through a severe—one has to hope—temporary crisis of widespread decline'.<sup>113</sup>

These sentiments were not necessarily due to a lack of artistic activity or innovative ideas. In Russia, too, a new generation of artists was making itself heard, though as yet, in fields other than music. In November 1898, the first issue of *Mir iskusstva* appeared and opened with an essay entitled 'Our Alleged Decline' by Sergey Diaghilev, who took a firm stance against the critics who were skeptical of the art of his generation. Hurling the charges of decadence back at what he called the decadents of Classicism ('our oldest and hence incorrigible enemies'), the decadents of Romanticism ('sentimental dreamers who pine away to the sound of Mendelssohn lieder'), and the decadents of Realism ('a still recent group which thought it had amazed the world with its bold discovery of dragging peasant shoes and rags onto the canvas'), Diaghilev quoted Émile Zola by declaring that he hated 'the impotents who cry out that our art and our literature are dying their natural deaths': 'they are people buried in the past who skim with contempt through works that are alive and inspired by our times and declare them insignificant and narrow'.<sup>114</sup>

These words could apply to Rimsky-Korsakov as well as anyone. In the composer's correspondence and writings of these and later years, one finds no shortage of severe indictments of decadent music. In a sketched summary of—mostly undesirable—modern tendencies in music, Rimsky listed, besides the general verdict of decadence, the more specific transgressions of formlessness, lack of harmonic discipline, impurity of voice leading, and the exaggeration of the conceptual (*ideyniy*) side of art.<sup>115</sup> The worst culprits, judging from the frequency with which they are named by the aging Russian composer, were Vincent d'Indy, Alfred Bruneau, and—above all—Richard Strauss, to whom the usually cool composer reacted with remarkable temperament.

The list of derisive comments about Strauss is both long and entertaining.

<sup>113</sup> César Antonovich Cui, 'Dva inostrannikh kompozitora' (1894), in id., *Izbrannnye stat'i*, p. 422.

<sup>114</sup> Sergey Pavlovich Diaghilev, 'Slozhniye voprosi. Nash mnimiy upadok', *Mir iskusstva* 1/1 (1898), pp. 5, 10. The French original of the Zola quote can be found in Émile Zola, 'Mes Haines: Causeries littéraires et artistiques' (1866), in id., *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Henri Mitterand, 15 vols. (Paris: Cercle du livres précieux, 1966–1970), vol. 10, p. 27. Diaghilev's journal did not start in 1899, as is sometimes claimed; see John E. Bowlit, *The Silver Age: Russian Art of the Early Twentieth Century and the 'World of Art' Group*, Studies in Russian Art History (Newtonville, Mass.: Oriental Research Partners, 1979), pp. 56, 61, 280n26. The announcement of the premieres of *Mozart and Salieri* (November 25th) and *Vera Sheloga* (December 27th) in the appendix ('Khudozhestvennaya Khronika', p. 9) serve to confirm 1898 as the correct date.

<sup>115</sup> RLPP, vol. 2, p. 68.

We find Rimsky's first documented response to the Bavarian composer in 1896, when a selection of Strauss's orchestral music was introduced in St Petersburg by his friend Friedrich Rösch. In these first comments Rimsky already complained about Strauss's 'incredibly massive and complex orchestration for quite bad music'.<sup>116</sup> Some two years later, after playing through *Also sprach Zarathustra*, Rimsky pronounced his young German colleague 'a madman, musically speaking', but still allowed for the possibility that 'this poem and his other orchestral works are nothing more than a hoax, a mockery of contemporary music and the people (like Nikisch and others) who think they understand such utter nonsense'.<sup>117</sup> No matter how often he stressed Strauss's lack of talent, Rimsky-Korsakov kept an acute interest in the German's newest compositions, and judging by the sheer frequency and vehemence of the derogations he was seriously unsettled by his works.<sup>118</sup> After he had acquainted himself with the score of *Don Quixote* in Brussels in 1900, he called Strauss 'a shameless bastard' and a 'scoundrel', and announced to his wife that, should he ever be introduced to him, he would refuse to offer his hand.<sup>119</sup> In 1904, the agnostic Rimsky-Korsakov even went so far as to follow Yevgeny Petrovsky in associating Strauss's compositions with devil worship, comparing his 'seemingly satanic escapades' with 'the contemporary phenomena to which one must ascribe the service of the *black mass* in Paris'.<sup>120</sup> At this time Rimsky

<sup>116</sup> Vasily Vasil'yevich Yastrebtsev, *Nikolay Andreyevich Rimskiy-Korsakov: vospominaniya*, ed. Aleksandr Vyacheslavovich Ossovsky, 2 vols. (Leningrad: Gosudarstvennoye muzikal'noye izdatel'stvo, 1959–1960), vol. 1, p. 358 (entry for 5 March 1896).

<sup>117</sup> Id., *Reminiscences*, p. 200 (entry for 11 February 1898).

<sup>118</sup> After the many denunciations listed in this paragraph, Rimsky-Korsakov still went to hear *Salome* in Paris in 1907, and Nadezhda Nikolayevna reported that this was the first time she had heard her husband hiss at a performance (Letter from Nadezhda Nikolayevna to Mikhail Nikolayevich, 14 May 1907; quoted in Nikolay Andreyevich Rimsky-Korsakov and Vladimir Ivanovich Bel'sky, 'Iz perepiski N. A. Rimskogo-Korsakova s V. I. Bel'skim: *Stenka Razin; Zolotoy petushok*', ed. Aleksandra Anatol'yevna Orlova and Vladimir Nikolayevich Rimsky-Korsakov, *Sovetskaya muzika*, 1976, no. 6, 103n). It turns out, however, that Arthur Nikisch's performance of *Don Juan* in 1899 had already provoked such an unusual display of disapproval (Yastrebtsev, *Vospominaniya*, vol. 2, p. 80 [entry for 2 May 1899]).

<sup>119</sup> Letters to Taneyev, 2/15 March 1900; Sergey Ivanovich Taneyev, *Materiali i dokumenti: perepiska i vospominaniya*, ed. Vasily Aleksandrovich Kiselyov et al. (Moscow: Akademiya nauk SSSR, 1952), p. 41; and to Nadezhda Nikolayevna, 29 February/13 March 1900; Rimsky-Korsakov, 'Izbranniye pis'ma N. A. Rimskogo-Korsakova k N. N. Rimskoy-Korsakove', p. 81.

<sup>120</sup> Letter to Kruglikov, 28 December 1904; RLPP, vol. 8b, p. 157. Compare Petrovsky's letter to Rimsky, 24 December 1904: 'I would even suspect that the Strauss's appearance is related to those satanic tendencies that have been absorbed in Western poetry, art, entertainment and spiritual searches' (Nikolay Andreyevich Rimsky-Korsakov and Yevgeny Maksimovich Petrovsky, "Pevets vechnoy, neuvyadayemoy vesni": iz perepiska s Ye. M. Petrovskim', ed.

denied that Strauss was an artist at all, declaring the larger part of his work 'anti-artistic': even though some 'cacophonous spots' might be found in the work of even the best composers, the composer argued, in Strauss's works 'everything consists of spots'.<sup>121</sup> This happens to be very close to one of the oldest and most influential formulations of what decadence in art is about: there is no whole, there are only the parts; the former being destroyed by excessive attention spent on the latter.<sup>122</sup>

What worried Rimsky-Korsakov most, presumably, was not that someone was writing music he disapproved of, but that this music was being listened to, and that it had its measure of success.<sup>123</sup> 'The indifference of taste is the decline of art,' he wrote in one of his notes on aesthetics.<sup>124</sup> What if Strauss's and similar music was to be the music of the new century?

THE RELEVANCE OF this pessimistic view on modern music for the understanding of *The Tsar's Bride* stems from the fact that Rimsky made several implicit and explicit connections between the decline and decadence in the arts and the new vocal style he had explored in his 1897 romances and applied in his new opera. Two of these, mentioning 'narrow *culs-de-sacs*' and the perishing of the operatic art, have been cited above. The most interesting of these documents, however, is a letter to Semyon Kruglikov, written on 19 February 1898,<sup>125</sup> around the time the composer made the decision to compose *The*

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Marina Pavlovna Rakhmanova, *Muzikal'naya Akademiya* 3/2 [1994], p. 160). Petrovsky was far more ambivalent about Strauss, and more inclined than Rimsky to recognize him as a considerable talent. Still, there are some notable similarities between their views. See e.g. Petrovsky's 1896 review, where he writes that Strauss 'seeks novelty, wishes to find new means of expression and stops at nothing; on the soil of German idealism, he sometimes arrives at Musorgsky's musical boldness; he falls into extremes, caprice, fancy'. If Max Nordau ('the German slanderer') had only been more interested in music, Petrovsky observes cynically, Strauss's name, too, 'would doubtlessly have figured in [Nordau's] honorary list of notorious degenerates, mongrels, idiots, imbeciles, etc.' Petrovsky agreed with Rimsky that modern Western music was lacking in melodic inspiration ('Ye. P—sky' [Yevgeny Maksimovich Petrovsky], 'Kontserti S. Peterburgskoy Muzikal'noy Shkoli. II. Rikhard Shtraus [...]', *Russkaya muzikal'naya gazeta*, Apr. 1896, no. 4, col. 463).

<sup>121</sup> Letter to Kruglikov, 28 December 1904; RLPP, vol. 8b, p. 157.

<sup>122</sup> See Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernism*, p. 158.

<sup>123</sup> Hence Rimsky's consternation after Strauss's performance of *Don Quixote* in Paris about the fact that 'they write about it with all seriousness in papers like *Le Figaro*!' (Letter to Nadezhda Nikolayevna, 29 February/13 March 1900; Rimsky-Korsakov, 'Izbrannīye pis'ma N. A. Rimskogo-Korskova k N. N. Rimskoy-Korsakove', p. 81).

<sup>124</sup> RLPP, vol. 2, p. 68. This fragment with the heading 'New artistic tendencies at the end of the 19th century' is dated in an unknown hand at 1 January 1902; this dating is disputed.

<sup>125</sup> The letter is dated 18 February on the original, but the editors of the Complete Works

*Tsar's Bride* and made his first sketches and drafts. This document contains many essential elements of the aesthetic behind *The Tsar's Bride*—and a fair impression of what motivated the work as well. It is worth discussing in some detail.

Kruglikov had cautiously suggested that Rimsky's new, simpler, melodic style seemed to cater to the wishes of the singers and the broader audience—and he got the following lecture in reply.<sup>126</sup> 'Not only is there no harm in becoming more simple, more natural, and broader,' the composer argued, 'it is even a necessity, not just for me, but for everyone.' Composers had moved too far in the opposite direction, Rimsky argued, and the audience had every reason to complain about 'shallow melodicity, fragmentariness, *harmonic* content of music and an overindulgence in dissonances', for these were 'things that are in themselves undesirable'. Even though the 'Berliozian-Lisztian-Wagnerian direction' had produced many 'good details and particular methods of writing', it had also 'engendered the current decadence of Bruneau, d'Indy, Sinding, Richard Strauss and others'. Notably, these Western innovators were not the only ones to blame: 'The Russian school of the 60s and 70s also played a part in the birth of decadence, for it already shimmers through in their works'. Rimsky recalled his Kuchka days, when 'a large number of Chopin's melodies were considered weak and cheap music' and when his friends had actually tried to replace the word melody with the word 'theme'. Now Rimsky saw the necessity of melodic writing: 'pure melody, coming from Mozart via Chopin and Glinka, is alive nowadays and must live, for without it the fate of music will be decadence.' He also raised the issue of polyphony, even though this was no direct response to Kruglikov's reservations about simplicity and it was more pertinent to *The Tsar's Bride* than to the romances he was ostensibly defending. Rimsky observed that 'in Liszt and Berlioz, counterpoint, as the presentation of simultaneous *melodies*, perished completely; it also perished in the Russian school.' The conclusion of his argument again reveals his pessimistic view of the future of music:

I firmly believe in the (relatively) near end of the musical art, although there is still enough for us and our children. I would like to support it for the time being instead of going headlong into the abyss. The

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have corrected this based on its contents (RLPP, vol. 8b, 55n).

<sup>126</sup> Letter from Kruglikov to Rimsky-Korsakov, 18 February 1898; RLPP, vol. 8b, p. 53. Dated 17 February on the original, corrected on the basis of the contents of Kruglikov's next letter (RLPP, vol. 8b, 53n).

problem is not at all with pleasing the public. You have insulted me a little.<sup>127</sup>

THAT RICHARD WAGNER is a key figure to our understanding of Rimsky-Korsakov's sense of crisis in music was to be expected. Wagner had famously been denounced by Nietzsche as 'the artist of decadence', who 'spoils our health—and music into the bargain'<sup>128</sup> and, of all the innovators mentioned by Rimsky, he had exerted the greatest impact on late nineteenth-century music as a whole, and on opera in particular.

In the early Kuchka days, it had been relatively easy to dismiss early, isolated Russian Wagnerites like Aleksandr Serov as 'Zukunftists'. Now, in the late 1890s, Rimsky complained to Yastrebtsev that Wagnerism had become 'a kind of cult, a sort of religion in art'.<sup>129</sup> Together they made jokes suggesting that the 'sheer ecstasy which not only his music but each separate note of it' evoked, could only have been caused by some sort of microbe science had yet to discover.<sup>130</sup> The new *Russkaya muzikal'naya gazeta*, founded by Nikolay Findeyzen in 1894, promoted Wagner's work, and began publishing translations of Wagner's writings in 1897.<sup>131</sup> The same period saw a strong increase in the number of Wagner performances. The Bolshoy, for instance, having staged only three Wagner productions between 1894 and 1898, suddenly presented ten in the 1898-1899 season alone.<sup>132</sup> Although Rimsky's concerns generally focused more on Wagner's followers than on the German master himself, he did hold him responsible for much that was wrong in contemporary music, and, remarkably, continued to perceive his work as modern and new, even some two decades after his death.

Rimsky's views on Wagner were more complex than those on later composers such as Strauss or d'Indy, and were subject to violent fluctuations. He never rejected Wagner more than partly, and never definitively. He valued many of Wagner's inventions and certainly considered him one of the greatest composers of his age. Rimsky also made no secret of his application

<sup>127</sup> Letter to Kruglikov, 19 February 1898; RLPP, vol. 8b, p. 54.

<sup>128</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Case of Wagner; Nietzsche Contra Wagner; Selected Aphorisms*, trans. Anthony M. Ludovici, 3rd edn. (Edinburg: T. N. Foulis, 1911; Project Gutenberg 2008), p. 11.

<sup>129</sup> Yastrebtsev, *Reminiscences*, p. 173 (entry for 6 January 1897).

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 235 (entry for 5–8 August 1899).

<sup>131</sup> Rosamund Bartlett, *Wagner and Russia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 60.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 78.

of Wagner's orchestra in *Mlada*, or of the fact that his portrayal of the night before Act IV of *Saltan* was written 'alla Wagner'.<sup>133</sup> Despite the enormous pull Wagner exerted on him, Rimsky would maintain that Wagner's own approach to music drama was one-sided, and not necessarily the only or most satisfying solution. He was certainly aware of his own ambivalence: 'I've always criticized most harshly everyone I had a special love for, such as Beethoven, Wagner, etc. To me it's always been especially painful when I found something mediocre or bad in such geniuses.'<sup>134</sup> The faults he found with Wagner, however, were no minor ones. In 1903, after reiterating his many objections to *Götterdämmerung*—'a million dissonances, randomness, formlessness, the duration and long-windedness, and the absence of (melodic) singing'—he asked: 'Is it really necessary to be infected with that in order to be new?!'<sup>135</sup>

Rimsky had already raised similar complaints a decade before in the unfinished essay 'Wagner and Dargomizhsky' (1892), which contains the composer's most structured attempt to critique the German master. While he found passages of great beauty in Wagner's accompaniment, harmony, tone painting and instrumentation, Rimsky condemned Wagner's melody and his use of the voice. Wagner's solo singing was judged to be 'only declamation', which could end up being 'repulsive and deformed melodic nonsense.'<sup>136</sup> Rimsky urged composers who wanted to follow in Wagner's footsteps to 'refrain without delay from this ghastly method of dealing with the voice and give a place to real, cantabile recitative and arioso singing as the ideal musical speech'.<sup>137</sup> He deplored, significantly, that Wagner's texts did not offer any occasion for simultaneous singing.<sup>138</sup> Rimsky also objected to the lack of clear cadential divisions in Wagner's 'endless melody', and felt that one should not dispense with 'architectonic forms', since these were valuable syntactical and formal means.<sup>139</sup> A final serious complaint was that Wagner's

<sup>133</sup> Letter to Bel'sky, 26 June 1899; RYAB, p. 282. Original in Latin alphabet.

<sup>134</sup> Yastrebtsev, *Reminiscences*, p. 173 (entry for 6 January 1897).

<sup>135</sup> Letter to Nadezhda Nikolayevna, 17/30 January 1903; Rimsky-Korsakov, 'Izbranniye pis'ma N. A. Rimskogo-Korskova k N. N. Rimskoy-Korsakove', p. 95.

<sup>136</sup> Id., 'Vagner [i Dargomizhskiy]: sovokupnoye proizved[eniye] dvukh iskusstv, ili muzikal'naya drama' (1892), in RLPP, vol. 2, p. 47.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 56.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 55–6.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 51–2. Taneyev recorded that Rimsky was 'convinced that Wagner wrote from bar to bar, without caring about a modulatory plan, going wherever he happened to go' (Sergey Ivanovich Taneyev, *Dnevnik, 1894–1909*, ed. Lyudmila Zinov'yevna Korabel'nikova, 3 vols. [Moscow: Muzika, 1981–1985], vol. 2, p. 97 [entry for 22 October 1899]).

music was generally oversaturated in terms of harmony, orchestration, and counterpoint. For Rimsky, Wagner was a perfect representative of what he called *iziskanniy* style, from the Russian word that in common parlance may mean 'refined', but here takes on associations of 'artificial', 'experimental', or the French '*recherché*', through its derivation from the verb *iziskat'*, 'to (re)search'.<sup>140</sup>

One could boldly say that harmony as the elementary factor in the music of Wagner is driven to the very extremes of its development as a consequence of the *iziskanniy* style, the monotony of its contrapuntal complexity, and the complete absence of economy in the distribution of its riches; and that further steps in this respect are impossible.<sup>141</sup>

Rimsky concluded that the only possibility was 'a step back'. He pleaded for the introduction of variety and contrast, and suggested to refresh Wagner's contemporary *iziskanniy* style by contrasting it to the 'strict' and 'free' styles, terms usually taken as characterizations of periods of stylistic history.<sup>142</sup>

It is clear that *The Tsar's Bride* incorporated many facets of his criticism of Wagner, and some of these aspects—emphasis on singing, 'architectonic forms' and a conscious reduction of complexity—were too obviously antithetical to Wagner's works for contemporary critics to ignore. During the negotiations about the publication of *The Tsar's Bride*, Rimsky and Yastrebtsev were already discussing 'the fact that this score is going to disconcert many people, mainly the Wagnerites, who will dislike it terribly'.<sup>143</sup>

It is obvious that Rimsky-Korsakov distanced himself from Wagner's principles in *The Tsar's Bride* soon after the raising of the curtain, in Gryaznoy's

<sup>140</sup> Sketches on aesthetics, RLPP, vol. 2, p. 69. The editors of Rimsky's Complete Works define the *iziskanniy* style, somewhat circularly it seems, as: 'a work of music with extreme application of some single or excessively varied methods of development, leading to, in Rimsky-Korsakov's expression, "monotony of wealth"' (Rimsky-Korsakov, 'Vagner', 60n). He identified this style in its most extreme forms in the music of Liszt, Wagner and Dargomizhsky (ibid., p. 47).

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., p. 49.

<sup>142</sup> In one of his sketches on aesthetics, Rimsky himself referred to the 'strict' (*strogiy*) style as the dominant style from the fifteenth to the seventeenth century and the 'free' (*svobodniy*) as the music of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century (RLPP, vol. 2, p. 69). The strict style is more commonly understood as the modal polyphony of the Renaissance, in contrast to the free style based on major and minor modes since the seventeenth century (see e. g. Georgy [Yury] Vsevolodovich Keldish, Boris Solomonovich Shteynpress and Izrail' Markovich Yampol'sky, *Èntsiklopedicheskiy muzikal'niy slovar'* [Moscow: Bol'shaya sovetskaya èntsiklopediya, 1959], pp. 240, 260; or Yury Stepanovich Bulchevsky and Vitaly Sergeyevich Fomin, *Starinnaya muzika: slovar'-spravochnik* [Leningrad: Muzika, 1974], pp. 113, 122).

<sup>143</sup> Yastrebtsev, *Reminiscences*, p. 235 (entry for 5–8 August 1899).

Act I aria. The preceding *scena* introduces Gryaznoy and the leitmotiv that will accompany him throughout the opera—a technique contemporary critics associated with Wagner, and thus with the ‘modern’ element of Rimsky’s opera. The aria itself, however, notwithstanding some late nineteenth-century touches and refinements, has the rough outlines of the traditional *da capo* form. It is true that only the second half of the opening section is repeated, and that at its return, its rhythm is changed to suit the  $\frac{3}{4}$  metre of the middle section. It is also worth noting that the aria is suffused with references to Gryaznoy’s leitmotiv, particularly the four-note arpeggio that concludes its initial full statement.<sup>144</sup> But the overall shape and character of the aria sufficed to ensure audiences that this would not be a music drama of the Wagnerian or Dargomizhskian kind. And if it failed to do so, the subsequent retreat into something resembling *secco* recitative definitely would.

IT MAY BE SURPRISING that Rimsky-Korsakov mentioned Musorgsky and Dargomizhsky—two Russian composers who had exerted little or no influence on composers like Strauss or d’Indy, though some on Debussy—as instigators of decadent tendencies. It is clear, however, that such works as Dargomizhsky’s *The Stone Guest* and Musorgsky’s similar experiment *Marriage* suffered from the subordination of music to the text, the lack of ‘architectonic’ forms, and the absence of simultaneous singing for which Rimsky criticized Wagner.<sup>145</sup> The work of his deceased friends, moreover, contained many transgressions in the local details of writing harmony, counterpoint and proper voice-leading. When going through the vocal score of *The Stone Guest*, which he intended to reorchestrate, Rimsky noted that it contained a ‘good deal of harmonic nonsense’, and imagined that much of the ‘harmonic evil’ in Musorgsky’s works derived from Dargomizhsky’s example.<sup>146</sup>

Unlike their Western counterparts, Musorgsky and Dargomizhsky could well be excused because of their lack of formal training. Just as he had rigorously rewritten all of his own early works, Rimsky-Korsakov invested

<sup>144</sup> These motivic relations have been observed before by V. Bakulin, ‘Leytmotivnaya i intonatsionnaya dramaturgiya v opere Rimskogo-Korsakova *Tsarskaya nevesta*’, in Yuri Nikolayevich Tyulin (ed.), *Voprosi opernoy dramaturgii* (Moscow: Muzika, 1975), pp. 277–81.

<sup>145</sup> For a comparison of Musorgsky to Wagner, see the letter to Yastrebtsev, 15 June 1901: ‘I came to the conclusion there is a large similarity between Musorgsky and Richard. What a misunderstanding that Musorgsky did not understand and recognized him. And what an even greater misunderstanding that the things everyone chided Musorgsky for can be found in Wagner at every step, and all of musically educated Europe listens to it and venerates it’ (RYAB, p. 130).

<sup>146</sup> Yastrebtsev, *Reminiscences*, p. 187 (entry for 30 June–1 July 1897).

much energy in revising and retouching as much as he could of his fellow kuchkists' legacy, especially Musorgsky's, hoping to correct for what he saw as an unfortunate lack of technique. In February 1896, Rimsky felt he was finally close to leaving that part of the past behind him, and told Yastrebtsev:

As soon as *Sadko* and *Boris* are finished, I must go through the score of Dargomizhsky's *Stone Guest* again, and if there's anything in the orchestration that strikes me as bad (and there will probably be many such things), I'll correct it, so that later on, no one will be able to accuse me of a careless attitude towards the works of others. After that, I'll be able to retire, since I've gone through everything of Musorgsky's. Therefore, my conscience is clear, for with respect to his works and his memory, I've done everything that I could and should have done.<sup>147</sup>

As it turned out, however, no amount of editorial work was ever going to suffice. It must have been a source of great frustration to see how a new generation of composers with excellent conservatory education and impressive technical abilities, continued to violate some of the 'divine laws' of composition willingly.<sup>148</sup> A telling illustration of the way in which matters of voice-leading, decadence, and his Kuchka past were interrelated for Rimsky, is provided by the composer's response after someone played Debussy's *Estampes* on his sixtieth birthday. 'The impudent decadent', Rimsky wrote in his diary: 'he scorns all music composed before him, and, persistently clinging to the second F $\sharp$ -G $\sharp$  in a B major piece for 2-3 pages, thinks he has discovered America; and the impudent and tone-deaf leaders of the contemporary music evenings applaud him and set him off against the outdated Glazunov, R.-Korsakov and co.'<sup>149</sup> The feature he isolated for censure in Debussy's collection must have reminded him of *The Sleeping Princess* (*Spyashchaya knyazhna*), a song Borodin had dedicated to him in 1867, which is famous for its continuously undulating major seconds in the piano accompaniment, treated as if they were consonants. In 1897, around the time he wrote his letter to Kruglikov that the Russian school anticipated the decadence of the 1890s, Rimsky had already put some effort in an attempt to 'correct' Borodin's song. By carefully introducing preparations and resolutions in the individual voices, Rimsky had managed to produce a clever orchestrated version (see Ex. 31a) in which the seconds are properly treated as dissonances without changing a note to the harmony

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 145 (entry for 11 February 1896).

<sup>148</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 188 (entry for 30 June-1 July).

<sup>149</sup> Nikolay Andreyevich Rimsky-Korsakov, 'Dnevnik, 1904-1907', in RLPP, vol. 1, p. 240-1 (entry for 9 March 1904).

as a whole—‘seconds without seconds’, as Yastrebtsev called the result.<sup>150</sup> Now these seconds reappeared at the very first page of Debussy’s collection (see Ex. 31b).<sup>151</sup> There was no question that these dissonances were being used deliberately—and this was true for Borodin no less than for the Frenchman. Such parallels between the young decadents and the Kuchka made it impossible for Rimsky not to condemn his friends as well. When Kruglikov dared to give Strauss the benefit of the doubt in 1904, arguing that, after all, Musorgsky had also met with initial opposition but had become recognized since, Rimsky bluntly stated that ‘all that was offensive in Musorgsky will remain so forever’.<sup>152</sup>

THERE WAS ONE consoling thought: the worst examples of decadence seemed to come from abroad. After returning from a visit to Brussels in 1900, where he found the artistic climate to be ‘generally decadent’,<sup>153</sup> Rimsky shared with Taneyev his impression that Wagner ‘already’ belonged to the ‘category of generally accepted classics’ for the local audience and that the Brusselians consider themselves to be ‘ahead of Paris in terms of musical taste’.<sup>154</sup>

Let them have R. Strauss and d’Indy and co. I comfort myself with the idea that, as it seems, we are still more ahead of them, for we have already moved beyond the phase of cacophony, which they (the Parisians and Brusselians) are only still living through.<sup>155</sup>

The Soviet editors of the correspondence suggested that Rimsky was speaking of the Wagnerian influence in Russia in the late 1880s and early 1890s.<sup>156</sup> In fact, the Russian ‘phase of cacophony’ referred to the Kuchka’s experiments

<sup>150</sup> Yastrebtsev, *Reminiscences*, p. 177 (entry for 10 February 1897).

<sup>151</sup> I owe the relation between these two pieces to Taruskin, *Stravinsky*, vol. 1, p. 55. The plausibility of Taruskin’s suggestion that the hearing of Debussy’s piece prompted the publication of Rimsky-Korsakov’s orchestration of *The Sleeping Princess* by Jurgenson is open to debate, since many sources, including *The New Grove*, state 1903 as the year of publication.

<sup>152</sup> Letter to Kruglikov, 28 December 1904; RLPP, vol. 8b, p. 157.

<sup>153</sup> Letter to Taneyev, 2/15 March 1900; Taneyev, *Materiali i dokumenti*, p. 41.

<sup>154</sup> Letter to Taneyev, 19 March 1900; *ibid.*, pp. 42–3. This claim about the Brusselians is not unfounded. With the exception of *Parsifal*, all Wagner’s music dramas since *Lohengrin*, were staged in Brussels many years before they reached Paris. See Alfred Loewenberg, *Annals of Opera, 1597–1940*, 2nd edn., 2 vols. (Geneva: Societas Bibliographica, 1955), vol. 1, cols. 885–6, 976, 1002, 1009–10, 1055–7; and Karel Wauters, *Wagner en Vlaanderen, 1844–1914: cultuurhistorische studie* (Ghent: Koninklijke Academie voor Nederlandse Taal- en Letterkunde, 1983), pp. 144–7, 321–5.

<sup>155</sup> Letter to Taneyev, 19 March 1900; Taneyev, *Materiali i dokumenti*, pp. 42–3.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, 43*m*.

a.) Borodin, *The Sleeping Princess*, mm. 1-5 (with Rimsky-Korsakov's 1897 orchestration below)

Andantino *p*  
 Spit. Spit v le - su glukhom,  
*pp*  
 Cl. (B $\flat$ )  
 Hn. (F)  
 Vn. I *ten. assai*  
 Vn. II *pp*  
 Vla.  
 Vc.

Detailed description: This musical score shows the vocal line and piano accompaniment for the first five measures of Borodin's 'The Sleeping Princess'. The vocal line is in a soprano register, starting with a rest followed by the lyrics 'Spit. Spit v le - su glukhom,'. The piano accompaniment features a delicate, flowing melody in the right hand and a steady bass line in the left hand. The tempo is marked 'Andantino' and the dynamics range from 'pp' to 'p'. The score includes parts for Clarinet in B-flat, Horn in F, Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello.

b.) Debussy, *Estampes*, nr. 1: 'Pagodes', mm. 1-6

*délicatement et presque sans nuances*  
 Modérément animé *m.g.*  
*pp* *m.d.*  
*rit.* *a tempo*  
*8va...* *3* *rit.*

Detailed description: This musical score shows the first six measures of Debussy's 'Pagodes' from 'Estampes'. The piece is in a 3/4 time signature and features a complex, layered texture. The right hand plays a melodic line with grace notes and slurs, while the left hand provides a harmonic foundation with chords and moving lines. The tempo is 'Modérément animé' and the dynamics are 'pp' and 'm.d.'. The score includes performance instructions such as 'délicatement et presque sans nuances', 'rit.', 'a tempo', and '8va...'. The piece concludes with a triplet of eighth notes and a 'rit.' marking.

Ex. 31: The use of a 'consonant' major second by Borodin and Debussy.

of the sixties and seventies, which were now an embarrassment to him. Some remarks he made to Yastrebtsev immediately after his return from Brussels leave no doubt about this:

What still excites them keenly—for example, the Wagnerian tendencies and, especially, the absurd and utterly senseless creations of all sorts of Richard Strausses—we've already experienced to a certain degree. After all, in terms of his artistic tendency, wasn't Dargomizhshy, in the period of *The Stone Guest*, a kind of a Russian Wagner? And Musorgsky, with his opera *Marriage* and 'grey hair' depicted in the accompaniment by a 'minor second'—wasn't he an absurd, grotesquely blatant innovator of the Richard Strauss type? And what happened? It's all past, finished! Meanwhile, even today, the Brussels public can get excited, even ecstatic over such rubbish.<sup>157</sup>

Taneyev had already reported with some astonishment about the music of d'Indy and other young French composers to Tchaikovsky back in 1880, and had made a firm distinction between the decadence in France and the contemporary state of music in Russia.<sup>158</sup> Although Taneyev was more lenient towards the Western experiments than Rimsky, they heartily agreed on the relative positions of Russian and Western music.<sup>159</sup>

In a sense, the two correspondents may have been right in their judgements. Russia at the turn of the century was not particularly hospitable to undesirable musical experiments. Musical life in St Petersburg, and musical education in particular were dominated by Rimsky-Korsakov and his

<sup>157</sup> Yastrebtsev, *Reminiscences*, p. 254 (entry for 8 March 1900).

<sup>158</sup> 'The scale has stopped to contain seven notes,' Taneyev wrote about his experience with contemporary French music, 'but contains all twelve, and not only in the melodies but also in the *harmonies*. There is no tonality; the only rule is: after any chord one may take any other, no matter to what key it belongs. All resourcefulness is brought to bear on this: to find a sequence of chords that no one has used before'. Taneyev argued that this music perfectly expressed the character of these composers: 'The music is like the people. But you have to express yourself precisely. You cannot say: our time is such, our music is such—that's not true; say: the music of the *Western people* is going through such a time—that will be true. But don't extend this to us.' (letter to Tchaikovsky, 26 June/6 August 1880; Pyotr Il'yich Tchaikovsky and Sergey Ivanovich Taneyev, *Pis'ma*, ed. Vladimir Aleksandrovich Zhdanov [Moscow: Goskul'tprosvetizdat, 1951] [henceforth cited as CHT], p. 54). This was the letter in which Taneyev shared with Tchaikovsky his ideas about an independent Russian music, as discussed in the introduction to this thesis (see p. 7 above).

<sup>159</sup> Taneyev claimed 'it would be unfair to see only the negative side in a "phase of cacophony"'. Eventually, he argued, 'the clarity of the language will be restored, and ultimately it will turn out to be enriched by the new turns and manners of expression' (letter from Taneyev to Rimsky-Korsakov, 7 April 1900; Taneyev, *Materiali i dokumenti*, pp. 44–5).

Belyayevite friends and pupils, while the Moscow conservatory was staffed by like-minded people such as Taneyev. It was only during the following decade that Skryabin would develop his most idiosyncratic style, and that Stravinsky and Prokofiev would break through—thus making three Russian composers stand at the very forefront of modernist music. In 1901, Kashkin—who had been Taneyev's colleague at the Moscow conservatory for many years—could still maintain with pride that there were hardly any decadent musicians in Russia. Nor did he seem to expect any, for in his view 'the newest tendencies of decadence, symbolism, impressionism, etc.' were most unsuited to the 'sober northern mind' of the Russians.<sup>160</sup> The notion that the West was the source of decadence and decline, or at least a bit further in this sad development, reminds one of the familiar trope of Russian messianism that, in the musical world, dated back at least as far as Odoyevsky's writings in the 1830s.<sup>161</sup> Rimsky's many pessimistic pronouncements, however, show that he was far from convinced of both Russia's lead in music and its independence from the West. Instead of foreseeing a glorious future, Rimsky thought that in Russia, too, something had to be done in order to 'support the art of music for the time being'.

### *Torniamo all'antico*

Rimsky-Korsakov had become convinced that music functioned according to some 'divine laws', which made it 'hardly possible now to blaze really new

<sup>160</sup> Nikolay Dmitriyevich Kashkin, 'O samobitnom v russkoy muzike' (1901); cited from Georgy Semyonovich Glushchenko, *N. D. Kashkin i russkaya opera* (Minsk: Izdatel'stvo Belgosuniversiteta im. V. I. Lenina, 1960), pp. 21–2.

<sup>161</sup> These ideas were embodied in Odoyevsky's first review of *A Life for the Tsar*: 'Glinka's music has brought new light to what people have long sought but not found in Europe—a new element in art. This is the dawn of a new age in the history of the arts—the age of Russian music' (Vladimir Fyodorovich Odoyevsky, 'Pis'mo k lyubilyu muziki ob opere g. Glinki: *Ivan Susanin*' [1836], in id., *Muzikal'no-literaturnoye naslediyе*, ed. Grigory Borisovich Bernandt [Moscow: Muzgiz, 1956] [henceforth cited as OMLN], p. 119; trans. James Stuart Campbell [ed.], *Russians on Russian Music, 1830–1880: An Anthology* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994] [henceforth cited as RRM1], p. 3). See also Vladimir Fyodorovich Odoyevsky, *Russian Nights*, trans. Olga Koshansky-Olienikov and Ralph E. Matlaw (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1997), pp. 210–2, 251–5, particularly the reference to Glinka on p. 254; and the comments on these passages in Frolova-Walker, *Russian Music and Nationalism*, pp. 16–7. Neverov wrote in a similar vein in his review of Glinka; see Yanuary Mikhaylovich Neverov, 'O novoy opere g. Glinki: *Zhizn' za Tsarya*' (1836), in Tamara Nikolayevna Livanova and Vladimir Vasil'yevich Protopopov, *Glinka: tvorcheskiy put'*, 2 vols. (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoye muzikal'noye izdatel'stvo, 1955), vol. 2, p. 214; trans. RRM1, p. 8.

trails in music, only to continue in the direction provided long ago if only in embryo by classic music.' Berlioz, Musorgsky, Richard Strauss, and d'Indy again served to illustrate that whenever an artist 'deviated sharply' from these norms, the result was 'absolute nonsense'.<sup>162</sup> Meanwhile, it seems that the necessity of innovation went without saying for Rimsky-Korsakov, even if this continuous quest for the new was at the same time the source of all his concerns. He was never adverse to change—on the contrary, he was always looking for new challenges, and was wary of repeating himself—even to the point of consciously starting and ending his operas with different keys, as he once admitted.<sup>163</sup>

This presented Rimsky with an apparently irresolvable dilemma. By considering some principles and rules as eternal, he set many limits and restrictions for music as an art form. Outside these limits lay decadence. Within these limits, the available technical resources would eventually be exhausted, though some were closer to depletion than others.

In 1900, Rimsky argued just about the opposite of what Cui had done back in 1864. He felt the resources of harmony were exhausted, that musical form, too, did not promise 'a particularly broad development after the examples of the classics', but that the same could not be said about melody and counterpoint.<sup>164</sup> This reversal of values makes sense considering the change from Italian to Wagnerian opera as the dominant style to compete with—Wagner had after all pushed the limits of harmony in his music dramas, and as Kashkin had observed in his review, replaced the supremacy of the singer with the supremacy of the orchestra.

As we have seen, Rimsky himself referred to the lack of counterpoint—that is, counterpoint 'as simultaneous melodies'—in Liszt, Berlioz and the Russian school in his plea against decadence to Kruglikov.<sup>165</sup> Rimsky felt that, as a result of the lack of counterpoint in modern compositions, the audience had lost the ability to appreciate it; like melody, therefore, it still promised a certain scope for development.<sup>166</sup> But ultimately, as Rimsky told Karasyov, he

<sup>162</sup> Yastrebtsev, *Reminiscences*, p. 187–8 (entry for 30 June–1 July 1897).

<sup>163</sup> Letter to Kruglikov, 1/14 July 1902; RLPP, vol. 8b, p. 120.

<sup>164</sup> Karasyov, 'Rimskiy-Korsakov, Vrubel' i Zabela-Vrubel", pp. 153, 155. Compare Cui's views quoted on p. 174 above.

<sup>165</sup> Letter to Kruglikov, 19 February 1898; RLPP, vol. 8b, p. 54, quoted above on p. 186. Rimsky had already been thinking of taking up his study of counterpoint again for some time, and it seems he was pushed in this direction by Glazunov, who had complained that Rimsky's operas were lacking in counterpoint; see Yastrebtsev, *Reminiscences*, p. 157 (entry for 23 August 1896).

<sup>166</sup> See Karasyov, 'Rimskiy-Korsakov, Vrubel' i Zabela-Vrubel", p. 153. Rimsky was overjoyed when his harmony-obsessed companion Yastrebtsev showed some interest in counterpoint,

felt that even counterpoint was 'richer but not unlimited', and thus it seemed that 'the very material that music uses is close to the end.'<sup>167</sup>

These pessimistic concerns were far from unique to Rimsky-Korsakov. It would become one of the central issues of art in the twentieth century. Taruskin has formulated it as 'the problem of an accumulated repertory: a past that has remained an eternally present and intimidating challenge to its successors. One solution [...] was to accept that eternally present past as a mine. Another, Schoenberg's, was to try at all costs to outdistance it with labored innovation.'<sup>168</sup> Rimsky-Korsakov opted for the former—as would in fact his nemesis Richard Strauss, some years after Rimsky's death.<sup>169</sup>

The past, fortunately, was indeed a mine, which left much to be explored in terms of both subject matter and musical and dramatic means. In his 1892 critique of Wagner, Rimsky had already written that 'any improvement of it will certainly have to be a step backwards'.<sup>170</sup> And after having considered some biblical and ancient Greek subjects for an opera in 1897, Rimsky had written to Bel'sky:

This is a difficult time for music: many former ideals have been shattered, our minds are restless, and there is not a trace left of the conceit and rosy dreams characteristic for the times of the Mighty Handful. Many things have grown old and have withered before our eyes, but

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and did not hesitate to explain that 'counterpoint cannot be submitted to such categorizations and generalizations as chords, of which there aren't many altogether. Thus, counterpoint will give you an interminable series of pleasures and delights for your entire life, whereas you have quite exhausted these in harmony' (letter to Yastrebtsev, 4 July 1899; RYAB, p. 104).

<sup>167</sup> Karasyov, 'Rimskiy-Korsakov, Vruble' i Zabela-Vruble'', p. 155.

<sup>168</sup> Richard Taruskin, 'A Surrealist Composer Comes to the Rescue of Modernism' (1999), in id., *The Danger of Music and other Anti-Utopian Essays* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), p. 146.

<sup>169</sup> In 1911, Strauss presented the world with *Der Rosenkavalier*, an eclectic mixture of old and new styles. In an interesting passage dealing with this opera, Bryan Gilliam writes in his biography of the composer: 'Strauss realized that the musical language for the new century should be one that intentionally lacks stylistic uniformity, a language that reflects a modernist preoccupation with the dilemma of history, one that arguably foreshadows the dissolution of the ideology of style in the late 20th century' (Bryan Gilliam, *The Life of Richard Strauss* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999], p. 89). Contrary to the commonly held view that the decadent early phase in Strauss's oeuvre up to *Salome* and *Elektra* is the most interesting period, followed by a long decline, Gilliam presents Strauss's eclecticism in *Rosenkavalier* as a genuinely modernist phenomenon. Taruskin considers this a 'beautifully calculated slap in the face of conventional historiography', which prompted the comment quoted above (Taruskin, 'A Surrealist Composer Comes to the Rescue of Modernism', p. 146).

<sup>170</sup> Rimsky-Korsakov, 'Wagner', pp. 49, 51–2. He makes this remark twice, with reference to Wagner's forms as well as his harmonic and contrapuntal complexity.

much that once seemed outdated will probably turn out to be fresh and solid and even eternal, if that were at all possible for anything.<sup>171</sup>

Rimsky's attitude at the time of *The Tsar's Bride* brings to mind Verdi's famous slogan 'Torniamo all'antico; sarà un progresso' ('Let us turn to the past; it will be a step forward'), which had likewise appeared, as James Hepokoski has remarked, in an environment increasingly pervaded by a 'claustrophobic sense of impending doom' connected with the decline of the Italian vocal tradition in the 1870s and 1880s.<sup>172</sup> It was in the period leading up to *The Tsar's Bride* that Rimsky all of a sudden began to 'sing hymns' to 'the "olden days" and its geniuses—Beethoven, Haydn, Mozart, et al.'<sup>173</sup> To Yastrebtsev, Rimsky repeated that music was already past its prime and admitted that he had only enjoyed three performances during the entire winter of 1897–98: Glinka's *Ruslan*, Haydn's 'Twelfth' (102nd) Symphony, and Beethoven's *Leonore* Overture no. 3, all pieces that were at least half a century old.<sup>174</sup>

It can hardly be a coincidence that Rimsky's work on *Mozart and Salieri* coincided with a sudden revaluation of Mozart. Although he had always greatly admired the Requiem, in 1882 Rimsky still wrote that he found Mozart's music 'at times very, very primitive', 'simply too old-fashioned', and even 'light, shallow, and superficial' for its own time.<sup>175</sup> In 1894, Rimsky confided to Yastrebtsev that *Don Giovanni* 'by no means has the extraordinary significance that some people once ascribed to it and very likely still do.' It was 'only a first step towards the latest music drama which, despite the fact that it had much in common with its prototype, far outstripped it and, in the persons

<sup>171</sup> Letter to Bel'sky, 3 March 1897; RYAB, p. 244.

<sup>172</sup> James Hepokoski, *Giuseppe Verdi: 'Otello'*, Cambridge Opera Handbooks (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 187. Verdi's phrase appeared in a letter to Francesco Florimo, 4 or 5 January 1871 NS, in which the Italian composer described how—if he would accept a conservatory position, which he did not—he would raise new composition students on a diet of 'ancients' like Palestrina and Marcello (Giuseppe Verdi, *I Copialettere*, ed. Gaetano Cesari and Alessandro Luzio [Milan: Commissione Esecutiva per le Onoranze a Giuseppe Verdi, 1913], pp. 232–3). Hepokoski describes the letter as 'a *cri de coeur* pleading for the survival of the grand tradition of Italian directness and vocality, ever more abandoned by the young.'

<sup>173</sup> Yastrebtsev, *Reminiscences*, p. 236 (entry for 6 August 1899). For Rimsky's fresh admiration of the classics, see also *ibid.*, pp. 174, 189 (entries for 19 January and 30 June–1 July 1897), where Rimsky noted: 'These days, I'm coming more and more to love the classics'. He praised the music of 'Bach, Beethoven, Haydn, and others' which he found 'still fresh and full of life'. Haydn's symphonies, for instance, were 'marvellously orchestrated' and contained 'the most novel harmonies'. 'And of these works, full of life and sound', Rimsky complained, 'Cui used to write that, like other classical music, they are dry and devoid of musical content.'

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 181 (entry for 10 March 1898).

<sup>175</sup> Letter to Kruglikov, 24 November 1882; RLPP, vol. 8b, p. 106.

of Wagner and Glinka, achieved heights unattainable by Mozart.<sup>176</sup> Now, in 1897, he declared that it was 'about time that all Russian progressives shed the stagnancy of liberalism and understand that this is a work of genius and that it is the *mother* of all operas.'<sup>177</sup> Discussing *Don Giovanni* some months later, he would conclude: 'All of this is still new, almost contemporary.'<sup>178</sup>

RIMSKY'S WORK on *Mozart and Salieri* gave him a perfect opportunity to study and experiment with eighteenth-century styles. It is significant that in a sketch for an overview of his own operas, the points he wrote down for *Mozart and Salieri* were not realism or recitative, as the dedication to Dargomizhsky might suggest, but 'the renewal of counterpoint' and 'the antique style'.<sup>179</sup> Next to the composition of *Mozart and Salieri*, Rimsky studied the counterpoint of Mozart and Bach in the summer of 1897, and practiced writing preludes and fugues.<sup>180</sup> Notably, these pre-Romantic styles of writing are amply represented not only in *Mozart and Salieri*, where they are motivated as the local colour of eighteenth-century Vienna, but in *The Tsar's Bride* as well. Although, as we have seen, it is not completely clear what Rimsky meant by his suggestion that Wagner's music could have been enlivened by the introduction of the 'strict' and 'free' styles, the introduction of imitative counterpoint and music reminiscent of the eighteenth-century certainly brings to mind this idea.<sup>181</sup>

An obvious instance of this is the *Fughetta a 3 voci* in Act I already mentioned above. Not only does the imitative polyphony in the voices show how Rimsky's contrapuntal exercises were applied in *The Tsar's Bride*, the sequential scales in the violins also give the piece something of an eighteenth-century feel (see Ex. 32). Gryaznoy's aria in Act I also has a small three-part *fugato* for the strings and bassoons in its middle section (see Ex. 33), which Yastrebtsev felt had 'a somewhat "Bach-Handelian" character'.<sup>182</sup> The manner of writing in the Lyubasha-Gryaznoy duet suggests that the study of Bach preludes left its traces in *The Tsar's Bride* (see Ex. 34). True to Rimsky's new ideas about the relative importance of harmony and counterpoint, this duet

<sup>176</sup> Yastrebtsev, *Reminiscences*, p. 93.

<sup>177</sup> Letter to Bel'sky, 29 May 1897; RYAB, p. 250. Emphasis original.

<sup>178</sup> Yastrebtsev, *Reminiscences*, p. 199 (entry for 8 February 1898). The discussion centred around 'Là ci darem la mano', Don Giovanni's serenade, Leporello's fear, and the scene with the Commendatore.

<sup>179</sup> 'Mislī o moikh sobstvennikh operakh' in RLPP, vol. 4, p. 447.

<sup>180</sup> Orlova (ed.), *Stranitsi zhizni N. A. Rimskogo-Korsakova*, pp. 102–4; Ossovsky, 'N. A. Rimskiy-Korsakov: khudozhnik mislitel', p. 333.

<sup>181</sup> See p. 189 above.

<sup>182</sup> Yastrebtsev, *Reminiscences*, p. 200 (entry for 25 January 1899).

OPRICHNIKI:

si - ti. Sla-shche myo - du las - ko - vo - ye  
 Sla - shche myo-du las - ko - vo - ye slo - vo, sla -  
 Sla - shche myo-du las - ko - vo - ye slo - vo, sla -  
 myo - du. Mi si - ti bu - dem,

slo - vo, sla - shche myo - du.  
 - shche myo - du las - ko - vo - ye slo - vo.  
 - shche myo - du las - ko - vo - ye slo - vo, sla - shche  
 mi si - ti bu - dem, si - ti bu - dem.

Mi si - ti bu - dem tvo-ye-yu las - koy, be - se-doy,  
 myo - du. Mi si - ti budem tvo-ye-yu laskoy,  
 fl. + ob.

Ex. 32: Part of the *Fughetta a 3 voci*, Act I, scene 2, mm. 74–82.

Ex. 33: Act I, scene 1, fagato in Gryaznoy's aria, mm. 95–102. Voice omitted.

hardly relies on harmonic devices for its interest. The harmony basically consists of a concatenation of full cadences every two or four measures, circling around the tonic G minor and its relative major B $\flat$ . A few chromatic passes and the excursions to B $\flat$  minor and D $\flat$  major are romantic touches within a harmonic palette that is otherwise close to that of the Baroque. The music contains few surprises and seems to express one 'affect'. It is based on a limited amount of thematic material, which is completely exhausted: all material is repeated in multiple keys, and what is sung by one character is also sung by the other, resulting in a complete equality of the voices. It is the intricate but transparent counterpoint that makes the piece attractive.

Rimsky wrote in his memoirs that 'the work of composing the ensembles—the quartet of Act II and the sextet of Act III—roused in me the particular interest of methods new to me'. He observed that this type of writing had become a rarity in the second half of the nineteenth-century, and he supposed, not without pride, that 'in the matter of cantilena and grace of independent part-writing, there had been no such operatic ensembles since Glinka's time.'<sup>183</sup> Both Mozart and Glinka may have functioned as important models for these ensembles, which clearly fulfilled the need for simultaneous singing, besides introducing even more free but intricate counterpoint.<sup>184</sup> Some of the

<sup>183</sup> RLPP, vol. 1, p. 210; trans. RMML, p. 315.

<sup>184</sup> Even though Rimsky's quartet features much imitation in pairs, it cannot reasonably be called a double canon, as was done by Yury Keldish, who was perhaps a bit too eager to demonstrate Rimsky-Korsakov's contrapuntal erudition (Yury Vsevolodovich Keldish, *Istoriya russkoy muziki*, 2 vols. [Moscow: Muzgiz, 1947–1948], vol. 2, pp. 268–9). The cosy family quartet in Act III of *A Life for the Tsar* has been pointed out as a possible model for Rimsky's quartet

The musical score consists of two systems. The first system is marked [Adagio] and features a duet between two voices. The second system is marked *poco ritard.* and then **Allegro** (♩ = 116) with a forte (*f*) dynamic. The bass line in the second system has a fermata over the final measure.

Ex. 34: Lyubasha–Gryaznoy duet, Act I, scene 6, mm. 33–37. Voices omitted.

techniques that Rimsky-Korsakov revived, however, had been so widely in use before the second half of the nineteenth century, that it is hard to point out specific sources for them. This is illustrated by a passage at the end of the Act I trio, where the soloists sing their separate notes on weak parts of the beat (see Ex. 35). Kashkin found the passage ‘extremely good’ and reminiscent of Mozart (see Ex. 36a and Ex. 36b for passages he may have had in mind).<sup>185</sup> Cui, on the other hand, related the technique to ‘the old Italians’, and since he judged that ‘such use of voices as orchestral instruments is neither realistic nor beautiful’, he thought it made ‘a rather inappropriately and unpleasantly comic impression.’<sup>186</sup> The same unrealistic method, it may be noted, had also been employed by Glinka (see Ex. 36c).

The way in which Rimsky himself now used the names Glinka and Mozart together or interchangeably as representatives of a past age is worth noting. In the 1898 letter to Kruglikov, Glinka was sided with Mozart as a representative of ‘pure melody’, whereas in 1894 he had still been sided with Wagner. Now we find Rimsky pronouncing himself a ‘Glinkian [*Glinkanets*] in word and deed,

more than once (e.g. Nikolay Dmitriyevich Kashkin, ‘Dva predstavleniya *Tsarskoy nevesti* N. A. Rimskogo-Korsakova 22 i 24 oktyabrya’, *Moskovskiye vedomosti*, 26–27 Oct. 1899, no. 296, p. 5; Aleksey Ivanovich Kandinsky, *Istoriya russkoy muziki*, 2 vols. [Moscow: Muzika, 1979], vol. 2, part 2: *N. A. Rimskiy-Korsakov*, p. 130).

<sup>185</sup> Kashkin, ‘*Tsarskaya nevesta*: opera v 3 deystviyakh N. A. Rimskogo-Korsakova’, p. 3.

<sup>186</sup> Cui, ‘Debyut Khar’kovskoy operi: *Tsarskaya nevesta* N. A. Rimskago-Korsakova’, p. 3.

**[Larghetto assai]**  
 LYUBASHA:  
 -chi. Net, net, ne tot, ne tot

BOMELIUS:  
 dan, no klyuch k nim dan,

GRYAZNOY:  
 -las'. Chtob mil

so mnoy ne tot so mnoy on te - per'.  
 k nim dan sve - tom zna - - ni - ya.  
 yey bil ya, chto-bi mu-zhem yey stal kogda ni - bud'.

Ex. 35: Act I, scene 5, Trio, mm. 20–26.

a.) Mozart, *Figaro*, Act I, nr. 7, Trio

[Allegro assai]  
SUSANNA:

-rà? Gius - ti Dei! Che mai sa - rà?

BASILIO:  
-tà? non c'è al - cu - na no - vi - tà! co-si

THE COUNT:  
va, or ca - pi - sco co - me v à.

b.) Mozart, *Don Giovanni*, Act III, scene 3, nr. 20, Sextet

[Andante]  
DONNA ANNA, ZERLINA, DONNA ELVIRA:

-rà ? che mai sa - rà ? che mai sa - rà ?

OTTAVIO, MASETTO

Ex. 36: Syncopated cadences in ensembles by Glinka and Mozart.

c.) Glinka, *A Life for the Tsar*, Act III, nr. 12, Quartet, mm. 290–94 (orchestra omitted)

[Vivace]  
ANTONIDA: *p*  
Zazhivom, zazhivom, za-pi - ruyem mi za - zhi-vyom,  
VANYA: *p*  
Zazhivom, zazhivom, za-pi - ru - yem vme - ste mi,  
SOBININ: *p*  
Zazhivom, zazhivom, za-pi - ru - yem za - zhi - vyom,  
SUSANIN: *p*

Ex. 36 (Continued).

struggling against Wagnerism, which has led music into a dead-end street'.<sup>187</sup> Thus appropriated for Rimsky's cause, what mattered about Glinka was not the Russian soul or soil from which he purportedly drew his inspiration, nor his distinctiveness, but his universality.

We did not have their Bachs and Palestrinas—that's true, but then the West didn't have our Glinka, who at one stroke absorbed all Western culture of the proceeding centuries. He made his appearance in the history of Russian music completely out of the blue, like the Greek Minerva, fully equipped with all the artistic ideas and compositional techniques of his time.<sup>188</sup>

By now Rimsky valued Glinka's music for quite other qualities than for instance Stasov would: 'if I try to be closer to Glinka, this is because Glinka is always noble and elegant, next to all his other qualities of genius'.<sup>189</sup> Glinka had moved from the progressive camp—which had become tainted with the threat of decadence—to that of the classics.

<sup>187</sup> Letter to Findeyzen, 30 October 1898; quoted from Orlova (ed.), *Stranitsi zhizni N. A. Rimskogo-Korsakova*, vol. 3, p. 151. In his letters to Petrovsky of 21 and 23 December 1904, Rimsky would write that he was a 'born Ruslanist' and that Ruslanism was 'just the same as anti-Wagnerism' (Nikolay Andreyevich Rimsky-Korsakov, 'Pis'ma k Ye. Petrovskomu', ed. Abram Akimovich Gozenpud, *Sovetskaya muzika*, 1952, no. 12, pp. 71, 72).

<sup>188</sup> Yastrebtsev, *Reminiscences*, p. 254 (entry for 8 March 1900).

<sup>189</sup> Letter to Kruglikov, 19 February 1898; RLPP, vol. 8b, p. 54 (see p. 186 above).

a.) 11 and 17 November 1898



b.) 25 November 1898



Ex. 37: Quotations from Marfa's aria in letters to Zabela.

## Conclusion

In his letters to Nadezhda Zabela, beginning with the very first addressed to her on 29 April 1898, Rimsky-Korsakov usually ended by wishing the soprano well and telling her to 'be in A major', in some letters substituting the words '*la majeur*' by little quotations from Marfa's aria in *The Tsar's Bride* (Ex. 37).<sup>190</sup> The composer explained that this was 'the key of youth, of spring—and not early spring with ice and puddles, but spring, when the lilacs blossom and all the meadows smell of flowers; the tonality of dawn, when the light only just glimmers but the entire east is already purple and gold.'<sup>191</sup> The imagery employed by the composer was the very opposite of the sense of impending doom, degeneration, and decline that so occupied him in this period. The language of decadence was never far away from that of natural cycles of decay and renewal, as Rimsky-Korsakov, of all people, should have been aware.<sup>192</sup> And indeed, the idea of decadence was not far from his mind when he wrote his explanation to Zabela. Realizing that the blurring of the boundaries between the arts was itself a common symptom of decadence, he joked: 'Haven't I shown well my decadent inclinations? *A major* and painterly impressions?'<sup>193</sup>

<sup>190</sup> Letters to Zabela, 11, 17 and 25 November 1898; Rimsky-Korsakov, *Perepiska s N. I. Zabeloy-Vrubel'*, pp. 87, 88, 95.

<sup>191</sup> Letter to Zabela, 28 October 1898; *ibid.*, p. 75.

<sup>192</sup> See Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernism*, pp. 155–6. Rimsky-Korsakov had a great interest in the seasonal cycle in nature and in pagan rituals, and composed a *May Night* as well as a *Christmas Eve*, a 'spring fairy-tale' (*The Snow Maiden*) as well as an 'autumnal parable' (*Kashchey*).

<sup>193</sup> Letter to Zabela, 28 October 1898; Rimsky-Korsakov, *Perepiska s N. I. Zabeloy-Vrubel'*, p. 75; emphasis added. Baudelaire already wondered in 1859 whether it was 'an inevitable result of decadence that every art today reveals a desire to encroach upon neighbouring arts,

Amidst all the pessimism around the turn of the century, *The Tsar's Bride*, and particularly the part of Marfa, had again given Rimsky genuine pleasure while composing, not unlike his experience with *The Snow Maiden*, when after a prolonged period of study he had been, as Yastrebtsev recorded it, 'faced with writing "Spring" for the first time'.<sup>194</sup> For the composer himself, at least, the opera represented a happy, temporary relief from the relentless advance of modernism, and its Russianness was but a secondary concern.

UNLIKE CALVOCORESSI, Rimsky-Korsakov did not reject eclecticism.<sup>195</sup> In 1901, he could still write about *The Tsar's Bride* that it was not only 'the most virtuosic and balanced' of his own operas, but that 'in the eclecticism of its forms and means it represents the most desirable type of contemporary opera'.<sup>196</sup> Although Rimsky fiercely rejected what we would now see as the first stirrings of modernism, his resistance was nevertheless prompted by a very modern awareness of history, in which 'progress' was a problem as much as a blessing. Unwilling to cross certain boundaries, to outdistance the musical past by going into terrains that would estrange not only the larger audience but his own sense of musical order as well, eclecticism was a sensible choice. The composer himself, however, felt it could be no more than a temporary solution, one that could only support the art of music 'for the time being' until all recombinations and revisions of older styles would have been explored.<sup>197</sup>

*The Tsar's Bride* did not offer any definitive solution. After having completed this opera, which was so poorly received within his own circles, Rimsky-Korsakov wavered between the continuation of his work in the familiar field of the Russian fairytale and adventures on new subject matter. *The Legend of Tsar Saltan* (1900) belonged to the former, but, according to the composer himself, inherited the improved manner of vocal writing of its predecessor.<sup>198</sup> It may be no longer be a surprise that, after he had probed the styles of Mozart and Glinka in *Mozart and Salieri* and *The Tsar's Bride*, Rimsky would also turn to the other representatives of 'pure melody' he recognized: Italian opera

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and the painters introduce musical scales, sculptors use colour, writers use the plastic means'. The poet himself praised Wagner for 'painting space and background' and discovered 'dizzy conceptions of opium painted on a background of half-lights' in his music (Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernism*, pp. 166–7).

<sup>194</sup> Yastrebtsev, *Reminiscences*, p. 298 (entry for 17 December 1901).

<sup>195</sup> See Calvocoressi's judgement of *The Tsar's Bride* on p. 153 above.

<sup>196</sup> Letter to Andrey Nikolayevich, 28 October 1901; Rimsky-Korsakov, 'Pis'ma k sinu Andreyu', p. 69.

<sup>197</sup> See the letter to Kruglikov, 19 February 1898; RLPP, vol. 8b, p. 54, quoted above on p. 186.

<sup>198</sup> Yastrebtsev, *Reminiscences*, p. 285 (entry for 22 April 1901).

in *Servilia* (1902), Mey's play situated in Nero's Rome, and Chopin in *Pan Voyevoda* (1904), a subject set in early-modern Poland. Gradually, however, Rimsky would begin to doubt the premises on which he had been working. After seeing *Servilia* performed in an 'outrageously empty' Mariinsky Theatre, the composer gave in to one of his characteristic bouts of despair: 'We cannot return to the old operatic forms, we also cannot continue Wagnerian forms,' he argued—but he was having doubts about writing in a 'middling "fish-nor-fowl" form' as well. 'If it would turn out that the public has no need for me because of my unusual progressiveness—then that would be fine; but if it turned out that it has no need for me because of my "fish nor fowl"—that would surely be sad. And it does look like that.'<sup>199</sup> In the same year (1902) he had written *Kashchey the Deathless*, a work that boldly pushed the limits in the field of harmony. Rimsky himself noted that its harmonic palette was '*recherché* [*iziskanniy*] and spiced to the extreme, beyond which decadence sets in'. He was careful to articulate the difference with 'd'Indism', though: one redeeming feature was the amount of 'singing'; others were 'the indisputable logic of the combinations', 'the *invisible presence* of the tonic', and 'irreproachable voice-leading'.<sup>200</sup> Decadence was still carefully held in check.

RIMSKY-KORSAKOV's stylistic searches around the turn of the century were not conducted in a 'dilettantish spirit of experiment', as Gerald Abraham supposed.<sup>201</sup> The range of sources and contexts explored in this chapter offer a remarkably consistent picture of Rimsky-Korsakov's aesthetic views at the time he composed *The Tsar's Bride*. The *fin-de-siècle* pessimism, the fear of decadence, the ambivalence towards Wagner, the dissatisfaction with the Kuchka, and the outright loathing of Strauss—all these sentiments stemmed from issues that, in the composer's analysis, were intimately connected, and, as I have argued, informed the choices he made in *The Tsar's Bride*. The reintroduction of rounded forms, the emphasis on melody and singing, and the substantial amount of ensemble writing, served the purpose of reinvigorating his musical language where he felt Wagner, the Kuchka, and contemporary progressives fell short. Those who shared his concerns, Nikolay Kashkin above all, welcomed these new features in Rimsky's work with much enthusiasm.

<sup>199</sup> Letter to Andrey Nikolayevich, 5 December 1902; Rimsky-Korsakov, 'Pis'ma k sinu Andreyu', p. 70.

<sup>200</sup> Letters to Kruglikov, 24 June/7 July 1902 (RLPP, vol. 8b, pp. 116–7); and Petrovsky, 11 January 1903 (Rimsky-Korsakov, 'Pis'ma k Ye. Petrovskomu', p. 69). Emphasis original.

<sup>201</sup> Abraham, 'The Tsar's Bride', p. 247.

As concerns the effects of eclecticism on the perception of Russianness, it should be noted that most of Rimsky's contemporaries, like the composer himself, did not see much of a problem, which indicates that the more austere aspects of the Kuchka's aesthetics were not widespread even at the end of the nineteenth century. A rather extreme case like the use of a *fughetta* for a band of oprichniks elicited the complaint of one reviewer that this was 'unnatural for a Russian opera'.<sup>202</sup> The 'Yar Khmel' chorus, on the other hand, was enthusiastically received by a number of critics, who did not find it lacking in Russianness at all.<sup>203</sup> Incidentally, the reception of *The Tsar's Bride* reveals that by this time, subjects with Russian historical settings had their downside as well: one reviewer remarked that 'given the inevitable similarity of all Russian operas, one cannot expect anything new or particularly original about the costumes of *The Tsar's Bride*'.<sup>204</sup> The composer would not have cared much, however: the costumes were clearly a lesser concern for him.<sup>205</sup>

The fact that *The Tsar's Bride* was on the whole well received by Rimsky-Korsakov's contemporaries, does not mean that they did not distinguish between *The Tsar's Bride* and his previous works. Jāzeps Vītols, a Latvian student of Rimsky who was now a respected member of the Belyayev circle and active as a critic in St Petersburg, did make this distinction, and reasoned just as Serov had done in the sixties: 'Some of his [Rimsky-Korsakov's] strongest works are too specifically Russian, they will not conquer ground where Glinka still vainly awaits recognition. Others—and to these belongs *The Tsar's Bride*—should earn recognition everywhere where music is daily bread but where some kind of surrogate is served that can only be accepted in times of musical drought.'<sup>206</sup> We can only guess what kind of music Vītols meant

<sup>202</sup> Lipayev, 'Tsarskaya nevesta', col. 1128.

<sup>203</sup> Consider the following responses to the 'Yar-Khmel' chorus: 'a number with very beautiful development in the chorus and the orchestra' (Kashkin, 'Tsarskaya nevesta: opera v 3 deystviyakh N. A. Rimskogo-Korsakova', p. 3); 'excellent chorus [...] based, if not on an original folk melody, then in any case on a highly masterly imitation of it' (Ėngel', 'Rimskiy-Korsakov, Tsarskaya nevesta', pp. 188–9); 'delightful in the purely musical sense' ('Vox', 'Tsarskaya nevesta', p. 3); 'masterly treatment' (Lipayev, 'Tsarskaya nevesta', col. 1128).

<sup>204</sup> 'Vox', 'Tsarskaya nevesta', p. 3.

<sup>205</sup> Already when Rimsky first turned to the Private Opera after *Sadko* had been rejected by the Imperial Theatres, he worried whether Mamontov, who he knew did 'not spare his means on decorations and costumes', would be willing to cover 'the expenses for additional instruments and two or three extra rehearsals'. Rimsky concluded with a clear-cut dictum: 'in opera music is the primary concern, and not the visual sensations' (letter to Kruglikov, 23 June 1897; RLPP, vol. 8b, p. 15).

<sup>206</sup> Yazep Vitol [Jāzeps Vītols], 'Tsarskaya nevesta: opera v tryokh deystviyakh N. A. Rimskogo-Korsakova' (1901), in id., *Vospominaniya, stat'i, pis'ma*, ed. Arvids Dankevich (Lenin-

that was being served to these poor audiences abroad. It is clear, however, that he got it just backwards: the ‘specifically Russian’ was just what audiences in the West have demanded from Russian composers throughout the twentieth century, and the cosmopolitan polish of *The Tsar’s Bride* has more likely inhibited than promoted popular and critical success of the opera in the West.

Rimsky himself recognized this. When *The Tsar’s Bride* was being translated into French in 1904, he clearly insisted on its Russian content, warning a manager of the Belyayev firm not to let the opera be ruined in French translation by introducing ‘French effects and smoking out all that is national and Russian, which should only be of interest to the French.’ It is well possible, however, that something other than Russianness was on his mind when he continued: ‘I don’t really need any performance of my operas abroad, but I think that they will be needed [there] sooner or later.’<sup>207</sup> These insights may have been informed by his bad experience after the opera’s first staging in Prague in 1902. His new appreciation of Italian opera notwithstanding, Rimsky was furious when his Russian *Tsar’s Bride* was accused of Italianism by the foreign press. In a letter to a Czech correspondent, Rimsky bluntly stated that when it came to the national quality of his music ‘I am more competent than your critics, and the latter should accept everything I give them as truth instead of criticizing me by taking singability and vocal combinations as symptoms of Italianism [*ital’yanizm*].’<sup>208</sup>

Already at its very first performance outside the Russian empire, the composer and his Czech critics were in the same stalemate position as Soviet and Western critics were to end up in the following decades: one side finds the opera lacking in Russianness, the other side does not see the problem. As this chapter has shown, many features introduced into *The Tsar’s Bride* did make the opera decidedly less *kuchkist*, and of this Rimsky was fully aware. We do not have to question the sincerity of Rimsky’s belief that there was nothing un-Russian about his opera; it is simply that he wanted Russian opera to represent something quite different than the experimental works of the Kuchka. If there was any feature of Russian musical life at this point in time that could make it superior to the West in Rimsky’s eyes, it was neither its national distinctiveness nor its daring novelty—it was the absence of the decadent experimentation that flourished in the West. With

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grad: Muzika, 1969), p. 157.

<sup>207</sup> Letter to Fyodor Ivanovich Grus, 22 June 1904; quoted from Orlova (ed.), *Stranitsi zhizni N. A. Rimskogo-Korsakova*, vol. 3, p. 340.

<sup>208</sup> Letter to Boleslav Kalenský, 15/18 December 1902; Bělza (ed.), *Perepiska M. A. Balakireva i N. A. Rimskogo-Korsakova s Boleslavom Kalenskim*, p. 86.

this understanding of the background of *The Tsar's Bride*, it becomes pointless to judge Rimsky-Korsakov for failing to meet kuchkist standards of realism, Russian style, or modernist standards of progress.



## Conclusion

IN AN OBITUARY for Balakirev written in the year 1910, the modernist critic Vyacheslav Karatigin pointed out ‘de-nationalization’ as one of the important new trends in Russian music.<sup>1</sup> He singled out Aleksandr Skryabin (1872–1915), the most promising and path-breaking Russian composer of the day, as a contemporary who had left ‘the nationalistic passions of the New Russian School’ far behind him. Karatigin’s representation of Russian music history—an epoch dominated by the Kuchka followed by a post-Kuchka phase led by Skryabin—was overly schematic, but the critic rightly perceived that interest in national distinction among composers was waning.<sup>2</sup> If these changes in aesthetics in the early twentieth century do not mark an appropriate end to the scope of the present enquiry, then the major upheavals of World War I and the Bolshevik Revolution that cut this period short, surely do.

Ironically, it was precisely at the time Karatigin was writing, that the fruits of the previous decades of national distinction were finally making their breakthrough in the West. Sergey Diaghilev was just beginning to present Russian works as exotic spectacles in France, introducing works of the Kuchka

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<sup>1</sup> Vyacheslav Gavrilovich Karatigin, ‘M. A. Balakirev’, *Apollon*, Sept. 1910, no. 10, pp. 49–50.

<sup>2</sup> For an account of how the search for Russianness was carried on in the early twentieth century in the orthodox church music of the so-called New Trend, as well as in more obscure, scholarly quarters, see Marina Frolova-Walker, *Russian Music and Nationalism from Glinka to Stalin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), pp. 226–300.

on Parisian stages and commissioning new works from Igor Stravinsky for the same purpose.

The beginning of the twentieth century in Russia did indeed mark a new age, and the problems it produced in historiography were of a wholly different kind. Stravinsky's works, for instance, have often been considered as an integral part of Western music history which needed little reference to nineteenth-century Russian traditions; it took Richard Taruskin's monumental efforts to re-establish connections between Stravinsky and his Russian predecessors.<sup>3</sup>

The historiography of nineteenth century Russian music, on the contrary, has suffered from the long-standing preoccupation with this national context. This thesis has offered an explicit corrective to this limitation, and contributed to the integration of the four operas studied here—and by extension, Russian opera as a whole—into more international contexts. The need for such an approach is a direct result of the thoroughly international character of the opera world in which nineteenth-century Russian composers participated. My research has shown how international contexts informed various aspects of their work: how they dealt with the dominant generic conventions of Italian and French opera, how they handled local colour, and how they responded to the relentless drive for innovation.

### *Western Conventions*

The persistence of Western conventions in Russian opera has been a continuous focus throughout this thesis. The Russian opera world, the immediate context in which Russian operas were produced, was a highly international arena in which Western operas played an important part: both the audience and the singers were familiar with a range of Italian, French, and other Western operatic conventions, which to a large extent defined the genre. It is worth stressing again that international operatic conventions merit as much attention as distinct local tradition. Because of the negative associations that have accrued to Italian and Meyerbeerian opera, there has long been a lack of attention for Russian applications of the specific conventions of the Italian and French repertoires, either because such conventions were not considered sufficiently interesting for close analysis, or out of fear that too much emphasis on these elements might devalue the object of research.

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<sup>3</sup> Richard Taruskin, *Stravinsky and the Russian Traditions: A Biography of the Works Through Mavra*, 2 vols. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

Especially in the case of *A Life for the Tsar*, my analysis has shed light on structural and dramaturgical aspects of substantial parts of the score, and the sources from which Glinka drew for his opera. Chapter One has demonstrated not only how the composer employed many of the conventions of *bel canto* opera, but also how he transformed and reinterpreted them with considerable freedom. Hence, the analysis suggests a means to overcome the obvious contradiction in the opera's reputation as 'basically Italian' on the one hand, and as progressive and a model for Russian national opera on the other. As I have argued, there is no clear-cut distinction between the Italian and other—some potentially Russian—elements in the score. The comparison drawn between Amina's sleepwalking scene in *La sonnambula* with Susanin's final scene in Act IV suggests that even a specific Italian model did not necessarily impair the perception of Russianness, and warns against reductive views on Italian opera. It seems likely, as Stasov implied, that the conventions of Italian opera played a considerable part in the success of *A Life for the Tsar* in its time.

Tchaikovsky's choice for *The Maid of Orléans* as a subject and his adherence to grand opera conventions should be understood in the light of his struggle for recognition as an opera composer, even though, in hindsight, *The Maid of Orléans* was not particularly successful in achieving this goal. Though *The Maid of Orléans* doubtlessly conforms to many grand opera conventions, I have shown that the many similarities of Tchaikovsky's libretto for *The Maid of Orléans* to those of Meyerbeer and Scribe can be traced back to the opera's literary source, Schiller's *Die Jungfrau von Orleans*. Hence, the opera does not stand in a simple derivative relation to either Meyerbeer's operas or Verdi's *Aida*, as has often been suggested.

Many have frowned upon the willingness of these composers to employ conventions that were likely to facilitate success, but since conventions played a vital role at various levels, they should be a central concern of anyone interested in the history of nineteenth-century opera, that is, anyone who wishes to understand them as part of nineteenth-century culture and who does not set higher store on bestowing honours for creative genius.

Finally, even more so than the others, the case of *The Tsar's Bride* raises the important question of how musicology deals with works which represent an aesthetic that is at odds with the discipline's dominant values. With its use of rounded forms and ensembles, and its emphasis on vocal elegance and counterpoint, this opera did not conform to accepted notions of either the progressive or the national. My study of *The Tsar's Bride* has revealed the hitherto uninvestigated relation of this opera to trends in contemporary

music represented by Richard Strauss, Vincent d'Indy, and Richard Wagner. It has shown that Rimsky-Korsakov's concerns about the future of music made him turn away from decadent tendencies, which, in his eyes, now included the experimental side of the Kuchka as well. Since all evidence suggests that Rimsky-Korsakov rejected knowingly and out of principle those qualities that have long been central to the assessment of Russian music for Western music historians, it seems rather pointless to upbraid him for not meeting up to their standards.

### *Russianness*

The choice to explore Russian opera at its conceptual borders and to focus on non-Russian subject matter and Western conventions has allowed me to approach the role of national thought in the Russian opera world from a new perspective.

As my analysis of *A Life for the Tsar* confirms, the recognition of an opera as a national and Russian work did not depend on pervasive or objective difference from Western opera. Relations between Russia and Western Europe were never so one-dimensional as to be simply a matter of 'for' or 'against'. It also cannot be assumed that the perception of Russianness corresponded directly to what I have called local practice, for not all local habits of composition were deemed equally significant or representative of the nation. Both Serov's *Judith* and Rimsky-Korsakov's *The Tsar's Bride* drew from aspects of Glinka's work that are not generally identified as specifically Russian features of his music. In the case of *Judith*, these include the musical portrayal of oriental characters, the use of a choral epilogue, and a musical dramaturgy based on two opposing nations; for *The Tsar's Bride*, it was Glinka's use of ensembles and his elegance of voice-leading. In *The Maid of Orléans*, Tchaikovsky used such musical means as an accompaniment with a chromatic middle voice over a pedal base and traits of the local romance genre, things that have also been associated with local Russian musical tradition—and with Glinka—in music scholarship, but which were not experienced as 'Russianisms' by the composer himself.

This is why I have treated Russianness as form of signification, a form of meaning attached to an, in principle, arbitrary set of musical features. Given the potential for ambiguity and multiplicity of musical meaning, the experience of Russianness in music is never fully predictable. The Minstrel Song in Act II of *The Maid of Orléans* serves as a curious instance of such ambiguity:

this ancient French melody was felt to be akin to Ukrainian folksong and, by extension, noted as a Russian element in the reception of Tchaikovsky's score.

Using the reception of the selected operas, I have tried to establish whether these works were considered not Russian enough in their own time and, if so, which elements were cause for debate. Initially, the Italian formal conventions of *A Life for the Tsar* do not appear to have posed a serious problem for the perception of the opera as a national and Russian work. In time, however, their presence would strike at least the composer himself and a commentator like Vladimir Stasov as inappropriate. Serov's *Judith* was criticized for lacking in Russian character by Tsertelev, primarily, it seems, because of its supposed Wagnerian influence. In the reception of *The Maid of Orléans*, on the other hand, I have found no similar complaints. The most explicit criticism of *The Tsar's Bride* on account of its Russianness, finally, was that the use of a fugue was 'unnatural' for a Russian opera. This latter remark, incidentally, may be applied to the other operas as well, since all four works studied here contain fugal movements—though Tchaikovsky's was eventually cut at Eduard Nápravník's behest. This list of complaints is rather modest, and shows that contemporary critics were generally not as puritanical about the notion of a Russian nation style as twentieth-century Western scholars could be.

That said, it should be noted that the explicit complaints about Russianness alone are only one way in which national thought operated in the nineteenth-century opera world. There are other indications of a demand for Russianness, such as Serov's anticipation of Tsertelev's complaints and his expectation for the Moscow audience to prefer a work with a more Russian character. The praise of Vladimir Odoyevsky and Herman Laroche for *Judith*'s Russianness show that these authors felt this would justify this opera, and that there was a certain sentiment to which they appealed.

Both the case of *Judith* and that of *A Life for the Tsar* shows how the views and criteria applied to the Russianness of a single opera could change over time and depended on the context. We can clearly see how Odoyevsky's theory that Russian music should be founded on diatonicism provided the key for him to interpret the music of *Judith* as Russian. Laroche picked up these ideas of Odoyevsky and continued to advocate *Judith* as an essentially Russian work. The interpretation of these two critics rested on shaky theoretical foundations and does not appear to correspond to Serov's own views or intentions. But, even though their argument was expedient for the advocacy of Serov's opera, there is no evidence to indicate that it cannot have been founded on sincere convictions at the same time. The case of *A Life for the Tsar* also shows how the context guided the interpretation. Glinka's definitive distaste for

Italian opera seems to be prompted by the dominance of the Italian troupe in St Petersburg after 1843. Only after the Italian repertoire became the most envied competition of Russian composers were the more Italianate elements in *A Life for the Tsar* considered inappropriate by Glinka and Stasov.

As is clear from Serov's statements on national music in the 1840s, the project of establishing a stylistically distinctive tradition of national Russian opera could be understood as an addition to the range of possibilities offered by the various trends in the international opera world, rather than a calling that outweighed all else. For Tchaikovsky, too, who claimed to aim at an 'objective' style in *The Maid of Orléans*, composing in a Russian style remained a matter of choice rather than an obligation. The reason Serov offered to Feofil Tolstoy when asked why he had not chosen a Russian subject for his first opera—claiming he did not want to retrace Glinka's footsteps—shows that national distinction was not the only available strategy to make one's mark as a Russian composer.

### *Russianness and Local Colour*

In my study of Serov's *Judith* I have situated this opera in the international trend of biblical orientalism. The characterization of the two opposing groups, the Assyrians and the Hebrews, was a central concern in both its creation and its reception, and I have suggested group colour as the most appropriate concept to analyse such a form of musical dramaturgy.

The relation between the notion of Russianness and that of local or group colour is a subject that warrants special attention. Composers' and critics' opinions about the desirability of Russianness in operas on non-Russian subject matter can reveal certain fundamental insights in the way people related national thought to art. In Russian-subject operas, the intention to cultivate a national style of composition may be hard to distinguish from the wish to supply the characters or groups on stage with characteristic, Russian group colour. In the case of a Russian opera on a non-Russian subject, however, any elements intended or found to be Russian cannot be ascribed to the characters or locations of the plot. An opera on a non-Russian subject can serve, therefore, as a kind of acid test to determine whether it is really possible to speak of a Russian style of composing operas rather than merely a manner of treating Russian subjects.

It is interesting to note that, despite the widely shared belief in the desirability of having a national school and a national manner of composition,

there does not appear to have been any consensus about the need for Russianness in operas on non-Russian subject matter. Serov found it unnecessary to have Russian national character in such an opera, Tchaikovsky thought it was undesirable, Vyacheslav Cheshikhin even suggests it was inappropriate. Tsertelev, Odoyevsky, and Laroche, on the other hand, clearly thought Russianness a virtue regardless of the subject. Odoyevsky and especially Laroche elaborated on the distinction between Russianness and local colour. As shown in my studies of *Judith* and *The Maid of Orléans*, the confusion about how local colour and national distinction were to relate to each other persisted in twentieth-century scholarship and criticism.

The reception of the four selected operas suggests that, notwithstanding the many calls for a national style of composition, the notion of local colour seemed to be a more valid and tenable criterion for critics than Russianness. Tsertelev's complaint about the Russianness of *Judith* appears to have been a rather rare occurrence. Both Serov and Andrey Dmitriyev suggested in their response that it was absurd to strive for Russianness when it was at odds with local or group colour. Similarly, as the reception of *Judith* and *The Maid of Orléans* shows, César Cui and other members of the Kuchka employed notions such as characterization and local colour—general and potentially universal aesthetic standards—rather than Russianness, to judge these works.

These findings confirm and build on Marina Frolova-Walker's suggestion that Russian composers may often have conceived of the Russian-sounding passages in their operas as local colour.<sup>4</sup> When seen from this perspective, it seems that there is little fundamental difference between the use of contrasting group colours for the Hebrews and Assyrians in *Judith* and the Russians and Poles in *A Life for the Tsar*. Since practically the entire cast of soloists of *A Life for the Tsar* are Russians, and lower-class, pre-Petrine Russians at that, the difference between group colour and national distinction is minimal in this particular subject.

The prioritizing of the demands of local colour over the notion of a national style made the idea of a national style of Russian opera differ from the Italian and French traditions, which were not as intimately tied to Italian or French subject matter. Given a suitable Russian subject, Russianness-as-local-colour could still serve as a means of national distinction. This would mean, however, that the notion of a Russian national style was subordinate to the broader international conventions of local colour, and, accordingly, that

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<sup>4</sup> Marina Frolova-Walker, 'A Ukrainian Tune in Medieval France: Perceptions of Nationalism and Local Color in Russian Opera', *Nineteenth-Century Music* 35/2 (2011), pp. 115–31.

Russianness was most easily introduced as a more or less decorative element within an opera—hence the prominence of rituals, choruses, dances, and diegetic songs in Russian opera. In addition, the choice for specifically national Russian subject matter came with a downside, namely that, as composers were convinced for most of the nineteenth century, Russian subjects had a limited potential for international success.

Judging from their views on *Judith*, Laroche and Odoyevsky were not satisfied with such a compromise. For them, the ideal Russian opera on a non-Russian subject was correct in terms of local colour and thoroughly Russian at the same time. Tchaikovsky, on the contrary, claimed to have avoided all ‘Russianisms’ in his *Maid of Orléans*, presumably because he did equate Russianness with local colour. The fact that this opera still contains stylistic elements that have elsewhere been labelled as Russian presents a special problem. As I have suggested, the presence of these elements in the score of *The Maid* can put our understanding of their significance and meaning in other scores of this period in better perspective. Although *The Maid of Orléans* has sometimes been presented as a complete break with *Yevgeny Onegin*, Tchaikovsky’s intensive use of the interval of a sixth as motivic and structural feature of melody in *The Maid* actually indicates an important stylistic continuity between this opera and its predecessor. Since this feature is so prominent in *The Maid*, an opera situated in medieval France, it is debatable whether one can still ascribe specific connotations of time, place, and social setting to its use in *Onegin*.

### *Opening Up the Borders*

The central focus of this study has been to determine how the wish to develop an authentic and distinctive national style of music interfered with existing practices, principles, and tastes in the Russian opera world. To this purpose, I have studied the role of nationalism in what I have called borderline cases: operas with non-Russian subjects or operas with Russian subjects and a clear reliance on Western operatic conventions. For such an inquiry, it is essential to open up a space in which nationalism is neither irrelevant nor the sole concern, but open to dispute and subject to negotiation.

This is what I have attempted to do in these four case studies. As the results of my research demonstrate, this approach can offer new insights into individual operas, and may improve our understanding of the relation between music and nationalism as a whole.

The research of Western conventions in operas by Russian composers may still teach us much about these works themselves, and is worth continuing for a much larger repertoire than has hitherto been done. The same will also be fruitful for operas from other regions traditionally considered peripheral, such as Bohemia, Hungary, Scandinavia, or Spain. Rather than stripping their composers of their identity, it will make our understanding of them, their music, and the culture in which they participated, more rich and more complete.

The status of operas on non-national subject matter as well as the relation between local or group colour and national style are matters also worth investigating for other countries, and in mutual comparison. Within Russia, my approach to the role of nationalism in opera could be applied to operas on non-Russian subjects by composers such as Dargomizhsky, Rubinstein, Cui, Taneyev, in order to test and enrich the findings I have outlined above. On the other hand, it could also be fruitfully applied to ostensibly Russian works, including the more canonical works of the Kuchka.

In principle, the approach taken in this dissertation is valid for all operas, and needs to be, because the decision whether nationalism affected the creation or reception of an opera cannot be made a priori. The hold of nationalism on the nineteenth-century opera world was never complete, nor ever completely absent. In the world of opera, with its international repertoire, foreign troupes, and touring stars—to paraphrase the Argentinian anthropologist Néstor García Canclini—all cases are border cases.<sup>5</sup> As there is no such thing as cultural purity, Russianness is always contested. Any opera can be considered to be not Russian enough.

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<sup>5</sup> Néstor García Canclini, *Hybrid Cultures: Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity*, trans. Christopher L. Chiappari and Silvia L. López (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), p. 261: 'Today, all cultures are border cultures'.



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# Samenvatting

(Summary in Dutch)

DIT PROEFSCHRIFT gaat over de complexe verhouding tussen de operapraktijk en het nationale denken in negentiende-eeuws Rusland. Het staat daarmee in een lange traditie waarin Russische muziek en nationalisme vrijwel onlosmakelijk met elkaar verbonden zijn. Zoals bekend werden negentiende-eeuwse Russische componisten, net als vele tijdgenoten in andere landen, door het wijdverbreide nationalisme aangemoedigd om hun muziek te onderscheiden van de dominante Italiaanse, Franse en Duitse tradities. Zij zijn hierin bijzonder succesvol geweest: een aantal negentiende-eeuwse Russische componisten heeft internationale bekendheid verworven en hun beroemdste werken, met name die van de groep componisten die bekend staat als de *Mogoetsjaja koetsjka* of ‘Het Machtige Hoopje’, klinken voor vele moderne luisteraars nog altijd herkenbaar ‘Russisch’.

Om meer inzicht te verkrijgen in hoe de operapraktijk en de idealen voor de nationale stijl zich tot elkaar verhielden, richt dit proefschrift zich primair op internationale aspecten van de operacultuur die zich juist niet voegden naar het nationalistische streven naar een eigen, unieke en authentieke Russische nationale stijl. Deze benadering staat in scherp contrast tot wat lange tijd gebruikelijk was in het onderzoek naar de Russische opera- en muziekcultuur.

In de overtuiging dat de ontwikkeling van een zogenaamde nationale school de belangrijkste verworvenheid van de negentiende-eeuwse Russische muziek was, waren twintigste-eeuwse auteurs over het onderwerp vaak

geneigd om zich te beperken tot die aspecten van het Russische repertoire die afweken van de praktijken van een Westerse mainstream, of om meer waarde aan dergelijke aspecten te hechten vanwege hun vermeend hogere authenticiteitsgehalte. In de inleiding van dit proefschrift wordt betoogd dat een dergelijke neiging om meer waarde te hechten aan de verschillen tussen bepaalde naties dan aan hun overeenkomsten, bestempeld kan worden als een vorm van 'cultureel essentialisme'. Dit geldt niet alleen voor het muzikwetenschappelijke onderzoek dat in Rusland verricht werd onder het Sovjet-regime, waar het sinds de jaren '30 onmogelijk was om bepaalde nationalistische dogma's en canonische figuren ter discussie te stellen. Het is nog veel sterker van toepassing op de Westerse muzikwetenschap, waar, althans tot ver in de twintigste eeuw, de studie van de negentiende-eeuwse Russische muziek zich heeft beperkt tot een vrij exclusieve interesse in 'Russischheid' en waar muzikhistorici en -critici – veel eerder dan hun collega's in Sovjet-Unie – geneigd waren deze Russischheid als een norm aan het werk van Russische componisten op te leggen.

In de afgelopen decennia is de benadering van Russische muziek aanzienlijk veranderd, in Rusland als gevolg van het uiteenvallen van de Sovjet-Unie, en in het Westen als gevolg van de kritiek op de oude aanpak sinds de jaren '80 en '90, met name van de kant van de Amerikaanse musicoloog Richard Taruskin. Het begrip van de rol van het nationalisme in het negentiende-eeuwse muziekleven is sterk verbeterd, waardoor de oude fascinatie voor Russischheid plaats heeft gemaakt voor een interesse in daadwerkelijk nationalisme met al haar mythen en consequenties op het terrein van politiek en identiteit. Tegelijkertijd is er sinds kort ook serieuze aandacht gekomen voor de overeenkomsten en de interactie tussen Russische opera en het Italiaanse en Franse repertoire. Deze parallele ontwikkelingen in de recente historiografie hebben allebei belangrijke bijdragen geleverd aan het onderzoek naar de negentiende-eeuwse Russische muzikcultuur. De resultaten zijn echter moeilijk met elkaar te rijmen aangezien men zich doorgaans op de meest sprekende manifestaties van de gekozen benaderingen heeft gericht. Onderzoek dat het nationalisme centraal stelt, benadrukt doorgaans hoe zeer het nationalisme het muzikale denken beïnvloedde, terwijl studies die Russische opera in een internationale context plaatsen soms terughoudend zijn om ook maar iets met de besmette notie van Russischheid van doen te hebben en weinig aandacht aan de notie van een nationale school schenken.

Dit proefschrift betoogt, ten eerste, dat de internationaal-georiënteerde praktijken in de Russische operawereld niet minder aandacht verdienen dan de specifieke lokale tradities; en ten tweede dat de daadwerkelijke rol van het

ationale denken in de operawereld pas in perspectief geplaatst kan worden als ook werken en aspecten van werken die zich *niet* eenvoudig voegden naar een nationalistische agenda, in relatie tot het nationale denken worden beschouwd.

Deze in steek is gevolgd voor vier opera's: *Een leven voor de Tsaar* van Michail Glinka (1804–1857), *Judith* van Aleksandr Serov (1820–1871), *De maagd van Orléans* van Pjotr Tsjaikovski (1840–1893) en *De tsarenbruid* van Nikolaj Rimski-Korsakov (1844–1908). Binnen de traditionele benadering namen deze werken een problematische positie in: zij liepen vanwege het prominente gebruik van bestaande Westerse operaconventies, dan wel door de keuze van een niet-Russisch onderwerp, al gauw het risico om 'niet Russisch genoeg' bevonden te worden. In dit proefschrift wordt geen oordeel geveld over hoe Russisch de werken zijn, maar wordt het gebruik van Westerse conventies en niet-Russische onderwerpen onderzocht met het oog op de vraag hoe deze opera's zich, vanuit het perspectief van de componisten en hun tijdgenoten, verhielden tot de nationalistische behoefte om een karakteristieke nationale stijl te cultiveren.

Hierbij moet opgemerkt worden dat er uiteraard geen sprake kan zijn van opera's die, in tegenstelling tot de bovengenoemde, wel 'puur' Russisch zouden zijn. Zoals in zovele andere domeinen, was het nationalistische ideaal van culturele puurheid in het geval van de Russische opera per definitie onhaalbaar – hiervoor hoeft men slechts te bedenken waar deze kunstvorm zelf, met de vele tradities die het in zichzelf verenigt, vandaan komt. Tevens bestond – en bestaat – er geen vanzelfsprekend verband tussen de perceptie van de Russischheid van een werk en de mate waarin dat werk afweek van buitenlandse tradities of de oorsprong van de gebruikte muzikale middelen. 'Russischheid' wordt in dit onderzoek dan ook niet beschouwd als een inherente eigenschap van de tekst of de muziek, maar als een vorm van betekenis die door zowel de componisten als de luisteraars aan de muziek is gehecht.

Afgezien van de vraag of een componist erin slaagde om zijn bedoelingen op succesvolle wijze aan zijn publiek te communiceren, moest hij zijn wens om in een nationale stijl te schrijven ook afwegen tegen verschillende andere belangen en idealen – en niet per se alleen die van hemzelf. Hoewel het componeren van een opera vaak alleen achter een schrijftafel of vleugel plaatsvond, moet de totstandkoming van een opera altijd beschouwd worden in een bredere context, waarin men afhankelijk was van – en daarom rekening diende te houden met – onder andere de leiding van de theaters, de zangers, de musici en het publiek. Het volledige netwerk van personen en instituten dat betrokken was bij de productie en consumptie van opera's

wordt in dit proefschrift ‘de operawereld’ wordt genoemd, naar analogie van Howard Beckers notie van *art worlds*. De negentiende-eeuwse operawereld in Rusland was een zeer internationale arena waarin Italiaanse, Franse en Duitse composities, conventies en artiesten een centrale rol speelden. In hoge mate definieerden zij zowel het genre zelf als de context waarin Russische operacomponisten werkten. Deze konden zich aansluiten of afzetten tegen verschillende bestaande conventies of stromingen, en mikken op Russischheid was slechts één van de mogelijkheden om een plek te verwerven binnen zowel de nationale als de internationale operawereld. Het streven naar een herkenbare nationale stijl binnen deze context kan daarom getypeerd worden als een streven naar ‘nationale distinctie’ (*national distinction*): het droeg bij aan de definitie van Russische muziek ten opzichte van muziek elders in de wereld, maar evengoed aan de eigen positionering binnen de Russische muziekwereld. Veel Russische componisten hebben pogingen gedaan om zich op een dergelijke wijze te onderscheiden, maar het was zeker niet altijd de enige of de meest vanzelfsprekende keuze.

DE AANDACHT VOOR Westerse conventies en niet-Russische onderwerpen in dit proefschrift heeft voor elk van de onderzochte opera’s afzonderlijk tot nieuwe inzichten geleid. De vergelijking van Glinka’s *Een leven voor de Tsaar* (1836) met het werk van Italiaanse tijdgenoten als Rossini, Donizetti en Bellini in Hoofdstuk Een biedt inzicht in structurele en dramaturgische aspecten van aanzienlijke delen van de partituur. Vanwege de negatieve associaties die in de loop der tijd verbonden zijn aan het Italiaanse repertoire uit deze tijd is er tot voor kort weinig aandacht geweest voor het Russische gebruik van de conventies van Italiaanse *bel canto* opera. De analyse laat niet alleen zien dat Glinka veelvuldig van deze conventies gebruik maakte, maar ook hoe hij deze met aanzienlijke vrijheid wist te herinterpreteren en te transformeren. Een gedetailleerde vergelijking helpt daarom de duidelijke tegenstellingen in de reputatie van deze opera – die enerzijds bekend staat als een progressief werk dat model stond voor de Russische nationale opera van de volgende generaties, en anderzijds als ‘eigenlijk Italiaans’ – beter te begrijpen en te overbruggen.

Hoofdstuk Twee plaatst Serovs *Judith* (1863) in de internationale trend van het bijbels oriëntalisme, en laat zien dat de karakterisering van de twee rivaliserende groepen, de Assyriërs en de Hebreërs, een centrale rol speelde in de compositie en receptie van deze opera. In dit hoofdstuk wordt het concept ‘groepskleur’ (*group colour*) voorgesteld als de meest geschikte term om een dergelijke vorm van muzikale dramaturgie mee te analyseren.

In Hoofdstuk Drie is aangetoond hoe de overeenkomsten tussen Tsjajkovski's *De Maagd van Orléans* (1881) en Giacomo Meyerbeer en Eugène Scribes opera *Le Prophète* grotendeels teruggeleid kunnen worden tot een gezamenlijke literaire bron, Friedrich Schillers toneelstuk *Die Jungfrau von Orleans*. Hoewel Tsjajkovski's opera soms wordt voorgesteld als een complete breuk met haar voorganger *Jevgeni Onegin*, laat de analyse in dit hoofdstuk zien dat het intensieve gebruik van het interval van de sext als een motivisch en structureel element in de melodieën van *De maagd van Orléans* een belangrijke stilistische continuïteit tussen deze twee opera's vormt.

Hoofdstuk Vier, tot slot, legt een verband tussen *De tsarenbruid* (1899), de negende opera van Rimsky-Korsakov, en trends zoals vertegenwoordigd door jonge componisten als Richard Strauss en Vincent d'Indy. De esthetiek achter *De tsarenbruid*, met haar nadruk op traditionele vormen, elegante stemvoering en lyriek blijkt ingegeven door Rimski-Korsakovs wantrouwen jegens de decadente tendensen in de moderne muziek rond de eeuwwisseling en, met terugwerkende kracht, in de composities van Richard Wagner en Het Machtige Hoopje. Hoewel de greep naar traditionele middelen in deze opera wel is opgevat als een draai naar het Westen, blijkt dat de componist zich evengoed van het Westen afwendde, althans in haar moderne, decadente vorm.

AAN DE HAND VAN de receptie van de geselecteerde werken is onderzocht of deze opera's in hun eigen tijd al dan niet Russisch genoeg werden bevonden en welke elementen aanleiding voor debat vormden. *Een leven voor de Tsaar* werd vanaf de première enthousiast onthaald als een authentiek werk van nationale bodem, waar de Italiaanse invloeden weinig aan af konden doen; Vladimir Stasov en de componist zelf zouden later echter hun ongenoegen uiten over het gebruik van ongepaste 'Italianismen'. Glinka's houding ten opzichte van zijn eigen *Leven voor de Tsaar* illustreert hoe de interpretatie van wat wel of niet gepast was in een Russische opera kon veranderen als gevolg van de veranderende omstandigheden. Het is waarschijnlijk geen toeval dat Glinka's bezwaren over zijn eigen gebruik van Italiaanse conventies in *Een leven voor de Tsaar* pas na 1843 aan het licht kwamen, op het moment dat een Italiaans operagezelschap in Sint-Petersburg, rijkelijk gefinancierd door de Russische staat, het leven voor Russische componisten en musici bijzonder moeilijk maakte. De kritische geluiden over de Russischheid van *Een leven voor de Tsaar* voerden duidelijk niet de boventoon. Datzelfde gold voor *De Tsarenbruid* en *De maagd van Orléans*. De meest uitgesproken contemporaine kritiek op de Russischheid van *De Tsarenbruid* kwam van een recensent die de aanwezigheid

van een driestemmige *fughetta* „onnatuurlijk voor een Russische opera” vond. Over *De maagd van Orléans* is er vóór het einde van de negentiende eeuw zelfs geen enkel commentaar met betrekking tot de Russischheid gevonden.

Alleen in het geval van *Judith* was er sprake van zeer expliciete kritiek, namelijk de klacht van de etnograaf Nikolaj Tsertelev dat deze opera van een Russische componist geen Russische klanken bevatte. Dergelijke openlijke bedenkingen lijken zeldzaam te zijn geweest. Er zijn echter andere getuigenissen die suggereren dat Tsertelev niet alleen stond in zijn vraag om Russischheid: Serovs zelf verwachtte bijvoorbeeld dat zijn opera *Judith* ondermeer vanwege een gebrek aan Russischheid geen succes in Moskou zou hebben. Toch is de algemene conclusie is dat contemporaine critici, ook als zij in andere gevallen soms lof over de Russische aard van deze of gene passage uitten, niet zo strikt waren wat betreft Russischheid als de twintigste-eeuwse Westerse commentatoren. De receptie van *Judith* laat ook zien hoe ver de meningen uiteen konden lopen waar het het nationale karakter van een opera betrof: in tegenstelling tot Tsertelev braken de schrijver en filosoof Vladimir Odojevski en de muziekcriticus Herman Laroche juist een lans voor de Russischheid van *Judith*.

UIT DE BESTUDERING van de twee opera's met niet-Russische onderwerpen, *Judith* en *De maagd van Orléans*, blijkt dat er, ondanks de wijdverbreide overtuiging dat het cultiveren van een nationale stijl van componeren wenselijk of zelfs noodzakelijk was, geen overeenstemming bestond over de noodzaak of wenselijkheid van Russischheid in Russische opera's met niet-Russische onderwerpen.

De receptie van de vier bestudeerde opera's tezamen suggereert dat de notie van *couleur locale* – het karakteriseren van de locatie of de personen op het toneel – voor de critici over het algemeen een meer legitiem en houdbaar criterium was dan de mate waarin de componist zijn eigen nationale identiteit etaleerde. De receptie van *Judith* en *De maagd van Orléans* laat zien dat ook César Cui en andere leden van de Het Machtige Hoopje eerder zulke algemene en potentieel universele esthetische maatstaven als karakterisering, groepskleur of *couleur locale* hanteerden dan een nationalistische norm als Russischheid.

Uiteraard betekent dit niet dat nationalisme of nationale distinctie er niet meer toe deed, maar dan moest men wel een geschikt Russisch onderwerp kiezen. *Een leven voor de Tsaar*, bijvoorbeeld, was zo'n onderwerp waarbij het lastig is om te bepalen of er daadwerkelijk sprake is van een nationale stijl van componeren of alleen van een wijze om het eenvoudige Russische volk op het

toneel te karakteriseren en te contrasteren met de Poolse vijanden. Nationale distinctie en het weergeven van groepskeur of couleur locale gingen hier dus hand in hand. Er konden echter nadelen en beperkingen verbonden zijn aan een dergelijke onderwerpskeuze: zo meenden Russische componisten zelf voor het grootste deel van de negentiende eeuw dat specifiek Russische onderwerpen op internationale podia weinig kans van slagen hadden.

Op de vraag hoe een Russische componist om zou moeten gaan met een niet-Russisch onderwerp bestond veel onduidelijkheid en de meningen hierover liepen ver uiteen. De critici Tsertelev, Odojevski en Laroche beschouwden Russischheid duidelijk als een pre, ongeacht het onderwerp. Afgaande op hun mening over *Judith* was de ideale Russische opera op een niet-Russisch onderwerp voor Laroche en Odojevski tegelijkertijd door-en-door Russisch én correct in termen van couleur locale. Uit het commentaar van Serov en Tsjaikovski en de vroeg-twintigste-eeuwse operahistoricus Vsevolod Tsjesjichin blijkt daarentegen dat zij de aanwezigheid van Russische elementen in opera's met niet-Russische onderwerpen onnodig of zelfs onwenselijk vonden. Zowel Serov zelf als de criticus Andrej Dmitriëv suggereerden in hun reactie op Tsertelevs kritiek dat het absurd was om naar Russischheid te streven waar dit niet overeen kwam met couleur locale. Tsjaikovski beweerde zelfs dat hij zijn best had gedaan om alle „Russicismen” in zijn *Maagd van Orléans* te vermijden, waarschijnlijk vanwege het gebrek aan onderscheid tussen Russischheid en couleur locale.

Het denken over nationale Russische opera verschilde zodoende aanzienlijk van het denken over Italiaanse en Franse tradities, waarin de notie van de nationale stijl niet zo nauw verbonden was met een lokale Italiaanse of Franse onderwerpskeuze. Zoals blijkt uit bespreking van de twintigste-eeuwse receptie van *De maagd van Orléans* in Hoofdstuk Twee, zouden de onenigheid en de verwarring over de verhouding tussen couleur locale en nationale distinctie in Russische opera ook onder twinstigste-eeuwse muziekwetenschappers blijven voortbestaan.



## *Curriculum Vitae*

**R**UTGER HELMERS was born in Amersfoort, the Netherlands in 1980. He obtained a MSc degree in Physics and Astronomy at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam in 2003. In the same year he enrolled in the BA Musicology programme in Utrecht. In 2005, he was admitted to the Research MA programme in Musicology, and as part of this programme studied at the University of Cambridge as an Erasmus student in 2006. After graduation, he successfully applied to become a Ph. D. candidate with the OGC (Research Institute for History and Culture) at Utrecht University in 2007. In this capacity, he has taught several courses and has presented papers at various conferences in the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and the Russian Federation. Besides his scholarly research, his output includes various writings such as programme notes, score prefaces, and book reviews.