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Ludwig Maurer and the reception of Beethoven in St. Petersburg in the first half of the 19th century

The study of the first half of the 19th century connected with the establishment of Russia as the bases of professional musical culture is one of the perspective trends in modern Russian musical science. Stressing the creative role of foreign and particularly German musicians and teachers, Konstantin Kuznecov remarks: "They don't stand as an obstacle among our young musical sprouts and great Western musical art, don't demonstrate themselves as "samples", but lead their pupils closely to this great art, lead to Beethoven"¹.

Periodicals of the time, articles of leading Russian critics such as Vladimir Fjodorovič Odoevskij, Aleksandr Nikolaevič Serov, and other literature reveal the great impact particularly German musicians had on the development of Russian musical life at this stage. European professional music tradition was represented by musicians such as Henrich Sussman, Franz Knecht, Georg Gross, Andrej Memel, Vcevolod Maurer or the conductors Ludwig Maurer, Karl Albrecht, Karl Schubert and others.

In this article I would like to attract attention to the personality of Ludwig Wilhelm Maurer. As a brilliant virtuoso violinist, known in Russia since 1817, conductor of the French theatre in St. Petersburg since 1835, inspector of all Emperor theatres since 1841 and conductor of the Philharmonic² and Concert societies, Ludwig Maurer was an advocate of the classic inheritance.

Since the beginning of the 1820ties Beethoven's music was actively distributed in Russia. It is widely known that the great merit for this belongs to Beethoven's admirer prince Nikolaj Borisovič Golicyн. He was personally acquainted with Beethoven, had a correspondence with him, edited his compositions and thus fulfilled enlightening activity in the circles of advanced musical people³. One of

¹ Konstantin Kuznecov, *Beethoven i russkie kompozitory* [Beethoven and Russian composers], in: *Russkaja kniga o Bechovene* [The Russian book about Beethoven], Moscow 1927, p. 15.

² The Philharmonic Society was established in ST. Petersburg in 1802.

³ About the contacts of Golicyн with Beethoven see M. Alekseev, *Russkie vstreči*

the supporting acts for Beethoven was the performance of the *Missa Solemnis* which took place on Golicyn's initiative on March 26th, 1824 with the participation of the artists of the Court Choir⁴.

"At all musical gatherings taking place at my home" Golicyn recalls, "nothing was performed but Beethoven in all his aspects. I had to endure lots of mockery, sarcasm, reproaches concerning the so-called Beethoven monomania. I was not embarrassed by this fact as I strived to acquaint our best artists and dilettantes with the latest pieces of art of the genius, who outstripped his age for many decades forward. My insistence brought fruits; hardly ten years had passed when Beethoven's music, which was considered absurd and clumsy before, began to reign in the salons and concert halls of our capital"⁵.

An important part in the propagation of Beethoven's inheritance played the musician count Matvej Viel'gorskij, and the journalist and music critic prince Odoevskij, who laid the foundation of the Russian musical science. Being not professional musicians, Golicyn, Viel'gorskij and Odoevskij were widely educated people and possessed a highly progressive mentality. Due to this fact Beethoven's chamber pieces from the first third of the 19th century, the later quartets including, began to spread earlier than symphonies for instance.

Recalling musical assemblies in the house of Viel'gorskij, Michail Alekseeviĉ Venevitinov says: "Count Wyelhorski⁶ [...] had in his time a significant sphere of influence upon the development of musical taste in our country. In 1830 – 1840 the comprehension of music in the enlightened circles of people was a luxury [...] bliss obtained from Beethoven's, Mendelssohn's, Schumann's pieces of art [...] it was accessible only to the exquisite listeners of the once famous mu-

i svjazi Betchovena [Russian meetings and Beethoven's ties], in: *Russkaja kniga o Betchovene* [The Russian book about Beethoven], Moscow 1927, pp. 76-110.

⁴ Beethoven's letter connected with the mentioned event from June 21st, 1823. It was published in "Five letters of famous artists addressed to the Administration of the Philharmonic Society in St. Petersburg" in: E. Albrecht, *Obščij obzor dejatel'nosti Sankt-Peterburgskogo Filarmoniĉeskogo Obščestva* [Summary of the St. Petersburg Philharmonic Society], St. Petersburg 1884, p. 100.

⁵ *La presse*, 13.10.1845.

⁶ The name Viel'gorskij was pronounced by his contemporaries very differently: Wyelhorski, Welehyiski, Welyehorski.

sical evenings in Wyelhorski's house. This house was in its time the pass to the high society of Petersburg artists, composers and their compositions, and served, so to say, as an academy of musical taste"⁷.

At the same time first attempts of the interpretation of Beethoven's creative personality appeared in fiction works. In 1830 Odoevskij published the short story "The Last Quartet by Beethoven", starting the "Beethoven theme" in Russian literature⁸. In Odoevskij's opinion Beethoven's image bears the traits of a romantic artist. This interpretation is one of the first of its kind in the world of Beethoveniana.

Nikolaj Golicyn, Matvej Viel'gorskij, Aleksej L'vov and Gustav Vil'de were the first performers of chamber music by Beethoven. Their quartet evenings took place in many Petersburg musical salons. In the quartet staff of Viel'gorskij a constant participant was also violinist Vsevolod Maurer⁹ – the elder son of Ludwig Maurer.

Analyzing the chronicle of the musical life in the first half of the 19th century, it becomes clear that Beethoven's music only slowly gained its stable place in the concert repertoire of the capital. The first performance of Beethoven in the concerts of the Philharmonic Society was in 1813 the oratorio *Christus auf dem Ölberge* under the conductor Paris. It is known that in 1827 Beethoven's 4th symphony

⁷ Michail Venevitinov, Franc List i graf Michail V'el'gorskij v 1839 godu [Franz Liszt and count Michael Viel'gorskij in 1839], in: Russkaja starina, November 1886, p. 485.

⁸ The evidence of almost one hundred years of interest of Russian literature and poetry in the personality and creative activity of Beethoven art are collected in the following research: Michail Alekseev, Betchoven v russkoj literature [Beethoven in Russian literature], in: Russkaja kniga o Betchovene [The Russian book about Beethoven], Moscow 1927, pp. 158-184.

⁹ Vsevolod Maurer, the elder son of Ludwig Maurer and a violinist-virtuoso, served for many years as a conductor of the orchestra of the Italian opera, and was a constant participant of the quartet gatherings in Viel'gorskij's house. V. Maurer is represented with Aleksej L'vov, Gustav Vil'de and Matvej Viel'gorskij in the well-known lithograph by R. Rorbach (1840). In 1872 V. Maurer becomes the honorary member of the St.Petersburg Society of Quartet music. From personal matter of Vsevolod Maurer it is also known, that this musician was appointed a hereditary honorary citizen. It took place on May 5th, 1888, four years before the death of the musician in 1892. See: RGIA (Rossijskij Gosudarstvennyj Istoričeskij Archiv), Fond 497, Opis' 1, № 2010, p. 104.

was played, the 2nd *symphony* and the *overture "Egmont"* was presented to the public in 1828 at the Michajlovski theatre.

On March 20th, 1829 the listeners were acquainted with Beethoven's *Fantasy for piano, choir and the orchestra* in a concert of Karl (manchmal auch Šarl') Majer. In 1831 the Philharmonic Society performed the *Coriolan* for the first time. The Philharmonic concerts on March 1st and 15th, 1833 were also significant for the concert life of St. Petersburg: the *Mass C dur*, the *Eroica* and the *Pastoral symphony* were presented. The review in the newspaper "Severnaja Pčela" is characteristic: "The listeners, I hope, still remember the storm from the Beethoven's *Pastoral symphony*. But all its beauty disappears before the tremendousness of the first allegro of the *Eroica*"¹⁰.

On February 27th, 1835 at a concert of the French flutist Cezar' Kjuj, two movements from the 5th *symphony* were performed. On March 13th in the same year, at the concert of the conductor and violinist H. Romberg, the first two movements from the 7th *symphony* were performed. The principle to perform a symphony in separate parts, intermitted by other solo items, was a sort of concession to the concert practice and musical tastes at that time. But through these concerts Beethoven's symphonies became the property not only of the elite - the visitors of the musical salons - but of a wide number of listeners.

In 1836 Odoevskij became the initiator of the performance of Beethoven's 9th *symphony*. One year before this notable event he wrote: "We heard that for its second concert [the Philharmonic society] prepares [...] a composition which has staggered the whole musical world and is anticipated by all music lovers, in short The *Ninth symphony* by Beethoven with the choir on Schiller's words: "An die Freude"¹¹. It goes without saying, that the musicians were not enough prepared for this performance. Aleksandr Dargomyžskij who visited this concert stated, that the performance was "wretched!"

¹⁰ Severnaja pčela, March 13th, 1833, p. 225. Glinka on the contrary was attracted not by the willful, heroic impulses of the 3rd, 5th, and 9th *symphony* but - in line with romanticism - by the feeling of nature and humour of Beethoven's 2nd, 4th, 8th and *Pastoral symphony*.

¹¹ Vladimir Fjodorovič Odoevskij, *Muzykal'no-literaturnoe nasledie. Pod redakciej Grigorij Borisovič Bernandt* [Musical-literary inheritance. Edited by G. B. Bernandt], Moscow 1956, p. 113.

Wind instruments at the rehearsal gave a full image of eternal chaos and its imperfections"¹².

But Odoevskij stressed the indisputability of the concert's historic importance: "We still remember the time when the artists were afraid to play the first symphonies by Beethoven – not to bore the listeners!!! – and between his first symphonies and the ninth symphony is an abyss"¹³.

Let's return to Ludwig Maurer, a professional musician of German origin, who has done his indispensable part for the reception of Beethoven's inheritance in Russia. Among his numerous talents was undoubtedly his virtuosity as violinist. In the press of the time many evidences about successful concerts of Ludwig Maurer and his sons are preserved. Ludwig Maurer was the first interpreter of Beethoven's violin concert in 1834. Recommending this unknown to the Russian listener Odoevskij wrote: "The music lovers will hardly manage to hear it some other time, it is because only Maurer is able to play this concert with the energy which this unusual creation requires. Herr Maurer added to the first allegro a charming cadence, composed from Beethoven's melodies. It is like the funeral feast about the great man"¹⁴.

Maurer as a conductor came into contact with Beethoven's music first in 1835, when for the first time Beethoven's overture to the drama "King Stefan" was performed under his guidance. Let's note that at this time the main sphere of the musician's professional activity was the theatre. In the 30ties and 40ties Maurer writes a lot of drama and ballet music. His ballet *Shadow* was a special success: it was the choreography of the famous Filipp Taglioni with Maurer's music. Maurer was also well known in the sphere of comic opera. Some comic sketches were written by him in cooperation with Aleksandr Aljab'ev and Aleksej Verstovski.

¹² Aleksandr Sergeevič Dargomyžskij, *Izbrannye pis'ma* [Selected letters], Moscow 1952, p. 18.

¹³ Vladimir Fjodorovič Odoevskij, *Muzykal'no-literaturnoe nasledie* [Musical-literary inheritance], p. 116. In Moscow the *9th Symphony* was performed for the first time in 1863 in a concert of Nikolaj Grigor'evič Rubinstein.

¹⁴ Severnaja pčela, March 14th, 1834.

Since 1835 Ludwig Maurer was the chief conductor of the French troupe of the Michajlovski theatre according to the appointment by the Emperor theatre management. According to the contract clause the composer was obliged "to take part in all comic sketches, operas, dramas with music and performances of French repertoire, and be always present at the plays which are appointed as benefit performances for the actors, to conduct the French orchestra at all theatres, in the city, outside the city, at the Court"¹⁵.

We want to stress the outstanding professional qualities of Maurer which were revealed in his work with the orchestra, which, as Odoevskij stated earlier, "could hardly play one and the same symphony by Krammer which was repeated every 10 years in each performance". The critic remarks: "Singing parties were full of mistakes, the musicians played sometimes false notes. During one year Maurer made of this orchestra, in which some musicians could hardly move their fiddle sticks, a small but brilliant orchestra, which played extremely thoroughly Haydn's, Mozart's, Andreas Romberg's symphonies and symphonies of other composers, remade purposely for this orchestra by Maurer. The intervals in the French performance became the subject of curiosity for specialists in music. All insignificant parts in French comic sketches are remade by Maurer and are performed so thoroughly as can be wished for in great Italian opera"¹⁶.

In the 40ties Ludwig Maurer becomes one of the leading conductors in St. Petersburg. With his name a great musical event is connected - the performance of the 5th *symphony* by Beethoven on March 28th, 1845. Polina Viardo Garcia, Giovanni Batista Rubini, Antonio Tamburini - the best Italian singers of the time -, the famous quartet of the brothers Müller - Friedrich und Georg (Violine), Henrich (Viola), August (Violoncello) - from Germany, the whole Maurer family, Franz Bem, Karl Rifstal and all orchestras of the Emperor theatres took part in it. Concerning this Odoevskij exclaimed: "Here is the concert which we never had before!"¹⁷ In this concert a new

¹⁵ RGIA, Fond 497, Opis' 1, № 6791, p. 4.

¹⁶ Istorija Muzyki. Soč. Štafforda. S primečanjami, popravkami i pribavljenjami Fetisa [The History of Music. Compiled by Stafford with comments, remarks and additions by Fetis], St. Petersburg 1838, Comments by Odoevskij, p. 392.

¹⁷ Russkij invalid № 69, March 28th, 1845.

qualitative level of performance was reached: The St. Petersburg public heard for the first time the full symphony. The orchestra staff corresponded to Beethoven's score.

Odoevskij, announcing this concert, marked that the symphony "belongs to those pieces of art where it is necessary to have a collection of instruments which Herr Maurer will possess, that is 60 violins, 16 violas, 16 violoncellos and 16 contrabasses. It is not necessary to tell music lovers that up to now we heard only a vague echo of Beethoven's symphonies. Due to the lack of the proper number of string instruments at some places violins were "covered" by wind instruments, so that only one half of the real effect reached the listener's ear. We hope that this time, having a cooperation of all our artists under the conducting art of Ludwig Maurer, the outstanding specialist in music, we'll hear the immortal composition of Beethoven in the way it must be heard"¹⁸.

After the performance of the *5th symphony* we observe that there is a slight interval in Maurer's occupation with Beethoven's music. This has to do with his many duties as an inspector of all the orchestras of the Emperor theatres. To this honorary post the musician was appointed by the order of the Emperor Theatres' Board in March 1841. The everyday duties of Maurer as inspector included the composition of "petitions" of different kinds (about giving titles, pension pays), the control for the timely coming of artists from their regular leaves etc. Along with the routine office work, Maurer fulfilled "creative" orders of different kinds, put before him by the theatre administration. One of the documents of the Emperor Theatre's Board from November 22nd, 1846, states that "for the establishment of a proper order in taking and using scores, composed and made for the Russian vaudevilles - for persons having no direct duty for it - I order the office to make it a rule that all scores must be given from the composers and even from the artists who would be presented for a benefit performance, to the Inspector of Music, who must be the only man to define whether they could be utilized and in what way"¹⁹.

In spite of the fact that an inspector of the orchestras required much forces and a lot of time, Maurer composed a lot at the end of the

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ RGIA, Fond 497, Opus' 1, № 6791, p. 19.

40ties, and gave concerts in different cities in Europe. In the 50ties Ludwig Maurer's activities as a conductor culminated. In this period he systematically addressed Beethoven's symphonic compositions.

It is not accidental that Odoevskij who called the musician in different years "the nestor of our violinists" justly counted him to "the number of the best conductors of Europe"²⁰. The critic was not alone with his estimation about the St. Petersburg conductors. Aleksandr Nikolaevič Serov marked "the best place belongs to Ludwig Maurer, then comes Karl Schubert, and after him with slight nuance Konstantin Ljadov [...] Rubinštejn as a conductor yields to Ljadov in experience and influence on the orchestra, and Balakirev I am forced to say - alas - some steps lower than Rubinštejn"²¹.

Serov means first of all the series of wonderful concerts, which took place in the Concert Society, which were organized in 1850 by Aleksej Fjodorovič L'vov. "The conductor Ludwig Maurer is the veteran of St. Petersburg conductors [...] In Beethoven's symphonies he used the good tradition of the very first performers (still during Beethoven's life time in Vienna and from there everywhere in Germany), he having known a lot of nuances"²².

The aim of these concerts was as usual an enlightening one: to acquaint the public with the best musical compositions of the European classic. During some seasons of the Concert Society the *Third*, the *Fourth*, the *Seventh*, the *Eighth*, the *Ninth*, the overtures *Coriolan*, *Egmont*, *Leonora* and other of Beethoven's compositions were performed. To perform these compositions the leading musical forces of St. Petersburg were enrolled. For Ludwig Maurer's orchestra (consisting of 60 persons) the best musicians of the Emperor theatres were selected, at the same time Court singers (under the guidance of L'vov) and selected soloists were enrolled.

Many enthusiastic lines are devoted by Serov on the high professional quality of the performance of Beethoven's compositions: "Excellent, magnificent, delightful! It is only necessary to say that really

²⁰ Vladimir Fjodorovič Odoevskij, Iz primečanij k knige Štafforda [From the comments in the book by Stafford - see footnote 16], p. 392.

²¹ Aleksandr Nikolaevič Serov, Kritičeskie stat'i [Critical articles], Vol. 4, St. Petersburg 1895, p. 1823.

²² Ibid., p. 1821.

in these concerts, in these really solemn feasts for everybody who likes musical art, every genius composition is performed in such a way that it's impossible to expect a better performance. [...] Even small sizes of the halls don't spoil the impression, but only strengthen it. One can frankly say, that the person who didn't hear symphonies in the performance like that, doesn't know them. And to love music and not to have the full idea about Beethoven's compositions is a serious misfortune to my mind [...] Each of Beethoven's symphonies opens before the listener the whole world. It is difficult to believe that there existed on Earth such a demigod, such a master in the realm of sounds [...] It is impossible to express one's gratitude to the person, who decided so seriously to acquaint the Petersburg public with immortal musical compositions!"²³

In the 50ties Ludwig Maurer organized his own concert cycles: symphonic and quartet matinee performances. Most of the time was devoted to Beethoven's music, to the concerts, overtures, symphonies, chamber-ensemble compositions, and piano compositions. Concerts conducted by Maurer attracted the public so much, that the reviewers wrote: "There was no vacant chair in the hall, and those who were late had to stand during the whole concert"²⁴.

The experience of the quartets of L'vov and V'etan in the 30ties and 40ties leads Ludwig Maurer to the establishment of his own quartet in the 50ties together with his sons. The "Sankt-Peterburgskich vedomostej" from 1852 informs that "in the hall of the Peter and Paul school, the Maurers, father and two sons give quartet matinee performances with the participation of one guest performer. [...] Vsevolod Maurer's play (the first violin at these Matinee performances), our public heard not once in quartet performances before. Ludwig Maurer - veteran of our music; he plays the second violin in the quartet. The publicity of this musical family attracts to these matinee performances a lot of listeners"²⁵.

From the statements of Wilhelm von Lenz follows, that the Maurers in their season ticket concerts "performed with all their German

²³ Aleksandr Nikolaevič Serov, Stat'i o muzyke. V semi vyšuskach. Vyš. 1, [Articles on music. In 7 issues. Iss. 1], Moscow 1984, p. 55.

²⁴ Sankt-Peterburgskie vedomosti № 94, April 27th, 1852.

²⁵ Sankt-Peterburgskie vedomosti № 27, November 30th, 1852.

diligence some of the last quartets by Beethoven, namely: deeply poetic a - minor and infinitely rich with respect of its contents cis - minor". Lenz justly remarked: "We hear the wonderful Maurers in public concerts not so regularly as Vieuxtemps, because they are very busy at the theatre"²⁶.

The great contribution of Ludwig Maurer to the process of popularization of Beethoven's music coincides with the realizing in Russia, that the inheritance of Beethoven and other European classics is an alternative to the "italianomania" entertaining virtuoso tricks. Maurer belonged to the progressive people in the Russian musical culture of the first half of the 19th century who opposed against this "italomania".

In all spheres of touching Beethoven's music Maurer appears a professional master. According to G. Laroš's words during the 40ties and 50ties "Beethovenizm was not an infection covering the whole [...] society; on the contrary, this religion was the religion of a few people"²⁷. However, Maurer as well as Odoevskij, Serov and Glinka were successive in its creed.

The many-sided and highly professional musical activity of Ludwig Maurer is one of the brightest examples for the imitation of Russian musicians, who laid the foundations of national musical culture in all its aspects. In this sense it is extremely symbolic, that in chamber and symphonic programs of Maurer more and more often appears the name of the young Anton Rubinštejn, who already in the 60ties, will be the embodiment of musical universalism (performer, conductor, musical-social public man, creator of the first Russian conservatoire, organizer of a series of historical concerts of piano music), who appeared on Russian ground and certainly not without influence of such musicians as Ludwig Maurer.

²⁶ Wilhelm von Lenz, *Beethoven. Eine Kunststudie*, Teil 2, Kassel 1855, S. 313.

²⁷ Cit. according to S. M. Popov, *Muzykal'naja žizn' Moskvy i Betchoven* [The Musical life of Moscow and Beethoven], in: *Russkaja kniga o Betchovene* [The Russian book about Beethoven], Moscow 1927, p. 145.