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Musical Portrayals of Death in Mussorgsky's Songs and Dances of Death

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The University of Southern Mississippi

MUSICAL PORTRAYALS OF DEATH IN MUSORGSKY'S

SONGS AND DANCES OF DEATH

by

Graham Michael Anduri

Abstract of Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate School
of The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Musical Arts

May 2015

ABSTRACT

MUSICAL PORTRAYALS OF DEATH IN MUSORGSKY'S

SONGS AND DANCES OF DEATH

by Graham Michael Anduri

May 2015

Musorgsky's *Songs and Dances of Death* presents a set of unique portrayals of death in art song literature. Aside from the obvious challenge of the Russian language and Cyrillic alphabet which are unfamiliar to most Western performers, the unique musical style, historical context, and complex psychological implications of *Songs and Dances of Death* require a good deal of study before one can fully grasp the profundity and importance of this cycle.

Musorgsky's views on music and life, the *Zeitgeist* in which these songs were composed, a historical analysis of the medieval Dance of Death tradition and its influence on the poet and composer, as well as an analysis of the psychological phenomenon of death personifications are provided to engender a holistic approach to interpreting these songs. A musical analysis illustrates the musical manifestations of the aforementioned elements. A guide to the various editions and their inherent merits and/or flaws gives the performer the necessary information to find a suitable version of the cycle. A word-for-word translation, IPA transliteration, and pronunciation guide are also included to facilitate the learning of the text by non-Russian speakers.

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A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate School
of The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Musical Arts

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May 2015

DEDICATION

I would first like to acknowledge my wife, Stefanie, for her unwavering love and support as we journeyed through three degrees together. This document and the degree it represents would not have been possible without my family supporting and encouraging me and my career throughout my life.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Musorgsky's *Songs and Dances of Death* presents a set of unique portrayals of death in art song literature. Often considered his crowning achievement in the genre, these songs have had profound influences on many of the major composers of the twentieth century. Certain challenges exist which the performer must acknowledge when learning this music. Aside from the obvious challenge of the Russian language and Cyrillic alphabet which are unfamiliar to most Western performers, the unique musical style, historical context, and complex psychological implications of *Songs and Dances of Death* require a good deal of study before one can fully grasp the profundity and importance of this cycle. The present document synthesizes and expounds upon the relevant research and information needed to undertake a well-informed and artistic interpretation of Musorgsky's final song cycle.

Individual interpretation must remain of the utmost importance for any singing artist. However, it is important to have sufficient background knowledge to inform one's interpretation. It is therefore the aim of this paper to provide a musical, historical, and psychological analysis of the various characters of Death in the cycle. Musorgsky's views on music and life, the *Zeitgeist* in which these songs were composed, a historical analysis of the medieval Dance of Death tradition and its influence on the poet and composer, as well as an analysis of the psychological phenomenon of death personifications are provided to engender a holistic approach to interpreting these songs. A musical analysis illustrates the musical manifestations of the aforementioned elements. A word-for-word translation, IPA transliteration, and pronunciation guide are also included to facilitate the

learning of the text by non-Russian speakers. Finally, a guide to the various editions and their inherent merits and/or flaws gives the performer the necessary information to find a suitable version of the cycle.

In the few performance-based writings which do exist on *Songs and Dances of Death*, two important elements of research are conspicuously absent: the importance and influence of the medieval Dance of Death, or *Totentanz*, on the cycle, and the exploration of different personifications of death and their musical representations. These factors present uncommon challenges to and opportunities for the performer. Taking them into consideration offers the performer an array of subtlety and nuance which is not addressed in existing analyses of these songs.

CHAPTER II

MUSORGSKY'S MILIEU

Today, Musorgsky is perhaps the most famous composer of the *Moguchaya kuchka*. Literally translated as “mighty little heap,” the term was initially coined by Vladimir Stasov in a review of a concert by several of the composers in the group.¹ Subsequently known as the Mighty Five, the Mighty Handful, the New Russian School, the Balakirev Circle, and the Powerful Coterie, the group consisted of founder Mily Balakirev, Cesar Cui, Modest Musorgsky, Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, and Alexander Borodin. The group upheld Mikhail Glinka as the model to be emulated. Alexander Dargomyzhky also figured prominently in their collective consciousness and hosted many of the group's early musical gatherings. The *kuchka* is generally recognized as the nationalist contingent of Russian composers, whereas conservatory-trained (and therefore sympathetic to Western aesthetic ideals) composers such as Anton Rubinstein and Pyotr Chaikovsky² are taken to represent opposing artistic aims. While this generalization is superficially true, the real picture is not quite so simple. Several of the kuchkists ended up attending the St. Petersburg conservatory and championing formal musical training, while Chaikovsky sought out Balakirev's tutelage on occasion to achieve a more distinctly Russian character in his own music.³

The Balakirev Circle formed during the 1850s and 60s as a result of several factors. In 1855 Tsar Nicholas I was succeeded by Tsar Alexander II, and a new era of

¹ Richard Taruskin, *Musorgsky: Eight Essays and An Epilogue*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983, xxxiii.

² Many of the common spellings of Russian names are German or French phonetic transliterations. In accordance with the most recent scholarship, all names in this document are spelled with the closest English phonetic equivalent possible.

³ Richard Taruskin, *Defining Russia Musically*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997, 61.

artistic freedom emerged, if only for a short time. According to the historian Sergey Platonov:

The practice of the new government showed important differences from the methods of the preceding regime. There was a whiff of softness and tolerance characteristic of the new monarch (Alexander II). Petty press constraints were removed; the universities breathed more freely; society showed a more vigorous spirit; it was said that the sovereign wanted truth, enlightenment, honesty, and a free voicing of views.⁴

The Emancipation Proclamation of 1861 freed serfs from their indentured servitude to nobles and aristocrats. Artistic censorship was loosened by large degrees, and some of the most important literary works to come out of Russia surfaced during this time, such as *War and Peace*, *Crime and Punishment*, and *Oblomov*. Musicians also began to yearn for greater societal prominence. By and large, only nobility could afford to be musicians, and then only as amateurs. Professional musicians were imported mainly from Italy and Germany, as native Russian composers and performers were considered to be of lesser stature.⁵ Piano virtuoso and composer Anton Rubinstein, who had been educated in Germany, sought to ameliorate this predicament and was able to petition for musicians to have an officially recognized social standing, allowing them to move freely about the country and exempting them from the poll tax and military duty. He also founded the nation's first music conservatory in St. Petersburg in 1862.⁶ All of this newfound social freedom proved to be a fertile soil for aspiring artists and musicians.

It was in the early 1850s that Glinka effectively passed on the baton of Russian Nationalism to Mily Balakirev, whose raw talent and aesthetic views he greatly admired. Balakirev encountered the other *kuchkists* one by one over the next several years, and by

⁴ Sergey Platonov, *Istoriya Rossiya*, 1917, 701. Found in Alfred Swan, *Russian Music*, 73.

⁵ Richard Taruskin, *Defining Russia Musically*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997, xi-xxxii.

⁶ Caryl Emerson, *The Life of Musorgsky*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999, 55.

1862, the Little Heap was complete. The group met regularly, at first to discuss the music of the past masters, an experience which proved to be a great musical education for the untrained musicians. They would then showcase their own compositions, which would be subjected to Balakirev's often harsh criticisms. They met largely as a reaction against Anton Rubinstein and other Western sympathizers who had been educated in European conservatories. None of the Five had received more than private lessons on an instrument and so initially had to find ways of self-teaching. Balakirev then took it upon himself to be the leader of the group and to offer composition lessons and critiques, despite having only a rudimentary knowledge of theory and counterpoint himself.⁷

They sought to create music which was quintessentially Russian, without the fetters of conventional technique and Western harmonic expectations. They valued verisimilitude over aesthetic beauty, especially during the reform years of the 1860s. As the poet of *Songs and Dances of Death*, Arseniy Golenishchev-Kutuzov, observed in his later memoirs, anything with a pleasing melody was generally frowned upon, whereas an unexpected or striking dissonance was received with great applause for its perceived novelty and expressionistic truth.⁸ Musorgsky championed these values even more steadfastly and stubbornly than his colleagues. Attitudes eventually shifted, and by the 1870s his stubbornness was seen as a serious flaw by the opposing camp and his friends alike.

Aside from the social factors of Musorgsky's artistic life, several other elements had profound influences upon him and his compositions. Death rates, especially among the poor, were very high in late nineteenth-century Russia. Disease, murder, depression,

⁷ David Brown, *Musorgsky: His Life and Works*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002, 12-13.

⁸ Arseniy Golenishchev-Kutuzov, in *Musorgsky Remembered*, edited by Alexandra Orlova, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991, 86-87.

alcoholism, and warfare were all quite common, making death a very present fact of life for Musorgsky. Serfdom was abolished when Musorgsky was 22, but social inequality and injustice were still rampant. As a result of the Emancipation Proclamation of 1861, he and his family lost a great deal of wealth, and he remained more or less destitute for the rest of his life, relying on friends and menial government jobs for financial support. Young Musorgsky had had a privileged upbringing, and he was quite close to many of his family's serfs during his childhood. He retained a degree of empathy and sympathy for the peasant class (from which he was partially descended, and which he effectively joined) for the rest of his life, a fact which is evidenced in his writings and compositions, and which was alternately praised and denounced by friends and family members.

Musorgsky's attitude towards death has proven to be elusive. Oskar von Rieseemann claims that "Death never appears to him [Musorgsky] as a peaceful, natural ending, but always as wanton cruelty, a senseless *cul-de-sac*, a hateful outrage."⁹ Shostakovich gives exactly the opposite reading. When discussing his fourteenth symphony, which was meant as a sort of appendix to his orchestration of *Songs and Dances of Death*, he wrote, "Composers such as Musorgsky have written works about death, works which have a soothing effect upon the listener."¹⁰ These two opposing views are evidence not only of Musorgsky's paradoxical personality, but of the myriad ways in which humans view death. His music portrays death in a multitude of lights, often highlighting the paradoxical duality of Benevolent Death who eases suffering and Malevolent Death who destroys life.

⁹ Oskar von Rieseemann, translated by Paul England, *Moussorgsky*, New York: AMS Press, 1970. Reprinted from the edition of 1929, 317.

¹⁰ Laurel Fay, "Musorgsky and Shostakovich" in *Musorgsky: In Memoriam 1881-1981* ed. Malcom Brown, Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1982, 220.

His circumstances were quite different from many of his contemporaries. He had no lover with whom he was very close, and his songs rarely mention romantic love in any serious fashion. He hated the idea of marriage for an artist. He was deeply hurt when Rimsky-Korsakov was married and even more so when Kutuzov announced his engagement.¹¹ His mother's death in 1866 was very hard on him. He had several friends who died around the time he composed *Songs and Dances*, friends whose deaths he evidently handled with great difficulty. In 1874, upon hearing of Viktor Hartmann's death, Musorgsky wrote to Stasov:

No, one cannot and must not be comforted, there can be and must be no consolation—it is a rotten mortality! If Nature is only coquetting with men, I shall have the honor of treating her like a coquette—that is, of trusting her as little as possible, keeping all my senses about me, when she tries to cheat me into taking the sky for a fiddlestick—or ought one, rather, like a brave soldier, to charge into the thick of life, have one's fling and go under? What does it all mean? In any case the dull old earth is no coquette, but takes every 'King of Nature' straight into her loathsome embrace, whoever he is—like an old worn-out hag, for whom anyone is good enough, since she has no choice.¹²

The nihilistic sentiments outlined in this portion of the letter, as well as the militaristic simile, strikingly foreshadow the message of Death as the Field Commander in the final song of the cycle. Also interesting to note is how Musorgsky describes Death in human terms like “coquette” and “worn-out hag.” Despite equating Death with the earth, or “Nature,” he is creating a very specific personification of Death; one that will be described later in this paper as the *Gay Deceiver*. The final sentence of the above-quoted passage is also exceedingly reminiscent of the core element of the medieval Dance of Death: Death will come for everyone, regardless of their station in life.

¹¹ Richard Taruskin, *Musorgsky: Eight Essays and an Epilogue* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993, 30-31. Taruskin believes this is evidence of the composer's latent homosexuality.

¹² Riesemann, 289.

An overall sense of futility, depression, and nihilism overshadowed St. Petersburg in the last decades of the nineteenth century and reached a boiling point at the beginning of the twentieth century. While the most notorious outcome of these circumstances was the 1917 revolution, it also yielded a plethora of creations by artists, writers, and composers during this time, works which commented on life, suffering, and death.¹³ Musorgsky died in 1881 at the young age of 42, but the negativity characteristic of St. Petersburg at the turn of the century is already evident in his later works.

It is clear from his correspondence and his compositions that he pondered questions of life and death extensively during the 1870s.¹⁴ It would seem from his reactions to the deaths of those close to him that he had a fearful and hateful view of death. Yet, this viewpoint is not consistent with the many portrayals of death in his music. This discrepancy would seem to speak to the Stasovian view of Musorgsky: the realist who valued above all the fidelity of his musical intentions. According to Stasov, he rarely sought to express his own inner emotions, and often fumbled when asked to do so.¹⁵ Rather, he preferred to portray the emotions of others and illustrate them as truthfully as he possibly could. Kutuzov claimed, in direct contradiction of Stasov, that it was precisely Musorgsky's change of heart concerning the expression of his own emotions during the 1870s that brought out the best of his natural talent.¹⁶

¹³ Mark D. Steinberg, *Petersburg Fin de Siècle*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011.

¹⁴ Jay Leyda and Sergei Bertensson editors, *The Musorgsky Reader: A Life of Modeste Petrovich Musorgsky in Letters and Documents*, New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1947.

¹⁵ Alexandra Orlova, ed., *Musorgsky Remembered*, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991, 6-10.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 81-99.

Russia had its own distinct way in which members of society dealt with the issue of death.¹⁷ Death was to be simultaneously feared and welcomed; it could take away both joy and suffering. In Russia at the time, popular folklore included a widely held belief in *naklanie*, a phenomenon which dictated that even speaking the name of Death was enough to invite it into one's life.¹⁸ Therefore creating four songs in which Death is not only named but personified was a very bold endeavor. Not insignificantly, Musorgsky had originally wanted to call the cycle simply "Ona" or "She" (the Russian noun *smert* (death) is a feminine noun, although Death appears in both genders throughout the cycle).

¹⁷ Robert Kastenbaum and Ruth Aisenberg *The Psychology of Death*, Concise Edition. New York: Springer Publishing Company, 1976, 39-86. "The concept of the *death system* is a way of encompassing the varied and complex relationships between death and the social structure. The death system is defined as 'a sociophysical network by which the relationship to mortality is meditated and expressed.'" Pg 60.

¹⁸ Emerson, 127.

CHAPTER III

COMPOSITIONAL STYLE

Musorgsky's brand of realism is somewhat different from his European contemporaries. Whereas as the Italian verists and French realists sought to present realistic pictures of life by portraying violence and tragedy in the lower classes in order to elicit a more visceral emotional reaction, Musorgsky's realism was less emotionally and politically charged, attempting to be more scientific and objective.¹⁹ He was obsessed with musically replicating Russian speech. M.D. Calvacoressi uses one of the definitions of realism given by the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* to best describe Musorgsky's music: "The realistic artist is he who tries to show facts and express feelings exactly as they are, without adornment, romantic distortions, exaggeration, or over-emphasis."²⁰ Musorgsky sought to convey real life through his music, and laboriously set the natural inflections of the Russian language in a quasi-recitative manner. He carefully crafted both melodic contours and rhythmic patterns to match spoken words as closely as possible. Thus, he rarely employed any melismatic writing, and intervals of more than a fifth are rare.²¹ The ideals he described bear a striking resemblance to those posited nearly three hundred years earlier by the Florentine Camerata. These ideals include the predominance of drama and human experience over fidelity to musical traditions and rules, and most critically, faithfully re-creating natural speech patterns in music.²²

¹⁹ M.D. Calvacoressi, *Mussorgsky*, New York: Collier Books, 1962, 32.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ M.D. Calvacoressi, *Moussorgsky's Musical Style*, *The Musical Quarterly*, Vol. 18, No. 4 (Oct., 1932), London: Oxford University Press, 530-546.

²² Jacopo Peri, *Le musiche sopra L'Euridice*, a facsimile of the Florence 1600 edition, New York: Broude Bros., 1973.

Musorgsky encountered the Florentines' ideas mainly in the work of Jacopo Peri through the writings of literary scholar Georg Gottfried Gervinus, who championed the aesthetic values proposed by Peri and his contemporaries. Gervinus defined three different types of spoken accents: grammatical or syllabic stress, rhetorical emphasis, and the "pathetic or affective accent."²³ It is the last which crosses into the realm of music. As the former two can be represented completely in writing, the affective accent, or *Empfindungsaccent*, can only be understood by the speaker's inflection, which can only be visually represented through musical notation.²⁴ Musorgsky was inspired by Gervinus's ideas and started setting Russian speech to music as faithfully as possible. In a letter to Rimsky-Korsakov, he wrote "Whatever speech I hear, whoever is speaking (or, the main thing, no matter what he is saying), my brain is already churning out the musical embodiment of such speech."²⁵

Musorgsky credited Darwin with corroborating his own theory that "the artistic depiction of beauty alone, in its material sense, is sheer childishness –art in its infancy."²⁶ Music's purpose, according to Musorgsky, was to illustrate the human condition realistically and communicate it effectively. He abhorred art for art's sake. In Hugo Riemann's *Musiklexicon*, the composer wrote of himself in a third-person autobiography, "The formula of his artistic *profession de foi* may be explained by his view, as a composer, of the task of art: art is a means for conversing with people, [it is] not an aim itself. This guiding principle has defined the whole of his creative activity."²⁷ And later

²³ Georg Gottfried Gervinus, *Händel und Shakespeare: zur Ästhetik der Tonkunst*, Leipzig: W. Engelmann, 1868, 200-235.

²⁴ Taruskin, *Eight Essays*, 77.

²⁵ *Ibid*, 80.

²⁶ Emerson, 68.

²⁷ Leyda and Bertensson, 419.

on in the manuscript, expressing still more Darwinian views, “Acknowledging that in the realm of art only artist reformers such as Palestrina, Bach, Gluck, Beethoven, Berlioz and Liszt have created the laws of art, he considers these laws as not immutable but liable to change and progress, like the entire spiritual world of man.”²⁸ He viewed himself as advancing the evolutionary process of music by rejecting the established rules and norms and creating a new, fresh musical language.

He had little formal training, being coached mainly by Balakirev, who acknowledged his own shortcomings when it came to harmony and counterpoint.

Because I am not a theorist . . . I could not teach him [Musorgsky] harmony (as, for instance, Rimsky-Korsakov now teaches it) . . . [but] I explained to him the form of compositions, and to do this we played through both Beethoven symphonies [as piano duets] and much else (Schumann, Schubert, Glinka, and others), analyzing the form.²⁹

Balakirev is hardly to blame. At the time, there were no conservatories or music schools in Russia. Chaikovsky was in the first graduating class of the St. Petersburg Conservatory in 1865, well after the Balakirev Circle had formed. He wrote of Musorgsky,

You are quite correct in characterizing Musorgsky as hopeless. His talent is perhaps the most remarkable of these [nationalist composers]. But he has a narrow nature . . . and a low nature, one which loves all that is coarse, crude, rough . . . He coquettes with his illiteracy and takes pride in his ignorance . . . But he has a real, even an original talent . . . A Musorgsky, for all his ugliness, speaks a new language. Beautiful it may not be, but it is fresh.³⁰

Musorgsky himself would likely have agreed with Chaikovsky. He was often modestly self-deprecating concerning his own musicianship, but justified his lack of technical ability with a strong sense of creative purpose. Music theory barely existed in

²⁸ Emerson, 70.

²⁹ David Brown, 12-13.

³⁰ Emerson, 115.

Russian translation, as Italian and German were still the musical languages of the time. Thus, Musorgsky's harmonic language rarely follows the established rules of Western common practice. He chose instead to utilize folk elements, including liberal usage of modality and melodically derived, often coarse, folk harmonies that he felt expressed the text as closely as possible.

The *fons et origo* of Mussorgsky's new idiom, of his harmonies and modal schemes, is to be found in Russia's folk music, and not so much in the solo tunes as in the less known choral songs, which carry us into a harmonic world of their own, unaccountable in terms of western music, and often disconcerting to the western ear.³¹

His music does not go so far as to be called atonal, though traditional functional tonality was a commodity of lesser value for him. Dissonances were rarely to be prepared and resolved in any standard fashion. Chords were essentially built out of tertian harmonies, but they could be stacked or superimposed upon each other to create a wider variety of sonorities. Chords were valued for their own individual sonic and emotional properties more than their functionality within a phrase.³²

His unorthodox style was not entirely the result of ignorance. Musorgsky was quite familiar with much of the music of the day and of the past. He greatly admired Liszt, Verdi, Beethoven, and Wagner.³³ Taruskin puts it quite eloquently when he says

Clearly, 'Europe' was something Musorgsky felt he could face up to . . . Roll [his] callowness, ignorance and innocence together, translate it all into Russian, and the specific nature of his Russian ideology, his national self-definition, will emerge. It is the ideology of *yurodstovo*, Holy Foolery, a state of perfect freedom from cogitation (brains) and charm (beauty), a state of perfect authenticity.³⁴

³¹ M.D. Calvocoressi, *Mussorgsky*, New York: J.M. Dent and Sons Ltd., 1946, 186.

³² *Ibid.*, 189.

³³ Taruskin, *Defining Russia Musically*, 71.

³⁴ *Ibid.* Taruskin equates brains with German music and beauty with Italian music from the Russian point of view.

What Musorgsky lacked in formal training, he made up for with an astonishing ability for tonal recall and a sensitivity for emotional expression through music. He was known to have played through entire movements of others' recent performances having only heard the music once.³⁵ While he had a definite gift for writing melody, his quest for realism often took precedent and his speech-centered melodies would prevail over a pleasing tune. According to Kutuzov, such was the style among the Balakirev circle, especially during the 1860s. In his memoirs, Kutuzov recalls how he too came to regard "pretty" music as somehow inferior to that which was unexpected and terse. He felt that Musorgsky was being untrue to his own nature during this time, and it was not until his later compositions that he was able to fully utilize his gift for melody.³⁶ Even his peers in the Balakirev Circle came to criticize his apparent lack of refinement. In a critique of Musorgsky's career written less than a month after his death, Cui backhandedly praises the composer's talents while focusing more on his faults. He lists three major shortcomings: his lack of facility with symphonic music, poor harmonization, and an over-obsession with accurately setting speech inflections to the point of losing the musical value in a given section.³⁷ He ends his ten-page critique by saying, "It is true that Musorgsky's works contain major defects and shortcomings, but without these shortcomings Musorgsky would have been a genius."³⁸ Rimsky-Korsakov later attended and then taught at the St. Petersburg Conservatory, the very institution which represented

³⁵ Emerson, 8.

³⁶ Orlova, *Musorgsky Remembered*, 81-99.

³⁷ Stuart Cambell, ed., *Russians on Russian Music, 1830-1880: An Anthology*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, 280.

³⁸ Cambell, 289.

the antithesis of all the *kuchka* had long upheld. His extensive revisions of most of Musorgsky's music are testament enough to his disapproval of his friend's ignorance.³⁹

Despite all opposition, and quite possibly due to the continued encouragement of his mentor Stasov, Musorgsky saw himself as a musical innovator who was advancing the art to its next evolutionary stage. After reading the theories of Darwin, he established two basic principles that would guide his compositions: "process," and "surprise." Process is "a celebration of the very fact of transition, of possible movement in multiple directions that is independent of beginnings and ends. Carried to its most exuberant extreme, processual writing would postpone closure, subvert full cadence, blur or avoid musical sectionalism, undermine functional harmony by opening it up, [and] increase tonal ambiguity."⁴⁰ Surprise, (also known as non-predetermination) is simply the utilization of unexpected musical gestures through which the element of process can be fully explored.⁴¹ Essentially, he strove for infinite formal permutations which could go so far as to erase any semblance of form all together.

Not being limited by conventional rules of form and harmony, his realist sensibility could explore uncharted possibilities. The result is an astonishingly diverse stylistic range. His songs are idiosyncratically bound to the text. Forms are fluid and flexible, themes and motives constantly undergo mutations, and biting dissonances are left unresolved, acting more effectively as moments of distinct emotional color. (Many of these unprecedented moments of dissonance were later "corrected" in editions of his

³⁹ Emerson, 31. Korsakov also tried to discredit Balakrev's harshly critical method of teaching in favor of a more standard technical educational approach to composing.

⁴⁰ Emerson, 68.

⁴¹ Ibid, 68.

music by Rimsky-Korsakov.)⁴² Something of a stylistic microcosm of Musorgsky's entire song output, *Songs and Dances of Death* displays widely varying and contrasting styles. Parts of "Lullaby" and "Field Commander" call for more declamatory speech mimicry, while other parts of those songs, as well as "Serenade" and "Trepak," utilize beautiful, luscious, soaring melodies. Various parts of the cycle employ distinctly martial or dance-like rhythms, while others flow in a more impressionistic and nebulous manner. These myriad characteristics can be seen throughout his body of songs.

⁴² Edward R. Reilly, *The Music of Moussorgsky: A Guide to the Editions*, New York: The Musical Newsletter, 1980.

CHAPTER IV

THE MEDIEVAL DANCE OF DEATH AND ITS LEGACY

The Dance of Death is a medieval allegorical concept of the all-conquering and equalizing power of death, expressed in the drama, poetry, music, and visual arts of Western Europe mainly in the late Middle Ages. Strictly speaking, it is a literary or pictorial representation of a procession or dance of both living and dead figures, the living arranged in order of their rank, from pope and emperor to child, clerk, and hermit, and the dead leading them to the grave. The dance of death had its origins in late 13th- or early 14th-century poems that combined the essential ideas of the inevitability and the impartiality of death.⁴³

Just as Russia had death on her mind in the nineteenth century, fourteenth-century Europe was likewise pre-occupied with death due to the extremely high mortality rates from bubonic plague and other diseases, wars, and the persecution of heretics. It is estimated that nearly one third of Europe, and perhaps one quarter of the world's population, met an early demise during the fourteenth century.⁴⁴ An important development during this time was the requiem mass, or mass for the dead. This service helped to solidify the Christian belief in life after death. While the requiem mass is meant to focus on the eternal life granted by Christ's self-sacrifice and the repose that comes with transition into the next realm, it was the *Dies Irae* theme which would garner the most attention from composers in later centuries. This section of the mass describes the judgment day, or day of wrath, during which all souls will receive final judgment for their sins here on earth and all of the cataclysms from the Book of Revelations will occur. The original chant melody has been used by countless composers since the Middle Ages to convey a sense of impending doom (see Figure 1).

⁴³ Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Dance of Death"
<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/154473/dance-of-death> accessed August 24, 2014.

⁴⁴ Kastenbaum and Aisenberg, 151.



Figure 1. Dies Irae Plainchant Melody⁴⁵

It was during the early medieval period that the “Dance of Death” also appeared, although it did not gain widespread popularity until the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, after which time its importance began to fade.⁴⁶ Psychologists Robert Kastenburg and Ruth Aisenbaum describe the Dance of Death as having

...originated from the custom of public dancing on the village green transfigured by the Black Death into a grisly whirl wherein Death himself becomes a participant. Indeed, nothing was more common in artistic productions than the depiction of Death as a person. The Dance of Death was also enacted as a theater piece in a direct form, as well as thinly disguised in burlesque, whose comedy was a fusion of sex and death.⁴⁷

This description uncannily fits at least two of Musorgsky’s songs. As will be discussed later, Death is a very literal participant in the Dance of Death in “Trepak,” in which Death dances with a man until he dies of cold and exhaustion. “Serenade” is certainly a fusion of sex and death, with the grotesque serenader divulging his carnal desires for a young dying woman. And of course the depiction of Death as a person is part of what defines the entire song cycle.

Often pictured as a skeleton in medieval sources, Death would escort people from various walks of life to their final destination. Death visited everyone from peasants to merchants to clergy to royalty in the numerous examples of pictorial *Totentanz* cycles, reminding people that death would come for everyone regardless of their station in life.

⁴⁵ Transcribed by author.

⁴⁶ Kathi Meyer-Baer, *Music of the Spheres and the Dance of Death: Studies in Musical Iconology*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970, 291-312.

⁴⁷ Kastenburg and Aisenbaum, 154-155.

Sometimes the skeletons are gently escorting someone to their grave, while other scenes depict a more violent struggle between the victims and their undertakers. In these various cycles, Death is not only seen as malevolent, but alternately as a jovial creature who comes to relieve all humans from their suffering. Some scholars propose that the term “Dance of Death” originates from a dance of the guild of grave diggers.⁴⁸ As death rates skyrocketed during the plague years, more and more people became aware of the grave diggers’ ritual. “From the expressions of the dancing skeletons shown in the books and paintings, the intention of the performance was not to warn, no *vado mori* idea, but to cheer the audience, to let them know that we who should know, want you to know that, after all, death is not a monster nor Satan.”⁴⁹

The *Totentanz* and the *Dies irae* were to gain new meaning and prominence in the nineteenth century with the rise of Romanticism and the Romantics’ focus on the supernatural. Saint-Saëns’ *Danse macabre*, Puccini’s *Le Villi*, Berlioz’s *Symphonie fantastique*, and Liszt’s *Totentanz* are some of the most enduring examples of the incorporation of these two themes. While Musorgsky despised Saint-Saëns’ work and died before Puccini’s career began, he certainly admired Berlioz, and was especially taken with Liszt’s composition. In a letter to Stasov, he wrote of it, “The Mystical picture of the ‘Dance of Death’ as variations on the liturgical ‘Dies Irae’ melody could only have been born in the head of a courageous European like Liszt.”⁵⁰ Balakirev was known to have played the piece often, and criticized others who did not see the genius in it.⁵¹ The influence of Liszt’s *Totentanz* can be heard in “Trepak” through the use and variation of

⁴⁸ Meyer-Baer, 312.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Alexandra Orlova, *Musorgsky’s Days and Works: A Biography in Documents*, Ann Arbor: UMI Research Pres, 1983, 326.

⁵¹ Ibid.

the *Dies irae* theme in a quite literal dance of death. Liszt's piece is a series of variations of the theme that illustrate a multifaceted view of death, from somber and foreboding to playful and innocent. The piece suggests that death comes to each of us in different ways, just as the ancient Totentanz cycles portrayed. A major source of inspiration for Liszt when composing *Totentanz* was "The Triumph of Death," a fresco cycle painted by Buonamico Buffalmacco between 1336 and 1341 in Pisa, Italy.⁵² Incidentally, Kutuzov originally gave the title "The Triumph of Death" to the poem which became the final song of the cycle, "Field Commander."⁵³

During the composition of the cycle, the songs were entitled *Danse macabre*.⁵⁴ The poet and composer took the Medieval and Renaissance form of the Danse macabre/Totentanz from various artists' renderings such as Hans Holbein the Younger, whose cycle of woodcarvings depicts death as a skeleton or group of skeletons who comes to claim everyone regardless of social stature or occupation (see Figure 2).



Figure 2. *Totentanz* Woodcarvings by Hans Holbein the Younger⁵⁵

⁵² James Walker, "Images of Death: The Poetry of Songs and Dances of Death." in *Musorgsky*, edited by Malcom Hamrick Brown, 237-248. Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1982, 244.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ According to Rimsky-Korsakov, *Night on Bald Mountain* had also been inspired by the *Danse macabre*. Orlova, *Musorgsky Remembered*, 58.

⁵⁵ Hans Holbein the Younger, *The Dance of Death: A Complete Facsimile of the Original 1538 Edition of Les simulachres & historiees faces de la mort*. New York: Dover Publications, 1970.

The resulting view of death as the great social equalizer was appealing to Musorgsky, who sympathized and empathized with the large peasant class of Russia for whom life held few blessings. Holbein's cycle of woodcuts and accompanying biblical verses and French quatrains warns, "Woe! Woe! Inhabitants of Earth, Where blighting cares so keenly strike, And, spite of rank, or wealth, or worth, Death—Death will visit all alike."⁵⁶ Musorgsky's songs give similar depictions of death to Holbein's woodcarvings; each song/carving presents a scene in which a personified Death figure comes to claim someone new and different from the last.

Modeled on the ancient Dance of Death tradition, the *Songs and Dances of Death* were originally conceived as a much larger grouping of scenes. In all of the Totentanz cycles, Death visits a variety of people, eliciting a variety of emotional responses. Had Musorgsky and Kutuzov continued to augment the song cycle, it would have had even greater variety, and therefore, a greater connection to the medieval tradition. They had plans for up to twelve songs.⁵⁷

1. "The Rich Man,"
2. "The Proletarian,"
3. "The Grand Gentleman,"
4. "The Dignitary,"
5. "The Tsar,"
6. "The Young Girl,"
7. "The Peasant,"
8. "The Child,"
9. "The Merchant,"
10. "The Warrior"
11. "The Priest,"
12. "The Poet."

⁵⁶ Holbein, 110.

⁵⁷ Orlova, *Musorgsky Remembered*, 157

“The Young Girl,” “The Peasant,” and “The Child” likely became the first three of the extant songs. After the first of the songs was composed,⁵⁸ Stasov urged Kutuzov to continue “. . . and to put together, in 5 or 6 scenes, a complete work, *The Russian Dance of Death*.”⁵⁹ Stasov wrote in a letter to Rimsky-Korsakov, “in his [Musorgsky’s] *Danse macabre* (three numbers of which you know) he has begun a 4th: ‘Monk’—very good—and is starting a 5th: ‘Anika the Warrior and Death.’”⁶⁰ In his autobiographical note in Riemann’s *Musiklexicon*, Musorgsky states that he had written an album entitled *Danse Macabre* in five scenes.⁶¹ Despite their grandiose plans, only four songs were completed: “Lullaby,” “Serenade,” “Trepak,” and “Field Commander.”

⁵⁸“Trepak” was the first song to be composed but according to Musorgsky’s wishes, was placed as the third song in publication. Rimsky-Korsakov re-ordered the songs in his edition with “Trepak” first.

⁵⁹ Alexandra Orlova, *Musorgsky’s Days and Works*, Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1983, 446.

⁶⁰ Leyda and Bertensson, 340. Stasov’s titles do not match those given in other sources. “The Monk” was likely the same as the “The Priest” while “Anika the Warrior” may have been “The Warrior.”

⁶¹ Leyda and Bertensson, 418. He wrote this in 1880 knowing that it would be at least a year before it would be published, and thus projected several assumptions about his future accomplishments, including the contemporaneous printings of his unfinished operas, *Khovanshchina* and *The Fair at Sorochintzi*.

CHAPTER V

PERFORMANCE GUIDE TO *SONGS AND DANCES OF DEATH*

Musorgsky's final song cycle was composed in a very close collaboration with the poet, Arseny Golenishchev-Kutuzov. Each song shows Death in a different light by using various personifications in different song/poem types: lullaby, serenade, folk dance, and triumphal march. In each song, the paradoxical nature of Death as a benevolent and/or fearsome specter is revealed in different ways and to varying degrees.

In *Songs and Dances of Death*, as with the medieval Dance of Death, Death is rarely an evil or malevolent entity.

Death assumes four distinct guises, and in each of the songs, "She" or "He" comes in response to a human need, fulfilling a function that the human or humans in question are incapable of fulfilling. The irony and ambiguity achieved by the presentation of Death as man's helper and comforter – a so-to-speak wiser and more humane "human"—underlies and unites the entire cycle, imparting to it much of its thematic interest.⁶²

The cycle presents death not as an abstract, formless concept which cannot be fully comprehended, but as a physical, humanoid, animated being which can be faced and reckoned with. In so doing, the fear of the unknown suddenly vanishes. Yet Musorgsky's vision of death is a decidedly nihilistic one. Unlike in the works of Brahms, Strauss and other composers who also wrote songs about death, there is no redemption or transfiguration that occurs.⁶³ There is only the consolation that earthly suffering has ended. Death's proclamation in the final song, "Field Commander" is that there is no escape from death, no higher meaning, and there will be no resurrection; death is forever. Given the state of life for many Russians at the time, such a nihilistic concept of death

⁶² Walker, 239.

⁶³ Brahms's *Vier ernste Gesänge* and Strauss's *Vier letzte Lieder* both approach death in different ways that highlight love, redemption, and transfiguration.

may have actually represented a hopeful future and a positive change from their present circumstances. It is therefore imperative that the performer not approach the songs with the popular one-dimensional view of Death as the Grim Reaper. Instead, a more complex psychological profile should be evident.

A common psychological response to the thought of death is to recast death as a knowable, recognizable figure with human qualities and physical features.⁶⁴ While certain singular songs had already been written which portrayed Death as some sort of personified character,⁶⁵ never before had an entire cycle been devoted to portraying human mortality from the perspective of Death rather than humanity. The psychological profile of Death created by Musorgsky and Kutuzov is different in each song, conveying the multitude of ways in which humans view death. The resulting personifications are strikingly similar to those found in a groundbreaking study done by psychologists Robert Kastenbaum and Ruth Aisenberg starting in the 1970s and continuing into the beginning of the twenty-first century.⁶⁶ Four types of personifications appeared to be the most common: *Macabre*, *Gay Deceiver*, *Gentle Comforter*, and *Automaton*.⁶⁷ The first three personifications appear in Musorgsky's songs and will be discussed in turn.

The cyclical nature of *Songs and Dances of Death* is somewhat different than what is seen in the major German song cycles of Schumann or Schubert. There are no musical connections between the songs, and nothing to suggest any key relations from one song to the next. Editions for high, low, or medium voice have differing key

⁶⁴ Robert Kastenbaum and Ruth Aisenberg, *The Psychology of Death, Concise Edition*, New York: Springer Publishing Company, 1976, 65.

⁶⁵ Schubert's songs "Erlkönig," "Der Tod und das Mädchen," and "Der Jüngling und der Tod" as well as Loewe's songs "Erlkönig," and "Tod und Tödin" all use different personifications of death.

⁶⁶ Robert Kastenbaum, *The Psychology of Death*, Third Edition, New York: Springer Publishing Co, 2000, 147.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

relationships between the songs. Rather, the cyclical connection is textual and thematic. Just like the medieval cycles of woodcuts, poems, and frescos, *Songs and Dances of Death* is its own Dance of Death cycle in that Death visits a different type of person in each scenario. Each song presents a dramatic scene which utilizes death personifications, begins with a narrative, and ends with Death's proclamations.

Despite these cyclical elements (or perhaps because of them), the music of each song is stylistically distinctive. The use of contrast, both within the individual songs and throughout the whole cycle, is pervasive and quite effective. As in the medieval Dance of Death cycles, each song is a vignette that displays a single facet of the omnipotence of Death. Therefore, the aforementioned stylistic variance between songs actually helps to tie the cycle together. Along with the Dance of Death, applying the Kastenbaum/Aisenberg personifications to the characters of Death reveals opportunities for a much deeper understanding of the songs and their meanings. The levels of contrast, subtlety, and nuance that can be achieved when one takes these factors into account create a deeply moving and thought-provoking interpretation of Musorgsky's final cycle.

Lullaby

"Lullaby," is comprised of an opening narrative and ensuing conversation between Death and the mother of a dying child. The song begins with a four-bar piano introduction which sets the scene with a winding, chromatic melody comprised of a sort of octatonic scale (B#, C#, D, E, E#, F#, G#, A) doubled at the octave (see Figure 3). The exotic sounding scale and meandering unison melody suggest the gloominess, exhaustion, and worrisome atmosphere of the house of the mother and child. The seemingly aimless melody constantly defies expectations by evading resolution and

avoiding any kind of pattern. One is unsure of where it will lead, just as the mother is unsure of the fate of her feverish child. The introduction ends suddenly as the parallel octave melody splits into a major tenth as if to portray the mother being jolted from an uneasy half-sleep by the groaning of her child. The narrative begins with an odd progression (D diminished, A6 augmented, C# major), and states very simply and coldly that “the child is groaning” (СТОИЕТ РЕБЕНОК).⁶⁸

The image shows a musical score for the song "Stonnet re-be-nok" (The Child is Groaning) by Modest Mussorgsky. The score is in 4/4 time and marked "Lento doloroso." It is published by Paul Lamm. The score consists of two systems. The first system shows the piano introduction, with a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The piano part begins with a series of chords: D diminished, A6 augmented, and C# major. The vocal part enters with the lyrics "Стоиет ре-бе-нок." (Stonnet re-be-nok). The second system shows the vocal entrance with the lyrics "Све-ча, на-га-ра-я, / Der Schein einer Ker-ze" (The glow of a candle). The piano part continues with a similar harmonic progression.

Figure 3. Octatonic Introductory Melody and Vocal Entrance⁶⁹

The serpentine introductory melody is repeated and then modified as B# becomes B natural in a series of triadic arpeggios (see Figure 4). The narrative describes the setting with dimly flickering candles and rocking cradle which define the mother’s all-night vigil to watch over her sick child. The introductory figure, once again modified, is clearly presented in A# minor, rhythmically augmented and separated by eighth rests on the “and” of each beat as the narrative transitions from the mother to the approach of Death

⁶⁸ Shostakovich quotes this motive almost directly in the opening lines of his *Symphony 14*.

⁶⁹ Pavel Lamm, ed., *M.P. Mussorgsky: Complete Collected Works, Vol. V, Series 9: Songs and Dances of Death for voice and piano*, Moscow: Muzgiz, 1931, 6.

(see Figure 5). The narrator doubles the piano's melody with a description of Death's slow, methodical approach which ends with Death "compassionately" knocking on the door. Another major tenth dyad (modulated up a fifth from that which jolted the mother awake and this time doubled at the octave) is accented at the word "knocks" (стук!) (see Figure 5, fourth measure). Immediately following is a frantic tremolo accompaniment as the narrator describes the mother's trepidation at opening the door.

The image shows a musical score for a lullaby. It consists of a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line is written in a single staff with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The lyrics are in Russian and German. The piano accompaniment is written in two staves (treble and bass clefs) and features a prominent triadic arpeggio pattern in the right hand. The tempo/mood marking 'poco dim.' is present in the piano part.

Lyrics:

ча, на-га-ра-я, Тус-кло мер-ца-ет кру-гом. —
 Schein einer Ker-ze Flak-kerl im Dun-ke-l der Nacht. —

poco dim.

Figure 4. Triadic Arpeggios in “Lullaby”⁷⁰

⁷⁰ Lamm, 6-7.

Moderato tranquillo. a mezza voce

Ра . ным ра . не . хонько в дверь, о . сто . ро . ж - но, Смерть сер . до . боль . на . я
Früh in der Däm . merung leis an die Tü - re Tod, der Barmher - zi . ge,

Moderato tranquillo.

pp

fagitato *dim.*

стук! Вздры . ну . ла мать, зг . ля . ну . лась тре . во . ж - но . . .
schl. „Kommst du nach ihm?“ es er . zit - tert die Mut - ter . . .

agitato

f *cresc.* *poco dim.*

Figure 5. Variation of Introductory Theme and “Knock”⁷¹

The second major section is divided into nine smaller sections which alternate between the two characters as shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Sections of “Lullaby”

Introductory narrative – Beginning to m.21
Death – mm. 22-32
Mother – mm. 33-36
Death – mm. 36-37
Mother – mm. 38-41
Death – mm. 41-42
Mother – mm. 43-45
Death – mm. 45-47
Mother – mm. 48-51
Death – mm. 51-54 (end)

⁷¹ Lamm, 7.

Death's opening speech is her longest oration of the song and immediately establishes a tonal center of A (fluctuating between major and minor) to offset the tonal ambiguity and instability of the introduction. The constant vacillation between major and minor in Death's repetitions can be seen to represent the duality of Death; she is a comforter who is relieving the sufferings of a sick child and the struggles of a worried mother, but she is also taking away the mother's joy in the form of her child. Such modal fluidity was also ubiquitous in Russian folk music, suggesting that the mother is a peasant rather than a noble woman.

Death calmly reassures the mother that she can rest now because she (Death) will take better care of the child. Her speech ends with "Sweeter than you I will sing." The music of this phrase is an altered form of the repeated lullaby motive which will punctuate the rest of the song (see Examples 7 and 7a). The constant repetition and variation of the lullaby motive along with the consistent medium-low tessitura work together to portray Death as calm and unwavering, in contrast to the mother's interjections.

The image displays two musical examples of a lullaby motive.
Figure 6 (left): Labeled *rallent. e dim. cantabile*. The vocal line features a triplet of eighth notes. The lyrics are "Слаще тебя я спою." and "Süßer, als du, sing ich ein." The piano accompaniment consists of a simple harmonic line in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand.
Figure 6a (right): Labeled *allargando*. The vocal line features a triplet of eighth notes. The lyrics are "Ба-юш-ки, ба-ю, ба-ю." and "Schla-fe, mein Kna-be, schlaf ein." The piano accompaniment is similar to Figure 6, with a harmonic line in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand.

Figure 6. Altered Lullaby Motive⁷² Figure 6a. Lullaby Motive⁷³

⁷² Lamm, 9.

⁷³ Ibid.

Taking into consideration the femininity of Death in this case, one might view her as another mother figure, taking over where the child's earthly mother has failed.

“Death...comes in response to a human need, fulfilling a function that the human or humans in question are incapable of fulfilling.”⁷⁴

During the ensuing conversation, Death grows calmer and more peaceful. Each of her subsequent sections follows the same short musical pattern with which she began her opening phrase, another variation of the lullaby motive (see Figure 7). Each phrase ends with the lullaby, “baiushky baiu baiu.” The word *baiat* in Russian means “to charm” with the diminutive form being a common lullaby. Death is literally trying to charm the child and protect it from any suffering. In all but the final iteration of the lullaby, she ends by skipping down a sixth from A to C, the third of the tonic A minor chord. The lack of resolution created by this cadence illustrates that the child is not yet hers. Death closes the song with the lullaby motive finally resolving down an octave to the root of the tonic A minor chord, marking the child's death with a simple eighth note (see Figure 8).

Lento funesto. ~

„Полно пугать-ся, мой друг!
 „Ruh-ig, erschrick nicht, mein Freund!

Lento funesto.

Figure 7. Death's Opening Phrase in “Lullaby”⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Walker, 239.

⁷⁵ Lamm, 8.

The image shows a musical score for a lullaby. The top staff is a vocal line in treble clef, marked *rallentando*. It features two triplets of eighth notes. Below the staff are the lyrics in Russian: "Ба-юш-ки, ба-ю, ба-ю." and in German: "Schlafe, mein Kna-be, schlafe in." The bottom two staves are for piano accompaniment, with the right hand in treble clef and the left hand in bass clef. The piano part is marked *pp* and *ppp*, indicating very soft dynamics. The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4.

Figure 8. Final Lullaby Motive⁷⁶

At the same time that Death is growing calmer, the mother grows more frantic and desperate. As the song progresses, the mother quickly moves through the various stages of death, or in this case, grief. Dr. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, in her seminal book *On Death and Dying*, describes five stages of human responses to dying which she observed during her extensive work with dying patients.⁷⁷ This song shows the Kübler-Ross stages (denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance) from the common perspective of someone who is grieving, rather than someone who is dying. The mother begins in denial, tending to her child as though she expects him to pull through his illness. Her denial is evident in her first response to Death, “Be quiet, my child is raving and flailing and tearing my soul into pieces.” She is telling Death to be quiet as if the specter were just another person coming to check on them. The mother’s dynamics are marked *pianissimo* at the beginning of the phrase with no dynamic changes indicated. The mother speaks softly so as not to wake the child and to show Death how softly to converse. At

⁷⁶ Lamm, 11.

⁷⁷ Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, *On Death and Dying*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1969, 37.

some level she may know that the child will not survive the night, but she refuses to allow that option to enter her consciousness. Even with Death literally at the doorstep, she continues tending to the child.

With Death's response, "Well, with me he will soon be calm, baiushky baiu baiu" the mother becomes fearful and angry, denouncing Death for her presence. The mother's dynamics increase and the tessitura rises to the highest point of the song (depending on the key, either F, F#, or A above middle C for males voices, an octave higher for female voices) as she again demands that Death be quiet, as though Death's lullaby is causing the child's symptoms to get worse. The mother's anger and tonal instability increase during her next phrase which begins on a highly dissonant chord, composed of two tritones offset by a major third (F, A, B, D#, F) followed by a series of more triadically conceived mutations of said chord (see Figure 9). She curses Death, telling her to stop before she destroys the mother's joy. Death responds quickly, almost interrupting with a soft, gentle "No, I will evoke peaceful dreams in the boy." In the mother's final section, marked *con dolore*, the music becomes even more chromatic and unstable until she finally concedes an unwilling defeat as she asks for just a few more moments before Death's terrible song lulls her child into eternal slumber (see Figure 10). The mother's last line, "Have mercy! Wait for just a moment before ending your dreadful song" is a combination of bargaining for a few more minutes with the child, and acceptance of the child's inevitable death.

Agitato. *con dolore* *dim.*

Прочь ты, прокля-та-я! Лас-кой сво-е-ю сгу-бишь ты ра-дость мо-ю.
Fort, du Verfluchtesier! Las-se ihn le-ben! O, die-se schreck-li-che Pein!

Agitato. *sf* *pp*

Figure 9. Chord Mutations⁷⁸

Agitato. *con dolore*

Сжаль-ся, пожди до-пе-вать, хо-ть — мгно-ве-нье, Страшную пес-ню тво-ю!
War-te, er-bar-medich doch, lass — dein Sin-gen, schau.er.völl.klein-get dein Lied!

Agitato. *cresc.* *dim.* **Lent**

Figure 10. Tonal Instability in Mother's Final Line⁷⁹

As illustrated above, utilizing the stages of grief in the interpretation of the mother adds layers to her character which not only create more dramatic interest, but add to the realism of the song as well. The performer can effectively portray these stages by creating a dramatic trajectory for the mother with the use of dynamic variation and timbral shifts. Denial calls for a calm, medium dynamic with an underlying sense of urgency manifested as a faster vibrato speed, whereas anger requires greater volume and intensification of frontal resonance to bring about a piercing, snarling tone. Depression

⁷⁸ Lamm, 10.

⁷⁹ Lamm, 11.

requires a darker color brought about by greater vertical pharyngeal space, and a less intense vibrato speed. Bargaining and acceptance can be affected by a medium tone color with a faster vibrato, creating a sense of desperation and longing.

In Kastenbaum and Aisenberg's study of death personifications, the *Gentle Comforter* was usually an older person, and had no malicious intent, but rather had the purpose of comforting those who were suffering or experiencing death in an uncomfortable way. "The *Gentle Comforter* has a wise and reassuring appearance. He is quiet and powerful, sympathetic and understanding."⁸⁰ This description fits perfectly into the portrayal of Death in "Lullaby." As the mother grows more frantic, Death becomes more calm and reassuring. While it may seem natural to portray Death with a darker, menacing vocal timbre, it would be completely inappropriate to interpret the character of Death in this song in a violent, malevolent, or evil fashion. This song's effectiveness comes from the juxtaposition of the mother's growing grief and Death's increasing peacefulness. Interpreting Death as a gentle comforter and the mother as progressing through the stages of grief supplies necessary complexity and intrigue to their characters. Death's calm nature can be portrayed through the use of a medium tone color and a calm and pleasing vibrato, not too wide, and not too fast. In some cases, the performer may wish to exercise a straight tone to counteract the mother's urgency.

Serenade

"Serenade" is divided into two major sections: an opening narrative followed by Death's seduction of a young girl. Musorgsky's gift for writing melody, oft lauded by Kutuzov and other peers,⁸¹ is immediately apparent in the striking melodic contours and

⁸⁰ Kastenbaum and Aisenberg, 130-131.

⁸¹ Orlova, *Musorgsky Remembered*, 81-99.

the lush incidental harmonies they create. Musorgsky generally tended to stay away from melodic leaps of more than a fifth in his vocal music, but this song is full of unexpected sixths and sevenths, often prepared and/or resolved by an additional leap in the same direction, rather than by the more conventional stepwise contrary motion.

The entire first section from the beginning up to measure 33 is tonally quite ambiguous, with no clear key area established. An open key signature is given along with liberal use of accidentals to create a nebulous atmosphere. The song begins with a single half note octave B with a fermata in the piano. In effect, the song is beginning on a leading tone, as the vocal line begins in the second measure on a C. The opening narrative describes a beautiful dark blue starlit sky with a starkly transparent repetitive D# diminished 7th chord in alternating inversions in the right hand of the piano and a low B in the bass, creating an oscillating B7 \flat 9 chord. The bass note ascends a minor ninth on every other measure only to return to B and then drop back to its original octave. The resulting C – B movement often doubles the vocal melody (see Figure 11). This atmospheric accompanimental pattern permeates the entire opening section through numerous chord mutations and an endlessly shifting melody. The opening narration gives a beautiful yet melancholy account of the dying girl's struggles through the use of large ascending melodic leaps followed by stepwise descending lines (see Figure 12). The stage is set for Death's serenade as the narrator drones on a repeated A \flat , "Death sings out his serenade." An uneasy cadence built upon a quartal harmony resolves suddenly into a clearly defined E \flat minor motive as Death begins his song (see Figure 13).

Figure 11 shows two systems of musical notation. The first system is marked [Moderato] and features a vocal line with Russian lyrics: "Не га вол шеб на я, ночь го пу" and German lyrics: "Wol ni ge Mit ler.nacht, Ster ne im". The piano accompaniment includes a prominent jumping bass line in the left hand, starting with a *pp* dynamic. The second system continues the vocal line with Russian lyrics: "ба я, Тре петный сум рак вес ны..." and German lyrics: "Wan en, Nor tischer Früh ling im Land...". The piano accompaniment continues with similar rhythmic patterns.

Figure 11. Leading Tone Introduction and Jumping Bass Line⁸²

Figure 12 consists of four lines of musical notation, each with a vocal line and Russian/German lyrics. The first line is marked *cresc.* and has lyrics: "- ны. Сон не смы ка ет бле стя щи е" / "- bannl. Schlaf los ihr Au ge in fieb ri get". The second line is marked *ч.п.* and has lyrics: "о чи Жизнь к нас лаж де" / "Schim mer... O, wie das Her". The third line is marked *p* and has lyrics: "- нью зо вет; А под о" / "- ge er glüht! Un ten at". The fourth line has lyrics: "- кош ком, мол ча ны пол но чи," / "Fen ster er lönt ei ne Stim me".

Figure 12. Melodic Leaps⁸³

⁸² Lamm, 12.

⁸³ Lamm, 13-14.

cresc. *dim. e rallentando*

Смерть се - ре - на - ду по - ет: _____
 Tod singt zur Lau - le sein Lied: _____

dim. e rallentando

sfp

L'istesso tempo (alla breve)

„В мра - ке не - во - ли, су - ро - вой и тес - ной,
 „Trüb, wie im Klo - ster, ver - schlos - sen, ver - git - tert“

L'istesso tempo (alla breve)

Figure 13. Key Change Transition to Death's Serenade Motive⁸⁴

Death's serenade is divided further into four smaller sections. Section 1 starts at measure 34 and continues until 62. Section two lasts from measure 63 until 72. Section three is from measure 73 to 98, and section four from 99 to the end. The first and the third sections use the same musical theme shown in the *L'istesso Tempo (alla breve)* in example 14 to portray Death seducing his subject. A pulsating 6/8 rhythm provides a lustily flowing melodic line with a distinctly sexual drive, which tinges the otherwise innocent poetry with a clear ulterior motive.

“In the shadow of captivity severe and tight,
 Your youth fades,
 I am your mysterious knight.
 Through miraculous power

⁸⁴ Lamm, 14.

I free you.
 Stand, look at yourself,
 Your beautiful face shines transparently,
 Rosy cheeks, wavy hair
 Encircles your waist like clouds.”⁸⁵

Death knows that his love for the girl can only be consummated through her demise. The melodic emphasis of the B \flat via its placement on the downbeat of each measure and its longer rhythmic value hint at Death’s single-minded goal and his strong drive to achieve that goal; namely, the seduction and acquisition of the young girl.

The second and fourth sections keep the pulsating rhythm while relinquishing tonal stability as Death finds himself being inadvertently seduced by the dying girl. The harmony becomes more chromatic and the melody less focused, with weaker resolutions and greater leaps to suggest Death losing control of his emotions (see Figure 14).

The image shows a musical score for a section of a piece. It consists of two systems of music. The first system is marked 'poco capriccioso' and '17'. The vocal line has the lyrics: 'При - - стальных глаз го - лу - бо - е - си - я - нье, / Blau - - ist dein Blick, wie die Blu - me - der Saa - ten,'. The piano accompaniment features a pulsating rhythm with a 'pp' dynamic and a 'cresc.' marking. The second system continues the vocal line with the lyrics: 'Яр - - - - - че не - бес и - ог - ня; / Strah - - - - - lend, wie Him - mel - im Mai;'. The piano accompaniment continues with similar chromatic and rhythmic patterns.

Figure 14. Death Being Seduced in Section Two⁸⁶

⁸⁵ My translation

⁸⁶ Lamm, 16.

“Fixed light blue eyes shining
 Brighter than heavens and fire.
 By the means of torrid heat of mid-day your breath flutters.
 You seduce me.”⁸⁷

Death’s carnal side is evident in the text of the fourth section as he trembles upon touching her, and can barely control himself at the thought of her embrace (see Figure 15). While the harmony becomes more wayward a pedal bass note anchors the tonal structure from going too far astray, and the phrases generally begin and resolve on the tonic (G \flat major in the second section, E \flat minor in the fourth section). The song concludes with Death’s final triumphant roar, “You are mine!” on an ascending octave leap on the tonic pitch in E \flat minor as the girl finally gives up her last breath (see Figure 16).

The image shows two systems of musical notation. Each system consists of a vocal line (treble clef) and a piano accompaniment (grand staff). The first system is marked *pp* and includes the lyrics: "He - жен твой стан, у - по - ни - телен трепет. О, за - ду - Schtark - ist dein Leib, Mich berauscht deine N h.e... O, wie be -". The piano part features a steady eighth-note bass line and chords in the right hand. The second system is also marked *pp* and includes the lyrics: "- шу я те - бя в крепких об' я - тьях; любовный мой ле - пет слушай... geh - re ich dein! Hol - de Um - ar - tung... Ich will dir ge - steh - en, h  - re...". The piano part includes dynamic markings *dim.* and *pp*.

Figure 15. Death Being Seduced in Section Four⁸⁸

“Your soft waist, entrancing trepidation,
 O, I shall strangle you in strong embraces!”

⁸⁷ My Translation

⁸⁸ Lamm, 18.

The image shows a musical score for a vocal piece. The top staff is the vocal line, starting with a piano (*ppp*) and parlando instruction. The lyrics are in Russian and German. The Russian lyrics are "МОЛ - ЧИ... ТЫ МО - Я!" and the German lyrics are "sei still... Du bist mein!". The vocal line has a dynamic change to *f* (forte) in the second measure. The piano accompaniment is on the bottom two staves, starting with a piano (*ppp*) dynamic and a *ffsf* (fortissimo sostenuto) dynamic in the second measure. The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat), and the time signature is 4/4.

Figure 16. “You are mine!”⁸⁹

This is a classic example of the *Gay Deceiver* personification. Death is young, handsome, and makes promises of a better life if she comes with him. “The *Gay Deceiver* is a physically attractive and sophisticated person who tempts his victims with veiled promises of pleasure—then delivers them unto death.”⁹⁰ The song effectively portrays both the benevolent and malicious aspects of death; Death is always looking for more victims to steal from this life and may go about the task in dubious ways, yet for those who are sick, suffering, poor, and depressed, Death’s touch can be very inviting.

While the character of Death in this song is certainly more conniving and driven by less altruistic motives, an overly dark and foreboding interpretation of Death in this song would detract from his character, and diminish the song’s effectiveness. Death should be attractive and suave rather than harsh and overbearing. Of great importance are the sections in which Death is being inadvertently seduced by the girl. These sections paint a picture of Death as having human urges and weaknesses, rather than an all-powerful, indifferent spectral abstraction. His intense desire can be effectively illustrated with an intensification of vibrato, greater consonant articulation, and a hushed yet energized tone, as though he is just barely able to contain his excitement. The more

⁸⁹ Lamm, 18.

⁹⁰ Kastenbaum and Aisenberg, 137.

sweeping melodic sections, in which Death is describing the wonders in store for the young girl if she joins him, should be sung with a seamless legato connection, and at times a boastfully stentorian tone to display Death's inflated confidence and machismo. The final line "You are mine!" should be filled with the grim satisfaction that his seductive ruse has worked.

Trepak

A slightly less Machiavellian variation of the *Gay Deceiver* is seen in "Trepak." Again, a menacing interpretation of the Death character in this song would be contrary to the music and the poetry. While his plans may appear devious to humanity, one must remember that the song is from Death's perspective, and can portray a very different view of mortality if done correctly.

In this song Death finds a drunk peasant wandering home one night through a blizzard and decides to dance the Trepak⁹¹ with him until he freezes to death. Death is playful in this song, whipping the blizzard into a jovial frenzy illustrated through frantic scalar passages in the piano. Death dances with the poor drunkard until he passes out in the snow and dies a quiet, peaceful death.

The "Dance of Death" is taken in quite literal terms here, as Death actually dances with his victim until the man's life is extinguished. Riesemann argues that Death's words in the peaceful ending of the song are not meant to be consoling, but are rather "...spoken in contemptuous scorn, and their mocking grin is made more uncanny by the magical music to which Moussorgsky has set them."⁹² Riesemann's interpretation of the character of Death in this case may be arguable, but contempt and scorn seem to be overly dramatic

⁹¹ A ubiquitous Russian folk dance.

⁹² Riesemann, 319.

and negative sentiments. Death as the *Gay Deceiver* may be deceptive, but never scornful or contemptuous. Death's final lines of which Riesemann speaks are:

“Sleep, my old friend, lucky peasant,
 Summer has come, blooming!
 Above the field the sun is laughing, and the sickles are working,
 The song is being sung, doves are flying...”⁹³

The music is as peaceful and serene as the words are, suggesting some similarities to the *Gentle Comforter*. For someone to project scorn and contempt onto this scene is to assert an unwavering vileness and malevolence onto Death which is not only counterproductive to this song but is a difficult generalization to substantiate. Perhaps a more effective reading of this scene, and the whole song, is that Death sees a drunk peasant wandering through a storm and either takes pity on him and decides to ease his earthly suffering (*Gentle Comforter*) or sees an opportunity to playfully deceive the man into surrendering unto him (*Gay Deceiver*).

The through-composed structure of “Trepak” is specific to the poetry. The song begins with a cold, hollow progression of three open-fifth chords (F5, A5, and F#5), punctuated by partial statements of the *Dies irae* theme in the bass (see Figure 16). The use of the *Dies irae* theme throughout the song betrays some of Musorgsky's European influence and serves as a constant reminder of the poor man's imminent demise. Different parts of the original chant melody are used and modified at various points throughout the song, highlighting the multi-faceted nature of death (see Figure 17). The narrator then describes a frozen, stark landscape. As the scene continues to be set, a tremolo figure in the right hand mirrors the vocal melody as the *Dies irae* theme is continually modified in the bass (see Figure 18). This pattern continues until the narrator

⁹³ My translation

stops to say “look, there it [the peasant man] is.” An ostinato bass which is constructed from other fragments of the *Dies irae* then begins the Trepak dance as Death spots a man wandering through the bleak landscape (see Figure 19). The rhythmic ostinato gives way to a livelier homophonic accompaniment as the narration ends and Death begins to speak to the man, luring him into the dance (see Figure 20). He says that he will warm the man with a snowball fight. The time signature constantly alternates between 4/4 and 3/2 to fit the pulse of the dance (see Figure 21).⁹⁴

Herausgegeben von Paul LAMM.

Lento assai. Tranquillo.

Лес, да по - ля - ны, без - лю - дье кру - гом;
 Wald, kei - ne Pfa - de, kein Haus in der Näh.

Lento assai. Tranquillo.

pp

pp

pp

Dies irae **Dies irae**

Figure 17. Opening Chords and Dies Irae in Bass⁹⁵

⁹⁴ Edward Garden, “Balakirev’s Influence on Musorgsky” In *Musorgsky: In Memoriam 1881-1981*, ed. Malcom Brown. Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1982, 23. This alternation of time signatures is characteristic of many Russian folk songs. The technique, along with the alternation of major and minor, was likely learned from Balakirev, who collected and arranged an extensive collection of folk songs.

⁹⁵ Lamm, 19.

Dies irae plainchant




"Trepak" theme Birdsong theme



Figure 18. Uses of Different Sections of Original Plainchant Melody⁹⁶

The Trepak theme underlies much of the song, occurring whenever the actual dance happens. Section "A" of the theme is taken from the second, third, and fourth notes of the Dies irae chant, and ties together the various other sections of the song as well, as can be seen in Figure 19, m.1 and Figure 22, m.2. The Birdsong theme ("C") is taken from another portion of the original chant and occurs several times in the final section of the song (see Figure 25) as the storm abates and birds are heard chirping as morning rises and the poor man falls into eternal slumber.



Вью - - га и пла - чет и сто - нет; Чу - ет - ся, буд - то
Wü - - ten - des Stur - mes - ge - tö - - se; War es nicht... Schluchzen...

Dies Irae Variation 1 Variation 2 Variation 3

Figure 19. Variations of Dies Irae Theme⁹⁷

⁹⁶ For a more extensive illustration of the uses of the Dies Irae theme, see Walker, 240.

⁹⁷ Lamm, 19.

poco più mosso.

так и есть! В тем - но - те _____
schau nur hin! *Fasst - der Tod _____*

poco più mosso.

[p]

Trepak Bezins

Figure 20. Dies Irae Becomes the Trepak⁹⁸

Allegretto moderato e pesante.

Ох, мужичок, стари - чок у - бо - гоЙ, Пьян напился, поплел - ся до - ро - гоЙ;
Seht mal den Süu - fer, den al - ten Süu - ler! Hal ei - nen Kausch, kan den Weg nicht fin - den!

Allegretto moderato e pesante.

Figure 21. Death's Homophonic Accompaniment⁹⁹

⁹⁸ Lamm, 20.

⁹⁹ Lamm, 21.

The musical score consists of two systems, each with a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The first system features a vocal line with lyrics in Russian and German, and a piano accompaniment with dynamic markings *mf* and *p*. The second system continues the vocal line and piano accompaniment, with dynamic markings *p* and *pp*. The time signature alternates between 4/4 and 3/2 throughout the piece.

poco meno mosso.
mf
 не.зна.чай за.гна.ла. Го.рем, тос.кой, да.нуждой то.ми.мый,
in den Wald den Bau.er. All' dei. ne Pla. ge ist bald vo. rü. ber,

poco meno mosso.
p
 Ляг, сна.кор.ни, да.ус.ни, ро.ди.мый! Я.те.бя, го.
Las. se dich nie. der und ruh, mein Lie. ber! Sieh, da. nah! die

p *pp*

Figure 22. Alternating Time Signatures¹⁰⁰

A frenetic chromatic passage with groupings of sextuplets, septuplets, nontuplets, and dectuplets suddenly interrupts the dance as Death cries out for the Snow-Witch to whip up a blizzard (see Figure 22). Then, just as suddenly as it was interrupted, the dance resumes. The tempo of the dance is noticeably slower this time, as Death starts singing the story of the man's unhappy situation to lull him to sleep. A two-bar interlude consisting of a single descending bass line brings the dance back to tempo and Death summons the wind and snow to make a downy bed for the man (see Figure 23). The pair continues dancing until the man is worn out, represented by the lonely bass line slowing to a standstill with a fermata over the bar line (see Figure 24).

¹⁰⁰ Lamm, 21-22.

Ancora più sostenuto.

Взбей ко по - стель. ты мя -
Leg ihn zur Ruh e, du

Ancora più sostenuto.

- тель ле - бед - ка!
Schnel ins Bet le!

Figure 23. Blizzard Scales¹⁰¹

poco a poco a tempo.

poco a poco a tempo.

f 3 3 3 3 *dim.*

a tempo
 [p]
 Ой, вы ле - са, не бе - са, да ту - чи!
 Hei! a, ihr Wäl - der, du Wol - ken - heim!

a tempo
 pp

Figure 24. Interlude Back to Trepak¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ Lamm, 22-23.

¹⁰² Lamm, 24.



Figure 25. Falling Asleep¹⁰³

An entirely new section begins, with a new theme derived from yet another portion of the *Dies irae* (see Figure 25) as Death lulls the man into a deep slumber. The storm has abated and birds are heard chirping in the new arpeggiated accompanimental figure. Each phrase is punctuated by a brief return to the Trepak which begins energetically but quickly slows, as if to show the man still stirring and trying to hang onto the last threads of life (see Figure 26). After four attempts at revival, there is a half measure of rest before he finally lets go as the opening hollow chords are sounded again like a death knell. This time, there are no doomful *Dies irae* fragments and the progression resolves with a definitive III-v-i cadence in D minor, the chordal structure expanding outward in both directions as the man's soul departs (see Figure 27).

 Musical score for 'Birdsong Variation of Dies Irae' featuring a vocal line and piano accompaniment. The tempo is marked 'Andante tranquillo.' and the dynamics are 'pp'. The vocal line is in treble clef and includes the instruction 'Andante tranquillo.' above it. The piano accompaniment is in bass clef and features a steady arpeggiated pattern in the left hand. The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is common time (C). The piece concludes with a fermata over a final chord.

Спи, мой дру - жок, му - жи - чок счаст -
Schlaf, *ruh,* *du* *At - ter, die Wo - chen*

Figure 26. Birdsong Variation of Dies Irae¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ Lamm, 26.



Figure 27. Last Stirrings¹⁰⁵



Figure 28. Final Cadence¹⁰⁶

“Trepak” is laudable for its expertly crafted thematic development. The *Dies irae* undergoes a metamorphosis just as does the peasant man who succumbs to Death’s fatal dance, showing, as with Liszt’s influential *Totentanz* and the numerous medieval totentanz cycles, the many faces of Death. In this song, Death is playful, cunning, joyous, and comforting at different points throughout. A brilliant, jubilant vocal tone should be at times full-voiced (stirring up a snowball fight) and at times hushed and reminiscent of a lullaby (ending scene) but should always maintain a bright, vibrant quality. Simply creating a happy facial expression will do much to create such a tone by engaging the zygomatic muscles which enhance the lifting of the soft palate, and bring the resonance

¹⁰⁴ Lamm, 26.

¹⁰⁵ Lamm, 27.

¹⁰⁶ Lamm, 27.

to a more forward and elevated position. Additionally, spending slightly more time on some of the consonants while maintaining a solid legato breath creates a bouncy, dancelike staccato articulation that contributes to Death's sense of playfulness.

Field Commander

The *macabre* view of death was predominant in the Kastenburg and Aisenbaum personification study. This was generally seen as an old man or woman, grisly or deformed in appearance, and imparting fear into its subjects. "The *macabre personification* portrays repulsive decay animated by a personality that is viciously opposed to life...Macabre personifications have striking similarities to medieval representations of death."¹⁰⁷ This definition harkens back to Musorgsky's own description of "Field Commander:" "You hear in it some transfixion [sic] some inexorable, death-like love! To be more exact: death, coldly passionately in love with death, enjoys death. The novelty of its impression is heretofore unheard!"¹⁰⁸ Death appears under the *macabre* guise in this final song of the cycle as a skeletal general come to claim his new recruits after a fierce battle. The triumphal march which Death sings to his new troops is ferocious and militant, and lends itself to a fearsome portrayal of Death by the performer.

The opening narrative in "Field Commander" comprises nearly half of the song. A bombastic accompanimental figure in E flat minor leads directly into a furious description of a battle with cannons firing and rivers of blood flowing, the two armies fighting throughout the day and into the night (see Figure 28). As night falls, the music becomes more subdued as the narrator describes the calm after the battle. The moonlight

¹⁰⁷ Kastenburg and Aisenbaum, 137.

¹⁰⁸ Leyda and Bertensson, 361.

suddenly falls onto the fearsome spectacle of a gruesome, skeletal general who appears to a slow, grave, march rhythm with a repetitive i-iii progression in D flat minor (see Figure 29). The moment of Death's appearance is marked by a sudden modulation to A Dorian (see Figure 30) as those who have not yet died are moaning and praying for their suffering to end. The vocal line begins a chant which is suggestive of Russian liturgical funeral chanting.¹⁰⁹ The nihilism inherent within the text makes the use of religious music ironic and even sarcastic, as if Death is telling them that their prayers are all in vain.

Figure 29. Battle Scene¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ Walker, 240. Walker claims that this part of the song quotes sections of the melody from the Russian Orthodox funeral hymn “With the Saints Give Rest,” though I found no evidence to validate his claim.

¹¹⁰ Lamm, 28.

Grave. Marziale.

да, о-за-ре-на лу-но-ю, на бо-е-вом сво-ем ко-не, ко-
ca, im fah-len Mon - den-lich - te, Auf sei-nem Ros-se, hoch und hehr, Mit

Grave. Marziale.

Figure 30. Death's Approach¹¹¹

***p*Andantino alla marzia.**

И в ти - ши - не, Гни - ма - я воп - ли и мо -
Still rei - tet er, Zer - tre - tend Ster - den - de. und

Andantino alla marzia.

- лит - - вы, До-воль-ства гор - до-го пол - на,
Lei - - chen, In sei - ner fin - stern Ma - je - stät, -

Figure 31. Death's Appearance¹¹²

Death's monologue ensues in the form of a triumphal march in D minor in which Death bellows out to his new legion that he is their new commander, and that they will soon be long forgotten, their bones being forever buried, never to rise again from the earth. There are three major repetitions of the triumphal march figure in the vocal line, each one gaining more energy and complexity until the final triumphant cadence.

¹¹¹ Lamm, 31-32.

¹¹² Lamm, 32.

However, the melody is hidden in two different variations in the piano prior to Death's proclamation, at the lines "in the silence we hear moans and prayers in the satisfaction of his proud fulfillment" (incidentally, this is where the funeral hymn is quoted in the vocal line) and in the following line, "Like a field commander, Death walks all around the battlefield" (see Figures 32.1 and 32.2).

The march melody is borrowed from a Polish revolutionary hymn "Z dymen pozarow," or "With the Smoke of Fires" (see Figure 31). This hymn would likely have been familiar to Musorgsky's contemporaries, as it was the Polish National Anthem at the time. It was written after a national uprising in which the peasants burned down the mansions and homes of the wealthy, and it sings praises and supplications to an angry and spiteful God. Malcom Brown calls it "...a veritable Polish *Dies irae*, quite appropriate to the close of a cycle on death."¹¹³

With the smoke of fires,
 With the smoking blood of our brothers,
 Our supplications are carried up to you, Oh Lord.
 Our hair becomes grey from our complaints and tortured groans.
 We no longer know songs without sorrows,
 And the wreath of thorns has pierced our brow;
 We will always remember your wrath,
 And our pleading hands will always be stretched to heaven...¹¹⁴



Figure 32. "Z dymen pozarow" Hymn Melody¹¹⁵

¹¹³ Walker, 245.

¹¹⁴ Walker, 248.

¹¹⁵ Transcribed by author.

Familiarity with this inspirational source lends an eerie sense of irony to Musorgsky's song, as it is now Death himself singing the hymn to the people, rather than the people singing to God. Yet, even without being familiar with the hymn, the forcefulness of the march due to the rhythmic accentuation of the text and the high tessitura in which Musorgsky placed it is incredibly effective.

Musorgsky altered the melody slightly, adding an ascending fifth at the end of the first phrase of each stanza. Uncharacteristically for Musorgsky, these necessarily accented notes fall on unaccented beats and syllables. It is as if he is relinquishing the power of text and acquiescing to the power of form, something which was against his own musical credo. Yet, he still retains a very flexible formal structure. As David Brown states, "Musorgsky varies the tune...truncates it...and finally dismantles it to break out of its four-square symmetry; by this expansion he could absorb three instead of two of Kutuzov's last four lines, thus permitting the final line to be highlighted with its own new phrase."¹¹⁶ Whereas the original hymn follows either an AAB or AAAB scheme for four stanzas, Musorgsky's six iterations of the hymn motive are as follows:

1. **A** stated in top voice of accompaniment.
2. First phrase of **A** stated in top voice of accompaniment.
3. Stanza 1: **AB** – The theme is in the vocal melody. The accompaniment is mostly half note block chords with a few chromatic passing tones and melodic doubling.
4. Stanza 2: **AB'** – The rhythmic figure in the accompaniment is expanded to create an increases sense of grandeur. The **B** motive is significantly altered.
5. **A** – The **A** motive is stated in accompaniment while vocal line has completely new melodic material.
6. Stanza 3: **AB''C** – Same accompaniment in **A** as stanza 2. **B''-C** have pedal notes "D" and "A" in the bass. **C** includes fragments of **A** and **B'** (see Figures 32-37).

¹¹⁶ David Brown, 294-295.

Andantino alla marzia.

Figure 33. “Z dymen pozarow” Theme in Top Voice of Piano¹¹⁷

poco cresc.

Figure 34. Fragment of A in Top Voice of Piano¹¹⁸

¹¹⁷ Lamm, 32.

¹¹⁸ Lamm, 32.

Tempo di marcia. Grave. Pomposo.

„Конче на бит ва! Я всех по бе ди ла! Все пре до мной вы сми.
 „At jes zu En de! Der Streit ist entschie den! Kämp fer und Füh rer be

Tempo di marcia. Grave. Pomposo.

dolce

ри лись, бойцы! Жизнь вас поссо ри ла, я по ми ри ла!
 siegt mei ne Machi. Krieg war das Le ben euch, ich bin der Frie den.

cresc. *f*

Дру ж но вставай те на смотр, мерт ве цы! —
 Auf nun zur Heer schau, ihr To ten, er wacht!

poco cresc. *mf* *f*

Figure 35. First stanza of Death's Speech.¹¹⁹ Ascending fifth added to first phrase of A. Theme B begins at in fifth measure.

ff

Мар шем тор жеств. венным ми мо пройди те, Вой ско мо е я хо чу со считать.
 Zieh et in fest li cheit Mar sche vor ü ber. Sehn will der Feld herr sein zahl lo sus Heer.

ff *dim.* *f*

Figure 36. Accompaniment is Filled Out in Second Stanza¹²⁰

¹¹⁹ Lamm, 33-34.

Poco meno mosso.

Го - ды не зри - мо прой - дут за го - да - ми,
Jah - re sich längst zu Jahr - hun - der - ten run - den,

Poco meno mosso.

В лю - дях ис - чез - нет и па - мять о вас.
Kei - ner wird den - ken an euch auf der Welt.

Figure 37. Theme A in Piano¹²¹

Meno mosso. *cresc.* *mf poco a*

Пляской, тя - же - ло ю, зем - лю сы - ру - ю я при топ - чу, что бы
Tanzend, mit knö - chernem Fu - sse die Er - de Stamp - fe ich fest, dass es

Meno mosso. *poco a*

сень гро - бо - ву - ю Ко - сти по - ки - нуть во век не мог - ли,
leich - ter euch wer - de, Tie - fer und tie - fer zu sin - ken hi - nab.

poco rallentando

pp marcato

Figure 38. Themes B", C of Final Statement of "Z dymen pozarow"¹²²¹²⁰ Lamm, 34.¹²¹ Lamm, 35.

The final phrase, “So that you never may rise from the earth!” receives a sudden shift to block chord accompaniment. The bizarre progression (i-vii-N-VI₆-V-III+6-i in D minor) is functionally tonal, in that the penultimate chord is a dominant function chord that morphs out of an actual V chord and then resolves to tonic (see Figure 38).

Dm: i vii N VI₆ V III+6 i

Figure 39. Final Cadence of “Field Commander”,¹²³

“Field Commander” is perhaps the only song of the cycle where a dark, menacing portrayal of Death is truly appropriate. He has not come with the promise of better things to come. He simply comes to claim his new troops and bellows out to them that their existence will be nothing more than bones in the earth, with any memory of their lives being lost to history. The unification of previously opposing forces through death, along with the Dance of Death concept, gives a final concrete and powerful portrayal of Death as the great social equalizer.

While it may be tempting to utilize an exceptionally heavy and dramatic tone quality for the character of Death, the high tessitura of the repeated march theme necessitates a more technically sound approach. If the singer refrains from over-accenting

¹²² Lamm, 36.

¹²³ Lamm, 36.

each high note and instead maintains good legato phrasing, he or she will find the music to be much easier to sing. Maintaining a high, forward resonance with sufficient pharyngeal space creates the necessary dark color and tonal intensity without manufacturing extra weight which quickly fatigues the voice in the upper register. By adhering to these guidelines, the singer will discover greater dynamic, timbral, and articulative variability than would be possible with the style of vocalism more akin to shouting which is regrettably common with dramatic art songs such as this one.

CHAPTER VI

THE EDITIONS

Even though the *Songs and Dances of Death* were performed during Musorgsky's lifetime, they were not published until after his death. Since that time, several different editions of the cycle have been published that present the performer with different options which must be carefully considered. The cycle can be sung with piano as it was written by the composer or with an orchestra. The cycle is available in three different keys, the high key being the original.

Numerous editions and orchestrations have been published throughout the years. Up until the first few decades of the twentieth century, the only edition of the songs available was the piano edition by Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov and the orchestration by Korsakov and Glazunov. As was the case with many of Musorgsky's pieces, his younger colleague and fellow *kuchkist* composer Rimsky-Korsakov took it upon himself to edit the "mistakes" out of the deceased composer's music. What Rimsky-Korsakov perceived as wrong notes were actually the very thing that made Musorgsky unique.¹²⁴ His liberal use of dissonance and his lack of regard for common practice period conventions was often misunderstood as ignorance when in fact his music was painstakingly designed to elicit a very specific emotional response from the listener. Along with an edition of the piano accompaniment, the younger composer also teamed up with Alexander Glazunov to orchestrate the cycle. Older recordings of the songs can be heard which used Rimsky-Korsakov's edition, however it has long since been recognized to be inauthentic and is no

¹²⁴ Calvocoressi, *Mussorgsky*, 189.

longer in publication.¹²⁵ If, by chance, the performer comes across a copy, it may be useful and interesting as a source of study but should not be used for performance.

Dmitry Shostakovich re-orchestrated the cycle in 1962 and remained faithful to the older composer's composition by not altering any of the rhythms or pitches.¹²⁶

The piano edition by Pavel Lamm is part of the definitive complete works of Musorgsky which Lamm edited during the 1920s and '30s.¹²⁷ As such, it is now the most commonly available and is accepted as the most accurate edition,¹²⁸ despite having numerous errors and inconsistencies between keys.

Several considerations need to be made concerning the three different keys in which the cycle is available. Key relationships between songs do not appear to be an issue, as transpositions for each song can vary from a half step between the low and middle keys in "Lullaby" to a minor third in "Field Commander." Differences between the low and high keys can be anywhere from a minor third to a tritone. While the singer may have an easier time singing in a lower key, a greater sense of emotional tension may be achieved by choosing a higher key. Doing so, if it is within the singer's ability, creates a much more thrilling performance. That is not to say that a singer must stick to the same set of transpositions for all four songs. One's voice may better fit the character of Death in a lower key for one song and a higher key for the next song. Additionally, the character(s) of Death can be seen as male or female, and can change from one song to the

¹²⁵ Peter Allen Barton, *Modeste Mussorgsky's "Songs and Dances of Death (A Performer's Guide)*, DMA diss., University of South Carolina, 2011, In Proquest Dissertations and Theses, <http://udini.proquest.com/view/modeste-mussorgskys-songs-and-pqid:2557050661/> (Accessed August 10th, 2013), 84-86. Rimsky-Korsakov's edition is still available on public domain websites such as imslp.org.

¹²⁶ Laurel Fay, "Musorgsky and Shostakovich," in *Musorgsky: In Memoriam 1881-1981*, ed. Malcom Brown, Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1982, 219-220.





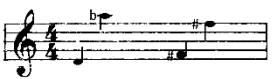
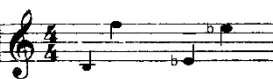



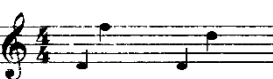






¹²⁷ Reilly, 31

¹²⁸ Ibid.

next. As a result, singers of all voice types can, and have, sung these songs. The following chart gives the range and tessitura of each song in each of the three keys.

Table 2

Ranges and Tessituras of Each Song in Each Key

	Model	High range/tessitura	Medium range/tessitura	Low range/tessitura
Lullaby:				
Serenade:				
Trepak:				
Field Commander:				

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

The many factors that the performer must take into consideration when preparing this cycle can either be viewed as challenges to be overcome, or opportunities by which to enhance one's performance of the music. Synthesizing relevant information about Musorgsky's personal history, his musical style and artistic aims, the social and artistic atmosphere in which he lived, cultural influences such as the Totentanz, as well as subsequent psychological research on death provides the performer with a much greater tool box with which to analyze and interpret the composer's music than would be possible from simply learning the notes on the page. It is then the responsibility of the performer to find effective ways to convey the complex emotional and dramatic scenes which appear in the songs. If done well, *Songs and Dances of Death* can provide a profoundly illuminating view of human attitudes towards death, and Death's relationship with humanity.

APPENDIX A

SINGING IN RUSSIAN

American singers are by and large untrained when it comes to transliterating the Cyrillic alphabet and translating Russian texts. For this reason, there are greater challenges inherent with learning a Russian song than there are with learning an Italian song, but the performer who is passionate about this music should not be deterred. First and foremost, there is the problem of transliterating from a foreign alphabet with thirty-three letters and multiple sounds that are not equivalent to any in English. Simply rendering the text into IPA will prove to be of little use if the singer is unfamiliar with the accompanying vowel and consonant sounds. Additionally, vowels can often have multiple different sounds, and the rules governing their pronunciations are somewhat esoteric. Therefore, unless (or even if) one has access to a Russian diction class or text,¹²⁹ it is best to seek out the assistance of someone who speaks the language. There are also multiple recordings by native Russian singers which can be utilized as diction guides.¹³⁰

When it comes to the actual translation of Russian texts, several problems arise. There are thirteen grammatical cases in Russian that do not exist in English. (Modern English and most Romance languages hardly use cases at all. Latin has five and German has four). There is also an absence of both definite and indefinite articles. As with many

¹²⁹ There are several Russian diction texts which can be quite helpful. *The Language of Song* (Edited by Heidi Pegler and Nicola-Jane Kemp, published by Faber Music) includes a short Russian diction guide with a CD recording of a native Russian speaker speaking the song texts to several Chaikovsky songs. <http://www.russianartsong.com/A-Guide-to-Russian-Diction-Full-Version.pdf> is a very comprehensive though somewhat convoluted diction guide. Perhaps the best source is Emily Olin's *Singing in Russian*, (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2012) which includes an easy to understand IPA and pronunciation guide, as well as stylistic considerations, beginning grammar, and a list of repertoire to give the singer a starting point for further song and aria study.

¹³⁰ Galina Vishnevskaya, Boris Christoff, Ewa Podles, and Dmitri Hvorostovsky all have excellent quality recordings with clear and reliable diction.

other languages, there are gender-specific pronouns that should be translated into English as “it” rather than “he” or “she.” The poetic translation of *Songs and Dances of Death* by Marion Fahrquar given in the International Music Company edition of the score¹³¹ is remarkably close to the literal translation in many cases, though a closer word for word translation should be consulted. A pronunciation guide for potentially unfamiliar sounds is given here, followed by my own word for word English translation and IPA transliteration of the Russian text.¹³²

¹³¹ Pavel Lamm, ed., *Mussorgsky: Songs and Dances of Death for voice and piano*, New York: International Music Company, 1951.

¹³² The translation given is my own, acquired with significant help from Lindsey Nuesca and Paul Lankau. The transliteration was also transcribed from their diction guidance, and edited by Ellen Rissinger.

APPENDIX B

PRONUNCIATION GUIDE

There are a great many rules and exceptions in Russian diction, and the scope of this document does not allow for an in-depth review of these rules. The pronunciation guide included here is limited to assisting the singer with the pronunciation of those sounds which are particularly foreign to the non-Russian speaker.

ы [ɨ] – similar to [ɪ] with a lower tongue position to create a more open vowel.

О,о [ɔ, ə, ɑ] – pronunciation changes depending on syllabic stress and word spelling.

Е,е [je, jɛ, e, ɛ] –often receives a [j] glide before the vowel. Pronunciation changes depending on syllabic stress and word spelling.

Ё,ё [jɔ] – almost all publications leave the dieresis out, which makes this letter difficult to distinguish from a normal e for non-Russian speakers.

Л,л [L, l] – [L] is a hard consonant unique to the Slavic languages. It is produced by placing the tip of the tongue between the teeth as in the English word “that” while arching the back of the tongue so that the consonant is created in the back of the mouth.

[l] is always a soft or palatalized consonant, which means it is always shown as [lʲ].

Ц,ц [t͡ɕ] – as in the combination “cash check.” In modern Russian, this has been modified to a lengthened and softened [t͡ɕʲʲ]

Ь,ь – No sound of its own. Makes preceding consonants soft. Soft, or palatalized, consonants are created by lifting the middle of the tongue to touch the hard palate. This is denoted by a small [ʲ] after the consonant.

APPENDIX C

TRANSLATIONS

КОЛЫБЕЛЬНАЯ

[kɔLɔbɛLnɔjɔ]

LULLABY

Стонет ребёнок... Свеча, нагорая,

[ˈstɔnɔt rɛˈbɔnɔk zvɛˈtɔnɔgɔˈrɔjɔ]

Moaning child candles burning

Тускло мерцает кругом.

[ˈtuskLɔ mɛrˈtsɔjet kruˈgɔm]

Dimly shimmering all around

Целую ночь колыбельку качая,

[ˈtsɛLuju nɔtɔ kɔLɔˈbɛLku kɔˈtɔjɔ]

All night cradle rocking

Мать не забылася сном.

[mɔtɔ nɛ zɔˈbɔlɔsɔ snɔm]

Mother didn't fall asleep

Раным-ранёхонько в дверь осторожно

[ˈrɔnɔm raˈnɔxɔnɔkə v dvɛrɔ ɔstɔˈrɔnɔ]

Early, very early on (the) door, very carefully,

Смерть сердобольная стук!

[smɛrtɔ sɛrdɔˈbɔlnɔjɔ stuk]

Death compassionately knocks!

Вздрогнула мать, оглянулась тревожно...

[ˈvzdrɔgnuLɔ mɔtɔ ɔglɔˈnuLɔs trɛˈvɔnɔ]

Flinches mother, she looks with trepidation...

„Полно пугаться, мой друг!

[ˈpɔLnɔ puˈgɔt:sɔ mɔj druk]

“Don't fear, my friend!

Бледное утро уж смотрит в окошко...

[ˈblɛdnɔje ˈutrɔ u ˈsmɔtrɔit v ɔˈkɔkɔ]

White morning already looks in (the) window,

Плача, тоскуя любя,
 [ˈplɑtʃə tɒsˈkujə lʊbˈlʌjə]
 Crying, worrying, loving

Ты утомилась, вздремни-ка немножко,
 [tʊ utəmˈɪlɪsə vʌdrɛmˈnʲi kə nɔmˈnɔkə]
 You have worried yourself out. Go nap a little bit

Я посижу за тебя.
 [jə pɔsʲiˈʋə zə tʲeˈbʲə]
 I will sit for you.

Угмонить ты дитя не сумела.
 [ugmɔnˈnʲit tʲə dʲiˈtʲə nɔe sʊmɛlɔ]
 To calm you (the) child didn't succeed;
 (You didn't succeed in calming the child)

Слаще тебя я спою.``
 [ˈslʌʃtʲe tʲeˈbʲə jə spɔˈju]
 Sweeter than you I will sing.”

„Тише! ребёнок мой мечется, бьётся,
 [ˈtʲiʃe rɛˈbɔnɔk mɔj ˈmɛtʲsɔ ˈbʲjɛtʲsɔ]
 “Quiet! Child mine raving flailing

Душу терзает мою!``
 [ˈduʃu tʲerˈzɔj tʲə mɔˈju]
 Soul tears in pieces mine.”
 (My child raving and flailing tears my soul into pieces)

„Ну, да со мною он скоро уймётся.
 [nu də sɔ ˈmnɔju ɔn ˈskɔrɔ ʊjˈmɛtʲsɔ]
 “Well, with me he soon will be calm

Баюшки, баю, баю.``
 [ˈbɔʃkʲi bɔju ˈbɔju]
 Hushaby hush hush”

„Щёчки бледнеют, слабеет дыханье...
 [ˈʃtʃkʲi blɛdnɛjʊt slɛbɛjɛt dʲɪxɔnjɛ]
 “(his) face gets whiter, weakening is (his) breathing

Да замолчи-же, молю!`` -
 [də ˈzɔmɔltʲiʃɛ mɔˈju]
 So be quiet for the sake mine!”

„Доброе знаменье, стихнет страданье,
 [‘d□br□je ‘zn□m□enje ‘st□ixn□et str□’d□nje]
 “Good sign, abate (his) sufferings,

Баюшки, баю, баю.``
 [‘b□ju□k□i ‘b□ju ‘b□ju]
 Hushaby hush hush.”

„Прочь ты, проклятая!
 [pr□t□□ t□ pr□k’l□□t□j□]
 “Leave you, cursed one!

Лаской своею сгубишь ты радость мою!``
 [‘L□skaj sv□’jeju ‘zgub□i□ t□ ‘r□d□st□ m□’ju]
 Through your caress will ruin you joy mine.”

„Нет, мирный сон я младенцу навею.
 [n□et ‘m□irn□j s□n j□ mL□’d□entsu n□’v□eju]
 “No, peaceful dreams I (in the) boy will evoke.

Баюшки, баю, баю.``
 [‘b□ju□k□i ‘b□ju ‘b□ju]
 Hushaby hush hush.”

„Сжался, пожди допевать хоть мгновенье,
 [‘□□Ls□ p□□’d□i d□p□ε’v□t□ x□t□ mgn□’v□enje]
 “Take pity, wait until the end at least just a moment,

Страшную песню твою!``
 [‘str□□nuju ‘p□εzn□u tv□’ju]
 Of (the) frightening song yours!”

„ Видишь, уснул он под тихое пенье.
 [v□i’d□i□ us’nuL □n p□d ‘t□ix□je ‘p□enje]
 “See, fell asleep he under quiet singing.

Баюшки, баю, баю.``
 [‘b□ju□k□i ‘b□ju ‘b□ju]
 Hushaby hush hush.”

СЕРЕНАДА [s□er□ε’n□d□] **SERENADE**

Нега волшебная, ночь голубая,
 [‘n□eg□ v□L’□εbn□j□ n□t□□ g□Lu’b□j□]
 Comfort magical, night light blue,

Трепетный сумрак весны.

[ˈtrɛpɛtnɔj ˈsumrɔk vɛsˈnɔ]

Trembling dusk of spring

Внемлет, поникнув головкой, больная

[ˈvnɛmlɛt pɔlˈnɔiknɔv gɔˈlɔvkɔj bɔlɔˈnɔjɔ]

Pay attention, losing her head (the)invalid

Шопот ночной тишины.

[ˈʃɔpət nɔtɔˈnɔi tɕiʃɪˈnɔ]

(she) whispers night time rantings.

Сон не смыкает блестящие очи,

[sɔn nɛ smɪˈkɔjɛt blɛsˈtɕɪtɕɪje ˈɔtɕɪ]

Sleep does not close shining eyes

Жизнь к наслаждению зовёт,

[ʒɪʒn knɔslɔˈdɛnjɔ zɔˈvɔt]

Life to enjoyment calls,

А под окошком в молчаньи полночи

[ɔ pɔd ɔˈkɔʃkɔm v mɔlˈtɕɔnʃi pɔlˈnɔtɕɪ]

from under (the) window in silence of midnight

Смерть серенаду поёт:

[smɛrtɔ sɛrɛˈnɔdu pɔˈjɔt]

Death (a) sweet serenade sings:

„В мраке неволи суровой и тесной

[v ˈmrɔkɛ nɛˈvɔlɪi suˈrɔvɔj i ˈtɕɛsnɔj]

“In (the) shadow of captivity severe and tight

Молодость вянет твоя;

[ˈmɔlɔdɔstɔ ˈvɔnɛt tvɔˈjɔ]

Youth fades yours;

Рыцарь неведомый, силой чудесной

[ˈrɪtsɔrɔ nɛˈvɔdɔmɔj ˈsɪlɛj tɕuˈdɛsnɔj]

Knight mysterious, through miraculous power

Освобожу я тебя.

[ɔsˈvɔbɔʃu jɔ tɕeˈbɔ]

Free I you.

Встань, посмотри на себя: красотой
 [fstɒn pɒsmɔ'tri:n sɔ'e'bɒ krɒsɔ'tju]
 Stand, look at yourself: beautiful

Лик твой прозрачный блестит,
 [li:k tvɔj prɔz'rɒtɒnj blɛs'tit]
 Face yours transparent shines

Щёки румяны, волнистой косою
 [ʃtɒkɔi ru'mɒn vɒl'nɪstəj kɔ'sɔju]
 Cheeks rosy, wavy hair

Стан твой, как тучей обвит.
 [stɒn tvɔj kɔk 'tutɔei ɔb'vɪt]
 Waist yours like clouds encircles.

Пристальных глаз голубое сиянье,
 [prɪstɒlnɒx glɔz glɒbʊje sɪ'jɒnje]
 Fixed eyes light blue shining

Ярче небес и огня;
 [jɔrtɔe nɔe'bɛs i ɔg'nɒ]
 Brighter than heavens and fire.

Зноем полуденным веет дыханье...
 [znɔjɛm pɒ'ludɛnɒm 'vɔejɛt dɔ'xɒnje]
 By the means of torrid heat of mid-day flutters breath

Ты обольстила меня.
 [tɔ ɔbɒlɪs'tɪlɒ mɔɛ'nɒ]
 You seduce me.

Слух твой пленился моей серенадой,
 [slɒx tvɔj plɛ'nɪlsɒ mɔ'jeɪ sɛrɛ'nɒdɔj]
 Hearing you enslaved my serenade,

Рыцаря шопот твой звал,
 [rɪtsɒrɒ 'ɔɔpɒt tvɔj zvɒl]
 (to the) Knight whispers you called

Рыцарь пришёл за последней наградой:
 [rɪtsɒrɒ pri'ɔɔl zɒ pɒs'lɛdnɔej nɔ'grɒdɔj]
 (the) Knight came for (the) last prize

Час упоенья настал.
[tʰs upʹjenj nʰstʰL]
(the) hour of rapture is near

Нежен твой стан, упоителен трепет...
[ʰnʰεʰʰen tvʰj stʰn upʰitʰelʰen ʰtrʰepʰet]
Soft your waist, entrancing trepidation.

О, задушу я тебя
[ʰzʰduʰʰu jʰ tʰeʰbʰʰ]
O, will strangle I you

В крепких объятьях; любовный мой лепет
[f ʰkrʰepkʰix ʰbʰjʰtjʰx lʰuʰbʰvnʰj mʰj ʰlʰepʰet]
In strong embraces; beloved (to) my babbling

Слушай... молчи... Ты моя!``
[ʰsLuʰʰj ʰmʰLtʰʰi tʰ mʰʰjʰ]
listen... be quiet... you are mine!"

ТРЕПАК
[ʰtrʰepʰk]
TREPAK

Лес да поляны, безлюдье кругом.
[lʰes dʰ pʰlʰʰnʰ bʰεzʰlʰudje kruʰgʰm]
Forest and woodlands without people all around.

Вьюга и плачет и стонет,
[ʰvjʰgʰ i ʰpLʰtʰʰet i ʰstʰnʰʰet]
Blizzard is crying and moaning,

Чуется, будто во мраке ночном,
[ʰtʰujet:sʰ ʰbudtʰ vʰ ʰmrʰkʰe nʰtʰʰnʰm]
Sensing, as if in shadows of night

Злая, кого-то хоронит.
[ʰzLʰjʰ kʰʰvʰ tʰ xʰʰrʰnʰit]
Evil someone is hiding.

Глядь, так и есть! В темноте мужика
[glʰʰdʰ tʰk i jɛstʰ f ʰtɛmnʰʰtʰe muʰiʰkʰ]
Glance, there is it! In (the) darkness (a) peasant

Смерть обнимает, ласкает,
[smʰertʰ ʰbnʰiʰmʰjet Lʰʰskʰjet]
Death embraces, caresses,

С пьяненьким пляшет в двоём трепака,
 [s 'pjənenkim 'pləʃet v dvɔ'jm trɛpək]
 With (the) drunk one dances together (the) Trepak,

На ухо песнь напевает:
 [n 'ux pɛzn n'pɛ'vjet]
 On (the) ear (a) song they sing

Ох мужичок, старичок убогой,
 [ɔx mu'itok stər'i'tok u'bɔgəj]
 "Oh poor man, old man, wretched one,

Пьян напился, поплёлся дорогой,
 [pjən n'pɪl's p'plɔ's dɔ'rgəj]
 (the) drunkard got drunk, dragged himself along the road

А мятель-то ведьма поднялась взыграла.
 [ɔ mɔ'tɛl tɔ 'vɛdma 'pɔdnɔ's vz'grɔ]
 (The) Blizzard Witch rose leaping

С поля в лес дремучий невзначай загнала.
 [s 'pɪlɔ v lɛs drɛ'mutɪj 'nɛvznɔtɔj zɔg'nɔ]
 From (the) fields into (the) forest dense accidentally driven.

Горем, тоской да нуждой томимый,
 ['gɔrɛm tɔ'skɔj dɔ nu'dɔj tɔ'mɪmɔj]
 (by) grief, depression, and poverty tormented,

Ляг, прикорни, да усни, родимый!
 [lɔg prɪkɔr'nɪ dɔ us'nɪ rɔ'dɪmɔj]
 Lay, snuggle and sleep my brother!

Я тебя, голубчик мой, снежком согрею,
 [jɔ tɛ'bɔk gɔ'lubtɪk mɔj snɛkɔm sɔ'grɛju]
 I you dear friend mine by snow will warm,

Вкруг тебя великую игру затею.
 [fkruk tɛ'bɔk vɛ'lɪkɔju i'gru zɔ'tɛju]
 Around you (a) great game to scheme.

Взбей-ка постель, ты мятель лебёдка!
 ['vzbɛjkɔ pɔ'stɛl tɔ mɔ'tɛl lɛ'bɔdkɔ]
 Fluff up (the) bed you snowstorm my swan!

Гей, начинай, запевай погодка!
 [g̊ei n̊t̊i'n̊j z̊p̊ε'v̊j p̊'g̊dk̊]
 Hey, get started, sing softly oh weather

Сказку, да такую, чтоб всю ночь тянулась,
 ['sk̊zku d̊ t̊'kuju t̊b fs̊u n̊t̊ t̊'nuL̊s̊]
 A tale, and such a tale, so that all night it would last,

Чтоб пьянчуге крепко под неё заснулось!
 [t̊b p̊nt̊'ug̊e 'kr̊εpk̊ p̊d̊ n̊e'j̊ z̊'snuL̊s̊]
 So that (the) drunkard strongly under her (the song) fell asleep!

Ой, вы леса, небеса, да тучи,
 [j̊ v̊ l̊ε's̊ n̊eb̊ε's̊ d̊ 'tut̊i]
 Oh, you woods, heavens, and clouds

Темь, ветерок, да снежок летучий;
 [t̊em̊ v̊et̊ε'r̊k̊ d̊ sn̊ε'k̊ l̊ε'tut̊ij]
 Also, breeze and flying snowflakes;

Свейтесь пеленою, снежной, пуховою,
 ['zv̊ejt̊es̊ p̊el̊ε'n̊ju 'sn̊εzn̊j̊ pux̊'v̊ju]
 To form (a) blanket snowy, downy,

Ею, как младенца, старичка прикрою...
 [jeju k̊k̊ mL̊'d̊ents̊ 'st̊r̊it̊k̊ p̊r̊i'kr̊ju]
 Her (the blanket) like (a) child (the) old man covers...

Спи, мой дружок, мужичок счастливый,
 [sp̊i m̊j dru'k̊ mu't̊k̊ st̊st̊l̊iv̊j]
 Sleep, my old friend, peasant lucky,

Лето пришло, расцвело!
 ['l̊et̊ p̊r̊i'L̊ r̊stv̊ε'L̊]
 Summer has come, blooming!

Над нивой солнышко смеётся, да серпы глянут,
 [n̊d̊'n̊iv̊əi 's̊Ln̊k̊ sm̊e'j̊t̊:s̊ d̊ s̊εr'p̊ gu'l̊jut]
 Above (the) field (the) sun is laughing, and (the) sickles are working,

Песенка несётся, голубки летают...
 ['p̊es̊enka n̊e's̊t̊:s̊ g̊Lub'k̊i l̊ε't̊jut]

(the) song is being sung, doves are flying...

ПОЛКОВОДЕЦ

[pɒlkɒ'vɒdɛts]

FIELD COMMANDER

Грохочет битва, блещут брони,
[grɒ'xɒtɒɛt 'bɒitvɒ 'blɛɛut 'brɒnɒi]
Thunder of battle, flashes armor,

Орудья медные ревут,
[ɒ'rudjɒ 'mɒdnɒje rɛ'vut]
Canons bronze roar,

Бегут полки, несутся кони
[bɛ'gut pɒL'kɒi nɛ'sut:sɒ 'kɒnɒi]
Running (the) regiments, galloping horses

И реки красные текут.
[i 'rɛkɒi 'krɒsnɒje tɛ'kut]
And rivers red are flowing.

Пылает полдень, люди бьются;
[pɒ'Lɒjet 'pɒLdɛnɒ 'lɒudɒi 'bjut:sɒ]
Blazing noon, people are fighting,

Склонилось солнце, бой сильней!
[skLɒ'nɒiLɒsɒ 'sɒntsɒe* bɒj sɒilɒ'nɒej] * The letter л is silent in this word.
Setting sun, battle increases!

Закат бледнеет, но дерутся
[zɒ'kɒt blɛd'nɒejɛt nɒ dɛ'rut:sɒ]
Sunset pales, but fight

Враги все яростней и злей.
[vrɒ'gɒi vsɒe 'jɒrstɒnɒej i zlɒej]
(the) enemies all the more violent and fiercely.
И пала ночь на поле брани.
[i 'pɒLɒ nɒtɒɒ nɒ 'pɒlɒe 'brɒnɒi]
And descended (the) night on (the) field of battle.

Дружины в мраке разошлись...
[dru'ɒnɒ v 'mrɒkɒe rɒzɒ'ɒlɒisɒ]
The unit in darkness separates...

Всё стихло, и в ночном тумане
[fsɒ 'sɒtɒixLɒ i v nɒtɒ'nɒm tu'mɒnɒe]
All is quiet, and in nighttime fog

Стенанья к небу поднялись.
 [stɛ'nɔnj k 'nɛbu pɔdnɔ'lis]
 Groans to (the) heavens rise.

Тогда, озарена луною,
 [tɔg'dɔ 'zɔrɛn Lu'nɔju]
 And then, illuminated by moonlight,

На боевом своём коне,
 [nɔ bɔjɛ'vɔm svɔ'jɔm kɔ'nɛ]
 Upon (the) battle his horse (Upon his warhorse)

Костей сверкая белизною,
 [kɔ'stɛj svɛr'kɔj bɛlɔiz'nɔju]
 Bones flashing whitely,

Явилась смерть; и в тишине,
 [jɔ'vɔilɔs smɛrt i v tɔiɔ'nɛ]
 Rode in Death. And in (the) silence,

Внимая вопли и молитвы,
 [vnɔimɔj 'vɔplɔi i mɔ'litvɔ]
 We hear cries and prayers,

Довольства гордого полна,
 [dɔ'vɔlɔstvɔ 'gɔrdɔv pɔL'nɔ]
 Contentment proud full (full of proud contentment)

Как полководец место битвы
 [kɔk pɔLkɔ'vɔdɔts 'mɛstɔ 'bɔitvɔ]
 Like a field commander, (the) place of battle

Кругом объехала она.
 [kru'gɔm ɔb'jɛxɔLɔ'nɔ]
 All around walks She (Death).

На холм поднявшись, оглянулась,
 [nɔ 'xɔLm pɔd'nɔvɔsɔ glɔ'nuLɔsɔ]
 On a mound rises, looks around,

Остановилась, улыбнулась...
 [ɔstɔnɔ'vɔilɔsɔ ulɔb'nuLɔsɔ]
 Stops, smiles...

И над равниной боевой
[i nɔd rɔv'ninəj 'bɔjɛvəj]
And over the field of battle

pronёсся голос роковой:
[prɔ'nɔssɔ 'gɔlɔs rɔkə'vɔj]
Cries a voice fatal

„Кончена битва! я всех победила!
[ˈKɔntɔɛnɔ 'bɔitvɔ jɔ fsɔɛx pɔbɔɛ'dɔilɔ]
“Over is (the) battle! I all vanquished!

Все предо мной вы смирились, бойцы!
[vsɔe 'prɔɛdɔ mnɔj vɔ smɔi'rɔilɔis bɔj'tsɔ]
All before me you cowered, fighters!

Жизнь вас поссорила, я помирила!
[ɔznɔ vɔs pɔ'sɔrɔilɔ jɔ pɔmɔi'rɔilɔ]
Life brought you strife, I (bring) peace!

Дружно вставайте на смотр, мертвецы!
[ˈdruɔnə fstɔ'vɔjtɔe nɔ smɔtr 'mɔɛrtɔvɔɛtsɔ]
All together stand to be inspected, (the) dead!

Маршем торжественным мимо пройдите,
[ˈmɔrɔɛm tɔr'ɛstvɔennɔm 'mɔimə prɔj'dɔitɔe]
March solemnly by (me) pass

Войско моё я хочу сосчитать;
[ˈvɔjskə mɔ'jɔ jɔ xɔ'tɔu sɔstɔi'tɔtɔ]
troops mine I want to count;

В землю потом свои кости сложите,
[V 'zɔɛmlɔu pɔ'tɔm svɔj 'kɔstɔi slɔ'ɔitɔe]
In the earth then your bones put

Сладко от жизни в земле отдыхать!
[ˈsldɔkə ɔt 'ɔznɔi v zɔɛm'lɔe ɔtdɔ'xɔtɔ]
Sweetly from life in earth you shall rest!

Годы незримо пройдут за годами,
[ˈgɔdɔ nɔɛz'rɔimə prɔj'dut zɔ gɔ'dɔmɔi]
Many years will pass without notice,

В людях исчезнет и память о вас.
 [v 'lʊdʌx is'tɛznɛt i 'pɛmɛt vɔs]
 In people (will) disappear the memory of you.

Я не забуду и громко над вами
 [j nɛ zɔ'budu i 'grɔmkɔ nɔd 'vɔmɔi]
 I will not forget and loudly over you

Пир буду править в полуночный час!
 [pɪr 'budu 'prɔvɪt v pɪLu'nɔtɔnɔj tɔs]
 A feast will preside at the midnight hour

Пляской, тяжёлою землю сырую
 ['plɔskɔj tɔ'ɔlɔju 'zɛmlɔu sɔ'ruju]
 I will stomp, pack (the) earth damp

Я притопчу, чтобы сень гробовую
 [j prɪtɔp'tɔu 'ɔtɔb sɛn grɔbɔ'vuju]
 I will dance, so that (the) canopy deathly

Кости покинуть вовек не могли,
 ['kɔstɔi pɔ'kɪnut vɔ'vek nɛ mɔ'glɔi]
 Bones leave evermore cannot,

Чтоб никогда вам не встать из земли!``
 [ɔtɔb nɪkɔg'dɔ vɔm nɛ fstɔt iz zɛm'lɔi]
 So that you can never rise from (the) earth!"

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