



**JOURNAL OF THE INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY  
FOR ORTHODOX CHURCH MUSIC**

Vol. 5 (1), Section II: Conference papers, pp. 50-56

ISSN 2342-1258

<https://journal.fi/jisocm>

## **THE ENLIGHTENMENT**

### **VERY DIFFERENT EFFECTS ON WESTERN EUROPEAN AND RUSSIAN SACRED MUSIC**

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#### **THE ENLIGHTENMENT**

The Enlightenment can be characterized as a major intellectual movement that swept across Western Europe and spread around most of the world.<sup>1</sup> It incorporated a broad repertoire of ideas based on reason – hence the alternative designation of the Age of Reason. These ideas included: liberty; tolerance; fraternity; separation of Church and State; and constitutional government. There was also an emphasis on scientific method and reductionism. The movement started shortly after 1637, the year that René Descartes published his seminal *Discourse on the Method*,<sup>2</sup> and ended around 1815. The Enlightenment is therefore sandwiched between the Renaissance that preceded it, and the Romantic movement that followed it. The Age of Reason had prodigious effects on most major disciplines, including Philosophy, Science, Sociology, Law, Economics, Politics, and Music. Further, beliefs in individual liberty and religious tolerance directly challenged both absolute monarchies and religious dogmas and orthodoxy. Major concepts were actively debated and disseminated in new Societies and Academies,<sup>3</sup> as well as informally in salons, coffee houses, debating clubs and masonic lodges. The Enlightenment contributed among other things to the birth of liberalism and neo-classicism, the Civil War in England and the French Revolution,<sup>4</sup> the Industrial Revolution, and the genesis of modern society with its progressive materialism and secularism.

1 Alan Kors, *Encyclopaedia of the Enlightenment* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 1-1874.

2 The full title of this work was *Discours de la Méthode pour bien conduire sa raison, et chercher la vérité dans les sciences* (Discourse on the Method of Rightly Conducting One's Reason and of Seeking Truth in the Sciences). It is perhaps best known today for "Je pense, donc je suis" ("I think, therefore I am").

3 For example, the Royal Society formed in London from 1660 onwards, while the *Académie des Sciences* (Academy of Sciences) was instituted in Paris in 1666.

4 Resistance to absolutism in England led to the Civil War, and in France to the French Revolution. Their respective Kings, Charles I and Louis XVI, both lost their heads.

## MAJOR RELIGIOUS EVENTS DURING THE ENLIGHTENMENT

The Enlightenment did not just happen. It can be seen as the inevitable consequence of the major events preceding it. In the domain of religion, the major event was the Protestant movement. The famous Wittenberg declarations of Martin Luther in 1517 set in the train the Reformation, schism from the Roman Catholic Church, and the Catholic Counter-Reformation. There followed a period of intense religious ferment as dogmas, beliefs and worship practices were hotly debated. The Peace of Augsburg, agreed in 1555 between the Lutheran Princes and the Holy Roman Empire, allowed the latter's states to choose between Roman Catholicism and Lutheranism.<sup>5</sup> However, passions continued to run high. The Holy Roman Empire under Ferdinand II tried to impose Catholicism on component states that had chosen Protestantism, and the parties went to war. The resulting Thirty Years' War was a brutal, vicious, bloody conflict lasting from 1618 to 1648. It spread across Western Europe and eventually dragged in many of the great states. Upwards of 8 million people were killed. It ended with the hard-won Peace of Westphalia.<sup>6</sup> This finally brought the religious warfare raging in Western Europe to an end and reasserted the right of free religious choice incorporated previously in the Peace of Augsburg. The brutality of the war, together with the widespread economic devastation and disillusionment it caused, are likely factors in the widespread questioning of religious dogma that erupted during the Enlightenment.

In Russia,<sup>7</sup> events were unfolding very differently. Tsar Alexei I wished to unify Orthodox Christianity, and handed the task to Nikon, Patriarch of Moscow. Nikon was determined to realign the Russian Church with the original Greek Church. Unfortunately, his grasp of Greek was sketchy, and the manuscripts purporting to demonstrate true Greek worship practices were confusing. In the end, the service books on which realignment was based had actually been printed just a few years beforehand, in Venice. The changes proposed – including such things as the Slavonic spelling of Jesus, the wording in the Creed and Doxology, the number of Alleluias, of prosphora to be used, and the use of three rather than two fingers for making the sign of the cross – seem today to be relatively minor. However, when they were introduced in 1653, they sparked concerted and furious opposition from clergy and laity alike. Nikon then compounded the problem by anathematizing the existing Russian Liturgy and those who refused to switch. This led to an open split (“raskol”) between the Church and the “new” rite, and adherents of the “old” rite. The latter were termed “Old Believers”, “Schismatics”, or more derisively, “Raskolniki”. Patriarch Nikon was later defrocked. However, his actions had in effect taken the Church in some very different directions, one of which was to permit the introduction of *partesnoe penie* (part singing) which had long

5 Calvinism was not permitted until the Peace of Westphalia at the end of the Thirty Years' War in 1648.

6 The Treaty of Westphalia also marked the end of the war between Spain and the Dutch Republic, which had dragged on for no less than 80 years.

7 For the purposes of this paper, Russia is taken to mean the Russian Empire declared by Peter the Great in 1721, which included Ukraine.

been resisted.<sup>8</sup> This move towards polyphony in sacred music was actively encouraged by Tsar Peter I (the Great), who in 1721 reduced the authority of the Church by abolishing the Patriarchate and forming a Holy Synod, which reported to him directly.<sup>9</sup>

## MUSIC BEFORE THE ENLIGHTENMENT

Throughout the Middle Ages, melodic chant continued to serve primarily as a vehicle for enhancing the power of sacred texts in Christian worship. Sacred music was created, organized and sung by monks and clergy of the Church. It was monophonic, and sung *a cappella*. Much music was handed down from generation to generation through an oral tradition of constant repetition, but music was also set down by monks on parchment with the use of specialized signs or neumes. Western Europe and Russia used different languages, respectively Latin and Church Slavonic. Although chant also existed for secular use, this was largely folk music that was not formally organized or written down. With the coming of the Renaissance, the thread of Western European music began to evolve quite rapidly,<sup>10</sup> and diverge from that of Russian music.<sup>11</sup>

*Development of Polyphony:* In Western European music, examples of polyphony are to be found in the eleventh and twelfth centuries or even earlier. The pace of adoption accelerated during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, with Giovanni Palestrina being a notable exponent. In contrast, polyphony in Russian sacred music did not appear until the seventeenth century during the Enlightenment.

*Use of instruments other than the voice:* Various instruments were added to choral works in Western Europe, both for purposes of accompaniment, and later to showcase soloists. Conversely, sacred music in Russia remained strictly unaccompanied.

*Composition of Music for Secular Purposes:* In Western Europe, this was facilitated by increased use of instrumentation. However, in Russia, music continued to serve a predominantly sacred function.

*Stave notation:*<sup>12</sup> This system was substituted for neumes, a transformation of musical notation likely accelerated by the invention of the printing press in the mid-fifteenth century. Unlike the relaxed metre of monophonic chant, polyphonic music required an unambiguous beat so that the multiple voice lines could stay interconnected. Stave notation helped to provide this. This new system of notation occurred later in Russia, along with the adoption of polyphony.

By the end of the Renaissance, Western European music had developed

8 Jopi Harri, *St. Petersburg Court Chant and the Tradition of Eastern Slavic Church Singing* (University of Turku, Ph.D. Thesis, 2011), 51-54.

9 Harri, *St. Petersburg Court Chant*, 57.

10 Chester L. Alwes, *A History of Western Choral Music*, Volume 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 1-504.

11 Vladimir Morosan, *Choral Performance in Pre-Revolutionary Russia* (Madison: Musica Russica, 1994), 4-36.

12 Stave notation is credited to Guido d'Arezzo, an Italian monk who lived early in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, and who also invented the ut (or do) system of "solmization."

a large, polyphonic, instrumented, secular tail, which was now wagging the sacred music whence it came.

### KEY FACTORS AFFECTING SACRED MUSIC DURING THE ENLIGHTENMENT

From the maelstrom of the Age of Reason, four factors in particular stand out as major determinants of the trajectory of sacred music.

*Sociopolitical Change:* By the end of the Enlightenment, serfdom had been abolished across most of Western Europe. This resulted in increased social mobility, with migration from the countryside to the cities, where growth of mercantilism and capitalism set off the Industrial Revolution. In Russia, while some Tsars, notably Peter the Great and Catherine the Great, wished to import some of the ideals of the Enlightenment, neither was anxious to limit their absolute powers. Peasants remained tied to the land, and urban migration and the Industrial Revolution in Russia did not really begin until after the serfs were finally emancipated later, in 1861.

*National Control by Church and State:* The prolonged ideological, and later physical, war between Catholics and Protestants in Western Europe all but guaranteed that questioning religious dogma and orthodoxy, and demanding freedom of religious expression, would become the norm. Both Catholics and Protestants now vied for parishioners. Churches became more sympathetic to changing other long-standing practices changes, for example: allowing greater interaction between clergy, choir and congregants; and exploration of new roles for the laity in services, and even in church administration. Movement occurred towards explicit separation of Church and State; neither pushed for direct control of the composition or performance of sacred music. Conversely, in Russia, national control was increasing. The reforms of Nikon, and Peter the Great, had vested greater control within the Church, and then of the Church by the State. In addition, new sacred music began to require review and approval both by the Holy Synod, and by the Tsar's Imperial Court Chapel Choir (or Kapella).<sup>13</sup>

*Educational and Social Changes:* Western Europe could boast a web of universities and other educational facilities dating back to the Middle Ages, and more were added during the Age of Reason. In Russia, opportunities for formal musical education outside the larger choirs were greatly limited. Indeed, the Enlightenment had been underway for almost a century before the first institutions of higher education were founded – the Saint Petersburg Academy of Sciences in 1724,<sup>14</sup> and Moscow State University in 1755 – and neither of these had a Faculty of Music. Furthermore, the world-class conservatories of Saint Petersburg, Moscow, and other major Russian cities, did not appear until the latter half of the nineteenth century, well after the Enlightenment ended. So, during the Enlightenment, Russia recruited many singers from Poland and Ukraine where vocal training institutions existed, and singers already had practical experience of part singing.

<sup>13</sup> Carolyn Dunlop, *The Russian Court Chapel Choir 1796-1917* (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 2000), 85-88.

<sup>14</sup> This later became the Saint Petersburg State University.



*Development of Secular Music:* In Western Europe, the Enlightenment brought broader opportunities for rigorous musical education. There was also tremendous growth in the number of orchestras, as larger towns and wealthier patrons competed to provide patronage and earn bragging rights. This in turn enabled a major increase in the number of paid positions for trained instrumentalists, and soloists, especially as an increasingly urban public developed an appetite for concerts and could afford to attend them. At the same time, orchestras became more capable, and provided a suitable test-bed for the increasingly innovative music now being composed. Musicians, from performers to composers, largely improved their lot from artisan to professional, and could increasingly make a living from making music. The result was that secular music in Europe continued to grow apace as the Enlightenment progressed. An extraordinary cohort of composers, especially Italian and later Germanic, fundamentally invented modern secular music and its component forms and genres – symphony, concerto, opera, sonata form and song cycle. Their music spans what are now known as the Baroque and Classical periods, and forms the bulk of serious music still performed today.<sup>15</sup> In Russia, the five Slavic composers of the Classical period (Berezovsky, Bortniansky, Davydov, Degtyarev, and Vedel), all wrote secular as well as sacred music, and the first three actually studied secular music in Europe under Italian composers<sup>16</sup>. However, secular music in Russia did not really take off until after the Enlightenment had ended.

### CHANGES IN SACRED MUSIC DURING THE ENLIGHTENMENT

In Western Europe, sacred music compositions expanded in scope, with larger vocal ensembles, vocal soloists and accompaniment by orchestras and instrumental soloists. Such works resembled symphonic music or even opera, and tended towards the dramatic. They were increasingly performed in public concert halls rather than sacred spaces, and often included paid musicians. Perhaps the apogee of this trend is the powerful *Missa Solemnis* composed by Ludwig van Beethoven between 1819 and 1823. Another development was the appearance in church services of rhyming hymns with a defined metre, set out in four parts for choir and organ accompaniment, and often sung in unison by the entire congregation. This was not dissimilar to the great four-part chorales created by Johann Sebastian Bach for his cantatas, although these were more often accompanied by small instrumental groups. In essence, it could be argued that sacred music was progressively “secularized”.<sup>17</sup> Meanwhile, to hear traditional monophonic or homophonic Gregorian chant required a visit to a monastery.

The situation in Russia could hardly have been more different. During the Enlightenment, sacred music did progressively adopt stave notation and

15 Egon Wellesz and F.W. Sternfeld, *The Age of Enlightenment, 1745-90, Vol 7, The New Oxford History of Music* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1973), 1-762.

16 Morosan, *Choral Performance in Pre-Revolutionary Russia*, 61-73.

17 Anthony Lewis and Nigel Fortune, *Opera and Church Music 1630-1750, Vol 5, The New Oxford History of Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), 1-892.

*partesnoe penie*, but was otherwise little changed. Its primary focus remained illumination during worship in sacred spaces, rather than dramatic concert performances in public. Instrumental accompaniment never appeared.<sup>18</sup> It is worth noting that in the latter half of the eighteenth century following the end of the Enlightenment, many of the factors driving change in Western European sacred music did appear belatedly in Russia. Prominent music conservatories, such as those in St Petersburg and Moscow, opened. Serfdom was abolished, and the Industrial Revolution began in earnest. Russian composers led by “The five” (Balakirev, Borodin, Glinka, Mussorgsky, Rimsky-Korsakov), Tchaikovsky, Rachmaninov and others, developed a world-class school of Russian secular music. Nevertheless, even as sacred music in Russia was beginning to be buffeted by the headwinds of secular innovation, control by the Kapella, the Tsar’s Choir, tightened into frank censorship.<sup>19</sup> The latter straightjacket was finally removed in 1878 following a court case brought by Tchaikovsky and his publishers.<sup>20</sup> By then, only four decades remained until the October Revolution of 1917, with its proscription of religious observances and music. Thus, sacred music was never really “secularized” as it was in Europe during the Enlightenment.

## SUMMARY

In Western Europe, a conglomeration of powerful forces accelerated the development and importance of secular music during the Enlightenment, and eventually allowed it to become commercialized and monetized. Sacred music then became progressively “secularized” – less a means of enhancing worship and more a medium for dramatic, virtuoso, paid performances in secular spaces. In parallel, many major composers began to focus more on creating secular than sacred works.

In Russia, sacred music incorporated polyphony, but the growth and influence of secular music seen in Europe during the Enlightenment was not apparent in Russia until later, and then only in part. Composers continued to write much sacred music in traditional formulation, intended for illumination of worship, until the religious prohibitions of the Soviet era in essence choked off sacred music.

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18 Morosan, *Choral Performance in Pre-Revolutionary Russia*, 37-60.

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