

Russian Music before Glinka:

A Look from the Beginning of the Third Millennium

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Illustration 1:
Picture Chamber in Catherine the Great's late 18th-century
Palace in Tsarskoe Selo, Russia

I Introduction

Due to the events of history and their complex intertwining, the artistic treasures of Russian music before Glinka have only relatively recently begun to attract public attention even in Russia itself, while outside Russia they remain virtually unknown. [\[1\]](#) Anyone studying this fascinating repertoire from a broad historical and cultural perspective must address intriguing questions. We know, for example, that J. S. Bach wrote in 1726 to his Lyceum-friend George Erdmann, the resident Consul of Danzig at the court of Empress Catherine the First (widow of Peter the Great), asking about a possible position (Pantielev, 1983). Similarly, Mozart, exhausted by his freelance existence, authorized Count Andrew Razumovsky, the Russian ambassador in Vienna, to start negotiations with Prince Gregory Potemkin about his possible service in Russia (Klimovitsky 1998, 232). What attracted these eminent West European composers? What knowledge might they have had concerning contemporary Russian musical culture?

The Russian musical culture of the 18th century always strikes one by its unevenness and the contradiction of its manifestations, the old and the new interact with each other, sometimes becoming thoroughly mixed. This is the time when the European-like infrastructure of musical culture crystallized. And yet, as crucial and fascinating as the 18th century is in terms of Russian musical history, in order to truly understand the history of Russian music we must step a little farther back in time. The present article is an attempt to conceptualize the full spectrum of pre-19th-century Russian musical culture, the known facts as well as the underlying processes.

We begin by surveying musical culture in medieval Rus'. Here we find the seeds of animosity toward everything "secular," "strange," and "new," which dominated Russian musical history practically up to the 18th century. The rise and fall of the *skomorokhi* (the Russian equivalents of European medieval minstrels), discussed in Section III, provide a fascinating illustration of the conflicting forces that shared in the shaping of Russian musical culture. Ironically, the demise of the *skomorokhi* secular culture coincides in the 17th century with the westernization of Russian church music (Section IV), a first step in a long and complex process championed in the early 18th century by Peter the Great (Section V). Ukrainian music plays an important role in this process of westernization and secularization (Section VI). Finally, we conclude that the intense interaction between the repertoires of various social classes formed the basis for the musical mentality in 19th-century Russia..

II Musical Culture in Kievan Rus' (9th – early 12th centuries)

When Kievan Rus' became Christianized, in the year 988, the country was not yet a sovereign state. The Church, therefore, strove from the very beginning to dominate all aspects of its culture, which had already been established according to the contemporary pagan East Slavic mode of life. The general political situation, which led Prince Vladimir (? – 1015), in search of Byzantine protection, to choose Orthodoxy, isolated Rus' from the surrounding countries. Choosing Orthodoxy by Kievan Rus' resulted in facing paganism from within, Catholicism from the West ("Latin heresy"), Islam from the East, and Judaism ("Jewish heresy"), maintained by a significant part of the native population that remained from the Khazar Empire. [2] In an attempt to eliminate these alien influences, the Russian Orthodox Church adopted an isolationist policy. Particularly aware of the power of music, the Church endeavored to control all aspects of both religious and secular music. As M. H. Brown notes: "The dominant position of the Russian Orthodox church in pre-Petrine Russian cultural life promoted a skepticism toward secular art in any form that endured into the eighteenth century. Even folk music, though never suppressed, had suffered periodic ecclesiastic ire, while secular music of the art tradition had simply never struck root in the inhospitable soil of Russia's pietistic culture" (1983, 57).

As a result of these policies, the Russian Church succeeded in establishing a national tradition that was later adopted by the secular authorities and, eventually, by the broad nationalist stratum of Russian society. This tradition succeeded in uniting the concepts of *sacred* and *national* into a single symbol of Russian genuineness, no matter how "sacred" or "national" a particular element actually was. With time, the rhetoric of *old* (canonized, stable) became a necessary proof of national authenticity, and the symbols of *secular* and *alien* were subsequently regarded as Western evils. Reinforced by their link with the *new* (changeable), the triad now comprised the social image of the enemy, projected and constantly reconfirmed by the Russian Church until its retirement from the political scene in the time of Peter the Great (1672-1725). Although Peter broke the Church's dominance, he could not eradicate this thorny duality between *religious–national–old* (stable) and *profane–extraneous–new* (changeable), and it was this antinomy that constituted one of the important factors that prevented Russia from completely joining the Western European entity. We can now understand that Minister of Education Prince A. Uvarov's notorious triad - *Orthodoxy, autocracy, nationality* - did not originate during the period of Czar Nikolai I (reigned 1825-55), but rather reflected a well-formulated reinvention, or variation, of a doctrine that had crystallized in pre-Petrine Rus'. The goal of this pronouncement, which perpetuated old prejudices, was intended to divert Russian public consciousness away from *modern–outlandish–non-religious* ideas of liberation.

Music, as a highly sensitive index of sociohistorical change, developed during the first seven centuries (11th–17th centuries) of Russia's history despite the stifling cultural environment. Russian peasant folklore, being modal and often monodic, was generally compatible with the Byzantine chant established by the Church. Hence, the later symbiosis of ancient and sacred was quite natural, even aesthetically; it was never oppressed, censored, or unwelcome in any way. But dance rhythms culled from ritual songs, dances, and instrumental music - the legacy of Rus'ian pagan culture and the result of intercultural connections - were the target for the curses and prohibitions of the Church's propaganda. Thus, *dance* and *instrumental* were added to the "negative" triad *secular–strange–new*. Accordingly, chant and vocal joined the "positive" triad *sacred–native–old* (Rytsareva 1989, 196). While it is true that dance and instrumental music experienced persecution not only in Orthodox countries but occasionally also in societies controlled by other Christian religions, no other church destroyed traditional folk instrumentalism to the extent that Orthodoxy did in ancient Rus'.

*Illustration 2:
A rare 17th-century score of an anonymous three-part liturgical
chant written in neumes*

III The Rise and Fall of Skomorokhi Culture

From its inception at the end of the tenth century, the Orthodox establishment in Kiev waged a constant and ruthless war against folk musicians, particularly instrumentalists. This opposition stemmed from the Church's hostility toward Catholicism, which supported instrumental music, and from its rejection of paganism, which was promoted and preserved by the folk instrumentalists. [\[3\]](#)

Orthodox animosity toward Catholicism was not an isolated phenomenon in Russian history; rather, it was part of a more general negative attitude of Russia toward the West. The West, as noted by Y. Lotman and B. Uspensky, was perceived as much more than "... a specific political-geographical reality, but as an ideal,

which was either adopted or rejected. Enthusiasm for such a position was based on the idea that it was not the real West being discussed but some concept in the system of values of Russian culture.... According to the ancient Russian tradition, the conception of West as the part of the world had a most definite character: West is where hell is" (Lotman and Uspensky 1974, 277).

In Kiev the Orthodox Church implemented its policies by pressurizing the local secular authorities, which, however, remained fond of secular music-making and continued to practice it at the courts. Nevertheless, regulated by the political situation, grand dukes were often dependent on the Church authorities and were forced, at least in public, to subject their interests to the religious dictates. Privately, they continued to enjoy secular music in closed court circles. At least two Russian chronicles in the 11th and 12th centuries and *Pateric Kievskogo Pecherskogo monastyrja* in the 13th century mention one popular and much quoted episode, which describes Saintly Monk Feodosiy Pecherskiy's visit to Prince Svyatoslav II of Kiev in 1073:

Once the holy Father Feodosii came to Prince Svyatoslav Yaroslavich. Entering the hall where the Prince sat, the Father saw in front of him many musicians playing *gusli* [a kind of zither or *kantele*], organs, and other instruments and enjoying themselves as usual. The holy Father, sitting at the side, looking down, lowered his head, and bowing slightly, said to him: "Will it be so in the future age?" The Prince, immediately touched by the words of the holy man, shed a small tear and ordered the musicians to stop playing. Afterwards, whenever listening to music, if he became aware of the holy Father visiting him, he would stop the music. (Rogov 1973, 49)

Thus, as early as the 12th century, we find a hypocritical tradition among the ruling classes. Formally, they observed the official ideological constraints, while informally they continued to enjoy forbidden pleasures.

Pre-Christian Rus' used typical medieval European musical instruments, including the *gusli*, *svirel* - a woodwind instrument equivalent to the oboe; *gudok*, similar to a fiddle; and also horns, as well as shamanic accessories like drums, small bells, tambourines, and noise-makers. Such instruments were typically used during rites, entertainment, court ceremonies, and probably in pagan temples. Folk musicians, who played these instruments and organized weddings in Kievan and later in Muscovite Rus', were called *skomorokhi*. These musicians also engaged in acrobatics, puppet shows, and juggling, perpetuating the traditional medieval popular culture. The source for the term or the phenomenon of the *skomorokhi* remains unclear. It may be of Byzantine, Western European origin (Famintsyn 1995, 1), or of Eastern (possibly Syrian histrionic) root (Findeizen 1928, I, 53-57). Zguta suggests that it may be of native origin, but resulting from foreign influences (1978, 14-15). There are about 20 different explanations of its etymology (Belkin 1975, 23-27; Koshelev 1994), although none are recognized as definitive. [\[4\]](#)



*Illustration 3:
Skomorokhi musicians in the popular 18th-century
picture,
“Semik i Maslemitsa”*

The various approaches to the origin of *skomorokhi* may not be as contradictory as they seem. The lack of available evidence about the ethnic and cultural complexity of the population of Kievan Rus' in the tenth century does not imply that this area was homogeneous or isolated. The proximity of the Khazar Empire to Rus' from the seventh to the tenth century (and whose very existence on pre-Rus'ian territory was a traditional taboo in Russian historiography) stimulated connections that affected the population of the future Kievan Rus'. Rus'ians absorbed not only the town of Kiev (the word itself means “lower settlement” in the Khazar language), but many of its social characteristics as well. These include its system of government, legal procedures, and military organization, as well as certain crafts, costumes, and coiffure. Several words derived from the Khazar lexicon (yet paradoxically regarded as “pure Russian”) include *bogatyr* (“brave warrior”), *telega* (“wagon, chariot”), *bayan or bojan* (“singer”), as well as many others (Brutskus 1944; Vasmer 1953-58). Lastly, Khazarian and Rus'ian populations formed a single super-ethnos. [5] Khazaria, a multiethnic state connecting West and East, had intercultural contacts with the Byzantine Empire, the Arab Caliphate, Persia, the Caucasus, and with Eastern and Western European countries. The difference between the multireligious establishment of Khazaria (Judaism, Islam, Christianity, not to mention the obviously strong pagan substratum) and the late paganism of the Rus'ian Eastern Slavs did not exclude cultural interrelations. Since Khazaria was a strong empire and a cultural center for at least two centuries, it accumulated various contemporary trends. Whatever the sources of Rus'ian *skomorokhi* may have been, some elements could have been transmitted via the Khazarian culture and inherited by Kievan Rus'. [6]

The study of the Rus'ian music culture began in the 19th century, but little mention was made of the Khazar kingdom. By the 1940s, however, the development of Khazar studies prompted Joseph Yasser (who contributed to Russian and Jewish studies in the USA from the 1930s to the 1950s) to analyze references to Hebrew music in Russian medieval ballads and to conclude that “through all sorts of channels - secular, sacred, social and professional, Hebrew chants and songs, doubtless well assimilated by the upper classes of the Khazars, also found their way into the musical practice of the same classes of the native population of Kiev, and to all appearance remained with them long after the Khazars had been banished from Russian soil”

(Yasser 1949, 44). [7] The texts of Russian *byliny* usually mention a repertoire performed by *skomorokhi* and grand-ducal singers active at the banquets of Kievan Dukes between the tenth and 12th centuries. It invariably included miscellaneous tunes: *evrejskiy, po umil'nomu* (“Hebrew, touching”); *igrishche ot Erusolima* (some minstrel performance of Jerusalem songs, which Yasser referred to as contemporary Jewish music); songs from the lands of the Saracens (which Yasser interprets as medieval European references to Muslim music [1949, 36-41]), *igrishche drugoe ot Tsarya-grada* (“another piece, Constantinoplian”), as well as Venetian or Italian, and Kievan music. [8] Sharing Yasser’s hypothesis regarding Rus’ian-Khazarian musical connections, I may add that Chernigov, considered a Khazarian town, and Tmutorokan, another town in Khazar possession in 704-988, under Rus’ian control in 988-1094 (Baumgarten 1939, 69; Bruckus 1939, 22; 1979, 211; Pritsak 1988, 9; Petrukhin 1997, 398-9; Wexler 2002, chapter 4.4), were the centers of the south Rus’ian rhapsodic epos - *byliny*, sung by *boyan* and narrating the deeds of *bogatyri* (Shlyakov 1928, I, 483-498; Keldysh 1983, I, 65). [9]

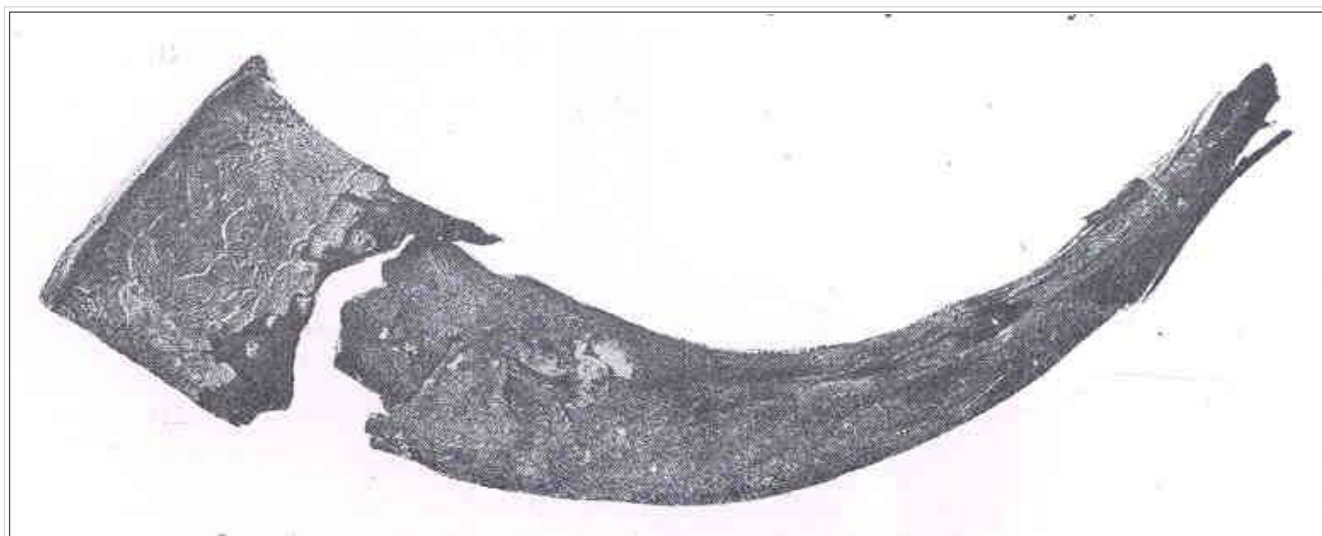


Illustration 4:
A tenth-century horn of an ox/tau found in an archeological site near Chernigov in 1873

Considering the fact that the *skomorokhi* already existed as an established Kievan sociocultural institution before Rus’ Christianization, alongside the pagan priests *volkhvy* (Zguta 1978, 3,6), we must also bear in mind the coexistence of Eastern Slavs and Khazar Jews living in Kiev and presumably in other locales. While Kiev was being transformed into a Slavic center, Kievan Jewry must have experienced acculturation, shifting from Khazar cultural sources and language to Slavic ones (Brook 1999, 302-303), and maintaining cultural interactions with the changing residents. The preoccupation of Kievan Rus’ Jewry with various professions and institutions is indicated by the widespread evidence of family names derived from Rus’ian professional denominations. The Jewish family name *Skomorovsky*, as well as other names related to the instruments played by the *skomorokhi*, such as *Dudnik* or *Tsymbal’nik*, speak of Kievan Jewry’s active involvement in this profession. [10] Folk fiddlers are still called *skomorokhi* in Byelorussia (*skamaroxi*) and the Kursk area (with a mixed Russian-Ukrainian-Jewish population). The name *Skomorokhov* appears in Ukrainian families too, though noticeably less. (Wexler reminds us that a significant number of Slavs converted to Judaism and Khazar Jews into Orthodoxy, especially at the end of the First Millennium and in the early Second Millennium; see Wexler 1987; 1993, Chapter 6). Socio-anthropological observations show that these occupations were still identified with Ashkenazic Jewish customs based, however, on their own minstrelsy institution of *badkhanim*, which served as a counterpart to the Rus’ian *skomorokhi*. [11]

While the practice of *skomorokhi* could have sprung up in ancient times within syncretic pagan rites, the word itself became known in Russia only during the 12th century, from an official ideological document, the *Russian [Primary] Chronicle*, which related to the events of 1068. [12] By the time of the *Primary Chronicle*, the *skomorokhi* had become a socially marginal group of itinerant actors (Keldysh 1983, I, 60). The term itself appeared later, and could have been in accord with the still unclear sociolinguistic phenomenon of a common Hebrew-Greek component in European slang, including the secret language of the Ukrainian minstrels, *lirniki* (Wexler 1993, 43, 234-235; Kononenko 1998, 72). It is not by chance that its existence in the Russian language preserves its initial ecclesiastic overtones of disapproval (Ozhegov and

Shvedova 1999, 724).

Forced to exist as a counter-culture yet enjoying great popularity, the *skomorokhi* represented an ideological threat to both sacred and secular authorities. This situation cost them their very existence as a cultural institution. Between the 14th and the 17th century, Muscovite Rus' experienced the painful processes of centralization and secularization of the state, which led to the long period known as the "Time of Troubles." During this time, being perceived as a danger to the regime, or perhaps sacrificed in the political game between church and state, activities of the *skomorokhi* were totally banned. The interdiction issued by Czar Alexei Mikhailovich in 1648, under pressure from the Church, was strongly enforced. The *skomorokhi*, whose art had been one of the most beloved constituents of Russian culture for more than seven centuries, were deported to Siberia and the northern parts of Russia, and their musical instruments were broken, burned, or otherwise destroyed.

The *skomorokhi* culture, however, which had developed in Rus' over such a long period of time, could not so easily be destroyed. Their instrumental music-making was preserved in folklore. The jester's tradition continued to entertain courts during the 18th and 19th centuries, as well as *balagan* performances given by traveling actors at fairs, puppet-shows, etc. (Popova 1981). The enormous popularity of balladry in the former Soviet Russia cannot be understood without its relation to the *skomorokhi* culture. The very existence of this phenomenon as a counter-culture, including the "double-standard" relationship with the authorities, is part of its tradition. The most famous singer-songwriter and actor Vladimir Vysotsky (1938-80), who actually became a folk hero, and who was ignored by the official culture, was often invited to the highest circles of the Soviet establishment.

IV Seeking an Art-Music Tradition

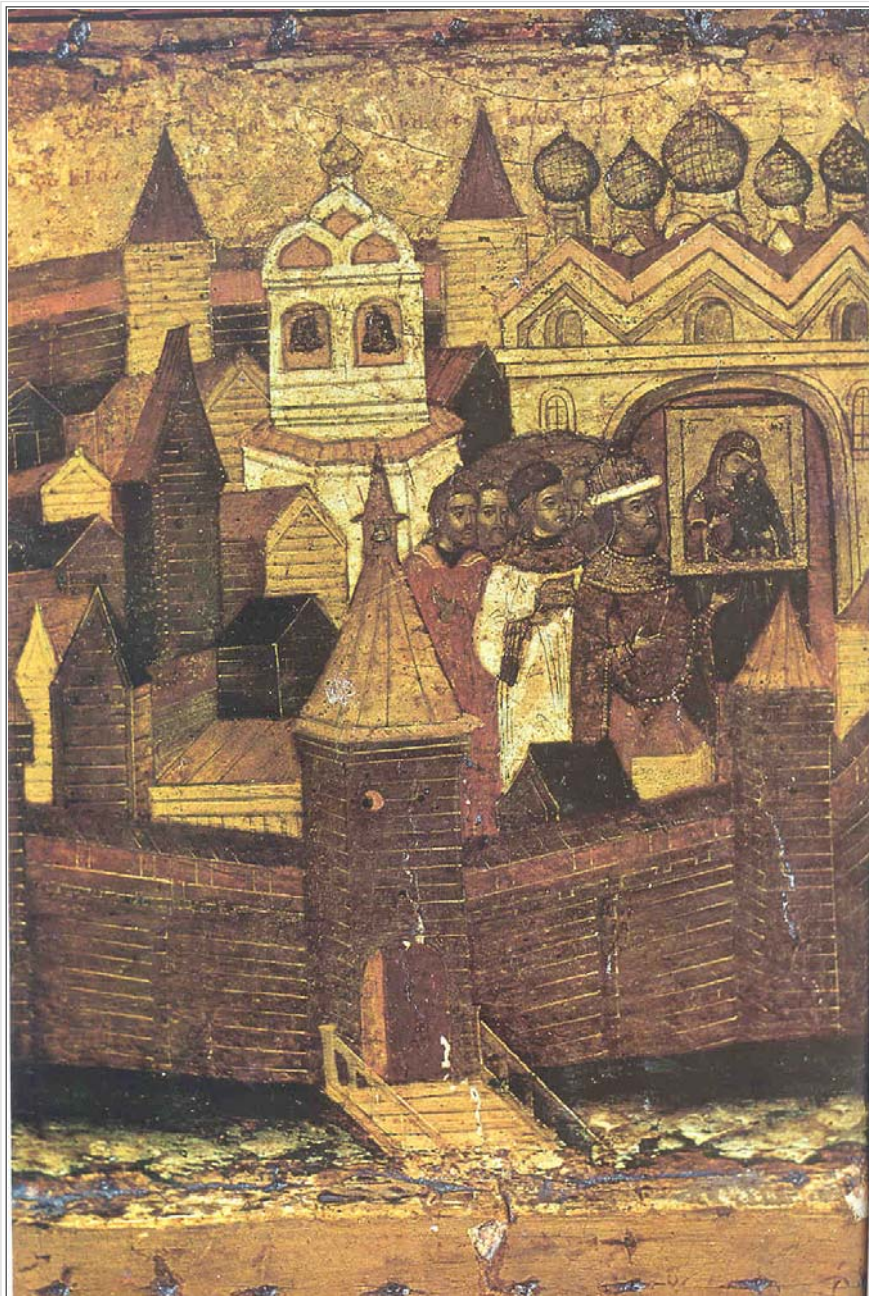
It is impossible to predict how instrumental music-making would have developed in Russia if the *skomorokhi* had not been repressed. However, the reasons for the demise of the *skomorokhi* went beyond their good or ill fortune. In European countries minstrels participated in creating popular urban music. But they were not the only necessary contributors to professional instrumentalism. The key to the situation lay in the establishment of the Russian Orthodox Church. Throughout those seven centuries the secular and sacred art music traditions maintained a strictly parallel but segregated existence, completely lacking the fruitful interaction that generated musical instrumental genres in the West. For example, by 1648, the year of the *skomorokhi* suppression, G. Frescobaldi died, leaving behind a sophisticated organ legacy. During his lifetime, he succeeded in tutoring disciples in many European countries. Other instrumental genres, such as the *sonata da chiesa* and the *sonata da camera*, developed alongside the German, French, and English suites. These forms failed to develop in Russia due to the absence of instrumental music in the church.

One may argue that there were other complications in Russian history that delayed the evolution of Russian art music. These may have included the Mongol yoke, which eventually arrested Russia's economic and cultural development. I would argue, however, that although accusing Orthodoxy of being the ultimate cause of all of Russia's misfortunes, as proclaimed in the 1830s by the Russian religious philosopher Peter Chaadaev (1794-1856), may seem far-fetched, this conception does seem helpful in understanding the following findings:

- a) The boundaries between the suppression of instrumental music in Russia and the beginning of its development are exactly the same as those between the pre-Petrine (Orthodox dominance) and Petrine (downplaying of Orthodoxy) Russias.
- b) Other Orthodox countries, such as Greece, Bulgaria, Romania, Serbia, Armenia, and Georgia, which had not experienced the Mongol yoke and whose minstrelsy were not eliminated, do not have significant early instrumental music traditions.

The Russian Church's crusade against secular instrumentalism may have resulted from its failure to develop a proper form of religious music in its own domain. What actually took place in the Church up to the 16th century was not even a parody of the music that was once introduced by the Greco-Byzantine missionaries. It was not a monodian chant but, still in neumatic notation, a multivoiced linear polyphony, termed *strochnoe penie*. This music lacked an acoustical harmonic basis and, in addition, appeared in multiple versions in various areas of Russia. A destructive revolt appears to have broken out against the musical confines established by the Church. The Russian Orthodox Church was aware of the situation but could do nothing about it. It needed to reconstruct its own institutions and to create a new, more realistic attitude to church

music in order to preserve its prestige.



*Illustration 5:
Fragment from the icon "Bogomater Tolgskaya," Yaroslavl, 1655.*

In the course of the centralization of secular power, there was also a campaign for the centralization and standardization of the Orthodox liturgy. The procedure began without any intention of introducing dramatic changes. The appearance of book printing made it possible to correct the handwritten liturgical books, which were full of mistakes and variants.

However, on studying the contemporary Greek sources, it became apparent that these sources had undergone serious reforms since the tenth century, undermining the authenticity of these models. Incidentally, the newly-appointed Patriarch Nikon (1605-81, who presided in the years 1652-59), working amicably with Czar Alexei Mikhailovich and known as a man able to complete any task he undertook, vigorously pushed this campaign forward. The Czar and Patriarch Nikon finally decided to adopt the Greek and Slavonic books of the Orthodox Church in the Russian-Lithuanian Uniate, printed in Venice, as sources. The result of these corrections was both unexpected and undesired. Since every local version had inevitably undergone some corrections, it was perceived as having lost the basis of its spiritual existence. The upheaval that these reforms produced, coupled with great socioeconomical shocks, resulted in a tragic situation, the so-called *raskol* [schism, dissidence] in Russian society (Nikolsky 1983, 129-132). This initiated the

self-imposed exile of the Old Believers, who emigrated to the outlying fringes of the country in order to maintain their traditional rituals. The Old Believers' liturgical practice continues to preserve the tradition of ancient Russian chant to the present day.

Since church polyphonic singing was in disorder, Nikon, at the first opportunity (in the post of Bishop of Novgorod, 1649-50), undertook some regulatory measures: "He dismissed the ugliness of polyphony and introduced strict monody, banned *homovoe penie* [singing with the addition of the particle *homo* to every word of liturgical texts] and established harmonic three-voiced part-singing on the Kiev model. He charmed the Novgorodians with this music and pleasantly surprised even Moscow herself" (Kartashev 1959, II, 136; see also Uspensky 1976, 15, although he referred to the later event in 1653, when Nikon demanded from the Father Superior of the Valdaysky-Iversky monastery to send him copies of multivoiced *kanty* and concertos). Thus, by way of a simple administrative order, Nikon introduced Western polyphony organized in the ready-made form of part-singing, the so-called *partesnoe penie*. This was the genre of the Venetian spiritual concerto of the school of Andrea Gabrieli, already widely adopted in Poland and the Ukraine. However, the organ accompaniment to polyphonic singing, such as had been prevalent in Italy, Poland, and West Ukraine, was not allowed to cross the border into the Orthodox countries. [\[13\]](#) In the rest of the Ukraine (and later in Russia) part-singing existed as a cappella genre. As N. A. Gerasimova-Persidskaya states (1983), the introduction of this music was one of the most revolutionary changes in the course of Russian music history. The most dramatic innovations were the acceptance of the five-line (though square) notation and the major-minor harmonic concept, though still with a strong prevailing tendency toward modality.

In spite of its purely vocal existence, part-singing became the vehicle for a healthy interaction between the Church and secular culture. It served as a bifunctional genre, used in the liturgy as well as in secular ceremonies. It lent the liturgy its attractiveness, while in secular ceremonies it perpetuated an atmosphere closer to the majestic beauty of the European courts. Although the European style of music-making was still far from being adopted, the end of the 17th century witnessed initial attempts to introduce it into the court life of several Western-oriented noblemen. Inventories of households and Kremlin *palaty* reveal that organs (ranging in size from portative to more massive) and harpsichords were especially popular among the Moscow people, and that the court supported a factory that constructed organs and harpsichords. This factory was destroyed by a fire in the Kremlin, 1701, and was never restored (Orlova 1979, 143-44; Moleva 1971). Timpani and winds were broadly used in military music and all kinds of urban occasions. Alongside Russian performers, several foreign instrumentalists also joined in these performances. Muscovite citizens especially enjoyed the fanfares that accompanied such ceremonies (Findeizen 1928, I, 307-324).

V Secularization and Westernization

All of these individual cases, however, could not help in the development of a European-style musical culture. Such a process demanded the creation of a new musical mentality, identified by an individual semantic system, a rhetorical tradition, and a variety of genres, not to mention education and production of music instruments.

It can be posited that the main social, political, and cultural trends in 18th-century Russia were increasing orientations toward secularization and westernization. The opposition consequently drew the country toward Orthodoxy and nationalism. In 1703 St. Petersburg was founded by Peter the Great as a Baltic port or "window to Europe." A decade later it became the capital of the Russian Empire itself, a radical embodiment of a new lifestyle. This was in effect an act of opposition and challenge to Moscow's slow release from its cultural isolationism, in dramatic contrast to the atmosphere of tradition-free Petersburg.

The course of development established by Peter the Great continued throughout the 18th century. It is not easy to assess his achievements in the field of musical culture. While Peter did not establish the genre of opera in Russia, he recognized its significance, and promoted the conditions that would enable it to flourish. Most importantly, he established the public forms of secular life that perceived music as one of its principal elements - *assamblei* [assemblies] among the nobility. In addition, the stream of German and other European musicians into Russia began to take definite shape, and St. Petersburg appeared on the map of the European musical market. If Peter had lived a few years longer, he probably would have been credited with installing the Italian opera and other forms of concert life. Opera would then have been associated with his name and the grand scale of his reforms. But this occurred somewhat later, after Peter's death. As it happened, it was Peter's niece, Empress Anna Ioannovna (1693-1740), who introduced opera. Empress Anna's obscure image somehow casts an undeserved shadow on the cultural events that then occurred in Russia, including the invitation to the Italian opera troupe and a number of ballet dancers to perform at her court. [\[14\]](#) However,

the introduction of opera was completely in keeping with the Petrine reforms. Moreover, the events of the near future showed that the appropriate cultural context, i.e. the environment of advanced music-making among a wider audience, was only a few decades away.

VI Ukrainization

The process of westernization in Russian music could not have succeeded had it been merely an implantation of ready-made alien forms into Russian culture. The process needed to have a cognitive base among the wide strata of Russian society. This base existed from the second half of the 17th century in the form of two interconnected and very popular genres that were highly compatible with the background of Russian secular folk music and, at the same time, with the Orthodox mentality of the Muscovite population. These were part-singing, mentioned above, and spiritual *kanty* and *psalmy*, a semi-secular popular genre of the urban culture. Both came from the Ukraine and made a profound impact on Russian culture. Ukrainization had become a stage of westernization in Russian musical culture, making this process natural and easily absorbed. Thus, nourishment from the European musical environment became available to the Russians through popular urban and art music. Neither Glinka nor Tchaikovsky could have become what they were without the Ukrainization of Russian music that continued throughout the “long eighteenth century.”

Russian and Ukrainian folk music differ in part due to the ethnocultural environments and influences under which they developed and evolved. Russian music of the 16th and early 17th centuries was exceedingly modal, and its polyphony lacked harmonic definition (in folk as well as church music), while Ukrainian music preserved these East Slavic traits only in its southeastern and north-central regions close to Kiev. The folk music of the larger, “right-bank” Ukraine, bordering with Poland, Austria-Hungary, and Bessarabia, has a strong major-minor base, reflecting its cultural ties with central Europe. The urban population in Russia since at least the mid-17th century has traditionally enjoyed Ukrainian music.

Whilst already entrenched in European tradition, art-music genres developed in Russia only in the last three decades of the 18th century. During these years a new type of song, evolving from *kanty* and *psalmy* - *rossiiskaya pesnya* [Russian song] - rose to prominence in social music-making. Not yet reduced to the status of a lower genre, it was exempt from any interdictions and ideological pressures, and was thus free to assimilate the traits of contemporary European music. (For a detailed survey of the development of Russian songs, see Mazo 1987, 3-76.) Stylistically compatible with what was most popular in Europe at the time - the minuet and siciliana—the new songs freely adopted their rhythms, benefiting greatly from this combination. These new songs were doubly enjoyed: as an exciting genre of fine poetry cultivating a courteous style of behavior, and as a gracious fashionable music with danceable motifs associated with an amorous poetic lexicon. Since popular music creates a particular ambience, as well as an audience, its role in developing a native audience ready to appreciate contemporary European music cannot be overestimated. It provided the missing link in the very special chain of conditions of 18th-century Russia that now made the lexicon of contemporary European comic opera and instrumental music not only recognizable and enjoyable, but also possible to reproduce in a vernacular Russian-Ukrainian manner. The development of the new Russian song began in the 1740s and '50s, which were two decades of political stagnation. Consequently, by the remarkable 1760s, when the accomplishments of the Russian state under the rule of Catherine the Great significantly accelerated, an audience for the fine art of music had already come into being. From then on, every embryonic facet and institution of musical culture began to grow and develop.

In the course of the general Ukrainization of Russian music, Ukrainian singers enjoyed much popularity and fame. Alexey Razumovsky, a court singer, became the favorite of the future Empress Elizabeth (Elizaveta Petrovna, Peter the Great's daughter, 1709-61), even before she ascended to power in 1741. (Alexey's family name became familiar in West Europe due to Beethoven's *Razumovsky* quartets, dedicated to his nephew Andrew Razumovsky.) It is now also clear why the main body of native musicians at the imperial court was traditionally of Ukrainian origin, including two first-rate composers of a high international standard, Maxim Berezovsky (174?-77) and Dmitry Bortniansky (1751-1825).

VII Social Structure and Musical Life

Four strata of the secular social hierarchy of Russian society in the second half of the 18th century produced their own musical subcultures: the imperial court, the nobility, the urban population, and the peasantry. These subcultures interacted in various ways, each of them having its own sources of nourishment and levels of openness toward native as well as alien cultural phenomena.

The musical court subculture, as part of the general court establishment (including ceremony, architecture,

costume, entertainment, behavior, rank, etc.), was completely European oriented. The degree of European influence was a matter of prestige and ultimately of political power: “We are one of you but richer and stronger” was the message usually conveyed to European society by the incredible luxury of the Imperial court of St. Petersburg. The court had no choice but to express this in the languages understood by Europe: the languages of classicist Italian architecture and music; of the Germanized army, education, and technology; the eclectic language of the French Enlightenment; American legalized slavery; and English imperialism. The appearance at the Russian court of such artists as the composers Baltassarro Galuppi, Giovanni Paisiello, Giuseppe Sarti, the male soprano Giovanni Carestini, and the soprano Caterina Gabrielli, was purely a matter of prestige. Each of them was courted protractedly and finally seduced by the most lavish conditions, beyond all economic and social proportions. One thing led to another: the finest composers and star singers required lavish opera productions, splendid halls, the best instruments, and so on in order to display their talent. Thus the stars’ environment became part of the whole Imperial court subculture. The native musicians, who developed within this framework, were then supposed to reproduce the high European standards of performance in Russia, thus founding a national culture of a new, Western-oriented kind.



Illustration 6:
The chamber of the Grand Duchess Maria Fedorovna in the Pavlovs' Palace, c. 1780



Illustration 7:
The Interior of the Grand Church in Winter Palace, St. Petersburg, c. 1780

The Russian nobility, whose cultural aspirations were determined by the fashions dictated at court, emulated this style; each according to his financial means, taste, and ambitions. Possessing many serfs and often employing foreign *kapellmeisters*, the nobility established the dominant culture in Russia at the time. Music in the estates of the Russian aristocracy combined selections from the court repertoire, urban music-making (including the repertoire of public theaters), and popular urban and peasant songs and dances. Since large numbers of people were involved, this musical subculture produced a mass of musically educated

people that contributed to the development of Russian musical culture in general.

The urban musical culture evolved in each town according to its particular urban anthropology and social and ethnic structures. The secular population of Moscow consisted mostly of merchants, artisans, servants, and a multiprofessional ghetto of foreigners (the German Quarter, Chinatown, and other communities). Moscow had also become home to a fast-growing educated class since the establishment of the *Slaviano-Greco-Latinskaia Akademia* in 1687 and of the University in 1755, while maintaining business and cultural connections with the old Russian, Ukrainian, and Byelorussian cities. As a former capital, Moscow possessed a great number of affluent homes and, accordingly, a large serf population, ghettoized within the estates. The upper class had begun to develop its own in-house music-making, which was at times performed outside the estates as public entertainment, uniting estate and urban subcultures.

The social anthropology of St. Petersburg differed from that of Moscow in every possible way. The Imperial court, the broad stratum of aristocracy, the large and non-ghettoized community of newly-arrived foreigners, the military staff, the bureaucratic apparatus, sailors, port workers and officials, educational institutions, many household servants - all contributed to a mosaic of a multicultural secularized population, each sector closed within itself. The creation and development of music performing institutions were accompanied by efforts to accustom the public to attending concerts and spectacles. Peter the Great's orders regarding the tutoring of musicians and the forming of orchestras were followed by directives strictly obliging the nobility to serve as an audience for concerts; disobeying could lead to exile from the capital. Such enforced participation continued throughout the first half of the 18th century (Stolpiansky 1989, 5-8), later turning into a way of life. In the course of time, this practice of concert-going penetrated the court circles, and supported the development of domestic music-making as well. Moreover, the process continued throughout the 19th and 20th centuries among the "mixed-caste" intelligentsia, and became a *bon ton* characteristic of the population of St. Petersburg.

The great culture of peasant music is a world in itself. Complex, multigeneric, traditionally transferring the skill of folk polyphonic (or multi-part) singing, this culture remained the only independent musical phenomenon, surprisingly unchanged throughout many centuries and absolutely resistant to urban influence (Marquise and Shchurov 1994). Paradoxically, although it did not absorb features from the other musical realities, peasant music served as an inexhaustible source for repertoires and styles in Russia's other musical subcultures.

Having examined these four sociomusical realities - court, estate, urban, and peasant - we can see that two extremes, court and peasant, were self-sufficient, not absorbing from others yet contributing to them, while estate and urban music were much more flexible and multichanneled in the give-and-take process. The two poles of 18th-century Russian musical culture, court art music and folk, were strangely associated with Western and native concepts. Estate and urban cultures broke this dependence, merging socially and geographically different sounds into what later became recognized as Russian music.

A comparison of the *first opera in Russia* and the *first Russian opera* demonstrates the continuing interaction of Western and native elements in 18th-century Russian musical life. This comparison clearly shows how the main components (composer, style, libretto, language, and performers) of an opera commissioned by Russians for a Russian audience were changing from foreign to native. In Araja's *La Forza dell'amore e dell'odio*, 1736, the first opera performed in Russia, all five components were foreign. In the first Russian opera, Popov's *Aniuta*, 1772, the five components were native (although some arrangements of Russian songs may have been done by foreign musicians, who were probably among the performers). While this comparison is not totally valid, because Araja's *opera seria* reflected a highly developed genre while Popov's comedy does not represent a developed musical culture, it does set a precedent. Indeed, only a few years were to pass before the creation of the elaborate Russian operas, albeit comic, by Vasiliy Pashkevich (1744-97) and Evstigney Fomin (1768-1801).

Summary

The above account of eight centuries of Russian music is, of course, only a general survey; many important phenomena have remained outside its scope. And yet, the article has hopefully achieved a number of goals. First, to correct the prevalent view that "Russian music begins with Glinka." Second to articulate some crucial points along the tortuous paths of Russian musical history. Finally, the article hopefully will provoke interest in a magnificent cultural legacy, which, still promises many discoveries. The dramatic tensions of Russian history reflect Russia's geopolitical location between East and West. Music, like a magical Aeolian harp vibrating to the breath of social life, translates these tensions into a rich and sophisticated language. One

who seeks to understand Russia must learn more about its music.

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Notes

1. Quite naturally, the bulk of material concerning early Russian music stems from Russian research. Among the older generation, Nikolai Findeizen, Yuriy Keldysh, Sergei Skrebkov, Vladimir Protopopov, Nikolai Uspensky, and Maxim Brazhnikov deserve particular mention. Of the non-Russian scholars, Robert-Alois Mooser's works (1932; 1945, 1948-51) provide a vivid picture of musical life of that time.

2. According to different sources, the time of destruction varies and lasts as late as the mid-11th century.

3. The Russian Orthodox Church persistently condemned pagan *Satanic games*, often associated with rituals and entertainment accompanied by instrumental music. Remarkably, the texts of such condemnations, mentioning *Satanic games*, *Rusaliias*, and *gusli* in Kievan Rus', are literally the same as those known in Bulgaria. Bulgaria had converted to Christianity almost a century earlier than Kievan Rus', and had also retained its pagan culture in a way that was very similar to that of Kievan/Muscovite Rus' (Krastev 1970). Apparently, it was not only Orthodoxy that spread from the Byzantine Empire; rather, as a center of world culture it also served as a model for a secular (primarily entertainment) culture that appealed to the pagan or recently pagan population. Orthodox encounters with pagan culture, therefore, were not an entirely new problem in the lands of Kievan Rus' or Bulgaria.

4. My thanks to Izaly Zemtsovsky for discussing the subject, and to Margarita Mazo for her help with the materials.

5. I follow here L. N. Gumilev's definition of super-ethnos as an ethnical system, consisting of several ethnic entities that have arisen simultaneously in a specific geographical area, and which display themselves in history as a mosaic whole (1989, 499).

6. P. Wexler gives a bibliography relating to the possible Jewish (Khazar) impact on Slavic literature and culture, and the possible Khazar contribution to the East Slavic pantheon (1993, 249).

7. My thanks to Paul Wexler for this precious reference and for other important bibliographical sources.

8. J. Yasser cites many collections of *byliny* written in various regions of Russia.

9. Chernigov's belonging to Khazaria also casts another light on the well-publicized archeological finding—a gigantic pair of horns from a now-extinct wild ox / tau discovered in *Chernaya mogila*, 1873. Its silver ornamentation, featuring oriental motives on one horn, and northern barbarian hunting birds, a dragon, and griffons on the other (Findeizen 1928, 26-27), might be related to the Khazarian culture.

10. A. Beider (1993) gives Skomorovsky as derived from the Ukrainian village in the Zhytomir district called Skomorokha (Skomoroxa).

11. Regarding the enigmatic etymology of the word *skomorokh*, I would like to suggest associating it with the phonetically close and logically connected Latin term *humor*, which has been adopted by many European languages, as well as the Hebrew (“hkumor”) and the Russian (“yumor”). There is also the Russian *umora* (dying from laughter) with its connotation to *skomorokhi* as the principal bearers of the laughter culture, and the *s-m-kh* root of the word that comprises the Russian *smekh* (“laughter”). As so often happens with adopted alien words, their phonetic closeness to the vernacular language serves to ensure their smooth absorption. *Skomorokh* was neither the single nor the first word for Rus'ian minstrels. They were often called by the Rus'ian terms *glumets* (one who sneers), *igrets* (one who plays), *gusel'nik* (playing *gusli*), and others of similar ilk. However, there was also the popular German word in use - *spielmann*, which was substituted by the term *skomorokh* (Belkin 1975, 46) and whose appearance in the Kievan Rus' context poses a serious challenge for researchers.

12. Belkin associates its appearance with the first translation of [biblical] texts from Greek into Old Slavic, and as coming from Bulgaria where he traces it to the ninth-tenth centuries (Belkin 1975, 40-41).

13. The predominant denomination in the West Ukraine was known as the Uniate Church, uniting Orthodox and Catholic churches in recognizing the authority of the Pope, while preserving Orthodox customs and observations.

14. Empress Anna is unfortunately associated in Russian history with the Kurlandian Count Earnest Johann Biron (1690-1772), actually the real ruler at the time - a period of cynical and aggressive corruption known as *bironovshchina*.

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Abstract:

The article presents an overview of the history of Russian music from the tenth to the 18th century. The belated development of a national school of art-music in Russia is explained in terms of the limitations imposed by the Russian Orthodox Church, which: a) prohibited instrumental music in the liturgy and prevented its development in secular practice; and b) opposed the influence of Western musical culture. The processes in Russian musical culture are interpreted in relation to general sociohistorical shifts. The strong impact of Ukrainian music on Russian music is examined, and four subcultures (court, estate, urban, and peasant) are analyzed from the perspectives of international and intergeneric connections.

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