The Political in Rimsky-Korsakov's Operas

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By

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This book is dedicated to my mother Tyyne Elina who, prior to her premature death, introduced me to the fascinating world of opera.

Portrait of Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov. Valetin Serov, 1898. The Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow, Russia.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

When considering Russian art and music it is interesting to note that the focus has been on the imposed ideological changes that occurred in the post-1917 period. Much has been written about the complex relationship between Shostakovich and Stalin. However, already in the century before this the socio-political climate in both Russia and Western Europe was changing. The accepted tradition of a 'God-appointed' monarchy together with a supporting aristocracy and Church was being questioned by a growing intellectual, professional and commercial class, as well as by the lower classes. The new 'enlightened' views were reflected in literature, the pictorial arts, and music. Theatre and opera were paramount due to their visual impact. In my initial studies concerning Russian music and the arts, I became aware of a lack of scholarship into their inter-relationship with the radical questioning of both the established autocracy, and the search for a Russian national identity during the 19th and early 20th century. This book is a contribution and, hopefully, a stimulus towards this line of study.

I have been fortunate during the time I have been developing my ideas, to have had the opportunity for extensive discussions with many eminent Russian scholars and musicians. As the Intendant of the Mikkeli Music Festival for many years, I had an opportunity to work closely with the Mariinsky Theatre, visiting artists such as Dmitry Hvorostovsky, and Valery Gergiev. Through this association, I was able to see many of the Russian classic operas during visits to St. Petersburg. I initially discussed my research topic with Boris Gasparov, Professor Emeritus of Russian and East European Studies, Columbia University who was very supportive of my line of enquiry. This view was also subsequently underlined and enhanced by Professor Andrei Denisov of the Rimsky-Korsakov St. Petersburg State Conservatory. In addition, I have spent many hours discussing Russian music with Eero Tarasti, Emeritus Professor of Musicology at the Department of Philosophy, History, Culture and Arts Studies at the University of Helsinki. Professor Veijo Murtomäki of the Sibelius Academy has given me continual support. I am especially grateful to the Director of the Aleksanteri Institute, University of Helsinki, Professor Markku Kangaspuro, for being able to continue my research as an External Post-Doctoral Researcher associated with the Institute.

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I would like to acknowledge permission given to me by Vladimir Morozon, Editor-in-Chief at Musica Russica to use musical excerpts from *Rimsky-Korsakov: The Complete Sacred Choral Works*, Elibron to re-print examples from their series of Rimsky-Korsakov's operas, and Lyle Neff for his translations of the libretti of some of these operas.

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14th June 2021
Kangasniemi

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

It became the fashion in Europe in the late 18th and 19th centuries to use music, and particularly opera, to protest against the politics of the day, and the *ancien régime*. There is also a tendency when considering the socio-political changes that occurred throughout Europe in the 19th century to focus on the year 1848. However, prior to this there were already changes in attitudes and censorship policies, and a tightening of control, which extended to education and the arts. As one can discern when considering Mozart,[1] this questioning of what a democratic society should be was prevalent a lot earlier. It was the ideas developing through the Enlightenment that needed controlling. These were the fears that drove the strict censorship regime of Nicholas I in Russia, and it was here that the establishment continually struggled with the freedoms appearing in Western society. It was assumed that the bureaucratic society of St. Petersburg around the court would enjoy the operas of Mozart, Beethoven and Verdi, and understand them. However, an increasingly more literate and ambitious middle class would find support in these operas for the liberal and radical views, which were developing at the time, and this needed to be controlled. This censorship continued through into the reign of Nicholas II. It has been assumed that a visible Russian music protest only became an issue in the 20th century, and focused on the ideological battle between the socialist realism of the State under Josef Stalin and the composer Dmitry Shostakovich. This book will show that Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov already criticized the tsarist autocracy in both the majority of his operas, as well as many of his songs. The works of the *kuchka*[2] were not to the liking of the tsars, the ultimate censors, and

[1] Details of people mentioned in the text are given in Appendix 1.

[2] *Moguchaia kuchka*, the Mighty Handful, a term introduced by the critic Vladimir Stasov in an article he wrote in the St Petersburg Bulletin (Sankt-Peterburskie Vedemosti) newspaper in 1867: ‘God grant that our Slav guests may never forget today's concert; God grant that they may forever preserve the memory of how much poetry, feeling, talent, and intelligence are possessed by the small but

consequently were not widely shown on the imperial stage until after the Imperial Theatre monopoly was rescinded in 1882. Prior to this the Russian opera that dominated the stage was, for instance, the nationalistic *A Life for the Tsar* by Mikhail Glinka, which opened each Mariinsky Theatre season.

Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov was born in 1844, at a time when Russia under Tsar Nicholas I was becoming concerned about the growth of the liberal, nationalist and socialist movements in Europe. Perhaps as a result of the social and legal changes, which occurred in Russia as he matured, Rimsky-Korsakov became an astute and critical observer of society in Russia in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. His operas project an image of his homeland, its customs and folklore that, for the Imperial court and the upper echelons of society, had long been lost. From his first opera onwards, his aim was to remind the audience of their heritage and history. However, later on, as an established Professor of the St. Petersburg Conservatoire, he took an interest not only in the pedagogical aims of the establishment, but also in the direction of education under a censorial and rigid tsarist regime. While perceiving Russian culture in his operas, the audience would also have become aware of Rimsky-Korsakov's underlying criticism of the politics of the time.

Since Russia was fully *au fait* with the social and political developments in Europe, following the defeat of Napoleon, it is necessary to initially, briefly outline these, to give a background to the Russian socio-political climate in the 19th century. In 18th century Western Europe, the Enlightenment concepts emphasising the need for reason, analysis and individualism became a dominant cultural and intellectual point of discussion. The contemporary thinkers questioned the traditional concepts of authority, the Church and hereditary power. At this time, musicians also became more aware of the possibilities offered by using their works, particularly operas, as a means of expressing their own criticism, but they too were constrained by the aristocracy and the Church. With this in mind it will be easier to understand the background to the censorial and self-centred policies of the Russian autocracy on which Rimsky-Korsakov based the political comment in his operas.

In Russia, stimulated by the ideals of the Enlightenment, Catherine the Great became concerned with the 'cultural symbols' of national identity. She understood that, since the indigenous culture, encompassing all aspects of the fine arts, was essential to the life of all

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already mighty handful of Russian musicians.' The group included Mily Balakirev, Aleksander Borodin, Cesar Cui, Modest Mussorgsky, and Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov.

social classes, it should be encouraged. In this respect ethno-symbolic concepts played a significant role. In Catherine's opinion it was essential for the aristocratic classes to appreciate and focus on the language and traditions of their own country, and for a middle class to grow and become the essential link between the upper classes and the serfs with their agrarian-based traditions. Through a realistic awareness and appreciation of the lives of these different levels of society, and through the increasing accessibility of published and performed works, there was a possibility for a diverse and unified 'nation' to become a reality. Inherited traditions, dances, songs and language are not static and change as society's fashions develop; these facets of identity were changing in Russia at that time through urbanisation. The late 18th and early 19th centuries became a time, not only to re-discover a lost ethnic culture, a more tradition-based way of life on which to build, but also to become aware of a changing society. In this respect the work of Nikolai L'vov with regard to folk music, for example, was exemplary. This was the period when Russia started to question the excessive Western orientation introduced by Peter the Great, and to re-discover itself. This concept was later taken up by Nicholas I who saw a need for Russia to return to its roots and the fundamental pillars of Russian autocracy. This resulted in the 'Official Nationality' policy of 1833, with its embodiment of 'orthodoxy, autocracy and nationality' (*pravoslavie, samoderzhavie, narodnost'*). This was an affirmation of the basis of tsarist rule, founded on a tsar being both the head of the nation and the church.[3]

Censorship as the autocratic response

One consequence of the growing discontent, as a result of the Enlightenment was that, from the late 18th century onwards, censorship of the theatre became extremely strict. With the rate of illiteracy still high in Europe, theatre became influential, due to it being more accessible to the general public than publications. It was considered that plays and operas would have a greater influence on public opinion since:

> The impression made by the former [theatre] is infinitely more powerful than that of the latter [publications] because the former engages the eyes and ears and is intended to penetrate the will of the spectator in order to

[3] Peter the Great abolished the Patriarchate in 1721 and replaced it with the Holy Governing Synod, which effectively brought the Church under the control of the State.

> attain the emotional effects intended; this is something that reading alone does not achieve.[4]

In Western Europe, opera developed as a public entertainment, attracting a large and dedicated audience. This opened the door to a questioning of facets of society, the distribution of power and the involvement of individuals. Between 1776 and 1790 Mozart, through his operas *The Marriage of Figaro*, *Don Giovanni* and *Così fan tutte,* drew attention to a society which questioned previously accepted norms. The institution and customs of the established aristocracy were being questioned by a growing enlightened intellectual, middle and lower classes who found them unacceptable. A century later, in Russia, *The Marriage of Figaro* would not be allowed by the tsarist regime because of its ridicule of the aristocracy. Mozart's operas also pointed towards political conflict at the time of the Enlightenment. It is not surprising then that 'Viva la Libertà', when repeated thirteen times in a short space of time by the main protagonists in Act 1, Scene III of *Don Giovanni*, leaves little doubt that Mozart was making a point, which struck a raw nerve with the Austrian censors in 1787 Vienna; the words had to be altered to 'Viva la società.'[5] In Mozart's final opera, *The Magic Flute* in 1790, he returned to this question of freedom; Sarastro admonishes Pamina with the words 'doch geb' ich dir Freiheit nicht' (I will not give you freedom). To quote Peter Sellars in The Telegraph, 3 July 2006, Mozart was in fact one of Europe's leading intellectuals, and one of the most intensely political artists in history: '[...] every single opera is a radical gesture of equality between the ruling class and the working class.' He also reminds us, that there is not much evidence of this radicalism in his letters since '[...] censorship was so intense, anyone who expressed revolutionary ideas or those that led to the French Revolution would be likely to be interrogated by the secret police.'[6]

The French Revolution in 1789 came as a shock to the ruling heads of Europe, and led to a tightening of regulations; words such as 'liberty' and 'equality' were not to be mentioned. The French Revolution

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[4] Quoted from Franz Karl Hägelin: memorandum concerning censorship in Hungary but principles effective in Vienna, *Jahrbuch der Grillparzer-Gesellschaft 7 (1897)*: 298-340 see also Yates, W.E., *Theatre in Vienna. A Critical History, 1776-1995* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996): 25.

[5] Rushton, Julian, *W.A. Mozart. Don Giovanni* (Cambridge University Press, 1981): 140 (footnote).

[6] <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/music/classicalmusic/3653580/Mozart-was-a-political-revolutionary.html>

also resulted in the words at the end of the German version of *Don Giovanni* Act 1, 'Es lebe die Freiheit,/Die Freiheit soll leben!' (Long live freedom/Freedom should live) to be altered to 'Es lebe die Fröhlichkeit/ Die Fröhlichkeit soll leben!' (Long live happiness/Happiness should live).[7] When considering the 'political' in Beethoven's compositions and, particularly, his final work, in which he used Schiller's 'Ode to Joy', it should be remembered that this was originally written in 1785. However, there has been reference to whether it was in fact 'Joy' (Freude) or 'Freedom' (Freiheit) that Schiller was referring to at the time, and the alteration had been made to appease the Austrian censorship.[8] This ode had a bearing in Germany on the concepts of brotherhood and liberty that were prevalent in revolutionary France. It is not surprising that the sentiments expressed in Schiller's works were not to the liking of the Habsburg censors, and his works were banned for fifteen years starting in 1793. Schiller supported the concepts of an idealised society and national liberation in many of his other works such as *Don Carlos*, *The Maid of Orleans* and *William Tell*. It was perhaps the excesses of an authoritarian state under Klemens von Metternich that led Beethoven to return to Schiller's 'Ode to Joy' for his final work Symphony No.9 in D-minor, Op. 125, *The Choral*, in 1824. This can be seen as upholding the concepts of a true democratic society and was Beethoven's expression of political defiance:

Laufet, Brüder, eure Bahn, Freudig, wie ein Held zum Siegen.	Brothers, run your course now, Happy as a knight in victory.
Seid umschlungen, Millionen! Diesen Kuss der ganzen Welt! Brüder, über'm Sternenzelt Muss ein lieber Vater wohnen. Ihr stürzt nieder, Millionen?	Be embraced, you millions! Share this kiss with all the world! Way above the stars, brothers, There must live a loving father. Do you not kneel down low, you millions?[9]

[7] Yates: 26 quoting from Hock Stefan (ed.), *Erinnerungen von Ludwig August Frank* (Bibliothek Deutscher Schriftsteller aus Böhmen, 29) (Prague, Calve, 1910): 315. See also Muxfeldt, Kristina, *Vanishing Sensibilities: Schubert, Beethoven, Schumann* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2012): 4; Rosen, Charles, *The Classical Style: Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven (*London, Faber & Faber, 1997): 94–95 and 322–355.

[8] Arblaster, Anthony, *Viva la Libertà! Politics in Opera* (London and New York, Verso, 1992): 53.

[9] <http:// saxonica.com/~mike/OdeToJoy.html>, accessed 18.05.2020.

If Schiller was abused by the Austrian censorship, Beethoven, in a letter to Niklaus Simrock in August 1794, clearly gives a view of the Emperor's police state: 'You do not dare raise your voice here or the police will take you into custody.'[10] His sentiments were also expressed to a friend:

> To help wherever one can,
> Love liberty above all things,
> Never deny the truth
> Even at the foot of the throne![11]

Whilst the year 1848 is significant due to the insurrections that occurred in Europe, it is important to note that they were not only a result of the changing socio-political attitudes within society but also the tightening of censorship to restrict their dispersion. Within the Austrian sphere of influence, it was the conservative Metternich who waged war against nationalistic elements within the realm up to his forced resignation following the European revolutions of 1848/49. Metternich's aim was to preserve the legitimate rulers, a strong church and, in particular, a multi-national and multi-cultural Austria. The police state with its censors, control of universities and the activities of the secret police, mirrors the regime of Nicholas I with his fear of the liberal revolutions of 1848 spreading to Russia.

Censorship and the theatre

Increased censorship led to a requirement that commercial theatres had to submit plays for performance to the censors, who also attended both dress rehearsals and performances. It was at this time that the editor of the *Wiener Zeitung*, Josef Karl Bernhard, joked with Beethoven that 'at the congress they now are drafting a law regulating how high birds may fly and how fast the hare may run!'[12] It is interesting to compare this with a comment made following the creation of the Russian Third Department of His Majesty's Own Chancery, the secret police, in 1826, that 'Fish swam

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[10] Soloman, Maynard, *Beethoven Essays* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1988): 201.
[11] Harman, Alec; Milner Anthony; Mellars, Wilfrid, *Man and His Music: The Story of an Experience in the West* (London, Barrie and Rockliff, 1962): 632.
[12] See Muxfeldt: 16. A meeting was convened by Metternich and representatives of the German States in Carlsbad that aimed at jointly supressing liberal and nationalistic tendencies within their states. The so-called Carlsbad Decrees were signed by the participants on 20 September 1819.

in the water, birds sang in the forest, because they were permitted to do so by the authorities.'[13] Again, comparing the censors of Nicholas I with those of central Europe, it is interesting to note that the restrictions, in many ways, mirrored those of the instructions given to the censors by the Director of the Court Theatre in Vienna '[to restrict everything] that offends in the slightest against religion, the State, or good manners […] everything unworthy of a capital city and the seat of court.'[14]

In Russia an edict already existed from the time of the Empress Elisabeth, which restricted the portrayal of church officials: '[...] at Russian comedies they will not dress up in black garments or other garments having to do with ecclesiastical persons [...]', and this was further confirmed in the Imperial Law Code of 1857.[15] It was a query from the Director of the Imperial Theatres, Alexander Gedeonov, to Prince Volkonsky, the then Minister of the Court in 1837, concerning Baron Egor Rozen's drama *The Daughter of Ivan III* that received the response, which would later be problematic for both Rimsky-Korsakov and Modest Mussorgsky:

> This is to inform Gedeonov that His Majesty permits the production of Rosen's drama *The Daughter of Ivan III* and, in future, the acceptance of dramas and tragedies, but not operas, in which are represented on stage Russian tsars who ruled before the Romanovs, but excluding those who have been canonized, as for example, Alexander Nevsky.[16]

This was amended in 1872 to include only Romanov tsars. Other censorship was very vague; negative portrayals of Ivan the Terrible, for instance, were forbidden, such as in Alexander Ostrovsky's *Valisia Melenteva* (1867). The tsar's dignity and humour had to be maintained. As an example, Nicholas II gave permission for Albert Lortzing's opera *Zar und Zimmermann* (1837) to be performed at the Nicholas II People's House in St. Petersburg,[17] since it showed Peter the Great's devotion to his people and Russia. This also showed the sensitivity of the authorities who

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[13] See Riasanovsky, Nicholas, *Nicholas I and Official Nationality in Russia, 1825-1855* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1959): 221, n71.
[14] Yates: 9–10.
[15] See Emerson, Caryl & Oldani, Robert William, *Modest Mussorgsky & Boris Godunov* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994): 304, n1.
[16] Emerson & Oldani: 129.
[17] The Nicholas II People's House was built in 1899–1900 and opened by the tsar. It housed a concert hall, theatre, public library and restaurant. One aim of the theatre was to present popular entertainment for the general populace and promote, amongst others, temperance.

gave approval for some presentations at the new People's Theatres, which had been approved for the Imperial stage, whilst others were not allowed. Subjects which the censor imagined might fuel discontent and protest within a popular worker-based (*narod*) audience were banned. As a result, Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro* was considered inappropriate for the popular stage due to its portrayal of the aristocracy's questionable rights *vis-à-vis* servants, as well as showing servants as being cleverer than their masters. The guiding principle was always to promote patriotism and national pride. In the wake of the 1905 public unrest the censors became even stricter, and Schiller's *William Tell*[18] was banned since they believed an audience would not be able to evaluate the play in the right light.[19]

Nicholas I's first act as tsar was the suppression of the 1825 Decembrist revolution,[20] and the creation of the Third Department of His Majesty's Own Chancery, the secret police, in 1826, to suppress any opposition to an existing status quo. At this time, the intellectual opposition was small and serf emancipation was still almost 40 years in the future. However, the European revolutions of 1848 were seen as a threat and, consequently, censorship was enhanced by the establishment of the Buturlin Committee in 1848, a censorship committee to censor the censors. Alexander Nikitenko, who served as a censor throughout Nicholas I's reign, wrote:

> It gradually became clear that the committee was created to investigate current trends in Russian literature, particularly in journals, and to develop means to control it in the future [...] Rumours spread that the committee was particularly ferreting out and interpreting the pernicious ideas of communism, socialism, and all kinds of liberalism [...].[21]

Following the draconian measures of Nicholas I, Alexander II set up the Obolensky Commission to look into a revision of the censorship laws, and to give greater freedom to the press. The Chairman, Prince Dmitry Obolensky 'was advised to prepare laws that would combine

[18] The play tells the story of the Swiss folk hero William Tell who symbolised a struggle for political and individual freedom and his incitement to rebellion against a foreign oppressor, Austria. Rossini composed an opera on this theme, which had its première in 1829.

[19] Swift, Anthony E., *Popular Theater and Society in Tsarist Russia* (Berkeley, California, University of California Press, 2002): 105.

[20] The uprising by a number of Russian officers on 26 December 1825, in protest at the accession of Tsar Nicholas I instead of his elder brother Constantine.

[21] Nikitenko, Aleksandr, *The Diary of a Russian Censor*. ed. and tr. Helen Salz Jacobson (Amherst, The University of Massachusetts Press, 1975): 116.

protection of Orthodoxy, morality, the imperial power, and private reputations with freedom for the press to consider public affairs.'[22] The report was completed in November 1862 and recommended, amongst others, that responsibility for censorship should be given to the Ministry of the Interior. The Council of State issued the decree of 6 April 1865, which freed all eligible publications from the preliminary censorship. The first section assigned all matters concerning censorship to the Chief Administration of Press Affairs in the Ministry of the Interior, with the exception of ecclesiastical matters. The fifth section dealt with the censorship of plays for performance and for publication. Various injurious words, which were defined, became articles of the criminal code. This law, which was signed by the tsar on 6 April 1865, was effective until November 1905. Following the assassination of Alexander II in 1881 there was a tightening of the regulations, leading to the 'temporary' measures of 27 August 1882, giving wide-ranging powers to close papers and ban topics.[23]

Suppression of artistic freedom led to a resolution by the Union of Russian Artists in 1904, which stated that 'suffocating guardianship […] not only kills art but also suppresses all other creative activities in Russian society.'[24] In October 1905 prior censorship was ended, in the wake of the unrest, which started with 'Bloody Sunday'[25] in January of that year, but effectively continued with the detention of journal staff and destruction of printing presses. In April 1906 prior censorship was reintroduced with a requirement to submit illustrated journals to the authorities, at least one day, before going on sale.

The complex question of 'national identity'

How did censorship influence music, and particularly opera, and national identity? Although Franz Grillpartzer in a 'conversation book' with the

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[22] Balmuth, David, 'Origins of the Russian Press Reform of 1865', *The Slavonic and East European Review*, 47/109 (1969), 369–388.

[23] See: Zhirkov, G.V., *Istoriia tsenzury v Rossii XIX-XX vv* (History of Russian Censorship in 19th and 20th Centuries). (Moskva, Aspekt Press, 2001): 143–176; Green, Jonathon; Karolides, Nicholas, *Encyclopedia of Censorship* (New York, Facts On File, Inc, 2005): 484–85.

[24] Ruud, Charles, *Fighting Words: Imperial Censorship and the Russian Press, 1804-1906* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press Inc, 2009): 238, 245.

[25] 'Bloody Sunday' occurred on 22 January 1905 in St. Petersburg when unarmed protestors bringing a petition to the tsar, carrying icons and led by Father Georgy Gabon were fired on by the Imperial Guard outside the Winter Palace.

deaf Beethoven wrote 'Musicians are lucky, they don't have to bother with the censors' this did not hold true when considering opera.[26]

Rimsky-Korsakov was born at a time when the Official Nationality policy was being enforced due to the fears of the European revolutions of 1848 spreading to Russia. He was in his late teens when the Emancipation Manifesto was eventually enacted. However, the liberal policies of Alexander II hardened, and the tsarist bureaucracy became more centralised, repressive and locked by confusion and uncertainty. This was the time when the liberal intelligentsia were also developing their ideological views of a 'new' Russian society, and questioning Count Sergei Uvarov's restatement of the imperial edict in 1834: 'Our common obligation consists in this that the education of the people be conducted according to the Supreme intention of our August Monarch, in the joint spirit of Orthodoxy, autocracy, and nationality.'[27]

National identity is a concept, which is very difficult to define. Its characterisation depends very much on the discipline of the definer, whether it be, for instance, geographical, political or sociological. The terms 'citizen', 'patriot' and 'nationalist' do not necessarily have anything to do with national identity. An immigrant can be all of them, however, irrespective of this, he is unlikely to attain the national identity of his chosen nation. To quote the words of Jean-Jacques Rousseau: 'The first rule which we have to follow is that of national character: every people has, or must have, a character.'[28] Lev Tolstoy in *War and Peace* (Voina i mir) underlines the essence of national identity when he describes Natasha's dance:

> Where, how and when could this young countess, who had had a French *émigrée* for governess, have imbibed from the Russian air she breathed the spirit of that dance? [...] But the spirit and the movements were the very ones - inimitable, unteachable Russian [...] she [Anisya Fiodorvana] watched the slender, graceful countess, reared in silks and velvets, in another world than hers, who was yet able to understand all that was in

[26] Goldstein, Robert, *Political Censorship in the Arts and the Press in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Basingstoke, The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1989): 155.
[27] Riasonovsky: 73; original see Zhurnal' minsterstva narodnago prosv'shcheniia, Chast' pervaia, 1834: XLIX-L.
<http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/5/5f/ЖМНП_1834_Часть_001_pdf>, accessed 20.05.2020
[28] See Franklin, S. and Widdis, E. (eds.), *National Identity in Russian Culture* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004): 1. This was stated in Rousseau's Constitutional Project for Corsica drafted in 1763.

> Anisya and in Anisya's father and mother and aunt, and in every Russian man and woman.[29]

The German-Swiss jurist and political theorist, Johann Kaspar Bluntschli in his *Theory of the State* has outlined identity in perhaps the most direct way as a 'national spirit embodied in common language, customs, and outlook of the people.'[30]

Any discussion of national identity views, particularly in the 19th century, needs to consider the ideas of Johann Gottfried Herder, and especially his concept of *'Volk'*. It was also Herder's concepts that formed a basis for the development of political thought in Russia. Herder underlined the importance of language, both as a means to understand the inner-self, as well as understanding external relationships; 'Climate, water and air, food and drink, they all affect language.'[31] The *volk*, or nationality, is spiritual and embodies a historical development, and awareness, of an inherent surrounding and culture. This arouses a sense of identity with the community. Herder strongly believed that reform would only occur by movements led from the *volk* through political, intellectual and cultural activity originating in the middle class, and diffusing to all classes of society. This would result in the disappearance of an inflexible, autocratic and repressive government, and be replaced by a 'government of the people'. These ideas found fertile ground within the developing middle class in 19th century Russia.

Both society and the bureaucracy were widely criticised in Russian art and literature. Nikolai Gogol's *The Inspector General* (Revizor), published in 1836 and revised in 1842, followed the creation of the Third Department and the Official Nationality policy of 1833. It was the 'little' minds in the censors' departments that questioned, amongst others, Gogol's valuation of a human soul at two and a half roubles in *Dead Souls* (Mertvye dushi), which was also published in 1842. They also feared that musical notation might include secret codes. Already earlier in 1830, Pyotr Chaadaev, in *Letters on the History of Philosophy* (Pis'ma iz istorii filosofii), questioned whether there was anything genuine in Russia, no original thought, and all that had been adopted from abroad was the

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[29] Tolstoy, L.N., *War and Peace*, tr. Rosemary Edmunds. (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, Penguin Books, 1967): 604.

[30] See, Snyder, Louis L., *The Meaning of NATIONALISM* (Westport, Greenwood Press Publishers, 1954): 193.

[31] See, Barnard, Frederick, *Herder's Social and Political Thought* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1965): 57. Barnard gives a comprehensive description and analysis of Herder's main concepts.

useless and trivial. Consequently, Russia had 'no past, no present, and no future' and was 'a gap in the intellectual order of things.[32]

Fig. 1-1. ***Easter Procession in a Village.*** Vasily Perov. 1861. The Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow, Russia.

Under state control, the church had also become secularised and corrupt, as can be seen in the realist painting by Vasily Perov, *Easter Procession in a Village*. The tsarist regime, however, needed religion as a support for the existing order. While the Official Nationality policy enforced the notion of the inviolability of the State, and aimed at underlining the authority of the tsar supported by the Church, it fanned the more extreme nationalist ideas of Nikolai Chernyshevsky, Alexander Herzen and Vissarion Belinsky, who would subsequently elaborate on them in their newspapers *The Bell* (Kolokol) and *The Contemporary*

[32] Riasanovsky, Nicholas, *Russian Identities. A Historical Survey* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2005): 151. See also Chaadayev, Peter, *Philosophical Letters & Apology of a Madman,* tr. Mary-Barbara Zeldin (Knoxville, The University of Tennessee Press, 1969): 35–37.

(Sovremennik). Prior to this, it was Prince Nikita Panin, who had been Russia's Ambassador in Sweden and a Councillor to Catherine's Foreign Affairs Commission, who indicated what would happen to a continuing despotic and autocratic Russia. In documents found after his death in 1783, he had written in his *A Discourse on the Disappearance in Russia of All Forms of Government and Likewise on the Unstable Position of the Empire and Sovereigns Arising Therefrom*:

> Where the arbitrary rule of one man is the highest law [...] there can be no lasting and unifying bonds; there is a state, but no fatherland; there are subjects but no citizens; there is no body politic whose members are linked to each other by a network of duties and privileges. […] Nor can you speak of democracy in a country where the common people, steeped in abysmal ignorance, drag without complaint the cruel yoke of slavery.[33]

This document also contained a clear warning that rebellion would occur if the country did not move towards democracy. It was Herzen who eventually published Panin's warning in 1861, and it only appeared in Russia after 1905.

The première of Glinka's opera *A Life for the Tsar* (Zhizn' za tsaria) took place in 1836, and appeared as a manifestation of the State 'National Identity' concept. However, it stirred up a discussion within society of the meaning of national identity (*narodnost'*). This was taken up by Dmitry Struysky, who asked: 'Of what does national identity consist?'[34] He questioned whether true musical national identity lay in the use and adaptation of folksong, and suggested that the reason for the success of many Russian operas was not in the quality of the music, but that the composers were imitating the *zapevala*, the initial melody of a folksong. This was not giving the music genuine national identity, but the national identity of the common people (*prostonarodnost'*).

In the literary world, however, there already existed a tradition, extending from Gavrila Derzhavin through to Alexander Pushkin, in which the writers wrote from an inner feeling; they did not necessarily need to look for a national identity. According to Struysky: 'Music has least need of national identity among all the arts since by its essence it is the common

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[33] Walicki, Andrzei, *A History of Russian Thought from the Enlightenment to Marxism*, tr. Hilda Andrews-Rusiecka (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1980): 33.
[34] Campbell, Stuart (ed. and tr.), *Russians on Russian Music, 1830 – 1880* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994): 44–46.

language of mankind and since it has *its own form* [...]'[35] However others, such as Prince Vladimir Odoevsky, felt that Glinka's composition *Kamarinskaya* (Kamarinskaia) fully reflected a Russian character in a way that no foreign composer could, since the orchestral work was entirely based on folk music. The music critic known as Rostislav, Feofil Tolstoy, compared composers to painters who 'are not subject to the demands of exclusive nationality.'[36] However, Tolstoy felt that in music the nationality invariably appears through the use of folksongs.

Whereas the music of composers such as Chopin in Poland, Smetana in the Czech region of the Habspurg Empire, and Sibelius in Finland embodied a 'national' music in opposition, in Russia the struggle was against an imported 'foreign' culture, that in its own way affected all levels of society. Glinka's opera supported a state ideology; maintenance of the status quo. It was a defence of a true search for identity that caused the Russian musical controversy in the second half of the 19th century. Stasov summed-up the feeling in his article in *Northern Bee* (Severnaia pchela), in answer to Rubinstein's criticism of Russian music life in *Century* (Vek), and his arguments to support the founding of Russia's first Conservatoire in 1862. Stasov wrote:

> All the music teachers in our country are foreigners; they were trained in conservatories and schools. Why then, are people complaining about the poor musical instruction here? Is it likely that the teachers coming out of our future conservatory will be better than those sent to us from abroad? [...] The time has come to stop transplanting foreign institutions to our country and to give some thought to what would really be beneficial and suitable to *our* soil and *our* national character.[37]

This concurred with the French philosopher, art critic, and writer Diderot's views, already expressed a century earlier, concerning the St. Petersburg academies instituted by Catherine the Great:

> Virtually all their active members were foreigners, mostly German, Swiss, and Huguenots, who spoke and wrote in languages the vast majority of Russian-speakers could not understand. The Academy did little to promote Russian as an enlightened language. Since the savants

[35] Campbell: 47.
[36] Ibid: 54.
[37] Stasov, Vladimir Vasilevich, *Selected Essays on Music*, tr. Florence Jonas (New York, Frederick A. Praeger, Publishers, 1968): 83.

> and artists that belonged to these bodies had no real connection to Russian society were they not 'inutiles et ruineux'? [38]

Burkholder, Grout and Palisca uphold the views presented earlier, by both Nikolai Karamzin 1802 and Juri Lotman (1984), concerning the essential essence of the problem concerning identity:[39] 'The search for an independent native voice was especially keen in Russia and Eastern Europe, where the dominance of Austro-German instrumental music and Italian opera was felt as a threat to home grown musical creation.'[40]

Rimsky-Korsakov's political journey

Alexander Radishchev, in his *Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow* (Puteshestviia iz Peterburga v Moskvy), published in 1790, drew a realistic picture of serfdom. In the *Journey*, Radishchev gave many examples showing the effect of despotism, and why the rights of citizens and freedom of speech should be upheld by the civil law and respected by the sovereign. Censorship was not needed since the law could protect the rights of citizens. Radishchev's aim, however, was not revolution but a wake-up call to the sovereign and nobility that the continuing repression of the majority of the population could eventually lead to a revolution.[41] He particularly highlighted the former 'free cities' of Novgorod and Pskov and wrote:

> It is known from the Chronicles that Novgorod had a popular government. They had princes, but these had little power. All the power of the government was vested in the civil and *posadniki* and *tysyatskie*. The people in its assembly, the Veche, was the real sovereign […] In Novgorod there was a bell, at the tolling of which the people assembled at the Veche for consideration of public business.[42]

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[38] Israel, Jonathan, *Democratic Enlightenment. Philosophy, Revolution, and Human Rights 1750-1790* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2012): 625–26.

[39] See Lotman, Juri, *The Poetics of Everyday Behavior in Russian Eighteenth Century Culture* in Lotman, Ju. M., Uspenskij, B.A. *The Semiotics of Russian Culture*, ed. Ann Shukman (Michigan, Ann Arbor, 1984): 231–256.

[40] Burkholder, Peter J., Grout, Donald J. and Palisca, Claude V., *A History of Western Music 7th Edition* (New York, W.W. Norton & Co, 2005): 682.

[41] Radishchev, Alexander, *Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow*, tr. Leo Wiener (Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1958), 155–156. In his *Journey* he emphasises his views by quoting from Herder: 165.

[42] Ibid: 83-85. In Novgorod the *posadnik* was equivalent to mayor; the *tysyatskie* was an elected official responsible for military matters and the police.

It is not surprising, then, to find Rimsky-Korsakov, who read widely, and was familiar with the radical writings of the time, already questioning the concepts of the State and the authority of the tsar, and testing the boundaries of censorship in his first opera *The Maid of Pskov* (Pskovitianka). The concept of the republican-type society of Pskov, that was portrayed, was too radical a concept at a time when such ideas were also a thorn in the side of the authorities. Not only had the play been banned for this reason, but, in addition, incidents such as Tver's demands for an independent local assembly in 1862 disturbed the existing order. The initial chapter of this book outlines how Rimsky-Korsakov's family background, his naval training and experiences helped him to form his analytical and critical mind, which led to the questions raised in *The Maid of Pskov*.

In addition to his criticism of the bureaucracy, Rimsky-Korsakov chose to highlight the Russian expansionist policies of the peripheral countries within their control. In addition to his father's experiences in Poland, and the Russian attitude towards that country, the suppression of the language and culture of both Ukraine and Poland in the 19th century would become an issue Rimsky-Korsakov addressed in his operas *May Night* (Maiskaia Noch), *Christmas Eve* (Noch pered Rozhdestvom) and *Pan Voyevoda* and is discussed in detail in Chapter 2. His choice of Nikolai Gogol's *Evenings Near the Village of Dikanka* (Vechera na khutore bliz Dikan'ki) stories drew attention to the Ukrainian question. Direct references were made to the distance between St. Petersburg and the Ukraine, and the differences in lifestyle, which, as a result, led to a non-appreciation of the local language and culture. The criticism in *May Night* (Maiskaia Noch) is limited to references to the visit to Ukraine by Catherine the Great in 1787. However, fifteen years later in 1894-1895 Rimsky-Korsakov returned to the Ukrainian question in *Christmas Eve* (Noch pered Rozhdestvom). In this opera, he questioned the reasons for Catherine's destruction of the Zaporozhian republic: 'Why do you punish your faithful people? How have we angered you?'[43] These comments can also be seen as criticism of Alexander III's continued suppression of the Ukrainian language and culture.

The French Revolution in 1789 cut any ambition Catherine might have harboured concerning the introduction of Enlightenment philosophies suitable for Russia. Whereas, she thought she could easily keep Russia under her control, it was Poland that clearly showed what might happen at

[43] Gogol, Nikolai, *Evenings Near the Village of Dikanka* (Moscow, Foreign Languages Publishing House): 174.

home. The Polish revolt against Catherine's autocracy led to an agreement being signed between Russia, Prussia and Austria, in January 1797 that aimed at totally removing the Kingdom of Poland from the map of Europe, and splitting the lands between them. Catherine now extended her power to include the Baltic States, White Russia and the Western Ukraine. Rimsky-Korsakov had grave reservations concerning the Russian attitude towards Poland. Herzen wrote a scathing comment in *The Bell* about the suppression of the Polish uprising in 1863: 'this was not a national war, this was a police suppression of war' and continuing that this would be how the Russian regime would, in the future, control the Russian peasants.[44] At the time when the future fires of 1905 were already beginning to burst into flame, Rimsky-Korsakov turned to the Polish question in 1903 with his opera *Pan Voyevoda*. It was the Russification policy, the banning of the Polish language, and the brutal suppression by the 'governors' (voevody), where law and order had no meaning, that Rimsky-Korsakov wanted to draw people's attention to, since this appeared to be the direction of the policies of Nicholas II.

Orthodoxy as an element of 'national identity'

As mentioned previously Orthodoxy was one of the central precepts of 'Official Nationality' and this, in part, concurred with the Slavophile[45] view that Orthodoxy defined the spirituality of the nation and its identity. The Ober-Procurator of the Holy Synod, Konstantin Pobedonostsev, appointed in 1880, would also later criticise the élite. His view of the church in Russian life was: 'He who is truly Russian, heart and soul, knows what the Church of God means to the Russian people [...]'. He also drew a comparison between church and folksinging.[46] Rimsky-Korsakov qualified the reality in this aptly: 'The people, as a nation sing their

[44] Quoted in Danilevich, L., *Poslednie opery N. A. Rimskogo-Korsakova* (The Last Operas of N.A. Rimsky-Korsakov), (Moskva, Gosudarstvennoe Muzykal'noe Izdatel'stvo, 1961): 117.

[45] Slavophile – this 19th century intellectual movement wanted Russia's development to be based on indigenous values and history. They opposed the Western-European influence on Russian society.

[46] Pobydonostseff, K.P., *Reflections of a Russian Statesman*, tr. Robert Crozier Long (London, Grant Richards, 1898): 218–222; Morosan, Vladimir, ed., *Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov. The Complete Sacred Choral Works* (USA: Musica Russica, 1999): xxxi-xxxii.

ceremonial songs by force of habit and custom, neither understanding nor suspecting what really underlies these ceremonies and games.'[47]

It was the religiousness of the people that continued to generate strong views during the 19th century, drawing opposing views from Gogol and Belinsky. Gogol's assertion that the Russian people were the most religious on earth was denied by Belinsky who wrote:

> That is a lie! The basis of religiousness is pietism, reverence, fear of God. Whereas the Russian man utters the name of the Lord while scratching himself somewhere. He says of the icon: 'If it isn't good for praying it's good for covering pots.'[48]

The Marquis de Custine also made pointed remarks concerning the Church in Nicholas I's society,

> The independence of the church is necessary to the motion of the religious sap; for the development of the noblest faculty of a people, the faculty of believing, depends on the dignity of the man charged with communicating to men the divine revelations. The humiliation of the ministers of religion is the first punishment of heresy; and thus it is that in all schismatic countries the priest is despised by the people, in spite of, or rather because of the protection of the prince. People who understand their liberty will never obey, from the bottom of their hearts, a dependent clergy.[49]

In her studies on traditional music and beliefs in Russian rural life, Marina Ritzarev correctly notes that many of them, although using the signs and rituals of the Orthodox Church, are mixed with other elements that have no bearing on Christian traditions. Ritzarev maintains that '*Nationality*, with a singing peasant as its primary symbol, became the highest value, leaving *Orthodoxy* like *autocracy* only as a formal attribute. A peasant was

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[47] Rimsky-Korsakov, Nikolay, *My Musical Life* (subsequently designated MML) (London, Faber and Faber, 1989): 207; Rimsky-Korsakov, N.A., *Letopis' moei muzhikal'noi zhizni* (A Chronicle of My Musical Life) (Moskva, Soglasie, 2004): 227.

[48] Belinsky, Vissarion, *Selected Philosophical Works*, tr. L. Navrozov (Moscow, Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1956): 540. See also Bojanowska, Edyta M., *Gogol Between Ukrainian and Russian Nationalism* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press): 209 and Gogol, Nikolai, *Letters of Nikolai Gogol*, ed. and tr. Carl R. Proffer (Ann Arbor, The University of Michigan Press): 179–187.

[49] de Custine, Marquis, *Empire of the Czar. A Journey Through Eternal Russia* (New York, Doubleday): 598.