

ANTECEDENTS, AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE SACRED CHORAL CONCERTO IN RUSSIA

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SUMMARY. Upon dealing with Russian religious choral music of the 18th century, one may clearly recognize the outlines of a unique genre, the *duhovny kontsert*, or in other words, the genre of the religious choral concerto. The subject is suppletory, since very few people in Hungary have dealt with pre-19th century Russian music, let alone with choral repertoire. In the present study, we may follow up the legalization and development of polyphony in church music – which was strictly monophonic up until the 1500s – and the different types of multivocal hymns. We will also get to know the Russian composers of the 17th and 18th centuries, who contributed to the genre with their own works. We will receive a detailed description about concertante techniques used in European vocal music, and about their appearance in the 18th century Russia, which was unique to a *cappella* choral concerto. We will also get to know more about the structure and characteristics of the *duhovny kontsert*, while taking a glance at the historical background. In the final part of the study, we will see how the genre influenced subsequent eras, and how the stylistic marks and techniques appear in the choral oeuvre of Rachmaninoff.

Keywords: Russia, 18th century, church music, choral concerto, Bortniansky, Berezovsky

Preface

In my treatise I would aim to present the history of the Russian sacred choral concerto. The genre itself had become especially popular by the 18th century, when it was being cultivated by two important composers of Ukrainian origin, mostly working in the Tsarist Court: Maksim Sozontovich Berezovsky and Dmitry Stepanovich Bortniansky.

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I have a great interest in Russian music, by which I was led to deal with the afore mentioned topic. What could precede the activity of Russian composers of the 19th century, whom I truly admire and appreciate? How could an a cappella genre be so popular in such an era, when in Western Europe, vocal ensembles were rather used in oratorical works already?

During my research, I came to realize the crucial importance of this era, as it induced rapid development of the Russian choral arts. It established the work of composers of Russian national Romanticism in the 19th century and provided posterity with a pattern of combining the stylistic marks of Western European music and the traditional world of ancient Russian music, even if many of the Russian Romanticists had later distanced themselves from western ideas.

The characteristics of early polyphony in Russia

For centuries, the Russian Orthodox Church prohibited the use of musical instruments in its ceremonial music, and strove to preserve the monophonic chant, despite the blossoming polyphony in secular folk music.²

Church music in Russia was subject to alterations by multiple emperors. The first noteworthy change was done by Tsar Ivan IV in the middle of the 16th century, as Moscow became a political and cultural center after the weakening of the Principality of Kiev.³ Earlier, during the reign of Ivan III, the city-state experienced an age of development, being liberated from Tatar oppression.⁴ Russian arts were in bloom, especially literature, architecture, icon painting, and church music. Tsar Ivan IV – although being rather known for his fearsome and wild temper – knew and appreciated the art of sacred music, as well as himself being a composer of hymns too. Just like his predecessors, the Tsar invited experts of sacred music to systematize the most popular Russian Orthodox melodies in Moscow. Carrying on their predecessors' initiative, an anthology was compiled in the 15th century.⁵ Moreover, later collections of the same kind began to specifically name outstandingly talented, or greatly popular composers, such as the Tsar himself.⁶

² Ritzarev, Maria. *Eighteenth-Century Russian Music*. Ashgate Publishing Co, 2006, p. 22.

³ Ivan IV (1530-1584) Grand Prince of Moscow from 1533, and first Tsar of Russia from 1547. He gained fame as a talented state-former, and as a person of mental instability also. As a result of his reforms, the spread of Russian Orthodoxy reached even Egypt. Tarján M, Tamás. „Rettegett Iván születése (*The birth of Ivan the Terrible*).” *Rubiconline*, www.rubicon.hu/magyar/oldalak/1530_augusztus_25_rettegett_ivan_szuletese/. Accessed 5 April 2018.

⁴ Ivan III (1440-1505) Ivan Vasilyevich, or Ivan the Great. He reigned from 1462 to 1505. Warnes, David. *Chronicle of the Russian Tsars*. Thames & Hudson, 1999, p. 16.

⁵ The collection was named *Обиход* (meaning usage, or custom).

⁶ *Тысяча лет русской церковной музыки (One thousand Years of Russian Church Music)*. Musica russica Dc. Ell., 2007, p. xlv.

Ivan IV was guided in his reign by the desires of modernization and centralization. Accordingly, he summoned the so-called Hundred Chapter Synod in 1551, which – through his cooperation with the leaders of the church – resulted in several regulations being issued, regarding domestic politics and arts as well. These determined how saints could be depicted by icon painters and stated that church singing would have to be executed in a “ceremonial and impeccable” manner. In addition, a plan was projected to establish schools of vocal training and the art of singing, to the likeness of schools of grammar and literacy. Several saints were inaugurated as well, which later resulted in a new *hymnography*. Another important event of the Synod was the official acknowledgement and permission of the use of polyphony in religious music.⁷

As polyphony in folk music was developing, the Church was destined to lose its ability of preserving religious music in its original state. Most sources mentioning polyphony in sacred music are from the 17th century, however, some documents confirm the fact that it was already in use by the 16th century.⁸ Subtitles of contemporary sheet music show widespread usage, the afore-mentioned hymns being sung from the smallest of rural chapels to the biggest monasteries. The polyphonic repertoire can be divided into two major sections:

- hymns for the major events of the Church,
- hymns for common occasions, such as the night vigil, or the liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom.⁹

Some of the melodies are two-part, however, three-part pieces or “three-line chants” are more common.¹⁰ The main melodies of these come from chants notated in neumes, now becoming the *cantus firmus*. It is usually the middle voice (puty), which is accompanied by a lower and a higher part (nyiz and verh).¹¹ The first attempts of four-part polyphony can be traced back to the 17th century, however, these were still rather rudimentary.¹²

⁷ afore cited.

⁸ afore cited.

⁹ Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom: mass compiled by Saint John Chrysostom, using *Antiochian* liturgical texts. It originates in the 4th century, but later on it was augmented by additional hymns and prayers. „Aranyszájú Szent János liturgiája (*Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom*).” *Magyar Katolikus Lexikon (Hungarian Catholic Lexicon)*, lexikon.katolikus.hu/A/Aranysz%C3%A1j%C3%BA%20Szent%20J%C3%A1nos%20liturgi%C3%A1ja.html. Accessed 31 May 2018.

¹⁰ This was called „lined singing” as different voices were notated with different lines of notes, which were finally placed on top of each other. Keldish, Yury Vsevolodovich. *Az orosz zene története (The History of Russian Music)*. Zeneműkiadó, 1958, p. 24.

¹¹ Путь – way (leader, figuratively), верх – upper, низ – lower.

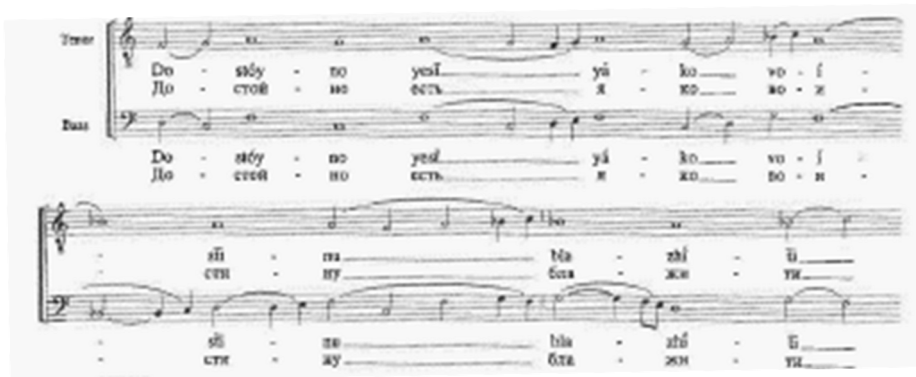
¹² Ritzarev, Maria. *Eighteenth-Century Russian Music*. Ashgate Publishing Co, 2006, pp. 22-23.

The early polyphony can be divided into two parts:

- *Znamenny* polyphony (E. g. 1., 2., 3.)
- *Demestvenny*¹³ hymn (E. g. 4.)

Examples of the *znamenny* type are melodically quite simple, mostly using consonant intervals. (E. g. 1.)

E. g. 1



Znamenny poliphony, late 1600s

It can be observed that most intervals in two-part hymns are octaves, fifths, and thirds, i. e. the usage of consonant intervals is quite common. Different voices usually move at the same time, in an organal fashion, instances of oblique motion are seldom.

A lowered seventh degree appears (and perpetuates later) at the end of the first unit, which results in an *octatone* tone set.

Three-part examples have a homophonic texture as well, mixtures of triads are used frequently, including the diminished root position triad. Substantial halts usually occur on open fifths, plagal motions can often be heard too. Voice crossings frequently happen between the upper parts. (E. g. 2.)

¹³ *Знаменное пение*: *знамя* = flag, i. e. sign. Which means hymn notated by signs. *демественное пение*: it probably originates from the word *domesticus* – domestic, at-home – regarding the singing of sacred hymns outside of the church, at home. *Православная Энциклопедия (Orthodox Encyclopedia)*, www.pravenc.ru/text/171656.html. Accessed 20 Oct. 2018.

E. g. 2

[♩ = 72 - 80]

Alto
[or Tenor]

Voz - brán - noy vo - ye - vó - de po - be - dí -
Воз - бран - ной во - е - во - дѣ по - бѣ - ди -

Tenor

Voz - brán - noy vo - ye - vó - de po - be - dí -
Воз - бран - ной во - е - во - дѣ по - бѣ - ди -

Bass

Voz - brán - noy vo - ye - vó - de po - be - dí -
Воз - бран - ной во - е - во - дѣ по - бѣ - ди -

ĭel - na - ya, yá - ko iz - bávĭ - she - ſĭa ot zĭĭ, bla -
тел(ь) - на - я, я - ко из - бавль - ше - ся отъ злыхъ, бла -

ĭel - na - ya, yá - ko iz - bávĭ - she - ſĭa ot zĭĭ, bla -
тел(ь) - на - я, я - ко из - бавль - ше - ся отъ злыхъ, бла -

ĭel - na - ya, yá - ko iz - bávĭ - she - ſĭa ot zĭĭ, bla -
тел(ь) - на - я, я - ко из - бавль - ше - ся отъ злыхъ, бла -

go - dár - stven - na - ya
го - дар - ствен - на - я

go - dár - stven - na - ya
го - дар - ствен - на - я

go - dár - stven - na - ya
го - дар - ствен - на - я

**Znamenny poliphony from the 17th century
(kontakion to Mother of God, the holiest)**

The afore-mentioned names of different voices may be observed on the following example, a *demestvenny* chant. (E. g. 3.)

[♩] = 76 - 84

[Верх] [Top] Днѣсѣ Хрис - тосъ в Виѣ ле -
 Днесъ Хрис - тосъ в Виѣ ле -
 [Путь] [Way] Днѣсѣ Хрис - тосъ в Виѣ ле -
 Днесъ Хрис - тосъ в Виѣ ле -
 [Низ] [Bottom] Днѣсѣ Хрис - тосъ в Виѣ ле -
 Днесъ Хрис - тосъ в Виѣ ле -

уѣ ѣ - - ѣ гази - да - yet -
 е е - - мѣ ражи - да - er -
 уѣ ѣ - - ѣ гази - да - yet -
 е е - - мѣ ражи - да - er -
 уѣ ѣ - - ѣ гази - да - yet -
 е е - - мѣ ражи - да - er -

сѣ
 ся
 сѣ
 ся
 сѣ
 ся

Demestvenny polyphony from the 17th century

The progression of the middle part, which carries the original melody, is characterized by longer values. Rhythmically much denser is the top part, and the bottom voice, the latter being arguably the most ornate of all. Compared to *znamenny* hymns, this genre of polyphony is rhythmically more diverse, and wealthier in figurations, presenting longer melismatic sections. These probably originate in the ancient monophonic hymns, which did not conform to the sacred ceremonial rules, thus remaining in closer relation with Russian folksongs. In addition, dissonant clashes of seconds are frequent in

the example presented above. Repeated patterns are a common phenomenon in both types of early polyphony, which is, above all, a fundamental stylistic element of Russian folk music and the music of the Russian Orthodox liturgy.¹⁴

Preservation of traditions, and innovations

After all, we can declare, that the 17th century was a time of substantial changes in Russian culture. The struggle to centralize both secular and ecclesiastic authorities was persistent. This included the goal to revise and authenticate liturgical documents, which had sustained significant errors and innumerable variants of melodies as well.

One of the leading personalities of the process was Patriarch Nikon,¹⁵ who had a friendly relationship with Tsar Alexei Mikhailovich Romanov, working together in the efforts of revision.¹⁶ However, the Patriarch – being a Greek Orthodox – was confronted with the rest of the clergy, as the latter had already lost faith in the Greek Church, since it seemed to seek the graces of the Roman Catholic Church in the 15th century. This great difference in personal views finally resulted in a schism in the Russian Church. Those who held on to their *traditional* religious practices, distancing themselves from infiltrating Western influences, instituted their own Church, and went into a voluntary exile,¹⁷ thus preserving their traditional ceremonies, and the *kant*,¹⁸ an ancient genre of hymns.

Still, because of Patriarch Nikon's activity, sacred vocal music changed significantly. Upon becoming the Bishop of Novgorod in the late 1640s, he implemented regulations concerning – among others – musical practices, as at the time he believed that church singing was executed improperly. He forbade the use of linear polyphony, which was judged as dissonant, and helped to spread homophonic three-part singing, based on the Kiev style. Characteristics of this style are simplicity, matter-of-course expression, its melodic structure bears resemblance to folksongs, and it is performed strictly without instrumental accompaniment. The examples presented earlier allow us to notice all these features accurately.

¹⁴ Rajkné Kerek, Judit. *Puskin lírája és a XIX. századi orosz románc (Pushkin's Poetry and the 19th century Russian Romance)*. DLA dissertation, Ferenc Liszt U of Music, 2008, p. 16.

¹⁵ Nikon, Patriarch of Moscow (1605-1681), born Nikita Minin. Religious leader, who tried to modify the Russian Church Liturgy to the likeness of the Greek Orthodox traditions, unsuccessfully. *Britannica*, www.britannica.com/biography/Nikon. Accessed 29 May 2018.

¹⁶ Alexei I (1629-1676), Alexei Mikhailovich Romanov. Tsar of Russia between 1645 and 1676, the schism of the Russian Orthodox Church took place while he was in reign. Warnes, David. *Chronicle of the Russian Tsars*. Thames & Hudson, 1999, pp. 69-76.

¹⁷ Ritzarev, Maria. *Eighteenth-Century Russian Music*. Ashgate Publishing Co, 2006, pp. 25-26.

¹⁸ *Kant*: song.

Patriarch Nikon greatly impressed the people of Novgorod, and the Muscovites as well, so much so, that by the second half of the 17th century, the genre became widely accepted and cultivated.¹⁹ The fact, that the usage of *parted singing* during church ceremonies was made legal by a religious leader – despite centuries of oppression by the Russian Orthodox Church itself – contributed to the uniqueness of this event.

By the time of this revolutionary innovation, older systems of notation had become outdated, being unable to carry new hymns accurately. Slowly, the use of the five-line staff was introduced and accepted, paired with *square notation*. This was the *Kievan square notation*.²⁰

These hymns were grouped into five volumes of books:

- *Obikhod*, i. e. collection of common melodies
- *Oktoikh*, book of the five tones
- *Irmologion*, book of canons
- *Prazdniki*, book of special events
- *Triodion*, triodes of the Great Lent and Easter²¹

In addition, numerous manuscripts contain additional pieces, that are recognized as *putevoy* or *demestvenny* hymns.²² Hymnal codexes also preserved many variations of the afore-mentioned melodies. These collections can be found in different cities – Tikhvin, Volodia, Smolensk, Ostrog – or in monasteries and cathedrals.²³

The turn of the 17th and 18th centuries, sacred vocal genres

The second half of the 17th century was a time of significant transformations in Russian church singing. The musical expectations of notation, style, and liturgy had changed fundamentally. While many of those following *traditional* practices were fighting against all these novelties, others rather withdrew from busy cities, that were influenced the most by new trends. They – practically even to this day – strive to preserve traditional monophonic chants, use the ancient notational system, and create complex manuscripts for church singing.

¹⁹ Ritzarev, Maria. *Eighteenth-Century Russian Music*. Ashgate Publishing Co, 2006, afore cited.

²⁰ *Square notation*: Gregorian notational system used in the late Medieval Period. Dobszay, László. "Kvadrátnotáció (*Square notation*)."
Magyar Katolikus Lexikon (Hungarian Catholic Lexicon), lexikon.katolikus.hu/K/kvadr%C3%A1tnot%C3%A1ci%C3%B3.html. Accessed 30 May 2018.

²¹ *Обиход, Октоих, Урмологий, праздники, Триоди. Тысяча лет русской церковной музыки (One thousand Years of Russian Church Music)*. Musica russica Dc. Ell., 2007, p. xlv.

²² *Путевой*: on the road.

²³ *Тысяча лет русской церковной музыки (One thousand Years of Russian Church Music)*. Musica russica Dc. Ell., 2007, afore cited.

Besides all these, their most precious treasure is the *kant*, preserved and performed in the original way, which made them a source of abundant information for those who pursue research on this field.²⁴

Ergo, the new style of religious polyphony had found its way in Russia by the late 1600s, through earlier efforts done by Patriarch Nikon. The process was supported by Tsar Alexei Mikhailovich, inviting educated singers from Kiev, who were proficient at the new style, to perform their repertoire in churches and in the Royal Court as well. The new pieces did not always receive a warm welcome, mostly because – according to many – they did not originate from Orthodox roots.

Despite all these circumstances, professional vocal ensembles soon began to emerge in both religious and secular institutions, to perform works of the new genre, which combined domestic traditions with the characteristics of Western European polyphony. The structures of these pieces resemble classical Western forms, but their melodies, and harmonic language imply Russian heritage.²⁵

The new style was named *partesny* i. e. *parted* singing, and it was performed using part books instead of the full score.²⁶ These choral works required an advanced, professional level of singing, and thorough knowledge of the new notational system.

The main rules of theory in *parted singing* were formulated in the second half of the 17th century. An important piece of literature regarding the subject was the work of a Ukrainian composer, Nikolay Diletsky, titled *Музыкайская грамматика*.²⁷ This theoretic book provided a guideline for Russian composers who were engaged in sacred vocal polyphony.²⁸ Also there are a few compositions by Diletsky, that are known to have survived.

Polyphonic works performed during church services were mostly choral-like and four-voiced, but hymns with eight, twelve, or even more parts were written as well. Among simpler choral pieces with less parts, the most common type was the *religious kant*. While these works were not being strictly connected to the religious repertoire, it is still important to mention them, as

²⁴ afore cited.

²⁵ afore cited.

²⁶ Parted singing – *партесное пение* – basically entails multivoiced hymns. Keldish, Yury Vsevolodovich: *Az orosz zene története (The History of Russian Music)*. p. 29. 2nd footnote: „The name is derived from the latin word *pars*= *part*, and it meant singing in parts, or voices.”

²⁷ Nikolai Diletsky (~1630-1680) composer and musical theorist who lived in the 17th century. He worked in the cities of Kiev, Vilnius, Smolensk, and Moscow. His treatise on music theory: *Музыкайская грамматика (Musical Grammar)*. *Grove Music Online*, doi:10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.S07795. Accessed 7 April 2018.

²⁸ *Тысяча лет русской церковной музыки (One thousand Years of Russian Church Music)*. Musica russica Dc. Ell., 2007, afore cited.

they had a strong influence on the emergence, and the development of the choral concerto. The *kant* consisted of 2, 4, but most often three voices. Its form was strophic and had a simple structure. In the beginning, the subjects arranged for music were always sacred, but these works were never a part of the liturgy itself. It was even used to commemorate important historical events.²⁹

The *kant* has Polish roots, many collections containing works of this type were published in Poland during the 16th century, called *kantyczki*.³⁰ The same melodies can be found in Russian compilations as well, and from manuscripts it was determined, that the *kant* went through changes regarding both melody and structure, resembling Russian features more and more as a result.

Most of the composers of *kants* have long been forgotten, however, it was possible to identify a few poets/musicians, through *acrostics*, for instance.³¹ These composers were certainly well educated, being affluent in the Western musical styles, but keeping to the Russian traditions.³²

The genre of the *laudatory kant* spread in the beginning of the 1700s, during the reign of Peter the Great. These works were composed to celebrate important feats or victories of the Tsar.

The *lyrical kant* emerged around the same time, which had a more personal tone, often depicting different shades and natures of love. Secular texts set to such music often originated from popular Russian poets such as M. Lomonosov³³ and A. P. Sumarokov,³⁴ and the genre quickly became popular. The *religious* and the *lyrical kant* was sung all over Russia even in the 19th century, and it remained popular until the dawn of the 20th century. The *lyrical kant* had evolved into the Russian romance by the beginning of the 1800s.³⁵

²⁹ *Тысяча лет русской церковной музыки (One thousand Years of Russian Church Music)*. Musica russica Dc. Ell., 2007, afore cited.

³⁰ The term *kantyczki* is of Polish origin, which is used to address religious hymns.

³¹ *Acrostic*: A poem in which the first letter of each line or verse spells out a name, or a message (usually it is the name of the writer). "Akrosztichon (*Acrostic*)." *Kislexikon (Small Lexicon)*, www.kislexikon.hu/akrosztichon_a.html#ixzz5HSiK2TtL. Accessed 30 May 2018.

³² *Тысяча лет русской церковной музыки (One thousand Years of Russian Church Music)*. Musica russica Dc. Ell., 2007, afore cited.

³³ M. V. Lomonosov (1711-1765) world famous Russian polymath, who mostly pursued activities in physics, chemistry, and prose. From a simple fisherman, he became an academic. Font, Márta, et al. *Oroszország története (The History of Russia)*. Pannonica, 2001, pp. 266-267.

³⁴ Alexandr Petrovich Sumarokov (1717-1777) Russian poet, playwright, theatre director, one of the first Russian Classicists of literature. Heller, Mihail. *Az orosz birodalom története (The History of the Russian Empire)*. Ed. Osiris, 1996, p. 277.

³⁵ Russian romance: vocal genre, which uses the main topics of Russian Sentimental poetry – separation, farewell, unfulfilled love. Papp, Márta. „Orosz népdal – dal – románc (*Russian folksong – song – romance*).” *Magyar zene (Hungarian Music)*, vol. XLIV, no. 1, February 2006, p. 15.

Later, the genre of *kant* was implemented to the liturgy. One may find in manuscripts harmonization's of independent hymns and works written for entire church services – morning devotion or Vespers for example – consisting of multiple chapters. These works of a novel style called *kant harmonization's* mostly consisted of four voices, but there do exist 5 or 6-parted pieces, and even arrangements for multiple choirs. The latter usually requires two ensembles, but it can be extended up to six different groups, with eight to twenty-four voices.³⁶

Features of the most popular, four-voiced pieces were these: the *cantus firmus* was sung by the tenor, while the role of the two upper voices – *discantus* and *alto* – was to ornament the music. The bass served as a foundation of harmonies, sometimes moving in parallel with other voices, and it could even contain rapid decorative turns. The texture of these works was basically homophonic, but the use of countermelodies became more and more common, which anticipated a polyphonic mindset.

We can safely say that the genre enjoyed great popularity, which is shown by the sheer quantity of manuscripts. Hundreds of harmonized collections have been preserved to celebrate various saints, over the course of the whole liturgical year.³⁷ Much like in other genres, the composers of these works are mostly unknown, but we may mention the name of Vasily Titov, who composed numerous liturgical works based on the *kant*, consisting of eight, twelve, and even twenty-four voices.³⁸ (E. g. 4. V. P. Titov: *Безневестная Дево {O Virgin unwedded}*)

The text of V. P. Titov's *Безневестная Дево* is a *stikhira*, i. e. a laudatory poem to the Mother of God.³⁹ The piece is eight-parted, and it is identified as a baroque *partesnoe penie*, but I think that the piece is rather Renaissance by its stylistic marks. Structurally – following the course of the text – it is constructed of smaller units, using a *responsorial* technique. Each unit is started by a two or three-voiced male choir or trio calling unto the Virgin, the musical pattern remaining always the same, to which the entire ensemble replies through units of different durations.

The starting units barely differ, parts are interchanged sometimes, but harmonically these units are identical (la-minor, Sol-major, Do-major, re-minor,

³⁶ *Тысяча лет русской церковной музыки (One thousand Years of Russian Church Music)*. Musica russica Dc. Ell., 2007, afore cited.

³⁷ Afore-cited p. xlviii.

³⁸ Vasily Polikarpovich Titov (1650-1715) Russian composer. One of the composers who introduced the multivoiced style to Russia. Abraham, Gerald. "Titov." *Grove Music Online*, doi:10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.28025. Accessed 14 Oct. 2018.

³⁹ "Dogmatikon (*Theotokion*)." *Egyháztudományi Lexikon (Religious Lexicon)*, www.egriparochia.hu/lexikon/d

Mi-major with a suspended third, then La-minor). *Tutti* passages, however, are quite diverse. First, the composer introduces a massive sonority by a homophonic usage of the four voices. (E. g. 4.)

E. g. 4

[J] = 66 - 72

Soprano 1
yá - zhe Bó - ga ñe - iz - fe - chén - no za -
я - же Бо - га не - из - ре - чен - но за -

Soprano 2
yá - zhe Bó - ga ñe - iz - fe - chén - no za -
я - же Бо - га не - из - ре - чен - но за -

Alto 1
yá - zhe Bó - ga ñe - iz - fe - chén - no za -
я - же Бо - га не - из - ре - чен - но за -

Alto 2
yá - zhe Bó - ga ñe - iz - fe - chén - no za -
я - же Бо - га не - из - ре - чен - но за -

Tenore 1
Bez - ñe - vést - na - ya Dé - vo, yá - zhe Bó - ga ñe - iz - fe - chén - no za -
Без - не - вѣст - на - я Дѣ - во, я - же Бо - га не - из - ре - чен - но за -

Tenore 2
Bez - ñe - vést - na - ya Dé - vo, yá - zhe Bó - ga ñe - iz - fe - chén - no za -
Без - не - вѣст - на - я Дѣ - во, я - же Бо - га не - из - ре - чен - но за -

Bass 1
Bez - ñe - vést - na - ya Dé - vo, yá - zhe Bó - ga ñe - iz - fe - chén - no za -
Без - не - вѣст - на - я Дѣ - во, я - же Бо - га не - из - ре - чен - но за -

Bass 2
yá - zhe Bó - ga ñe - iz - fe - chén - no za -
я - же Бо - га не - из - ре - чен - но за -

Piano
(for rehearsal only)

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V. P. Titov, *Безвестная Дево*, measures 1-4

As the piece proceeds, the musical texture becomes more complicated: different groups of voices respond to each other, being usually divided into four voices in each group, resembling two “SATB” choirs (ergo 1st and 2nd choirs). Titov also uses *diesis* notes, mostly in clausulas, by which the formerly *octatone* tonal system is augmented. By the help of the raised seventh (leading) note, the tonality is harmonic a-minor, with *Picardian* clausulas. The author tries to avoid chromaticism, which is typical in Renaissance, he rather uses crossing voices. By using raised *sol*, *do*, and flattened *ti*, along with the home tonality, the tonal system of the piece becomes ten-noted. Units are rhythmically multi-faceted, we can even hear a *tutti* passage using notes of longer values, embellished with sixteenth notes, which create the impression of a brisk tempo.

This piece by Titov, unlike other afore-mentioned examples, shows the signs of an advanced composition technique. A concertato-styled approach can easily be recognized upon investigating the structure, which manifests in the grouping of different voices.

Characteristics of the choral *concerto*, concertante techniques - antecedents

While there are numerous musicological works of great value discussing the attributes and history of this genre, I would still like to seize the opportunity to broadly expound – based on these publications – the subject. The beginning of its development started way before the 17th century, as the noun *concerto* was widely used all over Italy in the 1500s already. It served as a denomination of ensembles compiled of singers, instruments, groups of instruments, or all and any of the above, whereas pieces written for such ensembles received the same title.⁴⁰ The word in such a context appeared for the first time as a title for a series of motets and madrigals, composed for vocal and instrumental ensembles by Andrea and Giovanni Gabrieli.⁴¹ The first piece for two choirs was supposedly written by Fra Ruffino d’Assisi, the choir-master of the Padua Cathedral. It is believed that he composed a piece for nine choirs, later.⁴²

The meaning of *concerto* includes the ideas of competition and cooperation as well. Two main types of the genre are the *stile concertato*, based on the hierarchical relationship between the solo and tutti, and the *cori spezzati*, which employs several coequal groups responding to each other.

These compositions using multiple choirs – in which the different groups sing independently, and together as well – were perfected in the Cathedral of Saint Mark in Venice.⁴³ Andrea and Giovanni Gabrieli used countless combinations and variations of ensembles, exploiting the spatial features of the Basilica. Many of the following concertante elements were used in Russian choral concerti, but all were composed strictly for vocal ensembles only.

- separate groups for higher and lower registers
- main and concertante choirs (or even soloists)
- combinations of colors and timbres
- varied spatial locations of different groups
- instrumental reinforcement of vocal parts
- very frequent changes between different choirs
- reverberation effects

⁴⁰ Palisca, Claude V, and Zoltán Hézser, translator. *Barokk zene (Baroque Music)*. Zeneműkiadó, 1976, pp. 96-97.

⁴¹ *Concerti di Andrea, et di Gio. Gabrieli*, Venice, 1587.

⁴² Horváth, Balázs. *A térbeli zene típusai a XX. század második felének zenetörténetében, a zenei tér jelenléte a kompozícióban (Types of Spatial Music in the Music History of the Second Half of the 20th Century)*. DLA Dissertation, Ferenc Liszt U of Music, 2005.

⁴³ Eggebrecht, Hans Heinrich. „A nyugat zenéje: folyamatok és állomások a középkortól napjainkig (The Music of the West – Processes and Statuses from the Middle Ages to the Present day).” Typotex Publishing Co, 2009, p. 306.

Though the heyday of concertante vocal works employing multiple choirs was in the 16th century, the genre was well known in the Baroque period as well. A perfect example of that is a work by Heinrich Schütz, titled *Psalmen Davids sampt etlichen Moteten und Concerten*, which was published in 1619. Schütz most likely learned concertante techniques from his Venetian colleagues, as he was a student of Giovanni Gabrieli between 1609 and 1613, moreover, he got acquainted with Monteverdi two decades later.

The afore-mentioned series contained 22 pieces composed for 2-4 choirs, which are grouped into three genres by the author himself: psalms, motets, and concerti. Works for multiple choirs use selected passages from psalms, the texts being set to picturesque music of high artistic quality. We may conclude that the goal of Schütz was to use the manifold techniques and diverse musical colors of the Venetian *concerto*, as well as depicting the content of the texts by musical means.⁴⁴

There is another work, which is pertinent because of its title, *Geistliche Chormusik* by Schütz, published in 1648. The word *geistliche* has a lot in common with its Russian counterpart *духовный* (*duhovny*), which was used to indicate choral concerti of a religious nature.⁴⁵ However, this publication of Schütz contains soloistic concerti, which was even determined in the preface: *concertante over basso continuo, compositional style from Italy*.⁴⁶

The choral concerto in Russia

Much like the *kant*, the choral concerto as a genre began to appear in the second half of the 1600s and had been in constant development until the 18th century.⁴⁷ It was called *duhovny* or *horovy kontsert*, but the expression *partesny kontsert* was also in use.⁴⁸ This is the most elaborate of all types of multivocal compositions, being performed on special, ceremonial events only. Amidst all the changes in the style of the choral concerto, one thing remained: the sublime, pompous, ceremonial character. This majestic effect was only reinforced by the manner of performance, taking place in a church, as the singers stood on the chorus, and the melodies echoed through the building.

These pieces mostly used texts of a religious nature – which were extracted from liturgies in the early days of the genre – and they still had close ties with the traditions of the Church. They were mostly performed during Communion, sometimes using the texts of obligatory hymns of the rite.

⁴⁴ Afore-cited p. 309.

⁴⁵ *Духовный*: religious, spiritual.

⁴⁶ Afore-cited p. 311.

⁴⁷ Skrebkov, S. S. *Избранные статьи (Selected Studies)*. Музыка (*Muzyka*), 1980, p. 188.

⁴⁸ *Хоровый*, i.e., composed for vocal ensemble.

However, the text being freely chosen by the composer was more common, which could be a passage from a psalm, an entire psalm, or a hymn that was appropriate for the given occasion.⁴⁹ Still, it mostly was a psalm of David, that was set to music.⁵⁰

From the 17th century on, the musical interpretation of psalms was common in the Russian artistic scene, using transcriptions of contemporary poets, such as Lomonosov and Sumarokov. Composers of choral concerti however rather resorted to using traditional psalms originating in the Bible, although the texts sometimes ended up being handled with great liberty.⁵¹

Anyhow, authors of choral concerti had a novel attitude towards the text, as it was usually subject to the music. Fragments of the text, and repetitive passages were frequently assigned to sequences, imitations, and rhythmic variations. But unlike the earlier Russian traditional practice, the new style was strongly influenced by the subjective interpretation of the text.⁵²

Early choral concerti mostly had one single movement, characterized by one continuous idiom. Later, changing the meter of different units became more and more common, as other compositional techniques regarding structural considerations, and the relationship of different voices became more diverse.

The Russian choral concerto in the 18th century

In contrast with one-movement multivocal hymns, the choral concerto by the 1700s was a cyclic genre. It consisted of parts with different characters and tonalities, the structure being strongly influenced by the text, which was selected and organized according to the principles of the cyclic system. The cultivation of the new, classical concerto is attributed to Maxim Sozontovich Berezovsky⁵³ by many.

⁴⁹ *Тысяча лет русской церковной музыки (One thousand Years of Russian Church Music)*. Musica russica Dc. Ell., 2007, p. xlix.

⁵⁰ *Тысяча лет русской церковной музыки (One thousand Years of Russian Church Music)*. Musica russica Dc. Ell., 2007, afore cited.

⁵¹ It happened, for example, that the beginning of the psalm was left unused, and certain verses were left out sometimes as well. On several occasions the text was compiled of specific passages extracted from multiple psalms.

⁵² *Тысяча лет русской церковной музыки (One thousand Years of Russian Church Music)*. Musica russica Dc. Ell., 2007.

⁵³ M.S. Berezovsky (1745-1777) Russian composer. He went to St. Petersburg at an early age and sang in operas as a soloist. In 1765 he went to Italy to complete his studies at Bologna, under Padre Martini. In 1773 he returned to Russia. Unable to secure a suitable position in the musical life of the capital he shot himself after a few years of struggle. Berezovsky left several compositions for the church, chiefly for a cappella chorus. *Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, vol 1-10, The Macmillan Press Ltd.

Dmitry Stepanovich Bortniansky⁵⁴ – who was closely related to choral traditions by his first musical experiences – was also a notable contributor to the development of the genre. His *a cappella* works bear the stylistic marks of the classical style, through which he created the 18th century-type of Russian *duhovny kontsert*.⁵⁵

Because of the historical and cultural changes – and probably due to the activity of the two afore-mentioned composers – of the age, the genre went through remarkable transformations. It was likely influenced by the fact, that the Tsarist Court was opened towards Western Europe, and the idea of Enlightenment during the reign of Catherine II. Foreign guest artists, musicians, and composers – who moved to the country upon invitation from the Empress herself – had a great influence on native Russian artists. Even more so in the case of Berezovsky and Bortniansky, who both had the opportunity to embark for study trips in Italy, helped in their musical artistic developments by Italian mentors.

By their lifetimes, the Russian choral concerto already had a history of almost one hundred years. Both composers had preserved much of the musical and formal traditions of their predecessors, but they also introduced significant innovations.⁵⁶ The Russian choral concerto however remained to be strictly *a cappella*. Solo sections did appear in compositions, but only as a concertante element, without independent roles, as the choir itself was always of primary importance.

The *duhovny kontsert* – much like Western concertante choral pieces – is based on contrasts. Different movements of the cyclic works have adversative idioms, the rhythm, tonality, and meter may change also. Composers use the artistic opportunities provided by varying timbre, color, range, and pitch. They create contrasts by alternating between larger and smaller groups – solo-tutti – but it most often takes place in one single ensemble. Although, one may find – among the works of Bortniansky and Vedel – *concerti* originally written for an apparatus of two choirs.

We must mention the *repentance concerto* as well, which appeared around the final years of the 1700s in Russia. This is the rather melancholic type of the genre, which might originate in the Sentimentalism, that became increasingly popular in the latter half of the 18th century. The movement had

⁵⁴ D.S. Bortnyansky (1752-1825) Russian composer. He studied with Galuppi in St. Petersburg and Italy. From 1796 he was musical director of the imperial chapel in Russia. He wrote a large amount of church music. The collected edition of his works was edited by Tchaikovsky and contains more than 100 vocal compositions. *Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, vol 1-10, The Macmillan Press Ltd.

⁵⁵ Skrebkov, S. S. *Избранные статьи (Selected Studies)*. Музыка (*Muzyka*), 1980, afore cited.

⁵⁶ afore cited.

an influence on literature as well, one may observe its effects in the works of Mihail Nikitich Muravyov (1757-1807), and Nikolai Mihailovich Karamzin (1766-1826).⁵⁷ Sentimentalism naturally gained followers among composers too, which is clearly perceptible in works written after the 1790s.⁵⁸

The development of the choral concerto fell under yet another influence of a similar significance, which was the contemporary enthusiasm towards Italian music. While there was a strong presence of German traditions in various courts along with spreading habits of French origin, the audiences of Saint-Petersburg and Moscow had a desire for Italian-like music as much as they needed a sentimental atmosphere. This *Italia-mania* became almost hysterical by the beginning of the 19th century.⁵⁹ Editors and merchants of music titled their sheet music as *Italian masses*, or *new Russian song with refrain, in Italian style* for example.⁶⁰

Even serf singers were advertised accordingly, for instance: *...proficient in the Italian-style performance of parted singing...*⁶¹ Any work of art – let it be musical, of fine art, or whatever else – and any artist was worth more, if it was of an Italian origin, or if he mastered Italian music. The following text is a short passage from a letter of Vladimir Grigorievich Orlov, written to his son:

*„There is a well-praised Italian, who arrived here last year, to teach singing. I think his name is Minarelli, employed by Bibikov. He is the teacher of both of Bibikov’s sons, receiving a salary of 200 rubles per month. That is an insane amount of money, it truly is surprising, that such a miserly man can be so generous, when it gets to music.”*⁶²

Therefore, we can surely state, that the Italian style of expression was a trait of the *repentance concerto* as well between 1790 and 1800, which was considered up to date at the time, and it was cultivated by, among others, Bortniansky, Artem Vedel,⁶³ and the contemporary of the latter: Degtyaryov.⁶⁴

⁵⁷ Dukkon, Ágnes, and Katalin Szőke. „Az orosz irodalom története (*History of the Russian Literature*).” *Szláv Intézet (Slavic Institute)*, szlavintezet.elte.hu/szlavtsz/slav_civil/orosz-irodalom.htm#h1. Accessed 28 June 2018.

⁵⁸ Ritzarev, Maria. *Eighteenth-Century Russian Music*. Ashgate Publishing Co, 2006, pp. 297-298.

⁵⁹ afore cited 273.

⁶⁰ afore cited.

⁶¹ Serfs, or lowborn peasants.

⁶² *Хвалят очень италианца, которой учит петь, он приехал сюда прошедшую зиму. Помнится имя ему Минарелли, учит у Бибикова 2 мальчиков, получает по 200 на месяц, цена бешеная, удивительно, что такой скупец столячлив на музыку.* afore cited.

⁶³ A. Vedel (1767-1808) composer, conductor, singer and violinist, born in Kiev. *Internet Encyclopedia of Ukraine*, encyclopediaofukraine.com/display.asp?linkpath=pages%5CV%5CE%5CVedelArtem.htm. Accessed 13 Oct. 2020.

⁶⁴ S. A. Degtyaryov (1766-1813) composer and conductor, former serf musician. Ritzarev, Maria. *Eighteenth-Century Russian Music*. afore cited.

These choral works are characterized by a remorseful, mournful tone, by which they stand in contrast with earlier, unstrained concerti in major tonalities.

Sadly, it is often an exceedingly difficult task to identify the composers of these works, as they were usually rather distributed as manuscripts, due to the costliness of printed music. These manuscripts were written and copied by serfs, as manpower was cheap in contemporary Russia.⁶⁵ In addition, the same text was often set to music by multiple composers, but catalogues often mentioned only the title of the pieces, such as the KPN from 1793.⁶⁶ This catalogue – which supposedly contains the repertoire of a serfs' choir from a local estate – is now safely stored in a museum in Moscow.⁶⁷

The aftermath of the choral concerto

As we were able to see, the sparkling cultural life in the second half of the 18th century helped the Russian choral concerto reach the pinnacle of its development, the genre was blooming. From time to time, similar works did appear during the following century, and in the 1900s as well, however, there were no more notable changes taking place in the afterlife of the genre.

Concerti composed by the succeder of Bortniansky, and the new musical director of the Tsarist Court – Aleksei Lvov – might be an exception in this regard.⁶⁸ These were simpler, four-voiced choral compositions, with powerful emotional content, intended for rather common events. These usually had one movement. Lvov paid more attention to the innate attributes of any chosen text than his predecessors, rhythmically displaying the inflections of the liturgic prose. Through asymmetrical or independent rhythmical patterns – summoning *znamenny* hymns – he reinterpreted the genre. He later published an essay regarding the free handling of rhythm, titled *Free or asymmetric rhythm*.⁶⁹ He used a wide range of dynamics in his choral pieces, applied chromaticism, and strong dissonances. His style and artistic vocabulary can be linked to the early German Romanticism.⁷⁰

⁶⁵ Ritzarev, Maria. *Eighteenth-Century Russian Music*. p. 289.

⁶⁶ KPN: *Каталог певческой ноты* (Catalogue of Sung Notes) Handwritten catalogue, published by an anonymous music enthusiast on the 16th of January 1793. Ritzarev, Maria. *Eighteenth-Century Russian Music*. xxvi, p. 158.

⁶⁷ Afore cited 290.

⁶⁸ Alexei Fyodorovich Lvov (1798-1870) Lithuanian composer, violinist. He performed – among others – at the Gewandhaus in Leipzig. He composed in multiple genres. He has written works for violin and cello, as well as composing religious and secular choral pieces, and operas. *Grove Music Online*, doi:10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.45811. Accessed 29 June 2018.

⁶⁹ *О свободном и несимметричном ритме*.

⁷⁰ *Тысяча лет русской церковной музыки (One thousand Years of Russian Church Music)*. Musica russica Dc. Ell., 2007.

The turn of the 19th and 20th centuries saw some new choral concerti as well. Besides others, the most notable authors were Kyui and Rachmaninoff, who followed patterns developed in the 1700s. The concerto of Sergei Rachmaninov – written by the 19 years old composer – precedes the sonority of his later choral works. The piece was written for the feast of the Assumption, titled: *Mother of God, eternal in prayer*. The piece is faithful to the tradition of previous centuries, as it has a cyclic structure.⁷¹ It is divided into three distinct units, or movements. The first one is a long moderato part, which is followed by a somewhat disproportionately short *fugato* passage, and the piece is completed by a vivacious, laudatory last movement.

This product of Rachmaninoff's youth is titled as a choral concerto, but it is not rich in terms of concertante techniques, he did not really utilize the contrasting possibilities of different voices. Dynamics however sometimes go to the extremes, as they range from the fourfold piano to the quadruple forte. But, the handling of the text and the divided nature of the opus remind the listener of the traditions of 18th century Russian choral concerti, and even Bortniansky himself.

In his later choral series, the magnificent *Vespers*, we may discover again the imprint of traditions of the choral concerto. Alternations between trios or groups of voices, and authentic parallel melodies characterize some of the movements. Rachmaninoff enriched these with beautiful solo sections, and neo-modal elements.

The ascension of the New Russian School brought forth the realization that the religious choral concerto was not compatible with the nature of Russian church singing. Inclusion of foreign musical elements was not welcome anymore, since the new goal was to exalt the national history, and to implement it into music.⁷² Despite these circumstances, one may still find a few contemporary choral concerti, composed by Pavel Chesnokov for example.⁷³

It is worthy to listen to choral concerti performed by Russian, or Ukrainian artists. Fortunately, one can find multiple high-quality recordings of these three composers' works, released on disks and LPs, or uploaded to online video-sharing platforms. The dense, dark-toned sonority of the ensembles, and the usage of *basso profundo* in authentic performances open the world in which these lesser-known composers lived and created, who are, however, well worth exploring.

Translated from Hungarian by Dániel Kovács

⁷¹ В молитвах неусыпающую Богородицу.

⁷² Тысяча лет русской церковной музыки (*One thousand Years of Russian Church Music*). Musica russica Dc. Ell., 2007.

⁷³ Pavel Grigorievich Chesnokov (1877-1944) Russian composer and conductor. Because of Soviet oppression, the church, where he was a choirmaster, was destroyed, which led him to stop writing music altogether. Cummings, Robert. "Artist Biography." *Allmusic.com*, allmusic.com/artist/pavel-chesnokov-mn0001610579/biography. Accessed. 30 June 2018.

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