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## Concerning the History of Education of Music Theorists and Composers in the First Russian Conservatories<sup>1</sup>

The article is focused on the sources of education for music theorists and composers in Russia. It examines the question, for the preparation of what kinds of musicians the major studies of “Music Theory” were directed: whether it brought up instructors of music theory disciplines, or provided for education for composers? This question is legitimate already because Piotr Tchaikovsky in his aspiration to become a composer wrote a request to enroll into a special class of music theory at the St. Petersburg Conservatory, while in his diploma among the enumerated disciplines that of “Composition” is lacking. The historical documents, preserved in the archives of St. Petersburg, Moscow and Klin, bear witness that the music theory students were taught according to one program of preparation of composers. The entire process of study, in which the theory and practice of musical composition were placed on par with each other, was directed towards the achievement of this aim. The sources of the given concept lie in the German practice of teaching professional musicians, first of all, in the theoretical pedagogical system of Adolf Bernhard Marx. His pupil and follower, Nikolai Zarembo became the founder of Russian conservatory education, which was based on Marx’s system. And Zarembo’s pupil Tchaikovsky transferred the principles of parity teaching of the theory and practice of composition to the Moscow Conservatory. How these principles were carried out in the teaching of the disciplines “Harmony,” “Counterpoint,” “Form and Fugue,” “Orchestration” and “Composition” is examined in the article on concrete examples, which are the archival sources: the textbook “Forms” by Zarembo’s pupil Vasily Safonov and the rough drafts of the programs for music theory disciplines made by Tchaikovsky.

**Keywords:** first Russian conservatories, education for music theorists and composers, musical source studies, Adolf Bernhard Marx, Nikolai Zarembo, Piotr Tchaikovsky.

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## К истории теоретико-композиторского образования в первых русских консерваториях

Статья обращена к истокам теоретико-композиторского образования в России. В ней рассматривается вопрос, на подготовку каких музыкантов была ориентирована специальность «Теория музыки»: воспитывала ли она преподавателей теоретических дисциплин или же давала композиторское образование? Этот вопрос правомерен уже потому, что П. И. Чайковский, стремясь стать композитором, писал прошение о поступлении в специальный класс теории музыки Петербургской консерватории, а в его дипломе среди перечисленных дисциплин отсутствует «Композиция». Исторические документы, хранящиеся в архивах Петербурга, Москвы и Клина, свидетельствуют, что учащиеся-теоретики обучались по единой программе подготовки композиторов. На достижение этой цели был направлен весь процесс обучения, в котором теория и практика сочинения музыки находились в паритетных отношениях. Истоки данной концепции лежат в немецкой практике обучения профессиональных музыкантов, прежде всего – в теоретико-педагогической системе А. Б. Маркса. Его ученик и последователь Н. И. Заремба стал основоположником российского консерваторского образования, базирующегося на системе Маркса. А ученик Зарембы Чайковский перенес принципы паритетного преподавания теории и практики сочинения в Московскую консерваторию. Как осуществлялись эти принципы в преподавании дисциплин «Гармония», «Контрапункт», «Формы и fuga», «Инструментовка» и «Композиция», рассматривается в статье на конкретных примерах, каковыми являются архивные источники:



тетрадь «Формы» ученика Зарембы В. И. Сафонова и сделанные Чайковским черновые записи программ по теоретическим предметам.

**Ключевые слова:** первые русские консерватории, теоретико-композиторское образование, музыкальное источниковедение, А. Б. Маркс, Н. И. Заремба, П. И. Чайковский.

Questions of musical education and musical pedagogy, undoubtedly, stand among the universal and eternal ones. Inexhaustible are the theoretical and methodological issues of educating a musician in each separate country and in each separately examined period of time: this may be proven even by a random choice of works by present-day researchers, such as, for instance, the one proposed by the author in the present article [5; 11; 13–19]. The solution of imperative questions of musical education and pedagogy, as a rule, is preceded by study of the history of the question. Such an approach, in particular, makes it possible to comprehend the present from the positions of the losses and discoveries and, in many ways, to anticipate the future. This is particularly why historical research is so multi-faceted, while, in the meantime, history continues to pose us more and more new enigmas. Among the latter is the one which this work is dedicated to.

On August 22, 1862 a petition came from nobleman Piotr Tchaikovsky to the Directorate of the Russian Musical Society in St. Petersburg with the following content: “Having the wish to study music, and for the most part music theory, in the College<sup>2</sup> newly established by the Musical Society, I have the honor of kindly requesting of the Directorate of the indicated Society to admit me amongst the pupils of this institution <...><sup>3</sup>.” Three and a half years later, after having presented at the public final examination a cantata composed by himself set to Friedrich Schiller’s “Ode to Joy,” Tchaikovsky would graduate the aforementioned College as the first specialist “in theory<sup>4</sup>,” and the only one to graduate that year. His diploma would bear the information that he passed “the entire course of musical education and in the examinations has demonstrated the following proficiencies in the major fields of study: the theory of composition (in the class of professor Zarembo) and orchestration (in the class of Professor Anton Rubinstein), having received the marks of ‘excellent’<sup>5</sup>.” At the same time, the list of the main subjects would show an absence of the discipline of “Composition,” nor

would there be any written indication of what major qualification Tchaikovsky received. The question is valid: which major field of activity did the future great composer plan to pursue, and how was he indicated in the documentation when he graduated? The answer to this question is a crucial one for the comprehension of the conception of the major discipline of “Music Theory” in the first Russian conservatories.

The introduction of the word “theory” into the name of the major discipline indicated at its goal of bringing up the so-called “theorist<sup>6</sup>,” i.e. a specialist in music theory. This category could include a future composer – who may also pertain to this category, since his knowledge of music theory in its fullest capacity comprises the indispensable foundation for his creativity, – as well as a future instructor of music theory disciplines. Thus, both qualifications were combined in their studies by a single major discipline. In the report of the proceedings of the Directory of Professors of the Moscow Conservatory from February 1870 we can read: “As for the music theory classes, most of the students pursuing studies of Music Theory are especially intent on becoming teachers, since only few people become composers<sup>7</sup>.” Upon his graduation the composer received a diploma of the first category, whereas a teacher received the diploma of the second category. Such a dispensation also took place at the performers’ departments of conservatories, where the virtuoso soloist received a diploma of the first category, while the orchestral musician or an instructor of various instruments received a diploma of the second category<sup>8</sup>. In the preparatory instruction of these two qualifications for performers there was a distinction in the tutorial programs and in the examination requirements, which was specified in the relevant documents<sup>9</sup>. It would have seemed that in the instruction of composers and instructors of music theory disciplines the situation should have been the same. However, “Music Theory” was the only major discipline where the intrigue regarding the student subsequent specialization

was kept up until the final examination. History has preserved a remarkable document – the report of the proceedings of the Board of Professors of the Moscow Conservatory from January 13, 1872, where the resolutions included the following: “The goal of the class of major studies in music theory consists in submitting for the examination musical compositions the forms of which are stipulated by the board of professors two months prior to the examination. This goal is equally applicable for receiving diplomas of the first category, as well as those of the second category. Upon examining (sic!) the submitted compositions the examination commission decides<sup>10</sup> whether the student demonstrates compositional (artistic) abilities, or merely knowledge of musical form, orchestration and general composition technique. In the first instance the committee awards a diploma of the first category, while in the second instance it awards a diploma of the second category<sup>11</sup>.” The content of this document shows that the division into the future composers and teachers of music theory disciplines was not reflected in the process of education – *all the students of the major discipline of “Music Theory” were taught in accordance with one single program of preparation of composers.*

Such a state of affairs is what determined the conception of the major discipline of “Music Theory” in the first Russian conservatories: each of their graduates, regardless of whether he completed studies as a composer or a music instructor, was required to *know how to write music and to possess the abilities of writing it.* Such ability was considered an indispensable trait of professionalism, not only of a composer, but also of a teacher, as well as a critic. Tchaikovsky wrote: “Every good musician, especially a theorist and critic, must try himself out in all types of composition” [12, p. 201].

Essentially, this position presents nothing other than the didactic principle of the famous German music theorist Adolf Bernhard Marx, whose scholarly and pedagogical system, as is known, comprised the foundations of the Russian music theory education in the first conservatories – it was introduced into the educational system by his student and the first professor of music theory at the St. Petersburg Conservatory, Nikolai Ivanovich Zarembo. In the introduction of the first volume of his monumental work “Die Lehre von der musikalischen Komposition, praktisch-theoretisch” Marx expressed the thought that his

book is addressed not only to the composer but to any musician, especially to a conductor and teacher, who only then would be able to comprehend the deep meaning of a musical composition, when they would know how to write it [18, S. 3]. To take it more broadly, this was the general European principle of musical education, which the founders of the first conservatories in Russia successfully adapted to Russian conditions.

From the aforementioned testimony it follows that the theoretical and practical components of the educational process of major studies in music theory were required to be in sort of paired relations with each other. How was this demonstrated?

The *specialized* course of music theory designated for student theorists was divided into cycles of predominantly theoretical and predominantly practical disciplines. The theoretical cycle presented that very “Theory of Composition” which we find indicated in Tchaikovsky’s diploma. The enumeration of subjects of the theoretical cycle comprising the theory of composition in its broad meaning may be found in the encyclopedic article of N. F. Solovyov<sup>12</sup> from the Brockhaus & Efron Large Encyclopedic Dictionary, titled “Music Theory”: “The T[heory] of composition <...> is subdivided into elementary T[heory], harmony, counterpoint, summary of polyphonic and harmonic forms, both instrumental and vocal, as well as the summary of the characteristics of all musical organs, i.e. the human voice and instruments” [10, p. 890–891]. The article contains a subtle remark: “T[heory] of composition in itself cannot create a composer, but is merely conducive to an accurate development of compositional talent” [Ibid.]. Professor Zarembo also regarded the theory of composition as a basis for acquiring compositional skills. He compared it with “the material part of the art of composition” [2, p. 2], upon the mastery of which “the student proceeds to practical composition of orchestral and vocal pieces” [Ibid.].

At the same time, in its tutorial practice per se, the discipline of “Theory of Composition” was comprised of a smaller number of subjects. As a rule, these were “Harmony,” “Counterpoint” and “Forms and Fugues<sup>13</sup>.” As for “Elementary Music Theory” and “Orchestration,” the first, having been transformed into a preparatory course, was gradually taken off the curriculum of the theory of composition. At the same time, “Orchestration” during the first years of the existence of conservatories, being a significantly more practical

discipline, was joined with practical composition. Such a combined course was identified either by the single title of “Orchestration,” most frequently found in documents, or the double-title of “Orchestration and Practical Composition.” The content of such a combined course was comprised of a system of exercises for mastery of the technique of orchestration, as well as preparation by the students of their own compositions in various forms for different instrumental ensembles. This composite of disciplines, undoubtedly, was conducive to the development in a future composer of symphonic thinking, which was so eagerly sought for by the musical practice of Romanticism.

The combined course of orchestration, or the separated instruction of the aforementioned disciplines in combination with the subjects of “Orchestral Performance” (from the 1870s called “Direction of Chorus and Orchestra”) and “Score Reading” comprised the aggregate of practical disciplines which concluded the education for composers and theorists in the first Russian conservatories. Thereby, its structure consisted of two parts, which is what substantiates the parity origins of the theory composition and creative compositional practice.

It is indicative that this parity found its reflection not only in the correlations *between* the subjects of the theoretical and practical cycles of disciplines, but also *within* each one of them. A vivid example of this is the penetration of the practical component of instruction into the theoretical courses of harmony, counterpoint, form and fugue as a system of exercises in prescribing the studied forms, known in contemporary practice as *modeling*.

In confirmation to this let us examine two documents, which have direct bearing on the discipline of “Music Theory” in the first Russian conservatories – the musical notebook of Zaremba’s pupil, subsequently the outstanding pianist, conductor and musical public figure Vasily Ilyich Safonov, as well as Tchaikovsky’s autograph manuscripts of rough drafts of tutorial programs for theory of composition, which he put together during the period of his work as a professor at the Moscow Conservatory.

Safonov’s musical notebook with the title “Forms<sup>14</sup>” imprinted on the side of the cover presents a documentary source, where the course of musical forms as it was taught by Zaremba was written down on paper. Despite the fact that the notebook belongs to an individual student

of Zaremba<sup>15</sup> and pertains to a time when the professor had already ceased his work at the St. Petersburg Conservatory<sup>16</sup>, there is a good reason to view the course of forms taught to Safonov as a typical example of Zaremba’s teaching such a course at the Conservatory. As is well-known from the utterances about Zaremba on the part of his students<sup>17</sup>, he was a strict adherent to the theoretical and pedagogical system of A. B. Marx. Safonov’s course compendiums confirm this. Several pages of the given document contain references to concrete sections from Marx’s work “Die Lehre von der musikalischen Komposition, praktisch-theoretisch.” In his practice of modeling of the studied forms Zaremba likewise bases himself on Marx, utilizing a system of three types of exercises: “foundations,” “Skitz” and “execution<sup>18</sup>.”

It is noteworthy that such exercises had not been held out either by the teacher or by the student as finished compositions – their completion was presented as a mandatory practical component in the mastery of the course’s theoretical topics. The forms (from sentences and phrases to simple song forms and from chorale harmonization to fugues), texture, harmony and melodies of the exercises from Safonov’s notebook testify of the student’s mastery of sorts of *clichés of the time period*, which comprised an indispensable foundation for the formation of the professional musician.

Let us now turn to Tchaikovsky’s notebooks<sup>19</sup>. They give a perception on the basis of which statutes the education for composers was founded in the second Russian conservatory.

On pages 110–113 of the archiving in the frameworks of the years 1870–1877 there is a sort of strategic path of the major discipline “Music Theory” prescribed by Tchaikovsky’s hand, namely: a practical mastery of the forms parallel to the music theory subjects, i.e. the same kind of modeling. According to these notes, in a harmony course the student learned the simple forms: from the two-measure structure, containing in itself both a motive and a phrase, to a parallel period; in a counterpoint class he mastered in practice irregular periods, simple binary and ternary forms; in the course of “Canon and Fugue” the student tried his hand in the rondo and sonata Allegro forms.

An analysis of the document shows that the mastery of the forms was *through*, and towards the time of the student’s entry into the zone of

creativity, which was demonstrated by the course of free composition proper, the student already had the perception formed of the main musical forms, *prescribed, played and understood through the practice of systematic exercises.*

Let us observe that in his prescribing the practical part of the theoretical courses, Tchaikovsky constantly makes use of the term “exercise” in all the programs, including that of orchestration, but does not use this term in the course of free composition. Here, there are no other forms of practical work present, besides that of composing itself.

For the sake of understanding better the practical difference between exercises and composition let us return to Safonov’s notebook titled “Forms.” Having examined the system of three assignments, comprising the essence of practical work in mastering the theoretical course, we see that the student constantly dealt not with the creation of a ready-made musical composition, but with its preparation. And usually he stopped merely on this level of preparation. In our view, it is particularly this “preparatory character” which distinguishes the exercise as a certain *didactic* unit from a composition, as a unit of *creativity*, albeit in merely a tutorial process. Presumably, this is particularly what was presumed by Zaremba’s student Tchaikovsky, when in the working-out of his program he distinguished the exercise as the chief form of practical work in the classes of theory of composition from composition per se as the basic form of practical work in the class of free composition.

It is noteworthy that it is particularly *the principle of division between the exercise and the composition* which lay at the foundation of the content of the final examination in music theory, both the specialized and the mandatory subjects (i.e. mastered as part of the main disciplines for performers). Thus, if the requirement for the music theory majors involved the creation of a completed symphonic or vocal-symphonic composition in a large-scale form<sup>20</sup>, in other words, a full-fledged *composition*, the graduate of one of the major disciplines in performances completed his theoretical education solely with exercises, consisting “in proposing that the student add to a given voice, for ex[ample], a fragment of a quartet, separate voices; or to write an accompaniment to some art song, or – to write a variation, imitation, fugato, etc.<sup>21</sup>.”

Thus, the educational principle itself of *teaching how to write*, as well as the process of education itself, which presents nothing else but a path towards a consistent achievement of mastery in composition, and the final result of teaching the major discipline of “Music Theory,” is the creation of a composition in a large-scale form, and even the intrigue of the final examination, which passes its resolution in the last moment concerning the crucial question, or whether or not the graduate will be a composer – all of this testifies to the fact that the main purpose of the major discipline of “Music Theory” which the young Tchaikovsky decided to study in 1862, was the education of a composer.

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

TSMM	P. I. Tchaikovsky State Memorial Musical House-Museum. Klin
i.	Item
s.	Sheet
b.	Back
Inv.	Inventory
RSALA	Russian State Archive for Literature and Art. Moscow
RMS	Russian Musical Society
SPbMTaMA	St. Petersburg Museum of Theatrical and Musical Arts
f.	Fund
CSHA	Central State Historical Archive. St. Petersburg

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The present article is essentially a redaction of article [9], revised and complemented.

<sup>2</sup> During the first years of their existence the St. Petersburg and the Moscow Conservatories were officially called musical colleges. The first conservatory statute confirmed on October 17, 1861 was called particularly that way: “The Statute of the Music College” (see: [3, pp. 11–15]). In the documentation from the 1860s and early 1870s both of these titles may be found. Officially the name of “Conservatory” as the sole one was confirmed by the “Statute of the Conservatories of the RMS,” adopted on November 25, 1878 (see: [Ibid., pp. 45–64]).

<sup>3</sup> TSMM, a12 No. 4/2.

<sup>4</sup> Tchaikovsky was called a graduate in music theory studies in the “Program of Exit Examinations for December 29 and 31, 1865” (CSAA, f. 408, inv. 1, i. 47, s. 92).

<sup>5</sup> TSMM, a12, No. 198.

<sup>6</sup> This is how in the documentation both the student of the major discipline of “Music Theory” and the teacher of music theory disciplines are called.

<sup>7</sup> RSALA, f. 661, inv. 1, No. 8, s. 113 b. – 114.

<sup>8</sup> In the major vocal class such a division was not present.

<sup>9</sup> RSALA: f. 661, inv. 1, i. 8, s. 178 b. – 179; f. 661, inv. 1, i. 9, s. 13–13 b.; [4, pp. 25–26].

<sup>10</sup> Here and onwards in the quotation the words are underlined as they were in the document.

<sup>11</sup> RSALA, f. 661, inv. 1, i. 9, s. 12 b.

<sup>12</sup> Solovyov Nikolai Feopemptovich (1846–1916) – composer, musical critic and faculty member (since 1885 – a professor) at the St. Petersburg Conservatory,

the author of articles of the musical section of the Brockhaus–Efron Large Encyclopedic Dictionary.

<sup>13</sup> From the 1870s along with the subject “Forms and Fugue” the subject “Canon and Fugue” appears. From the 1880s it is already listed in the published programs.

<sup>14</sup> SPbMTaMA, f. 30, No. 9.

<sup>15</sup> Safonov, being employed in the administrative office of the Ministers’ Committee, took lessons in the theory of composition from Zaremba, presumably from the end of 1877 to May 1878. The lessons were discontinued due to the teacher’s sudden illness. In 1879 Safonov became a student of the St. Petersburg Conservatory [7, pp. 47–51].

<sup>16</sup> Zaremba was a professor at the St. Petersburg Conservatory from 1862 to 1871.

<sup>17</sup> Geller K. P. N. I. Zaremba, professor muzykal’noy teorii i byvshiy director Sankt-Peterburgskoy konservatoriyi (Nekrolog) [N. I. Zaremba, Professor of Music Theory and Former Director of the St. Petersburg Conservatory (Necrology)] // *Vsemirnaya illustratsia* [Worldwide Illustration], 1879, 12 May, No. 541; Safonov V. I. N. I. Zaremba. (Nekrolog) [Necrology] // *Moskovskie vedomosti*. 1879. 7 April. No. 86; Solovyov N. [F.]. Nekrolog [Necrology] [Nikolai Ivanovich Zaremba] // *Sankt-Peterburgskie vedomosti*, 1879, 29 Marta, No. 87; see also: [6, pp. 278–281].

<sup>18</sup> Read about this in greater detail: [8].

<sup>19</sup> RSALA, f. 2099, inv. 1, i. 8, s. 110–113.

<sup>20</sup> RSALA, f. 2099, inv. 1, s. 177 b. – 178; i. 9, s. 12 b.–13.

<sup>21</sup> RSALA: f. 661, inv. 1, i. 8, s. 178 b. – 179; f. 661, inv. 1, i. 9, s. 13 – 13 b.

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