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The Role of the Imperial Russian Musical Society in the Development of the Choral Culture of the Turn of the 19th and 20th Centuries

The article is devoted to disclosing the role of the Imperial Russian Musical Society (IRMS) in the apex of Russian choral culture at the turn of the 19th and the 20th centuries. Attention of the researchers is directed for the most part on comprehending the significance of the IRMS in organizing concerts of orchestral and chamber instrumental music, whereas its participation in the advancement of the choral culture has remained for the most part unstudied. Unlike the instrumental culture, which received substantial development in Russia in the 19th century, Russian choral performance has had a centuries-old history and established traditions connected with church singing. In the process of evolution of the activities of the Russian choruses, in the 19th a secular concert variety of it was formed. On the example of the Court Church Singers' Cappella, the author makes a study of the organization of concerts by the Philharmonic Society, starting from 1802, as well as the founding of the Concert Society in 1850. Characterization is given of the programs in which an immense role is played by large-scale compositions, as well as works by contemporary composers, and thereby this determines the succession in the activities of the indicated societies and the IRMS. The merit of the IRMS consists in its perfection of concert programs, the formation of the historical concert, its active advancement of musical culture, not only in the metropolitan cities, but on the territory of the entire country, perfection of musical education, and opening Music Colleges. Emphasis is made on the tendencies of development of choral art at the contemporary stage connected with musical societies which continue the traditions of the IRMS.

Keywords: Russian Musical Society (RMS), choral culture, Russian sacred concerts, programs of choral concerts, choral education.

For citation: Dabayeva Irina P. The Role of the Imperial Russian Musical Society in the Development of the Choral Culture of the Turn of the 19th and 20th Centuries. *Problemy muzykal'noj nauki/Music Scholarship*. 2018. No. 4, pp. 106–112. DOI: 10.17674/1997-0854.2018.4.106-112.

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Роль Императорского Русского музыкального общества в развитии хоровой культуры рубежа XIX–XX веков

Статья посвящена выявлению роли Императорского Русского музыкального общества (ИРМО) в расцвете отечественной хоровой культуры на рубеже XIX–XX веков. Внимание исследователей в основном направлено на осмысление значения ИРМО в организации симфонических и камерно-инструментальных концертов, в то время как его участие в подъеме хоровой культуры остаётся неизученным. В отличие от инструментальной культуры, получившей значительное развитие в России XIX века, русское хоровое исполнительство имеет многовековую историю, сложившиеся традиции, связанные с церковным пением. В процессе эволюции деятельности русских хоров в XIX столетии сформировалась светская, концертная ветвь. На примере Придворной певческой капеллы автор рассматривает организацию концертов Филармоническим обществом, начиная с 1802 года, а также создание Концертного общества в 1850 году. Характеризуются программы, в которых большую роль играют крупные сочинения, а также произведения современных композиторов, и тем самым определяется преемственность в деятельности указанных обществ и ИРМО. Заслуга ИРМО состоит в совершенствовании концертных программ, формировании исторического концерта, активном распространении музыкальной культуры не только в столицах, но и на территории всей страны, совершенствовании музыкального

образования, открытии музыкальных училищ. Прочерчиваются тенденции развития хорового искусства на современном этапе, связанные с музыкальными обществами, продолжившими традиции ИРМО.

Ключевые слова: Русское музыкальное общество (РМО), хоровая культура, русские духовные концерты, программы хоровых концертов, хоровое образование.

Для цитирования: Дабаева И. П. Роль Императорского Русского музыкального общества в развитии хоровой культуры рубежа XIX–XX веков // Проблемы музыкальной науки. 2018. № 4. С. 106–112.
DOI: 10.17674/1997-0854.2018.4.106-112.

It is hard to overestimate the role of the Imperial Russian Musical Society (IRMS) in the rapid development of musical culture in Russia from the second half of the 19th century. Having proclaimed as its chief idea the familiarization of a broad circle of listeners with serious music, the Society concentrated its attention on dissemination of musical education, organization of concerts, increase of professional mastery [14], and promotion of music by contemporary composers. The activities of the IRMS are well-known because of its annual written reports, publications on the pages of periodical editions, and research of contemporary musicologists. However, as a rule, its attention was focused on organizing concerts of symphonic and chamber music in Russia, which can be explained by the appearance of these varieties of genre in the country's culture, the familiarization with them in the narrow circles of aristocratic society, the creation by Russian composers of symphonic and chamber music, and their desire to draw wide strata of the population towards high art [15]. What remains on the periphery of research interest in the indicated direction is the culture of Russian choral music, by virtue whereof the legitimate question arises: what is the role of the IRMS in its development?

The culture of Russian choral music, unlike the instrumental variety, has a centuries-old history, connected with the formation, development and florescence of church singing. The tradition of liturgical singing established and consolidated in the professional activities of church choirs, whose art was highly prized, both with the country and in the reports of visitors from other countries who sojourned in Russia. Besides the main direction connected with the chanters' perfecting of liturgical services, the extra-liturgical branch gradually crystalized, its appearance being stipulated by the generation of secular culture: participation in the tsars' merrymakings, splendid court festivities and opera productions. A great interest for research is presented by the question about the organization of

concert activities of church choirs and, first of all, of choral concertos, which became a liaison between the church and the secular musical culture [1; 3].

The exuberant flourishing of concert performances by church choirs coincides with the turn of the 19th and the 20th centuries, a time of significant activation of the work of the IRMS. However, the appearance of concerts with participation of choirs in Russian culture pertains to an earlier period. Thereof our attention is drawn to the activities of the Court Chanters' Cappella, a professional ensemble which for a long time remained a model in terms of musical technique.

In 1772 in St. Petersburg a musical club engaged in organization of open concerts was established. The first mention of participation in them of court singers is contained in the "Sankt-Peterburgskie vedomosti" ["St. Petersburg Gazette"]: at the concert on March 25, 1774 the Cappella presented to the listeners Giovanni Batista Pergolesi's "Stabat Mater." From that time the tradition of performance of large-scale compositions by this ensemble was established. Only during the course of 1779 during Lenten season such compositions as Karl Graun's "Te Deum," Johann Hasse's "Salve, Regina," and Niccolo Jommelli's "La Passione de Gesu Cristo" were performed. Starting from 1802 the Cappella constantly participated in all the oratorio concerts of the Philharmonic Society, which to a considerable degree forestalled the activities of the IRMS in its aspiration to acquaint listeners with large-scale musical works created by contemporary composers or those written in earlier time periods, but unknown in Russia. Thus, on March 24, 1802 the Russian premiere of Joseph Haydn's oratorio "The Creation of the World" took place. Performances of the Cappella in the concerts of the Philharmonic Society continued until 1850: the ensemble took part in 96 out of the 106 organized concerts in which over 50 new compositions were performed. Thereby an important cultural task was carried out: acquainting the audiences of the capital city with the

best examples of Western vocal-symphonic music. Because of the concerts of the Philharmonic Society the public heard Georg Friedrich Handel's oratorio "Messiah," Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's and Luigi Cherubini's "Requiems," Ludwig van Beethoven's Ninth Symphony and Hector Berlioz's "Requiem." And the performance of Beethoven's "Missa Solemnis" by the Court Cappella jointly with the orchestra of the Philharmonic Society became its European premiere. Many compositions were subsequently performed repeatedly: "The Creation of the World" was performed 28 times, Mozart's Requiem received 9 performances, Haydn's "The Seasons" – 8 performances and Beethoven's oratorio "Christ on the Mount of Olives" – 5 performances [2, p. 25]. When characterizing the activities of the Philharmonic Society, Nikolai Findeisen noted: "The Society played an immense role in the history of our music. It developed an artistic taste in the public, accustoming it to complex and large-scale compositions" [11, p. 1176].

Let us also accentuate the "invalid concerts" which were held annually starting from 1815 in memory of the entry of the Russian army into Paris. They took place in the hall of the Mariinsky Opera Theater with the aim of fundraising in favor of soldiers who were injured or wounded during the military campaigns. The Bolshoi Theater and the Assembly of Nobility provided their halls for them. Over a thousand people participated in these grandiose concerts, including orchestras of guards' regiments, regimental singers, and touring musicians. The Court Singers' Cappella constantly performed in them up until 1917. During that time, it performed over 140 works by European and Russian composers: Giovanni Pierluigi Palestrina, Antonio Lotti, Orlando di Lasso, Mikhail Glinka, Piotr Tchaikovsky, Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, Alexander Borodin and many others. An outstanding event was the performance in 1889 of Berlioz's "Requiem," which featured the participation of a symphony orchestra comprised of 130 people and a chorus consisting of 270 singers, as well as the performance in 1893 of Beethoven's Mass in C major by an orchestra and chorus comprising 600 people. A most important stage in the formation of the choral concert activities was the establishment in 1850 by Alexei Lvov of an independent Concert Society affiliated with the Court Singers' Cappella. As it was asserted in its statute, the goal of organizing the musical evenings consisted in performing classical compositions in

the utmost possible perfection. From 1858 to 1917 sacred concerts were constantly conducted in the hall of the Cappella. Singers from this chorus took part in this concert, and opera singers performed as soloists. The programs included cantatas and oratorios by Joseph Haydn, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Ludwig van Beethoven, Hector Berlioz, Franz Liszt, compositions by their contemporaries and celebrated masters of previous years: Dmitri Bortnyansky, Alexei Lvov, Piotr Turchaninov, Piotr Tchaikovsky, Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, Anton Arensky and others.

In the 1870s the activities of the Concert Society diminished in quantity, and from 1882 the regular musical evenings ceased to exist. This period is marked by an increase of the role of the concerts of the Imperial Russian Musical Society, of which the other choruses of St. Petersburg became participants, while the Court Singers' Cappella performed there only episodically: in 1863 for the first time the choral episodes from Wagner's operas "The Flying Dutchman" and "Tannhäuser" were performed under the direction of the touring composer, in 1872 by means of three concerts performed under the direction of Eduard Napravnik the audiences became acquainted with Giuseppe Sarti's "Miserere," Franz Liszt's oratorio "The Legend of St. Elizabeth," Daniel Auber's opera "Fenella," and Dmitri Bortnyansky's "Te Deum Laudamus."

In the context of the examined problem range let us emphasize the connection between the choral concertizing with the tumultuous development of monumental forms of the art of performance. And if the IRMS brought this idea into life, starting from the last third of the 19th century, then the Philharmonic and Concert Societies of St. Petersburg began carrying it out much earlier. Thereby, it is possible to state the fact of the connection of the endeavors undertaken by the IRMS with the concert activities of the indicated societies, which became an example for organization of concert events.

Several choral ensembles were invited for productions of large-scale compositions: Hector Berlioz's "Requiem" was performed by the choruses of Alexander Arkhangelsky, Count Sheremetev and the Imperial Russian Musical Society. In connection with this it is necessary to highlight the activities of the St. Petersburg-based Church Chanting Beneficiary Fund, which united church choirs together and organized magnificent concerts under its own direction during Lenten season. The

compound of the unified chorus included over 500 singers.

Thereby, having continued the positive endeavors of the Philharmonic and the Concert Societies, the IRMS exerted its influence on the course of subsequent development of choral art in Russia, which demonstrated itself in many relations. Let us note, first of all, the perfection of concert programs actively promoted by society. This question became one of the most important in the publications of the turn of the 19th and the 20th centuries [5]. In his article “Ob ozdorovlenii programm dukhovnykh kontsertov v Moskve” [“About the Improvement of the Programs of Sacred Concerts in Moscow”] Stepan Smolensky indicated: “There exists an adequate means to turn the direction of social opinion to an effective side. This means is provided by a sacred concert, compiled in a sensible manner and without indulgence to low tastes, but with the aim of striving toward success, true enlightenment of the masses, and to familiarize themselves with accomplishments in the sphere of the final period in the art of Russian church singing” [10, p. 1146] and further on: “A sacred concert must have in mind the listeners’ artistic pleasure” [Ibid., p. 1147]. He noted the necessity of inclusion into concert programs of ancient chants, as well as the newest works by contemporary composers and made the following conclusion: “The preliminary performance of such compositions particularly in sacred concerts, outside of church service, as example of the latest novelties of church singing literature may best of all affect the ameliorate the taste of the listeners” [Ibid., p. 1148].

An important and perspective endeavor of the RMS was the organization of the so-called “historical concerts” the programs of which were formed according to the historical principle. Their foundation was laid by Anton Rubinstein in the famous concert seasons of 1885–1886 and 1886–1887. This idea was picked up by the progressive activists in the sphere of performance of choral music, and already in the late 19th century a large quantity of such concerts could be observed. They played an essential role in changing the repertoire polity. Their organization is connected with the names of Stepan Smolensky in Moscow and Alexander Arkhangelsky in St. Petersburg. In his article “Obzor istoricheskikh kontsertov Sinodal’nogo uchilishcha tserkovnogo peniya v 1895 g.” [“An overview of historical concerts of the Synod College of Church Singing”] [10]

Smolensky summed up the experience of the first three years of sacred concerts, which he determined as being essentially historical-ethnographical. Their programs covered church chants from the 17th to the late 19th century and thereby traced out the path of evolution of Russian sacred music. The program of the first of them demonstrated early works by Russian composers (Vassily Titov) and compositions by “visitant” Italians (Baldassare Galuppi, Antonio Sapienza, Giuseppe Sarti). The core of the second concert was comprised by the refined-virtuosic and sentimental school of students and imitators of the Italians, among which were Stepan Degtyaryov, Artemiy Vedel, Hieromonch Victor, Andrei Essaulov, Dmitri Bortnyansky and Gavriil Lomakin. The third concert presented arrangements of early Russian chants by contemporary composers – Piotr Turchaninov and Piotr Tchaikovsky, as well as their original works. The goal of the historical concerts put forward by Smolensky was accomplished: as the result of excellent performances of well-known and favorite compositions the concerts attracted the attention of audiences, and with that prepared them for the acquaintance with and perception of the main national heritage – genuine early Russian chants and works by contemporary composers. Information related to musical history diligently thought-out and expounded in detail placed in booklets aided an appropriate perception by listeners of performed chants. Such concerts, as well as cycles of concerts carried out an important educational function acquainting listeners with the historical development of the art of music.

Reviews in the periodical press abounded with calls for the necessity of putting into the practice of concert programs of the idea of the formation of Russian choral music. Historical concerts accompanied with detailed oral commentaries or the written variety (as programs or feature articles) formed in the listeners a knowledge of the formation of Russian musical culture. They were conducive to the development of artistic taste, the exposure to the best specimens of the art of choral music; comparison of compositions pertaining to different schools and stylistic directions brought to the thought of the preference of a genuinely Russian path reflected in the works of contemporary composers. Infiltrating concert programs with contemporary works was a tendency that was welcomed by critics. The repertoire of choruses, both in the two capital cities and in the gubernias, district centers, and

rural areas was gradually perfected, demonstrating implementation of this choice into life.

In connection with this, let us accentuate the immense role of the IRMS in the popularization of musical culture throughout the entire country. While the concentration of concert life during the course of the 19th century was focused in St. Petersburg, by the end of the century a renaissance of concert activities could be observed in the provinces as well. Great significance in the dissemination of the choral concerts lay in the active work of singers' societies created in various parts of Russia, as a rule, comprised of amateur musicians. Singers' classes were opened, choral ensembles were organized and beneficiary concerts were regularly set up under their auspices.

The idea of popularization of the music of Russian composers found implementation in the multifaceted activities of the composers of choral works: they were themselves engaged in organizing concerts, in which they included their own compositions. Many musical evenings were accompanied by lectures and talks which revealed the peculiarities and advantages of contemporary music. Thus, in one of the articles in the journal "Khorovoe i regentskoe delo" ["The Choral and Choirmaster Work"] it was reported that on March 18, 1912 in the hall of the Social Club a lecture took place on the subject of "the newest trends of contemporary Russian church music" read by Alexander Nikolsky [7]. The content of the lecture, which was rather profound, included a historical overview of various trends in the sphere of the church singing culture of the 19th century, as well as a short characterization of the performed compositions. Besides compositions by Sergei Rachmaninoff, Pavel Chesnokov and Alexander Kastalsky, works by Alexander Nikolsky were included into the concert program. Not infrequently composers, when bringing their compositions out to the judgment of the listeners, performed as conductors. For example, on December 13, 1914 in Penza Nikolsky's "Liturgy" was performed by a unified chorus consisting of 100 people under the direction of the composer.

By no means of unimportant significance for the uplift of choral culture were the tours of the leading choral ensembles throughout the country. Among them, first of all, mention must be made of the activities of the Cappella of Alexander Arkhangel'sky and two Moscow-based ensembles – the Synod and the Chudovsky chorus, both of which

demonstrated the highest level of performance mastery. It was not easy to attend performances of these ensembles. Thus, in the review of the concert of singers of the Chudovsky Monastery in Kursk it was noted: "Not a single concert of recent years had gathered such an enormous quantity of audiences... <...> The enormous hall of the Assembly of the Nobility was literally overfilled; the entrance seats and the choral venues were filled with such a thick crowd that during the intermission there was no possibility to pass by, and it was quite encumbering to squeeze through to the chairs and armchairs" [8, p. 3]. The upsurge of the culture of choral singing in the provinces became particularly possible due to the heightened attention to questions of musical education and upbringing. Throughout the country courses for singers and choirmasters were organized, as part of which concerts were organized by the efforts of students.

The energetic activities of members of the IRMS was conducive to the transformation of musical circles into musical colleges. In provincial regions active personalities came to the front which took charge of the movement directed toward the growth of professionalism in the field of the art of music. Research of recent years demonstrates a rather complete picture of a rise of culture in Russian provincial cities in the beginning of the 20th century [6]. Thus, in the 1870s in Rostov-on-Don a Circle of Lovers of Joint Singing and Music was organized, the members of which organized a chorus. At the end of the century due to the efforts of Matvey Pressman it was transformed into the Rostov Section of the IRMS with a choral class as a part of it. In 1900 on its base a Musical College was opened. By efforts of the students many concerts were organized and productions of choruses from operas were presented. By 1913 courses of choral singing, both secular and sacred, were established at the college, and also a special Choirmaster Class was opened, which was directed by graduate of the St. Petersburg Conservatory Grigoriy Davidovsky. The result of the perfection of the system of musical education was a powerful surge of musical culture, including that of choral singing, both in the cities and in the rural regions.

To sum up, it is important to emphasize that among the numerous factors conducive to the development of choral performance in Russia and the achievement of considerable eminence at the beginning of the 20th century, an important role was played by the Russian Musical Society,

which directed its activities towards the realm of enlightening the people, organizing concerts and perfection of education.

During the Soviet period the initiatives of the IRMS were picked up by the All-Russian Choral Society (VKhO), which was founded in 1957. The main goal of its activities was the development of artistic upbringing and education in the USSR, a rise of professionalism of choral ensembles. This period of time was marked with the founding of a large quantity of amateur choruses, which actively gave concerts, consistently raising their level of performance and mastering large-scale works by contemporary composers. In 1987 the VKhO was transformed into the All-Russian Musical Society, the statute of which testifies that it became the legal successor to the VKhO and the inheritor of the traditions of the IRMS.

The problem of choral upbringing and education remains extremely relevant in our days as well,

which is confirmed by publications of recent years devoted to the cultures of various countries, both ancient [12], and modern. The problem of motivation of singing in chorus remains an extremely acute one; researchers propose various paths of drawing amateur musicians to singing ensembles [13], and emphasize the important role of choral singing in the perfection of personality and its creative development.

In Russia after a lengthy period of prohibitions sacred concerts are being regularly organized, however, they differ to a considerable degree from the pre-revolutionary ones [4]. Their programs are noted for their poly-genre approach and their audience appeal, which corresponds to the requirements of the contemporary listener, and meets the demands of the new time. In addition to this, it is necessary to remember and preserve the centuries-old traditions of Russian choral culture, to aid their revival and entrenchment.

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