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## **The Moscow Conservatory: From the Russian Musical Society to the People's Commissariat of Enlightenment**

The history of the Moscow Conservatory has been actively researched, however, many themes and subjects from its past have remained insufficiently studied up to the present time. Among them are the activities of the Conservatory during its first post-revolutionary years, in particular, the procedure of its nationalization and transferal from subservience to the Russian Musical Society (RMS) to the jurisdiction of the People's Commissariat of Enlightenment (Narkompros). It becomes possible to fill in the indicated gap by means of turning to archival sources, which bear witness that in mid-1918 the Narkompros prepared the project of a special decree about the separation of the conservatories of the two capital cities from the RMS and their transferal to the Narkompros. This project was examined and affirmed with a few minor changes at the session of the Council of People's Commissars of the RSFSR on July 12, 1918. The "Decree Concerning the Moscow and Petrograd Conservatories" proclaimed these educational institutions as belonging to the state, equal in their status to institutions of higher education. After this decree was issued, a specially created commission of representatives of the RMS, the Narkompros, its Music Section and the Moscow Conservatory carried out the acceptance and transferal of the Conservatory from one department to the other. The Narkompros, and from it the Conservatory, received from the RMS financial means, the building with the concert halls, the musical instruments present in it, various other property and the inventory. From the 1918–1919 academic year the Conservatory gradually began to witness transformations taking place in it along the vein of establishment of the cultural and educational polity of the Soviet regime.

**Keywords:** Russian Musical Society (RMS), People's Commissariat of Enlightenment, the Moscow Conservatory.

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## **Московская консерватория: от Русского музыкального общества к Народному комиссариату просвещения**

История Московской консерватории активно изучается, однако многие темы и сюжеты её прошлого остаются до настоящего времени недостаточно исследованными. Среди них – жизнедеятельность консерватории в первые послереволюционные годы, в частности, процедура её национализации, перехода из подчинения Русскому музыкальному обществу (РМО) в ведение Народного комиссариата просвещения (Наркомпроса). Восполнить указанный пробел позволяет обращение к архивным источникам, которые свидетельствуют, что в середине 1918 года Наркомпрос подготовил проект специального декрета об отделении столичных консерваторий от РМО и о передаче их Наркомпросу. Данный проект был рассмотрен и с небольшими изменениями утверждён на заседании Совета народных комиссаров РСФСР 12 июля 1918 года. «Декрет о Московской и Петроградской консерваториях» провозглашал эти образовательные учреждения государственными, равными по своему статусу высшим учебным заведениям. После выхода декрета специально созданная комиссия из представителей РМО, Наркомпроса, его Музыкального отдела и Московской консерватории осуществила приём-передачу консерватории из одного ведомства в другое. От РМО Наркомпросу и от него консерватории были преданы финансовые средства, здание с концертными залами, находившимися в нём музыкальными инструментами, библиотекой, музеем, различным имуществом и инвентарём. С 1918/1919 учебного года в консерватории постепенно стали осуществляться преобразования в русле установок культурной и образовательной политики Советской власти.

**Ключевые слова:** Русское музыкальное общество, Народный комиссариат просвещения, Московская консерватория.

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A fair share of research works is devoted to the history of the Moscow Conservatory<sup>1</sup>. Recent years (especially the period of preparation towards the 150th anniversary of this institution) have witnessed the publication of a number of new works in which many previous unstudied questions of the historical development of this educational institution are examined [6–8; 11; 12]. At the same time, a significant amount of themes and subjects of the Conservatory's history have remained up till now little researched or not researched at all. The insufficiently studied topics include, among others, the functioning of the Moscow Conservatory during one of the most difficult periods of its existence – the first post-revolutionary years. Scholars still have to work a sufficient amount in order to gain insight into the events and processes taking place at the Conservatory and around it during that period of time fully, in great detail, without reticence, freeing themselves from clichés.

One of the central events for the Conservatories in the two capital cities in the post-revolutionary period was the adoption by the Council of People's Commissars [*Soviet Narodnykh Komissarov* or *Sovnarkom*] of the RSFSR of the "Decree concerning the Moscow and Petrograd Conservatories" according to which the aforementioned educational institutions were transferred from the Russian Musical Society into the maintenance of the People's Commissariat of Enlightenment [*Narodnyy komissariat prosveshcheniya* or *Narkompros*]. As a rule, reference is made to this fact in the research literature on the history of Russian music and musical education, but it has not been previously examined in any detailed manner.

In the present article, which was prepared on the basis of archival sources, the goal is set to fill in to a certain degree the indicated gap, to disclose certain aspects of the adoption of the mentioned decree and the transference of the Moscow Conservatory from one governmental administration to another.

### **The Decree of the Sovnarkom about Conservatories**

The Bolshevik Revolution of October 1917 was followed by a process of nationalization (the transference into the possession of the state) of business

enterprises, various branches of economy, including institutions of the sphere of culture and education. One of the first documents for the nationalization of educational institutions was the decree of the People's Commissariat of Enlightenment (Narkompros) about the transferal to the present Commissariat of the elementary, intermediate and advanced religious schools [2, p. 210–211]. Six months later (in May 1918) the "Decree of the Council of People's Commissars [*Sovnarkom*] about the Unification of Tutorial and Educational Institutions of all Departments into the Department of the People's Commissariat of Enlightenment" was adopted [3, pp. 358–359].

After the adoption of this decree the Narkompros prepared the project of a separate decree of the transferal of the conservatories of the two capitals unto the jurisdiction of the Narkompros [1, p. 700]. Apparently, the necessity for enforcing this document was created by the circumstance that in the pre-revolutionary period that the present educational institutions were subservient to a non-governmental institution – the Russian Musical Society, while their activities as educational institutions possessed pronounced specific features.

The aforementioned project of the decree was examined at the session of the government – the Council of People's Commissars – on July 12, 1918. The session began a few minutes after eight o'clock in the evening and took place under the chairmanship of Vladimir Lenin. The eleventh point in the agenda for the session was the question about the conservatories. It was reported by Anatoly Lunacharsky. The protocol of this session, which is preserved at the Russian State Archive of Social-Political History, contained the following inscription concerning the examined question: "Attended by 11 people. The project of the transferal of the Petrograd and Moscow Conservatories into the administration of the People's Commissariat of Enlightenment with the liquidation of their dependence on the Russian Musical Society [Lunacharsky]. Number of people adopting the decree: 11. It was agreed to approve the decree"<sup>2</sup>.

The approved original of the decree preserved in the archive presents a typeset text with handwritten proofs made by Anatoly Lunacharsky. The following changes have been brought into the initial version

of the decree: the phrase that the conservatories are transferring to the jurisdiction of the Narkompros “on the basis of autonomous self-administration” and the phrase is inscribed that the aforementioned educational institutions are transferred into the maintenance of the indicated people’s commissariat “on equal terms with all the institutions of higher education”<sup>33</sup>. In its final version the “Decree concerning the Moscow and Petrograd Conservatories” approved by the Council of People’s Commissars stated: “The Council of People’s Commissars decrees: the Petrograd and Moscow Conservatories are transferred to the maintenance of the People’s Commissariat of Enlightenment on equal terms with all the institutions of higher education, with the liquidation of their dependence on the Russian Musical Society. All the possessions and the inventories of these conservatories necessary and adapted to the goals of the state-run development of musical culture are declared to be the people’s state property” [4, p. 11–12]. The decree was signed by the Chairman of the Council of People’s Commissars Vladimir Lenin, the People’s Commissar of Enlightenment Anatoly Lunacharsky, the Director of the Affairs of the Council of People’s Commissars Vladimir Bonch-Bruyevich and the Commissar of the Council of People’s Commissars Nikolai Gorbunov.

Three important provisions received legislative formulization in the decree. The first. The new status of the conservatories was documented: from non-governmental educational institutions which were previously under the patronage of a social organization, which was the Russian Musical Society, were transformed into state educational institutions. The question of the necessity for these two institutions to receive particularly such a status was argued by representatives of both conservatories before the government in the pre-revolutionary times. The second. The document bears witness that the Soviet government planned to carry out work in state-run building of musical institutions in the country and regarded the conservatories as participants of this process. And, finally, the third. Both conservatories, as educational institutions, were placed on par with the higher educational institutions. And although the conservatories were still in the process of becoming institutions of higher education in their genuine meanings, they were definitely oriented on moving particularly in this direction.

The decree issued by the Sovnarkom (Council of People’s Commissars) was published on July 18, 1918 in the newspaper “Izvestia Vserossiyskogo Tsentral'nogo Ispolnitel'nogo Komiteta” [“News of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee”] (No. 150) and subsequently reprinted in a number of other editions [10,

p. 4; 4, p. 597]. The next day after the publication in the newspaper of the decree the Musical Section (MUZO) of the People’s Commissariat of Enlightenment directed a notification to the directors of the conservatories indicated in the decree. It suggested bringing to the notice of all faculty members and employees the fact of the separation of the conservatories from the Russian Musical Society and their transferal to the Narkompros, and gave recommendations to formulate and present to the MUZO the norms of content of the personnel of professors and faculty members of the administrative-managerial personnel, as well as the computation of expenses for the forthcoming academic year of 1918/1919. The notification contained the request to inform the MUZO about the proposals of the employees of the conservatories about the subsequent activities of these educational institutions [5, p. 217–218].

### **The Transferal of the Moscow Conservatory to the Narkompros**

The process of transferal of the Moscow Conservatory from one administrative entity to another is testified by genuine documents (protocols, acts and the supplement to them) preserved in the State Archive of the Russian Federation. These documents show that for the sake of fulfilment of this mission a special commission was created, headed by employee of the Section of the Transferring Educational Institutions of the Narkompros L. F. Favorsky. The structure of the committee included representatives of the Moscow section of the Russian Musical Society (Boris Jurgenson), the Musical Section of the Narkompros (N. M. Ovsyannikov) and the Moscow Conservatory (Mikhail Ippolitov-Ivanov). When the transfer took place, it was attended by representative of the State Control, assistant to the Control of Musical Affairs, E. G. Gelman.

The committee worked during the course of a month – from October 24 until November 26, 1918. Nine sessions took place during the course of which the acceptance and transfer of the real estate, properties, financial assets, etc. was carried out. A certain stage-by-stage approach to this affair was established: the assets and property were transferred from the Russian Musical Society first to the Narkompros, from it to the Musical Section of the present People’s Commissariat, and then from the MUZO to the conservatories. All of this was documented in protocols and enactments which were approved and signed by all the aforementioned persons.

On the first session of the committee all of the dossiers of the conservatory stored in its secretariat were accepted from the Russian Musical Society as per checklist. The transferal of the financial part of the

affairs of the Moscow Section of the Russian Musical Section<sup>4</sup> and the real estate property belonging to it – building No. 13 on Bolshaya Nikitskaya street “with all the maintenance, extensions and land”<sup>5</sup> took place during the previous sections.

A separate session was devoted to the acceptance and transfer of the library and the museum. In the protocol of the committee it was noted: “Having requested in the library for extract [i.e. verification. – V. A.] of a number of musical scores and books, the persons present found them in absolutely perfect order”<sup>6</sup>. During the time period in question the library held over 18 thousand items of musical editions – scores, piano-vocal scores and parts of orchestral compositions and operas, as well as works for various musical instruments. The piano repertoire was presented to the fullest extent possible. There were editions of complete works present (with the exception of separate volumes) of J. S. Bach, Handel, Haydn, Mozart, Liszt and other composers. The library collection included over 2 thousand items of books on various branches of the art of music (over half of them in other languages), as well as periodical and reference editions. One of the most valuable items of this book collection was the personal library of Vladimir Odoyevsky<sup>7</sup>.

In regards to the museum, the protocol contains the following statement: “Having passed on to the museum, the members of the committee checked a number of items, instruments, musical scores located in the display-windows of the museum, where everything turned out to be in perfect order. It was established that a part of the items in the museum which were damaged during the October Revolution were taken out of the display-windows and placed into a safer location”<sup>8</sup>.

There was also a transferal of the musical instruments<sup>9</sup>. In the inventory presented by the committee it was indicated that in 29 tutorial classes in the Conservatory and the office of its director there were 37 grand pianos. Most of them had been manufactured by well-known St. Petersburg-based firms – “Karl Schröder” (19 grand pianos) and “Jacob Becker” (13 grand pianos). The instruments were in different technical conditions: 6 of them were in good shape, the condition of 15 grand pianos was evaluated as “tolerable,” while 16 pianos were seen to be in a bad condition, requiring thorough repairs<sup>10</sup>. Along

with the grand pianos, over 150 string, wind and percussion instruments located in the Conservatory were transferred to the latter’s possession and became the property of the Republic<sup>11</sup>.

During the course of two more sessions the committee carried out the procedure of acceptance and transferal of the Small and Grand Halls of the Conservatory with the possessions and inventory located in it. The Grand Hall was inspected especially thoroughly, and the results of the inspection were documented in great detail in the committee’s certification<sup>12</sup>. This document stated, among other things: “The entire inventory of the Grand Hall is now in a stacked condition, gathered together in several rooms of the building... As for the organ, after a detailed inspection of it from the inside and the outside, it was evaluated as being quite safe and sound. There is a large quantity of abandoned items, all in disarray, belonging to the Vilno Military Hospital, which was hosted here during the course of four years, for the needs of which a lot of aids and appliances (kitchens, lavatories, etc.) have been set up, which are presently in a disrupted state. Moreover, in the premises of the hall many rooms have been set up by means of partitions, in which the belongings of the Hospital are held up till now (laundry and other things). In the vestibule and in the hall there are also items, also left in similar disarray, which had belonged to the Instructor Courses of the People’s Commissariat for Agriculture. In many places the ceilings of the hall were considerably wet. The plaster of the walls and columns was chipped off and spoiled, the glass in the windows was broken. In general, in its present condition, and especially due to the impure and filthy conditions of the heating and ventilation holes and chambers, it is not deemed possible to permit usage of the Hall for cultural and enlightening aims without major repairs”<sup>13</sup>.

In late November 1918, after having conducted its final session, the committee completed its work. The successive academic year of 1918–1919 (the 53rd year after its founding) was begun by the Moscow Conservatory in a new status as a state-run educational institution. There was immense work ahead in the restructuring of many sides of the Conservatory’s activities in the changed political, economic and sociocultural conditions.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> See, for example: *Moskovskaya konservatoriya. 1866–1966* [The Moscow Conservatory. 1866–1966]. Editorial board: A. S. Ginsburg, A. I. Kandinsky and others.

Moscow: Muzyka, 1966. 726 p.; Keldysh Yu. V. *100 let Moskovskoy konservatorii. 1866–1966: kratkiy istoricheskiy ocherk* [A Hundred Years of the Moscow Conservatory.

1866–1966. A short Historical Outline]. Moscow: Muzyka, 1966. 208 p.; Mironova N. A. *Moskovskaya konservatoriya. Istoki (Vospominaniya i dokumenty. Fakty i kommentarii)* [The Moscow Conservatory. Sources (Memoirs and Documents. Facts and Commentaries)]. The Moscow State P. I. Tchaikovsky Conservatory. Moscow, 1995, 96 p.; *Moskovskaya konservatoriya: materialy i dokumenty iz fondov MGK imeni P. I. Tchaikovskogo i GTSMMK imeni M. I. Glinki: v 2 t.* [Moscow Conservatory: Materials and Documents from the Funds of the Moscow State P. I. Tchaikovsky Conservatory and the State Central M. I. Glinka Museum of Musical Culture: in 2 vol.]. Editors in chief: E. G. Sorokina, E. L. Gurevich, etc. Moscow: Progress-Traditsiya, 2006. Vol. 1. 128 p. Vol. 2. 392 p.

<sup>2</sup> Protocol No. 155 of the session of the Council of People's Commissars from July 12, 1918. *Russian State Archive for Social-Political History (RGASPI)*. F. 19. Inv. 1. Act 155, p. 8.

<sup>3</sup> Decree on Moscow and Petrograd Conservatories. *RGASPI*. F. 2. Inv. 1. Act 6567, p. 1.

<sup>4</sup> Protocol No. 2 of the session of the Committee for the Transfer of the Moscow Conservatory into the control of the People's Commissariat for Enlightenment on October 29, 1918. *State Archive of the Russian Federation (GA RF)*. F. A-2306. Inv. 25. Act 28, p. 1–1 back side. (Subsequently abbreviated: Protocol No. \_ of

the session of the Committee ...).

<sup>5</sup> Protocol No. 3 of the session of the Committee... on November 1, 1918. *Ibid.*, p. 2–2 backside.

<sup>6</sup> Protocol No. 4 of the session of the Committee... on November 5, 1918. *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>7</sup> A short list and approximate cost of the musical scores located in the library of the Moscow State Conservatory. The general list of the State Library of the Moscow Conservatory. *Russian State Archive of Literature and Art (RGALI)*. F. 658. Inv. 6. Act 6, pp. 11–12 [September 21, 1918].

<sup>8</sup> Protocol No. 4 of the session of the Committee... on November 5, 1918. *GA RF*. F. A-2306. Inv. 2. Act 28, p. 3.

<sup>9</sup> Document from November 12, 1918. *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>10</sup> Inventory of the grand pianos located at the Moscow Conservatory. *Ibid.*, p. 19–19 backside.

<sup>11</sup> Inventory of the musical instruments located at the Moscow Conservatory comprising the possession of the Russian Republic and being under the jurisdiction of the Musical Section of the People's Commissariat for Enlightenment. *RGALI*. F. 658. Inv. 6. Act 6, pp. 19–21.

<sup>12</sup> Protocols Nos. 6, 7 of the session of the Committee... on November 5 and 19, 1918. *GA RF*. F. A-2306. Inv. 25. Act 28, pp. 5–6.

<sup>13</sup> Document of November 19, 1918. *Ibid.*, pp. 14–14 backside.

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