

Non-Nationalists and Other Nationalists

RICHARD TARUSKIN

Here's an old story I must have heard a hundred times growing up in a family of Yiddish-speaking émigrés from the Russian empire, many of whom were members of radical organizations and joined similar organizations in America. My family had both Socialist and Communist members, and, of course, Socialists and Communists hated one another far more than they hated capitalists. I had relatives on both sides when Socialists and Communists would try to break up each other's meetings with heckling that often ended up in brawls. According to the old story, told with relish from both perspectives, the police were breaking up one such brawl. A cop had his nightstick poised above the head of one of the brawlers, who looked up and said, "But officer, I'm an anti-Communist." "I don't care what kind of Communist you are," said the officer as the billy club came down.

That's how I feel addressing the subject of non-nationalist Russian music. I don't care what kind of nationalist you are, I'm against you. As long as nationalism is the issue we see as dividing Russian musicians, we are still in the ghetto

You don't have to be Russian to love Tchaikovsky.
—Ralph P. Locke

that nationalist discourse has created for us. The ghetto is especially obvious if we choose to speak only about Russian opera, for that means that our question is still "How Russian is it?"—the baleful question that I identified, and tried to shake, a decade and a half ago in *Defining Russia Musically*. That book, of course, did not succeed in shaking the baleful question because it, too, was almost wholly devoted to music by Russian composers and therefore, at best, merely added a new wing to the ghetto. In the *Oxford History of Western Music* I tried to shake it by spreading Russian composers as evenly as I could through the volumes devoted to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Russia makes its debut, it is true, in a chapter called "Nations, States, and Peoples," which sounds suspiciously like a euphemism for the old ghetto of "nationalism." But Russia's company in that chapter consists of Germany and France, and my purpose was to show that nationalism spread to Russia with Westernization. In the next chapter, on virtuosos, I gave a lengthy description of Liszt's first recital in St. Petersburg, replete with comments from Glinka as related by Vladimir Stasov. The purpose was to make Russia (or at least St. Petersburg) seem a normal—which is to say, unmarked—venue for European music-making.

In the chapter given in part to Chopin, Rus-

The epigraph is from Ralph P. Locke, *Musical Exoticism: Images and Reflections* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 17.

sia figured as the oppressor nation against which Chopin's nationalist sentiments were directed, and in a chapter called "Slavs as Subjects and Citizens" Russia was contrasted with the Czech and Moravian lands, with Smetana and Balakirev as the protagonists. The purpose there was chiefly to show how national character is assigned to music by audiences as well as composers—sometimes in the presence of folklore but sometimes without its benefit. In the chapter following those on Wagner and Verdi, called "Cutting Things Down to Size," Russian realism, exemplified by Musorgsky's *Boris Godunov* and Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin*, is juxtaposed with French *opéra lyrique*, verismo, and operetta. In the last chapter of the nineteenth-century volume, symphonies by Borodin and Tchaikovsky are discussed alongside symphonies by Bruckner, Dvořák, Amy Beach, César Franck, Saint-Saëns, Elgar, Vaughan Williams, and Sibelius.

One thing I knew I would do from the moment I conceived the book, before I even sat down to write the medieval chapters, was to make Alexander Serov one of the main spokesmen of the New German School. I admit that I was delighted to give myself a pretext for sneaking into the text a picture of the man to whom I devoted most of my doctoral dissertation, and in full consciousness that mine would surely be the only English-language general history of music in which Serov's name would so much as appear in the index. But the larger purpose, I hope, is clear: it is, to use a term that feminist historians coined, to "mainstream" Russian music and musicians into the general narrative. Serov, like Anton Rubinstein, was accepted during his lifetime as a cosmopolitan figure abroad (though for a Russian the term "cosmopolitan" is never without complications); and he was considered an authentic spokesman for the progressive faction in European musical politics at midcentury. That made him a terrific vehicle for mainstreaming.

And yet, I have been critical nevertheless of some of the mainstreaming efforts that have been mounted on behalf of women composers, since representing them disproportionately can distort the historical picture in a fashion that actually weakens the main political point of feminist scholarship: namely, that women have

been not merely excluded from the historical account but denied the access and opportunities that would have enabled them to earn their place within it. But that is hardly the case with Russian music, which since the days of Rubinstein in the nineteenth century, and Sergey Diaghilev in the twentieth, has been extremely prominent in the European and American performing repertoire even as it has been minimized and ghettoized in historiography. Of course that minimization-cum-ghettoization is a legitimate and necessary part of the story one has to tell, but so is the prominence, amounting at times to veritable crazes.

And with that I will stop recounting my attempts to counter the old habits of my profession. The account of twentieth-century music, replete with Stravinsky and Shostakovich, Rachmaninoff and Prokofiev, Schnittke and Gubaidulina, offers manifold opportunities for mainstreaming of a less tendentious kind, and I am sorely aware that I must appear presumptuous in offering my own work as an example. But the example seems relevant to my point here: that we need to look for other contexts into which to place Russian music if we want to normalize it within the historical narrative and counter the essentialist assumptions that have demeaned it—above all, the dogma that the authenticity or legitimacy of Russian music depends on its Russianness, however that quality is defined.

There are many contexts, for example, into which one might insert Sergey Taneyev's *Oresteia* besides that of "non-nationalist Russian opera." Operas after Aeschylus might be one, or after Greek drama generally, in which case Taneyev might take his place in a distinguished lineage that might extend all the way back to the Florentine *camerata*. Or mythological opera, for something even more general, although in that case he would have to stand up to Wagner, which is no one's idea of fun. *Oresteia* would be an interesting exhibit in any study of opera in the decade after Wagner, alongside many better-known works by Germans, Frenchmen, Italians, and Czechs. Or in a study of leitmotifs in and out of opera. Or a study of one-opera composers (where he might fare pretty well against Schumann and Franck, but then there's Beethoven). Or operas published by

Belyayev—in which case he would be in counterpoint with Rimsky-Korsakov and Borodin, thus cross-cutting the factitious divide between “nationalist” and “non-nationalists.” By now I’m reaching, of course, but to reach toward transcendence of the factitious divide, which has never done Russian music any good, would be a good deed.

Not that I don’t sympathize with the effort to give “non-nationalists” their due. I’ve done my share of complaining on this score. There is only one thing worse than being confined to a ghetto, and that is being judged a bad ghetto citizen, which is how Tchaikovsky is usually portrayed in non-Russian textbooks, not to mention Rubinstein or other “cosmopolitan” figures (to the minimal extent that they are ever included in such books). In the most recent such textbook published in America, which, following the latest trends in textbook publication, has very little continuous text but consists in the main of bite-sized verbal clumps, there is an opening that presents, on facing pages, a lightly annotated listing of “Major Composers of the 19th Century” grouped by countries. Although the breakdown thus emphasizes nations, the issue of national character is explicitly raised in only three of the nine groups: Spain, Russia, and the United States (not Scandinavia, not Great Britain, not even Bohemia). And only in the paragraph devoted to Russia is the matter presented as contentious. It reads:

Mikhail Glinka was one of the first Russian composers to gain international fame. While studying in Italy as a young man, he experienced “musical homesickness,” the desire to hear music that was distinctively Russian. His two great operas, *A Life for the Czar* and *Ruslan and Ludmila*, inspired several subsequent generations of Russian composers, including the group known as “The Five”: Mily Balakirev, César Cui, Alexander Borodin, Modeste Mussorgsky, and Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov. Many Russian composers considered Tchaikovsky too foreign in training and outlook to belong to this group of nationalists.¹

¹Mark Evan Bonds, *A History of Music in Western Culture*, 3rd edn. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2010), p. 489. Parenthetical dates and cross-references omitted.

Only a Russian composer, in this as in every such book, makes news by *not* making a fetish of his nationality. In the more extended verbal clump that provides a “Composer Profile” for Tchaikovsky, we read that he “embraced his Russian heritage but did not make a display of it, unlike some of his contemporaries, who made a point of writing explicitly nationalistic music.”² One could easily multiply assertions of this kind to illustrate the degree to which being “explicitly nationalistic” has become a normative or default assumption about Russian composers. Notice in this case, for example, that Tchaikovsky has to be explicitly pardoned for his deviance from the norm with the assurance that despite everything he “embraced his Russian heritage” after all. I really have no idea what the author meant by that; it makes sense only as a preemptive defense against some kind of implied McCarthyite or Zhdanovite attack (so I guess I do understand it at that); but it strangely parallels the statement one paragraph earlier that Tchaikovsky “acknowledged his homosexuality privately but otherwise kept it concealed for fear of public condemnation.” It was something else about which one could say that Tchaikovsky embraced it but did not make a display of it. My favorite illustrations of the spurious newsworthiness of non-nationalism in a Russian composer are two. One is Robert P. Morgan’s remark that “curiously, Skryabin was not himself nationalist in orientation.”³ I just love that “curiously”! The other concerns Taneyev, and it is something I’ll never forget because it gave me my first impulse to topple the national question from its privileged position in Russian music studies more than a quarter of a century ago. At a meeting of the Society for Music Theory, the reader of a paper on Taneyev’s treatise of 1909, *Podvizhnoy kontrapunkt strogogo pis’ma* (Invertible counterpoint in the strict style),⁴ went out of his way to inform the audience that Taneyev’s compositions were “without conspicuous nationalistic

²Ibid., p. 471.

³Robert P. Morgan, *Twentieth-Century Music* (New York: Norton, 1991), p. 55.

⁴Sergey Taneyev, *Podvizhnoy kontrapunkt strogogo pis’ma* [Invertible Counterpoint in the Strict Style] (Leipzig: M. Belyaev, 1909; English trans. 1962).

elements."⁵ When I asked him why he felt it necessary to state this negative "fact," he replied that it answered "a natural question" about a Russian composer. Natural. That got me thinking seriously, for the first time, about the pitfalls of essentialism.

But if we want to fix the blame for this situation, the name that should head the bill of indictment will not be the name of any feckless Western textbook writer, but a name revered in Russia to this day. Any Russian will know that I am about to summon Vladimir Vasilievich Stasov to the dock. It is he more than anyone else who made the distinction between nationalist and non-nationalist in Russian music not only factitious and contentious but also invidious. It is to his writings that we must look first to isolate the bacillus we need to extirpate. He wrote so voluminously that sampling his rhetoric could be an endless endeavor, so I will limit myself for the most part to his last testament, the grand summation called *The Art of the Nineteenth Century*, first published in abridged form in 1901 as a supplement to the arts journal *Niva* and reissued in full five years later (very shortly before Stasov's death) in the fourth volume of his collected works. I will be quoting from the text as given in the third and last volume of the lavish edition of Stasov's *Selected Works*, issued by the Soviet publishing unit *Iskusstvo* in 1952 in the wake of the so-called Zhdanovshchina, when Stasov's writings were recanonized because they were seen to favor the xenophobic arts policies of the Soviet government in the early years of the Cold War.

This huge final survey, *The Art of the Nineteenth Century*, sums up the seventy-seven-year-old Stasov's sublimely inflexible views at their final stage of cementedness, and at a point where he could portray the whole century whose art he had witnessed as if it were a single, static and highly polarized entity. The second great advantage of this text is that it was Stasov's single universal synopsis, uniting

his views on Russian and on European art and placing the former, the Russian, within the context of the latter, the European. And of course the place to look, in order to see the polarization of Russian and non-Russian within the Russian, will be Stasov's farewell characterizations of his perennial *bêtes noires*, Rubinstein and Tchaikovsky.

The linkage of names was not just a matter of Stasovian rhetoric. Rubinstein had been Tchaikovsky's mentor, and what brought them together, hence what they had most in common, was their affiliation with the St. Petersburg Conservatory, Rubinstein as its founder and first director, Tchaikovsky as a member of its first graduating class. This is our signal that the issue of nationalism was inextricably tangled up, both conceptually and strategically, and especially in the mind of Stasov, with the issue of education and professionalization. Indeed, during their lifetimes, Tchaikovsky and Rubinstein would never have cast their differences with the composers now thought of as the Russian nationalists in any other terms than those of professionalism, and this was true of their antagonists as well.

We know this now above all from their letters. There is the now-famous letter from Tchaikovsky to his patron, Nadezhda von Meck, sent from Italy late in 1877 (or early 1878, N.S.), in which, at her request, he cast a withering eye over the whole *moguchaya kuchka* (the Mighty Handful, as they are called in Britain). "All the newest Petersburg composers are very gifted persons," he allowed, "but they are all infected to the marrow with the worst sort of conceitedness and with a purely dilettantist confidence in their superiority over all the rest of the musical world." Immediately he excepted Rimsky-Korsakov from this generalization, because Rimsky-Korsakov was, in Tchaikovsky's words, "the only one among them to whom it occurred, five years ago, that the ideas propagated by the circle had really no foundation, that their contempt for schooling, for classical music, their hatred of authorities and standards were nothing more than ignorance." This happened to Rimsky-Korsakov, of course, because he had been appointed to the faculty of the hated Conservatory (something about which you can learn only with the greatest difficulty

⁵Gordon D. McQuere, "The Development of Music Theory in Russia: Sergei Taneev," *AMS/CMS/SEM/SMT Abstracts* (Vancouver, 1985), p. 39; cf. Richard Taruskin, *Defining Russia Musically: Historical and Hermeneutical Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), p. 48n.

if Stasov is your source). As for the rest, Cui, in Tchaikovsky's description, "cannot compose otherwise than by improvising and picking out on the piano little themelets supplied with little chords." Borodin's "technique is so weak he cannot write a line without outside help." Musorgsky actually "shows off his illiteracy, is proud of his ignorance, slops along any old way, blindly believing in the infallibility of his own genius." As for Balakirev, who at the time Tchaikovsky was writing was in a period of withdrawal, Tchaikovsky admitted that "he has enormous gifts, but," he added, "they are lost because of some fateful circumstances that have made a saintly prig out of him."⁶

"How Russian is it?", then, was not Tchaikovsky's question. And neither was it Musorgsky's question when he wrote, equally disparagingly, to Stasov, almost exactly four years earlier, about a visit from "the worshipers of absolute musical beauty," which left him with "a strange feeling of emptiness." This is the letter in which Musorgsky keeps referring to Tchaikovsky as Sadyk-Pasha, the *nom de plume* of his namesake, the Polish writer Michal Czajkowski. Tchaikovsky and Musorgsky met at Cui's apartment while Tchaikovsky was visiting St. Petersburg in connection with staging his opera *The Oprichnik*.⁷ Tchaikovsky listened to a medley of pieces by Cui and Musorgsky, including recently composed items from the revised *Boris Godunov*. He responded, according to Musorgsky, with some patronizing advice: "a strong talent . . . but dissipated . . . would be useful to work on . . . a symphony . . . (*en forme*, of course)."⁸

The link between the matter that divided Tchaikovsky and the kuchkisty and the spurious question of nationalism that has dominated the discourse of Russian music since their time was again provided by Stasov, originally in an article opposing the establishment of the St.

Petersburg Conservatory. The article appeared in 1861 in a reactionary, xenophobic newspaper called *The Northern Bee* (*Severnaya pchela*), an organ of bilious merchant-class opinion that would have been a strange place for a liberal *intelligent* like Stasov to be writing on any other subject. His opposition had been provoked, along with that of Balakirev and even Serov, by some rash comments made by Anton Rubinstein during his campaign to mobilize support for the institution. Among these remarks were tactless comments on the failure of Russia to produce any significant composers—this at a time when Glinka and Dargomizhsky, who were then still alive, had produced between them three operas in which Russian musicians could take justifiable pride, and when Glinka, at least, had made an international reputation.⁹ This faux pas gave the opposition a pretext to cast Rubinstein's activities as unpatriotic, a charge that resonated easily with Rubinstein's dubious ethnicity.

Although there were many aspects to Stasov's article that were out of character for him, he never retreated a step from it over the course of his career. (Retreat would have been more out of character for him than anything else.) He reprinted large extracts from it in his most famous essay on Russian music, namely the fourth chapter of his 1882 survey *Twenty-Five Years of Russian Art*; and he recycled the odious charge a full forty years later in *The Art of the Nineteenth Century*, where he wrote:

Not long before the opening of the St. Petersburg Conservatory voices were raised in the press *against* the necessity of such institutions at the present time generally, and in Russia particularly. For Russia it would be sufficient, said the protesters, to follow the example of Glinka and Dargomizhsky with regard to composition. Neither of them had ever gone to musical schools; they had developed independently, apart from the traditions and customs of European musical guilds. It would have been better if all the musicians of Russia went in their footsteps. These voices were Serov's and mine, and it would seem that in these protesting opinions there was a mea-

⁶Passages from Tchaikovsky's letter (24 Dec. 1877/5 Jan. 1878), trans. Vera Lateiner, in *Letters of Composers Through Six Centuries*, ed. Piero Weiss (Philadelphia: Chilton Books, 1967), pp. 362–64.

⁷An *oprichnik* was a member of the *oprichnina*, the bodyguard of Tsar Ivan IV.

⁸Letter of 28 December 1872; M. P. Musorgsky, *Literaturnoye naslediyе*, ed. Alexandra Orlova and Mikhail Pekelis, vol. I (Moscow: Muzika, 1971), p. 142.

⁹About this stage of the controversy, see Richard Taruskin, "How the Acorn Took Root: A Tale of Russia," this journal 6 (1983), 189–212; rpt. *Defining Russia Musically*, pp. 113–51.

sure of truth, because in a few years the results given by our conservatories turned out to be the same as those always given by all conservatories: an inclination toward workaday musicianship on the part of performers and composers alike; the forgetting of the main, essential tasks of musical artistry and its transformation into a mere livelihood; the proliferation of external, pretentious technical display to the detriment of art; in sum, the decline of robust feeling and common sense, the deterioration of taste, and base submission to tradition and authority.¹⁰

Stasov continues a while in this familiar vein, and then comes the modulation that interests us here:

Having made himself the director of our main conservatory, the Petersburg one, Anton Rubinstein brought to it, first of all, all his personal artistic tastes and ideas and, in the second place, all the tastes and ideas of the German conservatories he knew. He believed blindly in them, and beyond their horizon he knew nothing and saw nothing. He was a pianist of genius, amazing, profound in spirit and in poetry, than whom no one stood higher except, of course, his comrade and contemporary Liszt, whose like the world in all probability will not soon see again. But Rubinstein's tastes and ideas were very narrow and circumscribed. By nature he was an ardent Mendelssohnist and somewhat retreated from this cult only in his late years, not so much out of inner conviction as in response to the later opinion of Mendelssohn that took hold in most of Germany. . . . His own compositions, extraordinarily prolific, revealed a very middling and unoriginal talent, . . . and although he had an enormous success in Russia with his *Demon*, a rather weak opera (apart from its colorful Oriental dances) and a few mediocre romances (which included, however, the truly delightful "Persian Songs"), still, in the final analysis, his works never aroused any significant response anywhere. The national tendency he did not admit and did not like. All his ideas and tastes he implanted in his conservatory. In it they reigned eternal with majestic force, and reign there to a significant degree to this day.¹¹

The conservatory having now been associated through Rubinstein with opposition to "the national tendency," the stage has been set for

Tchaikovsky, who, Stasov wrote, "was born with a great and rare talent, but who unfortunately was trained at the St. Petersburg Conservatory in its earliest, that is, its most inauspicious time, during the unlimited dominion and spell of Anton Rubinstein." This was bad not only for Tchaikovsky but for Russia, since

Tchaikovsky's musical career lasted more than a quarter of a century. For practically all this time he went from success to success and was soon recognized, both at home and abroad, as the greatest musical talent in Russia, a talent equal to Glinka, and in the opinion of many, even higher than Glinka. That opinion was mainly conditioned by the fact that Tchaikovsky, although a sincere patriot and a zealous devotee of all things Russian, did not carry in his musical nature the "national" element and was from head to toe a cosmopolitan and eclectic.¹²

The pages that follow are fascinating to read, as Stasov piles up evidence that contradicts his assertions (some of it from letters to von Meck that had been published only in the few years since Tchaikovsky's death), only to sweep it all away with mantralike repetitions of his claims. Anyone who knows Stasov's writings knows that they give new meaning to the word "closed-minded," but his performance here reaches peaks probably unequalled in his own output, or in anyone's. Stasov's ideas about what constitutes "the 'national' element" remain in this last testamentary piece what they were before, as laid out in *Twenty-Five Years of Russian Art* in the form of four points: (1) the absence of preconception and blind faith; (2) the use of folklore as source material; (3) the Oriental element; (4) an extreme inclination toward program music.¹³ From this one could easily divine the list of exceptional Tchaikovsky works that Stasov cites (as one could have guessed the two exceptions he notes in his brief unsympathetic survey of Rubinstein's output, both of them "Oriental"). Since *The Art of the Nineteenth Century* was written more than seven years after Tchaikovsky's death, the list here is

¹²Ibid., pp. 745–46.

¹³For a translation of this portion of *Twenty-Five Years of Russian Art*, see Piero Weiss and Richard Taruskin, *Music in the Western World: A History in Documents*, 2nd edn. (Belmont, CA: Thomson/Schirmer, 2007), pp. 333–36.

¹⁰V. V. Stasov, *Izbranniye sochineniya* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1952), III, 744.

¹¹Ibid., p. 745.

the most complete one that Stasov ever drew up. It includes the *Scherzo à la russe* for piano, the finale of the Second Symphony, the Andante of the "third" [*recte*: first] quartet, the choruses in the first act of *Eugene Onegin* "and parts of the wetnurse's role in that opera," the finale of the Fourth Symphony, "and perhaps some other things," Stasov writes. And that was the secret of Tchaikovsky's success, Stasov concludes, dragging his other perennial whipping-boy, the lazy and ignorant Russian public, onstage. For (as he writes), "the Russian public, long since corrupted in its musical tastes by the Italian opera and other pernicious and banal elements, were sorely burdened by the New Russian School and its creations. And when Tchaikovsky appeared in the arena, a talented cosmopolitan and eclectic, who did not threaten to drag anybody toward anything particularly 'national,' everyone was gladdened and contented. Past the Verzhbolovsky station [i.e., the Polish border] there was even less demand for the national. Tchaikovsky suited Europe to a T."¹⁴

Lucky bastard! Of course this was not even true at the time Stasov was writing this self-pitying grumble, and it became less true as time went on. But leaving that contradiction unrefuted for the moment, I'll press on to some even bigger contradictions. In all of Stasov's vast output, he mentions Sergey Ivanovich Taneyev only once to my knowledge. That single mention comes toward the end of *The Art of the Nineteenth Century*, where Stasov strains for a proper valediction. Surveying the present scene as of 1901, Stasov finds some good words for everyone, even if they contradict the gloom and doom of his fulminations only a few pages earlier. Thus:

The number of musical figures who have received their education at the St. Petersburg and Moscow conservatories has been very considerable. From both have emerged several good pianists from the classrooms of the great Russian artists Anton Rubinstein (in St. Petersburg) and his brother Nikolai (in Moscow), and they have become pedagogues and propagators of the Russian pianoforte school. There have also emerged from these conservatories many teach-

ers and performers, both vocalists and instrumentalists, so that in the course of the past quarter century all of our choruses and orchestras have been basically staffed with Russian singers and musicians—and that is one of the best and most significant results of the conservatories' operation. The Moscow Conservatory has produced from its midst several musicians of remarkable talent and influence, at once composers, performers and pedagogues. Such, in particular, are Taneyev, Scriabin and Rachmaninoff. Among the works of Taneyev that are distinguished by great technical mastery, energy, elegance and superb expressivity are the opera *Oresteya* (1894), two quartets and a symphony.¹⁵

That is all Stasov ever had to say about Taneyev. After a similarly skimpy and dutiful recital of the merits of Scriabin and Rachmaninoff, Stasov turns northward and, despite the direction of his gaze, grows warmer. "But the advantage, both in terms of quantity and, at times, also in quality has always been on the side of the St. Petersburg Conservatory. Without doubt, this has depended above all on the fact that at the head of its musical faculty there stood such a great and independent artist as Rimsky-Korsakov." After a glowing rundown of Rimsky-Korsakov's *curriculum vitae* Stasov begins handing out accolades to Rimsky's offspring: "Many of the best pupils of this great teacher have themselves subsequently become not only remarkable composers, but also conductors and teachers. Thus the benign tradition of the independent Russian school has been wholly preserved. Chief among them are Akimov, Antipov, Arensky, Artsibushev, Blumenfeld, Wihtol, Grechaninov, Ippolitov-Ivanov, Sokolov, Cherepnin, and others." Following this list of greats there is a colossal paragraph in which each of them is provided with a résumé and a list of works.

To sort out all the double standards whereby these protégés of Rimsky-Korsakov (or more accurately, protégés of Mitrofan Belyayev, the Maecenas thanks to whom their works were published and performed) could be described as preservers of "the independent Russian school" and its four-point checklist of characteristics (particularly the first, namely "absence of pre-

¹⁴Stasov, *Izbranniye sochineniya*, III, 746.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 750.

conception and blind faith," meaning skepticism of academic routine) would be tediously anticlimactic, and of course it's been done.¹⁶ But Stasov is only getting started. The next major subdivision of *The Art of the Nineteenth Century* is devoted to the work of Lyadov and Glazunov, whom Stasov describes without evident qualm as "the most important artists and composers of the most recent period"—and remember, the survey from which this statement comes had not only Russia but all of Europe as its purview.¹⁷ A survey that had begun boldly, eighty large-format pages ago in the edition from which I am quoting, with Beethoven—and with Stasov's assertion that "architecture and music are the two arts that have blossomed more robustly, richly and extensively than all the rest in the course of the nineteenth century[, and] music has surpassed even architecture in the strength and breadth of its flight and the mightiness of the means it has attained"¹⁸—has culminated in Lyadov and Glazunov, and with a renewed affirmation that "music has done and achieved the most of all" the arts in the nineteenth century, because it is the youngest of the arts and has only in the nineteenth century managed to hit its stride.¹⁹

Stasov is left with Lyadov and Glazunov because the rest of Europe has in his unhappy view become enmeshed in decadence. That is the main reason why he had to make his peace with the conservatories, whose sins by century's end had come to seem to him to be the lesser evils. The way in which his mammoth survey fizzles amid dizzy proclamations of triumph is in its tragicomic way an effective epitaph to the New Russian School and to the century in which it flourished; and yet Stasov managed to bequeath his prejudices about Russian music to the twentieth century, both in and out of Russia. This is a story very much worth telling, and I will outline it here as far as I am able at this point to detect its outlines.

In the first instance Stasov bequeathed his prejudices to the West through his disciples, notably Rosa Newmarch, who carried them to an Anglophone readership at the exact moment when the arts of Russia began their steep ascent in popularity. In his recent, very interesting study of Newmarch, Philip Ross Bullock strives hard to vindicate her contribution to the literature on Russian music against what he correctly sees as my "comprehensive attempt to challenge the dominance of the writings of Vladimir Stasov,"²⁰ an attempt of which this article is obviously a component. Bullock seeks to vindicate Newmarch by challenging my contentions: first, that Newmarch's writings transmit Stasov's doctrinaire and intransigent views without significant change; and, second, that one of the views that she helped significantly to propagate was the view that Russian composers were to be divided into the very unequally valued camps of "nationalist" and "non-nationalist."

Bullock focuses his defense of Newmarch on the matter of Tchaikovsky, a composer for whom Newmarch certainly did evince a greater sympathy than did Stasov; after all, she undertook to abridge and translate Modest Tchaikovsky's biography of his brother as *The Life and Letters of Peter Ilich Tchaikovsky* in 1906. Bullock quotes a letter in which Stasov congratulates Newmarch on the book's appearance but reminds her that in his opinion Tchaikovsky "never has been, or will be, one of the *great men* of art," and apologizes for frankly expressing "these views if they do not coincide with your own."²¹ But in noting what he calls the "context of reception"—that is, in noting that Newmarch wrote for an audience whose expectations did not match Stasov's—Bullock accounts sufficiently for their differing estimates of Tchaikovsky's ultimate importance (and I fully agree that time has vindicated Newmarch rather than Stasov with respect to Tchaikovsky).²² The question remains, however: Did

¹⁶See, among others, Richard Taruskin, *Stravinsky and the Russian Traditions* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), chap. 1 ("Russia and How It Got That Way").

¹⁷Quotations in this paragraph to this point are from Stasov, *Izbranniye sochineniya*, III, 750–51.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, p. 673.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, p. 755.

²⁰Philip Ross Bullock, *Rosa Newmarch and Russian Music in Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth-Century England*, Royal Musical Association Monographs 18 (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), p. 2.

²¹*Ibid.*, p. 43.

²²*Ibid.*, pp. 3, 43.

Newmarch's actual description differ from Stasov's, and did it help spread Stasov's views on the nature and importance of nationalism in Russian art?

I think the answer to the first question is no: Newmarch's description did not differ in any significant way from Stasov's; and the answer to the second question is yes: Newmarch did indeed spread the view that the main factor distinguishing Tchaikovsky and a host of other composers in his historiographical entourage from those whom Stasov would have described as the "great men of art" was indeed the matter of nationalism as defined preeminently by Stasov. I would go further still and propose that Newmarch was the main carrier of this notion into the twentieth-century discourse of music history and that we are still laboring in her wake, even those of us who wish to vindicate the "non-nationalists."

First of all, Stasov never called Tchaikovsky a bad or an unimportant composer, so Newmarch's interest in him did not in itself contravene the Stasovian canon. Immediately after all the caveats and reservations Stasov leveled at Tchaikovsky and his reputation in *The Art of the Nineteenth Century*, Stasov added this: "But be all that as it may, the huge dissemination and fame of Tchaikovsky were in many ways completely justified and legitimate. He was so talented, so strongly endowed with the ability to fill his music with grace and beauty and withal so strongly equipped to affect the listener with his mastery of form and the subtle qualities of his colorful and elegant instrumentation, that he could not help having an uncommonly strong and charismatic influence on great masses of listeners."²³

If there is irony here, it is directed at the listeners, not at Tchaikovsky. Now here is the beginning of the chapter on Tchaikovsky in *The Russian Opera*, Rosa Newmarch's most important work on Russian music. She wrote:

Typically Russian by temperament and in his whole attitude to life; cosmopolitan in his academic training and in his ready acceptance of Western ideals;

Tchaikovsky, although the period of his activity coincided with that of Balakirev, Cui, and Rimsky-Korsakov, cannot be included amongst the representatives of the national Russian school. His ideals were more diffused, and his ambitions reached out towards more universal appreciation. Nor had he any of the communal instincts which brought together and cemented in a long fellowship the circle of Balakirev. He belonged in many respects to an older generation, the "Byroniacs," the incurable pessimists of Lermontov's day, to whom life appeared as "a journey made in the night time." He was separated from the nationalists, too, by an influence which had been gradually becoming obliterated in Russian music since the time of Glinka—I allude to the influence of Italian opera.²⁴

The very first sentence in Newmarch's chapter insists on Stasov's factitious and invidious distinction; and the rest does not matter, so far as we are today concerned. We may disagree over the nature of Tchaikovsky's Western affinities. For Stasov, the implication was that Tchaikovsky was German in orientation owing to his conservatory training at the hands of Rubinstein. Newmarch cites Italian opera—surprisingly, since she knew many of Tchaikovsky's letters intimately, having translated them, letters that affirm over and over again that his main enthusiasm was for contemporary French music (the music of Gounod, Saint-Saëns, Bizet, Delibes), the influence of which shouts loudly from virtually all his works.

And was Newmarch's take on Tchaikovsky quite as "adoring" as (following Stasov himself in a grumpy letter to an even grumpier Balakirev) Bullock implies it to have been?²⁵ This is from the last paragraph in the same chapter in Newmarch's *The Russian Opera*: "Tchaikovsky's nature was undoubtedly too emotional and self-centred for dramatic uses. To say this, is not to deny his genius; it is merely an attempt to show its qualities and its limitations. Tchaikovsky had genius, as Shelley, as Byron, as Heine, as Lermontov had genius; not as Shakespeare, as Goethe, as Wagner had

²³Stasov, *Izbranniye sochineniya*, III, 747.

²⁴Rosa Newmarch, *The Russian Opera* (New York: E. P. Dutton, n.d. [1914]), p. 334.

²⁵Bullock, *Rosa Newmarch*, p. 43.

it. As Byron could never have conceived 'Julius Caesar' or 'Twelfth Night,' so Tchaikovsky could never have composed such an opera as 'Die Meistersinger'.²⁶

Oh well, two can play this game. One can try to imagine *Eugene Onegin* by Wagner. Now we can smirk. But in saying that "opera is the one form of musical art in which the objective outlook is indispensable" and that "Tchaikovsky had great difficulty in escaping from his intensely emotional personality, and in viewing life through any eyes but his own," Newmarch was again distinguishing him invidiously from his nationalist confreres, who, like Shakespeare, could reflect in their art not only themselves but "humanity" at large.²⁷ Her view of Tchaikovsky self-evidently continued to inform that of Tchaikovsky's wordiest biographer, David Brown.²⁸

Of course Stasov was not alone in his characterization of Tchaikovsky, nor was Newmarch the first to bring the notion west. There was also César Cui, a musical politician as partisan as Stasov and far less principled, who in his book *La Musique en Russie*, which had begun as a series of articles published beginning in 1878 in the Paris journal *Revue et Gazette musicale*, brought to French readers the prejudices of the New Russian School (which Cui had named as such, just as Stasov had christened it the Mighty Kuchka). From Cui the French learned that "Tchaikovsky est loin d'être partisan de la nouvelle école russe; il est bien plutôt son antagoniste."²⁹ But that is only because Tchaikovsky was for Cui just a chip off of Rubinstein, and therefore an embodiment of Conservatory cosmopolitanism. The antagonism, in other words, went the other way, from Cui and Co. to Tchaikovsky, not from him to them. Remarkably, the ever clear-eyed Gerald Abraham, writing near the beginning of his career in collaboration with his mentor, Michel-

Dmitri Calvocoressi, got this right. "The Conservatoire," he wrote,

staffed entirely by teachers of foreign blood, had given [Tchaikovsky] a sound education, a hearty contempt for those who had not had a sound education, and a warm dislike of people who were constantly attacking "Germans" and "Jews." His idol was a German Jew and his bosom-friend a German-Russian. Added to this he was always quick to suspect hostility to his own work even where none existed, and Cui, the journalistic mouthpiece of the "handful," had dismissed his [graduation] cantata with contemptuous sarcasm. It is not unnatural that, although he had never met any of the "handful," [Tchaikovsky] regarded them as a hostile group, while, according to Rimsky-Korsakof, they on their side considered him "a mere child of the Conservatoire."³⁰

The divine Gerry wrote that in 1936! How we have regressed since.

Unlike Stasov, moreover, Cui was a competitor, happy to concede to Tchaikovsky the realms of chamber music and symphony so long as it was clear that Tchaikovsky could never compete with Cui as a composer for the stage. Bear in mind that as of Cui's writing Tchaikovsky had actually produced only two operas that had been staged, *The Oprichnik* and *Vakula the Smith* (the earlier version of what became *Cherevichki* [*The Tsarina's Slippers*]). But who was Cui to be making such a judgment? At the time of writing he had had three operas produced: *William Ratcliff*, after Heine; *Angelo*, after Victor Hugo (a subject that would later serve as the basis for Ponchielli's *La Gioconda*); and the insignificant one-act operetta *The Mandarin's Son*. Between Cui and Tchaikovsky, with operas to the latter's credit on subjects from Russian history and Little-Russian fakelore, who was the cosmopolitan? We know from a late memoir by Cui that has achieved wide exposure in America thanks to its incorporation into the music history text by

²⁶Newmarch, *The Russian Opera*, p. 361.

²⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 360–61.

²⁸David Brown, *Tchaikovsky: A Biographical and Critical Study*, 4 vols. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1978–92).

²⁹César Cui, *La Musique en Russie* (Paris: Fischbacher, 1880), p. 119. ("Tchaikovsky is far from being a partisan of the New Russian School; he is sooner its antagonist.")

³⁰M. D. Calvocoressi and Gerald Abraham, *Masters of Russian Music* [1936] (New York: Tudor, 1944), p. 266 (chap. "Peter Tchaikovsky" signed G. A.). The bosom-friend to whom Abraham alludes was German (i.e., Hermann) Avgustovich Larosh (i.e., Laroche).

Grout as revised by Palisca (and now by Burkholder) that as far as Cui was concerned the preoccupations of the New Russian School were far removed from what is usually thought of as nationalism. ("We carried on heated debates," Cui recalled, "in the course of which we would down as many as four or five glasses of tea with jam, we discussed musical form, program music, vocal music, and especially operatic form."³¹) Not only that, but as Cui perversely loved to admit, he was ethnically half-French and half-Lithuanian, "without a drop of Russian blood."³²

Nevertheless, Cui launched his book with a chapter on Russian folk song, giving a pair of examples that would have sounded completely out of place in his own music (though perfectly at home in Tchaikovsky's *Vakula*), and he ended that introductory chapter by stipulating that "it is in these national songs that most Russian composers have taken their principal inspiration, impregnating themselves with the spirit that reigns within them, or else using the melodies of national songs as themes in their vocal and instrumental works."³³ This utterly hypocritical remark was strictly for the benefit of his French readers, for whom the likeliest appeal of the music Cui was trying to sell them was an exotic appeal that excluded Tchaikovsky (as well as Cui himself, who, however, was assured of acceptance in France as a "*mi-français*"). And his calculation hit the mark, as we can see from the response of Alfred Bruneau, one of the most sympathetic of all French musicians toward the music of Russia, partly because he too was obsessed with questions of operatic form in his now forgotten settings of prose libretti by Zola. Having taken Cui's bait, Bruneau was perhaps the first of the many Western writers who have dismissed Tchaikovsky point blank for not being Russian enough: "Devoid of the Russian character that pleases and attracts us in the music of the New Slavonic school," he wrote, "developed to hollow and empty excess in a bloated and faceless style,

his works astonish without overly interesting us."³⁴ Without an exotic group identity, which is to say a ghetto identity, a Russian composer could possess no identity at all. Without a collective folkloristic or Oriental mask he was, as Bruneau says, "faceless."

Bruneau noted that Rubinstein and Tchaikovsky remained popular in Russia, and he thought this inexplicable. Diaghilev thought inexplicable the resistance to Tchaikovsky in France and England, thanks to which he almost lost his shirt in 1921 when he produced *The Sleeping Beauty* in London, where (thanks to his unappreciated spadework) it would later be so popular. To me it seems inexplicable that the relationship between "nationalism" (in quotes) and exoticism (sans quotes) was not obvious to these observers, let alone the fact that it depended on the angle of observation.

But oughtn't it be obvious to us by now? A while ago I cited Gerald Abraham, who in 1936 had a more sophisticated take on the national question and the social divisions that produced it than we have come since to expect. Why have we been backsliding? One reason remains the Diaghilev reason, which persists. Russian music is still valued abroad for its Russianness. Russian music is still purveyed by orchestras abroad in special Russian programs, Russian festivals, Russian seasons. When Shostakovich's quartets are heard, except for the Eighth, it is always in a cycle. But as I noted once when asked to write a program essay for a double cycle of Shostakovich and Beethoven, when the Shostakovich and Beethoven quartets are performed in a single sequence, Beethoven is the one who contributes the Russian folk songs. When will the individual Shostakovich quartets (I mean the ones that do not ask to be decoded verbally the way the Eighth does) be as commonly programmed as the Bartók quartets, which used to be programmed in cycles, and still occasionally are, but have long since begun leading their own lives in concert programs?

What is the antidote to Diaghilevshchina? Gergievshchina! Since the Soviet collapse legions of Russian musicians, with Generalis-

³¹"Pervīye kompozitorskiye shagi Ts. A. Kyui," in Cui, *Izbranniye stat'i* (Leningrad: Muzgiz, 1952), p. 544.

³²See Calvocoressi and Abraham, *Masters of Russian Music*, p. 147.

³³Cui, *La Musique en Russie*, p. 10.

³⁴Alfred Bruneau, *Musiques de Russie et musiciens de France* (Paris: Bibliothèque Charpentier, 1903), pp. 27–28.

simo Gergiev at their head, have invaded the West; and, while at first they mainly brought their special repertoire with them (and that was great for me, since Gergiev's San Francisco performances of Prokofiev and Rimsky-Korsakov gave me a lot of preview work), by now they are bringing us Verdi and Wagner and Beethoven and Mahler. And Tchaikovsky.

But the Diaghilevshchina has never been just a Diaghilevshchina. The reason why Russia has so stubbornly remained exotic has also had to do with its political and cultural isolation in the twentieth century. So the Diaghilevshchina is really another Zhdanovshchina. As long as Russia remained a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma its arts needed to seem mysterious and enigmatic in order to seem authentic, or at least worthy of attention. "Everywhere, secrets," John Updike's character Henry Bech muses upon realizing that the weird Russian writing above the elevator door in his Moscow hotel merely reproduces the word *étage*: "French hidden beneath the Cyrillic."³⁵ What is Shostakovich *really* saying, we automatically wonder, assuming that to Russian ears the subtexts we struggle with are crystal clear. (So why then did he end his life a Hero of Socialist Labor rather than a *zek*?)³⁶ What is Tchaikovsky *really* saying, we automatically wonder, assuming that what delights our children every Christmas at the ballet would corrupt them if they only knew. David Brown quotes Stasov's preposterous claim that the big *Slav'sya* chorus at the end of *A Life for the Tsar* is "a melody composed entirely in the character of our ancient Russian and Greek church melodies, harmonized with the plagal cadence of the middle ages," and he assumes that Stasov's Russian ears "really heard it this way."³⁷

Americans like me, brought up during the Cold War, have a hard time regarding Russia as

a normal place. Behind its closed doors were unspeakable, unimaginable doings that made us constantly curious but also constantly guarded. Take away the veil, peek behind the curtain, see the place as normal, and what would remain of any interest to us? And yet, at the same time we who know Russia desperately wish that she would become less, well, *interesting* (as per the Chinese curse, "May you live in interesting times"). "A Russia in which Musorgsky no longer looks like a prophet is the Russia we all long to see"—those were the last words in my book on Musorgsky, published eighteen years ago.³⁸ They were written in the bright dawn following the Soviet collapse, when that bland and beautiful fate seemed a possibility. It has not happened yet. The last eighteen years of Russian history still have the makings of a great Musorgsky opera: *Khodorkovshchina*, perhaps, or *Songs and Dances of Debt*. Russia is still an object of morbid curiosity, and that is still good for business when it comes to selling books, or music.

But a Russia that looms not as an exotic other but as a part of the common stash might turn out to be even better. Let Gergiev continue to play Mahler and Verdi until it no longer looks odd, let more Bullocks, Steven Muirs, and Simon Morrisons write the future's books on Russian music, and maybe we will not have to consider the "non-nationalists" again.



³⁸Richard Taruskin, *Musorgsky: Eight Essays and an Epilogue* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 407.

Abstract.

We have discussed Russian music in terms of its Russianness long enough. A short history and analysis of that discourse, its double standards and its contradictions, is given, focusing on the seminal writings of Vladimir Stasov, and an account of its migration westward, at first through the writings of Rosa Newmarch. The article ends with a call for de-exoticizing Russian music in the discourse of musicology. Keywords: nationalism, exoticism, Russian music, Stasov, Newmarch

³⁵John Updike, *Bech: A Book* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970), p. 192.

³⁶"Zek" is a Russian slang term for a forced labor camp or prison inmate.

³⁷David Brown, *Mikhail Glinka: A Biographical and Critical Study* (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), p. 134.