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Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov's *Third Textbook* in Alexander Ossovsky's Notes: Concerning the History of the Formation of the St. Petersburg School of Music Theory

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Abstract. The article presents a document from the personal archive of Doctor of the Arts History, Professor, Honored Art Worker of the Russian Federation Valery Vassilyevich Smirnov (1937–2023) — the notebook of outstanding Russian musicologist Alexander Vyacheslavovich Ossovsky. It summarizes notes of Nikolai Andreyevich Rimsky-Korsakov's lectures on the theory of counterpoint, which Ossovsky attended at the St. Petersburg Conservatory from January to November 1897.

The materials of the notebook, bearing the inscription Zapiski po chteniyam N. A. Rimskogo-Korsakova o kontrapunkte [Notes on Nikolai Andreyevich Rimsky-Korsakov's Lectures on Counterpoint], contain a sequential summary of the subjects of the course and detailed recommendations for fulfilling written assignments on the studied themes. However, they comprise merely a fragment of the counterpoint course, which was a special theoretical discipline.

Ossovsky's previously unknown autograph can be examined not merely as a notes of Rimsky-Korsakov's lectures, but also as a "sketch" for his unrealized textbook on counterpoint; information on Rimsky-Korsakov's planned textbook is present in Vassily Vassilyevich Yastrebtsev's and Nikolai Alexandrovich Sokolov's memoirs. The realization of such an intention in connection with the published works on harmony and the bases of orchestration would make it possible for us to compile an exhaustive theoretical compendium for the course on free composition the founder of the St. Petersburg school for composition taught at the Conservatory during the course of several decades.

Keywords: Nikolai Andreyevich Rimsky-Korsakov, Alexander Vyacheslavovich Ossovsky, the St. Petersburg Conservatory, theoretical school, textbook on counterpoint

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Introduction

The history of the studies of Nikolai Andreyevich Rimsky-Korsakov's pedagogicals dates back almost a century; it begins with Mikhail Fabianovich Gnesin's program article Muzykal'no-pedagogicheskie N. A. Rimskogo-Korsakova [Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov's Musical Pedagogical Outlooks published in the year of the 90th anniversary of the composer's birth in the journal Sovetskaya muzyka [Soviet Music]. [1]1 An important landmark in the further research of the topic was the publication in 1959 of the collection of articles and materials N. A. Rimsky-Korsakov i muzykal'noe obrazovanie [Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov and Musical Education] under the editorship of Semyon Lvovich Ginzburg. [2] The tradition continued also into the 21st century: the publications commemorating the composer's jubilees and the first Russian conservatory bearing his name contain a number of articles devoted to the different aspects of Rimsky-Korsakov's pedagogical activities. [3; 4; 5] However, up to the present day, numerous materials have still not been published, documents are dispersed throughout various archives and funds; occasionally it becomes possible to make unusual discoveries the study of which makes it possible to enrich the perceptions of the great composer's ideas and methods in the sphere of musical pedagogy.

The present article brings into scholarly use a manuscript document from the personal archive of Doctor of the Arts History, Professor, Honored Art Worker of the Russian Federation Valery Vassilyevich Smirnov (1937–2023) —

a notebook that belonged to outstanding Russian researcher, musical critic and pedagogue Alexander Vyacheslavovich Ossovsky (1871–1957) containing a notes of Nikolai Andreyevich Rimsky-Korsakov's lectures on the theory of counterpoint.² The authors wish to express their gratitude to Elena Alexandrovna Smirnova, Valery Smirnov's widow, for her permission to present Ossovsky's hitherto unknown autograph to the scholarly community.

Rimsky-Korsakov and the Conservatory-Based System of Preparing Composers

Upon graduating from the Moscow University, "from the law department," Ossovsky "made it his goal to study the theory of composition with Rimsky-Korsakov, and with this aim <...> moved to St. Petersburg in 1894." [7, p. 138] The young musician's personal acquaintanceship with his idol took place on January 15, 1896, and in September of that same year, Ossovsky passed the entrance exams into the St. Petersburg Conservatory. [8, p. 421]

The full scope of the conservatory program for teaching composers took place in 1866 with the "Instructions and Positions for the St. Petersburg Conservatory for instructing the tutorial and administrative life" and consisted of six years, in correspondence with the necessity of spending a year in each of the classes: "1) elementary music theory and solfeggio, 2) harmony, 3) counterpoint, 4) fugue and musical forms, 5) and 6) practical composition and orchestration"; it was especially preconditioned that "an assistant or teacher instructs in the elementary courses, an adjunct

¹ It must be noted that it was particularly Mikhail Gnesin who presented himself as the author of the introductory article of the compilation *N. A. Rimsky-Korsakov: Muzykal'nye stat'i i zametki [Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov: Musical Articles and Notes*], published under the editorship of Nadezhda Nikolayevna Rimskaya-Korsakova in 1911.

² About Valery Smirnov's acquaintance with Alexander Ossovsky and the fate of the legacy of "the legend of the science of music history" see: [6].

— in the intermediate courses, and a professor — in the advanced courses." [9, p. 26; 10, p. 20] Subsequently, the content of the compositional program was revised numerous times, each time — with the most active participation of Rimsky-Korsakov, who "with the aim of creating a maximal contact of the teacher with the student" considered it necessary to "relay the instruction of the whole compositional course in its entirety, from the beginning to the end, to one pedagogue." [11, p. 24]³ In 1892 Rimsky-Korsakov wrote: "While directing the professorial position of instructing the theory of composition, I have changed numerous times my system of instruction and passed from a pedantic pursuit of all that was offered by the program to an adaption, to a greater or lesser degree, to the personal peculiarities of each student." [12, p. 188]

However, the individualization of the time frames of the instruction (one, two and more years) applied only to the duration of the advanced segment of the program — the course of practical composition. The preceding levels had to be studied in full measure at the established durations of time. Special significance was bestowed by Rimsky-Korsakov to the course of counterpoint and fugue, "examining it as an 'especially technical course,' the completion of which 'is of considerable importance for acquiring technique, i.e., interesting musical texture'." [Ibid., p. 195]

Thereby, Rimsky-Korsakov himself delivered the course of lectures on counterpoint, and this course was attended by Ossovsky. Most likely, the notes were taken not during the classes themselves, but immediately afterwards, without delay: such a presumption is adduced judging

by the neat, absolutely legible handwriting, with only a small number of corrections. This type of work — not merely the recreation from memory of the saturating, terminologically complex text, but also a specific "reproduction" of it — most likely, paved the way for a longstanding comprehension on the part of Ossovsky of the personality and musical legacy of his teacher Rimsky-Korsakov (about Ossovsky's activities in this direction, see: [13]). Subsequently, when Ossovsky would begin fixating the materials of his personal conversations with his instructor, he would make notes after the end of each meeting, relying on his phenomenal memory.

Ossovsky's Notes: The Process of Its Formation and Its Content

So what does Ossovsky's manuscript present in itself? It is a notebook of an album format in a hard cover with alternating unlined pages and lined ones, presenting music paper, i.e., altogether meant for breviaries for music theory disciplines. The notes reflect the regularity of the classes: the first lecture took place on January 25, 1897, while the final dated material pertains to November 2 of the selfsame year. Only 10 out of the notebook's 32 pages are filled up, moreover, two of them being the notebook's final pages, which causes us to cast doubt upon their chronology. The content, as well as the table of contents indicate that we have in front of us a fragment of Rimsky-Korsakov's course on strict-style counterpoint, which Ossovsky attended from the winter of 1897 to the autumn of that year.

The table of contents on the back side of the cover (Il. 1) demonstrates for us several strata of content. The first, early stratum

³ There, in footnote No. 2, the researcher indicates that "such a system was essentially introduced into the St. Petersburg Conservatory in 1886, by means of setting up three parallel composition classes: those of Johannsen, Rimsky-Korsakov and Solovyov."

is inscribed in pen: "Notes on N. A. Rimsky-Korsakov's lectures on counterpoint." Below that, it is written in smaller handwriting: "(Junior section)," followed by a signature in a specific handwriting "Al. Ossovsky." Above the title, corrections are brought in marked with blue and red pencil: Roman numeral I is added in front of "Junior section," and after, as a continuation, — "II. Special section (2nd year) is glued in separate pages (pencil).



II. 1. A. V. Ossovsky's Notes on N. A. Rimsky-Korsakov's Lectures on Counterpoint (back side of cover)

The notes contain a small number of examplesillustrations. The materials of the notes include the mention of the teacher's name. Thus, on the second staved page (after the inscription of the theme "4th species, syncopated"), next to the second example, we read: "Anexampleofsyncopatedcounterpoint[written] by N. A. R[imsky]-K[orsakov]."⁵

The rules of the technique of strict-style counterpoint are stated in the traditions of their time — with the orientation towards the practice of completed exercises, they are modeled in the form of diverse recommendations and include elements of assignments. For example: contrapuntal lines written the previous lesson must be taken as the cantus firmus lines, and new contrapuntal lines must be composed to them, following all the previous rules, setting our attention towards supporting the motion.⁶ Where c. f. [cantus firmus] contains inverted pedal tones, the c. p. [contrapuntal lines] should have quarter notes and eighth notes, and vice versa. — Whenever there is a suspension, upon its resolution a new tone may be taken in another voice (which seems to create a new harmony). — Be attentive that each voice taken separately would be beautiful (melodically), — in other words, concern yourself about the artistic side." (Lecture VII, March 1)⁷

It is noteworthy that the music examples present in the manuscript are illustrations of theoretic postulates, and not practical assignments. At the same time, it is obvious that during the process of mastering the course, it was presumed that the students would complete a large portion of contrapuntal exercises. When discussing the content of Sergei Vassilyevich Yevseyev's notebooks in which he carried out his exercises during his studies with Sergei Ivanovich Taneyev in 1913–1915, Larisa Lvovna Gerver writes: "At the beginning of the 20th century, such an abundance of assignments [over 300 exercises

⁴ Here and onwards, the text is presented in contemporary spelling. The notebook's pages are numerated with double Arabic numerals — the alternating unlined and music-paper pages contain the numeration from 1 to 16. Thereby, subsequently, indications are used, such as: "P. 1, unlined" or "P. 1, staved."

⁵ Ossovsky A. V. *Zapiski po chteniyam N. A. Rimskogo-Korsakova o kontrapunkte [Notes on Rimsky-Korsakov's Lectures on Counterpoint]*. [Manuscript]. P. 2 staved.

⁶ By that time, all the five species of counterpoint in two voices had been studied.

Ossovsky A. V. Zapiski... [Notes...]. P. 4 unlined.

of different kinds] was still the norm for studying counterpoint." [14, p. 770] It must be added that Rimsky-Korsakov's own teaching materials on counterpoint and fugue comprise several hundreds of exercises and dozens of extended compositions. The detailed recommendations and instructions contained in the texts of the lectures were supposed to have found reflection in the written exercises, but it has not been possible to discover any documents or memoirs about these up till now.

In the exposition of the theory of strict-style counterpoint, two methodological positions draw attention:

1. The section of the notes about the five species of counterpoint does not contain even a single mention of the church modes: on the contrary, during the process of discussing the theoretical questions, as well as in the examples illustrating the text the subscriptions of "major" and "minor" are used, moreover, the conditions for making use of "melodic minor" are stipulated (!)9. At the end of the notebook, there are a little over two pages of musical examples with

the indication (written in red pencil): "The cantus firmus lines and themes for imitations and fugues assigned by N. A. Rimsky-Korsakov."10 The melodies for the contrapuntal work are notated in whole notes without being divided into measures; being grouped in pairs, they are given in the respective major key and its relative minor key with a gradual augmentation of the numbers of sharps and flats in the keys indicated at the right hand of each of the staves. Thereby, it may be presumed that, examining the counterpoint course in inseparable connection with practical composition, Rimsky-Korsakov did not deem it necessary to turn to the conditions of the strict-style modes, when he worked out with his students means of connecting the voices together and the conditions for pure voice-leading.¹¹ The means conducive for the stylistic norms for him are diatonic major and minor, the rules of rhythmic organization and the means of use of intervals.

It must be remembered that the body of tutorial works by Rimsky-Korsakov himself (1873–1875), as well as the teaching

⁸ Rimsky-Korsakov N. A. *Kontrapunkticheskie uprazhneniya* [Contrapuntal Exercises]. [Manuscript]. Manuscript Section of the Russian National Library. Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov Fund. Fund 640. Portfolio 343.

⁹ Most noteworthy in this regard is one remembrance about the work with the counterpoint students cited by Mikhail Mikhailov: "While rejoicing in the smallest manifestation of the artistic element in his students' works, at the same time, he could not stand any deliberateness or pretentiousness. One student in his counterpoint class, who (after a lengthy period of not doing the assignments) presented a work 'in Mixolydian mode,' aroused a displeased remark from Rimsky-Korsakov: 'Why could you not write an ordinary contrapuntal exercise? Here you are, not bringing any assignments for a long time, and then, suddenly, you bring one in Mixolydian mode!'" Cit. from: [11, p. 39].

¹⁰ Ossovsky A. V. Zapiski... [Notes...] [Manuscript]. P. 12 staved. — P. 13 staved.

Judging by the *Textbook of Counterpoint*, by Julius Johannsen, whose method of instruction formed the basis of the conservatory course, study of strict style counterpoint in major and minor was traditional. In general terms, the author elucidates his position: "All the examples of this compilation are built on the basis of the present-day major and tonalities, as the result of which all the rules for contrapuntal works are adapted in accordance with these two tonal genera; and for this reason all the positions of the early contrapuntalists especially pertaining to the church modes are dwelt upon only to the extent that these modes coincide with present-day tonalities. This difference <...> is not great at all; but the teaching of counterpoint in regard to strictness and seriousness does not lose anything by being based and demonstrated on both present-day tonalities, instead of the church modes." [15, p. 25]

materials of Alexander Konstantinovich Glazunov from the years 1880–1881, contain exercises in strict style, which include extensive compositions in the church modes. In Osskovsky's notes, on the other hand, we observe a fundamentally different (albeit, an incomplete) picture, since the theoretical theme devoted to the specificity of the modes is absent in the notes.

2. When explaining the conditions for constructing a three-voice contrapuntal exercise in first species, Rimsky-Korsakov suggests relying on the rules of harmony: counterpoint, "In this the following concordances would result (if we apply the harmonic side here): major and minor thirds, their inverted sixths, the sixths resulting from diminished triads [insertion: two tonics and a fifth scale degree (i.e. a six-three chord with an omitted third scale degree)], and incomplete triads consisting for two roots and a third scale degree [insertion: or vice versa]. Sixfour chords could not be encountered in any way, as the result of the aforementioned rule about the use of the perfect fourth. Upon a combination of triads, one must never lose the harmonic basis; it is necessary to apply particularly such combinations that are good from the point of view of the rules of harmony,"12 in such a presentation of the theory, the teacher follows the existent tradition of discussing three-voiced and many-voiced counterpoint in 19th century textbooks. For example, it must be reminded that the section of Ludwig Bussler's textbook "Three-Voice Counterpoint in Strict Style"

(§13) begins with an enumeration: "In three-voice texture, the following combinations of pitches are permitted: 1) The major and minor triads. 2) The first inversions of these two chords. 3) The first inversion of the diminished triad, i.e., a sixth chord with a minor third and a major sixth. 4) All the intervals permitted in two-voice counterpoint transformed into three-voiced chords by means of doubling one of the pitches they consist of." [16, p. 30]

Whereas the breviaries of the consecutive lessons include materials the melodicism and rhythm of strict style writing, the rules of writing two-voice counterpoint, as well as the very beginning of the theory of three-voice counterpoint, consistently, with an increase of difficulties, in the spring, in March 1897, a rupture occurs in the lectures, and instead of a consistent and detailed exposition, on March 22, on a pasted-in sheet of paper, there appears a fragment dealing with the theory of imitation, at the end of which, below an expressive vignette, we find the following inscription: "End of the junior (prep[aratory]) section. / 1896/7 (2nd semester)."13

Eight pasted-in sheets of paper, inscribed with the date of Autumn 1897, partially contain a repetition of the material from the notes from the spring semester, and partially its supplement. In truth, only one new topic, bearing the date of October 7, 1897, corresponds to the subsequent level of teaching: "The Double Counterpoint of the Octave" which is also a fragment

¹² Ossovsky A. V. *Zapiski*... [*Notes*...] [Manuscript]. P. 4 unlined, back side.

¹³ Ossovsky A. V. Zapiski... [Notes...] [Manuscript]. P. 4.3.

Since, as has been indicated earlier, in addition to the numerated main sheets of paper, following many of the topics in the notes, which was written down on unlined pages, the materials of the lectures from the autumn semester were pasted in on supplementary sheets, we shall stipulate to numerate them in correspondence with the number of the pastings in after a successive numerated page. Thereby, 4.1, 4.2 and 4.3 are three glued in sheets of paper following the unlined sheet 4.

¹⁴ Ossovsky A. V. Zapiski... [Notes...] [Manuscript]. P. 4.3 back side.

of the large-scale topic that in Bussler's textbook is titled "The Teaching of Complex Counterpoint: Double, Triple and Quadruple Counterpoint in the Strict Style."

A Textbook on Counterpoint by Rimsky-Korsakov?

The plan of a counterpoint textbook is reflected in Vassily Vassilyevich Yastrebtsev's Memoirs. Thus, in the notes from October 8, 1893 we read: "...we started talking about the necessity of compiling two textbooks: 1) of counterpoint and 2) of musical form" [17, p. 119]; and in November of the selfsame year, Yastrebtsev writes: "Rimsky-Korsakov seems to be very pleased with his new position [after leaving the Cappella], at least, there would be more free time to compile a counterpoint textbook," [Ibid., p. 129] and subsequently: "You know, - Nikolai Andreyevich added, — it so happened that, following the nature intrinsic to all of us, Russians, — I strewed and even wanted to include into this manual a whole set theoretical considerations regarding harmonization of church modes, but then I restrained myself and postponed this until my subsequent work on this topic, in supplement to my previous two textbooks on harmony and counterpoint." [Ibid., pp. 129–130]

The beginning of Rimsky-Korsakov's work on counterpoint is described by Nikolai Alexandrovich Sokolov in his *Memoirs*: "In his search for a more or less interesting work, N. A. stopped on the thought of writing a textbook on counterpoint. In the autumn of [18]93 he invited me and Lyadov to his home with the special goal of introducing us with the general plan of the future manual.

This plan had nothing in common with the usual stereotype: not being content with presenting a table of peremptory rules and prohibitions, the author of the textbook based them on the general rules of harmony. If I am not mistaken, only the introduction and the first chapter were expounded in a relatively completed form; the rest of the material was limited to sketches and fragmentary examples.

To what section was the textbook that was begun brought? Conversations about it were resumed more and more seldom..." [18, pp. 25–26]

There is no doubt that the text of the lectures summarized by Ossovsky reflect a fragment of the counterpoint course accurately elaborated and developed in detail by Rimsky-Korsakov. The materials presented in this article, as a minimum, contain specific techniques and methods of presentation of the theory of strict style counterpoint. And therein they had to correspond to the content of the planned (and, possibly, already begun) textbook on counterpoint, which along with the published works on harmony and the foundations of orchestration,15 was supposed to have comprised a very comprehensive theoretical framework to the course of practical composition. It is possible that the publication of the textbook would have been conducive to approaching the fulfillment of Rimsky-Korsakov's dream of an ideal system of professional preparation of composers, for the sake of which for several decades he ceaselessly elaborated and improved the tutorial disciplines taught by him at the conservatory.

Most likely, many students of Rimsky-Korsakov's counterpoint class, similarly to Ossovsky, took down notes of the lectures.

¹⁵ Osnovy orkestrovki [Foundations of Orchestration] were prepared for publication by Maximilian Steinberg and were published after the composer's death in 1913.

Nonetheless, by the present moment, such materials have not been discovered¹⁶ (for more details about this, see: [19]), while they could

have comprised a body of texts having a direct relation to Rimsky-Korsakov's "third textbook." The search continues...

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¹⁶ The very representative body of manuscripts of Alexander Glazunov's tutorial materials also includes works from his counterpoint course, but among them are particularly written assignments and exercises, possibly, examples for the theoretical rules examined together with Rimsky-Korsakov during the classes.

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