

Dear readers of the Problemy Muzykal'noi Nauki!

We are delighted to introduce the article by Dr. Ljudmila Kasantseva "The Genre of Passions in the Music of Alexey Larin." Although the concept of our International Division has been to publish materials in translation from English into Russian and from Russian into English, we managed to publish many of the former and very few of the latter. This seems to defy our purpose to bring the Russian musicology into the Western context. Therefore, this time, we are glad to publish an article by a prominent Russian scholar Dr. Ljudmila Kazantseva in translation into English. Anyone who is interested in church music will not pass

unnoticed the information on this interesting genre. Perhaps, not many in the West are familiar with the Russian passions – the genre, which existed and has been constantly developing in Russia since the 11th century. This process brought about the examples of the most contemporary interpretations, such as Alexey Larin's Passions. In addition to well-known numbers, Russian passions contain many more indigenous ones, adding up to fifteen. A Western reader may be interested as well in some quite unusual aspects, such as the introduction of the icon of the Virgin, addition of folk music, bells, and, ultimately, theatricality of presentation.

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"THE RUSSIAN PASSION" BY ALEXEY LARIN: CONCERNING THE ISSUE OF GENRE*

Sacred music – an integral and rich branch of the Russian musical culture. This music offers, together with works for the church services, great examples of concert genres. Among the latest there is an interesting «Russian Passions» of modern Moscow composer Alexey Larin. It is not surprising that most of his works are intended for the choir.

Alexey L'vovich Larin was born in 1954, graduated from Gnesins' Musical Pedagogical Institute (GMPI, 1976, composition class of N. Peyko). Now he is Professor at this institution, now renamed into Russian Gnesins' Academy of Music, Honorary Visiting Professor of Korean University (Seoul), prize-winner of several international composers' competitions (*Musica Mundi*, Germany, 1997; «*Classical Heritage*», Russia, 1999; *Jihlava*, Czechia, 2000; *Klang der Welt*, Germany, 2007).

The scope of A. Larin's work is large. He is the author of symphonic and vocal-symphonic scores (Symphony, suite «A Summer in Mitrofanovo Village», tableau «The Birth of the City», poems «White Shrine», «Farewell Fire», etc.), choral compositions (eight cantatas, among which there are «Soldiers' Songs», «Christmas Carols», «Gipsy Ways»; choral concertos «Blood of Kossacks», «Arduour and Mirages»; cycles «Pushkin's pages», «The Voice of Motherland»), compositions for Russian folk orchestra («Till the Third Cock-Crow», Concerto-Bylina, etc.) and for wind band (*Fantasia Rustica*), chamber compositions, works for children, incidental music for movies.

Having received his primary education in the Moscow Choral School for Boys, Larin participates in the performances of his own music as pianist, organist, conductor and member of a chorus. He works with best choirs and choral conductors: Vladimir Minin, Ljudmila Litsova, Vladimir Fedoseev, Gennady Dmitryak, Vadim Sudakov and many others.

Strong creative relationships have developed between the composer and the cappella «Moscow Kremlin» headed by Gennady Dmitryak. In particular, for this group «Christmas Carols» have been created, which is based on Slavic folklore, more than a hundred times performed both in our country and in Germany, France, Switzerland, Spain, Britain, Holland, Serbia, and then – oratorio «Russian Passions», which also have had a huge success not only in Russia but also abroad.

«Russian Passions» are remarkable in many respects, but perhaps most of all – the composer's bold approach to the genre. The latest is designated as an **oratorio**. This genre is quite customary to European music, but it is interpreted by the composer in a very original way. Oratorio is usually a large-scale vocal-symphonic work – here it is intended for soloists and choir, but the symphonic orchestra is not used. Timbral asceticism immediately raises the question: what is the reason for such obvious self-restriction?

The answer can be found if we penetrate deeper into the genre features of this work. They are revealed

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through the headline: «Russian Passions». Passions is a kind of a large-scale multipart vocal-symphonic genre, which shows the events of the last days of the earthly life of Jesus Christ. They are well known in Western Europe in the works of Lasso, Schütz, Johann Sebastian Bach, Telemann, Alessandro Scarlatti, Salieri, Jommelli and many other composers; they are, albeit in substantially transformed form, remain in demand of our contemporaries. Krzysztof Penderecki, Tan Dun, Bohuslav Martinu, Mauricio Kagel, Sulkhan Nasidze contributed into development of this genre; our compatriots – Sofia Gubaidulina, Michael Bronner, Nikolay Lebedev, Merab Gagnidze and others—did not stay away from it.

Larin follows the canon of the genre, building a story about the dying days of the life of Christ as the sequence of 15 parts:

1. «Не шум шумит, не гром гремит»	«Neither Noise, Nor Thunder»
2. Сон Богородицы	Dream of the Virgin
3. «Покаяния отвержи ми двери»	«O Lord, Show Me the Way to Penance»
4. Въезд в Иерусалим	Entry into Jerusalem
5. «И вошел Иисус в храм Божий»	«And Jesus Went into the Temple of God»
6. Иуда	Judas
7. Вечери Твоя тайныя	The Last Supper
8. Гефсиманский сад	The Garden of Gethsemane
9. «Повинен смерти»	«He is Guilty of Death»
10. Пилат	Pilate
11. Заповедь Иисуса	Jesus' Commandment
12. Распятие	Crucifixion
13. «Христос воскрес из мертвых»	«Christ is Risen»
14. Пасха	Easter
15. Аллилуиа	Alleluia

It is easy to see that the story does not end with Christ's afflictions: the last three parts are radiantly joyful. Thus a logical construction with the climax bend at the «junction» of 12 and 13 parts evolves, where at the point of «golden section» the past gives way to the eternal, the tragedy turns into a catharsis and a holistic concept gets an optimistic turn.

Serious adjustments to the genre are indicated by the word «Russian». They were formed in ancient native music. «Russian Passions», combining more than 50 songs, were known from the 11th century. There is also a manuscript of 1604, a sample from the heyday of old monodic singing. This complete set of hymns, which sounded in Russia at the beginning of the 17th century, belongs to the monk Christopher from St. Kirillo-Belozersky Monastery. It is based on texts from the Gospel that tell the story about the

sufferings of Christ. Hymns, deciphered by the famous explorer – medievalist, professor of the St. Petersburg Conservatory Albina Kruchinina, are performed by the oldest choir in Russia – the State Academic Capella of St. Petersburg headed by Vladislav Chernushenko.

However, the ancient tradition was interrupted for a long time. In fact, thanks to Larin, it was revived. It has been done with the references to the *Russian-language literary heritage*: the texts of the Gospels in the Synodical translation, the Orthodox canonical texts, and the words of Russian folk songs. By the organic unity of the texts taken from different sources, and by the Evangelical narration of recent events of earthly life of Jesus, «Russian Passions» of Larin are significantly different from other seemingly work similar in vision – «Passion Week», by Alexander Grechaninov and of Nikolay Lebedev's «Saints Passions of the God», written on exclusively canonical liturgical texts.

In an effort to bring his work to the Orthodox Church tradition, the composer *avoids the use of a symphony orchestra*; it is well known that the Russian church did not allow instrumental timbres in the temple. It is therefore natural that the principal means of performing «Passions» are the human voices.

As in many other Larin's works, the main carrier of the artistic meaning is the *choir*. And the composer attaches a particular importance to the choral sound. Here's how he described this in an interview with Irina Medvedeva: «The fact is that for many centuries Russian music found the most vivid and perfect expression particularly in the choral tradition. Here two great cultures came together: polyphonic peasant song, which has a truly Russian roots – this is no longer found anywhere else, it is phenomenal – and the church singing, which came to us from the Byzantine Empire. ... After all, the choir for any Russian is a very national, traditional thing»¹.

Larin's choir is multifunctional. The work starts with its generalizing musical «title page» in the prologue. It often assumes the role of the narrator, weaving the narrative thread. Choir is the witness and active participant of the events. Finally, in the concluding parts of the oratorio, chorus charged with pronouncing the evaluation of position and symbolical designation of unity of people. Such a large and multifaceted functional load of the choir reminds us Mussorgsky's operas.

In addition to the choir, the soloists are engaged in the «Russian Passions». A female voice stands out among others. Together with it the symbol of Russian culture, the *icon of the Virgin* is introduced. However, by its appearance something greater is achieved than an indication of the religious affiliation of Russians, the orthodoxy. Since the part of the Virgin is meant for the singer with the «popular» style of singing, this image becomes an important nationwide symbol of Russia.

Although in the «Russian Passions» the composer dispensed with the orchestra, its functions are partly assumed by occasionally used percussion instruments,

mostly without a definite pitch, which is possible in the creation of non-canonical character. Here dominate rare instruments with special character and coloristic sound: Valdai bells, hammers, whip, rattle, flexatone, tambourine, bells («preferably church», as stated in the score). Certainly, invented by the composer, a «monetofon» stands out – it is a wooden box with coins. Its role is not a small one: in addition to the illustrative hint of 30 pieces of silver, chime of the coins characterizes one of the acting figures of «Passions» – Judah, a former tax collector. In addition, monetofon involved in the scenes of conspiracy against Jesus; thus, becomes a sound symbol of betrayal.

An organ is also mentioned in the score. This could be perceived as a step toward Western-European music. However, this does not happen. The part of the organ is present only in the last part where the instrument is actually just duplicates the sound of the choir, giving it some greater solemnity, and thus, as indicated by the author, «its use is not mandatory».

Patriotic musical tradition manifests itself in the musical thematicism of the work. It is notable for its *intonational ambiguity*. In the score the tones of famous church hymns and folk songs-lamentations, subject to variant-variation development, are combined. For a composer their wrapping together is a principle, because it is «close to the idea of the «Russian way» as the merger of folk and orthodox elements in the highest sense of these words»². Thus, the combination of prayer and folk-song elements defining the basis of a verbal description of the work and characteristic of the icon of the Virgin Mary, of course, translates into the musical *intoning*.

For Larin, the «Russian», the «native» is personified by the indissoluble unity of the spiritual and secular aspects of life. This is an aesthetic credo which he expressed more than once. So, upon visiting the Vladimirskiy Cathedral in Kiev, he mentioned that «besides aesthetic impression of frescoes of V. Vasnetsov and his associates I have found in them something profoundly akin to my own ideas. These biblical characters are depicted with some clearly Slavic faces, in some almost Russian coats, boots ... I thought then ... that I am not alone in my quest, that this way of comprehending the evangelical events is also possible»³.

The meaning of the word is constantly realized in the creative practice by Larin, whom musicologists-researchers rightly call «the composer-*pochvennik*»⁴. A milestone of his work is connected with the poetry of a philosopher and mystic Daniil Andreev, on whose poems were written the «Triptych» for bass, mixed choir and piano and vocal-symphonic poem «White Ark». Larin admires Andreev's favorite image of the Council, symbolizing Russia, dating back to the folk myth of Kitezh. It is no coincidence that this image is used in a symbolic title of his arguments about contemporary musical life, published in the journal *Musical Academy* – «Will Kitezh City Rise to the Surface?»

Expressive choral sound, which is based on the origins of Russian culture – folklore and church singing – was inherent in the classical masterpieces of Russian music – Liturgies and Vespers of Pyotr Tchaikovsky and Sergey Rachmaninoff. It has become a prominent artistic trend of recent times. It draws choral canvases of Georgy Sviridov («Pushkin's Wreath»), Valery Gavrilin («Chimes»), Rodion Shchedrin («The Sealed Angel», choral opera «Boyar Morozova»). Alexey Larin has found his own aesthetic platform in it.

«Russian Passions» of Larin are notable by another feature of its genre – the tendency to *theatricality*. It manifests itself in a number of attributes. Thus, the role of narrator-Evangelist is reduced, and event series take place mostly in self-motion.

Soloists, although named in the score as the People's Voice (soprano), Tenor, Baritone and Bass, that is abstract and generalized (similar to how it was done in Bach's *Passions*), actually perform the parts of the characters – the Virgin Mary, Judas, Jesus and Pilate. The personification of the solo part of soprano is also done by means of the individualization of singer's appearance – the Russian folk costume of the performer of the Party of the Virgin.

Theatricality touched the choir as well. So, following, as it was said, the multifunctional tasks, the choir is split into layers. One of the choir members is given the role of narrator-protagonist. Along with the main singing activity choir members are also entrusted with the playing percussion instruments. *Mise-en-scene* movements of artists are provided.

Multi-dimensional scenes are quite effective. In number 4, «Entry into Jerusalem», the choir is divided into semichoruses, and one of them creates the overall festive atmosphere («Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!»), while the other «involves in the action», repeatedly inquiring: «Who is it?». In number 12, «The Crucifixion», four semantic plans are deployed in parallel: choir with the divisi parts describes the events, the background of which sounds as nervous claps of «the heart of Jesus» and measured claps – the funeral bell; the weeping of the Virgin is stereophonically connected with them in melodically and metrorhythmically autonomous way. Added to that «the description of events» is given in Church Slavonic language, and crying – in Russian with the characteristics of the archaic style.

Theatricality is supported by timbre colorfulness (inclusion to the score of rare instruments), *leitmotifness* (associated with the use of instrumental characterization of Judas *monetofon*), and illustrativeness (the sound of the whip at the scene of Jesus being beaten in number 9 «Is guilty of death» glissando of the flexatone likened to the noisy roar of a crowd in number 10 «Pilate», the rhythm of «heartbeat» of the tom-tom in the number 12 «The Crucifixion»).

We have to give a credit to the grouping of the multi-movement composition into three sections, where the

central (story) part is surrounded with a prologue and an epilogue, which is characteristic of the epic opera.

«Russian Passions» come close to the theatrical performance also in such performance attributes, as changing the lighting – a gradual darkening in the number 11 before the «darkness on the stage» (author's remark) in the climactic conclusion in number 12, and then (until the latest part of the oratorio) light amplification.

Finally, elements of theatricality are seen in the involvement of the audience in the oratorio performance. In the score of the final number the composer writes:

Soloists and artists of the first choir go to the hall with the Easter symbols. It is desirable that listeners were singing with the choir the choruses of «Alleluia». The composition ends by multi-voiced D-flat-major praise of Christ by all the present, including entering to the Hall Children's Choir, and a celebratory bell ringing.

As we have seen, the «Russian Passions» have incorporated several features of theatricality. Which exactly theatrical genres were shown here? Of course, we can talk about the Russian epic opera, in particular, given the special role to the choir – the opera by Modest Mussorgsky – «Boris Godunov». However, one can find much in common between of Alexey Larin's «Russian passions» and symphony-action «Chimes» by Valery Gavrilin. Not only that the choice of instruments is similar

(soloists, mixed choir and ensemble of instruments – Gavrilin's oboe and percussion), but the general principle of unity of secular and religious aspects. It would not be an exaggeration to say that Larin's «Russian Passions» relate back to the plays that have become known in our culture in the 16th–17th centuries and have been restored in the twentieth century by Alexander Kastalsky; large forty-minute work which appeals to religious subject, puts a large-scale theme of life and death, and treats it theatrically.

Considering the Larin's work from the perspective of theatricality, we will not exaggerate its importance and shall not put him into the category of supporters of the so-called “choral theater.” His elements of theatricality have artistic role, but all determining artistic meanings are carried, above all, by the music and words.

Thus, «Russian Passions» is a genre-synthetic work. The composer refracts underlying fundamentals of the genre of Passion (passions) through the prism of the traditions of national music. Continuing the line of M. Mussorgsky, going through the choral works of G. Sviridov and V. Gavrilin, Y. Butsko and V. Kalistratov, A. Larin takes on a fruitful path of evolution of the genre and the Russian sacred music. Inscribed in Russian musical culture, combining domestic orthodox, folk and theatrical traditions, «Russian passions» helped the composer to treat the Evangelical events as a part of great sacred culture of mankind.

NOTES

¹ Медведева И. Уж если петь – то хором! // Парламентская газета. – 2001. – 9 февраля [Medvedeva I. If we are to sing – do it in a choir! // Parliament newspaper. From the 9th of February, 2001].

² Words of the composer quoted in: Рожкова Т. Искусство быть понятым // Музыкальная академия. – 1996. – № 2. – С. 19 [Rozhkova T. The art of being understood // Music Academy. – 1996. – № 2. – P. 19].

³ Ларин А. Композиторские заметки // Выплывет ли град Китеж? Композитор Алексей Ларин. Материалы к твор-

ческой биографии. – М., 2009 [Larin A. Composer's Notes // Will Kitezh City Rise to the Surface? Composer Alexey Larin. Materials to the creative biography. – М.: Kompozitor, 2009. – P. 274].

⁴ Pochvennik – the one who belongs to the trend of “soil poets and writers,” aesthetic position, relying heavily on the local, khtonic, village, land-oriented style. There is a large group of writers and poets in Russia who support this aesthetic position. – Translators note.

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