

## Musical Culture of the Peoples of the World

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### The Concept of Ethnomusical Regionalism of the East Slavs: Formation and Current State

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**Abstract.** Regionalism occupies an important place in the system of modern Russian ethnomusicology, a branch of scholarship that studies the problems of the territorial structure of Russian and, more broadly, East Slavic traditional musical culture. The article traces the history of the formation of scholarship views in this field, the different stages of the formation of the concept based on structural, typological and geographical (areal) methods of research of traditional musical culture. The main scholarship achievements in the field of regionalism are associated with the names of Evgeny Gippius, Margarita Yengovatova, Irina Klimenko and other scholars. The main attention is paid to the largest level of spatial organization of the East Slavic ethnomusical culture — the musical and ethnographic macroregions formed on the East European Plain — the ethnic territory of the Eastern Slavs. According to this concept, three major musical and ethnographic regions are represented here: the Western (with the Ukrainian-Belarusian area as the center), the Northern Russian and the Southern Russian. The establishment of external and internal borders, the understanding of the laws of internal organization, the definition of unifying and differentiating factors, on the one hand, and the identification of systemic relations between macroregional cultures, on the other, are the main problems of East Slavic ethnomusicological regionalism. The main qualities of regional song traditions and the issues of their systemic relations are considered.

**Keywords:** Eastern Slavs, traditional musical culture, song folklore, musical and ethnographic regions

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## Introduction

The heterogeneity of the East Slavic ethnomusicological landscape is one of the fundamental tenets of contemporary musical folklore studies. Such a perspective requires, on the one hand, a meticulous description of local musical traditions, and on the other, their mutual comparison. Reflection on this issue at the largest scale of spatial organisation of national traditional cultures led to the formation of a system of musical-ethnographic regions within the East Slavic territory.

Today, area studies, which is grounded in geographical and structural methods for examining folk musical culture, has become one of the key directions in contemporary ethnomusicology. [1; 2] As well as presenting the history of the formation of the regional concept and modern ideas about the regional structure of the East Slavic ethnomusical continuum, the present article examines issues of systemic relations of contrasting musical and ethnographic complexes.

It is not surprising that the desire to group individual local traditions into large territorial associations emerged first of all in Russian ethnomusicology. By contrast, Ukrainian and Belarusian scholars, when dealing with typologically homogeneous and genetically related musical traditions, do not generally feel the need to go beyond the particular national folklore heritage under study. A crucial feature of both Belarusian and Ukrainian musical-folklore material, which elevates it to the level of significant ethnocultural markers, is its internal typological unity. In contrast, the Russian ethnomusical landscape is distinguished by a pronouncedly heterogeneous structure,

thus explaining the special interest in the internal organisation of this immense ethnomusical space. The empirical understanding of its structure, which formed over several decades of the 20th century, was influenced by existing ethnographic and linguistic concepts.

## Evgeny Gippius: The Concept of the Centralising Component of the Genre System

The first specialised work containing a theoretical justification of the principles for territorial grouping of local musical traditions in Russian territory was the article by Evgeny Gippius entitled *Problems of the Areal Study of Traditional Russian Song in the Regions of the Ukrainian and Belarusian Borderlands*. [3] Large associations of local traditions were referred to in it as *regional types of song systems*.<sup>1</sup> As well as reflecting the structural and typological positions of the author, this title describes the systemic vector of understanding the material that he set out. Two factors were asserted as constituting the “most general defining features” of regional song traditions. Firstly, the genre composition is presented not as a list of the genres existing within a tradition, but is rather understood as a system hierarchically organised by the presence of a “centralising component,” i.e., a genre that influences all the others. The second sign of regional tradition for Gippius is “types of melody in specific forms of intonation,” which should be understood as certain musical-structural types. [Ibid., p. 8]

It is significant that the task of classifying regional song systems posed in the work was considered by Gippius not on a nationally limited scale, but on a general East Slavic scale. On the other hand, the musicologist took into

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<sup>1</sup> Later, along with this definition, its short version, “regional tradition” began to be widely used in Russian structural ethnomusicology.

account only the European part of the Russian ethnic territory, as is customary in Russian dialectology.

Based on the above characteristics, two regional traditions of the East Slavs were attributed to them. One of these covered the Belarusian ethnic territory together with the adjacent Ukrainian and Russian border areas.<sup>2</sup> Until recently, the outlined geographical space represented the regional musical system that in the Gnesin scholarly tradition was referred to as the Western Region. Its relevant quality, according to Gippius, is the genre system in which the calendar song cycle, with which wedding ritual songs are typologically related, plays a centralising role. [Ibid.]

The Southern Russian regional system is characterised by a different genre structure: here, the central position is occupied by khorovod [round dance] songs. By now, researchers working in the territory of Southern Russia — in particular with the traditions of Kursk Popselye [4; 5] and the Voronezh-Belgorod borderland [6] — have confirmed the validity of the provisions proposed by Gippius. However, the boundaries of this region, including external, were not clearly defined by the researcher: this problem remains relevant to the present day.

Gippius's demarcation of the Western and Southern Russian regions structured the southern part of the East Slavic ethnocultural space, the division of which until then had been carried

out according to ethnic or administrative-regional principles. Apparently, at that time this task was considered as the most urgent, since the northern territories of the East European Plain by that time were being consistently interpreted as the Russian North, comprising an independent historical and cultural zone.<sup>3</sup> Its cultural specificity, by common opinion, is determined by the influence of the Finno-Ugric peoples indigenous to this territory. Gippius, who had personal experience of field work in different regions of the Russian North, repeatedly expressed a hypothesis about the centralising role of the lamentation genre in this region.<sup>4</sup>

Thus by the 1980s the idea of dividing the ethnic territory of the Eastern Slavs into three musical-ethnographic massifs had been formed in Russian structural ethnomusicology (and in general terms remains so to this day): Western, Northern Russian, and Southern Russian.<sup>5</sup> These were considered as traditions having a different status in terms of their historical stage, among which the Western Russian region was invariably treated as original and foundational, which preserved the most archaic forms of folk musical culture of the East Slavs. The decision to treat the other two regional systems as traditions of later formation served as the basis for their comparative comparison. The understanding of them as closely connected and mutually conditioned was strengthened

<sup>2</sup> The absence of Ukrainian traditions in this sphere, with the exception of the northern (Poleskikh) ones, is probably due to the researcher's insufficient knowledge of Ukrainian musical and ethnographic material — a problem that existed for Russian ethnomusicologists in Soviet times and remains relevant to this day.

<sup>3</sup> On the formation of the geocultural concept of the Russian North, its spatial dynamics and the history of the origin of the toponym, see article by Vladimir Kalutskov. [7]

<sup>4</sup> One of the first ethnomusicologists to point out the unifying role of lamentations for the different ethnic cultures of the Russian North was the prominent Russian folklorist Kirill Chistov. [8]

<sup>5</sup> However, there was also another musical-geographical concept. For example, according to Vyacheslav Shchurov, Russian musical folklore can be divided into seven "main stylistic zones": Northern Russian, Southern Russian, Central Russian, Western Russian, middle Volga, Ural and Siberian. [9] However, these were identified by the author empirically and were not provided with the necessary theoretical justification.

by the fact that both of them were geographically attached to the same Russian ethnic territory. Due to their isolation from the Belarusian-Ukrainian region, it is not surprising that for a long time the Northern and Southern Russian musical traditions seemed to embody the most striking and pivotal opposition on the map of East Slavic regional cultures.

In the formation of this approach, a certain role was played, in the words of Alexander Gerd, by the “magic of borders,” [10] i.e., a general correspondence between the Northern and Southern Russian musical and ethnographic regions and the linguistic areas of the two dialects of the Russian language having the same names. Moreover, the ethnocultural and linguistic differences between these zones are so great that the leading Russian ethnographer and philologist of the first half of the 20th century, Dmitry Zelenin, considered their populations to be two independent Great Russian peoples. [11]

### The Regional Conception Today

In terms of the study of regional issues, East Slavic ethnomusicology has been significantly advanced by active collecting activities carried out by a large number of specialists from different schools of thought in the last third of the 20th and early 21st centuries, along with the accumulation and development of a huge fund of new field materials, the improvement of analytical methods and the development of structural-typological and arealogical studies of musical traditions. Work in this direction has made certain adjustments to the ideas about the regional song systems of Eastern Slavia.

In the meantime, considerable efforts were made to establish the boundaries of the Western region. This single ethnomusical system, referred to as the Slavic-Baltic early traditional *melomassif* [melodic conglomerate], unites the ritual traditions of Belarus and Ukraine, which form the core of the region, along with the adjacent territories of Russia, Poland,

Lithuania and Latvia. [12; 13] In this way, the musical and ethnographic unity of this vast multi-ethnic space received a new justification. The idea of a morphological commonality of musical and ritual texts at the rhythmic and pitch levels of their structural organisation is advanced in contrast to the idea of a “centralising component.” Here another unifying factor is the significant commonality of their “vocabulary” — that is, specific musical forms.

However, since the location and nature of the outer boundaries of the Western region require further clarification, work in this direction continues. For example, for Russian researchers the most pressing issue is the regional attribution of traditions common in the Oka basin and located in the zone of multiple ethnocultural borders (see: [14]). Nevertheless, it is already becoming obvious that the unity of the Western musical-ethnographic region to a significant extent neutralises the most important linguistic boundaries from the point of view of ethnic identification. Thus, the East Slavic ethnomusical continuum has a broadly tripartite structure that is independent of the ethnic and linguistic division of this territory: Russian culture is represented by northern and southern regions, while Ukrainian and Belarusian culture is united into a single common ethnomusical identity.

At the beginning of the 21st century, a new position was formed on the issue of systemic relations between the three East Slavic ethnomusical macro-regions. Professor Margarita Yengovatova of the Gnesin Russian Academy of Music offered her view on this problem in her article *Northern and Western Traditions of Russian Song as Oppositional Systems*. [15] According to her concept, the core opposition among East Slavic regional cultures is not the Northern and Southern Russian, as was previously believed, but the northern Russian and Western regional massifs. Thus it is only when considering these macro-regions

that clear and unambiguous oppositions can be identified at all levels of the musical system.

According to the author, the opposition of these regional traditions appears “in its most obvious and simple form” in the area of musical rhythm — that is, at the fundamental level of oral musical cultures. In this connection, the relevant features are: (1) type of versification — syllabic in the West, but tonic (accentual) in the North; (2) class of musical-rhythmic forms — caesura-based in the West versus segmented in the North. [Ibid., p. 15] Thus, each of the compared regions not only has its own set of musical and rhythmic forms, but the very laws of rhythmic organisation and the morphology of musical and folklore texts conditioned by them are fundamentally different.

Of the differentiating features listed by the author, which are related to the sphere of pitch structure of chants, the most significant are “the development of intra-syllabic melody in northern slow-tempo songs (wedding, round dance, lyrical)” and the scale of their melodic constructions, which may be counterposed with the dominance of syllabic melody and comparative brevity of melodic cells in the corresponding structures of the Western region. [Ibid., p. 17] No less significant are the differences in the area of the textural embodiment of melodies: the dominance of the heterophonic structure in the north is opposed by the parity of different types of polyphony in the West, i.e., heterophony of various types, drone diaphony, and functional two-part singing.

Thus, when comparing individual genres, Yengovatova’s analytical generalisations clearly reveal the oppositional nature of Northern and Western traditions. Some observations of this kind are well known to ethnomusicologists — for example, the different degrees of development of songs of the calendar cycle or lamentation cultures in these regions. The author draws attention to the fundamental

nature of the differences in the structural organisation of melodies of the same genre.

Accordingly, wedding songs of the Western and Northern regions are related in line with the opposition of caesurised and segmented musical-rhythmic structures. Lamentational musical and poetic forms are contrasted according to the mobility/stability of their rhythmic organisation. The distinguishing features of lyrical songs of different regional affiliations are the comparatively simple forms characteristic of Western examples of the genre, and the complexly organised secondary melodic-rhythmic compositions in which Northern Russian drawn-out songs are most often realised.

Thus, in the work of Yengovatova, the Northern Russian and Ukrainian-Belarusian ethnomusical massifs are described through groups of musical-structural features that demonstrate an almost total typological contrast. According to this logic, we are obliged to regard the musical culture of the Western and Northern regions as two musical-linguistic systems that form a key opposition within the East Slavic ethnomusical continuum.

An additional basis in favour of the proposed concept consists in the comparability of these two macro-regions in historical-stage terms. Both were settled by the Eastern Slavs in the early Middle Ages and include territories classified by Academician Nikita Tolstoy as the “Slavic archaic belt.” [16, p. 42] The impressive historical depth determined the quality of their spatial organisation as a relatively homogeneous musical landscape without sharp contrasts according to the principle of continuity of adjacent local traditions.

In contrast, the heterogeneous cultural landscape of the Southern Russian region “resembles a patchwork quilt that was ‘sewn’ together over centuries of the complex history of settlement of these places.” [17, p. 241] The South Russian massif, according



to Yengovatova, represents “a very late conglomerate of musical dialects, typologically comparable not so much with the song complexes of the Western and Northern zones, but with the so-called secondary traditions of late mixed formation.” [15, p. 13–14]

The perspective on the regional structure of East Slavic ethnomusical culture presented by Yengovatova essentially offers a new system of coordinates in which the cultures of relatively late formation, including those of the Southern Russian region, should be considered. At present, when only its individual musical-ethnographic zones and some of the next generation of migrant traditions that “broke off” from it have been examined and studied from a structural-typological standpoint, the position of this region in the system of East Slavic regional traditions appears to be as follows.

From the point of view of the rhythmic morphology of ritual vocal texts, the Southern Russian culture is undoubtedly oriented toward the musical “language” of the Western region: the overwhelming majority of ritual songs are songs with syllabic verse and caesurised musical periods. Moreover, a significant part of the Southern Russian musical and rhythmic forms (in particular, wedding chants) goes back to the folklore traditions of the upper reaches of the Oka, where specific compositional and rhythmic versions of ritual chants were formed. [14]

At the same time, the culture of *protyazhnoe penie* [drawn-out singing] has developed greatly in the Russian South. While the rich intra-syllabic melody and complex musical-rhythmic compositions characteristic of the tunes of this genre clearly separate the Southern Russian samples from Western lyrical songs, the same factors conversely unite them

with their Northern Russian counterparts. Included among the questions that arise in connection with the study of this genre are the reason for the cultivation of Russian *protyazhnoe penie* in such contrasting regions and the regional features of their formation.

In any case, the specific qualities of the Southern Russian musical style are probably most clearly manifested in the area of the pitch structure of the melodies. Thus it is no coincidence that many ethnomusicologists pay special attention to this area when studying the local traditions of the Russian South. Often it is precisely the features of the pitch structure — i.e., the textural embodiment of musical texts and their acoustic qualities (for example, the significant role of anhemitonic forms) — that serve as the basis for identifying local song traditions and attempting the subregional division of southern Russian territories. [18; 19]

This refers, in general terms, to the large-scale structure of the East Slavic ethnocultural space that has developed in modern Russian ethnomusicology. Obviously, the characteristics of each of the three musical-ethnographic regions are presented in this article in a brief form and are far from exhaustive. The greatest attention here is paid to identifying the differentiating features that ensure, on the one hand, the oppositional relationship of the compared regional macrosystems, and on the other, their internal integrity. In light of the issues under study, the territories located in the contact zone of the largest regional musical and ethnographic massifs are of particular interest. Finally, a separate set of questions arises in connection with the study of East Slavic traditions of late formation, whether located within the European territory and in the Asian part of Russia or for that matter on other continents.

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