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## **The Moscow Section of the Imperial Russian Musical Society and the Concert Agencies Outside of Russia**

The article poses a scholarly issue, which has not yet found reflection in musicology in Russia and in other countries: the issue of the interaction of Russian and Western European musical culture in the focus of the collaboration of the Moscow Section of the Imperial Russian Musical Society (IRMS) with concert agencies in other countries. A broad overview of the present phenomenon, based on study of printed and manuscript documents from the funds of the Russian National Museum of Music and the Russian State Archive of Literature and Art is offered. The emergence of the phenomenon of specialized concert agencies in Europe dates back to the 1870s and the 1880s. The period of the most fruitful interaction between the Moscow Section of the IRMS and concert directorates in other countries, especially, the most large-scale concert agency of the final fourth of the 19th and the first third of the 20th centuries, the Concert Directorate of Hermann Wolff, occurred during the years 1890–1913. In connection with the toughening competition between the orchestral assemblies of the RMS in Moscow and concerts of other philharmonic organizations, the head of the Moscow directorate Vassily Safonov established a stable business relationship with his partners in concert management abroad, which subsequently expanded and solidified, which eventually led to the intensification of connections between Russian musicians and those of other countries. The outlined scholarly direction discloses new perspectives for study of the phenomenon of the musical culture of the Silver Age.

**Keywords:** Imperial Russian Musical Society (IRMS), the musical life of Moscow, concert management, Vassily Safonov, the Concert Direction of Hermann Wolff.

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## **Московское отделение Императорского Русского музыкального общества и зарубежные концертные агентства**

Статья ставит научную проблему, которая ещё не нашла отражения в отечественном и зарубежном музыковедении: взаимодействие русской и западноевропейской музыкальной культуры в фокусе сотрудничества Московского отделения Императорского Русского музыкального общества (ИРМО) и зарубежных концертных агентств. Предлагается широкий обзор данного явления, основанный на изучении печатных и рукописных документов из фондов Российского национального музея музыки и Российского государственного архива литературы и искусства. Само возникновение феномена специализированных концертных агентств в Европе относится к 1870–1880 годам. Период наиболее плодотворного взаимодействия Московского отделения ИРМО с иностранными концертными дирекциями, в особенности с самым крупным концертным агентством последней четверти XIX – первой трети XX веков, Концертной дирекцией Вольфа, приходится на 1890–1913 годы. В связи с усилившейся конкуренцией между симфоническими собраниями РМО в Москве и концертами других филармонических организаций, глава Московской дирекции Василий Сафонов устанавливает регулярные деловые отношения с зарубежными партнёрами по концертному менеджменту, которые в дальнейшем расширились и усилились, способствуя интенсификации связей между русскими и

иностранными музыкантами. Обозначенное научное направление открывает новые перспективы для изучения феномена музыкальной культуры Серебряного века.

**Ключевые слова:** Императорское Русское музыкальное общество (ИРМО), музыкальная жизнь Москвы, концертный менеджмент, Василий Сафонов, Концертная дирекция Германа Вольфа.

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The activity of the Moscow Section of the Imperial Russian Musical Society (MS IRMS)<sup>1</sup> in organizing tours of artists from outside of Russia, in contrast to the other aspects of the multifaceted contribution of the Society into the history of the musical culture of Russia, including the organization of concert life, has not yet been posed as a separate scholarly issue in either Russia or in other countries. In Russian musicology there has been intensified interest in recent years to research of the musical life of the metropolitan and provincial cities, including the musical events that took place under the aegis of the IRMS [3; 8; 10], but the mechanism itself of the organization of concerts of musicians from abroad has not been revealed. There are also works describing in detail performances by foreign musicians in Russia [2; 6], several conference presentations by the author of the present article, of which only one has been published so far [9], but they appear as a set of individual endeavours: apparently, there is a necessity of a systematic understanding of this side of the process of Russian music history.

If we bear in mind the broader research field, i.e., the history of European concert management in the sphere of academic music, then, unfortunately, it must be stated that at the present time research has not been done in Russian in this direction. The textbook of Irina Korabelshchikova [1] is focused almost exclusively on activities in the domain of theater. Musicologists in other countries have mastered this subject matter somewhat better. The works that stand out include Normann Lebrecht's popular book translated into Russian, which is not as much of a scholarly, as of a journalistic direction [4], as well as the interesting compilation of articles edited by William Weber, in which the historical path of Russian entrepreneurship, its mainstream and marginal paths are observed [14]. Our Western colleagues have also researched the history of

various separate concert agencies [11; 12; 13]. However, in my view, the value of this scientific perspective for world musical scholarship still remains underestimated.

The aim of the present article is to research the Russian-European connections in the sphere of musical life on the level of concert management. It is in line with the leading tendency of present-day musicology: as the authoritative scholar William Webber justly noted, during the last couple decades, research in the domain of musical life is based on strict foundations – namely, the study of the leading concert institutions [15, p. 115]. One of the most important goals is to position the present subject as one that is relevant for musical science. The article has the character of a survey: the problem is merely set, to be followed by documented research. The contacts of the Moscow Section of the IRMS and the concert agencies from other countries are presented in historical retrospective and in the context of the overall situation with concert management in Europe and in Russia from the final third of the 19th century to the early 20th century.

The chief method of the offered research is historiographical analysis. The sources for this work are formed by published works [5; 7] and manuscripts preserved at the Russian National Museum of Music (RNMM) and the Russian State Archive of Literature and Art (RGALI)<sup>2</sup>. Other methods of historical research are also used: the narrative, the systemic and the comparative.

From the time of its founding, the Russian Musical Society appeared in the role of an enlightening philharmonic organization. Most of the concert programs of the RMS were compiled by musicians of both of the capital cities, not only because of the established goals: to train Russian musical staff, but because of the insufficiency of the royalties for artists from other countries (this question would remain an acute one during the entire period of the functioning of the Society).

Nonetheless, it was impossible to avoid entirely engaging the musical stars from abroad. The directors of the Society realized that it was difficult to attract audiences into the hall solely by artistic merit or unusual programs – the listeners were likely to be attracted by loud names of celebrities. For this reason, from the very first steps of the RMS in the initial activities of the concert management, the question arose of the Society's interaction with musicians from abroad. It became even more relevant in the 1880s and later, in view of the success Russian music was enjoying in other countries and, consequently, the intensifications of cultural connections with the West. It influenced the process of organizing concerts in two different ways. On the one hand, the network of acquaintance of Russian composers and performers with their colleagues in other countries expanded, there appeared many instances of friendly relations with many artists and their impresarios. On the other hand, the process of engaging musicians in the last third of the 19th century was changing. At that time the formation of the concert industry was taking place, and several leading concert agencies appeared in Europe, which held in their power the organization of tours of almost all the celebrated musicians; it became common to make agreements about the performance of particular artists solely through them.

It is commonly known that the phenomenon of the professional concert agent appeared along with the institution of musical societies, i.e., in the 1830s and 1840s. Prior to that time, and occasionally in subsequent decades as well, artists organized their concerts and tours themselves, and in a number of cases relied on the assistance of music publishers and owners of grand piano factories. One of the pioneers in the realm of concert management was Gaetano Belloni, who organized concert tours for Franz Liszt. The first large-scale concert agency was established in Vienna in 1873 – this was the Concert Agency of Albert Gutmann, and it was located right within the building of the Vienna Opera. According to the old tradition, Gutmann engaged in many types of activities at once: music publication (for example, he published the compositions of Bruckner), as well as opera and concert engagements. In 1880 the Concert Directorate of Hermann Wolff was founded in Berlin – already it specialized solely in concert organizations, and during the course of almost half a century it was destined to become virtually a monopolist in this domain, pushing out all of its competitors. In the time period from 1880

to the 1900s there were plenty of smaller agencies working on the European and American markets. The Directorate of the Moscow Section of the RMS was compelled to collaborate with them, especially with Wolff's Directorate.

In the Moscow Section of the RMS sufficient attention was not always given to work with foreign concert managements, since it was preferred to deal directly with the artists. With the appointment of Vassily Safonov to the position of chairman of the orchestral assemblies in 1889, the business connections sparked and soon became very close, even though Safonov, likewise, frequently carried out negotiations personally with the musicians themselves. Starting from 1906 the emerging tendency was continued by Safonov's successor Mikhail Ippolitov-Ivanov, who delegated his powers of communicating with concert agencies to the members of the Directorate, Yuri Sakhnovsky, Yuri Pomerantsev, Alexei Chizhov and Nikolai Zhegin, having himself concentrated his attentions to the greatest degree on the work on director of the Moscow Conservatory and his own compositional work. With the outbreak of World War I all the contacts ceased, since performances of artists from abroad in Russia became impossible. Thereby, in the pre-revolutionary history of musical life only a little over two decades passed in terms of the regular partnership of the MS IRMS with foreign concert managements of various levels.

Not least of all, the intensification of the business relations with foreign representatives of large-scale concert business during the years 1890–1913 was accounted for by the accounted for of the MS IRMS with the Moscow Philharmonic Society (MPO). The MPO made its stake on artists from other countries, predominantly vocalists, first of all, because it did not set such global goals of musical enlightenment as the IRMS, and, second, the financial success of the MPO with the lack of material support from the imperial family (which, it must be reminded, was lavished on the IRMS and its conservatories) depended directly on concert earnings. In the subsequent years the policy of the MPO of inviting musical celebrities from other countries did not only remain, but also intensified, for which, as a matter of fact, it was subjected to criticism from the forefront musical community.

In 1901 the positions of conductor and artistic director of the MPO were assumed by Alexander Siloti, a musician of world renown, whose name attracted celebrated performers from other

countries; with many of them he was bound with personal friendship.

Although Siloti's chairmanship of this society lasted for only two years (in 1903, not having been well received by the senior staff, he withdrew from conducting concerts of the MPO and established his own concert organization in St. Petersburg titled "Siloti Concerts"), nonetheless, Siloti's moral and artistic authority remained unquestioned, and upon a verbal agreement he seemed to continue patronizing the MPO, frequently offering his musician friends to perform in the concerts of the Philharmonic Society, and not in the IRMS (it must have been accounted for by the offence that Siloti held against Safonov and the Moscow Conservatory in his person, as well as the administration of the Moscow Section). Siloti himself also continued to perform at the concerts of the MPO rather regularly and, obviously, continued to exert his influence on the repertoire policy. Starting from 1909 the Concerts of Sergei Koussevitsky also made their contribution to the domain of the Moscow philharmonic life. All of this took place against the background of a relative decline of the orchestral concerts of the IRMS after the resignation of Safonov (they were criticized for the rigidity of the programs, for the absence in them of new compositional innovations, of the insufficiently convincing interpretations of the permanent conductor Emil Cooper). Such was the musical-historical landscape in which the activities of the Directorate of the Moscow Section took place; it was compelled to exert titanic efforts for attracting audiences, and, as one of its tools, reasonably accentuated its contacts with musicians from other countries.

As has already been mentioned, the heads of the Central Directorate of the IRMS for the most part dealt with the musicians with whom they were personally acquainted, as well as with their impresarios. There is the correspondences of Nikolai Rubinstein, Vassily Safonov and Mikhail Ippolitov-Ivanov with many famous solo performers and conductors.

Soon after establishing his agency, in the autumn of 1880, Hermann Wolff turned to Nikolai Rubinstein with the proposition to organize his concerts in Germany. However, there is not a single word in the letters written about the connections between the institutions they both represented. It was possible that each of the sides did not fully fathom the opportunities of the other: Wolff was

only starting his business, while the MS IRMS<sup>3</sup> had not yet won its reputation of a concert organized on a European scale. But soon the situation would change: Moscow concert life would achieve such a high level which would attract serious attention of European celebrities and would open up a new promising market for them. This would happen during the time of the activities of Vassily Safonov, whose outstanding organizational talent was revealed in the most diverse directions, including the aforementioned one.

Apparently, Safonov's connections with the Concert Directorate of Hermann Wolff began during the late 1880s. During the course of two years they focused solely on the career of Safonov the pianist: Vassily Ilyich intended to settle his affairs by means of this agency. The business correspondence of Safonov as director of the MS IRMS with the Concert Directorate of Wolff pertains to the years 1890–1905. It documented the negotiations about the tours of outstanding musicians: cellists Hugo Becker, Hans Wigan, Jean Gerardi, Pablo Sarasate, violinists Jacques Thibault and César Thomson, pianist and composer Ferruccio Busoni, Emil Sauer, Xavery Scharwenka, pianists Teresa Careño, Klotilda Kleber, Joseph Levin, Oscar Neitzel, Raoul Pugno, Osip Gabrilovich and Vassily Sapelnikov, singer Ellen Gulbranson, and conductor Arthur Nikisch.

Intriguing details regarding the cooperation of the MS IRMS with Wolff's Concert Directorate are also revealed in the protocols of the sessions of the Directorate of the Moscow Section of the IRMS. Thus, the protocol from March 11, 1904 documents that during Safonov's sojourn in Berlin "...100 marks were paid by him to the Concert Directorate of Hermann Wolff for advertisements of the concert halls of the Moscow Conservatory"<sup>4</sup>, while the protocol from May 14 of the same year states that Emil Sauer "received an invitation through the agency of Wolff to participate in a concert of the Moscow Philharmonic Society and answered that as a former student of the Conservatory and a friend of the director he does not deem it proper to hold concerts in Moscow outside of the jurisdiction of the Musical Society"<sup>5</sup>.

The questions of concert management were decided by Safonov on both sides of the Russian border. He promoted his Russian protégés in Europe to the best of his abilities, which included making use of the resources of Wolff: thus, in 1898 Vassily Safonov proposed writing a recommendation letter

for cellist Mikhail Bukinik to Wolff's agency in order to organize his performances in Germany [7, p. 380]. Safonov's colleagues and friends also turned to him, making use of his connections with Wolff's agency, asking him to assist them in various questions related to the musical life of the provinces: in 1905 Alexander Vinogradsky asked him to find a good violin instructor for the Kiev Music College [Ibid., pp. 672–675], and Vassily Villuan asked him to provide recommendations of musicians who would give their consent to give concerts in Nizhni-Novgorod for a modest fee [Ibid., p. 676].

In 1902, soon after the demise of the founder of the Concert Directorate, Hermann Wolff, on January 28/February 10 Safonov received the notification about this from the director of the Warsaw Philharmonic, Alexander Reichmann [Ibid., p. 554]. Reichmann asked for permission for a trip to Berlin for establishing term contracts, and Safonov gave his consent [Ibid.]. However, the apprehensions that after the death of Herman Wolff his agency would lose its positions in world concert management turned out to be groundless. This was also proved by the personal artistic fate of Safonov himself: after his departure abroad, Wolff's concert management arranged all of his performances.

During the period between the two Russian revolutions the Concert Directorate of Hermann Wolff also continued to remain the chief counteragent of the MS IRMS. The affairs with Moscow were mostly managed by Hermann Fernow. We are indebted to the assistance of the agency in Berlin for the concerts as part of the MS IRMS of cellists Pablo Casals and Gerard Ecking, pianists Arthur Schnabel and Gottfried Galston, violinists Eugene Ysaye and Juan Manen and many other outstanding artists.

Along with Wolff and Co. the Management of the Moscow Section collaborated with the following concert agencies (only the most important ones are listed):

in Austria: The Concert Agency of Albert Gutmann (Vienna), the Theatrical and Concert Bureau of Ignaz Kugel;

in Germany: The Concert Direction of Norbert Salter (Berlin), the Concert Management of Jules Sachs (Berlin), the Theatrical Agency and Concert Directorate of Joseph Lau (Berlin, Lamberg), The Concert Bureau of L. Loewenson (Berlin), the Concert Bureau of Emil Gutmann (Munich);

in Holland: The Concert Bureau of Hans Augustin (Amsterdam);

in Czechia: The International Concert Agency of J. F. Glavac (Prague);

in Switzerland: The Concert Directorate of T. Walbach.

The expanded geography of the business dealings of the MS IRMS with concert agencies in other countries convincingly proves that the Moscow-based management organically fit into the system of concert activities in Europe of the first decades of the 20th century, and it may very well be regarded as one of the fully legitimate subjects of this system.

The perspective proposed in the present article pertains to the field of concert management and, as it would seem, does not pertain directly to the study of the achievements in the art of music. However, this kind of view, situated at the convergence of musicology, sociology and economics in the sphere of art makes it possible to highlight one of the most important typological features of the Russian culture of the Silver Age its ardent urge "to catch up with and surpass" the Western achievement and, at the same time, to create something original, pertaining only to itself. The connections between the Russian and Western European cultures of that time are distinguished by multi-parameter traits, and the scholarly comprehension of one of them, directly connected with the functioning of cultural institutions, opens up new horizons for the researcher.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> When the article mentions the Society's activities prior to 1873, i.e., before its acquisition of the status of "Imperial," the abbreviation RMS is used.

<sup>2</sup> The Russian National Museum of Music (RNMM). F. 80. Russkoye muzykal'noe obshchestvo [Russian Musical Society]; Russian State Archive for Literature and Art (RGALI). F. 661. Moskovskoe otdelenie

Russkogo muzykal'nogo obshchestva [The Moscow Section of the Russian Musical Society].

<sup>3</sup> A significant role was played by the transportation remoteness of Moscow from the touring thoroughfares of musical Europe. In this respect St. Petersburg was in a much better position.

<sup>4</sup> RGALI. F. 661. Inv. 1. D. 110, pp. 49–51.



<sup>5</sup> RGALL. F. 661. Inv. 1. D. 110, pp. 35–38. In Sauer's act, and even to a greater degree, in Safonov's pride with which he reported about this, one can clearly

hear the repercussions of the sharp competition between the RMS and the MPO in Moscow.

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