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Nicolai

RIMSKY-KORSAKOV

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FOREWORD

Nikolai Andreievich Rimsky-Korsakov's first real contact with romance as a genre can be traced to his Navy Corps years. Only from fleeting indications found in Chapter I of his *Chronicle of my Musical Life* do we know about a prior acquaintance with romance from the repertoire of his parents.

The beginning of his musical activities within the walls of the Naval Institute dates from 1860-1861 (chorus singing, playing harmoniflute, speaking enthusiastically of M. I. Glinka's compositions among his colleagues, etc.). During these years, Rimsky-Korsakov became acquainted with the family of his Corps friend N. I. Skrydlov. "His mother was an excellent singer; I visited them often and accompanied singing on the piano. At this time I became familiar with Glinka's romances, partly at Skrydlov's, partly on my own. Besides Glinka's romances, I became acquainted with the romances of Dargomyzhsky, Varlamov, and others" (*Chronicle of my Musical Life*, fifth edition, Chapter II, p. 30). In this context, Rimsky-Korsakov recollected about the romance he had then composed on the words: "Come out to me, Signora." This was "...Something like a barcarole," a romance, "suite melodious, even in a pseudoitalian style." No copy of this composition from that time was preserved. But, in 1906, Rimsky-Korsakov visited Venice; he remembered, wrote down, and sent off his barcarole in a letter to V. A. Iastrebtsev: "Dearest V. V., when I was young, that is, probably in 1860-1861, I composed this romance, and my friend Skrydlov (now an Admiral) sang it. The romance is about Venice. Forty-five or forty-six years afterwards, visiting in Venice, I renewed in my memory this nonsense and am sending it to you." Here is the romance as it was written in the letter to V. V. Iastrebtsev:

Andante.¹⁾

Голос

Ф.п.

Выхо-ди ко мне, сеньо-ра, я дум-но те-бе здось

жада; Выхо-ди, пока до-зо-ра час у-роч-ный не на-

стал. Я гор-до се по-лу-темной, Гси-дохер и нем, и

гаух, По-це-ду-я звук неслромный не встревожат чуждый слух.

The romance is reproduced from the *Russian Music Newspaper*, 1909, No. 1, p. 7.

An entire six years passed between this imitative "nonsense" and the actual composition of romances. In the

Chronicle, this beginning is indicated as December 1866, though in error. In reality, Rimsky-Korsakov's first romance, with Heine's words, "Lean thy Cheek to Mine," translated by M. Mikhailov, was composed in November 1865. Rimsky-Korsakov asked himself in the *Chronicle* why he wanted to compose this romance. "Most probably," he replied, "because I wished to imitate Balakirev, whose romances I adored." As we know, Balakirev completely revised the accompaniment part of this romance (see the notes to Op. 2, romance No. 1). Rimsky-Korsakov's acquaintance at the home of L. I. Shestakova-Glinka with Sofia Ivanovna Zotova, née Belenitsina, sister of L. I. Karmalina, served as a further motivation for his composing romances. This is the very same Zotova who figures in L. I. Shestakova's wonderful story about A. S. Dargomyzhsky who laughed at Glinka, when Dargomyzhsky attempted to persuade Glinka and his lady partner Zotova to perform an ingenious quadrille figure, an impossible feat for Glinka's aging constitution. Rimsky-Korsakov resolved to compose romances in the spring and summer of 1866 under the impression of Zotova's singing. To this attest not only Rimsky-Korsakov's own words in the *Chronicle*, but also the dedication of his three early romances to her ("Cradle Song," March 1866; "On the Hills of Georgia" May 1866, and "Switezianka," for which the censor's permit is dated November 25, 1868).

The history of the composition of the first romances is problematic, since we do not have a clear idea about their dating. Of the thirty-two romances written during the first half of the composer's creative life, only fifteen are preserved in manuscript form. The date of their first printing can be established with certainty only for some, since the censor's permit did not always immediately precede their publication. Nevertheless, exact dates for several romances, indirect information about others provided in the *Chronicle*, together with information provided on the sheet of paper listing the compositions of 1862, 1865, and 1866, a multitude of censor's permit dates, *opus* numbers written on first editions, reactions in the press, and, finally, an historical and esthetic analyses, allow us to provide in the present edition, if not complete in its entirety, then at least a quite clear sequence of the romances' publications during the period 1865 to 1883.

The thirty-two romances composed during this period fall into two groups. Group one consists of Op. 2, 3, 4, 7 and 8 (comprising twenty-two romances written during 1865-1870). Group two consists of Op. 25, 26, 27 (comprising ten romances written during 1877-1883). At present we have no direct information from Rimsky-Korsakov, nor from his friends, nor from their correspondence, about Op. 25, romances No. 1 and No. 2, except for a date indicating that romance No. 1, "To my Song", was composed in 1870 (see N. A.'s correspondence with Stasov, published in the magazine *Russian Thought*, 1909, vol. 6-9).

In a letter to S. N. Kruglikov, April 25, 1882. Rimsky-Korsakov reported about Op. 26, romances Nos. 1-4: "I, your obedient servant, composed *for some reason* four romances, which I dedicate to you and, probably, will soon publish." (Editor's italics – A. N. Rimsky-Korsakov).

And finally, we have none, not even similarly insignificant information, about the romances Op. 27, Nos. 1-4.

The particularity of Rimsky-Korsakov's activity in composing romances is that after having composed twenty-two romances during the first five years, from 1865 to 1870, he did not show an interest in this genre again until quite later, at a time when he was technically mature, that is, toward the end of the 1870's. This new wave of interest for romances, however, was marked by its short duration (1877-1883).

To a superficial critic concerned with the romances from the first half of Rimsky-Korsakov's life, it must appear as a general characteristic that his lyrics have little stylistic connection with the other compositions written during the same period. Yet a more attentive and deeper esthetic approach to his romances (not within the scope of the present academic edition) could not but pay attention to the following facts. The great majority of the thirty-two romances composed before 1883 were written during the period when the "Mighty Group", (*Moguchaia Kuchka*) was flourishing. In addition, a number of romances were composed while the composer was also working on "The Maid of Pskov." In contrast, a smaller number of romances was written during the time close to the composer's creation of the operas "May Night" and "The Snow Maiden." The romances of the 1860's are characterized by a declamatory style (for example "On the Hills of Georgia"), as well as by picture of landscape types ("The Night") and by eastern-exotic types ("Hebrew songs"). If one adds to these characteristics the freshness and directness of lyrical moods, penetrating for the first time Rimsky-Korsakov's consciousness during these years (tenderness in such romances as "I believe I Love," or passion in the romance "To my Song"), then one can exhaust with these characteristics the major categories of Rimsky-Korsakov's romance lyrics during the 1860's.

The period from the end of the 1870's to the beginning of 1880's, when Rimsky-Korsakov was writing "May Night" and the "Snow Maiden", is also the period of a creative transition onto new tracks. It is the period when Rimsky-Korsakov was captivated by the sun cult and by the national peasant song, that is, basically, by folklore. Viewed from this angle, the romances of this period present within their small number (nine in all) an unusual variety, in quality as well as in style (from the artificial and unnatural "Echo" to the gusty and fiery "Thou and You"), Should we not search in Rimsky-Korsakov's own feeling of discord the explanation for his "for some reason" in the letter to Kruglikov. During the years following the "Snow Maiden," Rimsky-Korsakov was busy at the Chapel, partly with the instrumentation class. During this period he brought his mastery of instrumentation to the highest point in a number of orchestral compositions. In 1889, Rimsky-Korsakov began composing the opera-ballet "Mlada." Soon after "Mlada," Rimsky-Korsakov entered a period of crisis and did not return to operatic activities again until 1894 ("Night before Christmas" and "Sadko"). Toward the middle of the 1890's, Ts. A. Kiui, commenting on Rimsky-Korsakov's romance production, came to the conclusion that Rimsky-Korsakov "is not particularly captivated with romances. To this attests the modest figure of thirty-two romances, as well as the fact that he wrote the last romance already long ago, in 1883." (Ts. A. Kiui, *The Russian Romance*, St. Petersburg, 1896, p. 136).

Approximately a year after Kiui's commentary, Rimsky-Korsakov showed a new, and this time prolonged interest for romance. In the spring of 1897, Rimsky-Korsakov contemplated composing a new opera and discussed various attractive texts with V. I. Belsky and other young friends. As it often happened with Rimsky-Korsakov during periods of searching for new themes and texts, he was overcome by feelings of regression or back sliding, declining faith in his talent, and a mood of skepticism. (He was ready to ascribe this skepticism to the people surrounding him, with the exception of maybe his closest young friends "who were inclined toward fanaticism.") Besides this, the general conditions for musical development toward the end of the 19th century seemed to him difficult. "Many previous ideals are broken into pieces, minds are disturbed, and of the self confidence and rosy dreams, present during the 'Mighty Group' period, not even a trace is left. Many things grew and finished blossoming in front of our eyes, and many things, seemingly now to old, will later become fresh and firm and even eternal, if anything can be so" (from the letter to V. I. Belsky, March 3, 1897).

During this apparently transitional mood, it came to his mind to write a few romances as an exercise. He discovered that he composed them considerably differently than before. Although in the *Chronicle*, Rimsky-Korsakov dismisses the reason for writing romances with a simple because ". . . I have not composed any for long time ago," we doubt that this exercise was accidental, but rather a desire to verify a vaguely felt hypothesis.

Already in the first four romances to A. K. Tolstoy's words, he discovered that the romance melody, following the turns of the text, became "completely vocal, that is, it became such in its very conception, accompanied only with hints of harmony and modulation. The accompaniment was formed and developed after the melody had been composed, whereas formerly, with few exceptions, the melody was created as if instrumentally, that is apart from the text, though in harmony with its general content, since the melody was stimulated by the harmonic foundation which occasionally preceded it. Feeling that my new method was true vocal music, and being content with my first attempts in this direction, I composed romance after romance to words by A. Tolstoy, Maikov, Pushkin and others. By the time we moved to the summer country house, I had about twenty romances ready." (The *Chronicle*, 5th edition, p. 290).

Rimsky-Korsakov tried out the same method on stage, with Pushkin's "Mozart and Salieri," which came in his own eyes to the same satisfactory result. Before leaving for the summer to the Smychkovo estate near Luga, Rimsky-Korsakov wrote to V. I. Belsky in Vienna: "During the summer I will compose trifles, romances, duets, choruses, etc. One should practice, that is one should write etudes as much as possible, and only afterwards start a large work, otherwise it is easy to begin repeating oneself."

In the same letter to Belsky, May 23, 1897, Rimsky-Korsakov praises the geniuses of Bach and Mozart, and wishes that Belsky would value and be charmed by them too. Rimsky-Korsakov wrote: "Maybe, having read these lines, you will say that I am growing old and that it is not becoming for me to write romances in my old age, and I will say, that in old age it is all the more clear why I should. . . ."

In the correspondence with S. N. Kruglikov, the romance series of 1897 is discussed from many sides. These discussions are of even greater interest for us where Rimsky-Korsakov relates the question of the romances and their style beyond the framework of his own personal characteristics to the vast field of ideas about the evolution of the entire musical present.

“You see the direction of my present romances,” Rimsky-Korsakov responded in the letter of February 17, 1897, “as if I were accommodating myself to the tastes of singers and large audiences. But I look at this differently, and this is how: I consider that the singers and the large audiences are justified in demanding harmonic melodiousness, sweetness and richness. Do not forget that the present decadence of Bruno, d’Indy, Sinding, Richard Strauss and others, stems from the Berlioz-Liszt-Wagnerian direction. The Russian school of the 1860’s and 1870’s is also not without participation in this descent, for decadence opened its eyes in the Russian school (and is rubbish, when it comes from Mussorgsky and Dargomizhsky). Insignificant melodiousness, fragmentation, music composed on harmony, and the requirement for dissonance are matters undesirable in themselves, and the audience is right in demanding melody and simpler harmony. The public is not right when it demands triviality, but it seems that God spared me from it, and, in this respect, I did not accommodate myself to their taste. If I strove to be more like Glinka, this was because Glinka is always noble and elegant besides his other genial qualities.

Simplicity is an ugly word, even a word of reproach, but to make simpler, more natural, vaster, does not hurt, it is even necessary, not only for me, but for all. There was a time (I remember it) in the 1860’s when the great part of Chopin’s melodies was considered weak and cheap music; dear V. V. Stasov still bends in two at hearing the word melody, which they tried to replace with the term theme. Pure melody, however, which went from Mozart, to Chopin and Glinka, is alive and must live; without it music’s destiny is decadence. There was a time when also Beethoven’s themes were considered bad, and they praised Beethoven for his additions, brilliant passages, and various rhythmic and harmonic pranks. Counterpoint, as a principle of simultaneous melodies, fell completely with Liszt and Berlioz; it fell also in the Russian school. One should distinguish triviality and routine from the justified demands of professional musicians as well as audiences. When a singer is satisfied with a romance without rubbish, this can only speak to the advantage of the romance; when the chorus conductor is satisfied with a musical piece not because of showily effects or affected *pianissimo*, then this speaks to the advantage of this musical piece. The Berlioz-Liszt Wagnerian direction plus Dargomizhsky gave us many good details and different creative methods, but finally it gave birth to decadence. Think about this. I believe firmly in the (relatively) near end of music art, even though for us and for our children there will still be enough of it. One wants to give support rather than crawl into the pit without thinking. It is not at all just a matter of pleasing the large audiences.”

Rimsky-Korsakov clarified the importance of the late period of his own romance writing in one of the letters to N. I. Zabela. Contrary to the opinion of many outspoken “musicians,” he defended the special place and value of the “Tsar’s Bride” among his compositions, and he opposed those who wished to limit the sphere of his speciality to fanciful music alone. These musicians “do not understand that the ‘Tsar’s Bride’ was preceded by an entire bunch of études in the form of forty or fifty romances and ‘Mozart and Salieri,’ which together changed to an important degree the style of my writing, and this style outpoured as a consequence into the ‘Tsar’s Bride.’ ”

Rimsky-Korsakov’s observations about his own romance writing of his later years, as well as the excerpts from his letters to S. N. Kruglikov and V. I. Belsky of a rather general character, introduce us to the method and mood of the mature artist, on whose shoulders lie dozens of years of creative work and critical thoughts about the destiny of music art. The romance composition of the earlier period did not and could not have known the obvious artistic maturity and awareness which make up the general creative conditions for the romances of the later period.

The same properties of maturity and awareness also appear in the selection of texts and their treatment as great poetry. Rimsky-Korsakov composed thirty-two romances during the first period of his romance writing (1865-1883) to the poetic texts of fifteen authors, with priority given first to Pushkin (7), then to Goethe-Mikhailov (6), Mey (4), Lermontov, Byron and Fet (2 each). The remaining nine authors are represented by one song each. During the second period (1897-1898), Rimsky-Korsakov wrote forty-seven romances, using texts from only seven authors: Pushkin (13), A. K. Tolstoy (13), Maikov (13), Lermontov and Fet (3 each) and Mickiewicz-Mey and Uland (1 each). In other words, during the first period priority was given to separate texts, and during the second to particular authors of the texts and cycles of their works.

Rimsky-Korsakov's careful treatment not only of the music to the texts, but also of the texts themselves, noticeably increases from the first period to the second. This can be judged from the Notes which accompany the present Academy publication of the romances. The Government Publishing House of Music requires that the composer's manuscript must be used as the basis for the Academy publications. This guideline can only partially be observed with respect to Rimsky-Korsakov's romances. Rimsky-Korsakov composed seventy-nine romances. He composed them during two (or more exactly three) periods. The first thirty-two romances were written between 1865 and 1883; the second group of forty-seven romances was composed from 1897 to 1898. Of the first thirty-two romances we now have only fifteen manuscripts. Thus, for the present publication, we must rely on the first publications as final documents for the majority of the romances.

The history of publishing the romances is not complicated. The first series of four romances (Op. 2, Nos. 1-4) was published by M. Bernardt Publishing House, St. Petersburg, in 1866. The following works (Op. 3, Nos. 1-4; Op. 4, Nos. 1-4; Op. 7, Nos. 1-4) were published by A. Johanson Publishing House, St. Petersburg, from 1866 to 1870. Op. 8, Nos. 1-4, and Op. 27, Nos. 1-4, were published again by Bitner, between 1877 and 1884 in St. Petersburg.

The Beliaiev Publishing House, Leipzig, was established in 1885, and its owner acquired the publishing rights for Rimsky-Korsakov's romances from Johanson and Bitner. In the following years, the Beliaiev firm published Op. 3 to Op. 7 and from Op. 25 to Op. 27.

In about 1885 P. I. Jurgenson, Moscow, bought out the M. Bernardt firm. Thus Jurgenson was able to publish a collection in 1894 of ten reprinted romances (Op. 2, Nos. 1-4 and Op. 8, Nos. 1-6).

When Beliaiev reprinted Rimsky-Korsakov's romances, the composer retouched the music slightly in certain though rare instances. One of the romances ("On the Northern Baren Cliff") is printed for the present Academy publication in two versions under Nos. 5 and 5a. In another case ("On the Hills of Georgia") the composer's later corrections for the Beliaiev publication are indicated in the Notes of the present publication. As a general rule, republications were made under the composer's own supervision, and he strove to preserve all the original characteristics of their first publications.

To establish the present Academic edition, the first and subsequent publication copies, kept in Saltykov-Shchedrin Public Library in Leningrad, were compared.

From 1897, on immediately upon completion, all Rimsky-Korsakov's romances became property of the Beliaiev firm and were published under the composer's supervision. These romances, with a few exceptions explained in the Notes, are represented by the composer's manuscripts kept in the Government Public Library in the late Beliaiev collection, which was gifted to the editors of the Manuscript Department of the Government Public Library during 1900-1901.

The main part of the preparation for the present publication consisted of systematic and careful verification of the preceding publications of the romances with the composer's manuscripts. There were forty-seven deviations found in the printed copies from the manuscripts of the romances composed between 1897 and 1898. Such deviations, quite rare in preceding publications, were brought almost to zero in the present publication.

A. N. Rimsky-Korsakov

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FOUR ROMANCES

OP. 55

1897-1898