

THE EARLY REIGN OF OLEG: CATHERINE THE GREAT'S  
GRAND AMBITION TOWARDS RUSSIA

by

Ai Lynn Ang

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the eighteenth-century Russian Enlightenment, cosmopolitanism, culture and humanities, and Russian music, under the reign of Catherine the Great (1762-1796). Petrine and pre-Petrine Russia was known for its autocratic and despotic rulers. However, Catherine was an avid disciple of Enlightenment philosophers such as Voltaire, Diderot, d'Alembert, Locke, Rousseau, Montesquieu, Beccaria, and Grimm. The objective of this research is to demonstrate Catherine's many "enlightened" ideals as she integrated them into Russia's "most" important historical play, her very own *The Early Reign of Oleg* (1790) with music by Carlo Canobbio, Vasilij Pashkevich, and Giuseppe Sarti. This thesis also aims to illuminate eighteenth-century Russian music in the empress's court.

## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 On Enlightenment

Eighteenth-century intellectuals described the Enlightenment as a process of social, psychological, or spiritual development, unbound to time or place, rather than a historical period that is often associated with its political revolution and ideals.<sup>1</sup> Most eighteenth-century European philosophers have a relatively similar variation on the concept of Enlightenment: an intellectual movement embracing the human capacity for self-improvement by subjecting every aspect of human life to reason and sentiment.<sup>2</sup>

“Enlightened” thinkers emphasized the human capacity for rationality and benevolence in shaping their destinies. They challenged pre-Enlightenment dependency on divine power, myths, and the monarchy – such as God, the Church, superstitions and traditions, and the privileges of the nobility – to determine, influence, and control their livelihood. These philosophers had confidence in humankind’s intellectual powers to develop a systematic knowledge of nature to serve as an authoritative guide in practical life. The movement provided an idealized blueprint for a liberal, tolerant, undogmatic, and secular understanding of politics in a modern form of universalism.<sup>3</sup> Comparing the Enlightenment with other intellectual movements, it was among the most fertile eras for the humanities as it saw the beginning of those disciplines that influenced much of how

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<sup>1</sup> William Bristow, “Enlightenment,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward N. Zalta, August 2010, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2017/entries/enlightenment>.

<sup>2</sup> Anthony Pagden, *The Enlightenment and Why it Still Matters* (New York: Random House, 2013), 16. Michael L. Frazer, *The Enlightenment of Sympathy: Justice and the Moral Sentiments in the Eighteenth Century and Today* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 18-21.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, x.

we understand humanity today. Such disciplines as economics, sociology, anthropology, political science, and various moral doctrines emerged during this period.

The aforementioned ideals of the Enlightenment proved too difficult to live up to. In hindsight, central tenets of the “model” philosophy, such as freedom and equality, were eschewed in the interests of preserving patriarchal rule and a slave-based economy, resulting in many ideological divisions within the modern world. Thus, developing a more nuanced understanding of the Enlightenment’s notions concerning progress, improvement of society, and amelioration of the state of humanity is necessary. According to Jonathan Israel, the current political thought and, eventually, political actions, were shaped by the egalitarian and democratic core values and ideals of the modern world derived from the “Radical” Enlightenment. This is a set of fundamental principles that include democracy, racial and sexual equality, individual liberty, freedom of thought, expression, and the press, the eradication of religious authority from the legislative process and education, and full separation of church and state.<sup>4</sup> The fundamental social and cultural values in the post-Christian age were primarily shaped by the Radical Enlightenment.

In terms of global history, Sebastian Conrad has argued that narratives assuming that the Enlightenment was specifically a European phenomenon while remaining one of the foundational premises of Western modernity are no longer tenable.<sup>5</sup> Such a rereading implies several analytical moves: first, the Enlightenment cannot be understood as the

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<sup>4</sup> Jonathan Israel, *A Revolution of the Mind: Radical Enlightenment and the Intellectual Origins of Modern Democracy* (United Kingdom: Princeton University Press, 2010), vii.

<sup>5</sup> Sebastian Conrad, “Enlightenment in Global History: A Historiographical Critique,” *The American Historical Review* 117: no.4 (October 2012): 999, <https://academic.oup.com/ahr/article/117/4/999/33183>.



sovereign and autonomous accomplishment of European intellectuals alone; second, Enlightenment ideas need to be understood as a globally integrated response to a cross-border interaction. Conrad urged that engaging with Enlightenment thinking should be done comparatively and globally; thirdly, the Enlightenment has continued beyond the nineteenth century, and its global impact was not energized solely by the ideas of the Parisian philosophers but by an accumulation of historical actors around the world.<sup>6</sup> This frame of analysis aims to re-articulate and reinvent the global history of references to the Enlightenment.

From a feminist standpoint, Joan Landes believes that the Enlightenment offers an excellent point of departure for investigating the relationship between feminist politics and discourses on women. Enlightenment thinkers championed the defence of reason and scientific method against prejudices and traditionalistic notions of truth in all fields of human endeavour. However, Landes highlights that the stance against prejudice and the promotion of equality were conditional, as “enlightened” thinkers usually maintained an ambivalent posture towards the justice of the women’s cause.<sup>7</sup> She explains that the portrayal of women was ambiguous. On the one hand, they were considered victims of oppression and were never seen as creators of their fate. On the other hand, it was expected of women to maintain the “natural” and unchanging relationship with the family and reproduction of children. Landes’s work demonstrates that the great intellectual and cultural movement, the Enlightenment, did not provide the same equality for women as it

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<sup>6</sup> Conrad, “Enlightenment in Global History,” 1001.

<sup>7</sup> Joan B Landes, “Women and the Public Sphere: A Modern Perspective,” *Social Analysis: The International Journal of Anthropology of Social and Cultural Practice*, no. 15 (August 1984): 21, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23169275>.

did for men. Indeed, in her 1792 classic *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Mary Wollstonecraft responded directly to male peers such as Thomas Paine, critiquing their blindness to the plight of women even as they argued for the natural rights of man.

Scholarship by Israel, Conrad, and Landes, among many others has challenged the notion that the “Age of Reason” represents the pinnacle of human civilization. Even so, Anthony Pagden argues that the Enlightenment still matters today. He acknowledges that the Enlightenment was Eurocentric and that it forged modern imperialism and modern racism. However, he urges readers to recognize the Enlightenment as a revolutionary movement and the intellectual origin of our still slowly emerging convictions that all human beings share the same basic rights and that women think and feel no differently from men or Africans from Asians.<sup>8</sup>

## 1.2 Catherine the Great’s Engagements with Enlightenment

Catherine the Great (1729-1796) was a monarch who actively supported, admired, and patronized Enlightenment thought while insisting that absolutism was a necessity. Her beliefs are mirrored in the production of *The Early Reign of Oleg*, a historical play that exhibited “enlightened” ideals while she oversaw every single detail before its premiere in 1790. Catherine had her own philosophy and understanding of what “enlightenment” meant. Her progressive views and her principles of governing were very much contradictory, which is reflected in her ideas about monarchical rule. Catherine

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<sup>8</sup> Pagden, *The Enlightenment*, x.

believed that Russia needed legislation that embodied Enlightenment principles but retained absolute power of governance.<sup>9</sup>

Catherine's exposure to Enlightenment ideals came at an early stage. She was familiar with the work of leading intellectuals, including Voltaire, Diderot, d'Alembert, Locke, Rousseau, Montesquieu, Beccaria, and Grimm; and works including the *Annals of Tacitus*, Montesquieu's *The Spirit of Laws*, and Voltaire's *Essay on the Manner and of Nations*.<sup>10</sup> These philosophers' writings reveal an array of ideals concerning what enlightenment should be, but Catherine believed it was impossible to implement all of these ideals to promulgate a Russian Enlightenment that could assimilate the massive Russian population of uneducated peasants. The empress did not align herself with radical philosophers such as Rousseau but rather aligned more closely with Montesquieu, Voltaire, and Diderot, who believed in benevolent despotism.<sup>11</sup> Her version of Enlightenment was outlined in her *Instruction*, a statement of legal principles.<sup>12</sup>

Catherine took various pathways to infuse Enlightenment thought into Russian society and culture, especially the Russian courts in St. Petersburg and Moscow. Some of her aims can be traced back to those whom she admired, especially Peter the Great (1672-1725). In his efforts to modernise and integrate Russia as a member of the European state system, Peter turned to the West seeking novel ideas concerning the "usable" culture of rationality, technology, and skills advancement, not on theories and philosophies about

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<sup>9</sup> Robert K. Massie, *Catherine the Great: Portrait of a Woman* (United Kingdom: Head of Zeus Ltd., 2012), 352.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 168.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 321.

<sup>12</sup> A further understanding of Catherine's perspectives of Enlightenment on her legislation on *Instruction* will be explained in Chapter 2.

refinement or liberal values.<sup>13</sup> He believed that the responsibility of an emperor was to be the first servant of the state.<sup>14</sup> Thus, his understanding of autocracy was essentially that of enlightened despotism that demanded reforms to the central and local government in Russia, its Church administration and finance, Russian society, the economy, and Russian culture.

Among the cultural “advancements” that Peter pursued was the transformation of Russian high society’s fashion and sociability into a Western style.<sup>15</sup> For instance, mimicking the court of Louis XIV, the officers and men were made to wear Western-cut uniforms; the nobles, aristocrats, and townsmen were compelled to shave their beards and don wigs and brocades; ladies and wives wore elaborate headdresses, skirts, and embroidered petticoats based on Western fashion. Members of high society were expected to give lavish balls and receptions in the modern stone palaces while offering guests the finest in food, drink, and entertainment.

Peter also reorganised the clumsy and complicated pre-Petrine bureaucracy and system of managing the armed forces. In 1721, he issued the so-called Table of Ranks, which laid down the order of ranks in Russian military, naval, civil, and court hierarchies to address deficiencies in the military chain of command. This effort to replace traditional Russian names for ranks and functions introduced new titles borrowed mainly from German practice.<sup>16</sup> Not only that, but Peter also hoped that the new Table of Ranks would foster Russian willingness to serve the country, as it would grant hereditary nobility to

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<sup>13</sup> Nicholas V. Riasonovsky and Mark D. Steinberg, *A History of Russia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011) 216.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 218.

<sup>15</sup> Isabel de Madariaga, *A Short History* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990), 13.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

those who rose high enough in government service, despite their social origins. These reforms served as Catherine's framework for her own administration.

Catherine expanded Peter's efforts in modernising, educating, and elevating Russia's high and low society. She encouraged people to pursue intellectual activities and interaction as a part of her "Russian Enlightenment." Thus, Catherine endorsed weekly satirical periodicals that promoted public criticism of the defects of Russian society, including ignorance, superstition, corruption, inhumane treatment of peasants, and worship of all things French.<sup>17</sup> She enabled such criticism with lax censorship laws that allowed printing presses to be virtually self-censoring. Nevertheless, on rare occasions, the Empress would intervene to tone down personal attacks on individuals. She also suppressed the publication or dissemination of anything that she considered subversive or immoral and prohibited the importation and distribution of literature that offended against "authority, decency, and religion."<sup>18</sup> The emergence of printing helped to spread Enlightenment ideas.<sup>19</sup>

With respect to culture, seventeenth-century French fashion and etiquette remained the model when Catherine ascended in 1762.<sup>20</sup> Catherine was brought up surrounded by a brilliant and orderly court life, which was found lacking in both of her predecessors, Empress Elizabeth and Peter III. Knowing that the courts in St. Petersburg and Moscow were almost the only Russian places that cultivated the fine arts, Catherine needed to restore and strengthen the central function of courts, mimicking the European

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<sup>17</sup> Madariaga, *A Short History*, 92.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

<sup>19</sup> Clifford Siskin and William Warner, *This is Enlightenment* (Chicago: University Chicago Press, 2010), 10-11.

<sup>20</sup> Madariaga, *A Short History*, 91.

courts.<sup>21</sup> One of the actions Catherine took was to build her private theatre, the Hermitage Palace, and to encourage her courtiers, officers and their ladies, and even their servants to participate, thereby exposing them to European culture, including theatre, ballet, music, and arts. The development and cultivation of art, architecture and music in Russia flourished under Catherine's patronage.

### 1.3 Establishing a Context for Eighteenth-Century Russian Music

Western art music remains a major topic in the field of musicology. In his book on *Music Theatre and the Holy Roman Empire*, Austin Glatthorn acknowledges that there is new archival evidence that reveals the interconnected world of music theatre during the "Classical era." By using the most recent historical interpretations of the Holy Roman Empire, he explores its cultural entity that found expression through music for the German stage.<sup>22</sup> This shows that despite the vast scholarly literature that already has been carried out on German-Austrian music (composers such as Beethoven, Mozart, and Haydn), there is still work to be done.

Outside of Russia, scholarly attention to eighteenth-century Russian music has not come close to matching the amount aimed at Western European music of the period. According to Marina Ritzarev, it was only in the last third of the twentieth century that Russian music before Glinka began to attract widespread public attention in Russia, while outside of Russia, it remained virtually unknown.<sup>23</sup> Richard Taruskin has underlined how the very notion of "Russian music" is problematic. For example, at the beginning of a

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<sup>21</sup> Madariaga, *A Short History*, 91.

<sup>22</sup> Austin Glatthorn, *Music Theatre and the Holy Roman Empire: The German Musical Stage at the Turn of the Nineteenth Century*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022).

<sup>23</sup> Marina Ritzarev, *Eighteenth-Century Russian Music* (England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2006), 1.

1939 lecture, Stravinsky asked, “Why do we always hear Russian Music spoken of in terms of its Russianness rather than simply in terms of music?”<sup>24</sup> As Taruskin has argued, Western critics have tended to value Russian music exclusively in terms of its perceived “Russianness,” but this is a double-edged sword, because its “Russian accent” marked it as inferior to the perceived “universal language” of German instrumental music. This tendency for Western critics to value only Russian music that “speaks” Russian has resulted in the cosmopolitan music produced in eighteenth-century Russia being largely ignored. It was mainly because it was easier to discuss Russian music in terms of its Russianness and harder than talking about its music in terms of just plain music.<sup>25</sup> In addition, the lack of discussion of eighteenth-century Russian music was because it was perceived as bereft of national “authenticity” while being overshadowed by the glorious nineteenth-century accomplishments and could “never” be comparable.<sup>26</sup>

Indeed, most scholarship identifies Mikhail Glinka (1804-1857) as the founding father of Russian music because his compositions such as *A Life of a Tsar*, *Ruslan and Lyudmila*, and *Kamarinskaya* had Russian folk elements that conspicuously signalled “Russianness.” However, he was not the first to merge both Western and Russian elements. Earlier Russian composers such as Alexey Verstovsky, Mikhail Matinsky, and Vasilij Pashkevich had quoted folk songs in their operas, but Glinka was the first Russian composer to achieve international stature, earning the prestige of Western art music.<sup>27</sup>

Another challenge that eighteenth-century Russian music faced was that early scholars

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<sup>24</sup> Igor Stravinsky, *Poetics of Music in the Form of Six Lessons*, trans. Arthur Knodel and Ingolf Dahl (New York: Vintage Books, 1959), 95.

<sup>25</sup> Richard Taruskin, “Some Thoughts on the History and Historiography of Russian Music,” *The Journal of Musicology* 3, no. 4 (1984): 323.

<sup>26</sup> Ritzarev, *Russian Music*, 1.

<sup>27</sup> Taruskin, “Some Thoughts,” 324.

tended to dismiss the work of foreign musicians and composers who visited or were employed in the Russian court, especially from the reign of Peter the Great through the reign of Catherine the Great. The reason for this, according to Russian music scholar Gerald Abraham, is that “they neither influenced nor, except in a few doubtful cases, were they influenced by [Orthodoxy] church, or folk music,” with the result that “it can hardly be said that they contributed much or directly to the music of the Russian people.”<sup>28</sup>

It is historiographically untenable to ignore music composed in eighteenth-century Russia by non-Russian composers just because of their nationality. Given the political climate since Peter I, the importation of Western culture to the Russian court would significantly influence Russian music, no less if it was composed by foreign composers. Thus, it is clear that much of the repertory performed in eighteenth-century Russia was composed primarily by foreign composers. In her book *Eighteenth-Century Russian Music*, Ritzarev extensively investigates prominent Russian-born composers who shared the stage with foreign composers that had contributed to Russian music.<sup>29</sup> This thesis aims to contribute to the scant literature on eighteenth-century Russian music while highlighting the need for more work in this area.

No master’s thesis can cover all of the lacunae mentioned in the previous paragraphs, but I will attempt to contribute some insights on eighteenth-century Russian music and Catherine’s vision and mission. This research will adopt a similar approach to that of Richard Taruskin, a prolific musicologist specializing in Russian music. Taruskin

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<sup>28</sup> Gerald Abraham, *The Tradition of Western Music* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), 49-50.

<sup>29</sup> Some of the non-Russian born composers that was discussed are Baldassare Galuppi, Vincenzo Manfredini, Tommaso Traetta, Paisiello, Giuseppe Sarti, etc.



acknowledged that as an American researcher, it was more appropriate for him to approach Russian music in an interpretative and critical approach rather than a philological or factual one.<sup>30</sup> As a non-native Russian musicology student, I aim to take the same approach modelled by Taruskin, whereby I seek to provide critical interpretive insights on music from eighteenth-century Russia in its broader cultural context.

This research will investigate the role music played in Catherine the Great's court and in late eighteenth-century Russian culture more broadly. I have chosen to concentrate on a historical play written by the empress herself with music by Giuseppe Sarti, Vassilij Pashkevich, and Carlo Canobbio, *Nachal'noe upravlenie Olega* (*The Early Reign of Oleg*), written in 1787 and premiered in 1790. The following Chapter 2 presents a survey of eighteenth-century Russian culture, concentrating specifically on Russian literature and focuses on the long-venerated Russian annals, *The Russian Primary Chronicle*, from which Catherine adapted her plot line for *Oleg*. Chapter 3 examines the eighteenth-century Russian musical soundscape, highlighting the cosmopolitan nature of Russian courtly music and its incorporation of Russian folk song during this period. Chapter 4 offers a critical musical analysis of *Oleg*. In this thesis I hope to demonstrate the importance of studying the music cultivated at the court of Catherine the Great, eighteenth-century Russian music more broadly, and its influence on subsequent Russian music. It is also the hope that this research will inspire researchers and musicians to explore, study, and perform eighteenth-century Russian music.

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<sup>30</sup> Taruskin, "Some Thoughts." 321.

## CHAPTER 2 EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY RUSSIAN CULTURE

### 2.1 Catherine the Great and the Russian Enlightenment

Catherine the Great of Russia, christened Sophia Augusta Fredericka von Anhalt-Zerbst, was born a princess in a small German principality on April 21, 1729. Though the court she grew up in was more modest than others in Germany, Sophia was raised in a sophisticated cultural environment strongly influenced by French culture.<sup>31</sup> Empress Elizabeth (1709-1762), Peter the Great's daughter, invited her to Russia to be groomed as a potential bride of the future emperor, Grand Duke Peter. In order to marry Peter, Sophia needed to adopt Orthodox Christianity. Hence on June 28, 1744, in a formal and public setting, Sophia disavowed the Lutheran faith and was admitted into the Orthodox Church, changing her name to Ekaterina, or, in English, Catherine.

Her years as Grand Duchess from 1744 to 1762 were difficult. Peter proved to be a miserable husband, and his behaviour was always unpredictable. For instance, Peter spent an entire winter immersed in plans to build a country house in the style of a Capuchin monastery and required Catherine and the court to dress in brown robes as Capuchin friars. To please him, Catherine made pencil sketches of the building and changed architectural features every day. These conversations left her exhausted, and she described his conversation as having "a dullness that I have never seen equalled. When he left me, the most boring book seemed delightful."<sup>32</sup> Seeking refuge in her books, she became a voracious reader. Knowing that she would be the Russian Empress in the future, Catherine was determined to learn the Russian language by reading every Russian

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<sup>31</sup> Riasanovsky and Steinberg, *A History of Russia*, 251.

<sup>32</sup> Massie, *Portrait of a Woman*, 144.

book within her reach.<sup>33</sup> However, she preferred French and favoured books such as the French translation of *General History of Germany* by Father Barre, letters describing the life of the court of Louis XIV by Madame de Sevigne, and *Dictionnaire Historique et Critique* by French philosopher Pierre Bayle. Gradually, guided by her own curiosity, she acquired what Robert Massie termed a “superior education.”<sup>34</sup>

Following a successful coup d’état against her incapable husband (Peter III) in June 1762, the newly crowned Empress Catherine II faced new challenges. She met financial disaster when Russia’s revenue went uncollected, the armed forces went unpaid, and the administration was in disorder. The Church hierarchy was dismayed by the threat of the secularization of their land, and the Church peasants were in uproar over the hope of being removed from the Church and the monasteries and transferred to the category of state peasants.<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, a foreign-born Empress ruling over Russia drew the ire of higher-ups who intend to rule Russia.

The palace revolution in 1762 was successful, though it left her without a legal title to the crown. Furthermore, her foreign blood was an obstacle to her legitimacy on the throne; especially when her son, Paul, could claim the crown and demote Catherine to the position of a regent -- or even eliminate her. The absence of high government officials trained in law at Catherine’s court did not help her cause. Thus, she had to rely on the knowledge she had gained from her reading of “enlightened” works.

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<sup>33</sup> Massie, *Portrait of a Woman*, 144.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 145.

<sup>35</sup> Madariaga, *Short History*, 14.

One of Catherine's approaches to educating Russians about Enlightenment thought was through culture, particularly literature, arts and music. Catherine strongly advocated for literature and contributed by writing her own literary work embedded with enlightenment ideals. These works include a lengthy philosophical doctrine titled *Instruction*, the weekly satirical periodicals *All Sorts of Things*, *Russian Primer for the Instruction of Youth*, and *Notes Concerning Russian History*, libretti to comic operas, historical plays, and, ultimately, *The Early Reign of Oleg*.

## 2.2 Eighteenth-Century Russian Literature

Russian literature in the eighteenth century embraced neoclassical and Enlightenment values. Following the footsteps of Peter the Great in secularising Russia, writers such as Antiokh Kantemir and Vasily Trediakovsky gradually tried to break away from their medieval traditions.<sup>36</sup> Even though medieval Russian literature and eighteenth-century Russian literature shared nearly the same function of supporting the state and church, eighteenth-century Russian authors went back to classical models and shaped literature based on its precepts. Literature became more secular than it had been earlier, but there was still a serious religious component to it.<sup>37</sup> Leading Russian literary figures such as Mikhail Lomonosov and Gavriil Derzhavin wrote religious odes titled *Morning Meditation* and *God*, respectively. In terms of neoclassicism, such writings serve the purpose of showcasing "universal" themes dealing with people in all places and at all times.<sup>38</sup> Furthermore, neoclassical literature questions, addresses, and raises moral and

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<sup>36</sup> Ilya Serman, "The Eighteenth Century: Neoclassicism and the Enlightenment" in *The Cambridge History of Russian Literature*, 45.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 46.

social issues, including problems affecting society as a whole or in which the state is involved. Thus, Russian writers after 1730 adapted western European neoclassicism to Russian conditions to establish the foundations of modern Russian literature.

Catherine was able to build on the work of Peter the Great, who had Europeanised Russia in its series of political and administrative reforms, cultural initiatives (involving fashion and etiquette), and educational legislation through the first quarter of the eighteenth century. Yet, he had much less interest in developing Europeanized arts and humanities. Catherine knew that literary culture would be tasked with guiding Russia into the new era. Thus, her literary ambitions were in full swing, stimulating a new literary vigour in the early 1760s. It was also her wish to function as an author herself, and she felt the obligation to her subjects and all of Europe to nurture Enlightenment ideals and literature.

As most of the literature and philosophy associated with the Enlightenment was written in non-Russian languages, Catherine perceived the urgency in translating these works to bring Enlightenment thought to Russians. To rectify this, Catherine launched the Russian Academy of Language.<sup>39</sup> Simultaneously, Catherine knew that education would be one of the most effective ways of reforming individuals and society at large.<sup>40</sup> Thus, Catherine and her collaborator, Ivan I. Betskoy, drafted and published their proposal to adopt the *General Plan for the Education of Young People of Both Sexes*, designed to create “a new kind of people.”<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Madariaga, *A Short History*., 95. Previously named Society for Translation of Foreign Books.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

Catherine's famous treatise, published anonymously and titled *Instruction to the Commission for the Compilation of a New Code of Law (Nakaz dlya komissi po sochineniyu novogo ulozheniya)*, exhibited the general principles of Enlightenment thought. The *Instruction* was less a legal code than a lengthy list of principles, destined to undergird effective government and ensure social stability.<sup>42</sup> The majority of Catherine's enlightenment ideals and approach in the *Instruction* were taken (literally) from Montesquieu's *The Spirit of the Laws*, Cesare Beccaria's *On Crimes and Punishments*, and Baron Bielefeld's *Institutions Politiques*.<sup>43</sup> The publication was intended to demonstrate to Europe that Russia, which was formally known as a despotic state, now had a legislative body that resembled a parliament, and would be governed on the basic principles of western political thoughts.<sup>44</sup> Her treatise deals with political, judicial, social and economic issues. It also shows her belief in human beings as "rational creatures" with natural dignity and liberty but that also needed to be educated.

Despite being an avid student of Montesquieu, Catherine inclined towards absolutism over the models provided in Rousseau's *Emile* and Montesquieu's *Spirit of Laws*. Rousseau's treatise on education has a daring exposition of religious belief founded not on Christian revelation as expounded by an established Church but on the natural intuition of the individual; it was condemned by the established Christian Church everywhere.<sup>45</sup> Given that Russia practiced the Russian Orthodox faith, Catherine knew

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<sup>42</sup> Robert Zaretsky, *Catherine & Diderot: The Empress, the Philosopher, and the Fate of the Enlightenment* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2019), 81.

<sup>43</sup> In the *Instruction*, of the 526 articles, 294 of them were taken mostly word for word, from Montesquieu's work. A slightly more than a hundred other articles are culled from Beccaria's work. Zaretsky, 82.

<sup>44</sup> Serman, "Neoclassicism and the Enlightenment," 71.

<sup>45</sup> Madariaga, *A Short History*, 94.

that aligning with Rousseau's views would put her on shaky ground so early on in her reign. In addition, Rousseau proposes a government administered by the *volonte generale* – the “the general will” – of the entire population.

As for Montesquieu's treaties, he states that “moderate” monarchies should have “political liberty” as their main principle, and he referred to England as an example. The separation of the executive (the king), the judiciary (the courts), and the legislature (parliament) will guarantee this political liberty.<sup>46</sup> However, he made exemptions on large Middle Eastern states, such as the Ottoman Empire, Turks, Persia, and later included Russia, where it was better suited for them to be ruled through despotism. Catherine disagrees with Montesquieu's assessment and could not publicly accept his classification of Russia, in which its governing authority could not be exercised effectively unless it were despotic. Therefore, Catherine declared that Russia was ruled by “a moderate government,” but because it was such a large state, it could only be governed with a system where the sovereign ruled alone but was subjected to fundamental laws.<sup>47</sup>

Enlightenment thinkers such as Voltaire (who never met Catherine in person, but corresponded through letters) painted her as intelligent, secular, broad-minded, cultivated, cosmopolitan, magnanimous, and humane: “a Louis XIV without his bigotry, a Frederick without his cynicism, and a Peter without his cruelty.”<sup>48</sup> After Voltaire read the French translation of *Instruction*, he attributed the entirety of the work to Catherine's genius and gushed that it was “the century's most beautiful monument.”<sup>49</sup> Another philosopher who

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<sup>46</sup> Madariaga, *A Short History*, 28

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>48</sup> Antony Lentin, *Voltaire and Catherine the Great; Selected Correspondence*, trans. Antony Lentin (Cambridge, Eng: Oriental Research Partners, 1974), 17.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

accepted Catherine's reasoning was d'Alembert, the co-writer of Diderot's *Encyclopedia*. Catherine confessed to him, "For the sake of my empire, I have robbed Montesquieu without mentioning him by name. If he sees my work from the next world, I hope he will pardon me this plagiarism for the good of twenty million people. He loved humility too well to take offense."<sup>50</sup>

In hindsight, Madariaga and other recent scholars have concluded that there were many inadequacies, inconsistencies, and brutalities under Catherine's long reign. They argued that Catherine's ideals, drawn from both the French Enlightenment and German cameralism and from her own observations and instincts, had made her not a liberal or a democrat, but neither was she an enlightened despot, much less a hypocritical one. However, most historians would agree that Catherine oversaw a regulated and orderly polity in which everyone performed their functions well and in the interests of the common good, which brought her considerable achievements.<sup>51</sup> One of Catherine's achievements was the election of deputies to a Legislative Commission in December 1766, replacing the outdated Code of 1649.<sup>52</sup> Catherine may have been influenced by Diderot's arguments in the *Great Encyclopedia* under the entry "representants" in which he stresses the need for the sovereign to hear the voice of the people through its

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<sup>50</sup> Massie, *Portrait of a Woman*, 350.

<sup>51</sup> Riasanovsky and Steinberg, *A History of Russia*, 268.

<sup>52</sup> The Code of 1649 consolidated Russia's slaves and free peasants into a new serf class and pronounced class hereditary as unchangeable. It was drafted by an Assembly of the Land, a representative body composed of deputies from the Church, the nobility, and the towns. Since the code was first issued, thousands of new laws have appeared, often without reference to previous laws on the same subject. Many decrees are conflicted and new laws are contradictory. It resulted in a disorganized government, corrupted and inefficient administration, and the total enserfments.



representatives.<sup>53</sup> The Legislative Commission met in Moscow at the end of July 1767 to be presented with Catherine's *Instruction* to guide them in their debates.

By all accounts, *Instruction* made it possible for journalists to discuss questions of political life, which had previously been forbidden.<sup>54</sup> Thus, it influenced other new publications, such as *All Sorts and Sundries* (*Vsyakaya vsyachina*), a weekly satirical publication, also written by Catherine and edited by her State Secretary, G. Kositsky, starting in early 1769. It was a gentle satire in which Catherine promoted social commentary, such as public criticism of Russian society's defects. These included ignorance, superstition, corruption, inhumane treatment of peasants, and worship of all things French.<sup>55</sup> Many other writers followed suit: Mikhail Chulkov published his weekly *This and That* (*I to I syo*), which ran for the entire year of 1769, a duplication of Catherine's *All Sorts*, Emin's weekly *Miscellany* (*Smes*) and monthly *Hell's Post* (*Adskaya pochta*) were also launched around this time, as well Nikolay Novikov's weekly *Drone* (*Truten*). The year 1769 signalled a new literary phenomenon in Russian culture and a new form of the expression of public opinion.

### 2.3 *The Russian Primary Chronicle and The Early Reign of Oleg*

In her play, *The Early Reign of Oleg*, Catherine claimed: "this historical performance contains more historical truth than fiction."<sup>56</sup> The play was first published anonymously in 1787, and in 1791 it was published in conjunction with its piano reduction score. Catherine commissioned a Russian composer, Vasilij Pashkevich, and

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<sup>53</sup> Madariaga, *A Short History*, 26.

<sup>54</sup> Serman, "Neoclassicism and the Enlightenment," 71.

<sup>55</sup> Madariaga, *A Short History*, 92.

<sup>56</sup> Lurana Donnels O'Malley, *The Dramatic Works of Catherine the Great: Theatre and Politics in Eighteenth-Century Russia* (England, Ashgate Publishing Company, 2006), 146.

two Italian composers, Carlo Cannobio and Giuseppe Sarti, to score her lavish play. Scholars have yet to settle on a genre classification for this work due to its unique Shakespearean elements, choruses, a sinfonia, melodrama, and dance music. It was described as an opera, musical spectacle, historical play, and Rus'ian epic. Regardless of the genre, the play was meant to be Catherine's declamation of her success in the 1787-91 Russo-Turkish War.

At the time of *Oleg's* premiere in 1790, Catherine's empire was at war with Turkey. Nonetheless, the war did not deter her effectiveness in producing a play of the highest standards. Catherine proclaimed that "this play cannot bear anything second-rate, and it will have a great effect."<sup>57</sup> Her statement reflects the long tradition in court operatic activities that rulers create musical drama to influence their audience to believe in ideals that are performed on stage while incorporating a thinly veiled representation of real political life. Thus, the empress personally supervised every detail of the production; her secretary Khrapovitskii reported that Catherine had ordered that the costumes be taken from her own personal collection<sup>58</sup> stating, "her Majesty checked the drawings of the costumes for chronicles, and after the portraits of Leon and Zoe, for it is in their time that the plot takes place."<sup>59</sup> Celebrated dramatic actors were invited to perform at the premier. Ivan Dmitreskij (1734-1821) performed the role of Oleg, and Ivan Val'berx (1766-1819), dancer and ballet master at the Imperial Theater School, played Igor. Renowned ballet masters Giuseppe Canzini (1750-1803) and Charles LePicq (1744-1806) were tasked

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<sup>57</sup> A-R Editions, Inc. edited by Bella Brover-Lubovsky, xv. "Cette piece ne souffre rien de mediocre et elle fera ungrand effet." *Pamyatny'ya zapiski A. V. Xrapovitskago*, 204 (28 August 1789).

<sup>58</sup> O'Malley, *Dramatic Work*, 154. Barsukov 299. Diary entry is from 24 July 1789.

<sup>59</sup> Brover-Lubovsky, A-R Edition, xv. "*Razsmatrivali risunki plat'ya dlya Olega, --poxvalili; oni vzyaty' iz lyetopisczev" i s" izobrazhenia Leona i Zoi, potomu, chto pri nix' l to yavlenie by'lo.*" *Xrapovitskago*, 15 September 1789.

with choreographing Act 3's dances and Act 5's games at the Hippodrome. The virtuoso Parisian harpist and teacher Jean-Baptise Cardon (1760-1803) was specially invited to St. Petersburg to perform in *Oleg's* premier. Apart from the actors and the court chapel singers, the staging involved about 800 persons in total.

The grandiose premiere on 22 October 1790, which took place at the court Hermitage Theater, was a stunning success. The premiere was followed by several performances in the public Stone Theatre, *Kamenny'j Theater*. It was performed eleven times in the public theatre during the 1790-91 season, and it was later revived again in 1794-95.<sup>60</sup> The estimated cost of the production exceeded 10,000 rubles. The prestige of this play reverberated across Russia and Europe. Foreign spectators who were unable to understand the spoken and sung text were especially astonished by the sumptuous scenery, as well as the dances and pantomimes of sporting games.<sup>61</sup>

Catherine's main source for *The Early Reign of Oleg* was *The Russian Primary Chronicle (Nachl'noe Letopis)*, formerly referred to as the *Chronicle of Nestor*, but known in modern Slavic critical literature as *The Tale of Bygone Years (Povest' Vremennykh Let)*.<sup>62</sup> This medieval annal is the earliest native source for Russian history which compiled practically all extant Russian chronicle texts, including the period extending from the traditional origins of Rus', the ninth century to the early twelfth century.<sup>63</sup> The *Chronicle* is a literary expression of the civilization and political system

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<sup>60</sup> A-R Edition, Brover-Lubovsky, xvii.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, xvi.

<sup>62</sup> Nestor, *The Russian Primary Chronicle: Laurentian Text*, translated and edited by Samuel Hazzard Cross and Olgerd p. Sherbowitz-werzow, 3.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

that prevailed while Kiev was the great national and intellectual centre of the Eastern Slavs.

Beginning in the nineteenth century, the *Chronicle* was commonly attributed to the monk Nestor. However, recent studies have not only placed his authorship in doubt but have also established through internal evidence that the *Chronicle* is a compilation of several chronicle texts of greater antiquity, rather than a homogeneous, single-authored work. Renowned Russian scholars have devoted themselves to studying the annals of Russia, including A. A. Shakhmatov and V. M. Istrin. A philologist in Russia, Shakhmatov (1864-1920), dedicated some forty articles to various phases of chronicle studies in his two works: *Investigations of the Oldest Russian Annalistic Compilations, 1908*) and the Introduction to his text of the *Primary Chronicles*. Collectively, Shakhmatov concluded that the annals presented in the *Chronicle* is a compilation of different manuscripts from many authors and Nestor had arranged it chronologically.<sup>64</sup> With regard to the older annals of Novgorod during the ninth century, it provided data originating in Kiev with material related to the ancient history of the northern area.<sup>65</sup>

However, Istrin's findings differ from Shakhmatov's. He undertook an extensive investigation of the Slavic translation of Byzantine historical work and discovered that the Russian annals' origins had foreign influences, particularly Greek influence. This is because he found stories that align with Byzantine originals, the *Chronicle of Georgius Harmartolus* and the *Russian Primary Chronicle*. Both of these chronicles share the same material – the calling of the Varangian princes on the accounts of Oleg's and Igor's raids

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<sup>64</sup> Nestor, *Primary Chronical*, 13.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

on Constantinople –<sup>66</sup> which is the plot of *Oleg*. Even though this research was carried out after Catherine’s passing, the empress might have purposefully or subconsciously chosen this particular chronicle knowing that it has ties with the Byzantine empire, which aligns with her political goals.

Nonetheless, during Catherine the Great’s reign, the *Primary Chronicle* was attributed to Nestor, a monk from the Caves Monastery, the monastic center of Kievan Rus, and the first notable hagiographer in old Russian literature. He contributed to two leading genres of old Russian literature, the chronicle and hagiography. The *Chronicle* is the oldest surviving manuscript of the old Russian chronicles.<sup>67</sup> From a literary point of view, the *Chronicle* is an unusual work, an accumulation of heterogeneous texts strung together according to a simple chronological principle.<sup>68</sup>

Catherine’s other sources for *Oleg* included one of her own writings, *Notes Concerning Russian History*, and probably the early volumes of V. N. Tatishchev’s *Russian History from the Earliest Times* (1768-1848).<sup>69</sup> The *Notes* elaborated on incidents and events from the chronicles and from Tatishchev. Catherine was pleased with her *Notes* publications – first serialized in 1783-84 and republished 1787-94 – as she told Friedrich Melchior, Baron von Grimm, “[it] puts history in the hands of everyone.”<sup>70</sup> Thus, it is not surprising that Catherine wanted Russia’s “earliest annals” to be staged.

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<sup>66</sup> Nestor, *Primary Chronical*, 20.

<sup>67</sup> Jostein Børtnes, “The literature of old Russia, 988-1730” in *The Cambridge History of Russian Literature*, ed. Charles A. Moser (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 12.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>69</sup> O’Malley, *Dramatic Works*, 140. The first four volumes appeared between 1768 and 1784.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

*The Early Reign of Oleg* was not Catherine's first historical play, but rather *From the life of Riurik* (composed in August of 1786). She in which took up the story of the Grand Prince Riurik, the Norse conqueror who founded Novgorod and consolidated power in northern Russia. *Oleg* was written one month after *Riurik*, and, finally, she set to work on *Igor* (unfinished). Table 2.1 provides an overview of the storyline of *The Early Reign of Oleg*, comparing Catherine's version to the *Primary Chronicle*. The play has a total of five acts.

Act	Primary Chronicle	Catherine's Preface
Preface	852, Emperor Michael (Byzantine Empire), went forth with an army by land and sea against the Bulgarians. The latter, on catching sight of his armament, offered no resistance and asked leave to be baptized and to submit themselves to the Greeks. The Emperor baptized their prince with all his warriors and made peace with the Bulgarians.	"This historical performance contains more historical truth than invention."
	The remaining tribes decided to govern themselves and went overseas to the Varangian Russes. However, tribes rose against each other and laws were abandoned. People of Rus', "Our land is great and rich, but there is no order in it. Come to rule and reign over us." Thus 3 brothers, with their kinsfolk, took with them all the Ruses and migrated, Rurik to Novgorod, Sineus to Beloozero and, Truvor to Izborsk. The district of Novgorod became known as the land of Rus. The present inhabitants of Novgorod are descended from the Varangian race, but aforetime they were Slavs.	

Act	Primary Chronicle	Catherine's Preface
	<p>After his brothers died, Rurik assumed the sole authority. There were two men (Askold and Dir) who did not belong to his kin but were boyars, not princes. They obtained permission to go to Tsar'gard (Constantinople) with their families. They thus sailed down the Dnieper, and in the course of their journey, they saw a small city on a hill. They decided to remain in the city, and after gathering together many Varangians, they established their dominion over the county of the Polyanians at the same time that Rurik was ruling at Novgorod.</p>	
	<p>Askold and Dir attacked the Greeks. When the Emperor had set forth against the infidels and arrived at the Black River, the eparch sent him word that the Russes were approaching Tsar'grad and the Emperor turned back. Upon arriving inside the strait, the Russes made a great massacre of the Christians and attacked Tsar'gard with two hundred boats. The Emperor succeeded with difficulty in entering the city. He hastened straightway with the Patriarch Photius to the Church of the Lady of the Blachernae, where they prayed all night. They sang hymns and carried the sacred vestment of the Virgin to dip it in the sea. The weather was still, and the sea was calm, but a windstorm came up, and when great waves straightway rose, confusing the boats of the godless Russes, it threw them upon the shore and broke them up. So they escaped such destruction and returned to their native land.</p>	

Act	Primary Chronicle	Catherine's Preface
	<p>Entire Bulgarian nations accepted baptism. On Rurik's deathbed, he bequeathed his realm to Oleg, who belonged to his kin, and entrusted to Oleg's hand his son Igor for he was very young.</p>	<p>As history tells us, "at the end of his life, the Great prince Rurik was very ill and was starting to languish; seeing that his son Igor was still in youthful years, he handed over his governance and his son to his brother-in-law, the Urman prince Oleg." Oleg, by this definition, was indeed the uncle and guardian of Igor. In <i>Notes Concerning the History of the Russian Empire</i>, under the heading <i>Great Prince Igor I</i>, it is written that Oleg began his guardianship with an inspection of Russian regions: having arrived at the place where the rivers Moscow, Yauza, and Neglinnaya join, he built a small town which he named Moscow, and he gave it to one of his relatives to govern".</p>
Act 1	<p>Oleg set forth, taking with him many warriors (different tribes). He thus arrived with his Krivichians before Smolensk, captured the city, and set up a garrison there. He then came to the hills of Kiev and saw how Askold and Dir reigned there. He hid his Warriors in the boats, left some other behind, and went forward himself bearing the child Igor.</p>	<p>The first act begins with the founding of Moscow. Here the envoys from Kiev come to Oleg to complain about Oskold. In the <i>Notes</i>, it is written thus concerning the complaint: "The authors think that the reason behind this was that Oskold, during the time of his campaign in Constantinople, had adopted the Christian faith and that the Kievans, upon learning this, informed Oleg, complaining that Oskold was baptized without the guidance of the Great Prince and wished to change the faith of his people." And thus, Oleg was forced to go to Kiev, where he received news from the north, west, and south about the baptism of his relatives, the Dutch king Harald, and Boris, the Bulgarian tsar, along with Borivoj, the Czech prince. It is true that these baptisms took place around that time, either slightly before or after, as is evidenced by the excerpts from the history of those people. Remarks of these examples were printed at the end of <i>Notes</i>.</p>



Act	Primary Chronicle	Catherine's Preface
Act 2	<p>He thus came to the foot of the Hungarian hill, and after concealing his troops, he sent messengers to Askold and Dir, representing himself as a stranger on his way to Greece on an errand for Oleg and for Igor, the prince's son, and requesting that they should come forth to greet them as members of their race. Askold and Dir straightway came forth. Then all the soldiery jumped out of the boats, and Oleg said to Askold and Dir, "You are not princes nor even of princely stock, but I am of princely birth." Igor' was then brought forward, and Oleg announced that he was the son of Rurik. They killed Askold and Dir, and after carrying them to the hill, they buried them there. Oleg set himself up as the prince in Kiev and declared that it should be the mother of Russian cities.</p>	<p>The second act begins with the march of Ugrians troops past Kiev, while at the same time, Igor meets with Oleg.</p> <p>Here we digress from history, as Igor, being young when Oleg succeeded Oskold, consequently could not marry Prekrasa in Kiev until several years after these events. Oskold was killed when he was deposed, but here he joins the Ugrians. After Oskold is deposed, Igor and Oleg enter Kiev, where Prekrasa is brought over.</p>
	<p>Oleg began expanding territory by conquering and imposing tributes from years 883-885. He established his authority over the Polyanians, the Derevians, the Severians, and the Radimichians, but waged war with the Ulichians and the Tivercians.</p> <p>On the lands where the princes and tribes were baptized, "Our nation is baptized, and yet we have no teacher to direct and instruct us and interpret the sacred scriptures. We understand neither Greek nor Latin. Some teach us one thing and some another. We don't understand written characters or their meaning. Therefore, send us teachers who can make known to us the words of the scriptures and their sense." Emperor Michael sent scholars to interpret the holy scriptures to them. The Slavs rejoiced to hear the Greatness of God extolled in their native tongue. Emperor Leo incited the Magyar (nomads) against the Bulgarians (baptized).</p>	

Act	Primary Chronicle	Catherine's Preface
Act 3	<p>As Igor grew up, he followed after Oleg and obeyed instructions. A wife, Olga by name, was brought to him from Pskov.</p>	<p>The third act opens with the wedding attire of Prekrasa, and almost the entire act is dedicated to the ancient rites observed at a wedding. In the end, Oleg prepares to go to Constantinople, which is true to history as regards the number of people and boats that were with him. Before departing, Igor renames Prekrasa Olga, and this is similar to what took place in history.</p>
Act 4	<p>Leaving Igor in Kiev, Oleg attacked the Greeks. He took a multitude of tribes who were pagans. All these tribes are known as Great Synthia by the Greeks. Oleg sallied forth by horse and by ship, and the number of his vessels was 2000. He arrived before Tsar'gard, but the Greeks fortified the strait and closed up the city. They waged war around the city and slaughtered many Greeks. They also destroyed many places and churches. Prisoners were beheaded, tortured, and shot. Oleg commanded his warriors to make wheels, which they attached to the ships, and when the wind was favourable, they spread the sails and bore down upon the city from the open country. When the Greeks beheld this, they were afraid and sent messages to Oleg, they implored him not to destroy the city and offered to submit to such tribute as he should desire. Thus, Oleg halted his troops. The Greeks then brought out his food and wine, but would not accept it, for it was mixed with poison. Then the Greeks were terrified and exclaimed, "This is not Oleg, but St. Demetrius, whom God has sent upon us." So Oleg demanded that they pay tribute for his 2000 ship at the rate of 12 gribny per man, with forty men reckoned to a ship.</p>	<p>In the fourth act, Oleg concluded a famous peace treaty near Constantinople. Catherine remarked, "this event is taken word for word from the history of Russia and foreign countries where this is precisely mentioned."</p>

Act	Primary Chronicle	Catherine's Preface
Act 5	<p>The Greeks assented to these terms and prayed for peace lest Oleg should conquer the land of Greece. Retiring thus a short distance from the city, Oleg concluded peace with the Greek Emperors Leo and Alexander. Emperors and Oleg made peace after agreeing upon the tribute (terms proposed by the Russes) and mutually binding themselves by oath. They kissed the cross and invited Oleg and his men to swear an oath likewise. According to the religion of the Russes, the latter swore by their weapons and by their god, thus confirming the treaty. The Russes hung their shields upon the gates as a sign of victory, and Oleg then departed from Tsar'gard.</p> <p>Oleg despatched his vassals to make peace and to draw up a treaty between the Greeks and the Russes. His envoys thus made a declaration. The Emperor honoured the Russian envoys with gifts.</p>	<p>In the fifth act, things do not diverge in the least from history, because Oleg really did have a meeting with the Eastern Emperor Leo. The end of our historical spectacle stays equally true to history, as Oleg did attach Igor's shield to the Hippodrome.</p>

**Table 2.1** Overview of the storyline of *The Early Reign of Oleg*, comparing the *Russian Primary Chronicle* and Catherine's preface.

Table 2.1 demonstrates the similarities between Catherine's *Oleg* and the "actual" Russian annals. Her attention to detail, such as the number of soldiers, was to establish its accuracy and authenticity of her play while providing a more merciful outlook.

## CHAPTER 3 EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY RUSSIAN MUSIC

### 3.1 Common Understandings of Russian Music

The idea of “Russian music” has largely revolved around the music of composers predominantly famous for the “Russianness” of their music. Their music is distinguished by its use of Russian idioms, Russian folk elements, Eastern European and Caucasus tunes, Russian church music, and the Russian nationalist themes embedded in their music. An article by Classic FM titled *The 15 best pieces by Russian classical music* is representative of the popular perception of what counts in the history of “Russian music.”<sup>71</sup> In it, Glinka is hailed as the “father of Russian music” for his deft incorporation of Russian folk and church elements into Western musical forms. Glinka is followed by the Mighty Handful (*Moguchaya Kuchka*), a rag-tag school of non-professional musicians comprising Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, Alexander Borodin, Modest Musorgsky, Cesar Cui, Mili Balakirev, often positioned as an emphatically nationalist group in opposition to the more cosmopolitan Pyotr Il’ych Tchaikovsky.<sup>72</sup> The following generation including Alexander Glazunov, Aleksandr Scriabin, Sergei Rachmaninov, Igor Stravinsky, Reinhold Glière, Aram Khachaturian, and Dmitri Shostakovich brought Russian music into the twentieth century. In other words: the article reinforces the popular perception that there was no music of note from Russia prior to the nineteenth century.

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<sup>71</sup> Rob Weinberg, “The 15 Best Pieces of Russian Classical Music,” Classic FM, September 26, 2014, <https://www.classicfm.com/discover-music/latest/best-russian-classical-music/>. Classic FM is one of the United Kingdom’s three Independent National Radio stations. The Mighty Handful includes Mily Balakirev, Modest Mussorgsky, Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, Cesar Cui, and Alexander Borodin.

<sup>72</sup> Richard Taruskin, “Non-Nationalists and Other Nationalists” in *19<sup>th</sup>-Century Music* 35, no. 2 (Fall 2011): 133-137. This article challenged the distinction between Russian nationalist composers and non-nationalist composers is largely an invention of Vladimir Stasov, the mouthpiece for the *kuchka*, which has been vastly exaggerated.

Stuart Campbell's Grove Music Online entry for Glinka deems him "the first Russian composer to combine distinction in speaking the musical idiom of the day with a personal and strongly original voice."<sup>73</sup> This is inaccurate. Campbell's primary justification was that Glinka had a lot of interaction with Russian traditions at an early age and travelled to the Caucasus during his early twenties, which had exposed him to a wider range of Eastern European tunes.<sup>74</sup> This led to Glinka's music being regarded "primarily as the essential forerunner of all that is associated with the ideals of Russian musical nationalism."<sup>75</sup> His achievements are not to be discounted, as many nineteenth- and twentieth-century composers looked to Glinka's compositions as models, but Western art music was cultivated in Russia prior to Glinka. Though art music in Russia has largely been understood to have begun in the early nineteenth century, its blossoming is largely due to Catherine the Great's vigour in cultivating Russian culture.

Glinka received his early music training in the Western art music tradition. This training enabled him to gain facility in the Western musical vernacular, which appealed to fine art patrons, including aristocrats and the bourgeoisie. As Campbell pointed out, Glinka's time in St. Petersburg was spent studying the classical restraint and elegant structures of the eighteenth century from composers such as Haydn, Beethoven, Schubert, Hummel, and Field.<sup>76</sup> In 1818, Glinka was among the 120 or so gentry youths enrolled in the new Noble Boarding School attached to the Pedagogical College in St. Petersburg, instructed by cosmopolitan poet Wilhelm Kuchelbecker. During this period, he took

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<sup>73</sup> Stuart Campbell, "Glinka, Mikhail Ivanovich," in *Grove Music Online*. 2001, accessed March 23, 2023. <https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.11279>

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, While Glinka was young living under his father's care, his servants had introduced him to Russian folk songs, lore, and traditions.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

piano and violin lessons from John Field and Charles Mayer. Additionally, Glinka's prolific operatic compositional capabilities were moulded by Rossini's Italian operatic techniques, and the leading Italian music publisher of the time, Ricordi, reckoned Glinka the equal of Bellini or Donizetti.<sup>77</sup> Not only did Glinka study under the tutelage of leading musical figures, but he also benefited from good publicity, which eventually led to his long-lasting celebrated success. After leaving the school in 1822, Glinka studied symphonies and operatic overtures by Mozart, Beethoven, Cherubini, Haydn, and others. He also took singing lessons from Belloli, later in 1824.<sup>78</sup>

In sum, Glinka had a thoroughly cosmopolitan musical background, which, paradoxically, provided the foundation for his distinctively "Russian" musical identity, a circumstance that is presaged in *Oleg*, which introduced Russian folk elements within a larger cosmopolitan frame.<sup>79</sup> Glinka's cosmopolitanism should be accentuated and highlighted as much as his Russianness. The "sound" of cosmopolitanism itself is a part of the Russian soundscape, and its origins can be traced back to the late-seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Understanding this may help us realize Stravinsky's vision and desire that the multitudes see "Russian music" just "simply as music" in a larger European context.<sup>80</sup> Taruskin also challenges the narrow-minded and superficial notion that Russian

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<sup>77</sup> Campbell, "Glinka."

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Also paradoxically, nineteenth-century Russian "nationalist" composers would allude directly to "cosmopolitan" music in their attempts to project as distinctively "Russian" national style. For instance, Richard Taruskin and Steven Baur have shown that both Rimsky-Korsakov and Musorgsky made direct references to Glinka's fairy-tale opera *Ruslan and Ludmilla* in their self-consciously "nationalistic" music from the 1860s and 1870s. See Richard Taruskin, "Chernomor to Kaschei: Harmonic Sorcery; Or, Stravinsky's 'Angle'," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 38, no. 1 (Spring, 1985): 72-142, and Steven Baur, "Russia, Western Europe, and Pictures at an Exhibition" in *Russische Musik in Westeuropa vor 1917: Ideen – Funktionen – Transfers*, ed. Inga Mai Groote and Stefan Keym (Munich: Edition Text und Kritik, 2018): 206-28.

<sup>80</sup> Taruskin, "Some Thoughts," 337.

music only approaches “high art” when it projects a sense of “Russianness” through the incorporation of “Russian chant or folk songs.”<sup>81</sup>

In order to overcome these prejudices, I believe that musicologists and researchers should bring forth, encourage, and popularise the notion that a cosmopolitan sound based on the Western art music tradition should not be used to devalue Russian music to echo Ritzarev’s call for a thorough rethinking of Russian music, especially in the eighteenth century. Her objective was not to discount the significance of Russian elements, their potential to inspire creativity, major Russian genres (such as horn music and the spiritual concerto), or Russia’s original aesthetics and ethical values, which were tied to their primacy and closeness to Russian soil. However, Ritzarev makes a compelling case that we need neither be advocating nor impugning the entire body of European-derived genres that Russian musicians familiarized, assimilated, and eventually mastered.<sup>82</sup> Rather, she urges us to view these characteristics for their significance as an introduction to the world of nineteenth-century Russian music.

### 3.2 Cosmopolitanism in Eighteenth-Century Russian Music

There are multiple factors that led the Russian court to adopt musical forms and styles from the West. These Western borrowings, however, were contained within their broader Russian context, a complex historical and cultural heritage grounded in the Orthodox Church. The struggles between the internal domination of Orthodoxy and

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<sup>81</sup> Taruskin, “Some Thoughts,” 328. Taruskin elaborated that Stravinsky’s early Symphony in E-flat as emphatically “Russian,” despite its lack from chant or folk song, for it is saturated with characteristic devices of chromatic harmony and modulation from Rimsky-Korsakov, Glazunov and Tchaikovsky. Hence, demonstrating that the music does not necessarily need to have Russian idioms to be considered as Russian music.

<sup>82</sup> Ritzarev, *Russian Music*, 8.

liberation from Byzantium lasted many centuries. It was hard for the secular state establishment to challenge the Church's authority, bolstered by both material resources and a firm grip on the hearts and minds of the people. The Church's successful propagation of the concept of "sacred and national" as a single symbol of Russian genuineness delayed and prevented advancement in secular culture.<sup>83</sup> For instance, the "secular, alien, and new" were portrayed as Western evils, and were considered unlikely to bring about any improvement to the Russians.

The Church's dominance, strict discipline, and abhorrence of anything but the purely sacred stunted the development of Russian folklore and music.<sup>84</sup> The Church's suppression of these rites eventually dissociated the ritual music from its functionality. However, important rituals such as marriage and burial survived Church suppression without being fundamentally altered. The complexity of how the Church influenced and shaped Russian music was made apparent when the Wilmot sisters, British collectors of Russian folk songs in the early nineteenth century, noted that elements of pagan superstitions were organically interlaced with Orthodox rites.<sup>85</sup>

The Russian Orthodox Church also condemned the *skomorokhi*, groups of folk musicians or minstrel entertainers, particularly instrumentalists playing medieval European instruments such as *gusli*, *svirel* (a woodwind instrument similar to an oboe), *gudok* (similar to a fiddle), horns, shamanic-like drums, small bells, tambourines, and noisemakers. The traditional medieval popular entertainment, such as clowning,

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<sup>83</sup> Ritzarev, *Russian Music*, 10.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, examples were quoted from Ritzarev; (the Marchioness of Londonderry and H.M. Hyde, 1934:238; Cross, 1988:32).



acrobatics, puppet shows, juggling, performing animals, and so on, were also performed by these musicians.<sup>86</sup> The Orthodoxy's unbending suppression of pagan "satanic games," often associated with pagan ritual and accompanied by instrumental music, certainly stifled the development and progression of secular music-making. Tsar Alexey (1629-1676 – with a fundamentally spiritual worldview, influenced by his ecclesiastical tutors) banned all entertainment halls.<sup>87</sup> Under his proclamation "On the Righting of Morals and the Abolition of Superstition" in 1648, the tsar banned all popular pastimes and amusement for moral and religious purposes. As a result, the *skomorokhi*'s arts were deported to Siberia and northern parts of Russia.<sup>88</sup> They were condemned for their "satanic" songs and dances, their bear acts, and use of masks. Tsar Alexey proposed drastic measures to curb and ultimately eradicate these vestiges of paganism. All musical instruments connected with such entertainment were confiscated and burned, while people who engaged in *skomorokhi* activities were met with severe penalties.<sup>89</sup>

Musical entertainment such as the *skomorokhi* was legalized in the court of Peter the Great, which prompted the rise of music in the theatre. Peter's court also relaxed restrictions on vocal music which hastened the development of the leading genres in Russian music for churches and courts. Genres such as the *a cappella* spiritual concerto, *kanty* and *psalmy* (popular spiritual three-voiced songs),<sup>90</sup> opera seria, mass, and oratorio,

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<sup>86</sup> Ritzarev, *Russian Music*, 16-17.

<sup>87</sup> Russell Zguta, "Skomorokhi: The Russian Minstrel-Entertainers," *Slavic Review* 31, no. 2 (1972): 303-305. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2494335>. He elaborated that the skomorokhi also contributed to their eventual demise, as the skomorokhi had degenerated into common thieves and outlaws.

<sup>88</sup> Ritzarev, *Russian Music*, 21.

<sup>89</sup> Zguta, "Skomorokhi," 306.

<sup>90</sup> Ritzarev, *Russian Music*, 29. *Kanty* and *Psalm* are three-voiced songs – bass and two upper voices in thirds. Russian urban music-making adopted the new and popular semi-secular genre and it became the primary source for the development of functional music. Both terms refer to the same functions of music

were the only genres of music before Glinka that Russian society recognised as legitimate.<sup>91</sup> Afterwards, Russian comic opera begin to develop in the 1770s under Catherine the Great's reign.<sup>92</sup> She herself wrote librettos for five comic operas, such as *Fevey* (1786), *Novgorodskiy bogatir' Boyeslavich* ("Boyeslavich, Champion of Novgorod"; 1786), *Khrabroy i smeloy vityaz' Akhrideich* ("The Brave and Bold Knight Akhrideich"; 1787), *Gorebogatir Kosometovich* ("The Sorrowful Hero Kosometovich"; 1789) and *Fedul s det'mi* ("Fedul and his Children"; 1791).

The thirty-four-year reign of Empress Catherine II (1762-96) supplied an array of musicians for the Russian court, including Vincenzo Manfredini and Baldassare Galuppi (Italian), Anton Ferdinand Tietz and Johann Palshau (German), Jean Batiste Cardon (French), and Russia's very own musicians, Maxim Berezovsky and Dmitry Stepanovich Bortniansky. Ritzarev identifies three musical periods at Catherine's court: 1760s-70s, baroque-preclassical style; 1780s, classic court fashion; and 1790s-1800s, sentimental mode.<sup>93</sup>

### 3.3 Russian Folk Songs and Folk Music

The rise of printing in eighteenth-century Russia was part of its secularization, urbanization and Westernization. The technology preserved and disseminated Russian folk songs, poetic texts, and early urban and peasant traditions. The first printed collection, *A Collection of Various Songs* (1770-1774) edited by Mikhail Chulkov,

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where it uses spiritual texts of psalms while using the Western-European harmonic progression of tonic and dominant chords, and their relative keys.

<sup>91</sup> Ritzarev, *Russian Music*, 7.

<sup>92</sup> Simon Karlinsky, "Russian Comic Opera in the Age of Catherine the Great," *19<sup>th</sup>-Century Music* 7, no. 3 (1984): 318. <https://doi.org/10.2307/746384>. Russian comic opera was essentially a literary rather than a musical-dramatic genre in Catherine's time.

<sup>93</sup> Ritzarev, *Russian Music*, 8.

contains song texts (without tunes), which had an enormous influence on future composers.<sup>94</sup> Next, Vasily Trutovsky was the first to publish a collection of Russian folk songs with melodies. A pioneering work, Trutovsky's *A Collection of Russian Simple Songs with Music* (1776-79) holds a place of honour in Russian folk music research.<sup>95</sup> Both of these composers had a huge impact on Nikolai Lvov and Ivan Prach, whose folk songs were incorporated in Catherine the Great's *The Early Reign of Oleg*.

One of the two composers of the *Collection*, Nikolai Aleksandrovich Lvov (1751-1803) was a gifted nobleman with many interests and talents in many fields. He was a poet, musician, artist, architect, and a practicing geologist and archeologist.<sup>96</sup> He lived in St. Petersburg but travelled widely as a diplomat. Additionally, he was an honorary member of both the Academy of Arts and the Academy of Science.<sup>97</sup> Lvov's role in the art, literature, and music scene is comparable to the prominent nineteenth-century Russian music and art critic Vladimir Stasov.<sup>98</sup> Lvov's elite salon started in 1779 was called *Khruzhok L'vova* (Lvov's circle), a gathering that attracted the cream of the nationalistic Enlightenment-oriented intelligentsia. Lvov was a leader among prominent intellectuals and poets that held government official positions. They were Vasily Kapnist

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<sup>94</sup> Margarita Mazo, "Introduction and Appendixes," in *A Collection of Russian Folk Songs by Nikolai Lvov and Ivan Prach*, ed. Malcolm Hamrick Brown, (London: UMI Research Press, 1987), 15-16. Chulkov's collection was published in four parts, each containing 200 texts.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid. Trutovsky's collection was published in four parts, each containing 20 songs.

<sup>96</sup> Ritzarev, *Russian Music*, 199.

<sup>97</sup> Mazo, *Collection*, 25.

<sup>98</sup> Stuart Campbell, "Stasov, Vladimir Vasil'yevich," in *Grove Music Online*, January 20, 2001, <https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.26573>. Vladimir Stasov (1824-1906) was a Russian art and music critic. His fascination with fine arts started in his Florence posting in the mid-nineteenth century. He aimed to promote Russian art and traditions to overcome public preference for Western culture. Thus, Stasov's literary critics in music discussion revolve around terms such as 'nationality,' where he champions Russianness, vitality and originality unfettered by 'German rules.' He coined the phrase *Moguchaya Kuchka* (the Mighty Handful).

(1758-1823), Ivan Khemnister (1745-84) and Gavriil Derzhavin (1743-1816);<sup>99</sup> musicians and artists such as Dmitry Bortniansky (1751-1825), Yevstigney Fomin (1761-1800), Vasily Pashkevich (1742-1797) and Ivan Prach (ca.1750-1818) were among the renowned men of arts to gather and discuss the arts, philosophize, and sometimes sing.<sup>100</sup>

Lvov contributed to the music scene with two major developments towards the end of the 1780s. Firstly, he participated in cultivating Russia's first national opera by Fomin, titled *Post Drivers* (1787). Fomin was acknowledged by Lvov to be Russia's national opera composer.<sup>101</sup> In the line of cultivating a more "Russian" sounding opera, Lvov's involvement in *Post Drivers* was to highlight and embed musical aspects of the "folklore ensemble," with elements taken from his *Collection*. This led to his next contribution, his greatest endeavour, the famous *A Collection of Russian Folk Songs by Nikolai Lvov and Ivan Prach*, published in 1790. The *Collection* is an accomplishment comparable to the literary publications of the Russian Academy.<sup>102</sup>

The other contributor to the *Collection* was Ivan Prach. He is also known as Johan Gottfried Pratsch, a Russified Bohemian musician who came from Silesia and was probably from Czechia. Prach arrived at St. Petersburg in the 1770s working as a clavichord master and music teacher. Later, he was appointed at the Institute for Young Ladies of Noble Birth (1780-90 and 1791-95), teaching composition and clavichord.<sup>103</sup> Prach is also known for his fondness for writing variations on Russian music, which

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<sup>99</sup> Derzhavin was the brother-in-law and a close friend of Lvov. He was an avid proponent of Catherine the Great. Derzhavin had written many poems that sing Catherine's greatness and virtue.

<sup>100</sup> Mazo, *Collection*, 25.

<sup>101</sup> Ritzarev, *Russian Music*, 199.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 201.

<sup>103</sup> Mazo, *Collection*, 27-28.

provided material for salon music-making.<sup>104</sup> His music compositions and arrangements were published in St. Petersburg, comprising 15 works, including piano-vocal reductions of two operas.<sup>105</sup> Prach also made a piano-vocal reduction on *Oleg*;<sup>106</sup> a note-worthy aspect because it shows Catherine's intention of distributing it for domestic consumption, in which her "enlightened" ideals could reach a wider audience.

*A Collection of Russian Folk* was first published in 1790 and had gone through a total of five reprints, each with significant and important modifications.<sup>107</sup> The first publication with only Prach's name on the title page, *Collection of Russian Folk Songs with Their Tunes Set to Music by I.P.*, contained only 100 songs. According to Nikolai Finderzen, the surviving first edition copies had only text and no music, similar to Chulkov's collection.<sup>108</sup> The *Collection's* preface claims the volume's great historical significance as it is the earliest known extensive discussion of Russian folk songs. It explains that the songs selected for publication would document what was currently popular and available, how Russian artist thought about its national arts, and most importantly, the questions that occupied the Russian intelligentsia. Although Lvov's name was not printed on its cover, he was presumably the author of the 1790 preface. Lvov

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<sup>104</sup> Ritzarev, *Russian Music*, 204.

<sup>105</sup> The two piano-vocal reductions were from the opera *The woeful bogatyr Kosometovich*, music by Soler and *Fevei*, music by Pashkevich.

<sup>106</sup> Brover-Lubovsky, "The Greek Project of Catherine the Great and Giuseppe Sarti," 38. The piano-vocal reduction was published in 1893 by the Moscow firm of P. Jurgenson.

<sup>107</sup> Previous scholars, such as Gerald Seaman and Robert Eitner, often mistakenly considered the first and second editions as continuous work and the third as its second edition.

<sup>108</sup> Mazo, *Collection*, 21. Chulkov's was the first compilation of Russian folk tunes and it is also without harmonisations or accompaniment. Mazo stated that there was no available copy for examination. All references to the first editions, including the 1790 preference, were based on its representation in the fifth edition and Findeizen, 1929.

stated that he took upon himself the task of not only presenting the songs but also observing the current state of folk singing.<sup>109</sup>

Lvov's *Collection* was well aligned with Catherine's vision of associating Russian roots with the Greeks – her so-called “Greek Project.”<sup>110</sup> The 1790 preface gave a detailed explanation of how Russian folk music's origins can be traced back to ancient Greek music and its Greek theory.

“...divided their music into Theoretical, or *Music for the Mind*, and Practical, or *Music for the Performance*... this latter was divided again into two parts, Melodic and Harmonic... This division of music by the ancient Greeks serves very naturally to divide our national songs as well.”<sup>111</sup>

Furthermore, the *Collection* also served as a glorification of the empress. Not only did Lvov dedicate this important work to Catherine, but he also used texts and overtones to propagate a royalist ideology by assimilating the words “Empress” or “God.”<sup>112</sup> One such song, discussed later, is quoted in *Oleg*'s music.

The last few years of Catherine's reign embodied a pluralistic, tolerant, and “enlightened” Western civilization while having a conspicuous nationalist bent. Unlike nineteenth-century nationalism, Catherine's “official nationalism” intended to present her people as happy, dancing, singing, and glorifying their ruler.<sup>113</sup> Hence, the *Collection* was really a megaphone to announce that the Russians were enjoying the prosperity of

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<sup>109</sup> Mazo, *Collection*, 33.

<sup>110</sup> Hugh Radsdale, “Evaluating the Traditions of Russian Aggression: Catherine II and the Greek Project,” in *The Slavonic and East European Review* 66, no 1 (January 1988): 91-117. Catherine's Greek Project is her expansionist foreign policy in south Russia, her intention to enthrone her grandson, Constantine, to become the “restored Byzantine Empire,” and to gain access to Ottoman's controlled areas.

<sup>111</sup> Mazo, *Collection*, 35.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>113</sup> Ritzarev, *Russian Music*, 202

Catherine's empire. The perception is supported by Mazo's findings that Prach's transliteration of the title *Narodnye pesni* can mean both "folk songs" as well as "people's" or "native" songs.<sup>114</sup> The empress's sentiment and message were unequivocally portrayed in the title page of the *Collection* (see figure 3.1); a blissful peasant boy sitting idly on the side of a beautifully carved stone while singing happily on a serene day, as though there were no suffering, poverty, or lack of rights.<sup>115</sup>



**Figure 3.1:** Title page of the *Collection of Russian Folk Songs*, 1790.

<sup>114</sup> Mazo, *Collection*, xi.

<sup>115</sup> Estelle Joubert, "Genre and form in German opera" in *The Cambridge Companion to Eighteenth-Century Opera*, ed. Anthony R. Deldonna and Pierpaolo Polzonetti (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 186-187. Joubert highlights the same case in Johann Adam Hiller's *Die Liebe auf dem Lande* (1767).

The second edition, *Collection of Russian Folk Songs with Their Tunes Set to Music by I.P. Published Anew with the Addition to It of a Second Part*, was published in 1806, three years after Lvov passed. It was expanded into 2 volumes; 98 songs were carried over from the first edition, and 52 new ones were added, for a total of 150 songs. The revised preface, by an unknown author, largely eliminated Lvov's praise of the Greek origins of Russian music. Instead, the 1806 preface argues for the autonomy of Russian folk music and its independent development by questioning its origins. The author explains that the songs belonged to the lower and middle-class social group of Cossacks, people with various military ranks, and factory workers. Nonetheless, the opening pages of the preface enumerate seven royal family members who supported its publication, alongside 139 subscribers' names, mainly members of the upper class. The select social status of this audience suggests that folksong collections such as these were intended not for peasant classes but instead serve to portray idealized versions of peasant life to aristocrats. This edition continued the practice of royal dedication, this time honouring Emperor Alexander I with a newly inserted passage at the end, proudly identifying "sacred fealty in all ways to their sovereigns" as one of the noblest characteristics of the Russian people.<sup>116</sup> This edition of the *Collection* shows that the intelligentsia remained steadfast in supporting the Romanov sovereign.

The 1815 third edition had the same title page as the second edition. It was not until the fourth edition that Alexander Palchikov saw to it that Lvov was credited as the collector, *Russian Folk Songs, Collected by N. A. Lvov. Melodies copied down and*

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<sup>116</sup> Mazo, *Collection*, 27.



*harmonized by Ivan Prach.*<sup>117</sup> Lastly, the final edition from 1955 was a scholarly edition edited by Victor Beliaev, equipped with an extensive scholarly introduction with prefaces to the earlier editions. As expected, the last edition has its own title version, a combination of the collectors' names, *The Collection of Folk Russian songs with their tunes by Lvov-Prach*. Beliaev's emphasis on both authors was crucial as it highlights that the famous folk music collection was not put together only by a "foreigner" but also by a Russian-born musician too. However, he failed to foresee that a "new author" with a hyphenated name was thus unintentionally introduced. The joint last name has sometimes created confusion and has been mistakenly picked up by some Western scholars.

The *Collection* has garnered different receptions in academic circles. In twentieth-century Soviet Russia, music historian Semion Orlov in his extensive study of the *Collection* and Prach's role in transcribing and arranging the folk tunes. He claimed that the *Collection* does not have an "authentic" Russian tune because Prach only transcribed Russian melodies from the social singing at Lvov's home and the music was fitted after. He also expressed that because Prach was a foreigner, he was incapable of understanding traditional Russian folk song, thus explaining Prach's strange arrangements and transcriptions that sounded "Western" and inaccurate.<sup>118</sup> Many critics, especially Soviet writers, shared the same sentiment and credited the whole *Collection* only to Lvov.

Soviet scholars' assessments were rather captious as they neglected to take a few aspects into consideration. Firstly, Lvov and Prach's methodology of compiling songs could not fairly be compared to ethnomusicological approaches of the twentieth century

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<sup>117</sup> Mazo, *Collection*, 22. Though in Palchikov's preface of the fourth edition, the sequence of the sections was changed for unknown reasons.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

or the present day. Bela Bartok, and his student, Zoltan Kodaly travelled to rural areas and collected samples of folksongs, transcribing into standard European notation (and often distorting the music to make it legible in this notation system) with the aid of a phonograph.<sup>119</sup> Lvov and Prach, by contrast, collected songs from the streets of the recently founded city of St. Petersburg. On another note, Prach indicated that one of his aims for the *Collection* was to provide material for salon music-making.<sup>120</sup> This helps explain why the transcriptions and arrangements were in vocal and piano arrangements. The “inauthentic” harmonic accompaniments, as a matter of fact, were emblematic of the cosmopolitan soundscape of eighteenth-century St. Petersburg’s. Therefore, the *Collection* should not be understood as a presentation of traditional rural song but rather scholars should acknowledge how Europeanised the Russian court was in order to fully capture the impact of this folk song collection.

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<sup>119</sup> David Taylor Nelson, “Bela Bartok: The Father of Ethnomusicology,” *Musical Offerings* 3, no. 2 (2012): 78, [https://digitalcommons.cedarville.edu/musicalofferings/vol3/iss2/2?utm\\_source=digitalcommons.cedarville.edu%2Fmusicalofferings%2Fvol3%2Fiss2%2F2&utm\\_medium=PDF&utm\\_campaign=PDFCoverPages](https://digitalcommons.cedarville.edu/musicalofferings/vol3/iss2/2?utm_source=digitalcommons.cedarville.edu%2Fmusicalofferings%2Fvol3%2Fiss2%2F2&utm_medium=PDF&utm_campaign=PDFCoverPages)

<sup>120</sup> Ritzarev, *Russian Music*, 204.

## Chapter 4 PLAY AND MUSIC ANALYSIS

### 4.1 *The Early Reign of Oleg*, Music by Carlo Ciliberto, Vasilij Pashkevich, and Giuseppe Sarti for the Play by Catherine the Great

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Catherine described *The Early Reign of Oleg* as “more historical truth than fiction.” Catherine’s declaration was deliberately made to distinguish this writing from her other’s writings. Similar to other monarchs, such as Maria Antonia of Saxony (1724-80), a princess of Saxony and renowned opera composer,<sup>121</sup> Catherine had a keen interest in political history. Therefore, she turned to Shakespeare’s historic plays as models for her work as a monarch-playwright.<sup>122</sup> The gravity of this play suggests that Catherine’s covert intentions were to seize and control the narration of Russia’s welfare under her reign. Thereafter, the purpose of her massively lavish production was really to showcase to her local and international audience how Russia was thriving amongst the great European empires and kingdoms. Through *Oleg*, Catherine was able to mould the narrative concerning Russia’s welfare, economics, intellectual life, politics, diplomacy, warfare, and culture, simultaneously highlighting that Russia’s achievements were all thanks to the magnificent ruler, Catherine the Great herself.

Similar to the *Collection*, the play too had an illustrated title page (see figure 4.1). The borders are decorated with beautiful flowers, vines, ribbons, and a Greek lyre set at the top. The drawing paints a brave warrior – possibly the Grand Prince Oleg – leading his troops from Kiev to slay the Greek soldiers in Constantinople. Battleships are docked

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<sup>121</sup> Estelle Joubert, “Performing Sovereignty, Sounding Autonomy: Political Representation in the Operas of Maria Antonia of Saxony,” *Music & Letters* 96, No. 3 (August 2015): 344-346.

<sup>122</sup> O’Malley, *Dramatic Works*, 139.

while the armoured warrior courageously strikes his enemies. Not only does the picture function in the same way as the *Collection*, providing an abstract of how magnificent Oleg was, but the artist that drew the engravings was no other than Lvov.<sup>123</sup> Additionally, he prepared a Russian translation of Sarti's "explanation", a distinctive neoclassicist trait, in which he explained that his modal compositional method was to integrate the Greek qualities in Act 5, stating "the scene from Euripides, in view of its position and nature, must be performed in the ancient Greek manner and therefore the music must be in the same style." Despite this, Lvov and Prach were not credited among the composers of the play – even though their folksongs, including Prach's piano reductions, were incorporated. The intelligentsia's involvement demonstrates the magnitude of this project.

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<sup>123</sup> Brover-Lubovsky, "The Greek Project," 38.



**Figure 4.1:** Title page of *The Early Reign of Oleg*, 1791

Although there were only three names listed as *Oleg*'s composers, Catherine actually commissioned four composers to set her libretto to music. When *Oleg* was conceived, the newly appointed Kapellmeister Domenico Cimarosa (1749-1801) was tasked to write choral and instrumental music for Act 5, the Greek scene in Constantinople. Cimarosa was an established and leading Italian comic opera composer

holding prestigious positions in both Naples and Venice. It was no surprise that Catherine would extend an invitation to Cimarosa to join her Russian court in 1787.<sup>124</sup> His stint in Russia was rather short as he could not withstand Russia's cold weather and the disdain of the empress and her court. Catherine's dissatisfaction with Cimarosa's work was reflected in her reaction to his attempt at Act 5. The empress's secretary, Alexander Khrapovitskii, bluntly expressed her disappointment with Cimarosa's choral writing and wanted Sarti to supersede.<sup>125</sup>

Giuseppe Sarti (1729-1802) was the only one of the "Russian Italian" composers<sup>126</sup> – a designation that acknowledged his contributions to Russian court culture while preserving his Italian origins as a composer and musician – to receive the Russian rank of Collegial Counsellor, equivalent to the military rank of colonel. Sarti is the composer most frequently mentioned among his colleagues in contemporary memoirs, documents, and other reminiscences,<sup>127</sup> and he earned his prestigious reputation by working with many aristocrats around Europe, including the Russian ambassador to Denmark, Prince Filosofoff, Queen Juliane Marie and Queen Karoline Mathilde in Denmark; Kapellmeister of St Mark's Cathedral in Venice and Maestro di cappella of Milan.<sup>128</sup> Sarti's entry to Catherine's court was presumably through her son, Paul I, during his incognito travels when he was impressed by Sarti's *Alessandro e Timoteo*.

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<sup>124</sup> Jennifer E. Johnson and Gordana Lazarevich, "Cimarosa, Domenico," in *Grove Music Online*, 2001, accessed June 22, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.05785>.

<sup>125</sup> Brover-Lubovsky, "Greek Tragedy," 40.

<sup>126</sup> Ritzarev used the term "Russian Italian" "acts" similarly to a conferment in order to express Sarti's great contribution to Russian music and his activities had stimulated intense Russian interest.

<sup>127</sup> Ritzarev, *Russian Music*, 215.

<sup>128</sup> David DiChiera, Marita P. McClymonds and Caryl Clark, "Sarti [Sardi], Giuseppe," in *Grove Music Online*, accessed June 29, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.24599>.

The last two decades of the eighteenth-century were the peak of Russia's remarkable intellectual flourishing during which Sarti made his debut at the Russian court. Hence, many significant political events were celebrated with Sarti's music, which eventually enhanced his reputation further. Sarti's arrival in 1784 to the Russian court attracted many influential audiences when he first presented the *buffa Gli Amanti consolati*, which he dedicated to the empress. However, scandals involving Sarti led to his eventual dismissal in 1787. The scandal involved the two star singers, Luisa da Todi and Luigi Marchesi, who were invited to sing in the opening of the Hermitage Theatre at the Winter Palace (the collaboration fell through for unknown reasons). Furthermore, Sarti was also involved in many scandals with prima donnas at the end of the century.<sup>129</sup>

The year 1787 was the beginning of Catherine's second Russo-Turkish war. Knowing that the court drama was not her prime necessity, the wise and calculating empress dismissed all three scandal-plagued musicians. Sarti was formally notified of the non-renewal of his contract, and his position was later filled by Cimarosa. Unlike most singers and composers, Sarti did not leave Russia. He later sought refuge and employment from one of Catherine's favourites, the empress's right-hand man and faithful supporter, Prince Potemkin.

It was not until the autumn of 1790 that Sarti was asked to return to St. Petersburg to participate in the "most" important play, *Oleg*. As discussed in the previous chapter, one of Catherine's objectives with *Oleg* was to celebrate and glorify her victory in the Russo-Turkish war. Consequently, she needed to ensure that *Oleg* was perfect for her

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<sup>129</sup> Ritzarev, *Russian History*, 217.

influential and important audience. Thus, Catherine invited Sarti back to court with open arms despite the scandals and damage to his reputation. The empress's urgency was reflected in her private correspondence with Prince Potemkin on August 28, 1789, "The chorus by Cimarosa did not please. That will not do. I sent *Oleg* to Prince Potemkin, so that it will be Sarti who will compose the music."<sup>130</sup>

The other Italian composer commissioned to be a part of *Oleg* was Carlo Canobbio (1741-1822). Canobbio's forte was composing ballets. Upon returning to Italy from Spain, he composed several ballets and led the Teatro S. Samuele orchestra in Venice from 1773-1775.<sup>131</sup> Later in 1779, Cannobio was amongst the foreign kapellmeisters, such as V. Martin y Soler, J. Kerzelli, A. Bullant, and others, to develop opera in Russia.<sup>132</sup> Opera at the time was simply comic opera, characterized by theatrical comedies with the addition of folk songs, overtures, dance, melodramatic scenes, short choruses, and other music dramatic elements. During his two decades of serving Catherine's court, Canobbio was also the deputy to Paisiello, the director of the Italian opera, and first violin in the orchestra. Although Canobbio spent the majority of his time in Russia, there is not much academic literature on the composer as it was not considered seriously until recently. In *Oleg*, Canobbio was responsible for the ballets, to which he contributed one sinfonia, four entr'actes that incorporate Russian folk songs, and a minuet.

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<sup>130</sup> For the actual quote, see Perepiska Kateriny II s G. A. Potëmkinym 1769–91 [Catherine II and G. A. Potemkin. Private Correspondence 1769–91], Literature Monuments, no. 1020 (Moscow: Russian Academy of Science, 1997). Translations were taken from Brover-Lubovsky, "Greek Tragedy," 40.

<sup>131</sup> Geoffrey Norris, "Canobbio, Carlo" in *Grove Music Online*, accessed June 29, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.04740>

<sup>132</sup> Ritzarev, *Russian Music*, 5.



The last composer who collaborated on the play was Vasilij Pashkevich (ca.1742 or 1749-1797). His music education and training were in Russia, under the renowned tutelage of European composers Vincenzo Manfredini (chief composer in Peter III and Catherine's court) and Tommaso Traetta. Pashkevich was active in the Russian music scene, where he was listed as a member of the court orchestra and presumably also sang in the court chapel choir in 1763. Then later in 1773-74, he taught singing at the Academy of Fine Arts and later became an impresario for a grandiose "theatrical festival" in honour of the empress's name-day in 1780. Pashkevich was later re-employed by the court as a violinist in the "first" orchestra in 1783 and was put in charge of music for the royal balls and appointed leader of the orchestra.<sup>133</sup>

The relationship between the monarch and the composer was a close-knit one.<sup>134</sup> It was no coincidence that Catherine chose Pashkevich for the very task of promoting her policy of "official nationalism." Pashkevich understood the magnitude of his role in conveying the empress's message. Thus, he was assigned to set music to Catherine's folktale-inspired librettos, such as *Fevey* (1786), *Fedul and his children* (1791), and *Oleg*. The Soviet historiography critic A. Rabinovich explains that Pashkevich's approach in these "operas" draws on melodic intervals from native folklore and elaborates upon it with techniques from classical music.<sup>135</sup> Ergo, he helped create the "authentic" sound of eighteenth-century Russia, for which his contributions to Russian music were indisputable. In *Oleg*, Pashkevich composed three choruses in Act 3's bridal scene.

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<sup>133</sup> Richard Taruskin, "Pashkevich, Vasily Alekseyevich," in *Grove Music Online*, accessed June 29, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.21006>.

<sup>134</sup> Ritzarev, *Russian Music*, 211.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*

At present, there are no digital recordings available online that could be retrieved other than a 53-second snippet of Pashkevich’s first chorus in BBC radio’s *The Early Music Show*.<sup>136</sup> Thus, this thesis relies on the A-R Editions orchestral edition of *Oleg*, which includes the score, some stage direction translations, a preface and explanation of translations, and other references, with an addition of the 1791 piano reduction for its dialogues.<sup>137</sup> Table 4.1 displays the composers and their compositions according to their appearance in *The Early Reign of Oleg*.

Acts	Libretto	Composer	Genre/Function
Act 1	Catherine	Canobbio	1. Sinfonia
Act 2			2. Entr’acte
			3. Entr’acte
Act 3		Pashkevich	4. First Chorus
		5. Second Chorus	
		6. Third Chorus	
		7. March	
Act 4		Canobbio	8. Entr’acte
			9. Entr’acte + Minuet
Act 5	Catherine and Lomonosov’s odes	Sarti	10. First Chorus
	Catherine’s paraphrase on Euripides’s <i>Alcestis</i>		11. Second Chorus
			12. Third Chorus
			13. Fourth Chorus
			14. Euripides’ <i>Alcestis</i> , Act 3
			15. First Strophe
			16. First Antistrophe
			17. Second Strophe
			18. Second Antistrophe
			19. [Epode]

**Table 4.1:** Chart of *The Early Reign of Oleg*’s acts, librettist, composers, and forms/structures.

<sup>136</sup> “Music at the Court of Catherine the Great,” hosted by Lucie Skeaping, *The Early Music Show*, BBC Radio 3, last aired January 17, 2021. Audio, 17:52. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b09dxbfc>.

<sup>137</sup> Piano reduction 1791-edition can be found at [https://imslp.org/wiki/The\\_Early\\_Reign\\_of\\_Oleg\\_\(Cannobio%2C\\_Carlo\)](https://imslp.org/wiki/The_Early_Reign_of_Oleg_(Cannobio%2C_Carlo)).

The following analysis of each act will not reiterate *Oleg's* storyline in detail. See the previous chapter for a full and comprehensive narrative.

#### 4.1.1 Act 1

The plot begins with Oleg holding a celebration rite for the newly founded city of Moscow at the intersection of three rivers, the Moscow, Yauza, and Neglinny. Nobles, townspeople from different places, and torch-bearing priests are present when a messenger brought news of grievances from Kiev. There is a clear representation of the enlightened ideal of tolerance conveyed through this scene in a specifically Russian context: in the vast Russian lands with diverse multitudes of people from different tribes and ancestry, respect for each other's beliefs, traditions, and culture is essential. Therefore, when Oleg discovers that Oskold had forced the Kievan people to adopt Christianity without consulting the Grand Prince, Oskold was disrespecting the Russian traditions, values, and customs.

The play opens with a sinfonia composed by Canobbio. The sinfonia's melody was no ordinary tune; it quotes a folk song in the *Collection* called "It was lower than the city of Saratov," (see figure 4.2).<sup>138</sup> The tune was taken from the first category (part 1, no 2) of Russian folk song, the *Protiazhnye*. The name was borrowed from folk terminology, and the genre encompasses a diversified imagery. The songs depict the typical peasant folklore about love, family life, women's destiny, and the lives of soldiers.<sup>139</sup> Canobbio quoted the full 8-bar folk song in his first melodic theme while keeping the same tonality. Although the tempo marking for "It was lower than the city of Saratov" indicates *un poco*

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<sup>138</sup> The title translation was taken from AR Edition, edited by Brover-Lubovsky. However, in Lvov and Prach, *A Collection*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, (Prot 1, no.2) edited by Mazo, it is titled *Twas hard by the city of Saratov*.

<sup>139</sup> Mazo, *Collection*, 37-39.

*andante*, whereas the *sinfonia* indicates *allegro comodo*, the elongated rhythmic value in the *sinfonia* gives the same auditory experience of “*un poco andante*.” This category, *Protiazhnye*, is generally a slow or moderate tempo (see figure 4.3).

N<sup>o</sup> 2.  
 Alu poco  
 Andante.

Что по ни же ве ло го ро -  
 да Са ра - - - то ва А по веи ше  
 ве ло го ро да Ца ри цы на.

Л. У. Гролл.

**Figure 4.2:** “It was lower than the city of Saratov” by Lvov and Prach in the *Collection*.



**Figure 4.3:** *Oleg's* piano reduction by Prach, Sinfonia in Act 1 by Canobbio, bar 1-20.

This folk song was not a random choice by Canobbio as its lyrics tell a special tale relevant to the plot of *Oleg*. The libretto printed between the staves of the folk song did not include the entire stanzas; even the AR Editions version does not provide a full translation beyond the first two lines, “It was lower than the city of Saratov and higher than the city of Tsaritsyn.” The song lyrics in their entirety can be found in the *Collection*. They depict a place between the town of Saratov and Tsaritsyn, the mother river (Kamyshneka) that flows among the beautiful banks and the green meadows. There were two decorated boats with brave warriors of Don Cossacks, Grebentsi, and Zaporazhians, singing and glorifying the Russian Emperor, Peter the Great.<sup>140</sup> As noted in the previous chapter, Catherine the Great was an avid disciple of Peter the Great. Her approach to handling her administration was largely based on Peter’s model. Thus, the first piece of her “most” important play quotes a Russian folk song that glorifies the almighty emperor, a clear homage to Peter.

<sup>140</sup> The translations were translated by Dalhousie’s librarian, Paul Duffy. The full translation will be included in the appendix.

The duality of serene scenery and courageous warriors in the folk song is also reflected in Canobbio's music. Canobbio maintains *dolce* and *piano* performance instructions for the folk tune whenever it appears, while sustaining a marching beat in the accompaniment. The tune is passed around between the bassoons and flutes suggesting different people praising Peter, an orchestration typically used to portray peasants singing folk songs in the eighteenth-century opera. The folk melody is treated as a "solo," as the tutti's dynamic drops to *piano*, letting the folk song shine while covertly emphasizing the tune's adulation. The tune makes its last appearance with the violins doubled by the flutes before the finale.

Another crucial reason for using this folk tune in *Oleg*'s opening sinfonia was to establish the "authenticity" of the play from the very beginning. In spite of the play having more Italian composers than Russian, a libretto written by a foreign-born ruler, Catherine, and inspired by an Englishman, Shakespeare, the folk tune abetted and solidified the play's status as a legitimate example of Russian arts and literature, the Russian court, and Russian society. It also reflected the eighteenth-century understanding of "nationality" (which had been conceived as "races") to justify their imagined bloodlines and allegiances to monarchs sanctioned by divine right.<sup>141</sup> Therefore, Canobbio's incorporation of Russian folk songs suggests that he understood the importance of the play from both an artistic as well as political standpoint, demonstrating Jean-Jacques Rousseau's observation that "cultural" and "political" nationalism have

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<sup>141</sup> Matthew Gelbart, *The Invention of 'Folk Music' and 'Art Music': Emerging Categories from Ossian to Wagner* (Cambridge: Cambridge University: 2007), 25.

always been two sides of the same coin.<sup>142</sup> As the premier and subsequent performances drew international and influential audiences, *Oleg's* folk tunes effectively projected a sense of Russian cultural history with a rich past, reinforcing claims to a distinct nationality.<sup>143</sup>

The *sinfonia* commences the opening act with a lively fast tempo and a tune in A major with the strings. Even though the melody's direction indicates *dolce*, it is accompanied by a strong march rhythm on the viola, emphasizing the first and third beats in a 4/4 time signature. The woodwinds, brass, and timpani only make their entrance on the second theme, also emphasizing the same marching beat. Canobbio employs a decent-sized orchestra in the *sinfonia* as he doubles all the woodwinds, horns, and trumpets with a standard string orchestration. As the purpose of the music is to draw the audience's attention to the stage, the dynamic markings throughout the piece are kept mostly *forte*. The *sinfonia* finishes with an orchestral tutti, as the entire ensemble plays every quarter-note beat outlining the tonic A major chord for five bars.

Canobbio's *Sinfonia* exemplifies well several musical characteristics that reflect the rationalist thinking associated with the Enlightenment, including regular antecedent-consequent phrase structure; large-scale formal balance; standardized formal procedures, and a coherent, "logical" tonal plan revolving around the recently codified circle of fifths. Jean-Philippe Rameau's *Treatise on Harmony* (1722) systematized Western tonality, bringing the entire range of musical pitches under rational control. Canobbio's *Sinfonia*

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<sup>142</sup> Matthew Gelbart, "Romanticism, the Folk, and Musical Nationalisms," in *The Cambridge Companion to Music and Romanticism*, ed. Benedict Taylor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 75.

<sup>143</sup> Gelbart, "Romanticism," 75.

displays this musical logic with great clarity and transparency, actually moving fairly well along the circle of fifths, starting in the tonic – A (I) moving through the dominant – E (V), then secondary dominant – B (V of V), even touching on F# (V/B) and C# (V/F#). The tonal meandering is resolved through rational means, and the “perfect,” “natural” order is restored with a series of logical, tonic-confirming cadences. The crystallization of Western tonality during the eighteenth century aligned with the values of “enlightened” monarchs. Both depended on the rigid maintenance of artificial hierarchies, and both functioned best when such hierarchies could hide themselves or be made to seem inevitable, just, and natural (see figure 4.4).<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> Christopher Small, *Musicking: The Meaning of Performing and Listening* (Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1998), 129. Small explains that the equal temperament is a highly abstract and mathematical concept, a metaphorical form for ideal human relationships. His line of thought here is indebted to the influential post-Marxist critical musicology of Theodor Adorno. Others who have explored the ideological relevance of Western tonality include Susan McClary, Robert Fink, and Rose Subotnik.





V I<sup>6</sup> V I V  
 V/V I V I  
 E: V V/B B p1<sup>st</sup> Theme  
 V/V V I I  
 V<sup>M7/IV</sup> IV I I  
 IV I V<sup>7</sup> I V<sup>7</sup> I  
 V<sup>7</sup> I V/F# V/vi  
 # vi (v/V/V) IV bVII IV/IV IV

The image displays a score analysis of Oleg's Sinfonia by Canobbio, consisting of seven systems of piano and bass staves. The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and the time signature is 3/4. The score includes various dynamic markings and chord symbols.

- System 1:** Piano staff starts with *f* and *dolce*. Bass staff has chord symbols *IV*, *V7*, *I*, and *V7*.
- System 2:** Piano staff has *p* and *f*. Bass staff has *p* 1st Theme (highlighted in blue) and *f*. Chord symbols *V7* and *I* are present.
- System 3:** Piano staff has *p* 1st Theme (highlighted in blue). Bass staff has *f*. Chord symbols *IV*, *V*, and *I* are present.
- System 4:** Piano staff has *f*. Bass staff has *f*. Chord symbols *IV IV IV IV* and *I* are present.
- System 5:** Piano staff has *f*. Bass staff has *f*. Chord symbols *IV* and *V* are present.
- System 6:** Piano staff has *f*. Bass staff has *f*. Chord symbols *I*, *IV*, and *V7* are present.
- System 7:** Piano staff has *f*. Bass staff has *f*. Chord symbols *I* and *V* are present.

Figure 4.4: Score analysis of Oleg's Sinfonia by Canobbio.

#### 4.1.2 Act 2

Igor's vassal Oskold, the sovereign of Kiev, had become spellbound by the new religion, Eastern Orthodoxy, when he held Tsargard under siege and brought back the captured Greeks. He then congregated with the captured Christian Greeks and abandoned Kiev's rituals and traditions, thenceforth denouncing the pagan priest. Even though the Russian ruler embraced Christianity in 988, at the time of Oleg, Oskold's actions were seen as disloyal to the native faith, the Grand Prince, and the Russian people. As Oleg ascertained Oskold's treachery, he gathered his troops from different tribes to dispose of him.

Oleg and his army marched to Kiev, although he did not enter the city. With the aim of avoiding bloodshed between the Slavs, Oleg set up camp on the bank of the Dneipr and enticed Oskold to come out to greet his overlords. Oleg took Oskold under guard outside the city walls and pardoned his adversary by merely stripping him of power. Catherine's version of *Oleg* differs slightly from the *Primary Chronicle*, in which he killed Oskold and buried him on a hill. Catherine's alteration of the plot presents Oleg as a merciful ruler, a vital criterion that she herself embodied. Catherine's desire to create a glorious enduring legacy was once again projected through her writing. Another aspect of Catherine's version is that Oleg, a paganist, was able to think rationally and compassionately without the guidance of Christianity. Catherine herself had an ambiguous relationship with Christianity and its cosmology, despite being the official head of Orthodox Church.<sup>145</sup> After her coup, Catherine pursued a policy of secularization in which she reduced the autonomy of the church in pursuit of an enlightened, reason-

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<sup>145</sup> O'Malley, *Dramatic Works*, 135.

based principle of wisdom. She embraced the moral philosophy of Immanuel Kant and the notion that all individuals are capable of making moral decisions and self-governing.<sup>146</sup> Thus, Catherine's re-telling of the Oleg story struck at the ideological foundations of the Church's power to the political benefit enlightened absolutist courts.

Act 2 begins with an Entr'acte by Canobbio (see figure 4.6). As in the Sinfonia from Act 1, Canobbio integrates a folk tune from the *Collection* in its entirety, in this case "Rabbit Dance," preserving its F major tonality and *allegro* tempo marking (see figure 4.5). The tune was taken from *Khconsistsye*, the third category (part 2, no. 1), which are tunes specifically for special dances performed when many village youths gather outdoors. This category consists of flowing tunes as well as animated and fast ones.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> Joubert, "Performing Sovereignty," 346.

<sup>147</sup> Mazo, *Collection*, 53.



№ 2.  
Allegro.

Зайчыка по скаці - зьрынькой  
по пляшці - кружкомь боцькомь повернася кружкомь  
боцькомь повернася.

Figure 4.5: “Rabbit Dance” by Lvov and Prach in the *Collection*.

АНТРАКТЪ КО ВТОРОМУ ДЪЙСТВІЮ.

Allegro.

Каноббіо.

Piano.

Figure 4.6: *Oleg's* piano reduction by Prach, Entr'acte in Act 2 by Canobbio, bar 1-17.

Canobbio orchestrated a larger string section with doubled flutes, oboes, bassoons, and horns in F. The upper strings (and occasionally the flutes) carry the folk tune, while the lower strings, woodwinds, and brass sustain a quarter-note march rhythm. The characteristic march style is appropriate for a scene during which Oleg's army marches to Kiev for the impending battle.

#### 4.1.3 Act 3

After successfully restoring Kiev to order, Oleg's victory is celebrated in conjunction with a wedding. The wedding scene displayed a union and expansion between tribes, where the Grand Prince Igor marries a boyar daughter, Prekrasa.<sup>148</sup> The act opens with an entr'acte by Canobbio, followed by three choruses by Pashkevich, and closes with Canobbio's march.

Unlike the previous two acts, Canobbio not only quoted another Russian folk song in this Entr'acte (see figure 4.8) but also incorporated the *kamarinskaya* rhythmic pattern. The folk song "In the dale stands a snowball tree" (see figure 4.7) was taken from the *Collection's* second category (part 1, no. 15), *Pliasovye* or *Skorye*. Lvov described the form of *Pliasovye* as a short and repeating melodic idea, mostly with joyful content and sung at a fast tempo in a major mode.<sup>149</sup> A German art historian, Jacob Stahlin von Storchsburg (1709-85) during his stay in St. Petersburg invited by the Russian Academy of Science, recorded that *Pliasovye* is "usually a dance, particularly in villages without men, in a circle of Russian maidens or young women, who require neither strident violins

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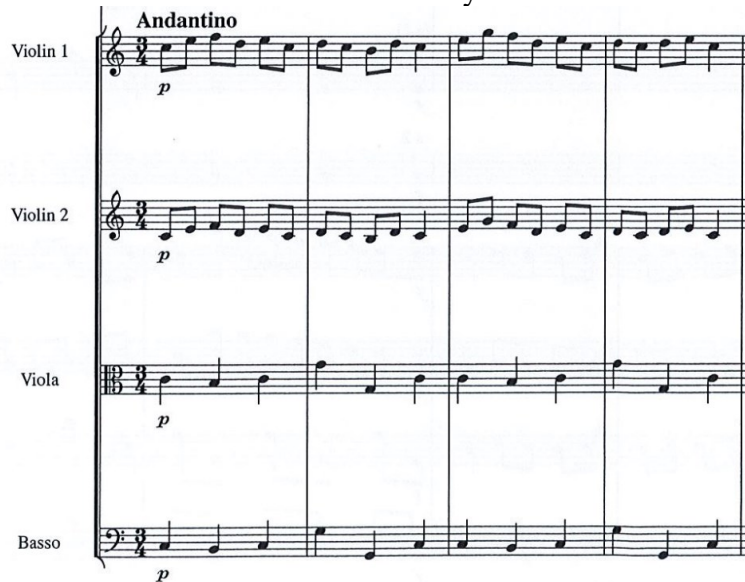
<sup>148</sup> In the *Primary Chronicle*, Prekrasa is named Olga. Naroditskaya in *Bewitching Russia Opera* made a note stating Catherine's brief remarks in her *Notes on Early Russian History* indicate that the bride was renamed for Igor's benefactor and advisor Oleg.

<sup>149</sup> Mazo, *Collection*, 49.

nor growling basses, or any other musical instruments. They replace them entirely with their own voices, singing the tune while dancing.”<sup>150</sup> Thus, the folk song chosen by Canobbio suits the wedding scene brilliantly, where the girls and maidens come together for Prekasa’s happy occasion, dancing away in a fast-paced major song that signals purity and virtue. The appropriate use of the chosen folk song reveals that Canobbio’s selection was made with careful deliberation.



**Figure 4.7:** “In the dale stands a snowball tree” by Lvov and Prach in the *Collection*.



**Figure 4.8:** Entr’acte in Act 3 by Canobbio, bar 1-4.

<sup>150</sup> Mazo, *Collection*, 49.



*Kamarinskaya* was a popular and common dance tune, and it inspired Glinka's *Kamarinskaya*, which eventually led to more self-consciously nationalistic composition in Russia. In Glinka's words, "By chance, I discovered a relationship between the wedding song 'From behind the mountains, the high mountains', which I had heard in the country [and had used in "Svadebnaya pesnya" ('Wedding Song')], and the dance tune, *Kamarinskaya*, which everyone knows. And suddenly my fantasy ran high, and instead of a piano piece I wrote an orchestral piece called 'Wedding Tune and Dance Tune.'"<sup>151</sup>

The *kamarinskaya* pattern (see figure 4.9), described by Mazo as a "syllabic rhythm," refers to the coordinated musical and poetic rhythms, in which the duration of the syllables of the sung text correspond precisely to the durations of spoken language. These syllabic rhythms can be found in *Protiashnaia* (category no.1) and peasant dance forms.<sup>152</sup> The characteristic of *kamarinskaya* usually consists of an 11-syllable pattern where the first 10 syllables are of equal duration and the last one is prolonged. A similar *kamarinskaya* pattern is found in Canobbio's entr'acte 3 (see figure 4.10).



**Figure 4.9:** Example of *kamarinskaya* pattern.<sup>153</sup>

<sup>151</sup> Campbell, "Glinka."

<sup>152</sup> Mazo, *Collection*, 44.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, see *Pri dolinushke kalinushka stoit* (fac.273) and *skuchno, matushka! Vesnoi mne zhit' odnoi* (fac. 175)

The image shows a musical score for the Entr'acte in Act 3 by Canobbio, bars 1-4. The score is for Violin 1, Violin 2, Viola, and Basso. The tempo is marked 'Andantino' and the dynamics are 'p' (piano). The Violin parts feature a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes, with bars 1-6 and 7-11 highlighted in yellow, and bars 10-11 highlighted in green. The Viola and Basso parts play a simple harmonic accompaniment.

**Figure 4.10:** Entr'acte in Act 3 by Canobbio, bar 1-4.

Incorporating a well-known, celebratory peasant dance into this Entr'acte suggests that good times are about to arrive for the Kievans. After a long period of suffering, it is time for some celebration to lift everyone's mood, which leads to the wedding scene.

Weddings are typically joyous occasions that are accompanied by uplifting music. For Prekrasa, however, her wedding was no call for celebration, and Pashkevich's music reflects this. Pashkevich set the First Chorus in D minor key to depict Prekrasa's sombre and solemn feelings about her matchmaking. The choir – consisting of 2 soprano parts and one alto part – sings with *sotto voce* on *piano* in a *larghetto* tempo to convey Prekrasa's plea to her parents, "...O mother dear, dear mother, could you change your decision, not to give me, a maiden, away to the great and mighty bogatyr?" A simple and sparse orchestration including only strings, horns, and flutes accompanied the choir.

The Second Chorus of Act 3 maintains virtually the same orchestration, with horns in D replaced with horns in F. This chorus is the polar opposite of the first chorus; it is set in D major with *presto* tempo marking. Pashkevich quotes another folk song from Lvov and Prach's *Collection* in this chorus (see figure 4.11). The title of this piece, "Uzh kak slava Tebe Bozhe," given by Lvov, translates to "Glory to God in the Highest." This folk song carries royalist overtones, which in the context of *Oleg* would be understood as glorifying Catherine the Great.<sup>154</sup> So clear are the royalist sympathies expressed in this tune, that it would have to be re-written under Soviet rule during the twentieth century, when the government strictly censored all forms of cultural production. Victor Beliaev, editor of the scholarly 5<sup>th</sup> edition of the *Collection* (1955), changed the song's title to "Slava na nebe solntzyu Veisokomu" ("Glory to the Lofty Sun in the Sky") to cleanse the royalist connotations (see figure 4.12). He carefully replaced and altered its ideological poetic text: those stanzas which used the words "Empress" or "God" were replaced by excerpts from a completely different collection.<sup>155</sup> The amended libretto can be seen as early as the first stanza; Lvov's version: Glory to God in heaven, glory!<sup>156</sup> Beliaev version: Glory to the lofty sun in the sky, glory!

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<sup>154</sup> Mazo, *Collection*, 23. For Beliaev's remarks, refer to the *Collection's* fifth edition's introduction.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>156</sup> A full translation of Lvov's original version will be provided in the appendix.

*Пѣсни Святочныя!*

№ 1. *Ужъ какъ слава Тебѣ Боже на небѣ -*

*Andante.*

*си сла - - ва.*

**Figure 4.11:** “Glory to God in the highest,” original title and libretto by Lvov and Prach in the *Collection*.

Libretto: Uzh kak slava Tebe Bozhe na nebe si slava.

132. СЛАВА НА НЕБЕ СОЛНЦУ ВЫСОКОМУ

Andante

[Сла - ва на не - бе солнцу вы со ко му, Сла - ва!]

**Figure 4.12:** “Glory to the Lofty Sun in the Sky,” from the *Collection*’s fifth edition by Beliaev.

Libretto: Slava na nebe solntzyu Veisokomu, Slava!

This folk song was taken from the fifth category, *Sviatochnye*. Folk songs under this category are usually performed during *Sviatki*, or Yuletide, two weeks between Christmas and Epiphany.<sup>157</sup> *Sviatki* songs are fortune-telling songs; the text of each stanza

<sup>157</sup> Mazo, *Collection*, 59.

carries a specific meaning that is supposed to foretell the future. Additionally, Lvov considered that these songs of *Sviatki* were “adopted” from the ancient Greek song and game which he calls “*Klidana[sic]*”<sup>158</sup> – another association to ancient Greece, and a nod to neoclassical ideals.

Unlike Canobbio’s quotation of a full folk song, Pashkevich only quoted the first two bars and anacrusis with its libretto, “Glory to God,” which is treated similarly to a motif (see figure 4.13).

**Figure 4.13:** “Glory to God in the highest,” original title and libretto by Lvov and Prach in *Collection*, with highlighted motif.

<sup>158</sup> Mazo, *Collection*, 59-60.

**Figure 4.14:** Second Chorus in Act 3 by Pashkevich, bar 1-5, with highlighted motif.

The “Glory to God” motif retains its melodic contour, similar melodic intervals, and rhythmic pattern (see figure 4.14, 4.15, 4.16). The motif is introduced right at the beginning of the chorus to establish its familiarity among the Russians with the famous chant (see figure 4.14). The motif also represents “God” and “Empress” being present during the wedding ceremony, overseeing the important union of Igor and Prekrasa. The motif reappears throughout the chorus, typically at the beginning of the phrase, and in other instruments.

**Figure 4.15:** Second Chorus in Act 3 by Pashkevich, bar 6-11, with highlighted motif.



Fl. 1, 2

Hn. 1, 2  
in D

S1

CHORUS  
S2

A

60

-ся, А мной по-хва-ля-ет-ся: У ме-ня де же-на ум-на-  
-суа, А мној ро-хва-луа-ет-суа: U ме-пуа de zhe-па ум-па-

-ся, А мной по-хва-ля-ет-ся: У ме-ня де же-на ум-на-  
-суа, А мној ро-хва-луа-ет-суа: U ме-пуа de zhe-па ум-па-

**Figure 4.16:** Second Chorus in Act 3 by Pashkevich, bar 60-65, with highlighted motif.

The incorporation of this multifaceted folk song into a wedding scene spoke volumes. First and foremost, according to Brover-Lubovsky, this song, the Slava (glory) chant, was among the famous chants that both Russian and Western composers extensively quoted.<sup>159</sup> The quotes can be found in the scherzo of Beethoven’s Quartet, Op. 59, No. 2, the ”Song of Natasia” from Franz Xavier Blyma’s opera *Starinnye sviatki* (ancient sviatki), Rimsky-Korsakov’s *Overture on Russian Themes*, Op, 28, and many others.<sup>160</sup> Given the close relationship between Catherine and Pashkevich, they likely consulted about using this famous tune in her play. The libretto of the second chorus

<sup>159</sup> Brover-Lubovsky, *The Greek Project*, 39.

<sup>160</sup> The list of quoted songs can be found *A Collection* edited by Malcolm Hamrick Brown. See appendix C: LPC songs used by composers before 1917.

narrates the wedding's procession: "By the hall, by the entrance hall, she went, she walked... where my dear friend is waiting, where he is now waiting, listening to music, boasting my glory..."<sup>161</sup> On the surface, Catherine's libretto praises both the groom and the bride, a grand and joyous ceremony for the nobles and peasants, a simple and straightforward message. However, the auditory experience of the famous Slava chant was intended to promote an additional agenda. Upon hearing the tune, audiences would subconsciously or even consciously recall the actual libretto, which glorifies Catherine. As the empress sought to eternalize the story of Oleg, she hoped that her glory would be remembered and praised forever.

The whole wedding scene act was dedicated to the union of Prekrasa and the Grand Prince Igor in conjunction with Oleg's victory against Oskold. Such an auspicious occasion was thanks to Oleg, who serves as a stand-in for Catherine. With Catherine's insistence that this play was written as close to the truth as possible, she superimposed herself onto Oleg. She implied that, by following her predecessor, she brought peace to her people in Russia and others with her victory against the Ottoman Empire. Therefore, the Russians were able to enjoy peace and harmony thanks to Catherine, hence they sang to the empress's glory.

Lastly, the folk song "Glory to God in the highest" was most likely chosen on account of the song's category, *sviatochnye*. As these songs from *sviat*, function as fortune tellers, it informs the audience that, according to this play, there will be a good ending because of God. Proving this prophecy in Act 5, Oleg defeats his adversaries and

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<sup>161</sup> Translation was taken from A-R Edition by Brover-Lubovsky.



comes out on top. He then signs a peace treaty with the Greek Emperor Leon to ensure peace among his tribes and the Greeks. Thus, following the play's course of events, Catherine will lead the Russians to victory and will come out on top.

Act 3 closes with an instrumental march by Canobbio. Oleg now takes his military campaign to Constantinople on his mission to protect the pagan Slavs, who were previously converted to Christianity during the battle with Oskold and the Greeks. Oleg's fleet of two thousand vessels (Catherine used the exact amount stated in the *Russian Primary Chronicle*) consisted of Varangians, Slavs, Russes, Kriviches, Drevlians, Radimiches, Polanians, Croatians, Dulebs, and Tverians. The accurate portrayal of the numbers and tribes that were involved in this expedition compared to the *Chronicle's* narration was vital to Catherine. This is because the scene portrays a unity among different tribes fighting for the same cause, and Catherine hoped these tribes would "still need to be united" under her rule as prophesied in her play and recorded in Russian annals.

Canobbio's March also showcased another leading genre, a unique phenomenon of mid-eighteenth-century Russian music other than the Russian theatre-comic opera, the horn orchestra (see figure 4.17).<sup>162</sup> The genre was invented by Jan Maresh (1719-1794), a horn player, cellist, and kapellmeister from Czechia. Under the employment of Count Semen Kirillovich Nartshkin, Maresh was ordered to put his huntsmen's sixteen horns "to accord all horns of his hunters in harmony."<sup>163</sup> The potential of the newly formed ensemble was immediately realized and was highly demanded by Russian society.

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<sup>162</sup> Ritzarev, *Russian Music*, 8.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

The era of horn music was indeed the essence of the Russian music scene especially when it was dubbed the “Pre-Glinka Russian music.”<sup>164</sup> The horn orchestra was widely requested by the Russian court and other aristocrats, particularly during their lavish outdoor festivities. It also acted as a substitute for the grand and costly Imperial court symphonic music. The genre tries to mimic the Imperial court’s atmospheric ideal intonation and powerful volume. Hence, the music produces a combination of power and delicate resonance. That is to say, horn music was purposefully invented and catered to the Russian upper-class needs.

In the case of *Oleg*, Canobbio’s horn music represents Oleg’s nobility and his impending military victories. With Catherine’s deep pockets, Canobbio would have had the resources to compose a massive symphonic masterpiece for Oleg’s march to Constantinople, the most important battle in the play as it alludes to Catherine’s Russo-Turkish war. An extensive orchestration of all instrumental families would presumably be a better representation of the two thousand mighty powerful soldiers. Instead, Canobbio opted for a horn orchestration which suggests that his decision was intentional. The purpose was to emphasize that Oleg was no doubt of Russian nobility, despite the fact that he was not directly related to Rurik, the founder of the longest Russian dynasty. It was vital to Catherine that Oleg’s legitimacy is never questioned or doubted. This is because Catherine is tacitly represented by Oleg in the play, and, like Oleg, she was not a direct descendent of the ruling Russian dynasty. Additionally, the march aims to parade Russian culture and flaunt its renowned Russian music.

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<sup>164</sup> Ritzarev, *Russian Music*, 60.

**Allegro comodo**

The musical score consists of five staves. The top two staves are for Trumpets 1, 2 and 3, 4, both in C major. The third and fourth staves are for Trombone 1, 2 and Serpent 1, 2, both in bass clef. The bottom staff is for the Triangle, in common time. The tempo is 'Allegro comodo'. The music is characterized by a rhythmic pattern of dotted eighth and sixteenth notes, especially in the Triangle part. The Trombone and Serpent parts have 'a 2' markings, indicating a second ending or a specific articulation.

**Figure 4.17:** March in Act 3 by Canobbio, bar 1-4.

The rhythmic march patterns of dotted eighth- and sixteenth-notes are heavily used throughout the piece. The novel triangle accompaniment added to the Russian horn music points to another aspect of the story, Catherine’s Russo-Turkish War (1787-1792). The Russia court, alongside the German and Austria courts, had fallen under the spell of Turkish military music.<sup>165</sup> Empress Anna Iranovna (reigned 1730-40, Peter the Great’s niece) jumped on the “Janissary” bandwagon with productions featuring musicians dressed in Turkish attire and re-creating unique instrumental sounds of native Ottoman musicians. Then, her successor, Empress Elizabeth, went further by forming her own *mehter* (Turkish musical ensemble).<sup>166</sup> The Russian court was clearly familiar with “Turkish” music.

<sup>165</sup> Edmund A. Bowles, “The Impact of Turkish Military Bands on European Court Festivals in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Centuries,” *Early Music* 34, no. 2 (November 2006): 550.

<sup>166</sup> Bowles, “The Impact of Turkish Military Bands,” 553.

Canobbio incorporates several *alla turca* elements into this march. Firstly, he set it in C major, a typical key signature alongside F, B $\flat$ , and D, for “Turkish” music according to Christian Friedrich Daniel Schubart in *Ideen zu einer Ästhetik der Tonkunst*.<sup>167</sup> The noisy and loud effects are created with the persistent and insistent sixteenth-notes on the triangle, scarcely considered a “real” musical instrument in the West, and the blaring brass orchestration. Then, the horns alternate playing simplistic, repetitive motives. Lastly, Canobbio uses only the fundamental simplicity of I-V harmonic progression, the only music in the entire play limited to only two harmonies, implying that the Turks could not comprehend anything more sophisticated. The overall effect is a depiction of the Turks as “primitive” and ignorant of the techniques of more "advanced" musical cultures.<sup>168</sup>

Even so, there are a number of Western- “Turkish” elements that are absent from Canobbio’s composition. For example, he uses quadruple meter instead of the commonly used duple meter, repeated and running notes in the accompaniment, doubling octaves in the melody, falling and rising thirds, and the lack of “Turkish” instruments such as the bass drum, piccolo, cymbals, and clarinets. The absence of these elements may suggest a highly superficial engagement with and lack of regard for Turkish culture. On another note, visually, the orchestration reveals the Turks’ inferior position as they only have one

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<sup>167</sup> Eva Badura-Skoda, “*Turca, alla*,” in *Grove Music Online*, January 20, 2001, <https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.28593>, (accessed July 25, 2023)

<sup>168</sup> Benjamin Perl, “Mozart in Turkey,” in *Cambridge Opera Journal* 12, No.3 (November 2000): 224-225, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3250715>. The “primitive” March that can only comprehend the banal I-V accompaniment dramatically contrasts the sophisticated Sinfonia’s tonal plan that displays the musical logic with great clarity and transparency, progressing along the circle of fifths.

triangle to represent them, compared to the Russian, who has four trumpets, two trombones, and two serpents.

#### 4.1.4 Act 4

The play continues with Oleg and his two thousand vessels marching toward Constantinople to face the Greek Emperor Leon. According to the Russian annals, Oleg's military campaign waged war around the city and slaughtered many Greeks. The captured prisoners were beheaded, tortured, and shot. Not only that, but they also destroyed many places and churches in Constantinople. However, in Catherine's version (similar to Act 2), Oleg and his army successfully terrified and overwhelmed the Greeks by staging a demonstration of his superior military power. She shaped her libretto to depict the merciful Oleg devising a tactful plan to win this war humanely, avoiding a massacre for the greater good of humanity. This plot alteration was purposefully devised to demonstrate Russia's advocacy for human rights and religious tolerance. In Catherine's letters to Voltaire, she was so inspired by Voltaire's writings on human rights<sup>169</sup> that she contributed to the defense of Jean Calas, a Protestant cloth merchant who was prosecuted by the local anti-Huguenot Roman Catholic magistrate.<sup>170</sup>

Canobbio's Entr'acte in Act 4 also quotes a folk song from Lvov and Prach's *Collection*, titled "Oh, tis not the new moon shining," (see figure 4.18). The folk song falls under the last category (part 1, no.2), *Malorossiikie*, which translates as "Little Russia," a term then used to refer to Ukraine. In today's context, I will be referring to *Malorossiikie* as Ukrainian songs instead. These Ukrainian songs are particularly

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<sup>169</sup> Lentin, *Voltaire and Catherine*, 37.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*, 38-40.

associated with Russian urban traditions of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Lvov's preface states that *Malorossiikie* are more melodious compared to other Russian folk songs.<sup>171</sup> Similar to Canobbio's previous folk song quotations, he lifted the whole tune onto his melody (see figure 4.19).



**Figure 4.18:** “Oh, tis not the new moon shining” by Lvov and Prach in the *Collection*.



**Figure 4.19:** *Oleg's* piano reduction by Prach, Entr'acte in Act 4 by Canobbio, bar 1-8.

#### 4.1.5 Act 5

The Greeks submit to Russian power in the final act. Oleg signs a peace treaty with the Greek emperor Leon that would protect both religious beliefs and levy taxes,

<sup>171</sup> Mazo, *Collection*, 62-63.

among other things.<sup>172</sup> These details of the treaty can be found in *The Russian Primary Chronicle*, which includes clauses such as the following:

“Whatsoever Russ Kills a Christian, or whatsoever Christian kills a Russ, shall die since he has committed murder. If any man flees after committing a murder, in the case that he is well-to-do, the nearest relatives of the victim shall receive a legal portion of the culprit’s property, while the wife of the murderer shall receive a like amount, which is legally due her. But if the defendant is poor, and has escaped, he shall be under distress until he returns, when he shall be executed.”<sup>173</sup>

Emperor Leon invited Oleg to Constantinople for a celebration of the new union. Oleg accepted his invitation and was also curious about its new religion, Christianity, and his city. The emperor ordered that “in honour of such a famous guest, nothing will take place but endless games, singing, dances, joy, and magnificent feast.”<sup>174</sup> Among the entertainments, the Greeks presented Euripides’ *Alcestis*, a Greek tragedy and a symbol of neoclassicism, for the grand finale.

It is evident that Act 5 was the most important part of the whole play, given its association with the Greeks and Catherine’s Greek project. A vignette (see figure 4.20) was purposefully drawn for this act, depicting the Greeks, Emperor Leon, and the Grand Prince Oleg in a peaceful and orderly Constantinople.

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<sup>172</sup> See peace treaty in Nestor, *Primary Chronicle*, 65-68.

<sup>173</sup> Nestor, *Primary Chronicle*, 66.

<sup>174</sup> Naroditskaya, *Bewitching Russian Opera*, 118.



**Figure 4.20:** Vignette of Act 5 in *The Early Reign of Oleg*.

Canobbio’s final composition for this play was the Entr’acte to Act 5 with an added minuet at the end. This time, Canobbio did not quote any folk songs. The absence of a folk song suggests that Canobbio sought to establish a scene in which “Russian” customs, culture, and beliefs are not imposed on the Greeks, an apt musical mirroring of Oleg’s intentions with his peace treaty. The piece was set in a lively tempo in D major with a large orchestration. The Greeks and Russians’ excitement is reflected in the strings’ consistent eighth-note series with syncopations in the upper strings (see figure 4.21).



The image shows the first four bars of a musical score for an entr'acte. The tempo is marked 'Allegro'. The score is for four parts: Violin 1, Violin 2, Viola, and Basso. The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is common time (C). The Violin parts play a melody of eighth and sixteenth notes, while the Viola and Basso parts play a steady eighth-note accompaniment.

**Figure 4.21:** Entr'acte in Act 5 by Canobbio, bar 1-4.

The celebration also depicts the soldiers from both sides with a march-like rhythm, featuring dotted eighth- and sixteenth-notes (see figure 4.22).

The image shows bars 17-20 of a musical score for an entr'acte. The score is for six parts: Oboe 1 & 2, Clarinet 1 & 2 in A, Bassoon 1 & 2, Horn 1 & 2 in D, Trumpet 1 & 2 in D, and Timpani. The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is common time (C). The woodwinds and brass parts play a melody of dotted eighth- and sixteenth-note figures, while the Timpani part plays a steady eighth-note accompaniment.

**Figure 4.22:** Entr'acte in Act 5 by Canobbio, bar 17-20.

The minuet has more significance than meets the eye. The minuet is a dance drawn from the social context of the eighteenth-century ballroom. It served a social

function for the aristocracy, where it embodied the ideals of aristocratic behaviour and displayed grace and noble simplicity.<sup>175</sup> It was also an overt celebration of aristocratic values whereby the dance movement manifested the elegance and regal deportment that were necessary components of aristocratic behaviour. Its association with the aristocracy was strongest at French court balls. The earliest extant minuet choreographies were presented by Andre Lorin to King Louis IV of France in 1685.<sup>176</sup>

A noteworthy point that Buurman mentioned in Melanie Lowe's article is that the late eighteenth-century's minuet increasingly leaned towards the characterised *noble simplicité*.<sup>177</sup> This concept of nobility was a more egalitarian than the type celebrated in early French court dance, where power and status took precedence. The dance emits an abstract Enlightenment concept that implied artlessness of expression and nobility of character and behaviour. The correspondence between Catherine and Voltaire had shown that she "believes" in "human equality."<sup>178</sup> Thus, there is no question of her choosing a piece that glorifies nobility of character while being "relatable" to non-aristocratic audiences. Nevertheless, the minuet continued to be understood as an expression of nobility.

Eighteenth-century audiences and listeners would have understood the minuet as a symbol of aristocratic hierarchy. They would recognise musical associations from their

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<sup>175</sup> Erica Buurman, *The Viennese Ballroom in the Age of Beethoven* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 55-57.

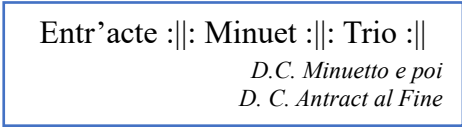
<sup>176</sup> Meredith Ellis Little, "Minuet (Fr. Menuet; Ger. Menuett; It. Minuetto; Sp. Minuete, minué)," Grove Music Online. 2001; Accessed July 13, 2023. <https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.18751>

<sup>177</sup> Buurman, *Viennese Ballroom*, 58-59. Melanie Lowe, 'Falling from Grace: Irony and Expressive Enrichment in Haydn's Symphonic Minuets', *The Journal of Musicology*, 19, no. 1 (2002), 171-221 at 174-175.

<sup>178</sup> Lentin, *Voltaire and Catherine*, 37-40

knowledge of real-life context, especially since this courtly dance was taught to “even the lowest members of the society.”<sup>179</sup> Their awareness of class hierarchy was attested to by Mozart, who assigned different dances to his principle characters according to their social status in *Don Giovanni* (1787).<sup>180</sup> The Leipzig *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*’s review (1804) stated that the minuet music could communicate noble gestures even when performed independently.<sup>181</sup> Therefore, Catherine’s cosmopolitan audience would have understood clearly that the minuet was a symbolic representation of nobility’s presence.

The inclusion of a popular aristocratic dance was also designed as a showcase to Catherine’s international audience, diplomats, and delegates, demonstrating that Russia had the cultural sophistication – including the latest musical trends – of other strong and influential empires and kingdoms. All these efforts were to counter the former conception of pre-Petrine Russia: that Russia lagged behind the West, experienced no “progressive” periods such as the Renaissance or Reformation, took no part in maritime discoveries or scientific and technological advances of the early modern period, experienced widespread illiteracy and ignorance in education and literature, and featured an imbalance of power between administration, church, and the emperor.<sup>182</sup>



**Figure 4.23:** Entr’acte 5’s form.

<sup>179</sup> Buurman, *Viennese Ballroom*, 58.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, 55. Aristocratic characters dance the minuet (Don Ottavio and Donna Anna); the low-class characters dance the German dance (Masetto and Leporello); to bridge the gap between their positions in society dance the contredanse (Don Giovanni and Zerlina).

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

<sup>182</sup> Riasanovsky and Steinberg, *A History of Russia*, 204-209.

As shown in the figure above, the minuet music is integrated with the Act 5's Entr'acte. Canobbio's incorporation of a minuet music (with no actual dancers dancing on stage) sonically announces the arrival of the aristocrats, Emperor Leo, Empress Zoe, and Prince Oleg. Wye Allanbrook has explained that stylistically the original minuet dance has a moving melody, mainly based on a quarter-note pulse which retained the tempo and character. By 1770s, the newer slower version had slowed down considerably, admitting eighth-notes to its figuration in a prominent role. The slower tempo imbued the minuet with a greater sense of gravity, encapsulating the "epitome of choreographic elegance and refinement,"<sup>183</sup> precisely how Catherine wanted her audience to view her.

As Mozart wrote to his sister about the tempo, "I shall soon send you a minuet... danced in the theatre [Milan] solely in order that you may see how slowly people dance here... It comes, of course, from Vienna ... It has plenty of notes. Why? Because it is stage minuet which is danced slowly."<sup>184</sup> As one would expect, Canobbio used the more modern, slower version style of the minuet, where eighth-notes figure prominently in the melody, while the bass maintains a steady quarter-note pulse (see figure 4.24).

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<sup>183</sup> Wye Jamison Allanbrook, *Rhythmic Gesture in Mozart: Le Nozze Di Figaro & Don Giovanni* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2016) 33. Both fast and slow versions share many characteristics: both use 3/4 time signature (sometimes 3/8), habitually begin on the downbeat, a moderate tempo with a regular movement, a bass moving in quarter notes to support the dancers, and a modest execution with few ornaments.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.



**Figure 4.24:** *Oleg’s piano reduction by Prach, Minuet in Act 5 by Canobbio, bar 1-12*

The first scene of the act depicts the solemn reception of Oleg and the ambassadors at Emperor Leon’s palace and the celebrations in their honour. As the caption accompanying the vignette states, “The Greek guard and the court walk ahead of them, while the Greek boyars and Oleg’s men follow in the back. The Greek military and nobility complete the procession. The emperor, the empress, and their court are all dressed in sumptuous garments.”<sup>185</sup> The next scene presents Flora and Pomona with their nymphs, who dance for three distinguished guests. Scene three presents a sporting competition at the Hippodrome. The final scene starts when Leon and Zoe are seated across the stage. The trumpets and kettledrums announce the upcoming show, and finally, the curtains are drawn for Euripides’s *Alcestis*, Act 3 to be performed.

In scenes one through three, Catherine included odes by “the greatest literary figure of mid [eighteenth]-century” Russia, Mikhail Lomonosov.<sup>186</sup> Lomonosov (1711-65) was among the first three neoclassicist writers (alongside Kantemir and Trediakovsky) who changed Russian literature. They initiated the transition to a modern

<sup>185</sup> Catherine II’s direction in Act 5, Scene 1.

<sup>186</sup> Serman, “Neoclassicism and the Enlightenment,” 45.

literature. Kantemir and Trediakovsky, following Peter the Great's lead, wished to effect a radical break from their medieval tradition, while Lomonosov incorporated ideas from eleventh- to seventeenth-century Russia in order to appreciate its genuine poetic and artistic nature.<sup>187</sup> Lomonosov studied at the Slavic-Greek-Latin Academy in Moscow and later studied mine engineering in Germany. He returned to Russia five years later and quickly garnered renown as a poet. Lomonosov's contribution was immense as he adapted a variant of a classical system that helped to develop a modern Russian literary language, which Pushkin later perfected.<sup>188</sup>

Compared to its European literary variation, the ode in modern Russian literature was an important poetic genre.<sup>189</sup> The Russian ode was usually written for official occasions and events, such as birthdays, coronations, jubilee, etc. The purpose of such odes was usually to praise and compliment whoever was in power at the moment. Although Lomonosov was criticized for his "unjustified praises," his odes were fundamentally his expression of ideals for Russian society, which he believed the Russian government would undertake if it genuinely had the nation's good at heart.<sup>190</sup> Lomonosov's odes set a precedent for future Russian odes, such as Pushkin's *Liberty* and Ryleev's *To Ermolov*, which set forth a political program oriented toward the future.

Catherine's decision to quote Lomonosov's odes was an astute artistic decision. First, the function of the odes perfectly suits Catherine's plotline. They praise Oleg's power and moral authority; as the Greeks exclaimed during their battle in Constantinople,

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<sup>187</sup> Serman, "Neoclassicism and the Enlightenment," 45-57.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*

“This is not Oleg, but St. Demetrius, whom God has sent upon us.”<sup>191</sup> At the same time, the odes indirectly gave homage to Catherine for her greatness, perfection, and fairness, which had brought peace and order to Russia.

First Chorus:

In such glory today  
does this town shine upon your arrival!  
It cannot be contained  
within the spacious limit of our joy!  
It fills the air with a splash  
and chases away nocturnal darkness with a blaze.

Second Chorus:

Delight of earthly kings and kingdoms,  
beloved tranquillity:  
blessing of villages and shield of towns,  
you who are so beautiful and wholesome!  
Around you flowers dazzle,  
and tall stalks of wheat become golden.  
Ships full of treasures  
venture out to sea for you.  
With a generous hand you scatter  
their riches over the land.<sup>192</sup>

Additionally, Catherine used Lomonosov’s odes to glorify and promote Russian literature to her vast and various audiences, who came from rich and expansive artistic and literary traditions. On another note, most Russian writers’ primary livelihood in the eighteenth century was no longer patronage from the church but rather from the state. Therefore, writers were prone to feel the need to write literature concerning secular policies. Using Lomonosov as an example, Catherine cleverly quoted his odes to remind her Russian writers to follow his example of serving and advocating for Russia and its sovereign.

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<sup>191</sup> Nestor, *Russian Primary Chronicle*, 64.

<sup>192</sup> Translation was taken from A-R Edition by Brover-Lubovsky.

Sarti composed all four choruses for Lomonosov's odes. His music uses extensive orchestration to match Lomonosov's idolization of the monarchy, including full string and woodwind sections, horns in D and A, trumpets in D, timpani, and chorus (soprano 1&2, alto, tenor 1&2, bass). For example, in the first chorus, the grandeur of Oleg is portrayed with all the instruments playing together from the very beginning, creating a grand, sonorous entry of the honoured and esteemed guest. The unity of both nations can be heard in the similar orchestration of strings and woodwinds (see figure 4.25):

**Tempo di marcia maestosa**

The musical score for the first chorus in Act 5 by Sarti, bars 1-3, is presented in three main sections. The top section, labeled 'Tempo di marcia maestosa', includes the woodwind and brass instruments: Flute 1, 2; Oboe 1, 2; Clarinet 1, 2 in A; Bassoon 1, 2; Horn 1, 2 in D/A; Trumpet 1, 2 in D; and Timpani. The middle section, labeled 'CHORUS', includes the vocal parts: Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass. The bottom section, also labeled 'Tempo di marcia maestosa', includes the string parts: Violin 1, Violin 2, Viola, and Basso. The woodwind and brass parts are highlighted in blue, and the string parts are highlighted in yellow. The tempo is marked 'Tempo di marcia maestosa'.

**Figure 4.25:** First Chorus in Act 5 by Sarti, bar 1-3.



Another important piece is Sarti's Fourth Chorus, composed in a march style. Brover-Lubovsky noted that Russian society was astonished by the march, and it was eventually performed as an independent piece.<sup>193</sup> Gerald Seaman too, singles out Sarti's March in his *History of Russian Music*. However, his information and findings are inaccurate as he stated, "Sarti's contribution to *Oleg* is notable in that the March in the Third Act (scored for 4 trumpets, 2 trombones, 2 serpents and triangle) is almost the sole surviving march for wind instruments in Russian music of eighteenth century."<sup>194</sup> I need to clarify that the piece Seaman is referring to is Canobbio's March; Sarti's March is located in Act 5, Fourth Chorus and features different orchestration.

Similar to Canobbio's March, Sarti's composition also incorporated Turkish Janissary elements. However, Sarti did not indicate clearly that it is a march but identified it simply as the Fourth Chorus. This is primarily, it is because the music is set to accompany entertainment during a sporting competition scene at the Hippodrome, rather than troops of soldiers marching. It may also be Sarti's intention of not distracting the listeners from Lomonosov's noble message:

The war keeps producing its fruit.  
It encourages glorious heroes in peacetime.  
Vast regions have a shield,  
The power of rulers becomes stronger.  
Let us look again to ancient times;  
Russian history is full of them.  
Even out of darkness comes light  
With a regiment of great men behind it,  
Which steps out into the theater of the world clothed in glorious sunlight.<sup>195</sup>

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<sup>193</sup> Bella Brover-Lubovsky, "Music for Cannons: Giuseppe Sarti in the Second Turkish War," in *Military and Political Music*, 74, ResearchGate.

<sup>194</sup> Gerald Seaman, *History of Russian Music* (Oxford: Alden Press), 110.

<sup>195</sup> Translation was taken from A-R Edition by Brover-Lubovsky.

Sarti had greater exposure to “Turkish” military music than Canobbio. During his employment with Prince Grigory Alexandrovich Potemkin-Tavrishesky (1739-1791) from 1787-1791, Sarti was commissioned to compose a wide range of communal ceremonies for Potemkin’s private musical demands. Potemkin was a Russian military leader, statesman, nobleman, and Catherine’s consort, who played a major role in the expansion of the Russian empire. In 1774, he became the governor-general, then founded new towns, built his own army, and established the Black Sea fleet in his “kingdom.” He strongly encouraged the intense colonization of the southern region, where he had the vision of developing a province that would flourish under free trade, industry, education, manufacturing, urban and landscape architecture, and the creation of a local nobility, bourgeois, and intelligentsia.<sup>196</sup>

Among Potemkin’s many ambitions and responsibilities, music was his foremost passion.<sup>197</sup> He composed religious chants, folk-style songs, and regularly listened to music throughout the day. During the outbreak of Second Turkish War, Sarti was required to follow Potemkin and his entourage to his Ottoman fortresses, headquarters, and military camps. Despite the horrendous and dreadful ongoing war, Sarti and Potemkin were still passionate about music. They would collaborate and compose, where “Potemkin would write two notes on a sheet of paper, and Sarti composed music around them.”<sup>198</sup> The Russian Army and Fleet’s victory were celebrated with elaborate ceremonies and Sarti’s music. It is evident that the war did not deter Sarti’s musical output. He was tasked with arranging and composing vocal music (cantatas and

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<sup>196</sup> Brover-Lubovsky, “Music for Cannons,” 74-75.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

oratorios), instrumental music, Russian horn music, military music, and a huge symphony with Italian-style choruses.<sup>199</sup>

Sarti's understanding of Janissary music is evident as he incorporated most of Western- "Turkish" elements in his Fourth Chorus. It is reasonable to conclude that Sarti had first hand exposure to Janissary music because Potemkin's residence housed a full Janissary band that was captured in Rymnik.<sup>200</sup> The *alla turca* elements in this chorus include: duple meter (cut time); the loud volume of heavy orchestration; noisy effects created by repeated notes in the middle range of the accompaniment; tremolo on the bass drum; the prevalent use of shrill piccolo timbres; simple rhythmic patterns throughout the piece; short and repetitive dotted eighth- and sixteenth-notes motifs; the typical "Turkish" key signature (D major); largely rudimentary harmony limited to I and V chords; octave doubling of the melodic line by piccolo, traverso, oboe, and first violin; unison writing; raising and falling thirds; "Janissary" instrumentation which include piccolos, clarinets, trumpets, bass drum, and triangle (see figure 4.26).<sup>201</sup>

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<sup>199</sup> Brover-Lubovsky, "Music for Cannons," 74-77.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>201</sup> The list of "Turkish" elements is compiled based on these articles: Perl, "Mozart in Turkey", 222-226; Bowles, "The Impact of Turkish Military Bands," 553; Badura-Skoda, "Turca, Alla"; Michael Pirker, "Janissary Music," in *Grove Music Online*, January 20, 2001, <https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.14133>.

**TEMPO DI MARCIA MAESTOSA**

The musical score is arranged in a standard orchestral format. The woodwind section (Piccolo, Traverso, Oboe, Clarinet in A) features short motifs highlighted in green. The percussion section (Drum, Triangle, Sistro) plays simple rhythmic patterns highlighted in purple. The vocal soloists (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) have lyrics: "Boh - na Voj - na". The string section (Violin 1, Violin 2, Viola, Basso) features repetitive and running notes in the middle range, highlighted in blue and yellow. The tempo is marked "TEMPO DI MARCIA MAESTOSA".

**Figure 4.26:** Fourth Chorus in Act 5 by Sarti, bar 1-4.

Because Sarti had direct interaction with Turkish musicians, one might think his take on *alla turca* would be a little more “refined” as he added uncommon instruments, such as traverso (an early type of flute), which provided additional shrillness, and sistrum

(a sliding rattle in the shape of a spur), which heightened the “noisiness” of this chorus. However, Sarti’s composition still largely adheres to Western- “Turkish” style, which often emphasizes primitive, unsophisticated, and crude stereotypes, even though he had intimate access to study and observe Turkish Janissary music. Stahlin, a German art connoisseur and author of the first study of Russian music describe the Janissary band:

“So oriental and foreign does this rather barbaric music sound to European ears, yet making such wonderful effect, that it delights one to a certain extent as a marked change from regular [i.e. ordinary] music... professional musicians who find it difficult enough simply to understand the bizarre and totally unexpected turns and unusual scalar patterns...”<sup>202</sup>

Even if Sarti’s initial intention was not to degrade, mock, nor colonize Turkish music, and though he used “actual” Turkish instruments to create a more accurate and authentic Turkish sound, his other compositional decisions suggest otherwise. In fact, I deduce that Sarti was in-line with both of his patrons’ vision of colonizing the Turks and the moral case for bringing “civilization” to “barbaric” non-Westerners. As previously mentioned, Potemkin was deeply interested in Russia’s southern borders and had colonized most of Ukraine territory. He also shared Catherine’s ambition in her Greek project and was invested in the fate of the Turkish empire, where he acted as the commander-in-chief in the second Turkish war.<sup>203</sup> As for Catherine, this play was purposefully written and produced to celebrate her victory against Turkey<sup>204</sup> and was intended to broadcast the triumph to her European peers. Therefore, Sarti’s Janissary-infused music can easily be interpreted as cultural appropriation, through which he and

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<sup>202</sup> Bowles, “The Impact of Turkish Military Bands,” 553.

<sup>203</sup> Adam Augustyn, “Grigory Potemkin,” in *Encyclopedia Britannica*, June 2, 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Grigory-Potemkin>.

<sup>204</sup> Naroditskaya, *Bewitching Russian Opera*, 116.

other composers (including Mozart, Schubert, Brahms, and others) made an effort to draw upon the sound of the Other, but typically within a frame that positioned the "Orient" as culturally inferior.<sup>205</sup>

The play within the play features Euripides's *Alcestis*, his oldest tragedy, first produced in 438 B.C.E and later rediscovered in the sixteenth century. *Alcestis* made several appearances in the musical arena with compositions by Georg Friederich Händel, Jean-Baptiste Lully, and Christoph Gluck based on the ancient Greek tragedy. Of the three settings, Gluck's *Alceste* carries the most significant change in musical style and is widely seen as a major example of neoclassical musical drama. Gluck's version was a "reform" opera in which he sought to restrict the music to its true function – serving the poetry.<sup>206</sup> Along with his librettist, Calzabigi, he argued that the music had strayed and disfigured the true form of Italian opera seria. For example, the flow of the expressive and beautiful poetry was ruined by the silliest and most tedious interruptions, such as unnecessarily long, impractical, and excessive ornaments, the lengthy and wearing ritornello, or the interruption of singers in mid-word over a favourable vowel to show off their virtuosic voice.<sup>207</sup> Gluck's *Alceste* was his attempt to restore Italian opera seria to its former glory. As Gluck's movement was highly influential, it is reasonable to expect that Sarti would have found his inspiration in Gluck's setting of *Alceste*. This is particularly evident in Sarti's melodrama style followed by a C minor chorus in Heracles's first

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<sup>205</sup> Jonathan D. Bellman, "Musical Voyages and Their Baggage: Orientalism in Music and Critical Musicology" *The Musical Quarterly* 94, no. 3 (Fall 2011): 424. Bellman draws on Edward Said's critique of Western representations of non-Western cultures, which Said outlined in his influential book, *Orientalism: Western Concepts of the Orient* (New York: Pantheon, 1978).

<sup>206</sup> Christoph Gluck, "Gluck's Operatic Manifesto," in *Music in the Western World: A History in Documents*, annotated and selected by Piero Weiss and Richard Taruskin (Belmont: Thomson Schirmer, 2008), 254-255.

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid.*

appearance at Admetus's palace, which is virtually identical to Gluck's rendering of the scene.<sup>208</sup>

According to Brover-Lubovsky, the idolization of Euripides's tragedies by French classicist, such as Philippe Quinault, Francois-Joseph de Lagrange Chancel, and Voltaire, had sparked Catherine's interest. Thus, she probably used Pierre Brumoy's translation for her reference.<sup>209</sup> Russia too had its own adaption by "The Northern Racine," Alexander Sumarokov (1717-77). Sumarokov became the first director of Russia's first theater after his early tragedies made an impression on Elizabeth's government. He wrote a total of nine tragedies, which had an immense esthetic and ethical impact on Russian society, where the heroes' actions addressed the value of morality and the concept of honour.<sup>210</sup> In general, Catherine's literary output was meant as a moral instruction for her grandsons, the future Emperor Alexander I, Emperor Nicholas I, and Grand Prince Constantine. Therefore, following Sumarokov's template, she chose the trending Greek tragedy for her inspiration and aspiration.

Further evidence of Catherine being inspired by Sumarokov includes her exact quotation of Sumarokov's version (Act III, scenes 1-3), even though these scenes and acts are not divided in the original version of *Alcestis*.<sup>211</sup> The three quoted scenes start with Heracles's arrival at Pherae. Admetus generously invites Heracles to stay in his house despite being in mourning for his wife, Alcestis. There are clear ethical and moral codes embedded into the tragedy and exemplified by Admetus's hospitality, virtue, and

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<sup>208</sup> Brover-Lubovsky, "Greek Project," 48.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>210</sup> Serman, "Neoclassicism and the Enlightenment," 63-65.

<sup>211</sup> Brover-Lubovsky, "Greek Project," 35.

empathy. These are the main qualities that Catherine intended to create as an allegorical link to Emperor Leon, who treats his adversary and conqueror, Oleg, as a respected guest. However, a larger ambition is at play when Catherine chooses this specific scene. The loving, kind, and loyal Alcestis, Queen of Pherae, sacrificed herself to prolong her husband's life; thus, Alcestis embodies the polar opposite of Catherine's alleged participation in planning her coup d'état against her husband and his eventual execution. Catherine borrowed Alcestis's narrative to counter this negative understanding of her, to garner sympathy, and to rehabilitate her reputation in the face of this horrific reminiscence.

Catherine's resolution to rehabilitate her reputation is evident in Sarti's usage of melodrama, a technique that alternates spoken text and instrumental music. As Austin Glatthorn demonstrates, along the same lines as Gluck's "reform" of opera seria, melodrama aims to separate words and music by restoring primacy to the voice and liberating instrumental music from a purely mimetic function.<sup>212</sup> According to Johann Sulzer and Johann Engel, the mid-1770s melodrama reformation prioritizes the expression (character) inasmuch that the text was the element that elevated music to a fine art.<sup>213</sup> According to Glatthorn, the "distrusted and ambiguous narratives, overdetermined dramaturgy, the transformation of the idyllic to the terrible, and music that illustrates the inexplicable and extraordinary without the aid of declamation,"<sup>214</sup> are set with a combination of *Strum und Drang* text (extreme emotional turmoil and draws

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<sup>212</sup> Austin Glatthorn, "The Legacy of 'Ariadne' and the Melodramatic Sublime," *Music and Letters* 100, no. 2 (May 2019): 245-246, Project MUSE.

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.*, 247.

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid.*, 236



on the power of nature) and *tempesta* music (characteristic that exhibits stormy, disruptive elements feature, etc.)<sup>215</sup> Therefore, for Sarti to devise a melodrama (see figure 4.27), in which the text is paramount, on a plotline that stresses Catherine’s “loving, kind, and loyal” nature, betrays the empress’s apprehension of being perceived otherwise.

The peaceful, merry, and lively celebration in Constantinople plunges into darkness, emotional turmoil, and solitude, where Admetus mourns for his wife, as the curtains draw in Sarti’s Act 5, Scene 4. Catherine’s text narrates the grieving and melancholic Admetus helping Heracles. The music supports the sorrowful text by Sarti’s setting of the entire melodrama scene in Mixolydian mode. According to Sarti, “it is said by the ancient authors that the Mixolydian mode is ordained for the Tragedies, because, of all the Modes, it is the saddest.”<sup>216</sup>

The musical score consists of three systems of piano reductions for voice and piano. Each system includes a vocal line with lyrics and a piano accompaniment. The lyrics are in Russian and the characters are labeled as АДМ. (Admetus) and ПРАК. (Heracles). The tempo marking 'pizz.' (pizzicato) is present above the piano parts in several places.

**System 1:**

- АДМ.:** Живи онъи родшя меня. Праклій.
- ПРАК.:** Такъ стало жена твоя мертва?
- АДМ.:** Объ ней двоякую рѣчь предлежитъ сказать.

**System 2:**

- ПРАК.:** Какъ? яко о мертвой или живой?
- АДМ.:** Она жива и не жива, и меня весьма оскорбляетъ.

**System 3:**

- ПРАК.:** Изъ сихъ твоихъ словъ ничего не разумю, не ясно что-то говоришь.
- АДМ.:** Или ты не вѣдаешь какой еяе судьба ожидается?
- ПРАК.:** Знаю; слышь, что она за тебя смерть восприметъ.

**Figure 4.27:** Excerpts of *Oleg’s* piano reduction by Prach, “Euripides’s *Alceste*, Act 3” in Act 5, Scene 4, by Sarti.

<sup>215</sup> Glatthorn, “Melodramatic Sublime,” 241.

<sup>216</sup> Brover-Lubovsky, “Greek Project,” 49.

Sarti's play within the play comprises two sections, a melodramatic dialogue between Heracles and Admetus and a series of unison choruses set to Apollo's odes. Sarti included an *Éclaircissement* (translated by Lvov), which discusses his musical arrangement of the Greek scene in detail. He stated:

“The scene of Euripides should undoubtedly be performed in the ancient Greek manner, and in consequence, the music should not move away from this prescription. For this reason, I ventured to compose a music completely Greek in relation to the melody. I accompanied it, however, by our instruments, according to modern harmony, but in a manner that would not distort it.”<sup>217</sup>

Sarti purposefully composed his music according to eighteenth-century perceptions of Greek monodic chant, in which instruments do not overwhelm the singing voice. Sarti employs what he understood to be “ancient Greek modes,”<sup>218</sup> into Apollo's ode choruses. As Brover-Lubovsky concludes in her extensive analysis of Sarti's modal treatment, the composer had some knowledge of the Greek modal system. Sarti's *Éclaircissement* also explains that Aristotle claimed that the lyre and tibia were instruments favoured by the Greeks because they resemble the voice. Thus, Sarti used harps to mimic the ancient lyre, and flutes to represent the tibia, an ancient wind instrument made of bone resembling a reed pipe.

Overall, this music-drama employs a range of generic devices, each carefully selected to communicate various dimensions of the political personae that Catherine was hoping to convey. Ranging from sonic nods to eighteenth-century heroic opera, incidental music, choruses, representations of Janissary music, French minuet dance, Russian

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<sup>217</sup> Translation was taken from A-R Edition by Brover-Lubovsky.

<sup>218</sup> Harold S. Powers, Frans Wiering, James Porter, James Cowdery, Richard Widdess, Ruth Davis, Marc Perlman, Stephen Jones, and Allan Marett, “Mode (from Lat. *modus*: ‘measure’, ‘standard’; ‘manner’, ‘way’),” in *Grove Music Online*, 2001, <https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.43718>

folksong, Russian horn music, melodramatic moments and monophonic settings that hark back to ancient Greece, this is truly a mixed genre composition representing the latest musico-dramatic fashions in Europe blended with expressions of Russian national, representation of enlightened political leadership, and depictions of virtuous military campaign.

## CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION

The historical play, *The Early Reign of Oleg*, was written by Catherine the Great to express her ambitions of putting Russia at the forefront of Western civilization, uniting Russian tribes, and tracing Russian roots. Simultaneously, she intended to demonstrate that her noble service and accomplishments made Russia a wealthy and happy nation. Thanks to Catherine the Great, the ruler of cosmopolitan nobility in the “most diverse of empires,”<sup>219</sup> Russia became one of the most powerful empires in the eighteenth century.

The “perfect ruler” that Catherine proudly proclaimed was truly a mirage. Catherine professed that in the name of Russian welfare, she took the role of *Kulturträger*,<sup>220</sup> bringing civilization and “enlightened” ideals to her subjects by encouraging the development of science, literature, and arts. This emphasis on culture was designed to attest to the empire’s capability and power to think, create, and change. However, she and her Russian monarchs overstepped, and they used various cultural modes to construct a largely mythological monarchy.

Catherine retained the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries’ “representational culture,” which Jürgen Habermas explains, served “not so much the pleasure of the participants as the demonstration of grandeur” but “as a vehicle for the representation of the monarch.”<sup>221</sup> T. C. W. Blanning added, “the representational display expressed in palaces, academies, opera houses, hunting establishments, and the like was not pure self-

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<sup>219</sup> Wortman, *Cultural Metamorphoses*, 133.

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid.*, 122.

<sup>221</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989), 9-10.

indulgence, nor was it deception; it was a constitutive element of power itself.”<sup>222</sup>

Catherine’s production of *Oleg* was thus a means of consolidating her tenuous hold on power as a foreign-born monarch who had deposed the “rightful“ hereditary ruler. The play drew heavily on Russian history and folk song, but incorporated these elements into a thoroughly cosmopolitan production, demonstrating both the court’s “Russianness” and its assimilation of Western Europe’s most “sophisticated” cultural developments. Through *Oleg*, Catherine constructed a powerful representation of the ideal, enlightened Russian monarch: an absolute “enlightened” monarch who believes in benevolent despotism, the importance of education, and “champions” human rights and religious freedom.

Grandmotherhood provided Catherine with joys that her marriage and maternity were lacking. She took a passionate interest in the upbringing of her two eldest grandchildren (Alexander and Constantine), explaining to Baron Grimm that it differed in every way from the upbringing inflicted on Paul by Empress Elizabeth.<sup>223</sup> In spite of her many occupations, Catherine managed to find time to play with her grandsons and to educate them. Thus, the five comic operas based on fairy tales and three Russian plays were written as moral and practical instruction for her grandsons. It is evident that her grandchildren were massively influenced by her governing method, especially Emperor Nicholas I (Alexander’s successor and Catherine’s grandson).

Emperor Nicholas (1796-1855) sought to distinguish the Russian monarchy from other astray-European monarchies, such as France, which was seduced by liberalism and the revolutionary. Similar to Catherine, he looked back to the foundational Varangian

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<sup>222</sup> T. C. W. Blanning, *The Culture of Power and the Power of Culture: Old Regime Europe 1660-1789* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 59.

<sup>223</sup> Madariaga, *A Short History*, 567-568.

model of monarchical rule and the Eastern Roman Empire for the cultural origins of Russian autocracy to redefine Russian institutions. Nicholas's esthetic interests lie within art and architecture. He turned to Alexei Olenin, an avid admirer of ancient Greek art, and Catherine's Greek Project, for help in finding an architect to design an early Russian Church. Additionally, Nicholas and Olenin published a collection of drawings and watercolours that mirrors the Greek Project in art, titled *Antiquities of the Russian State* (Drevnosti rossiiskogo gosudarstva).<sup>224</sup>

All these extravagant efforts were to secure their posthumous reputations, which Catherine had successfully achieved. For example, soldier-poet Denis Davydov lauded her reign in 1831 as "most brilliant, most triumphant and without a doubt no less useful to Russia than Peter's" and dubbed Catherine's reign "the miraculous age."<sup>225</sup> Princess Dashkova, Director of the Petersburg Academy of Arts and Science, the first president of the Russian Academy and Catherine's estranged friend, was consistently laudatory and basked in Catherine's reflected glory after her passing in 1796. She recalled her participation in Catherine's coup d'état fondly by reciting their letters and recounting to her guests the empress's kind and affectionate love for humanity.<sup>226</sup> This nineteenth-century poem, written by Prince I. M. Dolgorukov, conveys the prevailing Russian sentiment during the new reign of Emperor Alexander I (1801-1825):

God did not allow us to suffer,  
Having deprived us of PETER and ELIZABETH:  
He gave the world CATHERINE  
And decreed that she should rule here.  
When pen could render faithfully  
To this anointed monarch

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<sup>224</sup> Wortman, 137-139.

<sup>225</sup> Dixon, *Posthumous Reputation*, 648.

<sup>226</sup> *Ibid.*, 649-650.

All her munificence to us!  
As successor to PETER's daughter  
She opened many doors  
To Russia's fortunate tribes.

Fate cut short her days  
New Israel wept  
But soon the Almighty  
Gave CATHERINE's sceptre to ALEXANDER.<sup>227</sup>

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<sup>227</sup> Dixon, *Posthumous Reputation*, 658-659.

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## APPENDIX

Translation of Russian Folk Song quoted in *The Early Reign of Oleg*, from *Collection of Russian Folk Songs with Their Tunes Set to Music by I.P. Published Anew with the Addition to It of a Second Part* (Second edition) by Nikolai Lvov and Ivan Prach.

Translations are made with the help from Paul Duffy.

### **“It was lower than the city of Saratov”**

Below the town of Saratov  
And above the town of Tsaritsyn,  
Kamyshneka, the mother-river flowed and ran;  
How with herself she led the steep beautiful banks,  
The steep beautiful banks and the green meadows;  
With her mouth she falls into the Volga mother-river;  
On that same swift river Kamyshenka  
Floated two decorated boats  
They were well-decorated  
They were covered with a forest of spears and flags.  
There were brave rowers in the boats,  
Of the Don Cossacks, the Grebentsi, and the Zaporozhians.  
They had velvet caps lined with sable;  
Brown Kaftans, lined with bunting;  
Astrakhan silk belts;  
Coloured shirts, edged with gold lace;  
Green morocco boots with crooked heels.  
They row, they sing songs,  
They glorify the Orthodox Tsar, Tsar Peter I;  
They curse, they outrage Prince Menchikoff;  
They curse him, his wife, his children and his grandchildren:  
This dog, this thief, he eats our pay,  
Our provisions and our salaries.  
Still he doesn't allow us to walk on the Volga and  
To sing the Doudinay!

### **“Rabit, dance”**

Jump, little grey hare,  
Dance, turn around, turn around.

**“Glory to God in the highest”**

Oh, glory to You in heaven, Glory!  
To our Sovereign on this earth, Glory!  
His colourful dress is not worn, Glory!  
His faithful servants do not grow old, Glory!  
His good horses are not ridden, Glory!  
We sing this song to the Sovereign, Glory!  
We sing to the Sovereign, we honor him, Glory!