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About Sacred Music by the Composers of the Gnesins' House*

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Abstract. The author of the article delineates as a special scholarly issue the study of sacred music by composers of the Gnesins' House. The diverse aspects of its solution potentially include historical motives, subject matter and genres, content and form, meaning and its expression, etc. We can consider Sergei Trubachev (1919–1995), who was the head of the Conducting Department at the Gnesins' State Musical-Pedagogical Institute, to be one of the founders of the present-day sacred musical creativity in Russia in the post-Soviet period. While examining the sacred music created rather recently by the composers from the Gnesin Russian Academy of Music — Kirill Volkov, Alexei Larin, Vladimir Dovgan, Andrei Mikita, Andrei Golovin, Valery Pyankov, and Valery Kikta, the author observes that there is a predominance of non-liturgical genres in it. The artistic approach of the composers in the sphere of the sacred musical space is characterized in the article as the interaction of the classical and non-classical, the traditional and the non-traditional elements. On the examples of sacred works by Kirill Volkov, Vladimir Dovgan, Alexei Larin and Andrei Mikita, the author highlights its concrete features: first of all, the connection of canonic and secular texts, traditional writing and contemporary intonational language.

Keywords: sacred music by composers from the Gnesin Academy, Sergei Trubachev, Kirill Volkov, Vladimir Dovgan, Alexei Larin, Andrei Mikita

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Современное музыкальное искусство

Научная статья

О духовной музыке композиторов Гнесинского Дома**

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Аннотация. Автор статьи обозначает как специальную научную проблему изучение духовно-сакральной музыки композиторов Гнесинского Дома. Многообразные аспекты её решения потенциально включают исторические мотивы, тематику и жанры, содержание и форму, смысл и его выражение и др. Одним из основоположников современного духовно-музыкального творчества в России в постсоветский период следует считать Сергея Трубочёва (1919–1995), возглавлявшего в Государственном музыкально-педагогическом институте имени Гнесиных кафедру дирижирования. Рассматривая сравнительно недавно созданную духовную музыку композиторов Российской академии музыки имени Гнесиных — Кирилла Волкова, Алексея Ларина, Владимира Довганя, Андрея Микиты, Андрея Головина, Валерия Пьянкова, Валерия Кикты, автор отмечает, что в ней преобладают внелитургические жанры. Творческий подход авторов в сфере музыкально-сакрального пространства характеризуется в статье как взаимодействие классического и неклассического, традиционного и нетрадиционного начал. На примере духовных сочинений Кирилла Волкова, Владимира Довганя, Алексея Ларина и Андрея Микиты автор выявляет его конкретные черты: прежде всего, соединение канонических и светских текстов, традиционного письма и современной интонационности.

Ключевые слова: духовная музыка композиторов-гнесинцев, Сергей Трубочёв, Кирилл Волков, Владимир Довгань, Алексей Ларин, Андрей Микита

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Introduction

The article makes the attempt to glance at the artistic activities of composers from the positions of a direction that is presently relevant, — one could say, the present-day mainstream music connected with an interest in church service in contemporary culture. In this connection, we must refer to Pavel Florensky's conception of the kinship of "culture" and "cult." As the scholar wrote, "...The majority of cultures, as befitting to the word's etymology (*cultura* is that which is developed from *cultus*), featured particularly the springing up of the seed of religion, the mustard tree that has grown from the seed of faith."¹

The culture of the musical thought of the composers who presently work within the walls of the Gnesins' Russian Academy of Music, has sprouted from the professional Russian tradition. Having worked in various musical genres, including music for the stage and the cinema, large-scale operatic, symphonic and cantata-oratorio forms, these composers have turned their serious attention to music of sacred content — both choral and instrumental works. It suffices to mention such works as Kirill Volkov's Six Sacred Concertos for each day of the Passion Week *We Venerate your Passions* (2011), Alexei Larin's Russian Passions for soloists and chorus (1993/94), Vladimir Dovgan's oratorio *Hear my Voice, O God*, written in memory of Nikolai Gogol (based on the writer's sacred prose) (2009) and, finally, Andrei Mikita's oratorio *Seven Words about*

God set to a text by Boris Grebenschchikov to comprehend the scale of this activity, its demand by the best ensembles of performers and recognition across the world.

To listen to music, to immerse into its "semiosphere," to perceive that "encounter," which every "lonely artist" dreams of, — this is still the realm of aesthetic reception that every listener is endowed with. The world of music is not merely the world of the words in it, but also the world of words about it. From hence comes our task — to pose a special scholarly problem about the sacred music by the composers of the Gnesin House, the different aspects of which should include many things — historical motives, composers and their compositions, the subject matter and the genres, content and form, meaning and its expression. Having begun our scholarly search in this direction, we shall, nonetheless, limit ourselves with a very local subject matter.

The Sacred Music by the Composers of the Gnesins' House: The Past and the Present

Of great importance in the formation of the spiritual and musical creativity of the Gnesins' House were the activities of Sergei Zosimovich Trubachev (1919–1995) — the head of the Conducting Department. Having previously composed his music without having any prospects of having it performed or published, upon having gone to retirement, he went along the path of active spiritual and musical creativity.²

¹ Florensky P. A. *Zapiski o khristianstve i kul'ture* [Notes about Christianity and Culture]. *Sochineniya [Writings]*. In 4 Vols. Moscow: Mysl', 1996. Vol. 2. P. 549.

² In 1980 Sergei Trubachev moved to Sergiev Posad, near the Holy Trinity-St. Sergius Lavra. In 1995 he became ordained to the order of a deacon. For more about the composer's personality, his musical, literary and scholarly legacy see: Genchenkova M. V. The Personality of Composer Sergiy Trubachev in His Articles and Memoirs. *Bulletin of Slavic Cultures*. 2017. Vol. 44, pp. 180–188. (In Russ.)

His works have been performed by such celebrated choral ensembles as the famous choir of the Holy Trinity-St. Sergius Lavra under the direction of Archimandrite Matfey (Mormyl); the choir of the Moscow Sretensky Monastery (under the direction of choirmaster Nikon Zhila), and the choir of the Moscow Danilov Monastery (choirmaster Georgy Safonov, graduate of the Gnesins' Russian Music Academy).

Having been a musicologist, a conductor and a public figure, Sergei Trubachev could not assume that he would turn out to be one of the founder-composers of contemporary sacred music in Russia during the post-Soviet period. After almost twenty years after his demise, the Gnesin Russian Academy of Music may finally honor the memory of the outstanding musician with the acknowledgement of his valuable contribution to this musical historical activity.

However, it would be fallacious to assert that the composers of the Gnesins' House are continuers of the musical endeavors of Trubachev. It so happened that each composer developed his own paths of "service." And still the beginning prescribed by Trubachev is that secret which has become visible... Visible after a considerable period of time — after the publication of his musical and literary works³ (through the efforts of his family, the Trubachevs and Florenskys).

Liturgical and non-liturgical works, unified by sacred subject-matter, are at present written by many composers, including: Metropolitan Hilarion (Alfeyev), Yuri Butsko, Rodion Shchedrin, Roman Ledenev, Arvo

Pärt, Vladimir Martynov, Pavel Karmanov, Iraida Yusupova, Victoria Polevaya, Andrei Bondarenko and many others. The composers from the Gnesin Russian Academy of Music — Georgy Dmitriev, Kirill Volkov, Alexei Larin, Vladimir Dovgan, Andrei Mikita, Andrei Golovin, Valeriy Pyankov and Valery Kikta — for all of their individuality, comprise an artistic community that possesses a definite conceptual directive.

At the present time, the Composition Department and the Computer Music, Informatics and Acoustics Department,⁴ along with their pedagogy, have satisfied the artistic community by their broad and diversified compositional activities, including their organization of festivals, competitions, concerts, master-classes, collaboration with performance ensembles and other types of work in our country and abroad. The music of the composers of the Gnesins' House has remained in the sphere of active research interest of music scholars, whose attention has been attracted by questions of manifestation of neo-folklore tendencies in their music, [1; 2] issues of dramaturgy and the peculiarities of compositional structure in certain compositions, [3; 4] a complex of musical-expressive means and the specificity of the pitch system. [5; 6]

Among the numerous genres entering the sphere of composers' predilections, a special place is held by the genre of sacred compositions and church music compositions. Obviously, the question arises of the inner genre direction of this type of music. Composers write both liturgical and non-liturgical oeuvres.

³ See: Trubachev S., Deacon. *Izbrannoe: Stat'i i issledovaniya* [*Selected Writings: Articles and Research Works*]. Comp. by hegumen Andronik (Trubachev), M. S. Trubachyova, O. S. Nikitina. Moscow: Progress-Pleyada, 2005. 720 p.

⁴ Currently, both departments are united into a single department of composition.

The latter predominate in number, forming the sphere of contemporary topical music. Each of the masters possesses his own set of audio and video collections defined by their personal “predilections,” perceptions of their subject matter and expressive means. The respective correlations of the materials for choir galleries and for concert halls have characterized the catalogues of composers’ works in different ways, but, in all probability, the prevalence of non-liturgical genres has formed a discernible tendency, although this must not be considered a stable tendency by any means.

How can this be explained? On the one hand, by the specific qualities of choral compositions written for church services — genre-related, compositional and, of course, textual characteristic features. On the other hand, the freedom of choice of both the content-wise and the expressive means which, nonetheless, fit into a definite artistic-aesthetical format. And yet another peculiarity of the time — the availability of the choice of the realization of performance, in other words, the feasibility of both liturgical and concert performances.

Thus, Vladimir Dovgan, while summing up his impressions about the competition “Roman Sladkopevets” [“Romanus the Melodist”], which took place in St. Petersburg in 2012, called it a “great event” for all of Russia, but also saw a number of serious problems in its repertoire. The composer observed that the compositions designed for concert performance frequently turned out to be more professionally written than the works especially created for performance during church service. He explained this phenomenon by the conservative character of the latter, which required strict adherence to the church canons and traditions. In Dovgan’s opinion, in this sphere a special kind of compositional

talent is required, which has to combine with a profound knowledge of the Orthodox Christian church singing tradition. Let us note that fact that the first choral competition was won by a composer who worked at the Gnesin Russian Academy of Music — Alexei Larin. His “little choral piece” (according to his authorial remark) *Chiming Towards the All-Night Vigil* set to a poem by Ivan Aksakov impressed the listeners by the depth of content and the exquisiteness of form. Having awarded this composition with the first prize, the jury noted it as the best of all those submitted.

In what genres and forms do the Gnesins’ composers work? Do they maintain any common tendencies, or do they create something new, endowed with individual features?

If among sacred compositions for concert performance such genres as cantatas and oratorios, choral concertos and “Passions” have remained on demand, the music of our “academic” composers has continued to exist in the sphere of combination of conceptual musical compositions written on canonic and poetic texts. At the same time, the classical and the non-classical, the traditional and the non-traditional elements interact in a natural way in highly professional compositions, forming a single organic whole. We shall provide with a few examples below.

The Sacred Works by Kirill Volkov, Vladimir Dovgan, Alexei Larin and Andrei Mikita

On the website “Tserkovnyi kompozitor” (“Church Composer”) Kirill Volkov is mentioned as a composer of numerous works for church choir devoted to saints, holidays and holy events. They are presented in audio and visual (musical scores) format, which is important in the conditions of familiarization with this music, including through the Internet. *Sticheron, troparion,*

contakion, psalms, prayers, and sessional hymns — all of these and other genre forms are performed in church service and concert practice. A connoisseur of the small prayers (let us remember how Piotr Tchaikovsky exclaimed, marvelling at the numerous abundance and specificity of church forms!), Volkov feels himself more inclined towards large-scale compositions, including vocal and instrumental works (for example, the choral mystery *Zhitie protopopa Avakuma* [*The Life of Archpriest Avakum*], *Stikhira Ioanna Groznogo* [*The Sticherion of Ivan the Terrible*] for cello and bayan, etc.).

Among the latest large-scale compositions are the Six Sacred Concertos on each day of Passion Week *Poklonyaemsa strastem Tvoim* [*We Venerate Your Passions*] (2011), which has been brilliantly performed by the chorus directed by Evgeny Volkov. The composer's masterful skills manifested themselves in the creation of the cycle as compilations of church service chants unified by a single idea, by one spiritually uplifting inner state. The canonical text narrating about the Passions of Christ has found an adequate reflection in the musical images embodied in different genres. The Sticherion of the morning service (Holy Monday), the Kondak (Holy Tuesday), the Sessional Hymn (Holy Wednesday), the Sticherion of the morning service (Holy Thursday), the Sticherion for the Kiss of the Shroud of Christ (Holy Friday),

the Troparion of the Evening (Holy Saturday) — this genre-related figurative set has obtained an iconic character in the composer's interpretation. The creation of the image-symbol has been conducive to the unification of text and sound, meaning and compositional means.

Kirill Volkov's original work, inheriting the "Russian idea," possesses an original idiolect, in which it is possible to hear echoes of tradition (in the pitches, meter, rhythm and tempo), as well as contemporary intonations (modal-tonal effects, polyphonic technique, etc.). It must be observed that a considerable role in the stylistic formation is played by the spatial-temporal factor realized by means of the texture and especially the timbre effects — the artistic combination of the voices in the score. The suaveness of the solo-tutti sounds, the syllabic-tonic and imitational, the diatonic and quasi-chromatic fragments creates a remarkable panorama of sacred-musical images of the composition, *Poklonyaemsa strastem Tvoim* [*We Venerate Your Passions*] is a sign work of Kirill Volkov, a talented contemporary interpretation of the Eternal Theme.

Vladimir Dovgan is a well-known musician, composer, pianist and pedagogue, who likewise composes both secular and sacred music. The website "Tserkovnyi kompozitor" ["Church Composer"] presents an abundant selection of his liturgical compositions from various types of church service, which may be performed in church and in concerts.⁵

⁵ Let us enumerate Vladimir Dovgan's compositions pertaining to the sphere of sacred music: *Simvol very* [*The Creed*] for mixed choir (1991); *Iz Triodi postnoi* [*From the Lenten Triodion*], Concerto for mixed chorus in seven movements (1993); Liturgical Chants: *Trisvyatoe* [*Trisagion*], *Milost' mira* [*Mercy of the World*] for mixed chorus (1992–1996); Troparion for the Acquisition of the Relics of the Saint Blessed Prince Daniil of Moscow for mixed choir (2003); *Utverdi, Gospodi* [*Affirm, O Lord*] for mixed choir (2003); *Divnoe Imya Tvoe* [*Wondrous in Thy Name*] for mixed choir (2003); *Prednaznachitel'nyi psalom* [*The Intended Psalm*] for mixed choir (2006); *Iz chasov Svyatoi Paskhi* [*From the Hours of Holy Easter*] for mixed choir (2008). Most of these works are performed in churches and in concert venues.

From the recent compositions in large-scale form, one brilliant example is the oratorio *Uslyshi, Bozhe, glas moi* [*Hear My Voice, O God*], written in memory of Nikolai Gogol (2009). The composer elucidated his conception the following way: “I came up with the idea of generating particularly these words of Gogol with music, which was gradually manifested in the oratorio. In the latter I lead the listener from the time of the writer’s childhood to the end of his life, and in the spiritual plane — from the festivity of Christmas to Easter. After the Easter light comes Gogol’s farewell to the world and the penitence from the text of his will is sounded out. The writer speaks about what he was mistaken in, about the fact that his words may have yielded different fruit from those he wished to receive. Essentially, he warns that careless thoughtlessly disseminated seeds may generate monstrous seedlings, and turns to those who had still not understood that life is hardly a jest and requires a serious attitude towards itself.”⁶

Alexei Larin, a master of choral writing beloved by him,⁷ acquired broad renown, among his other compositions, as the composer of such sacred musical compositions as the cantata *Rozhdestvenskie kolyadki* [*Christmas Carols*] for soloists, chorus and percussion based on motives of Slavic folk music (1992), the oratorio

Russkie strasti [*Russian Passions*] for soloists, chorus and percussion based on texts from the Gospels, Orthodox Christian canonical and folk texts.⁸ Its idiostyle, having been formed to a great degree by the remarkable arrangements of folk songs (one of his compositions is *Rybatskaya fantaziya* [*Fishermen’s Fantasy*] based on themes of folksongs of the Astrakhan Region, 2014), has found its natural manifestation in sacred music, as well.

Of a non-liturgical character are such compositions as Three Works for Female Chorus *Blagovestye* [*Glad Tidings*] (2005) and *Triptych* for bass, chorus and piano set to poems by Daniil Andreyev (1992/94). To this list we may also add his original composition titled *Dva fragmenta iz ‘Sluzhby blagodarstvennoi o poltavskoi pobede’* [*Two Fragments from ‘Eucharistic Service about the Victory in Poltava’*] for mixed chorus (publication by Vladimir Protopopov, edition of Alexei Larin, 2009); as well as Ash Wednesday set to Thomas Stearns Eliot’s text in English (2006). A substantial attribute of such kinds of compositions is, in our opinion, an organic two-sided approach — the orientation on classical traditional writing in the context of contemporary compositional means of expression.

No matter, what kind of music Larin would write, in whatever genres he would

⁶ See: Vladimir Dovgan: *traditsionalizm v sovremennoi muzyke* [*Vladimir Dovgan: Traditionalism in Contemporary Music*]. URL: <http://www.classicalforum.ru/index.php?topic=2842.0> (accessed: 20.05.2024).

⁷ About the aesthetics of the composer’s choral works and the specificity of his idiostyle see: Sokolnikova E. Yu. Alexei Larin: Choral Works of the 2000s (Aesthetics and Musical Means of Expression). *Izvestia. Ural Federal University Journal. Series 2: Humanities and Arts*. 2018. Vol. 20, No. 2, pp. 230–238. (In Russ.) <https://doi.org/10.15826/izv2.2018.20.2.038>; Sokolnikova E. Yu. On the “Idiostyle” of Aleksei Larin in the Mirror of Tactics of Choral Composition (on the Example of Works of the 2000’s). *PHILHARMONICA. International Music Journal*. 2015. No. 4, pp. 67–77. (In Russ.) <https://doi.org/10.7256/2453-613X.2015.4.17251>

⁸ For greater details on this composition, see: Kazantseva L. P. “Russkie strasti” Alexeya Larina: k probleme zhanra [Alexei Larin’s *Russian Passions*: Towards the Issue of Genre]. *Problemy muzykal’noi nauki / Music Scholarship*. 2011. No. 2, pp. 132–135.

work in, his aesthetical-culturological position remains immutable: “And the main criteria in the search for one’s own path and in the evaluation of various musical phenomena is seen to be, in my opinion, the never outdated understanding of art as a means for people to communicate with each other. And until the search remains in this vein, that is, while one person tries to share something intimate and sacred with others, this may be considered as art.”⁹

Andrei Mikita, similar to many other composers of the Gnesins’ House, leads broad public musical activities — he is a teacher, a member of juries of a number of international competitions, and engages himself in literary work (writing articles, commentaries and interviews). As a composer, he has created, jointly with Metropolitan Hilarion (Alfeyev) the internet website “Tserkovnyi kompozitor” [“Church Composer”], the aim of which is to acquaint society with sacred musical works by composers of our time. And even though the speed of motion of the musical facts and their fixation on the website do not always coincide, this beginning, which has been implemented for the first time into our reality, has played a substantial role in the contemporary musical scene.

Pianist *Andrei Mikita* is also well-known as a composer of Orthodox Christian sacred music who has worked in this genre for numerous years. His style can be characterized for its interaction of the liturgical and the non-liturgical elements, which is noticeably manifested in both the canonical and the non-canonical

genres. Examples of the latter may be served by such compositions as *Liturgiya krasoty* [*Liturgy of Beauty*] (the final movement of a cantata set to a text by Konstantin Balmont), as well as his instrumental works *Znamenie* [*Presage*] and *Uteshenie* [*Consolation*].

Our attention is drawn by a set of works for church service: *Rozhdestvenskii gimn* [*Christmas Hymn*] (was completed on January 6, 2014), and *Tropar' Svyatomu Luke* [*Troparion to Saint Luke*] (written in June, 2014), which have been performed by the Patriarchal Choir of the Cathedral of Christ the Savior. These liturgical compositions were written on canonical texts, and their musical language does not contradict it. Let us also note that the church choir pieces composed by Mikita are endowed by an expressive choral timbral elaboration and sonority and have become the object of performers’ attention on the part of well-known ensembles: for example, the doxology to the Reverend *Ilya of Murom* has been sung by the State Choir under the direction of Evgeny Volkov (in November 2013), whereas the Kondak *To Hilarion the New Dalmatian* — by the Synod Choir under the direction of Alexei Puzakov (in the summer of 2013).

Only a few works by the composers of the Gnesins’ House have been identified and discussed in the article with the aim of attracting attention towards the issue of contemporary sacred music, relevant in the present day. According to our observation, the space of stirring questions

⁹ Larin A.: “...Nesmotrya na shchedro predrekaemye ‘kontsy sveta,’ muzykal'naya praktika sushchestvuet...” [“...Notwithstanding the Generously Predicted ‘Ends of the World,’ Musical Practice Continues to Exist...”]. Interview with N. Gulyanitskaya. *Slovo kompozitora: Mysli o muzyke* [*The Composer’s Word: Thoughts about Music*]. Moscow, 2011. P. 119.

is broadening, just as the circle of scholars studying artistic processes is widening. However, as always, there are much more questions than there are answers to them... The art of composition in the sphere of sacred compositions — as an “essential core”

of the activities of the composers pertaining to the Gnesins’ House,— we have attempted to reflect merely in our spur-of-the-moment observations, which are subject to further specification and development...

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