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History of Music: From the Source to Interpretation (Based on Materials from Russian Scholarly Periodicals of the Last Three Years)

Irina P. Susidko¹, Nina V. Pilipenko²^{1,2}*Gnesin Russian Academy of Music*¹*State Institute for Art Studies,**Moscow, Russian Federation*¹*i.susidko@gnesin-academy.ru*[✉], <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2343-7726>²*n.pilipenko@gnesin-academy.ru*, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5307-7197>

Abstract. The present article reviews Russian scholarly periodicals using various types of historical primary sources, such as archival documents, autographs, musical manuscripts, letters, diaries and memoirs, as the material for research. Approximately two hundred articles from more than two dozen Russian scholarly journals were examined. The examined journals belong to higher education institutions (conservatories and academies), research institutes and independent publishing houses. The article identifies the main publication groups formed according to two interrelated parameters including the type of primary sources and the purpose set out in a particular publication. The focus is on (1) archival documents as a basis for changing the characteristics and assessments of significant historical phenomena; (2) filling of gaps in knowledge about the musical culture of the past; (3) clarification and elucidation of the biographies of composers, performing musicians, critics, and publishers; (4) history of the musical composition of works and creative process of their authors, including in connection with the preparation of scholarly academic publications. An analysis of numerous articles has led to the conclusion that attention to primary sources has become widespread in Russian musicology due to both freer access to archives and library collections today and development of new approaches to understanding the reliability of scholarly research and to criteria for the scholarly foundation of contemporary academic publications of musical works.

Keywords: scholarly periodicals, musicology, document, primary source in scholarly research, egodocument

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История музыки: от первоисточника к интерпретации (по материалам отечественной научной периодики последних трёх лет)

Ирина Петровна Сусидко¹, Нина Владимировна Пилипенко²

^{1, 2}Российская академия музыки имени Гнесиных

¹Государственный институт искусствознания,

г. Москва, Российская Федерация

¹i.susidko@gnesin-academy.ru[✉], <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2343-7726>

²n.pilipenko@gnesin-academy.ru, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5307-7197>

Аннотация. Обзорная статья посвящена анализу статей в отечественной научной периодике, материалом исследования в которых стали исторические первоисточники разного рода: архивные документы, автографы, нотные рукописи, письма, дневники, воспоминания. В поле зрения авторов попало около двухсот статей из более чем двух десятков научных российских журналов, принадлежащих высшим учебным заведениям (консерваториям и академиям), научно-исследовательским институтам, независимым издательствам. В статье выявлены основные группы публикаций, сформированные по двум взаимосвязанным параметрам: типу первоисточника и цели, поставленной в той или иной публикации. Основное внимание уделено архивному документу как основе для изменения характеристик и оценок значимых исторических явлений; заполнению лагун в знаниях о музыкальной культуре прошлого; уточнению и прояснению биографий композиторов, музыкантов-исполнителей, критиков, издателей; истории сочинения музыкальных произведений и творческого процесса их создателей, в том числе в связи с подготовкой научных академических изданий. Анализ многочисленных статей позволил сделать вывод о широком распространении в российском музыковедении внимания к первоисточникам, обусловленного как более свободным доступом к архивам и библиотечным фондам, так и формированием новых подходов к пониманию достоверности научного исследования и критериям научного оснащения современного академического издания музыкальных сочинений.

Ключевые слова: научная периодика, музыковедение, документ, первоисточник в научном исследовании, эго-документ

Introduction

A glance at musicological periodicals of the last three years as a single information array reveals a kind of snapshot of the current state of scholarship for identifying priority areas of research. Review articles based on such an approach acquire additional meaning if they focus on examining a single problem or a single area of knowledge about musical art. Two years ago, at the end of 2023, the first experiment of this kind was undertaken in a work related to

opera. At that time, more than 200 publications were examined, which confirmed the high research status of this topic. [1] A year later, a review article was published on research into contemporary academic music — a field that has remained unconditionally relevant for several decades as well as having recently gained new approaches. [2]

The present article, which is the third in the original series of analytical reviews, pays close attention to primary sources of information, representing a key trend in contemporary

musicology. This interpretation implies a significant limitation of the material, since the term “primary source” in the title of the article can also mean the original musical work itself. In this case, any theoretical or historical study that uses the musical text of a specific work a priori turns into its interpretation; in other words, the field of research is maximally expanded, and its boundaries are blurred. Thus, we settled on materials of a special kind. These are archival or current documents, autographs, as well as a whole complex of biographical materials, which have recently been referred to as “egodocuments” [3] — letters, diaries, memoirs.

An analysis of approximately two hundred articles from 22 Russian scholarly journals publishing musicological research was performed:

1. *Actual Problems of High Music Education* (Nizhny Novgorod Glinka State Conservatory)
2. *Journal of Musical Science* (M.I. Glinka Novosibirsk State Conservatory)
3. *Bulletin of the Vaganova Ballet Academy*
4. *Vestnik of Saint Peterburg University. Arts*
5. *Journal of Saratov Conservatory. Issues of Arts*
6. *Vremennik Zubovskogo Instituta* (Russian Institute of Art History, St. Petersburg)
7. *Journal of the Music Theory Society*
8. *Art of Music. Theory and History* (State Institute for Art Studies, Moscow)
9. *Culture. Art. Education* (A.N. Kosygin Russian State University (Technology. Design. Art))
10. *Music. Art, Research, Practice* (N.G. Zhiganov Kazan State Conservatory)
11. *Music Academy* (Kompozitor Publishing House)
12. *Music in the System of Culture: Scientific Bulletin of the Ural Conservatory*
13. *Musical Journal of Northern Europe* (Petrozavodsk State Glazunov Conservatory)

14. *Journal of Moscow Conservatory*
15. *Opera musicologica* (St. Petersburg State Conservatory named after N.A. Rimsky-Korsakov)
16. *Russian Musicology* (Gnesin Russian Academy of Music)
17. *Contemporary Musicology* (Gnesin Russian Academy of Music)
18. *Sphere of Culture* (Samara State Institute of Culture)
19. *Scholarly Papers of Gnesin Russian Academy of Music*
20. *Art & Culture Studies* (State Institute of Art Studies, Moscow)
21. *South-Russian Musical Anthology* (Rostov State Rachmaninov Conservatory)
22. *Philharmonica. International Music Journal* (Nota Bene Publishing House).

Documents as an Impetus for Rethinking History

The most relevant results are produced when documents found in archives, museums and library repositories are brought into the orbit of research. Progress in the systematisation of such materials, greater accessibility of information, digitisation and description of collections, as well as online publication of documents represent a trend that is currently felt throughout the world. These processes, which are intended to facilitate scholars' access to primary sources, mainly achieve this goal. Nevertheless, the regular emergence of new archival finds and related discoveries, sometimes sensational, convinces us that this process is far from complete. A role is also played by how accurately and completely the discovered documentary sources are attributed and, no less importantly, how they are interpreted and how significant this interpretation is for the formation of new knowledge.

In recent years, Russian musicology has made many achievements in the field of archival research, source studies and generalisation

of these observations. The greatest number of discoveries are related to documents that introduce new details into the biographies of composers and performing musicians, about whom supposedly much if not everything was known.

Johann Sebastian Bach can be considered one of these figures. Despite the fact that his life and work were very thoroughly documented, Tatyana Shabalina, a prominent Bach scholar, manages time and again to discover sources introducing new details into the understanding of the composer's life and creative path and, most importantly, to consistently form new interpretations of the facts. Shabalina writes that the original printed text of the Bach's cantata *Wünschet Jerusalem Glück* BWV1139.1 found in the Russian National Library is the only surviving copy in the world for accurately establishing the date of the work creation as 1725, thereby ending the long-standing discussion on this issue, and its author's composition of seven, and not six — as previously believed — parts. [4, p. 11–19] A thorough analysis of all the circumstances, versions and facts makes a significant addition to the understanding of Bach's cantata work, while one curious detail rose a question about the intricate fate of archival documents in Russian collections: during the Soviet era, the pages with the text of Bach's cantata were located in a storage section of the Russian National Library designated as the "Anti-religious Department." [Ibid., p. 12] Equally impressive conclusions about the fate of the autograph of Johann Sebastian Bach's Mass in *B minor* (BWV 232 / II–IV) and its reception were made by Shabalina based on the analysis of the handwritten score kept

at the St. Petersburg Conservatory. [5] New documentary research became the basis for adjusting the idea of the Bach's youth in the article by Natalia Dahl. [6]

Anatoly Milka chose a different way of interpreting documentary materials in his articles of 2024. [7; 8] Two well-known stories — about Bach's journey on foot from Arnstadt to Lübeck in 1705–1706 and about his improvisation at the reception of the Prussian King Friedrich II (May 7, 1747) — are almost flawlessly supplied with historical evidence, as well as with more than 300 years of descriptions and interpretations, including the Obituary written by Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach.¹ However, this is only at first glance. An analysis of the available documents and identification of contradictions and oddities in them forced the scholar to doubt a number of details, even if they appeared to represent reliable and truthful evidence. Such doubts, in turn, led to the deconstruction of existing knowledge and conclusions that can safely be called paradoxical: the composer's journey to Lübeck in reality was most likely not the same as it is presented in the history of music, [7, p. 24] and Bach did use the king's theme in the improvised fugue, and not his own, as most historians insisted. [8, p. 645]

A critical assessment and revealed contradictions in the available documents related to the French debut of Christoph Willibald Gluck (1774) were used by Anastasia Khlyupina to put forward a bold assumption: the contract with the composer, which has been considered by historians for 250 years as a means of pressure from the theatre, is most likely a fiction and "an invention of Gluck's first German biographers." [9, p. 618] This time,

¹ Agricola J. F., Bach C. P. E., Mizler L. Chr., Venzky G. Der dritte und letzte ist der im Orgelspielen weltberühmte HochEdle Herr Johann Sebastian Bach, Königlich-Polnischer und Churfürstlich Sächsischer Hofcompositeur, und Musikdirector in Leipzig. In: *Musicalische Bibliothek...*, hrsg. von Lorenz Misler, S. 158–176. Leipzig: Mizlerischen Bücher-Verlag, [1754], Bd. 4, Theil 1.

as in Milka's work, interpretation became a means of "demythologising" a historical source by drawing on a wide range of arguments.

Larisa Kirillina used a combination of direct and indirect documentary evidence, as well as confirmed facts and hypotheses to paint a picture of the young Beethoven's journey to Vienna (1787). Using the publication of Dieter Haberl (2020), [10] who clarified the chronology of events, she significantly expanded the documentary base and drew on sources of a wide variety of types for a more accurate and complete answer to the question: "Did Beethoven meet Mozart, and if not, what did he do in Vienna?", which had not previously received any reliable answer. [11, p. 21]

On Deconstruction and Reconstruction

Reliance on the document, its unbiased, "unblinkered" analysis, along with meticulous comparison of facts and identification of diverse connections, have become one of the most important areas of today's research into Russian and Soviet music history. The thematic range of such works is quite wide. Very valuable publications of materials considering regional culture can be highlighted. As a paraphrase of a famous statement by Mikhail Lomonosov, we can say that the understanding of Russian history in its fullness and diversity will be enhanced precisely by such materials, which extend beyond the boundaries of the capital "locus" familiar to scholars. This concept became the basis for the research and bibliographic project "Scholarly Map of Russia," in which musicology was actively involved. [12] In addition, it stimulates the emergence of works of various genres: from those based on archival documents essays on the musical culture of individual regions, most often Siberian ones [13; 14; 15] to filling the gaps in the biographies of key figures in this history, such as the musicologist Boleslav Yavorsky [16] or theatre artist Pyotr Lambdin. [17] The discovery of

archival documents is perhaps the only way to bring the names of forgotten masters back from oblivion, thereby both restoring justice and making the understanding of historical processes complete and more adequate. The objectives and conclusions of the article by Natalia Gulyanitskaya can be assessed in this light. [18]

The histories of theatres, universities, and philharmonic societies, which are new in their essence, have also become relevant. Previous official releases and encyclopaedic articles, which generally lack historical specifics and have sometimes been subject to ideological "correction," have been replaced by works presenting history in a variety of diverse facts and opinions that did not yet have, and could not previously have had, the status of publication. The course of events and the struggle of opinions, recorded in the minutes and transcripts of meetings, the texts of treaties, curricula and programs, as interpreted by scholars, convey to us the living current of history. It is precisely this kind of documentary reconstruction that was undertaken by Tatiana Naumenko in an article considering the relationship between Dmitry Shostakovich and Mikhail Khrapchenko, [19] as well as in her work highlighting the scholarly activities of the Gnesin State Musical Pedagogical Institute in the first decade of its work. [20] Articles by Pyotr Gordeev, published in several domestic journals, formed a unique cycle of documented post-revolutionary history of theatre and music: the Moscow Bolshoi Theatre, [21] the Maly Drama Theatre, [22] and the Mariinsky Theatre. [23]

Forgotten pages of Soviet history were restored in an article by Liudmila Gavrilova, who published materials from a "Panorama of 20th Century Opera" series of programs issued by the Main Editorial Board of Music Broadcasting of the All-Union Radio, including 96 radio broadcasts literally saved from destruction by Valery Berezin, a professor

at the Moscow Conservatory. [24] However, these pages were forgotten rather as a historical fact, since the documentary materials were “sentenced” to be written off; nevertheless, the radio cycle itself still exists in the memories of those, albeit now small in number, listeners of these programs.

Although a voluminous study by Marina Raku, extremely rich in documentary material, which is read like a historical detective story, is focused on the film *The Fall of Berlin* by Mikhail Chiaureli with music by Dmitry Shostakovich, the interpretation extends to a wide range of phenomena of the Stalin era. [25] A similar historical perspective emerges in the article by Alexander Naumov about the play *Rip-grass* (1901) by Evgeny Goslavsky (text) and Alexander Shefer (music), studied on the basis of documentary materials. [26]

An analysis of responses in popular and professional periodicals “on the heels” of premieres and concerts serves as an effective means of deconstructing established and often unrealistic ideas. Presenting musical life in all its diversity in both the capital and regions, [27; 28] they recreate a picture of the musical perception of the work by famous musicians and clarify established assessments — as in the case of the materials concerning the reception of Sergei Rachmaninoff’s concerts in the USA and France, which were collected and interpreted by Vera Valkova. [29; 30] Newspaper publications, which have become sources for contemporary scholarly analysis, fill various episodes of music history with living, concrete material — both well-known and of little notice, e.g. an article about the Orthodox church singing tradition of Harbin in the 1920s–1940s. [31]

Studies dispelling misconceptions that having once arisen subsequently acquired the status of fact are particularly relevant. Referring to newspapers and journals of the past is unlikely to completely destroy established assessments,

but is often capable of significantly adjusting them. In this case, even a single detail can become the seed of a new interpretation. Thus, the widespread opinion about the failure of Bizet’s *Carmen* at the premiere secured its place among the list of masterpieces that suffered a fiasco, becoming one of the arguments for the short-sightedness of the critics who failed to appreciate this outstanding work. The work with articles from periodicals of that time shed light on the very complex circumstances of opera production, which can already be considered a success, and most importantly, managed to turn this judgment into a myth, proving its factual unreliability. [32]

Egodocuments:

Touches for Portraits and More

Egodocuments were the starting point for many discoveries and interpretations in a number of journal publications over the past three years. A common distinguishing feature of such sources is their “distinctly personal character.” [3, p. 185] Discussing this term, Yury Zaretsky calls it an “umbrella” under which “almost any autobiographical text can take refuge.” [Ibid., p. 186] In addition to autobiographies, memoirs, diaries, notebooks, letters and greeting cards, the egodocument concept includes any “testimonies” a person has about himself and his work, which sometimes manifest themselves in the most unexpected ways.

In musicological publications of recent years, such documents regularly become a source for clarifying various types of biographical data. In the overwhelming majority of cases, these letters are either newly discovered, little-known, or have not received due attention from researchers. Such publications include, for example, an article by Alexander Komarov about a previously unknown letter from Pyotr Tchaikovsky to Herman Laroche, “which was added to the collections of the Russian

National Museum of Music in 2024.” [33, p. 34] In addition to attributing this letter, which is valuable in itself, the author integrates it into the already known correspondence between friends, clarifying its details and filling in the gaps that existed until now. Among other articles of this kind, the publication of five letters from Alexander Serov to his mother, dating back to 1858–1859, the time of his travels through Europe, can be considered. It is interesting that during this same period, Serov “published correspondence in the form of ‘traveller’s notes’ in the magazine *Music and Theatre Herald*,” [34, p. 72] which also contained impressions from the trip. Compared to these correspondences, the letters to his mother act as a kind of quintessence of the egodocument concept, since in the first case, the composer striving to be more objective hardly described his feelings and impressions, while in the second, he generously shared his own assessments. [Ibid., p. 79]

Often, the study of letters as an additional source of information about the biographical facts, works and views of outstanding musicians becomes the impetus for an entire series of publications. Such are the articles by Natalia Savkina, based on the letters from *The Sergei Prokofiev Archive* at Columbia University. [35; 36; 37] The hero of the first of them was not only and not so much Sergei Prokofiev, but Boris Asafiev. According to the author, during the review of their correspondence from 1925 to 1935, “previously unknown life circumstances are investigated, and creative aspects are rendered in a new light,” [35, p. 112] and “tragic twists and turns of Soviet history ... can be read between the lines of these letters.” [Ibid.] In two other articles from this small cycle, Savkina focuses to a greater extent on the personality of Prokofiev, whose letters make a significant contribution “to the study of Prokofiev’s personality, which manifests itself differently in communication with different people.” [37, p. 171]

Finally, it is necessary to mention a whole series of articles devoted to translations into Russian of Ferruccio Busoni’s letters appeared in various musicological journals over the past three years. [38; 39; 40] No less interesting are the works using both unpublished and published egodocuments to reveal the details of the biography, as in the article by Maria Konstantinova, who outlined the Alexander Dargomyzhsky’s legal battle with the publisher Fyodor Stellovsky through the composer’s letters. [41]

Another type of egodocument — diaries — has recently been used less frequently to clarify biographical data. Nevertheless, Russian musicological journals include such publications. For example, the history of relationships between Anton Rubinstein and Grand Duke Konstantin Nikolaevich is examined in terms of the latter’s diaries. [42] On the other hand, such egodocuments can be used for other purposes — for “some generalisations on the problematic aspects of the study of manuscripts by Russian musicians” [43, p. 383] based on the diary entries of Nikolai Findeisen or even for identifying “the problem of teaching <...> harmony, to highly gifted students using the example of Sergei S. Prokofiev’s experience.” [44, p. 115]

In some cases, the role of egodocument may be played by rather untypical sources — for example, “the ‘joint text’ of composers’ titles has the ability to show author’s range of interests and explain the choice of topics” [45, p. 1] or personal library collections represent “a valuable source for research of composers’ artistic biographies, which bears the imprint of the personalities both of the owner of the book collection and of his or her entire generation.” [46, p. 29]

On the Path to Publication and After It

One of the most important areas of musicological work, requiring a thorough

study of primary sources of various kinds, is the preparation of works for publication. A contemporary scholarly publication includes a very wide range of tasks that confront scholars: the most complete, as far as possible, study of the autograph, drafts and variants, editorial versions, if they exist, the restoration and analysis of the context of this work, its critical reception, and many other necessary textual operations.

Such extensive and diverse work is being carried out by groups of musicologists as part of the preparation of new complete collections of works by Russian classics; its interim results and achievements are being recorded in scholarly periodicals. Thus, having examined the autographs of the score and piano arrangement of *The Nutcracker* ballet, prepared for publication by the composer himself, in the context of unpublished materials from the collections of the P.I. Tchaikovsky State Museum-Reserve, Alexander Komarov, concludes that such documents are of fundamental importance for reconstructing the history of the work. [47] Researchers have made public the complex and controversial history of Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov's editing of the orchestral and vocal works of Modest Mussorgsky, which had not previously attracted attention. [48]

An academic edition of a significant work requires an equally thorough study of the original source. The absence of a comprehensive study of Sergei Taneyev's *John of Damascus*, which would include reliance on a body of documentary materials, prompted the commissioning of such a special work, which paved the way for a critical edition of Taneyev's masterpiece. [49] As a result of describing and analysing the history of publication of the opera *Woman with a Dagger* by Vladimir Rebikov in the P. Jurgenson Moscow publishing house, recreated from the materials

of correspondence and handwritten biography of the composer, Elena Shabshaevich makes a conclusion that goes beyond the problem associated with a specific work: "on the basis of the archival documents, it will undoubtedly enrich the chronicles of both compositional activities and music publishing in our country, having written in an extraordinary page into the history of Russian music during the first decades of the 20th century." [50, p. 66]

The importance of analysing a primary source increases when a musicologist encounters an unpublished manuscript that has not previously attracted attention. In this case, it requires a careful textual description, such as in the article by Alla Yankus. [51] Archival discoveries occupy a special place among these studies. In this case, an article published in a periodical has the opportunity to become the first publication introducing a discovery into scholarly and performing circulation, and to attract the attention of a wide circle of interested musicians. In 2023, such a striking discovery was a previously unknown autograph by Modest Mussorgsky — an arrangement of the folk song "Oh, my freedom" for a male choir without accompaniment [52]; in 2025, this was the figure of the previously unknown East Slavic Baroque composer Kaplinsky and his Easter concert. [53]

The problems of research related to pre-press preparation of essays and scholarly support of such publications are closely related to works devoted to the study of the creative process. Even outside of publishing tasks, updating and understanding a documentary source enriches the understanding of a musical work and ultimately contributes to its performance destiny, which is what an academic publication serves. A novel detailed analysis of Mikhail Matyushin's sketches for *Victory over the Sun, Composition in Quarter Tones for Violin with Piano Accompaniment* and *Don*

Quixote, [54] early works of Shostakovich, examined in terms of rough drafts, [55] process of Rimsky-Korsakov's work on the opera *May Night*, [56] and identification of the specifics of the Russian manuscript version of Giovanni Paisiello's opera *The Beautiful Miller's Daughter*, discovered in the archives [57] — all this confirms the value of a thorough and meticulous analysis of the manuscript as the main source of primary information.

A special line of musicological research, reflected in periodicals, was formed by articles devoted to the history of publications. The range of such topics is very wide. As in the case of updating manuscript sources, such material is typically used to draw conclusions concerning a specific work or its author, touch upon a wider range of issues and, importantly, to outline the paths to deepening knowledge about the more general development processes of musical art, culture and scholarship. In the case of the publication of selected chorales by J.S. Bach, undertaken by Charles Gounod, the analysis of the collection and commentary makes it possible to draw conclusions about Gounod's special attitude to the legacy of the German classic, whose chorales he proposed to learn by heart, [58, pp. 78–79] and about the reasons for the emergence and growth of interest in his legacy in French culture as a whole. The same can be said of the article presenting Georges Bizet not as a composer but as an editor and proofreader of other people's works, [59] i.e., in a role that is non-considered when determining his place in the history of musical art.

Conclusion

It is quite clear that journal publications cannot claim to fully cover the problem of the primary source in musicological research, much less exhaust it. Monographs, dissertations, collections of articles and conference materials

that touch on this issue in one way or another have been left behind. Generalisations and assessments with this approach are obviously limited by the very nature of a scholarly periodical. However, in its essence and results, the perspective proposed in the article may be legitimate for several reasons. It allows a particular research trend to be grasped almost at the moment of its inception and, in addition, provides the opportunity to cover the “geography” of Russian musicology in its various regional manifestations. In scholarly periodicals, currently available online in most cases, it is easier to present the results of research that led to the most desired result for a scholar — a discovery, a find, a detection of a previously unknown name or fact.

The analysis of scholarly periodicals over the past three years has revealed some of the most important trends associated with the use of primary sources as the main research material. Scholars are increasingly turning to authentic documents of various types, which can help clarify both ancient and relatively recent episodes in the history of musical culture. The result almost always turns out to be more significant than simply filling the gaps in knowledge. Perceptions of individual artistic phenomena and even the interpretation of general historical and musical processes can change. Professionalism and interpretation practice prove to be an even more effective aspect than the very fact of using the original source. The primary source itself, even if it falls into the hands of a scholar for the first time, fails to guarantee the depth and completeness of the conclusions and protect against its superficial and passive use. The most works of the last three years fortunately demonstrate a combination of two necessary qualities: respect for the document and necessary established scholarly practice of its interpretation.

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Information about the authors:

Irina P. Susidko — Dr. Sci. (Arts), Full Professor, Head of the Analytical Musicology Department, Head of the Scientific and Creative Center for the Study of Musical Theater Problems, Gnesin Russian Academy of Music, Moscow, Russian Federation; Leading Researcher, Western Classical Art Department, State Institute for Art Studies, Moscow, Russian Federation.

Nina V. Pilipenko — Dr. Sci. (Arts), Professor at the Analytical Musicology Department, Gnesin Russian Academy of Music, Moscow, Russian Federation.

Информация об авторах:

И.П. Сусидко — доктор искусствоведения, заведующая кафедрой аналитического музыкознания, руководитель Научно-творческого центра по изучению проблем музыкального театра, Российская академия музыки имени Гнесиных; ведущий научный сотрудник сектора классического искусства Запада, Государственный институт искусствознания; г. Москва, Российская Федерация.

Н.В. Пилипенко — доктор искусствоведения, профессор кафедры аналитического музыкознания, Российская академия музыки имени Гнесиных, г. Москва, Российская Федерация.

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