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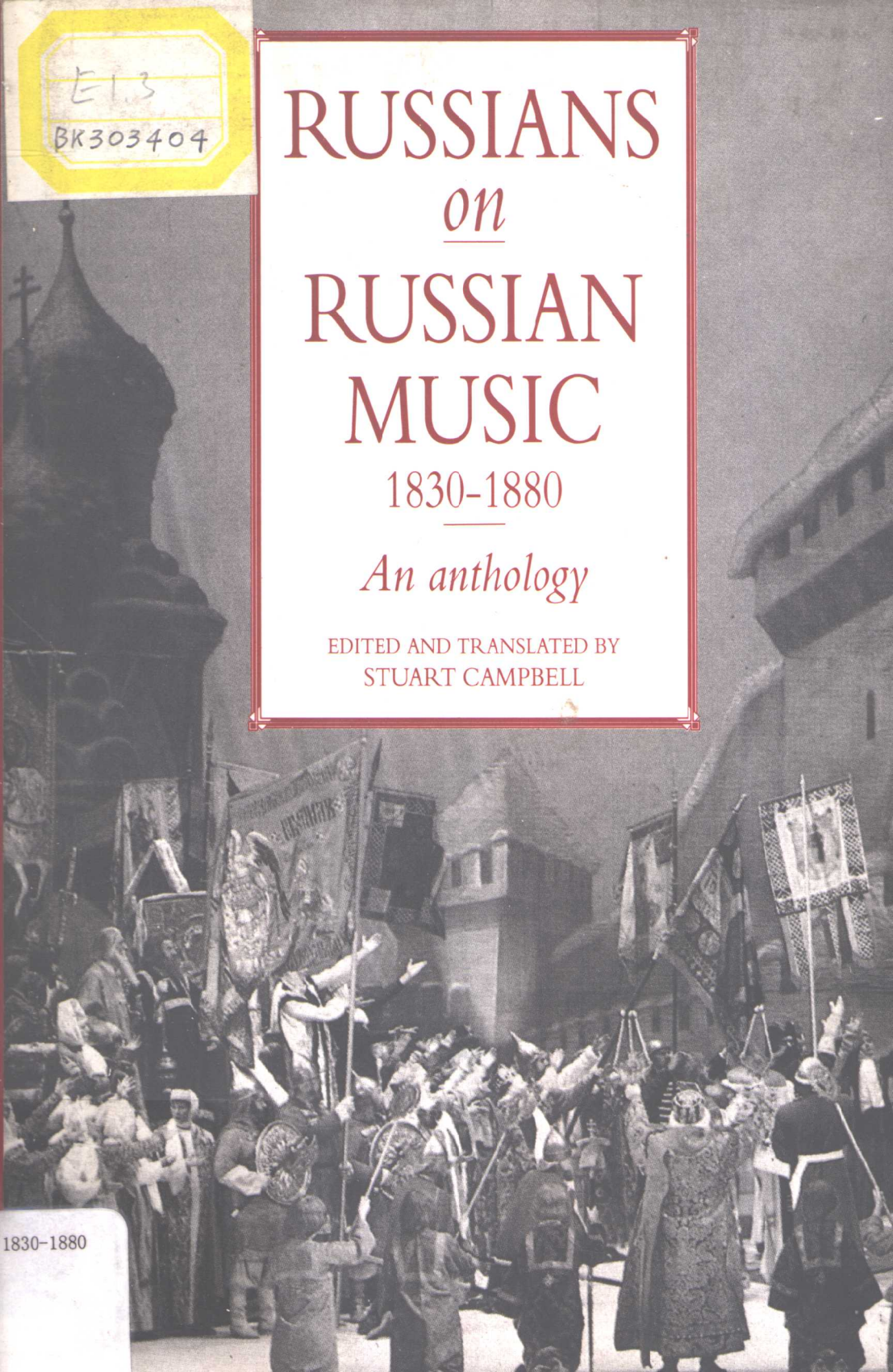
RUSSIANS *on* RUSSIAN MUSIC

1830-1880

An anthology

EDITED AND TRANSLATED BY
STUART CAMPBELL

1830-1880



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Tchaikovsky not only composed, he also wrote about music. This substantial anthology of Russian writing on Russian music also features the most influential critics of nineteenth-century Russia. They wrote on the first two generations of Russian composers from Glinka to Musorgsky, Tchaikovsky and Rimsky-Korsakov. The volume reveals through contemporary Russian eyes how the foundations of the hugely popular Russian classical repertory were laid, providing a vivid picture of the musical life of the opera house and the concert hall from which this repertory sprang.

Featuring most extensively the critical writing of Odoyevshy, Serov, Cui and Laroche, the volume contains the first authoritative reviews of key works, such as Musorgsky's *Boris Godunov*, Tchaikovsky's *Romeo and Juliet* and Rimsky-Korsakov's First Symphony.

This is the first anthology of its kind. With editorial commentary provided for each extract, it shows how Russian music criticism developed in step with the growth of Russian musical life, from initial dilettantism to well-informed professionalism.

Russians on Russian music, 1830–1880

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An anthology

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Preface

A small number of technical points, and a longer catalogue of indebtedness, must be recorded.

The term *narodnost*, which occurs with great frequency, requires some explanation. I have usually translated it as 'national identity', though 'nationality' and 'people's quality' are also conceivable; 'nationness' or 'peopleness' are starting-points for the translator. The words *narod* and *narodniy* have sometimes been rendered 'nation' and 'national', and at other times as 'people' and 'popular'; during the Soviet period they were much used as 'People's'. This dual interpretation ('national', and 'popular' or 'folk') should be kept in mind. The word *narodnost* had a further usage, however. It was part of the slogan put forward in 1833 by the Minister of Education (actually, 'Popular Enlightenment!') which acted as a summary of the state's official creed: Orthodoxy, Autocracy and Nationality (often rendered into English as 'Official Nationality' – the Russian word is again *narodnost*). This highly charged political element is relevant in considering *A Life for the Tsar*, which Nicholas I was right to perceive as a work useful for his purposes, whatever may have been Glinka's intentions.

Two other terms in particular may occasion difficulty. *Romans* is the word usually employed in Russian when the equivalent of an art-song, a *Lied* or a *mélodie*, is meant. I have generally retained 'romance' as its translation. *Deklamatsiya* was an important component of the ideas developed by Dargomizhsky, Cui and Musorgsky in relation to how words should be set to music. I have normally used 'word-setting' as the English equivalent, though I have tried to indicate those places where a wider meaning may be denoted.

All dates are given in Old Style, which means that they are twelve days behind the European calendar. The transliteration is based on that used in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, with slight modifications.

Completion of this book was advanced by study leave allowed by the University of Glasgow and by a Visiting Scholarship granted by St John's

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College, Oxford. Glasgow University Library (especially the Inter-Library Loan Department), the Slavonic Division of Helsinki University Library, the British Library, the Bodleian Library and the Library of the School of Slavonic and East European Studies provided help.

In annotating articles I have quarried liberally in the work of the Russian editors of sources listed elsewhere. Debts to David Brown (for *Mikhail Glinka* (London 1974) and *Tchaikovsky* (4 vols. London 1978-91)) and to Edward Garden for *Balakirev* (London 1967) must be acknowledged. *Kto pisal o muzike* ('Who has written about music') compiled by G. B. Bernandt and I.M. Yampol'sky (4 vols. Moscow 1971-89) has been heavily used. *The New Grove Dictionary* is, of course, indispensable. The *Muzikal'naya entsiklopediya* edited by Yu. V. Keldish (6 vols. Moscow 1973-82) and the same editor's *Muzikal'nyy entsiklopedicheskiy slovar'* ('Encyclopaedic dictionary of music') (Moscow 1990) have also served handsomely. I wish to acknowledge the help of Anne Ramsay, who translated 1b, 3b, 3c and 8a, Gareth Rankin, who typed several of the articles, and Carolyn Ritchie, who obtained several texts and prepared the music examples. The project received a stimulus from an invitation to conduct a seminar in the University of Newcastle upon Tyne, for which I am indebted to Dr Isobel Preece. Penny Souster guided the project to completion, with an anonymous publisher's reader reshaping it substantially and for the better. Edward Garden, Hugh Macdonald and John Warrack, together with the late Peter le Huray, administered welcome encouragement. The shortcomings are, of course, mine alone.

Stuart Campbell
15 February 1993

Introduction

The aims of this book are, firstly, to record the progress of the art of musical composition in Russia during the period of its most rapid development in the words of contemporary critics – that is, to provide a kind of history through texts; secondly, to set this repertory in the context of the distinctive ideas in which it burgeoned, or, in other words, to help to define the elements from which what is widely known as Russian musical nationalism was formed; thirdly, to sketch something of the background of musical life against which these new works were created.

Writing about music can scarcely exist without music, or criticism without material to analyse and comment upon; by ‘criticism’ is meant here, naturally, something more than a passage of a few hundred words lodged with an editorial office before midnight on the day of a performance: published Russian responses to new music usually involved lengthier discussion of matters of principle than is possible in that format, and writing in which such issues are raised is featured here. Material tending towards the ‘music theory’ end of the spectrum has not found a place here. Russian music criticism thus arose more or less in step with the growth of Russian music. While certain factors in the rise of both music and criticism were common to several European nations in the nineteenth century, others were peculiar to one alone. Those relevant to Russia are set forth briefly here.

The Russian army’s role in the defeat of Napoleon made the Russian state a major actor on the European political stage. A new sense of Russian national pride intensified a general Romantic interest in the history of nations and peoples, their languages and folklore, with a consequent increase in the production of dictionaries, collections of legends and folksongs and sundry studies of the past; these materials in turn engendered new works of art exploiting them in a variety of ways. One feature which set the Russians apart from the western nations was their use of their own Russian language, whose modern literature is largely of nineteenth-century creation, albeit with roots in the second half of the eighteenth century. The

language had recently been forged into a homogeneous medium of expression capable of universal application: lyric poetry, drama, philosophy and all other forms of intelligent discourse were newly possible in the Russian language. Writers hastened to establish a wide-ranging literature which in turn furnished texts for use in songs and stage works by composers. The latter in turn aspired to create a repertory of music which would be as distinctly Russian as other music was peculiarly French, German or Italian; the potential of Russian music dawned on Glinka and Dargomizhsky when they perceived the respective national qualities in Italian and French music while at large in western Europe. The struggle to formulate the principles of these new Russian compositions, to obtain regular performances and to win recognition is reflected in many of the passages in this book. Even by 1880, Russian music still had to be championed in its homeland against supporters of what was imported.

The half-century from 1830 to 1880 witnessed the creation of modern Russian music. Musical life became more active in reflection of increasing wealth and wider public interest. With technological advance came an expanding press issuing both sheet music and newspapers and journals, with some specialist periodicals supplementing the activities of the general periodical press. This process did not, of course, take place with relentless momentum, but we can identify the accession to the throne of Alexander II in 1855 as a crucial stage: the sense of liberation from previous rigidity and tight control, the encouragement of initiative and innovation, and the modernizing reforms of the 1860s brought new dynamism into Russian life, as we may observe in the setting-up of the Russian Musical Society with its conservatoires and the Free School of Music around the beginning of the 1860s.

Pushkin and Glinka played parallel and contemporary roles as the fathers of Russian literature and music respectively, though Pushkin is by far the more substantial figure. They are alike in being less familiar to the non-Russian world than their heirs; yet it will be clear from the contents of this volume that much later Russian music borrowed heavily – in principles and larger issues as well as in local ideas and fingerprints – from Glinka's work; moreover, these debts were universally recognized among both literary and musical artists. To the same generation belonged Gogol and Lermontov. During Glinka's lifetime, which ran from 1804 to 1857, further corner-stones of Russian literature were laid (in poetry, prose and drama) by Dostoyevsky, Ostrovsky, Tolstoy and Turgenev. The major works of Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy coincided, more or less, with those of Borodin, Musorgsky, Rimsky-Korsakov and Tchaikovsky.

These artists had contemporaries who wrote about music. Prince Odoyevsky was a member of the circle around Pushkin – indeed, they were

fellow *littérateurs*, journalists and publishing entrepreneurs; Odoyevsky was typical of his time in that he wrote about music among many other subjects. The next generation, Serov and Stasov, emerged in 1847 almost simultaneously with Dostoyevsky (whose *Poor Folk* was published in 1846): their work is marked by a new polemical urgency, and in the case of Serov by a thorough command of musical technicalities which he did not refrain from parading: a parallel, perhaps, to the detailed, hard-headed approach of contemporary Realists in painting and literature, and to the down-to-earth practical work of the doctors and engineers held to typify the men of the 1860s (as against the aristocratic dreamers and visionaries of earlier decades). Cui and Laroche took their first bows in the mid-1860s, the period (roughly) of *War and Peace* and *Crime and Punishment*. While Cui, a fortifications engineer by profession, continued the tradition of the musician not professionally trained in that field – along with his colleagues in the early days of the Balakirev circle (or ‘mighty handful’;¹ or ‘the Five’) – Laroche (like Tchaikovsky) was among the first graduates of the new Conservatoire in St Petersburg, and brought not only a thorough knowledge of music but a penetrating mind and a sense of proportion. This anthology thus illustrates how, as in Russian society in general, influence shifted gradually away from the amateur gentleman-musician at home in the salons (such as Prince Odoyevsky) to the fully-trained technical specialist, albeit in the best cases (such as Laroche) with a wide cultural background; paradoxically, the bourgeois specialist required income, so that Laroche turned his fluent pen to the assessment of new French novels and other matters.

Close personal ties between composers and critics are not unusual. Characteristic of the nineteenth century is the composer articulate enough to find employment as a writer on his subject. In the case of Russia, Borodin, Cui, Serov and Tchaikovsky were composers active as critics, while Odoyevsky and Laroche, whom we rightly think of first and foremost as critics, also had some compositions to their credit. All of those just mentioned had considerable musical competence, which was not true of all the jobbing journalists who sometimes revealed their ignorance when tackling musical questions. Links with composers gave writers a clearer understanding of the composers’ intentions and ideals, and this advantage is evident when Odoyevsky or Senkovsky is writing about Glinka’s music, or Laroche about Tchaikovsky’s. Stasov and Cui were the press heralds of the Balakirev circle, and Cui played an important part in formulating the group’s principles in the field of opera through many articles discussing what he termed ‘the New Russian Operatic School’. Strong factional loyalties did not preclude

¹ For discussion of this term’s ramifications, see Richard Taruskin: *Musorgsky. Eight Essays and an Epilogue* (Princeton 1993), pp. xxxiii–xxxiv.

occasional unsympathetic notices, as we shall see. Serov usually spoke for himself alone, since he was a particularly quarrelsome character.

Some account of the structure of this book is desirable.

It begins, as in effect did Russian art music, in 1836 with the première of Glinka's first opera *A Life for the Tsar*. It is natural for that opera and its successor, *Ruslan and Lyudmila*, which reached the stage in 1842, to occupy the first chapter; these are the first masterpieces composed by a Russian, and since they pioneered principles and techniques exploited by most subsequent Russian composers, it is justifiable for them to take up a great deal of space, both on their first appearance and later on, when they were at the centre of the debate on Russian music which touched further, younger composers (see Chapter 4). Before the 1860s Russian musical life was a tender plant whose blooms could by no means be relied upon. The semblance of randomness in the contents of Chapter 2 testifies to this factor. Awareness of the fragmentary quality of musical life was the essential prerequisite for improvement, and this consciousness gave rise in the 1840s and 1850s to various new ventures in concert promotion and education. The decisive step was the establishment of the Russian Musical Society in 1859, when the combination of an eminent and strong-willed Russian musician (Anton Rubinstein) with appropriate contacts (in the worlds of music and high society) and a climate favourable to change proved irresistible. The Russian Musical Society and its conservatoires brought greater vitality and stability to concert life, and prepared the ground for a tradition of performance which is still alive. Their supporters encountered opposition from those fearful that Russian native musical qualities would be constrained by the rules set out in German textbooks, who sought a more strongly Russian art. The Free School of Music was opened in 1862 to give expression to a different understanding of musical progress. Musical conservatism and radicalism came into play, as did all the emotions provoked by disagreement and rivalry. A sense of the forces at work in this conflict is given, I hope, in Chapter 3. Some of the principal authors drawn out by that controversy extended their quarrel to the question of which of Glinka's operas was the better model in casting light on the way ahead for composers. At this point the great length (literally) to which Russian criticism went becomes clear; thorough discussion of the matter in hand from first principles comes into it; minute blow-by-blow accounts of music are common; intimate intellectual wrestling with the publications of opponents is also conspicuous. To give some flavour of this style of criticism, Serov's article on Glinka's operas has been retained in full in Chapter 4, even though the details of the dispute with Stasov are now even less relevant than they seemed in 1860.

The next chapter is largely concerned with the operas of Dargomizhsky and Serov. The former had ploughed a lonely furrow, composing rather desultorily and with considerable changes of direction. He was taken up in the 1860s by a group of younger composers who shared the ideals which he was then espousing, especially in his *The Stone Guest*, and with their sympathetic encouragement he all but brought that opera to completion before he died. Through some of his romances, too, he showed the way ahead; he provided the only musical models for Musorgsky's songs of satire and social criticism. Serov's operas, on the other hand, were the most successful Russian operas composed in the 1860s. New streams thus joined the eventual flood of Russian opera at this point: 'musical truth' and speech-inflected melodies *via* Dargomizhsky, and the grand operatic spectacle, now in Russian guise, though Serov. Modest further assistance came in the shape of *William Ratcliff*, the opera with a Scottish setting from a play by Heinrich Heine composed by the Franco-Lithuanian César Cui; the composer probably was more influential in formulating concepts in prose than embodying them in music. The ground was now prepared for *Boris Godunov*.

The younger generation who gave stimulus to Dargomizhsky gathered at the feet of Balakirev. Inspired by Schumann, Berlioz and Liszt, and prodded to creative endeavour grossly disproportionate to their technical skills by their magnetic mentor, Borodin, Musorgsky and Rimsky-Korsakov embarked on compositions for orchestra; Tchaikovsky also fell under Balakirev's spell for a time. Balakirev himself was active as a composer in the 1860s – indeed his career as composer, conductor and *animateur* was then at its peak. Cui as critic, though not as composer, is represented in Chapter 6.

In the 1870s three major operas on Russian historical subjects were performed: while the space allotted in Chapter 7 to *Boris Godunov* will not occasion surprise, that given to Rimsky-Korsakov's *The Maid of Pskov* and Tchaikovsky's *The Oprichnik* may. It is in part a matter of setting Musorgsky's *chef d'œuvre* in context (since *The Maid of Pskov* is the product of thinking along lines parallel to Musorgsky's), and in part a matter of keeping pace with the still evolving ideas of the other two significant composers. Tchaikovsky's evolution is seen in the appearance in the same decade of *Eugene Onegin*.

This period also witnessed the flowering of Tchaikovsky's talent in non-operatic composition. This efflorescence is examined in detail by Laroche in the final chapter. Borodin continued to fit some composition in between periods devoted to professional commitments (he was a medical chemist); like Musorgsky, in proportion to his talent and creativity he is here perforce under-represented. The beginning of the next decade saw the death of Musorgsky, and thus provided Cui with the opportunity to review his work as a whole, though the critic concentrated on the works familiar through

performance and gave little sense of what treasures were still to emerge, and showed only limited understanding of the works he knew.

Compiling an anthology such as this presents certain difficulties. It is hard to include worthwhile material on every work one would wish to see discussed by virtue of its familiarity, or influence, or both. In the early part of the period especially, this is because coverage of musical activity was either not systematic or was in the wrong hands. Later on, especially in the case of Musorgsky, works of great significance were either not performed in public or not commented on for some reason. Disappointment and surprise at the absence of anything genuinely critical about *Kamarinskaya* ('the acorn from which all Russian symphonic music grew', as Tchaikovsky put it), and of anything at all on *Pictures from an Exhibition* or the *Songs and Dances of Death* are legitimate but unavoidable; a just evaluation of Musorgsky's work was not in any case arrived at in his lifetime (he died in 1881) or for a long time thereafter.

Another difficulty is that Russian musical life (by which is meant that of the two capital cities of St Petersburg and Moscow) did not offer so very many opportunities for the performance of music other than opera. Private performances, of course, took place, but were not regularly commented on in the press. Rezvoy's article in Chapter 2 gives an idea of the scale of concert life in St Petersburg before the 1860s, when it expanded markedly, thanks to the work of the Russian Musical Society and (in St Petersburg) the Free School of Music, especially with orchestral concerts; in the longer term, the conservatoires supplied talented and well-schooled executant musicians who subsequently enriched the musical life of Russia and indeed of other countries. Opera, on the other hand, was entirely under the control of the Directorate of the Imperial Theatres in this period. This body consumed substantial resources, but was accused of being too much at the mercy of the fashion-conscious aristocrats, their eyes fixed on western Europe, who manned it, and who were moreover obliged to pay heed to the views of members of the Imperial family (since the Directorate was subordinate to the Ministry of the Imperial Court), and too preoccupied with bureaucratic routine and intrigue. Musicians complained that too much money was invested in Italian opera, while the Directorate's lack of faith in Russian opera caused their neglect of it. A decisive change for the better occurred only with the relaxation of the monopoly and the establishment of private companies from the mid-1880s. Without the latter step, Rimsky-Korsakov's operas would hardly have been staged or the later ones, arguably, composed at all. This is a simplified picture, but it holds good, I believe, for the St Petersburg and Moscow stages throughout the period under consideration.

The material available for inclusion, in spite of some gaps, nevertheless is dauntingly extensive in quantity, and no one, I am sure, could reasonably claim familiarity with all of it. T. N. Livanova's *Muzikal'naya bibliografiya russkoy periodicheskoy pechati XIX veka* ('A musical bibliography of the Russian periodical press in the nineteenth century') (Moscow 1960-76, 6 vols., some issued in several parts) indicates the enormous number of announcements, reviews, surveys, memoirs, letters, biographical accounts, etc. which were published. This quantity of material (together with the musical richness of the period) dictated the concentration on Russian compositions: Serov's view of Beethoven and Laroche's of Bizet or Brahms are, alas, absent; even western composers whose works exerted a decisive influence on those of their Russian colleagues (such as Berlioz and Liszt) find almost no place here. Comment on performance has had to be kept to a minimum. This is nowhere more regrettable than in concealing the part played in the emergence of Russian opera by a small group of singers without whose skills – musical and dramatic – and commitment Russian opera would hardly have come into existence: among them are O. A. Petrov (1807-78), the bass who created the roles of Susanin and Ruslan, the Miller and Leporello in Dargomizhsky's *Rusalka* and *The Stone Guest* respectively, Ivan the Terrible in *The Maid of Pskov* and Varlaam; his wife A. Ya. Vorob'yova-Petrova (1817-1901), the contralto who created the role of Vanya and was an admired Ratmir, L. I. Leonov (1813 or 1815-c. 1872), the tenor who created the roles of Sobinin and Finn, and M. M. Stepanova (1815-1903), the soprano who was the first Antonida and Lyudmila; these exemplify the first generation: their successors showed like dedication. The skill and commitment of the conductor Eduard Napravnik (1839-1916) also deserve mention. The contribution of these artistes is underlined by their choosing to use their benefit performances to introduce works by their compatriots.

Excessive length often kept significant material out of the selection. A good instance is Laroche's *Glinka and his Significance in the History of Music* – a wide-ranging and fundamental discussion, but simply far too long for the present purpose.

The terminal date of around 1880 might be considered somewhat arbitrary, since it cuts off the careers of Rimsky-Korsakov and Tchaikovsky in full flight; on the other hand, it permits the completion of Musorgsky's work, and forestalls any temptation to move on to the next generation represented by the younger composers of the Belyayev circle. The work of the first two generations of Russian composers can be dealt with, from Glinka's extraordinary compositions of the 1830s and 1840s to such more familiar landmarks as *Boris Godunov* and *Eugene Onegin* in the 1870s. I hope that I may be allowed the licence of announcing the subject of the

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book as beginning in 1830 when the first event referred to did not occur until 1836: a half-century is neater than a period of forty-four years.

The most thoughtful and influential critics (Odoyevsky, Serov, Cui and Laroche) have been favoured at the expense of lesser men. Stasov is relatively neglected here, not on account of any underestimate of him or desire to minimize his role, but simply because some of his work is already available in English (see below).

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