

RUSSIAN MUSIC

1. THE BEGINNINGS OF A RUSSIAN STYLE

Until the middle of the nineteenth century, music in Russia was provided or inspired largely by Italian, French and German composers. Only in folk song and in sacred music was a particularly Russian style observable.

SACRED MUSIC

Dimitri Bortniansky (1751-1825) was appointed director of the Imperial Chapel at St Petersburg in 1796. He developed a new style of music for the Russian Orthodox Church, taking as its origin modal chants of the traditional liturgy. This was written for one or two unaccompanied choruses, each with between four and eight parts. It doubled and contrasted the voices effectively, creating a sound that was both rich and solemn. This style was picked up by later composers. Tchaikovsky's *Liturgy of St John Chrysostom* (1878) uses a mixed chorus, which is combined in various ways (sometimes men only, sometimes women only, sometimes mixed groups). The priests intone the traditional modal chants, and the chorus sings in a chordal, very diatonic style, with frequent dramatic shouts of ecstasy. The texture is very thick, and covers a wide register. Some passages feature frequent modulation in the style of an English anthem. Further interest is gained by having priest of different voices singing in different registers. This style contrasts with the instrumental passage which began Tchaikovsky's earlier work *Romeo and Juliet* (1869), in which the styles of an Anglican hymn and a Lutheran chorale are combined: a modal melody with regular cadences is accompanied by three other parts in a chordal texture with a strongly harmonic bass line. Stravinsky marked out his own paths, employing a variety of styles and textures. . In the *Symphony of Psalms* (1930), for example, the traditional chordal textures and high-pitched exultations appear, along with simple monophonic declamation in the style of a chant, but there are often uncomfortable angles accompanied by dissonant chords, and there is considerable tonal ambiguity, such as the conflict between E flat and C in the third movement. There is also at times a more polyphonic and imitative treatment. His Mass (1948) exhibits what Grout (p.633) terms "an austere 'neo-Gothic' style". The *Canticum Sacrum* (1956) adapts the techniques of the serialists.

FOLK SONG

Like Russian chant, folk songs tend to move within a narrow range, and feature irregular rhythms. They often feature a repetition of one or more ideas, with melodic lines falling frequently at cadences. The interval of a descending fourth is common. Both of these sources, chant and folksong, were modal. Modal chords and progressions had been used by Brahms, and was to be used by a range of composers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Debussy, in an attempt to discover new tonal possibilities, made use of modes, as did Ravel, the latter drawing on an interest in the antique. Vaughan Williams gained his modal technique from studying with Ravel, but was also interested in the same types of source which influenced Russian composers (plainchant and folksong). But it was the Russians who became the main force for introducing modal styles to Europe. Respighi, for example, studied under Rimsky-Korsakov, and used plainchant and church modes in some of his works.

GLINKA

An inherently Russian style in secular music began with Glinka (1804-1857), often regarded as the "father" of Russian music. He spent his early years studying the operas of Meyerbeer and the nineteenth-century Italians, and his early work shows these influences. However he wanted to blend these styles