FYSP 056:  
Music and the Search for Unity in Russian History

Oberlin College, Fall 2014  
King 327  
M/W, 2:30-3:45pm

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Scriabin, Prometheus and Ballets Russes costume for Rimsky-Korsakov, Scheherezade

Course Description:  
Throughout the history of the Russian Empire and Soviet Union, music has served as a means through which both political leaders and ordinary people have sought to create unity, be it political, social, religious or national. Composers and performers have participated in this larger cultural discourse through their creative work. However, the definition of what precisely makes a given musical work “Russian” has elicited intense debate, while the problem of differentiating “appropriate” from “inappropriate” forms of musical expression has given rise both to philosophical debate and active state intervention: issues that continue to resonate in our society today. This first-year seminar engages with this quest for Russian identity through music, exploring the multiple
directions and facets this search embodied, and reflecting on their significance both historically and in the present day. Topics to be explored include: defining musical meaning; the role of composer, performer and audience in musical production; music and identity (local, national, imperial); sources of inspiration; state control of artistic production; censoring “dangerous” art; the role of gender, ethnic and class distinctions in musical creativity.

**Learning Objectives:**
This course is designed to help first-year students at Oberlin experience music as an integral part of their liberal arts education by (1) encouraging the development of conceptual, oral and written skills that foster interdisciplinary approaches to music; (2) enhancing critical awareness of how music has historically intersected with diverse political, social and cultural power structures; (3) introducing the vibrant musical and cultural context of the Russian Empire and Soviet Union. In this course, we will read sources from a variety of disciplines and genres, and engage in listening assignments as a means to discuss the problem of translating aural experience into textual analysis.

**Required Texts:**
There are two required texts for this class: one scholarly analysis of Russian music history and one collection of essays by Russian composer Igor Stravinsky. Both texts are available in the bookstore for purchase, or can be requested via interlibrary loan. Additional reading and listening assignments will be posted on Blackboard. Please bring copies of assigned texts to class, together with any notes you take!


**Listening Assignments:**
As a course that focuses on musical expression, listening assignments are a central component of your weekly work. All assigned music and videos are available via Blackboard links. Please note that many recordings are accessible through the NAXOS music online database – a good option by which you can explore chosen works and composers more thoroughly at home!

**Writing In the First-Year Seminar:**
This course is classified as writing intensive (W-Int), and is intended to help you develop your writing skills through focusing on the process of writing (organization, composition, revision and editing). Several class sessions are devoted to discussion and development of written skills, and the process of revision will be an important component of several of the assigned papers.

**Role of Our Writing Associate:**
Our writing associate, Leo Harrington, is here to help you further your writing and analytical skills over the course of the class. Please note that it is not the writing associate’s job to edit your papers for you or to answer specific questions related to content covered in class; instead, the writing associate is here to aid you in developing
your ability to express ideas in verbal form and to hone your arguments. You are required to meet with the writing associate at least once over the course of the semester to work on writing-related issues; however, you are strongly encouraged to meet with the writing associate on a more frequent basis. Please remember that you can receive valuable feedback at all stages of writing (initial planning, comments on a draft, reviewing a graded paper to identify areas where you might continue to grow). Be sure to make use of this valuable resource!

**Useful Websites:**
- IMSLP/Petrucci Music Library ([http://imslp.org](http://imslp.org))
  - Complete scores of music that is now in public domain (includes Russian scores of works published prior to 1923).
  - Access page for Naxos Music, Grove’s Online, and other valuable resources.

**Grading Schema:**

*Listening Journal (20%):* For each week over the course of the semester, you will be required to keep a listening journal. This assignment, a form of “thinking through writing,” will require a written assessment of the observed connections between musical works and readings that week. Through the process of reflecting upon audio and textual sources in written form, you will develop your own analytical voice. These journals will also help form the basis of discussion in class. Because the listening journal is a space in which to develop your ideas and understanding of both the reading and listening, it will be not be given a letter grade (A, B, C, etc). Instead, it will be graded on a check plus, check, check minus basis.

*Concert Review (10%):* Due one week after selected concert. Over the course of the semester, I will announce various concerts that will take place at Oberlin College and Conservatory in which there will be some “Russian” content (broadly defined). You will select ONE concert to attend, briefly research the composer/piece to be performed before the concert (Grove’s Music Online or a similar scholarly source), and then write a 1.5-2 page review of the event. Be sure to consider the following questions: How was the concert program as a whole organized (temporally, by composer, by nationality, other)? How was the Russian music framed within the general concert context? What did the program notes (if any) suggest about the piece(s)? Did you feel that the performance and the framing of the work were appropriate? Why or why not?

*Short Paper I (10%):* 3-4 Pages. Due September 26, 2014. Prepare a short paper on a Russian composer of your choice, paying particular attention to questions of identity and style. Specific guidelines will be circulated in class.

*Short Paper II (10%):* 3-4 Pages. Due October 15, 2013. “What is Russian identity and how is it expressed through music? Why has national identity historically been an important way that musicians and audiences in Russia have sought to create political or social unity? From your listening and reading assignments, how would you define the relationship between ‘identity’ and musical expression? Is national identity an inherent part of music? Why or why not?”
Semester Project (25%): Due December 20, 4:00pm. A more extensive (8-10 page) analysis of a theme of the student’s choice (with approval of the instructor). The project may take the form of a scholarly essay, a concert program with scholarly program notes or a CD and liner-note project.

In-Class Presentation (10%): Each student will give a 10 minute presentation of their research findings in the final weeks of class. Presentations will be divided into panels based upon topic (in the format of a scholarly conference), and panelists will also respond to questions from their peers.

Participation and Attendance (15%): As a first-year seminar, the focus of this course is upon active discussion of reading and listening assignments. This is NOT a lecture-based class. You are expected to complete the assignments before class and come prepared for conversation and debate. Be sure to come in, not just with notes on your observations from reading and listening, but with at least one discussion question that you would like to see covered in class! Participation will be assessed after each class, and I will provide feedback to each of you at two points in the semester regarding your participation.

Late work will be penalized by a reduction of 1/3 of a letter grade per day late. Thus, an “A” paper received two days late will be downgraded to a “B+”. Be sure to look over the schedule and plan accordingly!

All course work must be received by December 20, 2014 at 4:00pm. Please note that all assignments must be completed in order to pass the class.

Attendance Policy:
I expect all students to be present and prepared for each class session. Be sure to inform me if there are extenuating circumstances that force you to miss a class. I reserve the right to fail any student with three (3) or more unexcused absences.

Class Etiquette:
1) Be sure to turn off ALL cell phones prior to class – this is a sign of respect for myself, your colleagues, and the atmosphere of learning in the classroom.

2) Please do NOT surf the internet during class time. Laptop computers are useful tools for learning and note-taking, but must be used responsibly. Internet surfing distracts both yourself and your colleagues and hinders classroom discussion. Offenders will be requested not to bring their computers to future classes.

3) When you send me an email, be sure to use proper written etiquette (formal address, correct grammar, clearly stated question or comment). Remember that this is a formal written exchange and part of your scholarly persona!

4) This classroom is a space for respectful discussion of concepts, ideas and events. Everyone has the right to express their ideas, pose questions, and engage in productive conversation. While differences of opinion will certainly arise, it is our collective
responsibility to create an open, respectful and cordial atmosphere.

**Plagiarism and the Honor Code:**
“The word plagiarism derives from Latin roots: *plagiarius*, an abductor, and *plagiare*, to steal. The expropriation of another author’s work and the presentation of it as one's own, constitutes plagiarism and is a serious violation of the ethics of scholarship.” [American Historical Association, Statement on Standards of Professional Conduct]. Presenting the work of others as one’s own goes against everything that a liberal education is about. It is a serious affront to the other students in the course, to me as a member of the course, and to the plagiariser him/herself. The College requires that students sign an “Honor Code” for all assignments. This pledge states: “I affirm that I have adhered to the Honor Code in this assignment.” For further information, see the student Honor Code which you can access via Blackboard>Lookup/Directories>Honor Code. If you have questions about what constitutes plagiarism please see me or raise it in class.

**Students with Disabilities:**
If you have specific physical, psychiatric or learning disabilities and require accommodations, please let me know early in the semester so that your learning needs may be appropriately met. You will need to provide documentation of your disability to the Office of Disability Services in Peters G-27/G-28.

*Please Note:* I reserve the right to change the syllabus over the course of the semester. Any changes that are introduced will be discussed in class at least one week prior to their implementation.

**Course Schedule:**

**Week One: Music and the Liberal Arts**
Session One (September 3, 2014): Introduction – Music and the Humanities
- **Discussion:** Finding a shared language (How do we talk about music? How does music contain meaning? What is music, and why is it important?)

**Week Two: What is Russian Music?**
Session Two (September 8, 2014): Defining Music
- **Reading Assignment:** Maes, “Introduction: Natasha’s Dance or Musical Nationalism,” 1-10; Stravinsky, *Poetics of Music*, 1-20 (“Getting Acquainted”);
- **Listening Assignment:** Stravinsky, *The Rite of Spring*; Medtner, *Sonata-Reminiscenza*

**Journal Reflection One:** How do Stravinsky, Medtner and Tolstoi understand music? Is it a pure art form, a moral exercise, self-expression, or something else? In what ways do Stravinsky’s and Medtner’s ideas find expression in the assigned compositions?

Session Three (September 10, 2014): Defining “Russian” Music
- **Reading Assignment:** Taruskin, “For Ukraine, He’s a Native Son Nonetheless”;
  “Bortniansky the Ukrainian”; Maes, 11-29.
- **Listening Assignment:** Bortniansky, Sacred Concerto no. 26; *Alcide* (excerpt) Glinka, *Kamarinskaia.*
Journal Reflection Two: How did Bortniansky and Glinka view “Russian identity” and did they seek to express it in their music? If so, how? If not, based on your listening and reading, what sort of style would you associate with each composer?

Week Three: Defining Music and Defining Russian Music
Session Four (September 15, 2014): The Role of the Composer
Listening Assignment: Stravinsky, Petrushka Suite (1911); Medtner, Angel, Sergei Rachmaninoff, Preludes (selection)

Journal Reflection Three: How do each of these composers define music and/or describe their source of musical inspiration? Do their written convictions seem to find expression in their musical works? Why or why not? How important is the composer’s perspective in understanding or enjoying a musical composition?

Session Five (September 17, 2014): Library Visit
Assignment: Select the composer you would like to research for Short Paper One.

Week Four: Creativity, Composers and Music in Russia
Session Six (September 22, 2014): The “Golden Age” of Russian Music: The Mighty Five
Listening Assignment: Mussorgsky, Pictures at an Exhibition, Rimsky-Korsakov, Russian Easter Overture
Discussion: How did the Mighty Five seek to embody “Russianness” in music?
NO Journal Reflection; work on Paper One
Session Seven (September 24, 2014): In-Class Paper Workshop (Complete Draft DUE TODAY)
Short Paper One: Composer Paper Due Friday, September 26 by 5:00pm.

Week Five: Style, Taste, Judgement and History
Session Eight (September 29, 2014): The “Golden Age” of Russian Music: Tchaikovsky
Listening Assignment: Tchaikovsky, Symphony No. 6 (Pathetique); Swan Lake
Session Nine (October 1, 2014): Musical Orientalism – Racism or Stylization?
Reading Assignment: Taruskin, “Sex and Race, Russian Style”; Maes, 167-185 (excerpts)
Listening Assignment: Glinka, Ruslan and Liudmila (overture); Borodin, Polovetsian Dances; Rimsky-Korsakov, Scheherazade

Journal Reflection Four: What sorts of “Russian” musical identities were constructed
by Tchaikovsky and the Mighty Five? How are they similar and/or different? What potential problems (if any) do you see in these definitions of “Russianness”? 

Week Six: Russian Identity
Session Ten (October 6, 2014): No Class (Professor at Conference)
   In place of class, individual meetings will be scheduled to discuss Paper One
Session Eleven (October 8, 2014): Russia’s Silver Age
   Reading Assignment: Maes, “Imagination and Renewal”, 196-235; Scriabin, “Philosophical Notebooks” (excerpt)
   Listening Assignment: Ciurlionis, “Two pieces” (op.4); Scriabin, Vers la Flamme; Sergei Rachmaninoff, Isle of the Dead

Journal Reflection Five: What was the Russian Silver Age, and what was the relationship between music, text and painting at this time? In your opinion, is music an adequate means for expressing non-musical concepts or images? Why or why not?

Week Seven:
Session Twelve (October 13, 2014): Identity and “Soviet” Music
   Reading Assignment: Marina Frolova-Walker, “National in Form, Socialist in Content”
   Listening Assignment: Khachaturian, Gayane (excerpts)
Session Thirteen (October 15, 2014): In-Class Debate - What is Russian Music?

Short Paper Two: What is “Russian” identity, and how is it expressed through music in the Imperial and Soviet eras? Why has national identity historically been an important way in which musicians and audiences have sought to create political or social unity? From your listening and reading assignments, how would you define the relationship between “identity” and musical expression? Is national identity an inherent part of music? Why or why not?

SHORT PAPER TWO DUE WEDNESDAY, October 15 (Submit in hard copy)

FALL BREAK (October 18-26, 2014)

Week Eight: Music and Social Divisions
Session Fourteen (October 27, 2014): Workshop
   Discussion: Choosing a research topic and organizing research
   Assignment: Email a potential description of final paper theme to the professor.
Session Fifteen (October 29, 2014): Late Imperial Russian Society
   Listening Assignment: Dmitrii Pokrovskii Ensemble (excerpt)

Journal Reflection Six: How does Bourdieu explain the relationship between taste in music and social origin? Does this analysis support or contradict the late imperial Russian and Soviet contexts? Why? Do you find this connection between music and social origin convincing or problematic?
Week Nine: Music and Social Divisions
   Listening Assignment: Roslavets, “Three Dances” (1923); Shostakovich, The Bolt (excerpt)
Session Seventeen (November 5, 2014): Morality and Musical Performance
   Listening Assignment: Prokofiev, Ivan the Terrible (excerpt)

Journal Reflection Seven: What is the role/responsibility of the performer? The listener? How do we judge this? Who has the right to decide? How do we control or interpret “correct” understanding?

Week Ten: Censorship, Propaganda and Music
Session Eighteen (November 10, 2013): USSR – Creating a Unified Musical Voice
   Listening Assignment: Prokofiev, Cantata on the 20th Anniversary of the October Revolution, op.74 (1937)
Session Nineteen (November 12, 2014): The Shostakovich Controversy
   Reading Assignment: Maes, 343-374; Solomon Volkov, Testimony (excerpt); “Muddle instead of Music”; Taruskin, “When Serious Music Mattered”
   Listening Assignment: Shostakovich, Symphony No.5

Journal Reflection Eight: Reflect on the relationship between politics and musical expression in this week’s assignment. How should we relate to artistic works created under the auspices of a totalitarian regime? Are Taruskin’s critiques fair? Why or why not?

Week Eleven: Music and Politics
Session Twenty (November 17, 2014): Workshop – Outlining the Final Paper
   Assignment: Thesis statement and bibliography (bring to class)
Session Twenty-One (November 19, 2014): Shostakovich - Writing for the Drawer or Supporting the State?
   Reading Assignment: Maes, 343-374; Taruskin, “Casting a Great Composer as a Fictional Hero”
   Listening Assignment: Shostakovich, Symphony no. 7; From Jewish Folk Songs

Journal Reflection Nine: Did music serve as an effective critique of Russian political regimes in the case of Shostakovich, or did it serve to justify the Soviet regime? What role does reception play in defining musical meaning?
**Week Twelve: Music after Stalin**

**Session Twenty-Two** (November 24, 2013): Protest or Self-Expression? Mieczysław Weinberg (Moishe Vainberg)

- **Reading Assignment:** Taruskin, “The Rising Soviet Mists Yield Up Another Voice”; “Weinberg,” *Grove Music*
- **Listening Assignment:** *The Passenger* (excerpts); *Symphony No.6*

**Session Twenty-Three** (November 26, 2013): In-Class Workshop

- How to Be an Effective Presenter AND How to Ask Effective Questions

**Week Thirteen:**

**Session Twenty-Four** (December 1, 2013): Music after Stalin (con’t)

- **Listening Assignment:** Andrei Volkonsky, *Suite of Mirrors*; Sofiia Gubaidulina, *Introitus*

**Journal Reflection Ten:** *In what ways did the music of Weinberg, Volkonsky and Gubaidulina serve as a means of critique of the existing political system in the Soviet Union? How might compositional choices about style be influenced by contemporary social and political conditions? Does this support or contradict ideas about inspiration discussed earlier in the semester?*

**Session Twenty-Five** (December 3, 2013): In-Class Presentations

**Week Fourteen:**

**Session Twenty-Six** (December 8, 2013): In-Class Presentations

**Session Twenty-Seven** (December 10, 2013): In-Class Presentations

**Final Projects Due: Friday, December 20, 2014 at 4:00pm**