

Music 320

Russia in the 19th Century

Russia perceived itself as culturally dominated by outside influences

- **Czar Peter the Great** (1672-1725) opened Russia to Western world, and made great accomplishments in engineering, but he was not much interested in music
- **Catherine the Great** (1729-1796) was more interested in culture, imported European composers to the court

In the early 19th Century there were some stirrings of Russian National Music:

Mikhail Glinka (1804-57):

- He had almost no formal music training, but came from wealthy family and travelled. He learned some details of western music while travelling: melody, language of tonal music, but not form.
- He often used Russian folk song as resource.
- He wanted to write a Russian Opera: wrote **A Life for the Tsar** in 1836.
 - An historical opera intended to arouse patriotic feelings: main characters are peasants or popular heroes; music is in folksong style.

Aleksandr Dargomyzhsky (1813-69):

- He was a bridge between Glinka and main Russian Nationalist composers, most of whom were children when Glinka died.
- He continued Glinka's interest in opera and nationalism: he and others chose stories by or about Russians for their music. Dargomyzhsky learned the romantic fascination with the macabre, grotesque or fantastic, e.g. his piece **Baba-Yaga**

The Five or the Mighty Handful: Mili Alexeyevich Balakirev, Cesar Cui, Alexander Borodin, Modest Mussorgsky, Nicolai Rimsky-Korsakov. The last two of these are best known

- None were composers by trade except Balakirev: all had other careers (e.g. Rimsky-Korsakov in Army early on, later became a music professor; Borodin was a chemist, Mussorgsky was in Army in tradition of "genteel," rich families)
- Most members of the group had trouble finishing their works; partly because they were uneducated as composers; also each time one died, he left works unfinished; one of the others would finish it for him

Modest Mussorgsky (1839-81):

- Like Dargomyzhsky, he was interested in the Grotesque and the Macabre; example is **Night on Bald Mountain**.
 - The version of this commonly played was orchestrated by; Rimsky-Korsakov was great at orchestration, while Mussorgsky struggled with it
- Opera: he worked toward and achieved a speech-dominated musical language: clear text declamation (in Russian) without sacrificing melodic interest. Example is Boris Godounov

Nikolai Rimsky Korsakov (1844-1908)

- The most famous of The Five, had most professional musical training
- Continued Glinka's tradition of exotic, fantastic, grotesque. **Scheherazade** is a good example of exotic: based on episodes and pictures from Arabian Nights

A Russian **music conservatory** was finally established in St. Petersburg in 1862 by Anton Rubenstein (a Russian with German music education). The curriculum was based on German musical ideals

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840-93)

- He was one of the first graduates of the Conservatory; his music was more western than The Five because of this
- He was both a **Romantic** and a **Classicist**: admired Mozart, many works show Classical balance, restraint, attn. to form; but lots of raw romantic emotion, torment peculiar to Russian composers and writers
- As a **Nationalist**, his achievements are underrated: conducted his own and other Russian composers' music all over Europe, wrote on Russian literature; but his operas are based on more Western ideas (human passion, not Russian history)
- He wrote in every genre, but his best-known works are ballets and instrumental works on Western forms (tone poems, Symphonies)
- His **6th** (final) **Symphony** ("Pathetique") makes a great study: there are many unanswered questions about it.