

CHAPTER 22

.....

‘MUSICAL METAPHYSICS’
IN LATE IMPERIAL
RUSSIA

.....

REBECCA MITCHELL

IN a 1916 article for the journal *Southern Musical Herald*, priest, poet, and philosopher Aleksandr Gorskii (1886–1943)¹ claimed that the next stage in the development of Russian religious philosophy was to be found in the musical compositions of Vladimir Rebikov. ‘It is already several decades’, Gorskii observed, ‘that Russian religious philosophical thought has essentially stood helplessly in the same place in which Vladimir Soloviev’s death left it [...] without the strength to move a step forward’ (Gorskii 1916, 116). Although Rebikov was unacquainted with the philosophy of Vladimir Soloviev, Gorskii concluded that the perfection of the Russian religious thinker’s teachings was nonetheless to be found in this little-known musician. Russian philosophy and spirituality would find their next stage of development, not through philosophy, but through music.

Gorskii’s celebration of music as the essential next step in the development of Russian religious philosophy reverberated with a larger metaphysical discourse about music influenced by the ideas of Vladimir Soloviev (1853–1900), German philosophers Arthur Schopenhauer (1788–1880) and Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900), and composer Richard Wagner (1813–1883). As an art form that was perceived to exist in time, but not in space, music appeared closer to metaphysical than to physical reality: its immaterial, metaphysical essence was viewed as offering insight into larger discussions of the transformation of the human spirit and the place of Russia amid a growing social, political, and cultural crisis after the upheavals of 1905. Music was thus conceived as a transformative spiritual force, able to transcend the problems of modernity (individualism, secularism, materialism) and re-forge a unified and spiritual society. Its immediate emotional appeal was believed to offer a pathway to a transcendent, spiritual experience for its

¹ Gorskii was also a follower of Nikolai Fedorov, active in preserving Fedorov’s teachings in the early Soviet state (Young 2012).

listeners, while its collective nature (both for listeners and performers) seemed to offer the ultimate embodiment of the Slavophile ideal of *sobornost'* (collectivity).

This widespread interpretation of music, which I call 'musical metaphysics', was not a strict philosophical system, but rather a loose set of concepts that posited three main claims: first, music offered insight into higher, transcendent reality, uninhibited by the bonds of physical reality; second, music was a unifying force, able to awaken a new spiritual consciousness and overcome contemporary social concerns, including the division between educated society and the *narod* (people); third, the musical embodiment of such transcendent power in a musical work required a contemporary Russian 'Orpheus'—a musical genius who would fulfil Russia's spiritual mission to reawaken faith amid a secularizing modern world. Musical metaphysics thus combined idealist aesthetics with the specific historic concerns of late imperial Russian society.

Musical metaphysics emerged from an interdisciplinary conversation involving philosophers, writers, poets, clerics, musicians, artists, and audiences in late imperial Russia. Writers and theorists such as Viacheslav Ivanov (1866–1949), Andrei Belyi (1880–1934), Aleksandr Blok (1880–1921), Sergei Durylin (1886–1954), and Wassily Kandinsky (1866–1944) were fascinated by music's unique attributes: its existence in time combined with its apparent lack of physical form, and its immediate appeal to emotion rather than intellect. These perceived attributes inspired poets and painters to attempt to imitate music in their own works as they sought to overcome divisions between the arts. Poems by Andrei Belyi, as well as paintings by Wassily Kandinsky and Mikalojus Ciurlionis (1875–1911) employed musical titles for their literary and visual works. Musical metaphysics also shaped composers' efforts to embody these ideas in their own compositions, and philosophers' employment of music as a symbol for the spiritual strivings of the human spirit in the modern age (Rosenthal 1983; Bartlett 1995; Mitchell 2015).

This chapter examines the philosophical basis for music's central place in late imperial Russian discourse, as well as its impact on Russian religious thought and musical creativity. The first section examines how music came to be perceived as the highest form of spiritual insight, an interpretation that combined threads of German idealist philosophy (particularly Schopenhauer and Nietzsche) with the philosophical aesthetics explicated by Soloviev. Soloviev's desire to overcome the positivist and utilitarian aesthetic of the previous age through a philosophy that respected the integral person helped to grant new importance to the non-rational experience of music. Concepts of *unity*, *theurgy*, and *sobornost'*, central themes in religious thought of the era, found striking embodiment in music, as did the question of morality. The second section looks at how these ideas about music were further developed in the late imperial Russian context, particularly within a growing concern with the division between the *narod* and educated society, the Symbolist desire for transfiguration of reality through art, and a growing belief in Russia's spiritual mission—concerns which grew stronger in the aftermath of the 1905 revolution. In particular, a growing expectation of a contemporary 'Russian' Orpheus, whose music would usher in a new, more spiritual age, not just for Russia, but for all humanity, gained appeal. The third section examines the figure whose philosophy

and creative striving most strikingly embodied this 'search for Orpheus': composer Aleksandr Scriabin (1871–1915). Ironically, Scriabin's ultimate failure to meet these dreams highlights the practical unattainability of musical metaphysics as an aesthetic project, even while the passionate debates surrounding his death show its success as a conceptual framework through which to discuss Russia's place in the world. As demonstrated in the final section, key aspects of musical metaphysics lingered on both amongst émigré communities and in the Soviet Union, even as religious thought came under increasing restraint.

THE ROOTS OF MUSICAL METAPHYSICS

The idea that music offers spiritual or emotional insight rather than rational understanding has ancient roots. Both Plato and Aristotle warned that music could awaken the wrong sort of emotions in its listeners. For the early Christian church, music offered both positive and negative power; John Chrysostom contrasted sacred chant's ability to ward off spiritual danger with the power 'licentious chants' had to summon the congregation of demons, and St. Augustine celebrated the potential of music to awaken spiritual devotion, while warning against being led astray by this 'gratification of the flesh' (Strunk 1998a, 9–34; 1998b, 13–16, 22–5). Such ideas passed into the teachings of the Russian Orthodox Church, serving both to explain the importance of Orthodox chant in the liturgy, and to justify the omission of instruments from religious worship. With the importation of secular forms of European musical entertainment and the rise of court and estate culture, the place of music in Russian society expanded rapidly after Peter the Great (1682–1725). By the nineteenth century, the German Romantic notion of music's emotional power over the human soul (which emphasized secular instrumental music) had found expression in Russia, particularly in the writings of Vladimir Odoevsky (Ritzarev 2006; Frolova-Walker 2007; Jensen 2009). However, it was in the German idealist conception of music, espoused most influentially in the writings of Schopenhauer, Wagner and Nietzsche, that musical metaphysics found its strongest inspiration.

In *The World as Will and Representation*, Arthur Schopenhauer raised music to the summit of artistic creation, arguing that 'we can regard the phenomenal world, or nature, and music as two different expressions of the same thing' (Schopenhauer 1958, 262). Building upon Kant's dualistic division of reality into *phenomena* and *noumena* (or the 'thing in itself'), only the former of which was knowable, Schopenhauer presented his own dualistic understanding of the world as 'Representation' (that which was knowable to the cognizing subject) and 'Will' (the world in its independent, unknowable existence). He found in aesthetic experience a possible escape from what he identified as the endless striving and suffering of Will, the basis of existence. All other forms of artistic expression sought to reference or provide copies of the representations (or ideas) through which the phenomenal world was knowable, thereby awakening disinterested aesthetic

contemplation and allowing the cognizing subject to break free of the endless striving and suffering of Will. In contrast, music alone was untainted by relation to the phenomenal world. Rather than representing a particular idea or concept, music was ‘*a copy of the will itself*’ (Schopenhauer 1958, 257). Music’s lack of concrete concepts and inability to offer precise representation of the phenomenal world allowed music to bypass the world of representation, serving as a direct embodiment of Will. Thus, rather than music being limited in its ability to convey human knowledge (as earlier philosophers had argued), mere human knowledge was unable to conceptually express the deeper realities depicted through music. For Schopenhauer, music was therefore not ‘indistinct and vague’ but was ‘in the highest degree a universal language’ (Schopenhauer 1958, 262). This glorification of music as portraying something specific and distinct, yet outside the realm of conceptual knowledge, served to make music the quintessential Romantic art form (Alperson 1982; Bowie 1990; Ferrara 1996).

In *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872), Friedrich Nietzsche built upon Schopenhauer’s image of music as a non-rational force. Employing the Greek figure Apollo to refer to the individualizing impulse (Schopenhauer’s Representation), and Dionysus to refer to the fundamental unity underlying the phenomenal world (Schopenhauer’s Will), Nietzsche dismissed attempts to employ rational concepts to express music’s essence as doomed to failure, because music ‘symbolizes a sphere beyond and prior to all phenomena’ (Nietzsche 1994, 35). Nietzsche considered the Dionysian art of music to be the embodiment of the ‘Primordial Unity’, which preceded the individualizing influence of the phenomenal world. Nietzsche’s youthful celebration of music was deeply inspired by the music and writings of Richard Wagner, whose musical dramas, together with his revolutionary dream of creating a *Gesamtkunstwerk* to unify the arts, inspired many of his contemporaries (Bartlett 1995; Liébert 2004). By the late nineteenth century, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and Wagner helped inspire the elevation of music to the pinnacle of the arts (Bowie 1990).

In Russia, these ideas about music merged with the Orthodox theological concepts of *theurgy*, *vseedinstvo*, and *sobornost*, popularized by the writings of philosopher Vladimir Soloviev. For Soloviev, human artistic creativity was intimately linked with the idea of ‘theurgy’ or ‘divine action’: artistic creation not only transformed, but also spiritualized reality. Drawing on Christian conceptions of both incarnation and transfiguration, and emphasizing the division between spiritual (eternally perfect) and material (existing) reality, Soloviev found in art an incarnation of Beauty that served to transfigure the material world (Paperno and Grossman 1994). According to Soloviev, Beauty transfigures (*preobrazhat*) material reality through the ‘incarnation (*voploshchenie*) of another, higher-than-material element in it’ (Soloviev 1991, 38). Thus, for Soloviev, art performed a uniquely Christian task, the ‘transformation of physical life into its spiritual counterpart’ (Paperno and Grossman 1994). Unlike Schopenhauer or Nietzsche, for Soloviev the transfiguring power of art was immediately connected with a moral goal: Beauty worked to advance Truth (*istina*) and Good (*dobro*); indeed, beauty was ‘only the physical form of good and truth’ (Soloviev 1991, 282). In Soloviev’s vision, human history was an expression of the ‘eternal battle between the cosmic (harmonizing)

beginning and the chaotic process of cosmogenesis' (Bychkov 2007, 81). His vision of Christian salvation emphasized the gradual spiritualization (harmonization) of the material world and the deification of humanity (*bogochelovechestvo*), a process in which art played an important role. Within this theurgic vision of art as a whole, Soloviev argued that music was the most 'direct or magical' expression of Beauty in which 'the deepest internal state connects us with the true essence of things and with the other world (or, if you like, with the "being in itself" of all that exists), breaking through every conditionality and material limitation, finding its direct and full expression in beautiful sounds and words' (Soloviev 1991, 84). Nonetheless, Soloviev dedicated little philosophical attention to music's specific attributes.

Soloviev was committed to a philosophy that would overcome the rationalism and positivism of the previous intellectual generation, replacing this one-sided approach to knowledge with *vseedinstvo* ('all-unity'), 'a metaphysics... which conceives the cosmos as the manifestation of the divine absolute in the process of its own becoming or self-realization' (Poole 2010, 132). Only a philosophy that emphasized the whole person, as well as humanity's relationship to the material world and to God, would allow the full development of humanity. Though different in its essence, Soloviev's metaphysics of *vseedinstvo* productively resonated with Schopenhauer's and Nietzsche's metaphysical claim that music expressed the 'Primordial Unity' or 'Will' underpinning the phenomenal world. This metaphorical focus on an underlying unity, expressible only through music, offered a valuable metaphor where rational philosophical concepts were deemed insufficient. As late imperial Russian thinkers 'spiritualized' Nietzsche, they did so through a lens coloured by Soloviev's metaphysics of *vseedinstvo*, creating a discursive field in which both philosophies interacted, a creative synthesis that raised music's status to that of the ultimate art form. For Symbolist writer Viacheslav Ivanov, music was the symbol of the secret essence of life that had been lost in the modern age. Andrei Belyi assigned music the highest position of all the arts, while Aleksandr Blok celebrated the 'spirit of music' which underpinned human existence itself (Rosenthal 1983, 1986; Bartlett 1995; Mitchell 2015).

One of the reasons for music's power was its perceived ability to offer immediate 'lived experience' (*perezhivanie*) to its listeners through the experience of *sobornost'*. Musical harmony, the simultaneous sounding of multiple voices, produces Beauty, not cacophony; in polyphonic compositions, musical voices are simultaneously independent, yet part of a greater whole. The Pythagorean concept of the 'harmony of the spheres' captured this metonymic value of music, and musical 'harmony' has been taken as an aural embodiment of social, state, and religious authority in many cultures; in the Russian context, musical harmony elided productively with the concept of *sobornost'*. This connection was made by Slavophile Konstantin Aksakov, who compared the peasant commune (which he considered the ultimate embodiment of *sobornost'*) to a 'moral choir' in which the individual voice 'is heard in harmony with all other voices' (Christoff 1982, 368). Philosopher Pavel Florenskii developed this metaphor linking music with *sobornost'* further, claiming that in his philosophical writings he wished to conceptually convey 'the same thing that the soul of the Russian *narod* express in song'—the quest for *sobornost'*

(Florenskii 2008, 19). The potential of music to embody *sobornost'* through its dynamic union of disparate parts into a coherent whole (even while each individual voice maintained its independence) allowed it to encourage collective identity rather than individuality, a claim often associated with Slavophile views of the distinction between the collective spirit of the Russian people, and the individualism of the West.

While for Soloviev, music was the art form most immediately connected with Beauty (and hence morality), the immediate, non-rational effect of music on its listeners also had potentially negative moral implications that particularly concerned Leo Tolstoy (1828–1910). Tolstoy was deeply sceptical of music's moral power; rather than innately connected with Beauty, he asserted that music (like all arts) could be either positive or negative, depending on the type of emotions it evoked. Music inspired his definition of art as the 'infection' of emotion passed from composer to performer to audience (Tolstoy 1995). The listener became 'infected' by the emotions of the composer, with potentially disastrous results. This same fear of music's potentially amoral influence was echoed by Symbolist writer Dmitrii Merezhkovskii and remained a constant undercurrent in musical metaphysics (Rosenthal 1983; Mitchell 2015).

Ultimately, it was not the specific interpretations offered by Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Soloviev, or Tolstoy, but the general philosophical conception of music as a non-rational, mystical force with the ability to dynamically embody unity, which had the greatest impact in the development of musical metaphysics. By framing music as a transcendent force outside the bounds of rational knowledge, it came to symbolize a potential path to deeper, spiritual insight. As Russian philosophical thinkers sought to move away from the rationalist and positivist worldview of the 1860s, this interpretation of music gained popularity, giving rise by the early twentieth century to the worldview of 'musical metaphysics,' in which music was elided with questions regarding the place of Russia in the modern world.

MUSICAL METAPHYSICS IN RUSSIA'S RELIGIOUS RENAISSANCE

In the early twentieth century, an entire generation of Symbolist writers found inspiration in Nietzsche's 'spirit of music,' and embraced music as the ultimate embodiment of the theurgic power of art (Rosenthal 1983; Bartlett 1995). Central to the early twentieth-century formation of musical metaphysics were an eschatological strain in Russian culture compounded by modern anxieties and revolution, a more firmly established musical society that sought to engage with larger questions of cultural significance, and a strengthened vision of the 'Russian idea'—Russia's spiritual task to save humanity from the extreme secularism and modernism of the modern age. This belief in Russia's immediate spiritual task, potentially achievable through music, lent a new urgency to discussions of music at this time.

Some of Russia's educated elite perceived in music a messianic or eschatological transcendence of linear time itself. Russian society, struggling with the pangs of modernization, combined Wagner's vision of a *Gesamtkunstwerk* that would overcome the divisions inherent within bourgeois society with Russian eschatological expectations of a contemporary 'Mystery', a religious-liturgical, artistic act that would transcend ordinary temporality and offer immediate mystical insight to the Absolute. Music, viewed as an immediate, experiential path to higher spiritual insight or reality, was believed to offer a means to transcend or break out of ordinary temporality. Poet Aleksandr Blok conceived of 'calendar time' and 'musical time': the former referred to the measurable, linear passage of time captured in history, while the latter described the 'incalculable' experience of immediate connection to the spirit of music that underpinned reality. For Blok 'musical time' offered a means through which to 'emerge from calendar time, from the flight of the days and years of history which gives no knowledge [of the All]', an argument that highlighted the transformative significance granted to music in late imperial Russia more broadly (Blok 1973, 61). 'Musical time' was thus perceived as a messianic or eschatological transcendence of linear time itself, even while the specific means through which music could transcend time remained open to interpretation.

Such apocalyptic visions grew stronger when the 1905 Russian Revolution laid bare the gulf that separated educated society from the *narod*. This crisis sparked a reconsideration of the relationship between art and society, as artistic theorists, philosophers, and religious thinkers increasingly turned their attention to the relationship between the artist and the common people (Rosenthal 1977). Music, the ultimate embodiment of *sobornost'*, was regularly employed both as a symbol of the unity that (it was feared) had been lost in modern society, and as a spiritual pathway through which that unity might be regained. For music critic Aleksandr Koptiaev, it was clear that a Russian composer must overcome the contradiction between the individual 'genius' and the 'crowd' in order to heal the traumas wrought by modernity, a task that Nietzsche had failed to achieve (Koptiaev 1903, 15; 1908, 8–9). Musical activists sought, through the founding of institutes like the Moscow Peoples' Conservatory (1906), to recreate true musical harmony among the *narod*, assuming that the performance of choral song by urban workers would help to forge social unity. Music's ability to resolve dissonance and create harmony similarly found new social significance as music received greater attention in journals like *Zolotoe runo*, *Trudy i dni*, *Apollon*, *Vesy*, and *Russkaia mysl'*. While the specific political slant of these interpretations varied, they agreed on the importance of music as a means of both conceptualizing contemporary society and of transforming it (Mitchell 2015).

Perhaps the most theoretically developed philosophical assessment of music's mystical significance was offered by Moscow musician Konstantin Eiges (1875–1950). In a series of articles devoted to musical aesthetics that first appeared in the Symbolist journal *Zolotoe runo*, Eiges argued (drawing on Soloviev) that music's central task was the transformation of the audience's relation to reality through the experience of Beauty (Eiges 1912). In *Beauty*, Eiges claimed, Nietzsche's Apollonian and Dionysian duality was

synthesized into a unified whole. This synthesis developed through art's evocation of artistic mood (*nastroenie*), which carried the listener 'outside the boundaries of the phenomenal world, lift[ing] us above the earth... to the other side of the world of will and representation' (Eiges 1912, 62–3). Building upon Soloviev's claim that music was a 'magical' art that intuitively gave access to the underlying unity of existence, Eiges identified in music an immediate, intuitive force that transformed Dionysian chaos into a higher, mystical experience beyond the realm of rationality. The initial chaos of the Dionysian impulse was transformed by the composer's creative genius into the 'crystallized musical phrases' of higher, mystical experience, referred to by Eiges (with an unspoken nod to Schiller) as 'musical mood' (Eiges 1912, 91–2, 84). Musical mood, like 'contemplative and religious moods' was a 'mystical state' (Eiges 1912, 18). In this interpretation, the composer was an artistic theurgist, transforming Dionysian chaos into an ordered, mystical experience, and therefore (following Soloviev) helping to advance the project of *bogochelovechestvo*. Eiges's specific emphasis on the religious component of musical creativity aligned his aesthetics with Soloviev's philosophical ideas, and defined music as intimately linked with one of the central concerns of Russian religious philosophy: *theosis*, or the deification of the material world through human creativity (Eiges 1912, 33–44). Nor was Eiges unique in such claims; similar discussions that found in music's influence the deification of the human realm permeated the late imperial Russian musical press (Mitchell 2015; Morrison 2019).

This theurgic power granted to music imbued the composer or musical 'genius' with great spiritual responsibility. The glorified image of the composer was, in part, a continuation of the idea of 'genius' adopted from German Romanticism, which emphasized the universal aspect of genius that transcended the individual limitations of the genius-as-man. Like Nietzsche and Schopenhauer, Eiges argued that musical creation was distinct from other forms of artistic creation. However, like Soloviev and Tolstoy, he also focused upon the question of morality within the creative impulse. For Eiges, the composer was the only artist who embodied both the lower ('Dionysian') and higher ('Apollonian') mystical impulses. While other artists were inspired by an object or idea in the phenomenal world, which reflected heavenly beauty, 'the creativity of the composer has a different character: strong excitement, leaning towards drunkenness, seizes him, when in the moment of inspiration he not only indefinably feels "the touch of another world", but also enters into this other world with his *entire soul* and contemplates the *transcendental* as a particular sound world-order in all its unearthly beauty' (Eiges 1912, 17–18). In entering this other world, Eiges claimed that the composer experienced the pure Dionysian state, the destruction of the boundaries between the individual self and the external world. This direct experience of irrational, Dionysian unity made musical inspiration uniquely dangerous, as the composer entered into a realm of 'lower' mystical experience that he then, through his own creative power, transformed into the 'higher' mystical experience of a musical composition (Eiges 1912, 89–94). Such an interpretation echoes Soloviev's insistence that morality was a necessary component of the creative genius (Soloviev 1991, 275).

This status gave rise to an expectation of a contemporary Russian Orpheus, the composer whose musical works would overcome the social and spiritual divisions of modernity, re-forge the bond between the *narod* and educated society, and reawaken the spiritual dimension of humanity. While Schopenhauer had found the embodiment of his musical vision most perfectly in the compositions of Rossini, and Nietzsche had sought (and ultimately failed to find) the purest expression of music's Dionysian impulse in the music of Wagner, in Russia this quest for a contemporary Orpheus elided with the belief that Russia held a unique spiritual mission in the modern world. The claim that the Russian people were inherently 'spiritual' was not new; however, the melding of the figure of musical genius with this claim was a distinct product of musical metaphysics. Building on Nietzsche as well as Soloviev, Symbolist writer Sergei Durylin (1886–1954) concluded that Wagner's attempt to reawaken the spiritual basis of modern society had failed in Germany due to the country's loss of its Christian foundation. In Russia, by contrast, he argued that Wagner's vision had found deeper resonance than in any other modern country due to the inherent Christian spirit of the Russian *narod*—perhaps a surprising argument in a country that had witnessed virulent anti-Wagnerian polemics among Russia's leading composers in the later nineteenth century, but nonetheless in keeping with the broader messianic claims of musical metaphysics in the early twentieth century (Bartlett 1995). Durylin concluded that a Russian composer would succeed where Wagner had failed, creating a genuinely transformative Christian and folk 'Mystery', thereby overcoming both the individualist and secularist impulses of the modern age. Through a combination of musical genius and the inherent religious belief of the *narod*, Russia would reawaken human spirituality in the modern age (Durylin 1913). This desire to identify a contemporary Russian Orpheus underpinned Gorskii's 1916 embrace of Rebikov as the true follower of Soloviev. However, perhaps no composer was so intimately associated with musical metaphysics as Aleksandr Scriabin.

ALEKSANDR SCRIBIN: THE RUSSIAN ORPHEUS

As a composer who insisted that his significance was far more than that of a mere musician, Scriabin embodied both the aspirations and limitations of musical metaphysics. His own search for unity (*edinstvo*) and a 'Mystery' through which humanity would be transformed echoed the dreams of his contemporaries. As Viacheslav Ivanov noted, Scriabin's views on '*sobornost* and the choral act [...] differed from mine only insofar as for him they were an immediate practical task' (Ivanov 1996, 10). In fact, the composer's extreme solipsism, obsession with 'ecstasy', rejection of moral absolutes, dabbling in theosophy, and grandiose claims of messianism encapsulated the egocentric tendency inherent in contemporary Symbolist aesthetic thought.

Scriabin's intellectual source base demonstrates a creative adaptation of ideas typical of late imperial Russia. As Simon Nicholls has effectively demonstrated, 'Skryabin's thought was not systematic' (Nicholls 2018, 1). His worldview was shaped through an eclectic reading list that incorporated Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, and Fichte alongside Helena Blavatsky's (1831–1891) theosophical work *The Secret Doctrine* and several general surveys of European philosophy. As numerous friends noted, the composer tended to read such works 'in his own way', selectively finding concepts or ideas that inspired him, rather than seeking a thorough understanding of any system of thought. Personal interactions played as important a role in shaping Scriabin's worldview as philosophical texts; his attendance at the Moscow Psychological Society, as well as personal friendships with philosopher Sergei Trubetskoi (1862–1905) and Marxist Georgii Plekhanov (1856–1918), broadened his knowledge of Western philosophy. After his discovery of theosophy in 1905, he freely integrated vaguely defined Eastern mystic ideals into his personal philosophy. Upon his 1910 return to Russia after several years abroad, his personal circle expanded to include conversation with poets and philosophers including Viacheslav Ivanov, Jurgis Baltrushaitis, Sergei Bulgakov, and Pavel Florenskii. Out of these varied influences, Scriabin developed an idiosyncratic philosophical worldview that evolved from extreme solipsism through grandiose self-aggrandizement. Ultimately, Scriabin emphasized concepts that corresponded to his intellectual contemporaries' preoccupation with *unity* and eschatological visions of life transformation. Scriabin's *Mystery*, his final (unfinished) artistic work, was intended to usher in the end of the universe itself (Sabaneev 1925; Schloezer 1987; Mitchell 2015; Nicholls 2018; Morrison 2019).

The central concept guiding Scriabin's artistic work was unity (*edinstvo*). The roots of this fascination can already be seen in the composer's early philosophical notebooks. After an early infatuation with Nietzsche's Zarathustra, Scriabin was enamoured with Fichte's subjective idealism (which he interpreted in an extreme form to suggest his own consciousness had created the existing universe, including other beings). However, Scriabin soon became disillusioned with what he perceived to be the dead-end of this line of thought, writing in 1904–1905 that 'Only I exist... *What horror to come to such a conclusion!*' (Nicholls 2018, 94; Skriabin 1919, 165–6). Rejecting this idea, he developed a worldview that differentiated between universal (Absolute) consciousness and individual consciousness: while Absolute consciousness referred to a single, eternally existing consciousness outside space and time, 'individual consciousness is its nickname when it is experienced in a given moment and a given place' (Nicholls 2018, 95; Skriabin 1919, 167). While individual consciousness (or individual will) might suffer limitation in its particular embodiment in space and time, it was through the struggle of individual wills to overcome the specific suffering that they experienced that universal consciousness developed. In this view, universal consciousness itself followed a theodicy of self-realization, advancing through the action of a multiplicity of limited, individual consciousnesses embodied in time and space.

Scriabin maintained a very strong sense of the role of the creative genius within this odyssey of universal consciousness. Embracing the Kantian view that space and time were

themselves mere categories of experience, he envisioned the development of universal consciousness both in linear and cyclical terms: from initial unity, the universe moved to multiplicity (differentiation in multiple individual consciousness), back to unity, though at a higher level of synthesis. This cycle repeated indefinitely. The role of the creative genius depended on whether an era was moving towards differentiation or synthesis; from unity, it was the creative genius who awakened a time of multiplicity; from an era of differentiation, the genius would instead spark a return to unity. In the current moment, which Scriabin saw as one of division, he (the creative genius of his age) was to spark a movement back towards unity by awakening a final moment of world ecstasy through his *Mystery*, which would lead to a return to unity or Absolute Being. As Scriabin himself expressed this vision:

Absolute Being is not a single moment, it is all being, it is all-embracing, heavenly consciousness, which, at the same time, will be the final moment in time and space, the final boundary, the moment of radiating eternity... The moment of ecstasy will stop being a moment (of time); it will swallow all time. This moment is Absolute Being.
(Nicholls 2018, 92; Skriabin 1919, 163–4)

These ideas took firmer shape in the evolution of Scriabin's vision of the *Mystery*. This mystical 'act' (*deistvo*) was to take place over the course of seven days in a temple built in India. The various days would represent the different races of humanity of theosophical doctrine, with time speeding up near the end. Conceived as a 'mystery' rather than an artistic performance or theatre, Scriabin sought to reawaken the connection between art and religion. Moreover, the inclusion of various forms of expression would re-embodiment the initial unity to which the universe was to return: music, dance, poetry, perfume, colour, philosophy, architecture, even nature itself, were all to participate in the *Mystery*. Like his literary Symbolist contemporaries (particularly Ivanov's fascination with theatre), Scriabin was inspired by Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk*, but felt the German composer had not done enough to overcome the divisions between composer, audience, and performer. All these distinctions were to vanish in the performance of his *Mystery* (Sabaneev 1925; Schloezer 1987; Nicholls 2018; Morrison 2019).

This obsessive search for unity through the evocation of a moment of universal ecstasy also found specific artistic expression in Scriabin's compositions. In his quest for an aesthetic language of unity, he dreamt of synthesizing sound, colour, smell, and even philosophy in a synesthetic experience that overcame the divide between performer, composer, and audience; his orchestral work *Prometheus* (1910) was envisioned to incorporate a light display, in which different colours were associated with specific philosophical concepts and keys. This desire to artistically enact unity also influenced the development of his unique compositional language. In *Prometheus*, he claimed to have achieved the reunification of melody and harmony (shattered into separate elements by European musical practice) through the creation of a synthetic chord from which both melody and harmony derived. Moreover, he intended to overcome the

binary division of Western harmony through this chord, which combined dissonance and consonance into a single whole.² *Prometheus* served as Scriabin's most elaborate completed attempt to transcend the realm of music (Sabaneev 1925; Gawboy 2010; Mitchell 2015).

Musical metaphysics gave rise to grandiose dreams of music's theurgic power. However, the very productiveness of metaphysical symbolism conflicted with the much more limited ability to compose musical works whose aural language approximated these dreams (Morrison 2019). For this reason, the number of completed 'symbolist' musical works are fewer than those envisioned; even Rebikov's work *Antichrist*, which had inspired Gorskii to predict that the future development of religious philosophy would pass to the musical realm, was never finished—Gorskii's assessment was based on the text and Rebikov's description, rather than an accomplished musical work (Gorskii 1916). However, Scriabin's *Mystery* is perhaps the most extreme example of this. As Scriabin's mystical aspirations grew, the actual composition of the *Mystery* was pushed back. By 1913, he had determined that human consciousness was not yet ready for the spiritual uplift of the final ecstasy, and turned his attention to the composition of a 'Preparatory Act' (*Predvaritel'noe deistvo*), which would provide a period of spiritual preparation to lift humanity to the appropriate level of awareness (Shletser 1919; Nicholls 2018; Morrison 2019, 153–8).

Though Scriabin did not see himself as a follower of Soloviev, the composer's obsession with unity attracted the enthusiasm of Soloviev's fin de siècle admirers, who found in it a parallel to their own ideal of *sobornost'* (Sabaneev 1925; Ivanov 1996). Similarly, his vision of a *Mystery* that would bring about the end of the universe appealed to the apocalyptic visions of the day. Scriabin's 1915 death from an infected carbuncle on his lip at the untimely age of 43 (amid the trauma of the Great War) spurred passionate debates over the path of Russia itself in the modern age. Alternately hailed as a 'prophet' or 'messiah' and condemned as a 'Satanist', such claims were less about Scriabin himself than about the hopes of educated society that Russia would fulfil its claimed messianic mission to reawaken spirituality in the modern world. Ivanov headed a contingent of admirers that insisted on the composer's status as the new 'Messiah', and argued that the task of Scriabin's followers was to continue the composer's spiritual work amid the flames of war. As doubts grew about Russia's ability to emerge spiritually victorious from the Great War, darker philosophical interpretations of Scriabin's significance emerged. In 1916, philosopher Sergei Bulgakov (1871–1944) interpreted 'Scriabinism' as a sickness afflicting contemporary Russian society, and emphasized what he considered the misinterpretation of Soloviev's concept of theurgy by contemporary artists, a misinterpretation that itself had devastating consequences for the spiritual health of the country. By failing to distinguish between 'white' and 'black' magic (true theurgy from false magic), contemporary

² Harmony of the common practice period emphasizes the need for dissonant chords to resolve to consonant; musical language is based on the movement from one to the other, a practice that Scriabin's combining of both into a single chord was meant to transcend. Musicologists have debated the source of Scriabin's harmonic language; the claim that it had a metaphysical origin in the desire to aurally embody unity is expressed in the writings of Scriabin's friend and disciple, Leonid Sabaneev.

Russian artists had fallen victim to the temptations of the material world. Such 'false messianism' led to an embrace of 'mangodhood' (*chelovekobozhie*) and 'luciferism', ultimately corrupting the spiritual mission of art itself. Scriabin, Bulgakov concluded, was the most spectacular example of this egocentrism (Bulgakov 1916). This claim was further developed in 1919 by philosopher Aleksei Losev (1893–1988), who used Scriabin as a stand-in for Russia's spiritual failure, emblemized by the Bolshevik revolution. Rather than the Orpheus that his contemporaries had awaited, Scriabin's influence, 'satanic' in its essence, had ushered in the triumph of Western rationalism in its most materialist form (Losev 1990).

THE LEGACY OF MUSICAL METAPHYSICS

While the Bolshevik revolution of 1917 changed the political and cultural landscapes, musical metaphysics and the religious concepts underpinning it continued to influence the development of philosophical aesthetics in the Soviet Union and amongst Russian émigrés. In the Soviet context, music's ability to offer a transformative collective experience, together with its unique relationship to temporality, received particular attention. Nadezhda Briusova (sister of the Symbolist poet Valery Briusov) argued that music empowered the masses to experience (*perezhivat*) 'new and unaccustomed' feelings, and to embrace the revolutionary consciousness required to build a new, Marxist life (Mitchell 2015, 210–11). Shifting music from the realm of religious experience to social phenomenon, the founder of Soviet musicology, Boris Asafyev (1884–1949) posited an influential theory of 'intonation' (*intonatsiia*) rooted in religious ideas of communal experience. 'Intonation' referred to a 'complex of musical thoughts, persistently occurring in the consciousness of a given environment' (McQuere 1983, 239); musical meaning was created collectively within society. Eras of sharp political or social change found musical expression in an 'intonational crisis' when previous intonations ceased to have meaning within a given society. Similarly, Asafyev argued that musical form needed to be conceptualized dialectically as a process unfolding temporally (but perceived as a unity) rather than as a static, unchanging form, as earlier musical theory had prescribed (McQuere 1983).

The uniquely temporal and dialectical significance of music was also developed by philosopher Aleksei Losev. Through combining the German Romantic 'myth' of music with phenomenology and Neoplatonic thought, Losev offered a philosophically rigorous account of music. Music, Losev argued, could be 'experienced, but never clearly thought' (Losev 2012, 49). It was non-spatial, chaotic, and formless being, embodying the temporal union (*sliianie*) of one subject with another, the 'unity of opposites' (*coincidentia oppositorum*) or combination of both form and formlessness (Haardt 1994; Zenkin 2004; Losev 2012). Alongside numbers (which Losev also interpreted through a Neoplatonic lens), music occupied 'the hierarchical step closest to the Absolute' (Zenkin 2012, 16). Despite approaching music from opposite sides of the materialist

divide, both Asafyev and Losev inscribed early Soviet conceptions of music with a dialectical emphasis on process, change, and temporality within a unified whole indebted to pre-revolutionary ideas (Rosenthal 2004; Viljanen 2017). Such emphasis found musical expression in the celebration of a Beethovenesque classical style, in which periods of dissonance alternated with (and developed into) consonance, thereby creating a single musical whole.

In the émigré context, the temporal conception of music followed a somewhat different trajectory within the philosophical movement of Eurasianism. Reinterpreting the Slavophile belief in Russia's destiny to overcome the crisis of modernity, Eurasianism redefined Russia as Eurasia, a 'continent' distinct from, yet fusing together European and Asiatic elements, which was believed to offer an alternative to the despotic and decadent Western ('Romano-Germanic') civilization. Eurasianism called for the replacement of Western civilization by a culture based on religious principles, to be implemented by the Russian/Eurasian nation, whose task was to redeem all humanity, reconcile the spiritual with the material and overcome the materialism of the Bolshevik revolution (Levidou 2011). Pierre Souvtchinsky (1892–1985), one of the founders of the Eurasianist movement, 'propagated music's unique power to transform modern humanity and its instrumental role in effecting the anticipated Eurasianist "religious" culture due to its capacity to overcome time, which rendered it capable of transforming human consciousness of the world' (Levidou 2012, 86). Souvtchinsky emphasized the importance of 'stasis' over 'processes', arguing that the transcendence of ordinary time 'may be achieved if time is intuited as a succession of static temporal points rather than as a continuous and dynamic, horizontal sequence of events' (Levidou 2011, 616). Rather than viewing music as a dialectical process, as Asafyev and Losev did, Souvtchinsky emphasized a musical style characterized by disjuncture, stasis, and simplification (*drobnost', nepodvizhnost, uproshchenie*), the most significant embodiment of which he found in the music of Igor Stravinsky (Taruskin 1997; Levidou 2011). Souvtchinsky's views on music (particularly musical time) were in turn perpetuated by Stravinsky in his Harvard lectures (Stravinsky 1993).

Musical metaphysics thus spanned across the revolutionary divide. In both Soviet and émigré contexts, the moral stature granted to composers showed a continued belief in the Orphic power of music to transform life. Whether experienced as a dynamic expression of the dialectical unity of opposites, or as temporal transcendence through the evocation of stasis, belief in music's immediate, non-rational and fundamentally spiritual power continued to shape discourse after 1917.

WORKS CITED

- Alperson, Philip (1982), 'Schopenhauer and Musical Revelation', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 40: 155–66.
- Bartlett, Rosamund (1995), *Wagner in Russia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Blok, Aleksandr (1973), *The Spirit of Music*, trans. I. Freiman. Westport, CT: Hyperion Press.

- Bowie, Andrew (1990), *Aesthetics and Subjectivity: From Kant to Nietzsche*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Bulgakov, S. (1916), 'Iskusstvo i teurgii: fragment', in *Russkaia mysl'* 12: 1–24.
- Bychkov, V. (2007), *Russkaia teurgicheskaia estetika*. Moscow: Lodomir.
- Christoff, Peter. (1982), *K. S. Aksakov: A Study in Ideas*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Durylin, Sergei (1913), *Rikhard Vagner i Rossiia: O Vagnere i budushchikh putiakh iskusstva*. Moscow: Musaget.
- Eiges, K. P. (1912), *Stat'i po filosofii muzyki*. Moscow: Tovarishchestvo tipografii A. I. Mamontova.
- Ferrara, Lawrence (1996), 'Schopenhauer on Music as the Embodiment of Will', in *Schopenhauer, Philosophy, and the Arts*, ed. Dale Jacquette. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 183–99.
- Florenskii, P. (2008), *Imena: Sochineniia*. Moscow: Eksmo.
- Frolova-Walker, Marina. (2007), *Russian Music and Nationalism*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Gawboy, Anna (2010), 'Alexander Scriabin's Theurgy in Blue: Esotericism and the Analysis of *Prometheus: Poem of Fire* op. 60', PhD diss., Yale University.
- Gorskii, A. (1916), 'Rebikov', in *Iuzhnyi muzykal'nyi vestnik* 17–18: 115–20.
- Haardt, Alexander (1994), 'Aleksii Losev and the Phenomenology of Music', in *Russian Thought after Communism: The Recovery of a Philosophical Heritage*, ed. James P. Scanlan. Armonk, NY and London: M. E. Sharpe, 197–205.
- Ivanov, Viacheslav (1996), *Skriabin*. Moscow: Memorial'nyi muzei Skriabina.
- Jensen, Claudia (2009), *Musical Cultures in Seventeenth-Century Russia*. Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Koptiaev, A. (1903), *Muzyka i kul'tura: Sbornik muzykal'no-istoricheskikh i muzykal'no-kriticheskikh statei*. Moscow: Iurgenson.
- Koptiaev, A. (1908), *Evterpe: Vtoroi sbornik muzykal'no-kriticheskikh statei*. St. Petersburg: Tipografiia glavnogo upravleniia udelov.
- Levidou, Katerina (2011), 'The Artist-Genius in Petr Suvchinskii's Eurasianist Philosophy of History: The Case of Igor' Stravinskii', *Slavonic and East European Review* 89/4: 601–29.
- Levidou, Katerina (2012), 'Arthur Lourié and His Conception of Revolution', *Muzikologija* 13: 79–100.
- Liébert, Georges (2004), *Nietzsche and Music*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Losev, A. (1990), 'Mirovozzrenie Skriabina', in *Strast' k dialektike*, ed. A. Losev. Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 256–301.
- Losev, A. (2012), *Muzyka kak predmet logiki*. Moscow: Akademicheskii Proekt.
- McQuere, Gordon D. (1983), 'Boris Asafiev and *Musical Form as a Process*', in *Russian Theoretical Thought in Music*, ed. Gordon McQuere. Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 217–52.
- Mitchell, Rebecca (2015), *Nietzsche's Orphans: Music, Metaphysics and the Twilight of the Russian Empire*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Morrison, Simon (2019), *Russian Opera and the Symbolist Movement*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Nicholls, Simon (2018), *The Notebooks of Alexander Skryabin*. Michael Pushkin, trans. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich (1994), *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. Shaun Whiteside. New York: Penguin.

- Paperno, Irina, and Joan Delaney Grossman, ed. (1994), *Creating Life: The Aesthetic Utopia of Russian Modernism*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Poole, Randall A. (2010), 'Vladimir Solov'ev's Philosophical Anthropology: Autonomy, Dignity, Perfectibility', in *A History of Russian Philosophy 1830–1930: Faith, Reason, and the Defense of Human Dignity*, ed. G. M. Hamburg and Randall A. Poole. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 131–49.
- Ritzarev, Marina (2006), *Eighteenth-Century Russian Music*. Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Rosenthal, Bernice Glatzer (1977), 'The Transmutation of the Symbolist Ethos: Mystical Anarchism and the Revolution of 1905', *Slavic Review* 36/4: 608–27.
- Rosenthal, Bernice Glatzer (1983), 'The Spirit of Music in Russian Symbolism', *Russian History* 10/1: 66–76.
- Rosenthal, Bernice Glatzer, ed. (1986), *Nietzsche in Russia*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Rosenthal, Bernice Glatzer (2004), 'Losev's Development of Themes from Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy*', *Studies in East European Thought* 56/2–3: 187–209.
- Sabaneev, L. (1925), *Vospominaniia o Skriabine*. Moscow: Muzkal'nyi sector Gosudarstvennogo izdatel'stva.
- Schloezer, Boris (1987), *Scriabin: Artist and Mystic*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Schopenhauer, Arthur. (1958), *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. 1, trans. E. F. J. Payne. Indian Hills, NV: Falcon's Wing Press.
- Shletser, B. (1919), 'Zapiska B.F. Shletsera o 'Predvaritel'nom deistvii'', in *Russkie propilei: Materialy po istorii russkoi mysli i literatury*, ed. M. Gershenzon. Moscow: M. and S. Sabashnikovoykh, 99–119.
- Skriabin, A. (1919), 'Zapisi A. N. Skriabina', in *Russkie propilei: Materialy po istorii russkoi mysli i literatury*, ed. M. Gershenzon. Moscow: M. and S. Sabashnikovoykh, 120–247.
- Soloviev, V. (1991), *Filosofia iskusstva i literaturnaia kritika*. Moscow: Iskusstvo.
- Stravinsky, Igor (1993), *Poetics of Music in the Form of Six Lessons*, trans. Arthur Knodel and Ingolf Dahl. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Strunk, Oliver, ed. (1998a), *Source Readings in Music History, Volume 1: Greek Views of Music*, ed. Thomas J. Mathiesen. New York and London: W.W. Norton & Co.
- Strunk, Oliver, ed. (1998b), *Source Readings in Music History, Volume 2: The Early Christian Period and the Latin Middle Ages*, ed. James McKinnon. New York and London: W.W. Norton & Co.
- Tolstoy, L. (1995), *What is Art?* Trans. R. Pevear, L. Volokhonsky. London: Penguin.
- Viljanen, Elina (2017), *The Problem of the Modern and Tradition: Early Soviet Musical Culture and the Musicological Theory of Boris Asafiev (1884–1949)*, PhD. thesis, University of Helsinki. Acta Semiotica Fennica. Approaches to Musical Semiotics, 23. Helsinki: Suomen Semiotiikan Seura.
- Young, George. (2012), *The Russian Cosmists: The Esoteric Futurism of Nikolai Fedorov and his Followers*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Zenkin, Konstantin V. (2004), 'On the Religious Foundations of A. F. Losev's Philosophy of Music', *Studies in East European Thought* 56/2–3: 161–72.
- Zenkin, Konstantin V. (2012), 'Muzyka kak predmet logiki i mifologii', in *Muzyka kak predmet logiki*, ed. A. Losev. Moscow: Akademicheskii Proekt, 6–32.

FURTHER READING

- Bartlett, Rosamund (1995), *Wagner in Russia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ivanov, Viacheslav (2001), 'Scriabin's View of Art', in *Viacheslav Ivanov: Selected Essays*, trans. Robert Bird, ed. Michael Wachtel. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.
- Levidou, Katerina (2013), 'Eurasianism in Perspective: Souvtchinsky, Lourié and the Silver Age', in *Russian Émigré Culture: Conservatism or Evolution?* Ed. Christoph Flamm, Henry Keazor, and Roland Marti. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Mitchell, Rebecca (2015), *Nietzsche's Orphans: Music, Metaphysics and the Twilight of the Russian Empire*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Morrison, Simon (2002), *Russian Opera and the Symbolist Movement*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Rosenthal, Bernice Glatzer (2004), 'Losev's Development of Themes from Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy*', *Studies in East European Thought* 56/2–3: 187–209.
- Taruskin, Richard (1997), *Defining Russia Musically: Historical and Hermeneutical Essays*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.