

Shostakovich & Other Russians



Session Two

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LIFECourses.ca/Shostakovich

Plan for this session

- Housekeeping
 - How to best use our 3rd hour?
- Birth of Russian classical music
 - The “Mighty Handful”
 - Borodin – String Quartet No. 2, 4th movement
 - Mussorgsky – Pictures at an Exhibition, orchestra & piano
 - Mussorgsky - Khovanshchina
- Rights of Spring revolution
 - BBC introduction
 - With Nijinsky choreography
- Next week

Use of our 3rd hour

- Last week
 - Only a few people came back, but ..
 - We started watching “Shostakovich against Stalin”
 - Should we continue with the second half?
- In the future
 - Go off for coffee with fellow music lovers
 - Bring in favorite music to share
 - Watch documentaries on the music
 - Etcetera

Smidgen of Russian history

- No middle-class, or working-class, until the 19th century
 - (Last place Marx expected a revolution)
- Royal family was European, peasants were Russian
 - Royal sponsorship of European musical imports
- Change started in 19th century
 - St Petersburg Conservatory – 1862
 - Moscow Conservatory – 1866

The Mighty Handful

- Gathered in St. Petersburg – 1856 – 1870
 - Mily Balakirev (the leader)
 - César Cui [met with Balakirev in 1856]
 - Modest Mussorgsky [joined in 1857]
 - Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov [joined in 1861]
 - Alexander Borodin [joined in 1862]
- Not European conservatory, but Russian roots
- Tchaikovsky (1840-1893) uneasy relationship

Alexander Borodin 1833-1887

- Composer, doctor, chemist
 - Illegitimate son of a Georgian noble, registered as the son of a serf, Porfiry Borodin
 - Chair in chemistry at the Imperial Medical-Surgical Academy, St. Petersburg
 - Founder of the School of Medicine for Women in St. Petersburg
- His music was basis for the US musical *Kismet* (1953)
- Composed symphonies, quartets and opera Prince Igor



String Quartet No.2 in D major

- 4th movement
 - Finale: Andante — Vivace in D major and 2/4 time, with 671 bars (contrapuntal in style)
 - Kopelman Quartet, March 2008
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qx8motRLZJA>



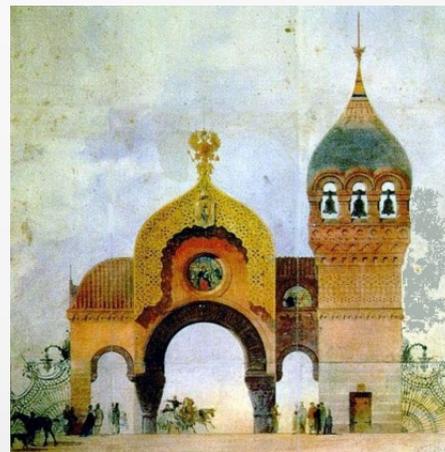
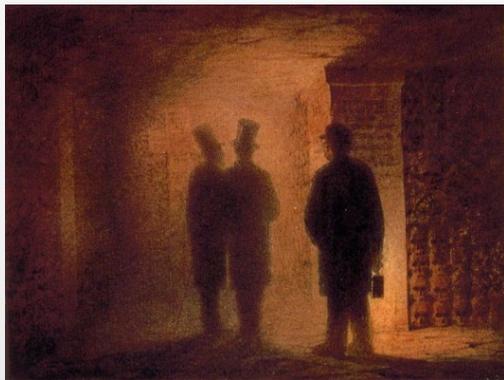
Modest Mussorgsky 1839-1881

- Son of noble, wealthy, land-owning family
- Guards Cadet School at age 13
 - Drunkenness was almost required of cadets
- 1856: Mussorgsky (17) met Borodin (22) while both served at a military hospital
- Was a (drunken) civil servant, (great) composer on the side
- Died of alcoholism, age 42



Pictures at an Exhibition

- Viktor Hartmann, artist, architect, friend of Moussorgsky died at 39 in 1873
- Retrospective show of his work in 1874
- Inspired by exhibition, Mussorgsky composed *Pictures at an Exhibition* in June 1874



Pictures at an Exhibition - music

- In the version orchestrated by Ravel
 - Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra, Mariss Jansons
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wSumsdfyiv8>
- As originally composed for piano
 - A young, energetic Evgeny Kissin
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g8ei1NF0oic>



Khovanshchina - *extra*

- Opera by Mussorgsky
 - First orchestrated by Rimsky-Korsakov
 - Presented in 1886 in St. Petersburg
 - Orchestrated by Ravel & Stravinsky
 - Presented in 1913 in Paris
 - Orchestrated by Shostakovich
 - Presented in 1960 in St. Petersburg



Khovanshchina - *historical*

- The death of the young Tsar Fyodor III in 1682 has left Russia with a crisis of succession. Supported by Prince Ivan Khovansky, Fyodor's sickly brother Ivan, who is 16, and his half-brother Peter, who is only 10, have been installed as joint rulers, with their older sister Sofia acting as regent. Sofia has allied herself with Prince Vasily Golitsin, a powerful courtier and liberal politician, who is also her alleged lover.
- Due to regulations applicable at the time of the composition of the opera in Imperial Russia, it was forbidden to portray members of the Romanov dynasty on stage, so Mussorgsky had recourse to a series of symbols and indirect mention of main characters in the plot. Sofia, Ivan and Peter never actually appear on stage.

Wikipedia

Khovanshchina - *plot*

- Concerns the rebellion of Prince Ivan Khovansky, the Old Believers, and the Muscovite Streltsy against the regent Sofia Alekseyevna and the two young Tsars Peter the Great and Ivan V, who were attempting to institute Westernizing reforms in Russia.
- Three-way conflict
 - Old guard – Muscovite Streltsy
 - Old faithful – Old Believers
 - Westernizer – Sofia Alekseyevna

Khovanshchina - *comment*

- Khovanshchina is a massive canvas of many conflicting tragedies, fears, ambitions and hopes for Russia. The additions of Stravinsky and Shostakovich, for all their musical interest, are comments on Russian history... and they result in a political emphasis to the opera which cannot be justified by Musorgsky's own scores and letters. The very ambiguity of Khovanshchina makes it an opera of great contemporary relevance; to polarise or clarify is, I feel, to reduce its effect, especially in the Russia of today.

Young Valery Gergiev

Khovanshchina - *performance*

- Vienna State Opera, Claudio Abbado
 - Orchestrated by Shostakovich, Final scene by Stravinsky
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X7JUbjWSKrY>
 - 2 hours, 52 minutes (1989)
- Bolshoi Theater, Moscow, Yuri Siminov
 - Orchestrated by Rimsky-Korsakov
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OVurxfqKG-k>
 - 2 hours, 47 minutes (1979)

Khovanshchina – *final scene*



Igor Stravinsky 1882-1971

- Born in Russia, worked in Paris, died in US
- In 1901 started to study law in St. Petersburg
- In 1905 studied with Rimsky-Korsakov
- In 1909 Sergei Diaghilev was impressed
 - Commissioned *The Firebird* in 1910
 - Commissioned *The Rites of Spring* in 1913
- And then a riot broke out in Paris at the 1913 performance of *The Rites* by Ballet Russes

Igor Stravinsky - images



1903



Picasso, 1920



1965

The Rites of Spring

- "Pictures of Pagan Russia in Two Parts"
- Choreography by Vaslav Nijinsky
- Stage designs & costumes by Nicholas Roerich
- "A musical-choreographic work, [representing] pagan Russia ... unified by a single idea: the mystery and great surge of the creative power of Spring"

PARISIANS HISS NEW BALLET

Russian Dancer's Latest Offering, "The Consecration of Spring," a Failure.

HAS TO TURN UP LIGHTS

Manager of Theatre Takes This Means to Stop Hostile Demonstrations as Dance Goes On.

By Marconi Transatlantic Wireless Telegraph to The New York Times.

PARIS, June 7.—"Bluffing the Idle

NYTimes, 1913

The Rites of Spring - performance

- BBC introduction
 - Interview with original English prima ballerina
 - BBC Proms 2013 - François-Xavier Roth conductor
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rq1q6u3mLSM>
(But it was 1913, not 1914)
- Original Nijinsky staging
 - Ballett Mariinski-Theater, Valery Gergiev
 - Théâtre des Champs-Élysées 29.05.2013
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BrylQ9QpXwl>

Next Week (plan)

- Just after the revolution
- Big 3 outside USSR
 - Rachmaninoff, Prokofiev & Stravinsky
- “Establishment” inside Russia
 - Alexander Glazunov 1865-1935
 - Arthur Lourié 1892-1966
- The latest musical fashion
 - The Nose by Shostakovich