

Joy and Radiance from Russia and Ukraine

December 9 and 12, 2007

Notes on the Program

from Artistic Director Nikolai Kachanov

Byzantine culture of the 10th century had a powerful influence on the development of Russian culture as a whole, and on Russian church music in particular. Over the course of centuries, the Byzantine style of church music was transformed through the influence of Slavic musical culture into a new style of church singing, known as "znamenny" chant (unison singing). It came into its final form in the end of the 16th century.

In 1654 (the year of the reunification of Russia and Ukraine), Ukrainian singers brought Kievan znamenny chant and linear transcription, with its square notation, to Moscow. Kievan chant, in contrast to the Moscow style, no longer had a system of short intonations but gravitated toward major-minor thinking and rhythms that built a symmetrical, quadratic musical construction. It reflected Ukrainian folk songs and elements of dance. Kievan chant rapidly earned recognition in Russia.

Our concert starts with znamenny chant. To illustrate its remarkable gradual development from unison to polyphony, we perform the same tune in three different arrangements. The first time, we sing the original melody without harmony or counterpoint, according to the oldest church traditions. The second time, the chant reflects the ancient Greek church polyphonic style known as "isson." The third time, the same tune emerges from a contemporary Russian monastic style of singing.

Russian composers were always inspired by folklore, but the development of choral music would not be possible without influence from the West, especially via Ukraine. One of the brightest examples of this influence was the Ukrainian Dmitry Bortnyansky. His baroque style was alien to the Russian musical language, but despite this, his sacred concertos—perfect in form and deep in content—gradually earned popularity in Russia. Bortnyansky is rightfully acknowledged as one of the creators of Russian professional music and his name remains beloved among church composers.

Thanks to the end of prohibitions in today's Russia, we are discovering new choral scores of little-known or completely unknown church composers; among these is Alexander Yegorov. His compositions reflect the "golden days" of Russian church music, when there were numerous church choirs with full-bodied sound ranging from light, high boys' voices to the lowest basso profundo. Yegorov's compositions can be compared to the music of such masters as Chesnokov and Gretchaninov.

We conclude our program with a new name: the well-known contemporary Ukrainian composer Oleksiy Skripnik, who continues in the tradition of introducing new ideas from Western music to the Slavic world. According to musicologist Anna Laskova, "Skripnik's *Alliuya* organically exudes a highly energetic mood, with syncopation, rhythms, and harmonies from American spirituals, blues, and jazz—a sort of 'musical bridge' between the Old and New Worlds."