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The Condition of Old Russian Musical Art by the Middle of the 17th Century and the Prerequisites for its Reforming

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Evolutionary processes in the state and social system of Russia in the second half of the 17th century accelerated the breakdown of the traditional worldview. The process of deep stylistic changes in Old Russian professional musical art began to be realized. The dominance of a number of negative phenomena, formed over several centuries, led to the awareness of the society itself of the need to carry out urgent corrections. These phenomena were the following: diversity in singing of the neumatic signs of notation by the masters of different regional schools, “razdelnorechie” (homony) as a specific manner of singing of verbal texts in the chants, “mnogoglasie” as a simultaneous performance of different parts of the church services. Under these conditions, there appeared the works, which not only called for the elimination of the accumulated “disorganizations” (negative phenomena) and acceleration of the musical reform, but also tried to disclose the causes of the emergence of disorganizations and indicate the ways of their correction.

Keywords: old Russian church chanting art, razdelnorechie, mnogoglasie, preconditions of musical reform.

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The completion of the economic foundation in the integrated Russian state in the second half of the 17th century took place in the framework of establishing absolute monarchy and separating the church from participating in the process of ruling the country. Transformations in the governmental and social systems accelerated the collapse of traditional values and views. The

main idea of the epoch's intellectual culture was secularization, getting free from the bondage of the church canon. The transition period art became a joining link between the Medieval art and the New Time art, the stylistic principles of which were formed under the influence of the internal patterns of the state's life and demands of the developing national culture.

During the transition period the Russian professional musical art also went through drastic stylistic changes. The Russian “znamennaia” monody and “linear” “strochnaia” polyphony style was gradually replaced by a new colorful, virtuosic and harmonically rich polyphony singing – “partesnoe”. Russian chanters took it differently. Most of them, supported by higher authorities and with the help of Western Russian chanters, were mastering the new art. Others tried to refresh the Ancient Russian chant reforming it the way they felt necessary.

The establishment of various chant centres with their own interpretation of complex neumes, formulae, with their own chanters who created their original chants, in general, had a great impact on the development of the church-chant art, which contributed to its richness and diversity. On the other hand, the deficit of uniformity in chanting hampered the joint performance of chants by singers from different centres. Here is how the author of “Valaam Conversation”, an essay of the mid-16th century, describes it: “The best singers begin to sing in the choir, each chanter thinks his own way only and each one starts praising his own manner... Like oxen, they roar at each other, boasting of this chanting. They kick their feet and shake their hands, nod their heads like crazy people during singing”. It was unacceptable for the chant art that had very specific functions – functions of church and liturgical chanting. An anonymous author believed that Tsar Ivan Vasilievich had to confer with the boyars and start correcting the chant system according to the books, and for the future “the tsar must approve a single corrected version of the singing” (Moiseeva, 1958: 176). Tsar Ivan the Terrible, engaged in musical creativity, really paid much attention to church singing, but he did not begin to correct it.

There also were other reasons causing the aggravation of coordination between performers

of chants. Even Archbishop of Novgorod Gennady (1496-1504) wrote to Simon, Metropolitan of Russia, that “Russia has sunk into transgressions: uneducated people sing in the choir ... These ignorant men are teaching children ... When they leave the master, they do not know how to do anything”. To change the things around, the Novgorod church lord urged “to build schools” (Akty istoricheskie..., 147-148).

But fifty years later, the Moscow Council (Stoglav) (1551) admitted that “even young chanters, who wanted to become diakons and priests, are greatly illiterate for they had learnt from their fathers and masters who also know little”. The participants of that Council, by the Tsar’s order, agreed to search in Moscow and all other cities for good priests, diakons and sextons, married and devout, who can teach others to read, chant and write. Each of them should arrange a school at his own place for all the believers to be able to bring their children there to be taught literate writing, church chanting and book reading (Stoglav, 1911: 59-60). As we can see now, the problem of literacy and chant teaching required the participation of higher authorities. In the times of Stoglav it was important to take into consideration the countless amounts of mistakes, misinterpretations accumulated in church service books for centuries as a result of their scribing. The Council decreed that “all those holy books should be edited from correct samples by the all together, that only good version of holy books could be brought into churches and used as basis for chanting, while the faulty poorly edited books should be kept away from the church services” (Stoglav, 1911: 61).

The old chant art was harmed not only by the lack of uniformity, but also by a phenomenon called “*mnogoglasie*” (simultaneous performance of different parts of several services).

With the development of church rites, introduction of new services commemorating

Russian saints, ascetics and feasts, more and more hymn-graphical texts were put onto music. This meant that what had been read before was sung now. Besides, the development of chant art gave rise to new stylistic trends and even styles with their own manners of chants recording, some having extremely prolonged melodies (for instance, Bolshoy, Putevoy, Demestvenny styles of chants). These changes inevitably influenced the length and quality of church services.

The prolongation of church services caused massive irritation among the members of the churches, particularly the highly ranked ones. The majority of priests began seeking the ways to shorten the duration of services without changing the content of the services envisaged by the church Regulations. The solution was found in mnogoglasie. Thus, the book-reading routine was performed at the same time as singing in the altar and on the choir-place, although they had to follow one after another.

The question of observing of “*edinoglasie*”, a step-by-step liturgical service procedure, was discussed by the Council in 1551, yet it was not given much attention to. Nevertheless, in practice, mnogoglasie acquired more and more hypertrophied forms. In his petition to Patriarch Iosif (1642-1652) an anonymous author wrote that “the rules of chanting are not fulfilled by many; because of the mnogoglasie the chanting is not step-by-step, it reminds the singing of drunken people, one, two, three, five and sometimes even six men simultaneously sing different parts of the service” (Rogov, 1973: 79). The educated layer of the Russian society could not stand that situation. Protected by Tsar Alexei Mikhailovich, a circle of “adherents of church piety” was formed. They “established edinoglasie concordant singing in their houses”, and then they asked the Tsar to introduce “edinoglasie singing”, instead of mnogoglasie, to all churches (Belokurov, 1902: 41). But there were powerful people, supported

by Patriarch Iosif, who defended the well-set mnogoglasie singing.

According to the Tsar’s decree of February 11, 1649 the Council was gathered with the Tsar and the Patriarch, Metropolitans Rostovsky and Krutitsky, archbishops of Vologda, Tver and Ryazan, archimandrites and superiors of Russia’s largest monasteries and ten Moscow archpriests, 29 people all together, present. During that meeting, the Tsar’s confessor Stefan aggressively and “with swearwords” condemned all supporters of mnogoglasie singing, including the Patriarch, but his proposal on introducing edinoglasie singing was refused. The main ground forwarded by his opponents was that “Orthodox people of all ranks from the churches of God began to leave because of long lasting singing”. Finally, the Council decided that “the services should be held as before with nothing to be changed” (Belokurov, 1902: 33-37, 41-44).

However, the disagreements between the Tsar and the Patriarch pushed the latter to address the Patriarch of Constantinople and Universe Parthenius II. In the reply of August 16, 1650, received in Moscow on December 8, it was said: “Singers should sing in order, successively... with only one or two people on the right and left choir places, not many” (Rogov, 1973: 78). Having received the confirmation of the edinoglasie approach, Patriarch Iosif “ceased to object” to its introduction. On the Tsar’s behalf, letters were sent to eparchial cities and large monasteries, the letters forbidding mnogoglasie singing and envisaging punishment for the priests who “would not obey the Tsar’s order” (Akty, sobrannye..., 1836: v. 4, 487-489). Meanwhile, the clergymen of middle ranks were extremely dissatisfied with the decisions of the Council.

Under these circumstances Shestak (Shestoy) Martemyanov, a Moscow Publishing House editor, wrote an essay “The Word about Edinoglasie Singing”. The master, apparently,

was born in the early 17th century and, judging by his nickname, was the sixth child in the family. There are no records about his early years. Since March 1640, he had been enrolled as editor with a salary of 30 rubles.¹ There is this author's surviving autograph in the essay known as "The Word about Edinoglasie Singing", which opens with the author's words: "Written in the summer of 7160² by the Publishing House editor Shestak Martemyanov"³.

In his essay the author defends "peace and silence of edinoglasie singing" and attacks mnogoglasie singing: "swearing, screams and noise all over the place; everything is sung and read too fast, against all the rules", and "what comes second is said ahead of the first, while the first is uttered at the end. How can this please God if Devil likes it?" Then come the grounds of sinful nature that mnogoglasie singing has; the author outlines his aesthetic views referring to the books of the Holy Bible, messages of Russian Patriarch Germogen and acts of Stoglav (Book of Hundred Chapters), etc.

Soon after the "Word" had been finished, Shestak Martemyanov was gone. In the books of charges of the Publishing House there is a record for 1652 states that "Shestoy has died" and that another editor has been receiving his salary since September⁴.

Thus, energetic activities of the most educated people of those times, decisions of the Council of 1651 and social and political public opinion to oppose mnogoglasie singing contributed to the gradual eradication of this phenomenon. Those priests who permitted it in their churches were punished⁵. Remote parts of the country preserved mnogoglasie singing particularly long. Repeatedly, the Tsar and the Patriarch sent out prohibiting letters to various distant parts of the country⁶. Meanwhile, in the last third of the century, it was actively instructed not only to sing in one voice, but "in one word"

(in accordance with the ordinary conversational pronunciation). However, while mnogoglasie singing could be fought with decrees, the elimination of "razdelnorechie" (separate speech) required the perfection of the chant art itself.

Razdelnorechie (homony) singing is a specific manner of chant singing with the insertion of non-existent vowels between consonants (that is why it is called "separate speech"), which was predominantly the result of voicing ancient Russian semi-vowels *ѣ* and *ѝ* that had neuma above them and also the result of replacing them with *o* and *e* in writing (denese, *sedokhomo*, *grekhomo*, *sotvorikhomo*; from specific endings – *homony*). The most distinct signs of razdelnorechie are found in manuscripts of the 15th century. Throughout the whole century this phenomenon acquired its long-standing and established features. Although razdelnorechie made it more difficult to understand the meaning of the texts, the majority of chant masters and their immediate surroundings took it as a stylistic marker of professional chanting; they preserved it for a long time and even often transferred it to new chants.

The urgency of the necessary reformations is proved by the sources of the 17th century. However, the higher authorities were reluctant to start the centralized reconsideration of chant texts. These were the conditions when the Russian society cried for the necessity of the reforms in the church-chant art. There was another essay whose author Evfrosin considered a wide range of problems in this field.

The first scholar, who published Evfrosin as the author of "The Tale", was V.M. Undolsky (Undolsky, 1846: 12). Apparently, the researcher had the copy of this work with the name on it. Also, there is the date of its creation: 7159(1651).⁷ Apparently, "The Tale" was written by Evfrosin in the second half of that year, as he did not touch upon the question of edinoglasie singing

in the churches which was already being actively eradicated after the 1651 Council (February), and there was no need to draw the authorities' attention to this problem. "The Tale" by Evfrosin was not separately studied and published in its complete form. On several occasions the fragments of Evfrosin's essay were re-issued from various copies (Rogov, 1973: 69-77).

In "The Tale" Evfrosin reveals himself as a great supporter and expert of church-chant art. As a well-educated man, he expresses profound knowledge of works by Apostles, the Fathers of church, and Councils of the local churches and refers to them widely. He also freely speculates on the questions of grammar and textual features of ancient Russian books.

In the beginning Evfrosin encourages singers to be attentive and sing in churches meaningfully and properly, i.e. he wants "singers and listeners to understand what is being sung", to avoid loud performance and decorative elements that make the meaning of the texts hard to understand. Yet, in practice "we, the singers, do not understand what we are singing and also do not let those willing to understand do that. The air is filled with cries and screams and such singing is of no use". Therefore, first of all, "it is important to pay attention to the meaning of what is sung, for all the false beauty and heresy come from negligence".

After that Evfrosin dwells upon the things that distort church chant.

The first one is *razdelnorechie* singing which resulted from distorting words for the good of the music: "We make the singing more beautiful and protect the neumatic signs, but we deprave holy lines breaking all the rules of the printed and hand-written old and new books". That is why Evfrosin believes that this work is done by "Satan and his helpers" – bad teachers who "pretend wise and work not for the sake of God, but in their own interest, and, wanting to be famous,

they create this false wisdom". Evfrosin makes the following conclusion: "We sing words of an unknown language: not Russian, not Greek, not Latin, not Tartar"; but should these words be sung in accordance with printed and ancient books, the author would have "praised this singing, agreed with it and listened to it".

Evfrosin gives the examples of lines where singers distort the meaning because of dividing or joining words while ignoring the punctuation marks. Numerous distortions were also introduced by the scribes, particularly inexperienced young men, who "wrote from each other, without knowing the power of language, the meaning of verses, without knowing grammar".

In "The Tale", monk Evfrosin not only describes negative aspects of the church chanting, but tries to find reasons for the existing situation in the chant art.

First of all, it was a low quality of education. Teachers of "church chant", "despite being paid very well, teach poorly and do not spend much time with their pupils, out of envy they conceal good versions of ancient masters and teach their pupils from spoiled books to prevent them from excelling their teachers and having all the fame".

Another reason for disagreements in chants is the existence of numerous schools following the teachings of outstanding masters. Evfrosin believes that all of them were concerned not with the purity and uniformity of singing, but with gaining fame and recognition. He says that getting together the chanters cannot sing in agreement: "And, during meetings, these singers blacken each other. Everyone praises himself and exclaims: 'I am Shaidur's pupil'. Another one says: 'I have Lukoshkov's teaching'. The third one would say: 'I learn from Baskakov's version'; and other ones would recall Dutkino's singing, Usol'e chanting, Krest'aninov's variant and many others".

Evfrosin urges Tsar Alexei Mikhailovich and Patriarch Iosif to instruct “good chanters and plain scribes” to correct chant books following “printed church books and parchment chant books – Hirmologion, Octoechos, and Stichérons, paying attention to the meaning of their texts”.

Evfrosin’s “The Tale” was widely promoted among hand-written collections of the second half of the 17th century. The Council of 1651, that soon took place, named *edinoglasie* singing its first preoccupation and stated that the second directive was “to sing any chant in a real language as it should be printed and translated from old books”⁸ (Belokurov, 1902: 48). This decision made by the Council was of great importance and led to the authorities’ first attempt to correct the chant system, uniting “good chanters and znamenny scribes”.

So, now we can see that the early 1650-s had all the conditions for conducting a musical reform.

The society had worked out an influential concept defending the *edinoglasie* and *istinnorechie* church singing. Many masters took up chant book correction on their own. Higher church and secular authorities, finally, realized that for making church singing uniform in the scope of the whole country, it was required to gather the representatives of leading chant schools and centers to correct hymn-graphic texts, work out a uniform musical “guidebook”, correct melodies and create a common “collection” of chants. The reform of the Russian church chanting was successfully performed as a result of the work of the masters’ commissions throughout the 50-70-ies. However, at that time the Russian musicians’ attention was already turned to a new, European, art – the so-called “*partesnaia*” polyphony with its simpler theory and system of musical notation. Therefore, not everything that was planned by the best masters of the outgoing art has come true.

¹ RGADA. F. 1182. Inv. 1. No. 33, fol. 5.

² 1651/52 years.

³ RGB. F. 178, No. 1407, fol. 1.

⁴ RGADA. F. 1182. Inv. 1. No. 51, fol. 3.

⁵ For example, in October, 1660 the Moscow priest (pop), whose “singing was not *edinoglasie* singing”, was deported to the Kirillo-Belozersky monastery with the order to keep him there “under strong supervision” (RGADA. F. 196. Inv. 2. No. 63, 1-2).

⁶ For example, the decree of Patriarch Adrian in Kostroma from 1698 (Rogov, 1973: 87).

⁷ RNB. Pogodin, No. 1559, fol. 46.

⁸ RGADA. F. 27. Inv. 1. No. 68, fol. 11.

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Состояние древнерусского музыкального искусства к середине XVII в. и назревание его реформы

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Эволюционные процессы в государственном и общественном строе России второй половины XVII в. ускорили ломку традиционного мировоззрения. Начинается осуществление процесса глубокого стилистического перелома и древнерусском профессионально-музыкальном искусстве. Господство целого ряда отрицательных явлений (раздельноречие, разнообразие в прочтении знаков нотации, многогласие и др.), сложившихся на протяжении нескольких столетий, привело к осознанию самим обществом необходимости проведения назревших исправлений. В этих условиях появились сочинения, не только призывавшие к ликвидации накопившихся «нестроений» и ускорению музыкальной реформы, но пытающиеся раскрыть причины появления нестроений, указать пути их исправления.

Ключевые слова: древнерусское церковно-певческое искусство, раздельноречие, многогласие, предпосылки музыкальной реформы.

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