

The Seven-String Guitar in Russia

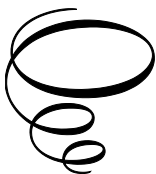
The Seven-String Guitar in Russia:

*Its Origins, Repertoire,
and Performance Practice,
1800-1850*

By

Oleg Timofeyev

**Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing**



The Seven-String Guitar in Russia: Its Origins, Repertoire,
and Performance Practice, 1800-1850

By Oleg Timofeyev

This book first published 2023

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Copyright © 2023 by Oleg Timofeyev

All rights for this book reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

ISBN (10): 1-5275-9285-5

ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-9285-8

To the sweet memory
of my grandmother Amalia Weksler (1903–94),
whose truly Romantic musical taste
forever shaped my own music sensibility

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface	viii
On Russian and Soviet Sources Used in This Book	xiv
Chapter I.....	1
Origins	
Chapter II.....	53
The Guitar's Welcome to Russia	
Chapter III	112
The Patriarch	
Chapter IV	166
The Art of Adaptation	
Chapter V	216
Semion Aksionov and His Russian Sound	
Chapter VI.....	287
Mikhail Vysotsky and the Romani ("Gypsy") Influence	
Chapter VII.....	349
The Russian Guitar after 1830	
Appendix I: Annotated Translation of Mikhail Stakhovich, "An Essay on the History of the Seven-String Guitar" (1854)	416
Appendix II: Notation of Russian Guitar Music, 1800–60	449
Select Bibliography	459
Glossary of Names	466
Index	468

PREFACE

This book is dedicated to the rich and diverse musical tradition associated with the seven-string guitar, tuned to an open G chord (DGBdgbd'), that was unique to the Russian Empire, and subsequently the USSR and post-Soviet territories. For years, as I was studying the instrument, its repertoire and performance practice, digging in libraries and archives, I called that instrument “the Russian guitar.” As I am finishing this monograph in the spring of 2022, however, the attention of the entire world is focused on the abhorrent war that Russia started in Ukraine, Russian-themed festivals and concert series are being cancelled around the world, and it appears that all things Russian will be tainted for years to come.

Can I claim here that the Russian seven-string guitar is “innocent” and that this book is purely about music, unrelated to the cultural and political domination of the 19th-century Russian Empire, 20th-century Soviet Russia, and the 21st-century Russian Federation? The situation, as usual, is complex and requires exploration. But the short answer is “no.”

First of all, the instrument is inseparable from the context in which it was created. The first four chapters of this book situate the invention and proliferation of the seven-string guitar in the context of the Russian Empire of the time. In particular, the geopolitical catastrophe of the late 18th century, the Third Partition of Poland (1795), which marked the end of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, had a direct influence on the musical life of Moscow and St. Petersburg in general, and on the development of the seven-string guitar in particular. For a variety of reasons, there were already many Western Europeans in Russia's two capitals at the time, but the 1795 Partition of Poland directly or indirectly brought a number of Poles, Czechs, and Ukrainians there. Ignaz von Held's story is a good illustration of a possible indirect path to Russia: a Czech by birth, he was an officer of the Polish Army and a participant in Kościuszko's 1794 uprising against Russian rule. This brought him to Russia as a prisoner of war even before the final Partition of Poland. Andrei Sychra, another Czech, came to Moscow from Vilnius (now the capital of Lithuania, then part of the Polish-

Lithuanian Commonwealth), where he was born and raised. Sychra's father Jozef is remembered as an instrumental figure in the development of *polonaise* as a musical genre, although the main manuscript demonstrating his importance vanished during the Second World War. When Mikhail Stakhovich, the most quoted writer in this book and the author of the earliest history of the instrument (1854), refers to Andrei Sychra's birthplace, he calls it "Russia's Western provinces." This is a perfect example of Russian imperial thinking, as Sychra was born in 1773, about twenty years before Vilnius was annexed by the Russian Empire (1795).

The *milieu* in which the seven-string guitar emerged thus originally had hardly any ethnic Russians in it, but rather Poles, Czechs, Germans, and possibly Ukrainians. While it is rather typical for Russian imperial thinking to appropriate the multi-ethnic entities under the single word "Russian," in the 19th-century itself the words "Russian seven-string guitar" were actually used very infrequently. For practical purposes, it was much more important to emphasize the instrument's number of strings ("seven-string") in order to distinguish it from the European six-string guitar, which also enjoyed some limited popularity in Russia.

It is also remarkable that the seven-string guitar was never used as a tool of pro-Russian propaganda. Outside of Russia, one barely finds any traces of this instrument. There are neither actual guitars nor large accumulations of printed or manuscript music in the world's museums and archives. Until very recently, even professional guitarists and guitar historians in the West were unaware of the instrument's existence. This must be connected to the domestic neglect for the instrument and its tradition throughout the post-1917 era.

After the 1917 October Revolution, any guitar in Soviet Russia fell out of favor as being too intimate and bourgeois. The situation further changed with the 1926 concert tour of the Spanish maestro Andrés Segovia, which boosted the image of the "international" Spanish guitar to the detriment of the seven-string domestic one. Throughout the 20th century, therefore, the Soviet guitar scene was reduced to a war between the six-string players who had little or no connection to their Western colleagues due to the Iron Curtain, and the seven-string players who had no access to public performance and education. Thus, even within Russia and the USSR the instrument was never used as a Russian national symbol. In fact, even the

current incipient revival of the seven-string guitar in Russia is largely indebted to similar developments taking place in the USA and Europe.

To sum up, the guitar culture associated with the seven-string guitar in Russia is a complex phenomenon that should be of interest to anybody who studies the music, culture, and—to some extent—the politics of the Russian Empire. Clearly, the fate of the instrument is entangled with the history of the Russian empire and its oppression of surrounding nations, and it is important to keep this in mind. But the seven-string guitar has benefited from its multi-cultural origins, and its repertoire reflects that diversity, as well. As we study and appreciate the musical and cultural legacy of the seven-string guitar, it is important to highlight that rich diversity, be it the connection to Polish or Ukrainian folk music, or the indisputable influence of the Romani (“Gypsy”) oral tradition.

Chapter I is solely dedicated to the narratives and facts associated with the instrument’s early origins. We will never know for sure if there was a single person who invented the seven-string guitar with its open-G tuning, but there are several late 18th-century developments that should be examined. Although no definite answer to the instrument’s origin is given in this book, it is to date the most comprehensive exploration of the early history of the seven-string guitar.

Chapter II invites the reader to consider the seven-string guitar in two ways. First, the origin and development of its physical body is considered, tracing many of its organological features back to their European roots. The rest of Chapter II is designed to explore the various ways in which Russia’s unique soundscape of the late 18th and early 19th centuries may have influenced the kind of sound the early players expected from their new guitar. Some of the connections are completely obvious, such as the short-lasting fad for harp music that just preceded the popularity of the seven-string guitar. But other concepts may be more provocative, such as the influence of omni-present folk singing and even church (and carriage) bells. In short, Chapter II is my attempt to speculate why the instrument itself and its music came to be what we know, significantly differing from its Western European counterpart, the Spanish guitar and its music.

Chapter III is dedicated to the life and musical career of Andrei Sychra, the giant of the Russian guitar tradition lovingly dubbed “the Patriarch of Russian Guitarists” by his peers. We will look into the evolution of Sychra’s personal guitar style, the overwhelming influence of which will be evident in the subsequent chapters. As most of Sychra’s works are arrangements of pre-existing compositions, Chapter IV is focused on transcription as an art form. It is common for musicologists to look down on the arrangements of other people’s works as compared to one’s original compositions. My main argument here is that a brilliant transcription, just as an excellent translation of a literary text into a different language, is in itself an original creative act. In a special section labeled “Horseshoeing the Flea” we will explore a compact yet revealing sub-repertoire of the seven-string guitar: transcriptions of the works of Western guitarists.

Chapter V deals with life and work of Semion Aksionov, one of the earliest and most successful students of Sychra. Aksionov is justly credited with the creation of a special style of writing rapid variations on Russian folk tunes as well as European arias. We will see how his teacher Sychra, initially suspicious about this innovation, eventually adopts this style, too.

Chapter VI is dedicated to one of the most original guitarists Russia has ever had, Mikhail Vysotsky. Supposedly, he studied with Aksionov, although no one can be sure how regular those studies were. Unlike Aksionov and Sychra who spent more time in the Northern Capital, Vysotsky never left Moscow and exemplified some of the aesthetics typical for the older city. One such trait is his inexhaustible fascination with the Russian folksongs: some of his variations have no rivals even in the works of his teacher Aksionov or his teacher’s teacher Sychra. The other is the Muscovite obsession with the musical tradition of the Roma (“Gypsies”), that in my view can also be read between the staff lines of Vysotsky’s compositions.

Finally, Chapter VII addresses the later generation of players who closed the period that can be called “The Golden Age of the Russian Guitar,” 1800–1850. Some of these guitarists—Vasily Sarenko, Fedor Zimmerman, and Nikolai Alexandrov—were true Romantics, whose attractive pieces can be hardly recognized as anything specifically ethnic. Others (e.g., Vladimir Morkov and Alexander Vetrov) combined the older ways of writing variations on and arrangements of the Russian and Ukrainian folksongs with

the newer practice of independent compositions. All of them creatively applied the legacy of their older peers, but in the end turned their guitar music into a sort of *l'art pour l'art* completely disconnected from other musical happenings. The notorious exception in this regard is Morkov, who left a massive collection of arrangements for guitar duets and also some for guitar with piano accompaniment.

The latter half of the 19th century is not of great interest from the perspective of guitar culture, and therefore the narrative of my book ends here. Appendix I is my annotated translation of the earliest and arguably still most important history of the instrument, Mikhail Stakhovich's *Essay on the History of Seven-String Guitar* (1854). Although full of errors and inconsistencies, this small brochure is a goldmine for anyone studying the subject. Appendix II is included to familiarize the reader with the notation for the seven-string guitar: in addition to conventional means, it has several unique features such as markings for the left-hand thumb and harmonics. Sychra and his peers developed a unique system of notating left-hand fingerings, and the readers will save themselves some time if they check Appendix II before looking at any music examples in this book.

It gives me great pleasure to express my thanks to Jelma van Amersfoort, Christopher Berg, Bruce Alan Brown, Marina Dolgushina, Marina Frolova–Walker, Vadim Kolpakov, Damián Martín, Inna Naroditskaya, Dmitry Petrachkov, Pavel Serbin, Kenneth Sparr, Erik Stenstadvold, Viktor Tarnovsky, Marietta Turian, and Stanley Yates with whom I had many productive discussions of sources, facts and personalia, to Wojciech Gurgul for his incredible help on Polish sources, to Alexandra Hack and the staff of the Library of Princess Anna Amalia (Weimar, Germany), to Alla Semenyuk and the staff of the Russian State Library (Moscow), the staff of the National Library of Russia (St. Petersburg), and to Alexei Dolgov of the State Archive of Tambov Region (Tambov, Russia). I am grateful to Jan Burger and César Ureña Gutiérrez for their help on Francesco Molino and W. A. Mozart respectively. As a non-native speaker of English, I greatly benefitted from the committed efforts of Dina Blanc, Eugene Braig, Dan Caraway, Christopher Doty, Miriam Gölz, Marc Greenberg, Katy Hoffer, Doc Rossi, Irina Sarapulova, John Schneiderman, and Alvin Snider. Evgeny Aksionov and Igor Golger kindly helped me with some music examples, for which I am also very grateful. Last but not least, I will never be grateful

enough to my wife Sabine Gözl and my mother Natalia Timofeyeva for their continuous support throughout the years it took to complete this project.

—Oleg Timofeyev
October 2022, Iowa City

ON RUSSIAN AND SOVIET SOURCES USED IN THIS BOOK

Unlike the case with other European languages, a working fluency in Russian is expected only from native speakers and/or narrow specialists on Russian culture and literature. Similar to the way I deal with German, French, and Polish sources, I provide the Russian originals throughout this book only if they could be of service to some readers in addition to my own translations. On the other hand, the works of such classics as Tolstoy and Dostoevsky I quote from reputable English translations and do not always supply the originals.

But since the readers usually cannot check the Russian sources themselves, they deserve to know some facts on the veracity and reliability of these sources. The following consideration may have something to do with the fact that Russian Orthodoxy does not believe in purgatory, and that the Russian word for Orthodox Christians (*pravoslavnye*) translates as “True Believers.”¹ Whether connected to this or not, there is a strong Russian and Soviet tendency to think exclusively in non-compromising terms of “true” and “false” (or “good” and “evil”). The notion of *truth* is more absolute in Russia than in Western countries, which often means that in many Russian and Soviet sources a number of facts are left to blind faith and do not require arguments. For example, once an anecdote of questionable veracity is cited in one source, it is destined to appear in many others, and often presented as truth beyond doubt.

The other much more concrete (although possibly related) consideration is that after 1917 and very much until the present moment, Russian guitar culture has been dealing with the politicized dichotomy of the Western six-

¹ For more discussion of this issue, see Yuri Lotman, “*Rol’ dual’nykh modelei v dinamike russkoi kul’tury (do kontsa XVIII veka)*” (“The Role of Duality Models in the Dynamics of Russian Culture (up to the end of the 18th century) in Yu. Lotman, *Istoriia i tipologiia russkoi kul’tury* (“History and Typology of Russian Culture”), St. Petersburg: Iskusstvo, 2002, 88-115.

string and the native seven-string variants of guitar. Again, this dichotomy has been seen in the USSR and subsequent Russian Federation in black and white, i.e., the good instrument vs. the evil one. Unfortunately, the national variety of guitar—the sole subject of this book—has often fallen into the evil category. This explains why some 20th-century “scholarly” literature on it is highly tendentious and subjective, condemning the Russian guitar to mere amateur status (Volman, 1961). And again, once presented in one source, the unfair, officially commissioned judgement is quoted in most subsequent publications.

Stakhovich: Essay on the History of the Seven-String Guitar

The two installments of this publication² have proven priceless for the study of the Russian guitar tradition. Mikhail Stakhovich (1820–58) was a playwright, poet, amateur guitar player, and student of the great Mikhail Vysotsky. Scholars of seven-string guitar history are in luck that Stakhovich left such a lively memoir, summing up his personal and indirect experience with Andrei Sychra, Mikhail Vysotsky, Semion Aksionov, Vladimir Morkov, and others. As one might expect, the various anecdotes and hypothetical statements from his *Essay* soon gathered the status of ultimate truth and have been quoted in every Russian-language source since 1854. It is easy to expose Stakhovich’s vagueness on many questions. Nonetheless, his groundbreaking *Essay* remains an intelligent text written by a perceptive eye-witness.

Stakhovich was born to a noble family of Polish origin, and unfortunately was murdered – allegedly by his own employees – when he was only thirty-eight years old. However short, his turbulent life was filled to the brim with passion and promising undertakings. A very successful playwright, Stakhovich also wrote what today we would call “non-fiction”: for example, he published a demographic report on the Elets’k *uezd* (county). He was successful in poetry, but he had to balance this with his passion for breeding horses, where he also had a reputation of an expert. He was a respected Marshal of Nobility, but he also traveled to Germany where he studied

² *Moskvitianin* (“The Muscovite”) IV (1854) 1–17 and V (1855) 226–238.

music theory and married a German woman.

Clearly, Stakhovich was too busy amidst his many different projects to double-check all the facts and numbers he incorporated in his *Essay*. Most of his numbers are very approximate or simply wrong, and some facts are mixed up and questionable. But with a proper critical apparatus, his *Essay* is a goldmine on the personalities, repertoire, performance practice, and perception of the Russian guitar tradition. This is why I include my annotated translation of Stakhovich's work as Appendix I. Among my annotations are references to various Russian and European writers which were not that easy to decipher in the original, due to Stakhovich's idiosyncratic citations. There are also some direct allusions to seven-string guitar compositions. But most importantly, having the complete translation of Stakhovich's seminal text at their fingertips will allow the readers to always be aware of the context from which this or that quotation has been pulled for the various arguments in my text.

Writings of Valerian Rusanov

Valerian Rusanov (1866–1918) was a passionate guitar advocate, teacher, and an amateur seven-string guitarist and composer. His engagement with the instrument began in 1889, and starting 1892 he took seven-string guitar lessons from Alexander Soloviov.

In a short time, Rusanov learned enough about the world guitar literature to publish the guitar periodicals *Gitarist* (1904-6) and *Muzyka Gitarista* (1907-10). After the latter journal ceased to exist, Rusanov continued to publish articles in Afromeev's journal *Akkord* (1911–13).

This time period may be referred to as the Silver Age of Russian Culture, and one of its characteristic traits is nostalgia with an emphasis on the glories of the past. Not surprisingly, Rusanov's journals were the first serious attempts to deal with the Russian guitar masters of the early 19th century: Sychra, Vysotsky, etc. However, the Russian guitar tradition was not the sole subject of Rusanov's publications, which were often dedicated to the forgotten pages of European lute and early guitar history.

Rusanov's journals were first and foremost a literary undertaking. A good writer himself, he also invited other people gifted in writing to work for his journals. There are many captivating stories and insightful histories

in these journals, but one needs to be aware of the omnipresent sense of nostalgia and loss typical for that era. In particular, the guitar's decline in the middle of the 19th century is often presented as an almost demographic catastrophe, and its witnesses—Vetrov, Liakhov, Beloshein, among others—as martyrs of the society's supposed persecution of the guitar. The tone of Rusanov's narrative offers a modern scholar an unsolvable conundrum. On the one hand, Rusanov personally knew several old-school guitarists who were still alive at the end of the 19th century, and his testimony in this respect is undoubtedly important. On the other, one can be almost certain that while relating the voices of the past in his publications, Rusanov definitely exaggerated their bitterness and disappointment, and made all the guitarists fit the Procrustean bed of his own gloomy imagination.

On certain subjects, however, there are no better alternatives to Rusanov's essays. This is the case, for example, with Alexander Vetrov. In his article, Rusanov reports on his exchange with Vetrov's student, Mikhail Lopatin, from whom he inherited a large compilation of Vetrov's compositions. In such a case we have no choice but to incorporate Rusanov's discoveries despite our reservations about his emotional coloring of the facts.

To judge from their music publications, it appears that neither Rusanov himself nor his immediate peers were solid guitarists or composers. It is not surprising, then, that his musical opinions often are quite inadequate. In addition, he was a fighter for guitar's prestige: he often published earlier repertoire with conventional titles that were supposed to sound more ambitious than the original ones, such as "Sonata" instead of "Fantasy," or "Fantasy" instead of "Variations on a Russian song." In short, Rusanov's writings should be taken with caution, and ideally cross-examined with other sources.

Writings of Vladimir Mashkevich (1888-1971)

A mining engineer by profession, Mashkevich industriously continued the grand project of his teacher Valerian Rusanov. After Rusanov's death in 1918, Musatov acquired the former's extensive library containing a great number of Russian printed editions and music manuscripts. Most of this collection is now housed at the Glinka Museum of Music (Moscow) as the so-called *Mashkevich Fund* (Fund 359).

Despite the limitations caused by the Iron Curtain, Mashkevich managed to stay in touch with many guitar historians outside of Russia. His *Fund* at the Glinka Museum is not only one of the richest collections in the world of Russian guitar music and related writings, but includes his own handwritten brochures such as “Guitar in Japan,” “Guitar in England,” “Guitar in Uruguay,” etc. His energy and stamina were unmatched by any other 20th-century guitar *aficionado* anywhere in the world, and the scope of his activities was nothing short of astonishing.

Over many years of his active life Mashkevich accumulated not only a large archive of printed editions and manuscripts, but also created a huge, diverse, and perfectly organized database. For example, he single-handedly processed a great number of pre-Revolutionary periodicals (such as the *Moscow Chronicle* and the *St. Petersburg Chronicle*) in the search for advertisements for guitar performances and/or guitar publications. The wealth of his handwritten notes made from a variety of sources resulted in his gigantic unpublished work *Guitar in Russia*, which was brought to the world in full by Mikhail Yablokov in 1992.³

Mashkevich’s discoveries and writings have undeniable value for guitar scholars. It is important to keep in mind, though, that he was not a professionally trained musician or musicologist. He also was strongly biased in favor of the Russian seven-string guitar. That made him quite a harsh and often unfair critic of his contemporaries committed to the “cosmopolitan” guitar, although he full-heartedly appreciated the six-string guitar developments outside of the USSR.

Writings of Boris Volman

Unlike Mashkevich and any guitar historian listed so far, Boris Volman was a conservatoire-trained pianist and musicologist. In addition to his *Guitar in Russia*⁴ (1961) he authored several other books, including *Russian Music Publications of the 18th Century* (1957).⁵ This book on the 18th-century Russian musical bibliography is very professional and useful. However, his

³ This book will be addressed in due chronological order.

⁴ *Gitara v Rossii* (“Guitar in Russia”) Leningrad: Muzgiz, 1961.

⁵ *Russkie pechatnye noty XVIII veka* (“Russian Music Publications of the 18th Century”) Leningrad: Muzgiz, 1957.

first work on guitar history (*Guitar in Russia*) must have opened new opportunities for him, as his following books continued his exploration of guitar history and even guitar pedagogy.

As much as Soviet guitar studies benefited from the attention and committed work of a professional musicologist, Boris Volman did a lot to damage the reputation of the Russian seven-string guitar. It is enough to cite the very last paragraph from his 1961 monograph, which reads like a verdict:

Here is a logical conclusion: in the field of amateur music-making both six-string and seven-string guitars are equal. But for the professional training and following concert activities, all the advantages come with the six-string guitar.⁶

Such a statement is somewhat surprising as a conclusion of a book on the Russian guitar tradition: in fact, it degrades the whole work as mere propaganda against the national variety of the instrument. Despite this ideological angle, one still finds a wealth of useful information on the Russian guitarists and their repertoire in Volman's book. But one needs to learn to filter out the author's unjustified opinions on the quality of Russian guitar music. For example, Volman has these words for Sychra:

One should not forget, however, the dark side of his [Sychra's] activities. Because of his forced propaganda of the seven-string guitar, his limited creative abilities (he has not written a single guitar concerto, sonata, or another large-scale composition) the Russian guitar art soon became isolated from the developing guitar music of the West. The Russian guitar art was locked in the limited circle and began to significantly lag behind the general development of musical culture.⁷

It is hard to believe that a serious scholar is writing about the seven-string guitar tradition in Russia as some kind of nuisance in the way of the proliferation of the European guitar. Quite obviously, everything in this passage is "forced propaganda," to use Volman's own words. The author consciously decides to downplay the excellence and magnitude of the

⁶ Translated from: Volman (1963), 178.

⁷ Trans. from: *Ibid.*, 83.

seven-string guitar tradition in favor of his slavish attitude toward the Western six-string guitar.

Volman's tendentious, propagandistic writing was sharply criticized by Vladimir Mashkevich. The mining engineer dug out a plethora of errors and inconsistencies from the pages of Volman's book, and exposed the author's insufficient engagement with guitar studies. While most of the found errors are genuine, at times Mashkevich is too polemical to be taken seriously: for example, he argues for the excellence of his teacher Valerian Rusanov as a composer without being able to support his claim.

But Mashkevich's text remained in manuscript, known only to a handful of people, while the run of Volman's book comprised 10,000 copies. The last paragraph of Volman's has been quoted in countless Soviet editions, representing the official position which closed the door into professional music for the seven-string guitar.

Yablokov's *Dictionary*

Starting in the late 1980s, Soviet realities began to dwindle in the face of Perestroika and Glasnost. One promising development for scholars was the short-lived openness of archives, famous for their hostility to outsiders throughout the Soviet (and soon, post-Perestroika) times. About then, Mikhail Yablokov, an energetic entrepreneur from the Siberian city of Tyumen, paid a lengthy visit to the Glinka Museum of Music (Moscow) and, with the help of a professional photographer, copied the entire part of the *Mashkevich Fund* dealing with the Russian guitar tradition. In 1992 he published all of Mashkevich's writings (more than 15,000 pages), interspersing them (alphabetically) with entries from the database of living guitarists that he himself had assembled.

This colossal book (more than 2,000 pages) was typeset at the publishing house *Slovo Tiumeni* ("The Word of Tyumen") and 3,000 copies of it were printed and quickly distributed among Russian guitarists. With its scope and magnitude, Yablokov's book is a goldmine for scholars of Russian guitar, mainly due to the titanic labor that Mashkevich accomplished in the 1930s-50s.

The professional collective of *Slovo Tiumeni* must have worked very hard on this formidable task, but there are still many typographical errors

and inconsistencies in their final product. This is not surprising due to the unprecedented volume of labor, and also due to the diverse nature of the contents of the *Mashkevich Fund*: typewritten pages, handwritten notes, clippings from newspapers and magazines. Especially frequent are misspelled foreign (French, German, and English) words, reflecting on the lack of a specialized corrector at the publishing house to deal with the non-Russian quotations.

Since post-Perestroika Russian archives are about as unwelcoming as they were under the Soviet regime, Yablokov's publication may offer the only chance to many guitar scholars to see such material. While writing my book, I had to extensively rely on Mashkevich's bibliographic apparatus, because I could not acquire access to some of his 19th-century references. Whenever possible, though, I used Mashkevich's writings to trace the original sources, and, if I was lucky, cited directly from the originals.

Viktor Tavrovsky's Internet Projects

A philosopher by training, Viktor Tavrovsky (b. 1959) began collecting a database of Russian guitarists back in 2001. Originally, this was the initiative of his son Sergei, which Viktor supported from the beginning. At the moment Viktor and Sergei run two major websites, "Guitarists and Composers" (<http://www.abcguitar.narod.ru/pages/authors.htm>) and "History of Guitar Personalities" (<http://www.guitar-times.ru/pages/magazine/mag5.htm>). In the former project, Tarnovsky offers a database on all 19th- and 20th-century Russian guitar performers, scholars, and composers listed in alphabetical order. It is a useful resource, not that different from Google or Wikipedia, for those who want to acquire the essential information quickly. The latter project is much more ambitious. It is a serious internet-based journal that presents Viktor's latest research on various guitarists, guitar builders, or composers. For example, he dedicated three issues of his journal to the biography and bibliography of Semion Aksionov alone.

Throughout writing this book I often consulted Tavrovsky's site, and got many ideas from the published results of his painstaking archival research. Moreover, a number of other times I contacted Viktor directly, and he generously shared his thoughts and unpublished findings. Tavrovsky's knowledge of the 19th-century Russian history is quite impressive, and so

are his publications on Morkov, Aksionov, Zimmerman, and others. Nowhere does he claim any musical expertise, but some of his publications can also be helpful for musical bibliography (e.g., his list of Aksionov's compositions is more complete than the one by Mashkevich).

Other Russian Internet Resources

A very useful website was created by Dmitry Petrachkov, a young Muscovite guitar player, pedagogue, and historian. Located at sevenstring.ru, this is a massive depository of sheet music for the seven-string guitar. All the important guitarists discussed in my book are also well represented on Petrachkov's site. For Andrei Sychra, Vladimir Morkov, and Mikhail Vysotsky, one finds the complete works as they were published by Gutheil in the 1880s. In some cases, I will be sending the readers to this resource. For example, when we will be discussing Vysotsky's song "Last Night I Was at a Postal Station," the reference will be given as *Gutheil 34*. This means that one can find the entire piece in the Gutheil Vysotsky catalog, located on Petrachkov's site in the Vysotsky section. As long as this internet resource is available, I can be sure that my readers will find the complete pieces of music central to my narratives and arguments, pieces that I can cite only partially as music examples. Of course, there are a number of manuscripts and rare prints not represented on Petrachkov's site.

In addition to a vast collection of sheet music, Petrachkov's domain offers a number of guitar methods and some articles on the guitar, as well as a good collection of sound and video files and an attractive collection of Russian paintings featuring seven-string guitars.

Also of interest is Igor Varfolomeev's bilingual (English and Russian) site on lute and guitar, lute.ru. The site has a module dedicated to the "Russian seven-stringed (sic!) guitar" which lists a number of Soviet publications, mainly sheet music and tutors. Such a selection may be of interest to those doing research on the Russian seven-string guitar during the 20th century.

Other than these few useful resources, the Russian web is overflowing with flawed ideas on the history, repertoire, and ultimate purpose of the seven-string guitar. From bloggers belonging to the six-string majority one finds many variations on the last paragraph from Volman's book, limiting

the seven-string guitar to the role of accompanying Russian and Russian-Romani (“Gypsy”) *romansy*, or art songs. From the opposite camp, one learns about Slavic spirituality and how the G–major open tuning is the true expression of the Russian soul. None of these “experts” have much to offer in terms of actual knowledge, but they will gladly explain why the Russian guitar fell out of fashion. Of course, most international internet resources other than the official archives and libraries are also unreliable. But the 20th-century-long politicized struggle between the Soviet “six–stringers” and “seven-stringers” was so absurdly resilient that one constantly encounters vestiges of this pointless discourse.

I have not listed several books—e.g., by Alexander Faminit syn (1891), Mikhail Ivanov (1948), and Anatoly Shirialin (1994)—on the subject because most of their contents are secondary to Stakhovich, Rusanov, or Volman, and we do not have to rely on them.

The system of transliteration I am using throughout the book is based on the Library of Congress principles, with minimal adjustments. For example, in personal names I sometimes follow the existing tradition, such as “Yablokov” instead of “Iablokov,” or “Vysotsky” instead of “Vysotskii.” I also simplify the transliteration of the Russian sound **ш**, and instead of “Krasnoshchekov” prefer to spell “Krasnoschekov.” The Russian soft sign in the Library of Congress is usually marked as an apostrophe. Since the non-Russian readers can rarely pronounce it, I omit it in some personal names, spelling, e.g., “Lvov” instead of “L’vov.”

CHAPTER I

ORIGINS

The Earliest Mentions of Guitar in Russia

In a recent lecture, the celebrated Yale historian Timothy Snyder suggested that Russia has always had the choice to be a part of Asia or to stick to European civilization (unlike Ukraine, which he considers an organic part of Europe). From this point of view, the Europeanization of Russia is not a synonym of progress or improvement, but rather a self-consciously regulated process that might accelerate, slow down, or even stop altogether at various historical moments. Even the word “Eurasia” itself, so familiar to every graduate of Soviet elementary school, hints at the ambivalent position of Russia between Europe and Asia.

To some extent, this varying proximity to Europe correlates with the rise or fall of instrumental music in Russia.⁸ Since the Eastern Orthodox Church does not allow the use of instruments in its services, the earliest written sources from Russia contain exclusively vocal sacred music. Although vernacular instrumental music was assuredly played and enjoyed, it was simply not written down, leaving something of a lacuna in our understanding of the earliest stages of instrumental music in Russia.

From the stern position of pre-Petrine Orthodox morals, music and entertainment were generally seen as sinful and inappropriate altogether. The Orthodox Church and the Russian state were specifically hostile to the street performers, *skomorokhi*⁹, who were in high demand from the beginning of the second millennium. These were Russian medieval acrobats

⁸ To take an example from more recent history: only with the end of the Iron Curtain period and the re-opening the country during the *glasnost* and *perestroika* era, did the classical guitar scene in Russia arise to international standards.

⁹ The word *skomorokh* is etymologically connected to Italian *scaramuccia* and French *scaramouch*.

and comedians, renowned for their satirical portrayals of the figures in power. The *skomorokhi*'s instruments included the *domra* (a lute-like instrument), the *gusli* (a sort of psalterium), the *sopel'* (recorder), the *volynka* (bagpipe), the *gudok* (a bowed instrument), and the *buben* (tambourine). Despite this range of instruments and their popularity with the common people, practically all that we know about instrumental music in Russia prior to 1700 comes with a negative connotation attached, from their devilish plays (performances) to their devilish vessels (instruments).

In 1653, things got even worse for the musicians of Russia. According to Adam Olearius, who visited the Muscovite Court about that time

[t]he present Patriarch considered that music was being misused in taverns and pothouses, as well as in the streets, for all kinds of debauchery and obscene songs. Accordingly, two years ago [1653] he ordered the destruction of any tavern musicians' instruments seen in the streets. Then he banned instrumental music altogether and ordered the seizure of musical instruments in the houses; once five wagon loads were sent across the Moscow River and burned there.¹⁰

Needless to say, this mid-17th-century catastrophe is the absolute worst moment in the history of instrumental music in Russia. In earlier times, the church was more relaxed about *skomorokhi* and their “diabolic vessels.” But now that *laissez-faire* attitude had ended.¹¹ This 17th-century holocaust of instrumental music became a lasting trauma for the people of Russia, and even centuries later no one can say with authority what the old *gudok* or *domra* even looked like, as none survived the purge.

And then came a powerful wave of Westernization known as the Petrine reforms. A great fan of English engineering and the Dutch navy, Peter the Great founded a completely new, fully European city—St. Petersburg. More than a century later, Alexander Pushkin, the greatest poet Russia ever had, described this unique act of city-building as “cutting a window into

¹⁰ Samuel H. Baron, trans. and ed., *The Travels of Olearius in Seventeenth-Century Russia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1967) 262-3.

¹¹ Ironically, Tsar Aleksei Mikhailovich (reigned 1645–1676), on whose watch these violent acts were implemented, became personally fond of Western style music that involved instruments—but of course, they were only allowed in his private chambers.

Europe.” With its gorgeous European architecture and completely Western city design, Russia’s Northern Capital soon became a topic in and of itself, especially through its relationship to the much older, patriarchal, organically grown, and overwhelmingly Russian capital—Moscow. Of course, the Petrine reforms were not limited to the new city but included the entire country and involved, among other things, a countrywide rethinking of the state apparatus, the military, education, and Russian social life. A large number of first-rate European scientists were invited to work in Russia during this era, and in 1725, the Russian Academy of Sciences was founded in St. Petersburg. Despite this push towards modernization, certain long-standing aspects of Russian culture – such as serfdom – had to wait until the middle of the 19th century before they were replaced with something more modern.

While his reforms affected almost every aspect of Russian life, Peter the Great was more invested in adopting the political, technological, and military know-how of European civilization than the fine arts. He was fond of music, too, but only the rather festive or militaristic kinds. In fact, Peter himself was an excellent performer on military drums. However, it was his rather-significant 18th-century successors—Anna Ioannovna (reigned: 1730–40), Elizaveta Petrovna (1741–1762), Catherine the Great (1762–1796), and Paul I (1796–1801)—who were responsible for the importation of first-rate European music and musicians into Russia. Some critics suggest that the general course towards Westernization slowed down during Anna Ioannovna’s reign—yet, she invested more into having first-rate musicians at the court than her powerful uncle had. From the correspondence of I. Lefort, a representative of the Court of Saxony in Russia, we know that the empress desired to have chamber music (*musique de cabinet*) with a virtuoso singer, a harpsichordist, a lutenist “of the rank of Silvius Leopold Weiss,” as well as a good flutist, an oboist, and a bassoonist.

Having surrounded herself almost exclusively with foreigners, most of them Germans, Anna definitely showed a Germanic taste in plucked instruments. And indeed, her royal wish was satisfied, and in 1733 the Ukrainian *bandurist* Timofey Belohradsky was sent to Dresden to study with S. L. Weiss. After studying with the outstanding lutenist for several years, he returned to St. Petersburg in October 1739, just in time for the last

year of Anna Ioannovna's reign.

Belohradsky's case, however remarkable, is but a single event in mid-18th-century Russian music, or at least a single *known* event of a Western-trained lutenist at the Russian court. Besides, this remarkable performer was only heard by the *crème de la crème* of the noble society, and the Baroque lute in D-Minor tuning—the instrument he must have learned from S. L. Weiss—did not gain broader popularity in Russia.

So much for Baroque lute in Russia. But what about Baroque *guitar*? It is reasonable to believe that Russia's first encounter with it happened as a result of the importation of Italian opera into Russia, a development ignited by Anna Ioannovna. At first, it was an Italian *comedia dell'arte* company that came to Moscow in 1731. However, this group, together with another Italian opera company that arrived a couple of years later, were but the first few: a real, lasting engagement with Italian opera would begin in Russia in 1735, when Francesco Araja arrived with his troupe. He served as the Russian Court's *Kapellmeister* for a quarter of a century, and thus established the presence of Italian opera as a part of the Russian cultural landscape. Elsewhere in Europe, the strumming of Baroque guitars was valued as a part of the continuo group in an orchestra, for it provided additional harmonic and rhythmical support. Thus, there is reason to believe that Italian operatic companies also employed this type of accompaniment. Outside of the orchestras, some of these Italian string players must have played guitars and mandolins for music-making on their own time.

The earliest real evidence of the guitar in Russia comes from the pen of a multi-talented German scholar Jacob von Stählin. He held a variety of posts at the court in St. Petersburg under Anna Ioannovna, Ekaterina Petrovna, and Catherine II, and had plenty of grotesquely negative things to say about the guitar:

Zum Beschluss der musikalschen Neuigkeiten und Merkwürdigkeiten unter der Kaiserin Elizabeth, ist noch zu gedenken, dass auch die Italianische Gitarre, la Chitarra, und ihr Landsmänngen, das Mandolino, durch verschiedene Italiener zu Petersburg und Moskau zum Vorschein, niemals aber zu grosser Kunst, gekommen: um so weniger, da sie nach der Welschen Weise, zur Begleitung der verliebten Seufzer unter den Fenstern der Geliebten, ihre gewöhnliche Dienste in einem Lande nicht leisten können, wo weder die Abendsträndgen (Serenate), noch die Seufzer auf der Gasse,

gebräuchlich sind.¹²

[Regarding the musical innovations and notable things under the Empress Elizabeth, it should be mentioned that the Italian guitar, la Chitarra, and its compatriot, the Mandolino, infiltrated Petersburg and Moscow through various Italians. They never resulted in great art: not surprisingly, since their function is to accompany the sighs of love under the windows of the beloved. But they cannot perform their ordinary services in a country where neither the evening serenades (serenates) nor the sighs out in the street are common.]

Stählin's prejudice against Southern nations—in terms of both their habits and their instruments—is quite typical for German-speaking Europeans of the time. Today we may wonder why any guitar should be reduced exclusively to nightly serenades and sighs of love, but to them it was one clearly outlined package, which was sometimes mixed with the Southerners' love for garlic—another unacceptable trait. For our purposes, however, Stählin's remark is quite helpful, as it confirms that the Western guitar was brought to Russia by “various Italians,” and also observes that the instrument did not become particularly popular there. And one can certainly trust Stählin on that, as he became intimately familiar with Russia's peoples and their culture during his half-century-long multifaceted career in St. Petersburg (1735-85).

A slightly later piece of evidence, albeit negative, comes from an unintentional foreign visitor, this time from the East. After a shipwreck in 1783, Daikokuya Kōdayū, the captain of a Japanese ship, ended up in Russia for several years. In 1791, he was brought to St. Petersburg, and in 1792 he was allowed to return to Japan. There, he was thoroughly interrogated, and the resulting written record is now a valuable document about the social life and customs of late-eighteenth-century Russia.¹³ This documentation is especially important as it is a rare perspective that does not assume that the

¹² Jakob Stählin, “*Stählins Nachrichten von der Musik in Russland*,” in M. Haigold, *Beilagen zum neuveränderten Russland*, Riga: Harstknoch, 1770, 152.

¹³ For more information on Daikokuya Kōdayū's impressions of Russia, see the Japanese original, Hoshu Katsuragawa, *Hokusa bunryaku*. Tokyo: Sanshusha, 1937, or the Russian translation by V. M. Konstantinov, *Kratkie vesti o skitaniakh v severnykh vodakh* (“Brief observations on the traveling the Northern Seas”), Moscow: Nauka, 1978.

Western elements of Russian life are self-evident. We learn from this fascinating document about the balalaika in terms of its similarity to the Japanese *siamisen*, and explicit mention is made of the former being equipped with two or three strings. Kōdayū describes the violin, harpsichord, and organ, all of them great novelties to the observer. Had he seen a guitar, he certainly would have reported this fact, so meticulous are his descriptions of every aspect of Russian life, from marriage to billiard rules. Because Kōdayū circulated in a variety of cultural strata, the fact that he does not mention the guitar strongly suggests that this instrument was not yet a visible part of Russian cultural life at the time.

First Guitar Publications in Russia

If the initial introduction of the Western guitar was instigated by the Italians, it was left to the French to start a guitar publishing industry in Russia. In 1796, two French musicians—Antoine-François Millet and Jean-Baptiste Hainglaise—apparently independently from each other, began publication of weekly guitar journals.¹⁴

The biographical or bibliographical information on either entrepreneur is scarce—for example, we do not know when either of them arrived in St. Petersburg. But the timing of their appearance (1790s) makes perfect sense in a global picture of Europe: as a result of the 1789 French Revolution, there was a massive exodus from France to other European countries, the United States, and Russia.

At this point in time, both of Russia's capitals were viewed by foreign musicians as lucrative locations for their pedagogical and/or performing activities. But it appears that Millet and Hainglaise had a more concrete business plan on their minds: dozens of monthly, weekly, or even daily guitar periodicals were published in France between 1760 and 1800. Familiar with this phenomenon, the two Frenchmen tried to do the same in Russia. Their marketing strategy was simple: without any linguistic content, every issue offered 1–3 songs in French or Italian, with elegant but not too

¹⁴ *Journal d'ariettes avec accompagnement de guitare par A. F. Millet*. St. Petersburg et Moscou: Ditmar, 1796. *Journal d'airs italiens. français et russes [arrangée pour chant] avec accompagnement de guitare [et por deux guitarres] par J. B. Hainglaise*. St. Petersburg: Gerstenberg at Ditmar, 1796-97.