

Nationalism in Glinka's Operas

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It is with good reason that virtually any Russian composer of the late nineteenth century would have cited Mikhail Ivanovich Glinka as an important influence. It was essentially he who made nationalist Russian music possible by laying the groundwork for Russian composers who wanted to express their own musical ideas on an equal footing with Western composers. He was the first Russian composer to write art music that was more than simply an imitation of Western music or a pastiche of Russian folk tunes. Glinka took both of these elements and built upon them in his operas in order to come up with a strong, individual music that was truly his own and which inspired future Russian composers to do the same. Glinka also used the music of his operas in directly political ways, first to glorify the Tsar in particular and then later the Russian nation in general.

The influence of Western culture on Russian aristocrats in the eighteenth century was immense, with the result that Western techniques and styles became central in the music patronized by the elite. In an attempt to overcome the hegemony of Italian and French music, many Russian composers of the early nineteenth century incorporated Russian folk songs into their work. Although Glinka went much further than this, as will be discussed later, he certainly used this technique as well in his operas.

Although a child of an aristocratic family, Glinka was exposed to Russian folk music very early in his life. He spent his early years living in the country, where his uncle's serf orchestra would often play Russian folk songs for his family. Glinka was so captivated by their music that he

would often stand perfectly still while listening to them or try to pick up an instrument and join in.¹ He even conducted the orchestra at times when he got older.² As Glinka himself stated, "During supper they usually played Russian folk-songs arranged for two flutes, two clarinets, two horns, and two bassoons, and it was possibly from these songs that I acquired my love for our native Russian music."³

Glinka's interest in Russian music continued even when he was a young man learning how to compose in Italy. He not only wrote a group of pieces based on Russian themes while there, but also began to plan a Russian opera. As he wrote to a friend in St. Petersburg, "I fancy I have the ability to enrich our stage with a big work. . . . In every way it will be absolutely national. And not only the subject but the music."⁴ He wrote on a different occasion that, "I want my fellow countrymen to feel thoroughly at home in my opera. I don't want foreigners to regard me as an imposter, a sort of crow in peacock's plumage!"⁵ This shows how rooted Glinka was in Russian music, that he would still be fascinated by it even while studying as a young man in a place as musically rich and inspiring as Italy.

¹ Mikhail Zetlin, *The Five: The Evolution of the Russian School of Music*. trans. George Panin (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1959) 24.

² James Stuart Campbell, "Glinka, Mikhail Ivanovich." *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*. 2nd ed.

³ Alfred J. Swan, *Russian Music and its Sources in Chant and Folk-Song*. (London: John Baker Publishers, 1973) 62.

⁴ Richard Anthony Leonard. *A History of Russian Music*. (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1968) 43.

⁵ Mikhail Zetlin, *The Five: The Evolution of the Russian School of Music*. trans. George Panin (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1959) 32.

Allegro moderato

Kak mat' u - bi - li u ma - la - go pten - sa,

Example 1: Vanya's song (*A Life for the Tsar*, Act III)

Akh! chto è - to za serd - tse vo mne vsyo iz - nī - lo!

Example 2: Lvov-Pratsch, *Sobraniye russkikh narodnikh pesen*, protyazhnaya no. 21

There are several examples of direct quotations from folk songs in Glinka's first opera, *A Life for the Tsar*. Two examples of this are Susanin's first repliche in Act I, which Glinka claimed to have taken from a real life coachman's song,⁶ and the melody of Vanya's song in Act 3 (example 1), which has a strong resemblance to the folk song seen in example 2, taken from Lvov-Pratsch. The seven bar phrases of Vanya's song also demonstrate how Glinka adapted the common practice in Russian folk music of alternating three and four bar phrases.

There are many other examples of the influence of traditional Russian music in this opera. The pizzicato accompaniment to the chorus of rowers in Act I is an imitation of *balalaika* strumming, the famous song "Downstream on the Mother Volga"

is reduced to a characteristic motif in the denouement in Act IV,⁷ and Act III contains a reference to the antiphonal singing of Orthodox choirs.⁸ The singing following the Overture is comprised of a solo voice echoed by a chorus coming in on the second phrase, a practice common in traditional Russian chorale singing.⁹

The bridal chorus in Act III (example 3), with its modal cadences, 5/4 rhythm, virtual pentatonicism and unharmonized cantilena in the second half, is perhaps the best overall example of the folk influence. It is easy to see its similarity to authentic Russian wedding songs such as those in examples 4 and 5.

⁶ Richard Taruskin, *Defining Russia Musically* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997) 31.

⁷ Ibid. 31.

⁸ Richard Anthony Leonard. *A History of Russian Music*. (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1968) 46.

⁹ David Brown, *Mikhail Glinka: A Biographical and Critical Study*. (London: Oxford University Press, 1974) 119.

Con moto
Chorus of girls (behind the scenes)

Raz-gu-lya-la-sya, raz-li-va-la-sya vo-da vesh-nya-ya

po-lu-gam. Ra-zui-gra-li-sya, ras-ply-sa-lis kras-nui de-vi-tsui

v te-re-mu. Kak od-na si-dit, ne i-gra-yet, pod-go-ryu-ni-las,

slyo-zui lyot, slyo-zui gor-ki-ye!

Example 3: Bridal chorus (*A Life for the Tsar*, Act III)

Example 4: Traditional Russian wedding song



Example 5: Traditional Russian wedding song

Andante mosso ma ben sostenuto

i *III*

V po - le, v po - le

chi - sto - ye glya - zhu, V dal', po re -

ke rod - noy, o - chi der - zhu.

Example 6: Antonida's cavatina (*A Life for the Tsar*, Act I)

(Cantabile con anima)

Ant.
Ne to-mis', moy mi - liy

Sob.
Kak ne to-mit' - sya mne,

Sus.
Ne to-mis' na - pras - no. Ne kru-shi se -

Ne kru-shi se - bya! Ne tom-ni na -

Ne kru-shit' se - bya! Ne kru - shit', ne

bya! Moy u - da - liy rat - nik

Example 7: Do Not Pine, Beloved (*A Life for the Tsar*, Act I)

The music of Russian towns was distinctly different from Russian village music. It was an amalgam of Western techniques and stylings with the indigenous tradition, and thus offered Glinka an excellent source of inspiration for his own fusions of Western and Russian music. This *style russe* had many traits in common with Pratsch's folk song arrangements, including the predominance of duple or compound duple time, cadential terminations by falling fourths or fifths and a very free interplay of relative major and minor

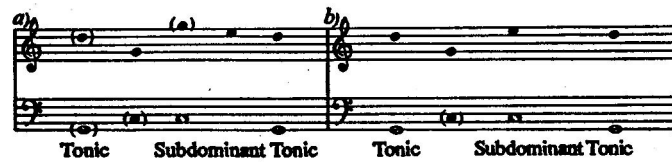
keys.¹⁰ Two of the best examples of Glinka's use of this urban Russian style are Antonida's cavatina in Act I of *A Life for the Tsar* (example 6) and the first part of "Do Not Pine, Beloved," also from Act I (example 7).

There is also a definite folk influence in Glinka's second opera, *Ruslan and Ludmila*, although it is less pronounced than in *A Life for the Tsar*. Act I begins with the song of the Bard in the ancient

¹⁰ Richard Taruskin, *Defining Russia Musically* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997) 29.



Example 8: Chorus of rowers (*A Life for the Tsar*, Act I)



Example 9: Folk song contours (Brown)



Example 10: The two main themes of *A Life for the Tsar*

bilini style, with a piano and harp imitating a *gusli*. The choral “Invocation to Lel” also shows strong folk elements, with its 5/4 rhythm and melody set forth in simple octaves or consecutive sixths.¹¹

There are also certain general characteristics of folk music that tend to appear in Glinka’s music. A good example of this is the practice of occasionally having the supertonic assume the role of the dominant in some Russian folk songs.¹² Glinka used this technique in the theme of the chorus of

rowers in Act I of *A Life for the Tsar* (example 8), for example. This may also be why he originally decided to begin the recapitulation of the Overture in A minor.¹³

In addition, there is also a certain melodic contour that often appears in both Russian folk songs (example 9 (the bracketed notes are sometimes omitted)) and Glinka’s music. Example 9 a is identical to the music in the opening of Ludmila’s cavatina in *Ruslan and Ludmila*, and the treble notes in example 9 b are the same as the opening notes of the Overture and the opening chorus. These folk contours also appear in both of the main themes of *A Life*

¹¹ Richard Anthony Leonard. *A History of Russian Music*. (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1968) 51.

¹² David Brown, *Mikhail Glinka: A Biographical and Critical Study*. (London: Oxford University Press, 1974) 118.

¹³ *Ibid.* 118.

for the Tsar (example 10). Glinka also often used a plagalism that is conspicuous in many heroic folk songs.¹⁴

Having said all of this, it is important to stress that Russian folk music was only a part of Glinka's operas and, although certainly an important part, not the dominant part. The influences on his operas were still predominantly Italian and French and they correspondingly follow many of the old formulae. Each act is comprised of set numbers such as solos, choruses, duets, trios and dances that are linked by recitatives. Much of the melody is imitation Italian, such as the parts of Sobinin and Antonida in *A Life for the Tsar*, which were meant to be vocal showpieces.¹⁵

Indeed, there were many contemporaries of Glinka who incorporated far more folk material into their work than he did. One of these men, Verstovsky, wrote a scathing letter to Prince Odoyevsky shortly after the 1836 premiere of *A Life for the Tsar*, complaining that composers such as himself and Alexander Alyabyev who wrote authentically Russian music were being overlooked in favor of Glinka and his European virtuosic technique.¹⁶

It is important to be very careful when attempting to judge the "authentic nationalism" of a piece of music by the quotient of folk music that has been incorporated into it. More significant than any statistical measure of folk content is the understanding that Glinka used what national material he did to a greater effect than many of his contemporaries. He incorporated national material into some of the most important dramatic moments of *A Life for the Tsar*, such as Susanin's Act IV scena.¹⁷ This stood in contrast to composers such as Fomin who relegated national material to the decorative periphery in order to have their work performed for aristocratic audi-

ences which viewed folk music as inferior peasant music that was beneath them.

The magnitude of Glinka's accomplishment is demonstrated by the words of Odoyevsky, who wrote, "One must hear it to be convinced of the feasibility of such a union, which until now has been considered an unrealizable dream."¹⁸ What made this accomplishment feasible was the fact that the main characters in the opera are all peasants and therefore eligible within the conventions of the time to sing folkish music. Even though the hero of the opera is a peasant, his heroic action is taken for the preservation of the Tsar. Glinka thus accomplished the dual nationalist purposes of glorifying the Tsar and giving national musical material a significance beyond what had previously been accomplished.

One must go further than this, however. Any measure of a composer's "Russianess" based simply on its relative content of folk material is, while occasionally useful, a very limited approach. Glinka's approach to composing was very different from that of Verstovsky and other composers like him. Rather than artificially incorporating folk material in a conscious effort to make his music more "Russian," Glinka simply used folk ideas in his music when it felt natural and when it benefited his music. By facing Western styles head on rather than turning away from them, Glinka was validating Russian music on an international level, something which no previous Russian composers had been able to accomplish. Glinka's achievement was to make Russian music competitive.

Rather than being a nationalist composer because he incorporated Russian folk idioms into his music, Glinka was a nationalist composer simply because he was Russian and because he was able to write music with originality, technical virtuosity and seriousness. It is a Western fallacy (as well as a Russian one, perhaps, as demonstrated by Verstovsky's letter) to measure

¹⁴ Ibid. 116.

¹⁵ Richard Anthony Leonard. *A History of Russian Music*. (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1968) 45.

¹⁶ Richard Taruskin, *Defining Russia Musically* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997) 41.

¹⁷ Ibid. 34.

¹⁸ Ibid. 31.



Example 11: Opening theme (*A Life for the Tsar*, Act I)

the “Russianness” of music by the extent to which it incorporates folk elements. The implication of this attitude is that Russian music must be exotic in order for it to be authentic, an essentially demeaning perspective. To say that a composer can only truly be Russian if he or she artificially incorporates peasant music into his or her music is to deny the creativeness and originality that are the marks of great composers. It is quite possible that Glinka consciously perceived this, given that he stated that one of the most favorable aspects of Pushkin’s *Ruslan and Ludmila* was that it was not particularly Russian.¹⁹ Glinka was ready to move on to finding his own original voice that was Russian because he was a Russian, not because he was trying to be a Russian.

The originality of Glinka’s *Ruslan and Ludmila* is what truly makes it such an important nationalist work. Its originality showed that it was possible for Russians

composers to move beyond not only Western influences, but their own musical heritage as well. It showed that they could write music in entirely new ways if they wished, an achievement that was necessary if they ever wished to be considered the creative equals of Western composers.

A good example of this originality can be found in some of Glinka’s modulations, which go to keys that would not have been expected in either the Western or Russian traditions of the time.²⁰ This can be seen in the opening theme of Act I (example 11) of *A Life for the Tsar*, where the oboe theme of the Overture’s introduction starts in G minor, end up in F in the fifth and sixth bars, and cadences on the flattened leading note.

Glinka also created an entirely new kind of recitative that later came to be used by other Russian composers. Although recitatives did appear in Russian melodramas and oratorios before Glinka’s time, *A Life for the Tsar* was the first Russian op-

¹⁹ David Brown, *Mikhail Glinka: A Biographical and Critical Study*. (London: Oxford University Press, 1974) 198.

²⁰ Ibid. 115.

era to be set entirely to music without any spoken dialogue.²¹ As Neverov put it, Glinka had created

a completely individual type of recitative ... His recitatives are like neither German nor Italian ones; they combine the expressiveness and dramatic flexibility of the former with the melodiousness of the latter, and in them it seems that you hear the intonation of Russian speech.²²

Glinka was also one of the first composers to use the whole tone scale. He used it in a much more conspicuous way than Schubert, by transforming it into a Leitmotiv to represent Chernomor and the supernatural in *Ruslan and Ludmila*.²³ Furthermore, Glinka used this scale in such a way as to give it symbolic nationalist meaning, if it is accepted that Chernomor represents the East and Ruslan represents the West in this opera. The music accompanying the battle between these two characters is governed by the whole tone scale while Chernomor has the upper hand, but then as Ruslan begins to win the music becomes much more tonal.²⁴ Glinka not only used the whole tone scale in a technically pioneering way, he also used it to signify the Russian conquest of the East.

The musical maturity of *Ruslan and Ludmila* is demonstrated by the fact that Glinka was not afraid to take material from wherever he wished, whether it be Russian folk music, old modal scales, what he perceived to be Eastern music, Western tonality or material from his own imagination. Not only were many of the ideas in *Ruslan and Ludmila* new, they were built upon a foundation of both Russian and Western influences. The very act of successfully combining these arguably incompatible systems was something which had little precedent and was itself an important crea-

tive achievement.²⁵ Glinka's eclecticism itself, which began in *A Life for the Tsar* and fully bloomed in *Ruslan and Ludmila*, inspired many later Russian composers to incorporate diverse styles and ideas into their own music.

Glinka's music was truly nationalist because he served as a model for future Russian composers who wished to find their own, unique voices and move beyond the limitations of a strictly Western approach to music or the compulsory link to Russian folk songs. His work was the foundation upon which much of the music of the Group of Five was built. He anticipated the use of subject matter from history or folklore, the use of derivatives of national folk music, the eclecticism and, most importantly, the inventiveness that became central to the music written by the Russian composers who followed him and looked to his music for guidance. There were virtually no Russian composers of the later 19th century, from either the Balakirev or the Tchaikovsky camps, who did not see Glinka as their forerunner.²⁶

Having established the national nature of Glinka's operas from a purely musical perspective, it is now possible to explore them further in terms of their content and political significance. As it happens, not only are the subjects of both operas distinctly Russian, but they also both have a significant amount of content that is directly political. This is in keeping with the idea of Russians such as Neverov that Russian music should not only be decoratively nationalist, but ideologically as well.²⁷

A Life for the Tsar is based on the legend of a peasant named Ivan Susanin. Our historical knowledge of his life is unfortunately fairly limited. It is known that a concession was granted to Susanin's son-

²¹ Ibid. 121.

²² Ibid. 121.

²³ Mary S. Woodside, "Leitmotiv in Russia: Glinka's Use of the Whole-Tone Scale," *19th Century Music* 14 (Summer 1990): 68.

²⁴ Ibid. 73.

²⁵ Richard Anthony Leonard, *A History of Russian Music*. (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1968) 50.

²⁶ James Stuart Campbell, "Glinka, Mikhail Ivanovich." *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*. 2nd ed.

²⁷ Richard Taruskin, *Defining Russia Musically* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997) 43.

in-law, Bogdan Sobinin, by Tsar Mikhail Fyodorovich in 1619. This concession granted dispensation from certain taxes and obligations, and was renewed to Sobinin's heirs. The dispensation was originally given to Sobinin by the Tsar in recognition of Susanin who, "suffering at the hands of said Polish and Lithuanian persons immeasurable torments on Our account, did not tell said Polish and Lithuanian persons where We were at the time, and said Polish and Lithuanian persons did torture him to death."²⁸ Simply put, Susanin was executed for refusing to reveal the whereabouts of the newly elected sixteen-year-old Tsar Mikhail Fyodorovich to a Polish search party.

The legend of Susanin became a fixture in the wave of patriotism that swept Russia following the defeat of the seemingly invincible Napoleon in the War of 1812. Inevitable parallels were drawn between peasant partisans in that war and Susanin.²⁹ This made it the perfect tool for the promotion of a new kind of Official Nationalism that was gaining strength in Russia at the time. Tsar Nicholas I wanted to associate love of country not with love of its inhabitants but with the love of the dynastic state. Count Sergey Semyonovich Uvarov, the minister of "popular enlightenment," circulated a directive in 1833 stating that "our common obligation consists in this, that the education of the people be conducted, according to the Supreme intention of our August Monarch, in the joint spirit of Orthodoxy, autocracy, and nationality."³⁰

Glinka could not help but have been influenced by this Official Nationalism. He was very close to Vasiliy Andreyevich Zhukovsky, the tutor to the royal heir, official state censor and one of the chief proponents of the Official Nationalism.³¹ As Glinka recalled in his memoirs, "When I declared my ambition to undertake an op-

era in Russian Zhukovsky sincerely approved of my intention and suggested the subject of Ivan Susanin."³² It was Zhukovsky who wrote the text to the epilogue to the opera and who had his protégé and the secretary of the Tsarovich, Baron Yegor Fyodorovich Rozen, write the rest of the libretto.³³

It is thus hardly surprising that the doctrines Official Nationalism are to be found throughout the text of the opera, with its consistent emphasis on the importance of zealous submission to dynastic authority. Although it could perhaps be argued that Glinka was not entirely responsible for this, a close examination reveals that the music of the opera works hand in hand with the text in its support of Official Nationalism. An excellent example of this appears in the epilogue of the opera, which portrays Mikhail Romanov's triumphant entrance into Moscow after routing the Poles. It is built upon a choral hymn-march performed by massed forces and contains the following quatrain by Zhukovsky (example 12):

Glory, glory to thee our Russian Caesar,
Our sovereign given us by God!
May thy royal line be immortal!
May the Russian people prosper through it!³⁴

The theme to this hymn-march, called the *Slav'sya* theme, plays a central role in *A Life for the Tsar*. It is musically foreshadowed not only in the opening peasant chorus in Act I, but whenever the topic of dynastic legitimacy is broached. Examples of this include the beginning of Act I when Susanin dreams of "A Tsar! A lawful Tsar!" and when Susanin and his household fall to their knees in Act III upon hearing that Mikhail was elected Tsar and exclaim "Lord! Love our Tsar! Make him glorious!"³⁵ A reference to the theme also appears in Act III when Susanin answers the Poles' demand to be taken to the Tsar by singing:

²⁸ Ibid. 27.

²⁹ Ibid. 28.

³⁰ Ibid. 26.

³¹ Ibid. 27.

³² Ibid. 27.

³³ Ibid. 28.

³⁴ Ibid. 36.

³⁵ Ibid. 36.

Allegro risoluto

Slav' - sya, slav' - sya nash Rus - skiy Tsar'! Gos - po-dom
 dan - niy nam Tsar' Gu - su - dar'! Da bu - det bes - smer - ten tvoy
 Tsar - skiy rod! Da im bla - go - den - stvu - yet Rus - skiy na - rod!

Example 12: Hymn-March (*A Life for the Tsar*, Epilogue)

Our Tsar's home is a high and holy place,
 Surrounded with God's staunch strength!
 Beneath it is the power of all of Russia,
 And on the walls, dressed all in white,
 Winged angels stand guard!³⁶

The extent to which *A Life for the Tsar* pleased the Tsar is demonstrated by the fact that it became the mandatory season-opener for the Tsar-owned Russian Imperial Theaters.³⁷ The Tsar was so impressed with the premiere of the opera that he gave Glinka a 4000-ruble diamond and topaz ring.³⁸ The *Slav'sya* theme was to become virtually a second national anthem in Nikolayan and Alexandrine Russia.³⁹

The opera was extremely well received and the crowd cheered very enthusiastically for all but a few of the scenes. The Tsar's influence was so great that the audience remained entirely silent after the Polish scenes for fear that they would offend him by applauding his historic enemies.⁴⁰ The pressure on Glinka to produce something acceptable to the Tsar, and therefore something promoting Official Nationalism, must have been immense. Glinka's willingness to please the Tsar is demonstrated by the fact that he changed the name of the opera to *A Life for the Tsar* from its original title of *Ivan Susanin* after the Tsar attended one of the rehearsals and indicated his pleasure in the work and its dedication to him. The Tsar also approved of Glinka's pursuit of a distinctively Russian style of music. Upon giving Glinka the position of

³⁶ Ibid. 38.

³⁷ Ibid. 38.

³⁸ Mikhail Zetlin, *The Five: The Evolution of the Russian School of Music*, trans. George Panin (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1959) 33.

³⁹ Richard Taruskin, *Defining Russia Musically* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997) 36.

⁴⁰ Richard Anthony Leonard, *A History of Russian Music*, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1968) 44.

Kapellmeister of the Imperial Chapel, the Tsar told him “do not turn them into Italians!”⁴¹

Part of the reason for this opera’s success was that Glinka realized the true extent of Official Russian nationalism. When Verstovsky complained about the presence of stylistically religious elements in *A Life for the Tsar* (“You don’t go to the theater to pray to God”⁴²), he was missing the key point of how even religious overtones had become an important part of Official Nationalism. Even the lower number of folk or folk-like songs in this opera relative to works by composers such as Verstovsky could conceivably be partially accounted for by the notion that Glinka was more interested in nationalism as a glorification of the Tsar than nationalism as a movement linked to the people of Russia.

The Official Nationalism in this opera was so blatant that it was considered an embarrassment by the newly liberalized intelligentsia of the 1860’s. Even Vladimir Stasov, a disciple of Glinka’s, complained that:

No one has ever done a greater dishonour to our people than Glinka, who by means of his great music displayed as a Russian hero for all time that base groveler Susanin, with his canine loyalty, his henlike stupidity and his readiness to sacrifice his life for a little boy whom, it seems, he has never seen.⁴³

This opera was so successful at glorifying the dynastic power of the Tsars that the libretto had to be rewritten during the Soviet era and the opera restored to its original name of *Ivan Susanin*. The new text, written by Sergey Gorodetsky, replaced devotion to the Romanov dynasty with abstract commitment to national liberation. What is interesting here is that the Soviets chose to rewrite the libretto rather

than simply denouncing and banning the opera outright, as they did many other musical works whose glorification of the Tsars are not nearly as pronounced as in this opera. Part of this may be due to a reluctance to denounce Glinka outright because of his essential role in the development of Russian nationalist music, but arguably an even greater contributor to their decision was the sheer power of Glinka’s music as a tool of political propaganda.

Another directly political aspect of *A Life for the Tsar* is its vilification of Russia’s traditional enemies, the Poles. Glinka did this intentionally in his music and, if anything, this effect is amplified in the Soviet version of the libretto. Glinka stated in his memoirs that the root conception of the drama in *A Life for the Tsar* is the opposition of Russian music and Polish music. The Poles are represented by stereotypical genres such as the polonaise, mazurka and krakowiak, and they express themselves only collectively in impersonal choral declamation.⁴⁴ In contrast to this, the Russian-style music in the opera is often highly lyrical and personal. The interplay between Russian and Polish music is most evident in Act III when Russian duple and Polish triple rhythms are briefly superimposed (example 13) as the Poles seize Susanin and he cries out “God, save the Tsar!” This is an excellent example of how Glinka wrote music in ways that directly promoted Russian political nationalism.

Ruslan and Ludmila is almost universally regarded as being much less political than *A Life for the Tsar*. While this is likely true, one must be very careful not to simply dismiss *Ruslan and Ludmila* as a simple fairy tale devoid of political content. A close examination of the opera reveals a potential symbolism which points very convincingly to the theme of a strong and ultimately victorious Russia pitted against foreign competitors. The music of this opera is a good deal more sophisticated than the music of *A Life for the Tsar*,

⁴¹ Mikhail Zetlin, *The Five: The Evolution of the Russian School of Music*. trans. George Panin (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1959) 35.

⁴² Richard Taruskin, *Defining Russia Musically* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997) 42.

⁴³ *Ibid.* 38.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* 29.

Susanin
 Stra - kha ne stra - shus', smer - ti ne bo -

Poles
 yus' lya - gu za Tsar - ya za Rus'!

Ten.
 Pro - klya - t'iy u -

Bassi
 pry - mets u - bit' ye - go chto li? Ka - ka - ya nam pol' - za ot smer - ti ye -

Ten.
 Bo - zhe, spa - si Tsar - ya, T'iy u - mud -

Ten.
 go? Kog - da za ne - znan' - ye dru - gikh m'í ko - lo - li tak è - tot

ri me - nya, T'iy na - u - chi me - nya Bo - zhe, spa - si Tsar - ya.

po - dav - no do - sto - in to - go.

Example 13: Superimposed Russian and Polish Rhythms (*A Life for the Tsar*, Act III)

so it is certainly not unreasonable to suspect that the subject might be more sophisticated and subtle as well. Despite the haphazard way that the libretto was eventually written, Glinka had originally wanted to work on the opera with Pushkin himself, so he obviously had lofty literary goals for the project.

It can reasonably be argued that Ruslan is meant to represent Russia in this opera.

He is a strong and ultimately triumphant hero whose Aria is made up almost entirely of Russian melodies. Farlaf, as a weak and treacherous knight who sings his Rondo in exactly the style of Italian opera buffa, can be seen as a parody of the West. Ratmir, with his harem and Persian influenced Aria, represents the Middle East. The mysterious and exotic Chernomor, finally, can be seen as a symbol for the East.

Ruslan defeats Chernomor and brings him home to be assimilated as the court fool. This is consistent with Russia's practice at the time of incorporating the elite of conquered countries into itself. This interpretation becomes particularly convincing when it is considered that the Caucasus was conquered in just this manner during Glinka's lifetime. Ruslan, and therefore Russia, is triumphant over not only his rival suitors, but over Chernomor as well.

It can perhaps be argued that Glinka has moved beyond Official Nationalism in this opera to a more generalized nationalism that glorifies Russians and Russia in general rather than the Tsar specifically. Just as his music had evolved from his first opera to become more creative and original, perhaps his nationalism broadened as well. Of course, it makes perfect sense that Glinka would have couched this generalized nationalism in symbolism in order to avoid offending the Tsar or his censors.

It is well known that *A Life for the Tsar* was very well received in Russia and that *Ruslan and Ludmila* was initially a failure. Of course, with the perspective offered by time, *Ruslan and Ludmila* is now generally acknowledged as a significantly superior work. This is in large part because *A Life for the Tsar* was a much more conservative work, both musically and politically, and was thus more palatable to the essentially conservative aristocratic elite that patronized the opera houses. *Ruslan and Ludmila* had departed too far musically from its Western origins to be acceptable to the same audience that had loved *A Life for the Tsar* and its firm roots in the Italian operatic tradition. The blatant Official Nationalism of *A Life for the Tsar* also made it very attractive to courtiers who were all too happy to jump at any chance to show their loyalty to their Tsar.

In actual fact, *Ruslan and Ludmila* was significantly more successful in its first season than many people realize. Although there is no doubt that its first few nights

were a dismal failure, V. F. Odoyevsky argues that these first showings were attended primarily by aristocrats accustomed to less adventurous music and looking only for light entertainment. Odoyevsky claims that the opera was in truth successful after these first few nights, when the audience was attended by a wider range of people⁴⁵ who were more prepared to accept the originally Russian nature of the opera and less inclined to be disappointed by the lack of any sycophantic glorification of the Tsar. This is supported by the fact that *Ruslan and Ludmila* was performed on thirty-eight nights during the season of 1842/1843 alone,⁴⁶ which is hardly a poor showing.

In any case, there is no doubt that Glinka's operas were eventually accepted as masterpieces by the Russian nation. They served as the primary inspiration for not only the Group of Five, but a whole generation and beyond of Russian composers. The scope of the nationalism in Glinka's music was very broad indeed, ranging from the purely musical realm to direct political propaganda. He blatantly glorified the Tsar by promoting Official Nationalism in *A Life for the Tsar* and he promoted a generalized Russian nationalism through symbolism in *Ruslan and Ludmila*. He incorporated Russian folk music and derivatives of folk music into his operas and experimented with new ideas such as the modified recitative and the use of the whole tone scale as a leitmotiv to represent the supernatural. Glinka's most important contribution to the Russian nationalist cause, however, was his originality and ability as a composer, which allowed him and those Russian composers who succeeded him to write music that was seen not only as great Russian music by Russians but simply as great music by the entire Western world.

⁴⁵ A. Rosanov, *Glinka: His Life and Times*. (Neptune City, NJ: Paganiniana Publications Inc., 1988) 45.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* 45.

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