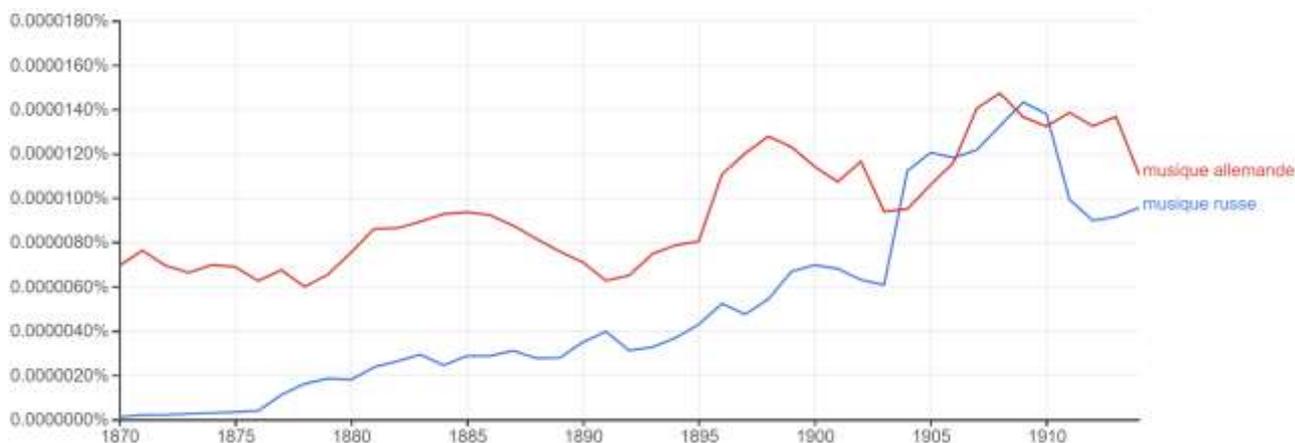


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ON RUSSIAN MUSIC'S RECEPTION IN FRANCE

Russian music seemed to be, to a certain extent, a *terra incognita* in France until the 1870's. Nonetheless, Russian music's reception in France became, in the late 19th century, a response to several issues. All at once seen as the cultural counterpart of the Franco-Russian alliance and as a way out of the wagnerism quarrel, it gathers both nationalist and artistic interests for French people. Indeed, a linguistical analysis made with *Ngram viewer*, which compares occurrences in a large corpus of French books printed between 1870 and 1914, reveals the slow but steady growth of a French interest in Russian music (*musique russe*) compared to German music (*musique allemande*). Aroused by enthusiastic discourses, the peak of this increasing curiosity takes place at the very beginning of the 20th century, around Djagilev's first venture in Paris (1907).

Figure 1. Linguistic comparison of musique russe and musique allemande from 1870 to 1914



Djagilev's *Ballets russes* are by far the most discussed theme concerning Russian music's reception in France [5], however, the 'Djagilev craze' should not conceal the slow progression of an interest in Russian music which took off after 1870. In other words, Djagilev's success is nothing more than the culmination of a movement preceding it. Thus, let us briefly summarize what studies have contributed to a better understanding of Russian music's reception in France before the well-known *Ballets russes*. Relationships and musical transfers between Russian and French musicians have been until recently extensively studied and have made it possible, on the one hand, to highlight some turning points in the Franco-Russian musical history and, on the other hand, to reveal some common aspects and reciprocal inspirations in the musical language of both Russian and French composers [2-10-11]. Furthermore, the role played by the Franco-Russian alliance and the nationalist issues related to music, as well as the significance of the *Expositions universelles* in the discovery of the Russian symphonic repertoire in France, have also been the subject of many analyses [8-9-12]. These major contributions have all more or less dealt with the issue of reception without really confronting it.

However, what should we understand by 'reception' ? In historical studies, it seems to mainly overlay two meanings : a first one, derived from the aesthetic concept, focuses on the history of ideas. Also called critical reception (*Rezeptionsgeschichte*), it defines the public appreciation of a work of art, or, in our case, of a national school. Although particularly striking for our subject, we engaged ourselves in another meaning of reception, way less commented. Indeed, few scholars really deepened what may be termed material reception, that would merely consist in the study of all the tangible phenomena that helped the reception to be realized. These phenomena, which constitute the background of a history of ideas, would nevertheless deserve special attention : beyond genuinely explaining the *why* and *how* of Russian music's outreach in France, it puts back the human

interactions and material exchanges that are the fundamental data of history, at the heart of the investigation.

In a recent and relevant work on Russian music's reception in Paris, Inga Mai Groote followed this path [6]. With great detail, she brought together the myriad of events that helped to make Russian music known to a large audience. We wished to pursue with even more meticulousness this investigation. Over the course of our research, whether they relate to Russian music in salons, symphonic concerts, theatres or official ceremonies, we systematically observed the presence of the same group of people. Indeed, whether they are part of the audience or on stage, whether they organize or subsidize these events, those who are part of what is termed by French commentators as the Russian colony (*colonie russe*) are always, somehow or other, involved in them.

The ubiquity of the so-called Russian colony in the process of reception invited us to think that beyond a favourable circumstance, the Russian colony was the condition of possibility itself of the reception. In other words, without the presence of this Russian colony in France, the reception of Russian music would have been quite different, but especially considerably delayed. To our knowledge, this hypothesis has not yet been explored. We therefore wish in this paper to expose some thoughts on Russian music's reception in France, not through French statements, but through those who have been at the initiative of this process. Thus, we will try to summarize what were their interactions with other communities and what was their role in the process of Russian music's reception. Rather than an exhaustive review of our research, which is still ongoing, it is more a new perspective on Russian music's reception in France that we humbly wish to outline here.

In the second half of the 19th century, a Russian tourist class, essentially aristocratic and bourgeois, spread out in France. This population of winterers, so named because they roughly stay in France from November to April, is divided

into three main areas : Paris, the Riviera (Nice, Monte-Carlo and Cannes) and to a lesser extent, the Basque coast (Biarritz). Favoured by the construction of many hotels and other entertainment establishments as well as the foundation of Orthodox churches in three areas we mentioned, the presence of a Russian colony often takes place in a cosmopolitan context. Although we estimate that several thousand winterers come to France each year at the turn of the 20th century, what French journalists call Russian colony refers to an elitist little society, which are only the visible part of a broader group. The life of this foreign colony is regularly commented in the press, which was the main source of our investigation. The newspapers thus allowed us to establish a kind of prosopography of the Russian colony and to observe its habits, especially when they involve music.

The main medium on which the interactions of the Russian colony with the French people are based is the salon. Paris, like Nice, have their own Russian salons¹, most often run by Russian ladies², who welcome both their compatriots as well as French guests or even other foreign communities, especially in Nice or Monte-Carlo, which are marked by a prominent cosmopolitanism. Some of these salons who regularly offer concerts of Russian music, whose programme consists most often in Čajkovskij, N. Rubinstein and Glinka's romances³, are places that allow on the one hand to introduce a part of the Russian repertoire to the French people who attended these worldly reunions, making Russian winterers what we could call 'cultural emissaries', and on the other hand to weave relationships with French artistic or political notabilities. While it is very common for Russian ladies to solicit local musicians, often from symphonic societies or from casino

1 A Parisian directory indicates at least 36 Russian salons in 1896 (See Chas JARRET-KNOTT, *Paris artistic, indicateur des salons russes, anglais et américains en France*, 1896). We count them, based on surveys made in the worldly press, around 30 in Nice, the same year (See *La Vie Mondaine*, Nice).

2 The ladies who hold these salons are most often from the great aristocratic families of the Russian Empire (Trubeckoj, Golicyn, Orlov, Jurievskij, Rimskij-Korsakov).

3 These three composers are the most mentioned in the forty programmes that we gathered in the press (*Le Figaro*, Paris, *La Vie mondaine*, Nice), from 1875 to 1895.

orchestras, to entertain their guests, some salons have been able to receive several times some distinguished musicians. Debussy and Ravel's relations with Russian personalities, notably Maria Olenina d'Alheim, are well known, but other avenues remain unexplored, such as that of Alkan, whose prince N. A. Orlov was the patron [3], or of Massenet, who was particularly close to the Benois family⁴.

Another fundamental medium in the socialization of the Russian colony with the French and other foreign communities present in France is the club tradition, that might be seen as an extension to the salons. In Paris, as in Nice and Biarritz, Russian winterers were part of these clubs and had the opportunity to influence their musical activities. Thus, from the mere recital in a private setting, where Russian artists, whether winterers or not, could perform Russian music, to lavish parties, where the success of 'Russian' dances (*à la russe*) is mentioned, the clubs are favourable places for Franco-Russian exchanges and familiarisation with the Russian repertoire. Although reserved for selected members, it happens that these clubs open to a wider audience : the case of the Mediterranean club is in this regard relevant. Mostly frequented by wealthy foreigners, who spend the winter in Nice, this club organized, under the impulse of one of its members, Pavel von Derwies, a series of prestigious concerts in von Derwies's castle, from 1870 to 1881. In the will of von Derwies, who owned his own orchestra, made up of local musicians, will be given for the first time in France, Glinka's « A Life for the tsar », in a semi-private setting, since the baron invites to this premiere more than two hundred winterers, mainly Russian and French. This exceptional and often discussed episode [4] remains, however marginal. Much more common are the modest *rendez-vous* given by Russian-founded clubs, and especially the charity clubs. Indeed, with their own clubs, the Russian colony frequently rented halls to organize concerts or charity galas where was given Russian music. In Nice, the Rumpelmayer Hall regularly hosts the festivities of the Russian colony. In addition

4 Massenet's relative Alfred was married to Maria Kuznecova-Benois.

to the ordinary musical programme of these meetings – composed of romances sung by Russian ladies, and piano or violin pieces, mostly played by winterers – we can observe the punctual presence of eminent musical personalities, such as Anton Rubinstein, who gave there a series of concert in March 1884⁵.

In Paris, the halls frequented by the Russian colony are numerous, however, some stand out : the Continental Hotel's salons, a few steps from the Palais Garnier, are often rented by the colony, which regularly organizes receptions, galas, or concerts there⁶. The case of the Bodinière Hall in Paris is even more emblematic : in 1896, after hosting a series of concerts-conferences by Maria Olenina d'Alheim and her husband, devoted to Musorgskij, the hall became a place very frequented by the Russian colony, but also by Debussy and Ravel. A few months later, another Russian lady, the Countess of Pethion, organized the Parisian premiere of « Eugene Onegin » (June 12th, 1896) in that same hall, in a reduced version.

Churches and their musical staff have also been a central theme of our research. Epicentres of the Russian community, they regularly gather its members for major celebrations. The music given in these churches (Paris, Nice and Biarritz's churches are the most active), does not present anything particularly relevant. Nevertheless, we could observe that outside the church itself, its musical staff could be an important medium of socialization. The choirs of these churches were thus often solicited by the Russian colony, or even by French, for worldly events or for celebrations with diplomatic connotations : so the choir of the church of Nice often performs at Russian parties⁷, so the church of the rue Daru in Paris

5 Again, Čajkovskij, N. Rubinstein and Glinka, are the most given composers in Rumpelmayer's recitals, according to the reports of *La Vie mondaine* (Nice), from 1884 to 1892.

6 Let us quote for instance, a lavish party with hundreds of Russian and French guests, for which a picturesque Russian village was reconstructed in the courtyard of the hotel ; the Orchestre Colonne, one of the most famous in Paris, entertained this party with a Franco-Russian programme. See *Le XIX^e siècle* (Paris) December 20th 1888.

7 See for instance *La Vie mondaine* (Nice), November 11th, 1875, February 4th, 1886.

performs excerpts of Moussorgskij's works in the salons of the famous newspaper *Le Figaro* to celebrate the coronation of Tsar Nikolaj II⁸. Even more interesting, we could observe that the Russian colony often solicited French singers to strengthen their choirs. This is particularly the case at the rue Daru's church in Paris, or at the church of Biarritz, where the choir was supported by Basque singers⁹.

A significant part of our research has been devoted to the casinos. Places of leisure and sociability, casinos are also important artistic centres : those of the Riviera especially offer a rich musical season. The frequent attendance of these establishments by the Russian colony has visible consequences in their organization and their musical programme. Not only, as is the case in Nice and Monte-Carlo, spaces are especially dedicated to the Russian colony within the casinos, but it also happens that casinos acquire small ensembles of Russian-gypsy musicians. These ensembles of popular music – which could just as easily be asked to play the Russian and French anthems in official contexts – performed several times a week in the various casinos of the Riviera, gathering the enthusiasm of both Russians and French winterers. More occasionally, we could observe Russian musicians or dancers in these casinos. Nonetheless, the main artistic activity of these establishments remains the orchestras, of which they are almost all endowed. The orchestra of the Monte-Carlo Casino particularly caught our attention.

Indeed, Monte-Carlo's cosmopolitanism inspired a specific kind of concert : the so-called *international concerts* (1889-1901). Each of these was dedicated to a national school, representing on the one hand the plurality of the winterers's nationalities, on the other hand, depicting, in the manner of an exhibition, the

8 See *Le Figaro*, May 14th 1896.

9 This regular contact between Russian and Basque singers seems to have favoured a musical transfer : indeed, we note that the *Legend of the twelve robbers*, the famous Russian song, was

national schools in competition. Russia is the second musical nation represented, in quantity of concerts after France¹⁰ : this prevalence of the Russian repertoire, which is certainly due to the presence of the Russian colony in Monte-Carlo, does not seem to have an equivalent in France on the same period. These concerts, which allow the French audience to get acquainted, in addition to the works of Glinka, Rubinstein and Čajkovskij and of the Balakirev's circle, to which they testify a special admiration (especially for « In the Steppes of Central Asia » and « Antar »), are also an opportunity to hear works composed by the winterers themselves, seen as ambassadors of the Russian culture in the cosmopolitan French Riviera's society : thus, for example, works composed by Princess E. V. Kočubej or the Grand-Duke Mihail Mihajlovič, who are among the prominent members of the Russian colony, are given at the international concerts. Let us add that we have gathered several clues indicating that N. V. Ščerbačov, a composer close to the Balakirev circle whose works are given at the international concerts, was present in Monte-Carlo in the last decade of the 19th century.

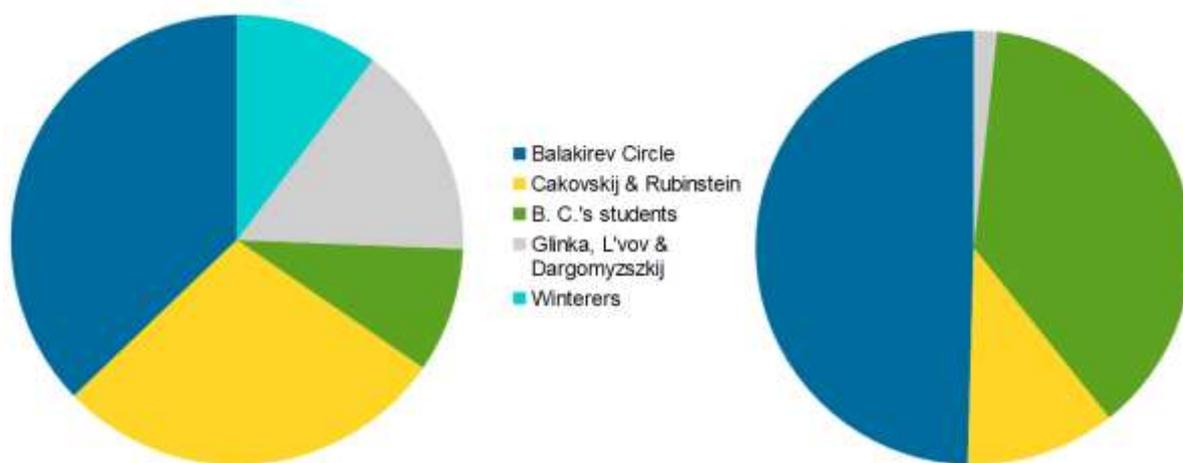
We pieced together the programmes of international concerts and regular concerts given at the Monte-Carlo Casino, within the limits of the available sources, in order to get a glimpse of the evolution of the public's taste for Russian music. Our analysis is based on a stylistic division into five categories of composers (B.C.'s students goes for Balakirev's Circle students), listed in the legend below. We therefore observed, over two distinct periods, the distribution of these categories in the general programming of the concerts (see Figure 2). The first diagram on the left, which covers the period 1889-1901, presents a relative homogeneity of the five categories, with certainly a strong representation of the Balakirev's Circle. In the second diagram on the right, which covers the period

taken up at the beginning of the 20th century by Basque choirs under the title of *Geroa*, with new lyrics in Basque language.

10 There are indeed 26 concerts announced in the *Journal de Monaco*, representing 22% of the all the international concerts. 27 concerts are dedicated to France and 19 to Germany.

1920-1923, Glinka, L'vov and Dargomyžskij almost disappeared, as well as the winterers, under the overwhelming majority of the Balakirev's circle and their students.

Figure 2. Comparison of the programmes given at the Monte-Carlo Casino between 1889-1901 (left) and 1920-1923 (right)



Last but not least, the presence of the Russian colony around Paris, Nice and Monte-Carlo's opera theatres also turned out full of consequences. Indeed, the rare Russian works given in French theatres seem to have been given thanks to members of the Russian colony. The first Parisian performance of « A Life for the Tsar » at the Nouveau-Théâtre was thus organized in October 1896 by the Countess of Pethion, the one who gave the first Parisian performance of « Eugene Onegin » a few months before. Yet Nice beat Paris for these first performances : in 1890, the Nice Opera gave « A Life for the Tsar » and in 1895, « Eugene Onegin ». Glinka's first publicly performed opera in France (though von Derwies's performance was private), which was the subject of a recent comment [1], was motivated by a character that deserves special attention : Raoul Gunsbourg. Born in Romania, he joined the Russian army against the Turks in 1878 and learned

Russian language and music there. After a brief sojourn in Paris, he went to Moscow, where he would have found a French theatre, which would have attracted the Tsar Aleksandr III's attention. Claiming in his memoirs [7] – which are partly a collection of inventions – that he subsequently held important positions as artistic director of the French theatre of Tsarskoye Selo, he returned to France in 1889 where he took the head of the Nice Opera. There, he organized the first public performance of « A Life for the Tsar », inviting the most eminent members of the Russian colony settled on the Riviera and many journalists to cover this musical and political event (indeed, the evening is marked by lively speeches celebrating the Franco-Russian alliance, which is about to be realized). In 1892, with the purported support of the Tsar, as Gunsbourg claims it in its memoirs, he became the director of the Monte-Carlo Opera. His mandate will be marked by important Russian opera performances, with the help of famous singers and dancers of which he is often a close friend : Rubinstein's « Demon » (1906, French premiere), with F. Šalâpin, Dargomyžskij's « Rusalka » (1909, French premiere), sung in Russian, with Šalâpin again and F. Litvin, in 1916, Gunsbourg organized a Russian opera festival in support of the Russian military, during which he gave « A Life for the Tsar » and « Eugene Onegin ». In 1921, he organized two French premieres, sung in Russian : « Sadko » and « The Fair at Sorochyntsi », both of which were co-organized by some ladies of the Russian colony for charitable purposes.

The Bolshevik Revolution provoked the slow dissolution of the Russian colony: on its bases the Russian diaspora, composed of thousands of emigrants, was founded. Indeed, the massive arrival of Russian emigrants in France considerably revitalizes the interest in Russian music for the French people, however, this theme would need to be treated separately. Let us just underlay that many emigrated artists partly borrowed the mediums that had been set up by the winterers, as the clubs, the casinos and even the opera theatres.

The few events that we have recounted in this paper should only be taken as examples : it was important for us to classify them in a typology. We wanted to show through it the omnipresence of the Russian colony in all kind of events that contributed to the reception of the Russian repertoire in France. Thus, we can affirm, in view of this ubiquity, that the Russian colony is, somehow, the *sine qua non* of the reception. It would be necessary, with great thoroughness, to gather dozens of them, as in a mosaic, to grasp the historical thickness of the perspective we proposed. Although the impact of a reception cannot be measured entirely from a quantitative point of view, it is nevertheless remarkable that its most democratic vectors remain the least studied : this is particularly the case of casinos or cabarets. This historiographical imbalance calls for reversal.

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