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University of Northern Colorado

Greeley, Colorado

FIN DE SIÈCLE RUSSIAN *TOPOS* AND RIMSKY-KORSAKOV'S *THE GOLDEN COCKEREL*

A Thesis Submitted in Partial

Fulfillment for Graduation with

Honors Distinction and the Degree of Bachelor of Arts

Jaidan Ursich

University of Northern Colorado

May 2024

FIN DE SIÈCLE RUSSIAN *TOPOS* AND RIMSKY-KORSAKOV'S *THE GOLDEN COCKEREL*

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Abstract

Russian composers, including Glinka and The Mighty Five, helped establish a *fin de siècle* Russian nationalistic style in art music through the implementation of idiomatic folk music gestures and other commonly employed musical elements. Scholars, including Richard Taruskin, Barry Bilderback, and Pieter Van Den Toorn, have identified many of these elements, however, they have not provided clear codification of a Russian topic. Likewise, the music of Nikolay Rimsky-Korsakov has been largely ignored when compared to that of his contemporaries, though most research indicates he was heralded as a nationalistic composer.

The purpose of this research was to create an initial working lexicon of the Russian style through a synthesis of the musical elements identified in the extant scholarship with those derived from an analysis of Rimsky-Korsakov's *The Golden Cockerel*. Among the most important of these lexiconic elements are pentatonic and octatonic scales (particularly when connected to a rotation of thirds), the Russian submediant, interpretations or mutations of folk music, and orientalism. While these gestures on their own are not specifically Russian, when used in conjunction with each other, they generate a strongly nationalistic *topos*.

The Golden Cockerel, a musical and theatrical satire of Alexander Pushkin's 1834 fairytale, is particularly suited to an exploration of this *topos*. Its use of folkloric theme mutations and allusions to traditional rhythmic patterns, orientalism, the Russian sub-mediant, and pentatonic and octatonic-flavored melodies demonstrates Rimsky-Korsakov's adherence to this nationalist style. Analysis of the work also reveals its colorful intersections between fantasy and the human world to be an ironic social commentary.

Most importantly, this initial lexicon, provides a tool for future scholarship that will refine the definition of the topic through comparisons of other works by Rimsky Korsakov and

his contemporaries and potentially provide insights into Stravinsky's unique brand of nationalism.

Acknowledgements

I am extremely grateful to my family for their support in my musical pursuits, research and beyond, and for their encouragement to try new things. I thank the University of Northern Colorado for their Honor's program and all the staff and faculty that keep it running for their dedication in guiding and supporting students in their research. Above all, I am most indebted to Dr. Janice Dickensheets who, through kindness, understanding, and no small amount of extra time spent helping problem solve, has supported me and my research through all the highs and lows that follow projects such as this. What an inspiration she, and all of the people who have guided me through this research, have been.

Table of Contents

List of Figures and Examples

Introduction

Russian Nationalism evolved in the nineteenth century when composers such as Mikhail Glinka sought to distinguish Russian art music from that of western Europe through the incorporation of traditional Russian musical idioms. Throughout that century and into the next, it developed into a distinctly Russian musical style, separate from its powerful western influences. A group of Russian composers later titled The Mighty Five, including Nikolay Rimsky-Korsakov, Mily Balakirev, César Cui, Modest Mussorgsky, and Alexander Borodin, built upon Glinka's Russian style creating an important compositional tradition featuring a musical nationalism that blended western European orchestral, operatic, and ballet traditions with Russian folk idioms.[1] In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Nikolay Rimsky-Korsakov incorporated combinations of musical elements including folk music gestures, octatonic and pentatonic scales, and orientalism into his compositions thereby largely contributing to the establishment of this nationalistic style. *The Golden Cockerel* is an excellent example of the use of this musical style, particularly since Rimsky-Korsakov accentuates it by applying a satirical lens.

Existing sources on Russian music practices during the turn of the century do not provide a clear codification of all the important musical elements that make up this Russian nationalistic style. Reputable authors most often expound in great detail upon some of the common elements and, perhaps, briefly mention other characteristics. However, a general codification of the style is not apparent in the existing scholarly literature. In addition, when compared to some of his

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[1] Richard Taruskin, *Musorgsky* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 42.

contemporaries, fewer sources are devoted to an exploration of Rimsky Korsakov's contributions though he was, by most accounts, celebrated in his time as a well-established nationalistic composer. *The Golden Cockerel,* likewise, is rarely even mentioned in scholarly sources and to date no existing source has been found that provides a detailed analysis of its use of the Russian style.

The purpose of this research is to create an initial codification of the Russian nationalistic style by combining musical gestures gleaned from the extant source material with those identified through analysis of *The Golden Cockerel*. Though multiple Russian composers were involved in the development of a nationalistic style in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, this research seeks to apply this initial codification of the Russian style specifically within the context of the opera itself.

Russian Style Literature Review

Barry Bilderback is one of the few scholars who focuses primarily on Rimsky-Korsakov and his use of folk tunes as a tool for creating a nationalistic sound in his dissertation *Nationalism in Rimskii-Korsakov's Instrumental Music: An Analysis of Three Symphonic Works Based on Russian Themes*. The three compositions he analyzes include the *Overture Based on Russian Themes*, the *Sinfonietta Based on Russian Themes*, and the *Concert Fantasia Based on Russian Themes for Violin with Orchestra*. All three compositions reveal Rimsky-Korsakov's contribution to Russian nationalism and the methods he used for the preservation of Russian folk songs.[2] Though this representation of nationalism may just be specific to Rimsky-Korsakov's

[2] Barry T. Bilderback, *Nationalism in Rimskii-Korsakov's Instrumental Music: An Analysis of Three Symphonic Works Based on Russian Themes* (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Oregon, 2001).

compositional techniques, other sources (such as Taruskin) also speak of a Russian style that is demonstrated in similar ways by contemporary Russian composers.

Richard Taruskin introduces material that contradicts the esteem of Rimsky-Korsakov as a nationalistic composer, however, and by none other than his own student, Stravinsky (though Taruskin clarifies his own positive view on Rimsky-Korsakov early on). Taruskin's article, "Catching Up with Rimsky-Korsakov," goes into detail about the certain musical notations and techniques in Stravinsky's compositions that originated with his teacher, Rimsky-Korsakov, but also explores more deeply Stravinsky's perspective of his teacher and the ways it changed after his death. Along with a surge of Russian nationalistic music focusing on the more archaic traditions, there was a counter movement in the musical realm with ideas of progressivism. Rimsky-Korsakov followed the traditional "academic" path, but Stravinsky was associated with progressive composers, continuously looking back on his teacher's conservatism with more negativity.[3]

The book *Rimsky-Korsakov and His World*, edited by Marina Frolova-Walker, provides significant historical context on Rimsky-Korsakov, especially regarding his role in the development of Russian nationalistic music. The chapters range from descriptions of his personal life outside of music to the intricacies of some of his more popular operas. The chapter titled "St. Petersburg Conservatory and the Beginnings of Russian Musicology," by Olga Panteleeva, provides contextual background to Rimsky-Korsakov's compositional and musical lifestyle choices during his mature professional career.[4] The following chapter by Yaroslav Timofeev, "How Stravinsky Stopped Being a Rimsky-Korsakov Pupil," provides personal details about the

[3] Richard Taruskin, "Catching Up with Rimsky-Korsakov," *Music Theory Spectrum* 33 (2011), 169-184.
[4] Olga Panteleeva, "St. Petersburg Conservatory and the Beginnings of Russian Musicology," in *Rimsky-Korsakov and His World*, ed. Marina Frolova-Walker (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018), 223-248.

teacher-student relationship between Rimsky-Korsakov and Stravinsky, and the ways it changed after Rimsky-Korsakov's death, as Stravinsky completely branched off to establish his own style.[5]

Other sources explored later in this research include Richard Taruskin's article ""Entoiling the Falconet:" Russian Musical Orientalism in Context," which focuses on orientalism, and his book titled *Stravinsky and The Russian Traditions – A Biography of The Works Through Mavra,* which explores the use of the octatonic scale, as does Peter Van Den Toorn's *Colloquy: Stravinsky and The Octatonic—The Sounds of Stravinsky.*

Historical Context: Rimsky-Korsakov and *The Golden Cockerel*

Nikolay Andreyevich Rimsky-Korsakov was born in northwestern Russia in a small town called Tikhvin—a place of few instruments (and even fewer instrumentalists) besides the piano and domestic or church singing. For this reason, Rimsky-Korsakov received his musical exposure not from town social occasions, but from the melodies he heard from a young age played by his parents on an old piano in their home.[6] His mother apparently had a good ear for music, playing melodies she could remember hearing, though she often sang too slowly—a tendency that Nikolay believes was passed onto him.[7] Though they never met, he also had an uncle who expressed a fair amount of musical talent. Rimsky-Korsakov's notable memory and general musical talent led him to study under various piano teachers in his town beginning at an early age, though he discovered a true appreciation of music much later in his life.[8]

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[5] Yaroslav Timofeev, "How Stravinsky Stopped Being a Rimsky-Korsakov Pupil," in *Rimsky-Korsakov and His World,* ed. Marina Frolova-Walker (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018), 249-276.
[6] Nikolay Andreyevich Rimsky-Korsakoff, *My Musical Life*, ed. Carl Van Vechten, trans. Judah A. Joffe (New York: Tudor Publishing Co., 1923), 3.
[7] Rimsky-Korsakoff, 4.
[8] Rimsky-Korsakoff, 6.

In 1856, Rimsky-Korsakov fulfilled a youthful dream and joined the military (the Navy) as many members of his family had done before.[9] Musical composition was not a significant part of his life at this time, but after he discovered larger musical works in local opera venues, he resumed piano lessons with a new instructor, Russian composer Mily Balakirev. Rimsky-Korsakov was eventually guided away from piano, due to his lack of talent on the instrument, and encouraged to focus more on composition, especially symphonic composition—genres in which he would later become especially adept.[10] His time studying with Balakirev, however, was not without its challenges.

> Balakireff, who had never had any systematic course in harmony and counterpoint, and had not even superficially applied himself to it, evidently thought such studies quite unnecessary. Thanks to his original talent and pianistic gifts, thanks also to the musical environment which he had found...he somehow became at a bound a genuine, practical musician.[11]

Rimsky-Korsakov learned to compose symphonies and other large orchestral works by copying the music of others with no real knowledge of the fundamentals essential to composition. However, despite his questionable teaching style, Balakirev shared with him a passion for folk music and the resulting transcriptions and harmonization would later be turned into large orchestral works. Rimsky-Korsakov was first introduced to folk songs such as "A my proso syeyali" and "Se zhenikh gryadyet" in his studies of folk music, and these became some of the first pieces he harmonized and placed into compositions.[12] He continued this practice, using the Russian folk tunes "Slava, Oo vorot vorot" and "Na Ivanushkye chapan" for his original overture on Russian themes.[13] As he gained an understanding of compositional techniques over

[9] Rimsky-Korsakoff, 8.
[10] Rimsky-Korsakoff, 61.
[11] Rimsky-Korsakoff, 25.
[12] Rimsky-Korsakoff, 58.
[13] Rimsky-Korsakoff, 60.

time, Nikolay entered the life of a full-time professional composer, supported by various jobs in conservatories.

The Golden Cockerel, Rimsky's last opera (1907), is based on Alexander Pushkin's fairytale poem of the same name. Set in three acts with a brief prologue and epilogue, it presents a satirical look at Russian aristocracy and nationalism. It evolved during a time of political unrest in Russia, with which Rimsky himself became involved by supporting student protests, an act that led to his temporary release from professorship at St. Petersburg Conservatory.[14]

The story follows the tale of a foolish Tsar named Dodon who receives the gift of a golden cockerel from an astrologer. This cockerel is intended to sound an alarm (a heraldic leitmotif) if an invasion were to occur, but its false alarms and misguidance lead Dodon's sons into a battle with the neighboring region, resulting in their deaths. Tsar Dodon then goes to the front lines himself where he meets the highly exoticized Oriental Queen of Shemakha who promptly seduces him. During their marriage ceremony, the astrologer returns and asks the Tsar to return his favor by giving him the queen. Dodon refuses and lashes out in rage, killing the astrologer. The golden cockerel, loyal to the astrologer, kills Dodon, and the opera concludes in the same manner as Pushkin's fairytale with the astrologer proclaiming that everything just portrayed on stage was fictitious, with the exception of himself and the queen: the human world was an illusion, the fantastical real.

> The story's false; but in it lies
> Some truth, seen but by inward eyes.[15]

[14] Simon Morrison, "The Golden Cockerel: Censored and Uncensored," in *Rimsky-Korsakov and His World*, ed. Marina Frolova-Walker (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018), 179.
[15] Alexander Pushkin, *The Tale of The Golden Cockerel* (1835), "Alexander Pushkin," https://alexander-pushkin.com/books/the-tale-of-the-golden-cockerel/ (2022-23), accessed 17 April 2024.

Simon Morrison explains the evolution of *The Golden Cockerel* in the following excerpt from his article "The Golden Cockerel: Censored and Uncensored:"

> The journey of Rimsky-Korsakov's The Golden Cockerel (Zolotoy petushok or Le coq d'or) from premiere to the present can be summarized in a single convoluted sentence: An 1832 short story by American author Washington Irving became an 1834 fairy tale in verse by Alexander Pushkin, which in turn became a three-act opera by Rimsky-Korsakov composed in 1907 (with a libretto by Vladimir Belsky) that premiered in 1909 before becoming first a three-act opera-ballet in 1914 (choreographed by Michel Fokine, though Rimsky-Korsakov's widow mobilized to have it prohibited owing to cuts to the music), then a three-act opera-ballet in 1918, then a one-act ballet in 1937, and finally a two-act ballet in 2012. Even Rimsky-Korsakov's original was subject to extensive revision. The two years between the creation of the opera and its premiere entailed a process of review and adjustment—or rather, of censorship—by government officials attuned to the political implications of the work. Indeed, in any guise and every era, The Golden Cockerel has been interpreted as explicitly political…[16]

The Golden Cockerel faced heavy censorship due to its inclusion of touchy political topics and allusions to problems facing Russia in the early twentieth century. Though the characters don't entirely represent actual figures, there is enough satire and more than a few hints that the opera lies beyond the realm of fiction.[17] The characters, their interactions with each other, and portions of the overall plot of the opera hint at court drama by the ruling class of Russia as well as recent political failures, both of which caused conflict and unrest in Russian society.[18] Given this, it is not surprising that the opera faced heavy censorship by officials before its premiere.

According to Morrison, Rimsky-Korsakov chose to compose *The Golden Cockerel* in response to some of the political turmoil in Russian, and that his inspiration came from an image posted by a satirical magazine—a magazine that only produced three issues before a forced shut down that sent the artist briefly to prison. The image was titled "Tsar Pea" and depicted an unflattering caricature of a Tsar that supposedly shared a likeness with Nicholas II.[19] The artist of

[16] Morrison, 177.
[17] Morrison, 178.
[18] Morrison, 178.
[19] Morrison, 179.

this image (see figure 1), Ivan Bilibin, went on to oversee the visuals, such as costume designs and decorations, for the 1909 production premiere of *The Golden Cockerel*. Rimsky-Korsakov's inspiration from this image in conjunction with his shaping of Puskin's fairy tale portray the satire and humor of this opera in a masterful combination of ingenuity and musicianship.

Figure 1: Ivan Bilibin, "Tsar Pea," Cover of Magazine *Zhupel*, 1906.[20]

The Style Codification Problem

Existing scholarship identifies common Russian musical characteristics used by Rimsky-Korsakov and his contemporaries, but none provide a concise codification of a universal musical style connected to Russian nationalism during the late nineteenth-century and *fin de siècle*.

[20] Image from Morrison, 181.

Richard Taruskin's article ""Entoiling the Falconet:" Russian Musical Orientalism in Context" explores orientalism, or the "Eastern Theme," and its purpose in Russian art music and opera.[21] He explains the ways orientalism was commonly used within the "New Russian School" to reference nationalism, while acknowledging that it is not uniquely Russian as it was a commonly-used form of musical exoticism throughout western art music of the period. Simon Morrison's chapter from *Rimsky Korsakov and His World*, "The Golden Cockerel, Censored and Uncensored," explores the ways in which orientalism appears in *The Golden Cockerel* and recounts the censorship Rimsky faced due to his inclusion of politics and political commentary within the opera.[22]

Regarding octatonicism (explored in more depth later), there is considerable debate about its prevalence and importance in Russian nationalistic music. The article "Rethinking Octatonicism: Views from Stravinsky's Homeland," by Philip A Ewell, explains the ways in which octatonicism should be viewed through a Russian musical perspective rather than through a westernized "American perception" of theory, which he claims other scholars (including Taruskin and Van Den Toorn) do.[23] Ewell explains the "Russian perspective" of the octatonic scale is more complex than the western, involving more theoretical concepts and ideas than scholars are willing to acknowledge.[24] The article "Stravinsky and the Octatonic: A Reconsideration," by Dmitri Tymoczko, similarly questions the validity of Taruskin and Van Toorn's westernized 'Russian octatonic' perspective.[25] The article by Peter Van Den Toorn,

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[21] Richard Taruskin, ""Entoiling the Falconet": Russian Musical Orientalism in Context," in *The Exotic in Western Music,* ed. Jonathan Bellman (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1998), 194-195.
[22] Simon Morrison, 177-196.
[23] Philip A. Ewell, "Rethinking Octatonicism: Views from Stravinsky's Homeland," *Society for Music Theory* 18, no. 4 (December 2012): 1-22.
[24] Ewell, 2.
[25] Dmitri Tymoczko, "Stravinsky and the Octatonic: A Reconsideration," *Music Theory Spectrum* 24, no. 1 (April 2002): 68-102.

"Colloquy: Stravinsky and The Octatonic—The Sounds of Stravinsky," essentially serves as a justification of his own and Taruskin's perspectives with regard to the octatonic scale and its importance in the works of Stravinsky.[26] Common rebukes and reevaluations of Taruskin and Van Den Toon's analysis of the octatonic in works by Stravinsky are explained as elementary and devised purely from opinions to justify a different standpoint with no consideration for the bigger picture.[27] It appears also that that the octatonic scale may have been less functional than these sources may indicate, providing instead a 'flavor.'

Richard Taruskin briefly mentions the use of folk music as a traditional Russian technique for indicating "Russian-ness" in nineteenth-century compositions in his extensive book, *Stravinsky and The Russian Traditions – A Biography of The Works Through Mavra*, though he speaks of it as an archaic and outdated form of nationalism that was at the end of its relevance having being replaced by harmonic and theory centered devices.[28] The book *Musorgsky*, by Richard Taruskin, goes into considerable detail about the nuances of using folk music as a form of nationalism, providing invaluable insights into this technique as it was used by the Mighty Five and their contemporaries.[29]

Mark DeVoto, in his article titled "The Russian Submediant in The Nineteenth Century," discusses the compositional gestures that developed in Russian music during the era when The Five were actively composing—gestures described as "national harmonic individualities," distinct from prominent western musical styles.[30] DeVoto's description of common Russian

[26] Pieter C. Van Den Toorn, "Colloquy: Stravinsky and The Octatonic – The Sounds of Stravinsky," *Music Theory Spectrum* 25, no. 1 (spring 2003): 168.
[27] Van Den Toorn, 167.
[28] Richard Taruskin, *Stravinsky and The Russian Traditions: A Biography of The Works Through Mavra* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 1996), 133.
[29] Richard Taruskin, *Musorgsky* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993).
[30] Mark DeVoto, "The Russian Submediant in the Nineteenth Century," *Current Musicology* 59 (1995): 48-76.

nationalistic musical intricacies provides a basis upon which nationalistic commonalities in the works of Rimsky-Korsakov and Stravinsky can be discussed and analyzed.

Austin Doub explores the history of The Five more broadly in his article titled "Understanding the Cultural and Nationalistic Impacts of the Moguchaya Kuchka," through analysis of compositions of The Five in conjunction with their cultural contexts. He demonstrates ways in which they "...influence[d] Russian culture and develop[ed] a 'pure' school of Russian music amid rampant westernization."[31] Both the analysis and the cultural context provides information as to where Russian nationalism appears to manifest in musical compositions, while also providing context as to why the compositional styles of The Five—including Rimsky-Korsakov—developed in such a way as to create a distinctly Russian sound.

The musical styles and gestures identified and discussed in this initial codification are supported by multiple scholarly sources, all of which vary in their range of specificity and complexity in terms of explanations and justifications for each gesture as well as their importance in creating Russian nationalism. That said, while these stylistic elements are identified in the extant scholarship as being commonly used in Russian Nationalistic music, none provide a definite codification, and the sources provide no consensus as to how these styles were used. It is, however, important to note that the definitions provided here of Russian nationalism in music have been pieced together from existing scholarship that appears to partially rely on the perceived intentions of the composers and their use of different musical gestures in the context of their own compositions. Rutger Helmers puts it this way:

> Russian composer of art music could never produce "purely" Russian music, if only for the simple circumstance that, whether they were writing operas, orchestral works, or piano pieces, they were working in genres with long and complicated genealogies that did not originate on Russian soil. As the outcome of a long sequence of cultural borrowings and exchanges, Russian music culture is—to use a term now current in academic literature—hybrid. Even though it has

[31] Austin M. Doub, "Understanding the Cultural and Nationalistic Impacts of the Moguchaya Kuchka," *Musical Offerings* 10, no. 2 (2019): 49.

> become an all-too-common caveat, it remains important to bear in mind that this is ultimately something Russian music has in common with all culture.[32]

Most of these individual musical gestures and styles, on their own, are not specifically Russian as they appear in other regions' art music (with the exception of course of Russian folk music). It is, therefore, the combination of these gestures in the context of these late-nineteenth century composers and their understanding of nationalism that can potentially define a Russian nationalistic style in the art music of this time.[33]

Nationalistic Russian Musical Gestures and Analysis of *The Golden Cockerel*

Musically, *The Golden Cockerel* makes use of many of the gestures connected to a Russian style. The octatonic scale is one of the most mentioned elements in the existing scholarship and according to some scholars, it is frequently associated with Russian music because of its use in well-known compositions such as Glinka's *Ruslan und Ludmilla* and Rimsky-Korsakov's *Sadko* and *Scheherazade*.[34] This scale pattern was used extensively by Rimsky-Korsakov throughout his compositional career (supporting its Russian associations). In fact, he used it so much that it became commonly known within this circle of composers as the *Korsakovian Scale*. The octatonic scale consists of eight notes, alternating between whole and half steps, usually comprised of the pitch set (0, 3, 6, 9) or C, D#, F# and A, and its transposition a half step higher—(1, 4, 7, 10) or C#, E, G, and A#—placed sequentially, creating the scale C, C#, D#, E, F#, G, A, and A#.[14]

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[32] Rutger Helmers, *Not Russian Enough?: Nationalism and Cosmopolitanism in Nineteenth-Century Russian Opera* (Rochester, NY: Boydell & Brewer; University of Rochester Press, 2014), 2.
[33] Helmers, 2.
[34] Taruskin, *Stravinsky and The Russian Traditions: A Biography of The Works Through Mavra*, 283.

There are three possible octatonic scales in the modern twelve-tone system, OCT (0,1) OCT (1,2) and OCT (2,3), distinguished by the starting pitch and its transposition. Each of these three different scales has two versions, one that starts with a whole step and one with a half step (See Figure 2).

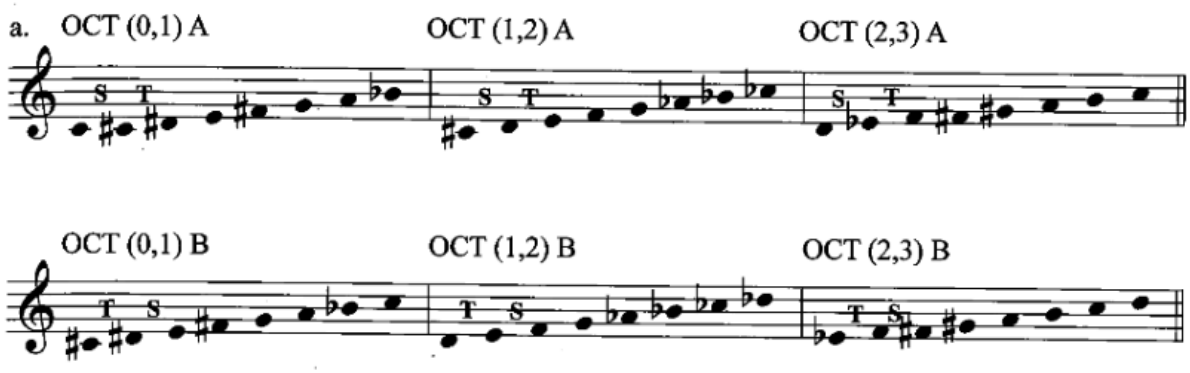

Figure 2: The Octatonic Collections.[35]

Richard Taruskin discusses the association of octatonicism with "Russian-ness" in-depth in *Stravinsky and the Russian Traditions,* noting that Rimsky-Korsakov routinely sketched third relations, harmonic patterns involving intervals of thirds, that outline octatonic collections in drafts for future compositions.[36] He describes further the manner in which octatonicism can be represented by a sequential progression of major, or more commonly, minor thirds (also described as mediant cycles—see Figure 3), that frequently evolve over a descending bass line, most commonly serving as an evocation for evil magic.[37] In fact, he states that beginning with Glinka's *Ruslan und Ludmilla* and continuing through *Petrouskha,* the use of chromaticism based in either the octatonic or whole tone scale and represented by third relations was a specifically

[35] Miguel A. Roig-Francoli, "Pitch Centricity and Symmetry," in *Understanding Post-Tonal Music* (New York: Routledge, 2021), 53.
[36] Taruskin, *Stravinsky and The Russian Traditions: A Biography of The Works Through Mavra*, 276.
[37] Taruskin, *Stravinsky and The Russian Traditions: A Biography of The Works Through Mavra*, 283.

Russian signification of the world of fantasy as compared to a human world signified by diatonicism rooted in fifth relations.[38]

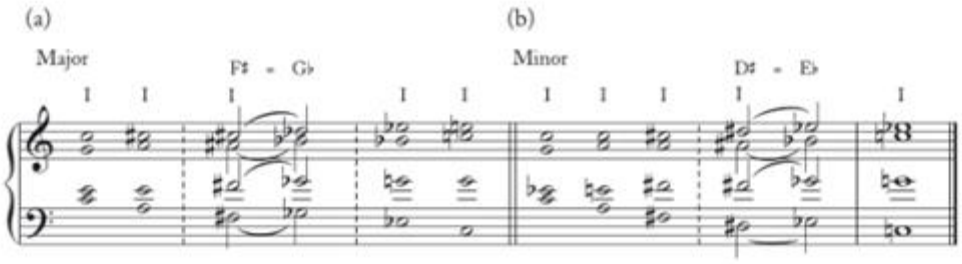

Figure 3: Sequential Progressions by Thirds.[39]

Taruskin also examines the involvement of two versions of an octatonic scale (one beginning with a half step, the other a whole step) within Russian musical literature—each having their own purpose due to their distinctly different qualities (one is best suited for harmonic material and the other for melodic material).[40] This is not discussed in other sources, but appears reasonable as the two different versions of the octatonic scale indeed have discernable differences in color and character. Other common features of octatonicism according to Phillip Ewell include the embellishment of diminished and dominant seventh harmonies in interaction with standard heptatonic scales, as well as exceptional flexibility—one of the reasons it became popular during the nineteenth century.[41]

Other sources concur with Taruskin's theories, and, while it is difficult to find an example of pure octatonicism in the musical examples provided in the existing scholarship (many appear to feature an octatonic flavor rather a specific version of the scale itself), it is possible to find

[38] Taruskin, *Stravinsky and The Russian Traditions: A Biography of The Works Through Mavra*, 267.
[39] Philip A. Ewell, "On Rimsky-Korsakov's False (Hexatonic) Progressions Outside the Limits of a Tonality," *Music Theory Spectrum* 42 (2020): 127.
[40] Taruskin, *Stravinsky and The Russian Traditions: A Biography of The Works Through Mavra*, 276
[41] Ewell, 126.

examples of an octatonic flavor highlighted by third relations (both harmonic and melodic) within *The Golden Cockerel.*

The Wizard's Theme, an indicator of the world of fantasy in this opera, employs a deceptively diatonic melodic idea in thirds over a series of chords that includes hidden descending third progressions in a manner extremely similar to a passage from the composer's *Skazka* (the example of the latter provided by Taruskin). The example from *Skazka* (see Figure 4) revolves around a descending bass line that results in every other triad functioning within a minor third series. The Wizard's Theme from *The Golden Cockerel* likewise lies over a largely chromatic bass line rising through a progression that repeats twice (interrupted by a dominant and diminished seventh series) that also features a major third series marked by every other triad (see Figure 5). Notably, there is a second triadic relationship buried in the progression. The result of these embedded triadic series is an octatonic flavored melodic idea over a chromatic foundation that resides in a deceptively diatonic chromatic passage, perhaps a marker of the intrusion of the Wizard into the otherwise human world of the Tsar of Dodon.

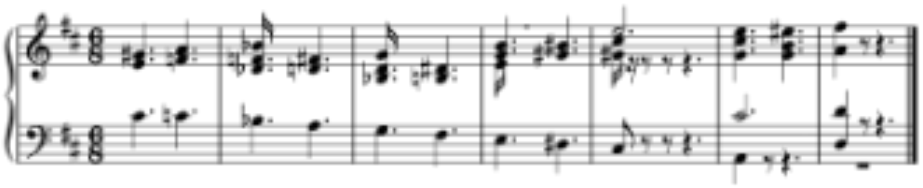

Figure 4: Rimsky-Korsakov, *Skazka,* op. 29, mm. 529-35.[42]

[42] Reduction created by author from Richard Taruskin, *Stravinsky and The Russian Traditions: A Biography of The Works Through Mavra* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 1996), 271.

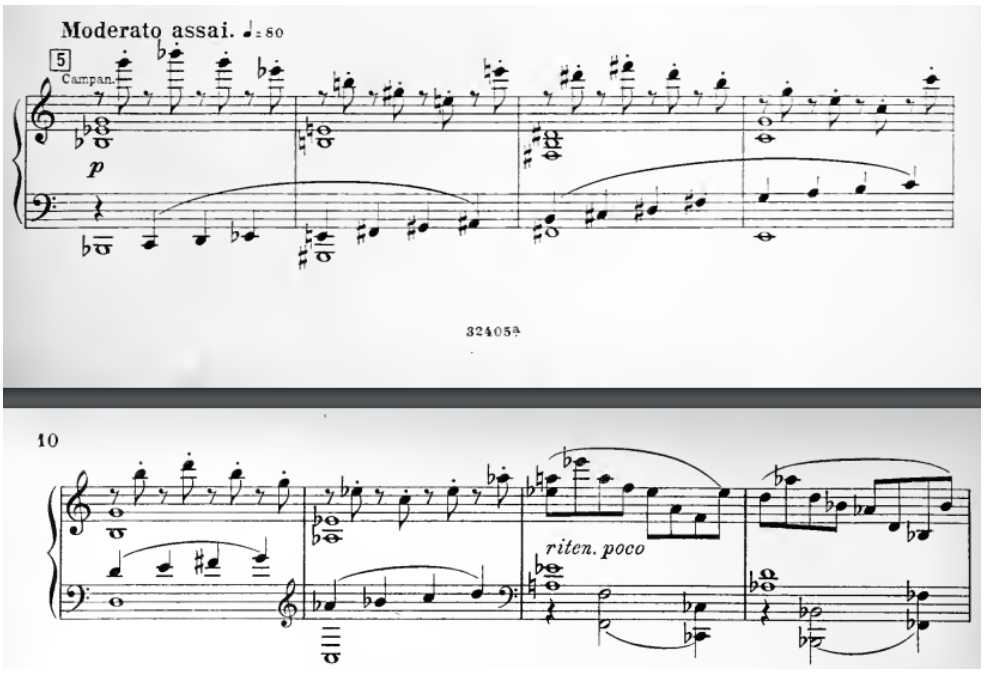

Figure 5: Rimsky-Korsakov, *The Golden Cockerel,* Introduction, Rehearsal 5.[43]

Therefore, though the use of the octatonic scale is identified as one of the distinguishing features of Russian nationalism by several authors, including Van Den Toorn and Taruskin, specifically due to its importance to Stravinsky and its appearances in Rimsky-Korsakov, Rimsky's use of it in *The Golden Cockerel* is less than literal since a complete octatonic scale cannot be sufficiently generated from the given pitches. It is, rather, triadic experimentation fostering pockets of octatonic pitch collections related by sequential progressions of thirds.

The Russian submediant and its relationship to relevant major and minor harmonies is also frequently discussed in definitions of Russian nationalism.[44] This involves the function of the sixth scale degree as a harmonic connection to the tonic triad, as well as possibly serving as an 'alternative tonal focus.'[45] It can be most easily marked as a lowered sixth (or raised fifth)

[43] Nikolay Rimsky-Korsakov, *The Golden Cockerel* (Moscow: P. Jurgenson, 1908), 9-10.
[44] DeVoto, 48.
[45] DeVoto, 48.

step that momentarily moves the piece from the major mode to the minor. DeVoto states that in his transcriptions of folk melodies, Rimsky-Korsakov (and others as well) make use of a pronounced modal harmony and often this harmony involved the natural minor scale as well as a frequent combination of both minor and relative major modes.[46]

In the opening of the dance of the Queen, Rimsky-Korsakov lightly touches on the minor mode in an otherwise diatonic major tonal center with the inclusion of an E flat over a tonicized G triad (marked in brackets) and later a G sharp over a tonicized C triad (See Figure 6). The effect is a slightly exotic diatonic passage that shines in sharp contrast to the Tsar's previous chromatic music—another example of Rimsky's satirical normalization of the fantastic and an othering of the human.

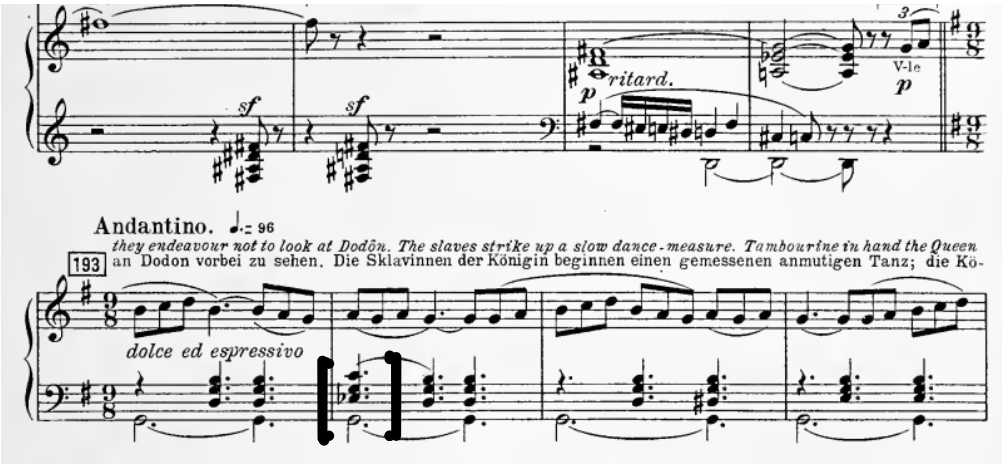

Figure 6: Rimsky-Korsakov, *The Golden Cockerel,* Act II, Rehearsal 193.[47]

As is common in many nationalistic styles, the Russian style incorporates elements of folk music, particularly folk song. It is important to keep in mind that accurate transcriptions of these folk tunes, including rhythmic aspects, were not the goal of the majority of Russian

[46] DeVoto, 52.
[47] Rimsky-Korsakov, *The Golden Cockerel*, 143.

composers at this time. Rather, it was the general character of the folk music that was most often conveyed through interpretations and patchworks of common folk songs, though general rhythmic similarities are frequently distinguishable.[48] The folk tunes often follow vocal patterns and voice inflections from the Russian dialects, resulting in rhythmic passages that involve freedom and flexibility.[49]

Balakirev was one of the first composers to personally collect folk songs for musical pursuits rather than textual—he sought out musical material within folk music and integrated that material into his compositions by adding his own harmonic material to the melodic songs.[50] The foundation of the Russian nationalistic style for the time between Balakirev's release of his folk collections and Borodin's death twenty years later was a folk style known as *protyazhnaya*, lyrical folk songs characterized by the significance of the melodic lines as well as their non-regular rhythmic patterns.[51] This style was later used by Stravinsky in *Firebird* for Ivan Tsarevich's theme, even though this appears to be the only example in his work as there was a general shift toward the more popular, shorter, and more progressive calendar song.[52] These are ritualistic agricultural songs associated with pagan peoples' seasonal work. Figures 3 and 4 list the common rhythmic and scalar patterns found within the Russian calendar songs.

[48] It is important to keep in mind that Russia is a very large country and contains many different regions in which many different styles of folk music developed.
[49] Bilderback, 27.
[50] Taruskin, *Musorgsky*, 47.
[51] Taruskin, *Musorgsky*, 38.
[52] Taruskin, *Musorgsky*, 40; 54.

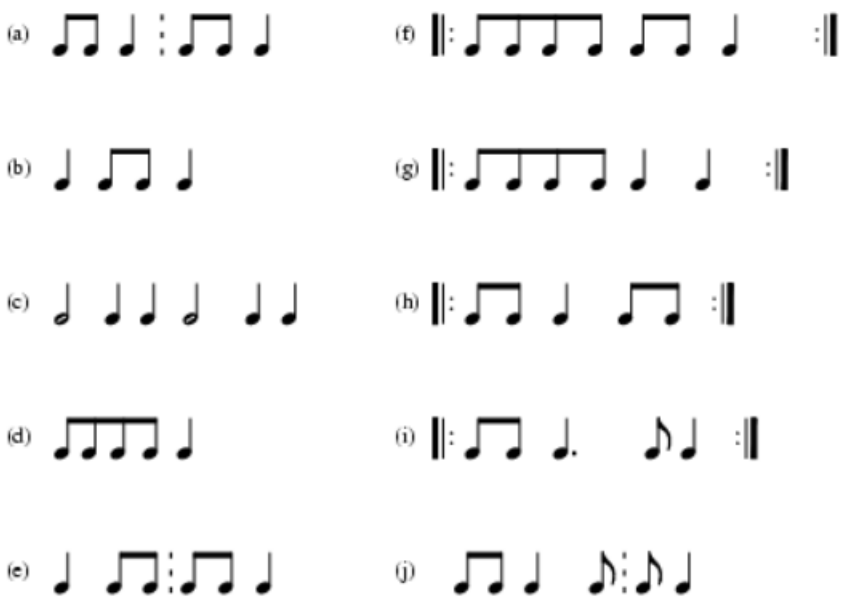

Figure 7: Rhythmic Structures, Russian Calendar Songs.[53]

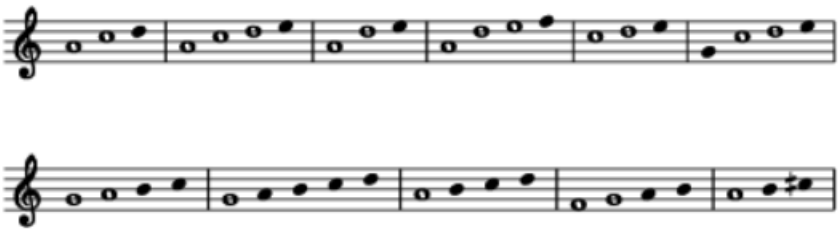

Figure 8: Scalar Structures, Russian Calendar Songs.[54]

A few of the rhythmic structures in figure 4 can be seen in *The Golden Cockerel*, most notable in the theme of Tsar Dodon. A half note followed by two quarter notes, as seen in section C in the heraldic brass motive accompanying the tsar's theme (see Figure 9 next page, top stave), includes the same uneven beat emphasis that many of the other rhythmic structures encompass (though this representation is through a satirical demonstration of a regal motif). A few minutes

[53] Jonathan Powell and Izaly Zemtsovsky, "Traditional Music," *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd ed. ed. Stanley Sadie (London: Macmillan, 2001), vol. 22, 2.
[54] From Jonathan Powell and Izaly Zemtsovsky, 2.

later, at the conclusion of the tsar's theme, a rhythmic pattern possibly following section b is heard, again through another regal motif played by the horns.

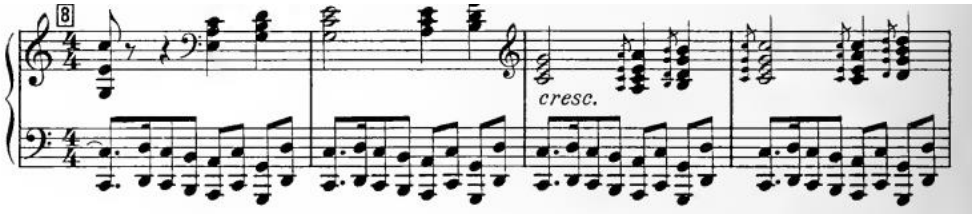

Figure 9: Rimsky-Korsakov, *The Golden Cockerel,* Act I, Rehearsal 8.[55]

Russian folk song usually involves call and response between a soloist and a group of singers, generally in heterophony (a single melodic idea that is improvised upon simultaneously).[56] Russian folk dances, on the other hand, are most often polyphonic: two different melodic lines played simultaneously. These folk textures were frequently realized by composers in a homophonic setting, where one instrument or voice plays the melody while others provide harmonic accompaniment.[57]

Russian folk music often features a pentatonic scale, and often in association with Orientalism.[58] In Act I of *The Golden Cockerel*, Tsar Dodon indulges in the good life and sings about the glories of the sun in a song that opens with a pentatonic flavored musical idea within the oboe melody (bracketed in Figure 10, next page), in this instance alluding to the common use of pentatonicism in Russian folk music.

[55] Rimsky-Korsakov, *The Golden Cockerel*, 12.
[56] Bilderback, 26.
[57] Frederick W. Sternfeld, "Some Russian Folk Songs in Stravinsky's Petrouchka," article in the score of *Petrushka*, ed. Charles Hamm (New York: W. W. Norton & Company INC., 1967), 210.
[58] DeVoto, 53.

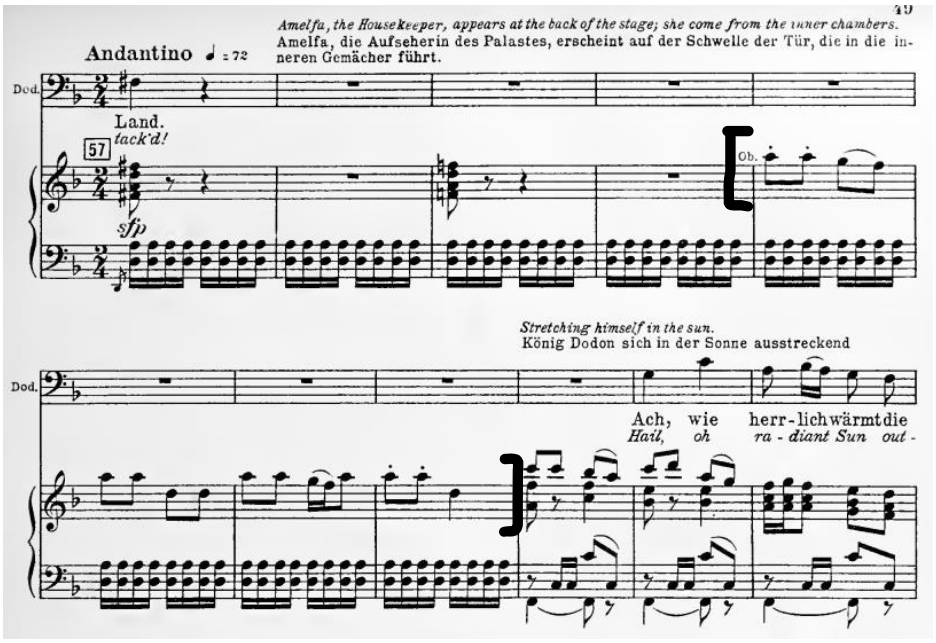

Figure 10: Rimsky-Korsakov, *The Golden Cockerel,* Act I, Rehearsal 57.[59]

Within the first five minutes of the opera, the Tsar's primary theme is introduced, providing another excellent example of a satirical representation of folk music. Featuring a slow, "regal," rhythmic pattern featured in the bass line modeled on Russian acrobatic folk dances, it represents a certain stereotypical image of virile Russian masculinity that is in stark contrast to the arrogant weakness of Dodon's character. (See Figure 9, Page 23)

Orientalism in general is the separation and otherness of the East through reduction and generalization in comparison with the west. Many credit Glinka with introducing the oriental style into Russian music as a distinctive element of a nationalistic style.[60] However, in the hands of the Russian composers, it functioned as exoticism. It was only in the latter part of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that audiences outside of Russia began to also associate it specifically with being Russian.

[59] Rimsky-Korsakov, *The Golden Cockerel,* 49.
[60] Taruskin, ""Entoiling the Falconet": Russian Musical Orientalism in Context," 205 and 208.

Over the course of oriental exoticism in Western Europe, the imagery moved from that of barbarous militaristic machismo during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries to seductive feminine beguiling beginning around the middle of the nineteenth century and carrying well into the twentieth. Ralph P. Locke's "Cutthroats and Casbah Dancers, Muezzins and "Timeless Sands: Musical Images of the Middle East"[61] and Richard Taruskin's "'Entoiling the Falconet;' Russian Musical Orientalism in Context" examine these evolutions and explore the unique connection of Russian nationalism to orientalism. Russian orientalism, as defined by Taruskin, can be split by into two categories based on the stages of the expansion of Russian empire, first being campaigns in Caucasia and central Asia, then campaigns in near and far eastern regions (with near being around Turkey and Arabia).[62]

According to Vladimir Stasov, orientalism could be considered one of the main four features that distinguish the Russian school. The remaining features include preferences towards program music, the search for a national character, and a cynicism regarding traditional European practices.[63] It is a delicate matter to describe Orientalism as a Russian form of expression because it does not belong solely to the Russians, and people west of Russia frequently considered Russia itself as 'Other' or 'Eastern.' In addition, eastern Russian does indeed lie within the geographical realm that was consolidated into the mass definition of Oriental.

Orientalism is usually evoked in music through ornamentations and augmentations, as well as the use of pentatonicism, in order to evoke exotic and seductive (western) ideas of the

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[61] Ralph P. Locke, "Cutthroats and Casbah Dancers, Muezzins and Timeless Sands: Musical Images of the Middle East," in *The Exotic in Western Music*, ed. Jonathan Bellman (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1998), 104-136.
[62] Taruskin, ""Entoiling the Falconet": Russian Musical Orientalism in Context," 196; 194.
[63] Taruskin, ""Entoiling the Falconet": Russian Musical Orientalism in Context," 194-195.

East.[64] Other common musical gestures associated with Russian orientalism include curling melodic undulations that represent the sensuous arm movements of a female dancer, rhythmically free oboe solos recollecting the wailing of the zurna frequently tied over the down beat, a chromatic pass between scale degrees five and six, pedal drum or drones, English horn timbres, neighbor note triplets, melodic outlining of the aeolian, phrygian, or chromatic scales, and (according to Taruskin) descending chromatic lines that tend to indicate seduction.[65]

Orientalism can be seen in Rimsky Korsakov's *The Golden Cockerel* in the theme of the Oriental Queen of Shemakha. The Queen's arrival is predictably highlighted by a free oboe solo featuring a descending chromatic gesture. This is followed, however, with a diatonic melody derived from the Russian folk song style, the only exoticism present lies in the pentatonic and chromatic-styled melismas. (Figure 11)

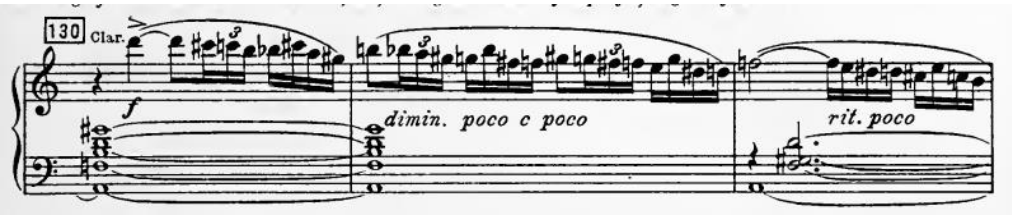

Figure 11: Rimsky-Korsakov, *The Golden Cockerel,* Act II, Rehearsal 130.[66]

However, in her dance intended to seduce the Tsar, Rimsky-Korsakov skillfully blends the Russian sixth present in the interchange from major to minor modes at rehearsal 195, a rhythmic pattern reminiscent of the Habanera seen at rehearsal 196, seductively sensuous melodic ideas for the queen and comedic *alla-turca* references for the buffoon of a Tsar present

[64] Taruskin, ""Entoiling the Falconet": Russian Musical Orientalism in Context," 195; 198.
[65] Taruskin, ""Entoiling the Falconet": Russian Musical Orientalism in Context," 205.
[66] Rimsky-Korsakov, *The Golden Cockerel*, 99.

in the accompaniment patterns at rehearsal 196 and scoring for the tambourine, which is not notated in Figure 12.

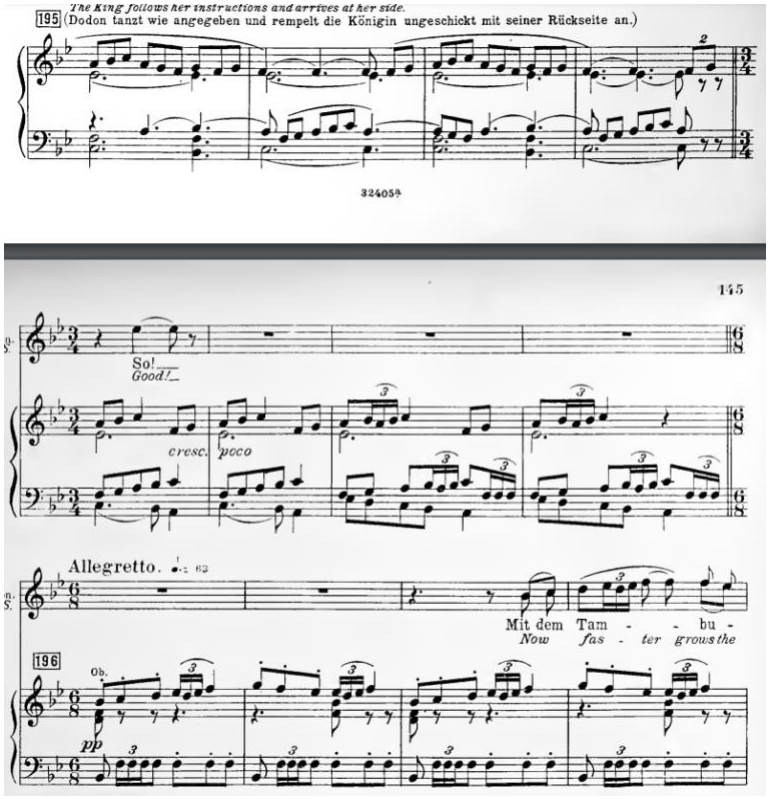

Figure 12: Rimsky-Korsakov, *The Golden Cockerel*, Act II, Rehearsal 195-96.[67]

These two primary characters (the Tsar and the Queen) seem to represent the two primary Western perceptions of Russianness: rugged masculinity and an otherness demonstrated by a sort of modified orientalism, both of which are distorted in this opera. Though the characters don't explicitly portray actual persons (undoubtedly any obvious references to elevated Russian figures in this satirical work would have been censored), given the political unrest at the time of this opera's composition and the photo that influenced the opera, it is reasonable to assume that *The*

[67] Rimsky-Korsakov, *The Golden Cockerel*, 144-45.

Golden Cockerel serves as a satirical commentary on the state of Russian politics and its leaders and that audiences would most likely have been in on the joke.

Conclusion

As a result of this research, it is now possible to posit an initial codification of the Russian style and its constituent elements. These elements include the octatonic scale, or an octatonic flavor, and its subsequent involvement with mediant cycles and harmonic relations of thirds, the Russian submediant and its relation to relevant major and minor harmonies, melodic and rhythmic folk material (often in association with pentatonic scales), and orientalism.

The Golden Cockerel provides a commentary on both the *fin de siècle* Russian musical style and the cultural climate in Russia in the early twentieth century. It appears to have been created to lampoon Russian ideals in troubling times as indicated by the over-the-top portrayal of its characters and their reactions to each other and their situations in both music and plot. Simon Morrison, in "The Golden Cockerel, Censored and Uncensored," goes even further, declaring that the Russian national style was also being parodied. He says:

> Everything seems to be a quotation. The Golden Cockerel becomes a caricature of a caricature, a mock juxtaposition of the Russian national style (the sound of the kuchka, or Russian nationalist music) with magical and oriental modes that make enchantment not the means, but the ends.[68]

This opinion is clearly supported by the music of the opera. Many of the elements connected to the Russian nationalistic style are used in a grotesque or exaggerated manner: the ridiculously masculine theme of the Tsar involving exaggerated characteristic folk gestures as well as the highly oriental yet strangely diatonic theme of Queen Shemakha. The use of orientalism in combination with the Russian tradition of a diatonic human world vs. a chromatic

[68] Morrison, 178.

fantasy one come to a head in the opera as the masculine 'superior' Russian roles become ever-more chromatic and "oriental" while the Queen resides in a largely diatonic realm flavored with just a touch of orientalism. The irony is complete when the astrologer declares all except he and the queen were fictitious. The Queen has the last say; the fantastic becomes real; and the human world fades into the realm of illusion.

There is much more research to be done, however. This initial codification of a Russian nationalistic style is in its infancy. In order to create a fully realized codification, extensive research must be undertaken to compare Rimsky-Korsakov's other compositions with those of the members of The Five and their Russian contemporaries (including Stravinsky) during this surge in nationalism.

In addition, research into the extent of Rimsky-Korsakov's influence over his student Igor Stravinsky, especially in his early compositions, can provide continuity between the early nationalistic endeavors of Glinka and the Might Five and Stravinsky's own brand of nationalism. Stravinsky studied with Rimsky-Korsakov for a relatively short duration, but in spite of that, Rimsky's influence can be seen in the younger composer's early works. Yaroslav Timofeev explores this in his article titled "How Stravinsky Stopped Being a Rimsky-Korsakov Pupil." He discusses Stravinsky's shift in compositional style after Rimsky-Korsakov's death along with his shift in views over the nationalistic movement, but also mentions their relationship as student and teacher and the compositional tendencies that followed this tutelage.[69] However, there still is much that remains un-explored and unresolved with regard to the late-nineteenth and early

[69] Yaroslav Timofeev, "How Stravinsky Stopped Being a Rimsky-Korsakov Pupil," in *Rimsky-Korsakov and His World,* ed, Marina Frolova-Walker (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018), 249-276,

twentieth century Russian nationalistic styles and their importance upon an emerging Russian national state in the dawn of modernism.

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