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# The Voice of The Motherland: Exploring the Development of Russian Music Before Mikhail Glinka

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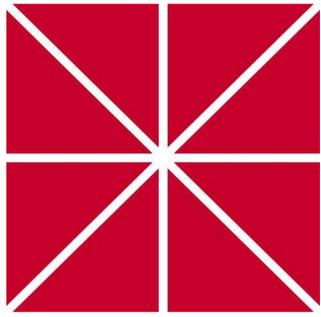
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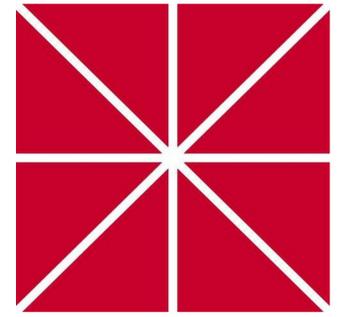


# The Voice of the Motherland:

## Exploring the Development of Russian Music Before Mikhail Glinka

By Alvin Ly

Advisor: Dr. Jessica Sternfeld



### Introduction

When learning about early western classical music history, the first countries often discussed include England, Germany, France, and Italy beginning around the time of Gregorian chant. It is not until approximately the early Romantic Era that we begin to learn about Russian composers such as Mikhail Glinka, Pyotr Tchaikovsky, or those of the "Mighty Handful" including most notably Modest Mussorgsky, Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, and Alexander Borodin. The emergence of Russian music into the western classical world is often taken for granted and we seldom ask how or why it happened, which is why I chose to research this particular topic.

### Thesis

Because of Russia's cultural revolution starting under the rule of Peter the Great and flourishing under the rule of Catherine the Great, Mikhail Glinka would become the first Russian composer to successfully integrate Russian music's different sounds and styles (influenced in part by the unique Russian Znamenny chant) with that of Western classical music in a way that no previous Russian composer was able to do successfully and thus is the first Russian composer to be discussed in Western classical music history.

### Conclusion

Russia's inheritance of the Greek and Byzantine civilizations of the Eastern Roman Empire which differed from that of Western Europe, who inherited that of the Latin civilization of the Western Roman empire. Ever since then, Russia had developed a unique musical sound, and would most stay secluded from Western European music until Peter the Great began his cultural revolution, which led to Western European composers residing in Russia to teach and perform music of their home countries. While several Russian composers successfully wrote in the Western classical style, none were able to combine both the Western classical and Russian styles into a single cohesive yet distinct style until Mikhail Glinka. It is because his music is so unmistakably Russian, yet simultaneously Western European that many historians find him to be the first prominent figure in Russian classical music.



**Znamenny Chant**

Znamenny Chant is primarily associated with the religious followers known as "Old Believers", after a great schism divided the Russian Orthodox Church. This style of chant is notable for its cinnabar ink accents alongside black ink. The notation for Znamenny chant was a type of musical shorthand, in the sense that it only gave general ideas of where the melody's direction went. Like the Western music tradition, music had to be taught and learned orally, since the notation could not indicate the exact pitch of every note.



**Peter the Great**  
1672 - 1725

Peter Alekseyevich Romanov, better known today as Peter the Great, was born to father Tsar Alexis, ruler of the Tsardom of Russia. Despite growing up around music, Peter showed very little interest in it except in church music, owning a vocal score legibly copied out and specially bound in parchment to sing in church. Despite his lack of interest in most music, he saw its importance in the development of Russian culture and introduced music to inhabitants of Moscow.



**Mikhail Glinka**  
1804 - 1857

Born in Novospasskoye, Russia, Glinka was born to a noble family and his first contact with music was through servants singing folksongs. His first instrument was piano, and would often play in and sometimes conduct his uncle's serf orchestra. Glinka would eventually travel across Europe, studying in Italy and staying in Vienna before returning to Russia. The exposure to different music allowed him to combine the aspects of Russian music such as peasant/folk song and church bells and chants with that of Western European music.

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