

THE BIRTH OF POETRY FROM THE SPIRIT OF CRITICISM: IVANOV ON SKRJABIN

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If you lived in Russia at the time Andrej Belyj defined as “between two revolutions”, and if you could easily tell who wrote *The Three Conversations* and who was the author of *Also sprach Zarathustra*, the name of Aleksandr Skrjabin would most likely occupy a very special place in your “list of reverences”. “My god came back from Switzerland,” announced young Pasternak upon learning about Skrjabin’s return from Europe. In the same spirit of worship, Vasilij Safonov – one of the most respected musicians of the time and, incidentally, a deeply religious man – solemnly proclaimed to the orchestra as he held up the score at the beginning of the rehearsal of Skrjabin’s First Symphony: “Here is the new bible” (“Vot novaja biblija”).¹ The spell which Skrjabin cast on his admirers was created by two elements: his music and his aesthetics. Admittedly, while in music Skrjabin was the supreme professional, in philosophy he was an educated dilettante. Nonetheless all attempts to separate his music from his philosophical ideas simply fail.²

“Music lives through thought,” Skrjabin used to say. “My ideas constitute my design and they go into my music just as sounds do” (“Muzyka živa mysl’ju”. “Ėti idei – moj zamysel i oni vchodjat v sočinenie tak že, kak zvuki”).³

“It is difficult to name any other composer,” writes the Skrjabin scholar Del’son, “who strives with such determination to resolve philosophical, aesthetic, and even questions of logic by the specific means of symphonic music [...] the intellectual character of Skrjabin’s music must be considered deeply organic to his creative method” (“Trudno nazvat’ kakogo-libo drugogo kom-

pozitora, kotoryj s takoj opredelennost'ju stremilsja by rešat' filofsko-estetičeskie, poroj daže čisto logičeskie problemy specifičeskimi sredstvami simfonizma [...] intellektual'noe načalo skrjabinskogo simfonizma dolžno rassmatrivat'sja kak gluboko organičnoe dlja ego tvorčeskogo metoda".⁴

It might be said that Skrjabin was the only musician who consciously grounded artistic imagery in philosophical concepts. In other words, he not merely exploited philosophical ideas as, for example, did Wagner, but even attempted to solve philosophical problems with music as his medium since he was convinced that music can express ideas.

Skrjabin's interest in philosophy, it would appear, began at an early age. At sixteen he wrote some notes from which it is clear that he was, for the most part, interested in matters of ethics and regarded faith in Christ as a necessary condition for morality. These notes are all the more interesting, as they demonstrate the initial Christological emphasis in Skrjabin's world view, one that would subsequently weaken, but which would gain strength again in his final years (without doubt under Vjačeslav Ivanov's influence). Of the philosophers, Skrjabin was particularly interested in Schelling, Kant, Fichte, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche.

At the very beginning of the 1900s, Skrjabin became friends with the philosopher Sergej Trubeckoj – a passionate admirer of his music. Trubeckoj belonged to a circle of friends and devotees of the recently deceased Vladimir Solov'ev. At Trubeckoj's invitation, Skrjabin conscientiously attended meetings of the Moscow Religious-Philosophical society.

What were the philosophical foundations of a man who was called by his good acquaintance, the Marxist theorist Plechanov, an "incorrigible mystic" ("mistik neispravimyj")?⁵ Skrjabin believed that humankind must attain the crown of its existence through the conquest of matter by art, in so far as the artistic, creative act constitutes the only means to save and transfigure the world. This act liberates the soul from sensuality and leads it – through victory over sensuality – to complete dematerialization. Skrjabin felt that he was predestined to perform this creative act. This act he called the *Mysterium* ("Misterija"); it was to lead to the fusion of all humankind in ecstasy and to the transformation of the world. Skrjabin viewed the project of the *Mysterium* as his "doctrine", his "philosophy", his "principal task" ("učenie", "filosofija", "bol'saja, glavnaja rabota").⁶

No wonder Skrjabin became closely involved with the Symbolists. "Skrjabin," writes Sabaneev, "to put it briefly, was none other than a symbolist in music, and all those premises which are now considered as traditional regarding Symbolists in poetry and literature are completely and even more categorically applicable to him" ("Skrjabin, vyražajas' kratko, byl ničem inym, kak simvolistom v muzyke i vse te predposylki, kotorye nyne stali tradicionnymi po otnošeniju k simvolistam poëzii i literatury, celikom i daže v ešče bolee kategoričeskoj forme priložimy k nemu").⁷ The first

documented evidence of Skrjabin's association with the movement is a 1906 letter to Emil Medtner, the musical editor of the Symbolist journal *Zolotoe runo*, in answer to an invitation to collaborate with the magazine. In 1909, during his stay in St. Petersburg in connection with the premiere of his *Poem of Ecstasy* (*Poéma ékstaza*), Skrjabin became acquainted with Vjačeslav Ivanov. Soon after Skrjabin said to Sabaneev about Ivanov: "He is *close* to me and to my thoughts as is no one else" ("On *tak blizok* mne i moim mysljam, kak nikto").⁸ The attraction was mutual. As Ivanov recalled later, "my friendship with Skrjabin during the final two years of his life was a profoundly significant and luminous event along the passages of my spirit."⁹ The profound significance of their relationship was directly reflected in Vjačeslav Ivanov's philosophical and spiritual influence upon Skrjabin. "From the time when Vjačeslav Ivanov appeared on Skrjabin's horizon, something began to change rapidly in the latter's conception" ("So vremeni pojavlenija V. Ivanova na skrjabinskom gorizonte, čto-to stalo bystro menjat'sja v ego koncepcii"), reports Sabaneev.¹⁰ Indeed, as Malcolm Brown demonstrated in his comparative analysis of Ivanov's and Skrjabin's pronouncements, the final version of the *Mysterium* acquired a special lucidity and moved in a different direction.

It was Skrjabin's notion of the role played by the artist-creator of the *Mysterium*, that is to say, by himself, that underwent a fundamental change. Earlier, during the composition of *Prometheus* (*Prometej*), he wrote:

I am God!
I am nothing, I am play, I am freedom, I am life,
I am the limit, I am the summit,
I am God.

("Ja bog! / Ja ničto, ja igra, ja svoboda, ja žizn', / Ja predel, ja veršina, / Ja bog.")¹¹ However, after he met Ivanov the idea of *sobornost'* pervaded his descriptions of the *Mysterium*. "There will be no question of the individual in the *Mysterium*. It will be collective [sobornyj] creation, a collective act. It will be one all-embracing, multi-faceted individuality, like the sun refracted in a thousand drops of water."¹²

After the composer's death Ivanov was among the founders of the Skrjabin society and took active part in many endeavors to commemorate his name.¹³ In subsequent years, Ivanov wrote over a dozen articles, speeches and notes on Skrjabin.¹⁴ In addition, Ivanov dedicated nine poems to Skrjabin, several of which form parts of the articles. It has been said that Vjačeslav Ivanov should be considered among the first scholars of Skrjabin and his most active propagandists.¹⁵

In the introduction to his collection of articles on Skrjabin Ivanov wrote: "Three speeches on Skrjabin, interwoven with verse dedicated to his

memory, comprise this belated book. The last of these speeches has already been published in my collection of articles 'Matters Native and Universal'. The first two were intended for a Skrjabin collection. It was not fated to be [...] Now the Skrjabin Society has ceased to exist. It was there that I, one of its founding members, delivered my speeches in the years 1915, 1916, 1917" ("Tri čtenija o Skrjabine s votkannymi v nich stichami, posvjaščennymi ego pamjati, sostavljajut sodržanie zapozdaloj knigi. Poslednee iz étich čtenij uže napečatano v moem sobranii statej 'Rodnoe i vselenskoe'. Pervye dva prednaznačalis' dlja Skrjabinovskogo sbornika. Emu ne suždeno bylo osuščestvit'sja [...] Rassejalos' i pervoe Skrjabinskoe obščestvo, v srede kotorigo ja, odin iz ego učreditelej, proiznosil svoi reči v 1915, 1916, i 1917 godach").¹⁶ The three speeches Vjačeslav Ivanov had in mind and prepared for publication were respectively 'Skrjabin's View of Art' ('Vzgljad Skrjabina na iskusstvo'), 'Skrjabin as the National Composer' ('Skrjabin kak nacional'nyj kompozitor'), and 'Skrjabin and the Spirit of Revolution' ('Skrjabin i duch revoljucii').

All three works are divided into sub-sections. These sections are linked in an unusual way: there are several cases when a section starts with the verse line from a poem found in the previous section. This results in the effect of sequence not unlike the one inherent in the construction of a corona of sonnets, a poetic genre favored by the Symbolists. This principle of sequence has prompted me to construct the rest of my article in the same fashion. I will proceed to discuss Ivanov on Skrjabin in a comparative mode matched to earlier literary and philosophical models, namely, Solov'ev on Dostoevskij, Dostoevskij on Puškin, Puškin on Mozart *and* Salieri.

Solov'ev on Dostoevskij

Ivanov's 'Three Speeches on Skrjabin' intersect in a number of ways with 'Three Speeches in Memory of Dostoevskij' by Vladimir Solov'ev. Both triptychs were written in comparable circumstances, in comparable span of time, and with comparable purpose. In each case the speeches were composed for public performance in the course of three consecutive years after the death of a prominent artist and personal friend. Both Ivanov and Solov'ev consciously shunned formal analysis of their subject's work, concentrating on its philosophical evaluation and on the mission of art as such. In each case, the author recounts the details of the unfulfilled creative plans of the deceased artist. Solov'ev speaks of the main idea that Dostoevskij had for a cycle of novels to follow *The Brothers Karamazov*; Ivanov elucidates many aspects of Skrjabin's planned *Mysterium*. The important matter, however, is not the formal similarities between the two triptychs, but their profound "elective affinities". Vladimir Solov'ev had more than a few followers and

disciples, but perhaps none of them synthesized his ideas so ingeniously and creatively as Vjačeslav Ivanov.

Speeches about Dostoevskij assume a special place in Solov'ev's legacy: they rank first among his critical and aesthetic works. Of course, his aesthetic conception began to take shape much earlier, and by the 1880s the philosopher's fundamental ideas had already been conceived and formulated. But in three speeches on Dostoevskij Solov'ev's ideas about art and about the role of the artist are argued not only in general terms but with reference to a concrete artist – Dostoevskij.

At the beginning of the triptych, in a brief discussion of the religious role of art as it took form in history Solov'ev writes, "poets were prophets and priests, the religious idea was master of poetry, art served the gods. Then as life grew more complicated and a civilization founded on the division of labor appeared, art, like the rest of human affairs, stood apart and separated itself from religion [...] Priests of pure art appeared, for whom the perfection of artistic form became the main thing, apart from any religious content [...] The heyday of new European art came to an end before our very eyes [...] Artists today are unable and unwilling to serve pure art, to produce perfect forms; they are searching for content" ("[...] poëty byli prorokami i žrecami, religioznaja ideja vladela poëzij, iskusstvo služilo bogam. Potom, s usložnieniem žizni, kogda javilas' civilizacija, osnovannaja na razdelenii truda, iskusstvo, kak i drugie čelovečeskie delanija, obosobilos' i otdelilos' ot religii [...] Javilis' žrecy čistogo iskusstva, dlja kotorych soveršenstvo chudožestvennoj formy stalo glavnym delom, pomimo vsjakogo religioznogo soderžanija [...] Na našich glazach končilsja rascvet novo-evropejskogo chudožestva [...] Teperešnie chudožniki ne mogut i ne chotjat služit' čistoj krasote, proizvodit' soveršennye formy; oni iščut soderžanija").¹⁷ According to Solov'ev, their search must lead them to aesthetic and religious synthesis, to new art. And it is Dostoevskij, in the eyes of Solov'ev, who is the forerunner of such art.

In the article 'Skrjabin's View of Art', Ivanov, elaborating upon the composer's concept of art, elaborates upon Solov'ev's cultural-historical analysis of the evolution of art as well. He brings to light not only the phases in the process of the separation of art from religion, but describes the structure of their ancient unity. Similar to Solov'ev, Ivanov sees in ancient art an imperfect model for the future synthesis of art and religion. But Ivanov proceeds beyond this thesis by projecting the forms of a new art, forms that should blend into one synthetic creation.

It is well known that Solov'ev's aesthetic ideas became the cornerstone of Ivanov's theory of Symbolism. In his articles on Skrjabin, the basic Solovievian conceptions defining the art of the future stand as the aspirations not only for the article's author, Ivanov, but also for the article's subject, Skrjabin. Solov'ev's vision of a new aesthetic which interprets beauty as the

“transfiguration of the material through the embodiment in it of some other, higher-than-material principle” (“preobraženie materii čez voploščenie v nej drugogo, sverchmaterial’nogo načala”)¹⁸ and his vision of new art as “a real force which must illuminate and regenerate the entire human world” (“real’naja sila, prosvetljajuščaja i pereroždajuščaja ves’ čelovečeskij mir”)¹⁹ – all this became a credo for Ivanov and Skrjabin. If Solov’ev called Dostoevskij the forerunner of the new art, Skrjabin saw himself as destined for the role of its creator. This was also how Ivanov saw him.

In ‘Skrjabin’s View of Art’, Ivanov wrote: “Skrjabin had a particular presentiment of himself as providentially marked and, as it were, spiritually anointed for a great, universal task. Such a presentiment, or, I would say, such magnetism of his deep will essentially cannot deceive its bearer [...] This secret voice, this inner experience was, of course, neither a proud fiction nor, all the more, deception [...] In the words of Schopenhauer, ‘a tall man cannot help but know that he is above others’: Skrjabin’s self-awareness was just as spontaneous as this” (“Sebja samogo Skrjabin predčuvstvoval osobenno, providencial’no otmečennym i kak by duchovno pomazannym na velikoe vseмирnoe delo. Takoe predčuvstvie, – ja by skazal: takaja magnitnost’ glubinoj voli, – po suščestvu ne obmanjvaet svoego nositelja [...] Ètot tajnyj golos, ètot vnutrennij opyt ne byl, konečno, ni samoljubivym vymyslom, ni – tem menee – umyslom [...] Po slovam Šopengauéra ‘čelovek bol’šogo rosta ne možet ne znat’, čto on vyše drugih: tak že neposredstvenno bylo i samosoznanie Skrjabina”).²⁰

Dostoevskij on Puškin

Ivanov’s second article, unpublished during his lifetime, was to be entitled either ‘Skrjabin as a National Composer’ or ‘The National and the Universal in Skrjabin’s Work’. As the titles suggest, Ivanov addressed a problem that remains a subject of controversy among Skrjabin scholars.

The supporters of the “national” principle in Skrjabin’s music look for similarities of his melody in Čajkovskij, or, in the spirit of Panslavism, in Chopin, with whom the early Skrjabin has, indeed, much in common. Their opponents emphasize the complicated harmonies in the late Skrjabin, invoking the name of Wagner and quoting Rachmaninov’s description of Skrjabin as a “wholly non-Russian composer” (“sovsem ne russkogo”) standing in “no man’s land” (“stojaščego na nič’ej zemle”).²¹ This controversy remains meaningless unless one defines the notion of the “national”. Skrjabin himself fully understood the importance of the “national question” in art but was indignant at over-simplifications of the idea: “Is it true that, if I do not write variations on Russian themes, I am not a Russian composer?”

To resolve this quandary, Vjačeslav Ivanov starts with defining the intellectual perspective from which one should examine the notion of nationality. "In our days," he writes, "the essence of nationality has become a matter of philosophical conceptualization, – this after many centuries when it sufficed as a given in terms of its externally manifested existence" ("V naši dni suščestvo nacional'nosti delaetsja problemuju filosofskogo osoznanija, posle togo, kak dolgie veka dovol'stvovalis' naličnost'ju ee vnešne vyjavlennogo bytija").²² In his subsequent discussion of the correlation between the national and the universal as the correlation of the particular with the whole, Ivanov argues that individual creativity also acquires universal meaning only through the realization of its nationality. At the same time, the national element in music (and, by implication, in other spheres of art) as displayed in the form of folkloric motifs does not express the essence of a nation but merely conveys its outer appearance. This is why German music, which Ivanov employs as a natural example of the highest achievements in the past, attained greatness: because "it was not concerned with the preservation of its national soul, but sought to actualize music in general as the all-human universal language" ("ona [nemeckaja muzyka] ne zabolilas' o sočranenii nacional'noj duši svoej, no iskala osuščestvit' muzyku voobšče, kak vsemirnyj, vsečelovečeskij jazyk").²³ Ivanov believes, however, that German music exhausted itself with the arrival of the crisis of humanism; now the time had come for what he called "the historical impact of a different *Weltanschauung*". Skrjabin, in Ivanov's view, is precisely a representative of this "different *Weltanschauung*". "Skrjabin has been guided," he writes, "by his great Geist which led him away from the personal and the particular to the divine expanses of universal being" ("Ego [Skrjabina] voždem byl ego velikij duch, uvodivšij ego ot častnogo i ličnogo v božestvennye prostory vselenskogo bytija").²⁴

Thus the flow of Ivanov's argument re-affirms his initial premise: the national and the universal correlate as the particular and the whole. Consequently, the global task Skrjabin was destined to fulfill is coincident with the national task: "Skrjabin's aspirations represent the moment of universal self-determination on the part of the national Russian soul." And Ivanov concludes that "in his understanding of the artist's responsibility, in the fervent zeal of his religious heart, in the 'sobornyj' inspiration of his creative work, which for him bordered on the sacrificial dissolution of his personal existence in universal and eternal being, Skrjabin was truly a Russian genius" ("Stremlenija Skrjabina predstavljajut soboj moment vselenskogo samoopredelenija nacional'noj russoj duši [...] Po svoemu postiženiju otvetstvennosti čudožnika v žizni, po istovomu goreniju svoego religioznogo serdca, po sobornomu okryleniju vsego svoego tvorčestva, kotoroe graničilo dlja nego s žertvennym rastvorenijem ličnogo suščestvovanija v edinom i večnom bytii, Skrjabin – poistine ruskij genij").²⁵

The posing of the problem in these terms and, in part, the logic of the argument point to a famous prototype of this article by Ivanov – namely Dostoevskij's speech delivered during the Puškin Celebration of 1880.²⁶ For Dostoevskij's contemporaries it was clear that this speech was an open proclamation of the writer's most cherished ideals, presented in full for the first time, in a concise and simple general formula. According to this "formula" Puškin's genius became an incarnation of the Russian spirit precisely because its character proves to be all-European, universal ("vsemirnyj"), and all-human. For Dostoevskij Russian man is the universal man ("vsečelovek") by definition.²⁷ According to Dostoevskij, this faculty in Puškin manifests itself in the purest form, which is why Puškin was able to recreate the spirit of other nations in his works. But this faculty also might be regarded as prophetic. In Dostoevskij's eyes Puškin *is* the prophet who celebrates in his art the spirit of the Russian nation as ultimate manifestation of universal, Christian all-humanity.

The beauty of this vision conceals the paradox hidden within it. Lev Karsavin, noting "several incompatible ideas" in Dostoevskij's line of reasoning, comments: "Dostoevskij unwittingly identifies the universal humanity of the Russian people with their nationality, dissolving the latter in the former" ("Dostoevskij nevol'no otoždestvljaet ego [russkogo naroda] vsečelovečnost' s ego nacional'nost'ju, rastvorjaja vtoruju v pervuju").²⁸

In contrast to Dostoevskij, Ivanov in his treatment of the dialectic of the universal and the national avoided this trap. As he emphasizes in his article, the role of the national element in the universal is determined not by national exclusivity, but by its communal ("sobornyj") nature. This quality of Skrjabin's oeuvre – "sobornost'" – accounts for his being both a nationally Russian and a universal phenomenon.

Certainly Skrjabin would favor Ivanov's evaluation of the national in his music, since his own position on the question was based on the same premises kindred in spirit to Dostoevskij's Puškin speech. "Russian music," he said, "cannot be confined within the narrow frame of nationalism in its West European sense. It is national by breathing in the atmosphere of the international" ("Russkaja muzyka ne vmeščajetsja v tesnyh ramkach nacionalizma v zapadnoevropejskom ego ponimanii. Ona nacional'na, dyša v atmosfere internacional'nogo").²⁹

Puškin on Mozart and Salieri

Among the verses "interwoven" into Ivanov's articles on Skrjabin there is one deeply emotional and intimate recollection of their almost "perfect" friendship that was full of spiritual significance and creative expectations:

Двухлетний срок нам был судьбою дан,
 Я заходил к нему на “огонек”,
 Он посещал мой дом. Ждала поэта
 За новый гимн высокая награда, –
 И помнит мой семейственный клавир
 Его перстов волшебные касанья.
 Он за руку вводил по ступеням,
 Как неопита жрец, меня в свой мир,
 Разоблачая вечные святыни
 Творимых им, животворящих слав...
 А после, в долгой за полночь беседе,
 В своей рабочей храмине, под пальмой,
 У верного стола, с китайцем кротким
 Из мрамора восточного, – где новый
 Свершался Брак Поэзии с Музыкой, –
 О таинствах вещал он с дерзновением...³⁰

In an uncanny way, this echoes yet another well-known text:

Я счастлив был: я наслаждался мирно
 Своим трудом, успехом, славой; также
 Трудами и успехами друзей,
 Товарищей моих в искусстве дивном.
 Нет! Никогда я зависти не знал,
 О никогда! – ниже, когда Пиччини
 Пленить умел слух диких парижан,
 Ниже, когда услышал в первый раз
 Я Ифигении начальны звуки
 [...]

Нет! не могу противиться я доле
 Судьбе моей: я избран, чтоб его
 остановить – не то, мы все погибли,
 Мы все жрецы, служители музыки.³¹

The juxtaposition of Ivanov's and Puškin's texts, opposite in terms of their content and message, demonstrates, however, a striking similarity of meter, rhythm, style, and even vocabulary – a fact which is hardly coincidental. The formal reflection of Puškin's dramatic monologue in Ivanov's poem is clear. But what is also clear, or at least, highly suggestive, is Ivanov's reading of Salieri's perception of art's nature. In his *Mozart and Salieri* Puškin was the first in Russian literature to formulate the problem of what is art. In his essay 'Skrjabin's View on Art' (as well as in the rest of the triptych) Ivanov inquires into the same problem.

The scholarly tradition in analyzing Puškin's tragedy had placed primarily one problem in the center of philosophical discussion: the problem of

“genius and villainy” (“genij i zlodejstvo”). Therefore Salieri’s aesthetic perception has been taken mainly as an explanatory reason for his ethical stand. Meanwhile, separately from other issues, Salieri’s “theory of art” has its own distinctive ontological significance and is based on ideas quite familiar to the chief theoretician of Russian “mystic” Symbolism. Needless to say, the affinity under consideration does not imply either moral or psychological parallelism between a fictional character – Salieri, and a real life person – Ivanov. The aim of my inquiry is to show that Vjačeslav Ivanov could easily perceive an ontological closeness between his own aesthetic theory and Puškin’s meditation on the nature of art as presented in the tragedy, regardless through whose mouth.

In Salieri’s attitude toward music one can clearly discern a mystical and religious element. At the very beginning of his first monologue he portrays his first experience of music almost as an act of initiation: “Zvučal organ v starinnoj cerkvi našej, / Ja slušal i zaslušivalsja – slezy / Nevol’nye i sladkie tekli.” It is not for nothing that Ivanov, speaking about Skrjabin’s vision of art borrows Salieri’s words: “net bol’še ni znakomoj grusti, ni izvedannoj prežde radosti, no celye miry unylosti i vesel’ja, i, kupajas’ v nich, duša ne sprašivaet sebja, čem ona tak sčastliva, ni o čem pečalitsja, kogda tekut *nevol’nye i sladkie slezy*...”³² Salieri conceives of himself and of his fellow musicians as high priests of music and as its servants. This attitude is manifested in particular in his apprehension of Mozart as a musical phenomenon. “Ty, Mocart, bog, i sam togo ne znaeš’; / Ja znaju, ja,” Salieri proclaims in “fear and trembling”. In other words, he views Mozart’s genius as qualitatively different from the talents of all other musicians. Furthermore, in his opinion, Mozart’s music threatens the very existence of art, that is to say, the normative art that Salieri has learned and mastered. The perfection of Mozart’s music presents an ideal that cannot be attained either by Salieri or by any other artist, since none of them has the creative power of God. In the language of the Symbolists, Salieri apprehends Mozart as the “theurgic artist”. But this perception of the artist does not provoke in Salieri’s mind – as would happen in the Symbolist mind – any thought about the transformation of art itself, or of the communal character of such transformation. Salieri’s intuition of the mystical, religious nature of art engenders fear rather than inspiration.

The translation of Puškin’s text into the language of Symbolist language extends even further the parallel between Puškin/Salieri and Ivanov/Skrjabin mythologies of art. In both cases the “theurgic artist” has to be sacrificed in the name of art. Salieri realizes this to the point of bringing death to his friend Mozart. Ivanov realizes this to the point of accepting the death of his friend Skrjabin. As one scholar suggests: “Seen from the point of view of Ivanov’s conception of Dionysos, to be anointed for a heroic task means to be designated as a sacrifice and destined for a tragic death. Ivanov

understands Skrjabin's untimely death from blood poisoning in just this way: Skrjabin's death was not absurd, but symbolic and intrinsically necessary. In Ivanov's metaphorical expression, Skrjabin, by dying, becomes 'a new fixed star in the heaven of our achieved glories [v nebe našich sveršivšichsja slav zasvetilas' novaja nepodvižnaja zvezda]'.³³

And finally, there is one more argument in favor of seeing in Ivanov's article on Skrjabin a poetic reference to Puškin's play about Mozart and Salieri. In his tragedy Puškin outlined two conflicting worldviews. By holding Salieri responsible for villainy ("zlodejstvo") traditional interpretations question his genius ("genij") and implicitly his "theory of art". Salieri's "algebra" is opposed to Mozart's "harmony". In Ivanov's eyes as well as in the eyes of many scholars Skrjabin was a composer who was in unique possession of both: a most refined and expressive musicality and an ability for rational, calculated design in his works. In other words, this was a composer who "was capable to check harmony with algebra, remaining at the same time antithetical to Salieri" ("kompozitor, sumevšij 'poverit' algebroj garmoniju', ostavajas' pri ètom tvorčeskim antipodom Sal'eri").³⁴ It seems to me that the affinity of Ivanov's poem with Salieri's monologue celebrates the synthesis of two methods in art which Ivanov found in Skrjabin. Moreover, what we see here is Ivanov's indirect dialogue with Puškin on the philosophy of art. This indeed was a recurrent subject of meditation, discussion and inspiration in the case of all these great artists: Puškin, Dostoevskij, Solov'ev, Skrjabin and Ivanov.

NOTES

I would like to thank Robert Bird for a number of source references.

- ¹ M. Presman, *Reminiscences in A. N. Skrjabin*, Moskva 1940, p. 34.
- ² Soviet cultural propaganda persistently tried to dismiss the composer's philosophy as irrelevant to his art or to reinterpret it in accordance with the ruling ideology. First, thanks to Lunačarskij and Plechanov, the revolutionary spirit of Skrjabin's music quickly acquired a "red" tint and in the sixties Skrjabin's cosmic vision of art made his works usable as an accompaniment to the Soviet space program.
- ³ Leonid Sabaneev, *Vospominanija o Skrjabine*. Moskva 1925, p. 134.
- ⁴ Viktor Del'son, *Skrjabin*, Moskva 1971, p. 337.
- ⁵ R. Plechanova, *Reminiscences in A. N. Skrjabin*, Moskva 1940, p. 75.

- 6 Aleksandr Skrjabin, *Pis'ma*, Moskva 1965, p. 8.
- 7 Sabaneev, *op. cit.*, p. 7.
- 8 *Ibid.*, p. 162.
- 9 Quoted in Malcolm Brown, 'Skriabin and Russian "Mystic" Symbolism', *19th Century Music*, III/I (July 1979), 42-51, p. 48.
- 10 Sabaneev, *op. cit.*, p. 169.
- 11 A. N. Skrjabin, Moskva 1940, p. 194.
- 12 Quoted in Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 49.
- 13 Skrjabin's death shocked his contemporaries by its suddenness and absurdity (he died of accidental blood poisoning).
- 14 This extensive literature has been documented by Myl'nikova, editor of Ivanov's important and hitherto unpublished texts on Skrjabin. See I.A. Myl'nikova, 'Stat'i Vjač. Ivanova o Skrjabine', *Pamjatniki kul'tury*, Moskva 1983, pp. 88-119.
- 15 The music critic Vjačeslav Karatygin, whose approach to Skrjabin was, incidentally, more "musical" than "philosophical", made a noteworthy comment on one of Ivanov's lectures: "How could we expect that a pronouncement about a musician made by a person who has little to do with music would be nearly the most significant and meaningful thing that has been said or written so far about the creator of the *Poem of Ecstasy* and *Prometheus*?" ("Kak mogli my oždat', čto slovo o muzykante, skazannoe čelovekom, malo imejuščim otnošenija k muzyke, okažetsja čut' li ne samym značitel'nym i polnovesnym iz vsego, čto do sich por pričodilos' slyšet' i čitat' o tvorce *Ėkstaza* i *Prometeja*?"); V. Karatygin, 'Lekcija-koncert pamjati A. N. Skrjabina', *Reč'*, 1915, No. 343, p. 4.
- 16 Quoted in Myl'nikova, *op. cit.*, p. 94. The proofs for Ivanov's collection have recently been published in a very limited edition: Vjačeslav Ivanov, *Skrjabin*, Moskva 1996.
- 17 Vladimir Solov'ev, *Stichotvorenija, estetika, literaturnaja kritika*, Moskva 1990, p. 168.
- 18 *Ibid.*, p. 97. This definition comes from Solov'ev's work 'Krasota v prirode'.
- 19 *Ibid.*, p. 169.
- 20 In *Pamjatniki kul'tury*, p. 103.
- 21 A. N. Skrjabin, Moskva 1973, p. 160.
- 22 In *Pamjatniki kul'tury*, p. 96.
- 23 *Ibid.*, p. 98.
- 24 *Ibid.*, p. 100.
- 25 *Ibid.*, p. 102.
- 26 This was promptly pointed out by Patricia Mueller in her article 'Ivanov on Skrjabin', *Cultura e Memoria*, Pavia 1988, p. 196.
- 27 As Versilov declares in *The Adolescent*: "In France I am a Frenchman, with a German I am a German, with the ancient Greeks I am a Greek, and by that very fact I am most typically a Russian."
- 28 Lev Karsavin, 'Dostoevskij i katoličestvo', *F. M. Dostoevskij, stat'i i materialy*, Vol. 1 (Ed. A. S. Dolinin), Petrograd 1922, p. 41.

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- ²⁹ A. N. Skrjabin, Moskva 1973, p. 158.
- ³⁰ In *Pamjatniki kul'tury*, p. 110.
- ³¹ Aleksandr Puškin, *Polnoe sobranie sočinenij*, Vol. 7, Moskva 1948, p. 124.
- ³² In *Pamjatniki kul'tury*, p. 114. Italics are mine.
- ³³ Patricia Mueller, 'Ivanov on Skrjabin', p. 199. One cannot help noticing that Skrjabin's death from blood poisoning echoes Mozart's death from poisoning, as presented in Puškin's tragedy.
- ³⁴ L. Danilevič, 'Ot Tret'ej simfonii k "Prometeju"', A. N. Skrjabin, Moskva 1940, p. 302.