

# RUSSIAN INDEPENDENCE: CONSIDERING STREAMS OF MODERNITY IN RUSSIAN MUSIC

**Book Review: *Analytical Approaches to 20th-Century Russian Music: Tonality, Modernism, Serialism***

**Edited by Inessa Bazayev and Christopher Segall**

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Russian music has emerged as a significant focus of study over the past several years. However, there remains a significant language barrier between English and Russian scholarship. *Analytical Approaches to 20<sup>th</sup>-Century Russian Music* addresses this gap by presenting thirteen chapters of in-depth analysis on music written by a variety of twentieth-century Russian composers. Bazayev and Segall recruit Russian music scholars to contribute to the book, and they divide the essays into three sections as indicated by the title: tonality, modernism, and serialism. I will provide brief summaries of each contribution and frame my summaries with the editors' remarks on each trend.

The editors advocate for scholars to use tonal theory as a lens to understand “new developments, extensions, and reconstructions” in tonality in Russian repertoire.<sup>1</sup> To encourage scholars to think more deeply about tonal centers, Ellen Bakulina analyzes how Rachmaninoff writes for two tonal centers in his songs “Water Lily,” op. 8, no. 1, and “The Migrant Wind,” op. 34, no. 4 to argue that he “challenges traditional norms of monotonicity.”<sup>2</sup> Scott Murphy examines Myaskovsky’s use of “antitonic” harmonies (harmonies that occur when the music vacillates between tonic and  $\text{bii}^4_2$  to prolong tonic) to modify OPTIC pitch space so that it includes inversion (I), retrograde (R), and key (K).<sup>3</sup> Rebecca Perry employs Prokofiev’s First Piano Concerto as a case study to understand his distortions of sonata form.<sup>4</sup> To illuminate the origins of parallel thirds in Shostakovich’s music and suggest how he discovered his D-S-C-H motto, Patrick McCreless examines the 1+2+1 instrumental texture in Shostakovich’s string quartets.<sup>5</sup> Finally, Knar Abrahamyan examines how Tigran Mansurian incorporates the augmented-

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<sup>1</sup> Inessa Bazayev and Christopher Segall, eds., *Analytical Approaches to 20<sup>th</sup>-Century Russian Music: Tonality, Modernism, Serialism* [hereafter *AATCRM*] (New York: Routledge, 2021), 3-4.

<sup>2</sup> Ellen Bakulina, “Tonal Pairing in Two of Rachmaninoff’s Songs,” in *AATCRM*, 28.

<sup>3</sup> Scott Murphy, “Abundant Novelty of Antitonic Harmony in the Music of Nicolai Myaskovsky,” in *AATCRM*, 32-35.

<sup>4</sup> Rebecca Perry, “House of Mirrors: Distorted Proportions in Prokofiev’s Piano Concerto No. 1,” in *AATCRM*, 54-70.

<sup>5</sup> Patrick McCreless, “A Curiosity in the Early String Quartets of Shostakovich and its Precedence in Previous Works,” in *AATCRM*, 71-90.

second *glas* formula from Armenian liturgical monody to bring religious connotations to his *Requiem* to decolonize Soviet rule.<sup>6</sup>

A second trend that Bazayev and Segall identify is Russian composers' anticipation and parallelization of Western atonal music trends.<sup>7</sup> To argue that non-chord tones create a deeper interplay between poetry and text that was not possible in Roslavets's early compositional styles, Inessa Bazayev examines the interaction between synthetic chords and non-synthetic chord tones in his *Three Poems of Zinaida Gippius*.<sup>8</sup> Daniil Zavlunov studies the significance of octatonic collections in Mosolov's Piano Sonata No. 1 to suggest that this scale is more vital to his generation than initially suspected.<sup>9</sup> Klára Mórica describes Arthur Lourié's thoughts on melody's spirituality, its "primacy" over rhythm and harmony, and its morality with respect to his *Concerto de camera*.<sup>10</sup> To demonstrate how Tcherepnin exploits the qualities of his nine-step scale, Joshua Bedford analyses the first movement of his First Symphony.<sup>11</sup> Maria Cizmic explores Galina Ustvolskaya's Composition No. 1, "Dona Nobis Pacem," through her own embodied experiences while listening to the piece and the experiences of the piece's performers. Cizmic discusses the "physicality" of Ustvolskaya's music and how it demonstrates the relationship between breathing and vibration.<sup>12</sup>

Finally, the third part explores how Russian composers experimented with Schoenbergian serialism and how, lacking instruction due to Soviet disapproval of this compositional method, they pioneered their own twelve-tone techniques. Zachery Cairns examines how multiple tone rows are at play in the first of Edison Denisov's *Five Etudes for Bassoon*.<sup>13</sup> Joseph Straus demonstrates that, in her *Reflections on a Theme of Bach*, Sophia Gubaidulina develops streams of melody, imitative counterpoint, and canon that originate in the piece's opening and progress toward a chorale based on a BACH cipher.<sup>14</sup> Christopher Segall details four techniques present throughout Alfred Schnittke's compositional output: monograms of dedicatees, twelve-tone rows, triads, and polystylism.<sup>15</sup> He identifies similarities between contrasting themes to elucidate otherwise obscure connections in Schnittke's Viola Concerto.

All told, *Analytical Approaches to 20<sup>th</sup>-Century Russian Music* offers a thorough introduction to the topic for scholars who are unfamiliar with twentieth-century Russian music and a broad sample of scholarship for those interested in Russian music. The connections it draws between trends in Russian and Western European music makes the former more accessible. Indeed, this book would be especially useful as required reading in graduate coursework, because it both summarizes and contributes to

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<sup>6</sup> Knar Abrahamyan, "Navigating Post-Soviet Armenia: On Decoloniality in Tigran Mansurian's *Requiem*," *AATCRM*, 91-109.

<sup>7</sup> Bazayev and Segall, *AATCRM*, 2.

<sup>8</sup> Inessa Bazayev, "Fifths' Paths through Nikolai Roslavets's *Three Poems of Zinaida Gippius*," in *AATCRM*, 113-31.

<sup>9</sup> Daniil Zavlunov, "Alexander Mosolov's Piano Sonata No. 1 and its Synthetic Modernism," in *AATCRM*, 132-54.

<sup>10</sup> Klára Mórica, "The Rebirth of Melody in Lourié's Post-Neoclassical *Concerto de Camera*," in *AATCRM*, 157.

<sup>11</sup> Joshua Bedford, "Alexander Tcherepnin's Nine-Step Scale and its Use in the First Movement of his First Symphony," in *AATCRM*, 173-88.

<sup>12</sup> Maria Cizmic, "Timbre and Vibration in Galina Ustvolskaya's Composition No. 1, 'Dona Nobis Pacem,'" in *AATCRM*, 191.

<sup>13</sup> Zachery Cairns, "Edison Denisov and Multiple-Row Serialism," in *AATCRM*, 205-28.

<sup>14</sup> Joseph N. Straus, "Historical and Stylistic Reconciliation of Sofia Gubaidulina's *Reflections on a Theme Bach*," *AATCRM*, 229-42.

<sup>15</sup> Christopher Segall, "Monogram, Theme, and Large-Scale Form in Alfred Schnittke's Viola Concerto," in *AATCRM*, 243-63.

previous scholarship. However, Bazayev has suggested the importance of examining Russian music through its Russian heritage.<sup>16</sup> Some essays in this collection have done this more than others (those by Abrahamyan, Móricz, and Cairnes come to mind), yet there is still significant room to explore Russianness in these works. To borrow from the title of Gordon McQuere's overview of Russian music theory, how does Russian theoretical thought fit into this music?<sup>17</sup> The next stage of Russian music study is to explore Russians' ideas of their music and consider the complements and contradictions that arise when combining theoretical traditions.

### About the Author

Anne Delfin is a PhD student in music theory at the University of Cincinnati. Her research interests include form, aesthetics, and intersections in the development of music, technology, and science. She holds degrees in music theory (MM, University of Cincinnati) and flute performance (BM, Lawrence University; MM, Indiana University). In her spare time, she can be found running, biking, or playing flute.

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<sup>16</sup> Thanks to Dr. Inessa Bazayev, the book's author, for permission to publish this extract from a personal email sent to Anne Delfin, on March 25, 2021.

<sup>17</sup> Gordon D. McQuere, ed., *Russian Theoretical Thought in Music* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2009).