

**“RELIGIOUS-PHILOSOPHICAL RENAISSANCE” AND MAIN  
TRENDS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF SACRED MUSIC CONCERTS IN  
KIEV CULTURE AT THE TURN OF XX CENTURY**

Kiev of late XIX – early XX was known to be one of the leading cultural centres of Eastern Europe. A rich cultural life of the city was unique and self-sufficient. Kiev has definitely fallen within a Russian culture sphere of significant influence, which was absolutely beneficial. Practice of sacred music choral concerts which golden age falls on 1900-1917 has become one of the most striking and underexplored examples hereof. Kiev sacred music concerts were held following the pattern of the similar Moscow and St. Petersburg concerts related to the activities of representatives of a New development in Russian sacred music, managed by S. Smolensky, the head of the Moscow Synodal School of Spiritual Singing and represented by such prominent composers as A. Grechaninov, A. Chesnokov, A. Kastalsky and S. Rachmaninov. However, despite the connection of Kiev sacred concerts with Moscow and St. Petersburg ones, they had their own unique artistic aspect. This was the reason for us to refer to the sacred music concerts within the framework of “religious-philosophical renaissance” in Kyiv culture at the turn of the XX century. To what extent did sacred concerts reflect the major trends in the development of sacred music at that time? How were Kiev concert programs drawn up? What genres were given special attention? What was the stylistic range of pieces of music played? What was the balance between the repertoire of old, famous and modern music?

What was the prerequisite for the spread and prosperity of sacred music concerts in Kiev in the early twentieth century? To answer this question, we should highlight the circumstances of the spiritual life of that time, which could contribute to the success of this initiative outside the context of all-Russia growing interest in and attention to the problems of religion, faith, spirituality and Orthodox culture.

Intellectual and spiritual life of Kiev at the turn of XX century was rich and diverse. In particular, M. Tkachuk who does not negate the role and significance of

Moscow and St. Petersburg being the most important centres of religious and cultural renaissance, notes that even a quick look at the spiritual processes which took place in Kiev at that time, and at the astonishing interweaving of varied roots and destinies forming the living tissue of the “Silver Age”, cannot but emphasize the role and importance of the Kiev “nest” of Renaissance culture, which certainly deserves to be on a par with Moscow and St. Petersburg centres of religious-philosophical renaissance [14, p. 68].

It is known that by the middle of the XIX century there has already been established its own Religious-Philosophical School at Kiev Theological Academy and University of St. Vladimir (so-called “Kiev Religious-Philosophical School” or “Kiev School of Philosophical Theism”), which is considered to be founded by Archbishop Innocent (Borisov). Its representatives (V. Karpov, A. Novitsky, J. Mihnevich, P. Avsenev, S. Gogotsky and P. Yurkevich being the most prominent among them) were united by deep interest in the works of prominent German philosophers, such as Schelling, Hegel, and of German mystics [11].

M. Tkachuk notes that the time was known for creating a basis for the emergence of philosophical community and legitimization of philosophical knowledge in a non-philosophical Russian society [14, p. 69]. These were theological academies and universities that cared about publication of philosophical monuments and translation of modern European literature, and initiated and developed philosophical periodicals and philosophical communities that contributed to the full assimilation of Kiev spiritual academic and university traditions and religious-philosophical renaissance in Russia in the early XX century [14, p. 69].

A fruitful and creative work of a large number of communities was observed in Kiev in the first decade of the XX century [14 p. 69]. This was associated with promulgation of Decree “On Temporary Rules, Communities and Unions” in March 4, 1906, regulating the process of their formation [15]. Following Moscow (1906) and St. Petersburg (1907) religious-philosophical community, in January 23, 1908 there was formed a Kiev religious-philosophical community (KRPC,

1908-1918) associated with many famous names, such as S. Bulgakov, N. Berdyaev, G. Chelpanov, V. Popov, V. Zavitnevich, P. Kudryavtsev, V. Ekzemplyarsky etc.

According to N. Filipenko, the question of religious renaissance was the focus of KRPC's attention. First reports and discussions of its participants were devoted to this topic [15]. Current state of the Orthodox Church, its relationship with the state, the need for church reform, the change of its relationship to culture, the role of religious revival of intellectuals and philosophical communities, the possibility of creating a "new religion" were the topics to discuss. Art being comprehended from a Christian perspective was as well an important topic of discussion of KRPC [15].

Thus, religious-philosophical thought in Kiev of the late XIX - early XX centuries played a vital role in the cultural and intellectual life of the city.

Religious-philosophical renaissance in Kiev had as well an artistic aspect. In general, the art of Kiev has been developed in the same direction as the art of the main cultural centres of Russia and Western Europe. Just as there, an increased interest in spiritual issues, especially in the field of monumental painting, was observed in Kiev art at the turn of the century. In this regard, A. Prahov shall be recognized as the prominent art historian and archaeologist.

From 1884 to 1896 A. Prahov was a manager of interior decoration of the new St.Vladimir Cathedral in Kiev, which was intended to be a monument dedicated to the 900th anniversary of the Baptism of Rus. The importance of the St.Vladimir Cathedral to Kiev can be compared with the importance of the St. Isaac Cathedral to St. Petersburg or the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour to Moscow. All these outstanding Russian Empire temple buildings of the XIX century have become a certain religious consciousness embodiment of that time.

The leading role in the interior decoration of the St.Vladimir Cathedral was known to belong to V. Vasnetsov. This work lasting for almost ten years has become a key period in the creative life of the artist. V. Vasnetsov tried to show his characters to be living participants of the history. The artist used chronicles and

hagiographies for this purpose. Preparing for work in the temple, upon advice of A. Prahov he looked through the monuments of early Christianity in Italy, studied the mosaics and frescoes of the St. Sophia Cathedral and frescoes of the St. Michael and St. Cyril Monasteries in Kiev. However, V. Vasnetsov managed to combine the traditional interpretation of images with his own vision of images. His saints are realistic as distinguished from schematic depictions hereof in the Byzantine churches. Perhaps this allowed V. Vasnetsov to pave the way to the hearts of ordinary people.

The paintings were a great success. Others saw V. Vasnetsov to be a brilliant precursor of a new direction in religious art [13].

The second largest amount of work after V. Vasnetsov's was performed by Michael Nesterov. Along with V. Vasnetsov the artist painted iconostases of aisles and created several other compositions. Living in Kiev, V. Vasnetsov and Nesterov liked to go to the St. Sophia Cathedral which attracted them by sounding of its famous choir directed by I. Kalishevsky, and especially enjoyed the singing of 12-year-old Grisha Chernichuk: "On holidays I continue to go to the St. Sophia Cathedral and rest after a working week listening to the incomparable choir of I. Kalishevsky (the most remarkable voice is the soprano of a boy of about ten years old, who has similar character to «Bartholomew» as according to V. Vasnetsov who has seen him)" [10].

In March 1893, Nesterov and V. Vasnetsov first attended a sacred music concert performed by the choir of I. Kalishevsky which played such concerts regularly. According to Nesterov, Grisha's talent helped him to understand the sacred music of older masters unknown to him before: "Last Sunday I and V. M. attended the concert of Kalishevsky which consisted of compositions of old masters of XVI, XVII and XVIII centuries, as well as compositions of Orlando Lasso, Antonio Leti, Pergolesi, Cherubini, Bortniansky, Turchaninov, Arkhangelsky and Chegopit (Kiev composer of this century). For those who have never studied it, this program is definitely difficult, but wonderful performance and especially Grisha has clarified many misunderstandings" [10, p. 89].

Enjoyment of a perfectly played sacred choral music became for Nesterov a constant pleasure to a certain extent: “Today I took part in all-night vigil; they sang “Repentance” amazingly. Again Grisha sang in the choir of Kalishevsky” [10, p.89]. However, he wrote later: “This week I and V. Vasnetsov attended the concert of Kalishevsky again. Despite an overall lovely expression I was somewhat disappointed; Grisha’s voice now changes from soprano to alto, and therefore, despite the beauty of the voice, he has lost the most important thing which is his insight and genius; it’s a pity, but they say it will return. Wouldn't that be nice? [10, p.89].

As it can be seen, church choir singing accompanied artists throughout the period of their work on the frescoes of St.Vladimir Cathedral, creating a special atmosphere of deep penetration into the spiritual world of the Christian faith. Subtle artistic perception of V. Vasnetsov allowed him to relate musical aspect of prayer chants to the artistic nature of his younger friend, the future singer of Russian monasticism. M. Nesterov himself perceived the spirit of these chants as a certain ideal to aspire to in order to achieve it in his art full of musical associations.

Indeed, since M. Nesterov began to work in Kiev one of the central places in his creative work in terms of ideal has been given to the image of a holy child, who sees the truth due to its pure soul, becoming a model for everybody. Thus, the holy child occupies a central place not only in the “Vision of the Youth Bartholomew” (1889-1890), but also in the painting “The Murdered Tsarevich Dmitry” (1899) which depicts a dormition of a smiling holly passion bearer, and in the painting “In Russia. The Soul of the People” (1916) depicting a little boy who heads a huge religious procession with icons, watching some vision in front visible to him only. The same image is embodied in the painting “Holy Russia” (1901-1905). But now it is a guide girl depicted in the conceptual centre of the painting with her face turned towards Christ as if being the one in the crowd to conceive His divine nature. However, at all these paintings M. Nesterov actually shows the same character type, first found in the painting “Vision of the Youth Bartholomew”. That skinny and pale inspired face with big and wide eyes and a keen glance

seemed to be watching another mystical reality is an image that once has been met by Nesterov and V. Vasnetsov in the person of one talented boy from Kiev choir. Although M. Nesterov has found the image of holy child two years before his acquaintance with Grisha Chernichuk in the St. Sophia Cathedral, after this acquaintance this image has been enriched with new additional nuances of meaning and received a special vital specificity.

Thus, we see that conditions for subtle artistic perception of sacred music existed in Kiev at the turn of the XX century. Revival of theological and religious-philosophical thought, growing interest in issues of religion and spirituality in all sectors of population, emergence of religious-philosophical society and religious periodicals, as well as holding lectures and seminars on the one hand, and growing interest in a historical past, ancient culture, art and folk belief on the other hand, have contributed to the attempt of directing the creative efforts towards the spiritual sphere. This was intended to be the basis for successful promotion of such specific events as sacred music concerts.

Connection of holding church concerts in Kyiv with a flourish of liturgical signing in Russia in general expectedly raises a question how Kyiv church concerts reflected the main tendencies of development of the church music at that time.

According to Kyiv press materials dated 1900–1917, and as already stated before, Kyiv church concerts present a phenomenon that had its own artistic dimension, distinction and similarity at the same time.

Kyiv church concerts undoubtedly had a certain specific character in relation to Petersburg or Moscow concerts.

To begin with, if the church concerts in Russia focused on the problem of revival and assimilation of early Russian signing by composers, the Ukrainian church concerts did not feature an opposition of “old” and “Italian”, due to the fact that in view of historical facts the Ukrainian music culture adopted the West-European (principally Polish and Italian) music stylistics much earlier and deeper. Moreover, things that in Moscow and St. Petersburg were perceived as “Italian” (such as music of Bortniansky, Vedel in its best manifestations), in Ukraine were,

on the contrary, considered as national and native, maybe due to the Ukrainian origin of the authors. Thus, the legendary Ukrainian choral conductor A. Koshetz recalls in his memoirs “With a Song Around the World”: “in three years I sang ... all Vedel’s music, except his two-choir concerts, and all music of Bortniansky” [8, p. 110].

On the other hand, Ukraine lacked solid music education and deep assimilation of the West-European musical heritage more than Russia. Therefore, one of the crucial tasks set by the best educated Kyiv musicians was a broad familiarization of the Ukrainian audience with treasures of the West-European musical art. This situation had an effect on the principle of composition of programs of Kyiv church concerts. The main difference from programs of similar events in Moscow and Petersburg was an absence of polemical orientation inherent to the latter already starting from 80-ies (since the times of activity of the “Society of Church Music Lovers”). At the same time, Kyiv programs also featured different directions of church music, however not with the purpose of their contraposition in favor of a certain direction, but with a purpose of underlining the richness and variety of stylistics of church music pieces. Thus, a church concert of the choir of Kyiv Opera House that took place on March 18, 1913, included A.Vedel’s concert “On Babylon Rivers”, D. Bortniansky’s concert “Eternal God”, G.Verdi’s “Requiem”, a couple of Beethoven’s church choral compositions, a couple of music pieces of “new school” of composers, such as A. Kastalsky, A. Kompaneyskiy, one composition of a “Petersburger” A.Arhangelsky.[5]

It is worth noting that such approach of Kyiv choral conductors to stylistic directions of old church music turned out to be more farsighted than the approach of choral conductors from the capital, since music pieces of the best representatives of “Italian” direction of religious singing were not only not forgotten (namely such destiny was predicted for them by representatives of the “new school”), but are now reviving after a certain oblivion, assuredly entering the repertoire of both secular and (at least partially) clerical choirs.

At the same time, absence of a certain orientation in the field of church singing in the programs of Kyiv church concerts put forward other criteria of choosing musical compositions for a concert; these criteria often included simple sonority, musical eurhythmy, “smoothness”, leading to inclusion of compositions of fameless authors that did not leave any significant imprint on the church singing art.

Another peculiarity of programs of Kyiv church concerts was a special sympathy to expanded, many-part religious music pieces of West-European composers, such as, for example, Haydn’s oratorio “The Creation”, Verdi’s “Requiem”, Rossini’s “Stabat mater”. Performance of these pieces was important, first of all, for choir collectives themselves, since, on the one part, it posed serious interpretation tasks, requiring good technique of vocal singing and deep sense of style, and on the other part was perceived as a sign of a high performance level of the given choir.

Thus, on November 4, 1911, L. Beethoven’s oratorio “Christ on the Mount of Olives” was performed in Kyiv, on March 21, 1912 – Rossini’s “Stabat mater”, on November 6, 1913 – Haydn’s oratorio “The Creation”, Huno’s “Ave Maria”... This is a clear example that church concerts in Kyiv presented extremely important events in the religious and cultural life of the city. Many-part compositions of domestic composers – Bortniansky, Vedel, Berezovsky – were often played during church concerts.

It is very important that even organ music was played at these concerts. Likely it can be explained by the presence of not only orthodox churches, but also catholic cathedrals in the city, where the church service is accompanied by singing to accompaniment. In particular, “The Kiever” newspaper as of March 15, 1915 wrote about the church concert with participation of the organist Y.Yasionovski, choir of St. Alexander Cathedral, cantors and a string quartet.

A prominent place in programs of Kyiv church concerts was held by compositions of a “new school” of composers – in fact, their music pieces were played at every concert. Thus, “The Kiever” newspaper as of December 18, 1909

announced a concert of M. Nadezhdinsky's choir, composed exclusively of A. Kastalsky's music pieces – a concert that had an obvious educational character. A church concert on January 11, 1915 included N. Kompaneyskiy's compositions “Troparion of the Holy Cross”, “Higher Than the Heavens”, A. Arhangelsky's composition “Praise the Name of the Lord”, Gretschaninow's composition “Gladsome Light”. Also, on March 13, 1915 the best and newest music pieces of P. Tchaikovsky, N. Rimsky-Korsakov, F. Petrushevsky were played in Kyiv. Such composers as A. Kastalsky, A. Arhangelsky, N. Kompaneyskiy, S. Davydov, L. Beethoven, S. Rachmaninoff, P. Tchaikovsky, N. Rimsky-Korsakov, A. Vedel, D. Bortniansky, P. Chesnokov, P. Turchaninov gained a widespread appreciation in Kyiv.

At the same time, it is notable that modern church music by Ukrainian composers was actually absent from Kiev concerts. In part, it might be connected with the fact that most of the prominent works in this field appeared in the 1920s (liturgies by N. Leontovich, A. Koshetz, and the requiem by K. Stetsenko). However, by 1917 K. Stetsenko as a greatest Ukrainian church music composer of those days was the author of the two of his three liturgies (the liturgies of 1907 and 1910, with the latter considered his best one), and fifty Christmas carols and New Year's Eve songs (which were very rare at church music concerts – probably because inclusion of such works in church performances was considered improper), and a great number of separate hymns within liturgies and vespers and matins. In addition, K. Stetsenko was well-known in Kiev musical circles. Certainly, such lack of attention to national church music can hardly be justified.

One of the most well-known conductors and organizers of church music concerts in Kiev within the period under consideration was Yakov Stepanovich Kalishevskiy. For 37 years (from 1883 to 1920) this conductor was the choragus of St. Sophia's cathedral and the principal conductor of Kiev University choir. The choirs which he directed set a high standard of choir sound in Kiev at the turn of the century.

A special place in the creative biography of Y. Kalishevskiy was his meeting with P.I. Tchaikovsky. In his letter to P. Pogozhev, Tchaikovsky mentioned Kalishevskiy's choir which took part in performance of his work "Queen of Spades" by Kiev Opera: "For cantata, requiem and the boy's choir, Prianishnikov invited the choir of Mr. Kalishevskiy, well-known in Kiev, and this choir turned out to be just wonderful. Either due to their natural qualities or because of Y. Kalishevskiy's training, voices of the boys achieved such excellence of sound that I could never dream of. Especially in the requiem – the sound of those voices actually drew tears from my eyes [12]. Besides, as reported by the Kievlianin newspaper, "On December 19, Tchaikovsky attended the church music concert given by Ya. Kalishevskiy's choir which took place at the conductor's place. P. Tchaikovsky gave a most flattering review to this choir which he recognized as the best of all choirs, in Russia or abroad, that he had ever encountered. The famous composer praised especially the richness of the children's voices and the excellent voice-training" [6].

The framework of this article cannot include any detailed account of other prominent performers who took part in Kiev church music concerts; among them there were such outstanding musicians as A. Koshetz, I. Palitsin, Y. Yatsinevich and M. Nadezhdniskiy. However, these names by themselves are the proof of the high quality of Kiev choir performance in the silver age.

Thus church music concerts have become a prominent development in the music-related life of Kiev at the turn of the century, closely connected with the general mood of spiritual rebirth. To conclude with, we would like to point out once more that artistic culture of Kiev – in particular, its musical culture of those days still remains little explored and requires further research.

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