Rachmaninov's *Aleko*:

Theoretical Reflections on the Russian-Gypsy Soul[1]

by David Malvinni and Ildar Khannanov

It is dusk and the young Gypsy clings to his Zemfira. Both Gypsies hope to remain until daylight, despite the dire tragedy they know this might bring. If Zemifa's non-Gypsy husband discovers the betrayal, he would kill them. Aleko finds them and immediately stabs both the Gypsy lover and Zemfira. During the double murder, Aleko seems both comatose (cataleptic) and yet paradoxically blinded by passion. Before the tragedy, Aleko had tried to accept the ways and laws of Gypsy culture. Yet the inherent passivity (more on this below) of Aleko's psychological constitution conflicts with his attempt to transform himself into a sensual, erotic, and freedom-loving Gypsy persona.

Gypsy scenes of intense passion like this one form a substantial element and source for Russian literature and music. Even today in the former Soviet Union, Rachmaninov's one-act *Aleko* remains one of the most common and popular operas in the repertory. Audiences of all ages seem to relate to the dramaturgy bridging Russian and Gypsy cultural stereotypes, and musically, to the melodic pathos and fluency of Rachmaninov's harmonic language.

It is perhaps this popularity that has led to the neglect of the opera by Russian musicologists, more inclined to investigate more "serious" topics. Yet another reason might have to do with prejudice against the opera's Gypsy or Roma connection, a group that continues to suffer considerable marginalization and persecution.[2] This article will try to interpret to the significance of the opera in two ways: through a hermeneutic explication of "Gypsy" as a unique unfolding of the exotic, and through a close analysis of Aleko's Cavatina, the stunning set piece and musical climax of the opera. For, beyond being a mass-audience favorite, *Aleko* is based on the one of the canonical texts of Russian literature, Puskin's poem *Tsigane*, to which we turn first.

I. Reading Pushkin's Tsigane

Like much of Pushkin's verse, the first lines of his *Tsigane* have become common expressions for many Russians:

> The noisy crowd of Gypsies
> Wandering in Bessarabia
> Tonight tonight, above the river
> They spend the night in the torn tents
> Their night is joyful as freedom itself
> And peaceful is slumber under the sky (lines 1-6)[3]

"Bessarabia" is the old name for the region of Moldavia (today the sovereign state of Moldova), and for the Russian reader it immediately imparts an exotic flavor to the text. The word translated as freedom is "volnost." Pushkin wrote a separate poem titled *Volnost* which he dedicated to anti-government forces (the so-called Decembrist coup, a anti-czarist event that took place in 1825). "Volnost" is distinct from "svoboda." This latter term refers to the abstract or philosophical concept of freedom. Pushkin yearns for volnost through his imagining of the noisy Gypsy camp—for him, the essence of Gypsy camps is noise.

Commenting on Pushkin, Alaina Lemon signals “volja” at the end of the poem as the key concept. She understands volja as free will or freedom—as, for example, when the old man admonishes Aleko: “You want ‘volja’ [free will/ freedom] only for yourself.” Lemon continues: “volja is the ideal inherent to Gypsies that Aleko cannot grasp.”[4] She is partially correct, no doubt, but she overlooks the complicated Latin etymology of the root “vol” as it unfolds in the Russian language. “Volja” alludes to the general term for open space (perhaps wilderness), locating a place away from civilization. It is not free will. The latter is abstract and has a peculiarly Christian heritage, and again, is better translated by the Russian word “svoboda.”

The young Gypsy Zemfira brings a dissatisfied non-Gypsy, Aleko, to her camp. She tells her father that she found him in the desert:

> “My father, I am bringing a guest.
> Beyond the barrow in the desert I found him
> And I enticed him to the tabor for the night.
> He wants to be a Gypsy as we are,
> He is chased by the law.
> I will be his girlfriend.
> He is ready to follow my footsteps.” (Lines 42-50)

“Tabor” designates both the nomadic camp and the social organization of the Gypsies. “Zazvat” means not only to invite by calling, but also to conquer someone’s heart, as in a seduction. It is the word in the Russian translation of the *Odyssey* to describe how the sirens entice the sailors to come. Aleko is persecuted for some crime, which remains mysterious in this story; it leads him to try to escape from his life into the imagined freedom of Gypsy life. Zemfira initially represents this freedom for him, a way out of his life in civilization. "Podruga" means literally a casual girlfriend, not a lover or wife. From this aspect of Zemfira's phrasing, we already understand that she will not commit herself, fully, to Aleko.

Pushkin joyfully returns to the noise a little further on in the text. With the sunrise, the energetic joy of the tabor takes off:

> Husbands, brother, wives, girls
> Old and young they all go;
> Shouts, noise, Gypsy refrains,
> The dance-bear's growl and his chain's
> Impatient jangle,
> Bright and mixed colors of the rags of the clothes
> The nudity of children and elderly men
> Dogs barking and howling,
> The bagpipe's garble, coach axles screech
> Everything is squalid, wild, and disharmonious,
> But so vivid and unsettled,
> So foreign to our dead pleasures,
> So far from our useless lives,
> which pass as the monotonous song of slaves. (Lines 80-93)

Pushkin contrasts the free, noisy, boisterous life of Gypsies to the dead, static, and monotonous life of "us"—the poem's listeners, who are non-Gypsies. Pushkin himself is a non-Gypsy onlooker, longing for the noise of the Gypsy refrains ("Pripevu"). He employs a classically metered Russian, which has been compared by Russian literary critics to Byron's English or Ovid's Latin. Pushkin never loses his artistic refinement (as one finds for instance in Tolstoy or Dostoevsky's realistic imitations of peasant and lower-class speech). Yet Pushkin's lexicon is wider than any previous Russian poet, which makes it possible to describe his subjects quite realistically.

Pushkin's portrayal of Aleko involves a crucial aspect of the stereotype of the Russian character, what can be called "heart laziness." This translates "serdechna len" (line 129). To understand this term, we refer to what the French literary critic Maurice Blanchot calls passivity:

> Passivity: we can evoke it only in a language that reverses itself. I have, at other times, referred to suffering: suffering such that could not suffer it [...] and then there the passivity which is beyond disquietude, but which nevertheless retains the passiveness of the incessant, feverish, even-uneven movement of error which has no purpose, no end, no starting principle.[5]

Aleko's passive laziness leads him to the Gypsy way of life, and makes him a toy of his passions. He suffers intensely without knowing from what he suffers. Furthermore, for Pushkin, this passive feature of the Russian character aligns the Russian to the Gypsy. As an aside, this perhaps could explain why especially the Russian upper-classes became taken by Gypsy culture during the nineteenth century.

Aleko lives the Gypsy life for two happy years with his beloved Zemfira. Then there is a tragic turn in the plot, as Zemfira becomes bored with him. She expresses her wish for a new lover through the song, "Old man, terrible man." She hates her terrible lover, she now denies his love for the love of another. Zemfira will die for the new love:

stab me, burn me, I defy your wrath. In fact, Zemfira has found a new lover, a young Gypsy. Thus Zemfira threatens Aleko in her song: "It is for thee" (beginning at line 285).

Zemfira has grown tired ("postula") of Aleko; my heart ("serdtse") longs for freedom (again, "vola," related to "volnost," lines 314-315). Aleko's jealousy comes out in the night, as he dreams. The dreams terrify Zemfira, who calls out to her father. Aleko does not trust Zemfira, he tells her father that she does not love her.

The Old Man's advice to Aleko is that a young woman's love is free and playful. It cannot be owned. He himself learned this learned lesson from Zemfira's mother, Mariula, who forsake and left her husband and baby daughter for the love of a Gypsy from another tribe (tabor). But Aleko cannot heed this advice, and his hot passions overtake him with a jealous rage as he stabs Zemfira's new lover and then Zemfira. The Old Man then tells Aleko to leave the tabor:

> Depart from us, proud man.
> We are wild, we don't have laws,
> We don't torture, we don't punish,
> We don't need blood and screams,
> We don't want to live with a murderer
> You are not born for the wild life,
> you want freedom only for yourself,
> We will be terrified by your voice,
> We are meek and kind souls,
> You are mean and bold,

Depart from us,

Forgive us, and let peace be with you. (lines 510-520)

In the eyes of the Gypsies, Aleko is proud in the narcissistic sense ("gordui"). The Gypsies, by contrast, are humble and good-natured. They have no formal law, yet they do not endorse assassination or murder. As a Russian, Aleko cannot comprehend this idea of an order outside of a written code of law. He is a murderer, yet the Gypsies have no punishment ("kazn," or execution), no torture ("terzanie") for dealing with this kind of transgression. Finally, Aleko's crime of passion asserts itself from within his personality, in which an inner meanness ("zlaw") resides.

Yet surprisingly in the poem's epilogue, we learn that Pushkin does not think that the Gypsy way of life leads to happiness. The poem ends:

Everywhere fatal passions
And there is no defense from the Fate.

These lines summarize Pushkin's worldview, one that is permeated by fatalism. There is no escape from our passions, whether we are Gypsy or Russian.

II. The development of Rachmaninov's musical language and the aesthetic of Gypsiness

Early on Rachmaninov became fascinated with Gypsies; his first attempt at opera, the fragment "Esmeralda," was based on Victor Hugo's *Notre Dame de Paris*. Commenting on Nemirowitsch-Dantschenko's libretto for *Aleko*, one of Rachmaninov's biographers, Maria Biesold, writes:

> The dramatic conception of *Aleko* is without doubt inspired by [Mascagni's] *Cavalleria rusticana* and Nemirowitsch-Dantschenko's Russian version of it. The Gypsy life in *Aleko* is comparable to the Sicilian village life.[6]

But comparing *Aleko* to Mascagni's opera de-emphasizes the force of Pushkin's poetry. The great Russian director who wrote the libretto for *Aleko*, Nemirowitsch-Dantschenko, cannot be counted as a representative of *verismo* (see **appendix 2** for a summary of his changes to the text, mostly in the form of lengthening of the lines). Along with the director Constantin Stanislavski, he believed in the recreation of a human life as the spirit of acting:

> our art demands that an actor's whole nature be *actively* involved, that he give himself up, both mind and body, to his part. He must feel the challenge to action physically as well as intellectually, because the imagination, which has no substance or body, can reflexively affect our physical nature and make it act [our emphasis].[7]

This, rather, was the direction of art, really the aesthetic atmosphere of the theater, in which Rachmaninov developed as an artist.

It appears that as Rachmaninov was finishing his degree at the Moscow Conservatory, he and to two other candidates were handed the libretto as his final examination project.[8] Rachmaninov says in the *Recollections told to Oskar von Riesemann* about how easily and quickly he composed *Aleko*:

> On the following morning I began my work, which I found very easy. I took the libretto as it stood, and the idea that it might be improved never even entered my head. I composed, as it were, under high pressure. Slonov [his friend who lived

> with him and his father] and I sat at my writing desk facing one another. I wrote without once looking up, and only passed the completed sheets across the table, when the kindly Slonov kindly proceeded to make fair copies of them in his neat hand.[9]

Though composers are notorious for fabricating accounts of the compositional process, it does not seem to be the case here, given the pressure he was under; from this description it appears that the youthful Rachmaninov wrote his opera in a kind of "white heat" of inspiration.

We will propose two ideas as a prolegomena to our analysis of the harmony and form as present in his opera: 1) Rachmaninov must have had some prior experience and real knowledge of "Gypsy music"; 2) on the other hand, the work itself is not inspired by "real" Gypsy music, but rather by the composer's own tonal imagination in its relationship to the so-called "oriental" music of Russian composers. In other words, Rachmaninov's musical language does not borrow *directly* from actual Gypsy music that surrounded him. His use of mode, like the tetrachord D, E-flat, F-sharp, G (known in the Middle East as the *hijaz* tetrachord, but referred to by theorists in Eastern Europe and in Russia as part of the "Gypsy scale," [*tsiganskaya gamma*, in Russian]), relates (at least for a Russian composer at this time) to the general idea of exotic, Eastern, or "oriental music," and overlaps with a notion of "Gypsy." Indeed, Vladimir Stasov, the famous Russian critic responsible for naming the composers in Balakirev's circle the "mighty handful" (*moguchaya kuchka*), had already recognized a strain of "orientalism" as a distinguishing feature of the Russian national school.[10] We can cite Balakirev's own piano fantasy *Islamey (orientale fantasie)* and Rimsky Korsakov's *Scherherazade* (which we will touch on below) as two among many examples of this exotic strain.

Yet Rachmaninov's own Romantic, emotive, expressive musical language, often thought as the essence of "Russianness" in music, borrows heavily from the communicative/ intervallic structure (modal path)/ musical rhetoric of Gypsy music. Rachmaninov's music does not rely on Gypsy tunes, rhythms, or harmonies per se, yet without Gypsy music as a sonic ideal, Rachmaninov's music would be different as we know it. Thus, in a sense, Rachmaninov displays through his harmony an insider's knowledge of the emotional effects of Gypsy performance, while his tonal language extends what was previously understood as an "oriental" style.

Because of this appropriation, we use the term "Gypsiness" to try to describe the aesthetic of this harmonic language.[11] Inherent in this ideal is the non-directionality of nomadic culture, the perpetual spacing and movement of the tabor. Generally, it these ideas that separate Gypsiness from the sedentary cultures of the Far East.

III. Russian music, Orientalism, and Gypsiness

Geoffrey Norris mentions the music of Rimsky-Korsakov, Borodin, and Tchaikovsky as immediate musical influences on the youthful Rachmaninov.[12] Although many connections to these and other composers such as Glinka, Anton Rubinstein, Arensky and Balakirev can be made, we will here provide only a couple of indications of the musical exoticism of the learned Russian musical environment of Rachmaninov's youth.

Rimsky-Korsakov's *Scheherazade* is a piece employing recognized exotic elements based on the Arabic *Thousand and One Nights*. Here, the idea of the “Orient” is transformed into the musical language of a Russian composer. The famous passage (**example 1**) introducing the violin soloist near the opening of this work captures the spirit of "Arabicness" as imagined by a Russian. The composer evokes the essence of Arabic *taqasim*, the soloistic, improvised form of this music. He does this rhythmically, through the oscillating triplet figure. The harmony is where he really departs from European, classical structure, but at the same time, it is also where he departs from Arabic taqasim, which would only admit of a drone, here, over an A (the "*maqam*" or mode of this passage would be A, B, C, D, E, F-sharp, g, which does not exist in Arabic music). Harmonically, what Rimsky-Korsakov does is expand the subdominant, A minor, resolving into E major with no reference to the dominant. (This is perhaps why the “exotic” or “oriental” can be thought as impossibly heterogeneous yet necessarily part of at least two traditions).

Yet there remains a crucial difference: that the exotic substance of *Scheherazade* lies *outside* of Russia, unlike Rachmaninov’s Gypsies, who constitute an exotic substance *within* Russia.

As a second reference, we would like to look at the *Polvetsian Dance* by Borodin (**example 2**), from *Prince Igor*. The melody is probably taken from a Tartarian folk song. It is impossible to use a Western harmonic tonality to set this tune. Although the chordal arsenal used by Borodin is familiar--triads, seventh-chords and their inversions in a context of a drone on A--the chordal movement is nothing short of astonishing, and probably unprecedented. The melody can be thought in B minor, yet against the A drone it assumes a transcendent meaning, beyond any original context of folk music. The final chord is an F-sharp minor 6/3 chord (with the A in the bass). It is well beyond the immediate topic of this paper, but we should say that what we are dealing with is a so-called "intermittent folk mode." This refers to a mode with two or more centers. With B, the other center would traditionally be F-sharp; however, with the addition of the A, what Borodin has done is added another center to this mode, in effect making it triple-centered.

What unites Borodin with the aesthetic of Gypsiness is the notion of additive tonal centers. The universe of alternative tonality is open to transformations of the harmonic substance. What justifies the use of an alternative tonality is, simply put, a non-consciousness of what the content of the mode is supposed to be. It is volnost, the abandonment of rules: as long as it feels and sounds right, no objection can be made.

IV. Aleko's cavatina

Our analysis focuses on the center of the opera, with the most conspicuous number, the "Cavatina" (no. 10 in the piano/vocal score). "Cavatina" comes from the Latin "*cavare*," which means to hollow out, to engrave; a short song in simple style without repetitions. In *Aleko*, the "Cavatina" follows this path. It is introduced by a short introduction in recitative style; the body proper begins at the *Meno mosso* (m. 37).

In nineteenth-century Russian music it was Glinka who established the genre of cavatina. For example, the cavatina of Antonida from Glinka's *Life for the Tsar* became a kind of standard for this genre, and it served as a model for many Russian composers to come including Borodin, Rimsky-Korsakov, Chaikovsky. Although the cavatina of Aleko has a ternary outline (the B section at m. 55, the recapitulation at m. 65), the music presents a powerful and uninterrupted flow, as if it were written in one breath, as one big wave. Indeed, as our analyses will show, the dynamic character of harmonic flow distinguishes this piece from most of the earlier cavatinas, and will characterize Rachmaninov's fundamental achievement in building what we call continuous lines of development. One way this can be described is as the line which exceeds the normal length of breath (the standard criterion for the length of musical phrases) and which in turn renders the listener breathless.

A. Melodic Ambiguity

First, to the melody. Melodic considerations pervade and perhaps overdetermine Gypsy music. Rameau's notion that melody comes from harmony is completely out-of-line when speaking of this topos. Yet the opposite is not entirely true either, namely, that the harmony comes from melody. Their relationship is difficult to conceptualize, but it seems clear that there is an additive approach to the appropriation of Western harmony in Gypsy music. Or, bricolage, as Levi-Strauss might say.

In terms of collecting folk music, Bartók wrote:

> It also became gradually evident that the slight alterations occuring verse by verse —especially in the ornamental notes of the melody—are not the result of unsureness on the part of the singer, or that he is "poorly acquainted with the melody, but that this variability is one of the most characteristic, integral peculiarities of folk melodies; indeed, a folk melody is like a living creature: it changes minute by minute, moment by moment.[13]

Though an ethnomusicologist operating under the assumptions of poststructuralism might want to question Bartók's method of collecting folk melodies, still, what Bartók has to say about the variability of melody, its breathing of life, applies unequivocably to Gypsy music, and we will add, to Rachmaninov's melodic line.

In a sense, the impossibility of grasping melody is similar to the difficult of understanding art: both revert to a materiality that conceals, escapes, and folds in upon itself when we try to get inside of it.[14] This has proved to be somewhat embarrassing in the analysis of melody, and perhaps explains why much analysis ends up trying to avoid melody (we could add rhythm, or timbre) and priviledges more rigid, graspable topics, such as form, counterpoint, or harmony. When a melody is investigated, it is broken down into motive. This exploding of the melodic substance has the positive effect of rendering a hierarchical structure, yet not without bending, twisting, and torturing the melody itself.

Rachmaninov's cavatina provides no melodic basis for defining the form. **Example 3** from the end of the A section of Aleko's cavatina shows this unpredictability of the melody. Aleko's vocal part is loose, not aligned with the accompaniment definitely, which gives the volnost: the tabor is asleep, his heart trembles, and he is tortured by sadness. As audience we empathize with his character.

B. Subdominant Subterfuge?

In a recent monograph on Rachmaninov, David Cannata discusses the equivocality of the harmonic complexes of the composer's early music. He speaks of "double-tonic," and "tonic-subdominant strategies," concepts which we think are valid, but which are in need of more refinement in terms of close analysis of tonal function; we will call attention to the overwhelming presence of the subdominant, to the point where it seems to override the tonic-dominant relationship.[15] We think that this lends support to our thesis about the Gypsy element in Rachmaninov's musical language.

In **figure 1** we provide a graphing of the harmonic structure. A quick glance at the figure shows that there is a heavy concentration of subdominant harmony. However, because the subdominant is reached by unorthodox means, we use arrows to show large-scale functional anomalies. According to both functional and Schenkerian logic, the subdominant cannot serve as a goal for a harmonic progression. In this case, we will use the term "functional streak" to describe the line of escape from the rules of inferential tonal hierarchy. The arrows in the figure show the connections, sometimes violent, between statements of the subdominant.

The progression of **figure 1** begins in m. 38 with a very short statement in C minor. Already in the next measure a strange chord, I4/2, appears (see below). What is important about this chord is that it is the first move away from tonic, going toward the mediant. Indeed, the mediant also plays a significant role in Aleko's cavatina and in fact, occupies a greater portion of this piece than C minor. After a short re-visiting of C minor in m. 42, the key does not return until its recapitulation (m. 65).

The next harmonic event is the oscillation between A flat/ D (mm. 42-43). This could be interpreted in two ways: 1) something within C minor; or 2) an event in its own right. If it is this latter, which we suspect that it is, then we can recall the work of Erno Lendvai and Boleslav Javorsky (et al.) who have suggested different ways to interpret such tritonic pairing of harmonies. Traditionally, this oscillation of A-flat and D is a form of pre-dominant preparation; however, as suggested by the work of these twentieth-century theorists, it can also be an independent element.

Our reason for suggesting that the oscillation is *not* a pre-dominant structure is the following: instead of going to C minor, the following progression brings us to F minor, which is where the first statement ends (m. 46). By such means Rachmaninov gives his listener a taste of what will unfold as a virtuosic display of the subdominant. We can call this harmonic "subterfuge." For example, in m. 47 he starts to go to C minor, but after reaching the dominant, he abruptly shifts to subdominant (m. 50). Here, though, the F becomes a pivot in the modulation to the mediant.

In the B section of the cavatina Aleko remembers the brighter side of his affair with Zemfira. To express the inner ecstasy of the text, Rachmaninov executes what we have already signaled as a virtuosic treatment of the subdominant. In order to do this, he introduces what can only be described as seismic semi-tonal shifts, which, we will add contribute to our idea of volnost and Gypsiness. The most impressive is the apposition of F-sharp minor and F major (mm. 57-58). And the composer continues this cycling downward by fifths by turning F into the dominant of B-flat minor (beginning in m. 58). Paradoxically, even though a V4/2 chord of B-flat minor shows up (m. 62), the tonic triad of B-flat minor never appears.

The recapitulation ends on F minor (m. 76), prepared by a closing with two chords, flat II and VII (a diminished-seventh chord) in C minor (mm. 72-73). Then, all of a sudden, a cadential 6-4 chord in F minor appears (m. 74). Astonishingly, the vocal part ends in F minor (m. 78). What happens next is an orchestral postlude which plays the main theme in F minor; next, as if to fulfill the "academic" requirement of the opera, Rachmaninov abruptly returns to C major (m. 86 to the end).

But how do we interpret the prevalence of the subdominant? The subdominant can be expanded, according to Schenkerian theory, but that is not the case in our cavatina. Rather, the subdominant plays an essential role, in a way subverting the function of tonic-dominant. Thus, Rachmaninov's emphasis on the subdominant, within the context of an elliptical harmonic language, is more than a simple programmatic reference to Gypsiness and Gypsy musical rhetoric: it is the essence of the harmonic language in-itself.

V. The Significance of Gypsiness for Russian Studies

The importance of Gypsies to the burgeoning nineteenth-century Russian artistic imagination has been well documented in literary examples, from Pushkin, Tolstoi, and Dostoevsky. In musicology this topic has received little attention, despite some efforts to discuss Gypsy source material in Stravinsky's *Histoire du soldat*.[16] Our intent in this article has been to investigate a striking example of Gypsy music in Russian art music, the cavatina from Rachmaninov's *Aleko*. Though hardly known in the West, this work was frequently performed throughout the twentieth century in Russia, and is one of the key sources to understanding the significance of Gypsy music in Russian music.

Finally, we have tried to show how Gypsiness can be added to the list of "oriental" or exotic elements that can be found in nineteenth-century Russian music. This idea can probably be expanded to include the twentieth century, as certain composers (Shostakovich) were known to be well-acquainted with this music. Essential to Gypsiness as it is understood in Russia is the idea of "volnost," as we have seen in

Pushkin's *Tsigane*. Thus, as with other exoticicms, Gypsiness can be interpreted as a device that allowed Russian composers to explore their own intuitive grasp of harmonic events as they heard them, apart from what they took from the West. In Rachmaninov's music, these events are, summarizing once again: subdominant subterfuge, semi-tonal shifts, and breaks in tonal-functional inference. Finally, our findings in analyzing early Rachmaninov allow us to suggest that other heterogeneities to be found in this period of Russian music, as in Skryabin, should not be held to Western notions of harmony or form.

Endnotes

[1] We would like to thank Michael Beckerman, Pietor van den Toorn, and Carol Emerson for providing helpful and insightful comments on earlier drafts of this article. Any remaining mistakes are the sole responsibility of the authors.

[2] The politically correct term for “Gypsy” is “Roma,” the word for person in the Romani language. Our use of the “Gypsy” must be understood not as a sign of disrespect for the Roma rights movement, but rather as the employment of a historical and aesthetic category that we are trying to understand. In short, Western artists for at least the last two centuries have lumped together diverse groups of Roma into the construct of the “Gypsies.” Currently it is estimated that there are over twelve million Roma scattered throughout world but mostly in Europe and the states of the former Soviet Union.

[3] All translations are by Ildar Khannanov; please refer to **appendix 1** for the original Russian text.

[4] *Between Two Fires: Gypsy Performance and Romani Memory from Pushkin to Postsocialism* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2000), 35.

[5] *The Writing of the Disaster*, trans. Ann Smock (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 14-16.

[6] *Sergei Rachmaninoff 1873-1943: Zwischen Moskau und New York, Eine künstlerbiographie* (Berlin: Beltz/ Quadriga Verlag, 1991) 62.

[7] *An Actor Prepares*, trans. Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood (New York: Theatre Arts Books, 1948), 66.

[8] Geoffrey Norris, *Rachmaninoff* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1993), 12. Norris also mentions in this context that Rachmaninov related that another member of Arensky’s free composition class,

Skryabin, also asked to take this exam; as Arensky did not like Skyrabin, the latter was denied. Skryabin left the Conservatory and never returned.

[9] (Freeport, New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1934 [1970]), 79.

[10] In Stasov's perception, oriental (*orientalnui*) falls under the general category of the Eastern element (*vostochnu element*), defined also as anything non-Slavic and non-European. Gyspy music, thus, is grouped with the *vostuchnu element*. However, one distinction that separates Gypsy music from this broad *vostuchnu element*--which in fact encompasses even China and Japan--is that Gypsy music is encountered inside of Russia. This has a few significant consequences, some of which are: 1) Russian composers were raised in an environment which contained Gypsy music (in the villages, Gypsy bands playing Russian folk music; in the cities, the choirs, and instrumental soloists and groups found in the restaurants and theaters); 2) it was an easy step to appropriate Gypsy musical language into a Russian paradigm. In a sense this language was already present in Russian folk music, which for composers was the source (*istochnik*) of artistic inspiration; 3) unlike Chinese or Arabic orientalism, Gypsy music allowed a composer access to the sphere of *volnost*.

[11] See Michael Beckerman's recent formulation of Gypsiness in his "Pushing Gypsiness, Roma or otherwise," *The New York Times*, 1 April 2001: "Indeed, Gypsiness in music may be represented by a mock formula, I + V = E. In this equation, I stands for improvisation, which in this sense implies that the performer has the ability and the "right" to change a design in accordance with momentary impulses; the audience thus comes to assume that choices are being made on the basis of *pure* life moods. V stands for virtuosity, a sign of control, mastery and power. Together they create E, emotion, the implication being that this combination of momentariness and power are signs of deep passion."

[12] "Rakhmaninov's Student Opera," *The Musical Quarterly* 59 (1973): 441-48, 447; Norris also proposes Mascagni as a significant source for the opera, and notes that the opera was performed in Moscow in 1891 and that it would have been impossible that Rachmaninov did not hear it.

[13] *Béla Bartók Essays*, ed. Benjamin Suchoff (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1976), 10.

[14] We refer the reader to Martin Heidegger's text "The Origin of the Work of Art," in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1971), especially his discussion of "earth."

[15] *Rachmaninoff and the Symphony* (Innsbruck-Wien: Studien Verlag, 1999), p. 68.

[16] See the discussion of *verbunkos* as a possible source of this work, in Richard Taruskin, *Stravinsky and the Russian Traditions: A Biography of the Works Through Mavra,* vol. 2 (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996), 1300-06.