

Nineteenth-Century Cosmopolitan Musicians and the Russian Aristocracy

As a country that was often perceived as an exotic, cold extreme of Europe, Russia nonetheless attracted a permanent influx of Western European musical luminaries throughout the nineteenth century. As such Russia provides a fascinating focus to study the cosmopolitanism of travelling musicians. In this paper I would like to explore in particular the role of the Russian aristocracy and court in encouraging and enabling these travels in the middle decades of the nineteenth century. Fluent in French, active in various cultural centres in Europe, and providing the key to the profitable concert and opera life in St Petersburg and Moscow, Russian nobles could be – and frequently acted as – influential mediators in European musical life.

In this period, the musical world was steadily moving away from aristocratic patronage towards a more anonymous musical economy relying on the bourgeoisie, and Russia itself, too, witnessed important steps towards the institutionalization of musical life in the 1850s and 1860s. Nonetheless, the Russian aristocracy and court continued to fulfil a vital role in facilitating international mobility, by offering personal or institutional patronage, recommendations for travellers, performances at court, noble decorations or even marriage within the nobility. Drawing on a broad collection of personal documents of musicians who visited Russia in the course of their careers, I would like to explore the continuing appeal noble recognition held for musicians on the international stage, and explore to what extent, even in the heyday of romantic nationalism, this may have pulled musicians' allegiances towards the older concept of service, rather than nationality.

Biography

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