ABSTRACT

This dissertation investigates the rise of comic opera in St. Petersburg during the reign of Catherine II “the Great” from her coup d’état in 1762 until her death in 1796. Aiming to cultivate bourgeois culture in her capital and improve the morals and manners of her subjects, the empress founded the court’s first public theaters and provided unprecedented support for Italian and Russian comic opera. She recruited Europe’s most acclaimed composers of opera buffa, such as Giovanni Paisiello, Giuseppe Sarti, and Vicente Martín y Soler, and supported the early development of Russian comic operas that reflected both her tastes and social ideals. By the end of Catherine’s reign, comic operas patronized by the empress were no longer solely a pastime for elites in the Winter Palace; rather, they had become a popular entertainment, eagerly consumed by St. Petersburg’s emerging civil society.

This study also explores the changes in theatrical administration that enabled the remarkable success of comic opera. Chapter 1 addresses the institutional history of the court theater under Catherine II, examining how changes to the theater’s infrastructure affected the operas it produced and staged. Decrees, financial records, correspondence, and contracts show that the empress and her advisors created a strong theatrical administration that gave Russian officials the power to regulate the works they staged and systematically educate Russians and promote them to positions throughout the theater.

Chapter 2 addresses the influence of Enlightenment aesthetics and dramatic theories on Russian comic opera at the court theater. Under Ivan Yelagin, Catherine II’s trusted advisor and the first Director of Imperial Theaters, the court supported Russian playwrights who were
adapting foreign comedies to local customs based on the belief that comedy could have a positive influence on the audience’s manners and morals only if it mirrored local society. Following an analysis of the earliest comic opera libretti, this chapter contends that the very same ideas and aesthetic values influencing the development of Russian comedy inspired and extended to the spoken dialogue and songs of early Russian opera.

The final two chapters are case studies. Chapter 3 considers the politics of musical humor by examining the empress’s adulatory writings on opera buffa in the context of her legislative and social agenda. In her letters, Catherine II claims to have been enthralled by the music of her maestro di cappella Giovanni Paisiello’s opere buffe and declares that his musical humor made her an attentive listener. Catherine’s letters suggest that she valued opera buffa for its music and for the beneficial properties that its music could have on the listener. These effects were of utmost importance to the empress, who was attempting to change the audience’s behavior and cultivate attentive listening practices at her new public theaters.

The final chapter investigates how—with Catherine’s support—Russian comic opera became a commercially viable, popular entertainment that also enjoyed support from the court. It explores the role of star performers, in particular Anton Krutitsky, whose naturalistic approach to acting and singing accorded with the emerging aesthetic, one that placed more emphasis on the abilities of the star performers than the qualities of the works being staged. With the opening of the Grand Stone Theater in 1783, Catherine II seized the public theater and brought the newly popular Russian comic opera and its most valuable asset, Anton Krutitsky, under the control and direction of the court. Through the end of Catherine II’s rule, Krutitsky would perform in the operas selected and shaped by the court, ensuring the popular success of Russian comic opera
and the genre’s continued reliance on court patronage in St. Petersburg. By the 1790s, both opera buffa and Russian comic opera — the repertory and the performers — were serving commercial and imperial interests as part of a de facto court monopoly that became the particular artistic, political, and social foundation on which Russian patriotic-heroic opera would emerge in the following century.
# Table of Contents

*Abstract*  
i  
*Notes*  
v  
*Abbreviations*  
vi  
*Acknowledgements*  
vii  

## Introduction  
1

1. **Opera as Emblem of Empire:**  
   *Catherine II, Ivan Yelagin, and the Rise of Russian Court Opera*  
   Appendix A: Salaries at the Court Theater, 1766–1791  
   22  
   75

2. **Comedy, Adaptation, and Education in the Invention of Russian Comic Opera**  
   81

3. **Musical Humor in Opera Buffa and its Politics at the Russian Court Theater**  
   Appendix B: The Charter of the Grand Stone Theater  
   135  
   190

4. **Russian Opera as a Popular Entertainment:**  
   *Anton Krutitsky and the Free Russian Theater, 1779–1783*  
   Appendix C: Operas Performed at Independent Public Theaters in St. Petersburg, 1775–1783  
   193  
   256

**Conclusion: Opera after Catherine II**  
260

**Works Consulted**  
263
NOTES

Throughout this dissertation, all eighteenth-century dates are given in the Old Style.

The original spelling in eighteenth-century Russian and French documents has been preserved.

All translations are mine unless otherwise indicated.

Transliterations follow the system used in Grove Music Online.
ABBREVIATIONS

ADIT


MA


MPES


RGADA

Rossiyskiy Gosudarstvennîy Arkhiv Drevnih Aktov [Russian State Archive of Ancient Acts]

RGIA

Rossiyskiy Gosudarstvennîy Istoricheskiy Arkhiv [Russian State Historical Archive]

SIRIO

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INTRODUCTION

This dissertation investigates the rise of comic opera in St. Petersburg during the reign of Catherine II (or “the Great”) from her coup d’état in 1762 until her death in 1796. Comic opera, which had become increasingly popular in Europe in the second half of the eighteenth century, had captured the values, tastes, and attitudes of the middle classes in the age of Enlightenment. In Russia, comic opera became an agent of the state as Catherine II, Russia’s first ruler to espouse Enlightenment ideals, strove to cultivate bourgeois culture and civil society.

Driven largely by Catherine’s desire to refine the morals and manners of her subjects through comedy, the empress founded the court’s first public theaters and provided unprecedented support for Italian and Russian comic opera. Although opera seria was among the imported repertory, some of the greatest successes came with the

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1 Catherine II (1729–1796), born Sophie Auguste Friderike of Anhalt-Zerbst, was a German princess who had travelled to Russia in 1744, where she would marry her second cousin, Karl Peter Ulrich — the duke of Holstein and future Peter III. After his coronation in 1762, Peter III ruled for little more than six months.

recruitment of Europe’s most acclaimed composers of opera buffa such as Giovanni Paisiello, Giuseppe Sarti, and Vicente Martín y Soler. Establishing St. Petersburg as a leading center of opera buffa, they created works that would achieve international popularity, such as *Gli astrologi immaginari* (St. Petersburg, 1779) and *Il barbiere di Siviglia, ovvero la precauzione inutile* (St. Petersburg, 1782). This was also to have a profound impact on Russian operas. At the behest of court officials, playwrights and composers created the first Russian comic operas intended to reflect both the tastes and social ideals of the empress. By the end of Catherine II’s rule, both opera buffa and Russian comic opera would become popular entertainments and staples of theatrical life in the capital.

This study also explores the fundamental changes in theatrical administration that made possible the remarkable success of comic opera. Early in her rule, Catherine II created the new position of Director of Imperial Theaters and appointed a trusted Russian nobleman, Ivan Yelagin, to the position. Yelagin would realize the desires of the empress by controlling the artistic decisions as well as the day-to-day affairs and expenditures of the troupes. He created a strong theatrical administration that gave Russian officials the power to regulate not only the works they staged, but also the behavior of the performers and the audience, using the theaters to cultivate bourgeois tastes and manners from the top down. The new organization and administrative practices would continue beyond Catherine II’s rule, providing the foundation for Russian patriotic-heroic opera to emerge in the century to come.

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3 The premieres of these *opere buffe* and their reception abroad are discussed in Chapter 3.
Comedies and musical theater had been performed for an elite audience at the Russian court for roughly a century before Catherine II seized power. In the seventeenth century, Tsar Aleksei Mikhailovich, who ruled Russia from 1645 until his death in 1676, made an effort to introduce European courtly entertainments to Moscow by sponsoring the first expedition to recruit musicians and comedians from abroad. In 1672, he hired performers from Prussia, Saxony, and Courland, who staged comedies with music on sacred themes, such as *The Little Comedy of Bajazet and Tamerlane*, *Comedy of the Parable of the Prodigal Son*, and *The Little Pleasing Comedy of Joseph*.\(^4\) These comedies featured various forms of music: songs (including a drinking song), trumpet solos, celebratory choruses, and independent musical episodes interpolated between the acts.\(^5\) The Tsar’s court staged at least one secular work as well: during Carnival in 1673, the court’s troupe performed *Orpheus and Euridice* (Dresden, 1638), a dramatic ballet with songs and choruses composed by Heinrich Schütz.\(^6\)

Italian opera arrived decades later under Empress Anna Ioannovna (1730–1740), who continued and expanded the Westernizing policies of her uncle, Peter the Great.\(^7\) She hired an Italian opera troupe of comedians from Dresden that included actors, singers,

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5 Ibid., 252–253.

6 Ibid., 256.

7 James Cracraft, *The Petrine Revolution in Russian Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004); Lindsey Hughes, *Russia in the Age of Peter the Great*, revised ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000);
musicians, and a composer, Giovanni Alberto Ristori.\textsuperscript{8} In 1731, Ristori’s opera buffa *Calandro* (Dresden, 1726) became the first opera to be staged at the Russian court.\textsuperscript{9} In the following years, performances of Italian comedies and intermezzi became routine, attesting to the success of the genre.\textsuperscript{10}

After ordering the construction of a theater in her Winter Palace, Empress Anna also recruited a permanent Italian opera troupe in 1735, hiring additional singers and dancers as well as a choreographer, set designer, machinist, and maestro di cappella, Neapolitan composer Francesco Araja.\textsuperscript{11} With these additions, the Italian company began to stage serious Italian opera to celebrate court holidays for the following twenty years.\textsuperscript{12}

\textsuperscript{8} The troupe’s singers included two men named Dreyer, a castrato and his brother, and Madame Avoglio. Avoglio and her husband continued to perform at the Russian court until 1738. Lyudmila Starikova, “Noviye dokumenti o deyat’lnosti ital’’anskoy truppî v Rossii v 30-e godî XVIII v. i russkom lyubit’l’skom teatre etogo vremeni,” *Pamyatniki kul’turi: novïe otkrïtiya: ezhegodnik* (Moscow: Nauka, 1988), 71.

\textsuperscript{9} Giovanni Alberto Ristori (1692–1753), a native of Bologna, had composed *Calandro* in Dresden in 1726, and the opera is considered the first opera buffa to have been composed in Germany. His father, Tommaso, led the traveling Italian company, and they traveled together to the Russian capital in 1731. Sven Hansell and Wolfgang Hochstein, “Ristori, Giovanni Alberto,” *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*, Oxford University Press, accessed October 20, 2016.

\textsuperscript{10} By April 18, 1733, the court was patronizing an “Italian company” — which included singers — that performed opera, comedies, and intermezzi. Performances of comedies and intermezzi were given at least monthly. The financial records, which include the salaries of the singers, actors, and musicians, have been published in Starikova, “Noviye dokumenti o deyat’lnosti ital’’anskoy truppî,” 80–81. The texts of the Italian comedies and intermezzi performed at the court of Anna Ioannovna from 1733 to 1735 have been printed in both the original language and in Russian in V. N. Peretts, *Italianskiye komedii i intermedi, predstavleniye pri dvore Imperatritsi Annî Ioannovnî v 1733–1735 gg.* (Petrograd: Tip. Imp. Akademii Nauk, 1917).

\textsuperscript{11} Francesco Araja (1709–1770) was a Neapolitan composer of opera seria whose operas were performed in Rome, Naples, and Milan before he accepted a position of the Russian court. In St. Petersburg, Araja composed *opere serie* annually to celebrate major court holidays until 1759 (he was briefly hired again by Peter III). A. L. Porfir’yeva, “Arayya,” *MPES*, 1:49–61.

\textsuperscript{12} Araja’s *La forza dell’amore e dell’odio* (Milan, 1734) was the first opera seria was staged in 1736.
Empress Elizaveta Petrovna, who ruled from 1741 until 1762, focused on improving and expanding theatrical performances for the elite audience at the court theater. Under her direction, theater officials hired a French theater troupe, improved ballet at the court by recruiting the acclaimed choreographer, Franz Hilverding, from Vienna, and, for a short period of time, offered a modest subsidy to the struggling impresario Giovanni Locatelli, who brought new opere buffe to the Russian capital.\textsuperscript{13}

Elizaveta also supported the early development of Russian talent and the Russian national theater. In 1755, the court staged the first opera in Russian, Tsefal i Prokris (St. Petersburg, 1755), a collaboration between the so-called father of Russian tragedy, Alexander Sumarokov, and the maestro di cappella Araja, and in the following year the empress formally established the first professional Russian troupe in the capital.\textsuperscript{14} The empress’s most telling investments were in construction: she commissioned her architect, Francesco Bartolomeo Rastrelli, to design three new theaters to be built in the imperial

\textsuperscript{13} In 1742, the empress hired a librettist, Giuseppe Bonecchi, a French theater troupe led by Charles Sérigny in 1743, and the choreographer, Franz Hilverding (1710–1768), from Vienna in 1758. In 1757, she provided a subsidy to Giovanni Locatelli (1713–1790), who was fleeing his creditors elsewhere in Europe. Locatelli was unable to cover his costs in St. Petersburg after one season and moved to Moscow, where his troupe staged opere buffe until 1761. G. N. Dobrovolskaya, “Gil’ferding,” MPES, 1, 247-249; Dobrovolskaya, “Lokatelli,” MPES, 2: 141–145; Mooser, L’opéra comique français en russie au XVIII siècle (Geneva: R. Kister, 1954), 16.

\textsuperscript{14} Alexander Rabinovich, Russkaya opera do glinki, 28. In 1756, Empress Elizaveta formally established the first Russian troupe, “Russkiy dlya predstavleniya tragediy i komediy teatr,” an independent troupe that performed in the theater in the Golovinsky home, the opera house in the summer garden, and the opera house in the Wooden Winter Palace. In 1759, the troupe was transferred to court control. I. F. Petrovskaya, “Russkiy dlya predstavleniya tragediy i komediy teatr,” MPES, 3:60–61.
palaces in the sumptuous Russian baroque style, suggesting that Elizaveta’s primary goal for her theaters was to display the wealth and refinement of the Russian court.¹⁵

Under Catherine II, opera became an emblem of empire, a way for Russia to insert itself into European cultural affairs. Catherine and her agents enticed celebrated opera composers, choreographers, and performers away from their posts in Venice, Vienna, Paris, and other capitals to bring the newest and the best of Italian opera to St. Petersburg.¹⁶ Suddenly, the Russian court theater found a place within an international network of theaters producing Italian opera, not just a passive consumer of imported cultural goods. Several operas staged in St. Petersburg under Catherine became successful and influential in Europe. In fact, Giovanni Paisiello’s Il barbiere di Siviglia, ovvero La precauzione inutile (St. Petersburg, 1782) was the most frequently performed opera in Mozart’s Vienna in the decade after its Russian premiere, and Mozart’s musical debt to the operas that Paisiello created for Catherine is readily apparent.¹⁷ Such exports


¹⁷ Michael Robinson compares the number of times that the most popular operas, including Il barbiere di Siviglia, were performed. Robinson, “Mozart and the Opera Buffa Tradition,” in W. A. Mozart: Le Nozze di Figaro, ed. Tim Carter, Cambridge Opera Handbooks (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 12. Robinson also claims that Mozart created Le nozze di Figaro (Vienna, 1786) in an effort to emulate the beloved opera of Paisiello, “the most popular opera composer among the Viennese” (Robinson, “Mozart and the Opera Buffa Tradition,” 24).
testify to the Russian court theater’s swift transformation into a preeminent opera center of international repute. Foreign visitors and writers lauded this transformation. Esteban de Arteaga observed in 1783 that Russia had become famous less for “its past barbarity than for its present splendor,” and declared St. Petersburg opera to be “the most accomplished in Europe,” a telling conflation of East and West.18

Catherine II likewise supported the rise of Russian comic opera, which first appeared at the court theater in 1772 and, similar to opéra comique, combined an overture, scenes of spoken dialogue, songs, and occasional dances.19 Musicologists have paid special attention the incorporation of folk songs into these early operas, focusing on the way librettists and composers used rural culture to define Russia’s identity in music and to create a national idiom.20 These operas, they argue, reflected an emerging national consciousness that resulted from extended contact with the West: in the second half of the

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18 Esteban de Arteaga, Le rivoluzioni del Teatro Musicale Italiano (C. Trenti, 1783), 246.

19 Mikhail Popov wrote the first Russian comic opera, Anyuta, which premiered in 1772 at the empress’s suburban palace in Tsarskoye Selo.

eighteenth century, Russians, too, had begun to romanticize peasant customs as the purest expression of their nation’s distinct identity within Europe, leading writers, artists, and composers to collect the songs, dialects, proverbs, and spiritual beliefs of the countryside.\footnote{Taruskin, \textit{Defining Russia Musically}, 3–5.} One of the most prominent song collectors, Nikolai Lvov (1751–1803), also wrote a comic opera, \textit{Yamshchiki na podstave} (Postal Coachmen at the Relay Station) in 1787 with composer Yevstigney Fomin (1761–1800), which has received particularly high praise from modern scholars. Both Richard Taruskin and Marina Frolova-Walker, for instance, have commended its impressive imitation of peasant performance practices, from its responsorial style and heterophony to the hocketing mandolins playing pizzicato to evoke the sound of a balalaika.\footnote{Taruskin, \textit{Defining Russia Musically}, 7–8; Frolova-Walker, \textit{Russian Music and Nationalism from Glinka to Stalin} 34, 77.} In studies of the so-called pre-Glinka era (which refers to the half century prior to the premiere of Mikhail Glinka’s first opera in 1836), Lvov’s opera has become a touchstone of the nascent national operatic style.

But \textit{Yamshchiki na podstave}, with its literal renditions of coarse peasant language and music, was never a touchstone for eighteenth-century operagoers. In fact, it failed to please the audience at its premiere and was quickly forgotten. Understanding why this opera failed to satisfy local tastes requires a broader examination of the intellectual context and the aesthetics of comic opera under Catherine II.
Catherine II as a Philosophe on the Russian Throne

Under Catherine II, the Russian state played a central role in introducing and disseminating Enlightenment ideas through publishing, legislation, education, and entertainment. In 1768, for instance, the empress established the Society for the Translation of Foreign Books, which was responsible for translating great works and their attendant foreign concepts into Russian. The society focused on modern and ancient texts central to the intellectual and philosophical movements of the era, including those by such writers as Homer, Tacitus, Cicero, and Livy, as well as Pierre Corneille, Charles-Louis de Secondat, Baron de Montesquieu, Jean-François Martmontel, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Voltaire, William Robertson, David Hume, William Blackstone, Jonathon Swift, and Henry Fielding, among others.

As Empress of Russia, Catherine II strove to be recognized and remembered as an enlightened ruler. This aim is reflected clearly in her writings. She authored dozens of didactic tales, satirical comedic dramas, and comic opera libretti, and she corresponded with leading figures in France’s Enlightenment, including Voltaire, Denis Diderot, Jean d’Alembert, and Friedrich Melchior Grimm. Catherine II also contributed to the growing body of Russian texts on topics central to Enlightenment thought. In 1765, for instance, she began writing a landmark work of Russian political philosophy, the Bolshoy

23 Gary Hamburg, Russia’s Path Toward Enlightenment: Faith, Politics, and Reason, 1500-1801, 381.
24 Madariaga, Catherine the Great: A Short History (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 95.
Nakaz (Great Instruction), in which she advocates the rule of law and defines Russian autocratic rule in terms of civil liberty, equality under the law, the public good, and the individual well-being, or happiness, of her subjects. Catherine II’s work was not wholly original; she borrowed heavily from foreign sources—Montesquieu’s *Spirit of the Laws* (1748) and Cesare Beccaria’s *On Crimes and Punishments* (1764). But she did not copy these tracts verbatim; she translated and synthesized their useful ideas while excising arguments that did not support her views.

The ideas and values espoused by the *philosophes* also shaped Catherine II’s legislation. She demonstrated her care for the public good by building progressive educational institutions, including Russia’s first Foundling Home, its first school for women, and schools for the townspeople. The empress also took steps to lay the groundwork for civil society: she ended many of the state’s monopolies, and, with the subsequent growth of trade, new markets arose that strengthened the upper strata or the townspeople, who would eventually become Russia’s bourgeoisie.

Catherine II also helped push St. Petersburg toward becoming a European cultural capital by competitively collecting visual art and foreign books. She acquired over four thousand paintings, ten thousand drawings, and thirty-eight thousand books, including the

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27 In contrast to Montesquieu, for instance, Catherine II defends an undivided autocratic government. Her defense invokes progressive ideals about liberty and happiness. She argues that the ultimate goal of a monarchy is not to “deprive People of their natural Liberty; but to correct their Actions, in order to attain the Supreme Good.”

private libraries of Denis Diderot and Voltaire.\textsuperscript{29} For the first time, St. Petersburg assumed a prominent place in the transnational circulation of art and ideas in Europe.

While improving Russia’s position in that cosmopolitan cultural community, Catherine also fostered Russian talent. Her appointments and financial support led writers and scholars in the nineteenth century to remember Catherine II’s era as the age of encouragement and Russia’s Golden Age.\textsuperscript{30} Under Catherine II, literature, the arts, science, education, and trade were flourishing; new public institutions and societies were encouraging the growth of a civil society; and the merchant class was acquiring unprecedented wealth. St. Petersburg had begun to resemble Vienna, London, and Paris — centers of Enlightenment thought.

**WAS THERE A RUSSIAN ENLIGHTENMENT?**

By many standards, however, Russia lacked the social conditions required for an Enlightenment to take root. The empire did not yet have a middle class, for example; merchants and other townspeople never attained sufficient financial or political strength to curb the absolute power of the sovereign.\textsuperscript{31} Also, Russia’s inchoate civil society never


\textsuperscript{30} In a letter to A. A. Bestuzhev in 1825, Alexander Pushkin wrote, that the eighteenth-century writers “Derzhavin and Dmitriev were made Ministers as a mark of encouragement. The Age of Catherine is the Age of Encouragement.” Reprinted in Tatiana Wolff, *Pushkin on Literature* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1986), 147.

\textsuperscript{31} As W. Gareth Jones writes, “There was no strong bourgeoisie struggling for economic or political freedom . . . Social grievances were to be largely disarmed by the emancipation of the nobles . . . The church in Russia formed no oppressive power center.” Jones, *Nikolay Novikov:*
fully formed. Through the end of the century, readership in Russia remained quite small. Although journalism thrived as a medium for the public exchange of ideas, the public discourse of private individuals was never entirely free from state control. In contrast to Scottish and German “national enlightenments,” Russia did not produce an original philosophical and intellectual movement or a coherent school of thought that reflected the empire’s particular geo-cultural perspective. Progressive ideas associated with the Enlightenment provoked little real social change in Russia, likely because most of those writing on topics such as social welfare occupied high positions in Catherine II’s government and owned serfs.\(^{32}\)

In Russia, Enlightenment ideals were largely consolidated into a civilizing program administered by state officials and court writers.\(^ {33}\) The effort to translate, interpret, and disseminate Enlightenment thought through new texts, institutions, and societies brought about an age of Enlightenment in Russia, even if it did not result in a uniquely Russian Enlightenment.\(^ {34}\) The process of organizing societies and circulating

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\(^{32}\) Elise Kimerling Wirtschafter explains that the educated classes were the ones who “defined what was just and virtuous,” and that nearly all of them served the monarchy and “owned, or aspiring to own, serfs.” Wirtschafter, *The Play of Ideas in Russian Enlightenment Theater* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2003), 51

\(^{33}\) Gary Marker, “Virtually all specialists, despite differing views on the politics and philosophy of the Russian Enlightenment, have recognized that Russia’s eighteenth-century writers felt strongly that their mission was to civilize society and raise the moral and intellectual level of the Russian people.” Marker, “The Creation of Journals and the Profession of Letters in the Eighteenth Century,” in *Literary Journals in Imperial Russia*, edited by Deborah A. Martinsen, Cambridge Studies in Russian Literature (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 15.

\(^{34}\) Gareth Jones writes, “This working of the ideas of the Enlightenment into the consciousness of Europeans was as essential a part of the Enlightenment as the composition of the seminal works had been.” Jones, *Nikolay Novikov: Enlightener of Russia*, 2.
texts has recently become important to understanding Enlightenment in Europe, which is increasingly characterized by values, beliefs, and lived experiences, rather than by a set of intellectual movements. One of the leading scholars of eighteenth-century Russia, Elise Wirtschafter, likewise argues that Russia’s enlightenment was “an enlightenment to be lived” — it was a cultural shift, she explains, that was informed above all by a belief in the moral and intellectual perfectibility of the individual.

Both the aristocracy and the townspeople experienced Russia’s Enlightenment through new schools and educational opportunities abroad. In addition to founding Russia’s first schools for women, orphans, and townspeople, Catherine II allowed Russians to study abroad in larger numbers, and Russians also began to go on the Grand Tour. Returning with new foreign books, drawings, and music scores, they brought foreign ideas, tastes, and their travelogues home to Russia.

Russians also began organizing and participating in fraternal societies and social clubs, which were a hallmark of Enlightenment culture. In St. Petersburg and Moscow, for example, the influence of Freemasonry was widespread; in fact, by the end of Catherine II’s rule, the majority of adult men — both aristocrats and townspeople —

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35 Wirtschafter provides a survey of scholarship that views the Enlightenment in terms of cultural practices and a new lifestyle in Wirtschafter, *The Play of Ideas in Russian Enlightenment Theater*, 51.

36 Wirtschafter, “Religion and Enlightenment in Eighteenth-Century Russia: Father Platon at the Court of Catherine II,” in *Personality and Place in Russian Culture: Essays in Memory of Lindsey Hughes*, ed. Simon Dixon (London: Modern Humanities Research Association for the UCL School of Slavonic and East European Studies, 2010), 180.

were members. The first social clubs were founded during this period and included four different music and dance clubs as well as a Bourgeois club, an English club, and others. These subscription-based groups included merchants, doctors, professors, and military officers, and often prohibited aristocrats from joining. The music clubs made concerts a regular part of the lives of the urban middle classes. The nearly one thousand members of the Music Club (1772–1777) and the New Music Society (or New Music Club) of 1778 attended semi-weekly concerts featuring singers and virtuosi from the court theater and assembled at the clubs nightly to read public papers, dine, and play cards. While wine merchants and bankers were founding private clubs, aristocrats were building private domestic theaters and organizing salons. One scholar went so far as to claim that by the end of the eighteenth century it was impossible to find a rich manor house in Russia that did not have a theater, a standing orchestra, and a choir.


39 In St. Petersburg, in addition to the music and dance clubs, there was an English club (founded in 1770), a bourgeois club (1776), which accepted “simple artisans” up to men with the rank of lieutenant colonel, a savant club (1781), the military club, and the American club. Johann Gottlieb Georgi, Description de la ville de St. Pétersbourg et de ses environs (J. Z. Logan, 1793), 338–341.

40 For a complete description of the club’s offerings, rules, and the membership requirements, which specifically restricted membership to those ranking no higher than brigadier, see “Reglement und fernere: Einrichtung für die Musicalische Gesellschaft,” which is held in the Otdel Rukopisey Rossiyskoy Natsional’noy Biblioteki (The Manuscript Division of the Russian National Library) f. 550, op. 1, razn. f xii d. 31.

41 The music club organized concerts every week with music performed by its orchestra of fifty musicians, supported by virtuosi and the choir of the court. The new musical club, organized by Baron P. G. Demidov, State Counselor Stiksel’, wine merchant Blando, and others, grew to over six hundred subscribers within the first two years of this society’s existence. By the early 1790s the membership had grown to over eight hundred. L. N. Berezovchuk, “Muzykal’niy klub,” in MPES, 2: 244–245 and Berezovchuk, “Novoye muzykal’noye obshchestvo ili noviy muzykal’niy klub,” in MPES, 2: 263–264

42 V. Pronin, Chastnaya opera v Rossii: istorichskiy ocherk (Moscow: Pokoleniya, 2007), 449.
Publishing and public discourse, like societies and salons, flourished under Catherine II. In 1783, the court ended its monopoly on publishing, permitting, for the first time, the rapid development of Russian journalism; in fact, nearly all the Russian journals printed in the eighteenth century were published during Catherine’s reign.43 These periodicals provided a platform for the public exchange of ideas on wide-ranging topics, including operas and singers in St. Petersburg and abroad.44 The new literary market attracted private music publishing entrepreneurs such as Schoor, Breitkopf, Weitbrecht, Meyer, Gerstenberg and Ditmar.45 They published scores and hundreds of issues of music periodicals in the 1790s alone, including operatic arias and ensembles from the court theater arranged for domestic performance.46 By the end of Catherine’s rule, opera was no longer solely an entertainment for the elites at court; it was embedded in the institutions and publications of Russia’s emergent civil society.

STUDYING OPERA AT THE COURT OF CATHERINE II

Although her reign was an era of remarkable economic and cultural prosperity, the legacy of Catherine II — a female ruler, a foreigner, an imperialist, and a usurper —

43 Gary Marker claims that 111 of the 120 journals published in eighteenth-century Russia were printed while Catherine II was empress of Russia. Marker, “The Creation of Journals and the Profession of Letters in the Eighteenth Century,” 14.

44 The critical reception of early Russian operas is discussed in chapters 2 and 4. Descriptions of foreign operas, singers, and opera houses were printed in periodicals, such as Magazin aglinskikh [sic], frantsuzskikh i nemetskikh novikh mod (Moscow: Tip. u V. Okorokova, 1791).


remains a battlefield in Russia and abroad. As scholars and politicians have fought over her legacy, they have exposed the high stakes of defining Catherine’s influence on the history of Russian culture. For nearly two hundred years, her image has oscillated between extremes: some writers have described her as a self-fashioned *philosophe* on the throne, while others have called her an authoritarian dictator with diminishing respect for human rights. Historian Isabel de Madariaga accuses ideologically driven Soviet scholars of distorting the history of censorship under Catherine by assuming the existence of a guerrilla war between the foreign empress and revolutionary Russian intellectuals. This line of thinking is pronounced in the writing of Soviet scholar Georgiy Makogonenko, for instance, who writes, “Catherine was not an enlightened monarch, but a despot and a mastermind of the politics of slavery, and for that reason it was necessary to fight her.”

Prejudices against Catherine have also influenced music history and stripped the empress of knowledge, taste, and power. In music history, Catherine is best known for her literary contribution to Russian opera as a writer. Between 1786 and 1791, she wrote six libretti, several of which were staged repeatedly for full houses over a period of several years. Despite their popular success, these operas were long dismissed as the trifling works of a dilettante. During the Soviet era, for example, Aleksandr Gozenpud

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argued that Catherine was an ignorant and talentless despot whose operas were popular for their music rather than their text.  

Recently, scholars have begun to reevaluate the empress’s writings for the stage. In a book examining Catherine’s comedies and comic opera libretti, Lurana Donnels O’Malley argues that Catherine was an influential political writer who used the stage to advance Enlightenment philosophy and Russian national consciousness while also defending absolutist rule. Musicologist Inna Naroditskaya’s book on Russia opera suggests that Catherine II was hardly a dilettante; in fact, she may have been the most influential librettist in eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Russia. She was the first librettist to incorporate patriotic subjects, the Russian epic form of bïlina, and fairy tales, which are precisely the literary sources that would define the genre through the end of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth.

This dissertation aims to expand the conclusions of O’Malley and Naroditskaya by showing that Catherine, much like Joseph II in Vienna, acted as a kind of producer,

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48 Alexander Gozenpud’s book is filled with anti-Catherine sentiments. He consistently downplays her contributions, portraying her as an ignorant and talentless despot. Among numerous negative comments, he claims that Catherine understood the Italian composers narrowly, as mere court jesters and fools, and claims that the operas for which she wrote the librettos were certainly not popular for the text, but for the music, which she did not write. Gozenpud, Muzïkal’niy teatr v Rossii: ot istokov do Glinki (Leningrad: Gos. muzïkal’noye izd-vo, 1959), 88, 157.

49 Lurana Donnels O’Malley argues, “Catherine the Great as playwright deliberately exploited the stage’s power to promote political ideas and ideology . . . Catherine the Great the playwright advanced her own political agenda — an amalgam of Enlightenment philosophy, Russian cultural pride, and her belief in the value of authoritarian rule.” O’Malley, The Dramatic Works of Catherine the Great (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 1. I should note that an earlier scholar, Nikolai Findeizen, also claimed that Catherine was an influential and prolific librettist (Findeizen, History of Music in Russia from Antiquity to 1800, 163).

determining the future and management of theater in her capital. There are, however, significant limitations to studying opera under Catherine II. It is impossible to create a comprehensive study of Russian comic operas that premiered at her court theater. We know that hundreds of Russian operas had premiered by the early nineteenth century, but only a handful of scores have survived. The popular and critical reception of comic operas is also obscure. Published descriptions or critiques of opera premieres were rare, and they do not offer the level of detail found in polemics published in other major European capitals. The limitations of these historical records have largely determined the shape of this dissertation and the focus of the musical discussions in its chapters.

Throughout this process, I have been guided by the pragmatic approach of Catherine the Great’s eminent biographer, Isabel de Madariaga, who acknowledges openly that she presents the reader with the history that can be written, and not the history that ought to be written.51

**Dissertation Overview**

This dissertation is organized in four chapters that examine the phenomenon of comic opera in St. Petersburg from different angles. Chapter 1 presents a history of theatrical administration at the court spanning the entire period of Catherine II’s rule, and considers how the Russian theater transformed from an unknown musical outpost to a leading center of opera and ballet. I use court documents to engage critically with scholarship on

the individuals and institutions of the Russian court theater, rethinking and reconstructing
the Russian court theater under Catherine from the ground up. I have returned to the most
basic materials: contracts, salaries, correspondence, legal disputes, taxes, decrees,
regulations, musical manuscripts, libretti and prologues. These documents allow me to
paint a more comprehensive picture of Russian opera at the court theater, trace its
development under Catherine, and reevaluate her participation and interventions.

The sudden transformation of Catherine II’s court theater began with her
appointment of Ivan Yelagin to the new position of director of Imperial Theater, which
he held from 1766 until 1779. Striving to realize the empress’s goals, Yelagin centralized
the theater’s administration, giving himself directorial oversight of opera productions. He
hired acclaimed international opera singers, composers, choreographers, dancers, and
musicians and simultaneously began promoting Russians to prominent positions across
the theater. Yelagin’s legacy, which continued into the nineteenth century, emerged not
only in Russia’s improved reputation abroad, but also in his efforts to systematize the
education and promotion of Russian talent.

Chapter 2 addresses the influence of Enlightenment aesthetics and dramatic
theories on the emergence of Russian comic opera at the court theater. In the 1760s,
Russian playwrights, including Yelagin, began to focus on writing comedies that
mirrored society, critiquing behaviors and beliefs that they hoped to eradicate. Drawing
and expanding on the ideas of Johann Christoph Gottsched, Ludvig Holberg, and Claude-
Joseph Dorat, they adapted foreign comedies to local customs and adhered to the
aesthetic principles of naturalism and simplicity in the hopes of pleasing and instructing
the audience. In the following decade, the earliest librettists, such as Mikhail Popov and Yakov Knyazhnin, began adapting foreign comedies before they turned to opera. Their first comic operas, which can be characterized broadly as vernacular adaptations of foreign operas with added local color, show that the ideas and values influencing comedies extended to the spoken dialogue and songs of early Russian opera.

The final two chapters are case studies that focus on the reception of comic opera in St. Petersburg. Catherine II’s taste in musical comedy is examined in Chapter 3. The empress applauded the _opere buffe_ by her maestro di cappella, Giovanni Paisiello, and especially the musical moments that incorporate low humor into a sophisticated musical language. Her letters also suggest that she believed the music of Paisiello’s operas made her a better, more attentive listener. In the context of the empress’s legislative and social agenda of the early 1780s and her decision to open the court’s first public opera house, I suggest that Catherine II’s response to Paisiello’s seemingly trifling musical humor reflected more than her personal taste: she was describing precisely the listening practices that she would cultivate at her new public opera house.

The final chapter investigates how Russian comic opera transformed from merely a courtly entertainment into a commercially viable, popular entertainment, examining the brief period when opera was staged in an urban public theater by Carl Jacob Knieper’s troupe from 1779 to 1783. The popular and critical reception of the troupe’s two most successful opera productions — _Mel’nik—koldun, obman’shchik i svat_ (The Miller who was a Wizard, Cheat, and Matchmaker; Moscow, 1779) and _Skupoy_ (The Miser, St. Petersburg, 1780 or 1781) — suggests that the success of Knieper’s troupe and of
Russian comic opera in the capital was due largely to the popularity of its star performer, Anton Krutitsky and a preferred aesthetic, manifest in aspects of Krutitsky’s performance, that entranced his audience. Catherine II eagerly brought the newly popular Russian comic opera and its most valuable asset, Anton Krutitsky, under the control and direction of the court.

With the opening of the Grand Stone Theater in 1783 and the court’s renewed investment in Russian opera, Krutitsky’s prominent position in Russian theater was secured, and so, too, was the role of the comic bass in Russian opera. As the end of Catherine’s rule approached, Russian opera — its repertory and performers — were serving both commercial and imperial interests as part of a de facto court monopoly in St. Petersburg that would continue for more than one hundred years, establishing the particular foundation on which Russian patriotic-heroic opera would be created in the following century.
CHAPTER ONE

OPERA AS EMBLEM OF EMPIRE: CATHERINE II, IVAN YELAGIN, AND THE RISE OF RUSSIAN COURT OPERA

When Catherine II came to power in July of 1762 after instigating the assassination of her husband Peter III, she inherited Russia’s most impressive royal residence to date — the new Stone Winter Palace. Situated on the banks of the Neva River, the building stretched beyond the pedestrian’s field of vision in an endless wall of columns alternating with gilded windows under a long line of statues perched above. With more than one thousand rooms, one hundred staircases, and nearly four thousand doors and windows, it was Russia’s sixth and largest Winter Palace. The Stone Winter Palace captivated travelers such as John Carr, who described it as one of the most expensive and elegant palaces in Europe. Its size and expense became a point of pride for Russians as well. Indeed, Nikita Panin, a Russian diplomat, boasted to Danish elites that the Stone Winter Palace had cost twenty times as much as the royal palace in

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52 The Stone Winter Palace was built between 1754 and 1762. Empress Elizaveta’s favorite architect, Francesco Bartolomeo Rastrelli, created the design. There had been five other, smaller incarnations, four of which were also built of stone and situated on the Neva River. Paul Keenan, *St. Petersburg and the Russian Court, 1703-1761* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 24.


54 John Carr, *A Northern Summer; or Travels Round the Baltic, through Denmark, Sweden, Russia, Prussia, and Part of Germany in the Year 1804* (Philadelphia: Robert Gray, 1805), 235.
The new palace was not merely fit for an empress; it projected the Russian empire’s new status as a great power in Europe.\textsuperscript{56}

The enormous theater on the second floor of the new Winter Palace reflected the same aesthetics of grandeur that informed the overall design of the building, overshadowing its predecessors in both size and cost. While the court’s previous theaters had only two tiers of loges, the new Imperial Theater’s auditorium had four, with balconies above and a notably long parterre below that was capped by an amphitheater.\textsuperscript{57}

The huge stage and enormous auditorium lent themselves to massive productions with grand spectacle and elaborate sets, also accommodating big operatic voices.\textsuperscript{58} Admission was reserved for the privileged few, granted only to the imperial family, foreign dignitaries, Russian nobles, highborn merchants, and members of the Russian Academy.

\textsuperscript{55} Dixon, \textit{Catherine the Great}, 139.

\textsuperscript{56} With Prussia, Russia attained great power and status following successful — and surprising — military campaigns in the Seven Years War. H. M. Scott defines “great power” as a state that possesses the material and moral resources to fight a major war without outside assistance,” and traces Russia’s growth into a leading military power and the change of opinion in Europe that confirmed its new status. Scott also shows that Russia’s role in major military and diplomatic negotiations changed. Prior to 1756, Russia was not included. In the 1760s, Russia was a central player in these discussions. H. M. Scott, \textit{The Emergence of the Eastern Powers, 1756–1775} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

\textsuperscript{57} The Opera House at the Summer Gardens, which the court operated from 1750 until 1763, had two tiers of loges and a parterre. From 1757 until 1763, the court also operated an opera house in the Wooden Winter Palace, which also had two tiers of loges. Like the theater in the Stone Winter Palace, Bartolomeo Rastrelli had designed these theaters for Empress Elizaveta. See I. F. Petrovskaya, “Opernïy dom pri derevyannom zimmn dvortse,” in MPES, 2: 294. Petrovskaya, “Opernïy dom u letnego sada,” MPES, 2:297.

of Sciences. 59 This was not a theater for the Russian people; it was the private domain of the empress, and catered only to the capital’s political and intellectual elite. 60

Catherine II was the first Russian sovereign to collect opera composers, singers, and scores, along with private libraries and thousands of drawing and paintings, rivaling the lavish image-building acquisitions of the most powerful rulers and houses in Europe. This competitive patronage made her court theater one of the best in Europe. Her first move was to recruit Baldassare Galuppi, the most widely revered composer of the era. 61 This was a coup for the new empress; he was far and away the most famous musician to work for a Russian sovereign. By choosing Galuppi specifically, Catherine II demonstrated that she understood opera to be an international phenomenon and embraced


60 Tickets to the Imperial Theater in the Winter Palace were distributed through the court office to the elites for free. Petrovskaya writes that tickets for seats on the third tier were given to nobles, and seats on the fourth floor were given to highborn merchants (Petrovskaya, “Opernïy dom v bol’shom zimnem dvortse,” 294). Looking at the announcements of ticket distributions for specific opera performances, like Galuppi’s debut in 1766, shows that not all merchants were granted admission. Only merchants from noble families were admitted, not the townspeople (the lower tier of merchants). The announcement reads, “The court gentry of both sexes, foreign ministers, the service elite (generalitet), the guard staff (shtab) and ober-officers, and army staff (shtab), and state positions, consisting of people in those ranks, with families, and also army ober-officers, and, of those in these ranks also the noble cadets; also merchants who are from the highest ranks of the gentry, without families, and entrance to the opera house is given only when it can be accommodated and not to those under fifteen years of age” (“Придворнымъ знатнымъ обоего пола персонамъ, чужестраннымъ Минстрамъ, Генералитету, и Гвардии штабъ и oberъ-офицерамъ, и армейскимъ штабамъ, а статскимъ чинамъ, состоящимъ въ тѣхъ рангахъ, съ фамилями, да армейскимъ oberъ-офицерамъ, и состоящимъ въ техъ рангахъ и знатному шляхетству; а купечеству только которыя изъ первыхъ знатные, безъ фамилий, и онымъ входъ имѣть въ оперный домъ сколько поместиться можетъ, а малолѣтнымъ, ниже 15-ти лѣтъ, отнюдъ не быть”). In Kamer-Fur’yerskiy Zhurnal, 1766 (St. Petersburg: n. p., 1853–1917), 34-35.

61 Baldassare Galuppi (1706-1785), who had been one of the most popular composers in Europe since about 1749, came to St. Petersburg from his hometown of Venice, leaving behind his prestigious posts as maestro di coro at San Marco and at the Ospedale degli Incurabili. He arrived in St. Petersburg on September 22, 1765.
the role the genre might play in fulfilling her aspiration to make Russia a great power in European culture. Opera thus became an emblem of empire.\textsuperscript{62}

The opera chosen for Galuppi’s debut served this purpose well, as he composed a brand new setting of \textit{La Didone abbandonata} (Dido Abandoned), written by the internationally renowned librettist Pietro Metastasio. \textit{La Didone} was one of Metastasio’s most popular opera seria libretti and was also among his most spectacular and one of the rare opera seria to end tragically.\textsuperscript{63} The debut was celebrated with astounding pomp and near limitless financial support from the court.\textsuperscript{64} The singers were dressed in expensive costumes of silk brocade, satin, and tinsel and decorated with pounds of sequins and hundreds of feathers.\textsuperscript{65} Elaborate set changes, machinery magic, and crowds of supernumeraries gathering on stage further enriched the striking visual splendor of the premiere.\textsuperscript{66} The opera concluded with a spectacular finale: Dido’s tragic suicide was

\textsuperscript{62} Porfir’yeva, “Galuppi,” MPES, 1:227.


\textsuperscript{64} \textit{La Didone abbandonata} earned the distinction of being the most expensive court opera to premiere for the next twenty years. As far as the extant documents can reveal, the most expensive opera between 1766 and 1786 was Galuppi’s \textit{Didone abbandonata} (St. Petersburg, 1766). This production cost 8,254.61 rubles (RGADA f. 17, op. 1, d. 324, l. 126). In contrast, the directorate only spent 3,268.29 1/4 rubles on Galuppi’s \textit{Ifigenia in Tauride} (RGADA f. 17, op. 1, d. 322, l. 118). The Russian-language production of Salieri’s \textit{Armida} in 1774 cost only 1,039.27 rubles (RGIA f. 468, op.36, d.30, l.2). Tommaso Traetta’s \textit{Lucio Vero} of the same year, on the other hand, cost more than the allotted sum. It totaled 7,083.73 rubles altogether (RGIA f.468, op. 36, d. 40, l.2). Paisiello’s much anticipated debut opera, \textit{La Nitteti} (St. Petersburg, 1777), which was acclaimed for the magnificence and opulence of its presentation, but still cost less than Galuppi’s \textit{Didone}. It cost 7,190.7 rubles (RGIA f. 468, op. 36, d. 37 ll. 237-38).

\textsuperscript{65} RGIA f. 468, op. 1, ch. 2, d.3878, ll. 157-58.

\textsuperscript{66} RGIA f. 466, op. 1, d. 115, l. 13.
accompanied by a haunting final sinfonia, while flames engulf Carthage, trapping its people in front of a violently churning sea under a sky of lightning.\textsuperscript{67}

\textit{Didone} was a resounding success.\textsuperscript{68} But this success was not easily won, and the challenges the theater’s administration encountered proved to be representative of its growing pains as Catherine’s court theater transformed into an internationally acclaimed center of Italian opera. Commissioning elaborate costumes and sets for Galuppi’s debut was a straightforward financial proposition. However, meeting the high standards of the new maestro — and the foreign elite generally — was a nettlesome challenge. The process of producing the opera exposed a number of weaknesses in the court theater both administratively and artistically, resulting in the delay of the opera’s premiere by several months.\textsuperscript{69} During the first rehearsals, for instance, Galuppi berated the musicians for their contemptible performance of his work and urged the court theater to hire two competent violinists whom he knew in Venice.\textsuperscript{70} Russia would have a long way to go before it would realize operatic ambitions comparable to its political ones.

\textsuperscript{67} The machinist, Gabriel Duclos, provided a list of materials that he used for the production, which indicate that he created a frothing sea, lightning across the sky, wild animals, and perhaps a crumbling city as well. RGADA f. 17, op. 1, d. 324, l.31.

\textsuperscript{68} The opera was performed at least five additional times throughout the year. The empress demonstrated her approval by presenting the soprano with gifts. MA, 46.

\textsuperscript{69} The production’s many costumes and elaborate sets and set changes were not prepared in time for the premiere, which had been scheduled for the empress’s name day celebrations in November 1765. These delays caused the theater’s managers to demand accounts from the set designer and the new French machinist, Gabriel Duclos. The managers also warned them that further problems would provoke the ire of the empress. Stählin mentions this delay in his accounts of the court theater. Shtelin, “Izvestiya o muzîke v Rossii,” 132. For the court document ordering the opera for name day celebrations, see RGIA f. 466, op. 1, d. 112, l.55. The document reprimanding the set designer and machinist can be found in RGIA f. 466, op. 1, d. 112, l. 63.

\textsuperscript{70} Shtelin, “Izvestiya o muzîke v Rossii,” 132. In addition to Stählin’s recollection, archival documents in the Russian State Historical Archive show that the court approved Galuppi’s
Within two decades, everything had changed because of one man: Ivan Yelagin. Catherine appointed him as director of her court theater in 1766 and during his tenure, which lasted until 1779, he transformed the Russian court theater from an insular, provincial institution into one that rivaled the best that Europe had to offer. Critics began to praise the cultural products of the Russian court. Jean-Benjamin La Borde, a specialist on music in Europe, claimed,

Russia, who was ignorant of the arts before Peter the Great… has since favored them with such success that in less than fifty years it has become a respectable rival of all civilized nations; and each day sees their success grow under the august Sovereign, whose brilliant court provides them a refuge.

One of the most famous eighteenth-century writers on musical theater, Esteban de Arteaga, elaborates on La Borde’s observation and explains what was making the Russian court theater earn the respect of foreign observers. He writes, “[By] the selection of the best voices, of the best musicians, for the magnificence of decoration, and of ballets the Petersburg Opera is the most accomplished in Europe.” Arteaga correctly identifies the greatest difference between the new empress’s court theater and her request to hire two violinists from Venice. First, an imperial decree dated October 10, 1765, explains that the new maestro di cappella is bringing someone whom he knows from a foreign land to be the new first violinist. In March 1766, a new court document indicates that he decided to hire two violinists from Venice rather than just one. RGIA f. 466, op. 1, d. 112, ll. 57, 96.

71 Ivan Yelagin (1725-1794) was educated in St. Petersburg at the Cadet Corps for noblemen. He went on to become a senator, member of the Imperial Cabinet, playwright, poet, historian, and a leading figure in Russian Freemasonry. In 1772, he became the Grand Provincial Master of the Assembly of English-system Masonic lodges in Russia. See Raffaella Faggionato, A Rosicrucian Utopia in Eighteenth-Century Russia: The Masonic Circle of N.I. Novikov (Dordrecht: Springer, 2005), 21–26.


73 Esteban de Arteaga, Le rivoluzioni del teatro musicale Italiano (Bologna: C. Trenti, 1783), 246.
predecessors’: Catherine and her assistant Yelagin had set about hiring the greatest celebrities in Europe, from composers to clarinetists, and their presence in St. Petersburg burnished the Russian court theater’s image abroad.

This chapter, which spans the entire period of Catherine’s rule from 1762 to 1796, examines how the Russian theater was transformed from an unknown musical outpost to a leading center of opera and ballet. Most of this metamorphosis occurred as a direct result of Yelagin’s efforts, which were inspired in large part by his desire to realize the empress’s vision for her theater. Yelagin filled the theater’s rosters with opera stars and effectively managed its finances; he also centralized its administration, placing the directorial oversight of opera productions in the hands of state officials. At the same time that he was improving the quality of the Italian opera and ballet performed at court, he was also cultivating Russian talent and promoting Russians to positions of importance across the theater. By the end of his tenure, foreign opera troupes were no longer the exclusive domain of foreigners; Russians were studying and working in the Russian troupe as well as the Italian opera troupe, ballet troupe, orchestra, and backstage. But Yelagin’s desire for control over every aspect of the theater proved to be his undoing. His despotic managerial style antagonized the celebrities whom he had struggled to recruit from abroad. Yelagin’s legacy, addressed in the final section of this chapter, emerged not only in the form of Russia’s improved reputation abroad, but also in the development of Russian opera. Late in Catherine’s rule, the foreign celebrities, elaborate sets, and grand spectacles that had lent prestige to Italian opera at the Russian court theater began to do the same for Russian opera, ultimately satisfying both Catherine’s cultural ambitions and her aesthetic preferences.
Early Theatrical Administration at the Court

Prior to Yelagin’s appointment as director in 1766, the organization of the court theater and its system of management made it difficult for the theater to expand or to improve the quality of its performances. Administrative and artistic control was not centralized; there was little coordination among the troupes and no indication that they maintained detailed financial records. The court theater was not even an independent organization; instead, it was integrated into various departments responsible for managing court affairs. At the highest level, the Court Office (Pridvornaya Kontora) was responsible for executing imperial decrees, but there is little evidence that the office intervened in the operations and finances of individual troupes. Rather, the Office appointed directors of each of the troupes — Russian, French, and Italian — who oversaw the personnel and performances.

The absence of a centralized control or authority presented obvious challenges when it came to coordinating the many individuals and spaces needed for a large opera

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74 The president (ober-gofmarshal), then Count Karl Sievers (from 1762), and vice-president (gofmarshal) of this office had responsibilities that extended far beyond the theater. They managed all the activities and personnel of court life, including servants’ salaries, official ceremonies, meal expenditures, and so forth. I. F. Petrovskaya, “Upravleniye Teatrom i Muzïkoy,” MPES, 3:182. The court office provided each troupe with a lump sum and did not manage the expenses for individual productions. For early financial accounts that show these lumps sums, see RGADA f. 1239, op. 3, ch. 109, d. 53458, l. 1.

75 The maestro di cappella led the Italian troupe and ballet, and the playwright Aleksandr Sumarokov directed the Russian troupe from 1756, the date of its establishment, until the court replaced him with Vasily Bibikov in 1765. The Russian troupe was established as an independent or vol’niy troupe in 1756, and was taken under court protection for financial reasons in 1759. The court had hired an independent French troupe led by former court performer Jean-Pierre Renaud in 1764. For the origins of the court’s Russian troupe, see I. F. Petrovskaya, “Russkiy dlya predstavleniya tragediy i komediy teatr,” MPES, 3:180–182 and Petrovskaya, “Russkaya pridvornaya (imperatorskaya) truppa,” MPES, 3: 57–60. For more on Renaud’s French troupe, see MA, 2: 34.
production such as *La Didone abbandonata*. For instance, the court theater had no
dedicated set designers, painters, or carpenters of its own until 1766. The theater relied on
the court’s Chancellery for the Construction of Homes and Gardens (*Kantseliariya ot
stroenii domov i sadov*) and the Office of the Master of the Imperial Household
(*Kamertsalmeysterskaya kontora*) to supply it with artists and materials.\(^{76}\) One of the
consequences of not having a dedicated production staff was that there was no space near
the stage for the construction of sets and costumes. In fact, when the Imperial Theater
was designed, the architect did not even allow for a shop or a workshop, which quickly
became a problem. In January 1764, while working on the ballet *Zefir i Flora*, the
machinist Friedrich Hilferding complained that sets and costumes were constantly being
damaged due to their frequent transport among various places, and requested that the
rooms below the dressing rooms be cleared to serve this purpose.\(^{77}\) The court theater
complied, but the fact that officials struggled to assemble a satisfactory space after
damaging expensive materials testifies to the limitations of the established system of
theatrical management.

This lack of foresight led to deficits that stressed the court theater’s budget,
precipitating a complete reorganization of the theater and its administration. Shortly after
Catherine II’s coronation, the Court Office president, Count Sievers, demanded a detailed

\(^{76}\) The Chancellery for Construction, for example, hired painter Francesco Gradizzi and his father
Pietro in 1753 to paint palatial interiors and subsequently had them paint sets for the court theater.
From 1762, Ivan Betskoy served as director of this department. See Petrovskaya, “Upravleniye

\(^{77}\) ADIT, 2: 65.
account of the theater’s financial expenses. Although he was responsible for theatrical affairs, he was not familiar with how the court’s money was being spent. Sievers asked Stepan Ramburg, the financial officer responsible for these disbursements, to supply a register of the French comedians, Italian company singers, and others receiving salaries at the theater, along with a general account of how the lump sums transferred to him were being used and distributed. Rather than completing the task, which must have been onerous, Ramburg resigned. Based on the incomplete and abbreviated accounts he left behind, the officer may well have been little more informed about the theater’s operations and personnel than the high-ranking members of the Court Office.

When the Court Office proved unable to bring theatrical affairs into order, Catherine II intervened. In 1766, she issued a decree through the Court Office that elaborated on the previous request for an account of the theater’s finances. The empress demanded a list of the theater’s personnel, their salaries, and information about the additional stipulations added to every contract signed by the court. But unlike the previous decree, this was not solely a request for information. The decree also explained what Catherine wanted from her theater. She proclaimed that the theater should be staffed only by worthy, knowledgeable, and talented people and that henceforth the theaters would not support any extraneous (izlishniye) personnel working without contracts. She expected an account of theatrical costs that would enumerate salaries as well as apartment

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78 The president and vice president were Count Sievers and Golistyn. Siever’s document is dated December 30, 1762. ADIT, 2: 64.

79 On January 8, 1763, Stepan Ramburg left his position. He did not admit that the request caused his resignation, but the two coincided. Instead, he attributed his decision to old age and overlong service. RGADA f. 17, op. 1, d.322, l.71.

80 ADIT, 2: 85–86.
costs, pensions, carriages, and even the horses supplied to the theater at the court’s expense. The empress’s decree demanded full financial accountability and a unified organization that did not yet exist.

Ivan Yelagin stepped forward to provide Catherine II with a thorough account of the personnel and finances of the theater, and in doing so he developed a new organizational framework for Russian court theater. With the empress’s support, Yelagin restructured the court theater into a single department centralized under the control of a single director, a position that had not existed previously. Once she had approved Yelagin’s work, she rewarded him by appointing him to that supervisory position. After 1766, the Court Office stopped its prior practice of distributing lump sums to the troupes. Instead, Yelagin approved and accounted for all the expenses of each troupe, from small purchases of fabric to the salaries of its members. He also unified the artistic staff (those responsible for sets, costumes, and machines), and he made the ballet troupe independent, separate from the Italian opera troupe. As a result, the ballet troupe might perform with the Russian opera troupe on one evening, and both would be supported by the same staff. As director, Yelagin involved himself in the operations, finances, and artistic decisions,

81 Yelagin’s budget for production, theater maintenance costs, and salaries to support the court’s Italian, French, Russian, and ballet troupes, two orchestras, the artistic and the supporting staff totaled 138,410 rubles annually. His accounts are reprinted in ADIT, 2: 86–90. Yelagin’s accounts, however, only cover the court’s theater in St. Petersburg. He did not include the court’s theater in Moscow, though he was acquainted with its finances. In his capacity as a member of the empress’s imperial cabinet, Yelagin enumerated and approved the transfer of funds to the court theater in Moscow in 1766 as well. In Moscow, the court also maintained an Italian troupe, French troupe, and ballroom musicians. RGADA f. 10, op. 1, d. 516, l. 49.
essentially functioning as an impresario, and requested a room nearby so that he could conduct his work and survey the daily activities of the theater.\textsuperscript{82}

Yelagin became the central link responsible for coordinating all activities at the court theater, which allowed him to regulate and develop theatrical affairs more uniformly.\textsuperscript{83} His appointment thus marks an important shift in the dynamics of the court theater and its relationship to the sovereign. For the first time, a powerful member of the Russian ruler’s inner circle was influencing the direction of the theater’s development and shaping individual operas as well.

\textbf{Ivan Yelagin and Catherine II}

Yelagin’s contributions to the court theater were made possible and influenced by his close relationship with Catherine II. He was among her most trusted confidants and artistic collaborators. Yelagin had proven his devotion to her years before she ascended to the throne. In 1758, he had participated in one of the conspiracies meant to put Catherine in power, and as a result he was arrested and exiled to his estate in Kazan.\textsuperscript{84} In the years of his exile, Catherine wrote letters to him assuring him of her unwavering gratitude. In one letter, she told him, “Be well and certain that I will not forget the love and loyalty

\textsuperscript{82} He also made himself the acting censor for the theater. G. Z. Mordison, \textit{Istoriya teatral’nogo dela v Rossii}, vol. 1 (St. Petersburg: Sil’van, 1995), 166–69.

\textsuperscript{83} Ibid., 165.

you showed,” and in another, she bid him an affectionate farewell, writing, “Goodbye, my friend.” As promised, her gratitude did not end when she became empress. She summoned Yelagin back to the capital following her coup, appointed him state councilor, added him to her Imperial Cabinet, and made him one of the three people with whom she held individual, weekly morning meetings. In the first twenty years of Catherine’s rule, few could claim to be closer to the empress or more involved in her affairs and the affairs of state.

Catherine II and Yelagin also approved of one another’s taste and vision for the future of the court theater. They were both distinguishing themselves as leading Russian authors, writing literary translations, plays, and adaptations of foreign stage works — a skill that was no doubt useful for someone involved in opera. Early in Catherine’s rule, they collaborated on translating a novel by Jean-François Marmontel that had been banned in France for its critique of the King, Louis XV. Over the following fifteen years, Yelagin continued to support Catherine’s writing, and they focused on the development

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85 “Будь уверенъ, что никогда не забуду любви и верности вашей... Прощай другъ мой,” and “Будь здоровъ и уверенъ, что невинность и усердие твои векъ изъ ума не выйдуть” (“Be well and certain that your innocence and diligence will never leave my memory”). Catherine’s letters to Yelagin have been published in SIRIO, vol. 7 (St. Petersburg: n. p., 1871), 76 and 79.

86 Every Friday and Saturday morning Catherine II and Yelagin met at eight o’clock. She met with M. Teplov on Mondays and Wednesdays and Adam Olsuf’yev on Tuesdays and Thursdays. RGADA f. 10, op. 1, d. 511, l. 8.

of the Russian troupe, which had been founded in 1756.\textsuperscript{88} They both wrote innovative Russian comedies, hoping to expand its repertory and improve its reputation.\textsuperscript{89}

Yelagin was particularly well suited for his position as director of Catherine’s theater because of his commitment to comedy, which he saw as a tool to improve society. Catherine and Yelagin shared the belief that comedy should mirror society and mock social vices, and he worked closely with the empress to prepare her satirical comedies for the stage. In fact, the extant manuscripts of Catherine’s early plays are all in Yelagin’s hand, which has led several scholars to claim that Yelagin edited her works and may have served as her co-author.\textsuperscript{90} Though the empress had other literary collaborators during her rule, few could boast such a close and prolonged working relationship with her on political, personal, and artistic fronts.

Part of Yelagin’s success stemmed from his ability to anticipate and fulfill the empress’s wishes, which helped make the court theater reflect Catherine’s taste and vision. As director, Yelagin prided himself on executing the empress’s demands. He also boasted that the improvement of the court theater during his tenure was his personal

\textsuperscript{88} The court’s Russian troupe had been founded in 1756 as an independent troupe under the direction of Alexander Sumarokov. By the end of the decade, Empress Elizaveta Petrovna had transferred it to court control because it was unable to support itself financially.

\textsuperscript{89} Yelagin would become the first of several directors at the court theater to assist Catherine II with her plays. Many of the manuscripts of the empress’s early plays are copies written by Yelagin. RGADA f. 10, op. 1, dd. 328, 333, 335, and 341. Lurana Donnels O’Malley, \textit{The Dramatic Works of Catherine the Great} (Ashgate: Aldershot, 2006), 16.

\textsuperscript{90} Giovanna Moracci, “K izucheniyu komediy Yekaterinï II,” \textit{Study Group on Eighteenth-Century Russia Newsletter} 30 (December 2002): 12-17. Four manuscripts of Catherine’s comedies held at the Russian State Archive of Ancient Acts have been identified as being in Yelagin’s hand. RGADA f. 10, op. 1, d. 328, 333, 335, 341.
achievement. In 1777, for instance, he described his accomplishments at the theater in a letter to the empress. The letter begins,

Your Most Gracious Majesty,
I executed your commands exactly over ten years, though prices — both for talented people and all items — in comparison with earlier times have increased . . . which shows the sufficiency of the state purse, the potential of giving spectacles with splendor never before seen in Russia, and the possibility of employing such people who by their great talents are paid three or four times their rank. Through this entire period, producing celebrations and spectacles as during His Highness's two weddings as well as during the arrival of His Majesty the King of Sweden and His Highness Prince Heinrich, I did not request even a single kopeck above my station. . . .
The theaters now are not burdened with debt of even a single ruble; the wardrobe is enormous; and the collection of set designs and props is full. In a word, this part of the theater is sufficient, and not as it was when I assumed the post, as shown in the accounts. 91

Yelagin presents himself as an ideal director by focusing on his bookkeeping savvy, which seems to speak to the empress’s previous concern about the financial management of her court theater. Moreover, he underscores the fact that he had managed to hire foreign celebrities, artists with the exceptional talent Catherine wanted to see working for her in St. Petersburg. Yelagin thus positions himself as her court theater’s trusty steward, having devoted himself to her vision for an accomplished and financially sustainable opera center. The new system of management that he established facilitated the growth and expansion of the court theater, and Yelagin’s successors maintained it for decades after he resigned, leading one theater historian to claim, fairly, that Yelagin’s

91 This letter is dated December 5, 1777. RGADA f. 17, op. 1, d. 322, l. 134.
reorganization established the regulatory and financial framework for the imperial theaters’ directorate of the 19th century.  

IMPROVING AND EXPANDING MUSICAL THEATER

After reorganizing the theaters, Yelagin’s next step was to put the Russian court theater on the European map. He recruited celebrities for the court’s Italian opera troupe, ballet troupe, and orchestra. There had never been as many internationally acclaimed musicians and singers working for the court as there were under Yelagin’s direction. In the past, the court had managed to hire composers and singers with only modest international reputations, like the aged castrato Giovanni Carestini, who spent one season in Russia after falling from favor elsewhere in Europe. The court had also tended to keep these individuals as long as possible. A single composer, the Neapolitan Francesco Araja, had served as maestro di cappella from 1735 until 1762 (with a brief break toward the end), a tenure that spanned the reigns of four rulers: Anna Ioannovna, Ivan VI, Elizaveta I, and Peter III. There was a stunning lack of variety in the Italian operas written for the Russian court, and none of the previous rulers had chosen to distinguish his or her rule by appointing a new maestro di cappella.

92 Ibid.
Yelagin had a discerning eye when it came to recruiting talent from abroad and sought out individuals with a notably modern sensibility. After Galuppi left, Yelagin was responsible for hiring two additional composers of comparable renown — first Tommaso Traetta, who had been associated with reform ideology in Parma and Vienna, and later Giovanni Paisiello, a preeminent composer at the vanguard of musical comedy and sentimental opera.\(^95\) Hiring renowned composers was at the core of how Catherine II and Yelagin began to improve Russia’s reputation, as foreign writers reliably took note of the whereabouts of these grand maestri. In 1776, just before Paisiello arrived, the Parisian *Dramatic Dictionary* praised the Russian court theater for the quality of its composers. The author reported,

> Catherine II, upon her accession to the throne, summoned to her court the famous Balthassare Galuppi, called Buranello . . . one of the most celebrated composers of modern Italy. . . . Galuppi was succeeded by Tommaso Traetta, a Neapolitan artist no less celebrated; Petersburg opera is today one of the most brilliant in Europe.\(^96\)

No longer a provincial outpost, Petersburg was edging its way toward the cultural center with the help of its new maestri.

These composers also helped the Russian court convince accomplished singers to travel to the distant northern capital. In 1777, when the empress tasked the director with assembling an opera buffa troupe, Yelagin quickly generated a wish list with first choices

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\(^{95}\) Traetta arrived in Russia at the end of 1769 and remained until 1775. Paisiello arrived in 1776 and worked for the Russian court until his sudden departure at the end of 1783.

and alternates, specified the salary ranges, and dispatched it to his recruiting agent in Venice, Count Maruzzi. Among the musicians he mentioned was the celebrated buffo caricato Baldassare Marchetti, whom Yelagin was so determined to hire that he pursued the singer through multiple channels: he enlisted a Russian diplomat in Vienna, a Viennese councilor, and the composer Giovanni Paisiello, who was then in Naples, to assist him. This dedication paid off, as Yelagin established an opera buffa troupe that achieved international acclaim with a number of triumphs, including Paisiello’s *Il barbiere di Siviglia* (St. Petersburg, 1782), which, as mentioned, was one of the most frequently performed operas in the Italian opera repertory in eighteenth-century Europe.

Yelagin was also attempting to improve the court’s orchestra by recruiting internationally acclaimed musicians. When he was appointed director, few of the orchestra’s members evinced great skills as soloists. After Galuppi expressed his dismay at the orchestra’s playing, Yelagin recognized the need to recruit talented violinists and hired two of the best virtuosi on the continent. In 1771, he hired Anton Titz from his position as concertmaster in Vienna, who introduced St. Petersburg to

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98 “. . . enfin pour l’emplois de buffo caricato, les Srs Baldassare Marchetti, & Genaro Luzio.” RGIA f. 468, op. 36, d. 37, l. 124. RGIA f. 468, op. 36, d. 37, ll. 137–38.


100 The ranks included two fine horn players: Jan Maresh, who began playing for the court orchestra in 1747 and led an all-horn orchestra; and Ferdinand Koelbel, credited with inventing the Amor-schall valved horn in 1766, some fifty years before Blühmel and Stözel introduced a similar version of the instrument. Edward Tarr, *East Meets West: the Russian Trumpet Tradition from the Time of Peter the Great to the October Revolution* (Hillsdale: Pendragon Press, 2003), 16–17. Pofir’yeva and A. A. Stepanov, “Kel’bel,” MPES, 2:53–54.
contemporary chamber music from Vienna. Yelagin also succeeded in signing the most revered violin virtuoso in Europe before Niccolò Paganini, Antonio Lolli. Lolli’s contract reflected the major shift in the theater’s priorities under Catherine II and Yelagin: the violinist earned as much as a castrato and three times more than any concertmasters had earned in Russia in the past.

Lolli’s salary might give the mistaken impression that Yelagin was working with an unlimited budget. But this was not the case; Lolli’s salary was exceptional. In fact, paying Lolli such a large sum required Yelagin to cut back his spending elsewhere. The virtuoso’s salary thus testifies to the importance that Yelagin and Catherine II were placing on bringing celebrities to the Russian capital. This proved to be a good investment, both in terms of improving the quality of performances and elevating Russia’s status abroad. In 1778, a prominent Milanese publication ranked Lolli among the finest artists of the Russian court theater:

103 Lolli’s contract awarded him 3,300 rubles annually, earning more than three times what the concertmaster had earned in 1766. RGIA f. 468, op. 36, d. 39, l. 17. The concertmaster in 1766 earned only 1,000 rubles. ADIT, 2: 87.
The best musicians of Italy are procured, and for the Ballet the most accredited masters . . . and to render brilliant the concerts that are given in the apartments of the Imperial Court is Sig. Antonio Lolli, of Bergamo, excellent professor of violin.  

Yelagin also restructured the orchestra according to more modern principles. In 1766, the court’s first orchestra consisted of thirty-five musicians, and by the time Yelagin resigned in 1779 it had nearly doubled in size. Yelagin updated the orchestra by adding a clarinet, which had become fashionable at prestigious theaters across the continent. Tommaso Traetta was the first to add a clarinet part to an opera for the Russian court with his L’Olimpiade in 1769, and included it in most of his subsequent operas for Catherine II. By 1777, Yelagin had not only increased the number of clarinets in the orchestra by hiring foreign musicians, he also supported Russians who wanted to apprentice with the clarinetists in the orchestra.

The first clarinet virtuosi to gain an international reputation, Joseph Beer, visited St. Petersburg in 1779. (Yelagin may have been responsible for Beer’s visit, but there are no documents to confirm it.) Beer’s trip to St. Petersburg was nonetheless part of the

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105 The first orchestra consisted of sixteen violinists, two contrabassists, two cellists, two bassoonists, two traverse flutes, two oboists, four violists, two horns, two trumpets, and one percussionist. The second orchestra had a director of music, twenty-four violins, four contrabasses, two cellos, two bassoonists, two traverse flutes, two oboes, two horns, two trumpets, and one percussionist (ADIT, 2: 87). The first orchestra grew from thirty-five musicians to fifty-seven musicians. The roster is included in Yelagin’s accounts from 1777. The second orchestra had diminished from forty-one members to twenty-nine, losing its cellists, oboists, and trumpeters. RGIA f. 468, op. 36, d. 39, l. 17. Porfir’yeva, “Pridvornyi Orkestr. Muzykanty,” MPES, 2: 426-28. L. N. Berezovchuk, “Vtoroy Pridvornoy Orkestr,” MPES, 1: 206.


107 RGIA f. 468, op. 36, d. 39, l. 18.

broader phenomenon of renowned musicians traveling to Russia. After the trip to Russia in 1779, Beer would return to St. Petersburg and join the court orchestra four months before Paisiello’s *Il barbiere di Siviglia* premiered in 1782. It was surely his presence in the orchestra that inspired the composer to include the opera’s memorable clarinet solos and cadenza in Rosina’s famous aria, “Già riede primavera” (Spring is coming).¹⁰⁹ In fact, *Il barbiere di Siviglia* was tailored by and for Yelagin’s recruits — Paisiello, Marchetti, Beer, and others — and its unprecedented success shows that the director’s contributions were critical to improving both the reputation of the Russian court theater and the quality of its operas.

**STAGING IMPERIAL TASTES UNDER YELAGIN’S ABSOLUTE AUTHORITY**

Yelagin not only controlled the recruiting of foreign talent, he managed the day-to-day activities of the court theater. He influenced artistic decisions from the selection of libretti to approval of the costume materials purchased from individual merchants. At a time when poets, composers, and singers were already vying for artistic control in opera productions across Europe, Yelagin coarsely and disagreeably asserted his authority over the Russian court theater and its affairs, issuing a statement to all theatrical personnel notifying them that they were “unconditionally subordinate to him.” He explained, “The theater administration is entrusted to me with absolute authority, which requires that I should command, and that they should obey me. . . . I cannot have anyone in my team

who does not follow my instructions.”

According to Yelagin, he needed to supervise each opera production and performance, because he alone was responsible for its success and failure. After occupying his position for thirteen years, he had arrived at an unsympathetic and inflexible view of the theater’s necessary hierarchy, which positioned him far above everyone else. As he put it,

> Alone, theatrical personnel never make anything great among themselves; the spirit of agreement in them never arises. Anything short of self-interest they will not do and they cannot produce grand spectacles without direction, because envy for money and for praise deprives them always of the feelings of fellowship and concord. For that reason, a failed spectacle corresponds to the director, though the lack of success arises from the disagreements and disobedience of his constituents.

From Yelagin’s point of view, centralizing management under his supervision was not just beneficial to the theater’s growth; it was necessary to its success.

> Although Yelagin viewed his authority as absolute, he understood the need to satisfy the tastes of the empress and the Russian elite, and in the 1760s the spectators at the Winter Palace preferred opera seria. When the court theater had hired an independent French troupe in 1764, the group’s debut performance of François-André Philidor’s opéra comique, *Le maréchal ferrant* (The blacksmith), earned only faint praise. One member of the audience suggested that the opera’s poor reception was due to the fact that Russian...”

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12 RGADA f. 17, op. 1, d. 322, ll. 138–39.
audiences had become accustomed to Italian music and lavish spectacles.\textsuperscript{113} In Philidor’s opera, the problem was that “aside from smiths, smithies, and smitheries,” there was nothing but simplicity in the music and on the stage.\textsuperscript{114} Another spectator concluded that the more the genre could be made to sound Italian, as opposed to French, the greater success it would have with the audience of the Imperial Theater.\textsuperscript{115}

Yelagin’s investments reflected the audience’s preferences, and the Italian opera troupe arguably benefitted the most during his tenure. Along with hiring celebrity Italian opera composers and enhancing the opera orchestra, Yelagin improved, as he had to, the quality of the singers. He recruited more expensive castrati, better tenors, and more famous \textit{prime donne} than had worked at the court theater in the past.\textsuperscript{116} His greatest accomplishment in this regard was signing Caterina Gabrielli, who had sung in Traetta’s operas in Naples, Vienna, and Milan before traveling to St. Petersburg to collaborate with

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{113}“Никита Ивановичъ то, что мы привыкли къ зрелищамъ огромнымъ и великолепнымъ, въ музыке ко вкусу итальянскому,” in Semyon Poroshin, \textit{Semyona Poroshina zapiski} (St. Petersburg: Tip. Karla Krayya, 1844), 13.
\item \textsuperscript{114}“... а туть кроме простоты въ музыке и на театре кроме кузницъ, кузнецовъ и кузнецихъ ничего не было,” in Poroshin, \textit{Zapiski}, 13.
\item \textsuperscript{115}Shtelin, “Izvestiya o muzïke v Rossii,” 130.
\item \textsuperscript{116}In 1766, the Italian opera troupe’s budget shows salaries ranging from the lowest-paid employee, the poet Ludovico Lazzaroni, who earned six hundred rubles, to the highest paid \textit{primo uomo}, castrato Domenico Luini, who received 3,500 rubles. Luini’s successors earned similar salaries. Pietro Benedetti, known as Sartorino, was \textit{primo uomo} from 1774 until 1777 and the more famous Giuseppe Compagnucci, who worked at the court from 1777 until 1782 both earned 3,600. Yelagin’s directorship also initiated a period of great and expensive tenors. He hired Antonio Prati in 1768, who was quite successful in St. Petersburg. When he took measures to leave Russia several years later, the Directorate offered him an unprecedented salary for a tenor — 2,200 rubles. The salaries of the \textit{prime donna} rose significantly during this period. In 1766 the prima donna earned only 2,000 rubles. In the late 1770s, the \textit{prima donna} Caterina Bonafini earned twice that amount. Remarkably, after Yelagin’s resignation the director offered her an unheard of sum of 7,000 rubles. Sartorino’s salary is recorded in RGIA f. 468, op. 36, d. 39, l. 13. See also Khodorkovskaya, “Bonafini,” MPES, 1: 144; Khodorkovskaya, “Kompanuchchi,” MPES, 2: 86; Khodorkovskaya, “Prati,” 2: 402.
\end{itemize}
him once more.\textsuperscript{117} She was revered by some of the most discerning and respected people working in opera in Europe; the librettist Pietro Metastasio claimed that Gabrielli possessed transcendent musical abilities.\textsuperscript{118} These international celebrities enhanced the quality of the Italian operas composed for the Russian court theater, which became star vehicles as greater disparities in pay and training emerged among members of the troupe. Though opera seria had long served to showcase the prima donna or castrato, this practice reached new extremes in the Russian capital.

Traetta’s last opera composed for the Russian court offers a clear example: \textit{Lucio Vero} (St. Petersburg, 1774), with a libretto by Apostolo Zeno (1700) revised by the Russian court’s poet Marco Coltellini.\textsuperscript{119} The court librettist modernized Zeno’s text by integrating ballets into the dramatic action and adding accompanied recitative and a number of choruses, including one in a new style that staged an exchange with a single character. He also changed the text to expand the role of Berenice, which was played by Caterina Gabrielli. She was likely the reason that the libretto was selected; Gabrielli had

\textsuperscript{117} Caterina Gabrielli (1730-1796), who may have been a pupil of Nicola Popora in Venice, had worked in Parma with Traetta in 1759 and 1760. After Parma, Gabrielli and Traetta went to Vienna and sang in the composer’s \textit{Armida} in 1761. She arrived in St. Petersburg in 1772. As musicologist Gerhard Croll and Irene Brandenburg write, “Gabrielli was one of the most eminent and perfect singers of her time.” Gerhard Croll and Irene Brandenburg, “Gabrielli, Caterina,” \textit{Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online}. Oxford University Press, accessed April 25, 2016, http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/10452.

\textsuperscript{118} This letter was written in 1759. Charles Burney, \textit{Memoirs of the Life and Writing of the Abate Metastasio}, vol. 2 (London: Printed for G. G. and J. Robinson, Paternoster-Row, 1796), 209.

\textsuperscript{119} Apostolo Zeno, \textit{Lucio vero} (St. Petersburg: Nella stamperia di Hartung, 1774). Before coming to St. Petersburg in 1772, Marco Coltellini had worked together in Vienna. In fact, Coltellini had worked once before with Traetta on the opera \textit{Ifigenia in Tauride} (1763). Though Traetta, Coltellin, and Gabrielli were all working in Vienna in the early 1760s, the three of them did not collaborate on an opera until they arrived in St. Petersburg.
already performed this role to great acclaim in a version composed by Antonio Sacchini in Naples a decade earlier.

In crafting the libretto for St. Petersburg, Coltellini based his revision of Zeno’s libretto on the one done for Sacchini, expanding further the role of the female lead and limiting the musical numbers for supporting characters. For instance, the supporting character Flavio, which was performed by the poorly paid Russian singer Marfa Kroleyevna, received only one aria. Coltellini’s expansion of Gabrielli’s role is particularly clear in the third act. Rather than following Sacchini’s example, Coltellini created a larger ombra scene for Berenice based on another version of Zeno’s libretto that had been in circulation since 1719 from the Roman setting by Francesco Gasparini (the librettist who altered Zeno’s libretto for this production is unknown). Berenice, played

120 The libretti of Traetta’s version and Sacchini’s version are nearly identical. The music of these versions is similar as well. Although Traetta’s Lucio Vero contains almost no melodic quotations from Sacchini or Jommelli’s operas, Traetta’s text, meters, tempi, key areas, instrumentation, and melismas are almost identical to Sacchini’s and Jommelli’s scores. The first aria of Traetta’s opera, Vologeso’s “Vedrai che non pavento,” provides a case in point. This aria text is found in both the settings of Traetta and Sacchini. It does not appear in any other setting, including those by Jommelli, Sarti, Martín y Soler, Leo, Pulli, or Capua. It is also not found in the earliest setting of Zeno’s libretto by Pollarolo in 1700. In both Traetta’s and Sacchini’s operas, this aria in common time with an allegro tempo, and both composers change the meter at the B section to 3/8. Strong dynamic contrasts in alternating pianos and fortes appear at the B section in both. Both composers also place melismas on the same word throughout the aria, “trionfar.” The instrumentation is also almost the same; these arias are written for horns, oboe, violins, viola, with bass accompaniment, except that Traetta’s replaced the oboe with the clarinet, which may not have been available to Sacchini.

121 Sacchini’s opera has a recitative “Berenice, ove sei?” and aria, “Gelida man tu tremi.” The other version, which included a longer version of “Berenice ove sei?” and an aria, “Ombra che pallida,” first appeared in Francesco Gasparini’s Lucio Vero, which premiered in 1719 in Rome. It is unclear what version of the libretto Coltellini was using. It is possible that he had access to Gasparini’s libretto before arriving in Russia. Two other Italian composers who had come to St. Petersburg — Francesco Araja (Venice, 1735) and Zoppis (Prague, 1753) — had composed versions of this opera prior to their arrival in Russia. Their versions of this opera also included the ombra scene. It seems to have become common practice to add this scene to revisions of Zenos libretto by the 1770s.
by Gabrieli, hears that her husband has been killed and goes mad, and she hallucinates the ghost of her dead husband in a highly dramatic and psychologically complex accompanied recitative and aria.

Traetta’s music for this scene resembles a version composed by Niccolò Jommelli (Il Vologeso, Ludwigsburg, 1766) in its use of the ombra key area (E flat major), shifting tempi, and sudden, violent dynamic contrasts. But in place of Jommelli’s through-composed cavatina and his austere, unembellished vocal melody, Traetta used a massive dal segno aria form with elaborate ornamentation. This provided Gabrielli with the opportunity to display her technical and dramatic prowess at length. Traetta’s scene begins with haunting restraint in a chromatic line of descending whole notes sung sotto voce to the words, “Ombra che pallida.” The vocal melody develops through rapid runs, trills, dotted rhythms, and virtuosic dissonant leaps, a final demonstration that this quasipastiche opera aimed to show the celebrity prima donna — and the court theater — to best advantage.

YELAGIN AND RUSSIAN IMPERIAL BALLET

The same values and tastes that shaped Lucio Vero also influenced the ballets created for Catherine’s court. Ensuring that the Russian court would have a leading ballet

122 Like Jommelli, Traetta also parses the obbligato recitative into three sections, separating the first and second with woodwind solos. In both, the concluding allegro section creates a fluid transition to Berenice’s subsequent aria, “Ombra pallide,” which is also marked allegro and features woodwind solos. For a description of Jommelli’s scene, see Clive McClelland, Ombra: A Supernatural Music in the Eighteenth-Century (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2012), 148.
troupe required the empress and Yelagin to hire an internationally renowned choreographer. In 1766, the court succeeded in hiring one of the most famous and innovative choreographers in Europe, Gasparo Angiolini, who had worked with the Russian court’s previous balletmeister, Franz Hilverding, in Vienna. Like Traetta and Coltellini, Angiolini embraced the so-called reform ideology, to which he had been exposed while working with librettist Raniere de’ Calzabigi and composer Christop Willibald Gluck. Collaborating with Calzabigi and Gluck, Angiolini not only choreographed ballets for reform operas like Orfeo ed Euridice, but also created a new type of dance-drama based on descriptions of pantomime in ancient Greece, which he described in the printed scenarios for Don Juan, ou le festin de pierre (Vienna, 1761) and Sémiramis (Vienna, 1765). With these and subsequent works, Angiolini became one of

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124 Gasparo Angiolini (1731-1803), who was born Domenico Maria Angiolo Gasparini, was a choreographer and a composer. He was, as Bruce Alan Brown notes, one of the leading proponents of the new danza parlante, or, as his rival Jean-Georges Noverre referred to it, the ballet d’action. Angiolini worked in Lucca, Turin, Rome, and Venice before traveling to Vienna, where he met his mentor, Franz Hilverding, and joined the French theater as premier danseur. During this period, he also worked with Marco Coltellini and Tommaso Traetta, who we would reunite with in Russia. The trio collaborated on Ifigenia in Tauride in 1763. Bruce Alan Brown, “Angiolini, Gasparo,” Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online, Oxford University Press, accessed June 12, 2016, http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/00929; Kathleen Hansell, “Theatrical Ballet and Italian Opera,” in Opera on Stage, trans. Kate Singleton, vol. 5 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 201n65.

the two leading proponents of drama in gesture, dance, and music, or what came to be known as *danza parlante* and *ballet d’action*.

Like the arrival of major composers and virtuosi, Angiolini’s appearance in St. Petersburg elicited praise from the foreign cultural elite and helped improve Russia’s reputation abroad. In Pietro Napoli Signorelli’s landmark book of 1787 on the history of musical theater, he mentions the theater in St. Petersburg, remarking on both ballet and opera. He states, “The ballets are magnificent,” noting that the Russian court was employing the celebrated Angiolini. In order to maintain a preeminent ballet troupe, Catherine II and Yelagin also had to pay the troupe’s leading members more than ever before. In fact, the salaries of the balletmeister, Gasparo Angiolini, and the leading ballerina, Santina Aubry, soon rivaled and exceeded those of the Italian opera stars.\(^\text{126}\)

Angiolini’s ballets delighted his audience at the Russian court. The choreographer claimed to follow the example of his mentor, Franz Hilverding, but Angiolini did not restrict himself to that model in practice. While Hilverding’s ballets often centered on peasants, gardeners, and shepherds dancing in their idylls, Angiolini gravitated towards the noble characters and moral dilemmas of opera seria, and incorporated Italian opera’s machinery as well as its elaborate sets and set changes.\(^\text{127}\) His debut ballet in Russia, *Le*

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\(^{126}\) In 1777, prima ballerina Santina Aubry made 3,000 rubles, as much as a castrato had made in 1766. Balletmeister Gasparo Angiolini earned 2,500 rubles, which was slightly less than a castrato, and, by 1777, was earning 4,000 rubles. ADIT, 92. RGIA f. 468, op. 36, d. 39, l. 15.

\(^{127}\) Hilverding also wrote allegorical ballets that celebrated the new empress, including the final ballet he choreographed for the opera *L’Olimpiade* in 1762 as well as *Le retour d’Apollon au Parnasse* and *Le combat de l’amour et de la Raison* of 1763. See Hilverding, *Ballet intitulé le combat de l’amour et de la raison* (Moscow: n. p., 1763); Hilverding, *Le retour d’Apollon au Parnasse. Ballet allégorique* (St. Petersburg: Imperial Academy, 1763); Metastasio, *L’olimpiade, dramma per musica* (Moscow: Imperial University of Moscow, 1762).
départ d’Enée, for instance, centered on the renowned prima ballerina Santina Aubry and concluded with a visually striking finale that the machinist, Gabriel Du Clos, had engineered for Galuppi’s opera.¹²⁸ According to the program, the heroine dies, looking towards Aeneas’s ship, as Jarba’s soldiers set fire to Carthage and the city’s ruins topple, crushing a great number of people.¹²⁹ The ballet astonished operagoers, and was — perhaps predictably, given local tastes — a tremendous success.

Angiolini repeated his success with subsequent heroic- and tragic-pantomime ballets that featured operatic spectacle on a similarly grand scale, even finding an equivalent in ballet for the lamenting operatic heroines such as Dido and Berenice. This is the case, for instance, in a scene from his Armida and Rinaldo (based on Torquato Tasso’s Gerusalemme liberate) created for the Russian court in 1769, in which — as Tasso describes — Rinaldo abandons the sorceress Alcina. Like Dido and Berenice, Alcina’s grief pushes her from cogent reason to hallucinations and madness. Angiolini describes her response to Rinaldo’s departure in the scenario, writing,

> With his departure, unhappy Armida comes to her senses. Her perturbed eyes dart about, and seeing herself alone, scorned and abandoned, she submits to her anger. In her fury, she wants to exact cruel revenge (as described by Tasso in Canto XVI of his poem). Her imagination is so strongly suffused with revenge that it seems to her that she has followed

¹²⁸ Angiolini, Le départ d’Enée, ou Didon abandonnée (St. Petersburg: Imperial Academy of Sciences, 1766).

¹²⁹ “Les cruautés des incendiaires, l’epouvante des Demoiselle, & la constance de Didon à mepriser Jarba jusqu’à la derniere extremité, forment le final du Ballet, qui se termine par la mort que Didon se donne sur le rivage de la mer, en regardant toujours la Flotte d’Enée, & par la destruction totale de Carthage, dont les ruines ecrasent & blessent une quantité de peuple” (The cruelties of the arsonists, the terror of the damsel, and the constancy of Dido scorning Jarba to the very end, constitute the conclusion of the ballet. It ends with the death of Dido, facing the seashore, looking always after Aeneas’s fleet, and the total destruction of Carthage, in which the ruins crush and maim a great quantity of people). See Angiolini, Le départ d’Enée, unpaginated.
him, approached him, pierced his heart, and removed it, leaving it as an example to all faithless lovers.130

Armida summons spirits from a dark abyss, and, in a striking set change similar to the fall of Carthage in Didone, Armida transforms her beautiful garden into a frightening wilderness. Statues morph into living beasts that breathe fire, and a building’s façade falls away to reveal an erupting volcano. The enraged sorceress mounts a chariot drawn by dragons with flames shooting from their mouths and noses, and flies into the air surrounded by the furies as fiery rain shoots down from the sky.131

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130 “По отшествий Ренольдовомъ приходить въ память нещастная Армида. Она обращаетъ повсюду смятенные вѣры, и вида себя едину, презрѣну, оставлену, предается своему гнѣву. Она въ лютости своей предпріемлетъ отмстить ему прежесточайшимъ образомъ (какъ описываемъ Тассъ въ XVI. пѣсни своей поэмы.) Воображеніе ея толь сильною местю наполнилось, что кажется ей, будто она за нимъ послѣдуетъ, приближается къ нему, пронзаетъ его сердце, извлекаетъ его радираетъ примириемъ кровь обагренное и смятенныя остались ужасную едину въ поемы i наполнилось толь что кажется ей. Воображеніе въ поемы i сильно местъ XVI. ю и своей, ее образомъ емлетъ ей отмстить предпріемлет ей какъ престрашайшемъ). Армида, видя наконецъ, что ни прелести ея, ни прошенія ни мало ей вспомоществуютъ предпріемлемъ намѣреніе превратить сѣвъ прекрасное жилище въ престрашную пустыню, а великокняжное зданіе въ ужасную огнѣдышующую гору. Потомъ изъ глубокой бездѣнѣ изводить она страшную свою колесницу,** и узвѣбъ людку, на которой Ренольдъ удаляется, восходить она на колесницу, и за нимъ отлетаетъ. [** Сѣя колесница везома двумя крылатыми драконами, бросающими пламень изъ горла и ноздрей, и когда возвышается она на воздухъ, тогда окружаютъ ей три Фурии Алекто, Мегера, и Тизифона.] Между тѣмъ безпрестанный огненный дождь возвращаетъ симъ дикимъ мѣстамъ ужасъ” (“Impassioned Armida, alone, creates new obstacles on their path to departure with the miracles of her art:* (*All the statues of this beautiful garden transform into magical creatures [such as Sphinxes, Gorgons, Harpies, and Chimeras] that each emit flames from its throat and nostrils.) But the warriors, unabated by it, display their fearlessness, and, redoubling their courage and prudence, clear the path by means of their magic wand, despite all Hades’s power. Armida, finally seeing that neither her charms nor pleas help at all, she transforms her beautiful dwelling into a frightening wilderness, and her magnificent building into a terrible fire-spewing volcano. Then from a deep abyss, she brings forth her frightful chariot.** (**) This chariot is led by two flying
In contrast to his mentor Hilverding’s modest pastoral ballets, which would have been difficult to see in the capacious hall, Angiolini made ballets that could enthrall both spectators near the stage and those in the distant upper galleries. Angiolini’s ballets benefitted from Yelagin’s support and hefty spending on sets and machinery and, like the operas of Galuppi and Traetta, displayed a level of grandeur and complexity that matched the Imperial Theater and the Stone Winter Palace of Catherine II.

THE LIMITED SUCCESS OF OPÉRA COMIQUE

Yelagin’s investments and coherent vision transformed the orchestra, Italian opera, and ballet troupe for the better, but he stopped short of producing a French troupe of equal stature. In fact, he showed the French theater limited support and was no less dismissive than the disappointed spectators, mentioned above, who had attended the premier of Le maréchal. His first intervention in the affairs of the French troupe involved its dissolution.

dragons, throwing flames from their nostrils and mouths. The chariot rises into the air and is surrounded by three Furies — Alecto, Megaera, and Tisiphone.) A ceaseless fiery rain returns terror to these wild places.” Angiolini, Armida i Renold, unpaginated.

132 Hilverding was, of course, famous for the narrative ballets that he choreographed in Vienna. In Russia, he choreographed a few of these as well, including Noviye Lavri and Pribyzhische dobrodeteli. Both dances had texts written by Russian tragedian Alexander Sumarokov and music by Hermann Raupach and Joseph Starzer. But the majority of his ballets for the Russian court were more modest in size and pastoral in content.

133 By 1777, the court theater was employing six times the number of painters than it was when Yelagin was hired. The number of painters, painters’ assistants, and pupils grew from three to nineteen. The number of costume designers and tailors grew from six to ten. With the increased spending, however, there was no concomitant influx of international celebrities working in this part of the theater during this period. Francesco Gradizzi served as the theatrical architect and painter for the duration of Yelagin’s tenure. For the 1777 roster of names and accounts in set design, see RGIA f. 468, op. 36, d. 39, l. 22.
in 1767. The troupe was allowed to stay in St. Petersburg and perform at an independent urban theater, but the performers failed to find favor with public theater audiences and left the city within a year. In 1767, the court theater assembled a new troupe of French actors, but Yelagin did not participate in their recruitment. This unusual break from his routine of micromanaging points to his lack of interest in the new troupe’s success.

For a brief period, the empress showed an interest in patronizing French opera and ordered Yelagin to assemble a French troupe to perform opéra comique in 1773. Robert Aloys Mooser claims that this new company comprised numerous artists of great valor, including Madame Daubercourt, the “brilliant singer” Suzanne Defoye, and the “remarkable” bass (basse-taille) Nicolas-Guilleminot Dugué. But these were not stars drawn from the stages of Paris. Dugué had been performing in La Haye (The Hague) and

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134 The troupe had performed dramatic repertory as well as a steady stream of comic operas by Philidor, Favart, Monsigny, Blaise, and Duni, including Le Maréchal-ferrant (Sept. 6, Nov. 8, Dec. 6, 1764), La Fête d’amour, ou Lucas et Colnette (Oct. 7, 1764), Les Deux chasseurs et la laitière (Nov. 1, 11, 14; Dec. 2, 1764; Apr. 24 Jul. 1, 1765), On ne s’avise jamais de tout (Nov 28, Dec. 3, 1766; Feb. 11 and June 3, 1765), Annette et Lubin (Jan. 3, May 30, Aug. 19, 1765), Soliman le second, ou Les Trois sultanes (Nov. 25, 1765), Le Caprice amoureux, ou Ninette à la Cour (Dec. 15, 1765), La Soirée des boulevards (Jan. 2, 1766), Le Cuvier (Renaud, no date). Khodorkovskaya, “Frantsuzskaya pridvornaya opernaya truppa,” 205; R. Aloys Mooser, L’opéra-comique français en Russie au XVIIIe siècle (Geneva: R. Kister, 1954), 32–40.

135 The troupe performed at the theater in the Wooden Winter Palace with a German troupe led by a man named Scolari. Shtelin, “Izvestiya o muzike v Rossii,” 130.

136 Khodorkovskaya, “Frantsuzskaya pridvornaya opernaya truppa,” 206. Unlike Renaud’s troupe, which performed many opéras comiques, the new troupe did not have any notable vocal training or talents, and may have performed only one opéra comique while working for the Russian court. Mooser, L’opéra-comique français en Russie, 51 and 67.

137 Yelagin writes that he is forming a troupe of French singers of opéra comique in response to the Empress’s verbal decree. Mooser, L’opéra-comique français en Russie, 51.

138 MA, 117.
had never established a major reputation, receiving limited praise in the press there. Defoye’s reputation was far worse. While working in Brussels prior to her employment in Russia, she sang for a disappointed audience that included Charles Burney, who recalled that Defoye possessed “something like execution, and a compass of voice; yet, with these advantages, her performance was unsteady and unfinished.” After hearing another performance, he declared her musically ignorant.

Dugué and Defoye were without question the most talented members of the new troupe; this did not bode well for the state of opéra comique in the Russian capital. A French diplomat then stationed in St. Petersburg, Marie-Daniel Bourrée, chevalier de Corberon, mentioned the troupe in his memoirs, and stated that Dugué and Defoye were the only members with any noticeable musical ability. Compared to the star-studded Italian troupe, ballet troupe, and orchestra, the French troupe’s lack of talent was striking. Given Yelagin’s success improving other areas of the court theater, the French troupe’s sorry state was surely the director’s doing. He expended comparatively little energy and finances on opéra comique, and did not display any determination to bring the newest and best of the genre to the Russian capital (see Appendix A, particularly Tables 7–8).

As one would expect, the middling troupe never helped the Russian court earn foreign accolades. It won only the contempt of Yelagin and the empress, who decried its

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139 A rare positive review of Dugué’s talents was printed in The Hague in 1762 when he performed the leading role in a performance of Philidor’s *Blaise le savetier*. See MA, 150.
performances in public. On one occasion, the director berated the troupe following a poor performance of André Grétry’s opéra comique Zémire et Azor in 1775. On another, he scolded them in the presence of the empress, and shouted, “Even their prompter is an ancient, miserable schoolmarm!” Catherine apparently agreed with Yelagin. She once playfully asked Friedrich Melchior Grimm, her correspondent in Paris,

How is it that the music of this bouffon [Giovanni Paisiello] makes me laugh, and the music of the French comic operas fills me with indignation and contempt, me who does not love and does not know anything at all about music?

The empress’s views had an immediate impact on theatrical affairs and were soon reflected in the budget. Yelagin allowed the new opéra comique troupe to dissolve on its own. In 1777, Catherine asked that Yelagin assemble an opera buffa troupe instead, which supplanted and outshone its French predecessor. By the early 1780s, the last traces of the French opera troupe’s existence had vanished from the director’s accounts.

EDUCATING AND PROMOTING RUSSIAN TALENT

Given the particular improvements made to the court theater under Yelagin, it would seem that the director was focused solely on promoting Italian opera and ballet. But in the

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142 Mooser, L’opéra-comique français en Russie, 55.
143 Ibid., 64.
144 SIRIO, vol. 23, 74.
145 Khodorkovskaya, “Frantsuzskaya pridvornaya opernaya truppa,” 208. The absence of the opéra comique troupe in the accounts of the early 1780s is found in RGADA f. 1239, op. 3, ch. 109, d. 53599, l. 7.
same years, he was also establishing a system of education at the court theater that would ensure that Russians were participating fully and that the court would not be forced to import so many performers from abroad. Yelagin fostered Russian talent through apprenticeships and collaborations, expanded the presence of Russians in all areas of the theater, and ensured that Italian opera would influence the nascent Russian genre.

When Yelagin became director in 1766, the theater was largely the domain of foreign talent, and there was no system in place at the court theater for training more than a handful of Russians for a professional career. The court had been sending select Russians abroad for education, but there were not sufficient resources to create a generation of Russian talent trained in Europe. Apprenticeship at the theater had been available only to the lowest-ranking members (*figuranti*) of the ballet troupe. There was no opportunity for Russians to rise through the ranks. By the time Yelagin’s tenure ended in 1779, Russians were apprenticing in and subsequently joining the Italian opera troupe, the ballet troupe, the orchestra, and the artistic staff. The court theater was on the verge of operating a professional school.

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146 The court had not been educating promising artists, but sending them abroad for “the best education possible.” This language appears in the decree that approved sending the Russian ballet dancer Timofei Bublikov to study abroad and provided the financial support for his education and living expenses. See ADIT, 2: 77.

147 In the mid-eighteenth century, ballet troupes were divided into two ranks: *ballerini* and *figuranti*. According to Kathleen Hansell, the “*figuranti* served to enhance the festive appearance of the company dances and should not be identified with the large corps de ballet of the later eighteenth century.” Hansell, “Theatrical Ballet and Italian Opera,” 210.

148 Pupils are listed in Yelagin’s 1766 accounts, and they are all in the ballet troupe. See ADIT, 2: 92.

149 The theatrical staff expanded significantly during Yelagin’s tenure. See Appendix A.
Yelagin’s increase in the number of Russian singers and dancers was especially notable. By 1776, for instance, with the exception of the prima donna Caterina Bonafini, all the women in the Italian troupe were Russian. The director also added Russians to the ballet. When Yelagin was appointed director, only one of the ballet troupe’s principal dancers was Russian, and he was never cast in a starring role. By 1772, Russians constituted half of the casts for Angiolini’s dance-dramas, and one Russian, Timofey Bublikov, had risen to the highest rank. Yelagin’s change in the personnel of imperial ballet was substantial and permanent.

A similar change was underway in the orchestra. An increasing number of Russians started as pupils and found positions in the orchestra after several years. As in the Italian and ballet troupes, the orchestra had supported no students in 1766. By the end of the 1770s, more than a dozen Russian students were receiving modest stipends as pupils. The violin section, led by Antonio Lolli, supported six Russian students. Russian students were also apprenticing as flutists, oboists, clarinetists, and horn players. Even behind the scenes, the number of Russians increased as Yelagin

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150 In 1777, the Italian opera troupe included only one Italian woman; all other female singers were Russian. Its members included Caterina Bonafini [Buonafini], Charlotta Shlakovskaya, Mar’ye Kotlyarevskaya, Agaf’ya Yavorskaya, and Marfa Kroleyevna. RGIA f. 468, op. 36, d. 37, l. 264.

151 Bublikov started to perform leading roles in 1769 when he was cast as Rinaldo in Angiolini’s Armida i Renold. The casting of this ballet was representative of ballet performances after Bublikov’s promotion. The two leading roles went to Santina Aubry and Bublikov, and the other solos were performed by Trofim Slepkin, Antonio Bianchi, and Varvara Mikhailova. G. N. Dobrovol’skaya, “Bublikov,” MPES, 1: 157–8. In Angiolini’s tragic pantomime Semira (1772), the roles were distributed as follows: Semira — Santina Aubry, Oleg — Trofim Slepkin, Rostislav — Timofei Bublikov, Oskold — Camille Fabiani, Vitozar — Francisco Morelli.

152 RGIA f. 468, op. 36, d. 39, ll. 17–18.

153 Ibid., 18–19.
supported half a dozen pupils working on set design.\(^\text{154}\) In every section of the theater that benefitted from Yelagin’s increased investments in celebrities — other than the French troupe — there was an attendant rise in Russian talent as well.

While training and promoting local talent proved beneficial to the rise of Russian opera, it also offered the director a useful strategy for increasing the number of foreign celebrities while balancing his budget. Because local talent earned far less than their foreign counterparts, Yelagin could hire expensive foreign celebrities without accruing debt. The director’s concern about balancing the budget is evident in his accounts; as the reputations and salaries of the leading singers rose, Yelagin added more and more cheap local talent (see Appendix A).

Yelagin offset the inflated salaries of Gabrielli, and then Bonafini and the castrato Sartorino, with those of the four other Russians in the troupe.\(^\text{155}\) Three of these four were apprenticing with the troupe as pupils and earned only a pittance. Though they were not full members, they performed supporting roles in opera seria and earned only one-twentieth of their counterparts’ salary.\(^\text{156}\) Yelagin’s promotion of Russian talent, together with his focus on balancing his budgets, made the St. Petersburg court one of the most

\(^{154}\) Ibid., 21–22.

\(^{155}\) While the primo uomo, Pietro Benedetti (a.k.a. Sartorino) earned 3,600 rubles and the prima donna, Caterina Bonafini [Buonafini] earned 4,000 rubles, Kotlyarevskaya, Yavorskaya, and Kroleyevna made two hundred rubles. Shlakovskaya, who had been a member of the troupe for much longer, earned 1,000 rubles. RGIA f. 468, op. 36, d. 37, l. 264. (Buonafini’s actual salary is listed in RGIA f. 468, op. 36, d. 37, l. 223.)

\(^{156}\) The three pupils were Kotlyarevskaya, Yavorskaya, and Kroleyevna. These were the lowest paid members of the troupe, given supporting roles in multiple operas. Kroleyevna, for instance, sang the role of Flavio in Traetta’s *Lucio Vero* (1774), Luminosa in Paisiello’s *Lucinda e Armidoro* (1776), Nitteti in *Nitteti* (1777, 1780), and Nearco in *Achille in Sciro* (1778).
egregious examples of financial exploitation in theaters across Europe.\textsuperscript{157} Ironically, the growing power and prestige of these foreign celebrities, financed in part by employing inexpensive local talent, would ultimately be undermined by Yelagin’s despotic management style.

\textbf{IVAN THE TERRIBLE: THE LIMITS OF YELAGIN’S AUTHORITY}

Yelagin claimed absolute authority over the personnel at the theater, and he managed theatrical affairs as a despot. His need for control stemmed from his dismal view of the people he managed, which he described in a letter, writing,

\begin{quote}
Theater people only listen to and respect a director or impresario when they are certain that their fate depends upon him, and that only he, who can dismiss them or add a new term [to their contracts] with raised salary, can satisfy both their ambition and self-interest. Only then will they diligently and obediently use their talents to the delight of the public. But they will conduct themselves without the necessary respect and obedience if they realize that with less work, but with greater recompense, they can by other means reach the object of their delight.\textsuperscript{158}
\end{quote}

Lacking any sense of camaraderie, Yelagin’s comment shows that he felt the need to manipulate the talent into doing their jobs.

\textsuperscript{157} London performances are often cited as particularly egregious cases of disparate pay. In the 1780s, the manager paid the lower category of talent £100 to £200, the middle £250 to £500 and the upper end earned £600 to 1,000. At the Russian court the supporting singers earned barely more than one-twentieth of the leading singers’ salaries. In comparison even to London, the socioeconomic disparity in St. Petersburg was excessive (which was in part due to the value of the ruble). Gabriella Dideriksen et al., \textit{Italian Opera in Late Eighteenth-Century London}, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 1: 127.

\textsuperscript{158} RGADA f. 17, op. 1, d. 322, ll. 138–39.
But Yelagin’s subordinates had a different opinion. They thought that problems arose because he was incompetent and insulting. The French actresses were particularly incensed about their mistreatment, and beseeched the French diplomat Corberon for help. One of them, Madame d’Aubercourt, accused Yelagin of calumnies and villainies, and stated,

[Yelagin] joins stupidity and wickedness with a blind aversion to the French, which he demonstrates in a continuous stream of injustices and blandishments; this will be a continual impediment to the improvement of French spectacles at the court, which are now worthless. This Yelagin has not the least idea what is necessary, and has an inconceivable passion for interfering indiscriminately.¹⁵⁹

Yelagin was, it seems, trying to influence more than the contracts, budgets, and prestige of the court theater. But he failed to exert the influence he desired: his performers resented and disputed his contribution and decided that his meddling had to be circumvented.

Yelagin’s creative advice to Angiolini exposed an ignorance that surely inspired resentment: he even went so far as to order Angiolini to stage twelve ballet programs choreographed by Jean-Georges Noverre, Angiolini’s archrival.¹⁶⁰ Like Angiolini, Noverre was a leading choreographer of dance-dramas, and his printed scenarios and treatise on dance, Lettres sur la danse et sur les ballets, had circulated widely in Europe.

¹⁵⁹ Corberon, Un diplomate français à la cour de Catherine II, 141–142. Also mentioned in Mordison, Istoriya teatral’nogo dela v Rossii, 218.

and secured his reputation. The two choreographers had engaged in a vitriolic polemic with one another in a series of published letters. Criticizing the French choreographer and his self-aggrandizing claims for ballet d’action, Angiolini had questioned Noverre’s knowledge of music and disparaged his programs for their length, complexity, and fantastic subjects. Finally, Angiolini denied his rival’s immodest and inaccurate claim to be the only reformer of pantomime ballet. These critical letters angered and offended Noverre, who called them “bittersweet libel” and claimed that they were published with the sole intention of making him look like an imbecile. The feud continued as Angiolini returned to St. Petersburg, where he chafed at Yelagin’s request to choreograph his rival’s ballets.

Yelagin’s demand that Angiolini stage Noverre’s ballet offended the choreographer and ended their professional relationship. The director described his troublesome exchange with the defiant Angiolini in one of his letters, writing,

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161 Jean-Georges Noverre (1727-1810) was a French-Swiss choreographer who established his reputation as a leading figure in dance with his book, Lettres sur la danse (1760). He was an exponent of the ballet d’action, and wrote the bulk of his famous printed scenarios while working in Stuttgart at the Württemberg court. A biography and discussion of his theories can be found in Hansell, “Noverre, Jean-Georges,” Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online, Oxford University Press, accessed July 16, 2016, http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/20148.

162 Angiolini, Lettere di Gasparo Angiolini a Monsieur sopra i balli pantomimi (Milan: n. p., 1773).


Angiolini’s contract required him to furnish ballets with printed programs for the audience. In the beginning he agreed to do his own . . . After certain circumstances, he rebelled. He did not want to make a ballet from twelve of Noverre’s programs with music, and he finally announced that he has no time to do anything ever for the theater. Perhaps he is busy, I do not know . . . I know only that never were there such expenses as there are today for a one-off and small little ballets, and I could not refuse him anything because I was commanded in a letter by the Hofmarshal to execute everything according to the proposals of the maestro di ballet to the general lieutenant, who sends the proposals to various offices and chancelleries according to the will of the monarch!165

As a result of Yelagin’s meddling, Angiolini produced fewer ballets. During his first stint in Russia (1766-1772), he created at least six large-scale heroic, tragic, and allegorical pantomime ballets, and published accompanying programs as well.166 But after the ballet master returned to St. Petersburg in 1776, he staged only two grand pantomime ballets — *Thèsée et Ariane* and *l’Orphelin de la Chine*.167 In the following years, he limited himself to choreographing ballets for the premieres of serious operas.168 This was

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165 RGADA f. 17, op. 1, d. 322, II. 138–39.


167 The theatrical accounts suggest that the ballet troupe was staging far more ballets than the published programs and libretti reveal. But the information about these performances is partial, so it is not possible to confirm that these ballets were Angiolini’s creations. The accounts from 1777 indicate that the director was approving expenses for the following ballets: *La précaution inutile, Diana, Torzhstvo lyubvi, “Chinese ballet,” La surprise, La triomphe de l’Amour, Obvorozheniye fontana, La rencontre, Tesei [Thèsée], Serseïa i Ulis, Orfei*. RGIA f. 468, op. 36, d. 39, II. 40–75, 102–5. The French diplomat also mentions attending performances of *Thèsée et Ariane* and *l’Orphelin de la Chine*. Corberon, *Un diplomate français à la cour de Catherine II*, 2: 3 and 189.

168 He choreographed ballets for operas throughout his time in St. Petersburg. During his first stint in Russia, he created ballets for: *Ifigenia in Tauride* (music by Galuppi, St. Petersburg, 1768), *La governante astuta, ed il tutor sciocco, e geloso* (Galuppi, Moscow, 1767), *l’Olimpiade* (Traetta,
unlikely to have been Angiolini’s preference given that he had earlier pledged, “The ballets of an opera combined with actors [singers] and choruses will never cost the choreographer any exertion of talent or of imagination.”169

Angiolini’s decision to choreograph solely for the opera was, in all likelihood, a response to Yelagin’s demand that he stage Noverre’s ballets — an affront to Angiolini’s views on dance, which Yelagin either did not know or ignored. Angiolini thus stopped following Yelagin’s orders and circumvented the director’s authority by seeking protection from the few people at court who outranked the stubborn director. The deterioration of their relationship illustrates how the empress’s desire to see the best of opera and ballet performed at her court was thwarted by her director’s inability to work with them successfully.

Composer Giovanni Paisiello, who arrived in 1777, exacerbated Yelagin’s problems. Paisiello overtly challenged the theater’s hierarchy and Yelagin’s ability to make the most basic decisions about repertoire. Yelagin clearly understood that his authority and artistic control were eroding, explaining,

For eleven years I selected the operas for performance, and never made an unsuccessful selection. But nowadays there has come a point when staging a particular opera is

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169 Quoted and translated in Kathleen Kuzmick Hansell, “Theatrical Ballet and Italian Opera,” 230.
undesirable if I choose it without the goodwill or approval of the maestro di cappella. This was not done under Galuppi or the rest, and no one asked.  

As Paisiello attempted to gain more control over finances, his relationship with Yelagin deteriorated further. Paisiello asked for larger sums than Yelagin was accustomed to spending on performances of opera buffa, a request that reflected Paisiello’s interest in incorporating some of the more expensive elements of visual spectacle associated with opera seria. Yelagin refused his request, and Paisiello walked off the set. The director tried to hire an impresario at an independent public theater to stage the opera, but the impresario declined his offer. The response was surprising because, like all eighteenth-century itinerant impresarios, he would have needed the money. One of the only reasons he would have had to turn down the director’s offer was loyalty to Paisiello (who was likely sharing some of his opera scores with the troupe). Yelagin explains that Paisiello reappeared at the last moment to fulfill his contractual obligations. He writes,

I asked one bouffon with the free Italian theater, offering him not a small sum of money, but I was rejected. Instead, the opera was presented by the bouffon here in my directorate. The same maestro di cappella gave it solely for the purpose of receiving special recompense for the exact execution of his contractual obligations [. . .]

170 RGADA f. 17, op. 1, d. 322, ll. 138–9.

171 “Несносно Паизіелло, что я недаль ему воспользоваться просимыми ими 38/т. рублевъ на выписку итальянской оперы-комикъ. Я ее выписалъ на ту же сумму, въ которой и до сихъ порь безъ прибавки обращался” (It was intolerable to Paisiello that I did not give him the 38,000 rubles he requested to create an Italian opera. I ordered it with the same sum that I have spent to this day without augmentation). RGADA f. 17, op. 1, d. 322, ll. 138–39.


173 Mattei’s troupe gave the Russian premiere of Paisiello’s La Frascatana, which would have likely required the assistance or support of the composer. The troupe was also able to access to Paisiello’s opera scores, like I filosofi immaginari, after they premiered at the court theater. Khodorkovskaya, “Mattei i Orechi Truppa,” MPES, 2: 196–97.
I humbly beg you in my poor condition to imagine what would have been tolerable by any commander if someone from another land flattered his subordinates, solicited others for rewards for them, exempted them from obedience and, with that level of disorganization in the regiment, even held its leader in contempt.¹⁷⁴

According to Yelagin, Paisiello was not following the chain of command and was defying him by cultivating outside alliances that necessarily limited his control. Yelagin also complained that the artists arrogantly defied him by exploiting loopholes in their contracts.¹⁷⁵ Their actions ultimately succeeded in costing Yelagin his post in 1779. Catherine, who had refused Yelagin’s proffered resignation in 1777, finally agreed that it was time for a new director.

YELAGIN’S LEGACY TO RUSSIAN OPERA

Despite these problems, Yelagin’s complicated tenure ultimately was of benefit to the development of Russian talent and Russian opera — as well as the theatrical budget. His successor, the former manager of the court’s Russian troupe, Vasily Bibikov, enhanced Yelagin’s system of promoting Russians across the theater.¹⁷⁶ Bibikov expanded Yelagin’s program for education and continued to pay stipends to dozens of pupils in the

¹⁷⁴ RGADA f. 17, op. 1, d. 322, ll. 138–9.
¹⁷⁵ Ibid.
¹⁷⁶ Vasily Il’ich Bibikov (1740?–1787?), was a kamer-yunker (valet de chambre) and later a Chamberlain under Catherine II. Like Yelagin, Bibikov had participated in Catherine II’s coup in 1762. He was an amateur actor, and Catherine II appointed him to manage the court’s Russian troupe after she came to power. After Yelagin’s resignation, he became director of the court theaters and served until 1783. His tenure is largely remembered as a failure; he alienated the foreign talent entirely and did little to develop the national theater. I. F. Petrovskaya, “Bibikov,” MPES, 1:136.
various troupes, the orchestra, and set design. He also hired a doctor and several teachers to instruct them in music as well as language and math. In an official court document, Bibikov articulated the aims that had motivated Yelagin to operate a professional preparatory school. Bibikov stated that the school was essential, because without it the court theater’s finances would be unsustainable and there would be no Russian talent performing there.

Catherine II reinforced this message a year later and assured Yelagin’s legacy by continuing to elevate Russians in all positions and making his educational system a permanent part of her court theater. In 1783, Catherine fired Bibikov and decreed that her new director Adam Olsuf’yev’s responsibilities include overseeing the court theater’s professional preparatory school. The theater, she informed him, must prepare young men and women to work in the Russian troupe, in music, in dance, and in the various other masteries required. She explained that the school was necessary to “not only fill out the theater with [Russian talent], but in time to achieve the total replacement of foreigners in all needed skills.” Russians were not merely supposed to support talented foreigners and limit spending; Russians should supplant them all.

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177 Bibikov’s accounts are dated January 1, 1782. RGADA f. 17, op. 1, d. 322, ll. 144–151.
178 RGADA f. 17, op. 1, d. 322, l. 152.
179 ADIT, 2: 112–18. In 1783, Catherine closed the Imperial Theater in the Winter Palace to open two new semi-commercial theaters in the city — the Large Stone Theater (Bolshoy Kamenniy Teatr), an opera house, and the Small Wooden Theater, which was a playhouse. The empress’s decision to open public theaters is the subject of chapter four.
180 “[. . .] дабы со временем достичь во всех мастерах по театрам нужных замены иностранцами своими природными.” ADIT, 2: 114.
The new director took steps to fulfill Catherine’s request. By 1787, education had expanded further; fourteen Russian pupils were training to be singers, and dozens of others were apprenticing in dance, music, and set design. New contracts from this era further attest to the importance that the authorities placed upon educating Russian students. The director added new stipulations that required the maestri di cappella, ballet masters, and other foreign celebrities to teach Russian students.

Over the next decade, as opera buffa was supplanting opera seria as the most popular offering at the court theater, the theater school enabled Russians to study with some of the most acclaimed musical talent working on opera buffa in Europe without leaving Russia. Locals worked closely with leading composers Giuseppe Sarti, Vincente Martín y Soler, and Gennaro Astarita, and the basso buffo Baldassare Marchetti. The relationships formed between Italians and Russians at the court’s school would shape the future of the Russian troupe. The school produced a new generation of Russian singers and dancers with Italian training and experience performing in the operas of their teachers; in so doing, they cemented the Italian foundation of Russian opera.

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181 There were also “pupils” in hair and makeup, but they are not included in the list of students in the theater’s school. See ADIT, 2: 320–23.

182 The contract with Martín y Soler included the following stipulation, “Les élèves de l’école du Théâtre assez avancés dans les principes ed la Musique . . . il leur apprendra le bon gout du chant en les perfectionnant en cet art” (The students at the theater school who are sufficiently advanced in the principles of Music . . . he [Martín y Soler] will teach them good taste in singing to perfect their art). RGIA f. 497, op. 4, d. 3, l. 113.

183 Petrovskaya, “Teatral’naya Shkola,” MPES, 3:140–141. Giuseppe Sarti worked in Russia from 1784 until 1801, Martín y Soler from 1788 to 1794 and returned in 1796, and Gennaro Astarita worked on and off in Russia from 1784 to 1787 and from 1794 to 1803.
The theater’s school also proved essential to realizing the empress’s particular vision for her Russian troupe. When she enumerated the new director’s responsibilities, she also ensured that the Russian troupe would become and stay a musical theater troupe, not just a dramatic troupe, by requiring that the troupe perform operas as well as dramatic comedies and tragedies in the coming years.\(^\text{184}\) Opera had never been the troupe’s focus; in fact, the troupe had only staged a handful of operas in its three decades of existence.\(^\text{185}\) Skilled Russian singers were performing more often with the Italian troupe in *opere serie* and *opere buffe* than with Russian troupe. Catherine’s directive required this to change, and the Russian troupe began to hire and cast singers in new productions of Russian opera. From that point on, the new management staged more Russian operas, and the theater school provided the steady stream of singers needed to perform them.\(^\text{186}\)

By the end of the decade, this effort had succeeded. Graduates of the school were starring in opera and ballet performances, attracting a devoted following, and rising to top positions in the Russian troupe. In 1795, one graduate, Ivan Valberkh, became the first

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\(^{184}\) “Российский театр нужно чтобы былъ не для одыыхъ комеди́й и трагеди́й, но и для оперъ” (“The Russian theater is necessary not only for comedy and tragedy alone, but also for opera”). This document is reprinted in full in ADIT, 2: 116.

\(^{185}\) The Russian troupe was founded in 1756 as an independent public theater troupe. It staged comedies and dramas, and included only men (who performed female roles as well). The initial members of the troupe included actors who had studied at the Cadet Corps, like Yelagin, and individuals from Fyodor Volkov’s Iaroslavl public theater. The court annexed the Russian troupe in 1759. Wendy Rosslyn, “Female Employees in the Russian Imperial Theatres (1785–1825),” in *Women and Gender in 18th-Century Russia*, ed. Wendy Rosslyn (Burlington: Ashgate, 2003), 258.

\(^{186}\) In 1785, the director acknowledged the insufficiency of trained Russian singers, and expanded the theater’s effort to train and hire them. The director and his management committee had issued a document “On the Inadequate Number of Opera Singers in the Russian Troupe,” which led to the increase in aspiring singers studying at the school, who were then hired. See Petrovskaya, “Russkaya pridvornaya (imperatorskaya) truppa,” MPES, 3: 57–60 and Petrovskaya, “Russkiy dlya predstavleniya tragediy i komediy teatr,” MPES, 3: 60–61.
Russian to be appointed ballet master. Another graduate, a singer named Yakov Vorobyov, had similar success. After studying voice with the opera buffa composer Martín y Soler and the basso buffo Marchetti at the theater’s school, he joined the court’s Russian troupe in 1787. He was lauded as a first-rate buffo with a clear voice and natural acting style, and performed the leading basso roles in translated opere buffe by Giovanni Paisiello, Pietro Guglielmi, and Marcos Portogallo, among others. By 1791, his success was rewarded with a new appointment to the most prestigious and highly paid position in the Russian troupe.

The school produced the first female stars of Russian opera as well. Vorobyov’s wife, Avdotya Vorobyova (née Volkova), had also studied voice at the school, and went on to perform comic operas at the court theater with her husband. She, too, was promoted to a leading position at the end of the century, but only after the departure of another graduate of the theater school — Yelizaveta Sandunova. Like Vorobyov, Sandunova had been coached by the court’s Italian maestri and she became a local sensation, starring in newly composed Russian comic operas and translated opere buffe. Sandunova’s remarkable reception in St. Petersburg testifies to the expansion of a prima donna cult from the stars of the Italian opera troupe to the Russian troupe as well. Her most beloved performances were in the role of Ghita in Martín y Soler’s Redkaya veshch’.

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187 The graduate Ivan Valberkh was a student of Gasparo Angiolini and Giovanni Canziani, and had a complicated relationship in St. Petersburg with the esteemed French ballet master Charles Didelot. See G. N. Dobrovol’skaya, “Balet,” MPES, 1: 86. Valberkh’s own diaries, notes, and scenarios have been printed as Val’berkh, Iz arkhiva baletmyistera: dneviki, perepiska, stsenarii (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1948).


190 Ibid.
(Una cosa rara) and as the Queen of the Night in Mozart’s *Volshebnaya Flejta* (Die Zauberflöte), which she was reputed to have sung with ease. Operagoers in the capital revered these performances and remembered Sandunova’s voice with especial fondness, as strong yet pleasing, supple, and expressive.

By the early 1790s, Russian singers filled both lead and supporting roles in the Russian troupe. As the director promoted singers from the school, he also added to their numbers by hiring other locally acclaimed Russian singers who had not trained at the school, such as Anton Krutitsky (see chapter four) — the only Russian comic bass to rival Vorobyov. In the Russian troupe, singers were surpassing their dramatic counterparts in both prestige and power, thus establishing a new hierarchy that ensured that the troupe’s focus on opera would continue for years to come.

The project that Yelagin had set in motion had been completed. The Russian troupe had grown into a full-fledged opera troupe, and was shaped by ongoing connections and collaborations with the Italian troupe. Decades after Russian vocal students first joined the Italian troupe as pupils, Russians and Italians were creating and performing operas together. But there was an important difference: Russians were no

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191 See Khovanskiy, “Poslaniye k E. S. Sandunova,” in *Sankt-peterburgskiy Merkuriy*, vol. 2 (St. Petersburg: v tipografii I. Krilova s tovarishchi, 1793), 83-84. MA, 678.

192 See also Petrovskaya, “Sandunova,” MPES, 3: 71.


194 The Russian troupe’s budget had also more that doubled by 1791. See Table 11 in Appendix A.
longer members of the Italian troupe. Russians and Italians were collaborating instead in performances of Russian opera. This change occurred because the director of the court theater had altered the standard contracts for foreign talent in the late 1780s. Both Guglielmo Jermolli, a tenor, and the maestro di cappella Martín y Soler signed contracts that required them to perform in and compose for the Russian troupe as well.\footnote{Jermolli’s contract required him to perform all the leading tenor roles in original Russian operas and operas translated from foreign languages. The contract’s stipulation reads, “Il jouera tous les rôles de premier tenore dans les opéras russes originaux ou traduits de langues étrangères” (He will perform all the roles of first tenor in original Russian operas or those translated from foreign languages). Martín y Soler was obligated to compose music for new Russian or Italian operas, and arrange Russian operas translated from foreign languages for the Russians capable of performing them (“[…] il s’engage de faire la musique pour des nouveaux opéras Russes ou Italiens ainsi que les cantates et les choeurs pour la cour, tant au concert que pour la musique de table. 2. Il arrangera les Operas traduites des autres Langues en Russe et les adoptera aux voix des acteurs russes capables de les executer”). RGIA f. 497, op. 4, d. 3, ll. 113–14.} When the Russian playwright Ivan Krylov translated the libretti of Martín y Soler’s popular opere buffe to Russian in the 1790s, the composer was required to adapt them for the singers in the Russian troupe.\footnote{Both Una cosa rara and L’arbore di Diana were translated by the Russian playwright and fabulist Ivan Krylov. Da Ponte, Diyanino drevo ili Torzhestvuushchaya lyubov’, trans. Ivan Krylov (St. Petersburg: Tip. I. Krïlova, 1792). Da Ponte, Redkaya veshch’, trans. Ivan Krylov (St. Petersburg: Tip. I. Krïlova, 1792)} As a result, his Una cosa rara and L’arbore di Diana, which were both collaborations with librettist Lorenzo Da Ponte, became as wildly successful in St. Petersburg as they were in Mozart’s Vienna and elsewhere in Europe, albeit in Russian translation.\footnote{Though documentation is sparse, box office records exist for the period of April 1789 through May 1791. During these years, the highest grossing performances were Russian operas (in part because the Italian troupe had been dissolved and the French troupe was no longer performing operas). Of the five most popular Russians operas — best attended and most frequently staged — two were newly composed Russian operas and three were translations of opere buffe. The newly composed Russian operas were, predictably, Mel’nik—koldun, obmanshchik, i svat (The miller who was also a wizard, cheat, and matchmaker) and Catherine the Great’s own historical spectacle with music, Nachal noye Upravleniye Olega (The Early Reign of Oleg). The Italian}
Catherine II began to contribute more directly to Russian opera during these years as well. She had written Russian plays for decades, and, as *opere buffe* entered the Russian troupe’s repertory, she began to write libretti and collaborate with her buffa composers (see chapter three). Between 1786 and 1791, she wrote one historical music drama and five comic opera libretti on subjects taken from Russian chronicles and fairy tales, and enlisted both Russian and Italian composers to compose the music for her.\(^{198}\)

Giuseppe Sarti, Carlo Canobbio, and Vasily Pashkevich wrote music for her opera, *Nachal’noye Upravleniye Olega* (The early reign of Oleg, circa 1790), and her *Fedul s det’mi* (Fedul and his children, 1791) was composed by Pashkevich and Vicente Martín y Soler.\(^{199}\) Through these collaborations, Catherine’s operas captured the entrenched Italo-Russian interchange that the theater’s directors had been cultivating for decades. But there was one important difference: Russians were not simply apprenticing as students. They were collaborating on new operas that interwove Russian musical styles and forms of opera buffa.

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\(^{198}\) In chronological order, Catherine II’s operas were: *Fevey* (music by Vasily Pashkevich, 1786), *Novgorodskiy bogatir’ Boyeslavich* (Boyeslavich, Knight Errant of Novgorod, music by Fomin, 1786), *Khrobroy i smeloy vityaz’ Akhrideich* (The brave and bold knight errant Akhrideich, Wanzura, 1787), *Gorebogatir Kosometovich* (The unfortunate knight errant Kosometovich, Martín y Soler, 1789), *Fedul s det’mi* (Fedul and his children, Pashkevich and Martín y Soler, 1791), and she wrote the historical pageant, *Nachal’noye Upravleniye Olega*.

\(^{199}\) The Early Reign of Oleg was likely written in 1786 and may have premiered as early as 1787, when the libretto was published in the *Rossiiskiy Featr* compendium. Mooser states that the choruses commissioned for the early version were by Cimarosa, but they were considered inadequate. Sarti was enlisted to replace them. He composed the choruses that were published in the 1791 edition of the score. MA, 552.
While Catherine’s tastes tended toward comedy, her music-drama, *The Early Reign of Oleg*, presents the culmination of the Russian court theater’s transformation during her rule. With *Oleg*, Catherine brought the values and tastes of Yelagin’s tenure into the 1790s. She advanced Russian opera and its performers while also incorporating Italianate music, grand spectacle, and foreign celebrities. This particular combination impressed both local operagoers and foreign observers. After one performance of *Oleg*, Heinrich Storch, a German visitor in the audience, recorded his astonishment at the numerous elaborate sets, the historic costumes, and military props. He recalled,

> The magnificence of the performance far exceeded everything I have ever beheld of this kind in Paris and other capital cities. The sumptuousness of the dresses, all in the ancient Russian costume and all the jewelry genuine, the dazzling luster of the pearls and diamonds, the armorial decorations, implements of war and other properties, the ingenuity displayed in the ever-varying scenery, went far beyond even the boldest expectations. Here were seen romantic regions, sailing fleets, towns and the proud battlements of antique places. . . The ballets corresponded with the brilliancy of the opera. 200

Following this description of stunning visual splendor, Storch enumerated the celebrities involved in the performance. Like writers on Russian court theater before him, he listed the famous individuals involved in the production. He named the famous composer Giuseppe Sarti, the choreographers Canziani and Charles Le Picq, and the preeminent set designer.

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designer Pietro Gonzaga as sufficient evidence for the quality of the work’s music, ballets, and sets.201

In Oleg, grand spectacle and foreign celebrities thus helped to legitimize Russian opera, as they had legitimized the Russian court theater under Yelagin. But Oleg harnessed more than what was required to impress writers abroad; all of Yelagin’s priorities came together, foreign and national, at the pleasure of the empress. This particular assortment of personnel and aesthetics shows how Russian opera became a prestigious genre that captured the political and national ambitions of the empress and her theater’s director. Although Yelagin’s tenure ended with dismissal under a cloud of strife, his recruitment of first-rate celebrities, his development of the grand spectacle, his encouragement of Italianate music, and his support of Russian talent influenced the development of an indigenous repertoire and created an important, albeit complicated, legacy. Together, the empress and her theaters’ directors transformed the hierarchies and collaborative dynamics of the court theater, and ensured that Russian opera would continue to flourish long after Catherine’s rule came to an end.

201 Storch, The Picture of Petersburg, 454.
### APPENDIX A

**SALARIES AT THE COURT THEATER, 1766–1791**

Table 1 Opera Troupe Salaries in Rubles in 1766 (ADIT, 2:86)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Salary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Poet</td>
<td>600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maestro di cappella</td>
<td>4,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primo Uomo</td>
<td>3,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prima Donna</td>
<td>2,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second</td>
<td>2,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second</td>
<td>1,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third</td>
<td>2,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third</td>
<td>1,000</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 Salaries of Singers in the Italian Opera troupe in 1776 (RGIA f. 468, op. 36, d. 37, l. 264)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Singer</th>
<th>Salary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sartorino</td>
<td>3,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bonafini</td>
<td>2,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prati</td>
<td>1,800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shlakovskaya</td>
<td>1,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Porri</td>
<td>1,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kotlyarevskaya</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amati</td>
<td>800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yavorskaya</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Krolevna</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 Ballet Troupe Salaries in 1766 (ADIT, 2:87)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Salary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Choreographer</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serious</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serious</td>
<td>2,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Comic</td>
<td>2,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Comic</td>
<td>2,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demi</td>
<td>1,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demi</td>
<td>1,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bas-Comic</td>
<td>1,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bas-comic</td>
<td>1,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figurants (24)</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students (4)</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pupils (4)</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4 Ballet Troupe Salaries in 1777 (RGIA f. 468, op. 36, d. 39, l. 15)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Salary</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lefevre</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aubry</td>
<td>3,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paradiso</td>
<td>2,150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prati</td>
<td>2,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bublikov</td>
<td>1,250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mikhailova</td>
<td>1,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taolato</td>
<td>1,050</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5 French Troupe Salaries in 1766 (ADIT, 2:88)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Actors</th>
<th>Actresses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First Lover</td>
<td>2,000</td>
<td>2,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second</td>
<td>1,200</td>
<td>1,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third</td>
<td>800</td>
<td>1,800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Noble</td>
<td>1,200</td>
<td>800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Comic</td>
<td>1,600</td>
<td>1,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peasant</td>
<td>1,000</td>
<td>600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Servant</td>
<td>1,500</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second Servant</td>
<td>600</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raisonneur</td>
<td>600</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidants (2)</td>
<td>600</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prompter</td>
<td>400</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendants (4)</td>
<td>60</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6 French Troupe Salaries in 1777 (RGIA f. 468, op. 36, d. 37, l. 264–265 and f. 468, op. 36, d. 39, l. 13–14)\textsuperscript{202}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Salary</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Salary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Daubercourt</td>
<td>1009.92</td>
<td>Brochard</td>
<td>1,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Floridor</td>
<td>1,500</td>
<td>Bogran</td>
<td>1,100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bourdais</td>
<td>2,000</td>
<td>Fleury</td>
<td>1,654.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lamery</td>
<td>2,000</td>
<td>Delpy</td>
<td>1,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prevo</td>
<td>1,500</td>
<td>Martin</td>
<td>3,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Devil’</td>
<td>2,200</td>
<td>Siuset</td>
<td>1,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boal’</td>
<td>800</td>
<td>Plancheneau</td>
<td>1,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reno</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>Brochard</td>
<td>1,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prompter Bonafon</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>Bakari</td>
<td>400</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7 Opéra Comique Salaries in 1773 (ADIT, 2:98)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Salary</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Salary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First Lover</td>
<td>2,000</td>
<td>First Lover</td>
<td>3,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second Lover</td>
<td>1,000</td>
<td>Second Lover</td>
<td>1,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Basse-Taille</td>
<td>2,000</td>
<td>First Duenna</td>
<td>2,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second Basse-Taille</td>
<td>1,000</td>
<td>Second Duenna</td>
<td>1,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ampula de la Ruette</td>
<td>1,800</td>
<td>Other Roles</td>
<td>600</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{202} I have included the original French spelling of names wherever possible. Transliterated names are given in italics.
Table 8 Opéra Comique Salaries in 1776 (RGIA f. 468. op. 36, d. 37, l. 264–266)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Actors</th>
<th>Actresses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dugué</td>
<td>2,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pontlaville</td>
<td>1,800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latraverse</td>
<td>800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marché</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>De Foix</td>
<td>2,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daubercourt</td>
<td>1,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pincemaille</td>
<td>1,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 9 Russian Troupe Salaries in 1766 (ADIT, 2:88–89)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Actors</th>
<th>Actresses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First Lover</td>
<td>800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second</td>
<td>600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First noble</td>
<td>600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Comic</td>
<td>600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Servant</td>
<td>600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidants (2)</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendants (2)</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raisonneur</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerk</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing</td>
<td>1,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidants (2)</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Costumes</td>
<td>1,130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prompter</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Copyist</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 10 Theatrical Staff in 1766 and 1777\textsuperscript{203}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Number of People (1766)</th>
<th>Salary Totals (1766)</th>
<th>Number of People (1777)</th>
<th>Salary Totals (1777)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Copyists</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music Copyists</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>758</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ushers</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>736</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Painter, Architect</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2,000</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2,050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Painters</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1,100</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3,712</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Painter Pupils</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>358</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Machinist</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>800</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>His Assistant</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>990</td>
<td>[?]</td>
<td>562</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Costume</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>800</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1,120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tailors</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>620</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hairdresser</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>260</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>221</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>7,010</td>
<td></td>
<td>10,765</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{203} Yelagin’s accounts from 1766 also include the secretary (600 rubles), accountant (60 rubles), a commissar for the wardrobe (300), a commissar for the decorations and sets (200), and an instrument master (150). ADIT, 2: 89–90. The 1777 accounts above do not include the accountant (500 rubles), secretary, six unspecified additional staff, the gusle player, and chimney sweep (150 rubles). RGIA f. 468, op. 36, d. 39, l. 21–24.
Table 11 Annual Sums to the Russian Troupe

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Rubles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1766</td>
<td>10,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1777</td>
<td>7,118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1781</td>
<td>3,749.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1783</td>
<td>10,320.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1784</td>
<td>14,355.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1786</td>
<td>13,805</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1791</td>
<td>21,310</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

204 These figures are taken from the following accounts: 1781 — RGADA f. 1239, op. 3, ch. 109, d. 53599, l. 1; 1783 — RGADA f. 1239, op. 3, ch. 109, d. 53599, l. 7; 1784 — RGADA f. 1239, op. 3, ch. 109, d. 53599, l. 10; 1786 – ADIT, 2: 315–315; 1791 — RGIA f. 497, op. 17, d. 53.
CHAPTER TWO

COMEDY, ADAPTATION, AND EDUCATION IN THE INVENTION OF RUSSIAN COMIC OPERA

In the 1760s and 1770s, as Catherine II and Ivan Yelagin worked to improve the court theater’s reputation abroad and to fill its rosters with Russian talent, they were also active playwrights. They completed dozens of comedic dramas (comedies) in French and in Russian, including both original plays and adaptations of foreign works, which contributed significantly to the Russian troupe’s comic repertory. In contrast to the court theater’s expensive, star-studded Italian operas and pantomime ballets that were attracting international attention, these were light entertainments intended primarily for spectators at the court’s theater. They were designed, much like Molière’s satirical comedies, both to entertain and to instruct the audience by mocking social vices.

Comedies and comic operas provided the empress with a didactic tool to reshape and redefine Russian society. During a visit to a Russian school’s theater, Catherine II publicly stated, “All the enlightened world knows how useful and pleasant theatrical

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205 For a comprehensive account of Catherine’s writings for the stage, see O’Malley, The Dramatic Works of Catherine the Great.

206 Catherine II sometimes sent her works abroad to elicit feedback and approval. In fact, she shared a few of her Russian comedies and comic operas with Voltaire and F. M. Grimm, two public figures with whom she maintained a correspondence. O’Malley, The Dramatic Works of Catherine the Great, 25.

207 Comedy was not the sole purview of Catherine and her toadies; Russian playwrights also used comedy as a platform to communicate ideas about authority and proper governance to the empress. Cynthia H. Whittaker, Russian Monarchy: Eighteenth-Century Rulers and Writers in Political Dialogue (DeKalb: Northern Illinois Press, 2003).
works are, fostering moral education for children . . . [by] showing them the gravity of wrongdoing in the characters on stage.”

The empress was sufficiently concerned with this issue that she commissioned several portraits from the famous painter Dmitry Levitsky in the early 1770s that would memorialize Russian students performing roles in French and Italian comedies and comic operas.

The desire to provide moral instruction was not the empress’s only motivation for writing comedies. When Catherine II was asked in a private correspondence why she chose to write so many comedies, she provided more detail, writing,

*Primo*, because it entertains me; *secondo*, because I would like to revive the national theater, which, having failed to produce new plays, has found itself somewhat neglected; and *tertio*, because it is good to lambast the visionaries who are growing conceited.

The empress modeled good behavior; writing comedies was a source of virtuous pleasure that displayed her taste and wit. Her comment also explains that writing comedies displayed her commitment to the success and development of Russian theater. Finally, she believed her moralizing satirical comedies would mock and correct certain behaviors in Russian society, like the arrogance of those who claimed to be visionaries. Catherine

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209 The students in these portraits studied at the Educational Society for Noble Maidens (later referred to as the Smolny Institute), which was founded under Catherine II and was the first school for women in Russia. Levitsky’s series, lovingly referred to as the “Smolyanki” paintings, includes seven portraits of the school’s students. One of them features a student performing the role of Serbina in Pergolesi’s *La serva padrona*. Another depicts two maidens performing in Favart’s opéra comique, *Ninette à la cour, ou la caprice amoureux*. A third portrait shows a maiden performing in Voltaire’s *Zaire*. The remaining portraits depict students playing music, dancing the minuet, and holding books.

(and other playwrights) sought to mirror local society to address topical issues, which led them to introduce Russia’s distinctive manners, foibles, sounds, and songs to their plays and libretti. These familiar details taken from life served as more than mere local color; they were central to the creation and reception of Russian comedy and comic opera during the first two decades of Catherine’s rule.

Ivan Yelagin, who shared the empress’s rationale for writing comedies, was initially responsible for encouraging playwrights at the court to naturalize foreign comedies. The Russian comedies they created and the attendant debate around naturalization, which are addressed in the first part of this chapter, show that Russian playwrights were creating a national repertory by following the examples of contemporary German and Scandinavian dramatists. These foreign dramatic theories, which explained that it was necessary for the audience to identify with the characters, advocated greater realism as a means to improve the efficacy of comedy’s moral lessons. As Russian playwrights adapted foreign comedies, they, too, tried to make these imported works mirror local society and seem true to life.

As this chapter shows, Yelagin’s enterprise produced not only new comedies, but also the first Russian comic operas. In fact, the earliest librettists, such as Mikhail Popov and Yakov Knyazhnin, began adapting foreign comedies under Yelagin’s direction before they turned to opera. This context helps to reconcile the conflicting narratives of Russian comic opera’s origins. While some scholars argue that these early works were no more than vernacular translations of opéras comiques, others believe that the genre arose
from Russia’s growing national consciousness.\footnote{Simon Karlinsky sees Russian comic opera as a derivative outgrowth of opéra comique that was motivated by the elite’s devotion to French culture. See Karlinsky, “Russian Comic Opera in the Age of Catherine the Great,” \textit{19th-Century Music} 7, no. 3 (1984): 318-325. Francis Maes concurs that Russian comic operas were based on the French \textit{comédie mêlée d’ariettes}, and were not true dramas. Maes, \textit{A History of Russian Music: From Kamarinskaya to Babi Yar}, translated by Arnold J. Pomerans and Erica Pomerans (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 16. Other scholars situate the emergence of Russian comic opera in the context of Russia’s growing national self-consciousness. Nikolai Findeizen states, “Catherine II foresaw the necessity of Russianizing theatrical plays. Nikolay Findeizen claims that Catherine II encouraged an interest in folk customs and music to the court, which probably explains the appearance of \textit{Anyuta}. Findeizen, \textit{History of Music in Russia from Antiquity to 1800}, trans. Samuel William Ping, vol. 1 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 162. Gerald R. Seaman also links the birth of Russian comic opera to growing interest in folklore and folk music, in \textit{History of Russian Music} (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1967), 93. Richard Taruskin’s history of Russian opera also situates Russian comic opera in the context of Westernization, which helped to produce Russia’s national consciousness. He directly links the emergence of folk song collections with the rise of Russian comic opera. Taruskin, \textit{Defining Russia Musically} (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 3-18.} Under Yelagin’s direction, however, playwrights were intentionally synthesizing foreign and national sources to create pleasant and didactic comedies tailored for the Russian audience. Finally, an examination of two early Russian comic operas shows that librettists were as concerned with understanding realism, its aesthetics, and its effects on the spectator as they were with defining Russia’s identity in spoken dialogue and songs.

\textbf{RUSSIAN COMEDY AND DRAMATIC ADAPTATION UNDER IVAN YELAGIN}

As in Germany and other parts of Northern Europe, Russian comedies emerged, in large part, under the influence of literary movements aimed at developing vernacular literature and theater.\footnote{Simon Karlinsky likens Russian and English approaches to adaptation in \textit{Russia Drama from its Beginnings to the Age of Pushkin} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 94. Bruce Alan Brown notes the trend in the Habsburg Empire, with Empress Maria Theresia advocating...} In Russia, they were also an outgrowth of the literati’s attempts...
to establish Russian as a literary language in the 1740s and 1705s by publishing books on rhetoric and poetics as well as the first literary journals.\textsuperscript{213} These writers championed Alexander Sumarokov’s statement, “Our beautiful language is capable of everything.”\textsuperscript{214} Sumarokov was Russian theater’s undisputed leader during this period and was known to his contemporaries as the Russian Racine or the Voltaire of the North. In the 1750s, Sumarokov also became the father of both Russian opera and Russian comedy.\textsuperscript{215} While his tragedies follow the example of classical French playwrights, his early comedies resemble intermezzi and include the archetypal characters of commedia dell’arte.\textsuperscript{216} In his early satirical works, Sumarokov took aim at the turgid rhetoric and archaic prose of his foreign models for German theater. See his \textit{Gluck and the French Theatre in Vienna} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 66.


\textsuperscript{214} Stacy, \textit{Russian Literary Criticism}, 23.

\textsuperscript{215} Sumarokov wrote the first opera libretti in Russian: \textit{Tsefal i Prokris} (1755) and \textit{Al’tsesta} (\textit{Alceste}, 1758). His first comedies, written in 1750, were \textit{Tresotinius} and \textit{Chudovishchi} (Monsters).

rival, Vasily Trediakovsky, making his comedies a polemical tool for literary discourse, rather than social critique.\textsuperscript{217}

During this period, Yelagin developed a different approach to creating vernacular literature through his work for Sumarokov’s literary journal, \textit{Yezhemesyachniya Sochineniya} (Monthly Compositions). In 1755, he published several articles written by foreign authors, but rather than attempting to translate the articles faithfully, he adapted them to Russian manners and adjusted them to local ways of life.\textsuperscript{218} He hoped his articles would suit the knowledge, experience, and taste of Russian readers.

This is precisely the approach that Yelagin and his followers would use when they began adapting foreign comedies in the subsequent decade. Their first batch of adaptations premiered in 1764 and 1765, and they reflect the diversity of comedies available to them at that time. In that season, Yelagin adapted a comedy by the Danish playwright Ludvig Holberg. Yelagin’s secretary and right-hand man, Vladimir Lukin, chose an English comedy, Robert Dodsley’s \textit{The Toyshop}. Many other Russian playwrights focused on comedies by French playwrights. Denis Fonvizin, for instance, adapted a comedy by J. B. L. de Gresset, and Bogdan Yelchaninov oversaw the premiere

\textsuperscript{217} The comedy sparked a debate between Sumarokov and Trediakovskyy. Trediakovskyy responded with “A Letter Containing a Discussion of a Poem That Has Now Been Published by the Author of Two Odes, Two Tragedies, and Two Epistles, Written from a Friend to a Friend.” Sumarokov refuted his comments in an essay, “Response to Criticism.” Reyfman, \textit{Vasiliy Trediakovskyy}, 60.

of his adaptation of Voltaire’s *L’écossaise*. Through the end of Yelagin’s tenure as director, adaptations would remain a mainstay of Russian theater.

These dramatic adaptations were not universally admired, and the ensuing debates about their merits reflect the values and priorities of playwrights working in the capital at that time. Unfortunately for Yelagin and Lukin, the greatest authority on Russian drama, Alexander Sumarokov, rejected the idea that Russian theater could be founded on reworking foreign dramas. He criticized the playwrights for copying foreigners, and, according to Lukin, said, “Adapting comedies is shameful and dishonorable for the adaptor and for his fellow countrymen; it is better to create one’s own original comedies or to labor on something or other that could be useful.” Lukin refuted the claim that adaptations were shameful, but agreed that it would be better to write original comedies. There was, however, a practical problem: it took far longer to write original plays than renovate old ones. Lukin concluded sardonically that original comedies have to be written by people who are not busy with anything else. Given the scarcity of playwrights who could support themselves solely by means of their writing, he implied that the national theater would have to be the work of Sumarokov alone.

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219 The 1764/1765 season included Yelagin’s *Zhan de Mole, ili Russkiy frantsuz*, Denis Fonvizin’s adaptation of J. B. L. de Gresset’s *Sidnei as Korion*, and Bogdan Yelchaninov adaptation of Voltaire’s *L’écossaise*. Vladimir Lukin also adapted Robert Dodsley’s *Toyshop* as *Shchepetil’nik*. This season is discussed in Karlinsky, *Russian Drama*, 93 and 97; Offord, “Linguistic Gallophobia in Russian Comedy,” 86.


221 Ibid., 114.
Lukin further defended his comedies against Sumarokov’s critique by explaining that adaptation was more worthy than translation because it required an original contribution from the author. To adapt or transpose (peredelivat’), Lukin writes, is not to imitate (podrazhat’). Imitations borrow heavily and depart minutely from the original. An adaptation had to be in line with Russian mores, which required the playwright to determine what he had to include and exclude from the original.\textsuperscript{222} Adaptations required playwrights to write new material that would be inserted into the action.

Yelagin and his circle shared a general approach when adapting foreign comedies. They preserved the plots of the originals and replaced foreign customs, conventions, names, and settings with distinctly Russian ones.\textsuperscript{223} The originality of these adaptations was often found in the character, rhetoric, and familiar situations.

Yelagin’s and Lukin’s dramatic adaptations adhere to the principles of neoclassical comedy and, like the empress’s comedies, were concerned with imparting moral values to the audience. Yelagin’s first comedy for Catherine’s court, completed in 1764, was \textit{Zhan de Mole, ili russkiy frantsuz} (Jean de Molay, or the Russian Frenchman), an adaptation of \textit{Jean de France eller Hans Frandsen} by the dramatist and philosopher Ludvig Holberg, who had cultivated vernacular comedy in Denmark with remarkable success.\textsuperscript{224} Although the text of Yelagin’s comedy is now lost, the \textit{Dramatic Dictionary}\textsuperscript{222} includes a description of the play.

\textsuperscript{222} Ibid., 115.
\textsuperscript{223} Karlinsky, \textit{Russian Drama}, 93.
\textsuperscript{224} Ludvig Holberg (1684-1754) is the so-called father of Norwegian and Danish comedy. He spent much of his life in Copenhagen teaching at the university and working for a local theater. He was a founding figure in vernacular literature and theater and wrote moralizing neoclassical comedies, satirical poems, mock heroic epics, epigrams, and fables. Holberg’s biography, contributions, and works are addressed in: Jens Hougaad, \textit{Ludvig Holberg: The Playwright and}}
of 1787 describes his version of the play as a social satire, criticizing Russians who send
their children to France for an education, only to have them subsequently reject their
native language and country. By praising the value of one’s native language, the
comedy may have also served as a kind of advertisement for Yelagin’s cause. To
naturalize Holberg’s comedy for local spectators, Yelagin had transposed the action to
Russia and replaced the foreign names with names and situations that seemed to be taken
from Russian life. When Lukin wrote about Zhan de Mole, he praised its didactic
message and the relevance of this message to Russian society. The comedy, he wrote,
was “very needed for the instruction of many youth regarding the foolish and shameful
imitation of French mischief.” Though Francophilia had become a trope in comedies
across Europe, Lukin’s comment suggests that Yelagin’s presentation of it had made the
work topical, particularly for the wealthy spectators at the court theater.

6 (Odense: Odense University Press, 1993); Raymond Immerwahr, “J. E. Schlegel and Ludvig
Holberg as Creators and Theorists of Comedy,” Germanic Review 13 (1938): 175-189; Sven
Hakon Rossel, ed., Ludvig Holberg: A European Writer (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1994). In the
1750s, Holberg’s essays and comedies began to appear in Russian translation. Excerpts were
published in the 1759 volume of Trudolyubivaya Pchela (The Industrious Bee). Several plays
were translated soon after, including Don Ranudo de Colibrados as Gordost’ i bednost’, Henrik
og Pernille as Genrikh i Pernila, Plutus as Plutus, ili spor bednosti i bogatstva, Jeppe of the Hill
as Jeppe paa Bjerget as Prevrashchenniy muzhik and Artaks (Artaxerxes). The translations and
their influence on Russian writers is addressed in Marvin Kantor, “Fonvizin and Holberg: a
Comparison of The Brigadier and Jean de France,” in Canadian-American Slavic Studies 7, no. 4
(1973), 475.

226 Derek Offord, “Linguistic Gallophobia in Russia Comedy,” in French and Russian in Imperial
227 Cynthia Dillard, “Ludvig Holberg in the Russian Literary Landscape,” in Ludvig Holberg: A
European Writer, ed. Sven Hakon Rossel (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1994), 168.
Yelagin’s decision to transpose Holberg’s comedy into Russian society reflected a set of beliefs shared by other eighteenth-century playwrights who were questioning the universality of comedy. This included Holberg himself, whose views on vernacular comedy came to the Russian reading public through his plays and essays. An excerpt of an essay by Holberg published in the *St. Petersburg Herald*, for instance, urges playwrights to mirror local society in their comedies and dramas because foreign comedies are never as pleasurable or instructive as one with characters and situations from the lives of those in the audience.\(^{228}\) Spectators, he explains, should not be obligated to transport themselves to Rome, Greece, Spain, or France over the course of an evening at the theater.\(^{229}\) Distancing the dramatic action from the spectators’ lives also risks obscuring the work’s allusions, meanings, and moral messages. Holberg proposes that the most internationally renowned playwrights were unable to safeguard their works against this problem, stating, “Even Molière will never be as great to us as he is to the French.” He concludes that French comedies will always be good for the French public, and Russian comedies for the Russians (which the anonymous translator presumably extrapolated given that Holberg would not have addressed Russia in the original text).\(^{230}\)


\(^{229}\) “Желательно бы было, что бы во всех комедиях действия были та земля, в которой комедия представляется, дабы зрители не имели нужды воображать себе, что они в чужой земле находятся” (“It is desirable that all comedies are set in the land where it is performed, so that spectators do not have to imagine themselves in a foreign land”). In [Unsigned], “Razmïshleniya o pozorishchakh, vzyatiya iz sochineniy barona Golberga,” 22.

\(^{230}\) Ibid., 23.
For comedy to succeed in pleasing and instructing the public, he argues, each society or nation must develop its own repertory that reflects the lives, behaviors, experiences, and places familiar to the local audience.

When it came to naturalizing Holberg’s play, Yelagin followed the example of another famous German playwright, Johann Christoph Gottsched, one of the earliest and most successful advocates of German vernacular literature and theater. In fact, Yelagin did not translate Holberg’s comedy from Danish, but instead used Gottsched’s German adaptation, published in a collection entitled *Die Deutsche Schaubühne: nach den Regeln und Exempeln der Alten* (German Theater: After the Rules and Examples of the Ancients), which became a primer of sorts for eighteenth-century Russian literary and dramatic adaptations. In the preface, Gottsched explains that mere translation does not render foreign comedies suitable for German audiences. He suggests that the playwright must be concerned with the audience’s senses, writing,

> I have, that is, simply changed all those French names which sound so repugnant to our German ears and that give such translated comedies an alien appearance, into German. Accordingly, the play acquires a wholly native and German appearance; and a German reader or spectator takes greater part than were it got up in so strange a form.

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233 Translated in Ibid., 38.
Naturalizing foreign comedies required each exotic sound, word, and image to be replaced with familiar alternatives. Excising everything that might disturb or offend the spectator’s ears or eyes made the foreign comedy more pleasurable and limited the risk of something in the text disrupting the theatrical illusion, which depended on the unbroken verisimilitude of the performance. In order to draw in the viewer thoroughly, comedies had to be true to the lives of the audience watching them.

Like Gottsched, Lukin wrote prefaces to his plays in which he argued that the national theater required more than the use of the vernacular. In 1765, he adapted Jean Galbert de Campistron’s *L’amante amant* as *Nagrazhdennoye postoianstvo* (Constancy rewarded), and introduced his play by discussing the merits of dramatic adaptation over translation. He explains,

> More than once I have heard from some members of the audience that both their hearing and understanding is offended when characters, even if their mores are somewhat like ours, bear stage names such as *Clitandre*, *Dorante*, *Tsitalinde* and *Claudine*, and utter speeches that are not in tune with our ways.

Lukin, too, believed that comedy should seem “wholly native,” which requires that the playwright not only translate the original, but consider what seemed alien to that society at that time. In 1760s St. Petersburg, French manners and language would not have seemed foreign to the elite audience of the court theater. French names and rhetoric, on

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the other hand, were sufficiently foreign for Lukin to suggest that they would confuse or startle local spectators.

Lukin also suggests that translated foreign plays are less effective at instructing the audience than adaptations. He writes,

I will as far as possible adapt all comic works for theater to our customs, because many members of the audience do not receive any moral correction from comedies staging foreign mores. They think that the comedy is making fun not of them, but of foreigners. It happens because they hear, as I said before, Paris, Versailles, Tuileries and so on, which for many of them belong to an unknown language; besides, they notice that the types who are treated comically, it turns out, not only speak in a foreign manner, but they also wear unfamiliar clothes. The French, the English, the Germans, and other nations who possess theaters always keep to their own types, and portray them. They rarely present foreigners, and when they do they are only minor characters. Why shouldn’t we stick to our own too?\(^{237}\)

The fact that French, English, and German comedies portrayed exclusively the people of their countries provided support for Lukin’s argument that Russians, too, should adapt foreign works to local customs. But national pride is little more than an afterthought. For Lukin, the primary reason why comedies should mirror local society has to do with the audience’s limitations. He did not believe that spectators could recognize themselves — their own avarice, ignorance or brutish behavior — if these shortcomings were embodied in foreign or unrealistic characters whose native language, name, speaking style, and dress were at odds with local customs. The people represented on the stage had to exemplify their Russianness more wholly. Only then could comedy have its intended effect: the audience would identify with the characters in the comedy and learn from

\(^{237}\) Translated in ibid., 40.
them. The naturalization, or Russification, of vernacular theater was thus indebted to new definitions of verisimilitude based on the belief that realistically mirroring local society would benefit comedy’s aesthetics and its ability to advance societal goals.

**ANYUTA: A GENEALOGY OF INFLUENCE**

Under Ivan Yelagin, comic operas were treated in much the same way as foreign comedies; they, too, began to reflect local society. Librettists incorporated the manners and mores of Russian life and at times used local musical sources as well. Mikhail Popov, a poet, translator, and playwright working at the court theater, wrote the first Russian comic opera in 1772. His one-act *Anyuta*, a spoken comic drama with Russian folk songs and popular tunes, premiered for an elite audience at one of the empress’s summer estates. This would seem to be an unambiguously Russian work; however, a number of recent scholars have proposed that Popov was merely imitating a French comic opera, thus confirming the long-standing claim that Francophile Russian writers were trying to replicate Parisian culture. Musicologists Richard Taruskin and Inna Naroditskaya have both argued that *Anyuta* was adapted from a *comédie mêlées d’ariettes et de vaudevilles* entitled *Annette et Lubin* (Paris, 1762) by Marie-Justine-Benoîte Favart.

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238 Popov was a merchant’s son from Yaroslavl. He arrived in St. Petersburg in the 1750s, and, with his brother, he joined the new Russian theater that was soon annexed by the court. Iurii Stennik, “Mikhail Ivanovich Popov,” in *Early Modern Russian Writers: Late Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Centuries*, ed. Marcus Levitt (Detroit: Gale Research, 1995), 309.

239 The premiere took place on August 26, 1772.

240 Simon Karlinsky writes, “Because of Russian culture’s orientation toward Parisian tastes in the second half of the eighteenth century, it was inevitable that Russian comic opera would materialize,” in Karlinsky, “Russian Comic Opera in the Age of Catherine the Great,” 320.
and composer Adolphe Benoît Blaise. But the situation is more complex. In all likelihood, Popov knew Favart’s opera, because it had been performed at least twice at the Russian court. Similarities between the two operas further support Taruskin’s and Naroditskaya’s claim: the heroines’ names are similar; the plots focus on two young peasants in love; and both libretti contain rhyming dialogue, pre-existing tunes, and a vaudeville final, the hallmark finale form of French comic opera. But in nearly all other respects, Anyuta was not a dramatic adaptation as this term was defined by the court theater’s director and his assistants. In fact, Anyuta can be best understood in the context of the adaptations by Yelagin and Lukin, as it reflects the same dramatic theories and aesthetics that had motivated their efforts.

Popov was deeply familiar with the work of his colleagues; he had spent many years working in the court theater, immersing himself in the theatrical and literary life of the capital. Since 1765, he had been adapting foreign comedies to Russian customs alongside Yelagin and Lukin. At the same time, Popov had become a leading poet and

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242 The court’s French troupe staged Annette et Lubin at least once in 1765, and a group of noble amateurs performed the opera in 1768. RA, 41 and 88.

243 Inna Naroditskaya aptly characterizes Anyuta and Annette as heroines “from an obscure village, a bearer of common sense, peasant wit, and rustic sentiment.” Naroditskaya, Bewitching Russian Opera, 54. Karlinsky argues that Popov imitates Favart’s mode of expressing rustic peasant life in “Russian Comic Opera,” 320.

244 In the 1760s, Popov translated Der Mistauische (The Distrustful One) by Johann Friedrich Cronegk, Deucalion et Pirra by G. F. Saint-Foix, Le Muet (The Mute), Burlin—sluga, otets i test’ (Burlin—Servant, Father, and Father-in-law) by David Augustin de Brueys and Jean Palaprat, and Philippe Poisson’s Le comédien imaginaire as Pritvornïy komediant. Several years later, he also translated Pierre-Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais’s Le barbier de Séville, Pierre de
lyricist. In the 1750s, poets in St. Petersburg had begun publishing song lyrics in Russian, and these proved to be an enduring success with local readers. At first, these texts were published in anonymous collections without musical notation, allowing readers to sing them to tunes of their choosing.\footnote{245} In later years, song collections began to include lyrics set to melodies.

Although songs were almost always published anonymously, Popov became one of the first poets to establish a reputation as a songwriter and attach his names to the lyrics he wrote. In 1765, he published the earliest songbook to bear an author’s name, *Pesni, sochinenniïa Mikhailom Popovïm* (Songs, written by Mikhail Popov). This collection included lyrical love songs, elegies, and newly written songs in a folk style that contained the meters, rhyme schemes, imagery, sentiments, and idiomatic provincial lexicon expected in traditional folk songs.\footnote{246} The publication was a hit, and its success warranted a second edition, revised and augmented, in 1768.\footnote{247}

The highest-ranking members of Russia’s cultural elite admired Popov’s songwriting. Nikolai Novikov, whose writing, publishing, and philanthropy shaped eighteenth-century Russian intellectual life, claimed that Popov’s songs deserved special

\footnote{245} Tamara Livanova, *Russkaya muzïkal’naya kul’tura XVIII veka v ee svyazyakh s literaturoy, teatrom, i bitom*, vol. 1 (Moscow: Gos. muzïkal’noye izdatel’stvo, 1952), 65.


praise in the history of Russian literature.248 The historian and publisher Mikhail Chulkov also recognized Popov’s expertise, and consulted him when compiling his landmark four-volume song compendium, Sobraniye raznîkh pesen (A Collection of Various Songs) in 1770.249

When Popov wrote Anyuta in 1772, he simply could have adapted a foreign libretto as he had done previously with foreign comedies, merely adding a few Russian songs. If he had applied this practice to Annette et Lubin, he would have preserved the plot, dramatic intrigue, and the moral of the original, and naturalized only the characters, mores, and settings. But this is not what he chose to do. The plots and didactic messages of Anyuta and Annette are strikingly different. Favart’s opera is based on a moral tale by Jean-François Marmontel that centers on two young peasants, Annette and Lubin, who are in love despite being cousins (a relationship prohibited by the laws of consanguinity). They also defy social norms by living together prior to matrimony.250 In one scene, the heroine Annette meets a local bailiff who has fallen in love with her. He attempts to separate her from the hero Lubin, and scolds her for having a romantic relationship with her cousin. To avoid further persecution, Annette and Lubin circumvent the bailiff’s authority and beg the village’s seigneur to take pity on them. They express their love and

248 An early dictionary of Russian writers includes the following statement: “In general, his [Popov’s] writing is quite good, and especially his songs and opera deserve praise.” Nikolay Novikov, Opït istoricheskogo slovarya o rossiyskikh pisatelyakh (St. Petersburg: Tip. Akad. Nauk, 1772), 171.


250 This discussion refers to the libretto published in 1763. Madame Favart & Mr. ***, Annette et Lubin, comédie en un acte en vers [. . .] Représentée pour la premiere fois par les Comédiens Italiens Ordinaires du Roi, le 15 Février 1762 (Paris: Chez Duchosne, 1763).
melancholy in a moving tearful duet. Their song touches the heart of the seigneur, who displays his noble mercy and condones their relationship. The opera thus celebrates the power of love to conquer all obstacles, including the most daunting restraints of laws, social customs, and figures of authority.

Popov’s Anyuta, in contrast, confirms the customs and hierarchy of society through the travails of a peasant damsel who possessed little of the pluck that defined her French counterpart. Anyuta is an adopted daughter of the farmer Miron; she falls in love with a nobleman named Viktor who loves her in return. Her father, knowing nothing of her illicit tryst, promises her hand in marriage to his hired laborer, Filat. Anyuta despairs but virtuously suppresses her love to obey her father. Viktor learns of the arrangement and proposes to her, after which the two sing a tender duet and Viktor kisses Anyuta’s hand, which Filat happens to see. He reports the incident to Anyuta’s father, Miron, who insists that Anyuta marry Filat. Miron exclaims, “Of the two, you must choose one: either your husband or a beating.” A sudden turn of events then resolves this dilemma: Viktor uncovers Anuyta’s noble origins and offers Miron and Filat large sums of money to allow him to marry her. The farmers accept and Filat rejoices, saying in a low comedic register that reflects his social identity, that he that he could use that much money to buy two peasant women. The revelation concerning Anyuta’s noble birth restores and affirms the hierarchy of society. Nobles love other nobles, and laborers

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252 “Да из двоих одно любое выбирай: Иль мужа, иль побои.”

253 “За тридцать рублей купить/ Можно две жены крестьянки” (“For thirty rubles, I can buy two peasant wives”).
love other laborers. Popov confirms this idea in a final chorus, “Happy is he in this world who is satisfied with his station.”

Favart’s *Annette* presents a wholly different relationship among peasants, laws, and authorities sanctioned by the state.

Given the discrepancies between *Anyuta* and *Annette*, it seems that *Anyuta* could just as easily be considered one of the many operatic offspring of Samuel Richardson’s epistolary novel, *Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded*. Like *Anyuta*, *Pamela* traces a cross-class love story that rewards the female protagonist for her selfless devotion to upholding social customs. In other operatic adaptations of the novel, such as Carlo Goldoni’s *La buona figliuola* (Rome, 1760), the story concludes with the sudden discovery of the heroine’s noble origins. But the plots and characters of Goldoni’s and Popov’s libretti differ enough to suggest that this *Anyuta* was not an adaptation of the Italian libretto either. In sum, although foreign operas shaped Popov’s work, none seem to have provided the specific model for it. It is more likely that the Russian librettist who constructed this first Russian comic opera was inspired by the aesthetic concerns that he shared with colleagues and by borrowing archetypes and tropes common in comic opera throughout Europe.

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254 “Всех счастливей в свете тот, кто своей доволен частью.”

ANYUTA, VERISIMILITUDE, AND THE RUSSIAN COUNTRYSIDE

New calls for realism at the Russian court theater were fundamental to this shared aesthetic. In contrast to his Russian colleagues, Popov did not ascribe fully to the theories of Holberg or Gottsched. He consulted the works of a French writer named Claude-Joseph Dorat.256 Around the time that Popov was writing Anyuta, he also translated Dorat’s didactic poem, La déclamation théâtrale as Na featral’noye [sic] vozglašeniye, an influential and widely read treatise that addresses, among other things, theatrical verisimilitude. In 1772, Popov included this translation in a collection of his writings published under the title Dosugi, ili sobraniye sochineniy Mikhaila Popova (Leisure time, or a collection of writings by Mikhail Popov).257 Dorat’s poem was the only piece of dramatic theory and aesthetics in this collection. All the other items were Popov’s own, including the first edition of Anyuta, his first original comedy, Otgaday i ne skazhu (Guess, for I won’t tell), and newly written love songs, folk songs, and elegies.258 Popov’s decision to include the translation of Dorat’s poem seems to suggest a desire to juxtapose his own writings with Dorat’s ideas.


257 Mikhail Popov, Dosugi, ili sobraniye sochineniy i perevodov Mikhaila Popova, (St. Petersburg: Pechatano pri Imperatorskoy Akademii Nauk, 1772).

258 This volume also included imperial odes to Catherine II, riddles, parables, and a description of ancient Slavic tales.
Dorat’s poem introduced a new definition of theatrical verisimilitude into the fray. While Holberg’s and Gottsched’s essays define verisimilitude in terms of the audience’s perception of reality, Dorat’s writing suggests that playwrights should attempt to represent reality as accurately as possible. His poem urges dramatists to travel to the countryside, observe the characteristic customs of rural life, and reproduce them on stage. He argues that comedy must be an agreeable and faithful mirror of society that humorously reproduces and corrects our ever-changing quirks and vices. Playwrights must replicate the traits, manners, and costumes of the lower classes faithfully. He praises one of his contemporaries, the playwright, librettist, and songwriter Jean-Joseph Vadé, for the unprecedented precision of his imitations. Dorat writes,

Vadé, to complete his faithful sketches,  
Pursued his models at the crossroads.  
Of the rural, naive, partisan costume,  
He questions the shepherd, approaches the artisan.  
Anxious to capture it without masks and without adornment,  
Up to Porcherons, he searches for Nature.  
Was he in the Village? There, he was tracing the mores. . . .

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259 Popov translated only the first two cantos if Dorat’s poem—translated to “Na featral’noye [sic] vozglasheniye,” in Dosugi. Dorat explains his aim, writing, “J’ai cru cet instant favorable pour recueillir mes idées sur l’art dont s’il agit [la déclamation], les réduire en corps de préceptes, & y joindre le prestige de la versification.” Claude Joseph Dorat, La déclamation théâtrale, poème didactique, en quatre chants (Paris: Impr. de S. Jorry, 1767), 26.

260 “Toi, qui, dans un miroir agréable & fidèle,/ Présentant l’homme à l’homme, amuses ton modèle, / Nous reproduis nos traits, nos mobiles travers,/ Et sçais, en te jouant, corriger l’Univers.” Dorat, La déclamation théâtrale, 89.

261 Porcherons was a neighborhood in Paris near Montmartre that famous for its cabarets and prostitutes.
Vadé, pour achever ses esquisses fidelles,
Dans tous les carrefours poursuivoit ses modèles.
De ce costume agreste ingénu partisan,
Interrogeoit le Pâtre, abordoit l’Artisan.
Jaloux de la saisir sans masque & sans parure,
Jusques aux Porcherons il chercha la Nature.
Etoit-il au Village? il en traçoit les moeurs. . . . ²⁶²

Dorat argues that Vadé succeeds because he records individuals in situ and knows the
countryside and villages where the dramatic action of his plays is set. Playwrights, he
argues, must travel and observe people in villages, cities, and at the court. ²⁶³ In a later
stanza, he suggests that this should continue throughout their lives because society, like
nature, is constantly changing.

In Anyuta, Dorat’s influence can be heard in Popov’s faithful incorporation of
folk songs and dialects from the countryside. ²⁶⁴ But incorporating dialects accurately did
not automatically satisfy Russian spectators, particularly when they believed the
librettists valued such accuracy over beauty or pleasure. The St. Petersburg Academic
Gazette (Sanktpeterburgskije uchyonïye vedomosti) published a review of Anyuta that
accused Popov of making this mistake.

²⁶² Dorat, La déclamation théâtrale, 103.
²⁶³ “La Nature, en créant, toujours se renouvelle:/ Les vices, les travers sont variés comme elle./
Observez, parcourez & la Ville & la Cour.” Dorat, La déclamation théâtrale, 114-15.
²⁶⁴ Popov was not, however, the first to praise the use of dialect on stage. Lukin, in the preface to
Constancy Rewarded, writes about the value of popular farces in which Russian characters
introduce the audience to unfamiliar Russian words – rural dialects, presumably — that “convey
the strength, spaciousness, and even the beauty of our native language.” William Brown, A
As regards *Anyuta*, over and above its fine arrangement and pleasantness of style, it has the honor of being the first of its kind in our language. Justice, however, compels us to say that the heroine of his piece, Anyuta, speaks and thinks in a more noble fashion and more pleasingly throughout the whole opera and in a more correct dialect that her peasant upbringing would have allowed. Moreover, it seems to us that the peasants in the entire opera speak in an accurate dialect and one that is used in remote provinces, but that for an opera this dialect seems to us rather uncouth. Poets, though obliged in such cases to imitate nature, yet have the liberty of choosing a better model, and Russian peasants do not all talk in the same dialect. There are provinces in which they employ a dialect that would not in any theatrical performance offend the tender ear of the audience.  

This excerpt shows that verisimilitude and its attendant principle of decorum (which required characters to display the traits expected of their class, gender, age, or profession) were central not only to Popov’s theoretical framework, but also to the way that operas were evaluated. The critic appreciated the librettist’s decision to incorporate a dialect from the countryside, but disapproved of the particular one used in the opera on aesthetic grounds. It failed to please the ears of the elite urban audience, which was a requirement for comedy according to Lukin and other Russian followers of Gottsched and Holberg. According to this writer, Popov also failed to use dialect properly within the opera. It helped Popov’s provincial farmers sound true to life, but Anyuta’s style of speaking fails to match her identity as a peasant. But Popov may have been using dialect strategically; Anyuta’s higher rhetorical hints at her hidden identity. The librettist treated speech like song: it communicates the character’s gender, feelings, and true social identity.

With the other characters, whose social identities are unambiguous, Popov used dialect and diction as expected, establishing clear distinctions based on social class. The

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265 Ibid, 199-200.
nobleman Viktor speaks in a cosmopolitan high style, likely derived from tragedy, which is marked by the use of words such as “eternity” and “fate.” The farmhand Filat, in contrast, speaks in a northern dialect filled with colloquialisms. Speaking style grounded the work in a specific region and society, characterizing the ill-mannered farmer or the farmhand and creating an aural setting with characteristic idioms and proverbs that made the opera seem true to life.

ANYUTA AS A DRAMATIZED SONGBOOK

While we can gain some insights into questions of verisimilitude and aesthetics in a study of the opera’s texts, the situation with the music is complex. No score exists, and most scholars agree that an original score was never composed for the opera. They argue that the songs were instead contrafacta — newly composed lyrics to be sung to pre-existing popular tunes, which was a common practice in Russia and throughout Europe. In fact, many of the song lyrics published in the 1750s and 1760s, including those by Sumarokov and Popov, were often intended to be performed to a pre-existing tune. Poets would

266 Brown, A History of 19th-Century Russian Literature, 199.


268 Tamara Livanova mentions that Aleksandr Sumarokov’s poems were among the first to be set “na golosa” in the late 1750s. Several of these songs were set to pre-existing tunes, arranged for multiple voices, and published with musical notation as well. Livanova, Russkaya muzikal’naya kul’tura XVIII veka, 65.
provide an indication of the appropriate tune by beginning with two lines of a popular song, and substituting their own text for the rest of the original lyrics.\textsuperscript{269} This made it easy for Russian librettists like Popov—who was already publishing song anthologies—to incorporate popular and folk songs into their operas.\textsuperscript{270} \textit{Anyuta} includes two songs that follow this practice: “Belolitsa, kruglolitsa, krasnaya devitsa” (“White-faced, round-faced, pretty maiden”) and “Kabī da na tsvetī ne morozī” (“If only frost on blossoms never lay”), both of which appear in Chulkov’s song collection, which Popov helped to edit.\textsuperscript{271}

When Popov constructed a musical identity for his characters, he chose to reinforce the perception that rural Russia’s aural landscape could be characterized by peasants who never stopped singing. Whether or not peasants in the countryside were singing as incessantly as the travelogues claimed, Popov’s opera shows that he was eager to incorporate this view of rural Russia. It certainly provided a pleasing and entertaining alternative to the darker realities of late eighteenth-century Russian provincial life.

All the major travelogues on Russia contain descriptions of the lower classes singing constantly, and Russians, for the most part, were happy to embrace this image of


their nation.  

In one of the more widely read travelogues, the English historian William Coxe describes the countryside as resounding endlessly with song. He explains to his reader,

In our route through Russia I was surprised at the propensity of the natives to singing. Even the peasants who acted in the capacity of coachmen and postilions, were no sooner mounted than they began to warble an air, and continued it, without the least intermission, for several hours. But what still more astonished me was, that they performed occasionally in parts [. . .] The postilions sing, from the beginning to the end of a stage; the soldiers sing during their march; the countrymen sing amid the most laborious occupations; the public-houses re-echo with their carols; and in a still evening I have frequently heard the air vibrate with the notes of the surrounding villages.

Postilions, coachmen, soldiers, patrons of public houses — who were all members of the lower echelons of society and constituted the rank of peasant in comic dramas — supposedly sang while they worked and while they relaxed in the evenings. Although

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273 William Coxe (1748-1828), a priest, wrote histories and travelogues from his journeys as a tutor.


275 Chappe d’Auteroche also refers to coachmen singing in his travelogue. See his *A Journey into Siberia, made by order of the King of France* (London: T. Jefferys, 1770), 103. The cultural importance of singing coachmen in eighteenth-century Russia is discussed in Randolph, “The Singing Coachman or, the Road and Russia’s Ethnographic Invention in Early Modern Times,” 33-61.
Coxe focuses on the countryside, other travelers observed laborers and artisans in Russian towns and cities singing at length. When Count Carlo Brentano de’ Grianti visited St. Petersburg, he described the evening air ringing with pleasant and amusing Russian songs sung by both oarsmen and musical ensembles traveling by boat along the Neva River.276 The variety and number of songs present in St. Petersburg were confirmed by the work of Nikolay Lvov and Ivan Prach, who created the most famous eighteenth-century song collection without ever leaving the capital.277

The duration and style of this singing also attracted attention. In Coxe’s travelogue, the author includes a summary of a recent study by Jacob von Stählin, who had tutored the young Peter III and chronicled of opera and ballet at the Russian court).278

Coxe writes,

An ingenious author, long resident in Russia, who turned his attention to the study of the national music, gives the following information upon this subject. The general music that prevails among the common people in Russia from the Dun to the Amoor and the Frozen Ocean, consists in one species of simple melody, which admits infinite variation, according to the ability of the singer, or the custom of the several provinces in this extensive empire. The words of the song are mostly in prose, and often extempore, according to the immediate invention or recollection of the singer... The subject of the song also frequently alludes to the adventures of the singer, or to his present situation;

276 “Pendant l’été... l’après diner et le soir sur La neva des bateaux remplis de gens, qui jouent de la Musique, et qui chantent;... ils font retentir les aires de leurs chansons Russes, qui sont fort agréables, et amusantes.” Count Carlo Brentano de’ Grianti described the concerts on these boats in his journal (“Count Carlo Brentano de’ Grianti journal,” General Manuscripts, Bound, 2nd series, C0938 (no. 649), Manuscripts Division, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library).

277 Mazo, A Collection of Russian Folk Songs, 4.

and the peasants adapt the topics of their common discourse, and their disputes with each other, to this general air; which, altogether, forms an extraordinary effect, and led me to conjecture, as I have before expressed myself, that they chanted their ordinary conversation.\textsuperscript{279}

Simple folk songs were not merely recited; they provided a starting point for improvisation and a platform for performers to display their skills. Stählin’s article, which was published in 1770, provides an example of this type of song (see Ex. 2.1).\textsuperscript{280} The tune’s unadorned melody, stepwise motion, parallel two-bar phrases, and limited vocal range, as well as its rhythmic pattern, identify the laborer’s melody as a \textit{plyasovaya}, a folk dance song.

Example 2.1 Jacob von Stähin, “Nachrichten von der Musik in Rußland,” in \textit{Musikalische Nachrichten und Anmerkungen}

\begin{music}
\begin{musicinput}{music}{Example2.1.mus}{4}{4}
M4\M4\M4\M4 \M4\M4\M4\M4 \M4\M4\M4\M4 \M4\M4\M4\M4
\end{musicinput}
\end{music}

\textsuperscript{279} Cox, \textit{Travels in Poland, Russia, Sweden, and Denmark}, 75-76.

\textsuperscript{280} Jacob von Stählin, “Nachrichten von der Musik in Rußland, 147.
In *Anyuta*, Popov brought the travelogues to life by capturing the distinctive vocality of the Russian laborers described in travelogues. The opera begins with the farmer Miron chopping wood alone in a field, following each stroke with the sound “*Ga! . . . Ga! . . . Ga!*”\(^{281}\) Miron tosses his ax down to rest for a moment, and laments the fact that he was born a peasant rather than a nobleman.\(^{282}\) Instead of remaining morose, he resolves, “Let me sing something to raise myself out of this sadness,” and launches into a comic song about the laughable concerns of a nobleman’s life — drinking, eating, strolling, sleeping, and collecting money.\(^{283}\)

After Miron finishes his song, the farmhand Filat enters and continues the rustic musical tableau by singing a folk song, “Belolitsa, kruglolitsa,” one of the most popular folk songs of the era. Dozens of variations of this song were conceived, and it appeared in most of the major song collections (see Ex. 2.1).\(^{284}\) Like Jacob Stählin’s example of singing in rural Russia, “Belolitsa, kruglolitsa,” is a *plyasovaya*.\(^{285}\) It has an unadorned melody in parallel two-bar phrases, stepwise motion, and a common rhythmic pattern of

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\(^{281}\) The stage directions read, “Мирон один, рубит дрова и голосом следует за ударами” (“Miron, alone, chops wood, and follows each blow with his voice.”)

\(^{282}\) “Охти, охти, хрестьяне!/ Зачем вы не дворяне?” (“Ah, peasants! Why were you not born noble?”)

\(^{283}\) “Запеть же мне теперь от грусти што-нибудь.”


twelve consecutive eighth notes followed by two quarter notes. The act is freighted with work songs of this sort, and dialogue is kept to a bare minimum.

Example 2.2 Trutovskiy, Sobraniye russkikh prostikh pesen s notami, “Belolitsa kruglolitsa”

[Allegretto]

[“White-faced, moonfaced beautiful maiden, stood in the vale and picked a guelder rose.”]

In addition to folk songs, Popov’s opera also includes love songs, which are associated with a higher social class and sung in a different dramatic context. For example, Viktor never sings to himself while working or alone. His two love duets are culminating events that conclude scenes. Stylistically distinct from the folk songs, which reflect the class identities of the farmer and his farmhand, love songs convey decorous sentiment. In Scene Six, Viktor sings to Anyuta,

Having come into your pleasing will,
I endure every lot,
Every fierce fate.

Став в твоей приятной воле,
Покоряюсь всякой доле,
Всякой яростной судьбе.
Unlike Filat’s folk lyrics about a pretty girl in a vale, Viktor’s lyrics are written in a high style that evokes the language of tragedy with words like volya, sud’ba, tyagost’ (will, fate, burden).

In keeping with her more complicated identity, Anyuta’s songs span both rhetorical registers and include distinctive images and gestures from sentimental dramas and operas, occupying the middle register between rustic and refined. Like her father and Filat, she first enters (in Scene Three) by walking onstage while singing a pre-existing folk tune. But she does not convey the lighthearted joy and simplicity found in Filat’s folk song. Instead, she is given sentimental lyrics with pastoral imagery and tearful grieving. An earlier version of the lyrics, published in Chulkov’s collection, also refers to sorrow and grief, but not to the singer’s tears, which Popov adds.  

If only frost on blossoms never lay,  
And in winter roses bloomed across the fields,  
If only it were not so grievous to me,  
I would not be seen in tears.

Кабы да на цветы не морозы,  
И зимой бы в полях цвели розы;  
Кабы да на меня не печали,  
Во слезах бы меня не встречали.

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286 Both song texts appear Chulkov’s collection, volumes 1 and 3. Chulkov, Sobraniye raznikh pesen (St. Petersburg: Tipografiya Imperatorskoy Akademii Nauk, 1770–1773). As mentioned, the first and second lines of Chulkov’s version of this song are the same. The third and fourth lines are, “Охь кабы на меня не кручина, / Не о чемь та бы я не тужила” (“Oh if only I were suffering, if only I had nothing to grieve for”).
Popov’s new lyrics alter the song in a significant way: though it begins as a folk tune, it becomes a heartfelt expression of tender sorrow that displays greater refinement than the songs of her father and Filat.287

Popov’s addition to the pre-existing lyrics may also reflect Dorat’s influence, who, in La déclamation théâtrale, advises playwrights to take full advantage of the ability of sentimental heroines to influence the emotions of the audience. The innocence of younger women on stage, Dorat explains, allows them to express feelings that seem unguarded, and thus more realistic and more moving. He admires the way that these young beauties would make the audience laugh or cry as they pleased. Dorat offers up Favart’s Annette as an example:

But what! What Beauty advances on the Stage!
Sentiment guides her uncertain gait.
Her voice develops in gentle, sweet sounds;
Her gaze is a ray that glows deep in one’s heart.
On her naive face what childlike grace! [. . .]
Summon back Lubin’s paramour to our gaze;
Or rather, in that air that pleases without artifice,
Under the chapeau of Annette, they believe they see Nature.

Mais quoi! quelle Beauté s’avance sur la Scène!
Le Sentiment conduit sa démarche incertaine.
Sa voix se développe en sons doux & flatteurs;
Son oeil est un rayon qui luit au fond des coeurs.
Sur ce front ingénu quelle grace enfantine! [. . .]
Retrace à nos regards l’Amante de Lubin;

287 Miron makes it clear that Anyuta is weeping during her song by consoling her and telling her not to cry. He tells her, “Не плачь и не грусти, мой друг!” (“Do not cry and do not suffer, my friend!”).
Ou plutôt, à cet air qui plaît sans imposture,
Sous le chapeau d’Annette, on croit voir la Nature.  

Purity, innocence, and youth, together with delicacy and tenderness, are the essential attributes of Dorat’s idealized sentimental characters. A naïve girl’s simple and unguarded expression of her emotions will always seem true to life. More than a skillful imitation of reality, she is real.

Dorat’s ideas about theatrical verisimilitude can thus be seen throughout the opera, particularly in Anyuta’s tearful song and the tunes of Popov’s laborers. The reliance on Dorat’s poem and foreign sources in general might seem to support Richard Taruskin’s conclusion that Anyuta is imitative and artistically insignificant. It is true that there is no unique vision of opera laid out in Anyuta, and it may not be a great opera. But in the context of Russian theater at the court, the opera displays aesthetic innovation in its particular approach to grappling with the vexing issue of theatrical verisimilitude. Popov pushed Russian opera forward by using songs to position his characters more accurately within eighteenth-century Russian society, highlighting its particular class distinctions, mores, and range of sentiments — from coarse to delicate — in accord with the agenda of the court theater under Ivan Yelagin.

Yelagin and Lukin’s values continued to influence comic opera through the end of the director’s tenure in 1779. Verisimilitude and moral instruction remained central principles of comic opera at the court theater; soon after the premiere of Anyuta, other librettists made similar adaptations. In the final year of Yelagin’s tenure, the playwright Yakov Knyazhnin would — unlike Popov — take up Favart’s Annette et Lubin to create his first libretto for a Russian comic opera, Neschast’ye ot kareti (Misfortune from a Coach), for which Vasily Pashkevich, one of the court’s violinists, composed a score.

Knyazhnin’s opera delighted audiences in the capital and across the Russian empire. In St. Petersburg, one member of the Russian beau monde asserted that it was the empress’s favorite, and the numerous performances of this opera at the court theater in subsequent decades support his claim. Soon after its premiere in St. Petersburg, Misfortune from a Coach had its Moscow premiere at the public theater, the beginning of a long and very successful run. In the final decades of the eighteenth century, Knyazhnin’s Misfortune achieved remarkable success with public theaters in the provinces and with amateur circles from urban centers to provincial estates.

Reviewers were particularly enthusiastic about the singing; a letter penned by the Russian nobleman and poet Mikhail Muravyov lauded the singers’ performance, writing,

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We were entertained here by a Russian comic opera. You cannot imagine the shared joy we derived from this new spectacle. Mr. [Vasiliy] Pashkevich, the composer, was himself performing a role in the performance. A young woman, a singer, debuted in the role of Anyuta. Her lover, Lukyan, was [Vasiliy] Chernikov.292

Murayov explains that the new opera did not feature the Russian troupe’s leading actors, as his interlocutor might have expected. When casting this opera, musical training must have trumped acting experience and celebrity. Pashkevich, for instance, had little or no experience acting; he joined the court theater as a singer in the chorus when he was young and later transferred to the orchestra when his voice changed.293 Muravyov does not even mention the name of the singer who debuted in the role of Anyuta, but chooses to emphasize the fact that the role was performed by a singer rather than an actress. Vasiliy Chernikov, on the other hand, was arguably renowned as both an actor and as a comic bass, particularly after his performance of Figaro in the Russian version of Il barbiere di Siviglia.294

While the music and cast distinguished Misfortune from a Coach, the opera’s social satire and characters were similar to those in Russian comedies. As the eighteenth-century writer and memoirist Sergey Glinka recalls,


293 He joined the chorus in 1756 when he was fifteen or sixteen years old. When his voice dropped, he switched to the orchestra. A. L. Porfir’eva, “Pashkevich,” MPES, 2: 341.

Several dramatic works of the eighteenth century were histories of the manners of that time. Knyazhnin’s opera entitled *Misfortune from a Coach* belongs to their numbers . . . It contained a living picture of all the follies from when the bustling city of Paris dictated laws to our so-called high society, and when fashion was everything and humanity did not matter.  

Knyazhnin’s didactic aims echoed those expressed in Yelagin’s earlier work, *Zhan de Mole*: the opera, mirroring the values and customs of Russian high society, critiqued the enlightened elite’s excessive devotion to French culture and lack of interest in moral and civic concerns.

Knyazhnin had good reason to echo Yelagin: he desperately needed to gain the support of the director. Some years earlier, Knyazhnin had been stripped of his title and estate and sentenced to death by hanging for his gambling debts. Although Catherine II spared his life, he suffered several years of destitution before regaining some of his former standing. During his years of penury, Knyazhnin had begun translating and adapting foreign comedies—particularly those by Carlo Goldoni—for public sale. He also began working for the empress’s educational adviser, Ivan Betskoy, who, in large part, was responsible for introducing performing arts to the curricula of Russian schools. Knyazhnin was in the process of restoring his position at the court and in elite society when the opportunity to write for the court theater arose.  

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295 Glinka, *Zapiski*, 95. The second half of this quotation is translated in Findeizen, 539n284.

296 In the 1770s, he translated Carlo Goldoni’s comedies, *I puntigli domestici* as *Domashniye nesoglasiya* and *Il Bugiardo* as *Lzeths*, and *La vedova scaltra* as *Khitraya Vdova*. He translated Voltaire’s *Henriade* and several tragedies by Corneille in these as well. Kukushkina, “Iakov Borisovich Kniazhnin,” 175.

297 Knyazhnin is better known today for his tragedies based on episodes from Russian history, particularly *Vadim of Novgorod*. The court deemed *Vadim* antimonarchical and burned copies in public squares in 1793. Elena Kukushkina, “Iakov Borisovich Kniazhnin,” in *Early Modern*
The similarities between Knyazhnin’s *Misfortune from a Coach* and *Annette et Lubin* suggest that Knyazhnin also followed Yelagin’s particular process of dramatic adaptation. The Russian librettist, for example, did not change the basic plot or moral instruction of Favart’s opera, and the class identities and relationships of the characters are identical to those in the original. In both operas, two peasants defend their love for one another against a figure of authority and a law that threatens to end their relationship. After being persecuted by a jealous bailiff motivated by selfish desires, the young couple resolves the dilemma by entreating a seigneur to grant them an exception to the law through a genuine musical display of their delicate sentiments. Their tears arouse the seigneur’s sympathy, which showcases his refined sensibility. With this change of heart, the opera concludes with a rural *deus ex machina* that eliminates the legal obstacle to true happiness.

As was customary in Russian dramatic adaptations, Knyazhnin diverges from the French model to mirror local society and adapt the original to Russian customs. He replaces foreign names and transfers the action to a Russian village. He also introduces

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*Russian Writers, Late Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, ed. Marcus Levitt (Detroit: Gale Research Inc., 1995), 175.

298 [Knyazhnin], Neschastie ot kareti, komicheskaya opera v dvukh deistviyakh, predstavlenaya v pervy raz . . . v Ermitazhe, slova sochineniya Gna. Knyazhnina, muzika Gna. Pashkevicha. 1779 goda Noyabrya 7 dnya (St. Petersburg: pri imp. akad. nauk, 1779). Theatrical performances were given in the adjoining stables on these evenings. See Simon Dixon, Catherine II, 192.
the familiar satirical trope of critiquing Francophiles with the character of the seigneur, whose virtues are exposed only in the opera’s conclusion. In addition, Knyazhnin replaces the laws of consanguinity, which were highlighted in Annette, with the Russian laws of conscription. In so doing, he refocuses the plot on a topical social and moral issue. Knyazhnin’s opera begins with the wedding of the young couple, Anyuta and Lukyan, which is quickly derailed by news that the groom will be sold into the army by the Francophile landowner Firyulin. The local bailiff (prikazchik), Klementii, orders Lukyan to be put in chains and reads a decree from the landowner aloud that mocks the landowner’s obsession with French culture. The decree begins,

Oh thou, who hitherto hast been dishonored by the foolish and barbarous name Klementii, by my especial grace to you, because you have dressed a great number of peasants in the French style, I grant you the name Clément.299

By replacing local names and clothes with foreign ones, Firyulin does precisely the opposite of what Russian dramatists were doing. He was, in other words, adapting Russian culture to foreign tastes.

Firyulin’s decree also allows the bailiff to sell Lukyan. The landowner wants to purchase a coach from Paris for himself and French hats for his wife, but this purchase requires more money than he has on hand. Since the wheat harvest seems meager, he suggests that the bailiff might obtain the needed sums by selling a few serfs as military recruits, which conscripts them for life. The bailiff chooses Lukyan, because, as in Favart’s opera, he hopes to win Anyuta’s hand himself. The young couple despairs and

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tries to convince Firyulin’s clever servant, Buffon, to help them. After Anyuta and Lukyan speak a few words of French and perform a tearful duet that moves Firyulin, the landowner spares them, and the opera concludes with a new moral performed in a multi-sectional finale, rather than the vaudeville final of *Annette et Lubin.*

The plight of soldiers conscripted for life, at times wrongly and for profit, was a popular theme with Russian dramatists and audiences. After the success of *Misfortune from a coach,* soldiers’ tales became a fixture in the emerging repertory of the court’s Russian troupe and can be found in a host of works, including Sergey Vyazmitinov’s comic opera, *Novoye Semeystvo* (A New Family), Nikolay Lvov’s comic opera, *Yamshchiki na podstave* (Coachmen at the Relay Station, 1788), Mikhail Kheraskov’s *Dobri Soldatyi* (Good soldiers, 1779), the anonymously written *Matrosskiya shutki* (Sailors’ jokes, 1780), Aleksandr Ablesimov’s *Pokhod s nepremennikh kvartir* (March from Stationary Quarters, 1782), and I. A. Kokoshkin’s comedy with choruses and ballets entitled *Pokhod na Shveda* (Campaign against Sweden, 1790) among others.

The plot used in *Misfortune from a Coach* also resurfaced over a decade later in one of the most controversial books published during Catherine’s rule: Aleksandr Radishchev’s *Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow* (1790). Radishchev’s allegorical quasi-travelogue presents a blistering critique of the Russian Empire, which authorities

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300 “Вас безделка погубила/ Нас безделка погубила, Но безделка и спасла.”

301 Soldiers were conscripted for the duration of their lives from the ranks of serfs, peasants, and the lesser townspeople — laborers, coachmen, and artisans. Elise Kimerling Wirtschafter, *The Play of Ideas in Russian Enlightenment Theater* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2003), 89.

302 Wirtschafter writes an entire chapter on soldiers in early Russian comedies and comic operas. See ibid., 89–95.
banned immediately and for the duration of the nineteenth century. In one episode of the journey, which contains a vignette on the inhumane treatment of the lower classes, the narrator encounters a group of army recruits in chains, explaining to the reader that they are being conscripted and sold by a landowner who needs money to purchase a new coach. Rather than being moved by the recruits’ cause, as in the opera, the landowner shows no mercy and remains steadfast in his devotion to personal gain. This minor difference between the opera and the book changes the focus of the scene’s critique. While Radishchev condemned the system of power in Russia, Knyazhnin’s comic opera focused on correcting the behavior of those operating within it.

MUSIC AND SENTIMENT: FINDING HUMANITÉ IN RUSSIA’S COUNTRYSIDE

In Misfortune, the sentimental entreaty of the peasants and Firyulin’s compassionate response show that the ability to be moved by the plight of others, which the French called sensibilité, actually existed in Russia. Throughout the eighteenth century, a growing number of French writers argued that Russians lacked sensibility, which the Encyclopédie defined as “the delicate and tender disposition of the soul that makes it easily moved, touched.” This claim often served to bolster arguments that Russia was a barbarous, despotic Asian empire rather than a civilized European one. Early in the

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304 “Sensibilité, (Morale) disposition tendre & délicate de l’ame, qui la rend facile à être émue, à être touchée.” In Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers (Neufchatel: Chez la Société Typographique, 1779), 810.
century Montesquieu famously stated, “To make a Russian feel, you must flay him,” arguing that the senses of the northern inhabitants had been dulled by the cold climate.\textsuperscript{305} When Astolphe, marquis de Custine, visited Russia early in the following century, he arrived at a similar conclusion. Claiming that Russians were extremely quick but cold, he states that they possessed “very little sensibility; highly susceptible, but very unfeeling — this I believe to be their real character.”\textsuperscript{306}

During Catherine II’s rule, in a wave of state-sponsored anti-Russia propaganda in France, one writer even took aim at the demographic that was often considered to be most prone to displays of sensibility: women at the theater. Charles Masson refers to this group in his risqué and libelous book, \textit{Secret Memoirs of the Court of St. Petersburg}. He presents a familiar picture of Russians as smart yet unfeeling, claiming that any man who “carries into those climes something of knowledge and sentiment finds it gradually extinguished in his heart.”\textsuperscript{307} He defends this assertion by describing Russian women watching a performance at the theater. His readers, likely Parisians, were accustomed to communal weeping at the theaters and may have anticipated that women certainly would have been moved to tears by tragedies or tearful dramas. But Masson describes Russian women as incapable of being touched by tender displays of sentiment:

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{306} He also wrote of their coolness, likening it to coarseness. Astolphe, Marquis de Custine, \textit{The Empire of the Czar}, vol. 3 (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1843), 199 and 330.
\item \textsuperscript{307} Charles François Philibert Masson, \textit{Secret memoirs of the court of St. Petersbourg, particularly towards the end of the reign of Catherine II and the commencement of that of Paul I} (London: C. Whittingham, 1801), 245.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
Almost all [the women] are naturally witty, and by no means destitute of grace; their
eyes, feet, and hands are every thing that could be wished; and there is an ease in their
manners, a taste in their dress, and charm in their conversation, which are peculiarly
agreeable. These sprightly and amiable Russian ladies have a taste for the arts. They
laugh at the representation of a good comedy, readily perceive a satirical stroke, perfectly
understand an equivocation, and applaud a brilliant line: but traits of sentiment appear lost
on them, and I never saw one weep at a tragedy. Mothers, daughters, and lovers behold
with dry eyes the moving scenes of Merope, Antigone and Zaire, though exhibited at the
French theater of Petersburg by those excellent performers, Floridor, Aufréne and la
Hus.308

In nearly every other way, Russian women were as educated, cultured, and refined as the
women of France. Their wit, grace, and style matched and perhaps exceeded the high
standards of Parisian society. But his comment implies that no amount of education or
wealth could make them cultural equals; they lacked the innate faculty that allowed their
sympathy to be aroused by others. This powerful claim effectively excluded Russia from
the leading cultural movement and from the community of Europe at that time.

Similar observations in the travelogue of the abbé Chappe d’Auteroche focus on
the nobility’s treatment of the lower classes. A travelogue entitled Voyage en Sibérie
includes an extended study of Russian manners and customs that concludes, “Delicacy of
sentiment, which characterizes the people of more civilized nations, is so rarely to be met
with here.”309 He claims that the Russian people were animated by one passion alone:
fear.310 Fear, d’Auteroche explains, causes Russians to treat one another inhumanely. He

308 Ibid., 323.
309 Abbé Chappe d’Auteroche, A Journey into Siberia, Made by Order of the King (London: T.
Jeffreys, 1770), 304.
illustrates his point by describing a villager who was selected as a military recruit and placed in chains to be sold for profit, as in Knyazhnin’s opera. D’Auteroche recounts,

Going, on my return from Tobolsky to St. Petersburg, into a house where I was to lodge, I found a father chained to a post in the middle of his family: by his cries, and the little regard his children paid to him, I imagined he was mad; but this was by no means the case. In Russia, people who are sent to raise recruits go through all the villages; and pitch upon the men proper for the service, as butcher, in all other parts, go into the stables to mark the sheep. [...] This practice has made the Russians cruel and inhumane: they are animals whom their masters think they must crush with a rod of iron, while they continue under the yoke.\textsuperscript{311}

For d’Auteroche, the practice of selling people to the military is rooted in the Russians’ lack of sensibility. This defect gives rise to despotism and slavery, and stifles “all principles of humanity, and all kind of sentiment.”\textsuperscript{312} The author echoes the Encyclopédie, which also presents the argument that humanity, or humanité (the quality of being humane), cannot exist without sensibility. As long as Russians were indifferent to the suffering of their fellow men, Russia could never count among the civilized nations of Enlightenment Europe.

D’Auteroche’s claims provoked an unusually indignant public response from Catherine II, who repudiated the French author’s claims in a book entitled Antidote, ou Examen du mauvais livre superbement imprimé intitulé Voyage en Sibérie (Antidote, or an Examination of a poor book superbly printed and entitled Voyage in Siberia).\textsuperscript{313} She

\textsuperscript{311} D’Auteroche, A Journey, 317.
\textsuperscript{312} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{313} [Catherine II], Antidote, ou Examen du mauvais livre superbement imprimé intitulé Voyage en Sibérie . . . (St Petersburg: n. p., 1770). This book was also published in Amsterdam in 1771 and
rejects d’Auteroche’s claim that Russian seigneurs, or landowners, are harsher than seigneurs elsewhere in Europe, and states that the practice of selling slaves and serfs was common throughout Europe. The treatment of servants, she responds, depends more or less on the “refinement of one’s morals” (*douceur dans les moeurs*), and in Russia, “it cannot be said that morals are unrefined.”

She asserts that Russians are not deprived of sentiments, and that her government is, in fact, dedicated to encouraging and compensating “intellect, talent, and all sentiments that are honest and useful to society.”

A similar defense of the Russian character had been articulated in *Misfortune from a Coach*. At first, it seems that the librettist agrees with the anti-Russian French writers. The young couple entreats Firyulin’s servant, Buffon, to take pity on them and help them persuade the landowner to change his mind. He responds that he would show compassion if he could and dismisses them, stating that nothing Russian will ever be able to arouse Firyulin’s pity. Lukyan and Anyuta then pander to the servant’s mercenary interests, and Anyuta offers him the presents that Lukyan has given her. The servant accepts the payment and remarks, “She speaks even more touchingly than Lukyan.”

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314 [Catherine II], *Antidote, ou Examen*, 200.

315 “*Notre Gouvernement loin de detruire l’esprit, le talent & toute espec de sentiment, n’est occupé que d’encourager & de recompenser l’esprit, les talens, & tout les sentimens honetes & utiles à la societé*” (this quotation contains the original spelling). [Catherine II], *Antidote, ou Examen*, 206.

316 “Я бы сжался, кабы льзя было; да барин-та у нас такой, что ничем русским его нельзя умилосердить” (I.vi). (“I would take pity on you if I could, but the seigneur here is not moved by anything Russian.”)

317 “Она еще умилительнее и Лукьяна говорит” (I.vi).
With tongue in cheek, Buffon suggests that he feels little genuine sympathy and is moved by his material interests alone.

Echoes of the anti-Russian stance of d’Auteroche, Montesquieu, and others also can be heard in Knyazhnin’s characterization of Firyulin, particularly as he attempts to use sensibility as an emblem of his French refinement in order to distinguish himself from his fellow countrymen.⁴¹⁸ In Act Two, Firyulin repeats familiar French complaints about the Russian people. He exclaims, “Barbarous people! Savage country! What ignorance! What coarse names! How they injure the délicatesse of my ears.”³¹⁹ This comment plays with the idea — stated in the writings of Gottsched, Lukin, and others — that a spectator’s ears are attuned to local names, not foreign ones. By stating that his delicate senses are repulsed by the sound of Russian names, Firyulin claims a French identity.

But the servant, Buffon, challenges the authenticity of his délicatesse based on Firyulin’s inability to be moved by the plight of servants like Lukyan. Their exchange addresses the limitations of Firyulin’s sensibility, and it begins,

Buffon: You returned [from France] with many curiosities, but no pity for your servants. . . .

Firyulin: Pity for Russians? You’ve gone off your head, Buffon. My pity remains in France, and now I cannot hold back my tears having remembered . . . O, Paris!

Buffon: That’s nice! Cry because you are not there, but torment your servant without pity, and for what? So that you can buy yourself a nice coach.

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³¹⁸ Levitt writes about this camp, which also included Mably, Condillac, Raynal, and Mirabeau, in “An Antidote to Nervous Juice,” 50.

³¹⁹ “Варварской народ! дикая сторона! Какое невежество! какия грубые имена! как ими деликатес моего слуха повреждается!” (II.v)
Thoughts of Paris bring Firyulin to tears, but his servants’ suffering awakens only disgust. Realizing that this approach will not convince Firyulin to change his mind, Buffon tells the landowner that the peasants speak French. This shocks the landowner, who orders the guard to remove Lukyan’s chains, which, he explains, do not befit a speaker of French. But Lukyan is not yet free; Firyulin, who says that he has given his word, remains intent on selling the peasant.

As in Favart’s opera, only Anyuta and Lukyan’s duet can move the landowner. Entreatning him to listen to their pleas, the lovers sing,

Gaze upon the tears
Of your subjects,
End, thou, the suffering
Of the unhappy wretches.

На слезы посмотри
Тебе подвластных,
Страданье прекрати
Тобой несчастных.

Firyulin: Жалости к русским? ты рехнулся, Буфон. Жалость моя вся осталась во Франции, и теперь от слез не могу воздержаться, вспомнив... O, Paris!

Шут: Это хорошо! плакать о том, что вы не там, а слуг своих без жалости мучить; и за что? чтоб французскую карету; купить.
Firyulin responds, “Parbleu! I would have never believed that Russian people could love so tenderly. I am beside myself with astonishment. Am I really not in France?” Anyuta and Lukyan, attempting to gain favor with Firyulin and his wife, fall to their knees and beg, “Monseigneur! Have pity on us!” and “Madame! Take up our cause!” Hearing these words, Firyulin begins to weep, and declares, “You have moved me to such a state of pity by these words that I cannot hold back my tears.”

The lovers’ moving duet in both Annette et Lubin and Knyazhnin’s opera begins with a plea sung by the young women, imploring the landowner to look at her and gaze upon her tears.

Annette: Monseigneur, voyez mes larmes (I.xvi)
Anyuta: На слезы посмотри (II.v)

The adaptation of Favart’s final scene may go beyond the text; similarities in the music of the two operas suggest that Pashkevich may have consulted Blaise’s score. The duets, both set in G major, begin with the young woman singing alone in simple duple meter. She enters on an upbeat with a melody that rises from the third to the fifth scale degree. Her phrase ends, and her lover sings a solo of his own. Once his solo concludes, they sing an unadorned melody in thirds that asks the seigneur to gaze on their tears in a simple syllabic setting that emphasizes their sentimental distress with repeated appoggiaturas (see Ex. 2.3 and 2.4).

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320 “Parbleu! Я этому б не повери, чтобы и русские люди могли так нежно любить; я вне себя от удивления! Да не во Франции ль я?” (II.v)
321 “Вы меня этими словами в такую жалость привели, что я от слез удержаться не могу” (II.v).
Example 2.3 Adolphe Blaise, *Annette et Lubin*, “Monseigneur, voyez mes larmes” (I.xvi)

[Music notation image]

322 Adolphe Blaise, *Annette et Lubin: comédie en un acte en vers* (Paris: Chez Mr. De la Chevardière, [1762?]).
Example 2.4 Vasily Pashkevich, *Neschast’ ye ot kareti*, “Otets, tvoy nas lyubil,” (III.v)\textsuperscript{323}

\textsuperscript{323} From the piano reduction published in S. L. Ginzburg, ed., *Istoriya russkoy muziki v notnikh obraztsakh*, vol. 1 (Moscow: Muzika, 1968).
Example 2.4 Cont’d

Together

-ню-ту, и-но-му-ты А-ню-ту.
На слезы по-смо-

три- те-бе- под- власт-ных,
стра- да-ние пре-кра-

ти- то-бой не- счаст-ных! На слезы по-смо- три те-бе- под-

власт-ных,
стра- да-ние пре- кри-

ти то-бой не-
Pashkevich’s use of appoggiaturas and *soupirs* in this duet raises a question central to the role of music in dramatic adaptation: When is the composer imitating aspects of the foreign style and when is he parodying parts of that style for comic effect? Richard Taruskin believes that the composer’s use of the sentimental mode in this duet is clearly exaggerated and should be considered a parody. He presents a compelling argument that implies that the cynical lovers are performing a saccharine number excessively decorated with French stylistic elements in order to exploit Firyulin’s devotion to all things French.\(^3\) But if Knyazhnin’s characterization of the young couple is taken into account, it is difficult to argue that either Anyuta or Lukin is capable of such self-interested duplicity. Throughout the opera, Anyuta is a paragon of simplicity and virtuous love, as a sentimental heroine ought to be. She and Lukyan beg in earnest for pity on multiple occasions. Firyulin’s genuine response to their earnest duet explains one of the final comic misunderstandings of the opera. Firyulin is moved by the duet, but

\(^3\) Taruskin claims that the duet is “couched in a parodistically sentimental idiom, full of exaggerated appoggiaturas and *soupirs,*” in Taruskin, “Pashkevich, Vasily Alexeyevich.”
misapprehends the cause of their tearful exchange. He is blind to the fact that the tender expression of sentiment can unite everyone, and instead regards the young couple’s delicate emotions as French rather than universal. He believes he has found a trace of France in the Russian countryside — a diamond in the rough. Firyulin comically fails to arrive at the moral of the story; he never takes up the mantle of Favart’s seigneur, who ends the opera by announcing that people must go to the villages to discover true sentiment.

The question of whether the duet is a musical parody also has consequences for the broader message of the opera. If the Russians’ sentimental pleas and duets in *Misfortune* are a cynical parody, Knyazhnin would have been giving credence to the degrading accusations of French writers who claimed that Russians are clever, but have no real capacity for empathy; they exhibit the traits of sensibility only to appear French. This would have been a highly unlikely message to convey either to the Empress, who took pains to repudiate this claim, or the literary elite of the capital. Instead, Knyazhnin mocks Francophilia while demonstrating the Russian people’s capacity for tenderness.

Within the established narrative of early Russian opera, in which Russian comic opera is seen merely as a flattering imitation of opéra comique, Knyazhnin’s anti-Francophilic message would seem to conflict with the use of French opera as a theatrical source. Based on the views of dramatic adaptation expressed by his contemporaries, it is possible that Knyazhnin did not see this as a conflict at all. For eighteenth-century playwrights and librettists, dramatic adaptation was not an attempt to imitate or copy the original. Adaptation was a departure; it allowed playwrights and librettists to deviate
from the original stage work in order to create comedies and comic operas that would be fully Russian and lifelike to them. What emerged in these early performances was neither a national style nor a random smattering of local color applied to foreign operatic models. Informed by cosmopolitan theories of verisimilitude, they were instead thoughtful attempts to use musical comedy to define, indeed re-define, Russia and its people.
CHAPTER THREE

MUSICAL HUMOR IN OPERA BUFFA AND ITS POLITICS AT THE RUSSIAN COURT THEATER

As a patron, a spectator, and a writer, Catherine II championed comedy. In a letter to Voltaire, she reflected on her penchant for humor, writing, “Perhaps you will say . . . that it is easier to make me laugh than other sovereigns, and you will be right. I am fundamentally an extremely jolly person.” She praised comedy’s ability to improve the morals and manners of the audience, and even started writing her own comedic dramas in 1772, imitating Yelgan and other court playwrights by adapting foreign plays to local customs and writing original satirical comedies that mocked social vices such as ignorance, superstition, and Francophilia.

Beginning in 1786, Catherine also wrote opera libretti for comic operas — a surprising next step that reflected a fundamental transformation of her views on music. Unlike other sovereigns writing or performing in opera, such as Frederick the Great or Marie Antoinette, Catherine was not a skilled musician; she even admitted that she struggled to enjoy music. “I am dying to listen to and to love music,” she complained to her correspondent Friedrich Melchior Grimm, “but no matter how hard I try, it is noise

327 Catherine II claimed to have no ear for music. One scholar claims that she studied singing and dancing when she was young, and took keyboard lessons with Francesco Araja before she ascended to the throne. A. N. Kryukov, “Yekaterina II,” MPES, 1: 322.
and that is all. I should like to establish a prize at your new society of medicine for the person who invents an effective remedy for the insensitivity to the sounds of harmony.”

To the empress’s astonishment, composer Giovanni Paisiello found the cure for her malady: musical humor. The effect on her was immediate; in 1779, Catherine began praising his opere buffe, claiming that Paisiello was a sorcerer; his music charmed her, captivated her attention, and made her laugh. Audiences concurred. The six operas that Paisiello composed for her between 1779 and 1783, which include Il barbiere di Siviglia, ovvero La precauzione inutile (St. Petersburg, 1782), proved to be among the most successful of his illustrious career. They also instilled in Catherine a love of music and an understanding of how music could work in comic opera.

Catherine II’s appreciation for Paisiello’s opere buffe was not simply an extension of her views on the ability of comedy to convey moral messages in an entertaining fashion. She appreciated lowbrow humor in music, which was so often criticized by both eighteenth-century and contemporary scholars. Indeed, what is particularly fascinating

Friedrich Melchior Baron von Grimm (1723–1807) was a prominent German critic living in Paris in the second half of the century, and one of several leading intellectual figures in French life with whom Catherine II corresponded. “Je meurs d’envie d’écouter et d’aimer la musique, mais j’ai beau faire, c’est du bruit, et puis c’est tout. J’ai envie d’envoyer à votre nouvelle société de médecine un prix pour celui qui inventera un remède efficace contre l’insensibilité aux sons de l’harmonie.” This letter has been published in SIRIO, 23, 111.

These letters, which were all published in SIRIO (vol. 23), are discussed below.

Michael Robinson shows that between 1783 and 1790 Paisiello’s Il barbiere di Siviglia was the most frequently performed opera in Mozart’s Vienna. Robinson, “Mozart and the opera buffa tradition,” in W.A. Mozart: Le nozze di Figaro, edited by Tim Carter, Cambridge Opera Handbooks (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 12.

is the way that the Russian empress reconciled her didactic aims with her taste for the humor of her new maestro di cappella.

Catherine II’s letters show that she prized the musical humor in Paisiello’s *opere buffe* because it taught her to listen, as is apparent in her detailed descriptions of Paisiello’s *Gli astrologi immaginari* (St. Petersburg, 1779), which are examined in the first part of this chapter. Paisiello, moreover, was keenly aware of the empress’s response to his operas, and he strategically added this type of musical humor to the operas that he composed for her. The effects of the empress’s tastes on Paisiello’s operas, which are explored in the second section of the chapter, offer a new perspective on the artistic influence of Catherine II’s patronage of opera. In the final part of this chapter, Paisiello’s operas are considered in the context of the empress’s legislative and educational agenda of the early 1780s and her decision to open the court’s first public opera house. Court-issued documents from these years suggest that Paisiello’s seemingly trifling musical humor and its effects on the spectator may have been significant not only to Catherine as a listener, but to her work as a sovereign.

**CATHERINE II’S VIEWS ON COMEDY AND MUSIC**

Although Catherine II invested heavily in opera and intervened in operatic affairs from the beginning of her rule, she did not pretend to enjoy the operatic music that she patronized. Giacomo Casanova, who was among the foreign visitors to observe the
empress’s indifference, recalled her complaints after a performance of Vincenzo Manfredini’s *dramma per musica, L’Olimpiade*:

The music of that opera has given the greatest pleasure to everyone, so of course I am delighted with it; but it wearies me nevertheless. Music is a fine thing, but I cannot understand how anyone who is seriously occupied can love it passionately. I will have Buranello [Baldassare Galuppi] here, and I wonder whether he will interest me in music, but I am afraid nature did not constitute me to feel all its charms.332

She did, however, find charm in the comic operas of Giovanni Paisiello, who served as maestro di cappella at the Russian court from 1776 until 1784.333 His melodies delighted and transported her with apparent ease, and they also inspired her most sensitive and extended discussions of music in opera. In her letters, she first expresses astonishment at her response to Paisiello’s music, writing,

Do you know that Paisiello’s operas are a charming thing? I forgot to tell you; I was all ears for his opera, despite the natural insensitivity of my ears to music; I place Paisiello next to Galuppi. A bouffon has arrived that is truly funny; the very music that is sung makes me laugh: God knows how this is arranged . . . How is it that the music of this bouffon makes me laugh, while the music of French comic operas inspires in me only indignation and contempt, in me who neither loves nor knows anything about music?334


333 Giovanni Paisiello (1740–1816) came to St. Petersburg from Naples, where he had been composing comic operas and a handful of serious operas. After he left Russia, he returned to Naples to work for King Ferdinando.

334 “Savez-vous bien que l’opéra de Païsiello était une chose charmante? J’ai oublié de vous en parler; j’ai été toute oreille pour cet opéra, malgré l’insensibilité naturelle de mon typan pour la musique; je mets Païsiello à côté de Galuppi. Il vient d’arriver un bouffon qui est fort drôle; la musique même qu’il chante me fait rire: Dieu sait comme cela est arrangé . . . D’où vient que la musique de ce bouffon me fait rire, tandis que la musique des opéras comiques français m’inspire
The music’s charms compel her to listen eagerly and attentively, and she becomes “all ears.” Catherine underscores this point in another letter, iterating that Paisiello has continued to work miracles by making her “watch operas without boredom and listen to the music with attention and interest.”

Catherine’s most detailed account of music and, more specifically, musical humor concerned Paisiello’s opera buffa *Gli astrologi immaginari* (The imaginary astrologists), which premiered at one of the empress’s private gatherings in the new Hermitage building in 1779. She describes a scene in which the humor is largely conveyed through a particular coordination of music, words, and movement. One duet (which she refers to as an aria) has an unusually strong effect on her, as noted in one of her letters:

de l’indignation et du mépris, à moi qui n’aime ni ne sais point du tout la musique?” SIRIO, vol. 23, 74.

335 SIRIO, vol. 23, 160.

336 There is confusion about the location of this opera’s premier, which affects the assumptions that can be made about the constitution of its audience. The libretto printed for the occasion does not include any details about the location or date of the opera’s premiere. In a letter to Grimm, Catherine II mentions that it premiered in her Hermitage. She writes, “Paisiello nous a régali avant-hier, sur mon théâtre de l’hermitage, d’un opéra comique, fait en trois semaines, de sa façon, à mourir de rire; c’est Le philosophe ridicule ou Le faux savant” (SIRIO, 23, 127). Yet the famous Hermitage Theater designed by Giacomo Quarenghi did not open until November 1785. Copies of Paisiello’s *Gli astrologi immaginari* held in national libraries in Vienna and Budapest bear title pages that read: “Gli Astrologi Immagginari/ Opera Buffa/ Messa in Musica da Giovanni Paisiello./ Per rappresentarsi nell’Imperial Teatrino dell’Eremitaggio di/ S: M: I:/ L’Imperatrice di Tutte le Russie/ l’Anno 1779 Il di 7 Febrajo. These title pages are reproduced in Karl Mohr, “Giovanni Paisiello’s *Gli Astrologi Immagginari*: An Urtext Edition,” (Ph.D. diss, Florida State University, 1969), 399. This suggests two options: either the opera premiered in the Imperial Theater in the Winter Palace, or—what is more likely—the opera premiered during one of the Empress’s “small hermitages,” private soirées held in the recently opened Hermitage building designed by Jean-Baptiste Vallin de la Mothe. These were extremely private gatherings in which organizers went to great lengths to keep even the servants out of sight. As Simon Dixon writes, these evenings often began “with a theatrical performances in the neighboring stables and [ended] at the two mechanical tables in the easternmost room.” Mechanical tables allowed the food and drink to appear without the interruption of table service. Dixon, *Catherine II*, 192.
Paisiello regaled us the night before last, at my theater in the hermitage, with a comic opera, made in three weeks, in his way, that is hilarious; it is *The ridiculous philosopher, or the False savant*. In this opera, there is an air in which a cough is set to music and one sings *la pulmonia* [pneumonia] and the other responds with fear that the seigneur Argaphontidas has come to *crepare in mia casa* [to croak in my house], to which no living soul can resist. This has merited Madame Paisiello a diamond flower and M. a snuffbox.  

Notably, she does not couch her description of the duet in moralizing rhetoric, as was typical in her writings about comedy. She embraces its lowbrow humor; her comments capture the sheer delight she felt listening to the way the music dramatized bodily noises.  

Months later, at her suburban palace in Tsarskoye Selo, a court theater troupe performed a concert of arias and duets that included “*La pulmonia*.” The empress was apparently still laughing. She writes to Grimm, “I laughed holding my sides from that

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337 “Paisiello nous a régalés avant-hier, sur mon théâtre de l’hermitage, d’un opéra comique, fait en trois semaines, de sa façon, à mourir de rire; c’est Le philosophe ridicule ou Le faux savant; il y a un air où la toux est mise en musique et où l’un chante la pulmonia, et l’autre répond par la crainte que le seigneur Argaphontidas ne soit venu crepare in mia casa, à laquelle âme qui vive ne résistera jamais. Cela a valu à mad. Paisiello une fleur de diamants et M. une boîte.” SIRIO, 23, 127–8.

Returning to this duet in yet another letter, she provides a more sophisticated discussion of the same duet, writing,

I must speak to you about Paisiello: Monday . . . he regaled us with his opera, [Gli astrologi immaginari] for the second time, and I wanted to see it a third time today. The more I see it, the more I am astonished by his singular use of tones and sounds: a cough, for example, becomes harmonious, and full of sublime follies. You do not know how this magician manages to make the least sensitive organs pay attention to la musica, and those organs are my own. I leave with the music, my head full of music. I recall and almost sing his composition: oh, the singular mind of Paisiello! I have ordered this music to be copied for you, and you will see many sublime things, das ist unvergleichlich [it is inimitable].

After hearing the duet a number of times, Catherine II characterizes the musical humor as a process of surprising musical and musico-dramatic transformations. She also makes an interesting claim in this excerpt: she did not decide to start listening attentively. According to Catherine, the composer determined how she listens to the opera. Paisiello controls her senses, compelling her to pay attention to the music and filling her head with

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339 “Hier on nous donné de nouveau ici, sur mon charmant théâtre, où il peut y entrer cinq cents personnes, la pulmonia, et j’ai ri à me tenir les côtés de cet air.” SIRIO, 23, 155.

340 “Il faut que je vous parle Païsiello; lundi . . . il nous a régälès ici de son opéra “Les astrologues ou les Philosophes” pour la seconde fois, et j’ai voulu voir cela au grand jour une troisième fois aujourd’hui, et plus je vois cela et plus je suis étonnée du singulier emploï qu’il sait faire des tons et des sons: et la toux, par example, devient harmonieuse, et tout plein de folies sublimes, et vous ne savez comment ce magicien fait pour faire prêter attention aux organes les moins sensibles à la musica, et ces organies-là sont les miens. Je sors de sa musique, la tête remplie de musique; je reconnais et chante presque sa composition: oh, la singulière tête de Païsiello! J’ai ordonné de transcrire pour vous cette musique-là, et vous verrez tout plein de choses sublimes, das ist unvergleichlich.” “Dans tout cet opéra il n’y a pas un air que je ne sache par coeur.. je crois que Païsiello peut faire rire, pleurer et donner à l’âme, à l’esprit et au coeur tel sentiment qu’il voudra, et que c’est un sorcier.” SIRIO, vol. 23, 152 and 156.

341 This type of musical humor — which is characterized by surprising and witty contrasts — was typical in that era. Gretchen Wheelock gives additional examples from instrumental music from the second half of the eighteenth century. Gretchen Wheelock, *Haydn’s Ingenious Jesting with Art: Contexts of Musical Wit and Humor* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1992), 5.
melodies. By describing herself as a more attentive and enthusiastic listener after attending performances of Paisiello’s operas, she implies that the composer’s musical humor was both entertaining and beneficial despite its apparent lack of moral content.

MUSICAL HUMOR IN PAISIELLO’S OPERAS FOR CATHERINE II

Although she had a privileged political and cultural position at the theater, Catherine II was in many ways a typical spectator in the eighteenth century in that she had extensive exposure to opera, yet little formal musical training. Catherine’s letters to Grimm present a rare perspective: the detailed descriptions of operas that have survived were typically by critics, theorists, and composers; the average viewer’s perspective and tastes are largely lost. These letters also offer a useful starting point for identifying the strategies that Paisiello used to entertain Catherine II and his Russian audience, particularly in the three most successful operas that he composed in St. Petersburg: *Gli astrologi immaginari* (Hermitage, 1779), *Il barbiere di Siviglia* (Imperial Theater, 1782), and *Il mondo della luna* (Grand Stone Theater, 1782).

*Gli astrologi immaginari*, the Russian empress’s apparent favorite, was the first original opera buffa that Paisiello composed for the Russian court. He used a libretto by Giovanni Bertati, which had premiered with music by Gennaro Astarita under the title

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I visionari in 1772 at Venice’s Teatro San Moisè. But it was Paisiello’s version that would make the opera internationally famous; the Russian empress’s accolades proved to be representative of the opera’s popular reception abroad. After its Russian premiere, the opera was staged throughout Europe under various titles. It became Paisiello’s first great success in Vienna, and continues to be regarded as one of the composer’s finest comic operas.

The plot of Bertati’s libretto presents a charming solution to a familiar intrigue. A young couple, Giuliano and Clarice, are attempting to trick the girl’s reluctant father, Petronio, into allowing them to marry. Giuliano appeals to Petronio, a pretentious old man, by disguising himself as an ancient Greek philosopher, Argatifontidas. The interactions between the fake philosopher and Clarice’s gullible father inspired the most popular comic music in the opera. In Act I, scene 8, for instance, Giuliano enters in disguise and begins singing, “Salve tu domine” in mock-serious stately musical phrases that alternate with contrasting asides of patter commenting on Petronio’s foolishness (in Italian rather than Latin). This number found admirers in both the musical and political

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elite: Catherine boasted to Grimm about accosting Paisiello at a masquerade by singing this aria to him, and later, in Vienna, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart would show his approval of the work by writing a series of piano variations on “Salve tu domine” (K. 398).  

But perhaps the most arresting comic moment was “pulmonia,” the duet between Petronio and the disguised Giuliano in Act Two, Scene Three that, as noted above, so amused the empress. The scene begins with a formal introduction as Petronio welcomes the false philosopher into his home. After they exchange haughty salutations, Giuliano moves slowly and begins to cough. The formalities disappear, and Petronio worries that the visitor is going to infect him and die in his house. The two begin coughing together, exclaiming in unison that pneumonia has come to attack them.

The comic effect of the situation is enhanced by the style and organization of the poetry. Bertati used poetic meter and rhyme to structure the duet into two contrasting parts — the mock-serious salutations and the coughing situation. The first half of the duet’s text consists of a hexastich (a grouping of six lines marked “H” in the translation below) and a quatrain (marked “Q”), and both groupings conclude with lines of end-accented versi tronchi (marked “t”) that articulate closure. In the first hexastich, Giuliano begins with a formal introduction of three lines of text, which Petronio follows with a toadying response that copies the rhetorical style and rhyme scheme of the philosopher’s greeting. The latter half of the duet opens with another hexastich, which begins oddly with an aside about the philosopher’s poor health that foreshadows the upcoming

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345 SIRIO, vol. 23, 155.

144
coughing episode. Giuliano coughs and Petronio joins him, and their exchange devolves into a playful juxtaposition of coughs and high style rhetoric (indicated by words such as “tormento” and “attacar”).

GIULIANO
Con anni cento addosso
vi abbraccio come posso
per segno d’amistà.

PETRONIO
Che siate il benvenuto
vi abbraccio, e vi saluto
mia cara Antichità.

Datemi quà la mano
mettetevì a seder.

GIULIANO
Ah! . . . ahi! . . . fate piano
che sentomi a doler.

PETRONIO
(È pieno di malanni!)

GIULIANO
Ah, compatite gli anni (tosse)
e il lungo mio studiar.

PETRONIO
(Io temo che si dia
che questi in casa mia
venuto sia a crepar.)

GIULIANO
Un poco di catarro . . .
talor mi dà tormento

PETRONIO
Io sento . . . via

PETRONIO E GIULIANO [a due]
Ah che la polmonia
me viene ad attacar.

At my hundred years of age
I embrace you as I can
As a sign of friendship.
So that you are welcome,
I embrace you, and I salute you
My dear antiquity.
Give me your hand
Take a seat.
Ah! . . . ah! . . . slowly
because I feel pain.
(He is full of ailments!)
Ah, pity my years (coughs)
and the length of my study.
(I am afraid that
that he has come
to die in my house.)
This bit of phlegm
At times gives me torment
I feel it . . . go
Ah, pneumonia
has come to attack me.
Paisiello’s setting closely follows the organization of the text, and he takes full advantage of the comic contrasts in the poetry and stage directions. The duet opens with an orchestral ritornello that evokes a ceremonial procession, with strings playing a dignified lyrical melody and a percussive tremolo bass, and with horns and oboes performing repeated octaves and thirds. But Paisiello also hints that the situation will not be as serious as it seems: he undercuts the moment’s gravitas with a duple meter, short note values in the accompaniment’s figuration, and the andantino tempo.

When Giuliano and Petronio begin singing, Paisiello represents their imitative greetings in the text with orderly antecedent and consequent phrases. The quatrain concludes with a half cadence, and, as the second hextastich begins, the opening theme returns (a diagram of the duet’s form appears in Fig. 3.1). But when the coughing begins, musical normalcy disappears, and it quickly becomes clear that this is not the recapitulation, but a developmental episode.

In this “development,” Paisiello makes it seem as though the coughing is responsible for derailing the repetition of the opening theme (Ex. 3.1, mm. 37–68). The motives are the first to be affected. In the initial statement in the exposition, the final two syllables of Giuliano’s line are sung as two eighth notes; but when it returns in the development with the new lyrics, “Un poco di catarro,” as shown in the examples, Giuliano hurries through the last two syllables of his line, singing them twice as fast before the coughs, with the rests between his phrases double to accommodate him. As he continues to cough, the music is dislodged from its repetition and modulates to the dominant. In an anxious aside, Petronio responds to Giuliano’s coughing by singing a
chromatic descending line about his fear that the philosopher has come to die in his house.

When the second motive returns in the dominant, Giuliano is coughing and seems to miss his cue (Ex. 3.1, mm. 48–49). The orchestra continues to play the theme without him for two bars, at which point Giuliano manages to rejoin the ensemble, singing, “Un poco di catarro talor mi dà tormento” (“A little bit of phlegm at times torments me”). The final vowel of the pompous word “tormento” is extended by percussive coughs that are pitched. Petronio joins him, and they cough together in chromatic counterpoint in a passage that evokes the learned style, despite the fact that it was performed by seemingly uncontrolled bodily noises (see Ex. 3.1, mm. 54–58). This phrase repeats as they sing the final lines, “Ah che la pulmonia mi viene ad attacar” (“Ah, how pneumonia is attacking me”), coughing again in chromatic counterpoint through several diminished harmonies. This is a standard developmental technique, to be sure, but one that suddenly becomes outlandish when delivered in successive noisy coughs.

The evolution of coughs through the developmental section of this duet is one of the composer’s primary strategies for making his audience laugh. For Paisiello, bodily noises were more than a momentary gag; he incorporated this low humor into a sophisticated musical language. The result was a direct form of musical comedy that required less fluency in Italian than in the musical conventions of opera buffa, and thus was accessible to Paisiello’s audience in the Russian capital.
Figure 3.1 Paisiello, *Gli astrologi immaginari*, “Con anni cento,” mm. 1–122

[Andantino]

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<td>Text:</td>
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Giuliano and Petronio begin coughing together in chromatic counterpoint (m. 55)

Abbreviations:

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<td>a2</td>
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Example 3.1 Giovanni Paisiello, *Gli astrologi immaginari*, “Con anni cento,” II.iii, mm. 34–69

[Andantino]

Vns.

Giul.

Petr.

Oh, com-pa-ti-te gli an-ni,(tosse)

(E' pieno di ma-lan-nil)

Ah, com pa-ti-te gli an-ni(tosse) e il lun-go mio stu-diar!(tosse)

(lo te-mo che si-a

un

di-a che que-sti in ca-sa... mi-a ve-nu-to... sia a cre-par!)

149
Example 3.1 Cont'd

150
Several years later, Paisiello used a similar strategy in *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, ovvero *La precauzione inutile* (St. Petersburg, 1782), which premiered at the Imperial Theater in the Winter Palace. In the preface to the libretto, Paisiello claims to have composed the opera with the intention of entertaining the Russian empress. He begins,

Madame! Your Imperial Majesty enjoyed *Le barbier de Séville* [by Pierre Beaumarchais], and I thought that the same play as an Italian opera would not displease you;

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346 *Il barbiere di Siviglia, ovvero la Precauzione inutile, dramma giocoso per musica tradotto liberamente dal francese, da rappresentarsi nel Teatro Imperiale di Corte, l’anno 1782* (St. Petersburg; nella Stamperia di Breitkopf, 1782).
consequently, I have made an extract, which I have attempted to keep as short as possible while conserving (as much as the genius of Italian poetry can permit) the expression of the original play without adjusting anything. My goal will be fulfilled if this Opera, for which I implore the indulgence of Your Imperial Majesty, can briefly entertain the Sovereign, whose assiduous work gives rise to the happiness of Her people and the glory of humanity.\footnote{“Le Barbier de Séville ayant été gouté par VOTRE MAJESTE IMPERIALE, j’ai pensé que cette même pièce en Opera Italien pourrait ne pas Lui déplaire; en conséquence j’en ai fait faire un extrait, que je me suis appliqué à rendre aussi court que possible, en conservant (autant que le génie de la Poesie Italienne peut le permettre) les expression de la pièce originale, sans y rien ajouter. Mon but sera rempli, si cet Opera, pour lequel j’implore l’indulgence de VOTRE MAJESTE IMPERIALE, peut délasser pendant quelques momens une Souveraine, dont le travail assidu fait la félicité de Ses peuples, et la Gloire de l’humanité.” Anonymous, Il barbiere di Siviglia, ovvero la Precauzione inutile, dramma giocoso per musica tradotto liberamente dal francese, da rappresentarsi nel Teatro Imperiale di Corte, l’anno 1782 (St. Petersburg: Breitkopf, 1782).}

Though Paisiello takes credit for extracting the opera from the French play, a librettist was surely involved. Giuseppe Petrosellini, a leading opera buffa librettist in the 1770s and 1780s, is believed to have adapted Beaumarchais’s comedy for Paisiello, but little is known about the genesis of the libretto.\footnote{Librettist Giuseppe Petrosellini (1727–ca. 1797) worked primarily in Rome and collaborated with the leading composers of opera buffa, including Niccolò Piccinni, Baldassare Galuppi, Antonio Salieri, and Domenico Cimarosa. Mary Hunter, “Petrosellini, Giuseppe,” The New Grove Dictionary of Opera. Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online, Oxford University Press, accessed October 18, 2016, http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/O009590.} The plot of the opera is typical: a young couple, Rosina and Count Almaviva, are struggling to be together because the young woman’s jealous guardian, Bartolo, also hopes to marry her. After four acts of deception, slapstick, and mistaken identities, Almaviva and Rosina enlist the help of the count’s former servant — the barber Figaro — and marry without Bartolo’s permission.
Il barbiere di Siviglia contains a number of ensembles that have attracted popular and scholarly attention, but perhaps the most successful was the sneezing trio in Act II. Bartolo suspects that Figaro had sneaked into his house and demands that his servants, Giovinetto and Lo Svegliato, tell him what has happened. Neither is able to respond because Figaro had tricked them into drinking potions that cause them to sneeze and yawn uncontrollably.

Like the coughing duet, this trio is in roughly ternary form, and the sneezing and yawning evolve through the musical number. Paisiello introduces the main motives in the exposition and concludes this section with a half cadence (a diagram of the trio appears in Fig. 3.2). A false recapitulation follows and the music modulates to the dominant for a kind of “development,” in which the opening motives return in the dominant and new key areas are briefly explored through modulating sequences. This is followed by a return to the tonic and a brief recapitulation.

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349 Michael Rose writes, “Paisiello’s terzetto at this point invariably brought the house down, so Sterbini and Rossini tactfully dispatched the incident in a few bars of plain recitative.” Michael Rose, The Birth of an Opera: Fifteen Masterpieces from Poppea to Wozzeck (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2013), 137. Daniel Heartz refers this ensemble as, “The great sneezing and yawning trio in Giovanni Paisiello’s Il barbiere di Siviglia” in Heartz, From Garrick to Gluck: Essays on Opera in the Age of Enlightenment (New York: Pendragon Press, 2004), 27.
Figure 3.2 Paisiello, *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, “Ma dov’eri tu stordito,” mm. 1–162

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<td>Lo Svegliato</td>
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<td>Giovinetto</td>
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[Modest]  

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<th>38</th>
<th>57</th>
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Giovanetto enters,  
Scene Six begins (m. 61)  
Modulatory passage of sneezes and yawns (mm. 79–88)
As in *Gli astrologi immaginari*, the sneezes and yawns first occur as lifelike sounds. After the opening ritornello, Lo Svegliato yawns, set realistically by Paisiello as a dotted half note that moves up by step to an eighth note. Bartolo responds—between yawns—in short bursts, asking insistent questions about Lo Svegliato’s whereabouts during the barber’s visit. All of these themes return in the development, albeit in a different order. Initially, the yawns are absent. As Bartolo sings his phrase alone, Giovinetto enters and begins to sneeze, and Lo Svegliato sneezes with him. Once all three are on stage, Paisiello repeats the opening motives again in the dominant and initiates a modulatory passage of simultaneous sneezes and yawns.

Once again, Paisiello has the servants treat sneezes and yawns as standard motivic material. The composer aligns the sneeze and yawn motives to create an odd duet (Ex. 3.2, mm. 75–88). Bartolo responds to this ludicrous chorus of bodily noises with exasperation, shouting, “Oh che canto è questo qui!”—“Oh what kind of song is this!” In this context, Bartolo’s exclamation has multiple meanings and confuses the sense of diegesis of the scene. Within the reality of the opera, he could be referring to the fact that the simultaneous sneezes and yawns are song-like in their synchronicity. But his comment also points to the qualities of the music that only the audience should be able to hear—yawns and sneezes make for an odd duet in opera. Bartolo’s interjection thus allows him to comment on the behavior of servants within the scene while also alluding to the strangeness of the song that he should not know that he is singing.
Paisiello thus unites the most unrestrained actions in the scene with unpredictable music of the ensemble. As Bartolo repeats his rhetorical question six times, the sneezes and yawns descend chromatically through sequences of alternating diminished and dominant seventh chords that resolve with an augmented-sixth chord and half cadence (Ex. 3.2). These are not the harmonies or the progression associated with buffo humor, which is typically characterized by harmonic stasis or long passages of tonic-dominant alternations. The chromaticism and dissonance add elements of high style rhetoric contrasting with the low humor of bodily noises. Paisiello’s musical humor again consists of surprising juxtapositions, motivic variations, and clever combinations of physical actions and familiar musical techniques, which unfold through large formal sections of the ensemble and reward the attentive listener.

350 High style traits include chromaticism and augmented sixth chords, which were typical of opera seria arias rather than buffo ensembles. For a list of musical traits associated with high style rhetoric, see Ronald Rabin, “Figaro as Misogynist: on Aria Types and Aria Rhetoric,” in Ópera Buffa in Mozart’s Vienna, eds. Mary Hunter and James Webster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 246.
Example 3.2 Paisiello, *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, “Ma dov’eri tu stordito,” II.vi, mm. 75–88

[Moderato]
Paisiello’s last opera for Catherine, *Il mondo della luna* (St. Petersburg, 1783), also contains a comic ensemble constructed around an unpredictable recurring motive. But in contrast to the previous examples, this ensemble was the opera’s moralizing finale, rather than a slapstick duet or trio in the middle of an act. The lack of physical humor reflected the higher rhetorical register of the opera overall, which was created for a stately occasion and for a wider audience: celebrating the anniversary of the empress’s coronation and commemorating the opening of the court’s first public opera house, the Grand Stone Theater.\(^{351}\)

\(^{351}\) These stately events were traditionally celebrated with the premiere of a new opera seria. Paisiello explained these obligations in a document addressed to the empress. He lists the annual court celebrations that require him to compose new operas. The anniversary of the empress’s coronation must be celebrated with a new grand opera seria (RGADA f. 17, op. 1, d. 322, l. 175). But there were no suitable leading singers for a new opera seria, in part because the recently hired prima donna, Luísa Todi, had fallen ill en route to St. Petersburg and was unable to arrive in time for the celebration. Paisiello thus decided to compose for the leading stars of the court’s opera buffa troupe, including Baldassare Marchetti and Anna Davia de Bernucci.
The libretto, which Carlo Goldoni had written in 1750, required significant revisions in order to be acceptable for the imperial holiday. The librettist responsible for these alterations, whose name is unknown, wrote a *protesta* in the new libretto that explains how the occasion of its premiere influenced his revisions.  

The present dramatic composition was created by its celebrated author in three acts, and presently is reduced to a single act, with changes that were believed courtesies to conform to the predetermined time of a short and light *brillante* spectacle. The music is completely new, composed expressly to celebrate such a glorious day: it is very different, and diverges from everything that in the years in Naples the aforementioned maestro di cappella [Paisiello] composed for the same drama under the title *Credulo deluso.*

Brevity was important not only to please the empress, but also because these extensive cuts removed large sections of recitative that were unintelligible to many members of the audience. The *protesta* does not, however, mention that these cuts also removed much of the libretto’s low humor. *Il mondo della luna* had premiered with music by Baldassare Galuppi in Venice at the Teatro San Moisè. The text was filled with licentious comments and morbid jokes that were *de rigueur* for the Venetian carnival, but inappropriate for a

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352 There was no court poet at that time. When Paisiello’s *Il mondo della luna* was performed in Naples in the following year, an “Avviso al pubblico” printed in the libretto claims that Marco Coltellini made the changes to the text. But Coltellini had died in 1777, and it was uncommon for librettists to revise libretti years in advance of their premieres.

public celebration of the Russian empress.\textsuperscript{354} Unsavory elements were removed from the original, and in several instances they were replaced with new texts evoking nobler sentiments that were cobbled together from Goldoni’s other works.\textsuperscript{355}

Once again, the plot centers on two sets of young lovers tricking a miserly old father into giving them permission to marry for love. Buonafede, the father, has forbidden the weddings because he foolishly hopes to marry his daughters to high princes who could improve the family’s wealth and status. But instead of dressing up as a philosopher or enlisting the help of a clever barber, these young suitors use a telescope and a fake trip

\begin{footnote}{354} For more on the Venetian premier, see Eleanor Selfridge-Field, \textit{A New Chronology of Venetian Opera and Related Genres, 1660–1760} (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 527.\end{footnote}

\begin{footnote}{355} Scholars have also argued that the extensive revisions censored Goldoni’s original by excising all of the social criticism as well. This change led musicologist Franca Saini to conclude that the Russian production changed the text in a way that left only a frivolous prank to maintain the intrigue. Saini argued that censorship or state intervention must have been the cause. See Giovanni Paisiello, \textit{Il mondo della luna}, ed. by Stefano Faglia and Franca Saini (Parma: Oca del Cairo, 2000), 30. However, I have been unable to find any evidence of such heavy-handed state censorship. Paisiello may have self-censored, in a sense, by conforming to the expectations of particular levels of formality on various occasions. Paisiello described these expectations and his needs in Russia in a now famous letter to Galiani. Libretti had to be written in a medium, not low, comic register. And just as Handel had done in London, Paisiello chose to keep the recitative as minimal as possible, because the audience did not speak Italian. Finally, as expected, he explained that the \textit{dramatis personae} must conform to the vocal types and talents available. The letter is reprinted in B. Croce, \textit{La Critica. Rivista di Letteratura, Storia e Filosofia diretta da B. Croce}, vol. 2 (Naples: Dir. della ‘Critica’, 1904), 514–7. An important counterargument, however, is that \textit{Il barbiere di Siviglia} premiered almost exactly one year earlier, presumably also during anniversary celebrations of the empress’s coronation. It may be an exception to the rule. It is also possible that \textit{Il barbiere} was considered somewhat separate from the official state celebrations. Unlike \textit{Il mondo della luna}, the libretto for \textit{Il barbiere di Siviglia} contains no information about a ceremonial event, which is unusual if the opera indeed premiered as an official part of the stately celebrations. This information was routinely included (i.e. Pietro Metastasio, \textit{L’Olimpiade: Dramma per musica, da rappresentarsi in Mosca il 24 novembre 1762 per celebrare il gloriosissimo nome di Sua Maestà Imperiale Caterina Seconda, imperatrice di tutte le Russie} (Moscow: Stampato presso l’Università Imperiale di Mosca) or Marco Coltellini, \textit{Ifigenia in Tauride: Dramma per musica recitato in St. Petersburgo gli aprile 1786 giorno anniversario della nascita di Sua Maesta Imperial Catarina II imperatrice di tutte le Russia} (St. Petersburg: Nella Stamperia dell’Accademia delle scienze, 1768).\end{footnote}
to the moon to trick Buonafede into approving their union. After drugging him with opium, the young lovers convince Buonafede that he can find the fortune he desires by joining the lunar emperor’s entourage. Once on the moon, the lunar emperor (the servant Cecco in disguise) proposes that the young women marry their suitors. Buonafede, who is eager to please his superior, agrees to the weddings and the drama ends happily.

The opera concludes with a multi-sectional finale in which Buonafede’s greed and gullibility are criticized. In the first of six stanzas, the servant Cecco explains Buonafede’s mistake,

**Cecco**

Buonafede, tondo, tondo, Buonafede, round and round,
Come il cerchio della Luna, As he searches for the moon,
Ritornate all’altro Mondo Returns to the other world,
A cercar miglior fortuna. Seeking better fortune.

In the penultimate stanza of the finale, Buonafede returns to the topic of the moon, expressing his outrage. The finale ends with a chorus that delivers the opera’s moral. The characters explain to the audience that Buonafede’s misery is not due to the young couples’ mischief, but to the old man’s desire for wealth and status beyond his reach. He, too, could have been happy if he had accepted his station in life.

**Buonafede**

Ah bricconi v’ho capito, Ah! You scoundrels, now I understand,
Son da tutti assassinato I have been assassinated by all,
Ma tu sei che m’hai tradito But you are the one that betrayed me
Cannocchiale disgraziato. You miserable telescope!
Tutti
Questo è quello che succede
A chi vuol cambiare fortuna.
Tutto spera, e tutto crede
Nelle stelle e nella Luna.
Ma alla fin si pentirà
Chi lunatico sarà.

This is what happens to one
Who wants to change his fortune.
He hopes for everything, believes in
everything,
In the stars and in the moon.
But he who puts his faith in the moon
Will regret it in the end.

The final couplet contains clever wordplay. As Pierpaolo Polzonetti explains, the word “lunatico” could mean mentally deranged or, in this context, it could also refer to a person who lives on the moon, a “moon-dweller.”

Eighteenth-century dictionaries contain yet another possible definition. “Lunatico” could refer to someone who is moon-sick; one whose mind is afflicted by the phases of the moon and whose behavior is erratic and unpredictable.

Paisiello takes up Goldoni’s characterization of Buonafede as moon-sick or moon-struck, associating Buonafede’s moon-sickness with a motive that is heard in an early scene in the opera and again in the finale. In Act I, Scene 3, Buonafede first sees the moon, looking through a telescope that Ecclitico had rigged to show him titillating,

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356 It is the –ico suffix that indicates a place of residence or citizenship (e.g. britannico). Pierpaolo Polzonetti nuances the word “lunatico” in his translation: “But he who wants to become a lunatic [lunatico means both “moon-dweller” and “crazy”] will regret it in the end.” Polzonetti, Italian Opera in the Age of the American Revolution (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 101.

fabricated images of the distant world. Instead of the heavens, Buonafede sees a young woman caressing an old man and a lover being led by the nose, and he exclaims, “Oh che mondo benedetto! Oh che gran felicità!” (“Oh what a blessed world! Oh what great happiness!”). Buonafede expresses the dizzying and salacious excitement that the images arouse in him by singing a distinctive circular motive that consists of eighth notes repeatedly ascending and descending in stepwise motion in four-bar phrases (Ex. 3.3).

Example 3.3 Paisiello, *Il mondo della luna*, “Ho veduto,” iii, mm. 24–33

[Allegro]

This same motive returns at the start of the finale when Cecco suggests that Buonafede is obsessed with the moon. He sings these lyrics to a similar circular motive of
eighth notes moving in stepwise motion back and forth between B flat and E natural (Ex. 3.4, mm. 13–16). Paisiello draws attention to the return of this motive with a sudden change in texture: the flutes and oboes stop playing, and the rest of the orchestra performs this motive with the singer in unison or at the octave.

Example 3.4 Paisiello, *Il mondo della luna*, finale, mm. 1–20

[Andante]
Buonafede’s circular figure returns again in the two final sections of the finale, where it gives musical expression to the word “lunatico.” First, the penultimate section, Buonafede’s final solo, begins with a sudden acceleration. The tempo shifts from andante to allegro as Buonafede vents his indignation. He sings each eight-syllable line of text to the circular motive. These two-bar phrase outbursts alternate in rapid succession with contrasting two-bar phrases of chordal harmonies orchestrated for the full ensemble. After the first eight-bar period, Buonafede’s ire intensifies ludicrously in a sputtering phrase that plays on the unusual circularity of the motive. He seems to begin another repetition of the two-bar phrase of the motive, but he delivers the line of text at twice the speed (Ex. 3.5, mm. 136–138). Yet the musical phrase does not conclude when he arrives at the final word of his last line of text, “disgraziato” (“miserable” or “unfortunate”). With a swift crescendo from piano to forte, Buonafede begins repeating “disgraziato” in an unruly passage that continues to cycle through the motive, ascending and descending again and again in an irrational extension of the phrase. The harmonic stasis and the strict
Example 3.5 Paisiello, *Il mondo della luna*, finale, mm. 128–146

[Allegro]
repetitions of this phrase make it appear to move forward according to Buonafede’s unstable or erratic behavior, his moon-sickness, rather than any musical or textual logic. Buonafede thus concludes his solo as Cecco had described him — “tondo, tondo,” or spinning round and round.

The circular motive returns for the last time in the final chorus. After Buonafede concludes his agitated solo, the characters join together to present the moral of the opera, which begins with a return to orderly parallel phrases. The clear harmonic progression and coordinated homophony of this passage contrast with Buonafede’s solo and reflect the nature of the harmonious and virtuous relationship of the young lovers.

But the finale does not remain peaceful and earnest for long. When this hushed homophonic passage concludes, a final section of imbroglio begins as the assembled sing the final couplet of the chorus, “Ma alla fin si pentirà,/ Chi lunatico sarà.” Paisiello begins this couplet with a surprise: the return of Buonafede’s motive (see Ex. 3.6, m.164). But in this iteration, Buonafede does not sing the motive. One of his daughters, Clarice, sings it instead. Her solo begins with a triadic melody, and when she reaches the word “lunatico” she begins to sing the circular motive. Imitating her father’s wild repetition of the word “disgraziato,” she thus critiques his self-interested pursuit of fortune on the moon, while also mocking its psychological consequences in the music.

Once Clarice concludes her phrase, the composer subverts the motive’s affect for comic effect, a technique that recalls the coughs in Gli astrologi immaginari and the humorous yawns and sneezes in Il barbiere di Siviglia. Previously, the circular motive was isolated from the ensemble as a solo vocal melody, estranged by its circularity and
peculiar thin texture. But after Clarice sings this theme as a solo, Paisiello does something unexpected: he incorporates this melody into a six-bar phrase of homophony, which serves to reconcile Buonafede’s isolated melody with the ensemble. The couples sing a homophonic six-bar phrase that cleverly features Buonafede’s motive in the middle voice.

After Clarice, each character takes a turn singing the “lunatico” phrase in dizzying repetitions of the previous period — the antecedent solo and consequent tutti — that cycle through the characters to form a circular period with the unpredictability of a developmental episode. Ecclitico sings the solo in the dominant, and Flaminia, Buonafede’s other daughter, sings it in the tonic again. Once the tonic is restored, they sing the solo on the subdominant, supertonic, submediant, and then on the tonic again. Three additional repetitions form a cadential gesture that mirrors the first three iterations, moving from the tonic to the dominant, and returning to the tonic with one final repetition of the tonic to establish a firmer sense of resolution (a diagram of this section appears in Fig. 3.3). After all of the other dramatis personae have sung the moral to Buonafede, he finally participates. He takes a turn and sings the final iteration of the solo, providing a visual and aural cue that Buonafede is accepting the moral; he is willing to sing it, and thereby rejoins the group to restore social harmony at last.

With word play and musical humor, Paisiello engages spectators and encourages them to listen attentively in order to enjoy the comic surprises. As in his previous operas for Catherine II, the musical humor benefited from the text, but it did not require the listeners to understand every word. Regardless of a listener’s comprehension of the plot
twists or awareness of Goldoni’s wordplay, Paisiello presents a clear and humorous
critique of Buonafede’s behavior. But in this opera, the music focuses the audience’s
attention not only on a ludicrous situation, but also on the opera’s social commentary.
The moral’s tune was so catchy and simple that listeners, including the empress, could
have continued singing it as they left the Grand Stone Theater at the end of the evening.
Figure 3.3 Il mondo della luna, finale, mm. 162–284

[Allegro moderato]
Example 3.6 Paisiello, *Il mondo della luna*, finale, mm. 155–175
Example 3.6 Cont’d
OPERA BUFFA’S MORALS IN RUSSIAN SOCIETY

Though the text and musical style of *Il mondo della luna* were foreign imports, the opera — particularly its moral and its musical humor — was positioned to advance the social agenda of Catherine II while also resonating with a body of Russian texts written by officials at the court in the early 1780s. The opera’s moral lesson about happiness and propriety presents the clearest example of the intersections between Paisiello’s comic operas and the literary texts and policies of Catherine II.

The moral of *Il mondo della luna*, common in that period, was also featured in a widely read didactic story by Catherine II that would later be adapted for the stage as a Russian comic opera. *Skazka o Tsareviche Khlore* (*The Tale of Tsarevich Khlor*, 1781) recounts the adventures of a precocious young tsarevich named Khlor, who is kidnapped by a Kyrgyz Khan and sent on a quest to find the mythical rose without thorns.358 Before Khlor embarks, he meets Felitsa (Felicity), a wise maternal figure who tells him that he must ignore all temptations on his journey: “I have seen peasants and tradesmen who have as happily succeeded in this pursuit as nobles, kings, or queens.”359 Along the way, he is tempted by vices and sensory pleasures — riches, tobacco, alcohol, cards, and dice.

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358 The tale was first public in Russian in 1781, and then translated to other European languages. The English title is: *Ivan Czarowitz, or the Rose Without Prickles that Stings Not, a Tale written by Her Imperial Majesty* (London, 1793). It was also published in German in 1782 and in French, in Grimm’s *Correspondence littéraire*, in 1790 (O’Malley, *The Dramatic Works of Catherine the Great*, 170). The opera, *Khlor Tsarevich, ili roza bez shipov, kotoraya ne koletsa, inoskazat’noye zrelishche v trekh deystviyakh*, contained much of the empress’s original with musical numbers added to the text, was published in the major theater anthology in 1788. The composer is unknown and there are no known performances of the opera, though that does not necessarily indicate that it was never performed. The opera was published in *Rossiyskiy featr ili Polnoye sobraniye vsekh rossiyskikh featral’nikh sochineniy*, vol. 24 (St. Petersburg, 1788), 195–232.

359 [Catherine II], *Ivan Czarowitz*, 17.
— and manages to refuse them all. He later stops to rest at the home of a peasant family who welcomes him. These humble and quiet peasants serve as a model of virtue and happiness. Despite their modest means, they accept their fate and fortune with peaceful contentment. 360

When the tsarevich continues, he discovers the true meaning of his quest. A group of young boys whom he meets along his path explain the significance of the rose and the lesson of his journey,

I have heard, said the boy, from our master an explanation of the rose without prickles that stings not. This flower signifies nothing more than virtue. Some people think to find it by going bye [sic] ways; but nobody can get it unless he follows the streight [sic] road; and happy is he that by an honest firmness can overcome all the temptations of that road. 361

Just like Buonafede, Khlor must cleave to virtue and passively accept his fate and fortune in order to be truly happy.

New educational texts also introduced the same moral lesson to Russian classrooms across the empires. In 1783, the year Paisiello’s opera premiered, Catherine II issued a new required reading for schools, O dolzhnostyakh cheloveka i grazhdanina (On the Duties of Man and Citizen), which teaches students about happiness and civic duties. Happiness, the reader learns, is the one thing that every person desires, and it is accessible to every person regardless of rank. The book claims that noblemen are often

360 [Catherine II], Ivan Czarowitz, 24.
361 Ibid, 27.
less happy than those who have nothing, which is why even slaves can be happy.\textsuperscript{362} The chapter continues,

We should never wish for something that is not suited to our occupation because we can never attain it . . . People would not be tormented by vain wishes if they knew that happiness is not contained in the material things that surround them. It does not consist in wealth . . . True happiness lies within ourselves. . . . When our soul is well, free of unruly desires, and the body is healthy, then man is happy. Therefore, the only people in the world who are completely happy are those who are satisfied with their possessions, because without satisfaction, a clean conscience, decency and the richest and most distinguished person can be just as unhappy as a person of lowest rank.\textsuperscript{363}

As in Catherine’s tale about Khlor and Goldoni’s \textit{Il mondo della luna}, this book teaches students that true happiness lies in virtue, tamed appetites, and tempered passions. Happy citizens are calm; they accept their station in life, behave with decency and propriety, and do not disturb the social order. This lesson also benefited society and insured the continuation of status quo. People are less likely to revolt against the government if they believe that their unhappiness is caused by their own importunate desires, rather than by entrenched systems of inequality and subjugation. The myriad iterations of this particular lesson in school readings, literature, and at the theater attest to the urgency and value that it had acquired.

\textsuperscript{362} The author uses the word \textit{blagopoluchiye} or well-being, a word often used as a synonym for happiness in eighteenth-century Russian texts.

In the early 1780s, Catherine II was eager to stabilize and regulate Russian society, and this undertaking involved the creation of a peaceful middle class culture. Through reforms to municipal governance in the mid-1770s, the empress worked to improve the morals and manners of Russian society, especially its middle strata, or meshchane (townspeople). In 1782, Catherine created the Uprava Blagochiniya (Board of Decorum), which regulated and policed urban life by making the people legally responsible for their order, cleanliness, and morality. Two years later, she further redefined the duties and rights of all categories of urban citizens with her “Charter to the Towns,” which reflected the empress’s new interest in the townspeople (meshchane).

Despite constituting the largest and most heterogeneous section of the city’s population, the townspeople had not been an official social category; they had no representation at the municipal level of government, and they been excluded from Peter the Great’s Table of Ranks (the only existing system of social classification recognized by the state). The “Charter to the Towns” established that the townspeople would constitute a single “social estate” (sosloviye) that included high-ranking property holders, merchants, artisans,

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364 In the early 1780s, Russia was still recovering from the greatest upheavals of Catherine II’s rule, including the Pugachev rebellion (1773–1775), plague epidemics and riots in Moscow (1770–1772), and years spent at war with Turkey (1768–1774).

365 Based on the model of Berlin’s Polizey Ordnung. Marc Raeff, The Well-Ordered Police State: Social and Institutional Law in the Germanies and Russia, 1600-1800 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 243. The Board laid out an extensive plan for establishing guilds and a system of administration to police or regulate all the towns and cities in her empire (a more extensive bureaucracy that had not existed prior to her legislation). Also, Marc Raeff, “The Well-Ordered Police State,” American Historical Review 80, no. 5 (1975): 1237.

foreigners, and the so-called eminent citizens (imenitye grazhdane) — rich businessmen and exceptional individuals from various fields, including architects, painters, sculptors, scholars, and state officials. With this document, Catherine II created the political and social framework for the nascent Russian bourgeoisie.

**Music and Morals at the Grand Stone Theater**

Catherine II’s efforts to cultivate a bourgeois culture, if not a true bourgeoisie, extended to her use of the theater. In the late 1770s and early 1780s, Catherine II enlisted the theater to help her regulate and improve the manners and morals of Russia’s townspeople. A public statement that the empress made early in her rule has since become emblematic of her views; she proclaimed, “Theater is the school of the people [. . .

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368 Social estates and the social structure of the Russian empire are explained in Gregory L. Freeze, “The Soslovie (Estate) Paradigm and Russian Social History,” *The American Historical Review* 91, no. 1 (1986): 11–36. Elise Kimerling Wirtschafter argues that there was "no clearly discernible civil society or political bourgeoisie" in eighteenth-century Russia. Wirtschafter shows that a bourgeois, or middle class, culture arose by the end of the century. Her book argues that the middle class in Russia did not achieve the status of a bourgeoisie because it did not develop a political voice or power to influence Russian politics or the state’s decisions. Instead of concluding that the Russian middle class was impotent, however, she makes the important point that the middle class was instead more dynamic and integrated into the power structures of society. Wirtschafter argues convincingly that one of the main reasons why a civil society did not successfully emerge in Russia was due to the lack of social institutions upon which civil society depends. See Wirtschafter, *Social Identity in Imperial Russia* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1997), 97–99; Wirtschafter, “A State in Search of a People: The Problem of Civil Society in Imperial Russia,” in *Eighteenth-Century Russia: Society, Culture, Economy*, eds. Roger Bartlett and Gabriela Lehmann-Carli (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2007), 380. Russia’s absent bourgeoisie is also discussed in Aleksandr Kamenskii, *The Russian Empire in the Eighteenth Century: Searching for a Place in the World*, translate and edited by David Griffiths (Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, 1997). Historian J. Michael Hittle also concurs that the 17th century predates the emergence of Russian middle class. See Hittle, *The Service City: State and Townsmen in Russia, 1600-1800* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), 1–2.
I am the teacher in charge of this school, and mine is the prime responsibility to God for the nation’s morals.”

In 1775, Catherine established the Office of Public Welfare (prikaz obshchestvennogo prizreniya), which administered and financed provincial theaters throughout the Russian empire. This office ensured that theaters would be governed as civic institutions dedicated to the common good.

When Catherine II constructed the court’s first public opera house, the Grand Stone Theater, she decided to admit the townspeople, who had previously been excluded from the Imperial Theater in the Winter Palace. The architect Friedrich Wilhelm Bauer


370 Wirtschafter, Play of Ideas, 18–9.

371 The Grand Stone Theater had a convoluted history; it required more than eight years and multiple architects to complete. When the empress first ordered the theater to be built in 1775, the court architect Antonio Rinaldi, who was sixty-five at the time, was responsible for designing the plans while Ludwig-Phillip Tischbein, a set designer, was responsible for the interior. Actual privy councilor and senator Mikhail Dedenev then executed the plans and was responsible for overseeing the construction. In 1781, however, the court transferred responsibility for constructing the theater to another architect, Friedrich Wilhelm Bauer. Catherine II seems to have wanted Bauer to alter Rinaldi’s design. Before giving Bauer the job, the empress had complained in a letter to Grimm that all her architects had become too old, too blind, too slow, or too lazy (SIRIO, vol. 23, 135). Only after Bauer altered the theater’s design did Catherine express approval. In 1782, after Rinaldi died, she praised Bauer’s plan, writing, “Bauer has completed the new theater and given it a form and figure that will accommodate me and the public as well” (SIRIO, vol. 23, 256). But Bauer did not live to see his work completed. He passed away in the first months of 1783 and Pietro Melissino, a member of the committee overseeing court spectacles, was charged with completing the project. For the 1775 decree, see RGIA f. 468, op. 1, ch. 2, d. 3892, l. 58. Tischbein’s involvement is mentioned in Johann Georgi, Description de la ville de St. Pétersbourg et de ses environs (St. Petersburg: Jean Zach Logan, 1793), 70. For the document stating that the court used Antonio Rinaldi’s plans and gave them to Dedenev to execute, see RGADA f. 17, op. 1, d. 300, l. 1. An announcement issued by the court explains the intended uses of the stone and wooden theaters. The wooden theater (where Knieper’s troupe of foundlings had performed) was for smaller productions of dramatic and operatic works in Russian, French, and German. There would be one hundred and thirty-two performances each year. In the summer, performances were offered twice a week, and in the winter there were four each week. The stone theater was supposed to offer performances of Italian and Russian operas, grand ballets, concerts, oratorios, and public masquerades. These took place once a week in the summer and twice each week in the winter. This announcement is reprinted in P. I. Bartenev, 178
wrote a charter for the new theater that articulates the court’s educational aims (see Appendix B). He begins,

The history of the most celebrated nations of antiquity and the example of the moderns note the utility of public spectacles in the large cities. . . . It is a healthy politics to protect honest public divertissements and for a sage and enlightened government to encourage them and assume a portion of the costs required to support them. . . . Dramatic and lyric stage works, aside from distracting and amusing people, contribute not a little to instructing and moderating their morals and manners. They make them assume a character of urbanity.

Admission to court spectacles was free to the nobility and qualified persons, where an inveterate etiquette excludes the third estate [townspeople] entirely. The result of this is that most populous section of society, and the commonwealth, finds itself deprived of its moral and political advantages.

It is because of these considerations that it pleased her Imperial Majesty, whose attention and maternal tenderness extends without distinction over all her good and faithful subjects, to order at her expense the construction of a new imperial and public theater for Russian, French, German, and Italian spectacles.373

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Arkhiv Knyazya Vorontsova, vol. 30 (Moscow: v Universitetskoy Tipografii, 1884), 364–369. In practice, however, popular Italian and Russian operas were also performed at the wooden theater. There is a list of performances that shows this discrepancy in ADIT, 3: 232–282.

372 RGADA f. 17, op. 1, d. 322, ll. 162-70. This “Fixed Plan” is unsigned, but a list of the contents that follows, in another hand, suggests that Bauer wrote the document: “1. Планъ театра гд: Баура” (RGADA f.17, op. 1, d. 322, l. 171). However, the list is also unsigned and undated and there is no information supporting the attribution, so it could be incorrect. Based on the contents of the “Fixed Plan” it is clear that someone who spoke French and had detailed knowledge of the court theater’s finances (a short list) wrote the document, and Bauer at least fits that description.

373 “L’histoire des Nations les plus célèbres de l’antiquité et l’exemple des modernes constatent l’important utilité des spectacles publics dans les grandes villes […] qu’il est d’une Saine politique de protéger les divertissements honnêtes publics, et d’un Gouvernement Sage et éclairé de les encourager, en se chargeant d’un partie des frais qu’ils comportent . . . Représentations dramatiques, et lyriques, outre qu’elles distraient et amusent le peuple ne contribuent pas peu à l’instruire à adoucir les moeurs et à lui faire prendre ce Caractère d’Urbanité . . . L’admission [est] gratis de la Noblesse seulement et des gens qualifiés au Spectacles de la Cour, dont une Etiquette invétérée exclut de fait tout le tiers Etat. D’ou il resulte que la partie le plus nombreuse du peuple, et la chose publique se trouvent privées des Avantages moraux et politiques […] C’est
Founding the Stone Theater was a civilizing project. In order to make Russia an enlightened empire, the state needed to support public theaters that would entertain and instruct nobles and townspeople alike.

Officials at the court theater echoed these ideas when they drew up the rules and regulations for theater personnel in 1784. The list of requirements concludes with a statement about the moral responsibilities of the performers:

It is desirable that all members of the theater, which must be a school of good morals [blagonraviye], conduct themselves with such decorum that the impression of virtue and propriety that authors strive to arouse with their works are not destroyed through their own dishonorable deeds.  

Though largely ineffective, this document shows that the empress’s focus on improving the morals and manners of the audience had, for a time, spread to those responsible for overseeing the daily activities at the court’s new public theater.

\[\text{RGADA f. 17, op. 1, d. 322, ll. 162–4.}\]

\[\text{ADIT, 2:158. Also mentioned in Frame, School for Citizens: Theatre and Civil Society in Imperial Russia, 23.}\]

\[\text{374 “Желательно, чтобы все члены театра, который должен быть училищем благонравия, вели себя всегда ся такою благопристойностю,чтобы впечатления добродетели и благонравия, которые возбудить старались авторы своими сочиненіями, не истреблялись чрезъ непорядочные ихъ поступки.” ADIT, 2:158. Also mentioned in Frame, School for Citizens: Theatre and Civil Society in Imperial Russia, 23.}\]

\[\text{375 But not everyone followed these rules. Though documentation is sparse, prostitution and affairs between female performers (actresses and ballerinas) and Russian noblemen were, it seems, rather routine. When they did occur, they often resulted in those women receiving preferential treatment in casting as well as pay. See Wendy Rosslyn, “Petersburg Actresses On and Off Stage (1775—1825),” in St. Petersburg, 1703–1825, edited by Anthony Glenn Cross (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 119–147.}\]
REGULATING BEHAVIOR AND LISTENING AT THE GRAND STONE THEATER

As theater officials began plotting to elevate the audience’s morals and manners, they had to overcome a major obstacle: inattentive listeners and a general disinterest in the content of the plays and operas performed. Talking, eating, and playing cards had been common at the opera for decades, and rowdy spectators at the Imperial Theater in the Winter Palace were making noise and offending the sensibilities of other members of the audience, as they did in Moscow, Paris, London, and other European capitals.376

In the 1770s, behavioral expectations were starting to change. Several anonymous operagoers at the court theater had begun to advocate silence in the auditorium during the performance. In 1770, the journal Večera (Evenings) published an anonymous letter that described the poor behavior of noble audiences at the court theater and explained precisely why their behavior was a problem.

I zealously entreat you to help our fellow citizens sympathize with the goal of establishing theaters and with those who go these spectacles, like comedy and tragedy, in order to listen, and not solely watch, or to show off oneself and gaze at others . . . If you yourself do not desire to listen, then do not disturb others. It so happened I was at the theater, when the Russian Beverley was performed, and truly I heard with abject grief that first people never stopped talking, then many women were ordering the guards to pass them mead while other ate, and in the parterre they were cackling with laughter . . . Only with the eyes, not the ears, could one pay attention . . . I was struck with the disconcerting thought that we would not be able to give the excuse to foreigners that the galleries, or in other places the parterre, was filled with people of all

stations, because at the Imperial Theater no one is permitted to attend aside from nobles.\textsuperscript{377}

Listening silently was beginning to be characterized as the more refined and more European alternative.

In Moscow in 1780, inattentive audiences famously infuriated the acclaimed tragedian Alexander Sumarokov. His ire caused a group of actors, who were preparing to perform his tragedy \textit{Semira}, to issue a plea for silence. The announcement begins,

On December 22, \textit{Semira} will be performed for the actors’ benefit. The author of this drama respectfully craves polite attention . . . He would indeed be giving his compositions for performance to no purpose, if he anticipated that people came to the theater not for the sake of hearing his plays, but solely for talk and conversation; because his scenes, so industriously written for their benefit, would disturb such people gathered there for gossip. The author deems this consideration to be well-founded and his request to be truly just; for this even the actors do humbly beg. Otherwise neither any comedy

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The chatter in the parterre had become a problem for audiences as well as for dramatists, who were beginning to take umbrage at the noise. Silent and attentive listening had begun to represent urbanity and politesse.

In St. Petersburg, there were also complaints about spectators who were actually paying attention, but apparently to the wrong things. In one anonymous letter, published by the journal *Vsyakaya Vsyachina* (All Sorts of Things), a theatergoer criticizes the self-identified connoisseurs for caring more about the performers than the moral content of the works performed:

Our nobility and the majority of our young gentlemen always say that they are great connoisseurs of theater... But they take greater part in the minor quarrels and disagreements of actors than in the fate of the glorious heroes and heroines that the actors perform for us. How [the actors] Dmitrevsky, le Sage, or Troepol’skaya Marten’sha and others were dressed, their voices, movements, and carriage were the topics of many conversations... Sinav’s intense passion, which ruined his brother, his love, and himself, Garpagon’s vile miserliness, Mahomet’s villainy and blinding superstition... can arouse in us noble sentiments and change our morals and manners... But this correction demands sound reasoning and diligent attention trained on the performance.379


379 “Наше дворянство и большая часть молодыхъ господь говорять всегда, что они великие охотники до театральныхъ представлений...Едва усяшать они о новой драммѣ, то уже толпами собираются въ феатръ, и съ нетерпеливостью действия дожидаются. Но какое имеютъ они при томъ намерение? чтобы примечать больше действующая лица, нежели характеры ими предсываемые. Они более беруть участия въ небольшихъ спорахъ и несогласяхъ актеровъ, нежели въ судьбѣ техъ славныхъ героевъ и героинъ, въ виде коихъ они намъ являются. Какъ Дмитревский, де Сажъ, или Троепольская, Мартеньша и пр.
The author dismisses questions of performance as unrefined and frivolous compared to the issues faced by the dramatis personae, such as Sinav, Garpagon, and Mahomet. The consequences of passion, love, villainy, and superstition — not the quality of the acting — should be the audience’s focus if the theater was going to succeed in improving the morals and manners of society.

With the founding of the Grand Stone Theater, officials intervened and attempted to change audience behavior. Their first task was to convince spectators to remain seated. A court announcement outlines the new requirements, explaining,

For the best order and general spectating pleasure, it is essential that during the time of stage actions, aside from entr'actes and the time of ballets, no one watch while standing and by that block those sitting beside and behind him, bearing in mind according to fairness in all public theaters, and yet more in Imperial ones, mutual respect for society and for oneself is required.\(^{380}\)

In the same document, officials informed spectators of additional incentives to remain in their seats. They added comfortable seats in the parterre to replace the standard benches

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\(^{380}\) “Впрочем, для лучшаго порядка и общаго зрителей удовольствия, за нужное поставляется, чтоб во время действия, кроме антрактовъ и времени балета, не смотрель никто стоя и темъ бы не засланивать подле и позади себя сидящихъ, памятная по справедливости должное во всѣхъ публичныхъ, колыми же паче Императорскѣхъ, театрахъ къ обществу и къ себе самому взаимное уважение.” Bartenev, *Arkhiv Knyazy Vorontsova*, 369.
that spectators found too uncomfortable to sit on for prolonged periods. The announcement continues,

For the greater pleasure of the spectators, there are comfortable chairs in place of the first bench of the parquet, nearest to the orchestra, so that behind them no one stands and disturbs the musicians or other spectators. And in the parterre [behind the parquet] and amphitheater [the raised seats behind the parterre] the first bench will be separated into individual seats for those who want them.  

If officials truly hoped to stop spectators from disturbing the musicians and other members of the audience, this excerpt suggests that seating the parterre was the first step in silencing it.

Better sightlines also promised to shape the behavior of the audience. The auditorium was built in the newly fashionable elliptical shape, which improved the view of the stage for much of the audience, especially for the seats along the sides of the hall. According to one contemporary witness, the German botanist and geographer Johann Georgi, viewers from any seat could understand the actors and distinguish their facial expressions despite the theater’s large size.  

![Image](https://via.placeholder.com/150)

381 “Для вящшаго удовольствия зрителей, вместо первой лавки паркета, возле самаго оркестра, дабы за онымъ никто не стоялъ, следовательно, какъ зрителямъ вообще, такъ и музыкантамъ помехи никакой не делать, поставятся покойныя кресла, а въ партере и въ амфитеатре отгорожена будеть первая лавка на отдельныя места для техъ, кои таковыя имьть пожелають” Bartenev, Arkhiv Knyazya Vorontsova, 365–366.

382 Though the auditorium was small considering the size of the building overall, it was much larger than the other theaters in the capital, most of which had only two tiers of loges. The Grand Stone Theater had three tiers, with the Imperial box in the center of the first tier. There were sixty-two loges altogether. On the third tier at the farthest end were two loges reserved for the actors. Near the orchestra, there were fifty chairs in three rows that were reserved for the patrons from the upper echelons of society. These were separated from the rest of the parterre with a wooden barrier. The parterre had twelve rows of benches. The auditorium also had an amphitheater, balcony, and upper gallery. Mordison, Istoriya teatral’nogo dela v Rossii, 274-275. However, Carr claims that the theater had no galleries. Carr, A Northern Summer, 196.
was unusually wide; according to Georgi, this reinforced the effects of the lighting and the voices.\(^{383}\) The elliptical shape of the hall also made it more difficult for spectators to see one another, which was not the case in the previous arrangement.\(^{384}\)

Lighting practices in the auditorium also made it more difficult for spectators to look at one another rather than the stage. A circle of large patent lamps hung from the ceiling, and there were girandoles mounted on the hall’s pilasters. Together, they could effectively illuminate the room, but the court lit them only on special occasions.\(^{385}\) Most of the time, small patent lamps provided only a dim light. The darkness surprised foreign visitors, including John Carr, who describes the room and its effects, stating,

> Although this gloom before the curtain is said to be advantageous to the effect of scenery, yet the eye is saddened, as it runs its circuit in vain for forms adorned with graceful drapery, the glittering gem, the nodding plume, and looks of adorned beauty, that give fresh brilliance to the gay galaxy of light.\(^{386}\)

According to Carr, seeing the stage more clearly did not outweigh the cost of losing an entire visual field of beauty. But for officials at the court theater, the lighting had precisely the effect on the audience that they desired.

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\(^{383}\) Georgi, *Description de la ville de St. Pétersbourg et de ses environs*. 70.

\(^{384}\) “On a eu pour but de faciliter aux spectateurs la vue du théâtre, d’un autre côté, les spectateurs eux-mêmes sont moins en vue: de sorte qu’on s’est permis un moindre mal, pour en éviter un plus grand.” Georgi, *Description de la ville de St. Pétersbourg et de ses environs*. 70.


\(^{386}\) Carr, *A Northern Summer*, 196.
Operagoers adapted to the new arrangement with little hesitation. In Carr’s travelogue, he commends the audience for its conduct, writing,

The silence and decorum of the audience cannot but impress the mind of anyone who has witnessed the boisterous clamors of an English audience.

As Russians had predicted, Carr interpreted the audience’s silent listening as a sign of good manners and its members’ urbanity. Changing the audience’s behavior may have had another desirable effect that this travelogue failed to mention. The seating regulations, comfortable chairs, improved sightlines, and dark auditorium all encouraged the audience to be absorbed by the performance.

By the end of the century, one’s ability to be affected by and understand music had become an important sign of cultural refinement in the capital. In 1800, the anonymous translator of a new book, *La musique des yeux* (The Music of the Eyes), wrote a preface that explains how attention and absorption were valued in St. Petersburg. He explains,

Today the pleasures of the ears are so accredited and so in vogue that the people of high society would be ashamed not to be affected by it. A person without enthusiasm for music is said to be poorly formed or stupid. The fear of being seen as imperfect beings,

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387 Several scholars have noted this change, but never fully explained it. Malcolm Burgess notes the change in behavior, but attributes it to the large size of the auditorium, writing, “Naturally it was more difficult to misbehave in such conditions: the old fun of a riot could not be so easily indulged in, in the formal atmosphere of a huge auditorium.” Burgess, “Russian Public Theatre Audiences,” 182.

without gentility, leads modish people to do everything in their power to be musicians, and to acquire a taste for and expertise in music.\textsuperscript{389}

This suggests that Catherine II’s private experience of becoming an attentive listener — one who was passionate about and affected by music — thus reflected a broader cultural change in Russia’s high society. By staging Paisiello’s comic operas at the opening of the Stone Theater and on many subsequent occasions, she created the opportunity for audiences to be transformed by them. Moreover, in the quiet and dimly lit auditorium of the Grand Stone Theater, court theater officials had created the optimal conditions for spectators to hear the performance, laugh at the music, and find themselves “all ears.”

The enthusiasm of spectators at the court’s public opera house soon matched Catherine’s own. In fact, the court’s opera buffa troupe inspired an “Italomania” in the capital at the end of the century.\textsuperscript{390} The success of opera buffa also extended to the Russian troupe. For years, three of the most frequently staged and lucrative “Russian operas” presented at the Grand Stone Theater were translated \textit{opere buffe} by Giovanni Paisiello and Vicente Martín y Soler. In fact, Russian-language \textit{opere buffe} would make up nearly half of the court troupe’s twenty-four Russian operas.\textsuperscript{391} But at its foundation,

\textsuperscript{389} N. N. [Pietro Gonzaga?], \textit{La musique des yeux et l’Optique Théatrale} (St. Petersburg: de l’Imprimerie Impériale, 1800).

\textsuperscript{390} E. S. Khodorkovskaya, “Astarittï Zh. Truppa,” MPES, 1: 70.

\textsuperscript{391} Documentation is sparse, but box office records are extant for the period of April 1789 through May 1791. During this period, the highest grossing performances were Russian operas. Of the five most popular Russians operas — highest grossing and most frequently staged — two were newly composed Russian operas and three were translations of \textit{opere buffe}. The newly composed Russian operas were, predictably, \textit{The miller—wizard, cheat and matchmaker} (\textit{Mel’nik—koldun, obmanschchik, i svat}) and Catherine the Great’s own historical spectacle with music, \textit{The Early Reign of Oleg} (\textit{Nachal’noye Upravleniye Olega}). The Italian operas include: Martin i Soler’s \textit{L’arbore di Diana} (\textit{Dianino Derevo}) and \textit{Una cosa rara} (\textit{Redkaya Veshch’}), and Giovanni Paisiello’s \textit{La finta amante} (\textit{Pritvornaya Lyubovnitsa}). ADIT, 3: 232–246.
the remarkable success of this genre in St. Petersburg, which continued into the following century, was owed to Catherine II — her efforts as an opera patron, her taste for musical humor, and the behavior she modeled as she attempted to transform her court’s public opera house into a national school.
APPENDIX B

THE CHARTER OF THE GRAND STONE THEATER

Document 1 Excerpt from “Projet d’un Plan fixe pour l’entretien et la Gestion des Spectacles à St. Petersbourg, aussi que de la Musique de la Chambre de Sa Majeste Impériale” (RGADA f. 17, op. 1, d. 322, ll. 162–164)\textsuperscript{392}


De tous les genres de divertissements publics le plus analogue aux vues d’une Sage et prévoyante politique est sans doute les théâtres, sur le pied qu’on les voit aujourd’hui établis dans les principales Capitales de l’Europe. Les Representations dramatiques et lyriques, outre qu’elles distraient et amusent le peuple, ne contribuent pas peu à l’instruire à adoucir les moeurs, et à lui faire prendre ce Caractère d’Urbanité, le manque du quel faisoit donner, par la Nation la plus illustre qui ait jamais existé, à tout ce qui n’étoit pas Grec, le nom de barbares.

On est si convaincu en france du Concours des Spectacles au Maintien d’une bonne police que hors la quinzaine de Pâques les Sales ne cessent d’être toute l’année ouvertes, même dans les plus grands deuils, celui pour le Roi excepté. Outre le Spectacle, que la Cour entretient à grands frais à St. Petersbourg il y a encore un théâtre pour le public, ou on donne alternativement la Comedie Russe, Allemande, et Italienne. Mais ce dernier theatre, faute de moyens suffisants, ne peut se soutenir, et celui de la Cour ne répond point au but que l’on se propose ici.

\textsuperscript{392} The original spelling and accents in the original have been preserved.
L’un et l’autre inconvenient résultent d’une seule et même Cause, Savoir l’admission gratis de la Noblesse seulement et des gens qualifiés au Spectacles de la Cour, dont une Etiquette inveterée exclut de fait tout le tiers Etat. D’ou il resulte que la partie la plus nombreuse du peuple, et la chose publique, se trouvent privées des Avantages moraux et politiques, qui pourroient et devroient resulter de ce Spectacle et que les Grands et les Riches temoignent peu d’empressement, d’acheter un amusement, dont ils peuvent jouir au moins deux fois par Semaine gratis.

C’est à ces Considerations, qu’il a plu à Sa Majesté Imperiale dont l’attention et la tendresse maternelle s’étendent indistinctement sur tous ses bons et fideles sujets, d’ordonner à ses frais la Construction d’un nouveau theatre Imperial et public pour le Spectacle Russe, François, Allemand et Italien. Mais comme un pareil etablissement ne peut se soutenir, sans une formule d’administration bien ordonnée et précise, et sans que la Caisse de ces Spectacles publics y compris ceux de la Cour, Soyent munis d’un fond suffisant et determiné, on propose le plan Suivant, au moyen du quel on se flatte pouvoir remplir la genereuse Intention de Sa Majesté Imperiale.”

Translation 1 Excerpt from “The Fixed Plan for the Maintenance and Management of Her Imperial Majesty's Spectacles and Chamber Music in St. Petersburg”

“The history of the most celebrated nations of antiquity and the example of the moderns are aware of the utility of public spectacles in the large cities and even more so in the metropolises of great empires. The useful citizen goes there to relax from his day’s work, and others will lessen their intemperance and occupy themselves in their idleness. From this, one can conclude that it is a healthy politics to protect honest public divertissements, and for a sage and enlightened government to encourage them by assuming a portion of the costs required to support them.

Of all the genres of public entertainments, the one most analogous to the views of wise and prudent politic is without a doubt the theaters, which is why one sees
them established today in the major capitals of Europe. Dramatic and lyric stage works, aside from distracting and amusing the people, contribute not a little to instructing and moderating their morals and manners. They make spectators assume a character of urbanity, without which would give, according to the most illustrious nation that has ever existed, to all that was not Greek the name barbarians.

The French are so convinced that supporting spectacles is essential to the maintenance of a good police that aside from Easter the halls remain open even during the greatest periods of mourning, except in the case of the death of the king.

Aside from the spectacles that the court maintains at great cost in St. Petersburg, there is also a public theater, where Russian, German, and Italian comedies are staged. But the latter theater, due to insufficient income, cannot sustain itself, and the court’s theater does not address the aims proposed here. Both drawbacks result from the same cause: free admission to the court theater being offered only to the nobility and qualified people and an inveterate practice of entirely excluding the third estate [the middle classes]. As a result, the largest stratum of society, the state, finds itself deprived of the theater’s moral and political advantages that could and should result from attending spectacles, and the illustrious and the wealthy show little eagerness to pay for this amusement, which they can enjoy at least twice each week free of charge.

Because of these considerations, it pleased her Imperial Majesty, whose attention and maternal tenderness extends equally over all her good and faithful subjects, to order at her expense the construction of a new imperial and public theater for Russian, French, German, and Italian spectacles.”
CHAPTER FOUR

RUSSIAN OPERA AS A POPULAR ENTERTAINMENT:
ANTON KRUTITSKY AND THE FREE RUSSIAN THEATER, 1779–1783

In the late 1770s, public theaters in St. Petersburg were offering a window to the world with performances of new chamber music from Vienna, foreign operas, Chinese shadow plays, Italian circus acrobats, and displays of automata, wild beasts, and wax figures in traveling exhibits of curiosities. Among this imported high art and exotica, a local impresario, Carl Knieper, founded a modest Russian theater that seemed destined to fail. His troupe, which performed in a rundown wooden stable in the city center, consisted of fifty destitute orphans. To make matters worse, the most promising performer, Anton Krutitsky (1764–1803), was neither a handsome tenor nor a sentimental heroine, but a small, disfigured comic bass.

Knieper’s troupe nonetheless began to draw a large and diverse audience, with spectators ranging from lowly soldiers stationed in the capital to the elite families of Russia’s high society. For the first time, Russian comic operas were drawing larger

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393 In Russia, commercial entertainments (publicni pozorishcha) had to give one-quarter of their profits to the Foundling Home. As a result, the Foundling Home kept accounts of the money received that document the various commercial and public entertainments in Russia’s cities. See RGIA f. 758, op. 5, d. 914. For contemporary responses to these performances, see Malcolm Burgess, “Fairs and Entertainers in 18th-Century Russia,” The Slavonic and East European Review 38, no. 90 (1959): 95–113.

394 Disfigured by a disease known as the King’s Evil, Anton Krutitsky had been surrendered as an infant to the Foundling Home. The widely accepted year of Krutitsky’s birth is 1754 due to a mistake in a published article on Krutitsky. But official records of the Moscow Foundling Home indicate that Krutitsky was given to the Home in 1765 and that he was one year old at the time. RGIA f. 758, op. 20, d.178, l. 38. S. Z-n, “Nechto o Krutitskom,” in Severny Vestnik 1, no.2. (St. Petersburg: v Imperatorskoy tip., 1804), 222.
crowds than operas staged by foreign troupes. The orphans eventually attracted the attention of the empress and officials at her court theater, who had switched their focus from opéra comique and opera seria to the *opere buffe* of Giovanni Paisiello. Russian comic opera was then still a novelty and under Yelagin’s successor, Vasily Bibikov, received little support. In fact, the single Russian opera known to have premiered at the court theater between 1780 and 1783 was a translation of Paisiello’s opera buffa, *L’idolo cinese*. Rather than premiering new Russian operas, the court staged the Russian operas made popular by Knieper’s troupe, subsequently inviting them to stage their most successful opera production at the empress’s suburban residence in Tsarskoye Selo.

Apparently, the empress — and her audience — was impressed. In a characteristically expansionist move, she seized the troupe’s wooden theater and hired its best singers, actors, and dancers. When the court opened its first public opera house and playhouse in 1783, Krutitsky would again perform his famous roles, now under the

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395 Between 1780 and 1783, the only recorded performances of serious Italian opera at the court are Paisiello’s *Alcide al bivio* (1780) and Gluck’s *Orfeo ed Euridice* (1782). The French troupe only performed Monsigny’s *Le déserteur* (1780) and, in 1782, Paisiello’s *La serva padrona* in French translation.


397 In 1781 and 1782, the court’s Russian troupe staged two of the public theater’s most popular operas, *Mel’nik — koldun, obman’shchik i svat* (The Miller — Wizard, Cheat and Matchmaker) and *Skupoy* (The Miser), and hired Knieper’s troupe to perform for the court theater’s audience. In 1783, the orphans staged their production of *Mel’nik* at the empress’s suburban residence in Tsarskoye Selo. *Kamer-fur’erskiy iseremonial’niy zhurnal 1783 goda* (St. Petersburg, 1882), 469.

398 More than fifteen actor-singers and dancers from the Free Russian Theater managed to join the court theater. The rest either entered the court’s new preparatory school or received passports to return to Moscow. V. N. Vsevolodskiy-Gerngross compiled a list of the actors and actresses hired from the free Russian theater to work in the court’s Russian troupe, in Vsevolodskiy-Gerngross, *Istoriiya teatral’nago obrazovaniya v Rossii* (St. Petersburg: Izd. Direktsii Imp. Teatrov, 1913), 307–308. The passports issued for the others appear in RGIA f. 758, op. 20, d. 99, l. 6–12.
aegis of Catherine II. He fared well at the court; by the end of her rule, he was managing the court’s Russian troupe and was its highest paid member. From the humblest of beginnings, Krutitsky had ascended to the most influential position in Russian theater, and he influenced its development in St. Petersburg through the end of Catherine II’s rule.

This chapter traces how Knieper’s troupe transformed Russian comic opera into a commercially viable, popular entertainment, one in which more emphasis was placed on pleasure and less on moral instruction than was the case in the court theater. The first section of this chapter surveys the competitive marketplace for public theaters in St. Petersburg and considers how Knieper’s troupe effectively vied for the attention of the capital’s ticket-buying public. The popular and critical reception of two of the troupe’s most successful opera productions — Mel’nik—koldun, obman’shchik i svat (The Miller who was a Wizard, Cheat, and Matchmaker; Moscow, 1779) and Skupoy (The Miser, St. Petersburg, 1780 or 1781) — is addressed in the second section. Descriptions of the operas and performances of them by the orphan troupe suggest that the success of Knieper’s troupe and of Russian comic opera in the capital was due largely to the popularity of its star performer, Anton Krutitsky.

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399 Krutitsky was lucky to be hired. Other members of the troupe became destitute and homeless when the troupe dissolved in 1783. They requested to be given the charitable funds held by the Foundling Home in their names, sums that were given by donors or family members (RGIA f. 758, op. 5, d. 680, l. 34). Some of the foundlings also requested passports to return to Moscow (RGIA f. 758, op. 20, d. 99, l. 7, 13).

400 By 1799, Krutitsky had become the highest-ranking member of the court’s Russian troupe and its manager. In 1783 he made 400 rubles, in 1786 he made 450, in 1791 he made 900, and finally in 1799 he was earning 2,000 rubles and held the prestigious position of inspektor. ADIT, 2: 315, 387, 528.
Spectators responded positively to certain aspects of Krutitsky’s performance, in particular the ways in which he used his voice, gaze, gestures, and movements to embody his comic roles. This realistic acting style and the striking physicality of his humor entranced his audience in much the same way that the sneezing and coughing characters of Paisiello’s operas charmed the empress. Given Catherine II’s particular tastes and her belief in comedy’s ability to influence society, she had ample reason to bring the newly popular Russian comic opera and its most valuable asset, Anton Krutitsky, under the control and direction of the court. With the opening of the Grand Stone Theater in 1783 and the court’s renewed investment in Russian opera, Krutitsky’s prominent position in Russian theater was secured and so, too, was the role of the comic bass in Russian opera.

**Urban Theaters and Opera in the Russian Capital**

When Russian opera entered the public theaters of St. Petersburg in 1779, a number of foreign commercial theater troupes were flourishing. Throughout much of the eighteenth century, itinerant foreign theater troupes — German, Italian, French, and English — had come and gone at different times, and none had stayed longer than a year or two without receiving significant support from the court.\(^401\) Russian theater had no apparent advantage

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\(^{401}\) Little is known about the public theaters operating in the capital, and the existing documents may not provide a complete account of the troupes that worked in St. Petersburg during the eighteenth century. In 1744, Sigmund (or Sigismund) received privileges that allowed his German troupe to perform in cities across Russia, including St. Petersburg. But printed announcements suggest that the troupe primarily worked in Moscow. In 1762, another German, I. F. Neuhof, received privileges. His German troupe performed in the opera house in the Wooden Winter Palace. An Italian troupe under the management of Giovanni Battista Locatelli performed for the court and for the public in St. Petersburg (after the impresario signed a contract with the Russian
and in fact had a history of failing as a public enterprise: a Russian theater founded in 1756, for instance, was unable to attract a sizeable audience.\textsuperscript{402} No troupe, no matter the repertory or performers, was able to gain sufficient support from audiences or wealthy Russian families to become a permanent fixture in the capital.

When Knieper founded the Free Russian Theater, more musical and theatrical ensembles were working in St. Petersburg than in the previous decade combined. These theater troupes sought venues across the city, playing to audiences in freestanding public theaters, private theaters in urban mansions, and school theaters. The international assemblage of performances on the city’s public stages reflected the diversity of the city’s residents. Foreign visitors were fascinated by the city’s combination of West and East. As Count Louis-Phillipe de Ségur, plenipotentiary to King Louis XVI, wrote upon arriving in 1784:

There are united the age of barbarism and that of civilization, the manners of Asia and those of Europe. . . . The aspect of Petersburg strikes the spirit with a double

\textsuperscript{402}The first independent Russian theater troupe was founded in Yaroslavl by Fyodor Volkov in 1750. This troupe traveled to St. Petersburg in 1752. In 1756, Empress Elizaveta founded a new public theater (called “Russkiy dlya predstavleniya tragediy i komediy teatr”) under the direction of Alexander Sumarokov that employed the best performers of Volkov’s troupe. The troupe performed comedies and tragedies — which featured instrumental music, choruses, and ballets — until 1759, when the public troupe was taken under court protection. Petrovskaya, “Russkiy dlya predstavleniya tragediy i komediy teatr,” MPES, 3: 60.
astonishment. . . . On the one hand, elegant fashions, magnificent costumes, sumptuous feasts, splendid fêtes, and theaters the equal of those that embellish and animate the select societies of Paris and London; on the other hand merchants in Asiatic costume, coachmen, domestics, peasants dressed in sheepskins, wearing long beards, and fur caps, long skin gloves without fingers, and hatchets hanging at a broad leather belt.  

St. Petersburg’s cultural map had been determined largely by the communities that Ségur noted — Russian, Central Asian, and European. At first, these communities clustered in distinct ethnic settlements (slobodi) that crisscrossed the city and its many islands. A Tatar settlement across the Neva River from the Winter Palace, for instance, was home to an enclave of yurts. It housed many of the Muslim Tatars, Turks, and Uzbeks from Kazan, Samara, and Astrakhan who had arrived at the beginning of the century to help construct the city (alongside tens of thousands of forced laborers—conscripted peasants, convicted criminals, and prisoners of war).  

There was also a French settlement on Vasilyevsky Island, and the so-called English Embankment on the Neva was named for the British community that lived there. But in the second half of the century, the borders between these communities began to dissolve. As new arrivals poured into the city from France, they spread along streets and avenues, and Bolshaya Morskaya (along the Moyka River) acquired the title “Little France.”  

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405 Anne Mézin and Vladislav Rjéoutski, eds., Les Français en Russie au siècle des Lumières (Ferney-Voltaire: Centre International d'Étude du XVIIIe Siècle, 2011), 70.
St. Petersburg’s Bolshaya Millionaya Street (the “great street of millionaires”) became the capital’s cosmopolitan heart. Lined with the oldest stone mansions, this street housed wealthy foreigners alongside the Russian beau monde. Only a few blocks in length, it stretched from the exclusive court theater in the Winter Palace on one end to the public theater on Tsaritsyn Meadow on the other. (See Fig. 1 Bol’shaya Millionaya — labeled here as Bol’shaya Nemetskaya Street after the German settlement that had been established there previously. It connects the Tsaritsyn meadow on the left side of the image, which is dotted with trees, to the Winter Palace, circled, on the Neva River.)

From 1779 to 1782, commercial theaters were scattered across the city, attracting a diverse audience. In contrast to the theater in the Winter Palace, the commercial theaters also sold tickets to individuals of lower social status. Commander Semyon Uvarov, for example, famously brought the soldiers in his regiment, who were conscripted former serfs, peasants, and lesser townspeople, to see plays and operas at the public theaters. The audience also included high-ranking officials who frequented the court theater, and even the empress herself enjoyed making surprise appearances at the public theaters from time to time.


407 Of course, the empress may not have attended all of the theatres equally. But correspondence from that time indicates that she attended the English theatre and German theatre. One audience member recalled: “Just as the play began, the door of the Empress’s box was unexpectedly opened; and her Majesty, without having given any previous warning, took possession of her seat. You may easily imagine how much we were pleased and flattered.” William Richardson, Anecdotes of the Russian Empires in a Series of Letters Written, a Few Years Ago, from St. Petersburg (London: printed for W. Strahan, and T. Cadell, 1784), 397. Another bit of
The number of theaters operating in the capital in the late 1770s was not just unusual; it may have been technically illegal. A system of monopolies designed to restrict the number of troupes operating in the capital and thus limit competition was in place. Any impresario in a given city who managed to receive monopoly privileges from the state had the sole right to stage operas there for a given period of time.  

In Moscow, foreign impresario Michael Maddox defended his monopoly for decades, and in one case even sued the Foundling Home when a public theater opened on its premises. But this did not happen in St. Petersburg. The state awarded monopoly privileges to court actor Jean Alexandre Pochet, granting him the sole right to produce Italian and French spectacles and organize concerts and masquerades in St. Petersburg for twenty years.  

He also received permission to use an opera house located on Tsaritsyn Meadow (the same theater where Giovanni Locatelli’s itinerant Italian troupe had introduced locals to correspondence from that time confirms that the Empress attended the German theatre often. Her interest is confirmed by the fact that she later transferred the entire troupe to the control of her court’s theatrical directorate when the troupe later went into arrears. MA, 216.

The police chief had awarded impresarios so-called privileges with the empress’s approval, but until 1770 they seem to have served merely as permission to perform. In 1749, for instance, German impresarios Sigmund and Hilferding each received “privileges” to perform comedies and operas in the same cities at the same time (and there were various German comedy troupes that been receiving privileges since 1742). I. F. Petrovskaya, Teatral’niy Peterburg, 91-94.

Michael Maddox, who came to Russia from England in 1767, initially shared his privileges with Prince Urusov. For more on Maddox’s case again the Foundling Home, see RGIA f. 758, op. 5, d.737 ll. 41–42; Vsevolod Vsevolodskiy-Gerngross, Istoriya Teatral’nago Obrazovaniya v Rossii, vol.1 (St. Petersburg: Izdaniye Direktsii Imperatorskih Teatrov, 1913), 331–341. On Maddox, see Simon Morrison, Bolshoi Confidentiali (New York: W. W. Norton, 2016), 2–42.

An abbreviated list of his privileges appears in ADIT, 2: 97. A more detailed version appears as law 13,477 in Polnoye Sobraniye Zakonov Rossiyskoy Imperii, vol. 19 (St. Petersburg: Tip. Otdeleniya Sobstvennnoy Ego Imperatorskago Velichestva Kantselyarii, 1830), 76–79. The brief introduction to this law gives him the wooden theatre near the Summer Palace to use for his theatrical venture and point fourteen indicates that the term of his privileges is twenty years. For more information about this theater, see I. F. Petrovskaya, Teatral’niy Peterburg, 44–49.
Baldassare Galuppi’s *opere buffe* in the late 1750s). But Pochet chose not to use his privilege or the theater, and took a position as intendant and rehearsal director at the Cadet Corps instead. The abandoned opera house became a haven for thieves and fugitives and was torn down in 1773.

The fact that Pochet was not interested in defending his monopoly made it possible for a number of other troupes to operate simultaneously. By 1781, audiences could choose among performances of opera buffa, opéra comique, singspiel, and *komicheskaya opera* (Russian comic opera). A troupe of French child prodigies from Paris’s Bois de Boulogne was using a stage in the state-owned Yaguzhin mansion near “Little France,” where the young performers sang opéras comiques by leading French

411 There is some confusion about the identity and activities of Pochet. Robert Mooser claimed that Alexandre Pochet received privileges in 1770. He writes that this Pochet did not use his privilege, and became the director of public entertainments at the Cadet Corps by 1776. He then concludes that the same Pochet directed a troupe of performers from the Bois de Boulogne in 1780. See MA, 396. But Anne Mézin and Vladislav Rjéoutski have since argued that Mooser was incorrect. They wrote that Jean-Michel-Alexandre-Pascal Pochet received monopoly privileges from the Senate in 1770 and a different person named Alexandre Pochet led the troupe from Paris in 1780. (Mézin and Rjéoutski, *Les Français en Russie*, 668–69). A titular decree in the court theater archive does not clarify matters. It refers to Pochet solely by his family name (in ADIT, 97). More complete information is offered in the document reprinted in the complete compendium of laws from the Russian Empire. This document supports Mézin: police chief Chicherin reported that he gave privileges to Ivan—the Russified “Jean”—Pochet, son of Alexander (“...дает сю привиллегию... Сантпетербургскому купцу Ивану Александрову сыну Поше,” in PSZ, 77). But an undated petition for privileges, which appears in a fond with similar items from 1769, the year before Pochet received privileges, complicates matters. The name of this undated document’s author, who requested privileges to found a public French theater, is transliterated to “Alexandr Poshe le Zhen” (лє Женъ, in Rossiyskiy Gosudarstvenny Arhiv Drevnikh Aktov (RGADA f. 17, op. 1, d. 329, l. 3). The French title “the younger” or “le jeune” becomes “Zhen” which may well have been confused with “Jean” and subsequently Russified as Ivan. This supports but does not confirm Mooser’s claim that a single Alexandre Pochet had privileges and later directed the Parisian troupe. Jean son-of-Alexander (who appears in PSZ) may also be Alexandre le jeune who requested privileges. It also suggests that references to “Alexandre Pochet” may refer to two individuals with the same name, Alexandre Pochet the elder and the younger.


413 Petrovskaya, *Teatral’niy Peterburg*, 44.
composers — Blaise, Duni, Monsigny, and Philidor. On the other side of town, an opera buffa troupe, which had arrived via Copenhagen in 1778, catered to nobles and the wealthy elite who lived near the city center. Its impresarios, Mariano Mattei and his wife Angiola Orecchia, rented the theater at the Cadet Corps of the Landed Gentry across the Neva River from the Winter Palace on Vasilevsky Island. These Italian performers tended to present opere buffe by composers whom audiences in St. Petersburg already knew and enjoyed. A rare exception was Niccolò Piccinni’s sentimental opera buffa, La buona figliuola, which was a hit with audiences in the capital, especially the wealthy Russian elites who began staging it at their posh domestic theaters (a list of opera premieres at the independent theaters can be found in Appendix C).

A local impresario, Carl Jacob Knieper, would entirely change this system of public theaters by making Russian opera a singular success. Knieper was himself a product of Russian culture and thus was uniquely suited for this task. An ethnic German from a large, wealthy merchant family, he had grown up in St. Petersburg and was an employee at the local state bank. Versed in local tastes and customs, Knieper was an active participant in the capital’s cultural life as a founding member of the English club,

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416 Though it was popular in the public theaters, there are no known performances of La buona figliuola at the court’s theater. Piccinni’s opera did, however, make it to the theater at Kuskovo, the grand Sheremetev family estate east of Moscow, which was known for its talented serf theater and serf theater school. It seems to have been performed in Russian translation. A libretto was printed for the occasion. K. Gol’doni, Dobraya devka: Komicheskaya opera, trans. Ivan Dmitrevskiy (Moscow: Senatskaya tip., 1782).
one of Russia’s oldest social clubs, and, as a member of the city’s beau monde, he enjoyed advantageous connections with local elites.417

The spare documentation reveals that Knieper began his theatrical career around 1777, when he started managing a German troupe that performed at the wooden manège on Tsaritsyn Meadow (not the aforementioned opera house), previously used by an English theater and which, according to one observer, had been furnished into “the likeness of theater.”418 Two years later, Knieper founded the Russian troupe largely as a result of his relationship with Ivan Betskoy, the director of the Moscow Foundling Home and educational adviser to Empress Catherine II.419 Having seen the abovementioned German troupe perform, Betskoy sensed that Knieper had a knowledge of and passion for the theater and a talent for working with limited resources.420 He allowed Knieper to act as guardian to fifty foundlings from Moscow and use them to create a new professional

417 By twelve years old, Carl Jacob Knieper (1738-1804) was studying at a gymnasium in St. Petersburg. His enrolment information indicates that his father, Paul, was a merchant and that the family had enough money to support his education at their cost. This document also provides one of the rare examples of Knieper’s name written in the Latin script in the eighteenth century. Almost always transliterated from Russian, his name commonly appears as Karl Knipper or Kniper. Materiali dlya istorii imperatorskoy akademii nauk, vol. 10 (St. Petersburg: Tip. Imperatorskoy Akademii Nauk, 1900), 686, 715, and 723. His employment at the bank in 1787 is listed in Metyatsoslov s rospis’yu chinovnikh osob v gosudarstve (St. Petersburg: tip. Imperatorskoy Akademii Nauk, 1787), 104. And subsequent publications indicate that he was working there in 1803 as well. See Heinrich Friedrich von Storch, Russland unter Alexander dem Ersten (St. Petersburg and Leipzig: bey Johann Friedrich Hartknoch, 1808), 73. Regarding the English club, Knieper’s name appears in the membership list in Stoletiye S. Peterburgskago Angliyskago sobraniya (St. Petersburg: Pechatnya V. I. Golovina, 1870), 5 and 1 (39).

418 William Richardson, Anecdotes of the Russian Empires in a Series of Letters Written, a Few Years Ago, from St. Petersburg (London: printed for W. Strahan, and T. Cadell, 1784), 396. The English troupe was managed by a man named Fisher.

419 On Betskoy, see also Morrison, Bolshoi Confidential, 23–29.

420 Vsevolodsky-Gerngross, Istoriya Teatral’nago Obrazovaniya v Rossii, 279.
theatre troupe on the condition that he also continue their education. Soon after, Knieper received fifty orphans from Moscow, of which twelve were actors or actor-singers, sixteen danced, and twenty-two played in the orchestra. Nearly half of the actors had also studied Italian and Russian vocal performance, and several others performed on various instruments. This included Krutitsky, who was an acclaimed violinist. Under Knieper’s direction, the foundlings performed comedies, comic operas, ballets, and instrumental works. On the troupe’s journey from Moscow, the young performers had carried their plays and scores, including one hundred forty-seven instrumental works — symphonies, concerti, and chamber music — by Haydn, Boccherini, J. C. Bach, and other prominent composers of the era.

Within a year of its formation, the Russian troupe became the local favorite. Audiences migrated to the theater en masse. For the first time, Russian comic operas were drawing larger crowds than operas staged by foreign troupes. Given the relatively

421 On Betskoy’s views on education, see Morrison, Bolshoi Confidential, 24.
422 The orchestra included six violins and two horns, basses, bassoons, clarinets, traverse flutes, cellos, and violas. RGIA f. 758, op. 20, d. 178, ll. 4–5.
423 Two other actors, Yakov Kalmanov and Maxim Volkov, had studied Italian vocal performance. And Kuzma Gomburov studied Russian singing, but not Italian. This may have proven valuable. Although not everyone from the Russian Theatre was invited to join the court’s Russian troupe, those with training in Italian singing were all hired (RGIA f. 758, op. 20, d. 178, l. 38; ADIT, 2: 132). I. F. Petrovskaya, “Krutitskiye,” MPES, 2: 113. The orphans also studied reading and writing in Russian, French, and German, geometry, arithmetic, drawing, acting, dancing, and playing instruments (RGIA f. 758, op. 20, d. 178, l. 38).
424 In St. Petersburg, the troupe’s orchestra performed independent concerts of works by such figures as Haydn and Boccherini, whose works were plentiful in their collections, as well as compositions by J. C. Bach, Gaetano Pugnani, among others (RGIA f. 758, op. 20, d. 178, l. 30).
425 The letter containing this information is dated November 22, 1781 (Pikar, “Pis’ma Pikara,” 143). Knieper’s own accounts also support Picard’s observation. Income from admissions more than tripled in three years. From a meager 7,308 rubles collected in the 1779/1780 season, Knieper claimed to have collected nearly 23,000 rubles in 1781/1782 season. See P. I. Bartenev, ed., Arkhiv Kniazya Vorontsova vol. 30 (Moscow: University Tip., 1884), 353–54.
small size of the market, this necessarily had a negative impact on the competing theaters. The French troupe was the first to fail — its impresario landed in debtor’s prison in November 1781 and quickly left Russia after he was released.\(^{426}\) The Italian troupe also faced insuperable financial problems and, after operating in the capital regularly for nearly four years, stopped performing within a month of the French troupe.\(^{427}\) Mattei died suddenly, and Orecia unsuccessfully petitioned Betskoy to allow her troupe to perform at the Foundling Home’s theater in Moscow.\(^{428}\) In the same period, Knieper too failed to cover the costs of his German troupe because of insufficient income from admission fees.\(^{429}\) The Germans were luckier than the rest, because the court was not already supporting a German troupe of its own. When that troupe ran out of money, Catherine II decided to expand her theater and placed the troupe under court control, thereby providing the performers reliable financial support.\(^{430}\) In the early months of 1782, the entire German troupe, minus Knieper, joined the court theater’s roster.\(^{431}\)

This was thus a turbulent period in the city’s cultural life. It was not enough for the city to lose three public theatres; their losses grew even more acute when, in the early months of 1782, the leading concert organizer, Louis-Henry Paisible, shot himself, and


\(^{427}\) The court hired prima donna sopranos Katerina Gibetti and Anna Davia de Bernucci. At the court, Bernucci created the roles of Serpina in Paisiello’s *La serva padrona*, Rosina in *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, and Clarice in *Il mondo della luna*.


\(^{429}\) MA, 319.

\(^{430}\) Pikar, “Pis’ma k kniazyu A.B. Kurakinu,” *Russkaya Starina* 22 no. 5 (1878), 41.

\(^{431}\) ADIT, 113.
the local star castrato Giuseppe Compagnucci, who gave acclaimed public performances in St. Petersburg, asphyxiated on mercury vapors during an avocational chemistry experiment.\textsuperscript{432} The urban network of commercial theaters and concerts suddenly and entirely collapsed. By the beginning of the Lenten season in 1782, the Free Russian Theater was no longer the most popular independent commercial theater in the capital; it was the only one that remained.\textsuperscript{433}

\textit{The Miller — Performance, Aesthetics, and Reception}

The Russian troupe’s success between 1779 and 1783 was due in large part to repeated performances of several comic operas and comedies that audiences loved.\textsuperscript{434} Without fail, the troupe’s operatic performances presented Krutitsky in a leading or title role. One opera in the troupe’s repertory was a standout success: \textit{Mel’nik — koldun, obman’shchik i svat} (The Miller — Wizard, Cheat, and Matchmaker), mentioned above, which had been written by Alexander Ablesimov with music by violinist Mikhail Sokolovsky in 1779 for Maddox’s public theater in Moscow, where it had been a hit.\textsuperscript{435} The foundlings performed several other operas from Maddox’s theater as well, including \textit{Derevenskoy}\textsuperscript{434}

\textsuperscript{432} MA, 277. See also Pikar, “Pis’ma k kniazyu A.B. Kurakinu,” 42 and 54.

\textsuperscript{433} For a more detailed explanation of these events, see Elise Bonner, “Theatrical Politics and Public Opera in Late Eighteenth-Century St. Petersburg,” in \textit{Eighteenth-Century Music in Context}, ed. Mary Sue Morrow (Steglein Press, forthcoming).

\textsuperscript{434} The following musical discussion does not address \textit{Gostinoy Dvor} (The St. Petersburg Bazaar), which was written by Mikhail Matinsky with music by Vasily Pashkevich. According to the \textit{Dramatic Dictionary}, performances of this opera earned more than those of any other opera (\textit{Dramaticheskoy Slovar}, 40). However, the date of the premiere and the cast cannot be verified, and little is known about its reception.

\textsuperscript{435} On the Moscow performance, see Morrison, \textit{Bolshoi Confidential}, 18.
vorozheya (The Village Soothsayer, Moscow, 1777) and Rozana i Lyubim (Rozana and Lyubim, Moscow, 1778) — both with musical numbers composed by Ivan Kerzelli. While Kerzelli’s music quickly vanished from the stage, The Miller achieved a permanent place in the orphan troupe’s repertory. When it premiered at Knieper’s theater in St. Petersburg in 1779, The Miller was not only key to Knieper’s success, it was the first popular success of Russian opera in the capital. During the three years following its premier in St. Petersburg, Knieper’s troupe performed The Miller dozens of times.

The Miller was similar to other “Russified” Russian comic operas composed in Moscow or St. Petersburg. The libretto and score exploit familiar tropes, and included Russian couleur locale alongside standard comic opera formulae. The basic premise should be familiar by now: the action is set in a Russian village where a young couple, Filimon and Anyuta, struggles to convince Anyuta’s parents to let them marry. They refuse their consent, without agreeing on an appropriate alternate suitor for Anyuta. The peasant father wants her to marry a good farmer like himself, but her mother, who had more illustrious origins, will only accept a nobleman. With no resolution in sight,

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436 Ivan Kerzelli, a composer working for Maddox’s theatre in Moscow, is referred to in some documents as Iosif and in others Johann. The origins and names of the Kerzelli family remain unclear. His first work, Derevenskoy vorozheya, which was called an intermezzo rather than a comic opera, was the first Russian opera to have arrangements of its songs published. Kerzelli, Uvertura s pesnyami iz intermedii, nazivayemoy Derevenskoy vorozheya: dlya klavikordov ili forte-piano (Moscow: Tip. Imp. Un-ta, 1778). His second opera, Rozana i lyubim, was a flop that was criticized and parodied for years. Specific complaints about the Moscow performances are recounted in A. N. Kryukov, “Nikolev,” MPES, 3: 261.

437 Dramaticheskoy slovar’, 78.

438 For a discussion of marriage and class in eighteenth-century Russia society, see Elise Kimerling Wirtschafter, The Play of Ideas in Russian Enlightenment Theater, 97.
Filimon asks for help from the village miller, who claims to be a matchmaker and a *koldun* — a magician or wizard.

The opera’s young couple and reluctant parents could be found in comic operas seen throughout Europe, but the *koldun*, or wizard, had become a staple in early Russian theater, and particularly in Moscow. In Ablesimov’s opera, the miller, Faddei, is clever, mercenary, and often drunk and, for a small fee, will help the young lovers resolve their dilemma. He meets with Anyuta’s parents individually, and promises each that he will deliver the perfect suitor in exchange for a fee and a few pulls of liquor. When Anyuta’s parents confer with one another, they realize that the miller had made the same promise to each of them and they believe they are victims of a deception. This is familiar territory for an opera buffa, which would typically end happily with the revelation of the deceit and with a marriage secured under false pretenses. However,

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439 In opera buffa and opéra comique, there were fortune tellers and gypsies, and most of these were women. A male soothsayer appears in Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s *Le devin du village*. Muireann Maguire offers a list of comic operas and comedies with *kolduns*: Ivan Krylov’s *Kofeynitsa* (1783–4), Catherine the Great’s *Shaman sibirskoy* (1787), Maikov’s *Lyubovnik-koldun* (1772) and *Derevenskiy prazdnik* (1777), Yukin’s *Koldun, vorozheya i svakha* (1789), Knyazhnin’s *Dobrodetel’nyi volshebnik* (1787), Plavil’shcikov’s *Mel’nik i sbitsenschik—soperniki* (a sequel to Ablesimov’s opera written in 1788), and the anonymous *Izoblichenniy koldun* (1780). Maguire “‘Kto umeyet zhit’ obmanom’: Wizards and Diviners in Late Eighteenth Century Russian Theatre,” in *Study Group on Eighteenth-Century Russia* 34 (2006): 66–80. Wizards and diviners in eighteenth-century Russian culture have also been discussed in: William Ryan, *The Bathhouse at Midnight: An Historical Survey of Magic and Divination in Russia* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999); David Welsh, *Russian Comedy 1765–1823* (The Hague: Mouton & Co., 1966), 86; Faith Wigzell, *Reading Russian Fortunes: Print Culture, Gender and Divination in Russia from 1765* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

440 In Russia, millers had long been accused of possessing magical powers. William Ryan notes that in 1689 several professions were accused of magic, including miller, horse-doctor, and tailor. Several other professions were also associated with magic, such as hunters, fishermen, woodsmen, beekeepers, and shepherds. Ryan, *The Bathhouse at Midnight*, 77.
Ablesimov’s opera includes further plot complications, which set this opera apart from its contemporaries.

A surprising revelation follows: against all odds, the miller has been telling both parents the truth. He stumbles back onto the stage drunk, holding a balalaika, reassuring Anyuta’s parents that he will deliver exactly what he promised. The miller prolongs the dramatic intrigue in an extended solo in which he sings a list of clues about the suitor’s identity, finally revealing the solution to his riddle: Filimon (the groom) is an odnodvorets, a single householder and member of the landed gentry, which gave him an unusual combination of legal privileges, obligations, and social status. As an odnodvorets, Filimon may have had noble ancestry and the right to own serfs, yet he could also work the land and be conscripted like a peasant. His legal identity also meant that he was the perfect match for Anyuta. The opera’s finale brings the cast together to sing a celebratory choral refrain: “So our friend the matchmaker did not come in vain, he arranged for us a marriage and in everything he pleased us.”

Ablesimov, the librettist, wrote The Miller in a folk mode, using a rural dialect and incorporating the lyrics from popular folk songs, village customs, and folksy conceits from earlier operas. The Miller opens with a nod to Popov’s Anyuta from 1772, considered in chapter 2, also featuring a scene set in the woods where a peasant is singing

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441 Wirtschafter, Structures of Society: Imperial Russia’s “People of Various Ranks” (De Kalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1996), 96.
while he works. While Popov’s peasant had chopped wood, Ablesimov’s miller
smooths a wooden board while humming a tune. After a short time, he remembers the
lyrics, which he had ostensibly forgotten, and sings,

As yesternight from midnight,
From midnight to the white light of day . . .

Как вечер у нас со полюночи,
Со полюночи до бела света . . .

He then stops singing, and says, “What a torrential little rain it was, and it stopped so
quickly.” He then continues,

At dawn there was, in the early morning,
At sunset of a bright month . . .

На заре то было да на утренней,
На закате ведь светлого месяца . . .

These lyrics were taken from a Cossack song, the text of which had been published in
Popov and Chulkov’s song collection in 1770. As in Anyuta, this scene’s pastoral
setting and type of song establish the character’s rural and lower class identity. For those

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443 Ablesimov indicates in the stage direction that the miller sings while continuing with his work.
“Зачинает петь на этот тон песню, продолжая сам свою работу” (“He begins singing this
song while continuing his work”).

444 Какой проливной бола пошёл дожник, да перестал скоро.” (Так же поёт и продолжает
работу.)

445 In Chulkov’s collection, the song begins, “На заре то было брацы на утренней.” It is song
number 134 in volume one of the first edition. Mikhail Chulkov, Sobraniye raznikh pesen, vol. 1
(St. Petersburg: Tip. Akad. Nauk, 1770), 149. A more detailed comparison of these two versions
of the song can be found in P. N. Berkov, Istoriya Russkoy komedii XVIII v. (Leningrad: Izd.
familiar with published song texts, this scene shows an astute political sensibility on the part of the librettist and displays the irreverence of the character. The miller sings the first two lines of a song about the failed uprising of the seventeenth-century Cossack Stepan Razin. In the published collection, the song concludes,

They tied his white hands,
Took him to stony Moscow,
And on the glorious Red Square,
Cut off his head.

Завязали руки белые,
Повезли во камену Москву
И на славной Красной площади
Отрубили буйну голову.

These lyrics would have certainly recalled the more recent uprising led by another Cossack, Yemelyan Pugachev. When his rebellion failed in 1775, he was likewise beheaded in a public square in Moscow.\footnote{Pugachev was publicly beheaded, quartered, and his severed limbs were displayed around the city. Martin, *Enlightened Metropolis*, 18.} In Ablesimov’s libretto, the lyrics of the Cossack song add an additional layer of meaning to the scene, and suggest that the miller’s comment about the abrupt end of a brief, torrential rain is not a benign reference to the weather, but a cheeky allusion to Pugachev’s short-lived rebellion that distills the clever irreverence of the miller.

Ablesimov’s libretto also captures village life by including rural customs such as wedding songs and references to matchmaking, fortune telling, and superstitions.\footnote{Ryan, *The Bathhouse at Midnight: An Historical Survey of Magic*, 77.} After
the miller concludes his Cossack song, he admits that he exploits the superstitious beliefs of the villagers for personal gain, stating,

They say a mill cannot work without a magician, and that there is more to millers than meets the eye. They’re familiar with house-spirits, it is said, and those sprites go turning around like devils in their mills. Ha! Ha! Ha! What rubbish they talk! Now me, I am a miller, born and bred . . . I was born and raised and grew old in the mill, and I have not once set eyes on one of those house-spirits in all my days! But, to speak the honest truth, if a man has a notion and a talent for fraud, then there’s witchcraft to be had all around. Let them rave on to their hearts’ content . . . we will earn our crust of bread by this trade.  

After this monologue, he sings a song about sly deceit and concludes, “Oh, what a sinner I am!”

THE CRITICAL RECEPTION OF THE MILLER

By following in Popov’s footsteps, Ablesimov opened himself up to the same criticism that Popov had faced. At the heart of the matter was—for many commentators—the fact that The Miller was not a pleasing imitation of rural Russia, an aesthetic problem that had preoccupied critics of Russian comedies and operas since the 1760s. This attitude is manifest in one of the earliest critical responses to Ablesimov’s opera, a lofty ode that parodies the librettist’s use of proverbial language and customs associated with peasant life. The anonymous author of this satirical poem, entitled Oda pokhval’naya avtoru Mel’nika (An Encomiastic Ode to the Author of The Miller, Tula, 1781), mingles words

448 Hughes, “Alexander Ablesimov: The Miller who was Wizard, Cheat, and Matchmaker,” 23.
and phrases from the opera with references to revered European librettists and the gods of antiquity. The critic begins ironically by begging the muses to give him a balalaika so he can sing a song of praise to the creator of “Miller the Wise,” a play on a royal epithet (like Ivan the Terrible or Peter the Great). In subsequent stanzas, he juxtaposes Quinault, Metastasio, and Favart with Ablesimov’s text, and he parodies the Russian libretto’s dialect, taking aim in particular at those words with the suffixes –ishcha and –ayka that evoke proverbs and folktales (e.g. vorozhishcha and vorozhayka, from vorozheya or fortune-teller). The poem also disparages peasant wedding songs and mocks the librettist for a particular element of staging: a bedraggled horse that Anyuta’s father yanks onstage in the eleventh scene. In the final stanza, he states: “Wanting to take a laurel for his verses, Ablesimov reached out to the muses, but unhappily his horse stumbled and he never got his garland crown.”

These criticisms are echoed in two unsigned articles attributed by scholars to the dramatist and court actor Pyotr Plavilshchikov and printed in 1782 in St. Petersburg’s monthly periodical, Utra (Mornings). Plavilshchikov claims to have seen The Miller several times but, try as he might, cannot get used to either the folksy speech or the

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449 The ode has been reprinted in Irina Sosnovtseva, ed., M. Sokolovskiy. Mel’nik—koldun, obmanshchik i svat, Pamyatniki Russkogo muzikal’nogo iskusstva (Moscow: Muzika, 1984), 224–25.

450 The author pokes fun at words like vorozhishcha, pivishcha, pletishcha, whose suffixes evoke proverbs and folktales (which should not be confused with the augmentative suffix –ishcha). See F. Buslayev, Istoricheskaya grammatika russkogo yazika: Etimologiya, vol.7 (Moscow: KomKniga, 2006), 124–5.

451 “...желая лавр за свой взять стих./ Но как ты к музам ни тянулся,/ Твой конь к несчастию споткнулся/ И ты венка не получил.”
aforementioned shabby horse. On the whole, he says, the music was no better, and he complains of the suffering of his ears. Bemoaning the fact that that this inferior work attracted more crowds than a masterpiece like Molière’s *Le misanthrope*, Plavil’shchikov, in a later article, concludes that *The Miller* had been performed more than two hundred times for full theatres not because it was so great, in his opinion, but because it trafficked in characters and situations to which audiences could relate.

Ablesimov published a short verse defending the speech and thoughts of his opera’s protagonist. His claim is simple: Russians onstage should be truly and recognizably Russian.

> What of it? They sang about the Miller
> And wanted to defame it,
> Finally the affair is over:
> They did not diminish the sound of glory,
> But only ever erred.
> Not French is this simpleton,
> The miller in Russian dress
> Goes about, as ever before he went . . .
> So I ask you to answer me this:
> If his mind had been French
> Would you give him higher honors?

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452 He singles out offending words like *kabachek, kryuchok, treykha*, and *pletishcha* (one that the satirical ode also mocked). [Plavil’shchikov], “Razsuzhdeniye o zrelishchakh,” in *Utra. Yezhenedel’ noye izdaniye* (St. Petersburg: Tip. Schnoor, 1782), 69.

453 “Пение . . . как только приятность для нашего уха; но в Мельнике и ухо мое страдало” (“Singing . . . is only pleasure for our ears; but in *The Miller* my ears suffered.” [Plavil’shchikov], “Razschuzhdeniye,” 69.

454 Ablesimov’s response, “Otvet A. Ablesimova Avtory Odï,” was first published in a weekly periodical printed in Moscow, *Razskashchik zabavnikh basen* in 1781. It has since been reproduced in Sosnovtseva, *M. Sokolovskiy*, 225.
Что ж? Про Мельника хоть пели
И порочь что хотели,
Вышло дело наконец:
Славы звуе не уменьшили
А лишь только погрешили,
Не французской то глупец,
Мельник в русской всей одежке
Ходит так, ходил как прежде. . .
То прошу сказать к сему:
По французскому ль уму?
Свыше честь дана ему?

Ablesimov’s miller is not an idealized peasant playing in an Arcadian pastoral in a
Russian disguise. Like Popov’s villagers in Anyuta, Ablesimov’s miller is a provincial
Russian whose identity emerges through his costume and his voice. This was not unique
to the miller; all the characters’ identities are constructed through their particular songs,
the style of diction (usually harsh), proverbial declensions, and dialect words that evoked
rural beliefs (e.g. “zachurat’,” or to protect from evil spirits, which refers to the protective
house spirit Chura). Believing that Russian opera should reflect rural life by
incorporating the mores, beliefs, and music from the distant region where the opera’s
action was set, Ablesimov aimed to create characters drawn from reality, regardless of
the expectations of the urban elites.

455 Anyuta’s mother, Fetin’ya, yells, “Zachuray menya!” (“Protect me from evil spirits!”) in Act 2
scene 9. Lyudmila Dmitruk has recently published several articles on the lexicon of Ablesimov’s
libretto. She notes, for instance, that the miller’s use of the word demon, for example, evokes not
the devil but sly spirits that people in the countryside believed in. Dmitruk also discusses
Ablesimov’s use of the verb zachurat’ and the ethno-cultural information it conveys. See
Dmitruk, “Leksika duxhovnoy kul’turï p’esë A. O. Ablesimova Mel’nik—koldun, obmanshchik и
svat kak odin iz istochnikov Slovarya Russkogo Yazika XVIII veka,” Vestnik Kostromskogo
Based on published descriptions of the opera and the actions and listening habits of that audience, it is clear that the opera’s success was not wholly due to Ablesimov’s libretto or to the music. Performers and performances, rather than individual works, had been the central focus of opera reception in St. Petersburg for years. In fact, operas that had sparked intense aesthetic debates about music and text in other cities stimulated only discussions about star singers in the Russian capital. When, for example, Giovanni Pergolesi’s intermezzo *La serva padrona* premiered in St. Petersburg at the Educational Society for Noble Maidens, members of the audience lavished praise on the performers and said little about the opera itself. One spectator, Aleksey Rzhevsky, reflected on the performance in an ode addressed to Yekaterina Nelidova, the young singer who performed the role of Zerbine (the students performed a French translation of Pergolesi’s work). He begins,

> As you, Nelidova, performing the role of Zerbine [Serpina],  
> You appeared in the mask of Thalia herself,  
> And, harmonizing the voice with the movements of your face,

It was not only the Russians who were commenting on the performers; foreigners were remarking on them as well. The visiting Englishman William Coxe thought that they acted and sang with spirit, displaying “great propriety both in their gesture and elocution.” Johann Albrecht Euler, who worked at the Imperial Academy of Sciences with his famous father Leonhard, attended the same performance in 1773, and he also thought they performed marvelously. Denis Diderot happened to be in the audience as well, and he claimed that the young women could captivate even the spectators familiar with the best actors and actresses on the French stage (“... à étonner tous ceux qui ont connu et les meilleurs acteurs et les meilleures actrices de la scène française”). William Coxe, *Travels into Poland, Russia, Sweden, and Denmark*, vol. 2 (London: Printed for T. Cadell, 1785), 145. Euler wrote, “Elles firent à mérveilles.” See Georges Dulac, “Un nouveau La Mettrie à Péterbourg: Diderot vu par l’Académie impériale des Sciences,” in *Recherches sur Diderot et sur l’Encyclopédie* 16 (1994): 31. MA, 112.
Pleasantness with action and with the sentiments of your gaze,
Giving Pandolfe caresses and reproaches,
Your acting is lively, natural, and done with propriety;
You have found the path to your spectators’ hearts and to glory—
You are worthy of glory without flattery;
You exceed all praise!
No less are we enraptured by your acting,
    Than by the sentiments you arouse
    In us
With the pleasantness of your face and your penetrating eyes.
By the naturalness of your acting you have led us all into oblivion:
Each of your actions were taken as truth;
And one felt envy at each for Pandolfe in that instant,
And each of us desired to be in Pandolfe’s place.

Как ты, Нелидова, Сербину представляла,
Ты маску Талии самой в лице являла,
И, соглашая глас с движением лица,
Приятность с действием и с чувствиями взоры,
Пандолфу делая то ласки, то укоры,
Пленила пением и мысли и сердца.
Игра твоя жива, естественна, пристойна;
Ты к зрителям в сердца и к славе путь нашла —
Нелестной славы ты, Нелидова, достойна;
Иль паче всяную хвалу ты превзошла!
Не меньше мы твоей игрою восхищенны,
    Как чувствии прельщены
    В нас
Приятностью лица и остротою глаз.
Естественной игрой ты всех ввела в забвенье:
Всяк действие твое за истину считал;
Всяк зависть ощущал к Пандолфу в то мгновенье,
И всякий в месте быть Пандолфовом желал.\textsuperscript{457}

Rzhevsky focuses on the performer’s voice, gaze, and carriage, but his poem nonetheless echoes Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s writing on \textit{La serva padrona} in Paris in the 1753. Both writers address the aesthetic paradigm of natural simplicity but, in contrast to the French author, the Russian poet praises neither the music nor the text. For Rzhevsky, the naturalness and “truth” of the opera was created in performance. It is the singer, not the writer-composer, who brings voice, gaze, sentiments, and actions into perfect harmony with one another to book look and sound true to life.

Russians also showed interest in opera stars abroad. When Prince Ivan Dolgorukov, a devoted opera fan and amateur performer, wrote about Nicolas Dalayrac’s \textit{Nina, ou La folle par amour} in his memoirs, he concentrates on the iconic performance of Rose Dugazon in the challenging title role of Nina, a character who loses her lover and goes mad in deeply moving scenes that brought the Parisian public to tears. He explains,

In Paris, [Dalayrac’s] \textit{Nina} was performed by Dugazon. They say she was excellent, and that two weeks before the premiere, she went to a mad house to study the disturbed women there in order to strive towards greater naturalness in her performance. She captivated and astonished the Parisian public, and after her it seemed an unforgiveable audacity to take on the role.\textsuperscript{458}


\textsuperscript{458} “В Париже представляла Нину славная Du Gazon\textsuperscript{18}. Говорят о ней, что она была превосходна и что недели две перед тем, как играть, она ездила в безумные дома наглядываться на женщин поврежденных, чтоб применить свою игру к натуре. Она пленила, изумила парижскую публику, и после нее казалось дерзостью непростительной за
As in Rzhevsky’s ode, Dolgorukov’s memoirs address the central issue of the opera’s reception abroad — its enhanced psychological realism — but through the work of the performer rather than the librettist and composer. The opera’s aesthetics are constructed in its performance, rather than by its texts.

Foreign treatises, several of which were published in Russian, informed this discourse about natural acting. Mikhail Popov’s translation of *La déclamation théâtrale* by Claude-Joseph Dorat urged performers toward an acting style of greater naturalism (discussed in Chapter Two). Natural acting was also praised in one of the most influential acting treatises of the century, *The Actor: A Treatise on the Art of Playing*, which appeared in Russian translation in 1781. This work claims that “natural playing” should not be confused with easy and unaffected acting. It was the expression of an exact imitation of nature or, the author adds, how something or someone appears in the world. Texts like this one were echoed in Dolgorukov’s praise of Dugzon’s achievement as Nina. He did not merely repeat that she had sung the role well; he

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459 The Russian translation of *La déclamation théâtrale* was published in Mikhail Popov, *Dosugi, ili Sobraniye sochineniy i perevodov Mikhayla Popovs* (St. Petersburg: Pri Imperatorskoy Akademii nauk, 1772).

460 The Russian translation of Antonio Sticotti’s *Garrick, ou les acteurs anglais* (which was a French translation of *The Actor: A Treatise on the Art of Playing*) was published as Antonio Stikotti, Garrick, ili aglinskiy [sic] akter: sochineniye, soderzhashcheye v sebe primechaniya na drammi, iskustvo [sic] predstavleniya, i igru teatral’nikh lits, trans. Vasily Levshin (Moscow: Univ. tip. u Novikova, 1781). Levshin translated Sticotti’s French translation from German (Garrick, oder Die engländischen Schauspieler). The treatise has long been attributed to John Hill, but scholars now credit it to Aaron Hill.


emphasized the remarkable naturalness of her performance and attributed her success to the fact that she studied real madness when preparing for her role.

Critiquing performers was not solely the work of a handful of Russian writers; it was an oral practice at the theaters, especially in the parterre. During the period when Yelagin and his circle produced their “pleasant and useful” Russian comedies, several anonymous writers, like S. Z-n of Penza, expressed concern that the audiences were so preoccupied with the artistry of the actors and the surface features of the performance that they were likely to overlook the didactic content of the work being performed. In 1770, the journal Vsyakaya Vsyachina (All Sort of Things) printed an article in which the author implies that connoisseurship should require the spectator to be an expert in the contents of the works performed, not merely in the actors and their lives, writing,

Our nobility and the majority of our young gentlemen always say that they are great connoisseurs of theater. . . . But they take greater part in the minor quarrels and disagreements of actors than in the fate of the glorious heroes and heroines that the actors perform for us. How [the actors] Dmitrevsky, le Sage, or Troepol’skaya, Marten’sha and others were attired, their voices, movements, and carriage were the topics of many conversations . . .

Though the writer disparages the amount of attention paid to the actors, the article reinforces the fact that spectators, like writers, were especially concerned with the use of

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463 “Наше дворянство и большая часть молодых господь говорят всегда, что они великие охотники до театральных представлений...Едва услышат они о новой драмме, то уже толпами собираются в театр, и с нетерпеливостью действия дождаются. Но какое имеют они при томъ намерение? чтобы примечать больше действующия лица, нежели характеры ими представляемые. Они более берут участия в небольших спорахъ и несогласияхъ актеровъ, нежели в судьбе техъ славныхъ героевъ и героинь, въ виде коихъ они намъ являются. Какъ Дмитревский, де Сажъ, или Троепольская, Мартеньша и пр. одеты были, ихь голоса, движения, осанка, составляютъ предметъ многочисленныхъ разговоровь,” in Vsyakaya Vsyachina (St. Petersburg, 1770): 420–22.
voice (presumably in speech and song), costume, gesture, and movement to create an opera or play that would appear effortlessly realistic.

Spectators even shared their opinions with the performers during the performance. One audience member, a poet and fabulist named Ivan Dmitriyev, delighted in being one of the self-proclaimed connoisseurs who delivered vigorous criticisms to the actors as they worked. In his memoirs, he writes,

My favorite seat was on the left side of the orchestra where the literati would often gather. There, harsh verdicts were pronounced on the actors and dramatists . . . Among the censures of taste and the harsh judgments I once noticed a stranger, a short man, evidently quite sharp. He mercilessly critiqued the performance of the actor Plavil’schikov. I took courage and reminded him of his youth and lack of experience, “At least,” I said, “He is now already better than the others his age. I agree with you that at times he shouts excessively, gets too excited, inopportune recites his words and gesticulates, but he has a resonant voice, expressive and comely face, and a free and noble gait.”

Just as the article in All Sorts of Things had claimed, Dmitriyev and the members of his circle showed almost no interest in the work being performed, even omitting its name.

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464 “Любимое мое место было с левой стороны у самого оркестра, где собирались обыкновенно любители словесности. Тут произносили были строгие приговоры актерам и драматическим авторам . . . Между порицателями вкуса и строгими судьями заметил я однажды незнакомого мне, малорослого человека, по-видимому, довольно бойкого. Он критиковал нещадно игру актера Плавильщикова. Я приняв сместью напомнить ему его молодость, еще малую опытность.-- "По крайней мере,-- говорил я,-- он и теперь уже лучше всех своих сверстников. Соглашусь с вами, что иногда он слишком кричит, горячится, невпопад произносит слова или размахивает руками, но у него звонкий голос, выразительное, пригожее лицо, свободная и благородная поступь.” (Mikhail Dmitriyev, ed., Vzglyad na moyu zhizn’: zapiski deystvitel’nago taynago sovetnika (Moscow: Tip. V. Got’e, 1866), 36. Mentioned in Malcolm Burgess, “Russian Public Theatre Audiences of the 18th and Early 19th Centuries,” The Slavonic and East European Review 37, no. 88 (1958): 176.
Instead, as in Rzhevsky’s poem, the memoirist only bothers to remark on the actor’s voice, gaze, and use of gestures.

At Knieper’s theater, Anton Krutitsky capitalized on the audience’s interest in performers and their craft. Shortly after arriving in the capital, he was a sensational success. Locals praised his singing and remarked that he had an “astonishingly supple and pleasing voice.”\(^{465}\) Fans also expressed their enthusiasm with gifts; on one occasion, a nobleman threw a purse filled with rubles and silver coins onto the stage with a note that read, “For the miller.”\(^{466}\) Following another performance, Empress Catherine requested that he appear before her in his miller costume to receive a gift.\(^{467}\) The troupe’s impresario, Knieper, also recognized Krutitsky’s exceptional talent and his importance to the financial stability of the Russian troupe. Within two years of Krutitsky’s arrival in St. Petersburg, Knieper was paying him twice what he paid the other foundlings.\(^{468}\)

An article published in 1804 suggests that in St. Petersburg, Krutitsky’s performance was a decisive factor in the popular reception of The Miller. An anonymous author, who signed his name S. Z-n of Penza, explains,

\(^{466}\) Ibid., 218.
\(^{467}\) MA, 393.
\(^{468}\) In 1782 he made 250 roubles. The other actors and actresses earned between 100 and 180 roubles. RGIA f. 758, op. 20, d. 178, l. 55.
Krutitsky’s skillful performance was the reason why this extremely weak opera, filled as it was with many infelicities, was performed around twenty-seven times, and for the most part at the request of the parterre.469

As Dmitriyev had claimed, the vocal audience members sitting in the parterre were particularly interested in the performer. The author also describes why Krutitsky was a success, using terms familiar from the previous example, writing,

Although Krutitsky had almost no external virtues — having small stature, a small and pockmarked face with little eyes — benevolent nature invested in him such talent, such a gift for the theatre that no one could see his performance without astonishment. What a being, what an instrument [kakoy organ] he had! What fire in his acting! What declamation! What naturalness in everything! It is impossible to perform the miller more naturally than Krutitsky — accent, manner, jokes, dances with folk songs, in a word, everything, even the slightest nuances characteristic of our Russian millers could be seen in him.470

Operagoers appreciated the veneer of verisimilitude, and they delighted in seeing familiar characters portrayed onstage. But it was not the Russianness, per se, that pleased them; it was instead the particular way that Krutitsky embodied the role. Just as Dolgorukov praises Dugazon’s so-called natural performance of madness, S. Z-n lauds Krutitsky for his performance because of how real and true to life his miller seemed.

The Songs and Dances of a Russian Miller

It is impossible to know precisely how the miller’s songs would have sounded to audiences at Knieper’s theater; ephemeral elements of performance have been lost to history. Unfortunately, the surviving sources are also limited in what they can tell scholars about a performance, particularly since there is no extant autograph score or edition approved by the composer, Mikhail Sokolovsky, and no parts or copies of the score have survived from the eighteenth century. A critical edition of the opera was published in the twentieth century, using only nineteenth-century sources. The orchestration in the various surviving sources differs, with changes that likely reflected the inevitable changes in the available orchestral personnel. The opera’s vocal melodies, on the other hand, do not vary from one source to another. Sokolovsky and other composers subsequently charged with adapting the score for performances elsewhere in

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471 Little is known about the composer, Mikhail Sokolovsky. He was born around 1750 and died in the late eighteenth century. He worked as a staff violinist at the public theater in Moscow, which was managed by Michael Maddox. During that time, he also instructed students in singing at the Moscow University. Richard Taruskin, “Sokolovsky, Mikhail Matveyevich,” Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online, Oxford University Press, accessed May 5, 2016, http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/26122.

472 There is no indication that any of the surviving parts were ever performed by Knieper’s theatre or in the eighteenth century. There are parts held in the manuscript division of the State Library in Moscow that are very well preserved. On the last page of the first violin’s parts are dated June 11, 1872. The same manuscript division also houses a different set of incomplete parts (only for two flutes, viola, and bass) that contain an overture likely composed by Fomin. Sosnovtseva dates these parts to the early nineteenth century. A different incomplete set of parts exists in the Central Library of the Mariinsky Theater, which houses the former imperial theatre’s music library. These parts are dated 1806 and contain the names of performers on several parts. The State Library also has parts from 1884 (Sosnovtseva, M. Sokolovsky, 236–41). Russian musicologists have debated the extent of E. Fomin’s contribution to the parts held in the Mariinsky library. For some time the entire opera was attributed entirely to Fomin. Findeizen believed that Fomin revised Sokolovsky’s score for performances in St. Petersburg. But Rabinovich countered that Fomin only put his hand to the overture and two or three vocal numbers, in A. S. Rabinovich, Russkaya opera do Glinki, 53–54.
Russia were unlikely to have needed to alter these simple tunes, which were, in large part, already borrowed in full from published song collections.

For many of the opera’s musical numbers, the librettist, rather than the composer, was responsible for selecting the borrowed tunes. Ablesimov, like other Russian librettists, indicates his choice of tune with a directive, “na golos,” or “to the tune of,” followed by the first words of a popular or folk song. When, for instance, the young peasant suitor, Filimon, performs a song about trusting the miller-matchmaker, he sings, “Stanu svata dozhidat’ya” (“I’ll wait here for the matchmaker”). Just above the lyrics is the italicized direction, “na golos, nachalo: ‘pri dolinushke gulyali.’” This is an alternative title for the popular folk dance song, “Belolitsa, kruglolitsa,” which is the same tune that the amorous farmhand sings in Anyuta and one of the most popular folk songs of the era. Sokolovsky’s vocal melody closely resembles a variant of the tune that Vasiliy Trutovskiy published in his song collection (Ex. 4.1). Both proceed mostly in eighth notes through an antecedent and a consequent phrase of the same length, first in C major and then in A minor.

Sokolovsky does not, however, preserve the strophic form of the folk songs that he incorporates from Trutovsky’s collection. In The Miller, Filimon’s song is instead in binary form. After he sings through the melody once, the phrase concludes with a perfect authentic cadence. This constitutes the A section (Ex. 4.2). A four-bar orchestral tutti follows and leads to the B section. The second half of the song introduces a new theme,

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473 The libretto indicates, “На голос, начало: ‘При долинушке гуляли,’” (“Pri dolinushke stoyala”), which is apparently another way to refer to “Belolitsa, kruglolitsa.”
and, as in the A section, the phrase does not develop, and there are no deviations from the strict two- and four-bar phrase groupings.\footnote{There is one repeat sign at the end of the B section (m.28) that indicates the A and B section should be sung a second time.}

Example 4.1 Trutovskiy, \textit{Sobraniye russkih prostikh pesen s notami}, “Belolitsa krugolitsa”

\begin{quote}
[Allegretto]

\begin{music}
\newtime\clef{treble}
\newclef{bass}
\makeatletter\ifnum\music@oldtime=1\settime
\makeatother\begin{musicnotes}
\notetil{\textbf{Be-lo-li tsa kru-glo-li-tsa kra-sna-ya de vi - tsa, Pri do-li-nu-shke sto-ya-la ka-li-nu la-ma-la}}
\end{musicnotes}
\end{music}
\end{quote}

[“White-faced, moonfaced beautiful maiden, stood in the vale and picked a guelder rose.”]
Example 4.2 Sokolovsky, *Mel'nik*, “Stanu Svata,” Act 2, Scene VI (mm. 7-14)

[“I’ll wait for the matchmaker, there is nothing to fear. He’ll get me a lady-love, he won’t swindle me a bit. He’s a wizard, don’t be scared, he consorts with house spirits. He rules over them, and eats and drinks with them . . . He treats demons like a child, He summons them when he needs. When he wants he orders them about, after which he hustles them away.”]
In Sokolovsky’s score, songs reflect class identity and character type. Filimon’s “Stanu svata” provides a clear musical analogue to the simple, rural suitor. When Anyuta enters for the first time in the first scene of the second act, she sings a melancholy diegetic song that resembles the initial song of Popov’s Anyuta (discussed in Chapter 2):

Ah, for my youthfulness,
I can see no happiness,
Here’s my
Sad destiny.

I don’t have one merry day;
No relief,
All is grief,
Every hour is gray.\(^{475}\)

Ablesimov indicates that Anyuta should sing these lyrics to a tune, “Zemlyanichka yagodka,” (“A Strawberry Grew in the Glade,” Ex. 4.3). As with Filimon’s song, Anyuta’s is in binary rather than in strophic form: the folk tune constitutes an A section and the B section introduces new motives in three two-bar phrases, two of which are repeated (the A section is reproduced in Ex. 4.4). Sokolovsky continues this pattern of altering the musical form of strophic folk songs when later in the scene Anyuta sings,

“Kabī ya mlada,” (“If only I were young”). This song likewise begins with a single performance of the tune, which is followed by a B section consisting of three new two-bar phrases. The B sections in all these songs were as simple and brief as the folk tunes that they followed, providing little contrast with the first theme. Yet by adding these B sections, Sokolovsky transformed these songs into operatic musical numbers that were distinct — if only slightly — from the collections from which he borrowed them. The result was an opera that was more than a compendium of popular tunes. He was both composing new music and orchestrating; in so doing, he created musical numbers based on familiar folk tunes that gave the characters more definition.

Example 4.3 Trutovskiy, “Zemlyanicka yagodka,” in Sobraniye Russkikh prostikh pesen s notami (1776)

[Allegro]

[“Little wild strawberry, growing in glade, Eh, oh, oh, oh, oh, growing in a glade.”]
Example 4.4 Sokolovsky, *Mel’nik*, “Vo svoye ya mladosti,” II.i, mm. 5–14

[Allegro]

[Music notation]

[“Ah, for my youthfulness, I can see no happiness, Here’s my sad destiny. I don’t have one merry day; No relief, all is grief, every hour is gray.”]
One musical number in *The Miller* — the miller’s final aria — stands out from the rest of the score. The critic Plavil’shchikov may have complained that the music made his ears suffer, but he made one exception for a showpiece aria sung by the miller: the final aria, he opined, was good and the music was pleasing; this, for him, was the highest of compliments.\(^{476}\) This song may not have been based on a pre-existing tune, but on the surface it is very much like the majority of other musical numbers in this opera in that it is largely syllabic with steadily repeating eighth notes in symmetrical groupings of two- and three-bar phrases.

What set the miller’s final aria apart most was its humor, spontaneity, and, in particular, the form and function of the dramatic action; this is neither a straightforward recitation of a folk tune nor a diegetic musical divertissement. As the miller explains to Anyuta’s parents how he will reconcile their conflicting desires, the dramatic action continues to progress through the aria and is resolved by it.

The song’s levity, simplicity, and in particular the use of repetition are perfectly suited to the action and to the character — a drunken village miller who tells Anyuta’s parents to listen to what he has to sing to them and then pauses to tune (or perhaps try to tune) his balalaika.\(^{477}\) The miller lists clues about Filimon’s identity and entices Anyuta’s

\(^{476}\) [Plavil’shchikov], “Razsuzhdeniye,” 69.

\(^{477}\) The dialogue and stage directions are as follows: «Ладно! Слушайте ж, что я вам петь буду.» (Настраивает сначала балалайку, потом поет). In English, “Fine! Listen to what I’m going to sing to you” (*He first attempts to tune the balalaika, and then he sings*). O. E. Levashyova discusses the integration of musical numbers into the action in “Nachalo Russkoy operi,” 36–37.
parents to guess who he is, providing hints in repeating 6-bar strophes. When the father
interjects and claims they cannot solve this mystery, the miller starts singing again,

My old folks, they haven’t got it.
Have not got it,
Not assessed it,
Guessed it...

So it falls on me to solve the riddle.
To solve it,
Not to swindle,
To declare...

Seeking something here indeed that
A long time we’ve had in Russia:
He’s a landed noble, he’s a peasant,
He’s a serf and he’s a boyar,
He tills and ploughs, and
Collects the quitrent from the peasants.

Know this:
Know this,
Don’t start
A big fight.
He is known as,
He is called
ODNODVORETS!
Старики мои догадки не имеют,
Не имеют,
Не умеют
Отгадать.
Так ин мне пришло загадку
разгадать,
Разгадати,
Не солгати,
Объявити.
Ища вот да что оно
На Руси у нас давно:
Сам помещик, сам крестьянин,
Сам холоп и сам боярин,
Сам и пашет, сам орет
И с крестьян оброк берёт.

Это знайте,
Это знайте,
Не вступайте
Больше в спорец.
Его знают,
Называют
Однодворец!

The progression is thus under the control of a drunken miller, and neither the end of the phrase nor the resolution of the suspense arrives as quickly as the listener might have expected. This is the kind of strategy that opera buffa composers used so brilliantly, as we saw in the previous chapter; the most famous example occurs in Paisiello’s *Il barbiere di Siviglia* when Bartolo demands that his servants tell him if Figaro had been in his house, but they are unable to respond because they are sneezing and yawning uncontrollably, which briefly delays what should have been a straightforward conclusion.

In *The Miller*, Sokolovsky likewise postpones the resolution in the music and dramatic action in unexpected ways. The miller-wizard’s song begins with three repetitions of a six-bar strophe. This suggests that the song is strophic and is reminiscent
of the repetitive — or even ritualistic — form that was typically sung by soothsayers in earlier operas, such as Rousseau’s *Le devin du village* (Paris, 1752) and Rinaldo da Capua’s *La zingara* (Paris, 1753). But in this instance, the miller’s strophe changes after he agrees to solve the riddle of the suitor’s identity, losing its regularity as the miller sings a list of the suitor’s traits that are intended to elicit the answer from the parents. With each new clue, the miller repeats the first bar of the six-bar strophe (Ex. 4.5, mm. 34–39). The miller repeats these false starts six times in a row, disturbing the metrical proportions of the song’s phrase structure; the odd five-bar extension seems to end when the miller wants it to, rather than according to musical logic, creating the illusion of spontaneity. These unpredictable repetitions also delay the resolution of the phrase, the musical period, the song, and the opera’s intrigue — playfully frustrating the expectations of both Anyuta’s parents and the audience.
Example 4.5 Sokolovsky, *The Miller*, “Uzh kak shli,” III.vi, mm. 25–44

[Allegro]
The comic interpolation in the miller’s otherwise strophic song evokes a popular Russian musical tradition: the skomoroshina, a type of song named for the minstrels (skomorokhi) who created them. Like the French jongleurs or German spielmänner, skomorokhi provided the entertainment at weddings as well as funerals, and, like Russia’s millers, they had been associated with magic for centuries. On festive occasions, they performed puppet shows, games, and dances, and they played music on folk instruments such as the psaltery, gudok (a bowed string instrument), and domra (the ancestor to the balalaika). The minstrels’ comic songs were often improvisatory and parodied the bïlina, an epic poetic form, to describe peasant life and elaborate lewd subjects in a rural dialect. They had profane, bawdy, and delightfully uncouth lyrics, and were accompanied by instruments as well as suggestive gestures and occasional nudity, which had provoked the Church to denounce them on multiple occasions. The minstrels’ songs were never destined for the salon, but they may have found a receptive home in urban public theaters.

The humorous narrative lyrics of the miller’s aria, its quasi-strophic form, and the particular contour of the melody are characteristic of a skomoroshina. Minstrels, too, told humorous stories in rapid patter through improvised rhyming couplets that they sang to

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478 Skomorokhi acted as jongleurs, but they likely descended from the pagan priests in the pre-Christian era. For the prehistory of the skomorokhi, see Russell Zguta, Russian Minstrels: a History of the Skomorokhi (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1978).

479 They also played flutes and reed instruments like the svireli, dudki, and sury. Claudia R. Jensen, Musical Cultures in Seventeenth-Century Russia (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 4 and 15.


simple musical phrases that were repeated many times, but adjusted according to the length of the tale. One song collected in the eighteenth century entitled “Sergey Khorosh” (“Good Sergey”) provides a useful comparison to the miller’s final aria. The song begins,

Aye, so you, laity,
Nobles of the sovereign, . . .
About Sergey I will tell,
About Sergey Borkova,
Son of Fedorovich.
And not Sergeyev’s Sergey,
Not Volodimer’s Sergey,
But the Sergey who always lived
On the river in Ufa,
In the coachmen’s settlement . . .

Ай уж ли вы, миряня,
Государевы дворяне, . . .
Про Сергея-та сказать,
Про Сергея Боркова,
Сына Федоровича.
А не сергеевской Сергей,
Не володимерской Сергей,
А жил ас Сергея
На Уфе на реке,
В ямской слободе . . .

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482 Danilov’s collection — which included the texts and melodic prompts — was not published until 1804, but copies of the manuscript were circulating in Russian between the 1760s and the 1780s. A critical edition, with texts, music, and a scholarly introduction was published in 1901. Petr Sheffer, ed., Sbornik Kirshi Danilova (St. Petersburg: Tip. Imp. Akademii nauk, 1901).
As in the miller’s final aria, this skomoroshina begins by addressing the listener and then describes the identity of his yet unknown subject by listing clues about him. The singer mentions Sergey’s home region, social class, and genealogy in seven- and eight-syllable lines of patter that closely resemble the miller’s own comic narrative song about Anyuta’s suitor. There are also musical similarities between the miller’s aria and the melody of “Sergey Khorosh,” which was transcribed in the eighteenth century. These songs resemble one another in their opening and closing gestures, melodic contour, and repeated note values. Minstrels would also repeat a given melody many times as they improvised new lyrics (see Ex. 4.6).

Example 4.6 “Sergey Khorosh,” in Drevniya russiya stikhovoreniya (1804)

The opera thus concludes with the greatest trickster of them all — not just a miller-magician and Russian basso buffo, but a skomorokh. The stylistic difference between the music of the miller’s final aria and the rest of the score’s folksy dance tunes is subtle on paper, but was likely quite pronounced in performance. If Krutitsky behaved

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as a *skomorokh* would, acting out and hamming it up, the music would have sounded improvised and unscripted, particularly as the inebriated miller drew out the resolution of his riddle, teased his listeners, and playfully warned them not to start a fight. The false starts provide rich and malleable comic material for the versatile performer inclined to improvise: you can almost hear a hiccup at each bar line. Ablesimov and Sokolovsky thus crafted an aria that emulated the simplicity and spontaneity associated with the improvisatory style of the minstrel; in so doing, they synthesized the most popular aspects of opera buffa and Russian comedy in a manner that was sure to succeed.

**Parody and the Comic Bass in Russian Comic Opera’s Success**

In 1779, the librettist Yakov Knyazhnin and composer Vasily Pashkevich, who had collaborated on *Misfortune from a Coach* at the court in 1779 (discussed in Chapter Two), decided to produce another opera together. Intended for Knieper’s troupe, where Pashkevich had begun working as the orphans’ music instructor, their new opera was entitled *Skupoy* (The Miser). Knyazhnin and Pashkevich made an effort to showcase Kruitsky, the troupe’s rising star. Their opera was an immediate hit; it became a fixture in St. Petersburg, eventually circulating to Moscow and the distant provincial theaters in Siberia.\(^{485}\)

As the title of the opera — *The Miser* — suggests, the librettist, Knyazhnin, was hoping to build on the troupe’s prior success staging Molière’s comedy of the same name. Krutitsky’s performance of the title role was already highly acclaimed, and the librettist may have counted on the audience’s eagerness to see Krutitsky perform a new version of it. Nonetheless, this was not a straightforward adaptation of the French comedy; the poet changed the plot in accordance with the conventions of opera buffa, relying instead on a familiar but far smaller group of stock characters: a miserly old guardian, a young couple, and two crafty servants, as opposed to the fifteen characters in Molière’s play. The young couple — Lyubima and Milovid — struggles to procure the necessary permission to marry from the young woman’s guardian. Lyubima is in the custody of her miserly uncle Skryagin (the name derived from *skryaga* or miser), who has no intention of releasing his control over her dowry. Lyubima and Milovid realize that in order to get Skryagin’s blessing, they must pry Lyubima’s dowry away from him. They devise a plan to trick him into releasing it and enlist the servant Marfa to help. Disguised as a wealthy countess from the provinces near China, Marfa seduces the miser and asks him to give her a token of his love in the form of twenty thousand rubles — the amount of his ward’s dowry.

Her request presents a devastating dilemma for Skryagin, who is torn between his love for the countess and his obsessive need to hoard his money. The librettist and composer contrive for him to echo the famous anguished monologue of Molière’s miser.

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At the very end of this scene he realizes that he can have everything he wants by giving Lyubima’s dowry, rather than his own money, to Marfa. Skryagin walks into the trap laid for him, and, with the triumph of young love, the opera concludes with a celebratory chorus.

Pashkevich’s score contains no folk tunes, and the opera’s combination of French and Italian textual and musical sources attests to the generic flexibility of Russian opera.\(^{488}\) When Lyubima laments her fate, much like a young opera buffa heroine, she sings an Italianate aria with lyrics in a high poetic style (with references to her soul, the innocence of the lovers’ hearts, and the tenderness of their passion) set as a minuet in triple meter.\(^{489}\) An Italianate quintet is sung towards the middle of the opera, when Skryagin is surprised by the unexpected arrival of Marfa and the young couple, whom Skryagin mistakes for burglars. His confusion results in a clamorous four-voice false canon that was clearly inspired by opera buffa. The finale also contains echoes of Italian comic opera: Skryagin performs a \textit{furioso} aria of comic self-pity, which continues without pause to a final celebratory chorus. Everyone, except Skryagin, sings,

\begin{quote}
Ha, ha, ha! Is anyone funnier than he?
Is anyone happier than we?
\end{quote}

\(^{488}\) Knyazhnin used recitative again in \textit{The Feigned Madwoman} (\textit{Pritvorno sumasshedshaya}, Astarita). In the scene when Lisa feigns insanity, Act II scene 10, she performs her madness in recitative.

\(^{489}\) Like a binary aria of opera buffa or a da capo aria from opera seria, the text is divided into two parts. Lyubima reflects on her happy love in the first sentence, which could stand alone as a separate stanza. She then turns her attention to Fate, which she asks to end her suffering. Knyazhnin strengthens the contrast between these two sections much like an Italian librettist would by changing the tone and shifting the perspective at the sentence break (here from first person to second person). Lyubima’s aria even has the da capo aria’s trademark stress on the last syllable (\textit{konéts}).
We achieved our desires,
We united our hearts;
O, blessed hour!

Ха, ха, ха! есть ли кто его смешнее?
Есть ли кто счастливей нас?
Наши желанья свершились,
Наши сердца соединились;
O, блаженный час!

Like sneezing and coughing, adding laughter to lyrics was a calling card of the Italian genre. The continuous succession of sections — Skryagin’s solo through the final chorus — forms a compound finale more akin to an opera buffa finale than the vaudeville finals of opéra comique.

Knyazhnin and Pashkevich used an Italianate style of delivery in the most celebrated scene in the opera, and the one that was most indebted to Molière: Skryagin’s monologue. Instead of imitating the French playwright, Knyazhnin’s miser expresses his

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491 This was not an exception for the librettist. Knyazhnin concluded all of his libretti with either a single chorus or an unbroken succession of musical numbers as in opera buffa. Knyazhnin’s *Misfortune from a Carriage* (1779, Pashkevich) ends with an ensemble that has solos and a celebratory choral ending. *The Miser* (1781, Pashkevich) concludes with an aria and chorus. *Sbiten’shchik* (*The sbiten’-seller*, Antoine Bullant) concludes with a ternary ensemble of chorus (A)—duet (B)—chorus (A). His opera *Prtvorno sumasshedshaya* (*The Feigned Madwoman*, Astarita) has an even more extended finale of unbroken succession of musical numbers that fall into active and expressive categories, much like opera buffa. Only *Muz’ya, zhenikhi svoikh zhen* has a vaudeville final with a choral refrain. And little is known about this opera (even whether it premiered in Knyazhin’s lifetime), which suggests it never enjoyed the same success that the others attained.
agony in a lengthy accompanied recitative. As The Dramatic Dictionary, which was published in Moscow in 1787, notes, the combination of French source text and Italian style was a great success:

The opera and its music pleased the public, and even more so the monolog that imitated The Miser of Molière, being set to recitative, brought tremendous honour to its creator.

In St. Petersburg, locals may have focused less on the source or style of the extended scene than on the fact that it was again a mid-act showpiece for the comic bass.

When he set out to compose Skryagin’s accompanied recitative, Pashkevich must have consulted Piccinni’s opera, La buona figliuola, which, as mentioned, was already a popular success in the capital. The composer honed in on the comic side of its sentimental mode. In fact, Skryagin’s accompanied recitative and arioso evoke the one sung by Piccinni’s basso buffo Mengotto — a pathetic buffo character that was not in the sentimental novel by Samuel Richardson on which the opera was based.

In the second act of La buona figliuola, Mengotto’s solo mixes pathos with humor as he clumsily mangles the refined sentimental techniques of nobler characters. After a minor display of heroism, Mengotto hopes to have won over Cecchina, the woman he loves and the opera’s sentimental heroine. But she runs off with the Marchese instead, causing Mengotto to launch into a maudlin accompanied recitative that begins, “Ah,

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492 Knyazhnin used recitative again in The Feigned Madwoman (Pritvorno sumasshedshaya, Astarita). In the scene when Lisa feigns insanity, Act II scene 10, she performs her madness in recitative.

493 Dramaticheskoy slovar’, 130.
povero Mengotto.” The recitative begins with self-pity and grows in intensity as he grabs a sword and threatens to kill himself. He quickly loses his ability to communicate. The orchestral punctuations fragment the text in an exaggerated manner, showing that the intensity of his emotions has overwhelmed his ability to convey his feelings through words — a common problem in the breathless cavatina of sentimental opera.

Ah, Cecchina . . . your Mengotto . . .
Wounds himself . . . and dies for you . . .
But I feel my heart will say:
Poor thing, don’t do it.
Eh . . . courage . . . I have to go:
Yes, I want to disembowel myself.

Ah, Cecchina . . . il tuo Mengotto . . .
Si ferisce . . . e per te more . . .
Ma mi sento a dir dal core:
Poverino, non lo far.
Eh . . . coraggio . . . S'ha d'andar:
Si, mi voglio sbudellar.

Mengotto sings, “Poverino, non lo far,” to a sighing motive made up of a pair of eighth notes descending by semitone in the minor mode, which later theorists would refer to as a sentimental imitation of tears (Ex. 4.7, mm. 18-20). Piccinni used some of the same

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494 Edmund Goehring describes this loss of speaking ability as a sentimental trope — an important part of the “physiology of sensibility.” in Goehring, “The Sentimental Muse of Opera Buffà,” in Opera Buffa in Mozart’s Vienna, ed. Mary Hunter and James Webster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 129.

495 Mary Ann Smart discusses Bonifazio Asioli (his Il maestro di composizione, 1836) on “sentimental imitation” and “il pianto” (tears) and reproduces his example: an aria from Paisiello’s Nino, o sia La Pazza per amore. The example has what Smart calls a “repeated sigh-figure” in the minor mode, rocking between scale degrees five and six. Smart, Mimomania: Music and Gesture in Nineteenth-Century Opera (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 79–80.
expressive techniques in Cecchina’s similarly titled aria, “Una povera ragazza,” but Mengotto performs without her simplicity or delicacy.\(^{496}\) A single tear became a flood.

Example 4.7 Niccolò Piccinni, *La buona figliuola*, “Ah, povero Mengotto,” II.v, mm. 17–20\(^{497}\)

[Andante non troppo]

In Skryagin’s through-composed recitative and arioso, the singer likewise moves from maudlin sentiments to incoherence and even suicidal ideation, reaching ludicrous extremes of pathos. This scene was also built on Krutitsky’s talents, and the resulting generic mixture displayed the singer’s best qualities, but in a more sophisticated musical language than in *The Miller*. It was also lengthier and more demanding: over one hundred and eight measures, the solo required a singer to display an impressive dramatic and musical range. This scene was a vehicle for Krutitsky, and Knyazhnin and Pashkevich took full advantage of the performer’s vocal talents. The orchestral accompaniment of


strings, horns, and oboes suggests that Krutitsky had a powerful voice that was sufficiently supple and agile to manage the chromatic inflections and large leaps.

Example 4.8 Pashkevich, *The Miser*, “Prishlo tebe,” mm.10–13

[Allegro]

Skryagin: What’s come to you, o Skryagin! The worst! Terrible misfortune, misfortune from every side, And I have no defences . . .]

At first, the Russian recitative seems merely to echo or imitate Mengotto’s self-pitying opening proclamation. In the Russian opera, Skryagin declaims,
What’s come to you, o Skryagin! The worst!
Terrible misfortune, misfortune from every side,
And I have no defenses . . .

Пришло тебе, о Скрягин! до зарезу!
Беда ужасная, беда со всех сторон,
И нет мне оборон . . .

In contrast to the tempered orchestral accompaniment in Piccinni’s opening, Pashkevich begins Skryagin’s recitative with agitated syncopated rhythms played at allegro in G minor (Ex. 4.8). In the bass register, rapid and short ascending scalar passages repeat at intervals that sound like a threatening bark (and very similar to the tempesta opening of Mozart’s piano concerto in D minor, K. 466 of 1785).

Skryagin’s vocal line becomes increasingly frantic over the first few measures, reaching a zenith when he refers to his own death and begins to cry. He says he should die soon and take his sweet money with him to the grave, “There, what will be will be.” When he finishes this thought, he falls silent and the strings play a sighing motive — or, as mentioned, the imitation of tears — that rocks quietly between the fifth and flattened sixth scale degrees. They continue to play this plaintive motive through the next measure as Skryagin sings, rather than declaims, “You cry, Skryagin! . . .Cry, cry!” (“Ti plachesh’, Sryagin! . . . Plach’, plach!”).

After these cries, Skryagin’s vocal line becomes somewhat more lyrical, employing an expressive melody with volatile jumps that ascend nearly an octave in a sweeping gesture of emotional intensity (see Example 4.9). His final cry launches the music forward, with a sudden tempo change to presto, and the strings begin to play rapid
repeating sixteenth notes for two measures before suddenly halting. There is a brief silence, but Skryagin claims he hears a sound. But it seems to exist only in his mind:

I hear a sound! . . . Who is there? . . .
No countess runs so higgledy-piggledy . . .
I’ll die! . . . died . . . well, farewell!

Я слышу шум! . . . Кто там?
Никак графиня скачет . . .
Я умираю! . . . умер . . . ну, прости!

As in Piccinni’s aria for Mengotto, Pashkevich uses the orchestra in the accompanied recitative in an exaggerated fashion, and he fragments the text in a manner that shows Skryagin’s addled state, which was typical of operatic mad scenes.498

498 Castelvecchi discusses the punctuation and fragmentation of the “direct sentimental style” in Da Ponte’s Le nozze di Figaro, e.g. “L’ho perduta...me meschina!.../Ah chi sa dove sarà?/ Non la trovo...e mia cugina!.../E il padron cosa dirà?” (Castelvecchi, Sentimental Opera, 201). It would also happen to Paisiello’s Nina, for example. Stefano Castelvecchi discusses madness and the psychodrama of sentimental opera in “From ‘Nina’ to ‘Nina’: Psychodrama, Absorption and Sentiment in the 1780s,” Cambridge Opera Journal 8, no. 2 (1996): 91–112.
Example 4.9 Pashkevich, *Skupoy*, “Prishlo tebe,” Scene 11, mm. 31–34

[Adagio]

This sort of emotional display also parodies the expression of distress in Knyazhnin’s tragedies. His *Didona* (1769), based on the episode of Dido and Aeneas episode in Book IV of Virgil’s *Aeneid*, provides a useful point of comparison. When Dido, the Queen of Carthage, thinks of being separated from her love, the great hero Aeneas, she expresses her devastation, proclaiming,

Otherwise... you shed tears, and I cry with you!

Aeneas! Do not believe in the words of desperate love;
Deprived of you, I die! . . . Revive this unfortunate wretch!
Close my coffin; my spirit already leaves my body!

Иной... ты слезы льешь, и я с тобою плачу!
Эней! не верь словам отчаянной любви;
Лишь тебя, умру!.. несчастную оживи!
Закрой мой гроб; мой дух уж с телом расстается! 499

As Dido plans her suicide, her speech also becomes increasingly disjointed. Although the musical strategies may be similar, Knyazhnin differentiates the serious and comic characters in terms of their social class. As Skryagin begins to hallucinate, his haughty pretenses dissolve. The text is filled with ellipses and exclamation points as in the tragedy, but his speech contains none of tragedy’s metaphors or elevated poetic style. The simplicity of the miser’s language reinforces his identity as a comic figure and makes the tone and intensity of his reaction all the more absurd.

Throughout this scene, the music reflects Skryagin’s psychological disorder, rather than following standard formal procedures. In m. 53, for example, Skyrigin fantasizes about his own death, intrigued by the notion that the grieving countess would not take his money if he were dead. 500 The realization is given comic suspense with two fermatas and an augmented sixth half cadence, which pauses the music and gives Skryagin the opportunity to sing his phrase freely (these two bars are marked “rit. ad lib.” in the published edition of the score, see Example 4.10). After the second fermata,

499 She gives this speech in Act III Scene vii.
500 “The countess, perhaps, from pity will begin to cry. And my money she’ll not take . . . then I’ll rise from the dead!” (“Grafinya, mozhet bït’, ot zhalosti zaplachet. I deneg ne voz’met . . . togda voskresnu ya!”)
Skryagin’s mood changes abruptly. With a sudden modulation from minor to major, the tempo accelerates to *Allegro* as Skryagin envisions his loophole — he will rise from the dead to reunite with both his money and his beloved countess.

Example 4.10 Pashkevich, *The Miser*, “Prishlo tebe,” mm. 53–58

[Skryagin: The countess perhaps will begin to cry from pity and not take the money. . .]

This elaborate solo scene created for Krutitsky is once again a lengthy comic narrative musical number that gives the illusion of progression according to the ideas and emotions of the character, rather than following standard formal procedures. Unlike much of the rest of the opera, it is distinctive for its lack of parallel phrases and rhythmic
regularity. The sudden shifts in tempi and time signature encouraged the singer to perform spontaneously, seemingly without premeditation, as he had done so successfully in the role of the miller.

Remarkably, this disfigured orphan would continue to shape the creation and reception of Russian comic opera in the capital, including those staged at the court theater. Over the following twenty years, the number of Russian operas performed in the capital that had a title or leading role for a male comic bass increased significantly.501 Many of these included the character type that Krutitsky made so famous—the curmudgeonly or conniving older man, a kind of buffo caricato à la Russe. Lengthy solo scenes for the comic bass became a staple in the final acts of new Russian comic operas premiered in St. Petersburg. They appear, for instance, in Mikhail Matiinsky’s libretto, Sanktpeterburgskiy gostinoy dvor (The St. Petersburg bazaar, 1782), which was also composed by Pashkevich and created for Knieper’s theater, and in Knyazhnin’s subsequent libretti — Sbitenshchik (The sbiten seller, 1783[?]) and Pritvorno sumashedshaya (The feigned madwoman, 1787[?]). In the 1790s, even the empress Catherine the Great created a leading role for Krutitsky. In fact, one of her most popular

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501 The most frequently performed operas in the repertory of Knieper’s troupe featured title roles or prominent roles for the comic bass. Several were koldun operas, such as Derevenskiy vorozheya in and Izoblichenniy koldun, ili za bezdelitsu ssora, which were performed repeatedly throughout 1780 and into 1781. Krutitsky performed the role of the Francophile landowner, Firyulin, in the troupe’s performance of Knyazhnin’s Misfortune from a Carriage, and Akut’ev in Ablesimov’s less successful comic opera, Schast’e po zhrebiyu. According to Nosov’s chronicle, Krutitsky also performed the role of Skryagin in another comic opera about two misers (possibly translated from French), Dva skupikh (p354). Krutitsky performed the leading role of Albert in a Russian translation of Duni’s Le peintre amoureux de son modèle. E. V. Barsova, ed, Khronika Russkago teatra Nosova (Moscow: Pri Moscovskom Universitete, 1883), 344–369.
comic operas, *Fedul s det’mi* (Fedul and his children), featured Krutitsky in the title role and allotted him the greatest number of solos in the opera.

This would leave a mark on the repertory that went beyond the proliferation of comic bass roles. Krutitsky’s performances of the miller and the miser were notable for their broad musical and dramatic range, incorporating folk sources as well as the most popular devices from opera buffa. Russian opera thus became an increasingly rich and flexible genre, drawing on diverse musical styles and source texts in order to secure its place as a popular entertainment in theatrical life of the capital.

Krutitsky’s fame had another significant consequence on the development of Russian opera in the capital: his success attracted the attention of the empress. In 1783, when Catherine seized Knieper’s theater and hired Krutitsky out from under the impresario’s control, as mentioned above, it was a departure from past practices; Catherine II was not intervening to help a struggling theater unable to survive on its own. Knieper’s theater had been doing remarkably well. From a meager 7,308 rubles collected in the 1779-1780 season, Knipper claimed to have collected nearly 23,000 rubles in 1781–1782 season. This was not a benevolent takeover, but a hostile one.

When Catherine II opened the court’s first public theaters in 1783, she merged the best of urban public theater with the court theater. She hired the most popular and talented performers from the local Russian, Italian, and German troupes to work for her, and they likely would have brought their fans along with them. When Krutitsky and

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fifteen of his colleagues from Knieper’s troupe began working for the court, the court
director had them continue to perform many of their most popular operas. Krutitsky
would perform the role of the miller dozens of times before Catherine’s rule ended. She
thus capitalized on the comic singer’s success and, by bringing together all of his fans,
established a de facto monopoly on Russian opera. With Catherine II and Krutitsky
taking full advantage of the imported operatic techniques, styles, and forms that best
suited Russian performers and local tastes, Russian opera was transformed into an
entertainment that was at once imperial and popular, a combination that would propel the
rapid rise and development of Russian opera through the nineteenth century.

503 Vsevolodskiy-Gerngross compiled a list of the actors and actresses hired from the free Russian
theater to work in the court's Russian troupe (Vsevolodskiy-Gerngross, Istoriya teatral’noho
obrazovaniya v Rossii 307–308). The passports issued for the others appear in RGIA f.758 op.20
d.99 ll.6–12.

504 All the other companies either went out of business or were taken over by the court.
Interestingly, once the court was the exclusive impresario of public theater in the capital,
Catherine II issued a statement that the court was not operating a monopoly. In other words, in
theory, the court was not operating a monopoly. But in practice, it was; no other company could
compete. At the very end of the century, a German troupe led by Josef Mire arrived in St.
Petersburg, but could not afford to continue to operate in the capital for long due to the exorbitant
fees (or taxes) it was required to pay to the Foundling Home. The text of Catherine II’s decree is
reproduced in I. F. Petrovskaya, “Upravleniye teatrom i muzïkoy,” MPES, 3: 184. The arrival of
Mire’s troupe and its repertory are discussed in E. S. Khodorkovskaya, “Mire Y. truppa,” MPES,
2:214.
APPENDIX C

OPERAS PERFORMED AT INDEPENDENT PUBLIC THEATERS IN ST. PETERSBURG, 1775–1783

Table 1 Operas Performed by the Independent Italian Troupe under Mariano Mattei, 1778–1782

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First Performance</th>
<th>Librettist/Composer</th>
<th>Title</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oct. 24, 1778</td>
<td>F. Livigni/G. Paisiello</td>
<td><em>La frascatana</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov. 14, 1778</td>
<td>F. Puttini/P. Anfossi</td>
<td><em>La vera costanza</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec. 26, 1778</td>
<td>G. Bertati/G. Gazzaniga</td>
<td><em>La locanda</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan. 23, 1779</td>
<td>M. Coltellini/G. Astarita</td>
<td><em>La contessina</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 20, 1779</td>
<td>C. Goldoni/N. Piccinni</td>
<td><em>La buona figliuola</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 29, 1779</td>
<td>G. Petrosellini/P. Anfossi</td>
<td><em>L’incognita perseguitata</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sept. 25, 1779</td>
<td>T. Grandi/G. Sarti</td>
<td><em>Le gelosie villane</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov. 16, 1779</td>
<td>G. Bertati/P. Anfossi</td>
<td><em>La forza delle donne</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sept. 17, 1781</td>
<td>G. Bertati/T. Traetta</td>
<td><em>Il cavaliere errante</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec. 8, 1781</td>
<td>G. Bertati/G. Valentini</td>
<td><em>Le nozze in contrasto</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec. 18, 1781</td>
<td>C. Mazzolà/G. Astarita</td>
<td><em>Il marito indolente</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan. 3, 1782</td>
<td>Unknown/G. Paisiello</td>
<td><em>La finta amante</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan. 8, 1782</td>
<td>G. Bertati/G. Paisiello</td>
<td><em>I filosofi immaginari</em></td>
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Table 2 Operas Performed by the Independent German Troupe under Carl Knieper, 1775–1781\(^\text{506}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First Performance</th>
<th>Librettist/Composer</th>
<th>Title</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dec. 27, 1775</td>
<td>P. Chiari/P. Guglielmi</td>
<td>Robert und Kalliste (<em>La sposa fedele</em>, tr. Eschenburg)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan. 3, 1776</td>
<td>G. Heermann/E. Wolf</td>
<td>Die Dorfdeputierten</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan. 11, 1776</td>
<td>J. Jacobi/A. Schweitzer</td>
<td>Das Elysium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan. 18, 1776</td>
<td>C. Henisch/F. Holly</td>
<td>Der Bassa von Tunis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan. 21, 1776</td>
<td>M. Sedaine/P. Monsigny</td>
<td>Der Deserteur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb. 1, 1776</td>
<td>C. Weisse/J. Hiller</td>
<td>Die Jagd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb. 11, 1776</td>
<td>J. Gotter/G. Benda</td>
<td>Der Walder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 7, 1776</td>
<td>C. Weisse/J. Hiller</td>
<td>Die Jubelhochzeit</td>
</tr>
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<td>May 9, 1776</td>
<td>J. Engel/C. Neefe</td>
<td>Die Apotheke</td>
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<td>May 16, 1776</td>
<td>C. Weisse/J. Hiller</td>
<td>Die Liebe auf dem Lande</td>
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<td>May 26, 1776</td>
<td>C. Weisse/J. Hiller</td>
<td>Der Dorfbalbier</td>
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<td>June 30, 1776</td>
<td>C. Weisse/J. Hiller</td>
<td>Lottchen am Hofe</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aug. 18, 1776</td>
<td>J. Bertuch/E. Wolf</td>
<td>Das Grosse Loos</td>
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<td>Sept. 12, 1776</td>
<td>J. Marmontel/A. Grétry</td>
<td>Lucile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sept. 29, 1776</td>
<td>[L. Anseaume/A. Grétry]</td>
<td>Das Redende Gemälde</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov. 28, 1776</td>
<td>C. Gellert/F. Fleischer</td>
<td>Das Orakel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan. 1, 1777</td>
<td>K. Musäus/E. Wolf</td>
<td>Das Gärtnermadchen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan. 22, 1777</td>
<td>D. Schiebeler/J. Hiller</td>
<td>Lisuart und Dariolette</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb. 9, 1777</td>
<td>C. Favart/A. Grétry</td>
<td>Die Freundschaft auf dem Probe (<em>L’Amitié à l’épreuve</em>)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Play Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feb. 16, 1777</td>
<td>K. Schubert/G. Baumgarten</td>
<td>Semire und Asor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apr. 18, 1777</td>
<td>C. Schwan/C. Stegman or F. Holly</td>
<td>Der Kaufmann von Smyrna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 28, 1777</td>
<td>A. Meissner/G. Baumgarten</td>
<td>Das Grab des Mufti, oder Die zwey geizigen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 30, 1777</td>
<td>C. Weisse/J. Hiller</td>
<td>Der Krieg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aug. 24, 1777</td>
<td>C. Goldoni/N. Piccinni</td>
<td>Das Gute Mädchen (La Buona figliuola, tr. Eschenburg)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan. 21, 1778</td>
<td>G. Heermann/E. Wolf</td>
<td>Das Rosenfest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb. 18, 1778</td>
<td>J. Marmontel/A. Grétry</td>
<td>Erast und Lucinde (Silvain, trans. Eschenburg)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apr. 13, 1778</td>
<td>G. Barlocci/G. Latilla</td>
<td>Das Verstellte Kammermaedgen (La finta cameriera)</td>
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<tr>
<td>July 30, 1778</td>
<td>D. Schiebeler/J. Hiller</td>
<td>Die Muse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aug. 16, 1778</td>
<td>F. Gotter/A. Schweitzer</td>
<td>Die Dorfgala</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov. 4, 1778</td>
<td>J. Soden/N. Mühle</td>
<td>Lindor und Ismene</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov. 29, 1778</td>
<td>[N. Audinot/F. Gossec]</td>
<td>Der Fassbinder (Le tonnelier)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb. 1, 1779</td>
<td>C. Weisse/J. Hiller</td>
<td>Die Verwandelten Weiber, oder Der Teufel ist los</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb. 3, 1779</td>
<td>[L. Anseuma/E. Duni?]</td>
<td>Das Milchmädchen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 20, 1779</td>
<td>J. Brandes/G. Benda</td>
<td>Ariadne auf Naxos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 27, 1779</td>
<td>A. Sprickmann/N. Mühle</td>
<td>Die Wilddie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sept. 12, 1779</td>
<td>F. Großmann/F. Benda</td>
<td>Der Barbier von Sevilien</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mar. 29, 1780</td>
<td>A. Niemeyer/J. Rolle</td>
<td>Abraham auf Moria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>? 1780</td>
<td>O. Bretzner/N. Mühle</td>
<td>Der Irrwisch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan. 28, 1781</td>
<td>F. Gotter/G. Benda</td>
<td>Medea</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3 Operas Performed by the Independent Russian Troupe under Knieper (“The Free Russian Theater”), 1779–1783

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First Performance</th>
<th>Librettist/Composer</th>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jan. 30, 1780</td>
<td>V. Maikov/ I. Kerzelli</td>
<td>Derevenskoy vorozheya [The village soothsayer]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb. 17, 1780</td>
<td>M. Kheraskov/H. Raupach</td>
<td>Dobriye soldati [Good soldiers]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct. 11, 1780</td>
<td>[?]/[?]</td>
<td>Izoblicheniy koldun [The sorcerer unmasked]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec. 6, 1780</td>
<td>V. Maikov/ I. Kerzelli</td>
<td>Rozana i lyubim</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb. 3, 1781</td>
<td>A. Ablesimov/M. Sokolovsky</td>
<td>Mel’nik — koldun, obmanshchik i svat [The miller — wizard, cheat and matchmaker]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 8, 1781</td>
<td>[?]/[?]</td>
<td>Pustinnik [The hermit]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 22, 1781</td>
<td>M. Matinsky/V. Pashkevich</td>
<td>Tunisskiy Pasha [Tunisian pasha]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1782</td>
<td>M. Matinsky/V. Pashkevich</td>
<td>Sanktpeterburgskoy gostinnoy dvor [St. Petersburg bazaar]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The surviving documentation does not provide a comprehensive account of the theater’s performances — it does not include Pashkevich’s Skupoy, for instance. Also, it is unlikely that the troupe waited until 1781 to perform Mel’nik — koldun, obmanshchik i svat. Dates given in this table appear in Petrovskaya, “Vol’ny rossiyskiy teatr,” MPES, 1:197. There is also a less reliable chronicle prepared by an anonymous source that presents a different account of the operas premiered by Knieper’s troupe printed in Khronika russkago teatra Nosova, ed. Ye. V. Barsov, Chteniya v imperatorskom obshechestve istorii i drevnostey rossiiskikh (Moscow: v universitetskoy tipografii, 1882), 322–369.
CONCLUSION

O PERA A FTE R C ATHERINE II

Over the ensuing decades, Russian opera developed along the course set by Catherine II and her advisers. During Catherine’s lifetime, she continued to shape the genre, writing libretti on Russian fairy tales, epics, and history such as The Early Reign of Oleg, collaborating with advisers and friends willing to supply her with lyrics for the musical numbers. She brought together Italian and Russian composers who collaborated on opera scores that interwove Russian folk songs with the formal structures and styles borrowed from Italian opera, including the ever-popular multi-section finales.

After the empress passed away, these practices continued with the arrival of a new composer, Catterino Cavos, in 1799. Like his eighteenth-century predecessors, Cavos composed Russian operas, worked for the court’s Italian troupe and taught promising Russian singers. His Russian operas, such as Ivan Susanin (Grand Stone Theater, 1815), followed the pattern established under Catherine that had proven successful with local audiences at the court’s commercial opera house: the libretti drew on patriotic themes and fairy tales sung to melodies from Russian folk songs within scores that were otherwise Italianate. The eighteenth-century legacy was also apparent in the title role of Ivan Susanin: the opera concerned a peasant character sung by a bass named Osip Petrov.

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508 There was an administrative reorganization in 1803 under Alexander I, but it did not change the public’s behavior, tastes, or stop collaborations between Italians and Russians. Borovsky and Leach, A History of Russian Theater (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 201.
(1806–1878), following the model established in such works as the *The Miller, The Miser, Fedul and his Children* (Catherine II, Pashkevich and Martín y Soler, 1791), and others.

Mikhail Glinka’s first opera, *Zhizn’ za tsarya* (A Life for the Tsar, Grand Stone Theater, 1836) can be understood as a consummate achievement of the operatic program begun under Catherine II. As in Cavos’s opera, the role of Ivan Susanin was again performed by the Russian troupe’s rising star, Osip Petrov. Glinka’s use of folk songs in opera continued and perfected a practice from Catherine’s rule. Early nineteenth-century Russian opera audiences would have recognized Glinka’s rural musical landscape, which took form through the songs of the laboring lower classes — of coachmen and oarsmen who, like Ablesimov’s miller, played the balalaika. Glinka, who combined these Russian tunes with Italian cavatinas and the cabalettas of the so-called Code Rossini, also drew on the tradition of introducing the newest and best of Italian opera to local audiences.  

Glinka’s opera — with its historical subject, combination of Italian operatic traditions and Russian folk music, and bass protagonist — benefitted from the transformation of opera and the court theater under Catherine II. The opera’s star, Petrov, had studied with Cavos at the theater and owed his Italianate musical education to the pedagogical practices established in the previous century.  

Public discourse about the opera also followed a pattern established under Catherine: spectators evaluated and

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analyzed the use of Russian sources in *A Life for the Tsar* as they had since the 1760s. Nineteenth-century Russian opera was thus built on the musical traditions and cultural framework that arose from the grand aspirations of Russia’s last ruling empress and her court. There are still many unanswered questions about the operas produced under Catherine’s auspices, but as more of the story is told, it becomes that much more imperative that we recognize the complexities of Russian opera history. Rather than dismissing the eighteenth century as simply the inchoate “pre-Glinka” era, perhaps it is time to come to view Catherine’s “age of encouragement,” as Alexander Pushkin described it, as an important historical chapter in the development of opera in its own right.

511 Like the articles written by Vladimir Odoevsky and Yanuariy Neverov, for example. These reviews have been translated and printed with introductions in James Stuart Campbell, ed., *Russians on Russian Music, 1830–1880* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).
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fund 1239

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fund 468
fund 758

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