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**Anton Rubinstein and Grand Duke
Konstantin Nikolayevich.
Concerning the History of Their Interactions***

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Abstract. The topicality of the research and the academic novelty of the work are stipulated by the fact that for the first time on the basis of unpublished archival documents it presents an overview of the interactions between the august director of the Imperial Russian Musical Society, Grand Duke Konstantin Nikolayevich (1827–1892) and the founder of this largest concert and educational organization, the outstanding Russian musician Anton Rubinstein (1829–1894). Various methods of analysis are made use of in the article, including comparative analysis of source materials and the biographical method. The main material of the research is formed by the Grand Duke's personal diaries. They reflect all of Rubinstein's artistic roles — a prodigy musician, the unsurpassed chamber music player, the prolific composer, the pianist, the conductor, the promoter of Russian

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Translated by Dr. Anton Rovner.

music abroad, the director of the St. Petersburg Conservatory, and the educator. The peculiarity of the interrelationship between Konstantin Nikolayevich and Anton Rubinstein is conditioned by several factors — on the one hand, their belonging to the same generation, and on the other hand, the lengthy time-span of their communication. The article is written in a four-part structure. The first section deals with the phenomenon of composer's protection as a child and the history of the dedication of two of his compositions — the early *Piano Concerto in D minor* (1849) and the *Piano Octet opus 9* (1856). The second section is associated with the musical life and ensemble performance at the imperial court. It demonstrates how from the diary entries it becomes possible for us to restore the chronology of Rubinstein's performances at the imperial and grand-ducal residences, to acquire the perception of his instrumental ensemble partners, his musical repertoire and his audience. The central place of the article is taken up by the section *The Composer and the Pianist*. It contains critical comments made by Grand Duke Konstantin Nikolayevich about various musical works pertaining to different genres (chamber music, operas and symphonies), as well as about visiting seven *Historical Concerts* held in St. Petersburg in January and February 1886. In the final part, an attempt is made to look at Rubinstein, the director of the St. Petersburg Conservatory through the eyes of the august patron of this educational institution.

Keywords: Anton Rubinstein, Grand Duke Konstantin Nikolayevich, Russian Musical Society, St. Petersburg Conservatory, august patronage, Marble Palace

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*История музыки
в письмах и документах*

Научная статья

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**Антон Рубинштейн и великий князь
Константин Николаевич.
К истории взаимоотношений***

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Аннотация. Актуальность исследования и научная новизна работы определяются тем, что впервые на основе неопубликованных архивных документов предложен обзор взаимоотношений августейшего президента Императорского Русского музыкального общества великого князя Константина Николаевича (1827–1892) и основателя этой крупнейшей концертно-просветительской организации, выдающегося русского музыканта Антона Рубинштейна (1829–1894). В статье используются методы музыкального источниковедения, компаративный анализ источников, биографический метод. Основным материалом послужили личные дневники великого князя. В них отражены все артистические амплуа Рубинштейна — музыканта-вундеркинда, непревзойденного ансамблиста, плодовитого композитора, пианиста, дирижера, пропагандиста русской музыки за рубежом, директора Петербургской консерватории, просветителя. Своеобразие взаимоотношений Константина Николаевича с Антоном Рубинштейном обусловлено несколькими факторами. С одной стороны, их принадлежностью к одному поколению. С другой — долговременностью их общения. Статья имеет четырехчастную структуру. В первом разделе затронуты феномен детского покровительства и история посвящения двух произведений — фортепианного Концерта *d-moll* (1849) и фортепианного

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Перевод кандидата искусствоведения Антона Ровнера.

Октета ор. 9 (1856). Второй связан с придворным музыкальным бытом и ансамблевым исполнительством. В нем показано, как на основе дневниковых записей можно восстановить хронологию выступлений Рубинштейна в императорских и великокняжеских резиденциях, получить представление о его партнерах по ансамблю, репертуаре и слушательской аудитории. Центральное место занимает раздел «Композитор и пианист». В нем приводятся критические отзывы великого князя Константина Николаевича о произведениях разных жанров (камерно-инструментальных ансамблях, операх, симфониях), а также о посещении семи «Исторических концертов», состоявшихся в Петербурге в январе — феврале 1886 года. В завершающем разделе сделана попытка взглянуть на Рубинштейна — директора Петербургской консерватории глазами августейшего покровителя этого учебного заведения.

Ключевые слова: А. Г. Рубинштейн, великий князь Константин Николаевич, Русское музыкальное общество, Санкт-Петербургская консерватория, августейшее покровительство, Мраморный дворец

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“Konstantin was always interested in music. He was always a clever and intelligent person.”¹ Such a sympathetic characterization was bestowed in his *Autobiographical stories* by the legendary Russian composer, pianist and musical public figure Anton Rubinstein (1829–1894) to his august contemporary, Grand Duke Konstantin Nikolayevich (1827–1892).

“He is an incredible colossus.”² “It is hard to appease such an artist as he is.”³ This is what was written in his diaries about Rubinstein by His Imperial Highness Grand Duke Konstantin — the President of the *Russian Musical Society*⁴ and the patron of the St. Petersburg Conservatory, the founder of which was “the vehement Anton.”

¹ Rubinstein, A. G. (1983) *Literaturnoe nasledie: v 3 t. [Literary Heritage: in 3 vols]* (L. A. Barenboim, Ed.) (Vol. 1). Muzyka, p. 68. (In Russ.).

² *Gosudarstvennyy arkhiv Rossiyskoy Federatsii (GARF)* [State Archive of the Russian Federation]. F. 722 (Konstantin Nikolayevich, velikiy knyaz') [Konstantin Nikolayevich, grand duke of Russia]. Op. 1, no. 1166. L. 149.

³ GARF. F. 722. Op. 1, no. 120. L. 110 back side.

⁴ The name of this organization had changed several times. It was established as the *Russian Musical Society* (RMS, founded in 1859), and fourteen years later it was transformed into the *Imperial Russian Musical Society* (IRMS, 1873). The initiator of this transformation was Grand Duke Konstantin Nikolayevich.

The theme of “the artist and the government,” set up by the paradigm “the poet and the tsar” (represented by Pushkin and Nicholas I) is one of paramount importance for Russian culture. At the same time, the relations of outstanding Russian musicians with representatives of the imperial family have not become the object of intense analysis up to the present time. The problem-related aspects of this subject matter have been traced by the author of the present article within the framework of the research project “Presidents of the Russian Musical Society (the 19th Century): Materials and Documents.”⁵ At the center of attention was the phenomenon of the august musical patronage, both official and private (see [1; 2; 3]). My recent publication emphasizes, once again, the importance of archival-documental research and the comprehension of this phenomenon “from new methodological positions, since in the historiography of the Soviet period the images of the patrons were construed as indubitably negative [i.e., standing against the figure of the musician], whereas in the texts of prerevolutionary historiographers — just as inevitably idealized.” [3, p. 67] The same work highlights the adherence of some of the modern authors to “apologetic tones, of an officious protrusion of the ‘philanthropy’ of the august persons” to the detriment of objective characterizations. [Ibid.]

This is frequently accompanied by a substitution of historical specificities with abstract discoursing. For example, Natalia Efimova in her work devoted to “the dialogue between the government and the musical community” under the “banner of the reigning imperial house,” [4, p. 154, 156] departs from her declared subject matter to the direction of a “state-oriented accent” in a “salon system of informal relations” and certain “patronizing relations built on idea-based relations,” [Ibid., p. 157] failing to comment her metaphorical formulations. The subject matter of musical patronage has become a sphere of attraction not only for musicologists, but also for culturologists, archivists and historians. The many-sided examination of the subject matter could have been conducive for the appearance of a productive interdisciplinary dialogue. However, this is deterred by a corporation-based insularity and an insufficient competence of the aforementioned specialists in the questions of music history, as a consequence of which the scholarly level of their publications does not stand up to criticism.⁶ Thus, the works of scholar of Scandinavian history Yulia Kudrina about Pyotr Tchaikovsky and Emperor Alexander III err due to their facilitated approach towards the issue and distortion of the facts. Unfortunately, one of its texts (*Vernopoddanny russkogo tsarya. Pyotr*

⁵ Project of the Russian Humanitarian Scholarly Fund No. 09-04-00396a. See <http://socionet.ru/publication.xml?h=spz:citis:infkar:02201260756%20> (accessed 06.12.2023).

⁶ See, for example, the contemporary scholarly edition of the diaries of Grand Duke Konstantin Nikolayevich for 1858–1864, in which the names of the musical public figures are deciphered with mistakes, the names of canonically famous musical compositions (by Mendelssohn, Beethoven, etc.) are omitted (replaced by suspension points), and the titles of operettas by Suppé and Offenbach are ridiculously translated into Russian, etc.: Mironenko, S. V. (Ed.). (2019). *Dnevnik velikogo knjazja Konstantina Nikolaevicha. 1858–1864* [The Diaries of Grand Duke Konstantin Nikolayevich. 1858–1864]. ROSSPEN. (In Russ.).

Ilyich Tchaikovsky i imperatorskaya vlast' [*The Loyal Subject of the Russian Tsar. Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky and the Imperial Authority*]) was accepted for publication by the journal *Muzykal'naya zhizn'* [*Music Life*] and published in commemoration of the 180th anniversary of the composer's birth. [5]⁷ The other weak point of research works of this type, the concentration of attention on the "top figures" (the emperor and the empress), leads to the result that the other representatives of the Romanov family (the Grand Dukes and grand duchesses) have remained beyond the scope of this research, even though the duties of patronage of musicians was allotted particularly to them, and particularly their interactions with the musicians were characterized by significant durations of time, as well as the abundance of personalized tints and artistic productivity.

The musical public activities of Grand Duke Konstantin Nikolayevich have made their way into the trajectory of scholarly research only in recent times. The familiarization with his personal archive, "musical diary" and correspondence has disclosed new strata of information connected with his undercover patronage extended to a number of musicians and music ensembles. The distinctive qualities of the interactions of Konstantin Nikolayevich with Anton Rubinstein was stipulated by their durable contact: their acquaintance was made during their childhood (in 1841) and continued for around half a century. In the Grand Duke's diaries all of Rubinstein's professional activities were reflected, including that of a musical child prodigy, a young court accompanist of singers, an ingenious pianist-interpreter, a prolific composer and an outstanding pedagogue, educator, promoter of Russian music abroad, conservatory director and administrator. Let us fix our attention on a few chosen subjects.

The Acquaintance. Childhood Patronage (the 1840s)

Most remarkable are the circumstances of Rubinstein's first meeting with Konstantin Nikolayevich, which had an almost random character. It took place at The Hague (on June 27, 1841) at a musical evening organized at the residence of King Willem II, where the main personage was the 11-year-old guest performer from Russia. According to the diary, "the little boy named Rubinstein, who,

⁷ I shall limit myself to two quotations that illustrate the scholarly level of this publication and shall comment them. The first quotation: "While being a tsesarevich, Alexander Alexandrovich assisted the composer materially" [5, p. 96]. The information that Tchaikovsky received material assistance from Alexander Alexandrovich when the latter held the status of heir and tsesarevich has not found any documental substantiation. The only exception is Modest Tchaikovsky's letter from December 2, 1893, but it gives admission to an obvious error (for more details on this, see [2, pp. 500–501]). The second quotation: "Nine sacred [sic!] musical compositions have been written by the composer upon the invitation of the emperor. Among them is the famous *All-Night Vigil* and *Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom*." [5, p. 97] Here a grave fallacy is made: three independent cycles created by the composer in different years have been mixed together: *Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom* opus 41 (1878), *All-Night Vigil* opus 52 (1882), and *Nine Sacred Musical Compositions* Tchs 79–87 (1885). To bring other examples (which are numerous) would be superfluous.

nonetheless, was Russian, played the piano quite well,” performing compositions by Henselt and Liszt’s transcriptions of Schubert’s songs.⁸ The Grand Duke himself (who at that time was 13 years old) turned out to be in Holland participating in a program of swimming studies. Having been drawn by the extraordinary talent of his compatriot, Konstantin expressed the desire to become acquainted with him. “I don’t know, how it was for others, but for me it was, at least, very amusing,” he wrote.⁹ “He was a guest and was very charming with me,” Rubinstein noted.¹⁰

In light of the subsequent biography of Anton Grigoryevich and, in perspective, of the history of Russian music, as well, it would be difficult to underestimate the significance of this meeting: under the impression of it, the Grand Duke prepared the ground for the child prodigy’s concerts at the court in the capital of Russia. The musician emphasized this especially: “In 1843 we returned to St. Petersburg. <...> I played at the Winter Palace. Konstantin Nikolayevich knew me and talked about me to the tsar’s family”.¹¹ It was particularly the Grand Duke who “discovered” Rubinstein for his parents — Emperor Nicholas I and Empress Alexandra Feodorovna, having therefore exerted patronage to him at the childhood stage of his artistic activities. The Grand Duke’s diary does not convey to us in details of their communication in the second half of the 1840s and the early 1850s. But, judging by the preserved financial documents, Rubinstein performed in Konstantin Nikolayevich’s residence in the capital city (the Marble Palace) and received valuable gifts from the Grand Duke’s court bureau.¹²

The initial period of their communication is crowned by a musical dedication: in 1849 the twenty-year-old Rubinstein dedicated his *Piano Concerto in D minor* to His Highness. The title page of the presentational manuscript bears the inscription in French: “Concerto pour le piano avec accompagnement d’Orchestre composé et très respectueusement dédié a Son Altesse Imperiale Monsieur le Grand Duc Constantin Nicolajewitch par Antoine Rubinstein.”¹³ Having published it seven years later in the form of the *Octet opus 9 for piano, flute, clarinet, horn, violin*,

⁸ GARF. F. 722. Op. 1, no. 78. L. 41–41 back side. The diary provides the impression not only of the advanced level of Konstantin Nikolayevich’s musical preparedness as a listener and an audience member (practically all of the compositions performed by Rubinstein were very familiar to him, their titles were precisely recorded by him), but also of what significance was provided to the education of the Grand Duke’s musical aesthetical taste (the basis was formed by the orchestral and chamber works of the Viennese classicists; a tremendous role was played by attending the opera).

⁹ Ibid., L. 41–41 back side.

¹⁰ Rubinstein, A. G. (1983) *Literaturnoe nasledie [Literary Heritage]* (Vol. 1), p. 68.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 70.

¹² Thus, for example, in late March 1850 “artist Rubinstein” was presented with a brilliant breastpin worth 110 rubles in silver from the “English store” (*Rossijskij gosudarstvennyj istoričeskij arhiv* (RGIA) [Russian State Historical Archive]. F. 537. Op. 1, no. 30. L. 7–9).

¹³ The “Concerto for piano with accompanying orchestra, composed and respectfully dedicated to the Sovereign, Grand Duke Konstantin Nikolayevich by Anton Rubinstein.” (The presentational manuscript copy was preserved in the Grand Duke’s music collection. At the present time, it is preserved in the Manuscript Section of the Library of the Moscow State Conservatory [6, p. 166].)

viola, cello, and double-bass (Leipzig: Peters, 1856), Anton Grigoryevich preserved the dedication.¹⁴

The momentous character of the acquaintance, which took place abroad, is enhanced by the diary entries from the subsequent decades: the descriptions of Rubinstein's concerts in Western Europe at which the Grand Duke was present invariably convey the feeling of pride for the great musician's connection with Russia.¹⁵ The childhood meetings were not obliterated from the memories of both participants and left a mark on their subsequent relations. Their repercussions can be perceived in the notes made after almost half a century during the period of Rubinstein's Historical Concerts and the conjoint attendances of the student concerts at the St. Petersburg Conservatory in the 1880s.¹⁶

The Court Accompanist and Ensemble Performer (1850–1870-e)

Having emerged because of Grand Duke Konstantin Nikolayevich within view of the imperial family, Rubinstein in the early 1850s came into the circle of another influential personage — Grand Duchess Elena Pavlovna (1806–1873), due to the direct patronage of which the Russian Musical Society was established in 1859, and the St. Petersburg Conservatory — in 1862, where Anton Grigoryevich became its first director. At the same time, he ended up being one of the most high-demand musicians at the numerous imperial and grand-ducal residences, since the main form of palatial music-making was served by vocal and instrumental ensembles (orchestral concerts were held rarely). “What others consider as a career for an artist, I seem to have plenty; I do not have any business with anybody lower than the royal family,” Rubinstein confessed in one of his letters of the late 1850s.¹⁷

¹⁴ Rubinstein A. (n.d. [1856]). *Ottetto op. 9 pour Piano, Violon, Violoncelle, Contrebasse, Flûte, Clarinette et Cor*. C. F. Peters, p. 1.

¹⁵ See, for example, the diary entries made in Paris in 1882. January 23: “The Club of Russian artists, where there was a very nice evening. The performers who played were Brandukov, Poul Viardot and, most importantly, Anton Rubinstein, incredibly, as always, and Turgenev read from the series of his portraits about two old men resembling old-world country gentlemen; very cute and amusing” (GARF. F. 722. Op. 1, no. 1166. L. 147 back side). February 7: “I set out for Cirque D’Hiver to a concert which was conducted by Rubinstein and which consisted entirely of Russian music. Tchaikovsky’s Overture to *Romeo and I zhar i znoy* [And Heat and Sultriness] sung by Ryndina, Korsakov’s *Sadko*, Davidov’s *Cello Concerto* played by Verzhbilovich,” Susannin’s final aria sung by Malakhov, Dargomyzhsky’s *Kazachek* [Little Cossack] (so in the original. — G. M.), Rubinstein’s *Nimfa* [The Nymph] sung by Ryndina, and Rubinstein’s *Feramorz* dances. Everything was received extremely sympathetically” (GARF. F. 722. Op. 1, no. 113. L. 3–3 back side). The event was organized within the framework of the Sunday “Pasdeloup concerts” addressed to a broad circle of listeners; it took place in one of the commodious halls of Paris, the *Cirque d’Hivers* [Winter Circus].

¹⁶ While observing the students of the St. Petersburg Conservatory in January 1886, the aging Konstantin singles out among them the fourteen-year-old pianist Evgeny Gollidey, “who positively reminds me of Rubinstein, when he was little” (GARF. F. 722. Op. 1, no. 118, L. 158–158 back side). This sounds with special veracity from the mouth of a person who remembers the “original,” bearing witness to the fact, how strong were his childhood remembrances.

¹⁷ Rubinstein, A. G. (1984). *Literaturnoe nasledie: v 3 t.* [Literary Heritage: in 3 vols] (Barenboim L. A., Ed.) (Vol. 2). Muzyka, p. 83. (In Russ.).

Judging from the diaries of Konstantin Nikolayevich, an active attendee of private musical gatherings and the organizer of his own (at the *Marble Palace*), it is possible to receive an impression of the type of the participants involved, the character of the music-making, the repertoire and the listeners' auditorium, and to recreate the chronology of the performances. Let us cite some selected diary entries:

(March 5/17, 1857; Nice, Villa Bermond) "In the evening at Elena [Pavlovna]'s there is music. Rubinstein and Géraldy"¹⁸

(March 2, 1861; Mikhaylovsky Palace) "In the evening a gathering at Elena Pavlovna's. <...> The music was quite bad. The only good music was Beethoven's Kreutzer Sonata, which was played in a splendid manner by Rubinstein and Wieniawski."¹⁹

(April 8, 1861; Winter Palace) "Maria²⁰ had a little musical evening. Rubinstein, Schubert and Wieniawski played Beethoven's *Grand Trio in B-flat major*²¹, a movement from one of Mendelssohn's sonatas²² and various other miscellanea. It was rather good."²³

(April 26, 1861; *Mariinsky Palace*) "In the evening at Mary's²⁴ there was a large concert. The guests numbered 300 people and the entire diplomatic corps. The *Overture to Oberon*²⁵, played in such a way as I have never heard before. Mendelssohn's *Concerto for Violin*²⁶ — excellently. *Konzertstück* by Weber²⁷, Rubinstein, not very well and the entire *Sommernachtstraum*.²⁸ The orchestra was superb, the choruses less so."²⁹

¹⁸ GARF. F. 722. Op. 1, no. 134., L. 21 back side. Jean-Antoine-Juste Géraldi (1808–1869) was a French chamber singer, teacher and composer. A pupil of Garcia Sr. and Garcia Jr. During the years 1837–1850 he was a professor at the Brussels Conservatory. He became celebrated as a performer of Franz Schubert's songs and Giacomo Meyerbeer's romances. The presence of the highest Russian aristocracy in Nice in the middle of the 19th century was conducive to the expansion of international musical contacts. Special attention is merited by Count Eugene de Cessole, 1805–1876), an amateur violinist and composer, a close friend of Niccolò Paganini and a collector of musical score autographs. As the senator of Nice, Cessole had the opportunity of communicating with the most elevated Russian guests and is mentioned in Konstantin Nikolayevich's diary entry from November 29, 1858. Unfortunately, in the publication of the diaries (2019) his name is extremely distorted (*Dnevnik velikogo knjazja Konstantina Nikolaevicha. 1858–1864* [*The Diaries of Grand Duke Konstantin Nikolayevich. 1858–1864*], p. 19). The correct spelling (in Russian) was verified according to Robert Adelson's catalogue (Adelson, R. (2020) *Autographes musicaux du XIX siècle. L'album niçois du Comte de Cessole*. Acadèmia Nissarda).

¹⁹ GARF. F. 722. Op. 1, no. 1153. L. 18 back side.

²⁰ Empress Maria Alexandrovna (1824–1880).

²¹ The *Trio for Piano, Violin, and Cello in B-flat*, opus 97, dedicated to Archduke Rudolf.

²² Most likely, what is meant here is the *Sonata for Cello and Piano No. 2, opus 58* dedicated to M. Yu. Vielgorsky.

²³ GARF. F. 722. Op. 1, no. 1153. L. 27 back side.

²⁴ The Grand Duchess Maria Nikolayevna (1819–1876) was the eldest sister of Grand Duke Konstantin Nikolayevich.

²⁵ The *Overture to the opera Oberon* by Carl Maria von Weber.

²⁶ The *Concerto for Violin and Orchestra in E minor, opus 64*.

²⁷ The *Konzertstück for Piano and Orchestra in F minor, opus 79*.

²⁸ *A Midsummer Night's Dream opus 61 for soloists, female chorus and orchestra* by Felix Mendelssohn. In the publication of the diaries this entry was deciphered incompletely and with distortions (*Dnevnik velikogo knjazja Konstantina Nikolaevicha. 1858–1864* [*The Diaries of Grand Duke Konstantin Nikolaevich. 1858–1864*], p. 283).

²⁹ GARF. F. 722. Op. 1, no. 1153. L. 27 back side. L. 31 back side.

(February 21, 1866; *Mikhaylovsky Palace*) “In the evening at Elena P[avlovna]’s. Stockhausen³⁰ sang, Rubinstein and Wieniawski played Beethoven sonatas.”³¹

(December 19, 1869; *Mikhaylovsky Palace*) “To Elena P[a]v[lovna] for the evening, where Rubinstein played better than ever before.”³²

It is notable that, being in the service of Grand Duchess Elena Pavlovna, Rubinstein did not perform at the musical gatherings of Grand Duke Konstantin Nikolayevich. What was the reason for this? In one of his letters to Baroness Edith von Raden (1862) the musician calls Elena Pavlovna “his friend” and source of “everything good that occurs in the sphere of music,” while calling Grand Duke Konstantin Nikolayevich “his enemy” [7, p. 50]. This testifies to the competition of the two grand-ducal courts within the space of “musical St. Petersburg” of the 1860s.

After 1873, each visit of Rubinstein and his fellow chamber musicians to the *Marble Palace* for the grand-ducal musical matinees becomes a noticeable event:

(February 23, 1874) “From 2 to $\frac{3}{4}$ 6 music. <...> Rubinstein arrived. He played alone, then the *B-flat major Trio* by Beethoven and the *Adagio* from his *D-major Trio*. This was an inexpressible, unbelievable charm”³³

(November 11, 1875) “Anton Rubinstein was here, having brought from Paris Saint-Saens himself, with whom I had the chance to acquaint myself and invite him to my musical event on Thursday”³⁴

(November 13, 1875) “From 2 to $\frac{3}{4}$ 6 music. <...> Saint-Saëns was there. He played one Bach fugue on the organ and his own wonderful and extremely interesting quartet on the piano. then he played the entire first half of Mozart’s *Requiem*. This way, we had a very multitudinous dinner. Next to me sat Anton Rubinstein and Saint-Saëns”³⁵

(January 14, 1877) “From 2 to $\frac{1}{2}$ 6 music. <...> A. Rubinstein, Davydov and Auer arrived, and they played charmingly Beethoven’s charming *B-flat major Trio* with the wondrous *Adagio*.”³⁶

Rubinstein visited the *Marble Palace* afterwards too, but his visits were stipulated by other reasons.

About Rubinstein the Composer and the Pianist (the 1870s and 1880s)

An epigram to this section can be served by the diary entry made by the Grand Duke reflecting the contradictory impressions from one of Rubinstein’s concertos, where he presented himself both as a composer and a performer: “He played extraordinarily wonderfully Beethoven’s *Concerto in E-flat major* and himself conducted his own symphony, which is incredibly boring and tedious.”³⁷

³⁰ Julius Stockhausen (1826–1906) is a famous German baritone.

³¹ GARF. F. 722. Op. 1, no. 1157.L. 13.

³² GARF. F. 722. Op. 1, no. 97. L. 53.

³³ GARF. F. 722. Op. 1, no. 106. L. 26 back side.

³⁴ GARF. F. 722. Op. 1, no. 110. L. 14.

³⁵ GARF. F. 722. Op. 1, no. 110. L. 14 back side–15.

³⁶ GARF. F. 722. Op. 1, no. 112. L. 49.

³⁷ GARF. F. 722. Op. 1, no. 115. L. 102. It is referred to the *Forth (Dramatic) Symphony opus 95 in D minor*, which takes up more than one hour in performance. It was played at the Fifth Orchestral Meeting of the St. Petersburg Section of the *Imperial Russian Musical Society* (on December 17, 1883).

Let us focus our attention on his specialization as a composer. From the early 1870s, Rubinstein's compositions began to be performed regularly on the theatrical and concert stages of the Russian capital. How does Rubinstein appear on the pages of the Grand Duke's diary? What is his place in the hypothetical hierarchy of the contemporary composers as arrayed by the Grand Duke?

First of all, our attention is drawn by the comments about his chamber instrumental ensembles: Konstantin Nikolayevich, being a passionate amateur cellist and an encyclopedically educated connoisseur of chamber music,³⁸ demonstrated a constant interest in new chamber works. Not coincidentally, the highest appraisal was bestowed by the Grand Duke on Rubinstein's string quartets, especially *opus 90 No. 1 in G minor* — “a most interesting work with a charming scherzo in 5/8”,³⁹ “very beautiful, but frighteningly difficult.”⁴⁰ It is likewise not coincidental that one of the most ardent promoters of Rubinstein's chamber production was the *Russian Quartet* — a young chamber ensemble, the initiator of the creation of which is traditionally thought to be Anton Grigoryevich, and the tacit patron of which was Grand Duke Konstantin Nikolayevich (see [8]). The quartets are adjoined by the “perfectly made, interesting, beautiful, but extremely difficult” *String Sextet in D major, opus 97*,⁴¹ and among the piano ensembles there is a “the beautiful *Cello Sonata*” *opus 18*.⁴² The other chamber ensemble works involving the piano were accorded more reserved comments. The *Viola Sonata opus 49* seemed to the Grand Duke to be unintelligible in regards to the balance of sound: “The viola can barely be heard”.⁴³ The *Piano Quartet opus 66* was marked with a laconic “did not like”⁴⁴ as similarly was the *Piano Trio opus 108*.⁴⁵ (Was it possible that the reason for this evaluation was due to poor performances of these works?)

A separate block is comprised by notes about operatic and orchestral compositions — that part of the legacy by which usually the composer's reputation is formed. Only one of them — the programmatic musical-characteristic picture for orchestra *Ivan the Terrible opus 79* — was evaluated by Konstantin Nikolayevich as being perfect in all compositional parameters.⁴⁶ The others aroused critical

³⁸ “Being enthusiastic about playing quartets and quintets (with two cellos), he played at home though all the chamber works of both the classics and the contemporary composers. <...> He knew the chamber and orchestral literature sometimes better than the quartet players and the conductors, upon numerous occasions proving this in a witty manner,” — as Eduard Napravnik testified in his unpublished *Memoirs (Kabinet rukopisey Rossiyskogo instituta istorii iskusstv (KR RIII) [Cabinet of Manuscripts of the Russian Institute of Art History]*. F. 21 (Nápravnik E.F.). Op. 1. № 221. L. 20 backside–21).

³⁹ GARF. F. 722. Op. 1, no. 102. L. 12.

⁴⁰ GARF. F. 722. Op. 1, no. 1160. L. 23 backside.

⁴¹ GARF. F. 722. Op. 1, no. 112. L. 9.

⁴² GARF. F. 722. Op. 1, no. 113. L. 3.

⁴³ GARF. F. 722. Op. 1, no. 106. L. 40.

⁴⁴ GARF. F. 722. Op. 1, no. 112. L. 39 back side–40.

⁴⁵ GARF. F. 722. Op. 1, no. 115. L. 115.

⁴⁶ GARF. F. 722. Op. 1, no. 1161. L. 13.

comments, albeit, with the acknowledgment of positive sides, which he tried to convey to the composer (in most cases, unsuccessfully). The main motive of the critique was an insufficient selection of expressive musical material, combined with dramaturgical miscalculations and, as a consequence, a loss of interest on the part of the audience. Thus, having attended the premiere of *Makkavei* [*The Maccabees*] (February 4, 1877), the Grand Duke acknowledged: “In general, the music is good, and some of the numbers are outstanding, but the entire opera is still very boring, and on several occasions I almost fell asleep”.⁴⁷ His observation of the *Fourth (Dramatic) Symphony* was made in the same vein: “The scherzo is excellent and extremely original. The rest of the work also has some good and beautiful things, but, overall, it is overly extended”.⁴⁸

The Grand Duke had special expectations connected with the opera *The Demon*. He began his familiarization with it at the rehearsals at the *Mariinsky Theater* a month before the premiere.⁴⁹ (January 7, 1875): “I heard the first scene and the ballet music and found that it has decent spots in it”.⁵⁰ On January 11 he listened to “the second act with the ballet” and “the very end”.⁵¹ And, finally, on January 22, already in full: “In the evening, the first time at Rubinstein’s *The Demon* (the third performance). The first and third acts are very good. The second, besides the excellent ballet music, is long and boring.”⁵² It is possible that particularly at this performance the intense “backstage” conversation between Rubinstein and the Grand Duke took place in the presence of Eduard Napravnik and Mikhail Ippolitov-Ivanov. According to the latter’s memoirs, “Konstantin Nikolayevich tried to criticize something, and I was surprised, how sharply Anton Grigoryevich contradicted him, and Konstantin Nikolayevich, being himself rather harsh in conversation by his nature, went silent obediently and without contradictions”.⁵³

Another composition based on a plotline by Lermontov — *The Merchant Kalashnikov* — transfers us to a musical-political platitude. Having attended on February 22, 1880 the first performance of this opera by Rubinstein, “which he conducted himself,” Konstantin Nikolayevich noted with satisfaction: “He had great ovations and, in general, the public accepted the opera well. It is produced well and is listened to with interest, except for the second scene of Act II, which is very dull.”⁵⁴

⁴⁷ GARF. F. 722. Op. 1, no. 112. L. 61.

⁴⁸ GARF. F. 722. Op. 1, no. 108. L. 26.

⁴⁹ Most likely, he familiarized himself with it in the form of the piano-vocal score (it was listed in the musical library of the Marble Palace). The date of the premiere was January 13, 1875.

⁵⁰ GARF. F. 722. Op. 1, no. 108. L. 23 back side.

⁵¹ GARF. F. 722. Op. 1, no. 108. L. 25 back side.

⁵² GARF. F. 722. Op. 1, no. 108. L. 33 back side–34.

⁵³ Ippolitov-Ivanov, M. M. (1934). *50 let russkoj muzyki v moih vospominaniyah* [50 Years of Russian Music in My Reminiscences]. Gosudarstvennoe muzykal’noe izdatel’stvo, p. 28. (In Russ.). Rubinstein’s operas were also criticized by his other contemporaries including Napravnik and Tchaikovsky (see [9, p. 315]).

⁵⁴ GARF. F. 722. Op. 1, no. 1164. L. 31.

However, having not stood three performances, the opera was suddenly taken off the repertoire. The prohibition was issued from the heir, tsesarevich Alexander Alexandrovich, which regarded the libretto ideologically disloyal.⁵⁵ The Grand Duke, as we can see, was of a differing opinion about it — the quoted response is devoid of any political subtext. The response of Konstantin Nikolayevich's son, Grand Duke Konstantin Konstantinovich, also has a favorable tone.⁵⁶ Thereby, the opinions of the representatives of the imperial family differed with each other. The composer himself reacted to such an unexpected prohibition extremely oversensitively. Having visited the Marble Palace a few days later (on February 26, 1880), most likely, he discussed the current situation with Konstantin, who at that time possessed some influence on the Russian opera.⁵⁷

Four years later, the tsar's family accepted the opera *Neron* [*Nero*] practically unanimously (on January 29, 1884). However, in the opinion of Konstantin Nikolayevich, the opera, once again, has “many excessively lengthy passages,” notwithstanding the “effective and beautiful spots” and the “splendid and exceedingly effective” production carried out by the St. Petersburg-based Italian troupe under the direction of Alberto Vicentini.⁵⁸ This became the last opera by Rubinstein of all those attended by the Grand Duke in stage performance.

The diary entries testify that although the Grand Duke allocated Rubinstein a high position in the hierarchy of composers, he did not list him among the greatest masters of modernity. He gave priority to Tchaikovsky for his “musical and melodic qualities” and to Serov for his “sublimity and grandiose qualities.” Rubinstein was merely provided with an “honorable” niche.

The Grand Duke perceived the art of Rubinstein the virtuoso absolutely differently. For him, just as for many other Russian contemporaries of his, Anton Grigoryevich was not only an unsurpassable pianist, one of his kind, but a national asset. An especially high status in the diaries is given to the educational project *Historical Concerts* (1886) — one of the culminating heights of the world art of piano playing. For Konstantin Nikolayevich, this triumph of his

⁵⁵ For more on this see Eduard Napravnik's unpublished “Memoirs” (*KR RIII*. F. 21 (Nápravník E.F.). Op. 1. № 221. L. 26, 35 back side). According to Anna Vinogradova, “as it is known, the reason for the prohibition was the “untimeliness” of the plotline of the opera, in which Kalashnikov's execution coincided in time with the real execution of activist of the *Narodnaya volya* [*People's Will*] political group Ippolit Mlodetsky, which took place on the day of the premiere of Rubinstein's opera. Another reason, possibly, was the scene of the first act, which created the impression of a parody of an Orthodox Christian Church Service (in which Ivan the Terrible himself was presented in the role of the patriarch).” [10, p. 68].

⁵⁶ “I especially liked the chorus *a cappella* of the oprichniks, the first scene and the entire third act. In the new opera, as in other works by Rubinstein, there is a lot of purposeless noise and clack sound in the orchestra” (*GARF*. F. 660 (Konstantin Konstantinovich, velikiy knyaz') [Konstantin Konstantinovich, Grand Duke of Russia]. Op. 1, no. 16. L. 118 back side).

⁵⁷ See Grand Duke Konstantin Nikolayevich's diary entry (February 26, 1880): “At home I had a meeting with Rubinstein” (*GARF*. F. 722. Op. 1, no. 1164. L. 33).

⁵⁸ *GARF*. F. 722. Op. 1, no. 115. L. 127–127 back side.

contemporary was especially significant, because he was a witness of the latter's entire artistic path.

The Grand Duke attended the cycle of concerts fully:

(on January 4) "At 8 o'clock at the first of the historical concerts. <...> Rubinstein played composers from the 16th and 17th centuries, and played them with unutterable mastery. What a colossal force and memory this person has!"⁵⁹

(January 11) "At Rubinstein's historical concert. Today he played 8 sonatas by Beethoven. This is extremely tiring."⁶⁰

(January 18) "At Rubinstein's third historical concert. This time he played Franz Schubert, Weber and Mendelssohn. Naturally, it was superb, but, in my opinion, he spoiled many pieces, because he took to fast tempos."⁶¹

(January 25) "At 8 o'clock I am present at the assembly of nobility at Rubinstein's fourth concert, which consisted entirely of Schumann's compositions, and he played them exceedingly superb."⁶²

(February 1) "In the evening at Rubinstein's fifth historical concert. He played Hummel, Moscheles, Henselt, Thalberg and Liszt and has once again showed himself as an unrivaled colossus."⁶³

(February 8) "At 8 o'clock at Rubinstein's sixth historical concert devoted solely to Chopin. Naturally, he played superbly, but, once again, he spoiled many things a great deal, by taking too fast tempos. <...> It finished only at 3/4 11."⁶⁴

(February 16) "At the Hall of the St. Peter and St. Paul for a repeat of the last of Rubinstein's historical concerts (Chopin and the Russian composers). During the intermissions, we smoked with Rubinstein in a separate room."⁶⁵

Given that the notes are written down laconically, each one of them is endowed with its own characteristic feature, and the last one — even with something "all too human." I shall specify that only three of the concerts were bestowed unreserved fascination on the part of Konstantin Nikolayevich. To the others he made a set of comments, among which the complaint about the parameter of tempo is symptomatic.⁶⁶ All of this characterizes him as a very demanding and even extraordinary listener. Having familiarized himself with the performances

⁵⁹ GARF. F. 722. Op. 1, no. 118. L. 144 back side. The works of ten composers were performed: William Byrd, John Bull, François Couperin, Jean-Philippe Rameau, Domenico Scarlatti, Johann Sebastian Bach, Georg Friedrich Handel, Carl Philip Emmanuel Bach, Joseph Haydn and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart.

⁶⁰ GARF. F. 722. Op. 1, no. 118. L. 149 back side. It is hard not to agree with such a comment, after having seen the list of the performed sonatas (No. 14, 17, 21, 23, 27, 28, 30, 32), the aggregate timing of which adds up to about three hours.

⁶¹ GARF. F. 722. Op. 1, no. 118. L. 153 back side.

⁶² GARF. F. 722. Op. 1, no. 118. L. 157.

⁶³ GARF. F. 722. Op. 1, no. 119. L. 1–1 back side.

⁶⁴ GARF. F. 722. Op. 1, no. 119. L. 6–6 back side.

⁶⁵ GARF. F. 722. Op. 1, no. 119. L. 10–10 back side.

⁶⁶ The complaints about "incorrect" tempos, as Natalia Vlasova notices, "more frequently in the excessively fast tempos, which at times leads to 'ambiguity,' haste in the performance" sounded out frequently in Rubinstein's address from the mouths of both Russian critics and those from other countries. At the same time, "the musician's performing style was unified, regardless of whether he performed as a conductor or a pianist". [11, p. 121]

of the most outstanding listeners (among others, Franz Liszt), having discussed their performing art with his interlocutors (including Feodor Litke, Rudolf Kündinger, Eduard Napravnik and others), he accumulated an abundant amount of experience as a listener. If we are to speak of a virtuoso who could provide competition for Anton Rubinstein, from the angle of the Grand Duke, it could only be his younger brother Nicholas. He characterized the latter's playing with the same epithets. His diary contains several mentions of the two brothers making music together.⁶⁷ However, we would not find any direct comparisons between them.

Konstantin Nikolayevich also had the opportunity of comparing the brothers in another, administrative sphere of activities, as well.

Rubinstein the Conductor in the Eyes of the August Patron

When the Grand Duke assumed the position of the chairman of the Chief Directory of the Russian Musical Society and the patron of the conservatories, (1873), the creative activity of Anton Rubinstein, who stood at the origins of these institutes, was mainly connected with concert and compositional projects abroad. Substantial aid in solving questions of musical organization was provided to His Highness by Nikolai Rubinstein (1835–1881), who up to his death was his closest assistant (as the director of the Moscow Conservatory, he was a member of the Chief Directory); between them warm human relations were formed.

Nonetheless, each one of Anton Grigoryevich's appearances in St. Petersburg was marked by the Grand Duke in his diary. This was not only the already mentioned theatrical and orchestral premieres under his direction and the chamber music performances at the Marble Palace, but also the discussions of important organizational projects. Thus, in June, 1873 the Grand Duke "had a lengthy conversation with A. Rubinstein, who returned from his American trip, about our musical activities".⁶⁸ In the summer of 1878, Rubinstein is mentioned in the role of virtually the sole intermediary who could resolve the conflict between cellist Karl Davydov (at director of the St. Petersburg Conservatory at that time) and the other members of the Chief Directory of the Imperial Russian Musical Society in the question of appointing a director of the *Concerts Russes* at the World Fair in Paris.⁶⁹ After the death of his brother, Anton Grigoryevich, who at that time did not hold any official post at the *Imperial Russian Musical Society*, is mentioned numerous times in the diary as an influential consultant in the determination of the fate of the orphaned Moscow Conservatory. In April 1881, the members of the Chief Directory, taking his suffrage into consideration, make the decision of introducing there "an interregnum with

⁶⁷ See, for example, the diary entry from December 28, 1876: "In the evening at the Kononov Hall for the benefit of the Kologrivov family. <...> Both of the Rubinstein brothers played Schumann's variations for two pianos, and this was splendid" (GARF. F. 722. Op. 1, no. 112. L. 39 back side–40).

⁶⁸ GARF. F. 722. Op. 1, no. 104. L. 83 back side.

⁶⁹ GARF. F. 722. Op. 1, no. 1160. L. 52–52 back side.

the local small-range powers”.⁷⁰ On January 19, 1885 he single-handedly provides the Grand Duke with “the thought of appointing Tchaikovsky” as the director of that educational institution.⁷¹

Discovering anew these and others unknown details, we convince ourselves of how high was the status of reputation which Rubinstein held, not only in the eyes of the Grand Duke, but also of the public opinion in Russia, overall. He “was considered by public consent to be the head of the entire musical affair in our native country” (cit. from: [12, p. 98]). With the aim of consolidating this position, the project was developed for establishing for Anton Grigoryevich the title of “Honorable Director of Music” affiliated with the Russian imperial court (the implementator was Senator Andrei Markevich, Grand Duke Konstantin Nikolayevich’s assistant in directing the Imperial Russian Musical Society; the project was not realized — see [Ibid., pp. 94–100]). In light of the foregoing, the invitation addressed to Rubinstein to return to heading the St. Petersburg he had established does not appear as unexpected, even despite the stressful situation emerged around his “invocation to reign” (stipulated by the sudden escapement of Karl Davydov in January 1887). Incidentally, it came not from the Grand Duke, who was absent from the capital city and compulsorily played the role of an observer, but from the already mentioned Markevich.⁷²

After having returned to St. Petersburg, Konstantin Nikolayevich immediately met with Rubinstein: “We discussed the conservatory and, generally, talked about musical matters, and coincided in our thoughts. I hope that the affair would take a favorable turn.”⁷³ Undoubtedly, hope centered on the entire experience of their previous communication. Indeed, the first impressions from Anton Grigoryevich’s actions gave hopes by their serious qualities, while his displeasure with “the entire piano instruction and the professors and their programs” could be explained by the fact that “it was difficult to satisfy such an artist as he was.”⁷⁴

However, soon after that (on June 14, 1887) the Grand Duke expressed his worry about the future:

“At the Marble Palace I have a musical counsel with Rubinstein. Great changes are to occur. We spoke in general, about the conservatory and its future, about establishing our own concert orchestra, and various musical matters. I am continuing to be cautious that the business with Rubinstein would not last long.”⁷⁵

⁷⁰ GARF. F. 722. Op. 1, no. 1165. L. 144–144 back side.

⁷¹ GARF. F. 722. Op. 1, no. 117. L. 52 back side.

⁷² See Moiseev, G. A. (Ed.). (2011). Konstantin Nikolaevich (vel. kn.), Markevich A. N. Perepiska (1885–1889) [Konstantin Nikolayevich (Grand Duke), Markevich A. N. Correspondence (1885–1889)]. T. S. Tsar’kova (Ed.), *Ezhegodnik Rukopisnogo otdela Pushkinskogo Doma na 2009–2010 g.* [Yearbook of the Handwriting Department of the Pushkin House for 2009–2010]. Dmitriy Bulanin, pp. 540–596, pp. 564–565. (In Russ.).

⁷³ GARF. F. 722. Op. 1, no. 117. L. 77.

⁷⁴ GARF. F. 722. Op. 1, no. 120. L. 110 back side.

⁷⁵ GARF. F. 722. Op. 1, no. 121. L. 51–51 back side.

Such an unfavorable prediction was the consequence of Anton Grigoryevich's peremptory demand to bring in, instead of the then active official conservatory *Regulations*, the *Provisions for the St. Petersburg Conservatory* developed by him. In the event of their non-adherence, he threatened to leave his post immediately. The *Regulations* were printed out and sent to the august patron. Such an initiative, as well as the ultimatum manner shocked the Grand Duke. "I have read them and have determined that they completely destroy and topple down the present *Provisions*," he wrote. "It seems to me that our venerable Anton Grigoryevich <...> has set himself on the path of personal arbitrariness. <...> is this not a case of setting a knife against my throat? — la bourse ou la vie,⁷⁶ do not interfere with my predilections, or I shall leave! <...> I hope that he [Rubinstein] would not want me to change my opinion of him in such radical a manner."⁷⁷ Nonetheless, the conditions were partially accepted by His Highness. "I could not do anything else, because in the event of a different answer on my part, Rubinstein would immediately leave, frightful confusion would begin, and both the conservatory and the Musical Society <...> would be thereby placed in a most difficult, it could be said, desperate position."⁷⁸

It goes without saying that such confessions could only be entrusted to a personal diary, or a private correspondence. Other rules of the game were active in a public space. And for this reason, upon a crossed reading of a number of documents, the feeling of nervous tension arises. The contrast is present (1887):

"I congratulate you with my whole heart in regard to the twenty fifth anniversary of the conservatory you have created, which has been so valuable to Russia; I ask you to convey my heartfelt congratulations to all the members of the conservatory, the teachers and the learners; I wish that it continue to flourish; they all know that I love all of them with my entire heart" (September 8, Konstantin — to Rubinstein, a salutatory dispatch).⁷⁹

"I preserve an inner deep doubt, that things would hardly go successfully with Rubinstein's character" (diary from October 10).⁸⁰

(1888): "To the conservatory, where <...> especially for me the second act of Wagner's *The Flying Dutchman* has been prepared. <...> generally, it was very charming, and I thanked everybody cordially, and kissed Rubinstein" (diary from February 16).⁸¹

"I received Anton Rubinstein. It is difficult to speak with him about practical affairs, and I find that his mind is impractical" (diary from August 24).⁸²

The discharge of the atmosphere was aided by outer circumstances — the authorization coming from Emperor Alexander III to build the new building

⁷⁶ Your purse or your life. — French.

⁷⁷ Moiseev, G. A. (Ed.). (2011). Konstantin Nikolaevich (vel. kn.), Markevich A. N. Perepiska (1885–1889) [Konstantin Nikolayevich (Grand Duke), Markevich A. N. Correspondence (1885–1889)], p. 580, 582.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 579.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 575.

⁸⁰ GARF. F. 722. Op. 1, no. 121. L. 116–116 back side.

⁸¹ GARF. F. 722. Op. 1, no. 122. L. 48.

⁸² GARF. F. 722. Op. 1, no. 123. L. 36.

for the St. Petersburg Conservatory. It seems that the Grand Duke gave a sigh of relief, since Rubinstein set part of his energy onto a positive channel and disengaged himself from the utopian ideas of the inner transformation of that educational institution (from which both the teachers and the students suffered). However, they both were not fated to view the final result — the paths of their lives were terminated at the beginning stage of this grandiose project.

Conclusion

In the field of art studies in the 20th and 21st centuries outside of Russia, the subject of “the artist and the government,” “music and patronage” are being actively developed on the materials from various time periods, in diverse angles and forms. At that time, the phenomenon of Russian musical patronage is practically not reflected at all in them. In Philip Taylor’s monograph *Anton Rubinstein. A Life in Music* (2007) the Grand Duke is mentioned only a few times. The latter have to do with Konstantin Nikolayevich’s contacts with Anton Grigoryevich only in the year of their childhood and youth [13, pp. 15, 29, 82]. In the offered work, on the basis of the materials of the Grand Duke’s archive, their ambiguous and peculiar interactions are shown. It can only be hoped that the filling of the existent lacuna by facts and reflections presented for the first time shall serve as a definite contribution to world musical historiography.

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