

*Technique  
of Musical Composition*

Original article

UDC 781.61; 782

<https://doi.org/10.56620/2587-9731-2025-4-010-048>

EDN [NLMEGG](#)



**Operatic forms of Mikhail Glinka in the context of  
Western European theory and practice**

*Irina P. Susidko*<sup>1,2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Gnesin Russian Academy of Music,  
Moscow, Russian Federation,

<sup>2</sup>State Institute for Art Studies  
Moscow, Russian Federation,

✉ [i.susidko@gnesin-academy.ru](mailto:i.susidko@gnesin-academy.ru),

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2343-7726>



**Abstract.** The article focuses on the musical forms in Mikhail Ivanovich Glinka's operas *A Life for the Tsar* and *Ruslan and Lyudmila*, examined from the standpoint of their relation to the theoretical views and operatic practice of the 19th century. Particular attention is paid to comparing the views on the nature of musical form held by Glinka and his teacher Siegfried Dehn, as well as Adolf Bernhard Marx, the author of fundamental works on composition theory.

A detailed analysis of the rondo form in Glinka's arias revealed a connection with its treatment in Marx's *Die Lehre von der musikalischen Komposition, praktisch-theoretisch* and Reicha/Czerny's *Traité de haute composition musicale*, demonstrating its influence on variations with a soprano ostinato. The relation of large-scale vocal forms to the theory of the Italian *la solita forma* is equally thoroughly investigated; tables are provided illustrating the precise adherence to typical models of this structure in Glinka's arias. As a result, it is concluded that Glinka assimilated and adapted European compositional experience, introducing significant individual accents: the complication of structural models, and a special role for architectonic proportionality and symmetry of form. The results of the analytical study allow for new emphases in understanding Glinka's style.

**Keywords:** Mikhail I. Glinka, Adolf B. Marx, Siegfried Dehn, *Ruslan and Lyudmila, A Life for the Tsar*, rondo form, soprano ostinato variations, *la solita forma*, musical form, symmetries in musical form, proportions in musical form

**Acknowledgments:** The author expresses gratitude to Dr. Sci. Svetlana Konstantinovna Lashchenko for the opportunity to participate in the International Conference *Mikhail Glinka and Russian Artistic Culture of the 19th–21st Centuries: The Experience of Performing, Critical, and Scholarly Interpretation* (October 16–17, 2024, State Institute for Art Studies), where the ideas presented in the article were tested.

**For citation:** Susidko, I. P. (2025). Operatic forms of Mikhail Glinka in the context of Western European theory and practice. *Contemporary Musicology*, 9(4), 10–48. <https://doi.org/10.56620/2587-9731-2025-4-010-048>

Техника  
музыкальной композиции

Научная статья

**Оперные формы М. И. Глинки в контексте  
западноевропейской теории и практики**

*Ирина Петровна Сусидко<sup>1,2</sup>*

<sup>1</sup>Российская академия музыки имени Гнесиных,  
г. Москва, Российская Федерация,

<sup>2</sup>Государственный институт искусствознания  
г. Москва, Российская Федерация,  
[✉i.susidko@gnesin-academy.ru](mailto:i.susidko@gnesin-academy.ru),  
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2343-7726>

**Аннотация.** Статья посвящена музыкальным формам в операх Михаила Ивановича Глинки «Жизнь за царя» и «Руслан и Людмила», рассмотренным с точки зрения их отношения к теоретическим воззрениям и оперной практике XIX века. Особое внимание уделено сопоставлению воззрений на природу музыкальной формы Глинки и его учителя Зигфрида Дена, а также Адольфа Бернгарда Маркса, автора фундаментальных трудов по теории композиции.

Детальный анализ формы рондо в ариях Глинки позволил выявить тесную связь с ее трактовкой в работе Маркса *Die Lehre von der musikalischen Komposition, praktisch-theoretisch* и Антонина Рейхи *Vollständiges Lehrbuch der musikalischen Compozition. Aus Französischen ins Deutsch übersetzt und mit Anmerkungen versehen von Carl Czerny*, влияние принципов организации рондо на вариации на сопрано *ostinato*. Столь же основательно исследовано отношение крупных вокальных форм и теории итальянской *la solita forma*, приведены таблицы, иллюстрирующие точное следование типичным образцам этой структуры в ариях Глинких. В результате сделан вывод, что Глинка усвоил и адаптировал европейский опыт композиции, сделав существенные индивидуальные акценты: усложнение структурных образцов, особая роль архитектонической соразмерности и симметричности формы. Результаты аналитического исследования позволили внести новые нюансы в понимание глинкинского стиля.

**Ключевые слова:** Михаил Иванович Глинка, Адольф Бернхард Маркс, Зигфрид Ден, «Руслан и Людмила», «Жизнь за царя», форма рондо, вариации на сопрано-остинато, *la solita forma*, музыкальная форма, симметрии и пропорции в музыкальной форме

**Благодарности:** Автор благодарит доктора искусствоведения Светлану Константиновну Лашченко за возможность выступить на Международной научной конференции «Михаил Глинка и русская художественная культура XIX–XXI веков: опыт исполнительской, критической и научной интерпретации» (16–17 октября 2024 года, Государственный институт искусствознания), где идеи статьи были апробированы.

**Для цитирования:** Сусидко И. П. Оперные формы М. И. Глинки в контексте западноевропейской теории и практики // Современные проблемы музыковедения. 2025. Т. 9, № 4. С. 10–48.

<https://doi.org/10.56620/2587-9731-2025-4-010-048>

### Introduction

Over the last three decades, a major trend in Russian studies into the composer Mikhail Ivanovich Glinka (1804–1857) involves a consideration of his work through the prism of Western European music of his time. This approach undermines the firmly rooted assessment of Glinka as a composer whose achievements are associated more with overcoming the European experience than with its acceptance and adaptation. For a long time, musicological studies of his work neglected any serious comparison with examples of Western music, above which, as Anatoly Tsuker writes, “he towered like a majestic Mont Blanc, and certainly did not permit the very thought of his inheritance of Western European traditions” [1, p. 15]. This interpretation was dominant not only in popular Russian discourses but also in the scholarly literature. Tsuker defined the critical analysis of this and other well-established assessments as demythologisation, which, in relation to the personality and music of Glinka, became almost the main tendency in Russian musicology of the first quarter of the 21st century [1, p. 12].

In a two-volume collection of articles based on materials from international conferences held at the Moscow and St. Petersburg conservatories to mark the 200th anniversary of the composer’s birth (2004), this tendency was fully evident [2]. The formula “Glinka and...” has acquired a tendency to be applied to a wide range of musical phenomena: from opera plots to orchestral writing.

Among the latest works of this kind, published in the year of the 220th anniversary of the composer’s birth (2024), we note the article by Nina Pilipenko, which compared musical interpretations of Franz Schubert and Glinka of the text of the aria Pietro Metastasio *Mio ben ricordati* from the opera *Alessandro nell’ Indie* [3]. Glinka’s perception of Italian opera is examined in the article by Alexander Filippov [4]. Svetlana Lashchenko, in her analysis of Lyudmila Shestakova’s memoir essay *The Last Years of the Life and Death of Mikhail Ivanovich Glinka*,<sup>1</sup> repeatedly touches upon the issue of the composer’s diverse Western European contacts [5]. Alla Korobova’s article, which presents a comparison of Glinka’s *A Life for the Tsar*

<sup>1</sup> Shestakova, L. I. (1870). Poslednie gody zhizni i konchina M. I. Ginki (Vospominanie L. I. Shestakovo) [The Last Years of the Life and Death of Mikhail Ivanovich Glinka (Memories of L. I. Shestakova)]. 1854–1857. *Russkaya starina* [Russian antiquity], 2, 610–632.

and Giacomo Meyerbeer's *Les Huguenots* [6], is one of the latest in a series of studies of parallels and intersections in 19th-century musical theatre, a problem that is attracting much scholarly attention in the 21st century.<sup>2</sup>

However, among such comparative studies, it seems that the least fortunate are questions of operatic form—and, more broadly, musical form in general. This served as the impetus for an attempt, as far as possible, to reconstruct Glinka's attitude to Western European theory and practice of musical form in the first half of the 19th century.

### *Glinka and Siegfried Dehn*

Studies addressing the composer's relationship to German theoretical thought generally begin with the name of Siegfried Wilhelm Dehn. (1799–1858, *Illustration 1*).

Dehn, a highly educated and authoritative musician who held the post of keeper of the Royal Library in Berlin, took part in the publication of the *Collected Works* of Johann Sebastian Bach in the Leipzig publishing house Peters and is known as a specialist in early music. He is the author of two works: *Theoretisch-praktische Harmonielehre mit angefügten Generalbaßbeispielen* (1840) and *Lehre vom Contrapunkt, Canon und Fuge* (1859).<sup>3</sup> Glinka studied with Dehn during his stay in Berlin in 1833–1834 and 1856–1857 (*Illustration 2*). His well-known attitude towards these activities is the subject of a much-quoted fragment from the *Notes*:

...I studied with him for about 5 months [...] He put my theoretical knowledge in order...

[...] There is no doubt that I am more indebted to Dehn than to any of my other maestros; as a reviewer for the Leipzig music newspaper, he not only brought my knowledge into order, but also my ideas about art in general, and from his lectures I began to work not by touch, but with consciousness. Moreover, he did not torment me in a school-like and systematic way; on the contrary, almost every lesson revealed something new and interesting to me.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Such intersections in Glinka's operatic works are specially examined in the dissertation: Nagin, R. A. (2011). *Opernoe tvorchestvo M. I. Glinki v kontekste zapadnoevropeiskogo muzykal'nogo teatra XVIII – pervoi poloviny XIX vekov* [Mikhail Glinka's Operatic Works in the Context of the Western European Musical Theatre of the 18th and the First Half of the 19th Centuries]. [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. Gnesin Russian Academy of Music. (In Russ.).

<sup>3</sup> Dehn, S. W. (1840). *Theoretisch-praktische Harmonielehre mit angefügten Generalbaßbeispielen*. Verlag von Wilhelm Thone; Dehn, S. W. (1859). *Lehre vom Contrapunkt, Canon und Fuge*. Schneider.

<sup>4</sup> Glinka, M. I. (1988). *Zapiski* [Notes]. Muzyka, p. 60.



Illustration 1. Siegfried Wilhelm Dehn. Portrait by Adolph Menzel (1854)

Retrieved November 20, 2025, from

[https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Siegfried\\_Wilhelm\\_Dehn#/media/Datei:Siegfried\\_Wilhelm\\_Dehn.jpg](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Siegfried_Wilhelm_Dehn#/media/Datei:Siegfried_Wilhelm_Dehn.jpg)

In the margins of the same manuscript, Glinka wrote the aphoristic assessment of the teacher's personality—"And undoubtedly the first musical healer in Europe".<sup>5</sup> He would repeat this comment in a letter to Konstantin Alexandrovich Bulgakov.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Glinka (1988), p. 60. (The original punctuation has been preserved.)

<sup>6</sup> "...Despite the severe fatigue, I am already working diligently with my teacher, Professor Dehn—the first healer in the world." Letter dated May 25/June 6, 1856 (Bogdanov-Berezovsky, V. M. (Ed.). (1953). *Mikhail Ivanovich Glinka. Literaturnoe nasledie* [Literary Heritage]: Vol. 2: *Pis'ma i dokumenty* [Letters and Documents]. USSR Acad. Sci. Publ., p. 588).

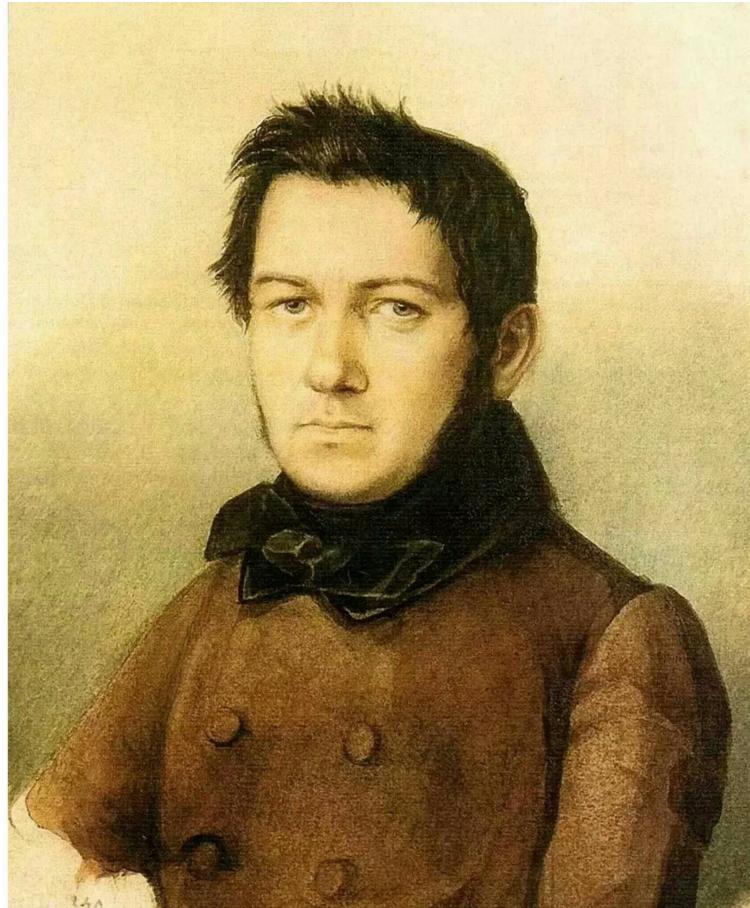


Illustration 2. Mikhail Ivanovich Glinka. Portrait of Yakov F. Yanenko, 1840s

Retrieved November 20, 2025, from

<https://history.ru/read/articles/kratkii-kurs-istorii-mikhail-glinka>

A whole series of publications, based to varying degrees on the text of the *Notes*, have been devoted to Glinka's studies with Dehn, and the composer's opinion has given rise to far from unambiguous comments. The discussion, spread out over time, spanned almost a century and a half—from the composer's death until the end of the 20th century. For the most part, the comments were critical. Boris Vladimirovich Asafyev repeatedly returned to this episode of Glinka's biography. In a 1942 pamphlet, while recognising Dehn's status as “one of the most advanced music teachers”<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Asafyev, B. V. (1952). M. I. Glinka. In B. V. Asafyev. *Izbrannye trudy* [Selected Works]: Vol. 1: *Izbrannye raboty o Glinke* [Selected Works on Glinka]. USSR Acad. Sci. Publ., p. 45.

of his time and citing Glinka's characterisation, he nevertheless does everything to downplay Dehn's importance, if not disavow it altogether. The German scholar was accorded a largely formal function: "Glinka had to appear in St. Petersburg with a sort of 'diploma from a German'—otherwise he would have been considered an ignoramus and would not have been given any chance at all".<sup>8</sup> Five years later, in 1947, in his classic monograph, Asafyev spoke more cautiously, but even this time he was not inclined to extol the merits of the German theorist, recognising him only as the "intelligent organiser" of Glinka's already existing compositional knowledge.<sup>9</sup>

Among the works touching on this topic and appearing in recent times, the article by Vera Aleksandrovna Savintseva, which is based on a thorough study of various sources, seems to me to be particularly significant [7]. Its pathos lies precisely in drawing a line between such characteristics and the real state of affairs, which can only be judged after a meticulous study of all the documentary material related to Dehn's lessons. This material gives us every right to trust the assessment of Glinka himself, who treated his teacher with great respect.

Glinka briefly outlined the content of his studies with Dehn in his Notes: "the science of harmony, or *basso continuo*, the science of melody, or counterpoint and orchestration".<sup>10</sup> As can be seen, questions of musical form theory are not mentioned here; therefore, it can be assumed that, if they were discussed, it was only in passing. However, indirect evidence of Dehn's attitude to musical form is found in his 1854 letter to Glinka, where he praises the works of his Russian student and colleague:

...sie sich durch die glücklichste Wahl und Erfindung originellen Themas, durch saubere und effektvolle Ausführung des ganzen und endlich auch durch geniale Oekonomie in Anwendung der Mittel zur Ausführung wie auch durch die vollendete Abrundung der Form der einzelnen Teile und durch Klarheit des ganzen auf eine hohe Kunststufe gestellt haben.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Asafyev (1952), p. 49.

<sup>9</sup> Asafyev (1952), p. 78.

<sup>10</sup> Glinka (1988), p. 60.

<sup>11</sup> Letter from S. Dehn to M. I. Glinka dated September 2, 1854. As cite in: Kiselev, V. A., Livanova, T. N., & Protopopov, V. V. (1958). *Pamyati Glinki (1857–1957). Issledovaniya i materialy [In Memory of Glinka (1857–1957). Materials and Methods]*. USSR Acad. Sci. Publ., pp. 478, 480.

In addition to its characterisation of Glinka's music, this quote is also important because it allows us to gain some insight into Dehn's priorities in matters of musical form. In his judgment, he outlined the various aspects of a musical composition—thematic material, texture, performance instructions, and, finally, the most important aspect, viz. its structure as an organised whole. This interpretation refers to the understanding of musical form in its classical, exemplary sense, which was widespread in Germany at that time and, of course, particularly intelligible to the people of Berlin, where in the 1820s at the University of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel gave his famous lectures on aesthetics, published in the 1830s–1840s. Dehn's wariness of new ("romantic") trends in art is well known. "...Die sogenannte Zukunftsmusik von Wagner und von unserem Pianisten di primo rango, Franz Liszt hier in Berlin vollständig fiasco gemacht hat, was ich den Leuten im Voraus gesagt habe", he reported to Glinka on 3 April 1856.<sup>12</sup> Contrasting them with Gluck, Mozart and Cherubini, he reminded his student of his own words: "*L'Allemagne c'est le pays Classique!...*"<sup>13</sup>

The closeness of Dehn's formulations to another document seems obvious: a letter, written by Glinka to Vladimir Kashperov (1826–1894) in 1856, two years after Dehn's correspondence. A particularly telling fragment from this letter could be called "Glinka's Theses on Composition":

- 1) *Feelings* (L'art c'est le sentiment)—it originates in inspiration from above.
- 2) *Forms*. *Forme* means *beauty*, that is, the proportionality of parts to constitute a *harmonious* whole.

Feeling creates—gives the main idea, *form*—clothes the idea in decent, *suitable* garments.

*Conventional forms*, such as canons, fugues, waltzes, quadrilles, etc., all have a *historical* basis.

---

<sup>12</sup> As cited in: Kiselev, Livanova, & Protopopov (1958), pp. 490, 492. The legacy of Luigi Cherubini (1760–1842) today loses out in its historical significance and popularity to the masterpieces of Gluck and Mozart. But for Dehn he was an undoubted authority, if only because Dehn himself studied with Bernhard Klein (1793–1832), who in turn was a student of Luigi Cherubini.

<sup>13</sup> As cited in: Kiselev, Livanova, & Protopopov (1958), pp. 490, 492.

*Feeling and form* are soul and body. The first is a gift of the highest grace, the second is acquired through labour—and an experienced and intelligent advisor is not at all a superfluous person.<sup>14</sup>

In his second thesis, Glinka, in asserting that “*Forme* means *beauty*, that is, the proportionality of parts to constitute a *harmonious whole*”, actually repeated Dehn’s formulation. The feelings given by inspiration and divine grace that he mentions are nothing more than an impulse to invent original thematic ideas, about which Dehn also wrote. Here they are in close contact.

But Glinka does not stop there. The letter contains three more statements: about the relationship between feeling and form—in other words, about content and form, about certain “conventional” forms, and about the role of the teacher in studying the art of composition. These conclusions were apparently drawn by Glinka largely on the basis of his own experience. At the same time, they resonate with other ideas that had become widespread in Berlin musical circles during the years of his visits.

#### *Glinka and Adolf Bernhard Marx*

There are no obvious reasons or any documentary evidence to justifiably place the two names of Glinka and Adolf Bernhard Marx (1795–1866) side by side. We do not know whether Glinka was personally acquainted with Marx; there is not a single mention of this in his letters or in his Notes. But it is highly probable that he would have heard of the German scholar and teacher. Marx lived and worked in Berlin and played a very significant role in the musical life of the Prussian capital: in 1832, shortly before the arrival of the Russian composer, he took the post of musical director at the University of Berlin on the recommendation of Felix Mendelssohn (*Illustration 3*).

It is reasonable to assume that Dehn could have introduced Glinka to Marx. The two Berlin theorists certainly moved in the same professional circles. It is known, for example, that for four years (1825–1828) Dehn wrote regularly for *Berliner allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*, which was headed by Marx; indeed, their names stand next to each other in the index of articles (*Illustration 4*). However, it should be emphasised that there is no evidence to suggest that

<sup>14</sup> Letter to V. N. Kashperov dated 10/22 July 1856. See Bogdanov-Berezovsky (1953), pp. 602–603.

Glinka made Marx' acquaintance. Indeed, the radically different views on music, composition theory and music pedagogy articulated by the two German theorists would hardly have contributed to their close personal communication and would have provided no obvious reason for introducing Marx to a Russian composer taking counterpoint lessons in Berlin.



Illustration 3. Adolf Bernhard Marx. Lithographie von Georg Engelbach, gedruckt vom Königl. Lithograph. Institut Berlin, erschienen bei Breitkopf & Härtel, Leipzig, 1848

VI. Allgemeinere Korrespondenzen.

Ort.	Ber. Erstatt.	No.	Seite.
1. Aus Berlin	G.	2	12.
—	L. P. S.	2	13.
—		4	29.
—	M.	3	20.
—	Dehn.	3	20.
—	M.	5	37.
—	M.	8	61.
—	Dehn.	8	61.
—	Dehn.	11	84.
—	Marx.	14	111.
—	Dehn.	14	111.
—	4.	16	126.
—	Marx.	17	132.
—	4.	17	133.

Illustration 4. Fragment of the articles index in the *Berliner allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* for 1826

In 1841, after the publication of the first two volumes of his textbook on composition,<sup>15</sup> Marx published a sharp polemical pamphlet, *Die alte Musiklehre im Streit mit unserer Zeit*.<sup>16</sup> The main thrust of the work lay in its criticism of the existing “teachings” for their guild narrow-mindedness, isolation from real compositional practice, and orientation towards old, ossified rules, with Marx choosing Dehn as his main opponent, whose work *Theoretisch-praktische Harmonielehre mit angefügten Generalbaßbeispielen* had just appeared the year before, in 1840. The 170-page pamphlet, not so much theoretical as musical-publicistic, arose as a response to the apology for the technique of basso continuo by Dehn, the “freshest” of a number of such conservative works from Marx’s point of view. The establishment of *basso continuo* as the basis of the composition of a musical work provoked a fierce critical reaction [8, p. 51].

<sup>15</sup> Marx, A. B. (1837, 1838, 1845, 1847). *Die Lehre von der musikalischen Composition, praktisch-theoretisch* (In 4 Teilen). Breitkopf & Härtel.

<sup>16</sup> Marx, A. B. (1841). *Die alte Musiklehre im Streit mit unserer Zeit*. Breitkopf und Härtel.

Moreover, Marx categorically objected to Dehn's position, which left the mastery of musical form to the independent work of the student. He quoted a fragment from his *Theoretisch-praktische Harmonielehre mit angefügten Generalbaßbeispielen*: “[An diese] muss sich die weitere Kompositionslehre anschliessen, welche jedoch zum grossen Theil der bereits in der Lehre des Kontrapunkts und der Fuge vollkommen ausgebildete angehende Komponist besser durch eigne Anschauung und analytische Zergliederung anerkannter Kunstwerke älterer und neuerer Zeit, als aus einem Lehrbuche lernen kann”.<sup>17</sup> Challenging this assertion, Marx formulated a statement about the importance of studying musical forms and genres, which is, in fact, the cornerstone of his fundamental work, *Die Lehre von der musikalischen Komposition*. In other words, the controversy that arose apparently in connection with a purely narrow professional question about the role of *basso continuo*, ultimately led to the problem of composer education in general and the confrontation between the “old” and the “new,” “tradition” and “progress” in musical art. In this controversy, Dehn was assigned the role of a retrograde, while Marx represented the “avant-garde.”

If we take into account that in Marx's life and work the professional was closely intertwined with the personal (the history of his relationship with Mendelssohn is evidence of this) then it is clear that his contacts with Dehn could not have been particularly close, not only in the 1840s, after the differences had already become clearly evident, but even earlier, in the 1830s. Dehn, in turn, certainly adhered to his own position in his studies with Glinka.

All the more remarkable is the coincidence of three of the five theses on composition that were set out by Glinka in a letter to Kashperov with Marx's ideas. One of them is the question of the relationship between content and form in a musical work. Glinka designates content with the word “feeling” (“чувство”), while Marx specifies it precisely as *der Inhalt*, but in fact they are writing about the same thing albeit the German scholar in detail and verbosely, while the Russian composer is more aphoristic:

<sup>17</sup> Dehn, S. W. (1840). *Theoretisch-praktische Harmonielehre mit angefügten Generalbaßbeispielen*. Verlag von Wilhelm Thome, p. 308. As cited in: Marx, A. B. (1841). *Die alte Musiklehre im Streit mit unserer Zeit*. Breitkopf und Härtel, p. 22.

Marx	Glinka
Form ist die Weise, wie der Inhalt des Werks—die Empfindung, Vorstellung, Idee des Komponisten—äusserlich, Gestalt worden ist, und man hat die Form des Kunstwerks näher und bestimmter als Aeusserung, ... Gestaltwerden seines Inhalts zu bezeichnen. <sup>18</sup>	Feeling creates—gives the main idea, <i>form</i> —clothes the idea in a decent, suitable garments. <sup>19</sup>

The points of contact are equally obvious in the attitude towards musical form as an independent phenomenon requiring special training—and, importantly, under the guidance of an experienced mentor.

Marx	Glinka
Die Bildung für Kunst beruht wesentlich und zum grossen Theil auf Entführung und feststellung in den Formen und ihrem Geist; ohne Formerkenniss bleibt jedes Werk [...] ein unbestimmt Etwas... <sup>20</sup>	<i>Feeling and form</i> are soul and body. The first is a gift of the highest grace, the second is acquired through labour—and an experienced and intelligent advisor is not at all a superfluous person. <sup>21</sup>

Finally, the “conventional forms” mentioned by Glinka in his letter to Kashperov (canons, fugues, waltzes and quadrilles) are nothing more than the “applied forms” in Marx’s Theory of Composition, which are intended to put the principles of the general theory into practical use. Thus, there is no basis for any claim that these similarities demonstrate a direct influence of German theory, specifically Marx’s views, on Glinka. Nevertheless, the similarities are still significant, as are some of the ideas concerning other aspects of musical art, such as the composer’s relationship to folk song and the necessity of a national opera, which are shared by both. Glinka’s operatic forms, which are the primary focus of our article, suggest that the composer was well aware of contemporaneous German ideas about compositional structures.

<sup>18</sup> Marx, A. B. (1847). *Die Lehre von der musikalischen Composition, praktisch-theoretisch* (Vol. 2, 3rd ed.). Breitkopf und Härtel, p. 5.

<sup>19</sup> Letter to V. N. Kashperov dated 10/22 July 1856. See Bogdanov-Berezovsky (1953), p. 603.

<sup>20</sup> Marx, A. B. (1868). *Die Lehre von der musikalischen Komposition, praktisch-theoretisch*. (Vol. 3. 4th ed.). Breitkopf und Härtel, p. 605.

<sup>21</sup> Letter to V. N. Kashperov dated 10/22 July 1856. See Bogdanov-Berezovsky (1953), p. 603.

*Rondo*

Glinka's rondos bear a clear imprint of Western European theory and practice.<sup>22</sup> Considering vocal arias, the first two that come to mind are Antonida's from *A Life for the Tsar* and Farlaf's from *Ruslan and Lyudmila*. Glinka himself called them "rondo," apparently referring to the genre rather than the actual form—that is, he did the same as, for example, Ludwig van Beethoven in his piano sonatas.<sup>23</sup> The fast part of Antonida's aria (Act I) has a structure that in the Russian theory of musical form is usually defined somewhat vaguely (rondo-like form with the scheme *a - passage - a' - passage - a*) due to the discrepancy between its thematic plan and the scheme of a typical rondo with two contrasting episodes (*abaca*) (Table 1):

Table 1. Antonida's rondo:

1)	A-flat major modulation E-flat major	E-flat major modulation C minor	A-flat major	D-flat major modulation F minor	A-flat major	A-flat major
2)	MT	passage	MT	passage	MT	Coda
3)	27	16	27	10+7	29	15

1) key; 2) form (MT – main theme); 3) number of bars

The tonal and functional plans of Antonida's rondo completely coincide with the description that Marx gave of the first of the five rondo forms that make up his system. Refrain (Marx prefers the term *der Hauptsatz*), sounding in A-flat major, alternates with the tonally unstable passages of *der Gang*, plural *die Gänge*.<sup>24</sup> According to Marx, this form, like other types of rondo, is more suitable for instrumental music, "denn der Vokalsatz unterliegt ... ganz andern Erwährungen."<sup>25</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Tatyana Yu. Chernova writes about the use of German rondo forms in Glinka's romances [9].

<sup>23</sup> Beethoven often described as rondo not only the movements written in this form (e.g., the finale of the sonata op. 53), but also those that in the modern sense are considered "rondo-sonatas" (finales of op. 2 no. 2, op. 7, op. 10 no. 3); sometimes movements in the form of a rondo (*abaca*) did not receive such a designation (e.g., the finale of the sonata op. 14 no. 2).

<sup>24</sup> The first form of rondo in Marx's interpretation, as a rule, has three parts. Its five-part structure is also acceptable as a variant of the basic structure. Marx, A. B. (1868) *Die Lehre von der musikalischen Komposition* (Vol. 3), pp. 573–576.

<sup>25</sup> Marx (1868), p. 129.

This verdict is refuted by Glinka's aria, an example which Marx logically could not have known, as well as by examples from the music of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, which he certainly knew—Figaro's aria *Non più andrai farfallone amoroso* and Don Giovanni's aria “with champagne” *Fin c'han dal vino calda la testa*. However, as has already been remarked, Glinka, in turn, was unlikely to have been intimately familiar with Marx's theory, but at the same time, he undoubtedly knew the examples given from Mozart's operas. In other words, quite in the spirit of Dehn's recommendations and 18th-century practice, he apparently drew information about musical forms directly from the experience of other masters.

Thus, while it is difficult to speak of the existence of any specific model for Antonida's *Rondo*, it is also impossible to ignore a certain similarity with Mozart's arias. In *Non più andrai farfallone amoroso*, the presence, as in the Rondo of Antonida, of identical material in the episodes—a kind of “chorus”—is noteworthy.<sup>26</sup> The same technique makes Antonida's *Rondo* related to Don Giovanni's aria, and in this case the same material is presented in different keys (keys of mediant and submediant in Glinka; dominant and tonic in Mozart). It can be stated with great confidence that all these arias implement a similar compositional principle.

Farlaf's *Rondo* from *Ruslan and Lyudmila* has a more complex structure. To use Marx's terminology, its basis is The third rondo form, which belongs to the so-called “higher forms of rondo” and has, in addition to the *Hauptsatz*, two more *Seitensätze* (secondary themes) (*Table 2*). This structure is traditionally considered fundamental to the rondo genre, where the refrain (according to Marx, the main theme) alternates with various, non-recurring episodes (*a b a c a*).

*Table 2. Farlaf's Rondo:*

1)	F	d	F	B-flat	F	D→b	d	F	F
2)	MT	1 ST	MT	2 ST	MT	passage	1 ST	MT	Coda
3)	<i>a</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>c</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>b+c</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>a</i>	
4)	16	16	16	48	16	46	16	16	114

1) key; 2) form (MT – main theme, ST—secondary theme); 3) theme; 4) number of bars (uppercase letters—major key, lowercase letters—minor key)

<sup>26</sup> This example was appropriately noted by St. Petersburg authors: Afonina, N. I., Goryachikh, V. V., & Kulmina, N. I. (Eds.). (2022). *Forms of Vocal Music: A Textbook on Analysis*. Compozitor Publ. House • Saint-Petersburg, p. 248.

However, if we consider the composition as a whole, and not just its structural basis, then Farlaf's aria noticeably deviates from Marx's description. There are many differences. After the third refrain, a large developmental section follows (46 bars), then the first episode (the first secondary theme) is repeated along with the refrain. Even if we do not take into account the enormous coda, the scheme of both Marx's rondo and typical examples of this form among composers of the 18th and first half of the 19th centuries is violated in Farlaf's aria. The actual "rondo scheme", which takes up 112 bars, a little more than a third of the total length, is dominated by the pulsation of uniform sixteen-bars, the remaining two-thirds being additions, including more subdivided and less symmetrical chains of motifs.

The search for a model from which Glinka could draw inspiration, whether in contemporary opera or in earlier vocal and instrumental music, proves to be as difficult as in the case of Antonida's rondo. In terms of style, the swirling flow of Farlaf's patter, driven mad by the anticipation of his triumph, undoubtedly evokes associations with similar ostinato build-ups in the comic operas of Gioachino Rossini. A tempting—and, in our view, even provocative—parallel arises with the already mentioned aria of Don Giovanni. In this case, Farlaf turns out to be a parodic, even farcical version of the famous lover, singing his monstrous Russian "champagne aria" with exaggerated force and scope. However, it is not possible to find any obvious analogues of a similarly developed rondo form among other masters.

Except for one sample. This was, however, not revealed in a musical composition, but in a theoretical treatise.

#### *Anton Reicha's Rondo*

The Czech composer Anton Reicha (1770–1836), who worked in both Paris and Vienna, gained fame primarily as a teacher (*Illustration 5*). Among his students were Hector Berlioz, Franz Liszt, Charles Gounod, and César Franck. The appearance of his theoretical works, including *Traité de haute composition musicale* (*The Study of Musical Composition*), was also connected with teaching. The two-volume work, including 10 chapters, was published in France (Zetter, 1824–1826), then translated

by Carl Czerny and published in Vienna with parallel texts in French and German (Diabelli, 1832).<sup>27</sup>



Illustration 5. Anton Reicha. Portrait by Eleonore A. von Steuben

Retrieved November 20, 2025, from

<https://collectionsdumusee.philharmoniedeparis.fr/doc/MUSEE/0157073>

<sup>27</sup> Reiha, A. (n.d.). *Vollständiges Lehrbuch der musikalischen Composition. Aus Französischen ins Deutsch übersetzt und mit Anmerkungen versehen von Carl Czerny. Ant. Diabelli und Comp.*

Even a cursory glance at this treatise convinces us of its fundamental nature and, at the same time, its practical orientation. The chapters devoted to harmony, counterpoint and fugue are most thoroughly developed. Musical forms are discussed in the concluding tenth chapter. Its relatively small size does not prevent Reicha from demonstrating his characteristic originality in the interpretation of the phenomena of musical composition, including the rondo form (*Illustration 6*).

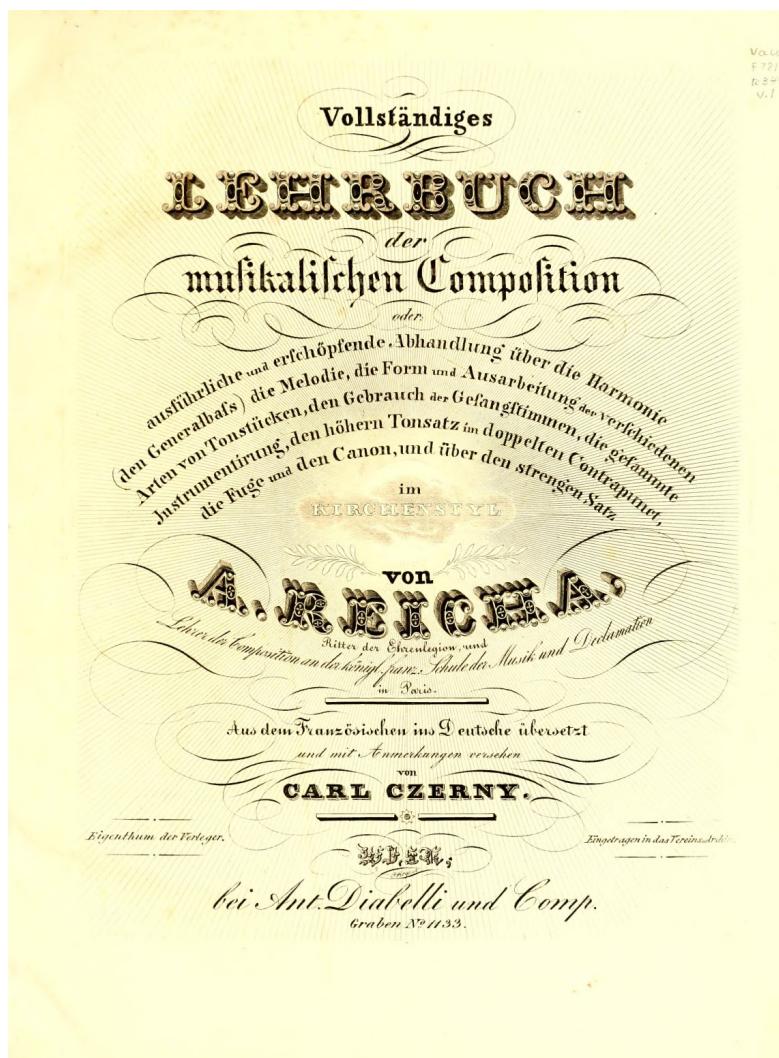


Illustration 6. Title page of Anton Reicha's treatise with translation by Karl Czerny.  
Vienna: Ant. Diabelli, 1832

The rondo “according to Reicha” consists of four sections, each of which begins with the main theme, which plays a fundamental role in the form.<sup>28</sup> The theme usually has a two-part structure with or without a reprise—Marx classifies this structure as a song form (*Liedformen*). Further, in three of the four parts, the main theme, repeated *da capo* exactly or in a varied form, is followed by constructions that Reicha—and after him Czerny—calls new “ideas” (*idées, Ideen*). As a result, the following thematic plan is formed: *a + b, a + c, a + d*.

If completed with a repetition of the refrain, the three designated parts do not contradict the structure of Marx’s third form of rondo; however, Reicha has not two, as Marx did, but three secondary themes (in Russian terminology—episodes). This scheme also corresponds to the Viennese classical composition practice, where multi-themed rondos are found—for example, Mozart’s A minor Rondo KV 511 (its scheme is *a b a c a d a*). To present “new ideas,” Reicha proposes the key of the sixth degree or the dominant key (first episode), the subdominant key (second episode), and the parallel key (third), which also fully corresponds to generally accepted norms.

However, the fourth part of the rondo in Reicha’s treatise is something quite unusual:

Diese Abtheilung ist die wichtigste und zugleich die längste. [...] Man beginnt wieder mit dem Hauptthema, und diesmal kann man es vollständig, mit oder ohne Veränderungen wiederhohlen, nur dass man die Repetitionen unterdrückt. Die Grundtonart ... muss in dieser Section vorherrschen. Die ENTWICKLUNG ist hier notwendig. Man führt hier wieder die anziehendsten, in den drei vorigen Sectionen exponierten Ideen vor; man versetzt sie [...] und entwickelt sie mehr oder weniger. Das Ganze geschieht mit leichten Modulationen, und immer an die Haupttonart erinnernd.<sup>29</sup>

In fact, here we are talking about including a kind of development in the rondo, as if added to the typical scheme. However, although the author insists on development as such, highlighting this word in large font, this part lacks the active tonal movement characteristic of developments. Modulations are permitted, but only “light” ones that do not lead far away from the main key. The general structure of the rondo in Reicha’s treatise appears as follows (*Table 3*):

<sup>28</sup> Reiha (n.d.), pp. 1167–1170.

<sup>29</sup> Reiha (n.d.), p. 1168.

Table 3. The structure of the rondo in Reicha's treatise

1	2	3	4
$a + b$	$a + c$	$a + d$	$a + \text{development, Coda}$

In Glinka, Farlaf's rondo seems to have been written directly according to this scheme, with one deviation: the third section ( $a+d$ ) is omitted. However, the unusual fourth section, which appears to have been invented by Reicha, is present, as is the coda, which is given a significant amount of time and space in the score. In development the vocal part is built on material from episode  $b$ , while the orchestral part contains motifs from episode  $c$ . The unusual configuration of the rondo form in Glinka's aria thus finds its theoretical justification. The striking coincidence of the compositional solution in the aria and Reicha's theoretical innovation leads to the question of the reasons and circumstances of its appearance.

It is not possible to give a definite answer to this question due to the shaky nature of the assumptions. It is very tempting to imagine that Glinka became acquainted with Reicha's work in Austria, where he stopped on his way from Italy to Berlin. Judging by the *Notes*, the composer spent the summer and early autumn of 1833 in Vienna and its environs; shortly before this, Reicha's treatise was published in Vienna. While the place and time coincide in an auspicious way, such a coincidence cannot justify the assumption that Glinka became acquainted with Reicha's book, and moreover, acquired it, studied it, remembered such a detail as the description of the rondo form, and reproduced it in Farlaf's aria ten years later. His brief reports in the *Notes* and letters are full of complaints about poor health and continuous treatments. There could have been no time for independent theoretical studies, especially since Dehn's lessons lay in the future. Thus, the question about the nature of the coincidence in the form of Farlaf's aria and Reicha's "rondo" remains open.

#### *Rondo and "Glinka variations"*

One of the main qualities of the rondo "according to Marx" was the differentiation of the role of a stable, complete theme and an unstable passage—a theoretical thesis that laid the foundation for a functional approach to musical form. In the preface to the second volume of *Die Lehre von der musikalischen Komposition*, Marx writes that any musical work has a beginning and an end, and therefore a volume

consisting of parts united in a special way.<sup>30</sup> This “special way” is precisely what constitutes an alternation of structurally complete constructions and unstable transitions. Marx developed this understanding based on an analysis of the Viennese classical musical heritage. Anton Reicha also refers readers of his work to the works of the Viennese classics, advising them to master various methods of developing musical ideas using the works of Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven as examples.<sup>31</sup>

Quite a few pages of his *Die Lehre von der musikalischen Komposition* are devoted to the relationship between this development and exposition, which again—although not as clearly and definitely as in Marx—testifies to his attention to the functional differentiation of parts in musical form.

A similar attitude, not in theory but in practice, is found in Glinka: the phenomenon of “passage,” involving the appearance of a zone of instability in his operatic forms, can introduce dynamics into the most static structures, including variations on soprano ostinato. This type of variation, which was rare in instrumental music, only occasionally crops up among the Viennese classics. Composers of the Romantic era paid it more significant attention, mainly in opera. One of the early examples, perhaps the earliest, is Adolard’s Romance in Carl Maria von Weber’s *Euryanthe* (1823). In chamber vocal music, an even earlier example is the song that opens Beethoven’s cycle *An die ferne Geliebte* (1815–1816). Quite often, such strophic forms with variated accompaniment are found in Russian operas of the 19th century, including for the first time in Glinka, which led to the name “Glinka variations,” which became established in Russian theory.

This form can come very close to its song basis—as, for example, in the Persian chorus from *Ruslan and Lyudmila* (Act III), where exposition dominates: from one verse to the next, only the orchestration, texture and details of harmony change. It seems that the Head’s Tale from the finale of Act II is constructed in a similar manner. However, here, two recitative lines from Ruslan intervene in the measured flow of the verses. They are very important, they are essentially “passages”—both in dramatic and musical terms. The lines contain questions that are key to resolving the conflict: “who is the villain” (Chernomor) and “how to defeat him” (the sword must cut off Chernomor’s beard); they coincide with the modulation links that connect the variation stanzas (B-flat major → G minor).

<sup>30</sup> Marx (1847), p. 4.

<sup>31</sup> Reicha (n.d.), p. 1130.

The “passages” in Finn’s Ballad are even more dynamic. They actually transform the ostinato soprano variations into a kind of rondo with transition sections between varied repetitions of the main theme (*Table 4*). The variation, as in the Head’s Tale, primarily affects the orchestral texture. The 38-bar passage is actually a development with a very intense tonal-harmonic transformations. It includes Finn’s story about how he mastered the secrets of magic in order to conquer the unyielding Naina.

*Table 4.* Structure of Finn’s Ballad:

1)	A	A1	passage	A2	A3	passage	A4	passage	A5	A6	A7	Coda
2)	16	10	12	16	16	4	14	38	16	22	25	27
3)	A	a, A	E, fis, gis	A	A	A → C	C, a	F, Ges, G, B-flat	A	A, a	A	A

1) thematic and functional plan; 2) number of bars; 3) keys (uppercase letters—major key, lowercase letters—minor key)

The very phenomenon of Glinka’s variations in *Ruslan* thus demonstrates a wide range of possibilities. In other words, ostinato soprano variations, which are static in nature, were enriched with components of effective development, which can be considered Glinka’s invention.

#### *La solita forma*

Glinka’s attitude towards Italian opera is very well documented by the composer himself in his literary and epistolary legacy, examined in the monograph by Elena Petrushanskaya [10], as well as in a number of scientific articles by domestic and foreign researchers. Among the Italian composers who attracted Glinka’s attention and aroused his genuine interest, the most prominent were the 19th-century bel canto masters: Gioachino Rossini, Vincenzo Bellini and Gaetano Donizetti. A trip to Italy provided the opportunity to see their compositions on stage more than once. During the 1830 carnival season in Milan, Glinka attended two major premieres at the Teatro Carcano: Donizetti’s *Anna Bolena* and Bellini’s *La Sonnambula*. He not only lost his head over Bellini’s cantilenas, but also studied them, which resulted in a desire to remember and thoroughly incorporate their features into his auditory experience:

To open the theatre, the first performance of Donizetti's opera *Anna Bolena* was given. I found the performance magical; Rubini, Pasta (who really did a great job of playing Anna Bolena throughout, especially the last scene), Galli, Orlandi, etc. [...] From other operas I recall: *La Semiramide* by Rossini, *Romeo e Giulietta* by Zingarelli, *Gianni di Calais* by Donizetti. At the end of the carnival, Bellini's long-awaited *Sonnambula* finally appeared. Despite the fact that it appeared late, and despite certain envious people and ill-wishers, this opera had a huge impact. In the few days before the theatres closed, Pasta and Rubini, in order to support their beloved maestro, sang with the liveliest delight: in the second act, they themselves cried and forced the audience to imitate them, so that during the merry days of the carnival one could see how people in the boxes and chairs were constantly wiping away tears. We, embracing Shcherich in the ambassador's box, also shed a copious stream of tears of emotion and delight. After each opera, returning home, we selected sounds to remember the favourite places we had heard.<sup>32</sup>

Glinka's initial enthusiasm, as is well known, was replaced after some time by a more critical attitude, even irritation, a desire to mark his own isolation, a distance from Italian opera as such—not least because of its dominance in the St. Petersburg imperial theatre. Of course, artistic reasons also played a role—the desire to “write in Russian” a Russian opera—such statements by the composer are well known.

The search for points of contact between Glinka's musical language, primarily melodic, and the music of his Italian contemporaries has already become a “common place” in musicology. While the debates that began during the composer's lifetime continue into the 21st century, the “Italian trace” is in any case obvious to both Russian and foreign scholars, regardless of how it is assessed. This problem is covered in detail in the already mentioned dissertation of Roman Nagin and the article by Rutger Helmers, dedicated to *A Life for the Tsar* [11].

The compositional solutions of the Italian masters also could not help but influence Glinka—if only because the Italian operatic tradition retained its leading role in European musical theatre during the first half of the 19th century. Helmers drew attention to the fact that even the genre designations in the autograph of *A Life for the Tsar* revealed Glinka's “Italian orientation,” which correlated some of the numbers and scenes of his opera with the compositional

<sup>32</sup> Glinka (1988), pp. 42–43.

structures accepted in Italy—*Scena, Terzetto e Coro, Recitativo e Duetto, Romanza* [11, p. 27]. He did the same in the “Original Plan” of *Ruslan and Lyudmila*,<sup>33</sup> where there are also designations in Italian—and sometimes even Italian words written in Russian: Ludmila’s Cavatina after *Ritornelli, Stretta, Duetto, Duettino*. It is noteworthy that in the layout of the dance scene in Naina’s magical garden, Glinka used French terms—*Entrée, Variation*—along with Italian ones (*Adagio, Coda*).

Among the large vocal operatic forms that corresponded to Glinka’s ideas *la solita forma* stands out. During the 19th century it replaced the previously widespread form in the *da capo* aria. In the theoretical sources of Glinka’s time, the term *la solita forma* was not used. German musicology was, in principle, quite indifferent to operatic forms: the only work that Marx mentions in his *Die Lehre von der musikalischen Komposition*—and even then in connection with recitative, and not with aria—is *Iphigenia in Aulis* by Christoph Willibald Gluck.<sup>34</sup>

The first person to write about *la solita forma* during the mid-19th century was Abramo Basevi (1818–1885), an Italian composer and critic. His book on the operas of Giuseppe Verdi was published in 1859, two years after Glinka’s death.<sup>35</sup> The monograph was then forgotten, but in the second half of the 20th century, on the wave of interest in musicology for historically authentic terminology, it was noticed among others by Russian musicologists, who began to actively use this definition in works devoted to Italian opera of the 19th century.<sup>36</sup> Among the latest publications in Russian, dedicated in particular to *la solita forma*, I may note

<sup>33</sup> Aranovsky, M. G. (2004). *Mikhail Glinka’s “Initial Plan” of the opera “Ruslan and Lydmila”* Kompozitor Publ.

<sup>34</sup> Marx (1847), pp. 412–416.

<sup>35</sup> Basevi, A. (1859). *Studio sulle Opere di G. Verdi*. Tofani.

<sup>36</sup> Here we may cite a number of dissertations in Russian: Korovina, A. F. (2017). *Opera semiseria v europejskom muzykal’nom teatre pervoj poloviny XIX veka: genezis i poetika zhanra* [Opera semiseria in the European Musical Theatre in the First Half of the 19th Century: The Genesis and Poetics of the Genre] [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. Gnesin Russian Academy of Music; Logunova, A. A. (2017). *Muzykal’no-dramaturgicheskaya forma finalov v operakh Dzhuzeppe Verdi* [Musical and Dramatic Form of Finales in the Operas of Giuseppe Verdi] [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. Saint Petersburg Rimsky-Korsakov State Conservatory; Sadykova, L. A. (2016). *Opery seria Dzhoakkino Rossini: vokal’noe iskusstvo i osobennosti dramaturgii* [Operas seria Gioachino Rossini: Vocal Art and Features of Dramaturgy] [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. Zhiganov Kazan State Conservatory.

the articles by Nina V. Pilipenko [12] and Alexander A. Filippov [4]: the first focuses on the issue of the formation of this structure and the second notes a number of similar forms in Glinka's operas.

Numerous examples of such compositions can easily be found in the operas of Rossini, Bellini and Donizetti, who were well known to Glinka. The solo and ensemble scene (primarily the duet) is usually built on the principle of tempo and thematic contrast. As a rule, it includes four sections—*recitative*, slow *cantabile*, *tempo di mezzo* (a connecting section, usually of a *recitative*), and a fast *cabaletta*, which is sometimes called *stretta* (that is, the aria itself, without *recitative*, consisted of three sections). There are also more compact two-part versions—without *tempo di mezzo*. In all sections, a choir may join the soloists. *The Cambridge Companion to Verdi* contains a scheme of a solo scene typical of Rossini's operas (Table 5) [13, p. 50].

Examples of Glinka's use of *la solita forma* in solo numbers are quite numerous: Cavatina and rondo of Antonida, Recitative and aria of Vanya with chorus (*A Life for the Tsar*), Arias of Ruslan and Ratmir, Cavatina as well as Scene and aria of Lyudmila (*Ruslan and Lyudmila*). It is this term that should apparently replace the generally accepted designation in Russian theory “kontrastno-sostavnaya forma” (“contrasting-composite form”), which has vague boundaries. A direct comparison of Glinka with Italian models shows how accurately and completely he mastered the principles of organising the great Italian vocal form. In Lyudmila's Cavatina, one can recognise not only the general outlines, but also all the stages of the development of the form of Rosina's Cavatina from Rossini's *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*—right down to the syntactic structure and the expected similarity of a number of melodic turns. It also recalls Amina's Cavatina from Bellini's *La Sonnambula*—especially since the plot and stage situation are very similar: the brides are on the eve of the wedding, surrounded by friends, Lyudmila turns to her father, Amina to her mother. Comparing the *la solita forma* diagram from *The Cambridge Companion to Verdi* and Lyudmila's Cavatina, it is easy to find an exact match (Tables 5, 6). Ruslan's Aria from Act II (Table 7) and Vanya's Aria with the chorus from *A Life for the Tsar* (Table 8) have a similar structure.

Table 5. Scheme of the Nineteenth-century Italian aria form (Rossini) from *The Cambridge Companion to Verdi* (Figure 4.1a) [13, p. 50]:

1)	Scena	Aria		
		Movement 1	Movement 2	Movement 3
		<i>Primo tempo/ Cantabile</i>	<i>Tempo di mezzo</i>	<i>Cabaletta</i>
2)	Recitative; may be preceded by a chorus or orchestral introduction	Open melody Closed melody	Dialogue; may include chorus and/or secondary characters	Theme Transition Theme' Coda
3)	Modulation V/I	I I or V/I (modulation) V/?	(I) modulation V/I	I
4)	Interaction	Reflection/reaction	Interaction/reappraisal	Reflection/reaction
5)	Recitative verse	Lyric verse		

1) section; 2) style and internal form; 3) key; 4) action; 5) poetry

Table 6. Scheme of Lyudmila's Cavatina from *Ruslan and Lyudmila*, Act I:

1)	Introduction	Lyudmila's Cavatina		
		Movement 1	Movement 2	Movement 3
		<i>Cantabile</i>	<i>Tempo di mezzo</i>	<i>Cabaletta</i>
2)	Preceded by a chorus	Ternary form with open reprise	Chorus	Ternary form A B A Coda
3)		I modulation III	III modulation V	I – VI – I
4)		An appeal to a father: "Грустно мне, родитель дорогой"	Reappraisal: "Не тужи, дитя родимое"	Reaction: «Не гневись, знатный гость»
5)		Lyric verse		

1) section; 2) style and internal form; 3) key; 4) action; 5) poetry

Table 7. Scheme of Ruslan's Aria from *Ruslan and Lyudmila*, Act II:

1)	Scena	Ruslan's Aria		
		Movement 1	Movement 2	Movement 3
		<i>Cantabile</i>	<i>Tempo di mezzo</i>	<i>Cabaletta</i>
2)	Recitative	Ternary form	Recitative	Sonata form <i>Coda</i>
3)		i (e)	Modulation	I (E – H – D – E – G – E)
4)	Interaction: “О поле, поле, кто тебя уселял мертвыми костями?”	Reflection: “Времен от вечной темноты, быть может, нет и мне спасенья”	Reappraisal: “Но добрый меч и щит мне нужен”	Reaction: “Дай, Перун, булатный меч мне по руке”
5)		Lyric verse		

1) section; 2) style and internal form; 3) key (parenthetical: capital letters—major key, lowercase letters—minor key); 4) action; 5) poetry

Table 8. Scheme of Vanya's Aria with the chorus from *A Life for the Tsar*, Act IV:

1)	Scena	Vanya's Aria with the chorus		
		Movement 1	Movement 2	Movement 3
		<i>Cantabile</i>	<i>Tempo di mezzo</i>	<i>Cabaletta</i>
2)	Recitative	Strophic form (AA1)	Solo with choir	Lyric form, <i>Coda</i>
3)		I (B-flat)	Modulation (g → F)	V (F)
4)	Interaction: “Бедный конь в поле пал”	Reflection: “Ты не плачь, не плачь, сиротинушка”	Reappraisal: “То не выюга, метель окликается”	Reaction: “Зажигайте огни, вы седлайте коней”
5)	Recitative verse	Lyric verse		

1) section; 2) style and internal form; 3) key (parenthetical: uppercase letters—major key, lowercase letters—minor key); 4) action; 5) poetry

However, rather than limiting ourselves to simply stating the closeness of Glinka's forms to Italian models, it is important to understand whether there are any differences in their interpretation beyond the natural differences in themes.

The form of the fast section in Vanya's Aria—the *cabaletta*—most closely corresponds to the Italian model. In Russian terminology, this form is defined as a binary with reprise (simple end-rhyming binary form) with the pattern *a a' b a''*. Most English-language sources call it a *lyric form*,<sup>37</sup> referring to its closeness to simple song and dance patterns. Both definitions imply the clarity and proportionality of the eight-bar structure (4+4+2+2+4). In Vanya's Aria, the metro-rhythmic and syntactic division is a variant of this structure: *a* (2+2+4) *a'* (2+2+4), *b* (1+1+1+1+1+2), *a''* (2+2+4). The syntax in part *b* is more fractional, which, together with the sequential development, gives the composition greater dynamics. Binary *lyric forms* can also be found in the Trio *Don't languish, dear*, in the Duet of Vanya and Susanin—these examples are also pointed out by Rutger Helmers [11, pp. 31, 37].

A feature that complicates the structure of Lyudmila's Cavatina is the inclusion of addresses to three suitors: Farlaf, Ratmir and Ruslan. Such lines, addressed to characters present on stage, were found in Italian arias *d'azione* as early as the 18th century, but Glinka presents the technique differently, in a “broad stroke”: Lyudmila's addresses occupy the entire section of a composite ternary form with a contrasting middle section (the words intended for Ratmir, with their oriental flavour, sharply differ from the rest of the Thematic material). Thus, the *cabaletta* actually includes stage action; it outlines the *mise-en-scène*—an original and unusual solution.

An even more complex *cabaletta* appears in Ruslan's aria: it is written in sonata form, including a development section that is extremely rare in vocal music. The secondary theme from the aria appears earlier in the opera's Overture, giving the number additional weight and significance. Sonata logic, by its very nature, contradicts the final function of the rapid *cabaletta*, imparting to it a special internal tension and thereby taking Ruslan's aria very far from its Italian prototypes.

In general, it can be said that, despite Glinka's undoubted reliance on the generally accepted structural prototypes of contemporary Italian opera, his practical experiments reveal a noticeable desire to complicate compositional solutions, their closer interaction with specific stage situations and the characters' reactions to them. An analysis of ensembles and finales leads to the same conclusions.

<sup>37</sup> The term was proposed by Joseph Kerman [14].

The scheme of the duet, based on *la solita forma*, does not differ significantly from the aria; the structure of the scene and the duet of Vanya and Susanin (*A Life for the Tsar*, Act III), Ratmir and Finn (*Ruslan and Lyudmila*, Act V) almost exactly coincides with this model. The finales of Acts I and III of *A Life for the Tsar* and Act IV of *Ruslan and Lyudmila* were also made according to the Italian models.

*“Forme means beauty”*

“Beauty” is a category for which it is difficult to find objective criteria in the field of musical form or for that matter in musical composition in general. However, in his above-mentioned “Theses on Composition,” Glinka provides a hint, explaining the beauty of form by the harmony of the whole and the proportionality of its parts. In other words, number, equality, symmetry and proportion are the elements by which, if not to unravel the mysteries of musical thinking, then at least to pay attention to the patterns of composition, to that quality that so delighted Dehn, who noted in Glinka’s music the complete roundness of the parts of the form and the clarity of the whole.

The architectonic harmony of Glinka’s operatic forms can be felt even without analysing the scores and counting the bars. It is revealed in a special quality—the equal length of sections, which apparently comes from the strophic organisation of the poetic text, often from the eight-bar constructions of the Russian song of the late (urban) period, on the one hand, and the Italian *lyric form* on the other. In the trio “Don’t torment my dear”, which is included as *Largo concertato* in the Italian in its genesis scene of the finale of the Act I of *A Life for the Tsar*, there are five such parts: three 16-bar verses and a 24-bar coda (8 + 16). The measured rhythm of the “Russian barcarolle,” which has gained popularity both in Russia and among European audiences, is not disrupted by the second and third verses being performed in the form of a canon by a pair of voices, nor by the inclusion of a choir in the coda.

The combination of almost deliberate simplicity and learned technical wisdom is one of the most characteristic qualities of Glinka’s composition. It manifests itself even when the composer himself, in Vanya’s Song, the most famous vocal number of *A Life for the Tsar* (*Example 1*), directly designates this unpretentious genre.

**Allegro moderato**  
*semplice con anima*

Как мать — у - би - ли у ма - - ло - - го птён - - ца,  
о - стал - - ся — птён - чик сир и гла - - ден — в гнез - - де...

Example 1. Vanya's Song (*A Life for the Tsar*, Act III)

The verse form consists of a series of melodic units of almost equal length. Most of them are eight-bars typical of urban song. The proviso “practically” is due to the exquisite detail that Glinka introduced into the metrical homogeneity: he compressed the first two phrases to 7 bars, which became an example of Glinka’s *organicheskaya nekvadratnost’* (“organic non-squareness”), which in Russian theory usually serves as an argument for the closeness of his thematic material to Slavic folk song sources.<sup>38</sup> However, in the seven-bars of Vanya’s song one can still sense a derivative of the normative eight-bar phrases, when the first three-bar is perceived as a compression of the four-bar—a technique that is also found in Mozart. But the reason for the non-squareness in Glinka’s case is not of fundamental importance; what is truly important is that the two seven-bar sentences of the theme sound fresh and original, breaking the inertia lyric form perception.

The feeling of proportionality may also arise when the length of the parts of the form is different, but the symmetry is created by their combination. In Lyudmila’s Cavatina (*Ruslan and Lyudmila*, Act I) a structure of precisely this kind is formed (Table 9).

<sup>38</sup> The term was introduced to denote the non-square structure of the period, which arose not due to a violation of squareness, but as an independent phenomenon. Mazel, L. A., & Zukkerman, V. A. (1967). *Analiz muzykal’nykh proizvedenij. Elementy muzyki i metodika analiza malykh form* [Analysis of Musical Works. Elements of Music and Methods of Analysis of Small Forms]. Musyka, p. 605.

Table 9. Scheme of Lyudmila's Cavatina (movement 1—*cantabile*) from *Ruslan and Lyudmila*, Act I:

1)	Introduction	Exposition A section	Middle B section		Non-tonal recapitulation	Recapitulation	Coda
2)	G	G—D	A	G	B-flat	G—D	b
3)	a	a	B	C	A	a	c
4)	8	11 (3+3+5)	8	4	2	7	11
5)	—	“Грустно мне, родитель до- рогой”	“Разгони тоску мою”	“В терему моем вы- соком”	“Запою”	“Запою”	“Про любовь мою”

1) section; 2) key (uppercase letters—major key, lowercase letters—minor key);  
3) theme; 4) number of bars; 5) lyrics

The cantabile (*Andante capriccioso*), written in ternary form with addition typical of Italian aria, is distinguished by subtle tonal and modal *chiaroscuro*; there are no exact repetitions, but there is an abundance of melismata, reminiscent of Rossini's coloraturas. The perfect structure of this part can be seen from the scheme. The introduction together with the exposition of the theme (19 [8+11]) are balanced by the reprise together with the coda (20 [9+11]); the reprise “rhymes” with the introduction (9 and 8)—and the exposition with the coda (11 and 11). In addition to this kind of balance, the cavatina very clearly emphasises the golden section point of the entire composition. It comes at the beginning of the non-tonal reprise: the first motive of the cavatina sounds brightly at the climax not in the main key of G major, but in B-flat major.

The proportions of the *Allegro moderato* section of Lyudmila's Cavatina are also impressive. The golden section point in it coincides with the beginning of the coda, where Lyudmila's voice intertwines with the sound of the choir; here, the phrases of her melody refer not so much to the thematical material of the *Allegro* section, but to the initial turns of the *Cantabile* section. Proportionality and symmetry are attributes of many forms in Glinka's arias in both his operas.

Analytical observations allow us, to use the famous words of Alexander Pushkin from his *Mozart and Salieri*, “to verify harmony with algebra.” Comparing Glinka with Mozart, Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov wrote that “both of them were born with that wonderful natural architectonic ear and that natural logic of thought that does not require school study, but develops and strengthens in life's musical

practice.”<sup>39</sup> This quote is given by Alexander Ya. Selitsky in his article “Was Glinka a Mozartian?” [15], noting that the parallel “Glinka—Mozart” has a very solid track record in musicology [15, p. 180]. A gravitation towards symmetrical proportional correspondences is one of the qualities that unites the attitude towards form of these two composers. Moreover, in both cases, proportionality and symmetry are not primitive; they are not revealed in a straightforward manner, which becomes obvious, for example, if we compare Lyudmila’s Cavatina and Amina’s Cavatina from *La Sonnambula*, where balance is achieved in the simplest way—the equality of exposition and reprise in both *cantabile* and *cabaletta*. As has already been noted, Glinka’s solutions are almost always more complex and refined than those of his Italian “teachers,” as strange as it may seem to give such a characterisation to a composer whose music is usually associated with ideas of simplicity and economy of means. The structural organisation of his operatic forms is highly consistent with Dehn’s assessment—a complete roundness of parts and clarity of the whole, but at the same time concealing an internal dynamic and purposefulness.

### Conclusion

A discussion of Glinka’s operatic forms has shown that in this area, as in many others, his thinking was closely linked to the implementation of Western European experience. The feeling of proportionality also arises when the length of the parts of the form is different, and symmetry is created by their combination. The exchange of musical ideas was not the exception, but rather the rule—not only in the 18th century, but also in Glinka’s time. Discussions about the “plagiarism” of George Frideric Handel and Christoph Willibald Gluck, which were carried on in musicology in the first half of the last century, were replaced at the end of the century by a total search for intertextual connections, including in the music of Romantic composers. However, it would be completely wrong to ignore the issue of parallels and intersections. Numerous examples of commonality that emerge when comparing Glinka’s musical forms with German and Italian theory and practice are proof of this.

<sup>39</sup> Rimsky-Korsakov, N. A. (1963). Teoriya i praktika [i] Obyazatel’naya teoriya muzyki v russkoj konservatorii [Theory and Practice [and] Compulsory Music Theory in the Russian Conservatory]. In Rimsky-Korsakov N. A. *Polnoe sobranie sochinenij. Literaturnye proizvedeniya i perepiska* [Complete Works. Literary Works and Correspondence]. (Vol. 2, pp. 188–212). USSR Acad. Sci. Publ., p. 189.

Glinka's genius consisted primarily in the fact that his compositional solutions were new for Russian music. Drawing on rich traditions, he placed Russian opera on a par with European opera for the first time. In his works, the form received an infusion of Western European professionalism, giving impetus to the development of Russian musical theatre in the 19th century, not on the sidelines, but in line with pan-European processes. But in Glinka's operas, the European musical theatre received the first example of a grand opera created outside the borders of the main operatic metropolises, an opera in which the national plot, imagery and intonation basis were combined with complex and developed principles of musical composition.

The reliance on the Italian operatic tradition and the assimilation of German compositional theory, about which scholars of the past and present have spoken at length and in varying tones, particularly acutely highlight the problem of the national and the international in Glinka's music—and, more generally, in 19th-century Russian opera. Strictly speaking, the statuses of "the first Russian classic" and "national genius", with which Glinka was accorded and which are difficult to dispute, contradict each other to some extent, since "classic" presupposes a certain universality, syntheticity, a fusion of various stylistic and linguistic qualities into a coherent whole, while "national" is inseparable from the specific. Evidently, Glinka managed to become a national opera classic due to the exceptionally organic approach according to which he was able to fit together very diverse sources. And "Russian" is only one of a series, albeit a very important component of his style. The characteristic features of his music often escape the European ear, since it is pan-European vocabulary and compositional logic that come to the fore. On the contrary, the Russian ear, without special tuning, often finds it difficult to catch references to German, Italian, and French operatic experiences. This subtlety in turn creates extra scope for new analytical interpretations of Glinka's rich legacy.

### References

1. Tsuker, A. M. (2024). Glinka in the Twenty-First Century Musicology. *South-Russian Musical Anthology*, (2), 10–20. (In Russ.). <https://doi.org/10.52469/20764766.2024.02.10>
2. Degtyareva, N. I., & Sorokina, E. G. (Eds.). (2006). *M. I. Glinka. K 200-letiyu so dnya rozhdeniya: Materialy mezhdunarodnykh nauchnykh konferentsii* [Mikhail Glinka. Towards the 200th Anniversary of the Birth: Materials of the International Scholarly Conferences] (Vols. 1–2). Moscow State Tchaikovsky Conservatory. (In Russ.).
3. Pilipenko, N. V. (2024). *Mio ben ricordati* by Franz Schubert and Mikhail Glinka: Concerning the Problem of “the Personal” and “the Alien.” *Russian Musicology*, (3), 19–30. <https://doi.org/10.56620/RM.2024.3.019-030>
4. Filippov, A. A. (2024). Italian Traditions in M. I. Glinka’s Operas. *Theory and History of Art*, (3/4), 229–247. (In Russ.).
5. Lashchenko, S. K. (2024). Mirrors of Memory: Liudmila Shestakova and Mikhail Glinka. Second Article. *Problemy muzykal’noi nauki / Music Scholarship*, (1), 8–23. (In Russ.). <https://doi.org/10.56620/2782-3598.2024.1.008-023>
6. Korobova, A. G. (2024). *A Life for the Tsar* vs *Les Huguenots*: European Opera in Search of New Forms (On the 220th Anniversary of the Birth of M. I. Glinka). *Scholarly Papers of Gnesin Russian Academy of Music*, (3), 42–64. (In Russ.). <https://doi.org/10.56620/2227-9997-2024-3-42-64>
7. Savintseva, V. A. (2006). The Teachings of Siegfried Dehn and Glinka. What is the Secret behind the “Learned German’s” Methods? In N. I. Degtyareva, & E. G. Sorokina (Eds.), *M. I. Glinka. K 200-letiyu so dnya rozhdeniya: Materialy mezhdunarodnykh nauchnykh konferentsii* [Mikhail Glinka. Towards the 200th Anniversary of the Birth: Materials of the International Scholarly Conferences] (Vol. 1, pp. 55–63). Moscow State Tchaikovsky Conservatory. (In Russ.).
8. Menke, J. (2018). Deutsche Partimento-Rezeption im 19. Jahrhundert, dargestellt am Beispiel von Siegfried Dehn und Richard Wagner. *Musiktheorie*, 33(1), 49–61. <https://irf.fhnw.ch/handle/11654/31474>
9. Chernova, T. Yu. (2025). On Vocal Form Design in the Music of M. I. Glinka, or in What Form Was the Romance “I Remember a Wonderful Moment” Written? *The Music Theory Society’s Journal*, (3), 20–41. (In Russ.). <https://doi.org/10.26176/otmroo.2025.51.3.003>

10. Petrushanskaya, E. M. (2009). *Mikhail Glinka i Italiya: zagadki zhizni i tvorchestva* [Mikhail Glinka and Italy: The Enigmas of his Life and Work]. Klassika-XXI. (In Russ.).
11. Helmers, R. (2014). *A Life for the Tsar* and Bel Canto Opera. In Helmers, R. *Not Russian Enough? Nationalism and Cosmopolitanism in Nineteenth-Century Russian Opera* (pp. 20–49). Boydell & Brewer. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781580468732-005>
12. Pilipenko, N. V. (2022). The Forms in Giovanni Simone Mayr's Opera Arias: At the Turn of Classical and Romantic Eras. *Contemporary Musicology*, (4), 42–63. (In Russ.). <https://doi.org/10.56620/2587-9731-2022-4-042-063>
13. Balthazar, S. L. (2004). The Forms of Set Pieces. In S. L. Balthazar (Ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Verdi* (pp. 47–68). Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CCOL9780521632287.005>
14. Kerman, J. (1982). Lyric Form and Flexibility in *Simon Boccanegra*. *Studi Verdiani*, 1, 47–62.
15. Selitsky, A. Ya. (2007). Byl li Glinka motsartiantsem? (Zametki k probleme) [Was Glinka a Mozartian? (Notes on the Problem)]. In A. M. Tsuker (Ed.), *Motsart i motsartianstvo* [Mozart and Mozartianism] (pp. 180–202). Kompozitor Publ. House

### Список литературы

1. Цукер А. М. Глинка в музыковедении XXI века // Южно-Российский музыкальный альманах. 2024. № 2. С. 10–20. [https://doi.org/10.52469/20764766\\_2024\\_02\\_10](https://doi.org/10.52469/20764766_2024_02_10)
2. М. И. Глинка. К 200-летию со дня рождения: материалы международных научных конференций: в 2 т. / отв. ред. Н. И. Дегтярева, Е. Г. Сорокина. М.: Московская государственная консерватория им. П. И. Чайковского, 2006. Т. 1, 2.
3. Pilipenko N. V. *Mio ben ricordati* by Franz Schubert and Mikhail Glinka: Concerning the Problem of “the Personal” and “the Alien”. *Russian Musicology*. 2024. No. 3, pp. 19–30. <https://doi.org/10.56620/RM.2024.3.019-030>
4. Филиппов А. А. Итальянские традиции в операх М. И. Глинки // Теория и история искусства. 2024. № 3/4. С. 229–247.

5. Лашенко С. К. Зеркала памяти: Людмила Шестакова и Михаил Глинка. Статья вторая // Проблемы музыкальной науки / Music Scholarship. 2024. № 1. С. 8–23.

<https://doi.org/10.56620/2782-3598.2024.1.008-023>

6. Коробова А. Г. «Жизнь за царя» vs «Гугеноты»: европейская опера в поисках новых форм (к 220-летию М. И. Глинки) // Ученые записки Российской академии музыки имени Гнесиных. 2024. № 3. С. 42–64.  
<https://doi.org/10.56620/2227-9997-2024-3-42-64>

7. Савинцева В. А. Учебные занятия Зигфрида Дена и Глинки. В чем секрет методы «ученого немца»? // М. И. Глинка. К 200-летию со дня рождения: материалы международных научных конференций: в 2 т. / отв. ред. Н. И. Дегтярева, Е. Г. Сорокина. М.: Московская государственная консерватория им. П. И. Чайковского, 2006. Т. 1. С. 55–63.

8. Menke J. Deutsche Partimento-Rezeption im 19. Jahrhundert, dargestellt am Beispiel von Siegfried Dehn und Richard Wagner // Musiktheorie. 2018. Bd. 33, Nr. 1. S. 49–61.

<https://irf.fhnw.ch/handle/11654/31474>

9. Чернова Т. Ю. О вокальном формообразовании в музыке М. И. Глинки, или В какой форме написан роман «Я помню чудное мгновенье»? // Журнал Общества теории музыки. 2025. № 3(51). С. 20–41. <https://doi.org/10.26176/otmroo.2025.51.3.003>

10. Петрушанская Е. М. Михаил Глинка и Италия: Загадки жизни и творчества. М.: Классика-XXI, 2009.

11. Helmers R. *A Life for the Tsar* and Bel Canto Opera // Helmers R. Not Russian Enough? Nationalism and Cosmopolitanism in Nineteenth-Century Russian Opera. New York: University of Rochester Press, 2014. P. 20–49.  
<https://doi.org/10.1515/9781580468732-005>

12. Пилипенко Н. В. Формообразование в ариях Иоганна Симона Майра: на рубеже классической и романтической эпох // Современные проблемы музыковедения. 2022. № 4. С. 42–63.  
<https://doi.org/10.56620/2587-9731-2022-4-042-063>

13. Balthasar S. L. The Forms of Set Pieces // The Cambridge Companion to Verdi / ed. by Scott L. Balthazar. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004. P. 47–68. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CCOL9780521632287.005>

14. Kerman J. Lyric Form and Flexibility in *Simon Boccanegra* // Studi Verdiani. 1982. № 1. P. 47–62.

15. Селицкий А. Я. Был ли Глинка моцартианцем? (Заметки к проблеме) // Моцарт и моцартианство. М.: Композитор, 2007. С. 180–202.

Information about the author:

**Irina P. Susidko**—Dr. Sci. (Arts), Full Professor, Head of the Analytical Musicology Department, Head of the Scientific and Creative Center for the Musical Theatre Studies, Gnesin Russian Academy of Music; Leading Researcher, Western Classical Art Department, State Institute for Art Studies.

Сведения об авторе:

**Сусидко И. П.**—доктор искусствоведения, профессор, заведующая кафедрой аналитического музыковедения, руководитель Научно-творческого центра по изучению проблем музыкального театра, Российская академия музыки имени Гнесиных; ведущий научный сотрудник сектора классического искусства Запада, Государственный институт искусствознания.

The article was submitted 08.10.2025;  
approved after reviewing 21.11.2025;  
accepted for publication 05.12.2025.

Статья поступила в редакцию 08.10.2025;  
одобрена после рецензирования 21.11.2025;  
принята к публикации 05.12.2025.