

2021

Constants And Changes In Russian Music Education

Laurence Lepherd

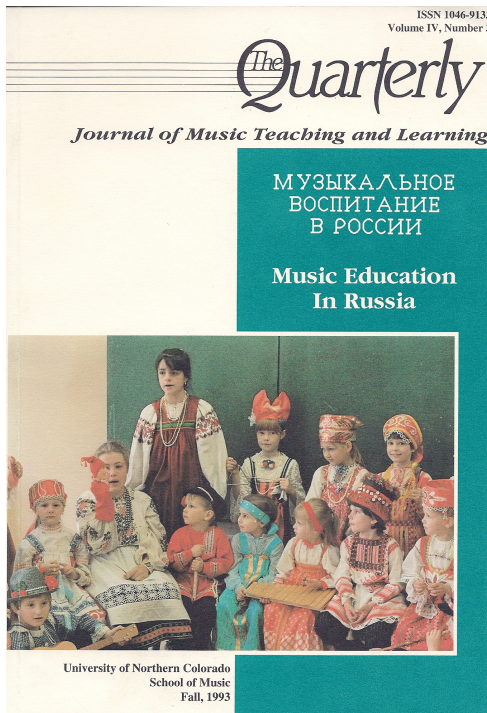
University of Southern Queensland

Follow this and additional works at: <https://opencommons.uconn.edu/vrme>

Recommended Citation

Lepherd, Laurence (2021) "Constants And Changes In Russian Music Education," *Visions of Research in Music Education*: Vol. 16 , Article 32.

Available at: <https://opencommons.uconn.edu/vrme/vol16/iss4/32>



Title: Constants and Changes in Russian Music Education

Author(s): Laurence Lepherd

Source: Lepherd, L. (1993, Fall). Constants and changes in Russian music education. *The Quarterly*, 4(3), pp. 59-63. (Reprinted with permission in *Visions of Research in Music Education*, 16(4), Autumn, 2010). Retrieved from <http://www-usr.rider.edu/~vrme/>

It is with pleasure that we inaugurate the reprint of the entire seven volumes of The Quarterly Journal of Music Teaching and Learning. The journal began in 1990 as The Quarterly. In 1992, with volume 3, the name changed to The Quarterly Journal of Music Teaching and Learning and continued until 1997. The journal contained articles on issues that were timely when they appeared and are now important for their historical relevance. For many authors, it was their first major publication. Visions of Research in Music Education will publish facsimiles of each issue as it originally appeared. Each article will be a separate pdf file. Jason D. Vodicka has accepted my invitation to serve as guest editor for the reprint project and will compose a new editorial to introduce each volume. Chad Keilman is the production manager. I express deepest thanks to Richard Colwell for granting VRME permission to re-publish The Quarterly in online format. He has graciously prepared an introduction to the reprint series.

Constants And Changes In Russian Music Education

By Laurence Lepherd

University of Southern Queensland

One of the most important constants of Russian music education is the high standard of cultural excellence, evident for centuries in traditional folk music, and in art music since before the beginning of the century. It is important to recognise these accomplishments when examining the current state of music education in that country. Notwithstanding the criticisms that might be leveled at the more recent repressive communist policies, much of the music of Shostakovich and Kabalevsky, as examples, were created during that period. Rostropovich flourished during this time, and high standards of music have continued to be achieved in relative international isolation. The question that will never be answered is whether, with more liberal policies, the artistic standards would have been higher. Despite the acknowledged difficulties of the last 80 years, the love and high standards of Russian music, both in its folk and European forms, have continued.

These are the constants. As will be discussed, the changes that have occurred since the Russian republics' declaration of independence in 1990 have had both positive and negative aspects for music education.

Laurence Lepherd is Associate Professor and Associate Dean in the Faculty of Arts, the University of Southern Queensland, Australia.

[D]ecision making ... occurs within the framework of traditions of key institutions which have been operating for decades and are proud of their achievements ... Radical changes in policy are not, therefore, readily entertained.

Context

The 15 republics that formed the Soviet Union asserted their independence during 1990. Russia itself consists of 16 republics with a central government in Moscow and has a considerable ethnic mix throughout. Each ethnic group has its own folklore which exists alongside European art traditions. The principal change in context has been the abandonment of communist ideals and greater freedom of expression. This was heralded before 1990 in the term *glasnost*, or openness; the term is no longer used because the society is now "open."

The other term prevalent before 1990 was *perestroika*, or restructuring. This was loosely applied to the fabric of society and broadly encouraged the concepts of democracy and the shift of educational and societal emphasis to the development of the individual. This term also is no longer used. In one sense, restructuring took place, although some call it disintegration. Others saw it as successful—democracy now exists, in that there is greater opportunity for "democratisation" and "humanisation," the latter term referring to the development of the whole, individual personality. Some saw *perestroika* as a slogan—one of the many that have emerged and disappeared at various times in recent history. Others have been grateful that a

There appears to be common agreement that all children should receive a musical education, but the debate centres around whether the emphasis should be on developing love and appreciation for music, or on more musical development in the form of skills and knowledge of theory. It is possible that as a reaction to the formally controlled, central fixing of aims and objectives, now there is almost an overreaction resulting in polarised positions.

more specific form of *perestroika* that may have had adverse affects on music did not eventuate. They argue that the techniques and pedagogy of musical training have been constants over decades—there was no need to restructure them.

Greater freedom has also meant increased emphasis on international exchange programs, for previously music educators felt isolated. The advent of *glasnost* translated into a hunger among Soviet artists for international exchange—both to demonstrate with pride their own artistic achievements, and to become more aware of current international trends. This potential is now being realised with a greater loosening and facility for exchange, because there are fewer political barriers. Moreover, increasing freedom of religious worship continues to encourage a resurgence in choral music. The constants of musical traditions will continue and be stimulated by change, but there are some problems.

Aims of Education

The central goal of Russian education, once stated as the desire to educate citizens for a socialist and communist society, has become a loosely ascribed commitment to the development of individuals who will contribute to society. The emphasis has shifted to the individual, as distinct from the group.

Two observations can be made about the effect of this change on music education. In the development of musicians of the highest calibre, many Russian music educators believe that they have been emphasizing “humanization” for decades, despite officially expressed governmental aims. Specialisation in high quality music instruction, performance, and composition has always nurtured individual creativity and expression. On the other hand, concerning the education for the

children who are not considered to be highly talented and who are enrolled in the general schools, there is no consensus about the goals of music education. Since there is now greater freedom to develop educational goals in a more open society, the Ministry of Education indicates that all subject areas should develop sets of goals, objectives, and curricula. In music, there is no such set as yet, nor is there a formal mechanism in place for its development.

Debate about music education is carried on through various seminars and publications. There appears to be common agreement that all children should receive a musical education, but the debate centres around whether the emphasis should be on developing love and appreciation for music, or on more musical development in the form of skills and knowledge of theory. It is possible that as a reaction to the formally controlled, central fixing of aims and objectives, now there is almost an overreaction resulting in polarised positions. More critical Russian colleagues refer to a state of chaos, although Rust (1992) draws attention to the existence in the Russian Ministry of Education of a broad educational framework that has “a clear set of conceptual goals and orientations” (p. 1). The common element that music education colleagues are enjoying is the freedom to express their views and develop their interests.

One of the most positive aspects of these recent changes is a resurgence of traditional Russian music. Fewer restrictions on some traditional forms of Russian ethnic expression have enabled folk music to again become an important part of the unstated aims of music education. Teachers are using their new freedoms to begin to promote more vigorously Russian traditional music, with the aim

of reinforcing the great cultural traditions. The support of organisations such as the Russian House of Folk Art in providing seminars, workshops, and resources for teachers in special music and general schools (as well as for amateur musicians) is doing much to assist this resurgence.

Administration and Finance

With the disintegration of the Soviet Union, a layer of the top communist hierarchy affecting the administration of music has been abolished. With this abolition and with freedom of expression has come the greater ability of individual organisational units to control their own direction. Previously, the central government dictated policy and financial management. Now, in the music colleges, special schools, and conservatories each individual institution can determine its own policies, curricula, and financial management while remaining accountable to the state. Such management is the responsibility of each institution's governing council that includes staff and student representatives. This decision making, however, occurs within the framework of traditions of key institutions which have been operating for decades and are proud of their achievements—the constants of their art. Radical changes in policy are not, therefore, readily entertained.

It is in the financial sphere that one now finds the greatest change in Russian music education, and change that is the most negative. Economic difficulties existing before 1991 have been exacerbated, resulting in less government funding for music education. While the more established institutions, designated as components of the Russian national heritage, have been somewhat protected from financial cutbacks, other factors such as inflation severely affect all of music education. Consequently, these institutions have increased their fund-raising efforts by focusing on such sources as alumni, direct grants, foundations established to receive gifts from sources such as graduates residing and performing outside Russia, sponsorships by businesses such as the Russian airline Aeroflot and car manufacturers, and increasing the enrollment of international students, particularly those from Europe and East Asia. The lack of tax incen-

tives to sponsors, however, inhibits contributions. One of the difficulties associated with financial stringency is the deterioration of buildings and musical instruments. Thus far, staffing levels seem unaffected.

Formerly fully funded by the state or district councils, special music schools now receive virtually no government funding. This is a critical problem. With little music education available in the general schools, the special interest schools have played a vital role in providing music instruction for young musicians, the most talented of whom apply to conservatory schools and colleges. Parents must now pay the cost of tuition at the district special interest schools. As inflation erodes the parents' ability to subsist, declining enrollments threaten the future of the special music schools.

Coupled with these factors is also the problem of inflation in relation to the cost of instruments. Some institutions are renting instruments to students. Because fewer parents can now afford to purchase pianos, however, doubt is cast on the future development of piano instruction.

Structure and Organisation

The organisational structure of the school system has not seen major changes (see Figure 1). Children still begin school at the age of 6 and progress through the general school, where there is little music. They can choose to have parallel music instruction in district special music schools (where they obtain music instruction for about 4-8 hours per week) or, if sufficiently talented, they can be admitted to conservatory music schools. Very successful music students ultimately progress to the *uchilisches* (colleges) and thence to conservatories. Admission requirements are stringent, and examinations are a major factor in maintaining enrollment status.

One significant change concerns the kind of students admitted to some of the more advanced institutions. Previously, as these Russian institutions were Soviet funded, a designated number of places was reserved for talented musicians from other Soviet Republics. Similarly, some places were reserved for particular kinds of Soviet citizens, such as the children of farmers. Consequently, in a few instances the more talented students were

Teacher education for general schools increasingly reflects the diverse nature of the curriculum. Three principles of teacher education are articulated: First, music teachers must be musicians. Second, they must be interested in pedagogy, Third, they must have a love for children.

not able to gain entry into the conservatories.

The basis for admission has now changed so that only the most talented students are accepted. Music students native to the former republics are still accepted, generally at no cost to those republics. Also in terms of admission, the institutions are not influenced by the temptation to accept fee-paying students unless these students are also exceptionally talented. Fees charged for international students are very low, particularly by some American, British, and Australian standards. Russian colleagues are adamant that they are more interested in maintaining the highest musical standards than in obtaining the highest funding.

Russian music educators draw attention to the unique and constant nature of student progress within music education. Talented children are identified at an early age and receive a broad education in general schools. At the same time, district music schools provide these children specialised music education through the primary and secondary levels. Then these students may enter college or a conservatory. No other subject in Russian education enjoys this specialised education.

Curriculum

There have been major changes in the general curriculum that all music students took before 1991. At the specialised institutions, students formerly studied some sciences, had mandatory classes in Marxism and Leninism, and some military instruction. As these institutions began to determine their own curricula, science and political studies were abandoned and replaced by a greater emphasis on the humanities, including world and Russian history, philosophy, and literature. Military instruction has been replaced by physical education. The reduction in science and communism studies has often resulted in an increase in music studies, including additional music history, harmony,

solfege, and ensemble studies. There have been some changes to the development of traditional folk music. The curricula of special schools is now more diverse, and more folk-music students are becoming involved in research and categorisation of folk musics.

The diversity of goals for music education in general schools is now being encouraged. Before 1991, Kabalevsky's system was all but compulsory in the general schools. Often described as promoting the love and appreciation of music, the system was developed by Kabalevsky to try to fill the gap in music learning that existed for students who did not attend the district special interest schools. The Kabalevsky system has been criticised as being too passive and emphasising appreciation rather than promoting music making, although this may have been a reflection of the implementation rather than Kabalevsky's concept. Documentation associated with the system (Kabalevsky, 1988, p. 51, and RSFSR, 1988) demonstrates clearly that singing is a vital element. The current status is that the system is being adapted and developed but is receiving far less support.

Initially, the system received impetus by virtue of Kabalevsky's authority as a musician and composer, President of the Soviet Union of Composers, and member of the Supreme Soviet and the Academy of Pedagogical Sciences. With his death and the lack of insistence on the maintenance of his system through more liberal curriculum principles, and the lack of any individual colleague strongly carrying on his work, the system is being less strictly promoted. The journal he initiated, *Music in Schools* (now known as *Art at School*), continues to assist in the development of music education, and not the Kabalevsky system only. The aims associated with traditional music are also translated into the curriculum, together with elements of the approaches developed by Orff and Kodály.

One advantage of the broadening of the curriculum is the greater likelihood of the curriculum being implemented. With a less-than-wholehearted commitment to the implementation of the Kabalevsky system in the first place, and lack of adequate teacher education to support his system, outstanding results on a wide scale were unlikely. Current growth in the study of traditional folk music in schools, led by enthusiastic and committed teachers and given appropriate regional variations, is more likely to succeed. Our Russian colleagues are likely to develop a diverse general school curriculum over the next few years.

Teacher Education

There is little change in teacher education for music students wishing to teach in the specialised music schools and colleges. Formal pedagogy associated with individual instrumental teaching and folk music in special schools mostly takes place in the Russian Academy (Gnesin's Institute) where the music training also includes psychology and teaching principles. Graduates are generally appointed to district special interest schools. How long this will continue remains to be evaluated. Because students of these schools must now pay fees, enrollment may soon fall drastically, and these teaching positions will no longer be available.

Teacher education for general schools increasingly reflects the diverse nature of the curriculum. Three principles of teacher education are articulated: First, music teachers must be musicians. Second, they must be interested in pedagogy. Third, they must have a love for children. Pedagogical courses include elements of Kodály, Orff, and Kabalevsky, in an endeavour to train students in a wide variety of methodologies from which they can select the most effective approaches. The freedom associated with the aims and curriculum content is reflected in teacher education.

Conclusion

High standards of European-centred music have remained constant throughout all aspects of specialised Russian music education. The constant of unique folk music now receives greater emphasis. Changing degrees of freedom should continue to enhance music teaching and learning, but the severe eco-

nomie problems may reduce the number of students in music and subsequently the standards. In general education there are few constants. Changes are taking place in aims, objectives, curricula and teacher education. It is important that Russian music educators develop some consensus regarding the goals and objective of music education, lest more purposeful and definitive educational interests crowd out music education in the general education schools.

Sources

Most of the information contained in this article was obtained through discussion with key personnel in music education. Among the many colleagues who have contributed observations the author would like to sincerely thank those listed below. Specific comments cannot be attributed to them individually, and they may or may not agree with all the views expressed by the author or their colleagues.

Vladimir Sukhanov, Deputy Rector for Foreign

Relations, Moscow Conservatory

Larisa Artinova, Director, and Alexandre Lagutin, Vice-Principal, Moscow Conservatory Musical College

Anatoly Ryabov, Deputy Director, Moscow Conservatory Music School

Sergey Kolobcov, Rector, Russian Academy of Music (Gnesin's Music Institute)

Mikhail Vorogeev, Director, and Avia Kabakchieva, Deputy Director, Gnesin's School and College

Oleg Galakhov, Deputy Chair, Russian Composers Union

Gennady Pozhidayev, Editor-in-Chief, *Art at School*

The Russian House of Folk Art

The author would also like to thank Professor Vadim P. Dyem, the Deputy Minister of Culture for Russia, for sponsoring and facilitating his recent visit. The work of translator Yana Yakhnina is also appreciated.

References

- Kabalevsky, D. (1988) The basic principles and methods of the music curriculum for the general school. *Soviet Education*, 30, pp. 1, 29-58.
- RSFSR Ministry of Education. (1988) The music curriculum from grade one of the fourth year of elementary school. *Soviet Education*, 30, pp. 1, 94-101.
- Rust, V. D. (1992) Nonequilibrium theory: Implications for educational systems undergoing radical change in eastern Europe. *Comparative and International Education Society Conference Proceedings*, March, pp. 1-2.