

PREFACE TO PIOTR ILLYICH TCHAIKOVSKY, *CONCISE MANUAL OF HARMONY*,  
*INTENDED FOR THE READING OF SPIRITUAL MUSIC IN RUSSIA* (1874)

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“Tchaikovsky wrote a harmony book?” That was my first question after hearing of such an occurrence. “Tchaikovsky wrote a harmony book? I didn’t know that.” That was the reply from virtually all of the musicians I approached, including recent graduates from the Moscow and St. Petersburg Conservatories. It seems a bit bizarre that such an important event has, for the most part, been forgotten. We know Piotr Illyich Tchaikovsky as a great composer, as a pioneer of Russian music who wrote operas, concert overtures and great symphonies, but we generally overlook the fact that this musician was also a conservatory professor for twelve years and created the first Russian textbook on harmony. As it turns out, Tchaikovsky actually wrote two textbooks on harmony. The first one, entitled *Guide to the Practical Study of Harmony*, was completed in 1871.<sup>1</sup> The second book, *Concise Manual of Harmony, Intended for the Reading of Spiritual Music in Russia*, was written in 1874.<sup>2</sup> This second book has not been translated into English until now; I provide a translation of the entire book in the pages that follow.

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<sup>1</sup> Piotr Illyich Tchaikovsky, *Rukovodstvo k Prakticheskomu Izucheniyu Garmoniy* [Guide to the Practical Study of Harmony], in *Polnoye Sobraniye Sochineniy: Literaturniye Proizvedeniya I Perepiska* [Complete Works: Literary Works and Correspondence], ed. B. V. Asafiev, Vol. iiiia (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe Muzikalnoye Izdatelstvo, 1953–81), 3–163; German trans. by Paul Juon (Leipzig, 1876 and 1881); English trans. by Emil Krall and James Leibling (1970). It was not translated directly from Russian into English.

<sup>2</sup> Piotr Illyich Tchaikovsky, *Kratkiy Uchebnyk Garmoniy, Prispособlenniy k Chteniyu Dukhovno-Muzikal’nikh Sochineniy v Rossiy* [Concise Manual of Harmony, Intended for the Reading of Spiritual Music in Russia], in *Polnoye Sobraniye Sochineniy: Literaturniye Proizvedeniya I Perepiska* [Complete Works:

A highly contradictory situation was created in Russia in the middle of the nineteenth century. In a country with a very rich and old musical tradition, society did not treat music or musicians seriously. One could find operas, theaters, concert halls, and virtuoso musicians, but all of these were considered and looked upon as venues or purveyors of tricks and entertainment. Those from noble, aristocratic families were free to practice music, but could never make it a career or a serious occupation. When Anton Rubenstein formed the St. Petersburg Conservatory in 1862, he opened a new path to musicians, for they were able to train professionally and receive a new status—that of professional musician.<sup>3</sup>

Tchaikovsky, a graduate of the Conservatory, was one of the first musicians in Russia to acquire a serious, professional musical education and call himself a ‘musician’. Mikhail Glinka, although respected as a composer, never achieved such status and was never treated seriously in Russia. Similarly, the members of the “Mighty Five,” while being active composers, all had other occupations, relegating music to the status of a hobby.<sup>4</sup>

Anton Rubenstein’s brother, Nikolay, opened a second conservatory in Moscow in 1866. Nikolay Rubenstein asked his brother to find him a graduate of the St. Petersburg Conservatory to teach music theory and harmony. Piotr Tchaikovsky, after an interview, was offered the position. Leaving his jurisprudence job, Tchaikovsky did not have to be ashamed; he could proudly say that he was simply exchanging one career for another, and becoming a professor at a conservatory.<sup>5</sup>

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Literary Works and Correspondence], ed. B. V. Asafiev, Vol. iiiia (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe Muzikalnoye Izdatelstvo, 1953–81), 164–217. This manual was never translated.

<sup>3</sup> David Brown, *Tchaikovsky: The Early Years 1840–1874* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1978), 61–65.

<sup>4</sup> Brown, *Tchaikovsky: The Early Years*, 18.

<sup>5</sup> This is discussed in Brown, *Tchaikovsky: The Early Years*, 64–65.

Nikolay Rubenstein wanted to provide his students with an all-encompassing musical education and required them to take many classes outside their main instrument. Many students considered such 'extra' subjects as 'second rate' and not important. Harmony and theory were among the 'boring' subjects they were required to take. In addition, the new students were not adequately prepared for the complicated study of harmony by their prior education. Mariya Gurye, a former student of Tchaikovsky, writes: "We were truly not at all prepared for his course, since the course in elementary theory that we had with Nikolay Kashkin in our first year was quite episodic, with no system, textbook, or program, and therefore did not provide us with the necessary (solid) basis for the course in harmony."<sup>6</sup>

After some time teaching, Tchaikovsky found himself unhappy with his teaching job. In a letter to his brother Anatoly, he complained about the annoyance of the Conservatory and the exhaustion of the teaching.<sup>7</sup> In another letter to his brother he writes: "Due to being sick of my lessons, due to my fatigue and distress of them, I would be happy in any type of a change."<sup>8</sup> In a letter to his friend Ivan Klimenko, Tchaikovsky writes: "The Conservatory has annoyed me until nausea: I am more and more assured that I am not fit for the teaching of music theory."<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, he was a very strict professor who approached his responsibilities with great seriousness. He demanded from his students the thorough realization of exercises, the acquisition of the proper rules of harmony, the avoidance of mistakes (such as parallel fifths and octaves),

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<sup>6</sup> Alexander Poznansky, *Tchaikovsky Through Other's Eyes*, with translations from Russian by Ralph C. Burr, Jr. & Robert Bird (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1999), 60.

<sup>7</sup> Letter to Anatoly Tchaikovsky, October 7, 1869, included in Modest Tchaikovsky, *Zhizn' Petra Illiycha Tchaikovskogo: Geniy v Iskusstve* [Life of Piotr Illyich Tchaikovsky: A Genius in the Arts], Vol. I (1840–1877) (Moscow: Algorithm, 1997), 311.

<sup>8</sup> Letter to Anatoly on December 2, 1871. *Ibid.*, 347.

<sup>9</sup> Letter to Ivan Klimenko on May 1, 1870. *Ibid.*, 319.

the ability to compose modulations and other important skills. Recalling the music theory class she took with Tchaikovsky, Mariya Gurye writes:

The subject he taught, the theory of harmony, was not especially interesting for us (perhaps due to his teaching method) and was only of secondary importance in the Conservatory at that time. But then, Tchaikovsky himself did not exhibit any great interest in his subject and in our success at it (it is well known that he generally saw teaching as a burden and always dreamed of freeing himself from it). With regard to our studies he was extremely demanding and became terribly annoyed at our evident inability to grasp harmonic theory in the way he understood it, demanding not only that we learn the rules by heart and fulfill the assignments, but also expecting a display of musical skill in our written exercises, interesting modulations at the piano, as well as rapid transcription from his dictation, and so forth... We were especially afraid of Tchaikovsky's caustic and at times rather harsh remarks when, sitting at the piano, we had, at his indication, to modulate boldly, swiftly, and without resorting to parallel fifths or octaves.<sup>10</sup>

Alexander Litvinov, another student of Tchaikovsky remembers: "[We] would play our exercises; stopping for a second, he would circle the parallel fifths and octaves with a rapid and abrupt movement, then continue on with the playing."<sup>11</sup> Another student, Rostislav Genika, when recalling his lessons with Tchaikovsky, writes:

Tchaikovsky's hours of teaching theory passed for him in gloomy file. He was clearly bored, barely able to stifle his yawns... Reluctantly he would listen to students drearily banging out sequences and modulations on the dreadful-sounding piano, and patiently mark forbidden fifths and octaves with red pencil. When I entered Tchaikovsky's class his textbook on harmony had not yet been published; it appeared in Jurgenson's catalog the following year. Tchaikovsky, pacing about the classroom, would dictate to us slowly and very distinctly, and we would take notes. He spent the entire first semester acquainting us with the formation and relationship of different harmonies, explaining suspensions and anticipations, and making us solve problems in thoroughbass. Only in the second semester did he move on to melodic harmonization.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Poznansky, *Tchaikovsky*, 60.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

Theoretical literature was very sparse in Russia. David Brown writes that “not only had there never before been such classes [music theory] in Russia; there was not even a textbook on harmony in Russian (it would be Tchaikovsky himself who, in 1871, would fill this gap).”<sup>13</sup> Tchaikovsky’s *Guide to the Practical Study of Harmony* became the first textbook on harmony written by a classically trained Russian author. It was published by P. I. Jurgenson in 1872, and was then published four more times: in 1876 and 1881, in Leipzig, and in 1885 and 1891, in Moscow. The German version, translated by P. Juon, was then translated into English by Emil Krall and James Liebling and published in the United States by Summit Publishing Company in Canoga Park, California in 1971. There is no translation of the textbook directly from Russian into English.

Tchaikovsky’s textbook became an instant success and was adopted immediately in Russia. As a testament to its success, eight editions of the guide came out from 1872 to 1909. In 1890, Anton Arensky completed his *Collection of Exercises (1000)* to go with Tchaikovsky’s *Guide to the Practical Study of Harmony*, which greatly delighted Tchaikovsky. In a letter to his publisher Piotr Jurgenson on July 2, 1890, Tchaikovsky writes: “Arensky visited me yesterday, showing me his exercise book. It is finely comprised and fits my guide. I advise you to purchase it.”<sup>14</sup> After the *Guide to the Practical Study of Harmony*, many other music theory textbooks followed. Rimsky-Korsakov, after using Tchaikovsky’s book for a few years in his own teaching, wrote his own *Textbook of Harmony* in 1884.<sup>15</sup> Weinstock notes Tchaikovsky’s

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<sup>13</sup> David Brown, *Tchaikovsky: The Man and His Music* (New York: Pegasus Books, 2007), 15.

<sup>14</sup> Modest Tchaikovsky, *Zhizn' Petra Illiycha Tchaikovskogo: Geniy v Iskusstve* [Life of Piotr Illyich Tchaikovsky: A Genius in the Arts], Vol. III (1885-1893) (Moscow: Algorithm, 1997), 339.

<sup>15</sup> Nikolay Rimsky-Korsakov, *Uchebnik garmonii* [Textbook of Harmony], in *Polnoye sobraniye sochineniy: literaturniye proizvedeniya i perepiska* [Complete Edition of Compositions: Literary Works and Correspondence] (Moscow, 1955–), iv, ed. V.V. Protopopov (Moscow, 1960), 7–387. See Tchaikovsky’s letter to Rimsky-Korsakov

influence on Rimsky-Korsakov, declaring that “it was this text that Rimsky-Korsakov—who had become a composer largely by intuition—seized upon three or four years later and used to start his transformation into a theorist and academician.”<sup>16</sup> Sergey Taneev (1856–1915) wrote his *Invertible Counterpoint in the Strict Style* in 1909.<sup>17</sup> Many other theory books followed placing Russian music theory guides in the first tier of international musicology.

The second textbook Tchaikovsky wrote was completed at the request of the Russian Orthodox Church Synod, which asked for a textbook to aid in the process of learning liturgical choral writing.<sup>18</sup> Tchaikovsky volunteered for the task and completed the *Concise Manual of Harmony, Intended for the Reading of Spiritual Music in Russia* in 1874. This textbook was published only once by Jurgenson in 1875.<sup>19</sup> It was specifically intended for the reading of spiritual musical compositions and to ease the burden of church choral conductors learning their craft. One of the techniques Tchaikovsky incorporated into the *Concise Manual of Harmony* was his use of real musical examples to illustrate the main points. This method became commonplace in the textbooks that followed. One of the composers whose music is frequently quoted in the guide is Dmitry Bortnyansky. Although his music seems to illustrate the focal points Tchaikovsky makes in the book, he does not seem to have been much impressed with Bortnyansky's works, even though he had earlier edited ten volumes of his compositions.<sup>20</sup> Herbert Weinstock writes: “Bortnyansky became director of the imperial chapel. He was a prolific composer whose pretty and slavishly Italianate religious music was highly regarded. His

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on April 6, 1885 and Rimsky-Korsakov's letter to Tchaikovsky on April 15, 1885, where the two composers discuss Rimsky-Korsakov's textbook, in Modest Tchaikovsky, *Tchaikovskogo* [Tchaikovsky], Vol. III, 29–33.

<sup>16</sup> Herbert Weinstock, *Tchaikovsky* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1943), 78.

<sup>17</sup> Sergey Taneev, *Podvizhnoy kontrapunkt strogogo pis'ma* [Invertible Counterpoint in the Strict Style] (Leipzig and Moscow, 1909); English trans., 1962.

<sup>18</sup> Brown, *Tchaikovsky: The Man and His Music*, 101.

<sup>19</sup> David Brown, *Tchaikovsky: The Crisis Years 1874–1878* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1982), 28.

<sup>20</sup> Weinstock, 232–3.

collected works were published in 1882, in ten volumes edited by Tchaikovsky, who found them very boring indeed.”<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, the selections frequently found in the manual are by Bortnyansky, whose works, if not exciting to Piotr Ilyich, must have exhibited the proper usage of harmony to the latter’s satisfaction.

Tchaikovsky’s influence on the world of music is very significant. According to Rostislav Genika, “not a single composer who came after Tchaikovsky has escaped in one way or another his influence. Since then his methods have been so exhausted, so widely used! Many of them have become commonplace, even cliché.”<sup>22</sup> Regrettably, while there is much truth to this statement, Tchaikovsky’s second manual has been, for the most part, forgotten. While some still remember and use his first textbook, the existence of this concise manual is rarely acknowledged. Nevertheless, for its prominence in music curricula around the world, music theory—especially in Russia—owes much to Tchaikovsky. Tama I. Kott believes that Tchaikovsky’s “greatest contribution to the pedagogy of music theory was his landmark *Guide to the Practical Study of Harmony*, published in 1872. This treatise greatly influenced Rimsky-Korsakov and Tchaikovsky’s other contemporaries and became a foundation for the discipline in Russia lasting to the present day, influencing generations of musicians.”<sup>23</sup> It is hoped that the present translation of the *Concise Manual of Harmony* will further clarify the composer’s thoughts on the subject of tonal harmony. A more nuanced knowledge of the techniques Tchaikovsky used in his theoretical guides might well prove to be a useful source for analyzing

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>22</sup> Poznansky, *Tchaikovsky*, 58.

<sup>23</sup> Tama I Kott, Review of “Guide to the Practical Study of Harmony by Piotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky” trans. Emil Krall and James Leibling, *Music Educators Journal* 93, no. 4 (March 2007), 18.

the compositions of Piotr Illyich and may lay the groundwork for a greater appreciation of his musical skills and the breadth of his work as a composer.

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