MUSIC, DRAMA AND FOLKLORE IN NIKOLAI RIMSKY-KORSAKOV'S OPERA
SNEGUROCHKA [SNOWMAIDEN]

DISSERTATION
Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
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ABSTRACT

Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov’s third of his fifteen operas, *Snegurochka* [Snowmaiden], is examined here from historical and analytical perspectives. Its historical importance begins with the composer’s oft-expressed preference for this work. It was by far his most popular opera during his lifetime, and has endured as a staple of the operatic repertory in Russia to this day. Rimsky-Korsakov’s famous declaration that he considered himself for the first time an artist “standing on my own feet” with this work, *Snegurochka* also represents a revealing case study in the dissolution of the Russian Five, or *moguchaia kuchka*, as a stylistically cohesive group of composers.

The opera’s dramatic source was a musical play by the same name by Aleksandr Ostrovsky, with music by Piotr Tchaikovsky. Rimsky-Korsakov solicited and received Ostrovsky’s permission to adapt the script into an opera libretto. Primary sources, including the composer’s sketchbooks, the first editions of the score and the subsequent revisions, and correspondence with Ostrovsky and others, reveal how he transformed the dramatic themes of Ostrovsky’s play, in particular the portrayal of the title character.

Finally, the musical themes and other stylistic features of this opera are closely analyzed and compared with those of Richard Wagner’s music dramas. Although Rimsky-Korsakov had not yet seen or studied *Der Ring des Nibelungen* when he worked on *Snegurochka*, he was acquainted with Wagner’s early works and his theoretical
writings. Comparison of these two composers’ representations of dramatic themes through music is not only appropriate, but necessary for a full appreciation of Snegurochka in its historical context.

Far from the pedantic conservative that others have described, this study reveals Rimsky-Korsakov to have been a profoundly innovative composer. Disenchanted as he was with the naturalistic prosody that characterized his comrade, Modest Musorgsky’s most well-known works (as well as Rimsky-Korsakov’s own first opera, Pskovitianka [The Maid of Pskov]), Rimsky-Korsakov blended melodic recitative, Russian folksong, and late Romantic chromaticism into a distinctively new musical language. In so doing, he established a reputation as one of Russia’s foremost composers of opera, a distinction that survives to this day.
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All dissertations are dauntingly large projects, but the chronological scope of this endeavor may be unprecedented. Throughout this long ordeal, I was blessed by the love, support and encouragement of a host of guardian angels. Without their unflinching faith in me, this document would never have reached its conclusion. My parents, Glen and Beverly Halbe, and my sister, Rebecca, have sustained me through countless disappointments, and prodded me to maintain a focus I never could have managed on my own.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Nikolai Andreevich Rimsky-Korsakov (1844-1908), known around the world as the composer of Sheherazade and Russian Easter Overture, was first and foremost a composer of operas. He wrote fifteen of them, many of which survive as staples in the repertory of Russian opera companies. He made no secret of which was his favorite; it was Snegurochka [Snowmaiden], his third, written in 1880. In his memoirs, Letopis’ moei muzykal’noi zhizni [Chronicle of My Musical Life], he described Snegurochka as his first independent creation, in which he felt himself an artist “who had finally come to stand on my own feet.”¹ For Rimsky-Korsakov, a relentlessly self-critical and reflective artist, that statement attaches a level of significance to this opera that cannot be overestimated.

Snegurochka also provides an interesting case study in the dynamics in Russian musical life at the time. Written in 1880, with its premiere within months of Modest Musorgsky’s death in 1881,² its fairy-tale subject and its rather conventional recitatives,

¹Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, Letopis’ moei muzykal’noi zhizni, edited by Nadezhda Rimskaya-Korsakova (Moscow: Muzgiz, 1909); 4th ed., ed. by Andrei N. Rimsky-Korsakov (Moscow: Muzgiz, 1932), p. 187. Hereinafter this edition will be cited as Letopis’. An English translation of the second Russian edition appeared as My Musical Life, translated by Judah A. Joffe, edited with an introduction by Carl van Vechten (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1925), p. 205. Hereinafter this edition will be cited as Chronicle. According to Nadezhda Rimskaya-Korsakova’s preface, Letopis’ was written sporadically over the course of several years. Her footnotes indicate places where her husband had dated the manuscript. According to these footnotes, the section about the composition of Snegurochka was written sometime between 1895 and 1905.

²Modest Petrovich Musorgsky (1823-81) was at one time Rimsky-Korsakov’s closest friend and colleague in Milyi Balakirev’s group of composers, which came to be known as the moguchaia kuchka (see below).
arias and cavatinas aroused ambivalence among his comrades in the Balakirev circle, but they praised Rimsky-Korsakov’s folk choruses and affective harmonies. *Snegurochka*’s reception history thus offers a special perspective on his relationship with the group, as the opera for him a sort of artistic declaration of independence, a statement of his personal aesthetic stance. On the other hand, it is far from a complete break from Milyi Balakirev, Musorgsky, or the ideals they represented. It is clear from his writings that Rimsky-Korsakov sought freedom from allegiance to anyone or anything, save his own aesthetic vision. With *Snegurochka*, he achieved that independence.

The life of this opera on stage, and the critical attention it has received, will be examined in Chapter Two, "*Snegurochka* in Russia and Beyond." The chief concerns in this chapter will be the opera's historical context within the dynamics of musical life in the Russian capitals, and the disparity between the opera's popularity in Russia and its relative obscurity in the world beyond Russia's borders. Both within and outside Russia, we have yet to come to terms with this member of the anti-academic Balakirev group for whom one of Russia’s two major conservatories of music is named. He is all too often stuck between two negatives: he is considered the conservative of the Balakirev group, who forced Western academic conventions on Musorgsky’s works, while at the same time not as proficient or adept with those conventions as was Piotr Tchaikovsky (1840-93). I would propose a positive synthesis that takes into account the historical roots of these negative viewpoints.

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3 The group's senior members were the composer Milyi Balakirev (1837-1910), the composer and critic Cesar Cui (1835-1918), and the critic Vladimir Stasov (1824-1904). The composers who joined the group one by one were Alexandr Borodin (1833-87), Musorgsky, and Rimsky-Korsakov.
Rimsky-Korsakov was, in fact, a rugged individualist. The stylistic diversity of his operas posed no less challenges for his contemporaries than for us today. At a time when personal and professional rivalries divided the Russian musical scene into two vigorously opposing camps, i.e., the Balakirev group and the Russian Music Society headed by Anton Rubinstein (1829-94), he dared to bridge the divide. His acceptance of Rubinstein's offer of a faculty position at St. Petersburg Conservatory and his subsequent self-education in academic harmony and counterpoint, merely bolstered his resolve to forge a new musical language based largely, though hardly exclusively, on Russian folksong. Indeed, by unraveling the apparent contradictions in Rimsky-Korsakov’s life and works, we might more fully appreciate the subtleties of musical life in Russia in the closing decades of the nineteenth century. Nowhere is this more true than with regard to his relationship with the Balakirev group, known variously as the Russian or Mighty Five, but here referred to by its Russian nickname, *moguchaia kuchka*, or *kuchka* for short.

All too often, the *kuchka* is characterized as the "Russian nationalist school." Russian intellectuals at the time were divided regarding Russia's national identity. Some looked to the West for models of a better, more enlightened Russia, and were called Westernizers (*zapadniki*). The Slavophiles, on the other hand, believed that Russia's political, cultural and spiritual ideals were to be found in its native Slavic identity. When direct reflections of this debate are sought in the arts, though, misunderstandings often result.

Among musicians, the Slavophile-Westernizer debate had particularly little to do with questions of musical style. For example, Balakirev was an avowed Slavophile, as
was one of his close friends, Tertii Filippov (1825-93). Rimsky-Korsakov's lifelong fascination with Russian folksong began when Balakirev introduced him to Filippov, who was a recognized authority. Rimsky-Korsakov nevertheless derided Balakirev's Slavophilism as misguided mysticism. He inherited Balakirev's dedication to the development of a Russian musical style with its roots in folksong, but was quite solicitous and appreciative of Tchaikovsky's help in developing his command of Western counterpoint.

Rimsky-Korsakov's account of his choice of the subject for this opera reveals much about the decline of his relationship with the closest of his colleagues during the time leading up to Snegurochka's composition: Modest Musorgsky. Rimsky-Korsakov first read Snegurochka, a musical play by Aleksandr Nikolaevich Ostrovsky (1823-86), in 1874. He had just completed Pskovitianka, his first opera, and was a confirmed operatic revolutionary. As a member of the Balakirev circle, Rimsky-Korsakov hailed in music and in words the advent of a new operatic style. The choral writing in Pskovitianka, particularly in Act Two, brought the chorus into active participation in the drama in an unprecedented fashion. While orchestrating this opera, he shared an apartment with Musorgsky, who was revising Boris Godunov, and, as Richard Taruskin noted, the choral writing in Pskovitianka, particularly in Act Two was a model for Musorgsky's Scene in the Kromy forest. Pskovitianka bore the stamp of Boris as well: both were historical

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4 Letopis', p. 107-08; Chronicle, p. 110-11
dramas, and both paid homage to Alexander Dargomyzhsky's (1813-69) pioneering efforts in melodic declamation of prose text.\(^5\)

The rift between Rimsky-Korsakov and his kuchkist colleagues apparently was exacerbated by his rapid, early rise to general public acclaim. At the age of 26, he was being invited to join the faculty of the newly founded St. Petersburg Conservatory. Another telling and ironic manifestation of Rimsky-Korakov’s fame was Ilya Repin’s (1844-1930) painting, “Russkie i slavianskie kompozitory” (Russian and Slavic Composers) (1871). The painting was Repin’s first big commission, thanks to a referral by Stasov, requested by a Slavophile entrepreneur who was refurbishing the Slavic Bazaar restaurant.\(^6\) The painting depicted the pantheon of Russian composers, and originally included Rimsky-Korsakov, Musorgsky, and Borodin. The entrepreneur requested that Repin remove the latter two from the canvas, however, as they were—in his opinion—merely dilettantes.\(^7\)

As Musorgsky and, to a lesser extent, Cui scorned the creative path Rimsky-Korsakov had chosen, he found support from the champion of the rival musical camp, Piotr Tchaikovsky. Tchaikovsky’s public and private support for Rimsky-Korsakov’s academic endeavors led to a correspondence in which Tchaikovsky shared the folksong sources he used in composing the incidental music to Ostrovsky's *Snegurochka*. Rimsky-Korsakov’s interest in these songs may well have prompted him to re-read *Snegurochka*.

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While his colleagues scoffed at his fugue exercises and his string quartets, he earned Tchaikovsky’s respect and support.

Rimsky-Korsakov’s formerly close friendship with Musorgsky declined quickly with the success of *Boris*; as the two parted aesthetic ways as well, acrimony between them approached outright hostility. Musorgsky’s reaction to Rimsky-Korsakov’s academic pursuits and to *Snegurochka* was decidedly negative. By the 1870s, Musorgsky had become the group’s staunchest anti-academic, and apparently never fully reconciled with his colleague’s acceptance of the Conservatory position. His ambivalence toward *Snegurochka* clearly exacerbated that rift. For his part, Rimsky-Korsakov regarded Musorgsky’s final period with intense disdain.

*Snegurochka* was, for Rimsky-Korsakov at least, a declaration of independence from the realist aesthetic of Musorgsky. It was a numbers opera with occasional continuous scenes. Its *a piacere* recitative, in which Rimsky-Korsakov took considerable pride, is the stylistic opposite of the *arioso* declamation developed by Dargomyzhsky and Musorgsky. He was, in effect, rejecting *Boris Godunov* in favor of *Ruslan i Liudmila* (1842). Dramatic realism and naturalistic declamation gave way to numbers opera, with aria, recitative, and spectacular choral scenes.

Only a few years before he first read *Snegurochka*, Rimsky-Korsakov’s review of Eduard Napravnik’s (1839-1916) *Nizhegorodtsy* (1869) revealed that he was still very much aligned with Musorgsky. Rimsky-Korsakov criticized at length Napravnik’s

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conventional arias, ensembles, choruses and recitatives, noting (just as Ostrovsky's critics would a few years later, as we shall see), how the numbers interrupted and detracted from "natural" dramatic flow. But then he goes on: “One of the most significant demands of contemporary opera,” Rimsky-Korsakov writes, “is well-crafted recitative. In Napravnik’s opera there is not a hint of present-day recitative.”¹⁰

Although he never abandoned his belief that musical phrases should be appropriate to the text, Rimsky-Korsakov himself foreswore “present-day recitative,” the naturalistic declamation pioneered by Dargomyzhsky and perfected by Musorgsky. Among his proudest achievements in Snegurochka was his use of “a piacere recitative,” in which a simple orchestral accompaniment, with frequent rests and sustained notes, allows for rhythmic and melodic flexibility in the vocal line, a style more closely similar to the rhythmic and melodic flexibility of Italianate recitative than to the measured, broad arioso style of Musorgskian declamation.

This stylistic departure from Musorgskian naturalism in itself suggests that the two composers were drifting apart. Rimsky-Korsakov’s description of his captivation with the Snegurochka subject, six years after his initial disdain, confirms an aesthetic parting of the ways:

“...I re-read Snegurochka, and my eyes were opened to its wonderful, poetic beauty...My warmth toward ancient Russian custom and pagan pantheism, which had manifested itself little by little, now blazed forth in a bright flame.”¹¹

As profound and direct as this aesthetic shift may have seemed to Rimsky-Korsakov,

¹⁰ Ibid.
¹¹ Rimsky-Korsakov, Letopis', p. 178; Chronicle, p. 193. The first sentence is my translation; the published English translation implies a gradual awakening to the play’s charms, but in Rimsky-Korsakov’s Russian, the transformation is more immediate.
it was more likely the indirect result of several developments in the intervening years, in his creative activities and in his friendships, both within the Balakirev group and beyond. The intricacies of Rimsky-Korsakov's evolving relationship with the *kuchka* will be addressed more fully in Chapter Two.

The play's reception history will be addressed in Chapter Three, "*Snegurochka*'s Birth on the Russian Stage." It was written in 1873 by Aleksandr Nikolaevich Ostrovsky, whose melodramas and social dramas had earned him widespread recognition as Russia’s leading playwright. This fairy-tale production, a verse play with nineteen musical numbers composed by Piotr Tchaikovsky, was a departure from Ostrovsky’s usual creative path, and received quite mixed reviews. Its story is an amalgam of Russian folk tales pieced together into a rather conventional Romantic representation of folk mythology. The title character appears in several children’s tales as a beautiful little girl who magically appears to a childless elderly couple. Literally a snow figure come to life, she meets her demise in the late spring, either by getting lost in the woods while gathering berries, or by joining the village young people in jumping over bonfires during a spring ritual. Ostrovsky expanded these short tales into a full-length drama by adding characters from Russian mythology and a sub-plot involving the residents of a mythical Russian village of Berendei.

Chapter Four, "From Play to Libretto," is an examination of Rimsky-Korsakov's adaptation of Ostrovsky's play. The play did not open in St. Petersburg until 1900, well after Rimsky-Korsakov composed his opera, so he only knew the play in print. He did know the reviews in daily newspapers, which were critical. Mostly, they addressed the lack of dramatic realism, without which the contemporary play was not satisfactory to the
critics. The play’s harsh reviews in *Golos* and *St. Peterburgskie vedomosti* too may have contributed to Rimsky-Korsakov’s initial negative response to Ostrovsky’s *Snegurochka*. The only record of Rimsky-Korsakov’s acquaintance with and opinion of the play is his *Letopis*’. There he reported that he knew the play only from reading it in *Vestnik Evropy*, and that he had

> liked it but little; the kingdom of the Berendeis had appeared queer to me. Why? Were the ideas of the sixties still alive in me, or did the demands, current in the seventies, that subject matter be taken from so-called *life*, hold me in their grip? Or had Musorgsky’s naturalism carried me away on its current? Probably all three together.\(^\text{12}\)

With a work such as *Pskovitianka* freshly completed, and given his insistence on dramatic integrity in opera and his impatience with discrete musical units within a dramatic work, Rimsky-Korsakov’s initial disdain for Ostrovsky’s “spring fairy-tale” is hardly surprising. The play's structure and style, with nineteen musical numbers interrupting the dramatic action in utterly conventional fashion, certainly must have earned the scorn of Rimsky-Korsakov and his kuchkist colleagues.\(^\text{13}\) Ostrovsky’s poetic text on a quasi-folk subject no doubt also left them cold, as their attention was focused on musical declamation of prose, and on historical drama.

Rimsky-Korsakov offers only hypothetical reasons for that assessment: “ideas of the sixties,” the current fad of dramatic realism, or Musorgsky’s “naturalism.” The “ideas of the sixties” refers precisely to the issues for which the reviews condemned Ostrovsky’s play as non-dramatic, and thus ill suited for the stage.


\(^{13}\) Since he only encountered the play in written form, there is no evidence that Rimsky-Korsakov had any direct acquaintance with the music, written by Piotr Tchaikovsky. The placement of the musical numbers within the play was evident in the published script, though, and likely did not impress Rimsky-Korsakov or his colleagues.
Rimsky-Korsakov's cryptic mention of the "ideas of the sixties" refers to the social reforms of the time, most notably the freeing of the serfs. Some Russian artists and intellectuals felt that art in this age of reform must hold a critical mirror up to reality. Others, the so-called pochvenniki (from the Russian word pochva [soil], a sort of Russian roots movement) sought direct acquaintance with the Russian peasantry, the social stratum believed to be least “tainted” by Western culture. They found there a dual belief system, in which pagan ritual blended with a uniquely mystical Orthodox Christianity. Peasant beliefs, especially the concept of organic unity in community, and between humanity and nature, became the basis of fundamental challenges to critical realism, beginning in the 1870s. Balakirev and others in this movement felt that Orthodoxy was an essential ingredient. Rimsky-Korsakov, on the other hand, was drawn much more powerfully to the pagan side of the peasant's dual belief system.

Rimsky-Korsakov’s subsequent writings, specifically his descriptions of summer vacations and other experiences with nature reveal larger changes in his world outlook. A description of his new summer home in Tikhvin, where he composed Snegurochka, can serve as a perfect example of these changes, suggesting another possible reason for his changed attitude toward Ostrovsky’s play. The description also prompts a comparison with the writings of Lev Nikolaevich Tolstoy (1828-1910),¹⁴ Compare the following excerpts, the first from his Letopis' moei muzyal'noi zhizni [Chronicle of My Musical Life], describing Rimsky-Korsakov’s first days at his new estate. The second is from a

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¹⁴The connection between Rimsky-Korsakov and Tolstoy was first suggested by the idealist philosopher Ivan Lapshin, but has not received serious attention since Lapshin’s emigration to Paris in the late 1920s. Ivan Lapshin, Dvachkerka (Peterburg: Gosudarstvennaia Akademicheskaia Filarmonia, 1922), p. 21.
passage in Tolstoy’s *Anna Karenina*, in which he describes a personal transformation of Levin after a night he spent on a haystack:

> For the first time in my life I had the opportunity of spending the summer in a genuine Russian village. Here everything was to my liking, everthing delighted me. A picturesque location, charming groves, … impenetrable roads, solitude, antique Russian names of villages, … everything threw me into raptures. The excellent garden with a multitude of cherry trees and apple trees, currants, wild and garden strawberries, gooseberries, lilacs in bloom, an infinity of field flowers and the incessant singing of birds, everything was somehow in peculiar harmony with my pantheistic frame of mind at the time and my passion for the subject of *Snegurochka*. A thick crooked knot or stump overgrown with moss appeared to me the wood demon or his abode; the forest Volchinets—a forbidden forest; the bare Kopytets hillock—Iarilo’s mountain; the triple echo heard from our balcony—voices of wood sprites or other supernatural beings.15

> “How beautiful!” he thought, looking up at a strange mother-of-pearl colored shell formed of fleecy clouds, in the center of the sky just over his head. “How lovely everything is, this lovely night! And how did this shell get formed so quickly? A little while ago when I looked at the sky all was clear, but for two white strips. My views of life have changed in just the same unnoticeable way.”16

The similarity of style may seem to suggest self-conscious imitation of Tolstoy in Rimsky-Korsakov’s account, but more likely reflects the depth of affinity that the composer felt with the connection to nature that Tolstoy was describing. In both passages, an individual’s mid-life change of attitude is so closely connected to a fresh outlook on the world of nature that it seems to that individual that nature itself has caused

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the change. Tolstoy’s unique depiction of landscape and natural phenomena as almost
causal symbols of psychological change in his heroes had a profound effect on many in
the Russian intelligentsia, Rimsky-Korsakov evidently among them.

In literature, Lev Tolstoy first challenged Western individualist historiography in
*War and Peace* (18), and ultimately rejected civilized art altogether in *What is Art?* (18).
Aleksandr Nikolaevich Afanas’ev’s (18-) collections of Russian folktales, and especially
his interpretation of those tales in the context of pagan beliefs, provided Russian
intelligentsia with a window into Russian mythology and folk allegory. Aleksandr
Ostrovsky, the quintessential realist dramatist, looked to peasant folklore and Russian
pre-history in *Snegurochka*. Painters associated with the railway magnate and arts patron
Savva Mamontov (1841-1918) became fascinated with Russian folk decorative art, and
gradually abandoned the critical realism of the *pochvenniki*.

Rimsky-Korsakov describes in *Letopis’* the gradual development of his own
interest in folklore in the mid-1870s. He pursued this interest by reading studies of
Russian folklife by Afanas’ev and others, by analyzing the folk songs collected by
Balakirev, Tchaikovsky, and others, and by trying his own hand at folk song transcription
and arrangement, with the help of Tertii Filippov. First, he compiled a set of
arrangements of folksongs sung to him by Filippov;\(^\text{17}\) soon thereafter he compiled his
own selection of folk songs, again in his own arrangement for voice and piano\(^\text{18}\). As he
studied ancient Russian folksong and acquainted himself with its cultural context, he
utilized some of the same ethnographic collections and studies that Ostrovsky used in

\[^{17}\text{Sorok narodnykh pesen, sobrannych T. I. Filippovym i garmonizovannyykh N. A. Rimskim Korsakovym (Moscow: P. IUrgenson, 1882). Although published five years after op.24 (see next note), this collection, according to Rimsky-Korsakov’s account in *Letopis’,* was compiled first, in 1875.}\]

\[^{18}\text{N. A. Rimsky-Korsakov, *Sto russkikh narodnykh pesen*, op.24 (St. Petersburg: Bessel, 1877).}\]
writing his play. By his own account, ritual and game songs attracted him more than other folk genres, as they were “the most ancient that have come down to us from pagan times and have therefore been preserved most nearly in their original form.”

His newly found interest in folk culture in turn prompted him to prepare his own collection of Russian folk songs, concentrating on those older genres. While his interest here may seem purely musical, his description of his folksong collection (op.24) indicates a much broader and deeper fascination with the songs’ cultural and theological context. After noting this collection’s generic organization (bylinas, lyric, dance, game, and ritual songs, the latter grouped according to the ancient seasonal festivals), he recalled that he had

read some descriptions and essays of this side of folk-life by Sakharov, Tereshchenko, Shein and Afanas’ev…[I] was captivated by the poetic side of the cult of sun-worship, and sought its survivals and echoes in both the tunes and the words of the songs. The pictures of the ancient pagan period and spirit loomed before me, as it then seemed, with great clarity, luring me on with the charm of antiquity.

Chapters Five and Six address the opera's music. In Chapter Five, "From Sketches to Final Version," evidence of the opera's evolution will be sought in its primary source materials. Chapter Six, "Folklore and Fantasy in Music," is an analysis of Rimsky-Korsakov's unique assimilation of chromatic, diatonic, and folk-derived styles in a coherent musical whole. It is no small coincidence that Rimsky-Korsakov's interest in folksong developed at the same time that he was training himself in theory and counterpoint. In doing so, he had not abandoned the esteem for innovative technique,


which Balakirev had fostered; instead, he had turned to academic training as a craftsman seeking to perfect his technique and as a teacher who felt ill-equipped to explain his craft to his students. Armed with a broader theoretical vocabulary, he was prepared to study folksong more deeply, and to thus more thoroughly understand its potential as source material for a new, harmonically and texturally adventurous musical style.

In his second opera, *May Night* (1879), he began developing an alternative operatic style, one that he became eager to pursue further. He also renewed and intensified his acquaintance with Mikhail Glinka’s (1804-57) style as he assisted Balakirev with critical editions of Glinka’s operas. The culmination of these efforts was *Snegurochka*, in which he mastered the emulation of folksong and Glinka’s transparent style of orchestration.

The final chapter, "Snegurochka's Thematics and the Case of [Richard] Wagner," will address the comparisons drawn by many in the 1890s between the characteristic themes used in this opera and Wagnerian *Leitmotiv*. In this chapter I will also address the critical issues facing *fin de siecle* Russia as it confronted this opera and Richard Wagner's (1813-83) music dramas.

With the exception of Rimsky-Korsakov's *Chronicle of My Musical Life* and V. V. Iastrebtsev's *Rimsky-Korsakov: Vospominaniia* [Reminiscences], the sources used in this study are available only in Russian; translations are my own. Quotes from *Chronicle* and *Reminiscences* have been drawn from the English translation, with occasional emendations where my reading of the original differs from the translator's. The opera libretto has been translated into English, but Ostrovsky's play has not. Translations of

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passages from the libretto are taken from liner notes, and translations of passages from
the play are mine.

Transliterations of Russian text are in accordance with the Library of Congress
guidelines. Palatalized vowels are preceded with an "i" (as in liubov'), except in the case
of the letter "e." In Russian text, most e's are palatalized, but rendering them as "ie" can
be cumbersome in long words, and leads to confusion with the English "ie" as in "friend."
Palatalized consonants are followed by an apostrophe, and de-voiced consonants are
rendered as spelled in Russian, rather than as they are pronounced. For example, the final
consonant in "liubov'" is palatalized and de-voiced, and would be pronounced "liubof'."
Occasional exceptions are made with respect to proper names. I use Rimsky-Korsakov
and Tchaikovsky, rather than the Library of Congress's Rimskii-Korsakov and
Chaikovskii, out of deference to a century of transliteration of these popular composers'
names. I prefer spelling Tchaikovsky's first name Piotr, however, in order to more
accurately render its pronunciation.
CHAPTER 2  
SNEGUROCHKA IN RUSSIA AND BEYOND

While Snegurochka has remained a consistent staple of the Russian operatic repertory, its critical acclaim has been mixed at best. Rimsky-Korsakov proclaimed Snegurochka to be his favorite opera, and began his exposition of his operatic aesthetics with this work.²² His friends and foes alike acknowledged the effectiveness of its music, but none would have placed it at the top of his fifteen works for the operatic stage. Beyond Russia’s borders, it is virtually unknown. Scattered performances throughout the western world have achieved moderate success at best. The history of this opera’s performances, both at home and abroad, reveals several possible reasons for this critical ambiguity. More important, its reception history represents a compelling case study of the late nineteenth-century Russian operatic world. It also provides a glimpse at Russian opera’s challenges for foreign opera companies and audiences.

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²² Rimsky-Korsakov’s Razbor Snegurochki was one of his many projects initiated during his dry spells as a composer. Unlike his harmony and orchestration textbooks, this proposed exegesis of his operatic aesthetics did not progress beyond an unfinished manuscript analysis of this opera.
Taruskin’s general observation that this review “poisoned relations between Rimsky-Korsakov and the conductor [Napravnik] for life”\textsuperscript{23} also sheds light on \textit{Snegurochka}’s premiere under Napravnik’s direction.\textsuperscript{24} Both \textit{Pskovitianka} and the review of the Napravnik opera qualified Rimsky-Korsakov as a leading proponent of a new operatic style in which naturalistic declamation and dramatic “truth” took precedence over musical convention.

After the premiere production at the imperial Mariinsky Theater in the 1881-82 season, \textit{Snegurochka}’s first revival was in Moscow, at Savva Mamontov’s Moscow Private Opera. It was a financial and critical success for the fledgling company, and was to be the first in a long series of Mamontov productions of Rimsky-Korsakov's operas. The opera returned to the imperial stage in St. Petersburg in 1892, and was subsequently revived when Mamontov's company visited St. Petersburg in 1898.\textsuperscript{25} In 1903-06, it enjoyed its longest run, at the Narodnyi dom [People's Home] theater of Nikolai II. In Moscow, the Solodovnikov Theater staged productions in 1896-97 and in 1905-06. The Moscow Private Opera brought \textit{Snegurochka} back to its stage in 1902-03 and in 1905-06. In addition to these productions in the Russian capitals, \textit{Snegurochka} thrived on the provincial stage. From Kiev, Khar'kov, and Odessa in Ukraine, to Kazan' and Saratov, to far-off Irkutsk, \textit{Snegurochka} persisted in the repertory far more than any of his other operas. After the Bolshevik Revolution, the opera's popularity continued unabated. Productions in the capitals and provinces are too numerous to mention here.


\textsuperscript{24} Napravnik’s cuts, to which Rimsky-Korsakov strongly objected, will be addressed in Chapter Five.

\textsuperscript{25} Productions of Rimsky-Korsakov's operas are reflected in the records of royalty payments paid to the composer by Bessel, the score's publisher and the owner of staging rights in Russia. Records of these payments from 1894 to the composer's death in 1908 are found in V. A. Kiselev, ed., \textit{N. A. Rimskii-Korsakov: sbornik dokumentov} (Moscow: Muzgiz, 1951), pp. 253-63.
While *Snegurochka* has endured as a staple in the Russian repertory, critical assessments have been mixed, and sometimes contradictory. Some conservatives, most notably Hermann Laroche (1845-1904), were vexed by its simple folk-like melodies and unconventional harmonic gestures, but at the same time hailed the academic polish of its counterpoint and form as “a giant step away from *Pskovitianka*.”26 At the turn of the century, in the wake of the St. Petersburg revival and new productions throughout opera, new appreciation for the opera welled up in a new generation of the Russian intelligentsia. Idealists at the time were drawn to its mythic and pagan themes, and described Rimsky-Korsakov's aesthetic in idealistic and religious terms. After the 1917 revolution, Soviet writers have concentrated more on the opera's realistic qualities. As we have seen in the introductory chapter of this dissertation, Rimsky-Korsakov proclaimed *Snegurochka* to be his artistic declaration of independence. Since that statement has been interpreted in such contradictory ways, the opera’s reception history represents a further obstacle to a full appreciation of this work.

The first productions of *Snegurochka* provoked conflicting critical responses, revealing the sharp divisions in Russian musical life. Hermann Laroche, a devotee of Eduard Hanslick (1825-1904) and a sworn enemy of the *kuchka*, favorably reviewed Tchaikovsky's incidental music to Ostrovsky's play, and later gave Rimsky-Korsakov's opera the mildest of praise mixed with criticism of his *kuchkist* tendencies.

Laroche found in Tchaikovsky’s use of folk music in *Snegurochka* ammunition for one of his many attacks on the composers of the Balakirev group. Even before Rimsky-Korsakov began working on his opera, Laroche used criticism of the kuchkists to magnify his praise of Tchaikovsky’s style. In so doing, Laroche defines one of the more

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fundamental issues in the ongoing polemics between the partisans of the Russian Music Society and the \textit{kuchka}: the use of folk materials in an original composition.

Laroche’s praise focuses more on what Tchaikovsky does not do with folksong than on what he does. “The music to \textit{Snegurochka} is written in a lively, light, unaffected manner. In this work, the pretense and superficial gestures, without which some contemporary Russian musicians are incapable of approaching folk genres, are refreshingly absent.”\textsuperscript{27} The identity of these offending musicians is hardly ambiguous, given the larger context of Laroche’s critical writings. Pretense, affectation, and superficiality were faults he often found in the music of Rimsky-Korsakov and his colleagues. That Laroche cites this piece, which the \textit{Kuchka} dismissed as shallow, as a positive alternative to the kuchkist approach makes it possible to scrutinize in precise musical terms the points of contention between these warring factions, the kuchkists and the academics.

For Laroche, \textit{Snegurochka} was a hopeful sign that the young composer was not following the “radical” path of his kuchkist mentors. This praise was mixed with harsh criticism, though. Having noted that Rimsky-Korsakov had experimented for a time with academic counterpoint and harmony, Laroche considered \textit{Snegurochka} to be an indication that the composer was still under the sway of Balakirev’s influence in general, and of Richard Wagner and Franz Liszt (1811-86) more specifically.

I cannot but notice that Wagner is often heard in Rimsky-Korsakov’s melody and harmony, and \textit{early} Wagner in his orchestration, specifically the abuse of orchestral tremolo in \textit{Der fliegende Hollander}, a device that the German master later forsook….The augmented triad plays a large role. Progressions of several augmented triads are also heard, just as they were in \textit{Pskovitianka}. Unnatural and unknown until we heard them for

In sum, Laroche castigated Rimsky-Korsakov and the entire Balakirev group for mannerisms that “kill art” and for being derivative and unoriginal. His only words of praise for Rimsky-Korsakov concern the composer’s openness to and talent for academic style.

The publication of this article provoked a barrage of responses from Rimsky-Korsakov and the Balakirev group’s spokesman, Vladimir Stasov. Despite the divisions that had developed among the members of the Balakirev group, Vladimir Stasov managed to remain a champion of each of them. Indeed, his picture of a unified, staunchly nationalistic group held sway. Only recently has a more nuanced view of a diverse group of individual composers emerged. With all the skill of a modern public relations expert, Stasov embraced all of the kuchkist composers even as their artistic paths diverged. When listing Rimsky-Korsakov’s best works, he gave equal praise to Pskovitiana, the composer’s opera nearest to the group’s ideals as espoused in the 1860s, and to Snegurochka, which Rimsky-Korsakov considered his first successful break from their influence.

Stasov also compared Snegurochka to Ruslan i Liudmila, the opera he championed in a vehement mid-century public debate with Aleksandr Serov (1820-71). It is no small coincidence that, in praising Snegurochka, Vladimir Stasov compared it favorably with Ruslan. By so doing, he emphasized that Rimsky-Korsakov’s roots were still firmly in Glinka, and in the opera that Stasov defended against Serov’s charges of anti-dramatism. He even refers obliquely to the Ruslan polemics when he describes Rimsky-Korsakov’s opera as having “a predominantly epic quality, as did Ruslan and [Borodin’s] Igor’.”

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together with nature vignettes of striking poetic beauty and deeply lyrical moments. The last observation was calculated to contradict the most common fault found in Rimsky-Korsakov’s vocal writing in this opera, seen already in Napraevnik’s approval of the opera for performance, and in Laroche’s praise of Tchaikovsky: insufficient lyricism. Stasov’s two examples of these lyrical moments, Kupava’s incantation to the hops and bees, and Snegurochka’s melting scene, reveal Stasov’s main point of contention. Both vocal lines are deeply rooted in folk style, the latter being a stylization of “Ai vo pole lipen’ka.” Stasov’s claim was that the narrow pitch range and short phrases typical of folk style were not inimical to lyricism, but embodied a new kind of lyricism.

Despite the group’s apparent unanimity in the face of Laroche’s criticism, unmistakable divisions within the group were apparent by the time of Snegurochka’s composition. Rimsky-Korsakov’s desire for artistic self-determination, and the complicated nature of his allegiance to the Balakirev group, can be seen in his account of Milyi Balakirev’s teaching style. Written years later in Letopis’, it describes a dogmatic approach, and suggests that his declaration of independence was from just this pedagogical style.

Whenever I, or other young men, later on, played him our essays at composition, …he would improvise and show how the composition in question should be changed exactly as he indicated….He was obeyed absolutely, for the spell of his personality was tremendous….But with all his native mentality and brilliant abilities, there was one thing he failed to understand: that what was good for him in the matter of music education was of no use to others….Moreover, he despotically demanded that the tastes of his pupils should exactly coincide with his own.

30 Rimsky-Korsakov, Letopis’, p. 34-35; Chronicle, p. 25
Rimsky-Korsakov was not revealing any secrets here. In the article quoted earlier, Laroche, described Balakirev's influence on the young Rimsky-Korsakov as a "suffocating tutelage." Still, while Rimsky-Korsakov considered himself free of Balakirev’s controlling influence when he composed *Snegurochka*, he never abandoned his loyalty to the guiding principles of Balakirev’s circle.

It is not mere coincidence that Laroche’s criticism of Balakirev’s influence on Rimsky-Korsakov would appear in his review of *Snegurochka*. In the early 1880s, Laroche and other conservatives had reason to hope that Rimsky-Korsakov was parting ways with Balakirev. His acceptance of the conservatory teaching post seemed a direct rejection of Balakirev’s staunch anti-academic stance, and hinted that the young composer might be leaning toward a more academic style of composition, like that favored by the Russian Music Society.

Rimsky-Korsakov left no doubt of his feelings for Laroche when he recalled the critic’s death in *Letopis’*.

Laroche, once famous among us as a music critic, but in reality a copy of Eduard Hanslick, died after having dragged out a pitiful existence….The sympathy shown him by members of Beliaev’s circle is incomprehensible to me. Many said “thou” to him, forgetting the past. Fortunate that his verdicts had not been enforced and his prophecies never came true. His activity was mere grimace and gesticulation, lies and paradox, exactly like the activity of his Viennese prototype.32

This memoir reveals that it was Laroche’s hostile attitude toward the avant garde that most annoyed Rimsky-Korsakov. He could not fathom how any self-respecting young composer could pay homage to such a reactionary critic.

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32 Rimsky-Korsakov, *Letopis’,* p. 298; * Chronicle*, p. 344-45. Mitrofan Beliaev founded a publishing house devoted to Russian music. His patronage was the center of a group of Russian composers, known loosely as the Beliaev circle.
In sum, neither Laroche nor Stasov fairly assessed Rimsky-Korsakov's place in the Russian musical world of the 1880s. Laroche's hopes that Rimsky-Korsakov would part ways with Balakirev never materialized. For his part, Stasov persisted in emphasizing Rimsky-Korsakov's loyalty to the *kuchka* long after Rimsky-Korsakov openly expressed his alienation from Balakirev and Musorgsky.

Stasov's link between *Snegurochka* and *Ruslan*, and his description of *Snegurochka* as having epic qualities, are misleading as well. While its orchestration and harmonic language are openly indebted to Glinka (Rimsky-Korsakov proudly proclaimed Glinka's influence in his description of the opera in his memoirs\(^3^3\)), *Snegurochka* is a fairy tale, not an epic. As Marina Frolowa-Walker has pointed out, Stasov's use of the word "epic" referred to operas "which eschew dramatic tension in favour of a series of elaborate, contrasting tableaux."\(^3^4\) It is true that Rimsky-Korsakov diffused dramatic tension in his adaptation of Ostrovsky's libretto (of this more will be said in Chapter Four). The opera's narrative, however, is more focused and its scope less sweeping than is the case with *Ruslan*, or indeed with Rimsky-Korsakov's later epic operas, *Mlada* (1889), *Sadko* (1895), and *Kitezh* (1903).

Meanwhile, detractors such as V. Baskin levied the familiar anti-*Ruslan* attacks against *Snegurochka*, criticizing its libretto as un-dramatic, acknowledging the beauty of individual numbers, but finding it lacking in depth and sophistication.

It would have been better to illustrate this subject with a sort of ‘musical portrait’, like Rubinstein’s *Ivan Groznii*, or with entr’actes and individual numbers, like Tchaikovsky’s music…. Can *Snegurochka* be considered a nationalist opera? In

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our estimation, no; there is no artistry [tvorchestva] here, but only a well-done, accurate snapshot of folk motives.35

The issue of genre, in fact, plagued both Ostrovsky's play (and with it Tchaikovsky's music) and Rimsky-Korsakov's opera. Baskin appears to have been in a relatively small minority, as neither Ivan Groznii nor Tchaikovsky's incidental music have found a place in the Russian canon remotely comparable to Snegurochka.

When revivals of the opera enjoyed great success in both Moscow and St. Petersburg in the late 1890s, among its most ardent admirers were adherents of the new artistic trends of the Silver Age. Typical of this group’s appreciation of Rimsky-Korsakov’s artistry is a letter addressed to an E. N. Lebedova from someone identified only as a “liberal,” a member of the Society of Musical Gatherings [Obshchestvo muzykal’nykh sobranii], quoted by Andrei Rimsky-Korsakov in his father’s biography. Note especially mention of pre-Raphaelite influences, and the reference to the “eternal feminine,” an important component of the nascent symbolist school’s worldview.

I worship Rimsky--I can’t describe it otherwise--and by that I mean not the man, though I adore N. A., but the artist. Rimsky the man makes a most charming impression, but before us sits a loftier being, who reveals himself only in the moment of creativity, and about whom he himself does not always have a clear understanding. It is this loftier personage that I worship. One must have the foulest nature to confuse personal pessimism with global, and, when suffering from color-blindness, to blame nature for its absence of color (Chekhovshchina). I find such a viewpoint sad, and look to the (far distant) future with the most optimistic hopes. Rimsky seems to me the songster of that future. It is the noble “solemn summons” to revelry in all the greatest goods in life, the apotheosis of nature, love, and art. At the same time it is a deeply mystical philosophy—a religion of beauty, to which we are called by Reskin and the pre-Raphaelites in England, Hauptmann in Germany, and Vasnetsov in Russia….In Rimsky’s work there was always a religious pathos. It took the form of an enthusiastic bond with the world as a whole; it also

appeared as worship of the “eternal feminine” (Pannochka, Snegurochka, Volkhova, the Swan, Martha, and especially Mlada). On the other hand, he only used Christian religious elements as imagery, and not out of heartfelt demands (Ivan the Terrible, Nikola-ugodnik, the legend of Aleksei, Russian Easter Overture, etc.)… I hope that Rimsky’s religious music will be powerfully life-affirming, and not penitential and oppressive, in a word, à la Vasnetsov, and not à la N.  

“N.” presumably refers to Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), whose worldview was often characterized in Russia as pessimistic. The references to mysticism and the eternal feminine, and the connections to Pre-Raphaelism and Hauptmann eventually lost favor with Soviet scholars, but they shared the author’s preference for “life-affirming” aesthetics, and his enthusiasm for Rimsky-Korsakov’s wholistic, “optimistic” embrace of nature.

The liberal appreciation of Rimsky-Korsakov held sway with at least a portion of the Russian intelligentsia into the 1920s. Ivan Lapshin (1870-1952) found the same reflections of Pre-Raphaelite thinking in Rimsky-Korsakov’s output. Snegurochka, Sadko, and Kitezh make up a trilogy, claimed Lapshin, in which is felt “a deep inner unity in the form of the glorification of nature, human genius, and moral renunciation of self in the name of humanity.”  

Lapshin’s description of manifestations of Rimsky-Korsakov’s “universal feeling” as apotheoses of nature and love, artistic creation, and moral heroism are virtually identical to similar observations in the “liberal” letter. 

Soviet scholarship, even that of renowned opera scholar Abram Gozenpud (1908-2004), is particularly marred by politics concerning the issue of Rimsky-Korsakov’s allegiance to the aesthetic principles of the Balakirev Circle. His monograph on the philosophical underpinnings of Rimsky-Korsakov’s operas, a contribution of extreme

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38 Ibid., p. 11.
importance to Rimsky-Korsakov scholarship, suffers nevertheless from the author’s
determined assertion from beginning to end that the composer was at all times “a man of
the sixties.”

Gozenpud’s political agenda notwithstanding, his interpretation of Rimsky-
Korsakov’s about-face concerning Ostrovsky’s play cannot be dismissed lightly.
Gozenpud contends that, of the possible factors listed in *Letopis’,* that which most likely
exerted the most influence was the composer’s recent fascination with Russian folk song
and culture. The *Letopis’* account leading up to the year 1880 certainly lends credence to
the folk influence theory. Even so, just as Gozenpud quite correctly argued that the
prevailing conservatism of the 1890s should be considered when interpreting the contents
of that book, so also the socio-political climate of the Soviet Union in the 1950s
necessarily contributed to the tone and content of Gozenpud’s own *Temy i idei.* Published
in 1957, at the beginning of the Khrushchev “thaw,” it reflects the rigorous Stalinist
political agenda that persisted at the time of its writing.

Identification of Western influences in the composer’s musical style, an historical
method expressly renounced by the Soviet leadership in 1948, is not to be found in most
Soviet analyses. Yet Rimsky-Korsakov himself freely compared his use of modal
harmony in *Snegurochka* to that of Franz Liszt and Hector Berlioz (1803-69). One
remarkable Soviet theorist, Viktor Tsukkerman (1903-88), noted forthrightly Rimsky-
Korsakov’s debt to Liszt. He also demonstrated Rimsky-Korsakov’s integration of folk
style at a deep structural level into his personal style. In so doing, Tsukkerman directly
challenged the radical proletarian movement’s assessment of Rimsky-Korsakov as
bourgeois, and only superficially attracted to folk music.

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Critics of the RAPM years accused him of a lack of sincere interest in folk creativity. They claimed that his attention to folksong was governed only by pure aesthetics, and that his settings were no more than superficial stylizations.  

Tsukkerman argues effectively to the contrary, and identifies several important aspects of Rimsky-Korsakov’s musical style that embody Russian folksong at a deep structural level.

Scholars like Gozenpud, Aleksei Kandinsky (1918-2002), and Tsukkerman have turned attention to archival evidence and to the music itself, and have revealed Rimsky-Korsakov as an artist whose interest in Russian folklife extended from aesthetic fascination with the mechanics of folk choral style to a quasi-spiritual resonance with the pagan belief system. Unfortunately, the general disorder and difficulty of access in Russian archives has severely limited the quantity and quality of archival research on this important composer’s music. In subsequent chapters, an attempt will be made to fill in some of the larger gaps in our understanding of the compositional process of this opera.

Western unfamiliarity, even disdain for Rimsky-Korsakov’s operas can be only partly attributed to our ignorance of their semiotic context. More to the point is the ideological haze that has surrounded them throughout this century. As Vladimir Stasov’s heavy-handed insistence on nationalist identity in Russian art gave way to the idealist neo-nationalism of the Silver Age at the turn of the century, only to be usurped by the official nationalism of the Stalinist doctrine of Socialist Realism, Rimsky-Korsakov’s operas found favor with all three, but suffered from ideological reinterpretation by each. While Kandinsky and Tsukkerman have effectively disproved the notions of Rimsky-Korsakov as mannerist, miniaturist, and elitist, those ideas have persisted in Western


conventional wisdom. Gerald Abraham’s *New Grove* article, quoted at the beginning of this chapter, takes its cue from Laroche as well as the RAPM party line. Only recently, in Taruskin’s *Opera Grove* articles on Rimsky-Korsakov and *Snegurochka*, have Rimsky-Korsakov’s fairy-tale operas been portrayed in a positive light in the West.43

It was Rimsky-Korsakov’s student, Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971), and French modernist proponents of Musorgsky who prevailed in the West. Stravinsky dismissed his teacher for having resisted and rejected his more adventurous students’ innovations, and linked the entire Balakirev group with Stalinist official nationalism. French modernists derided Rimsky-Korsakov’s editions of Musorgsky’s operas for having diluted the raw innovations of the original; ironically, they were joined in this attack by the revolutionary proletarian movement in the Soviet Union. Musorgsky’s originals were, in the words of the editorial preface to the 1931 critical edition of *Boris Godunov*, “raw material for the great proletarian movement;” Rimsky-Korsakov’s editions had “purified and civilized” this crude revolutionary to suit “bourgeois” tastes.44

Western productions of *Snegurochka*, as with most of Rimsky-Korsakov’s operas, have been infrequent and short-lived. During the composer’s lifetime, *Snegurochka* was translated into German and French,45 and was performed in Prague (1905) and at the Opéra Comique in Paris (1908). Both translations were submitted to the composer for his approval before performance or publication, and he devoted some attention to both before granting his permission. Alfred Loewenberg indicates that the Prague production was in

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44 Pavel Lamm, "Vvedenie [Introduction]," in *Modest Musorgsky, Boris Godunov* (Moscow: Muzgiz, 1931).

45 The opera’s second edition, revised and with optional cuts indicated, was published, in engraved full and piano-vocal scores with Russian and German texts, in St. Petersburg by V. V. Bessel in 1898. Bessel sold distribution rights to Breitkopf & Härtel for a new printing in 1908. This printing appeared variously with Russian, German, and French texts, or with only German and French.
Czech, but lists no translator. Since neither Rimsky-Korsakov nor his biographer Vasilii Iastrebtsev (18-19) mention a Czech translation, it seems more likely that the German translation was used. Neither production appears to have attracted much attention from either press or public. The Paris production no doubt suffered from its competition at the Grand Opéra: Sergei Diaghilev’s (1872-1929) production of Modest Musorgsky’s *Boris Godunov*, with Fyodor Chaliapin (1873-1938) in the title role.

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<tr>
<th>City and company (if known)</th>
<th>Premiere</th>
<th>Language</th>
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<tr>
<td>Prague</td>
<td>29 March 1905</td>
<td>German?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paris, Opéra comique</td>
<td>22 May 1908</td>
<td>French</td>
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<tr>
<td>Zagreb</td>
<td>1921</td>
<td>Croatian?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Seattle</td>
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<tr>
<td>New York, Metropolitan Opera</td>
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<td>French</td>
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<tr>
<td>Barcelona</td>
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<td>Berlin, Volks-Oper</td>
<td>27 September 1923</td>
<td>German</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antwerp</td>
<td>1927</td>
<td>Flemish?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Buenos Aires</td>
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<td>Russian</td>
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<tr>
<td>Turin</td>
<td>September 1931</td>
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<tr>
<td>London, Sadler’s Wells</td>
<td>12 April 1933</td>
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<tr>
<td>New York, Philharmonic-Symphony</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paris, Théâtre des Champs-Élysées</td>
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<td>Munich, Theater am Gärnerplatz</td>
<td>14 March 1962</td>
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<td>London, Royal Academy of Music</td>
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<td>Reading, Reading University</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dortmund</td>
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<tr>
<td>London, Chelsea Opera Group</td>
<td>1986</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minneapolis-St. Paul, Plymouth Music Series</td>
<td>3 February 1989</td>
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Table 2.1. Productions of Snegurochka outside Russia and the Soviet Union

From 1908 until 1921, the opera apparently disappeared from the Western stage. Loewenberg reports a production in Zagreb, in a Croatian translation. As with the Prague 1905 production, Loewenberg lists no translator for this production, nor for subsequent translations into Flemish, Hungarian, and Bulgarian. In the absence of further evidence, some skepticism concerning these translations seems prudent. The American premiere, according to Loewenberg, was in Seattle, followed two weeks later by the Metropolitan Opera in New York.
The only non-Russian production known to have enjoyed a multi-year run was at Sadler’s Wells in London, which had its premiere on 12 April 1933. In his review of the 1976 Royal Academy production, Harold Rosenthal recalled that Snegurochka “used to be a regular item at Sadler’s Wells in the 1930s and again in the immediate post-war seasons….It is full of lovely things and would be a welcome addition to the ENO repertory as a Christmas opera.”

Rosenthal’s suggestion of seasonal performances is worth considering. The opera is set at the end of winter, and features Russian peasant rituals that ushered in the spring, so the association with Christmas is not immediately apparent. Its fairy-tale setting, and its appeal to children and adults alike, though, offer some appeal to Yuletide audiences in search of family entertainment. More intriguing is a connection between the Snow Maiden and Yuletide that Rosenthal may not have known. Grandfather Frost, who is portrayed in the opera as the Snow Maiden’s father, is the Russian counterpart to Santa Claus or Father Christmas. At Yuletide celebrations, he is often accompanied by his daughter.

The onset of the Cold War in the 1950s no doubt accounts at least in part for the largest gap between Western premieres of this opera. Between 1939 and 1976 only Munich’s Theater am Gärnerplatz staged it. Political tensions between East and West seems to have made production of little-known Russian works too risky to warrant the expense of an opera production. The decline of the Soviet state and the Gorbachev era coincided with new productions in Germany, the United States, and two in Great Britain, including the Royal Academy of Music production that prompted Rosenthal’s comments. Of these four productions, two were low-budget affairs: the Royal Academy student production and the semi-staged Plymouth Music Series concerts in Minneapolis-St. Paul.

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This recent increase in performances notwithstanding, the disparity still persists between *Snegurochka*’s popularity and acclaim in Russia, and its obscurity abroad.

In Chapter One, I addressed Richard Taruskin’s argument, advanced in his *New Grove Dictionary of Opera* article, that this disparity is due to Western unfamiliarity with the semiotic context needed to fully appreciate this folk subject and the musical materials used in its portrayal. However convincing this explanation may be, though, the peculiarly Russian qualities of Rimsky-Korsakov’s music do not fully account for Western indifference to his operas, particularly *Snegurochka*. Gerald Abraham, even while advocating greater attention to Rimsky-Korsakov’s operas, charged the composer with “what might seem to be a crippling disability: lack of dramatic power.” Acknowledging that Rimsky-Korsakov often wrote quite effective music for certain character types, Abraham observed that

> …the music hardly ever seems to have grown out of the character’s inner being. Rimsky-Korsakov’s operas paradoxically succeed by being, in most cases, deliberately non-dramatic….Instead of dramas, he created musico-scenic fairy tales; instead of characters, fantastic puppets. 48

What appears to Abraham to be paradoxical was and is in Russia the subject of a vibrant debate. Due to what Taruskin has called the “ambiguous legacy” of Mikhail Glinka’s two operas, 49 the question was among the most hotly discussed topics in Russian music, as mentioned earlier in this chapter. In reference to *Ruslan i Liudmila*, Glinka’s second opera, Prince Vladimir Fedorovich Odoevsky argued that a different

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aesthetic applies to opera than that of spoken drama. He attributed the libretto’s dramatic weakness to its fantastic idiom:

To seek drama in a fantastic work would be in vain. Drama in the fantastic fairy-tale world has its own peculiar conditions, which belong to that world exclusively. Conflict among men, which constitutes the essential ingredients of earthly drama, is here brought to naught and there only remains struggle within the self and with non-human forces.  

Abraham’s paradox, then, is an inevitable condition of any fantastic stage work, according to Odoevsky. The world of fantasy is by its nature peopled with “fantastic puppets” devoid of psychological “inner beings.” This suggests an additional obstacle for Western appreciation of Rimsky-Korsakov’s operas: the peculiarly non-dramatic qualities of Russian fairy-tale opera. Despite the enormous popularity of Tchaikovsky’s fairy-tale ballet, *Nutcracker*, Western audiences have not endorsed the fairy-tale genre in opera with anything approaching their enthusiasm for Tchaikovsky’s Christmas classic.

The music critic for the *New York Times*, Richard Aldrich, apparently did not know of the Seattle production, as he considered the Met production to be the American premiere. Aldrich found nearly every aspect of the production praiseworthy, particularly Lucrezia Bori’s performance in the title role and Boris Anisfeld’s “richly imaginative scenery.” Despite its many pleasant qualities, though, Aldrich observed that

… it made no very deep impression upon the audience, for whatever reason: whether because of the strangeness of the whole thing, or because there is undoubtedly, with all the beauties and originality of the opera, a certain sluggishness, not to say long-windedness, in its unfolding.  

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Elsewhere Aldrich notes that the opera seemed to have thwarted the audience’s expectations, “both as a fairy folk tale in an artistic embodiment, and in its thoroughly Russian national note.” Presumably it is these qualities to which he refers as “strangeness.” His observations lend credence to both Taruskin’s and Abraham’s speculations about Western ambivalence toward this work, especially since he offers its fairy-tale genre and its peculiarly Russian context as possible explanations.

Compounding the problems of genre and semiotics was this opera’s inauspicious premiere in Paris. While Sergei Diaghilev’s staging of Boris Godunov at the Opéra, with Fyodor Chaliapin in the title role, launched that work into Western acclaim, the Opéra Comique production of Snegurochka presaged ambivalence and obscurity. Both operas opened during the same season (1908), with the lion’s share of attention going to Boris. The Opéra Comique’s Snegurochka was plagued with problems from the beginning, most involving a certain Mme. Halperine. A self-styled patroness of the arts, Halperine claimed exclusive credit for bringing Snegurochka to the Paris stage, but her role is far from certain. She charged Diaghilev with having sabotaged the production, but the available evidence does not substantiate her charges. Neither is her role in the opera’s staging borne out by correspondence among the principal parties; she does not appear to have been consulted in any of the decisions concerning direction or set design.52

Her charges against Diaghilev are contained in a letter she apparently sent to each of the major music periodicals in Russia; the editors of Russkaia muzykal’naia gazeta published the letter, apparently in its entirety, in the 10-17 August 1908 issue.53 She complains that the credit given to Diaghilev for having introduced Russian opera to the French stage is misdirected, that it was she who was primarily responsible. She claims to

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52 Her name is conspicuous by its absence in all correspondence between concerned and interested parties (Stasov, Rimsky-Korsakov, and Carré).

53 "Russkaia opera za granitsei," Russkaia muzykal’naia gazeta, No. 32-33 (10-17 August 1908): columns 665-67. All subsequent quotes from this letter are taken from this article.
have worked on translating and promoting *Snegurochka* for five years, and to have translated *Boris Godunov* into French. The editors point out here that the published French translation is credited to Michel Delin. In sum, she claims that the Opéra Comique had attempted to stage *Boris Godunov* well before the Opéra began its preparations, and that it was she who proposed the project.

Her claims about *Boris* would be difficult to substantiate; no independent evidence has come to light concerning any plans to stage *Boris* at the Opéra Comique. Her role in the initial stages of the *Snegurochka* production is likewise hard to prove. She shares credit with Pierre Lalo (1866-1943) for the French translation of the libretto, but just how large a role she played is unclear. In a letter to Vasilii Bessel, the publisher of the score, Rimsky-Korsakov expressed grave concern about Halperine’s contributions. After expressing concern about the translated title and the names of several characters, and despite his “complete confidence in M. Pierre Lalo as a man of letters,” he requested “to see the translation in order to make sure that the sense and content of the Russian text have been accurately rendered by Mme. Halperine.”

Her more serious charges against Diaghilev concern the design and construction of sets and costumes.

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Halperine’s blatant resort to Russian nationalism, blaming Diaghilev for the fact that French designers were hired for this production, flies directly in the face of all available evidence, and raises serious doubts concerning her credibility. Correspondence between Albert Carré, Director of the Opéra Comique (18-19), Rimsky-Korsakov, and Russian impresario Savva Mamontov reveals that Diaghilev was not involved in the decision to replace Korovin.

Sometime in the fall of 1907, Carré turned to Rimsky-Korsakov for advice and assistance concerning the musical materials and stage decor. The composer referred his request for materials to Bessel, and his inquiries concerning sets and costumes to the Imperial Theater Directorate in St. Petersburg.\(^55\) Whether Carré was already familiar with Korovin’s work through Halperine’s efforts or not, his subsequent letter to Savva Mamontov, brought to light by N. Alekseev, reveals that Carré, and not Diaghilev, sought a replacement for Korovin.

…I must tell you that the costume designs for the Petersburg Imperial Theater, which I requested out of curiosity, give a poor impression of how this work was presented there. I much prefer the several designs you have sent me….I requested nothing from Mr. Korovin, not having the honor of knowing him nor having corresponded with him. I would therefore appreciate those color designs of Vasnetsov that you would consent to send me.”\(^{56}\)

The French designers to whom Halperine refers produced costumes closely similar to Vasnetsov’s designs. Alekseev’s observation that “it would be just and correct to refer to Vasnetsov as the director of the 1908 Paris production”\(^57\) is well taken. The French designer Juissac did little more than adapt the designs Carré requested from Mamontov,

\(^{55}\) N. A. Rimsky-Korsakov to Albert Carré, 29 October 1907, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.


\(^{57}\) Ibid., p. 113.
though no Russian artist was publicly credited for the production. Halperine’s account is thus only partially accurate, and appears to be a deliberate ploy.

This practice of crediting local talent without recognizing Russian artists who contributed their ideas was a source of tension in this production. In response to another request from Carré, Rimsky-Korsakov recommended Nikolai Tcherepnin (1873-1945) to help with conducting. Tcherepnin gave Rimsky-Korsakov detailed accounts of rehearsals, reporting that “the conductor is quite capable and fully prepared, but since my arrival Carré has placed direction of rehearsals entirely in my hands. They heed me as if I were God himself.”58 Meanwhile, Rimsky-Korsakov was warning Tcherepnin that the score being prepared by Bessel listed Franz Rulmann as the conductor of the French premiere, with no credit to Tcherepnin.59 Tcherepnin always professed satisfaction with the treatment he received, but Rimsky-Korsakov was constantly at odds with the French concerning royalties and rights. Lalo and Halperine expected payment for their translation, a demand greeted with consternation from Rimsky-Korsakov and Bessel. According to Iastrebtsev, the composer heard from Bessel that the publisher understood that complimentary use of the musical materials for the Opéra Comique production constituted payment for the translation.60 Rimsky-Korsakov had raised the issue in the letter to Bessel cited above, and in his letter to Carré (quoted earlier) Rimsky-Korsakov informed the director that Russian translators typically did not expect payment for translations of librettos. Iastrebtsev’s report of a letter from Halperine that the composer’s wife showed him confirms how deeply such business matters troubled the composer. The letter was in response to Rimsky-Korsakov’s inquiries about royalties (an issue he had

60 V. V. Iastrebtsev, Vospominaniiia, vol. 2, p. 437.
also raised in that lengthy letter to Bessel), and informed the composer that he was not admitted into a French professional organization. Members of that organization were accorded higher royalties for performances of their works than were non-members. Nadezhda Nikolaevna [Rimskaia-Korsakova, the composer's wife] kept the letter from her husband for some time, fearing the effect it would have on his failing health.61

Ironically, the lack of credit accorded to Mamontov, Tcherepnin, and Vasnetsov may have lessened the production’s appeal to French audiences. Russian music was the current rage, with productions of *Boris Godunov* and scenes from Rimsky-Korsakov’s *Sadko* crowded into the same season with *Snegurochka*. The enormous success of Diaghilev’s production of *Boris*, with Chaliapin in the title role, not to mention the subsequent popularity of the Ballets Russes, attests to French enthusiasm for Russian performers and artists. The all-French cast and ostensibly local production of *Snegurochka* could not fully capitalize on this russomania, and garnered far less publicity and critical attention.

To attribute this opera’s subsequent obscurity in the West entirely to this production’s failures would be stretching the point, but the impact of a Paris premiere is worth considering. Until 1907, Western acquaintance with Russian music and art was spotty at best. Much of the nineteenth-century Russian music with which Western audiences are familiar today appeared outside Russia for the first time in Diaghilev’s Russian seasons at the Opéra. A successful Parisian *Snegurochka* might well have won a place in the Western repertory comparable to *Boris Godunov*, or at least *Prince Igor*.

Whatever the reasons for the disparities between Russian and non-Russian appreciation for this opera, many of the factors contributing to those differences are changing. Russia's political and cultural isolation through most of the twentieth century is

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dissipating. As her doors open to the rest of Europe and to the United States, and as Russian cultural institutions look abroad for infusions of capital, the Bolshoi and Kirov Operas are performing throughout Europe. Equally important, Russian artists' recordings are now distributed by major European labels. Phillips has released several recordings of Rimsky-Korsakov's operas in multi-CD boxed sets, performed by Valeri Gergiev and the Kirov Opera.

Recent scholarship is also beginning to revive interest in Rimsky-Korsakov, and to reassess previous impressions of him as a stodgy conservative. Richard Taruskin's articles in the *New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, already mentioned here, and Marina Frolowa-Walker's article in the latest edition of the *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* paint a far richer portrait of Rimsky-Korakov, informed by greater access to primary sources, than did Gerald Abraham. Recent performances of Rimsky-Korsakov's operas, most notably *Mlada* and *Kitezh*, in Europe and the United States, have also generated renewed interest in the core of this great composer's output.
A fire at the Malyi Theater having forced an early end to its 1872-73 season, the Moscow Directorate commissioned both Aleksandr Ostrovsky and Piotr Tchaikovsky to write a play with musical numbers for the dramatic, operatic, and ballet corps of the Bolshoi and Malyi Theaters. The directorate’s commission came in the early months of 1873, predicated by the need to close the Malyi Theater early that season for extensive remodelling. The directorate apparently wanted something that would fill the seats on short notice, and would employ both the Malyi Theater’s dramatic company and the Bolshoi Theater’s opera and ballet corps in the same production. The result was a stage play with nineteen musical numbers, including entr’actes, choruses, dances, songs, and melodramas.

Ostrovsky’s *Snegurochka* was a folklore-based *feieria*. The Russian *feieria* was a popular form of entertainment that involved dramatic action, vocal and instrumental

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62 Gerald Abraham, *The Music of Tchaikovsky* (New York: Norton, 1974), p. 123. Abraham’s attribution of the commission to the Bolshoi alone is misleading, as the production was designed as much for the Malyi’s dramatic company as for the Bolshoi’s singers, chorus, and corps de ballet.

63 The exact date of the commission is unknown, but its pretext is beyond speculation. The Malyi Theater records confirm that the theater closed early that season for remodelling, and that its actors were engaged for Ostrovsky’s play at the Bolshoi. The fact that both the play writer and the composer were specifically commissioned by the Directorate may be no more than a legal technicality, since all available evidence indicates that the primary authority and responsibility was Ostrovsky’s. The choice of subject was his, and Tchaikovsky deferred to his judgment in nearly all matters. Thus, *Snegurochka* has been regarded primarily as Ostrovsky’s play. Although Tchaikovsky’s music certainly merits more attention than it has received in literature, its examination is outside the scope of the present work. The current chapter mainly concerns Ostrovsky’s play as a basis of Rimsky-Korsakov’s opera.
music, dancing, and elaborate stage effects. Ostrovsky's most successful and enduring
feieria was Snegurochka, written in 1872 with nineteen musical numbers composed by
Piotr Tchaikovsky. Its story is an amalgam of Russian folk tale and nineteenth-century
quasi-mythology. The title character appears in several children’s tales as a beautiful little
girl who magically appears to a childless elderly couple. Literally a snow figure come to
life, she meets her demise in the late spring, either by getting lost in the woods while
gathering berries, or by joining the village young people in jumping over bonfires during
a spring ritual.

From its very beginnings, theater has always been closely connected with ritual.
From the Dionysian rites of the ancient Greeks to medieval liturgical dramas, and in
operas from the Renaissance onward, theatrical entertainment and sacred ritual have been
closely related, cross-fertilizing traditions. In Russia, parts of the wedding ritual appeared
in opera as early as 1779, in Sokolovsky and Ablesimov's Mel'nik-koldun, obmanshchik i
svat (1779). In 1869, Dmitri Agrenev-Slaviansky staged episodes from the wedding
ritual, complete with songs, dances, and stylized folk costumes, starting a movement that
lasted throughout the century. Perhaps the least likely playwright to be influenced by this
movement was Alexandr Ostrovsky, who was Russia’s most prominent playwright of
social drama. "The public expects,” he stated, “explication of the moral and social
phenomena and issues posed by everyday life,”64 and he largely followed what he
believed is a social obligation of a Russian writer. And yet, to the surprise of his

64 Alexander Ostrovsky, Polnoe sobranie sochinenii, vol.12, p. 256.
colleagues and the consternation of critics, he turned in the late 1860s to writing *feierii*, a popular form of musical theater full of spectacle, myth, magic, and folklore.\(^65\)

*Feeria* subjects were usually based loosely on folk themes, and were characterized as popular entertainment with an emphasis on spectacle. Nothing could be more different from Ostrovsky’s social dramas, for which he was most famous. In fact, he devoted himself to purging Russian theatre of shallow entertainment like the *feieria*. The question of what inspired Ostrovsky to explore this genre has been a matter of speculation by many, from Fyodor Batiushkov and Nikolai Kashin at the beginning of the 20\(^{th}\) century to K. N. Derzhavin and Georgii Siniukhaev in the Soviet era. Derzhavin’s conclusion speaks well for all of them, albeit with some Socialist Realist overtones. He observed that Ostrovsky's social dramas dealt with social and moral themes through “concrete portrayal of social circumstances,” while *feeria*, and *Snegurochka* specifically, approached these themes on an “abstract philosophical” level.\(^66\)

Ostrovsky pieced together the characters and themes of his *feiera* from fairy tales about a Snow Maiden in various anthologies of Russian folk tales, mainly from a recently published multi-volume collection of Aleksandr Afanas’ev *Narodnye russkie skazki*, which included two Snegurochka tales. Ostrovsky expanded these short tales into a full-length drama by adding characters from Russian mythology and a sub-plot involving the residents of a mythical Russian village of Berendei. In addition, he inserted texts from folk rituals that he had observed in the villages near his country estate. Batiushkov points out several moments in Ostrovsky’s life that influenced creation of Snegurochka: his

\(^{65}\) *Feerii* (pl., singular *feeria*) a genre apparently borrowed from the French *féerie*, a popular entertainment, often incorporating spectacle, pantomime and dance.

\(^{66}\) K. N. Derzhavin, *A.N. Ostrovskii* (Moscow, 1950), p.70
years of study of Russian history and folklore after he foreswore writing any more plays; living in his father’s estate in Kostroma, the site of the Iarilo rituals (Iarilo is the pagan god of sun) published in volume 5 of Tereshchenko’s celebrated ethnographic publication Byt russkago naroda, which he purchased in 1867, the year before he started working on Snegurochka; and his expedition down the Volga river, during which he possibly encountered tales of Berendei in Vladimirkaia province, Aleksandroviaski district.67

Among the published versions of these tales, three are most likely to have been familiar to the playwright: one appearing in the journal Moskvitianin, on the editorial board of which Ostrovsky served, two in the collection by A. N. Afanas’ev, and another collection containing a Snegurochka tale, M. Maksimovich, Trí skazki i odna pobasenka,68 copies of which may still be found in both Ostrovsky’s and Rimsky-Korsakov’s personal libraries.

In all three versions, a childless elderly couple fashions a girl out of snow, and she comes to life and lives with them as a daughter. In the Moskvitianin version, she melts away while carrying water from the well for her parents. In both Afanas’ev versions, she gets lost in the woods. In one, she is rescued by a fox, who demands payment from her parents of one chicken for her return. The couple outwits the fox by putting a dog in the sack with the chicken. In the other, her girlfriends take her out to gather berries, and abandon her in the woods. They tell her parents that a wolf ate her, but reeds grow on her grave, and when the wind blows, they betray the girls’ treachery. The reeds,


parenthetically, were of the type used by Russian women to make kugykli, a type of pan-flutes. Whether this tale had anything to do with Rimsky-Korsakov’s choice of a flute as Snegurochka’s characteristic instrument is purely speculative. As intriguing as this coincidence is, it is more likely that the composer chose the flute for its shrill, bright timbre. It closely resembles the timbre of a coloratura soprano, and it suggests Snegurochka’s cold qualities.

In his analysis of the Snegurochka tales, Afanas’ev finds thematic evidence linking them with the ancient Slavic myths of “cloud spirits,” ghosts which come to life in the springtime in the form of clouds. According to Afanas’ev, these myths, including the Snegurochka tales, represent primitive, poetic attempts to account for the melting of snow into the mists and thunderstorms of spring. Kashin also connects Snegurochka’s fear of Iarilo to Serbian tale of Trojana, a snow maiden who avoided going out in the daytime for fear of being melted by the sun. Afanas’ev himself related this tale to Snegurochka, and included it in volume 8 of Narodnye russkie skazki.

The pretext for Snegurochka’s arrival in the village is established in the Prologue. Vesna [Spring Beauty] and Moroz [Grandfather Frost] argue about whether to allow their fifteen-year-old daughter to venture out of the forest in which Moroz has been protecting her. Snegurochka pleads with them to allow her to discover love, of which she has heard in the songs of Lel’, a shepherd. Lel’ is a figure loosely drawn from Russian mythology.

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71 Afanas’ev, Poeticheskiia vozreiniia slavian na prirodu, p. 61.
closely associated with folksong. The word *lel’* and its variants *liuli, lioli,* etc., are common refrain syllables in Russian folksongs, especially spring and wedding songs of southern Russia. The verb *leleiat’* is an archaic Russian word meaning “to sing.”

Ostrovsky adopts Lel’ into this drama as the son of Iarilo, the Russian sun god, Moroz’s bitter rival. The conflict between Moroz and Iarilo, with Snegurochka caught tragically in the middle, drives the drama’s central plot line: Snegurochka’s quest for the ability to love, ending in her demise.

Ostrovsky may have turned to Russian folklore for the characters and general storyline of this musical play, but the play's dramatic themes were primarily his invention. Specific references to Afanas’ev’s analysis of the Snegurochka tale in light of Russian beliefs and superstitions, however, are clearly evident in the play: Snegurochka sees her face full of tears reflected in the river and fears that her beauty will be fading; the tsar expresses concern about clouds shrouding Iarilo’s mountain, quite likely alluding to Afanas’ev’s “cloud spirits.” More importantly, though, Ostrovsky's allegorical opposition between warmth and love, on the one hand, and cold and work on the other, is entirely his invention. This theme drives the play's dramatic plot, and sharply distinguishes it from its folk sources.

In neither of the Snegurochka tales included in Afanas’ev’s collection is her death either tragic or final. Indeed, in one version she remains alive at the tale’s end. In the other, she disappears as simply and suddenly as she appears. If a moral were to be derived, it would have more to do with her girlfriends’ treachery than in any sense of tragedy in her loss. She achieves a sort of immortality, as her characteristic song is re-created by the reeds and the blowing wind. In the *Moskvitianin* version, her demise is a
bit more tragic, as the story ends with her parents sadly looking up at the clouds after she
melts before their eyes. Still, in this tale she is at all times a magical creature. As much as
the elderly couple love her as a daughter, she never speaks, and indeed doesn't even have
a name. The epithet *rusokudraia snegurka* (light-brown-haired snowgirl), uncapitalized,
is her only name throughout the story. Her growth and development is linked constantly
to the seasons, so it comes as no surprise, and no great tragedy, when she melts in the
spring, when the snow is melting all around.

Snegurochka's entanglement in a love triangle, and the tragic equation between her
discovery of love and her demise, are both Ostrovsky's invention. By the end of this full-
length play, the audience's sympathies are with her, and her death cannot but hold some
trace of tragedy. Indeed, in contrast to all the folk tales, her melting is portrayed much
more as a death than as the natural end of a seasonal phenomenon like a snowgirl.

To these folk tales Aleksandr Ostrovsky added themes of love and social morality
from Russian mythology and of his own invention. As he adapted themes from Russian
fairy tales into a staged work made up of spoken dialogues, dramatic actions, singing, and
ballet, he made stylistic and thematic changes that placed the work within an aesthetic
environment quite different from that of the folk tale. Snegurochka’s mythic heritage in
Moroz and Vesna is entirely his invention, as is the shepherd Lel’. The crisis among the
village youths and maidens created by her presence, culminating in Mizgir’s
abandonment of Kupava, is a theme not found in any of the Snegurochka tales.

Imbedded in the play’s text are clear messages concerning the work ethic, love and
marriage, and physical beauty. As we mentioned earlier, Ostrovsky felt quite strongly
that drama must address such issues. Rimsky-Korsakov would remove these messages.
While it is practically impossible, in the absence of direct evidence from the composer, to know whether the exclusion of these messages was conscious or deliberate, their removal contributes to the stylistic differences between play and opera, and indicates the divergent dramatic aesthetics of Ostrovsky and Rimsky-Korsakov.

Throughout the play, the relative virtues of work and play are debated; indeed, the issue underlies much of the personal conflicts among the principal characters. Moroz and Snegurochka frequently extol the virtues of work, and disparage Vesna, Le'l', and the Berendeians as frivolous and lazy. Part of that laziness, in the eyes of Moroz, is the time wasted on seasonal rituals and song (Prologue, Scene Two, Moroz’s second monologue). Snegurochka also finds the maidens’ songs to Le'l’ (khorovods and other seasonal dances, songs, and games) frivolous, and equates their courtship activities with slothfulness (see Act One Arietta). She takes pride in her own industriousness, even when others admonish her that she seems cold and severe as a result (Act One, Scene One, with Bobyl’ and Bobylikha).

The constant bickering between Bobyl’ and Bobylikha, often concerning his legendary laziness, is another manifestation of the work vs. play opposition. Their arguing is an essential component of their comic nature, and is preserved in the opera, but specific instances of Bobylikha nagging her husband about his laziness are to be found only in the play. The best example of such a passage is their argument about firewood at their first appearance. The argument remains apparent in the opera, but the precise topic of this argument becomes obscure. As a result, the audience first glimpses these two characters not as husband and wife arguing about firewood, but as prototypes: The Nagging Wife and The Slothful Husband, a quite common pair in Russian folklore.
Bobyl’ and Bobylikha also introduce another of Ostrovsky’s social messages, the dynamics of love and marriage, in their domestic scene with Snegurochka, Act One, Scene One. As they exhort her to choose a mate, she protests that she cannot love anyone. Their response, which is only half comical, is that she is better off not being able to love. Indeed, for them, love is quite a separate issue from marriage. Financial security (both hers and her parents’) is far more germane to the choice of a marriage partner. Marrying for love can only bring misery, they say, referring to themselves as an example.

Decades after its premiere, Kashin considered Snegurochka and Ostrovsky’s earlier abortive attempts at feierias to be attempts to elevate the style of this popular entertainment, in keeping with his oft-quoted desire to foster a “noble, well-crafted, thriving folk repertory.” Soviet writers have since unanimously endorsed Kashin’s interpretation, and have canonized this play as a landmark of poetic nationalism. At the time of its premiere, though, most Russian intellectuals considered this work a debasement of Ostrovsky’s talent.

Controversy surrounded the play as soon as it opened at the Malyi Theater in Moscow. The Russian scholar Fyodor Batiushkov and the early Soviet literary scholar Nikolai Kashin provide exhaustive accounts of these early critical responses to Ostrovsky’s play, to which the present summary is deeply indebted. Kashin’s analysis is especially thorough. He concentrates mainly on the play’s critiques published in Sankt-Peterburgskie vedomosti. Although primarily grounded in substantive aesthetic disagreements, the polemics surrounding this play were fueled by rivalries among some of Russia’s prominent journals, particularly Golos and Vestnik Evropy.

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72 Kashin, “Snegurochka. Vesenniaia skazka v 4-kh deistviakh s prologom (opyt izucheniiia),” p. 70.
Criticism of the play took two forms: some critics argued that such a fantastic work was ill-suited to the stage, while others challenged it as little more than a “slavish” imitation of William Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. The argument concerning fantastic stage productions had by this time already become a passionate debate among Russian intellectuals, focused on Glinka’s *Ruslan i Liudmila*. Some of Ostrovsky’s critics even echoed Prince Odoevsky’s well-known assessment of *Ruslan*. Odoevsky recognized what seemed to him the inherent, inevitable weakness of staged fantasy: the inadequacy of stage effects. “Theatrical forms are too crude to express the passions, vices, virtues, sufferings, and joys of the fantastic world.” Even the addition of music, which “by virtue of its limitless, indefinite form, can give a scenic presentation precisely what it lacks before it can be called fantastic,” ultimately fails to redeem staged fantasy, “since everything distracts the spectator [from the world of imagination], even the beauty of the sets.” Odoevsky was clearly addressing here not only *Ruslan and Ludmila*, but staged fantasy in general, including the *feieria*.

Kashin addressed the critics’ comparisons with Shakespeare with special force, devoting an entire section of his article to “*Snegurochka* and Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*.” “All critics who wrote about *Snegurochka* seemed to consider it their sworn duty to point out that it was written under Shakespeare’s influence, particularly his *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*.” Although this might overstate the case somewhat, the references to Shakespeare do appear in a remarkable number of the play’s reviews. Kashin quotes extensively from three reviews and one letter to the

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editor, all of which had appeared earlier in Nikolai Denisiuk’s collection of critical literature about Ostrovsky’s plays.

Kashin, and Batiushkov before him, both allow that some connection exists between Shakespeare’s fantasy play and Ostrovsky’s “spring fairy tale,” but both argue against the charges that Ostrovsky borrowed from or imitated the English playwright. Batiushkov observed that both plays happen to have been set in springtime (though at opposite ends of the season), but argued that general similarities were dispelled by significantly different treatments. Only one theme, that of fated love, might have been borrowed, but this theme “corresponds as well with Ostrovsky’s own conception of love, which can be easily verified in a whole series of his works.” Kashin advanced the argument further with evidence from Ostrovsky’s sketches.

Kashin found no evidence of Shakespeare’s influence in Ostrovsky’s first scenario for this play, and traced every putatively borrowed element to the second scenario. The theme of love fated by flowers (in Shakespeare, the Love-in-idleness blossom, in Ostrovsky, a wreath of many flowers) does not appear in the first sketch. The second scenario begins, as does Shakespeare’s play, with a palace scene. Kupava’s complaint about Mizgir’s broken vows compares loosely with Egeus’s charges against Lysander of interference in the intended marriage of Egeus’s daughter Hermia to Demetrius. The argument between Vesna and Moroz over Snegurochka, which bears striking resemblance to Titania’s dispute with Oberon over a child, also appears for the first time in the second sketch. Ostrovsky’s play included a secondary plot (not present in Rimsky-Korsakov’s libretto) involving two pairs of star-crossed lovers, roughly similar to those in Shakespeare’s play; in the first sketch there was only one pair. Even the Iarilo-Day
festivities, also not found in Ostrovsky’s first sketch, generally serve the same function as the marriage of Theseus and Hippolyte: both are festive occasions ordered by royalty, and both are climaxes of their respective plays.

Criticism of the play did not end with these charges of derivativeness, though. The anonymous letter to the editor characterized Snegurochka as a “personification of nature,” and found the play’s fanciful tone inappropriate. “It can’t be helped that our countryside is forbidding and severe, that [peasant] life is poor and gloomy. One can’t disguise it with exotic, fantastic trappings.”74 This demand for realism even in a fairy-tale setting betrays a deeply rooted, pervasive complaint common to nearly all of the play’s critical reviews: flaws in the genre itself. At a time when Vissarion Belinsky’s call for critical realism held sway with much of the Russian intelligentsia, some critics regarded the deliberately fanciful feieria with disdain.

Nearly every critic found no room on the dramatic stage for such a work. S. T. Vinogradskii regarded this “apotheosis of spring and love” appropriate only for painters, lyricists, or epic poets, but not for dramatists. Chebyshev-Dmitriev stated categorically that “a fairy tale cannot serve as the subject of a dramatic work.”75 If Odoevsky’s voice is faintly perceptible in these arguments, it resounds unmistakeably in the charges leveled by the Moscow arts correspondent for the St. Petersburg journal Golos:

It is not a drama. What kind of drama can there be where the main heroine lacks a heart, where she lacks all that, in the common parlance, must exist in the human heart, upon whose

74 Ibid., p. 94.
75 Ibid., p. 90.
manifestations drama depends. It is not a comedy, because the subject itself negates the possibility of its treatment in that form….Neither is it a fairy tale. There is so much of mundane stage effects, it is so artificial, and it drags so, that the audience is utterly incapable of entering the fairy-tale world it portrays.  

Given this widely publicized critical antipathy toward the play, its short run at the Bolshoi is not surprising (the play was dropped from the repertory after one season). The controversy surrounded the initial reception of the play may have influenced Rimsky-Korsakov’ initial disdain for the work. In Chapter Four, his account of his first reaction will be addressed, along with his subsequent change of heart and his transformation of Ostrovsky's play into an opera libretto. Aside from the changes required by a shift from the spoken to the sung word, Rimsky-Korsakov also refocused the work's dramatic themes. The result was a work that more closely resembles the folk tales than does Ostrovsky's play.

76 Ibid., p. 97.
Rimsky-Korsakov’s libretto is, according to the opera’s title page, “taken from A. N. Ostrovsky’s play.” The exact nature of that adaptation, and its place within the larger compositional process, are vital elements in the composer’s conception of this opera.

It is my belief that...the opera libretto cannot be examined otherwise but in connection with the music. Separated from the music, the libretto is only a means to get acquainted with the content and the details of the opera, and not at all an independent literary work. Therefore I allow myself...to change the meter and the feet in each line to correlate the lines with the needs of the musical rhythm, since in opera the rhythm of the verse must depend on the musical rhythm, and not vice versa.

As one might surmise from this quote, Rimsky-Korsakov’s Snegurochka is quite substantially his own, the product of extensive textual revision, both in detail and in larger design. From his work with Musorgsky’s Boris Godunov, for example, we are familiar with Rimsky-Korsakov’s propensity for changing another’s work to suit his tastes. The extent of his revisions of Ostrovsky’s play and the nature of these changes also reveal important insights into the composer’s aesthetic views, understanding of and interest in this subject. In particular, his adaptation of material that Ostrovsky had himself

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77zaimstvovano is p’esy. Title page of vocal score (St. Petersburg: Bessel, 1880).
borrowed or adapted from folk sources demonstrates the differences between these two artists’ interest in and use of folklore. Additionally, the net effect of the change from spoken drama to opera, and of the structural and textual modifications that accompanied that change, was a subtle yet significant shift in the interpretation of the title character, Snegurochka.

Although the libretto’s general shape and the vast majority of its text originate in Ostrovsky’s play, it bears Rimsky-Korsakov’s stamp in many aspects, quite significant to the opera’s general artistic impression. The nature of that stamp may be found by examining the revision process itself, and by comparing both the libretto and the play to the folk sources familiar to Ostrovsky and Rimsky-Korsakov. Such a comparison has not been done before now. The play’s dramatic subject and its narrative presentation are essentially preserved in the opera. The differences between the play and the libretto reside primarily at local and middle-ground levels of dramatic composition.

With the exception of V. Paskhalov’s short study of Lel’s Third Song, Rimsky-Korsakov’s textual changes to Ostrovsky's script have never been examined in the context of the original folk texts. Behind his removal of some scenes and his revision of others lies an aesthetic stance with regard to folk material that is very different from that of Ostrovsky.

As we have seen, *Snegurochka* was a watershed in Rimsky-Korsakov's development as a composer, so a complete picture of its composition holds potential treasure for a fuller understanding of his practical implementation of his operatic vision.

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79 V. Paskhalov, "Pesenka Lelia," *Muzykal’nyi sovremennik* (Nov. 1915), pp. 42-43. Paskhalov presents a side-by-side comparison of Ostrovsky's and Rimsky-Korsakov's texts, and notes that the strict dactylic meter in Ostrovsky's is "alien to Russian [folk]song." This, he argues, is why Tchaikovsky's song, with Ostrovsky's original text, is less folk-like than Rimsky-Korsakov's.
As he has observed, “Rimsky-Korsakov was either the author or the co-author of the librettos to all his operas,” so to disregard his textual decisions is to pass over an essential step in the composition of each of his operas. In this chapter, his work on the text will be considered in isolation from the music. In the following chapter, the adaptation of the libretto will be examined as part of the general compositional process. As that process took place with Ostrovsky’s permission and consultation, the precise nature of the relationship between composer and playwright is an important pretext for this discussion.

The relationship between the young, then little-known composer and the venerable playwright has been the subject of some investigation, and sheds some light on the context within which the opera was composed. Direct evidence is limited to their published correspondence, edited and commented upon by Vasilii Iakovlev. A somewhat less direct but equally revealing account is contained in the published correspondence between Rimsky-Korsakov and his student, Semyon Niklaevich Kruglikov (1851-1910). The picture offered by both accounts is of a cordial, respectful, yet somewhat diffident relationship. Rimsky-Korsakov respected and deferred to Ostrovsky, but never again collaborated with him, nor even shared the spotlight with him at the opera's premiere. Ostrovsky communicated with the young composer as a fellow

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80 Gozenpud, "Rimskii-Korsakov v rabote nad opernym libretto" [Rimsky-Korsakov at Work on Opera Librettos], Izbrannye stat'i, p. 132.


artist, but did not appear to have felt himself especially involved in the creation of this opera, nor more than casually interested in its production.

Rimsky-Korsakov’s relationship with Ostrovsky was distant and tenuous at best, and leaves open the question of whether the playwright genuinely approved of the opera. Their letters, while cordial, are rather formal; they address only matters related to Snegurochka, and their tone is at all times polite and business-like. During the fall and winter of 1881-82, Ostrovsky made frequent trips to St. Petersburg. Despite those frequent trips, he apparently did no more than drop by a dress rehearsal. He is not known to have met or collaborated with Rimsky-Korsakov in any way. Ostrovsky was quite interested in contemporary music, and worked closely with Tchaikovsky and Serov on several occasions, but he never worked with Rimsky-Korsakov.

For what it is worth, Ostrovsky apparently did not care for Rimsky-Korsakov’s opera. A rather amusing anecdote from Savva Mamontov, published in 1910, reveals that Ostrovsky did see the opera during its first production (whether a rehearsal or performance is not clear), and that he found Rimsky-Korsakov’s music too unconventional for his tastes.

…when I explained to him that I had come to invite him to a rehearsal of Rimsky-Korsakov's opera, he replied, "I won't come."

"Why on earth not," I asked in disbelief.

"I won't come," he repeated, and added, "I heard it in Petersburg; it's not music. Now, Traviata--that's music, but this is not."

No matter how much I implored, he would not go.83

83 V. Iakovlev, "A.N. Ostrovskii v perepiske s russkimi kompozitorami,: p. 37. Originally published in Iakov L'vov, "Chetvert' veka nazad (k 25-letiu pervoi postanovke Snegurochke v Moskve)," Rampa i zhizn' (1910, no. 43).
With his primary musical ideas on paper, Rimsky-Korsakov visited Ostrovsky in Moscow to secure the playwright's permission to revise the play into an opera libretto. The trip was prompted originally by a concert that Rimsky-Korsakov conducted at the Bolshoi Theater on 26 April 1880, featuring the Moscow premieres of his Overture to *Maiskaia noch’* [May Night] (1879) and his *Uvertiura na russkie temy* [Overture on Russian Themes], op. 28 (1866). It seems likely that, by the time he traveled to Moscow, Rimsky-Korsakov had at least a general idea of the cuts he would like to make, and may well have had specific large-scale cuts to propose to Ostrovsky. By then Rimsky-Korsakov had sketches in hand for nearly all the major characters (he had just finished the first sketch for Snegurochka’s Prologue Aria), and was thereby prepared to give Ostrovsky a complete, if rudimentary, summary of his musical ideas for character exposition and development.

According to Iastrebtsev, the first sketch was composed on 10 April, before Rimsky-Korsakov visited Ostrovsky in Moscow. The second sketch, dated 8 May (soon after Rimsky-Korsakov’s return to St. Petersburg) includes a new melody, more nearly like the final version, and a very different text.⁸⁴ These sketches will be examined more closely, in the context of the composition process, in the next chapter. Rimsky-Korsakov's month-long hesitation to make such a radical change in Ostrovsky's text suggests that he felt it necessary to gain the playwright's permission before doing so. Having received it, he apparently felt free to make quite significant revisions here and elsewhere, in response to his own aesthetic judgment.

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⁸⁴A letter from Semyon Kruglikov addressed to Rimsky-Korsakov in St. Petersburg, dated 8 May, confirms that the composer had left Moscow sometime before then.
Neither composer nor playwright mentioned this profound alteration to a rather graceful bit of poetry in any of their correspondence. Even in his detailed inventory of questions and concerns about the libretto, Ostrovsky did not take issue with the textual transformations in this aria. This would suggest either that the two writers clearly saw this passage as an appropriate example of the general principles to which both had agreed, or that they had discussed this passage in particular during Rimsky-Korsakov’s visit. In either case, there is no evidence that Ostrovsky took issue with Rimsky-Korsakov’s changes to Snegurochka’s opening monologue. He appears to have fully accepted the accommodation to musical concerns as a vindication of the sacrifice of literary quality.

Rimsky-Korsakov recalled that the playwright received him warmly. Having seen and heard the composer’s ideas for the opera, Ostrovsky gave him permission to compose it, “with authorization to make changes and cuts that might be necessary,” and presented him with a copy of the play.85 Satisfied that he had the author’s blessing, Rimsky-Korsakov returned to St. Petersburg and continued to sketch out his musical ideas.

Already in the first stage of the opera’s composition, the initial adaptation of Ostrovsky’s play, Rimsky-Korsakov made textual changes as large as entire scenes and as small as single words. Rimsky-Korsakov seems to have taken Ostrovsky’s permission to “make changes and cuts that might be necessary” in the broadest possible way. Having secured the playwright’s permission to make changes, he must have considered the libretto to be as much his creative property as the music.

85 Rimsky-Korsakov, Letopis’, pp. 177-78; Chronicle, pp. 193-94.
After having completed the entire piano-vocal score with no further consultation with Ostrovsky, Rimsky-Korsakov hoped to go again to Moscow, to solicit Ostrovsky's opinions of the libretto. Unable to make the trip, he instead sent the libretto to Kruglikov. Judging from Rimsky-Korsakov’s accompanying letters to Kruglikov and to Ostrovsky, he was fully prepared for extensive comments from the playwright. He suggested that Kruglikov familiarize himself with the libretto before giving it to Ostrovsky, in case “he tells you anything by word of mouth.”

His letter to Ostrovsky suggests his willingness to accommodate requests for changes, and deference to the playwright’s literary talent and taste. This letter and Ostrovsky’s response constitute the last known and most detailed communication between the two concerning the content of the opera.

Rimsky-Korsakov’s letter is the most complete account of the relationship between text editing and musical composition. Recalling that he had originally intended to prepare the libretto before composing the music, Rimsky-Korsakov reports that events took an unexpected turn. Having arrived for the summer at my dacha, I tried working on the Prologue. I was so drawn to Snegurochka that soon I took up the music. Beyond all expectations, the Prologue was already completely finished by 23 June [1880]. I revised the text simultaneously with the musical composition. I then decided to stop, but could not bear it, and proceeded to compose further. Just imagine, by 15 August the entire five-act opera was completely sketched out.

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87 N. A. Rimsky-Korsakov to A. N. Ostrovsky, 26 October 1880, and A. N. Ostrovsky to N. A. Rimsky-Korsakov, 10 November 1880, in A. N. Ostrovskii i russkie kompozitory, pp.176-80.

88 N. A. Rimsky-Korsakov to A. N. Ostrovsky, 26 October 1880, in A. N. Ostrovskii i russkie kompozitory, pp.176-77.
He closed the letter on an apologetic and apprehensive note. “I am sending you the
libretto in terror: the opera is ready, and I am afraid that you will find it all muddled! I
beg you once more not to withhold from me your comments and corrections. Forgive me
for troubling you.”

The account in this letter of the work’s progress agrees entirely with Rimsky-
Korsakov’s description of the composition process in *Letopis’*, and with Iastrebtsev’s
assignment of dates to the individual scenes in this initial draft. It was indeed an
unprecedented flurry of activity for the composer. It was not the intensity of the work,
though, that kept him from corresponding with Ostrovsky earlier. After all, Rimsky-
Korsakov found time to correspond with others, notably Kruglikov, throughout the
summer. Instead, the nature of the work, it appears, made correspondence with the
playwright pointless until the entire draft was completed. Since text revisions proceeded
simultaneously with musical composition, Rimsky-Korsakov did not have a complete
libretto to show Ostrovsky until after the music was composed as well.

Kruglikov reported that he delivered the libretto personally to Ostrovsky on 3
November 1880, and that the playwright promised to return it within a week with any
corrections he might have. According to Kruglikov, Ostrovsky told him that he could
only comment on “any possible unevenness of text; he agreed in advance to your
[Rimsky-Korsakov’s] cuts, expansions, and even those revisions of his *Snegurochka*
made for musical reasons.” On 10 November, Rimsky-Korsakov asked his student to

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89 Ibid., p.178.
91 S. N. Kruglikov to N. A. Rimsky-Korsakov, 3 November 1880, in N. A. Rimskii-Korsakov. *Polnoe sobranie
sochinenii. Literaturnye proizvedeniia i perepiska,* vol.8a, p.57.
visit Ostrovsky once more and “politely hasten him; I have heard that he has a habit of
sometimes holding on to things that are given to him.”92 The reminder was unnecessary,
though, as Kruglikov reported having received the libretto from the playwright on the
same day. In a letter also dated 10 November, Ostrovsky expressed general satisfaction
with the libretto, and listed several proposed text corrections. His only musical suggestion
was in response to Rimsky-Korsakov’s question about what gender and range to use for
the Maslenitsa effigy. Ostrovsky expressed a preference for a bass, but left the decision to
Rimsky-Korsakov.93 Kruglikov also reported that Ostrovsky had not expected the
effigy’s monologue to make it into the opera. According to Kruglikov, Ostrovsky also
acknowledged that his preference of a masculine voice was at odds with folk practice, in
which the doll is usually feminine.94 In a subsequent letter to Kruglikov, Rimsky-
Korsakov expressed heartfelt relief that Ostrovsky’s corrections were all minor, and
required no major revisions.95

By the time Rimsky-Korsakov received Ostrovsky’s comments, he had already
begun the opera’s orchestration, which comprised his chief labor from 7 September 1880
to 26 March 1881 when he produced new versions of a few numbers. Still other revisions
were made in preparation of the full-score lithograph, published by Bessel in 1881. The

92 Ibid.
93 A. N. Ostrovsky to N. A. Rimsky-Korsakov, 10 November 1880, in A. N. Ostrovskii i russkie kompozitory,
pp.179-80.
94 S. N. Kruglikov to N. A. Rimsky-Korsakov, 3 November 1880, in N. A. Rimskii-Korsakov. Polnoe sobranie
sochinenii. Literaturnye proizvedeniia i perepiska, vol.8a, p.57.
95 N. A. Rimsky-Korsakov to S. N. Kruglikov, 15 November 1880, Ibid., p.59.
printed vocal score and libretto both bear a censor’s approval stamp dated 14 May 1881.  

The fact that both publications pre-date the opera’s premiere (29 January 1882) is not unique in the history of Russian opera of this period. Many of the piano-vocal scores to Piotr Tchaikovsky’s operas, including Evgeni Onegin, were published before their premieres, as were the scores to several of Rimsky-Korsakov’s later operas, including Sadko and Skazanie o nevidimom grade Kitezhe i o deve Fevronii. (1907)  

In other cases, scene structure was further revised; as was true in the initial adaptation, changes in this second stage often did not affect the opera’s length. Some changes made as late as during the opera's orchestration suggest that, while Rimsky-Korsakov's aesthetic vision of the opera seems to have been clear from the outset, some rather significant details of that vision were still evolving throughout the process of composition and orchestration.

The nature of changes made in the second stage, the opera’s orchestration in 1881, further indicate that faithfulness to Ostrovsky’s text was not among the composer’s primary concerns. Many of the changes made at this time were apparently prompted by musical concerns. Text changes in these cases seem to be incidental to the revisions in the music's structure, meter, or rhythm. For example, Rimsky-Korsakov quite thoroughly revised the brief scene involving Moroz, Vesna, and Snegurochka, following Snegurochka's arietta and preceding the Maslenitsa chorus, in the autograph full score.

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96 I am indebted to the Russian National Library in St. Petersburg for providing a microfilm copy of the lithograph of the orchestral score (Fond 640, no. 174).  

97 Evgeni Onegin opened 29 March 1879, and the publication date on the piano-vocal score is 1878; likewise, the publication dates for Sadko and Kitezh (1897 and 1906, respectively) precede the premieres of those operas (7 January 1898, and 20 February 1907).
The version found in the piano-vocal score is here crossed out in pencil, and a new version is inserted.

Documentary evidence concerning the chronology of cuts made after the approval of the full score in March 1881 is practically non-existent. Nothing in Rimsky-Korsakov's autobiography, Iastrebtsev's memoirs, or the secondary literature indicates when, where, or why any of the post-1881 changes were made. Some small cuts made at this stage in Vesna's scene with Moroz involved the removal of lines made unnecessary or awkward by previous reductions in their dialogue. First, having eliminated Moroz’s lengthy account of a story told to him by a bird, Rimsky-Korsakov had kept Vesna’s response, “I don’t believe your empty stories.” The awkwardness of this line, with Moroz’s story left out, apparently escaped the composer’s notice until after the full score was approved. At the conclusion of this scene, Moroz and Vesna agree to terms for Snegurochka's departure from the forest. In the play, this truce follows an acrimonious argument, and each qualifies acquiescence with a final verbal jab at the other. Moroz’s last speech was cut altogether from the vocal score, but Vesna's statement, which immediately preceded it, remained in the first edition of the full score. Quite possibly, the problems with both these passages were revealed in rehearsal or early performances.

In the third and final stage, changes and cuts made in the course of the opera’s first productions are reflected in the 1898 edition. Changes made here were often in response to the practical concerns of the work’s performance. The nature of these changes demonstrates that the composer continued refining some significant details of this opera as he saw it take shape in rehearsals and, perhaps, performances.
The most obvious change made in this third stage had no effect at all on the opera's length; rather, it was a stylistic change, perhaps prompted as well when the composer saw the work staged. In its original version, the Introduction to Act One was a choral scene in the kuchkist style of the 1870s. Two principals and the chorus converse in free declamation, accompanied by hunting-horn motives in the orchestra. The style is quite similar to that of the gorelki scene in Pskovitianka, where musical continuity rests in the accompaniment, while the vocal lines are tailored simply to declamation of the text. In the 1898 edition, all vocal lines are removed, leaving an orchestral Introduction practically identical to the original accompaniment.

The original Introduction featured Bobyl’, Lel’, and men's and women's choruses, the latter replacing Kupava's father Murash, and an anonymous villager, neither of whom appears at all in the opera. The text consisted of excerpts from Ostrovsky’s Act One, Scene Two, in which the men coming home from the fields argue about who will be stuck with the lazy shepherd, Lel’, as a house guest (Bobyl’, naturally, loses the argument). Lel’ somewhat ironically thanks Bobyl’ for his kind offer of a warm place for the night.

The result of the revision is that our first acquaintance with Lel’ is quite different in the opera’s second edition than it was in the first. The irony of Lel’s expression of gratitude (preserved in the second edition as the first line in Act One) is lost in the absence of the preceding argument. More important, Lel’s laziness is not an issue in the second version. His proud refusal of payment from Snegurochka seems far nobler when

we have not just seen him begging for a place to spend the night. Further evidence that
this was a concern of the composer is that several references to Lel’ as “the lazy
shepherd” in the Prologue were also eliminated. Rimsky-Korsakov apparently had second
thoughts about some of the mortal details of Ostrovsky’s Lel’, particularly his laziness.
By carefully removing all references to his lazy nature, the composer transformed Lel’
to a less concrete, more symbolic manifestation of the spirit of music and love.

The timing and exact purpose of the transformation of the Act One Introduction are
quite unknown. Neither Rimsky-Korsakov nor Iastrebtsev left any indication of when the
change was made, or the reason behind it. Two possible concerns were the scene’s
general character, and Bobyl’s vocal line. The original version was the only choral
declamation scene in the entire opera, an anomaly in an otherwise quite lyrical opera. Its
removal is further evidence of Rimsky-Korsakov’s rejection of the operatic aesthetic
within which Pskovitianka was composed. The move from declamation to lyricism is
reflected as well in the changes made in Ostrovsky’s text for Snegurochka’s Prologue
aria, and in the preponderance of cuts made in the play’s spoken scenes, while musical
numbers were changed far less. As for Bobyl’s vocal line, outside this scene it quite
consistently incorporates a single motive; the ubiquitous nature of this motive in all his
utterances is an essential component of his comedic nature in the opera. In this choral
scene, his second appearance in the opera, the motive is entirely absent. It is quite
probable that this consideration also influenced Rimsky-Korsakov’s decision to change
the scene.

Whatever the composer’s primary intentions were for each of the revisions
described here, their result is a work quite substantially different from its source. The
differences, at least from the perspective of drama, may be summarized in five categories. First, several minor characters in the play, and of necessity, the plot lines associated with them, are absent in the libretto. Second, Rimsky-Korsakov quite deliberately removed some rather explicit moral messages found in the play. Third, many of the details of folk ritual observances, and with them the dramatic connections between those festivals and the villagers’ daily life, are blurred or eliminated in the opera. Finally, personal conflict among the major characters, an important feature in Ostrovsky’s drama, is minimized or eliminated in favor of the juxtaposition of symbolic personages. Most important, the fate of the title character is transformed from being a tragic consequence of the feud between Moroz and Iarilo to the symbolic passing of a natural phenomenon. In short, Rimsky-Korsakov constructed a drama that relates to its roots in folklore in quite a different way from Ostrovsky’s play.

Abram Gozenpud presents the only scholarly discussion of Rimsky-Korsakov's work on the libretto, and even he treats only the large-scale structural and dramatic changes. As a pioneer in the study of Rimsky-Korsakov’s libretti, Gozenpud properly brought attention to this important, under-studied topic. Unfortunately, his commentary at times has little or no basis in direct evidence. For example, he asserts that the opera’s "main idea is Snegurochka's passionate struggle to become human." If this were true, the removal of Act One, Scene One, her only scene with her human adoptive parents, is inexplicable. Certainly, an important part of Snegurochka's efforts to become human is her attempt to fit into human society; this scene early in the play shows how foreign she is to the human world, and how unlikely her transformation is. If, on the other hand,

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99 Gozenpud, "Rimskii-Korsakov v rabote nad opernym libretto" [Rimsky-Korsakov at Work on Opera Librettos], Izbrannye stat’i, p. 151.
Rimsky-Korsakov's "main idea" were to represent Snegurochka's struggle in the context of the Russian folk belief system, this and all of the larger cuts make sense. They shift attention away from the more realistic aspects of Ostrovsky's drama, and toward its more symbolic component, the pagan understanding of the seasonal change from winter to spring. Fortunately, Gozenpud’s comparison of the opera with its dramatic source dwells more on the music and its dramatic affect than on the text and dramatic structure.

The most profound differences between the two works relate to the generic qualities of opera and spoken drama. A scene of spoken dialogue produces an aesthetic effect quite distinct from that of the same scene set entirely to music. The suitability of the subject for spoken drama was, as we have seen, the subject of some discussion among contemporary critics, and Gozenpud has touched upon some of the dramatic effect of Rimsky-Korsakov’s addition of music. The net effect of his changes to the text and dramatic structure of Ostrovsky’s play bears closer scrutiny, though. His setting of the Wedding Scene is a strikingly different representation of the wedding ritual, even though very few textual changes were made. He created a divertimento at the beginning of Act Three with some subtle yet telling shifts in scene structure and by inserting a new character in one number. His transformation of two scenes from Act Three into a solo arioso produces a profoundly different portrayal of Snegurochka, with only the slightest changes in text. In each of these cases, the textual and structural changes are only partly necessitated by the change from drama to opera. They all contribute to a new aesthetic as well: symbolism and the inevitability of the pantheistic cycle of seasonal ritual replace realism and human conflict.
Elimination of minor roles is usually a matter of practical necessity when spoken dramas are adapted into operas; compared with spoken drama, opera production requires much higher costs, and the sung text takes much longer to present. Drama actors are also less costly, and require less rehearsal for a new work than do opera soloists. While the elimination of a handful of minor characters from a stage play would make little difference in the production’s budget, their presence in an opera production might stretch expenses too far.

Practical necessity notwithstanding, the removal of any characters and their plot lines certainly has an aesthetic effect. Dispensing entirely with the text and plot lines involving the village youths and maidens, as well as Elena Prekrasnaia, was one alternative. Most often, though, Rimsky-Korsakov substituted the chorus for individual minor characters in these situations, thus diffusing their unique personalities into more generalized features of the villagers. The net effect of these changes is one of the most profound differences between the play and opera. The minor characters were sometimes directly involved in plot lines with the leads; the removal of the minor characters’ roles in those situations, or their sublimation into a generalized chorus, cast the protagonists in a quite different light. In other cases, the sub-plots involving those characters were cut entirely; the absence of those plot lines noticeably altered the shape of the drama.

The village youths, Brusilo, Kurilka and Malysh, and the maidens, Radushka and Malusha, appeared in many of the play’s village. In the first of these, the Wedding Scene in Act One, they participated with Mizgir and Kupava in a pivotal dramatic event. When Mizgir arrives to claim his bride, he is met with ritualistic challenges from the men of the village, and pleas from the women not to take their friend away from them. Rimsky-
Korsakov simply assigned their individual speeches to groups of men and women of the chorus; this revision was made even simpler by the fact that the individuals most often spoke in behalf of the group: “Don’t take her from us,” “We won’t let you take her,” etc. In Table 4.1, the three types of changes in this scene are summarized: some lines are cut, others revised, and lines spoken by minor characters are re-cast for chorus.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scene 6</th>
<th>Wedding Ritual</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>OSTROVSKY</strong></td>
<td><strong>RIMSKY-KORSAKOV</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Radushka:</strong> We girls need beautiful Kupava most. If we give her up, who would dance with us, and sit and talk with us in the evening? <strong>Mizgir:</strong> Beauties, you need your girlfriend, but I need her more. I wander all alone without a housewife. To whom shall I give the golden keys to the treasure chest? <strong>Radushka:</strong> Shall we give her up or not?</td>
<td><strong>Cut</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Malusha:</strong> Don’t give her up, girlfriends! We still have songs we haven’t sung, and games we haven’t played with her.</td>
<td><strong>Recast for Chorus.</strong> [Added]: We won’t give up Kupava!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mizgir:</strong> Beauties, you need your girlfriend, but I need her more. Who will comfort me, an orphan? Who will sing to me, pamper me, comb and tend my blond curls?</td>
<td><strong>Unchanged</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Radushka:</strong> Shall we give up our girlfriend or not? <strong>Malusha:</strong> Well, the ransom had better be big. <strong>Rad.:</strong> A ruble, a half, or at least a gold farthing—give that to the girls, and we’ll give up Kupava.</td>
<td><strong>Revised. recast for Chorus:</strong> We’ll give you our girlfriend only for a big ransom. Give the ladies a ruble, a half, or at least a gold farthing, and we’ll give up Kupava.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mizgir:</strong> I won’t begrudge you a ruble, a half, or a gold farthing. Here, a ship of nuts and honey-cakes has come for you.</td>
<td><strong>Unchanged</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Malysh:</strong> You’re not taking Kupava yet. We won’t give her up without a ransom. Guys, stand like a mountain! Don’t give her up for free, or else they’ll take all our girls, and we won’t have enough in the village.</td>
<td><strong>Recast for Tenors,</strong> accompanied by Women’s Chorus singing folksong “To ne pava.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.1. Cuts and revisions involving the villagers

When Mizgir’s ritualistic rivals are subsumed into a chorus of villagers, he becomes more of a symbolic “outsider,” a “stranger” at odds with the village as a whole. His bargaining with Radushka and the maidens changes very little, since in the play, Radushka is little more than spokesperson for her cohorts. After Mizgir purchases their approval of the marriage, the men, represented chiefly by Brusilo, challenge the “foreigner,” complaining that maidens of the village should go in marriage only to youths...
of the village. Kupava’s rejection of Brusilo silences this challenge, and the wedding proceeds. This entire passage (the end of Ostrovsky’s Act One, Scene Six), the climax of the ritualistic confrontation between the bride’s friends and the groom, was removed in the preparation of the opera’s libretto.

The removal of one minor character merits special attention. A character found in many Russian folktales, including many of the Ivan Tsarevich tales, Elena Prekrasnaia (Beautiful Elena) appears in Acts Two and Three of Ostrovsky’s play as the wife of the Tsar’s minister, Bermiata. In folk tales, she is often the object of a quest, usually the desirable ruler of a neighboring country.\textsuperscript{100} Likewise in the play, she is an exceptional beauty, indeed the most beautiful woman in the Berendei court. When a young man is to be chosen to inspire love in Snegurochka, the Tsar appeals to Elena for her judgment. She chooses Lel’. Later, in Act Three, she attempts to seduce Lel’ in the woods. Lel’ graciously spurns her. When her husband, Bermiata, appears and accuses her of having betrayed him yet again, she swears her loyalty to him and promises never to betray him again.

Elena Prekrasnaia’s first appearance in the play is in Act Two, Scene Four, in which she leads the people in a hymn of praise to the Tsar. Rimsky-Korsakov kept the hymn, eliminated the Tsar’s greeting to Elena which preceded it, and substituted Lel’ for Elena as leader of the chorus. The replacement is convenient, since Lel’ personifies the spirit of music, and since he is already present in the scene.

Elena Prekrasnaia’s removal has much to do with an important change that Rimsky-Korsakov makes in Lel’s character: he is de-sexualized, or perhaps more

\textsuperscript{100}The Russian Elena Prekrasnaia, or Helene the Beautiful, is quite likely related to another legendary woman, Helene of Troy. Both are renowned for their beauty, and are the objects of legendary quests.
accurately, de-personalized. In both play and opera, the shepherd is a breeches role, and the maidens’ attraction to him rests largely on his singing ability. Still, in the play, he is praised, and even propositioned by the most beautiful woman in the kingdom, and he responds to the Tsar’s charge to inspire love in Snegurochka with a vow that, “by dawn, Snegurochka will steadfastly love either me or another.” In the opera, his encounter with Elena Prekrasnaia is removed entirely, as is his vow to the Tsar. Instead, Lel’ undertakes the challenge on behalf of Iarilo. His only remaining association with a woman is his union with Kupava, which is more a part of a spring ritual than a sexual pairing. Further, the animosity of all the men in the play, save the Tsar, toward Lel’ is almost entirely absent in the opera. Ostrovsky’s Moroz referred to him several times as “lazy,” the men of the village refuse to let him into their homes, and Brusilo responds in vexation to the Tsar’s request that Lel’ sing at the Iarilo Day festivities, saying “all we hear is Lel’; he has all the luck! But what about we young men? We sing and dance no worse than he!” Rimsky-Korsakov removed all of these instances of male animosity toward Lel’ from the opera’s libretto. These cuts are most often limited specifically to phrases or sentences referring to Lel’, so they have no other apparent reason or effect. The conceptual effect of the cuts, however, is important, as the rivalry between the men and Lel’ is now turned from a “reality place” into a symbolic plane: Lel’ is not a particular person, but a bearer of a mythological idea.

The episode involving Elena Prekrasnaia and Lel’ in the play’s Act Three further develops the love and marriage theme. The two characters are presented as archetypal lovers in a sort of morality tale. As he spurns her advances, he teaches her several lessons, most important of which is that, while love in its purest form may be free,
marriage requires fidelity. As attractive and alluring as youthful love may be, it is
undependable and fleeting. This kind of moral lesson lies close to the heart of
Ostrovsky’s dramatic vision, but is much less important to Rimsky-Korsakov’s more
aesthetic approach.

The concerns of re-working a spoken drama into an opera that were mentioned
above underlie her removal: soloists had to be limited in the opera for budgetary reasons.
However, aesthetics were involved in the composer’s choice of which minor character to
eliminate; Leshii, Bobyl’, Bobyljka, Bermiata, or Maslenitsa might have been removed
as well. With respect to simple number of lines, all of these roles were roughly equivalent
to Elena Prekrasnaia. Leshii’s close relationship to the title character, and the centrality in
the Snow Maiden fairy-tale of the elderly childless couple give the first three priority, and
the Tsar’s lengthy monologues in Act Two would be difficult to stage without
interpolations from Bermiata. But the removal of the Maslenitsa doll’s monologue in the
Prologue would have been far simpler, and would have had no greater effect on the
drama’s main plot lines, than the elimination of Elena Prekrasnaia.

That Rimsky-Korsakov considered Maslenitsa important is clear from his
correspondence with Ostrovsky. On 26 October 1880, when he sent the playwright the
vocal score and libretto for approval, he included a letter discussing some of the more
significant changes he made. Nowhere in the letter is Elena Prekrasnaia mentioned, but
Rimsky-Korsakov asks Ostrovsky whether he has a preference for Maslenitsa’s
gender.\textsuperscript{101} Such a question not only assumes the character’s inclusion in the opera; it
demonstrates concern for the role by the composer.

The direct result of the removal of minor characters and their associated plot lines,
mostly in Acts One and Three, is a change in the balance between the mortal and
fantastic elements in the drama. Further, as plot lines involving human conflict are
removed from the drama, the drama itself becomes more symbolic. The largest cuts are
the removal of Act One, Scene One, set outside Bobyl’s hut, with Snegurochka arguing
with her adoptive parents, and several episodes in Acts One and Three, involving sub-
plots among the minor characters that Rimsky-Korsakov removed or incorporated into
the chorus. After the relationships between Brusilo, Radushka, Murash, Kurilka, Malysh,
and Malusha are excised, along with Snegurochka’s scenes of human-like jealousy and
pride, her struggle is much less that of becoming human. With most of the scenes of
ordinary mortal life removed, the world of people that she finds fascinating is represented
in their rituals, games, and songs, in which Vesna, Moroz, and Iarilo are just as real as are
mortals. Snegurochka is thus caught not in a struggle between mortality and fantasy, but
between warmth and cold, between Moroz and Iarilo.\textsuperscript{102}

Another important consequence of the textual revisions made by Rimsky-Korsakov
was the nearly complete removal of Ostrovsky’s social commentary. Imbedded in the
play’s text are clear messages concerning the work ethic, love and marriage, and physical

\textsuperscript{101} N. A. Rimsky-Korsakov to A. N. Ostrovsky, 26 October 1880, in *A. N. Ostrovskii i russkie kompozitory*, p. 178.

\textsuperscript{102} It might be argued that Ostrovsky’s Snegurochka also is not so much trying to become human as she is caught
in the eternal struggle between cold and warmth. Detailed consideration of Ostrovsky’s aesthetics is beyond the scope
of this project; for a thoughtful analysis of the play’s dramaturgy, see Abram Shtein, *Master russkoi dramy* (Moscow:
Sovetskii kompozitor, 1973). Rather than comparing Ostrovsky and Rimsky-Korsakov, of chief concern here is an
assessment of Rimsky-Korsakov’s aesthetic vision for his opera, which accounts for the creative choices he made in the
revision process.
beauty. As Zh. Kulish has observed, Ostrovsky felt quite strongly that drama must address such issues. While it is practically impossible, in the absence of direct evidence from the composer, to know whether the exclusion of these messages was conscious or deliberate, their removal contributes to the stylistic differences between play and opera, and indicates the divergent dramatic aesthetics of Ostrovsky and Rimsky-Korsakov.

The removal of the theme of love and marriage represents one of the more important stylistic shifts that Rimsky-Korsakov made. By removing nearly all of the passages in which this theme is developed, Rimsky-Korsakov blurred this detail of their individual personalities, and to that degree made their conflicts with each other less personal and more symbolic. While, as Kulish rightly observes, love and marriage lie at the heart of Ostrovsky’s drama, they hold significance in the opera only as analogues to the changing seasons. Just as it is impossible for spring to come without winter melting away, so Snegurochka cannot experience love and remain cold and invulnerable. This analogy is very much active in the play as well, but it is somewhat overshadowed by the fully developed exposition of the human drama of Snegurochka’s condition.

This change of focus also extends to the representation of folk rituals and festivals in the two works. Ostrovsky’s play includes a wealth of details about several rituals, corresponding to ethnographic studies that were published at the time, by Afanas’ev and

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104 Kulish, p.108.
Ostrovsky integrated into the drama some specific ethnographic features of Russian village weddings and spring festivals. Rimsky-Korsakov removed many of those features as he revised the text, and in so doing shifted the drama’s emphasis away from the realistic, ethnographically documented details of the rituals’ observance, and toward their general function as the symbolic connection between the ancient Slavs and the world of nature around them.

The rituals portrayed in both works are the final procession of Maslenitsa or Carnival Week in the Prologue, a Russian folk wedding in Act One, and Iarilo Day, a spring ritual, in Acts Three and Four. Typical features of each ritual appear in both works, but in the opera several specific events in the wedding and Iarilo Day rituals are excluded, and the Iarilo Day observances are much less tightly integrated into the drama. The Maslenitsa Procession, presented in a choral scene in both works, is practically unchanged, at least textually, in the opera.

Rimsky-Korsakov strengthened the dramatic connection between the Maslenitsa procession’s entrance and Snegurochka’s departure from the forest by combining the offstage cries of the chorus contrapuntally with Moroz’s farewell to his daughter. In the play, the offstage cries are indicated in the stage directions, but the musical coordination of the two events makes their juxtaposition more powerfully felt. As the villagers parade the Maslenitsa effigy out of town to the edge of the forest, Snegurochka leaves the forest and prepares to enter the village.

105 Many ethnographic studies, from journal articles to monographs, appeared at this time. Among those with which both Ostrovsky and Rimsky-Korsakov were familiar: Aleksandr Afanas’ev, Poeticheskaia vozreniia slavian na prirodu (Moscow, 1865; reprint ed., Ann Arbor: UMI, 1980), and Pavel Shein, Obriadь narodov severnoi Rossii (Moscow, 1870).
As with the Maslenitsa festival, only parts of the Russian folk wedding are included in Act One. The Wedding Scene begins with the arrival of the groom’s party at the bride’s house. The ritual challenge and negotiation between the groom and the bride’s friends and family, and the groom’s gifts of food to the bride’s people, are present in both works. The singing of a *khorovod* by the bride’s girlfriends, a traditional feature of the Russian wedding ritual, is represented in both by the *khorovod*, “Ai vo pole lipen’ka”.

After abandoning Kupava, Mizgir initiates the ritualistic negotiations with Bobyl’ to ask his blessing on a marriage to Snegurochka. In the play, this haggling session is much longer than in the opera.

In the play and opera, an unspecified length of time elapses between the Prologue and Act One. The lapse is more evident in the play’s opening scene of Act One, as a herald’s announcement of the upcoming festival begins the act, and as Snegurochka’s argument with her adoptive parents apparently arises from several weeks of life in the village. This time lapse is important, as the other acts clearly comprise a twenty-four-hour period. Iarilo festivals were common among the Eastern Slavs, falling either sometime soon after Maslenitsa, or in midsummer, typically on the feast of Ivan Kupalo. According to Abram Shtein, the late spring observance was typical of the Belorussians, and it is this time of year that Ostrovsky chose.\(^\text{106}\) Whatever the ethnographic details, Ostrovsky’s priorities were more likely dramatic: to conclude the tale in late spring, at the moment of the sun’s complete subjugation of winter with the advent of summer.

Act Three begins with a variety of songs and dances, all part of a celebration of Iarilo Eve. The Tsar’s tumblers perform a boisterous dance, the Tsar and Lel’ sing songs, and...
and the celebration culminates in Lel’s choice of his “favorite” to take to the next day’s feast. As the crowd disperses, one of the youths sings a joking song, “The Song of the Beaver.” In Ostrovsky’s drama, much of these events are of critical importance to the development of several plot lines; when Rimsky-Korsakov re-organized them into a more musically cohesive suite with little or no intervening dialogue, he did so at the expense of this dramatic integration.

The Song of the Beaver is the most telling example of these changes. In the play, Brusilo is the soloist, and prefaces the song with jealous remarks about the attention paid to Lel’ by the Tsar and the maidens of the village. After he finishes, the maidens congratulate him, and the estranged couples reconcile. Thus the song, and the spring ritual to which it belongs, serve to undo the damage wrought by Snegurochka; the onset of spring brings with it the restoration of human love. Rimsky-Korsakov made Bobyl’ the soloist, in the absence of Brusilo, and dispensed with the prefatory and concluding dialogue; he also placed the song just after the tumblers’ dance. The result is that the song bears none of the dramatic significance it had in the play, and it remains simply as a component of the general celebration. Devoid of its social-dramatic function, its purpose is simply structural. Together with the Dance of the Tumblers, it frames the Tsar’s Cavatina with two spirited, virtuoso dances. The result is that the opening scene of Act Three becomes a suite-like divertimento with a carefully contrived, symmetrical musical shape. Note in Table 4.2 below that the orchestral introduction and postlude frame the scene with the folksong, “Ai vo pole lipen'ka.” With the Song of the Beaver moved from the end to near the beginning of the scene, the ritual kiss (the scene's dramatic climax in both play and opera) brings an end to the celebration.
As a result of these changes, Snegurochka’s quest and her fate are portrayed quite differently in these two works. In the play, she is the tragic victim of a feud between Moroz and Iarilo. She seeks human love while disdaining its rituals, and demands exclusive commitment while admitting her own inability to love in return. In the end, she willingly accepts death despite her mother’s warnings, and her demise is welcomed as symbolic of Iarilo’s victory over winter. In the opera, Snegurochka’s animosity toward the human way of life is almost entirely absent, and the animosity between her father and Iarilo is substantially minimized. As a result, she is far less a tragic figure; rather, she is symbolic of that time of year when winter and spring vie for dominion over nature. As such, her demise is not a tragic finality, but a necessary part of nature’s course. Accordingly, references to her demise as “death” are carefully removed from the opera.

Table 4.2. Structure of Iarilo Eve celebration (Act 3)

| Scene 1: Chorus: “Ai vo pole” | Orchestral introduction and chorus: “Ai vo pole” |
| Dialogue | (moved to Tsar’s Cavatina) |
| Tumblers Dance | Song of the Beaver (Bobyl) |
| Tsar’s departure | The Kiss |
| Song of the Beaver | Tsar’s departure |
| Orchestral postlude: “Ai vo pole” |

| Scene 2: Snegurochka, Lel | Snegurochka’s Arioso |
| Scene 3: Snegurochka, Mizgir | Arioso (concl.); Magic forest scene |
| Scene 4: Lel, Helena Prekrasnaia | Cut |
| Scene 5: Helena, Bermiata | Cut |
| Scene 6: Lel, Kupava, Sneg. | Lel and Kupava: Kiss Motive; Sneg. |

Act 4

Scene 1: Mizgir | Moved to end of Magic forest |
Most telling is the deletion of Vesna’s reminder of Moroz’s warnings in the opening scene of Act Four, and of Snegurochka’s response, “Let me die. One moment of happiness is more precious than a lifetime of sorrow.” In the Tsar’s final pronouncement, Iarilo’s victory is celebrated, but not as punishment for Snegurochka’s intrusion into the village. In the play, he equates her fifteen years on earth with the fifteen long winters they have suffered, and notes that Iarilo knows “whom to punish and whom to bless.” In the opera, he simply notes that the fifteen years of long winters are ended, and nothing is said of punishment.

Perhaps Rimsky-Korsakov’s most telling transformation of the drama was a shift away from conflict among individual characters as the primary dramatic device. In the play, personal conflict propels much of the action, climaxing in arguments between two or more characters on stage. A part of the revision process was the almost complete removal of these arguments, with conflict mostly confined to lyrical moments. Conflict thus becomes less personal and more symbolic. Instead of individual characters arguing on stage, personality types (villagers vs. the foreigner) and concepts (warmth vs. cold) clash in and among these lyrical moments.

Only vestiges of the play’s first of many onstage arguments remain in the opera libretto. By eliminating most of the argument between Moroz and Vesna, and by reducing their dialogue altogether, Rimsky-Korsakov elevated them into more completely symbolic prototypes of Cold and Warmth, and distanced them dramatically from their human counterparts. The insults and petty bickering so common in their scene in the play’s Prologue were among the first cuts the composer made in the libretto. What
remains is a rather dispassionate difference of opinion regarding the well-being of their daughter.

Rimsky-Korsakov quite thoroughly revised the brief scene involving Moroz, Vesna, and Snegurochka, following Snegurochka's arietta and preceding the Maslenitsa chorus, in the autograph full score. The version found in the piano-vocal score is here crossed out in pencil, and a new version is inserted.

Moroz in Ostrovsky's play refers frequently and bitterly to Iarilo-Sun as his rival and as a threat to Snegurochka. In the opera, for reasons to be discussed later, none of these hostile references to Iarilo remain; indeed, Iarilo’s name does not even come up in the opera until Act Four. Many of those lines were cut as the piano-vocal score was composed, but in the autograph full score Moroz still warns Snegurochka, in the trio just prior to his exit, to beware Iarilo and his son, Lel’. This line is crossed out in the autograph score, requiring minor rescoring of the trio. The revision affected the music very little, but entailed the replacement of eight measures of full score with four new measures. Rimsky-Korsakov probably would not have bothered with such a minor change requiring that much recopying without a compelling aesthetic purpose.

Two changes, excisions made in pencil in the autograph full score but not made in the 1881 edition, may be assigned with relative certainty to the rehearsal period, roughly the second half of 1881. Both affect the final scene of the Prologue, and apparently represent changes made by the composer after the score’s acceptance for printing on 14 May 1881. Because they are reflected in the autograph score, it seems likely that the changes were reflected in the premiere production.
Bobyl’ and Bobylikha, in their first appearance in the opera, are engaged in a mild argument concerning Bobyl’s propensity for merry-making. Rimsky-Korsakov reduced this argument in two places. First, Bobylikha’s complaint that they have no firewood is cut, leaving only her demand that they go home. Bobyl’s reluctant agreement to chop some birchwood remains, leaving the audience with the reasonable assumption that the argument began offstage. A second passage, moments later, features an appearance by Leshii. In Russian mythology, the leshii, or wood demon, preys on unwary travelers by diverting them from their path, and by tickling them to death. Ostrovsky adopted this legendary prankster as Moroz’s right-hand man. When Bobyl’ first glimpses Snegurochka at the edge of the forest and calls the others’ attention to her, she hides and Leshii takes her place. When Bobylikha sees Leshii, he laughs and switches places once again with Snegurochka. This little prank is crossed out entirely in the autograph full score. The removal of this little game, a rare moment of direct interplay between Snegurochka and Leshii, eliminates a small but significant detail of her personality: her playful relationship with a wood demon. This close connection with the cold, frightening wood demon adds distance between Snegurochka and the mortal world that fascinates her. Rimsky-Korsakov’s removal of such details, together with his association of contrasting musical styles with characters in conflict, makes the dramatic tension in the plot less empirically obvious, but more intuitively suggestive. Removing this incidental episode streamlines the plot, and makes Snegurochka’s association with cold and winter somewhat less accentuated than in the play.

Ostrovsky began Act One with another argument scene, between Snegurochka and her adoptive parents, Bobyl’ and Bobylikha. They accuse her of indifference toward the
youths of the village, who are abandoning their girlfriends for her. She denies that she is
cold and severe, and contends that she simply works hard and hasn’t time for frivolities.
Thus are exposed the tensions that develop immediately upon Snegurochka’s arrival in
the village, along with some comic relief. Bobylikha assures Snegurochka that the key to
a happy marriage is not love, but a rich husband.

Despite the scene’s dramatic value, Rimsky-Korsakov removed it from the libretto
as well during the earliest stage of revisions. Concerns of musical style may well have
been the primary reasons for the cut; Rimsky-Korsakov may have been dissatisfied with
the alternatives open to him in setting this scene to music.\footnote{Questions of musical style, including the aesthetic choices involved in the revision process, will be addressed in Chapter Four, “The Music’s Evolution From Sketchbook to Final Version.”} Whatever the motivation for
the cut, its dramatic effect was to blur the focus on Snegurochka’s relationships with her
human counterparts. Instead, attention is focussed on her conflict with Lel’, with whom
she shares her first appearance in Act One, and who is himself detached from
relationships with the villagers by the elimination of Act One, Scene Two.

The friction between Snegurochka and Lel’ in the first scene of the opera’s Act One
is less intense than in the corresponding scene in Ostrovsky’s play (Act One, Scene
Three). Brief argumentative passages at the beginning and end of the scene are drastically
curtailed. The remaining dialogue of rather nervous politeness preserves the apparent
incompatibility of the two characters, but without the testy repartee.
Sneg.: I’ll bow to you, dote on you. And tomorrow at sunrise I’ll wake you up.
Lel’: I don’t deserve your bows.
Sneg.: Then how am I to pay you for your songs?
Lel’: With a kind, inviting word.
Sneg.: What kind of payment is that? I’m kind to everyone.

Lel’: I don’t expect payment for songs. They caress and fondle the wretched boy shepherd for his songs, and sometimes kiss him.

Sneg.: You sing your songs for a kiss? Is it really so precious? I kiss anyone whom I greet or bid farewell.

Kisses are no different than the words, “Farewell” or “Hello.” You sing your song for a girl, and all she pays you with is a kiss. She should be ashamed to pay so cheaply, to tease fair Lel’! Don’t sing for those girls!

They don’t know the value of your merry songs. I consider them more precious than kisses, and won’t kiss you, Lel’.

Lel’: Pluck a flower from the ground and give it to me for a song,…

... to me that’s enough.
Sneg.: You’re joking! You’re laughing [at me]. What’s a flower to you? If you need one, pluck it yourself.
Lel’: The flower isn’t important to me, but Snegurochka’s gift is.
Sneg.: What are you talking about? Why do you tease me? It makes no difference where you get a flower—you’ll just sniff it and throw it away.
Lel’: You’ll see. Give it to me!

Sneg.: Take [it]! (pronoun understood)
Lel’: I’ll pin it in a special place.

Let the girls see it and ask where I got it. I’ll tell them you gave it to me.

Table 4.3. Revisions in Act One, Scene 3

The reduction of six lines of one of Snegurochka’s early speeches into one line (see fourth row in Table 4.3 above) eliminates one of many disparaging comments about the village maidens. When Lel’ tells her that his customary payment from maidens for a song...
is a kind word or a kiss, she tells him not to sing for them, that “they do not know the value of your merry songs.” In the process of reducing this passage’s length, Rimsky-Korsakov eliminated all references to the maidens, and changed Snegurochka’s line to read, “you [Lel’] do not know the value…."

Rimsky-Korsakov eliminated Snegurochka’s expressions of hostility toward village maidens elsewhere as well. In her soliloquy in Act One, Scene Four, from which her Arietta in Act One of the opera is taken, she speaks at length and with barely veiled jealousy of Lel’s attraction to the village maidens. After lamenting that he runs off to them because their laughter is sweeter (preserved in the opera), she lists several of their attributes which Lel’ prefers but, it is clear, she disdains:

They are more generous with their kisses; they drape their arms about his shoulders, look boldly into his eyes, and melt in his embraces in public. They have all the fun! (Act One, Scene Four, 1.9-13)

Rimsky-Korsakov’s removal of this passage may have had a musical pretext, but the concern here is more accurately one of genre. The passage in question is a digression from the soliloquy’s main theme, a lament of her abandonment by Lel’, and as such provides variety in the spoken soliloquy. As he constructed the Arietta, the composer practically eliminated that textual variety in the interest of structural unity. The one-line reference to the maidens is a brief transition between the Arietta’s two strophes; to have retained the entire passage would have required a longer section of contrasting music, and hence an entirely different musical form.

Snegurochka’s conflict with Lel’ has its climax in Act Three, precipitated by Lel’s choice of Kupava as his favorite at the Iarilo Eve celebration. Here again, Rimsky-Korsakov’s revisions demonstrate that his interests lay not in the personal, dramatic
manifestations of the story, but in Snegurochka’s symbolic representation of the melting of winter into spring. He transformed the most crucial scene in the Snegurochka-Lel’ plot line from a climactic, confrontational dialogue into a solo arioso for Snegurochka. The result is that the dynamics of their relationship, especially the details of their different perspectives on love, are left rather vague in the opera. On the other hand, the stark contrast between the mythical Snow Maiden and the life of the village is captured by the sudden shift from the boisterous choral scene to her mournful Arioso.

In the remainder of Act Three, Rimsky-Korsakov further shifts the focus away from personal conflict, even as the drama reaches its climax. As Lel’ approaches the group of maidens to make his choice in the play, Snegurochka alone prims and calls to him; when he passes her and kisses Kupava in token of his choice, Snegurochka is devastated and runs off. In Scene Two of the play, after the festivities have concluded for the night, Lel’ seeks Kupava and finds Snegurochka alone, in tears. In this scene, the full extent of the conflict between their personalities is exposed. Snegurochka is vain, jealous, and possessive, and incapable of celebrating others’ happiness, while Lel’ steadfastly refuses to be possessed by anyone, least of all someone as incapable of genuine love as Snegurochka.

Rimsky-Korsakov entirely removed Lel’ from this scene, and transformed it into an Arioso for Snegurochka alone. In so doing, he eliminated the dramatic climax of the play’s central conflict, and left in its place a poignant lyrical moment for the heroine. He accomplished this with rather deft manipulation of a conversation between the two characters into a solo monologue, summarized in Table 4 below.
**OSTROVSKY**

*Sneg.:* Aren’t you sorry to have hurt an orphan so?

*Leļ’:* I don’t know what offense you’ve taken.

*Sneg.*: What? Is Snegurochka a beauty or not?

*Leļ’:* [She’s] a beauty.

*Sneg.*: Yet you choose Kupava, present her to the Tsar and kiss her. Is Kupava really better than Snegurochka?

That’s the offense, which is impossible to forget.

*Leļ’:* Why so angry, Snegurochka? A kiss in front of everyone isn’t precious. In private it is dearer and sweeter.

*Sneg.*: I don’t believe you. Stealing kisses isn’t sweet to me. Imagine, when will the Tsar again decree, of all the beauties, to present one to him!

*Leļ’:* You don’t have long to wait.

*Sneg.*: Again you will tease me, again you’ll choose another.

*Leļ’:* What am I to do? If I take you, I offend others; if I take others, I offend you; soon the rosy dawn will break, the Tsar and people will greet the Sun. And I will lead them, singing, with my girlfriend.

Whom to choose? I don’t know.

*Sneg.*: Fair Leļ’, take me!

*Leļ’:* Another would not spare her soul for such an honor.

*Sneg.*: Anything in the world Snegurochka would give you.

*Leļ’:* Love me!

*Sneg.*: I would be glad to with all my soul, but I cannot. Fair one, when the time comes for Snegurochka to love, I will love no one but you.

*Leļ’:* We shall see.

*Sneg.*: Dear one, take me.

*Leļ’:* Perhaps I shall.

[Long conversation, in which Snegurochka insists that Leļ’ love only her.]

*Leļ’:* It’s your fault! All you had to do was say one kind word to me.

*Sneg.*: Forget the past.

Fair Leļ’, love me a little, and wait for me. Snegurochka herself will love you. Take me to see the Tsar’s tents, and take me as your girlfriend to greet the sun!

Dear one, fair one, take me!

*Leļ’:* Wait for me, then I will take you. I’ll go now with the fellows. I have not had supper yet. Then I’ll return.

**Scene 3:** *Sneg.*: How lovely! What a joy! Snegurochka won’t be looking at the festivities from the crowd, from behind someone’s back. The Tsar and people will say: Such a couple is hard to find!

The wreath is wilted—in the morning I will have to weave a new one with fine branches. I will weave cornflowers into it.

Oh, pretty cornflowers!

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**RIMSKY-KORSAKOV**

*Snegurochka’s Arioso: Fair Leļ’,* Aren’t you sorry to have hurt Snegurochka, an orphan, so?

*Sneg.*: Is Snegurochka a beauty? [She is] a beauty!

That’s the offense, which is impossible to forget.

*Leļ’:* Why so angry, Snegurochka? A kiss in front of everyone isn’t precious. In private it is dearer and sweeter.

*Sneg.*: I don’t believe you. Stealing kisses isn’t sweet to me. Imagine, when will the Tsar again decree, of all the beauties, to present one to him!

*Leļ’:* You don’t have long to wait.

*Sneg.*: Again you will tease me, again you’ll choose another.

*Leļ’:* What am I to do? If I take you, I offend others; if I take others, I offend you; soon the rosy dawn will break, the Tsar and people will greet the Sun. And I will lead them, singing, with my girlfriend.

Whom to choose? I don’t know.

*Sneg.*: Fair Leļ’, take me!

*Leļ’:* Another would not spare her soul for such an honor.

*Sneg.*: Anything in the world Snegurochka would give you.

*Leļ’:* Love me!

*Sneg.*: I would be glad to with all my soul, but I cannot. Fair one, when the time comes for Snegurochka to love, I will love no one but you.

*Leļ’:* We shall see.

*Sneg.*: Dear one, take me.

*Leļ’:* Perhaps I shall.

[Long conversation, in which Snegurochka insists that Leļ’ love only her.]

*Leļ’:* It’s your fault! All you had to do was say one kind word to me.

*Sneg.*: Forget the past.

Fair Leļ’, love me a little, and wait for me. Snegurochka herself will love you. Take me to see the Tsar’s tents, and take me as your girlfriend to greet the sun!

Dear one, fair one, take me!

*Leļ’:* Wait for me, then I will take you. I’ll go now with the fellows. I have not had supper yet. Then I’ll return.

**Scene 3:** *Sneg.*: How lovely! What a joy! Snegurochka won’t be looking at the festivities from the crowd, from behind someone’s back. The Tsar and people will say: Such a couple is hard to find!

The wreath is wilted—in the morning I will have to weave a new one with fine branches. I will weave cornflowers into it.

Oh, pretty cornflowers!

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**Table 4.4. Text selection for Snegurochka’s Arioso, Act 3**
In the play’s Act Three, Scene Two, Snegurochka reproves Lel’ with accusatory questions: “Aren’t you ashamed to have hurt Snegurochka so,” and “Don’t you find Snegurochka beautiful?” Lel’s answer to the first of these questions is simply removed from the opera, rendering the question rhetorical; to the second, his affirmative response is given to Snegurochka, who thus answers her own question. Snegurochka’s demands that he forsake all others for her, for which she promises him anything he wishes, and Lel’s insistence that she simply love him, are removed entirely from the opera. All that remains of this scene in her Arioso are a single exclamation, “and when I see this I cry,” and her final desperate plea for him to love her. His departing promise to return to take her to the Tsar’s feast (a promise he breaks when Snegurochka discovers him with Kupava), and her triumphant monologue of disdain for the villagers are cut, thus changing drastically the significance of the drooping flowers in her wreath. In the play, she has just gloated about how she will outshine everyone at the feast, so her concern for the drooping flowers is inspired by vanity. In the opera’s Arioso, this closing section is a melancholy observation of the fleeting nature of external beauty. The analogy between the flowers and Snegurochka herself (which is operative in the play, particularly in retrospect, when Snegurochka laments to her mother at the beginning of Act Four that her beauty is fading) is brought to the surface. The addition of text (“you grow so freely in the field,” using the same phrase, na vole, that Vesna uses frequently in the Prologue and Act Four in reference to Snegurochka) emphasizes the connection between Snegurochka and the flowers. The setting of this passage to one of the motives from her Aria in the Prologue seals the connection.
Also of interest here are the changes made by Rimsky-Korsakov surrounding Lel’s choice of Kupava with a ritual kiss. That choice, its devastating effect on Snegurochka, and Lel’ and Kupava’s response to her pain, are essential elements in the Snegurochka-Lel’-Kupava plot line. Lel’s scene with Snegurochka, especially his promise to return to her, coming so soon after his choice of Kupava as his “favorite,”108 indicates that his choice does not, for him, signify a life-long commitment, but simply a ritual honor. The absence of that scene in the opera, together with his love song with Kupava in the act’s final scene, leave the depth of his feelings for Kupava somewhat in doubt. Indeed, since Rimsky-Korsakov consistently shifted focus to the symbolic and mythical, the issue of Lel’s personal feelings for Kupava is of far less importance in the opera.

Of equal significance is Rimsky-Korsakov’s removal of a brief exchange between Kupava and Snegurochka in the final scene of the act. Kupava rebukes Snegurochka for her superficial, self-centered attitude toward preparations for the festival, saying that such egoism is inappropriate to worship of Iarilo. It is these “warm words” that earn Lel’s praise, and that he poses to Snegurochka as an important lesson in the ways of love. Here again, the celebration of a spring ritual is intimately connected with human love in the play; in Rimsky-Korsakov’s opera, the connection is still very much apparent, but the focus is much more on the natural context of the festival, at the expense of its relevance to human relationships.

While nearly all personal arguments are either removed entirely or distilled into brief disagreements, one argument remains virtually intact and full-blooded in the opera: the scene following Mizgir’s betrayal of Kupava, the Act One Finale. Unlike all the other

108 The Russian word liubimaia can mean favorite or beloved; it is the difference between these two meanings which lies at the heart of misinterpretations (including Snegurochka’s!) of Lel’s feelings for Kupava.
arguments in the play, that which erupts between Mizgir and Kupava in this scene appears virtually intact in the opera. Its singularity in the opera attaches far more importance to this scene than in the play. For Ostrovsky, this argument, and the betrayal at the altar (so to speak) that precipitates it are merely part of a long series of misfortunes caused by Snegurochka’s intrusion into the village. For Rimsky-Korsakov, though, it symbolizes all of the discord created by her presence. Ostrovsky’s play incorporates many personal arguments between various human characters.

The only cuts made by Rimsky-Korsakov are from a speech by Mizgir, and from Kupava’s incantations to the bees, hops, and river at the end of the scene. The former removed an important realist aspect of the scene by eliminating the clearest reference to Mizgir’s fickle nature. In a realist drama, this revelation of an aspect of his personality accounting for his behavior adds greatly to the scene’s verisimilitude; in Rimsky-Korsakov’s opera, such considerations are of secondary importance. The incantations’ abbreviation may be explained more directly by their musical setting. The sudden reduction of volume and tempo, and the stark contrast between this passage and the scene’s general storm and fury would have been mitigated by rapid syllabic text setting, and would have become tedious if prolonged too much; the only available solution was to reduce the text.

Of great importance to an understanding of Rimsky-Korsakov's evolving operatic style is what his revisions reveal of his aesthetic that may be found as well in much of his other operas. First, he was concerned above all with the opera’s musical style, to which he adapted Ostrovsky’s text even at the expense of literary style. This utter subjugation of text to music ran counter to the operatic aesthetic of his colleagues, particularly
Musorgsky. Second, his approach to folklore as the basis of a work of art clearly reflected Afanas’ev’s interpretation of Russian folklore, and in a quite innovative way. By limiting, and in many cases, eliminating altogether the concrete details of folk life and ritual, he elevated the symbolic connection that Afanas’ev found between the tales and rituals of the Slavs and their understanding of the world of nature. As he removed or blurred the details of the particular episodes that precipitate Snegurochka’s personal crisis in the play, Rimsky-Korsakov brought her symbolic representation of the change of seasons closer to the center of the drama.

Finally, the legitimacy of qualitative comparisons of such different works demands some attention. Opera scholars such as Asaf’ev and Gozenpud have found the subject more suitable for opera, thus explaining its greater acceptance in that genre. Dramatic scholars such as Shtein, on the other hand, have extolled the virtues of Ostrovsky’s drama, avoiding comparison altogether. Ostrovsky’s own assessment of Rimsky-Korsakov’s opera, meanwhile, has itself become the subject of some controversy and confusion. The very different working conditions faced by the two artists, and the generic distinctions between opera and spoken drama are both factors that must mitigate any direct comparison of the two works.

Nonetheless, the two works invite comparison, as they are distinct treatments of the same subject, and both endure in the Russian repertory to this day. Ostrovsky’s more realistic approach befits his reputation as the leading realist playwright of his day. The social commentary imbedded in his script coincides with his vision of drama as a vehicle for social change. Rimsky-Korsakov, on the other hand, clearly directed his attention more to the symbolic aspects of the subject. As such, his treatment might be said to be the
more direct descendent of Afanas’ev’s collection of and commentary upon the drama’s folktale source.

In sum, while much remains to be learned about the sketches, autographs, and early editions, it can safely be said that they reveal an initial, remarkably short period of inspiration and creation, followed by revisions made over the course of several years. The result of less than six months of work, the sketches and rough draft nonetheless comprise the stage in which the vast majority of Rimsky-Korsakov's creative activity was done. The opera's dramatic tone and musical style continued to evolve, though, throughout the production of the published scores. Such an important change as the transformation of the Act One Introduction from *kuchkist* ensemble scene to orchestral entr'acte was not made until after the appearance of the first edition. The ongoing tinkering, with some changes in orchestration being made as late as 1898, is consistent with Rimsky-Korsakov's meticulous self-critical nature. *Pskovitianka* was likewise revised years after its premiere. His oft-repeated fondness for *Snegurochka* might thus be seen as reflected in these ongoing changes.
CHAPTER 5

FROM SKETCHES TO FINAL VERSION

A close examination of the composition process of this pivotal opera discloses a great deal not only about the complex relationship between composer and playwright, but also about Rimsky-Korsakov’s gradual turning away from the proto-kuchkist style of Dargomyzhsky and Musorgsky. In letters, sketchbook, manuscripts, and published editions, the development of this opera from inspiration to final product reveals hitherto unexamined depths of Rimsky-Korsakov’s treatment of Ostrovsky’s text and subject, and of the composer’s evolving operatic style.

The only existing critical edition of this opera includes general remarks about editorial changes made after the publication of the first edition, the piano-vocal score of 1881. Comparison of this edition with the lithograph print of the orchestral score (1882), and of both editions with the “definitive” version of 1898, reveals more details about the work’s evolution. Letters from Rimsky-Korsakov to his publisher and to conductors of productions in the Russian provinces allow an even closer view of the composer’s understanding of the score as a performance tool.

The story of Snegurochka’s composition is unique in Rimsky-Korsakov’s biography. After an unusually complete reversal of judgement concerning the subject’s merits, work on the opera proceeded at an astonishing rate, in response to profound inspiration. None of his other operas were completed in such a short span of time. His source was a dramatic work by Russia’s preeminent playwright, Aleksandr Ostrovsky,
with nineteen musical numbers by Piotr Tchaikovsky, whose name recognition at the
time far surpassed Rimsky-Korsakov’s. It is therefore striking that the young composer
sought only nominal guidance from the revered playwright, and appears to have totally
disregarded Tchaikovsky’s treatment of this subject.109

According to the composer’s account, work on the opera began in February 1880,
with “rough notes” of the “motives, themes, and chord progressions”110 that first lept to
his mind upon re-reading the play.111 These notes were jotted down on sheets from a
"thick book of music paper."112 Stored in the composer's archive, fond 640, nos. 177-91,
is a wide variety of sketches, most on paper of comparable size, with some odd-sized
scaps. Many of the pages are numbered, often re-numbered, and a few are dated, some
precisely with month and day, others with only a month indicated.

Although carefully preserved, the sketches have thus far not been thoroughly
studied. What catalog information we have is largely provided by the composer’s
biographer, Vasilii Iastrebtsev.113 It is not entirely clear which sketches are on paper from
the "thick book." Grouped in different archival sets are sketches that appear to have been
grouped together at some point, paginated and perhaps bound. This study has been done

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109 The two composers’ relationship, and reputed connections between their respective Snegurochkas will be
addressed in Chapter 5.

110 Rimsky-Korsakov, Letopis’, p. 177; Chronicle, p. 193. Italicized words in this and future citations indicate
my own emendations of the translator’s rendering of the original.

111 The aesthetic and personal reasons behind the composer’s reassessment were discussed in Chapter Two; of
primary concern in this chapter is the dramatic and textual selections made by the composer in preparation for and
during the opera’s composition.

112 Letopis’, p. 177; Chronicle, p.193.

113 Vasilii Vasil’evich Iastrebtsev, Nikolai Andreevich Rimskii-Korsakov, Vospominania, 2 vols., ed. by A. V.
with access only to microfilm,\textsuperscript{114} from which only an incomplete picture can be drawn. Further study, with access to the materials themselves, is clearly needed, and should yield valuable evidence of Rimsky-Korsakov's work on this opera.

Abram Gozenpud was the first scholar to examine critically the sketches and scores, along with primary biographical sources, for evidence of the nature and chronology of the compositional process. Gozenpud is also the only scholar to give serious attention to Rimsky-Korsakov's work on the libretto.\textsuperscript{115} Aleksei Kandinsky took a second look at the sketches' thematic material. His article on the “spring sketches” advances a theory about the genesis of the opera's principal character themes, based on the dates found on some of the sketches. Unfortunately, no one, including these scholars, has attempted a comprehensive, detailed summary of the sketches.\textsuperscript{116}

All the surviving materials are housed in archives in St. Petersburg, Rimsky-Korsakov’s hometown throughout his adult life. The sketches reside in the composer’s archive at the State Public Library. In fond 640, No.176\textsuperscript{117} of the same archive is the piano-vocal autograph, completed on 13 August 1880. The autograph is Rimsky-Korsakov’s draft, from which he worked on the orchestral score, the manuscript of which resides in the Central Music Library of the State Academic Theaters in St. Petersburg.

\textsuperscript{114} I am grateful to Olga Haldey for securing the microfilm, and to the archival staff at the Rossiiskaia Natsional'naia Biblioteka in St. Petersburg for producing it.


\textsuperscript{117} According to personal correspondence from M. I. Demidova, in response to my request for pages from the sketchbook. Kandinsky and the library’s published archival catalog list this fond as 33b. Due to the confusion caused by the new system, my request for nabroski [sketches] from this opera was supplied instead with two pages from the autograph score, described below.
The table below is a list of the sketches housed in the Rossiiskaia Natsional’naia Biblioteka archives, with a general description of each page's contents and, where they exist, pagination and dates (all from the year 1880). In most cases, the sketches encompass large passages, often in piano-vocal format, occasionally with instrumentation indicated. Where the sketch has been titled, it is listed here with quotation marks, in transliterated Russian and English translation. Where I have supplied the title of the corresponding scene, the title appears in brackets.
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<td>10</td>
<td>42 6</td>
<td>_March</td>
<td>Tsar's Entrance, [Act 4]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1 pg)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Birds' Chorus and Dance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>38 7</td>
<td>_March</td>
<td>[Moroz's recitative]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>24 8</td>
<td>_March</td>
<td>Lel's Song (Act 3), crossed out [Moroz]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1 pg)</td>
<td></td>
<td>_March</td>
<td>Snegurochka in Prologue (Scene with Moroz and Vesna) crossed out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td></td>
<td>_March</td>
<td>Lel's [Second] Song in Act 1, Tsar Berendei's Arioso</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>8 May 12 Ap.</td>
<td>Snegurochka (Prologue) [Moroz's Song]</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>86 13</td>
<td>[Tsar, Act 2; Snegurochka and Mizgir duet, Act 4]</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>65 11</td>
<td>Kupava with the Tsar, Act 2</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>23 ___</td>
<td>Act 1 Finale [Heralds, Act 2]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>continuation, with the following written over the music, upside down, diagonally:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Snegurochka, R-Korsakov, 24 June</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.1. Fond 640, no.177
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page no. (top)</th>
<th>Title and description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Pesnia Ded Moroza (Ded Moroz's Song)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>___ miatelia i Pesnia Deda Moroza (___ snowstorm and Ded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Moroz's Song)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.2. Fond 640, No. 178

The remaining sketches are, except where noted below, untitled and undated. Most, like those in nos. 177-178, are in piano-vocal score, and appear to represent a late stage of composition. Melodic, harmonic, timbral and textural details are carefully worked out, and often bear close resemblance to the published score. Others, where noted below, are more fragmentary and far less detailed.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Archive no.</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>179</td>
<td>passage from Snegurochka's scene with Lel', Act 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>181 (2 pgs)</td>
<td>passage from Snegurochka's scene with Kupava and Mizgir, Act 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>183</td>
<td>Snegurochka's &quot;fright&quot; motive, and melodic fragments and text from Mizgir's &quot;O liubi menia, liubi&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>184 (3 pgs)</td>
<td>unidentified recititative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>185 (6 pgs)</td>
<td>Tsar's Duet with Kupava (title unclear: Aria??)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>186 (2 pgs)</td>
<td>passage including phrase &quot;Eto Lel', Eto Lel&quot; (Act 2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>pagination: 55 1 on first page, nothing on second (verso?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>187</td>
<td>strip of music paper, apparently cut from a larger page; unidentified,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>untexted choral passage; pagination: 76 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>188</td>
<td>passage from Mizgir, near end of Act 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>pagination: 69 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>189 (9 pgs)</td>
<td>magic forest scene, Act 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>pagination: 74-1; (2nd page unnumbered); 75 2; 76 3; (5th page unnumbered);</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>77 4; (7th page unnumbered); 78 5; 79 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>190 (3 pgs)</td>
<td>unidentified recititative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>191 (2 pgs)</td>
<td>unidentified recititative</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.3. Fond 640, nos. 179-191

The sketches in fond 640 closely resemble the published version of the score, but they differ in important ways. Some sketches were crossed out, and thus overtly rejected. Others include melodic, harmonic, and contrapuntal variants from the published version. Still others contain textual variants. In all cases, where the text differs from the published version, it agrees with corresponding passages in Ostrovsky's play. It is in these sketches that Rimsky-Korsakov's textual adaptation, and the possible musical rationale for some of his changes, may be found.

The 10 April and 8 May sketches of Snegurochka's Prologue Aria, mentioned in the previous chapter, provide clear evidence of the close connections between some of
Rimsky-Korsakov's changes to Ostrovsky's text and the music's composition. As pointed out by both Abram Gozenpud and Alexei Kandinsky, Snegurochka’s vocal line in the 10 April sketch differs markedly from that in the autograph score, while the 8 May melodic line closely resembles the final version. The text in the 10 April sketch is taken strictly from the play, while in the 8 May version.

Gozenpud further supposed that Rimsky-Korsakov “apparently [felt] that the melody [of the sketch] was better suited to Lel’,” since the very next entry in the notebook is a rough sketch of Lel’s second song. Gozenpud supports this assertion of author’s intent (concerning which Kandinsky is altogether silent in his analysis of the sketchbook) only with musical examples showing the first four measures of each sketch (reproduced here in Example 1). The melodies share predominantly conjunct motion, and to some extent both also exhibit the folk-like simplicity of contour found in all of Lel’s melodies. Thus, it is possible that Rimsky-Korsakov was prompted, as Gozenpud claims, to sketch Lel’s melody by certain aspects of Snegurochka’s (they share the same tempo, meter, and general rhythmic characteristics). Beginning with the upward leap of a major sixth in the third measure of the aria, though, Snegurochka’s melody loses its folk-like quality, as it spans a major tenth within a two-measure phrase. A more gradual unfolding of the melodic range would be much more characteristic of a folksong-like melody. From that point this version of the aria exhibits musical characteristics more appropriate to Snegurochka than to Lel’. It must have been something else, then, that prompted the revision.


119 Ibid.
Figure 5.1. Initial sketch of Snegurochka’s Aria ¹²⁰

Figure 5.2. Initial sketch of Lel’s 2nd Song ¹²¹


¹²¹ Ibid.
Together with the complete change of melodic material, Rimsky-Korsakov also abandoned Ostrovsky’s text in favor of his own text, a sort of patchwork of Ostrovsky’s phrases in an entirely new metric environment. Neither Gozenpud nor Kandinsky concerned themselves with issues of text when analyzing the sketches, but Kandinsky’s musical examples include text indications. Evidence in Kandinsky’s transcription of the first sketch of this aria suggests that the root of the problem that faced Rimsky-Korsakov lay in the difference between declamation and singing of poetry.

Among the textual changes made in this first stage of composition, none was more clearly motivated by musical concerns than the textual emendations made in this sketch. Rimsky-Korsakov’s first sketch of this aria reveals his failed attempt to adapt Ostrovsky’s poetry to a new—musical—setting. Ostrovsky’s text, although poetic, was intended for spoken performance. To mitigate any possibility of sing-song recitation, and to create an interesting interplay between semantic clauses and poetic lines, Ostrovsky’s poetic line endings often do not coincide with the ends of sentences or clauses. This device, known as enjambment, creates tension between poetic and semantic cadences for expressive effect.

An enjambment introduces a sort of counterpoint between the text’s meaning within the line and its grammatical continuation to the next. In the passage that Rimsky-Korsakov adapted for this aria, Ostrovsky used two enjambments to good poetic effect. First, in the third line of Table 1, he interrupts the line with a semi-colon, and ends it with "and at sunset…," creating some anticipation of what it is that happens at sunset. The second example occurs at the end of the following line, which ends with "that's what is dear…." This case is a far more powerful use of enjambment, as the line ends with what
appears to be a complete thought. Its continuation at the beginning of the next line, "…to Snegurochka," reveals the device.\footnote{I am indebted to Prof. Frank Silbajoris of the Ohio State University Dept. of Slavic Languages and Literatures for calling my attention to these enjambments, and to their poetic effect.}

While enjambments are not at all foreign to lyrical poetry, Rimsky-Korsakov’s first sketch of this aria contains evidence that these particular enjambments presented unacceptable difficulties for the composer. Unable to satisfactorily adjust Ostrovsky’s text to eliminate the enjambments, he completely changed the entire passage, particularly in the last line, retaining some of the original words and phrases and preserving the general content of the original text. In Table 1, the arrangement of poetic lines in Ostrovsky’s text, on the left, is compared with Rimsky-Korsakov’s first attempt at redistribution of the text into musical phrases.

Table 5.4. Text comparison: Snegurochka’s Prologue aria, 1st sketch

\begin{tabular}{|l|l|}
\hline
\textbf{Ostrovsky} & \textbf{Rimsky-Korsakov, 1st sketch} \\
S podruzhkami po aluiu malinu, & S podruzhkami po aluiu mali-nu, \\
Po chernuiu smorodinu khodit’ & Po chernuiu smorodinu khodit’ \\
Aukat’sia; a zor’koi vechernei & Aukatsia. \\
Krugi vodit’ pod pesni, vot chto milo & \textit{Poroiu} vechernei \\
Snegurochke. Bez pesen zhizn’ ne v & Krugi vodit’ pod pesni \\
radost’.
& Vot, chto milo Snegurochke \\
& Bez pesen \textit{mne}\footnote{Kandinsky transcribes this word as \textit{moia}, a two-syllable word that disrupts the poetic meter. From my reading of the sketch, it is clearly \textit{mne}.} \textit{i} zhizn’ ne v radost’. \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
Immediately after this sketch is an untexted melody, identified by Gozenpud as a draft of Lel's Second Song. Noting that the two melodies (first sketch of Snegurochka's aria and sketch of Lel's Second Song) are quite similar, Gozenpud concluded that Rimsky-Korsakov "apparently felt that the melody more closely suited Lel".\footnote{Gozenpud, p. 167.} Gozenpud did not enumerate the similarities, but they are not hard to find. In [musical example], note the pedal tones and off-beat chords in both sketches. Also, Rimsky-Korsakov uses a type of bi-tonality in both numbers, a device common in his settings of folksongs. The melodic contour outlines a minor-mode tonality (A-minor in Snegurochka’s aria, G-sharp minor in Lel’s song) while the accompaniment proceeds in a parallel major mode (F major in the aria sketch, B major in the song). The eighth-note motion of both vocal lines, with occasional dotted rhythms, represents a third level of similarity between the two sketches. In short, both sketches correspond closely with the style found in many of Rimsky-Korsakov's folksong settings.

The text indicated in the 10 April sketch already differs from Ostrovsky’s original (see Table 1). Ostrovsky’s text is blank verse, unrhymed iambic pentameter, and each of the lines, save the second, concludes with a feminine ending. Thus, the second line, with its masculine ending, contains ten syllables, and all others are eleven syllables in length. Rimsky-Korsakov's musical setting of this text is in 3/4 meter, with two-measure phrases. If each syllable were to have an eighth note’s duration, each of Ostrovsky's lines would fit easily into a musical phrase. Beginning with the third line, though, the composer discontinued this pattern of syllabic text setting. A long melisma, resulting in a single word stretching over an entire musical phrase, effectively reinforces its semantic
meaning: *aukat'sia* is an onomatopoeic word meaning ‘to call out’ (the conventional Russian call is “Ah-oo!”). The remaining seven syllables present a two-fold problem: setting them to an entire phrase requires an alteration of the prevailing text rhythm that is not clearly indicated by the text’s meaning (as was the case with *aukat'sia*), and the poetic line ends with the first of two enjambments.

The long melismas and irregular poetic meter in the last half of this sketch closely resemble the text setting in Lel's Second Song. In order to extend the length of the line, “po-ro-iu ve-cher-nei,” to two measures, he set the final, unstressed syllable to an awkwardly long melisma, three quarter-notes in length. His revision also disrupts the prevailing iambic scansion, as the shortened line scans not in iambics, but in amphibrachs.

Thus, Gozenpud was only half right. Indeed, the 10 April sketch bore several musical similarities to Lel's Second Song. Just as important, though, are the metrical similarities, and the close resemblance between these sketches and Rimsky-Korsakov's folksong settings. The dramatic importance of Lel's connection to folksong will be explored further in the chapter on the opera's musical language. As will be shown in that chapter, any connection between Snegurochka and folksong, particularly at this, her first appearance, was unacceptable.

The aria in its final form is a compelling musical invention, a thoroughly conventional yet highly effective entrance aria in binary form. In his analysis of *Snegurochka*, Rimsky-Korsakov himself identified each of the vocal line’s motives with a different aspect of Snegurochka’s personality, and the succinct tidiness of form coincides nicely with the character’s emotional coldness. For all the charm and appeal of
this melodic invention, though, it clearly had nothing to do with the number and length of
phrases in Ostrovsky’s original text.

Besides these sketches found in the State Public Library in St. Petersburg, three
individual orchestrated sketches are housed in Rimsky-Korsakov’s personal archive in
the All-Russian Institute of the History and Theory of the Arts, also in St. Petersburg.
Unfortunately, due to limitations of staff and equipment at the institute, I was unable to
secure a microfilm of these materials. Their catalog descriptions indicate the following
contents:

1) 26 m. from the beginning of the Introduction to the Prologue, to the raising of the
curtain. 4 p., 26 x 38 cm. This is evidently the orchestrated fragment, composed 1
September, that Iastrebtsev described as in his possession.\textsuperscript{125} The archive’s catalog does
not indicate a date of composition.

2) The initial variant of the Introduction to the Prologue, with the author’s heading:
“Krasnaia gorka [Beautiful Hill]. Scene 1 a) Introduction.” Marginal note by V. V.
Iastrebtsev: “Page from the “Steliovo manuscript,” \textit{Snegurochka}, 1880.” 2 p., 37.5 x 25.5
cm.\textsuperscript{126} The description “initial variant” and Iastrebtsev’s indication that it was part of the
Steliovo manuscript suggest that this fragment was one of Rimsky-Korsakov’s initial
stabs at composing in full score, dated 10 June 1880 by Iastrebtsev.\textsuperscript{127}

\textsuperscript{125}Iastrebtsev, vol.1, p.372.

\textsuperscript{126}Iastrebtsev’s memoirs describe a gift from the composer of two fragments of the opera: “1) a manuscript of
the Introduction to Snegurochka (full score), in somewhat different orchestration, and 2) a pencil sketch of
Snegurochka’s entire “melting scene.” (Iastrebtsev, vol.1, p.233) This sketch is apparently the first of the two; the
present location of the second is unknown.

\textsuperscript{127}\textit{Ibid.}, p.236.
3) Fragment from the end of Snegurochka’s Duet With Mizgir (Act Four), from “V teni vetvei ukroi menia” to the end. 4 p., 38 x 25.5 cm.

The second fragment  the only surviving evidence of the first days of actual composition, after initial sketches were completed. Rimsky-Korsakov reported that he began composing the opera in orchestral format, but quickly found that “my fancy tended to outstrip the rapidity with which I wrote the score. Moreover, from a certain insufficiency in the coordination of the whole, there resulted defects in the score.” He switched to piano-vocal score after finishing Vesna’s Aria. The second fragment seems to be the version, in “not quite final” form, of the Introduction to the Prologue dated 1 September 1880 that Iastrebtsev owned at the time he wrote his Reminiscences, although the archive’s description lists no indication of date. Judging from Iastrebtsev’s catalog, the third fragment may have been composed sometime in late December 1880.

Rimsky-Korsakov composed Snegurochka relatively quickly, during the summer of 1880, and completed its orchestration by March 1881, but the opera’s final form did not take shape until 1898. Since Rimsky-Korsakov was at various times faced with the challenges of accommodating an accomplished playwright’s dramatic text into a new genre, and of salvaging a satisfactory score despite “savage” cuts by the director of its premiere production, the date, nature, and effect of each change reflected in the various primary materials are crucial first steps toward a fuller understanding of the opera as a

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128 Letopis’, p. 180; Chronicle, p.197.
130 Ibid., p.373.
finished product. Sources like the sketchbook and autograph scores, usually considered for their musical content alone, often reveal important details of the text revision as well.

The critical edition of the opera, published as part of the composer’s collected works in 1952, describes only generally the differences between the first edition, published in 1881, and the composer’s 1898 revision. The variant readings provided in the appendix raise as many questions as they answer, as they indicate that the 1880-81 autographs, piano-vocal and orchestral, and their published counterparts all differ with each other in significant ways. Appendix B contains a list of these variant readings, with an English translation of their headings. Comments enclosed in square brackets are my additions, based upon comparison of these fragments with the authoritative text. None of the fragments or headings were checked against the primary sources for accuracy.

The edition’s preface, “From the Editorial Board,” describes the sources consulted and their locations.

1) The manuscript of the full score of the opera, kept in the Central Music Library of the State Academic Theaters in St. Petersburg.
2) The lithographic score, published in 1881.
3) The printed score, published in 1898, with Rimsky-Korsakov’s notes, kept in the Library of the Union of Soviet Composers in Moscow.
4) The manuscript of the full piano-vocal arrangement of the opera, kept in the Saltykov-Shchedrin State Public Library in Leningrad (N. A. Rimsky-Korsakov’s archive, No.33a).
5) The printed piano-vocal arrangement.
The present publication has the same form as the printed edition of the score as the composer marked the opera for production in 1898.131

The full score, the autograph of which rests in the Central Music Library of the State Academic Theaters, St. Petersburg, is dated 10 April 1881. The last known notations in the composer’s hand are “markings for production” in an exemplar of the 1898 edition of the orchestral score; this copy was last reported to reside in the library of the former Union of Soviet Composers in Moscow. \(^{132}\) A third edition, with a French translation, was published with the composer’s participation, but no significant musical changes were made for this edition, and no markings of any kind in the composer’s hand dating after 1898 are known to exist. Since the marginal notes in the 1898 score represent the last known written indications by the composer in a score of this opera, the editors of the Soviet critical edition chose this exemplar as their authoritative text.

Our view of the composition process is made somewhat more complete by the composer’s correspondence with his student, Semyon Kruglikov, which has been published only recently. \(^{133}\) Kruglikov is an essential source for Rimsky-Korsakov’s biography, especially with regard to the composer’s connections with the Moscow artistic community. Kruglikov’s service as liaison between Rimsky-Korsakov and Ostrovsky, and his subsequent efforts in securing and promoting a production of *Snegurochka* by Savva Mamontov’s fledgling Private Opera Company, provided the foundation for many successful productions of Rimsky-Korsakov’s works in the old capitol.

Comparison of the composer’s and Iastrebtsev’s accounts, and the scholarship of Gozenpud and Kandinsky, with evidence contained in the Kruglikov correspondence and in the scores themselves, suggests that Rimsky-Korsakov’s vision of this opera evolved

\(^{132}\) Ibid.

throughout its composition and orchestration, even beyond the date of its premiere. From
the elimination of a short but significant passage near the end of the Prologue to a
thorough revision of the orchestration, Rimsky-Korsakov’s tinkering with this, his
favorite opera, continued for several years after its premiere. Indeed, the composition of
this opera, even in its earliest stages, was as much reinvention as invention: a gradual
shift of focus from dramatic to musical modes of expression.

In late May Rimsky-Korsakov took these sketches to his newly-purchased estate in
Steliovo and started writing the score. Initially, he composed in full score, starting with
the Introduction to the Prologue. This full-score Introduction is apparently preserved in
the fragment in the Institut Iskusstvoznaniia, mentioned earlier. After about a week,
having completed Vesna’s Recitative and Aria, the Birds’ Song and Dance, and the first
draft of a “snowstorm” theme, he resorted to piano-vocal format in order to compose
more quickly. By the end of the summer he had completed the entire opera in piano-vocal
score.

Judging from Rimsky-Korsakov’s correspondence with Kruglikov, the composer
kept this opera as secret as possible throughout the summer of 1880. Rimsky-Korsakov
trusted Kruglikov as his emissary to Ostrovsky, but he said nothing of his opera to
Kruglikov until it was finished, save a cryptic reference to a “big project” that was
occupying his time. The piano-vocal score was completed on 12 August 1880; at that

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134 Rimsky-Korsakov’s correspondence with Kruglikov, published in volume 8 of his collected writings, is
among the richest accounts of his artistic activity. In addition to his role as courier between Rimsky-Korsakov and
Ostrovsky, Kruglikov did much to foster ties between the composer and Savva Mamontov’s Private Opera Company.

135 N. A. Rimsky-Korsakov to S. N. Kruglikov, 26 June 1880, in N. A. Rimskii-Korsakov, Polnoe sobranie
sochenii. Literaturnye proizvedeniia i perepiska, vol.8a, ed. by A. P. Zorina and I. A. Konopleva (Moscow: Muzyka,
point, Rimsky-Korsakov intended a return trip to Moscow, to show Ostrovsky the libretto.

This score was essentially the first complete draft of the opera. It provided the basis of the autograph orchestral score, but it was not the source of the engraved piano-vocal score published by Bessel in 1881. The source of that edition was a piano-vocal arrangement of the orchestrated autograph, written by Georgii Alexeevich Kazachenko. A student of Rimsky-Korsakov, Kazachenko arranged the score at the same time that the composer was orchestrating it. Rimsky-Korsakov first mentions him in a letter to Kruglikov on 23 September 1880, and expresses satisfaction with his work in a 9 October letter.\footnote{N. A. Rimsky-Korsakov to S. N. Kruglikov, 23 September and 9 October 1880, op. cit., pp.50 and 52.} At that time, the opera’s orchestration had just begun. The present location of Kazachenko’s manuscript is unknown, as are the whereabouts of the correction proofs for both editions.

Materials related to the production of printed editions have not concerned Russian scholars, nor are they housed in composers’ personal archives. In this case, some details of the first edition might cause some confusion. The engraved piano-vocal score is dated 1880, but its stamp of approval from the imperial censor is dated 18 March 1881; the libretto and full score bear censor’s stamps with the same date. Since the censor’s approval was required for all published material, it seems reasonable that the first editions of both scores and the libretto reflect revisions and corrections made by the composer and publisher prior to the date of the censor’s review.
Rimsky-Korsakov reviewed the correction proofs for those editions, but their present location is unknown. The only evidence of their existence is a letter from Rimsky-Korsakov to Kruglikov, dated 4 April 1881.

I have given *Snegurochka* to the Directorate. Napravnik looked it over, and says it merits performance; the singers already know their roles, but I have no official reply from Lukashevich.¹³⁷… Bessel purchased [the rights to] *Snegurochka* from me and is printing the piano score. At this moment about thirty pages of correction proofs are on my desk, and the full score will be lithographed. I am so busy with preparing the piano score for print, and with correction and review of the full score, that I am quite weary of it all. I am disappointed that it is written and the Directorate still will not stage it.¹³⁸

Vasilii Iastrebtsev was the first to thoroughly study the autograph scores. He assumed the role of the composer’s private secretary, organizing and dating the manuscript scores of many of Rimsky-Korsakov’s operas. His account of *Snegurochka*’s dates of composition,¹³⁹ which agrees with but provides far more detail than the composer’s own,¹⁴⁰

The sequence of events described here raises some questions about the processes of publication and approval by the censor. Since Kruglikov states that the piano-vocal score to *Snegurochka*, dated 1880, was not available to the public at the end of 1881, it is reasonable to assume that dates of publication signified some earlier stage in the publication process. Direct comparison of the autograph scores with several exemplars of the first editions of the piano-vocal and full scores should provide a reasonably clear

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¹³⁷ Costume Master and Head of the Repertory Division of the St. Petersburg Theater Directorate.


¹³⁹ V. V. Iastrebtsev, pp.233-35.

¹⁴⁰ *Letopis’*, pp.239-40; *Chronicle*, pp.198-99.
picture of the publication process. The date of the censor’s stamp, one week after the
Theater Directorate’s acceptance of the opera for production and twelve days before the
completion of the full score, suggests that some provisions existed for changes to the text
or music after the censor’s review.

Because Rimsky-Korsakov evidently accepted some of the cuts demanded by
Napravnik, and in light of other changes the composer apparently made voluntarily after
the opera’s premiere, the first edition does not represent the work in its final stable form.
The opera’s next edition appeared in 1898, again printed by Bessel, this time in an
engraved printing. In the interim, productions had been mounted on Imperial Theater
stages in St. Petersburg (1882, 1898), Moscow (1893), Kiev (1895), and Kharkov (1896),
and on the Mamontov Private Theater stage (1885, 1897). Since the composer enjoyed
complete artistic control over the publication, the changes reflected in this edition were
certainly voluntary. This edition marks the end of all but minor editorial revisions; thus it
is generally regarded as the opera’s authoritative version. Its most significant
differences with the 1881 edition are its orchestration, in which textures are thickened
and doublings increased, and the abbreviated Introduction to Act One, in which the vocal
parts are removed. Some of the later changes may have been prompted by the director of
the premiere, Eduard Napravnik, with whom Rimsky-Korsakov openly disagreed. On the
other hand, the composer apparently enjoyed much greater control over the opera’s
publications and its subsequent productions. The changes reflected in the second edition
of the opera, published in 1898, must therefore be attributed to the composer, despite
relatively scarce physical evidence of Rimsky-Korsakov’s participation in the preparation

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of that edition. In the absence of such evidence, the timing, rationale, and agent of the revisions made after the 1881 edition are subjects for speculation.

Rimsky-Korsakov’s account of the opera’s acceptance for publication and performance by the Theater Directorate describes the extreme ambivalence that the Artistic Director of the Mariinsky Theater, Eduard Napravnik, had toward _Snegurochka_.

Napravnik hemmed and hawed for a long time, but said in the end that, owing to the absence of dramatic action, this was a “dead” opera and could not be successful; however, he had nothing against its being produced.¹⁴²

The text of Napravnik’s decision to accept the opera for performance provides a detailed enumeration of his misgivings about staging this work.

It is difficult to explain what attracted the composer to this fairy tale. It is neither well suited to the demands of the stage, nor is it redeemed by exceptional content or familiar character types. All such telling deficiencies in the libretto are reflected in the music as well, despite its having been composed by a talented musician with both knowledge and practical ability….The text’s only redeeming quality is its uniqueness; it is ill-suited for the creation of powerfully dramatic scenes or the arousal of human emotions….The unending short two- and even one-measure melodies (broad, lyrical melodies are almost non-existent) are set in a manner inappropriate for vocal, and especially operatic music. The frequent artificial harmonic progressions over pedal tones in the bass make the work monotonous (a ruinous circumstance in dramatic music); the result will leave a not entirely pleasant impression with the audience.

Despite all the problems noted here, this opera is a work of talent all the same. With the scarcity of good, new, successful, original Russian operas, its production will be a refreshing addition to the coming season.

¹⁴²Rimsky-Korsakov, _Letopis’,_ p. 195; _Chronicle,_ p.211.
As an absolute condition for the production of this opera, the composer must make significant cuts before vocal, choral, and orchestral parts are assigned and distributed.\footnote{Reprinted in Eduard Napravnik: sbornik [A Compendium] (Leningrad:Muzgiz, 1959), pp.66-67.}

The composer also complained of intense pressure from Napravnik from the very beginning of rehearsals to make severe cuts. Rimsky-Korsakov resisted, but final authority for performance decisions was Napravnik’s alone, and the cuts were made.\footnote{Rimsky-Korsakov, Letopis’, p. 192; Chronicle, p.214.} All the cuts described as coming at the insistence of Napravnik, though, were restored in subsequent productions, and none were represented in any published score.

Rimsky-Korsakov’s account in Letopis’ is silent on the matter of musical or textual changes to the opera after initial completion of the full score. Iastrebtsev mentions that the composer gave him the full score in 1892, asking him to note in the margin any errors needing correction.\footnote{Iastrebtsev, Vospominaniia, vol. 1, p. 47.} In 1898, in preparation for the publication of the German translation, he notes that Rimsky-Korsakov was making changes in the vocal score.\footnote{Ibid., vol. 2, p. 30.} A year later, in reference to Alexander Glazunov's fastidious attention to detail, Iastrebtsev recalls that Rimsky-Korsakov pointed out Glazunov's minor harmonic corrections in Snegurochka, but it is not clear whether these corrections were made prior to the 1898 publication.\footnote{Ibid., vo. 2, p. 81.} The critical edition the 1881 autograph and lithographic print, and the 1898 print, and the 1908 print. The 1898 and 1908 plate numbers are identical, suggesting that the French edition was a reprint of the German edition. Thus, with two
small exceptions, it is practically impossible to assign even an approximate date or
general rationale to any of the revisions made in this final stage of composition.
Snegurochka was, on the whole, an effectively conventional work for its time. Contemporary audiences quite readily assimilated its musical language, its harmony, form, orchestration, and even its remarkable integration of folk melodies, harmonies and textures. Admirers described even its most adventurous moments as charming, while critics quibbled with the austerity of its folk-derived melodies or a perceived overuse of techniques used by Rimsky-Korsakov’s peers for over a decade. In short, this was not a work that shocked, or perhaps even challenged its audience.

The opera’s most remarkable feature is its craftsmanship. Form follows function in an exceptional way, as harmonic, melodic, structural, and orchestrational devices are all used to delineate the characters, and develop the drama that unfolds among them. Nineteenth-century chromaticisms merge with folk modality. Classical cavatinas blend with through-composed scenes. The seamless integration of such disparate musical devices undergirds the transformation of two-dimensional fairy-tale characters into players in a rich, compelling drama. As folk songs modulate chromatically and chromatic passages employ folk-like pedal tones, so human villagers and fairy-tale characters interact as individuals rather than symbolic representations.

By far the most inventive feature of this opera's music is the interplay between three distinct musical styles, each closely associated with certain dramatic characters and themes. The chromatic style that was to become a hallmark of Rimsky-Korsakov's
fantasy operas is fully developed in this opera for the first time. Associated with magical characters in later operas, this style represents cold forces of nature here, specifically Ded Moroz and his assistant, Leshii. Folk borrowings had appeared in each of Rimsky-Korsakov's previous two operas, but here for the first time they are incorporated in a larger, folk-derived style. Even for those familiar with Russian folk repertory, distinguishing borrowed folksongs from Rimsky-Korsakov's original melodies in this style is very difficult indeed. This folk-derived style represents the life of the village, particularly its rituals. The opera's third dramatic sphere, warm forces of nature, is represented in a tonal style typical of the late nineteenth century, fundamentally diatonic with occasional chromatic tonicizations and modulations.

As we have seen, Alexei Kandinsky observed that Rimsky-Korsakov drafted the primary characters’ themes beginning with “warm” characters (Vesna, Lel’), followed by “cold” characters (Moroz, Leshii), and finally Snegurochka. Despite the absence of any mention of such categories in Rimsky-Korsakov’s analysis, the musical distinctions between cold and warm forces of nature are readily evident. The dramatic conflict between cold and warm is introduced in the Prologue, in the themes associated with Moroz, Leshii, Vesna, and Snegurochka. In addition, folksong and folk thematics represent a third governing musical style. Appearing first in the Birds’ Song and Dance and in the Maslenitsa Chorus, borrowed folksongs appear in each of the large-scale choral scenes, occurring at pivotal dramatic moments. Folk-based musical style is also found in solo and ensemble scenes, most notably in Lel’s three songs and the Wedding Scene.
The contrasts between the themes of Moroz, Leshii, and the snowstorm, on the one hand, and Vesna on the other, are immediately apparent at the beginning of the Prologue. As the Prologue ends and the scene shifts to the village, musical representation of cold and warmth becomes less obvious, and indeed less important. The chief events in the life of the village are embodied in folksong, and its bard, the shepherd Lel’, sings in a thoroughly folk-like fashion.

The opera’s opening measures introduce a musical style that will come to be associated with Ded Moroz, Leshii, and winter snowstorms. The angular bass line (Figure 6.1) will later reappear as the opening phrase of Moroz’s Song. Leshii delivers a monotone incantation, accompanied by a sequential melody (Figure 6.2) that itself returns when Moroz calls Leshii out of the forest near the end of the Prologue. This accompaniment is just as angular and chromatic as the opening bass line, with a characteristic leap of a tritone. Indeed, the entire Introduction is quite chromatic, and harmonically unstable. Frequent modulating sequences mitigate any sense of a tonal center. Nor is there any thematic or structural closure, as the first strong authentic cadence arrives in the clarinet’s introduction to Vesna’s aria.
Figure 6.1. Bass line, Prologue Introduction, m. 1-4

Figure 6.2. Leshii motive, Prologue Introduction, m. 34-37

149 Ibid.
Vesna’s aria contrasts sharply with the preceding orchestral Introduction. Broad, plastic arioso replaces short, angular melodies. Sustained D-flat major tonality and large-scale thematic development and recapitulation establish the first closed musical form of the opera. An ostinato bass and accompanimental pizzicato in the strings signal a more subsidiary role for the orchestra. Despite the stylistic diversity that distinguishes the themes of Vesna, Tsar’ Berendei, and Mizgir, their arias, songs, and other lyrical moments all share these general musical characteristics.

The Birds’ Song and Dance introduces a third musical style, derived from Russian folksong. The opera’s large choral scenes and Lel’s three songs all belong to this genre. Here the orchestra more often doubles the vocal and choral lines. The harmonic language, while less chromatic than in the “cold” Introduction, is also less conventionally tonal than Vesna’s aria. Most often, passages in this folk-derived idiom are more nearly modal, sometimes with inflections toward two tonal centers. This idiom reappears in the Maslenitsa Chorus, in Lel’s first two songs and the Wedding Scene in Act One, in the Gusliars’ Chorus in Act Two, and almost throughout the pivotal third act. Its final appearances are in the “Proso” Chorus and the final chorus of Act Four.

The plethora of motives embedded in Snegurochka’s main theme might offer an opportunity to delineate the “cold” and “warm” aspects of her personality, but even Rimsky-Korsakov’s exhaustive analysis of those motives avoids any mention of that dichotomy. Her placement within the cold-warm polarity of her parents is quite subtle and dynamic, as it changes as the drama progresses. She is first revealed to the audience in the company of her parents. The text of her Aria and Arietta aligns her very closely with her mother, as she pleads to be allowed to pursue the stirrings of love that Lel’s
songs have evoked in her heart. Likewise, the closed structure of both numbers and their diatonic harmonic language connect her more closely with Vesna. In particular, the Adagio middle section of her Aria (m. 42-60) is in quintessential “warm” style. Her father’s legacy is revealed much more subtly. The rather mechanical text declamation and sequential melodies in the Aria, and the occasional angular chromaticism of her vocal line in the Arietta all reveal his heritage.

Within this triad of warm, cold, and folk styles, one would also expect Snegurochka’s music to somehow blend cold and warm characteristics, while remaining quite foreign to the folk style. Certainly her virtuoso coloratura delineates her sharply from the villagers. In her scene with Lel’ at the beginning of Act One, her cold side is particularly evident in her melodic line. In Figure 6.3, Snegurochka’s melodic line is particularly angular as she refuses to kiss Lel’.
Snegurochka: I consider them (Lel’s songs) more precious than kisses, and I will not kiss you, Lel.

Figure 6.3. Act One, Snegurochka’s Scene with Lel’, m. 81-85.

This antipathy persists through the first two acts, begins to dissipate in Act Three, and melts away entirely in the opera’s finale. At the beginning of Act Three, Snegurochka joins for the first time in a folksong, singing “Ai vo pole lipen’ka” with Lel’ and the chorus. Her participation is not entirely in keeping with folk practice, though. She skips the first half of a verse (m. 125-32), and raises the tonic pitch by a whole step, from A to B. Lel’ and the chorus accompany her, accommodating the key change and returning to the tonic, all within the second half of the couplet (Figure 6.4).
As the Iarilo Day festivities progress, Lel’ chooses Kupava for his ritual kiss, rather than Snegurochka. Snegurochka’s Arioso in Act Three marks the plot’s climax: her recognition of Lel’s rejection. This musical number’s special role in the drama is marked by its music. It is the only through-composed solo number in the opera, probably as a result of its unique textual origins. As discussed in Chapter Four, this Arioso is the only solo number in the opera that is derived from a conversation between two principal characters, Lel’ and Snegurochka. All other solo vocal numbers originated as musical numbers or monologues in Ostrovsky’s play, and are thus more suited to closed forms.

This number also boasts the highest concentration of recalled themes from previous moments in the opera, some with significant musical alterations. Her entrance onto a bare stage is heralded by her characteristic flute cadenza, which slows from sixteenth notes to triplet eighths. The slower rhythm, along with a chromatic descent to the flute’s low range, provide a transition to the somber mood of the Arioso. Her rhetorical question,
“Isn’t Snegurochka beautiful,” and its answer, “She is,” are prefaced with the same string motive (Figure 6.5) that introduced her Prologue Aria (m. 1-5). Her subsequent lament that Lel’ has rebuffed her (Figure 6.6) is accompanied by the orchestral motive from Lel’s choice of Kupava, leading to their ritual kiss (m. 144-47). Finally, her melancholy address to the flowers (Figure 6.7) is set to the theme from the lyrical middle section of her Prologue Aria (m. 42-53). This high concentration of musical reminiscences of key dramatic moments undergirds the climactic nature of Snegurochka’s despair in the wake of Lel’s public rejection of her.

Figure 6.5. Act 3. Snegurochka’s Arioso, m. 20-23.\textsuperscript{150}

\textsuperscript{150} Lithograph first edition (Rossiiskaia National’naia Biblioteka, N.A. Rimsky-Korsakov archive, fond 640, no. 174.}
Figure 6.6. Arioso, m. 24-27
Figure 6.7. Arioso, m. 46-57
In the opera’s final scene, Snegurochka’s transformation is completed. Her exclamations after the sun’s first rays strike her (Figure 6.8) are accompanied by the theme from her Prologue Arietta (m. 3-4). Her final words are an expression of love for Mizgir (Figure 6.9), sung in folk style for the first time, a striking representation of her ultimate transformation.

Figure 6.8. Act 4, Finale, m. 216-19.

Figure 6.9. Finale, m. 256-60
Moroz’s Song in the Prologue, immediately after Vesna’s Aria and the Birds’ Song and Dance, clearly establishes him as the embodiment of winter, sharply clashing with the warmth of spring. Some of the contrasts between Vesna’s Aria and Moroz’s Song are not surprising, original, or new to this opera. Stylistic differences between operatic solo numbers sung by sopranos and basses have been common throughout the five centuries of operatic history. For example, Moroz’s vocal line is doubled by the bassoons, cellos and basses, with occasional countermelodies in the upper woodwinds and homophonic accompaniment in the upper strings. Such stylistic traits have been uniquely characteristic in bass arias since the seventeenth century.

The shape of the soloist’s melodic line, the chromatic harmonic language, and the absence of strong authentic cadences are all more uniquely characteristic of this opera’s “cold” idiom, and thus more dramatically significant contrasts with Vesna’s aria. The song’s principal theme, Moroz’s opening melody, is derived closely from the opening bass melody in the Introduction (see Figure 6.1).

The remainder of Moroz’s melodic line in this song and most of his musical utterances throughout the Prologue are similarly angular and triadic. Such an outline is not at all unusual for an instrumental bass line, but it is a striking feature in a vocal line, particularly when employed as consistently as it is here.

The song begins and ends in F minor, but modulates enharmonically to remote keys, and does not arrive at a strong authentic cadence until the very end of the song. The song’s middle section (m. 19-35) illustrates the modal mixture, enharmonic modulation, and relatively weak cadences that are characteristic of this song. The passage begins with a phrase in D-flat minor (m.19-22), followed by a slightly varied repetition of the same
phrase in D-flat major (m. 22-25). The dominant seventh-chord, which concludes the second phrase, then shifts enharmonically to an augmented sixth-chord in C major.

Leshii’s themes are even less tonal than those of Moroz. His thematic complex appears in its entirety as Moroz summons him in the Prologue (Snegurochka’s Scene with Vesna and Moroz, m. 78-91). The pitch set of the entire nine-measure passage is a nine-note gapped chromatic scale, which I will call the Leshii Scale, shown in Figure 6.10. As Moroz calls to him, Leshii’s motive (see Figure 6.2) descends sequentially by a major third, repeating at the octave after three appearances. The axes of symmetry at the major third and the tritone are outlined by the contour of the motive and its sequential repeats (Figure 6.11).

![Figure 6.10 Leshii Scale](image)
The tritone leap is the motive’s most striking melodic feature, and its net descent of a major third is emphasized by the fact that each sequential appearance begins at the same pitch level as the final note of the previous utterance. The major third is further emphasized in the woodwinds and Leshii’s vocal line. Leshii’s repeated notes in the first four measures, doubled at two octaves by the flutes, are a major third above the first note of the motive, played by the low strings and sustained two octaves above by the oboes. After the violins repeat the motive a major third higher, the flutes and Leshii repeat the violins’ last note while the oboes sustain the low strings’ last note. At the same time, the low strings begin the motive anew, a major third lower, thus completing the pitch set. The net effect is the production of an augmented triad by stacking major thirds.
Vesna’s opening Recitative and Aria introduce the warm musical style, preceded by a short clarinet solo (a sonority that becomes closely associated with warmth and love throughout the opera). This new style is connected with the “warm” characters (Vesna, Tsar’ Berendei, and Mizgir). It is no less chromatic than that of the cold Introduction, but it is much more clearly tonal. New tonalities are established, however briefly, by means of authentic cadences. And each new key is closely related to the home key, D-flat major. The aria begins and ends in D-flat major, and is binary in form with a brief coda that recalls the opening phrase of the first section. Its harmonic scheme is shown in Table 6.1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure no.</th>
<th>Form</th>
<th>Harmonic language</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>m.28-35</td>
<td>introduction</td>
<td>D-flat dominant pedal, to authentic cadence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>m.36-59</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>D-flat, w/tonicizations of f (48), E-flat (52)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>m.60-71</td>
<td>A’</td>
<td>D-flat, ending w/ A-flat authentic cadence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>m.72-102</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>Extended D-flat dominant to authentic cadence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>m.103-06</td>
<td>coda (A)</td>
<td>Opening motive over tonic pedal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.1. Form and harmonic scheme in Vesna's Aria

Another distinguishing characteristic of this warm lyrical style is the ostinato accompaniment figure in the cellos. Although its harmonic function is nothing more than that of an ornamented pedal tone, it nevertheless represents an important melodic feature in this aria. Aside from occasional clarinet phrases imitating the vocal line, this ostinato pattern comprises the only melodic motion in the orchestral accompaniment. Persistent, distinctive ostinato patterns like this are found as well in Tsar Berendei’s cavatinas, and in Mizgir’s aria, “Na tioplom sinem more.” As shown in Figure 6.12, each pattern is one
measure in length. In each case, this figure is the most distinctive feature in the accompaniment. This combination of thin texture and distinctive ostinato is a telling marker of the warm style throughout the opera.
Snegurochka is filled with borrowed tunes, primarily folksongs, and most of those from the composer’s collection, as the table below indicates. The songs used in the opera have been cataloged, first by the composer in Letopis’, and then by Nina Bachinskaia. Of the two lists, Bachinskaia’s is the more exact and thorough, and includes several songs not mentioned by the composer, though it overlooks a handful of borrowings cited in Letopis”. Given the intervening years between the opera’s composition and the writing of Rimsky-Korsakov’s account, and the more focussed, meticulous approach taken by Bachinskaia, it is tempting to simply dismiss the inaccuracies as carelessness or forgetfulness on Rimsky-Korsakov’s part.
Rimsky-Korsakov included in his list of borrowed melodies those with sources in nature, notably bird calls, as well as folksong. Bachinskaia, on the other hand, included in her list only those melodies with musically annotated sources in folklore or folksong collections. That difference in selection criteria accounts for most of the melodies listed by Rimsky-Korsakov and not by Bachinskaia: the bird calls in the Prologue (no musically annotated source, not from folksong), the quote from the Orthodox Requiem (not a folk source), and the Heralds’ Call (no notated source). Of more interest are the discrepancies between the two lists of borrowed folksongs.

The composer began his account of musical borrowings by noting the folksongs used, “primarily from my Collection”: Nos. 4, 7, 12-14, 16, 19, and 20 from the table below. He did not intend this as an exhaustive list of all borrowed tunes, conceding that, “in addition to this, many minor motives or fragments, the component parts of more or less long melodies have undoubtedly been borrowed by me from similar little tunes in various folk-melodies that I did not introduce into the opera in their entirety. Such are certain little motives of the Maslenitsa Procession [Nos. 6 and 9 in Table are likely candidates], some phrases of Bobyl’ and Bobylikha, Mizgir’s phrase: “Da, chto ia strashen, to pravdu ty skazala” [No. 18 below].”

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151 Letopis’, p. 183; Chronicle, p. 200.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Letopis?</th>
<th>Bachinskaia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Prologue Intro, m.8</td>
<td>cock crow (Nadezhda)</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Birds’ Song, m.22</td>
<td>R-K, No.72</td>
<td>no</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Birds’ Song, m.46</td>
<td>Bylina “O ptitsakh,” <em>Sbornik Arkheol. inst.</em></td>
<td>yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Birds’ Song (m.??)</td>
<td>“various bird songs”</td>
<td>yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Sneg. Arietta: m.62-64; also Act 4, Flowers Chorus, m.62</td>
<td>bullfinch song (in violins)</td>
<td>yes</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Maslenitsa Chor., m.1</td>
<td>R-K, No.47</td>
<td>no</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Masl. Chor., m.99</td>
<td>R-K, No. 46</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Masl. Chor., m.139</td>
<td>“Orthodox Requiem”</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>Masl. Chor, m.151</td>
<td>R-K, No. 41</td>
<td>yes</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>Act 1 Intro, m.1 (horn)</td>
<td>from R-K’s childhood</td>
<td>yes</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>Act 1 Intro, m.15 (oboe)</td>
<td>from Liadow</td>
<td>yes</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>Wedding Scene, m.1</td>
<td>Stakhovich III/6; R-K No. 100</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>Wedding Scene, m.5: oboe, Kupava</td>
<td>Lvov-Prach No.1; R-K No. 78</td>
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<td>Scene: Kupava, Sneg, Mizg, m.7</td>
<td>Lvov-Prach No.3; R-K No. 54</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>Act 2, Herald’s Call</td>
<td>from R-K’s childhood</td>
<td>yes</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>Act 3, Scene in Forbidden Forest, m.153</td>
<td>R-K, No. 16</td>
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<td>17</td>
<td>Act 3, Jesters’ Dance</td>
<td>Stakhovich II, p.9</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Act 3: Scene: Sneg &amp; Mizgir: m.104-11</td>
<td>??</td>
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<td>19</td>
<td>Act 4 Finale, m.125</td>
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<td>20</td>
<td>Finale, m. 137</td>
<td>Balakirev, No. 8</td>
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Table 6.2. Borrowed melodies cited in *Letopis’* and by Bachinskaia.

One of Rimsky-Korsakov’s most striking omissions is No. 2 in the table above. Even though “Zvon kolokol” comes from Rimsky-Korsakov’s own collection, he only refers to “Orel voevoda” (the first line of “O ptitsakh”) as a borrowed tune in this number.
(No. 3 in the table above). Clearly, Rimsky-Korsakov’s intent in *Letopis’* was far different from Bachinskaia’s. His list of borrowings was merely descriptive, while hers aimed at an exhaustive account.

Unconcerned as the composer was with establishing an exhaustive catalog of sources for his borrowed tunes, the task was left to Bachinskaia. Connecting cited passages in the opera with their folksong sources is not always a simple matter. All but three were cast with new texts, as Ostrovsky only used the texts of the bylina “O ptitsakh,” the khorovod “Ai vo pole lipen’ka,” and the spring dance “A my proso seiali” in the play. Also, the folk tunes in some cases were adapted melodically, further obscuring their derivation from the original sources. Fortunately, Bachinskaia produced a thorough, meticulous, and judging from this opera, quite reliable catalog of all folksong borrowings in the works of Russian composers.

Bachinskaia’s work is all the more impressive for the fact that appearances of borrowed tunes are not identified as such, nor are they set apart musically from the rest of the opera. Borrowed folksongs are not displayed as *divertissements*, but are woven into the opera. The unique harmonic, textural, and structural characteristics of Russian folksong, as they were understood at the time, are found not only during passages based on borrowed tunes, but throughout the opera.

Although folk-based harmonic, textural, and melodic gestures permeate the entire score, there are certain numbers in which borrowed folksongs represent all or most of the important thematic material. If one disregards Lel’s horn calls and the oft-repeated folksong “Ai vo pole lipen’ka” (special cases of which more will be said later), all other borrowed folksongs are found in six numbers: the Birds’ Dance and the Maslenitsa
Chorus in the Prologue, the Wedding Scene in Act One, the Song of the Beaver and the Jesters’ Dance in Act Three, and the “Proso” Chorus in Act Four. Three of these numbers are choral: the Birds’ Dance, the Maslenitsa Chorus, and the “Proso” Chorus. Two feature soloists with occasional choral accompaniment: the Wedding Scene and the Song of the Beaver; and one, the Jesters’ Dance, is orchestral.

In the earlier discussion of Rimsky-Korsakov’s chromatic style, musical structure was seen to be based more on melodic, linear patterns than on chord progressions. One of the salient features of Rimsky-Korsakov’s chromatic style is adherence to Riemannian principles of voice-leading. Accordingly, chains of seventh-chords are unified not by harmonic function but by minimal pitch displacement. Although Riemannian chord transformation hardly offers a better approach to Russian folksong, the highly conjunct melodic lines, frequent pedal tones, and spare or non-existent harmonic progression in folksong generally comply with Riemann’s principle of minimum possible pitch change. Harmonic stasis and tonal ambiguity are common features in many Russian folksongs, precisely because melody, and its heterophonic variation, are typically the primary focus and organizing principle in Russian folk singing. Any identifiable "chords" are merely by-products of the voice-leading; the tonal center is not a tonic chord, but a single pitch. In Rimsky-Korsakov’s settings of these songs, tonic pedal tones at times substitute for a functional bass line, as in Kupava’s entrance in the Wedding Scene (m.5-12) or the opening melody of the Birds’ Chorus (m.22-35).

Despite the highly diatonic nature of Rimsky-Korsakov’s folksong settings, he nevertheless manages some smooth connections between these passages and the chromatic passages representing winter, particularly at the beginning of the Prologue. In
the Birds Dance, both borrowed folksongs are presented first in rather conventional modal harmony, followed by chromatic sequences. These sequences, in which false progressions are quite common, resemble the harmonic idiom of the snowstorm and Moroz’s Song, which follow the Birds’ Dance, as closely as they relate to the folksong’s original modal context.

The entire number is based on two folksongs, only one of which Rimsky-Korsakov mentioned in *Letopis*. The musical structure of the entire number is a simple alternation between a fast wedding dance (“Zvon kolokol vo Evlasheve-sele” [Ring the bell in Evlashevo village]) and a somewhat more measured, declamatory bylina (“O ptitsakh” [About Birds]). Passages based on these two songs alternate twice, producing an A-B-A-B structure. The number ends abruptly, with no coda or strong final cadence, as a brief snowstorm sends the birds scurrying for cover.

“Birds’ Dance” begins with a short introduction, featuring woodwind imitations of birdcalls (Figure 6.13). The clarinets’ two-note descending diminished fourth represents a cuckoo, while the flutes twitter like sparrows with sixteenth-note trills on F#-E. The trilling carries over as an accompaniment to the folksong melody in the chorus, and underscores the harmonic flexibility of the tune’s setting.
Presentations of both folksongs all share common musical characteristics: common-tone harmonic fill, often in thirds; lack of a functional bass line; lack of authentic cadences. The orchestra most often doubles or takes the place of the chorus when it presents a folksong. There is no distinct orchestral texture, functional bass line, or accompanimental figuration during presentations of folksong.

In Tchaikovsky's version of the Maslenitsa Procession in the Prologue (Figure 6.14), the orchestral color is tutti, for the most part, and the choral texture entirely homophonic. The phrase lengths are generally two- and four-measure, with one-measure extensions at the end of each "proshchai Maslenitsa" refrain. This simple, repetitive choral number holds much less musical interest than does Rimsky-Korsakov's version, a rondo-like form in which strikingly different musical verses are unified by the returns of the refrain. Considering Tchaikovsky's subsidiary role and the extreme time pressure he was under, such a qualitative comparison is unfair to him.
Figure 6.14. Tchaikovsky, *Snegurochka*, Maslenitsa Procession.
The most striking difference between this folksong arrangement and those of Rimsky-Korsakov, though, is the text setting: Tchaikovsky forces the asymmetrical meter of the folk text into waltz time here; particularly striking is the refrain, which starts each time on the second beat with a rest on the first beat. That one-beat pause would hardly occur in folksong performance, where poetic meter is rarely if ever symmetrical. Pauses at phrase endings are particularly foreign to ritual songs such as those represented in this scene.

Ostrovsky's entire Scene 4 in the final act consisted of a brief set of stage directions and the folksong, "A my proso seiali." The folksong included indications for antiphonal performance by two choruses. This is the raw material given to Tchaikovsky, and later to Rimsky-Korsakov for a depiction of the Semik celebration. Semik is a summer ritual, occurring about seven weeks after Easter. By the time Ostrovsky was writing this play, several descriptions of this ritual had been published, by Snegirev, Tereshchenko, and others. The weaving of wreaths and decoration of a birch tree are common elements in all descriptions, and Ostrovsky included those practices in Act Three. Other common elements in all descriptions are games and dances, and a ritual group wedding, or blessing of betrothed couples. All this is summed up in the stage directions: Snegurochka, Mizgir (her betrothed), Lel' (a Pan-like shepherd), Tsar Berendei, and the whole people. All look expectantly to the east and start singing at the first light of dawn.

Tchaikovsky's job was to compose music for the entrance of all these people. He chose a march, written in rather conventional fashion. In the march's middle section, a folk dance-like melody likely accompanies a brief khorovod. The song they sing, "A my proso seiali," appears in several descriptions of Semik, and by then was published in at
least two folk song collections. The two versions, one from Nikolai L'vov and Ivan Prach's collection (Figure 6.15), and the other in Milyi Balakirev's (Figure 6.16). Tchaikovsky chose the L'vov-Prach version. Note in particular the ends of each line: the last syllable is extended, and harmonized with a half cadence. As with Tchaikovsky’s setting of the Maslenitsa Procession, the phrases in his setting of this folksong are quite noticeably closed with a cadence, sometimes a rest, sometimes a lengthened note harmonized with a strong cadence. These phrase endings violate a common feature in Russian ritual songs: continuous sound, with elided phrase endings.
Figure 6.15. N. L’vov and I. Prach, *Sobranie narodnykh russkikh pesen s ikh golosami na muzyku polozhil Ivan Prach* (1790)\textsuperscript{152}

Figure 6.16. M. Balakirev, *Sbornik russkikh narodnykh pesen* (1866), No. 8, 2\textsuperscript{nd} variant
As he adapted this scene in the libretto for his opera, Rimsky-Korsakov elaborated a bit on Ostrovsky's stage directions: Snegurochka and Mizgir stand in the shade of a hedge (to protect her from the sun!). From the forest around the hill come the people: first gusliars playing their gusli (a folk instrument imitated by harp and piano, a technique pioneered by Mikhail Glinka) and shepherds on their horns, after them the Tsar with his court, after the Tsar in pairs the betrothed couples in festive attire, and finally the rest of the Berendeians. As they come out into the field, the folk divide into two groups.

Rimsky-Korsakov’s Proso Chorus is derived from Balakirev's version of the folksong. In m. 227, the last word (seiali [we sowed]) is extended, and set to a melodic turn that moves directly to the first note of the refrain (Oi Did Lalo…). This turn more accurately captures the Russian folk practice of eliding phrases together in one continuous melodic line. Rimsky-Korsakov goes even further. He re-sets the word seiali, extending "se-" through the first four notes, moving "-a-" to the eighth note, and abbreviating the last syllable to the last three notes of the phrase. This results in the last two syllables having equal length, more in keeping with Russian folk practice.

The differences between these two composers’ settings of the same folksong reveal an important truth about Russian musical life in the 1880s. According to the tired old dichotomy between Westernizers and Slavophiles, Tchaikovsky was a Westernizer, while Rimsky-Korsakov and his colleagues in Balakirev's Circle were Slavophiles by comparison. Notice here that that dichotomy is false and misleading. Both composers approached this scene in remarkably similar ways. Both used the same folk melody, only in slightly different versions. The distinction between them was not the use of Russian folk material, but how it was used. Tchaikovsky followed the more conventional
traditions taught in the Conservatories, while Rimsky-Korsakov devised choral texture and phrasing more reminiscent of the unique qualities of Russian folk choral style.

Elements of all three of these musical styles appear in the music associated with the title character. In her opening Aria, her father’s and mother’s legacies are both apparent in her vocal line. Leaps of a perfect fourth and octave, and rapid sixteenth-note rhythms are typical of the cold style, as is the lack of a strong cadence until the end of the first section of this ternary aria (m.33). The contrasting second section is as typical of the warm style as any of Vesna’s, Mizgir’s, or the Tsar’s numbers.

As was demonstrated in the earlier discussion of the libretto, in the Prologue’s final scene, Ostrovsky reveals Snegurochka to the villagers behind a sort of cold, magical mask. Rimsky-Korsakov likewise removes all warmth from her music in this scene. Her first appearance is mute, accompanied by a flute cadenza derived from one of the motives in her Aria theme. Her farewell to her friends in the forest is her most angular, chromatic utterance so far (Figure 6.17). The villagers’ response is shock and amazement, and thus dramatic tension is established between her depth and latent warmth seen only by the audience, and her cold, magical exterior by which the villagers know her. Indeed, the villagers’ expression of horror might be construed as a response to her utterly foreign manner of singing, as well as the more obviously frightening echoes from the forest.
The return of many of Snegurochka’s themes, compressed tightly into her short Arioso in Act Three, underscores this pivotal moment in her character’s dramatic development. Her concluding address to the wildflowers in the field is set to the theme from the middle section (Adagio) of her Prologue Aria (see Figure 6.7). In its original setting, this theme accompanied Snegurochka’s assurance to her father that she would always sing to him, accompanied by snowstorms. This theme’s musical characteristics, though, clearly reveal her mother’s heritage. Note that its melismatic text setting, the classic melodic arch of each phrase, its clear tonal structure, and its simple, repetitive accompaniment, make this a quintessentially warm musical moment.

When the tsar questions the sincerity of her feelings for Mizgir, her response, “Great tsar! If you ask me a hundred times, I will still answer, ‘I love him!’” is set to two motives from her earlier expressions of delight in music. These thematic recollections convey an important dramatic subtext: for Snegurochka, the people’s folksongs and their ability to love are practically synonymous. It was folksong that first attracted her out of
the forest; during her stay in the village it was folksong that gave her the greatest pleasure; and in the end, she will express her love for those close to her with a motive from folksong. One of these two motives appeared first in her response to a question from her father. Asked what has prompted her to leave the woods for Berendei, she answers simply, “The people’s songs.” The second motive originated in her first scene with Lel’, when she tells him that “listening to songs is my only entertainment.”

As she is struck by the sun’s rays, she sings, “I love and I melt from the sweet feelings of love; farewell, my friends,” set to the arietta theme (Example 6.18). Even here, the composer manages to include a reference to her kinship with Frost in the orchestra’s bass line. The melodic tritons are the most consistent identifying motive of Frost and his assistant, Leshii (the Wood Demon). The reference is subtle, but its significance is certain, because this simple tritone motion is reserved for Frost and Leshii, and appears nowhere else save in accompaniments of the Snow Maiden.

Figure 6.18. Act 4, Finale, m. 246-49
Her final words are an expression of love for Mizgir, her first true expression of love in the opera. Rimsky-Korsakov sets this crucial moment of transformation with an exquisitely subtle musical gesture. The melody, shown in Figure 6.19, is a variation of the folksong melody, “Ai vo pole lipen’ka.” Unlike her participation in the singing of that folksong at the beginning of Act Three, here she offers a fresh twist to the melody, while preserving its general contour.

Figure 6.19. Snegurochka’s final utterance, Act Four Finale, m. 256-58
For a composer all too often dismissed as conservative, this opera's music is surprisingly innovative. It certainly did not shock its audience, but it did present sounds they had not heard before. Cold forces of nature were represented by a chromatic style filled with symmetrical pitch sets. Borrowed folksongs and original melodies, set in a new style that emulated the harmonic language, melodic structure, and choral texture of Russian folksong, accompanied scenes of village life and folk rituals. More important, these sounds corresponded with dramatic themes in such a way as to present a familiar folk tale in an exciting new way. The subtle interplay of chromatic, diatonic, and folk styles evoked a world in which mortal villagers and mythical forces of nature came together in pantheistic ritual.

Connections and relationships between the musical styles in this opera represent the interplay among cold and warm natural forces, and the folk world of the village. Snegurochka’s drama unfolds within the context of this interplay. Far from a two-dimensional caricature with “fantastic puppets,” (pace Gerald Abraham) this scheme of musical thematics portrays an epic world in which mortals and forces of nature correspond naturally. As the musical paradigms of cold, warm, and folksong blend together, the epic kingdom of Berendei is revealed as a unified whole. Within this context, the title character’s final musical utterance, a folksong variant, symbolizes her acquisition of the mortal ability to love. Small wonder that this work was to so profoundly resonate with the symbolists and idealists of Russia's Silver Age.
CHAPTER 7

SNEGUROCHKA’S THEMATICS AND THE CASE OF WAGNER

Rimsky-Korsakov’s Snegurochka cannot be adequately addressed without reference to Richard Wagner’s music dramas. Direct influence is not to be found, as Der Ring des Nibelungen came late to Russia. Historical coincidence abounds, however, as Russian interest in Wagner grew substantially in the 1880s. Moreover, Snegurochka’s revival and entry into the Russian operatic canon occurred at precisely the same time as the first Russian production of Der Ring. Most contemporary accounts, including Rimsky-Korsakov’s own, were either clouded by nationalistic bias or diminished by imperfect or incomplete understanding of Wagner’s music. Subsequent analyses have at times overstated connections between this opera and Wagner’s theories, while comparisons between Snegurochka’s characteristic themes and Wagner’s leitmotives have overlooked some important similarities.

The performance and reception of Wagner’s music in Russia were among the more vibrant topics in Russian music criticism in the last decades of the nineteenth century, most recently summarized by Rosamund Bartlett. Wagner’s tour of Russia in 1863 coincided with Rimsky-Korsakov’s naval cruise, so the young composer learned of these concerts only second-hand. Of all Wagner’s operas, only Lohengrin and Rienzi made it to the Russian stage in the 1870s. Several Russian composers and music critics attended

153 Letopis’, p. 56; Chronicle, p. 52.
the first Bayreuth Festival in 1876, including Tchaikovsky and Cui, and their published
acquaintance with and study of \textit{Der Ring} was not to be until 1889.\footnote{\textit{Letopis’}, p. 226-27; \textit{Chronicle}, p. 253.} Thus, at the time of
\textit{Snegurochka}’s composition, he was only acquainted with Wagner’s music dramas in
theory and by reputation.

\textit{Snegurochka}’s resemblance to the \textit{Gesamtkunstwerk} model has been slightly
exaggerated. Rimsky-Korsakov’s keen attention to the libretto notwithstanding, his
artistic vision for this opera is most directly and completely realized in its music. In
Chapter Three I observed his relative lack of concern for the integrity of poetic meter
when matters of musical style were at stake. Scenic matters appear to have been even less
important to him. Indeed, the opera’s most famous and enduringly influential production
was designed entirely without his input.

Richard Taruskin’s characterization of the 1885 Mamontov Private Opera
imply a level of collaboration that did not exist in 1885. The costumes and sets were all
borrowed from Mamontov’s 1882 house production of Ostrovsky’s play production, and
were completed before the premiere of Rimsky-Korsakov’s opera. The 1882 production
was indeed a hothouse of artistic camaraderie, with the impresario and painters alike
helping to build the sets and even playing the major roles. Il’ia Repin, in a letter to
Vladimir Stasov in December 1881, reported having heard that Rimsky-Korsakov’s opera
was in rehearsal at the Mariinsky Theater, and offered the use of Vasnetsov’s designs.158
Years later, Vladimir Stasov recalled those designs when he advocated greater
recognition of Vasnetsov’s talent in 1898; their influence on practically all subsequent
productions of the opera testifies further to their importance. Although too late for
inclusion of Vasnetsov’s decor in the premiere, the letter proves that they pre-dated the
opera’s performance, and that the artist knew nothing of the opera when he made them.
Rimsky-Korsakov’s complete silence concerning the 1885 Mamontov production further
suggests that it proceeded largely or entirely without his input.

Rimsky-Korsakov insisted throughout his life that opera is first and foremost a
musical genre; his contribution to this particular work is to be found most clearly in its
music. His insistence on music’s primacy is expressed most directly in his preface to
Sadko (quoted at the beginning of Chapter Four), where he complains of declamatory
interjections added by some singers, and he demands that everything in his operas is to be
apprehended primarily as a musical event. It is also evident in his discussion of his operas
in his memoirs. The libretto and stage design are never discussed, save in connection with
the music. Nowhere is this more clearly seen than in his writings about Snegurochka.
Both in Letopis’ and in his unfinished analysis of the opera, the music is always his chief
concern. Although lifted up as a response to Richard Wagner’s melo-declamation and
through-composed scenes, Rimsky-Korsakov, as we have seen, was reacting more
directly to Dargomyzhsky and Musorgsky. Although his later writings on opera,

including the *Sadko* preface, are in large part responses to Wagner’s music dramas and their influence, his subjugation of text to music began well before his first acquaintance with Wagner’s works.

As crucial as Rimsky-Korsakov’s music is to his artistic vision of this opera, it is rather ironic that one of its most salient features, a network of themes related to the characters and events of the drama, escaped critical attention for twelve years after the opera’s premiere. Despite generally successful productions throughout Russia and abroad, *Snegurochka* did not gain a lasting place in the Russian opera repertory or the respect of Russian music critics until Nikolai Findeizen devoted a lengthy six-part article\(^\text{159}\) to its “thematics.”\(^\text{160}\) From the appearance of Findeizen’s article to the present, Russian music scholars have been unanimous in their praise of this opera. Its second edition, including a German translation and an engraved orchestral score, followed in 1898, together with simultaneous productions in Moscow and St. Petersburg. Rimsky-Korsakov’s prodigious output of new operas at this time certainly secured retrospective respect for his early works, including *Snegurochka*, but Findeizen’s glowing accolades doubtless contributed to the opera’s popularity.

Findeizen divides the opera’s thematics into three categories:

1. Wagner-like Leitmotives associated with Iarilo and Snegurochka, and other forces of nature (Moroz, Vesna, Leshii)
2. The rich musical *characteristics* with which the composer portrays most of the other characters, namely Tsar Berendei and his court, Bermiata, Lel’, Kupava, and Bakula-Bobyl’

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\(^{160}\) The Russian word, *tematizm*, translated here as “thematics,” denotes the use, recall, and transformation of musical themes in order to establish a connection between musical events and dramatic personages or events.
3. Snegurochka’s part\textsuperscript{161}

Although Iastrebtsev reports that Rimsky-Korsakov endorsed Findeizen's groups, he divided the characters into three groups slightly differently in his analysis:

1. Mythical (Ded-Moroz, Vesna, Leshii, Maslenitsa)
2. Half-mythical/half-real (Snegurochka, Lel’, Tsar Berendei)
3. Real (mortal): Mizgir, Kupava, Bobyl Bakula, and Bobylikha (players in drama); and Bermiata, two heralds, and royal page (merely episodic characters)\textsuperscript{162}

Both give special place to Snegurochka’s theme. It is unique for its length, complexity, and variety of constituent motives, each of which is developed in Snegurochka’s vocal lines throughout the opera. Rimsky-Korsakov’s analysis, unfinished as it is, amounts to a catalog of themes and musical devices. Motives in Snegurochka’s theme are attributed to various aspects of her personality, but no musical connections are drawn between different characters’ themes.

The stated purpose of Findeizen’s analysis was to promote an opera that he considered unjustly neglected. In the opening installment, he asserted that

\textit{Snegurochka’s} thematics are unique in the whole New Russian School\textsuperscript{163}. Unfortunately, all too few musicians, and an even smaller portion of the public fully understand this profoundly poetic Russian creation. Perhaps one of the reasons this opera has spread so slowly (besides the complete disregard of the theater management and music critics) is the absence of a thorough analysis, or even a guide for the proper appreciation of this peculiarity of Rimsky-Korsakov’s opera.\textsuperscript{164}

Here Findeizen was joining Vladimir Stasov and Cesar Cui as a champion of the composers of the old Balakirev group. Issues of compositional craftsmanship and the

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\textsuperscript{163} Findeizen’s term for the Balakirev group.
\textsuperscript{164} Findeizen, “Tematizm opery Snegurochka N. A. Rimskogo-Korsakova,” p. 121.
\end{flushright}
respect of musicians, critics, and arts administrators had plagued the group and its legacy from its inception, since it directly challenged the major institutions of professionalism in Russian music: the conservatories and the Russian Music Society. Advocacy of the group’s music nearly always included, as it did in this article, criticism of the music establishment’s neglect of, or hostility toward the work in question. That adversarial stance also accounts for the polemical tone of some aspects of Findeizen’s analysis. Everything he observes in the music indicates the composer’s mastery of his craft and creative vision. Appeals to Russian nationalism are also common here: the epithet “profoundly Russian poetic creation,” and the inference that what’s good for Wagner should be accorded Russian composers as well, are but two examples.

Findeizen presents a two-fold argument for greater recognition of Snegurochka: its subject’s loftiness and the sophistication of its musical setting. This drama is far more profound than a folksy feeria; at its core, Findeizen notes, is a mythic struggle between winter and summer, a subject found in folklore worldwide. Rimsky-Korsakov’s recollection and transformation of certain themes at key moments in the drama convey through music this struggle, and its tragic consequences in the life of the title character.

Any late nineteenth-century opera boasting such a mythic subject and intricate network of musical themes invites comparison with Richard Wagner’s music dramas. Findeizen, like several other Russian music critics, quite clearly favored Rimsky-Korsakov over his more famous German predecessor. While lamenting the absence of a thematic guide to this opera (quoted above), he noted that such guides “through the debris of complicated Wagnerian thematics and its echoes in German and French music”

165 This is all the more remarkable because, as Rosamund Bartlett observes, Findeizen frequently advocated increased attention to and production of Wagner's operas. Bartlett, p. 59.
had become quite common abroad.\footnote{Findeizen, “Tematizm opery Snegurochka N. A. Rimskogo-Korsakova,” p. 121.} This comment holds interest on several levels, not the least of which is the Russian nationalist perspective on Wagner and Wagnerism. Attention here will be limited to the use of Wagner, or more often Wagnerism, as a negative foil against which Russian scholars, beginning with Findeizen, projected the merits of Rimsky-Korsakov’s musical dramaturgy.

The tendency to confuse Wagner’s musical theory and practice with the cult of Wagnerism that had surrounded his music by 1894 is evident in Findeizen’s next three references to the German composer. In each case, he refers to Wagnerian theory and practice not with specific examples from his operas but with sweeping generalizations taken from popular interpretations of his works. Among the primary sources of this misunderstanding were the very “guides” just mentioned. The lamentable practice of tracing leading motives as a method of analyzing or appreciating the Wagnerian music drama was fostered by Hans von Wolzogen in 1876. The success of his “thematic guide”\footnote{Hans von Wolzogen, \textit{Thematischer Leitfaden durch die Musik von Richard Wagners Festspiel “Der Ring des Nibelungen”} (Leipzig, 1876).} and its many offspring is evident in the all too common belief that the music drama is little more than a chain of musical signposts to be catalogued and memorized. Findeizen, no less than the likes of Claude Debussy and Igor Stravinsky, and as we have seen, Rimsky-Korsakov himself, perpetuated this unfortunate misconception.

Later in the article’s introductory installment, he acknowledged Wagner’s apparent influence on “the musical development of the opera’s primary (mythic) idea.” Still, “these characteristic themes…are highly developed, in comparison with Wagner’s thematics. Far from labels slapped on character’s backs, with which they frequently enter
and exit the stage in Wagner’s music dramas, Rimsky-Korsakov’s themes almost always characterize not just one person (Frost, Spring, Leshii), but all the various forces associated with these deities.” While his point about Rimsky-Korsakov is well taken, Findeizen’s generalization about Wagner is utterly groundless. Even disregarding (as he does) Wagner’s later music dramas, examples may be found in Der Ring of just this sort of broad thematic association. One cited by Carl Dahlhaus is the Spear motive, related not only “to the stage property carried by Wotan, but also to his contract with Fasolt and Fafner, the runes of which are carved on the spear’s shaft, and by extension to agreements in general…”

Findeizen’s next point of comparison was Snegurochka’s theme. He regarded this motivic complex and its development throughout the opera to be Rimsky-Korsakov’s greatest innovation. “In [Snegurochka’s theme] Rimsky-Korsakov far surpassed Wagner: he produced a concise, singularly musical portrayal of a familiar person, situation, or event, artistically developed Snegurochka’s poetic image, and in her characterized the essential plot twists of his drama.” He continues by describing this theme as a “profoundly Russian musical type,” embodying in music the various aspects of the title character’s personality. Except the assignation of Russian character, which Findeizen neither defines nor fully describes, he may just have well have been discussing Siegfried’s complex of themes. Again quoting Dahlhaus, “is the theme of Siegfried as Hero a variant of the Horn Call, or a different motif with a degree of kinship in the

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material? And what distinguishes the relationship between the Horn Call and Hero theme from the connection between the Ring motif and the Valhalla motif…?"  

Any attempt to answer these questions necessarily leads to assessment of the entire music drama and its intricate connections between event, text, and music. In both Der Ring and Snegurochka the association between musical themes and dramatic events or personages is suggestive and dynamic, not direct and static. Themes in both works consist of component motives, the musical relationships of which are not always associated directly with stage events, but do contain dramaturgical meaning. Attempts to assign a precise connection between dramatic events and each musical manifestation of a given theme, or with the musical similarities between themes, are ultimately shallow, and demean the music. In both Wagner and Rimsky-Korsakov, music’s role is much more powerful: the interplay and transformation of themes and theme complexes convey a level of symbolic meaning beyond the direct language of text and stage events.

Findeizen closes his article’s first installment with an observation about the pervasiveness of thematics in these composers’ operas. Alleging that Wagner “abuses” his themes by saturating the entire score with them, Findeizen praises Rimsky-Korsakov’s restriction of key themes to “the most important events in the drama.” In scenes of a “descriptive” or “lyrical” nature, and in folk scenes, “thematics are almost entirely absent.” 172 Once again, the allegation against Wagner pertains more to the popular motivic guides than to the music. When nearly every orchestral motive, regardless of its lyricism, is identified as a leading motive, its musical qualities are

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subverted to its dramatic significance. The “abuse” is not at the hands of the composer, but of the critic.

As for Rimsky-Korsakov’s restraint in lyrical moments, the themes in these scenes are no less dramatically significant than those Findeizen groups under the rubric “thematics.” The recurring theme in the Wedding Scene, for example, appears in Kupava’s vocal line at key moments in the Finale of Act One. It may be loosely described as the Wedding Theme; its presence in Kupava’s line emphasizes her insistence on the sanctity of the ritual, and her admonitions to Mizgir to honor it as well. To Findeizen’s credit, his decision not to identify such themes as having primarily dramatic significance demonstrates a more sophisticated analytical stance than von Wolzogen’s. His recognition of these “lyrical” and folk-related moments encourages apprehension of Rimsky-Korsakov’s music as something more than a dramatic device. Nonetheless, these themes often serve the drama equally as powerfully as the “characteristic themes” associated with the major characters. Some, like the Wedding Theme, underline key dramatic moments; others, like the folk melody “Ai vo pole lipen’ka,” recur at important structural points in the drama, and thus improve its focus. The particular importance of this folksong in the dynamics of music and drama will be addressed below.

Although Findeizen’s claims of Rimsky-Korsakov’s superiority over Wagner were generally groundless, it would be equally erroneous to find him in Wagner’s debt. Rimsky-Korsakov had not yet attended a performance of Der Ring when he wrote Snegurochka; his acquaintance with Wagner was limited to performances of his earlier works and discussions of his theory among the Balakirev group. The mere use of leading motives, a practice that did not begin with Wagner, is hardly enough to establish
influence. Even if one distrusts the *kuchkist* inclination to claim Glinka as Rimsky-Korsakov’s chief influence, echoes of the Russian master are unmistakable in this opera. Glinka’s musical dramaturgy, including the opposition of folk-diatonic and fantastic-chromatic styles in *Ruslan i Liudmila* and the use of leading motives in *Zhizn’ za tsaria* [A Life for the Tsar], influenced Rimsky-Korsakov far more directly than did Wagner.

As for the body of Findeizen’s article, his angle on this opera is the composer’s use of thematic recall and development as a dramatic device. His analysis proceeds chronologically through the opera, drawing attention to individual themes, their reappearances and transformations, and the musical similarities among some themes. Nearly all his observations concern the contribution that Rimsky-Korsakov’s music adds to the drama. Structural concerns, and connections between the composer’s music and his familiarity with Russian folk style, escape Findeizen’s attention. Melody is the prevailing concern here; Findeizen only rarely addresses harmony, and mentions instrumentation only in passing.

Findeizen’s rather narrow perspective occasionally produces glaringly erroneous observations. Despite his recognition that Rimsky-Korsakov’s music does not always carry explicit dramatic meaning, his exclusive focus on “thematics” leads him to claim rather dubious dramatic significance for some musical passages. For example, his association of the two motives shown in Figure 7.2 with the conflict between winter and spring is somewhat forced. The bass motive is, as he observes, Moroz’s theme, and is closely associated with winter throughout the opera. The connection between the clarinet motive and the “springtime awakening of nature,” though, is supported only by Findeizen’s description of its “soft, elegaic character.” His observation is not
immediately apparent in the music, nor is any evidence given of its “role in the drama of
mediator between the strong, decisive Moroz and the tender, poetic…Vesna.”

Figure 7.1. Prologue, Introduction, a) m.2, b) m.4

Another example of this grasping at analytical straws is his discovery of the same
melodic gesture at the beginning and end of Snegurochka’s Arietta in the Prologue.

Findeizen finds significant the fact that Snegurochka sings “mama” at the beginning and
“taesh’” [one melts] at the end to exactly the same two notes: e’ descending to a on
“mama,” and a ascending to e’ on “taesh’”.174 The musical similarities end there, though.
As shown in Example, “mama” is syllabically set to these two notes; here they serve as a
melodic reinforcement of the authentic cadence in A major that immediately precedes
them. “Taesh,” on the other hand, is set to three notes: a slur from a up to e’ on the first
syllable, descending to d’ on the second. The harmonic context is also entirely different: a

173 Ibid., p.141.
174 Ibid., p.145.
cadence in D major in the orchestra arrives on the tonic simultaneously with the second syllable. Thus, the a and e’ together belong to the dominant chord in this cadence, as opposed to the dominant-tonic motion implied in the earlier example. Seeing a dramatic connection between the reference to Vesna (who ultimately provides Snegurochka the magic wreath that leads to her melting) and the word “taesh’,” Findeizen forced a less plausible musical link between these two moments.

Figure 7.2 . Prologue. a) Snegurochka’s Aria, m.122, and b) Snegurochka’s Arietta, m.31-33.

Rimsky-Korsakov’s understanding of the rules of harmony merits further study, beginning with his self-imposed preparation for his faculty position at the conservatory. His *Practical Textbook of Harmony* provides valuable insight to his theory and practice, even though it lacks examples taken from his own works (unlike the orchestration textbook, which is rich with examples, primarily from his operas). Some of the most valuable material in the harmony text, for the purpose of this study anyway, is

the discussions of harmonic progression and modulation. In Russian music theory, the term *lozhnye posledovaniia*, or “false progressions,” refers to progressions in which two adjacent chords belong to “different tonalities or modes.” “Different” here clearly means “distant,” as this discussion follows a thorough delineation of two degrees of key relationships. All modulations among keys with first- or second-degree relationships proceed through pivot chords that belong to both keys. False progressions (*lozhnye posledovaniia*) are introduced as means of moving directly from one key to a distantly related key, outside the first and second degrees of relationship. Under this heading, Rimsky-Korsakov includes enharmonic modulation (particularly with use of augmented-sixth chords), deceptive cadences, modal mixture (outside the major-minor mixtures he included in first-degree relationships; see below), and common-tone progressions of seventh-chords.¹⁷⁶

In his analysis of *Snegurochka*, Findeizen finds two occurrences of “false progressions.” As his understanding of this term differs markedly from Rimsky-Korsakov’s, it is entirely possible that this is the “obvious misunderstanding” mentioned in Iastrebtsev’s account of Rimsky-Korsakov’s assessment of the article. Each of these occurrences includes one or both of two chords Findeizen outlines as G#-B-E-G-♭, and D-E♯-G♯-B. His spelling of these chords is mysterious, since they would be more conventionally represented as an E-major ninth chord (E-G♯-B-F♯) and a G# fully diminished seventh chord (G♯B-D-F). As such, they would fit neatly into an A-major context, with major-minor mixture accounting for the F-natural. Musical examples are few and quite short, and thus offer little help. Also complicating the picture is Findeizen’s

tacit transposition of these two chords. He never specifically identifies these chords in the passages he cites, so interpretation of his analysis necessarily involves some speculation. Nonetheless, Findeizen’s examples offer at least one contemporary perspective on Rimsky-Korsakov’s use of chromatic harmony. According to Findeizen, this progression evokes a “magical” atmosphere appropriate to the dramatic situations in which it is employed. A closer look at each of Findeizen’s examples of this procedure, along with references to Rimsky-Korsakov’s harmony textbook, will disclose how the composer and his audience understood such progressions.

Findeizen describes this progression most accurately in his discussion of its last occurrence: the first scene of Act Two. As the Tsar exclaims, “Iarilo is angry with us,” the horns repeat the two chords shown in Figure 7.3. The tonal context of this passage is B-flat major, and it is immediately preceded by a brief tonicization of F major. Neither the F half-diminished-seventh chord nor the B-flat major-minor-seventh chord fit neatly into Findeizen’s progression, but the progression does at least in part qualify as a “lozhnoe posledovanie.” The progression signals a return to E-flat major, the key in which this scene began. The return does not finally occur until the Tsar decrees a festival to appease Iarilo (m.67).
Findeizen’s remaining reference to this “false” progression is his most obscure. He concludes his discussion of the Maslenitsa Effigy’s monologue by noting that at the end of the scene “a series of chords (in a false progression) appears in the orchestra; the nature of these chords was discussed above.”¹⁷⁷ He apparently has in mind the low brass chords in the scene’s final ten measures. Like the previous two examples, the “falseness” of this progression may be attributed to voice leading; unlike the other passages, here a tonally functional harmonic progression does, in fact, exist. The scene ends with an unresolved dominant-seventh chord in B-flat major; the last ten measures may be heard as an extended approach to that chord.

The prolonged secondary dominant (m.317-22) embraces a chromatic ascending line (A-flat—A—B-flat) in the second trombone, which may account for Findeizen’s claim of “falseness.” The surrounding diminished triad, though, clearly sustains harmonic motion toward the dominant-seventh chord.

In his discussion of both passages, Findeizen calls attention to their harmonic complexity or ambiguity, but disregards its source: voice-leading. Rimsky-Korsakov’s willingness, evident here and in many other places in this opera, to embellish a prolonged harmony, sometimes to the point of obscuring it, has attracted far less attention than it deserves. Perhaps because the composer himself went to great lengths, in his harmony textbook and elsewhere, to explain his music from a harmonic perspective, critics and scholars have failed to notice the precedence that voice leading often takes over harmonic function.

The only account of Rimsky-Korsakov’s reaction to Findeizen’s article is a brief mention in Iastrebtsev’s memoirs. Except for a cryptic reference to “one obvious misunderstanding,” Iastrebtsev reports that Rimsky-Korsakov was generally satisfied with the article. Since he was familiar with Findeizen’s analysis when he described Snegurochka’s music in Letopis’ and in his unfinished analysis of the opera, his accounts should be considered within the context of Findeizen’s arguments.

Findeizen was not alone in comparing Snegurochka’s themes with Wagnerian leitmotives. Rimsky-Korsakov’s account of Snegurochka’s composition and his description of its music in Letopis’ was written in 1905, and thus partook of his study of Der Ring.

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I have made use of leading motives (Leitmotiv) in Snegurochka. At the time I knew little of Wagner and whatever I did know, I knew superficially. Nevertheless the employment of leitmotives is present in Pskovitianka, Maiskaia noch’, and particularly in Snegurochka. No doubt my use of leitmotives is different from Wagner’s. With him, they serve as the material from which the orchestral fabric is woven. In addition to using them similarly, I employ leitmotives in the vocal parts as well. Sometimes my leitmotives appear as component parts of more or less lengthy themes, as for instance in Snegurochka’s main theme and in Tsar Berendei’s theme. Sometimes leitmotives are truly rhythmic-melodic motives, but occasionally they are simply harmonic progressions. In such cases they might rather be called leitharmonies. Such leading harmonies are hard to perceive for the mass audience, which more readily picks up Wagnerian leitmotives, resembling as they do sharp military signals.\footnote{Letopis’, p. 186; Chronicle, p. 204. Italics indicate my own translation. Rimsky-Korsakov’s first use of the term Leitmotiv is in the original German; subsequently he adopts the word into Russian usage, just as we do in English. I have therefore substituted “leitmotives” for the published translation’s “leading motives.”}

As we have seen, Rimsky-Korsakov was not alone in this rather unsophisticated assessment of the Wagnerian leitmotif. He does not address at all Wagner’s thematic development of his leitmotives. At first glance, such development appears to be entirely absent in Snegurochka, but such is not the case. As was shown in the previous chapter, Snegurochka’s last musical utterance is a folk-like variation of the folk tune “Ai vo pole lipen’ka.” This folksong, while not directly associated with a particular character, has a profound relationship with a central dramatic theme in this opera, that of love and marriage. From its first appearance in Kupava’s wedding ritual in Act One, to the courtship rituals at the beginning of Act Three, to this climactic expression of love by the title character, this song carries as much dramatic weight as any theme in the opera.

In addition to this characteristically Russian type of thematic development, Rimsky-Korsakov also uses more conventional devices. In the Introduction to the Prologue, the first appearance of birds is accompanied by piccolos emulating the birds’
twittering (Figure 7.4). Shortly thereafter, as Vesna appears for the first time, Rimsky-Korsakov uses rhythmic augmentation to create one of Vesna’s principal motives, and combines the two motives contrapuntally (Figure 7.5).

![Figure 7.4 Piccolo motive, m. 22](image)

![Figure 7.5. Piccolo motive and Vesna’s motive in counterpoint, m. 47-50](image)

The *leitharmonie* that Rimsky-Korsakov mentions is another example of thematic development, although he does not describe it as such. In this case, it is a motive from Leshii’s theme, used in a scene in which Leshii is luring Mizgir away from Snegurochka.
and into the magic forest. Leshii’s theme is first heard in the Prologue, as a melody outlining a tritone (Figure 7.3). This melody is repeated sequentially, culminating in a dissonant chord with a tritone in its lower two voices (Figure 7.4). When Leshii magically blocks Mizgir’s path in the magic forest (end of Act Three), the tritone alone, in stopped horns, punctuates each of his tricks (Figure 7.5). Although Rimsky-Korsakov doesn’t make the connection explicit in his discussion, the derivation of this leitharmonie from Leshii’s theme is most likely why he chose to draw attention to it.

In the same year that he wrote this account in Letopis’, Rimsky-Korsakov attempted a thorough analysis of the opera, entitled Razbor “Snegurochki.” According to Iastrebtsev, the purpose of the analysis was two-fold: it was to be the first of a series of analyses of the composers’ operas, aimed at explicating in positive terms his operatic theory, and it was to set the record straight on an opera Rimsky-Korsakov considered to be largely misunderstood.181

First published in a collection of his writings edited by his wife, Nadezhda Nikolaevna Rimskaia-Korsakova, this analysis was reprinted, with notes regarding the composer’s editorial revisions, in his collected works. It is clear from this reprint that the analysis remained an unfinished draft at the composer’s death. It was to be divided into three sections: an introduction devoted to the drama’s literary images and their relationships, a middle section entitled “Tematizm,” and a final section, “Form.” Of these, an apparently complete draft survives of the first two, but his scene-by-scene

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180 Letopis’, p.349.
discussion of the opera’s form includes only the first scene of the Prologue and a schematic analysis of the Maslenitsa chorus.

Presumably intending to review the entire opera in the “Form” section, Rimsky-Korsakov addressed its thematic generically rather than chronologically. He described three large categories of themes, each with its unique musical and dramatic properties, but illustrated only the first category with musical examples. This first group corresponds to Findeizen’s “characteristic themes,” associated with main characters and their followers. Rimsky-Korsakov’s discussion of the motivic composition and development of these themes resembles Findeizen’s, in that both seek to establish a correlation between musical and dramatic content. The second category consists of themes that might be called “lyrical,” because they relate not to characters but to “lyrical moments” in the opera: arias, songs, and dances. The final type of themes “are transitory in a way, serving temporarily as characteristics of an individual moment, not a character or idea.”

The response to Findeizen is inferred most directly when Rimsky-Korsakov describes the relationship between the first category of themes and their component motives. Findeizen described Snegurochka’s theme as her “musical type (profoundly Russian)… composed of several different, independent motives; only their aggregate, like the aggregate of the many and varied sides of a living human personality, comprise one artistic whole…” Rimsky-Korsakov took pains to clarify the relationship between motive and theme in the middle of his own discussion of Snegurochka’s theme. Having described the theme’s five component motives, he noted:

In structural analyses such motives are often posited as the fundamental elements, and the theme which manifests itself as a chain of such motives is regarded as a manufactured product. Oh, how dry themes composed in this manner will be. (The editor notes Rimsky-Korsakov’s marginal inscription in the draft at this point: ‘Commentary on Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony.’) In the best circumstances, the creative process proceeds in the opposite direction: the theme arises as a whole in the composer’s consciousness. The more this theme is found to be composed of motives which are rhythmically and tonally diverse yet aesthetically compatible, the more material it offers for the composer’s development and transformation of the individual themes which, by their union, comprise the theme.\textsuperscript{183}

If Rimsky-Korsakov is taking exception here to Findeizen’s description (and the fact that both remarks are imbedded in discussions of Snegurochka’s theme suggests a connection), the difference is extremely subtle. Both men describe the theme as an organic whole comprised of distinct parts. Findeizen describes those parts as independent entities making up an aggregate. It bears mentioning that Rimsky-Korsakov’s marginal note does not appear to be an attack on Beethoven’s music, but on poor analyses of it.

Rimsky-Korsakov noted that themes belonging to the second category (lyrical moments) appear from time to time as reminiscences; unfortunately, he offered no specific examples of these themes, nor any discussion of their reprises. Presumably, he intended to include such analysis in his section on the opera’s form. As we saw in the last chapter, the return of two such lyrical themes, Snegurochka’s Prologue Arietta and the folksong “Ai vo pole lipen’ka,” play an important dramatic role in the opera’s final scene.

As it is written almost a decade before Rimsky-Korsakov’s first serious study of Wagner’s \textit{Ring}, Snegurochka’s debt to Wagner is indeed quite small. Nonetheless, everyone, including Rimsky-Korsakov, has recognized its ties to the German composer’s

\textsuperscript{183} \textit{Ibid.}, p.398.
operatic theory and practice. Rimsky-Korsakov did not share Wagner’s interest in his opera’s scenic design, and certainly never went so far as to design a hall for its performance. On the other hand, his work on the libretto, crafting a work full of mythic symbolism out of a simple melodrama, ranks with Wagner’s tetralogy. More important, his use and development of leitmotives to reinforce the opera’s mythic themes, qualify *Snegurochka* as a truly Russian music drama.
Most composers, if they have a preference among their compositions, choose not to reveal it publicly. Such was not the case with Rimsky-Korsakov. Of all his fifteen operas and his many other works, *Snegurochka* was his favorite. He chose a quote from Vesna's opening recitative when Iastrebtsev asked for an epigram for the close of the nineteenth century.\footnote{According to Iastrebtsev, Rimsky-Korsakov wrote out the orchestral accompaniment to the following line, “I vse lish’ blesk, da blesk kholodnyi, i net, i net tepla” [And all is merely sparkle, and cold at that, and there is no warmth],” along with the caption, "Solve the riddle, kind sir. This is my music." V.V. Iastrebtsev, *Vospominaniia*, vol.2, p. 165.} When Rimsky-Korsakov envisioned an analysis of all his operas, he chose *Snegurochka* as his starting point. Even his relationship with Iastrebtsev started with a discussion about *Snegurochka*. Iastrebtsev’s modest musical talents certainly didn’t portend a close relationship with this great composer and teacher, but a simple question about the folk sources of melodies in *Snegurochka* led to Iastrebtsev’s exhaustive study of this and other scores and sketches of Rimsky-Korsakov’s operas. Iastrebtsev’s meticulous efforts in this study, combined with apparent personal affection between mentor and protégé, formed the basis of a professional and personal relationship that lasted till Rimsky-Korsakov’s death.

As special as this opera was to its composer, it offers a uniquely revealing context within which to address some issues that have plagued our appreciation of this pivotal
composer. Rimsky-Korsakov occupies a rather ambiguous place in our understanding of Russian music history, among both Western and Russian scholars. We have yet to come to terms with this member of the anti-academic Balakirev group for whom one of Russia's two major conservatories is named. He maintained his loyalty to the group throughout his life, even after declaring himself an independent artist, and despite quite candid criticisms of his fellow kuchkists, particularly Balakirev and Musorgsky. With *Snegurochka* he defined his personal brand of kuchkizm, one that may be found reflected in everything he wrote subsequently, from his edition of Musorgsky's *Boris Godunov* to the sardonic *Zolotoi petushok*. For Rimsky-Korsakov, there was no contradiction between the creation of a Russian national style and academic polish. With *Snegurochka*, he demonstrated how they might be combined, more eloquently than he was able to do in words.

When he wrote *Snegurochka*, Rimsky-Korsakov had not yet seen Richard Wagner's music dramas on stage, so it would be pointless to look for the German composer's influence in this opera. Even so, its quintessential marriage of musical and dramatic narrative certainly mirrors the ideas expressed in Wagner’s *Oper und Dram*. *Snegurochka*'s fairy-tale subject, and especially its mythic approach to folk ritual, became staples of Russian modernism at the turn of the century, at roughly the same time that Wagner's music dramas were creating a stir in the Russian capitals. The composer’s single-handed adaptation of the libretto from Ostrovsky’s play reveals a deeper, subtler dramatic flair than even Abram Gozenpud was able to demonstrate.

Perhaps beguiled by the naïve surface of this and many of his other works, many critics and scholars, in Russia and abroad, have yet to appreciate the philosophical depth
and structural ingenuity of Rimsky-Korsakov’s opera. His music transformed this simple fairy tale about a girl made of snow, and Ostrovsky's melodrama, into a Russian pantheistic myth.

The most striking achievement in this opera is its complex of musical styles that are closely related to opera's dramatic and philosophical themes. Chromatic, diatonic, and folk styles represent cold and warm forces of nature, and village life. These three styles are subtly connected, representing an integral, pantheistic worldview in which humanity and the forces of nature are connected through ritual and song. It is this last feature that had the most profound impact on Russian musical and intellectual life. Its revival productions in the 1890s coincided with successful productions of Richard Wagner's music dramas. As audiences and critics confronted Snegurochka side by side with Der Ring, this opera became a Russian counterpart to the Wagnerian Gesamtkunstwerk for a generation of Russian symbolists and idealists.

Rimsky-Korsakov used borrowed folksongs extensively, and integrated them into the drama, for the second time in this opera (the first time was in Maiskaia noch' [May Night], whose composition in 1879 immediately preceded Snegurochka). More than in its predecessor, he developed in Snegurochka a folk-derived musical style, which embraced both borrowed folk tunes and his own original melodies. Borrowed and original tunes were so stylistically similar that even sophisticated listeners found it difficult to tell the difference. This innovative work also provides conclusive evidence that Rimsky-Korsakov deserves more credit as a precursor to Russian modernism. The fully developed use of chromatic style in a dramatic context was groundbreaking for its time. This style
was to become a hallmark of his later fantasy operas, corresponding to magical elements and characters. Here it is used to represent cold forces of nature.

Certainly the account of his most famous pupil, Igor Stravinsky, has convinced most in the West that Nikolai Andreevich was a died-in-the-wool conservative, even a reactionary. This, his third opera, composed in the full flower of his young adulthood, rewards closer scrutiny and reveals the richness of its composer’s imagination and creativity. Standing for the first time on his “own feet,” Rimsky-Korsakov left behind the social realism of the 1860’s, and helped open the door to Russian modernism.

Whether *Snegurochka* ever finds a place in the operatic canon outside Russia, its significance as a turning point in Rimsky-Korsakov’s biography will always make it a worthy object of study. If for no other reason than Rimsky-Korsakov's oft-repeated affection for this opera, it represents an important example of his operatic style. Written soon after his acceptance of the Conservatory teaching position, and shortly before Musorgsky's death, it came at a crucial time in Rimsky-Korsakov's relationship with the *kuchka*, the group that fostered his early development.

It would be far too simplistic, indeed far from the truth, to conclude that with *Snegurochka* Rimsky-Korsakov had abandoned the *kuchka*. It would be more correct, I suggest, to claim that by 1882 the *kuchka* no longer existed as a clearly identifiable, cohesive camp. Despite the personal loyalties that Rimsky-Korsakov retained to his death, in *Snegurochka* he foreswore allegiance to everyone and everything except his Muse. If any musical event might be said to have brought Russian musical life into the "safe harbors" of the 1880s and 1890s, *Snegurochka* would certainly be a leading candidate. Its broad appeal transcended the rivalries and antagonisms of the 1860s, and
its blend of well-crafted counterpoint, conventional form, and adventurous harmony and orchestral color belonged no more to the kuchkist camp than to any other. It was, indeed, the work of a composer standing on his own feet.
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