The Russian Word in Song: Cultural and Linguistic Issues of Classical Singing in the Russian Language

Dissertation

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Abstract

This is an interdisciplinary dissertation that addresses an array of questions relating to Russian opera and, in particular, the Russian language as it is sung in “classical” or, to use the Russian term, “academic” music (art song and opera). The first half of the dissertation examines several matters of cultural and literary interest, including: the first major programming of Russian operatic music in the West during Sergei Diaghilev’s Saisons Russes; the adaptation of Russian literature to opera; the notion of a Russian “national” vocal timbre; and the current culture of vocal training, professional opera singing, and opera production in Russia.

Having examined some historical, textual, and cultural contexts surrounding the art of singing as practiced in Russia, the second half of the dissertation studies Russian lyric diction – that is, how the language is pronounced for communication and expression during performance of the vocal repertoire. After establishing and contextualizing the precise definition of “lyric diction,” the dissertation investigates ways that the pronunciation of Russian changes from its speech norms in the lyric diction. The centerpiece of the study is an analysis of the vowel reduction patterns of sung Russian. The final portion of the dissertation discusses consonants in the lyric diction, suggesting strategies to assist the Anglophone vocalist in singing intelligibly and expressively in Russian.
In keeping with its interdisciplinary nature, the research for this dissertation encompasses a variety of methods, including literary analysis, in-country ethnographic field research, acoustical analysis by computer, and – perhaps most fruitfully – much listening and observing of recordings of Russian opera and song performance in consultation with native speaker informants.

The results of this research should be of interest to scholars of Russian culture and music and to vocalists, vocal coaches, and voice teachers who are involved or wish to be involved in the performance and presentation of Russian vocal literature. The discoveries about Russian diction help to correct frequent misunderstandings and demystify the subject. They should prove useful for the future development of much needed manuals or other instructional materials on Russian lyric diction. The results may also be of interest to linguistic studies on topics in phonetics, inasmuch as classical singing can be considered a form of maximally emphatic, formal, or stylized speech. Finally, the sections on cultural and literary aspects of Russian opera contribute a new point of view to the omnipresent discussion of Russian musical self-identity versus Western perceptions of Russian music.
Dedication

Dedicated to my husband and best friend, Karen Manukyan
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Finally, I am thankful to my family for their love and support, especially to my parents. My mother, Kathleen Althen, was the first person to introduce me to Russian music through her love for the Russian ballet. My father, William Althen, has always been there to support my academic pursuits, not least of all by many years of meticulous proofreading. My husband, Karen Manukyan, has been a steadfast source of love and encouragement throughout my dissertation project. I thank him for all he does and all he is, and also for being my constant guinea pig for quick pronunciation checks!
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A Note on Transliteration and Transcription

Transliteration of Russian text in this dissertation follows the American Library Association and Library of Congress System (ALA-LC). However, I have chosen to make exceptions for the familiar spellings of names of famous composers, theaters, etc. (e.g. Tchaikovsky, not Chaikovskii, Bolshoi, not Bol’shoi). Transcriptions use the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA).
Chapter 1: Introduction: Russian singing comes West

1.1 Purpose of this study

In the past couple of decades in the United States interest in Russian vocal music among vocalists and voice teachers has greatly increased, along with efforts to perform the repertoire in the original language. This is explained by a number of factors such as the changed political relationship and more open cultural borders between the United States and Russia, curricular development at music schools and foreign language departments, the wide distribution of music through the internet, and the clout and popularity of certain international opera celebrities who have promoted Russian vocal music (Valerii Gergiev, Renée Fleming, Dmitrii Khvorostovskii, Anna Netrebko, and others). Whereas the expectation used to be that, in the West, Russian repertoire would be sung in translation (either English or German, and sometimes Italian) because of the perceived inaccessibility of the language, now the custom of singing in the original language has extended to the Russian repertoire as well. This new situation calls for investigations into the cultural contexts of the Russian repertoire and Russian singing, as it takes a greater and greater place in American performance culture.

In that vein, the first half of this dissertation should be of interest to any scholar or musician who studies Russian opera and art song. It examines a combination of literary, cultural, and vocal factors, all of which have played a role in creating the character and perception of Russian opera and Russian vocalism today. The discussion
touches on such questions as: Why is Russian music, especially opera, still so often perceived as located outside the Western European music paradigm? What are the factors that may contribute to the success or failure of an adaptation of a work of literature into opera, as is often the case with Russian opera? What sort of critical apparatus is most useful for evaluating operas as narratives? What factors brought about quality of vocal timbre usually associated with Russian singing voices, and are generalizations about vocal quality along national or geographical boundaries even legitimate? What are current vocal-pedagogical practices in Russia and how is music education there structured? How highly is opera valued in Russian society today?

The second half of the dissertation is about Russian lyric diction. Although Russian has become a fairly common singing language for opera and art song performance in the United States, the proper diction itself remains much less accessible to most American singers, teachers, and coaches than other languages, such as Italian, French, German or Spanish. Apprehension about the foreignness of the Cyrillic alphabet frightens many away from Russian vocal music; and the concern is not altogether unfounded, as one may frequently come across highly inaccurate transliterations/transcriptions in scores. Equally valid are concerns about the unavailability of native speakers as consultants, depending on one’s individual situation and network of contacts. In addition, Russian as a language for singing remains less accessible to the American singer than other languages due to the absence of literature on the subject. For instance, whereas lyric diction manuals and language descriptions focused on singing are widely available for English, French, German, Spanish, and Latin, only brief charts or essays are available for Russian, which
are often lacking in one important quality or another: thoroughness, clarity,\(^1\) or accuracy. Finally, various, sometimes contradictory, conceptions about the vocal demands of Russian repertoire can lead to extreme caution on the part of good singers about taking on Russian songs or arias, for fear of having an inappropriate vocal timbre or faulty diction.

This dissertation is not intended to be a manual for singers and coaches, but rather meant to investigate the most controversial or hazy issues in the area of Russian diction. It may assist specialists in instruction or coaching, as well as advancing the quality of future manuals for singing in Russian. Ultimately, it should help alleviate some of the apprehension about undertaking the Russian repertoire by clarifying what the keys are to producing genre appropriate and intelligible Russian in song.

Inasmuch as singing pronunciation is (in a way) an extreme form of emphatic speech, the portions of this study that address the changes in the phonetic system of Russian during classical singing may also provide useful data for linguists working in the field of phonetics. In particular, in the chapter on vowel reduction, I hypothesize about phonetic processes that may motivate the changes from speech norms that occur during singing. Finally, since this is an analysis of language production in the context of ‘high art,’ the results also provide observations that could be of interest for future sociolinguistic studies.

\(^1\) In certain cases problems with clarity include not just deficient presentation, but also prohibitive complexity in the language descriptions. One of the goals of this dissertation is to determine which of the complexities of the spoken diction are vital to enact in the lyric diction, and which are of secondary, or no, importance.
1.2 Methods

The methods used to carry out this study are diverse, as the project is interdisciplinary. Research approaches include: in-country field research of an ethnographic nature; acoustical analysis by computer; and listening to recordings in consultation with native speaker informants. Since the exact methods vary so much by topic, specific descriptions of methods used are contained within the individual chapters.

1.3 Organization

The dissertation is divided into seven chapters, one of which is this introduction. The second chapter studies the “texts and contexts” of Russian opera. The first part of the chapter discusses the complex problem of Russian musical self-identity versus perceptions about Russian music in the West through an analysis of the early programming of Sergei Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes. The second part considers factors of primary importance to the outcome of adaptations of literature to opera, with examples from three Russian operas by different composers.

The third chapter discusses the Russian vocal school from a music-cultural perspective. In particular, it first addresses the concept of a tonal ideal and its origins, followed by a report on features of the Russian vocal training system. Discussion of the culture of Russian opera circles is also included in the chapter.

The fourth chapter defines lyric diction, including some Russian-specific clarifications and commentaries.

The fifth chapter is the centerpiece of this project. It includes the results of research on the patterns of vowel reduction used by well-received native Russian vocalists. The
chapter begins with background on the nature of vowels in singing. The theoretical framework by which the results are organized and analyzed is explained. Various factors that influence reduction patterns and are exclusive to the singing context are put forth, together with the findings of the research and examples from the repertoire. Finally, three potential explanations for the differences between speech patterns and singing patterns are presented. In addition to the main topic of vowel reduction, the chapter discusses the modifications to one particular vowel sound, ы, during singing and comments on other forms of allophonic variation during singing.

The sixth chapter discusses consonant sounds in the lyric diction. It focuses on the difficulties presented by the palatalized consonants of Russian and suggests strategies for overcoming them. It also includes some commentary on using consonants emphatically and expressively in singing.

The seventh chapter contains brief final remarks.
Chapter 2: Russian opera theater: Texts and contexts

But how people regard music is not something static, for it is not indifference but a quiet flame, a persistent peering at and listening into the world of the soul, which gives in a creative synthesis a continuous ideal coming into being, a reflection of images of the world in a lake which on the surface is calm.

-Boris Asaf’ev

This chapter takes as its subject the textual and cultural contexts of the Russian operatic repertoire in its varying forms. Which works seem to have appealed most to the West? What seems to have been perceived as typically Russian? And is it? Why do so many Western singers shy away from the Russian repertoire, claiming they cannot enter into the “exotic” culture it represents while they have no qualms about singing Italian brigands for example, or Spanish gypsies? Since this dissertation’s primary concern is the problems of Russian vocalism in the West – cultural and linguistic – it is only appropriate to include a discussion of the most culturally momentous occasion of the exportation of Russian opera and ballet theater: Diaghilev’s Paris “Saisons Russes” (1907-8) and his subsequent founding of the Ballets Russes. The “Russian Seasons” saw Fedor Chaliapin in the title role of Boris Godunov, which remains one of the most beloved and frequently produced Russian operas in the West, as in Russia, rivaled only by Petr Tchaikovsky’s Eugene Onegin (Evgenii Onegin).

The effect of Chaliapin’s capacious and expressive basso and his supreme acting skills (not to mention his impressive physiognomy) on audiences is legendary. Nonetheless, Diaghilev’s paramount achievements as impresario were, of course, in dance. The innovations and exotica of the early seasons of the Ballets Russes undoubtedly left their mark on the Western perception of Russian performance artistry in general. Section 2.1 takes up the question of the impact of the “Russian Seasons” in the West through an examination of those dances that Diaghilev plucked from the Russian operatic repertoire for the Paris seasons. For reasons that will be discussed in detail below, these dance excerpts to a large extent were responsible for the Western perception of Russian opera as something “mysteriously oriental” and inaccessible to Western performers. What Western audiences who saw “exotic items” such as the The Polovtsian Dances and listened to their rousing music were unaware of was that they were “oriental” to the Russians as well and had even been composed to stress their differences to “genuine” Russian qualities. That “Polovtsians” and “Russians” were virtually interchangeable remained a conviction in the West for a long time and, arguably, is so still. This chapter, therefore, discusses the complexities of Russian musical self-identity, taking the excerpted oriental dances as a point of departure. In spite of Russian “self-orientalization,” i.e. Russian efforts to demarcate their different cultural identity from Western norms by pointing to their affinities with the “East” (the Turkic South mainly), there was an equally strong tendency to demarcate Russian culture from various Asian ones. The aforementioned dances, in fact, were used to emphasize difference, in the quest for a Russian “national” opera in the nineteenth century, as will be demonstrated below. One of the goals of this chapter, then, is to point to the profound ironies of this quest:
seeking their true national identity, Russian composers introduced “oriental” ballet music to create contrasts to Russian opera music, but it was the oriental dances that in the West were perceived as archetypically Russian. The resultant perception of Russian opera as “Other,” alongside the Cyrillic alphabet and other issues discussed in this dissertation, discourages Western singers and opera producers away from a large sector of the Russian repertoire.

Perhaps the quest for national opera already mentioned above explains the seemingly invariable selection of Russian classic literature or folklore for the subject of Russian operas, historically and also today. The textual, musical, and cultural issues that arise in the adaptation of varying forms of literature to opera are of considerable interest for scholars of literature and of music, as well as for specialists in adaptation. Therefore, section 2.2 of this chapter discusses a number of such issues and how they affect the overall aesthetics and success of operatic adaptation. In contradistinction to their counterparts in other European opera traditions, which frequently borrow subjects and settings from other nations, the librettos of Russian operas take mostly Russian subjects. Perhaps the overwhelming dominance of Russian sources for the libretti of Russian opera explains why one finds in both Russian and Western scholarship more criticism of Russian operatic adaptations than of other adaptations according to the mode of criticism that will be called “fidelity discourse” (in section 2.2): the shared linguistic and cultural context of the source text and the libretto make direct comparison tempting. In addition, the potential to offend sensitivities in performance of the Russian repertoire seems unusually high. For example, consider the inevitable outcry resulting when Tat’iana and Onegin engage in any physical contact during the final scene of *Eugene Onegin.*
Tchaikovsky himself, for all his oft-noted reinvention in the opera, still heeded (against his own inclinations) the popular view that the heroine behave with decorum, as demonstrated in a letter to his brother, Anatolii:

You say that I should change the last scene of Onegin. Although I do not really agree – because Pushkin by a hint here and there gives the right to finish the scene more or less as I have done – in response to your request I have tried to change it, as you will see from the notes I am sending. First of all, on page 242, instead of the notes saying that Tatiana throws herself into Onegin’s arms I have written: ‘Onegin comes nearer.’ Then he sings what is on the same page, still using the formal ‘you’; then everything goes on without change until the very end where I changed Tatiana’s words: she will not weaken and be drawn to him but continues to assert duty. Then instead of the words ‘I am dying!’, Tatiana will say ‘Farewell forever’, and disappear. As to Onegin, after a few moments of bewilderment, he will say his last words. The general must not appear.

When opera companies embark on producing an opera or singers interpret roles, they inevitably encounter difficult decisions about when to innovate and when to honor tradition. Usually previous stagings serve as the traditional standard by which innovations are evaluated. Since so much of the Russian repertoire has yet to premiere in the West, especially by Western companies, the force of operatic tradition in the case of premieres might be expected to be less than for the Italian, German, French, and English repertoire. Indeed, for any premiere, the literary sources of the librettos may be expected to play a greater role in interpretive decisions than they would in repeat performances. It is often claimed, for instance, that the Tat’iana of the imaginations of today’s Russians is long since Tchaikovsky’s rather than Pushkin’s. This dissertation urges American companies and singers to branch out into the Russian operatic repertoire. Therefore, considering how

3 Tchaikovsky, Letters to his Family, 251.
4 See, for example, Caryl Emerson’s article, “Tatiana,” on the phenomenon that she calls the “Tatiana cult” in Russian culture: “Here, Tchaikovsky’s wonderfully nuanced 1879 reworking of the novel into opera—‘lyrical scenes’ that probably should have been titled Tatiana—must figure as a crucial stage in the maturation of the cult.”
thorny the topic of adaptation can be as concerns the Russian repertoire, the discussion included here of literary adaptation to opera as a genre and artistic medium may be useful to American presenters of Russian opera. This will be the subject of section 2.2.

Section 2.2 will also provide a convenient transition of sorts between the topic of the texts of Russian opera and that of Russian diction. The discussion offers examples of how the combination of musical and poetic meters can alter the tone and meaning of an utterance when versified text is put to music. These observations prefigure the discussion of prosody and diction that will form a large portion of chapter 5. Likewise, the concept of “chronotope” – a term that will be discussed in that section – in the operatic context is a theoretical construct that encompasses several formal factors found to influence diction in Russian vocal performance (discussed in chapter 5) – factors such as style of delivery, structural elements, and personal versus impersonal utterances. Lyric diction can be an interpretive tool for a singer rather than just a straightforward set of pronunciation rules. Adaptation of a literary text to opera is nothing if not an act of interpretation on the part of librettist and composer. Therefore, many of the most important factors affecting the success of the adaptation also influence the best phonetic use of language in singing at a given moment in the musical composition. Section 2.2 serves in this way as a precursor for what is to come in the second half of the dissertation.

2.1 Russianness and Orientalism in Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes

Were the ability to generate controversy an accepted gauge of artistic greatness, then the verdict on Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes would be long decided. Since the impresario is known to have relished to some degree the scandals his troupe’s
performances could cause,\textsuperscript{5} perhaps he would be pleased to know that his legacy remains contentious. Specialists argue the value and impact of the \textit{Ballets Russes}, usually in the process leaving their readers with no doubt of the methodological habits and priorities of their individual fields.\textsuperscript{6} Hence, while dance historians definitively declare that the \textit{Ballets Russes} were ground-breaking in their day and still without equal today, Slavists rush to contextualize, and sometimes qualify, the phenomenon. They like to remind the world of the vibrant modernist artistic culture in Russia of the early twentieth century (the so-called “silver age of Russian literature,” dominated by largely untranslatable symbolist and futurist poets) in order to downplay the “simpler” art forms of ballet and opera: Russia’s “true” cultural legacy is found beyond Diaghilev’s “shows,” they like to argue. Perhaps availed of an intermediate point of view are the art historians and musicologists, with the oft-claimed “universal” language of their artistic mediums of choice. Whatever the case, the discussion in this section takes as its starting point Richard Taruskin’s writings on the ever-controversial question of Russian orientalism and examines selected examples of Diaghilev’s and his collaborators’ use of orientalia. The discussion is meant to supply a broad, fresh, and dispassionate look at the “texts” at hand, and at the areas where Diaghilev may be criticized, to avoid the hyperbole (both positive and negative) so often accompanying his name in print.

Taruskin concludes a 1992 article on Russian musical orientalism (which includes an analysis of three separate settings of Pushkin’s poem “Ne poi krasavitsa” and the

\textsuperscript{5} Lynn Garafola, for instance, writes: “Under the pressure of financial necessity, Diaghilev eschewed the task of educating his Parisian public. Instead, he sought to dazzle and tantalize it, counting on the allure of fashion and scandal to establish a niche for his enterprise on the Parisian firmament.” 296.

\textsuperscript{6} See, for example, the opinions of Garafola (dance scholar), Wachtel (Slavist), and Taruskin (musicologist) in the discussion in this section.
operatic orientalia of Glinka’s *Ruslan and Liudmila* and Borodin’s *Prince Igor*) with something of a digression on Diaghilev:

In most of the examples discussed (and in any number of others) *nega*,\(^7\) associated with the orient, is held up as a degenerate counterpart to more manly virtues associated with Russian. It marked the Other – marked it, in fact, for justified conquest.

Bearing this in mind, a list of the compositions through which Sergey Diaghilev and his ballet company conquered Paris in their first two *saisons russes* (1909-10) makes droll reading… …Clearly *nega* was having a field day in Paris, and Stravinsky’s first ballet was created in part to supply a new infusion of semi-Asiatic exotica-cum-erotic, the sex lure that underpinned Diaghilev’s incredible success.

Of course, *nega* had a meaning for the French vastly different from what it meant to the Russians. For the French it meant Russia, for to them Russia was East and Other. The heavy emphasis on oriental luxus in his early repertory was something Diaghilev had calculated coldly, one could even say cynically. It accounts for the disproportionate popularity of Russian musical orientalia in the West to this day, and for the mistaken notion (abetted by Stasov’s influential propaganda) that it was one of the main modes of Russian musical expression, if not (next to folklore-quoting) the dominant one. The ploy eventually held Diaghilev captive, preventing him from presenting to the West the musical artifacts of the European Russia with which he personally identified.\(^8\)

Taruskin’s article expressly addresses “orientalism,” as distinct from the “Eastern theme” in Russian music. He provides at the outset a clear explanation of the differences between the two terms, as well as the precise definition of “orientalism” he uses. This chapter borrows his definition, given below:

> In Russian the word ‘Orientalism’ may be rendered either as *orientalizm*, or more commonly *orientalistika*, which are perfectly good Russian words (well, Russian words, anyway) or as *tema vostoka*—the ‘Eastern theme.’ The ‘Eastern theme’ is neutral: from a study with that phrase in its title one expects inventories, taxonomies, identification of sources, stylistic analysis. ‘Orientalism’ is charged: from a study with that word in the title one expects semiotics, ideological critique, polemic, perhaps indictment…

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\(^7\) Taruskin translates the term as “sweet bliss” and “gratified desire.”

…Leaving taxonomy aside, we are left with Orientalism: the East as sign or metaphor, as imaginary geography, as historical fiction, as the reduced and totalized Other against which we construct our (no less reduced and totalized) sense of ourselves. As Stasov implied, as we knew to begin with, and as we have been forcibly reminded by postcolonialist writers, it is not possible to separate this constructed East from ‘the real one.’ The East is the East only to the West: the very act of naming it is already constitutive and heavily invested, consciously or not, with theory. There can be no investigation of it that is not both itself an ideological critique and subject to ideological critique in its turn.

The only question is how overt shall we make our critique, and how bluntly accusatory.9

Surely we need not doubt that Diaghilev’s eye for business played a role in the selection of the orientalist musical compositions and scenarios that are so prominent in the early repertoire of the Ballets Russes. However, several questions cast doubt on the validity of chalking up “the disproportionate popularity of Russian musical orientalia in the West to this day” exclusively to Diaghilev’s cunning. First, as Taruskin points out, the composers of the nationalist school of the 1860s provided not just rhetoric, but a large amount of compelling, danceable orientalist music. In his article, Taruskin traces the harmonic roots right back to the “Father of Russian Opera” himself, Mikhail Glinka. The scholar finds an interpretive link between the father’s and his successors’ depictions of the East in nega – the languorous, “feminine” qualities that are suggestive of sexual conquest and are signified in Russians’ invocations of the Orient in music.10

9 Ibid. 253-254.
10 Specifically, Taruskin locates the harmonic origins of oriental nega in the third act of Ruslan and Liudmilá, set in the garden of the sorceress, Naina: “Here is the fount and origin, the passage that established the voluptuous undulation and the chromatic pass as emblems to be displayed by oriental singing or dancing girls in future operas and songs… …what made the chorus a marker of nega and a model for generations to come were the elements Glinka brought to it, not any ‘oriental’ essence. As a recent impassioned authority [Edward Said] has observed, ‘Orientalism overrode the orient’.” Ibid. 270-271.
Even if the popular overemphasis on Russian musical orientalism is indeed rooted not in the compositions themselves, but in Stasov’s successful “propaganda” program, nonetheless I argue that the unique and clear connection between orientalism and dance in Russian opera, rather than Stasov’s theories on Russian national music, explains Diaghilev’s early decisions. Indeed, if we take time to consider the early dances of the Ballets Russes in the context of the operas from which the music was excerpted, we may find more significant meaning in the dances, than merely confirmation that titillation is good business. After all, we are speaking of the Ballets Russes – dance, not opera, was the dominant artistic medium of Diaghilev’s enterprise after the first two (1907-8) seasons. The excerpted musical compositions might very well function differently in a performance of primarily dance than they did in the operatic and concert scenarios from which they were borrowed.

A second question concerns the idea that Diaghilev was held “captive” by the orientalist mode, as Taruskin puts it. If this were truly the case, then how can we explain his shift away from strictly orientalist works after just a couple of initial tours? Moreover, orientalism was already in vogue throughout the West when the Ballets Russes began. Being so in tune with a European trend, how could Diaghilev’s dances be single-handedly responsible for the enduring perception of Russian music as “oriental”? For better or worse, facts so basic as Russia’s intercontinental geography, its long history of being conquered by and conquering Eastern peoples, and its multi-ethnic population,

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11 The “Oriental element” is one of the four elements that, according to Stasov, characterize Russian national music of his day. He states the view in, among others, his famous and oft-quoted 1882 essay “Twenty Five Years of Russian Art,” which will be quoted below. Incidentally, the other three elements were folk-song quoting, skepticism of European music, and an inclination toward “program music.”
which includes Eastern ethnic groups, motivate the Westerner to seek an “authentic” oriental vein in Russian art. In fairness to Stasov and the Five, many of the best and most widely-read Russian authors from the nineteenth century endorsed similar views in their own quest for a truly national literature. Thus we might compare Stasov’s remarks with those of a critic and writer of the romantic age: Orest Somov. Stasov writes:

Along with the Russian folk song element there is another which distinguishes the new Russian school of composition. This is the Oriental element. Nowhere in Europe does it play such a prominent role as it does in the works of our composers… …They shared the interest which Russians in general have in everything Eastern. This is hardly surprising, since so much of the East has always been an integral part of Russian life and has given it such a special, distinctive colouring. Glinka himself was aware of this, and that is why he wrote in his Memoirs: ‘There is no doubt that our Russian song is a child of the North, but it has been affected somewhat by the denizens of the East.’

And romantic writer Orest Somov writes:

But how many diverse peoples merged under the single name of Russians, or depend on Russia, separated neither by the expanse of alien lands nor by wide seas!… …Russian poets, without leaving the boundaries of their motherland, can fly across from the stern and somber legends of the North to the opulent and brilliant fancies of the East; from the educated mind and taste of Europeans to the crude and unaffected mores of hunting and nomadic peoples; from the physiognomy of society people to the appearance of some half-wild tribe, imprinted with one common feature or distinction.

Indeed, Russian Romantic literature is filled with musings over how much of Russian national character is civilized Western and how much is Eastern “noble savage.” Certainly imperialist tendencies and a sense of superiority over other races, by which European orientalism is now most commonly explained among scholars, was strongly at play in much of the search to define national identity in Russia. Many Russian writers

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12 Stasov, 72-73.
13 Ukrainian writer Orest Somov (1793-1833). Somov, 174-175.
posed spiritual superiority over others as the reason why their nation should rule over them, with the inclination coming to fruition, perhaps, in the often blatantly chauvinistic ideas of Dostoevsky. He explained, for example, Russian “universalism” by its intermediate position between West and East:

Even the greatest of the European poets were never able to embody in themselves with such strength as Pushkin the genius of a foreigner… … Pushkin alone of all world poets has the virtue of reincarnating himself wholly into a foreign nationality.\textsuperscript{14}

With the broader context of Russian orientalism in mind, we may turn to the ballet scenes of the nationalist nineteenth-century operas from which Diaghilev borrowed so much music.

If, in the increasingly preeminent Russian imperial ballet of the nineteenth century, Russians saw themselves as preservers of a dying, but admittedly once great European tradition, in opera they sought to catch up with the West and develop a uniquely Russian tradition both in subject matter and style. About Glinka’s (“the Father’s”) two operas, \textit{A Life for the Tsar} (\textit{Zhizn’ za tsaria/Ivan Susanin}) and \textit{Ruslan and Liudmila} (\textit{Ruslan i Liudmila}), Taruskin points out that “Glinka’s legacy posed serious problems to those who sought to build upon it. His two operas seemed to point in opposite directions, between which Glinka’s heirs found themselves forced to take sides almost from the first.”\textsuperscript{15} While Taruskin has in mind questions of form and musical drama, the two operas also diverge in terms of subject matter and dance content – matters that are of great relevance to the present study.

\textsuperscript{14} Dostoevsky, 148-149. Translations mine unless translator noted in the bibliography.
\textsuperscript{15} Taruskin, “Glinka’s Ambiguous Legacy and the Birth Pangs of Russian Opera,” 142.
A Life for the Tsar (also called Ivan Susanin, depending on political era; premiere in Moscow, 1836) takes a patriotic subject of a legendary folk hero, the peasant Ivan Susanin, who sacrifices his life to save the tsar from Russia’s arch-enemy: the Poles. He misleads an enemy Polish detachment about the location of Tsar Mikhail Romanov, taking them deep into the forest instead of to the tsar’s hideout: there they all perish.

Ruslan and Liudmila (premiere in Moscow, 1842) is based on the young Pushkin’s mock-epic by the same name. Liudmila is abducted from her wedding feast in her father’s kingdom in Kiev, and her betrothed, Ruslan, must compete against two other suitors – Ratmir, a Khazar prince, and Farlaf, a Varangian knight – to find and return her to her father. The operas of the Five generally worked within the historical-patriotic and fairy tale genres set by Glinka. The manner in which they included (or excluded) dance from their operas followed the example set by Glinka as well.

A Life for the Tsar includes no dancing in the narrative or in the Russian settings. It has a full second-act ballet, as dictated by convention. Tellingly, the ballet is the only portion of the opera set in Poland rather than Russia. The act includes the mostly Polish and assuredly Western dances of a polonaise, krakowiak, waltz, and mazurka. The sumptuousness and aristocratic elegance of the “Polish” act contrasts sharply with the sung scenes of the simple, honest, and Russian Susanin family. It is quite difficult to imagine Ivan Susanin’s peasant-neighbors gathering to dance for an entire act. Indeed it seems almost sacrilegious to envision them wearing the customary form-fitting costumes of dancers. However, since Russian opera began with Glinka, such feelings are more likely a product of the compositional structure of the operas by his successors in the
Kuchka than of any a priori objection to dancing Russian peasants.\textsuperscript{16} Therefore, whereas contemporary composers in Europe might grudgingly work the ballet into the opera without changing the setting (we think of Verdi and especially Wagner in \textit{Tannhäuser}), Glinka’s abrupt change in settings for his ballet acts seems indicative of resistance to ballet in the creation of a Russian identity on stage.

\textit{Ruslan and Liudmila}, on the other hand, in its fantastic, mock-epic setting, contains a variety of dances interwoven into the opera. These are performed by magical and oriental characters, often with an aim to seduce: the evil sorceress Naina’s maids seduce Ratmir with dance, and the final act contains “oriental dances,” including a “Turkish dance,” “Arabian dance” and “lezginka.” Here Glinka established what became a model for the use of ballet in Russian opera: cultural “Others,” especially Easterners, dance, but Russians do not, and dancing is often used in sexually suggestive scenes. So while the Five generally wrote little for dance, we find César Cui including wedding dances in the wedding scene of \textit{Prisoner of the Caucasus}. Modest Musorgsky writes a “Dance of the Persian Slaves” in \textit{Khovanshchina}. Musorgsky and Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov both include dances in their operas, which are based on Gogol’s Ukrainian tales. Ukraine was regarded as a peripheral possession of the Russian empire, so the nineteenth-century folksy Ukraine of Gogol (as opposed to the revered, medieval Kievan

\textsuperscript{16} In fact, the dances of Tchaikovsky’s peasants in \textit{Eugene Onegin} are not in the least disagreeable, though such peasant dances differ from both the oriental and the occidental dances in that they may presumably be danced in loose sarafans rather than the close-fitting, “immoral” costumes demanded by the latter. We may also recall that the aristocratic Russians in Tchaikovsky’s \textit{The Queen of Spades} perform a dance in the extremely stylized rococo ballet at the ball – one of many stylizations of various Western artistic periods presented in the opera. Some might consider these pieces a confirmation of the popular (and usually condescending) notion of Tchaikovsky being a “Westerner,” as opposed to the “truly Russian” \textit{kuchkist} composers. However, this would be a simplistic reading of these stylized musical (and dance) quotations in what is an extremely complicated opera. Also of note is how few of the chronologically parallel Imperial Ballet productions used Russian settings: of Marius Petipa’s choreographies, only “The Little Humpbacked Horse.”
Rus’’) makes for a convenient setting for the performance of Slavic folk dances similar to some of those in Russia proper.

Certainly the Ukrainian dances are motivated not by nega, but by their inclination toward childlike merriment. That distinction does not negate the argument, though, that dance is clearly only to be performed by cultural Others in the Russian nationalist opera of the Mighty Five, frequently to the accompaniment of the oriental melodies that Stasov called one of the main elements of the new school. Therefore, we could draw a rough analogy: hearty or fervent song is to sultry or devious dance as Russian is to the exotic Other.¹⁷ For mid to late nineteenth-century artists engaged in the serious business of developing the national school of music, the formula above is not surprising; dance occupied a low level in the hierarchy of the arts, and it was usually not of interest to elite composers. In many places in Western Europe the ballet had degenerated into essentially gentlemen’s clubs.

When Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes began staging one-act ballets, it required the adaptation of portions of longer works – such as opera or concert pieces – or the commissioning of new music. Thus, many of the works of the first seasons comprised excerpts from the operas mentioned above: “Dances of the Persian Slaves” from Khovanshchina (Musorgsky), the Arabian Dance from Ruslan and Liudmila (Glinka), “Apparition of Cleopatra” from Mlada (Rimsky-Korsakov), and, of course, “Polovtsian Dances” from Prince Igor (Borodin). As we have seen, though these excerpts represent the markedly non-Russian element in their source texts, Diaghilev promoted them

¹⁷ The analogy is approximate because singing also occurs in orientalist scenes.
specifically for their Russianness. In an open letter responding to criticism for the lack of “Russian music” and “full-programme ballet,” Diaghilev writes:

…the programme planned for London includes the names of the truly great amongst Russian composers, such as Borodin, Rimsky-Korsakov, Arensky, Stravinsky, Tcherepnin, this last being Rimsky-Korsakov’s star pupil, composer of many major symphonic works, whose ballets Le Pavillon d’Armide and Narcisse are by no means compulsory (‘conductor’s rights,’) but have their own intrinsic and first-class qualities.

As for Les Sylphides and Carnaval, these two charming trifles were among those most applauded both in Paris and Berlin, which would seem rather an unconvincing reason for depriving London of them just because the music is not Russian…

Finally, let it not be forgotten that Chopin was a Pole, - that is to say, a Slav, - and that being so, far more Russian than English.18

The final line is especially amusing if we recall Susanin’s Poles. Though the times had changed since the high nationalism of nineteenth century Russia, the “what is Russia”-question is clearly still of concern in the presentation of “Russian Ballet” to the West, as well as at home. Hanna Jarvinen has argued in a recent article that Russians at home were familiar with the pieces Diaghilev took abroad and to an extent displeased with the critical reactions from Western reviewers. She identifies one general reason for this displeasure:

Apart from illustrating the dichotomies typical of contemporary cultural rhetoric (body versus mind, culture versus barbarism, high versus low, and so on), and reinforcing stereotypical Western views of Russia at the time, this characterization fixed the aesthetic of the company in ways incompatible with modernity and modernism. Russian dancers did not merely represent something remote in space and time, they became themselves fixed in the exotic and in the past, incapable of civilized behavior, rational analysis or modernity. The Russians may have thought of themselves as orientalists, but in the eyes of their Western admirers they were simply orientals.19

18 Quoted in MacDonald, 29. The letter was dated March 3, 1911.
19 Jarvinen, 25.
Jarvinen refers, in particular, to the fact that overt sexuality was limited solely to the oriental body in the repertoire. To the Russian, this situation marks the uncivilized, barbarous, and sexual as specifically non-Russian; to the Westerner it did the opposite. To the Russian artistic elite engaged in modernist projects that were all about challenging old forms, Jarvinen seems to argue, the Western reception of the Ballets Russes came as something of a surprise, Jarvinen argues:

Unfortunately, the attention given to ballet in Russia, especially since the emergence of the ‘new ballet’ of Gorsky, also meant that Russians were accustomed to dance reviews addressing the form as well as the content of the spectacles. It was standard practice to compare, for example, different castings of the same work. I say ‘unfortunately’ because this meant the Russians expected the same of the Russian reviewers of the 1909 season. Consequently, for the Russians, the Western reviews of the Ballets Russes – for all their laudatory clichés – simply indicated a lack of interest in both choreographic form and its execution by different dancers.\(^\text{20}\)

Of course, the overall inferior quality of the dancing produced by the West at the time does much to explain Western critics’ “unsophisticated” enthusiasm for the Russian troupe. However, I would add to the overall picture the observation that the framing of the orientalist dances in the repertoire and nightly programs of the early Ballets Russes had different cultural implications, depending on the viewer’s familiarity with the tradition of Russian nationalist opera, from which so much of the music was borrowed.

Two stark differences are apparent. First, on the question of Russianness versus Otherness, to a Russian observer, borrowings from canonical Russian opera (such as Diaghilev’s) bring to the work the opera’s narrative as an obvious intertext, something which is lost to a foreign observer. Thus the representation of the Polovtsians on stage in

\(^{20}\) Ibid. 21.
the “Polovtsian Act” of Prince Igor is one of a threatening, though seductive, alien people. Though the music was a Russian composition, the image to a Russian observer would be that of an iconic enemy of the emerging Russian state, especially as The Lay of Prince Igor, upon which Borodin based the opera, is the most famous of the medieval Russian epics. These sources, which would be so apparent to the Russian observer, would have been only vaguely known to even some of the most educated of Western observers with little exposure to Russian opera. Even where the narrative of the source was known, the full cultural significance of the epic could not be understood. Russian viewers brought a cultural frame of reference that Diaghilev did not and could not provide for Western audiences.

Second, viewers’ understanding of the relationship between the several dances presented during the Ballets Russes’s first Paris season also depend on their exposure to the operatic tradition. Jarvinen argues that “From the Russian point of view, the works selected for the 1909 visit of the Imperial theaters to Paris were presenting the history of ballet in a very Russian nutshell.”21 Jarvinen interprets Le Pavillon de Armide as the baroque artifact and Les Sylphides as the romantic artifact. In this scheme, then, the oriental scenes make sense as artifacts from Russian opera ballet – a function of ballet that goes back to Glinka and hence seems appropriate in a “history lesson.” While the orientalist works shocked Westerners as new and bold, to Russians they may have seemed relatively predictable as artifacts in this “ballet museum” interpretation of those first tours.

21 Ibid. 22.
Yet, if the musical and narrative content leads to some divergent interpretations based on cultural background, most dance scholars in Russia and the West, from Diaghilev’s time to the modern day, seem in agreement that the dance vocabulary of Michel Fokine’s orientalist choreographies for the early Ballets Russes was indeed new. “Liberating” is the word that Lynn Garafola uses in the Fokine chapter of her landmark volume on the company. She notes that, as opposed to classical ballet practice:

Fokine, by contrast, worked boldly and broadly. His ‘mimetic of the whole body’ demanded a torso as pliant and expressive as limbs. Ridding women of corsets, he freed both midriff and back; recoiling from verticality, he celebrated the curve. Fokine’s forward bends and backbends, side-pulls and waist twists stretched the body into an expansive spiral. Emotionally, they explored virgin territory as well. 22

And of Léon Bakst’s costuming, she writes:

Costume unfettered the body no less than choreography. Like Fokine, Bakst freed the back and midriff. He dressed his women in tunics and harem pants, soft flowing garments that released the torso from the constricting bodice of the tutu. He exposed unwonted stretched of flesh. In Cleopatre navels showed; in Scheherazade the lower reaches of the spine; in several ballets legs pushed through a slit in the skirt. 23

In these two early works, it seems that the orientalist mode served Fokine and Bakst as a convenient means of introducing the “liberating aesthetic” to the stage, just as it served the opera composers as means for working ballet into their nationalist operas. Though the dances made an enormous splash as they were (danced by oriental characters), the initial introduction of such dance vocabulary by European (or European Russian) characters on stage might have increased the scandal and perhaps ended the entire enterprise. The very first orientalist dances, “Polovtsian Dances” and “Cleopatre”

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22 Garafola, 38.
23 Ibid.
were received with joyous enthusiasm in Paris, in contrast to the accompanying occidentalist works that earned polite applause. These reactions are primarily due not to the orientalism per se, but to the bold and “barbaric” movement and costuming innovations. In another interesting angle on the topic, Joan Ross Acocella has pointed to a number of essays from the early Paris seasons of the Ballets Russes that made a connection between the decadence of the uncivilized orient on stage and the decadence of civilized or modernist moral corruption:

On consideration, the two ideas – barbarism and corruption – are not entirely irreconcilable. After all, the Russians’ brand of barbarism was frequently identified as ‘oriental,’ with all that that supposedly meant in terms of ability to plumb the depths of sensory experience, unchecked by Christian scruples. Or perhaps the mere fact that primitivism and corruption were simultaneously so important to the fin-de-siècle mind is sufficient to explain their application to the Ballets Russes. In any case, the company was, from the very start, embraced not only for ‘precivilized’ vigor but also for those qualities that fall under the heading of ‘overcivilized’ decadence: opulence, hyperrefinement, sado-eroticism, the connoisseurship of sensation and emotion.

In my view, the Ballets Russes begins to explore this dichotomy in the highly meta-literary, or perhaps more accurately put, “meta-performative” ballet Petrushka. Here it is appropriate to remark again how quickly the strictly orientalist mode was dropped by Diaghilev and the new aesthetic was applied to ballets with a wide array of settings: semi-oriental Russian, pan-Slavic, Mediterranean, European, classical Greek, etc. The original “exploitation” of orientalist music for public appeal and as a vehicle for making acceptable the newly physical, “decadent” aesthetic to European stages, was soon parodied by Diaghilev’s company itself in Petrushka (premiere in Paris, 1911).

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24 Acocella, 328-330.
Andrew Wachtel points out that “the Moor [in Petrushka] is not, strictly speaking, Asian, but he is emphatically not European, and... he clearly recalls the exotically dressed black Slave in the orientalist ballet Scheherezade.”26 In Petrushka, we have parodies of the two performance modes of the first Paris season of the Ballets Russes as discussed in the “museum” interpretation above. The Moor is presented as the oversexed, superstitious (praying to a false god – in this case – a coconut), physically robust, dimwitted oriental whose movements are free and brazen. The ballerina is the cool European, technically advanced, but civilized to the point of soullessness. From there, interpretation of Petrushka himself could go in a variety of directions: is he a representation of Russia? The Ballets Russes? The art of dance? Vaslav Nijinsky? I suspect that any or all of these could be convincingly argued, but regardless of which precise interpretation one uses, the important point is Petrushka’s main characteristics: he is vulnerable, turned inward, pitiful, but ultimately as immortal as art itself. As a symbol of any performer or the concept of performance, he invokes many of the big questions of art: love, hate, loneliness, power, vulnerability, public spectacle, and self-awareness. Concerning the last of these, one of the central mysteries of Petrushka is the question, “Does Petrushka know who or what he is?” And in recognizing that mystery, an artist in the audience watching him then asks the same question of himself.

Petrushka can only explore this question by dancing, living, and dying among his absurd neighbors: the tyrannical magician, the laughably folksy crowd, the emotionless ballerina, and the caricatured moor-brute. While his social and performance environment is shown with all its deficiencies, that world still seems preferable to the empty prison of

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26 Wachtel, 27.
his room in scene two. Like Petrushka’s, the Ballets Russes’s first dances came into existence hand-in-hand with both a brand of orientalism that can offend and a classical virtuosity that can seem lifeless and defunct. However, as opposed to being “held captive” by these two modes, it is noteworthy that Diaghilev’s collaborators in the Ballets Russes simultaneously identified and parodied them. Admittedly, that fact could be interpreted as further proof of cynicism on Diaghilev’s part – but is not such an interpretation itself, perhaps, needlessly cynical?

The Ballets Russes experimented in many performance modes that, I believe, juggled marketing demands and sincere artistic inquiry. This discussion has attempted to show some contexts through which the “Russian Ballet” was operating in its travels to the West – contexts that are important to gaining a fair picture of the company. By reading the orientalist dances of the Ballets Russes in terms of the opera narratives from which many of them were extracted, we find a revealing synopsis of the complicated, and much debated, question of Russian national musical identity and its perception in the West.

2.2 From page to stage, operatically: some notes on adaptation

In recent years, the much beleaguered category of artistic production called “adaptations” has finally received attention in major theoretical studies, such as those of Gérard Genette, Linda Hutcheon, and Robert Stam and Alessandro Raengo. These studies have sprung up in connection with work in the field of narratology and as scholars develop an increasingly sophisticated critical apparatus for the ever-growing field of film studies. Scholarly attention to the process of adaptation into opera has been scarcer, and so, where film has made some progress in overcoming the primacy of “fidelity
discourse,” to use Stam’s term, toward a “palimpsestic” approach, to use Hutcheon’s, opera has a less robust rebuttal to the many recriminatory voices that use violent language (e.g. “butchering”) to refer to adaptations that alter what the accuser considers the dominant theme, poetics, or “essence” of a beloved work of literature. Operas are narratives, and, as a medium, opera shares several important properties with film, such as approximate duration of the performance and the combination of visual and aural elements. Therefore, much of the work that has been done in these areas could be itself ‘adapted’ to the specifics of the operatic medium to enhance our understanding of the most important issues involved when an existing text is partially or fully put to music and performed on stage.

Caryl Emerson’s study in her book on *Boris Godunov*, in which she articulates a “poetics of transposition,” predates much of the theoretical work on film adaptation to which I refer above. In introducing the concept of “transposition” – in the case of *Boris* as a national narrative – Emerson emphasizes the need to distinguish between *medium* and *genre*, two terms that are often conflated in critical writings. Medium, she clarifies, refers to the materials used in the artistic production. Genre refers to the work’s “chronotope” – Mikhail Bakhtin’s term for the relationship between time, space, causality and plausibility in a narrative. Sometimes, these two concerns interweave in ways that demonstrate how intriguing the study of operatic adaptations can be.

This section delineates three textual elements that are fundamental considerations in the process of adaptation: meter, narrative voice, and a composite category comprising

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27 Caryl Emerson, *Boris Godunov: Transpositions of a Russian Theme*

28 Bakhtin writes, “We will give the name chronotope (literally, “time space”) to the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature.” 84.
length, characters, plot and dramatic conflict. A final section briefly discusses non-textual factors that can affect the “success” of an adaptation in terms of critical and popular reception in the general and Russian contexts. To illustrate each of the categories considered, examples are gleaned from the Russian operatic repertoire: Musorgsky’s incomplete opera *The Marriage (Zhenit’ba, 1868)*, adapted from Nikolai Gogol’s play; Rimsky-Korsakov’s *Snegurochka* (premiere 1882), adapted from Alexander Ostrovsky’s play; and Tchaikovsky’s *Eugene Onegin* (premiere 1879), adapted from Alexander Pushkin’s novel in verse.

### 2.2.1 Chronotope and meter

Since the music of opera is set to regular meters, it is only logical that for much of opera’s history, the librettist’s job required providing the text for an opera in versified form. Before the experimentation with, then acceptance of, prose libretti, – for which Musorgsky was a groundbreaking figure – the text of arias would be in verse, while recitative could be in prose. This circumstance results in what Emerson calls “dual time” in the opera. Recitative moves the plot along with an understanding of time that is equivalent to that of daily life. Much as in a play, the speech of recitative may be in verse or prose, without great consequence for this flow of time. Arias, on the other hand typically either freeze or stretch time. They focus on one emotional moment of a character’s experience. It is not rare that the other characters on stage fail to hear or react

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29 Emerson, *Transpositions*, 165.
to what is said in the aria, as that character has her or his moment of indulgence in her or his emotions (and vocalism).

Even within the aria, as a voice teacher I know once said, there are “text moments” and “vocal moments,” the latter meant to prolong the emotional high points of the aria or simply demonstrate virtuosity, but certainly not move the narrative along. By the time the “vocal moment” occurs, the text of the aria is likely to have been repeated several times already. The listeners understand these workings of the opera “chronotopes.” This understanding and acceptance of opera conventions is the reason it does not defy logic to have a multiple bar, multiple octave cadenza emerge from the mouth of a dying, consumptive heroine – time has stretched out to the extent that we understand it as merely her emotionally charged “dying breath.” Regarding diction and the seemingly ubiquitous problem of unintelligible singing, it is expected (and for some, justifiable) that singers sacrifice clear pronunciation to the instrumental aesthetics of the voice while performing in the aria “chronotope,” especially in repetitions of text phrases. In anticipation of the discussion to come in later chapters, it should be noted that pronunciation practices in Russian diction take into account the musical context of the given text, in ways that are related to this dual time (see section 5.9).

This concept of the “chronotopes” of opera is a handy critical tool for understanding the association between prose libretti and alternatives to the traditional recit-aria structure of opera composition: through-composed scenes, melodic recitative, etc. Clearly, in Musorgsky’s experiment in the creation of the ultimate naturalist opera that is the
“musical embodiment of speech,”\textsuperscript{30} a prose text would be desirable. Indeed, a prose text of the kind Gogol’s comedy offered seems especially suitable as it is not an elegant or high-flown prose, but itself mimics the natural speech of such unrefined speakers as its protagonist, Podkolesin, or the matchmaker, Fekla. Versified speech is not “natural,” and even when it is set to music without regular meter, its fundamental verticality creates rhythms that insist on themselves even if they are contradicted by the score.

\textit{The Marriage} has an interesting example of something like the inverse of the phenomenon just mentioned. Instead of poetry imposing its rhythms on the music, the rhythm of the accompaniment, during one speech by Fekla, tends to impose itself on the sung speech, which Musorgsky was very careful to keep faithful to the intonations of speech rather than of song. The passage is Fekla’s description of the bride’s dowry for Podkolesin. “Accompaniment” may in fact be a misnomer, for in the score of \textit{The Marriage}, the piano/orchestra (Musorgsky never orchestrated the one completed act, but in the twentieth century it was orchestrated and recorded by others) mostly offers only “occasional ironic comment on the text,”\textsuperscript{31} to use Taruskin’s phrase. During the part in question, though, Musorgsky does supply accompaniment for her lines in the form of incessant, quick triplets that give a rushed quality to her speech, in accord with a manner of speaking that catalogues and attempts to persuade. However, a perhaps unplanned consequence is that the listener tends to perceive the rhythm of the speech itself as intending to conform to these triplets, though the passage is scored the same as the rest of the opera’s vocal phrases, in irregular, “speech-like” rhythms, only some of which

\textsuperscript{30} See excerpts from Musorgsky’s writings on the matter in Richard Taruskin, \textit{Musorgsky: Eight Essays and an Epilogue}, 80.
\textsuperscript{31} Taruskin, 88.
coincide with the triplets in the accompaniment. The parts where there is a duple over triple superimposition can create a tension and the expectation of a resumption of triplets in the vocal line. This instance would seem to be a case of the ear attempting to regularize the speech to the conventions of music to which it is accustomed, looking for regular rhythmic connections between sung lines and accompaniment.

The play of Snegurochka also has a scene in which a ternary meter is used for hastened speech. The majority of Ostrovsky’s play is primarily written in iambic pentameter. The meter of the play occasionally changes, mostly when the characters sing, as in the birds’ or Lel’s songs, at which times ternary meters appear in accordance with the folk spirit. However, there is one lengthy exchange that is not connected with song in the play, but in which the meter changes very noticeably. When Kupava complains to Tsar Berendei about Snegurochka’s stealing away her fiancé’s love, she speaks in dactylic dimeter between bouts of crying (the stage directions indicate “she cries” five times throughout the exchange). The tsar repetitively encourages her to continue her story in the same meter “skazyvai, slushaiu” or “skazyvai, skazyvai.” With the default meter of the play being pentameter, this meter supports the effect of rushed speech as the insulted girl tries to complete each part of her story between sobs.

Батюшко, светлый царь,
Видно, людское-
Счастье ненадолго.
Вздумали, в лес пошли,
Взяли подруженек,
Звали Снегурочку.

I base this impression on listening to the version orchestrated and conducted by Gennadii Rozhdestvenskii. Modest Musorgskii, Zhenit’ba, 1982. Taruskin notes that in all three recorded versions the performers “fail to maintain Musorgsky’s tempi, nor do they even come close to the difficult rhythms…” Eight Essays, 90.

Ostrovskii, 145-150.
Только завидел он
Злую разлучницу,
Коршуном воззрелся,
Соколом кинулся,
Подле разлучницы
Вьется, ласкается,
Гонит, срамит меня,
Верную, прежнюю.

In Rimsky-Korsakov’s opera, this scene’s time signature is 2/4, but alternates between quick triplets – for the portion of Kupava’s monologue that emphasizing the betrayal (plus the tsar’s encouraging words “skazyvai, skazyvai”) – and duplets – for the parts of her narration that tell the story of how she fell in love with Mizgir’ and some words of sympathy from the tsar. The effect of the duet is to show the two sides of Kupava: the triplet side is vengeful, something of a tattletale who cannot get the accusatory words out fast enough; the duplet side is the lyrical one – she was truly in love and deeply hurt. In the play, the whole exchange is in the triple meter, and the words are basically set to music unchanged. But Rimsky-Korsakov’s alternation between triplets and duplets could be interpreted as a musical rendering of the stage directions (“she cries”) during breaks in her speech. Alternatively, it could be the composer’s effort to make Kupava more sympathetic and downplay her petty side, as he did for several other major characters in the play. Either way, the duet illustrates how the composer’s decision to reinforce or modify the meter suggested by the source text or libretto can affect the meaning in concrete, identifiable ways.
2.2.2 Narrative voice

The process of adapting both The Marriage and Snegurochka to opera is somewhat simplified by the fact that they are plays, thus basically lacking a narrator. Therefore, most of this section analyzes, instead, Tchaikovsky’s Eugene Onegin, in which the
transfer of the colorful and highly individualized narrator’s statements into the voices of the characters about whom he speaks has great consequence for the adaptation.

Before that discussion, however, note that in the two plays the decisions about how to adapt the “narrator’s” speech already were made by the playwrights. In a play, as in a novel, there is also background information conveyed to the audience about characters’ private thoughts and emotions. Since in Gogol’s and Ostrovsky’s era plays did not typically include a narrator or chorus to provide this information, the job falls to the characters themselves – hence the standard solution of the dramatic monologue, an example of which we see in Podkoleskin’s opening lines as he sits smoking a pipe on his couch: “Well, when you start to think about it in your free time, by yourself, you’ve got to get married…” This sort of monologue is not at all “naturalist” in that most people do not converse with themselves in this manner, but it is still included in Musorgsky’s naturalist adaptation.

In Snegurochka – both play and opera – the characters are mostly responsible for narrating the events that surround them. Additionally, the character of the leshii (wood spirit), who plays a rather minor role in the action of the story line, sounds like a narrator when he announces the end of spring at the beginning of the play/opera. Since there is no other addressee, the audience might reasonably suppose that he intends his words for them alone. Further, in the prologue, Moroz commands him to watch over Snegurochka and keep Lel’ away from her, so he is further aligned with the audience as observer of the main action. In both works, the issues of narrative voice in the plays and operas are handled similarly. Narrative commentary independent of a character’s voice can be

34 N. V. Gogol’, Zhenit’ba, PSS 5:9.
added, of course, in many other ways, such as through sound effects, blocking, costuming, and of course, musical elements such as the orchestra’s “ironic commentaries” (Taruskin’s term) in Musorgsky’s *The Marriage*.

One of the most interesting examples of the power of narrative voice (or its absence) in all operatic repertoire is in Tchaikovsky’s *Eugene Onegin: Lyrical scenes in three acts*. In *Onegin* Tchaikovsky eliminates Pushkin’s chatty, ironic, first-person narrator. Most of the words of the libretto are taken directly from the novel in verse (with some notable exceptions), but the grammar of the lines taken from the narrator’s commentary is sometimes adjusted so that characters can narrate about themselves in the appropriate first person. A good example occurs in the beginning of the opera, when Madame Larina and Filipp’evna relay the story of Larina’s life: sentimental readings, settling on a husband, learning that “habit is given us from on high as a substitute for happiness.”

In the novel in verse, we hear this history from the narrator and the quoted line is the final, ironic couplet of the pertinent stanza. Indeed, the speech seems unlikely in the first person (outside of the operatic chronotope, that is).

Gary Schmidgall, in the chapter of his book on *Onegin*, focuses much of his discussion on the problems associated with the loss of the ironic narrator from the novel in verse:

> The composer felt obliged to turn Pushkin’s characters—‘charming dunces’—into real people… …Pushkin treats them precisely as puppets through the means of his omniscient first-person narrator. This narrator is part of the reason for the ironic distance in the poem, and it should not surprise us to find him nowhere in the opera. For the impact and communicative power of music are direct; music cannot, alone, say other than what it ‘means’—cannot itself create ironic distance. And so the

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35 Pushkin, *PSS* 5:43.
operatic form is uncongenial to literary conventions, like the omniscient narrator, which distance the reader from the apparent meaning of a text.\textsuperscript{36}

Schmidgall brings up a very interesting issue: can opera express irony? This is a question that has been directed at film as well, and Stam and Raengo address it affirmatively in their book, indicating the different \textit{means} by which it may be achieved:

Film complicated the literary narrative by practicing two parallel and intersecting forms of narration: the verbal narration, whether through voice-over and/or the speech of characters, and the film’s capacity to show the world and its appearance apart from character narration… …Films thus both tell stories (narration) and stage them (monstration).… …While it is not impossible to relay unreliable first-person narration in the cinema, it would require relentless subjectification on almost all the cinematic registers: foregrounded presence in the shot, uninterrupted voice-over, non-stop point-of-view editing…\textsuperscript{37}

Opera generally does not have these technological wonders at its disposal. But there are stage techniques that can be, and are (not rarely in the modern theater) used to create multiple levels in meaning: subversive costumes, set elements, or blocking; projections on the backdrop of photographs or other images. These techniques, of course, are apart from the music, and thus they do not respond to Schmidgall’s assertion that music alone cannot create irony. However, have we not already seen Musorgsky’s “ironic commentaries”? Opera has the means to create ironic distance through not only ironic combinations of narration and monstration, but also through music’s unique ability to combine multiple narrations simultaneously by overlaying voices in ways not possible in spoken speech. In fact, in my interpretation, Tchaikovsky does create a gentle irony in just the scene spoken about above in which the ladies call habit a blessing.

\textsuperscript{36} Gary Schmidgall, 225.
\textsuperscript{37} Stam and Raengo, 35, 38.
The opera opens with Tat’iana and Ol’ga singing a duet on the words of an early, sentimental Pushkin lyric, “Pevets” (1816):

Слыхали ль вы за рощей глас ночной
Певца любви, певца своей печали?
Когда поля в час утренний молчали,
Свирели звук унылый и простой
Слыхали ль вы?38

After the first verse of the romance and after noting that Larina once sang that same song, Larina and Filipp’evna’s narration begins in recitative - the operatic equivalent of prose. Their recitative duet unfolds against the background of the second verse of the young girls’ duet, reinforcing the comparison to the audience. As the girls are singing in the typically off-stage Larin house, we can understand their singing – poetry superimposed on prose – to be the memory of Larina’s sentimental reading and crushes. Further, the superimposition could foreshadow the end of the opera: the older ladies know what life has in store for the young daughters. This is an example of narrative distancing in opera, but the ironic part comes at the end of the quartet, when the girls’ duet finishes, to be immediately replaced by the lines “Privychka svyshe nam dana, zamenu schastiiu ona. Vot tak-to tak!” to a plodding canon. The ladies then recall how much the master loved Larina, and a final reprise of the “privychka” line decrescendos into a dark, tragic final word on the matter. Obviously, this is not an operatic equivalent of Pushkin’s narrator.

Certainly Tchaikovsky did not approach his characters with the irony with which Pushkin regarded his, as all musical and autobiographical evidence points to an empathetic position toward them. However, this is an example of a case where

38 Pushkin, PSS 1:184.
Tchaikovsky effectively uses narrative distancing and even introduces a bit of irony into his telling of the story by superimposing two musical lines and repeating the same words in two divergent moods. If this occurs in the “conservative” Tchaikovsky’s operas, then it surely occurs in others. It may still be true, however, that irony and other kinds of narrative distancing in opera are, however, ultimately more difficult to communicate than in literature and in film, perhaps not only because of the issues identified by Schmidgall and Stam above, but also because of the pacing of the performance: you cannot stop to reread or rewind a live opera performance. The question of opera’s narrative devices, which this section only begins to examine, warrants detailed analysis in future studies.

2.2.3 Structural elements

Four factors, which I call “structural elements” – length, size of cast, plot complexity, and dramatic conflict – are all separate literary categories through which one could examine an adaptation. Yet, they are mutually dependent in the context of the process of adaptation to opera. Therefore the most effective way to discuss them for the purposes of this discussion is jointly.

Snegurochka is an excellent example of reduction in textual length and number of characters, simplification of plot, and focus on dramatic conflict, all of which are typical of the adaptation process from play or novel into opera. These four practices originate in the budgetary and commercial realities of staging an opera, in combination with operatic convention (much of which probably derived from practical concerns). Sung speech is much slower than spoken speech, and an opera often incorporates non-textual segments,
such as overtures, interludes, and dances. Therefore, the volume of text usually must be reduced when adapting even another stage form such as a play in order to finish the performance in a span of time that the audience can tolerate (Wagner excepted!). This need, along with budgetary and personnel restraints, requires a certain limitation in the number of characters that can be included in the opera as soloists. The reduction of characters leads to a simplification of the plot, as sub-plots are eliminated. This step also determines which themes will come to the fore in the opera, and hence is an opportunity for creative discretion on the librettist’s part. The simplification of the plot then leads to an amplification of the dramatic dependence on the plot lines and characters chosen, heightening their emotional intensity. The new focus, in combination with musical fireworks, earns opera its notorious melodramatic tendency, which has made many writers particularly wary of having their works adapted into opera.

One opera convention that is highly relevant in the adaptations of many works of literature, though it will not be discussed here with reference to Snegurochka, is opera’s preference for an even distribution of voice parts among the soloists. Although there are exceptions, typically an opera will have at least one soloist from each of range: soprano, mezzo/contralto, tenor, baritone/bass ranges. This convention can lead to the insertion of extra characters into the story, hence complicating, rather than simplifying, the source plot.

Gregory Halbe in his dissertation on the opera Snegurochka conducted a detailed analysis of the differences between Ostrovsky’s play and the opera’s libretto, discussing which portions of text and which characters were cut from the play’s text. In the remainder of this section, I discuss what I find to be the most interesting of the changes
that Halbe identifies. Rimsky-Korsakov eliminated a great number of the minor characters in Ostrovsky’s play, among them such figures as Snegurochka’s many suitors and their insulted girlfriends, as well as some members of the court and Kupava’s father. Yet he retained some of the lines of these characters, however, as choral lines. Halbe makes the excellent point that collecting these voices into a choral whole increases the symbolic meaning of what is said. An example is how, as Mizgir’s rivals speak chorally, he becomes more symbolic in his position of the village’s outsider.\(^\text{39}\) Another character that is eliminated is Elena Prekrasnaia, who, curiously, attempts a tryst with Lel’ in Ostrovsky’s play. Her absence lessens the satiric nature of the play in the adaptation process.

The primary way, however, that Rimsky-Korsakov strips the text of satire is by selectively eliminating lines of main characters. For instance, Halbe has discovered that references to Lel’ as “lazy” are crossed out, as is the scene in which he sponges for free rooming for a night. This moves his character in the direction of the symbolic as well: Lel’ experiences no everyday worries, instead he appears on the operatic stage exclusively as a mythical embodiment of love’s caprices and music’s charm. Similarly, some of the bickering between Snegurochka’s adoptive parents is removed, whereby they become simply comical, with the sharpness of Ostrovsky’s satire on marriage removed.

In general, the pattern in the elimination of lines is to remove character deficiencies from everyone and expunge extraneous conflicts from the story. The one real dispute that remains from Ostrovsky’s text is Kupava and Mizgir’s at the end of the first act.\(^\text{40}\) This is

\(^{39}\) Halbe, 70.  
\(^{40}\) Ibid. 90.
the climax of conflict in the opera’s story. With a host of other trysts and jealousies excised, the momentum is now concentrated on the coming *Iarilin den’* (the sun-god’s day) and our expectation of Snegurochka’s melting (as anticipated in the Prologue). Indeed, the only moment that reaches the dramatic heights of Kupava’s anger is Snegurochka’s love duet with Migir’ and the subsequent melting scene. For Halbe, the changes all add up to Rimsky-Korsakov’s bringing “her symbolic representation of the change of seasons closer to the center of the drama.”41 He also finds that the operatic adaptation reflects Aleksandr Afanas’ev’s vision of folklore as connected with the seasonal rituals of the Slavs.42

On the whole, Halbe’s conclusions are sound. The reduction of the social drama in favor of redoubled focus on Snegurochka’s inevitable melting does increase the symbolism and at least in this respect brings her closer to the folk Snegurochkas than to Ostrovsky’s. However, Rimsky-Korsakov’s heroine is still much more of an operatic than a folk heroine. Her actions and her emotional register all make sense only within the opera “chronotope,” in which everyone in the house – conductor, performers, audience – have in the back of his or her mind the expectation of the musical climax of the opera. The folk Snegurochkas, on the other hand, do not typically worry about such serious things as love or betrayal; they are much too busy collecting berries and jumping over bonfires. Rimsky-Korsakov’s opera condenses the list of characters and simplifies the plot of Ostrovsky’s play in a way that allows dramatic momentum to build up in a basically linear mode. It is released with the musical and emotional climax in

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41 Ibid. 91.
42 See Afanas’ev, *Poeticheskiia vozrieniia slavian na prirodu.*
Snegurochka’s melting, which is symbolic of the season change, but also of the erotic love theme – a theme central to both play and opera, and not found in the folk stories about her.

2.2.4 Conclusions

Regarding the question of the critical and popular reception of operatic adaptations, which is a matter somewhat removed from strictly textual issues, the cultural status of the source text in the setting where the opera is to be presented is a matter that can determine success or failure. Adapting a canonical work, for instance, is a gamble that can pay off if successful. Hutcheon has demonstrated how the repetition of a story line that everyone knows is at the root of the enduring appeal of adaptations.43 This sort of appeal is all the stronger for well-known stories. The risk of backlash to an adaptation based on “fidelity discourse” seems to lessen as the origins of the source text become either chronologically or culturally removed from the audience, perhaps because of the audience’s hazy knowledge of the source texts or because of the reduced emotional connection to texts that speak about a bygone era. The stronger one’s emotional investment in one’s own interpretation of a work, the more likely one is to object to a differing interpretation in the form of an adaptation. For this reason, the “safest” choices for adaption may often be works that have been adapted many times before. For all the significant changes that Rimsky-Korsakov made to Ostrovsky’s text in his libretto, even hostile critics did not

43 Hutcheon, 173.
comment about its “infidelity.” After all, he was adapting a text that itself created a whole socio-mythological world around a folk story that existed in several variants.

In the Russian operatic context of the late nineteenth century, the folk theme and musical stylings that are essential to Snegurochka also play a part in “justifying” its suitability as an operatic text. The question of creating Russian opera was a prevailing concern among composers and music critics, as discussed in the previous section. Composers of the nationalist school often chose to adapt works by Russian writers and on national themes, with a preference for works that could accommodate the inclusion of folk tunes and oriental scenes or the creation of “musical realism,” in accordance with Stasov’s vision of “Russian” opera. Although Snegurochka was written after the heyday of the Moguchaia kuchka, Rimsky-Korsakov’s writings at the time of his work on it indicate that all these issues were still somewhat on his mind.44

In the contemporary age, fidelity discourse is still a dominant mode in critical writings on Russian opera in both scholarly and popular publications. The majority of Russian operas are adaptations of nineteenth classic Russian literature, which the Russian public cherishes (see the repertoire list of the Mariinsky Theater in table 2 in chapter 4). Therefore, as we have proposed that the “riskiest” texts to adapt are those chronologically and culturally closest to the public, it is no surprise that Russian opera is subject to this mode of criticism more often than those opera traditions which tend borrow texts from sources outside of their own national literatures. For example, rarely are Verdi’s Otello and Falstaff assessed in terms of their faithfulness to Shakespeare’s ideas. This section has attempted to discourage the fidelity mode of criticism by highlighting the essential

44 See Rimskii-Korsakov, Letopis’ moei muzykal’noi zhizni.
changes that operatic adaptation entails because of opera’s nature as a genre and medium. Nonetheless, Western producers of opera may benefit from awareness of the particular sensitivity to adaptations that Russians (and non-Russian admirers of Russian literature) tend to display. Touchiness about the degree of faithfulness in adaptations is essentially related to another sensitivity – that toward innovation in stagings – that also runs relatively high in Russian opera culture and will be discussed in section 3.5.

Both of these sensitivities are in part outcomes of the quest for a Russian national identity in opera, which was considered in the previous section. But just as the complexities and subtleties of the formal issues of operatic adaptations are not unique to Russian opera, the question for Russian national identity also deals with conflicts and emotions that are completely comprehensible and have been met with elsewhere in the Western repertoire. For example, Wagner’s search for the German spirit is well understood (though not well loved), and it certainly has done little to quell interest in singing his operas. Westerners should not be discouraged from producing Russian opera, including yet-to-be-premiered works, due to either a mistaken perception of Russian opera as “incomprehensibly exotic” or an equally erroneous belief that works without the Eastern theme are somehow “not truly Russian.” The reflection and discretion that Russian opera demands with regards to the theme of nationality is not fundamentally unique or impossible to tackle, though it may be more frequently encountered in the Russian than in Western repertoire. Russian literature has a large readership in the West. Since so much of the opera repertoire adapts this very literature, it stands to reason that Russian opera could also have great appeal to Western audiences, were more operas to be produced.
This section has focused on those textual elements that I consider most fundamental to the process of adapting a text, such as a play, novel, or “novel in verse” to opera. Versified texts were once the rule, but, thanks in part to Musorgsky and other innovators, prose texts have also proved highly “adaptable” in the twentieth century. The meter or its lack in the libretto can be directly reflected in the music to which it is set. Otherwise, it may be juxtaposed over a different meter, creating metrical textures that affect the color and emotion of the thoughts expressed, as well as their meanings in the drama. Narrators in the strictest sense are not common in opera, and so present a special issue in adaptation as well. Many of the techniques used to present information provided by the narrator in a literary text resemble those of the dramatic play: monologues or characters’ expedient, if not always “realistic,” remarks about themselves and each other. If the librettist/composer/director so desires, the difficulty in showing narrative distance such as we see in ironic texts may be at least partially overcome by innovative use of visual elements, simultaneous or adjacent vocal gestures, or orchestral gestures.

Finally, the practical concerns of putting an opera into production usually require a reduction in the length of a text and the number of characters, leading to a simplification of the plot. The choices made in this regard are of great consequence for the resulting work, its major themes, message, and ability to reach the audience. The operatic convention of focusing on only one or a few story lines and of including clearly identifiable dramatic-musical climaxes means that the most easily “adaptable” text may be that from which the librettist and composer can extract these features. However, the potential source texts and the interpretive possibilities they offer are, in fact, unlimited. As adaptations come to be understood not as imitations, but “transpositions” in different
media and genres, the operas that do not resemble their source texts due to issues of
meter, narration, scope, character, plot, or theme will hopefully be more likely to avoid
the worn-out fidelity discourse and be evaluated based on their merits or deficiencies in
their own genre, as operatic adaptations.
Chapter 3: The Russian Vocal School and opera culture

-Do you have a favorite Russian opera?
-Oh no, I couldn’t name just one!
-And a favorite opera in general?
-Definitely – Boris Godunov!

  -From an interview with a voice teacher (a basso)

3.1 On the notion of a “national” vocal school

In critical assessments of performers of vocal music, specifically, of the opera and art song repertoire, one often encounters descriptors like the following: “she has the French sound, which is often translucent, but mainly hard to describe;”\(^\text{45}\) “the idiomatic Italian timbre;”\(^\text{46}\) “his voice has the typical Russian timbre, full and resonant.”\(^\text{47}\) Epithets along national lines seem to be accepted as a valid means of characterizing vocal quality. This tendency in characterization contradicts the position of a good percentage of voice teachers from every tradition, who maintain that there is only one true, unified school of singing.\(^\text{48}\) The “ideal” school is presumed to be the collection of techniques regarding breath, phonation, resonance, and diction that the particular teacher advocates. And these approaches, in turn, are almost uniformly claimed to have been passed down from the

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\(^\text{48}\) See Richard Miller’s \textit{National Schools of Singing}.
Italian masters of bel canto (“beautiful singing”) – the rather malleable term for the much romanticized old Italian school of singing. The term has been used to indicate the vocal
practices and repertoire of Italy during various eras from about the seventeenth century to the early twentieth century.\textsuperscript{49}

Despite such claims, other teachers fully acknowledge that there are identifiable characteristics that may be validly associated with the vocalism of individual nations. Richard Miller’s study \textit{National Schools of Singing} (1997, second edition) takes up this question in a detailed analysis of the various physical techniques advocated in singing in several countries. The aesthetic source of these different approaches is the “multiplicity of tonal ideals” among the different nations.\textsuperscript{50} In addition to dissecting the physical ways that the “typical” national timbres are produced, Miller remarks on the musico-historical influences on the tonal ideals. For example, the rich tradition of choral singing and sacred oratorio in England explains a presumed English tendency to “solemnize” vocal timbre and, in a segment of the English music community, to adhere to a vibrato-less “cathedral tone.”\textsuperscript{51} He even includes chapters on how the language and “national temperament” may affect the tonal ideal.

In the twenty-first century, it is often said that the vocal aesthetic heard in the major opera houses of Europe is becoming increasingly “globalized.” An overall normalization of standards is perhaps a logical outcome of the increasing mobility of singers in both their training and their performance engagements afforded by technological advances in the efficiency of travel and, especially in the internet

\textsuperscript{49} For a review of the many incarnations of the term in literature on vocal pedagogy, see the introduction in James Stark, \textit{Bel Canto: A History of Vocal Pedagogy}, xvii-xxv.
\textsuperscript{50} Miller, xxxv.
\textsuperscript{51} Ibid. 77.
generation, communication across oceans. Miller already notes this tendency in the 1997 revised edition of his book:

However, due to a trend toward cultural globalization and to the changes in popular taste, elite vocalism in some respects has become more homogenous than it was fifty years ago. In professional circles of this era, with its rapid intercontinental transportation, regional and national tendencies cannot as easily remain isolated as they could even four or five decades ago. Recorded performances make international vocal stars almost as available to the student studying singing in a provincial conservatory as those premier singers are to the ticket-holder at the opera house of a great metropolis. Yet parallel with this increase in the accessibility of international singing styles, many private teachers and public conservatories of music retain those national and regional tendencies that formed the original subject of this study.

Singing artists must recognize these lingering national and regional tendencies if they are to transcend them. Sometimes one still hears that a tenor trained below the Alps has different tonal ideals than one trained in Northern European techniques. Is his British or French counterpart ever able to completely submerge national tonal preferences into the international model? The question is not one of style and literature but of vocal technique, because vocal freedom is essential to all styles and literatures. One does not sing Bach and Puccini with the same degree of vibrancy or vocal coloration, but one does not need two different singing techniques to accomplish both literatures. The physiology and the acoustics of the vocal instrument are unalterable givens.52

If the second paragraph of the passage above strikes the reader as having an oddly teleonomic tinge for a discussion of an art form, be assured that it is not an exceptional mode of thought in American vocal-pedagogical circles. A significant portion of the English language literature offerings on vocal pedagogy take a scientific posture, with the underlying assumption that the ideal of “vocal freedom” is a quantifiable value. To the extent that subjective modifiers describing tonal quality (rich, fluid, clear, strident, light, etc.) are employed in such studies (and they are employed a great deal!), they are sometimes treated as imperfect but necessary placeholders for yet-to-be-parsed acoustic properties of the singing voice. Clearly, this type of approach differs greatly from the

52 Ibid. xvii-xviii.
qualitative nature of critical reviews and audiences’ reception. The latter two embrace indefinable qualities of the singing voice and often find regional idiosyncrasies intriguing and desirable.

In the case of Russian-trained voices, there is still a good degree of critical fascination with the perceived particularities of their tonal color. The most common reaction to and expectation of Russian vocalism is that it is exceptionally “rich, warm, or deep” and filled with unrestrained drama and emotion. This is an impression that has carried straight through since the early twentieth century, when Chaliapin caused a sensation in the West, and is reinforced by the disproportionate number of Russian mezzo sopranos and basses who made their way to international stardom throughout the century. Paradoxically, those Westerners familiar with the vocalism of sopranos and tenors trained in Russia (current headliner Anna Netrebko excepted) tended to regard it as excessively “bright” and occasionally “nasal.”

This chapter reports on field work undertaken to learn Russian perspectives on notions such as the tonal ideal and the existence of a “Russian School” of singing, and to specify practices in Russian vocal training that significantly differ from the American system. Research was undertaken in three Russophone cities with conservatories and national opera theaters: Moscow, Russia; Saint Petersburg, Russia; and Odessa, Ukraine. Interviews were conducted with voice teachers, concertmasters, active opera and concert singers, students of voice, and choral conductors, who were recruited through personal contacts. The formal questions focused on two topics: 1) the “typical” Russian timbre and Russian vocalism’s status in the worldwide opera culture, 2) attitudes towards language

Ohio State University IRB protocol number 2010E0594.
and diction and methods for teaching it. The specific questions may be found in the appendix. During the interviewing process, however, a great deal of other interesting and relevant information was also obtained, especially pertaining to cultural issues, by conversing with the subjects in a free-form manner. Another component of the field work involved sitting in on voice lessons, rehearsals, and master classes. Because vocal pedagogy is not the author’s area of specialization, the results reported in this chapter do not include physical or physiological aspects of Russian vocal technique, as would a work on vocal pedagogy such as Miller’s. Rather, they concentrate on attitudes and aspects of Russian vocalism that relate to language use and the cultural conditions of Russian opera in the twenty-first century.

The next two sections of this chapter discuss two varieties of singing, both of which are located somewhat outside the “academic singing” context, but likely influence the historic quality of the Russian “tonal ideal.” Then, a report on some of the ways that Russian vocal training differs from its American counterpart comprises the next section. The final section comments on the current culture of academic singing in Russia today, touching on the most discussed areas of controversy in Russian operatic circles.

3.2 The “bright:” Russian folk singing

Much like the scientific literature on vocal pedagogy that was discussed in the previous section, the next two sections should probably be preceded by a disclaimer. The discussion of Russian folk singing and church singing that follows uses those subjective descriptors of timbre that tend to elude precise definition – after all, they are synaesthetic in nature. Therefore, the connections suggested here between folk singing and academic
singing, on the one hand, and church singing and academic singing, on the other, may be regarded as somewhat speculative. However, I consider the connections worth making because they offer a compelling explanation for the paradox of the “typical” Russian tonal color being “bright” for the higher voices and “dark” for the lower voices.

Anyone who is familiar with the famous Russian folk singer Lidia Ruslanova has heard the unmistakable brand of vocal “brightness” that is associated with Russian folk singing. In Russian, this kind of timbre is called an *otkrytii zvuk* (“open sound” – not to be confused with the so-called “open throat” of some vocal pedagogies, which usually implies a raising of the nasal pharynx or lowering of the larynx). The open sound is defined in one author’s words as a “бли́зкое, звонкое, необлагороженное звучание, зачастую речевое по формированию.”

Phonetically it is most associated with the close front vowels. That is, when as singer wishes to increase the brightness of the sound, he or she typically vocalizes on [i], though any vowel can be more or less bright, as can entire voices. It contrasts with the concept of “covering the sound,” which is an extremely common method of resonance used for blending the registers and resonating high notes, especially in male voices. A covered sound is associated phonologically with back rounded vowels. It also often implies doming of the soft palate and sometimes lowering of the larynx.

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54 Daletskii, in a 2011 book entitled *Obuchenie peniu: Put’ k bel’kanto iz opyta pedagoga*, 346. The translation may be rendered as a “Close, ringing, unrefined sound, often speech-like in formation.”

55 Renée Fleming offers a vivid description of the physical maneuvering and sensation involved in the technique in her memoir, “In covering, as a singer moves up through the high passagio, the transition area, she changes the very direction of the flow of air. Her use of resonance transforms the sound from a forward-placed, bright one that is entirely open to an almost *oh* or *ooh* position, directed toward the soft palate. The basic forward direction of the sound is never abandoned; a “domed” quality is added just above the passaggio. This gives the tone a covered sound, as if the singer has just taken a bright tone and put a lid
Available studies on the differences between Russian folk singing and academic singing repeat this terminology. One summary of the differences is as follows in table 1:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Folk singing</th>
<th>Academic singing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Open mode of vocalizing</td>
<td>Covered mode of vocalizing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speech-like manner of vocalizing</td>
<td>Vowelized* manner of vocalizing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vibrato as the result of the natural oscillation of the vocal folds in the process of necessarily reflexive sung speech</td>
<td>Vibrato as a vocal-acoustic device, as a result of artificial, nominally reflexive oscillation of the vocal folds in the process of phonation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speech-like articulation</td>
<td>Syllabic articulation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expressive devices of the oral tradition</td>
<td>Expressive devices of the written tradition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single registration singing in the range of approximately one octave</td>
<td>Multiple register singing in the range of at least two octaves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singing in the local dialect</td>
<td>Singing in the Russian standard (literary) language</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Differences between Russian folk singing and academic singing as summarized by K.F. Nikol’skaia-Beregovskaia and based on the research of L.V. Shamina.  

Notice that the first characteristic of Russian folk singing underscored by these authors is the “open” quality. For the purposes of the current study, the table illuminates just how closely aligned folk singing is with speech – both in “vocalizing” (here, vowel formations) and articulation in general – in contrast to academic singing. Shamina also emphasizes one more difference between the two types of singing, in the context of teaching choral ensembles to sing in the folk manner: “In folk singing you cannot confuse the rounding of the sound with its covering, because the higher the sound moves, the

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56 In the Russian text, the author writes, “Вокализированная манера голосообразования.” The formulation is not entirely clear, but the author most likely has in mind the predominance of extended vowels and minimized consonant durations in classical singing. Chapters five and six of this dissertation include discussion of this practice.

57 Nikol’skaia-Beregovskaia, in Russkaia vokal’no-khorovaia shkola ot drevnosti do XXI veka, 72. And Shamina, in Shkola russkogo narodnogo peniia.
sharper (ostree) it is. Covering the sound is a prerogative of the academic vocal school.”58

Presumably, in the first sentence the author is trying to express that the singers should not modify the formation of rounded vowels any more than they would in speech. (See section 5.2 of this work for an explanation of vowel modification in singing.) Once again, the necessity of preserving speech articulations is emphasized.

One would suspect (it cannot be proved) that the bright vocal timbre of Russian folk singing, which, according to one author at least, should be carefully preserved in choral performance of folk songs as well, had some influence on the Russian tastes in vocal aesthetics. The last quote is particularly interesting in its embracing of so-called “sharpness” of the sound as it rises in pitch; “sharpness” does not sound like something desirable in a classical voice, and it is most likely synonymous with the more common parlance of “strident” and “spread” – both considered pejorative by classical singers.

Since the concept of “covering” in academic singing is most applicable in the upper register of the voice, it is in the high voices that this influence of the folk aesthetic would be most conspicuous. That is, since middle and low parts of the range are not covered in classical singing anyway, the absence of the technique of covering will never be missed in the lower voices. I suggest, then, that the influence of the folk singing aesthetic on the Russian tonal ideal may account for much of the division between the upper and lower voice parts in qualitative assessment of “typical” Russian vocal quality.

Incidentally, this disparate evaluation of the high and low voices is one I encountered in Russia and Ukraine more than in the United States, a fact easily explained by the preponderance of low Russian voices that have risen to fame outside of their

58 Shamina, Razvitie horovoi samodeiatel’nosti v SSSR, 17.
country of origin (e.g. Fedor Chaliapin, Evgenii Nesterenko, Irina Arkhipova, Olga Borodina). Several of the voice teachers with whom I spoke during field research independently brought up the fact that Russian sopranos and tenors “used to” have excessively bright (blizkie) voices, with Ivan Kozlovskii’s name repeatedly mentioned as the top offender. Other terms used were horizontalness (gorizontal’nost’, i.e. “spread”) and even slashchavost’ (maudlin tackiness). The latter, applied to the tenors, is perhaps not completely connected to brightness of timbre, but simply interesting in its own right. It is certainly not a quality one would ever ascribe to the Russian basses or contraltos.

Those who considered this brightness of timbre a deficiency of the historic Russian vocal school uniformly followed up by assuring me that things had changed a great deal in the last generation (since the 1970s, according to one teacher). Many considered that Russians and Ukrainians had “finally” begun to sing in the “European” or “Italian” manner, with okruglennost’ (“roundness”) and vertikal’nost’ (“verticality”).

The specialists with whom I spoke uniformly took great pride, however, in the national school as concerns the low voice types. When asked about the best representatives of the Russian vocal tradition, most were able to issue a long list of basses and mezzo-sopranos (Fedor Chaliapin, Maksim Mikhailov, Ivan Petrov, Irina Arkhipova, Elena Obraztsova, Ol’ga Borodina, Mariia Maksakova, and others).

3.3 The “deep:” Russian church singing

In choral rehearsals in the United States, it is not rare to hear conductors request the sound of a “real Russian basso” at times when a maximally sonorous, “warm,” ringing and fortissimo sound is desired in the lowest parts of the bass vocal range. Indeed, the
prominence of the bass lines, including their doubling down the octave by the “octavists” (a lower voice even than the Western basso profundo, and a word that is sometimes used interchangeably with “Russian bass”) is one of the most recognizable features of Russian choral music.

Musicologist Vladimir Morosan traces the doubling of the choral bass line, used to express especial solemnity in Russian music, to eighteenth-century Italian composers who replicated the Baroque instrumental practice of part doubling.\(^5\) Russian and foreign instructional commentary on the performance of Russian choral music invariably emphasizes the importance of the lowest voice part. An example from a 1916 Russian publication on choral conducting reads, “A full sonority of the lowest notes in a chord sung by the second basses and octavists tremendously beautifies and enhances the sound of the choir (in slow tempos).”\(^6\) Interestingly, Marina Ritzarev even discovered a wanted ad for a serf octavist (as estates often had in-house serf orchestras and choirs) among the classifieds section of Moskovskie vedomosti: “The house of his Excellency major-general Zagryazhsky requires a singer, third or second bassist possessing a good vocal octave…”\(^7\)

Morosan writes that by the twentieth century the line between liturgical choral singing and concert choral performance had become blurred with respect to both repertoire and vocalism:

…some churches in Moscow and St. Petersburg serviced by well-known choirs posted the ‘repertoire’ that would be sung at the upcoming service on a bulletin board outside the church. Soloists from the Imperial Opera were routinely invited to

\(^5\) Morosan, 25.
\(^6\) Kovin, 5, quoted in Morosan, 154.
\(^7\) Ritzarev, 255.
sing solos and trios in church, particularly during Great Lent and Holy Week, when such musical selections were particularly numerous and theaters were closed. The protodeacons of major cathedrals, who frequently had voices of operatic caliber, were treated as cult figures with popular followings; some cognoscenti would keep teams of horses ready outside the church, so that as soon as the protodeacon finished the Gospel reading at one church, they could dash off to another church just in time to hear another ‘star’ protodeacon perform.⁶²

The operatic flavor in liturgical singing testified here paralleled the composition of musical settings of the liturgy expressly for concert performance in works such as Rachmaninov’s *All-Night Vigil (Vsenoshchnoe bdenie)*. Although this line of musical activity came to a halt with the arrival of bolshevism,⁶³ nonetheless the aesthetic influence of the choral repertoire on the Russian conception of beautiful tonal color would remain, particularly in the lower voices that were so celebrated in this repertoire. Certainly the idea that Russian singers excelled at singing warmly and expressively in the lower registers influenced on operatic composition, with many of the most outstanding and heroic operatic roles of Russian opera written for bass and mezzo soprano – those voices so often relegated to villains and supporting roles in other national repertoires: Ivan Susanin, Boris Godunov and Marina Mniszek, Marfa (*Khovanshchina*), Konchakovna (*Prince Igor*), etc. Additionally, many of the soprano roles in the Russian repertoire are in a low enough tessitura that they may be sung by mezzos. In general, the soprano tessitura of Russian opera is lower-lying with fewer melismatic lines than that of other national traditions, such as the Italian. For this reason the bright timbre spoken of above tends to be confined to coloratura sopranos. All of these factors contribute to the historical cultivation of a “rich,” “warm,” and “deep” characteristic Russian timbre, so

⁶² Morosan, 301.
⁶³ See Johann von Gardner, *Russian Church Singing* for the hymnography of Russian liturgical singing and a detailed report on revival efforts.
often noted in the press reviews. And despite the continued successes of Russian mezzos and basses in the major opera stages throughout Europe and the United States, some foster a protective sentiment toward the “national” timbre as demonstrated by the comments of Galina Vishnevskaiia in a recent interview:

Russia is declining in the quality of singers. We have basses – but for some reason they are all singing baritone. Throughout there is a baritone sound, and not a classical bass, for whom, by the way, Russian composers especially composed suitable repertoire. The same with the Russian mezzo soprano with a big sound in the middle register. The low notes should be obligatory in it and the high notes not obligatory, since we do not have such high parts, as in the Italian repertoire. Verdi, as a given, wrote for the mezzo soprano almost like for the soprano, and occasionally sopranos sing his mezzo soprano parts. Why has this happened? Because when, as stated, they opened the gates to the West and our singers started traveling there to sing, they started to sing Italian repertoire most of all. Nobody needs the Russian repertoire there…

3.4 Vocal training in Russia

This section reports on some aspects of musical education and vocal pedagogy in Russia (and Ukraine), focusing on aspects that differ from those in the United States and that have significant consequences (vocal and cultural) for the practice of classical singing as an art form and occupation. The information was garnered through the in-country interviews that formed a part of the research for this dissertation.

3.4.1 Music education institutions and instruction time

Many of the differences in music education in Russia versus America are rooted in the differing economic structures of the two countries’ educational systems. Russia and

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many of the other former Soviet republics have extensive systems of local music schools for children. The cost of lessons can vary, but in some cities can be a matter of as little as a few dollars per month. This affordability is in stark contrast to the situation in the United States, where most childhood lessons are obtained through private teachers, and one would be lucky to get half a lesson at the monthly cost of music schooling in Russia. Differences in income levels aside, music lessons for children in Russia are far more affordable than they are for children in America.

This difference continues through the conservatory system. Russian conservatory students have lessons with their teachers several times per week, whereas American students generally have them once a week. In addition to the increased instructional time with the voice teacher, lessons in Russian conservatories are always attended by a concertmaster (концертмейстер). “Concertmaster” is the title that Russians give to the person who serves as accompanist and vocal coach. During lessons, the concertmaster takes a more active role in instruction than accompanists do in the United States. The concertmaster gives corrections on a variety of performance issues, including intonation, musical articulation and dynamics, expression, other stylistic elements, and diction. The only element of singing that the concertmaster does not instruct on, it seems, is the precise physical maneuvers required in vocal production.

Russian students’ access to concertmasters contrasts with the American situation again in regard to finances. Music students in the United States often have to pay high rates, sometimes even while enrolled and paying tuition at a conservatory or music school, for sessions with “coaches” – our equivalent to the concertmaster in Russian vocal training. Coaches certainly offer instruction in the same categories listed for
concertmasters, but most often they are sought out as diction coaches, and their instruction focuses on diction in greater proportions than concertmasters’. During a voice lesson proper, American accompanists and/or coaches usually refrain from interrupting the voice teacher, whereas the concertmaster and voice teacher in Russia tend to share the instructional role throughout the course of the lesson.

Several of the Russian teachers with whom I spoke indicated some frustration with a lack of discipline and inability to work independently on the part of some students – a direct corollary of the advantage in frequency of instructional hours. This problem seems to be felt most acutely in the simple matter of the self-discipline required to put in the hours needed to memorize repertoire. American music students, on the other hand, tend to be very self-motivated as concerns selection and memorization of repertoire and daily practice routines. Indeed, they have no choice but to learn self-discipline because of the long stretches of time between lessons. This difference is, in a way, well-suited to the respective occupational conditions into which the students are preparing to enter. American singers, especially those unmanaged, usually have to serve as their own managers/promoters, in contrast to Russian singers (those accepted into opera companies) who remain in Russia. This topic is further discussed in the next sub-section.

Another significant way in which the teaching approaches of the two nations differ is that students of solo singing in Russia are not required, and often not encouraged, to participate in choral singing. Clearly, many of the singers who study at the conservatories will end up singing in opera choruses, but performance of the major repertoire for chorus is not a part of the educational program for students of the “solo singing” departments. In fact, the choral conductors with whom I communicated admitted
openly that they did not recruit from the departments of solo singing, especially not for women’s voices, because the solo singers could not hold back enough dynamically or sing without a prominent vibrato. In American vocal programs, on the other hand, a certain number of ensemble credit hours are usually obligatory. Though ensemble experience is undeniably useful for the purposes of developing musicianship skills (sight-reading, tuning, etc.), there seems to be a constant tension between the vocal prerogatives of the solo voice teachers and the choral conductors at American institutions, with each demanding a different vocal aesthetic. Misunderstandings and plain contentiousness between the choral conductors and voice teachers or choral conductors and students abound.65

3.4.2 Attitudes toward and teaching of diction

Instruction in the area of lyric diction strongly differs between Russian and American conservatories. Americans approach the topic more formally, with classroom instruction in the lyric dictons of the major singing languages, including English, in addition to courses on specific national vocal literatures. Many American singers have a relatively sophisticated level of linguistic knowledge in the area of phonetics and detailed knowledge of the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA), which is their medium of choice for transcribing foreign sounds. An amusing neologism that I have heard in American vocal circles goes, “How do you IPA that word?”

65 For a description of the conflicts between voice teachers and choral directors in American institutions and suggestions for solving the problem, see Matthew Ferrell, Perspectives on Choral and Solo Singing: Enhancing Communication Between Choral Conductors and Voice Teachers.
As a rule, the Russian specialists with whom I spoke had never heard of IPA and indicated that transcription, when used at all, would be into the language and phonetic system of the singer (this was in reference to non-Russian students at one educational institution I visited). Russian students do study the Italian language and often other languages, however, and therefore they would have practice in the speech pronunciations of the languages they study. When teachers and coaches were asked what specific techniques they employed for the teaching of diction, the most common answer was tongue-twisters. Interestingly, many of the Russian institutions also require coursework in the area of “kul’tura rechi” – that is, Russian elocution. These courses involve learning techniques for speech-making and poetry declamation, rather than lyric diction per se. In the Odessa conservatory, the courses involve specific instruction on how to eliminate Ukrainianisms from Russian speech. The music departments in the United States usually do not offer or require an equivalent course in English speech. More detailed remarks on approaches to lyric diction are offered in the following chapter.

3.4.3 Vocational perceptions and theater organization

In the modern-day culture of classical singing in Russia, there is much less middle ground between professional singing and amateur singing than in the United States. In general, Russian students decide on their university specializations earlier in their education and have less opportunity for changing course after beginning a program of study. Those who enter conservatories intend to become professionals (though not all will succeed) and those who do not enter conservatories have scant opportunities to perform.
In other words, there are very few semi-professional or actively performing, amateur classical singers of the kind that abounds in the United States. In this respect, the current situation in Russia differs from the music culture during Soviet times, when a multitude of amateur troupes (*kruzhki samodeiatel’nosti*) supplied ample performance opportunities for talented young amateur singers. For instance, one teacher and former leading tenor at a major theater mentioned how he had the opportunity to learn and perform half a dozen roles before he even entered the conservatory. He related how this experience was invaluable to him, but not an option for today’s young singers.

The experience of those singers who are accepted into one or more of the Russian theaters as soloists or choristers differs markedly from that of their American counterparts. Most of the theaters operate on a permanent ensemble model, which means that they cast both soloist roles and chorister positions from their internal rosters and rarely bring in outsiders to sing in their productions. One major exception is the Bolshoi Theater. It does make contractual hires, and even brings in foreign stars. There were mixed opinions on the benefits and drawbacks of this system among those with whom I spoke. Affairs at the Bolshoi have been perceived as disorganized and artistically stagnant, to say the least, in the midst of questionable financing and continual extensions to the reconstruction of the theater, and sometimes the casting structure is cited as one of the contributors to disorder. Others, however, opined that the ensemble model can lead to a lowering of standards, as it is difficult to dismiss employees. After all, they are state workers.

The ensemble model is connected to the repertoire system that Russian theaters use in scheduling their productions. Operas do not have “runs” in the American sense;
rather, successful shows will be repeated at various times throughout the season, with the scheduling and announcements of the schedule occurring much later than would be the case in the United States. It makes sense that to carry out this type of scheduling the theater would need a permanent group of performers ready to sing any of the operas in the repertoire list. Additionally, unlike the situation in the United States, the major Russian opera theaters double as ballet theaters. Dance ensembles must have a permanent membership, since a unified look, style, technique, and repertoire throughout the company is so important in dance. Therefore, there is probably some degree of normalization between the business models of each half of the joint ballet and opera companies. This structural difference in the opera business has significant consequences for the singing occupation, with Russian singers who stay in the country signing up for a long-term commitment and some stability, and American singers – those who wish to make a living off their singing, at least – constantly on the road and auditioning for theaters all over the country (or world) as a necessary part of their chosen career.

3.5 Notes on contemporary opera culture in Russia

A strong current of opinion that ran through the interviews for this project, as well as through communications with Russian music professionals from about five years ago, was that many of those invested occupationally and emotionally in Russian opera, perceive Russian opera as being “in a crisis.” The first few times that I heard the comment applied to opera culture in Moscow and Saint Petersburg, it struck me as strange. Though attendance at the opera is reportedly less than in Soviet days, there are still several opera theaters in each of these cities that fill their halls several times a week.
There also seems to be a constant stream of premieres and inventive stagings. It is difficult to say how much of the dissatisfaction is caused by actual decline and how much is caused by the traditional nostalgia that opera seems to inspire (“Things will never be what they were!” “The golden days are gone!”). A few of my interviewees complained about the degree of corruption in the conservatory, music competition, and theater hiring system: it is indeed an ugly situation when educational institutions sell students diplomas to pay the bills. Some of the other major grievances, however, lead to interesting (and more music-specific) insights into opera culture in contemporary Russia.

Thus, in addition to bemoaning the lack of attendance and general disinterest in academic music, Russian singers and others working in the field took issue with the loss of good voices to popular music genres, in particular to estrada. The level of disinterest and disdain for the popular music genres on the part of those with whom I spoke was quite high. In this they differ from American opera circles, where interest in other genres (at least for relaxing/driving, etc.) runs relatively high. The Russian attitude is associated with a sentiment, which many of those interviewed expressed, of guarding a national treasure in the operatic and song repertoire as well as in the methods of vocal pedagogy.

In this vein, the other most significant grievance was against the stage directors (khudozhestvennye rezhisery) of the opera theaters, who, in the opinion of some, do not understand singing or the art of opera as they should. The most extreme criticism is of the Vishnevskaya brand, in her 2006 boycott of the Bolshoi Theater over Dmitrii Cherniakov’s “destruction of the national heritage” through his updated staging of Eugene Onegin. Incidentally, the two stage directors who cause the most clamor are Cherniakov and Dmitrii Bertman, founder of the avant-garde Helikon Opera in Moscow.
Other interviewees had more nuanced concerns about the untraditional, often visually saturated stagings developed by such stage directors. In their view, the busy stage action and sets distract from the primary goal of expression through music, or the athletic stage movement makes unreasonable demands on the singers. Trends in the staging of opera – be they updates, minimalist, politics laden, etc. – have been a favorite topic for controversy throughout the opera capitals of Europe and America for many years. In this respect, the Russian opera scene might be viewed as “catching up” with European and American opera culture. The vigorous debate about new stagings demonstrates, above all, that contemporary opera culture in Russia is dynamic and healthy.
Chapter 4: What is “lyric diction”

4.1 Defining lyric diction

The remaining chapters of this study deal exclusively with issues of how the Russian language is sung in the operatic and art song repertoire, and do so from a largely linguistic point of view. In other words, what follows is a study of the lyric diction of Russian. Before tackling specific concerns about the sounds of Russian, however, it is necessary to address how precisely lyric diction is defined, as well as to place the concept in the Russian cultural and linguistic context.

In the context of singing, and in contrast to other fields in which diction may encompass lexicon and syntax, lyric diction is considered to describe appropriate pronunciation, enunciation, and expression. Kathryn LaBouff, diction coach for the Metropolitan Opera among others, supplies concise definitions for those three elements in her book on English lyric diction for speakers of English:
**Pronunciation:** The cultivation of sung speech that is free from regionalisms and is easily understood by the audience.

**Enunciation:** The study of the physiology of speech sounds in order to deliver the vocal text with ease, clarity, and minimal tension.

**Expression:** The communication of the meaning and emotion of a vocal text within the parameters of the musical setting given to us by the composer.\(^{66}\)

This is an appropriate definition for lyric diction as the study of language in the context of classical singing, since some elements that may fall under the rubric of diction in studies of literature or speech performance are either indicated by the musical setting of the text or are the subject of the general vocal technique outside of language considerations. Obviously, issues of lexicon and syntax are dictated by composer and librettist. But as a further example, consider how Iurii Ozarevskii, actor and theatrical director, in a work oriented toward professional readers and actors, suggests the subdivision of “diction” into 1) hearing, 2) breath, 3) voice, and 4) pronunciation, and of “pronunciation” into 1) correctness, 2) clarity, 3) sufficient strength, and 4) musicality.\(^{67}\)

Such elements as breath, strength, and musicality, for instance, which may be central to an actor’s study of diction, are prerequisite for becoming a singer. However, one may counter that issues such as breath-control for the articulation of consonants or sufficient emphasis of stressed syllables are indeed in the domain of diction for singers, as for actors – these issues cannot be strictly approached as a matter of vocal technique detached from diction. Such an observation points to the fact that there cannot be a true division between study of the voice as a musical instrument and as a communicator of sung text. Truly competent voice teachers are knowledgeable about lyric dictions, and competent coaches know something about the workings of the singing voice.

\(^{66}\) LaBouff, 3.

\(^{67}\) Ozarevskii, 213, 239.
LaBouff’s point that the pronunciation cultivated in lyric diction should be “free from regionalisms” gives reason for pause. How can a pronunciation be completely “freed” of regionalisms when even national pronunciation standards, when they exist at all, are sometimes themselves built on a specific region’s pronunciation variant, as is the case in Russian?\(^\text{68}\) Miller, in fact, offers the following suggestion for proper diction in the English language:

An excellent rule for determining the handling of sung English diction might well be the following: if the nationality of either the British or the North American singer is recognizable on the basis of sung English diction, than neither is handling it properly.\(^\text{69}\)

The statement above is surprising, considering the many significant and, one would imagine, undisguisable differences between the English pronunciations of the two continents. Perhaps Miller had in mind that the best English lyric diction would result in a mix of the two dialects, taking those features from each dialect that are considered more amenable to singing – that is, selecting a mix of vowels and consonants that are presumed beautiful in timbre and easy for the listener to perceive. In realizing such a hybrid pronunciation, then, it would indeed be difficult to identify the nationality of the performer. LaBouff, on the other hand, seems to have a different outlook, as she offers in her book descriptions of the General American, British Received, and Mid-Atlantic pronunciations, with suggestions on which dialect is best suited to various compositions in the English language repertoire. It seems reasonable to demand that in singing in English, vocalists show some sensitivity to glaringly inappropriate regionalisms. Anyone

\(^{68}\) Admittedly, some language standards comprise a mix of features from different regions. However, the Russian standard pronunciation is based on the dialect of educated Muscovites.

\(^{69}\) Miller, 182.
who has sung in a school choir knows that Handel should not be sung with the same pronunciation as an American spiritual. Prominent non-standard dialectal features do indeed sound inappropriate in the performance of the majority of the art song and opera repertoire. And yet, perfect dialectal consistency in many of the subtle pronunciation features either among various members of a cast or in the performance of a single vocalist would also seem a dubious demand. With all the aural input that takes place in the performance of a song or opera, not to mention various modifications to pronunciation that take place for the benefit of the voice as an instrument, it is not likely that listeners will notice or object to subtler dialectal inconsistencies that may arise.

This question of dialectal inconsistency leads to another basic, but important, observation about the nature of lyric dictions: they are not intended to be ethnographically realistic. This may seem like a statement of the obvious – after all, it is rather unrealistic to have kings, lovers, sassy maids, and bohemians walking around singing to each other in the first place, let alone to sing to one another in French in Seville or Italian in Peking. Nonetheless, you can sometimes find opera professionals tweaking the lyric diction to reflect pronunciation nuances of certain cities or centuries. For one American production of *Eugene Onegin*, I am told, there was considerable dispute among the artistic staff about whether they would use the Saint Petersburg or Moscow pronunciation of such words as *chtō* and *skuchno*, since, after all, the opera is set in both the countryside and Saint Petersburg. One wonders if it occurred to any of them to use instead a Francophone Russian as a compromise and out of respect for Pushkin’s narrator!
Как уст румяных без улыбки,
Без грамматической ошибки
Я русской речи не люблю.  

The same point about the artificial nature of pronunciation applies to all forms of stage speech. Regardless of the linguistic detail with which a vocalist or actor studies a certain dialect, in most cases both are unlikely to achieve a fully ethonographically “realistic” diction, nor does the audience expect them to. The fact should not be regarded as a shortcoming, but simply as a property of the theater as an artistic medium. Grigorii Vinokur, in the introduction to his guide to stage pronunciation, even finds cause for praising this attribute of theatrical speech:

Compare this with what is said in Shakespeare’s Merchant of Venice in the original – in English, Portia (act 1, scene 2): ‘You know I say nothing to him, for he understands not me, nor I him: he hath neither Latin, French, nor Italian, and you will come into the court and swear that I have a poor pennyworth in the English.’ Accordingly, theatrical speech is by its very nature conventionally-unrealistic, and precisely this attribute makes possible our communication with other epochs and peoples through the theater.

Adopting Vinokur’s approach to language use in singing liberates vocalists and coaches from painstaking efforts to understand and imitate every nuance of the pronunciation of a foreign (or of their native) language in lyric diction. Instead, it prompts one to think about what the purposes of lyric diction are and about how it can be used artistically. Lyric diction should be concerned with studying the sounds that are actually crucial for communicating and useful for doing so expressively within the
context of opera and song, and not within the context of native conversation or even poetry declamation, dramatic theater, or other modes of formal speech.

4.2 The standard dialect of Russian

Unlike English, Russian overall does not present the problem, touched upon in the previous section, of competing standard pronunciations associated with different nations or regions. The standard language pronunciation on which the lyric diction is based is called Contemporary Standard Russian (CSR), generally considered the pronunciation of educated Muscovites. The most often cited description of CSR is Ruben Avanesov’s *Russian Literary Pronunciation*, which first appeared in 1950, with its most recent edition published in 1984. The Russian dictionary by Borunova et al. (1983) reflects current pronunciation practices and is based on Avanesov’s description and Ozhegov’s dictionary.\(^{72}\)

CSR developed from Old Moscow pronunciation (OM), which itself was considered the pronunciation standard at the turn of the last century. Thorough descriptions of OM pronunciation were given by M. Panov and S. Ozhegov.\(^{73}\) Many of the features distinguishing OM from CSR are rooted in the increasing influence of spelling on pronunciation in CSR. In OM, for example, we find such pronunciations as: [xodˈut] for ходят and [tʲɪxəj] for тихий.\(^{74}\) Occasionally, such pronunciation differences between OM and CSR may cause cases of uncertainty about the best pronunciation to


\(^{74}\) Comrie et al., 28, 70.
use in the lyric diction when a rhyme in the text depends on the OM pronunciation. In such cases, it is better to rhyme, of course, in accordance with practices in poetry declamation. Many features of OM pronunciation were still considered the appropriate practice in theater until the 1970s, especially in the performance of tragedies and classical plays. Therefore it would be expected that remnants would remain in the pronunciation of Russian singers, as lyric diction is extremely conservative in the matter of language change. That is, singers are likely to emulate the pronunciation of those who came before them, as well as “high” theatrical style that they would have heard growing up, attending theatrical performances and listening to recordings. This fact should be kept in mind by coaches who listen to native singers for reference: just because a native singer may use a feature of OM does not mean that it is the only appropriate option in Russian lyric diction in general. On the other hand, there can be instances in which the older pronunciation is compelling because of tradition developed through continual performance of popular compositions. Lenskii of Eugene Onegin, for instance, invariably sings, [kak adna dusha poeta] in his arioso to Olga, and it is hard to imagine the phrase pronounced with the speech norm of [paeta].

Other influences that affect certain words in the lyric diction of native Russian-speaking singers and often cause confusion to foreigners studying the repertoire include some features of Saint Petersburg and Church Slavonic pronunciation, particularly the pronunciation of the letter ц as [ʃʧ] instead of [ʃʃ], the word что as [ʧто] instead of [ʃто], the consonant cluster чн as [ʧн] instead of [ʃн] (an example we have met already in the previous section), and the letter г as [ɣ] or [x] instead of [g] in a few words with
religious connotations such as Бог and Господи. In cases such as these both, pronunciations are usually appropriate to the lyric diction.

Indeed, native speakers are not always consistent in their pronunciation. For all the examples above, studies have shown that speakers tend use certain pronunciations when speaking with the “explicit code” of more formal speech and others when speaking with the “elliptic code” of less formal speech.75 One might suppose that the explicit code would be the foundation of the lyric diction because of the emphatic nature of classical singing and, perhaps, overall stodginess frequently associated with the art form of opera. This may indeed be the case for some features of pronunciation, but it is not necessarily the rule. For example the explicit76 pronunciation [ʃjʧ] for the letter щ is far less common among today’s Russian vocalists than [ʃʃ]. Determining the dominance of the so-called “explicit code” in singing would require methodically summing occurrences of each feature that is presumed to have an explicit variant in recordings. Such an undertaking was not within the scope of this project, as the intention here is not to inventory all the sounds of Russian pronunciation. However, it is worth mention that, based on the listening performed for the following two chapters, it is my impression that those features that have variants in speech tend to maintain the variation in singing without dire consequences in style. That is, the foreign student of Russian diction need not lose sleep over deciding between such variants.

75 Comrie et al., 32. They borrow the terms from Michael Shapiro (1968) and M.V. Panov (1963). See the introduction and chapter on pronunciation in Comrie for specific examples of many sounds which are often produced during careful speech or when the speaker knows he is being tested on pronunciation: i.e. the pronunciations comprising the “explicit code.” For the authors cited above, the term seems to indicate the pronunciation tendencies in speech that is carefully and consciously controlled. These tendencies are purported to contrast with the pronunciation tendencies in the “elliptic code” of relaxed speech.

76 According to Comrie et al., 32.
A final point about the study of the lyric diction of Russian is that, just as there can be an explicit and elliptic code in speech, so in singing there are multiple modes of rendering a given text, which depend on the musical and dramatic context of the phrase, among other factors. This phenomenon will be examined in more detail in the following two chapters. It will be demonstrated that those features that are most variable for expressive ends in the lyric diction do not always coincide with the most prominent variable features of the spoken pronunciation. For this reason, it is possible for foreign singers to sing quite expressively and communicatively in languages in which they have no conversational proficiency.

4.3 Intelligibility in singing

Inasmuch as clear enunciation and intelligibility are one of the three elements of good lyric diction, there are, no doubt, enormous disparities in the levels of accomplishment in this area between varying vocal schools and individual artists. Some singers make themselves understood in every language they sing in, while others perpetually seem to sing a vocalise or, frankly, gibberish, even in their native languages. And some fall in between the two extremes and demonstrate different levels of facility in the different languages. Such disparity is the result of several interrelated factors: the vocalist’s background in the area of language study and linguistic knowledge; particular issues in their vocal technique and varying conceptions of tonal color and legato; the vocalist’s attitude towards diction and the importance of being understood.

Despite this disparity in accomplishments, teachers of singing across schools and across nations almost uniformly claim to emphasize intelligibility as an imperative in
singing, with the traditional admonition in the Italian school (which is sometimes borrowed in the pedagogies of other schools) being, “cantare come si parla,” “sing as it is spoken.” However, there is no question that the demands for intensity of sound, beautiful and even timbre, and smooth legato in classical singing do present challenges to intelligibility; they demand, in singing more than in speech, conscious attention to the articulatory formation of vowels and consonants. One Russian scholar offers the following explanation for the “sore subject” of unclear diction:

The main reason for bad diction in singing is the necessity for the singer to simultaneously solve two difficult and related problems: on the one hand, to secure the required quality of the vocal timbre, which is connected with significant stabilization on the resonance system (Dmitriev, 1968), and, resultantly, the location of the frequencies of the main singer’s formants, and, on the other hand, to secure the required phonetic quality differences of the vowels, which requires the converse – greater mobility, greater changes in the volume and formation of the resonators, as in conversational speech…

…Despite the indicated difficulties, the masters of singing – we recall S.Ia. Lemeshev, F.I. Chaliapin, and others – overcome them surprisingly easily and freely: both the vocal timbre, cantilena, strength, and soaring ability are splendid and the diction excellent.

In general, Russian singers, not only the “masters,” usually sing in the Russian language with remarkably intelligible diction, especially in comparison to, say,

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77 Miller, 174. On the subject of singing as one speaks in Italian and the borrowing of the idion into other languages, Miller writes: “Having thus concentrated on this manifestly favorable condition of the Italian language for singing, it may be surprising to learn that the Italian maestro does not accept the notion popularly held outside the Italian School that his allievo or allieva naturally enjoys an unimpeded speech which leads him or her directly to functionally free song. This is a point worth stressing: it is often hypothesized, especially among German and English pedagogues, that the basic pedagogical admonition of the Italian School – “Cantare come si parla” – simply indicates a natural freedom of the speech mechanism among Italians and is not really an instruction which works for the non-Italianate singer as well…

…The teacher of singing who, when working on English diction, requests that English be sung as Italian obviously is not requesting an Italian accent in the handling of English consonants but is demanding pure, well-articulated basic vowel sounds. A greater variety of phonetic shapes is entailed in the singing of English (or German or French) than in singing of Italian, but all can be realized through the same principles of execution.” 173-174.

78 Morozov, 83-84.
American singers in English. In the other languages, however, the situation is reversed. American graduates of conservatories and music schools usually have courses in the dictions of the major singing languages, as well as some knowledge of phonetics, and can sometimes even read transcription in the International Phonetic Alphabet with ease. In the vocal programs of Russian conservatories, on the other hand, diction is not taught so thoroughly, and the strong presence of the foreign accent tends to interfere with the intelligibility of the text in languages other than Russian. When professional American singers sing unintelligibly in foreign languages or in English, the problem is most likely rooted in a vocal technique that interferes with articulation. When professional Russian singers are not understood in a foreign language, it is often because they have not learned what the speech sounds of the given language are.

This seemingly paradoxical situation is quite easily understood by considering the different cultural contexts and available resources to the singers, conservatories and opera production staff in the two countries. Three factors in particular would seem to bring about the current state of affairs.

1) American singers generally have much greater access than Russian singers to resources for the learning of foreign language diction. There are multiple published guides to the lyric dictions of Italian, French, German, Spanish, and Latin that have been written specifically as pedagogical tools for vocalists. Additionally, the populations of big cities in the United States include native speakers of the various languages, often within the ranks of the university or opera company itself. Russians (those performing or studying in Russia, that is) have the disadvantage of fewer such materials in the Russian language and less access to native speakers of other languages. The major language in
which American singers are weakest in terms of diction is, as already discussed in the Introduction, Russian, for they often have less access to written resources in this language than in others. There is no innate reason why the acquisition of good lyric diction in the Russian language should be so much more problematic than it is in other languages, which also have complicated phonologies that differ from English.

2) Russian opera companies regularly perform works from their own national repertoire, whereas American companies perform in English only occasionally, often only once per season. This is clearly illustrated by a comparison of the repertoire of the Mariinsky Theater with that of the Metropolitan Opera Company (table 2). At the Mariinsky, almost half of the repertoire list comprises Russian operas, whereas the Metropolitan Opera will produce only two operas in English in the current season. Another related difference in the American versus Russian structure of the companies is that the Russian opera companies operate almost exclusively as “ensemble companies,” casting soloists from within their own rosters, while American companies, including those at the regional level, usually cast leading roles by contract, with the bigger companies flying in stars from abroad on a regular basis. It is no surprise, then, that Russian singers excel in singing intelligibly in their native language for native audiences, since Russian works comprise such a large portion of the repertoire they perform. Likewise, the American companies’ repertoire of choice explains why American singers sometimes can make themselves understood better in Italian than in their native English: they have more performance incentives and practice opportunities in the former.
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Mariinsky Theater, repertoire</th>
<th>Metropolitan Opera, 2011-2012 season</th>
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<td>Aida, Verdi</td>
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<td>Aida, Verdi</td>
<td>Anna Bolena, Donizetti</td>
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<td>Ariadne auf Naxos, Strauss</td>
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<td>Attila, Verdi</td>
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<tr>
<td>Benvenuto Cellini, Berlioz</td>
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<tr>
<td>Betrothal in a Monastery, Prokofiev</td>
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<td>Boris Godunov, Musorgsky</td>
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<td>The Brothers Karamozov, Smelkov</td>
<td>Faust, Gounod</td>
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<tr>
<td>Carmen, Bizet</td>
<td>La Fille du Régiment, Donizetti</td>
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<tr>
<td>Christmas Eve, Rimsky-Korsakov</td>
<td>Götterdämmerung, Wagner</td>
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<td>Così fan tutte, Mozart</td>
<td>Hansel and Gretel, Humperdinck</td>
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<td>Der Fliegende Holländer, Wagner</td>
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<td>Der Ring des Nibelungen, Wagner</td>
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<td>Dido and Aeneas, Purcell</td>
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<td>Die Frau ohne Schatten, Strauss</td>
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<td>Die Zauberflöte, Mozart</td>
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<td>Don Carlo, Verdi</td>
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<td>Don Giovanni, Mozart</td>
<td>Rodelinda, Handel</td>
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<td>Don Pasquale, Donizetti</td>
<td>Satyagraha, Glass</td>
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<td>Duke Bluebeard’s Castle, Bartók</td>
<td>Siegfried, Wagner</td>
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<td>Elektra, Strauss</td>
<td>Tosca, Puccini</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Enchanted Wanderer, Shchedrin</td>
<td>La Traviata, Verdi</td>
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<tr>
<td>Eugene Onegin, Tchaikovsky</td>
<td>Die Walküre, Wagner</td>
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<td>Falstaff, Verdi</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gogol, Nesterova, Bespalova, and Kruglik</td>
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<td>Gianni Schicchi, Puccini</td>
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<td>Idomeneo, Re di Creta, Mozart</td>
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<td>Iolanta, Tchaikovsky</td>
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<td>I pagliacci, Leoncavallo</td>
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<td>Il barbiere di Siviglia, Rossini</td>
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<td>Il viaggio a Reims, Rossini</td>
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<td>Jenůfa, Janáček</td>
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<td>Katerina Ismailova, Shostakovitch</td>
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<td>Khovanshchina, Musorgsky</td>
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<td>L’heure Espagnole, Ravel</td>
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<td>L'Elisir d'Amore, Donizetti</td>
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<td>La Bohème, Puccini</td>
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<td>La Forza del Destino, Verdi</td>
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<td>La Traviata, Verdi</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk, Shostakovich</td>
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Continued

Table 2: Repertoire of the Mariinsky Theater (as posted in May, 2011) versus the Metropolitan Opera’s 2011-2012 season
Table 2 continued

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opera</th>
<th>Language</th>
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<td>Le Nozze di Figaro, Mozart</td>
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<td>Le Rossignol, Stravinsky</td>
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<tr>
<td>Les Troyens, Berlioz</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lohengrin, Wagner</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lucia di Lammermoor, Donizetti</td>
<td>Italian</td>
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<tr>
<td>Macbeth, Verdi</td>
<td>Italian</td>
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<tr>
<td>Madama Butterfly, Puccini</td>
<td>Italian</td>
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<tr>
<td>May Night, Rimsky-Korsakov</td>
<td>Russian</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mazepa, Tchaikovsky</td>
<td>Russian</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nabucco, Verdi</td>
<td>Italian</td>
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<tr>
<td>Norma, Bellini</td>
<td>Italian</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oedipus Rex, Stravinsky</td>
<td>French</td>
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<tr>
<td>Orfeo et Euridice, Gluck</td>
<td>Italian</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parsifal, Wagner</td>
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<td>Rigoletto, Verdi</td>
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<td>Prince Igor, Borodin</td>
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<td>Rusalka, Dvořák</td>
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<td>Ruslan and Liudmila, Glinka</td>
<td>Russian</td>
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<td>Sadko, Rimsky-Korsakov</td>
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<td>Semion Kotko, Prokofiev</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Enchantress, Tchaikovsky</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Fiery Angel, Prokofiev</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Gambler, Prokofiev</td>
<td>Russian</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Legend of the Invisible City of Kitezh and the Maiden Fervonia, Rimsky-Korsakov</td>
<td>Russian</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Love for Three Oranges, Prokofiev</td>
<td>Russian</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Makropulos Case, Janáček</td>
<td>Czech</td>
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<td>The Maid of Pskov, Rimsky-Korsakov</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Marriage, Mussorgsky</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Mystery of Paul the Apostle, Karetnikov</td>
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<td>The Nose, Shostakovich</td>
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<td>The Opera of How Ivan Ivanovich Quarrelled with Ivan Nikiforovich, Banshchikov</td>
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<td>The Queen of Spades, Tchaikovsky</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Snow Maiden, Rimsky-Korsakov</td>
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<td>The Story of a Real Man, Prokofiev</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Tale of Tsar Saltan, Rimsky-Korsakov</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Tsar's Bride, Rimsky-Korsakov</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Turn of the Screw, Britten</td>
<td>English</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tosca, Puccini</td>
<td>Italian</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tristan und Isolde, Wagner</td>
<td>German</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tsefal i Prokris, Araja</td>
<td>Russian</td>
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<tr>
<td>Turandot, Puccini</td>
<td>Italian</td>
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<tr>
<td>Un Ballo in Maschera, Verdi</td>
<td>Italian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>War and Peace, Prokofiev</td>
<td>Russian</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3) A final contributing factor is the difference in supertitle practices between the two countries. In the United States almost all opera productions provide synchronized projected supertitles of the text in English translation or in the original English when the opera is performed in the English language. Frequent opera-goers in the United States come to English language operas ready to read and, correspondingly, with no expectation of being able to understand most of what will be sung. The famous director Peter Sellars, for example, related his conversion to the practice of supertitling English operas in a recent interview about his Metropolitan Opera production of *Nixon in China*:

> The mark of a serious thinker is that he is willing to change his mind. Sellars is now resigned to English supertitling of operas in English. ‘David Gockley and I fought to the death with Nixon in Houston, and I refused to allow supertitles. And twenty years later at English National Opera I fought to the death to insist on supertitles… …With Nixon, I have to say, even with the best diction on earth, so many of Alice’s [Alice Nixon, librettist] formulations are so complex. The lines are so extraordinary that I love having it there so you don't have to worry about it.’

Thus, supertitles and diction are like the proverbial chicken and the egg: by providing them, “so [that] you don’t have to worry about it,” you are relieving the singers (and the orchestra, as concerns dynamics) of some responsibility in communicating the text. As the artists and audiences become accustomed to this convenience, standards and habits for diction fall.

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79 For more on the practice of translation of supertitles and the effect of supertitles on opera reception, see Marta Mateo, “Reception, text, and context in the study of opera surtitles,” in *Doubts and Directions in Translation Studies*. Mateo ultimately argues that, “the very existence of surtitles has utterly changed opera reception, as they have brought with them a new way of watching opera, one which is more enriching but also more active, requiring some effort on the part of the audience but, in turn, affording them a fuller enjoyment of the operatic experience.” 178.

In the Russian situation, on the other hand, Russian supertitles are not typically provided during Russian language operas. At the major theaters that foreign tourists visit, English supertitles are supplied during Russian operas and Russian supertitles during operas in other languages. Clearly, this scenario offers strong incentive for Russian singers to make themselves understood when they sing in the Russian language, especially as so much of the repertoire comprises adaptations of beloved classics from Russian literature.

4.4 Singing in the original: language and musical aesthetics

In an interview with Komsomol’skaia Pravda in 2001, the famous soprano, and now director of her own opera institute and theater, Galina Vishnevskaya, known to have raised eyebrows with her public pronouncements more than once, objected in the strongest terms to the staging of opera in a language other than the language of the public:

Russian performers have already learned how to scream on stage in the Italian language. I cannot stand this. It is indecent to sing in the Bolshoi or Mariinsky Theater in Italian. It is disrespect toward the public. It is not a symphony orchestra; the public wishes to understand.\textsuperscript{81}

The debate about whether to sing in the original or in the language of the public is nothing new to opera, and there is no need to repeat all the well-worn arguments for each side here. In Russia, it is indeed the case that now opera is most often performed in the original language in the major theaters – a major change from the practice of Soviet days of singing in Russian translation – and in this respect opera culture in Russian has

\textsuperscript{81} “S menia khvatit iubileia v Bol’shom,” Komsomol’skaia Pravda, October 25, 2001.
become more similar to that in the West, where the original has been the preferred language since the post-World War II era. Some other Russian music professionals, and certainly a portion of the public, as I can tell from conversations overheard in the coatrooms of theaters, share Vishnevskaya’s opinion that opera should be performed in Russian in Russia. Among those who hold that view, the practice of singing in the original is often derided as a passing fashion that must be waited out. But the vast majority of practicing vocalists and others involved in opera productions in Russia, like their American counterparts, now support the notion that singing in the original, when possible, is preferable.

In much of public discourse, a reason given for the superiority of the original libretto has been expressed as aspiration toward a general, unspecified fulfillment of the composer’s (and obviously librettist’s) intentions, in accordance with the late twentieth century trend toward “historically accurate” performance, or at least the illusion of it. Questions of performance “authenticity” are not, however, particularly pertinent to the subject of this study. Two of the arguments for singing opera in the original – neither of which is by any means a recent discovery – are of some relevance here, however: 1) the limitations of artistic translation and its effects on the vocal phrase in music, and 2) the inevitable effect on musical aesthetics of the languages in their phonetic distinctiveness.

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82 Mark Herman and Ronnie Apter, “Opera Translation” in Translation: Theory and Practice, Tension and Interdependence, 101. In this article, the authors discuss the options that translators of opera have with respect to “rhythm, rhyme, sound and repetition.”
83 Moscow director Nikolai Kuznetsov, for example, published a book in 2004 about the art of opera entitled The Thought and the Word (Mysl’ i slovo), a large portion of which makes the case for opera in the language of the public.
84 Taruskin has much to say on the question of “authenticity” in music performance, and several of his essays on the subject are collected in the book Text and Act: Essays on Music and Performance.
The poet W.H. Auden, both a librettist and a translator of libretti himself, as well as a skeptic of opera translation, touches on both of these issues in his warnings about translation’s serious drawbacks:

It is precisely because I believe that, in listening to a song (as distinct from a chant), we hear, not words, but syllables, that I am violently hostile to the performance of opera in translation. Wagner in Italian or Verdi in English sounds intolerable, and would still sound so if the poetic merits of the translation were greater than those of the original, because the new syllables have no apt relation to the pitch and tempo of the notes with which they are associated. The poetic value of the notes may provoke a composer’s imagination, but it is their syllabic values which determine the kind of vocal line he writes. In song, poetry is expendable, syllables are not.

Translation is a dubious business at best and we are inclined to agree with those who believe that operas should always be given in their native tongue. However, if audiences demand them in their own way, they must accept the consequences. Obviously, the texture and weight of the original words set by the composer are an element in his orchestration and any change of the words is therefore an alteration of the music itself. Yet the goal of the translator, however unattainable, must be to make audiences believe that the words they are hearing are the words the composer actually set, which means that a too-literal translation of the original text may sometimes prove a falsification.

Auden’s perspective is useful here because it illustrates the nature of the dilemma companies face when choosing between performance in the original language or the language of the public: namely, that there will always be a trade-off between accessibility to the meaning of the text and the aesthetics of the aural experience. This

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85 Auden collaborated with Stravinsky as librettist for *The Rake’s Progress*. Stravinsky is known for a syllabic treatment of text in his music. The two undoubtedly discussed this concept during their work on this opera, and it is telling that the quoted passage is from the same year as the opera’s premiere. The generalizing of the syllabic nature of sung speech in all of opera is questionable. The next chapter on vowels in Russian singing, in fact, deals with the questions in some detail, showing that the actual vowel sounds that are used by Russian singers depend on the degree of syllabicity in the phrase, which is itself dependent on a great variety of musical factors.


87 Auden, *The Magic Flute*, XIV-XV.
balance is negotiated in the practice of translation, as Auden mentions, and is also a
decision to be made by the director, who must decide upon the language of performance.
The perceived needs and preferences of the company’s audience (or prospective
audience) often motivate the decision. For this reason, many companies that, as a rule,
sing in the original, make exceptions on occasion – take, for example, *Hansel and
Gretel*, in the Metropolitan Opera’s upcoming season. Other companies, particularly
ones that are local in scale, choose to perform exclusively in the language of the public.

Those who believe in a trade-off or balance at the core of the controversy over
performance language and take sides, privileging one value over another, perhaps see
consequences for the vocalist in his or her study of lyric dictions. If the singer cannot
produce the language of the public intelligibly, the entire rationale of singing in
translation is negated. If he or she cannot produce the original language with sensitivity
to stress, vowel color, and correct articulation of consonants, then the true benefit of
singing in the original language is, likewise, lost. This does not mean that the singer
must have native-like pronunciation (as was noted above, sometimes native singers can
be quite awful models for the diction of their own language). Instead, good lyric diction
can be acquired by learning the precise articulation of the sounds of the target language,
which are most important to being understood (essentially, the phonemes), and
rehearsing with a good vocal coach who can instruct the vocalist on ways to avoid the
most egregious errors in style. Certainly, the task is a complex one. But it is greatly
simplified by first determining what the sounds of the language’s lyric diction actually
are, and how they differ from the spoken language. This goal has not yet been
accomplished for Russian lyric diction, and it comprises the gap that the next two chapters seek to fill.
Chapter 5: Vowels and Vowel Reduction

How unpleasant are these motley voices in which the sound $A$ flies out from the belly, the sound $E$ from the glottis, $I$ squeezes through the constrained throat, the sound $O$ hoots, just like in a barrel, and $Y$, $bl$, $IO$ make their way to such places, from which you won’t pull them out by any means.\(^8\)

- Konstantin Stanislavsky on vowels in theatrical speech

5.1 Vowels in lyric dictions

Vowel sounds are a subject of endless discussion in the literature on vocal pedagogy because they are the carriers of the musical tone. They are responsible for the creation of the musical line in a piece of vocal music. The positioning of the vocal tract and articulators for the formation of vowels is one of the major contributors (along with phonation-centered issues such as breath flow and vocal fold approximation) to the creation of a pleasing and individual vocal timbre. Therefore, it is not at all uncommon for the important function of vowels in communicating texts to be neglected in the pursuit of an expressive musical line or beautiful timbre. Indeed, a central tenet of standard vocal pedagogy – the ideal of an even scale with a unified timbre throughout the registers – may, in some respect, be seen as working at odds with the pursuit of a free, nuanced, and expressive enunciation of vowels. In other words, both vowel quality and vocal timbre are in large part determined by formant values, which are, in turn, determined by the formation of the resonator, that is, the vocal tract (pharyngeal cavity, mouth, tongue,

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\(^8\) Stanislavskii, *Rabota aktera nad soboi*, 65.
lips). It is no surprise, then, that the two priorities may commonly interfere with one another. For this reason, the negotiation of vowels, even (and sometimes especially) in the native language of the vocalist, dominates a significant portion of time and energy in vocal study.

Vinokur\textsuperscript{89} ascribes a dual role to stage pronunciation: first, that of communicating the text; second, that of expressing – a tool of the actor’s trade, along with gesture, costuming, etc. If this is an accurate account of stage pronunciation’s function, then, in considering singing pronunciation, vowels must have a triple role: the communicative function of relaying the text; the musical function of relaying the melody; and the expressive function of interpreting both words and music intelligently. Owing to the complexity of negotiating these competing demands, the vowels of any language’s lyric diction differ dramatically from those used in speech pronunciation, including those of widely accepted, codified stage pronunciations. In the case of Russian lyric diction, some of these differences are striking and, as we will see, consequential for linguistic study of Russian phonetics.

As a result of the aesthetic need for vocal instruments capable of creating sonorous, \textit{legato} musical lines, the vowel systems of all languages may be expected to undergo changes when they are sung by classically trained vocalists. Although the individual changes are language dependent, the motivation behind many of them is nonetheless rather straightforward. So these changes are part of the most basic level of a lyric singing diction, as distinguished from a speech pronunciation. Often lyric dictions demand a reduction of non-sonorous vowel sounds from the vowel system or a

\textsuperscript{89} Vinokur, 21.
neutralizing of features considered disruptive to the continuous musical line. A familiar example of this from English diction would be the elimination of rhotic (R-colored) vowels and substitution with a true vowel. Surely the most extreme example would be the vocalization of the mute French vowels. According to the aesthetics of each singing language, as interpreted by the singer together with his or her teacher or coach, various other, more nuanced substitutions take place for the sake of an even musical line.

The commentary on singing in French offered by the tenor Nicolai Gedda, who is widely regarded as a singer of rare intelligence and exemplary diction, illustrates the complexity of the issue of vowel color:

‘If you hear the great singers of the past there are always pure vowels. If I teach, I will stress very much that young people learn the language and the pronunciation
‘The French say that the non-French singers who speak the language sing French better than the French, because the French are exaggerating the nasals too much. They’re closing and they lose the line.’
‘French should be slightly Italianized,’ I offered.
‘Exactly! Of course we should say sans . . .’ He demonstrated the French nasal vowel. ‘But the French are overdoing it. I was lucky to work with people who were very, very strict with legato, expression, line, and style…’

Gedda describes the following paradoxical but not atypical situation: Fine lyric diction (not to mention style, though that is a subject outside the scope of this chapter) can often be achieved more easily by those with intimate knowledge of the sounds and rhythms of the spoken language, however, excessive faithfulness to those same speech sounds may lead to perceived problems in musicality and style. Of course, such perceived problems are subject to the tastes and background of the listener; judgments about the

appropriateness of vowel modifications\textsuperscript{91} will not be uniform between native and non-native speakers, or even between subgroups or individuals of different linguistic, socio-economic, regional, and musical backgrounds within these two categories. Yet, as an increasingly globalized vocal aesthetic grows in demand, it is clear that the vocalists appearing in prestigious opera theaters often use changes to the vowel systems of the spoken languages during their singing in conformity with that aesthetic.

In the passage quoted above, interviewer Hines and Gedda agree that, in the case of French, the changes to the vowels of a language for singing amount to an \textit{Italianization}. Since at least some vocal specialists from every major national school of singing claim that the techniques of the true, old Italian \textit{bel canto} are their nation’s own aesthetic, it is no surprise that some teachers of all nationalities, including Russian, call for \textit{Italianization} of vowels and sometimes consonants while teaching song in their native languages.\textsuperscript{92} This phenomenon is not solely rooted in romantic nostalgia for the bygone days of “authentic \textit{bel canto}.” As far as vowels are concerned, there is at least one concrete phonetic reason for which an orientation toward the Italian language could theoretically be expected to be conducive to a more fluid and sonorous vocal line.

The small vowel inventory and limited number of allophones in standardized Italian as compared to other major Western singing languages is reasonably viewed as

\textsuperscript{91} The term “vowel modification” refers to vowel substitutions that singers make to achieve certain aesthetic goals that relate more to beauty of timbre than to diction. It will be defined precisely in section 5.2.

\textsuperscript{92} For information on such claims in the English, French, German, and Italian schools see Miller, \textit{National Schools of Singing}. Regarding the Russian School, the claim was repeated to me continually in my interviews with pedagogues.
advantageous to the nurturing of a voice capable of balanced tone and legato lines.93

Consider the vowels utilized in most vocalizations (i.e. wordless exercises) in American vocal pedagogy: /a/, /i/, /u/ most commonly, and also /o/, /e/. Though varying colors of these vowels will inevitably be exercised in developing a consistent timbre throughout the range, nonetheless it is comparatively rare for other intermediate vowel sounds to be specifically cultivated in scales, arpeggios, etc. during vocal exercises, warm-ups, and other vocalizations in isolation from the repertoire.94 Often, these five vowels will be designated “the pure vowels” by teachers of singing. When young aspiring singers begin to take on repertoire they are commonly assigned old Italian songs of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.95 In moving from exercises to such a repertoire, the beginning singer need only learn to discriminate between the phonemic open [ɛ], [ɔ] and close [e],

93 Miller states the case succinctly: “It might be better affirmed that Italian is an easier language for singing than any other because it contains fewer possible vowel formations and because it presents a more favorable condition with regard to consonants, requiring fewer radical adjustments of the vocal tract than does either speech or song in most other European languages,” 172. Looking ahead to chapter six of this dissertation, I will argue that judging by vowels alone, Russian should still be a comparatively manageable singing language for non-native vocalists, but it is the consonants of Russian that cause considerable problems, necessitating “radical adjustments” that are indeed cumbersome for the uninitiated to accomplish.

94 These observations are likely applicable, with modification, to the vocal pedagogies of other Western nations as well. However, investigation into the specifics of each national school is well beyond the scope of this dissertation. For a discussion of the most common practices in England, France and Germany, I would direct the reader, once again, to Miller’s National Schools of Singing. Notably, in Germany he observes a tendency of singers to vocalize on umlauted vowels, maintaining the umlaut posture as the positional center of the whole vocal line – that is, letting it influence all the vowels, even in native German repertoire (56). This practice is apparently at odds with cultivation of the five (really seven) Italian vowels first, which I treat in this paragraph. However, Miller associates this practice with a uniquely and identifiably German aesthetic that stands somewhat apart from the increasingly globalized international school of classical singing (which, of course, includes many fine German singers). As concerns the vowels of preference for vocalization among Russians, in my observations of lessons [i] and [a] were clearly favored.

95 In the United States, the Alfred Publishing series Italian Songs and Arias and similar collections are considered by many an indispensible pedagogical text for the early years of training. In my interviews with Russian pedagogues, several indicated a preference for ancient Italian arias (starin’nye ital’ianskie arii), along with Russian and Ukrainian folk songs, as appropriate repertoire for the beginning vocalist.
[o] in order to acquire the vowel sounds necessary for competent Italian diction. Understandably, this relative simplicity in vowel formations creates a favorable environment for developing other qualities of the voice-as-instrument. Study of the French, German, or English repertoire at least doubles the number of vowel sounds (vocal tract formations) that the teacher and student must attempt to incorporate into a well-tuned, even *legato*, because of the much larger vowel inventories of these languages.

In addition to the potential pedagogical advantages of a small vowel inventory, a more limited set of vowels, in the context of singing, should also be advantageous to perceptual accuracy as well. Quite simply, the limitation of a listener’s options increases the likelihood that the targeted sound will be perceived as intended. Underlying this is also the fact that Italian vowels not only number few, but also are located far apart from one another in the perceptual vowel space. And from a vocal-pedagogical standpoint, one could make the argument that the Italian vowels’ peripherality in the acoustic vowel space is conducive to fast acquisition of the most significant contrasts.

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96 Even the necessity of a clear distinction between the open/close mid-vowel phonemes of Italian for good Italian diction is a matter of controversy among coaches of Italian repertoire, with some authorities insisting on a speech-like distinction in the lyric diction, and others favoring one or the other variant for all or most singing, according to his or her own aesthetic preferences. This subject will be discussed further in section 5.10, in which I argue that preoccupation with the issue of the Italian mid-vowels needlessly obfuscates the understanding of Russian mid-vowels.

97 For the current theoretical understanding of the “perceptual vowel space,” see Ken Stevens’s “The Quantal Nature of Speech.” Also, *Journal of Phonetics* 17 (1-2) (1989) is a special issue dedicated to quantal theory.
The location of the vowels in the acoustic space (F₁-F₂ plot) for any language may be expected to be somewhat more consistent and peripheral in lyric diction than in speech because of the deliberate and elongated nature of articulation in classical singing. While here I do not intend to test that hypothesis or pursue the subject, I would point out that related phonological studies that juxtaposed the plots of formal and informal speech found spontaneous speech to shrink the vowel space and acoustical analyses of the sounds of singing also support this assumption.

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99 Study of the spectral characteristics of sung vowels has been performed by Bloothooft and Plomp “Spectral analysis of sung vowels. iii. characteristics of singers and modes of singing. III. Characteristics of singers and modes of singing.” A work-in-progress that looks, specifically, into the changes to acoustic vowels space between spoken and sung vowels of the same text is being undertaken by Bradley, “An investigation of the acoustic vowel space of singing,” 2010. His preliminary findings appear to lend some support to the hypothesis put forward here in that he found a smaller acoustic vowel space and a smaller standard deviation for vowel formants in the sung versions. However, his discussion of the finding, as of yet, focuses primarily on the effects of conscious lowering of the larynx (an instructional technique that is
Yet, perhaps paralleling the paradox described earlier in this section, in which intimate language knowledge can be at once both a necessity for and an obstacle to exemplary lyric diction, the modern aesthetic norms for classical voices would be expected to exclude sounds on the extreme periphery of the acoustic vowel space from use in singing. For example, excessive brightness in front vowels (raised F\textsubscript{2}) is widely considered undesirable and described pejoratively as strident or “spread” in vocal music circles. On the other hand, an immoderately back, low vowel such as /ɒ/ is also widely considered unfavorable for beautiful singing, not to mention inaudible under orchestral accompaniment. These and other sounds on the extreme low end of the formant spectrum are often intentionally raised and forwarded, not in keeping with spoken standards, through such singerly admonitions as “sing in the mask” and “bring the sound forward,” as well as exercises for developing consistency of tone and smooth legato. Interestingly, there is at least some evidence that Chaliapin may have exhibited a shrinking of the vowel space in his singing, according to Morozov’s comparison of the spectra of the singer’s spoken and sung vowels. Morozov claims that “Chaliapin’s vowels turned out surprisingly similar [to one another] in their spectra, despite very precise diction and the absence of distortion.”\textsuperscript{100}

The purpose of the foregoing discussion is to supply some phonetic specificity to the various ways in which vowel systems of spoken languages undergo change during classical singing. With this background, we may now define terms used in the

\textsuperscript{100}Morozov, 83.
investigation into vowel reduction that comprises the major portion of this chapter. In this dissertation, processes that lead to greater acoustical accuracy in approximating target vowels (as a result of more deliberate articulation and an expansion of the articulatory and acoustic vowel space) result in the diminishing of what will be called vowel 
undershoot. Note that many other authors have included undershoot as a form of vowel 
reduction. Here, however, vowel reduction will be defined (see section 5.4) as a separate, specific phonetic process. Processes that lead to a reduction in the acoustic or articulatory vowel space or a shifting of that space in one direction or another in comparison to the space of speech, for the purpose of a more pleasing or consistent timbre throughout the range, will be referred to as vowel modification. Processes of modification – a musical/vocal phenomenon of no relevance to speech sounds – are also clearly distinct from phonetic vowel reduction, though the two processes interact in the vowel decisions of the Russian singers whose recordings provide the data for this study.

5.2 Defining vowel modification as distinct from vowel reduction

Vowel modification for reasons of vocal aesthetics is a phenomenon that occurs to varying degrees in virtually all schools of classical solo singing, as well as choral singing, though it is not universally acknowledged or identified as such. Perhaps the most widely recognized and accepted instance of vowel modification is that which occurs in the upper soprano register, when the musical tessitura results in fundamental frequencies much higher than the frequencies of the first formants of the high vowels. As the musical pitch rises, more and more vowels are precluded from being perceptibly produced, regardless of the formation of the vocal tract. Indeed, forcibly positioning the vocal tract for vowels
that are acoustically prohibited at these pitches is known to give a non-resonant, “pinched” sound of no musical use.\textsuperscript{101} For this reason, sopranos’ choices of vowel in the upper registers are quite reasonably determined more by concerns of musical and vocal aesthetics than by requirements of diction.

Vowel modification does not only occur when it is confirmedly acoustically justified, however. Singers use modifications throughout the range to achieve desired musical outcomes. Some examples of practices that may be considered vowel modification, all of which I have observed repeatedly, include: the aforementioned shrinking of the vowel spaced for the purpose of an even legato; the use of sonorous vowels for more volume; the use of less sonorous vowels for an easier and more focused pianissimo; the forwarding of vowels for greater carrying power over orchestras; and even “vowel matching,” as practiced in choral singing. The final example is the manner in which choristers are asked to sing with the same vowel color as their neighbors, creating a more resonant and clear sound.

The most comprehensive, intriguing, and extreme exposition of vowel modification and its virtues is found in the works on vocal technique by the American pedagogue Berton Coffin.\textsuperscript{102} While only a handful of teachers practice his methods to the letter, nonetheless his work influences the vocal pedagogy practiced in the United States.

\textsuperscript{101} Lloyd Smith and Brian Scott performed an experiment that tested vowel intelligibility in the upper part of the soprano range and found that intelligibility could be increased by 1) CVC presentation which provides transitional cues to assist perception; and 2) raising of the larynx, which allowed tracking of the fundamental with the first formant (raising of the first formant). The first of these options is of potential use for singers practicing significant vowel modification, who still desire good intelligibility. The second, as acknowledged by the authors, is of limited use as such a laryngeal manipulation is at odds with the dictates of most vocal techniques used in classical singing: “the resulting sound was described as a very ‘white’ or ‘shallow’ vocal tone.” Smith and Scott, 14.

\textsuperscript{102} Coffin, Sounds of Singing: Principles and Applications of Vocal Techniques with Chromatic Vowel Chart
Most importantly here, a look at his methods and recommendations helps illustrate the nature of vowel modification (in its most extreme form) for vocal aesthetics. Coffin used a “vowel resonator” – a speaker that emits the fundamental frequencies of the human vocal range – to find the vocal tract formations (vowels) that lead to the loudest sympathetic resonance at each pitch for each fach (vocal classification). He then organized his findings in a “chromatic vowel chart for voice building and tone placing.” The chart includes four rows: front vowels, neutral (central) vowels, back vowels, and umlaut vowels. Each row is composed, then, of the vowel qualities (indicated in IPA) that Coffin found to be the most resonant at each pitch through the chromatic scale. He also indicated vowel qualities that can be used to create a “somber” timbre at each pitch and those that should be avoided. The chart is to be placed behind the piano keys during practice for guidance in deciding on vowel modifications used for individual notes in the repertoire.

Coffin’s approach is basically concerned with balancing the linguistic demands placed on the resonators with the demands of “instrumental” singing, defined as producing maximally resonant sounds:

I must conclude that the basis of “instrumental” singing is the harmonic series. The more ringing and vibrant the singer wishes his voice to become, the more he should utilize the harmonic values of the Chromatic Vowel Chart. The more a singer wishes to approximate the sounds of speech, the more he can let his voice become non-harmonic. There will be a reduced size of voice and carrying power in the process. The Chromatic Vowel Chart is concerned with the formation of the voice as a musical instrument. The degree to which a singer desires to deviate from the harmonic is at his own artistic discretion.  

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103 The quoted words are the title of the chart that accompanies Coffin’s book.  
104 Coffin, 59.
The danger of an overzealous adherence to this chart or this approach as a whole is clear. Since the chart maps out only ideal vowel formations for four classes of vowels, a singer limiting himself to the recommended vowels may be expected to produce an unnatural and unexpressive, and perhaps unintelligible, diction. Indeed, this is a critique sometimes voiced against followers of Coffin’s school – that they sing IPA sounds rather than languages, and it shows. However, to some extent all classical singers use vowel modifications that are essentially the same, though less codified, process propounded by Coffin. Every time an adjustment is made to the vocal tract to change dynamics or modify timbre, the vowel is also modified.

It is by now clear that vowel modification is a very different phenomenon from vowel undershoot. The former is usually consciously performed and motivated by musical/aesthetic intentions; the latter occurs in less attentive speech modes and, thus, the opposite context from that of classical singing. Both phenomena are distinct from phonetic vowel reduction, the main topic in the sections that follow. A proper understanding of vowel modification is important not only for defining “vowel reduction” as used here, but also for the methods used in the investigation that follows. That is, the possible vowel modification practices of the singers whose recordings supply the data can potentially influence vowel choices more than the phonetic factors that are the main subject. This possibility was kept in view throughout the collection of tokens, analysis, and discussion.
5.3 The vowel system of Contemporary Standard Russian

In the stressed position in spoken Contemporary Standard Russian (CSR) there are five vowels: [i,e,a,o,u], with /i/ realized as [ɨ] after hard consonants.\(^{105}\)

In the immediately pretonic position, after a hard consonant the number of vowels decreases to three: [i,a,u]. After soft consonants in this position, the vowels that may occur are just: [i] and [u].

In the remaining unstressed syllables, after hard consonants occur vowels: [i,ə,u]. After soft consonants, the same vowels occur in the remaining unstressed syllables as in the immediately pretonic: [i] and [u].

In CSR there are a considerable number of vowel allophones determined by the surrounding consonantal environment. As the reader may already understand from the discussion of Italian in section 5.1, learning to produce phonemic distinctions is immeasurably more important in the quest to acquire proficient diction than learning the allophonic nuances. In fact, given the influence of vowel modification on the target vowel qualities, the usefulness of painstaking study of allophonic variations to vocalists is doubtful. In the final section of this chapter, I discuss one example of how preoccupation with allophonic variation in vowel quality – usually due to the influence of a singer’s linguistic knowledge of the pronunciation of other major singing languages – often leads to unnecessary complication in the study of Russian diction. For the purposes of the next few sections on vowel reduction in Russian lyric diction, most cases of

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\(^{105}\) I am following here the description given by Panov, *Istoriia russkogo literaturnogo proiznosheniia XVIII-XX vv*, 47. Note that in other language descriptions, [ɨ] has been listed as a sixth phoneme.
allophonic variation of vowels in spoken CSR, much like undershoot and vowel modification, will be regarded as not of central relevant to the topic at hand.

5.4 Vowel reduction and its motivations

The definition of vowel reduction that I am using is Katherine Crosswhite’s in her work on vowel reduction and its underlying motivations.106 In distinction from tempo and register dependent undershoot of target qualities of vowels, which may occur in both unstressed and stressed syllables, vowel reduction here will refer to cases in which multiple underlying vowel qualities categorically neutralize in a stress-dependent manner, regardless of the speech tempo. The inventory of unstressed syllables of the vowel system of CSR, as described in the previous section, is largely determined by vowel reduction as defined here.

Vowel undershoot, on the other hand, is the shrinking of the vowel space that tends to be stronger with increasing speed and informality of speech.107 That is, vowels become more like each other, and often move toward the center of the vowel space – toward [ə] – or become increasingly influenced by the surrounding consonant environment. Since this phenomenon is by definition dependent on an informal, relaxed articulation of the vowels, it is clear that it is not of great interest to the lyric diction. Employing this kind of vowel undershoot, in fact, would be anathema to vocal coaches in almost any context.

106 Katherine Crosswhite, *Vowel Reduction in Optimality Theory*, 3.
107 For detailed study of vowel undershoot see Koopmans-van Beinum, “Vowel Contrast Reduction, an Acoustic and Perceptual Study of Dutch Vowels in Various Speech Conditions.” Also, Moon and Lindblom, “Interaction between Duration, Context, and Speaking Style in English Stressed Vowels.”
Illustrative of the difference between the vowel reductions at issue here and undershoot is the fact that rhymes based on vowel reduction are commonly used in Russian poetry (and song texts), in contrast with vowel changes due to undershoot, which would not be a valid basis for rhyme. The examples below are shown in phonemic, unreduced transcription.\footnote{Examples and their transcriptions taken from Crosswhite, 7. For full texts of the verses, see Lermontov, 287, 328.}

И белой одежды красивые складки
I b'el'oj o'd'ezd i kras'iv ij e sklad'k'i

По плечам фариса вились в беспорядке
Po pl'o'et s fa'ri sa v'i'l'i s v b'espor'ad k'e

-Mikhail Lermontov, “Three Palms”

На груди утеса-великана;
Na gru'd'i ut'sa-vel'i kan a

Утром в путь она умчалась рано
U trom v put' on a um't' alas' rano

-Lermontov, “The Cliff”

Perhaps an even clearer illustration of how this kind of reduction differs from undershoot is the fact that the changes spoken of here occur regardless of the speech tempo, even in very slow and/or emphatic speech such as in instructional materials for learning the language.\footnote{See Crosswhite, 8. She cites audio materials such as Dover’s \textit{Listen and Learn Russian}, and suggests that in “this type of audio tape, words are spoken slowly and in isolation for the benefit of a non-native speaker…” and that “vowel reduction changes are, if anything, produced in a slightly exaggerated manner.”} Hence, the reductions in CSR are obligatory in nature, in contrast to those produced by the process of undershoot. Speakers of CSR pronounce the
underlying vowels only in infrequent speech acts that emphasize each (or a single)
syllable of a word, most commonly occurring to demonstrate spelling.

With the nature of the vowel changes at hand described, now follows a
description of the specific reductions that take place. It has long been recognized that
there are two different types of reduction in CSR: one occurs in the immediately pretonic
position and the other in the other unstressed syllables. Vinokur describe them just this
way, as “type I” and “type II,” representing pretonic and other unstressed, respectively.\textsuperscript{110}
Crosswhite refers to the types as “moderate” (pretonic) and “extreme” (other unstressed)
neutralizations. For clarity, I replicate here Crosswhite’s figures,\textsuperscript{111} used to illustrate how
vowels reduce in CSR after non-palatalized and palatalized consonants, resulting in the
position-dependent vowel phone sub-inventories described in the previous section (5.3).

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure4.png}
\caption{Type 1 or moderate vowel reduction in CSR as modeled by Crosswhite.}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{110} Vinokur, 52-53.
\textsuperscript{111} Crosswhite, 61-62.
In comparing the summaries of reductions in CSR in figures 2 and 3, two points are striking. First, the reduction patterns after palatalized consonants are identical in the moderate and extreme positions. Second, the change from underlying to reduced vowel after palatalized consonant involves a much greater leap across the articulatory vowel space than in the case of vowels after unpalatalized consonants.

Crosswhite explains the occurrence of two-patterned vowel reduction patterns, such as those illustrated above, by suggesting two distinct underlying motivations (both themselves motivated by easing perception) for reduction in the two positions. In her theory, the moderate, immediately pretonic position vowels fulfill the function of contrast enhancement. The reduction vowels ([i, a]) used in the immediately pretonic position are, therefore, peripheral in the vowel space, acoustically dispersed, and least

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112 Crosswhite puts the vowel /e/ in parenthesis because “it is not clear if this portion of the process can be generalized to all dialects [of CSR].” 61.
likely to be misinterpreted by the listener. In the other unstressed positions, the underlying motivation is said to be prominence reduction, hence non-sonorous vowels ([i, ə]) make up the reduction set.\textsuperscript{113}

The proposition that two distinct motivations are at work governing the reductions that take place in Russian speech will be relevant in speculating about the factors that influence vowel options in Russian singing diction. Clearly, both the contrast enhancement and the prominence reduction motivations are tied to the prosodic nature of Russian, which will be discussed in the following section (5.5).\textsuperscript{114} At first glance, we might guess that for a couple of reasons reductions motivated by contrast enhancement will be less distorted from their speech norms in singing than those motivated by prominence reduction: 1) Vocalists, especially on the operatic stage, have an imperative to make every note clearly audible, even at low dynamic levels. Moreover, there is no guarantee that notes on non-prominent speech syllables will not have forte dynamic levels indicated by the composer or conductor. Could this motivate an inclination toward more sonorous (i.e. resonant) vowel renderings, if there is a choice to be made? 2) A song, in accordance with the nature of music, has a melodic prosody all its own. In the case of vocal music, which sets words to a musical phrase, there occurs a weaving of the speech prosody with the metrical prosody indicated by the meter and other musical

\textsuperscript{113} For discussion of the parameters that make up “sonority” see Crosswhite, 36-37. Though there are competing theories about its precise nature, nonetheless we may be assured that sonority increases with increasing loudness and duration. Interesting from a vocal-pedagogical point of view is the proposed correlation of sonority with, specifically, jaw opening found in Malsch and Fulcher, “Categorizing Phonological Segments: The Inadequacy of the Sonority Hierarchy,” 70-80.

\textsuperscript{114} Roman Jakobson’s description of vowel reduction, in fact, roots the phenomenon in the historical change of Russian from a pitch-accent system to a stress-system. Crosswhite views her own discoveries as “the Optimality-Theoretic formalization of concepts discussed in Jakobson.” 185. See Roman Jakobson, “Remarques sur s’évolution phonologique de russe comparée à celle des autres langues slavs.”

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factors, including note durations, pitch, syncopation, indicated musical articulations, etc.

In some settings of metered texts, the poetic meters do not directly align with the musical meters. In such cases, then, there are at least three competing prosodies that vocalists must negotiate in their musical phrasing. If prominence reduction functions to facilitate or reinforce the speech prosody of the spoken language, then in song it may logically operate (i.e. motivate vowel reduction) on different syllables in order to better accommodate the other prosody at work in the music.\textsuperscript{115}

In summary, vowel reduction as defined here is the most interesting issue in Russian lyric diction for several distinct reasons. First, native singers do not always produce the same vowels in singing as would be expected in either standard or theatrical speech. This fact makes an analysis of the patterns of vowel reduction useful in discussion of the underlying motivations of vowel reduction as a phonetic process.

Second, as illustrated above, the specific reductions that take place in unstressed positions in Russian are, for a singer’s purposes, drastic changes in vowel color. The vowels do not always neutralize to an adjacent vowel in the vowel space; in some cases the underlying vowel and the vowel to which it reduces lie on opposite sides of the vowel space. And finally, decisions about when to use the speech-like, reduced vowel and when to use the vowel indicated by the orthography in singing are not straightforward: they can potentially be influenced by a considerable number of musical factors including tempo,

\textsuperscript{115} Here it should be noted that speech prosody itself comprises several levels of prosodic hierarchy: mora, syllable, foot, prosodic word, accentual phrase (phonological phrase), and intonational phrase. In the singing context, presumably accentual phrases and intonational phrases are relevant and interact with musical prosody, but are determined largely by composer and dictated in the music notation (pitch and rhythm), especially as concerns intonational phrases. The singer reserves more interpretive rights concerning the former categories of word prosody, etc. and this is the prosody that I refer to in this dissertation with the term “speech prosody.” For more on the levels of prosodic structure see Mary Beckman and Janet Pierrehumbert’s work on the tone structure of Japanese.
note duration, mood, genre, musical articulations (staccato versus legato, for example). Published transcriptions of Russian song texts, and often, in my experience, even those provided by personal coaches, tend to embrace extremes – either remaining overly faithful to either the orthography or spoken CSR (See section 5.6). The investigation conducted in the following sections both encourages a more balanced approach and explains the potential effects of various musical and linguistic factors on vowel choices of accomplished native vocalists; thereby it may lead to better informed coaches, and ultimately more nuanced and expressive performance of Russian repertoire.

5.5 A hybrid prosodic structure

Russian vowel reduction’s rootedness in Russian prosody is obvious, especially if one accepts Crosswhite’s account of vowel reduction’s underlying motivations as a combination of syllable-dependent contrast enhancement and prominence reduction. In her study Crosswhite discusses the prosodic nature of CSR from which she works. Specifically, the model says that CSR is 1) iambic, and 2) that unfooted syllables are nonmoraic, where a *mora* is a timing unit used to calculate prosodic weight. The prior supposition describes the distinction between the vowels in stressed syllables and those in immediately pretonic syllables. The latter describes the distinction between the moderate vowel reductions in the immediately pretonic position and the extreme ones in other unstressed positions, since those vowels in the “weak periphery” are outside of the foot and extremely durationally impoverished.

Whether one subscribes to this description of Russian prosody or not, it is clear that the prosody of a given Russian text is necessarily altered when put to music, at the very least because of the metrical, dynamic, and articulatory features of the melody. As mentioned in the previous section, the prosody of text in music could indeed be complicated by combinations of a great variety of prosodic interests, including those of speech, those of poetic meters, and those of musical meters and other musical indicators that by no means uniformly reinforce the poetic or speech prosody. Attempting to develop a complete taxonomy of such combinations would be unwieldy. However, it is useful to have a very basic prosodic typology that accounts for speech and musical patterns for reference in an analysis of the recordings. The system I propose for labeling syllables/notes is the following:

**Type 1**: The syllable is both stressed in speech and accented in music, where accent means the note either occurs on an ictus or a musical accent is indicated in the score.

**Type 2**: The syllable is not stressed in speech, but is accented in the music, using the above definition.

**Type 3**: The syllable is neither stressed in speech nor accented in the music.

**Type X**: The rarer instances in which a stressed syllable is given an unaccented musical note.

For example, the syllables of the first line of the well-known Glinka romance, “Ia pomniu chudnoe mgnovenie,” would be labeled as follows:

```
2 1 3 1 3 3 3 1 3 3 3 1 3 1 3 1
я пом-ню чуд-но-е мгно-вень-е: пе-ре-до мной я-ви-лась ты,
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Figure 6: Excerpt from Glinka romance, “Ia pomniu chudnoe mgnovenje” (1840), words by Alexander Pushkin.

The preponderance of 1s and 3s above demonstrate that the setting of the poem remains prosodically “correct,” with the stressed syllables coinciding with musical accent. And while syllables of type 1 and 3 will generally be the case, syllables of the second type appear periodically and should not be regarded as entirely exceptional, nor only as indicators of syncopated accent (though that could be one of the manifestations of type 2). Below is the first line of the Musorgsky romance “Otchego, skazhi, dusha devitsa.”

3 3 1 3 1 3 2 1 3 3 2 3 1 3 2 3 3 1 3 3
От-че-го, ска-жи, ду-ша де\textsuperscript{117}-ви-ца, ты си-дишь те-перь при-го-рю-ни-лась

\textsuperscript{117} The stress of this word is variable. I assign it in accordance with the poetic meter: дёвица.
It is apparent even from these two small excerpts how the composers, as would be expected, tend to use syllables of the second type on words that are less lexically prominent, such as pronouns and adverbs. As the reader will find below, lexical category is one of the factors that influences the use of vowel reduction in unstressed syllables by vocalists. Whereas composers have the option of deemphasizing words or word parts through type 2 prosody, for vocalists vowel reduction of unstressed syllables is a tool that may be used for deemphasizing words; because this prosody type may only be legitimately used on unstressed syllables, it is unique among the many other linguistic and musical tools that can apply to any syllable, stressed or unstressed, to increase or decrease emphasis, such as dynamic changes, musical articulations, or lengthening of consonants.

The example from the Musorgsky song above demonstrates how complex the prosodic analysis can become when combining the three interests: the word, the poetic verse, and the melody. The word “dusha” is labeled with a 2 on the second syllable,
although the composer’s setting of this word is in fact a straightforward reproduction of
the poetic scansion (anapests alternating with iambs). This, no doubt, is an example of the
limitations of the system used here. But, as mentioned above, the scope of this project
does not allow a typology to account for cases of this kind, considering the multitude of
combinations possible. However, the influence of verse prosody was taken into
consideration in selecting and analyzing the data.

Syllables of type X may be considered rarities in the full body of Russian vocal
repertoire. They are found in two contexts: markedly folkloric songs and choruses, and
twentieth-century syllabic treatments of texts first found in modernist compositions.
Perhaps, given the prominence of the treatises on realistic declamation by Alexander
Dargomyzhsky and Musorgsky in Russian music culture, it is no surprise that in setting
non-folkloric (or, to borrow Taruskin’s term, “personal”118) texts of songs and opera,
Russian compositions tend to adhere rather strictly to the accentual norms of both speech
and verse prosody of the standard central Russian dialect (of CSR in the modern context).
Cui’s strong endorsement of stringent faithfulness to speech accents is telling:

True vocal music is written to a preexisting text, to a work of artistry, of poetry,
capable of inspiring a musician. It is moreover essential that the music faithfully
transmit the general mood of the poetical work and that it serve as its beautiful
and well-fitting attire. It is essential that in quantity the music correspond to the
dimensions of the poem, so that the music does not dangle on it like a gown on a
hook, so that the text need not be artificially prolonged by repeating stanzas,
verses, or individual words, and so that by such repetitions the artistic and elegant
form of the poem be not distorted. It is essential that, in singing, the pronunciation
of every word be suitably rendered, and that the phrasing of the text and the
observance of its punctuation be correct. Besides that, the rhythm of the music
and its meter must be in direct correspondence with the meter of the verse, the
length of the musical phrase with the length of the text phrase, and, in fine, the

118 Richard Taruskin, Stravinsky and the Russian Traditions: A Biography of the Works through Mavra,
1208.
music must in every way blend with the word so as to form with it one indissoluble, organic whole.\textsuperscript{119}

When it comes to controversial violations of speech accents, namely, for syllables of type X, Stravinsky is the Russian composer who first comes to mind for his settings of both Russian and English texts. Taruskin traces the development of Stravinsky’s syllabic approach, an approach in which “one does not create music with words but with sounds,”\textsuperscript{120} and demonstrates that it is rooted in Stravinsky’s discovery of free accentuation in Russian folksong.\textsuperscript{121} Thus, the question of vowel reduction on syllables of type X is complicated in several respects: 1) Folkloric settings justify dialectal renderings of vowels, rather than those of standard lyric diction. Among the dialectal speech features a vocalist may choose to emulate could be included changes in vowel qualities, changes to or omission of vowel reduction, and alternative prosody patterns, to say nothing of the free accentuation in folk singing. 2) Non-folkloric instances of type X syllables are likely to represent intentionally syllabic pronunciations, using vowels as “sounds, not words.” Therefore, syllables of type X may be of lesser linguistic relevance here, though still important to describe for the benefit of vocalists and coaches. 3) The severely limited pool of data, due to few examples and few recordings by reputable artists, make definitive conclusions difficult to achieve.

\textsuperscript{119} From Ts.A. Kiui, “Neskol’o slov o sovremennykh opernykh formakh” (1889), 406-8. Quoted in and translated by Taruskin, \textit{Stravinsky}, 1200.
\textsuperscript{120} Taruskin, \textit{Stravinsky}, 1235.
\textsuperscript{121} See Taruskin’s chapter on Stravinsky’s “‘Swiss’ songs and beyond,” \textit{Stravinsky}, 1198-1236.
5.6 Treatment of reduction in published song transcriptions

As discussed in previous chapters, it is only among the last generation or two of Western professional singers that the preference/necessity of singing Russian repertoire in the original language has sprung up. And with the new interest in Russian repertoire and Russian as a singing language, scores of songs and operas have been published in various combinations of translations into English or other major singing languages, original lyrics in Cyrillic print, transcriptions and transliterations. The last of these – transliterations, or the replacement of Cyrillic graphemes with Latin, with or without diacritics – has tended to cause much confusion on the part of vocalists who take up this repertoire without access to a coach versed in Russian pronunciation. A wide variety of transliteration systems exist and are employed according to the personal preferences of the individual editors. Additionally, there is a tendency for the transliterations, which are by no means representations of Russian pronunciation, to be altered based on a few selected, seemingly arbitrary pronunciation rules that the editor has chosen to highlight. Such practices further tempt vocalists to interpret transliterations as pronunciation guides, especially since the words are printed under the notes, as would be the case in any normal song text. It is unclear what the purpose of such transliterations in song scores is. Since they do not reflect Russian pronunciation, they are of little use and, indeed, a danger to vocalists unfamiliar with Russian language. Vocalists and coaches with knowledge of Russian pronunciation rules would be able to work from a transliteration. However, such individuals would most likely already have the ability to read using the Cyrillic alphabet, through which, after all, the pronunciation rules are much more clearly applied.
This section will examine one style of transliteration in a book of arias published, surprisingly, as recently as 2002. Then it will compare three different transcriptions of the same song as published in a recent songbook and two books of song lyrics. Since all three sources contain relatively extensive remarks on the rules of pronunciation in Russian lyric diction, it will be especially useful to note the places in which their descriptions and the transcriptions themselves differ regarding vowel reduction.

The Edition Peters series of collections of operatic arias for four major vocal categories, edited by David Fanning, appears to be a quite an attractive publication and valuable resource in many ways. Few similar collections exist. However, its approach to the printing of the song texts – that is, the decision to include a transliteration rather than transcription is puzzling and unfortunate. Examining a short excerpt from one of the arias vividly illustrates the problem. The Cyrillic text is followed by the transliteration for a well-known portion of Tat’iana’s letter scene from Eugène Onégin (Tchaikovsky/Pushkin) and the opening lines of the lullaby from Sadko (Rimsky-Korsakov) below:

Я вам пишу, чего же боле? Что я могу ещё сказать? Теперь я знаю, в вашей воле меня презреньем наказать!

Ja vam pi-šu, če-čǐ je bo-le? Čto ja mo-gu e-ščě ska-zat’? Te-per’ ja zna-ju, v va-šej vo-le me-nja pre-zre-n’em na-ka-zat’

Сон по бережку ходил, Дрěма по лугу... ..."А и где же спит Садко, купав добрый молодец?"

Son po be-rež-ku ho-dil, Drě-ma po lu-gu... ...A i gde že spit Sad-ko, ku-pav dob-ryj mo-lo-dec 122

Any Russian speaker can recognize the debacle that would result, should a singer misinterpret the transliteration above as a transcription; apart from the problem of the orthographic representation of vowels, there is also no representation of the palatalization of consonants, among other issues. However, the layout of the transliteration in the score – syllables under notes and between the Cyrillic version and English singing (artistic) translation – suggests that a singable text is printed. The editor acknowledges in the preface that it is indeed a transliteration and offers a brief description of some of the rules of Russian pronunciation that is far from sufficient to allow the singer unfamiliar with Russian to approximate a suitable transcription on her own. And it is worth repeating: a singer with the fortitude to perform such a task would find the Cyrillic alphabet a help rather than an obstacle, thus rendering the transliteration a needless distraction.

As mentioned, such song transliterations tend to have various idiosyncrasies. In the case of this edition, it is the use of the g-breve, such as in the word, “čeğö” above. The editor explains the decision in the preface:

Transliteration follows the International Organisation for Standards ISO/R9 system (see G.P.M Walker, Russian for Librarians, London, 1973, pp. 42-3), with the one exception: Г in certain genitive singular constructions, usually at the end of words, (-ОГО, -ЕГО), where it is pronounced [v], is transliterated as ğ.123

Although the clarification about which system of transliteration is being employed is preferable to the practice in older publications, which omitted explanations of what is printed, nonetheless, the description of the following substitution using g-breve must be confusing to singers, some of whom may not have a firm grasp on the distinction between

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123 Fanning, vi.
transliteration and transcription. Indeed, the substitution seems an absurdity, considering that the relatively few instances to which it applies would be the least of problems for someone who omits vowel reduction and consonant palatalization from his or her first attempt at singing in Russian!

Fanning’s description of vowel reduction in the preface of the collection is interesting, for in some respects rather it is detailed, but it concludes with a rather vague and perhaps discouraging statement:

Vowels in stressed syllables are pronounced more or less as in the above table. However, in unstressed syllables they undergo reduction as follows:

- a and ə: one syllable before the stressed syllable these reduce to [ʌ] as in hut; two or more syllables before or anywhere after it they become [ə] as in river.
- ɐ and ɐ: these reduce to [ɪ] as in bit or, at the beginning ad a word, to [yɪ] as in yippee
- ə: reduced to [ɪ] as in bit

However, these reductions tend to be less drastic in singing than in speech. Moreover, as in sung English, they may vary according to the taste of the individual singer and the demands of the text and vocal line.

Given that none of the reductions as described in this passage are represented in the scores, it is perhaps ironic that the description lists the reductions with IPA symbols of greater articulatory specificity than those that will be used in the three publications to which I will now turn. These three books do not include song scores, but are collections of text transcriptions and translations, intended to aid vocalists and coaches in diction and interpretation. Therefore, the transcriptions tend to be generally studied and accurate. Additionally, each volume presents an introduction with a description of Russian diction. Therefore, the books invite direct comparison of both the transcriptions they offer and

\[124\] Fannin, v.
their remarks on vowel reduction. Indeed, the works will be found to differ from one another in their recommendations on the Russian reduced vowels in singing. The investigation compares three transcriptions of the song “Zdes’ khorosho,” Rachmaninov Op. 21, No. 7, with words by G.A. Galina.

Здесь хорошо…
Взгляни, вдали огнем
Горит река;
Цветным ковром луга легли,
Белеют облака.

Здесь нет людей…
Здесь тишина…
Здесь только Бог да я.
Цветы, да старая сосна,
Да ты, мечта моя!

Note that, since each work uses different symbols in its transcriptions, I have normalized the transcriptions to standard IPA for convenience in the comparison.

The first book of the three to be published is Natalia Challis’s *The Singer’s Rachmaninoff* (1989). Her transcription is as follows:

[zˈdɛsʲ xaraˈʃo]
[vzglʲaˈnʲi (sic) vdaˈlʲi agˈnʲom (sic) gaˈri tˈeʃka]
[tsvʲeˈtʲim kavˈrom luˈgʲi bʲeˈlʲejut aˈbla ka]
[ˈzdʲesʲ nʲet lʲuˈdʲi dʲeˈeʲ (sic)]
[ˈzdʲesʲ tʲiʃˈi na]
[ˈzdʲesʲ tɔlʲkɐˈbox daˈja]
[tsvʲeˈti daˈstɐrajə sasˈna]
[daˈti mʲetʃˈta mɐˈja]125

Before discussing the vowels, we may note the abundance of mistakes in the transcriptions in the book, many of which tend to reinforce the pronunciation difficulties that the Anglophone vocalist typically encounters. The pattern of mistake found in the

sample above is a result of the author’s analysis of the whole set of “soft vowels” as vowel glides, even when following a consonant, rather than as just causing palatalization of the preceding consonant. This analysis is even put forth, if inconsistently, in the book’s introductory essay on Russian pronunciation. As will be seen in the next chapter, insertion of unnecessary glides is perhaps the most pervasive of all the diction problems faced by non-native singers of Russian – even among professionals with otherwise accomplished acquisition of the sounds of Russian.

Challis claims to be following the norms of “poetic pronunciation” with respect to unstressed vowels in her diction guide:

Unstressed vowels are articulated with less force and are said to be reduced. This reduction, common in everyday speech, is not strong in poetic diction. (The IPA transcription of the song texts in this edition follows the poetic pronunciation.)

She gives the following vowel inventory for vowels in stressed position after non-palatalized consonants: /i, i, u, e, o, a/. And she gives the following for unstressed position: /i, i, u, e, o, a/. For the letters that she names the so-called “vowel glides,” that is the letters я, е, е, ю, she lists the following inventory in stressed position, /je, e, jo, ju, ja/. (This is where we note the inconsistency of offering both /je/ and /e/ as the sound of the letter е, but overlooking /o, u/ and /a/ and providing transcription examples such as [d'it'ja]. The following sounds are given for these letters in unstressed position, /e, i, i (after always-hard consonants), ju, ja/.

126 Ibid. 7.
127 Ibid. 11.
Challis makes a few remarks that specifically address her view on vowel reduction while laying out the vowel inventories listed above. Concerning reduction of /o/ after non-palatalized consonants (or word-initially), she declares:

In the prestress position o is pronounced as an advanced back vowel a… …In the second prestress position or in poststress position, it is pronounced as a central half-open vowel ə. In poetic diction, and advanced back vowel a can be used.128

Concerning reduction of /a/ after non-palatized consonant (or word-initially):

In prestress position it is pronounced as an advanced back vowel a, but in the second prestress position or in a poststress position it can be pronounced as a central half-open vowel ə.129

And concerning the reductions of /e/ after palatalized consonants:

In spoken Russian, the unstressed e is usually pronounced as a front closed vowel i. In poetic diction the choice of pronouncing e or i depends upon neighboring sounds. The IPA transcription of the songs reflects the choice.

And finally, on the letter я in unstressed position, that is, /a/ after palatalized consonants:

In most nonstress positions it changes slightly toward an open i, as in ‘it’ in English… …When in final position я ja does not undergo a change130

To summarize, Challis acknowledges the vowel reduction patterns of CSR, but, as seen in the song transcription above, in most cases indicates against the use of speech patterns of vowel reduction after palatalized consonants in singing and for a modified form of vowel reduction after non-palatalized consonants that recognized the “moderate” but not the “extreme” form of reduction:131 recall [vzglija’nǐ], [xara’ʃo], [bʲe’lʲejut abla’kə]. The last word, [abla’kə], demonstrates Challis’s unusual description of a quality

128 Ibid. 8.
129 Ibid. 8.
130 Ibid. 12.
131 Very occasionally, Challis does indicate the reduced pronunciation after palatalization, such as in the word еуё, /’fi’o/, 96.
change between /a/ under stress and unstressed, in which the lack of stress causes a fronting, rather than a raising or centralizing – the neutralization typically found in descriptions of Russian pronunciation. It is curious that the author chose to emphasize this relatively fine distinction and indicate it consistently in her transcriptions, since, as we have seen, many other possible neutralizations are generally not represented. For instance, she does not list open [ɔ] as a sound of Russian, and the schwa is used extremely sparingly for an occasional declensional ending. To frame Challis’s approach in terms of the schematic used in section 5.4 above, she seems to recommend against reducing vowels after palatalization and against distinguishing between “moderate” and “extreme” reduction vowels in the vast majority of cases.

The book *Russian Songs and Arias: Phonetic readings, word-by-word translations, and a concise guide to Russian diction*, published in 1991 by Jean Piatak and Regina Avrashov, takes the opposite approach of Challis’s by providing a transcription that represents spoken Russian pronunciation with few alterations in the lyric diction. The transcription they provide for “Zdes’ khorosho” is:

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[zdʲesʲ xaraˈʃo]
[vzɡliˈni (sic) vdaˈli agˈnom gaˈriit rʲiˈka]
[tsvʲitˈnim kavˈrom luˈga liɡˈli biˈlejut ablaˈka]
[ˈzdʲesʲˈnʲet lʲuˈdʲei]
[ˈzdʲesʲ tʲijˈna]
[ˈzdʲesʲˈtolʲkɑˈ bog daˈja]
[tsvʲiˈti daˈstaraʲsˈsasˈna]
[daˈti mʲitˈtəˈta maˈja]
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132 In most of the songs transcribed, a schwa will not be found, though it does seem to be used consistently for unstressed endings in the masculine singular instrumental -ом, and inconsistently for some feminine endings in –ои.

133 Piatak and Avrashov, *Russian Songs and Arias: Phonetic readings, word-by-word translations, and a concise guide to Russian diction*, 117-118.
Piatak and Avrashov, in contradistinction to Challis, represent vowel reduction after non-palatalized and palatalized consonants ([vzglʲiˈni], [mʲiˈtʃʰə]) and distinguish between moderate and extreme forms of reduction ([xərəˈʃo], [starəjə]). Interestingly, whereas Challis emphasizes a special quality for /a/ under stress, Piatak and Avrashov do not represent a distinction between stressed /a/ and unstressed /a/ in the immediately pretonic (moderately reduced) position ([səsən]). In fact, Piatak and Avrashov show a rather textbook transcription of the vowel reductions of CSR as described in section 5.4 and refrain from representing vowel quality differences outside of such a schematic, such as the extent of openness or closeness of /o/ and /e/, are the precise quality of /a/.

This book also offers a prose description of vowel reduction in the first chapter on vowel reduction. However, since it essentially covers the well-known rules of vowel reduction in CSR, which have already been covered above (5.4), there is no need to quote it here. Note that Piatak and Avrashov also provide an accurate and concise description of the function of the “softening vowels,” specifically stating that the glide must be eliminated when these vowels occur after consonants and thus avoiding the major flaw of Challis’s book. While this is a crucial improvement, it will be seen that their treatment of reduced vowels, so closely modeling speech, are probably less appropriate to lyric diction than those provided by Challis.

The final transcription considered here comes from Laurence Richter’s book,

*Rachmaninov’s Complete Song Texts*, published in 2000:

[zʲdʲesʲ xərəˈʃo]
[vzglʲaˈni (sic) vdaˈli agˈnom gaˈrit rʲeˈka]
[tsvʲetˈnim kavˈrom luˈga legˈli biˈlejut ablaˈka]
[
[ˈzʲdʲesʲ ˈnʲet ˈjuˈdʲej]]
[ˈzʲdʲesʲ tʲiʃʲi ˈnə]}
This transcription may be considered a return to Challis’s approach as far as vowel reduction is concerned. Richter’s transcriptions do not represent any vowel reductions after palatalization ([vzglʲa’ni (sic)], [mʲetʃ’ta]) or a difference between moderate and extreme forms of reduction ([xara’jo], [’staraja]). And, like Challis, Richter zeroes in on the finer quality changes of one phoneme. He represents the openness and closeness of /e/ based on the surrounding consonant environment, indicating [e] before palatalized consonants and [ɛ] when the following consonant is unpalatalized. Interestingly, he does not represent the parallel gradient changes in the openness and closeness of /o/ based on consonantal environment. The final section of this chapter will discuss the practice of distinguishing among such vowel qualities – arguably a habit borrowed from Italian and German diction class – in the context of singing in Russian.

In summary, the three published transcriptions of the song “Zdes’ khorosho” demonstrate that even presumed authorities on Russian diction can be at odds with one another regarding proper practice of vowel reduction in classical singing. Although each of the authors whose works are discussed above would probably concede some ground on the matter, it is likely that the practicalities of publishing great quantities of song text transcriptions pushed them toward adopting regular phonetic rules for which vowels to represent, thereby placing them at one extreme or the other. The chronologically middle book applies the rules of vowel reduction in spoken CSR. It is sandwiched between two books that show only moderate reduction after unpalatalized consonants. The most recent

134 Richter, Rachmaninov’s Complete Song Texts, 41.
book, additionally, represents gradient changes in vowel quality based on consonantal environment. Overall, this situation suggests that an investigation into what environments condition vowel reduction in singing could be of great use to singers and coaches who aspire to perform Russian repertoire effectively, but do not have access to the intuitions of a native speaker with a background in classical singing. The next section details the features – all of which are linked to prosody in a musical setting – that, I hypothesize, influence the vowel decisions of skilled vocalists who are native speakers of Russian.

5.7 Factors that may affect reduction

Below follow the nine factors that seem to have the most potential to affect the practice of vowel reduction in Russian lyric diction, based on the prosodic nature of the reductions as discussed above in section 5.5. Hypotheses are put forward in this section and the factors are investigated with data in section 5.9. Though this study analyzes each of these elements individually, in practice they are interrelated within the vocal line: staccato articulation implies less duration, more duration implies slower tempo, lexical prominence often implies prosodic prominence, etc. Studying each element individually, however, helps determine which factors show the strongest correlation with speech-like vowel reductions or their absence in sung speech in CSR.

1) Prosodic position of the vowel in phonetic word. Since this determines reduction in speech, it is presumed that the vowels of singing would follow the speech pattern if not for the effect of the following factors (and of vowel modification).
2) **Prosodic position of the vowel in the melodic phrase.** The musical meter may interfere with the speech prosody, presumably blocking reduction in unstressed syllables on an ictus.

3) **Duration.** Long duration is presumed to act like a stress, thus blocking reduction.

4) **Tempo.** Slower tempos are presumed to allow a more emphatic prosodic rendering, thus blocking reduction. This may seem to contradict the foregoing admonition that vowel reduction is independent of tempo. However, as we are now speaking of changes in prosody due to the superimposition of melody on words, tempo may be considered as a correlate of duration: the slower the tempo the longer duration for each note and the greater opportunity for each note to receive prosodic weight. For example, a slower tempo could allow more possibilities for musical emphasis on each note through melismatic ornamentation, dynamic changes, etc.

5) **Musical articulations, such as staccato/legato/melisma and dynamic markings.** Staccato articulation may be expected to block reduction as it results in something like a syllable-by-syllable rendering of the text. Melismatic phrases may also be expected to block reduction, as they essentially turn one syllable into its own small phrase. The frequency of melisma on non-stressed syllables in the music is another interesting question in itself. Dynamic markings can operate like musical articulations to also give or take prosodic weight from musical notes and, hence, syllables.

6) **Style of delivery and structure, specifically recitativo/through-composed scene/aria.** Presumably, recitativo would be the most speech-like and support reduction, through-composed scenes less so, with more blocking of reduction, and arias least of all.
7) *Genre, date of composition, composer, other remaining stylistic factors.* Certain composers and genres may influence the vowel choices of the singers either directly or because of the qualities and/or historical circumstances of the compositions. For instance, singers might be expected to use more speech-like vowels in performances of works by Musorgsky or Dargomyzhsky. They may be expected to “Italianize” vowels in singing Glinka’s works.

8) *Pitch.* Pitch can sometimes cause a musical accent through extremes of the tessitura, interesting intervals, accidentals, interesting harmonic relationships, etc. This is a factor to be aware of for singers and coaches handling Russian repertoire. However it is difficult to generalize on this factor here because 1) the variations of this factor are prohibitively numerous, and 2) the most frequent way pitch is used to give musical prominence (prosodic weight) in vocal repertoire – through a high pitch – cannot be accurately analyzed for its influence on vowel reduction because of interference from vowel modification commonly used in extremes of the vocal range. Moreover, describing the interactions of vowel modifications at the extremes of the range and the prosodic role of pitch in music is complicated by the fact that the substitution vowels used in such modifications will vary by vocal *fach* (type of voice).

9) *Morpho-syntactic and lexical factors: lexical category (pronoun versus nouns), inflectional endings versus root, frequency of word.* Through my listening, I have found that other linguistic factors besides prosody can motivate reduction in Russian lyric diction. Or, perhaps more accurately, certain morpho-syntactic factors can block the blocking of reduction that would normally occur due to the combination of the prosodic considerations above.
5.8 Methods

Among the many factors that may influence vowel reduction in singing, such as those listed in the previous section, is the factor of personal preferences. There is great variation in the practices of native Russian singers, variation that does not seem to be highly correlated to dialectal issues, as singers take on a different speech mode in singing from that in speech. Some vocalists have a much stronger inclination to avoid vowel reduction when possible. Others use a more moderate approach. No one consistently uses all of the speech reductions all the time, however. Because of these individual distinctions and the highly complex nature of the prosody of text set to music, it was not feasible to perform a statistical study of vowel reduction. Therefore, the analysis was carried out by careful listening to a range of works and singers. When a song or song excerpt was found that was especially interesting or provided close to an isolated context for one of the prosodic features of interest, several recordings by well-regarded vocalists were compared to identify consistencies and inconsistencies between the renditions. Attempts were also made to locate and listen to recordings of a variety of voice parts (soprano, bass, etc.) and to avoid the extremes of any voice part’s range, where vowel modification would certainly overwhelm pronunciation considerations.

Obviously, it is not possible to completely isolate most of these factors in the music: how can duration be isolated from tempo, for example, without the introduction of a significant musical articulation, another factor considered here? Since this is the case, the discussion of the results includes some remarks on the interrelations of the various factors and how they contribute to an overall picture of vowel reduction in singing, arguing, ultimately, that to attempt to design or apply a rulebook of vowel reduction is
impractical. Rather, an understanding of the contributing factors and their motivations will help coaches and singers learn to use vowel reduction as one of the many interpretive tools available to them in their effort to sing expressively in Russian.

5.9 Analysis and results

5.9.1 Prosodic position of the vowel in the phonetic word

It is clear by now that the vowels employed in singing vary substantially from the expected values based on the rules of vowel reduction in CSR as described in section 5.3. The reason for this phenomenon has also been established: the underlying motivations for vowel reduction in CSR are themselves based on reinforcing the prosodic structure of the language. The relationship between the vowels of Russian lyric diction and of spoken pronunciation may be summarized in the following way: 1) The total vowel inventory remains unchanged, but distribution based on word prosody is drastically altered. 2) Vowels in the stressed position maintain the same target vowel qualities in singing and speech (allowing for changes due to vowel modification for timbre or musical line and exceptions for the rare instances of musically unaccented stressed syllables of “type X”). 3) Vowels in the immediately pretonic (moderate) position may either be realized as their reduced value as in speech or as their underlying value, with the exception of underlying /o/, which may never be restored without producing a false musical accent and word stress. In cases of underlying /o/ after palatalization, only the orthographic pronunciation, [e], may replace the reduction vowel. 4) Vowels in the other unstressed (extreme) position may either be realized as their extreme reduced value, as the moderate reduced
value for that vowel, or as their underlying value, with the exception of underlying [o],
which, again, may not be restored without producing a false accent. As with immediately
pretonic syllables, in cases of underlying /o/ after palatalization, only the orthographic
pronunciation, [e], may replace the reduction vowel.

Therefore, in classical singing, the new vowel inventory by prosodic position in
the phonetic word is summarized as follows in table 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Singing</th>
<th>Stressed Syllable</th>
<th>Immediately pretonic syllable</th>
<th>Other unstressed position syllable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>i u</td>
<td>i u</td>
<td>i u</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>e o</td>
<td>e a</td>
<td>e ə</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speech</th>
<th>Stressed Syllable</th>
<th>Immediately pretonic syllable</th>
<th>Other unstressed position syllable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>i u</td>
<td>i u</td>
<td>i u</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>e o</td>
<td>e a</td>
<td>e ə</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Vowel inventory of Russian vowel in lyric diction based on prosodic position in
phonetic word

Table 3 shows that the vowel inventory based on prosodic position in the phonetic
word increases substantially during singing. The choice of when to use the reduction
vowel suggested by speech and when to revert to moderate reduction vowels or
underlying vowels (except /o/) is determined primarily by those musical factors that alter
prosody and are discussed in the next seven sub-sections. The last sub-section (5.9.9)
discusses some other linguistic considerations that may also affect vowel reduction in singing, sometimes counteracting the reduction-blocking effects of the musical prosody.

5.9.2 Prosodic position of the vowel in the melodic phrase

The previous sub-section, which listed the vowel inventories by position in the phonetic word, showed that the number of possible vowels available in the unstressed positions increases during singing. For the coach without native intuition on the matter, so many choices could be overwhelming. As we consider the musical factors that influence the vowel choice by affecting prosody, the most straightforward example of a change in the speech prosody is the meter of the music and the composer’s manner of overlaying the words with the melody. As mentioned, even this can be quite complicated, especially when one adds the poetic meter to the mix in settings of verse. However, it is possible to draw up some suggestions using the hybrid prosodic structure developed in section 5.5. The suggestions in table 4 help to serve this purpose, though coaches should be aware that the other musical factors affecting prosody frequently outrank meter in determining the best vowel to use on any given note. These recommendations, in a sense, aim for a compromise between the two extreme approaches to the issue of vowel reductions taken by Challis and Richter, on the one hand, and Piatak and Avrashov, on the other. Though the table was developed through listening to native Russian vocalists of high artistic reputations, it does not consistently predict the results of actual native singing, as there are always other musical, stylistic factors at play, not to mention personal preferences.
| **Type 1** – Stressed syllable and musical accent | After palatalized consonant | Use unreduced vowel as in speech |
| | After unpalatalized consonant | Use unreduced vowel as in speech |
| **Type 2** – Unstressed syllable and musical accent | After palatalized consonant | Use underlying, unreduced vowel; except, for underlying /o/ use the sound [e] as suggested by the orthography |
| | After unpalatalized consonant | Use the moderate reduction (see figure 4) |
| **Type 3** – Unstressed syllable and no musical accent | After palatalized consonant | Either the unreduced or the reduced vowel may be chosen, depending on other factors affecting prosody and personal preference/interpretation |
| | After unpalatalized consonant | Either the moderate reduction (see figure 4) or the extreme reduction (see figure 5) vowel may be chosen, depending on other factors affecting prosody and personal preference/interpretation |
| **Type X** – Stressed syllable and no musical accent | After palatalized consonant | When type X is a folk stylization (or found in a character role) the singer may choose to reduce the vowel, and this is often the better choice. Use the unreduced vowel when type X occurs as syncopation, for a syllabic effect, or in other rare instances in songs and opera. |
| | After unpalatalized consonant | When type X is a folk stylization (or found in a character role) the singer may choose to reduce the vowel, and this is often the better choice. Use the unreduced vowel when type X occurs as syncopation, for a syllabic effect, or in other rare instances in songs and opera. |

Table 4: Potential effects of the prosody of the musical meter on the use of vowel reduction in Russian lyric diction. The general recommendations are commonly negated through the influence of other musical factors.
There is no ambiguity for syllables of type 1. Syllables of type X are usually not ambiguous in context and not often met in the most popular Russian repertoire in the West. Therefore, types 2 and 3 are of most interest and are worth illustrating now with examples from the repertoire.

For those vocalists who tend to use some of the speech patterns of vowel reduction after palatalization (there are some fine Russian singers who do so only rarely), the metrical/musical prosody can be a reliable predictor of which syllables may be reduced and which may not. An example of this may be found, for instance, in Nina Rautio’s recording of the Tchaikovsky song “Lish’ ty odin.”\textsuperscript{135} She sings the following two words:

\[
\begin{array}{cccc}
3 & 2 & 3 & 1 & 3 \\
\text{из-не-мо-га-вщий}
\end{array}
\]

\[
\begin{array}{ccc}
2 & 3 & 1 & 1 \\
\text{ис-те-ка-вшим}
\end{array}
\]

These two words are of the same grammatical category and, more importantly, occur at a similar dynamic (\textit{forte}), within a similar range (middle voice), and with similar emotional content. Rautio sings the /e/ that occurs as type 2 as [e] bordering on [ɛ]. She closes the /e/ that occurs as type 3 to [i]. Note that, although the prosodic weight applied by the melody returns the vowel clearly to its underlying value, if the two examples switched types, there would be no possibility of returning the underlying /o/ to \textit{истекавшим} (cf. \textit{истѐк}), no matter how much weight it carried. In this case, the spelling pronunciation of /e/ would be used.

The Rachmaninov song “Zdes’ khorosho,” which was used in the discussion of the published transcriptions in section 5.5, provides three examples of type 2 syllables after unpalatalized consonants. The prosodic type assignments were made by counting all four beats in the 4/4 measure as an accent and the second eighth note per beat as unaccented due to the slow tempo and manner of singing the piece.

```
3 2 3 1
Здесь хо-ро-шо…
3 1 3 2 3 1
Бе-ле-ют об-ла-ка.
3 1 3 1 1 1
Здесь толь-ко Бог да
3 1 3 1 3 2 3 1
Цвет-ы, да ста-ра-я сос-на,
```

There are two instances of type 2 syllables after unpalatalized consonants in the song. In dozens of available recordings of the piece, the vocalists almost exclusively used the moderate reduced vowel, [a], instead of the extreme reduced vowel [ə], which would be predicted by the speech patterns of CSR: хорошо → [xaraʃo]; облака → [ablaka]. There is one instance in the song of a type 3 syllable after unpalatalized consonant in the other unstressed (non-pretonic) position, for which the speech reduced vowel would be [ə]: the second syllable in the word только. For this syllable, both realizations [a] and [ə] (and qualities in-between the two) occurred.

The word старая, additionally, makes for an interesting example of the effect of musical meter on vowel reduction. In speech it would be realized as [starəjə]. (Note that

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136 In the score, this measure switches into 2/4 time. However, since the word is marked with *un poco tenuto*, I assign it type 1.
the third syllable is an exception to the usual reduction of a→i after a palatalized consonant.) In the song, this word was uniformly pronounced [starəja]. Though some of the vocalists used a vowel closer to [a] for the second syllable as well, the vowel of the third syllable was uniformly much more open than the second.\textsuperscript{137} This pronunciation is the opposite of what would be expected in speech, in which the vowels farthest from the stressed syllable undergo the most neutralization. Adding to the prosodic weight is the fact that a crescendo is marked as beginning on this word. It is only logical that the singers would use vowels in order of increasing sonority ([ə] then [a]) to achieve that dynamic effect as well. The example only reinforces the inescapable fact that all these features are intertwined and it is virtually impossible to isolate one from another. Perhaps that is nowhere more evident than in the inverse relationship of the next two factors: note duration and tempo.

5.9.3 Duration

The more time the vocalist spends on a syllable, the more likely the vowel is to return to its underlying value or, in the case of underlying /o/, to use the moderate reduced vowel (after an unpalatalized consonant) or the orthographic [e] (after palatalized consonant). Obviously, there are limitless numbers of possible note durations and, thus, no way to determine a strict rule or cut-off point for how long a note must last for reduction to be blocked. Indeed, such decisions are part of the vocalist’s interpretive

\textsuperscript{137} Some might explain this example as the result of vowel modification since the third syllable is a minor third above the second (and in the passagio on the pitch of D\textsubscript{3}). However, the difference in vowel quality between the two syllables was much too large and obvious for vowel modification to be the explanation on a pitch that is, after all, not even a “high note” for the sopranos that perform this piece.
apparatus. However, the importance of duration to vowel reduction in singing may be clearly illustrated with a song excerpt that features notes of alternating very long and very short duration. Conveniently, a perfect example is found in Rimsky-Korsakov’s opera *Snegurochka*, in the title character’s melting theme, which appears first in the prologue of the opera. The first few measures of the first occurrence of the theme are given in figure 8.

![Figure 8: Excerpt from Snegurochka’s arietta, from the prologue of Rimsky-Korsakov’s Snegurochka.](image)

Snegurochka’s vocal line evokes a “melting” sensation expressly through the alternation of very long notes with sixteenth notes. This rhythm is juxtaposed against triplets in the orchestra, giving an additional feeling of tripping or delay in moving from syllable to syllable through the late sixteenth note, just as if one were anticipating water drops from the end of an icicle and surprised each time one finally falls. The vowels used by the Russian singers reinforce this effect: they reduce the vowels on sixteenth notes and do not reduce (or use the moderate reduction only) for the remaining syllables:

Syllables falling on sixteenth notes and the vowels frequently realized:
Syllables falling on long notes and the vowels frequently realized (only syllables which are unstressed in speech and would normally be reduced are underlined):

This is one instance in which the vowel choices made by Russian singers are quite consistent in reducing the vowels of short duration and not reducing those of long duration. The assignments displayed above were remarkably uniform throughout the available recordings. Interestingly, in some renditions the third syllable of the word жа́воро́нков is slightly colored with [ɔ], rather than being the expected purer [a]. Closing to [o], even in cases of heavy musical accent such as this, is generally reserved for folk stylizations and not usually the case in “personal” singing, even in characters based on folklore, such as Snegurochka. It could be that an exception occurs here because of the combination of a type 2 syllable of exceptionally strong prosodic weight and a text that may strike the vocalist as mildly folkloric, “the lark’s singing.” In any case, there were no instances of vocalist’s reverting to the underlying close [o] on this syllable, and the expected [a] was commonly used as well.
5.9.4 Tempo

In a sense, tempo may be considered simply the inverse of duration as concerns vowel reduction. That is, the faster the tempo, the shorter the duration, the more likely the vowels of Russian are to reduce in lyric diction. Although some Russian vocalists strongly resist using reduced vowels after palatalized consonants, it is my conclusion based on listening that, for any Russian vocalist, as tempo increases there will eventually come a point at which s/he will begin to use the vowel reductions suggested by speech patterns.

An excellent example of this tendency occurs at another point in Snegurochka, just a few minutes before the excerpt discussed above. The line given in figure 9 is usually taken at an allegro tempo, sometimes even at the faster side of allegro and always at a significantly faster tempo (about 50 percent faster in some recordings) than the preceding lines of the aria. Whereas the preceding lines are sung with a mix of reduced and unreduced vowels depending on the note duration, the singer’s preferences, and so forth, the line given in figure 9 is sung with most of the vowel reductions equivalent to speech practice, including “extreme” reductions (usually one or two of the many vowels to be unreduced in a given recording; the unreduced vowels selected were not consistent between the renditions).

и и и а и и и и
Ми-ле й Снегу-роч-ке тво-е й, без пе-сен жизнь не в ра-дость ей.
It is tempting to attribute such tempo-triggered reductions in singing as motivated by the lack of time to make the greater adjustments to the vocal tract that would be required for, say, an open [a] or a mid or open vowel after palatalization. And, no doubt, the avoidance of such articulatory gymnastics is an advantage of vowel reduction at fast tempos. However, this factor cannot be regarded as the primary motivator for the pattern: all of the singers fastidiously avoided any hint of vowel undershoot on the stressed syllables, even at extremely fast tempos. Considering that the stressed syllables are given the same duration as the unstressed syllables in this line and are therefore equally difficult to produce at their target values, ease of articulation may not be regarded as the primary explanation for the manner of reducing vowels. Rather, the vowel reduction is likely used as: 1) a means of expression: here perhaps “animato” is in part achieved through speech-like pronunciation; 2) a means of increasing understandability: since there is little time for the listener to perceive each individual syllable and stress is not durationally

Figure 9: Excerpt from Snegurochka’s first aria from the prologue of Rimsky-Korsakov’s Snegurochka.
indicated, the singer uses the techniques of prominence reduction and contrast enhancement, as described by Crosswhite, to demonstrate the prosody of the phrase in the same manner as she would in speech. The second of these considerations would not apply to slow phrases because the slow manner of singing the syllables would result in the opposite situation: the listener has the time to dwell on each syllable and may misinterpret reduced vowels as indicating the orthographic pronunciation. Therefore the unreduced manner of slow singing could perhaps be better regarded as explicit singing of Russian orthography, rather than the vocalist taking advantage of excess time to make articulatory maneuvers, though this latter consideration should not be entirely discounted.

5.9.5 Musical articulations

In the example discussed in the previous sub-section, the tempo was quick enough for reduced vowels to be used despite the fact that most of the syllables were sung on more than one note, a feature that may be considered as giving each syllable more prosodic weight. This feature and other, more complex uses of melisma, along with a large range of musical articulations (accents, sforzando and other subito dynamic markings, staccato, marcato, etc.) that may be marked by the composer or used in the vocalist’s personal interpretation may all be considered bearers of prosodic weight and potential blockers of vowel reduction (with the usual exceptions concerning /o/).

Figures 8 and 9 display phrases from the same aria of Snegurochka as discussed above. Although the slurred eighth notes bear a resemblance to those in Figure 9, these phrases are sung in an entirely different, lyrical mood at an adagio tempo and flowing
*legato*. These sections are always performed without vowel reduction after the palatalized consonants. The /о/ in запою uses the reduced vowel [a] as expected and described in subsection 5.9.1. Using reduced vowels after the palatalized consonants in this passage would sound inappropriate not only because of the slower tempo, but also because of the added prosodic weight applied by the slurred notes. Thus, certain musical articulations may add reduction-blocking prosodic weight in the *legato* context.

Figure 10: Excerpt from Snegurochka’s aria in the prologue of Rimsky-Korsakov’s *Snegurochka*.

Figure 11: Excerpt from Snegurochka’s aria in the prologue of Rimsky-Korsakov’s *Snegurochka*.

In the non-*legato* context, there are many varieties of articulations – either written explicitly or implied through dramatic moods or other musical considerations – that work to block vowel reduction. In fact, in such cases vowel reduction can be a means of
achieving or reinforcing the musical articulation. For example, consider the first excerpt from Zemfira’s song, “Staryi muzh, groznyi muzh,” from Rachmaninov’s opera *Aleko*, displayed in figure 12. Usually no vowel reduction at all takes place in this phrase, even though the prosody of the melodic phrase and allegro tempo would seem to allow it. The lack of vowel reduction is used here to add to the defiant, “risoluto” manner of the singing. This example may be contrasted with the second excerpt from the same song in figure 13. The phrase is marked *con moto*, “with movement,” and Zemfira begins recalling her lover’s appealing qualities. I have observed some variation in the degree of vowel reduction utilized in this phrase in the recorded performances. However, the variation is associated with the individual interpretation of the drama here. Those singers who continue to sing in a defiant manner, as if taunting the “staryi muzh,” *Aleko*, utilize less vowel reduction than those who interpret the section as being a truly personal, lyrical moment in which Zemfira sings of genuine love. Thus, in the case of Zemfira’s song, reduced vowels may be used to create *legato* in certain phrases, while unreduced vowels may be used for contrast to reinforce an accented, somewhat *marcato* articulation in others.

![Allegro Risoluto](image)

Figure 12: Excerpt from Zemfira’s song from Rachmaninov’s *Aleko*. 

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5.9.6 Style of delivery and structure

The matter of style of delivery in the context of musical structure is, in some sense, just an extension of the factor of musical articulation discussed above in section 5.9.5; that is, different structural parts of an opera (and in some cases song or song cycle) serve different dramatic purposes and therefore require different articulations. Vowel reduction acts as a powerful tool in performing contrasting sections with good style, not only through improved and more understandable diction, but also by reinforcing the required musical articulations, as discussed above. The three major styles of delivery in which singers perform are: recitative, arioso (and lyrical singing in through-composed scenes), and aria. As the rhythms of the text become increasingly dictated by regular musical meters rather than speech norms, so reduced vowels become scarcer. Thus, recitative in Russian opera predictably follows the speech patterns of CSR vowel reduction in most instances, arioso less so, and arias use more unreduced than reduced...
vowels (with the now familiar exception of underlying /o/). For example, in Tchaikovsky’s *Eugene Onegin*, Lenskii sings in all three styles of delivery already in the first scene (as do the other characters). His first line of the opera, sung as recitative, is found in figure 14. In the recordings, this line is performed with speech-like vowel reductions, with one interesting exception in the first syllable of the word рекомендую, which is quite consistently realized as [e], in contrast to its spoken pronunciation of [i].

![Musical notation]

Figure 14: Lenskii’s first line in Tchaikovsky’s *Eugene Onegin*.

After some other remarks in recitative by other characters, Lenskii has the lyrical outburst given in figure 15. It offers an example of a delivery lying between the speech-oriented recitative and music-oriented aria, and is usually performed with some blocking of speech reductions. For example, in the 1958 film version, Anton Grigor’ev (Bolshoi Theater) sings the unstressed vowels as follows:

![Musical notation]

Про-ле-ст-но здесь! Люб-лю я э-тот сад у-кром-ный и те-ни-стый! В нём так у-ют-но!
In the arioso style of delivery, then, Russian singers generally apply vowel reduction inconsistently, but in a way that adds texture to the line – unreduced vowels may be used to create more declamatory or demonstrative “vocal moments” and reduced vowels may be used to emphasize or personalize the text. The vowels used in arioso style singing, as well as in performance of art song or romansy, will vary greatly from singer to singer. For example, in the same scene, Onegin (Evgenii Kibkalo, Bolshoi Theater), also singing in an arioso style, pronounces the word прелестной with the reduced first syllable [prʲɪlʲesnəj] during his colder and more subdued conversation with Tat’iana. The final phrase we will examine here comes from just before the climax of Lenskii’s arioso “Ia liubliu vas” in the same scene, shown in figure 16. For this rapturous phrase, Grigor’ev uses the following vowels:

Figure 15: One of Lenskii’s lyrical phrases in the first scene of Tchaikovsky’s Eugene Onegin.
The vocalist chose to use [i]-reduction in two of the four syllables for which it was an option (Всегдаповседемечтаемедченежалечепечаль). This is similar to the pattern evidenced in the previous example. However, this example differs in the realizations of the vowels in the word endings. Of the several unstressed endings that in speech reduce to [ə], this singer refrains from reducing a single vowel. Sub-section 5.9.9 will discuss how grammatical endings are more prone to reduction than word roots in Russian singing. Therefore, the singer’s use of the orthographic vowels (/o/ excepted) in each case is a sign of the aria style of delivery, in which the musical prosody dominates over the text. Although this piece is technically still an “arioso,” for this particular line the singer switches into aria mode in his vowels. When considering style of delivery within musical structure for coaching Russian diction, in some cases it is necessary to be more attentive to the characteristics of each given phrase rather than to the formal category of the piece as a whole.
5.9.7 Other stylistic considerations

The previous section suggests that vowel reduction in Russian lyric diction is strongly connected to the issue of stylistics in singing – one first identifies modes such as recitative or aria and then employs the appropriate speech patterns. Style, in this sense, is developed through experience and study. And the intricacies of style go well beyond just the three modes of singing discussed in the previous sub-section. For this reason, the vocalist who begins singing Russian repertoire or any new repertoire requires one or more coaches with some experience in the language and knowledge about the musical period, genre and, often, specific composer who wrote the piece. As a final examination of how patterns of vowel reduction vary depending on context in Russian singing, and to illustrate two works of vocal music that are located at opposite poles of the style field, consider the excerpts given in figures 15 and 16.

Figure 16: Phrase from Lenskii’s arioso in the first scene of Tchaikovsky’s *Eugene Onegin*.
The first is taken from Musorgsky’s unfinished experimental “realist” opera, *The Marriage*, in which he sought to represent musically the nuances of natural speech. Hence, the score is filled with intricate and unusual rhythmic notations such as those in the excerpt.\footnote{138 Taruskin uses this excerpt to point out that in none of the few recordings that exist of *The Marriage* performers come even close to fulfilling tempo and rhythmic dictates of the composer. Rimsky-Korsakov testifies that the vocal lines were intended to be performed *a piacere*, a position with which Taruskin disagrees based on the “finicky” rhythmic notation throughout the score. See Taruskin’s *Eight Essays*, 89-90.} The second excerpt, in figure 18, is taken from Tchaikovsky’s opera *The Queen of Spades*. It comes from a pastoral ballet, “The Shepherd’s Sincerity,” performed during the ball scene. All the music (and indeed the very concept) of the pastoral is highly stylized as classical/rococo, with the duet quoted here a borrowing from Mozart.

Figure 17: Excerpt from Musorgsky’s opera *The Marriage*. 
By this point, it should be obvious what patterns of vowel reduction would be expected in each of these pieces. And, indeed, recordings confirm that in *The Marriage* vowel reductions are produced as in speech, whereas in the pastoral duet from *The Queen of Spades*, reduction is almost uniformly blocked, with the exception of the moderate reduction of /o/ after unpalatalized consonants. Obviously, the majority of Russian repertoire that a vocalist will pick up will fall somewhere between these two stylistic extremes: most singing in the Russian repertoire is not intended to represent all the nuances of speech, nor is it to be performed in a stiff, formal, or detached manner.

However, in any opera there will be a stylistic ebb and flow based on dramatic content. In the song literature, it is up to the coach and vocalist together to interpret, essentially, the declamatory mode they seek to evoke in the song and to make vowel decisions.
accordingly by taking into account the foregoing factors, as well as any other relevant stylistic information that could not be included in this description of the vowels of Russian lyric diction.

5.9.8 Pitch

Since vocal extremes in pitch and vowel modification are so closely linked, and because such modification practices themselves differ by vocal fach and individual vocal preferences and techniques, it does not seem appropriate to undertake an analysis of the effect of pitch on reduction patterns. However, because pitch is one of the ways prosodic weight can be expressed in both speech and music, coaches and vocalists may consider pitch – extremes of the range, accidentals, interesting intervals, etc. – as another factor that may validly influence vowel choices.

5.9.9 Morpho-syntactic and lexical factors

Through the hours of listening undertaken for this project, it became clear to me that syllables in certain morpho-syntactic and lexical categories reduce more readily in Russian lyric diction than do other syllables. This is not to imply that syllables in these categories invariably reduce, as even in these cases the right combination of prosodic factors described in the preceding eight sub-sections can block reduction in any syllable. Nonetheless, in cases where reduction is sparingly used, it is more likely to occur on syllables in one of these categories:
- Inflectional endings: in particular, adjectival endings and neuter or feminine noun endings in –не/ле and –ия/ья. Word roots are less likely to reduce.

- Pronouns in the oblique cases: in particular, меня and тебя (these fall into the next category as well, but warrant their own category, as they reduce with remarkable frequency and are words every singer will encounter).

- High frequency words and words with little lexical weight: in general, nouns and verbs reduce less readily in singing than do adverbs, pronouns, particles, prepositions, etc.

These categories may be related to speech phonetics in that they also describe syllables that are more likely to be subject to vowel undershoot.\textsuperscript{139} This points to the fact that, although the processes and motivations of vowel undershoot and vowel reduction as defined here are separate, nonetheless there is still a level of connection between the two, as well as obvious overlap in some of the vowel changes that they promote.

\textbf{5.10 Conclusions and discussion}

The major discoveries in the foregoing investigation into vowel reduction in Russian lyric diction may be restated as follows:

1) It is well known that vowel reduction patterns differ among individual Russian-speaking vocalists. But it is also the case that vowel reduction practice will vary within

\textsuperscript{139} See, for instance Van Son et al., “Frequency effects on vowel reduction in three typologically different languages (Dutch, Finish, Russian).” As far as endings and pronouns are concerned, it is well-known that in informal speech Russian speakers tend greatly to undershoot declensional ending, sometimes dropping them entirely, while the pronouns tebia and tebe are often realized as [t\textipa{a}] or [t\textipa{e}].
the performance of any individual vocalist based on a variety of linguistic and musical factors that all bear a connection to the prosody of the (textual and/or melodic) phrase.

2) Vowel reduction in lyric diction should be regarded as an interpretive tool, rather than a set of rules to be memorized and applied by rote.

3) Yet there are a few rules that should be observed. Underlying /o/ in unstressed position may not be restored to its underlying value in classical singing without giving a false musical accent and a speech stress that could potentially strike the native ear as comical. The two exceptions to this rule are folk music stylizations and intentionally syllabic sound-play.

4) The vowels used for syllables with underlying /o/ under heavy prosodic weight (that is, in lieu of restoring the underlying value) are [a] after unpalatalized consonants and the orthographic <e> after palatalized consonants.

5) Underlying /e/ and /a/ may undergo reduction as expected according to the description of spoken CSR, but they may also return their underlying value in unstressed position. In classical singing they tend to restore more readily the underlying value than to reduce as in speech, unless there is a clear motivation to reduce through lessening of prosodic weight in the melodic context.

6) The patterns of vowel reduction used in singing do not entirely conform to the expectations based on Crosswhite’s theory for the underlying motivation of vowel reduction in spoken CSR. While her theory unifies the motivations for reduction of all vowels in CSR according to prosodic position in the phonetic word, the evidence from lyric diction suggests either a different motivation for reduction of /o/ versus reduction of /e, a/, or another issue (in addition to prosody, which is common to both speech and
singing) at play in the process of reduction in singing – an issue that is not a factor in vowel reduction of spoken CSR. The next three subsections present hypotheses about how the differences between spoken and sung vowel reduction may be explained.

5.10.1 Vowel sonority

As was discussed in section 5.2, the vowel modifications that singers use to properly tune the vocal instrument and produce a beautiful timbre and even scale have a connection to loudness; that is, one of the purposes of vowel modification is to produce a musical tone of maximal carrying power with minimal physical effort. It is therefore plausible that the patterns of vowel reduction that Russian singers choose to employ in their singing are also motivated by the high amplitude demands of theatrical singing. This hypothesis is supported by some of the patterns discussed in section 5.9. For example, the high use of vowel reduction during recitative versus the moderated use during arias, while undoubtedly an outcome of the varying degree of “speech-likeness” appropriate to the style of delivery, also results in a greater preponderance of highly sonorous vowels during aria singing that recitative. This outcome is a favorable for the singer, since arias are accompanied by much denser orchestral (or piano) accompaniment than is recitative.

Recall that, according to Crosswhite’s theory, reduction in the “extreme” positions is motivated by “prominence reduction” and therefore the reduction vowels used are of low sonority. Reduction in the “moderate,” immediately pretonic position is motivated by “contrast enhancement” and therefore the reduction vowels used are
peripheral in the acoustic vowel space. Crosswhite utilizes the following scale of vocalic prominence (sonority):  

\[ a > \varepsilon, \circ > \varepsilon, \varepsilon > i, u > \circ \]

She bases the ranking of \( \widehat{\varepsilon} \) as less sonorous than the high vowels on the work of M. Kenstowicz, who demonstrates that schwa repels stress in certain languages. Perhaps in the context of singing, in which duration and intensity are largely predetermined based on the dictates of the music, \( \widehat{\varepsilon} \) is more appropriately ranked as more prominent than the high vowels, on the basis of greater jaw depression, resulting in the scale:  

\[ a > \varepsilon, \circ > \varepsilon, \varepsilon > \circ > i, u \]

Using either of these hierarchies, the vowel reductions of CSR speech and the vowels of the most “conservative” Russian singing – that is, vowel reductions or lack thereof of those vocalists who make the most minimal use of vowel reduction – may be summarized as displayed in table 5. The order of ranking of \( \widehat{\varepsilon} \) and the front vowels does not affect the outcomes in the chart, as they never compete with one another in the system.

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140 Crosswhite, 39.
141 Kenstowicz, “Sonority Driven Stress”
142 It should be noted that the actual quality of \( \widehat{\varepsilon} \) in terms of jaw depression and other factors varies greatly from language to language.
Table 5: The vowels used in “conservative” singing versus the underlying vowels and reduction vowels of spoken CSR. The most sonorous of the speech vowels are highlighted for comparison with the sung vowels.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>After</th>
<th>Underlying vowel</th>
<th>Immediately pretonic vowel (moderate reduction vowel when applicable)</th>
<th>Other unstressed position vowel (extreme reduction vowel)</th>
<th>Vowel used in “conservative” singing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>unpalatalized consonant</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>ι</td>
<td>a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>ι</td>
<td>a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>e</td>
<td>i</td>
<td>i</td>
<td>e</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>palatalized consonant</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>i</td>
<td>i</td>
<td>a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o</td>
<td>i</td>
<td>i</td>
<td>e (orthographic value)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>e</td>
<td>i</td>
<td>i</td>
<td>e</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5 demonstrates that, in the most conservative singing, with respect to reduction the singers always opt for the more sonorous vowel. Doing so entails using the underlying value in most instances, but using the reduction vowel in the case of /o/ after unpalatalized consonants, resulting in a more sonorous [a]. In the case of the restoration of the orthographic pronunciation [e] after palatalization, the sonority rankings of the underlying vowel (/o/) and the quality used (/e/) are equivalent.

5.10.2 Old Moscow ekanie plus analogy

When informally questioned about the reasons why they prefer one vowel over another in singing, of native speakers of Russian without a background in linguistics usually offered explanations that were socio-linguistically tinged. The blocking of reduction, as described in section 5.9 is said to sound “more correct,” “more formal,”
“higher style,” etc. These remarks suggest possible influence of theatrical affectation in the pronunciation choices of singers. The common practice of restoring underlying /e/ in singing is suggestive of the ekanie reduction pattern in the Old Moscow Pronunciation, the dialect that was previously the theatrical standard. Many of the features of the Old Moscow Pronunciation were reportedly maintained on the stage until the late 1970s.

This vowel reduction pattern of Old Moscow pronunciation is characterized by the lack of reduction of /e/ in the immediately pretonic position and by the reduction of non-high vowels (/a/ and /o/) to [e], or, actually, to an intermediate vowel between [e] and [i], in the immediately pretonic position after palatalization. Vinokur’s 1948 guide to theatrical pronunciation recommends this pattern of vowel reduction, although ikanie appeared in literary pronunciation at the end of the nineteenth century. Works written a few decades later report that ekanie is only inconsistently used in the theater and losing ground – a process that continued to the modern day. However, many of the singers whose pronunciations have been the subject of this study would have been exposed to ekanie delivered as a high, theatrical style on stage or in film versions of plays and would be expected to conserve it in performance practice to create an effect of high style. The

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143 For more on the topic of the theatrical standard see Vinokur, 25: “In the course of the eighteenth century, when Classicism dominated Russian art, Russian stage pronunciation was dual: in comedy it coincided with the prevailing everyday pronunciation, and in tragedy it distinguished itself by a few attributes that expressed ‘high’ pronunciation for its contemporaries, but connected in origin with the literary speech of the Russian Middle Ages and the so-called Church Slavonic language. The character of these attributes may be easily guessed from the general rule of the literacy of the day, by which the academic-literary and ‘high’ pronunciation, in distinction from the prevailing everyday pronunciation, tended toward the ‘precise articulation of letters’ (Lomonosov)… As far as the accepted everyday pronunciation in comedy is concerned, it is connected in origin with the dialect of seventeenth century Moscow, where, at this time, the foundations of the Russian national standard language were being laid.”

144 See Bernard Comrie, Gerald Stone, and Maria Polinsky, The Russian Language in the Twentieth Century. They cite descriptions by Il’inskaia and Sidorov (1955), Kuz’mina (1963), and L.S. Kuznetsova (1963).

145 Panov, 135.

146 See Panov, 48.
blocking of reduction of immediately pretonic /a/ after palatalization (such that the underlying value is completely preserved) in singing is not consistent with the ekanie reduction pattern discussed here. Therefore, although Old Moscow ekanie may plausibly influence singing pronunciation, it would appear that this influence must be combined with a general inclination toward spelling pronunciation: that is, the singers may reanalyze ekanie in the case of underlying /e/ and /o/ as spelling pronunciations, and then by analogy realize underlying /a/ also as its spelling pronunciation during singing. This leads logically to the final possible explanation about why vowel reduction in classical singing differs from speech reduction: the undoubted influence of spelling.

5.10.3 Orthography plus extreme markedness of okanie

Spelling pronunciation in singing, as suggested in the previous sub-section, probably has some connection to an overall “high style” of pronunciation, many features of which in speech, even stage speech, would strike the ear as affected and pretentious. The opera world already carries that label, pronunciation aside. Therefore, it is not at all unexpected that singing pronunciation would tend toward such features. However, for the final hypothesis about why vowel reduction patterns in singing differ from those in speech, I would point to a different motivation for spelling pronunciation. Making oneself understood is often difficult for classical singers due to the extended pitch range and vocal tract manipulations required to create a pleasing timbre that can project over an orchestra. Spelling pronunciation may perhaps help to improve understandability, especially in slow singing. As suggested in the discussion of tempo above, spelling
pronunciation of vowels could perhaps constitute an ultra-explicit mode that is unique to singing. After all, singing is the only speech context in which each syllable of a word or phrase may be stretched to as long as several seconds. With that much time for the listener to contemplate the vowel (and to forget which sounds have come before it), it may be perceptually more efficient to, essentially, spell the word for the audience, especially given the high literacy levels that would be expected in the opera-going audience.

The blocking of reduction in the most conservative forms of lyric diction (see table 5) always results in the orthographic vowel being sung, with the one exception of /o/ after an unpalatalized consonant. This exception could be explained very easily, however, as a result of the extreme markedness of okanie as dialectal. For this reason it is acceptable (and desirable) to sing [o] for musically accented, but word unstressed underlying /o/ after unpalatalized consonants in the context of stylized folk singing. Hence in figure 19, the seeing off of Maslenitsa in Snegurochka, the chorus of villagers sings честно with the “incorrect” stress as [ʨesno] due to the musical ictus on this syllable. Figure 20 has an example of a stress shift common in folk song with a contrast between the repeated word (in different conjugations): воротись and воротишься. They are pronounced according to their musical accents, [voraʨiʃ] and [varoʨiʃsə]. Note that the chorus does not imitate true okanie, in that it continues to reduce /o/, but merely sing using the “incorrect” stress. Therefore, in such examples the singers do not play with dialect explicitly, but, rather, tweak the degree to which they allow the musical accents to influence their vowel reduction patterns.
Figure 19: Excerpt from the chorus “Farewell, Maslenitsa” from the prologue of Rimsky-Korsakov’s opera *Snegurochka*. 
Figure 20: Excerpt from the chorus “Farewell, Maslenitsa” from the prologue of Rimsky-Korsakov’s opera \textit{Snegurochka}.

5.11 One modification: the sound of \textit{ты}

Though up until this point this study has specifically avoided analysis of those vowel modifications that occur for the sole purpose of vocal timbre and musical line, one such modification warrants special attention because it may be regarded as unique to Russian and because it is a cause of anxiety among singers first encountering the Russian
language. The high-central vowel ы, the phonemic status of which has been the subject of debate among linguists, is described in the available diction guides as the only Russian vowel without an equivalent in English or Italian. Indeed, when Russian speakers demonstrate this sound, especially when the vowel is isolated from surrounding consonants, according to my observations, the faces of voice teachers, choral conductors, and singers usually take on an expression ranging from puzzlement to a grimace as they consider how such a “guttural vowel” can be sung beautifully. Russian vocalists, on the other hand, do not consider this vowel problematic in the least. In fact, when I asked Russian voice teachers about this sound’s amenability for singing, they seemed surprised at the question. In this section, I argue that ы need not be a major obstacle for the English speaking vocalist. Both и and ы undergo modifications in singing that make them acoustically very similar. As far as lyric diction is concerned, [ɨ] is determinedly not phonemic, but rather, signifies phonemic hardness in the preceding consonant in the same manner as the other members of the set of “hard vowels,” [а, э, о, ы].

As an illustration of how tortuous attempts at explaining the sound of ы can be, consider Piatak and Avrashov’s exposition of what they (erroneously) call one of the only “two Russian sounds not in English” (along with the sound of letter x):

The vowel sound [ɨ], as stated above, is not an English sound, but rather a distinctly Russian sound not commonly found in other languages. To produce [ɨ], you must combine it with the preceding consonant. If the preceding consonant uses the front of the tongue, such as [t], then lower the back of the tongue to begin [ɨ] and then quickly raise the tongue to the [i] position. If the consonant uses the back of the tongue, such as [g], then lower the front of the tongue to begin [ɨ],

147 Piatak and Avarashov, 7: “There are only seven vowel sounds in Russian, and all but one, [ɨ] (see next page), are similar to English vowel sounds.” And Richter, ix “The vowels of Russian are pronounced essentially like Italian vowels, with the exception of [y].”
148 The choice to explain the articulation of this combination of letters at such length is somewhat odd, considering [гы] (or any velar followed by [ɨ]) is deemed an unacceptable sound combination within the
and then quickly raise the tongue to the [i] position. In other words, the tongue must move – as rapidly as it does during a diphthong – from a low position to a high position to produce [i]. The low position adds a distinct gutteral (sic) quality to the sound.\textsuperscript{149}

The vowel [i] must be modified during singing because it is impossible to sustain the quick motion of the tongue. It is best to think of and sing the vowel [i] as a guttural form of [i], that is, lower the back of the tongue while you sing [i].

One may imagine the reaction of the student of voice to the first paragraph above, as well as the strange sounds that might be produced from attempts to follow its instructions unsupervised. Interestingly, after that daunting description, the authors end with a rather straightforward explanation of the sound of [i] – one that is not very different from the one I propose here. In my opinion, the first paragraph in the passage gives a muddled description of the imperative that the vocalist not palatalize the preceding consonant: hence the exhortations to lower parts of the tongue that are not involved in the primary consonant articulation. This is indeed an important concern, but it is out of place in the description of the vowel sound here, and it leads to misdirected over-thinking of the kind demonstrated in the first paragraph above.

The difference in nature between the spoken and sung vowel that may be of primary importance here is that of duration. Since the duration of a spoken vowel is only a fraction of the duration of a sung vowel, the spoken vowel is much more influenced by its surrounding consonant environment; the sung vowel, for most of its long duration, is not necessarily so bound to its consonant neighbors. In other words, for the purposes of

\textsuperscript{149} Perhaps any speech sound described as “distinctly guttural” would warrant consideration of how such a quality is moderated in the language’s lyric diction.
good lyric diction, I suggest that the vowel onset is of crucial importance, but, at least in the case of these two high vowels, [i] and [ɨ], significant modifications can, and almost invariably do, occur for the greater duration of the vowels. Moreover, the vowel onset, which may well approximate the prototypical formant readings for the given vowel, is more correlated to a clear articulation of the preceding palatalized or unpalatalized consonant than it is an outcome of efforts to distinguish the two vowels themselves. Essentially, the “guttural” or even diphthongal quality present when native speakers of Russian demonstrate isolated ы in speech becomes absorbed into the preceding consonant through emphatic lack of palatalization. But there is no requirement to preserve a “distinct guttural quality” beyond this hard onset – indeed, such a quality would be contrary to general principles of classical singing in most musical contexts. The “quick motion of the tongue” spoken of in the quoted passage above is, in the singing context, simply the articulation of the preceding consonant, and since all consonant articulations imply a quick motion of the tongue, this one need not be seen as particularly exceptional or mysterious to the student of singing.

Listening to recordings of Russian singers, I came to suspect that the two vowels и and ы were acoustically more similar in singing than in speech. In casual polling, native singers were unable to identify accurately the intended sung vowel in isolation from its preceding consonants. The remainder of this section presents a study of the acoustics of these vowels, as sung by highly-regarded, professional singers and native speakers of Russian.

The singers whose vowels were analyzed are: Galina Vishnevskaya, soprano (Bolshoi Theater); Il’ia Levinskii, tenor (Komische Oper Berlin, Frankfurt Opera); Sergei
Leiferkus, baritone (Kirov); Nina Rautio, soprano (Bolshoi); contemporary star, Dmitri Khvorostovskii, baritone; and, for good measure, the legendary Fedor Chaliapin, bass.

The vowels were taken from recordings of songs or romansy, under the assumption that the artists would be more sensitive in their diction due to the intimate nature of art song, as opposed to the bravado and dynamic requirements of opera. In the selection of the specific sounds analyzed, attempts were made to select vowels of equal musical pitch and similar dynamic and emotional levels by selecting notes that are near to one another, if not adjacent. Of course, all these musical factors, including pitch or fundamental frequency, are constantly changing in music. However, it is reasonable to assume that a comparison of adjacent vowels from the same portion of one song is more telling for an acoustic comparison than a comparison from two differing songs or different portions of one song, in which the vocalist may be singing in two entirely differing modes or moods.

The exact slices analyzed using open source software, Praat, were from the middle sections of the vowels, far from the initial onset or the vowel’s release/onset of the next consonant. The formants were recorded from slices that seemed representative of the greatest portion of the vowel as determined by average formant values and by ear rather than from calculated vowel midpoints. That is, within those notes of longer duration, various effects of the vocalist’s musical interpretation, such as a brief intensifying could cause an acoustical change of little relevance to the issue of vowel discrimination. Such moments were avoided in the samples taken. Also avoided were

150 Songs taken from the following CDs: Piotr Tchaikovsky, Tchaikovsky: Complete Songs, Vol. 1 and 2; Modest Mussorgsky, Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, Pyotr Tchaikovsky, Mussorgsky, Rimsky-Korsakov, Tchaikovsky: Songs and Arias, Galina Vishnevskaya; Zolotye rossyip romansa, Fedor Shaliapin.

pitches at the extreme of any of the singers’ ranges because the vowel modification of interest here is one that occurs throughout the range for the sake of overall vocal timbre and line, but not those extreme modifications that accommodate vocal acrobatics. The highest pitch that was analyzed is the soprano D♯5 at 622 Hz, which is considered to be a part of the soprano “passaggio,” meaning that this pitch is transitional between the middle and upper registers of the voice. This note’s fundamental frequency is definitively higher than the first formants of the spoken close vowels, yet words should still be produced and perceived with relative ease on this pitch when performed by trained vocalists. For this reason it is of some interest to compare this note to the other pitches that have fundamentals only slightly above or below the first formants of the spoken close vowels. Finally, care was taken to select, when possible, sung tones in the absence of accompaniment. When accompaniment could not be fully eliminated, it was determined to be at a dynamic level that was quiet enough relative to the voice to have little effect on the formant readings on Praat.\(^1\)

The data collected below in table 6 constitute the first three formants for seven different pairs of и and ы performed by the six vocalists. In figure 21, the first and second formants are plotted along with the prototypical formant readings for the spoken vowels as reported by G. Fant.\(^2\)

\(^{1}\) For some of the songs the dynamic level of the accompaniment was reduced digitally by filtering out the parts recorded in stereo, with the assistance of Blake Althen at Human Factor Productions.

\(^{2}\) Fant, Akusticheskaia teoriia obrazovaniia rechi
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vocalist, voice type</th>
<th>Song, Composer</th>
<th>Pitch (Musical note and approximate $F_0$ in Hz)</th>
<th>Text (vowel measured in bold)</th>
<th>$F_1$ (Hz)</th>
<th>$F_2$ (Hz)</th>
<th>$F_3$ (Hz)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vishnevskaiia, soprano</td>
<td>&quot;Я ли в поле да не травушка была&quot; Tchaikovsky</td>
<td>D$^2_3$ (622)</td>
<td>да с немилым, седым</td>
<td>693.16</td>
<td>1979.74</td>
<td>2721.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>да с немилым, седым</td>
<td>664.94</td>
<td>1888.6</td>
<td>25770.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>G$^2_4$ (415)</td>
<td>Я ли в поле</td>
<td>474.65</td>
<td>1891.43</td>
<td>2138.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>Ох, ты, горе</td>
<td>472.66</td>
<td>1712.4</td>
<td>2512.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rautio, soprano</td>
<td>&quot;Погоди!&quot; Tchaikovsky</td>
<td>G$^3_4$ (370)</td>
<td>дождёмся ль мы ночи такой</td>
<td>418.77</td>
<td>1626.5</td>
<td>2604.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>дождёмся ль мы ночи такой</td>
<td>389.4</td>
<td>1704.97</td>
<td>2503.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Levinskii, tenor</td>
<td>&quot;Я тебе ничего не скажу&quot; Tchaikovsky</td>
<td>G$^3_3$ (208)</td>
<td>Раскрываются тихо листы</td>
<td>573.7</td>
<td>1820.18</td>
<td>2699.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>Раскрываются тихо листы</td>
<td>411.91</td>
<td>1861.04</td>
<td>2327.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leiferkus, baritone</td>
<td>&quot;Ни слова, о друг мой&quot; Tchaikovsky</td>
<td>C$^4_4$ (262)</td>
<td>Молчалы</td>
<td>526.49</td>
<td>1767.57</td>
<td>2581.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>Молчалы</td>
<td>448.27</td>
<td>1679.18</td>
<td>1874.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khvorostovskii, baritone</td>
<td>&quot;Не пой, красавица&quot; Rachmaninov</td>
<td>B$^3_3$ (247)</td>
<td>Увы, напоминают мне</td>
<td>318.28</td>
<td>1587.85</td>
<td>2286.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>Увы, напоминают мне</td>
<td>518.74</td>
<td>1768.87</td>
<td>2321.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chaliapin, bass</td>
<td>&quot;Сомнение&quot; Glinka</td>
<td>G$^3_5$ (98)</td>
<td>Счастливый</td>
<td>469.75</td>
<td>1713.33</td>
<td>2402.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>F$^3_2$ (92.5)</td>
<td>Счастливый</td>
<td>392.39</td>
<td>1703.98</td>
<td>2395.95</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6: Formants of sung high front/central vowels /i/ and /ɨ/ performed in commercial recordings of Russian songs by renowned Russian vocalists

154 With concert $A=440$ Hz
In speech, и and ы differ in the value of their F₂, indicating greater fronting of и, as illustrated with the triangle shaped icons in figure 21. These data support the hypothesis that acoustically the differences between these two vowels are greatly reduced in classical singing. All the F₂ values measured fall between the prototypical speech values. Some lowering of the second formant may be expected and attributed to the overall singing posture of the individual singers (lift in the nasal pharynx, larynx lowering or stabilizing, and other manipulations with the aim of achieving an “open
throat"). However, it is notable that nonetheless not a single measured $F_2$ falls beneath the prototypical speech second formant for ы. Regardless of whether the backing of и was the result of this overall posture or a conscious modification, it is telling that these singers do not adjust ы through further backing to compensate – that is, to maintain the contrast in $F_2$. In fact, in two cases – Leiferkus’s and Rautio’s – sung ы resulted in a higher $F_2$ than sung и. In summary, the acoustic data suggest that in cases where these singers may distinguish between the two vowels based on degree of fronting, the difference is dramatically less prominent than in speech. Further, the two cases in which the second formant value of ы was higher than that of и suggest that in lyric diction it is acceptable to forego entirely distinguishing between the formations of the two vowels.

Unexpectedly, the data seem to suggest that the singer who is determined to distinguish the two sounds may be better served to think in terms of openness and closeness. And, even more surprisingly, и was produced at least slightly, and sometimes significantly, more openly than ы, as attested to by the $F_1$ values and in contradistinction to the speech vowels, in which ы is slightly more open. The first formant of all sung vowels may be expected to raise both because of the singer’s vocal tract posture, as discussed above, and because the fundamentals are often higher than the first formants indicated by speech. As demonstrated in the data for the note of $D^5$, the first formant will rise to track with the fundamental as the fundamental rises. Nonetheless, in some instances the degree to which $F_1$ of и exceeded that of ы was striking (Khvorostovskii). It is not obvious how this can be explained. It is possible that the singers intentionally modify и for timbre to a greater extent than ы, as it is a notoriously “bright” vowel and also one they are likely to use in vocalizing (exercises) every day; that is, perhaps they
move into a more open posture automatically on и, but sing ы “naturally.” Regardless of
the explanation, even this difference is sometimes still quite slight; in the case of
Vishnevskaya’s lower note, the first formants are virtually identical. I maintain the
position that the foreign singer need not be overly concerned with producing the
demonstrably fine and inconsistently applied distinction between these two vowels, as
demonstrated by the data.

Regarding this statement, I have observed anecdotally that when native speakers
of Russian who are not trained coaches or language teachers take exception to the
pronunciation of ы in singing, usually the problem may be solved by insisting that the
singer articulate the preceding consonant “harder,” that is, without a trace of
palatalization. This sparks the question: was the prolonged ы vowel sound, in fact, to any
degree “incorrect” or was the problem entirely a consonantal issue all along? From the
phonological point of view, perhaps the question may seem poorly formulated, since the
division between consonant and vowel is not so clear cut. In the case of voiceless stops,
for instance, there is no consonant without vowel onset. In the context of singing,
however, the question is both valid (because of the prolonged nature of the vowel sound)
and important (due to the vowel configuration’s contribution to both diction and timbre,
musical line, etc). Basically, this question asks whether the singer must learn to carry this
vowel sound throughout the sung note in order to have an appropriate diction. The data
suggest that it is not necessary, that concentrating on an authentic consonant articulation
offers a suitable solution. It is likely that a good articulation of the consonant will
produce the vowel quality as vowel onset that will satisfy native listeners as acceptable.

Figure 22 maps the formants of the onset of the vowel ы and illustrates how the tenor
Levinskii fleetingly passes through the prototypical formants for spoken ы before raising the second formant to the values displayed in the table in a matter of about four hundredths of a second. For the purposes of vowels as singers think of them – the carriers of musical tone and melodic lines – the vowel quality he resolves to is “the vowel.” The vowel quality passed through so briefly at onset is functionally a consonant for a singer’s purposes: a movement of the tongue or other articulators that is ideally performed with clarity for the purposes of the text and with brevity for the purposes of the voice-as-musical-instrument.

Figure 22: Onset of vowel /ы/ in word листы on pitch G#3 (approx. 208 Hz) by tenor Il’ia Levinskii. At the place marked the formants, as calculated in Praat, approximate “prototypical” formant values: $F_1=335.92$ Hz; $F_2=1412.09$; $F_3=2053.35$. 
5.12 Other gradient allophonic vowel changes and singing in Russian

In the previous section, it was proposed that the differences in vowel quality between sung и and ы, which are inconsistent among native singers, are a result of the surrounding consonantal conditions. After initial vowel onset and within the duration of the sung note, the singer has some freedom to modify the vowel quality according to aesthetic needs, and it was shown that the modifications made by Russian singers do not preserve a well-defined acoustic distinction between и and ы. This result points to the fact that in lyric diction there is no question of a phonemic contrast between the two vowel sounds [i] and [ɨ]; when a difference in these vowel qualities is practiced in classical singing, it is certainly allophonic.

Besides the important vowel changes caused by reduction and the case of high front/central vowels discussed in section 5.11, there is another instance of allophonic vowel change that is the subject of frequent inquiry by students of singing and some discussion in the few available guides to Russian diction: the closeness versus openness of the mid-vowels [e] and [o]. Like the high vowels discussed above, in speech the mid-vowels also become more close when surrounded by palatalized consonants and more open when surrounded by unpalatalized consonants. Unlike the front vowels, however, there is no debate about the phonemic status of these differences: they are positively allophonic. However, some diction guides, with the aim of purveying precise transcriptions, choose to show two degrees of allophonic openness and closeness for either one or both of the mid-vowels ([ɛ] versus [ɛ] and [o] versus [ɔ]). Attentiveness to this vowel change sometimes results in formulations such as the following:
Close [e] occurs in Russian only before a palatalized consonant or a front vowel, [i] or [e]. Elsewhere only open [ɛ] occurs. Consequently, if word-final -e is followed without pause by a word beginning with a palatalized consonant or a front vowel, it is transcribed as [e] and is followed by ligature: . The singer who opts to break here, however, must sing the -e as [ɛ].\textsuperscript{155}

Though this may be an accurate formulation of a rule of spoken Russian pronunciation, it is highly questionable whether this vowel quality variation is regular enough in the lyric diction to warrant teaching it as a pronunciation rule to singers or expressing the difference in transcriptions for singing, especially in transcriptions that do not incorporate any value reductions after palatalized consonants such as those in the volume from which the passage above is quoted. Given the effects of vowel modification, with its tendency to vary based on the individual aesthetic preferences and vocal techniques of the vocalist, it seems implausible that a relatively small degree of allophonic change in vowel color in the spoken norm would be requisite in the lyric diction based on concerns about understandability or style.

The tendency for singers, coaches, and some publications of transcriptions to take pains over the precise degree of openness and closeness of mid-vowels is a habit acquired in the study of the pronunciation of Italian and German – two languages whose lyric dictions are studied by every English-speaking classical singer and in almost all cases at a much earlier stage in his/her education than Russian would be, of course. In both Italian and German, the openness and closeness of the mid-vowels is phonemic. Particularly in German, coaches and native speakers insist that singers show this contrast accurately. In

\textsuperscript{155} Richter, xi. Emphasis in the original.
the study of Italian diction, interestingly, this has long been an issue of some controversy, despite the contrast being undoubtedly phonemic in the spoken language:

The matter of the close or open E or O is a difficult one for the singer. Most authorities state unequivocally: “in unstressed syllables E and O are always close.” One grammarian states, unstressed E and O have an intermediate sound. In practice, however, this rule seems not always to hold and is broken continually and openly by front line artists, both Italian and foreign. If vocalists adhered strictly to this rule of close unstressed vowels, diction in some cases would be difficult and tone would suffer…

…Many singers, both Italian and foreign, feel the open vowel improves the flow of the singing tone and adopt a policy of open E and O throughout; these vocalists, in many cases, are abetted by vocal teachers, coaches and some reputed teachers of Italian diction… …In more than thirty-five years of singing and teaching singing, this writer has found the close vowels to be beautiful sounds, brilliant in resonance and constituting elements of great practical use in relation to correct intonation.156

This text was published in 1953. Based on a casual survey of more recent publications on Italian Lyric Diction, internet resources, and conversations overheard in American music departments, the debate appears to rage on. If there is such difference of opinion even among native speakers of Italian about the proper pronunciation of vowels for which the contrast at hand can be phonemic, it is unlikely that the issue is important to the lyric diction of a language in which the given contrast is not phonemic. Native listeners are unlikely to take note of the openness or closeness of mid-vowels in listening to singing. Further, during my in-country research, I did not come across a single instance of a teacher or student (Russian or foreign) of singing indicating any consciousness of this contrast in his/her instruction or performance of Russian repertoire. In the Russian

156 Errolle, Italian Diction for Singers: A treatment of methods and means for pronouncing Italian correctly in singing according to phonetic principles and with special attention to the necessary difference between spoken sounds and those that are sung, 52.
context, it seems that shades of openness and closeness of mid-vowels, indeed, fall under the domain of vocal aesthetics and technique, rather than lyric diction.

For those singers who insist on aiming for “authentic” (really, speech-like in the standard dialect) pronunciation of these vowels, it is worth also taking into account that even the binary laid out in a transcription system such as Richter’s does not even come close to representing the full spectrum of vowel colors produced in speech. Nor are these types of allophonic change restricted only to mid-vowels. Vinokur explains these changes with examples in his work on theatrical pronunciation:  

Apart from [the vowel’s] position in relation to the stress, also the consonantal environment – hard or soft – surrounding a given vowel sound has great significance for the sound structure of Russian vowels. Particularly important in this respect is the consonant that follows the vowel; specifically, in a position preceding a soft consonant, by the effect of assimilation, all vowels of the Russian language become either more fronted or more raised in comparison with the quality they have in a position preceding a hard consonant or in a position in which they are not followed by any consonant.

In addition, a similar change to vowels in the fronting or raising direction when preceding a soft consonant is possible in two degrees: the lesser – the first degree, when a hard consonant precedes the vowel or a consonant is absent; or the greater – the second degree, when the vowel is located between two [soft] consonants…

…All the back vowels—а, о, у—become more fronted…. …The front vowels—е, и—naturally, cannot move farther forward. But е moves higher… …and i remains generally unchanged…

Since all the changes described present an inevitable feature of Russian vowels, we will not mark their transcriptions, we will offer only for comparison (in orthographical writing) rows of basic and positional sounds.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Basic sound</th>
<th>First degree positional sound</th>
<th>Second degree positional sound</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>цел</td>
<td>цель</td>
<td>щель</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>мат</td>
<td>мать</td>
<td>мять</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>тот</td>
<td>плоть</td>
<td>тётъ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>стул</td>
<td>пуль</td>
<td>тюль</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

157 Vinokur, 55-56.
The excerpt from Vinokur demonstrates that gradient changes in vowel color occur throughout the spoken Russia vowel system, not exclusively to [e] or to just mid-vowels. Trying to represent each of these vowel shades in transcriptions, even in a book that takes speech pronunciation as its subject, struck its author as unnecessary. The usefulness of such a practice in singing transcription is all the more dubious. Further, according to Vinokur, there are at least three potential vowel colors for the four vowels above, determined by the consonantal conditions. Transcribing each of these vowel shades (and becoming proficient in pronouncing the transcriptions) would be a time-consuming and tedious task for the singer, with little return in improved understandability and style. Such an allowable (some may argue, preferable) simplification of the vowel systems of languages in lyric dictions is what permits Miller to argue that all languages are equally “singable:”

In the singing of any language, if the vowels are exact in their formation (not being victimized by transitional sounds) and if consonants are allowed to occur within the vocal line without influencing neighboring vowels, it will not matter whether vowel and consonants are few or many. The manner of their exact execution will vary from language to language, but their presence need not so complicate a given language that it becomes unfavorable for singing. Only by carrying over into song the retention of speech habits that include on-glides, off-glides, nasality and gutteral (sic) production does the singer allow one language to be less singable than another.  

If, nonetheless, a singer is determined to demonstrate such nuances of spoken diction in his singing, he is perhaps better served by simply allowing the consonantal environment to influence the vowel color throughout its duration. In order for that to occur, the singer must learn to consistently produce the distinction between palatalized and unpalatalized consonants. Once again, we find that proper articulation of consonants

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158 Miller, 185.
has the potential to affect the vowel quality in sung Russian. But learning to produce the Russian consonants is no easy task for the singer taking up Russian repertoire for the first time.

Whereas Russian sung vowels, as we have seen, are very easily produced by English-speaking singers – the difficulty lies in deciding which vowel to choose, but not in the physical task of articulation – consonants present the inverse situation: it is usually clear which consonant sounds are appropriate, but it is very difficult for English-speaking singers physically to articulate the sounds and, even having acquired the sounds, to self-monitor the proper application of the sounds in performance of the repertoire. The next chapter considers the consonants of Russian diction, focusing on acquisition difficulties among English-speaking vocalists and strategies for overcoming such obstacles.
Chapter 6: Consonants and strategies for the Anglophone singer

Brute animals have the vowel sounds; man only can utter consonants. It is natural, therefore, that the consonants should be marked first, as being the framework of the word…

-Samuel Coleridge\textsuperscript{159}

6.1 Introduction and methods

The findings in chapter five make it abundantly clear that the phonetics of a given language undergo significant change in the context of sung speech within “classical” or “academic” vocalism. In the case of the Russian language, the most prevalent of these changes occur within the vowel sounds, as described in chapter five. Consonant sounds may also be altered from speech norms in singing, but the allowable changes are on a much smaller scale than the changes that occur in vowels. This is a logical outcome of the fact, discussed in section 5.1, of vowels’ dual function (linguistic and melodic) in singing. One change that consonants may undergo in the singing context is optional voicing of sounds that are devoiced in speech. A secondary category of change includes lengthening for expressive purposes. This practice may be used with discretion in the diction of other singing languages as well. Section 6.5 discusses the sounds of Russian to which the native singers apply the practice.

A major concern of this chapter is the teaching and learning strategies that may be used to increase the likelihood of American singers’ acquiring an intelligible and

\textsuperscript{159} Specimens of the Table Talk of the Late Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 1835, 126.
appropriate Russian diction. The approaches suggested in sections 6.2 and 6.3 are tailored to the teaching of pronunciation in lyric diction with respect to the special abilities of a trained American singer or student of singing who has already studied the diction of other major singing languages. That is, they are designed with the assumption that the vocalist already has an understanding of basic phonetic differences between English and other singing languages, such as shifts in the primary place of articulation, aspiration, and voicing. These are issues with which even young singers will be familiar through study of the Italian repertoire. In this respect, the following report is by no means a list of the sounds of Russian or even a full discussion of every sound of Russian that causes problems in diction. It is not meant to be a manual of Russian lyric diction. Rather, the discussion concerns those features of Russian phonetics that are seldom encountered in the other major singing languages, and therefore are features with which singers and coaches are less accustomed to grappling.

The methods used to select the sounds and develop learning strategies over the course of this research included: consultation with American coaches of Russian diction and American singers who have tried Russian repertoire; consultation with Russian teachers, concertmasters, and singers about the sounds they consider most problematic to producing good Russian diction in foreign performers; research in the few available English-language guides to Russian diction and a few Russian-language works on vocal pedagogy; research in literature about pronunciation difficulties for American language learners; and – the most fruitful of all – many listening sessions together with native speaker informants. During the listening sessions the patterns of mistakes became quite evident. The most pervasive obstacle to good diction – by a wide margin – is the
difficulty singers have in acquiring the set of palatalized consonants and producing them with consistency in all vowel contexts.

6.2 Phonemic palatalization as the central problem of Russian lyric diction

Phonemic palatalized articulation in the set of soft consonants is the most distinctive feature of Russian phonology in the context of lyric singing diction. If a foreign singer of a Russian song wishes to have any chance of being understood by a Russian audience, making clear distinctions between the “hard” and soft” consonants is obligatory. Most of the consonant letters of Russian orthography can be realized as phonemically distinct hard (unpalatalized) and soft (palatalized) sounds, depending on the following vowel letter. Three consonant letters are always realized as hard and three always as soft. The always hard consonants are: /ʂ/ ш; /ʐ/ ж; and /ts/ ц. The always soft ones are: /ʨ/ ч; /ɕɕ/ щ; and /j/ й (ь in certain contexts). The paired consonants sounds are given below:
Table 7: The paired palatalized and unpalatalized consonants of Russian. The velars are asterisked (*), as palatalization is allophonic for them. Due to the vowel context in which the palatalized velars occur, they are not problematic for foreign singers to articulate accurately.

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Labial nasal</td>
<td>m, m'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dental/alveolar nasal</td>
<td>n, n'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voiced labial plosive</td>
<td>b, b'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unvoiced labial plosive</td>
<td>p, p'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voiced dental/alveolar plosive</td>
<td>d, d'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unvoiced dental/alveolar plosive</td>
<td>t, t'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voiced velar plosive*</td>
<td>g, g'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unvoiced velar plosive*</td>
<td>k, k'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voiced labial fricative</td>
<td>v, v'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unvoiced labial fricative</td>
<td>f, f'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voiced dental/alveolar fricative</td>
<td>z, z'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unvoiced dental/alveolar fricative</td>
<td>s, s'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unvoiced velar fricative*</td>
<td>x, x'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dental/alveolar trill</td>
<td>r, r'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dental/alveolar approximate</td>
<td>l, l'</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Palatalized consonants are the most difficult feature of Russian phonology for American singers to learn to hear and produce. For most of the paired consonants, American singers perceive palatalization as an up-glide into the following vowel rather than as a feature of the consonant (CjV), a logical outcome of the fact that English does not have this phonemic distinction. Russian speakers, on the other hand, parse the combination as palatalized consonant plus vowel (CjV), and do not perceive a glide at all, even though a short off-glide is sometimes present in the pronunciation of most speakers. Therefore, the first task to be presented when teaching Russian diction should be learning how to think about the soft consonant sounds of Russian. In this respect, various
transliterated or poorly transcribed editions of Russian songs have done a disservice to non-Russian singers, as unfortunate representations of soft consonants of the type tebia, tebja, tebya, tyebya encourage singers to misunderstand Russian soft consonants and drill the most insidious pronunciation error of Russian diction into the “muscle memory.”

The proper sequencing in the presentation of new information is a crucial element of effective pedagogical practices in all disciplines, which includes language acquisition and the study of lyric diction. The soft Russian consonants should be presented immediately as entirely separate sounds from their hard counterparts to singers in order to get a head start in the battle against Russian orthography, which encodes consonantal palatalization into the vowel letters. In fact, presenting the distinction between palatalized and unpalatalized consonants before the orthography is tackled could be an effective strategy for faster acquisition of the correct pronunciation, though ideally the students should ultimately become familiar with the Cyrillic orthography since so much of the repertoire is unavailable in transcription. In order to disassociate further the hard consonant sounds from the soft consonant sounds, it may be useful in initial lessons to practice pronouncing groups of soft consonants in sequence, separating these from groups of hard consonants, so that the tongue and brain are trained to associate the soft set of consonants more with one another than with their corresponding hard pair. Through this technique the tongue, ideally, will become accustomed to performing the secondary (palatal) articulation, and later practice of the consonant pairs will be less mystifying to the singer than is often the case now.

Even with a perfect explanation and sequencing of the topic of consonant palatalization, several of the soft consonants are physically quite difficult for American
singers to produce. Typically the labial plosives and labial fricatives are more difficult to maneuver than the other soft sounds, with the exception of the palatalized dental trill /r/, which carries the distinction of being the trickiest sound for many singers, especially in the intervocalic or word-final position. Several of the strategies presented in the next section address the problem of soft consonants and how they may be practiced for both initial acquisition and, later, consistent realization.

6.3 Sounds and strategies

6.3.1 A starting point: /l̞/ and /n̞/

Usually the best sounds to begin with in training soft consonants for Russian lyric diction are [l̞] and [n̞] because most singers are already very proficient in producing a similar sound in the Italian palatal consonants: [ʎ], -gl- *pagliacci* and [ɲ], -gn- *gnocchi*. Essentially, the diction coach may use these familiar sounds to promote a tactile understanding of the palatal articulation and then direct the student to introduce the primary alveolar articulation back into the sound. Even if the singer ultimately over-“Italianizes” the sound – that is, does not learn to distinguish the palatal articulation from the simultaneous double (palatalized) articulation, these two Italian sounds are an acceptable alternative to the authentic Russian soft sounds in the lyric diction and, at any rate, are far preferable to the insidious [lj] and [nj].
6.3.2 Using [i]

The palatalized consonants of Russian are much easier to produce in certain vowel contexts than in others. Before the front close vowels, for example, they come relatively naturally, since the tongue does not need to move much in transitioning from consonant to vowel. Therefore, to practice pronouncing the soft consonant sounds, it is useful to begin by producing the consonants between two front close vowels, then to introduce other vowels gradually, beginning with more fronted vowels and working your way back. An example of one possible such sequence is given below:

Student repeats:

[i-d'j-i-d'i-d'i-d'i d'ik'ij ad'in
i-d'e-d'i-d'e-d'i id'eja d'elajet
i-d'u-d'i-d'u-d'i d'uz'ina d'ujm
i-d'o-d'i-d'o-d'i id'o$ d'orgat$]

Exercises of this type could be designed to target effectively any combination of vowel and soft consonant.

6.3.3 Fast vowel onset

Even among non-Russian singers who have otherwise excellent Russian diction, there is one kind of flaw that frequently appears at some point in performance and is immediately recognizable and disagreeable to native ears. The problem is the lengthening
of consonant stops followed by long glides during the realization of soft consonants. The more back and open the vowel, the more likely the problem is to appear for the reason discussed in the previous sub-section. In addition, it is more pervasive in the pronunciation of more energetic performers and pieces of music because, in an attempt to emphasize the consonant for expressive reasons, the performers either linger on the consonant sound (and hence lengthen the off-glide) or energetically aspirate consonant sounds that are un-aspirated in Russian. These practices result in a pause between consonant and glide. Because this pronunciation is linked to the emphatic production of singing, the mispronunciation is more noticeable in singing than, for instance, in the speech of students of Russian.

The problem may be observed in many commercially available recordings on common words such as тебя and меня. Russians parse the problematic pronunciation as /tʲebʲja/ and /mʲenʲja/. Note that /j/ after a stopped soft consonant is possible in Russian and would be indicated in the orthography through a soft sign: /pʲuʲ/ пью, /sʲemʲja/ семья.

This pronunciation should be especially vigilantly avoided. When it occurs, it may often be corrected by requesting from the singer a short consonant and immediate vowel onset. This sound distinction is extremely difficult for non-native singers to recognize. Therefore, it is important that the coach always point it out and insist on correcting it when it occurs.
6.3.4 Dark [ɫ]

Richter indicates that special caution is needed to produce the pharyngealized “dark” Russian [ɫ]:

Russian hard [ɫ] merits special mention, since it is much harder than even English final ‘dark’ [l] and affords, by its mispronunciation, one of the most common giveaways of a non-Russian singer. Hard [ɫ] is pronounced with the tongue in the same contour as in English ɹ: earn, earth, etc. A good exercise for practicing Russian hard ɬ is to say English grr, then hold everything in place except the tip of the tongue, which moves forward only far enough to make dental contact, and say girl with the ɬ in the throat, as in gargling with it, and hold onto it as long as breath allows. That’s Russian hard [ɫ]; and the substitution of ‘continental’ ɬ for it sounds comically wrong to the Russian ear. 160

As Richter suggests, some caution must be taken to make sure that Russian unpalatalized [ɫ] is decisively hard and dark. Overall, the sound is not at all difficult for American singers to produce; it can be difficult for speakers of dialects of English that do not have the dark L (in Wales and Ireland, for example). Using the American dark L is sufficient for an appropriate and intelligible, even if not native-like, lyric diction, but care must be taken not to allow habits acquired from singing Italian or other repertoire influence this sound.

One final note on this consonant is in order. Occasionally it is suggested that vowels adjacent to the hard [ɫ] should be backed due to coarticulatory effects, as in Russian speech. This question is similar to the one taken up in section 5.12. Just as was found in 5.12, for the majority of singing contexts, allophonic changes to vowel color on adjacent vowels, which would be indicated in speech pronunciation, do not need to be realized in singing. Indeed, musical aesthetics should take priority over faithfulness to

160 Richter, x. Emphasis in the original.
speech vowel qualities in this case. Singers are accustomed to avoiding coarticulation or “contamination” of vowels by the dark L or other consonant sounds in English (e.g. common admonitions to extend the vowel sounds as long as possible, delay or avoid diphthongization, perform consonants quickly, use CV-CV syllabification, etc.). Russian singers likewise frequently shift away from the backed vowel sound after hard [l] during a sustained note. In allegro singing, of course, there may not be sufficient time to articulate away from the more backed vowel sound. But on the whole, vowel color here may be determined by the musical context, vocal aesthetic, and comfort.

6.3.5 Consonant clusters

Another cause of anxiety among those who first encounter Russian diction is the large number of consonant clusters found in the language. Care must be taken not to insert so-called “shadow vowels” in between sounds in clusters. American singers often approach consonant clusters with an overly energetic articulation, usually expressed through unnecessary aspiration of one or more of the consonants. In general, the same approaches that often are taken in practicing German consonant clusters are useful in practicing those of Russian: one may begin practicing the last consonant in the cluster and build backward. Additionally, for word initial clusters, an excellent practice technique is to insert a vowel in front of the cluster to practice, then remove it once the muscles have become accustomed to the cluster.\(^{161}\)

\(^{161}\) A technique recommended by Timothy Cheek for Czech diction. *Singing in Czech*, 74.
One reason that Russian consonant cluster are so intimidating to learners is the word-initial position in which many of them are found. English has its own complex consonant clusters, but they often occur word-finally.\textsuperscript{162} Therefore, an excellent (and entertaining) strategy for practicing clusters can be to think up combinations of English words that result in the same or similar cluster over word boundaries as the one targeted in Russian. Once the student sees that s/he has the ability to produce the cluster using familiar words from his/her native language, s/he usually can produce it in context in a much more relaxed manner appropriate to pronunciation. For example:

здрасьвуіте [zdrastuvjte]

For the initial cluster, the coach may instruct the singer to pronounce the English words “Faze dross,” imitating a foreign accent to maintain the dental and trill in the combination [dr]: [fejzdras]. The second cluster may be similarly approached with the words, “lost voom.” A difficult cluster like взгляд [vzgljat] is more manageable when one points out its similarity to the English sentence “Dave’s glad.”

6.4 Emphatic consonants: voicing in Russian lyric diction

It has already been discussed how some of the most ubiquitous obstacles to acquiring good Russian lyric diction are connected to efforts singers make to enunciate consonants clearly or emphatically, specifically through un-Russian aspiration and shadow vowels. Russian diction classes or coaching sessions should include a discussion of Russian as a “true voicing” language, in contrast with aspirating languages like

English and German. Diction courses and manuals always include listings of voiced/unvoiced pairs of consonants, but there is rarely mention of the different meaning of voicing for different languages. It is quite common for voiced/unvoiced pairs of Russian stops to be drilled using the model of the aspirated/partially voiced contrast of English stops. None of the manuals consulted for this project addresses the issue. If singers are made aware of the early voicing onset time of Russian stops, they can develop much greater authenticity in their Russian pronunciation. Additionally, learning to “truly” voice consonants has advantages for emphasis, expressivity, and musicality in the performance of Russian repertoire.

The few English language manuals on Russian diction uniformly report devoicing of final consonants according to speech norms as obligatory in Russian diction. However, a Russian language source, as well as native speaker informants with whom I checked, is of a different opinion. Aleksei Ivanov, baritone (Bolshoi Theater) and author of several books on singing, indicates that final “revoicing” may sometimes be used for projection and expression:

Where it is phonetically possible replace a non-sonorous [consonant] with another, related one (instead of ф – в), the word ‘любовь’ in speech is usually pronounced ‘любофиь.’ In singing, for great clarity in diction, one should sing ‘любовь’ (Chaliapin does so in Massenet’s ‘Élégie’). In general, when words have more sonorous consonants, you must skillfully use them in the interests of diction and the addition of vividness in the vocal phrase, despite speech practices.163

163 Aleksei Ivanov, Iskusstvo peniia, 91.
6.5 Expressive consonants: lengthening and legato

Ivanov indicates another way in which consonants may change from their speech norms for expressivity and projection – through lengthening:

It is also recommended to pronounce Russian words that have sonorous consonants in their composition not only with support on the vowels, but also, in singing, with lengthening of the semi-consonants:

пrrрасвет, порррядок, таммм, тенннь, лллюди, лллюбовь

Lengthening of consonants, when used sparingly, can be quite effective for emphasizing important words. Such a technique may also be employed on the fricative consonants. However, it would be inappropriate in the general lyric diction to use this device whenever possible, as Ivanov’s seems to recommend. In fact, the available Russian language literature on the subject (of which there is little) usually focuses on the opposite practice: the need to minimize consonant length for the benefit of a smooth legato line:

Consonant sounds disrupt the stream of vowels. For the sake of cantilena, consonants and their clusters should be pronounced quickly, compactly. It is necessary to abbreviate the change in the vocal tract, which happens during consonants, and quickly return to the singing formation of the oral pharynx. That is, the form of the mouth, the position of the tongue must be stabilized for the projection of the cantilena sound.

Here it should be mentioned that true voicing of consonants is another way that the Russian language is able to produce a fluid cantilena, hence another reason that more attention to voicing in Russian diction would be beneficial to singers. Regarding consonant brevity, one author invokes linguistic studies of transitional cues – the fact that information about consonants (for perception) is contained in their surrounding vowels and vice versa – as validation of the concept that “the vowel carries the consonant.”

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164 Ivanov, 90.
165 LaBouff calls the technique “expressive doubling,” 149.
166 Daletskii, 179.
quotes an aphorism he heard from an old voice teacher: “A vowel carries a consonant, as a horse his rider.”

Thus, in all likelihood there are different “schools” and certainly different practices concerning the degree to which consonants may be emphasized through lengthening and “revoicing,” just as there is a diversity of approaches to vowel reduction. And, as in the issue of vowel reduction, there is some room within the bounds of good lyric diction for artistic interpretation. However, there remains a major disparity between the vowels and consonants of sung Russian with respect to the amount of effort that must be expended in order to learn them. Whereas the vowels, even in the complexities of reduction, remain relatively simple sounds to produce, the consonants of Russian present significant challenges in learning their articulations and avoiding interference from English.

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167 Morozov, 86. Quoting teacher A.M. Razvarina.
Chapter 7: Concluding remarks

This dissertation discusses a variety of topics related to the cultural, literary, and linguistic contexts of vocalism in the Russian language, as performed by both Russian and non-Russian singers. The author hopes that this work will pique interest in the vast repertoire of wonderful art songs and opera that Russian composers have created, much of which remains largely unknown outside of former Soviet countries. Russian *romansy*, in particular, comprise a trove of beautiful music that is virtually unexplored in the West, for only a meager handful of songs of Rachmaninov and Tchaikovsky are regularly performed in concert.

The early chapters of the dissertation argue that Russian music should not be evaluated as “authentic” or “inauthentic” based on factors such as the Eastern theme, folksong quoting, national subject matter, source text, or the degree of association with Western musical idioms. The historical tendency for critics (Russian and Western) to do so is a symptom of the perceived “Otherness” of Russian performance art that still persists to a degree today. The discussion in the second chapter traces this perception to Diaghilev’s “Russian Seasons.” However, rather than “placing blame” solely on Diaghilev, the chapter examines the cultural context surrounding the Western reaction to Russian opera and dance.

The dissertation also sheds light on the topic of Russian lyric diction in an effort to demystify some aspects of sung Russian that have made Western artists hesitant to sing
in Russian in the past. It develops specific strategies for singers’ acquisition of the soft
consonant sounds. The largest chapter is devoted to the topic of the vowels of lyric
diction and, especially, the patterns of vowel reduction used in singing in Russian. The
analysis demonstrates that vowels in Russian lyric diction are a powerful interpretive tool
available to the vocalist. Rather than simply memorizing pronunciation rules, vocalists
and vocal coaches should always consider how the musical setting of a text should
influence diction practices. As vowel reduction has been the least understood topic in
Russian lyric diction, the discoveries contained in these chapters should give singers
confidence that good Russian diction is not out of reach. American musicians and
audiences have a proven fondness for Russian instrumental music; it would be a great gift
to the opera-going public if American companies would begin to present a greater variety
of the Russian operatic and art song repertoire.
References

Bibliography


Errolle, Ralph. *Italian Diction for Singers: A treatment of methods and means for pronouncing Italian correctly in singing according to phonetic principles and with*
special attention to the necessary difference between spoken sounds and those that are sung. Boulder: Pruett Press, 1953.


**Discography/Videography**


Appendix

Research instrument: Questionnaire on Russian vocalism and diction

Биографические сведения

Инструкции: В данной анкете Вам будет предложено ответить на некоторые вопросы о Ваших географических, лингвистических и музыкальных данных, с целью того, чтобы исследователи были осведомлены о Вашем опыте и специализации. Все данные будут собраны анонимно и надежно защищены. Анализ и отчет о результатах данного исследования будут основаны на общих тенденциях в ответах, а не на индивидуальных ответах. Вы можете пропустить вопросы, на которые Вы не можете или не хотите отвечать.

Географические данные:

1. Пожалуйста, перечислите места (города/регионы и страны), где Вы прожили значительное время, начиная с детства и заканчивая сегодняшним днём. Также укажите, в каком возрасте Вы жили в каждом из указанных Вами городов/стран.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Город/регион/страна</th>
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Языковые данные:

1. Какой Ваш родной язык (родные языки)? ________________________________

2. Какие другие языки вы изучали? ________________________________
3. На каких языках Вы говорите свободно? ____________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

4. На каких языках Вы разговариваете регулярно? Как часто (каждый день/неделю,
и т.д.)?
________________________________________________________________________

5. Опишите, какой у Вас есть опыт/образование в области лингвистики, лирической
dикции и в смежных областях.
________________________________________________________________________

Музыкальный и вокальный опыт:

1. Опишите Ваше музыкальное и/или вокальное образование, а так же место
(географическое и/или название учебного учреждения), где Вы получили это
образование.
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

2. Перечислите другие страны, в которых у Вас был значительны опыт в качестве
исполнителя либо слушателя музыки.
________________________________________________________________________

3. Опишите, какая музыка оказала на Вас наибольшее влияние, и какие
музыкальные жанры, стили, и каких композиторов Вы учите или исполняете
наиболее часто.
________________________________________________________________________
4. Пронумеруйте следующие пункты в порядке, в котором они описывают Ваш род занятий в области музыки. Поставьте 1 перед пунктом, который характеризует Ваш основной род занятий, 2, 3, 4 и т.д. перед другими пунктами, которые относятся к Вашему роду деятельности. Не пронумеровывайте пункты, не имеющие отношения к Вашему роду занятий.

_____ Вокалист - (классическая музыка)
_____ Вокалист - (не классическая музыка)
_____ Педагог по вокалу
_____ Педагог по дикции
_____ Дирижёр хора
_____ Концертмейстер
_____ Аккомпаниатор
_____ Дирижёр оркестра
_____ Композитор
_____ Критик
_____ Музыковед
_____ Инструменталист
_____ Другое: __________________________________________
_____ Другое: __________________________________________
_____ Другое: __________________________________________
5. Перечислите произведения и композиторов русских опер и романсов, которые вы пели, играли, или учили. Если их слишком много, чтобы перечислить, укажите названия тех произведений, с которыми Вы наиболее долго и близко знакомы.
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

6. Какие у Вас любимые произведения русских композиторов?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

7. Перечислите несколько Ваших любимых произведений любой народности.
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

**Русский вокализм**

**Инструкции**: В данной анкете Вам будет предложено высказать Ваше мнение о русской музыке и пении. Вы можете пропустить вопросы, на которые Вы не можете или не хотите отвечать.

1. Перечислите некоторых из Ваших любимых широко известных певцов классической музыки любой эры и народности.

Сопрано:______________________________________________________________

Меццо-сопрано:________________________________________________________

Контральто:____________________________________________________________

Тенор:______________________________________________________________

Баритон:____________________________________________________________

Бас:______________________________________________________________
Другое:

2. Если у Вас есть любимое вокальное качество или тембр, который Вам особенно нравится в классических голосах, пожалуйста, опишите его своими словами.

3. Считаете ли Вы, что Русская Школа пения существует наряду с другими национальными школами, такими как Итальянская, Немецкая и Английская?

4. Если вы ответили "да" на вопрос №3, с какими другими национальными школами, по Вашему мнению, Русская Школа имеет общие черты, например: историческое развитие, педагогические подходы или понятия о резонансе, дыхании и т.д? Вы можете дать развернутый ответ на данный вопрос.

5. Считаете ли Вы, что русские классические певцы часто имеют узнаваемые вокальные качества или тембр(ы), общие между собой и отличные от вокальных качеств певцов других народностей.

6. Если Вы ответили "да" на вопрос №5, пожалуйста, опишите своими словами тембр(ы) или другие качества типичных русских голосов. Вы, также, можете указать, когда данные качества зависят от классификации голоса (сопрано, контратто и т.д.).
8. Перечислите нескольких певцов, которые, по Вашему мнению, являются представителями русской вокальной традиции.

9. Другие комментарии:
Русская лирическая дикция.

Инструкции: В данной анкете Вам будет предложено ответить на вопросы о Вашем опыте в области вокальной музыки, исполняемой на русском языке. Вы можете пропустить вопросы, на которые Вы не можете или не хотите отвечать.

1. Укажите, сколько внимания Вы уделяете следующим аспектам подготовки песен и арий по шкале от 1 до 10, где 10 означает "максимальное" количество внимания.

___ Ритмическая точность
___ Точная дикция
___ Физические жесты
___ Музыкальная фразировка
___ Ясная дикция (четкое произношение)
___ Динамика (соответствие нотам)
___ Красота тона/голоса
___ Чистота интонирования
___ Понимание музыкального стиля
___ Естественное произношение (как у носителя языка)
___ Понимание слов
___ Понимание характера/атмосферы
___ Аутентичная дикция

2. Когда Вы или Ваш студент исполняет песню или арию на родном языке перед слушателями, для которых данный язык также является родным, какую часть текста песни Вы ожидаете, что слушатели поймут?

___ Всё или почти всё
___ Большую часть
3. Когда Вы или Ваш студент исполняет песню или арию на неродном языке перед слушателями, для которых данный язык является родным, какую часть текста песни Вы ожидаете, что слушатели поймут?

__ Всё или почти всё
__ Большую часть
__ Некоторую часть
__ Небольшую часть
__ Ничего
__ Не уверен(а)

Комментарии: ____________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

4. Когда Вы слушаете оперу на языке, на котором Вы говорите свободно, какую часть текста Вы обычно понимаете?

__ Всё или почти всё
__ Большую часть
__ Некоторую часть
__ Небольшую часть
__ Ничего
__ Не уверен(а)

Комментарии: ____________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
5. Когда Вы слушаете романс/lieder на языке, на котором Вы говорите свободно, какую часть текста Вы обычно понимаете?

__ Всё или почти всё
__ Большую часть
__ Некоторую часть
__ Небольшую часть
__ Ничего
__ Не уверен(а)

Комментарии: ___________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

6. Когда вы не можете понять текст песни, исполняемой на Вашем родном языке носителем языка, насколько негативно это воздействует на Вас по шкале от 1 до 10, где 10 означает "полностью портит впечатление" и 1 означает "не имеет никакого значения"?

________________________________________________________________________

Комментарии:
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
7. Когда вы не можете понять текст песни, исполняемой на Вашем родном языке не носителем языка, насколько негативно это воздействует на Вас по шкале от 1 до 10, где 10 означает "полностью портит впечатление" и 1 означает "не имеет никакого значения"?

Комментарии:

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

8. (Пропустите данный вопрос если он не актуален для Вас) Когда Вы преподаете или изучаете песню или арию на русском языке, для исполнения не русскоязычным певцом, что из нижеперечисленного Вы используете?

__ Кириллический алфавит

__ Транскрипцию в интернациональном фонетическом алфавите (IPA)

__ Другую транскрипцию (Какую? ______________________________________)

Выразите Ваше мнение относительно любой техники, которую Вы считаете полезной для изучения/обучения русской дикции.

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

9. (Пропустите данный вопрос если он не актуален для Вас) Когда Вы преподаете или изучаете песню или арию на русском языке, для исполнения русскоязычным певцом, уделяете ли Вы специальное внимание вопросам дикции? Если да, пожалуйста опишите факторы и звуки, которые вы обсуждаете.

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

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10. (Пропустите данный вопрос если он не актуален для Вас) Насколько сложно, по Вашему мнению, англо-язычным певцам освоить русскую дикцию, по сравнению с дикцией следующих языков:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Язык</th>
<th>Легче русского</th>
<th>Примерно одинаково</th>
<th>Сложнее русского</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Итальянский</td>
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<tr>
<td>Французский</td>
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<td>Чешский</td>
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Комментарии: ___________________________________________________________
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11. Какие факторы и звуки русского языка, по Вашему мнению, являются наибольшим препятствием для достижения хорошей русской дикции англоязычными певцами? Вы можете дать развернутый ответ на данный вопрос.
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________

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12. Поддерживаете ли Вы идею перевода текстов опер и романсов на родной язык певца или слушателей для того, чтобы а) у исполнителя не возникало проблем с дикцией при исполнении произведений на иностранном языке; б) у слушателей не возникало проблем с восприятием текста произведений на иностранном языке.