

St. Petersburg State Academic Capella

Sunday, November 16, 3 pm, 2003
Zellerbach Hall

Vladislav Chernushenko, artistic director and chief conductor

Sacred Hymns of the Russian Orthodox Church and Russian Folk Songs

Sacred Hymns

Dmitry Bortniansky	Priidite vospoim, liudie ("Come, O People"), Concerto No. 15
Georgi Sviridov	Molitva ("Prayer")
Sviridov	Liubov' sviataya ("Sacred Love")
Sergei Rachmaninoff	Nine otpushchayeshi ("Lord, Now Lettest Thou Thy Servant Depart")
Pavel Chesnokov	Da ispravitsia molitva moya ("Let My Prayer Arise")
Aleksandr Arkhangelsky	Simvol veri (The Nicene Creed)
Chesnokov	Velichit dusha moya Ghospoda ("My Soul Magnifies the Lord")
Chesnokov	S nami Bog ("God Is with Us")
Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky	Sviat Ghospod' Bog nash ("Holy Is the Lord Our God")

INTERMISSION

Russian Folk Songs

arr. M. Klimov	Suita ("Suite of Russian Folk Songs")
arr. A. Novikov	Uzh ti pole moyo ("O Thou, Field of Mine")
arr. A. Pashchenko	V tiomnom lese ("In the Dark Forest")
arr. O. Kolovsky	Ey, uhnem ("The Song of the Volga Boatmen")
arr. A. Fliarkovsky	Kalitka ("The Wicket")
arr. F. Kozlov	Korobeyniki ("The Peddlers")
arr. V. Bulin	Dvenadtsat' razboinikov ("The Legend of the Twelve Robbers")
arr. Poltavtsev	Shto mne zhit' i tuzhit' ("Why Should I Live and Grieve")
arr. O. Kolovsky	Na goruske, na gore ("On a Mountain, on a Hill")

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When in 1988, the Eastern Slavic peoples (Russians, Ukrainians, Belarussians) celebrated 1000 years of their baptism into Christianity, they were also marking the 1000-year anniversary of the origins of their glorious tradition of vocal art music. It was within the context of the richly chanted Orthodox liturgy, received from Byzantium, that the Slavs began to cultivate the practice of solo vocal and ensemble performance, unaccompanied by any instruments. For more than 500 of those

years, since the latter quarter of the 15th century, one particular group of performers—known variously as the Tsar’s Singing Clerics, the Court Singers, the Imperial Court Chapel, and the Glinka State Capella—has continuously played a leading role in the nurturing of those traditions; their direct artistic “descendants”—the St. Petersburg Capella—stand before you tonight, making their first tour ever on the North American continent.

The great Russian choral tradition of modern times developed as a result of a fortunate cross-fertilization between Orthodox liturgical chant—essentially a unison tradition of purely vocal singing—and Western European choral part-singing, which came to Russia some half a century before the founding of St. Petersburg in 1703. The Tsar’s Singing Clerics were already adept at singing seemingly endless, seamless phrases of melismatic chant for hours at a time. With the coming of Western-style polyphony, their skills expanded to encompass florid Baroque-style sacred “concertos,” some in as many as 12 and 24 parts. Italian opera composers who began to be invited regularly to the imperial court in St. Petersburg brought with them the traditions of bel canto, which eventually became the foundation of the Russian vocal school. Already in 1765, when the famed Italian composer Baldassare Galuppi heard the Imperial Chapel for the first time, he exclaimed: “I have yet to hear such a magnificent choir in Italy!”

The excellence of the Imperial Chapel continued to grow under the leadership of Dmitry Bortniansky (1751–1825), the first composer featured in today’s program. Born in Ukraine, the talented lad was brought to St. Petersburg as a boy soprano at the tender age of seven. After studies with Galuppi, he was sent at the age of 18 to Italy, where he remained for 11 years, refining his musical and compositional skills. Bortniansky composed music in all vocal and instrumental genres, including Italian and French opera, but his greatest legacy remains his sacred music written for the Orthodox Church. Some of his settings are on appointed liturgical texts from specific services; others are based on texts freely selected from the Psalms and other sacred texts, which were intended to be sung on ceremonial occasions or as “sacred concertos” preceding Holy Communion at the Divine Liturgy, when the practice arose of filling the time with extended musical selections. Altogether, Bortniansky wrote 35 such concertos for single choir, 10 for double choir, and 14 settings of the *Te Deum Laudamus*—four for single choir and 10 for double choir.

During Bortniansky’s tenure, the Imperial Chapel not only sang at services in the court churches, but also became increasingly involved in concert performances of Western Masses, oratorios, and cantatas. In 1824, it gave the world premiere of Beethoven’s *Missa Solemnis*. So famous did the Chapel’s reputation become, that in the 1820s the King of Prussia Friedrich Wilhelm III sent a special envoy to St. Petersburg to investigate how the Chapel managed to achieve its level of musical and administrative excellence, so that the Berlin Cathedral Choir could be reorganized in a similar fashion.

The tradition of choral excellence that was formed within the walls of the Imperial Chapel found a worthy successor in Moscow towards the end of the 19th century, when the second oldest Russian choir, the Patriarchal Singing Clerics, eventually renamed the Moscow Synodal Choir, was reorganized in the 1880s as a specialized institution for the cultivation of Russian Orthodox church music. This reorganization gave rise to the great renaissance of sacred choral composition known as the “new Russian choral school.” Emerging as a splendid choral ensemble, the 80-voice Synodal Choir of men and boys inspired dozens of Russian composers—from such prominent figures as Tchaikovsky and Rimsky-Korsakov to lesser-known “choral specialists” such as Kastalsky, Chesnokov, Gretchaninoff, and Nikolsky—to turn their creative energies to composing choral music on texts drawn from the liturgy. The culmination of this compositional flowering was Sergei Rachmaninoff’s monumental *All-Night Vigil* (a.k.a. “Vespers”), Op. 37, composed in 1915, shortly before the communist revolution of 1917. The atheistic Bolsheviks thoroughly disrupted and suppressed the Russian Orthodox Church and the cultivation of its musical and artistic traditions for the ensuing 75 years. Both the Imperial Chapel and the Synodal Choir were secularized and, with only the narrowest exceptions, were effectively forbidden to perform sacred choral music. Composers who had composed for the Church either emigrated (Gretchaninoff, Rachmaninoff, Arkhangelsky) or were compelled to turn their attention to arranging folk songs for chorus (Kastalsky, Chesnokov, Victor Kalinnikov, Nikolsky). Only within the last 10 to 15 years has the cultivation of sacred and liturgical music resumed in Russia, as choirs have attempted to recapture

the interpretational subtlety and depth of spiritual understanding that marked the performances of their pre-revolutionary forebears.

Tonight's program by the St. Petersburg Capella resonates with the rich and turbulent history of both the choir itself and Russian choral music in general. The program opens with a sacred concerto by Bortniansky, perhaps the quintessential St. Petersburg composer, whose works, while cast in an Italianate musical form, nevertheless reflect an Orthodox church composer's commitment to expressing the emotion and meaning of the sacred text. The concerto "Come, O People" is a setting of a resurrectional text typically sung at Vespers, which, in the course of its extended multi-movement form, uses contrasting tempos and tonalities to express the nuances of the text. The extensive use of solo voices, contrasted with the full choir, ties it together with the other selections on the first half of the program.

St. Petersburg composer Georgi Sviridov (1915–1998) lived almost his entire creative life under the Soviet regime, yet he stands as one of the foremost perpetuators of the pre-revolutionary Russian choral school. Unable openly to write sacred music, in 1969 he composed the two choruses, "Prayer" and "Sacred Love," which in 1973 he fashioned into a triptych of pieces for a historical play, *Tsar Feodor Ioannovich*, by Aleksei Tolstoy, set in the 16th century; within the context of the play, the religious content is well concealed. Although the text of the first chorus, "Bogoroditse Devo, raduysia" (Rejoice, O Virgin), is liturgical, and its melodic treatment initially reminds one of the ancient *znamenny* chant, Sviridov's use of the solo alto voice in the reprise and the "passionate" culmination, place it well outside of a liturgically suited style. As Sviridov scholar Peter Jermihov points out, "This is a concert piece, born of religious sentiment and full of emotion." "Dispassionate passion," the spiritual ideal of Orthodox saints and martyrs, likewise characterizes the solo writing in "Sacred Love."

The remaining selections on the first half of the program are all drawn together by their juxtaposition of the solo voice and chorus. As such, they stand outside the realm of "liturgical" expression, characterized by the universal and collective sentiment of the worshipping community (the Greek word *leitourgia* means "common labor"); rather, they tend to focus on the dramatic elements that are to be found in some Orthodox texts. Whether it is the words of the psalmist speaking in first person in "Let My Prayer Arise," the words of St. Symeon the Elder or the Virgin Mary as related by St. Luke's gospel narrative ("Lord, Now Lettest Thou" and "My Soul Magnifies the Lord"), the personal confession of faith in Arkhangelsky's "Nicene Creed," or the prophetic utterance of Isaiah in "God Is With Us," these "sacred arias with chorus" stand as supreme expressions of personal faith and religious emotion, which has undoubtedly contributed to their enduring presence in the concert repertoire. It is interesting to note that the popularity of Chesnokov's settings for soloists and chorus, for example, has resumed today at the very same level that existed right up until the 1917 revolution.

Next to liturgical chants, Russian folk songs, those anonymous, collective creations of an entire people, stand as the other venerable stream of native Russian musical expression. In their totality, they represent a vast landscape of human experience and emotion: jocular and tragic, heroic and sentimental, ritualized and intensely personal, they sometimes even juxtapose wildly contrasting moods as "laughter through tears." The arrangements heard on today's program all reflect the richly coloristic writing of the modern Russian choral school, initially developed in the realm of sacred music, but transferred and applied to the sphere of the folk song after the revolution of 1917. Brilliantly "orchestrated" for unaccompanied chorus, they are unfettered expressions of the human soul speaking collectively through the medium of human voices working in community. It is from this experience that the Russian chorus—as well as any other chorus, really—derives its identity and power to move the listener.

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The St. Petersburg Academic State Capella, Russia's oldest choir, has an unparalleled history among institutions of its kind. Initially named the Tsar's Singing Clerics, it was established in 1479 by Tsar Ivan III as the tsar's private choir, responsible for singing services in the newly constructed Cathedral of the Dormition in the Moscow Kremlin, as well as for providing entertainment at various

formal ceremonial occasions. In their time, both Ivan the Terrible and Peter the Great sang in the choir.

With the founding in 1703 of the new city of St. Petersburg (Tsar Peter's "window to Europe"), the Court Choir, as it was now known, was relocated there, serving as the territory where traditional Russian musical culture interacted with and assimilated Western European influences. In 1717, a contingent of the ensemble accompanied Peter the Great on his travels to Poland, France, Germany, and Holland, making its first "foreign tour."

During the reign of Empress Anna, a small court orchestra was established, and in 1736, the Capella gave the first Russian performances of an Italian opera at the Imperial Court Theatre. Anna was responsible for establishing a singing school in the village of Glukhov, near Chernigov, Ukraine, from which many distinguished singers and musicians were to emerge, among them Maxim Berezovsky (1745–1777) and Dmitry Bortniansky (1751–1825).

Empress Elizabeth, the younger daughter of Peter the Great, married a Ukrainian bass singer in the Court Choir named Alexei Razumovsky, who encouraged the Empress to bring more singers from Ukraine. In 1763, Empress Catherine the Great began inviting Western musicians to St. Petersburg to work with the Court Choir. The most talented singers were sent to Italy: Berezovsky and Bortniansky were among those sent to Bologna and Venice to further their musical education. These two composers were responsible for imbuing Russian choral singing with a decidedly European influence, particularly Bortniansky, who was to head the Imperial Chapel from 1796 until his death in 1825.

On January 1, 1837, Mikhail Glinka, considered by many to be the first great Russian national composer and the founder of Russian classical music, was appointed director of the Capella. Glinka's famous operatic works, *Ivan Susanin* and *Ruslan and Ludmila*, were both performed to great acclaim with the Capella's participation. During Glinka's brief tenure, classes were set up at the Capella School for training the young boy singers in a variety of musical disciplines.

In the late 19th century, the Capella and its orchestra gave public concerts for the Philharmonic Society and the Imperial Music Society, playing a major role in the advancement of both Western and Russian contemporary music in Russia. In 1889, a new concert hall was constructed at the Capella School on the Moika Canal Embankment across from the Winter Palace; designed by the architect Benois, it exists to this day and is considered to have some of the finest acoustics in the world. Noted for its unusually high ceiling and its elaborate decoration, it remains a venue for a regular series of orchestral, choral, and chamber concerts.

Following the Russian Revolution of 1917, the combined choir and orchestra gave their last concert for many years on November 8, 1918, with a performance of the "Internationale" and the Mozart Requiem at the Smolny Palace. The orchestral musicians were subsequently transferred to the Philharmonic, while the choir was re-named the People's Academic Chorus. Many Soviet composers wrote numerous choral works for the Capella during this era, but most sacred works ceased to be performed. In 1920, women's voices were introduced into the choir, at first augmenting and eventually replacing the boy sopranos and altos. In 1928, the Capella made its last major tour to the West prior to World War II, traveling to Lithuania, Germany, Switzerland, and Italy, and performing traditional Russian folk songs and excerpts from Rachmaninoff's *All-Night Vigil*. During the War, between October 1941 and July 1943 alone, the Capella gave some 500 concerts in support of the Russian war effort. Following the War, the ensemble gave many distinguished first performances of works by Shostakovich, Kabalevsky, and Prokofiev under the great conductor Yevgeny Mravinsky.

With the appointment in 1974 of former Capella pupil Vladislav Chernushenko as artistic director, an era of major artistic advances began. In 1982, Rachmaninoff's choral masterpiece, the *All-Night Vigil* ("Vespers"), Op. 37, was performed in its entirety in the composer's homeland for the first time. Under Chernushenko, the choir began to tour abroad again, and beginning in 1976 made a number of recordings of Russian sacred music, the first being a recording of excerpts from Tchaikovsky's *Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom* that sold several million copies.

The St. Petersburg Academic State Capella is now regarded as the leader in Russian choral music, and is also highly acclaimed for its renditions of the major Western choral works by Mozart, Verdi, Beethoven, and Haydn. By promoting many forgotten and neglected choral works by

composers of the 19th and 20th centuries, the Capella has also played a significant role in the cultural renaissance taking place in the former Soviet Union since the early 1990s.

Over 500 years have gone by since the Capella was first established in Moscow. It has been the pride and joy of Russian choral music for many centuries, a center of professional music education as well as popular enlightenment. With the Capella's first-ever tour of the United States, marking the 300th anniversary of the City of St. Petersburg, it aims to continue bringing joy and beauty to audiences around the world for many years to come.

Vladislav Chernushenko's (artistic director and chief conductor) illustrious career as a conductor, educator, and administrator includes leadership of two of Russia's oldest professional musical institutions—the St. Petersburg Academic State Capella (formerly the Imperial Court Chapel) and the Rimsky-Korsakov Conservatory of St. Petersburg. His broad span of activities includes conducting choral, symphonic, and operatic performances, lecturing, teaching conducting classes, and managing festivals and competitions.

Born in 1936 in Leningrad, Chernushenko received his musical education at the Capella's Choir College and the Leningrad Conservatory, from which he graduated in 1958 with a specialty in choral conducting and composition. After a stint as a teacher and conductor in the Ural city of Magnitogorsk, he again entered the Conservatory in 1962, graduating in 1967 with a specialized degree in operatic and symphonic conducting, and completing his post-graduate studies in 1970. In 1962, Chernushenko founded the Leningrad Chamber Choir, which he headed for 17 years, garnering international acclaim.

In 1974, Chernushenko became the artistic director and principal conductor of the oldest professional musical institution in Russia, founded in 1479, and now known as the St. Petersburg Capella. Under his energetic leadership, the Capella has regained its reputation as one of the world's finest choirs. One of his principal accomplishments was the restoration, after years of suppression for ideological reasons, of Russia's sacred musical heritage to the Capella's performances, further broadening the ensemble's sizeable and diverse repertoire, which includes oratorios, cantatas, and concert versions of operas by both Russian and Western European composers, choral works of various epochs and styles, and works by modern Russian composers. For the past fifteen years, the music of Georgi Sviridov (1915– 1998)—Russian's most prominent modern-day composer—has occupied a special place in the choir's repertoire, influencing everything from its aesthetic approach to performance and expressiveness to its vocal speech patterns and its very sound.

In 1979, Chernushenko became rector of Russia's first conservatory, the Rimsky-Korsakov Conservatory of St. Petersburg, founded in 1862. In his varying roles, Chernushenko remains in constant contact with the professors, students, and graduates of the Conservatory. For his tireless and selfless work on behalf of his nation's musical heritage, Chernushenko has been awarded some of his country's highest awards and honors.

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