2015

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Recommended Citation

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An Ethnomusicological Investigation of the Russian Traditional Folk Instrument

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INTRODUCTION

According to the Hornbostel-Sachs system of characterizing instruments, the balalaika is considered a three stringed, triangular lute, meaning its strings are supported by a neck and a bridge that rest over a resonating bout or chamber, like a guitar or violin. Many relegate the balalaika solely to its position as the quintessential icon of traditional Russian music. Indeed, whether in proverbs, music, history, painting or any number of other Russian cultural elements, the balalaika remains a singular feature of popular recognition. Pity the student trying to find a Russian tale that doesn’t include a balalaika-playing character. This study will demonstrate through ethnomusicological means that the balalaika exceeds its role as a folk instrument, and in fact represents an adaptable and multifaceted musical tool, fulfilling a wide variety of roles within Russian culture.

The significance of this research relates to its exploration and insight into Russian culture over the past millennium. Of course, while suggesting new perspectives on the history and musical function of the balalaika may prove interesting in and of itself, this honors thesis aims towards other, more practical uses. For example, a better understanding of Russian culture, or any culture for that matter, helps to facilitate interactions with that culture. Though there exist many more influential reasons explaining the rocky relationship between Russia and the USA, one could be the latter’s lack of understanding of many nuances in Russian culture, including, perhaps, its musical culture. This research may also demonstrate its significance by contributing to the longevity of the balalaika. Very few people, even within Russia, learn to play this instrument. While many countries are losing interest in their own traditional music, the case of the balalaika is exacerbated by the fact that it is an instrument found almost exclusively within
Russia. This thesis aims to raise awareness beyond Russia's borders as to the instrument’s intrinsic musical and cultural value. In so doing, this work will also illustrate the balalaika’s versatility.

To prove the balalaika’s capability to serve multiple functions, this project will explore two perspectives: 1) the instrument’s history from its unclear origins, through its physical standardization, to its contemporary usage and cultural impact; 2) relevant ethnomusicological examples, such as its musical functions and purposes throughout Russia’s cultural history. In support of both perspectives, this work will analyze facets of the balalaika such as its physical characteristics, its repertoire, and the characteristics of its performances. Additionally, examples from Russian history and culture will reveal the instrument’s wide variety of roles within Russian civilization. Finally, the project will explore similar paths of development observed in several other “national instruments” from cultures around the world.

As previously mentioned, this thesis will employ ethnomusicological means in order to analyze the instrument within its own culture, attempting to avoid biases from the outside. The study of music within the context of culture and society has only officially been practiced since the founding of the Society for Ethnomusicology in 1955, though various precursors to the field have existed since the late 1800’s. There has also been substantial criticism of the early days of this field, because it only analyzed music through Western lenses, rather than a lens of its own culture. In relation to this particular analysis of the balalaika, an ethnomusicological approach entails investigating the music as a cultural and social phenomenon, but from a specifically Russian point of view. Furthermore, this paper will demonstrate the balalaika’s prominence within the three functional branches of music: folk, pop, and art. Folk music is typically defined
as having no professional performers, a transmission of material that is often indirect or passed orally, and an emphasis on text, considering it is mainly performed in social occasions. Art music focuses more on formal performances that demonstrate an individual’s extensive training and creativity. Where folk music brought text to the foreground, classical music values notation and composition more. This branch of music can be both expansive as well as limited, depending on the support provided by the specialist’s patrons. The last branch, pop music, receives its patronage indirectly from a mass audience. The audience of pop music relies on technology to provide performances or recordings, and the purveyors of this technology determine the flow of music and capital. Therefore, the economy often plays a detrimental role in the relationship between the producers and consumers of this music. This paper will ultimately demonstrate that the current iteration of the balalaika fits within all three of these branches of music functionality, and it will show the journey of how the instrument made its way into these branches.

There are countless examples of written works, especially from within Russia that detail the instrument’s history. However, considering that the study of ethnomusicology was only recently founded, research specifically tying Russian traditional music to its cultural functions is rare, but does exist. One such article makes a comparison between the balalaika in Russia and the banjo in the U.S. as instruments that were used for revolutionary purposes. The two are physically very similar, their roles coincided at various points of time. The banjo acted as a symbol of “conflict” in America, where the pro-slavery image of a docile negro, happily playing the instrument enraged abolitionists. Meanwhile medieval Russian minstrels played the balalaika in defiance of the bans on instrumental music, instated by the Russian Orthodox
Church. To my knowledge, the only sources that provide evidence of the balalaika’s adaptability either do so indirectly by giving summaries of the instrument’s history, or don’t expand on how it achieves this adaptability. For example, one encyclopedia of Russian history clearly agrees that the balalaika remains “a hybrid phenomenon, incorporating elements of folk, popular, and art or classical music.”

To construct a more in-depth argument, this thesis will take a similar approach, but with the help of historical sources, will also combine descriptions of the balalaika’s performance and physical characteristics. In addition to these more narrowly focused studies, I will incorporate research on general Russian history, Russian culture, and ethnomusicology. It should be noted, however that some of the most significant supporting evidence compiled for this thesis hails from Russian proverbs, folk lore, literature, art, film, and music.

UNCERTAIN ORIGINS

Unfortunately, the roots of the balalaika are neither clear, nor definitive. Even the etymology of its name causes debate. It could come from words such as balabonit’, balabolit’, or balagurit’, providing the instrument a light and easy atmosphere, since these words translate to crack jokes. Others hypothesize that the name derives from verbs such as boltat’ and balakat’, meaning to chatter. Not only have researchers failed to establish a consensus on the etymology of the instrument’s name, but on its geographic origins too, insinuating that it might not be as authentically Russian as many believe it to be. The balalaika has grown to become such an important symbol of Russian culture (why and how this came to be will be discussed in later sections), and suggesting its potentially non-Russian origins would discredit its iconic representation. There are a variety of theories explaining the balalaika’s creation. The most
commonly agreed upon theory supports the idea that it is indeed native to Russia, and that it evolved from another instrument called the *domra*. For example, one account comes from an Arabic text, describing a funeral in 922 AD of a Volga Bulgar, who had died during an emissary’s visit from Arabia. The document depicts a stringed instrument native to the Volga being played during the funeral, which reminded the visiting Arabic emissary of his country’s own lutes.\(^\text{10}\)

According to Nikolai Findeizen, a Russian musicologist, other French and Russian translators of the Arabic text describe the instrument simply as a lute, but Findeizen interprets the translation of the Russian historian Kotliarevskii as a possible balalaika.\(^\text{11}\)

However, there exists a small problem found within Kotliarevskii’s account: the lute had an oval body. Most notably, the *domra*, a close relative of the balalaika that is still played today, fits this description. The *domra* is very similar in size, but the tuning differs from the balalaika and the performance focuses more on melody rather than on harmonizing chords.\(^\text{12}\) In addition, the *domra* is played with a *piorko*, or plectrum rather than with the finger, as a balalaika is played.\(^\text{13}\) Findeizen also cites works from Matthew Guthrie, who claims that the balalaika is a replication of a Russian two-stringed guitar, but in Findeizen’s opinion, it much more closely fits our idea of a *domra*.\(^\text{14}\) Three-stringed *domry* were very common in Viatka province until the 1800’s.\(^\text{15}\) Early renditions of the *domra* had long circular bodies that flattened toward the bottom. Three short wooden dowels perpendicularly placed into the back of the neck acted as tuning pegs. One hole, surrounded by six smaller ones opened into the body, allowing the sound to enter and resonate. Lastly, the strings, made of gut, ran along the length of the fingerboard which had six frets, also made of gut.\(^\text{16}\) Guthrie also found that there was a Kirghiz instrument, with a very similar name, the *dumbra*, that appeared with both oval and triangular bodies.\(^\text{17}\) The
*domra*, according to Findeizen, could have been the instrument that eventually mutated into the balalaika.

However, possible biases exist in this theory, considering that Findeizen was a contemporary of Vasily Vasilievich Andreev, the man who standardized the modern balalaika. As will be discussed in greater detail at a later point, both scholars had their reasons for promoting the balalaika as a Russian instrument. For now, it is important to acknowledge that the two influenced each other in their work. For example, Findeizen’s personal *domra* from Viatka was tuned starting at B below middle C, then two consecutive, ascending fourths at E and A. Andreev then took this tuning directly from Findeizen, when he assembled his Great Russian folk orchestra and standardized the *domra* as well as the balalaika.18

Another possible theory to the balalaika’s origin is that it evolved from various lutes imported from the East. If the balalaika did derive from the domra, that would mean that the instrument originates from the Tatars, as several sources suggest.19 However, other scholars argue that it could have been based on instruments from Mongolia and central Asia, considering that Russia was invaded by the Mongols in the 13th century.20 Commerce, not only war, may have led the balalaika to Russia. Rivers, especially like the Volga River, were high-traffic trading routes that received goods from the Silk Road. Travelers, and merchants very easily could have brought along instruments from the Far East. Instruments such as the *shamisen* from Japan, or *pipa* from China share various physical and performance characteristics with the balalaika. These characteristics relate to possessing only three to four stings, and bearing oddly shaped bodies. While the *pipa* is fashioned in a pear shape, the *shamisen* a square shape, and the balalaika a triangular one, each of these differently shaped bodies provides a different timbre in
these instruments. Though this early in history, there, of course, existed no way to regulate these physical properties. The *pipa, shamisen*, and balalaika also share similar characteristics of their performances. Far Eastern music is well renown, for example, for following very minimalistic playing styles. Part of what makes the balalaika and Russian folk music so effective is its simple melodies. One Russian authority on this topic notes that from these “little melodies” one can make symphonies, suggesting that despite having very basic structure and melody, the music can be expanded upon to produce a performance greater than the sum of its parts. There is a reason, however, for this music to be so minimal. For a work to be categorized as “folk,” it means that something has been passed down and learned through oral tradition. The reason that the melodies from both the Far East and Russia are so simple could relate to their being easily learned. The facility of orally passing down these traditions has, thus, contributed to the longevity of these instruments.

**PRE-ANDREEV CONSTRUCTIONS**

Several reasons account for the confusion attached to the balalaika’s origins. One problem is that wooden artifacts cannot be preserved as well as metallic ones dating from such distant time periods. However, the biggest problem is that the Russian Orthodox Church placed several bans on musical instruments starting as early as the 11th century. During these prohibitions, few materials documenting the instruments were preserved, if even produced. Historians are familiar with the image of the balalaika from the periods after the ban on instrumental music, but because of this gap in Russian music history, it is far more difficult to trace the balalaika’s initial appearances during the Pagan Rus’ and Kievan Rus’ eras.
Even what the public today considers the most key features of the balalaika were not fixed and consistent before the instrument’s standardization. Pre-Andreev balalaikas varied in shape, number of strings, tunings, and even construction materials. Some had more oval shapes (again, suggesting that it had developed from the *domra*), like those found in Voronezh province. Though balalaikas were typically triangular, sometimes their shape was determined by the technique of its creation. Nikolai Gogol, who lived a few decades before the balalaika’s standardization, wrote a passage in his novel, *Dead Souls*, which offers one of the many possible explanations of the balalaika’s triangular form.

"As he approached the entrance steps he caught sight of two faces peering from a window. One of them was that of a woman in a mobcap with features as long and as narrow as a cucumber, and the other that of a man with features as broad and as short as the Moldavian pumpkins (known as *gorlianki*) whereof balallaïki--the species of light, two-stringed instrument which constitutes the pride and the joy of the gay young fellow of twenty as he sits winking and smiling at the white-necked, white-bosomed maidens who have gathered to listen to his low-pitched tinkling--are fashioned."25

This excerpt may have spurred the popular belief that the shape of the balalaika results from the quartering of a pumpkin. Note that the quote also details how this particular balalaika only had 2 strings, indicating that pre-Andreev renditions could have various numbers of strings. What has been consistent, however, remains to this day: the first two strings of 3-stringed balalaikas are tuned in unison, and the last one would be either a third, fourth, or a fifth higher.26 There are simpler ways of explaining the instrument’s shape though. Considering that the majority of balalaikas were made from wood (before its standardization, no particular type of wood was used27), the instrument’s straight edges avoided the complications and frustration of bending wood during the construction of *domry*.28 Different styles of forming the triangular shape, also
depended on which provinces they were made in. One scholar writes that “in its simplest form, the balalaika consists of four small triangular boards glued together with the addition of a fretted fingerboard.” However, examples exist of balalaikas from Arkhangel’sk that are comprised of only two, parallel triangular boards with sides glued on. While some believe that the shape provides easier assembly or draws one’s eye to it, others think that it serves more timbral purposes. In one expert’s opinion, the triangular body does not possess a visually aesthetic function, but rather gives it a unique and “exotic timbre that is connected only with Russia.” Others agree, that the sharp vertices of the balalaika undoubtedly give it a peculiar timbre compared to more mellow timbres from rounded instruments. Most of the variation of these features however, apparently depended on the design of its individual crafters. Aside from the timbre, there is one more popular notion, explaining the purpose of the balalaika’s triangular appearance. Some believe that its three sides represent the holy trinity. While this idea remains very popular, some scholars have discredited this theory, since, as previously noted, the Russian Orthodox Church instated several restrictions on instrumental music. It does not seem likely, or logical that the Church had much involvement in the development of the balalaika. The decision of the Russian Orthodox Church to outlaw it was not in response to the balalaika itself, but rather to the skomorokhi.

**THE CHURCH AND THE SKOMOROKHI**

The first role associated with the balalaika was its use by the skomorokhi. This initial appearance of the balalaika into written history predates even the more traditional and
stereotypical visions of Russian villagers playing their self-made balalaikas. These depictions date from the heyday and peak of popularity of the balalaika in the 18th and 19th centuries. Although most perceptions of the balalaika view the instrument within more modest connotations, its original ones were far more rebellious.

The skomorokhi, medieval entertainers and musicians, played for a multitude of events and whose suggestive repertoire of music and tricks gained them a high level of notoriety in Russia. Readers of Russian most commonly translate skomorokhi as “minstrels,” “buffoons,” or “jesters,” though the translation is based more so on the practice of skomorokhi rather than a lexicological translation. Within Russian, the etymology of the word does not lend itself to any single confirmed source. Though most notably from Greek, the word resembles “σκόμμαρχος,” (skōmmarchos), combining skōmm, meaning “jokes,” and archos, meaning “master.” Very similarly from Byzantine, skommarkh shares an identical meaning of “master of laughter.” Russians might not have merely imported the word skommarakh from Byzantium, but the practice itself. Today, most scholars agree that the first appearance of the skomorokhi remains captured in a well known fresco found within St. Sophia’s cathedral in Kiev, dating from 1037 [fig. 1]. The fresco depicts a skomorokh ensemble, playing various Russian medieval instruments and performing acrobatic stunts. Though this would suggest definitive evidence that the skomorokhi existed this early in Russian history, other historians cited in Findeizen’s research point to other features of the fresco. The art in its style and ornamentation reflect Byzantine origin, showing that the commissioners of the fresco most likely hired Byzantine artists to produce it. There are elements of the fresco’s content that would further support the notion that its connection with Russian life remains indirect. Firstly, all the figures in the piece are wearing
actors’ clothing and in Byzantium the forms of entertainers depicted in the fresco would have been hired among actors. Furthermore, King Liutprand (712-744 A.D.) describes how acrobats would climb poles as entertainment in Byzantine court, as seen in the far right of the fresco.

Lastly, there are several figures wearing high-cut, oriental tunics and turbans, again proving the Byzantine affiliations of this fresco. However, despite the Byzantine nature of this artwork and the long history of Russians borrowing from Byzantine culture, both Findeizen and his source, N. P. Kondakov, admit that the minstrels are indeed playing ancient Russian instruments including the truba (types of horns/trumpets), sopel’ (flute), and bandura (a type of harp). Nevertheless, the entertainers depicted can still be Russian since Kievan princes often indulged in various forms of hunting, merry songs, and dances. It is ironic though, how the fresco
remained in the cathedral and in many clerical documents, considering that the Church felt so strongly opposed to instrumental music.

It is possible that these numerous bans on instrumental music did not just coincide with the rise of the *skomorokhi*, but were instigated by the minstrels. The Russian Orthodox Church and the *skomorokhi* proved to have a cat-and-mouse relationship. If one discredits the images in St. Sophia’s Cathedral as the very first appearance of the *skomorokhi*, all other records first mentioning them confirm that the Church always disapproved of their practices. For example, Nestor’s *Chronicle* includes a passage from 1068 that calls the *skomorokhi* “messengers of the devil, who turn the peoples’ mind away from God with their songs and trumpets and games.” The Church clearly labeled *skomorokhi* as heathen provokers for their performances early on. Aside from playing music, *skomorokhi* irritated the Church by frequently using swear words, and wearing masks, both of which constituted obscene behavior. Proof of this lies in an account by Archbishop Luke of Novgorod, urging the public to refrain from engaging in these acts: “It is unseemly, brothers, to wear masks [*moskoloudstvo*] or to say shameful words.” Furthermore, to the great distress of the Church, the *skomorokhi* would not only wear unfit articles of clothing, but would even lack clothing, exposing themselves at festivals and public events. Shameless drunkenness, shouts, and whistles filled these events, which the Church intended to exemplify godliness. Therefore, especially on religious holidays, the Church made continuous efforts to discourage others from following the devilish ways of the *skomorokhi*. A didactic article from 1300 did just that, warning: “and if you are at home when they are playing pagan games [*rousaliia*] and there are *skomorokhi* and there is drinking . . . or there are idolatrous games, then
you should stay home.” This drinking and playing, along with all of the other vulgar acts of the skomorokhi caused much anxiety for the Church over the next several centuries.

However, the skomorokhi survived and continued their obscene ways as much as they could, pushing back against the clergy. Not only did they passively rebel with the continuation of their performances, but they would actively and openly antagonize too, incorporating commentary into their lyrics that ridiculed politics and the patriarch. In addition, many stories that these jesters performed began to introduce easily-tricked and greedy priests whom the peasants would outsmart. Even with the relentless pressure from the Church, the profession appears to have included several prestigious opportunities as well. For example, Tsar Ivan IV (“Ivan the Terrible”) appreciated the value of music. He loved and supported Church music and even insisted the Church choirs of Russia begin the practice of Western-style part-singing (as opposed to unison chant). Surprisingly though, he admired folk music as well, and often hired skomorokh troupes to perform in his court. Such popularity and opportunities to perform for the Tsar earned the skomorokhi a decent wage. For example, in a petition to the Tsar from 1633, one member of a particular ensemble details how civil authorities had beaten, detained, and robbed one of his fellow minstrels of a whole 25 rubles, which at the time was a considerable amount money. The fact that this poor skomorokh was carrying such a sum demonstrates that his occupation could indeed provide a decent living. Despite this success, some state that the Church managed to suppress the skomorokhi, but only as of the mid 17th century. If that is the case, this implies a tremendous failure on the part of the Church, considering that the first mention of the “satanic” skomorokhi appeared in the 11th century, thereby allowing 600 years of buffoonery.
After centuries of only warning the public against the skomorokhi, the Church finally gained a definitive advantage. In 1648, the patriarch Nikon convinced Tsar Alexei Mikhailovich to officially outlaw the practices of the skomorokhi, all forms of masks, masquerade costumes, and folk instruments.\textsuperscript{51} As previously described in the aforementioned petition to the Tsar, once the laws came into effect, civil authorities would often use violent means against performers. For those who still continued to perform, they risked not only physically demeaning forms of arrest, but the Church strongly encouraged civil officials to confiscate and destroy their instruments. Adam Oleary, the secretary of the Embassy of Holstein, wrote about one event he witnessed where officials gathered and destroyed literally wagonfulls of gusli, the skomorokhi’s most treasured instrument.

«В домах, особенно во время своих пиршеств, русские любят музыку. Но так как ею стали злоупотреблять, распевая под музыку в кабаках, корчмах и везде на улицах всякого рода срамные песни, то нынешний патриарх два года тому назад сперва строго воспретил существование таких кабачьих музыкантов и инструменты их, какие попадутся на улицах, приказывал тут же разбивать и уничтожать, а потом и вообще запретил русским всякого рода инструментальную музыку, приказав в домах везде отобрать музыкальные инструменты, которые и вывезены были... на пяти возах за Москву-реку и там сожжены»

"In their houses, especially during their feasts, Russians love music. But as they began to abuse it, singing in pubs, taverns and everywhere in the streets obscene songs of all kinds, the current patriarch of two years ago at first strictly forbade the existence of such pub musicians and their instruments, which if found on the streets, were ordered to immediately be broken and destroyed, but later banned instrumental music of any kind, having ordered every home to forfeit their musical instruments, which were then taken ... in five carts to the Moscow River, and burned there."\textsuperscript{52}

This event made way for the common on sight seizure and destruction of instruments by the authorities. Despite the harsh punishment, many continued to play, fulfilling the skomorokhi’s
tradition of rebelling against the Church and in turn providing the balalaika its first foray into history.

In the discussion of the *skmorokhi*, the balalaika has up until now not made many appearances. This is due to the fact that up to this point in history, researchers have not found concrete evidence of the existence of the balalaika, only theories and possible precursors such as the *domra*, which in fact the *skomorokhi* played quite frequently. Theoretically speaking, the simplified methods of constructing the balalaika, mentioned previously, could have acted as the catalyst for the balalaika’s evolution from the *domra*. If the clergy were continuously hunting down instruments like the *skomorokhi’s domry*, professional craftsmanship would not have been possible. The only way to make these lutes would have been in derelict regions of Russia, ultimately affecting the outcome of the *domra* and resulting in the first balalaikas. While it is entirely plausible that the *skomorokhi* did perform on the balalaika, the *skomorokhi’s history* provides important precedent in explaining the social environment of the balalaika’s first confirmed appearance.

Theories aside, the explanation of the circumstances of Russian secular music in the 17th century provides an introduction to what scholars agree to be the first official written appearance of the balalaika. A record from the year 1688 documents the arrest of two peasants, Savka Fyodorov, son of Selevnev, and Ivashko Dmitriev, who rode up to Yausky gate and antagonized the guard stationed there whilst singing and playing the balalaika [Fig. 2]. Not only does this event capture the first concrete glimpse of the balalaika, but exemplifies its initial role as an instrument of rebellion, defying the oppression of the hierarchy. Not to mention the fact that Russians now consider June 23rd (the original date of the arrest, June 13th, 1688, varies slightly
“В нынешнем в 196 году (1688 год - В.А.) июня в 13 день в Стрелецкий приказ приведены арзамасец посадский человек Савка Фёдоров сын Селезнев да Шенкурского уезду дворцовой Важеской волости крестьянин Ивашко Дмитриев, а с ними принесена балалайка для того, что они ехали на извозничье лошади в телеге в Яуские ворота, пели песни и в тое балалайку играли и караульных стрельцов, которые стояли у Яуских ворот на карауле, брали...”\textsuperscript{54}
due to the changes made to the Russian calendar) international balalaika day, though the holiday
does not bear any significant meaning to the public. On a similar note to the arrest record,
another incident from a few decades later in October of 1700 calls attention to the balalaika’s
aggressive beginnings. Pronka and Alexey Bayanovy, two coachmen from Verkhotursky county,
claim that they were chased by L. Pashkov, the domestic servant of the magistrate K.P.Kozlov,
and beaten with a balalaika.\textsuperscript{55} While this incident doesn’t demonstrate resistance to the Church, it
still confirms some of the earliest dates of existence of the balalaika as well as its tumultuous
infancy.

The majority of scholars agree that the balalaika was indeed played by the \textit{skomorokhi},
since their dates coincide.\textsuperscript{56} However, Professor Findeizen notes that the skomorokhi would
have only been playing the balalaika late into their existence; a time that he referred to as the
“balalaika period” of the \textit{skomorokhi}.\textsuperscript{57} As the balalaika made its first boisterous appearances,
restrictions made on instrumental music and the practices of minstrels in the 17th century caused
the \textit{skomorokhi} to slowly dissipate. Peasant and serf musicians who succeeded the \textit{skomorokhi}
would more likely perform on the balalaika in rural Russia, than \textit{skomorokhi} at large public
celebrations. No longer able to perform, most of the \textit{skomorokhi} resorted to thieving and
scrounging for money.\textsuperscript{58} However, folk music managed to survive in a time when it could have
been smothered out by the Russian Orthodox Church, and in turn flourished as a widely used
instrument during the 18th and 19th centuries.
HEIGHT OF THE BALALAIKA’S POPULARITY

During the ensuing centuries, balalaika players began to wane from their rambunctious and antagonizing tendencies as the Church was beginning to lose its dominance over Russian secular life. Transitioning from the end of the 17th century into the 18th, Russian civilization underwent enormous changes thanks to Peter the Great. While many at the time criticized the first emperor for his admiration of the West and, perhaps, for his embarrassment of his own country, his decisions in fact allowed Russia’s native traditions to develop. This time of growth allowed the balalaika to establish its next role as a widespread tool of expressing Russians’ emotions, and to confirm its initial classification as a folk instrument.

Firstly, let us examine the events leading to the balalaika’s rise in popularity. Two major events led to the decline of the Patriarch’s singular force and influence and in turn the expansion of folk music: the great schism in Russian Orthodoxy and the policies of Peter the Great. Firstly, Patriarch Nikon, the same who convinced Tsar Alexei Mikhailovich to criminalize instrumental music, made several crucial decisions that did not win the favor of his bishops and countrymen. Some of the relatively less detrimental decrees included how many times “alleluia” must be said in service or whether to use two or three fingers when making the sign of the cross. However, at this time, members of the hierarchy were arguing over whether or not Moscow should act as the definitive arbiter of Orthodoxy as opposed to the Greeks. Nikon ultimately recognized the Greek’s authority, for he understood that he lacked any compelling argument to suggest otherwise, especially since it was the Greeks who introduced Russia to Orthodoxy in the first place. He also made this decision with the intention to unite the denominations of Orthodoxy against the continuous pressure exerted by Western
Christianity. 62 Ironically, this intention to unite the divisions of Eastern Orthodoxy resulted in the split within the Russian branch between those who followed the Patriarch and the so called “Old Believers” who adhered to Russian sacred traditions. 63 This schism naturally weakened the power of the Church within Russia, but Peter the Great then took further measures to virtually disintegrate any power the Church had.

Tsar Alexei Mikhailovich had three possible heirs after his death. The eldest, Feodor III, only ruled for a few years due to his poor health, which then left either Peter, or Ivan, Peter’s half brother, to ascend to the throne. Ivan was lawfully older, and therefore next in line, but Peter proved to be physically and mentally more adept to rule. 64 Amidst the struggle to determine the next Tsar, several members of Peter’s side of the family were killed, yet Peter managed to maintain his composure and life throughout the ordeal. 65 In the end, an agreement was made that Ivan and Peter would reign together with their sister Sophia acting as regent, though Peter ultimately became the sole ruler after Ivan passed away in 1696. 66 As previously mentioned, Peter the Great’s reforms of Russian civilization aimed at modernizing the country with the introduction of Western European technology, culture, and ideals. The Russian Orthodox Church, however, disapproved many of the new Tsar’s reforms. Not fearing the Patriarch, but finding the moral judgment of his actions aggravating, Peter rebuked him and made himself Emperor of Russia, thereby abandoning the sacred connotations of the title “Tsar.” 67 Already weak after the schism, the Patriarch received a final blow from Peter, causing the Patriarch to virtually lose all of his power. Harkening to Martin Luther’s “German Ecclesiastical Synods,” Peter passed “The Ecclesiastical Regulation” which replaced the Patriarch with the “holy governing Synod,” and thereby forced religious institutions under secular control. 68
While the introduction of Western classical music to Russia affected Russian folk music in its own way, what really allowed it to develop was the annulment of the clergy’s conservative musical restrictions. At this point, even the balalaika made appearances in religious icons - something unheard of in the previous century. For example, one icon from the Church of the Archangel Michael in Korsun illustrates a musician with a balalaika, personifying sexual temptation. Despite the fact that the Church’s regulations had been minimized, concerns still existed that this influx of new, foreign music would further limit, or deteriorate traditional performances. During this era, Russian society began to divide drastically in terms of class, and for the most part, the upper portions of society had access to European classical music. For example, Italian opera captivated and enticed Russians who had access to it. Western music distracted Russians in the upper social strata from traditional music a bit. Even Peter the Great did not care much for musical creations from rural Russia. Though this makes sense, considering his general disdain for Russian folk culture after the murder of his family members by those whom he associated with a barbaric image of Russia. However, contrary to the concerns that the balalaika would die out, balalaika performers were present at the celebration that Peter the Great organized for the prince-pope’s mock wedding in 1715. The availability of classical music, though, was not reserved to the upper class. It managed to disseminate from the aristocracy down to the peasantry. There exist many accounts of wealthy Russians who formed their own orchestras of serfs, which consisted of 8 to 10 people, who would play arrangements of Mozart. However, these serf musicians played on Russian folk instruments, including possibly the balalaika, and performed not only the music of Western composers like Mozart, but traditional Russian tunes as well. Commoners also began to practice music independently as
music education and materials became more accessible. If anything, some scholars point to the rise of serf orchestras as the cause of the increase in both music educators as well as the popularity of the balalaika.\textsuperscript{75} The mid 18th century also saw the first publications of printed folk tune anthologies, which were widely available.\textsuperscript{76} All of these examples clarify that the balalaika and folk music in general were capable of withstanding the flood of foreign art and traditions, and even began to be popularized among the lower classes.

Aside from the previously mentioned cases, the best evidence that exemplifies the balalaika’s new found popularity relate the countless depictions found within Russian literature, art, proverbs, and stories. While in previous centuries, musicians played the \textit{domra} and the \textit{gusli} far more frequently, the balalaika surpassed these instruments in terms of its boundless use in the 1700’s and 1800’s. The commonality of the balalaika is understood in the proverb “на словах, как на гусях, а на деле, как на балалайке,” or as the translators of Findeizen’s research interpret, “the balalaika is prose, the \textit{gusli}, poetry.”\textsuperscript{77} This proverb suggests that, while the balalaika was more widespread in use, the \textit{gusli} retained a more sophisticated and exclusive reputation.\textsuperscript{78} Other examples of proverbs that mention the balalaika include, “что мне соха: была б балалайка (Why would I plow when I have a balalaika),”\textsuperscript{79} and “на балалайку станет и на кабак станет, а на свечку не станет.”\textsuperscript{80} The latter dates specifically from the 18th century, and makes use an outdated form of grammar that an exact translation, unfortunately, cannot be accurately provided, even by native speakers of Russian. However, what is understood is that it reinforces its folk role as an instrument associated with “taverns” and not “candles (referring to faith).” While the individual proverbs may not prove the balalaika’s popularity directly in their meaning, the instrument’s presence in these sayings show that the instrument was commonplace
enough to be recognized. On the theme of verbal accounts, the balalaika was featured in various fairy tales. For example, in the story Тайна царя Гороха (The Mystery of the King of Peas), the protagonist, Ivanushka, strikes a deal with an evil woman keeping him hostage. Convinced that she’ll never shed a tear, she agrees to let Ivanushka free if he makes her weep. Of course, after just a few notes on his balalaika, the woman begins to cry from the sheer beauty of his playing [Audio fig. 1: @~25min].

Not only does this story show the balalaika’s presence in folk stories, but when the villain gives a balalaika to Ivanushka to play, it is assumed that he already knows how to! This assumption on her part only further proves that the instrument was well known throughout Russia. However, beyond proverbs and folk tales, the balalaika’s rising fame granted it appearances into more tangible examples of Russian artwork.

At this time, the instrument started to emerge into visual art, as well. A German painter, Wilhelm Amandus Beer (1837 - 1907) produced numerous paintings showcasing the daily routines and activities of Russians. Many of his paintings include subjects holding balalaikas, such as Young Lad with Balalaika, [fig. 3] and Russian Family [fig. 4]. Aside from these paintings from the 19th century, various artists also fabricated woodcuts illustrating the balalaika during the 18th century. Also known as xylography, woodcuts were fairly easy and cheap to create and therefore remained a medium available to a larger audience. These woodcuts, produced and admired by common Russians, ultimately represented their own folk lifestyles. The first woodcut shown here comes from a romantic scene portraying a young boy holding a balalaika under his arm [fig. 5].

The second is an excerpt from a famous woodcut entitled “The
Mice Bury the Cat [fig. 6].” Both of these samples of xylography and paintings of the 18th and early 19th centuries exemplify not only the instrument’s folk connotations, but its increasing prevalence in Russian culture.
Literary works also began to include depictions of the balalaika. As noted earlier, the instrument was mentioned in Nikolai Gogol’s *Dead Souls*, which was published in 1842. However the balalaika made its way into the works of several other famous Russian writers of that time period. Aleksandr Pushkin, for example, mentioned it in his masterpiece, *Eugene Onegin*. Set in the 1820’s, the last chapter of this poetic novel paints several depictions of Russian life as Onegin travels throughout Russia.

Иные нужны мне картины:
Люблю песчаный косогор,
Перед избушкой две рябины,
Калитку, сломанный забор,
На небе серенькие тучи,
Перед гумном соломы кучи -
Да пруд под сенью ив густых,
Раздолье уто молодых;
Теперь мила мне балалайка
Да пьяный топот трепака
Перед порогом кабака.
Мой идеал теперь - хозяйка,
Мои желания - покой,
Да яй горшок, да сам большой.86

I need another kind of image:
A sandy, sloping eminence,
Two rowans and a little cottage,
A wicket gate, a broken fence,
The sky when grayish clouds are passing,
The straw before the thresh-barn massing,
A pond beneath dense willow trees
And ducklings doing as they please;
I’m fond now of the balalaika
And, at the tavern’s door, the pack
Of drunkards stamping the trepak.
Now my ideal’s a housewife - like her,
It’s peace alone that I desire,
‘And cabbage soup, while I’m the squire.’87
Pushkin’s writing verifies that it was commonplace to come across a balalaika while traveling through Russia. This quote also adds the fact that one of the early uses of the balalaika as a folk instrument was to accompany dances, such as the trepak. Dostoevsky also referred to the balalaika in his semi-autobiographical writing, *House of the Dead*. This work is littered with examples of balalaika playing characters. In addition, some examples like the following, also demonstrate the balalaika’s capabilities of accompanying dance.

Suddenly sounds of bustle and hurrying were heard on the stage. In a minute the curtain would rise. Then the band struck up. This band deserves special mention. Eight musicians were installed on the bed on one side: two violins (one from prison and one borrowed from someone in the fortress, but both the fiddlers were convicts), three balalaikas, all home-made, two guitars and a tambourine instead of a double-bass. The violins simply scraped and squealed, the guitars were wretched, but the balalaikas were wonderful. The speed with which they twanged the strings with their fingers was a positive feat of agility. They played dance tunes. At the liveliest part of the tunes, the balalaika-players would tap the case of the instruments with their knuckles; the tone, the taste, the execution, the handling of the instrument and the characteristic rendering of the tune, all was individual, original and typical of the convicts.  

These references by Dostoevsky, Pushkin, and Gogol not only suggest the widespread popularity of the balalaika in the 18-19th centuries, but document descriptions of the balalaika as a folk instrument as well.

As mentioned in the opening of this thesis, folk music bears several characteristics. Firstly, it is closely intertwined with social occasions. A celebration of any kind easily constitutes as a social event, including Peter the Great’s mock wedding celebration for the prince-pope at which balalaikists were present. Additionally, Dostoevsky’s and Pushkin’s quotes depict scenes of dance with many enthusiastic participants. Balalaika experts attest that some of the instrument’s early use complemented dance as well as other social occasions and events.
Secondly, traditionally speaking, there are no professional performers in folk music. In this regard, the literary quote from Dostoevsky’s *House of the Dead* once more attests to the balalaika’s folk classification. The balalaika players’ performance remains “individual, original and typical of the convicts,” not of trained professionals. Furthermore, both this excerpt as well as the one from Gogol’s *Dead Souls* describe how the instruments were “home made,” whether from wood or perhaps a quartered pumpkin. Another definition of folk music requires that it is transmitted orally and often in an indirect manner, such as through observation and imitation. This characteristic closely relates to the previous one, where, undoubtedly, there were virtuoso balalaika players, but none would have learned from trained instructors in the absence of professionals. During his visit to Russia circa 1900, one ethnomusicologist noted that this was exactly how the balalaika was learned in the 18th century. Furthermore, the proverb “the balalaika is prose, the *gusli*, poetry” suggests that this early in the instrument’s development, performers would have been amateurs who taught themselves through observation, while proper instructors were perhaps reserved for pupils of the *gusli*. Furthermore, what would have facilitated the oral transmission of this music is the last characteristic of folk music: an emphasis on text and simple melodies. In this regard there even exist some *chastuskhi* that make note of the balalaika. *Chastushki* derives from the Russian word “часто” (*chasto*), meaning “frequently,” and by definition are short, high-tempo, humorous songs, composed of four-lined couplets.

Балалаечка гудит,
Жалко милого будить…
Балалаечка - гудок
Разорила весь домок…
Как на эту балалаечку
Я навешаю цветов,
Чтобы эта балалаечка
Мне играла про любовь.95

This balalaikist is abuzz,
It’s a pity to wake this charm…
This balalaikist is a toot
She’s caused a ruckus in all the homes…
How can I present some flowers
To this beautiful balalaikist
So that this balalaikist
Sang to me a song of love.96

The AABBCC rhyming scheme and the rhythmic meter of the Russian chastuskha, as well as the subject matter offered in my translation, demonstrate the simplistic nature of these tunes. The straightforward and uncomplicated construction of chastushki allowed them to be orally passed down from generation to generation. It should be noted that every simplistic attribute of the balalaika, and folk music in general, whether its uncomplicated construction, basic repertoire, or even how easily instruction can be passed down remains one of the most crucial reasons that the balalaika still exists today. The simplicity of folk music is what allows it to endure.97 Finally, the fact that the balalaika’s use in this era doesn’t fit into the classical or pop branches confine it to the classification of folk even more. For example, with the exception of the prince-pope’s mock wedding, few accounts have provided evidence of high class patrons regularly supporting balalaika players financially. One could argue that the earlier example of serf orchestras would suggest otherwise, but those musicians were not making a livelihood off their talents. Rather, they were owned by wealthier people, and played for their entertainment. If anything, many accounts exist depicting abuse of these musicians.98 Furthermore the instrument’s performance still lacked any formality and its repertoire was till focused on folk style music. When placed
alongside the artistic and literary, as well as historical examples aforementioned, the balalaika in the 18th and 19th centuries clearly qualifies a folk instrument.

In contrast to being an upbeat accompaniment to dance, the balalaika, when played individually, also acts as a tool that conveyed the more melancholy emotions of Russian people. One professor of the balalaika believes that, “a doctor heals physical pain, but music heals the pains of the soul.” While dance tunes complement times of celebration, such “pains of the soul” would be mimicked by *protyazhnaya* - the songs set to minor keys, that flow with long, aching, tender lines. The balalaika had now become a readily available and popular tool, capable of communicating the joys and pains of Russian emotion. One must not forget, though, that Russia was still facing an invasion of Western music during the 18th and 19th centuries. Though traditional Russian music already proved itself capable of outlasting this threat, the newly emerging phenomenon of Russian classical music was struggling to materialize. During the transition into the 20th century, the balalaika, along with general traditional Russian music, allowed Russian classical music to overcome its identity crisis. The balalaika was to become a classical instrument.

**PRE-REVOLUTIONARY BALALAIKA**

From the mid 1800’s through the creation of the Soviet Union, Russian classical music and the balalaika influenced each other’s development. Russian composers were finding it increasingly harder to identify their creations as Russian. For several decades, these composers studied and wrote according to the theories and styles of the Western European model. In regards to these early stages of Russian classical music, one Russian thinker expressed that
Russians’ “participation in the general movement of the human spirit was confined to the blind, superficial, even awkward imitation of other nations.”⁹¹⁰¹ In Russia, Western classical music certainly offered a plethora of new approaches to composition, but at the same time inhibited Russian composers’ sense of originality while writing. Even outside of the world of music, such concerns of identity had already existed ever since Peter the Great first introduced Western technology, fashion, and mannerisms to Russia. As the country began to see its first nationalist movements, folk music and the balalaika became the tools to Russify classical music.

As previously discussed, before the 18th and 19th centuries, music particular to Russia, namely religious vocal music and ancient folk music remained detrimentally unchanged due to the constraints that the Church had repeatedly instated. This meant that the theoretical attributes of these styles, including their scales and rhythms, remained relatively untouched. There were only a few exceptions: the introduction of part singing during the time of Ivan the Terrible, and then later, of chromaticism alongside contemporary major and minor scales (as opposed to the old church modes).¹⁰² Then, when classical music entered Russia, especially during the reign of Anna Ioannovna, since her predecessors’ reigns were fairly short, composers had to adapt to similar but far more complex and developed concepts of polyphony and harmonization. In the end however, it was folk music’s unspoiled qualities that made a name for Russian classical music.

Those who comprehended the negative effects of imitating Western music to this extent also recognized the introduction of traditional content as a solution. Some emperors and empresses encouraged the practice of traditional Russian music. Elizabeth, for example, had bandura, and gusli players perform in her court.¹⁰³ Later, Catherine the Great suggested to find
ways of introducing folk stories and tunes into theatrical works. She herself dabbled in writing plays that had such narratives and songs.\textsuperscript{104} The Tsarina was not the first to attempt this by any means, but this demonstrates two things: 1) that the need to create original Russian works was felt widely among both the intelligentsia and nobility and 2), opera was the first classical genre that allowed an opening for folk music. As previously mentioned, Italian operas were extremely popular during both Anna Ioannavna’s and Catherine the Great’s rule. The most popular ones, especially comedies, were translated into Russian, but publishers often only printed the names of the Russian librettists on the scores in a desperate attempt to earn more credit than the foreigners who composed the music.\textsuperscript{105} Eventually, though the idea was again borrowed from Italian practices, Russians began to write their own operas and wove into them various folk tunes and popular songs. The first and prime example of such an opera is Mikhail Matinskii’s \textit{Санкт Петербургский Гостиный Двор} (\textit{Saint Petersburg Merchants’ Row}) which was first performed in 1779. While the opera did make frequent use of folk songs, they were merely thrown into the performance and hardly altered, therefore Matinskii ultimately compiled these tunes rather than compose an opera.\textsuperscript{106} Despite its lack of sophistication, both musically and in its crude humor, the show still proved to be a great success.\textsuperscript{107} It wasn’t until the mid 1800’s that Glinka achieved to write an opera that was based on an actual analysis of Russian folk music. As for the balalaika, the instrument was not yet physically featured in classical works. These passages that hint to the balalaika acted as the instrument’s introduction into the classical world, but its complete transformation into a classically performed instrument would occur soon enough.

Aside from including traditional melodies in the performance, \textit{Saint Petersburg Merchants’ Row} boasted the fact that it was created by Russian born musicians.\textsuperscript{108} Furthermore
it led to the publication of composed art-song arrangements for piano and solo voice that were based on the folk tunes featured in operas.\textsuperscript{109} However, despite such accomplishments, the composer Mikhail Glinka was not satisfied. For the better part of his life, Glinka trained in music and studied Western approaches. At the same time, many Western European composers were composing for their representative countries’ national movements. Then, after many years of trying to master the art of composing Italian operas, he came to a realization. While he was abroad from 1830-34 he noted, “Everything I have composed to please the people of Milan has proved to me that I was on the wrong path and that I could never honestly be Italian. Nostalgia gradually gave me the idea of composing in Russian.”\textsuperscript{110} To accomplish this, Glinka had to develop his own set of characteristics, stylistic of Russia, to fit within the definitions of Western classical music. He drew these Russian musical traits, as previous composers did, from folk music. However, unlike his predecessors, Glinka carefully analyzed Russian folk music and became fully aware of the mannerisms in performing it.\textsuperscript{111} He understood that in order to produce Russian classical music, the aspects of Russian folk music should be neither superficial nor a forced imitation of the traditional tunes, but a symbolic representation. Since the performance of many folk tunes naturally break the parameters of classical music, early operas compromised the folk songs’ integrity to fit them in. For example, in \textit{Saint Petersburg Merchants’ Row}, the song \textit{Как ходил гулял молодчик (As the Fellow Strolled Along)} is played in 10-measure rhythmic phrases [A:2 bars; a:2 bars; B:3 bars; b:3 bars], but the original tune would have been performed in a freer meter, rendering this pattern of 2 versus 3 awkward and disproportionate.\textsuperscript{112} The result is an awkward paraphrasing of Russian folk songs, rather than a symbolic interpretation. In comparison, Glinka refrained from simply quoting these songs, but
instead employed references that conveyed to the audience a deeper meaning and understanding of Russian national character.

Let us examine now some of the specific technicalities that Glinka employed to accomplish this. Undoubtedly, one can find the best examples in Glinka’s opera, Жизнь за царя (A Life for the Tsar). Of course, this work is littered with countless details that shed light on Glinka’s practices. Firstly, he frequently juxtaposed high-tempo dance themes with long, melismatic protyazhnaya: the sorrowful and drawn-out themes mentioned earlier. Such styles harken to the earlier discussion on balalaika folk performances. Listeners of A Life for the Tsar would have easily recognized these characteristics that originate from folk tunes, especially the protyazhnaya melisma by its typical decorated descent from a relative sol to do. However, scholars have noted that while this occurs in Russian folk music, ornamenting such a common interval is by no means exclusive to Russia, and can be found in examples from Italian music [fig.7]. Perhaps this exemplifies Glinka’s attempt to assimilate Russian culture to Western classical music. A Life for the Tsar included another example of Italian-Russian parallels. Both Russian folk
music and Italian opera make use of octave jumps while approaching cadences. Glinka wrote many of these leaps between the interjecting lines of the men’s chorus in the Introduction.\textsuperscript{116} However, to specify something only found in Russian folk music, the composer also wrote octave leaps as a decoration after the cadence, not in its approach.\textsuperscript{117} Such leaps also exist within the Introduction during the women’s chorus [fig. 8], compared with the example from the folk song, \textit{Тройка} (Troika) [fig. 9]. Modern music history textbooks from Russia even confirm that all of these qualities of the opera’s opening provide a traditional Russian feel to the music.\textsuperscript{118} To further mesh Russian and Western traditions, Glinka

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.8\textwidth]{figure8.png}
\caption{Women’s chorus excerpt, Act 1, \textit{A Life for the Tsar}}
\end{figure}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.8\textwidth]{figure9.png}
\caption{Excerpt from \textit{Тройка} (Troika), for balalaika and piano accompaniment}
\end{figure}

had to solve some of the modal issues of Russian folk songs. For example, he often modulated to notes that gave off the impression of a local tonic, but by conventional harmonic means.\textsuperscript{119} Doing so in this manner kept the music within classical definitions, but still allowed the
irregularities of Russian folk scales to exist. Further accentuating Russian modes uncommon to Western audiences, Glinka also made use of the subdominant in the majority of situations where Westerners would default to the dominant.\textsuperscript{120} Aside from his combination of Russian and Western harmonizations, Glinka also evoked folk music more literally. One can find the perfect example in the rowers’ chorus of Act I. While the men sing in the foreground, the strings follow a pizzicato motif that mimics the balalaika in the background.

\begin{quote}
You need to listen to this chorus in order to understand the effect it produces. In the instrumentation [the use of] pizzicato is especially remarkable, separating itself completely from the singing: here the balalaika is elevated to the level of art. The effect produced by this chorus is simply beyond description.\textsuperscript{121}
\end{quote}

As shown in this quote from Odoyevsky, critics of the opera noticed this hint to the balalaika immediately. All of these examples from Glinka’s creation were highly praised by composers both Russian and foreign. His work earned him the designation of being the Pushkin of music, that is to say that where Pushkin was to Russian literature, Glinka was to Russian music.\textsuperscript{122} Despite the fact that \textit{A Life for the Tsar} sounds very Italian in its operatic style and very German in its harmonies, Glinka’s contemporaries, Berlioz and Tchaikovsky, both agreed that the opera was “truly national, original, having no prototype or antecedent.”\textsuperscript{123} More specifically, it was not important to simply include Russian folk music into opera. The Russian musical community celebrated Glinka’s music, because it exalted Russian folk music to the status of classical music.

Soon thereafter other composers and musicians began to expand on this newly developed Russian national music. For example, the \textit{Kuchka}, also known as The Five, or The Mighty Handful in the West, began their endeavors in the mid 1800’s. The Five consisted of Mily Balakirev, César Cui, Modest Mussorgsky, Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, and Alexander Borodin.
Following in Glinka’s footsteps, these composers also used folk inspired material to convey the Russian origin of their works. Just as Glinka had made use of both protyazhnye and naigrïshi - fast paced, repetitive, and improvised instrumental tunes - the Kuchka turned these folk styles into a common characteristic of Russian classical music. Speaking of naigrïshi, the practice of repeating simple melodies and creating a variation for each repetition, often called “changing background” or “ostinato variations,” proved so widespread in folk music that it easily spread to classical Russian compositions. Glinka abused this technique so much that even though the Kuchka used it far more frequently, Soviet musicologists referred to it as “Glinka variations.”

As for the balalaika, typical tunes for the instrument follow this style, especially since naigrïshi are meant to be instrumental. Therefore, some cite the Kuchka as having drawn source material from these balalaika-like techniques directly. However, members of the Kuchka made their own original contributions to Russian compositional technique. For example, Rimsky-Korsakov found more ways to use octatonic scales, and Mussorgsky began to use parallel fifths and seconds more freely, though many ultimately considered this poor compositional technique on Mussorgsky’s part. Of course, Russian textbooks claim that he was simply “experimental.”

However, originating from folk imagery, Mussorgsky also created his famous “bell harmonies,” which were supposed to evoke the beauty of provincial church bells. This touch quickly became a cliché of Mussorgsky, especially after its use in the last movement of Pictures at an Exhibition, a piece well known for its depictions of Russian rural life and folk stories.

The Kuchka did have to face similar challenges to Glinka. That is, Russian folk music by definition does not fit nicely within the rules of Western classical music. For example, critics chastised Glinka for recycling German harmonizations under his folk melodies instead of
developing his own system. Though the Kuchka’s approach to harmonizing was just as fake, combining loose theories of the composer, Odoyevsky, together with the personal tastes of Balakirev, their guide. Furthermore, there also seemed to be a problem with properly transcribing the leading tone of minor-mode folk songs. The decision of whether or not to flatten the leading tone caused much anxiety for the members of the Kuchka as well as other composers, since the original pieces were sung in scales of different temperament. Some arbitrarily decided, while others desperately avoided writing them down at all. They may have had good intentions in the preservation of Russian culture, but ultimately compromised its integrity. This lack of confidence on the part of 19th century composers resulted in the fairly inaccurate transcription of all the folksongs that had been compiled, thereby permanently affecting their performances for future generations.

On the other hand, there were other musicians at the time who took a different approach in elevating the status of Russian folk music, namely Vasily Vasilyevich Andreev. Often omitted from history books, Andreev also succeeded in transforming Russian folk traditions into high art. Rather than composing music that ultimately adhered to Western theoretical standards, he introduced the etiquette and professional environment of classical music to Russian folk instruments. Most notably, he standardized the balalaika. His inspiration came from a particular night in 1883 that he later reminisced about:

It was a calm June evening. I had been sitting on the terrace of my datcha, delighting in the silence that comes with the fall of evening over the countryside. Suddenly, I heard sounds whose source was invisible to me. I arose and ran to the wing from which the sounds were coming. In front of me on the staircase was sitting a peasant, Antipe, playing the balalaïka! I had already seen this instrument in shops but I had never seen it played. I was dumbstruck by its rhythmic capacity and the originality of how it was being played and could by no means imagine
how an instrument so imperfect and lacking in appearance, furnished with only three strings, could produce so many sounds! I remember at that moment, an idea burned in my head like a red-hot iron; to play this instrument myself and to concern myself with playing it perfectly!132

Since, at this point in time the balalaika was still only a folk instrument, the homemade version that he observed had many “imperfections,” as he called them. However, convinced of the instrument’s beauty and potential, Andreev embarked on his mission to modernize the balalaika. Having already completed his studies and proved himself a gifted musician, he worked with various local woodworkers to craft a custom balalaika with improved features and solidified his playing skills with the help of his neighbor, Antipe.133 Some of the earlier models that he designed still made use of old components, such as diatonic frets.134 Though after several reiterations and more practicing, he managed to play three concerts in St. Petersburg which the public found sensational.135 These concerts were so successful that Andreev was offered to play for Tsar Alexandr III, after which a famous violinmaker, V. Ivanov, volunteered to help him construct what would eventually become the standardized balalaika.136 This new and improved balalaika had a few new features to better suit its foray into the world of classical music. Most notably, Andreev and Ivanov built a balalaika with a set of metal chromatic frets.137 However this new hardware acted as a double edged sword. On the one hand, the parting from diatonic frets allowed performers to play chords, even with the first two strings remaining in unison.138 This new ability facilitated the performance of classical compositions on the balalaika, but on the other hand, this can be interpreted as a deviation from the instrument’s traditional roots, having allowed even more Western changes to Russian culture. Nonetheless, the balalaika still retained a lot of its original qualities, even after Andreev’s standardization. Of course, its iconic shape
and tone remained intact as well as its tuning. To many, the E-E-A tuning of the balalaika seems redundant, but as proven earlier, this feature predates Andreev’s time. Before its standardization, the two unison E strings would have acted as a sort of “drone” under the solo A string.\textsuperscript{139} Now that the balalaika had undergone some modifications, the E strings were made from nylon and the A from steel to balance their dynamic volume as well as to create a difference in timbre. However, aside from the development of its construction and Andreev’s virtuoso playing, the balalaika began to be accepted as a classical instrument for another reason.

After Andreev finalized the design of his new instrument, he went on to create a family of balalaikas. Just as there exist various sizes of saxophones, he developed six different sizes for the balalaika, each with its own tuning [fig. 10].\textsuperscript{140} To showcase the production of these instruments, Andreev founded the Great Russian Orchestra, to which he steadily added more Russian folk instruments like the previously mentioned \textit{domra}.\textsuperscript{141} The group became an instant success within Russia, and soon started to plan more elaborate tours. During his career, Andreev and the orchestra played in many foreign countries, including France and the United States.\textsuperscript{143} At the orchestra’s homecoming concert in St. (fig. 10 Tunings of the different balalaikas in Andreev’s Orchestra)\textsuperscript{142}
Petersburg, Tchaikovsky said, “these balalaikas are a delight! What an astonishing effect they have on an orchestra! Their tone is unrivaled.” While the 18th century is considered by scholars the height of the balalaika’s popularity as a folk instrument, there is no mistake that Andreev managed only to make it even more accessible to the public as a classical instrument in the late 19th century. In 1894, a balalaika school named after Andreev was opened. Around the same time, Balakriev from the Kuchka opened a similar school that was free to the public, was taught by Russians, and focused on beginner level folk music. The balalaika had now spread not just all across Russia, but even began to be recognized internationally. Furthermore, the performances of Andreev’s new and improved balalaika possessed the same amount of formality and professionalism of any other classical concert of the time. This, along with its instruction in schools and repertoire that included not just transcriptions of folk music, but of Western classical pieces, as well as original compositions intended for the balalaika, transformed the instrument into an officially recognized classical instrument.

As mentioned earlier, there still exists the possibility that the balalaika originated from elsewhere, thereby discrediting the nationalistic endorsements of Andreev’s work. Nonetheless, at this point, the balalaika was already undoubtedly considered a Russian instrument. The only difference that had occurred was that the balalaika played the role of both a folk instrument, performed by country folk at social events, and a classical instrument, performed by virtuosos on the stage. In the following years, the establishment of the Soviet Union caused a great amount of change in the musical world, but luckily, the balalaika managed to keep its footing. Not only that, but with the advent of popular music, balalaikists found ways of getting in on this new sensation.
THE BALALAIKA OF THE SOVIET UNION

The *Kuchka* and nationalistic composers of 19th century Russia enjoyed great success after the establishment of Russian-style classical music. Their achievements allowed them to continue inventing new ways of pushing the boundaries of art-music and developing their nationalistic identity through music. Russian classical music contributed to many of the major developments of classical music worldwide during the 20th century. For example, Scriabin experimented with the ideas of mysticism and symbolism in his works and Roslavets began to incorporate elements of atonal music. However, some of the most influential developments came from Stravinsky’s ballets, *The Firebird* and *The Rite of Spring*, which completely revolutionized Western classical music. Speaking of revolutions, Russia, quite famously, suffered through its own political revolution during the early 1900’s. The founding of the Soviet Union brought its own changes to the existing paradigms of music in Russia. It was during this century when the role of the balalaika evolved yet again, though at the same time, it didn’t necessarily abandon its previous functions. Firstly, leaders of the USSR saw the propaganda potential that the balalaika possessed, since it had already been used as a symbol of Russian folk culture. Then, thanks to the introduction of jazz music to the country, the balalaika also began to expand in the field of pop music, which was a new phenomenon of its own.

Again, after the Russian Revolution, classical music underwent a lot of alterations. The Bolsheviks aimed to convert all facets of Russian life into instruments of their own interests. While it strongly represented the nation previously, the *Kuchka's* music was considered decadent and bourgeois by the new regime. While these musical writers did strive to create works that represented Russia, the music they produced still made use of far too many Western elements for
the Bolsheviks to accept, from writing techniques to the subject material itself. Some composers did conform to the communist party’s requirements, while many others sought ways to leave the country. Luckily for those who stayed, Lenin’s New Economic Policy (NEP) period did loosen some of the restrictions on social life in the country, and therefore a lot of the music written before 1917 was permitted to be performed. The more relaxed NEP period also gave jazz an opportunity to introduce itself to the Russian people from the West, a topic that will be discussed further. However, even after the NEP, Stalin, Lenin’s successor, further encouraged the vast majority of the music written by the Kuchka for its nationalistic character. By 1951 the Kuchka’s music had become the reference point for all Soviet composers.\textsuperscript{149} Stalin did not treat classical renditions of folk music the same way though. Under Stalin’s rule, composers that wrote folk inspired music, but did not take the Kuchka approach would often be accused of “savoring the archaic.”\textsuperscript{150} Such compositions were only allowed if they met the definitions of Socialist Realism through qualities like march tempos and ascending melodic contours.\textsuperscript{151} The Kuchka model was perceived as being modern compared to traditional music, even with contemporary transcriptions.

As for folk music, before Stalin’s era its approval was not unanimously agreed upon, though the majority of high ranking Russians did support it. The worker and peasant, for example, became national symbols after the revolution, and Lenin and the Bolsheviks endorsed the balalaika as an instrument that represented the Russian peasant.\textsuperscript{152} Then, Lenin went on to take this a step further. He not only passively allowed the balalaika to exist in his newly created country, but understood the power it had as a propaganda tool.\textsuperscript{153} Part of his efforts to promote music consisted in the creation of the Commissariat of Enlightenment, even though it was
ultimately in charge of controlling the propagandistic regulations on Soviet music.\textsuperscript{154} The Soviet government also encouraged the research of folk music. The Imperial Russian Geographical Society had already been collecting records of folk performances since the late 1800’s. Though they forced the society to change its name for obvious reasons, the new government sponsored trips to remote provinces of Russia to gather even more information on folk musical practices. While this research yielded some of the first audio recordings of Russian folk music ever created, the organization faced recurring problems related to funding, poor facilities, and a lack of trained personnel.\textsuperscript{155} Another way that folk music, especially the balalaika, was supported took the form of orchestras of folk instruments. Andreev’s orchestra, renamed the “Original Great Russian Popular Orchestra” by the new parliamentary Duma, continued to perform with great success even after Andreev’s death in 1918.\textsuperscript{156} The Duma also connected the orchestra to the Red Army, initiating the traditions of military musical ensembles.\textsuperscript{157} Soon thereafter, other ensembles formed with the same purpose of symbolizing the proletariat through music. For example, Nikolai Osipov, an excellent balalaikist himself, directed a Russian folk choir.\textsuperscript{158} Later, he conducted the Academic Orchestra of State “Osipov,” which was named to pay tribute to his career after his death.\textsuperscript{159} All of these examples demonstrate the general support that folk music received during the early years of the Soviet Union, however some factions disagreed with this trend. Folk music was capable of symbolizing Russia’s national character as well as the proletariat, but at the same time, it was a relic of the past. Groups such as Proletkul’t adhered to extremist views, disconnecting themselves entirely from any aspects of Russia’s traditional past.\textsuperscript{160} Luckily, Proletkul’t’s endeavors were neither very influential or long-lasting. However, from the 1920’s on, other complications arose.
The relationship between folk music, classical music, and the state remained fairly awkward for the next several decades. The government still supported folk musical practices, but many divisions of the musical community, especially from the classical side, realized instead that the state was forcing these practices. Many previous associations responsible for Russia’s music had now been replaced by the Union of Soviet Composers. This group was ultimately responsible for enforcing the doctrine of Socialist Realism within the music scene of the USSR, which only further limited how musicians could approach the state’s folk music requirement. Officially, Socialist Realism demanded that artistic creations be “truthful, historically concrete presentation[s] of reality in its revolutionary development.” Unfortunately, this definition was vague enough that the Union could easily change its opinions on music and condemn artists for reasons unrelated to their work. Composers like Dmitri Shostakovich lived in constant anxiety, never knowing whether his music would please or betray both the Union and the Communist party. Some believe that Shostakovich disagreed with Socialist Realism, but he still conformed for his own safety. Whether it was to meet the demands of the government or for his personal artistic explanations, Shostakovich used plenty of examples from Russian folk music within his works. For example his opera The Nose, based on the story by Nikolai Gogol, includes traditional elements. In the opera, there exists an entire interlude played by balalaikas [Audio fig. 2]. While the example is played by balalaikas, one can hear the 20th century compositional techniques that otherwise permeate throughout the rest of the opera. Sergey Prokofiev was another Soviet composer, famous for his incredibly distinct compositional language that made frequent use of dissonances and deceptive impressions of modulation. He too composed plenty of works that were based on folk melodies and stories. A prime example is his piece,
Peter and the Wolf. The piece is narrated by a speaker, often times the conductor, as the music tells the very folk-like tale that Prokofiev wrote himself for his younger audience. Prokofiev wrote this and other pieces in an attempt to acquaint and introduce classical music to the children of the USSR.

Prokofiev’s works were by no means the only ones aimed towards Soviet youth. Writing for children was another expectation that the Union of Soviet Composers had of its members. Especially during the years of Stalin, classical together with folk musical education flourished in the Soviet Union. While the Moscow Synodal School was the first folk music school to open in 1857, there was now a greater demand for similar institutions to open their doors. Prokofiev was unarguably satisfied with this initiative from the government, as expressed in the following quote: “The time is past when music was written for a handful of musical aesthetes. Today vast crowds of people have come face to face with serious music and are waiting with eager impatience.” It is worth noting, that Prokofiev was not only content with the push for children’s music, but as seen here, he wanted to make artistic music approachable to everyone in Russia. Music schools were therefore standardized, and the child’s journey through the system would be fairly identical whether he or she was attracted to folk or classical music. If a child displayed noticeable talent as early as kindergarten, the student would then attend school for 7-10 years before entering a specialized secondary music school. Then, after 5 years at a conservatory the Union of Soviet Composers would be responsible for the graduate’s employment, even if that person was not necessarily a composer. This encouragement of musical education unfolded just as successfully as how the government addressed the country’s illiteracy problem. In this respect, one scholar notes that “this was facilitated by the innate musicality of the Russian
people; even the illiterate peasant could sing or play the balalaika or the *garmoshka* (accordion),” and that these strives in musical education were just as encouraging of *samodeyatelnost* (amateurism). While these were excellent and noble endeavors on the part of the Communist Party, all of the processes described were still obligated to follow the doctrine of Socialist Realism. That is to say, the Union of Soviet Composers still held the final word in regards to what material, what music, what subjects etc. constituted as “aesthetically good” for the masses. Not only composers, but teachers and performers, had to remain extremely cautious with their activities, even those who matriculated in Russian folk music.

Unfortunately, the existence of groups like *Proletkul’t* and the lack of official attitudes from the state further limited folk music performers. Furthermore, the traditional tunes played in the early years of the Soviet Union were drastically altered by those who transcribed it, such as the *Kuchka* and Russian ethnographers, and in turn lead to inauthentic performances several decades later. However, just as government policies began to thaw, so did the the Communist Party’s opinions on music. By the 1960’s the musical atmosphere of the Soviet Union was open enough to allow for a sort of renaissance of Russian folk music. While there were more people who began to take a genuine interest in this style, musicians became frustrated with the task of correcting almost a century’s worth of inaccurate transcriptions. Ever since composers from the nationalist movement started to incorporate Russian folk music into their compositions, the information that modern musicologists and historical performers had available was too distorted to work with accurately. Problems related to tuning and scales permeated even until the late 20th century so that when movies depicted Russian peasants, film composers were still altering their folk-like melodies with conventional harmonic techniques. However, the easing
of musical views was not solely beneficial to folk music. Jazz appeared as brand new form of music to Russia during the 20th century, and while the Soviet government rebuked it sometimes far more harshly than they ever did folk music, it also received fewer limitations as time went on.

Jazz music was not only new to Russia in the sense that it had not previously existed in the country, but that this style became the first taste Russia developed for popular music. To remind the reader, popular (or “pop”) music entails the production of music in response to mass demand and for largely commercial purposes. Part of the pop definition also depends on advancements in technology, but the balalaika remained relatively unaffected by such developments. While it remains unavoidable to acknowledge jazz’s birth from folk music in the Americas, its 20th century connotations easily lend themselves to pop, as well as classical music, resulting in a hybrid style. In Russia, it first made its appearance in the 1920’s. Despite being a clearly Western phenomenon the NEP period gave jazz some leeway from the control of the Bolsheviks, though transitioning into the 30’s, negro groups began to be replaced by local performers who would play primarily for the urban middle class and NEP businessmen. Between the NEP period and World War Two, jazz underwent a lot of scrutiny. For example in 1928 Maxim Gor’ky, a founder of Socialist Realism, claimed that jazz was connected with homosexuality, drugs, and bourgeois eroticism in attempts to dissuade the nation away from Western influences. The Great Purge of the 30’s only exacerbated matters. Many famous Russian jazz artists like Aleksandr Tsfasman were arrested, and, despite the fact that Stalin even admired others such as Leonid Utesov, those who remained understood the threat at hand and resorted to stifling their creative flares. While jazz was still allowed, it no longer focused on creative freedom. Jazz became homogenized and carefully arranged instead of becoming an
outlet for expressive improvisation. While we can understand that the Soviet government discouraged this artistic freedom, it is a shame they didn’t support the inherent Russianness that lies within improvisation, a tradition that has existed within Russian folk traditions for centuries. Nonetheless, Stalin had his own solution for making jazz Russian. In a very similar fashion to Hitler in Nazi Germany, Stalin urged that traditional instruments perform in jazz ensembles. After a while, this wasn’t necessarily obligatory, but the trend stuck and ultimately introduced the balalaika to jazz. Where Andreev formed orchestras that founded the relationship between the balalaika and classical music, jazz ensembles of balalaikas began to appear and formed the first associations between the instrument and popular music. Then as time went on, and musical practices in the USSR became less and less stringent, the balalaika strengthened its association with non-folk musical styles.

One of the first events to cause this relaxation of musical policies was the Second World War. Just as Lenin had recognized the propagandistic potential of music, war-time Soviet leaders saw the effect music had on troops’ morale. Music produced during the war certainly made more use of folk songs to evoke patriotic themes. In addition, some soldiers even brought balalaikas with them on service. Personal accounts mention that during the less intensive moments in the battle of Stalingrad, the Germans and Russians engaged in psychological warfare, where the Nazis played military music through gramophones directed at Soviet lines, and the Russians “returned fire” with balalaikas and folksong. Alongside folk music, jazz also found a place on the battlefield. To boost the soldiers’ morale, jazz concerts were even organized for soldiers on the front. A lot of the music still adhered to Socialist Realism, containing lyrics about serving the Motherland and so on. As a result, an entire genre of war-time songs developed in
the Soviet Union that mixed characteristics of classical, folk, and popular music (in the form of jazz). Such tunes include the famous song “Katyusha,” [Audio fig. 3] which has clear folk qualities in its harmonies and simple structure. Not to mention that it was entirely common to perform the piece with balalaikas and other folk instruments. Another song, “Potomu chto my piloty” (“Because We Are Pilots”), displays traits of jazz via swung rhythms and the inclusion of saxophones [Audio fig. 4]. However for a short time after the war, jazz once again experienced hostility from the government. Saxophones were strictly forbidden, to the point where authorities actually “arrested all the saxophones” in the country.\textsuperscript{182} Luckily, this only lasted a few years and by the time Khruschev succeeded Stalin, most of the bans on jazz were lifted.

From the 1950’s on, jazz didn’t face as much strife as before, though there were some moments here and there where the government or individuals retreated to conservative views. In 1955 the stilyagi (hipsters/dandys) became prevalent in urban Russia, imitating what little glimpses of American pop-culture they could obtain.\textsuperscript{183} Cocktail halls began to open their doors and allowed such groups to boogie and twist. When Brezhnev came to power, very few policies were holding jazz musicians back. For the first time, jazz performers were allowed to play unspoiled renditions of American jazz. Adi, also known as “Eddie,” Rosener specifically banned the balalaika from his band and didn’t face any large repercussions.\textsuperscript{184} That is not to say, though, that balalaika jazz ensembles didn’t remain popular. Soviet television broadcasts in the 60’s even showed off some of these groups, and to this day, there are plenty of bands that enjoy playing standards on the balalaika [Audio fig 5]. Finally, this late in the 20th century, there is no doubt that the balalaika had now established its capabilities of acting as a pop-musical instrument thanks to the introduction of Jazz to the Soviet Union. Furthermore, it did not lose its
recognition as a folk and classical instrument either. The balalaika was still being performed by orchestras on stage, amateurs in villages, and soldiers on the front lines, but now it was also being played by jazz artists in clubs. However by the time that jazz became completely accepted in the country to the point where it was being studied in schools, ironically, the youth lost interest in it. A new musical sensation had caught their attention, one that fits even better under the category of popular music: rock. Today, Russian musicians easily have found ways to include the balalaika into our modern understanding of music, whether it be for folk, classical, or popular performances.

THE BALALAIKA TODAY

In each era of the balalaika’s history, the instrument’s social and cultural roles slightly changed. However, every time the balalaika expanded into a new branch of music, it hardly lost its associations with previous styles. That is to say, when the balalaika started to become a classical instrument in the 1700’s, it did not forfeit its relationship to folk music. The same holds true today, where its present form perfectly summarizes its own history as well as its multitude of musical capabilities. Nonetheless, the balalaika has further developed as a musical instrument, and its cultural representations have evolved once more, especially in the realm of pop music.

As the Beatles’ fame continued to grow, the entire world began to recognize the entertaining qualities of rock music more and more. Eventually, in small increments, rock even made its way into the USSR. Of course, at first, it was not an instantaneous hit considering its Western origins. Many Soviet leaders even thought that the fascination with rock would boil over rather quickly. Nonetheless the government still placed what restrictions it could on the
consumption and performance of rock music. Just as jazz was labeled as promoting vagrant behavior, drug abuse, and even homosexuality, so was rock in the 60’s and 70’s. One would think that this new style would be a little more accepted in Russia, since it actually originates from jazz practices, which at that point had been completely integrated into society. However, there exists a very differentiating quality in rock. On the one hand jazz remains a hybrid style of music (much in the same way that the balalaika is also a hybrid instrument) that combines composing via conscious theoretical decisions with folk mannerisms and personalizations, all the while writing and performing to respond to popular demand. Rock, on the other hand, lacked any sort of professionalism or compositional formality that the classical branch of music provided to jazz. For that reason, many classical composers, even outside of the USSR, did not view this new musical invention with admiration. Combining the disapproval of foreign creations with the lack of classical professionalism, Shostakovich considered rock to be a form of “alien primitivism.” However, rock wasn’t the only form of new music that was receiving harsh criticism. Schchedrin began experimenting with electro-acoustic music which, for the most part was considered to not follow the contours of Socialist Realism, and was therefore discouraged. Despite all of the opposition to rock, there was still clearly enough of an interest in it for it to have survived in Russia to the present day.

Where jazz still combined elements of classical folk music, rock was the first pure form of popular music to have existed in the Soviet Union, whether it was illegal or not. Considering that it falls under the category of pop music, that means that there must have existed a considerable enough demand for rock. In fact, as of 1960, there were already an estimated 250 amateur rock groups in the Moscow area, including one formed by cadets in the prestigious
Soviet Military Academy. Numbers only grew and more restrictions were lifted. Then in 1973, Stas Namin became the first rock musician to join the Union of Soviet Composers. As rock popularity grew, unfortunately, from 1979 to when Mikhail Gorbachev came to power in 1985, rock music suffered some setbacks. Relations between the Soviet Union and West turned sour after the USSR invaded Afghanistan. Seeing this as an act of aggression from Russia, Western countries, most notably the United States, began to offer aid to Afghanistan in the form of military support. In response, the Soviet Union began to reinstate many of the bans that existed earlier, shutting down many discos and canceling tours. In practice, however, Gorbachev’s policies of glasnost’ and perestroika effectively annulled this short setback in the development of rock within Russia. At first there were still some regulations in place. For example, officials monitored decibel levels at concerts, and performers’ outfits required approval. Slowly but surely, rockers were allowed more and more leeway. Not only were they permitted to use foreign produced instruments, but to participate in world tours, as the group Автограф (Autograph) did at the 1985 Live Aid concert in Africa. A year later, the Soviet Union organized its own benefit concert for the victims of the catastrophe in Chernobyl. For the next decade, as the collapse of the Soviet Union drew nearer, rock became more acceptable. By 1992, the doctrine of Socialist Realism was entirely meaningless, and the Russian people were free to perform, write, and listen to whatever form of music they desired.

The balalaika certainly had its own place during this time of transition. While, of course, the majority of Russian rock and pop bands stuck to instruments like guitars, drums, and maybe a keyboard, there existed some bands that made use of the balalaika and other folk instruments. A prime example is the group Ноль (No’l’), which combined guitars together with the balalaika and
accordion [Audio fig. 6]. As a matter of fact, of the five members in Ноль, only their bassist never played the balalaika. Other Russian musicians started to play the balalaika in new, experimental ways. One of today’s most famous balalaikists, Aleksei Arkhipovsky, has made a solo career playing balalaika in fusion jazz styles. A lot of this music still carries a very strong tone of Russian traditional music. For example, some of his pieces begin with an exposition of a theme in a minor mode and modulates abruptly half way through into the relative major - a very common characteristic of Russian folk music. Yet at the same time, when Arkhipovsky is not playing in traditional harmonic progressions, he frequently makes use of blues scales and 12-bar blues progressions. In the same way that he alternates between jazz and traditional harmonies, he also rotates between rhythmic interpretations. While it is common for folk music to explore different ways of accenting the beat or offbeat, it hardly ever does so on the level of the 16th note as he does in his jazz-inspired syncopations [Audio fig. 7]. Arkhipovsky demonstrates just how well the balalaika and its traditional performance methods lend themselves to any form of music. However, the balalaika is by no means the only instrument in the world to achieve this. Other cultures have their own traditional instruments that are today being played out of their folk contexts. Earlier, this thesis compared the balalaika to other instruments from Eastern Asia including the Japanese shamisen. An artist from Japan, Hiromitsu Agatsuma, plays his own renditions of Japanese folk-jazz-fusion music on the shamisen in an extremely similar manner to how Arkhipovsky chose to approach his balalaika performances [Audio fig. 8]. Both the balalaika and the shamisen followed nearly identical paths of history within their respective countries, making it only natural that they appear so analogous in their modern connotations.
As for the balalaika in Russia, it now serves one more major function in popular music. If it doesn’t stand as a principle instrument in a pop group, nor performs modern music on its own, it is mentioned within examples of popular music. Just as it has acted as symbol of Russia for centuries, now, the balalaika functions primarily as an icon of all things related to Russia in general, as well as its rural, pre-revolutionary past. In effect, the balalaika has become a stereotype. Within pop, songs will include the instrument, either acoustically, or in the lyrics to strengthen the identification of their song with Russia, its culture, or its history. For example, the Soviet pop-star Alla Pugacheva wrote a song entitled “Balalaika” about a young boy courting a girl with the instrument, hark back to the romantic traditions the instrument had in the 18th century, such as at weddings [Audio fig. 9]. Then, in “American Boy,” by Комбинацая (Combination), the two female vocalists sing about their desire to be taken away from Moscow to America by the boy of their dreams. To identify the singers as Russian, the first verse even begins with the lines, “I play the balalaika. It’s the most Russian of instruments [Audio fig. 10].” Even the Beatles quickly mention the balalaika in the last verse of their song, “Back to the USSR.” Lastly, more recently the balalaika has appeared in rap songs as well to symbolize various themes. For example, in “Жулбаны,” (“burglars”) by Ногганс (Noggano) ft. Крестная семья (The God-Family), a descending melodic line on the balalaika loops throughout the song, while the refrain of the song mentions how these burglars “often reminisce the old days [Audio fig. 11].” All of these examples verify how musicians have been able to incorporate the balalaika into modern popular music.

However, there is nothing to suggest that the balalaika has lost its place in folk or classical environments. One balalaika expert agrees that one can play “any kind of music on the
The balalaika fulfills its role as a folk instrument in the sense that it is still played in rural Russia, and is learned through oral tradition in those areas. The instrument’s history also defines its original folk character - an identity that it will never be able to shake off, especially now that it has become a stereotype of Russian culture. Where some foreigners might first envision Putin, the hammer and sickle, or even an AK-47 when prompted to think about Russia, the Russian people believe that the outside world only perceive their country as a land of “bears, circuses, and balalaikas.” The instrument has also not lost its reputation as a classical instrument. Balalaikas are still taught at the vast majority of Russian music schools. This training prepares students not only in a professional manner, but focuses on classical repertoire. Again, the current status of the balalaika proves how much of a versatile and adaptable instrument it is. Unmistakably, the balalaika’s musical potential is incredibly expansive for an instrument that only possesses three strings. Throughout history it has been able to express rebelliousness, joy, suffering, and love. Furthermore, the balalaika has symbolized Russia’s history, its culture, the proletariat, and even the Russian soul. When searching for summarizing descriptions of the balalaika, it is no wonder that one entry simply describes it as “a hybrid instrument.” However, it is a shame that over the last few years, fewer and fewer people are taking up this instrument. On the other hand, the balalaika has begun to expand internationally. There exist multiple balalaika ensembles based within the United States, such as The Washington Balalaika Society and The Los Angeles Balalaika Orchestra, and France and Germany also are home to several successful balalaikists. There should not exist any reason for the balalaika to die out now. After possibly a thousand years of existence, the balalaika has proved its adaptability to any situation. Surely its future will not be an exception.
AUDIO FIGURES

Audio Fig. 1) http://www.staroeradio.ru/audio/3584 (about 25 mins. in)

Audio Fig. 2) http://balalaikafr.free.fr/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=24&Itemid=61

(Play button to the right of Shostakovich’s picture)

Audio Fig. 3) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=boI5cTbPIHs

Audio Fig. 4) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Uoz-V5HkbU&index=16&list=PL1cjREzU0HP_GU15GQvH7Y4A5x-9KwX5A

Audio Fig. 5) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W46FD9SDF-w&index=4&list=PL1cjREzU0HP_GU15GQvH7Y4A5x-9KwX5A

Audio Fig. 6) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ci8bfThiwRc&index=15&list=PL1cjREzU0HP_GU15GQvH7Y4A5x-9KwX5A

Audio Fig. 7) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5JqeSU7lSLE&index=3&list=PL1cjREzU0HP_GU15GQvH7Y4A5x-9KwX5A

Audio Fig. 8) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EQDV5hj0mHM&index=1&list=PL1cjREzU0HP_GU15GQvH7Y4A5x-9KwX5A

Audio Fig. 9) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vZzKtf0lTMo&index=5&list=PL1cjREzU0HP_GU15GQvH7Y4A5x-9KwX5A

Audio Fig. 10) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1_6x8dESOvM&index=12&list=PL1cjREzU0HP_GU15GQvH7Y4A5x-9KwX5A

Audio Fig. 11) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y6mvTaunhPs&index=34&list=PL1cjREzU0HP9JTjAKdyMecnGaJCBg4VWB
ENDNOTES


2 From personal experience while studying abroad in Yaroslavl, Russia, January- July 2014.


11 Ibid. 11.


13 Findeizen. vol 1. 172.

14 Ibid. vol 1. 172.
15 Ibid. vol 1. 172.

16 Ibid. vol 1. 172.

17 Ibid. vol 1. 172.

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