

# Week 8

Exoticism and Nationalism in Nineteenth-Century Russian Opera

# Russia

- 18c-19c: musical consumer—domestic producer—musical exporter
- Only indigenous literate music tradition in Russia: chant, sometimes polyphonic
- 1735: Empress Anne imports Italian opera to St. Petersburg
- Mid 18c: several Italian operas written + premiered in Russia
- Late 18c: Herder's ideas of national uniqueness based on language + folklore become influential in Russia
- Late 18c: first collections of Russian folk songs
- Late 18c: first operas (singspiels) in Russian written + first native Russian composers of opera + first opera's "folk" and "folk-like" themes

# Mikhail Ivanovich Glinka's *A Life for the Tsar*

- 1836
- First significant Russian national opera (considered as the foundation of later developments)
- Plot
- Combining international styles with Russianness
- Russian peasants (10:14)
- Rossinian two-tempo structures (cantabile, 14:55; cabaletta, 17:55)
- French ballet (opening of Act II [the "Polish" act], 39:40)
- Russian folk songs (1:39:10)—5/4 meter

# Final Chorus from *A Life for the Tsar*

- *Slavsya* theme: reminiscence motive (prefigured throughout the opera)
- Style: similar to *kanty*=celebratory songs for 3 or 4 voices, common in 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, earliest Western-like secular genre in Russia
- FORM: theme + variations (Bach + Beethoven)

# Russian Operatic Exoticism

- Richard Taruskin
- *Defining Russia Musically*, 1997
- “Entoiling the Falconet” Chapter
- Russia=contiguous empire (vs. France and Great Britain)=incorporating exotic peoples into the Russian state
- Alexander Borodin (1833–1887): *Prince Igor* (1869–1887)
- Period of the opera’s conception coincides with Russian campaigns in Central Asia
- Although the plot based on the 12C epic *Lay of Igor’s Campaign* (Slovo o polku Igoreve)—it also reflects 19C Russian imperialism

# Borodin's *Prince Igor*

- Russian “Self” vs. Polovtsian “Other”
- Prince Igor’s aria (ABA): 32:00 (B section 34:00)
- Khan Konchak’s aria: based on a Chuvash tune; MET #18, 2:30
- Intro to Polovtsian Dances: 42:30
- Konchakovna’s Aria: 19:00
- Based in Glinka’s aria for Ratmir from *Ruslan and Lyudmila* (1842)—  
VAST, 1:39:10