



Research Article

The image of Saint Petersburg in Tchaikovsky's operas

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Abstract

The theme of St. Petersburg in Russian literature is currently explored quite extensively, whereas in music it remains largely unexamined. This article investigates the portrayal of St. Petersburg in two operas by Pyotr Tchaikovsky - Eugene Onegin and The Queen of Spades. The research subject is the 'dualism' as an essential characteristic of St. Petersburg in these two operas by Tchaikovsky, the bipolarity of its culture, the ambivalence of its image and the nature of interaction between these poles. The study is based on the works of Yuri Lotman and Vladimir Toporov the latter of whom introduced the concept of the 'Petersburg text' into scholarly discourse. Within the philosophical consideration of the image of St. Petersburg from a systemic approach, this work relies on the parameter of 'temporality'. By analysing compositional techniques, the author identifies the peculiarities of depicting St. Petersburg in the two operas through the lens of temporal and spatial perception of the city as a holistic system of Tchaikovsky's era. After examining the content of Tchaikovsky's two operas and conducting searches for the essence of the phenomenon of St. Petersburg, a conclusion is drawn about the specific genesis of the northern capital, which lies in the unique combination of its European nature with Russian tradition. The study of the capital as a metaphor in contemporary musical art appears promising and sheds light on new possibilities for the development of urbanistic theories, and on the other hand, it continues the exploration of the sphere of musical content.

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Introduction

In the realm of musical art, city names often appear in compositions from the Baroque and Classical eras. The titles of such compositions were derived from the names of the cities to which they were dedicated or were assigned later to signify the place and period of composition. However, the depiction of the city wasn't always manifested in the content of these works. During the Romantic era, the focus on 'geographical' locations shifted towards images more closely connected with rural life. The pinnacle of urban themes in musical art arrived in the 20th to early 21st century². It was during this period that new dimensions of urban themes emerged, and, crucially for our research, these compositions increasingly exhibited metaphorical qualities of the city.

The Petersburg landscape as a unique phenomenon in European musical culture was shaped through intercultural interactions resulting in the formation of a cohesive, vibrant, and dynamically evolving cultural space. Petersburg became a site of cultural and semiotic contrasts where many elements developed distinctively. Initially perceived as an 'embodiment of order' the city transformed into the most phantasmagorical city in world mythology and texts, where mystery became the driving force of narration.³ Yuri Lotman asserts that the Petersburg mythology has always been

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² Anna Stepanova, 'City on the borders: aesthetic facets of the image in the literature of transitional epochs', *Ural Philological Bulletin. Series: Russian literature of XX-XXI centuries: trends and currents* (4), 2014, pp. 25-38; here, 25.

³ Jurij Lotman, *Selected Articles* (Tallinn: Alexandra, 1999), 21.

present in the city's real history and the everyday life and beliefs of its inhabitants were imbued with mythological elements. Oral tales and rumours of terrifying events played an exceptional role in urban folklore.

In the 19th century, St. Petersburg with its cultural landscape became the culmination of meaningful elements, manifested in musical compositions, and acquired a metaphysical existence, becoming an integral part of world culture.⁴ Over its more than three-hundred-year history, the Northern Palmyra became a source of inspiration for numerous composers. It is portrayed as a system conveying various attributes into the realm of musical art, creating the opportunity to concentrate hidden meanings, intricate ideas, and metaphysical questions related to human existence within specific works.

The visual imagery of objects - streets, buildings, squares, monuments - largely shaped the lives of characters in classical musical works. St. Petersburg inspired Mikhail Glinka but also gnawed at his creative instincts, persistently drawing his sunny sensitivity into pessimism. Alexander Dargomyzhsky was the first to reveal in music the grotesque faces of the 'underground' world of St. Petersburg and the bitter, mocking laughter of 'vulgar anecdotes'. In this city, Modest Mussorgsky's creative output matured into song cycles like *Without Sun* and *Songs and Dances of Death*. His tragic humour, akin to Dargomyzhsky's, found an inexhaustible source in the life of the bureaucratic city with its distorted and emaciated existence.

Tchaikovsky can be considered a chronicler of St. Petersburg, as his creative work was interwoven with the city and infused with its moods.⁵ The theme of St. Petersburg, which resonates with Tchaikovsky's work, unfolds through a metaphorical interpretation of the city: St. Petersburg serves as a metaphor for the loss of Russian 'folkness', the erasure of roots, and the suppression of individuality, which condemns the Petersburg hero to agonising experiences and a tragic outcome.

Exploring the city as a metaphor in contemporary musical art holds promise. On one hand, it sheds light on new possibilities for the development of urban theories, and on the other hand, it continues the research into the realm of musical content.

The image of Saint Petersburg in Tchaikovsky's works

St. Petersburg played an immense role in Tchaikovsky's life and creative journey. Within the city on the Neva River, his childhood impressions intertwined with his earliest vivid musical experiences and the composer's own tragic emotions. It was in this city that his passion for music was ignited, his determination to dedicate himself entirely to music solidified, leading him to forsake a bureaucratic career and transform into a professional musician. St. Petersburg birthed Tchaikovsky's initial compositional experiments and offered a receptive audience for his music. He returned to St. Petersburg multiple times - initially to reunite with his family - but then the city became the nucleus of his fame. It was here that he graced theatre stages and concert halls, where the public recognised and adored him. St. Petersburg was the place where he first tested his conducting skills; it became a hub for close friendships, family ties, and creative connections.⁶

Tchaikovsky perceived St. Petersburg not merely as a location of education and residence, but as a life force, a living essence. Thus, in his compositions, St. Petersburg assumes various facets. The sensation of the city's unparalleled beauty intertwines with the social and historical contradictions of Russia. In Tchaikovsky's works, St. Petersburg is multifaceted: it can be haunting, exquisite, and majestic.⁷

The longing for the city's white nights resounds vividly in Tchaikovsky's lyrics, blending with fantastical hues and his unique sense of humour, inherent to his music. The fifth piece, *May (White Nights)*, from the piano cycle *The Seasons*, includes a nocturne. From the first notes, the listener is transported to the atmosphere of the northern capital in spring. St. Petersburg's music couldn't help but convey its terror and mystic dread through unprecedented sounds.

⁴ Maria Kholodova, 'Domestic musical 'Petersburgiana': a historical excursion', *PHILARMONICA: International Musical Journal* (4), 2020, pp. 1-10; here, 4.

⁵ Boris Asafiev, *Symphonic Etudes* (Leningrad: Music, 1970), 159.

⁶ Lydia Koniskaya, *Tchaikovsky in St Petersburg* (Leningrad: Lenizdat, 1969), 320.

⁷ Solomon Volkov, *Balanchine's Tchaikovsky: Interviews with George Balanchine* (Moscow: Eksmo, 2004)

The initial sounds immediately immerse the listener into the atmosphere of a bright summer night. A calm tempo, undulating movement, and soft arpeggios convey a captivating image. A gentle crescendo, a melody ascending to a higher register, leads to a minor climax. A duple melody overlays a triple meter, outlining something ephemeral, weightless, and mysterious.⁸

The city's character is conveyed diversely by the composer and assumes an independent identity in many of his works - a feat achieved by only a few artists. Tchaikovsky was a poet-musician of this city, vividly embodying the horror of its urban intricacies. Ultimately, St. Petersburg embraced Tchaikovsky, drew him in with family ties, admiration for his music, meticulous staging's, and splendid performances of his operas, becoming his final sanctuary.

Resisting the embrace of St. Petersburg was impossible: the intoxication of white nights, the sweet shimmering of their ethereal forms, autumn mists, the fading joys of summer, the comfort and sharp contradictions of Petersburg life, the meaningless revelry of Petersburg revelers, the romantic yearning of secret Petersburg encounters and promises, the seeming cold disdain and indifference of high society toward superstitions and rituals, even to the sacrilegious laughter at the supernatural. Secret meetings and promises in Petersburg, the seemingly cold disdain and indifference of high society toward superstitions and rituals, even to the sacrilegious laughter at the supernatural, and at the same time, the mystical trembling before the unknown - these were the moods and emotions that filled Tchaikovsky's soul. He carried this poison with him everywhere, and his music was steeped in it, both in its highest achievements and in its adaptation to middle-class Petersburg life.⁹

Tchaikovsky became the first Russian composer whose sentiment for St. Petersburg poured into powerful nostalgia, concentrated in his *Fourth Symphony*, where the foreground is dominated by sentimental sorrow for the lonely soul lost in the vast city. On one hand, this conflict seems to rise upwards, dissolving into the expanses of the Universe, as a confrontation between a person and their fate. On the other hand, the individual is consumed by tragic questions within themselves.¹⁰ In both cases, the city becomes almost unreal, otherworldly. These nostalgic motifs, interweaving with admiration for Mozart and the 18th century, gave rise to *The Variations on a Rococo Theme for cello and orchestra* (1876) and the orchestral suite *Mozartiana* (1887). The Petersburg theme occupies a significant place in the composer's oeuvre and is present in three of his major operas: *Mazeppa*, *Eugene Onegin*, and *The Queen of Spades*. Alexander Nikolaev remarks: 'In Tchaikovsky's music, life is reflected, perpetually triumphing over death in its eternal renewal. His art reaches towards the sun, light, and warmth; it gives us a sense of joy, makes us dream of a beautiful future, and teaches us to appreciate the beauty in the present'.¹¹

In Tchaikovsky's symphonies, one can trace a quarter-century evolution of his relationship with St. Petersburg - a path that mirrors Russian culture's journey over 150 years. In his first three symphonies, Tchaikovsky's admiration for the imperial capital is evident, with its dazzling atmosphere, vibrant parades, and lavish balls.

Tchaikovsky portrayed the forces of evil in various manifestations of social life. Violence and cruelty in merchant households in the Overture to *The Tempest*, social inequality rooted in the power of money in the opera *The Queen of Spades*, and the 'fatal' conventions of social morality leading to Lensky's demise in *Eugene Onegin* - these are just a few examples of the diverse yet socially significant embodiments of evil in Tchaikovsky's music, which the composer himself unified under the concepts of 'fate' and 'destiny'. Furthermore, loneliness as detachment from others and death as eternal separation from them, thus representing a philosophy of individualism as a conscious detachment from societal life, as a philosophy of estrangement - this constitutes another set of primary adversaries for Tchaikovsky's characters in his music.

Eugene Onegin

The first two acts of the opera take place at the Larin estate, where there is a high degree of life's regularity, and the leisurely rhythms of rural residents prevail. The absence of haste, bustle, and movement forms the image of a space

⁸ Boris Asafiev, *On Tchaikovsky's music* (Leningrad: Music, 1972), 204.

⁹ Solomon Volkov, *Balanchine's Tchaikovsky: Interviews with George Balanchine* (Moscow: Eksmo, 2004), 46.

¹⁰ Boris Asafiev, *On Tchaikovsky's music* (Leningrad: Music, 1972), 249.

¹¹ Alexander Nikolaev, *Tchaikovsky's Piano Heritage* (Moscow: Muzgiz, 1958), 62.

with a lesser intensity of time perception. In the third act of the opera, events unfold in St. Petersburg, where eternity and a moment intertwine. A socio-philosophical view when examining the city allows for correlating time with social and personal changes, as well as local and global transformations. The city, being a temporal system, constitutes a collection and sequence of events occurring within its space.

In the opera *Eugene Onegin*, Act III, Scene VI, the ‘St. Petersburg Ball’ depicts the domestic and social context. The action opens with a triumphant polonaise, sounding with a vividly expressed splendour and brilliance, painting a picture of the Petersburg elite. In the score, Tchaikovsky intentionally notes: ‘The scene represents one of the side rooms of a wealthy nobleman’s house in Petersburg’.

Here, the ‘glittering Petersburg’ is portrayed with its conventional social relations in the upper echelons of society, where restraint, controlled emotions, and so-called social etiquette reign, as evident from the solemn polyphonic ‘polonaise’ and Prince Gremin’s aria ‘All ages are submissive to love’.

After the polonaise, against the backdrop of a D major waltz, Tatiana appears, and the chorus of guest’s comments on her arrival. The waltz provides a direct development of the opera’s main dramatic line; in this case, the dance not only creates the atmosphere of the capital but also introduces a new image of Tatiana, now connected with high society life. This is her facade, concealing her true essence and portraying her as cold and emotionless. This is emphasised by the composer’s remark ‘con dolcezza e eleganza’ (with sweetness and elegance).

Gossip about Onegin: ‘Strange, pretentious, sad madman’ - this theme depicts the portrayal of Petersburg society: the contrast between the tranquil rural life depicted in the first part of the opera and the finale, showcasing the upper echelons of city society (Example 1).

Poco più animato

Poco più animato

p cresc.

The image shows a musical score for a vocal and piano piece. The top system is for the voice, with the tempo marking 'Poco più animato' and the instruction '[p]'. The lyrics are: 'жу! Чу дак при твор ный, пе чаль- ный, стран- ный су-ма сброд. В чу-жих кра'. The bottom system is for the piano, with the tempo marking 'Poco più animato' and the instruction 'p cresc.'. The score consists of two systems of music, each with a vocal line and a piano accompaniment.

Example 1. Tchaikovsky, *Eugene Onegin*, third act ‘Scene, Ecocese and Gremin’s aria’

It should be noted that originally, in the first version, two intermezzi (musical interludes) were absent, which Tchaikovsky composed at the request of the theatrical director Ivan Vsevolozhsky for the staging of the opera in Petersburg in 1885. This was done to intensify the drama and create a more vivid atmosphere of early 19th-century Petersburg. The lost urban space is manifested in a contemporary cultural phenomenon known as the ‘departing nature’ of the capital, representing the disappearing historically developed urban environment. The loss of the past leads to a rupture in time and the potential for its reconstruction.

Tchaikovsky presents the city as a dynamic entity, encompassing numerous conceptual parameters that allow it to be perceived as a whole. Petersburg is characterised by a unique experience of urban space in the form of a lost past.

The complexes of intonations inherent to individual characters intertwine with each other in kinship sharing emotional states and affects becoming not so much personal as generally human under the given circumstances. Furthermore, they merge with the psychological portrayal of the era and dramatic situations. This forms a system of compositional intonational arcs, sound arcs, a kind of transition from one point of action to another. The noticeable prevalence of sequences in the composition of *Eugene Onegin* is indicative of the presence of an associative system of reminiscences or reflected reflexes.¹²

The final scene takes place in the drawing room of Prince Gremin's house. The key shifts to D minor, resulting from a harmonic modulation from D major with a dominant bass on 'F'. The orchestral theme recalls the theme of the dying swan from the ballet *Swan Lake* (Example 2).

Allegro Moderato

Allegro Moderato

Allegro Moderato

Example 2. Tchaikovsky, *Eugene Onegin*, third act 'Final Scene' (1)

¹² Boris Asafiev, *On Tchaikovsky's music* (Leningrad: Music, 1972), 74.

Example 2. Tchaikovsky, *Eugene Onegin*, third act 'Final Scene' (2)

In the major key, dissonances resonate. When the waltz in D major sounds during the ball, a welcoming and composed Tatiana appears. Years have passed, and she has become the wife of Prince Gremin. Fate has brought her and Onegin together again. Their brief conversation is nothing more than a polite exchange of opinions. However, as a reminder of the past, one of the themes from the letter scene sounds in the orchestra, and a change occurs in Onegin's character. For the first time in the opera, his music is filled with sincerity and emotional warmth – 'There's no doubt, I'm in love'.

The recitative conveys her surprise at meeting Onegin. Tatiana has 'learned to control herself', as Onegin advised her in the first act, after receiving her letter. Even the music does not betray her state, portraying the heroine as composed and experienced.

Indirectly, her character is also shown in Prince Gremin's aria 'All ages are submissive to love'. Here, Tatiana is contrasted with the heartless society surrounding her, where cunning and indifference prevail: 'She shines like a star in the clear night sky'. A weighty accompaniment with ascending sequences in G \flat major is heard. A parallel can easily be

drawn with Lensky's aria 'I love you, Olga' from the first act. Thus, the essence of the temporality of existence emerges based on the contradictory unity of time, eternity, and the moment.

At the end of the opera, the duet-*élegie* in C minor between Tatiana and Onegin is heard: 'Happiness was possible, how close it was'. Its foundation is a melody close to the leading lyrical themes of Lensky and Tatiana. The entire concluding section of the scene is devoted to revealing Tatiana's resolute character and emphasising the significance of duty to her. The scene and *arioso* of Onegin mark a turning point in his character development. Tatiana's thematic material is heard in Onegin's part (roles are reversed), and he even responds to her with her own words from the first act.

In the final scene, the main character is depicted as 'frozen': he 'pauses' while explaining to Tatiana, signifying the transition from 'movement' to 'stillness' - from life to death. In the finale, he remains in Gremin's drawing room 'forever' - symbolically, Onegin is struck by the rejection of his beloved woman.

Tatiana: But my fate is already decided, And irrevocably so! I am now married, you must, I implore you, leave me in peace! Why hide, why deceive! Ah! I love you!

Eugene: What do I hear! What words you have uttered! Oh, joy! My life! You have become the Tatiana of old again!

Tatiana: No! No! The past cannot be undone! I am now devoted to another, my fate is already decided, I will be faithful to him forever!

The mirror-like composition is a highlight of the libretto of the opera *Eugene Onegin*. At the beginning of the work, St. Petersburg with its way of life, customs, and manners personifies the charming rogue, the flirtatious Onegin, who rejects Tatiana Larina and reads notes to the naive girl. However, by the finale, all the unattractive aspects of city life are embodied in the married socialite lioness Tatiana Gremina. She responds to Onegin with a rejection, depriving him of the happiness of being together, although she still loves him. St. Petersburg is the embodiment of Tatiana, as if she is dressed in it. According to Tchaikovsky's opinion, St. Petersburg is not merely the backdrop of events - it is an active participant in the drama. It influences what happens, affects the destinies of people, and shapes their consciousness.

The Queen of Spades

The genuine 'Petersburg' masterpiece became the opera by Pyotr Tchaikovsky *The Queen of Spades* created in 1890 based on the story of the same name by Alexander Pushkin.

The Queen of Spades had to undergo transformation, or more precisely, almost entirely dissolve within the waves of Tchaikovsky's music, to indirectly contribute to the fading of the old myth of Petersburg and the creation of something new.

Yakov Platek, the author of essays dedicated to the Petersburg theme in the life and work of Tchaikovsky, agrees with the statement of ballet master George Balanchine:

'For me, Tchaikovsky is a composer of Petersburg, absolutely a Petersburg composer. And not just because he studied in Petersburg, graduated from the conservatory, and lived here for a long time. Not just because he considered this city his own and spoke about it. What is much more important is that in the essence of his music, Tchaikovsky is a Petersburg resident, just like Pushkin and Stravinsky were natives of Petersburg. It's not by chance that the entire creative life of the composer unfolded in this city'.

The foundation of the plot of *The Queen of Spades* is one of the most 'Petersburg-centric' aspects of Tchaikovsky's work.¹³ At its core is the obsessive idea of the gambling addict Herman, who attempts to unearth the secret of the three magical cards from the old countess, fails, and loses his sanity. Many future motifs of the literary Petersburg myth are already embedded in this story. But who was the Queen of Spades, and where was her residence located? The first question was answered by Alexander Pushkin, the author of the story that served as the opera's libretto. On April 7, 1834, he recorded in his diary: 'At court, a resemblance was found between the old countess and Princess Natalia Petrovna, and it seems they are not upset'. The famous 'mustached princess' Natalya Golitsyna, a distant granddaughter

¹³ Solomon Volkov, *Balanchine's Tchaikovsky: Interviews with George Balanchine* (Moscow: Eksmo, 2004), 45.

of Peter the Great, was close to Catherine the Great, who admired her intelligence and independent judgment. As a lady-in-waiting and courtier to five emperors, Golitsyna symbolised the continuity of power. Her city mansion was a hub for French aristocratic emigrants, and she herself exerted influence on public opinion. Being received at the countess's reception was considered a great honour, and presenting a young lady to the princess before introducing her to society was deemed proper etiquette. She instilled fear and submission in those around her. Princess Natalya Petrovna passed away at the age of 97 on December 20, 1837, outliving the immortal Pushkin.

Her residence was situated on the left side of Malaya Morskaya Street, at the corner of Gorokhovaya Street, without intersecting it. Today, this is house number 10 on Gogol Street. This elongated three-story building has survived to the present day. Beneath the porch of this house, Herman, with the profile of Napoleon and the soul of Mephistopheles, spent long hours amidst rain and wind.¹⁴

Tchaikovsky expresses the substrate of the city's system from a socio-philosophical perspective, using numerous elements of urban life that reflect its existence in time, space, and movement.

In the first act, first scene ('Scene in the Summer Garden'), the action takes place in spring. 'Rarely does the sun, dear ones, delight us with joy!' The urban public space shapes the visual image of the city, revealing its social essence. The key of B minor (associated with masses, death, suffering) shifts to Mozart's favoured key of D major. The Summer Garden resembles Mussorgsky's 'Tuileries Garden' from *Pictures at an Exhibition* symbolising hope and vitality (Example 3).

Example 3. Tchaikovsky, *Queen of Spades*, First act 'Chorus of Children, Nurses and Others'

The opera presents two contrasting groups of musical themes: a bright beginning that symbolises humanity's aspiration for happiness, moral uplift, the beauty of emotions, and the force of darkness, evil, and death. These themes,

¹⁴ Andrei Yatsevich, *Pushkin's Petersburg* (Saint Petersburg: Petropol, 1993), 234.

encompassing the overarching theme of the work – the collision of light and darkness, life, and death – interact and intertwine.

To enhance the conflict, the opera begins with a depiction of childhood. Portraying children among the city's inhabitants reveals one aspect of Petersburg society. The boys' chorus (evoking associations with the boys' chorus from *Carmen*) performs the children's march 'Long live the wise queen, the mother of us all...' about Catherine the Great. Amid the tense drama and central conflict of the scene, these childlike images characterise the domestic aspect of the opera, concealing something far more significant beneath. Dramatically, the children's march, Liza's aria 'I do not know his name', the quintet 'I am frightened', and Tomsky's ballad from the very beginning of the opera intensify the conflict and foreshadow the tragic resolution of the finale (Example 4).

The musical score consists of two systems. The first system begins with a vocal line marked *f* (forte) and a piano accompaniment marked *p* (piano). The vocal line has the lyrics: "Да здрав - ству-ет же-на, пре-муд - ра - я ца-ри - ца". The piano accompaniment features a rhythmic pattern of eighth and sixteenth notes. The second system continues the vocal line with the lyrics: "как ма - терь всем о - на, сих стран им-пе - рат-ри - ца и". The piano accompaniment continues with the same rhythmic pattern. The score is written in 4/4 time, key of B-flat major, and includes dynamic markings *f* and *p*.

Example 4. Tchaikovsky, *Queen of Spades*, First act 'Chorus of Children, Nurses and Others'

Temporal dimension, as a parameter of the urban system relates to the reflective perception of the 'duration' of urban environment objects over time and the eventfulness of the territory. For Tchaikovsky, it becomes a philosophical

parameter of the city system concept. Time, in relation to urban dynamics, can be interpreted as a measure of its development, reflecting global processes within the civilisation space.

In the finale of the second act, in the third scene, Catherine the Great herself appears at the ball. 'In the chorus, there is great excitement. The host divides the crowd to create a passage for the queen'. In the Russian Empire, there was a prohibition on depicting the tsars in operas. Herman stands apart, uninterested in her – this is a dramaturgical device employed by the composer. The hero's thoughts are preoccupied with something entirely different. At the end of the scene, the key changes to D minor, and tension is felt in the orchestra.

In the third scene, 'Chorus of Promenaders' sings together and then divides into social groups: the elderly men and women, the young people, and the young ladies. In the key of F major, they sing about the same topic but in different ways. The number is based on polyphony: each group has its own thematic material, and each does not listen to the others. This way, the composer portrays the division within society and juxtaposes age and death with youth and life (Example 5).

Lo stesso tempo (Allegro)

4

Example 5. Tchaikovsky, Queen of Spades, First act 'Chorus of Promenaders'

The external atmosphere of Petersburg is intertwined with the inner lives of the main characters in the duet of Yeletsky and Herman who are both in love to Liza. The key of F-sharp minor with a dominant organ point foreshadows the tragedy. The archetype of the Russian woman is depicted – one who loves to pity. The Prince represents the highest society of Petersburg, behaving and speaking formally, while Liza is drawn to Herman's passion.

The intimate and social aspects of Petersburg are portrayed in Scene 7 (the duet), where Tchaikovsky presents Liza with a high status – she is the Countess' granddaughter. The interconnection between 'person and city' is defined by understanding the semantic 'body' of the cultural living space. The composer manages to infuse deep philosophical

meaning linked with contemplation and detachment from worldly affairs, enabling the enrichment of life with true values. The home is a primary component of the substrate, with its enclosed format. Liza is shown playing the harpsichord in the Countess' house, in a chamber-like setting. The personal space of the individual in the urban environment is a significant factor in human development. It is undeniable that humans live in two types of time: inner and outer. External time is defined by the individual's response to social challenges within the cultural context of existence. The temporality of the inner character is based on Liza's personal impressions of significant life events. Petersburg, as the 'natural' habitat of the opera's characters, greatly shapes the temporal perception of their personal worlds.

The third act of *The Queen of Spades* – the masquerade – artistically captures the amusements and daily life of Russian aristocracy. The key of D major brings back an aura of hope and happiness. The delightful intermezzo 'The Sincerity of the Shepherdess', with its naive narrative and borrowed passages from Mozart's piano concertos and Dmitry Bortniansky's sonatas, is artistically one of the prime stylisations of courtly Rococo.

The Countess sings in French in the 'Scene and Chorus of Governesses and Governesses-in-waiting'. Her recitative 'Le duet d'Orléans, le duet d'Ayen...' – a language spoken only by the upper echelons of society – is given in C-sharp minor (Example 6).

The musical score for Example 6 is presented in two systems. The first system consists of three measures. The vocal line (treble clef) features triplets of eighth notes: 'Le due-d'Or-leans', 'le-due d'Ae-en', and 'due de Colg-ny'. The piano accompaniment (treble and bass clefs) is marked *ppp* and features a steady eighth-note accompaniment in the bass and a more active line in the treble. The second system also consists of three measures, starting with a measure rest in the vocal line. The vocal line continues with triplets: 'La com-tesse d'Estrades', 'la du-ches-se de Braneas', and 'Ка-ки - е и - ме-'. The piano accompaniment continues with the same *ppp* dynamics and accompaniment style.

Example 6. Tchaikovsky, *Queen of Spades*, Second act 'Scene and Chorus'

In the memory scene, Tchaikovsky convincingly portrays the old lady's caprices, her grumbling, and stubbornness. Set to a leisurely and majestic minuet rhythm, the Countess reminisces about her splendor at the Versailles court, how she danced with distinguished representatives of French aristocracy. The music accompanying this recitative monologue provides a general idea of the minuet, its rhythmic structure, intonated by the solo clarinet (Example 7).

Poco meno

А бы-ва - ло кто тан-це- вал? Кто пел?

Example 7. Tchaikovsky, *Queen of Spades*, Second act 'Scene and Chorus'

This motif, with its calm indifference and consistently repeating melisma in the third measure, conveys a peculiar detachment and dreamy tranquillity. There is a certain lifelessness in it. For the old lady, who stands with one foot in the grave, this graceful melodic figure serves as a catalyst for memories: Back then, she lived – danced, sang, played games of chance, had lovers; now, in the pale light, her days are only left with faint echoes of past merriment. When memories reach their zenith, the English horn enters with a carefree, naive quadruple melody infused with tender melancholy. It embodies the 'golden age' of gallant celebrations, a lost paradise, and the countess's habits. As her faded lips utter the king's name, a gentle breeze passes by, a ghostly whisper 'pppp' and vanishes immediately. This is the only emotional movement that the old lady is still capable of.

Tchaikovsky's Petersburg is a place where a person confronts their destiny, attempting to subdue the irrational, mystical forces of nature, history, and fate. Liberated from moral constraints (a central theme in the works of Fyodor Dostoevsky), the criminal hyper-persistence in achieving goals introduces new nuances to the artistic world of opera, conveying themes of temptation, destructive desires, passion, and death. Each scene of the opera is directed towards depicting the psychology and cause-and-effect relationships of characters, determined by the Petersburg setting.

Tchaikovsky's nostalgia and intuitive dread of the impending revolutionary catastrophe and the crumbling Petersburg way of life – in accordance with the legendary curse and fashionable Slavophile theories – find powerful reflection in *The Queen of Spades*. Petersburg in the opera is profoundly psychologised. Here, the fate of the state is not pondered; only love, life, and death are of concern. Death triumphs in Tchaikovsky's opera: not only does the Countess die (as in Pushkin's novella), but also the main characters – Herman and his beloved Liza. The listener may not immediately realise that their demise foreshadows the downfall of Petersburg. However, once understood, the sense of the city's inevitable demise emanating from the music of *The Queen of Spades* becomes indelible.

In the third act, during Scene 20 on the embankment, Liza's aria resounds in a sombre D-sharp minor tonality with the use of brass instruments. Midnight helps realise life from the perspectives of the 'temporal' and the 'eternal', actualising the question of the temporality of individual existence in the urban context. Liza mentally comprehends the static essence of being and her imminent passing (Example 8).

Example 8. Tchaikovsky, *Queen of Spades*, Third act ‘Liza’s Arioso’

‘Night’ becomes a symbol of the stylistic poetry in Tchaikovsky’s later works, as manifested in *The Queen of Spades*, *The Nutcracker*, and *Iolanta*. Following *The Queen of Spades*, where the breath of death was so ethereal and yet real, the Composer even attempted to replace the word ‘death’ with euphemisms in his letters (for instance, ‘old lady’), as if imposing a taboo upon it. The night awakens fears and loneliness, pangs of conscience, and terrifying visions. With the onset of twilight, a different attitude toward life emerges, unveiling new realms of time – gateways to the bites of conscience.¹⁵ *White Nights* and their accompanying major tonality unveil new dimensions of time, reflecting the daytime world and commenting on it.¹⁶

The ‘nocturnal’ manifests itself as a distinct type of perception—a contemplative re-evaluation of daytime impressions, where one phenomenon is inseparable from another, like images united by a single emotional affect. Nocturnal fantasy emphasises much more actively the ‘strange and unusual’ qualities of night-time images, whose level

¹⁵ Michael Gassmann, *Die Musik der Nacht: Musik, Malerei, Liturgie, Literatur. Vorträge des Symposiums im Rahmen des Musikfestes Stuttgart* (Kassel: Bärenreiter-Verlag Karl Vötterle), 63.

¹⁶ Boris Asafiev, *On Tchaikovsky’s music* (Leningrad: Music, 1972), 340.

of concreteness is elevated here to that of 'characters', and their development takes on distinctly pronounced narrative forms.

The scene in the Countess' bedroom, in the barracks, by the Winter Canal - all of this portrays Petersburg with its hypnotic irrationality, divinations, and enchantments. The sombre view of the night barracks harmoniously blends with the mournful music. All the necessary stage effects for the appearance of the ghost are present: late evening, moonlight that flickers on and off, the howling of the wind, fleeting shadows, and snowstorm. However, all this necessary stage setting is not truly frightening; the music itself is what is truly terrifying, acting with indescribable force. And it's not so much the howling of the storm that is terrifying, but the precise understanding of all the motifs and expressive means that possess an almost 'speaking' power.

In the scene at the gambling house, the atmosphere of drunken revelry naturally gives rise to the genre of a 'playful' song and dance. The entire scene authentically reflects the lives of the noble representatives of the 'golden youth' of old Petersburg. The music is filled with genuine zest for life, and that's where its strength lies. Through the method of genre characterisation, Tchaikovsky, like no one else, achieved the most accurate and vivid portrayal of the dissipated lifestyle of the 'golden' youth. Against this backdrop, the tragic finale of the opera becomes particularly vivid.

In a letter to Nadezhda von Meck in 1878, Tchaikovsky wrote: 'Petersburg currently exerts the most oppressive, melancholic influence on my soul. The weather is dreadful: fog, endless rain, dampness'.¹⁷ The motif of 'strangeness', 'illusion', 'phantasm', and the 'appearance of the visible', introduced by Boris Asafyev in his essay on this opera, became a distinctive feature of Tchaikovsky's *The Queen of Spades*, creating a significant and vivid context in the exploration of one of the most expressive and poignant pages of St. Petersburg's musical narrative. Regarding the 'strange' element, which holds the status of a leitmotif in the Petersburg text, Vladimir Toporov writes: 'General operators and indicators of modality: suddenly, unexpectedly, at this moment, strangely, fantastically'.¹⁸

It is not surprising that the plot of *The Queen of Spades* triggered in the composer's imagination a tumultuous influx of sound images and rhythms, clothed in distinctly specific harmonies and hues. In his composition, the composer conveyed the atmosphere of the peculiar Russian city, embodying the cold, granite-destructive phantasmagorical world of the Northern capital - precisely in this key did the master perceive Herman's tragedy, a truly 'Petersburg type' of person, consumed by his passion for roulette.

The 'eerie' orchestral colour, achieved through the peculiar use of timbres and intricate rhythmic lines of the woodwinds (especially the bassoon and clarinet), could only be born in Tchaikovsky's mind under the influence of distorted reflections of vital and grotesque phantasms of Petersburg. The state of heartrending emptiness and coldness of Petersburg is expressed through the timbre of the clarinet.

In *The Queen of Spades*, Tchaikovsky interprets Petersburg as a city of 'distorted reflections of life force and grotesque phantasms', a city with its hypnotic irrationality, divinations, and enchantments. The composer captured the 'essence of the city, shrouded in mystery and pursued by irrational forces'.¹⁹ Tchaikovsky's music is infused with the illusions of Petersburg's white nights and contrasting winter scenes: black tree trunks, a snowy blanket, the oppressive weight of granite masses, the precision of forged patterns.

The use of the minor seventh chord of the second degree is often encountered in episodes of oppressive melancholy and terrifying solitude: in the scene of the approaching ghost in the fifth act and in the episode of the Countess' death. In both cases, the composer modulates to the key of the minor dominant: from A minor to E minor in the fifth act and from E minor to B minor in the fourth. In both cases, the tonic and dominant of the new key are prolonged (especially in the fifth act), and the entire development is built on various transformations of the seventh chord of the second degree, subtly conveying the emotional sensation of severe Petersburg. The seventh chord appears in various forms: tremolo in the bass, swirling harmonies in the winds, harmonisation of the theme of secrecy, descending scale-like progressions.

¹⁷ Pyotr Tchaikovsky, *Correspondence with Nadezhda von Meck in 3 vol.* (Moscow: Music, 1935), 431.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 314.

¹⁹ Boris Asafyev, *Symphonic Etudes* (Leningrad: Music, 1970), 328.

The urban cultural landscape emerges as a result of the creative transformation of the hero's geographical environment in the opera. Space becomes a landscape imbued with philosophical content. In episodes of emotional intensity, dominant organ points are often encountered. The sequential development of melody on the dominant is one of the composer's favourite techniques in tense, evolving dramatic moments, embodying both the bright and dark sides of the city.

Indeed, mysticism and infernal elements in the interpretation of the theme become defining for the characters. The tragic fatalism of fate in Herman, Liza, and the Countess, tied to the 'world' of Petersburg, is inseparably linked with the image of this city - a phantom city, a ghost, where life resembles a dream. Tchaikovsky's music is enveloped in the illusions of white Petersburg nights and the contrasting elements of winter: black tree trunks, a snowy veil, the crushing weight of granite masses, the sharpness of 'iron railings'.²⁰

As the plot of *The Queen of Spades* unfolds, the orchestral score becomes infused with dark and sombre chords, accompanying the melodies of the characters as the opera's events lead them to a tragic conclusion. The white night, coming with spring, is poisoned by this sorrow. It torments, lures, beckons with its strange, reflected light, and when the sun rises, people have no strength left to rejoice in it; they are enervated by the process of being drawn toward the light. Longing for spring, the tantalising and inexplicable attraction to elusive images - this is one sphere of emotions. But in the winter twilight and the reflected light of summer nights in this city, other feelings arise: a sense of phantasmagoria and the transience of all existence, and from there - a keen curiosity about the process of destruction and death. Destruction and death, not as natural laws of development, but as existing for their own pleasure. The fantastical images that emerge inevitably take on the appearance of eerily real ghosts, while real images distort to the point of delirium. For those who perceive all that is visible as illusion, or for those who are inclined to the enchantment of the irrational, maintaining equilibrium among them is difficult.

In the opera, the city represents a self-contained and self-sufficient space where shifts in societal formations, cultural paradigms, and types of cultural consciousness occur. These developments are cultivated and established by aesthetic thought, and it's within this city that Herman finds himself at a pivotal moment in his life. Tchaikovsky's understanding of St. Petersburg is twofold: on one hand, it's a city of triumph and national identity; on the other, it's a hub of evil and crime, a city of abyss. The music of *The Queen of Spades* allows the protagonist to immerse himself in a 'world of shadows', which proves to be a reality. Thus, St. Petersburg becomes the authentic subject of intense, often contradictory aesthetic experiences.

In *The Queen of Spades* there is a collision of two spatial worlds: the real and the unreal. The spatial organization of the text is multi-layered - mystical narration cannot exist within the framework of real space. In the unreal Petersburg, spatial distortion and its mirror reflection occur.

Every day and mystical episodes take place in different locations and types of space. The unreal space is characterised by boundlessness, transformation, dynamic action, constant changes, and rapid movement. Everyday space is always limited and often static.

Tchaikovsky's music could not help but embody in unheard-of sounds the horror and fleeting mystique of Petersburg. The ominous orchestral colour achieved through characteristic timbres and complex rhythms (especially among bassoons and clarinets) could only arise under the impression of Tchaikovsky's distorted reflections of 'Petersburg life and grotesque'.²¹

In *The Queen of Spades* Tchaikovsky does not display cynicism because he keenly felt that the time when one could approach the 'Petersburg' theme with indifference or cynicism had passed. In Tchaikovsky's music the 'fatal' forces of evil are represented by unjust and inhumane social relations that govern and oppress the protagonist. These forces restrict his consciousness and behaviour, limit his freedom, destroy his nature, cloud his mind, distort his feelings, and ultimately ruin his life.

²⁰ Pyotr Tchaikovsky, *Correspondence with Nadejda von Meck in 3 vol.* (Moscow: Music, 1935), 329.

²¹ Boris Asafiev, *On Opera: Selected Articles* (Leningrad: Music, 1976), 328.

By performing a requiem for Herman at the end of the opera with a sublime and sombre choral composition Tchaikovsky bid farewell to himself and to Petersburg - a gesture that would later be echoed in his *Pathétique Symphony*. Since Herman's fate was intertwined with that of Tchaikovsky himself and the city it became a psychologically charged symbol of a new era in Petersburg culture.

In *The Queen of Spades* Tchaikovsky created a social tragedy revealing the characters as contemporary people. The composer depicted their suffering with great sympathy which is caused by the injustice of the social order. The music revealing the drama of the characters contrasts sharply with the themes in scenes depicting everyday life. Strolling in the Summer Garden, festivities among the nobility, and the gambling house - these are background scenes, and their themes are not always related to the era's atmosphere.²²

Thus, alongside Herman's tragedy Tchaikovsky succeeded in making his opera a truthful reflection of Russian reality, an objective expression of ideas, relationships, and customs in their generalised form. In other words, Tchaikovsky's objective portrayal of Russian reality in *The Queen of Spades* captured its essential aspects, preserving its significance for many decades.

For the Petersburg 'sense of the world' the notion of phantasmagoria is characteristic intertwined with the tradition of visions and prophecies, as well as theatricality, the sensation of being present in the city's grand architectural ensembles, creating an indelible impression of scenery.²³

As Vladimir Toporov noted, the essence of Petersburg is determined by the duality of nature and culture where nature is characterised by amorphousness, curvature, horizontal planes, and culture by clear formality, linearity, verticality. The spiritual, metaphysical essence and atmospheric specificity of the city and the Petersburg text are defined by their phantasmagorical and transparent nature. The Petersburg text like the city itself is characterised by the impression of a mirage, metaphysical properties, fantastical elements, intentionality, and phantasmagoria: miracles, revelations, dreams, prophecies, visions, divinations.²⁴

Petersburg as a theme of fate, intertwined with the theme of the card, becomes a metaphor for a predetermined tragedy for both the characters and the author. This new transformation was achieved through Tchaikovsky's music.

Conclusion

Saint Petersburg, from its foundation, has become a symbol of profound change and grand achievements, always standing apart from other Russian cities. Its uniqueness besides the fact of its emergence on marshlands against nature's odds is affirmed by its entire subsequent history. Located on the edge of Russian territory it peculiarly merged European and inherently Russian national traits, forming a new phenomenon - Petersburg culture.

Interest in cultural phenomena such as Petersburg has persisted over many generations retaining its significance. As noted by the renowned literary scholar Toporov, 'The theme of Petersburg leaves few indifferent. Far from being exhausted or definitively resolved, it is characterized by a special antithetical tension and explosiveness'.²⁵

In Tchaikovsky's two operas Petersburg is depicted as proud, mysterious, and shrouded in secrecy. The soul of Petersburg is 'hidden in tightly buttoned uniform'. In these works, the city is portrayed with an intense flow of life. The rules of high society, the depersonalisation of individuality, and indifference are the main characteristics of the capital in the two operas.

The city reflects the spiritual upheavals of Tchaikovsky's opera characters and appears as a temporary space of personality. The temporality of Petersburg is combined with transience indicating a crisis moment in the characters' lives: Herman - Liza, Tatiana - Onegin.

In Tchaikovsky's works Petersburg is not only a backdrop but also an independent character. The image of Petersburg is calmly reflected in the steel Neva preparing for a new, unprecedented transformation of its famous reflection. The city ceases to be perceived as a closed and orderly space awakening the elemental movement of the free

²² Yulia Rozanova, *History of Russian Music, vol. 2: The second half of the XIX century* (Music, Moscow, 1981), 219.

²³ Jurij Lotman, *Works on sign systems XVIII. Scientific Notes of the Tartu State University* (Tartu: Tartu University Press, 1984), 36.

²⁴ Toporov, Vladimir, *Petersburg Text of Russian Literature: Selected Works* (Saint Peterburg: Art, 2003), 30.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 259.

human spirit, independent of the cultural imperatives of the preceding era creating new values and a new space. In this sense Petersburg represents an experience of borderline 'elusive' consciousness existence revealing the intimate interdependence of the capital phenomenon as an aesthetic ideal and a litmus test of social environment and living conditions.

During the research, the musical interpretation of the northern capital and the customs of people of Saint Petersburg in Tchaikovsky's two musical works was established. In *Eugene Onegin* the capital's parade-representative image is shown while in *The Queen of Spades* the city appears 'from the inside'. The wide panorama of musical incarnations of the image of Petersburg testifies to its sharply expressed bipolarity which constitutes the essence of the city as a holistic phenomenon. It seems that two dissimilar operas by Tchaikovsky are for the first time aligned within the framework of belonging to the unified theme of Petersburg.

Thus, in Tchaikovsky's two operas every day and mystical episodes take place in different locations and types of space. Characteristics of unreal space include boundlessness, dynamic action, transformation, constant changes, and swift movement. Everyday space is always enclosed and often static. Another distinguishing feature separating real space from unreal is the content and character of its contents. In Tchaikovsky's operas everyday space is filled with simple material objects. Real space encompasses the material sphere, the sphere of physical and sensory experience. The mystical and unreal are characterised by boundlessness, often represented by natural and astral phenomena, air, and spirits.

Indeed, in Tchaikovsky's two operas Petersburg not only accurately conveys the cultural context of the era but also becomes a 'mirror' for the characters reflecting their hopes, feelings, and dreams of happiness.

Petersburg serves as the centre of a certain coordinate system with the main directions being the musical text and its interpretation which form a cohesive image of the city. As a result, a consistent chain of musical interpretations of Petersburg is built forming a unified representation of the capital.

The artificiality of the Petersburg situation gave rise to its mythogenicity, eschatological expectations, and premonitions of doom. According to Nikolay Antsiferov's viewpoint, the foundational ideas of the Petersburg text were predetermined by its unique individuality, the city's tragic imperialism, and the mysterious life of its complex and subtle soul: Petersburg – 'a city of great struggle... facing grandiose tasks - the struggle with tension is palpable. The spectre of a great catastrophe hovers over it, like the spirit of inexorable fate'.

In terms of the quantity of texts, codes, connections, associations, and the volume of cultural memory accumulated over its historically insignificant period of existence, Petersburg can rightfully be considered a unique phenomenon in world civilization. Simultaneously, like the unique Petersburg architecture, Petersburg culture is one of the national conquests of Russia's spiritual life.²⁶

Thus, the attribute of 'duality' of Petersburg, the organic unity and interdependence of its opposing elements, has been discovered. However, besides the entirely obvious duality of the image of the city on the Neva, conditioned by the strongest influence of Western culture 'cultivated' on Russian 'soil' no less significant and essential characteristic of Petersburg is the opposition of its two contradictory aspects: the parade 'façade' and the 'reverse side'. It is these aspects that form the basis for sharply contrasting and unequivocal assessments evoked by Petersburg in Tchaikovsky's perception.

Recommendations

The article would be recommended for scholars and researchers interested in interdisciplinary studies bridging Russian literature, musicology, and cultural theory. Additionally, readers interested in the philosophical consideration of urban imagery and systemic approaches to cultural analysis, as well as those studying the intersection of music and literature, would benefit from the insights provided in this research. Overall, this article offers a promising avenue for further exploration into the representation of cities in musical art and its implications for urbanistic theories and musical content.

²⁶ Jurij Lotman, *Selected Articles* (Tallinn: Alexandra, 1999), 21.

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