

# REPERTOIRE & STANDARDS

## Music in Worship



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### To Russia with Song

By Thomas R. Vozzella

Music of the Russian tradition, both Eastern Orthodox and folk, is some of the most beautiful and spiritually moving examples of choral music. Thick harmony, rhythmically driven texts, basso profundo tones (not notated), all work together to create a mystically magical experience of choral sound. Yet, to achieve this stylistic sound is a daunting task. To narrow the learning curve, I took advantage of an opportunity to sing with a Russian choir, under a Russian conductor in Russia...the three R's of Orthodox music. An opportunity such as this is a rare occurrence. However, the Patriarch Tikhon Russian American Music Institute (PaTRAM) organized a five-day, intensive master class with Russia's leading choral technician, Vladimir Gorbik. Classes were held September 2-6 and took place at the Moscow Representation Church of the Holy Trinity-St. Sergius Monastery. Maestro Gorbik comes from a long line of Russian Master Conductors, including a teacher with whom we share a common bond, Boris Tevlin (1931-2012). I studied with



Tom Vozzella and Vladimir Gorbik

Tevlin for two summers in Bulgaria at the University of South Carolina's Conductors Institute, under the leadership of Larry Wyatt.

Vladimir Gorbik (b. 1970) began his musical studies in Yekaterinburg, Russia, and

continued them at the Moscow State Conservatory, completing a specialization in choral conducting in 1998 and in orchestral conducting in 2000. Since 1996 he has served as the choir director at the Moscow Representation Church (Metochion) of the Holy Trinity-St. Sergius Monastery and since 1998 has been the artistic director and conductor of the professional men's chorus formed at the Metochion. With this choir he has made more than a dozen outstanding recordings of both liturgical services and concert programs. The choir has on numerous occasions sung at Patriarchal services in the Dormition Cathedral in the Kremlin, and they accompanied Patriarch Alexy II on his trip to the Holy Land in 2000. The repertoire of the Metochion's Men's Chorus cultivates the finest repertoire

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and interpretive traditions of the Moscow School and the Holy Trinity-St. Sergius Lavra. For his outstanding achievements and service, he has received an award of recognition (gramota) from the Patriarch and the medal of the Order of St. Sergius of Radonezh, 2nd Degree. In September 2012 he was appointed to the conducting faculty of the Moscow State Conservatory. (<https://patraminstitute.org/about/vladimir-gorbik/>)

Thirty-five singers and choral directors from the United States,

Canada, and Australia joined with the Professional Male Choir of the Moscow Representation Church along with students and faculty from the Moscow Conservatory. Most participants knew little to no Russian and/or sung Church Slavonic prior to this experience. Our participation included singing the Saturday Night Vigil (three-and-a-half-hours, standing) and the Sunday *Divine Liturgy* (two-hours, standing). The Orthodox tradition does not include padded pews. The music at these services was not by a single composer, as would a major work from the Orthodox tradition. Many have come to understand this literature, with limited availabil-

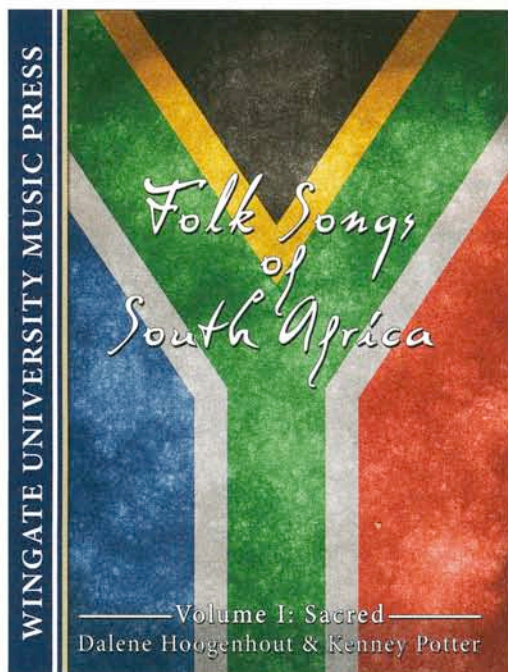
ity, through Rachmaninoff's *All Night Vigil* and other major works such as Grechaninov's *Passion Week*. Although these are marvelous works, the Russian Orthodox tradition is much more extensive.

Similar to American churches with a liturgical worship tradition, Orthodox worship includes beautiful houses of worship, exquisite liturgy and pageantry, outstanding psalms, hymns and spiritual songs by various composers. Instruments are not used in Orthodox Liturgy. Services are unaccompanied. It is music crated to the glory and worship of God. To have experienced this firsthand was transformational, both musically and spiritually.

Preparing a choir to sing Russian literature is difficult due to the complexity of the language and diction. However, the results far outweigh the preparation time. Music of this tradition is originally in Church Slavonic, written in Cyrillic. Of late, publishers such as Musica Russica ([www.musicarussica.com](http://www.musicarussica.com)) have published these works in transliterated editions. Musica Russica goes one step further by providing diction resources. However, if this causes one to avoid this great music, numerous English editions are available from Musica Russica and other publishers.

Attendance at an event such as this is life changing through new friendships and shared experiences. For me, new friends and colleagues enlighten my life and work. Gaining new knowledge and resources adds to the philosophy of inclusiveness for worship ministry. This opportunity opened the door to repertoire options that I otherwise would not have

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known existed. To this end, the most widely used resource for Orthodox service music in America is known as the "Green Book" or The Divine Liturgy can be purchased at St. Vladimir's Seminary Press & Bookstore ([www.svspress.com](http://www.svspress.com)). The "Green Book" is a tremendous resource.

Now, the treasure trove of Orthodox literature can be found at [www.podoben.org](http://www.podoben.org). There is no cost to use these resources and choral scores. Additionally, the site offers links to other resources, many of which have no cost involved. However, some are only

in Russian-Cyrillic. For those versed in Russian and Church Slavonic, you will have a field day. According to the website: "In the past half-century, individuals have undertaken the task of adapting, into English, the music which was brought to this land by the Orthodox faithful. This website, 'Podoben,' is an effort to make available the musical adaptations to all who find a need for English and Slavonic adaptations to accompany the services of the Orthodox Church. It will contain arrangements for all aspects of life in the Church. The scores

are arranged by individuals who have freely given their time and talent for the sole benefit of the Church..."

My goal in sharing this experience is to offer resources for concert and worship from the Russian Orthodox tradition that are accessible to those seeking accessible Russian repertoire. Additionally, when opportunities avail themselves for musical advancement, if possible, attend the event. It will be life changing and musically uplifting professionally and spiritually.

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