

Long-Lost Songs by Romanovs Surface

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ST. PETERSBURG — Taking 15 years to put together, a recent concert at Tavrichesky Palace in St. Petersburg could have claimed a place in "The Guinness Book of World Records." The performance, entitled "The Imperial Musical Collection," showcased 20 long-lost musical works composed exclusively by members of the Romanov family, including Tsar Alexander II and Prince Konstantin Romanov.

These works had last been played almost 1 1/2 centuries ago and then were lost in the chaos of the Bolshevik Revolution. Vyacheslav Mozardo, president of the Moscow-based Slava international cultural center, sought to revive Russia's imperial musical legacy. Along with his team of researchers, Mozardo spent more than a decade going through thousands of files in the Romanov family archives as well as libraries far beyond Russia, from Switzerland to Thailand.

The idea of searching for music written by the Romanovs originally came to producer Bella Abayeva, the driving force behind the project, when she was contemplating her relationship with her own children.

"I was thinking what sort of people I want them to be inspired by," Abayeva said. She joined forces with the Slava Center, and the research began. "Sometimes we would find a fragment of a letter containing a musical score in an archive in one country, and it would take many months to find the rest of the document thousands of miles away in a totally different library," she said.

Most members of royal families in countries where they have existed or still exist are involved in some sort of artistic activity, from poetry to painting, but hardly ever composition, and in this respect the Romanov family stands out.

"The Romanovs adored composing romances or short classical music opuses as presents for their loved ones," Abayeva said. "Indeed, we have made it all very private in the sense that while presenting the music, we withhold any personal dedications. We respect the privacy of the authors."

The music presented at the concert was terra incognita not only for general classical music audiences, but even for musicologists whose area of expertise is 19th-century Russian music.

"When I played bits and pieces of various works to music reviewers and historians, they would come out with the wildest guesses, from Hector Berlioz to Pyotr Tchaikovsky, but not a single person even suspected that we could be talking about a musical piece written by a Russian aristocrat," said Mikhail Golikov, the artistic director and principal conductor of the Tavricheskaya Cappella that comprises a youth symphony orchestra, a chamber choir and a horn ensemble. The cappella musicians played the music of the Romanovs to audiences at the concert on Dec. 10.

The cappella will perform the program in Russian cities including Moscow in 2012 in a series of charitable concerts, said Golikov. In 2013, the program will be played for general audiences. A CD recording of the works will also be made.

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