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***From Barbarism to Enlightenment. The institutionalization of the Russian musical theatre during the 18th century***

During the 18th century, the formation and development of the Russian musical theater were marked by an extraordinary intensity. Over a short period of time, a nation steeped in deeply feudal backwaters went the way that led to the birth of a national opera. The introduction of European music in Russian everyday life began with the legislative acts promulgated by Peter the Great. The increasing interest of the Russian court for musical events stimulated the influx of Western musicians as well as the permanent presence of foreign troupes. From the very first performances, the genre of the opera played a major role in Russian theater history ; this genre benefited from the court’s protection and financial support. Despite the success of opera performances given by troupes recruited in Europe – mainly in Italy and France –, the authorities understood the necessity to establish a national theater. Elisabeth's 1756 edict on the foundation of this theater caused a vibrant development of the theatrical life and contributed to its rise during the Russian Enlightenment in the last third of the 18th century. In our opinion, it is necessary to ask the following questions: how could a country so remote from European culture at the beginning of the century succeed in producing domestic composers capable of establishing the basis for a national opera in the 1770s? Which political and socio-cultural events influenced the institutionalization of the Russian musical theater? The history of this theater, marked by the strong rivalry between the Italian and French troupes, has been the focus of several musicologists. In spite of the indisputable scientific value of their works, they principally limited themselves to one of three periods: that of the Italian opera seria or buffa, that of the French opéra-comique and the beginnings of the Russian opera. The study of Russia’s musical life requires that we observe this phenomenon in full, in its context throughout the 18th century. Moreover, the rare historical evidence about the ambitions and personal preferences of Russian monarchs in theater should significantly enrich our research.

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