Aleksandr Grechaninov
GRETCHANINOFF, Alexandre Tikhonovich
(b. 13 [25] October, 1864, Moscow; d. 4 January, 1956, New York City)—studied at the Moscow Conservatory 1881–90 and St. Petersburg Conservatory 1890–1893, from which he graduated in N. Rimsky-Korsakov’s composition class. In 1894–96 composed a number of secular choral works for Melnikov’s and Bekker’s Choir in St. Petersburg; in 1896 moved back to Moscow, where he began writing sacred music under the influence of S. Smolensky’s ideas being propagated at the Moscow Synodal School of Church Singing; continued to compose secular choral music, theater music, and music for children’s choirs. Worked as a pedagogue, and performed as a pianist, accompanist, and conductor. In 1925 left Russia to live in Paris; from 1939 until his death lived in the United States, where he also composed a number of large- and small-scale choral works.

Grechaninoff’s choral style is characterized by an intense Russian “flavor” on the one hand, and exceptionally rich choral textures and opulent harmonic sonorities on the other. While he occasionally quoted actual liturgical chants and, in his secular choral works—folk songs, more often he composed new melodies and themes that exhibited chant-like characteristics: stepwise melodic movement, the stringing together of melodic nuclei (known as popovki in the Znamenny Chant of the Russian Orthodox Church), and rhythmic syncopations. Out of these melodies he wove splendid choral textures that expanded and contracted freely, from unison to as many as twelve or sixteen parts, and utilized the extremes of the vocal range, creating, in effect, a choral “symphonism,” similar to that found in the works of Kastalsky, Chesnokov, Nikolsky, and Rachmaninoff. In 1917 Grechaninoff took the notion of “symphonism” in Russian sacred music a step further, composing his third Divine Liturgy (opus 79) for chorus with instrumental accompaniment, which placed it odds with the Orthodox Church’s tradition of exclusively a cappella performance.

“Da molchit ﬁtykaya plôt” (“Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silent”) is No. 13 from the cycle Strastnáya sedmítsa (Passion Week or Holy Week), opus 58, which was premiered on 12 May, 1911, in Moscow by Vasil’yev’s Choir. In the scheme of Orthodox liturgics, this hymn is sung only once a year, at the Liturgy of Great and Holy Saturday, where it replaces the Cherubic Hymn. As at every Divine Liturgy, the singing of the Cherubic Hymn accompanies the Great Entrance, during which the bread and wine are transferred from the Table of Oblation to the Altar Table in solemn procession. Ordinarily the hymn is interrupted by a series of commemorations, followed by “Amen,” after which the hymn is concluded at a slightly faster tempo. Although Grechaninoff has set the “Amen,” there is a tradition of making this particular Great Entrance in total silence. Certainly, the “Amen” should be omitted in a concert performance.

Grechaninoff’s music for this hymn, while generally freely composed, nevertheless makes reference to the initial motive of the common chant melody “Da molchit,” found in the square–note chant books of the Russian Orthodox Church. The same melody has been arranged polyphonically by such composers as Turchaninov (1779–1856), Balakirev (1836–1910), and Azeyev (1851–1918), and Pavel Chesnokov (1877–1944).

The present edition is based upon the original first edition published by P. Jurgenson of Moscow. All performance indications and the piano reduction have been retained from the source. In the source the text appears only under a single voice part in homophonic passages; the editor has systematized the placement of the text. The slurring in the composer’s original piano reduction generally follows the conventions of vocal slurring and has therefore been omitted, with one notable exception: in mm.63–73 the slurring in the piano parts seems to indicate how the melismas in the vocal parts of Chorus 2 should be articulated, and the slurs have, therefore, been retained.

—Vladimir Morosan

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