NOTES

GRETCHANINOFF, Alexandre Tihanovitch (b. 13 [25] October, 1864, Moscow; d. 4 January, 1956, New York) —
studied at the Moscow Conservatory (1881-1890) and the St. Petersburg Conservatory (1890-1893), which he completed in
composition as a student of Rimsky-Korsakov. Collaborated with various choral ensembles, including Melnikov’s Choir in St.
Petersburg, the Moscow Synodal Choir and Vassilev’s Choir in Moscow, which premiered his numerous choral compositions.
Also worked in the fields of theater music, children’s music, and musical ethnography. Toured in Russia and abroad as a pianist,
accompanist, and conductor. In 1923 emigrated to Paris, where he lived until 1939, when he moved to New York.

Gretchaninoff composed several operas, symphonic and chamber music, as well as numerous solo songs, children’s songs
and choruses, choral part songs and arrangements of folk songs for chorus. On texts from the Russian Orthodox liturgy, he
composed four settings of the Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom, an All-Night Vigil, and a cycle of hymns from Passion
Week, as well as approximately 20 shorter works. He also composed several settings of the Latin Mass and several Latin motets,
much of which remain in manuscript.

Gretchaninoff’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 chansonnier characteristics: stepwise
melodic movement, the stringing together of melodic nuclei (known as popeski 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
“symptomism,” similar to that found in the works of other composers working at the Moscow Synodal School (e. g., Kastalsky,
Chesnokov, Nikolaev). The present work serves as a particularly vivid example of this style.

“Sláva v vishněh Bógu” (Glory to God in the Highest) is a setting of psalm verses prescribed to be chanted at the beginning
of the Matins service, before the complex of six psalms known as the Hexapalamos (or Shestapalamy). Ordinarily these verses
are simply chanted by the psalm reader. But in the Russian Orthodox Church a tradition arose of having the choir sing them to
an elaborate composed setting (there are no unison versions in the chant books), particularly at the solemn Vigil services on the
eves of Christmas and Theophany (the Baptism of Christ). It was this tradition that Rachmaninoff followed in his famous setting
of the All-Night Vigil, opus 37 (No. 7), and which is reflected in Gretchaninoff’s present setting. Because the initial words (from
the Gospel of St. Luke, 2:14) are closely associated with the Nativity story, this work is particularly appropriate for the Christmas
season.

—Vladimir Morosan

Postscript: According to a note in Gretchaninoff’s autobiography, My Life (New York: 1952), the correct pronunciation of
the composer’s name puts the stress on the third syllable: Gret-cha-ni-Off.

ALEKSANDR GRECHANINOV

Слава в вышних Боже

Glory to God in the Highest

Alexandre Gretchaninoff
(1864 – 1956)

Sláva v vishněh Bógu

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