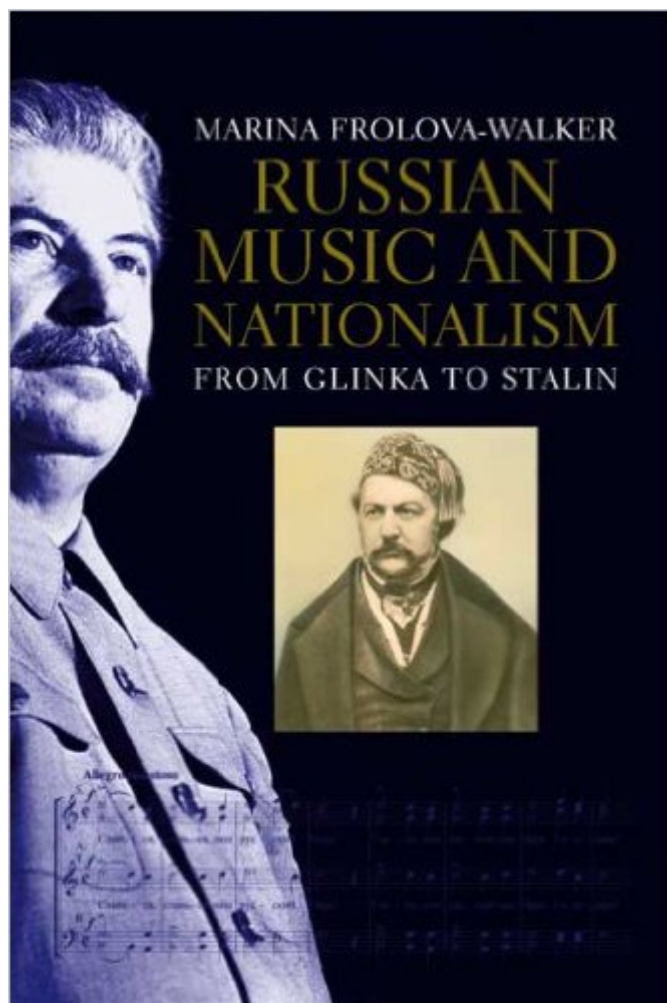


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Russian Music And Nationalism: From Glinka To Stalin



Synopsis

Challenging what is widely regarded as the distinguishing feature of Russian music—its ineffable Russianness—Marina Frolova-Walker examines the history of Russian music from the premiere of Glinka's opera *A Life for the Tsar* in 1836 to the death of Stalin in 1953, the years in which musical nationalism was encouraged and endorsed by the Russian state and its Soviet successor. The author identifies and discusses two central myths that dominated Russian culture during this period—that art revealed the Russian soul, and that this nationalist artistic tradition was founded by Glinka and Pushkin. The author also offers a critical account of how the imperatives of nationalist thought affected individual composers. In this way Frolova-Walker provides a new perspective on the brilliant creativity, innovation, and eventual stagnation within the tradition of Russian nationalist music.

Book Information

Hardcover: 416 pages

Publisher: Yale University Press (March 19, 2008)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0300112734

ISBN-13: 978-0300112733

Product Dimensions: 6.5 x 1.6 x 9.5 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.9 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 5.0 out of 5 stars — See all reviews (1 customer review)

Best Sellers Rank: #1,371,124 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #295 in Books > Arts & Photography > Music > Musical Genres > Ethnic & International > International #4812 in Books > Arts & Photography > Music > History & Criticism #23533 in Books > Arts & Photography > Performing Arts

Customer Reviews

In a way, this book is simultaneously exactly what it appears to be from its title, and also not. To begin with, it seems to be a very scholarly and erudite analysis of Russian music—that is, it has a great deal in it that is very technical, and generally beyond the grasp of a casually trained musician like myself. On the other hand, the author incorporates so much relevant historical background material that the text is virtually a history of Russia (since Glinka) viewed from a music conservatory window—that is, it is a very compelling and fascinating read. At the very least, if you have a fascination or interest with Russia and music, then this is virtually a must read. With a great deal of

careful, and exacting analysis (occasionally well-beyond a casual musical understanding, though not so much so that one must give up the book), the author dismantles the several historical conceits about any essential "Russianness" of Russian music. Putting this in another way, she debunks the validity of the different Slavophile myths of Russian music, without, however, debunking most Russian music itself. Ultimately, the author suggests that what Russian composers did was to compose less in a distinctively Russian vein, and more by a deliberate avoidance of typical Western musical gestures, tropes, and clichés (without always rejecting them continuously). In an oblique way, then, this at least partially explains the distinctive sound of much Russian classical music. While extraordinarily broad and deep at the same time, there are also some minor issues that may be taken with the book.

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