

Chapter Five

The predecessors of Vardar, the nationalistic style and comparison

In order better to understand the significance of Rhapsody Vardar, I decided to compare it to earlier nationalistic works from other European schools. The selected pieces for comparison are Liszt's Hungarian Rhapsodies, Glinka's Kamarinskaya, Rimsky-Korsakov's Serbian Fantasy and Enescu's Romanian Rhapsody No.1.

Vladigerov's knowledge and awareness of his previous older colleagues from the Western-European Classical and Romantic music was deep and respectful. This certainly influenced his compositions. Wagner's Tristan style, limitlessly-continuous melodic line and the constant combining of melodic elements in complex harmony can be found also in Vladigerov's musical language as well as in many other musicians in the 20th century. Moreover, the widespread mediant chromaticism, typical of Richard Strauss, suggests another source of inspiration. A major flourishing of multiple nationalistic compositional schools developed from the 1850s across Europe. Accomplished composers such as Liszt, Glinka, Rimsky-Korsakov, Tchaikovsky, Smetana, Dvořák, and Grieg, lived and spent years amongst ordinary people, endeavouring to research the habits, rites and traditions of original folklore. Then they combined the classical understanding with folk diversity. This historical period encouraged Vladigerov's interest in Bulgarian folk music, following and developing the aesthetic principles and tradition from such cultural figures. Many of these composers created music by adapting traditional songs to their melodies and harmonies, which made them focus on the usage of ancient modes. The strong influence of folksong triggered in composers a vast development of modal harmonic systems. The construction of the piano is almost incapable of producing the naive effect of singing. Despite this, Liszt and Chopin were amongst the first initiators to infuse their keyboard music with idiosyncratic singing, applying it even when the texture is complicated. This, in particular, recalls the Vladigerovian methods.

In 1840, after receiving many honours and respect in Hungary, Liszt comprehended these eulogies as a guarantee of the importance of his future

public activities and engagement as an artistic icon. Transformation into a national figure consequently brought him some worry, as he stated: “serious duties... life-long

obligations as both man and artist” . In order to achieve the role of a national composer, he needed to start writing national operas and flamboyant choral and symphonic pieces on Hungarian themes:

“Nineteenth-century folklorism was linked to the idea of national style, turning national styles into artistic species of folk music and, conversely, folk music into national styles in embryo... For folk-music tradition consists to no small degree of elements, melodies and structures that were local and regional in origin, but also of others that ‘migrated’ throughout the whole of Europe. In short, a folk-music tradition never represents one nation and one nation only.”

At that time the Hungarian-Gypsy tradition, known as verbunkos was a major transcultural impact on music. This phenomenon portrays a relationship with several other cultures bordering on Hungary. Such influences were from Austrian, Romanian, Balkan and Turkish traditions, characterized by various improvisatory practices. It was a high-level nationalist ambition to convert oral folk heritage into an international classical-music for Hungary, by the importance of which they strove to highlight their reputation as a European country. Liszt as a native Hungarian grew up in childhood with no academic musical prejudices about what is or is not perceived as beautiful. Following his own instincts, he had been a big admirer of oral tradition and the skillful verbunkos virtuosi, having the chance to attend Gypsy band performances and to sketch their music by ear. Due to the importance of his Hungarian identity, based on acknowledgment of the gypsy’s significant input in cultivating verbunkos, Liszt presented his fifteen Rhapsodies Hongroises (RH) to Paris in 1851, which gained the immense popularity which it still enjoys.

Looking closer at the features of the RH, there are several similarities that can be found and compared with Vladigerov’s Vardar. RH were created both in the style of the art-music fantasy and the lassu-friss (slow-fast) tempo structure of verbunkos, typically containing improvisation, diverse rhythms, ornaments and modal harmonies. The Lasso-Friss idea or the ‘playing with the tempos’ was probably influential in Liszt’s creative life and appeared even before Hungarian

Rhapsodies. An example of this slow-fast effect is RH14, where there was neither pace nor key preparation between the F major Allegro Vivace and the A minor Alegretto Alla Zingarese in bar 134, followed by Vivace Assai (bar 209). Despite the tempo differences, this immediately reminds of the structure of Vardar but in reverse (slow-fast-slow) and with almost no preparation. Acceleration was perceived as an intensification principle by Liszt, preparing and putting pressure on the drama. Again, Pancho realised a similar idea, but conversely contrasted the slow hymn-tune in the first and third sections with the central dancing medley. Moreover, the acceleration in Vardar's closing bars with the successive chords does create intensity but in a very patriotically-optimistic way.

What distinguishes Vladigerov's from Liszt's approach to this genre is the use of medley rather than variation. The idiomatic repetitions of cadences, themes, sections were very typical element of the verbunkos language, which was reflected in the Hungarian Rhapsodies and more specifically in RH7, RH8 and RH13. A further verbunkos tradition is represented by the use of the pedal point. In Bulgarian folk music the pedal note was also common, and Vladigerov adopted this association, developing it in his unique way (the tuning effect of the violin's G open string down to E, discussed below). Another key innovation in Liszt's music was the involvement of folk or in his case verbunkos-minor scales. As he enjoyed the augmented fourth, "diminished sixth" and "augmented seventh" intervals in combination, Vladigerov felt responsible for absorbing the harmonic language of the Bulgarian modes. Such a similar and common feature for his music was applying the hijas maqam scale (influenced by the Arabic modal system), characterized by diminished second, sixth and "augmented" third intervals (also typical for wider Balkan music).

Nowadays, Lisztian contribution to music is greatly valued and admired, however it was considered very controversial in the 19th century, especially in Hungary, because of the highly-exposed connection and influence of Gypsy music in the folk tradition. A similar controversy reminds us of Vardar and its politically- problematic Bulgarian-Macedonian context. "His drive to experimentation", along with highlighting the stylistic significance of the verbunkos idiom, gave birth to the much-needed Hungarian Rhapsodies, showing altogether splendid virtuosity, improvisation, ornamental techniques

and modal thinking. The use of this nationalistic concept by Liszt gave a fundamental example and brought inspiration to the European schools for developing Rhapsodic and similar genres in the following decades and centuries.

“Just as the whole oak is in the acorn” wrote Tchaikovsky in his diary from 1888, meaning that Kamarinskaya (1848) was the seed of the entire music school of Russian symphonism and its author Glinka the father of Russian music. This was the first composed piece, distinctive of the folk tradition in Russia, created in Western European music, a certain sign for the appearance of the new Russian music as an art form.

Glinka's Kamarinskaya and two other Spanish pieces, were inspired mainly by Berlioz and his Hungarian March. Francis Maes writes that Glinka “had no nationalistic Russian objective” when composing Kamarinskaya. However, the actual fact of basing the work entirely on folksongs and involving specific folk characteristics can already make this statement controversial. Moreover, it was very modern, and almost compulsory especially in Russia to generate nationalistic music at that time. It is true, though, that Glinka did not highlight strong patriotically-nostalgic and political feelings but tried to portray a picturesque expression of Russian folklore. He decided to use two folk melodies: the wedding song *Izza gor* (From Beyond the Mountains) and Kamarinskaya – an instrumental dance with a tune in ostinato, depending on the dancers' stamina. In contrast in *Vardar*, Vladigerov involves far deeper patriotic senses and politically-historic feelings. The whole structure of Kamarinskaya shows the relationship between the two main subjects, smoothly integrated with several motivic transitions. It opens with the bridal theme, revealing some motifs from the dancing second tune, which follows, being repeated around 75 times. The Kamarinskaya melody is in ostinato form with no thematic development and with characteristic originality. But in order to avoid a simple boring repetition of these variations, Glinka wisely applies orchestral colour, counterpoint and harmonic development, thus allowing him to keep the traditional specification of the dance, at the same time elaborating it by European-classical means.

The use of variations on a folk theme on the one hand can be related to Liszt's variations and the verbunkos in the RH, but on the other hand – with *Vardar's*

middle section, where Vladigerov kept the folk specification of the dance tunes, adding rich orchestral colours and imitating folk-music features by his classically-trained orchestra. Additionally, there are obvious analogies between Kamarinskaya and Vardar (also in RH) in the application of compositional techniques, as Glinka used Brass pedal note signals over the second theme, repetitive procession and acceleration in tempo towards the end of the piece. Two years after creating Kamarinskaya, Glinka surprisingly affirmed: "I have decided to shut down the Russian song factory and devote the rest of my strength and sight to more important labours".

Another piece, which allowed Russia to take a closer cultural view of the Balkans, is Rimsky-Korsakov's *Fantasia on Serbian Themes* op. 6 (1867). However, apart from the use of some Serbian folk tunes it cannot be considered a typical rooted Balkan piece in order for strong comparison with Vardar. Moreover, the Serbian Fantasy was composed with no nationalistic ideology but in Rimsky-Korsakov's Russian manner with rich orchestration, intending to underline the beauty of the tunes themselves. It was Balakirev who insisted that Rimsky-Korsakov use Serbian melodies for a new fantasy, having composed his *Czech Overture* and organized and conducted a spring concert dedicated to Czech and Slavic guests: "In undertaking to compose the Serbian Fantasy I was not at all carried away by Slavism, but rather by the delightful themes Balakirev had selected for me". His Fantasy is constructed in an ABA1 form based on a slow theme (opening) and a faster dancing one (middle section), where the closing A1 is a combination of the two melodies in fast-moving tempo. The entire piece is developed by a variational principle, which already distinguishes it from the later Balkan compositional tradition of medleys. However, the general ABA1 structure (slow; fast; slow + fast summary), polyphonic melodic entanglements and vibrant, expressive orchestral symphonism, may be considered certain influential factors, of which Vladigerov was profoundly aware when transcribing the orchestral version of *Rhapsody Vardar*. Tchaikovsky himself, after hearing the Fantasy, was captivated "by the freshness of its purely Russian harmonic turns".

Having had a glance at Serbia, one cannot avoid acknowledging the nationalistic importance in the Balkans of George Enescu and his two Romanian Rhapsodies (1902-1903). Enescu graduated from the Vienna and Paris

Conservatoires, having inspirational contact with names such as Jules Massenet, Richard Strauss, Alfred Cortot, Debussy, Ravel, Bartok and others. Despite their diverse music influences, he realized the need to clarify his style by basing it on the national Romanian folk tradition, which he was deeply bound up with from early childhood. By his compositions, vast repertoire and performing skills as a violinist, pianist and conductor, Enescu became the first internationally acclaimed champion of the Romanian national school and tradition. His nationalist views were similar to Glinka's and Rimsky-Korsakov's ideas of representing the beauty of the motherland by classical motivic unity and principles, whereas Vladigerov, although intending the same conception went further particularly by involving historically-patriotic context in Vardar. Two themes played central roles in Enescu's works: his homeland and human society. Along with them, the problem of the difference between what was perceived as national and what universal was in a constant competition (similar to the process in Bulgaria). Enescu's national consciousness was inspired by the abundance of folk-style rituals, striving to reveal some new vivid views about a young culture to the world, basing his composing on his people and their customs.

Indeed, Enescu briefly described the two Romanian Rhapsodies as "an orchestration of folk motifs, which I enriched with dynamic development", further remarking that he had "thrown a few tunes together without thinking about it". The last statement is not very true as some of his preparatory drafts of the Rhapsodies explore his precision in ordering the tunes' succession, creating transition passages and rationalising instrumental colour. This is reminiscent of the limited folk-influenced music realism mentioned earlier, which is mainly defined by the use of the popular Balkan genre – medley. The rhapsodic style was appropriate for writing nationalistic pieces because its close connection with folklore was organic. Enescu's more liberal and wider knowledge and his admiration of traditional music, integrated ever since early childhood, have both been made visible in his Rhapsodies. This way he continued the living tradition in European music, following the example of composers as Liszt, Glinka, Dvořák, Brahms and others. With the turn of the twentieth century interest in the genre did not vanish and its characterizing traditions kept evolving, being manipulated by geographical cultural heritage. His childhood memories of seeing touring Romanian folk ensembles, typically

containing two violins, clarinet, cymbal and double bass, were then employed in translating such traditions into lavish symphonic forms without deforming the original materials.

Romanian Rhapsody No. 1 is a clearly established example of the orchestral genre, unifying the vigorous pulsation of folk dance, the long singing improvising tunes of *lăutărească* music (particularly the peasant tune style *doina*) with splendid imitation of violin, clarinet and double bass folk music-making. The composer constructed it as an ABCDEF... form with multiple contrasting sections and no recapitulation (reminiscent of Liszt's Hungarian Rhapsodies), having 11 distinctive motifs in total. The first subject is represented with a calm serene atmosphere in solo woodwinds, using the popular folk tune *Am un leu și vreau să-l beau* [I want to spend my shilling on drink]. In order to link with the irregular sense of rhythm of traditional amateur musicians, Enescu innovatively put the beginnings of this theme on different beats of the bar. Moreover, he gave free expressive processing of the melody's ending (second phrase) by placing unexpected tenuto markings and fermata rests:



Traditionally played as:



Then, the violins take over and start varying the theme which gradually sets up the moving rhythm. This grows faster, leading into ordered timbre variation and rhythmic medleys of folk (and some gypsy-influenced) tunes, close to the *lăutărească*. Like Bulgarian folk-music, some of these folk-tunes are successively replayed and to some extent transformed in the process, containing elements of previously-heard themes (also known as sub-variation or variation of the variation).

Also rewarding attention is Enescu's application of new contrasting elements in the inner variation of the sections, which makes the development even more complex. In order to contradict that, however, he integrated supporting centripetal moments, functioning as refrains, to unify the entire movement of musical material. For instance, the expressive melodic line in violins in the beginning of the piece might be perceived as an addition but just after a few more following tropes, it settles back periodically as a refrain and becomes part of the entire Rhapsody's organism. A vital role is also played by the tempo contrasts connecting the different parts of the piece. The pulse acceleration is very typical of Romanian folk dances and melodies, which is used to show off the technical abilities of violinists and cymbalists. Enescu kept that tradition "by adapting creatively a particular genre of melody, such as the 'ciocirlie' or 'skylark' tune", which is the tune in violin trills with speeding-up. The exotic modal colouring did an additionally important job for the piece, by contributing effectively to the sub-variations' rebirth. Common elements such as chromatic modal build-ups with flexible thirds, sixths and sevenths, highlight the sense of shifting major/minor/mixolydian scale and are, as Enescu stated, "the characteristics of Romanian music".

The comparison with the Bulgarian Rhapsody comes at the end of the paragraph because the observed features of the Romanian Rhapsody, taken together, better 'speak' for themselves. There is a tremendous number of obvious similarities between them both such as the common basis on folksong medleys, imitation of traditional folk-dance and music elements, inventive effects (Enescu's metrical juxtaposition; Vladigerov's scordatura/wood-knocking), exotic harmonic modes and major-minor scales, motivic polyphonic constructions and tempo acceleration. This is not a surprise because of the connections between the typical Balkan folk-style, and the cultural heritage.

Researching into selected nationalistic schools and works, establishes that the Bulgarian music school, led primarily by Vladigerov's Vardar, undoubtedly proves its important place in European musical culture, not only as a mono-ethnic art but as a central Balkan representative. The Bulgarian Rhapsody's original characteristics such as ornamentation, irregular metre, highly-vibrant dance, historical patriotism, deeply-painful but optimistic feeling and spirit, and

rich folklore heritage, stand out proudly, despite it being revealed to the world rather later, than the works already discussed.