



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH  
*Reid School of Music*



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# Pancho Vladigerov's Bulgarian Rhapsody Vardar and the question of national style

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by Svetoslav Todorov



Degree Programme: Music (BMus)  
Student Number: S1008420  
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Supervisor: Dr Benedict Taylor



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## ***Preface***

I decided to undertake this research because nobody in Great Britain has done a deep study so far on the establishment and the development of the Bulgarian national music tradition from the 1880s. Pancho Vladigerov is undoubtedly the greatest representative of this school, being defined by international critics as what Smetana was for the Czechs, Bartók for the Hungarians, and Enescu for the Romanians. In particular, his 'Bulgarian Rhapsody *Vardar*' deservedly became the foremost representative of a musical symbiosis between Western European classical principles and the Bulgarian folk tradition. However this research is important not only in the UK but also in Bulgaria, because it brings together fundamental musicological issues such as the development of national schools across Europe and the delay in their development in the Balkans. Also considered are social and cultural variables such as the controversial choice of the title *Vardar* and its political-historical associations for his Bulgarian rhapsody. There is not a single published work dedicated to the political aspects of this piece, most probably because it raises sensitive questions of National identity. As music has always been politically engaged, I decided to dedicate a whole chapter on Vladigerov's *Vardar* and its political aspect, searching for reasons why it became as important for the Bulgarian (and Balkan) people as the official Bulgarian/Balkan hymns.

## Chapter One

### **Introduction: The rise of musical nationalism in the Balkans**

**The liberation of almost all Balkan nations from the five-century Ottoman occupancy set their cultural development alight. Firstly Serbia, then Romania, Greece and Bulgaria established their own National music schools by discussing what was traditional and foreign, thus inspiring a series of generations of composers.**

With the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the Balkans, having been under the occupation of the Ottoman Empire for five centuries, started becoming independent nations with specific cultural features based on common humanist principles. The process of national revival and striving for freedom slowly moved towards the heart of the Balkans, Bulgaria. During this period of rapid development in Balkan cultural evolution, what was traditional, National, old or new became gradually clear. Serbia, Romania, Greece and Bulgaria opened their minds towards neighbouring and other European traditions. The flourishing of new musical cultures stemmed from the Balkan revolutions against the Ottomans. Firstly, Greece and Serbia in the early 1830s, and later Romania (1862) and Bulgaria (1878) gained their freedom, all supported by Russia. Influenced by these events, Serbian, Romanian and Bulgarian humanists and folklorists began propagating their national history and folklore in order to revive the Balkan people's self-consciousness and patriotic spirit (witness Vuk Karadzic's *Historic Songs of Serbia* and the Miladinov Brothers' 1861 *Bulgarian Folk Songs*). The concept of freedom is of course universal, and this provoked Balkan interest in western European cultures. Thus, by adapting choral singing in the spirit of traditional folklore, new diverse urban songs became established across the different regions. There were two common ideas about these songs: patriotic music accessible to the people; and professional (Western-European influenced) music based on national folklore, together making singing the central genre in this development. Throughout these early years, this stimulated the foundation of numerous choral, instrumental and theatrical societies and groups in the Balkans, which apart from organizing cultural events, also offered educational activities. Some of these societies (especially in Serbia and Bulgaria) were not established as state institutions (opera houses, conservatoires and theatres) until the end of the First World War, in the years around 1920.

Educating young musicians with western techniques who retained a strong sense of national identity is a certain sign of formation of the new European national musical culture. Apart from being individualists with personal views, the new generation of musicians had patriotic aims. Due to them, the idea of national music

came to existence around the 1860s in Russia with the Balakirev/Stasov circle, followed by Czechoslovakia with Smetana, by Norway with Grieg and Nordrak, and in the Balkans in the 1890s. However the personalities of the founding generations were the real instigators, who would stay back stage. For instance, Hubert Parry (b. 1848) played that role in England as Felip Pedrell (b. 1841) did in Spain, although Edward Elgar (b. 1857) and Isaac Albéniz (b. 1860) respectively were considered the founders of their national schools, in the Balkans instigators were Nikolaos Mantzaros (b. 1795) in Greece; Joseph Schlesinger (b. 1797) in Serbia; Chiprian Porumbescu (b. 1853) in Romania; and Dobri Chintulov (b. 1823) in Bulgaria.<sup>1</sup> The first Greek music school was led by Spyridon Samaras (b. 1863), Dionisos Lavragas (1864) and Georgios Lambelet (b. 1875), who studied operatic performance in Napoli and Paris and became known as scholars and folklorists. The process was similar in Serbia, whose pioneer in the field was Stevan Mokranjac (b. 1856). Graduating in Germany, he became a respected composer, folklorist and teacher, whose main contribution was composing 15 medleys of songs some of which were Montenegrin, Bosnian, Macedonian and Bulgarian – a model of the genre which was to be used by the new Balkan cultures, whose details I will discuss later. The Romanian national music school founder was the violinist, pianist, conductor and composer George Enescu (b. 1881). He stated: “I researched how it could be possible to connect the typical Romanian way of composing, which is rhapsodic, with my own symphonic nature”.<sup>2</sup> Although educated in Vienna and Paris and living abroad, Enescu loved his homeland, writing his two *Romanian Rhapsodies*, the suite *Romanian Poem* and other works in a bright style with opulent orchestration.<sup>3</sup>

While the Balkan countries had already started developing their cultures independently, Bulgaria was still under occupancy. However its cultural development was underway. Angel Bukurestliev (b. 1870), Panayot Pipkov (b. 1871) and Georgi Atanassov (b. 1882) were among the main composers, but Emanuil Manolov (b. 1860) and Dobri Hristov (b. 1875) became popular as the founders of the first Bulgarian music school. Manolov’s varied contribution included the creation of the first Bulgarian opera (*Poor woman* in 1900), singing and orchestral medleys, and books with children songs. Hristov, particularly, stood out the most as a composer, choral conductor, scholar and folklorist. After studying with Dvořák, he established two choral societies (1899 & 1923) and the first private music school (1904) in Bulgaria; he publicized the book *Rhythmic Rules of Bulgarian Folklore* (1913, based on the asymmetrical time signatures of analysed peasant folk songs),

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<sup>1</sup> Hlebarov, I., *Music of 20<sup>th</sup> Century Book 1*, p 353

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. quoting Țăranu, C., *Georges Enesco dans la Conscience du Present*, p 57 (translated Todorov, S.)

<sup>3</sup> Hlebarov, I., *Music of 20<sup>th</sup> Century Book 1*, p 353

which Bèla Bartók summarized in his 1939 article as 'Bulgarian rhythm'.<sup>4</sup> Hristov also composed two orthodox liturgies and some orchestral pieces (two *Balkan Suites* and Bulgarian medleys). During his time he not only wrote choral songs using European classical principles but also arranged folk melodies in a peasant style, for instance in his volume *Balkan Songs* (1912), containing the widely popular *A Single Cry is Heard*.<sup>5</sup>

Having discussed the new Balkan musical culture, it seems logical to summarize the close connections between the new national music schools. Around the 1880s and '90s the first important pieces of work were invented by the generation of composers who succeeded the earliest instigators. Probably the most significant common feature was the focus on the national folklore and its variety. Composers researched and started creating genres which were close to people's everyday-life while simultaneously applying European classical principles. This was innovative and unique for those Eastern territories, which swiftly led to musical styles of "limited folk-influenced musical realism", surely part of the development between the late 19<sup>th</sup>- and early 20<sup>th</sup>-century including composers such as Mahler and Albéniz.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid. p 351

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. p 353

## Chapter Two

### European-wide musical movements in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century

The turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century brought intensively-changing movements in art and music in Western Europe.

Studying abroad at the time, Vladigerov was one of the composers whose music style was influenced by most of these trends. The second Bulgarian school's ideal was the interaction between Bulgarian folk and Western music.



A musical postcard from Berlin, 1930. Titled 'Junge internationale Tondichter'. From the top left: Igor Stravinsky, Pancho Vladigerov, Paul Hindemith, Jaromir Weinberger, Erich Korngold, Ernst Ksenek.

There were several art movements that came to existence in culturally-advanced Western Europe. Musical impressionism was popular by 1910 particularly in France. Its features included a constant changing pulsation, harmony, usage of pentatonic scales and quartal chords, multiple melodic subjects, and frequent dependence on programmatic titles.<sup>7</sup> Important composers such as Debussy and Ravel developed the style. Another emerging movement was expressionism, mainly in Germany and Austria between 1910 and 1920. It had typically very strong expression: horror and shock; very complex rhythms; even no bar lines. Characterized by extremely wide intervals, sharp dissonance and atonal harmonies, dodecaphony was invented by those who had previously been expressionists.<sup>8</sup> The 12-tone system was presented to the world by the Second Viennese School composers Schoenberg, Webern and Berg. At the same time Hindemith, Scriabin, Bartók and Stravinsky were four key composers representing the other schools. Other less

important cultural tendencies were Futurism in Italy and Dadaism in Switzerland, which did not have a significant impact on European musical development at that stage. After World War I, *Neue Sachlichkeit* (New Objectivity) gained popularity in Germany as a term used by post-expressionist artists and musicians. Its understanding was more traditional, ironic and simpler compared to expressionism. Original theatrical music,

<sup>7</sup> Riede, B., *Vorbereitung auf das Abitur Musikgeschichte des 20. Jahrhunderts*, pp 56-67

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

influenced by jazz and popular music, started being produced with distinctive rhythmic patterns, diatonic melody, tonal harmony and large orchestration. Simultaneously, neoclassicism was born with new expressive features shared with *Sachlichkeit* such as parody, involving the audience in concerts, and the organisation of out-of-hall concerts.<sup>9</sup> Almost all the composers at that time were influenced to a certain extent by these tendencies. Composers considered to be part of this trend were Hindemith, Stravinsky and others. After the 1920s musicians started being engaged with political purposes all over Europe, including the Balkans. It is within this context of multiple musical styles and movements that the oeuvre of Pancho Vladigerov, the subject of this dissertation, may be understood.

It was an intense and creative time for Bulgarian cultural history between the two world wars. Following the end of the Balkan (1913) and the First World Wars 1918, Bulgaria met two national catastrophes. According to the Treaty of Neuilly of 1919, large areas were to be taken out of the Bulgarian territory, “The aversion of big territories from the nation giving rise to national-liberating movements, particularly strong in Macedonia, Thrace and South Dobrudja”.<sup>10</sup> However these difficult times with much terror and pain encouraged significant cultural achievement. Being influenced by public event, artists’ understanding was based not on the revival of national spirit but on national opposition. Composers’ new ideal became the people, the engine of history, individuals became teams. Their means to represent their unity were symphonism and the adoption of contemporary expressionist techniques. The new period of Bulgarian musical culture was formed by musicians with clear open-minded perception of the difference and “the relationship between Bulgarian and European, national and universal”.<sup>11</sup> The so-called second generation, consisting of musicians such as Petko Staynov (b. 1896), Pancho Vladigerov (b. 1899), Marin Goleminov (b. 1908), Dimitar Nenov (b. 1901) and Lubomir Pipkov (b. 1904), played not only the role of composers but also of performers, scholars and educators. Being musically-accomplished having trained in prestigious European institutions, they all came back to their roots with a clear desire to contribute and develop their entire musical heritage.

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid. (translated Todorov, S.)

<sup>10</sup> Kracheva, L., *Bulgarian Musical Culture from Antiquity to Nowadays*, p 117 (translated Todorov, S.)

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. p 121

## Chapter Three

### **Pancho Vladigerov**

**What makes sense of his biography and entire work is that he brought the most significant Bulgarian acknowledgement from the world of music.**

Pancho Vladigerov (1899-1978) is generally considered one of the brightest and most internationally acclaimed Bulgarian classical composers. Acknowledged as a child prodigy on piano and composing, his unique and colourful musical utterance was of great significance and influence in Bulgarian musical culture as well as playing a valuable role in European cultural heritage. Born in Zurich into a family of a Bulgarian lawyer father and a Russian-Jewish doctor mother, Vladigerov started playing the piano at the age of 6, spending his childhood mainly in Bulgaria. Bulgarian, Swiss-German and Russian-Jewish traditions and languages were part of his everyday life and influenced his future creative style, characterized by the original mixture of Bulgarian folk music and contemporary European compositional techniques. Performing Beethoven's piano concertos and composing his first pieces by the age of 10, he started taking piano and composition lessons with the first generation Bulgarian composer Dobri Hristov. In 1911 the famous French violinist Henri Marteau heard Pancho Vladigerov performing with his twin brother-violinist, Lyuben, and invited both children to study in Berlin, where he lived at the time.

In 1920 Vladigerov graduated from the Berlin Akademische Hochschule für Musik, having studied both piano (with Leonid Kreutzer) and composition (with Paul Juon and Friedrich Gernsheim). Highly commended for his extraordinary talent, Vladigerov was twice awarded the prestigious annual Mendelssohn prize – in 1918 for his First Piano Concerto (with which Herbert von Karajan graduated in 1926 from the Salzburg Mozarteum) and in 1920 for his *10 Impressions* op. 9. Just after his graduation he was invited by the popular theatre director Max Reinhardt to collaborate and was appointed as Director of Music in the Deutsches Theater Berlin, which was a hot spot venue for modernism and the avant-garde. For 12 years there, Vladigerov wrote music for many of Reinhardt's productions such as George Bernard Shaw's *Caesar and Cleopatra*, Strindberg's *Dream Play*, Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* and others. Simultaneously his early career as an independent Bulgarian nationalist composer, having written his First Piano Concerto (1918), his masterpiece *Bulgarian Rhapsody Vardar* (1922), *Six Exotic Pieces* (1924), *Bulgarian Suite* (1926) and others, very soon flourished. Admiration in Europe and the USA, brought contacts with Richard Strauss, Sergei Rachmaninov, Arnold Schoenberg and

many other important figures. His work started being published by the Viennese company Universal in 1922, and being recorded by Deutsche Gramophone in 1928. Leopold Stokowski, Bruno Walter, Kirill Kondrashin, Fritz Reiner, Anton Webern, Herbert von Karajan, Evgeny Svetlanov, Sviatoslav Richter, Emil Gilels and David Oistrakh were some of the major conductors and performers who presented his music in concert halls around Europe and the USA.

In 1932 on the rise of Nazism, Vladigerov decided to come back his Bulgarian homeland (the Jewish Max Reinhardt also emigrated to the USA). Appointed as a professor in piano (later in composition) at the Bulgarian Music Academy in Sofia, he continued writing, performing, conducting and promoting his music across Europe. He performed his Second Piano Concerto in Utrecht (1933), in Bucharest (1934), in Zagreb (1935). He premiered his Third Piano Concerto in Sofia (1937) and later performed in Belgrade, Budapest, Vienna, Bratislava, Warsaw, Stuttgart and Brussels. During World War II Vladigerov mainly visited the Balkan countries. In 1946 he played his Third Concerto in Paris and Prague, conducted the Vienna Philharmonic with his compositions in 1947, gave a concert in Stockholm in 1948, and toured Germany in 1952. He was the only Bulgarian representative at the Permanent Council for International Collaboration of Composers between 1936 and 1942; juried at International Piano Competitions in Vienna, Prague (Smetana), Budapest (Liszt), Moscow (Tchaikovsky), Bolzano (Busoni) and others.<sup>12</sup> Especially from the 1950s, partly for political (socialist) reasons, Vladigerov's style gained great popularity in the Soviet Union. After having heard his newly written *Jewish Poem* (1951), Shostakovich stated: "A unique piece! Such a piece is written once in a hundred years".<sup>13</sup> After his concert at the Tchaikovsky Hall 1948, the Moscow newspaper Pravda noted: "The name of Pancho Vladigerov is widely popular far away from the borders of Bulgaria. In his homeland he is reasonably considered the founder of Bulgarian symphonism and one of the most active propagandists of their national musical culture".<sup>14</sup> As a nationalistic form Bulgarian symphonism was meant to differ from the Western Classical tradition. This did not happen with the first attempts of composing in this genre in the 1910s as those early pieces had been created as orchestrated folk-based melodic structures with modest harmonic development. The solid Western classical education of Vladigerov and his talent brought together for first time the long-awaited synthesis of traditional Bulgarian music and classical form.

Vladigerov invented many genres in Bulgarian music as well as developing the Bulgarian composition-teaching school, having educated some of the most prominent contemporary composers. He created his

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<sup>12</sup> Pavlov-Klosterman, E., *Pancho Vladigerov*, p 189

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. p 183 (translated Todorov, S.)

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. p 168 (translated Todorov, S.)

instrumental pieces with a full-size orchestra in mind. His music can be well understood if a close view is taken of two main features of his compositional style: Bulgarian folklore and the Western classicism. The Bulgarian traditional music with its characteristic rhythm, modes (oriental augmented seconds), metre, structure, chromatic harmony and rich ornamentation is unique compared to the folk music of other European nations. Particularly the diversity of metre is endlessly colourful with typical combinations of irregular bars and rhythms. Characteristic folk elements like dissonant and diminished intervals (most commonly up to a fourth), lack of a leading note and use of Bulgarian modes were adapted to Vladigerov's classical training and developed by incorporation into his own musical language. For example, his *Bulgarian Songs and Dances for Piano* (1932), including *Fine Horo*, *Rachenica*, *God's Horo*, dances close in style to the Western *Rigaudon*, *Sarabande*, *Courante*, *Minuet* from his *Classical and Romantic* (1931). It could be admitted that there were noticeable influences in his style such as "Richard Strauss' splendid orchestration and extended chromaticism, Rachmaninov's Slavic melodic lines", Debussy's impressionistic colour (modal and whole-tone constructions, 9th 11th and 13th chords and parallel chords), Stravinsky's advanced usage of dissonant harmonies and melodic elements (close to Bulgarian folklore), and jazz.<sup>15</sup> However, Vladigerov firmly believed that "a man could compose everything he feels... but he must go along with the traditions from of classical predecessors. The most important tradition for the young generation composers is to stick to the Bulgarian heritage".<sup>16</sup>

As the first Bulgarian artist to work with advanced contemporary compositional techniques, Vladigerov composed on the basis of varied ancient modes, significantly developing and deploying the full potential of folk song in his music, whereas the first generation limited themselves to major-minor tonalities. That is a clear sign that all his efforts brought real national individuality into Bulgarian classical tradition, which the next distinguished Bulgarian musicians and his students such as Alexis Weissenberg, Alexander Raychev, Milcho Lelev and many others, followed. Apart from his major dependence on Bulgarian music, Vladigerov was one of the first to interact with literature, creating various vocal transcriptions setting Bulgarian poetry, the opera *Tsar Kaloyan* (1936) and the ballet *A Legend for the Lake* (1946), both portraying tragic and glorious moments from Bulgarian history. Other major works include his most popular *Bulgarian Rhapsody Vardar*, 5 piano and 2 violin concertos, 2 symphonies, *Seven Symphonic Bulgarian Dances* (1931), *Shumen Miniatures* (1934), *Horo Staccato* (1942), *9<sup>th</sup> September 1944* for choir and orchestra (1945), symphonic suite *Lulin Impressions* (1972) and many others. Along with his international reputation as a highly respected composer, Vladigerov

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<sup>15</sup> Palieva, A., *Pancho Vladigerov – A View from the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, p 7 (translated Todorov, S.)

<sup>16</sup> 'An interview with Pancho Vladigerov' <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WiekGTikHIY> (translated Todorov, S.)

undoubtedly managed to integrate the unique Bulgarian exoticism in the world's cultural heritage. "The Gottfried Herder Prize which he was awarded in 1968 reflects the importance of his work".<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Pancho Vladigerov – Grove Music Online

<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.ezproxy.is.ed.ac.uk/subscriber/article/grove/music/29559?q=pancho+vladigerov&search=quick&pos=1&start=1#firsthit>

## Chapter Four

### Genesis and Characteristics of the National Rhapsody

**As *Bulgarian Rhapsody Vardar* is the main subject of this study, it is logical to observe briefly the history of this musical form.**

Rhapsody, from the ancient Greek (*rhapsōdos*), refers nowadays to “an instrumental piece in one movement, often based on popular, national, or folk melodies” and “may be passionate, nostalgic, or improvisatory”.<sup>18</sup> The form of *Bulgarian Rhapsody Vardar* is ABA. The whole piece is expressed by vivid contrast between lyrical and emotional parts, and the traditional folk-dance middle section. One of the very first composers to compose rhapsodies was Vaclav Tomášek in the 1810s. His two rhapsodies represented the features of the genre by vibrant and overwrought emotions, and later they became an example and inspiration for dozens of significant composers. At that early stage the genre was more amateur, known as *Hausmusik*, rather than professional, and functioned as an equivalent to literature, as did many other romantic genres (odes, romances, sonnets). Above all Liszt’s 19 Hungarian Rhapsodies for piano marked the beginning of nationalist idea in this genre in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, changing its status to professional with virtuoso display. Involving epic and nationalistic associations, the genre influenced composers such as Brahms, Glazunov, Enescu, Ravel, Rachmaninov, Vladigerov and Gershwin to try to represent their countries by using rhapsodic elements.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Rhapsody – Oxford Companion to Music

<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.ezproxy.is.ed.ac.uk/subscriber/article/opr/t114/e5627?q=rhapsody&search=quick&pos=2&start=1#firsthit>

<sup>19</sup> Rhapsody - Grove Music Online

<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.ezproxy.is.ed.ac.uk/subscriber/article/grove/music/23313?q=rhapsody&search=quick&pos=1&start=1#firsthit>

## 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 20<sup>th</sup> 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”<sup>20</sup>. 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.”*<sup>21</sup>

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.<sup>22</sup>

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

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<sup>20</sup> Loya, S., *Liszt’s Transcultural Modernism and the Hungarian-Gypsy Tradition*, p 94

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.* p 87

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

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*.<sup>23</sup> 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 19<sup>th</sup> 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.<sup>24</sup> 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.<sup>25</sup>

"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.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid. p 39

<sup>24</sup> Brendel, A., *Musical Thoughts & Afterthoughts*, p 84

<sup>25</sup> Loya, S., *Liszt's Transcultural Modernism and the Hungarian-Gypsy Tradition*, p 58, 101

<sup>26</sup> Maes, F., *A History of Russian Music*, Preface xi

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*.<sup>27</sup> 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.<sup>28</sup>

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".<sup>29</sup>

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

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid. p 27

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. p 28

<sup>29</sup> Ibid. p 11

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"<sup>30</sup>. 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"<sup>31</sup>.

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*.<sup>32</sup> 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.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid. p 187

<sup>31</sup> Brown, D., *Tchaikovsky: The Early Years, 1840-1874*, pp 129-130

<sup>32</sup> Stoyanov, P., *Reader of Music Literature with Analysis*, pp 56-57

<sup>33</sup> Hlebarov, I., *Music of 20<sup>th</sup> Century Book 1*, pp 358-359

Indeed, Enescu briefly described the two *Romanian Rhapsodies* as “an orchestration of folk motifs, which I enriched with dynamic development”,<sup>34</sup> further remarking that he had “thrown a few tunes together without thinking about it”<sup>35</sup>. 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.<sup>36</sup>

*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].<sup>37</sup> 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:

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid. p 361(translated Todorov, S.)

<sup>35</sup> Malcolm, N., *George Enescu: His Life and Music*, p 64

<sup>36</sup> Stoyanov, P., *Reader of Music Literature with Analysis*, pp 58-59

<sup>37</sup> Malcolm, N., *George Enescu: His Life and Music*, p 64



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.<sup>38</sup> 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.<sup>39</sup> 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

<sup>38</sup> Stoyanov, P., *Reader of Music Literature with Analysis*, pp 60-61

<sup>39</sup> Malcolm, N., *George Enescu: His Life and Music*, p 65

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”.<sup>40</sup>

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.

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

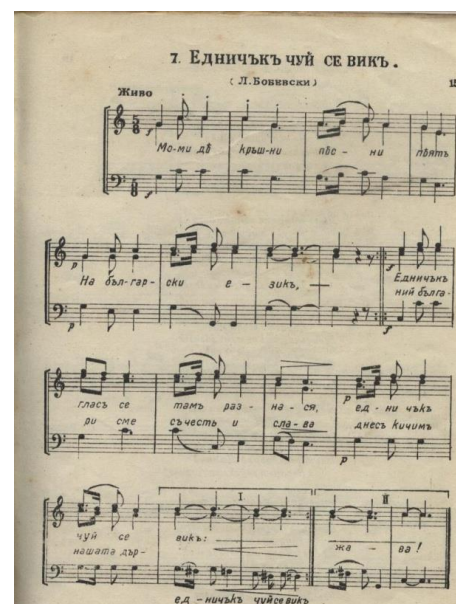
## Chapter Six

### **Vardar: Background and Compositional Genesis**

**The detailed history of Vardar’s creation is researched, paying tribute to its instigators, influencers and notable performers.**

The Bulgarian Rhapsody “Vardar” op.16, also known as the “Balkan Anthem”, is the most emblematic, popular and performed Bulgarian piece ever written. A highly developed structural conception, infused with memorable melodic content and featuring colourful instrumentation, the rhapsody is a real masterpiece. The story about the creation of the piece began in the Berlin restaurant Pshor Broy in 1922, when Vladigerov heard the folksong *Nie Sme Bulgari* [We are Bulgarians] sung by his Bulgarian friend the artist Konstantin Shtarkelov. It was considered a folksong from Macedonia, where his friend had first heard it. Vladigerov loved it and then, following his patriotic and nostalgic feelings, he began to write a rhapsody for violin and piano, using that particular song for the main theme. The middle section is in fast tempo, involving a rich medley of folk and of his own choral tunes. The third last section is a recapitulation with the main subject returning as a patriotic hymn in a festive and triumphal mood. *Vardar* is the biggest river in Macedonia and it was his friends who persuaded Vladigerov to put that name next to *Bulgarian Rhapsody* and to dedicate his piece. While composing the rhapsody Vladigerov added a sentence on the top of the score - "Dedicated to the struggling Bulgarian youth in Macedonia", having in mind the political situation there after the two Balkan Wars in the mid 1910s. In 1924, Universal Edition in Vienna released the piece with two technical instructions: “right hand’s thumb knocking on the violin’s ribs and tuning the G string down to E and then back while playing”.<sup>41</sup>

Another important element to note is the authenticity of the Macedonian song. Actually, it was the song *Ednichak chuy se vik* [A single cry is heard] from *Balkan dances* (1912) by Dobri Hristov, which he composed for choir in the spirit of a Macedonian folksong with a patriotic text by Lubomir Bobevski. The song was very popular (also known as “In Bulgarian language”) by that time its authorship was forgotten. Later, the



<sup>41</sup> Pavlov-Klosterman, E., *Pancho Vladigerov*, p 67

combination of Bulgarian Rhapsody and *Vardar* (Macedonian river) would become controversial and would be presented as either '*Bulgarian Rhapsody*' or '*Rhapsody Vardar*', because of politically-historic events. Vladigerov later found out the song's author was Hristov, while the latter in turn felt privileged that his beloved student had immortalised his song in such a significant work. The premiere of the rhapsody was in January 1923 in Berlin with Vladigerov on the piano and his twin-brother, Lyuben, on the violin, and was received in laudatory fashion by the audience and the press. After that it was performed in many places across Europe and the US but one of the most remarkable performances of the *Rhapsody* was given by the violinist Max Rosen in 1925 in the New York's Carnegie Hall. In addition, Vladigerov made a transcription for violin and orchestra (1951), dedicated to, performed and recorded by the Russian violinist David Oistrakh.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

## Chapter Seven

### **Vladigerov's Vardar as National Rhapsody / Anthem**

**This chapter focuses on the detailed analysis of the piece itself, observing the compositional techniques, folk music/dance tradition and Vladigerov's unique innovations. The original violin and piano version and the orchestral transcription are compared in terms of originality, performance and perception through the decades.**

The opening of the piece begins with Hristov's Macedonian-type song of 16 bars. Without having seen the author's song in advance, Vladigerov used a 5/16 time signature rather than the original 5/8. Moreover, an amateur singing of that particular song can easily be perceived in 8/8 time, typically for Macedonian folksongs. Due to the fact that the composer used the song in the opening and the recapitulation, he decided to revise the original melodic structure (in bars 2, 4, 8 and 10), which made it partly lose the Macedonian spirit. In comparison, both 5/8 and 5/16 are in a slow tempo, which avoids the dancing feeling of the typical Bulgarian dance "Paydushko" (in 5/8). However, this is a treat, especially with the accents on 4<sup>th</sup> beat of 5/8, which strongly deceives the listener of hearing 8/8 instead of 5/8. In order to avoid that, Vladigerov's conception needs to be performed as an irregular three-part bar of 2+1+2 quavers. This was the first time he used an irregular-time song from the endless fountain of Bulgarian folklore.

The first version of Bulgarian *Rhapsody Vardar* from 1922 is introduced by a four-bar hymn-tune with full solid harmonies on the piano, joined by the violin on low G string exploring the main theme. This is repeated on the violin an octave higher in double stops, expressive melody, 'heavy' rhythm and rich harmonies. Then, there are a few fluctuations in tempo as it speeds up, the rhythm becomes more emphatic and the violin stands out with a highly lyrical utterance of the song theme. The big *ritardando* marking and the very quiet dynamics at the end of this first section suggest some calmness but also anticipate the vivid mood to come. It begins in 2/4 *Allegro vivace* in the same key of E as the opening section but this time in minor. The second section brings the typical dancing themes, characterized by rapid changes. When a folk musician starts playing, excited by the nature of improvisation, the moving and spirited dances ('hora' pl.) come one after another successively and connectedly. In such manner, Vladigerov mixes a cluster of colourful melodies. The medley of folksong themes varies between 5/8 and 13/16 in time signature. The contrasting inner episodes number six in total and operate as open structures ABCDEF, typical of Bulgarian folk music

The innovative acoustically-rhythmic effect grabs attention Vladigerov did, consisting of right hand's thumb knocking over the ribs of the violin on the first and the third quaver beats, varied by pizzicato on second and fourth. The following cheery episode marks the start of a process of merging several folkdance tunes, which proliferate through imitative techniques between piano and violin in a manner typical of folk style. Features, such as ornamentation (short grace notes, mordents, trills), constant jump from the melodic oscillations, *pizzicatti* in chords (imitating playing on the Bulgarian instrument *tambura*), enrich the violin's part. Another Bulgarian feature is found in the following passages. Vladigerov had another very innovative idea half way to the dancing section. While the piano is given a connecting passage, the violin is busy with a descending tremolo glissando down to low G and D on the open G and D strings respectively. Then, the player is instructed to tune the G string lower by the pegs with the left hand down to the note of E. However, this must happen without stopping the movement of the bow over the strings in tempo *Vivace* for two bars. In order to make the effect work, the tuning needs to be done gradually between F and E, going along with the harmonic changes in the piano. The function of the low E is to keep sounding for a long time as a rhythmic pedal note to the melody on top. The reverse tuning effect back to G is approached 40 bars later, again while playing: "This original impulse of the composer undoubtedly has a connection with the Bulgarian instrumental folk music, being performed on the traditional instruments like gadulka, gaida [bagpipe] or tambura, where there is a constant sounding low isotone".<sup>43</sup> This device facilitates the modulation from G major down a minor 3<sup>rd</sup> to E major and back to G, giving a virtuoso solo part to the violin. The exciting medley of several dancing episodes reaches its end with a big dominant climax which flows into the major peak of the piece – the third section with the repeated and partly further developed main theme *A single cry is heard* as a recapitulation, bringing a triumphal glorifying the beloved country. The piece ends with a coda in 2/4, gradually developed and sped up with final virtuoso brilliance.

The *Bulgarian Rhapsody* was published by Universal Edition in 1924 as well as later released on Gramophone plate in Berlin by Polydor. After its success, Vladigerov decided to orchestrate the piece in 1928. This contributed to its status as one of the most significant creative works of the Bulgarian classical music heritage. The orchestral version has the same structure as the original. The opening starts in the whole orchestra, producing the first passage of the main theme for four bars. A *tutti* statement of the theme develops into the fanfare in the key of E-major with violins in low register and woodwinds, cor anglais, clarinet and bassoon. With the second return of the Macedonian-type theme, the whole orchestra explodes in grand

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<sup>43</sup> Pavlov-Klosterman, E., *Pancho Vladigerov – Monography*, p 192 (translated Todorov, S.)

gestures, supported by the trumpets and the rest of the brass instruments. That merges into a more lyrical and even nostalgic repeat of the theme. A few imitating inner-voices are allocated to various instruments in quiet dynamics leading to the calm ending of the *Rhapsody's* first section. The following middle section (*Allegro vivace* in 2/4) brings several new subjects, based on diverse folk and art songs and developed very delicately and precisely. When composing medleys there is always a potential danger of the music disintegrating into separate components but the author avoided that by building up and wisely combining rhythms, harmonies and tunes of folk-dance. Even more, the difference between folk-like and creative artifice is annulled, as if Vladigerov's thinking merged authentically into the roots and principles of people's music and dances. As such, this whole melodic unification contributes to a sonic image of Bulgarian folk identity. Particularly this tempered folk connection of his "defines to the biggest extent the significance as well as the truths of conceptually-emotional imagery".<sup>44</sup>

The idea of the whole section underlines the bringing of more impetus and vitality to the suffering but energetic and optimistic Bulgarian people. A grand summary of the rhapsody, following the splendid medley, takes place in the last section with a new ringing out of the central patriotic melody. In order to finish the entire piece triumphantly, Vladigerov used the full capacity of the orchestra to emphasize the grand, powerful, joyful hymn-tune and thus to unify and elevate the feelings of love, magnificence and virtue to his beloved homeland. The premiere of the rhapsody's orchestral version was on 26<sup>th</sup> March 1928 during the 'Bulgarian music celebrations' in Prague under Frantisek Stupka, achieving a major success. Vladigerov had already performed his piano and violin version in the first edition of 'Folk music celebrations' in Varna 1926 (now 'Varna Summer International Festival' – the oldest in Bulgaria), but in 1929 during the fourth festival he conducted and premiered the orchestral *Vardar* in Bulgaria, which has been the Festival anthem ever since. There was a violin and orchestra transcription of *Vardar* (1951), premiered in Bulgaria, but it did not gain much popularity in this version. For orchestra, it was performed in cities such as Berlin, Salzburg, Dresden, Philadelphia, New York, Chicago, Turin, Vienna, Budapest, Paris, Belgrade, Ljubljana, Athens, Bucharest, Oslo, Moscow, Hamburg and others, being published in Vienna, Sofia and Moscow.<sup>45</sup>

The strong musical character, textural interplay and public success of the piece became key factors in Vladigerov's decision to orchestrate it. In particular, these two versions of *Vardar* have been equally popular over time. While splendid concert virtuosity is displayed in the original, the orchestrated version stands out with strong elements of patriotic hymn-tune enthusiasm and programmatic 'description' of nature and

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid. p.27 (translated Todorov, S.)

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

ordinary people's life. Moreover, this transcription leads to the Golden Age of Bulgarian symphonism, contributing with its nationalistic structure, self-conscious belonging and freedom to the 'first generation' of Bulgarian composers. Its existence is even more than just that because it was established as the crucial influence on the future of Bulgarian symphonism. This piece of work is the Bulgarian equivalent of the remarkable rhapsodies of Liszt, Dvořák, Enescu and Ravel; the folk-based symphonic compositions by Glinka, Rimsky-Korsakov and Balakirev; the capriccios of Tchaikovsky and the exoticist dances by Borodin.

European musical taste of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with its complicated modal basis can be seen as an influence in Vladigerov's compositions. The composer was not afraid of using various modal systems. Many of the Bulgarian folksongs were created in ancient modes. As mentioned above, his predecessors also employed ancient modes in their creative pieces, but in a far more elementary manner, due to historically-political circumstances. In *Vardar* a clear hint of Aeolian mode appears in the beginning of the second section, while in that mode, chords with a dominant function lose the sharpened leading note which is typical in classical harmony.

Within this particular specification, the harmony matches authentic sequence with features of Bulgarian folksongs, without the limiting need to alter the leading note. The dominant minor seventh chord is a particular example of this. The parallel repetition of several successive harmonic chords and the way of connecting them "may create a parallel with *ostinato* form, which is exactly how the authentic cadence works in the middle section's beginning".<sup>46</sup>



In addition, Vladigerov seems to enjoy using a natural Aeolian mode in longer harmonic progressions. These chord movements here are related to each other in fourths with a minor dominant seventh feeling, different from the typical perfect cadence due to this mode's nature. The composer's thinking goes even further with the use of the chord on the supertonic, which effectively 'cheats' the listener to hear the subdominant.

A very common contrivance for Vladigerov is preparing the audience for a forthcoming musical development

<sup>46</sup> Avramov, E., *Vladigerov's Harmony*, p 169 (translated Todorov, S.)

by involving open constructions resolving on imperfect cadences, staying in the diatonic area. The opening 4-chord progression of the rhapsody exemplifies this practice. In parallel, the *ostinato* harmony is combined in this opening which contributes to the development of the musical utterance – i.e. the dramatic tension is organized not only by chord progression, but also by its repetitive harmonic function.



This imperfect cadence may also have the purpose of summarising the diverse harmonic ideas of a piece such as the final few bars of *Vardar* – the chord harmonic rotation from the second section merges into the *ostinato* harmony from the opening, reproducing for the last time in the piece the gradual tempo acceleration. What could also be said is that the tonal plan takes an important place in Vladigerov's forms. This gives a strong basis, which makes his form more easily perceived and brings a clearer aesthetic. The *Rhapsody*, consisting of a complex 3-part form, exemplifies such tonal plan. The clear exposition is constructed in the main key of the piece - E major. Then, the rich and colourful middle section, exposing the medley of serial dancing-like theme-tunes, stays mostly in the tonic E minor. This was the perfect place for the big show-off deploying modal diversity, which is the composition's generic signature.

## Chapter Eight

### **Reception history: Vladigerov and *Vardar* in historiographic and political context**

Eastern composers often studied abroad to gain experience in the established classical idiom. They were very cosmopolitan, folk-influenced and enormously skilled as national representatives. Bartok, Szymanowski and Enescu were in roughly analogous situations, being criticized for being exotic. Vladigerov was writing tonal music with many influences. Mahler, Sibelius, Strauss and Elgar were described as modern around 1900 but around 1910 Schoenberg and Stravinsky were creating a new kind of modernism. Suddenly what had been conceived as modernistic was old-fashioned. By 1920, many composers found themselves out-of-date and tonality was being questioned. For example, Strauss had composed his almost atonal operas 'Salome' (1905) and 'Elektra' (1906-1908) and later come back to tonality in the 1910s. So Bartok, Schoenberg, Berg and Stravinsky were considered avant garde and composers like Elgar and Sibelius were left behind. Generations born around 1880-1900 (Enescu, Vladigerov) became mature in the 1910s-1920s as technical composers with enormous skills with tonal idioms. They were unlikely to be praised because historically critics tend to favour progress. If Vladigerov had been writing in the 1860s like Dvorak, Grieg or Mussorgsky, tonality would have been quite normal. But it was a bit late for nationalism post-1920s in Western Europe and his position in this context was problematic, which probably prevented him becoming popular in countries with major music traditions like Great Britain, France and Italy. After Vladigerov's concert in Zagreb, the Morgenblat critic in 1935 noted: "His style is similar to the young Schoenberg, but to a certain extent it stays romantic".<sup>47</sup> On the one hand it was an honour to be compared with such a figure, but on the other hand an acknowledgement of his problematic historic position. However, for the Socialist realism in communist USSR and the Eastern Block after the 1940s, pretty much controlled by Moscow, he fitted quite well and was significantly celebrated by his Slavic brother-Russians, using folk motifs and being a bit, but not too modern.

In order to explain how and why *Vardar* was used for political occasions, I need to describe briefly the intense historic events in the Balkans from the 1880s to the 1980s. The Treaty of Berlin, just after Bulgaria's liberation from the Ottomans, caused major conflicts for territories and peoples. According to the Treaty, Macedonia and Eastern Thrace, with mainly Bulgarian inhabitants, remained under occupancy. After Eastern Thrace joined Bulgaria in 1885, Bulgarian and Macedonian elites started planning the entire Unification of Bulgaria. Having big designs on Macedonia as Greece had, Serbia feared a strong neighbouring Bulgarian

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<sup>47</sup> Pavlov-Klosterman, E., *Pancho Vladigerov*, p 134 (translated Todorov, S.)

power and as a result declared a war. Bulgaria won within a week, which triggered and settled a stronger desire for Unification. With the first Balkan war in 1912 Bulgaria, supported by the military forces of Serbia and Greece, routed the Turkish empire, liberating more lands of Eastern Thrace and some in Macedonia. The dispute about Macedonia between the allies, however, led to the second Balkan war in 1913 with all, including Romania and Turkey, against Bulgaria. That was a big defeat for Bulgaria, which lost territories like Dobrudja, Macedonia and Edirne. Even more territories were lost after the First World War's Treaty of Neuilly (Paris), which led to the second national catastrophe.<sup>48</sup> All these events seemed significant enough for the patriot Vladigerov (in Germany at the time), who was worrying about his homeland, to express his empathy by composing and dedicating his 'Bulgarian Rhapsody *Vardar* to the struggling peoples of his mother country.

Between 1918 and 1941, Macedonia was under the wing of Yugoslavia. Serbs then began spreading their national ideas by sending tutors and priests: "They have been brought up as Bulgars: now, they have been told by the peacemakers at Paris they are Serbs".<sup>49</sup> These events might have been certain stir up controversy, yet would make many people think that this was a peaceful thought enforced 'Serbianisation' (primarily proved by the surname ending changes from the Bulgarian -ov to the Serbian -ich and by the ban on the Bulgarian language at the expense of the Serbian). The author Bernard Newman visited a village near Skopije in 1933, where he interviewed the children of one of two brothers (the one calling himself Bulgarian and the other Serbian):

*"And are you a Bulgar or a Serb?" I asked his son.*

*"Neither. I am a Yugoslav," he replied.*

*"And you?" I turned to the man's daughter.*

*"I am a Yugoslav too," she said, "if you include Bulgaria as well."<sup>50</sup>*

Due to this repression, many Macedonians with Bulgarian allegiance decided to move to Bulgaria and to keep fighting from there for the glorious Unification.

In 1933, there was an exhibition of Bulgarian artist organized in Athens, supported by notable Bulgarian composers. In front of the attending Greek prime-minister and diplomats, Vladigerov performed '*Vardar*',

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<sup>48</sup> Fol, A., *Bulgaria: History Retold in Brief*, pp142-146

<sup>49</sup> Newman, B., *Balkan Background*, p 61

<sup>50</sup> Ibid. p 62

which was received very successfully by the critics and the audience.<sup>51</sup> It is very likely that the name Bulgarian Rhapsody was avoided because the concert was under a strong political patronage, and it was important to avoid triggering the conflict about the Greek ambitions in Macedonia.

In 1936, Pancho Vladigerov and the Romanian violinist Isidor Koganov gave a recital in Dobrich (the capital town of the Dobrudja area, which was given to Romania by the Treaty of Bucharest, finally confirmed after World War I). Later an audience member reflected its tragic ending in a Bulgarian newspaper saying that the audience was crying after the performance of '*Bulgarian Rhapsody Vardar*', and that "Pancho Vladigerov's *Vardar* was sounding like a hymn to the people's liberty"<sup>52</sup>. What makes sense here is that Vladigerov consciously chose *Vardar* for the event, bringing the message to the people that he and the Bulgarians supported their brothers in these lands. After 1937, *Vardar* was performed in Bulgaria as '*Bulgarian Rhapsody*' due to political influence repressing the title *Vardar*. From 1934 to 1940 the pro-totalitarian regime came into power with the idea of centralisation and annulment of democratic freedom. The tragic events of the wars and the catastrophes of the 1910s were still remembered. So Bulgaria had to be careful in expressing 'Great-Bulgarian' patriotic feelings on public occasions or in art, especially those affecting the former allies, but now rivals – Serbia, Greece and Romania. Serbia and Macedonia were part of Yugoslavia, which explains why the name of Rhapsody *Vardar* was 'tactfully' changed. In 1937, the orchestral '*Rhapsody Vardar*' was performed in Bucharest. A month later, Vladigerov and the child prodigy violinist Dobrin Petkov performed the Bulgarian Rhapsody (without the title *Vardar*) in Beograd. The Yugoslavian Vreme newspaper's critic Zhivkovic simply stated: "*Bulgarian Rhapsody* is a greatful virtuosic piece for violinists in terms of technique and interpretation, revealing the instrument's capabilities"<sup>53</sup> – again, the original name and the Macedonian question are consciously avoided or censored. From 1940, Vladigerov stopped touring Western Europe because of the war and focused on the Balkans – mainly Yugoslavia. The same year, the orchestral *Vardar* was premiered in Yugoslavia (Ljubljana) successfully with shouts from the audience as "Viva" and "Hurray".<sup>54</sup> This was a certain evidence of the Balkan character of the piece, which made it a favourite with the Slavic ethnos, despite political repressions of the title.

In the beginning of World War II, Bulgaria decided to join the Nazis, who promised to give them back territories they considered Bulgarian. In May 1941, 22 years their previous union, the Bulgarian army entered

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<sup>51</sup> Pavlov-Klosterman, E., *Pancho Vladigerov*, p 146

<sup>52</sup> Ibid. p 135 (translated Todorov, S.)

<sup>53</sup> Ibid. p 136 (translated Todorov, S.)

<sup>54</sup> Ibid. p 145 (translated Todorov, S.)

and liberated Macedonia, being excitedly welcomed by the populace. Considered the Bulgarian Jerusalem, Ohrid was celebrating the long-awaited Unification with Bulgaria. Especially for that occasion, the Tsar Military Symphony Orchestra, led by Vladigerov's friend Sasha Popov, came from Sofia to perform a joyful concert on the Lake square. Michail Ognyanov shares these events and his own experience in his book: "The *Bulgarian Rhapsody Vardar* opened the concert and the older people started singing along 'We are Bulgarians' by Dobri Hristov", possibly the apogee of Bulgarian and Macedonian expression of National brotherhood – the *Rhapsody's* virtue bringing long-expected freedom.<sup>55</sup> As a quarter Jew, Vladigerov could not attend this major event, most probably because he was staying hidden, composing in Bulgarian villages, although not chased by the Nazis. At the same time, Radio Sofia was daily replaying the *Rhapsody's* recording, which was also broadcast in Macedonia.<sup>56</sup> This mood of celebration continued until 1944, when the Nazis (alongside Bulgaria) lost the war. Southern Dobrudja was returned to Bulgaria, but the Macedonian dream had to be forgotten.

After the war, the Bulgarian Communist Party (BKP) took over power, headed by Stalin's puppet Georgi Dimitrov. Vladigerov was then required to become a (nominal) member of the Fatherland Front as were many other public figures. His interest was only in the political attitude to culture. Composers were encouraged write profoundly folk-based music dedicated to the workers. In response Vladigerov wrote many transcriptions of folksongs and pieces such as *May Sinfonietta* (1949) – dedicated "to the working Bulgarian youth in honour of Labour Day"<sup>57</sup>. As a favourite of the authorities, the composer was honoured with the three highest Socialist prizes (one of which is for *Rhapsody Vardar*). Despite this, the Communists kept suppressing the name as '*Rhapsody Vardar*', because of their close relationship with 'Red' Yugoslavia. According to the Comintern, there were no real Bulgarians, but people from Dobrudja, Shopsko, Thrace, Macedonia etc. So 'Bulgarian' became a slightly dangerous word and meaningless for the Communists, whose main task was to serve Soviet rules. This defined *Bulgarian Rhapsody Vardar* as 'Great-Bulgarian chauvinism' and led to dropping the name Bulgarian. The partnership with 'Big Brother', opened up cultural exchanges with Russia, which also made Vladigerov admired and successful there. As a result, Moscow Radio and the Musgis edition started producing recordings, and the score of *Bulgarian Rhapsody* (without *Vardar*, although the full name was used for concerts) was published. Moreover, a short documentary film was made about Vladigerov in Russia, with the composer conducting *Vardar* himself. At the same time, Vladigerov was criticized by the Union of Bulgarian Composers (UBC) for bringing "German impressionism, eroticism and

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<sup>55</sup> Ognyanov, M., *Macedonia: A Lived Destiny*, p 189 (translated Todorov, S.)

<sup>56</sup> 'Valtava and Vardar' <https://melomem.wordpress.com/2011/02/16/vardar/>

<sup>57</sup> Pavlov-Klosterman, E., *Pancho Vladigerov*, p 173 (translated Todorov, S.)

foreign tone” into some of his work, despite his “faithful orientation towards folklore” in *Rhapsody Vardar*.<sup>58</sup> Even Shostakovich and Prokofiev were described as foreign. Not all composers had been criticized by UBC, which might suggest that these reports were made under political duress. However, the idea of the new music becoming more and more based on folklore in order to develop a better national cultural consciousness seemed well-founded. As a matter of fact, “many orchestras of folk instruments were created”, offering educational activities throughout Bulgaria.<sup>59</sup>

But even though Vladigerov was classified as a folk composer, why didn't he move further into the atonality as Bartók did? Vladigerov did use some of the principles of Debussy, Ravel and Strauss, but he consciously avoided those of Schoenberg and Bartók, as he was interested in the melody of Bulgarian folksong. Another reason could be his education in Berlin, which had helped him to clarify his own style. The real answers found in the previous paragraph, which underlines the encouragements of the UBC and the Communist Party to continue writing clear folk-based music with as limited modern Western influence as possible. Moreover, he seemed to be feeling responsible towards the Bulgarian people for enriching their own National development.

Vladigerov had a similar piece to *Vardar* as a ‘successor’ with the same patriotic intent, having the official Bulgarian hymn-tune worked into it. However, this was not perceived as controversial because it did not affect other Balkan cultures. The official national anthem between 1886 - 1944 *Shumi Maritsa* [*Maritsa* river sparkles] was one of the three tunes which Vladigerov wove into his concert overture *Zemya* [Earth] in 1933, premiered in Sofia (1934) after the warm welcome to his homeland. The Bulgarian magazine ‘Nation and Earth’ reviewed this concert stating that the piece represented “the sad memories of the Ottoman occupancy, the festivities of peasant life and the voice of victory”.<sup>60</sup> Yet in 1919, Vladigerov had published his own harmonization of the anthem for piano, which distinguished it from the official version. In 1926, the official anthem *Shumi Maritsa* opened the first event of the Varna Summer Music Festival. As part of it, the twin brothers played the ‘*Bulgarian Rhapsody Vardar*’ in a special concert. In 1929 the orchestral version was performed for first time and since 1957 it has been the opening hymn-tune of the Festival. *Vardar* is the most suitable opening for such occasions for several reasons. It plays the role of a hymn-tune, representing the Bulgarian folk tradition and spirit yet being longer and larger than the official hymns. Most importantly, it represents a fight for freedom and peace in a particular area (Macedonia) but is also known as a universal

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid. p 181 (translated Todorov, S.)

<sup>59</sup> Prashanov, T., *The Bulgarian Orchestra of Folk Instruments*, p 2 (translated Todorov, S.)

<sup>60</sup> Pavlov-Klosterman, E., *Pancho Vladigerov*, p 120 (translated Todorov, S.)

symbol of all the fights, struggles and victories of the Bulgarians, especially against the Ottomans. The Belgrade Philharmonic closed the UBC's concert in Belgrade in 1938 with *Zemya* with no evidence of disturbance. However, its reception was cool probably due to anti-Bulgarian propaganda, especially among the Serbs.

In Vladigerov's biography there is evidence that *Bulgarian Rhapsody Vardar* was performed in concerts under varied names abroad in Berlin (1923), New York, Berlin (1925), Vienna (1926), Paris (1927), Prague (1928), Berlin, Salzburg, Tel Aviv (1929), Dresden, Rome, Warsaw, Bucharest (1930), Milwaukee (1931), Utrecht, London, Philadelphia, Berlin (1932), Athens, Riga, Torino, Vienna (1933), Milwaukee, Vienna (1934), Vienna, Budapest (1935), Paris, Vienna, Stockholm (1936), Bucharest, Belgrade, Dresden, Prague, Salzburg, London, New York (1937), Budapest, New York, Leipzig, Goteborg, Helsinki, Copenhagen (1938), Venice, Florence (1939), Breslau (1940), Oslo (1941), Berlin, Waldenburg, Vienna, Bucharest (1943), Moscow (1948), Prague (1950), Berlin (1951), Buenos Aires (1954). Performances were more frequent especially between 1980 and 1995, and too numerous to list. To summarize, *Vardar* was performed more than 50 times in different arrangements by 2000 mainly in Germany, Austria and Czechoslovakia, even more frequently than in Bulgaria.

In recent years, an unknown author has also given *Vardar* the name Balkan Anthem. I can offer some hypothesis about this renaming. It is logical that such an anthem after all the historically-patriotic events of the past 90 years should be renamed. What makes sense from my research so far is that *Vardar* and Vladigerov's music in general have been favourite not only in Bulgarian, but also in all the other Balkan lands. For example, the Croatian composer Boris Papandopolou writes for the journal *Novelties* after the premiere of *Zemya* in Zagreb 1935: "The success was big... The audience praised Vladigerov not only as a world artist, but also as one of the greatest representatives of Eastern Slavonic [Yugoslavian] music".<sup>61</sup> All politicians did not favour it because its name and dedication could have inflamed territorial and ethnic conflicts. Moreover, its message was encouraging the mass to fight for freedom, which consequence authorities would seek to avoid. So a Balkan anthem would satisfy and unify all the disputed territories inhabited by Bulgarian people under a neutral name, without recalling the *Bulgarian-Vardar* controversy. Also, it is true that people moved a lot throughout this horrific period in the small but unstable area and some of their traditions could have become more Balkan than national. It could also have been called an anthem because of the march-like beginning and ending of *Vardar*, supported brass and percussion, which in combination with 4/4 time make military associations. In addition, the use of medleys in the middle section was common to all Balkan.

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid. p 133 (translated Todorov, S.)

It seems that Vladigerov's music was very nationalist and political, yet I was told by one of his students Georgi Kostov, that he was trying to stay apart from politics. What is certainly true is that he insisted on calling his piece with its full name – '*Bulgarian Rhapsody Vardar*'. For Vladigerov, the word patriot meant admirer and supporter of the Bulgarian people in a spiritual encouraging way. Not only *Vardar* but a large number of his pieces are evidence of his moral stand. Apart from the already mentioned *Zemya* and *May Sinfonietta*, Vladigerov wrote the Heroic overture *September 1944* (1949) for the 5<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of WWII; *Bulgarian Suite* (1927) – dedicated "to the Bulgarian people for one century since the birth of the Bulgarian Tsar Simeon and 50 years since the Bulgarian liberation".<sup>62</sup> Several folksong transcriptions and *Autumn Elegy* op. 15 (1922) were dedicated to those friends, who suffered from the political regime through the years. Patriotism for Vladigerov really meant expressing his views by his art without being politically active.

During the political changes across Europe in 1989, it was an interesting fact that the first thing Germans performed was Beethoven's 9<sup>th</sup> Symphony, Czechs played *Vltava* and *Ma Vlast* by Smetana, but Bulgarians astonishingly "sung *Let It Be* by the Beatles".<sup>63</sup> There could be a few reasons for this. Under Communism in Bulgaria, there was a ban on distributing and Western Popular decadent music, although many people found ways of accessing it secretly. The breakdown of the regime meant freedom of access and *Let It Be* itself celebrated liberal a spirit. *Vardar* might have stayed isolated at this time because of its forgotten patriotic meaning and its more recent Communistic variant. Gradually, during the so-called Bulgarian Transition since 1990, *Bulgarian Rhapsody Vardar* started retaining its full and ancient power, being transformed into a prime symbol of Bulgarian Nationalism. It is being used mainly for concert purposes, but politicians dare to use it for election campaigns, rousing the national spirit of voters. However, the Macedonian Question and the memory of the unrealized national ideal are still current for Bulgaria and there is silence and no evidence of recent performances or appreciation of '*Bulgarian Rhapsody Vardar*' in Macedonia. Now that Macedonia is independent and some of its national ideals have altered, the piece might be considered chauvinistic by the Skopje's authorities and therefore banned. Suppose we dream that one day musicians from the two countries could unite and perform the '*Bulgarian Rhapsody Vardar*' for the sake of the music alone, setting aside political propaganda? Could that happen someday? Who knows ... Perhaps '*Bulgarian Rhapsody Vardar*' might be the real key to more peaceful Balkans.

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid. p 75 (translated Todorov, S.)

<sup>63</sup> 'Vltava and Vardar' <https://melomem.wordpress.com/2011/02/16/vardar/>

## Conclusion

It could be said that the first full meeting of the idealistic ambition of a Bulgarian national musical style, and the maturity of an individual artist is realized in the *Bulgarian Rhapsody*. By creating it, Vladigerov achieves something even more meaningful – a musical description of a revived people, much as “Chopin’s A-major Polonaise op. 40 is a representation of greatness and glory for the Polish people”.<sup>64</sup> Since Dobri Hristov’s melody ‘A single cry is heard’, which frames the opening and the closing of the middle dancing-rhythm section, is also dance-based, one might suggest that the work’s conclusion forms an apotheosis of Bulgarian folkdance, bringing a national pride in its musical achievement and respect to its inventor. Moreover, Vladigerov deals with his work’s drama by developing the Bulgarian symphonic tradition. The existence of folkloric elements in *Vardar* can also be seen as following the ‘first generation’ composers their so-called ‘mannered’. “We, old musicians grew up in tonal thinking and utterance with classical compositional techniques. Young musicians are lucky to have on hand limitless modern compositional techniques, which were unknown to us”, said Dobri Hristov in an interview just before he died.<sup>65</sup> The fact that Vladigerov took the opportunity to use subjects of folk songs allows us to add the word ‘folklore’ to his type of symphonism. Even more, the composer’s skill in instrumental writing far exceeds that of his predecessors, standing out through a colourful, rich and grand orchestration.

It has been 93 years now since the birth of *Bulgarian Rhapsody Vardar*. Yet it remains the most popular and performed Bulgarian classical piece ever, certain evidence of its eternal artistic value. The *Rhapsody* is one of the very first Vladigerovian compositions, in which the use of authentic Bulgarian voices and rhythms heralded his future unique style. The *Bulgarian Rhapsody Vardar* is a piece that stimulates feelings of love and respect in the peoples of the homeland it depicts. Irrespective of what can be analysed within a musico-historical account such as this. As a work it has been digested instinctively by the Bulgarian people with their hearts and souls, becoming deeply rooted in their unique spiritual and cultural heritage.

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<sup>64</sup> Krastev, V., *Profiles: Essays for 11 Bulgarian Composers Book 1*, p 133 (translated Todorov, S.)

<sup>65</sup> Avramov, E., *Vladigerov’s Harmony*, p 23 (translated Todorov, S.)

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