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# SERENE ECSTASY — The Light and Sorrow of Orthodox Russia

SPIRITUAL REVIVAL CHOIR OF MOSCOW'S SCHNITTKE INSTITUTE OF MUSIC

LEV KONTOROVICH, DIRECTOR

- ① **The Russian Soil** [2:52] "Holy Russia! Keep your Orthodox faith, and in it shall you strengthen," are the final words of this *Stikhir*. *Stikhirs*, similar to mid-17th century chant, are dedicated to the Orthodox Saints of Russia.
- ② **Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky** (1840–1893): **Prayer of Repentance for Russia** [2:28] The concluding piece from the composer's *Children's Album, Op. 39* for piano. It is based on the text of the penitent prayer and was arranged for choir in 1914, at the beginning of World War One.
- ③ **Tchaikovsky: Eucharist from the Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom** [2:09] A joyful culmination of the service: "Glory to God in the highest! Alleluia!"
- ④ **Alexander Alexandrovich Arkhangelsky** (1846–1924): **I cried out to the Lord** [6:46] Composer and choral conductor, Arkhangelsky was the first to introduce female voices into Russian church music. This work contains some of his most passionate, poignant music, most notably the climax, which comes in the middle movement: "O Lord, My God, give ear to my prayer, clear my eyes but not when I see death; attend and hear me."

**Pavel Grigorievich Chesnokov** (1877–1944): **Three Choruses from the cycle *Days of Battle, Op. 45*** Dedicated to Russia and all its people whose lives were touched by the devastations of World War I:

- ⑤ **On the sickbed** [2:56] Prayer for the recovery of a wounded soldier.
- ⑥ **Deliver us from evil** [1:29] Prayer to Jesus Christ to help stave off Russia's enemies.
- ⑦ **Mother of God** [3:25] Prayer to Mary to protect the Russians and help vanquish the enemy.

The following three pieces by **Pavel Chesnokov** are often sung as Liturgy in the Russian Orthodox Church:



- [8] **O Praise our Lord** [2:32]
- [9] **Blessed is the Man** [4:35] ~ Soloist: *Sergei Aksionov, baritone*
- [10] **The Angel Cried** [2:48] "Rejoice, pure Virgin! Thy Son has risen from His three days in the tomb." ~ Soloist: *Elena Khmara, soprano*

- [11] **Mikhail Mikhailovich Ippolitov-Ivanov** (1859–1935): **Praise the Lord, O my soul** [2:44] This is an excerpt from Liturgy No. 2: faith in God is what purifies the soul.

**Vladislav Germanovich Agafonnikov** (1936) is one of the leaders of Russia's Union of Composers. The following three excerpts from his *Vespers* were first performed by The Spiritual Revival Choir.

- [12] **Joyful light** [3:04]
- [13] **Lord now lettest Thou Thy servant depart** [2:27] Dedicated to the memory of Georgy Sviridov.
- [14] **Rejoice, Virgin, Mother of God** [2:02]

**Nikolai Sergeevich Lebedev** (1947–2000) composed numerous sacred works. The following two chorales are based on verses by Georgy Poliachenko, a poet, public figure and for many years an active organizer of the annual International Festival of Orthodox Christian Music held in Moscow.

- [15] **Angel** [1:45] "An angel flew over in the moonlight."
- [16] **Prayer** [5:19] ~ Soloist: *Sergei Aksionov, baritone*.

Selections from Lebedev's *Requiem*:

- [17] **Upokoi, Bozhe (Let them rest in peace, O Lord)** [2:17] Prayer for the dead: "Grant eternal rest to Thy departed servants"
- [18] **Trisiyatelnoye** (Lux aeterna) [1:41] Prayer to the Holy Trinity.  
Soloist: *Viktoria Smirnova, soprano*
- [19] **With Thy Holy Ones let them rest in eternity** [2:12] One of the oldest chants of the Russian Orthodox Church Liturgy and often used in Russian music.



The following three final movements of Lebedev's *Requiem* are sung without pause. Soloists: *Victoria Smirnova, soprano* and *Denis Khramov, baritone*.

20 **God, have mercy on us** [:33]

21 **Blessed Assumption** [:51]

22 **Eternal memory** [2:15]

**Valeri Grigorievich Kikta** (born 1941) One of Russia's most popular, though rarely recorded, contemporary composers of choral music.

23 **St. Dmitry Rostovsky's Psalm of Repentance** (1651–1709) [2:19]

24 **Hymn to the Holy Virgin** [2:56] Written specially for the Spiritual Revival Choir. Soloist: *Victoria Smirnova, soprano*

**Alfred Schnittke** (1934–1998): **Three sacred Chorales**. Schnittke weaves his unmistakably modern romanticism through a texture redolent of traditional Russian Orthodox music.

25 **Rejoice, pure Virgin, Mother of God** (for two choirs) [1:29]

26 **O Lord Jesus Christ** [1:30]

27 **Our Father** [3:25]

*Commentary: Lev Kontorovich*

TOTAL PLAYING TIME: 70:46

Executive Producers: *Amelia S. Haygood/Carol Rosenberger*  
Recording Producer: *Vladimir Koptzov*  
Recording Engineer: *Igor Solovyov*  
Associate Engineer: *Alexy Pogarsky*  
Editing: *Ruslana Oreshnikova*

Recorded May 20-30, 2000  
Great Hall, Moscow Conservatory, Moscow, Russia  
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SPIRITUAL REVIVAL CHOIR OF MOSCOW'S SCHNITTKE INSTITUTE OF MUSIC

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## **SPIRITUAL REVIVAL CHOIR OF MOSCOW'S SCHNITTKE INSTITUTE OF MUSIC**

The Spiritual Revival Choir of Moscow's Schnittke Institute of Music was created in 1992, at the end of the Soviet era, a time when freedom of religious expression, long forbidden, was once again permitted. As result, much of the Choir's repertoire deals with religious subjects and the spiritual exaltation that accompanies religious celebration.

The Choir's repertoire includes not only the music of Russia and its composers, but music of the Renaissance and Baroque, Viennese classics, the 18th- and 19th-century Romantic masterpieces, and music of the last century. As its name and origins would imply, one of the Choir's chief missions is to perform the music of Alfred Schnittke. It performed his "Three Sacred Chorales" at the composer's burial service in 1998, and has since sung his music at various Schnittke memorials in Russia.

Since 1997 the Choir has been under the direction of Lev Kontorovich. It performs frequently in the various halls of the Moscow Conservatory, at the Tchaikovsky Philharmonic and at the Glinka Museum Concert Hall, and has toured in Germany.

### **LEV KONTOROVICH**

Born in Moscow in 1947, Lev Kontorovich was graduated from the Moscow Sveshnikov State College of Choral Music in 1964 and from the Moscow Conservatory in 1967. At the Conservatory he studied choral conducting with Klavdyi Ptitsa, symphonic conducting with Leo Ginzburg and composition with Alfred Schnittke. Upon graduation, Kontorovich joined the faculty at Sveshnikov College, both as teacher and director of the college boys choir. Since 1996 he has been on the faculty at the Moscow Conservatory and in 1997 he became director of the Spiritual Revival Choir of Moscow's Schnittke Institute of Music.

In addition to the familiar choral repertoire of such composers as Bach, Beethoven, Mahler, Mozart, Stravinsky, and others, Kontorovich performs a wide range of Russian choral music. The latter encompasses not only music of Balakirev, Glinka, Rachmaninoff, Shostakovich and Tchaikovsky, but also works by contemporary composers, including music of his own students. Kontorovich has made numerous recordings and his concerts are frequently broadcast on Russian radio.



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