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ORTHODOX CHANT IN PORTUGAL TODAY PROJECT PRESENTATION

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II THE MODERN CONTEXT: MUSIC IN CONCERT

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In the few last decades, Christian music from Eastern Europe has been gaining a prominent place on the Portuguese stage. It started to become more widespread at the beginning of the millennium, which can be explained, in part, by the increase in people coming to Portugal from countries such as Ukraine, Moldova, Romania and Russia between 1991 and 2001, as documented by the National Institute of Statistics. This significant migration trend resulted in a more diverse foreign resident population.¹

In 2001, Russian Music: A Feast was the theme for one of the most important annual musical events in Portugal, the Dias da Música (Days of Music) at Centro Cultural de Belém in Lisbon. Located near the iconic point where ships departed to cross the Atlantic for the Portuguese “Discoveries”, the Centro Cultural de Belém is an arts complex with exhibition galleries, a conference centre, spaces for dance, theatre and performing arts, restaurants, outdoor spaces, and a grand auditorium for symphonic music and opera. Since 2002, it has been classified as a monument of public interest. For Dias da Música, La Folle Journée de Nantes, created by René Martin, came to Lisbon, offering a thematic three-day programme with 132 concerts across the various spaces at the Centre. Choral music was particularly significant. One of the choirs was the Drevnerusski Rospev choir from the Moscow

¹ Instituto Nacional de Estatística (INE), Censos 2001: resultados definitivos: XIV recenseamento geral da população: IV recenseamento geral da habitação (Lisboa: I.N.E., 2001).

Patriarchate, directed by Anatoly Gridenko. A small book entitled *Russian Music: A Brief Overview*,² edited by Público, one of Portugal's daily newspapers, was distributed. Chapter six, 'A panorama of Russian sacred music', was written by Ivan Moody, Protopresbyter of the Greek Orthodox Church, and it introduced music enthusiasts to the history of this repertoire. Given its visibility and status, the festival became a key element in the dissemination of Russian sacred music.

In 2001, the first group dedicated to singing this repertoire in Portugal was founded. The Pravoslava chamber choir, made up of musicians from various Orthodox traditions, including Protopresbyter Ivan Moody and the musicologist Svetlana Poliakova, aimed to show the richness and diversity of this type of music. One of the group's first concerts took place at Palácio Foz, a palace built in the late 18th century in the historic centre of Lisbon, which has a regular music programme, often with free entrance.

Embassies have also made an important contribution to the dissemination of sacred music from eastern Europe, through organizing concerts to commemorate key events, for example. At the invitation of the Bulgarian Embassy, the Ioann Koukouzelis choir performed in Portugal under the direction of Dimitar Nikolov Dimitrov, in 2011; and as part of the programme to celebrate Europe Day, the Romanian male choir Theophania, formed of seventeen singers and directed by Maestro Ciprian Para, gave the Portuguese public a rendition of Byzantine songs in the Church of Madre de Deus and the Estrela Basilica, which are important monuments in the Portuguese capital as well as being spaces of Christian worship.

More recently, in July 2019, the Georgian Embassy supported a concert by the Batumi Ensemble (which had previously visited Portugal four times) to present the country's polyphonic singing, which is classified by UNESCO as an Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity. The concert took place at the Panteão Nacional (National Pantheon), whose dome rises above the historic centre of Lisbon and whose marble interior contains the tombs of luminaries who contributed to the country's political and cultural history.

The Russian Orthodox community in Portugal has formed special groups to perform choral repertoire and has also, through the Pravoslava choir, promoted the music beyond religious spaces. For example, the Choral Group of the Russian Orthodox Church of Lisbon gave a concert of Russian polyphonic liturgical music at the Assembly of the Republic in 2008. And international links have continued for performances in religious spaces. For example, in 2017, the choir of the Russian Orthodox Seminary in France was invited by the parish of the Orthodox Church of Faro, in the south of Portugal, to participate in the evening liturgy and its attendant vigils, and to give a concert of liturgical and popular songs in Faro Cathedral. This choir returned to Portugal the following year, giving two more concerts, one of them at Lisbon Cathedral.

In 2017, Orthodox music was performed at the shrine of Fátima, an important place of pilgrimage for Catholics from all over the world. The Lisbon Gregorian Choir, directed by Armando Possante, and the Alpha Ensemble, directed by Ivan Moody, gave a concert entitled "The Virgin Mary in the Latin Monodic Tradition and the Orthodox Liturgy", which inaugurated a concert series called the Cycle of Sacred Music. The performance was an important bridge between Catholic and Orthodox traditions.

2 Svetlana Poliakova et al., *Música Russa: Um Breve Panorama* (Lisboa: Público, Centro Cultural de Belém, 2001).

Christian music from Eastern Europe has had an increasing presence in prestigious music venues and groups in Portugal. At the Casa da Música in Oporto, the main music venue in the north of Portugal, the programme for 2016 was dedicated to Russian music, with the title “Year of Russia”. It opened with Rachmaninov’s *All-Night Vigil*, Op. 37, performed by the choir of the Casa da Música, directed by Paul Hillier. Music from Eastern Europe was also included in a cycle called “Around the Baroque”, with a concert entitled “Celestial Powers” showcasing music from the 16th and 17th centuries, including the polyphonic work *Today Christ Was Born in Bethlehem* by Demestvenny and *Three Sacred Hymns* by Alfred Schnittke, as well as works by Vassily Titov, Giuseppe Sarti, Dmitry Bortniansky, Tchaikovsky and Stravinsky.

In Lisbon, the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, established by Calouste Sarkis Gulbenkian, a philanthropist of Armenian origin, is key to the promotion of culture and science in Portugal. The Foundation hosts the Gulbenkian Choir, one of the most prestigious choirs in Portugal, which was founded more than fifty years ago and has sung with renowned orchestras and distinguished conductors from all over the world. 2018 was the 30th anniversary of the Music Festival in São Roque, which promotes Portuguese performers through a series of concerts, with affordable tickets, in the Church of São Roque, a Jesuit church built in the 16th century, richly decorated with Mannerist and Baroque elements. For the festival, the Gulbenkian Choir interpreted *All-Night Vigil*, Op. 37 by Rachmaninov in an unprecedented way. The choir’s singing was interspersed with improvisations on the organ, diverging from the Orthodox musical tradition by including an instrument. However, this was not the only time that Orthodox sacred music was included in the festival. In another edition, in 2012, the Capella Duriensis ensemble, known mainly for promoting Portuguese sacred music under the direction of Jonathan Ayerst, performed music from the Russian Orthodox Church.

It is also important to mention the work of academic choirs. The Romanos Melodos Academic Choir came out of a course called Musics of the World - Russian Choir Practices, part of the BA in Musicology at Nova University, Lisbon, and taught by Professor Svetlana Poliakova. This choir has given concerts since 2012, both in Lisbon – in various churches and cultural institutions, such as the Museum of Portuguese Music – and in other parts of the country, particularly in the interior.

In 2018, as part of a project called Eastern Christian Singing in Portugal, organized by the Centre for the Study of Sociology and Musical Aesthetics (CESEM) at Nova University in Lisbon, the choir took part in a concert in collaboration with Fr Ivan Moody and the parish choir of the parish of St John the Russian of Estoril. In the summer of 2019, the Romanos Melodos choir gave a joint concert with the Chamber Choir of the University of Lisbon; both choirs sang key works of Orthodox sacred music and the Romanos Melodos choir also sang some Byzantine monodic chants. That year the Chamber Choir of the University of Lisbon included Orthodox works in several of its programmes, alongside sacred music from Catholic and Protestant traditions.

It should be noted that the repertoire performed by Portuguese choirs consists mainly of compositions from the second half of the 17th century onwards, not only because they are a popular part of the history of European music, but also because they are already in a notation accessible to Western non-specialist

performers. Although not all the concerts of Orthodox sacred music held in Portugal are mentioned in this text, it can be seen that these repertoires have become increasingly present. Both international and Portuguese choirs, well-known and less well-known, have participated in this dissemination, performing Eastern Christian music both in sacred spaces and in large concert halls. The fact that these concerts are often free of charge has been an important aspect of attracting a diverse audience.

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