

# **RUSSIAN METHODOLOGIES OF VOCAL TRAINING APPLIED IN A CZECH CHILDREN'S CHOIR**

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## **Abstract**

This paper presents a dissertation thesis project that focuses on Russian methodologies of vocal training and their application in a children's choir, which requires a careful choice of methodologies and methodological approach to organization of choir lessons. The paper begins with a brief description of the history and foundation of the Russian choral school and tradition of choral singing education, followed by a brief overview of the most popular vocal methodologists whose work has been dedicated to vocal training. The final part introduces two modern vocal training methodologies of leading musical trainers. The practical part of the future dissertation will deal with the selection of optimal exercises and their systematic development to help children improve their singing skills and musicality, as well as contribute to the cultivation of good singing habits. The aim is to enable school teachers or kindergarten teachers who are not professional musicians to use successfully the assembled methodology.

## **Keywords**

Choral singing – Russian choir tradition – vocal methods – methodologies of choir singing – children's choir

## **Introduction**

Working with children for the past 14 years on an everyday basis, as well as leading children's choirs, naturally led me to the choice of topic for my dissertation that is focusing on vocal training. Nowadays teachers are constantly encouraged to move forward, look for improvements and fresh ideas. There is a big need for new inspiration and effective ways of vocal teaching among children. My Russian roots and childhood spend in Russia tightly connect me with Russian vocal traditions and methods of choir education that I had chance to experience myself. Choir singing, vocal education of children and youth are very important sources of spreading musical culture in Russia. They contribute to the formation of personal qualities, artistic taste, develop musical skills; they also broaden horizons and generally increase the cultural level among children and young adults. Fully fledged music and vocal education presupposes involvement in the creative process of acquiring and improving singing skills and becoming accustomed to performing in public. The Russian choral school offers a very rich tradition of choral art. For centuries singing and choral singing, as the most accessible form of artistic expression, have been the main form of music education and training in Russia.

## The aims of the future dissertation thesis are:

- To summarize the main principles of the phenomenon of the Russian choir school and map the historical circumstances of its development.
- Create an overview of the most popular Russian vocal, choral methodologies of the late 19th and 20th centuries, usable in a choir.
- Analyze selected contemporary Russian singing methodologies applied in the children's choir.
- Modify the analyzed current modern choir singing techniques for work with children's choirs (with practical verification in the Jitřenka children's choir, České Budějovice/Czech Republic).

## Establishment of Russian singing and choral school

Acceptance of Christianity around the 10<sup>th</sup> century was a major starting point for the development of choral art and its culture in Russia. The unique Russian singing and choral school was founded during this time period. Many choirs started functioning in churches and monasteries that were part of the orthodox service. Professional choral singing education was concentrated in two choirs: the St. Petersburg State Academic Capella (the oldest active Russian professional musical institution that was founded in 1479),<sup>1</sup> and the Russian Patriarchal choir formed in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and consisting of adult clerics, later renamed the Moscow Synodal Choir. At the beginning, singing in the choirs was unison, the so-called Znamenny Chant, which is melismatic liturgical singing. It has also its own specific notation, the stolp notation.<sup>2</sup> Singers in the choirs were male only until the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century. With the development of polyphonic music, young boys become part of the choirs. These professional choirs became music educational centres and played an invaluable role in the training of choristers, regents, opera singers and singing teachers. Singers were not only developing their vocal skills there, but also learning about music theory, grammar and reading. It should be noted, however, that church singing in Russia was influenced for some time by the Italian vocal school, which enriched the methodologies of vocal teaching with new techniques and expanded the musical horizons of the singers, their erudition and artistic taste. The first theoretical scripts dedicated to singing education were "A Musical Grammar" (1677) by Nikolay Diletsky and "The harmonic and melodic rules for teaching music" by Vincenzo Manfredini a three-year programme of vocal training (translated into Russian by Stepan Dekhtarev and publisher in 1805).<sup>3</sup>

The appearance of opera in Russia was a great impetus for the development of secular choral singing in a European manner and the organization of professional training singers from childhood. In the line of the great musicians of that time, such as M. Berezovsky, S. Degtyarev, G. Lomakin and others, a very special place belongs to D. Bortniansky, conductor, music teacher and composer. He transformed the Court singing cappella into a centre of professional music training of opera singers and vocal teachers. Music training of young

<sup>1</sup> Founded by the Grand Prince of Moscow Ivan the Great on August 12, 1479 for taking part in the celebrations and holy service of newly opened Cathedral of the Dormition.

<sup>2</sup> The symbols that were used for stolp notation were called kryuki.

<sup>3</sup> Available with open access at Russian state electronic library.

children in a church choir led by him was on the highest professional level. Choir practices were three hours long on a daily basis. Each young singer had his own mentor among older students. The very style of church singing prevailed predominantly mid-range sounds, demanded from singers a certain manner of singing mostly in slow tempo, typically with smoothness and duration of musical phrases. Great attention was paid to breathing technique and breath support, as well as the ability of sensitive dynamic control.

Based on the experience of choral activities of the Russian choral school, at the beginning of the XIX century, new theoretical works arose by M. Glinka<sup>4</sup> and A. Varlamov<sup>5</sup>. In spite of their differences, both works take a similar approach to Russian choral school, and both agree a typical feature of its style is singing a cappella in mid-range sounds, vocalization based on chant, typical of Russian folk songs. Glinka assembled sequences of original vocal exercises with the aim of achieving the already established voices, based on working range, mid-range sounds (within one octave). He noted the importance of breathing technique, phonatory process, smooth transition between chest and head registers, combination of consonants and vowels and their role and importance in the singing process. His exercises give voice “alignment and increased flexibility”.<sup>6</sup>

Composer Alexander Varlamov (1801–1848) was a pupil in Court singing cappella led by Dmitry Bortniansky. He was his best student. In his “Complete School of Singing” Varlamov wrote: “When completing my work I was guided by my experience with singers and in particular I was inspired by the work of my famous teacher D. Bortniansky.”<sup>7</sup> In a variation of Glinka’s exercises, Varlamov describes in his very own original way all stages of voice training from the very beginning of vocal education. Songs and romances written by Varlamov came from Russian folk music. The great value of works by both Varlamov and Glinka lies in the fact that they were the first Russian methodological manual which reflected the centuries – old experience of choral singing, as well as laying the foundation for further development of Russian vocal pedagogy. Thus they were the foundation of a more detailed development of the theory questions in the field of vocal education of singers (Nikolskaja-Beregovskaja, 1998).

Many private choirs were created during the 19<sup>th</sup> century by wealthy nobility. They became also very important centres of vocal choral education in Russia. Their number had significantly increased by the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The best known were the choirs in the Count Sheremetyev court and Knyaz Golitsyn. Choirboys were receiving not only vocal education, but also music theory and intonation, along with languages (Russian, German and French), geography, mathematics, writing. During lessons violin was used and individual singing. The best-known teachers were Gavriil Lomakin (1811–1885) and Stepan Degtarev (1766–1813). Lomakin emphasized the importance of the initial stage of vocal education in his methodical work.<sup>8</sup> For the first time ideas were introduced concerning the importance of singing with use of the head register; he also examined the question of sound production and the position of the lips, tongue, palate, larynx when working on the fullness of the sound. Those were quite innovative thoughts for their time. New progressive methods of teaching were giving good results and very soon choirs were able to sing

<sup>4</sup> GLINKA, Mikhail. *Uprazhnenija dlia uravnenija i usovershenstvovanija gibkosti golosa*. Moskva: Muzgiz, 1994.

<sup>5</sup> VARLAMOV, Alexandr. *Polnaja shkola penija*. 4.izdanije. Moskva: Lan, 2012. 120 p. ISBN 978-5-91938-062-7.

<sup>6</sup> NIKOLASKAJA-BEREGOVSKAJA, Klavdija. *Russkaja vokalno-khorovaja škola 19–20 vekov*. Moskva: Jazyki russkoj kultury, 1998. 192 p. ISBN 5-7859-0052-1.

<sup>7</sup> VARLAMOV, Alexandr. *Polnaja shkola penija*. 4.izdanije. Moskva: Lan, 2012. 6 p.

<sup>8</sup> LOMAKIN, Gavriil. *Kratkaja metoda penija*. 3.izdanije. Moskva: Jurgenson, 1882. 71 p.

difficult compositions written by Palestrina, Lotti, Bach, Gluck, Cherubini, Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven and Russian composers like Bortniansky, Berezovsky, Glinka, Dargomyzhsky and so on.

Another milestone in vocal education was opening of the “Free music school” in St. Petersburg in 1862 on the initiative of Gavriil Lomakin and Mily Balakirev. The very first music institution educated music teachers on a professional level. The Mighty Handful<sup>9</sup> was actively involved in it.

In methodological works of the pre-revolutionary period (before 1917) attention was focused on expressive performance, development of vocal hearing, singing voice, cultivated sound by such great choral leaders and musicians as N. Bryanskiy, D. Zarin, I. Kazansky, A. Maslov, S. Smolenksy, V. Orlov.

## Soviet and post-Soviet choral education

After the October Revolution (1917), Russia became a Soviet state with significant changes in the country's structure and spiritual life. Many church choirs including the Synodal choir discontinued their existence. In the first years of Soviet power, music education in elementary school became mass oriented. There was a predominance of revolutionary, marching songs in the repertoire of the choirs, which provoked children to forced singing and very often led to voice defects, as well as stagnation in voice development. By the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century this problem was acknowledged and the first steps were taken towards child voice protection and voice singing methods, taking into consideration the very fragile child's voice while developing. The first research into the child's voice was done by I. Levidov<sup>10</sup> and N. Orlova, later by T. Ovchinnikova and G. Stulova. Vocal education manuals oriented on voice protection were published by V. Bagadurov<sup>11</sup> and V. Beloborodova<sup>12</sup>. Many talented choirmasters and vocal trainers left their heritage in numerous books about vocal and choral singing, choral conducting, names such as K. Ptiza, S. Kazachkov, K. Olkhov, B. Asafjev, V. Krasnoshekov, D. Ogorodnov, V. Popov, I. Ponamarkov, P. Chesnokov, G. Dmitirevskij, V. Sokolov, A. Jegorov, A. Anisimov, K. Pigrov, B. Teplov, P. Levando, O. Apraksina, L. Dmitriev, V. Morozov.

The post-Soviet era has opened up new possibilities for teachers to exchange their experience abroad. The change of ideology has also brought changes in the goals of vocal education. New methodologies focus mainly on voice protection, movement synchronization and coordination of visual and voice expressions. The most popular choral and vocal educators include M. Karaseva (playful singing exercises oriented on preschool children), G. Struve (Russian adaptation of the Z. Kodaly method), A. Strelnikova (developed paradox breathing healing gymnastic, very actively used by singers), V. Khachaturov (jazz vocal singing methodology), V. Yemelyanov (phonopedic method of voice development).

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<sup>9</sup> The Mighty Handful (The Mighty Five) were five prominent composers from St. Petersburg who worked together at the 19th – century and created a national style of classical Russian music. They collaborated from 1856–1870. Mily Balakirev, Cesar Cui, Modest Mussorgsky, Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, Alexander Borodin.

<sup>10</sup> LEVIDOV, Iosif. *Okhrana i kultura detskogo golosa*. Moskva: Iskusstvo. 1939, 114 p.

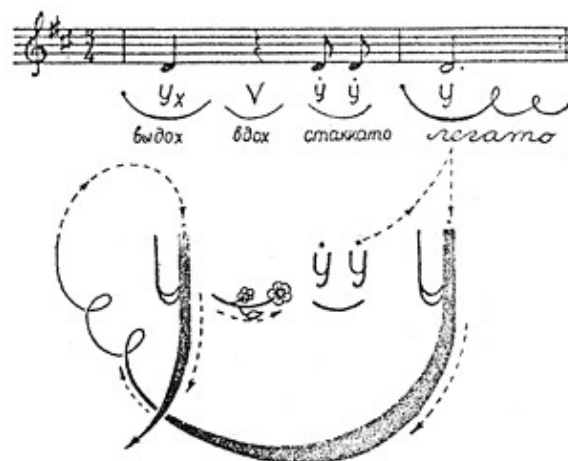
<sup>11</sup> BAGADUROV, Vsevolod. *Vospitanije i okhrana detskogo golosa*. Moskva: APN RSFSR, 1953, 72 p.

<sup>12</sup> BELOBORODOVA, Věra. *Razvitije muzykalnogo slucha uchaschikhhsa I klassa*, Moskva: APN RSFSR, 1965. 108 p.

## Vocal choral training in children choir based on D. Ogorodnov and V. Yemelyanov methodology

The methodology of D. Ogorodnov and V. Yemelyanov has proved to be effective in vocal education. **Dmitry Ogorodnov** is probably the best known among Russian theorist and practitioner. He developed his original complex method (vocal training with visually presented algorithms, drawn on the boards, special movement signs, so called artistic reading and so on. This methodology was based on development of modal hearing, metrical rhythm and music form. The sequence of algorithms combines body and hand movement, and exercises focused on voice control<sup>13</sup>.

Another very important aspect is the visual side of the exercises. Ogorodnov offers a number of charts that have been very precisely worked out with use of major scale degrees as tonic, mediant, dominant and later added subtonic, supertonic and subdominant.



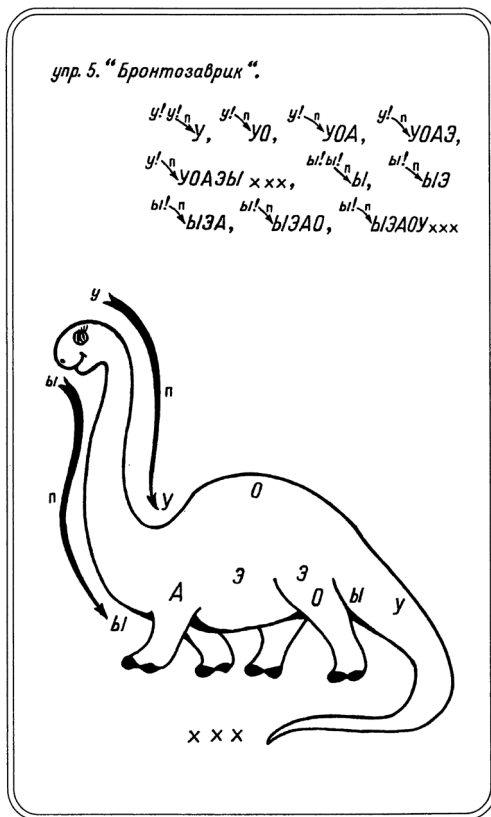
Basic algorithm number 1. (Ogorodnov 2019, p. 122)

The basic vowel to start the exercises is “U” with the increased difficulty of algorithms, there are added other vowels like “O”, “A”. D. Ogorodnov also includes articulatory gymnastics, vocal artistic reading and artistic conducting. A geophysicist in his original profession, Ogorodnov became a musician in his forties after World War II but his love of mathematics is present in all his exercises. The complex methodology helps not only improve singing ability and cultivates vocal skills but also develop music hearing, sense of rhythm, modal hearing and so on. Ogorodnov tried his method in his teaching career for over 50 years, achieving excellent results and gaining thousands of followers.

A similar set of glissando exercises are presented in **Viktor Yemelyanov’s** singing methodology, that he called a multi-level training programme “Phonopedic method of voice development”. It first appeared in his book “Razvitije golosa, koordinacija i trening” – “Voice

<sup>13</sup> OGORODNOV, Dmitrij. Metodika muzykalno-pevcheskogo vospitanija. Uchebnoje posobie. 7 izdanije. Sankt-Peterburg: Planeta muzyki, 2019. 224 p. ISBN 978-5-8114-1612-7.

development, coordination and training”<sup>14</sup> in 1997’ it has subsequently been updated and reprinted ten times. The Phonopedic method is based on pre-speech communication and has a number of exercises based on roaring, strohbass, screaming, howling and so on. For over thirteen years Yemelyanov ran a phoniatic outpatient clinic where he gathered much knowledge and focused his training programme on restoring voice function caused by stress, chronic fatigue caused by overuse etc. Yemelyanov’s method designed for children in children’s choirs and individually for students, future teachers, and adults who use their voice professionally: teachers, actors, singers. The pre-speech communication voice training programme focuses on understanding the process of vocal sound formation, development of the range of voice, singing with vibrato and different types of sound attack. His methods are primarily aimed at the development of vocal motor skills. The given method offers the possibility of training using a kinesthetic system. Many kinesthetic exercises are presented alone or in combination with audiovisual. The illustration below shows the exercise called Brontoaurus, which is very popular with children.



РАЗВИТИЕ ГОЛОСА. КООРДИНАЦИЯ И ТРЕНИНГ

(Yemelyanov 1997, p. 181)

<sup>14</sup>YEMELIANOV, Viktor. Razvitije golosa. Koordinacija i trenink. S. Peterburg: Lan, 1997. 190 p. ISBN 5-86617-006-X.

The methodology has been actively used in Russia and abroad for more than 30 years with excellent results.

## Discussion

The Czech Republic also has an abundance of excellent choir and vocal teachers. A number of works on vocal education have been published by Oldřich Dolanský (problems of non-singing pupils and vocal intonation), František Lýsek (methodology of music education, musicality and singing ability among children), Jarmila Vrchatová-Pátová (methodology of working with choir), Bohumil Kulínský (singing voice, music hearing development), Ladislav Daniel (methodology of music education), and most recently the famous vocal educator Alena Tichá (original methodology focused on improvement of singing ability). This provides a very solid base for Czech vocal education tradition. Most of the sources date from the 20<sup>th</sup> century and even though there were historically close links with the Soviet Union, there is little mention of Russian vocal education or choral traditions. One exception is the book “Could we teach all children how to sing?” by František Sedlák in 1966, where he talks about Russian masters of vocal education such as Boris Teplov, Vera Beloborodova, Ivan Ponamarkov, Vasilij Lukanin and phoniatriest E. Almazov. Knowledge of Russian choirmasters and their methods of choral education in the Czech Republic is quite poor. Obviously, the idea of amusing glissando exercises, voice games and playful way of teaching presented by D. Ogorodnov and V. Yemeylanov is not new. The front vocal teacher of today Alena Tichá also uses a similar way of voice development. Personal correspondence with Mrs. Tichá revealed that during her studies she did not acquire a knowledge of Russian choral masters apart from researchers in music psychology focused on music hearing development such as Boris Asafiev and Boris Teplov. Her own methodology stems from a combination of over twenty years of personal observation and experience as a vocal teacher, studying singing at the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague, an interest in music therapy, Webrek voice methodology, the Feldenkrais Method (a type of physical exercise therapy), courses and observation in K. Orff Institute in Austria and a number of courses on yoga and physiotherapy. We arrived at the conclusion that sooner or later each teacher develops their own set of exercises and, most importantly, intuitively starts using glissando exercises when working on voice range extension and smooth transition between registers.

Ogorodnov's and Yemeylanov's methodologies are special because of their complexity, very strict division from simple levels with increasing difficulty, focusing not only on voice training itself, but also including exercises that help develop the music skills of pupils in general. Combined with appropriate breathing techniques and body posture exercises, it could be very productive for children choral education. I have been adding some elements of both methods in my choir practice with positive results. I have also conducted research into applying methodology based on Russian vocal educators V. Yemeylanov, G. Stulova and M. Karaseva in pre-school age group in 2013. The methodology was adapted for the Czech language and successfully applied in a kindergarten. After using a special set of exercises on the basis of a daily routine for a period of three months, singing ability increased significantly as all children learned how to use head voice range and sing in general. Most of the children felt good about singing and were less shy than they had been at the beginning. They had improved intonation and ability of repeating offered sounds, developed their sense of rhythm and musical memory.



Based on this experience, I would like to extend research to slightly older children. The idea is to modify the methodology of D. Ogorodnov and V. Yemelyanov for use at rehearsals, which offer the most effective opportunity for developing vocal skills. The methodology would be adapted to the Czech language and an evaluation made after its application.

My future dissertation thesis could be interesting and useful for music education students, teachers who already work with children choir or are planning to create one, choral conductors and anyone seeking new things to discover and learn in vocal education.

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