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Encyclopedia of Romantic Nationalism in Europe

National-classical music : Ukrainian

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The development of a national tradition of Ukrainian classical music in the 19th and 20th centuries was an uphill battle.

In the 19th century, western Ukraine, which under Habsburg rule enjoyed substantial cultural and civic liberties, was a hotbed for Ukrainian nation-building activity. The most significant institution in this context was the *Tovarystvo Prosvita* (Society for Enlightenment, founded in L'viv in 1868), which aimed to disseminate Ukrainian national culture to a mass audience, and amongst other things sought to offer arranged music to the villages. Composers in this area, particularly the cities Peremyšl' and L'viv, made first efforts in developing a folk-song-based national repertoire, largely aimed at amateur performance. This included Myhajlo *Verbyc'kyj* (1815–1870), the composer of Ukraine's current national anthem (*Šče ne vmerla Ukrajina!*, "Ukraine has not yet perished", 1863; on lyrics by Pavlo *Čubyns'kyj*).

In the larger part of Ukraine that fell within the Russian Empire, the official ideology promoted the idea of a fundamental kinship of the Russian and Ukrainian peoples, and "Ukrainophile" particularism was viewed with suspicion. In the second half of the century, attempts at Ukrainian cultural production were discouraged, most notoriously through the *Ems Ukaz* of 1876, which prohibited most forms of public expression in the "Little Russian dialect", including theatrical performances and printed music with words.

Folklore, however, was exempted from such restrictions, and the rich and lively traditions of Ukrainian folk-music have been appropriated for the Russian tradition no less than by the Ukrainian national movement. Just as Ukrainian songs were often included in early collections of "Russian" folk-song, *Russian composers* routinely mined Ukrainian folk-music and subjects as sources of "provincial" local colour and self-definition vis-à-vis the West. Among the most famous examples are the operas by *Rimskij-Korsakov* ("May Night", 1880; and "Christmas Eve", 1895) and *Čajkovskij* (*Čerevički*, 1887) based on the Ukrainian stories of Nikolaj *Gogol'*, whose legacy has been claimed for Ukrainian and Russian nation-building alike. The success of such works has tended to overshadow similar works by Ukrainian composers, both internationally and within the Empire.

In the 1860s and 1870s, several Ukrainian composers such as Petro *Sokal's'kyj* and Myhajlo *Kalačevs'kyj* attempted large-scale works with national subject-matter or a distinctive idiom, most of which, however, remained relatively obscure. The first widely recognized classic is *Zaporožec za Dunaem* ("The Zaporozhian Cossack Behind the Danube", 1863), a comic opera by Semen *Hulak-Artemovs'kyj*, premiered in Russian at the St Petersburg Mariinsky Theatre, where its composer was engaged as a baritone. The opera has been adopted as a cornerstone for the Ukrainian national repertoire in the Soviet era, but the opera itself, as some commentators warn, was an occasional work and in its original form hardly an expression of a Ukrainian nationalist sentiment.

Mykola *Lysenko* (1842–1912) is conventionally viewed as the proper founder of the national school of Ukrainian music, not only for the quality of his work and the breadth of his activities, but also for his nationalist and revolutionary ideals, which strained his relations with the authorities and briefly saw him imprisoned in 1907. Starting in his student days in Leipzig (1864–66), he published several collections of

Ukrainian **folk-songs**. In 1874-76, he briefly moved to the imperial capital St Petersburg to study orchestration with Rimskij-Korsakov, and then settled in Kyiv to devote himself to the cause of Ukrainian music. For the stage, Lysenko composed several comic works (including *Natalka Poltavka*, 1889) and one patriotic historical opera, *Taras Bul'ba*, based on Gogol'. He characteristically dismissed proposals to stage *Taras Bul'ba* in Russian translation, which eventually left the opera unorchestrated and unperformed until early Soviet times (1924). Like many contemporaries, Lysenko drew extensively on the work of Ukraine's national poet Taras **Ševčenko** (1814-61) for his vocal works, most notably in his cycle *Muzyka do "Kobzarja"* (1868-1903). As a composer and choral conductor, he gave an important impetus to the **choral movement** in Ukraine, and he founded a Music and Drama School (1904) as an alternative to the Imperial Russian Musical Society, which had established branches in Kyiv (1863), Kharkiv (1871) and Odessa (1884).

The first decades of the 20th century saw the formation of what might reasonably be called a Ukrainian national school, even though the independent Ukrainian Republic, which materialized out of the Revolution, was short-lived and the Ukrainian lands were soon annexed by Poland and the Soviet Union. With Lysenko's Music School and the establishment of the Kyiv and Odessa Conservatories (1913), music education vastly improved. Composers continued the paths set out by Lysenko in various ways: by continuing the tradition of choral music, drawing on folk-song as well as the 18th-century Kyivan choral concerto (*partesnyj koncert*) tradition (e.g. Stanislav **Ljudkevyč** and Mykola **Leontovyč**) or by integrating folk-style into large instrumental forms such as the symphony (Levko **Revuc'kyj**). Borys **Ljatošyn's'kyj** (1895–1968), the outstanding composer of the interwar period, focused on avant-garde instrumental works not easily related to traditions of Romantic Nationalism, but he did on occasion turn to national themes and folk-song in significant works such as "Overture on four Ukrainian Themes" (1927) and the opera "The Golden Ring" (1929).

The imposition of Socialist Realism and the crackdown on the cultural elite in the mid-1930s again posed severe strictures on the development of Ukrainian national music. Stalinist cultural policy, however, did allow for a cultivation of national culture and hero worship in the republics. This included revivals of *Zaporozec za Dunaem* and *Taras Bul'ba*, and the production of new works heavily reliant on 19th-century tradition, most notably Kostjantyn **Dan'kevyč's Bogdan Hmel'nic'kyj** (1951), which succeeded in becoming a new national opera by fuelling Ukrainian national pride on the one hand while espousing the official view of the eternal friendship between the Russian and Ukrainian peoples on the other.



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