

Krassimir Kyurkchiiski's choral arrangements: The avant-garde approach to Bulgarian choral Obrabotki

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Abstract

The music of Bulgaria is an excellent example of a complex musical tradition which combines Middle Eastern *makams* (modes), regional microtonal structures, pentatonic scales, diatonic modes, and major/minor collections. This paper explores the avant-garde approach to Bulgarian choral arrangements (*obrabotki*) pioneered by the Bulgarian composer Krassimir Kyurkchiiski. The genre of choral obrabotki was established in the early 1950s and became popular worldwide through the performances of the female choir at the Bulgarian National Radio "Le Mystère Des Voix Bulgares." This paper analyses several trend-setting obrabotki by Kyurkchiiski which defined the avant-garde style. *Kalimanku Denku* (God Mother Denku) is recognized as one of the symbols of modern Bulgarian choral traditions. In this arrangement, Kyurkchiiski sets the standards for enriching modal harmonic vocabularies through mode mixture, tonicizations, incorporation of multiple drones, vertical displacements, quintal-quartal harmony, and clusters. *More Zazheni Se Gyuro* (Hey, Gyuro Is Getting Married), is the first obrabotka that involves whole-tone based verticals. After a short reference to traditional vocal diaphony (melody and drone), Kyurkchiiski introduces palindromic structures of gradual textural expansion followed by gradual textural contraction. At the center of these palindromes, the composer uses whole-tone based sonorities. *Prochul Se Strahila* (Word Spread about Strahil) obrabotka illustrates innovative harmonic approach to makam Hicaz. Rather than exploring contrasting key areas, Kyurkchiiski plays with established listener's expectations about Hicaz harmony and deviates from the expected harmonic standards and cadences. Finally, I analyze *Zableyalo Mi Agüntse* (A Lamb Was Bleating), an obrabotka which typifies the most recent avant-garde trends of the genre. In my presentation on Kyurkchiiski's avant-garde choral arrangements, I suggest that Roman numerals, pitch-class set, and Schenkerian analyses are valid methods of examining the Bulgarian choral obrabotki if we alter some of our Western harmonic expectations to embrace modal and Middle Eastern influences in the Bulgarian musical language.

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Kalin Kirilov is an Assistant Professor at Towson University. Kalin received a B.A. from the Academy of Music in Plovdiv, Bulgaria, and a Ph.D. in Music Theory from the University of Oregon. Kalin's dissertation traces the development of harmonic languages in Bulgarian music. A master of multiple instruments, Kalin has performed extensively in Bulgaria and Western Europe. In 2003 and 2005, he toured the United States with Ivo Papazov, recipient of the 2005 BBC audience award in the "world music" category. Kalin is one of the organizers of the First International Conference on Analytical Approaches to World Music.