
In Search of the Wind-Band: An International Expedition

By Daniel Rager

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EXCERPT CHAPTER 13

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In Search of the Wind-Band: An International Expedition is a new interactive E-book, exploring 16 countries. The first-of-a-kind, interactive encyclopedic e-book uses text, video, mp3 and pdf files to bring the history and development of the wind-band to life.

The following pages contain a sample of
Chapter 13:
Russian Wind Music

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In Search of the Wind-Band: An International Expedition By Daniel Rager
EXCERPT CHAPTER 13

In Search of the Wind-band

Table of Contents

Chapter 1

- Overture (What constitutes a Wind-band)
(Questions / Assumptions / Transcriptions / Nationalism)

Chapter 2

- Introduction into European History & Development
(France, Prussia, Germany, Spain)

Chapter 3

- Historical Homogeneous Wind-Bands
(Waits, Garden Spas, Church, Court)

Chapter 4

- American Wind Music

Chapter 5

- Denmark Wind Music

Chapter 6

- Finnish Wind Music

Chapter 7

- Industry Wind Bands
(Railroad, Hospital, Police, Company, Misc.)

Chapter 8

- Ireland Wind Music

Chapter 9

- Japanese Wind Music

Chapter 10

- Mexican Wind Music

Chapter 11

- Native American Indian Wind Music

Chapter 12

- Penitentiary Wind Music
(Prison & WWI & II, Internment Camps)

Chapter 13

- Russian Wind Music

Chapter 14

- Spanish Wind Music

Chapter 15-19

- South American Wind Music
 - 16: Argentina
 - 17: Brazil
 - 18: Colombia
 - 19: Peru

Chapter 20

- Strawberry or Bubblegum
(Industry Products)

Chapter 21

- 20th Century American Wind-Band Timeline
(Events, Composers, Repertoire)
- Acknowledgments
- Forward
- Bibliography

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CHAPTER 13: Russian Wind Music

This chapter is unlike any other in the book when it comes to ideologies, education and music traditions. The mere size of Russia has contributed to its cultural diversity among its population. Russia has over 100 distinctive cultures, each having its own linguistic and ethnic developments, traditions and heritages from which to draw. Over the centuries, political turmoil, dictators and wars have created a country unlike any other. In addition, Russia's borders were closed to the west for most of the 20th century, creating alienation and deficiencies in education, as well as common opportunities for its people. One could ask whether there is one common entity or bond that holds the country together, but upon examining Russia's rich natural resources, it has cultivated all of the arts and is steeped in many musical traditions.

Its long history of music (classical/military), pre-communistic and post-communistic years, has given the world some of the greatest music written by composers of unprecedented talent. This juxtaposition is paradoxical, transcending Russia's musical future into one of uncertainty. We will discuss briefly Russia's early military wind music, its transition and music in the Soviet era, wind music since the downfall of Communism and the future of wind music.

Locating accurate historical information on wind-music in Russia is difficult for a number of reasons. Prior to the 20th century, records were not always kept and new régimes destroyed and plundered as they conquered to lead Russia. In the Soviet years, history was deliberately changed to reflect positively on the new government and, in other situations, countries under Soviet rule spilt away to create their own governments, leaving that region's history destroyed or questionable. In addition, the mere size of Russia and its many regions (twelve time zones) contain different cultures, some of which have different systems for education, including music.

Military Wind-Band

The earliest military music is said to have been formed in the province of Moscow in 1547. Little is known about it, but is believed to be influenced by Prussia (now Germany) since craftsmen from Prussia worked in Moscow in many capacities that affected Russian culture. The great fire of Moscow occurred in 1547, destroying sections of the city, which was built from wood. Months after the fire, Ivan IV (1530-84) was crowned as the first Tsar of Russia. He was a patron of the arts and considered a poet and composer of considerable talent. Soviet composer Rodion Shchedrin (1932-) has put his Orthodox liturgical hymn, "Stichiron No. 1 in Honor of St. Peter" to music. Upon special orders, Ivan IV had created a 'Big Palace' to manage Russian military music. Although Ivan IV, better known as 'Ivan the Terrible' had another side to his personality, he was the first recorded leader of Russia to dabble in music, and probably strengthened his army by incorporating musicians into it.



Kremlin Military

In Search of the Wind-Band: An International Expedition By Daniel Rager

EXCERPT CHAPTER 13

During the days of the Imperial Russian Armed Forces, military bands followed the Prussian (German) style military bands and employed the chromatic fanfare trumpet. Bands usually had a conductor, a drum major using a ceremonial mace or musician playing a chromatic fanfare trumpet. The band size during this period was small containing about 6 - 8 musicians. Military bands would eventually expand with each new ruler, as influences from within as well as other countries presented new ideas.

In 1711, the first official record of military bands is credited to Peter the Great (1672-1725). He created the first conventional army and navy to protect the country and believed music in the military was important, as it provided a means of enhancing discipline and morale in the ranks.

The first regimental bands to appear were the Semenovskiy Life Guards Regiment (stationed in St. Petersburg) and the Preobrazhenskiy Regiment (stationed in Moscow). Both were deployed during the Northern War of 1700 to 1721 and performed for the victory parades upon the war's end. Russian bands of the early 18th century remained modeled after Prussian military bands.

After the war, The 'March of the Preobrazhenskiy Regiment' was written and became quite famous. Written in the time of Peter the Great, the march was used as the unofficial national anthem of the Russian Empire, and today is played for the annual victory day parade for the trooping of colours (Russian flags and banners). There are no records of the march being officially performed during any Soviet Union parade; however, the march was performed by several Soviet military orchestras during that era.

During the reigns of Empress Elizabeth Petrovna (1709-61), Alexander I (1777-1825) and Nicholas I (1796-1855), medals were given to the regiments that had distinguished themselves in action, receiving silver trumpets of St. George that symbolized glory and military valor. The first regiment to receive an instrument was the 6th Egerskiy Regiment. In 1807 they were bestowed two trumpets inscribed with: For the heroic deeds 4 November 1805 in the battle near Schengraben, with 5000 troops against 30,000 enemies. This tradition became firmly established in the Russian Army.



Silver Trumpets of St. George

Catherine the Great (Empress Ekaterina II/1729-96) was also a patron of the arts, who advocated education and literature. Under her reign, the staff of the regimental bands was increased while the military, social, patriotic and cultural importance of military music dramatically increased during the Russian-Turkish wars...

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In Search of the Wind-Band: An International Expedition By Daniel Rager
EXCERPT CHAPTER 13

At the beginning of the 20th century, Russian military bands participated in both the Russian-Japanese War (1904-05) and World War I (1914-18). An unknown number of musicians perished in the battles. Many others received distinguished awards for their heroics, receiving Silver Trumpets of St. George.

Russian military bands began to improve by the time the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (and later Soviet) Armed Forces came into existence in 1818. As bands began to grow they needed more organization so a committee was created in 1919 known as the Military Band Bureau of the Red Army and Navy. It was tasked with centralizing management and keeping control and accountability of military music.

In 1927, Semen Chernetskiy established the 'NKVM Central Military Band'. The NKVM was the Soviet secret military police known as 'The People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs'. The new 'Central Military Band' was seen as the birth of today's Russian and ex-Soviet Union military band culture. By the 1930s, the typical Soviet Massed military bands consisted of Corps of Drums and large military wind-bands. Typical Soviet military bands of the 1930s -1940s had a drum major, conductor with an optional two or three deputy conductors marching in front of the band.

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It would be remiss not to mention the political stifling of music during this period. While military bands and other forms of classical ensembles were growing, the Stalinist régime had its grip on creativity, controlling all forms of music. All Soviet composers including Dmitri Shostakovich and Sergei Prokofiev were evaluated by the "Union of Composers USSR." Beginning in 1934, this ideological doctrine of "Socialist Realism" required composers to create music of the Communist Party. Music had to reflect patriotism and folklore that elevated the masses to support the Communist ideology. Prokofiev, among others created propaganda music to satisfy the party. Moreover, in 1948, Tikhon Khrennikov (1913-2007), was appointed head of the Composers Union by Andrei Zhdanov (1896-1948). Under his authority, Khrennikov oversaw the ousting of many composers including Prokofiev, Shostakovich, Khachaturian, Miaskovsky, Popov and Shebalin, calling them formalists. The term 'formalism' was used in the Soviet Union in reference to music that lacked appeal for the masses. Theoretically, it meant the work was too interested in elements of musical 'form' over simple, uplifting music that glorified the Soviet Union. This proscription of formalism was not restricted to just the Soviet Union but found in Poland, where composers were accused and punished for writing music that did not reflect Socialist realism. Many Polish composers including Witold Lutosławski (1913-94) and Andrzej Panufnik (1914-91), had performances of their compositions banned, and other Eastern Bloc countries experienced the same restrictions. This was a dark period in the 20th century when composing music could have the composer and his family killed, imprisoned or exiled if the state found him guilty of writing "formalism."

The ideological campaigns of 1948-49 criticized nearly all Soviet composers, banning their works from being performed. A list of composers and their Soviet works for propaganda and alike is beyond the scope of this text, but much material is available for further research. Volumes could and should be written on the untold stories of many artists, composers and alike who suffered during this era.

In Search of the Wind-Band: An International Expedition By Daniel Rager

EXCERPT CHAPTER 13

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Invalid Concerts

After the Great Patriotic War of 1812-1814 against Napoleon, military bands gave annual concerts called the "Invalid Concerts". The purpose was to commemorate the historical events of the entry of Russian troops into Paris in 1814. The money raised was given to invalids and disabled soldiers. Some 600 bands performed in these concerts that took place in St. Petersburg and Moscow. The conductors for these events included A. Dörfeldt, E. Napravnik, S. Rachmaninoff and W. Wurm, all of whom were well known contributors to the growth of Russian music. Throughout the next century from 1813 to 1914, invalid concerts were performed in cities and towns throughout Russia...

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Music Education

Russia has a long tradition of classical music and has produced many of the world's finest musicians and composers. Its conservatories were begun in the 19th century and have continued to nurture and produce talented musicians. Political and ideological differences have stifled educational growth over the past century, due to dictatorial régimes, but this is slowly changing since the downfall of the Soviet Union. Anatoly Dudin, Pro-Rector of the Conservatory at Magnitogorsk spoke in his 1999 address to the (BASBWE) British Association of Symphonic Bands and Wind Ensembles about the challenges faced in music education. New studios are being established for secondary education to teach wind and percussion to younger students. The State College of Wind Department in Moscow has developed a wind and percussion program that is in place at every central music school where there are 50 - 60 children. Dudin says that the new music education system is based on the model from the west.

While music education appears to be improving, there are other challenges beyond education. Some issues are cultural, social and economical. According to Dudin, from an early age, young people do not want to study or take up culture as a career because of low wages, a lack of social support, etc. In these conditions, many professional teachers and performers leave Russia to work abroad. Another challenge music schools face is the cost of education. Under the Soviet Union students went to school for free. Under the new system, students must pay for their education. Because many cannot afford it, enrollment has dwindled to the point that many schools are closing, particularly music conservatories. In an interview with Professor Alexander Bazikov, director of The Rachmaninoff State Academy of Music Conservatory in Tambov, Russia, told this writer that its school is actively recruiting music students from other conservatories to stay open.

Since 1990, many new wind orchestras have been established around the country including Saratov, Rostov on Don, Novgorod, Samara, Magnitogorsk, Orsk and others. This has been a blessing for those musicians who perform in such groups and an



In Search of the Wind-Band: An International Expedition By Daniel Rager
EXCERPT CHAPTER 13

opportunity for them to reach out and experience visiting conductors and musicians. Whether it is the wind ensembles in the conservatory at Magnitogorsk, directed by Anatoly Dudin, the Volga Windorchestra in Saratov founded by Anatoly Selianin in 1991 or the Surgut Wind/Orchestra of Surgut Siberia, each wind-band is forging its own path, performing a variety of quality wind literature with the help of guest musicians and conductors from the west. The current model of student and professional wind ensembles reflects that of any western ensemble. They are professional sounding and perform the genre's greatest literature.

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For more information, or to purchase the *In Search of the Wind-Band*, contact Daniel Rager at windbandhistory@gmail.com

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