EAST OF THE EAST: THE ORIENT OF IMPERIAL RUSSIA IN THE COMIC OPERA *FEVEJ* (1786) BY VASILIJ ALEKSEJEVIČ PAŠKEVIČ

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Abstract: Fevej *(1786), a comic opera by the Russian composer Vasilij Aleksejevič Paškevič (ca. 1749–1797), is based on the dramatic work* Skazka o careviče Feveje *('The tale of Prince Fevej', 1783) by Empress Catherine II. It is regarded not only as one of the earliest Russian fairytale operas, but also as one of the first 'oriental' Russian operas. Interestingly, this work was written as early as the second half of the eighteenth century. In Russia, this was a time of great economic and cultural expansion, which also witnessed the promotion of enlightment ideas through theatre and music. Prominent institutions such as the Bol'šoj ('Grand') Theatre and the Hermitage Theatre were established during this period; it was also here that operas and other forms of stage music were performed. With her own dramatic works, Catherine II made a contribution to their repertoire. Some of these works served as libretti for comic operas with an educational aim, dedicated to her grandchildren. The opera* Fevej *is a story about the teenage Siberian Prince Fevej's dream about the exotic Princess Danna and his fantasy to discover and travel to distant places. His father, the Siberian Tsar Tao-au, together with the empress, succeed in their attempt to prevent their son's departure thanks to the help of their advisor Rešemysl ('resolute thinker', 'voice of reason'), who arranges Fevej's marriage with Princess Danna. Although a Siberian emperor's family is – from a Western point of view – already exotic enough a subject, they have their own exotic Other: Kalmyk ambassadors at the emperor's court and a group of Tatars. The Other is presented in several numbers of the opera, the most characteristic of which is the Chorus of the Kalmyks, an embodiment of the Mongolian world. Due to the specifics characteristics of Russian comic opera – presence of folk music, popular songs – both the Self and the Other have their own distinct musical spheres in the opera. Their harmonious co-existence shows that the treatment of the East in the specific Russian context reveals a kind of self-orientalization.*

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Fevej, a comic opera by Vasilij Aleksejevič Paškevič based on the libretto by Empress Catherine the Great (Catherine II, born Sophie Friederike Auguste von Anhalt-Zerbst, 1729–1796, reigned 1762–1796), is regarded not only as the first Russian

fairytale opera, but also as one the first 'oriental' Russian operas.[1] This work, according to Warrack,

> not only contrasts a Russian musical idiom with an 'Oriental' one, but makes some use of the idea of accompanying a repeating folk melody with a changing background – a technique that arises from Russian folk music and was brought to prominence by Glinka.[2]

Interestingly, *Fevej* was written as early as the second half of the eighteenth century – in a style close to Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*, composed four years earlier – and can be seen as a precursor of the characteristic nineteenth-century Russian opera style. It is also one of only three operas that were published in Russia in the eighteenth century.

POLITICAL AND CULTURAL LIFE IN RUSSIA DURING THE REIGN OF EMPRESS CATHERINE II

In Russia, the eighteenth century was a time of great economic and cultural expansion. Catherine II continued the cultural policy of Peter the Great (reigned 1682–1725) of Europeanization and Russification, as well as encouraging Russianization. Up to this time, Russia was frequently understood as an Asiatic culture and hence as part of the oriental world.[3] This was not only because of its geographical position and its relations with the Far East, but also because of the predominant Orthodox religion; more precisely, the Orthodox Church objected to the drive for Westernization in the second half of the eighteenth century, since it saw the Latin influence as a possible threat to herself and to Russia in general. Nevertheless, political, military and cultural efforts by the empress also resulted in a strengthening of Russia's position in Europe.

During her 34-year long reign, regarded as a 'golden age' in Russian history, the territory of her empire was significantly expanded: following the First Russo-

1 In this paper I have used a system of transliteration for Russian personal names, names of the compositions and the institutions in accordance to the ISO 9/1995 standard.

2 John Warrack: "Russian opera", in: *A History of Russian Theatre*, ed. Robert Leach and Victor Borovsky. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 200.

3 "[Louis-Philippe, comte de] Ségur had a name for the space that he discovered when he seemed to leave Europe but still remained in Europe; eventually he located himself in 'the east of Europe', which in French, as *l'orient de l'Europe*, offered also the potently evocative possibility of the 'the Orient of Europe'." Cf. Larry Wolff: *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994, p. 6.

Turkish War (1768–1774), Russia got direct access to the Black Sea, having conquered southern Ukraine, the northern Caucasus and the Crimea. Under Catherine II's auspices, several expeditions were sent to study the culture, languages, and religions of Slavs, Tatars, Cossacks, and Mongols in the eastern or northern parts of the Russian Empire. During her reign, the relations with non-Christians were much more tolerant than before. The first academic expeditions (1761–1802), both scientific and ethnographic, were organized by her – now led by Russians rather than foreigners. These were critical monuments in the genesis of a national identity.[4]

> Ethnographic exploration was part of multifaceted project of self-discovery, intrinsically linked to literary and historical debates, which allowed the development of a sense of the Self based on the knowledge of Russia's own territorial domains and cultural resources, including both its Asiatic and European characteristics.[5]

Along with the expansion to the East and the study of eastern cultures, Catherine II strongly fostered enlightment thought through direct contacts with leading French philosophers, such as Voltaire and Diderot. She even modelled her progressive social reforms in the *Nakaz* (Instructions for the Guidance of the Assembly, 1766) mainly after Montesquieu's ideas. In the very first sentence of this text, the empress defined Russia as a 'European nation'. Her political and cultural promotion of Russia placed St. Petersburg and Moscow on the map of European cultural centres. Voltaire wrote to her in 1722, "you make your court the most delightful in Europe, while your troops are the most formidable"[6].

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4 Russian identity was formed over a long historical period and is characterized by its complexity and deep division between East and West: "The idea of theocratic absolutism, maintained by the Riurik dynasty and culminating in Ivan the Terrible's rule, crystallized Russian identity as inseparable from Orthodox and was personified in the Tsar, ordained by God to rule the land … Although Peter broke the church's dominance, he could not eradicate this thorny duality between *religious–national–old (stable) and secular–extraneous–new (changeable)*, and it was this antinomy that constituted one of the important factors that prevented Russia from completely joining Western Europe … It is thus hardly surprising that two identities took shape long before Petrine Russia: the first – that of the Orthodox Church sanctifying the old Byzantine values, and the second – secular and/or Western-oriented." Cf. Marina Ritzarev: *Eighteenth-Century Russian Music*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006, p. 10.

5 Giulia Cecere: "Russia and its 'Orient'. Ethnographic Exploration of the Russian Empire in the Age of Enlightenment", in: *The Anthropology of the Enlightenment*, ed. Larry Wolff and Marco Cipolloni. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007, p. 199.

6 Voltaire's letter to Catherine the Great, March 12, 1772, is quoted in: Lurana Donnels O'Malley: *The Dramatic Works of Catherine the Great: Theatre and Politics in Eighteenth-Century Russia*. Burlington: Ashgate, 2006, p. 6.

Enlightenment ideas were promoted also through her general cultural policy, in particular through theatre and musical life. During the reign of Catherine II, there were the so-called Stone and Wooden theatres (where Locatelli's company performed opera buffa), as well as a permanent Russian theatre established in 1756. The Stone Theatre, the first music theatre in Russia, with 2000 seats, was constructed according to Catherine II's orders. Completed in 1783, it came to be known as the Bol'šoj teatr (Grand Theatre), and in 1896 was replaced by the Conservatory. She also established the Hermitage Theatre in her Winter Palace, which in 1785 replaced an earlier house constructed in 1763. The Hermitage Theatre was the site of numerous court performances: plays by the Russian and Italian court troupes were staged there, as well as musicals and dramas, including presentations of the empress's own plays and operas. Therefore, theatre and musical life there was comparatively rich, demonstrated also by a report about the repertoire from the *Sankt Peterburgskie vedomosti* ('St. Petersburg Gazette') in 1783:[7]

Stone Theatre (1783)	Tuesday: Russian comedies with ballet Friday: Italian comic opera with ballet
Wooden Theatre (1783)	Wednesday: German comedies with ballet Saturday: French comedies with ballet Sunday: Russian comedies with ballet Monday: one of the previous, without ballet

The empress formalized theatrical training in Russia by founding the Imperial Theatrical School for actors, singers, and dancers in 1779.

She also made a direct contribution to the theatre repertoire through her own dramatic works, some of which served as libretti for comic operas, thus promoting "her Enlightenment belief in the value of education for her entire populace"[8]. Three works to the libretti by Empress Catherine were written with the help of her

7 "*Sankt Petersburgskie vedomosti* (The St. Petersburg Gazette) (in 1914–17 Petrogradskie vedomosti), one of the oldest Russian newspapers, appearing since April 1728 in the Petersburg Academy of Sciences Press in Russian and German languages, and was the successor of the Petersburg's first newspaper Vedomosti. Following its first editor, academy member G. F. Miller, among others Y. Y. Shtelin I. F. Bogdanovich held the position in the 18th century. In 1728–42 the paper published its supplement Primechaniya k Vedomostyam being the first journal in the Russian language (the name repeatedly changed). In the 18th century the paper came out twice a week, from 1800 circulated as a daily." *The Encyclopaedia of Saint Petersburg* http://enc-dic.com/enc_spb/Sankt-peterburgskie-vedomosti-1437.html

8 O'Malley: *The Dramatic Works of Catherine the Great*, p. 2.

literary secretary Aleksandr Hrapovickij: 1) *Fevej* (1786, music by V. A. Paškevič);[9] 2) *Načal'noe upravlenie Olega* ('The beginning of Oleg's reign', 1790; choir text by Mihail Lomonosov and Euripides, music by V. A Paškevič with Carlo Cannobio and Giuseppe Sarti); and 3) *Fedul s det'mi* ('Fedul and his children', 1791, music by V. A. Paškevič and Martín y Soler).

The music for these three comic operas was written by one of the leading opera composers of the time, Vasilij Alekseevič Paškevič, however, only the first opera was composed solely by him.[10] Paškevič (ca. 1749–1797) was a composer as well as a singer, actor, violin player, court Kapellmeister, and the empress's favourite Russian composer. Although his biography has not yet been completely reconstructed, it is known that his duties at the court started with the position of violin player in the ball orchestra (1776). Subsequently, he worked as composer and director of the orchestra at Knipper's Free Theatre and, in 1789, was appointed music director for court balls.[11] He composed music for eight operas, starting with *Neŝast' je ot karety* ('Misfortune from a coach', performed in 1779 at the Hermitage Theatre), for three of which, including one of his later operas, *Fevej*, he was the sole author.

DEPICTING THE SELF THROUGH THE SIBERIAN COURT

The drama *O careviče Feveje* was dedicated to, and sought to influence, Catherine II's grandson Aleksandr. Hence the choice of a fairytale to communicate what she perceived as the highest political and moral values is understandable. Through the communicativeness of the simple plot, folk songs, and ballet spectacle, the drama is close to sentimentalism, which replaced classicism as the dominant style in literature and theatre in the last third of the eighteenth century. Rejecting a differentiation between the 'high' and the 'low' in art, sentimentalists endeavoured to bring art as close to life as possible. Theatre was richly significant as a reflection of the social values and political ideology of the times.[12]

9 The source of the story about Fevej is Catherine II's original fairytale '*The Tale of Prince Khlor*' (*Skazka Carevič Hlor*, 1781). Later on, the empress wrote a new tale, a continuation of the tale about the little prince, who became the fifteen-year-old Fevej. Cf. Inna Naroditskaya: *Bewitching Russian Opera: The Tsarina from State to Stage*. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2012, p. 89.

10 Beside Paškevič, the most prominent eighteenth century Russian opera composers were Dmitrij Stepanovič Bortnjanskij (1751–1825) and Jevstignej Ipat'jevič Fomin (1761–1800).

11 A. L. Porfir'eva: "Paškevič, Vasilij Alekseevič", in: *Muzikal'nyj Peterburg: Enciklopedičeskij slovar'*, vol. 2 (K–P). Saint Petersburg: Kompozitor, 1998, pp. 340–344.

12 Victor Borovsky: "The Emergence of the Russian Theatre, 1763–1800", in: Leach and Borovsky:

This was precisely the aim of the author: to praise virtues such as family, matrimonial love, and the rightfulness of a merciful emperor. The story is about the fifteen-year old Siberian Prince Fevej who, inspired by a dream about an exotic princess, wishes to leave his country and to discover and travel to distant places. His father, the Siberian Tsar Tao-au, together with his tsarina, succeeds in preventing their son's departure from home with the help of their advisor Rešemysl ('resolute thinker', 'voice of reason'), who arranges Fevej's marriage with Princess Danna, the girl from Fevej's dream.

The use of a Siberian royal family was not accidental, but rather represented a particular symbolic significance in a Russian context: the 1552 conquest of Kazan had opened Siberia to Russia and eastward expansion into this vast region became an important mainstay of Russian identity.[13] From a Western point of view, a Siberian emperor and his family alone may have been perceived as exotic enough, but in this Russian opera even the Siberians have exotic Others: Kalmyk ambassadors, a group of Tatars, and an eastern princess named Danna.

Thus the Self in this opera is represented not only by the emperor, the empress and their son Prince Fevej, but also by people of the Siberian court. This sphere is signified by idyllic scenes of a strong and peaceful empire, a perfect marriage, gentle and caring parents with an obedient son who expresses virtues and decent behaviour under all circumstances, even when confronted with a savage group of Tatars. This world of the Self is presented by the music numbers of the empress and the emperor – both in duets and their arias respectively – and the courtiers, including in some cases Russian folk songs. The only shadow in this perfect world appears in the very first music number, Fevej's aria, in which his wish to leave his parents and travel to distant (eastern) places is expressed. As a consequence, the plot starts immediately, resulting in a juxtaposition to the exposition of the characters.

The first part of the opera, that is, the first and second acts, is the space of the Self. The most interesting music number in this part is certainly the aria by Ledmer, "a song consisting of ostinato-variations on a folklike tune about neighbours, often cited by historians of Russian music as the earliest ancestor of Glinka's orchestral work *Kamarinskaâ*"[14]. This aria, based on two four-bar phrases, is followed by a folk dance.[15]

A History of Russian Theatre, p. 58.

13 See O'Malley: *The Dramatic Works of Catherine the Great*, p. 85.

14 Richard Taruskin: "Pashkevich, Vasily Alexeyevich", in: *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*. 2nd ed., ed. Stanley Sadie, vol. 19. London: Macmillan, 2001, p. 183.

15 I have used the piano score of the opera: Vasilij Paškevič: *Opera komičeskaâ Fevej*. Saint Petersburg: Tipografiâ Gornago učiliŝa, 1789.

As some Russian musicologists, such as Ûrij Keldyš, have noted, other folk songs are used by Paškevič at other points in this opera. The two folk melodies Keldyš had in mind are used at a very appropriate moment – when the court ladies Miâ and Naâ tried to convince Fevej not to leave their homeland;[16] in addition, there is one, which 'does not belong to the primordial Russian melodies'[17]. The presence of folk music is brought up also in the context of a 'sequence of fresh and interesting moments'[18] in the opera.

It is precisely this discourse of Russian traditional music that was the only aspect in the opera to be approved of by musicologists in the Soviet Union. All other aspects of the libretto and music were evaluated negatively. It was claimed, for instance, that the empress's libretto was of very doubtful artistic quality, including senseless comedy of lavish court ballet[19] and 'conservative'[20], 'impersonal' music of 'gallant lyricism'[21], typical of the eighteenth-century arts. Paškevič was actually regarded as a 'realist', which was the most positive remark in music criticism in the Soviet Union, but 'unspeakably' poor libretto did not allow him to show his talents.[22]

DEPICTING THE OTHER: TATARS AND KALMYKS

The Other is represented first by somewhat inaccurate images of a distant country in the East through negative and positive aspects of the orientalism. Moreover, the Other is found placed not only in the East, but also in the South-East, even the West, if Siberia is taken as the centre.

Insight into the history of Western Mongols, Kalmyks or Oirats, and their relation to Russia, especially since the seventeenth century when they settled near the Volga river,[23] shows a fascinating actuality of the drama, that is, the opera *Fevej*. Namely,

16 According to Keldyš, these two folk songs are "Molodka molodaâ" and "Ah ty, dušen'ka, krasna devica". Cf. Û. Keldyš: *Istoriâ russkoj muzyki*, vol. 1. Moscow, Leningrad: Gosudarstvennoe muzykal'noe izdatel'stvo, 1948, p. 209.

17 A. S. Rabinovič: *Russkaâ opera do Glinki*. Moscow: MUZGIZ, 1948, p. 63.

18 Keldyš: *Istoriâ russkoj muzyki*, p. 209. Naroditskaja mentions six folk songs woven into the libretto of *Fevej*. Naroditskaya: *Bewitching Russian Opera*, p. 96.

19 Keldyš: *Istoriâ russkoj muzyki*, p. 209.

20 T. Livanova: *Russkaâ muzykal'naja kul'tura XVIII veka v eë svâzah s literaturom, teatrom i bytom*, vol. 2. Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe muzykal'noe izdatel'stvo, 1953, p. 178.

21 Rabinovič: *Russkaâ opera do Glinki*, p. 63.

22 Ibidem, p. 62.

23 "The appearance of the Kalmyks near the Volga River in the early seventeenth century represented the last wave in the traditional pattern of migration of nomads from their homeland in Inner

Catherine II was herself engaged with Tatars, Kalmyks and other people in Russian territories that she wanted to 'civilize'. Her politics were also presented on stage: while the relations with Tatars were problematic because of their insubordination to Russia, the situation with Kalmyks was better, since they struggled with Russia against the Ottomans. Indeed, they were presented accordingly in the opera.

References and hints of the Other can be seen throughout the first two acts:

1. **Aria Fevej**: a dream about a distant land he would like to learn about, to find out about its court, army, joy, nature: the East is introduced as a place where a wonderful princess lives through the fantasy, as an object of interest and longing (by means typical of the Classical style);

8. **Quartet Miâ, Naâ, Tina, Fevej**: the three girls promise the empress to convince Fevej not to leave his home, they talk about the beauties of Siberia (2/4, C major), but Fevej does not want to listen to them and at the same time mentions the distant country in a more concrete way (the place where mountains are high, meadows are big, the sea is deep, the cities exciting) and promises to bring them lavish gifts (6/8, G major);

11. **Aria Rešemysl** (hint of denouement): he mentions a 'foreign, alien, distant, unknown country', where one cannot feel at home (modulation d minor–F major, minor second 'trembling' in semiquavers); the future bride is mentioned for the first time in the spoken dialogue after this aria: she should be good, pleasant, graceful, and should have white face;

(12. **Chorus** about the beautiful future bride of Fevej);

(14. **Aria Fevej**: mentions the princess from his dream).

After these hints, the second part of the opera (that is, the third and fourth acts) is reserved for the appearance of the Other, the three Kalmyk ambassadors, and later the Princess Danna. Symbolically, both sides are finally united by the wedding of Danna and Fevej. Thus the more exotic people – at least compared with the Siberian

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Asia to the Caspian steppes." As Khodarovsky also points out, "It was only in the course of the nineteenth century that the Kalmyks adopted the name *Kalmyk* to identify themselves. Even then it was predominantly used in relations with outsiders and with neighboring states." Michael Khodarovsky: *Where Two Worlds Met: The Russian State and the Kalmyk Nomads, 1600–1771*. Ithaca, London: Cornell University Press, 2006, p.1.

The fact that Catherine II used the term 'Kalmyk' instead of 'Oirat' shows that she had a presentation of the empire to international spectators in mind.

court representing St. Petersburg – are introduced. While the Kalmyk ambassadors are musically exhibited in a way that one could describe as 'positive orientalism' – they are barbarians, but friends – the image of another group, Tatar traders, is drawn in a more negative light. Consequently, the Tatars appear only in spoken dialogue (in which they threaten to kidnap Fevej) without music. In spite of the unpleasant experience, Fevej – as any merciful ruler in an eighteenth-century opera would – asks the court guard to let them go without reprimand.

The Kalmyk ambassadors come to ask the Siberian (or Russian) emperor for a favour: they request an extension of their territory. Given that they were at that time a "totally nomadic society"[24], this request could have only meant that they needed the emperor's allowance to move through wider space, which was not a very demanding wish. After receiving many 'exotic' presents typical of the Kalmyk culture, the emperor not only grants them their wish, but also presents them with a big feast. The Kalmyk ambassadors, announced to the emperor as young people with big fore-heads covered by winter fur hats, express their gratitude and joy through folk dance and song.

This episode is a further documentary detail in which the Siberian (Russian) court is presented in a most positive light. Kalmyk embassies namely followed certain etiquette when they visited the Russian or some other court. Usually they were not received by the emperor, but rather by a high-ranking court representative.

> The presentation of the gifts was an important part of the diplomatic ritual. For the Kalmyks, each gift had a symbolic significance. The most common Kalmyk gifts were horses, sabers, bows and arrows, and saddles. Offerings of Chinese or Bukharan handicrafts, expensive brocades, silk, or musk were rarer … The presentation of nine gifts meant particularly friendly intentions.[25]

The opera scene of the Kalmyk ambassadors' appearance is set very much in accordance with actual practices, including the aforementioned 'rare' cases (they were received by the emperor personally and brought the most precious gifts). The Kalmyks are presented as slightly awkward when they enter the emperor's room – the three ambassadors simultaneously talk about different issues, which produces a

24 "The Kalmyks were organized into a loose confederation of tribes with no urban centers or even winter headquarters where hay could be stored. Instead, they followed seasonal migration routes throughout the entire year. Kalmyk society of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was totally nomadic society." Khodarovsky: *Where Two Worlds Met*, p. 15.

25 Ibidem, p. 61. Interestingly enough, certain presents, such as sword or bow "served to underscore commitment to a military alliance". Cf. BA: *Nâme-i Hümayun*, in: Ibidem, p. 61.

comic effect: while the first kindly expresses wishes from Tao-au, the second asks the emperor to serve them food and drink, and the third lists all the gifts they have brought – all almost at the same time. Among the presents are a sabre, a bow, a horse, a kind of tent, a blanket of sable's fur, sixty ells of Chinese silk, fifty ells of expensive blue brocades, caps of sable fur with velvet at the top, astrakhan sashes and golden vodka – even more than nine. Obviously, the empress Catherine II was not only excellently informed about the results of the mentioned expeditions, but also promoted her political ideas very seriously and consequently even in a fairytale comic opera.

The eight stanzas of the Kalmyk choir are obviously variations of the first one, based on the repeating four out of five lines (see Example 1, Example 2). The musical form is constructed in the same way, typical for folk dances: the units consisting of two measures are multiply repeated or slightly varied, with drone octaves (G major tonic), and also a characteristic reverse of the dotted rhythm. There are no extensive studies about this opera, and in short reviews in several histories of Russian music or certain articles, the opera is mentioned mainly because of this music number (if mentioned at all), designated as the first expression of the Russian opera orientalism and exoticism, later characteristic of fairytale operas by Glinka or Rimskij-Korsakov. Both worlds in the opera are presented by (early-) classical musical means, symmetrical phrases, simple harmonies including modulation to the closest tonalities and also by the folk songs and dances.

RECEPTION OF THE OPERA *FEVEJ*

It was unusual that the opera *Fevej* was premiered at the public Stone Theatre in April 1786, was then performed at the Hermitage three days later and afterwards remained in the repertoire for an entire decade. The Hermitage Theatre was used for ceremonial performances in the presence of the diplomatic corps, however, this opera was presented also for the nobility and foreign ambassadors at the court. Some of them wrote about their delightful impressions. According to these reports about the court spectacle performances, oriental aspects were also expressed in the iconography of the opera. The performance of the opera *Fevej* in 1791 at the Hermitage Theatre was attended by the ambassador of Louis XVI at the Russian court, Count Valentin Esterházy, who reported of the spectacle in a letter:

> Hier, j'y ai été encore à un opéra russe don't la musique est toute des anciens airs du pays … Les paroles sont de Sa Majesté. Le spectacle est superbe. La

scène se passe en Russie dans l'ancien temps. Tous les costumes sont de la plus grande magnificence, faits d'étoffes turques de ce temps-lá et comme on les portait alors. Il y a une ambassade de Kalmouks qui chantent et dansent à la manière tartare, des Kamtschadale vètus à la manière du pays et dansant aussi lec danses du nord de l'Asie … On y voit les peuples différents qui composent l'empire, chacun avec ses habillements. Je n'ai jamais vu un spectacle plus varié et plus magnifique; il y avait plus de cinq cents personnes sur le théatre et quoique les petits Grand-ducs et les quatre petites Grandes-duchesses y fussent, avec leurs gouverneurs et leurs gouvernantes, nous n'étions par cinquante spectateurs, tant l'Impératrice est difficile pour ceux qu'elle admet dans ses Ermitages.[26]

('Yesterday I was at the Russian opera, all the music of which was composed of ancient native melodies … The libretto is written by Her Majesty … The setting was magnificent. The scene took place in Russia in ancient times. All the splendid costumes were prepared with the greatest luxury from Turkish fabrics, identical with those which are worn there. There were Kalmyk ambassadors, who were singing and dancing with Tatar melodies, as well as Kamchadali who were dressed in national costumes and also performed dances of Northern Asia … In the closing ballet were represented all the different peoples inhabiting the Empire, each in his own peculiar dress. I have never seen a spectacle more varied and wonderful; on the stage were more than five hundred people. In the auditorium, however, although the young princes and the four noble princesses with their governors and governesses were all assembled there, there could not have been more than fifty spectators, so rigid is the Empress in the manner of access to her Hermitage.')[27]

The opera's splendid performance is confirmed in another diplomatic source:

The magnificence of the theatres, and the sums that have been expended on them, surpass every possible description. I was present at the representation of the pieces *Olga* and *Fevey*, written by the empress herself, and played with a perfection worthy of the author … *Fevey* is not less interesting: it exhibits the different costumes, usages, and dances, of all the nations in subjection to

26 *Lettres du comte Valentin Esterhazy à sa femme 1784–1792*, ed. Ernest Daudet. Paris: Plon-Nouritt et Comte, 1907, pp. 318–319.

27 The translation into English appears in: O'Malley: *The Dramatic Works of Catherine the Great*, 175. This description is also quoted in a book by Inna Naroditskaya, but under the wrong name of Victor Esterházy. Cf. Naroditskaya: *Bewitching Russian Opera*, p. 86.

> Russia. This mixture forms the most striking and agreeable *coup d'œil*. The illusion is even carried so far, as to have imitated the scenery of the countries, represented as much to the life as the costume and dresses. This exhibition concluded with the most delightful ballets.[28]

Due to the specifics of this Russian comic opera – namely the presence of folk music and popular songs – both the Self and the Other have their own musical spheres in the opera, but they are not all different from each other. Their harmonious co-existence shows that the treatment of the oriental world in a Russian context assumes a kind of self-orientalization – an 'exotic self' from the Western point of view.[29]

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29 David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye: *Russian Orientalism: Asia in the Russian Mind from Peter the Great to the Emigration*. New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 2010, pp. 199–223. "Balakirev did not see the Oriental style as a means for representing a separate, alien people, and Other, in current parlance, but as an essential component of musical Russianness." In: Marina Frolova Walker: *Russian Music and Nationalism from Glinka to Stalin*. New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 2008, p. 153.

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Example 1. V. A. Paškevič, *Fevej*: No. 22. Hor Kalmyckoj ('Kalmyk choir'), text.

V narode vo Kalmyckom	('The Kalmyk people
Kušaût kajmak,	Eat kajmak,
Sul'âk i turmak,	Sul'jak and turmak,
Tabak kurât,	Smoke tobacco,
Kumys varât.	Boil koumis.
Pri reke ležal kamen'.	Near the river there was a stone.
Tut eli kajmak,	There they ate kajmak,
Sul'âk i turmak,	Sul'jak and turmak,
Tabak kurili,	Smoked tobacco,
Kumys varili.	Boiled koumis.
Na tom kamne Kalmyčka	A Kalmyk girl was sitting on the stone
Glotala kajmak,	She ate kajmak,
Sul'âk i turmak,	Sul'jak and turmak,
Tabak kurila,	She smoked tobacco,
Kumys varila.	She boiled koumis.
(solo) Prihodil k nej Kalmzčok,	A Kalmyk guy came to her,
Poprosil kajmak,	asked for kajmak,
Sul'âk i turmak,	Sul'jak and turmak,
(tutti) Tabak pokurit',	To smoke tobacco,
Kumys povarit'.	To boil koumis.
(solo) Ty čto činiš' devočka,	What are you doing, girl,
Ty ela kajmak,	You ate kajmak,
Sul'âk i turmak,	Sul'jak and turmak,
(Solo+Tutti) Tabak pokurila,	You smoked tobacco,
Kumys povarila.	You boiled koumis.
(Solo) Cvetočki rvu, venočki v'ju:	I pick flowers, make the wreaths,
Ja em kajmak,	I eat kajmak,
Sul'âk i turmak,	Sul'jak and turmak,
(Tutti) Tabak pokurû,	I smoke tobacco,
Kumys povarû.	I boil koumis.

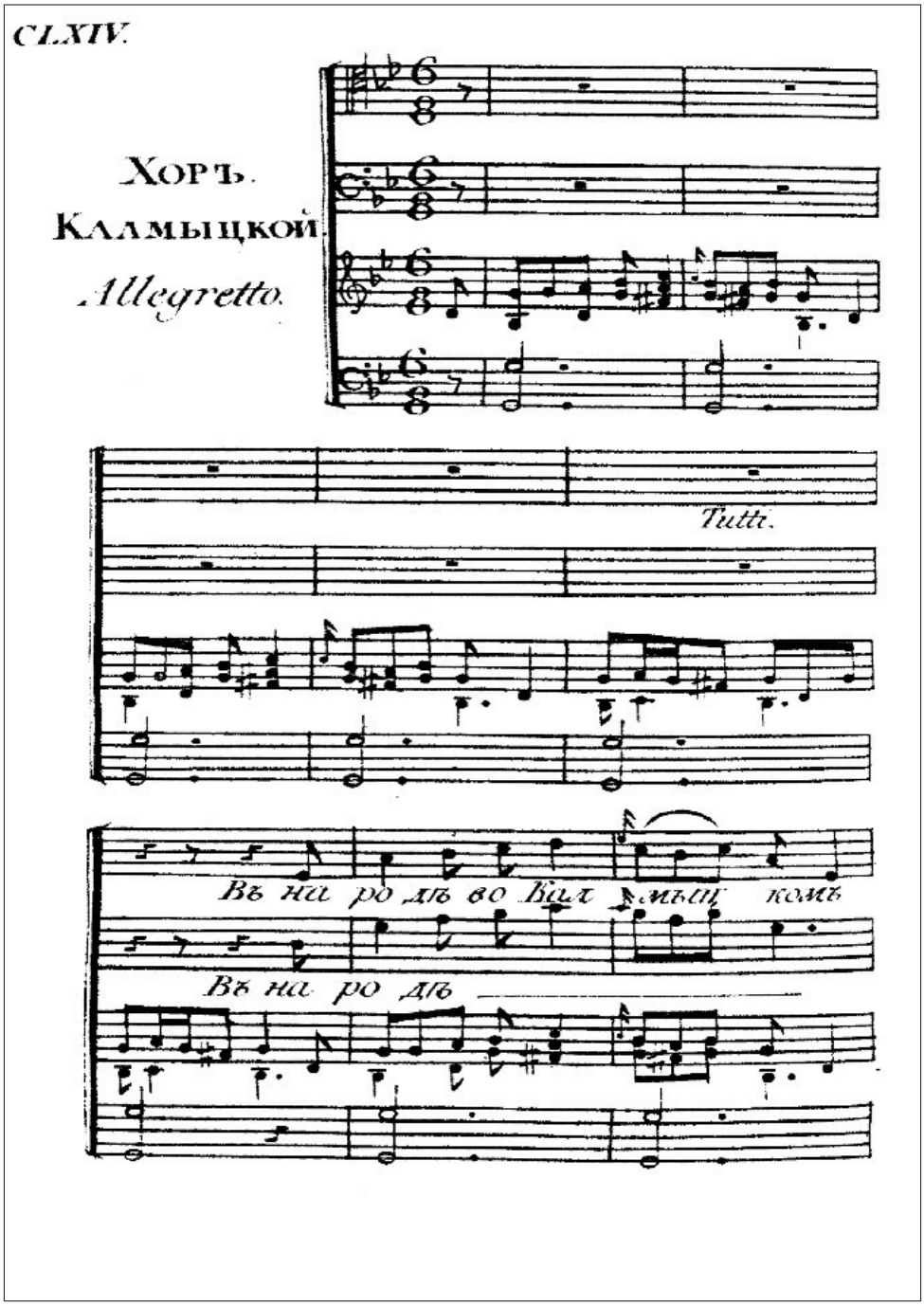
(Solo) Daj mne hot' edin cvetok.
Ty eš' kajmak,
Sul'âk i turmak,
(Tutti) Tabak pokuriš',
Kumys povariš.

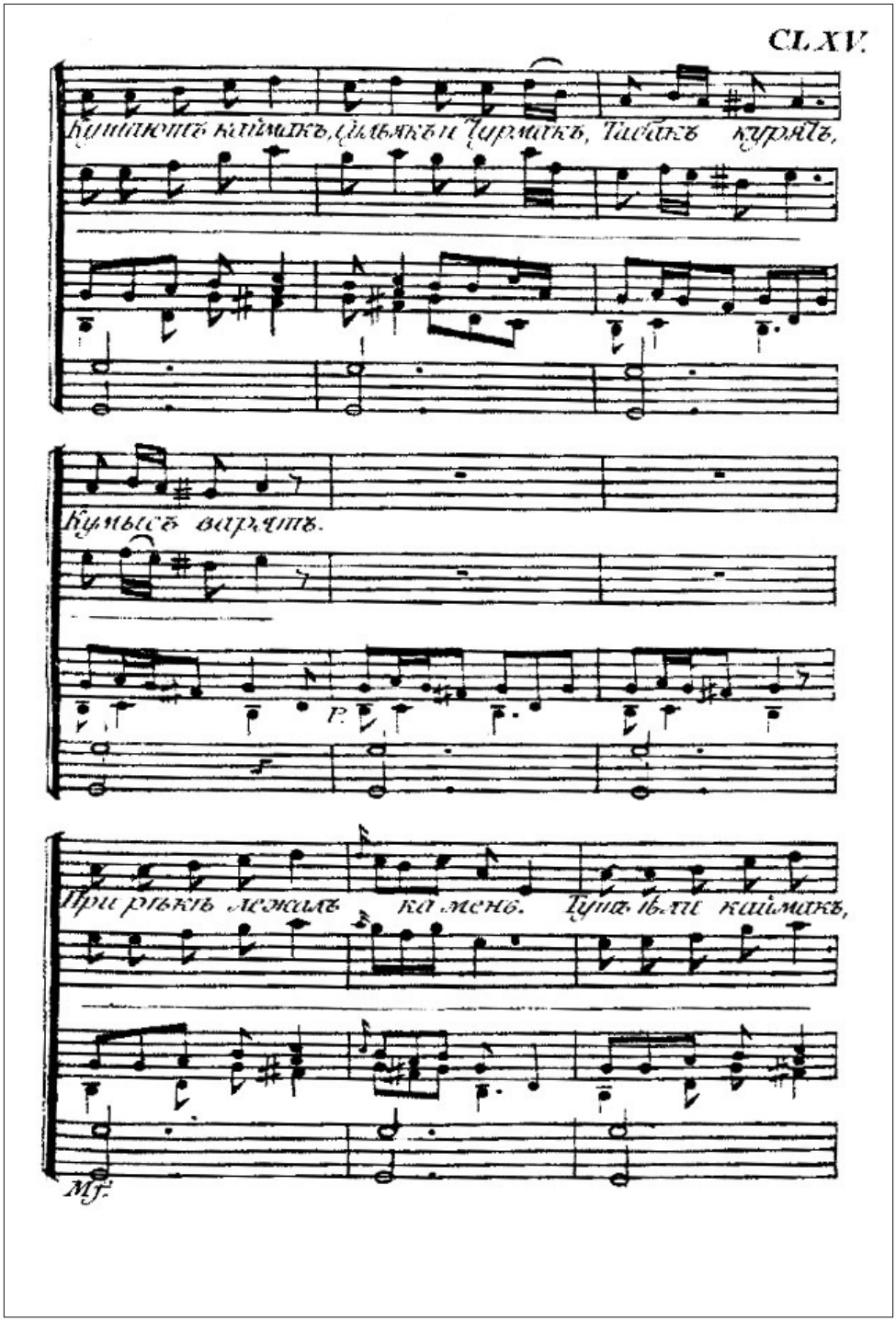
Ne tokmo edin, hot' vse vozmi,
Beri kajmak,
Sul'âk i turmak,
Tabak pokurim,
Kumys povarim.

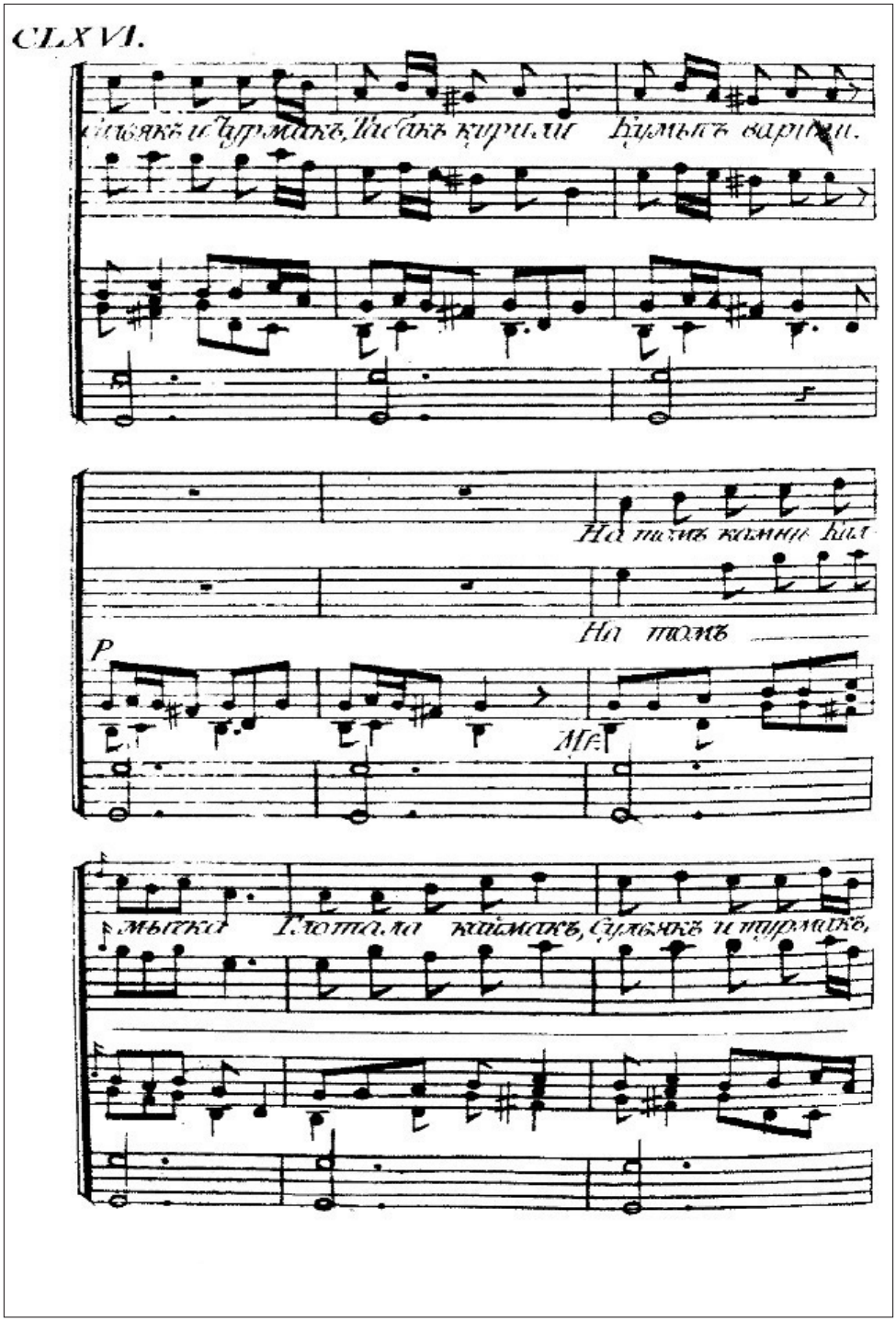
Give me but a single flower,
You eat kajmak,
Sul'jak and turmak,
You smoke tobacco,
You boil koumis.

Not just one, but take them all,
Take the kajmak,
Sul'jak and turmak,
We shall smoke tobacco,
We shall boil koumis.')

Example 2. V. A. Paškevič, *Fevej*: No. 22. Hor Kalmyckoj ('Kalmyk choir'), m. 1–26.




CLXV.
Кушаютъ каймакъ, сальякъ и чуреакъ, Табакъ курятъ,
Кумысъ варятъ.
При рѣкѣ лежалъ камень. Тутъ былъ каймакъ,


CLXVI.
На тихъ камни бил
На тихъ
Мы