

Decentralising via Russia:

Glinka's *A Life for the Tsar* in Nice, 1890

Published *Cambridge Opera Journal*, Vol.27, No.1 (March 2015), pp.35-62

Abstract On 30 January 1890, the audience at the Théâtre Municipal in Nice witnessed something extraordinary. Midway through the first public performance of a Russian opera in France, Glinka's *A Life for the Tsar*, the chorus and orchestra broke into a rendition of the Russian national anthem, followed by the 'Marseillaise'. Both anthems were then repeated, with the audience calling out 'Vive la Russie!', 'Vive la France!' With France and Russia on the verge of an historic alliance, the evening was proclaimed a political and an artistic triumph. The success of this unusual event, I suggest, can be explained further by considering the context of operatic decentralisation in France, in conjunction with the arrival of the new director at the Théâtre, Raoul Gunsbourg. As a result of local and personal imperatives, the performance came to resonate nationally, with *A Life* serving as an unlikely emblem of modernity, while also bringing one peripheral French region strongly into Paris's purview.

In 1891, *Charme dangereux*, the latest release from the prolific novelist André Theuriet, hit the shelves. It told the story of a staid Parisian, Jacques, who succumbs to the charms of a mysterious Russian princess, the unforgettably named Mania Liebling, while vacationing in Nice. She first catches his eye at the Théâtre Municipal during a performance of *Don Giovanni*:

After the conclusion of the *trio des masques*, the singers were recalled and an ovation was given to Ludkof. All of a sudden, from amid the upstanding crowd, voices called for ‘the Russian anthem!’ The curtain, already half dropped, rose, the soloists and choir reappeared on the stage and the orchestra struck up the first bars of the Russian national air. In the blink of an eye, the whole room was on its feet, and it made a striking effect: the sight of these three tiers of boxes, decorated with bare-shouldered young ladies, applauding with excitement. With each word of the hymn, the demonstration heightened, the audience in the orchestra stalls letting out loud cheers and stamping their feet. An electric thrill shook all these souls. Mouths opened wide to hurl out acclamations, ladies tore the flowers from their corsages and threw them onto the stage, men frantically waved their hats. Jacques looked to the box on the first level; the unknown woman in white, eyes lit up, breast heaving, had torn off her gloves and was striking the palms of her little bare hands together, as if to bruise them...¹

Beyond its function as a rather unsubtle plot device, this outpouring of enthusiasm for Russia might seem incongruous. Yet Theuriet’s description is made up of near-direct quotes from newspaper reports of a real-life event: on 30 January 1890,² midway through the French-

¹ ‘Après le finale du *trio des masques*, on rappela les chanteurs, on fit une ovation à la Ludkof. Tout à coup, du milieu de la foule très montée, des voix réclamèrent “l’hymne russe !” Le rideau à demi baissé déjà se releva, les artistes et les chœurs reparurent sur la scène, puis l’orchestre attaqua les premières mesures de l’air national russe. En un clin d’œil la salle entière fut debout, et c’était d’un effet saisissant, l’aspect de ces trois étages de loges garnies de jeunes femmes aux épaules nues applaudissant avec exaltation. A mesure que se succédaient les paroles de l’hymne, la manifestation grandissait, les spectateurs de l’orchestre criaient des vivats et trépignaient. Une émotion électrique secouait toutes ces âmes. Les bouches s’ouvraient pour jeter des acclamations, les femmes arrachaient les fleurs de leur corsage et les lançaient sur la scène, les homes agitaient frénétiquement leurs chapeaux. Jacques regarda la loge du premier étage; l’inconnue en blanc, les yeux illuminés, la poitrine soulevée, avait déchiré ses gants et frappait l’une contre l’autre, à les meurtrir, les paumes de ses petites mains nues ...’ André Theuriet, *Charme dangereux* (Paris, 1891), 66-7. ‘Ludkof’ is a fictional Russian singer playing Zerlina. All translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.

² The date of *A Life for the Tsar*’s French premiere is frequently given as February 1899, following the incorrect information given in LeRoy Ellis, *La Colonie russe dans les Alpes-Maritimes: des origines à 1939* (Nice, 1988), 161.

language premiere of *A Life for the Tsar* at the Théâtre Municipal in Nice, the audience had risen for the Russian national anthem with excited cries of 'Vive la Russie! Vive la France!'³

Afterwards, the *Marseillaise* was sung, before both anthems were repeated. The reaction was so heated, so unprecedented – and so many critics from Paris were there to witness it – that it was vividly related in all the local, and many of the national papers in the following days. Never before had an opera performance in Nice provoked such widespread interest. Reviewers on all sides declared that the premiere had 'achieved a double success: the first, from an artistic point of view, and the second, from a political one'.⁴

The reason, in part, was that France and Russia were on the verge of a critical alliance. After the Franco-Prussian War (1870-1), France had been left diplomatically isolated. Then, in 1882, Russia also became vulnerable following Bismarck's consolidation of the Triple Alliance (*Triplice*) between Germany, Austro-Hungary and Italy, and negotiations began for a Franco-Russian entente, the terms of which would be drafted in 1892 and finalised in 1894. The period has frequently been described as one of growing chauvinism, in which French music critics became increasingly hostile towards the importation of foreign repertoire.⁵ After all, the humiliating losses suffered during the Franco-Prussian War, combined with the threat of the new central European alliance, left many anxious over the country's waning political and

³ See, for example, the report in *Le Petit Niçois*, 31 January 1890: 'The whole theatre rose to its feet trembling and applauded the hymn ... Cries of *Vive la Russie! Vive la France!* sounded out from around the auditorium ... A new cry rang out from every breast: *La Marseillaise!* And all of a sudden ... among this enthused, sparkling, vibrant, enflamed crowd, came the opening bars of our national anthem' ('La salle toute entière se lève frémissante et applaudit l'hymne ... Des cris de *Vive la Russie! Vive la France!* partent de diverse points de la salle ... un nouveau cri s'échappe de toutes poitrines: *La Marseillaise!* Et tout à coup ... au milieu de ce public enthousiasmé, éclatent, vibrantes, enflammées, les premières mesures de notre chant national').

⁴ *Le Cosmopolite* (Nice), 4 February 1890, quoted in Paule Druilhe, 'Une Originale figure de directeur de Théâtre lyrique: Raoul Gunsbourg à Nice (1889-1891)', *Nice historique* 62 (1978), 108.

⁵ On French nervousness over German and Italian influence in this period see, for example, Christophe Charle, 'Opera in France, 1870-1914: Between Nationalism and Foreign Imports', trans. Jennifer Boittin, in *Opera and Society in Italy and France from Monteverdi to Bourdieu*, ed. Victoria Johnson, Jane Fulcher and Thomas Ertman (Cambridge, 2007), 243-66; Jann Pasler, 'Paris: Conflicting Notions of Progress', in *The Late Romantic Era: From the Mid-Nineteenth Century to World War I*, ed. Jim Samson (Basingstoke, 1991), esp. 392-400; and Clair Rowden, 'Werther, *La Navarraise* and *verismo*: A Matter of Taste', *Franco-British Studies* 37 (2006-7), 6-17.

cultural prestige in comparison with the growing strength of the new Italian and German nation states. None of this, however, would not stop audiences flocking to foreign operas, leaving critics in a double bind: while internationalism in the opera house could not be explicitly encouraged, to ignore foreign repertoire would be to risk sacrificing Paris's position as a leading cultural centre.

In this context, the approaching alliance led some to frame Russian music as an ideal foreign import – something that would maintain international connections, without compromising nationalistic agendas. Although the early French reception of Russian music has been explored to an extent, the story typically focuses around moments in which this repertoire was treated as an exotic import, such as the special Russian nights held during the Parisian Universal Expositions of 1878 and 1889.⁶ The next major event to receive attention is then the arrival of Sergei Diaghilev in 1907, which famously led to years of sensational seasons of Russian ballet and opera. Revisiting these incidents is undoubtedly important for understanding the roots of one of the most frequently discussed problems in the reception of Russian composers: that their popularity in the West has often been dependent on their supposed 'Russianness'.⁷ But, at the same time, this focus paints a picture of Russian musical culture as structurally isolated, and with little in it of interest to its westerly neighbours beyond novelty. Such narratives, as I seek to demonstrate here, require nuancing through investigation

⁶ See, for instance André Schaeffner, 'Debussy et ses rapports avec la musique russe', in Pierre Souvtchinsky, *Musique russe; études réunies* (Paris, 1953), 95-138; Elaine Brody, 'Russians in Paris (1889-1914)', in *Russian and Soviet Music: Essays for Boris Schwarz*, ed. Malcolm Hamrick Brown (Ann Arbor, 1984), 157-83; Annegret Fauser, *Musical Encounters at the 1889 Paris World's Fair* (Rochester, NY, 2005), 43-7; and Malou Haine, 'Paris à l'heure musicale russe: le rôle des expositions universelles de 1867 à 1900', *Musique, images, instruments: Revue française d'organologie et d'iconographie musicale* 13 (2012), 15-28. One study that has taken a more political approach is Helena Tyrväinen, 'Helsinki – Saint Petersburg – Paris: The Franco-Russian Alliance and Finnish French Musical Relations', *Finnish Music Quarterly* 1 (2003), 51-9.

⁷ For a recent discussion of this problem, see Richard Taruskin, 'Non-Nationalists and Other Nationalists', *19th-Century Music*, 35 (2011), especially 143.

into a broader range of moments of cultural contact, and by uncovering more complex processes of musical migration.⁸

In what follows, I explore how it was that, in this period of new alliances, *A Life for the Tsar* (and not a French opera) became so important for the Théâtre Municipal in Nice, an institution thoroughly on the periphery of the French opera network. Drawing on recent investigations of operatic decentralisation in France by Katharine Ellis and Clair Rowden, I explore both the desire in Nice for Parisian recognition, and also why Nice, rather than Paris, was first to stage Russia's cornerstone opera.⁹ But there was more to this premiere and its raucous reception than concerns about the state of the French nation, or of Niçois musical life. After all, many in the audience were foreign tourists rather than local patriots. Such a reaction, therefore, would not have been possible were it not for the right publicity, the right guests and a carefully choreographed first night.

The Arrival of Gunsbourg

The driving force behind the French premiere of *A Life for the Tsar* was the new director at the Théâtre Municipal, Raoul Gunsbourg (1860-1955). Though born in Romania, Gunsbourg spent his career lucratively marketing France to Russia and, later, Russia to France; he was, it could be said, the model of a transnational intermediary. Having lived in Paris as a medical auditor, he moved to Moscow in 1880 to work as an actor at a French Salon des Variétés. After the

⁸ One study that has already made forays in this direction is Philip Bullock's *Rosa Newmarch and Russian Music in Late Nineteenth and early Twentieth-century Britain* (Farnham, 2009).

⁹ On operatic decentralisation in nineteenth-century France, see in particular Clair Rowden, 'Decentralisation and Regeneration at the Théâtre des Arts, Rouen, 1889-1891', *Revue de musicologie* 94 (2008), 139-80; and a number of important chapters and articles by Katharine Ellis: 'Unintended Consequences: Theatre Deregulation and Opera in France, 1864-1878', *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 22 (2010), 327-52; 'Funding Opera in Regional France: Ideologies of the Mid-Nineteenth Century', in *Art and Ideology in European Opera: Essays in Honour of Julian Rushton*, ed. Clive Brown, David Cooper and Rachel Cowgill (Woodbridge, 2010), 67-84; 'Mireille's Homecoming? Gounod, Mistral and the Midi', *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 65 (2012), 463-509; and 'How to Make Wagner Normal: *Lohengrin's* "tour de France" of 1891-92', *Cambridge Opera Journal* 25 (2013), 121-37.

assassination of Tsar Alexander II the following year, all the state theatres were temporarily closed for public mourning, but foreign institutions were permitted to remain open. Gunsbourg seized the opportunity and took over as manager of the Salon, transformed it into a Théâtre des Variétés and began staging plays and operettas in French.¹⁰ With the revocation of the Imperial theatre monopoly in 1882, full-length French-language operas were permitted for the first time in Russia in almost 70 years.¹¹ Gunsbourg gradually worked his way up, directing open-air theatres and private performances for Alexander III, until, in 1888, he was appointed to the Arcadia Theatre, where he staged full-scale French-language operas for the paying public.¹²

Once well established in Russia, Gunsbourg began to spend his winters directing in France, first in Lille (1888-9) and then Nice (1889-92).¹³ His tenure at the Théâtre Municipal, however, had an uncertain start. The opera season was no small matter for the people of Nice, and when municipal council meetings were held to select the director in April 1889, large crowds turned out to have their say.¹⁴ 'This question, as we know', a report read in the leading local paper, *Le Petit Niçois*, 'is one of utmost importance and can have a serious influence on the success of our winter season, in which the performances given at the magnificent hall on the rue St-François-de-Paule constitute one of the main attractions'.¹⁵ The 'winter season', which ran

¹⁰ Raoul Gunsbourg, *Cent ans de souvenirs ... ou presque* (Monaco, 1959), 25-7.

¹¹ See Murray Frame, "'Freedom of the Theatres": The Abolition of the Russian Imperial Theatre Monopoly', *Slavonic and Eastern European Review* 83 (2005), 254-89.

¹² In 1882, Gunsbourg was invited to direct a French open-air summer theatre in St Petersburg, and later established the Théâtre de la Renaissance there, dedicated to French operetta. His first French-language operas were for Alexander III at Peterhof and Krasnoe-Selo, where he gave Saint-Saëns' *Samson et Dalila* and Gounod's *Faust*. See Gunsbourg, *Cent ans*, 33-5.

¹³ In his (somewhat unreliable) memoir, Gunsbourg recalled that he was advised to make the change for his health. He also reported that he was sent as a personal envoy for the Tsar to help smooth the Franco-Russian alliance, though there is scant evidence to support this claim. Gunsbourg, *Cent ans*, 70.

¹⁴ The minutes of the meeting show that Gunsbourg was chosen on the basis of his excellent references and his ambitious list of proposed singers. Recorded in council meeting minutes of 10 April 1889, Nice Archives Municipales [hereafter NAM], 'Délibérations du conseil municipal de la ville de Nice', Vol. 19, 325-7.

¹⁵ 'Cette question, on le sait, est des plus importantes et peut avoir une influence sérieuse sur la réussite de notre saison d'hiver, dont les représentations données à la magnifique salle de la rue St-François-de-Paule constituent un des attrait principaux.' *Le Petit Niçois*, 10 April 1889.

from November to April, saw thousands of wealthy visitors flock to Nice for the mild climate and the chance to mingle with aristocrats from across the globe. Their expenditure determined the economic well-being of the city, making it vital that the opera house, the centrepiece of the season, was a success.

Though shaped by the habits and tastes of outsiders, the Théâtre Municipal had become a hotly contested space for expressing local identity. Gunsbourg's election took place just as the city's first ever French-language municipal opera season, under its first ever French director was drawing to a close. Although Nice had been ceded to France from the Kingdom of Sardinia in 1860, the language, directors and much of the repertoire of the Municipal Theatre had remained Italian until 1888, when a four-year campaign to switch the language of the theatre from Italian to French finally came to fruition.¹⁶ Since 1871, pro-Italian separatists, under the banner of their newspaper, *Il pensiero di Nizza*, had campaigned to retain Italian opera in Nice.¹⁷ They eventually lost out to the French nationalists, led by Henry Hardy-Polday through the local journal, *Le Rabelais*, which described the Francification of the theatre as the top priority in the fight against 'Italianisms' (*italienneries*) in the city, ahead of guarding the French-Italian border and eliminating separatist newspapers and societies.¹⁸ In 1888, the Italian impresario,

¹⁶ See Laure Baretge, 'L'Évolution de la vie musicale à Nice de 1860 à 1914', MA dissertation (Université de Nice Sophia Antipolis, 1998), résumé available at <https://www.cg06.fr/documents/Import/decouvrir-les-am/rr163-musique.pdf> (accessed 18 November 2014).

¹⁷ The title of the paper played aptly on Verdi's 'Va pensiero' – Garibaldi was born in Nice and campaigned against its return to France in 1860. The newspaper was closed in 1895 in the clampdown on separatism. For more on the separatists and the integration of Nice into France in these years, see Mireille Massot, 'L'intégration de Nice à la république française à travers le *Pensiero di Nizza*, 1870-1895', in *Les Alpes-Maritimes. Intégration et particularismes. 1860-1914* (Nice, 1988), 347-57.

¹⁸ 'In the plans for the long-term campaign that *Le Rabelais* has waged against Italianisms, there are four objectives that have been pursued relentlessly: 1) The implantation of the Opéra Français at the municipal theatre, 2) The defence of the south-east frontier, 3) The expulsion of those papers published in a certain foreign language, which have the special mission of spreading separatist ideas, 4) The dissolution of Italian Societies which masquerade as charitable groups in order to conceal their dangerous political associations' ('Dans le plan de campagne que depuis longtemps, *Le Rabelais* s'est tracé contre les italienneries, il est quatre objectifs qui ont été poursuivis sans relâche: 1° L'implantation de l'Opéra Français du Théâtre subventionné de la ville. 2° La défense de la frontière du Sud-Est. 3° L'expulsion de certaines feuilles publiées en langue étrangère et qui ont pour mission spéciale d'entretenir ici des idées de Séparatisme. 4° La dissolution des Sociétés italiennes qui sous masque de Charité par Secours mutuels cachent de dangereuses associations politiques.') 'Italienneries', *Le Rabelais*, 17 April 1892, 49-50.

Edoardo Sonzongo, was replaced with the French Auguste Taillefer, and, as a show of support for the theatre's national rebranding, the council made a considerable increase to the opera subsidy, raising it from 72,000 to 100,000 francs.¹⁹ Some members of the municipal council even proposed adding a clause to the *cahiers des charges* dictating that the director of the theatre must be of French nationality.²⁰ Though the motion was not passed, there was public outcry and rioting at the Théâtre Municipal when it was announced that Taillefer was being replaced, after just one season, by someone called 'Gunsbourg'.²¹ The local papers released various assurances that, despite his name, he was definitely *not* German. Gunsbourg nevertheless had much to prove in that first year if he wanted to secure a second term.

One obvious method of ensuring that the season was at least financially stable would be to stage an opera that piqued local interest. *A Life for the Tsar*, still one of the most frequently performed operas in Russia, was sure to appeal to the city's sizeable Russian community. Though Nice had attracted Russian visitors since the eighteenth century, it had become a particularly fashionable winter destination after 1856, when Nicholas I's widow, Alexandra Feodorovna, and her entourage began to make extended visits, setting up home at the villa Avigdor annually until her death in 1860.²² She also had an Orthodox chapel, the first in France outside of Paris, erected on the Rue Longchamp, creating a focal point for an emerging Russian

¹⁹ 'Grand Théâtre de l'Opéra de Nice [Document d'archives]: tableaux de la troupe et journal des recettes', Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Musique [hereafter BNMus], VM DOS-5 (1). This new figure was much closer to that found at leading opera houses in the provinces. Rouen's Théâtre des Arts, for instance, at that time received a subsidy of 130,000 francs.

²⁰ This was proposed by 'M. Iaort' according to the council meeting minutes of 10 April 1889, NAM, 'Délibérations du conseil municipal de la ville de Nice', Vol.19, 325-7.

²¹ Reports about the riots can be found, among others, in *Le Petit Niçois*, 14 April 1889, 1. The news even spread to the national papers, including *Gil Blas* on 13 April, where it was related by the somewhat impartial correspondent, Hardy-Polday.

²² See Martine Arrigo-Schwartz, *Âme slave au pays bleu* (Nice, 2008), 57-62. For more on the Russian presence in Nice, see Emmanuel Fricero, 'Les Russes à Nice au siècle passé', *Nice Historique* 116 (1952), 55-82; Paul Augier, *Quand les grands ducs vasaient à Nice* (Paris, 1981), 14-19; and Ellis, *Les Russes sur la Côte d'Azur*.

quarter.²³ By 1880, the Russians were the third most numerous visitors to Nice (after the French and British), and had established a substantial permanent presence there.²⁴

In recognition of this influential demographic, Gunsbourg's whole first season had an unusually Russian bent. As well as producing *A Life*, he used his Russian connections to book the ballerina Virginia Zucchi, a firm favourite on the Russian stage. By the time subscriptions went on sale in October 1889, both *A Life* and Zucchi had been announced for the coming season,²⁵ and one notice reported that 'the Russian colony, [which is] so well represented in our city, has proven extremely quick to fill the boxes and orchestra stalls, and the number now registered far surpasses that of previous years'.²⁶ But, it was not simply by pandering to the Russian community that Gunsbourg could hope to secure his re-election; he would also use his season showpiece to help put Nice on the map, thus proving not only his local but also his national loyalties.

Nice through Parisian Eyes

The journey is short, but the route delicious, along this silk-fringed ribbon of coast
 [...] Come! We'll bid adieu to the mists of the Seine. We'll forget, for a time,
 the failings of men, the sadness of things.²⁷

²³ See Sophie Ollivier, 'L'Orthodoxie dans le Sud-Est de la France', *Eastern Christian Studies* 3 (2003), 463-4.

²⁴ See Arrigo-Schwartz, *Âme slave au pays bleu*, 26.

²⁵ *A Life* was announced when Gunsbourg applied for the post (*Le Monde élégant*, 24 April 1889) and Zucchi's appearance was confirmed as early as July (*Le Monde élégant*, 10 July 1889). See Druilhe, 'Une Originale figure', 97-98.

²⁶ *Le Cosmopolite*, 10 October 1889, quoted in Druilhe, 'Une Originale figure', 98.

²⁷ 'Le trajet est court, mais la route délicieuse, le long de ce ruban de côtes à la frange moirée. ... Venez ! nous dirons adieu aux brumes de la Seine. Nous oublierons, pour un temps, les lâchetés des hommes, les tristesses des choses.' Stéphen Liégeard, *Côte d'Azur* (Paris, 1887), 2. *Côte d'Azur* was a best-selling travel guide and rebranded the area, replacing the Italian term, 'Riviera', with the French 'Côte d'Azur'.

In 1890, music critics in Nice were preoccupied with the issue of operatic decentralisation. After the deregulation of the theatres in 1864 under Napoléon III, and even more so after the Franco-Prussian War, theatres in the provinces had struggled to hold grand opera seasons due to a lack of funds.²⁸ By 1890, however, things were looking up. When the Théâtre-Lyrique in Paris closed in 1877, just two state-funded opera theatres were left in the capital: the Opéra and Opéra-Comique, meaning that spare funds and the position of the nation's third opera house were up for grabs.²⁹ What is more, with the *cahiers des charges* of the Opéra and Opéra-Comique restricting their repertoire to just two novelties per season, there was insufficient space for the vast supply of new operas being written. Composers began to look to theatres further afield, thus lending further incentive, and further opportunities, for regional stages to make their mark.³⁰ Back in 1877 and 1879, Lyon had established itself as a potential contender for France's third opera house, with premieres of Gounod's *Cinq mars* and Saint-Saëns's *Etienne Marcel*; but it was only around a decade later that theatres in the provinces were really beginning to rival Paris. Following a Parisian-led campaign in 1888, Rouen's Théâtre des Arts, for instance, presented itself as a viable extension to the capital's opera scene through premieres of Saint-Saëns's *Samson et Dalila* and Albert Cahen's *Le Vénitien* on 3 March and 14 April 1890 respectively, as well as the first successful French performance of Wagner's *Lohengrin* in 1891.³¹

²⁸ See Ellis, 'Unintended Consequences', 334-43 and 351-2.

²⁹ Operatic decentralisation had been under discussion since the 1830s, but it was in this period that the matter gained in urgency. See Rowden, 'Decentralisation and Regeneration', 141-4.

³⁰ Beyond France, a major alternative to Paris became the rival French-speaking capital, Brussels. Its Théâtre de la Monnaie saw the premieres of Massenet's *Hérodade* in 1881, Chabrier's *Gwendoline* in 1886 and Ernest Reyer's *Sigurd* in 1884 and *Salammbô* in 1890. Composers also looked beyond French-speaking theatres, to cities such as Vienna (Jules Massenet's *Werther*, 16 February 1892), St Petersburg (Gaston Salvayre's *Riccardo III*, 21 December 1884) and Weimar (Saint-Saëns's *Samson et Dalila*, 2 December 1877).

³¹ See Ellis, 'How to make Wagner Normal', 121-37 and Rowden, 'Decentralisation and Regeneration', 149-55 and 172. The early months of 1890 indicate just how strong competition was becoming. As well as these two performances in Rouen in 1890, and following shortly after Nice's *A Life for the Tsar* on 30 January, Reyer's *Salammbô* was premiered on 10 February in Brussels and Saint-Saëns's *Ascanio* at the Opéra in Paris on 21 March.

Yet while Nice was on its way to becoming France's fifth most populous city, and despite its opera house receiving a considerable municipal subsidy, attracting eminent soloists and giving packed six-month seasons every year, it remained far from being counted among the leading regional centres for opera.³² For a start, having been Italian until 1888, the Théâtre Municipal had only recently become an eligible extension of the French opera network. What is more, the physical distance of Nice from Paris, combined with its predominantly Niçard-speaking local population (an Italianate French dialect), rendered the city separate in practical terms. And things were further complicated, first by questions over the city's conceptual connections to France and second, by the feeling that its cosmopolitan, elitist opera scene belonged in a past age.

For readers of Theuriet's *Charme dangereux*, the symbolism of the foreign, carefree 'woman in white', Mania, who seduces the restrained Frenchman, Jacques, would not have been difficult to decipher. Nice, at the time, was typically depicted by writers in the capital as a destination for the French to escape to, rather than to inhabit. Even in appearance, the Comté de Nice seemed something of an alien place. Its landscape, with its stretches of unindustrialised land, azure seas, bright sun, orangeries and palm trees, little resembled the densely populated, damp north. The exotic plants imported to the region from across the Mediterranean even meant that Parisian observers were more likely to compare the area to Africa or the Orient than to the rest of France.³³ When critics came to Nice from Paris to report on *A Life for the Tsar* in 1890, many started their accounts with wide-eyed descriptions of the scenery. Henri Bauer of *L'Echo de Paris*, for instance, began his review:

³² Cities better known for opera at the time included Lyon, Rouen, Bordeaux, Marseille, Lille, Toulouse and Nantes. See Rowden, 'Decentralisation and Regeneration', 139.

³³ See Martine Arrigo-Schwartz, 'Les littérateurs parisiens entre 1860 et 1914 à la recherche d'une spécificité niçoise', in *Le Comté de Nice de la Savoie à Europe: identité, mémoire et devenir* (Nice, 2006), 303-8. Palm trees, brought over from Egypt, were a particular source of novelty.

Here, we have the sun, the pleasure of life in the sweet fresh air and by the blue water. It is a contrast to the fog and mud in which you are currently paddling, dear Parisians, my brothers, who are accustomed to hellish winter. Ah, how soothing the sojourn in this blossoming corner of the world, blessed with the sun's caresses.³⁴

Fresh air and fog, blue water and muddy puddles, pleasure and struggle, paradise and hell; in each pairing, the former belongs to the unfamiliar world Bauer is in the midst of discovering, the latter, to his French 'brothers' in Paris.

Mania Liebling's cosmopolitanism (she is a Russian princess of Galician heritage with an Austrian husband) embodied another of the city's most often-noted traits. Since the late eighteenth century, Nice had attracted visitors from far afield as a destination for the sick to take the sea air. From the 1860s, however, the influx of foreign visitors increased dramatically, both as a result of the 1860 annexation to France, and the railway, which reached the south in 1864.³⁵ In the 1870s and '80s, tourism boomed and it became fashionable for wealthy families from Britain, Russia, Germany, Austria and the United States to migrate for the winter simply for leisure.³⁶ Even the people in Nice could therefore lead Parisians to forget they were in France.

Nice was also deemed morally distant, as suggested by Mania's 'charme dangereux' and the plot of Theuriet's novel, which reflected the city's reputation as a place of luxury and hedonism. The winter residents ('hivernants') brought such an influx of wealth to the city that,

³⁴ 'Ici c'est le soleil, le plaisir de vivre dans l'air frais et doux, devant l'eau bleue; c'est une revanche de la brume et de la boue où vous barbotez en ce moment, chers Parisiens, mes frères, coutumiers en géhenne hivernale. Ah! le lénitif séjour que ce coin de terre fleuri, béni des caresses du soleil.' *L'Echo de Paris*, 3 February 1890.

³⁵ The journey, once the direct railway line connecting Paris to Nice opened in 1864, took around 15 hours.

³⁶ See C. James Haug, *Leisure and Urbanism in Nineteenth-Century Nice* (Lawrence, 1982), 23-6 and 48-9; and Dennison Nash, 'The Rise and Fall of an Aristocratic Tourist Culture, Nice: 1763-1936', *Annals of Tourism Research* 6 (1979), 65-7.

for 'the season', all efforts were directed towards their leisure. Nice became alive with music, carnivals, flower shows, balls and theatrical entertainments; so much so that many of the Parisian critics who came in 1890 for the premiere of *A Life* described the city as a 'ville de fête'. As Francisque Sarcey, influential feuilleton writer for *Le Temps*, marvelled in a lengthy account of his visit: 'Ah, millionaires are fortunate people! It must be a never-ending party to be able to spend the three months of winter in those blessed climes!'³⁷ At first, the hivernants had purchased villas for their visits, and moved their entire households for the winter. Some of these residences became home to *cercles* and salons at which private musical and theatrical performances were given.³⁸ In the 1870s and '80s, however, with tourism expanding and the new rail connection generating the possibility of short-term stays, hotels replaced villas as the accommodation of choice. With the decline of villa-based soirées as a result, entertainment shifted more and more to the public sphere.³⁹ Casinos arrived alongside the hotel boom, generating more Parisian disdain for – and equal fascination with – the debauched south.⁴⁰ By 1890, Nice was thus known as a place of extravagance and pleasure-seeking: the ideal setting for novels about illicit love affairs, though not, perhaps, for serious operatic enterprises.⁴¹

That said, Nice was by no means a cultureless place. Indeed, the city had already been host to two significant opera premieres. Long before the French-language premiere of *A Life*, the Russian Baron Pavel von Derwies had given the first performances of the opera in France at his

³⁷ 'Ah! Les millionnaires sont d'heureuses gens! Ce doit être une perpétuelle fête de pouvoir passer dans ces climats bénis trois mois d'hiver!' *Le Temps*, 3 February 1890.

³⁸ See Michel Foussard, 'Nice', *Dictionnaire de la musique en France au XIX^e siècle* (Paris, 2003), 863; and Paulette Lèques, 'Tourisme hivernal et vie mondaine à Nice de 1860 à 1881: cercles et salons', in *Aspects de Nice du XVIII^e au XX^e siècle* (Paris, 1973), 98-101.

³⁹ See Alain Ruggiero, *Nouvelle histoire de Nice* (Toulouse, 2006), 192-7.

⁴⁰ The casinos were not just gambling halls, but also theatres in which family entertainments, operetta and ballet were staged. See Baretge, 'L'Évolution de la vie musicale', 9.

⁴¹ In this respect, musical culture in Nice was comparable to that of the spa town, another tourist-centred environment then perceived as non-conducive to serious music-making. See François Lesure, 'La villégiature lyrique, ou la musique dans les casinos au XIX^e siècle', in *D'Un Opéra l'autre: hommage à Jean Mongrédien*, ed. Jean Gribenski (Paris, 1996), 389-98.

villa Valrose (1879 and 1881) and, in 1881, the mezzo-soprano Sophie Cruvelli sang in France's first *Lohengrin* at her Cercle de la Méditerranée.⁴² Both, however, had been in Italian, and both had taken place at private villas, rather than municipal institutions. Such performances, therefore, would not be counted as part of the decentralisation effort, or even as national premieres, but as evidence of the persistence of a dated Italianate operatic tradition, governed by closed social circles.

Even as the focus of the winter season moved towards the public Théâtre Municipal, however, evenings at the opera in Nice continued to resemble elite social gatherings. Most of the seating in the theatre was taken up by boxes in the old Italian style (rather than more democratic galleries) to satisfy the foreign colony and to cater for the high demand for subscriptions.⁴³ Indeed, four different lists were in place to grant access to as many hibernants as possible.⁴⁴ Rather like Jacques in Theuriet's novel, the Parisian critics who came to Nice in 1890 were duly struck by the wealth on display (even if the scene cannot have been so different from an evening at the Opéra). Sarcey, for instance, continued his gushing commentary by observing that 'the theatre was truly beautiful [...] all decorated with pretty ladies in full evening dress, sparkling with diamonds! Heavens, one could never tire of Nice!' ⁴⁵ Attractive as this might have been in the context of a temporary escape from the capital, it sat uneasily next to the contemporary Parisian arguments for the popularisation of the opera houses, and even for an end to the heavy subsidisation of an institution that catered for the privileged few.⁴⁶ In

⁴² The next performance of *Lohengrin* in France would not take place until 1891 in Rouen. For more on the Cruvelli premiere, see Georges Favre, *La Villa Valrose: 1870-1881: un haut-lieu musical niçois au XIXe siècle* (Paris, 1977), 79-82 and 114-15; and *La Vicomtesse Vigier: Sophie Cruvelli: 1826-1907: une grande cantatrice niçoise* (Paris, 1979), 71-82.

⁴³ See Foussard, 'Nice', 862.

⁴⁴ The four groups of abonnés were labelled A, B, C and D; announcements in the papers then informed patrons of the list in use for the evening's performance.

⁴⁵ 'La salle était vraiment belle ... Toute garnie de jolies femmes en grande toilette, toute étincelante de diamants! Bigre! On ne doit pas s'ennuyer à Nice.' *Le Temps*, 3 February 1890.

⁴⁶ See Myriam Chimènes, 'Le Budget de la musique sous la III^e République', in Hughes Dufourt and Joël-Marie Fauquet, eds., *La Musique: du théorique au politique* (Paris, 1991), 269-71.

Nice, not only were municipal funds being lavished on the few, but also on foreigners, rather than those whose taxes funded the theatre. Local critics, therefore, had both to counter the usual Parisian prejudices about provincial opera-going, and to overcome the preconception that their city was out of touch – an immobile sunny paradise, full of pleasure-seekers, who left serious art and matters of national importance to the capital.⁴⁷

Making the Music of the Past the Music of the Future

Glinka's *A Life for the Tsar* might seem an unusual choice of opera to help dispel this image: it was, by then, 54 years old, it was not French and its musical language was notably Italianate. On a local level, the opera certainly ensured that the season had a positive financial impact. With the local papers having built anticipation for the premiere by printing lengthy preview articles and releasing warnings that tickets were selling fast,⁴⁸ the first night took 12,828 francs in receipts, almost eight times the season average of 1,668.⁴⁹ Even though ticket prices had been raised to higher rates than usual, this was a huge amount, on par with the '*extraordinaire*' nights which the theatre held in honour of celebrity singers: Adelina Patti, for instance, brought in 13,200 and 12,621 francs for two of her performances in 1895. And it was not just the premiere that did well. Seven of *A Life for the Tsar*'s eleven performances were among the ten highest grossing nights of the season (see Table 1).

[INSERT TABLE 1 AROUND HERE]

⁴⁷ For more on Parisian perspectives on the musical situation in the south, see François Lesure, 'La Musique dans le Midi, vue de Paris', in Lesure, *La Musique de la Midi de la France. Tome II, XIX^e siècle: actes des rencontres de Villecroze, 16 au 18 mai 1996* (Paris, 1998), 7-21.

⁴⁸ Previews appeared, for instance, in *Le Petit Niçois*, *L'Eclaireur*, *Le Phare du littoral*, *La Colonie étrangère*, *La Saison de Nice* and *Nice-Monte-Carlo*. A review in *Le Petit Niçois* on 31 January 1890 reported that the box office had been sold out for six days before the performance, that people were paying vast prices for last-minute tickets (5 to 10 louis – 1 louis being worth 20 francs – for a seat in the stalls and a baron offering 3000 francs for a box), and that there was a queue of 200 people lined up outside the opera house at 6pm on the evening of the premiere.

⁴⁹ These figures come from the the lists of receipts for the theatre recorded in 'Grand Théâtre de l'Opéra de Nice [Document d'archives]: tableaux de la troupe et journal des recettes', BNMus, VM DOS-5 (1).

The premiere was also a critical triumph. Gunsbourg sealed local approval by achieving the ‘miracle’, as Émile Blavet of *Le Figaro* put it, ‘of tearing around fifteen of the most prominent Parisian journalists away from their posts at the peak of the winter season and persuading them that the “action” was not in Paris, but in Nice’.⁵⁰ In order to encourage the warmest possible responses from his guests, Gunsbourg greeted them personally on their arrival at the train station on 29 January 1890, and treated them to extravagant banquets during their stay. This all seems to have paid off. The Parisian response was uncharacteristically unanimous for a new opera, and unusually substantial for a regional premiere. Newspapers in the capital were filled with glowing reports from self-proclaimed Wagnerians, such as Victor Wilder, and conservatives, such as Sarcey, alike.⁵¹ Highlights from these reviews were proudly reprinted in Nice in the coming days as evidence that the premiere of *A Life for the Tsar* constituted a decentralist achievement. Even before the performance, Jean Labeille of *Le Petit Niçois* declared that the opera had already ‘had the initial result of bringing some of the most eminent of our Parisian brethren to Nice and reminding them that the borders of France do not stop at the fortifications of Paris’.⁵²

But the Parisians’ enthusiasm was not just a result of Gunsbourg’s good hospitality. For over twelve years, there had been attempts to have *A Life* performed in the capital, provoking

⁵⁰ ‘Lui [Gunsbourg] seul pouvait faire ce miracle d’arracher à leurs travaux, en pleine saison d’hiver, une quinzaine de journalistes parisiens, et des plus en vue, et de leur persuader que le “mouvement” était, non à Paris, mais à Nice.’ *Le Figaro*, 1 February 1890. The critics and editors who attended (many with their wives in tow) included: Francisque Sarcey (*Le Temps*), Aurélien Scholl (*Le Matin*), Louis Besson (*L’Événement*), Adolphe Brisson (*Le Parti national*), Edmond Stoullig, Lieutard (*Le Petit Marseillais*), Emile Blavet (*Le Figaro* and *Le Gaulois*), Maurice Lefèbvre (*Le Figaro*), Léon Kerst (*Le Petit journal*), Louis de Fourcaud (*Le Gaulois*), Victor Wilder (*Gil Blas*), Henri Bauer (*L’Echo de Paris*), Juliette Adam (director of *La Nouvelle revue*), Octave Mirbeau (*La France*), Valentin Simond (founder of *L’Echo de Paris*), Francis Magnard (editor of *Le Figaro*).

⁵¹ Victor Wilder (1835-92) was not only a Wagner enthusiast but played a significant role in promulgating Wagner in France by translating every opera from *Lohengrin* onwards and assisting Lamoureux with his staging of *Lohengrin* in Paris in 1887.

⁵² ‘a déjà eu pour premier résultat d’amener à Nice quelques-uns des plus éminents parmi nos confrères parisiens et de leur rappeler que les frontières de la France ne s’arrêtent pas précisément aux fortifications de Paris’; *Le Petit Niçois*, 28 January 1890.

many of the Parisian critics to express their regret that the first French performance had taken place in Nice, and not Paris. Wilder, for instance, remarked in his review:

How is it that a work, so popular in Russia that one cannot begin to count the number of performances [given there], has remained obstinately ignored here? It will never be clear. Twenty times over there has been a chance of translating it and putting it on at one lyric theatre or another; the project has always been abandoned as soon as it was conceived.⁵³

One reason for such efforts was that *A Life* had already appeared in numerous cities across Europe (see Table 2), putting pressure on Paris to follow suit. The 1874 Italian premiere in Milan may well have triggered the first attempt to give the opera its French début. In 1876, rumours surfaced of plans to have the opera sung in Russian at the forthcoming Universal Exposition of 1878, but in the end, only extracts were given.⁵⁴ Performances of the opera in London in 1887, which were widely reported in Paris,⁵⁵ were also quickly followed by announcements that plans were under way for the French premiere.⁵⁶ Soon afterwards, the publisher Durdilly commissioned a French vocal score, thus addressing the ‘question of translation’ noted by

⁵³ ‘Comment un œuvre, si populaire en Russie qu’on n’en peut compter [...] le nombre de représentations, est-il obstinément resté ignoré chez nous ? On ne le saura jamais. Vingt fois il a été question de le traduire et de le monter sur l’une ou l’autre de nos scènes lyriques; toujours le projet a été abandonné, aussitôt que conçu.’ *Gil Blas*, 1 February 1890.

⁵⁴ For reports on these plans, see *Le Ménestrel*, 9 July 1876, 254. The announcement also indicated that Dargomizhsky’s *Stone Guest* would be performed. Extracts from *A Life* appeared in all four of the 1878 Exposition concerts, with the first including the opening chorus and Antonida’s Cavatina, the second another unnamed ‘air’ and the third and fourth, the Overture and final chorus.

⁵⁵ See, for example, *Le Ménestrel*, 24 July 1887, 268-9, which included a translation of a lengthy review by the *Times* critic, Francis Hueffer.

⁵⁶ *Le Figaro*, on 15 November 1887, reported that the librettist Paul-Armand Silvestre and author Jehan Soudan were planning a French adaptation of *A Life* for the Opéra. Two days later, however, a letter from Jules Ruelle was printed stating that he was currently under contract with Durdilly to make a translation for his upcoming vocal score, making it impossible for Silvestre and Soudan to do the same.

Wilder.⁵⁷ Then, in 1888, a Parisian staging of *A Life for the Tsar* seemed to be on the cards once again when a troupe from St Petersburg embarked on a tour of Europe with the opera in their repertoire.⁵⁸ All the Parisian theatres appear to have turned them away, however, and they performed in Germany, Denmark and Britain instead.⁵⁹ Not that this was the work's premiere in Germany where, as the Russian translator and critic Michel Delines lamented, 'this masterpiece' had been known since its premiere in Hanover in 1878.⁶⁰ Meanwhile, in addition to keeping up with other cities, the prospect of performing the opera was attractive for the chance it offered to shake up the tired repertoires of the Opéra and Opéra-Comique. Many Parisian critics at the Nice premiere in 1890 used their reviews to voice their frustrations at the state of opera on the capital's main stages, one remarking, for instance, that he hoped Gunsbourg would come to Paris soon, since he would be sure to offer them 'something other than a hundredth reprise of *la Juive* or a thousandth reprise of *Guillaume Tell*'.⁶¹

This was not just about finding something outside the usual repertoire, or securing an opera that had been performed elsewhere. Russian critics had been arguing since 1836 that this opera heralded 'the dawn of a new age' for Europe: that Glinka had combined the best of 'Italian singing and German harmony' with a fresh Russian sound to create 'a new element in art'.⁶² Indeed, it was Glinka's perceived potential to beat the 'two "wests"' at their own game that had helped *A Life* come to be considered Russia's figurehead opera.⁶³ While some of the first French visitors to attend performances of the opera in St Petersburg were sceptical (in 1840,

⁵⁷ It was published in vocal score with a French text as *La Vie pour le Tsar* (Paris, 1888).

⁵⁸ See Tamsin Alexander, 'An "Extraordinary Engagement": A Russian Opera Company in Victorian Britain', in Anthony Cross, ed., *A People Passing Rude: British Responses to Russian Culture* (Cambridge, 2012), 97-112.

⁵⁹ In *Le Ménestrel*, reports were still appearing on 29 April 1888 (142) that the company might stop in France. It may be that plans had been made but were abandoned. The troupe's stay in London had ended in financial disaster, forcing them to return home prematurely (see Alexander, 'An "Extraordinary Engagement"', 101).

⁶⁰ *La Revue universelle illustrée* (January-February 1890), 330.

⁶¹ *Le Guide musical*, 9 February 1890, 47.

⁶² Vladimir Odoyevsky, 'Letter to a music lover on the subject of Glinka's opera *A Life for the Tsar*', *The Northern Bee*, 7 December 1836, trans. Stuart Campbell in Campbell, ed., *Russians on Russian Music, 1830-1880* (Cambridge, 1994), 3.

⁶³ See Richard Taruskin, *Defining Russia Musically* (Princeton, 1997), 65-6.

Adolphe Adam declared *A Life* 'a failure' that 'would have next to no chance of success in any country besides Russia'⁶⁴), these Russian accolades soon began to spread. François-Joseph Fétis, for instance, praised *A Life* in 1857 for being unfettered by tired operatic conventions.⁶⁵ Russian assertions that Glinka marked out a third way became increasingly relevant in the 1860s as French critics railed against Wagner's 'music of the future'. In a lengthy article for the *Revue nationale* in 1862, Théophile Gautier fils depicted Glinka as a healthy antidote:

Glinka enjoys an advantage which will perhaps shield him from the curse launched by the public against the so-called school of the future; he has discovered a gold mine in the music of his country, an inexhaustible vein of completely fresh melodies, whose procedures, if they have them, differ essentially from ours ... If one needs a special musical education to appreciate the works of Wagner, the least initiated will always discover with Glinka a charm that will enchant them.⁶⁶

By the end of the following decade, Glinka was not being portrayed as an appealing addition to European repertoires, but as a rival force. After the humiliations of the Franco-Prussian War and Wagner's subsequent diatribes against France, debate raged over whether Wagner should be accepted on the French stage as a progressive artist or rejected as a national

⁶⁴ 'Mais il fallait aussi faire une œuvre intéressante, et là, il a échoué ... M. Glinka voudrait faire traduire son opéra en allemand et en français, et le faire représenter en Allemagne et en France ... mais je crois que dans nul autre pays que la Russie cet ouvrage n'aurait la moindre chances [sic] de succès.' Adolphe Adam, *La France musicale*, 21 June 1840, 239.

⁶⁵ 'Il ne s'est proposé, en les écrivant, ni de s'astreindre à de certaines formes traditionnelles et considérées aujourd'hui comme nécessaires pour produire ce qu'on appelle de l'effet, ni d'obéir aux exigences d'une action dramatique plus ou moins rapide.' 'Michel de Glinka', *La Revue et gazette musicale de Paris*, 22 November 1857, 378.

⁶⁶ 'Glinka jouit d'un avantage qui le mettra peut-être à l'abri de l'anathème lancé par le public contre l'école dite de l'avenir: il a découvert dans la musique de son pays une mine d'or, une veine inépuisable de mélodies toutes jeunes, dont les procédés, si elles en ont, diffèrent essentiellement des nôtres ... S'il faut une certaine éducation musicale pour apprécier les œuvres de Wagner, les moins initiés trouveront toujours chez Glinka un charme qui les enchaînera.' 'La Musique Russe', *Revue nationale et étrangère, politique, scientifique et littéraire*, 25 January 1862, 297.

enemy.⁶⁷ Glinka, and Russian music in general, signalled a less fraught alternative. In 1879, Octave Fouque wrote a ten-part biographical article on Glinka for *Le Ménestrel*, which concluded:

If it is true ... that we are on the eve of a complete musical revolution; if the antique modes are to reappear on the scene and dethrone modern tonality, which was established on their ruins; and if the scales of the Orientals are to invade European music, we shall probably be preceded in this course by the Russians.⁶⁸

In this passage, Russian composers are revolutionaries, dethroners, invaders; but this is a welcome form of anarchy, one in which the French would share. As such, Russian achievements in the field of national opera were even portrayed as an example to French composers.⁶⁹ Fouque concluded his biographical series by announcing that Glinka was at the head of this new movement:

⁶⁷ See Steven Huebner, *French Opera at the Fin-de-Siècle: Wagnerism, Nationalism, and Style* (Oxford, 1999), 13 and 20.

⁶⁸ 'S'il est vrai ... que nous soyons à la veille d'une complète révolution musicale; si les modes anciens doivent rentrer en scène et détrôner la tonalité moderne, qui s'était établie sur leurs débris; si les gammes des Orientaux doivent faire irruption dans la musique européenne, il est à croire que les Russes nous précéderont dans cette voie.' 'Michel Ivanovitch Glinka', *Le Ménestrel*, 14 December 1879, 10. One of Fouque's sources, a chapter entitled 'L'Opéra national russe' from Gustave Bertrand's *Les Nationalités musicales étudiées dans le drame lyrique: Gluck-Mozart-Weber-Beethoven-Meyerbeer-Rossini-Auber-Berlioz-F.David-Glinka-Verdisme et wagnérisme-l'école française militante* (Paris, 1872) also aligned Russian music with Wagnerism. When Fouque speculated 'if the antique modes are to re-appear', he was in all likelihood reworking the arguments of the French composer and teacher, Louis Bourgault-Ducoudray, who had suggested in previous years, with reference to Greek music, that contemporary music could be rejuvenated through the discovery of scales beyond the major and minor. See Bourgault-Ducoudray, *Souvenirs d'une mission musicale en Grèce et en Orient* (Paris, 1876) and *Etudes sur la musique ecclésiastique grecque: mission musicale en Grèce et en Orient* (Paris, 1877).

⁶⁹ See, for instance, Bertrand, *Les Nationalités musicales*, 310-31.

[Glinka] is the founder and creator; he is the patriarch and father of this numerous generation of musicians. He was the first who conceived the idea of delving into the mines of popular melody, all the wealth of which is not yet known.⁷⁰

Again, the image of the 'mine' of folksong treasures is used, this time suggesting that Russia was in possession of an ancient, powerful natural resource that could be tapped to reinvigorate Europe.

Throughout the 1870s, Glinka had been increasingly aligned with new music, not just in print, but also in the concert hall.⁷¹ In 1873, Jules Pasdeloup began to programme works by the composer in his Concerts populaires at the Cirque d'hiver. Taking pride in providing the masses with the 'classics' (Beethoven, Haydn, Mozart, Mendelssohn and Weber) alongside new, adventurous repertoire, the series was considered the most prestigious in the capital.⁷² It was here that Parisians were first able to hear extracts from Wagner's operas, such as the preludes to *Lohengrin* (1870), *Tristan und Isolde* (1874) and *Die Walküre* (1881),⁷³ but also some of the first French performances of Glinka's *Kamarinskaya*, *Jota Aragonesa* and the Overture to *A Life for the Tsar*.⁷⁴ This mirrored similar events elsewhere, such as the promotion of Glinka by prominent figures of the New German School: Liszt in his Weimar concerts of 1873 and Bülow in his concert tours and productions of *A Life for the Tsar* in Hanover in 1878.⁷⁵ Bülow's high opinion

⁷⁰ '[Glinka] en est le fondateur, le créateur; il est le patriarche, le père de cette nombreuse génération de musiciens. Le premier, il a eu l'idée de fouiller cette mine dont on ne connaît pas encore toutes les richesses, la mélodie populaire.' 'Michel Ivanovitch Glinka', *Le Ménestrel*, 14 December 1879, 10.

⁷¹ Extracts from Glinka's operas, *A Life for the Tsar* and *Ruslan and Lyudmila*, had first been performed in Paris when Berlioz conducted a concert at the Cirque Olympique des Champs-Élysées on 16 March 1845, following his return from a Russian tour. See *La Revue et gazette musicale de Paris*, 23 March 1845, 90-1.

⁷² See Yannick Simon, *Jules Pasdeloup et les origines du concert populaire* (Lyon, 2011), 1-5.

⁷³ See Martine Kahane and Nicole Wild, *Wagner et la France* (Paris, 1983), 49-54 and 158-61.

⁷⁴ *Kamarinskaya* was given in 1873, 1875, twice in 1877 and in 1879; the Overture to *A Life for the Tsar* in 1873; and *Jota Aragonesa* in 1879 (information gathered from concert announcements and reviews in *La Revue et Gazette Musicale de Paris* and *Le Ménestrel*). After this, Pasdeloup stopped programming Glinka, but did introduce Paris to works by Rimsky-Korsakov, Tchaikovsky and Dargomizhsky; see Simon, *Jules Pasdeloup*, 233-8.

⁷⁵ See Kennett Birkin, *Hans von Bülow: A Life for Music* (Cambridge, 2011), especially 280.

of Glinka was also publicised widely in 1874 thanks to the infamous article for the *Allgemeine Zeitung*, written while in Milan for the Italian premiere of *A Life*. His outrage at the Milanese public's disinterest in Glinka and adoration for Verdi, whose *Requiem* (which he famously described as an 'opera in ecclesiastical robes') premiered in the same week, prompted a veritable scandal, leading the review to be translated and reprinted worldwide.⁷⁶ All these links – to the New German School, to the Concerts Populaires, to Wagner – reinforced the idea that Glinka, and Russian music more generally, shared the artistic ideals and serious aesthetics of the 'music of the future', without sharing the problematic Germanic associations that usually came with it.

In Nice, meanwhile, Padeloup's programming techniques were being mirrored at Valrose. Derwies likewise included Wagner and Glinka alongside the 'classics' to local and – by the late '70s – Parisian acclaim.⁷⁷ During the years in which the concert series at Valrose was active (1870-81), many of Glinka's works were performed ahead of Paris, such as *La Jota Aragonesa*, which appeared in 1874, before the first performances in Paris at the Trocadéro in 1878.⁷⁸ One Niçois reviewer, 'Ch-M. Domergue', praised Derwies's concerts as 'art for art' [*l'art pour l'art*], and wrote that one forthcoming concert programme, which included *Kamarinskaya*, constituted 'the epitome of an appreciation of the *music of the future*'.⁷⁹ Glinka had thus come to be associated, both in Paris and Nice, with audiences interested in serious, pioneering artistic

⁷⁶ See Gundula Kreuzer, "'Oper im Kirchengewande"? Verdi's Requiem and the Anxieties of the Young German Empire', *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 58 (2005), 404-6; and Birkin, *Hans von Bülow*, 222.

⁷⁷ A critic for the *Le Monde élégant*, 13 December 1876, declared that 'neither the Paris Conservatoire, nor Padeloup's concerts, offer their subscribers an equal variety of novelties' as Derwies (see Favre, *La Villa Valrose*, 48-50). This local perspective may well have been an exaggeration, but, from what can be gleaned about the programming and the performers, it may not be inaccurate. Derwies was wealthy enough to employ a full-scale orchestra, which counted some of the best musicians in the world: see Ellen Knight, *Charles Martin Loeffler: A Life Apart in American Music* (Urbana, 1993), 21-3. That the Parisian press picked up on Derwies's activities also suggests that these concerts were of a high standard.

⁷⁸ See Schaeffner, 'Debussy et ses rapports avec la musique russe', 120.

⁷⁹ *La Saison musicale de Nice*, 18 December 1878. The concert also included Beethoven's *Leonore Overture No.3*, the 'Scherzo' and 'Finale' from Victorin de Joncières's *Symphonie romantique*, Bruch's *Requiem Romain*, Wagner's *Sonate d'album* and a *Rêverie* by Schumann.

ventures, making *A Life for the Tsar* a shrewd choice for a city like Nice – deemed stuck in the past – to reinvent itself.

When it came to promoting *A Life* in Nice in 1890, preview and review articles were consequently filled with declarations that this was a thoroughly modern opera, despite it having been written in the 1830s and bearing the strong imprint of the *bel canto* tradition.⁸⁰ Some attempted to style this music of the past as the music of the future by stressing that the opera, as Labeille of *Le Petit Niçois* put it, was ‘overflowing with originality’.⁸¹ For those who found it less easy to refute the opera’s Italianisms, assurances were made that Glinka’s Russianness shone through. ‘Scratch away at the Neapolitan’, Wilder assured his readers, ‘and you find the Cossack. If the form of his melody is Italian, the sentiment which animates it remains Slav’.⁸² The local tourist journal *La Colonie étrangère* provided particularly positive and comprehensive coverage of the opera, publishing three front-page preview articles in the weeks leading up to the premiere. In the final instalment, the critic stated: ‘Russia is the country of the future. Who can dare to deny it, when looking at its literature, its music, its painting, its industry?’⁸³ In an earlier article, he had remarked that those listening to *A Life* might be forgiven for thinking that Glinka had lifted whole passages from the scores of Gounod, Delibes, Massenet and Saint-Saëns.⁸⁴ Not only did this declaration suggest affinities between Russia and France, but it also aligned Glinka with composers who were, quite literally in this case, of the future. Framed in

⁸⁰ See Rutger Helmers, ‘“It just reeks of Italianism”: Traces of Italian Opera in *A Life for the Tsar*’, *Music & Letters* 91 (2010), 376-405.

⁸¹ *Le Petit Niçois*, 28 January 1890.

⁸² ‘Grattez le Napolitain, vous retrouverez le Cosaque. Si la forme de sa mélodie est italienne, le sentiment qui l’anime reste slave.’ *Gil Blas*, 1 February 1890.

⁸³ ‘La Russie est le pays de l’avenir. Qui oserait le nier, en regardant sa littérature, sa musique, sa peinture, son industrie?’ *La Colonie étrangère*, 2 February 1890.

⁸⁴ ‘Il les a empruntées, pour ne pas dire volées, de nos compositeurs en vogue, ici 16 pages entières de Delibes, là des phrases de Gounod, de Massenet, de Saint-Saëns et d’autres.’ *La Colonie étrangère*, 19 January 1890, 1.

this way, *A Life* became an asset to the Théâtre Municipal – proof of its artistic merits and of its ability to avoid the repertorial stagnation plaguing Paris.

The Nation on Stage

The performances of *A Life for the Tsar* in Nice also seemed to demonstrate the city's political relevance. All the suggestions that Russian music might be the future, that the New Russian School might provide an equal and opposite force to the New German School, even that Glinka might be an alternative to Wagner, were highly politically charged – reflections of mounting hostility towards Germany and new attempts to draw closer to Russia in light of the impending alliance. In the years before the treaty was signed, there were increasingly frequent public displays of Franco-Russian affection on both sides in the form of formal visits and cultural exchanges.⁸⁵ A production of *A Life for the Tsar* had the potential to form an ideal, not to mention dramatic, diplomatic gesture, and thus to place Nice at the forefront of a critical national issue.

Since the very first article on Glinka to appear in France, *A Life* had been presented as the cornerstone of the Russian operatic tradition.⁸⁶ Not only was it patriotic in subject – it depicts the legend of the rescue of the first Romanov tsar through the self-sacrifice of the peasant, Ivan Susanin – but it was also the first full-scale, all-sung Russian opera, and the first to gain permanent repertory status. In consequence, *A Life* had already been discussed in France as a potential tool for solidifying the alliance. After the first Russian translation was made of Victor

⁸⁵ See Michel Espagne, 'Le Train de Saint-Petersbourg: Les relations culturelles franco-germano-russes après 1870', in *Transferts culturels triangulaires: France-Allemagne-Russie*, ed. Katia Dmitrieva and Espagne (Paris, 1996), 329-31.

Debora Silverman, in addition, has explored how the alliance was celebrated through a rococo revival invoking the two countries' 'common cultural history of the mid-eighteenth century, when the first Franco-Russian alliance had occurred'. See Silverman, *Art Nouveau in Fin-de-Siècle France: Politics, Psychology and Style* (Berkeley, 1989), 159-71.

⁸⁶ Adolphe Adam declared, somewhat disdainfully in 1840, that 'the Russians possess but a single national opera, it is called *All for the Czar*'. 'Quelques Mois Loin de Paris', *La France musicale*, 21 June 1840, 239.

Hugo's *Hernani* in 1887, a staging of the opera was proposed by the pseudonymous 'Saint-Jean' as a suitable return gesture, as recorded in *Le Figaro*:

If it is true that one act of civility merits another, then, since Russia has translated *Hernani* and is going to produce it in St Petersburg and Moscow, would it not be in good taste to stage *A Life for the Tsar* at the Paris Opéra?⁸⁷

The next year, French composers actively promoted a French premiere of *A Life* on similar grounds. In February, Ambroise Thomas, Charles Gounod, Ernest Reyer, Camille Saint-Saëns, Jules Massenet and Léo Delibes all signed the charter of the newly-formed 'Association artistique et littéraire franco-russe'. At its head was Juliette Adam (1836-1936), a Republican and Russophile who used her influence as an editor and in her literary salons to promote the Franco-Russian cause.⁸⁸ Having secured these composers' endorsements, Adam encouraged them to write music on Russian themes and to disseminate Russian music in France in the coming years.⁸⁹ It is also likely that she was behind the following appeal, signed by the five composers, to the minister of the Académie des Beaux-Arts in July 1888:

We the undersigned, members of the musical composition section of the Académie des Beaux-Arts, eager to give a welcome of international and artistic sympathy to Russia in

⁸⁷ 'S'il est vrai qu'une politesse en vaut une autre, puisque la Russie traduit *Hernani* et va le représenter à Pétersbourg et à Moscou, ne serait-il pas de bon goût de monter la *Vie pour le Czar* à l'Opéra de Paris?' Quoted from *La Revue de Paris et de Saint-Pétersbourg* in *Le Figaro*, 15 November 1887.

⁸⁸ This charter, with these composers' names as well as those of influential literary figures such as Alexandre Dumas, can be found in Folder 14 of the Juliette Adam Collection held at the Lilly Library, Indiana University. As well as being a Russophile, Adam's hatred of Germany was renowned. In 1885, she famously wrote to *Le Figaro* denouncing plans for a production of *Lohengrin* at the Opéra-Comique.

⁸⁹ See Elaine McAllister and Joseph Baylen, 'Saint-Saëns and Juliette Adam: An unpublished letter', *Music & Letters*, 50 (1969), 296-300. Saint-Saëns wrote to Adam from Algiers on 9 February 1888, saying 'When I get back I shall begin practising pieces in the purest Muscovite style again and shall see that both the music and my fingers are at your disposal.'

the person of Glinka, the illustrious founder of Russian opera, would be glad to see his principal and popular work, *La Vie pour le Tsar*, performed on a French stage.⁹⁰

But if the premiere of *A Life* represented such a significant political and artistic moment, how did it end up in Nice, and not Paris? There was, of course, the issue of the overcrowding of the theatres to keep it from the capital, and the arrival of Gunsbourg to propel it to Nice; but the answer is also, once again, political. While Paris was home to a large Russian community, many of its members were political émigrés who opposed the Tsar.⁹¹ In Nice, on the other hand, which filled up each winter with Russian aristocrats, an opera depicting the rescue and coronation of the first Romanov through the martyrdom of a peasant was more likely to be well received.⁹²

At the same time, Gunsbourg was also well aware that, by producing an opera that spoke to a central issue in Republican international policy, he could soothe local anxieties about the city's disconnectedness from the rest of France (and about his own national allegiances). And indeed, the Republican *Petit Niçois*, for whom enforcing French local identity was a central concern, offered by far the most extensive and positive coverage of Gunsbourg's project, publishing articles on the opera in every issue from 28 January to 5 February, often on the front page. With public feeling towards Russia at a new high, not only could *A Life* be used to attract

⁹⁰ 'Monsieur le Ministre, Les soussignés, membres de la section de composition musicale de l'Académie des Beaux-Arts de l'Institut de France, désireux de donner un témoignage de sympathie internationale et artistique à la Russie, dans la personne de Glinka, l'illustre fondateur de l'opéra russe, seraient heureux de voir représenter sur une scène française son œuvre capitale et populaire, *la Vie pour le Tsar*.' The letter was published, with the five composers' names, in a number of journals and newspapers, including *Le Ménestrel*, 22 July 1888, 235-6:

⁹¹ The Russian embassy even encouraged pro-Russian groups in the capital in the 1880s and '90s for fear that the émigré community would unsettle public opinion. See George Kennan, *The Fateful Alliance: France, Russia, and the coming of the First World War* (Manchester, 1984), 69.

⁹² Funnily enough (in this context), one of the negative stereotypes about the 'colonie russe' in Nice was that it was full of wealthy Russian socialites who had no concept of politics, only the social scene. See, for instance, Louis Bertrand's derisive anecdotes in *La Riviera que j'ai connue* (Paris, 1933), 219.

the attention of Paris, but also to demonstrate the city's Frenchness, in a venue where this very issue had long been under dispute.

The reviews in 1890, in Nice and Paris alike, helped enforce the feeling that staging *A Life* was an unofficial demonstration of Franco-Russian friendship.⁹³ The librettist, Louis Gallet, writing in the pro-Russian *Nouvelle revue*, even called the opera a 'sort of dramatised *Marseillaise*',⁹⁴ suggesting the performance was akin to an extended rendition of Russia's national anthem. A prominent tendency of the reviews was to treat the opera as the embodiment of Russia itself. The critic for *Nice Artistique* informed his readers, for example, that Glinka's music 'was animated by a distinctive spirit as vague and poetic as the land in which the action takes place'.⁹⁵ Such affirmations were also used to convey positive popular opinion towards the Russians. The opera was described by Labeille of *Le Petit Niçois* as reflecting 'the characteristics of a strong and youthful people',⁹⁶ and by Wilder of *Gil Blas* as 'the manifestation of an elevated spirit and a sincere soul'.⁹⁷ Both echoed familiar tropes that Russia was a powerful up-and-coming nation, untarnished by Western failings; in short, the ideal ally.

In this context, French critics also proved sympathetic towards the depiction of a peasant dying to save the ancestor of a soon-to-be allied monarch. Susanin's self-sacrifice had become a point of contention among Russian critics in previous years. Vladimir Stasov, for instance, had complained about what he called Susanin's 'hen-like' submission to a tsar he had never met.⁹⁸ The plot had similarly raised eyebrows when the opera was performed in London

⁹³ There is no evidence to suggest that the staging of *A Life* in Nice was an official (or even covertly official) diplomatic act. The council minutes in Nice's municipal archive show that this was Gunsbourg's personal initiative. Nor was it an official ambassadorial quest on Gunsbourg's part. Though in his autobiography Gunsbourg makes numerous, often far-fetched, claims about his role in the formation of the Franco-Russian alliance, he makes no mention of this performance serving such a purpose; see Gunsbourg, *Cent ans*, 109-10.

⁹⁴ *La Nouvelle revue*, January-February 1890, 878.

⁹⁵ *Nice artistique*, 2 February 1890.

⁹⁶ *Le Petit Niçois*, 28 January 1890.

⁹⁷ *Gil Blas*, 1 February 1890.

⁹⁸ A letter from Stasov to Mily Balakirev, *M.A. Balakirev i V.V. Stasov: Perepiska*, ed. A.S. Lyapunova, Vol. I (Moscow, 1970), 130, quoted in Richard Taruskin, *On Russian Music* (Berkeley, 2009), 49-50.

in 1887, with one critic describing Susanin's actions as a display of 'dog-like fidelity'.⁹⁹ For Louis Dumas of the fashionable journal *La Saison de Nice*, however, 'the devotion of this poor peasant who places his affection for his country before his children and gives his life to save his prince' was 'quite simply sublime'.¹⁰⁰ This French-language performance of Russia's cornerstone opera, at the newly French Théâtre Municipal and before a cosmopolitan audience, thus became a reaffirmation of the city's national allegiances: not to Italy, but to France and Russia. It was through fostering a transnational relationship, rather than simply premiering a new French opera, that Gunsbourg could offer Nice a decentralist triumph – an opportunity to draw the nation's gaze truly away from the capital.

Staging the Auditorium

And yet, perhaps in recognition of the difficulties in convincingly framing *A Life for the Tsar* as a modern opera, without a plot that contradicted Republican politics and without Italian trappings, the overwhelming focus of the critical response was not the opera itself. Nor did critics dwell long on the lavish production, replete with new sets and live horses for the coronation finale.¹⁰¹ Instead, it was the performance in the auditorium that induced most widespread and enduring media attention. Once again, Gunsbourg was key in ensuring that the political significations of the premiere were highlighted on the night. Though the anthem singing was portrayed as spontaneous in the press, the conditions had been carefully set in place. True, there had been an appreciative atmosphere throughout the evening: the Act I finale

⁹⁹ *The Weekly Dispatch*, 17 July 1887.

¹⁰⁰ *La Saison de Nice*, 30 January 1890.

¹⁰¹ This was noted, for instance, in *Le Phare du littoral*, 31 January 1890: 'Finally, I [will] report on the superb decor in a few lines ... above all, that of a forest in the snow, which produced a striking effect. The grand procession finale was not lacking in scale. A series of riders processed across the stage; it was magnificent.' ('Enfin, je signale en quelques lignes les superbes décors ... et surtout celui d'une forêt sous la neige, qui a produit un saisissant effet. Le grand défilé final ne manquait pas d'ampleur. Une série de cavaliers ont défilé sur la scène; ça été superbe.')

was followed by three curtain calls to the tune of enthusiastic cries of 'Vive la Russie!'; Zucchi's solo in the Mazurka of Act II was encored, as was Vanya and Susanin's duet in Act III; the public, reportedly, cheered every mention of the 'Tsar' or 'Russie'.¹⁰² But it was only after Act III that the demonstrations broke out. One reviewer disclosed that the Russian anthem did not start up because the audience requested it, but because Gunsbourg 'gestured to the orchestra'.¹⁰³ The music was already on the stands, and the chorus had already learnt the words. The timing was perfect. Such an outburst could not have come after Act I in case the auditorium had not filled up yet. Act II ends with a chorus of Poles vowing to overthrow the Tsar, Act IV with the hero's death, and leaving it to Act V would run the risk of playing to a half-empty house. Act III, however, concludes with a militant peasant chorus swearing death to a foreign foe: just the thing to follow up with a patriotic demonstration.¹⁰⁴ And in case the public had forgotten that Gunsbourg was responsible for the evening's success, he clambered out of his box and took centre stage to sing along.¹⁰⁵

Though this was the first time that the two anthems had been sung in tandem at an opera house, or that the Russian anthem had interrupted a French opera performance, such patriotic vocal outbursts were not unprecedented in France. Gunsbourg even had first-hand experience of the positive impact ostensibly spontaneous singing could have. As the director in Lille in the previous season, he had introduced Étienne Méhul's famous revolutionary war song, 'Chant du départ' (1794) at the end of Act III of Offenbach's *La Fille du Tambour-Major*: the point when the Austrian troops attempt to prevent the French from breaking free from a

¹⁰² See, for example, the account in *Le Figaro*, 1 February 1890.

¹⁰³ *L'Union*, 2 February 1890.

¹⁰⁴ This point was also a common one for such appreciative demonstrations. Indeed just two years before, the theatre had erupted into a special round of applause midway through a performance of *Hamlet* due to Ambroise Thomas himself being in attendance.

¹⁰⁵ This was reported in almost every review. 'Amaury', for instance, noted that 'the enthusiasm [of the crowd] reached its climax when Gunsbourg appeared on the stage, placed himself among the singers, and sang the *Marseillaise* with them', *Le Petit Niçois*, 31 January 1890.

beleaguered position.¹⁰⁶ Well aware of the political connotations, the audience rose to sing along.

Gunsbourg could be confident of an even more heated reaction to his choice of interpolation in Nice. The sound of Alexey L'vov's Russian anthem (1833) had become familiar in France since the 1840s as a popular melody for arrangements and fantasias.¹⁰⁷ But in the years leading up to the alliance, this tune afforded new resonances. Playing the Russian anthem with the *Marseillaise* became a common occurrence in public manifestations of pro-Russian feeling.¹⁰⁸ Both had been sung, for instance, in Nouart in 1886 at the erection of a monument to Antoine Chanzy, a general who had served during the Franco-Prussian War and ambassador to Russia from 1879 to 1882. A report in *l'Avenir de la Dordogne* in 1889 told of the warm welcome given to the Russian general and chief of the Main Staff, Nikolai Obruchev, and his French wife when they came to stay in the region, with crowds gathering to call out 'Vive la France! Vive la Russie!' as the two national songs were played, while similar demonstrations were made at a barracks in Paris that same year for the visit of the captain of the Russian imperial guard.¹⁰⁹ As the first notes of the Russian anthem sounded at the Théâtre Municipal on 30 January 1890, therefore, both French and Russian audience members would have realised the implications; the follow up calls for *La Marseillaise* were not so much a spontaneous request as part of a well-rehearsed pattern of patriotic performance.

¹⁰⁶ T. J. Walsh, *Monte-Carlo Opera, 1879-1909* (Dublin, 1975), 67.

¹⁰⁷ Though various arrangements of the hymn had been heard in performance since the 1830s, the first to be published was *Russische Volkshymne* (Vienna, 1841), and the first from a Parisian publishing house was a 'Grand fantaisie par l'hymne national russe ... pour violon' (1844). Many followed in the coming decades, including a 'Fantaisie sur l'hymne national russe' by Charles Gounod (1886).

¹⁰⁸ See also Janine Neboit-Mombet, *L'Image de la Russie dans le roman français, 1859-1900* (Clermont-Ferrand, 2005), 18-19.

¹⁰⁹ The former story was reported, for example, in *l'Avenir de la Dordogne*, 1 October 1889; the latter in *Le Figaro*, 16 May 1889.

That evening, moreover, the auditorium was particularly primed for a public outpouring of Franco-Russian enthusiasm. Gunsbourg scheduled *A Life's* premiere at the highpoint in the season, when all the finest of high society had made their way to Nice for the carnival, meaning that the turnout was sufficiently impressive to merit extensive lists of notable persons present in the reviews.¹¹⁰ These included various distant members of the Russian royal family (such as the Duke and Duchess of Leuchtenberg¹¹¹) and other members of the Tsar's entourage (including an ex-mistress of Nicholas I, Varvara Nelidov Bux). There was also an array of French and Russian celebrities, such as the spiritualist Maria de Mariategui, Baron de Rothschild (of the famous banking family) and Henckel von Donnersmarck, one of the richest industrialists of the age, with his glamorous wife Katharina Slepzow, a fashion icon from St Petersburg. Alongside such figures, the political leaders of the Alpes-Maritimes, including Arsène Henry, the Prefect, and Alfred Borriglione, the Deputy, turned out to show their support. Two well-known lobbyists for the Franco-Russian alliance had also come down to Nice from Paris expressly to attend the premiere: Paul Déroulède (1846-1914), a nationalist author and politician who founded the Ligue des patriotes to promote French retaliation against Germany after 1870; and Juliette Adam who, as well as being an influential campaigner for the Franco-Russian alliance, was the editor of *La Nouvelle revue*.¹¹² Then, of course, there were all those Parisian critics to ensure that the demonstration was reported back in the capital.

The spectacle of the theatre – packed out with politicians, aristocrats and critics, and united in cheering both France and Russia – caused quite a stir. The combined performance of

¹¹⁰ The season was busiest between the end of January and early March.

¹¹¹ On 14 July 1839, Nicholas I had granted the title of Imperial Highness to Maximilian de Beauharnais after he married his daughter, the Grand Duchess Maria Nikolayevna. The Duke in attendance in 1890 was Nicholas Maximilianovich de Beauharnais, husband of Nadezhda Sergeevna Annekova. He was named the Fourth Duke of Leuchtenberg in 1890 by Alexander III.

¹¹² The lengthy review that appeared in the journal after the performance, however, was written by Gallet. Since he was not recorded as being one of the Parisian journalists in attendance, it is likely that he wrote his account using a report provided by Adam. See *La Nouvelle revue*, January-February 1890, 876-9.

the anthems was widely treated as symbolic of the harmony between the two nations, and no one seemed concerned by the contradictory pairing of a revolutionary anthem with one declaring fealty to an autocrat. A reporter for *Le Mentonnais*, for instance, declared: 'the Marseillaise and Bogè Tzara formed a single national and patriotic song'.¹¹³ This sense of unity, at once of art and politics, of the two nations and of the cosmopolitan audience, was emphasised by innumerable references to the way they were dressed. Review after review noted the striking impression created by the uniformity of the bejewelled ladies all with bare shoulders alongside men all in black.¹¹⁴ By providing such details and listing the attendees, local critics stressed that this, as Dumas of *La Saison* described it, was 'not some hoi polloi or short-sighted ignorant mob'.¹¹⁵ In other words, the demonstration was not the work of some extremist, or paid French clique, but of a like-minded and well-informed audience.

Having carefully staged the auditorium and, of course, the opera itself, Gunsbourg followed up with another well-orchestrated performance. The lavish banquet he threw at the Grand-Hôtel for his Parisian guests was replete with an exemplary cast, scenery and set pieces, all of which were, once again, widely reviewed in the local press. Reports informed the Nice public that after the Franco-Russian themed menu (including 'Canapés Moscovites' and 'Salade Parisienne'), Gunsbourg rose to give the first of many toasts.¹¹⁶ He began by recalling his childhood memories of the Franco-Prussian war, asserting that even then (aged ten) he had felt French, despite his Romanian birth.¹¹⁷ He went on to recount the warm welcome he had

¹¹³ *Le Mentonnais*, 8 February 1890. Hardy-Polday in *Gil Blas* also expressed excitement over the 'fusion of these two national airs', 1 February 1890.

¹¹⁴ As, for example, noted by Bauer in *L'Echo de Paris*, 3 February 1890: 'The men in black, the women with bare shoulders in elegant dress, upstanding in the boxes applauding, cheering, certainly offered a curious and completely novel ensemble. It was marvellous to see, marvellous to hear.'

¹¹⁵ *La Saison de Nice*, 6 February 1890.

¹¹⁶ The menu was noted in *Le Petit Niçois*, 1 February 1890, among other papers.

¹¹⁷ Many of the local reports included dictations of his speech, including *Le Phare du littoral*, which quoted Gunsbourg as saying: 'I have always considered myself a Frenchman'; 1 February 1890.

received in Russia as an impresario, thus strengthening his self-made image as an ambassador of Franco-Russian goodwill. 'By giving you the first performance of *A Life for the Tsar*', he concluded, full of emotion, 'I have provided you with the opportunity to further the great sympathetic movement in favour of Russia which has been born in France, to cultivate it, to give it life'.¹¹⁸ For all these claims, however, there was not a single Russian representative among the fifty guests. Neither were any of the correspondents from the Moscow, Vienna, New York, London or Rome newspapers who attended the premiere invited.¹¹⁹ Instead, the guest list comprised Parisian and local journalists, the opera soloists and leading members of the municipal council. This assembly was not so much a Franco-Russian gesture as it was a chance to nurture connections between Côte and capital: to celebrate French unity, and for Gunsbourg to emphasise his decentralist success in front of those who would decide his fate the following year.

Rather than providing a platform for *A Life for the Tsar*, Gunsbourg had succeeded in making *A Life for the Tsar* a showcase for Nice; one observer remarked that 'one could not dream' of 'a more grandiose and powerful advertisement in favour of our town'.¹²⁰ If the implications of placing Russia's cornerstone opera in the French language, in front of an international audience, were not obvious enough, the demonstrations after Act III pronounced that there was a place for Nice in French politics. Even without this, the performance had been declared a triumph and the opera itself an adventurous step, thus affirming the city's artistic merits. Gunsbourg had chosen an opera that exploited the very features that typically caused

¹¹⁸ 'Je vous ai fourni avec l'occasion, en vous offrant la première représentation de la *Vie pour le Tsar*, de grandir en France le grand mouvement de sympathie que est né en faveur de la Russie, de le féconder en quelque sorte, de le vivifier.' *Le Phare du littoral*, 1 February 1890.

¹¹⁹ 'Francis Sam' of *Le Phare du littoral* (31 January 1890, 1) noted that correspondents from the *New York Herald*, the *London Daily News*, the *Gazette de Moscou*, the *Fremblatt* and the *Rome Tribuna* attended.

¹²⁰ 'Il est certain qu'on ne pouvait rêver ... une réclame plus grandiose et plus efficace en faveur de notre ville.' *La Vie mondaine*, 6 February 1890.

Parisians to be dismissive of the Comté de Nice – the luxurious lifestyle of its visitors, its large foreign contingent – by turning them to the national cause of the Franco-Russian alliance. He had even allowed Nice temporarily to show Paris up by successfully putting on an opera they had failed to and, in so doing, legitimised his position. So it was that a Russian opera first came to a public stage in France, not for the chance to marvel at its Russianness, but for the chance it provided for one regional town to prove itself to the capital.

Epilogue

Unsurprisingly, Gunsbourg secured his second season. But writers on the chauvinistic *Rabelais* still grumbled that the Théâtre Municipal was being managed by a ‘Romanian, born to German Jews’, and that his magnificent first season had been nothing more than ‘vainglory’,¹²¹ rather than, as Blavet put it, a selfless ‘mission to cement the Franco-Russian alliance in the field of art’.¹²² In 1891, Gunsbourg quit Nice and moved along the coast to Monte Carlo, where, once again, he drew Parisian attention through exploiting his Russian connections. It was here that he would eventually found his own ‘Ballet Russe’.¹²³ The theatre commission, meanwhile, appointed a new (Italian) director: Santino Costa.

As for *A Life*, the reviews in Nice and Paris alike insisted that the opera would surely now make its ‘tour de France’.¹²⁴ Rumours appeared even before the season was up that Gunsbourg was in negotiations with the Eden-Théâtre in Paris to stage the opera there the

¹²¹ ‘L’Opéra français à Nice’, *Le Rabelais* (1891), 257-258. The article accepted that the performance of *A Life for the Tsar* had been a great patriotic event, but claimed that the idea had been theirs, not Gunsbourg’s.

¹²² *Le Figaro*, 1 February 1890.

¹²³ After Diaghilev’s financially disastrous first visit with his ballet troupe to Paris in 1909, Gunsbourg bought the sets to use in Monte Carlo, where he produced his own opera, *Ivan le Terrible*, in 1911. For the remainder of Diaghilev’s career, Gunsbourg became a strong rival in terms of Russian opera and ballet performances. He founded the ‘Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo’ in 1938. See Lynn Garafola, *Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes* (New York, 1998), 178-9 and 238-41.

¹²⁴ *Le Petit Niçois*, 3 February 1890, 1: ‘*A Life for the Tsar*, said one of these gentlemen [the Parisian critics], will make its tour of France. We are certain of it.’

following year. However, *A Life* was never repeated in Nice, let alone at any other regional opera house. It did reach Paris in 1896, but at the small-scale, privately managed Nouveau Théâtre, where it was given in the hope of cashing in on the excitement of the state visit of the newly crowned Nicholas II. The rendition was so poor that it was dropped within a week.¹²⁵

But in truth this had not been an attempt to establish Glinka's first opera in the French repertoire. The extraordinary nature of the event made it unrepeatable and the performance itself forgettable. The opera had receded in the press coverage, through unrealistic attempts to style it as modern, its representation as an emblem of an idealised Russian nation, and its disappearance in reviews in favour of recounting the patriotic demonstrations after Act III. And sure enough, the one thing missing from the scene at the theatre in Theuriet's *Charme dangereux* is the opera itself: *A Life for the Tsar* disappears in favour of *Don Giovanni*.

Instead, it was the demonstration that persisted in public memory. Just a few months later in Vichy, during a performance of Offenbach's operetta *Madame Favart*, a curiously familiar sounding report appeared:

It was known that M. Wannovski [the Russian Minister for War] would be attending the performance ... All of a sudden, when the second act began, the orchestra started up the Russian national anthem. ... It was like an electric shock. In the blink of an eye, the whole audience was on its feet.

¹²⁵ Arthur Pougin in *Le Ménestrel*, 25 October 1896, 338-9, described the Paris version as 'truncated and mutilated' and the general execution as mediocre.

Hats were waved. Cheers were interspersed with cries of 'Vive la Russie!'

Everyone, turned towards the box where M. Wannovski was seated, applauded him as the representative of a powerful friend of France.¹²⁶

The singing of the Russian and French anthems in this way became a staple part of gala concerts held to celebrate official state visits. The anthems were included in concerts for the visit of the French fleet to the Russian port of Cronstadt in 1891, for the Russian fleet's visits to Toulon and Paris in 1893 and when Nicholas II came to the capital in 1896. Similar demonstrations also began to take place in Russian theatres. In the 1896-7 Moscow season, renditions of the two anthems were reportedly demanded before every French opera performance.¹²⁷ This aspect of the 1890 premiere became part of the diplomatic repertoire, even if *A Life for the Tsar* itself failed to make it into the operatic canon.

Neatly aligning national sympathies with aesthetic value had thus proved unrealistic. After the excitement had died down, some, even in Nice, began to question the motivations behind the performance. 'Zut Majeur' of *La Saison* argued a few weeks later:

Patriotism has nothing to do with the arts, particularly music. Though born in countries which are now enemies, Beethoven, Wagner, Mendelssohn and Verdi, should not be any less admired by even the most chauvinistic Frenchman, and it would be difficult for us

¹²⁶ 'On savait ... que M. Wannovski devait assister à la représentation ... Tout à coup, au moment où allait commencer le second acte, l'orchestre attaqua l'hymne national russe ... Ce fut comme une étincelle électrique. En un clin d'œil, tout le public fut debout. Les chapeaux s'agitaient. Les cris de Vive la Russie! se mêlaient aux acclamations. Tous les spectateurs, tournés vers la loge où se trouvait M. Wannovski, saluaient en lui le représentant d'une puissance amie de la France.' *La Semaine de Cusset et de Vichy*, 12 July 1890; quoted in Neboit-Mombet, *L'Image de la Russie*, 385-6. Neboit-Mombet states that this was the event that inspired Theriet in *Charme dangereux*. It is far more likely, however, that events in Nice prompted Theriet's scenario, not only thanks to the close similarities between the descriptions in the press and his account, but also because Theriet regularly stayed in Nice. Even if he had not been there, he would have been more likely to have read about *A Life for the Tsar's* premiere in the national papers than the Vichy performance, which was far less widely documented.

¹²⁷ See Olga Haldey, *Mamontov's Private Opera: The Search for Modernism in Russian Theatre* (Bloomington, 2010), 249.

to take Glinka and Rubinstein as our musical diet under the pretext that their country is allied to France and that, in listening to this bland music, we are doing a service to our dear country.¹²⁸

Indeed, despite the early 1890s seeing the consolidation of the Franco-Russian alliance against the *Triplice*, it was in these very years that *Lohengrin* spread all over France and became fixed in the French repertoire, while *A Life* was remembered as little more than a glorified national anthem '*en action*'.¹²⁹

So political sympathies were not enough to keep *A Life* on the French stage; but these, combined with the idea that Russian music heralded an alternative 'music of the future' helped pave the way for a new (and more familiar) turn in French musical life. Debussy and Ravel would look to Russian music in the belief that it possessed the keys to liberating Western harmony and form;¹³⁰ Diaghilev would pose his *ballets russes* as an alternative *Gesamtkunstwerk* that would draw the public to modern art;¹³¹ and Stravinsky's Parisian ballets would rebrand Glinka's 'mine' of Russian melodies as a source of primitivist modernism.¹³² The clichés in which Theuriet dealt in *Charme dangereux* might well show that, despite the Franco-Russian alliance, and despite burgeoning interest in Russian music, stereotypes prevailed in the popular

¹²⁸ 'Le patriotisme n'a rien à faire avec l'art en général et la musique en particulier. Bien que nés en pays momentanément ennemis. Beethoven, Wagner, Mendelsohn [*sic*] et Verdi, n'en doivent pas moins être admirés par les Français les plus chauvins, et il serait dur de nous mettre au régime de Glinka et de Rubinstein sous prétexte que leur pays est allié à la France et qu'en entendant cette musique grise nous rendons service à notre chère patrie.' 'Zut Majeur', *La Saison de Nice*, 19 February 1890.

¹²⁹ On *Lohengrin's* spread around the provinces and, eventually, Paris, see Ellis, 'How to make Wagner Normal', 127-31.

¹³⁰ See Schaeffner, 'Debussy et ses rapports avec la musique russe', 133-8; Boris Gasparov, *Five Operas and a Symphony* (New Haven, 2005), 185-208; Roy Howat, 'Russian imprints in Debussy's Music', in *Rethinking Debussy*, ed. Elliott Antokoletz and Marianne Wheelon (New York, 2011), 31-51; and Steven Bauer, 'Ravel's "Russian" Period: Octatonicism in His Early Works, 1893-1908', *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 52 (1999), 531-92.

¹³¹ Garafola, *Diaghilev's Ballets Russes*, 45-7.

¹³² As discussed in Taruskin, *Defining Russia Musically*, 360-88. For more on Russian primitivist modernism and its reception abroad, see Rebecca Beasley and Philip Bullock's introduction to *Russia in Britain, 1880-1940: From Melodrama to Modernism* (Oxford, 2013), 9.

imagination. Mania Liebling's exotic allure, after all, stems not only from her embodiment of Nice's characteristics, but also from her Russian nationality. And yet, by placing the original scenario – on which Jacques and Mania's is based – under the magnifying glass, a far more intricate cultural web comes into view: one which suggests that it might be time to start plotting a musical map of nineteenth-century Europe in which Russia both has a more important, but also more complicated part to play than its familiar role as the novel Eastern neighbour.