

Invitation to an Interdisciplinary Seminar

Conflict and Coexistence of Ethnic and National Identities in Russian, Central and East European Music

St Antony's College,
University of Oxford

When examining the local contexts of musical cultures in Russia, Central and Eastern Europe in the 19th and 20th centuries, we are faced with difficulties that are different from those related to the consideration of musical cultures in Western Europe. Among the causes of these difficulties is the diversity of ethnic and national identities in the music of these regions.

In the areas in question there have often been a variety of ethnic groups in one place, who in the 19th and 20th centuries fostered their cultural identities in their musical activities. As shown in the studies of German folk songs in Bohemia and Moravia which were carried out by German philologists in Prague at the end of the 20th century, some of these ethnic groups specifically developed their national identities in music when confronted with the cultural nationalism of neighbouring ethnicities. At the same time there were also ethnic groups such as Jews and Romani who were – and still are – stigmatised as separate ‘races’, and not allowed to nurture their own nation-building in the places where they inhabited. They also cultivated their cultural identities in music, which was consumed by their neighbours. Yet once the ethnicities which politically and economically prevailed within the places of their inhabitation succeeded in establishing their own nation states, they also held hegemony over local historiographies of music, in which their nationalistic biases were reflected. These biases were strengthened by the doctrine of Socialist Realism in the second half of the 20th century, with the result that the multi-faceted characters of the musical cultures in these areas in the 19th and 20th centuries remained obscured.

The aim of the seminar is to consider and discuss the coexistence and conflict of local ethnic and national identities in the musical cultures of these regions through the presentation of case studies by participants.