

## FACTORS INFLUENCING THE CONDUCT OF ILYA SLATIN'S SYMPHONIC CONCERTS IN KHARKIV IN THE 1870s–1880s

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**Zhang Lichuan. Factors influencing the holding of Ilya Slatin's Symphonic Concerts in Kharkiv in the 1870s–1880s**

The purpose of this article is to determine the specifics of the organization and conduct of symphonic concerts led by I. I. Slatin under the auspices of the Kharkiv branch of the Russian Musical Society (KhRMS) during the 1870s–1880s. The article identifies the main factors that influenced this process: the organizational and financial conditions under which the musical society operated, as well as the orchestral performance practices of that time in Kharkiv. It is argued that the limited personnel and financial resources led to the involvement of periodically active theater enterprise in the city's symphonic concerts. Factors such as the improving financial position of KhRMS in the 1880s, the opening of wind instrument classes at the Kharkiv Music School in 1886, and the formation of a pool of orchestral musicians in the city helped solve the issues of forming a full-fledged symphonic orchestra, which by the early 1890s consisted of professional musicians from Kharkiv.

**Keywords:** *musical performance, symphonic orchestra, Kharkiv, I. Slatin, performance practice, instrumental composition, repertoire.*

**Чжан Лічуань. Чинники впливу на проведення симфонічних концертів Іллі Слатіна в Харкові 1870-х — 1880-х рр.**

Мета статті полягає у визначенні специфіки організації та проведення І. І. Слатіним симфонічних концертів під егідою Харківського відділення Російського музичного товариства (ХВ РМТ) протягом 1870-х — 1880-х рр. Визначаються основні фактори впливу на цей процес: організаційні та фінансові умови функціонування музичного товариства, практика оркестрового виконавства того часу в Харкові. Доводиться, що обмежені кадрові та фінансові можливості зумовлювали залучення до участі в симфонічних концертах періодично діючих у місті

оркестрів театральних антреприз. Такі чинники, як поліпшення з 1880-х рр. фінансового становища ХВ РМТ, відкриття в 1886 р. класів духових інструментів у Харківському музичному училищі та формування прошарку оркестрових музикантів у місті сприяли вирішенню проблеми формування повноцінного складу симфонічного оркестру, який з початку 1890-х рр. складався з професійних музикантів Харкова.

**Ключові слова:** *музичне виконавство, симфонічний оркестр, Харків, І. Слатін, виконавська практика, інструментальний склад, репертуар.*

**The relevance of the research topic.** Symphonic performance spread actively throughout Ukrainian culture from the second half of the XIX century, playing an important role in the development of national academic musical art. The specifics of how symphonic orchestras functioned during this period were shaped by the musical cultures of various regional centers in Ukraine, including Kyiv, Odesa, Poltava, and Kharkiv, which highlights the need for a scientific understanding of symphonic practice in these cities.

**Problem statement.** The prevalence of orchestral performance in Kharkiv has been studied by researchers since the late XVIII century. Kharkiv residents were familiar with various instrumental ensembles, diverse in their composition and size, which operated in military, educational, and theatrical environments; by the mid-XIX century, these ensembles also performed in summer gardens and entertainment venues (Loshkov, 2007). As early as the beginning of the XIX century, Kharkiv music lovers were introduced to the specifics of a symphonic orchestra, thanks to the work of I. M. Vitkovsky, a prominent Polish artist and a student of one of the leading figures of the Viennese Classical School,

J. Haydn, who (Vitkovsky) led the music classes at Kharkiv University (Zhang Lichuan, 2024). The activation of symphonic performance in Kharkiv in the second half of the 19th century is primarily associated with the activities of the Kharkiv branch of the Russian Musical Society (KhRMS). In this context, an analysis of the specific periods of the symphonic practice within the functioning of the Kharkiv musical society will contribute to optimizing the scientific knowledge of musical art in one of Ukraine's leading cultural centers — Kharkiv.

#### **Analysis of recent research and publications.**

The symphonic performance in Kharkiv during the XIX and early XX centuries has, to some extent, has attracted the attention of researchers of Ukrainian regional musical culture mostly in the context of highlighting individual facts and phenomena, including the activities of the musical society in Kharkiv (Myklashevskiy, 1967; Bohdanov, 2000; Kononova, 2004; Shchepakina, 2016; Ovchar, 2016; Hladkykh, Shchepakina, 2023). However, the practice of conducting symphonic concerts under I. Slatin's leadership during the period of the KhRMS's activity in Kharkiv, within the context of forming symphonic performance in the city, has not been studied.

**The purpose of the article** is to define the specifics of organization and conduct of symphonic concerts under I. Slatin's leadership in Kharkiv during the 1870s–1880s.

#### **Presentation of the main research material.**

The Kharkiv branch of the Russian Musical Society (hereafter, RMS) was first opened in the mid-1860s. The activities of the KhRMS from 1864 to 1866, and particularly the symphonic concerts of that period under the direction of the renowned Czech musician S. V. Nemetz, were covered by Ukrainian scholar V. Shchepakina, who noted that compliance with the symphonic orchestra standards of the time (35 string instruments and a double complement of wind and brass instruments, totaling around 50 musicians) was achieved by involving the former serf orchestra of M. Khorvat and “amateurs and performers” (Shchepakina, 2016, pp. 303–304). The term “performer” referred to musicians from

Kharkiv's orchestras — local orchestras from the commercial club and the theater, whose numbers were typical for that period (20–25 musicians) (Zhang Lichuan, 2024). With the participation of “amateurs” as string players it became possible to form a double complement of a symphonic orchestra.

The lack of funding led to the cessation of the first professional musical society in Kharkiv in 1866, which resulted in symphonic concerts disappearing from the cultural map of the city for more than five years. The resumption of symphonic orchestra performances was tied to the revival of the KhRMS in 1871, thanks to the efforts of the well-known artist and advocate of academic musical art, I. I. Slatin (1845–1931). His adherence to the ideals of musical academism is evident in the KhRMS's charter, where one of the main tasks of the classes was defined as “developing the public's aesthetic taste and correct perception of classical music” (Neskolko Slova, 1872, 2.12).

In the announcements for the first symphonic concerts, or gatherings, emphasis has been placed on the number of musicians — 65 — which practically met the standards for a triple complement of a symphonic orchestra (Barsova, 1981, p. 65). This was made possible by Slatin recruiting musicians from Kharkiv's commercial club and theater orchestras, as well as professional performers who were members of the musical society at that time (Teatralnyye, 1871, 30.11).

Thanks to the professionalism of the conductor and the musicians, the audiences of the symphonic gatherings in the early 1870s<sup>1</sup> were able to hear proper renditions of music by great composers: symphonies by J. Haydn (D-dur), W. A. Mozart (C-dur, Jupiter), L. Beethoven (D-dur, F-dur, B-dur, c-moll), F. Schubert (h-moll), F. Mendelssohn (a-moll), overtures by C. M. Weber, F. Mendelssohn, and piano, violin, and cello concertos by L. Beethoven, F. Liszt, F. Schubert, A. Vieuxtemps, and others (Teatralnyye, 1871; Otchet, 1874; Sokal'skiy, 1880, April 10). The Kharkiv press emphasized the key role of I. Slatin, who, when forming concert programs, “consistently adhered to a serious approach,

1. The concert activities of the KhRMS were carried out within the academic year, from October–November to April–May. During the 1871–1875 academic years, symphonic gatherings took place twice a year, except for the 1873–1874 academic year, when they were held three times (Sokal'skiy, 1880, 10.04).

performing his duties with full knowledge of the matter” (Sokal’skiy, 1880, 10.04).

It is important to note that during the organization of symphonic concerts, I. Slatin, like S. Nemetz in the 1860s, faced financial difficulties, which affected the composition of the orchestra. For example, in 1873, Slatin encountered problems with M. Dukov, the owner of the Kharkiv theater, who stopped providing theater musicians for KhRMS gatherings. That year, Slatin managed to solve the problem by involving a French operetta troupe performing in Kharkiv; however, after the touring group left in early 1874, the composition of the symphonic orchestra significantly deteriorated, which “hindered the performance of major works, as a fuller orchestra than what the management could provide was required” (Otchet, 1874).

As a result of the lack of professional personnel and financial resources, the KhRMS was able to conduct just two symphonic concerts during the 1875–1877 academic years. At the end of 1876, the renowned opera singer E. A. Lavrovskaya toured in Kharkiv, and during her concert on November 17, an orchestra conducted by I. Slatin performed, not only accompanying the vocal pieces but also playing the overture to C. M. Weber’s opera *Der Freischütz* and the music for J. Racine’s play *Athalie* by F. Mendelssohn (Chast, 1876, 16.11). On November 23, 1876, another symphonic gathering of the KhRMS took place, featuring Lavrovskaya. The program, aside from accompanying the vocalist, included Beethoven’s *Egmont Overture* and *Symphony in C-dur*, as well as the *Waltz-Fantasia* and *Krakowiak* from M. Glinka’s opera *A Life for the Tsar* (Chast, 1876, 23.11).

The last symphonic concert of the KhRMS took place on December 16, 1876, during which the orchestra performed F. Mendelssohn’s *Hebrides Overture* and the choral symphony-ode *The Desert* by F. David (Chast, 1876, 16.12). Reflecting on the orchestra’s performance, the reviewer commented on the incomplete string section, the significant number of brass instruments, which led to their dominance in the overall sound, and the poor selection of woodwind instruments, which exhibited “tuning inconsistencies and, at times, false intonation.” The critic attributed these issues to the fact that “it is impossible to form a decent orchestral

performance with only 2–3 rehearsals by musicians who usually play dance music at balls, restaurants, and gardens. For serious music, these are spoiled players, accustomed to false intervals, inaccurate rhythm, and out-of-tune harmony” (Muzykalnaya, 1877, 3.03).

Adhering to the principles of musical academism, I. Slatin, unable to form a full and high-quality orchestra in terms of both instrumentation and numbers, ceased holding symphonic gatherings in 1877 (Sokal’skiy, 1880, 10.04). Several years later, analyzing the situation at the end of the 1870s, a Kharkiv reviewer focused on the educational role of the musical society. Identifying the main issue as the lack of quality performers, the critic negatively characterized the symphonic concerts of the KhRMS at the time, during which “classical works were far from being performed in a classical manner,” not fulfilling the educational mission outlined in the society’s charter. According to the author, this did not give Slatin the right, as the organizer of these gatherings, to “limit himself to performing easier works that were accessible to the local musical forces,” which ultimately led to the cessation of orchestral concerts: “neither the charter was violated, nor the honor lost” (Muzykalnyye, 1880, 17.12).

It should be noted that during this time, I. Slatin did not stop seeking ways to improve the financial situation of the Kharkiv musical society, relying on the support of patrons (Sokal’skiy, 1880, 11.04), organizing charitable events and paid musical evenings (*Mestnaya khronika*, 1878, 13:09; *Mestnaya khronika*, 1879, 12.04), and appealing to local authorities, which resulted in the Kharkiv City Council granting an annual subsidy of 1,000 rubles in 1878 (*V kharkovskoy*, 1878, 14.05). Despite some improvement in financial conditions, Slatin managed to form an orchestra consisting solely of strings from local musicians and students of the KhRMS music classes only once, which, along with a choir, performed L. Cherubini’s *Requiem* in c-moll on March 18, 1879 (Sokal’skiy, 1880, 11.04).

Difficulties in ensuring the functioning of the musical society in Kharkiv led I. Slatin to appeal to the central RMS management to step down as head of the KhRMS. It was likely this move that prompted the visit of A. G. Rubinstein, the ideologist and

founder of the RMT, to Kharkiv. Between March 28 and 30, 1880, the artist gave three solo concerts, with the proceeds from one of them benefiting the music classes of the KhRMS (Mestnaya khronika, 1880, 28.03). On March 29, 1880, A. Rubinstein listened to the students, communicated with the teachers, and, being pleased with the quality of the educational process, expressed the opinion that a school should be opened based on Kharkiv's music classes (Mestnaya khronika, 1880, 30.03). This support encouraged I. Slatin, and by June 1880, the Kharkiv press reported that he had agreed to remain as head of the KhRMS (Mestnaya khronika, 1880, 19.06).

In addition to the certain improvement in financial standing, moral and financial support of A. Rubinstein, the restoration of symphonic concert practices was facilitated by the activities of opera enterprises in Kharkiv, particularly the high quality of their orchestras. Starting in September 1880, a troupe led by P. M. Medvedev performed in the city, with an orchestra of 35 musicians under the direction of the talented Czech conductor, U. J. Avranek. Leading positions in the orchestra were held by professional European musicians: cellist Teich, flutist Scardini, oboist Elenek, trumpeter Piccari, and horn player Kranek; the concertmaster and first violinist was V. Salin, a teacher at the KhRMS music classes, and the first clarinetist was his colleague in pedagogy, F. Panchenko (Mestnaya khronika, 1880, 26.08).

The available information on Medvedev's troupe orchestra allows for its classification as a small symphonic orchestra, with a minimal number of string players — about 20 performers. After the first opera performances, critics noted some lack of cohesion in the instrumental ensemble (Muzykalnyye, 1880, 3.12), which was typical for provincial enterprises where long-time rehearsals before performances were not customary. However, by early 1881, the quality of the opera orchestra's performances had reached a satisfactory level, and a concert by leading orchestra members was even planned for March 1, 1881 (Mestnaya khronika, 1881, 28.02), but it did not take place due to the ban on all public spectacles in the Russian Empire following the assassination of Emperor Alexander II.

The conditions of the opera orchestra prompted an agreement between I. Slatin and P. Medvedev to form a symphonic orchestra based on this ensemble to participate in the musical gathering under the auspices of the KhRMS on December 8, 1880. The program included: F. Mendelssohn's Symphony in A-dur, A. Litolff's Girondists Overture, music to N. Kukulnik's tragedy Prince Kholmisky by M. Glinka, with Kharkiv opera prima donna Ye. Kadmina as the soloist, and piano works by F. Chopin and F. Liszt, performed by the young and talented pianist R. V. Genika, a new teacher at the KhRMS music classes (Otchet, 1881, p. 14).

The Kharkiv press paid special attention to this event: in the announcements, it was noted that the symphonic gathering was a rather rare occurrence in the local musical life of recent years (Mestnaya khronika, 1880, 6.12). On the eve of the concert, a description of the performed works was published in the press (Po povodu, 1880, 6.12), which later became a common practice. A series of publications was devoted to the impressions from the performance. It was emphasized that the concert was made possible only thanks to the quality of the opera orchestra, strengthened by Kharkiv's professional musicians and "amateurs", and there was hope expressed for the establishment of a permanent opera theater in the city, as the "best and only opportunity for the musical society to introduce the public to classical works" (Muzykalnyye, 1880, 17.12). Another reviewer stated that the results of the symphonic gathering directly influenced the future of such events in Kharkiv, and optimistically concluded: "The sympathy with which the large audience welcomed this first attempt resolved the issue in a positive direction" (Simfonicheskiy, 1880, 17.12).

Musical practice in Kharkiv in the 1880s positively impacted the possibility of forming a full symphonic orchestra, both in terms of numbers and instrumentation, for KhRMS's symphonic concerts. First, the practice of opera and operetta enterprises, for which orchestras were an essential component, became well established. Second, orchestral performance gradually spread to the city's summer gardens, whose numbers steadily increased. In addition to traditional military capellas, orchestras with strings and wind instruments began to form for the summer season to perform popular dance music. This led to orchestral musicians remaining in

Kharkiv after the end of the autumn-winter season, hoping to find permanent work in the summer music ensembles.

This process can already be traced to 1881, when, after the departure of P. Medvedev's troupe, a significant number of musicians and choirmaster A. K. Pauli remained in Kharkiv, the latter performing with an orchestra of 28 musicians formed by Pauli himself in the city's Tivoli Garden from May of that year (*Mestnaya khronika*, 1881, 27.08). When P. Medvedev returned to Kharkiv in September of that year with his operetta troupe, it was noted that the orchestra of this troupe, consisting of 30 musicians headed by O. S. Kondrashev, was almost identical in personnel to the concert orchestra of the Tivoli Garden during the summer (*Mestnaya khronika*, 1881, 27.08). In the summer of 1882, a Kharkiv-formed operetta troupe, including an orchestra of 30 musicians led by the violinist F. V. Alekseyenko, a teacher at the KhRMS music classes, performed in the same garden (*Mestnaya khronika*, 1882, 2.02), indicating the formation of an orchestra from musicians who were in the city at the time.

Throughout the 1880s, when forming the KhRMS symphonic orchestra, I. Slatin continued to rely on musicians from theatrical orchestras. For example, for the symphonic gathering on November 14, 1881, a group was formed from the members of drama and operetta troupes, expanded with members of the musical society and students of the music classes. The concert featured Beethoven's Pastoral Symphony (F-dur), the overture to M. Glinka's opera *Ruslan and Lyudmila*, and the orchestra accompanied violinist Nikolaev during the performance of P. Sarasate's *Fantasy* (*Reklama*, 1881, 11.11). A subsequent symphonic gathering was scheduled for November 28, 1881, with the participation of the famous pianist P. Voronets-Bertenson. However, the orchestra de-facto did not participate in this event, as several musicians had left the theater orchestra (*Mestnaya khronika*, 1881, 25.11).

This situation continued until the end of the autumn-winter season, so during February to April 1882, I. Slatin formed a string orchestra for the musical gatherings of the KhRMS. The classical composition of the orchestra was ensured

by the available musical personnel in Kharkiv, comprising "artists, amateurs, and students of the music classes" (*Mestnaya khronika*, 1882, 11.03). The organizational and conducting skills of I. Slatin became a guarantee of the quality of the repertoire specifically written for string orchestras (*Novels* by N. Hade and A. Krug, *Serenades* by P. Tchaikovsky and A. Dvořák, etc.) (*Otchet*, 1882, pp. 17–19), which captivated local music critics (*Muzykalnyy*, 1882, 19.04). Therefore, the critical remarks regarding the performance of the assembled symphonic orchestra that periodically appeared in the local press primarily concerned the insufficient cohesion of the musicians, which was due to the limited opportunity for only 2–3 rehearsals.

In the symphonic gatherings of the KhRMS during the 1882–1883 academic year, a group formed by I. Slatin based on the orchestra of the opera troupe of A. Palchynskiy, which accompanied performances under the direction of the well-respected Kapellmeister N. B. Emanuel, performed. The opera orchestra consisted of 40 musicians, and the string section included 10 violins, 4 violas, and 2 cellos and double basses. The press noted the presence of a harp, which was rare for provincial orchestras (*Mestnaya khronika*, 1882, 31.07). The significant numerical limitation of the string group relative to the double complement of wind instruments did not prevent N. Emanuel from conducting a symphonic concert in Kharkiv in mid-October 1882, during which the overtures of F. Mendelssohn's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, A. Litolff's *Girondists*, M. Glinka's overture to *Ruslan and Lyudmila*, F. Liszt's *Hungarian Rhapsody* (solo — Miller-Bergauz), and F. Mendelssohn's *Violin Concerto* (solo — I. Alekseyenko) were performed. The reviewer noted that the performance of the opera orchestra "satisfied aesthetic feelings" precisely because of the efforts and tireless work of N. Emanuel (*Simfonicheskiy*, 1882, October 19).

The Kharkiv opera orchestra formed the basis of the symphonic orchestra under the direction of I. Slatin, which performed at a symphonic gathering of the KhRMS on November 6, 1882, executing three orchestral pieces: F. Schubert's *Unfinished Symphony*, P. Tchaikovsky's *Serbo-Russian March*, and A. Rubinstein's musical picture *Ivan the Terrible*,

which I. Slatin had performed in Dresden in 1871 (Mestnaya khronika, 1882, 6.11). The reviewer remarked that the orchestra played with precision and the appropriate nuances, and that “I. Slatin’s masterful conducting, competent and inspired, infused the performance with life” (Muzykalnyye, 1882, 9.11). On December 18, 1882, the next symphonic gathering took place, featuring Robert Schumann’s Symphony in C-dur, the overture Night in Madrid by M. Glinka, and the musical picture In Central Asia by O. Borodin. A Kharkiv music critic characterized the orchestra’s performance as “completely wonderful,” despite the fact that there had only been two rehearsals for a substantial program, attributing the “minor unevenness and roughness” in the music performance to this fact, which did not hinder the overall excellent impression (Muzykalnyye, 1882, 31.12).

Thanks to the collaboration with N. Emanuel’s orchestra, I. Slatin conducted two more symphonic gatherings in the spring of 1883. From that point on, the practice of holding symphonic concerts stabilized: the orchestra, formed from musicians of touring opera troupes as well as educators and students from the KhRMS educational institution, performed symphonic programs 4–5 times a year. In selecting programs, I. Slatin adhered to a certain system: the basis included three orchestral pieces — a symphony and two major symphonic works (overtures, fantasies, musical pictures, etc.); the orchestra accompanied the performances of solo instrumentalists and vocalists; a small portion of the programs featured numbers without the orchestra’s participation.

The reorganization of the KhRMS music classes into a music school in 1883 (hereafter — KhMS) had a particularly positive impact on expanding the educational structure of the institution. Thus, starting in September 1886, classes for wind instruments were established at the KhMS (Kratkiy, 1896, p. 16), the specifics of which were analyzed in detail in a dissertation by Kharkiv researcher O. Ovchar (Ovchar, 2016). This event played a decisive role in solving the problem of forming the KhRMS symphonic orchestra since, in addition to a certain number of educators, the number of students in wind instrument classes increased each year.

In the 1888–1889 academic year, 13 students were receiving professional education in woodwind instruments and 8 in brass instruments under the guidance of talented practitioners Y. A. Yuryan (horn, cornet-à-piston, trumpet, trombone), E. Prillya (flute, oboe, clarinet), and Y. Prohazka (bassoon) (Otchet, 1890, pp. 33–36). Naturally, I. Slatin involved both educators and the best students from the wind instrument classes in the composition of the symphonic orchestra, gradually filling all relevant sections with representatives from the KhRMS. Finally, in the report for the 1891–1892 academic year, it was noted for the first time that all musical (symphonic and chamber) gatherings took place with the participation of only representatives from the KhMS (Otchet, 1893, p. 7), marking the beginning of a new stage in the development of symphonic performance in Kharkiv in terms of quality.

**Conclusion.** Thus, the main factors influencing the conduct of symphonic concerts under I. I. Slatin during the 1870s and 1880s were the organizational and financial conditions of the Kharkiv branch of the Russian Musical Society (KhRMS) and the orchestral performance practices of that time in Kharkiv. The inability of the young musical society to form a complete symphonic orchestra composed of local professional musicians and amateurs necessitated collaboration with the periodically active theater enterprise orchestras in Kharkiv. The limited financial capabilities of the KhRMS sometimes led to refusals by impresarios to provide orchestral musicians for the musical society, which resulted in a scarcity of symphonic gatherings and even their cessation for a period during the 1870s. Improvements in the financial situation of the KhRMS from the 1880s and the formation of a pool of orchestral musicians who were permanently in the city contributed to the stabilization of symphonic concert practices, and the opening of wind instrument classes in 1886 gradually solved the problem of forming a full symphonic orchestra, which from the early 1890s consisted of musicians directly associated with the KhRMS (members of the society, educators, and students from the Kharkiv Music School).

**The prospects for further research** are related to covering the specifics of symphonic performance in Kharkiv during the 1890s and early XX century.

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