

MUSIC OF THE CONTINENTS – PRESS RELEASE

American Recording Engineer Seraphim Hanisch speaks about “Teach Me Thy Statutes”, Vladimir Gorbik’s GRAMMY-nominated CD.

This interview was translated into Russian for Dobro! TV and appears on YouTube at this link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7cEw0Bc2LIQ>

What are your impressions of the process of the Chesnokov recording in Saratov in July 2016?

This was actually my fourth major project working with Maestro Gorbik. I recorded and produced his first ever American CD, "Hymns of Holy Russia in the New World", which helped establish his name and prowess in the United States. This also helped launch the Patriarch Tikhon Russian-American Music Institute in the United States, and our project then became to create and record a professional choir of American and Russian Orthodox singers together at the highest possible level.

The Chesnokov recording was absolutely remarkable on many fronts. As a new American group, we learned that the way to produce a great CD involved great planning and care from beginning to end. This project was a beautifully organized and executed effort from its inception all the way through recording, post-production and distribution. For such a new group to come so far in only three years is miraculous.

Everything about this recording project was meticulously taken care of. The process of selecting the music, the venue and the singers, and our coordination and adherence to the guidance of the Grammy Award winning production company Sound/Mirror with Producer Blanton Alspaugh and Sound Engineer John Newton could not have gone better. The only problems we encountered were minor logistical ones, but we had plans in hand to deal with this inevitability as well, and everything went extremely smoothly.

What are your impressions about Maestro Gorbik as a choral and symphony conductor?

When I first heard of Vladimir Gorbik, it was in 2013. I was phoned by Benedict Sheehan, Music Director at St Tikhon's Orthodox Theological Seminary in Pennsylvania, USA, about coming to record a male choir under the direction of this Russian maestro Vladimir Gorbik, whom I had heard about a little but really knew nothing of his music. Since I have a small recording enterprise, I was eager to put it to use, but I was truly amazed when I did some research on Maestro Gorbik and his choral work in Moscow.

What I saw was truly world class conducting and musicianship, with a sound I only dreamed that a choir in America could produce. I am a choral conductor as well, and I have been blessed to sing and conduct with some excellent groups. But what I witnessed from videos in Russia of Maestro Gorbik's work was unprecedented.

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I got on the phone right away with Benedict and told him very directly, "Benedict, this is a world-class situation and we need to meet it as a full-scale professional effort. This cannot be just two microphones on a stand! Thanks be to God, I was blessed to create and produce this project and it turned out beautifully.

When the actual night of this performance came, I still had not actually heard what Vladimir could do with the singers. However, the performance was jaw-dropping for me, even though I am a very astute critic of good singing and good sound. This was nothing like anything I had ever heard by American singers, and even more, these were singers I largely knew and even had sung with in Seminary and elsewhere. Maestro Gorbik had taken this choir to a truly professional level such as had not been heard in American Orthodox Christian church choirs at any point of my own involvement in the Orthodox Church, and there were no extant American recordings to match what I heard, either.

Maestro Gorbik's mastery was such that I threw my whole attention and focus into learning how to do what he does. I became his student in both choral and symphonic conducting, I came to visit him in Russia two or three times, and then finally decided to move to Moscow, to be able, among other things, to sing with him and learn from him. He has been my mentor through years of hard work.

As a symphonic conductor he is also of the highest level. His conducting style evokes grace. The prime image he gave to me to learn with is the style and technique of the late great Herbert von Karajan of the Berliner Philharmonic, but as I studied conducting more and more I found myself adopting the elements of Maestro Gorbik's own style. It is very open and free, yet extraordinarily precise.

The great classical works that he conducts with his symphony, as well as more contemporary works like that of Alexandra Pakhmutova's "Poklonimsya Veliki Tem Godam" elicit the way Maestro Gorbik feels, and transmits that feeling of music to his performers. For example, the Pakhmutova piece is distinctly a Soviet-style hymn about the Battle of Stalingrad. Yet in a clear, transparent manner, Maestro Gorbik turned this piece into a prayer. When he performed it at the Capital Symphony Orchestra's debut in 2015, the piece instantly connected with everyone there. We all stood to remember those who gave everything of themselves in the Great Patriotic War - even myself, as an American, who is still just beginning to learn of the great efforts by the Soviet Union to throw back the Nazi invaders. I stood with my Russian brothers and sisters as one, united in the music.

Everything I have seen or heard Maestro Gorbik perform reflects this same light and spirit. His is not a somber approach that loses melancholy in depression, nor is it so fast and light as to be ridiculous. The musical approach is on what we might call the "Golden Road", that is, the middle, where the music was written to be, and where it transmits the soul of the composer who penned it. Gorbik does not break the composer's style with his own interpretation of music. He becomes a window through which we hear that composer's style. To do this takes humility, which is a very hard commodity for professional musicians to acquire, let alone teach, but here, I think the framework of the

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Maestro as shaped by the spiritual tradition of the Russian Orthodox Church makes him able to present these qualities.

What are your impressions about the Grammy nomination for our CD "Teach me Thy Statutes"?

I had a feeling from the outset of this project that this would be a Grammy contender. In fact, all of us involved in the project felt very positive about it. I do not want to say such a thing out of prideful arrogance. In fact, quite the opposite. I have also assisted on major recording projects such as The Kansas City and Phoenix Chorale's 2015 Grammy-Award winner "Rachmaninoff: All-Night Vigil", and the highly acclaimed production of the Illumini Men's Chorale's "Music of Russia" which was itself rated very highly in direct comparison with the Rachmaninoff CD. I have been blessed to work with the best and experience what that is like, and when I saw it happen with this project, I can only say it was like watching a miracle unfold. In fact, my photos from this project are saved in a folder I called the "Saratov Miracle", because I got to see it happen and help as well.

What was your role in the Saratov project?

Well, in 2014, Maestro Gorbik connected me with Sound/Mirror and I have since been blessed to assist with them on several projects: The Rachmaninoff project I mentioned before, an earlier PaTRAM project we recorded in America which is also a remarkably good CD, called "Praise the Lord, all ye Nations", and a role as sound engineer working with [Byeong-Joon Hwang](#), himself a Grammy winner with Sound/Mirror South Korea for the movie "Cavalia: Odysseo", shot by South Korean firm Fabulous Films.

This project was my fourth time working with Sound/Mirror. My role was support - I came with the company to help pick out the recording venue for the CD, and I helped a bit with assessing the sound environments of the various churches we visited. When the actual project came, I was called to Saratov again to help with logistical matters, but as I also know the musical style, there were some points where I could assist the producer, Blanton Alspaugh, with some insights, and I supported John Newton, the sound engineer as an extra pair of discerning ears - and hands.

I should say something about these two men as well. John and Blanton are an incredible team to work with. In the same way that Maestro Gorbik has become my mentor on the performance side of professional music, Blanton and John have shown me many of the great secrets of making good recordings. Their coaching has utterly transformed my own work from something good into something noteworthy in of itself, and they are very gracious people. I literally was a working part of the recording team on this project.