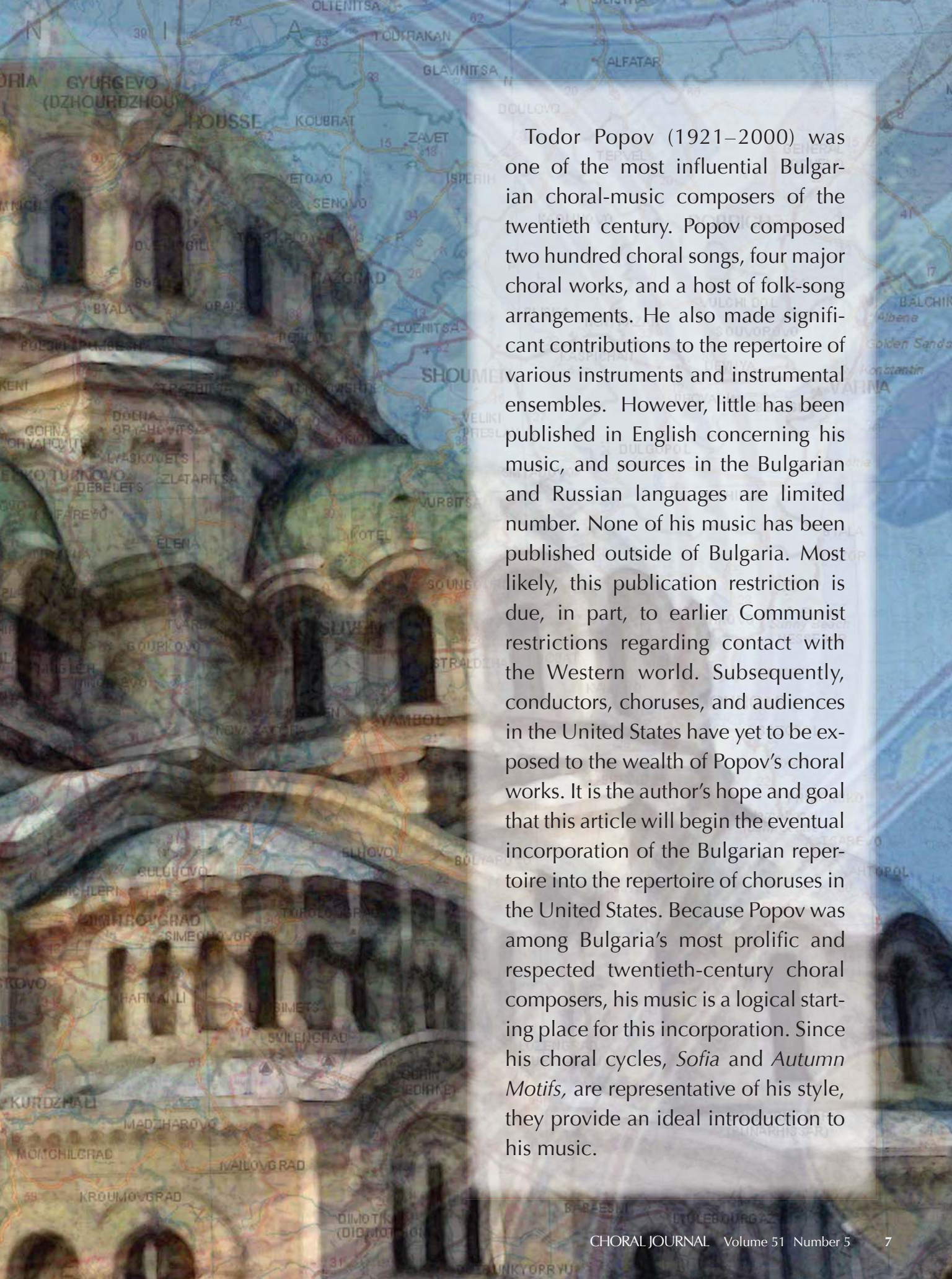


A BIOGRAPHY AND A CONDUCTOR'S ANALYSIS OF TODOR POPOV'S CHORAL CYCLES

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Todor Popov (1921–2000) was one of the most influential Bulgarian choral-music composers of the twentieth century. Popov composed two hundred choral songs, four major choral works, and a host of folk-song arrangements. He also made significant contributions to the repertoire of various instruments and instrumental ensembles. However, little has been published in English concerning his music, and sources in the Bulgarian and Russian languages are limited number. None of his music has been published outside of Bulgaria. Most likely, this publication restriction is due, in part, to earlier Communist restrictions regarding contact with the Western world. Subsequently, conductors, choruses, and audiences in the United States have yet to be exposed to the wealth of Popov's choral works. It is the author's hope and goal that this article will begin the eventual incorporation of the Bulgarian repertoire into the repertoire of choruses in the United States. Because Popov was among Bulgaria's most prolific and respected twentieth-century choral composers, his music is a logical starting place for this incorporation. Since his choral cycles, *Sofia* and *Autumn Motifs*, are representative of his style, they provide an ideal introduction to his music.

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Childhood

On January 23, 1921, Todor Popov was born in Dryanovo, Bulgaria. His early years of school were filled with singing and taking guitar lessons. During middle school, he taught himself to play violin and joined a local orchestra. While attending high school in Veliko Turnovo, he learned repertoire by Russian, western European, and Bulgarian composers, developing a particular affinity for the works of Borodin, Schubert, and Ipolitov-Ivanov. When family financial issues forced Popov to quit high school for three years, he began teaching violin, viola, cello, and contrabass to a number of students. At the same time, he began to compose. A local literature teacher enlisted Popov to compose music for the folk tale *The Sleeping Queen* (as adapted in play form by Borzanov). The performance of this work, his first publically performed composition, was successful, but the work was never performed again and the original manuscript is not extant. During the same year, a string quartet was formed in Dryanovo in which Popov played viola, exposing himself to the music of Bach and Handel. For this quartet, he wrote his second composition, *Andantino*, which has also been lost.

A high school later opened in Dryanovo where Popov enrolled. While having access to the high school's piano, he taught himself

to play the instrument. During the school year, Popov was asked to compose the music for another play, *King's Son, the Smith* by Konstatin Sagaev. A new string quartet was formed in town, and Popov performed with this group. At the same time, he conducted the high school's mixed choir and, after the death of their director, the town choir. Through his work with these two choirs, he was introduced to the works of Dorbri Hristov and Emanuil Manalov (considered the fathers of Bulgarian choral music). In the spring of 1938, Popov graduated from high school.

Formal Education

In the fall of 1938, Todor Popov entered into the National Academy of Music in Sofia, where he studied violin and piano. Due to severe financial problems at the end of the school year, Popov went to Filip Kutev for help. By Kutev's arrangement, Popov was able to join the army as a music student without losing his civilian status. For one year, Popov served in the army where he played in the jazz orchestra and began arranging music for performance by army ensembles. Following these accomplishments, his parents were able to help him financially as he continued his musical studies at the National Academy of Music. During this time, Popov became

active in communist activities. At one point, he was even arrested for participating in activities deemed subversive by the Bulgarian government. He later became a member of Mensa, where he met with many other student communists. (These early ties with communism would later secure him valuable government-related musical appointments once the Fascist government was replaced by a communist government.) At the same time, he earned money by playing accordion for parties and by transcribing music. In 1942, he graduated from the middle department of the National Academy of Music. During the yearly academy concert, a mixed choir performed his ballad *Zmeinoto Libe* to great reviews that reached the local press.

In the fall after his graduation, he was drafted into the Bulgarian Army. For his army division, he composed what became one of the most famous army marches, *March na Kartechnika*. During this time, he composed the first army musical, *Bakari I Metachi*. Later modified and renamed *Chervenata Metla*, Popov's musical received 100 performances at the theater Trudov Pat.

Following the Bulgarian *coup d'etat* of September 9, 1944, which overthrew the axis-aligned government and installed a pro-Soviet government, Popov was able to return to the National Academy of Music, where he studied in the theory department. He continued work as a composer for the army, writing songs and working as an editor for the propaganda division. Concurrently, he performed with the Academic Symphony Orchestra. Popov worked with a theater director to develop the Theater of the National Army, and he wrote music for the comedy *Rajat na Zemjata* [Heaven and Earth] by Voscovez and Verih, which was quite successful at the National Realistic Musical Theater. Furthermore, Popov became composer for the orchestra of the Ensemble for Dances and Songs of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. At the same time, he headed the Department of Children's Music for Radio Sofia and began composing choral music for children. In 1947, the Socialist Party of Bulgaria organized a concert featuring the nation's most talented performers. Popov was one of those featured and was awarded a golden pin from the Central Committee of



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the Communist Youth. In December of 1949, Popov again graduated from the National Academy of Music.

From 1950 to 1952, Popov held the post of assistant professor of musical harmony at the National Academy of Music. During this time, he received the "Laureate of Georgi Dimitrov" award for composing the music for the movie *Utro nad rodinata* [Morning Upon the Country]. This film was dedicated to the young communist movement. He also received the same award for composing a collection of songs, *Pesni za moeto celo* [Songs About My Village]. This collection also received acclaim during the first review of the Bulgarian Musical Art.¹

Between 1952 and 1957, Popov was a doctoral student at the Moscow Conservatory of Music. While there, he was a composition student of E. Golubiov, Aram Khachaturian, and others. During this time, he became acquainted with Soviet intellectuals, musicians, painters, and poets. This exposure would lead to a more cosmopolitan sound and choice of texts.²

Position of Influence

Upon graduating from the Moscow Conservatory, Popov returned to Sofia, Bulgaria, where he remained for the rest of his life. He served as professor of harmony and musical instruments at the National Academy of Music and worked as music editor for Bulgarian National Radio.³ Popov served as both secretary and general secretary of the Union of Bulgarian Composers. He also served the Bulgarian army

and continued as a composer.⁴ He wrote and edited music textbooks and song collections. For his musical and artistic service, Popov was awarded the title *artist emeritus* by the Union of Bulgarian Composers, one of its highest honors bestowed. Popov twice received the Order of St. Cyril and Methodius award. In addition, he received several awards at national and international composition competitions. Before his death, he donated part of his personal archives to the Historical Museum of Dryanovo. This collection includes scores, collections of his works, personal documents, records, photographs, letters, awards, and congratulatory speeches from international competitions. Todor Popov died in Sofia on February 2,

2000. His final wish was to be buried in Dryanovo with the melody to his song "Volen vyatur" (text by Ivan Radoev) inscribed on his memorial plaque.⁵

Overview of Compositional Output

Todor Popov composed music for a variety of instruments and ensembles (Table 1). His many instrumental works include two works for string quartet, four compositions for string orchestra, and several pieces for full orchestra. For solo voice, Todor Popov wrote twenty art songs and two song cycles for solo voice and orchestra.⁶ He also wrote two musicals: *Zingshpil* (1979)⁷ and *Tinkling*

Table 1

Representative Compositions of Todor Popov (excluding choral music)

Type	Title	Instrumentation
Orchestral	<i>Concerto for Cello</i>	Cello and Orchestra
	<i>Song</i>	Violin and Orchestra
	<i>Symphonic Suite "A Distant Childhood"</i>	Orchestra
	<i>Symphony "The Stalwart"</i>	Orchestra
	<i>Elegy</i>	Cello and String Orchestra
	<i>Three Minatures</i>	String Orchestra
	<i>Children's Sinfonietta</i>	String Orchestra
	<i>Ancient Suite in Seven Movements</i>	String Orchestra
Art Songs	<i>It is So Quiet</i>	Voice and piano
	<i>Lullaby</i>	Voice and piano
	<i>My White Pigeon</i>	Voice and piano
	<i>Sonnet</i>	Voice and piano
	<i>Springtime</i>	Voice and piano
Song Cycles	<i>Eight Songs</i>	Voice and Orchestra
	<i>Three Songs</i>	Bass and Orchestra
Musicals	<i>Zingshpil</i>	
	<i>Tinkling Forest</i>	

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Forest (1981).⁸

While these works gained him notoriety, Popov is best known for his compositions for chorus (Table 2). His major works include the oratorio *Svetuhl praznik* [Bright Festival]; *Pesen za golemiya den* [Song for the Great Day]; the suite, *Pesni za moyeto celo* [Songs About My Village]; and *Six Miniatures*. Popov composed two hundred choral songs for children's choruses, women's choruses, men's choruses, and mixed choruses. His choral

songs can be divided into several categories including: songs for massed choirs, songs for the *Pionerski*,⁹ impressionistic-romantic songs, and folk-song arrangements. In addition, Popov arranged for women's chorus and piano both the African-American Spiritual *Deep River* and Schubert's *Ave Maria*. Perhaps in homage to the composer who so greatly influenced his impressionistic style, Popov wrote parts for women's chorus (singing "ah") over Debussy's piano piece,

Clair de Lune.

Popov composed two major, unaccompanied choral works he titled "choral cycles." Each of these works contains multiple choral songs united by a single textual theme. *Sofia* (1979) is a choral cycle for unaccompanied mixed chorus (SSAATTBB). Two of the songs have texts by Evstati Burnaski, one song has text by Elisaveta Bagryana, and two songs have texts by Nikolai Zidarov. These texts are all impressionistic poems, that elucidate

something about Bulgaria's capital and largest city, Sofia. *Esenni motivi* [Autumn Motifs] (1983) is a choral cycle for unaccompanied women's chorus (SSAA). Just like *Sofia*, *Esenni motivi* comprise five songs. Each of these choral songs is based on impressionistic poetry by Peyo Yavorov describing autumn.

Form

Popov's music is divided into clear, definable sections. His music generally follows the pattern of beginning with a musical idea, departing to another, and ultimately providing some sense of return to the original idea. Of the ten choral songs that constitute the two choral song cycles, six are in ternary form, and two others contain a false return to the A section, giving some sense of return to the original idea (form: A B Pseudo-A). The two that do not follow this pattern are in binary form.

The form of each of the movements of *Sofia* is:

Table 2

Representative Choral Compositions of Todor Popov

Classification	Title	Voicing
Major Works	<i>Bright Festival</i>	S, MS, A, T, Bar solo SATB Chorus Orchestra
	<i>Song for the Great Day</i>	Bass solo Children's chorus SATB chorus Orchestra
	<i>Songs About My Village</i>	SATB Chorus Orchestra
	<i>Six Miniatures</i>	SATB Chorus String Orchestra
Choral Cycles	<i>Sofia</i>	SATB
	<i>Autumn Motifs</i>	SSAA
Songs for Massed Choirs	<i>Celebration Song</i>	SATB
	<i>May Day</i>	SATB
	<i>Thank You, Our Beloved Party</i>	SATB
	<i>Under the Party's Flag</i>	SATB
Songs for the Pionerski	<i>Children of Peace</i>	Children's Chorus
	<i>Youth May Day Song</i>	Children's Chorus
Impressionistic-Romantic Songs	<i>Gardens in Blossoms</i>	SATB with Piano
	<i>Impression</i>	SSAA
	<i>Study with Watercolor</i> <i>Winter</i>	SATB with Piano SATB
Folk-Song Arrangements	<i>Blonde, Small Girl</i>	SATB with Piano
	<i>From How He Is</i>	SATB with Piano
	<i>Old Mother Does Not Sleep</i>	SATB
	<i>Three Rhodopian Miniatures</i>	SSAA

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- I. "Mirage" A B A'
- II. "Nastroenie" A B A
- III. "Kuksna esen" A B Pseudo-A
- IV. "Pod duhrvetata" A B
- V. "Dichanie" A B Pseudo-A

The form of each of the songs in *Esenni motivi* [Autumn Motives] is:

- I. A B A'
- II. A B
- III. A B A'
- IV. A B A'
- V. A B A'

Melody

Melody is one of the two prime musical foci for Popov. The brief melody from the second song in *Sofia*, "Nastroenie," provides an excellent example of his melodic style. His melodies are generally smooth, conjunct, and lyrical, with leaps occurring only occasionally (Figure 1). Popov is conservative with melodic material and will often reuse it with only a slight alteration (compare Figure 1 and Figure 2). Motivic material from melodies is often reused and subjected to traditional motivic treatment. For example, the countermelody for the A section of "Nastroenie" uses a retrograde form of the initial motive of the melody for the same section (Figure 3). In the transition from the B section to



Figure 1. Todor Popov, *Sofia*, "II. Nastroenie," mm. 1–2.
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Figure 2. Todor Popov, *Sofia*, "II. Nastroenie," mm. 3–4.
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Figure 3. Todor Popov, *Sofia*, "II. Nastroenie," mm. 2–3.
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A', the initial motive is reused imitatively to usher in the return to A (Figure 4). In many songs, the melody may be significantly longer than this example, but in the case of longer melodies, musical material from the beginning of the melody will be reused within the melody, such as in the melody from the A section of "Mirage" from *Sofia*. Popov's melodies are often written in modes, including Ionian, Dorian, Phrygian, Mixolydian, and Aeolian.

Harmony

Melody notwithstanding, harmonic color is the primary focus of Popov's music. He employs tertian harmony, but seldom within the context of common practice harmonic progressions. Extended tertian sonorities (7ths, 9ths, 11ths, etc.) are an integral part of Popov's harmonic language (Figure 6). Except for the final song in *Sofia* and two of the five songs in *Esenni motivi*, the songs end on an extended tertian sonority. The only times common-practice chord progressions

occur are during the B section or on the final cadence of a particular song.

Rhythm

Popov utilizes symmetrical meters and does not employ mixed meters. The meters used in *Sofia* are:

- I. "Mirage" 2/4
- II. "Nastroenie" 6/8 (two measures of 4/8, three measures of 3/8)

The image shows a musical score for the song "II. Nastroenie" from Todor Popov's *Sofia*, measures 41-45. The score is in 6/8 time and features four vocal parts: Soprano (S), Alto (A), Tenor (T), and Bass (B). The lyrics are in Russian. Measures 41-45 are highlighted with boxes. Dynamics include *pp*, *mp*, and *mf*.

Measure 41: *pp* Да - леч - ни - те__ град - ски квар - та - ли

Measure 42: *pp* Да - леч - ни - те__ град - ски, квар - та - ли, квар - та - ли из -

Measure 43: *pp* Да - леч - - - ни, да - леч - ни - те__ град - ски квар -

Measure 44: *pp* Из -

Measure 45: *pp* да - леч - ни - те__

Measure 46: *mp* гря - ват сми - ти, су - ми - ти ли - ца, да - леч - ни - те__ град - ски, квар

Measure 47: *mp* та - ли__ сли - ца, да - леч - - - ни, да

Measure 48: *mf* гря - - - ват су - ми - ти ли - ца,

Figure 4. Todor Popov, *Sofia*, "II. Nastroenie," mm. 41–45.
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Alto *p* (5)
 Лу - на - та вся - ка ве - чер за от - мо - ра се
 9
 спус - ка над Бо - я - на нис - ко. От во - до - па - да
 14
 пий - ва глът - ка, вто - ра сво - да ли - це то си на - плис - ква
 19
 и пак по - е - ма сво - я лу - нен път.

Figure 5. Todor Popov, *Sofia*, “I. Mirage,” mm. 5–24.
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72 *cresc. poco a poco* *fff*
 S A...
cresc. poco a poco *fff*
 A A...
cresc. poco a poco *fff* *sfp > p*
 T A...
cresc. poco a poco *fff* *sfp > p*
 B A...
 ход - ка, на - раз - ход - ка.
 Fm Ebm7 Ebm7 FmM7 Cø7 F9
 Fm(no 3rd) Gb Fm

Figure 6. Todor Popov, *Sofia*, “I. Mirage,” mm. 72–77.
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- III. "Kuhnsna esen" 2/4, 3/4, 4/4
(large sections in each meter)
- IV. "Pod duhrvetata" 3/8, 2/4
(large sections in each meter)
- V. "Dichanie" 4/4 (four measures
in 6/4)

The meters used in *Esenni motivi* are:

- I. 2/4 (with one measure of 3/4)
- II. Alternating with some frequency
between 3/4 and 2/4
- III. 3/8
- IV. 4/4 (with one measure of 5/4)
- V. 3/4, 2/4
(large sections in each meter)

The one exception to this is the second

song in *Esenni motivi*. It alternates between 3/4 and 2/4 with some degree of regularity. Asymmetrical meter is integral to the folk music of Bulgaria. Of symmetrical meters, 2/4 is the most common in folk music. 3/4 and 3/8 are uncommon, and 4/4 and 6/8 are extremely rare.¹⁰ Popov's exclusive choice of symmetrical meters is likely due to the Western European influence on his music rather than to the influence of folk music. Popov gives all tempo designations in traditional Italian terms. Tempo changes occur to introduce a section of music or to usher in the ending of section or piece. Rhythmic subdivisions occur, at most, on the level of

the sixteenth note, and even this subdivision is used sparsely (with the exception of "Nastroenie" from *Sofia*, in which sixteenth notes form the motivic basis for the A section of this song).

For Popov, rhythm can also be subject to motivic treatment, both with melody and apart from melody. An example of the use of a rhythmic motive is contained within "Dichanie" of *Sofia*. The motive is presented in a portion of the A section (Figure 7). This rhythmic motive becomes a basis for the B section (Figure 8). *Ostinati* are used in sections of two movements of *Sofia* (I. "Mirage" and III. "Kuhnsna Esen") (Figure 9).

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Figure 7. Todor Popov, *Sofia*, "V. Dichanie," mm. 5–8.
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Texture

Popov utilizes all three traditional textures: monophony, homophony, and polyphony. Monophony is used only sparingly, either to begin a piece or to usher in the return to A. Homophony and polyphony are interchangeably used. No purely polyphonic sections exist, and only a sparing number of purely homophonic sections is used. Most of the homophonic sections are found within *Esenni motivi*, which is considerably less complex than *Sofia*. When Popov employs polyphony, it is to harmonize a melody with a countermelody with an imitative line. The imitative portions are never subjected to the rigidity of pure canonic imitation.

Range and Tessitura

Popov consistently keeps the *tessitura* within what is characteristic and comfortable for any given voice part. Furthermore, most vocal lines have a comfortable range. The two exceptions to this are the second alto part in *Esenni motivi* and the bass part in *Sofia*. At the end of the fourth song of *Esenni motivi*, half of the second altos are required to sing $F\sharp^3$ on the final chord. The basses are required to sing a range from $E\flat^2$ to $E\flat^4$ in *Sofia*. However, the brief passages that venture into the highest part of the range are unison with the baritone part, and this range is comfortable for most baritones.

Conclusions

Popov influenced countless schoolchildren through the musical textbooks he authored and edited. He influenced masses of choral singers on all levels (from

Soprano (S): *p* (15) Вдрез - га - ви - на - та снеж - ни кес - те - ни за про - лет -

Alto (A): *p* Вдрез - га - ви - на - та снеж - ни кес - те - ни за про - лет -

Tenor (T): *p* Вдрез - га - ви - на - та снеж - ни кес - - - те -

Bass (B): *p* Вдрез - га - ви - на - та снеж - ни кес - - - те -

mm. 17-18: та за про - лет - та коп - не - ят пак,

Figure 8. Todor Popov, *Sofia*, "V. Dichanie," mm. 15–18.
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Soprano: M... M... M...

Figure 9. Todor Popov, *Sofia*, "I. Mirage," mm. 1–6.
Soprano *ostinato*

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choral ensembles for children in school, to the youth of the *Pionerski*, to adults) through his two hundred choral songs. Popov taught scores of musicians at the National Academy of Music and thus influenced their art as performers and composers. Sadly, given the limited musicological publications that discuss third- and fourth-generation Bulgarian composers, a list of composers whom Popov directly affected or taught is unavailable. However, it is clear, given his role in Bulgarian society, that his influence was widely felt.

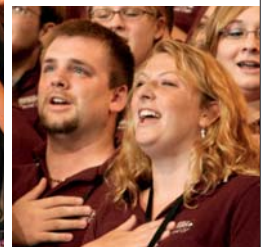
Popov's firm place in the history of Bulgarian music has been noted in several

definitive English texts. *The New Harvard Dictionary of Music*, in its short article on Bulgaria, lists Popov among 10 significant composers of "a younger generation."¹¹ Both editions of *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* devote entire articles to Popov. Although brief, these identical articles hail Popov primarily as a composer of song, known specifically for his melodies and state "many of his works betray the influences of Soviet mass songs and light music."¹² Nick Strimple's *Choral Music in the Twentieth Century*, devotes three pages to Bulgarian choral music. A paragraph is devoted to each ten composers. Popov is

among these composers. Like *New Grove*, Strimple describes Popov's music. "Melody is the most important aspect of his easily accessible style, which also contains elements derived from folk music."¹³

Most Bulgarian composers of the twentieth century chose to use the folk song as the basis for the bulk of their choral compositions. Hence, these composers are known for their skill in arrangement of preexisting melodies. Popov did write many arrangements of folk songs. However, he also composed completely original music, establishing his unique place in Bulgarian musical history. Popov is consistently re-

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membered as a melodist and for the lyrical quality of his melodies. His unique combination of lyrical and memorable melodies with harmonies reflecting both national color (modal influences of Bulgarian folk music) and impressionistic qualities (the use of extended tertian sonorities outside the context of common-practice harmony, the use of harmony purely for sake of color, etc.) set his music apart. For these reasons and for his influence on other composers, this high quality music is worthy of inclusion in the repertoires of choruses worldwide.

As mentioned above, this music has not been published outside Bulgaria. In fact, during the author's many trips to Bulgaria, he found only one store in the entire country that still has copies of this music (the store of the Union of Bulgarian Composers in Sofia). These choral cycles cannot be ordered online. Were U.S. conductors to visit Bulgaria and purchase scores, they would still be unable to perform these works unless they and their choruses both read and spoke Bulgarian. The author, however, has already created editions of both choral cycles, complete with transliterations of Bulgarian into the Roman alphabet directly in the score, English-language performance instructions (except where the composer used Italian terms), a Bulgarian pronunciation guide, and translations of the texts into English. Currently, the author is approaching publishers in an attempt to get these performing editions published in the United States. Until these editions are published, any conductor interested in performing these works should contact Matthew Caine directly to obtain this music without charge.

NOTES

- ¹ Milka Miladinova, *Todor Popov: Bio-Bibliographski Ocherk* (Sofia: Biblioteka Detski Tvorshi, 1976), 8–14.
- ² Vania Popova, e-mail message to author; October 29, 2009.
- ³ Elisaveta Valchinova-Chendova, *Encyclopaedia of Bulgarian Composers*, translated by Maya Ilieva and Vladimir Molle. Sofia: Union of Bulgarian Composers, 2003, 217.

⁴ Stanley Sadie, ed. *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd ed. (New York: Grove's Dictionaries, 2001), s.v. Popov, Todor; by Lada Brashovanova.

⁵ City of Dryanovo Information Portal, Todor Popov, City of Dryanovo, <http://www.dryanovo.net/new/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=117> (accessed January 7, 2010).

⁶ Valchinova-Chendova, 217.

⁷ Sadie.

⁸ Valchinova-Chendova, 217.

⁹ *Pionerski* were children ages 10–14 who were a part of the youth division of the communist party.

¹⁰ Venelin Krostev, *Bulgarian Music*, translated by

Jean Patterson-Alexieva (Sofia: Sofia Press, 1978), 50.

¹¹ Don Michael Randel, ed. *The New Harvard Dictionary of Music*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), s.v. "Bulgaria," by Dimitri E. Conomos.

¹² Sadie.

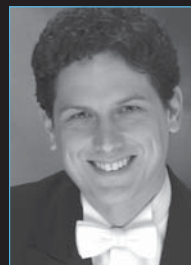
¹³ Nick Strimple, *Choral Music in the Twentieth Century* (Portland, Oregon: Amadeus Press, 2002), 176–78.



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