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PhD Field: Orthodox Theology

PhD Thesis

**Orthodox Theological Horizons in Russian
Composition of the 20th Century. Gheorgy
Sviridov.**

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Table of Contents

List of abbreviations	5
Introduction.....	6
Motivation for choosing the Topic	7
Objective	8
Methodology	8
Chapter 1.	11
The Historical and Cultural Context of Gheorgy Sviridov's Creation	11
Introduction	11
1.1.A Brief Overview of Russian Music History	12
1.2.On Russian Choral and Church Music	18
1.3.The Historical, Cultural, and Musical Context of Gheorgy Sviridov's Creation	21
Conclusions	30
Chapter 2.	32
The Life of Gheorgy Sviridov: General Information.	32
2.1.Childhood: Early Musical Education, Studies in St. Petersburg, and First Awards.....	32
2.2.The Years of Apprenticeship and His Relationship with Shostakovich.....	37
2.3.The Year 1948 and Sviridov's Inclusion in the "Formalists" List.....	46
2.4.Testimonies about Sviridov from Those Who Knew Him	51
Conclusions	58
Chapter 3.	60
An Analysis of Gheorgy Sviridov's Ideas and Artistic Vision	60
Introduction	60
3.1.On Art.....	64
a. On the Antinomy of Complex/Simple and Profound/Simplistic	64
b. On the Spiritual and Ethical Dimension of Art.....	67
3.2.On the Concept of "Novatorstvo" – Artistic Innovation.....	70
3.3.On the Church and Orthodox Faith.....	72
3.4.On the Artist's Condition and Creativity.....	80
3.5.On Church and Secular Music (On Hymns, Prayers, and Para-Religious Compositions) ..	84
3.6.On Society and the Concept of Sobornost in Sviridov's Work and Thought.....	86
3.7.On the Relationship Between Music and Word.....	92
3.8.On the Concept of "Narodnost" and Patriotism	96
3.9.Orthodox Themes and Liturgical Symbols in Gheorgy Sviridov's Composition.....	109
Conclusions	123
Chapter 4	125

Examples from Works	125
Introduction	125
4.1. Glory and Alleluia	126
4.2. Holy God	127
4.3. It Is Truly Meet	128
4.4. Troparion of the Nativity	129
4.5. Prayer of the Blind Man	131
4.6. "The Earth is the Lord's..."	133
4.7. The Betrayal of Judas	135
4.8. "Beholding a Wondrous Birth..."	138
4.9. "Behold, the Bridegroom Comes..."	139
4.10. The Return of the Prodigal Son	142
4.11. "In the Morning, Hear My Voice..."	143
4.12. Kondakion of the Publican and Pharisee	145
4.13. "Come, Let Us Worship..."	146
4.14. "Have Mercy on Us, O Lord, Have Mercy on Us..."	147
4.15. "The King of Glory"	148
4.16. Song of Purification	152
4.17. "O Most Praised Mother..."	154
4.18. Prayer to St. Apostle and Evangelist John the Theologian	155
4.19. Holy Love	156
4.20. "Prayer"	157
4.21. Repentance Verse	159
4.22. "The Soul Longs for Heaven"	160
4.23. The Icon	163
4.24. "The Voice in the Choir"	167
4.25. "The Mother of God in the City"	171
Conclusions	175
Final Conclusions	177
New Directions for Research	177
Bibliography	180
List of Vocal Works	201
Awards, Prizes, and Major Positions Held	220
Appendices	221

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When we say that the Church is Sobornic, do we mean that its laws extend and are valuable even to the artistic domain? Does the concept of Sobornicity have any relevance to musicians, for example? If so, how can we find this intersection between theology and art?

These questions form the basis of the motivation for exploring this direction, exploration which led to the formulation of a topic addressing the interdisciplinarity between theology and music.

How compatible is Orthodox faith teaching with artistic activity and vice versa? To explore this, it is necessary to begin research that studies the connection between the two fields. These studies could proceed along two parallel paths:

1. A philosophical and conceptual study of art, aligned with Evangelical teaching, so that, through the interaction of the two, a new way of making art is illuminated; a way that does not destroy the personality of the artist but helps it grow; so that art is not like a parasitic organism in the heart of the artist, which, the more it grows, the more it drains the artist of life and identity, with the latter becoming one with his art, merging with it, and being identified with it, leaving nothing of himself. Rather, the artist should grow and be invigorated through art. We believe that this is possible by aligning art and the creative process with the law of love and Evangelical teaching.
2. By studying personalities who build this bridge between theology and art: theologians-artists and artists-theologians. Among others, we could mention St. Sophrony Sakharov, who was a master of visual art, painting, and whose memoirs contain many testimonies about how he tried to unite these two worlds in his soul. He describes the fierce struggle of artistic pursuits that found peace in finding Christ. Another example is St. Hierarch Joseph Naniescu, Metropolitan of Moldova, whose interest in music in general and his involvement in church music is well-known, especially within the Metropolitane of Moldova.

Of course, the Romanian Orthodox Church is familiar with other such theologians who served the Church with dedication but also had evident cultural, literary, and artistic pursuits. For instance, we can cite Metropolitan Bartolomeu Anania and Metropolitan Antonie Plămădeală as examples.

But how many artists do we know who carry the Evangelical message into the world of arts? We strongly believe that theological research deserves to move in this direction as well so that we can bring Christ into a world that may be seeking Him without knowing it.

This thesis is the result of personal searches and research into the theological field in its symbiosis with the musical (and artistic in general), historical, and philosophical domains. Besides the personal interest in addressing this subject, we consider that the connections between art and theology are insufficiently researched today, both in the field of arts and in theology. We believe it is imperative that, in these times when many research fields are treading on shared ground, becoming related and joining forces to highlight new dimensions of human pursuits, this interdisciplinary terrain between art and theology deserves and must be closely studied to discover the artistic dimension of Orthodox theology, as well as the theological dimensions of contemporary art.

It is also necessary that the personalities whose lives consisted of the symbiosis of theological and artistic pursuits be brought to light and become more widely known, so that, through living examples, we can understand the empirical basis of this theological-artistic connection, not just remaining on the surface of discussing an idea but understanding the practical aspects and how artistic thinking and spiritual living according to the teachings of the Orthodox Church intertwine and bear fruit in a specific way of life that is understandable to people in the field of art.

This paper addresses the interdisciplinarity between theology and music, with a focus on 20th-century Russian composition, taking as a case study the personality of the Russian composer Gheorgy Sviridov. Throughout the work, several interconnections between music and theology were highlighted, with the main objective being to investigate how Orthodox doctrinal and liturgical elements are reflected in the creation of the aforementioned composer. By exploring the relationship between musical art and Orthodox theology, the work emphasizes how art can express theology and how theology influences artistic creativity, with a central point being the idea of sobornicity and how it can be relevant to art in general and musical art in particular.

Before briefly describing each chapter of this thesis, we consider it important to mention some of the key works and studies that form the foundation of our research. The work "Музыка как судьба" (Music as Fate) published in 2002 in Moscow is the core of this thesis, as it contains the personal notes, memoirs, and recollections written by the composer himself in his notebooks. Thanks to this work, we can glimpse certain searches and tensions within the composer's soul; how the chronological evolution of his artistic creed, the idea of the inseparable connection

between music and words, or the concept of the sobornost of art unfolds. Here, too, we find various responses to the accusations brought against him in different contexts; we can find authentic testimonies regarding his relationship with Shostakovich and other notable figures of the 20th century. Based on this book, we developed chapters three and four, which represent the most important part of our research.

Another particularly valuable work is "Хоровая «Теодицея» Свиридова" ("Sviridov's Choral 'Theodicy'") by the composer's nephew, Aleksandr Belonenko. Although this work is actually an introductory study of approximately 50 pages and appears in Volume XXI of the Complete Works of G. Sviridov, Belonenko delves into the ideas behind Sviridov's religious or para-religious works. Thanks to this study, we understand the true dimensions of the composer's artistic ideas and learn, for example, that behind the 26 works from the Orthodox liturgy (which are included in the aforementioned Volume XXI) lies an extensive project entitled "From Liturgical Poetry," comprising over 300 compositions in progress, which unfortunately remained unfinished.

In general, Aleksandr Belonenko is the one who, through his activity, made an enormous contribution to making his uncle's name known; thanks to him, we have the published notebooks with the composer's personal notes as well as the complete list of his works; he is also the one who closely analyzed the relationship between Sviridov and Shostakovich, as well as Sviridov's relationship with composer Mieczyslaw Weinberg, developing comprehensive works on this subject.

As for the structure of the thesis, it consists of four parts. **In the first part**, we analyze the historical and cultural context of the 20th century. We will briefly go through the most important events and provide a few examples of the laws and steps that were implemented, as well as their consequences.

The Russian composer Gheorgy Sviridov was born and created during a complex period in Russia's history (1915-1998), characterized by political and cultural changes. The work presents an exploration of Russian music history, highlighting the connection between ancient church traditions and new artistic currents. In this chapter, we will also explore the social and historical context of the 20th century to understand the circumstances and the cultural, artistic, social, and political environment in which Gheorgy Sviridov operated. Despite the ideological and political pressures of the Soviet regime, Sviridov managed to integrate elements of the Orthodox religious tradition into his works, a subject analyzed in this chapter.

The second part will focus on the life and work of Gheorgy Sviridov. We will examine his relationship with his teacher and mentor Dmitri Shostakovich, a particularly important

figure for Sviridov, who had a major impact not only on Sviridov's compositional style but also on his thinking. In this context, we will also see how, at some point, Sviridov made an important decision for himself and his compositional activity, a decision that would influence his entire life and become a turning point in how he approached music and art in general. We will also highlight how Bolshevik censorship struck Sviridov in the midst of his artistic activity, leading to difficult years in which Sviridov lived on the edge of poverty. This chapter analyzes how the composer's life was influenced by the ideological and cultural challenges of the time, and the impact of this influence on his music. Sviridov was deeply affected by the political changes of his time, being listed as a "formalist" in 1948. During this time, a personal rupture also occurred in his self-perception as an artist. Starting from 1950, Sviridov practically immersed himself fully in vocal art and abandoned purely instrumental music.

The work also explores his relationships and influences from other cultural figures to understand the personal path the composer took, his historical journey in discovering his artistic vocation, and when exactly the Evangelical message found greater resonance in the composer's soul.

At the end of this part, we will bring testimonies from those who knew him personally, so that, later in the third part, we can discuss the composer's actual thinking, as it emerges from his notes and memoirs. Combined, the testimonies of those who knew him, as well as his own notes from his notebooks, will help us create a virtual portrait of the composer's thinking.

In the third part, as mentioned above, we will closely analyze the composer's notebooks and divide them into several main themes, the most evident of which are, of course, directly related to Sviridov's theological thinking. Here, we will highlight how Sviridov's interest in Orthodox musical tradition was natural and was driven not by external factors but by the particularities of his worldview. The remarkable purity, integrity, and fidelity to the chosen path defined his mission as a preserver of national, cultural, and ethical traditions, like a beacon that brings light during the threatening storms of our time. Later, in the composer's consciousness, national and religious elements would be closely intertwined, leading him to formulate his own creed and vision of the world and his homeland.

By thoroughly examining Sviridov's vision, this work aims to bring to the forefront the importance of authentic art, rooted in spirituality and a sincere search for truth. We will see how the concepts of artistic conscience, moral responsibility, and closeness to cultural and national values are essential to understanding the artist's mission in this composer's view. This is not just a retrospective of Sviridov's thinking, but also an invitation to reflect on how art can continue to maintain its authenticity and relevance in the face of contemporary challenges.

In the fourth and final part, we will closely analyze, using some musicological techniques as well as symbolic-theological interpretation, several musical works where the depth of the composer's thinking is clearly evident, and the authentic and original way in which he managed to unravel the hidden meanings in the scriptural texts he used in his works. Our focus in this part will be particularly on the cycle "Songs and Prayers," which is also the composer's last work, referred to by some researchers as the crowning achievement of his a cappella choral creation. In this final part, we will understand through examples the words of Sviridov's teacher, Dmitri Shostakovich, who said, "Sviridov does not use many notes, but he has a lot of music."

Conclusions

In conclusion, this work emphasizes Gheorgy Sviridov's significant contribution to sacred music in the 20th century and the important role of Orthodox theology in his art. The study offers an innovative perspective on the connection between theology and music, showing how a modern composer can create profoundly spiritual works in an adverse political and cultural context.

At the end of this work, several general conclusions are necessary:

1. In a world hostile to any spiritual search and development, as was the 20th century in Russia (but also in other geographical areas affected by authoritarianism and the persecution of the Orthodox Church), art was one of the main forms of preserving and manifesting the spirit's search for spiritual truths.
2. Gheorgy Sviridov represents a notable and particularly important figure of the 20th century, especially for those who want to understand how the Orthodox spirit managed to continue promoting itself in a world that was openly fighting against it. His life and work, interviews, and memoirs in his notebooks are clear testimonies of a life that continually sought to find the ultimate truth of life on earth. For Sviridov, this ultimate truth is the Word, and the human word as its religious icon. Regarding his music, the composer declared as early as the 1950s that music and words are the foundation of the new in art; a return to what has always been, to tranquility, peaceful song, and restful harmonies—this is what the contemporary soul seeks. As for his life, the Word-Christ represents the ultimate truth toward which the human soul must strive. The composer repeated this many times, especially toward the end of his life.
3. Gheorgy Sviridov's religious music represents a true musical treasure and a jewel of 20th-century religious choral singing. A close study of his works, especially from the second half of the century, can serve as important sources for understanding how

Russian choral music evolved and what the new directions in this field are. The collection "Songs and Prayers" is unanimously considered one of Sviridov's compositional pinnacles and one of the most performed song cycles; through this series of compositions, Sviridov once again demonstrates the beauty of scriptural and liturgical text and practically confirms his definitive creed: the unity between music and words, the latter being supreme.

Our research work has focused on bringing to light this personality, relatively unknown in the Romanian space, as well as highlighting the most important elements related to his thinking and work.

New Research Directions

Researchers who wish to explore this interdisciplinary area between theology and art can focus their attention on the two main research directions mentioned earlier in the introduction to this work.

Many studies can be developed in the field of liturgics by analyzing hymnography and the text of many songs with theological contexts. Works in the field of patristics could also be elaborated, highlighting the artistic, linguistic, and philological value of many patristic writings, thus opening the door to patristic literature for artists in a language accessible to them.

To achieve this, theologians will need to make a greater or lesser effort, we believe, to step out of the comfort zone of the theological language they are accustomed to and try to adapt it to a new world; to enter and understand a new world—the artistic one; to study its laws of organization and enter it with the law of Christ's love and peace.

Regarding the personality and compositional works of Gheorgy Sviridov, future research can delve deeper into each aspect, whether we speak of his thinking oriented towards the people and tradition, or especially the connection between music and words—crucially important notions for understanding Sviridov's musical, theological, and philosophical world.

Beyond the musical themes, some specific ideas for the connection between theology and art concerning the 20th century in the Slavic space and Gheorgy Sviridov's personality could emerge by deepening the subject of Sviridov's sobornicity of thought and how it intersects with the elements of dogmatic theology that can be traced in his thinking and works on this subject.

Additionally, a more detailed and thorough analysis of his religious-themed works could be conducted. Patristic interpretations of scriptural or liturgical texts could be sought, analyzing them in parallel with the melody used by Sviridov for one text or another, and examining how the composer manages or fails to capture the meaning conveyed by the Holy Fathers. Gheorgy

Sviridov, being a lover of theological works, could certainly provide new elements and nuances of understanding through in-depth research of his compositions and the way a church text can be artistically conceived.

Gheorgy Sviridov reveals himself to be a missionary and apostle of scriptural meaning in concert halls and philharmonics where his music resonates. His thoughts and ideas are of exceptional intensity and scope, devoid of triviality; his statements are bold and courageous, despite the dangers specific to the time in which he lived. This thinking of his grows and is founded on the philosophical particularities and traditions of Russian culture, primarily on an unrestrained love for the people, and of course, on a profound search for and investigation of the truths of the Orthodox faith.

In the context of a modern society in constant change, where art is often viewed through the lens of commercialization and entertainment, Sviridov reminds us of the fundamental values of authentic art. He proposes a vision in which the artist is not just a creator of aesthetic forms but a servant of truth and spiritual beauty. This approach can offer valuable perspectives and inspiration for contemporary artists seeking to define their place and role in today's world.