On the borderline of the XX and XXI centuries the European community proved to be a witness of a remarkable historical phenomenon: on the territory of the former USSR there emerged a series of independent countries. The Republic of Belarus is one of the above-mentioned states. It is geographically situated at the very center of Europe, has been identified as a state for many centuries, has its own history, including prolific humanistic and enlightenment traditions as well as its own cultural background.

The system of musical education in Belarus has a long-lasting historical path closely related with all the complex of musical traditions of this region. Because of its location — situated in-between Europe and Russia — Belarusian musical culture (including musical education as an integral part of it), has been influenced by a wide scope of different cultural elements: beginning with musical teaching in Orthodox monasteries and Jesuit Collegiums through the traditions of court musicianship of famous Belarusian-Polish noble families and up to the present with civil music education in regional cities of the country.

The modern history of music education in Belarus gets its start at the very beginning of the XX century, when the first professional music institutions of a new type (public conservatories and music colleges) were founded in Minsk, Mogilyev, Vityebsk, Gomel and Bobruisk. The first public elementary music schools were opened at the same time. In 1932, on the base of a reorganized Minsk Music Technicum, the Belarusian State Conservatory was opened. In 1935, under the auspices of the Conservatory, was arranged a special Department for talented children — a prototype of today’s Republic Gymnasium-College of Music, a true cradle of hundreds of professionals in the realm of music.

Today, Belarus has in place an effective system for the professional training of musicians, which could be considered one of the most efficient in the world. We fortunately have managed to keep it intact after the breakup of the USSR, in contrast to other elements of our social and economic structure. The keystone of this system is its three-level constitution:

**Three-level system of music education in Belarus**

- **Higher**
  - Belarus State Academy of Music
- **Secondary**
  - approximately 30 specialized secondary institutions (music colleges, lyceums, gymnasiums)
- **Preliminary**
  - approximately 500 children music schools
This type of tiered system of musical education instills in the student as early as possible a professional orientation leading toward a high level of musical knowledge, abilities and skills at the final stage. The vitality of this multilevel system is guaranteed by a sufficient number of highly qualified teachers for each level.

Each level plays a specific role in the growth of young musicians:

- **PRELIMINARY (general)** (which lasts usually from age 7 to age 14) is opened to all children who would like to study music. Because in many music schools there exists a two-year preliminary group, studies on this level sometimes begin even earlier than at age 7. In public music schools children have lessons on a specific instrument combined with other musical subjects (solfeggio, music literature, choir participation, ensemble/orchestra playing, etc.). The pupils who, after successfully completing their public music school studies, are recommended for and decide to continue their studies are placed into the first level of professionalization, which is

- **SECONDARY (special)** level (14–17 y.o.). This is also the first level at which it is possible to obtain a professional qualification. After graduating from a music college young musicians are certified to work as teachers in public music schools and kindergartens, as accompanists, choir conductors, etc. On this level, students take a complete “package” of special music disciplines (including solfeggio, music theory, harmony, polyphony, music history) that are combined in programs of study with subjects of general secondary education. Pupils of some specialties are able to enter straight into a music college without a public music school education. This level covers a number of specialized music lyceums and gymnasiums, where the total period of study lasts for 12 years.

- **HIGHEST (specialized)** stage is represented by one institution, standing on the very top of this educational “pyramid”, the Belarus State Academy of Music (formerly the Belarus State Conservatory). This is not the only institution that prepares professional musicians and music teachers in Belarus, but it has been appointed the chief institution for professional music education by the state.

In the Academy students, in addition to intensive studies in special subjects, are provided with fundamental training in humanities, psychology and pedagogic, and theoretical and practical knowledge in the area of teaching methods of music disciplines. Moreover, most of the students are involved in various kinds of creative and scientific work. It is widely known that our traditional academic structure focuses not only on aspects of performance, but also on musicology as an integral part of our programs of general study. This in particular permits students of performing specialties, after finishing the graduate level, to proceed directly to the creation of a M.A. thesis or even a PhD dissertation.

The Belarusian musical education tradition embodies the best traits of the Moscow and St. Petersburg conservatories. It’s worth mentioning that a number of professors of the first generation of the former Belarusian State Conservatory (V. Zolotaryov, N. Aladov (composition), Y. Dreizin, M. Matison (musicology), A. Klumov, G. Petrov (piano), A. Amiton, A. Bessimertny (violin) among many others) were pupils and representatives of the great Russian music school. We continue to nourish these traditions in the development and strengthening of creative activity that links us with Russian institutions and musicians.
At the same time, Belarusian musical art and education reflects national traits. They are characterized by profound national originality and genetic ties with the West-European musical culture, despite the fact that processes of national self-identification in modern Belarusian culture have become increasingly complicated and sensitive. We have not forgotten, however, our rich historical heritage and make a lot of attempts, especially in the course of the last several years, to study and reconstruct the best of our cultural past.

One must take into consideration that while in Russia, the involvement of the European cultural process dates back to Peter the Great’s reforms (XVIII century) only on the site of modern Belarus it was felt much earlier. This helps to explain why the principle characteristics of Belarusian culture, with all its variety, are undoubtedly deeply incorporated into the course of European music tradition. This idea leads to many important conclusions, one of which being that the regularities of formation and recent development of Belarusian professional music are typologically much closer to similar phenomena in the European region than in the case of some of our Eastern neighbors. This is why today, when we feel much more independent in creating and proving our own national ideas of modern education in the sphere of music, we appeal both to the best of Russian and European experience. Belarusian professional musical education leans upon the best traditions of Russian and West-European musical art. At the same time it carries on all the contradictory characteristics of the educational system of the former USSR with its total centralization, unification of educational process, which leads in its turn towards a certain ignorance of personality factors.

All the above-mentioned ideas and factors influenced to a great extent a core of music educators concentrated in the Academy of Music. This group of musicians, teachers and ad-
ministrators has been busy recently with the elaboration of a solid scientific background for reforming the whole system of music education in the republic. Some years ago the Concept of Professional Education in the Field of Arts was created within the framework of functioning the “CULTURE” state scientific and technical program, which became one of the most important program documents for all the people involved in this work. One of the main goals of this Concept is the idea of national revival, actualization of historical and cultural heritage as a kernel of sovereignization of Belarus and the building up a national system of artistic education within it. In accordance with this program we try to solve a number of problems having not only international significance, but also those specific to our region.

THE REFORM OF THE MUSICAL EDUCATION IN BELARUS THUS AFFECTS THE FOLLOWING LEVELS:

**Content.** This level is determined by the interaction of the artistic education and the art itself which determines, in turn, the optimum ratio of general and special education, theoretical and practical professional training, stages (“steps”) of training, the essence of life-long teaching, etc. Overcoming the negative trends in our system of music education, of which we are very much aware, is possible acting on the principles of the priority of general human values; national tradition of education, humanism as a form of implementing an individual approach to the creative development of a person; democratization, depolitization and deideologization of the teaching-upbringing process; and, in general, dialogue between the content of the national educational system and the modern stage of world music art.

**Didactics.** The imperative nature is a specific feature of a model of our modern artistic education. It is a didactic principle that stems from the so-called “production” (industrial) method of musical training, according to which an educational institution was viewed as one of the “industries” of the age of total planning. The failure of such an approach is obvious since the imperativity is leveling the main prerequisite of professional artistic education: an individual approach to the development of a creative personality. Thus, a transition is necessary to the principle of the development of a personality of an artist on the basis of creativity as the method of teaching and upbringing.

**Structure.** As the European experience proves, democratization of education inevitably leads to its diversification — increase of types, volumes and formats of education. The main difference of the state system of artistic education is in its slim structural integrity. The special problem of the reform today is implementation of factors of a multi-level and multi-model system of higher music education.

**Management (organization).** The main target of this level is the determination of competence limits of the bodies of state management of educational institutions. The function of the state management is executed through the system of state attestation of specialists. The difference in the types of educational institutions is compensated for by means of accrediting them on the basis of the standards of education.

**Law.** The legal basis of the reform of artistic education is formed by the laws of the Republic of Belarus on culture, education and languages. At the same time the further legislative acts are necessary for aesthetic education, for higher artistic school, for certification of arts experts, for accreditation of educational institutions of arts, etc.
Nevertheless, recent achievements of Belarusian school are considerable. The Belarusian piano school in particular has today been internationally recognized as testifying to a high level of professional training. An excellent level of virtuosic skills of young Belarusian pianists goes together with the highest quality of *pianistic intonation*, which consists not only of the attainment of ideal acoustic results in the process of performing, but also of solution of variety of complicated *semantic* tasks of musical interpretation, this idea based on the adaptation not only of theoretical ideas of famous piano teachers of Russia and Europe, but also on a long-lasting performance tradition, which many of our piano professors inherited straight from their hands.

The modern system of musical education in Belarus is forming a unique model. Studying it could enable one to penetrate into the core of musical education of the whole East-European region. The latter, in its turn, could be considered necessary for successful process of integrating the European space of professional music education.