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An Approach to Analysis in the Context of the Theory of Musical Content: Holistic Analysis-Interpretation

ABSTRACT

Present-day Russian musical scholarship represented by the leading schools of musicology offers new approaches towards analysis of musical compositions in the context of application of the theory of musical content. However, the problem of integrity in teaching theoretical disciplines on an elementary level of musical education is the predominance of the old traditional approaches which are noted for their lack of integration with classical music scholarship. In the given context musical pedagogy is in need of new approaches to analysis of musical compositions. Such a new approach is the *content-semantic analysis of musical compositions*.

On all stages of education, especially at its early stage, the traditional structural-grammatical analysis, only in combination with content-based semantic analysis, makes it possible to present the pupils with a *holistic perspective* of a musical composition: to immerse into the understanding of ethics, aesthetics, the cultural codes of the relevant period, to study the composer's musical thinking, musical language and style (Zhurova 2013, 10).

Such a process is fully conducive to the harmonic interaction of abstract and concrete thinking, as well as analytical and metaphorical thinking of the pupils. Musical thinking is metaphorical, since it refers to something significant and substantial, to a symbol encoded in sound structures (Kirnarskaya 1997, 136). It must be noted that the discovery of the analogue of the sound structure — the so-called metaphorical leap — presents the basis of any kind of artistic perception (Broechx 1986).

In order to solve this complex problem I suggest the alternative approach of application in lessons of theoretical disciplines of a new direction in Russian musical scholarship — the theory of musical content (the author of which is Professor at the Moscow State P. I. Tchaikovsky Conservatory Valentina Kholopova, see Kholopova 2014), in which the understanding of the content-related aspects of music possess a conceptual significance.

The theory of music content has made itself known relatively recently — in the late 20th and early 21st centuries — and was evoked by an acute cultural necessity of this time: it is called upon to balance the disproportion which has arisen between the subjects of the compositional-grammatical cycle and the content-semantic elements.

The concept of content in music is taken as a self-sufficient category, the short definition of which is disclosed in the formula: 'the content of music is its expressive-semantic essence' (Kholopova 2007, 17, 22). The concept of musical form also possesses a content-related interpretation.

The theory of musical content must in no way replace the cycle of studies of musical grammar. However, for a full-fledged perspective of music it is called upon to balance it, especially in connection with the extreme disproportion which has emerged at the present time between the immense accumulation of knowledge of musical grammar and incomparably lesser amount of cognition of musical lexicology.

The leading categories of the theory of musical content may be listed: 1) intonation in the Asafiev sense; 2) musical language with the semantic unit of the musical lexeme; 3) the dyad of specialized/non-specialized musical content; 4) the dyad of 5) the triad of the three sides of musical content.

The conceptual foundation of the theory of conscious/unconscious content; of musical content is the theory of musical intonation, which was developed back in the 1920s by Boris Asafiev (Asafiev 1971, 344). The present-day Russian understanding of music bases itself particularly on this epochal discovery by the Russian scholar, who presented a fundamental teaching about the intonational foundation of music. Herein lies the distinction between the typical Western and Eastern conceptions of music which are directed at numbers, pitch sets, intervals and all sorts of musical structures.

In this new direction of Russian musical scholarship Asafiev's theory of intonation is not only brought out to the forefront, but also a certain type of constructive work is carried out with it, namely:

- the typology of the basic types of intonations is adopted in the process of revealing its basic features and auditory differentiation — the pentad of intonations, according to Valentina Kholopova: the emotional-expressive, pictorial, genre-related, stylistic and compositional;
- examples are presented from musical compositions based on various types of intonations, also taking mixed types of intonations into consideration.

The concept of intonation is examined as semantic unity, not split into any components of musical grammar — intervals, steps, chords, etc. Intonation is defined here as a musical turn with a particular kind of musical expressivity and presents a purely musical formation, and not molded from words.

The theory of musical content in the understanding of music as an art bases itself upon Asafiev's fundamental definition: 'Music is the art of intonated meaning' (Asafiev 1971, 344). Asafiev expressed the thought that the nature of music is not sonic but intonational, and for this reason musical intonation presents the 'comprehension of sound, the sphere of semantic sound-manifestation' (Asafiev 1971, 344), as well as the manifestation of intonational form at its most basic level (Meduxhevsky 1993). The musician's ear makes it possible to discern millions of sound combinations, which we call intonations.

Musical language as one of the leading categories of the theory of musical content is regarded not as a metaphor — in analogy with verbal language —, nor as the grammatical aspect of music — melodic language or harmonic language. Musical language may be essentially defined as a peculiar instrumentarium in the understanding of such an important branch of present-day musical scholarship as musical lexicology. At that, it is Asafiev's intonation in particular which is used as the analogy with the verbal lexeme — the smallest semantic unit —, having acquired the name of musical lexeme (Kholopova 2014).

The next foundational categories are presented by the specialized and non-specialized content of music (Kholopova 2014). The theory of musical content corrects that widespread misinterpretation of the meaning of music, when only the extra-musical element is perceived to represent musical content: programs, titles, verbal poetical characteristics etc. Here the extra-musical stratum is perceived to be non-specialized content.

Correspondingly, along with non-specialized content, we can see that specialized content is disclosed and characterized as inseparable from music itself (Kholopova 2014). The latter locution denotes the content of the musical elements proper of musical sound: timbre, interval, chords, rhythmic formulas, metric organization, texture, counterpoint, melody, musical themes and compositional forms.

Next comes the dyad of conscious/unconscious content. The boundary between the strata of the conscious and the unconscious in the perception of music and its content is principally mobile depending on human beings' musical experience and concrete circumstances of perception of music. The perceptible conscious strata of content include all the phenomena expressed by words: titles, literary programs, the composers' verbal instructions to the music, poetic texts.

Research of the domain of the unconscious in the perception of musical content requires the incorporation of psychological methods (Clynes 1986, 169–94). Turning to the idea of Boris Asafiev about music as a language without concepts, albeit a very concrete language, it may be said that music is a language, but not everything in music may be reduced to language (Kholopova 2014).

Such categories as the three sides of musical content — the emotional, the depictive and the symbolic — serve as the main criterion for comparison between each other of the chief historical musical periods from the early modern to the contemporary — Baroque, Classicism, Romanticism and 20th–21st century music (Kholopova 2014).

This triad was intentionally constructed by Valentina Kholopova from the famous semiotic triad of signs developed by American philosopher and logician Charles Peirce: icon, index and symbol. On the basis of Peirce's own concrete examples the *icon* was interpreted as the emotional side of music (Kholopova 2010), the *index* as the depictive side and the *symbol* as the symbolic (Kholopova 2014).

On the basis of the three sides of content the special features of each of the four aforementioned main epochs are examined; primary attention is paid to musical emotions — from the formation of the theory of affects during the Baroque period to the fixation of the conception of feeling in the work of the Classicists, towards the understanding of music as the language of feeling in 19th century Romanticism, up to the emotional

extremities and crises in the music of the 20th and 21st centuries (Clynes 1986, 169–94).

The ideas of the theory of musical content have also found their practical manifestation at the elementary stage of musical education in Russia, where since 1999 the new educational course of Musical Content has been introduced. The aim of the course is the development of the students' musical culture in the process of artistic perception and mastery of the expressive-semantic essence of music.

For ten years at the venue of the Moscow N. G. Rubinstein Children's School for the Arts I have conducted dozens of integrated classes based on my own original educational program (Zhurova 2011).

Upon carrying out experiential-experimental work based on my own original methodology, I have developed a system-generating foundation of a new educational course, which I define as integral analysis-interpretation (my own term, see Zhurova 2015). Integral analysis-interpretation presents a new approach towards analysis of musical compositions in the context of the theory of musical content, since it is fully conducive to the harmonious development of the pupils' logical and associative thinking.

Another reason why it may be considered as being new is that the integration of the traditional structural-grammatical and the content-semantic types of analysis also leads to a considerable influence on performance interpretation, which is conducive towards the formation of a holistic perception of music. For this reason I defined this type of analysis as integral analysis-interpretation of musical compositions, since it naturally unifies into itself three vectors: the structural-grammatical, the content-related semantic and the performance-related (Zhurova 2015).

The combination of the two terms of analysis and interpretation presumes their mutual influence, interaction and interdependence. Such an analysis helps consider the variability and plurality of interpretations of a concrete conception of each musical composition, and also presumes the creation of an individual performance conception of each musical composition, the ability to create various renditions of one musical composition.

During the process of experimental research I was able to reveal the effectiveness of integral analysis-interpretation of musical compositions, which is conducive to a conscious understanding by the pupils of music as a language, their ability to decipher the semantic contexts and implications of the art of music, as well as the mutual influence and interaction of the content-semantic type of analysis with the structural-grammatical.

Presuming the infinite multidimensionality of the art of music, it must be emphasized that the reliance for the most part only on the foundations of traditional structural-grammatical analysis limited to the circle of the well-known musicological disciplines is perceived as being extremely inadequate. Such a position demonstrates an obvious insufficiency of the present-day understanding of the phenomenon of music; it trains the pupils' thought towards a static understanding of composition and form and does not lead to an understanding of the profound philosophical contexts of the art of music.

Thereby, in the late 20th and early 21st centuries there arose the idea of another musical theory (Aranovsky 2012, 49), marked by broader boundaries, extending far beyond the

horizon of the traditional type. A conscious interpretation of music as a language, a profound understanding of its semantic implications, determined by cultural-historical contexts of a particular epoch becomes possible only in the conditions of new content-semantic approaches to analysis of a musical composition. An effective realization of the approaches described above may be realized upon implementation into musical education of innovative conceptions of Russian musical scholarship.

KEYWORDS

Musical Pedagogy, Musical Content, Content-Meaning Analysis, Theory of Musical Content, Analytical Theory, Musical Signification, Holistic Analysis-Interpretation.

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