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CHORAL POLYPHONY AS A METHODOLOGICAL PROBLEM OF THE CONTEMPORARY RESEARCH IN CHORAL SINGING

Abstract. The purpose of the research is to determine the conceptual foundations of the system analysis of choral polyphony as a component of stylistic processes of 20th century in composer's practice. To substantiate the methodological principles of choral polyphony as a phenomenon, and to provide the definition of choral polyphony as a scientific category of research in choral singing.

Keywords: choral polyphony, choral writing, artistic counterpoint, methodology, research in choral singing.

Choral research as a component of the science about music studies the "specific patterns of the choral art" (according to Y. Kuznetsov). The theory of the choral performance, in turn, is one of the directions of choral research, the subject of which is the specificity of the performing thinking. Its content in the context of academic choral creativity is traditionally constituted by the means of the *performing poetics* (intonation, articulation, phrasing, tempo-rhythm, timbre qualities, and dynamics). At the same time, the modern concert and educational practice of appealing to polyphonic choral compositions is quite selective. This is due to their rather high technical level of performing thinking, as well as the stylistic multidimensionality of choral polyphony in the context of the composing creativity of the 20th century. Understanding the immanent logic of the complex phenomena of the choral art requires an interdisciplinary approach.

In other words, the compositions that are the product of polyphonic thinking in the choral genre exist in the individualized style systems the logic of which requires a special study. Therefore, the urgent justification of the system of choral polyphony in the musical culture of the 20th century, containing a sig-

nificant difference from the previous epochs, makes the topic of the present research relevant.

The object of the article is the categorical apparatus of the contemporary choral research; the subject is choral polyphony as a phenomenon that characterizes the fundamental constant of the style system of the choral art of the 20th century.

The purpose of the study is to determine the conceptual foundations of choral polyphony as a fundamental component of the stylistic processes of the composing creativity of the 20th century.

The notion of choral polyphony contains components that reveal its specificity, among them there is the "choral writing", which has been studied in the works by O. Ryzhynsky [4], O. Prikhodko [3], O. Zaverukha [1]. All the authors give the definition of the "choral writing", study it on the example of the contemporary composing creativity from different aspects of the artistic process.

T. Frantova initiates the understanding of polyphony in a broader sense – as an artistic universal [6; 7]. The musicologist characterizes A. Schnittke's innovation through the definition of the "artistic counterpoint". It is fundamental for understanding the specificity of the choral polyphony of the 20th

century: "...super-polyphony" as the highest artistic embodiment of the harmony of the universe, which contains the whole spectrum of human feelings and thoughts..." [7, 43]. Important for the methodology of the analysis of choral polyphony is the research made by O. Samoilenko, who implements a dialogical understanding of polyphony and its highest degree – the "semantic multiplicity" into the musicology [5].

The research methods are conditioned by the material of the research of the choral polyphony of masters of the 20th century: *the structural-functional one* is aimed at revealing the interaction of the content and form of the phenomena of choral polyphony; *the semantic one* helps to understand the connection between the musical and poetic (canonical) text; *the systemic one* gives an opportunity for the forming of definitions of choral polyphony in the modern choral studies, which have a general methodological significance.

In one of his early articles, K. Yuzhak relates the bloom of polyphony in the 20th century with "the reflection in the musical sphere of various social and aesthetic processes and tendencies, as well as with the development of musical thinking" [9, 6]. This type of thinking is one of the leading ones for many masters of the 20th century, who, while creating works of art, directly or indirectly use polyphony as a special logic for their construction.

The aesthetic-philosophical approach. The polyphonic nature of being and consciousness in the modern humanitarian thought is interpreted in the context of a dialogue that seeks a "polylogue". Under these concepts O. Samoilenko means "the whole set of forms of inter-subjective communication – all means of transforming the phenomena of the world, the components of life experience into accessible precedents of the subjective entry into the reality" [5, 15]. Polyphonic nature can be seen in the very essence of neoclassicism direction, in which, in addition to the constructive stylistic means, the principles of thinking characteristic of the reproduced models occupy the leading role. The logic of this

trend is based on the "dialogue of cultures", according to O. Samoilenko: "the highest form accessible for the human consciousness and creativity in their sole orientation of the meaning-creating dialogue" [5, 110]. It may indeed make an impression of being the inter-stylistic and inter-authorial one, but "it occurs internally in a stylistic way, through the semantic deepening of the textual structures of music, thus it serves to build the meaning in music through the extension of these structures, and serves to self-grow the musical "logos" [5, 110].

The cultural approach. The principle of polyphonism greatly influences the stylistic processes of the 20th century. According to M. Lobanova, "the fundamental multiplicity, the openness of the style, agrees with the distinctive feature of consciousness, noted by Bakhtin, which manifests itself in relation to the "other", against the background of the "other". The theme of dialogical polyphonism becomes dominant both in art and in scientific knowledge [2, 132].

Basing upon the general concepts of polyphony nature in the musical art, such as a specific time and space organization and the presence of relatively independent, equal voices (components), each of which has its own rhythm of creating the meaning, T. Frantova gives the formulation of the concept of the "artistic counterpoint", which is universal and reflects the logic of the non-musical forms: *the artistic counterpoint should be understood as a universal logical principle whereby several semantically autonomous components interact in parallel in the unity of the time and space continuum* [7, 12].

The logic of this concept extends to the artistic forms of the art of the 20th century, is manifested on many levels of the organization of musical forms.

In the recent research of the *choral writing* category there are several definitions, the content of which varies depending on the object of the study: from the point of view of genesis or performing-practical interpretation. Among the positive moments of the concept by O. Zaverukha we shall point to a clear structure of the components of choral thinking: the

word-Logos (the verbal factor); the genre-communicative principles; the dramaturgy and composition; the performance poetics. The result of these factors is the choral style of the master, which is expressed through the mechanisms of the choral writing. The author proposes to understand the *choral writing* as a product of the composer's thinking, the means of fixing and organizing the composition through a system of signs: *"the choral writing is a hierarchical communicative-sign system that reflects the mechanism of the musical communication – from the composer through the performer to the listener"* [1, 7]. As the author has been seeking the universal mechanisms of musical creativity in the unity of worldviews and techniques of writing, we consider her definitions too broad and not taking into account the choral specificity. However, the urgent need of the contemporary choral research is not only to establish a connection between the choral writing and the composer's worldview, but to deepen and refine the specificity of the very choral specificity.

O. Ryzhynsky understands the notion of the "choral writing" as *the sum of individual features that distinguish compositions for the chorus from other genre types of musical art* and identifies the specific features of the choral writing: 1) the presence of an intoned poetic word; 2) the dependence of the means of musical expression on the "vocal nature of choral art", i.e. on the "ranges of voices, their timbre features, technical capabilities"; 3) the presence of vocal polyphony as a factor of the emergence of a variety of texture solutions, and a factor of occurring of the problems with the structure and timbre merge which are characteristic exclusively of the chorus [4].

Based on the concept by O. Ryzhynsky, O. Prykhodko gives a definition similar by the meaning. The choral writing is understood as *the sum of individual features of a composition (a group of compositions) arising from the nature of choral performance*, and also determines the stable properties of the choral writing: taking into account the vocal nature of choral art; the crucial importance of the ensemble; the cor-

relation between music and words [3, 23]. In our opinion, the choral writing is, by its genetic nature, a polyphonic writing, which is why we consider it as an analytical tool, as a way of learning about *choral polyphony*.

Choral polyphony is a hierarchical concept and reflects the entirety of musical creativity as communication: "the composer – the performer (composition-text) – the listener".

Due to the presence of a conductor as the subject of choral art, the second component of the triad the "performer" should be interpreted in unity with the performing cast: *"the conductor – the chorus"*. In the communication process, there is always a mediator – the conductor-interpreter and the chorus – a specific "living instrument" consisting of the chorus performers. Thus, ***the chorus as a performing unit actualizes the understanding of the specificity of thinking in choral creativity, which becomes the content of the category of the "performing poetics"***.

Let us formulate the definitions of choral polyphony in the system of subjects of choral creativity. Thus, the polyphonic thinking of the *composer-creator* directs the logic of construction of the composition, which can be reflected at all levels of the organization of the whole: from the canonical techniques of writing, genres and forms to the counterpoint of the dramatic layers, the separation of the choral component into the semantic unit of the general concept of the composition. Thus, ontologically, ***choral polyphony is a phenomenon of the composer's thinking; it is the ideal sound image of the Universe, aimed at communicating by the means of choral performance: from the composer through the performer (conductor-chorus) to all of humanity*** (definition #1).

As the consequence of the composer's creativity, definition #2 emerges: ***choral polyphony of a musical composition*** is the result of the action of the counterpoint as the immanent logic of the composer in certain genre conditions. *The chorus as a performing unit serves as an autonomous component of holistic dramaturgy in the composing style system.*

The performing discourse of choral polyphony (definition #3) *is the ratio of dialogical connections between the components of a choral composition and the subjects of their performance in the multidimensionality of the "living text" (through the ensemble, structure, phrasing, tempo rhythm, diction, articulation, timbre, and dynamics).*

To substantiate the scientific generalizations in the proposed definitions, let us turn to the creative work of composers of the 20th century, the thinking of whom is polyphonic in the form and essence. Thus, in **P. Hindemith's** Requiem "*When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd*" dedicated to the memory of "Those We Love" based on W. Whitman's poem, we find the example of the counterpoint as an immanent logic of the master's artistic thinking. The poem's inherent ways of artistic organization (the variant or contrast of paired lines, the interaction of dramatic plans, the network of poetic motifs-symbols) correspond to the immanent-musical principles of thinking of the composer. At the same time, the theme that is revealed in it is specified in the pictures of the mourning procession and the battle march, sends, on the one hand, to Requiem, and on the other hand – to the centuries-old practice of program music and opera and theatre genres.

Interpreting the composition of the American poet as philosophical, unlimited by any historical event, P. Hindemith addresses the semantic possibilities of the genre that embodied the theme of death in its ontological sense – the Bach passions. The composer does not rely on them as on a compositional and dramatic model, but uses those features that allow embodying not only the content but also the artistic form of W. Whitman's poem. The possibility of dramatic versatility inherent in the Bach passions was realized by P. Hindemith in accordance with the literary primary source: different plans are distinguished – the narrative, the lyrical, the plan of communication and the generalization, which do not directly coincide with Bach's, but correspond to them. Using the polyphonic structure of W. Whit-

man's poetic composition and focusing on how to convey the theme set in J. S. Bach's "Passions", P. Hindemith creates a multi-layered semantic polyphony.

Like its great predecessor, the composer gives the performers different roles: the narrative plan is given to the baritone solo, the lyric one – to the mezzo-soprano, the diverse one – to the chorus. And if in the baritone party sometimes there are displacements towards the lyrics, then the chorus shares the function of the generalization with the soloists. Similar to J. S. Bach, P. Hindemith addresses various genre means of the content generalizing – songs, choral, march, recitative, fugue, and hymn. The key points of the dramaturgy are mainly related to the sound of the chorus, which confirms the thesis of choral polyphony as the ideal sound image of the universe.

The dramaturgical functions of the chorus are quite diverse. The chorus appears as a carrier of effective forces, as a representative of the lyrical plan in the dialogues with the hero and as an objective measure (the fugue of the seventh part, the anthem of death of the ninth part and the choral of generalizations). The chorus participates in the story line; on its part, the appeal to higher powers often sounds. Such an interpretation of the chorus is nothing more than an appeal of the composer to the tradition of passions, where the chorus is a crowd (*turbæ*), a community (choral), and a lyrical generalization in the "madrigal" choruses.

Understanding the ideological and artistic concept of Requiem is served by the system of poetic and musical symbols. Like the poetic symbols, the through musical figures in Requiem do not have the property of uniqueness: the composer constantly transforms their semantic circle, bringing the poetic word closer to music. In turn, musical motives "sprout" from a single grain, which facilitates their interaction under purely musical laws. This kind of technique of working with the word is reminiscent of Bach's rhetoric. The system of poetic and musical symbols is based on the key images of Lilac, Star and Bird, who interact with each other and the context that allows the content of each of them to be varied.

The transcoding of the images is based on their interaction with other a priori structures, such as the musical form, genre, style of the composer, forming inter-textual connections in the compositions (according to M. Aranovsky).

The performed functional analysis of Requiem by P. Hindemith confirmed the existence of the *semantic counterpoint as an immanent logic of the composer's thinking*.

I. Stravinsky is a composer whose artistic thinking is fundamentally polyphonic. Turning to one of the most extensive compositions of the later period, we focus on a composition in which choral polyphony is a concept responsible for the ontological content of creativity as a whole. For example, in "Canticum Sacrum ad honorem Sancti Marci Nominis", choral polyphony serves as the objectification of the ideas of Christianity. The similar semantic structure can be seen in the spiritual cantatas by J.S. Bach: choral pieces are the centre of gravity of the whole composition. I. Stravinsky's chorus represents the main tenets of Christianity: the Gospel Sermon and the Three Virtues – Love, Faith, and Hope, embodied in the style of the choral writing: the proportionality or symmetry of forms, the contrapuntal texture. At the same time when the voices of the soloists perform the function of subjectification (through the expression of the recitation of the lyric lines and the appeal to the Almighty), **choral polyphony serves as the sound image of the congregational prayer, the Communion.**

The bright example of universal polyphonic logic is found in the concept of **A. Schnittke's** Second Symphony "St. Florian" (1979–1980), where the genres of symphony and mass are dialogically combined. According to the composer's idea, the "invisible" chorus mass seems to flow over the orchestra symphony. Choral polyphony embodies the upper world with the help of material borrowed from Gradual (Gregorian monody according to the parts of the mass: Kyrie, Gloria, Credo, Sanctus, and Agnus Dei). The sound form of the choral sound is full of grandeur and

exaltation, contrasted with the orchestral layer of dramaturgy, which "as the carrier of the emotional pain of the present earthly world" [8] embodies the tragic culmination of the cycle. The polyphonic thinking of A. Schnittke also determined the constructive level of the organization of the whole. With the help of the polyphonic writing, the monody of the Gregorian choral gets the texture-space volume.

The common features can be seen in all the compositions that became the material for the definition of "choral polyphony" category. It can be said that *choral polyphony* is a systemic and universal phenomenon; its semantic complexity has ontological, semantic, communicative factors that are combined in the multidimensional time-space of the music culture of the 20th century through the subjects of musical communication.

Finally, the definition of "choral polyphony" #4 is proposed – from the point of view of the listener: *choral polyphony is a model of the sonorous Universe, which is perceived as the semantic counterpoint and is the most perfect way of spiritual communication.*

Conclusions. In order to develop the already existing in choral research attempts to define the role of the "choral writing" (by O. Ryzhynsky [4], O. Zaverukha [1], O. Prikhodko [3]), we have proposed a system of definitions of "*choral polyphony*" (in the ontological, textual, performing, and listening dimensions).

The content of the definitions of "choral polyphony" (illustrated on the basis of the compositions by of P. Hindemith, I. Stravinsky, A. Schnittke, in which *choral polyphony* is the embodiment of the ideal sound image of the universe) expresses this phenomenon as a multilevel system in the whole entirety of the artistic modelling of the world, and that is the creativity as it is. A broad understanding of polyphony as the semantic counterpoint (according to T. Frantova) allows one to see its system manifestations in all the spheres of the choral art. The choral writing constitutes the artistic and scientific paradigm in the context of the polyphonic consciousness of the contemporary culture.

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