Gnesin
Russian Academy
of Music

ISSN 3034-3836 (Online)

Russian Musicology

Scholarly Journal

2026/2

Russian Musicology

Scholarly Journal

16+

https://doi.org/10.56620/RM.2026.2

ISSN 3034-3836 (Online)

2026. No. 2

Russian Musicology is a peer-reviewed open-access electronic journal publishing theoretical and empirical research in the fields of music studies and music education. The journal welcomes contributions from scholars and practitioners worldwide in the form of original research and review articles, opinion papers and book reviews covering the topics of Russian and foreign music history, contemporary art and musical theater, as well as those of style and genre, poetics, semantics and interpretation of artistic texts. Among other invited themes are art synthesis, ethnomusicology, musical performance and music education.

Since September 2024, *Russian Musicology*, ISSN 3034-3836 (Online) (Registration Certificate: ЭЛ № ФС 77-78770 from 07.30.2020, https://russianmusicology.com), is the successor to the journal *Problemy muzykal'noi nauki / Music Scholarship*, ISSN 2782-3598 (Online). The journal has been published in English under the title of *Russian Musicology*.

Founder and Publisher: Gnesin Russian Academy of Music, Moscow, Russian Federation

Main subject areas: Art and Humanities, Cultural Studies, Education

Publication Frequency: Quarterly

Language of publication: English

With the view to encouraging international dialogue, *Russian Musicology* will provide English translations and linguistic editing support for submissions that have been approved for publication.

Publication fee: The journal supports Platinum Open Access, i.e., no publication fees are charged.

The authors are not charged for English translation. No royalties are paid.

The Journal is included in the List of Peer Reviewed Scientific Journals published by the Higher Attestation Commission (VAK) in which major research results from the dissertations of Candidate of Art (Cand.Sci.) and Doctor of Art (Dr.Sci.) degrees are to be published, in accordance with Paragraph 5 of the Order of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Russian Federation dated May 31, 2023, No. 534.

The journal is included in the Unified State List of Scholarly Publications (USLSP), level 2.

All submissions are subject to anti-plagiarism check and double-blind peer review by at least two specialists in the field. All published articles are assigned a DOI (Digital Object Identifier) number.

The editorial policy of *Russian Musicology* is based on recommendations of the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE), the European Association of Science Editors (EASE) and the Association of Scientific Editors and Publishers (ASEP-ANRI).

The publications are indexed in the Russian Index of Science Citation (RINTs).

The journal is covered by international scientific information databases: Web of Science Core Collection (ESCI); Scopus; Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ).

Russian Musicology supports the Budapest Open Access Initiative (BOAI) and provides direct open access (platinum model) to its content. The materials are available under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 Licence (CC–BY–NC–ND)

Russian Musicology

Scholarly Journal

EDITORIAL TEAM

Editor-in-Chief

Alexander S. Ryzhinsky, Dr.Sci. (Arts), Professor,
Gnesin Russian Academy of Music, Moscow, Russian Federation

Deputy Editor-in-Chief

Tatiana I. Naumenko, Dr.Sci. (Arts), Professor,
Gnesin Russian Academy of Music, Moscow, Russian Federation

Managing Editor

Artur A. Mingazhev, Musicologist,
Gnesin Russian Academy of Music, Moscow, Russian Federation

Executive Secretary

Daniil V. Charikov
Gnesin Russian Academy of Music, Moscow, Russian Federation

Academic Editor

Ekaterina G. Okuneva, Dr.Sci. (Arts), Professor,
Petrozavodsk State A.K. Glazunov Conservatoire,
Petrozavodsk, Russian Federation

Editors

Galiya R. Bayazitova, Cand.Sci. (Arts),
Gnesin Russian Academy of Music, Moscow, Russian Federation

Elias R. Khananov, Musicologist,
Gnesin Russian Academy of Music, Moscow, Russian Federation

Coding

Yuliya V. Gritsaenko

Editorial Office Address

Bd. 30–36, Povarskaya Str.,
Moscow 121069, Russian Federation
Telephone: +7 (495) 691–54–34,
e-mail: rm@gnesin-academy.ru

Russian Musicology

Scholarly Journal

EDITORIAL BOARD

Alexander S. Ryzhinsky, Editor-in-Chief, Dr.Sci. (Arts),
Professor, Gnesin Russian Academy of Music,
Moscow, Russian Federation

Galina V. Alekseeva, Dr.Sci. (Arts), Professor,
Far Eastern Federal University,
Vladivostok, Russian Federation

Beslan G. Ashkhotov, Dr.Sci. (Arts), Professor,
Northern Caucasus Institute of Arts,
Nalchik, Russian Federation

Farogat A. Azizi, Dr.Sci. (Arts), Professor,
Tajik National T. Sattarov Conservatoire,
Dushanbe, Tajikistan

Catello Gallotti, Ph.D., Professor,
"Giuseppe Martucci" Salerno State Conservatoire,
Salerno, Italy

Irina B. Gorbunova, Dr.Sci. (Pedagogy), Professor,
Herzen State Pedagogical University of Russia,
St. Petersburg, Russian Federation

Edward Green, Ph.D., Professor,
Manhattan School of Music,
New York, United States of America

Ludwig Holtmeier, Ph.D., Professor,
Freiburg University of Music,
Freiburg, Germany

Elena A. Kaminskaya, Dr.Sci. (Cultural Studies),
Professor, Institute of Modern Art,
Moscow, Russian Federation

Liudmila P. Kazantseva, Dr.Sci. (Arts), Professor,
Astrakhan State Conservatoire,
Astrakhan, Russian Federation

Grigory R. Konson, Dr.Sci. (Arts, Cultural Studies),
Professor, Moscow Institute of Physics and Technology,
Moscow, Russian Federation

Victor P. Krutous, Dr.Sci. (Philosophy), Professor,
Lomonosov Moscow State University,
Moscow, Russian Federation

Alexandra V. Krylova, Dr.Sci. (Cultural Studies),
Professor, Rachmaninov Rostov State Conservatoire,
Rostov-on-Don, Russian Federation

Li Jianfu, Cand.Sci. (Arts), Associate Professor,
Liupanshui Normal University,
Liupanshui, China

Augusta V. Malinkovskaya, Dr.Sci. (Education),
Professor, Gnesin Russian Academy of Music,
Moscow, Russian Federation

Nicolas Meeus, Ph.D., Professor,
Sorbonne University,
Paris, France

Vera I. Nilova Dr.Sci. (Arts), Professor,
Petrozavodsk State A.K. Glazunov Conservatoire,
Petrozavodsk, Russian Federation

Peng Cheng, Cand.Sci. (Arts),
Shanghai Conservatory of Music,
Shanghai, China

Anton A. Rovner, Ph.D., Cand.Sci. (Arts),
Moscow State P.I. Tchaikovsky Conservatoire,
Moscow, Russian Federation

Gemma Ruiz Varela, Ph.D., Professor,
Francisco de Vitoria University,
Madrid, Spain

Tatiana B. Sidneva, Dr.Sci. (Cultural Studies),
Professor, Glinka Nizhny Novgorod State Conservatoire,
Nizhny Novgorod, Russian Federation

Kenneth Smith, Ph.D., Professor,
University of Liverpool,
Liverpool, United Kingdom

Nadezhda A. Tsareva, Dr.Sci. (Philosophy), Professor,
Far Eastern State Technical Fisheries University,
Vladivostok, Russian Federation

Dmitry I. Varlamov, Dr.Sci. (Arts, Pedagogy),
Professor, Saratov State L.V. Sobinov Conservatoire,
Saratov, Russian Federation

Polina S. Volkova, Dr.Sci. (Arts, Philosophy), Professor,
Herzen State Pedagogical University of Russia,
St. Petersburg, Russian Federation

Contents

Congratulation

5 A Historic Achievement: *Russian Musicology* Has Ranked No. 1 in the World

Musical Genre and Style

6 ***Irina P. Susidko, Pavel V. Lutsker***
Dmitry Shostakovich's Orchestral Dialogues: The Symphony as an Opera

19 ***Orzubonu N. Nurulloyeva***
Clarinet Concerto by Tolibkhon Shakhidi: Poetics of the Genre

Contemporary Musical Art

33 ***Nadezhda V. Shirieva***
Dialectics of Contrasts in the Oratorio *On Love and Hatred* by Sofia Gubaidulina

51 ***Ekaterina G. Okuneva, Darya S. Semko***
Chamber and Instrumental Music by Alexey Krasheninnikov: Experimental Poetics

Musical Culture of China

74 ***Wang Xuqing***
Musical Rhetoric in China: Knowledge Production and Paradigm Construction

93 ***Shen Wei***
The Dilemma and the Resolution: A Study of the Compatibility between Traditional Chinese Musical Elements and Western Music Systems

Dialogue of Cultures

117 ***Zheng Yue***
Cao Xueqin's Novel *Dream of the Red Chamber* and the Opera of the Same Name by Bright Sheng and David Henry Hwang in the Space of Art Historical Discourse

133 ***Kang Xiao***
The Landscape of Russian Opera Scholarship within China across the Last Ten Years

Musical Education

143 ***Yu Guo***
Educational Models of Woodwind Performance in Russia: Moscow Conservatory vs. Gnesin Russian Academy of Music

159 ***Hao Guanghui***
The Phenomenon of the Piano School in Art History: Specifics of Functioning in a Foreign Environment Based on the Case of China

Theory and History of Culture

167 ***Polina S. Volkova, Natalia G. Solodovnikova***
Emotiology in the Context of Musical Aesthetics: Towards the Problem Statement

183 ***Nadezhda A. Tsareva***
The Issue of Virtual Leisure in the Digital Culture of the 21st Century

ISSN 3034-3836 (Online)

Congratulation

Editorial note

A historic achievement: *Russian Musicology* has ranked No. 1 in the world



Russian Musicology, a scholarly journal indexed in highly authoritative Web of Science Core Collection (ESCI) and Scopus databases, has received international recognition of the highest order. According to the 2025 SCImago Journal & Country Rank (SJR), which is based on Scopus data, *Russian Musicology* has been ranked No. 1 worldwide among 201 journals in the field of musicology and placed in the first quartile (Q1), signifying its position among the world's leading journals in its subject categories.

For the first time in history, Russia has surpassed the United States and the United Kingdom in the global *Music* category, where those countries had long maintained their leadership. In addition, a musicology journal has, for the first time, topped the overall SCImago ranking of Russian scholarly journals, an achievement that had long been regarded as virtually unattainable for the humanities. This remarkable accomplishment provides compelling evidence that Russian scholarship in musicology is fully capable of competing at the highest international academic level and of attaining leading positions in the world's most prestigious research rankings.

I extend my heartfelt congratulations to the members of the Editorial Board and to the Journal's authors on this outstanding achievement. I express my profound gratitude for their invaluable contribution to the advancement of Russian scholarship.

I would like to acknowledge the dedication and professionalism of the Journal's Editorial Office and the staff of the Department of Scientometrics and Ranking Strategies at the Gnesin Russian Academy of Music, including:

- Tatiana I. Naumenko, Deputy Editor-in-Chief and Vice-Rector for Research;
- Artur A. Mingazhev, Managing Editor and Head of the Department;
- Daniil V. Charikov, Executive Secretary and Department Specialist;
- Ekaterina G. Okuneva, Academic Editor;
- Galiya R. Bayazitova and Ilyas R. Khananov, Editors;
- Anastasia A. Mashkovskaya and Marina A. Povalyaeva, Department Specialists.

With profound respect,
Alexander S. Ryzhinsky
ryzhinskii@gnesin-academy.ru
Editor-in-Chief, *Russian Musicology*
Rector, Gnesin Russian Academy of Music

ISSN 3034-3836 (Online)

Musical Genre and Style

Research article
UDC 78.082.1, 785.11
https://doi.org/10.56620/RM.2026.2.006-018
EDN APJYXR

Dmitry Shostakovich's Orchestral Dialogues: The Symphony as an Opera*

Irina P. Susidko[1], Pavel V. Lutsker[2]

[1, 2]Gnesin Russian Academy of Music
[1, 2]State Institute for Art Studies,
Moscow, Russian Federation
[1]i.susidko@gnesin-academy.ru✉, https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2343-7726
[2]p.lucker@gnesin-academy.ru, https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4456-4460

Abstract. The article is devoted to the orchestral technique in Dmitry Shostakovich's symphonies. Of all the important issues connected with the analysis of this most important component of Shostakovich's style, accentuation is made on the functions of orchestration as a dramaturgical and form-generating means, on those opportunities that orchestral writing is provided with in the process of construction of musical composition. At the center of our attention is the second movement of the Fifteenth Symphony (1972), written, similar to many of the slow movements of Shostakovich's symphonies, in a freely and original quasi-rondo form, based on juxtapositions of musical themes and the contrasts resulting thereby. The demonstrated dialogic effect induces us to remember a number of compositions in which the antithesis of musical ideas contrasting in terms of imagery and timbre provide the impulse for their purposeful development and interaction. In the *Andante* movement of Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 4 opus 58 (1806), such an antithesis has for a long time evoked associations with the famous scene of the furies from Christoph Willibald Gluck's *Orfeo ed Euridice* (1762). A special type of interpretation of this narrative without any direct correspondence to the mythopoetic plotline of Gluck's opera, but with a clearly visible antithesis between life and death is suggested by Shostakovich in his Fifteenth Symphony.

---

* The article was published in Chinese in the Journal of the Shanghai Conservatory of Music Musical Art, 2025, vol. 6, pp. 159–167. CN 31-1004/J*1979*b*16*192* zh*P*¥16.00*3000*17*2025-12.
https://doi.org/10.19359/j.cn31-1004/j.2025.06.015

Translated by Dr. Anton Rovner.

© Irina P. Susidko, Pavel V. Lutsker, 2026

Keywords: Dmitry Shostakovich, Fifteenth Symphony, Christoph Willibald Gluck, *Orfeo ed Euridice*, orchestral writing, formative functions of orchestration, musical and thematic dramaturgy

For citation: Susidko I.P., Lutsker P.V. Dmitry Shostakovich's Orchestral Dialogues: The Symphony as an Opera. *Russian Musicology*. 2026, no. 2, pp. 6–18. https://doi.org/10.56620/RM.2026.2.006-018

Оркестровые диалоги Д. Д. Шостаковича: симфония как опера

Ирина Петровна Сусидко[1], Павел Валерьевич Луцкер[2]

[1, 2]Российская академия музыки имени Гнесиных
[1, 2]Государственный институт искусствознания,
г. Москва, Российская Федерация
[1]i.susidko@gnesin-academy.ru✉, https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2343-7726
[2]p.lucker@gnesin-academy.ru, https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4456-4460

Аннотация. Статья посвящена оркестровой технике в симфониях Дмитрия Шостаковича. Из всех возможных проблем, связанных с анализом этого важнейшего компонента стиля Шостаковича, акцент сделан на функции оркестровки как драматургического и формообразующего средства, на тех возможностях, которые даёт оркестровое письмо в построении музыкальной композиции. В центре внимания — вторая часть Пятнадцатой симфонии (1972), написанная, как и многие медленные части симфоний Шостаковича, в свободно и оригинально трактованной рондальной форме, основанной на музыкально-тематических и тембровых контрастах. Возникающий диалогический эффект заставляет вспомнить ряд сочинений, в которых антитеза контрастных в образном и тембровом отношении музыкальных идей становится импульсом к их целенаправленному развитию и взаимодействию. В *Andante* Четвёртого фортепианного концерта Людвига ван Бетховена ор. 58 (1806) такого рода антитеза издавна вызывала у многих учёных ассоциации со знаменитой сценой с фуриями из «Орфея и Эвридики» (1762) Кристофа Виллибальда Глюка. Особая трактовка этого нарратива без прямого соответствия мифопоэтическому сюжету глюковской оперы, но с ясно прочерченной антитезой жизни и смерти, предложена Шостаковичем в Пятнадцатой симфонии.

Ключевые слова: Дмитрий Шостакович, Пятнадцатая симфония, Кристоф Виллибальд Глюк, «Орфей и Эвридика», оркестровое письмо, формообразующие функции оркестровки, музыкально-тематическая драматургия

Introduction

Orchestral writing plays a crucial role in the style and compositional technique of Dmitry Dmitrievich Shostakovich (1906–1975). Edison Vasilyevich Denisov wrote about the composer's attitude towards the characteristic features of the sound of orchestral instruments: "Dmitry Shostakovich thought with orchestral means already at the very first stage of creation of his compositions; all of his musical ideas were generated by him already possessing the appropriate timbres. In many cases, the expressiveness of the timbre carries much greater significance than the other components (intonation, rhythm, dynamics, etc.)." [1, p. 46]

Nonetheless, variants of orchestration did exist in the composer's works, but were stipulated by certain concrete practical goals, such as, for instance, in his early works, when he was mastering the technique of orchestral writing. [2]

The first quality marked out by Denisov, — the generation of musical ideas immediately in certain timbral guises — was not unique for the composer. In compatible ways, the themes of Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky's orchestral compositions appeared. In his answer to a question posed by Nadezhda Filaretovna von Meck, he emphasized this moment precisely: "I never compose abstractedly, which means that a musical theme never appears to me otherwise than in a manner corresponding to its outward form. Therefore, I invent the musical theme itself simultaneously with its orchestration." [3, p. 236][1] Analogous comments can be found from Nikolai Andreyevich Rimsky-Korsakov, albeit, in many ways, the composers were antipodes. In the introduction to his work *The Principles of Orchestration*, Rimsky-Korsakov criticized the comprehension of orchestration as a process exterior from composition, which was false in its assumption: "How wrongly do many people think, when they say: a certain composer orchestrates wonderfully, or a certain (orchestral) composition is orchestrated in an excellent manner. After all, orchestration is one of the sides of the soul of the musical composition itself. The composition itself is conceived with orchestral means, and in its very conception already guarantees certain orchestral colors inherent solely to it and only to its creator." [4, p. 11] These qualities of Tchaikovsky's and Rimsky-Korsakov's musical thinking have been treated with attention by composers and musicologists. [5, pp. 105–106; 6, p. 401; 7]
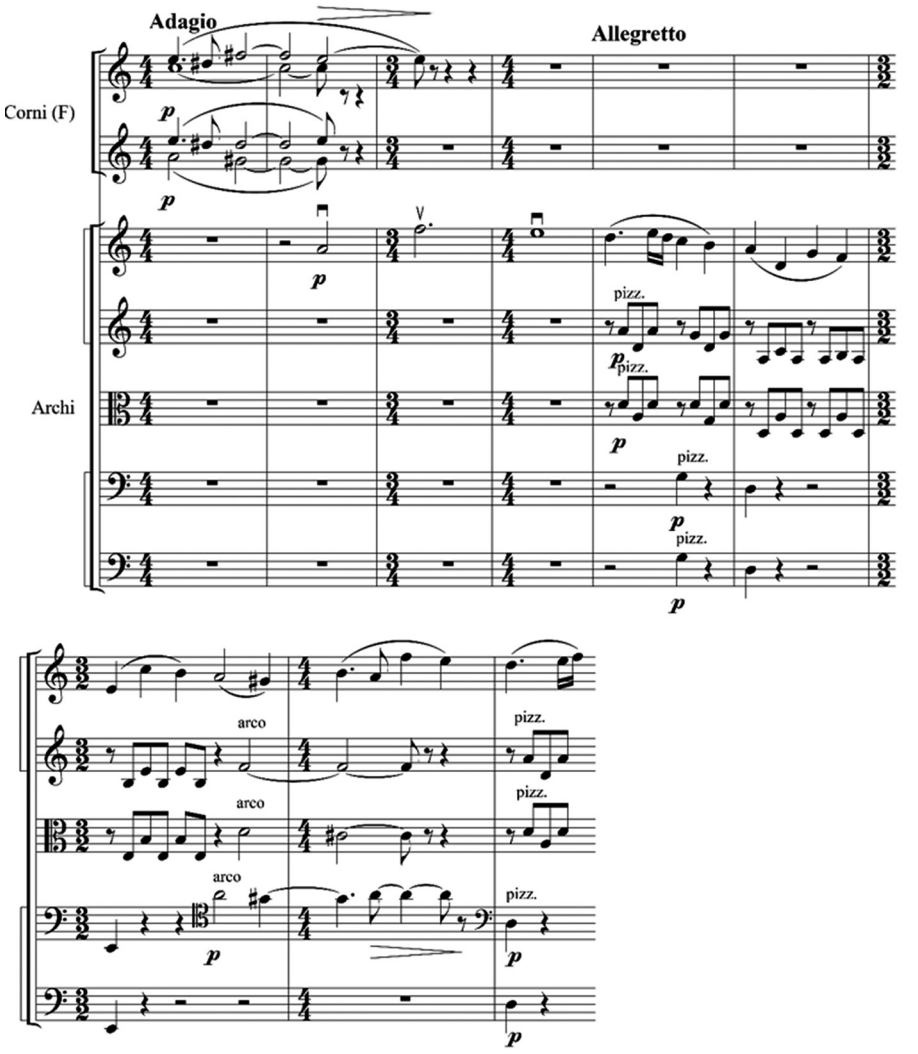
Denisov's second conclusion about Shostakovich's frequent priority of timbre over the other components of musical language establishes a feature that is extremely rare for the classical symphonic tradition. There is a wish to depart from this thesis and pose the question even more sharply: about orchestration as the most crucial means of the musical composition's construction.

The *Adagio* of the Fifteenth Symphony

Let us examine the status of orchestration in Shostakovich's music with the example of the second movement of his final symphony — the Fifteenth (1971). Notwithstanding all of the vividness of its musical themes and its outward compositional clarity, it has remained up to the present one of those compositions that has presented special difficulties for semantic interpretation. Not least of all, the reason lies in the heterogeneous allusions and quotations included in its musical text. In his letter to Krzyszrtof Meyer, Shostakovich directly indicated the presence of precise quotations from Rossini, Wagner and Beethoven. [8, p. 474] The first two of them are easily recognizable: the motive from Rossini's *Guillaume Tell* appears several times in the first movement, while the leitmotif of fate from Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen* can be heard in the finale. The last quotation indicated by Shostakovich (of Beethoven) remained "unidentified" for a long time. Levon Hakobian suggested that the composer may have referred to the coincidence of the beginning of the finale's primary theme with the initial motive of the last movement of Beethoven's Piano Sonata No. 17 and, simultaneously, — with the beginning of Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* (Example No. 1). [9, p. 626]

[1] Pyotr Tchaikovsky's letter to Nadezhda von Meck from March 5/17, 1878.

Example No. 1 Dmitry Shostakovich. Fifteenth Symphony. Finale, mm. 13–21



The enigmatic quality of the symphony can also be seen in the striking simultaneous presence of several contrasting styles in the musical material, which, according to Meyer, even hindered it from joining the world concert repertoire, notwithstanding all of its magnetic power of impact on listeners. [8, pp. 430–431] Hakobian considers this symphony to be one of Shostakovich's auto-epitaphs. [9, p. 615] Having generalized an entire set of its hermeneutic explanations, he provided his own interpretation of its conception as an authorial confession: "…the symphony's dramaturgical linchpin — 'from Rossini to Wagner' — may be interpreted as a metaphor for the composer's path from the scherzo-type youthful works, through all sorts dramatic vicissitudes, stylistic shifts and crises, ascents and falls, towards the complex psychological expressivity of his final years." [Ibid., p. 630]

In all likelihood, the least amount of doubts and controversial estimations is caused by the second, slow movement of the symphony. Its funereal, mournful character carries a reference to the most tragic pages of Shostakovich's music. In this sense, it may be considered to present the conclusion of a whole line of the composer's instrumental utterances about
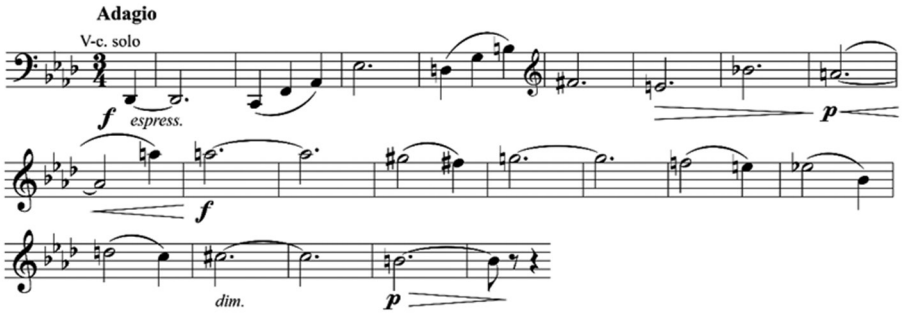
death, his attitude, and his experiencing the very fact of its existence.[2] Although no direct musical quotations have been discovered in this movement, nonetheless, it seems that it contains certain allusions bringing us beyond the limits of Shostakovich's music. They are not as apparent as the theme from Rossini's *Guillaume Tell* or the leitmotif of fate from Wagner's tetralogy, indicating the beginning and the conclusion of life. The *Adagio* movement does not have any quotations recognizable upon first hearing at all. The antithesis of life and death, comprising the basis of its narrative, is realized based on an "inner" authorial material, without any references to any sound symbols familiar to everybody. But associations still arise, nonetheless. They shall be the subject of our discussion, while we focus our attention on orchestral technique as a means of expression that is special for Shostakovich.

Orchestral Writing

The slow movement of the Fifteenth Symphony is written in a quasi-rondo form, interpreted by Shostakovich in an absolutely non-standard way. It is possible to speak of the recapitulative repetition only in the most general terms; it rather comprises a nominal basis of the structure, its outer contour. The composition itself is comprised of several sections, in which the contrasting musical material becomes juxtaposed with each other. It becomes more appropriate to label these sections as comebacks, since in both cases, vocal preimages can be divined in the thematicism — chorales, declamations, and plangent cantilenas. But most important, as it seems to us, is that virtually the entire movement is built on the juxtaposition of the instruments playing the solo passages and the "pure," homogenous full ensemble sound of the orchestral groups — the brass and the strings, which, in principle, demonstrates one of the most recognizable qualities of Shostakovich's orchestration. As a result, three episodes appear, reminding of three opera scenes in which the instrumental timbres play the roles of peculiar protagonists. The movement begins with alternations between a powerful and austere chorale in the brass instruments and the expressive monologue of the solo cello. The monologue presents one of the dodecaphonic themes of Shostakovich, who paid his due to this technique in his late works. The melody spans the range of almost three octaves, albeit during the time frame of 10 measures (Example No. 2). The brass chorus sounds three times, and the cello

Example No. 2

Dmitry Shostakovich. Fifteenth Symphony. Second movement, mm. 17–38



[2] The theme "Shostakovich and death" is examined in detail in an article by Marina Grigoryevna Raku and interpreted as a crucial factor in the composer's creative biography, [10] while its interpretation in connection with the concepts of memory, nostalgia, and melancholy is discussed in Ivana Petković Lozo's article on the vocal cycle *Seven Romances on Verses by Alexander Blok*. [11]

solo answers it, endowing the thematic statement of a semblance of a certain funereal ritual.

The second section is likewise built on an allusion on funereal music, but at this time resembling a solemn funeral setting. Against the background of the pizzicatos in the low strings counting off the steps, there is an alteration of hesitant phrases of the duo of flutes and the elevated "speech" of the trombone, evoking almost visual associations with an orator who pompously pontificates from his tribune, addressing the crowd (Example No. 3).
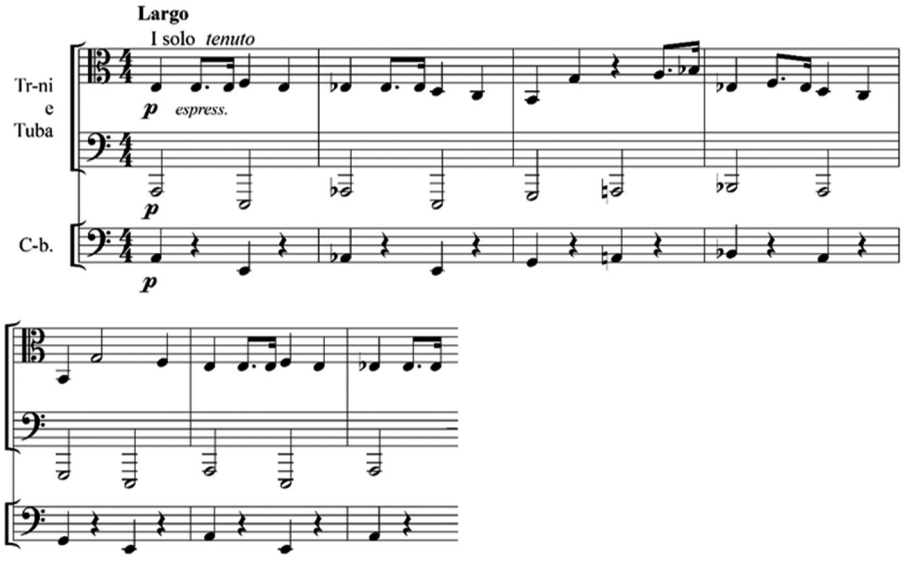
Therefore, in both sections of the form, dialogic qualities are clearly perceived. Being purposefully realized, this technique erodes the boundaries of customary instrumental composition. The associations appearing with dramatic action may be interpreted not only as a certain general analogy, but also as more concrete parallels with opera — the genre in which dialogic qualities have diverse manifestations. In the second movement, such associations appear with opera scenes, in which the images of inner, impersonal power and a personal, individual feeling come into collision. The closest parallel, virtually lying on the surface, is the scene of Orpheus with the furies from Act II of Gluck's *Orfeo ed Euridice* (1762). There can hardly be found a musician who does not know this scene. It is fairly considered to be one of the most effective in the history of opera and, at the same time, one of the most innovative. The radical qualities of the opera experiment carried out by the composer in the genre of *azione teatrale* was in many ways stipulated particularly by it (Example No. 4). [12, p. 61]

Not only in the operatic, but also in musical forms, in general, two contrasting musical-thematic spheres are shown in interaction for the first time: the furies' retorts gradually lose their offensive onset, while Orpheus' utterances, on the contrary, acquire a greater amount of expression. In other words, the development of the musical themes on stage realizes the principles of sonata form logic.

It has been known for a long time that the scene of Orpheus and the furies has served or may have served as an example for a number of instrumental works. The most well-known example of them is the slow movement, *Andante con moto,* of Ludwig van Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 4 (1806). Larisa Valentinovna Kirillina in her monograph devoted to Beethoven's life and music highlighted very
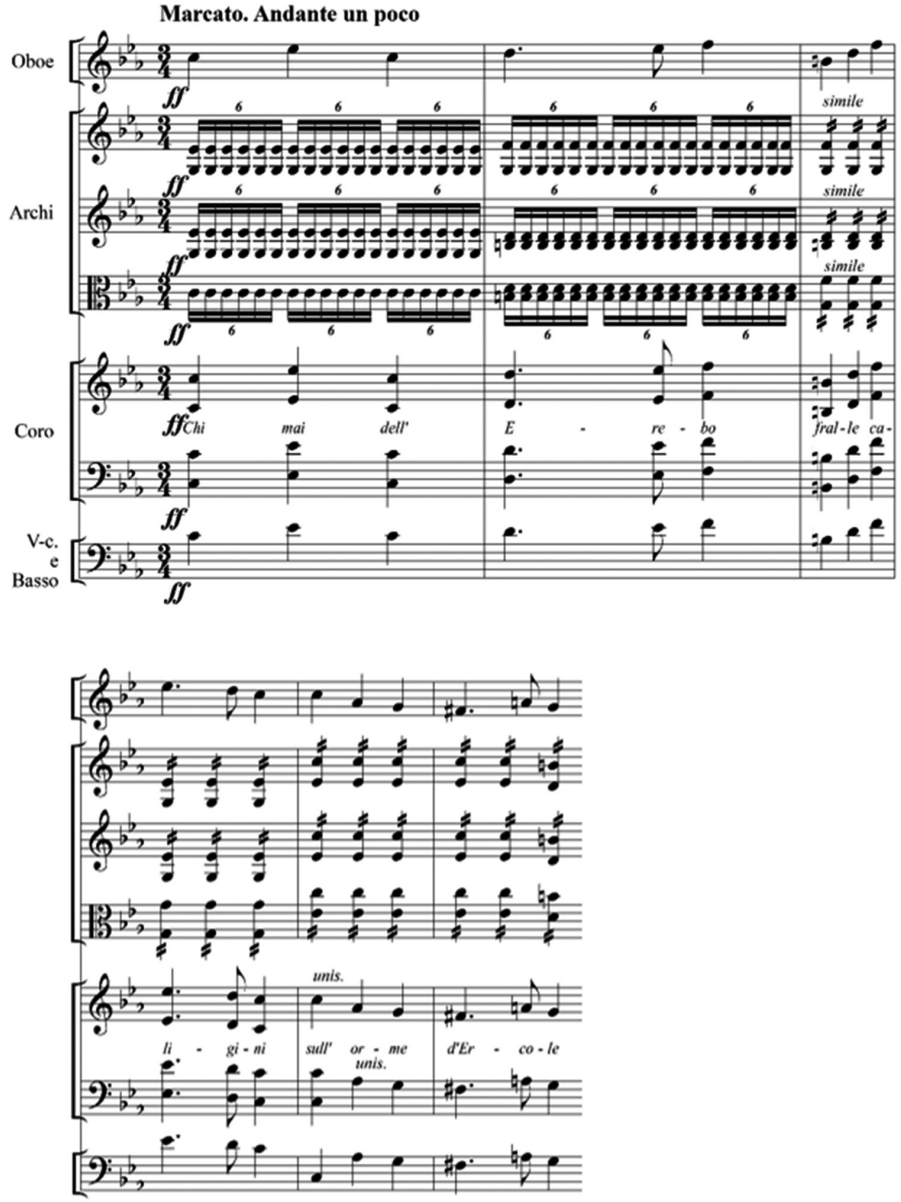
Example No. 3

Dmitry Shostakovich. Fifteenth Symphony. Second movement, mm. 163–169



Example No. 4
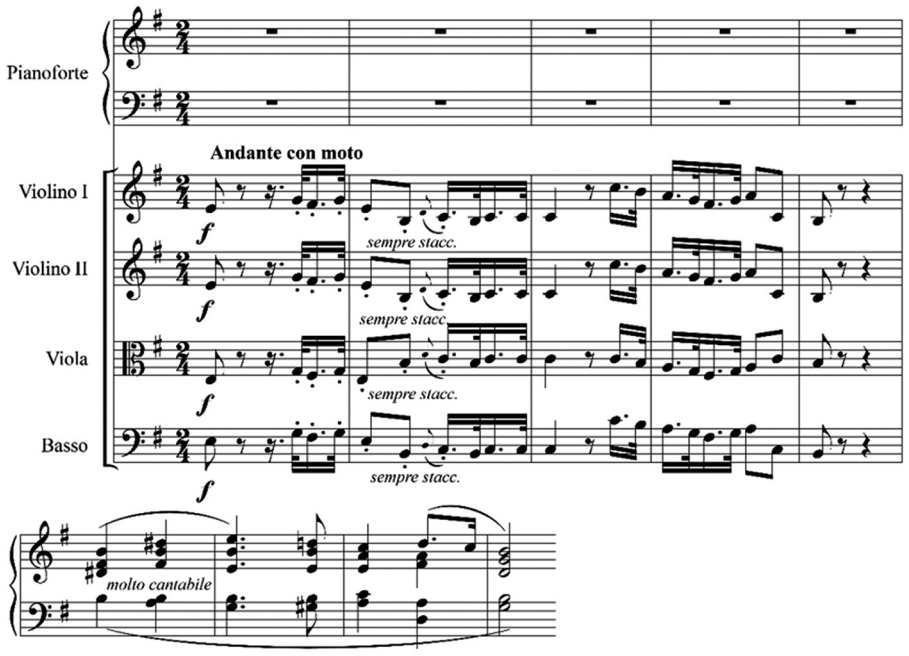
Christoph Willibald Gluck. *Orfeo ed Euridice*.
Act II. Chorus of the Furies, mm. 24–29



precisely the compositional ingenuity of this movement, having observed that its form cannot be defined otherwise than an operatic scene consisting of a set of recitatives and arioso sections. [13, p. 451] The resemblance to *Orfeo ed Euridice* had been noticed back in the 19th century — Kirillina's book provides references to an entire set of sources of such an interpretation.[3] Indeed, in the through compositional structure of the *Andante,* the commanding unisons in the string instruments are juxtaposed to the sensitive arioso answers in the piano reminding of the antecedent by Gluck (Example No. 5).

[3] In particular, the examination of this parallel has been the topic of a special article by Owen Gender, which subsequently became a part of his monograph, wherein the plotline about Orpheus is spread throughout all the three movements of the concerto. [14]
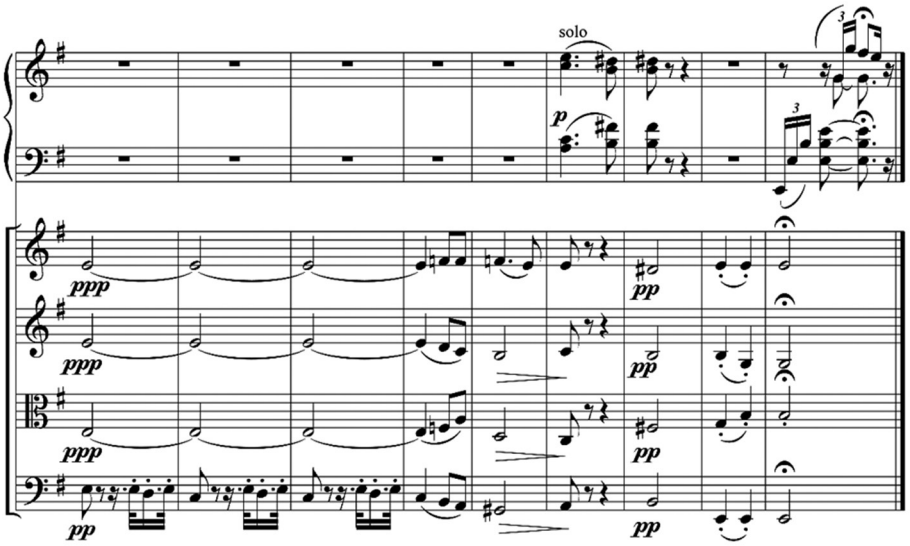
Example No. 5 Ludwig van Beethoven. Piano Concerto No. 4. Second movement, mm. 1–9



The solos in the piano part become more and more elaborated, while the unisons of the string instruments become shorter and quieter, until they are transformed into barely audible reverberations (Example No. 6).

Kirillina also names other possible and even more probable instrumental antecedents of the second movement from Beethoven's concert. They are: Carl Philipp Emmanuel Bach's Concerto in *c minor*, Wq 31 (1753), the slow movement of which also reminds of an alternation of arioso and recitative sections in an opera scene, and Haydn's Cello Concerto in *D major*. [13, p. 452] However, it must be

Example No. 6 Ludwig van Beethoven. Piano Concerto No. 4. Second movement, mm. 64–72



reminded that the fundamental direction of Beethoven's narrative in the *Andante* movement of the Piano Concerto No. 4 is especially close in the logic of its elaboration to what Gluck proposed, although in particular parts of the musical form, there are differences.
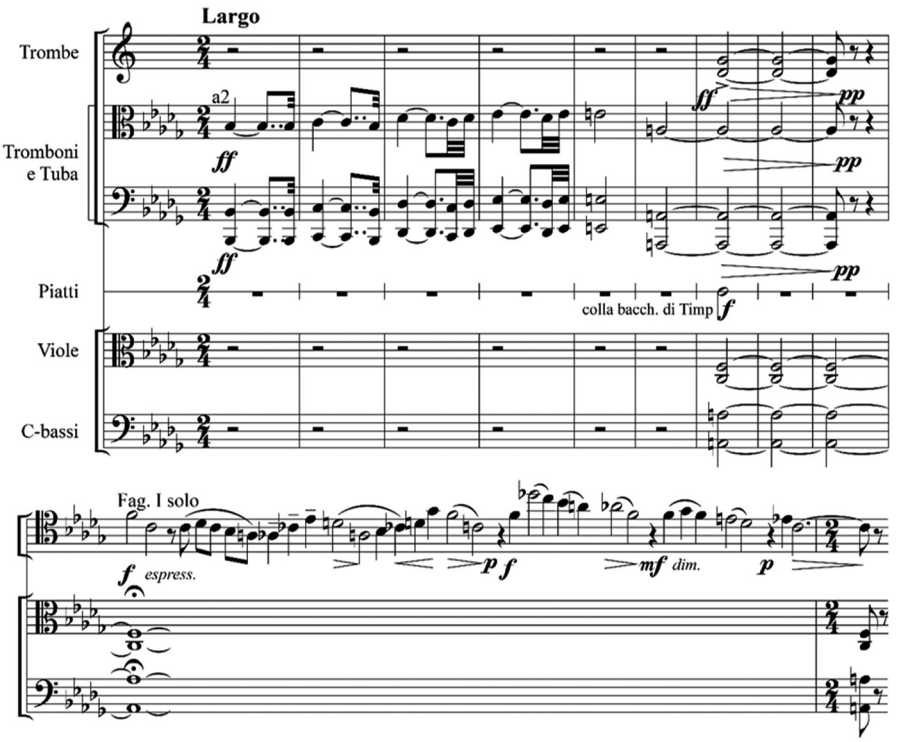
Georgy Petrovich Dmitriev, stemming from his analysis of the slow movement of Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 4, examines in his book an entire set of later works where the principle of such dialogic qualities is realized. The slow fourth movement of Shostakovich's Ninth Symphony, [15, pp. 20–30] brief in its duration, also appeared among their number. In the latter, the influence of the example from Gluck is also perceived: the powerful unisons played by three trombones are contrasted to the heartfelt monologue of a bassoon — a freely elaborated unmetered instrumental declamation (Example No. 7).

It seems that this movement, in which there are only two pages of the score, may be considered to be a sketch of the *Adagio* from the Fifteenth Symphony. Thus, the *Adagio* movement of Shostakovich's final symphony fits quite well into the category of slow movements of orchestral compositions genetically connected with the idea of juxtaposition of the impersonal and the personal, as expressed by Gluck's *Orfeo ed Euridice*. They all possess non-standard forms, and in each case, their forms are crystalized first of all by means of contrast of timbres.

In the *Adagio* movement of his Fifteenth Symphony, Shostakovich not only juxtaposes contrasting spheres, but also, similarly to Gluck, Beethoven, and later Béla Bartók in his Piano Concerto No. 2, shows their interaction and mutual influence. In the unfolding of this plotline, the leading role is played, once again, by the orchestral means. During the first section, the chorale played by the brass instruments gradually loses its energy and softens, almost literally repeating the collision in the scene

Example No. 7
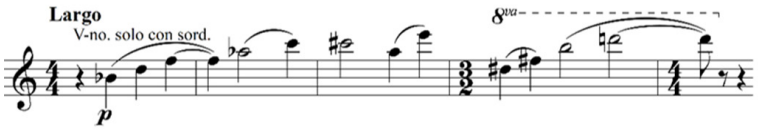
Dmitry Shostakovich. Ninth Symphony. Fourth movement, mm. 1–11
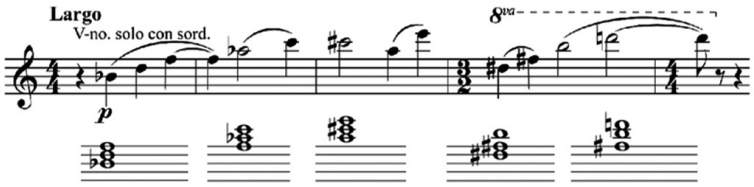


of Orpheus and the furies. The cello solo also undergoes a transformation. In conclusion of the initial section, the cello passes the cantilena melody on to the violin, which soars into the high register up to the *D* of the fourth octave. The twelve-tone theme in the cello part is replaced by yet another twelve-tone phrase. However, unlike the flexuous expressive cello solo, the melody in the violin part is comprised of motives distributed along the pitches of triads: *B-flat – f – A – B – b* (Example No. 8).

Such a consonant "twelve-tone row" induces us to remember another theme, which also sounds in the solo violin part, also in ascending motion, and also in a high register — the theme of Alban Berg's Violin Concerto (1935). The coincidence can hardly be considered accidental. As it is known, Shostakovich was personally acquainted with Berg, whose *Wozzeck* made strong impression on him. It is hardly likely that he would have bypassed the famous Violin Concerto, dedicated to the memory of Manon Gropius, the daughter of Alma Mahler who died young. The concerto bore a dedication "In Memory of an Angel," so the initial phrase soaring upwards may have also had a symbolic meaning. The similarity of Shostakovich's and Berg's melodies, as it seems to us, is quite perceptible, moreover, the violin timbre becomes their common denominator. Of course, this allusion is not in the least as recognizable as the quotations from the music of Rossini and Wagner. But the tragic directedness of Berg's Concerto clearly corresponds with the mood of Shostakovich's *Adagio* (Examples No. 9a, 9b).
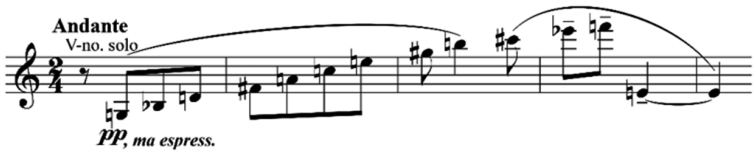
Example No. 8 Dmitry Shostakovich. Fifteenth Symphony. Second movement, mm. 174–178



Example No. 9a Dmitry Shostakovich. Fifteenth Symphony. Second movement. Violin solo



Example No. 9b Alban Berg. Violin Concerto. Solo violin, mm. 15–18

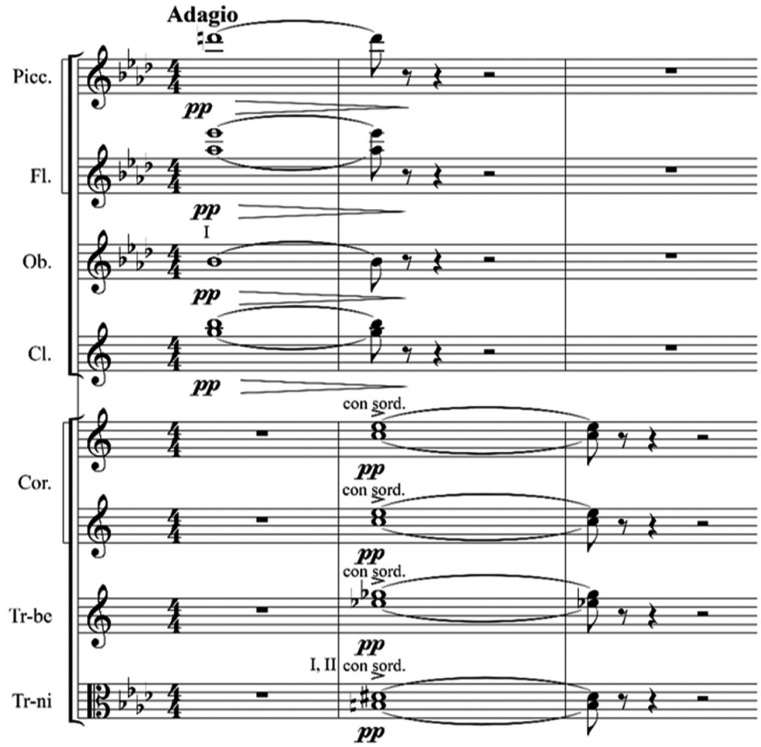


The theme in the violin in the second movement of the symphony is heard twice: in the end of the first section and before the incursion of the destructive, catastrophically sounding *tutti*. Both times, its motion is intersected by two cluster chords. The latter are orchestrated with the entire vertical sonority of the wind instruments — from trombones to a piccolo (Example No. 10). The chords appear four times in the composition, each time exactly on the same pitches and with the same orchestration.

Meyer asked himself the question: "What must be the meaning of the remarkable six-pitch chords, altogether forming a twelve-tone sonority and appearing in the most unexpected places in the score?" [8, p. 431] The fact that the chords are "remarkable" does not evoke any doubt; their phonic qualities sharply contrast with the rest of the thematicism of this movement. But as for them occurring in chance places, we could hardly agree with Meyer here. The chords, labeled by Yuri Semyonovich Korev as "chords of torpor," [16, p. 13] mark all the boundaries of the composition and choreograph the current of the musical events. So it also occurs when they appear in the score for the final, fourth time, opening up the conclusive recapitulative section, which is strikingly different from the exposition.

The chorale opening up the *Adagio* movement sounds this time at a *pp* in the strings *con sordino,* all the parts playing *divisi*, without any blends of timbres of other instruments. It sounds elevated, but at the same time, almost in an incorporeal, otherworldly manner. Instead of an expected responding phrase of the cello, a totally different timbre appears — the cold sound of the celesta. Moreover, the theme provided to the cello in the exposition is stated in inversion, in a downward motion from a high register, opposite to the soaring theme that

Example No. 10 Dmitry Shostakovich. Fifteenth Symphony. Second movement, mm. 116–118



earlier had aroused such poignant associations. The celesta is replaced by an equally intrepid vibraphone timbre. In this outcome, there is no trace of the narrative of Gluck's opera with its victory of light over darkness. In Shostakovich's work, the darkness loses its force, but the light also fades.

Conclusion

In conclusion to our discussion of the *Adagio* movement from Shostakovich's Fifteenth Symphony, it must be emphasized, once again, that the techniques of construction of the musical form here, just as in a number of Shostakovich's other instrumental compositions, remind us of the principles of dramatic development in opera. It is as if, time and again, the composer finishes telling and finishes writing what was interrupted by outward events in 1936, when his opera *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk Dictrict* was attacked in the sadly remembered article published in the newspaper *Pravda*. In the slow movement of Shostakovich's orchestral work, the symphony discloses itself as an opera. It derives from the latter not only the dialogic qualities, but also the freedom of unfolding that modifies the customary contours of instrumental forms. In this process, orchestral writing in Shostakovich's music plays almost the decisive role, which proves its primary significance among the incorporated means of musical composition.

References

1. Denisov E.V. Notes on the orchestration of D. Shostakovich. In: Denisov E.V. *Contemporary music and problems of the evolution of compositional technique*. Moscow: Sovetskii kompozitor Publ., 1986, pp. 46–90. (In Russ.)

2. Lukyanov A.V. Dmitry Shostakovich's early works: An insight into the creative process through the prism of variants of musical works. *Contemporary Musicology*. 2024, vol. 8, no. 2, pp. 86–103. (In Russ.) https://doi.org/10.56620/2587-9731-2024-2-086-103

3. Tchaikovsky P.I. *Correspondence with N.F. von Meck.* Moscow; Leningrad: Academia Publ., 1934. Vol. 1: 1876–1878. 672 p. (In Russ.)

4. Rimsky-Korsakov N.A. *Fundamentals of orchestration. With score samples from his own compositions: A textbook*. 6th ed. St. Petersburg: Lan' Publ.; Planeta muzyki Publ., 2024, vol. 1. 128 p. (In Russ.)

5. Rogal-Levitsky D.R. Tchaikovsky's orchestra. *Sovetskaya Muzyka* (Soviet Music). 1940, no. 5–6, pp. 105–111. (In Russ.)

6. Zuckerman V.A. Timbre and texture in Rimsky-Korsakov's orchestration. In: Zuckerman V.A. *Musical-theoretical essays and studies*. Moscow: Sovetskii kompozitor Publ., 1975, pp. 341–458. (In Russ.)

7. Butsko Yu.M. Tchaikovsky's orchestra. *Journal of Moscow Conservatory.* 2016, vol. 7, issue 3, pp. 32–45. (In Russ.)

8. Meyer K. *Dmitry Shostakovich*: *Life, work, time*. Trans. by U. Gulyaeva. Moscow: Kompozitor Publ., 1998. 559 p. (In Russ.)

9. Hakobian L.O. *The phenomenon of Dmitry Shostakovich*. Moscow: Publishing House of the Russian Christian Academy for Humanities, 2018. 756 p. (In Russ.)

10. Raku M.G. Shostakovich and death: A lifelong musical thanatology. *Contemporary Musicology*. 2025, vol. 9, no. 4, pp. 132–169. https://doi.org/10.56620/2587-9731-2025-4-132-169

11. Petković Lozo I. Resonances of absence: Voice, nostalgia, and memory in Dmitry Shostakovich's *Seven Romances on Verses by Alexander Blok*. *Contemporary Musicology*. 2025, vol. 9, no. 4, pp. 170–225. https://doi.org/10.56620/2587-9731-2025-4-170-225

12. Susidko I.P. Small-scale opera genres in Vienna before and after Christoph Willibald Gluck's *Orfeo ed Euridice*: adaptation and polemics. *Contemporary Musicology*. 2024, vol. 8, no. 1, pp. 50–71. https://doi.org/10.56620/2587-9731-2024-1-050-071

13. Kirillina L.V. *Beethoven. Life and work: in 2 vols*. Moscow: Scholarly Publishing Center "Moscow Conservatory", 2009, vol. 1. 535 p. (In Russ.)

14. Jander O. *Beethoven's Orpheus Concerto: The Fourth Piano Concerto in its Cultural Context*. New York: Pendragon Press, 2009. 215 p.

15. Dmitriev G.P. *On the dramatic expressiveness of orchestral writing*. Moscow: Sovetskii kompozitor Publ., 1981. 175 p. (In Russ.)

16. Korev Yu.S. About the 15th Symphony by D. Shostakovich. *Sovetskaya Muzyka* (Soviet Music). 1972, no. 9, pp. 8–22. (In Russ.)

Information about the authors:

Irina P. Susidko — Dr.Sci. (Arts), Professor, Head of the Department of Analytical Musicology, Gnesin Russian Academy of Music; Head of the Scientific and Creative Center for the Study of Problems of Musical Theatre, Leading Researcher at the Department of Classical Western Art, State Institute for Art Studies, Moscow, Russian Federation.

Pavel V. Lutsker — Dr.Sci. (Arts), Professor at the Department of Analytical Musicology, Gnesin Russian Academy of Music; Leading Researcher at the Department of Classical Western Art, State Institute for Art Studies, Moscow, Russian Federation.

Информация об авторах:

И.П. Сусидко — доктор искусствоведения, профессор, заведующая кафедрой аналитического музыкознания, Российская академия музыки имени Гнесиных; руководитель Научно-творческого центра по изучению проблем музыкального театра, ведущий научный сотрудник сектора классического искусства Запада, Государственный институт искусствознания, г. Москва, Российская Федерация.

П.В. Луцкер — доктор искусствоведения, профессор кафедры аналитического музыкознания, Российская академия музыки имени Гнесиных; ведущий научный сотрудник сектора классического искусства Запада, Государственный институт искусствознания, г. Москва, Российская Федерация.

Received / Поступила в редакцию: 13.01.2026
Revised / Одобрена после рецензирования: 02.03.2026
Accepted / Принята к публикации: 04.03.2026

ISSN 3034-3836 (Online)

Musical Genre and Style

Original article
UDC 788.6
https://doi.org/10.56620/RM.2026.2.019-032
EDN BBUCHP

Clarinet Concerto by Tolibkhon Shakhidi: Poetics of the Genre

Orzubonu N. Nurulloyeva

Gnesin Russian Academy of Music,
Moscow, Russian Federation,
orzumid1199@gnesin-academy.ru✉, *https://orcid.org/0009-0005-0174-5092*

Abstract. The article presents an analysis of the Clarinet Concerto by Tolibkhon Shakhidi, created in 2009–2010. The work's dramaturgic, orchestration and composition features are considered in the context of contemporary trends in the development of the clarinet concerto genre. The interpretation of the solo clarinet as a multifaceted "chameleon" instrument, capable of organically synthesising academic, jazz and national performance traditions, is examined. The principles of interaction between the soloist and the orchestra, the specifics of the sonorous organisation of sound, as well as the role of the extended cadence as the semantic and dramatic centre of the composition are analysed. A conclusion is made about the synthetic nature of the musical language, which combines elements of dodecaphony, modality and ethnically coloured thematism in the work. Shakhidi's concerto is interpreted as an example of a contemporary rethinking of the genre canon combining the classical logic of a form with poetry and the principle of continuous development.

Keywords: Tolibkhon Shakhidi, clarinet concerto, genre poetics, 21st-century instrumental concerto, contemporary academic music

For citation: Nurulloyeva O.N. Clarinet Concerto by Tolibkhon Shakhidi: Poetics of the Genre. *Russian Musicology*. 2026, no. 2, pp. 19–32. https://doi.org/10.56620/RM.2026.2.019-032

Translated by Thomas Alexander Beavitt, Laboratory for Scientific Translation (https://nauka-perevod.ru/eng).

© Orzubonu N. Nurulloyeva, 2026

Концерт для кларнета с оркестром Толибхона Шахиди: поэтика жанра

Орзубону Нуруллоевна Нуруллоева

Российская академия музыки имени Гнесиных,
г. Москва, Российская Федерация,
orzumid1199@gnesin-academy.ru✉, *https://orcid.org/0009-0005-0174-5092*

Аннотация. В статье представлен анализ Концерта для кларнета с оркестром Толибхона Шахиди, созданного в 2009–2010 годах. Рассматриваются особенности драматургии, оркестровки и формообразования сочинения в контексте современных тенденций развития жанра кларнетового концерта. Исследуется трактовка солирующего кларнета как многоликого «инструмента-хамелеона», способного к органичному синтезу академической, джазовой и национальной исполнительских традиций. Анализируются принципы взаимодействия солиста и оркестра, специфика сонорной организации звучания, а также роль развёрнутой каденции как смыслового и драматургического центра композиции. Делается вывод о синтетической природе музыкального языка произведения, объединяющего элементы додекафонии, модальности и этнически окрашенного тематизма. Концерт Шахиди интерпретируется как пример современного переосмысления жанрового канона, в котором классическая логика формы сочетается с поэмностью и принципом сквозного развития.

Ключевые слова: Толибхон Шахиди, концерт для кларнета с оркестром, жанровая поэтика, инструментальный концерт XXI века, современная академическая музыка

Introduction

> *The music of Tolibkhon Shakhidi is always beautiful and bright; the heart of the East and ancient Tajik nation beats in it. At the same time, this music has the features of all people on earth. It seems to me this is what makes it understandable and dear to every person.*
>
> Roman Ledenyov [1, p. 16]

Tolibkhon Shakhidi is a Tajik and Soviet composer, recognised as People's Artist of Tajikistan. On March 13, 2026, the maestro celebrated his 80th birthday. In honour of the anniversary, a concert was held in the Great Hall of the Moscow Tchaikovsky Conservatory with Valery Gergiev conducting the combined orchestra of the Bolshoi and Mariinsky Theatres.

The instrumental concerto occupies a significant place in Shakhidi's creative legacy. The composer has written more than twenty works in this genre, some of which go beyond typical notions of "oriental beauty." One of them is the Clarinet Concerto.

"Harsh age — harsh sounds" — this is how musicologist Olga Malevich described Tolibkhon Shakhidi's Concerto. [2, p. 76] This assessment acquires special meaning in the context of the history of the work's creation. Work on the concerto took place in 2009–2010, which was a difficult period in the composer's life, marred as it was by health problems. At one point during the process, Shakhidi felt so bad that he destroyed all the written material out of despair. However, a sense of responsibility and his promise made to the soloist Igor Fedorov,

at whose request the concerto was being created, prompted the master to overcome himself and recreate the score.[1] As Igor Fedorov told the author of this article in a personal conversation, the musical material of the "second" version of the score differed significantly from the original, which he and the composer had managed to review and discuss together.

Shakhidi dedicated his opus to the clarinettist, whom he considers one of the outstanding musicians of our time: "Meeting him was a real discovery! He is a brilliant professional and a deep-thinking person, whose worldview is very clear and close to me." [1, p. 78]

The premiere of the concerto performed by Igor Fedorov and the Omsk Academic Symphony Orchestra under the direction of conductor Dmitry Vasiliev took place on April 4, 2010 in Omsk. A few days later, the work was successfully presented at the prestigious Russian Symphony Forum in Yekaterinburg. The conductor himself mentioned that both premieres were warmly received by the public and highly appreciated by professionals. [2, p. 81]

The present work sets out to analyse Shakhidi's Clarinet Concerto and identify the specifics of dramaturgy, the role of rhythm as a formative factor and the interpretation of the solo instrument in the context of the contemporary development of the genre.

Clarinet Concerto by Tolibkhon Shakhidi in the Context of Genre and Performance Practice

By the beginning of the 21st century, the clarinet had established itself in performance practice and academic musicology not only as an orchestral, but also as a self-sufficient virtuoso instrument with significant acoustic potential. The evolution of its expressive means, which began in the era of classicism with the works of Johann Molter, Johann Stamitz and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, is determined by the expansion of the timbre palette and dynamic range, which cemented the instrument's place in various genres, including the large-scale concerto form. [3, p. 2]

A significant factor in the enrichment of the technical arsenal of the present-day clarinet is the interpenetration of academic and jazz traditions. A prime example of this synthesis is the creative tandem of Aaron Copland and Benny Goodman. While the Clarinet Concerto (1948) created by the outstanding jazz clarinettist retains the foundations of academic form and orchestral writing, jazz features can be traced in the intonational structure, rhythmic organisation and improvisational nature of the solo part. In this context, the turn to the genre of the clarinet concerto made by Tolibkhon Shakhidi represents a logical stage in the synthesis of academic heritage with contemporary and national performance trends.

Dramaturgy and Musical Language of the Clarinet Concerto

Like all of Shakhidi's other works in this genre, the Clarinet Concerto is written in a single-movement form with through-composed development. This model, which goes back to the tradition established by Franz Liszt, is used by the composer to abandon traditional cyclicality and focus on the continuous development of musical thought. According to Olga Genebert, "compositional combinations arose due to the intersection of two interdependent stylistic tendencies in 19th-century music: on the one hand, the tendency toward greater relief, sometimes polarisation

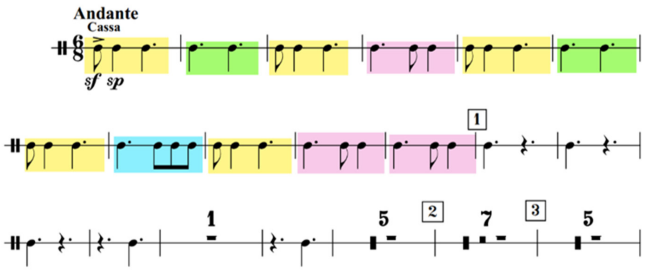
[1] Tolibkhon Shakhidi. "Symphony of Time". TV movie. YouTube. URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D1LX98O_GiE (accessed: 16.04.2026).

of contrasts, completeness and expanded presentation in the sonata form of the first part of the cycle; on the other hand, the desire for conceptual unity achieved by various means, such as veiling the boundaries between parts, thematic unity reaching its limit in the conditions of monothematicism or the previously practiced principle of clinging, the derivative formation of thematically independent sections." [4, p. 250]

The orchestra in Shakhidi's concerto can be defined as intermediate between a double and triple varieties. On the one hand, the woodwinds are represented by two main performers; on the other hand, the expansion of the group by the piccolo flute (which has three flutes) and a separate English horn (with two oboes) creates a number characteristic of the triple composition. The orchestra also includes brass (the score lists four trumpets; however, this is a typo — only three are used in total), a large percussion section (timpani, triangle, tambourine, snare drum, castanets, bongos, tom-toms, cymbals, bass drum, tam-tam, bells, xylophone, vibraphone), harpsichord/piano and strings.

Let us turn to a sequential analysis of the concerto event line. The 11-bar bass drum solo (Example No. 1) serves as the impetus for the opening section. In the absence of a strict ostinato formula, the rhythmic fabric involves a combinatorics of short microformulas consisting of three basic durations: an eighth, a quarter and a quarter with a dot. This sequence can be interpreted as a *rhythmic progression*, which is a kind of a gradual expansion of duration that creates a "swinging" effect. In this sense, a special sound space is formed with elements related both in time and in terms of tension and duration. As Catherine Nolan notes, "space may be broadly defined as an extent in which objects or phenomena exist in relative positions, relations, or distances from one another." [5, p. 201]

Example No. 1 Tolibkhon Shakhidi. Clarinet Concerto, mm. 1–34



The dominant syncopated rhythm sounds in odd measures (1, 3, 5, 7, 9[2]) to form a repeating structure that gives the pattern integrity. This alternation suggests an analogy with a poetic stanza or couplet form. This repetition can be graphically represented as a sequence of rhythmic "stanzas": AB – AC – AB – AD – AC – C, where "A" performs the function of an unchanging "chorus" (ostinato "swinging" element), while "B", "C", "D"[3] have the function of updated "verses" (corresponding to measures 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 11) with variability preventing the rhythm to become mechanical.
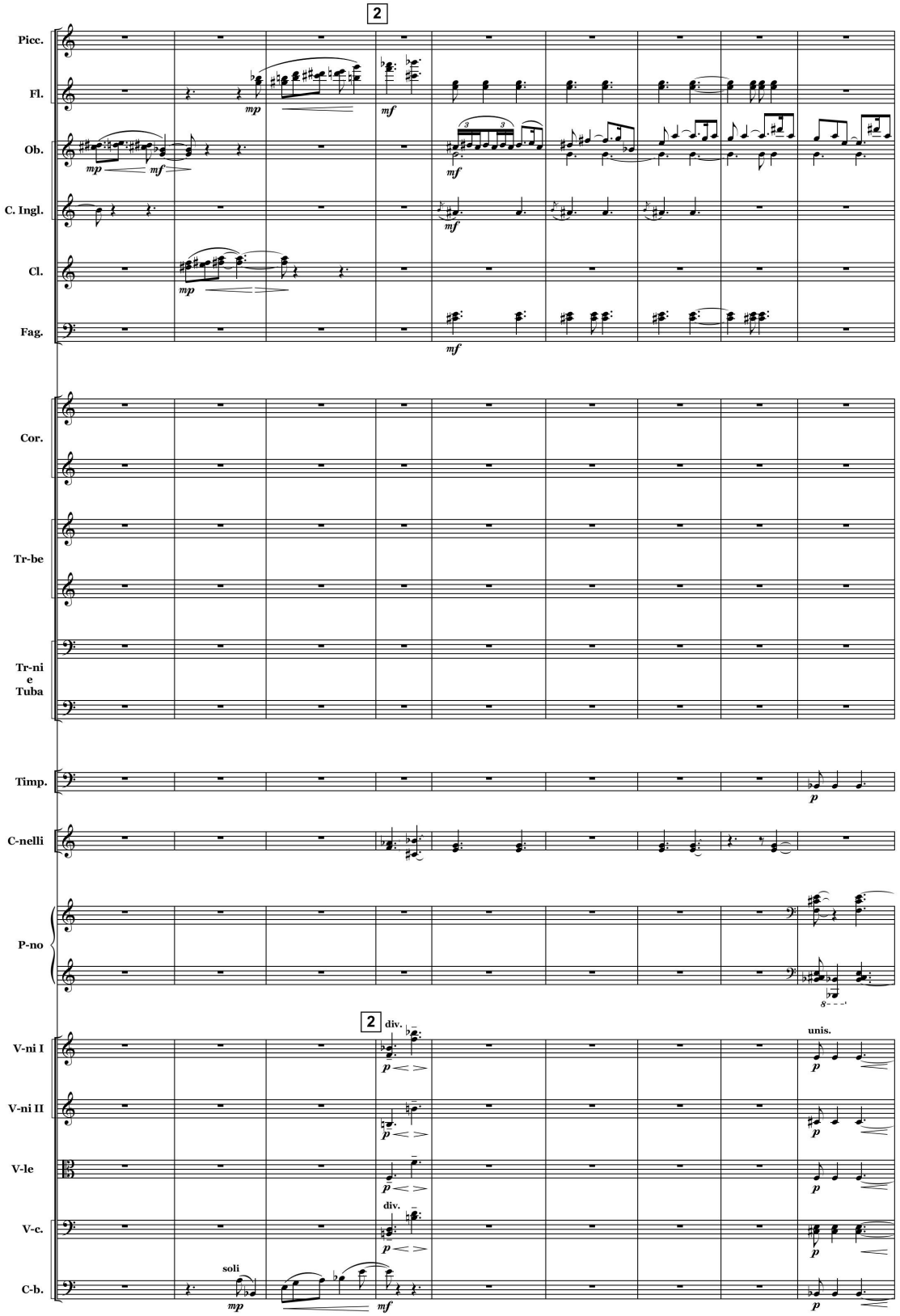
The next event in the introductory section is the appearance of a pitch. Against the ornamental presentation of the rhythmic sequence from the bass drum solo, the strings produce a four-note chord (*B♭ – C♯ – E – F*), which can be interpreted as a minor triad (*C♯* is enharmonically equal to *D♭*) with a split fifth tone.

By the end of the first number, four ascending interrogative intonations smoothly passing from one timbre to another (oboe, clarinet, double bass, flute; Example No. 2) in their totality cover almost the full twelve-tone scale omitting only the sounds *C* and *F♯*.

[2] In Example No. 1, they are highlighted in yellow.

[3] In Example No. 1, they are highlighted in green, blue and pink, respectively.

Example No. 2 Tolibkhon Shakhidi. Clarinet Concerto, rehs. 1–2, mm. 20–28



Let us consider the composer's timbre solution of this fragment. A double bass has been added to three woodwind instruments (flute, oboe, clarinet) as if replacing the bassoon. At first glance, the choice of this instrument seems paradoxical: traditionally, the double bass plays the bass line, often doubling the cello at an octave, whereas in this case, along with the woodwinds, it acts as the bearer of the melodic figure. However, the timbre contrast is free of conflict with the overall colour of the sound. This technique reveals parallels with jazz practice, where the double bass often goes beyond the bass voice, acting as a carrier of the melodic line both in *solo* and in ensemble *tutti*.

The interpretation of the string group is of particular interest. The composer deliberately rejects the basic cantilena, "bowed" nature of the instruments, instead giving preference to percussion-plucking methods of sound production: *pizzicato* (rehs. 5–7, 12–14, 22, 45, 57, 59), *col legno* (rehs. 14, 22), *tremolo* (rehs. 11, 55, 58, 61). Taken together, these techniques evoke direct associations with the folk instruments of the Central Asian countries — rubab (similar to the domra in terms of sound production) and chang (a type of cymbals) — and generally reflect the influence of the national musical tradition on composers' thinking. [6, p. 8]
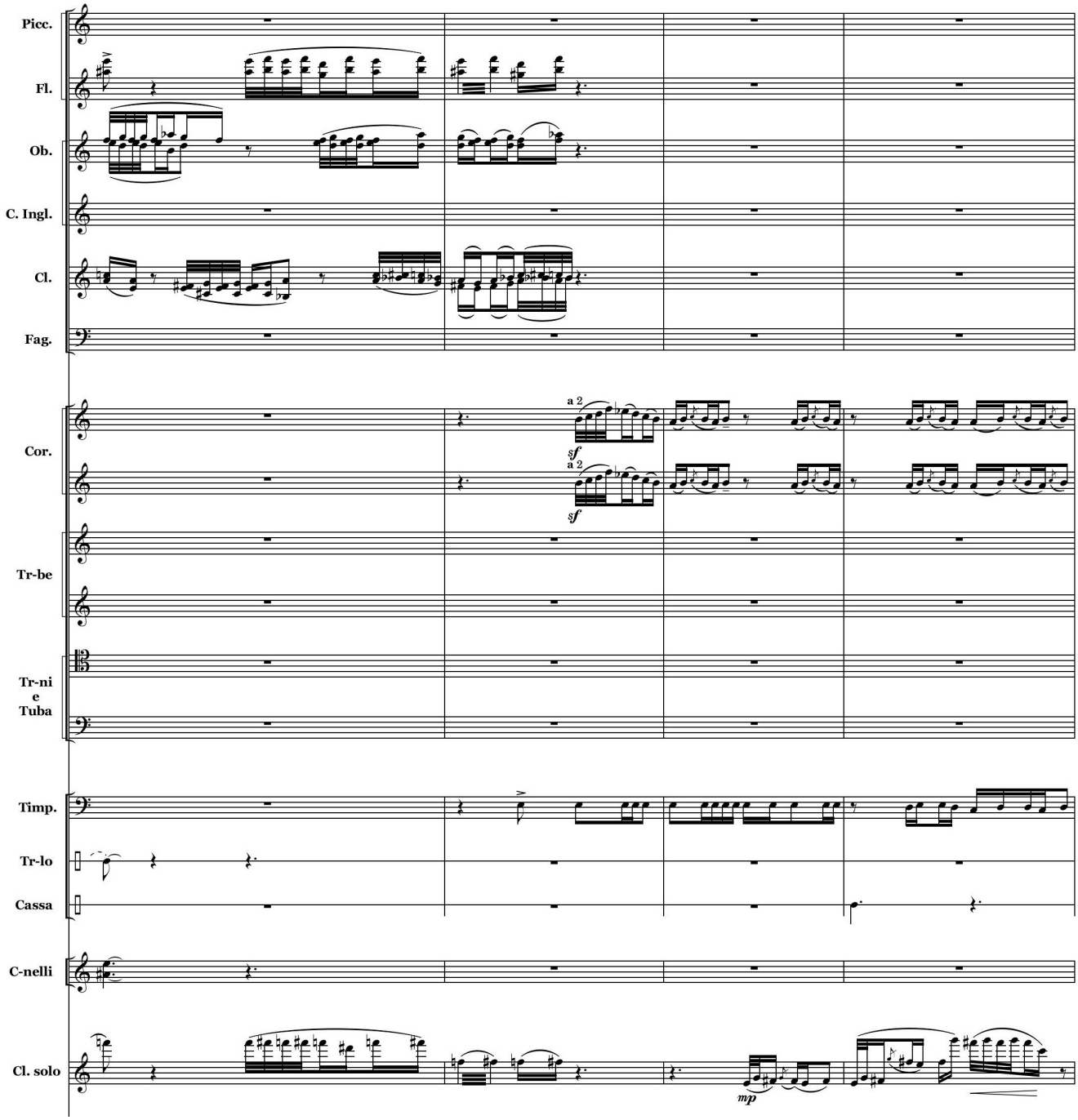
Strings in this interpretation most often perform the function of a sonorous (timbre-harmonic) background emphasising the ethnic colouration. Conductor Dmitry Vasiliev notes that this approach to the embodiment of Eastern style represents a deliberate move away from direct quotations in favour of the "inner feeling of the East," where "often veiled characteristic Eastern intonations give birth to unique, original sounds." [2, p. 81]

The clarinet part announces itself from the very first measures with extreme expression. Its thematic kernel emerges from a single sound point. The motivic fragmentation of the phrases adds tension to the entire development. The conventional melodic line with its rough dynamic bursts, virtuoso passages and sharp accents evokes some associations with the first movement of Edison Denisov's Clarinet Concerto (1989), which literally begins with the soloist's cadence. The similarity is manifested not in the thematism, but in the very set of means of musical expression: just like Denisov, the soloist's part includes trills, figurations, passages and wide leaps, which are rhythmically quite complexly organised and presented at a fast tempo. However, in Shakhidi, the clarinet part is associated with the "voice" of a person and its inherent excited intonation. The illusion of "humanised" musical speech is broken only by the disproportionately wide range and abrupt leaps between registers, which give the utterance a bizarre character. The hero seems to be "listening" to his own memory, "remembering" and conducting a conversation not so much with the orchestra as with himself, unfolding this internal dialogue in time and space. Altogether, it creates a feeling of spontaneity and primordiality, similar to a chaotic flow of thoughts in the process of intense reflection; at the same time, the action can be interpreted as a process of internal comprehension, correlated with the Sufi principle of "zohir–botin" ("explicit –hidden," "external–internal") [7, p. 46–51].

At this time, the orchestra does not oppose the soloist, but forms a single sound space with him: the composer uses a sonorous writing technique, in which the voice of the clarinet sometimes moves along the very surface of the sound mass and sometimes appears as if from the depths. Olga Malevich also emphasises this duality in her note: "...he soars in the sky like a free bird, and then, like a wounded animal, he cries, screams and rages." [2, p. 77] Individual expressive accents of the orchestral groups, for example the fanfare unison of four French horns in reh. 9 (Example No. 3) picks up and develops the intonations of the clarinet, keeping the general atmosphere of the sound.

Example No. 3
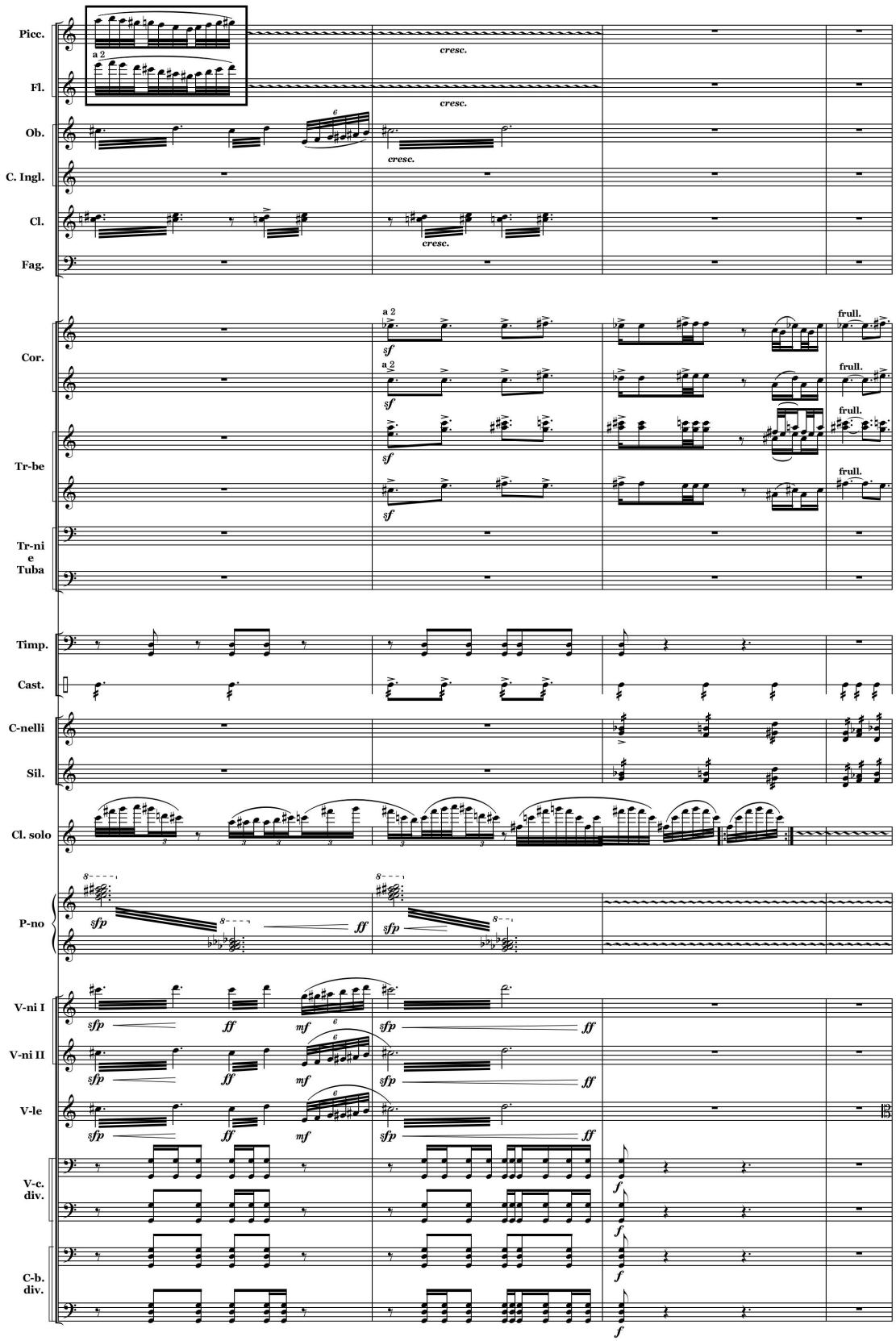
Tolibkhon Shakhidi. Clarinet Concerto,
reh. 9, mm. 73–76 (score fragment)
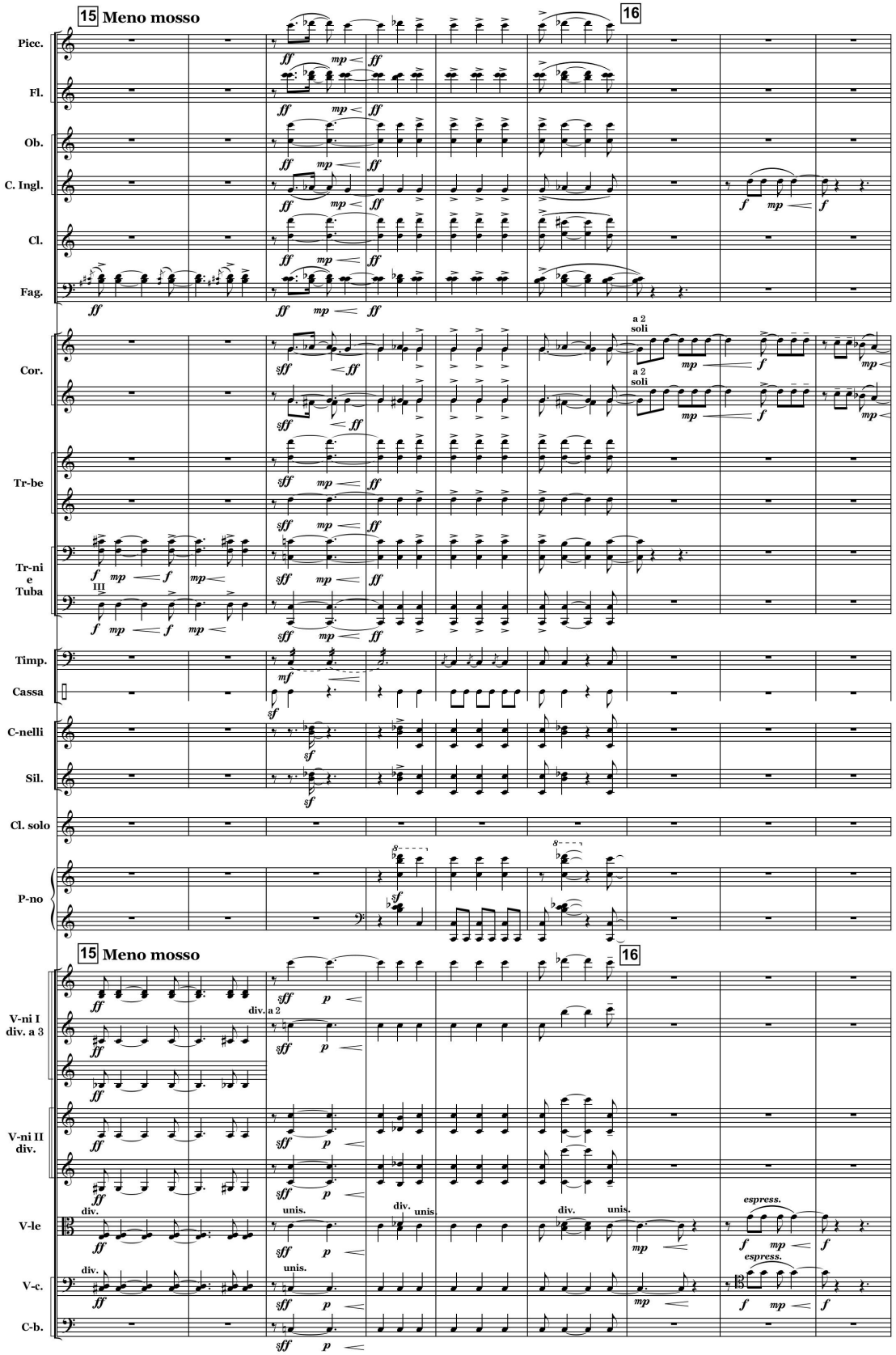


Rehs. 11–14 have a local culmination with a dense *tutti* sound. The composer uses several different writing techniques at once — polymetry, polyrhythm, aleatoricism and clusters — to create a chaotic effect (Example No. 4).

A sharp dramatic turning point occurs in reh. 15. The ostinato unison of the entire orchestra, based on the sound of *C*, interrupts this rich flow as if "clearing" the acoustic space for a new section (Example No. 5).

Example No. 4 Tolibkhon Shakhidi. Clarinet Concerto, reh. 14, mm. 98–101



Example No. 5 Tolibkhon Shakhidi. Clarinet Concerto, rehs. 15–16, mm. 102–110



Reh. 16 contains a full-fledged lyrical theme presented by the unison of four French horns. A more restrained tempo and rhythmic unison restore the triple meter, which forms a structural arch with the introduction. Without waiting for the theme to end, the soloist enters with an expressive melody recitation that complements and develops the main idea sounding in the French horns. The sound palette is refreshed: the inclusion of vibraphone, triangle and harpsichord in the background of the group gives the sound the effect of a reminiscence. Its fragile, almost immaterial nature is emphasised by its variable meters giving the texture lightness and instability.

Cadence as the Dramatic Centre of the Work

The very presence of a *cadence*, which forms the central event of the concerto, indicates that the composer adheres to the classical-romantic model of form creation. However, while in the classical-romantic tradition, the cadence was intended to demonstrate the soloist's technical mastery, in Shakhidi, its function is diametrically opposed. Despite its external virtuosity, it plays the role of the semantic and dramatic centre of the entire composition. This is an arena where external action stops and the protagonist is left alone with himself, giving way to internal reflection. It is here where two contrasting images of the exposition — expressive-dramatic and lyrical-contemplative — are revealed to be a dual manifestation of a single whole. First comes the expressive-dramatic one with its sharp trills, tremolos, dynamic bursts, intermittent rhythms, chromatic tension and wide leaps (Example No. 6, sign 1). Then the lyrical-contemplative one based on diatonicism, fifth leaps with filling goes (Example No. 6, sign 2). The tragic *B-flat minor* with its archaic natural seventh degree emphasises the sublimity and serenity of the image. However, a third, meditative element emerges in this struggle — a restrained "authorial commentary" (Example No. 6, sign 3), a neutrally-philosophical voice embodied in a calm recitative and a repeated structure (Example No. 6). It acts as an internal regulator stopping the emotional outbursts of one and transferring the thoughts into a lyrical channel of the other.
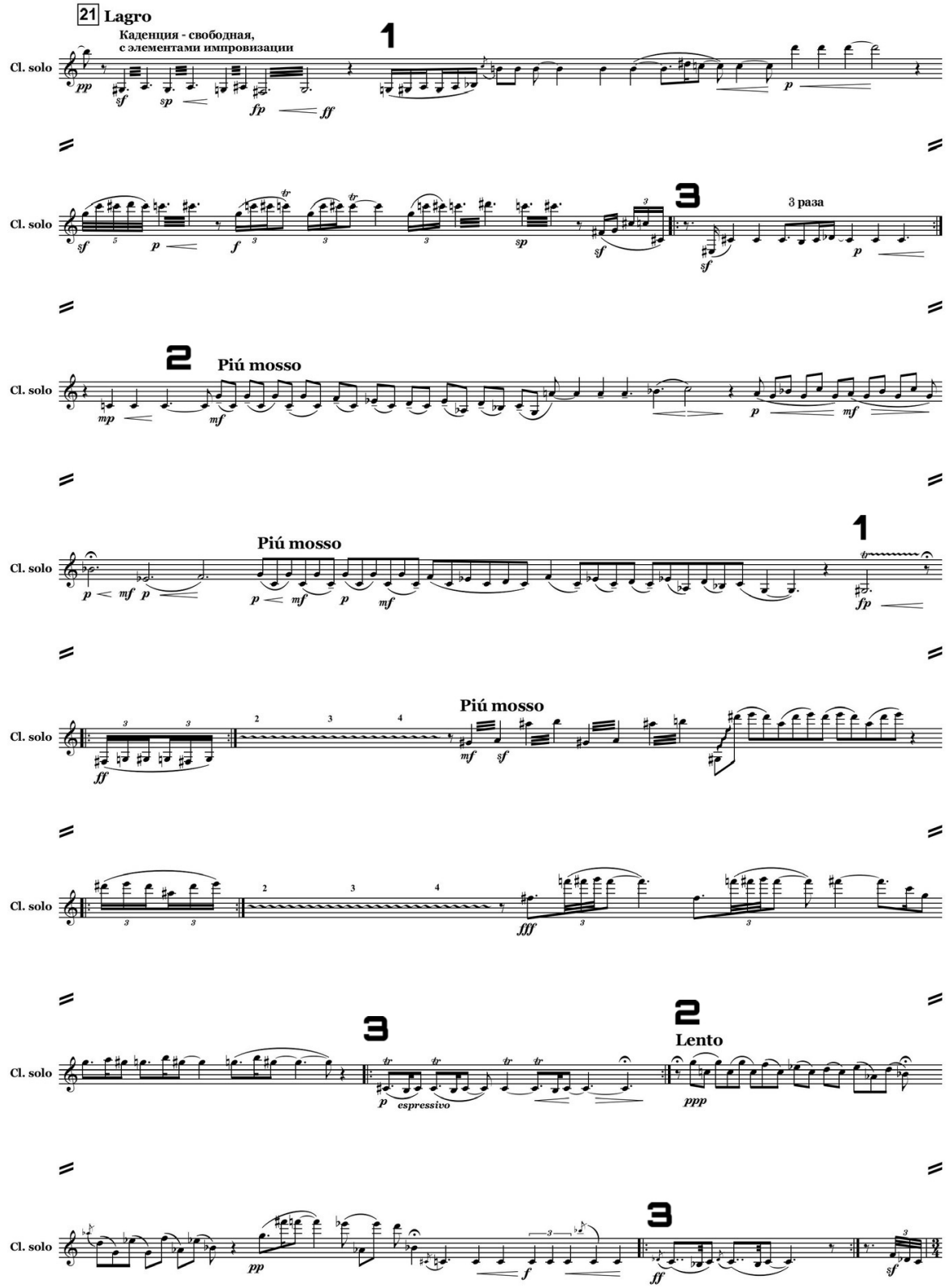
According to clarinettist Igor Fedorov, "the result is an incredible oriental saga taking emotions to the extreme: the highest tenderness and trepidation contrast with unbridled passion and strength." [2, p. 79]

It is noteworthy that the cadence designated as a free kind is presented in an untimed notation containing elements of improvisation. This gives the performer the right to become a co-author of this intense reflection and influence the development of the internal conflict according to his own artistic vision. This approach refers to the traditions of folk music or jazz, where improvisation is one of the main principles of development.

The unfolding performance resembles a one-man show. A rich palette of technical means (strokes, dynamics, agogics) serves as a tool for both demonstrating the technical capabilities of the soloist and switching between these stage roles. This interpretation is particularly relevant in light of the composer's own statement about dedicating the concerto to Igor Fedorov: "Frankly speaking, if it wasn't for Igor, I would never have written a concerto for clarinet and orchestra. I dedicate this work to him as my heartfelt co-author!" [Ibid., p. 78]

The further development of the musical material in terms of form is perceived ambiguously. It hardly can be called a reprise without theme repetitions; however, the figurative content is subject to repetition. Thus, starting from reh. 22, the expressive figurative sphere dominates, while the lyrical sphere comes to the fore from reh. 45. The performed analysis indicates a hidden three-part structure: the section at the tempo of *Andante*
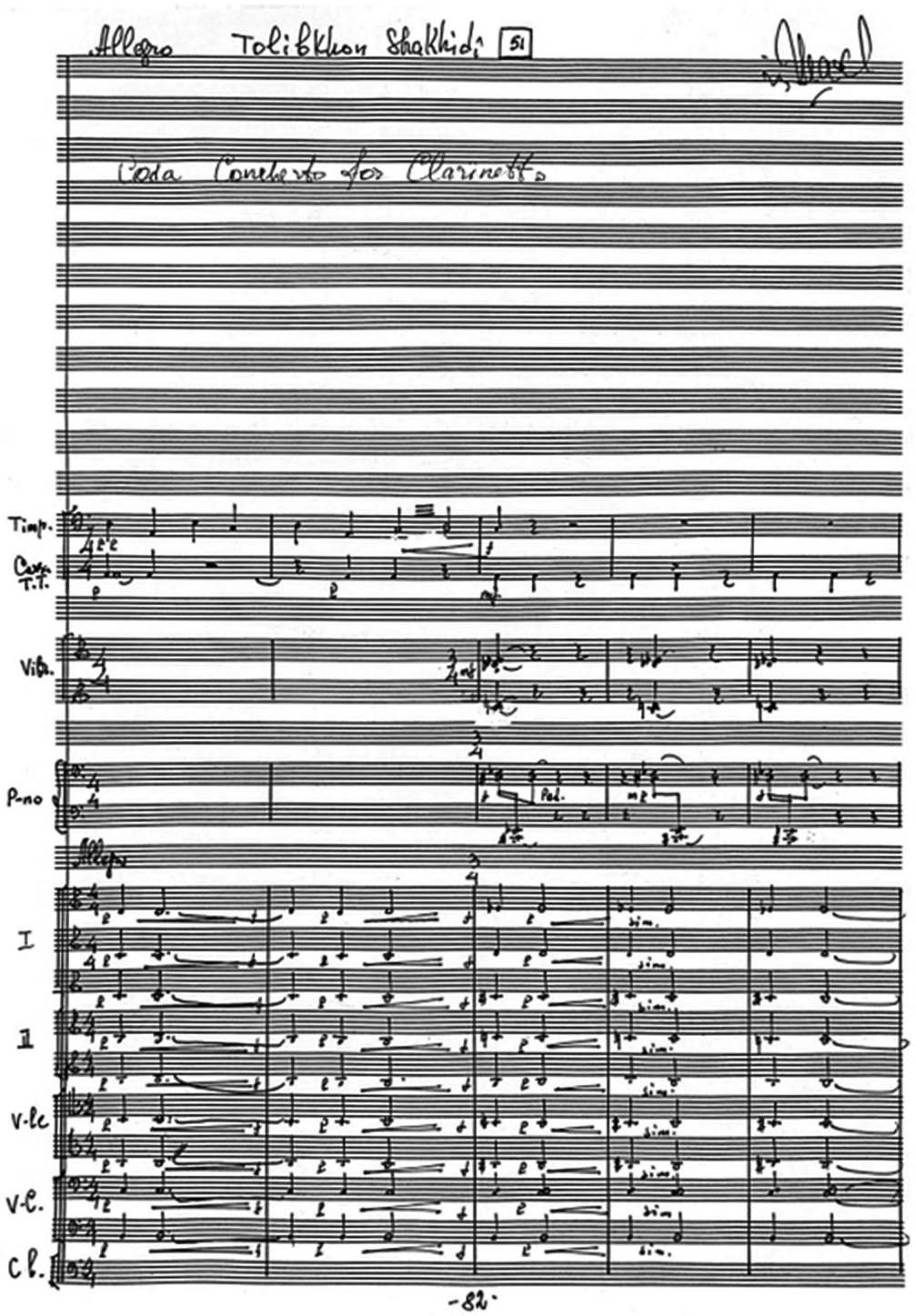
Example No. 6 Tolibkhon Shakhidi. Clarinet Concerto. Cadence



(two measures up to reh. 45) is the lyrical centre of the composition, while the *Allegro* section (from the anacrusis to the second measure of reh. 52 and until the end) sounds like the finale. However, such structuring was not the author's intention. The fact that the composer felt no desire for a three-part logic is evidenced by his notes in the manuscript: the *Allegro* section added at the last moment before the premiere is designated by him as *Coda* (Example No. 7).

Example No. 7

Tolibkhon Shakhidi. Clarinet Concerto. Coda



Thus, it can be argued that the work is dominated by continuous development and a tendency towards poetry as a principle of form creation, while the apparent tripartite nature arises unintentionally.

Conclusion

To summarise the results of the performed analysis, let us note that the identified features of the musical language and dramaturgy of Shakhidi's concerto reflect a broader process of searching for adequate means of artistic expression in contemporary musical art. In this context, Adam Carse's remark that "the impetus for gradually moving forward art has always entailed the discovery of the most valuable means of self-expression" is indicative. [8, p. 17]

The conducted analysis allows a number of conclusions to be drawn regarding the interpretation of the solo instrument and the features of the musical language used in the composition. Firstly, the composer demonstrates a special, creative approach to rhythmic organisation. Rhythm in this composition becomes one of the main formative and unifying principles to permeate the fabric of the work from the first to the last bar. Rhythmic logic is consistently carried through all sections of the form to ensure continuous development. Even string instruments are often treated by the composer more as percussion than as plucked or bowed ones, which emphasises the dominance of the rhythmic principle over the timbre-melodic one.

Secondly, the clarinet appears as a "chameleon" instrument, whose nature can be used to organically transform itself. On the one hand, in the chant-like, lyrical episodes, the imitation of the timbre and melismatics of a folk wind instrument, for example, the naya or surnaya, is clearly evident. On the other hand, the expressive, rhythmically sharp phrases gravitate towards the manner of jazz improvisation, emphasising the dramatic intensity and contemporary sound. Thus, the composer freely uses all the available means of the musical language of his time, not limiting himself to the framework of one direction.

Thirdly, the musical language of the composition demonstrates a synthesis of various compositional techniques. The pitch line combines elements of dodecaphonic writing with thematism of ethnic origin. The modal and harmonic language also has its stylistic versatility and combines features of complex romantic harmony with contemporary sonorous techniques for organising sound space and modal consonances characteristic of the folk music of Central Asian regions.

Fourthly, the improvisational nature of the extended cadence acts not simply as a performance technique, but as the semantic centre of the work, which reveals the protagonist's internal dialogue. At the same time, the integrity of the form and the listener's attention are preserved due to the single-part structure, unified rhythmic logic and contrasting images.

The area of form creation presents a synthesis of classical-romantic external contours with continuous development, which makes the concerto akin to jazz improvisation with variability on a fixed harmonic framework and to the principle of variability characteristic of Central Asian music (in particular, maqoms), where melodic development is based on a gradual, continuous transformation of the original grain. As a result, classical logic is organically combined with the fantasy-narrative development of the material to define the form of the concerto as hybrid, open to multiple interpretations.

Thus, the work of Tolibkhon Shakhidi represents an organic fusion of national

origins, academicism and contemporary compositional techniques: the centre of this fusion is an updated interpretation of the solo clarinet and the active use of rhythm as a key dramatic factor.

Let us conclude the analysis with the words of the Latvian composer and musicologist Georgs Pelēcis, addressed to the author of the concerto. This short letter captures with remarkable precision the main substantive and technical merits of the work:

"Dear Tolib!

Congratulations! Such a wonderful, bright, informative Clarinet concerto! The longing, pain and beauty of your soul sings and cries in it! Masterful orchestration, form, solo part! Excellent performance! I think, Aram Ilyich would be glad and proud of you! I especially liked the warm, watercolour-like space before the quick coda. Once again, congratulations and much, much success in the future!

Riga, May 27, 2010." [2, pp. 105–106]

References

1. Shakhidi T.Z. *Memory beads*. Moscow: Kompozitor Publ., 2022. 223 p. (In Russ.)
2. Shakhidi T. *Contrasts of times. Interviews, articles, letters, photographs: collection of articles*. Moscow: Kompozitor Publ., 2014. 120 p. (In Russ.)
3. Chernaya M.R., Zhao Yu. Clarinet Concerto and its peculiarities in the form building during the 20th–21st centuries. *Bulletin of the Kemerovo State University of Culture and Arts*. 2019, no. 46, pp. 33–38. (In Russ.)
4. Genebart O.V. Sonata cyclic form and specificity of its interpretation in F. Liszt's Piano Concert No. 1. *Manuscript*. 2019. Vol. 12, no. 11, pp. 249–253. (In Russ.) https://doi.org/10.30853/manuscript.2019.11.46
5. Nolan C. On musical space and combinatorics: Historical and conceptual perspectives in music theory. In: *Bridges. Mathematical Connections in Art, Music, and Science*. Ed. by R. Sarhangi. Winfield, Kansas, 2000, pp. 201–208.
6. Khasanova M.M. *Musical life of Tajikistan in the late 20th – early 21st centuries: Diss. Cand.Sci. (History)*. Dushanbe, 2018, 169 p. (In Russ.)
7. Davlatova S. *Sufi theme in the works of Tajik composer Tolib Shakhidi: Diss. Cand.Sci. (Arts)*. Novosibirsk, 2020, 210 p. (In Russ.)
8. Kars A. *History of orchestration*. Moscow: Muzyka Publ., 1990, 304 p. (In Russ.)

Information about the author:

Orzubonu N. Nurulloyeva — Post-Graduate Student of the Analytical Musicology Department, Lead Specialist of the Research and Creative Center for the Study of Russian-Chinese Musical Relations, Gnesin Russian Academy of Music, Moscow, Russian Federation.

Информация об авторе:

О.Н. Нуруллоева — аспирант кафедры аналитического музыкознания, ведущий специалист Научно-творческого центра по изучению российско-китайских музыкальных связей, Российская академия музыки имени Гнесиных, г. Москва, Российская Федерация.

Received / Поступила в редакцию: 20.03.2026
Revised / Одобрена после рецензирования: 15.04.2026
Accepted / Принята к публикации: 17.04.2026

ISSN 3034-3836 (Online)

Contemporary Musical Art

Original article
UDC 78.071.1
https://doi.org/10.56620/RM.2026.2.033-050
EDN BHGDAJ

Dialectics of Contrasts in the Oratorio *On Love and Hatred* by Sofia Gubaidulina

Nadezhda V. Shirieva

Zhiganov Kazan State Conservatoire,
Kazan, Russian Federation,
taha1978@mail.ru✉, *https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9359-7234*

Abstract. Sofia Gubaidulina is an acknowledged luminary of the contemporary classical music world, a composer who created her own sonic universe. The language of her music is grounded in the interplay of binary oppositions, which serve as the starting point for the conceptual frameworks of her compositions — often giving them their titles, shaping their dramatic arc and structuring their form. The article focuses on the oratorio *On Love and Hatred*, in which the method of contrasting thinking serves as the foundational principle for unveiling the composer's artistic vision. The attempt undertaken in the present study to identify and systematise the musical-expressive means associated with the opposing emotional poles of "love" and "hatred" falls within the scope of existing analytical approaches to the study of Gubaidulina's large-scale vocal-orchestral works. The functioning of the binary opposition "love – hatred" in the oratorio is demonstrated at the verbal and auditory levels. The assignment of texts selected by the composer to one or other pole is determined by their sources. In the musical fabric of the composition, the expressive means that characterise the oppositions are found in the intonation-rhythmic, phonic, articulation-stroke, dynamic and textural plans of organising the whole. The conclusion of the study reveals the dialectic relationship between the plot-dramatic and compositional structure of the oratorio, based on the dual interpretation of the category of "love," which in one case turns into hatred, and in the other takes the form of true love, bringing man closer to the Divine essence.

Keywords: Sofia Gubaidulina, binary oppositions, oratorio, love, hatred

For citation: Shirieva N.V. Dialectics of Contrasts in the Oratorio *On Love and Hatred* by Sofia Gubaidulina. *Russian Musicology*. 2026, no. 2, pp. 33–50. https://doi.org/10.56620/RM.2026.2.033-050

Funding: This work was supported by a grant provided by the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Tatarstan to higher education institutions, research organizations, and other institutions for the implementation of personnel development programs aimed at encouraging their researchers and academic staff to complete doctoral dissertations and conduct research activities (Agreement No. 2/2025-ПД-КГК dated December 22, 2025).

Translated by Thomas Alexander Beavitt, Laboratory for Scientific Translation (https://nauka-perevod.ru/eng).

© Nadezhda V. Shirieva, 2026

Диалектика контрастов в оратории «О любви и ненависти» Софии Губайдулиной

Надежда Велеровна Шириева

Казанская государственная консерватория имени Н.Г. Жиганова,
г. Казань, Российская Федерация,
taha1978@mail.ru✉, https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9359-7234

Аннотация. София Губайдулина — признанный классик мирового музыкального искусства, композитор, создавший собственную звуковую вселенную. Язык её музыки основывается на функционировании бинарных оппозиций, которые становятся отправной точкой для концепций сочинений, зачастую давая им названия, организуя их драматургию и выстраивая форму. В центре внимания статьи — оратория «О любви и ненависти», в которой метод контрастного мышления выступает основополагающим для раскрытия авторской идеи. Предпринятая в настоящей работе попытка выявить и систематизировать музыкально-выразительные средства, относящиеся к противоположным эмоциональным полюсам «любовь — ненависть», находится в русле уже существующих аналитических подходов к исследованию вокально-симфонической музыки Губайдулиной. Функционирование в оратории бинарной оппозиции «любовь — ненависть» демонстрируется на вербальном и звуковом уровнях. Отнесение отобранных композитором текстов к тому или иному полюсу строится на определении их источников. В музыкальной ткани сочинения выразительные средства, характеризующие оппозиции, обнаруживаются в интонационно-ритмическом, фоническом, артикуляционно-штриховом, динамическом и фактурном планах организации целого. Вывод исследования выявляет диалектику соотношения сюжетно-драматургического и композиционного строения оратории, базирующуюся на двойственной трактовке категории «любовь», которая в одном случае обращается в ненависть, а в другом приобретает вид истинной любви, приближающей человека к Божественной сущности.

Ключевые слова: София Губайдулина, бинарные оппозиции, оратория, любовь, ненависть

Финансирование: Работа выполнена за счет гранта, предоставленного Академией наук Республики Татарстан образовательным организациям высшего образования, научным и иным организациям на поддержку планов развития кадрового потенциала в части стимулирования их научных и научно-педагогических работников к защите докторских диссертаций и выполнению научно-исследовательских работ (Соглашение № 2/2025-ПД-КГК от 22.12.2025).

Introduction

The name of Sofia Gubaidulina has long been widely renowned, her work having firmly established itself in the annals of world musical culture. Her works continue to be regularly performed by outstanding musicians at the largest concert venues in European countries. The composer's works, while written in various genres and for a wide variety of performing ensembles, are united by a recognisable musical language unique to her, a figurative structure — and, most importantly, a spiritual dominant embedded in the underlying concept of each composition.

An important part of the composer's oeuvre is represented by her large-scale vocal and symphonic works. These include *Alleluia* (1990), *St. John Passion* (2000), *St. John Easter* (2001). The most recent work in this series was the oratorio *On Love and Hatred* (2016–2018). All these compositions written by Gubaidulina over the course of many years and brought into being by a variety of occasions are united by a single idea — the artist's drive to affirm the necessity of restoring to religion its lost status as the supreme authority of Divine Law over human life. This idea is embodied by the composer through binary oppositions and musical symbolism.

The binarism of Sofia Gubaidulina's creative thinking has been repeatedly emphasised by Valentina Kholopova. In her article "Contrast of World View as a Principle of Sofia Gubaidulina's Musical and Philosophical Thinking," the musicologist presents a whole set of antitheses that served as the impetus for the birth of the works, gave them their name and manifested themselves at the level of musical composition. [1] Projecting the principle of contrastive thinking onto *Alleluia*, Kholopova analyses the musical fabric of the composition in terms of the unity of three components — sound, colour and number — and closely links their triumvirate with the dramaturgy of the vocal-symphonic cycle, whose contrasts she conceives in the spirit of Russian icon painting: "<…> the act of symphony and the inaction of chant, the drama of earthly sacrifice and salvation in the heavenly light of eternity." [2, p. 275]

Magdalena Stochniol also presents her vision of Gubaidulina's binary thinking, explaining the contrasts that arise in the solo parts of the *St. John Passion* as a dialogue between East and West, with their respective states of contemplation and activity. The researcher notes that the parts of solo singers are polar in two fundamental areas: in the musical design of time (rhythm) and in the specifics of the melodic (intonation) contour. The criterion for these contrasts was the source of the text — the Gospel and the Apocalypse. The researcher writes: "Events relating to the crucifixion are presented with what seems like detachment, while the apocalyptic visions use expressive musical techniques." [3, p. 47]

In terms of the antitheses used by Gubaidulina, the most important thing for her creative method is their intersection, which forms the main symbol that appears to permeate all of the composer's works — the figure of the cross. It can be found in the textural and dramatic structure of *Alleluia*, both encrypted in the symbolism of the musical text and as the "internal form" of the composition. [4]

The "cross" concept of the dilogy *St. John Passion* and *St. John Easter* is explained in numerous interviews with Gubaidulina herself. The first part of the dilogy was conceived by her as a metaphor for the crossroads of time and eternity, which is expressed as a combination of the Gospel narrative about the last days of Christ on earth with apocalyptic events occurring beyond the existence of the human world. The second part, according to the composer, "is not ***a continuation*** of events that have already taken place, but their ***transformation*** and ***implementation***. If *Passion* defines and *closes in a circle* the earthly path of the incarnate Word, then *Easter* is *the revelation* of our soul, its exit into another dimension. <…> The greater and more significant becomes the role of the apocalyptic layer, that is, the internal events revealed to us in vision." [2, p. 321] Sofia Gubaidulina's biographer, Michael Kurtz, also emphasises this: "Because the events in St. John Easter are not earthly but spiritual, the Apocalypse of John stands in the foreground: spiritual eternity (vertically) devours — that is, conquers — earthly temporality (horizontally)." [5, p. 256]

Joanna Cieślik-Klauza pays tribute to the role of the "cross" as a symbol that permeates the entire musical fabric of *St. John Passion*,

capturing it in the intersections of static texture elements with sliding structures. [6, p. 187]

The binarism of the composer's thinking is emphasised by Olga Moskvina, who draws attention to the *anabasis* and *catabasis* baroque figures that arise within the musical fabric of *Alleluia* and points out their role in revealing the theme of death. [7, p. 29]

The oratorio *On Love and Hatred* is the last vocal-symphonic work to come from the pen of Gubaidulina. In terms of the grandeur of its conception, it stands on a par with the *St. John Passion*. Drawing a parallel between passions and oratorios, Kholopova defines their similarity as "*philosophical and religious* content that can include the worldview of millennia of human existence (the author's italics. — *N.Sh.*)." [2, p. 365]

The impetus for the creation of the work was "the thought of the world state, in which the author sees the accumulation of weapons of total destruction and growing hatred." [1, p. 70] The result of these reflections was a nine-movement oratorio, the world premiere of which took place in 2016 in Tallinn. However, already in 2018, Valery Gergiev presented a new fifteen-movement version to the public of the Rotterdam Festival — a nearly 50-minute choral symphonic work for four soloists, a mixed choir and a large orchestra, which, in terms of the scale of the idea and the existential force of the statement, has all the features of *opus summum*.

Despite the stage fate of Gubaidulina's last oratorio having been successful, it remains a little-studied opus. In the latest reprint of her monograph, Kholopova dedicates an annotation to it; on a basis of an interview with the composer, she offers her view on the dramatic development of the work, which is based "on the contrast of the ideas of 'love' and 'hatred,' declared in the title." [2, p. 365] Noting the manifestations of antitheses in the text of the oratorio in the instrumental and vocal timbres of the instruments, in the phonism of harmonic consonances, the musicologist emphasises that the contrasts of the two main ideas "are intensified as the form develops, but ultimately, in the finale, lead to Light, spiritual uplift and a hopeful state coloured by major — *D major*, similar to the Gloria of the Mass." [Ibid., p. 366]

Kholopova's essay provides a general overview of the oratorio *On Love and Hatred* with the aim of demonstrating its place among the composer's works of recent years. The work considered here is an attempt to take a closer look at the musical fabric of the composition for identifying in it a system of expressive means corresponding to two moral poles, as well as to demonstrate how dramatic and compositional plans can be built using these means. The relevance of the analysis undertaken in the article is confirmed by the properties of contemporary music, which is distinct in experimental practices with sound matter due to the desire of composers devoid of the general path of movement to create individual systems for conveying their concept and invent new techniques for organising sound fabric and new compositional models. Innovative approaches to the means of conveying the author's ideas have placed at the forefront the problem of not so much the perception of the musical text, but its understanding. It is possible to comprehend a sign system endowed with meaning, and since music is precisely such a system, its comprehension is possible only through "the disclosure of musical symbols, their interpretation in all hermeneutic-axiological dimensions." [8, p. 82]

Methodology

The focus of research attention on the problem of identifying the binary opposition "love – hatred" in the oratorio led to the inclusion in the methodological orbit of the monographs of *Sofia Gubaidulina* [2] and *The Numerical Secrets of Sofia Gubaidulina* [9]

by Valentina Kholopova and Valeria Tsenova, respectively, in which the authors discover figurative and semantic dominants in the text of the composer's works, encrypted with the help of various elements of texture and numerical parameters.

A valuable methodological aid was Olga Moskvina's dissertation dedicated to identifying religious-symbolic programming in the instrumental music of Sofia Gubaidulina. [10]

The consideration of antithesis as a compositional method reflected in the oratorio required reference to Kholopova's article "Contrast of world view as a principle of the musical and philosophical thinking of Sofia Gubaidulina" [1]; the author explains this principle by Gubaidulina's ideological attitudes manifested in the ideas of her works and compositional technique.

The process of identifying the system of expressive means characterising the binary opposition of love and hatred in Gubaidulina's oratorio was carried out based on the method proposed by Ekaterina Akishina for establishing a connection between the ethical concepts of good and evil with musical symbolism in the works of Alfred Schnittke. [11]

Verbal Sources of the Oratorio

The action of the binary opposition "love – hatred" manifests itself in the oratorio on two compositional levels: verbal and musical.

For the "libretto" of Gubaidulina's oratorio, texts of psalms from the Psalter and others were selected, primarily from the prayerful and spiritual works of monks and saints. The centon composed from these texts formed the basis of a fifteen-movement composition.

Table 1. Sofia Gubaidulina. Oratorio *On Love and Hatred*. Compositional structure and verbal sources

Parts	Verbal sources
No. 1. When Jesus died for us	John 19:25 Psalter: Psalm 42:6 Psalm 42: 2 Psalm 42:3 Psalm 56:5 Psalm 57:7 Psalm 55:3 Psalm 55:7 Psalm 142:6 Psalm 69:3 Psalm 42:6
No. 2. Thy peace, O Lord, grant us from heaven	Alcuin's Evening Prayer
No. 3. Nothing can separate me from your love	Romans 8:38-19 Psalter: *Psalm 45:2* Matthew 19:21 Prayer of Pope Clement XI

No. 4. I groan from my grief	Psalter: Psalm 54:3 Psalm 54:6 Psalm 58:4 Psalm 142:3 Troparion, Tone 4 “On those who hate and offend us” Psalter: Psalm 142:3 Psalm 70:13
No. 5. Love for God	Virtue Reflections on Gospel by Charles de Foucauld
No. 6. My soul is ground into the dust	Psalter: *Psalm 118:25* *Psalm 118 :28* *Psalm 118:61* *Psalm 118:85* *Psalm 68:3* *Psalm 68:4* *Psalm 68:9* *Psalm 68:21* *Psalm 68:20* *Psalm 142:11*
No. 7. Prayer for all	Morning prayers of Hieroschemamonk Parthenius of Kyiv
No. 8. O God, grant us purity of heart and simplicity of spirit.	Morning prayer of Hieroschemamonk Parthenius of Kyiv
No. 9. Burning hatred	Psalter: *Psalm 118:136* *Psalm 118:143* *Psalm 118:139* *Psalm 118:136* *Psalm 142:6* *Psalm 70:13* *Psalm 119:53* *Psalm 119:69* *Psalm 119:78* *Psalm 119:21* *Psalm 54:7*
No. 10. Abandon the wrath	Psalter: *Psalm 36:8*

No. 11. Prayer for salvation	Psalter: Psalm 27:4 Psalm 26:2 Psalm 17:38 Psalm 17:43 Psalm 20:11 Psalm 20:10
No. 12. From the Song of songs	Psalter: Psalm 6:11 Psalm 7:12 Psalm 4:9 Psalm 4:16
No. 13. The wrath of God	Without words
No. 14. A simple prayer	Prayer of Saint Francis of Assisi
No. 15. Come, Holy Spirit	Prayer to the Holy Spirit, attributed to Saint Augustine

Table 1 contains the titles of the work movements and their literary sources.

If hatred is characterised by expressively coloured texts of the psalms, then to convey the feeling of love, the composer used texts from Alcuin's Evening Prayer, Augustine of Hippo's Prayers to the Holy Spirit, the Gospel, the Old Testament, church hymnography, the prayerful spiritual works of Pope Clement XI, monk Charles Foucauld, Hieroschemamonk Parthenius of Kyiv, Francis of Assisi, as well as texts from the Psalter without any negative message.

The verbal content of individual movements entirely relates to one or the other pole. The fifth movement "Love for God," the seventh movement "Prayer for all," the tenth "Abandon the wrath" and the fourteenth movement "A simple prayer" tell about love. The pole of hatred is represented by the ninth and eleventh movements, "Burning hatred" and "Prayer for salvation," respectively. In the remaining parts, the conflict of love and hatred is verbally presented as a confrontation between two opposing feelings that make up human nature.
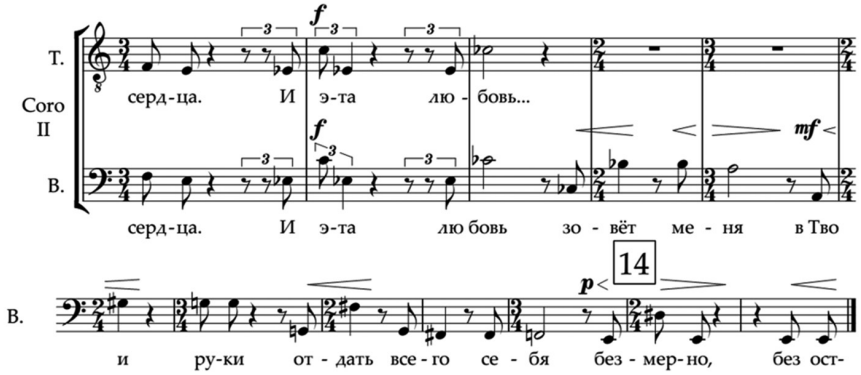
In the musical fabric of the oratorio, the dualism of love and hatred is also reflected and manifested at various levels of the compositional organisation.

Intonational-Rhythmic Contour of Vocal Parts

In the oratorio score, the intonational and rhythmic pattern of the vocal "speech" in the soloists' parts has a certain semantic load expressing the "love – hatred" binary opposition. Thus, the love is characterised by the prevalence of sixth and seventh intervals, exclusion of extreme tessitura zones and a slight variability of the rhythmic pattern. These qualities are possessed by the bass solo from the first movement, the third and fourteenth movements of the oratorio, as well as the part of the male choir that sounds at the end of the fifth movement (Example No. 1).

Example No. 1

Sofia Gubaidulina. Oratorio *On Love and Hatred*.
Fifth movement. Love for God, mm. 58–69



Hatred is characterised by the predominant use of minor second intervals, as well as minor and major thirds typically sequenced upwards and touching the extremes of the singers' range. Rhythmic diversity of vocal parts is achieved by using a whole spectrum of duration groupings. Such means of expression are typical for solo parts with expressive text of psalms.

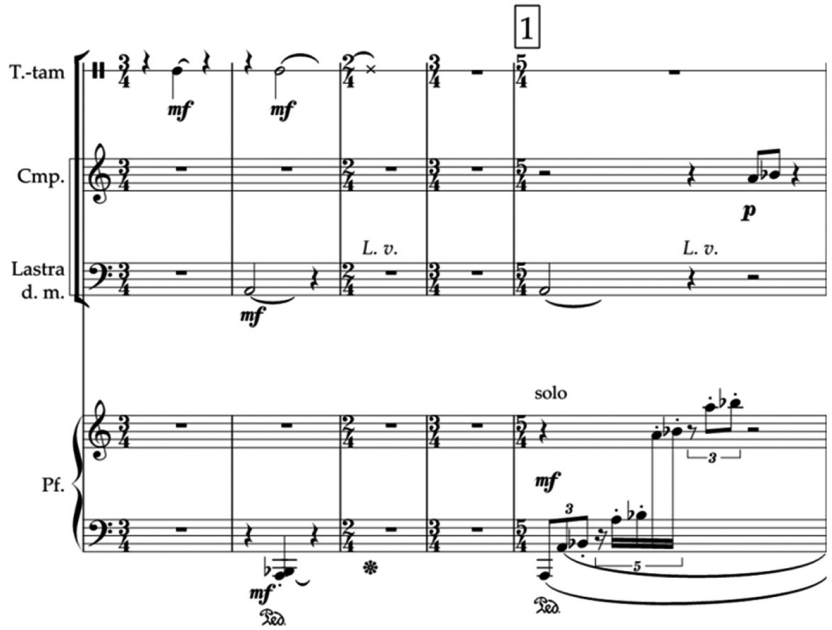
Sound Emblematics

In the musical fabric of the oratorio, a number of stable melodic-rhythmic formations are observed to correlate with the opposition "love – hatred," which appear as a musical symbol. Some of them, repeating throughout the entire work, have the character of leitmotifs and hold the work together from within.

The sphere of love includes the upward transposed, as if ascending, second intonation in the piano part, which can be compared to the *anabasis* baroque rhetorical figure. This move accompanies the bass solo in the first, third, fourteenth and fifteenth parts of the oratorio (see reh. 1 of Example No. 2).

Example No. 2

Sofia Gubaidulina. Oratorio *On Love and Hatred*.
First movement. When Jesus died for us, mm. 9–13
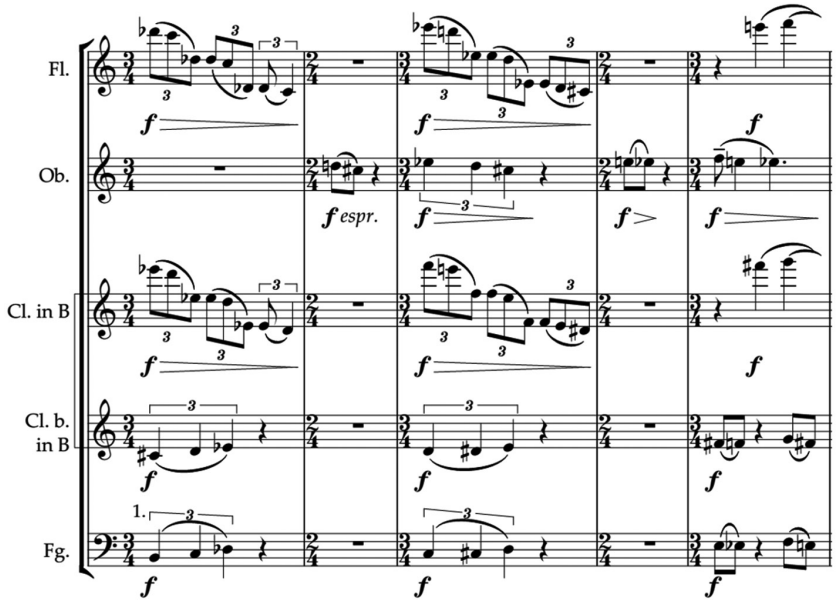


Specifically, it first appears with the words "When Jesus died for us" and can be interpreted as a symbol of both the departing soul and resurrection. In the fifteenth movement, this returns in a descending form, acquiring an almost visible image of the descent of the Holy Spirit (Example No. 3).

Another intonation, typical for reflecting the sphere of love, is the trembling octave movement of the strings, sliding to a harmonic sound, as if moving into another dimension. It concludes the first movement of the oratorio as a transition to the second one, "Grant us your peace, O Lord, from heaven" and the eleventh movement as a transition to the twelfth one, "Song of Songs" (Example No. 4).

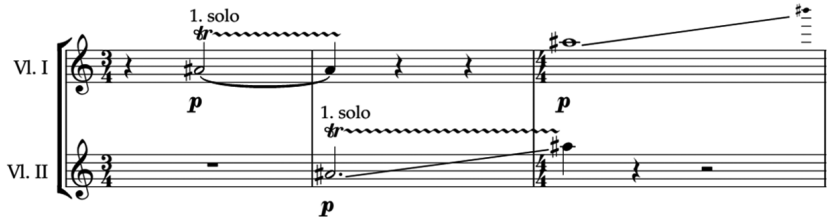
In the fourteenth movement, "Simple prayer," this move finds its opposite in the form of descending glissandos in the low strings. A multidirectional movement starting from one sound symbolises a cross (Example No. 5).

Chromatic passages are a stable melodic-rhythmic structure that appears in places containing an emotional message of hatred. They appear in the first, fourth, sixth, eighth, ninth and fifteenth movements of the oratorio (Example No. 6).

Example No. 3 Sofia Gubaidulina. Oratorio *On Love and Hatred*. Fifteenth movement. Come, Holy Spirit, mm. 83–87

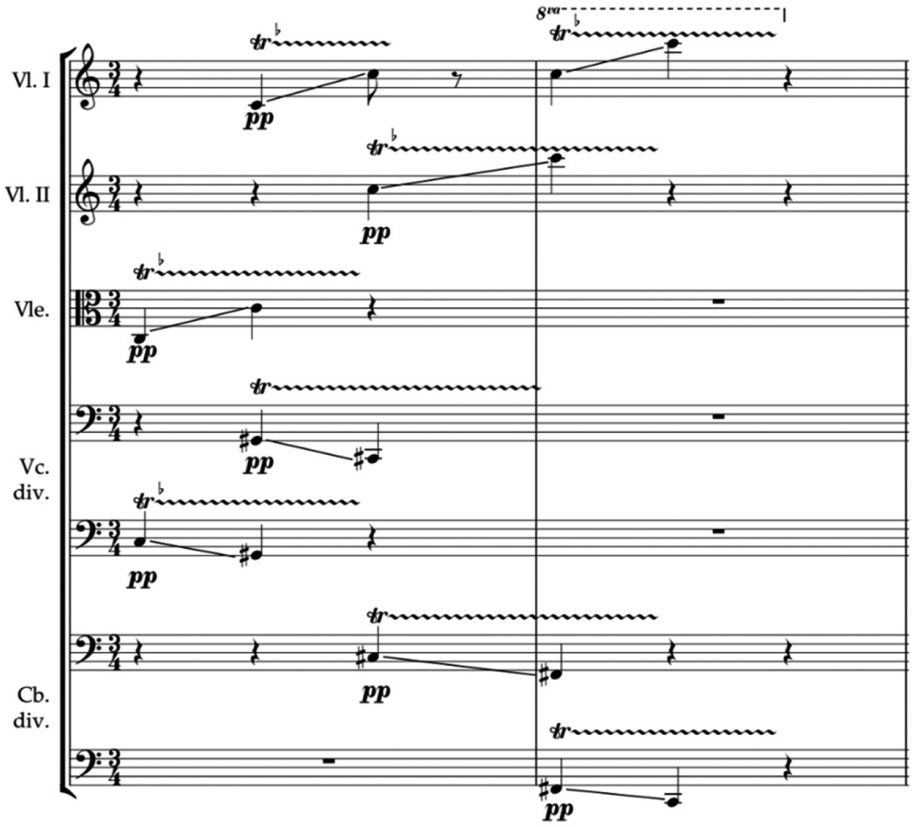


Example No. 4 Sofia Gubaidulina. Oratorio *On Love and Hatred*. Fifth movement. When Jesus died for us, no. 38, mm. 214–216



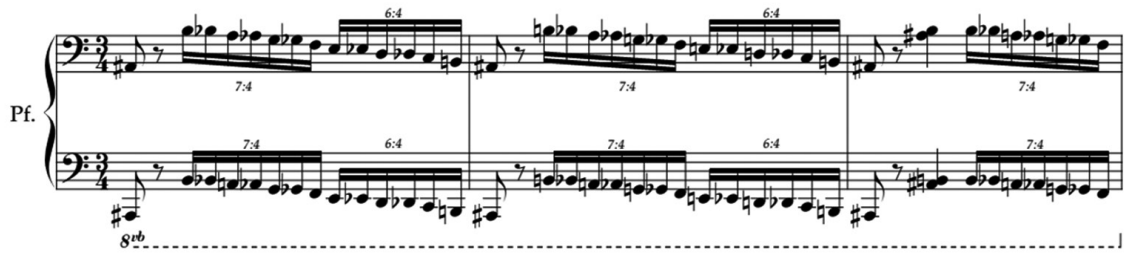
Example No. 5

Sofia Gubaidulina. Oratorio *On Love and Hatred*.
Fourteenth movement. A simple prayer, no. 19, mm. 50–51



Example No. 6.

Sofia Gubaidulina. Oratorio *On Love and Hatred*.
Ninth movement. Burning hatred, mm. 73–75
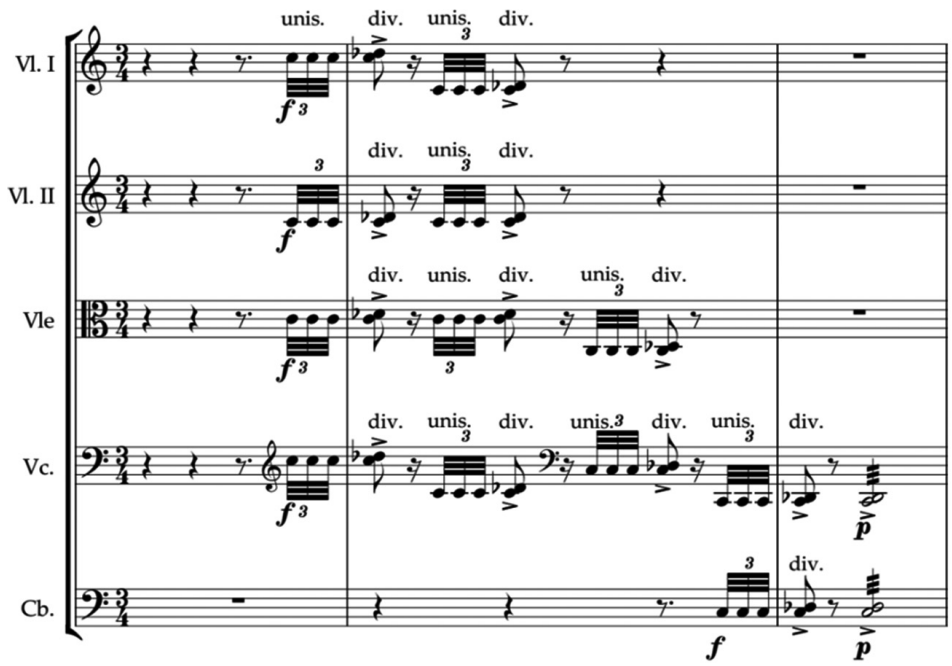


The sphere of hatred includes a rhythmic-intonational structure built on the intervals of the prime and minor second (Example No. 7). This structure is found in the first movement of the oratorio "My soul and among the lions."

The oratorio repeatedly contains a melodic formula built on the coupling of intervals of a minor second, a tritone and a minor seventh (Example No. 8).

A move that starts in the upper register collapses to the lowest notes (Example No. 9).

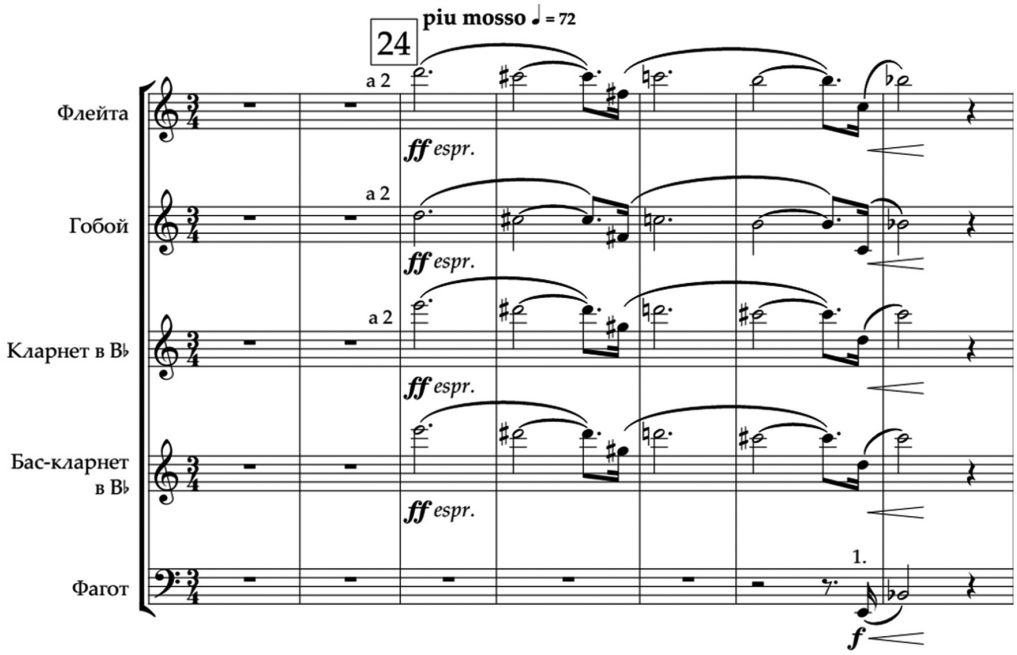
Example No. 7

Sofia Gubaidulina. Oratorio *On Love and Hatred*.
First movement . When Jesus died for us, no. 21, mm. 125–127



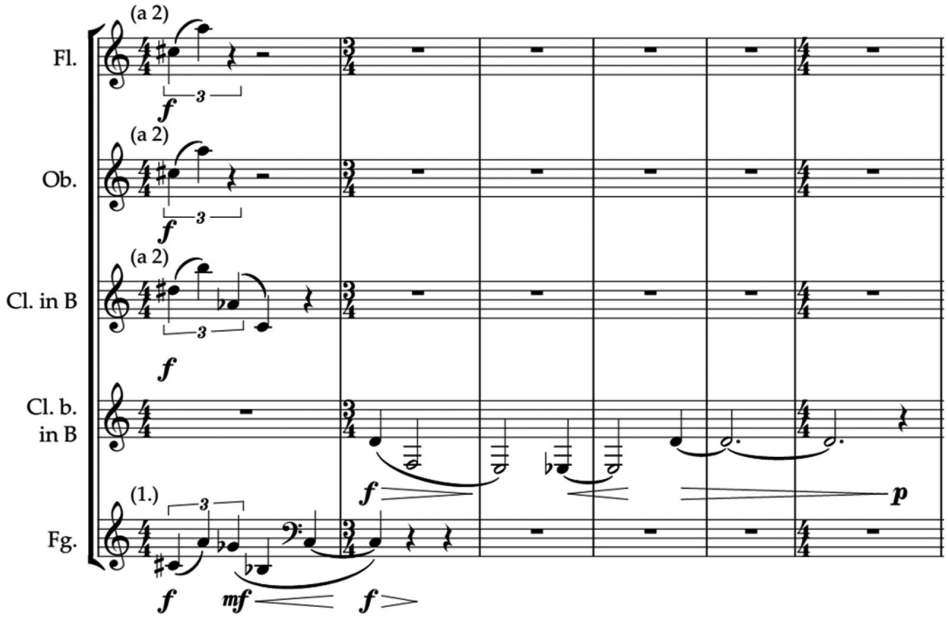
Example No. 8

Sofia Gubaidulina. Oratorio *On Love and Hatred*.
Sixth movement. My soul is ground into the dust,
no. 24, mm. 108–114



Example No. 9

Sofia Gubaidulina. Oratorio *On Love and Hatred*. Sixth movement. My Soul is Ground into the Dust, no. 25, mm. 115–120



This melodic fragment can be called the leitmotif of God's wrath. Appearing in the oratorio from the third movement, it unfolds in full force in the thirteenth movement.

Phonism

The binarism of love and hatred also manifests itself on a colouristic level: Gubaidulina emphasises the contrast of these states with consonant and dissonant sounds.

Consonance is characteristic of the antiphonal sound of the choir in the first movement, where the text "The endless morning dawn of the resurrection" is intoned with major and minor triads (Example No. 10), as well as of the chorale in the second movement the text from Alcuin's prayer *Deinen Frieden, Herr, gib uns vom Himmel*.

Consonant intervals and chords form the basis of the parts of the two choirs in the seventh movement, interacting on the principle of layer polyphony. In the tenth movement, the text *Lass ab vom Zorn* ("Abandon the wrath") is intoned by the choir on the sounds of a minor third.

All types of dissonant sounds mark movements or episodes with the feeling of hatred as the main emotional dominant.
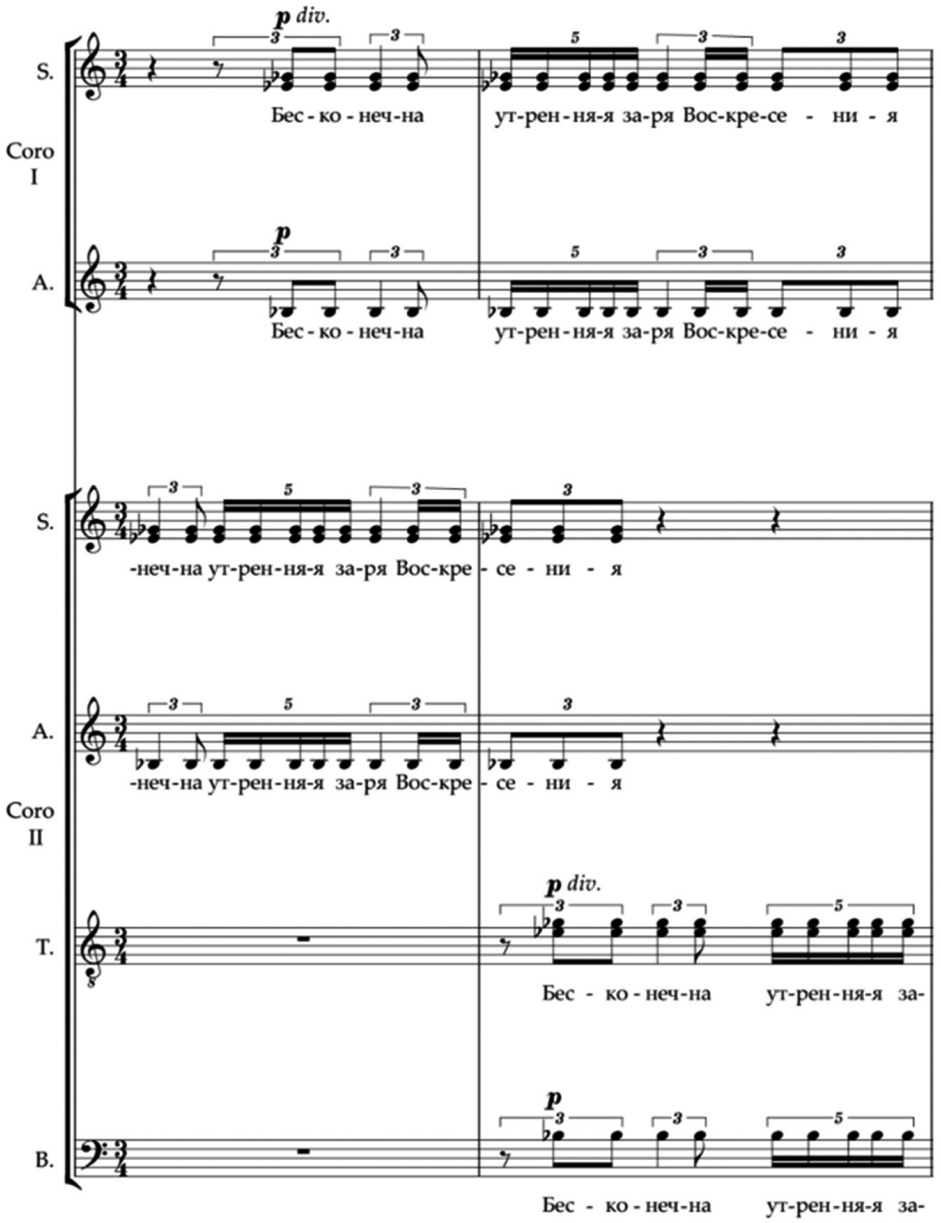
The orchestral episode that opens the third movement of the oratorio is distinguished by its emphasised dissonance. Being based on four short ascending motifs, which are few-second moves, it is "harmonised" by a cluster vertical, which falls apart into crumbling fragments upon reaching its greatest density at the climax.

The soloist's text "I lament about my grief" in the fourth movement is accompanied by cluster spots of varying duration with expression similarly emphasised by the relief of the orchestra's chromatic passages.

The orchestral dissonant sound in the sixth, tenth and eleventh movements is much more individualised, woven from dots, spots, stripes and scatterings that coexist simultaneously in a single sonorous space. A characteristic feature is the increased mobility of the textural layers

Example No. 10

Sofia Gubaidulina. Oratorio *On Love and Hatred*.
First movement. When Jesus died for us, mm. 70–71



as they move towards the climax, making the sound field even more dissonant.

The culminating thirteenth movement of the oratorio "The wrath of God" includes all kinds of textural forms of sonorous music, which help the composer paint a truly apocalyptic picture. Beginning with a strip, the orchestral sonority gradually stratifies into independent fragments, which interact polyphonically with each other to form sharp-sounding and extremely unstable harmonic combinations.

Articulation, Strokes, Performance Techniques, Dynamics

The reflection of the hatred pole is characterised by a variety of performing techniques and strokes. These include playing downwards with the bow, accents, *spiccato*, *martele*, *pizzicato*, the use

of grace notes, various *tremolo*, both "trembling" on short notes and vibrating for a long time mainly in the low register.

The pole of love finds expression in the use of *legato*, *tenuto*, *staccato* (piano passage in the first movement), *glissandi* and *tremolo*, sounding in the high register (twelfth and fifteenth movements).
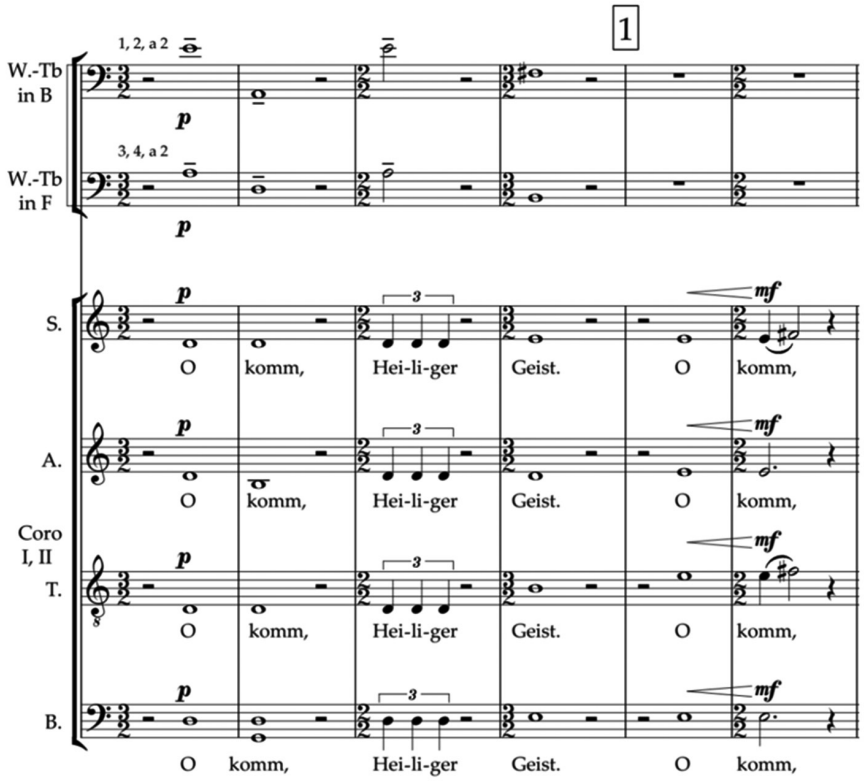
The binarity of dynamic nuances is also inscribed into the semantic context of the oratorio. Thus, the dynamics that are in the *pp* – *mf* range are characteristic of the love pole, while the pole of hatred is typically located in the dynamic scale from *f* to *ff*. No less important is how dynamic development proceeds. For example, love is characterised by a smooth dynamic change in long phrases (*crescendo, diminuendo, cresc. poco a poco*), while hatred is reflected in a contrasting juxtaposition of nuances carried out in short phrases and extensive use of *fp, sf, sfp*.

Constitution

The oratorio uses two types of structure: chordal and polyphonic. The first type, creating a persistent allusion to church hymns, always refers to the pole of love. Examples include the chorales "The endless dawn of the resurrection" from the first movement, *Deinen Frieden, Herr, gib uns vom Himmel* ("Grant us your peace, O Lord, from heaven") from the second movement, "Forgive those who hate us and offend us, O God, the all-merciful" from the fourth movement, the psalmody "Abandon the Wrath" sounding in the third from the tenth movement, the chorales *O, Gott, gib uns, dass die ganze Welt erlöst werde* ("O God, grant that the whole world be redeemed") from the tenth movement, and *O komm, Heiliger Geist* ("Come, Holy Spirit") from the fifteenth movement (Example No. 11).

Example No. 11

Sofia Gubaidulina. Oratorio *On Love and Hatred*. Fifteenth movement. Come, Holy Spirit, mm. 1–6



The composer's use of polyphonic structure is ambiguous. In certain movements of the oratorio, the imitative polyphony is a reference to the ancient motet style of constitution, characteristic of the church music traditions of the Renaissance and Baroque. In this sense, its use in the choir part of the movements related to the sphere of love — the second *Deinen Frieden, Herr, gib uns vom Himmel, und dein Friede bleibe in unseren Herzen* ("Thy peace, O Lord, grant us from heaven") (Example No. 12), the fifth *In deine Hände lege ich meine Seele* ("I place my soul into your hands"), the eighth "O God, grant us purity of heart and simplicity of spirit," as well as *Atme in mir, du Heiliger Geist* ("Breathe into me, Holy Spirit") and *O komm, Heiliger Geist* ("Come, Holy Spirit") from the fifteenth movement — has a very specific semantics.

However, the composer also uses the polyphonic type of presentation to express hatred. The total textural polyphony used by Gubaidulina to express negative emotions can be observed in the culminating zones of the ninth ("Burning hatred"), eleventh ("Prayer for salvation"), thirteenth ("The wrath of God") and fifteenth ("Come, Holy Spirit") movements.
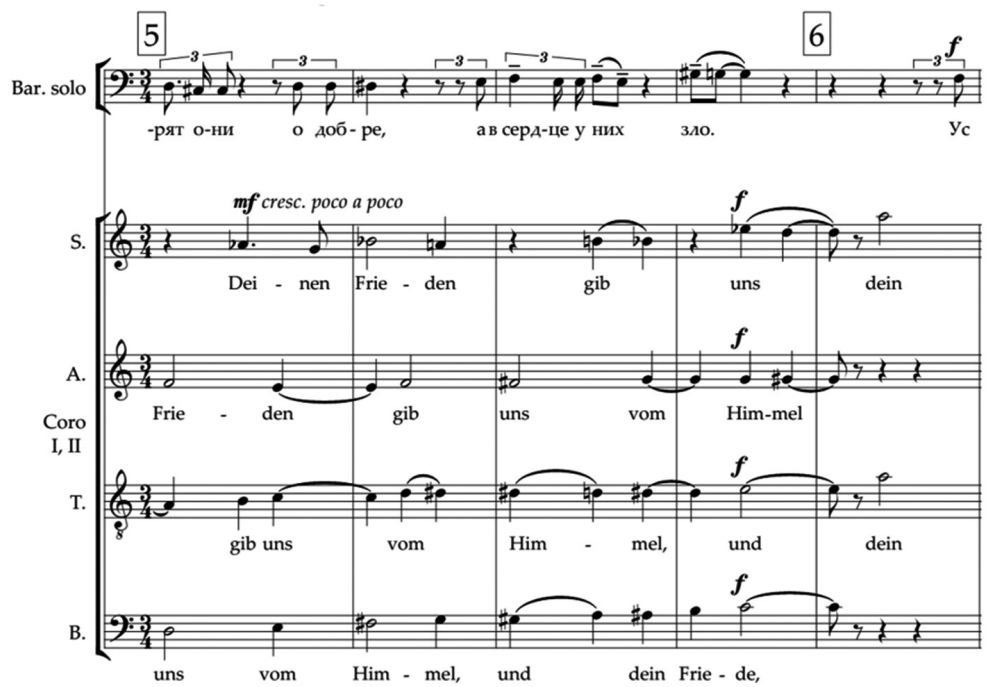
Drama of Contrasts

The identified means of expression and musical symbols characterising the binary opposition "love – hatred" manifest themselves in different ways throughout the work.

Movements with musical material entirely characterising the pole of either love or hatred are distinguished. Thus, the musical material of the fifth ("Love for God"), seventh ("Prayer for all"), twelfth ("Song of songs") and fourteenth ("A simple prayer") movements is built on the symbolism of love: the polyphonic constitution of the "strict style" in the fifth movement; the bass solo psalmody sounding against the background of the incantatory "mantras" of the two choirs to imitate the reading

Example No. 12

Sofia Gubaidulina. Oratorio *On Love and Hatred*.
Second movement. Thy peace, O Lord, grant us from heaven,
mm. 22–26



of the Gospel by a deacon in an Orthodox church in the seventh movement; the sparse sonority of the orchestra in the twelfth movement, achieved by the fluttering of the marimba and strings in combination with a gradually rising tessitura; the upward transposed second intonation accompanying the bass "prayer" in the fourteenth movement.

The pole of hatred is represented by the sixth movement ("My soul is ground into the dust"), the ninth ("Burning hatred") and the thirteenth movements ("The wrath of God"). They feature descending chromatic passages, trills and tremolos, abrupt changes in dynamic shades, extreme dissonance achieved through the use of clusters, horizontal and vertical dominance of semitone intervals, chromatic layering of melodic lines and polyphonic texture built on ostinato variations of different sound-rhythmic patterns.

In the remaining parts, the composer demonstrates the dualism of love and hatred through either sequential or simultaneous contrasting juxtaposition of expressive means.

A consistent contrast can be observed in the first movement, when the Gospel narrative of the Jesus' death, which ends with the otherworldly-sounding chorale "The morning dawn of the resurrection is endless," is suddenly replaced by the text of the psalm "My soul is among the lions," which has the opposite emotional message. Gubaidulina uses a similar technique in the second movement, where the choir's blissful singing of Alcuin's prayer is contrasted with the expressive sounding baritone solo "Look at my enemies."

The composer uses an inverted order to juxtapose two emotional poles in the third movement. The opening leitmotif of the God's wrath is followed by a bass solo accompanied by *anabasis* seconds. In the fourth movement, David's words "I groan from my grief" are interrupted by the chorale with the text of the troparion of the fourth tone "Forgive those who hate us." The strict choral polyphony of the eighth movement, on the text "O God, grant us purity of heart and simplicity of spirit," gives way to ominous chromatic passages and tremolos signaling the transition to the ninth movement "Burning hatred." In the tenth movement, the composer uses the textural *crescendo* technique three times, starting with one sound and each time covering an increasingly larger range. Upon reaching the climax, the composer "cools" the sonic intensity with a chorale to the text "Abandon the wrath."

In the eleventh movement, a technique of simultaneous contrast emerges: a sound field woven from expressive means characteristic of the hatred pole is cut through by the fervent singing of the choir "God, grant us that the whole world may be saved." The fifteenth movement serves as an epilogue: it retrospectively develops practically all the patterns that characterise love and hatred to form at the climax a grandiose picture of a world torn apart by contradictions. However, according to the composer, "one must resist hatred at all costs." [12, p. 4] And the enlightened coda filled with the ringing of bells, symbolising the grace of the descent of the Holy Spirit, leaves humanity with hope for salvation granted only by love.

Conclusion

Gubaidulina uses binary oppositions to organise the plot and dramatic plan of the oratorio. In accordance with the author's antinomic musical thinking, the narrative development of the composition is based on a harsh confrontation between the categories of love and hatred. However, the compositional structure of the oratorio, in our opinion, is not conductive to such an unambiguous interpretation of this dichotomy. This is in line with the opinion of Anna Amrakhova, who suggests going beyond the "flat binarity" and looking at Gubaidulina's works through

the prism of the meaning-bearing cognitive models associated with it. [13] The researcher considers complementarity to be the most important principle that gives meaning to binarity, which "transforms the simple rigid antonymy of mutual exclusion into a dialectical antinomy of mutual determinacy." [Ibid., p. 19] Let us explain this idea in relation to the oratorio. Hatred in Gubaidulina is a category belonging to the Personality understood as the "I" directed at itself — the Personality standing "at the center of all human impetuses."[1] It is precisely egoistic love for oneself that awakens in the hero of the oratorio hatred for his enemies, whom he also calls the enemies of God, causing the desire to destroy them, including by the punishing right hand of God. As an integral part of this world, true love belongs to it from the day of Creation and is directed outward. True love erases the difference between those who have done us good and those who have done us evil; they are equal in our love for them, according to Gubaidulina, only this love is connected with the highest principle and turns the Personality to God.

Thus, it is precisely love that acts as the dialectical category both distancing the Personality from God and bringing him closer to Him.

On the one hand, this difference is compositionally based by Gubaidulina on the principle of paired contrast: through the opposition of expressive means that characterise the antithesis "love – hatred." On the other hand, in the eighth movement, as Valentina Kholopova writes, a moral turn occurs: "Man is horrified by the evil of hatred in his own soul. Among the expressions of music, this turning point is conveyed by the composer through *speaking word*: "I hate!", "I hate?", "Me?", "I hate?" [2, p. 367] This turn becomes the starting point for the simultaneous combination in the eleventh movement of oppositional means that were previously strictly delimited by compositional frameworks, which, in turn, is a harbinger of the events of the final movement, in which hatred generated by egocentric love turns into love for the whole world, overshadowed by the descent of the Holy Spirit and bringing man closer to God.

References

1. Kholopova V.N. Contrasting effects of world perception as a principle of Sofia Gubaidulina's musical-philosophical thinking. *Muzykal'naya akademiya* (Music Academy). 2021, no. 3, pp. 58–73. (In Russ.) https://doi.org/10.34690/178

2. Kholopova V.N. *Sofia Gubaidulina*. Moscow: Kompozitor Publ., 2020. 444 p. (In Russ.)

3. Stochniol M. Intercultural musical dialogue in *St John Passion* by Sofia Gubaidulina. *Interdisciplinary Studies in Musicology*. 2020, vol. 20, pp. 41–50. https://doi.org/10.14746/ism.2020.20.4

4. Shirieva N.V. *Principles of structural organization of choral works by Sofia Gubaidulina*. Kazan: Astor i Ya, 2016. 338 p. (In Russ.)

5. Kurtz M. *Sofia Gubaidulina: a biography*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007. 335 p. https://doi.org/10.2979/3600.0

[1] Sofia Gubaidulina: "Not me alone — many feel like the world is on the brink of collapse...": an interview with Vladimir Dudin. URL: https://www.classicalmusicnews.ru/interview/sofiya-gubaidulina-interview-2016/ (accessed: 01.03.2026).

6. Cieślik-Klauza J. Passion music at the turn of the XX and XXI centuries. Part I: Sofia Gubaidulina and Wolfgang Rihm. *Rocznik Teologii Katolickiej*. 2018, vol. 17, no. 1, p. 183–194. https://doi.org/10.15290/rtk.2018.17.1.12

7. Moskvina O.A. *Alleluia* by S. Gubaidulina: doxology in the requiem genre. *Aktual'nye problemy vysshego muzykal'nogo obrazovaniya = Actual problems of high musical education*. 2022, no. 4, pp. 24–30. (In Russ.) https://doi.org/10.26086/NK.2022.66.4.004

8. Kapichina E.A. The problem of interpretation of music in the context of philosophical analysis (hermeneutic-axiological approach). *Studia Culturae*. 2016, no. 29, pp. 73–84. (In Russ.)

9. Tsenova V.S. *The numerical mysteries of Sofia Gubaidulina*. Moscow: Moscow State Conservatory Publ., 2000. 197 p. (In Russ.)

10. Moskvina O.A. *The instrumental creativity of Sofia Gubaidulina in the aspect of religious-symbolic programming: Thesis of Diss. Cand.Sci. (Arts)*. Nizhny Novgorod, 2017. 287 p. (In Russ.)

11. Akishina E.M. *Semantic aspects of the analysis of A. Schnittke's creativity: Thesis of Diss. Cand.Sci. (Arts)*. Moscow, 2003. 268 p. (In Russ.)

12. Sofia Gubaidulina: "You can't get involved in hate...": interview with E. Yeremenko. *Musical review*. 2014, no. 12, p. 4. (In Russ.)

13. Amrakhova A.A. Essay on the classification of individual projects in modern composition. *Journal of the Music Theory Society*. 2022, no. 3, pp. 14–25. (In Russ.) https://doi.org/10.26176/otmroo.2022.39.3.002

Information about the author:

Nadezhda V. Shirieva — Cand.Sci. (Arts), Professor, Head of the Department of Choral Conducting, Zhiganov Kazan State Conservatoire, Kazan, Russian Federation.

Информация об авторе:

Н.В. Шириева — кандидат искусствоведения, профессор, заведующая кафедрой хорового дирижирования, Казанская государственная консерватория им. Н.Г. Жиганова, г. Казань, Российская Федерация.

Received / Поступила в редакцию: 11.02.2026
Revised / Одобрена после рецензирования: 06.04.2026
Accepted / Принята к публикации: 08.04.2026

ISSN 3034-3836 (Online)

Contemporary Musical Art

Original article
UDC 78.01
https://doi.org/10.56620/RM.2026.2.051-073
EDN DGSLDE

Chamber and Instrumental Music by Alexey Krasheninnikov: Experimental Poetics

Ekaterina G. Okuneva[1], Darya S. Semko[2]

[1, 2]Petrozavodsk State Glazunov Conservatoire,
Petrozavodsk, Russian Federation
[1]okunevaeg@yandex.ru✉, https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5253-8863
[2]dasalodocnikova@yandex.ru, https://orcid.org/0009-0005-8725-2167

Abstract. The article considers the study of the experimental direction in chamber instrumental music by the St. Petersburg composer Alexey Krasheninnikov (b. 1976). This line of creativity focuses on explorations related to the expansion of the timbre resources of instruments, mixing of different compositional techniques and use of instrumental theatre elements. The article examines a number of works created by Krasheninnikov over the past 10 years: *Flight from Oneself* (2018), *The Seasons* (2019), *The Path of the Star* (2019), *The Ring* (2022), *Angel at the Holy Sepulchre* (2022), *Bedroom Scene* (2023), *Memory* (2025) and *Self-Portrait* (2025). All of these works are introduced into the scholarly circulation of Russian musicology for the first time. The performed analysis characterises the methods of extended performance techniques and features of the stage implementation of instrumental opuses and identifies features of the composer's writing as individually refracting the principles of seriality, cryptophony and combining deterministic and aleatory methods of organising musical material. The role of extra-musical factors in the formation of the artistic concept and form of the compositions is revealed, and parallels are drawn with the compositions of Western European authors. The example of *Memory* establishes the humanising direction of Krasheninnikov's experimental searches. It is emphasised that the specificity of the composer's approach is determined by dialogue with other forms of art, attempts at their intersemiotic translation and by the expansion of the medial possibilities of musical art.

Keywords: music of the 21st century, Alexey Krasheninnikov, instrumental theatre, extended performance techniques, seriality, cryptophony, aleatoric music, experiment

For citation: Okuneva E.G., Semko D.S. Chamber and Instrumental Music by Alexey Krasheninnikov: Experimental Poetics. *Russian Musicology*. 2026, no. 2, pp. 51–73.
https://doi.org/10.56620/RM.2026.2.051-073

Translated by Thomas Alexander Beavitt, Laboratory for Scientific Translation (https://nauka-perevod.ru/eng).

© Ekaterina G. Okuneva, Darya S. Semko, 2026

Камерно-инструментальная музыка Алексея Крашенинникова: поэтика эксперимента

Екатерина Гурьевна Окунева[1], Дарья Сергеевна Семко[2]

[1, 2]Петрозаводская государственная консерватория имени А.К. Глазунова, г. Петрозаводск, Российская Федерация
[1]okunevaeg@yandex.ru✉, https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5253-8863
[2]dasalodocnikova@yandex.ru, https://orcid.org/0009-0005-8725-2167

Аннотация. Статья посвящена исследованию экспериментального направления в камерно-инструментальной музыке петербургского композитора Алексея Крашенинникова (р. 1976). В этой линии творчества сосредоточены поиски, связанные с расширением тембровых ресурсов инструментов, смешением разных композиторских техник, использованием элементов инструментального театра. В статье рассматривается ряд произведений, созданных А. Крашенинниковым за последние 10 лет: «Бегство впереди себя» (2018), «Времена года» (2019), «Путь звезды» (2019), «Звонок» (2022), «Ангел у гроба Господня» (2022), «Сцена в спальне» (2023), *Memory* (2025), «Автопортрет» (2025). Все они впервые вводятся в научный обиход отечественного музыкознания. В ходе анализа характеризуются приёмы расширенных исполнительских техник, особенности сценической реализации инструментальных опусов, выявляются черты композиторского письма, индивидуально преломляющего принципы серийности, криптофонии и сочетающего детерминированные и алеаторные способы организации музыкального материала, раскрывается роль внемузыкальных факторов в формировании художественного замысла и формы сочинений, проводятся параллели с композициями западноевропейских авторов. На примере *Memory* устанавливается гуманизирующая направленность экспериментальных поисков А. Крашенинникова. Подчёркивается, что специфику композиторского подхода определяет диалог с другими видами искусств, попытки их межсемиотического перевода, расширение медиальных возможностей музыкального искусства.

Ключевые слова: музыка XXI века, Алексей Крашенинников, инструментальный театр, расширенные исполнительские техники, серийность, криптофония, алеаторика, эксперимент

Introduction

Contemporary composing work characterised by a pluralism of ideas and stylistic heterogeneity actualises the problem of individual artistic strategies in the context of metamodernist thinking balancing between all sorts of opposites and striving for the fusion of all kinds of cultural practices. In this perspective, the figure of a composer with multi-creative potential is of particular research interest. The mutual influence of various activities often stimulates experiments in the field of musical language, genre and form and leads to original artistic results.

Such a multi-creative personality is the St. Petersburg composer Alexey Krasheninnikov (b. 1976). He graduated from the St. Petersburg Conservatory with a double major in violin and composition and has worked in the Mariinsky Theatre Symphony Orchestra for over 25 years. In addition, he was engaged in literary activity,

publishing collections of stories[1] about music and musicians; moreover, he is excellent at drawing[2] (for more details, see: [1]).

Although spanning a wide range of genres, the composer's creative work demonstrates two distinct lines of artistic exploration. Thus, Krasheninnikov's list of works includes, on the one hand, creations within the framework of classical genres of academic music (operas, concertos, symphonies, symphonic poems, etc.) and, on the other hand, pieces of experimental nature, demonstrating a synthesis of different types of art and contemporary compositional techniques. In the first case, remaining within the framework of the academic genre sphere, the composer strives to renew it; in the second, compositions within "de-objectified" genres arise. [2, p. 236] The present article considers the second of these lines.

Extended Performance Techniques and Instrumental Theatre

The experimental element is most clearly manifested in the sphere of Krasheninnikov's chamber instrumental music. From this perspective, *Flight from Oneself* (2018), *The Seasons* (2019), *The Path of the Star* (2019), *The Ring* (2022), *Angel at the Holy Sepulchre* (2022), *Bedroom Scene* (2023), *Memory* (2025) and *Self-Portrait* (2025) are most indicative. The composer's endeavours are primarily connected with the expansion of the instrument timbre resources, new performance techniques and intermedial interaction of arts. The composer also willingly turns to elements of instrumental theatre, electroacoustics and experiments with various methods of notation. All the works mentioned include string instruments, which is no coincidence. Krasheninnikov is a professional violinist with excellent command of the instrument and knowledge of its specific features.

The composer's search for new timbral sounds is largely determined by extra-musical pulses. Thus, in the one-part piece *The Seasons* for 14 strings,[3] the variety of sound production methods is connected with the desire to capture the sounds of nature. In the "Summer" section, glissandi, trills, ricochets, and playing behind the bridge and at the bridge are used to depict the chirping of birds; in the "Autumn" section, the musicians drum their fingers on the top of the instrument as if reproducing the sound of rain. Perhaps the most unusual way of playing is presented in the "Winter" section: striving for purity and transparency of sound, associated with the icy surface, the composer makes some of the performers move their bows across crystal glasses with different pitches (d^2, e^2, g^2, a^2 and c^2).[4]

Specific performance techniques, however, are also encountered in works of strictly academic genres. For example, the imitation of birdsong is present in the *Piano Concerto* (2025)

---

[1] In 2023, the Amplituda Publishing house produced a book of his stories *Waltz for Saint-Germain*; in 2025, the collection Half-Erased Character was published.

[2] The composer posts his drawings and paintings on his personal page on the social network "VKontakte."

[3] The composition was first performed on April 24, 2019 on the stage of the St. Petersburg Documentary Film Studio ("Lendok") under the baton of Mikhail Tatarnikov.

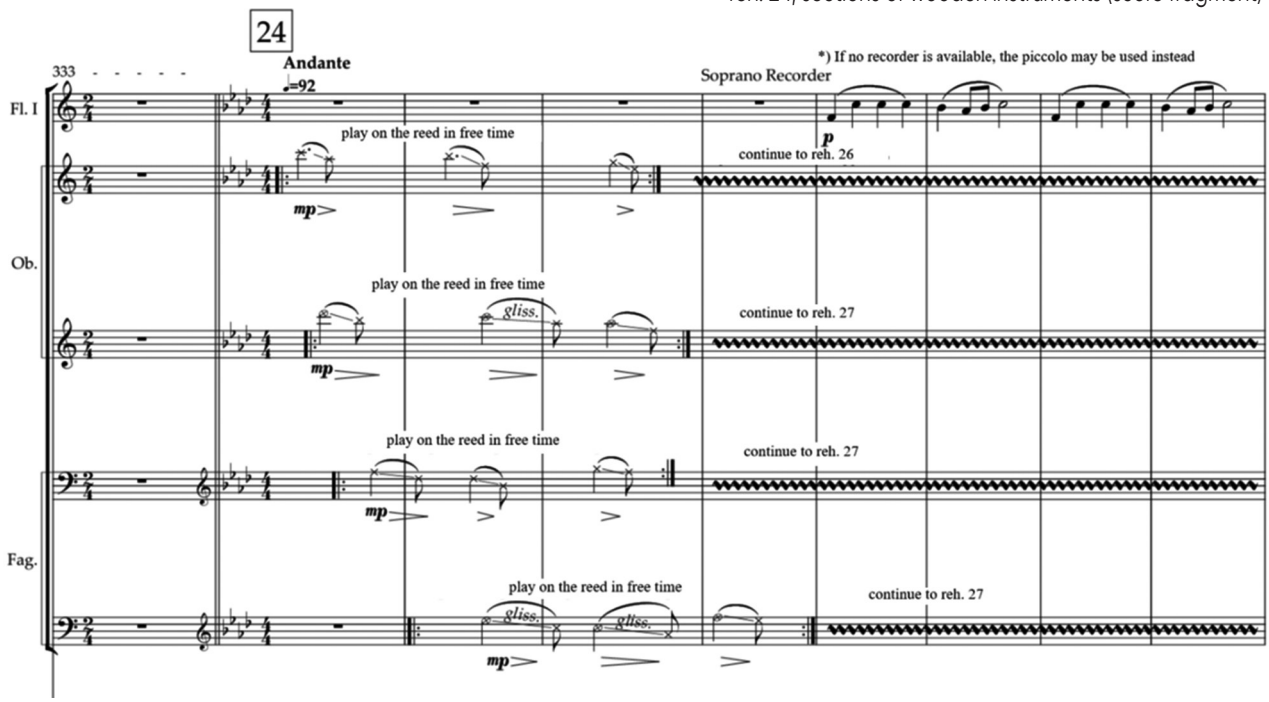
[4] Krasheninnikov also resorts to a similar technique in the symphonic picture *The Constellation of Orion* (2025), which premiered on May 14, 2026 in St. Petersburg as part of the Musical Spring Festival. At the end of the composition, the sound of string harmonics is added with glasses, as well as the vibraphone and crotales, with the bow of the double bass moving across their keys and body. All together this creates a cool, truly unearthly ("cosmic") sound.

written for the 2nd Rachmaninoff International Competition for Pianists, Composers and Conductors.[5] Its lyrical culmination (reh. 24–30) is connected with the theme of the Russian folk song "A Path in the Damp Forest," performed on the recorder (for more details on the concerto concept, see: [3]). The accompaniment is given to the violins, sustaining a quartal-quintal sonority in harmonics, and to the woodwinds (oboes and bassoons), playing a reed glissando, thereby producing an almost naturalistic effect of a clamour of birds (Example No. 1).

In the piece *Angel at the Holy Sepulchre* (2022) specially created for the *Wiener Collage* ensemble, Krasheninnikov turns to microchromatics and makes the musicians play and sing at the same time. The composition is intended for bass clarinet, violin, viola, cello, accordion and piano. The programmatic concept was based on one of the key episodes of the Gospel story about the resurrection of Christ, namely, the appearance of an Angel to the myrrh-bearing women who came to the tomb of Jesus for anointing. The microchromatic melodic writing of the strings — embodying, according to the composer's conception, the three Myrrh-bearing women — draws on the Russian lament (prichet), while the bass clarinet theme displays features of Middle Eastern music (the theme is based on variant diatonicism, combining elements of the Phrygian, Ionian, Lydian, and hemiolic modes), and the accordion and piano create an organ-like sonority. The singing of the musicians is used primarily in the final part of the piece, which corresponds to the Angel's good news of Jesus' resurrection. The timbre of the human voice, with its warmth and spirituality, literally brings

Example No. 1

Alexey Krasheninnikov. Piano Concerto, reh. 24, sections of wooden instruments (score fragment)



[5] The concerto was performed on June 24, 2025 on the stage of the Moscow Philharmonia (S.V. Rachmaninoff Hall) by the Novaya Rossiya Orchestra under the baton of Alexey Rubin with Sergei Oskolkov Jr. as a soloist. The composer was awarded second prize at the competition.

to life the instrumental ensemble. Its addition is perceived as an acoustic metaphor of light, joy and triumph of life over death.

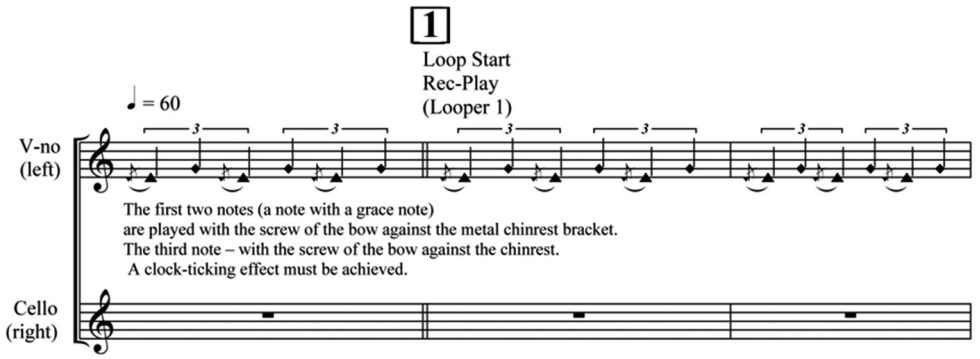
Krasheninnikov similarly turns to extended performance techniques in the *Bedroom Scene* piece.[6] Here, in addition to using microchromatics and glissando, the musicians produce sounds by using the bow screw on the iron chin rest, as well as play on the tailpiece. This entire arsenal of techniques is designed with a specific purpose in mind: to reproduce the squeak of a mosquito against the backdrop of the measured ticking of a clock. The piece is intended for violin, cello, objects and a loop machine for performing in the dark. The musical "sketch" (as the composer himself designates the genre of his work) represents a humorous scene of a banal, but familiar to everyone everyday situation — the nighttime torment of a fighting between a person falling asleep and a mosquito. In this regard, the performance also presupposes certain theatrical actions: musicians clapping on various parts of the body, falling objects (chairs, stools, aluminium mugs), noisy breathing, cries of "Beast! Bastard!" etc.

The violin and cello must be equipped with microphones; the sound from them is fed into the stereo channels of the loop machine: left and right for the violin and cello, respectively. The performers are synchronised with a metronomic click transmitted into the earphone (one beat equals one second). The violinist is responsible for operating the device (BOSS RC-30 or equivalent). Its rhythmic cycle (loop) is strictly fixed and lasts 16 seconds.

The musical fabric of the composition is built on the counterpoint of several layers. The foundation is a permanent rhythmic ostinato (Example No. 2), performed by the violin and then reproduced by a loop-machine loop, which conveys the monotonous ticking of a clock. On top of this seam, a layer that imitates the squeak of a mosquito is developed: quarter-tone intervals with trills appear on the cello and then on the violin (Example No. 3).

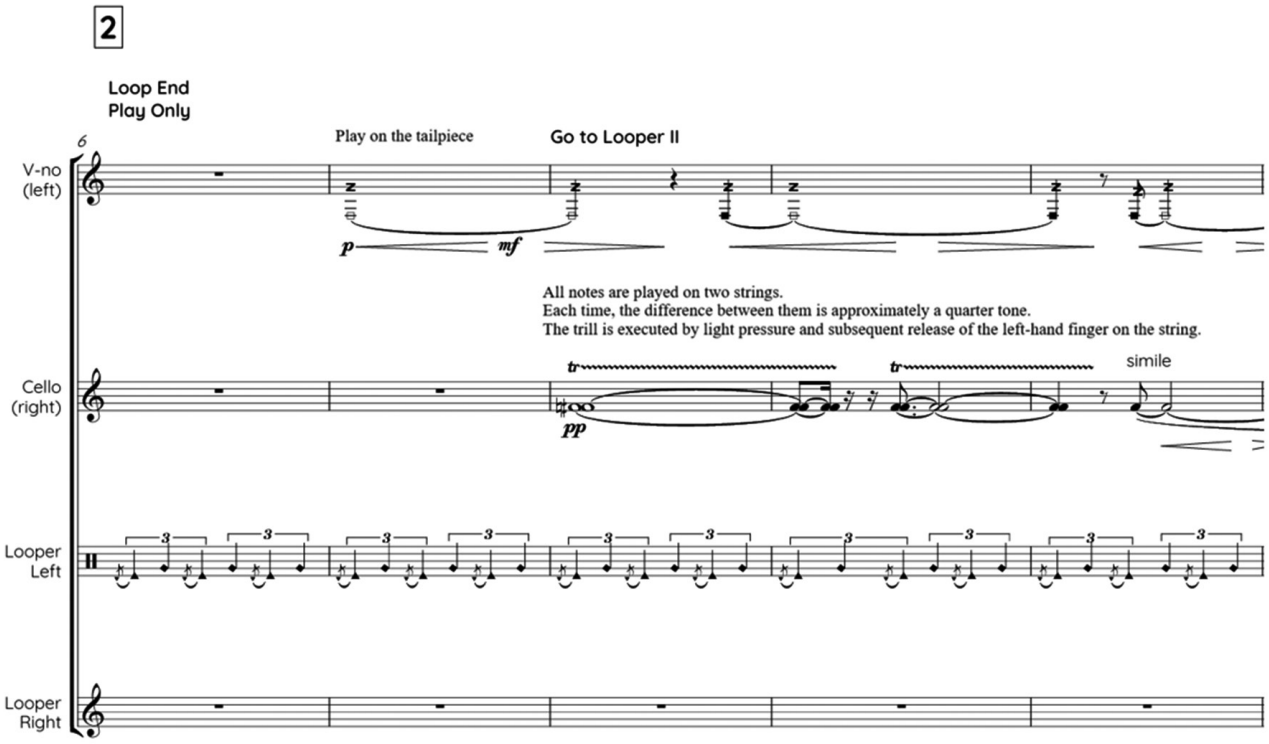
With the help of a loop machine that records and gradually reproduces the instrumental parts, a double 13-voice canon gradually emerges to enhance the sense of obsession and phantasmagoria of what is happening. In total, Krasheninnikov achieves the effect of a semantic rift: the intellectual, ordering principle of writing turns into its opposite — an irrational picture reflecting nervous excitement.

Example No. 2 Alexey Krasheninnikov. *Bedroom Scene*



[6] The premiere of the work took place on October 29, 2023 at the Krash Club. The violin part was performed by the composer himself, and Maxim Gonchar pieced the cello part. The composition was also performed at the 57th Leningrad Musical Spring Festival on May 11, 2024.

Example No. 3 Alexey Krasheninnikov. *Bedroom Scene*, reh. 2



The piece is written with a great sense of humour and evokes genuine laughter from the audience. The author's performance also contains elements of *mise en abyme*: for example, at the Krash Club premiere, the cellist kills a mosquito by swatting it with the score of *Bedroom Scene*.

The Ring[7] piece, the genre of which is designated by the composer as a "thriller quintet," also provides for theatricalisation of the performance process. Mobile phone calls during music performances have become an integral part of concert life. Despite persistent requests to the audience to turn off the sound signals of their devices, there will always be those who ignore this. Krasheninnikov's composition is designed as a humorous *memento mori* for such "guilty" listeners; it refers to the iconic Japanese horror film *The Ring* (*Ringu*, 1998). Let us remember that the film is about a cursed videotape, after viewing which a telephone call is heard warning of imminent death. The punishment is carried out by a long-haired ghost crawling out of the television screen.

Krasheninnikov's piece is designed for violin, cello, piccolo flute, clarinet, piano and a phonogram containing the sounds of a metronome, a telephone ringtone, a child's singing and laughing voice. In addition, the piece includes a stand-in character in the audience. During the performance, the mobile phone first rings for the flutist, who hides behind the raised

[7] The composition was performed at the New Music Offline festival on May 19, 2022. The performance featured musicians from the St. Petersburg New Music Ensemble: Tatyana Rezetdinova (flute), Alexander Oskolkov (clarinet), Nikolai Mazhara (piano), Mikhail Krutik (violin), Elena Grigorieva (cello). The author himself, Alexey Krasheninnikov, acted as a proxy spectator.

lid of the piano with a frightened look. After some time, a bell rings in the hall near a fake spectator, at whom the musicians turn and "drill him with their eyes" (a remark in the score). Next, the lid of the piano falls with a crash and a flutist wearing a wig put on backwards appears to emerge from the instrument, so that the hair covers his entire face. The piece ends with a frightened cry from the stand-in and children's laughter from the soundtrack.

The composition is based on the juxtaposition and combination of different material types — microchromatic (quarter-tone glissando intervals) and tonal-associative (figurations based on triads), as well as different themes — purely diatonic and simple in the children's voice on the soundtrack and atonal-expressive in the piccolo flute. The structure of the piece unfolds in accordance with the logic of the scenario described above; however, it displays features of a concentric (arch) form of the type A–B–C–B_1–A_1: at the outer extremes lies the children's song (Example No. 4), followed by the piccolo theme (Example No. 5); section C is the emotional reaction to the ring.

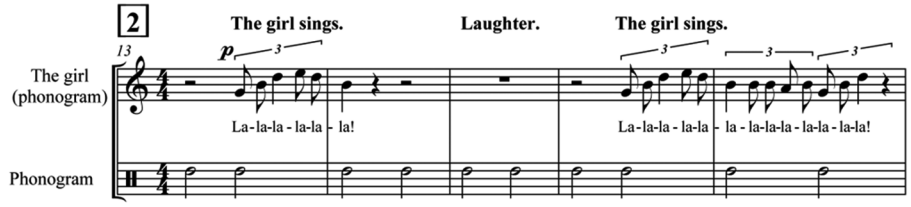
Memory — a Humanising Experiment

However, Krasheninnikov has not so many humorous pieces in the line we have designated as experimental (they also include, for example, *Self-Portrait*, which will be discussed below). Most of the works are based on a deeply conceptual idea. Such is, first of all, the piece *Memory* for a discarded violin and electronics.[8] The reason for writing it was again an extra-musical pulse. For many years, the composer kept an old violin that his father had once found in a garbage bin and brought home. It had no strings, no bridge and no tailpiece. Looking at the instrument, Krasheninnikov often wondered what this violin contained, whether any traces of musical memory were left in it. These thoughts led him to write the piece.

Memory relies on the genre of instrumental theatre, the synthetic nature of which and, above all, the visual series "expands the semantic
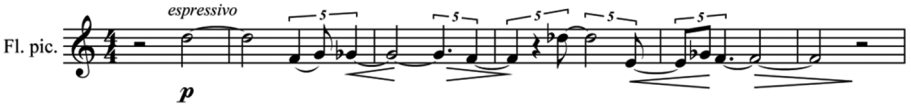
Example No. 4

Alexey Krasheninnikov. *The Ring*, reh. 2, mm. 13–17 (score fragment)



Example No. 5

Alexey Krasheninnikov. *The Ring*, reh. 5, mm. 28–33, piccolo flute theme (score fragment)



[8] The premiere of the work performed by the author took place on May 14, 2025.

sphere" [4, p. 3] and helps the listener to decipher the meanings laid down by the composer. The composition begins and ends with a soundtrack of Gluck's famous *Melody* from the opera *Orfeo ed Euridice*, presented in an arrangement for violin and organ and combined with the sound of rain. On a table placed on the stage there is to be an old violin, with only a single peg, around which a broken string is wound. Beside the instrument (right there on the table) lie a tailpiece, a bow with its screw undone and its hair slack, and a pencil. The performer first brings the bow into working order and draws it across the violin's top plate (using both the hair and the stick), as if imitating playing it. In this gesture lies an attempt to "resurrect" the body of the instrument and make it respond to the performer's actions. At this moment, the sounding of Gluck's *Melody* ceases, and the sound of rain transforms into applause. The rustling sounds of the bow are recorded and then reproduced by a loop machine, while the musician, in the meantime, attaches the tailpiece to the violin and stretches the string over it. Then, by applying pressure to the bow, he draws rasping sounds from the instrument. In the subsequent stages of the piece, the performer taps the body with the pencil, slips it under the string — thus creating a kind of substitute bridge — which helps the violin to find its "voice." On a single string (!), the musician plays various parts of the accompaniment of Gluck's *Melody* and, finally, the melody itself. Each of these stages constitutes the content of a separate loop on the loop machine. The layering of the loops one upon another produces a staggering effect — from scraping, cracking, tapping, and other noises, music is born. Its semblance is a faint glimmer of the unearthly beauty and serenity of Gluck's original, for the melody, played on a violin without a chinrest, with a single string, with a pencil in place of the bridge, and without the possibility of prior tuning, naturally sounds out of tune. And yet it is precisely this distortedness that produces a deeply moving effect. Resurrected to life by a "blessed shade,"[9] this sound breaks through the moans and creaks, proclaiming the strength of the spirit that prevails over matter.

The concept of Krasheninnikov's piece partly corresponds with the concept of the piece *In spite of, and Maybe Even Therefore* (2007) by the Danish composer Simon Steen-Andersen (b. 1976), a contemporary of the St. Petersburg author. In this work, a trio of musicians (flute, clarinet and French horn) act in the opposite way: they take their instruments apart, trying to reproduce fragments of Beethoven's *Bagatelle*, Op. 126 on their individual parts (mouthpieces, valve levers, knees, valve pipes, etc.). Analysing the piece, Tatiana Tsaregradskaya writes: "After a certain amount of time, the sounds disappear, paving way to that 'choreography of motions' that is indispensable for their performance. Out of these 'musical ruins,' the music attempts to build new relationships and new paths of construction of continuity, but the sought for coalescence is slowly destroyed by the interruptions, which continuously become lengthier in time." [5, p. 73] According to the apt observation of the researcher, the "thinned out matter" of the instrument becomes a symbol of the victory of spirit over matter, which truly brings together the pieces of both composers. However, a similar idea is expressed by purely opposite methods: in Steen-Andersen — through destruction, *dismantling* of instruments and *deconstruction* of Beethoven's text; in Krasheninnikov —

[9] Let us remember that Gluck's *Melody* is included in the *Dance of the Blessed Spirits* added to the second, French, edition of the opera in 1774.

through *restoration*, instrument assembly and a kind of *reconstruction* of Gluck's melody.[10] In these oppositely directed vectors, a fundamental difference in the author's positions can be seen: when ruining the instrument, Steen-Andersen, by his own admission, focuses on the "beauty of the destroyed" [Ibid., p. 74] in order to *radically transform* the tradition, while for Krasheninnikov, cultural memory has an enduring value and is capable of *spiritualising* and *humanising* any, even the most radical, experiment.
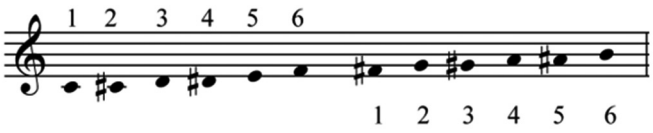
The Path of the Star — a Mono-Element Composition

Analogies with the works of Western European avant-garde artists can also be found in the composer's other works. This is *The Path of the Star* piece for seven string instruments. It was created in 2019 on the initiative of Anna Adzhemova, curator of the "Games with the Classics" Festival.[11] For two years, Krasheninnikov actively participated in this event both as a composer and a performer. Adzhemova suggested he accompany the writing process with detailed comments on his personal blog. Indeed, the creation of the piece was documented in five videos that Krasheninnikov posted on his official page on the social network VKontakte.

The work began with the formation of the main intonational core of the composition, designated as the leitmotif of the star. It was obtained using aleatory procedures, by throwing a dice. This creative act acquired conceptual significance in the context of the festival for which the piece was intended, since Krasheninnikov literally played with its title ("Games with the Classics"), resorting to the playful method in the process of creating the work.

As working material, the composer used a twelve-tone chromatic scale divided into two segments (Scheme 1). The die was thrown 8 times. The number of throws was determined by one of the key ideas of the piece about the continuity and infinity of the star flight.

Scheme 1. Alexey Krasheninnikov. *The Path of the Star*. Pre-compositional material

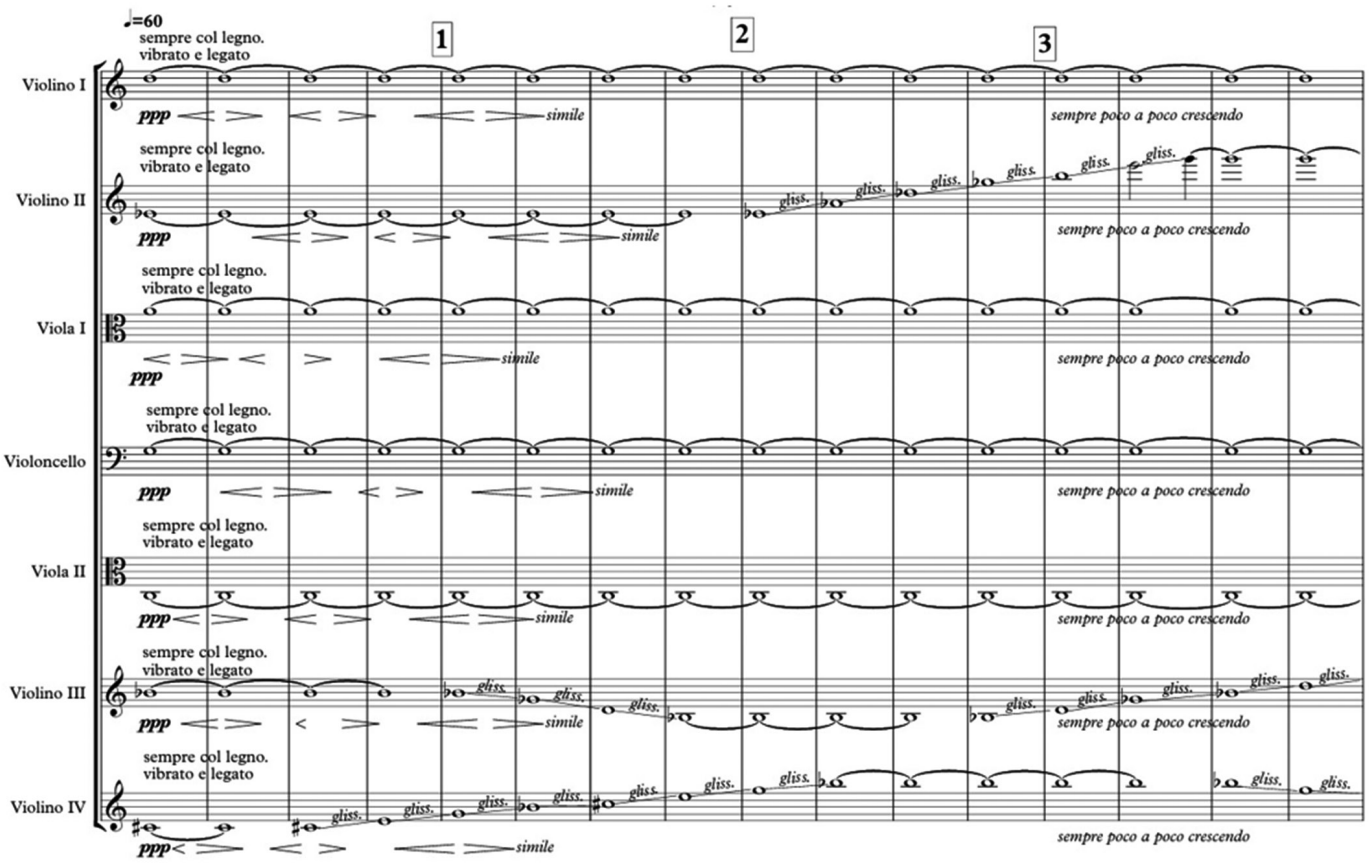


As a result of the game procedure, the following numerical series emerged: 1-2-2-4-4-5-3-5. From the segments of the chromatic scale presented in Scheme 1, Krasheninnikov alternately selected sounds corresponding to the dropped numbers. Due to the fact that one of the notes (*A♯*) was repeated (the number 5 from the numerical series), the resulting intonation cell included only seven unique sounds: *C–G–C♯–A–D♯–A♯–D*. This sequence was verticalised into the chord that opens the piece (Example No. 6).

[10] In this case, reconstruction can be understood as an attempt to return the original source to its value and aesthetic meaning. No prize for guessing that the freshness of the perception of Gluck's *Melody* under the influence of its wide dissemination in popular and academic culture is gradually being levelled out and "erased." Although the music reconstructed by Krasheninnikov from individual parts turns out to be only a pale imitation of the original, it makes the listener feel its beauty anew, as if the Gluck's melody is heard for the first time. It is significant that the soundtrack makes its strongest impression not at the beginning, but at the end of the piece, in comparison with the distorted version of the discarded violin.

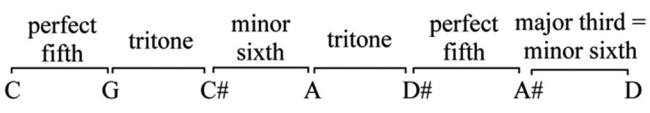
[11] The festival was held in St. Petersburg from 2014 to 2019.

Example No. 6 Alexey Krasheninnikov. *The Path of the Star*, mm. 1–16



The composer paid special attention to the intervals of the resulting series; their number was limited to a perfect fifth, tritone and minor sixth (Scheme 2). This sound structure can be more accurately terminologically defined as a leitmotif complex.

Scheme 2. Alexey Krasheninnikov. *The Path of the Star*. Intervals of the Sound Leitmotif Complex



The composition belongs to the mono-element category (for more details see: [6]), since it is entirely built on a leitmotif complex, which is transformed through a change in articulation and texture.

The artistic concept is based on a large-scale astrophysical process — the final evolution stage of a star completing its life cycle. The musical representation of this plot is distinguished by its strict and well-thought-out dramaturgy.

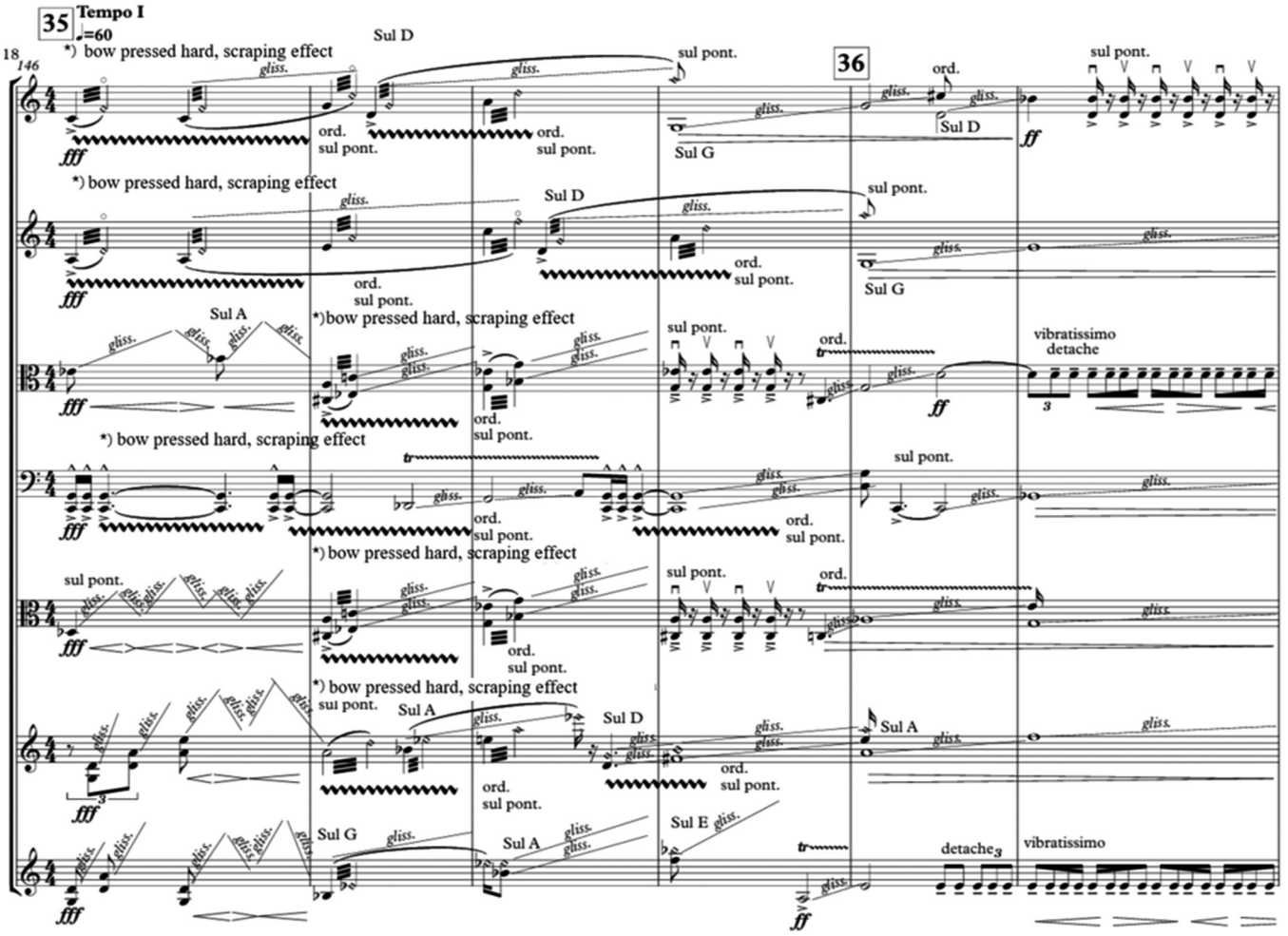
Krasheninnikov paid special attention to the problem of musical form. At the conceptual level, in terms of vector motion, he considered two options. The first assumed a static form intended to convey the illusion of uniform movement of the star. The second option, which was ultimately selected, relied on a dynamic process reflecting the transformation of a celestial body. The composer found this approach to be more successful, as it ensured the construction of a tense dramaturgy with a clear development and climax.

The main means of "visualising" the cosmogonic plot becomes the transformation

of articulation and textural forms, representing a finely constructed transition from statics to dynamics. Thus, the piece begins with a motionless sonorous band (see Example No. 6) symbolising the statics of boundless cosmic space. From its thickness, the first signs of life — slow glissandos and flickering dots *pizzicato* — gradually begin to emerge. The choice of glissando used asynchronously in different directions (ascending and descending) by all performers is determined by purely artistic goals: in this way, the effect of extreme smoothness and sonic continuity, permanent pulsating movement and shimmering is achieved.

The transition from stasis to kinesis is accomplished through a series of interpenetrating textural transformations. The glissando speeds up; tremolos and trills are added to the musical texture to generate a turbulent, swirling texture that conveys the buildup of internal energy and temperature (special sound production techniques also play a significant role in this process, for example, playing with the shaft and the hair of the bow simultaneously and pressing hard on the bow, resulting in crackling and creaking). By reh. 35, all seven string parts are concentrated in a zone of dense pulsation, reaching its apogee at the moment of "explosion." In this case, textural transformations are both audible and "visible." It is significant that the score also visually takes on "chaotic" features (Example No. 7).

Example No. 7 Alexey Krasheninnikov. *The Path of the Star*, mm. 146–151
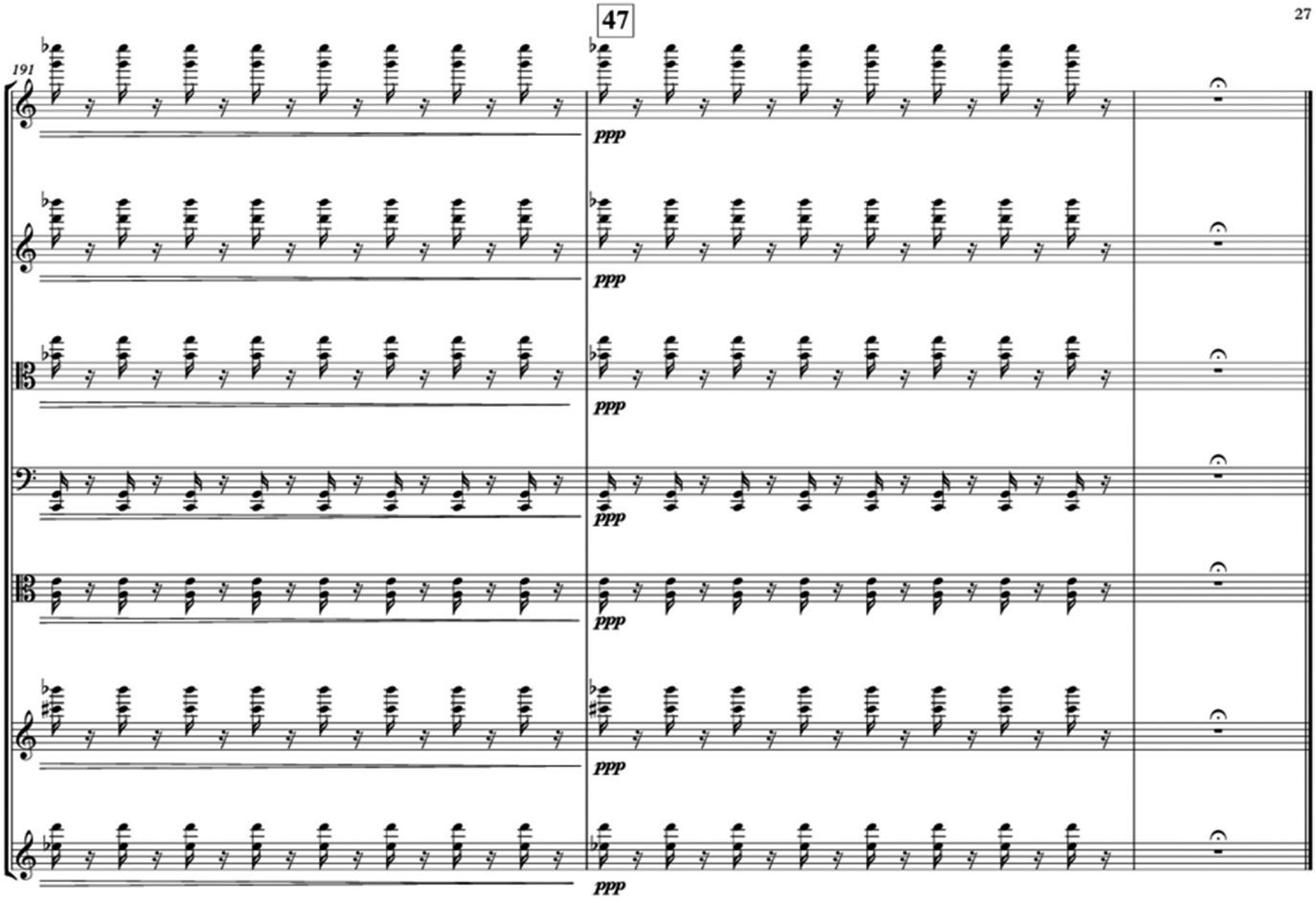


In the final section, the instrument voices diverge, dissolving into the sacred silence of cosmic space. In the sound void, only a rhythmic pulsation remains to be based on the harmonic leitmotif of the composition — an acoustic image of the residual radiation of a star (Example No. 8).

In this case, the composer offers an acoustic interpretation of the pulsar[12]: the powerful compression of the star leads to the emission of radio waves, which, when translated into the range of audible sound, are perceived as a monotonous pulsating signal. This final gesture becomes a sonic metaphor for non-existence, essentially an acoustic image of the death of a star.

In order to create a specific "cosmic" sound atmosphere, Krasheninnikov uses microphone amplification of the strings. The use of equipment makes it possible to detail

Example No. 8 Alexey Krasheninnikov. *The Path of the Star*, mm. 191–193



[12] A pulsar is an astronomical object, a rapidly rotating neutron star that emits strictly periodic pulses of electromagnetic radiation (radio waves, X-rays or gamma rays). Pulsars are formed by the gravitational collapse of the core of a massive star after its supernova explosion. A characteristic feature of pulsars is the high stability of the radiation period due to the conservation of angular momentum and a powerful magnetic field, which can be trillions of times stronger than the Earth's magnetic field. The radiation of pulsars is registered on Earth in the form of short pulses that follow with precise periodicity.

quiet and extraordinary playing techniques (for example, noise effects), which are difficult to discern in acoustic performance conditions. As the author himself notes in the explanatory note to the score, this technology is necessary for a more vivid depiction of the explosion, created with the help of "noises generated in the immediate vicinity of the microphone." The proposed by the composer non-traditional symmetrical seating arrangement for the performers also becomes an important component in the concept implementation: Violin I – Violin II – Viola I – Cello – Viola II – Violin III – Violin IV.

The idea of constructing a composition based on a harmonic leitmotif complex transformed in texture and timbre is reminiscent of the concept of Stockhausen's vocal sextet *Stimmung*, which is known to be played with one consonance — the ninth chord from the sound *B* ♭.[13] The fundamental difference between the pieces lies primarily in the concept of form. Krasheninnikov relies on the "deductive dynamic form," [7, p. 280, 293] constructing a clear linear dramaturgy that depicts the stages of the birth of a star and its evolution, while Stockhausen implements the idea of a moment-form that has no vectoral movement. The status of the musical text is also different: Krasheninnikov uses traditional notation, which assumes a relatively precise reproduction of the composer's intent; Stockhausen develops a model — a system of rules and materials — that grants performers a greater degree of freedom.

Experiments in Intermedial Transposition

Krasheninnikov's creative process is often influenced by other forms of art. A good example is the piece for violin and loop machine *Flight from Oneself* (2018).

The composition was created for the festival "Games with the Classics". It was announced in the program before its appearance, which predetermined an extremely tight deadline of one month for the work.

The inspiration for writing the piece came from the eponymous drawing by Paul Klee (1929), given to the composer for his birthday (Il. 1).[14]



Il. 1. Paul Klee. *Flight from Oneself*, 1931

The picture shows a running man overtaking himself. The split figure is created using the monoline technique, a continuous pencil stroke, without lifting the hand from the sheet of paper. The image is filled with deep meaning; it makes thinking about the transience of time, existential duality and the loss of an authentic experience of the present in the whirlwind of everyday life.

[13] Another source is the Scriabin's poem *Prometheus*. It is known to be based on the "Prometheus six-sound system." However, Scriabin's technique of central consonance presupposes the transposition of the leading harmonic complex, its variations and transformations. Stockhausen and Krasheninnikov have no sounds of any other pitch than those making up the original complex.

[14] Painting inspired both Krasheninnikov's compositional and literary work. Thus, his story *Half-Erased Character* was written under the impression of *Erased de Kooning Drawing* by the American conceptual artist Robert Rauschenberg.

It was in this artistic and philosophical way that Krasheninnikov interpreted the drawing. The composer noted: "This drawing is a metaphor for the contemporary pace of life, when people try to do everything and succeed, forgetting about the main thing — eternity, which is becoming more and more illusory and inaccessible. And, having stopped once, we understand that nothing can be returned back, we rushed somewhere in pursuit of false values, and now we see with bitterness how much we have lost through our own fault..."[15]

The given quotation in a certain sense serves as a program for the work. The piece is differentiated into two contrasting sections related with the principle of the golden ratio. The first (mm. 1–220) occupies two-thirds of the work and embodies the image of a chaotic pursuit, vanity and inner anxiety; the second (mm. 221–340) represents the realm of lyrical reflection, nostalgia for the "bright and eternal."

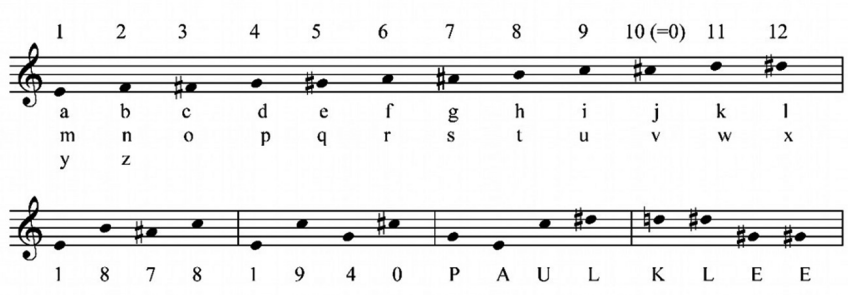
The piece begins with an image of a man running. To achieve this, the composer resorts to special techniques: the violinist must strike the soundboard with his fingers in an ostinato rhythm and blow into the f-holes of the instrument at regular intervals to imitate the breathing of a running person. The piece ends with a chorale, which includes both the sounds of the violin and the timbre of the human voice (the performer is required to sing part of the chorale notes).

The technical basis of the composition is a loop machine with two independent pedals forming and superposing sound loops. The total duration of the piece (12 minutes) is realised through twelve one-minute loop cycles: eight in the first section and four in the second.

The choice of instrumentation turns out to be "symbolic," as it reflects the concept of the piece: the timbre and texture of the violin, as well as the human voice, are contrasted with the mechanical, cyclical nature of the loop machine sound. In addition, the loop machine can create a multi-layered composition by layering audio tracks. The "reproduction" of the same material acts as a kind of analogue of the double image in Klee's drawing.

Elements of seriality and cryptophony find individual refraction in the compositional technique. As in *The Path of the Star*, Krasheninnikov turns to pre-compositional procedures for obtaining the main thematic material. Once again, he starts from the chromatic scale this time built from the sound *E*. Initially, on this basis, the composer recodes the dates of Klee's life — 1879–1940. From the chromatic scale numbered from 1 to 12, he selects individual sounds according to the digital sequence 18791940. The resulting sound sequence is: $E-B-A\sharp-C-E-C-G-C\sharp$ (Scheme 3).

Scheme 3. Alexey Krasheninnikov. *Flight from Oneself*. Pre-compositional material of the piece: recoding of the dates of life and name of the artist



[15] New music: composers on Radio Kultura. Issue 29. Alexey Krasheninnikov. URL: https://www.unioncomposers.ru/projects/474/?ysclid=mkshszd5n9717399178 (accessed: 15.04.2026).
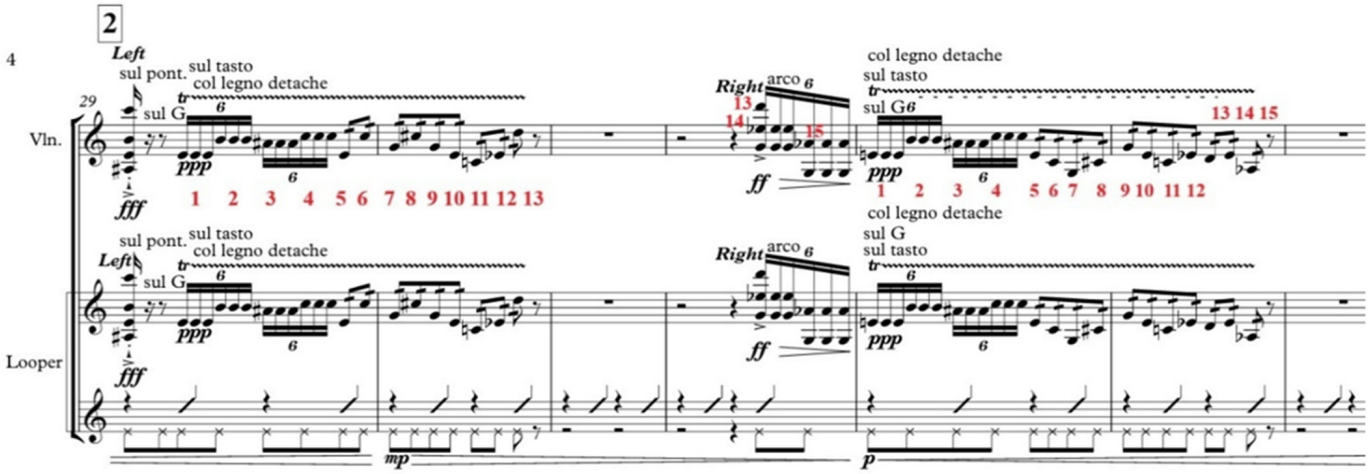
The artist's name is then recoded. The chromatic scale from *E* is correlated with the letters of the Latin alphabet (Scheme 3), after which the sounds forming the name Paul Klee are selected from it. This is how a new eight-sound model is created: *G–E–C–D♯–D–D♯–G♯–G♯*.

These complexes are represented in the second loop[16] to serve as the foundation of the pitch system for the entire work. Thus, the high-pitched material of the piece is determined by the dates of life and the name of the artist on the basis of tone-numerical and musical-letter encryption, which undoubtedly brings Krasheninnikov's approach closer to cryptophonic technique. However, being subject to other laws, coded elements only partly determine the structure of the musical fabric, which is typical for cryptophonic compositions.

The organisation of pitch material is determined by the principles of individually interpreted serial technique. Thus, two eight-tone complexes combined together essentially function in the piece as a 15-tone series (the final sound *G♯* is not always repeated when realised in the musical fabric). Its fundamental difference from orthodox serial constructions lies in the repetition of tones within a row, the absence of full chromaticity and the presence of tonal associativity (in *E*). However, the principles of operation are the same — development of serial rows one after another, one above the other and division of the row into segments and recombining them. This is easy to verify by looking at the beginning of the second loop (Example No. 9).
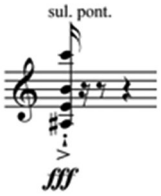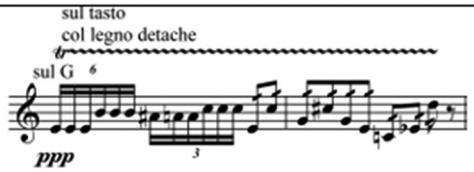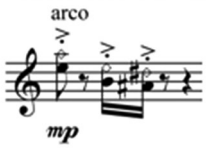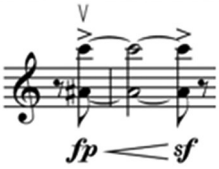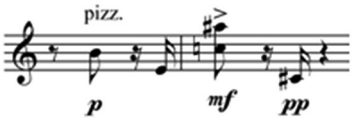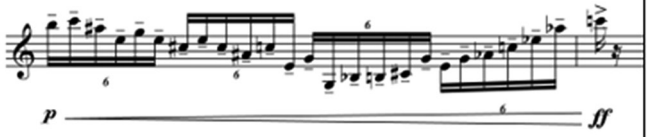
The structural basis of the composition is six motives or, more precisely, sound objects differing in performance technique (Table 1).

Example No. 9 Alexey Krasheninnikov. *Flight from Oneself*, mm. 29–34



[16] The material of the first loop consists of blows on the deck and breathing in the f-holes.
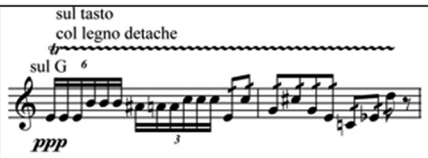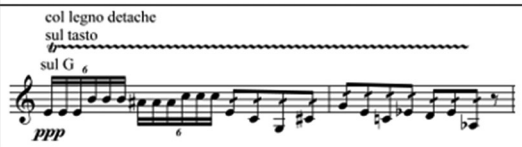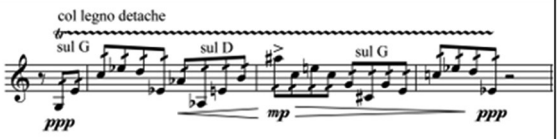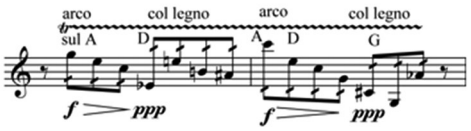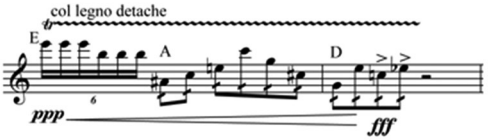
Table 1. Alexey Krasheninnikov. *Flight from Oneself*. Sound objects of the piece

№	Objects	Designation
1		Chord
2		Détaché with trill
3		String harmonics
4		Long double notes
5		Pizzicato
6		Sextuples

These sound objects are developed first within the second loop and then throughout the entire piece. Let us demonstrate the features of the composer's work using the example of the "détaché with trill" object. In the second loop, it appears 5 times (Table 2).

In the first case, the "tone row" is partly presented; the motif unfolds *ppp* in the range of the ninth, and its graphic design begins with an ascending movement. With the new appearance of the object, the full tone row is completed; some sounds have changed their register location, expanding the range towards the small octave. In the third development, the motive is presented in its most expanded form; it begins and ends with the second half of the "series" (that is, with the sound complex associated with the name of Klee); its range

Table 2. Alexey Krasheninnikov. *Flight from Oneself*. Development of the "détaché with trill" sound object in the second loop

1st development (mm. 29–30)	
2nd development (mm. 33–34)	
3rd development (mm. 37–40)	
4th development (mm. 44–45)	
5th development (mm. 51–52)	
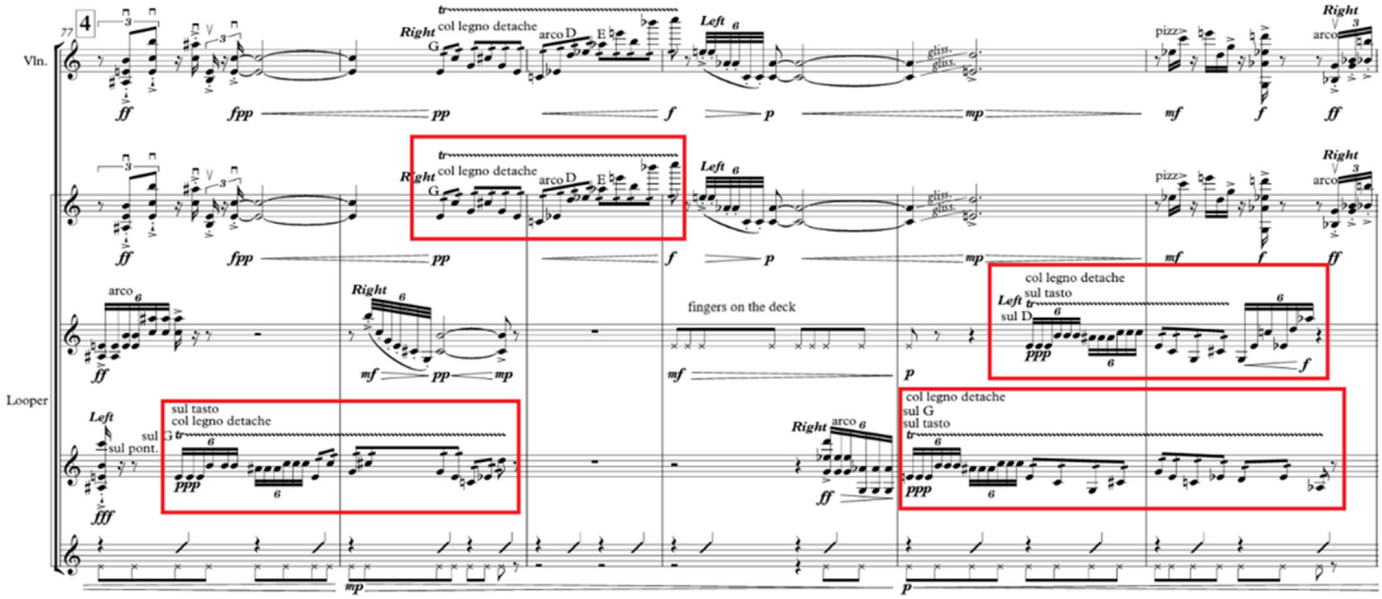
is further expanded, the dynamic nuances are changed (a small *crescendo* and *decrescendo* appear within the first half of the "series"). From a pitch point of view, the fourth development is a shortened version of the third, but the graphic line is inverted (the object begins with a downward movement), the dynamics is significantly transformed (moves from *f* to *ppp*), the sound volume is expanded from *g* to c^3, the way of playing changes (alternation of *arco* and *col legno*). The final development approaches the two initial ones; however, graphic contours are different, the motif is shifted to the upper register, the dynamics unfold from *ppp* to *fff*.

As new loops are formed, the given sound object continuing to vary is temporary distributed in such a way that its imitation appears when the loops are superimposed. The composer considered this technique as analogous to the splitting of the figure in Klee's drawing. Example No. 10 presents the "détaché with trill" motif in a cross-section of four loops. It should be noted that the same "splitting" effects are characteristic of other sound objects.
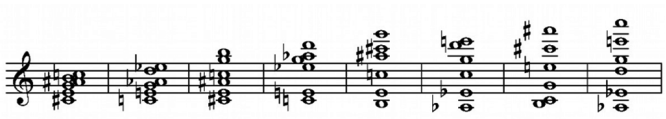
The distribution of "long double notes" (object No. 4 from Table 1) across the loops was subject to a special harmonic design. At the pre-compositional level, Krasheninnikov created eight alternating consonances from two eight-sound complexes with different register arrangements of sounds, the range of which expanded from one to five octaves (Scheme 4).

Example No. 10

Alexey Krasheninnikov. *Flight from Oneself.*
"Détaché with trill" sound object in the cut of four loops[17]
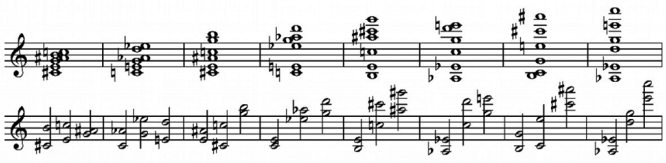


Scheme 4. Alexey Krasheninnikov. *Flight from Oneself.* Harmonic plan of "long double notes"



These chords were then broken down into "double notes" taking into account the octave position of the tones in the consonances of the harmonic plan (Scheme 5).

Scheme 5. Alexey Krasheninnikov. *Flight from Oneself.* Isolation of "double notes" from the consonances of the harmonic plan



The appearance of "long double notes" in the loops was carried out in such a way that these sound objects were summed up in the resulting sound (when all the loops are superimposed) into metachords of the harmonic plan (Example No. 11).
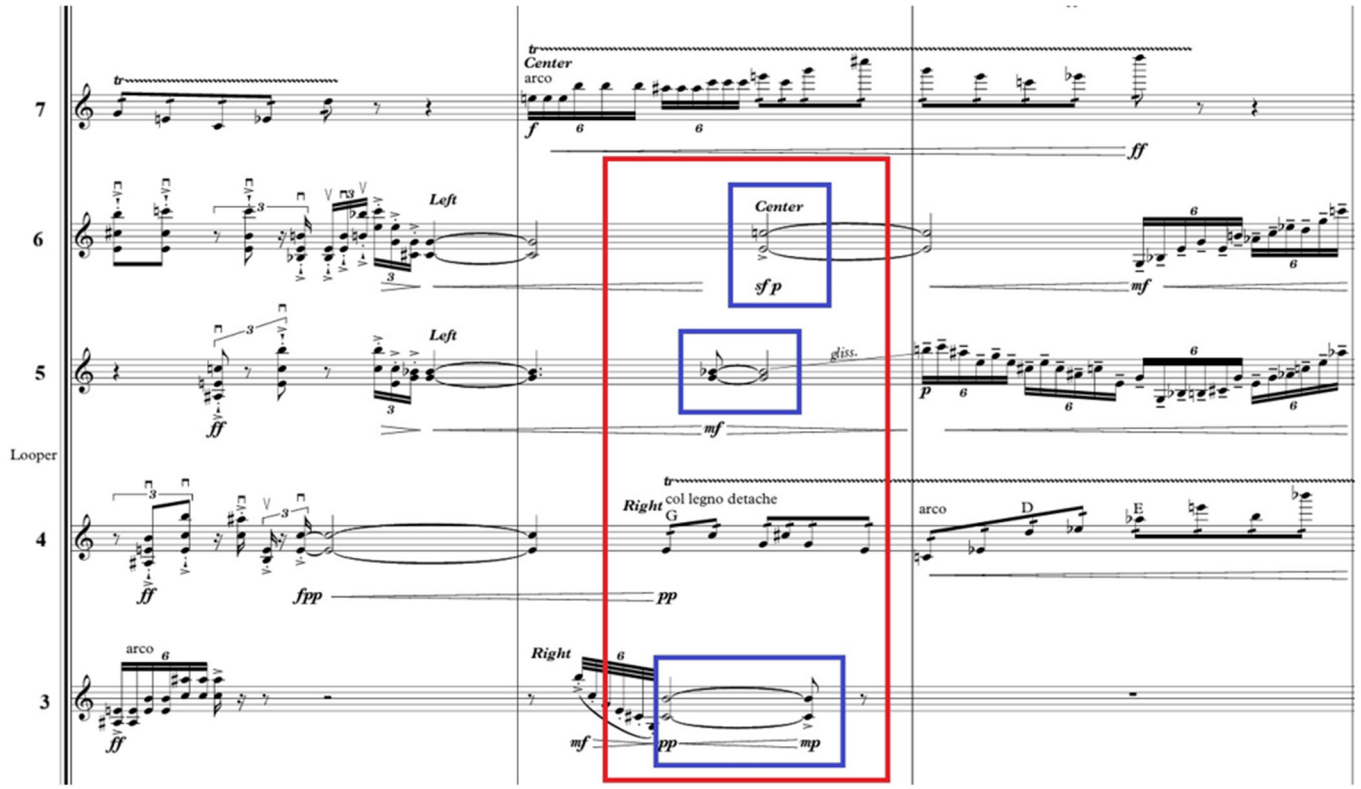
Five sound objects (chord, détaché with trill, string harmonics, long double notes, pizzicato) are represented in the second loop, while the sixth (sextuple) appears for the first time only in the fifth loop. From the moment of its appearance, it acquires an increasingly dominant meaning in the musical text, practically displacing all other sound elements. This decision was driven by the composer's desire to give the piece a natural acceleration linked to the concept of the race of life.

The second, choral section of the work is essentially based on the same pre-compositional material as the first one. Initially, Krasheninnikov

[17] In Example No. 10, the loops go from bottom to top, that is, the bottom row represents the first loop.

Example No. 11

Alexey Krasheninnikov. *Flight from Oneself*.
reh. 9, mm. 197–199, loops 3–7 (score fragment)[18]



intended to emphasise the antithesis of everyday vanity and eternity not only through genre, texture, tempo, rhythm and timbre juxtaposition, but also through intonational contrast. Therefore, the chromaticism of the first section is contrasted with the diatonicism of the second. Wishing to preserve the unity of the musical material of the piece, the composer took the eight-note complexes formed from Klee's name and the dates of his life as a basis and removed the accidentals from them. The performer voices the outlines of the original motifs, while the violin plays the missing notes (Example No. 12).

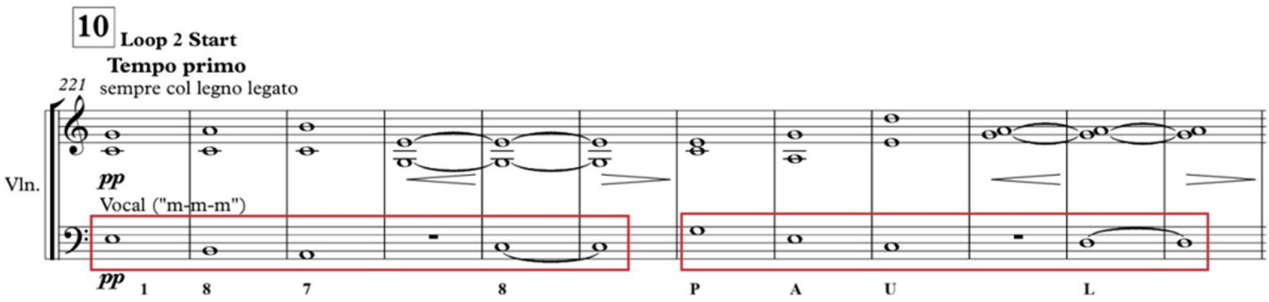
The static, introspective nature of the choral sound is contrasted with the preceding dramatic tension and creates the effect of stopping time. Thus, the dramatic "chase" of life ceases, and the listener is immersed in a sacred-lyrical space to feel the value of existence.

The piece *Flight from Oneself* can be seen as a fascinating example of intermedial transposition, an attempt at an intersemiotic translation of one art form into another. A more radical approach connected with the expansion of the medial space of music is presented by a joke piece for violin and piano *Self-Portrait* (2025). The composition was created especially

[18] In Example No. 11, blue rectangles highlight the long double notes, and the red rectangle marks the first meta chord. Compared with the first bar of Scheme 4.

Example No. 12

Alexey Krasheninnikov. *Flight from Oneself*
Section 2, reh. 10, mm. 221–232



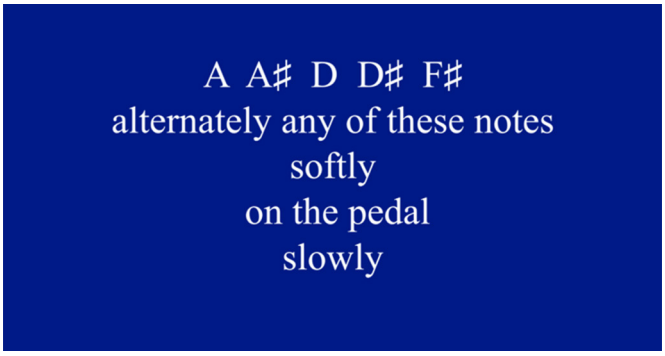
for the festival "Sergey Oskolkov and His Friends."[19]

The composer here turns to the technological possibilities of *video score*. Each performer plays their part according to a video file containing verbal instructions regarding the musical material and the actions of musicians. Video must be launched simultaneously. If precise synchronisation is impossible, minor time differences are allowed.

The instructions included in the video score offer performers the opportunity to improvise within the given parameters. For example, the piece begins with the pianist producing the sounds suggested on the screen in any order and at any rhythm; however, the articulation, dynamics and tempo are prescribed (Example No. 13). Similarly, the violinist plays combinations of double notes from a given set of sounds, also guided by tempo and dynamic instructions. Let us note that the volume level is regulated by changing the background colour of the screen: blue, green and red for *piano*, *mezzo-forte and fortissimo*, respectively.
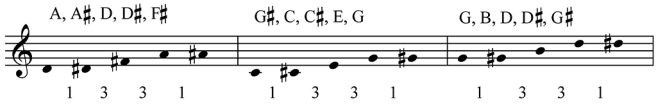
Example No. 13

Alexey Krasheninnikov. *Self-Portrait*.
Beginning of the pianist's part



At first glance, the composer allows the utmost degree of performing freedom, but this is not so. The set of notes offered to the pianist for improvisation — initially *A*, *A♯*, *D*, *D♯*, *F♯*; then *G♯*, *C*, *C♯*, *E*, *G*; and finally, *G*, *B*, *D*, *D♯*, *G♯* — can be reduced to a single symmetrical interval model: 1–3–3–1 (Scheme 6).

Scheme 6. Alexey Krasheninnikov. *Self-Portrait*. Interval model of note sets in the pianist part



[19] The premiere took place on June 4, 2025 in the performence of Nikolai Mazhara (piano) and Mikhail Krutik (violin). Later, on November 12 of the same year, the piece was performed again as part of a Krash Club concert at the Benois Apartment Museum. This time the parts were performed by Nikolai Mazhara (piano) and Alexey Krasheninnikov (violin).

The programmed complex of sounds ensures harmonic consistency of the piece. The indicated interval model, vaguely reminiscent of Roslavets' synth chord technique or Hauer's tropes, functions like a modal scale, which is transposed in different fragments of the composition. Two new models in the violinist's part (one of them is whole-tonic) are periodically superimposed on it, leading to polymodal diversity.

Despite the radical format of the score and the significant role of improvisation, the piece has a strict, almost classical structure — it relies on a three-part reprise. The central section of the composition is associated with a performative act: while the pianist improvises given sound complexes, the violinist is proposed to draw his self-portrait. For this, a small plywood board with a sheet of paper and a pencil is placed on the music stand in advance. During the process, regardless of the artistic merits of the drawing, the violinist must shout out the phrases: "Amazing!", "Magnificent!", "Crazy!", "Brilliant!" After this, he takes up the violin again and improvises virtuoso passages, arpeggios and chords, pausing for yet another round of self-praise ("Bravissimo!", "Inimitable!").

The reprise clearly perceived by ear due to both the sound material and the methods of its articulation is enriched with a new element: the melody improvised in the exposition based on the whole-tone scale must now be whistled by the violinist. The final line "Brilliant!" is accompanied by a demonstration of a self-portrait created during the performance. When performing the piece at the Krash Club, the composer depicted himself in a playful, cubist manner (Il. 2).



Il. 2. A drawing by Alexey Krasheninnikov during the performance of the piece *Self-Portrait*

It should be noted that the work contains a considerable amount of irony, which can also be found in the literary works of A. Krasheninnikov. For example, *Glinka*, the hero of his short story, is a composer (the story is told in the first person), confident in his talent, but not averse to hack work, which, in his opinion, is what current musical practice (based, by the way, on experiments) encourages. "It should be said", the hero reasons, "that contemporary music has come so far that, taking into account all the complexities of its performance, and most importantly, its perception, the author can always count on at least a certain reverence from an audience that understands little. But in my case, when a name has long been made and people flock to concerts, it is possible (let's be honest — thanks to promotion) to sometimes do some extra work: throw in a few more special tricks (extended playing technique, for example, a prepared piano, tapping on the violin and other crap that goes down so well and without which it is now impossible to appear in the party scene). In fact, my new brilliant work was not without a little hack work, of course. By and large, it consisted entirely of such tricks. But, on the whole, this did not in any way affect the overall picture — the public was delighted, the feeling of spiritualised unclear emptiness and 'ironic all-permeation into the metaphysical

plane of existence' remained for a long time." [8, p. 127] It is no surprise that the Glinka monument, which came to life on Theatre Square after being introduced to the score of the hapless composer, who unfortunately fell into one of St. Petersburg manholes, not only fails to help him escape, but also closes the hatch. *Self-Portrait* with its lines "Brilliant!", "Inimitable!" seems to appeal to the image of the story hero. Therefore, in this joke piece, the composer both experiments with new forms of representing the material and ironically distances himself from his own searches.

Conclusion

Summarising the consideration of the experimental branch of Alexey Krasheninnikov's work, we can highlight the main features of his compositional approach. The works of the St. Petersburg author quite organically combine the random and the determined. Aleatory procedures concern both the creative process and performative freedom. However, Krasheninnikov always uses them in "dosed amounts." He permits "chance" only at the stage of pre-compositional work (typically for the generation of sound material, which is then organised with rational understanding), while at the level of musical text, he prefers to use the techniques of limited aleatoricism. The latter, despite the sometimes-significant degree of performance freedom (for example, in *Self-Portrait*), leaves the composer's ideas about the type of sound stable due to the "programmed" nature of harmonic complexes, dynamics and articulation.

Krasheninnikov freely uses a wide range of different compositional techniques (tonality, modality, sonorism, aleatoricism, seriality, cryptophony), individually refracting and combining them with each other, and readily turns to technical devices (for example, a loop machine, sound amplifiers). At the same time, the experiment is nothing but the end in itself for him, since aimed not so much at expanding the boundaries of expressiveness (which is incidentally also important for him), as rather serving the adequate realisation of artistic ideas.

The compositional structure of Krasheninnikov's works is oriented towards an "individual project" (Yuri Kholopov's term) determined by the author's intention. According to the classification of Anna Amrakhova, who examines compositional models in the optics of cognitive science, [9] it can be argued that the St. Petersburg author is inclined to image schemes in his work; however, traces of classical form creation can be found in the architectonics of some of his pieces.

The predisposition to image schemes can be explained by the personality traits of Krasheninnikov as a performer, composer, writer and artist. The specificity of the composer's approach determines the dialogue with other forms of art, attempts at their intersemiotic translation and the expansion of the medial possibilities of musical art. Instrumental theatre, electroacoustic instruments, and expanded performance techniques become integral components of Krasheninnikov's artistic expression, revealing the synthetic and synesthetic nature of his musical thinking.

Thus, the poetics of experiment in the composer's work is determined by the paradoxical balance between the random pulse of the creative process and the determinism of the structure, between intellectual play and simplicity of thought, between a "serious" statement and a "jokingly ironic" gesture, between the musical and extra-musical principles. Krasheninnikov constantly asks himself the question: "What if...?" — and every time he finds an aesthetically convincing answer.

References

1. Okuneva E.G., Semko D.S. The creative worlds of Alexey Krasheninnikov. *Opera musicologica*. 2026, no. 1, pp. 126–153 (In Russ.) https://doi.org/10.26156/operamus.2026.18.1.006

2. Korobova A.G. The destiny of the phenomenon and the concept of "genre" in the musical culture of the contemporary times. *Problemy muzykal'noi nauki / Music Scholarship.* 2013, no. 1, pp. 233–237 (In Russ.)

3. Chupova A.G. Time, tradition, author: Artistic concepts of the Piano Concerto by Alexey Krasheninnikov. *Russian Musicology*. 2026, no. 1, pp. 104–118. https://doi.org/10.56620/RM.2026.1.104-118

4. Petrov V.O. *Instrumental theatre of the twentieth century: History and theory of the genre: Thesis of Diss. Dr.Sci. (Arts)*. Saratov, 2014. 48 p. (In Russ.)

5. Tsaregradskaya T.V. Simon Steen-Andersen — a composer of the postmodernist era. *Russian Musicology*. 2024, no. 4, pp. 69–76. https://doi.org/10.56620/RM.2024.4.069-076

6. Molchanov A.S. Mono-element compositions in the musical art of the twentieth century. In: *Music science in the context of culture. Musicology and the challenges of the information age: Materials of the International scientific conference on October 27–30, 2020*. Moscow: Gnesin Russian Academy of Music Publ., 2020, pp. 330–338. (In Russ.)

7. Kyuregyan T.S. Musical forms. In: *Theory of modern composition: a textbook*. Moscow: Muzyka Publ., 2005, pp. 266–312 (In Russ.).

8. Krasheninnikov A.A. *Waltz for Saint Germain*. St. Petersburg: Publisher Sadilov A.V., 2023. 152 p. (In Russ.)

9. Amrakhova A.A. Essay on the classification of individual projects in modern composition. *Zhurnal Obshchestva teorii muzyki / Journal of the Music Theory Society*. 2022, no. 3, pp. 14–25. (In Russ.) https://doi.org/10.26176/otmroo.2022.39.3.002

Information about the authors:

Ekaterina G. Okuneva — Dr.Sci. (Arts), Professor at the Department of Music Theory and Composition, Petrozavodsk State Glazunov Conservatoire, Petrozavodsk, Russian Federation.

Darya S. Semko — Student at the Department of Music Theory and Composition, Petrozavodsk State Glazunov Conservatoire, Petrozavodsk, Russian Federation.

Информация об авторах:

Е.Г. Окунева — доктор искусствоведения, профессор кафедры теории музыки и композиции, Петрозаводская государственная консерватория им. А.К. Глазунова, г. Петрозаводск, Российская Федерация.

Д.С. Семко — студентка кафедры теории музыки и композиции, Петрозаводская государственная консерватория им. А.К. Глазунова, г. Петрозаводск, Российская Федерация.

Received / Поступила в редакцию: 18.03.2026
Revised / Одобрена после рецензирования: 27.04.2026
Accepted / Принята к публикации: 29.04.2026

ISSN 3034-3836 (Online)

Musical Culture of China

Original article
UDC 811.111
https://doi.org/10.56620/RM.2026.2.074-092
EDN FAWIWL

Musical Rhetoric in China: Knowledge Production and Paradigm Construction

Wang Xuqing

Shanghai Conservatory of Music,
Shanghai, China,
hz_wxq@163.com✉, *https://orcid.org/0009-0006-0650-0278*

Abstract. Over the past three decades, musical rhetoric in China has undergone a "double variation" of introducing Western theories and constructing indigenous discourse, currently advancing toward a critical transformation from "dialogue with the other" to "subjective construction." Confronting the ontological tension between Western logocentrism and the characteristics of traditional Chinese music — which emphasizes *yijing* (aesthetic conception) and is non-semantic — the academic community has strived to break through the dilemmas of "theoretical application" and "indigenous aphasia," achieving the localized reproduction of Western theories. This article systematically reviews the evolutionary trajectory of this field across the dimensions of ontology, methodology, and praxis. It analyzes how researchers have reconstructed concepts such as "musical rhetoric," "sound rhetoric" and "work rhetoric," elevating rhetorical thinking from mere technical embellishment to the core creative logic of "conception – layout – expression." The study argues that by establishing "rhetorical awareness" and constructing rhetorical paradigms that organically fuse Chinese and Western elements, significant insights are offered for contemporary Chinese music composition regarding the modern translation of national spirit and the establishment of cultural subjectivity.

Keywords: musical rhetoric, knowledge production, cultural subjectivity, music analysis, composition

For citation: Wang Xuqing. Musical Rhetoric in China: Knowledge Production and Paradigm Construction. *Russian Musicology*. 2026, no. 2, pp. 74–92. https://doi.org/10.56620/RM.2026.2.074-092

© Wang Xuqing, 2026

Музыкальная риторика в Китае: производство знаний и построение парадигм

Ван Сюйцин

Шанхайская консерватория музыки,
г. Шанхай, Китайская Народная Республика,
hz_wxq@163.com✉, *https://orcid.org/0009-0006-0650-0278*

Аннотация. За последние три десятилетия музыкальная риторика в Китае испытала «двойное преобразование» — внедрение западных теорий и формирование собственного дискурса, продвигаясь в настоящее время по пути трансформации от «диалога с Другим» к «субъективной интерпретации». В условиях онтологического противоречия между западным логоцентризмом и традиционной китайской музыкой, для которой характерны «ицзин» (художественный образ) и отсутствие семантической нагрузки, научное сообщество стремится разрешить дилеммы «теоретического применения» и «афазии автохтонной культуры» путём локализации западных теорий. В настоящей статье представлен систематический обзор эволюционного пути в данной области с позиций онтологии, методологии и практики. Проанализированы подходы исследователей к переосмыслению таких понятий, как «музыкальная риторика», «звуковая риторика» и «риторика произведения», что позволило преобразовать риторическое мышление из простого технического аксессуара в основную творческую логику процесса «замысел — композиция — выражение». Показано, что формирование «риторического сознания» и создание риторических парадигм, органично интегрирующих китайские и западные элементы, способствуют воплощению национального самосознания и формированию культурной субъективности в современном китайском музыкальном творчестве.

Ключевые слова: музыкальная риторика, производство знаний, культурная субъективность, музыкальный анализ, композиция

Introduction

Rhetoric is the art of expression, embodying the convergence of its academic rigor and artistic elegance. Originating within linguistics, rhetoric is a scientific discipline dedicated to summarizing rhetorical principles and constructing rhetorical systems. Its core research scope encompasses the normative methods of language usage across diverse conditions of linguistic communication, varied stylistic genres, and distinct socio-cultural contexts. Correspondingly, special rhetorical devices — known as figures of speech or schemata — such as parallelism, repetition, parallel structure, anaphora, epiphora, ellipsis, quotation, antithesis, gradation, inversion, chiasmus, transposition, and silence, constitute an indispensable component of the rhetorical system. If art represents the highest form of expression, then the language of art is rhetoric itself. In this sense, regardless of the medium employed, art is essentially a rhetorical expression of concepts and reality. The development of rhetoric has always paralleled the progress of human civilization, playing a pivotal role in advancing various artistic disciplines.

The academic study of rhetoric in China spans from antiquity to the present. Ancient Chinese

rhetorical inquiry centered on the elucidation of philosophical thought and had not yet formed an independent disciplinary system. As early as the Pre-Qin period, the *I Ching* (Book of Changes) proposed the central thesis that "establishing sincerity through rhetoric" (*xiu ci li qi cheng*), laying an ethical foundation for rhetorical practice. Modern Chinese rhetoric emerged in the early 20th century amidst the fusion of Chinese and Western cultures. The publication of Chen Wangdao's *An Introduction to Rhetoric* (*Xiucixue Fafan*) [1] in 1932 marked the formal establishment of a scientific and systematic framework for rhetoric in China. Since 1978, successive works such as Zong Tinghu's and co-author's *New Treatise on Rhetoric*, [2] Tan Yongxiang's *Aesthetics of Chinese Rhetoric*, [3] and Wang Xijie's *General Theory of Rhetoric* [4] have appeared, promoting trends toward diversification and interdisciplinary integration, thereby facilitating theoretical innovation within the discipline. Through the cross-disciplinary expansion of rhetoric into fields such as aesthetics, and via a dialectical absorption of both indigenous traditions and Western theories, Chinese rhetoric has gradually developed an academic landscape that integrates distinctive local characteristics with a modern global perspective.

As an ancient field of study, musical rhetoric naturally aligns with linguistic rhetoric due to the expressive commonalities between music and language. The Roman scholar Quintilian addressed this relationship as early as antiquity.[1] During the 17th and 18th centuries, theorists of "musical poetics," including Joachim Burmeister, Christoph Bernhard, Johann Printz, Johann Adolph Scheibe (often associated with Janowka in this context), and Johann Walther, constructed theories of musical rhetoric by borrowing terminology from classical rhetoric. Later, figures such as Johann Mattheson and Scheibe focused on rhetorical principles in instrumental music, providing compositional guidance for wordless instrumental works. By the late 18th century, with the maturation of the theory of musical autonomy, musical rhetoric gradually diverged from classical rhetoric, laying the groundwork for modern music theory. In the 20th century, philosophical and analytical approaches spurred a revival of musical rhetoric theory. Scholars such as Arnold Schering, Arnold Schmitz, and Hartmut Krones deepened related research and categorized musical figures. Contemporary Western "New Musicology" regards this field as a frontier area; its cross-disciplinary applications have opened new pathways for musical analysis and the interpretation of meaning. The inclusion of nearly ten thousand relevant entries in the EBSCO database (as of 2026) and the growth trend of literature over the past three decades in China's CNKI database corroborate the assertion that this topic possesses both profound historical depth and a vibrant potential for revival, rendering its research value and academic promise self-evident.

Admittedly, exploring the research value of musical rhetoric and its reception history in China cannot rely solely on academic retrieval for "verification" of influence. Rather, it necessitates a historicized understanding of specific moments in this "traveling theory." As a significant component of Western music theory, possessing both theoretical criticality and analytical instrumentality, the journey of musical rhetoric to China was not a simple transplantation of knowledge. Instead,

[1] Marcus Fabius Quintilian discussed the relationship between music and oratory (rhetoric) specifically in Book I, Chapter 10 of *Institutio Oratoria*.

it constituted an academic practice characterized by a fusion of critical reflection and indigenous creativity.

In the process of modernizing contemporary Chinese music theory, the introduction, study, and reconstruction of cutting-edge Western theories have remained central issues. Compared to other theoretical discourses that entered the academic horizon earlier, the indigenization of Western musical rhetoric in China began relatively late, with relevant research only emerging in the 1990s. It is noteworthy, however, that although this theoretical lineage appeared later in the form of "formal introduction," it was not devoid of prior practice. Qian Renkang stands as a pioneer who early on engaged with musical rhetorical thinking. [5] Although Qian Renkang did not systematically employ the explicit theoretical label "musical rhetoric," nor did the concept directly appear in the titles or argumentative frameworks of his analytical texts, a close examination of his scholarly practice reveals that he had already extensively utilized core terminology from the category of rhetoric in his music analysis. Devices such as palindrome, *dingzhen* (anadiplosis/topological linkage), antithesis, parallelism, allusion, repetition, symmetry, inversion, hyperbole, and ellipsis were skillfully applied to the interpretation of specific works. [Ibid.] It can be said that this research path, grounded in textual analysis and approaching musical structure and expression from a rhetorical perspective, constituted the initial form of musical rhetoric research in China. At that time, however, it had not yet been christened "rhetorical theory," presenting instead as a pioneering exploration that was both conscious and slightly unconscious.

In 1999, Zhao Hai published the article *Musical Rhetoric in the Baroque Period and its Implied Aesthetic Concepts*, [6] which systematically reviewed the origins, developmental trajectory, and core figures of Baroque musical rhetoric, marking a seminal starting point for musical rhetoric research in China. The article pointed out that "musical rhetoric" in the Baroque period was not a simple borrowing of rhetorical concepts but a theoretical achievement resulting from the deep integration of rhetorical principles and musical composition. Based on the research of theorists such as Burmeister, it formed a complete system encompassing structural principles of "exordium – mediation – conclusion," developmental techniques of the "central topic," and seven major categories of musical figures. This system was not only systematically elucidated theoretically but also fully embodied in the compositional practices of composers such as Monteverdi and Bach. The article further argued that the aesthetic core of musical rhetoric is concentrated in the "Doctrine of the Affections" (*Affektenlehre*). Its essence lies in the organic fusion of affective aesthetics and rationalism: it emphasizes the direct expression of human emotions through music while advocating for the regulation of emotional presentation through rational rules, thereby endowing musical expression with both infectious power and a sense of order. This characteristic represents a significant embodiment of the humanistic spirit in the field of music. Furthermore, the article noted that the emergence of musical rhetoric was not accidental; it was closely related to the popularization of rhetorical education and the cultural context where vocal music occupied a dominant position, serving as a concentrated projection of the *zeitgeist* and aesthetic trends onto the level of music theory. As one of the earliest domestic documents to systematically study musical rhetoric, its theoretical significance is particularly prominent. Not only did it first systematically expound the aesthetic concepts inherent in Baroque musical rhetoric — namely, a "rationalized affective aesthetics" formed by the fusion of affective aesthetics

and rationalist thought — but it also provided preliminary definitions and classifications of various musical figures, offering foundational conceptual tools for subsequent research. Its pioneering value and foundational significance continue to resonate in related studies today.

A decade later, Yao Yaping's research, situated within the context of European medieval music cultural history, employed theories of cultural conflict and power discourse analysis to elucidate the underlying motivations and evolutionary logic behind the artistic transformation of European music. In his article "Rhetoric: A Strategy for Music's Breakout — Observations and Analysis on How the Artistic Tendency of European Music Emerged from Church Liturgy," [7] Yao argued that the artisticization of European music was not a result of spontaneous evolution. Rather, it was rooted in the structural tensions between reason and sensibility, and between divinity and humanity, within Christian culture. "Rhetoric," serving as a strategy of power and a mechanism of accommodation throughout this process, became the key medium for resolving contradictions and propelling music to break free from the constraints of liturgical rites. Its core value lay in subtly leveraging the transformation of music from a religious appendage to an independent art. Yao's research broke through the traditional paradigms of Western music history studies. Its core innovation lies not only in reconstructing the narrative logic of European music's artisticization using "rhetoric" as a thread but also in revealing the universal law whereby marginal forces in cultural conflicts achieve paradigm shifts through rhetorical strategies, thus providing a unique analytical perspective on the interaction between power and discourse for art history research. This study not only clarified the dual attributes of rhetoric as a "breakout strategy" for music, enriching the theoretical connotations of Western music aesthetics, but also provided a typical case study by analyzing the interactive relationship between music and religion. Its academic value extends beyond Western music research itself, offering an important reference for subsequent comparative studies of Chinese and Western musical rhetoric and research on artisticization processes.

Overall, the academic practice of musical rhetoric during this period exhibited more of a "unidirectional input" characteristic. Chinese scholars, adopting a humble posture as "recipients," introduced, organized, and interpreted the theoretical frameworks and research methods of Western musical rhetoric, playing a crucial role in enlightening and laying the foundation for subsequent theoretical explorations.

In 2012, the academic seminar "Musical Rhetoric and Musical Narrative in Contemporary Western Music Research," jointly hosted by the Shanghai Conservatory of Music and Hangzhou Normal University, became a significant turning point in the development of musical rhetoric in China. By this time, the academic context had changed significantly: after more than a decade of accumulated research, Chinese scholars had gained a profound understanding of the theoretical system of Western musical rhetoric and possessed the academic foundation to engage in critical dialogue. Simultaneously, the demand for "indigenous subjectivity" within the Chinese music academia grew increasingly strong; scholars were no longer satisfied with mere theoretical transplantation but sought a deep integration of Western theories with Chinese musical practice. This seminar gathered prominent Chinese music scholars to conduct in-depth discussions on core issues such as the definition of musical rhetoric, its objects of study, and analytical methods. To a certain extent, this marked the transition of Chinese musical rhetoric research from a stage of "enlightenment" to one of "dialogue." Since

then, attention to the theory and analytical practice of musical rhetoric within the Chinese music academia has increased significantly.

Admittedly, the localization and construction of musical rhetoric is essentially an academic recreation and practical adaptation under cross-cultural theoretical dialogue. Its core essence is neither a simple revision of Western theories nor a unilateral return to indigenous traditions. Rather, based on grasping the essential core of rhetoric as the "strategic construction of expression," it aims to achieve a localized reconstruction of the theoretical system and an innovative exploration of practical pathways. This process requires, first, clarifying the essential definition of musical rhetoric through theoretical speculation, breaking the double shackles of Western logocentrism and the theory of musical autonomy, so that the conceptual interpretation of musical rhetoric aligns with the aesthetic characteristics and expressive logic of Chinese music. Second, it necessitates constructing a rhetorical logical framework adapted to the entire process of musical composition through systematic thinking, elevating rhetorical thinking from the level of technical embellishment to the core level of creative thought, thereby connecting the internal relationships among creativity, layout, and expression. Finally, it must be rooted in the practice of contemporary Chinese music composition, excavating the rhetorical wisdom and paradigmatic characteristics of indigenous music to achieve an organic rhetorical fusion of Chinese and Western musical elements. Only in this way can rhetoric become an important carrier for highlighting the cultural connotations of Chinese music and conveying the national aesthetic spirit. Only by advancing layer by layer from the three dimensions of ontology, methodology, and praxis can research on Chinese musical rhetoric escape the predicament of theoretical application, constructing a theoretical system that combines academic rigor, cultural adaptability, and practical guidance, thereby laying a solid theoretical foundation and practical direction for future research.

I. Ontology of Musical Rhetoric

In addressing the essence and conceptualization of musical rhetoric, Chinese scholars have grounded their research in Western classical rhetoric and music theory while integrating indigenous reflections into theoretical interpretation, research perspectives, and academic expression. By "grafting" the Western concept of musical rhetoric onto China's long-standing tradition of rhetorical studies, they have strived to achieve the indigenization and localization of Western music theory. This effort has fostered a research system that combines academic rigor with cultural adaptability, reflecting the scholarly self-awareness and cultural stance of Chinese musicologists.

Elucidation of the Concept of "Musical Rhetoric"

Researchers have endeavored to break free from the singular reference framework of Western theory, striving to define musical rhetoric in a manner more aligned with the context and cognitive patterns of Chinese music research. [8] In his article "Analysis of the concept and phenomena of musical rhetoric," Chen Hongduo drew upon definitions of musical rhetoric found in sources such as *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*. However, rather than mechanically adopting Western logic, he took the definition of "rhetoric" from *Cihai* (The Sea of Words) as his core reference. He defined musical rhetoric as "a tonal activity (substituting for 'speech') that appropriately expresses the emotional content intended by the composer (substituting for the 'speaker/writer') by employing various sonic materials (substituting for 'linguistic materials') and

expressive techniques based on the theme and context."[2] [9, p. 160]

Furthermore, Chen incorporated achievements from indigenous Chinese linguistics and rhetoric, referencing works such as Wang Xijie's *Chinese Rhetoric* and Chen Wangdao's *An Introduction to Rhetoric*. He transformed the indigenous theoretical cores of "selection of synonymous means" and "application of language variants" in literary rhetoric into the core definition of musical rhetoric as "the selective variant application of general compositional rules." [10, p. 76] This achieved a reference, grafting, and translation of indigenous literary rhetorical theory into the realm of musical rhetoric. [9, p. 160–161] In his conceptual elucidation, Chen further integrated Chinese structural cognition of music, juxtaposing the Western structural principles of "exposition, development, and conclusion" with the traditional Chinese layout concept of "*qi, cheng, zhuan, he*" (initiation, development, transition, and conclusion). This dual reference served as a basis for judging variants of "structural planning" in musical rhetoric, thereby endowing the definition of musical rhetoric with a Chinese structural perspective. [Ibid., p. 160, 168] Additionally, in selecting case studies for analysis, Chen did not limit himself to the Western musical context. Beyond works by Western composers, he intentionally introduced works by Chinese composers such as Chen Mingzhi, incorporating Chinese compositional practices into the scope of musical rhetoric research. By analyzing rhetorical devices such as personalized treatments of cadences, he ensured that the theoretical definition and interpretation could better explain rhetorical phenomena in Chinese music creation.

Definition of Concepts such as "Sound Rhetoric" and "Work Rhetoric"

Similarly, Han Zhong'en, in his article "Sound Rhetoric, Sonic Narrative, and the Achievement of Musical Meaning," [11] defined concepts such as "sound rhetoric" and "work rhetoric" in resonance with Chinese academic traditions. Grounded in the interrogative scholarly spirit of Huang Xiangpeng's "Questions on Music," [12] Han combined rhetorical research with the exploration of the musical subject. Thus, sound rhetoric became not merely an analytical tool but a pathway to penetrate the musical ontology and achieve musical meaning. Han's definition of "sound rhetoric" and "work rhetoric" was not constructed *ex nihilo*; rather, it evolved progressively through teaching practice, academic accumulation, and Chinese music research. The generation and interpretation of these concepts remained rooted in the disciplinary context of Chinese musicology, freeing rhetorical concepts from the original frameworks of Western philology and narrative theory and transforming them into academic tools adapted for Chinese music research.

Han's proposal of the concept "work rhetoric" can be traced back to the 2001 Cross-Strait and Hong Kong-Macao Musicology Symposium. At that time, based on traditional rhetoric and integrating theories from Vico and Foucault, he proposed the fourfold constructive significance of rhetoric:

1. Rhetoric possesses the original significance of driving cognitive structures: specific theoretical terms can not only express a meaning but also structure a meaning themselves.

2. Rhetoric possesses the derivative significance of fabricating historical texts:

[2] *Cihai* defines rhetoric as: "... a speech activity that appropriately expresses the emotional content intended by the speaker/writer by employing various linguistic materials and expressive techniques based on the theme and context." [9, p. 160]

while engaging in historical narration, specific theoretical terms often contain deeper statements of meaning.

3. Rhetoric possesses the root significance of concealing the text itself: once a specific theoretical term becomes overly saturated in conventionality to the point of becoming a center, it naturally implies the legitimacy of negative deconstructive forces.

4. Rhetoric possesses the constructive significance of organizing genealogies of facts: rather than focusing on ideal meanings, infinite teleological meta-historical expansions, and origins, it is better to excavate the occurrence, beginning, drive, rupture, and generational shift of history and culture at specific base points and links through rhetorical methods. Furthermore, through the multiple folding and ordered topology of the narrative itself, one can increase the depth and tortuosity of the narration, thereby establishing a genealogy of facts with coherent meaning. [11, p. 125]

In 2007, he formally proposed the concept of "work rhetoric," anchoring it in case studies within Western music history teaching and research. Focusing on composers such as Brahms and Liszt, he concentrated on "overall structural description and pure sensuous expression," detaching the concept from its original philological sense of embellishment and establishing it as a professional term for musical work analysis.

The definition of "sound rhetoric," moreover, was a direct product of teaching practice. Inspired by students' discussions on the relationship between music and rhetoric, Han extended "work rhetoric" inward, proposing that sound rhetoric is the "ordered connection of sounds." [Ibid., p. 124] Spanning from the micro-relationships between individual notes to the overall sonic structure of a work, this definition shifted the rhetorical research perspective from external work analysis to the internal structural logic of sound itself. Unlike the narrative-purpose framework of rhetoric in Western post-classical narrative theory, this definition centers on the musical sound ontology, aligning with the essential characteristics of music as an auditory art.

In the process of deepening these concepts, Han linked sound rhetoric with sonic narrative and musical meaning. This was not mere theoretical deduction but a response to the core problem in musicological writing: "How to describe and express through written language what music expresses." This reflects his profound engagement with Chinese musicological writing and disciplinary construction. He paralleled the "sensuous rhetoric" proposed by students with the concept of sound, starting from specific issues in Chinese music research such as piano dynamic morphology and the single-note techniques in *suona* concertos, thereby grounding sound rhetoric research in practical work analysis. Simultaneously, his conceptual definition consistently revolved around the construction of paradigms for musicological writing. By incorporating work rhetoric and sound rhetoric into the basic conditions of "form – sensibility – history" and the fundamental concerns of "poetry – poetics – poetology," he established rhetorical concepts as cornerstones for building a Chinese musicological writing system.

Construction of a "General Theory of Musical Rhetoric"

The construction of a "General Theory of Musical Rhetoric" by scholars is not without source; it is rooted in a deep examination of the origins of Chinese and Western rhetoric, a systematic understanding of the isomorphism between language and music, and a musical translation of classical rhetorical theory. Wang Dandan points out that the origins of both Chinese and Western rhetoric point to the essence of "the subject achieving effective communication through appropriate

expression." [13, p. 19][3] She reviews ancient Chinese interpretations of "*xiu*" (cultivate/embellish) and "*ci*" (words/rhetoric), clarifying that "*xiu*" encompasses both internal self-cultivation and external embellishment, together pointing to purposeful, organized acts of expression; "*ci*" carries multiple connotations of debate, speech, and decrees, with its core being discourse expression for specific purposes in specific contexts. [Ibid., pp. 13–15]

Viewing music as an independent language system is the key premise for the validity of general musical rhetoric. Wang Dandan argues that music and language share a homogeneous material essence, both presenting through the combination of "sound" and "meaning" and possessing complete grammatical systems of vocabulary, syntax, and structure. In music, pitch and rhythm serve as "words," melody as "sentences," and mode and theme as core vocabulary. Moreover, both are externalizations of human inner consciousness as symbols, with processes of selection, organization, analysis, and judgment permeating their entire construction. This isomorphism between language and music allows the theoretical framework of rhetoric to be reasonably migrated to music research, serving as a bridge connecting rhetoric and musicology. It is precisely upon these solid theoretical foundations that the definition of general musical rhetoric gains rigorous academic support. Its theoretical innovation not only opens a new vision for music research ranging from micro-techniques to macro-thinking but also reshapes the academic community's cognition of the essence and value of musical rhetoric.

When exploring the rhetorical logic of the musical ontology, Wang Dandan, while accounting for European vocal and instrumental music, implicitly reflects on the Chinese tradition of the "fusion of poetry and music." For instance, in analyzing the "poetry-music" rhetorical logic of early vocal music, the symbiotic relationship between lyrics and music she elucidates resonates with the tradition of musical expression in classical Chinese poetry, providing a theoretical reference for subsequent rhetorical analysis of traditional Chinese music. [14]

Furthermore, it is noteworthy that in adapting conceptual interpretations to the Chinese context, scholars did not rigidly copy Western definitions when analyzing core concepts of Western musical rhetoric. Instead, they fully integrated the semantic connotations of Chinese vocabulary and indigenous habits of music research for translation and interpretation. For example, the Western rhetorical term "style" is translated as "*wencai*" (literary grace/flair), [15, p. 128] merging the connotation of "*wencai*" in traditional Chinese literary theory, which encompasses both textual embellishment and stylistic charm, thereby endowing musical style with richer cultural implications. Similarly, "invention" is interpreted as "*chuanyi*" (creative conception), [Ibid.] aligning with the traditional Chinese musical thinking of "establishing intent and conceiving ideas," thus making abstract Western theoretical concepts fit the Chinese context of musical expression. Meanwhile, in their research, scholars have fully excavated and cited rhetorical figure concepts from Qian Renkang's research, such as "*dingzhen*" (anadiplosis), "musical allusion," and "metaphor," [5, pp. 84–85; 15, p. 130]

[3] General musical rhetoric constructs and expresses music through musical language, using an appropriate metaphysical language system to express metaphysical spiritual connotations, endowing them with specific meaning; it is a profound act of musical philosophy.

integrating classic theories from the field of Chinese music analysis with Western musical rhetoric. This builds a bridge for dialogue between Chinese and Western music research, providing indigenous academic support for foreign theories.

Overall, research on the ontology of musical rhetoric in China, grounded in Western classical rhetoric and music theory, has achieved its core breakthrough by constructing an academic paradigm of "mutual learning between East and West, with roots in the local soil." This has realized the indigenization of foreign theories and the autonomous construction of disciplinary discourse. By abandoning the singular reference framework of Western theory and through conceptual reconstruction, perspective integration, and practical adaptation, scholars have formed a research system that combines academic rigor with cultural adaptability, demonstrating distinct scholarly self-awareness and cultural stance.

II. Methodology: Constructing the Rhetorical Logical Chain of "Conception – Layout – Expression"

The "Five Canons of Rhetoric" from Roman rhetoric (Invention, Arrangement, Style, Memory, and Delivery) have been adopted by musical rhetoric as the core logic of creation. Researchers have re-examined music composition from the perspective of "speaking and expression," excavating the expressive intentions and rhetorical thinking behind musical forms. Integrating the research perspective of rhetoric into music studies provides a new analytical paradigm for music work analysis, music aesthetics, and music composition theory. This allows musical rhetoric research to cover the complete ecosystem of musical art, offering a more comprehensive and profound theoretical perspective for understanding the mechanisms of musical expression and its aesthetic value.

Emphasizing "Micro-Rhetorical Awareness" in Detail Refinement

Han Zhong'en's theory of "sound rhetoric" emphasizes that musical rhetoric permeates the entire process from "the relationship between the first note and the second" to "overall sonic narrative." This inspires composers to attach importance to rhetorical refinement at the micro level. In terms of pitch relationships, alternating between "semitone progression" and "perfect fourth leaps" can construct emotional tension. In rhythm design, using "syncopated rhythms" can break steady pulses to create rhetorical effects of liveliness or anxiety. In timbre combination, contrasting and blending "instrumental timbres" (e.g., juxtaposing the warm tone of the violin with the cold tone of electronic sounds) can reinforce the layers of expression.

Wang Dandan traces Western classical rhetoric from the oratory of the Homeric era to Aristotle's systematic theory, clarifying its core goal of "persuasion" and its five-stage system of "Invention, Arrangement, Style, Memory, and Delivery." She deeply aligns the five canons of classical rhetoric with the processes of music composition, performance, and dissemination, providing concrete theoretical references for the practical pathways of general musical rhetoric. This ensures the theory is not an abstract concept but an analytical tool applicable to the entire flow of musical practice. She proposes the concept of "general musical rhetoric," explicitly defining the dialogical relationship between "rhetorical subject" and "rhetorical receiver." She argues that music composition is a complete rhetorical process of "Who is speaking (the composer)? What is being said (expressive intent)? To whom is it spoken (the audience)? In what context is it spoken (cultural-aesthetic context)?" Rhetorical practice permeates the entire process of music composition: from the preliminary conception of "invention" in classical rhetoric, to the logical construction of "arrangement," and finally to the lexical presentation of "style,"

all reflect the creator's subjective intent. This inspires composers to transcend the single dimension of "self-expression" and establish "audience awareness" from the outset of creation: designing rhetorical strategies tailored to the aesthetic habits of different audiences; positioning expressive intent in conjunction with cultural contexts (e.g., in ethnic-themed compositions, using rhetoric to evoke cultural resonance among listeners rather than merely displaying ethnic musical elements).

From the author's definition of general musical rhetoric, it is evident that its research significance breaks the narrow focus of traditional musical rhetoric on micro-techniques, elevating musical rhetoric from "detail embellishment after the work is formed" to a "thinking system permeating the entire process of musical expression." The author emphasizes that general musical rhetoric is not an additional adjustment to existing musical texts but, starting from the creative conception of the subject, dominates the overall design of musical speech. It covers all stages from the selection of musical materials, structural layout, and style shaping, to score notation and performance interpretation, even extending to the levels of music writing and interpretation. This shifts musical rhetoric research from the analysis of formal elements like melody and harmony to the exploration of the subject's thinking and creative logic behind music construction, achieving a leap from the "technical level" to the "thinking level." Secondly, this theory clarifies the core status of the creative subject and the decisive role of context, reshaping the ontological cognition of musical rhetoric. The author points out that musical rhetoric is a personalized manifestation of the creative subject's conscious thinking; its emotional expression and stylistic tendencies always bear the imprint of the subject's life experience and identity. Furthermore, the combined effect of cultural, situational, and cognitive contexts determines the construction strategies of musical rhetoric. This ensures that musical rhetoric research does not view musical texts in isolation but places them within the dual dimensions of subject thinking and socio-culture, revealing the essence of musical rhetoric as "the subject's cognition and expression of the world." Simultaneously, general musical rhetoric bridges the rhetorical logic research of vocal and instrumental music. Addressing the different characteristics of vocal music ("expressing textual connotations through musical vocabulary") and instrumental music ("constructing musical discourse through musical thinking"), it clarifies the differences and commonalities in their rhetorical logics, allowing musical rhetoric theory to adapt to the research of different music types.

Musical Rhetoric and the "Theory of Compositional Strategy"

Jia Daqun emphasizes that the essence of music composition is the rhetorical organization of sound elements — that is, the purposeful and logical artistic arrangement of basic elements such as pitch, rhythm, dynamics, and timbre to achieve specific aesthetic effects and meaning transmission. From this, he proposes the core viewpoint that "musical rhetoric is the core process of artistic expression." In the opening of his article "A Rhetorical Perspective on Composition and Analysis," he first clarifies the essence of rhetoric: it is not merely a technique of linguistic embellishment but the internal logic of artistic expression. He posits that music, as "organized sound expression," manifests rhetorical traits through its "mental intervention," "aesthetic selection," and "logical craftsmanship." [16, pp. 31–32] This assertion subverts the traditional cognition that "rhetoric belongs solely to linguistics." Precisely by emphasizing that "all artistic expression is a rhetorical reconstruction of reality," he argues that music is no exception. [Ibid., p. 31] Composers and performers, through strategic

sound organization, accomplish the transmission of emotions and concepts, with rhetoric serving as the core bond throughout this process.

Regarding the dynamic attributes and boundary definition of rhetoric, the author's discussion is particularly inspiring. He opposes the view that "rhetoric is the breaking of rules," proposing instead that rhetoric possesses the dialectical attribute of both "accumulation of rules" and "innovative breakthrough": rules are the crystallization of negative rhetoric, while breaking rules is the practice of positive rhetoric; together, they constitute the dynamic development of rhetoric. This cognition not only explains the inheritance and innovation of music theory but also provides a reasonable footnote for the evolution of compositional techniques — from the formal norms of Classicism to the avant-garde experiments of Modernism, essentially representing the iteration and expansion of rhetorical strategies.

The practice of musical rhetoric is embodied in the dual dimensions of composition and performance. The author reveals the cross-disciplinary commonality of rhetorical strategies through the correspondence between linguistic figures and musical forms: metaphor corresponds to graphic metaphors in music, parallelism echoes parallel phrases, and the figure of repetition transforms into the technique of varied repetition in music. Numerous examples from composers' creations corroborate this: Sibelius's "cellular derivation" and Schnittke's "polystylism" are exemplary cases of integrating rhetorical thinking into technical innovation. Furthermore, emotional interpretation and breath control in performance are essentially a secondary rhetoric of the musical text, serving as the key link for realizing rhetorical efficacy.

At the level of music analysis, rhetoric offers dual pathways of "heteronomy" and "autonomy." The heteronomous level focuses on the cultural connotations of materials and procedures, while the autonomous level focuses on the uniqueness of rhetorical techniques. Combining both allows one to trace the sources of compositional concepts while verifying the effectiveness of technical expression. This analytical perspective transcends the limitations of traditional form analysis, better highlighting the pluralistic values of musical works.

This research emphasizes that rhetoric is not merely a technique of expression but the essential mode of musical existence, thereby truly constructing a bridge of dialogue between rhetoric and musicology. This viewpoint not only enriches the theoretical system of music composition and analysis but also inspires us to examine the internal logic of artistic expression with a broader cultural vision. It provides an important paradigm for interdisciplinary art research and offers theoretical support for contemporary Chinese music composition.

Strengthening the Dialectical Application of "Norm–Deviation"

Chen Hongduo proposes the "Theory of Rule Deviation," which theoretically resonates with J. Peter Burkholder's assertion of "Rule-Breaking as a Rhetorical Sign." [17] In defining the concept of musical rhetoric, Chen moves beyond the traditional cognition equating musical rhetoric with composition methods, explicitly stating that the essence of musical rhetoric lies in the deviation from general compositional rules. Chen points out that musical rhetoric is not a natural product of general compositional rules but a creative product resulting from composers endowing composition methods with personalized, era-specific, and region-specific characteristics and adapting them to different spatiotemporal contexts. Thus, he argues that the core of musical rhetoric is "the selective variant application of general compositional rules": "norms" provide aesthetic consensus, while "deviations" create expressive tension. This inspires composers to seek a balance between "adhering to rules"

and "breaking rules." This definition clarifies the boundary between musical rhetoric and composition methods: composition methods are the system of common rules for music creation, akin to "language" in literature; musical rhetoric, however, is a strategy of personalized expression in specific contexts, akin to "speech" in literature. Their relationship is analogous to that between grammar and rhetoric in literature: the former ensures the correctness of expression, while the latter achieves the uniqueness of expression.

At the level of phenomenon analysis, Chen transforms abstract theoretical concepts into perceptible musical practice through specific work analyses. Whether it is Mozart's personalized treatment of cadences, Ligeti's unique construction of "sudden disappearance" endings, Tchaikovsky's breakthrough of boat song meter conventions using 4/4 time, or Debussy's departure from the traditional major-minor system via the whole-tone scale, these cases all confirm that "rule deviation" is the core pathway of musical rhetoric. He further expands his research horizon to musical "structural planning." Wagner's "endless melody" dissolves the segmented mode of opera music; Ligeti's static sonority erases the sense of motion in traditional music; the infinite repetition in Minimalist music breaks the structural paradigm of "exposition – development – recapitulation." These breakthroughs of traditional structural principles are all endowed with profound rhetorical significance. Meanwhile, the translation and introduction of Burkholder's text provides a cross-cultural theoretical reference for the rhetorical value of "rule-breaking" from the source of Western music theory, reinforcing the academic foundation of Chen's theoretical propositions.

Chen Hongduo's research on musical rhetoric, at the theoretical level, constructs a rhetorical analysis framework applicable to pure instrumental works, remedying the defect of traditional musical rhetoric research bias towards vocal texts, and promoting the transformation of musical rhetoric theory from "dependence on literature" to "independent self-consistency." At the methodological level, he takes "deviation" as the core analytical tool, providing an operable pathway for style interpretation of musical works and personality interpretation of composers. This enables music analysis to delve from technical formal description into aesthetic meaning interpretation.

Reviewing the above theoretical genealogy of musical rhetoric research — from Han Zhong'en's micro sound rhetoric to Wang Dandan's general rhetoric framework, from Jia Daqun's theory of compositional strategy to Chen Hongduo's theory of rule deviation — the common direction is to push musical rhetoric from "marginal formal embellishment" to "core thinking permeating the entire creative process." This theoretical evolution not only breaks the monopolistic definition of rhetoric by linguistics but also highlights the essence of music as a "medium of communication." The intention anchoring in the conception stage, the logical construction in the layout level, and the strategic selection in the expression link constitute a complete closed loop of musical rhetoric "from thinking to practice." Scholars deconstruct music composition with an interdisciplinary vision, revealing the rhetorical wisdom behind elements such as pitch, rhythm, and structure, while clarifying the three-dimensional interactive relationship of "subject – receiver – context." This enables musical rhetoric research to achieve a triple leap: from technical analysis to ontological inquiry, from textual isolation to contextual correlation, and from vocal dependence to instrumental independence. Against the backdrop of diversified development in contemporary music composition, this rhetorical logical chain of "conception – layout – expression" not only

provides composers with creative guidance that balances normativity and innovation but also opens an integrative path connecting form, aesthetics, and culture for musicology research. It demonstrates the universal value of rhetorical thinking as the "universal grammar" of artistic expression, promoting the realization of deeper meaning transmission and aesthetic resonance in musical art through the dialectic of upholding integrity and innovating.

III. Praxis: Attending to Contemporary Chinese Music Composition

"Rhetorical Awareness" in Music Composition

The core inspiration of musical rhetoric for music composition can ultimately be summarized as the establishment of "rhetorical awareness." Composers must be clear: every technical choice, every element application, and every structural design is a "rhetorical act" serving expressive intent.

In a series of studies, Wang Xuqing, taking rhetoric as the core perspective, not only delves into the indigenous rhetorical paradigms of contemporary Chinese music but also explores paths for the rhetorical fusion of Chinese and Western elements, constructing a musical rhetoric system that combines theoretical depth with practical value. [18; 19; 20]

Her core theory first focuses on the indigenous construction of "rhetorical paradigms" in contemporary Chinese music. In her analysis of Wen Deqing's *Ink Splash II*, the author discovers that the composer, grounded in traditional Chinese culture, extracts unique rhetorical elements and techniques. The work transforms the "heavy breaking light, wet breaking dry" techniques of ink wash painting into musical timbre contrasts and texture changes, achieving a cross-media translation from visual to auditory art through the rhetoric of "synesthesia." The *Luo Shu* (Lo Shu Square) numerals serve as the deep structural logic, controlling rhythmic pulsation and voice relationships, causing the music to imply mathematical harmony amidst seemingly chaotic instantaneous transitions, thus creating a rhetorical effect of "hyperbole." This creative approach, which takes traditional cultural symbols as the rhetorical core and transforms calligraphic/pictorial imagery and traditional numerical concepts into musical language, has become a significant rhetorical paradigm in contemporary Chinese music.

Regarding the "rhetorical fusion" of Chinese and Western elements, the author proposes the core viewpoint of "organic symbiosis." In Jack Body's *Fourteen States*, the composer combines Western modern music's sound experiments and performance art with Eastern pentatonic scale elements. Through the pitch structure of "black-and-white key juxtaposition + tone clusters," a rhetorical unity of cross-cultural musical language is achieved. Wen Deqing correlates complex tone techniques (blending natural harmonics and microtones) with the vertical stroke forms of Chinese calligraphy, making Western compositional techniques serve Eastern aesthetic expression. This fusion is not a simple collage but is guided by rhetorical goals, allowing Chinese and Western elements to fit each other in structural logic and aesthetic connotation, forming a new musical signification system.

The author also points out that the rhetorical paradigms of contemporary Chinese music possess the distinct characteristic of "symbolic metaphor." Traditional cultural elements in these works are no longer superficial decorations but rhetorical symbols bearing structural functions. The *Luo Shu* numerals are not merely tools for rhythm control but metaphorically represent the traditional Chinese cosmology; the musical transformation of ink wash techniques is essentially a rhetorical expression of Eastern dialectical thinking. Simultaneously, this rhetorical paradigm accommodates both

openness and indigeneity, absorbing analytical frameworks such as "syllogism" and "discourse structure" from Western rhetoric while adhering to the pursuit of artistic conception (*yijing*) and the cultural core of Chinese art.

Wang Xuqing's research reveals that the rhetorical innovation of contemporary Chinese music lies in using rhetoric as a bridge to enable traditional cultural elements to gain modern musical expression and to achieve functional fusion of Chinese and Western techniques. This rhetorical paradigm not only highlights the unique value of indigenous culture but also expands the boundaries of musical signification, providing the rhetorical wisdom of "tradition as the substance, modernity as the function" for contemporary music composition.

Modern Translation of Ethnic Elements and Indigenous Reconstruction of Rhetorical Thinking

In his in-depth analysis of the Suona Concerto *A Branch of Flowers* [21] and the Symphonic Poem *The Great Wall*, [22] An Luxin outlines the core pathways for the rhetorical fusion of Chinese and Western elements in contemporary Chinese music composition. Simultaneously, he excavates a Sinicized musical rhetorical paradigm that combines national cultural cores with modern musical thinking, providing important theoretical references for indigenous creation and expression in contemporary music. His core theory can be summarized into three dimensions: the mutual fusion and symbiosis of Chinese and Western techniques, the modern rhetorical translation of ethnic elements, and the indigenous reconstruction of rhetorical thinking.

Regarding the rhetorical fusion of Chinese and Western elements, An Luxin proposes that contemporary music composition is not a simple technical collage but a chemical-style fusion where "ethnic elements are the seeds, and Western techniques are the irrigation." In *A Branch of Flowers*, the composer Shen Ye blends the nine-tone scale, tone contours, and heterophony of Dolan Muqam with Messiaen's modes of limited transposition and Western single-movement suite structures. The nine-tone scale not only highly coincides with the modal pattern of the Dolan Muqam piece *Maigaiti Dugamaiti Bayawan* but also shares origins with Messiaen's modes, achieving a deep dialogue between ethnic modal thinking and modern tonal thinking. *The Great Wall* combines the traditional Chinese "*chanda*" form and the theory of "same *jun*, three *gongs*" with Western rondo form, compound binary form, and the technique of leading motive development. For instance, the movement *Po Zhen Zi* uses the *chanda* form to carry the war narrative while borrowing the familial derivation of Wagner's leading motives, allowing the three major motives of "Call," "Deep Affection," and "Sigh" to derive diverse variants, becoming the musical thread connecting the entire work. This fusion breaks the binary opposition between Chinese and Western music, using Western musical structures as the skeleton to grant ethnic musical elements space for modern expression, achieving unity of form and content.

Regarding the modern rhetorical translation of ethnic music elements, An Luxin emphasizes the abstract refinement and technical reconstruction of the core of folk music rather than the superficial appropriation of materials. The core of his theory lies in the notion that contemporary music composition must excavate the morphological characteristics and cultural spirit of ethnic music and transform them into symphonic rhetorical language through modern musical techniques. For example, the tone contours, heterophony, and *ban-shi* (metrical) factors of Dolan Muqam are transformed in *A Branch of Flowers* into the *suona*'s "chanting, trembling, sliding" cavity expressions, the orchestra's modern heterophonic textures, and a layout of accelerating tempos.

The improvisational nature and roughness of folk music are condensed into rigorous modern sonic forms. The patriotic sentiments and historical vicissitudes embedded in the culture of the Great Wall are presented in *The Great Wall* through a "quasi-symmetrical" chapter layout and the symphonic transformation of the opera "tight beating, slow singing" (*jinda manchang*) style. National cultural spirit is concretized into perceptible musical rhetorical symbols. This translation allows ethnic music elements to transcend the limitations of folk contexts, gaining a broader dimension of modern musical expression.

In excavating indigenous musical rhetorical paradigms, An Luxin distills a contemporary Chinese music paradigm combining "hybrid structural thinking" with "personalized rhetorical expression." On one hand, at the macro planning level, a "hybrid structure" is adopted, breaking the rigid rules of Western classical forms and integrating the cyclical and open thinking of traditional Chinese music. For instance, the single-movement suite of *A Branch of Flowers* fuses sonata form with symphonic poem thinking, presenting characteristics of latent tonal layout, blurred structural symmetry, and rich sectional factors. The eight chapters of *The Great Wall* adopt a "quasi-symmetrical" layout, with each chapter integrating rondo, variation, *chanda*, and other forms, achieving structural freedom that follows the heart's desire without transgressing the rules. On the other hand, at the micro-rhetorical level, attention is paid to the combination of ethnicity and personalization. For example, *A Branch of Flowers* deconstructs the concerto relationship between the *suona* and the orchestra into five diverse modes, incorporating the style of opera "tight beating, slow singing" into the cadenza, thereby expanding the rhetorical boundaries of the concerto. *The Great Wall* creates rhetorical effects that combine dramatic quality and ethnicity through various symphonic treatments of the choir and orchestra (contrapuntal, unison, independent expression) and a unique instrumentation of "mixed trio (vocal/instrumental)," integrating the aesthetic principles of "harmony in diversity" and "interplay of void and solid" into modern symphonic language.

The core of An Luxin's theory is essentially the establishment of "indigenous subjectivity" in contemporary Chinese music rhetorical creation: taking national culture and musical elements as the core, borrowing Western musical techniques and structural thinking to achieve a leap from "formal fusion" to "rhetorical symbiosis," and ultimately constructing a Sinicized musical rhetorical paradigm that embodies national spirit, modern aesthetics, and personalized expression. This provides key theoretical support for the indigenous development and international expression of contemporary Chinese music.

Overall, the Chinese music academia, focusing on the practice of contemporary Chinese music composition and grounded in traditional Chinese music culture, aesthetic thought, and creative practice, has deconstructed an indigenous rhetorical logic distinct from Western music. Its core lies in the combination of formal rhetoric and conceptual rhetoric. Formal rhetoric cuts into the four ontological dimensions of music: pitch, rhythm, texture, and structure, integrating traditional elements such as the Five Elements composition method, *Shifan Luogu* (Ten Fan Drums and Gongs), single-line texture, and Tang Dynasty Grand Suite thinking. Conceptual rhetoric, through means such as metaphor and symbolism, achieves the sonic translation of cultural images like calligraphic brushwork and traditional philosophical thoughts, following Chinese classical aesthetic principles to construct a sound symbol system with Chinese national identifiers.

On this basis, the academia advocates integrating cultural archetypes such as Confucian-Buddhist-Taoist philosophy and poetic narrative traditions to construct an indigenous signification model based on Eastern philosophy, breaking away from dependence on Western theories. These studies emphasize that music composition must achieve a deep coupling of creative concepts and musical forms, taking Chinese cultural expression and spiritual transmission as the core value, rather than copying Western evaluation criteria.

This "rhetorical awareness" in creation can help works escape the traps of "technicism" and "symbolism," achieving a return to three major values: from "technology supremacy" to "expression as the foundation," from "piling up cultural symbols" to "expressing cultural spirit," and from "Chinese-Western opposition" to "Chinese-Western mutual learning." The essence of the indigenization of musical rhetoric is the rhetorical docking of Chinese and Western musical elements, inspiring composers to abandon simple collages and organically integrate Western techniques with indigenous elements with expressive intent as the core. In the contemporary context, this "rhetorical awareness" can not only enhance the artistic appeal and ideological depth of works but also promote the formation of a unique style in contemporary music that combines technical height, cultural thickness, and the warmth of the times.

Conclusion

Looking back over more than two decades of research on Chinese musical rhetoric theory, a group of scholars spanning older, middle, and younger generations — represented by Qian Renkang, Yao Yaping, Han Zhong'en, Chen Hongduo, Jia Daqun, Wang Dandan, Huang Zongquan, An Luxin, and Wang Xuqing — have conducted explorations across various research facets. These include the deep inquiry into the essence of musical rhetoric, the systematic construction of the "conception – layout – expression" rhetorical logical chain, and the excavation of rhetorical fusion of Chinese and Western elements and Chinese musical rhetorical paradigms. They have formed a research path characterized by both critical reflection and constructive innovation. The series of explorations by this scholarly community has completed an advancement from theoretical enlightenment to deep integration and finally to systematic exploration and construction. This has not only promoted the key transformation of musical rhetoric from the introduction and borrowing of "other theories" to the autonomous construction of "dialogue theories" but also demonstrated the academic mindset metamorphosis of the Chinese music academia from "craving new knowledge" to "constructing subjectivity."

As an interdisciplinary field combining theory and practice, the indigenous exploration of Chinese musical rhetoric has always revolved around the two core propositions of "theoretical reproduction" and "practical re-creation." The academia has promoted the deep grafting of Western musical rhetoric theory with Chinese rhetorical traditions and indigenous music composition practices through contextual adaptation of concepts, indigenous turning of research perspectives, and cultural construction of expression systems. By constructing the "conception – layout – expression" rhetorical logical chain, it has connected the complete ecosystem of musical art from creative thinking to performance interpretation. From the systematic excavation of indigenous rhetorical paradigms to the organic fusion of Chinese and Western musical elements, musical rhetoric has become an important carrier for highlighting Chinese music culture. The development journey of Chinese musical rhetoric, from the digestion of Western theories

to the autonomous construction of indigenous theoretical systems, has made the rhetorical wisdom of Chinese music and the practice of contemporary music composition the core foundation of this theoretical construction, injecting unique indigenous new qualities into global musical rhetoric research.

Standing at a new academic node, the development of Chinese musical rhetoric still faces many open issues: How can non-semantic-oriented traditional Chinese music further enrich the theoretical dimensions of musical rhetoric? How can the living rhetorical wisdom of folk music be systematically refined and modernly transformed? Answering these questions requires the academia to continue to delve deeply into music composition practice, promoting the continuous innovation of this theoretical system on the basis of upholding the core of indigenous culture.

References

1. Chen Wangdao. *An introduction to rhetoric.* Shanghai: Dajiang Bookstore, 1932. 207 p. (In Chinese)
2. Zong Tinghu, Deng Mingyi, Li Xizong, Li Jinling. *New treatise on rhetoric*. Shanghai: Shanghai Education Press, 1988. 528 p. (In Chinese)
3. Tan Yongxiang. *Aesthetics of Chinese rhetoric*. Beijing: Beijing Language Institute Press, 1992. 557 p. (In Chinese)
4. Wang Xijie. *General theory of rhetoric*. Nanjing: Nanjing University Press, 1991. 297 p. (In Chinese)
5. Wang Xuqing. Concept clusters, problem domains, and music analysis: On Qian Renkang's theoretical research in music. *Art of Music — Journal of the Shanghai Conservatory of Music*. 2024, no. 5, pp. 83–92. (In Chinese)
6. Zhao Hai. Musical rhetoric in the Baroque period and its implied aesthetic concepts. *Journal of the Central Conservatory of Music*. 1999, no. 4, pp. 3–16. (In Chinese)
7. Yao Yaping. Rhetoric: A strategy for music's breakout — observations and analysis on how the artistic tendency of European music emerged from church liturgy. *Huangzhong — Journal of Wuhan Conservatory of Music*. 2009, no. 1, pp. 57–66. (In Chinese)
8. Chen Hongduo. Analysis of the concept and phenomena of musical rhetoric. *Huangzhong — Journal of Wuhan Conservatory of Music.* 2012, no. 3, pp.159–172. (In Chinese)
9. Chen Hongduo. Analysis of the concept and phenomena of musical rhetoric. In: *Cihai*. 6th ed., compact ed., ed. by Xia Zhengnong and Chen Zhili. Shanghai: Shanghai Lexicographical Publishing House, 2011, 2955 p. (In Chinese)
10. Wang Xijie. *Chinese rhetoric.* Beijing: The Commercial Press, 2004. 506 p. (In Chinese)
11. Han Zhong'en. Sound rhetoric, sonic narrative, and the achievement of musical meaning: Recalling master Huang leading the younger generation in scholarly inquiry. *Musicology in China*. 2012, no. 1, pp. 122–130. (In Chinese)
12. Huang Xiangpeng. Questions on music: One hundred puzzles in the history of traditional Chinese music (Parts I, II, III). *Music Research*. 1997, no. 3, pp. 5–24; no. 4, p. 14–35; 1998, no. 1, p. 38–60. (In Chinese)
13. Wang Dandan. The construction and expression of musical language: On general musical rhetoric. *Music & Performance — Journal of Nanjing University of the Arts*. 2018, no. 4, pp. 13–20. (In Chinese)
14. Wang Dandan. An exploration of the rhetorical logic of musical ontological existence. *Chinese Music*. 2024, no. 1, pp. 65–80. (In Chinese)
15. Wang Dandan. The art of 'speaking' by sublime minds: The underestimated 'musical rhetoric'. *Art of Music — Journal of the Shanghai Conservatory of Music*. 2012, no. 1, pp. 126–134. (In Chinese)

16. Jia Daqun. A rhetorical perspective on composition and analysis. *Music Research*. 2020, no. 1, pp. 31–36. (In Chinese)

17. Burkholder J. P. Rule-Breaking as a rhetorical sign. In: *Festa Musicologica: Essays in Honor of George J. Buelow*, ed. by T.J. Mathiesen, B.V. Rivera. Stuyvesant, New York: Pendragon Press, 1995, pp. 369–389; trans. by Chen Hongduo. *Journal of Tianjin Conservatory of Music*. 2017, no. 3, pp. 36–48 (In Chinese).

18. Wang Xuqing. The rhetoric of musical time: A study on the musical language of Wen Deqing's *Ink Splash II*. *Journal of Tianjin Conservatory of Music*. 2020, no. 1, pp. 17–25, 31. (In Chinese)

19. Wang Xuqing. Irony and grotesque, spiritual bitter journey: A rhetorical narrative interpretation of Jack Body's *Fourteen States*. *Art of Music — Journal of the Shanghai Conservatory of Music*. 2016, no. 3, pp. 128–137. (In Chinese)

20. Wang Xuqing. *A Historical Account of Western Musical Rhetoric*. Shanghai: Shanghai Conservatory of Music Press, 2018. 326 p. (In Chinese)

21. An Luxin. Musical narrative and rhetorical analysis of the Suona Concerto *A Branch of Flowers*. *Music Research*. 2024, no. 2, pp. 122–145. (In Chinese)

22. An Luxin. Analysis of musical rhetoric in Zhang Qianyi's symphonic poem *The Great Wall*. *Music Creation*. 2024, no. 1, pp. 101–121. (In Chinese)

Information about the author:

Wang Xuqing — Ph.D., Professor of Musicology, Director of the Research Administration Office, Department of Musicology, Shanghai Conservatory of Music, Shanghai, China.

Информация об авторе:

Ван Сюйцин — доктор философии, профессор музыковедения, директор отдела научных исследований, кафедра музыковедения, Шанхайская консерватория музыки, г. Шанхай, Китайская Народная Республика.

Received / Поступила в редакцию: 10.03.2026
Revised / Одобрена после рецензирования: 13.05.2026
Accepted / Принята к публикации: 15.05.2026

ISSN 3034-3836 (Online)

Musical Culture of China

Original article
UDC 78.01
https://doi.org/10.56620/RM.2026.2.093-116
EDN FFRVUD

The Dilemma and the Resolution: A Study of the Compatibility between Traditional Chinese Musical Elements and Western Music Systems

Shen Wei

Shaanxi Normal University,
Xi'an, China,
shen-wei@snnu.edu.cn✉, *https://orcid.org/0009-0005-0562-3586*

Abstract. This article explores the compatibility between traditional Chinese musical elements and Western art-music systems within a comparative theoretical framework. Focusing on representative Sino-Western fusion works from different historical periods, the study examines this issue from multiple dimensions, including musical structure, Chinese phonetics, timbre, and performance techniques. Particular attention is given to the relationship between traditional Chinese music and the two principal systems of Western art music: tonality and atonality. Through systematic comparison, the article argues that the core elements of traditional Chinese music, rooted in *Han* cultural and aesthetic traditions, demonstrate only limited compatibility with the Western classical tonal system. Fundamental differences in pitch organization, melodic construction, vocal inflection, polyphony, and the underlying concept of sound itself significantly constrain their integration. By contrast, Western modern and contemporary music, largely based on atonal or post-tonal principles, exhibits a higher degree of compatibility with traditional Chinese musical elements. Shared characteristics such as non-hierarchical pitch organization, flexible rhythm, curvilinear melodic motion, and an emphasis on the intrinsic qualities of sound facilitate a more organic interaction between the two traditions. On this basis, the article proceeds to investigate the criteria for evaluating the artistic value of cross-cultural compositions and reflects on the historical and contemporary issues in Chinese art music.

Keywords: traditional Chinese music, Western music, music theory, Chinese phonetics, compatibility

For citation: Shen Wei. The Dilemma and the Resolution: A Study of the Compatibility between Traditional Chinese Musical Elements and Western Music Systems. *Russian Musicology*. 2026, no. 2, pp. 93–116. https://doi.org/10.56620/RM.2026.2.093-116

Funding: This research was supported by the 2026 Fundamental Research Funds for the Central Universities (Grant No. 1301032922) and the 2026 Youth Talent Program of the School of Music, Shaanxi Normal University.

© Shen Wei, 2026

Дилемма и ее решение: исследование совместимости традиционных китайских музыкальных элементов с западными музыкальными системами

Шэнь Вэй

Педагогический университет Шэньси,
г. Сиань, Китайская Народная Республика,
shen-wei@snnu.edu.cn✉, *https://orcid.org/0009-0005-0562-3586*

Аннотация. В статье рассматривается совместимость традиционных китайских музыкальных элементов с западными системами академической музыки в рамках сравнительно-теоретического подхода. На примере репрезентативных произведений, объединяющих китайские и западные музыкальные традиции и относящихся к разным периодам времени, этот вопрос изучается в различных аспектах, включая музыкальную структуру, китайскую фонетику, тембр и исполнительские техники. Особое внимание уделяется соотношению традиционной китайской музыки с двумя основными системами западной академической музыки — тональностью и атональностью. На основе систематического сравнения автор приходит к выводу, что основные элементы традиционной китайской музыки, уходящие корнями в культурные и эстетические традиции Хань, демонстрируют лишь ограниченную совместимость с западной классической тональной системой. Существенные различия в высотной организации, мелодической структуре, вокальной интонации, полифонии и самом понятии звука значительно ограничивают их интеграцию. Напротив, западная современная музыка, основанная на атональных или посттональных принципах, демонстрирует более высокую степень совместимости с традиционными китайскими музыкальными элементами. Общие характеристики, такие как неиерархическая высотная организация, гибкий ритм, извилистое мелодическое движение и акцент на внутренних качествах звука, способствуют более органичному взаимодействию двух традиций. На этой основе в статье рассматриваются критерии оценки художественной ценности межкультурных композиций и анализируются исторические и современные проблемы китайской академической музыки.

Ключевые слова: традиционная китайская музыка, западная музыка, теория музыки, китайская фонетика, совместимость

Финансирование: Данное исследование было поддержано Фондом фундаментальных исследований центральных университетов на 2026 год (грант № 1301032922) и Программой поддержки молодых талантов Школы музыки Педагогического университета Шэньси на 2026 год.

Introduction

Both Chinese and Western art music possess distinct theoretical and practical systems. In the realm of contemporary art music, the question of how to effectively integrate elements of traditional Chinese music into the Western musical system — while avoiding simplistic categorization and excessive polarization — has remained a core issue for Chinese and East Asian composers, as well as an attractive subject of exploration for a select few Western composers.

Traditional Chinese music, shaped by historical, ethnic, and regional factors, exhibits a broad spectrum of stylistic forms. Its core musical elements are rooted in *Han* cultural foundations, characterized by theoretical depth,

practical adaptability, and universal relevance. These elements span multiple dimensions, including musical theory (modes, rhythm, form, and notation), melody and phonetics (especially the phonetic features of traditional Chinese music), timbre and performance techniques. Western art music encompasses two principal systems: "tonal music" and "atonal music." This paper proposes to explore the aforementioned topics within this framework.

The article first conducts a comparative study of the structural elements of traditional Chinese and Western music, followed by an analysis of selected Sino-Western fusion works from different historical periods. Through perspectives of music theory, Chinese phonetics, timbre, and performance practice, the study examines the theoretical basis and aesthetic implications of cross-cultural synthesis and, furthermore, discusses the artistic evaluation, historical development, as well as contemporary issues in the creation of Chinese art music.

Core Elements of Traditional Chinese Music and Their Comparison with Western Musical Elements

The core elements of traditional Chinese music encompass multiple aspects including musical theory, melodies and vocal techniques, timbre and performance techniques. Examining their distinctive characteristics and comparing their similarities and differences with Western musical elements serves as a crucial prerequisite for exploring the compatibility between traditional Chinese musical elements and the Western musical systems.

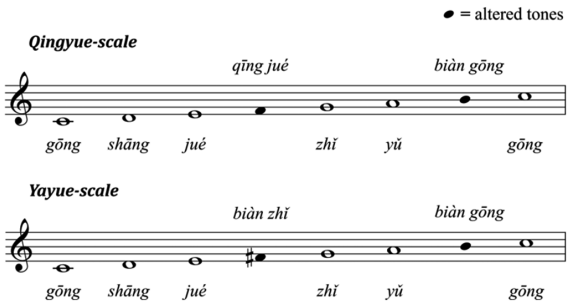
The term "traditional Chinese musical elements" in this paper refers to the core elements of traditional music that are rooted in *Han* Chinese culture and possess both theoretical and practical universality. The unique musical phenomena of individual ethnic minorities are not included in the scope of this study.

Music Theory

1. Modal System

The modal system of traditional Chinese music is centered on the *five tones* (五声) framework. Upon this foundation, *altered tones* (偏音) are added to multi-tone scales such as the *six-tone* (六律) and the *seven-tone* (七音), among which the seven-tone scale is the most typical and widely employed. Structurally, the traditional Chinese seven-tone scale resembles the early Western church modes. For instance, the Qingyue-scale (清乐音阶) is identical to the Ionian mode, while the Yayue-scale (雅乐音阶) shares the same interval structure as Lydian mode (Example No. 1).

Example No. 1 Traditional Chinese Qingyue-scale and Yayue-scale



Substantial differences nevertheless remain in structural tones, modal function, and melodic characteristics. The notions of *changing gōng* (旋宫) and *transiting mode* (犯调) are roughly analogous to Western modulation and transposition — or, more precisely, to broadly defined modal transformation. [1, p. 442] However, since traditional Chinese music lacks the modern concept of "tonality," interpreting these phenomena through such system is inappropriate. A more accurate analogy would be the transformation of Western church modes within twelve-tone equal temperament. For example: 1) Changing gōng: C-gōng → D-gōng ≈ C-Ionian → D-Ionian; 2) Transiting mode: C-gōng → G-zhǐ ≈ C-Ionian → G-Mixolydian.

2. Rhythm and Meter

The concept corresponding to rhythm and meter in traditional Chinese music is known as *bǎnyǎn* (板眼). Its emergence and standardization underwent a lengthy historical evolution. The structural patterns of *bǎnyǎn* are referred to as *bǎnshì* (板式), which may be roughly compared to "meter" in Western music theory. Among these, the *sǎnbǎn* (散板, free rhythm) — also called *wúbǎn wúyǎn* (无板无眼, unmeasured) and marked with the symbol サ — is one of the most distinctive meter in Chinese traditional music. *Sǎnbǎn* does not specify precise meter; instead, only a final beat marker *dǐbǎn* (底板) is placed at the end of a phrase to signify closure. [2, p. 44] Within this framework, performers interpret the rhythm freely according to the musical context, creating a highly flexible, irregular and non-isochronous rhythmic flow.

In the Western classical system, there is no direct metrical equivalent to *sǎnbǎn*. However, tempo or expression markings such as *ad libitum* and *rubato* perform an analogous role, though they are relatively brief and serve as auxiliary or ornamental devices rather than governing an entire musical section — and this is precisely what characterizes *sǎnbǎn*. By contrast, in Western contemporary music, the concept of "ametric music" closely parallels *sǎnbǎn* in function and performing effect, as both deliberately abandon fixed meter and are applied comprehensively throughout entire works or substantial sections.

3. Form

Traditional Chinese music shares many structural similarities with Western musical forms and may be broadly classified into three principal categories: *jùshì form* (句式体), *qǔpái form* (曲牌体), and *bǎnqiāng form* (板腔体).

The *jùshì form* originates from the structure and prosody of Chinese poetry. It represents a fundamental musical form akin to the "Liedform" in Western tradition. The *qǔpái form* — built upon the concept of the *qǔpái* (曲牌), meaning "tune-title" or "labeled tune" — is one of the most crucial concept in traditional Chinese musical form. [3, p. 6] The *qǔpái* functions both as an independent composition and as an organized structure. In terms of musical form, it generally refers to an existing fixed melody, serving a role similar to that of the "cantus firmus" in early Western music.

The *bǎnqiāng form*, which means "metric change form," constitutes a unique compositional structure, primarily formed through the combination and variation of various *bǎnshì* and *bǎnqiāng* (板腔, melodic patterns). A typical *bǎnqiāng form* manifests as a *Bǎnshì Variational Form*, internally organized by a sequence of rhythmic patterns derived from multiple *bǎnsh* patterns. The most representative sequence is "sǎn–màn–zhōng–kuài–sǎn" (散—慢—中—快—散), [4, p. 368] meaning "free–slow–moderate–fast–free."

Distinct from the large-scale musical forms in Western classical tradition, traditional Chinese formal counterparts rarely incorporate the concept of "recapitulation." Instead, they emphasize contrast and structural variation, predominantly adopting a "free multi-sectional form." This musical structure is quite common in modern and contemporary Western music, exemplified by forms like "sequential form" and "collage," though it currently lacks a unified term to describe such compositional principle.

4. Harmony and Polyphony

Traditional Chinese music, rooted in *Han* culture, is predominantly monophonic. While the harmony in a broad sense (the combination of tones of different pitches) can be found in operatic music, ensemble performances, certain *Han* folk music, and the music of ethnic minorities, it is not in the sense of Western

functional harmony. In contrast, polyphony has been more widely applied in traditional Chinese musical practices, though it mainly appears as an auxiliary form known as "heterophony."

5. Notation

Traditional Chinese musical notation originated early and encompasses a wide variety of systems. From the perspective of notation format, it can be broadly divided into two categories: *Chinese character notation* (文字谱) and *symbolic notation* (符号谱).

Chinese character notation includes several classifications, the most representative being *qín notation* (琴谱), *jiǎnzì notation* (减字谱), and *gōngchě notation* (工尺谱). The written symbols in these systems are not always standard Chinese characters in their literal sense; rather, they are derived or modified forms of Chinese characters — simplified, compounded, or altered components such as radicals — endowed with specific musical meanings. Their function is to indicate pitch and finger position, performing techniques, or in some cases to provide comprehensive textual descriptions of actual performance.

Symbolic notation refers to systems in which the notational signs are visually distinct from Chinese characters. The most typical example is *curve notation* (曲线谱), also known as *shēng qǔzhé* (声曲折), [2, p. 188] which employs curved or winding lines to indicate the approximate melodic contour of musical pieces, typically songs. In attribute and function, it corresponds closely to Western "Neume notation," while in visual form, it bears a stronger resemblance to "graphical notation" that emerged in Western music during the twentieth century.

In contrast to the precisely measured Western staff notation, nearly all traditional Chinese musical notations do not aim for "precision." Musical knowledge and performance practice were transmitted primarily through oral instruction and imitation, leaving performers considerable interpretative freedom and resulting in a degree of improvisation during actual performance. Moreover, traditional Chinese performance practice places great emphasis on performing from memory. Playing directly from a score was often regarded as rigid and limited, hindering the expression of musical emotion and artistic atmosphere; consequently, the concept of "sight-reading" was virtually absent from traditional Chinese musical performance.

Melody, Tune and Tone

The melody and tune of traditional Chinese music — both vocal and instrumental — are fundamentally determined by the phonetic characteristics of the Chinese language and its dialects. Two phonetic features are most prominent in Chinese: "monosyllabism" and "polytone." Among these, *tone* (声调, language tone) plays a crucial role in shaping the melodic essence of Chinese traditional music.

Dialects of the Central Plains and northern regions in China predominantly feature "four tones" with pronounced tone fluctuations, resulting in vigorous and dynamic musical styles with curvy and jagged melodic lines. In contrast, southern dialects often possess more than four tones (ranging from five to nine), with less tone fluctuations, resulting in softer, more lyrical musical styles with winding and undulating melodies. Even modern Mandarin retains phonetic traits and musical potential distinctly different from Western languages and many others worldwide.

The vast majority of Western languages are polysyllabic, with only a few monosyllabic words. They emphasize *intonation* rather than *tone*. In fact, the Western linguistic system lacks the concept of "tone" in the Chinese language sense. The so-called "intonation" in Western languages pertains only to the pitch of sounds produced in a language at the phonetic

level. The essential difference lies in semantic function: Chinese tone is meaning-bearing, whereas Western intonation is non-semantic.

Timbre and Performance Techniques

Sound (声) is an essential concept in traditional Chinese music. Traditional Chinese musicians have long emphasized the equal importance of normal sound and musical tone — or, in some theoretical interpretations, the inseparability of sound and music — a conception that differs from the Western analytical division of "sound" into categories such as musical tone, noise, and microtone, etc. "Noise" and "microtone" are the most distinctive features of traditional Chinese music in terms of timbre. These timbral attributes are found abundantly across various genres of traditional Chinese instrumental and vocal music.

The most explicit manifestation of noise in traditional Chinese instrumental music appears in *gong and drum music* (锣鼓乐) — a form of percussion ensemble that relies primarily on gongs and drums, performed independently without reliance on melodic instruments. *Bitter notes* (苦音), [2, p. 138] which are prevalent in the folk music of Northwest China, represent a characteristic microtonal phenomenon in traditional Chinese vocal music. Within the modal framework, these are characterized by a slightly raised fourth degree (↑F) and a slightly lowered seventh degree (↓B).

The unique Chinese musical performing concept rooted in noise and microtones is *yáoshēng* (摇声, *changing tone*, this concept was proposed by the Chinese music theorist Du Yaxiong (for related content, see: [Ibid., p. 18–22])) — a self-contained theoretical and performative notion derived from the interaction of noise and microtones. More precisely, *yáoshēng* refers to the intentional alteration of pitch and timbre through specific techniques, applicable to both instrumental and vocal performance (though more common in instrumental practice). As of now, Chinese musicologists have not established a clear academic definition for this term.

The closest Western equivalent to *yáoshēng* might be *glissando*, widely used in orchestral and plucked-string instruments. While similar in form, they differ significantly in musical concept and performing system. In traditional Chinese music, *yáoshēng* is not merely ornamental, but an integral component of the instrumental performance — in certain instruments, such as the *gǔqín* (古琴), it is even more crucial than conventional techniques. Furthermore, *yáoshēng* has developed into a systematic hierarchy of technical types within traditional Chinese musical performance. For instance, the *gǔqín* technique *yín* (吟) — a rapid, oscillating slide motion on a sounding string, typically executed downward then upward with the left hand — has several subcategories, including *cháng yín* (长吟), *xì yín* (细吟), *fēi yín* (飞吟), *yóu yín* (游吟), and *dìng yín* (定吟), [Ibid., p. 19] which exhibit the variety and nuance of performance.

By contrast, in Western classical music, *glissando* remains a decorative or expressive device applied sparingly and occasionally. In Western contemporary music, however, techniques functionally and acoustically analogous to *yáoshēng* have become widespread — a consequence of the twentieth century's so-called "timbre revolution," which fundamentally reshaped the conception of sound in Western musical world.

Traditional Chinese Musical Elements and the Western Classical Music System

The foundation of Western classical music — referring to the "common practice period" — lies in the tonal system and functional harmony, collectively known as "tonal harmony." In this tradition, melodies are generally derived from harmony, while polyphony also possesses an inherent harmonic logic, with multiple and

simultaneous voices forming vertical harmonic sonorities. By contrast, traditional Chinese music is rooted in the pentatonic modal system and the phonetic characteristics of the Chinese language — the latter often exerting an influence even stronger than the former. Elements such as melody and tune, rhythm and meter, phonetics and timbre are all deeply grounded in the tone and prosodic nature of Chinese language.

As shown in Table 1, apart from certain rhythmic or formal similarities, there are no identical or significantly analogous features between traditional Chinese and Western classical music. Instead, they tend to exhibit a series of contrasting paradigms, such as: "monophonic vs. polyphonic," "equal vs. unequal," "irregular vs. regular," and "curvy vs. steady," etc. Each possesses intensely distinct core musical characteristics that resist mutual compatibility. In light of this, the study selects four representative Sino-Western fusion works for analytical demonstration and discussion.

Anton Arensky. Étude in G-flat Major, Op. 25 No. 3

The Russian composer Anton Arensky is renowned for the lyricism and technical refinement of his musical style. His Piano Étude, composed in 1893 as part of the collection *4 Morceaux*, exemplifies these qualities through the idiom of Romantic expressivity with a five-part rando form. This piece is distinguished by the fusion of a thematic quotation from the Chinese folk song *Jasmine Flower* (*茉莉花*) in its contrasting section.

This Étude, however, cannot be regarded as an authentic Sino-Western fusion work. Arensky did not intend to compose a "Chinese-style" piano piece; rather, he directly quoted a Chinese folk melody, a practice typical of musical exoticism. The main sections are built in *G-flat major*, with the left-hand melody and right-hand accompaniment frequently featuring numerous chromatic alterations

Table 1. Comparison of the Core Elements of Chinese Traditional Music and Western Classical Music

Musical Elements	**China**	**Western**
Mode and Tonality	Pentatonic modal system	Heptatonic tonal system
Rhythm and Meter	Free and irregular rhythm, limited meter types	Equal and regular rhythm, diverse meter types
Musical Form	Mainly free multi-sectional form	Mainly A-B-A form
Harmony and Texture	Heterophony	Functional harmony, polyphony
Notation	Chinese character and symbolic notation (more interpretive flexibility)	Staff notation (limited interpretive flexibility)
Melody and Tune	Based on Chinese phonetics, varied melodic contour	Based on functional harmony, arched melodic contour
Phonetic Features	Monosyllable and polytone	Polysyllable and non-tone
Timbre	Emphasis on sound	Emphasis on overtone theory

(see Example No. 2). The contrasting section retains the same texture but modulates to *B-flat major*, where the theme of *Jasmine Flower* is introduced (see Example No. 3). This work demonstrates that juxtaposing Chinese and Western musical elements creates stark stylistic contrast and musical tension — precisely the aesthetic effect that the exoticism aims to achieve.

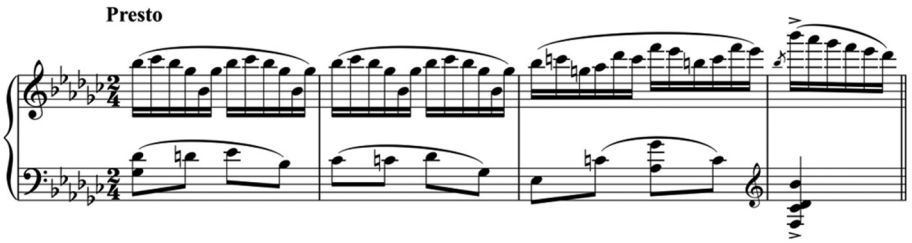
Charles Tomlinson Griffes. So-fei Gathering Flowers, Op. 10 No. 1

The art song *So-fei Gathering Flowers*, as part of the vocal cycle *Five Poems of Ancient China and Japan*, composed in 1917 by American composer Charles Tomlinson Griffes. The lyrics may be drawn from Tang dynasty poet Wang Changling's poems *Song of Lotus Gathering* (*采莲曲*) or *Autumn Lament in the Palace* (*西宫秋怨*). This piece takes Chinese pentatonic mode as its compositional foundation, reflecting Griffes's personal interpretation of Chinese musical idioms. Compared with works that merely quote melodies from traditional Chinese music, it represents a step forward, as it attempts to internalize stylistic characteristics rather than reproduce surface details. Nevertheless, the piece still falls within the realm of musical exoticism. Apart from the Chinese pentatonic mode, all other compositional elements remain firmly grounded in the Western Romantic tradition.

As shown in Example No. 4, both the vocal line and piano accompaniment employ characteristically Romantic gestures: expressive melodic contour, chromatic harmony, and textural density. Were it not for the typical pentatonic scale, this piece would be virtually indistinguishable from Western art song of the same period. In essence, therefore, *So-fei Gathering Flowers* is an atypical Western art song written in a typical eastern pentatonic mode — a Westernized interpretation created by a Western composer based on his personal understanding of traditional Chinese musical style.

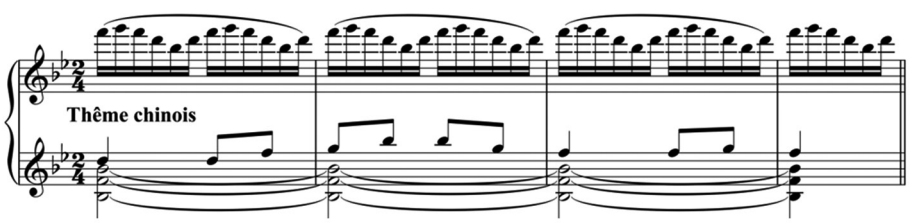
Example No. 2

Anton Arensky. *Étude, op. 25 No. 3*, mm. 1–4, the main theme

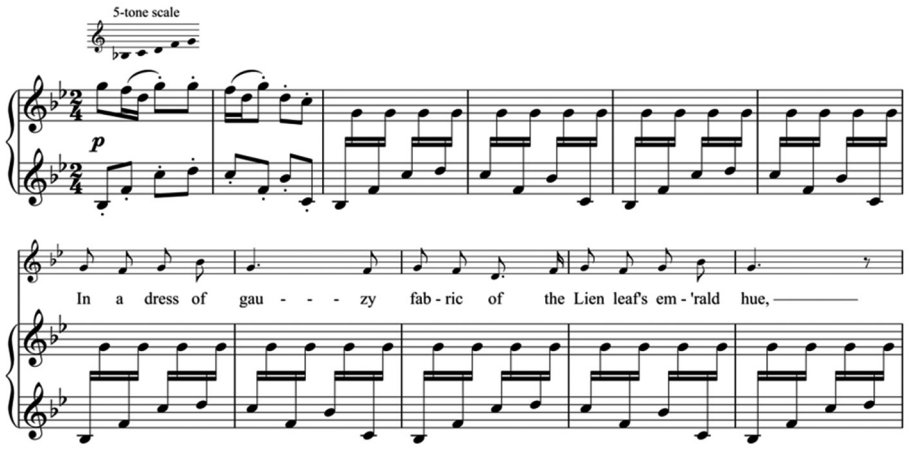


Example No. 3

Anton Arensky. *Étude, op. 25 No. 3*, mm. 49–52, the theme of *Jasmine Flower*



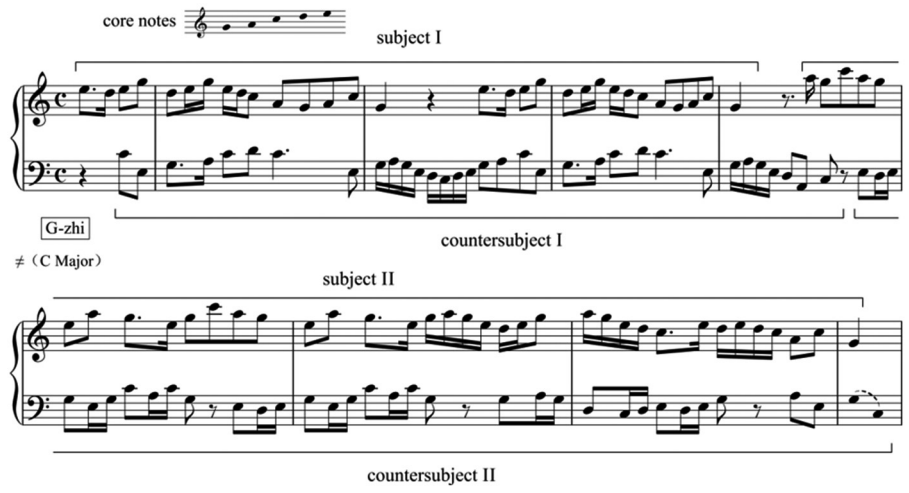
Example No. 4 Charles Griffes. *So-fei Gathering Flowers*, mm. 3–13



He Luting. The Cowherd's Flute, for Solo Piano

The Cowherd's Flute (*牧童短笛*), composed in 1934 by the Chinese composer He Luting (贺绿汀), stands as one of the earliest Chinese-style piano works employing Western compositional techniques while retaining a distinct Chinese folk style. It is regarded as a successful example of the early exploration of Sino-Western fusion composition in Chinese modern music history. The piece adopts a simple ternary form within a typical recapitulation (A–B–A_1). The outer sections (A and A_1) are composed in *G-zhǐ* mode (G徵调) and feature two-part contrapuntal technique, while the middle section (B) shifts to *D-zhǐ* mode (D徵调) with harmonic texture. In section A, both voices are based on the *G-zhǐ* pentatonic scale without "altered tones." The melodic contour and developmental patterns closely resemble those of traditional Chinese instrumental music, particularly the folk music performed by the bamboo flute. The contrapuntal texture also parallels the heterophony characteristic of traditional Chinese ensemble music. Thus, although Western counterpoint is employed, the overall stylistic impression remains distinctly Chinese (Example No. 5).

Example No. 5 He Luting. *The Cowherd's Flute*, mm. 1–8



The B section introduces a tonal harmonic texture, employing typical Western piano accompaniment. As shown in Example No. 6, the upper voice presents a pentatonic melody in *D-zhǐ* mode, while the lower part employs the tonic pedal point of *G major* with brief harmonic progressions, with a short modulatory sequence appearing in the second phrase. Structurally, the juxtaposition of pentatonic melody and Western harmonic accompaniment generates a potential stylistic contrast. However, this section moves at a faster tempo, and the accompaniment centers primarily around tonic pedal point without extended functional harmonic progression, the resulting fusion feels natural and unobtrusive.

In summary, the success of *The Cowherd's Flute* lies in He Luting's careful and deliberate selection of Chinese and Western musical elements and his artistic handling of their inherent contrasts. By employing measured compositional restraint and stylistic sensitivity, he achieved a balanced and organic fusion in which the two traditions complement rather than conflict with each other.

Li Yingha. Spring Dawn, Art Song

Chinese contemporary composer Li Yinghai's art song *Spring Dawn* (*春晓*), based on the poem of the same title by Meng Haoran of the Tang dynasty, is part of his vocal suite *Three Tang Poems* (1982) and also one of his most representative works. This piece is founded on the traditional Chinese seven-tone scales and adopts the parallel binary form typical of Western Romantic art songs. It integrates coloristic harmony and piano accompaniment textures derived from the late-Romantic musical tradition. The noteworthy feature of *Spring Dawn* is the composer's intentional imitation of the rhythmic prosody of classical Chinese poetry. This approach lends the vocal melody an expressive quality akin to poetic recitation, capturing the speech-like inflection and contour of the Chinese language. This is demonstrated in Table 2 and Example No. 7.

In all sections featuring vocals, the bass line of the piano accompaniment consists solely of intervals or single tones, while in the upper voice occasionally occur superimposed thirds forming weakly functional chords that serve primarily

Example No. 6 He Luting. *The Cowherd's Flute*, mm. 25–33

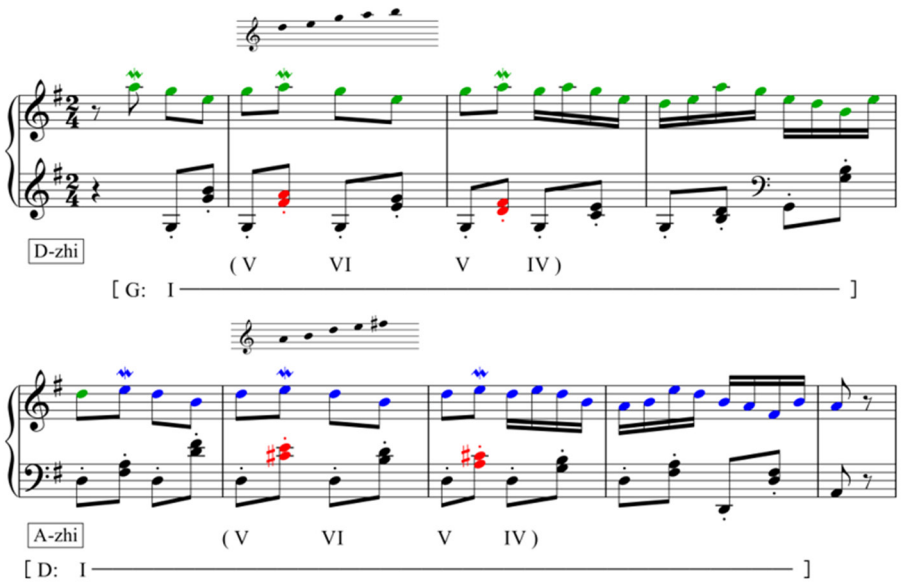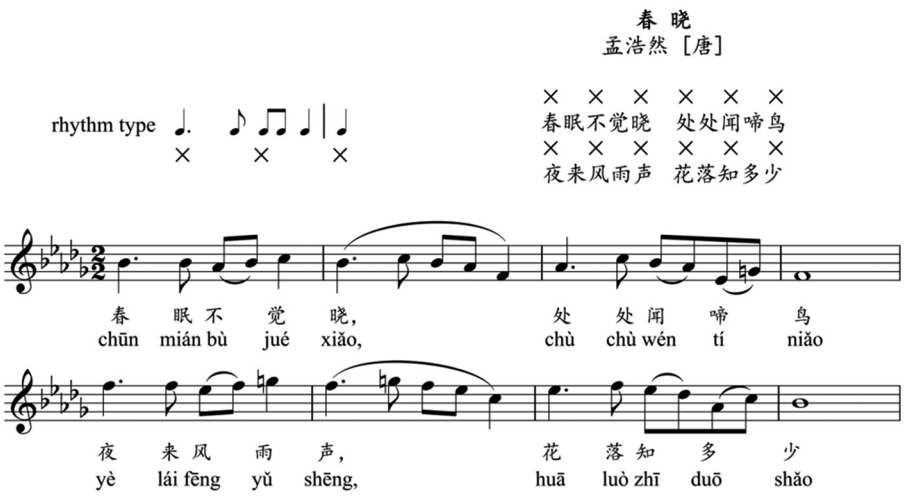


Table 2. Li Yinghai. *Spring Dawn*. Musical Form

Binary Form					
Period	Pre.	A	Tra.	B	Coda
Measure	1–8	9–16	17–20	21–28	29–36 （37–45）
Key	*B ♭-yu*	*F-yu—B ♭-yu*	*B ♭-yu*	*C-yu—B ♭-yu—F-yu*	*F-yu*
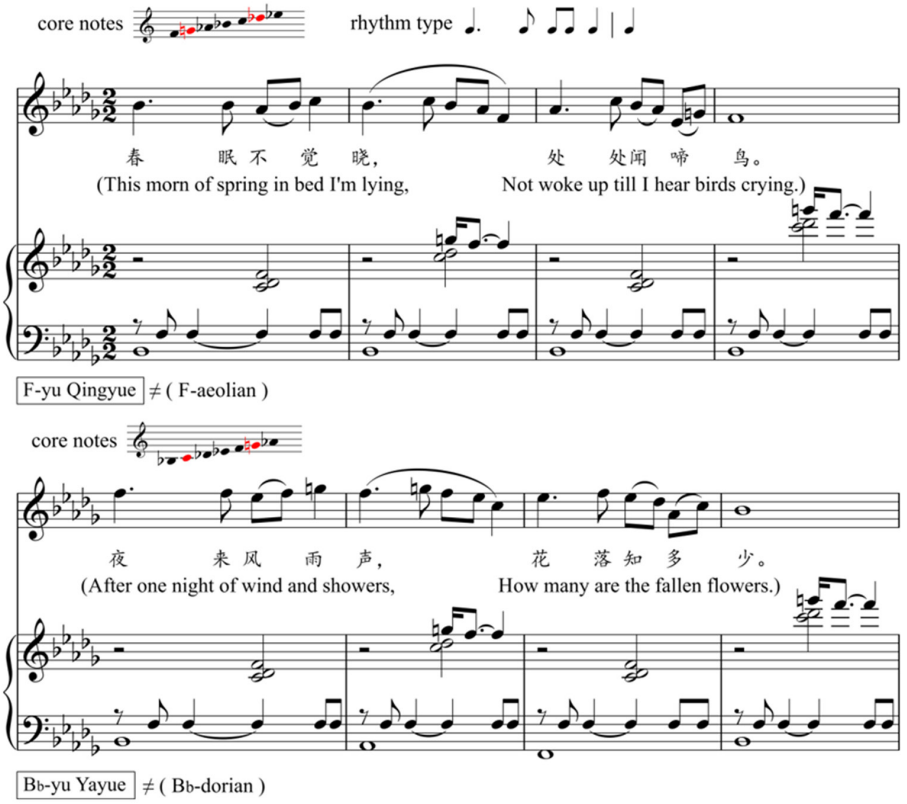
Example No. 7 Li Yinghai. *Spring Dawn*, mm. 9–16
[A Comparison of Poetic and Musical Rhythms in *Spring Dawn*]



as ornamental sonorities rather than elements of harmonic progression. This approach ensures the preservation of the traditional Chinese heptatonic modal character of the vocal line. As illustrated in Example No. 8, the first vocal phrase centers on the tones *F–G–A ♭–B ♭–C–E ♭*, which, together with the *D ♭* in the piano accompaniment support, indicate an *F-yǔ Qingyue* mode — where *A ♭* functions as *gōng* (宫音, primary tone ≈ tonic), and the two altered notes are *D ♭* (as *qīngjué*, 清角) and *G* (as *biàn gōng*, 变宫). Since the main tones of the scale form a pentatonic core, it cannot be interpreted as belonging to the Western *F-Aeolian mode*. The second vocal phrase modulates to the *B ♭-yǔ Yayue* mode, similarly not interpretable as the *B ♭-Dorian* mode in Western terms.

Examination of the score reveals that the bass line of the piano accompaniment frequently alternates between the perfect fifth interval of *B ♭* and *F*, both of which serve as *gōng* (primary tone) of the *F-yǔ Qingyue* and *B ♭-yǔ Yayue* modes, respectively. Although the two modes differ in *gōng*, they share an identical scale. In light of the limited role of functional harmony in this work, and the bass line constructed primarily from intervallic support rather than harmonic progression, the transition

Example No. 8 Li Yinghai. *Spring Dawn*, mm. 9–16
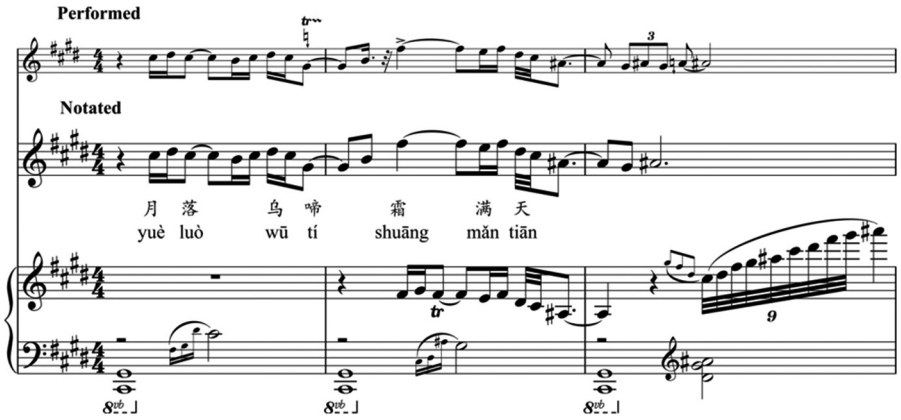


between the two modes does not evoke a strong sense of tonal modulation. This approach successfully preserves the ethnic identity of the traditional heptatonic mode. Thus, it is evident that Li Yinghai was acutely aware of the "incompatibility" between traditional Chinese seven-tone mode and Western tonal harmony, and therefore adopted this compositional strategy to achieve a delicate reconciliation between Chinese traditional musical elements and the Western classical system.

From a stylistic standpoint, *Spring Dawn* does not exhibit the same degree of national stylistic character as the second song of *Three Tang Poems — Mooring by Maple Bridge at Night* (*枫桥夜泊*). The two works share a number of structural and stylistic similarities — for instance, the traditional Chinese heptatonic scales, the piano bass line primarily consisting of intervals, as well as the coloristic harmony. Their principal distinction lies in the fact that *Mooring by Maple Bridge at Night* draws explicitly upon vocal articulation and melodic inflection from traditional Chinese opera, with an emphasis on *yáoshēng* (摇声, changing tone) and ornamented, undulating melodic lines. In more precise terms, the composition leaves intentional interpretive space for performers to employ specialized vocal techniques derived from Chinese operatic singing (Example No. 9).

In contrast, *Spring Dawn* is characterized by greater Western Romantic influence in both its textural and vocal formulation. Beyond the Romantic piano accompaniment, the vocal phrasing and articulation are entirely Westernized — a reflection not merely of performance style but of compositional design,

Example No. 9 Li Yinghai. *Mooring by Maple Bridge at Night*, mm. 6–8



since *chàngqiāng* (唱腔, vocal tune/vocal style)[1] is itself a compositional parameter as well as a performative one. The overall musical texture of *Spring Dawn* presents a relatively static rhythmic flow, leaving little room for interpretive flexibility or free rhythmic treatment. This limitation stems not solely from the vocal line but also from the piano accompaniment, which maintains a harmonic and metric regularity that limits expressive elasticity. Consequently, in the absence of other distinctive traditional elements — such as operatic inflection or idiomatic timbral color — the features of the traditional seven-tone mode tend to be overshadowed by the harmonic texture.

In summary, while both songs demonstrate Li Yinghai's adept fusion of Chinese tradition and Western formation, *Mooring by Maple Bridge at Night* achieves a more authentic synthesis of ethnic idiom, whereas *Spring Dawn* remains more aligned with Western Romantic lyricism in both structure and style.

Traditional Chinese Musical Elements and the Western Modern and Contemporary Music System of the 20th and 21st Centuries

As Western music entered the 20th century, the tonal system gradually disintegrated, and atonality emerged as a major approach to pitch organization. Functional harmony ceased to exist or was significantly weakened, and melody was no longer necessarily derived from harmony. Instead, in some compositional approaches, it was constructed from tone rows composed of selected pitches, or shaped according to the phonetic features of Western languages, producing inflected and undulating melodic contours. This tendency, however, does not imply that all 20th–21st century music is atonal; rather, it reflects one significant direction within Western modern and contemporary compositional practice. Polyphonic thought and texture were further developed, granting music a higher degree of compositional freedom. Musical form became more flexible, while

[1] "Chàngqiāng" refers to the particular vocal tune or singing style associated with a role or genre in traditional Chinese opera. It forms the core of operatic performance and varies across regional traditions and role types.

rhythm began to emphasize non-isochrony and irregularity, simultaneously, clear and constant meter gradually lost its crucial significance. In terms of timbre, both noise and microtones were elevated to unprecedented prominence, leading to the emergence of entirely new performance techniques and notation systems. Nevertheless, from a comparative perspective, elements and characteristics of Western modern and contemporary music evoke a sense of *déjà vu* for artists well-versed in traditional Chinese music.

As shown in Table 3, although traditional Chinese music and the Western modern-contemporary musical system still exhibit significant differences in mode, tonality, and phonetic characteristics, most of their musical elements and features reveal a considerable degree of correspondence. Their similarities are particularly evident in aspects such as rhythm, form, melody, and timbre. To examine whether the aforementioned theoretical observations hold practical validity, this paper will analyze two contemporary compositions that integrate elements of traditional Chinese music.

Mo Wuping. Fan I [Chamber Music, 1991]

Fan I (for voice and instruments), composed in 1991 by the contemporary Chinese composer Mo Wuping (莫五平),[2] was commissioned by the "Nieuw Ensemble" of the Netherlands and

Table 3. Comparison of the core elements of Chinese traditional music and Western modern and contemporary music

Musical Elements	China	Western
Mode and Tonality	Pentatonic modal system	Mainly Atonality
Rhythm and Meter	Free and irregular rhythm, limited meter types	Free and irregular rhythm, diverse meter types or non-meter
Musical Form	Mainly free multi-sectional form	Mainly free multi-sectional form
Harmony and Texture	Heterophony	Non-functional harmony, polyphony
Notation	Chinese character and symbolic notation (more interpretive flexibility)	Staff notation and graphical notation (more interpretive flexibility)
Melody and Tune	Based on Chinese phonetics, varied melodic contour	Based on pitch sequences or phonetics of Western languages, varied melodic contour
Phonetic Features	Monosyllable and polytone	Polysyllable and non-tone
Timbre	Emphasis on sound	Emphasis on sound

[2] Mo Wuping (1958–1993) was renowned for his compositions that seamlessly integrated vocal and instrumental elements. He graduated from the Central Conservatory of Music in 1988 and pursued advanced studies at the École Normale de Musique de Paris in 1990. Mo passed away from cancer in Beijing in 1993.

received the Composition Award at the "1992 Asian Music Festival" in Japan. This piece takes the northern Shaanxi folk song *Thirty Mile Shop* (*三十里铺*)[3] as its musical source material, incorporating varying degrees of quotation, adaptation, and abstraction throughout.

In terms of musical form, *Fan I* appears to follow the "free multi-sectional form" commonly used in Western contemporary music. In reality, however, its structural logic is rooted in the traditional Chinese musical concept of the *bǎnshì variational form* (板式变奏体). As illustrated in Table 4, the piece consists of five sections with the following tempo sequence: "free – medium – slow – fast – free." Despite not the archetypal "free – slow – medium – fast – free" pattern, its overall progression aligns closely with the *bǎnshì* sequence principle, which typically follows the sequence "free – slow – fast – slow – faster – free." [4, p. 387]

Therefore, the form of *Fan I* shall be regarded as a non-typical *bǎnshì variation form*, functionally analogous to the "sequential form" in Western modern and contemporary music. The first free section *sǎnbǎn* serves a role similar to that of an introduction in Western music, while the final free section constitutes a genuine *sǎnbǎn*, marked by dotted bar lines and occasional alternation between the vocal and instrumental parts, emphasizing a free and flexible rhythmic flow characteristic of Chinese traditional music.

Overall, the most distinctive artistic feature of *Fan I* lies in its highly expressive treatment of microtonal inflections in both the vocal and instrumental parts. However, it is not an intentional imitation of Western 20th-century techniques such as microtone or glissando, but rather stems directly from the inherent qualities of traditional Chinese vocal and instrumental music. The vocal part,

Table 4. Mo Wuping. *Fan I.* Musical Form

Banshi Variational Form ≈ Sequential Form					
Period	Free	Medium	Slow	Fast	Free
Measure	1–15	16–31	32–41	42–75	76–84
Tempo	♩= 35–40	♩= 58/72/62	♩= 40/58	♩= 62	♩= 35–40
Traditional elements	Folk Song Vocal Style and Ethnic Instrumental Timbre	Folk Song Vocal Style And Ethnic Instrumental Timbre	Ethnic Instrumental Timbre	Folk Song Vocal Style And Ethnic Instrumental Timbre	Folk Song Thirty Mile Shop
Special technique	microtone	microtone	microtone	microtone micropolyphony	quotation collage

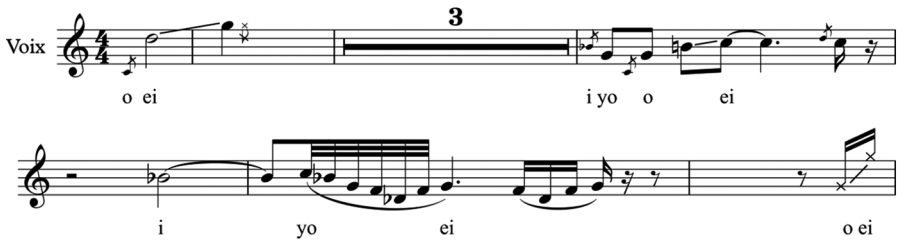
[3] *Thirty Mile Shop* was composed during the Chinese Civil War period. Its melody originates from the Shaanbei folk genre *Xintianyou* (*信天游*) — a traditional form of folk song popular in northwest China, sung in Jin-dialect Chinese, featuring a strophic structure, expansive melodic contour, and the frequent use of microtones.

in particular, is characterized by its unmistakable "authenticity" — unaffected by any Westernized embellishments, it preserves the complete melodies and the inflectional singing style of northern Shaanxi folk songs (*Xintianyou*). For instance, as shown in Example No. 10, the piece opens with a powerful mountain-song-style "call shout" (吆喝). After a brief three-measure instrumental introduction, the voice unfolds a winding, ornamented mountain-song melody rich in ascending and descending glides, with syllables that are non-semantic — serving purely phonetic and musical purposes. Objectively speaking, this nearly "primitive" musical material aligns seamlessly with Western modern and contemporary compositional techniques, achieving a remarkable degree of expressive intensity and artistic cohesion.

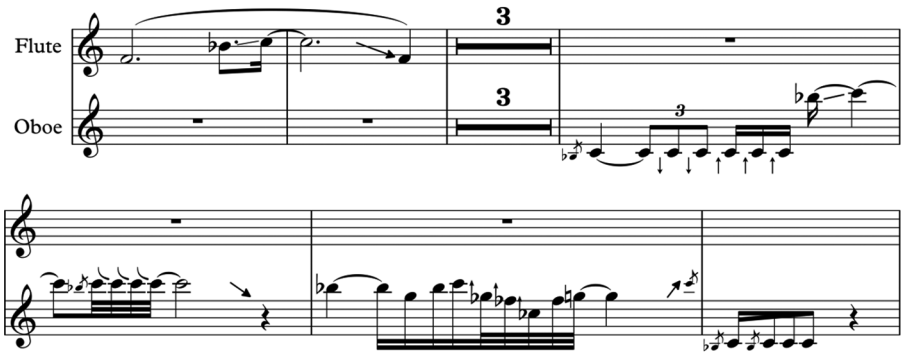
Apart from the human voice, the composer deliberately employs Western instruments to evoke the distinctive timbres and techniques of traditional Chinese instruments. Example No. 11 reveals that the flute clearly imitates *xiāo* (箫, Chinese vertical end-blown flute), while the oboe mirrors the sound and performing style of *suǒnà* (唢呐, double-reeded Chinese wind instrument). Both Western woodwinds utilize *yáoshēng* technique — a significant feature of traditional Chinese instrumental performance — manifested here through varying degrees and types of microtone and glissando. The melodies performed by these instruments, like those of the voice, are stylistically rooted in the folk musical traditions of Northwestern China, demonstrating that the timbral qualities of many mainstream Western and Chinese instruments can, to a certain extent, be mutually resonant.

In the final section of *Fan I*, Mo directly quotes the melody of *Thirty Mile Shop* along with the lyrics from the first section of the folk song. The primary difference between the two lies in notation (compare Example No. 12 and Example No. 13): *Thirty Mile Shop* is notated non-precisely, omitting indications

Example No. 10 Mo Wuping. *Fan I*. Voice, mm. 1–8



Example No. 11 Mo Wuping. *Fan I*. Flute and Oboe, mm. 33–41
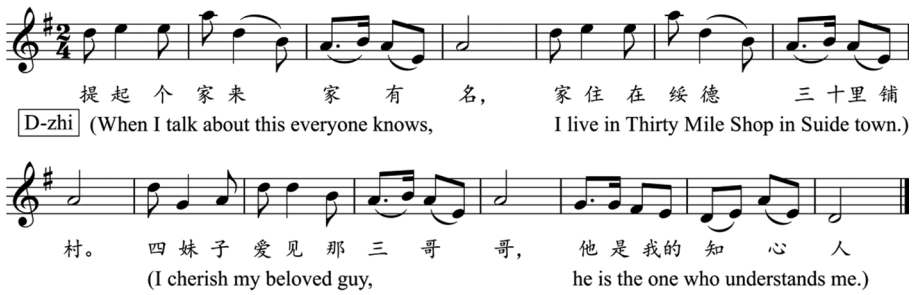


of microtone, glissando, and exact rhythm, resulting in significant discrepancies between actual performance and written notation. By contrast, in *Fan I*, the whole range of performing details — microtone, glissando, and subtle rhythmic nuances — are meticulously notated. The composer further introduces slight rhythmic adjustments and modified motivic patterns, integrating them with Western contemporary compositional techniques to create a sense of suspended emotion and lingering expressivity.

To sum up, the traditional Chinese musical elements in *Fan I* achieve a high degree of compatibility with the Western contemporary musical system. The work embodies the typical characteristics of Western modern-contemporary music while avoiding the "clichés" of exoticism. The result is a balanced and compatible musical idiom — neither wholly Westernized nor narrowly nationalized — that exemplifies an organic realization of Sino-Western musical integration.

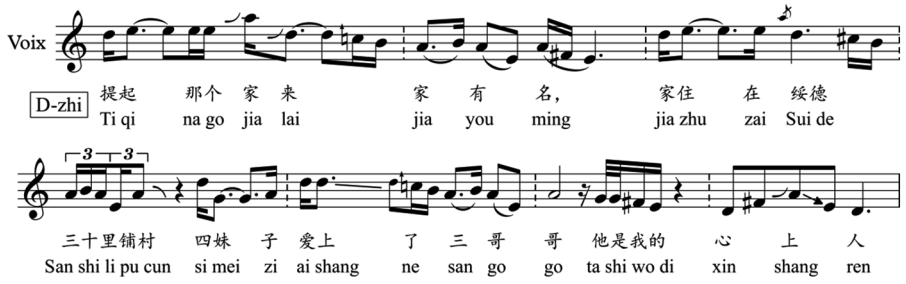
Guo Wenjing. Wolf Cub Village, Op. 21

The chamber opera *Wolf Cub Village* (*狂人日记*), created by contemporary Chinese composer Guo Wenjing[4] in 1994, is notable as the first Chinese-language opera commissioned by a European institution and performed entirely by Western singers and instrumentalists. The libretto is adapted from Chinese author Lu Xun's seminal short story *Diary of a Madman* (1918). The opera integrates a wide range of

Example No. 12 Folk song *Thirty Mile Shop*



Example No. 13 Mo Wuping. *Fan I*. Voice, mm. 76–82



[4] Guo Wenjing (b. 1956) is one of the most influential contemporary Chinese composers. Along with Tan Dun, Ye Xiaogang, and Qu Xiaosong, he was among the first generation of composition students admitted to the Central Conservatory of Music after the Cultural Revolution. Guo is renowned for his Chinese-language operas and large-scale symphonic works, which are distinguished by a monumental and tragic expressive character.

traditional Chinese musical elements, including structural, rhythmic and percussive idioms of *xìqǔ* (戏曲, traditional Chinese opera), phonetic inflections of Mandarin, and instrumental timbres and techniques derived from traditional Chinese performance — particularly the *yáoshēng* technique.
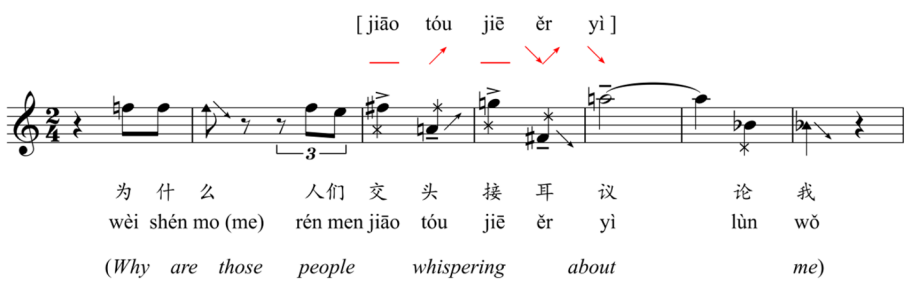
In contrast to Mo Wuping's *Fan I*, Guo Wenjing's opera employs a combination of the Western vocal techniques from the traditional *bel canto* and the 20th-century expressionist *Sprechstimme*. Yet the most striking innovation of the opera lies in its sophisticated musical treatment of Mandarin phonetics and tone. In one passage from the first scene (Example No. 14), the protagonist "Madman" delivers a vocal line written in *Sprechstimme* — not a conventional melody, but a speech-like row of sharply inflected tones. Crucially, the contour of this "jagged tone row" does not originate from Western linguistic intonation or emotional emphasis, but directly from the "tone" of the Chinese language itself.

As demonstrated in Example No. 14, the correspondence between lyrics and notes follows a so-called "one-word with one-note" pattern, which forms the basis for the jagged tone row. In the central phrase "jiao tóu jiē ěr / yì" (交头接耳/议, secretly gossiping, *F♯–A–G–F♯–A*), the intervallic range is exceptionally wide, with a progressively intensifying curvature that culminates in the final two notes. Here, *ěr* (耳) is a "third tone" (上声), while *yì* (议) is a "fourth tone" (去声), and the transition of them requires an inflection of tone (*F♯–A*). Guo skillfully utilized this natural feature of the Chinese language to achieve a musical gesture of expressive ascent. The syllable *yì* (议) is placed on both the metric accent and the highest pitch of the phrase, sustained across the bar line, creating a tone row of enormous tension and dramatic power.

It can be said that the Chinese-Sprechstimme passages in *Wolf Cub Village* not only adhere to the intrinsic tone-principal of Mandarin, but also amplify the musical potential of Chinese phonetics within a modern Western compositional framework, ultimately demonstrating the compatibility between Chinese tone and the Western modern-contemporary musical system.

In reality, it is not necessary to rely on linguistic intonation, emotional expression, or even the musical and dramatic context; systematic, logical, and meaningful "tone rows" (pitch sequences) can be constructed from the "tone" of the Chinese language — that is, by assigning compositional "tone rows" according to linguistic "tone rows" of the Chinese lyrics themselves. Since the correspondence between Chinese lyrics and musical notes can be organized on the "one-word with one-note" basis, it allows the number of notes in the pitch sequences to be determined directly by the number of characters in the lyrics. This is something impossible in Western languages. Furthermore, in Mandarin Chinese, the five tones — *yīnpíng* (阴平, first tone), *yángpíng* (阳平, second tone), *shǎngshēng* (上

Example No. 14 Excerpt from *Wolf Cub Village*, scene 1, Madman's recitative

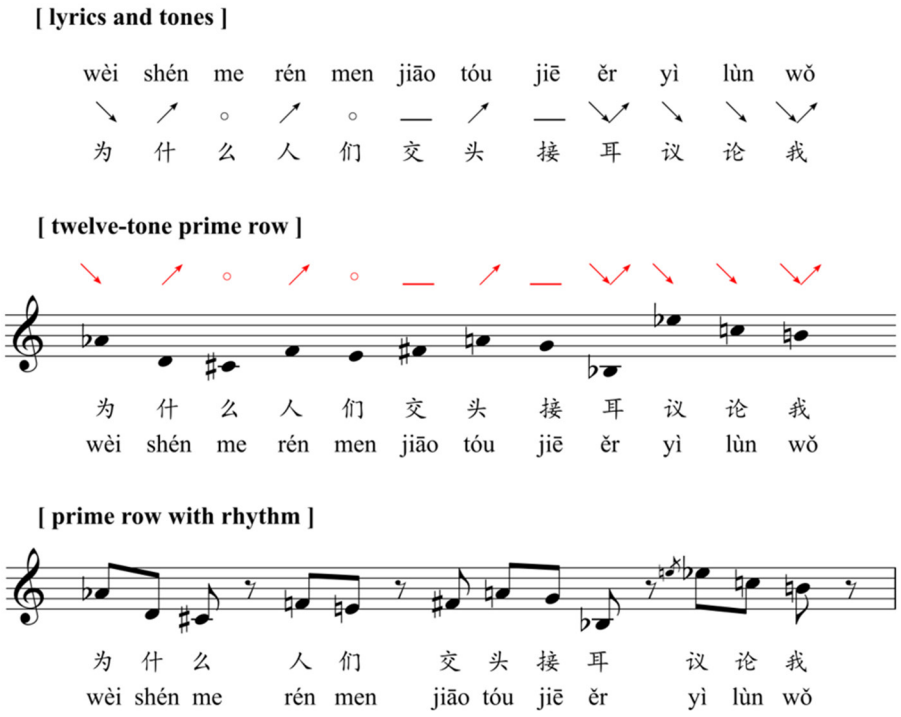


声, third tone), *qùshēng* (去声, fourth tone), and *qīngshēng* (轻声, neutral tone) — each possess distinct "tone values"[5] and occur in sentences in an irregular and unpredictable order. This inherent variability naturally generates curved and jagged "Chinese-tone rows," making it especially suitable for Western serial composition.

Example No. 15 illustrates a twelve-tone row devised by the author, based on the selected lyrics and tones of *Wolf Cub Village*. Initially, the tones of each of the twelve characters in the lyrics — *wèi shén me rén men jiāo tóu jiē ěr yì lùn wǒ* (为什么人们交头接耳议论我) — are listed individually (the neutral tone is marked with a dot). Subsequently, a "twelve-tone row" is arranged according to the "Chinses-tone row," based on the criteria and method derived from the phonetic properties of Chinese tone rather than from auxiliary factors such as intonation or emotion. For instance: "first tone" has no contour, suitable for sustained notes or connection; "second tone" has an upward trend, can be expressed by ascending step or leap; "third tone" involves a marked inflection, fitting for wide leap; "fourth tone" descends and is suited for accent or downward leap; "neutral tone" has a function of rest and should not be emphasized.

Once the twelve-tone row is arranged, it can be freely employed according to compositional purpose. As shown in the Example No. 15, the author attempts to highlight the inherent prosody and tension of the lyrics through modifying the rhythm. It should be noted that this method does not constitute a precise notation of actual speech, since tone values in Mandarin represent relative, not absolute pitch. Nevertheless,

Example No. 15 Twelve-tone row based on the twelve-characters lyrics and tones of *Wolf Cub Village*



[5] "Tone value" is a unit of measurement representing the actual pitch, rise and fall, curvature, and duration of Chinese language tone. For related content, see: [5, p. 271–275].

the principles of tone values, ascending or descending direction, and inflection in the Chinese-tone remain constant, allowing the composer to select appropriate relative pitches and organize them within a serial framework that preserves both linguistic logic and musical coherence.

As previously discussed, *Wolf Cub Village* incorporates numerous elements from Chinese opera and traditional instruments, yet Guo Wenjing seldom resorts to direct quotation or imitation. Instead, he fuses traditional elements with Western musical system in a creative and organic manner, achieving a unique artistic effect that transcends stylistic boundaries. A specific example appears in the orchestral introduction to Scene 2 (Example No. 16). The flute unmistakably imitates the timbre and *yáoshēng* technique of the *xiāo* (箫, Chinese vertical end-blown flute) — a treatment reminiscent of Mo Wuping's *Fan I*. The guitar, on the other hand, is explicitly marked by the composer to "imitate the Guqin." After the flute and guitar perform a two measure-phrase rich in Chinese traditional musical idiom, the texture shifts seamlessly into a passage typical of Western contemporary music, built upon single notes or clusters. Particularly striking is Guo's utilization of percussion: the score indicates instruments to be played "with S. D. sticks (standard drumsticks)," yet the instrument in question is not the Western cymbal, but the *Jīng luó* (京锣) — a traditional gong used in Peking Opera and normally struck with a padded mallet.

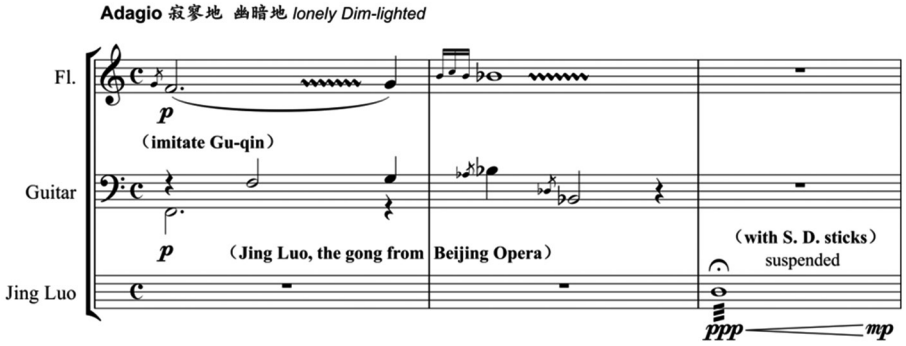
It is evident that this is a deliberate inversion — Westernizing traditional Chinese instruments while Sinicizing the Western ones. Far from acoustic incongruity, this approach yields a distinct and compelling sonic effect. By allowing timbral hybridity to serve the dramatic context, Guo avoids the superficiality of either purely Westernized modernism or overtly nationalistic pastiche. Instead, he achieves a balanced and expressive synthesis, one that powerfully conveys the emotional tension, musical atmosphere, and dramatic narrative of the opera.

Conclusion and Reflection

Traditional Chinese Musical Elements with Western Classical Music System: Minimal Compatibility

Due to the profound cultural and theoretical differences between Eastern and Western musical traditions, many of the core elements of traditional Chinese music prove hardly compatible with the Western classical system, which is grounded in tonality and functional harmony. Examples of such divergences include: homophonic pentatonic tonal system versus polyphonic harmonic modal system; highly inflected voice and curvilinear melody versus

Example No. 16 *Wolf Cub Village*, Scene 2, "Night: In the Study of the Madman," mm. 1–3, Flute, Guitar, and Jing Luo parts



relatively steady voice and arched melody; and the fundamentally different aesthetic concepts regarding "sound."

However, this conclusion first requires clarification of a crucial question: what does "compatibility" mean exactly? In this context, the term refers to the degree of integration between the original qualities of different elements without excessive modification or transformation. This definition resolves several lingering questions: Why are the "contrasting elements" in most "Sino-Western fusion tonal compositions" modified or weakened? Why do the few successful "Sino-Western fusion tonal compositions" contain a minimal amount of "contrasting elements"? Why are many of the less successful "Sino-Western fusion tonal compositions" still melodious?

The answer lies precisely in the limited compatibility between traditional Chinese musical elements and the Western tonal-harmonic system. Composers, therefore, often select only certain adaptable components — for instance, combining a pentatonic scale with tonal harmony — to create a workable synthesis. In such compositions, the musical features of one side are typically weakened rather than preserved or emphasized, which in itself serves as evidence of their incompatibility.

From a historical perspective, although countless Eastern and Western composers have attempted such cross-cultural integration since the 19th century, truly successful cases — such as *The Cowherd's Flute* or *Mooring by Maple Bridge at Night* — remain an exception. Most so-called "Sino-Western fusion tonal compositions" would not be real "innovation," but rather "combination" with seemingly novel decorations, namely the exoticism, or exaggerated nationalism, and even descend into "Nationalkitsch."

The minimal compatibility between traditional Chinese music and Western classical music system constitutes a decisive factor. Since the core elements of both music are explicitly distinctive, it ultimately leads to two extreme results — either too difficult or too simple. For the true artist, "Sino-Western fusion tonal composition" is difficult — and never meant to be simple; for those who merely bear the title of "artist," it is simple — but never compelled to be difficult. This, precisely, is the dilemma of the current creative condition.

Traditional Chinese Musical Elements with Western Modern-Contemporary Music System: Optimal Compatibility

Western modern and contemporary music, rooted in atonality, shares striking affinities with certain elements of traditional Chinese music. Both are not based on tonal harmony, often feature free and unstable rhythms, as well as curvilinear melody or jagged tone row. More significantly, they all focus on the intrinsic attribute of sound itself rather than on the hierarchical organization of pitch relationship. These commonalities serve to dissolve the long-standing divide between Eastern and Western musical systems, liberating composers from the shackles of compositional integration of the two systems. This grants them immense creative freedom and imagination, readily facilitating the emergence of "artistic innovation."

Nevertheless, this does not imply that such fusion compositions are easy to realize. On the contrary, they impose extremely high demands on the composer's own qualifications. In truth, contemporary music — both in China and globally — remains an "elite art," one that the general public and many musicians alike find difficult to access and accept, let alone easily cross the "entry threshold" of this field. The discourse authority of Sino-Western modern-contemporary fusion works thus continues to rest in the hands of a select few composers who possess both artistic sophistication and moral integrity. Therefore, the emergence of successful

cases of Sino-Western fusion compositions ultimately stems from the convergence of two indispensable prerequisites:

1) the inherent compatibility of both music systems;

2) the presence of true artists — those capable of transcending both systems without compromising either.

Reflection: Value Judgment on the Sino-Western Fusion Works

The compatibility between traditional Chinese musical elements and the Western musical systems is not merely an internal phenomenon or issue of music theory, but one that extends into the more pragmatic areas: the value judgment on the Sino-Western fusion works, as well as the historical and contemporary issues of Chinese art music.

Despite the proliferation of works labeled as "Sino-Western fusion" today, the mechanisms and logic for judging their artistic value remain ambiguous. From the author's perspective, the "compatibility" may provide a potential framework for such artistic judgment. When viewed through the lens of compositional outcomes, Sino-Western fusion works can be logically derived into two paradigms: 1) A + B = AB (*Combination* instead of *Innovation*); 2) A + B = C (*Innovation* instead of *Combination*). These two paradigms, in turn, can serve as a sort of evaluation criterion to guide new musical creation. Ultimately, this cyclical process may form a reference system for judging the artistic value of Sino-Western fusion works (Fig. 1).

The "combination" in the "two paradigms" refers to superficial fusion composition, such as musical exoticism, where elements coexist without true integration. "Innovation," by contrast, functions more as a designation and signifies a transformative synthesis that transcends mere juxtaposition — its actual meaning extends beyond the literal term. At the center of this evaluative mechanism lies

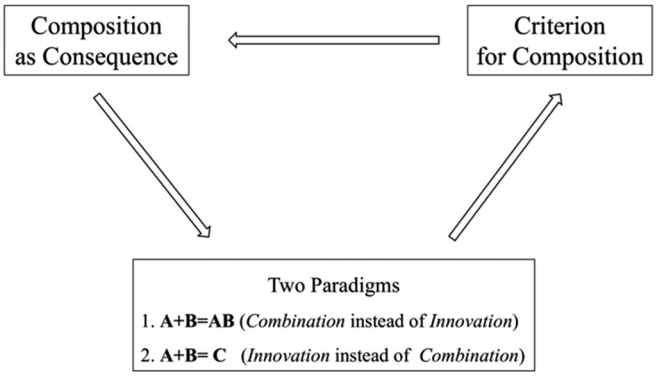


Fig. 1. A Reference System for Judging the Artistic Value of Sino-Western Fusion Works Based on "Two Paradigms"

the "compatibility" between traditional Chinese musical elements and the Western musical systems. This serves as the most essential criterion — grounded in the formal logic of musical organization rather than in variable factors such as individual aesthetic preferences of musicians or critics, or the ideological content of the work itself — establishes a universal and objective framework.

Historical and Contemporary Issues of Chinese Art Music

In the course of modern and contemporary Chinese music history, Western art music was accepted as the dominant paradigm, while Chinese composers — often blindly or unconsciously — followed and internalized Western aesthetic criteria that had, ironically, already been abandoned by the West itself. This process affirmed and reinforced the discursive authority of the West on the musical cultures of China. The concept of the "Chinese pentatonic mode" is, in fact, a constructed label within the Western artistic system — a categorization imposed from the outside, designating it as a component of non-Western, exotic *Other*. "Tonal harmony" functions likewise as a label, though of a different kind: it represents a universal system, a common language rather than a culturally specific construct.

Its dominance rendered it unnecessary to be "constructed" as a label; rather, it emerged and solidified naturally through musical practice.[6] Under these circumstances, two corresponding formulas were gradually established: "Pentatonic mode = Chinese music" and "Tonal harmony = Western music." From this binary emerged the enduring notion that "Chinese music ≠ Western music" — a definition that has long shaped, and indeed confined, creative practice. Decades of compositional activity have unintentionally reinforced this artificial distinction, further entrenching the conceptual and stylistic divide between the two traditions.

Conversely, Western composers have historically engaged with Chinese traditional musical elements in a selective and appropriative manner. The *xìqǔ chàngqiāng* (戏曲唱腔, vocal style of Chinese opera) serves as an illuminating example. From a purely sonic perspective, operatic singing in Chinese tradition possesses a far stronger sense of "exoticism" than the pentatonic mode — its highly ornamented melodic inflection and timbral distinctiveness are instantly recognizable, even to Western listeners with no musical training. Yet, strikingly, Western composers have almost never incorporated the operatic idiom into their "Oriental-style" works — nor even considered it as a means to achieve exoticism. More precisely, *xìqǔ chàngqiāng* has never been included in the category of "exotic elements" available for composition. The reasons are clear: the profound aesthetic divergence between Eastern and Western musical cultures; and the incompatibility between the vocal style of Chinese opera and the Western tonal-harmonic framework. As a result, Western composers either abandoned the attempt altogether or avoided the risk of criticism for introducing what might be perceived as an "inappropriate element."

In the current landscape of Chinese art music, numerous pressing challenges remain unresolved. Among them, perhaps the most prominent and intractable is the mutual estrangement between the spheres of Western-oriented music and traditional Chinese music within China — a situation in which each operates in isolation and without meaningful dialogue. In academic and creative contexts alike, composition and pedagogy in China are overwhelmingly guided by the Western musical system, often with only a superficial engagement with the native traditional system. Conversely, within the realm of traditional Chinese music, there persists a limited — sometimes even distorted — understanding of Western and contemporary music. This situation has led to a result that almost deviates from the nature of art: the "Chinese traditional musical elements" serve merely as an indispensable symbol for validating the concept of "Chinese contemporary music," frequently being exaggerated or overemphasized in composition. In other words, contemporary Chinese composers generally strive for "semblance" (像) — the audible recognizability of traditional musical signs — rather than for "essence" (意), the deeper aesthetic idea long valued in Chinese artistic thought.

This is not to deny the aesthetic legitimacy of "semblance" itself, but rather to point out that the overemphasis on identity has led to an aesthetic imbalance in practice. In its most detrimental form, this tendency risks devolving into what may be called "Nationalkitsch" — an undefined yet widely used term

[6] In reality, the pentatonic mode and tonal harmony are not truly comparable — they differ profoundly in nature, structure and function. To draw an accurate parallel, the Western musical element that most closely corresponds to the pentatonic system is the church modes of the Western pre-tonal tradition. Traditional Chinese music, by contrast, lacks an equivalent to tonal harmony in either conception or function. While it possesses a highly developed and systematic theory of performance, it lacks a corresponding compositional theory in the Western sense.

in German context, combining "national" and "Kitsch." It originally refers to vulgarized or sentimentalized works that simplify or exploit national symbols and cultural motifs in order to evoke or flatter a sense of national identity (the "New National Style" in Chinese popular music falls into this category). In the present context, I extend this term further: a pretentious form of craftsmanship that is superficially adorned with seemingly sophisticated national elements, yet lacks thought (not technique) while claiming to be "art." Such works are now widespread in China's contemporary music scene; the only thing lacking is a precise term to name them.

Contemporary Chinese music composition is by no means a "privilege" exclusive to China or East Asia; by contrast, it is supposed to be a universal artistic form within the broader landscape of global contemporary music. For Western composers, the engagement with Chinese musical elements should not remain confined to superficial formal borrowing. Rather, it ought to involve a deeper exploration of the core aesthetic and musical principles underlying these cultural traditions. The central issue discussed in this paper — the compatibility between traditional Chinese musical elements and the Western musical systems — thus provides a potential reference frame for rethinking compositional practice in this area. Yet it must be emphasized that traditional Chinese musical elements are neither intrinsic "compositional materials" nor "ready-made resources." At most, they could be regarded as one category of creative possibilities among many others. Only by breaking free from the stereotype that "traditional Chinese music = exoticism" and, simultaneously, establishing the concept that "Chinese contemporary music = Western contemporary music" — not in geographical or cultural identity, but in artistic and aesthetic purity — can truly valuable and meaningful masterpieces of Sino-Western fusion music emerge.

References

1. *Dictionary of Chinese music*. Beijing: People's Music Publishing House, 1985. 581 p. (In Chinese)
2. Du Yaxiong. *A tutorial on traditional Chinese music theory*. Shanghai: Shanghai Music Publishing House, 2004. 221 p. (In Chinese)
3. *Comprehensive introduction to Chinese traditional music*. Ed. by Yuan Jingfang. Beijing: Central Conservatory of Music Press, 2023. 647 p.
4. Tian Yaonong. *An outline of traditional Chinese music theory*. Beijing: People's Music Publishing House, 2014. 410 p. (In Chinese)
5. Jiang Mingdun. *An introduction to Han Chinese folk songs*. Shanghai: Shanghai Music Publishing House, 2004. 438 p. (In Chinese)

Information about the author:

Shen Wei — Ph.D., Lecturer at the School of Music, Shaanxi Normal University, Xi'an, China.

Информация об авторе:

Шэнь Вэй — доктор философии, преподаватель музыкальной школы, Педагогический университет Шэньси, г. Сиань, Китайская Народная Республика.

Received / Поступила в редакцию: 04.02.2026
Revised / Одобрена после рецензирования: 15.04.2026
Accepted / Принята к публикации: 17.04.2026

ISSN 3034-3836 (Online)

Dialogue of Cultures

Original article
UDC 78.01, 782, 821.581
https://doi.org/10.56620/RM.2026.2.117-132
EDN KVJVJX

Cao Xueqin's Novel *Dream of the Red Chamber* and the Opera of the Same Name by Bright Sheng and David Henry Hwang in the Space of Art Historical Discourse

Zheng Yue

Saratov State L.V. Sobinov Conservatoire,
Saratov, Russian Federation,
1318208266@qq.com✉, *https://orcid.org/0009-0009-9199-8120*

Abstract. Cao Xueqin's classic novel *Dream of the Red Chamber* was vividly reimagined in the eponymous academic opera by Bright Sheng and David Henry Hwang in a production that seamlessly integrates Eastern and Western cultural traditions. Due to its intriguing manifestation of aesthetic dialogue between East and West, the work has become a significant subject of contemporary art history research. In order to understand the problems of transforming literary sources into academic opera and specific mechanisms of interspecific artistic transformation, along with the particular aspects of cultural dialogue between East and West in the context of a globalised space, a wide range of scholarly literature should be considered. In the article, the work is considered according to the following aspects: general works on the writer Cao Xueqin, those specifically dedicated to the history of the composition, the ideological circle and philosophy of the novel *Dream of the Red Chamber*, works that discuss the characters and the specifics of their interaction, modern works that consider the creation and dramaturgy of Sheng and Hwang's opera, as well as research on traditional Eastern aesthetics and artistic production of modern opera.

Keywords: Cao Xueqin, "Dream of the Red Chamber" (novel), "Dream of the Red Chamber" (opera), Bright Sheng, David Henry Hwang, redology, art history

For citation: Zheng Yue. Cao Xueqin's Novel *Dream of the Red Chamber* and the Opera of the Same Name by Bright Sheng and David Henry Hwang in the Space of Art Historical Discourse. *Russian Musicology*. 2026, no. 2, pp. 117–132. https://doi.org/10.56620/RM.2026.2.117-132

Translated by Thomas Alexander Beavitt, Laboratory for Scientific Translation (https://nauka-perevod.ru/eng).

© Zheng Yue, 2026

Роман Цао Сюэциня «Сон в красном тереме» и одноимённая опера Б. Шэна и Д.Г. Хвана в пространстве искусствоведческого дискурса

Чжэн Юэ

Саратовская государственная консерватория имени Л.В. Собинова,
г. Саратов, Российская Федерация,
1318208266@qq.com✉, https://orcid.org/0009-0009-9199-8120

Аннотация. Классический роман Цао Сюэциня «Сон в красном тереме» получил яркое претворение в одноимённой академической опере Брайта Шэна и Дэвида Генри Хвана, органично объединившей в своём пространстве восточные и западные культурные традиции, что стало интересным примером эстетического диалога Востока и Запада и сделало данное явление значимым объектом современного искусствоведческого исследования. Для понимания проблем претворения литературного первоисточника в академической опере, механизмов межвидовой художественной трансформации, а также особенностей культурного диалога Востока и Запада в условиях глобализированного пространства оказалось важно изучение научной литературы широкого диапазона. В статье она рассматривается по следующим направлениям: труды о творчестве писателя Цао Сюэциня; об истории сочинения, идейном круге и философии романа «Сон в красном тереме»; о героях, их характерах и специфике взаимодействия; работы по вопросам создания и драматургии оперы Шэна и Хвана; исследования о традиционной восточной эстетике и художественной постановке современной оперы.

Ключевые слова: Цао Сюэцинь, роман «Сон в красном тереме», опера «Сон в красном тереме», Брайт Шэн, Дэвид Генри Хван, редология, искусствоведение

Introduction

Cao Xueqin's[1] novel *Dream of the Red Chamber* (Palladius system: *Hong lou meng*; Chinese: 红楼梦) [1; 2; 3] is one of the Four Great Classical Novels of Chinese literature. It is a large-scale work comprising many relatively independent parts. According to the author, the book "was created over the course of ten years <…> the text was supplemented five times and repeatedly edited," [1, p. 4] which testifies to the desire for artistic perfection. The result was the creation of a work that was to become an outstanding monument of Chinese culture.

According to surviving manuscript materials, the author's text of the novel included eighty chapters. However, the commentary of Zhi Yanzhai[2] refers to a continuation that was subsequently lost. The completion of the novel in the form of forty chapters is credited to Gao E. It is precisely thanks to this that the reader gains the opportunity to follow the continuation

[1] Cao Xueqin (1715–1763) — novelist, poet and artist.

[2] Zhi Yanzhai is the pseudonym of the first critic of *Dream of the Red Chamber*.

of events and form a complete picture of the characters' fates. The novel's multifaceted dramaturgy includes several plot lines: the love story of Baoyu, Daiyu and Baochai, the decline and ruin of the noble Jia clan, the fates of numerous female characters, as well as portrayals of social contradictions and moral conflicts of feudal Chinese society.[3]

The narrative, which is saturated with symbolism and allegory, is constructed around a synthesis of prose text and poetic inserts to give the work its notable multi-layered quality. At the same time, the language of the novel itself is distinguished by a high degree of poetic quality, especially in the descriptions of nature and the relationships between the characters. The sophistication of style, the depth of imagery, and the emotional expressiveness allow the reader to subtly perceive the inner world of the characters and the dynamics of their feelings. It was precisely this poetic quality, combined with vivid dramaturgy, that made the novel *Dream of the Red Chamber* a particularly favourable basis for an operatic adaptation.

The fate of the work and its interpretation in the form of publications with commentary and scholarly works unfolded at a time of great socio-cultural change, when the traditional system of values and artistic representations began to collide with external influences. Following the Opium War,[4] China was forced to open its trading ports, leading to gradually increasing cultural exchange with the West. Thus, the distribution and reception of the novel occurred at a time of expanding contacts with Western countries. Thanks to its translation into many languages, the book became known throughout the world.

The international recognition of the novel and its widespread dissemination in the Western cultural environment contributed to the emergence of new forms of artistic understanding of this work, including in the field of musical theatre. One of the most significant examples of such an engagement with this classical Chinese plot was its academic operatic adaptation. Having heard of Bright Sheng's composition work,[5] David Gockley, former director of the San Francisco Opera, decided to approach the composer with the initiative to adapt Cao Xueqin's novel *Dream of the Red Chamber* into a musical-theatrical work. Intrigued by the idea, Sheng invited the experienced screenwriter David Henry Hwang[6] to create the libretto

---

[3] For the first eighty chapters, the love between Baoyu and Daiyu is still blossoming — the protagonists experience deep mutual affection and cannot imagine life without each other. However, their relationship is destroyed by the intervention of the family, who replace the bride on the wedding day. The tragic destruction of love becomes the novel's climax, vividly revealed in Gao E's conclusion, in which he creates expressive and psychologically compelling images of the older generation — Mother Jia, Madam Wang, and Wang Xifeng — that emphasise their cruelty, imperiousness, and treachery. Against this backdrop, Baoyu's obsession and Daiyu's despair, as well as her death, which is accompanied by the music of Baoyu and Baochai's wedding, are revealed in a particularly tragic way. Baoyu himself, despite having achieved success in the state examinations and received an official position, ultimately retreats from the world to a monastery. Thus, the love story of Baoyu and Daiyu, who rebelled against feudal norms and social restrictions, ends in deep tragedy. The contrast between Daiyu's death and the solemn wedding ceremony of Baoyu and Baochai creates a particularly strong artistic effect.

[4] The First Opium War took place between 1840 and 1842, while the Second was fought in the years between 1856 and 1860.

[5] Bright Sheng (b. 1955, Shanghai) is an American composer of Chinese origin, conductor and pianist of international renown.

[6] David Henry Hwang (b. 1957) is an American writer, also of Chinese descent.

for the opera. The San Francisco Musical Theatre hired Lai Shengchuan[7] as director, and Ye Jintian[8] as stage designer and costume designer. As a result of a long and complex process of intercultural artistic communication, the project was successfully implemented.

On September 10, 2016, the San Francisco Opera hosted the world premiere of the English-language opera *Dream of the Red Chamber*, [4] which became an important cultural event in terms of introducing Western audiences to the artistic world of the Chinese classical tradition. This significant creative experiment generated a wide public and audience response, which was particularly evident in the demand for the performances. With a capacity of 3,150 spectators, the San Francisco Opera's attendance was 97%, some performances completely selling out with standing room only. It seems that many people wanted to see firsthand how Western opera would interpret classical Chinese literature. The success of this opera, in turn, attracted the attention of researchers.

In the operatic interpretation, as in the novel, the central place is occupied by the love triangle of Baoyu, Daiyu and Baochai, while conflicts within aristocratic families and the struggle for power form a secondary, but closely connected to the main storyline. This structure heightens dramatic tension by emphasising the connection between the characters' personal lives and the rise and fall of their families.

Both the novel and the opera are examples of highly artistic works, whose detailed study is relevant to scholarly research. The present article sets out to review and systematise art criticism literature related to Cao Xueqin's novel *Dream of the Red Chamber* and the opera of the same name by Sheng and Hwang, as well as analysing the main directions of their study in traditional and modern scientific discourse. Here the main aim is to identify and summarise existing research approaches to the work of Cao Xueqin, systematise the problems of the novel, including the rich system of characters, as well as to consider the dramaturgy of the opera along with issues of interaction between Eastern and Western artistic traditions. Taking this approach, we will identify the most significant aspects of the study of the literary source and its operatic interpretation, as well as outline the prospects for further research in the field of interspecific artistic transformation and cultural dialogue between East and West.

Creativity of Cao Xueqin

The sources and theoretical works that are the subject of this study can be grouped into several main areas. The first group comprises works that shed light on issues related to the life of Cao Xueqin, given that historical events left a particular autobiographical imprint on the novel's plot, as well as studies of his literary work.

The Palace Museum of the Ming and Qing Dynasties has an archives section that contains the book *About the Jiangning Weaver Cao: Family, Documents, and Historical Materials* (1975). [5] This book, which was created in the Palace Museum, is an important source for revealing the family's history during the Qing Dynasty. The book provides an insight into the position and influence of the Cao family in politics, economics and culture.

The researcher Feng Qiyong argues that to gain a deeper understanding of the novel *Dream of the Red Chamber*, it is especially important to understand the history and origins of the author and his family. In *Narrative Essay on Cao's Studies* (1992) [6] he examined the origins of the

[7] Lai Sheng-chuan (b. 1954) is a playwright and director from Taiwan Province of China.

[8] Ye Jintian (b. 1967, Hong Kong) is an art director, costume and set designer.

Cao family and the changes it underwent under the influence of historical events. By collecting and analysing biographical documents, Wu Xinlei and Huang Jinde in the book *Jiangnan Family History of Cao Xueqin* (2009) [7] developed the issues of origin, migration and development of the Cao Xueqin family, as well as testing hypotheses, presenting facts and evidence about the events of the writer's life related to his youth in Nanjing, the service of his ancestors as inspectors of silk manufactories, the prosperity and fall of the Cao clan, as well as the prototypes of the characters and places of action of the novel. In his work *Genetic Examination of the Families of Cao Cao and Cao Xueqin* (2017), [8] Kang Dongdong combines modern DNA science and technology with historical documents and archaeological data to conduct a comprehensive study of the history of Cao Xueqin's family. His theoretical generalisations not only fill a gap in historical research, but also facilitate subsequent study of the work of the famous writer.

One of the volumes of the anthology edited by Wu Enyu [9] presents unknown works by Cao Xueqin (2019). The author collected and analysed a wide variety of works. This book is important for understanding the creative thought and artistic style of Cao Xueqin. By expressing his thoughts about the value of the Chinese author's works, Wu Enyu provides important recommendations about the artistic world of his creations.

Thus, new methods and approaches open up additional perspectives for understanding the historical origins of Cao Xueqin's family and expand the possibilities for revealing the content of the novel. The interdisciplinary study of genetic data not only enriches the tools of historical research but also provides new clues and foundations for understanding history. In order to provide a deeper understanding of the historical evolution and cultural heritage of the Cao family, genetic data has also been used. By studying the customs of the Cao family, scholars identify the characteristics of the writer's creative style and his ideological orientation to support a more accurate interpretation of the cultural subtext of the novel *Dream of the Red Chamber* and the plot of the subsequent opera. Despite using Western operatic form, Sheng and Hwang's composition retains the historical context, cultural subtext, and spiritual content of the novel. Thus, when understanding how traditional Chinese values are reimagined in the stage version, accounts of the origins of the Cao family provide an important historical and cultural background for the play.

Poetics and Philosophy of the Novel

A separate group of studies consists of the works of famous philosophers and art historians, which are dedicated to aspects of the novel *Dream of the Red Chamber* that include the process of its composition, conceptual spheres and problems, editions of the work, questions of its incompleteness and the emergence of stylistically different versions of the text in this connection.

The Chinese writer and researcher Yi Su became the author of a fundamental work (1963), which was included in the book series *Collection of Scientific Materials on Classical Literature.* [10] His theoretical work consists of six parts. The first contains information about the creators of the novel *Dream of the Red Chamber* — Cao Xueqin and Gao E (the author, who wrote the last forty chapters of the novel). The second part is devoted to editions, sequels, musical and theatrical performances and imitations of the book. The third part presents an analytical commentary on the plot, as well as offering a characterisation of the characters in the novel. The fourth part includes a review of film music and other works based on the novel, as well as poems, paintings, songs, Cao Xueqin's diaries,

official documents and decrees. The fifth part analyses poems from the novel, most of which acquired independent artistic significance to form the basis for much subsequent novel writing. The sixth part is a collection of texts by Chinese literary scholars, thinkers and critics of the 19th and 20th centuries about *Dream of the Red Chamber*, revealing the depth and multidimensionality of the ideas embedded in the book, which gives the reader a complete understanding of the significance of the book in the history of Chinese culture. Yi Su not only provides researchers with a wealth of factual material, but also makes it more accessible for use through systematisation and classification.

In his 1973 book *A Study of "Dream of the Red Chamber"* [11] Yu Pingbo examines the background, ideological subtext and artistic features of the novel. He pays special attention to such important episodes as the rise and fall of Daguanyuan,[9] the fall of the House of Jia, and the love tragedy between Jia Baoyu and Lin Daiyu, which reveal the suffering of lower-class people and the hypocrisy of the feudal family system. In addition, the literary scholar focuses on the art of versification, which reveal the poetic talents of such characters as Jia Baoyu and Lin Daiyu. Yu Pingbo's interesting aspects, research methods, and ideas became valuable reference points for later researchers.

In his 1973 book *Cao Xueqin and his "Dream of the Red Chamber,"* [12] Li Xifan examines in detail the background to the creation of the novel, as well as the thematic ideas of the work. He argues that *The Dream of the Red Chamber* is not only a literary masterpiece, but also a political and historical novel with profound social significance. The researcher notes that Cao Xueqin reveals the dark sides of human nature that accompanies people's desire for glory, as well as expressing a longing for freedom, equality and true love. In addition, Li Xifan's book introduces the history and current state of redology,[10] as well as the literary scholar's own experience and achievements in this field.

Zhou Ruchang's work *A New Argument for "Dream of the Red Chamber"* (1976) [13] is a work of great scholarly value, not only containing interesting information, but also contributing to the development of redology by outlining new research perspectives. The book draws on a wide range of sources, such as general history, political works, archives, local historical records, anthologies, genealogies, biographies, notes, and other historical materials. In fact, all subsequent articles, reviews, books and periodicals on redology were created under the influence of the large-scale work of Zhou Ruchang. This book today is cited as a sign that the study of redology has entered a new stage — an era of systematic, comprehensive scientific research.

In his 1989 *A Study of the Novel "Dream of the Red Chamber,"* [14] which focuses on the time of the book's creation and its editions, Hu Shi offers many new ideas and conclusions. By comparing the versions of the novel's continuation to identify the differences and features of each of them, the work lays a solid

---

[9] Daguanyuan (Chinese: 大观园) is a residence built by the Jia family for their daughter Jia Yuanchun, who became a princess. It symbolises the greatness of the Jia family. Daguanyuan epitomises the author's ideals of life and society. The great garden thus becomes the embodiment of the realm of illusion in the mortal world. The plot of the novel *Dream of the Red Chamber* mainly unfolds at Daguanyuan.

[10] Redology (Chinese: 红学) is an academic field of study that focuses on everything related to the work of Cao Xueqin and his novel *Dream of the Red Chamber*, from analytical research on the content and character system to the broader context, including history, philosophy, society, economics, traditional Chinese medicine, etc.

foundation for further theoretical research. In terms of methodology, Hu Shi emphasises empirical analysis of historical materials and logical reasoning, avoiding subjective assumptions and hasty generalisations. This scholarly approach ensures the reliability of the author's research findings regarding the *Dream of the Red Chamber*.

From a bibliographic standpoint, Cao Xueqin's book is examined in Zhu Danwen's 1992 work *Arguments and Facts about the Source of the Novel "Dream of the Red Chamber."* [15] The researcher provides a detailed description of the history of the creation of the novel. She argues that the main reason for the confusion in the chronology of events is due to the repeated editing of the text by Cao Xueqin himself. A large number of contradictions that objectively exist in the novel, such as the age of the characters and the temporal and spatial background of the plot, are due to the many textual interconnections and issues arising from co-authorship. Such additions, deletions and mergings, however, not only lead to chronological confusion, but also reflect the complex psychology and artistic searches of the author in the creative process.

Cao Zuyi's 2006 book *"Dream of the Red Chamber" and Mount Dagushan* [16] examines the connection between the events of the novel and the small town near Mount Dagushan where the book was written. The author studies the influence of the natural landscape, historical background and regional culture of this area on the creation of the work. The beautiful scenery and secluded geographical location of Dagushan,[11] according to Cao Zuyi, are associated with the personalities and destinies of the characters, as well as the development of the plot.

In the 1981 book *The Two Worlds of the "Dream of the Red Chamber,"* [17] Yu Yingshi notes that Cao Xueqin created two contrasting worlds in the novel: while Daguanyuan represents an ideal, the other — the society outside Daguanyuan — is all too real, being filled with life's contradictions and ugliness. By exploring the relationship between these two worlds, the researcher emphasises their interaction and influence on each other. He comes to the conclusion that the ideal world is beautiful, but eventually collapses, while the real world is ugly, but omnipresent. By making the novel's content more comprehensive, this contrast allows readers to more deeply understand the author's creative intent and its ideological subtext.

In another scholarly work, Du Jinghua [18] explores the psychological world of the characters in Cao Xueqin's book. The author reveals the inner world and emotional states of the main characters, such as Jia Baoyu, Lin Daiyu and Xue Baochai, as well as the socio-psychological environment and the concept of life and death reflected in the novel. Through the interpretation of dreams, he reveals the deepest fears, desires and aspirations of the characters, and the writer's reflections on the philosophical questions of life, death and destiny.

In 2011, Wang Guowei and Cai Yuanpei jointly published the book *Commentary on the Novel "Dream of the Red Chamber" — in Search of Hidden Meanings in "Notes on Stone."* [19] In it, Wang Guowei analyses the aesthetic and ethical values of the novel. Cai Yuanpei revealed the deep meanings and

[11] During the period of writing the novel *Dream of the Red Chamber*, Cao Xueqin had settled near Mount Xishan in the suburbs of Beijing (he lived for some time at the foot of Mount Dagushan before moving to the Xishan Mountains).

clues to its plot. This research work, with its significant results and unique perspectives, occupies an important place in the history of redology studies.

Kong Fanfang and Chen Junling (2013) examine Cao Xueqin's literary masterpiece from a philosophical perspective. [20] They focus mainly on the ideas of simple materialism and dialectics contained in the book. These ideas are vividly demonstrated through the novel's characters and plots, allowing readers to deeply experience the multifaceted nature and complexity of life.

In his 2018 work, [21] Liu Zaifu emphasises that the philosophy embedded in the content of the novel does not belong to one teaching, but represents a fusion of Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism that forms a unique and symbiotic system. This system is not only reflected in the plot and characterisation of the novel, but also has a profound influence on its overall structure and ideological core. Liu Zaifu also evaluates *Dream of the Red Chamber* from an aesthetic perspective. He argues that the novel is the pinnacle of Chinese creativity, whose unique charm consists in the interpenetration and mutual influence of the author's philosophical ideas and aesthetic concepts.

Thus, these works allow us to more accurately understand the social customs, values, and creative intentions of Cao Xueqin as reflected in the novel. By focusing on the problems of human nature, destiny and ethics, the works of a philosophical orientation help to understand the creative concept of Cao Xueqin and the philosophical ideas contained in the book. For the analysis of the opera, this range of questions is especially significant, since the philosophical ideas of the novel are reflected not only in the text of the libretto, but also in the musical dramaturgy, the system of leitmotifs and stage symbolism. Thanks to this system, it becomes possible to trace which philosophical meanings were preserved in the opera, and which received a new artistic interpretation.

Characters of the Novel

A separate group of works consists of works that offer characterisations of the novel's protagonists. In the 1983 book by Wang Kunlun *Characters in the Novel "Dream of the Red Chamber,"* [22] the personalities of the heroes and their destinies are analysed to reveal the vices of society. Based on the book's main ideas, which are related to the fight against feudalism and the glorification of free life and individual goodness, the researcher divides all the characters into two categories: those who "support feudalism" and those who rebel against it.

Zhang Jie's 2003 work [23] focuses on the artistic subtext and the unique charm of the dialogues of the characters in *Dream of the Red Chamber*. The researcher asserts that these dialogues not only convey the inner world and character of the heroes, but also reflect the customs and cultural atmosphere of the society of a certain historical period. However, in addition, they contain a rich philosophy of life and moral ideas.

Li Ruixue (2020) [24] also emphasises the importance of dialogue in the novel. Like Zhang Jie, she argues that the characters' communication style is one of the main means of characterising them and revealing their inner world. In the novel, it is each character's unique mode of speech that fully reflects his or her personality traits and state of life. The researcher notes that Cao Xueqin often uses metaphor, symbolism, and other rhetorical devices, which give the dialogues artistic beauty. This subtle and profound way of expression not only enhances the aesthetic impact of the work, but also forces the reader to seriously consider the deep meanings hidden behind the characters' words.

O Lijuan's 2020 book *Characters in the Novel "Dream of the Red Chamber"* [25] offers a thorough analysis of the main characters of the book. The researcher pays attention to the characters' appearance and behaviour to reveal their inner world and emotional changes. Her approach is based on knowledge and methods drawn from various disciplines such as psychology, sociology, mythology, etc. to create a "three-dimensional" interpretation of the novel's characters. Using this interdisciplinary approach, she reveals the richness and complexity of individuals, as well as the complex relationships and interactions between them.

Ren Jingli (2022) [26] takes a textual analysis approach to show how Cao Xueqin uses the expressive means of literary language to create vivid and voluminous characters. Focusing on the linguistic features of the novel, she reveals their role in representing the individual traits of the characters. In her opinion, the writer's verbal art serves as an inspiring example for contemporary literary creativity.

Thus, the works of the third group provide a deep analysis of the characters of the novel, revealing their character traits, the motivation for their psychological actions and the trajectory of their destinies. The cited books and articles offer new methods for studying the work's protagonists and their interactions. On the basis of this literature an idea is formed of how to analyse characters when studying the opera *Dream in the Red Chamber*, since the characters of the novel's heroes and the features of their relationships also become the foundation of musical dramaturgy. By comparing the novel and the opera, it is possible to see which character traits were retained, which were enhanced, and which were artistically reimagined.

Dramaturgy of the Opera

We will highlight in a separate group of works those that examine the issues of the creation and artistic dramaturgy of the opera by Sheng and Hwang, as well as aspects of its reception by the general public.

In his critical notes,[12] Han Xianyang analyses and evaluates the work from several points of view, focusing on the issues of creating the libretto and interpreting the original text of the novel (the opera is written in English). Han Xianyang believes that Sheng and Hwang's musical-theatrical project is not only a successful artistic attempt to adapt a literary work to the stage, but also a useful contribution to cultural exchange between China and the West, which may help to inspire people to pay attention to Chinese classical literature and traditional culture.

The 2017 work by Zhang Xue [27] studies the text of the opera *Dream of the Red Chamber* from the point of view of linguistic aspects, focusing in particular on the problem of interaction between words and music. In her opinion, this is a very successful adaptation. In particular, it serves as a model for foreign translation of Chinese literature and thus provides a new impetus to cultural exchange between China and the West.

---

[12] See: Han Xianyang. The opera *Dream of the Red Chamber* is stirring San Francisco. *International news: magazine "Guangming Daily"*. 2016. September 19. (In Chinese) URL: https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s?__biz=MjM5NzM0MzQ4MQ==&mid=2654519167&idx=3&sn=c4796ab2ab1481e93048c9fc792fb86e&chksm=bd1766e98a60efff470ccd8c90127378452b761fc7bf13dbf63f8c0503907b892fb7946baad3&scene=27 (accessed: 04.04.2026); Han Xianyang. Why did the opera *Dream of the Red Chamber* become popular in the USA? *International news: magazine "Guangming Daily"*. 2016. 19 October. (In Chinese) URL: https://epaper.gmw.cn/gmrb/html/2016-10/11/nw.D110000gmrb_20161011_1-12.htm (accessed: 04.04.2026).

Bright Sheng, Wei Lingzhi, Guo Yamei, Gu Yinuo, and Zhao Shengqing (2017) [28] discuss the artistic value, creative process and cultural implications of the opera *Dream of the Red Chamber*. Wen Lu and Jiang Bo (2017) present an English-language production of the opera *Dream of the Red Chamber* in the format of an analytical interview with the director Lai Shengchuan.[13] Systematising information about the genesis of the project, the composition of the creative team, and the adaptation strategy, the authors emphasise that the opera was created by a team of Chinese artists with intercultural experience. When working on the production, the director was guided by the principles of "artistic integrity," giving priority to the musical nature of the opera genre. The stage movement and acting of the artists were constructed in accordance with the musical and dramatic logic of the score, which testifies to a deep mastery of the material and a conscious adherence to the traditions of Western opera. According to the adaptation strategy, the emphasis was shifted to the love story of Baoyu, Daiyu and Baochai while reducing the secondary characters and plot branches. Thanks to this, the spiritual core of the original was preserved in the limited space of the theatre, while accurately reflecting the fate of the family and historical changes as well as integrating Confucian, Buddhist and Taoist cultural meanings. The interview between Wen Lu and Jiang Bo is valuable as a source for the analysis of the structural reorganisation of Eastern classics in Western operatic form and the mechanisms of its intercultural representation.

A short article by Liu Huafang (2018) [29] highlights the innovative achievements of the work. According to the researcher, the opera *Dream of the Red Chamber* is a successful attempt to tell a Chinese story in the language of Western music. This cross-cultural fusion not only expands the opera's audience but also opens new avenues for the international dissemination of Chinese culture.

Deng Lin (2019) [30] examines the features of the process of creating an integrated musical-theatrical work that combines elements of traditional and Western culture in its space. It also reveals some of the problems faced when adapting works as part of the process of cross-cultural communication.

The authors of this group of reviewed works have made important contributions to understanding the history of the creation of the opera *Dream in the Red Chamber* and its stage embodiment. Thanks to these theoretical works, it becomes possible to trace how the novel was transformed into operatic form.

Eastern Aesthetics and Opera Scenography

The fifth group of scholarly studies is devoted to the problem of interaction between the traditional Eastern aesthetics of the novel and the artistic creativity of modern opera.

Zhang Fangsong's (1994) [31] study focuses on the clothing of the novel's characters and its colour palette. In particular, it is noted that Cao Xueqin, who came from a family associated with weaving production and knew the technologies of the weaving craft very well, organically integrated this knowledge as symbolic codes into the artistic structure of the work. Specific patterns of costumes and colour differences allow Zhang Fangsong to differentiate the social status of the Jia family characters and their individual

[13] Wen Lu, Jiang Bo. Director Lai Shengchuan stages the opera *Dream of the Red Chamber*: Following the laws of art. Beijing: Youth Daily Newspaper. 17.08.2017. (In Chinese)
URL: http://culture.people.com.cn/n1/2017/0817/c1013-29475684.html (accessed: 04.04.2026).

qualities, using the categories of costume and colour as a means of artistic characterisation. Particular attention in the study is paid to the detail and semantic richness of the descriptions of clothing and colour in the first eighty chapters, which contrasts with their laconicism in the following forty chapters; this textual contrast is considered as an indirect argument in the discussion of the problem of the dual authorship of the novel.

Systematising the functions of colour in traditional Chinese costume, Deng Xiaoxue (2011) [32] points out that Cao Xueqin builds the colour dominant of the novel around the opposition of "red" and "green": the first symbolises the rise and decline of the Jia family, while the second refers to the unique poetics of Baoyu and Daiyu's mutual love. The researcher emphasises that the diversity of colour names and their combinations is subject to certain laws of colouristics, as well as a strict system of class restrictions, which at the institutional level reveals the ritual-hierarchical structure of feudal society. Deng Xiaoxue also analyses the correspondence of the costume to the characters' personalities, noting the idealisation of natural beauty and the emphasis on the spiritual charm of women, correlating the textual descriptions with the development of fabric dyeing technologies in the Ming and Qing eras. As a result, a thesis is put forward about the importance of understanding the costume and colouristic system of the novel for the modern practice of costume design — both in terms of demonstrative forms of adaptation and in the field of specialised research.

Jiang Yao (2025) [33], who examines the novel in three dimensions — the historical and cultural context of the era, the colour expression of the costume and the formation of the artistic image — substantiates the deep integration of the art of clothing and the literary expressiveness of the work. In her opinion, descriptions of clothing not only represent the social appearance of early Qing society during the reign of Emperor Qianlong, but also reveal the structural features of the feudal hierarchy. At the level of colour, the novel displays a variety of hues (from bright red to begonia), as well as using colour contrasts to model characters, convey their inner states, and create aesthetic space. In terms of image-building, costume functions as a means of symbolising status, demonstrating individuality, and expressing feelings, becoming an important artistic mechanism for the development of narrative.

These studies, which are located at the intersection of literary studies and visual arts, form a theoretical basis for understanding the methods of textual representation of Eastern aesthetics. The body of the works examined adequately reveals the internal structure and mechanisms of expression of Eastern traditional aesthetics in the literary text — at the levels of the costume system, colour symbolism, aesthetic semantics and figurative characteristics, which creates a theoretical basis for understanding the visuality and symbolic nature of the novel. However, with the transition of this aesthetic system into the space of a modern synthetic artistic form, i.e., opera as a music-centric genre that unites scenography, performance and visual design, new problematic fields arise associated with the transformation of expressive means and the logic of artistic representation.

In the field of contemporary intermedia practice, Ye Jintian, in his monograph *Creative Aesthetics of Ye Jintian* (2016), [34] formulates the concept of "new orientalism" as the aesthetic core of his work, which implies a synthesis of Eastern tradition and Western culture. His work on the opera *Dream of the Red Chamber* is a substantive implementation of this concept: at the level of artistic logic, he rejects one-sided cultural borrowing, instead forming a visual-

artistic system that combines the virtual and the real in the Chinese cultural context; at the level of interpreting the text of the novel and its refraction in figurative terms, the emphasis is on identifying the spiritual core of the work, and not on reproducing external signs; at the level of visual representation, he advocates a modern translation of traditional elements and their intercultural adaptation; at the methodological level, he engages in a search for an aesthetic balance of "half reality — half fantasy." This practice opens up new possibilities for the contemporary interpretation of classical literature, laying a theoretical foundation for the visual transformation of traditional aesthetics in opera and the performing arts.

In general, contemporary research, encompassing textual aesthetics, the system of costume and colouristic symbolism, visual transformation, and intercultural operatic adaptation, has made significant progress in understanding the ways of actualising Eastern traditional aesthetics in the context of contemporary art. At the same time, the complex integration of the Eastern aesthetic paradigm and the synthetic nature of modern opera — taking into account the literary text, stage visuality, musical structure and mechanisms of intercultural communication — requires further theoretical development. It is precisely in this problematic field that the theoretical perspective and scientific significance of the problem of traditional Eastern aesthetics and the artistic creativity of modern opera are formed.

Russian-Language Studies

A separate group consists of studies published in Russian. While Cao Xueqin's classic novel is already widely known in China, it is gaining increasing popularity in Russia every year. It has been translated into Russian and reprinted several times. The novel attracts not only ordinary fans of Eastern literature, but also researchers from various fields of scholarly and humanitarian knowledge. One of the most fundamental was the study by Gao Haiyong (2001), [35] which examines the tragic motifs of the novel based on an examination of the features of the author's concept, composition and artistic techniques for revealing the main ideas. Anna Trunova's large-scale study (2017) [36] describes the influence of the novel on the subsequent literary process in China.

One of the main directions in the study of the novel *Dream of the Red Chamber* involves a consideration of its cultural and general historical context. Ekaterina Kolitenko (2008) [37] regards the novel as a source of knowledge about the culture of China in the 18th century, which is especially important for understanding the historical accuracy of the depiction of social structure and traditions. Zhang Lin and Zheng Luyan (2020) [38] analyse the semiotic system of clothing and ornaments to identify the symbolic codes used by Cao Xueqin. In turn, Wan Qinle (2019) [39] draws a parallel between the nihilism of the novel's protagonist Jia Baoyu and the image of Bazarov in Turgenev's novel *Fathers and Sons*, which provides a basis for considering the work from a comparative literary perspective.

Of particular interest is the review article by Dmitry Voskresensky (1995), [40] which was published in the third volume of one of the Russian editions of the novel. There are also several modern articles that discuss various aspects of Cao Xueqin's work. Valeria Maksimenko (2024) [41] reveals sentimental motives in the novel, Qian Zixing (2024) [42] analyses the meaning of names, Dema Angamaeva (2024) [43] studies stratagems, etc. There are also several works by Cui Shuo (2021, 2022) [44; 45] dedicated to the opera by Sheng and Hwang.

Thus, studies on the novel *Dream of the Red Chamber*, published in Russian, cover a wide range of topics and approaches. An important place is occupied by the analysis

of tragic motifs, the influence of the novel on subsequent Chinese literature, as well as its cultural and historical context. Special attention is paid to symbolism, comparative literary study and the specifics of the depicted traditions. Contemporary works continue to explore in depth various aspects of the work, including its influence on opera. This testifies to the growing interest in the novel and the versatility of its scholarly research.

Conclusion

Based on the review of works on the stated issues, the following conclusions can be drawn. Existing studies focus either on the study of the artistic world of Cao Xueqin's novel, its philosophical and aesthetic ideas and system of characters, or on the analysis of the musical and dramatic features of Sheng and Hwang's opera of the same name. The works of the first group reveal the features of the creative personality of Cao Xueqin and the place of his novel in the history of Chinese literature; the studies of the second group are devoted to the history of the creation of the work, its ideological circle and philosophical and aesthetic issues; the third group of works demonstrates the system of characters, their personalities and features of interaction; the works of the fourth group examine the process of creating the opera and the specifics of its musical and dramatic solution; the fifth group addresses issues of traditional Eastern aesthetics and the principles of artistic staging of modern opera; a separate group consists of studies in Russian, contributing to the introduction of this issue into the space of Russian-language art criticism discourse. Within the framework of the designated groups, the topic related to the processes of interspecific transformation of artistic text, the features of stage interpretation and the interaction of various cultural and aesthetic traditions is of particular interest. Indeed, to this day it remains underdeveloped. In this regard, addressing the problem of the implementation of the novel *Dream of the Red Chamber* in the space of operatic art seems to be a relevant and promising direction of research, allowing us to identify the mechanisms of interaction between literary and musical-theatrical texts, as well as to expand our understanding of the forms of artistic interpretation of classical literary heritage in modern academic opera.

References

1. Cao Xueqin. *Dream of the Red Chamber*. Beijing: Beijing Normal University Press, 1987. 958 p. (In Chinese)

2. Cao Xueqin. *Dream of the Red Chamber: novel: in 2 vols.* Trans. from Chinese by V. Panasyuk, L. Menshikov. Moscow: AST Publ., 2024. Vol. 1. 976 p. (In Russ.)

3. Cao Xueqin. *Dream of the Red Chamber: novel: in 2 vols.* Trans. from Chinese by V. Panasyuk, L. Menshikov. Moscow: AST Publ., 2024. Vol. 2. 960 p. (In Russ.)

4. Opera *Dream of the Red Chamber*. Music by Bright Sheng, libretto by David Henry Hwang and Bright Sheng. Based on the book by Cao Xueqin; Commissioned by San Francisco Opera. New York, 2016. 525 p.

5. *About the Jiangning weaver Cao: family, documents, and historical materials.* The Palace Museum of the Ming and Qing Dynasties. Archives Department. Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1975. 222 p. (In Chinese)

6. Feng Qiyong. *Narrative essay on Cao's studies.* Beijing: Guangming Daily Publ., 1992. 170 p. (In Chinese)

7. Wu Xinlei, Huang Jinde. *Jiangnan family history of Cao Xueqin.* Harbin: Heilongjiang Educational Organization Publ., 2009. 320 p. (In Chinese)

8. Kang Dongdong. *Genetic examination of the families of Cao Cao and Cao Xueqin*. Shanghai: Caijin University Press, 2017. 280 p. (In Chinese)

9. Wu Enyu. *Anthology of Wu Enyu. Unknown works of Cao Xueqin.* Beijing: Commercial Press, 2019, vol. 4. 311 p. (In Chinese)

10. Yi Su. *Collection of scientific materials on classical literature: "Dream of the Red Chamber"*. Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1963, vol. 1. 652 p. (In Chinese)

11. Yu Pingbo. *A study of "Dream of the Red Chamber"*. Beijing: People's Literature Publishing House, 1973. 183 p. (In Chinese)

12. Li Xifan. *Cao Xueqin and his "Dream of the Red Chamber"*. Beijing: People's Publishing House, 1973. 61 p. (In Chinese)

13. Zhou Ruchang. *A new argument for "Dream of the Red Chamber"*. Beijing: People's Publishing House, 1976. 1182 p. (In Chinese)

14. Hu Shi. *A study of the novel "Dream of the Red Chamber"*. Beijing: Peking University Press, 1989. 133 p. (In Chinese)

15. Zhu Danwen. *Arguments and facts about the source of the novel "Dream of the Red Chamber"*. Nanjing: Jiangsu Ancient Books Publishing House, 1992. 410 p. (In Chinese)

16. Cao Zuyi. *"Dream of the Red Chamber" and mount Dagushan*. Beijing: China Federation of Literary and Art Publishers, 2006. 260 p. (In Chinese)

17. Yu Yingshi. *The two worlds of the "Dream of the Red Chamber"*. Táiwān: Taiwan: Joint Publishing Division, 1981. 305 p. (In Chinese)

18. Du Jinghua. *The psychological world of "Dream of the Red Chamber"*. Beijing: Yanshan Publishing House, 1992. 278 p. (In Chinese)

19. Wang Guowei, Cai Yuanpei. *Commentary on the novel "Dream of the Red Chamber" — in search of hidden meanings in "Notes on Stone"*. Shanghai: Ancient Books Publishing House, 2011. 106 p. (In Chinese)

20. Kong Fanfang, Chen Junling. Analysis of philosophical thoughts of *Dream of the Red Chamber*. *Social Sciences Journal*. 2013, issue 5, pp. 39–42. (In Chinese)

21. Liu Zaifu. Philosophical essay on the *Dream of the Red Chamber*. *Bulletin of Shanxing Normal University (publication on philosophy and social sciences): a study of ancient Chinese literature*. 2018, issue 4, pp. 5–16. (In Chinese)

22. Wang Kunlun. *Characters in the novel "Dream of the Red Chamber"*. Beijing: Sanlian Bookstore Publishing House, 1983. 257 p. (In Chinese)

23. Zhang Jie. Brief discussion of the artistic characteristics of character dialogue in *Dream of the Red Chamber*. *Bulletin of Hebei Tourism Vocational College*. 2003, issue 4, pp. 58–60. (In Chinese)

24. Li Ruixue. A brief analysis of the art of character dialogue in the linguistic art of *Dream of the Red Chamber*. *Journal of Comparative Studies of Cultural Innovations*. 2020, issue 5, pp. 77–78. (In Chinese)

25. Lijuan. *Characters in the novel "Dream of the Red Chamber"*. Beijing: Beijing University Press, 2020. 532 p. (In Chinese)

26. Ren Jingli. Discussion on the linguistic art of characters in *Dream of the Red Chamber*. *Literary Review*. 2022, issue 5, pp. 13–15. (In Chinese)

27. Zhang Xue. Looking at the adaptation of the English opera version of *Dream of the Red Chamber* from the perspective of multiple systems theory. *Masterpiece Assessment Magazine*. 2017, issue 6, pp. 13–14. (In Chinese)

28. Bright Sheng, Wei Lingzhi, Guo Yamei, Gu Yinuo, Zhao Shengqing. A story about the opera *Dream of the Red Chamber*. *Journal of Cao Xueqin Studies*. 2017, issue 4, pp. 132–150. (In Chinese)

29. Liu Huafang. The English-language opera *Dream of the Red Chamber*: a successful experience of representing Chinese history through Western language means. *Dramatic Literature: Dramatic Art Monthly.* 2018, issue 1, pp. 107–110. (In Chinese)

30. Deng Lin. A study of the adaptation of the novel in the English version of the opera *Dream of the Red Chamber*. *Dramatic Literature: Dramatic Art Monthly*. 2019, issue 5, pp. 136–139. (In Chinese)

31. Zhang Fangsong. Artistic significance of costumes and color in *Dream of the Red Chamber*. *Journal of Research on Dream of the Red Chamber*. 1994, issue 1, pp. 83–96. (In Chinese)

32. Deng Xiaoxue. Aesthetic meaning of color in clothing in the novel *Dream of the Red Chamber*. *Bulletin of Shanxi University of Finance and Economics*. 2011, issue 4, pp. 242–243. (In Chinese)

33. Jiang Yao. Costume art and literary charm in *Dream of the Red Chamber*. *Journal of Research in Art Education*. 2025, issue 1, pp. 82–84. (In Chinese)

34. Ye Jintian. *Creative aesthetics of Ye Jintian*. Beijing: New Star Publishing House, 2016, 348 p. (In Chinese)

35. Gao Haiyong. *Tragic motifs in the novel "Dream of the Red Chamber"*. Moscow, 2001, 168 p. (In Russ.)

36. Trunova A.S. *The influence of Cao Xueqin's classical novel "Dream of the Red Chamber" (18th century) on the literary process in modern China*. Moscow, 2017. 371 p. (In Russ.)

37. Kolitenko E.E. The novel *Dream of the Red Chamber*: some aspects of Chinese culture. *Izvestiya Vostochnogo instituta Dal'nevostochnogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta* (Bulletin of the Oriental Institute of Far Eastern National University). 2008, no. 15, pp. 128–132. (In Russ.)

38. Zhang Lin, Zheng Luyan. Semiotic system of clothes and decorations in Cao Xueqin's novel *Dream of the Red Chamber*. *Nauchnyi dialog* (Scientific Dialogue), 2020, no. 1, pp. 242–256. (In Russ.) https://doi.org/10.24224/2227-1295-2020-1-242-256

39. Wan Qinle. A Comparative analysis of the nihilists Jia Baoyu in the novel *A Dream in the Red Chamber* and Bazarov in the novel *Fathers and Sons*. *Kazanskii vestnik molodykh uchenykh* (Kazan Bulletin of Young Scientists), 2019, vol. 3, no. 3, pp. 28–37. (In Russ.)

40. Voskresensky D.N. The saga of a big family. In: Cao Xue-qin. *Dream of the Red Chamber*. Moscow, 1995, vol. 3, pp. 561–585. (In Russ.)

41. Maksimenko V.A. Sentimental motives of the poetic creativity of "Begonia Poetry Society" on the pages of the novel *Dream in the Red Chamber* by Cao Xueqin. *Nauka v megapolise — Science in a Megapolis*, 2024, no. 1, article 5. (In Russ.)

42. Qian Zixing. An analysis of name meanings in Chinese literature based on the example of the work *Dream of the Red Chamber* by Cao Xueqin. *Russian Linguistic Bulletin*, 2024, no. 6, article 19. (In Russ.) https://doi.org/10.60797/RULB.2024.54.10

43. Angamaeva D.R. Stratagems in Chinese literature (based on the novel *Dream of the Red Chamber*). In: *Asia-Pacific Region: History and Modernity – 17: Proceedings of the scientific and practical (correspondence) conference of young scientists (Ulan-Ude, May 17, 2024).* Ulan-Ude, 2024, pp. 5–9. (In Russ.)

44. Cui Shuo. Themes, plots, and characters in Bright Sheng's operas. *Kul'turnaya zhizn' Yuga Rossii — Cultural Studies of Russian South*. 2021, no. 4, pp. 32–41. (In Russ.)
https://doi.org/10.24412/2070-075X-2021-4-32-41

45. Shuo Cui. Timbre specificity as a reflection of Chinese cultural identity in Bright Sheng's opera *Dream in the Red Chamber*. *Bulletin of Vaganova Ballet Academy*. 2022, no. 4, pp. 150–162. (In Russ.)

Information about the author:

Zheng Yue — Post-Graduate Student of the History and Theory of Performing Arts and Music Pedagogy Department, Saratov State L.V. Sobinov Conservatoire, Saratov, Russian Federation.

Информация об авторе:

Чжэн Юэ — аспирант кафедры истории и теории исполнительского искусства и музыкальной педагогики, Саратовская государственная консерватория им. Л.В. Собинова, г. Саратов, Российская Федерация.

Received / Поступила в редакцию: 31.03.2026
Revised / Одобрена после рецензирования: 13.05.2026
Accepted / Принята к публикации: 15.05.2026

ISSN 3034-3836 (Online)

Dialogue of Cultures

Original article
UDC 78.01
https://doi.org/10.56620/RM.2026.2.133-142
EDN LEBDMC

The Landscape of Russian Opera Scholarship within China across the Last Ten Years

Kang Xiao

China Conservatory of Music,
Beijing, China,
kangxiao@ccmusic.edu.cn✉, *https://orcid.org/0009-0008-1915-6378*

Abstract. This paper reviews the research achievements of Chinese scholars on Russian opera over the past decade, drawn from academic journals and master's and doctoral theses. First, concerning research presented in academic journals: studies encompass multiple dimensions, including the historical evolution of Russian opera, pivotal composers, the profound influence of folk music, distinctive vocal characteristics, Sino-Russian musical exchanges, and innovations in stage art. Among these, investigations into core figures like Tchaikovsky and Glinka delve profoundly into their seminal innovations in musical techniques and dramatic structure. Research on folk music explores the seamless integration of folk songs and religious choruses within opera, highlighting the very essence of the Russian national spirit. Vocal art research focuses sharply on the unique qualities of the Russian vocal school and the integration of dramatic singing with bel canto traditions. Studies on Sino-Russian musical exchanges examine the pivotal role of Russian expatriate musical activities in shaping Chinese portrayals within Russian opera. Second, master's and doctoral dissertations reveal three major characteristics: interpretations of classic works; a focus centered on the musical ontology; and an increasing scholarly focus toward topics related to Sino-Russian cultural exchanges. Among these, vocal performance research constitutes nearly half of all dissertations; music theory research concentrates on harmonic and formal analysis; while musicology research emphasizes the exploration of works' rich cultural connotations. Looking ahead, future research on Russian opera in China still requires crucial breakthroughs in several key areas: conducting deeper investigations into music skills; bolstering the application of interdisciplinary research methods; addressing the scarcity of philosophical profundity and aesthetic discernment; expanding the scope of references to Russian literature; enhancing the exploration of historical context; and fostering greater engagement in international academic dialogue.

Keywords: Russian opera, Chinese academic journals, Chinese music master's/doctoral theses, music theory, Sino-Russian cultural exchanges

For citation: Kang Xiao. The Landscape of Russian Opera Scholarship within China across the Last Ten Years. *Russian Musicology*. 2026, no. 2, pp. 133–142. https://doi.org/10.56620/RM.2026.2.133-142

© Kang Xiao, 2026

Исследование русской оперы в Китае за последнее десятилетие

Кан Сяо

Китайская консерватория музыки,
г. Пекин, Китайская Народная Республика,
kangxiao@ccmusic.edu.cn✉, *https://orcid.org/0009-0008-1915-6378*

Аннотация. В статье рассматриваются достижения китайских учёных в исследовании русской оперы за последнее десятилетие. Обзор основан на материалах академических журналов, а также магистерских и докторских диссертаций. Исследования, представленные в академических журналах, охватывают несколько аспектов, включая историческое развитие русской оперы, фигуры композиторов, влияние народной музыки, особенности вокала, русско-китайские музыкальные связи и инновации в сценическом искусстве. В работах, посвящённых таким ключевым авторам, как Чайковский и Глинка, анализируются значимые достижения этих композиторов в области музыкальной техники и драматургии. Исследования народной музыки фокусируются на органичном слиянии народных песен и религиозных хоров в опере, подчёркивая суть русского национального духа. В статьях, затрагивающих проблемы вокального искусства, акцент делается на уникальных особенностях русской вокальной школы и интеграции драматического пения с традициями бельканто. Исследования, касающиеся русско-китайских музыкальных связей, сосредоточены на роли музыкальной деятельности русских эмигрантов в формировании китайских образов в русской опере. Обзор магистерских и докторских диссертаций выявляет три ведущих тематических направления: фокусирование на интерпретации классических произведений; акцент на музыкальной онтологии; растущий интерес к темам, связанным с культурным обменом между Китаем и Россией. Из рассмотренных диссертаций почти половина посвящена исследованию вокального исполнения; работы в области музыкальной теории сосредоточены на анализе гармонии и формы; в целом ряде трудов уделяется внимание изучению культурных коннотаций произведений. В будущем исследования русской оперы в Китае требуют значительных прорывов в нескольких ключевых областях: углублённого исследования музыкального мастерства; усиления применения междисциплинарных методов исследования; преодоления дефицита философской глубины и эстетической проницательности; расширения ссылок на русскую литературу; более глубокого изучения исторического контекста и стимулирования активного участия в международном академическом диалоге.

Ключевые слова: русская опера, китайские академические журналы, китайские магистерские и докторские диссертации по музыке, музыкальная теория, русско-китайские культурные связи

Introduction

On the contemporary global cultural stage, Russian opera and musical theatre hold a position of profound significance. In recent years, the evolution of Russian musical theatre has prompted not only artistic innovation but also dynamic shifts in market demands, evolving audience demographics, and burgeoning potential for international expansion. The development of Russian opera itself, evolved from its nascent imitations of Western models into a uniquely national artistic tradition, resonates not only with legendary brilliance and enduring legacy but has also exerted a profound and far-reaching influence on the world stage through its remarkable achievements.

Since the dawn of the twentieth century, cultural exchanges between China and Russia have flourished with ever-increasing frequency, like countless babbling streams converging into a mighty river. Russian opera has gracefully flowed into the view of Chinese audiences through vibrant concerts, captivating stage performances, and insightful academic seminars. The Russian operas is known to more people in China and its dramatic performance techniques unfold with the power of a masterful play, captivating Chinese music lovers and professionals alike. Beloved classics such as *Eugene Onegin*, *The Queen of Spades*, and *Prince Igor* now frequently grace the stages of China's grand theatres, where tickets vanish instantly and audience applause swells like thunderous waves. Simultaneously, music conservatories across the nation have cultivated dedicated courses, nurturing generations of professionals intimately familiar with Russian opera art — much like diligent gardeners tending precious seedlings — infusing continuous, vibrant new life into the inheritance and flourishing development of Russian opera within China.

Since the dawn of the 21st century, Russian opera performances in China have surged in frequency, showcasing increasingly diverse and rich content. During the early years (2000–2008), the focus lay primarily on sporadic introductions and performances scattered across the nation. Examples include the Mariinsky Theatre's initial visits and small-scale productions by local troupes, which remained relatively modest in scale. Following the completion of the National Centre for the Performing Arts (2008–2015), the introduction and co-production of Russian opera entered a new phase of regularity. The Mariinsky Theatre returned, bringing timeless masterpieces like *Prince Igor* and *Eugene Onegin* to Chinese audiences. A landmark performance was the Mariinsky Theatre's production of Borodin's *Prince Igor*, which inaugurated the National Centre for the Performing Arts in 2007. Russian opera performances have since graced multiple cities, including Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Harbin (Table 1). Sino-Russian co-productions have multiplied, Chinese music troupes have significantly strengthened their independent staging capabilities, and mechanisms like the "China-Russia Year of Culture" have fostered deeper cultural collaboration.

With the proliferation of related performances, a corresponding surge of academic studies has emerged. Russian opera scholarship has consistently remained a focal point within the Chinese academic community. This investigation centers on Russian opera research papers published in China over the past decade, primarily encompassing dissertations and academic journal articles. Through a systematic review of these two literature categories, we have yielded valuable insights into the research trajectory and developmental trends of Russian opera studies among Chinese scholars.

Table 1. Important performance information of Russian opera in China over the past two decades

A Particular Year	Opera Title	Composer	City	Theatre	Version / Partner	Key Highlights
2007	*Prince Igor*	Borodin	Beijing	National Grand Theatre	Original import (Mariinsky Theatre)	The National Centre for the Performing Arts opens with a full cast of Russia's national epic
2010	*The Queen of Spades*	Tchaikovsky	Beijing	National Grand Theatre	Local production (with a Russian conductor invited)	The National Centre for the Performing Arts' first Russian opera produced independently becomes a repertoire
2014	*Eugene Onegin*	Tchaikovsky	Beijing	National Grand Theatre	Joint production (National Centre for the Performing Arts + Mariinsky Theatre)	Chinese and Russian co-creators share actors and production resources, balancing art and localization
2016	*War and Peace*	Prokofiev	Harbin	Harbin Grand Theatre	Original import (Mariinsky Theatre)	Gergiev at the helm, a 600-strong lineup, China's debut
2018	*War and Peace*	Prokofiev	Guangzhou	Guangzhou Grand Theatre	Original import (Mariinsky Theatre)	Directed by Konchalovsky and conducted by Gergiev, the epic masterpiece is presented again
2019	*Snow Maiden*	Rimsky-Korsakov	Beijing	National Grand Theatre	Joint production (National Centre for the Performing Arts + Russian director team)	The characteristics of fairy tale opera and the cooperation between Chinese and Russian stage design and music teams
2025	*Eugene Onegin*	Tchaikovsky	Beijing	Central Opera House Theatre	Joint production (Central Opera House + Ministry of Culture and Tourism of Yaroslavl Region, Russia, etc.)	The China-Russia Cultural Year project, featuring a reverse narrative and multimedia stage design, showcases joint performances by actors from both countries, organized by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism

Research Trends in Academic Journals

China's academic journals encompass distinguished publications from music academies, leading industry organizations, and established publishers. Representative examples prominently feature:

1. Journals founded by prestigious music academies and research institutions, such as the *Journal of the Central Conservatory of Music* (中央音乐学院学报), *Chinese Music* (中国音乐), *China Musicology* (中国音乐学), *Shanghai Conservatory of Music Journal (Music Art)* (音乐艺术—上海音乐学院学报), *Huangzhong* (黄钟), *Tianjin Conservatory of Music Journal (Tianlai)* (天籁—天津音乐学院学报), *Xinghai Conservatory of Music Journal* (星海音乐学院学报), *Northern Music* (北方音乐), *New Tunes of the Music Bureau (Shenyang Conservatory of Music Journal)* (乐府新声—沈阳音乐学院学报), *Music Life* (音乐生活) and *Dramatic Literature* (戏剧文学).

2. Journals sponsored by major industry bodies and publishers, notably *People's Music* (人民音乐, sponsored by the Chinese Musicians Association of the China Federation of Literary and Art Circles), *Music Research* (音乐研究), and *Singing Art* (歌唱艺术, sponsored by People's Music Publishing House), *Art Hundred Families* (艺术百家, sponsored by Jiangsu Provincial Academy of Culture and Arts), *The Voice of the Yellow River* (黄河之声, sponsored by Shanxi Federation of Literary and Art Circles).

Predominantly quarterly publications, these journals vividly reflect China's academic currents and research hotspots through rigorous scholarly discourse. Our analysis has specifically examined articles addressing Russian opera and music culture within these music academic journals over the past decade, covering the following content:

1. The history and development of Russian opera.
2. Research on important composers and representative works.
3. The influence of national music and folk culture on opera creation.
4. Russian vocal art and performance tradition.
5. Chinese and Russian music cultural exchange and influence.
6. The study of opera stage art and modern interpretation.

The literature chronicling Russian opera's history and evolution predominantly centers on the 18th–20th centuries, detailing the nation's remarkable journey from assimilating Western European traditions to forging a distinct national style. This profound transformation was deeply shaped by Italian influences, with foundational giants like Glinka and Dargomyzhsky playing pivotal roles in sculpting Russian national opera. Glinka's masterworks, for instance, extensively wove local materials and traditional instruments into their fabric, masterfully blending ethnic elements with Western forms to create music imbued with unmistakable Russian character. Chinese scholars dissected 17th–19th century Russian musical culture through four critical dimensions:

1. Embracing comprehensive learning and exploration.
2. Undergoing secularization and professionalization.
3. Igniting national consciousness.
4. Exerting widespread and profound influence.

Russian composers and their iconic works have been profoundly explored, encompassing figures like Tchaikovsky, Glinka, and the "Mighty Handful," with particular emphasis on their compositional techniques, dramatic architecture, and character portrayal. Concerning Tchaikovsky, Sun Zhaorun and Wang Fei's research [1] illuminates his choral style and achievements through dual lenses — religious and secular works — scrutinizing his

a cappella choruses, cantatas, [2] and operatic choral segments. [3] Zhang Gui, drawing upon the operas *Eugene Onegin* and *The Queen of Spades*, probes Tchaikovsky's compositional essence, examining his creative vision, thematic distinctiveness, and artistic methods. Liu Chang and Zhang Peng's study traces the vital connection between historical [4; 5] traditions and the "psychological drama" permeating Tchaikovsky's oeuvre, linking Russia's "lyric drama" heritage to the "psychological dramatic elements" within his music. Investigations into Glinka's [6] creative priorities similarly center on opera: one article meticulously compares the character construction of Susanin in *A Life for the Tsar*; another interprets the dramatic functions within the "intercalary" scenes of *Ruslan and Liudmila* dialectically, analyzing three core contradictions — the rationality versus abruptness of dramatic roles, the satire versus praise of character emotions, and the universal love versus deep affection in musical expression — thereby uncovering the humanistic spirit embedded in early Russian opera. Shifting focus to Russian comic opera, scholars including Sun Zhaorun and Wang Shutong have also undertaken significant research.

The study of Russian folk music and folk culture delves into the artful adaptation of Russian folk songs, religious choruses, and folk dances within opera and instrumental compositions. The embodiment of national identity in opera is frequently exemplified through meticulous analyses of seminal classic works such as *Ruslan and Liudmila*, *The Tsar's Bride*, and *The Snow Maiden*.

Within the vast realm of vocal art and performance traditions, this research deliberately centers on the seamless fusion of the Russian vocal system, dramatic singing styles, and *bel canto* techniques. This potent synthesis vividly illuminates the unique allure of Russia's vocal education and performance framework. Sun Zhaorun probes the ethnic and religious foundations of the Russian vocal school in his article, emphasizing [7] its profound contributions to vocal methodology and spiritual depth. [8] He demonstrates how the school has forged a distinctive "cultural synthesis phenomenon" by steadfastly preserving its indigenous traditions while masterfully assimilating Western artistic excellence. Simultaneously, Lu Wanru underscores the significant influence of Italian *bel canto* on Russian vocal artistry in her analysis.

Research on Sino-Russian musical and cultural exchanges primarily centers on the profound influence of Russian expatriate musical activities on Chinese opera art, alongside the artful crafting of "Chinese images" within Russian musical compositions. This vividly demonstrates the deep mutual impact and rich cultural integration between Chinese and Russian music. Several significant papers delve into Russian operas featuring Chinese elements, meticulously examining how the materials, characters, and stage effects of the opera *The Mandarin's Son* incorporate and reinterpret these influences. [9] They further elucidate that the late Qing Chinese image portrayed in the opera emerges as a distinct foreign entity viewed through the "other's gaze," mirroring the collective Russian societal imagination of China at that time.

The study of stage art and modern interpretation centers on the dynamic visual and dramatic reinterpretation of opera for contemporary stages. By skillfully integrating literary adaptation techniques with innovative directorial artistry, it deeply probes the narrative structures and rich cultural symbolism embedded within operatic works. [10] Articles such as "Stage Narratives and Cultural Metaphors in the Mariinsky Opera's *The Dead Souls*" [11] delve extensively into the cultural metaphors and profound meanings revealed through the lens of stage performance.

Some important discussions on Russian music studies have also been translated into Chinese, playing a significant role in the study of Russian music in China. Richard Taruskin's article offers a concise historical overview and analysis of the double standards and contradictions inherent in discussing Russian music through the lens of national characteristics. The article urges scholars to abandon the notion of treating Russian music as exotic within musicological discourse. [12] Yulia Medvedeva's article explores the evolution of Russian composers' perceptions of China. [13] It also reveals the characteristics of China and Russian music creation from another perspective.

Overall, this research explores Russian opera and other musical genres with a sweeping scope — delving into historical origins, composing practices, national characteristics, vocal systems, cross-cultural communication, and modern interpretations. This breadth powerfully reflects contemporary scholars' comprehensive engagement with Russian opera, its distinctive national musical language, and the dynamic interplay between Chinese and foreign cultures.

Research Trends in Dissertations

Since the 1980s, China's music discipline has commenced enrolling master's and doctoral students. Presently, doctoral candidates in this field primarily emerge from prestigious institutions like the Central Conservatory of Music, China Conservatory of Music, Shanghai Conservatory of Music, and the Chinese National Academy of Arts. Entering the 21st century, China's doctoral music education gradually initiated pilot programs for performance-focused doctorates. A pivotal moment arrived in 2006 when the China Conservatory of Music first enrolled doctoral students specializing in music performance, marking a significant breakthrough within China's music doctoral landscape. This pioneering step held groundbreaking significance for the exploration of performance research doctorates. Research on Russian opera within China's master's and doctoral theses typically exhibits distinct characteristics, including a focus on canonical works, a core emphasis on music analysis, and the increasingly prevalent trends of cultural exchange and localization studies.

This article showcases a curated selection of over fifty master's and doctoral dissertations from the past decade, all dedicated to Russian music. The research findings are systematically categorized into seven key areas: musical styles; cultural significance; compositional techniques; aesthetic theories; performance practices, encompassing vocal, instrumental, and music education; social dimensions; and other related fields. These findings may be further detailed under the following aspects:

– music ontology analysis (60%): composer's style, opera music structure, arias/duets/choruses, orchestration, vocal techniques;

– cultural and historical studies (20%): Russian opera's national identity, literary adaptations, historical context, and Sino-Russian musical exchanges;

– performance and communication studies (accounting for 15%): history of performances in China, rehearsals by Chinese troupes, reception and localization;

– other (5%): character portrayal, aesthetic features, comparative studies.

The distribution of academic papers demonstrates that vocal music performance research constitutes nearly half the total, revealing a highly concentrated focus with a pronounced classicization tendency. These studies predominantly dissect specific arias from Russian opera classics. Notably, research on Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin* and *The Queen of Spades*, alongside works like *The Snow Maiden*, *Boris Godunov*, and *Prince Igor* by the "Mighty Handful," dominates

the music field's scholarly output, cementing their undeniable academic influence. The research content primarily falls into two distinct categories: first, delving into character development through musical motifs and thematic evolution, exemplified by studies of the Lensky from *Onegin*, which probe the protagonist's artistic persona through scales, thematic motifs, lyrical tone, and emotional expression; second, concentrating intensely on practical vocal techniques, particularly demanding aspects like Russian phonetic processing and vocal register transitions.

Compared with vocal performance research, studies in music theory and musicology are less voluminous in scholarly output, yet they encompass a diverse array of research angles, with certain fields exhibiting distinctive characteristics.

In music theory, research focuses predominantly on harmonic and formal analysis within Russian operas. For instance, Li Bingjie's "Research on Compositional Techniques and Musical Style of Stravinsky's Opera *The Rake's Progress*" (斯特拉文斯基歌剧〈浪子的历程〉的作曲技法及音乐风格研究) employs a conventional approach, lacking distinctive innovative insights. Conversely, musicology-oriented papers exhibit richer substance; their musical style studies penetrate deeply into the national characteristics of Russian music, exploring its unique cultural DNA. Gong Jue's "A Study on the Nationality of Tchaikovsky's Music" (柴可夫斯基音乐的民族性研究, Nanjing Normal University, 2021) meticulously examines Russian national elements in Tchaikovsky's works, while Hao Qing's "On the Nationality of Glinka's Operas" (论格林卡歌剧的民族性, Northeast Normal University, 2021) systematically analyzes how Glinka's operas richly weave folk music traditions.

Research on the Russian opera's national identity has drawn considerable attention, as evidenced by in-depth examinations of Russian ethnic elements within the works of Glinka, New Russian School, and Tchaikovsky. Scholars have further broadened this inquiry, deploying sociological methodologies as demonstrated in Zhang Qi's "Social Analysis of the 'Kremlin' and Its Musical Creations" (《强力集团》及其音乐创作的社会性分析).

Chinese music graduate students delve deeply into the cultural essence of Russian opera, concentrating their inquiry on the dramatic music itself, with particular focus on masterpieces like *Boris Godunov* and *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*. They meticulously examine the interplay between narrative structures and historical contexts, further dissecting musical storytelling strategies through the critical prisms of gender and power dynamics. Research into aesthetic thought demonstrates groundbreaking innovation. This is evident not only in interpreting Russian musical works through the lens of Chinese aesthetics — such as reimagining Prokofiev's epic opera *War and Peace,* based on Leo Tolstoy, using traditional Chinese aesthetic concepts — but also in conducting multi-faceted reexaminations of the works from the perspective of aesthetic psychology. Similarly, for *War and Peace*, they investigate how the music elicits profound emotional resonance and spiritual experiences within the audience. Collectively, these studies significantly broaden the multidimensional perspectives within the academic field of Russian music.

Since 2015, intensified collaborations between the China National Centre for the Performing Arts and Russia's Mariinsky Theatre have sparked a wave of fresh scholarly inquiry: exploring the dissemination and reception of Russian opera within China, examining localized productions by Chinese troupes, analyzing Sino-Russian co-productions, and probing the profound artistic and cultural significance of these performances on Chinese soil. Consequently,

Chinese scholars are devoting heightened attention to researching Sino-Russian artistic exchanges. The dissertation "Historical Narratives and Ethnic Identity: A Cultural Interpretation of Russian Music Activities in Harbin during the First Half of the 20th Century" (历史叙事与族群认同：20世纪上半叶哈尔滨俄侨音乐活动的文化解读, Northeast Normal University, 2024) offers fresh interpretive frameworks for understanding the social resonance and contemporary value of musical works, significantly broadening the horizons and possibilities of academic research. Simultaneously, studies like "Research on 'China Cultural Elements' in Modern and Contemporary Western Music Composition" (近现代西方音乐创作中的《中国文化元素》研究, Jilin Arts University, 2022) and "A Study of Prokofiev's Opera *War and Peace*, Viewed Through the Lens of Chinese 'Fenggu' Theory" (普氏歌剧《战争与和平》研究—以中国《风骨》理论为观照, Fujian Normal University, 2020) meticulously examine the distinct presence and interpretation of Chinese elements within the fabric of Russian opera.

Research on Russian opera within China's music master's and doctoral theses has transcended single-dimensional music analysis, embracing a multi-perspective approach that integrates music, culture, and communication. This evolution resonates profoundly with the 21st-century surge in Russian opera performances across China. Future efforts could broaden the repertoire scope, strengthen interdisciplinary methodologies, deepen localized and exchange history studies, and significantly enhance the research's depth and breadth.

Epilogue

Over the past decade, China's academic community has woven a remarkably dense academic tapestry exploring Russian opera, delving into multifaceted dimensions including historical origins, composer research, ethnic musical characteristics, vocal art practice, and Sino-Russian cultural interaction. This vibrant body of work vividly showcases the field's comprehensive attention and profound engagement with the subject. Specifically, existing research not only delves deep into historical contexts, meticulous analysis of compositional techniques, and insightful interpretation of ethnic cultural characteristics, but also encompasses pioneering explorations of cross-cultural communication pathways and innovative modern stage performances. Together, these studies richly illustrate scholars' intense fascination with Russian opera and its profound cultural resonance.

Despite notable accomplishments, certain fields still demand deeper investigation. For instance, it is imperative to systematically explore innovative compositional techniques or significantly strengthen interdisciplinary integration. Crucially, the vast majority of research concentrates on practical outcomes within contexts like singing, teaching, and rehearsals, offering scant in-depth critique concerning philosophical speculation, aesthetic interpretation, or intellectual history. Overall, the research landscape remains largely applied and practice-driven.

Moreover, existing research still falls short in leveraging literature and historical excavation: scant references are made to Russian-language documents, Soviet-era scholarship, and pertinent Western academic discourse; inadequate investigation exists into the dissemination of Russian opera in China during both the Republican era and the Cold War period; most studies predominantly draw upon Chinese materials and domestic performance cases, while international academic dialogue remains significantly lacking in depth and breadth.

References

1. Sun Zhaorun, Wang Fei. Diverse artistic expressions: Tchaikovsky's choral art. *Northern Music*. 2024, no. 3, p. 35–45. (In Chinese)
2. Zhang Gui. Research on the creative characteristics of Tchaikovsky's opera works: A case study of *Eugene Onegin* and *The Queen of Spades*. *Art Hundred Families*. 2016, vol. 32, no. 4, p. 250–251, 254. (In Chinese)
3. Liu Chang, Zhang Peng. The "psychological dramaticity" in Tchaikovsky's lyric operas. *Dramatic Literature*. 2024, no. 4, pp. 81–86. (In Chinese)
4. Jiang Lu, Sun Zhaorun. A comparative study on the character construction of Susanning in Kavos *Ivan Susanning* and Glinka's *A Life for the Tsar. Singing Art*. 2024, no. 8, pp. 21–28. (In Chinese)
5. Jiang Lu, Sun Zhaorun. A comparative study on the character construction of Susanning in Kavos *Ivan Susanning* and Glinka's *A Life for the Tsar. Singing Art*. 2024, no. 9, pp. 23–33. (In Chinese)
6. Cao Yecheng, Yang Jiuhua. On the love core of "flashbacks" in the opera *Ruslan and Liudmila*. *Northern Music*. 2024, no. 2, pp. 64–72. (In Chinese)
7. Sun Zhaorun. On the national roots and religious traditions of the Russian vocal school. *Northern Music*. 2025, no. 1, pp. 17–26. (In Chinese)
8. Lu Wanru. On the influence of Italian opera vocal art on the development of Russian vocal art. *The Voice of the Yellow River*. 2025, no. 3, pp. 68–71. (In Chinese)
9. Ming Hong. An investigation into the late Qing Dynasty China image in the Russian opera *The Mandarin's Son*. *Chinese Music*. 2023, no. 4, pp. 116–125. (In Chinese)
10. Peng Cheng. On Russia's first China' opera *The Mandarin's Son*. *Music Life*. 2023, no. 3, pp. 11–15. (In Chinese)
11. Zhang Lian M. Stage narratives and cultural metaphors in the Mariinsky opera's *The Dead Souls*. *Dramatic Literature*. 2023, no. 8, pp. 89–93. (In Chinese)
12. Taruskin R. Non-nationalists and other nationalists. *19th-Century Music*. 2011, vol. 35, no. 2, pp. 132–143.
13. Medvedeva Yu.P. China in Russian music of the second half of the 19th – early 20th centuries. *Journal of Musical Science*. 2021, vol. 9, no. 1, pp. 31–40. (In Russ.)
https://doi.org/10.24412/2308-1031-2021-1-31-40

Information about the author:

Kang Xiao — Ph.D. (Musicology), Professor and Doctoral Supervisor, Dean of the Graduate School, China Conservatory of Music, Beijing, China.

Информация об авторе:

Кан Сяо — доктор наук (музыковедение), профессор, научный руководитель аспирантов, декан аспирантуры, Китайская консерватория музыки, г. Пекин, Китайская Народная Республика.

Received / Поступила в редакцию: 26.02.2026
Revised / Одобрена после рецензирования: 06.04.2026
Accepted / Принята к публикации: 08.04.2026

ISSN 3034-3836 (Online)

Musical Education

Original article
UDC 78.01, 78.071.4
https://doi.org/10.56620/RM.2026.2.143-158
EDN LGGRTT

Educational Models of Woodwind Performance in Russia: Moscow Conservatory vs. Gnesin Russian Academy of Music

Yu Guo

South China Normal University,
Guangdong, China,
guoyu@scnu.edu.cn✉, *https://orcid.org/0009-0004-2850-6510*

Abstract. Within the larger context of Russian music education, Russian woodwind performance education possesses a systematic yet dialectical approach to music education; its school education systems are best represented by two top Moscow institutions — Tchaikovsky Moscow State Conservatory and Gnesin Russian Academy of Music. On one hand, these two educational organizations differ from each other regarding their emphasis on tradition and innovation as well as theory and practice. On the other hand, they both constitute the three-level model of Russian music performance education that effectively cultivates mature musicians who have serious collaborative awareness, drawing a continuous line from the classroom to the music stage in an ecological operation. With the modern demand of compound talents, the author aims to reveal the dialectical nature between depth of specialization and breadth of knowledge in general music education. As a clarinet performance specialist, the author intends to stress the importance of a musical professional ecosystem while eliciting some insights from the Russian paradigm, taking "woodwind art as the art of dialogue" as an analogy to the fundamental principle of woodwind performance education.

Keywords: master-apprentice model, Soviet-era specialist degree program, Bologna Process, situated learning theory, Moscow Conservatory, Gnesin Russian Academy of Music

For citation: Yu Guo. Educational Models of Woodwind Performance in Russia: Moscow Conservatory vs. Gnesin Russian Academy of Music. *Russian Musicology*. 2026, no. 2, pp. 143–158.
https://doi.org/10.56620/RM.2026.2.143-158

© Yu Guo, 2026

Образовательные модели исполнительства на духовых инструментах в России: Московская консерватория vs. Российская академия музыки имени Гнесиных

Ю Го

Южно-Китайский педагогический университет,
провинция Гуандун, Китайская Народная Республика,
guoyu@scnu.edu.cn✉, *https://orcid.org/0009-0004-2850-6510*

Аннотация. В широком контексте российского музыкального образования обучение игре на деревянных духовых инструментах отличается системным, но в то же время диалектическим подходом. Лучшие образцы таких образовательных систем представлены двумя ведущими московскими вузами — Московской государственной консерваторией имени П.И. Чайковского и Российской академией музыки имени Гнесиных. С одной стороны, эти учебные заведения различаются акцентами на традициях и инновациях, а также на теории и практике. С другой — оба формируют трёхуровневую модель российского музыкального образования в области исполнительства, которая эффективно воспитывает зрелых музыкантов с развитым чувством ансамблевого взаимодействия. Эта модель выстраивает непрерывную линию от учебной аудитории до концертной сцены в рамках «экологической» организации процесса. В условиях современных требований к универсальным талантам автор ставит цель раскрыть диалектическую природу взаимосвязи между глубиной специализации и широтой знаний в общем музыкальном образовании. Как специалист по исполнению на кларнете, автор подчёркивает важность музыкальной профессиональной экосистемы и извлекает ценные уроки из российской модели, используя аналогию «искусство игры на деревянных духовых как искусство диалога» в качестве основополагающего принципа обучения исполнению на духовых инструментах.

Ключевые слова: модель «учитель – ученик», программа специалитета советской эпохи, Болонский процесс, теория ситуативного обучения, Московская консерватория, Российская академия музыки имени Гнесиных

Introduction

Russia has a significant position worldwide regarding its music performance education. As one of the three major schools of music worldwide, the Russian school of music (hereafter referred to as the “Russian school”) possesses a profound musical culture and has nurtured countless great musicians. This musical cultivation continues to this day and is deeply integrated into its music education systems. While the brilliance of the Russian school in piano performance pedagogies is widely recognized, the establishment of such a school is attributed not to a single great musical figure or the prosperity of one discipline, but to the comprehensive development and flourishing of all performance specialties. As a clarinet performance specialist, the author is well aware that research on Russia’s music performance education in China is predominantly focused on the piano, while similar research for other instrumental performance disciplines remains insufficient and requires further investigation.

The author holds that conducting such research is of great significance for the improvement and development of Chinese music education systems. On the one hand, it allows for a deeper understanding of Russia's advanced ideas and methods in woodwind performance education. On the other hand, Tchaikovsky Moscow State Conservatory and the Gnesin Russian Academy of Music — as two shining pearls in Russian music education — both benefit from Moscow's rich musical resources while each possessing distinct characteristics in their educational approaches. In today's increasingly globalized world where musical and cultural exchanges become more frequent, the achievements of Russian music education hold potential reference for music performance education in China. By conducting a comparative analysis of the curricula from the above institutions, valuable insights can be gained to support the development of Chinese music performance education and contribute to the enhancement of its overall quality.

On Russian Music Performance Education in General

As the capital of Russia, Moscow partakes in the most abundant artistic resources. Resulting from the difference of historical contexts, there exists a number of differences in the education systems between the Moscow Conservatory (or the Tchaikovsky Conservatory) and the Gnesin Russian Academy of Music (or the Gnesin Academy). The divisions and bearings on education of their music performance programs also differ considerably from those in China.

History of Russian Music Performance Education and Its Current Status

Music education in Russia has an extensive and illustrious history, holding a significant position in its global field. The systematic and specialized development of Russia's music education is rooted in a profound musical-cultural tradition, the origin of which can be traced back to the 18th century. As outlined in the historical overview of Russian music, "the new era of the eighteenth century... saw a musical spread not only to court life but also to the mansions of the nobilities and landowners, and into the homes of townspeople. The first collections of folk songs were published. Models of Russian national compositions emerged." [1, p. 55] The introduction of European musical culture, the institutionalization of musical activities, and the sprout of national musical creation during this period laid a solid foundation for the subsequent establishment of specialized conservatories.

The Tchaikovsky Conservatory, one of Russia's top music institutions, has its trace back to 1866. Since its founding, it has cultivated countless outstanding musicians and achieved excellence in various fields such as music theory, composition, and performance. The Gnesin Academy also possesses extensive historical breadth; founded in 1895, it has carved out a unique place in Russian music education with its distinctive pedagogic style and high-quality education.

At present, the overall state of music performance education in Russia is characterized by diversity and high quality. In terms of educational philosophy, there is a strong emphasis on cultivating students' artistic creativity and individual expressions, while also underscoring the deep integration of music and culture. The curriculum is rich and varied, covering areas such as music theory, performance techniques, and music history, which aim to provide students with a comprehensive and systematic music education. In teaching methodologies, there is a blend between inheriting the traditional master-apprentice model and integrating modern educational ideas and technological means, including multimedia teaching, interactive classes, etc.

Founding Contexts and Educational Characteristics

The Tchaikovsky Conservatory is renowned for its rigorous teaching system and outstanding artistic tradition. Its distinctive educational features can be described as "traditional" — the institution's history dates back to 1866, reflecting a long and rich heritage. In its early years, Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky taught at the conservatory; and later in his honor, the Soviet government renamed it Tchaikovsky Moscow State Conservatory, where numerous internationally renowned music masters had continued this heritage. In terms of its teaching members, the conservatory brings together a constellation of professors and artists who possess not only state-of-the-art expertise but also practical performance experience. The teaching facilities are advanced, including professional concert halls, recording studios, and rehearsal rooms, providing students with a favorable environment for learning and practice. It is regarded as a place of pilgrimage for musicians, representing the benchmark of Russia's comprehensive criteria of advanced art education.

In contrast to the Tchaikovsky Conservatory, the Gnesin Academy can be described as "modern" in its educational approaches. The establishment of the Gnesin Academy arose from a family's crisis — following the death of their father, the Gnesin sisters were compelled to undertake incumbent responsibilities and consequently founded a new music academy near the Tchaikovsky Conservatory in 1895 (hence its reputation as the sister institute to the former). Despite their sisterly resemblance, the Gnesin Academy did not merge with the Tchaikovsky Conservatory. Instead, it emphasized its own distinctive characteristics, being among the first in Russia to establish an international and modern teaching system. Its education framework integrates Russian folk music traditions with modern educational philosophies, and employs the particular teaching method conceived by the Gnesin family, which has evolved into a renowned convention of pedagogy. The academy strongly adheres to the traditions of this education method while striving to remain at the forefront of current education tendencies, playing a pivotal role in the field of music at present.

The Gnesin Academy is distinguished by its innovative teaching methods and ingenious artistic approaches. The academy focuses on cultivating students' creative thinking and practical capacities, encouraging them to experiment with new approaches and techniques in music composition and performance. The faculty is dynamic: many teachers themselves are active innovators on the contemporary music stage. The teaching facilities are highly modernized, equipped with advanced music technologies and equipments that provide substantial support for students' creative work and performance.

The two institutions also differ in their admission criteria: the Tchaikovsky Conservatory places particularly strong emphasis on applicants' solid fundamental skills and comprehensive musical literacy, whereas the Gnesin Russian Academy of Music, while equally requiring a high level of performance proficiency, places additional emphasis on students' artistic individuality, creative potential, and openness to innovative approaches.

In terms of the education school system, the Tchaikovsky Conservatory has retained the Soviet-era specialist degree program, a five-year system equivalent to a combined bachelor's and master's degree. In contrast, the Gnesin Academy, while also preserving the specialist degree, places greater emphasis on the three-tier degree structure of the Bologna Process — bachelor's, master's, and doctorate. Although the specialist and bachelor's programs differ in duration and curriculum, both serve as indispensable cornerstones of the Russian music

school. The integration of the traditional and the modern forms a complete ecosystem within the Russian education systems.

Woodwind Performance Major Curriculum

Teaching Modules Analysis

To illustrate the distinct curricular characteristics of the two institutions' educational systems, this section examines the specialist program of the Moscow Conservatory and the bachelor's program of the Gnesin Russian Academy of Music. The analysis is based on the officially published curricula for the 2024/2025 academic cycle, which represent the most recent stage of pedagogical development and current educational standards in both institutions. The distribution of modules at each school clearly demonstrates the diversity within the Russian music education system. The number of modules at each school intuitively demonstrates the diversity of Russian music education. Although many courses at the Tchaikovsky Conservatory and Gnesin Academy are similar, and the allocation of elective courses is relatively limited, differences in emphasis can be observed in particular course offerings, credit hours, and semester distribution. Based on their teaching themes, the courses can be categorized into four types: applied core courses, artistic practice courses, music theory courses, and other extended courses (Table 1).

Table 1. Applied Core Courses

Applied Core Courses					
The Tchaikovsky Conservatory	**Total Hours**	**Semester**	**The Gnesin Academy**	**Total Hours**	**Semester**
Woodwind Major	600	1–10	Woodwind Major	264	1–8
Secondary Instrumental Study	18	1–2	Study of Difficult Orchestral Excerpts	33	1–2
Orchestral Excerpts and Sight-reading Practice	34	3–6	History of Woodwind Performance	66	1–2
			Performance Characteristics of Woodwind Early Music (Elective)	32	2
			Contemporary Woodwind Repertoire Studies (Elective)	33	3–4
			Instrument Materials Studies	33	5–6
			Study of Related Woodwind Instruments	33	6–7
			Teaching Repertoire Studies	31	7–8
			Contemporary Performance Techniques (Elective)	31	7–8

In both schools, the displayed courses designed for the applied major are allotted with a relatively high proportion of total credit hours and semesters. The Tchaikovsky Conservatory assigns a very extensive duration to principal instrument study, covering the majority of the total instructional hours. In comparison, the Gnesin Academy allocates slightly less time to the applied major coursework, but within its "applied core courses" it particularizes a set of courses related to the major, systematically deconstructing the relevant knowledge into research-oriented courses.

The difference is small in category of artistic practice courses (Table 2) between the two schools, with the Tchaikovsky Conservatory offering an additional wind quintet course, which spans four academic years — the same duration as its chamber music course. This reflects the considerable intensity of artistic practice training at the Tchaikovsky Conservatory. Regarding ensemble rehearsals, both schools allocate six semesters to it. Although the Gnesin Academy has a relatively shorter program length compared to the Tchaikovsky Conservatory, it places greater emphasis on ensemble training by assigning more credit hours, thereby intensifying students' practical engagement with ensembles.

In China, although there are corresponding chamber music and ensemble courses, due to varying student admission ratios for different instrumental majors across institutions, the number of students in different majors varies significantly, making it difficult to offer corresponding wind quintet course. Aside from maintaining their own conservatory orchestras, the two Moscow institutions (i.e., the Tchaikovsky Conservatory and the Gnesin Academy) facilitate student collaborations with various renowned professional orchestras each year. This cooperation effectively provides students with more platforms and employment opportunities, constructing a professional ecosystem that allows students to gain early experience of professional careers while learning alongside professional musicians and accomplished instrumentalists.

As a subject, music must take theoretical studies into account. Corresponding courses in China include "Musical Skills," "Music History," "Harmony," etc. Both conservatories offer "Psychology and Pedagogy," indicating the broad application of this course. The Tchaikovsky Conservatory allots more instructional hours to "Music History" and "Art History," reflecting its emphasis on theoretical depth (Table 3). In contrast,

Table 2. Artistic Practice Courses

Artistic Practice Courses					
The Tchaikovsky Conservatory	**Total Hours**	**Semester**	**The Gnesin Academy**	**Total Hours**	**Semester**
Ensemble Rehearsals	582	1–6	Concert Practice	33	3–4
Teaching Practice	52	5–8	Chamber Music	198	3–8
Concert Practice	16	7–8	Ensemble Rehearsals	792	3–8
Wind Quintet	304	3–10	Teaching Practice	48	5–8
Chamber Music	304	3–10	Performance Practice	48	5–8

Table 3. Music Theory Courses

Music Theory Courses					
The Tchaikovsky Conservatory	**Total Hours**	**Semester**	**The Gnesin Academy**	**Total Hours**	**Semester**
Musical Skills	74	1–2	Musical Skills	66	1–2
Art History	207	1–2	Harmony	66	1–2
History of Performing Art	115	1–3	Psychology and Pedagogy	66	1–2
Harmony	76	1–2	Score Reading	16	2
Psychology and Pedagogy	70	3–4	Music History	66	3–4
Analysis of Musical Styles	72	3–4	Counterpoint	66	3–4
Music History	284	3–8	Acoustics	34	5
Counterpoint	39	5	Transposition and Sight-reading	33	5–6
Fundamentals of Early Music Interpretations (Elective)	36	5	Analysis of Musical Styles	66	5–6
Contemporary Music and new Performance Techniques (Elective)	37	8	Introduction to Art History	28	7–8
History of Performing Styles (Elective)	36	8			

the Gnesin Academy enhances practical application by incorporating courses such as "Score Reading" and "Acoustics," making its curricular features more pronounced.

In the extended courses (Table 4), "Piano," "Foreign Languages," and "History" are particularly important. Despite differences in the length and structure of their curricular programs, the course offerings at the two institutions are quite similar. Interestingly, "Physical Education" encompasses various ball games, sports theory lessons, and specialized fitness training; it not only pursues diversity but also requires a substantial number of credit hours, reflecting the significance given to this subject. This aligns with the educational philosophy in China, which advocates for the development of well-rounded individuals with comprehensive qualities. The Tchaikovsky Conservatory introduces "Music Arts Management" and "Philosophy" into its interdisciplinary curricular integration, whereas the Gnesin Academy introduces such courses only at the master's degree stage. Furthermore, the Gnesin Academy incorporates courses such as "Conducting," "Public Speaking," and "Etiquette Training," which, under the Bologna

Table 4. Extended Courses

Extended Courses					
The Tchaikovsky Conservatory	**Total Hours**	**Semester**	**The Gnesin Academy**	**Total Hours**	**Semester**
Piano	140	1–8	Conducting	50	1–4
Physical Education	318	1–9	Foreign Languages (Russian)	132	1–4
Foreign Languages (Russian)	326	1–9	History	132	1–4
Russian History	96	3–4	Etiquette Training	67	1–4
Philosophy	94	5–6	Piano	83	1–5
Guide for Academic Writing	37	7	Physical Education	226	1–8
Aesthetics	72	7–8	Safety Training	32	2
Music Arts Management	38	9	Fundamentals of Law	34	5
Performance Academic Research	10	10	Public Speaking	34	5
			Russian Economic and Cultural Policies	66	5–6
			Fundamentals of Academic Writing	32	6
			Basic Military Training	32	6

Process, reflects the institution's emphasis on cultivating students' interdisciplinary abilities and breadth of knowledge, aiming to prepare modern musicians for the diverse professional market. Although the specific courses differ between the two institutions, they are all designed around the subject matter of music, which is a common curricular characteristic in Russian conservatories.

Analysis of the Differences of School Education Systems

The specialist program arose from the Soviet era, emphasizing a single, consistent cycle of education that typically lasts five years. In contrast, the Bologna Process was implemented in Russia after the country signed the Bologna Declaration in 2003. This system adopts a two-tier structure consisting of a four-year bachelor's degree followed by a two-year master's degree, aiming to facilitate international credit transfer and degree recognition. [2] Following this, Russian art institutions generally adopted a three-level system. The Gnesin Academy took a leading role in its full-scale implementation, promoting a hybrid approach to the education systems. Today, most Russian art institutions have progressively opened programs under the Bologna system. As one of the three major Russian music schools, the Saint Petersburg Conservatory also opened its Bologna program

in 2012 and has since enrolled a considerable number of international students. To date, however, the Tchaikovsky Conservatory has not yet opened such curriculum and continues to offer only the Soviet specialist program as the available option.

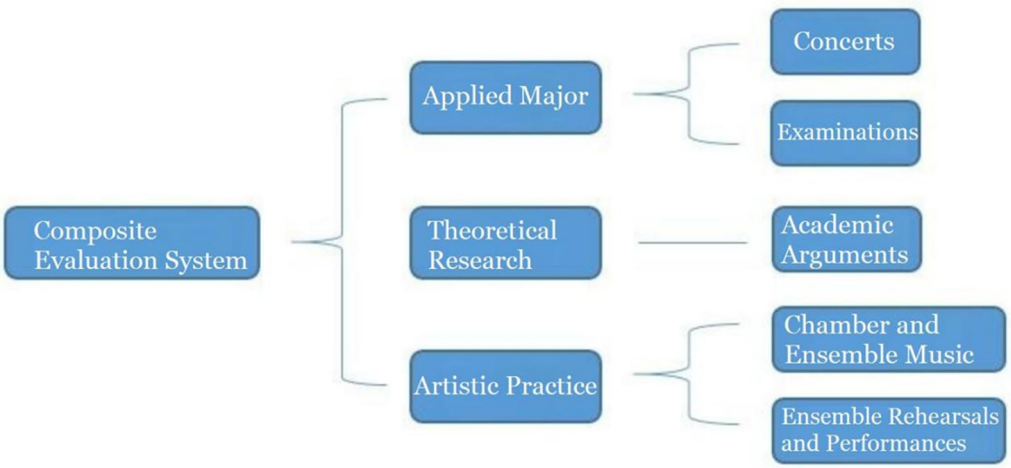
Regarding the differences in the education systems, the Soviet specialist degree is similar to the combined bachelor's and master's program in China. It features professional consistency and depth, allowing students to focus on their specialized development without facing the competitive nature of undergraduate-master transition and consequently reducing the pressure for further academic advancement; but it could lack flexibility and may not be suitable for any change in direction mid-course. In contrast, the Bologna system offers greater flexibility. After completing their bachelor's degree, students can choose from various master's programs, adapting to diverse career needs. However, this might require a longer time to complete the entire educational process. The Bologna system emphasizes credit transfer, degree recognition, and a three-cycle structure (bachelor's, master's, doctorate), whereas the Soviet specialist degree focuses more on the continuous cultivation of professional skills. [3] The curriculum at the Tchaikovsky Conservatory, based on its five-year specialist program, might be more compact, while the Gnesin Academy's four-year bachelor's program could distribute courses more broadly. For instance, the woodwind major requires 600 credit hours at the Tchaikovsky Conservatory, compared to 264 credit hours at the Gnesin Academy — a difference likely stemming from the distinct education systems rather than simply in curricular depth. This phenomenon of "institutional duality" essentially reflects a dialectical balance between adhering to traditions and opening up internationalization within Russian music education — preserving the "marrow" of its century-old school through the specialist system while embracing global integration via the Bologna system.

Evaluation Management

Composite Evaluation System

Russian music education is renowned for its rigorous academic standards, where the grades and graduation certificates directly influence an artist's career development. Two top institutions (the Tchaikovsky Conservatory and the Gnesin Academy) in Moscow exemplify their philosophy of art education through their characteristic evaluation system (Scheme 1).

Scheme 1. Composite Evaluation System



The curriculum of both schools employs a "tripartite" assessment model, encompassing three key areas: musical performance, theoretical research, and artistic practice. Accordingly, the evaluation content is structured around these three columns, which include: the applied major (concerts and examinations), academic arguments (analysis of musical works), and artistic practice (chamber music, ensemble music, and ensemble rehearsals). Among these, the applied major carries the most significant weight in the overall assessment ratio.

The evaluations hold significant importance in students' future career development. Strong academic standing and competency demonstrated through these assessments will increase a student's employment competitiveness. For those intending to pursue further studies, assessment outcomes also serve as a critical reference in applications for higher degree programs.

Credit Management and Resource Integration

The credit management system in Russian music institutions functions as a flexible support mechanism meticulously designed to align with the developmental patterns of music performance talents. Its core principle is that the support on high-level artistic practice is an organic component of music education itself, not a disruption to academic work. Through systemic innovation, professional achievements outside the campus are effectively incorporated into the credit evaluation of the educational progress. Consequently, the two Moscow institutions can leverage their credit management systems to provide more robust support for professional practice and academic exchange.

By dint of their geographical proximity and historical ties, the two Moscow institutions have achieved a significant level of resource integration and mutual credit recognition. This initiative goes beyond mere administrative convenience; its deeper significance lies in breaking down the physical and institutional barriers between the academies, thereby fostering a regional, highly concentrated "musical-educational ecosystem." Practices such as teaching staff exchanges, cross-registration for courses, and mutual credit recognition enable students from both institutions to access a wider extent of high-quality educational resources. This effectively mitigates the potential resource limitations of a single institution and offers students a broader and more enriched academic menu, which demonstrates the principle of maximized utilization of educational resources.

Successful Experiences and Issues Summary

Through an in-depth comparison of the education models for woodwind programs at the Tchaikovsky Conservatory and the Gnesin Academy, the successful experiences of these two renowned music institutions, as well as the challenges they face in contemporary development, can be clearly extracted. These experiences and difficulties offer significant retrospective insights relative to Chinese higher music performance education in its reformation and development.

Systematic Construction and Ecological Operation

The serious effectiveness of Russian music education is rooted in its educational paradigm that deeply integrates "systematic construction" with "ecological operation." Within this paradigm, chamber music and woodwind ensemble training are far from being simply ordinary items on the curriculum; they serve as the "core spine" that runs through the entire educational cycle, connects every skills, and aligns with career requirements.

In Russian woodwind education, the three-level system manifests itself through the adaptation between "artistic depth" and

"breadth of knowledge" to suit different educational goals. The value of the five-year specialist degree program at the Tchaikovsky Conservatory lies in providing woodwind students with an extended cycle of immersive artistic refinement. Woodwind instruments require nearly full commends on breath control, articulation techniques, and timbral consistency, necessitating years of stable training. The specialist degree avoids the potential discontinuity upon reaching the master's stage, allowing students to focus entirely on honing their techniques and developing collaborative skills with orchestras, chamber groups, and so forth.

In contrast, the four-year bachelor's program under the Bologna system at the Gnesin Academy places greater emphasis on cultivating a mature musician's adaptability. By incorporating courses such as "Musical Instrument Acoustics" and "Fundamentals of Conducting," it aims to swiftly develop students' occupational adaptiveness and cross-disciplinary potential.

The curriculum that places the "woodwind quintet" course on par with the chamber music course and spans four academic years at the two Moscow institutions, particularly at the Tchaikovsky Conservatory, holds profound significance that extends far beyond mere credit hours distribution. This signifies that ensemble pedagogy has evolved from a course into a fundamental teaching principle. The artistic essence of woodwind performance is the "art of dialogue." Core competencies such as extreme sensitivity to intonation, blend of timbre, synchronized breath management in phrasing and, most crucially, the ability to listen attentively, can only be initially laid down in solo lessons; they must be refined and solidified through ensemble practice.

This long-term, systematic ensemble training constitutes a form of "situated learning" that cannot be replicated by any solo lessons. It requires performers to focus not only on their own part but also to distribute their attention to other voices, constantly adjusting, coordinating, and supporting each other within the dynamic flow of performance. This approach serves as a "microcosm" for the work fitted to professional orchestras, providing students with the most immediate practical path from a "soloist" to a "mature ensemble player."

Furthermore, incorporating ensemble performance as a core component in comprehensive assessments institutionally affirms that collaborative skills hold equal importance with solo capacity. Such evaluation system compels students to value ensemble collaboration throughout their entire learning phase.

The excellence of the two institutions is that they did not leave ensemble training in the confines of campus; instead, they transcend these by integrating the former into the broader music ecosystem of Moscow and Russia through institutionalized design, thereby actualizing "ecological operation." Their close collaboration mechanism with top professional orchestras, such as the Russian National Orchestra, creates an efficient "learning-practice-feedback" cycle for students. This allows students to test their "collaborative awareness" acquired in the classroom within a high-pressure professional environment, effectively cultivating pragmatical talents. [4] This approach effectively transforms singular artistic making into lively artistic collaboration, constructing a holistic education ecosystem that extends directly from the classroom to the stage.

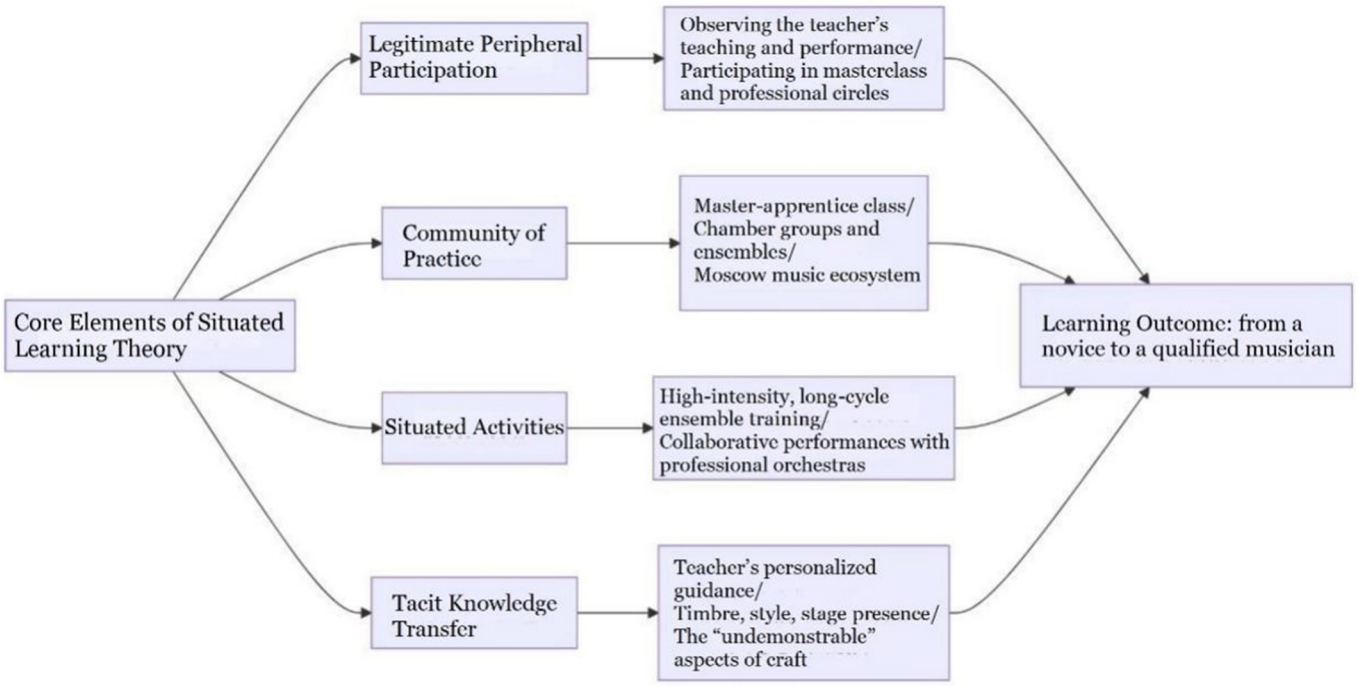
Issues and Challenges

While acknowledging the advantages of this systematization, it is equally essential to examine the inherent conflicts of this paradigm from the perspective of woodwind professional development.

From the perspective of music pedagogy, the highly effective "master-apprentice" model held by the Russian music school essentially accords with the core principles of "situated learning" theory. [5] Proposed by Jean Lave and Étienne Wenger, this theory emphasizes learning practical operation directly within authentic contexts through observation, communication, and interaction (Scheme 2). This process allows learners to move gradually from "legitimate peripheral participation" towards full involvement in the community of practice, achieving socialization. In music performance education, the teacher's class is a typical "situation." Students are not merely passive recipients of instructions during lessons; they are fully immersed in a professional environment through long-term observations of demonstrations from the teacher, attention to critiques given to other students, participation in masterclasses, and even access to specific performance circles through recommendation from the teacher. It is precisely this "situated," tacit knowledge transfer that ensures the continuity of the Russian school's exceptional technical proficiency and unique artistic style in woodwind performance — an outcome difficult to achieve through standardized curricula divorced from specific contexts.

However, the "situated learning" theory can also reveal the potential risks inherent in this paradigm. When a "situation" becomes overly dominant and enclosed, "legitimate peripheral participation" could devolve into absolute obedience to authority, thereby inhibiting the cultivation of the learner's critical thinking and independent artistic personality. In the context of woodwind pedagogy, this implies that students might excessively internalize their mentor(s)' personal style and tone philosophy, regarding a specific approach as the only standard. Consequently, in the pursuit of academic "unity," the diversity of personal artistic expressions is sacrificed. This is particularly significant for instruments like the

Scheme 2. Core Elements of Situated Learning Theory



clarinet and oboe, which are known for their distinctive characteristics; the mark of a great instrumentalist often lies in their unique tone and musical interpretation. Over-emphasizing assimilation within the situated context could result in cultivating woodwind players who are technically flawless yet stylistically convergent; this is the potential cost to artistic diversity that the "master-apprentice" model might incur while maintaining a high baseline of proficiency. Furthermore, the model's heavy reliance on individual mentors, where teaching quality and stylistic continuity are highly dependent on a few renowned masters, also poses a potential challenge to the system's overall stability and sustainability.

Furthermore, to meet the demands of either the specialist degree program or the intensive bachelor's program, woodwind students are required to invest a significant amount of time in individual practice, ensemble rehearsals, and ensemble performances. This often renders the relatively weak elective components within the curriculum virtually nominal. However, contemporary musical development increasingly emphasizes interdisciplinary collaboration and multicultural understanding. A serious woodwind player today needs not only exquisite technique but also a certain level of cognizance in literature, drama, modern art, and even electronic music to adapt to the ever-changing creative environment. While the Russian paradigm excels in building "professional depth," how to effectively expand students' "humanistic breadth" within the limited credit hours becomes a practical challenge. The highly specialized nature of its curriculum reflects, to some extent, a structural conflict within traditional music education when confronted with the modern demand for compound talents.

By focusing on the analysis of woodwind performance education, it becomes manifest that the Russian experience is not a perfect template, but rather a complex system riddled with dialectics. It has successfully transformed the woodwind performance major into an interlocking education system. However, its steadfast adherence to traditional standards and highly specialized orientation also brings challenges, including the risk of homogenization and an overly narrow knowledge structure.

Inspiration and Reference to Chinese Woodwind Performance Education

In the current research on Russian music education in China, there exists a significant tendency towards "piano-centrism": major scholarly works inadvertently present the model of piano specialization as the entirety of the Russian school of music education; and this perspective overlooks the "iceberg" underneath the surface of the Russian school, namely, the educational systems of woodwind, brass, string instruments, and others, all flourishing and each in its own manner. As a woodwind (clarinet) specialist, the author intends to fill this gap by exploring the valuable, yet often overlooked, experiences within the Russian woodwind education systems, which have been somewhat obscured by the monumental achievements in piano pedagogy. The successful practices of Russian woodwind education directly point to some of the core poignancies currently faced in China's own woodwind education.

Paradigm Referencing

The primary inspiration from Russian music education lies in the precise and systematic nature of its objective orientation. It is not singularly directed towards cultivating woodwind soloists, but is dedicated to constructing an ecosystem capable of producing high-level,

comprehensively developed professional woodwind musicians in quantity. In contrast, China's education model often wavers between "emulating the soloist-oriented education of piano majors" and "basic skills training," lacking the investigation of the professional essence of woodwind performance — namely, an in-depth understanding of reliance on collaboration, emphasis on blending, and demands on precise control.

The two Moscow institutions implement years of intense training in woodwind quintet and chamber music, precisely predicated on the essence of woodwind art as the "art of dialogue." Chinese institutions urgently need to elevate woodwind chamber music and ensemble courses from optional electives to compulsory core courses for all woodwind majors. This is not merely to train performance skills, but also to cultivate systematically students' collaborative spirit, sectional awareness, and listening ability — a crucial step in transforming them from "soloists" into "mature musicians."

One of the major difficulties facing Chinese woodwind majors is their stark unfamiliarity with the repertoire, performance practices, and working procedures of professional orchestras. As this current investigation has discovered, the two Moscow institutions have established a seamless practical line from the classroom to the professional stage through an in-depth collaboration with professional orchestras. Therefore, Chinese institutions ought not be content with occasional lectures. Instead, the concept of "ecological operation" ought to be examined — thereby learning from the Russian model — this involves, that institutions proactively sign agreements with professional orchestras to establish a "woodwind section residency training program" within the campus; that they allow principals and assistant principals from professional orchestras to regularly guide ensemble groups in workshop formats, even leading students in sectionals; and that students' performance during orchestra internships should be strictly assessed and converted into core academic credits.

A woodwind player in an orchestra is not merely an instrumentalist, but must also possess skills such as immediate sight-reading, deep understanding of their instruments' capabilities, and stable psychological state on stage. Those courses in the Russian curriculum that may seem "non-core" are, in fact, precisely designed to meet these professional demands.

Curriculum and Evaluation Reformation

The "Acoustics" course offered by the Gnesin Academy for its woodwind program is highly forward-looking. It enables students to comprehend, on a theoretical level, the instrument design, sound production, and the harmonic series. This knowledge allows them to adjust timbre and tackle technically challenging passages not just from equivocal "feelings," but with scientific groundings. Concurrently, there is a need to establish an "Advanced Sight-Reading Class" specifically for woodwind players, designed to simulate the realistic scenarios of orchestral auditions. This would significantly improve students' quick response to unfamiliar scores and its mastery, which accords closely with the demands of the "sight-reading" course.

Furthermore, this reformation should take the solo recital as the primary graduation assessment model, establishing a "portfolio-based" evaluation system that corresponds to the professional characteristics of woodwind music. The portfolio must comprehensively include: an argumentative recital encompassing both solo and chamber repertoire; an academic

essay closely related to woodwind performance practice; and a practical report and introspection on their participation in ensemble rehearsals and performances. This multifaceted approach can provide a holistic assessment of a player's comprehensive potential as a professional woodwind musician.

Institutional Supports

Some Chinese institutions face a significant regulative imbalance in the admission ratios across various woodwind majors, which results in the inability to properly conduct courses such as woodwind chamber music and quintets due to incomplete instrumentation. At the institutional level, long-term planning is needed to ensure a stable and balanced enrollment of students in core disciplines — such as flute, oboe, clarinet, and bassoon — thereby laying a solid foundation for high-quality ensemble teaching.

Woodwind faculty members should not only teach within the institutions but also be encouraged to actively participate in performances with professional orchestras, thereby maintaining their "stage readiness." Furthermore, it is crucial to invite institutionally woodwind principals from professional orchestras as guest professors in order to bring state-of-the-art ensemble experience and employment standards as well as effectively break down the barriers between institutional pedagogy and professional demands.

Conclusion

From a comparative perspective, the educational models of the Moscow Conservatory and the Gnesin Russian Academy of Music demonstrate a clear yet complementary divergence. The former represents a more tradition-oriented and vertically integrated specialist training system, emphasizing continuity, depth of specialization, and the inheritance of established performance practices. In contrast, the latter reflects a more flexible and innovation-oriented structure under the Bologna framework, highlighting adaptability, interdisciplinary awareness, and the cultivation of individual artistic identity.

Despite these differences, both institutions converge on a shared pedagogical foundation: the integration of rigorous performance training, systematic curriculum design, and extensive artistic practice. This duality — between tradition and innovation, depth and breadth — constitutes a defining characteristic of contemporary Russian music performance education.

For woodwind performance education in China, drawing reference from the Russian experience necessitates a move beyond the "piano-centric" frame and embarking on a systematic "ecological reconstruction" fundamentally oriented towards the artistic essence of woodwind performance. The core of this transformation lies in shifting the educational goal from cultivating singular technical performers towards that of professional woodwind musicians who can enter into the modern musical ecosystem, possessing both collaborative and specialized expertise. This requires profound, woodwind-centered and specialized reformation in curriculum design, practical platforms, evaluation manners, and even student admission strategies. Only then can we truly learn the essence of the Russian school of education and cultivate serious woodwind players who are capable not only of solo performance but, more importantly, of excellence in orchestral and chamber music roles. This holds significant referential value for improving the overall quality of woodwind performance education in China.

References

1. Siniaver L.S. *An Outline History of Russian Music.* Trans. by Liang Xiang. Shidai Shubao Press, 1947. 52 p. (In Chinese)

2. Kang Chiongchiong. Research and enlightenment of higher professional education in library and information science in Russia: Based on the analysis of Russian National Educational Standard for library and information science specialty. *Library Work and Study*. 2023, no. 5, pp. 28–35. (In Chinese) https://doi.org/10.16384/j.cnki.lwas.2023.05.010

3. Meng Lingxia, Li Shuhua. Viewing the reform and effectiveness of Russian higher education from the Bologna process. *China Adult Education*. 2019, vol. 3, no. 12, pp. 70–72. (In Chinese)

4. Cai Chang. The Dissemination and influence of Russian music education system in China. *Voice of the Yellow River.* 2017, no. 23, p. 63–64. (In Chinese) https://doi.org/10.19340/j.cnki.hhzs.2017.23.040

5. Lave J., Wenger É. *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991. 138 p.

Information about the author:

Yu Guo — Professor, South China Normal University, Guangdong, China.

Информация об авторе:

Ю Го — профессор, Южно-Китайский педагогический университет, Гуандун, Китайская Народная Республика.

Received / Поступила в редакцию: 13.01.2026
Revised / Одобрена после рецензирования: 06.04.2026
Accepted / Принята к публикации: 08.04.2026

ISSN 3034-3836 (Online)

Musical Education

Original article
UDC 78.01
https://doi.org/10.56620/RM.2026.2.159-166
EDN MILYQQ

The Phenomenon of the Piano School in Art History: Specifics of Its Functioning in a Foreign Environment Based on the Case of China

Hao Guanghui

Saratov State L.V. Sobinov Conservatoire,
Saratov, Russian Federation,
haoguanghui@yandex.com✉, *https://orcid.org/0009-0000-3402-4316*

Abstract. The article systematises approaches to defining the concept of the "piano school" in modern art history and identifies the specifics of the functioning of this phenomenon in a foreign cultural environment on the example of China. The work sets out to clarify the theoretical and methodological foundations of the study of the piano school and develop an analytical model of its cultural transformation. The methodology is based on historical-cultural, comparative and systemic approaches. The theoretical basis of the study was formed by a systemic-synergetic approach to the study of the performance school in the context of contemporary theories of culturally determined musical perception. It is established that the Chinese piano school is not a mechanical borrowing of Western European models, but the result of their complex adaptation as conditioned by the interaction of the conservatory system of professionalisation and the traditional Eastern paradigm of the "teacher-student" relationship. Particular attention is paid to the role of private schools within the broader national system on the example of Zhou Guangren's school, which demonstrates how imported piano traditions can be transformed in different cultural environments through pedagogical continuity, institutional consolidation, and the rethinking of artistic norms. As a result, the Chinese piano school can be understood as a hybrid model that synthesises Western academic technologies, the specifics of the national "ethno-hearing," and the central role of the creative personality of the Master as the main transmitter of artistic tradition.

Keywords: piano school, foreign environment, Chinese piano art, pedagogical system, continuity, art history, Zhou Guangren

For citation: Hao Guanghui. The Phenomenon of the Piano School in Art History: Specifics of Its Functioning in a Foreign Environment Based on the Case of China. *Russian Musicology*. 2026, no. 2, pp. 159–166. https://doi.org/10.56620/RM.2026.2.159-166

Translated by Thomas Alexander Beavitt, Laboratory for Scientific Translation (https://nauka-perevod.ru/eng).

© Hao Guanghui, 2026

Феномен фортепианной школы в искусствознании: специфика функционирования в инонациональной среде (на материале Китая)

Хао Гуанхуэй

Саратовская государственная консерватория имени Л.В. Собинова,
г. Саратов, Российская Федерация,
haoguanghui@yandex.com✉, https://orcid.org/0009-0000-3402-4316

Аннотация. В статье систематизированы подходы к определению понятия «фортепианная школа» в современном искусствознании и выявлена специфика функционирования данного феномена в инонациональной культурной среде (на примере Китая). Цель работы — уточнение теоретико-методологических оснований исследования фортепианной школы и разработка аналитической модели её культурной трансформации. Методология опирается на историко-культурный, компаративный и системный подходы. Теоретическую базу составили системно-синергетический подход к изучению исполнительской школы и современные теории культурно-детерминированного музыкального восприятия. Установлено, что китайская фортепианная школа представляет собой не механическое заимствование западноевропейских образцов, а результат их сложной адаптации, обусловленной взаимодействием консерваторской системы профессионализации и традиционной восточной парадигмы отношений «учитель — ученик». Особое внимание уделяется роли частных школ в рамках более широкой национальной системы и примеру школы Чжоу Гуанжэнь, демонстрирующей, как заимствованные пианистические традиции могут трансформироваться в иной культурной среде посредством педагогической преемственности, институциональной консолидации и переосмысления художественных норм. В результате китайская фортепианная школа понимается как гибридная модель, синтезирующая западные академические технологии, специфику национального «этнослуха» и центральную роль творческой личности Мастера как главного транслятора художественной традиции.

Ключевые слова: фортепианная школа, инонациональная среда, китайское фортепианное искусство, педагогическая система, преемственность, искусствознание, Чжоу Гуанжэнь

Introduction

The problem of defining of the concept of “school” in musical art is one of the most controversial issues in contemporary art history. In scholarly discourse, this word may denote a national tradition, a local circle of students around a master, a methodological system, a conservatory institution, a performing direction, and even a distinctive mark of artistic reputation. Although such broad usage provides the term with practical convenience, at the same time, analytical precision is undermined. Therefore, any study that claims to examine the phenomenon of the piano school in art history must first of all address the fundamental question: what salient features of a school can be used to distinguish it from an individual

style, class, institution or historical tradition in the broad sense. [1, p. 1407]

In the field of pianism, this difficulty becomes particularly acute. Here the problems of interpretation, performance history, professional socialisation, artistic memory, repertoire policy and the transmission of skill from generation to generation intersect. [2, p. 40] As a result, the term "piano school" should be interpreted merely as a pedagogical metaphor. [3] Rather, it records a stable unity of artistic principles, principles of sound production, methods of working with text, ideas about style and form, as well as professional and normative models of musical behaviour. [2, p. 44]

In China an additional problem arises since here one can observe not only the internal evolution of the European piano school, but also the transfer and subsequent transformation of its principles in a different cultural environment. [4] In this context, the institutional logic of the conservatory type collides with the model of "teacher-student" relations, which goes back to the Confucian tradition, in which the artistic authority of the mentor has not only a professional but also an ethical dimension. [5, p. 70] This is precisely why the phenomenon of the piano school in the Chinese cultural situation is fruitful for analysis not just as a simple borrowing of the Western model, but in terms of its cultural refraction, in which the European-Russian system of professionalisation enters into dialogue with indigenous forms of mentoring and succession. [6, p. 90]

Therefore, the present work sets out to clarify the theoretical and methodological foundations of the study of the piano school as an art history phenomenon and to propose a working model for the analysis of its functioning in a foreign national environment (that is, in a different national-cultural context).

Theoretical Foundations of the Concept of "Piano School"

In Russian musicology, an obvious starting point for a theoretical understanding of the piano school remains Lev Barenboim's work *The Path to Music-Making*, in which training is understood as an introduction to meaningful music-making, rather than the accumulation of private skills. [7, p. 5] Later, this direction receives structural concretisation from Anton Borodin, who interprets the piano school as a historically determined association of musicians with their own aesthetic, pedagogical and performing profiles, based on communication mechanisms and oriented towards the preservation and transmission of artistic ideas. [8, p. 229]

In the work of Dmitry Varlamov and Elena Vinogradova, the school is considered not as a rhetorical metaphor, but as a functioning artistic organism, in which the personality of the master, repertoire, interpretative norms, continuity and institutional environment are interconnected. [1, p. 1407] This position is continued by Elena Vinogradova, who insists on a systemic study of the school as a whole formed of components, [3, p. 104] as well as by Augusta Malinkovskaya, who understands the performing and pedagogical school as a form of musical culture and cultural memory. [9, p. 94]

This theoretical line is complemented by the problem of interpretation. According to Alexander Lebedev, interpretation in performance is an artistically meaningful process of recreating a work [2, p. 41]; therefore, a school manifests itself as a system of stable norms and values. [Ibid., p. 44] In a foreign environment, this level is also associated with the reconfiguration of hearing: the study of Alla Toropova and Tatyana Knyazeva, which

is dedicated to the phenomenon of "ethno-hearing," shows that professional training partially levels out ethnic differences in the perception of European classics, but does not cancel out culturally conditioned differences in the perception of "native" and "foreign" music. [10, p. 565]

Based on the concepts considered above, it seems possible to propose a working definition. In the present study, a piano school is understood as a multi-level artistic education institution that coalesces around the creative personality of a leader, including stable interpretative principles, repertoire and methodological guidelines, mechanisms of intergenerational continuity, as well as institutional forms of consolidation and transmission of these principles. [1; 3] This definition explicitly combines personal, communicative, artistic and organisational dimensions. It is in this capacity that the school is further considered as an art historical phenomenon, the particularities of whose functioning in a foreign national environment require special analysis. The model is then tested on a personal case.

China as a Culturally Foreign Operational Environment for the Piano School

The history of Chinese pianism shows that a piano school is formed in a foreign environment not as a direct continuation of the European line, but as a result of cultural translation. While in the Chinese context the conservatory organisation of education, the canon of repertoire, and the norms of working with texts are borrowed, [6, p. 93] they are introduced into an environment where the high importance of personal mentoring, the ethics of apprenticeship, and a Confucian understanding of education are preserved. [5, p. 73; 11, p. 37] Therefore, the Chinese piano school does not represent a mechanical borrowing of an external model so much as its cultural refraction. [4, p. 33]

Contemporary research justifies a consideration of the Chinese piano school as a multi-level formation. While the phenomenon manifests itself at the macro level as a national system, at the meso level it consists as a collection of personal schools, [Ibid., p. 33] while at the micro level it is revealed as a line of students and followers. [12, p. 155] In this context, personal schools are important not in themselves, but as mechanisms of internal differentiation and historical concretisation of the national tradition. [13]

When considering the Chinese case, a special role can be seen to be played by the cultural adaptation of auditory and interpretive norms. The concept of "ethno-hearing" allows us to explain why the mastery of European repertoire occurs not as simple copying, but as a restructuring of auditory expectations and professional musical identity. [10, p. 565] When considered in combination with data on the specifics of mastering musical and psychological disciplines by Chinese students, this confirms that the analysis of the Chinese piano school should take into account not the biological, but rather the culturally determined category of perception. [14, p. 41]

China thus emerges not simply as an empirical example, but as a methodologically privileged space where it is possible to observe the interaction of an imported professional model with indigenous forms of mentoring, continuity, and artistic self-awareness. It is precisely this space that served as the environment for the formation and functioning of the Zhou Guangren piano school: in absorbing and reinterpreting these disparate traditions, her school remains both a product and a subject of musical dialogue.

The Zhou Guangren School as a Culturally Adaptative Model of the Piano Tradition

The figure of Zhou Guangren has a special heuristic value for testing the proposed model of the school on specific material. At the same time, it is methodologically important to consider it not as a synonym for the Chinese piano school, but rather as one of the most influential personal centres within a broader national system, in which the school manifests itself through a set of stable artistic principles, mechanisms of continuity and institutional forms of consolidation of tradition. [4, p. 33; 12, p. 155]

Zhou Guangren (周广仁, 1928–2022) was an outstanding Chinese pianist and teacher whose work occupies a special place in the history of Chinese musical culture in the period spanning the 20th and 21st centuries. Born in Hanover and returning to Shanghai with her parents as a child, Zhou Guangren's talent was formed in a space of intense intercultural interaction. [15, p. 245; 16] Her early professional training, which was influenced both by Chinese and European models, was later supplemented by assimilation of the Soviet professional tradition: training with teachers of various piano schools was a process of active selection, comparison and internal processing of performance principles. [6, p. 90–93] Although this kind of education cannot be called systematic in the academic sense, it was precisely such a non-systematic approach that served as the condition for the formation of an individual strategy for integrating heterogeneous performance models that provided Zhou Guangren with her characteristic adaptability and stylistic flexibility.

Such qualities were soon internationally recognised: in 1951, Zhou Guangren won acclaim at the piano competition at the 3rd World Festival of Youth and Students in East Berlin. [15, p. 58] This event was of historic significance, since she became the first Chinese pianist to win an international competition award. No less important is her contribution to the development of the national piano repertoire. Already at an early stage of her creative career, she included works by Chinese composers in her concert repertoire. Her rendition at the same international festival in 1951 of He Luting's piece *The Shepherd Boy's Flute* (牧童短笛) was significant not only in terms of performance but also in terms of cultural-representation. [Ibid., p. 58]

Since the second half of the 1950s, Zhou Guangren's professional destiny has been linked with the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing. Over the course of more than half a century of teaching activity, she trained several generations of pianists, thereby forming a stable mechanism for the transfer of professional experience. [12, p. 158; 16] Continuity is captured here not only biographically but also culturally: the name Zhou Guangren becomes both a bearer and a transmitter of professional norms. Specific facts of pedagogical continuity also support this conclusion. The book by Huang Dagang entitled *The Piano Teaching Art of Zhou Guangren* (周广仁钢琴教学艺术) contains sections that include the memories of students and materials about her pedagogical influence. This provides a useful basis for tracing the circle of musicians and teachers who were formed in line with her artistic and pedagogical principles. [16, pp. 311–506] Among them are named Ni Hongjin, Dan Zhaoyi, Pang Bo, Sheng Yuan, Wang Xiaohan and others. Consequently, Zhou Guangren's pedagogical influence was not confined to a single graduating class or a single cohort, but unfolded across generations.

Zhou Guangren's piano school can be seen to represent not a simple coexistence of various artistic elements, but rather their functionally organised synthesis. Its significance lay not in the development of a closed system

of rigid regulations, but in the formation of a sustainable model of professional growth, in which a personally differentiated approach was combined with high normative artistic requirements. In pedagogical practice, this was manifested in the principle of individualisation (因材施教): Zhou Guangren always insisted on planning the content of lessons in accordance with the unique characteristics of each student. [12, p. 158] At the same time, she sought to develop artistic and performing maturity in students, consistently working on sound culture, touch on the keyboard, tempo-rhythmic organisation, dynamics, pedalling, accuracy of reading musical text, musical memory and means of musical expression. [Ibid., pp. 155–156] She also paid special attention to auditory control and the necessity of fine work on timbre. These approaches were aimed not at the mechanical reproduction of a unified model, but at revealing the individual creative potential of each student and forming his or her own interpretation.

The institutional dimension of Zhou Guangren's school was expressed in its active participation in the creation of the methodological and organisational infrastructure of Chinese piano education. With her work on textbooks, education programmes and the articulation of teaching principles, she contributed significantly to the development of the Chinese piano school as an institutional phenomenon. [15, p. 208–210] It is significant that, on her initiative, the first all-China conference on the teaching of piano was held in 1991. Moreover, the Xinghai Young Pianists School in Beijing (星海青少年钢琴学校, 1983) and the private Leyu Music School (乐友, 1990) which she founded, became important platforms for training a new generation of pianists.[1] Thus, her teaching experience was not lost in oral tradition, but was reflected in methodological publications, student memoirs, lecture materials, and editorial work. This allows us to consider the Zhou Guangren School as a long-standing artistic and pedagogical institution. In 2000, at the Symposium on the Reform of Piano Education in Higher Pedagogical Educational Institutions, Zhou Guangren proposed the target setting for training specialists according to the principle of "one speciality — several skills," which implied the expansion of the function of piano training beyond the actual performance specialisation and its connection with the tasks of pedagogical, methodological and practical activities. [17, pp. 24–25] In the broader context of music and pedagogical education reform, this justifies the consideration of her school not only as a space for training concert pianists, but also as a mechanism for expanding the professional and pedagogical functions of piano training.

Thus, the line of continuity that formed around Zhou Guangren's school is quite clearly discernible: her approach has been consolidated in the recollections of her students, methodological materials, articles, and editorial work. The transfer was carried out through the formation of a holistic system of performance guidelines. At the same time, the main significance of the Zhou Guangren school lies not in the reproductive preservation of adopted European norms, but in their inclusion in Chinese musical life. Her example demonstrates that an indigenous school emerges in a culturally foreign environment wherever international performance experience receives personal, methodological, and institutional

[1] Benevolence and Virtue, Utmost Love and Sincerity — A Profile of Professor Zhou Guangren, Recipient of the "50 Years of Glory in the Party" Commemorative Medal and Former Head of the Piano Department of Our School. Source: Central Conservatory of Music. URL: https://www.ccom.edu.cn/info/2611/25391.htm (accessed: 13.04.2026).

articulation and subsequently endures in the form of intergenerational continuity. [5, p. 79; 11, p. 37]

Conclusion

The presented study confirms that the piano school retains scholarly productivity only on condition of its rigorous structural concretisation. It should be considered as a multi-level artistic system characterised by interaction between the creative personality of the leader, the interpretative norm, the mechanisms of continuity, the methodological forms of recording and the institutional environment.

A systemic approach reveals the internal connections among these elements, while the Chinese case demonstrates that a culturally foreign environment does not obstruct the emergence of a school but transforms it through a dialogue between the Europeanised conservatory model and an indigenous ethics of mentorship. [4, p. 31] In this context, the Zhou Guangren school acts not as an independent alternative to the national system, but as one of the most indicative mechanisms for its local implementation. [13]

A promising direction for further research seems to be a comparison of Zhou Guangren's personal schools with other centres of Chinese pianism that were formed under similar conditions of cultural translation, but relied on other lines of the Russian-European tradition. Such a comparison will allow us to more accurately describe the range of variability in repertoire preferences, sound production models, and pedagogical strategies, as well as to identify which elements of "ethno-hearing" remain stable during professional socialisation, and which are subject to standardisation within the framework of the conservatory system. It is also important to clarify the extent to which institutional mechanisms of transmission (the conservatory program, methodological publications, national conferences and competitions) enhance the effect of the personal authority of the mentor and convert it into a long-term educational standard. Thus, the proposed analytical model can be used not only for a retrospective description of already established schools, but also for analysing modern processes of their institutional and discursive consolidation. This has the potential to expand the possibilities of comparative analysis per se.

References

1. Varlamov D.I., Vinogradova E.S. Theoretical and methodological approaches to the research of performing school in music art. *Fundamental'nye issledovaniya* (Fundamental research). 2013, no. 11 (part 7), pp. 1407–1411. (In Russ.)

2. Lebedev A.E. The artistic foundations of performing interpretation in musical art. *Vestnik Saratovskoi konservatorii. Voprosy iskusstvoznaniya* (Journal of the Saratov Conservatory. Issues of arts). 2024, no. 4, pp. 40–47. (In Russ.)

3. Vinogradova E.S. System approach as the method of research of piano school in musical performing art. *Bulletin of Kazan State University of Culture and Arts*. 2016, no. 2, pp. 102–106. (In Russ.)

4. Wang Yanzhe. On the specifics of the concept of "Chinese piano school". *Khudozhestvennoe obrazovanie i nauka* (Arts education and science). 2024, no. 3, pp. 31–40. (In Russ.)
https://doi.org/10.36871/hon.202403031

5. Fei Yan. Music education transformation in China: from origins to digital technologies. *Nauchno-pedagogicheskoye obozreniye – Pedagogical Review*. 2023, no. 5, pp. 70–79. (In Russ.)
https://doi.org/10.23951/2307-6127-2023-5-70-79

6. Chen Yanan. The historical role of foreign piano schools in the development of Chinese pianism. *Muzykal'noe iskusstvo i obrazovanie = Musical Art and Education*. 2020, vol. 8, no. 1, pp. 90–103. (In Russ.) https://doi.org/10.31862/2309-1428-2020-8-1-90-103

7. Barenboim L.A. *The path to music-making*. 2nd ed., expanded. Leningrad: Sovetskii kompozitor Publ., 1979. 352 p. (In Russ.)

8. Borodin A.B. About structure of the concept "Piano School". *Vestnik Bashkirskogo universiteta* (Bulletin of the Bashkir University). 2007, vol. 12, no. 1, pp. 226–229. (In Russ.)

9. Malinkovskaya A.V. The performance-pedagogical school as a phenomenon of musical culture and education. *Vestnik kafedry YuNESKO. Muzykal'noe iskusstvo i obrazovanie = Bulletin of the UNESCO Chair* "*Musical Art and Education.*" 2013, no. 1, pp. 94–102. (In Russ.)

10. Toropova A.V., Knyazeva T.S. Considerations of the phenomenon of "ethno-hearing": The perception of "native" and "alien" music in Chinese and Russian university students. *Psychology. Journal of the Higher School of Economics*. 2021, vol. 18, no. 3, pp. 562–574. https://doi.org/10.17323/1813-8918-2021-3-562-574

11. Yang Chenghai. Enlightenment of Confucian thoughts of music education on contemporary general music education . *Journal of Contemporary Educational Research*. 2020, vol. 4, no. 2, pp. 35–39. https://doi.org/10.26689/jcer.v4i2.1046

12. Liang Chenyi, Bazhanov N.S. The formation of the piano school of China: Personalities. *Journal of Musical Science*. 2023, vol. 11, no. 3, pp. 152–161. (In Russ.) https://doi.org/10.24412/2308-1031-2023-3-152-161

13. Zhang Xin. *A Glimpse into Chinese Piano Education and Performance Through an Influential Professor: Doctor of Musical Arts Dissertation*. University of Kentucky, 2021. https://doi.org/10.13023/etd.2021.364

14. Luo Cong, Toropova A.V. The problem of mastering the content of musical and psychological disciplines for students of the people's republic of China. *Vestnik kafedry YuNESKO. Muzykal'noe iskusstvo i obrazovanie = Bulletin of the UNESCO Chair* "*Musical Art and Education*." 2023, vol. 11, no. 2, pp. 28–41. (In Russ.) https://doi.org/10.31862/2309-1428-2023-11-2-28-41

15. Liang Xiang. *Piano's Vinculum of China: The Creative Path of Zhou Guangren*. Beijing: Renmin Yinyue Chubanshe, 2005. 255 p. (In Chinese)

16. Huang Dagang (ed.). *The Piano Teaching Art of Zhou Guangren*. Beijing: Zhongyang Yinyue Xueyuan Chubanshe, 2007. 652 p. (In Chinese)

17. Wang Changkui. Review and thinking of piano teaching in China's higher normal school. *Asian Social Science.* 2009, vol. 5, no. 7, pp. 23–28. https://doi.org/10.5539/ass.v5n7p23

Information about the author:

Hao Guanghui — Post-Graduate Student of History and Theory of Performing Arts and Musical Pedagogy Department, Saratov State L.V. Sobinov Conservatoire, Saratov, Russian Federation.

Информация об авторе:

Хао Гуанхуэй — аспирант кафедры истории и теории исполнительского искусства и музыкальной педагогики, Саратовская государственная консерватория имени Л.В. Собинова, г. Саратов, Российская Федерация.

Received / Поступила в редакцию: 20.03.2026
Revised / Одобрена после рецензирования: 20.05.2026
Accepted / Принята к публикации: 22.05.2026

ISSN 3034-3836 (Online)

Theory and History of Culture

Original article
UDC 78.01
https://doi.org/10.56620/RM.2026.2.167-182
EDN UJANMO

Emotiology in the Context of Musical Aesthetics: Towards the Problem Statement

Polina S. Volkova[1], Natalia G. Solodovnikova[2]

[1]Herzen Russian State Pedagogical University,
Saint Petersburg, Russian Federation
[2]Volgograd State Socio-Pedagogical University,
Volgograd, Russian Federation
[1]polina7-7@yandex.ru✉, https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2424-7521
[2]tommyboy22@mail.ru, https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1985-8678

Abstract. The article is devoted to the place and role of emotiology (Viktor Shakhovsky) in modern musical aesthetics. This is an interdisciplinary field of humanitarian knowledge focused on human emotions and their manifestation in various types of activities (mental activity included). Identifying parallels between the advanced scientific thought of the early 20th century and works in the field of musical emotivity (Ekaterina Prikhodovskaya) and philosophy of emotions (Yulia Lobanova), which were published in the first quarter of the 21st century, the authors emphasize the importance of the following point. Emotiology has a significant potential aimed at the development of subjectivity. The significance of the latter is recognized in the fact that subjectivity today turns out to be the main condition on which the outcome of the confrontation between Homo Emotionalis and artificial intelligence usurping its right to artistic creativity depends. At the same time, emotivity itself, which marks the transition of emotion as a psychological phenomenon into an integral component of artistic discourse, regardless of whether it is a musical, verbal or visual art, acts as a fulcrum in the formation of the experience of reflection or otherwise — subjectivity of consciousness.

Keywords: emotiology, musical aesthetics, musical emotivity, philosophy of emotions, Homo Emotionalis, artificial intelligence, subjectivity of consciousness, verbality, non-verbality, emotionality, rationality

For citation: Volkova P.S., Solodovnikova N.G. Emotiology in the Context of Musical Aesthetics: Towards the Problem Statement. *Russian Musicology*. 2026, no. 2, pp. 167–182.
https://doi.org/10.56620/RM.2026.2.167-182

© Polina S. Volkova, Natalia G. Solodovnikova, 2026

Эмотиология в контексте музыкальной эстетики: к постановке проблемы

Полина Станиславовна Волкова[1], Наталия Геннадиевна Солодовникова[2]

[1]Российский государственный педагогический университет им. А.И. Герцена, г. Санкт-Петербург, Российская Федерация
[2]Волгоградский государственный социально-педагогический университет, г. Волгоград, Российская Федерация
[1]polina7-7@yandex.ru✉, https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2424-7521
[2]tommyboy22@mail.ru, https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1985-8678

Аннотация. Статья посвящена месту и роли эмотиологии (В.И. Шаховский) в современной музыкальной эстетике. Речь идёт о междисциплинарной области гуманитарного знания, сфокусированной на человеческих эмоциях и их проявлении в различных видах деятельности (мыследеятельности). Выявляя параллели между передовой научной мыслью начала XX столетия и работами в области музыкальной эмотивности (Е.А. Приходовская) и философии эмоций (Ю.В. Лобанова), увидевшими свет в первой четверти XXI века, авторы подчёркивают важность следующего момента. Эмотиология таит в себе существенный потенциал, нацеленный на развитие субъективности. Значимость последней опознаётся в том, что именно субъективность оказывается сегодня главным условием, от которого зависит исход противостояния Homo Emotionalis и узурпирующего себе право на художественное творчество искусственного интеллекта. При этом собственно эмотивность, маркирующая переход эмоции как психологического феномена в неотъемлемую составляющую художественного дискурса, независимо от того, идёт ли речь о музыкальном, словесном либо изобразительном видах искусства, выступает точкой опоры в становлении опыта рефлексии, или иначе — субъектности сознания.

Ключевые слова: эмотиология, музыкальная эстетика, музыкальная эмотивность, философия эмоций, Homo Emotionalis, искусственный интеллект, субъектность сознания, вербальность, невербальность, эмоциональность, рациональность

Introduction

Today, the entry of artificial intelligence (AI) into the space of human life is unprecedented. However, if in some fields of knowledge, for example, in medicine, the participation of AI in solving issues relevant to maintaining the health of citizens leads to positive results, in others it makes us think about the place and role of man in the digital universe, where artificially created intelligence is given great importance. It's no secret that AI today demonstrates the ability to compose music, paint pictures, write poetry, and even offer its own version of a sermon. In particular, not so long ago, the head of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims, Sheikh Ravil Gainutdin, shared his impressions of a similar experiment related to the text of the khutbe — Friday prayer. In his opinion, a programmed sermon is devoid of the main thing — the soul, which excludes the possibility of AI participation in such endeavors.

On the contrary, similar experiments in the field of musical art demonstrate the

exact opposite situation. Thus, according to a sociological survey "conducted in November 2025 by Deezer streaming (together with the Ipsos research company), 97% of listeners could not distinguish artificial music from that written by humans."[1] Moreover, the song *Walk My Walk*, associated with the "creativity" of the virtual band *Breaking Rust*, took the first place among music lovers living in the United States, as evidenced by information posted on the Billboard chart.

Professional musicians talk about the difficulties that arise in the perception of a musical simulacrum created by AI. "I'm afraid of AI...," composer and performer Leonid Agutin confesses to journalist Alexander Alekseev. According to the musician, "songs made with the help of AI are ... difficult to distinguish from 'human' ones," the only way to recognize the difference between a neural network and real creativity is "if you take it very personally."[2] In other words, only your own experience will allow you to feel the absence of "genuine emotions" that lies behind the "technical perfection" of such music.[3]

Accordingly, it is not so much laws and mass protests of representatives of the professional community that will help to resist the dominance of the "masterpieces" of artificial intelligence, as personal development or otherwise — developed subjectivity. Actualization of the desired subjectivity is impossible without realizing that the totality of the verbal code, aggravated by digitalization and, as a result, the formalization of relationships between individuals, disrupts the harmonious coexistence of non-verbality and verbality. In other words, reaching the subjectivity of consciousness or otherwise, the experience of reflection is directly related to the reconciliation of contradictions essential to non-verbality (emotionality) and verbality (rationality).

Therefore, in the context of modern musical aesthetics, the appeal to emotiology seems more than relevant and timely. We emphasize that this branch of knowledge was initially positioned as a purely linguistic discipline. Having been born at the intersection of psychology and linguistics to identify and study the connection between emotions and language,[4] today emotiology appears as an interdisciplinary branch of the humanities, which focuses on the role of emotions in human activity.

Emotions and Emotivity as a Linguistic Category

According to Viktor Shakhovsky, emotion acts as a mechanism for assessing a situation in terms of an individual's needs. [2, p. 43] At the same time, the scientist analyzed emotivity from the position of the semantic property inherent in language, to express emotionality as a fact of the psyche through the system of its means. [3, p. 24] The basis of the emotivity content plan is subjective evaluation, which is the source of the speaker's emotional state/attitude; the plan of expression is represented by the category of expressivity, the main function of

---

[1] Why making music with AI is dangerous... *Audiomania blog*. URL: https://www.audiomania.ru/content/pochemu-delat-muziku-vmeste-s-ii-opasno-yuridicheski-i-tvorcheski/?ysclid=ml9hd57j3y309529963 (accessed: 05.02.2026).

[2] Leonid Agutin will perform in the avatar format at "The Vysotsky show 'Height'." *Rossiiskaya gazeta*. 2025. October 23. URL: https://www.rg.ru/2025/10/23/gde-moi-17-let.html (accessed: 05.02.2026).

[3] Agutin criticized artificial intelligence in his work. URL: https://peterburg2.ru/news/agutin-raskritikoval-iskusstvennyy-intellekt-v-tvorchestve-176099.html (accessed: 05.02.2026).

[4] The starting point here was emotivity, formed in line with the linguistics of emotions as a purely linguistic category. For more information on this issue, see: [1].

which is the ability to increase the influencing, pragmatic power of a linguistic unit, ensuring its emotionality. [4] Warning about the danger of replacing the classification of emotions, which is so necessary for their differentiation, with the classification of linguistic means of naming, describing and expressing them, that is, about mixing emotionality and emotivity, [3, pp. 88–91] Viktor Shakhovsky saw the difficulty in the absence of a universal approach to solving this issue in world science.

At the same time, the scientist expressed confidence that for linguistic analysis it is possible to limit oneself to the most frequent emotions, which differ by an evaluative sign. [2] Arguing his point, Shakhovsky insisted on the following point: being part of the natural development of the human race, basic emotions are universal and recognizable in all ethnic cultures, differing in their forms of manifestation. [Ibid.] However, since the number of fundamental emotions varies from one scientific school to another (they range from 6 to 5,000), there is no definitive opinion on the final catalogue of human emotions. [5]

For a long time in psychological science, the emotions and mind of a linguistic personality were separated on different sides of their psyche. Now there is no doubt that the psyche, consciousness, thinking and language are closely interrelated and that in any language there are emotive signs with which a person's emotional relationship to the world is verbalized, that is, reflected and expressed. Russian psychologists Lev Vygotsky, Sergey Rubinstein, and Alexey Leontiev correlated emotion, intelligence, and thinking in different ways, but they intuitively felt their close relationship. Later it was found that they were right and that these phenomena represent a certain unity.

Now no one disputes the idea that all human speech is permeated with emotions. And since language is woven into all human activities, emotions are represented not only in words, but also in sound, stone, metal, fabric, smell, and other cultural forms created by man. This refers to a situation when, for example, musicians, sculptors, painters, architects, perfumers, and designers invest in these cultural forms and reproduce in them the emotional experiences generated in the creative process. [2, pp. 9–10]

Therefore, the study of lexico-semantic categorization of emotions seems extremely promising both for individual languages and for their contrastive study. [6, p. 243] What is fundamental here is the simultaneous involvement of not only individual emotions reflected in the semantics of linguistic units, but also social emotions in the problematic field born in the bosom of polyparadigmality. [Ibid., p. 24]

Despite the fact that the problem of emotions in language was posed and solved by Viktor Shakhovsky back in the 20th century, and today, in the 21st century, the basic concepts of emotiology — *emotion*, *emotivity*, as well as the issue of *nomination*, *description* and *expression* of emotions, still require close attention from the scientific community. The noted necessity is due to a number of reasons:

– first, emotions are closely related to knowledge, the expansion of which entails a change in the emotional baggage of the speech subject;

– secondly, the mobility of the emotional palette depends on age, since the emotional dominants of a young person and, for example, an elderly person differ in intensity, brightness, and duration;

– finally, and thirdly, emotions depend on the epoch in which they are formed (compare the 18th century of sentimentality and sensuality with the 21st century of pragmatism and cruelty).

At the same time, linguistics of emotions provides an impetus for studying them in types of communication that differ from

verbal discourse. Moreover, the greatest interest in emotional processes in the context of non-verbality is noticeable in the works of professional musicians. In particular, back in the 20s of the 20th century, advanced Russian thought, represented by the works of Arseny Avraamov,[5] Boris Asafiev, Nadezhda Bryusova,[6] Mikhail Gnesin, Leonid Sabaneev, Nikolai Medtner, focused on the study of irrational or sensory-emotional consciousness, as well as on the study of the process of awareness born on the basis of irrationality of musical eidoses.[7] Both were realized under the sign of the aesthetic nature of the experience.

A similar approach can be seen in the phenomenon of the multilevel process of musical perception, which develops into a triad that absorbs what the subject of perception: a) hears; b) experiences; c) is aware of the experience born in the process of listening. It is significant that, reflecting on the comprehension of the national spirit embodied in the author's creation, Semyon Frank also builds a three-step hierarchy. *The first step* is determined by the need to discover the ideas and philosophemes objectively contained in the cultural text,[8] *the second step* is to realize their identity through "intuitive deepening and feeling." *The third step* involves "sympathetic comprehension of internal tendencies and the uniqueness of the national spirit." [9, p. 163]

Commenting on the methodology being developed by Semyon Frank, Sergey Nikolsky and Valery Filimonov note that "in all the three steps, an important role is played not so much by rational-logical as by intuitive-sensory comprehension." [10, p. 13] Let us assume that emotivity as a purely linguistic category creates a precedent for "feeling" and "sympathetic comprehension of internal tendencies and the uniqueness of the national spirit." [9, p. 163] In our opinion, its significance is especially noticeable in a situation when there is awareness or otherwise a sympathetic comprehension of inner experience, since in both cases we are talking about the verbalization of feelings born in the process of perceiving a work of art. At the same time, according to Viktor Shakhovsky, the desired verbalization can be carried out through such emotives as:

– *affectives*, in the emotive meaning of which emotion (and only emotion) is clearly expressed (for example, *headpiece*, *mediocrity*, *boor*, etc.);

– *connotatives*, the emotive connotation of which ensures the actualization of the speaker's emotion through co-meaning (for example, *a falcon* in relation to a boy, *a swan* in relation to a girl, etc.);

– *potentiatives*, the emotive potential of which is implicitly present in each verbal sign, does not relate to emotive meaning or emotive connotation and is marked by emotive valence, established situationally in the context (for example, *an evil wall* for Romeo, separated from Juliet).

It seems that in this context emotivity rhymes with the so-called emic units. Developed in the scientific studies of Sofya Belyaeva-Ekzemplyarskaya, they act as

---

[5] Arseny Avraamov (Krasnokutsky) (1886–1944) was a Russian avant-garde composer, inventor, and music theorist.

[6] Nadezhda Bryusova (1881–1951) was a Soviet musicologist, teacher, and public figure.

[7] For more information on this issue, see: [7].

[8] A cultural text is "a connected, compact, reproducible sequence of signs or images, unfolded along the arrow of time, expressing some content and having a meaning that is understandable in principle ... The text is considered as a connecting component of the act of communication." For more information on this issue, see: [8, p. 134].

"archetypes of intonation, having a biological origin and related to the processuality of vital activity itself and mental time, which is filled and measured by the change of processes of tension and relaxation." [11, p. 46] As a result, the emotion experienced in the process of musical perception "turns out to be fused with mental, volitional processes and, ultimately, with a worldview." [12, p. 54]

Accordingly, emotivity, placed in the space of musical discourse, provides meaningfulness to the process of creating an artistic image that corresponds to the composer's concept. By emphasizing or (in the case of emotive potential) actualizing verbal emotivity, non-verbal (musical) emotivity contributes to the transformation of an objective verbal sign into a personal meaning or, in other words, an intersubjective personal experience. It is no coincidence, taking into account the fact that emotivity is directly related to "the inner activity of the musical consciousness of the subject, because it addresses the holistic flow of experiences...," [13, p. 243] Ekaterina Prikhodovskaya sees in it a correlate of a timeless message that is transmitted to the listener "through the ages." [14, p. 17]

Emotions and Emotivity as a Musicological Category

The appeal to emotivity as a musical phenomenon was first undertaken in the work of Valentina Kholopova. This refers to the textbook *Musical Emotions* addressed to students studying at music and art universities. [15] By establishing a connection between mimetic emotions and energetic emotions, emotions-states and emotions-processes, as well as revealing the specifics of the emotional form using the example of Pyotr Tchaikovsky's opera *The Enchantress*, Valentina Kholopova, in fact, acted as a follower of Boris Asafiev's ideas.

In his analytical works devoted to the works of Pyotr Tchaikovsky, in which the academician saw the director of human emotions, Boris Asafiev repeatedly fixed attention on the emotional side of the composer's legacy. This is evidenced by the characteristic speech patterns, including:

– *sonoids in an emotionally directed form*[9];

– *emotionalization of symphonic and operatic accompaniment*[10];

– *emotional meaning*[11];

– *the emotional impact of the singing itself*[12];

– *emotional and semantic implications*.[13]

---

[9] "Tchaikovsky correctly groped for those ways to combine lively ambient intonation with the principles of symphonic development, which made Russian opera music a means of transmitting sound ideas in an emotionally directed form, visually projected in stage images." [16, pp. 153–156]

[10] "When performing, one has to take into account this 'feverishness' of the score very much in order to obtain a certain stylistic balance, taking into account all the subtleties of Tchaikovsky's skill in the sense of sensitive 'emotionalization' of symphonic and operatic accompaniment, but at the same time significant instrumental overload." [Ibid., p. 154]

[11] "In opera, the text is sung, and what is heard is what determines it: the inner, emotional meaning." [Ibid., p. 155]

[12] "In order to make the intonation content of the opera clearer and clearer to himself in live sound, checking both the vocal difficulties and the emotional impact of the singing itself, P.I. Tchaikovsky patiently responded to the artists' requests for one or another alteration." [Ibid., p. 155]

[13] "Operatic symphonic development requires:

a) that there be elements-impulses in the musical fabric that are attracted by their very nature to the growth of music,

b) that these sprouts are constantly organically combined with the emotional and semantic overtones of the dramatic action being vocalized, developing in singing." [Ibid., p. 155]

Despite the fact that, as Tatiana Bukina points out, Boris Asafiev's conception was influenced by the ideas of representatives of "auditory philology" [17] who studied the living word, in his dictionary, the obvious connection between the linguistics of emotions and musical emotions cannot be seen for one simple reason: this scientific field appeared in Russian science some time after the scientist's death in 1949.[14] Nevertheless, in his publications we find all the types of emotives listed earlier: from *affectives* ("A boy is *a smart guy*: charming, likeable, attracts people to himself, loving to fondle, because he loves affection" [18, p. 15]) and *connotatives* ("There were no limits to his impressionability, so you had to be very careful with him. Every little thing could offend and hurt him. He was *a glass child*" [Ibid., p. 16]) to the *potentiatives* ("It should also be taken into account that Tchaikovsky's ancestors and relatives are no longer *old Russian*. I repeat, these are people who have served and earned their nobility" [Ibid., p. 14]).

In addition, studying the creative legacy of Asafiev, a musicologist, one is struck by the acuteness of the issues discussed by him on the pages of a monographic study devoted to Tchaikovsky's genius. As an argument, let us turn to a number of fragments, the key ideas of each of which we will comment on in the logic and terms of Viktor Shakhovsky's emotiology:

1) "Elementary psychology teaches that representations based on recollection or recollection of directly experienced are almost equal in brightness to pure perception. The soul of a poet is consonant with the life of the world, and even more so with the soul of a poet-musician, in which images arise and exist without translation into the language of concepts. Even if the composer refracts his own mental world through the prism of the material sounding in his mind (he himself, of course, does not know this), expressing his dreams and his thoughts in a tangle of tones, then when reproducing this complex of sound representations, only music (a sounding current) goes into the world (into space), and the listener is the person who perceives the music, — passively submitting to the influence of its or the hypnosis of intonation, actively translates these states of consciousness into the language of emotions: sadness, joy, sorrow, despair, delight, happiness, suffering, love, anger, horror, and, further, more abstractly, down to concepts: humor, sarcasm, indifference, heroism, lack of will, hostility, hatred, vindictiveness, etc. It would be bad for a composer who would invent some kind of mental state and then translate it into music. With a final remark, I want to make it clear the difference between *emotional music* or *musical emotions* in their true sense and between the naive idea of 'music with a soul,' that is, as if such music, composing which the composer records his current experiences in the form of musical compositions. Since music cannot but reflect the transitory states of our consciousness, it is *psychological*; since emotions are present in these states of consciousness, it is *emotional*; but all this does not mean the translation of emotions into sounds. The composer composes only music, embodying the relations of sounds suggested to him by an unknown spiritual need and combining them, for reasons of intellectual order, into one or another series of schemes-forms, for the sake of the greatest economy of perception, i.e. so that the listener, perceiving, can capture

[14] The beginning of the linguistics of emotions in Russia can be considered 1987 — the time of Viktor Shakhovsky's first publication in an authoritative journal. For more information on this issue, see: [6].

the sounding mass flowing in front of his inner eye (hearing) with as little energy as possible. It was especially necessary to make such an introduction, bearing in mind Tchaikovsky, a predominantly *emotional composer*, since it can be assumed with full probability, based on his confessions and diaries, that his music, without his knowledge, of course, but due to his natural properties, reflects not so much a direct sense of the world that is outside of himself, how much the transient states of his (personal) consciousness are expressed." [18, p. 6] In this fragment, Asafiev's intention to consider music as an experience of embodying a non-verbalized personal meaning marked by an intersubjective character seems to be fundamental for emotive linguistics.

2) "It is often impossible to say with certainty where in Russian songwriting one should draw the line between real life and a dream about it, an imaginary life. Russian art is a constant demand from Russian life: to be in life, only in life. *Russian utilitarian aesthetics* follows from this requirement, and on the other hand, all the extremes of psychologism, all the *emotional anguish*, and at the same time the spontaneity and sincerity of Russian art are due to the same blurred line between life and dreaming about it, between action and contemplation." [Ibid., p. 11] This fragment demonstrates Asafiev's involvement in a problem area relevant to modern emotive linguistics: how authentic are the emotions experienced in the imagination, and whether they are comparable to the emotions actually experienced.

3) "If we take into account the constant bias of Russian art towards emotionality, its extremely close connection with everyday life and the mentally urgent need to pour out one's soul in song, if we connect this desire with the diverse, extremely complex impressions and influences that the newly emerging young cultural environment of the semi-barbaric youth, miraculously emerged, experienced and was subjected to cities with various painful mental trials, in connection with political vicissitudes, to which a response should have arisen in the heart, — then, perhaps, we will understand the value and deep meaning of St. Petersburg songwriting, as well as the reasons why it took on the flavor of sentimental melancholic thoughtfulness and sad contemplative mood." [Ibid., p. 26] Asafiev's key idea in the quoted passage is the possibility of considering emotivity as a marker of national identity.

4) "In Tchaikovsky's music, the method of enticement or teasing, very often used by him, is of great importance, by developing some kind of sounding idea that irritates the nerve centers, but the development is not complete, not brought to a discharge, but either returned, as if nothing had happened, to the starting point, or sharply refracted. I believe that it is precisely this principle of understatement and imperfection that is the most important and main magical means of influencing his music on our psyche." [Ibid., p. 33] The ability of the composer, revealed by Asafiev, to embody the emotiogenic effect he intended in a musical creation through the "guidance" of the listener, a kind of control of his emotions, can be considered in modern emotiology from the perspective of the effect of deceived expectations.

5) "Music sounds like a constant reaction to life, but, of course, it is not a reaction in the sense of consciously translating what has been experienced into the language of music, but in the sense of an unconscious assimilation of everything experienced by a person and the embodiment of his life formation in musical expression ... the definition of a composer's work as revealing — through the prism of the musical material that sounds in his mind — the disturbing order of the surrounding world or his own mental world, it is somewhat complicated by the introduction of an image of a person reacting to life, but it excludes the psycho-mechanical nature of this process. A greater

or lesser degree of this personal coloring, i.e. a special qualitative sound that evokes an idea of this composer, rather than any other, gives the works various shades of subjectivism." [Ibid., p. 49] In fact, Asafiev's reflections on Tchaikovsky's creative process presented in the quoted fragment correspond to the specifics of emotional intelligence, under the sign of which nonverbal artistic discourse develops.

There is no doubt that Boris Asafiev's passages can be used as the clearest illustrations of all the types of emotivity that Viktor Shakhovsky mentions in his works, as well as the students[15] who develop his ideas. At the same time, the problematic field that arises in the texts of the academician due to the concepts he uses allows us to consider the linguistics of emotions from different angles. These are the techniques of creating emotiogenic discourse, and the methods of its influence on the addressee, including the experience of actualizing counter emotions in the reader, and the precedent of so-called verbal music. Among the possible analogies that arise between emotivity as a musical category and emotivity as a linguistic category, we will focus on three points:

1) if we consider the increase in the volume of emotion in the semantics of a word in the sequence of potentiatives-connotatives-affectives as a kind of conditional gradation, then the stages of Pyotr Tchaikovsky's creative path can be represented as a gradation of his animism (Psyche) [Ibid., p. 49];

2) the gradation of emotion power, which in the works of Viktor Shakhovsky is identified by describing the volume of emotion in the semantics of words (potential-connotation-denotation), can be traced in Boris Asafiev's characterization of Tchaikovsky's stylistic techniques used to "rock" sound materials [Ibid., p. 22];

3) the gradation of the power of emotions, reflected in luring and teasing as Tchaikovsky's favorite method, [Ibid., p. 33] correlates with Viktor Shakhovsky's real and potential emotives.

All this clearly demonstrates the possibility of talking about emotivity not only from the standpoint of linguistic knowledge, but also in the context of musical art, especially since currently a fairly successful attempt to identify points of contact between verbal and non-verbal (musical) emotivity is demonstrated by research initiated by Ekaterina Prikhodovskaya, a professor at Tomsk State University, Doctor of Art History, and, at the same time, a professional composer and poet. Having studied the works of Viktor Shakhovsky, who very actively supported the initiatives of the young scientist, Ekaterina Prikhodovskaya, in fact, projected the linguistic concept of emotions onto the field of vocal music as the basis of the opera genre, acting as the developer of emotivity as a purely musicological category. Moreover, the concepts used by our contemporary rhyme with the previously mentioned speech phrases used by Boris Asafiev.

For example, the sound theory correlates with *the emotive plan*, designed to connect the semantic areas of the opera with the features of its dramatic architectonics, [19, p. 157] and the impulse elements sound in unison with the *emotive impulse*. [Ibid.] In turn, the concept of *an emotional* or *emotionally directed form* is related to the concept of *an emotional vector*. [Ibid.] Similarly, the *emotional* or *emotional-*

[15] Viktor Shakhovsky has served as the supervisor of more than 30 PhD dissertations and scientific advisor to over 10 doctoral dissertations.

semantic subtext, inner, *emotional meaning* correspond to the attitude according to which "the subtextual semantic layer acts in opera not only as the main 'field' of meaning formation through the mechanisms of emotivity, but also as the main area of combining the multiplicity of synthesis elements and two global linguistic systems observed in opera." [20, p. 1317] As for *emotionalization*, it correlates, in our opinion, with *emotivity* as a musical category, which is "a factor in the integration of expressive means of a vocal composition, acting as an organizing property of the text." [21, p. 144]

At the same time, Prikhodovskaya's monograph *The Embodiment of Personality in Art* hypothesizes that there is a similarity between the hero of a polyphonic novel and a character in an opera. It is significant that the most complete disclosure of the psychological world of the latter, the peak embodiment of which the researcher associates with the genre of monoopera, is unattainable, according to Prikhodovskaya, outside of verbal-nonverbal unity. [14, p. 2] As the scientist writes, "emotion — verbalized or not — is present in any human action, but it does not find expression everywhere," because "not always the one who could, wants to express it." Arguing that, "remaining in consciousness in the form of a subtext," emotion inevitably retains its belonging to the inner world of an individual, [Ibid., p. 4] the art critic comes to the conclusion that "all events occurring in life are facts of many individual inner worlds, appearing in millions of different contexts and angles." [Ibid., p. 5]

Taking into account the fact that "in different languages throughout world history, art speaks about the same thing — about timeless universal values," [Ibid., p. 10] the Russian scientist states: "verbalization is ... one of the forms of expression of emotion; unfortunately, there still does not exist in psychology a well-known and generally recognized system that would classify the verbalized and non-verbal in human consciousness." [Ibid., p. 11] Insisting that the verbal-nonverbal unity present in human consciousness is adequately embodied only in synthetic genres of art, which have both in the spectrum of means of expression, [Ibid.] Ekaterina Prikhodovskaya positions the sought-after unity as the "key" to the transition from reality to its artistic embodiment, from emotion as a psychological phenomenon to emotivity as an aesthetic phenomenon." [Ibid., p. 23] As a result, nothing more than "emotivity contributes to the transfer of emotional charge from the author to the listener, who, as a rule, are not contemporaries of each other." [Ibid.]

Emotions and Emotivity as a Philosophical Category

In unison with the 1920s, when, along with composers and performers, irrational experiences attracted professional philosophers, primarily Ivan Lapshin[16] and Alexei Losev, Yulia Lobanova's study *Philosophy of Emotional Regime* was published in 2025 almost at the same time as Ekaterina Prikhodovskaya's monograph. [22] The modern author's work focuses on the philosophy of emotions, under the sign of which Lobanova comments on multiple events taking place not only in the field of art, but also in the media, politics and other areas of modern society. The legitimacy of this state of affairs is due to the fact that in the socio-cultural

[16] Ivan Ivanovich Lapshin (1870–1952) was a Russian philosopher, publicist and translator, teacher, researcher of musical culture.

dynamics, the status of the emotional sphere of our contemporary has "changed dramatically: from a peripheral and dangerous 'enemy of reason' it has become the fundamental basis of consciousness, cognition and sociality." [Ibid., p. 8]

Therefore, it seems natural to introduce an interdisciplinary dialogue implemented in the context of the philosophy of emotions, in addition to the previously mentioned linguistics, psychology and musicology, as well as cultural studies, history, anthropology and literary studies. [Ibid., p. 16] The latter, in fact, serves as an indirect argument for the justification carried out by Ekaterina Prikhodovskaya analogy between Mikhail Bakhtin's polyphonic novel and the opera genre. Moreover, stating that "the philosophy of consciousness actively discusses the 'complex problem of consciousness' and the place of qualitative, subjective experience (qualia) of emotions in the physical world," [Ibid., p. 16] including taking into account cognitive theories of emotions, Yulia Lobanova makes it possible to talk about participatory thinking, which Mikhail Bakhtin considers "in terms of actual communion, i.e., an act" as "a participating and effective experience of the concrete uniqueness of the world." [23, p. 20]

In other words, by arguing that "emotions, being historically and culturally mediated, act not as an obstacle to cognition, but as a necessary cognitive condition and cultural-historical a priori (in the tradition of Ernst Cassirer)," [Ibid., p. 80] Lobanova actualizes a new context for understanding the Bakhtin's philosophy of act. Equally valuable here is the attitude that "scenarios of feelings are not external patterns, but internal cognitive schemes that structure an individual's experience, assessment of events, and self-understanding. Consequently, the emotional mode sets the epistemological horizon of the epoch, defining what and how can be known" [Ibid.] and, we add, embodied in the life of each specific subject.

In general, at least three positions defended by Lobanova can be considered fundamental for the future of emotiology. The first includes the need to "make a clear terminological distinction between sensations, emotions and feelings," which "has ... a fundamental ontological character, since it allows us to build the architectonics of the human emotional sphere from pre-reflexive bodily experience to complex culturally mediated forms of experience." [Ibid., p. 35] If the author attributes sensations to the primary, prepersonal level of affectivity, then Lobanova positions emotions as "deliberate reactions." Arising on the basis of sensations, they usually:

– have a focus "on a specific object, situation or event";

– perform "adaptive and signaling functions";

– "they connect the physical and the social." [Ibid.]

In turn, feelings "represent the highest, reflexive level of emotional life." In contrast to the transience and situationality of emotions, feelings are characterized by "long-term states that form the semantic core of a personality. It is feelings that become the basis for the formation of emotional habitus, a system of predispositions that determine the ways of perception and action in the world around them." [Ibid., p. 35] (Note that, despite the validity of the statement according to which "an integral feature of emotional experience is its processuality," [24, p. 84] in connection with which representatives of world science prefer to talk not only about emotions, but also about *emotional processes*. These definitions make it possible to find grounds for interdisciplinary research to a greater extent.)

The second position states that emotions "differ from culture to culture." [22, p. 52] Building a system of argumentation, the

author relies on such cross-cultural studies as the Japanese "amae,"[17] the Ifaluk "fago"[18] or the Innuit taboo on anger,[19] which are not subject to direct translation. [Ibid., p. 69] Nevertheless, the author does not reject the original idea of the universality of emotions, considering it a "structurally necessary cultural myth." [Ibid., p. 52] As the researcher writes, "the belief in universality, being analytically false, is functional because it serves the purposes of intercultural communication, social integration and legitimization of humanistic ideologies, but at the same time it can mask ethnocentrism and be an instrument of symbolic power." [Ibid., p. 69]

Finally, the third position, based on the philosophy and sociology of emotions,[20] is directly related to the idea of the social construction of emotions. In other words, what "we perceive as intimate and authentic is actually a product of history and power." [Ibid., p. 59]

It should be noted that by revising the works of foreign scientists studying emotions, Yulia Lobanova enriches the vocabulary of emotivity with a number of concepts. Among them:

– *emotional repertoire;*
– *emotional mode;*
– *emotional ethos;*
– *emotionalism;*
– *emotiology;*
– *emotionalization;*
– *emotional labor;*
– *emotional navigation;*
– *emotional habitus.*

Let us assume that, having a certain set of essential constants, the designated concepts, in the case of migration from one sphere of scientific knowledge to another, will inevitably acquire additional meanings, as happened with the linguistics of emotions, developed in the space of musical aesthetics. Moreover, this state of affairs is due, on the one hand, to the originality of emotions as biocultural constructs, assessed by Lobanova from the perspective of "dynamic, historically variable and culturally specific formations arising at the junction of universal bodily processes and unique systems of cultural meanings." [Ibid., p. 69] On the other hand, "new emotional modes in modern culture adapt extremely quickly to the changing world and produce new terms to describe them." [25, p. 62] It seems that the study of their meaningfulness in the light of emotiology is fraught with many unique discoveries, the significance of which is directly related to the possibility of preserving the human in a person.

Conclusion

Let us summarize the triangulation of linguistics, musicology and philosophy, which is accepted in this article as the main assumption through the concept of emotions.

From 1967 to 2021, that is, for more than fifty years, Viktor Shakhovsky was engaged in, in fact, a thorough study of only one

[17] "Amae" (甘え) is a concept whose essence consists in the conscious and desired dependence of one's own behavior on others based on their kindness and condescension.

[18] "Fago" is an emotion typical of the aborigines of Ifaluk Island (Micronesia), which combines compassion and sadness.

[19] The Inuit are an ethnic group of the indigenous peoples of North America, in whose culture there is no such emotion as anger due to self-control. The Inuit are part of a larger group of indigenous peoples of the North, united under the common name "Eskimos."

[20] The sociology of emotions is a well-established discipline within the framework of sociology, designed to study the social and cultural aspects of emotions.

phenomenon — the reflection of emotions in the semantics of the word. Of the scientist's 616 publications to date, one stands out — "Reflection of Emotions in the Semantics of Words," [6, p. 237] dated 1987, which seems to be keynote in his scientific work. We consider it such because it succinctly reveals the essence of the linguistic theory of emotions, its key concepts, research method, history and prospects.

It is in the mentioned article that the scientist:

– provides precise definitions of such key terminology concepts as emotions, emotionality, emotivity, emotive semantics, emotives;

– reveals the principles of the method of analyzing various types of emotive vocabulary in language (dictionary) and speech (text);

– describes the history of the transition from the psychological category of emotionality to the linguistic category of emotivity;

– outlines the prospects for the intra- and intercultural study of emotions in verbal and non-verbal discourse.

These facts make it possible to establish in the works of such authors cited in the article as Boris Asafiev, Ekaterina Prikhodovskaya and Yulia Lobanova points of intersection and analogies on the issue of emotions with the scientific studies of Viktor Shakhovsky, with only one caveat. The terms proposed by Shakhovsky — meaning "potentiatives-connotatives-affectives" — work in this case as a kind of metaphor that reveals the reflection of emotions of different strength and volume in the semantics of completely different units of verbality and non-verbality.

Obviously, with this approach, verbal and non-verbal emotives are interpreted as broadly as possible, excluding a highly specific understanding of emotivity. A similar experience is already implicitly present in Viktor Shakhovsky's works. In particular, within the framework of the linguistic approach developed by the scientist, there is an expansion of concepts due to the inclusion of real (linguistic, with vocabulary emotive semantics) and virtual (speech, with contextually emotive semantics) units in the concept of emotive. In his further works, the scientist writes that the nature of the emotive as a sign can be not only linguistic, but also extra-linguistic, which makes it legitimate for us to study the category of emotivity from the perspective of linguistics, musicology and philosophy.

It is significant that in the works by Boris Asafiev, who used to work creatively long before the appearance of the first works on the linguistic theory of emotions proper, we find not only emotives as part of his own style, actualized in the process of analyzing Tchaikovsky's work, but also see analogies according to which:

1) the stages of the composer's life themselves are comparable in their fullness of emotions with different types of emotives, the volume of emotions in the semantics of which is different[21] (from this point of view, the stage of acquiring a composer's own handwriting rhymes with emotive potential; the time of his more or less successful handwriting reveals an analogy with a positive or negative connotation; the stages of maximum realization or stagnation of the author's style can be likened to the affective culmination of the composer's creative Self);

2) Pyotr Tchaikovsky's creative techniques for rocking music in the case when he teases the listener and only leads him to a premonition

[21] It is important to note that here we are talking about the idea of gradation, and not about the fact that Boris Asafiev uses potentiatives, connotatives and affectives to characterize the work of Pyotr Tchaikovsky.

of certain emotions expressed by music show similarities with emotive potential; where negative or positive emotions reflected in music become obvious to the listener, connotation is observed; where the emotions expressed by music cause certain emotions of the listener, there is affectivity;

3) the works of Pyotr Tchaikovsky themselves are comparable to different types of emotives.

In turn, Ekaterina Prikhodovskaya develops the concept of emotivity in the key of its artistic (that is, aesthetic) essence. This refers to a situation when, in order to fully reveal the inner world of a stage character, emotion requires the unity of verbal and non-verbal discourses, which is culminated in the genre of mono-opera. Moreover, according to Prikhodovskaya, it is emotivity that ensures the processes of meaning-formation and meaning-making in the composer — performer — listener triad.

Finally, Yulia Lobanova treats emotions as a complex cultural palimpsest. The author formulates a holistic philosophical view on understanding what it means to be Homo Emotionalis in the world of sentiment capitalism, impression industry, affective economics, schizophrenia of digital authenticity, and culture of late modernism.

Despite the absence of a strict correlation between emotivity as a linguistic category and emotivity as a category of musicology and philosophy, we are convinced of the importance and indisputability of the following position. The multi-paradigm nature of modern science will give rise to joint research by representatives of different fields of humanitarian knowledge in the field of emotiology, aimed at the formation and development of subjective consciousness as a unique and therefore the only phenomenon capable of resisting the absorption of creative potentials by artificial intelligence as a purely human prerogative.

References

1. Shakhovsky V.I. *Linguistic theory of emotions*. Moscow: Gnosis Publ., 2008. 416 p. (In Russ.)
2. Shakhovsky V.I. *Language and emotions in the aspect of linguoculturology*: a textbook on elective subjects “Language and emotions” and “Linguoculturology of emotions” for students, undergraduates and graduate students of Institute of Foreign Languages of Volgograd State Pedagogical University. Volgograd: Peremena Publ., 2009. 170 p. (In Russ.)
3. Shakhovsky V.I. *Categorization of emotions in the lexico-semantic system of language: An example of the vocabulary of the English language*. Moscow: URSS, 2023. 206 p. (In Russ.)
4. Ionova S.V. *Emotivity of the text as a linguistic problem: Diss. Cand.Sci. (Philology).* Volgograd, 1998. 197 p. (In Russ.)
5. Izard K.E. *Human emotions*: trans. from English. Moscow: Publishing House of Moscow State University, 1980. 439 p. (In Russ.)
6. Shakhovsky V.I. Reflection of emotions in the semantics of a word. *Voprosy yazykoznaniya. Seriya literatury i yazyka* (Questions of linguistics. A series of literature and language). 1987, vol. 46, no. 3, pp. 237–243. (In Russ.)
7. Vysotskaya L.N. *The problem of musical and aesthetic subject in the context of Russian musicology of the late 19th – early 20th century: Thesis of Diss. Cand.Sci. (Philosophy).* Vladimir, 2005. 22 p. (In Russ.)
8. Brudnyi A.A. *Psychological hermeneutics*. Moscow: Labirint Publ., 1998. 335 p. (In Russ.)

9. Frank S.L. *Russian worldview: collected papers*. St. Petersburg: Nauka Publ., 1996. 736 p. (In Russ.)

10. Nikolsky S.A., Filimonov V.P. Preface. In: Nikolsky S.A., Filimonov V.P. *Russian worldview. The meanings and values of Russian life in Russian literature and philosophy of the 18th – 19th centuries*. Moscow: Progress-Traditsiya Publ., 2008, pp. 7–24. (In Russ.)

11. Toropova A.V. The genesis of musical language codes: a psycho-genetic aspect. *Teoriya i praktika obshchestvennogo razvitiya* (Theory and practice of social development). 2014, no. 5, pp. 45–48. (In Russ.)

12. Serova O. Sofiya Nikolaevna Belyaeva-Ekzemplyarskaya is a graduate of Moscow Higher Women's Courses. *Razvitie lichnosti* (Personality development). 2012, no. 2, pp. 40–58. (In Russ.)

13. Pichko N.S. Philosophical and aesthetic aspects of the phenomenon of music in culture. *Vestnik Adygeiskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta. Seriya: Regionovedenie: filosofiya, istoriya, sotsiologiya, yurisprudentsiya, politologiya, kul'turologiya* (Bulletin of the Adygea State University. Seria: Regional studies: philosophy, history, sociology, jurisprudence, political science, cultural studies). 2013, no. 3, pp. 227–242. (In Russ.)

14. Prikhodovskaya E.A. *The embodiment of personality in art*: *monograph*. Tomsk: Publishing House of the Tomsk State University, 2025. 98 p. (In Russ.)

15. Kholopova V.N. *Musical emotions: a textbook for music universities and art universities*. Moscow: Alteks Publ., 2012. 346 p. (In Russ.)

16. Asafiev B.V. "The Enchantress". Opera by P.I. Tchaikovsky (The experience of revealing intonational content). In: Asafiev B.V. *Selected works*. Moscow: Publishing House of the USSR Academy of Sciences, 1954. Vol. II: Selected works. Works about P.I. Tchaikovsky, A.G. Rubinstein, A.K. Glazunov and other Russian composers, pp. 142–168. (In Russ.)

17. Bukina T.V. The ideas of "ohrenphilologie" in establishment of the Russian theoretical musicology of the 1920s: Boris Asafiev and the researchers of the "live word". *International Journal of Cultural Research*. 2023, no. 3, pp. 116–132. (In Russ.) https://doi.org/10.52173/2079-1100_2023_3_116

18. Asafiev B.V. *The genius of music Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky. Life and creativity*. Moscow: Russian Chess House Publ., 2020. 85 p. (In Russ.)

19. Volkova P.S., Solodovnikova N.G. Language and music towards emotions: The category of emotivity in the space of polyparadigmality. *Tomsk State University Journal of Cultural Studies and Art History*. 2024, no. 56, pp. 151–164. (In Russ.) https://doi.org/10.17223/22220836/56/12

20. Prikhodovskaya E.A. The functional dynamics of elements as a factor in ensuring the dramatic integrity of the opera. *Fundamental'nye issledovaniya* (Fundamental Research). 2014, no. 12, pp. 1316–1320. (In Russ.)

21. Prikhodovskaya E.A. Counter intentions of language: On the issue of creative searches and solutions of the composer. *Teoriya i praktika obshchestvennogo razvitiya* (Theory and practice of social development). 2014, no. 5, pp. 144–147. (In Russ.)

22. Lobanova Yu.V. *Philosophy of emotional regime: monograph*. Moscow: Sfera Publ., 2025. 344 p. (In Russ.)

23. Bakhtin M.M. Towards the philosophy of action. In: Bakhtin M.M. *Works from the 1920s*. Kiev: NEXT Publ., 1994, pp. 9–68. (In Russ.)

24. Kortunov V.V., Saenko N.R. Emotional antinomies of modernity. *Context and Reflection: Philosophy of the World and Human Being*. 2022, vol. 11, no. 5A, pp. 83–91. (In Russ.) https://doi.org/10.34670/AR.2022.10.76.011

25. Kortunov V.V., Saenko N.R. New modes of emotions in modern culture. *Russian Studies in Culture and Society*. 2022, vol. 6, no. 3, pp. 53–67. (In Russ.) https://doi.org/10.12731/2576-9782-2022-3-53-67

Information about the authors:

Polina S. Volkova — Dr.Sci. (Arts), Dr.Sci. (Philosophy), Cand.Sci. (Philology), Professor of the Department of Musical Education and Training, Herzen Russian State Pedagogical University, St. Petersburg, Russian Federation.

Natalia G. Solodovnikova — Cand.Sci. (Philology), Associate Professor of the Department of Linguistics, Volgograd State Socio-Pedagogical University, Volgograd, Russian Federation.

Информация об авторах:

П.С. Волкова — доктор искусствоведения, доктор философских наук, кандидат филологических наук, профессор кафедры музыкального воспитания и образования, Российский государственный педагогический университет им. А.И. Герцена, г. Санкт-Петербург, Российская Федерация.

Н.Г. Солодовникова — кандидат филологических наук, доцент кафедры языкознания, Волгоградский государственный социально-педагогический университет, г. Волгоград, Российская Федерация.

Received / Поступила в редакцию: 03.02.2026
Revised / Одобрена после рецензирования: 02.03.2026
Accepted / Принята к публикации: 04.03.2026

ISSN 3034-3836 (Online)

Theory and History of Culture

Original article
UDC 78.1+130.2+004
https://doi.org/10.56620/RM.2026.2.183-193
EDN VSJIRK

The Issue of Virtual Leisure in the Digital Culture of the 21st Century

Nadezhda A. Tsareva

Far Eastern State Technical Fisheries University,
Vladivostok, Russia,
nadezda58@rambler.ru✉, *https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6179-3978*

Abstract. Virtual leisure is a phenomenon of 21st-century digital culture that transcends the boundaries of everyday life and the multiplicity of communications. The diversity of its forms and types increasingly attracts contemporary man. In this situation, it is important to determine the degree of influence of virtual leisure on individual's life attitudes. The present article identifies factors behind the active development of virtual leisure, including: (1) dominant mass culture in society, which is aimed at satisfying the needs of an "average" person; (2) consumer model of social existence with the priority of the material over the spiritual; (3) development of digital technologies encompassing all spheres of human activity, including leisure. Virtual leisure has contradictory characteristics. The article identifies positive factors of its influence on value attitudes. Thus, an increase in the volume of virtual leisure gives rise to new interests and needs, i.e., entails a change in value orientations. The intersection of real and virtual worlds in the form of digital leisure expands the possibilities for transforming human meanings and lifestyles. Virtual forms of leisure practices help to construct the individual's "I." The changing spatial-temporal circumstances of virtual leisure remove social and other differences between individuals. The negativity of virtual leisure is associated with its role as a means of manipulating people's thinking and behaviour. Representing a function of virtual leisure, consciousness management is manifested in the unification and integration of a person into a certain social group, orientation towards a certain standard of behaviour, propaganda of a consumer attitude and dominance of hedonistic values. The contradictory nature of the effect of virtual leisure on the individual's value system requires serious culturological analysis.

Keywords: virtual leisure, leisure activities, digital culture, value orientations, technicalisation of consciousness

For citation: Tsareva N.A. The Issue of Virtual Leisure in the Digital Culture of the 21st Century. *Russian Musicology*. 2026, no. 2, pp. 183–193. https://doi.org/10.56620/RM.2026.2.183-193

Translated by Thomas Alexander Beavitt, Laboratory for Scientific Translation (https://nauka-perevod.ru/eng).

© Nadezhda A. Tsareva, 2026

Проблема виртуального досуга в цифровой культуре XXI века

Надежда Александровна Царева

Дальневосточный государственный технический рыбохозяйственный университет,
г. Владивосток, Российская Федерация,
nadezda58@rambler.ru✉, *https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6179-3978*

Аннотация. Виртуальный досуг — это феномен цифровой культуры XXI века, который преодолевает границы повседневности и множественность коммуникаций. Разнообразие его форм и видов всё больше привлекает современного человека. В этой ситуации важно определить степень влияния виртуального досуга на жизненные установки личности. Автор статьи обозначает факторы активного развития виртуального досуга, среди которых: 1) доминирующая в обществе массовая культура, нацеленная на удовлетворение запросов «усреднённого» человека; 2) потребительская модель существования общества, ориентирующая на приоритет материального над духовным; 3) развитие цифровых технологий, захватывающих все сферы жизнедеятельности человека, в том числе и досуг. Виртуальный досуг имеет противоречивые характеристики. В статье выявляются позитивные факторы его влияния на ценностные установки. Так, увеличение объёма виртуального досуга обусловливает появление новых интересов и потребностей, то есть влечёт изменение ценностных ориентиров. Пересечение реального и виртуального миров в формах цифрового досуга расширяет возможности трансформации смыслов и образа жизни человека. Виртуальные формы досуговых практик помогают конструировать «я» личности. Изменяются пространственно-временные обстоятельства виртуального досуга, снимаются социальные и иные различия между индивидами. Негативная оценка виртуального досуга связана с его ролью как средства манипуляции мышлением и поведением людей. Управление сознанием как функция виртуального досуга проявляется в унификации и интеграции человека в определённую социальную группу, в ориентации на определённый стандарт поведения, в пропаганде потребительской установки, в доминировании гедонистических ценностей. Противоречивый характер влияния виртуального досуга на ценностную систему индивида требует серьёзного культурологического осмысления.

Ключевые слова: виртуальный досуг, досуговая деятельность, цифровая культура, ценностные ориентиры, технизация сознания

Introduction

In the culture of the 21st century, new virtual forms of leisure emerge. These include various types of computer games, social networks, social media, virtual travel, online courses, etc. A person's preference to spend free time in virtual reality instead of the real world is reflected in their value orientations and goals. Moreover, the nature of leisure not only influences the person's value system and moral attitudes in the public consciousness, but also indirectly affects the content and state of other spheres of society: education, art, science, etc. What is the level of influence of virtual leisure on a person and his existence? Is there a technicalisation of human consciousness? Isn't man becoming alienated from society and his essence? The attitude towards virtual leisure is contradictory, and questions about the essence of this phenomenon of contemporary culture have an anthropological dimension:

they require a thorough culturological analysis.

The present article aims to substantiate the influence of virtual leisure on human value systems in the era of digitalisation.

The following objectives are set: (1) to identify the factors in the development of virtual practices; (2) to examine the basis for the positive influence of virtual leisure on individual's value orientation; (3) to demonstrate that virtual leisure, as a technology for manipulating consciousness, shapes a person's value system.

Literature Review

The phenomenon of leisure has been discussed in the scientific community since the end of the 20th century. The positive effect of the growth of leisure practices has been noted by a number of philosophers. Michel de Certeau reflected on the influence of the diversity and availability of leisure on the growth of consumer demands in the information society. [1] Manuel Castells believed that virtual forms of leisure offer more options for personal self-identification.[1] Michel Foucault viewed leisure as a form of protest against the control of power and compulsory participation in the work activities of society. In his opinion, various leisure activities open up the possibility of self-development for the individual. A person is transformed from a subject of consumption in leisure activities into a subject of creation. Foucault understood this process as "self-concern," a "self-forming effort" that "requires the individual to act on himself, to observe, experience, improve and transform himself." [2, p. 71]

Foucault's reflection on the development of culture at the end of the 20th century included the trends in changing ideas about the human life world. Indeed, in the 21st century, "self-concern," the world of one's everyday life becomes one of the main guidelines for the individual. What place does virtual leisure occupy in creating a comfortable world for people? Does this form of leisure preserve the possibility for "self-creation" or does it turn out to be a "disciplinary practice," a technology for manipulating the consciousness of the individual and society?

The phenomenon of virtual leisure in the scientific space is being studied by foreign and domestic authors. Joffre Dumazedier considers "leisure" as "the totality of activities that a person can indulge in of his own free will in order to rest, amuse himself, develop his knowledge or education, <...> being free from the fulfilment of professional, family and civic duties." [3, p. 84] From the point of view of Dmitry Nekrasov, Elena Cherdymova and V.S. Cherdymova, the concepts of "leisure" and "free time" most often turn out to be synonyms and mean time opposite to work and aimed at rest: this is "a zone of active communication that satisfies the need for contacts." [4, p. 302] This view is close to the position of Nikolai Yaroshenko, who considers the concepts of "entertainment industry" and "leisure industry" to be synonymous, since the main motivation for a person to turn to these practices is to receive pleasure. [5, p. 112] The author discusses the problem of a person's hedonistic dependence in choosing the content of his free time. Elena Salganova, Lyudmila Belova and Natalia Gafner define the leisure time of young people in the media space as time for entertainment: "getting momentary pleasure becomes the basis for leisure activities." [6, p. 70]

Virtual leisure has not received a clear scientific definition due to the fact that

[1] M. Castells, A. Alekseeva. An interview. Manuel Castells: Our life is a hybrid of virtual and physical space. URL: https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/intervyu-kastels-nasha-zhizn-gibrid-virtualnogo-i-fizicheskogo-prostranstva (accessed: 29.01.2026).

the Internet space is constantly creating new leisure practices: its types, forms and variations. In the broadest sense, "virtuality" is understood as a second reality, a computer-created audiovisual environment that lies beyond the physical and social world. [7, p. 71] Therefore, virtual leisure can be considered as free time spent in virtual reality. Since this space is a product of computer technologies, the term "digital leisure" is often used in scientific literature as a synonym for "virtual leisure." [8, p. 59]

The characteristics of virtual leisure and its special status in consumer society were examined in the work of Ekaterina Surova and Natalia Butonova. According to the authors, "the values of everyday experience become dominant in consumer society, and the cozy world of the individual and his immediate circle is created by virtual practices in the digital society." [9, p. 59] In addition, the culture of virtual leisure is assessed as a means of individual self-identification, since personal priorities are determined in the choice of form and content of spending free time. [Ibid.]

A number of authors note the diversity of forms of virtual leisure practices: online visits to cultural institutions and mass entertainment, online travel, eSports, amateur activities, etc. [10; 11] Forms of virtual leisure include services, blogs, portals, websites, forums, social networks, photo and video sharing, video hosting, video broadcasts (streams), online cinemas, interactive museums, various games and other leisure practices; moreover, their number is only growing. [12] The authors evaluate the positive and negative aspects of virtual leisure activities.

In a scientific aspect, the influence of virtual leisure on an individual's value system was considered indirectly. Thus, the role of social networks in the formation of value orientations for young people was analysed in [13]; the problem of the effect caused by virtual space on the consciousness and lifestyle of young people was studied in. [14] Philosophers and sociologists reflect on the significance of information and communication technologies in the process of deformation of value aspirations. [15] Andrey Popovkin and Galina Popovkina highlight "basic life meanings and values that will certainly be affected by the processes of 'digitalisation'." [8, p. 57] Nevertheless, a lack of published special studies on the problem of the connection between virtual leisure and individual value orientations makes the consideration of the influence of virtual leisure on a person's worldview of a novel nature.

Factors in the Development of Virtual Leisure

The post-industrial society is called "informational" due to the qualitative leap in information processing. In the 21st century, digital technologies are accelerating this process. Structural changes are taking place in production and in the social sphere. Improvements in information technology influence the dynamics of social development. As a result, the quality of human life undergoes a transformation. At the end of the 20th century, Karl Jaspers wrote the following about this: "…the structure of interaction and the life of people in all its dimensions and ramifications depends on the nature of labour and its division." [16, p. 119] With the reduction in the share of physical labour, the problem of "free time" and leisure activities becomes more pressing. The expanding leisure sector increases the number of people working in this industry. Forms and types of virtual leisure become especially popular.

In the postmodern era, mass culture offers people a variety of information and communication practices and entertainment content to spend their free time in accordance with their values. Among the reasons for

the growing interest in virtual leisure and its preference over real life, let us highlight the following:

1) The constant improvement of technical means and the expansion of the Internet provide for the creation of all kinds of virtual worlds. Therefore, many types and forms of leisure activities are transferred to virtual reality.

2) The speed and interactivity of the Internet and media space in disseminating information induce people to transcend the boundaries of everyday life, time and space.

3) Contemporary forms of virtual leisure have the potential for multiple communications, which enables broad virtual interaction with other individuals.

4) The range of forms and means of digital leisure can be used for the realisation of human needs and requests that are impossible in reality.

In the 21st century, mass culture in a consumer society has created new prospects for leisure based on the development of digital technologies. Let us note the following main factors that determine the constant increase in the volume and forms of leisure:

1) Mass culture. Being targeted at the "average" person, it dominates society and offers a growing variety of types and forms of virtual leisure without high demands and deep knowledge.

2) Consumer model of social existence. A distinctive feature of virtual leisure is its close connection with the nature of consumption in the 21st century. A person strives to possess things and improve the material means of his life; the motives of his activity acquire an economic dimension. The spiritual component of the consumer person is being displaced by material values.

3) Digital technologies. The constantly updated range of goods and services of digital technologies influences the process of consciousness technicalisation. All spheres of human life are computerised, all life activities are connected with the Internet as a socio-cultural environment of everyday life, where an individual learns, works, rests, etc. The rapid dynamics of digital existence leaves the individual little time to reflect on existence. People have no time to process a massive amount of information, which is perhaps why they prefer virtual leisure with its entertaining content.[2]

Thus, the choice of virtual leisure forms is associated with value orientations. A person prefers something that corresponds to his interests, tasks and goals. However, a feedback loop also exists. In turn, forms of virtual leisure determine the moral aspirations of the individual and shape the values of contemporary consumer society.

Factors of the Positive Influence of Virtual Leisure on the Value Orientation of the Individual

Digital technologies influence human consciousness, as well as change the motives of their behaviour, types of activities, and lifestyle. Let us define the grounds for the formation of a new human value system, conditioned by dynamically developing forms of virtual leisure.

Firstly, in the post-industrial world, people have more free time, and virtual leisure becomes a significant part of their lives.

[2] According to Mediascope, in 2024 people spent on average about four and a half hours a day watching videos, communicating and searching for information on the Internet; young people spend seven hours on the Internet. See: *Russians spend 4.5 hours a day online: According to Mediascope, the internet has permanently defeated television.* URL: https://hi-tech.mail.ru/news/125764-rossiyane-provodyat-v-internete-po-45-chasa-v-den/ (accessed: 29.01.2026).

The nature and content of leisure time changes, and the social circle expands. The greater amount of leisure time entails more new interests and needs to emerge, that is, value orientations to develop.

Secondly, in the existence of images and symbols offered by virtual leisure, a person feels as if he is in the real world. Virtual and real existence intersects, and cyberspace is perceived as an extension of the physical world. Gilles Deleuze considered the virtual to be a certain part of the real. "For Deleuze, the virtual has the reality of a task to be accomplished or a problem to be solved." [17, p. 175] Virtuality appears as a logical reconstruction of reality, generated by the latter, and, as a subjective reflection of being, generates a new virtual reality of the next level. Castells also considered reality to be a "hybrid of virtual and physical space."[3] Virtual space does not replace reality; rather, the two spaces coexist. Taking root in the consciousness of the Internet user, the values of virtual culture change the consciousness and behaviour of a person.

Virtual reality and hence its forms of leisure are constantly initiating changes in human lifestyles. Without leaving the real world, an individual draws information from the virtual space, focuses on it, transforms and reorganises his way of life. According to Vladimir Komarov, "a high level of Internet connectivity acts as a mechanism for the formation of personal qualities, knowledge and skills." [18, p. 144] In the digital space, both private and public, production and leisure spheres of communications are becoming increasingly intertwined. In contemporary internet culture, leisure is integrated with everyday practice. Virtual worlds and communities are being created. Other forms of communication reconstructing its content appear; new concepts, judgments and meanings are introduced. During virtual practices, motives, goals and interests constantly change. The rules followed by a person in virtual leisure are transferred into his daily activities, into the system of connections and contacts with other people. Virtual leisure influences lifestyle and shapes new life priorities.

Thirdly, in digital projections of leisure practices, the "I" of individuality is constructed. Virtual leisure removes the everyday and real-life limitations. The social space of virtual leisure helps individuals realise freedom of choice, demonstrate independence and make decisions.

In connection with the prospect of realising the creative efforts of an individual in virtual practices, some researchers consider the concept of "online identity." [4, p. 304] Here, the experience of being in a virtual digital environment is meant. What is unthinkable in the real world is possible in the virtual one. The digital environment offers an alternative reality with limitless possibilities, where individuals can simulate various options for their actions.

Thus, virtual leisure ceases to be just entertainment: it becomes one of the main areas of human activity. In the process of realising human freedom and aspirations, virtual leisure shapes his value systems, helping with communication and self-identification.

Fourthly, the processes of globalisation and digitalisation are closely linked, and this connection ensures the effective overcoming of national, historical, social, gender, and other boundaries. Thus, the way of spending leisure time traditionally demonstrated the social status of an individual, his solvency (travel, holidays, sports, etc.). Due to different economic conditions, leisure became a marker of social differentiation. In the 21st century, digital space

[3] M. Castells, A. Alekseeva. Op. cit.

erases social boundaries in virtual forms of leisure [9, p. 55]; it becomes universal.

Representatives of all social groups spend a significant portion of their time online: communicating, relaxing, shopping, working, etc. The spatial-temporal circumstances of virtual leisure are changing; social and other differences between individuals are being removed. Due to broad communication capabilities, it unites and organises people: social relations, which are determined by rules, norms and attitudes, are formed between individuals. Globalisation processes increase their influence on value orientations through virtual communities. In the digital leisure space, a person feels like part of a global media platform, a citizen of the world.

Thus, virtual leisure creates the basis for changing value orientation by blurring differences in communicative practices and helping people adapt to new conditions.

Virtual Leisure as a Technology for Manipulating Consciousness

Thinkers at the end of the 20th century warned that the development of information and computer technology will increase the influence on personal and social consciousness. Alvin Toffler and Harold Adams Innis came up with the idea of media culture as the fourth branch of government. Jean Baudrillard defined the virtual environment as "simulacra" of physical reality, "copies of copies" that transform existence according to a specific purpose. [19, p. 7]

According to Herbert Marcuse, total domination over the individual in post-industrial society is intensified through the imposition of false repressive needs on him. He becomes an object of suggestion and turns into a person of "one-dimensional culture," "one-dimensional thinking." In a society of "total unfreedom" he has the "happy consciousness" that this is the order of things. [20, p. 274] What is the role of virtual leisure in personality development in the context of Marcuse's theory of the "one-dimensional man"? A person, unlike an animal, experiences needs not only vital inputs, but also those that define his anthropological essence: aesthetic, scientific, spiritual, etc. Does virtual leisure offer a multidimensional experience — high goals, moral aspirations — or is it limited to the "comfortable comfort" of everyday life? What is the main life goal promoted by virtual leisure: "to be" or "to have"?

The phenomenon of virtual leisure is that the mass consumer spends a significant part of his or her life in a reality different from everyday life. The problem lies in the contradictory impact of virtual leisure on a person.

On the one hand, virtual practices have a universal and widespread character. They are accessible to everyone without age, ideological, status, hierarchical or other restrictions. All participants in virtual leisure are free from social control. On the other hand, virtual leisure when manifested in a consumer society becomes a means of manipulating the individual's consciousness to form a certain value system and model of behaviour. As a derivative of computer technology, virtual leisure has its own specific producing programmer who actively colonises the human life world by creating a network environment. In accordance with the demands of the Network author, the individual detached from reality can inadequately evaluate it and agree with the deconstruction of traditional concepts, the substitution of the original with a simulacrum of secondary reality.

What is the relationship between these two aspects of leisure activity and how does this ambivalence influence person's value orientations? On the one hand, the criterion of progress is manifested as the increase in the amount of free time due to the reduction of work. However, on the other hand, what becomes the character of liberated time?

There are positive and negative aspects to the socio-cultural phenomenon of virtual leisure. The total computerisation of human and social activity offers certain rules for their interaction with computer technologies. The 21st century sets a massive digitalisation of leisure. In virtual worlds, a real man becomes an online person; he communicates, lives and experiences, watches and listens, visits and travels outside of real space and time.

Humanity exists in the reality of an increasingly digital process that developes in all spheres of individual and social life. Virtual leisure also progresses to become an active part of people's daily lives. This aspect of human life and activity cannot be unambiguously assessed, since we are within this process. After identifying the positive influence of virtual leisure on the formation of a person's value system, negative aspects of this process should be noted:

1) Virtual leisure promotes the integration of a person into a certain social group. The mass culture of the 21st century is characterised by an increasing tendency to manage the processes of virtual practice formation. They become more and more unified. Online communities, chats, bots, online travel and event attendance, etc., shape a person's behavioural strategy and fit them into the typical lifestyle of a consumer society. Technologies of consciousness manipulation are actively involved in the organisation of leisure activities. [9, p. 56] Digital space is manageable.

2) In the space of virtual leisure, a pragmatic focus and utilitarian component prevail. Digital platforms and networks create algorithms and programs for managing information flows. As a result, the priority and demand for the consumer becomes what is useful, rather than the search for a meaningful choice. As a result of leisure virtualisation, a de-individualised and standard personality is formed.

Forms of virtual leisure in a consumer society increasingly become a sphere of commerce; they orient people toward a non-creative, consumer mindset. Despite the diversity of virtual practices, they all offer a certain stereotype, a fashionable trend. Market economics and marketing satisfy the demands of mass culture consumers, while forms of creative leisure remain in low demand. Everyday human activity and leisure are so closely intertwined that they become consumer products. According to the French philosopher Guy Debord, in the culture of the contemporary society of the spectacle, or spectacular society, all the results of human activity are transformed into commodities: "The spectacle is the stage at which the commodity has already succeeded in achieving complete capture of social life. The relationship to the commodity becomes not only visible, but the only thing we see now: the world we see is its world." [21, p. 34]

3) Virtual leisure mainly satisfies the primitive demands of a mass audience and offers a utilitarian pattern of behaviour. While the Internet facilitates the realisation of the human ego, the development of all levels of his worldview is gradually becoming an instrument of global control, propaganda and the enslavement of personal and political freedoms. Nowadays, the culture of digital leisure represents one of the means of people's control.

By influencing value systems and behavioural patterns, virtual leisure helps manage individuals and society. The promotion of fashionable appearance and prestigious lifestyle is implemented in various cyberspace environments, including forms of virtual leisure. The universal algorithm of actions offered by digital leisure can rid a person of accumulated value experience, depriving them of individuality and freedom of choice.

A large proportion of virtual leisure activities involve the consumption of low-quality content

— *brainrot*.[4] Such content is oriented towards values that reduce cognitive functions and weaken concentration (videos, clips, online posts and other internet products). The term of "brainrot" is thus used to define the level of fatigue and mental stagnation after viewing a large volume of material that does not expand a person's worldview and carries no intellectual, cognitive information. Brainrot can have a destructive effect on a person's mental health, as well as undermine a cultural system based on traditional values.

In virtual leisure, a large amount of content is represented by informational "garbage." The perception of such useless materials requires no analytical efforts: they gradually displace intellectual material from the subject's area of attention. It turns easier to look at a meme or a picture than to strain your memory and turn on associative images. The individual prefers meaningless rewriting (rewritten or generated texts) and turns into a thoughtless consumer of information with a reduced level of intelligence.

According to Karl Jaspers' forecast, digital leisure will become a significant part of a person's everyday life; however, "this private life itself becomes empty, mechanised and transforms leisure and pleasure into a type of work." [22, p. 138]

4) The hedonistic function prevails in virtual leisure. Fu Lisha believes that individuals in a mass culture society are guided by consumer aspirations, preferring entertainment over creative activities in their free time. The hedonistic focus of leisure is due to the fact that virtual practices aimed at obtaining pleasure require no physical exertion or real participation in any actions, but provide emotional and psychological relief. As a result, virtual leisure for a person becomes preferable to real social communication and activity. [23, p. 615] Since people spend a significant amount of time in virtual space, socially significant values are relegated to the background after individualistic values.

Thus, the ambivalent nature of virtual leisure defines the problem of its study as both relevant and heuristic, as well as requiring serious culturological analysis.

Conclusion

Thus, virtual leisure has a serious impact on the content and nature of various spheres of social life. As a phenomenon of digital society, it expresses the dynamics in the development of culture. The significant role of virtual leisure in the 21st century was determined by three factors: (1) the mass culture of postmodern society has shaped the individual's orientation toward entertaining leisure content; (2) the consumerist model of social existence has promoted material values as a priority over spiritual ones; (3) the development of digital technologies has expanded the range of virtual leisure forms and increased their influence on human value orientations.

Due to its contradictory characteristics, virtual leisure has both positive and negative effects on the individual's value system. A positive result of a person's turn to virtual leisure is the emergence of new interests and needs, the interweaving of various spheres of communication and associated lifestyle changes. The alternative reality of virtual leisure helps to construct the individual's "I" and shape its value systems.

The negative significance of virtual leisure is that it becomes a means of manipulating the individual's consciousness and forms a certain behavioural strategy of a person. The entertainment content offered by digital leisure with its consumer focus dominant over

[4] Brainrot: what it is and how it works? URL: https://www.unisender.com/ru/glossary/chto-takoe-breinrot/ (accessed: 29.01.2026).

the creative one discourages the development of critical, analytical thinking.

The progress of digital technology is irreversible, and its spiritual challenges will also manifest themselves in virtual leisure, which will expand its audience. The development of digital technologies is gaining momentum, and the possibilities of virtual worlds are increasing, offering new forms of leisure. Augmented reality (AR), virtual reality (VR), and mixed reality (MR) blur the boundaries between real and digital space.[5]

How to use leisure time and what it should be filled with depends entirely on the individual. Will it be entertainment-focused or aimed at the creative process? The uncertainty of the future forces us to acknowledge that the substantial purpose of leisure is the comprehensive development of the individual. In this context, digital culture raises the question of a certain level of self-restraint for individuals, who are called upon to exercise moderation in their use of technological innovations, including virtual leisure content.

References

1. Certo Michel, de. *Invention of everyday life. The art of doing*. St. Petersburg: European University in St. Petersburg Publ., 2013. 330 p. (In Russ.)

2. Foucault M. *Self-care. History of sexuality*. Kyiv: Grunt Publ., 1998. 258 p. (In Russ.)

3. Dumazedier R.F. On the way to the civilization of leisure. *Moscow University Bulletin. Series 12. Social political science*. 1993, no. 1, pp. 83–88. (In Russ.)

4. Nekrasov D.A., Cherdymova E.I., Cherdymova V.S. Adolescents' leisure time in social networks and the ecology of digital communication: a theoretical perspective. *Human Capital*. 2023, no. 6, pp. 301–307. (In Russ.) https://doi.org/10.25629/HC.2023.06.36

5. Yaroshenko N.N. The Entertainment industry in the field of contemporary cultural practices. *International Journal of Cultural Research*. 2017, no. 1, pp. 112–122. (In Russ.)

6. Salganova E.I., Belova L.I. Gafner N.A. The impact of media space on the leisure activities of today's youth. *Bulletin of the South Ural State University. Series Social Sciences and the Humanities*. 2022, vol. 22, no. 1, pp. 70–77. (In Russ.) https://doi.org/10.14529/ssh220109

7. Tsareva N.A. The processes of digitalization in art and creativity: Dialectics of interconnection. *Problemy muzykal'noi nauki / Music Scholarship*. 2024, no. 1, pp. 157–168. (In Russ.) https://doi.org/10.56620/2782-3598.2024.1.157-168

8. Popovkin A.V., Popovkina G.S. A look at "digitalization" in terms of life meanings and values. *Oriental Institute Journal*. 2022, no. 4, pp. 56–65. (In Russ.) https://doi.org/10.24866/2542-1611/2022-4/56-65

9. Surova E.E., Butonova N.V. Leisure practices in the context of everyday experience. *Vestnik of Saint Petersburg State University. Series 6. Philosophy. Culturology. Political science. Law. International relations*. 2014, no. 2, pp. 53–60. (In Russ.)

10. Fatkullina G. Current trends in the transformation of digital leisure for young people in the Republic of Bashkortostan. *Economics and Management: Scientific and Practical Journal*. 2025, no. 4, pp. 89–93. (In Russ.) https://doi.org/10.34773/EU.2025.4.16

[5] What is mixed reality and what is its difference from virtual and augmented reality? URL: https://dzen.ru/a/aG4yoF2nMF-5gM6v (accessed: 29.01.2026).

11. Barsukova T.I., Sergodeeva E.A., Kobzarenko L.N. Leisure practices of youth of the Stavropol Territory: a symbiosis of the real and the virtual. *Bulletin of the South-Russian State Technical University. Series Socio-Economic Sciences*. 2025, vol. 18, no. 1, pp. 7–18. (In Russ.) https://doi.org/10.17213/2075-2067-2025-1-7-18

12. Gorokhova I.Yu., Gorokhova Yu.E. The practice of using virtual forms of youth leisure. *Education and Problems of Development of Society*. 2023, no. 1, pp. 134–139. (In Russ.)

13. Fetisova O.V. The impact of virtual space upon the system of values of modern Russian youth. *Humanities, Social-Economic and Social Sciences*. 2017, no. 10, pp. 84–90. (In Russ.)

14. Migunova Yu.V. Peculiarities relating to the impact of virtual space on modern youth. *Theory and Practice of Social Development*. 2021, no. 11, pp. 51–65. (In Russ.) https://doi.org/10.24158/tipor.2021.11.6

15. Borodina A.V., Tikhonova A.S. Digitalization of leisure practices of young Russians and its social consequences. *International Journal of Humanities and Natural Sciences. Sociological Sciences*. 2021, no. 11-2, pp. 32–41. (In Russ.) https://doi.org/10.24412/2500-1000-2021-11-2-33-41

16. Jaspers K. Modern technology. In: Jaspers K. *The meaning and purpose of history*. Moscow: Politizdat Publ., 1991, pp. 113–141. (In Russ.)

17. Sayapin V.O. Virtuality in the understanding of Gilles Deleuze and Henri Bergson and its role for modern philosophy of information science. *Philosophical Thought*. 2024, no. 12, pp. 175–193. (In Russ.) https://doi.org/10.25136/2409-8728.2024.12.72882

18. Komarov V.V. Modern trends in digital socialization of youth: challenges, risks and prospects. In: *Psychological science and new challenges of our time: collection of scientific papers*. Tambov State University named after G.R. Derzhavin. Tambov: "Derzhavinsky" Publishing House, 2023, pp. 142–148. (In Russ.)

19. Baudrillard J. Simulacra and simulations. In: *Philosophy of the postmodern era: collection of translations and abstracts*. Minsk: Krasiko Publ., 1996. 284 p. (In Russ.)

20. Marcuse G. *Eros and civilization. One-dimensional man: A study of the ideology of an advanced industrial society*. Moscow: AST Publ., 2003. 526 p. (In Russ.)

21. Debord G.-E. *Performance society*. Moscow: Radek Publ., 2000. 183 p. (In Russ.)

22. Jaspers K. The origins of history and its purpose. In: Jaspers K. *The meaning and purpose of history*. Moscow: Politizdat Publ., 1991, pp. 28–287. (In Russ.)

23. Fu Lisha. Leisure practices as an object of media reflection. *Mir Nauki, Kul'tury, Obrazovaniya*. 2020, no. 2, pp. 613–615. (In Russ.)

Information about the author:

Nadezhda A. Tsareva — Dr.Sci. (Philosophy), Professor at the Department of Social and Humanitarian Disciplines, Far Eastern State Technical Fisheries University, Vladivostok, Russian Federation.

Информация об авторе:

Н.А. Царёва — доктор философских наук, профессор кафедры социально-гуманитарных дисциплин, Дальневосточный государственный технический рыбохозяйственный университет, г. Владивосток, Российская Федерация.

Received / Поступила в редакцию: 28.01.2026
Revised / Одобрена после рецензирования: 02.03.2026
Accepted / Принята к публикации: 04.03.2026