

THE FEATURES OF VIKTORIIA POLOVA'S CHORAL COMPOSITION

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Abstract

The purpose of the article is to analyse the specifics of choral religious pieces by the Ukrainian composer Viktoriia Polova on the example of *Luminous Canticles*. *The methods* of studying the features of the artist's choral style requires the use of the analytical method. The comparative method is necessary to highlight the nature of the relationship between individual creativity and previous artistic choral practice. The synthesis method is used to distinguish the philosophical and aesthetic basis of the Ukrainian composer's work. *Results*. The choral works of leading Ukrainian composer Viktoriia Polova are an outstanding phenomenon in the context of contemporary national and world musical art. They are a kind of bridge between the traditions of the past and contemporary composer techniques. The verbal text is a source of inspiration for the artist, who forms musical fabric based on it. The choice of canonical texts in religious works signifies V. Polova's creative method. The phonism of choral singing is used to convey sacred and divine images. The turning to the traditions of Renaissance polyphony, Znamenny Chant (Eastern Orthodox Church traditional singing — *translator's note*) is combined with sonorous complexes and minimalism aesthetics. The compositional and phonic architectonics aim to reproduce the idea of the harmony of the world, which is implemented by the means of choral sounding. Contrasting comparison of different figurative spheres and tonalities is the basis of the composer's style, in which there is no place for drama and conflict. The colouristic of the harmonic verticals is formed due to the logic of the polyphonic unfolding of the individual vocal layers. *The scientific novelty* of the article is in highlighting the specificity of Viktoriia Polova's choral compositions and distinguishing the stylistic dominants of her creative method.

Keywords: choir; choral style; Viktoriia Polova; sonorism; minimalism; style; verbal text; drama

For citations

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INTRODUCTION

Viktoriia Polova is one of the leading Ukrainian composers of our time. The philosophical way of thinking, the diversity of style and the progressive nature of the artist's artistic guidelines indicate the significance of her creative legacy. The composer's choral works take an important place in the context of national music because they demonstrate a connection with national choral traditions and are innovative at the same time. The study of Polova's choral style's features is a relevant task, contributing to comprehension of the specifics of the development of the national musical art.

ANALYSIS OF RECENT RESEARCH AND PUBLICATIONS

In modern musical literature, there are a number of studies that outline the specificity of Polova's compositional style. A general description of the artist's work is presented in V. Kuzyk's article (2018). Some features of V. Polova's choral works are described in N. Pertsova, V. Horobets and V. Hrytsenko's publication (2017). The contribution to musical art is made by L. Dychko and V. Stepurko is also mentioned. An important basis allowing understanding the specifics of the composer's creative thinking is the interviews conducted with V. Polova by such authors as D. Desiatyryk (Polova, 2019b) and O. Naidiuk (Polova,

2019a). The issues of the philosophical foundations of music are presented in the work of the leading thinker A. Schopenhauer (1992), whose views are interpreted in A. Tormakhova's work (2009). A comprehensive understanding of the composer's style as a specific phenomenon of a complex nature has been carried out by authors such as V. Lihus and O. Lihus (2018). In their publication, different approaches to the definition of style are provided, and the influence of historical and cultural factors is outlined. The features of choral thinking of contemporary Western composers were analysed in O. Prykhodko's work (2017). The author focuses on ways of adapting basic performance skills and methods to new compositional techniques that composers are inventing. Currently, there is a lack of works devoted to analysing Polova's creative method, realised in the sphere of choral art.

The purpose of the article is to analyse the specifics of choral religious compositions by the Ukrainian composer Viktoriia Polova on the example of the *Luminous Canticles*.

Methods and approaches. The study of the features of the artist's choral style requires using the analytical method. The comparative method is necessary to highlight the nature of the relationship between individual creativity and previous artistic choral practice. The synthesis method is used to distinguish the philosophical and aesthetic basis of the Ukrainian composer's work.

RESULTS

The oeuvre of the Ukrainian composer V. Polova includes various works, among which there are both instrumental and vocal-instrumental ones. Throughout her creative growth, the composer's musical language has evolved. The range of styles the artist has worked covers such opposed directions as avant-garde, polystylism and holy minimalism. In the works composed in the mature period of creativity, the aesthetic of minimalism prevails. These stylistic characteristics are formed due to the interaction of various objective and subjective factors. In particular, as O. Lihus and V. Lihus (2018) note, "the strongly individual qualities of the composer's style are determined by national, historical, social and psychological factors" (p. 674).

A prominent place among the composer's works is choral opuses because the artist turned to various choral compositions both at the beginning of her creative activity and in the mature period. The composer chooses a choral piece to implement topics related to profound philosophical ideas, problems of human existence, and so on. The choir's interpretation as a bearer of the sublime and sacred origin is inherent to V. Polova. The choral composition is appropriate to convey the deep

divine meaning, while the orchestral sound is associated with the human, objective and terrestrial dimension. Among the genres the artist turns to, it's possible to mention cantatas, masses, choral cycles and individual religious works. Polova chooses different choir line-ups (women's, men's, mixed, children's choirs) depending on the artistic idea. Her choral writing can be considered as a dynamic phenomenon that is the sum of "the individual characteristics of a work (group of works) arising from the nature of choral performance" (Prykhodko, 2017, p. 3).

The desire to explore opposed figurative spheres contributes to the fact that the author's range of interest includes the literary works of different poets. The list of poetic texts is impressive, as it contains works by Quintus Horace Flaccus, Simeon the New Theologian, F. Schiller, A. Fet, D. Donne, D. Glanvill and J. Brodsky. As N. Pertsova and others (2017) note, a number of composers' works are related to genres performed during religious practices: "a significant number of works are closely related to religious themes, which are mainly composed on canonical texts. Folk texts are used partially, and the words of famous poets are used very rarely" (p. 616). The choice of canonical texts is one of the composer's authorial method features. The verbal level demonstrates the connection with previous composer practice and the tradition of national choral art. V. Kuzyk (2018) points out that the composer's religious works are characterised by "restraint, meditateness and prayerfulness" (p. 337).

The interaction of verbal and musical components is an extremely important issue for the composer. The verbal text is an incentive for composing a piece of music. It inspires the author and generates an auditory fabric. The composer draws inspiration from the text and is always primary concerning music. V. Polova's philosophical way of thinking manifests itself in need for self-awareness through music, understanding each sound's deep meaning. In the interview on the essence and specificity of the creative process V. Polova noted that for her self-awareness is more important than self-expression, and "it was the prayer texts that allowed me to move internally, live and grow my essence through sound... And first the word is sown in you and it sprouts with music" (Polova, 2019b).

The composer's interpretation of vocal and choral genres indicates that she is rethinking the achievements of national choral practice creatively, manifested according to canonical religious singing. The author uses canonical texts that strengthen the connection with the practices of past centuries. The artist also turns to the type of texture that has developed in choral music of religious content. The musical content also correlates with canonical elements. It includes, in particular, the presence of recitative-related inserts, the use of rhetori-

cal figures, which also illustrate the connection with Orthodox religious music.

There are many innovative features in the composer's choral works that are characteristic of contemporary musical language. In particular, attention is paid to the sonorism of individual sounds that are not functionally linked. In V. Polova's harmonious vertical, there is a formation of vivid colouristic and colourful combinations generated by the movement of horizontal lines. Due to the attention to every colouristic shape, its sonorism, the choral works seem to transport us into some extraterrestrial time-space. It gives the impression of slowing downtime. There is neither rapid change in chord verticals nor conflicting collision of topics. The principle of contrast prevails in the combination of parts in cyclic works. Choral works are full of "airs", in which every sound is clearly audible. The mastery of the composer's work is manifested in the "sparing" use of expressive means. V. Polova uses elements of mode thinking and extended tonality. There are often examples of the third comparison of tonalities, which replace modulation and deviation. Such a technique breaks the usual logic of tonal development and adds dynamics to the presentation of the material.

The composer is characterised by attention to harmony, which V. Polova interprets in two ways. Harmony is considered by her as a substantive characteristic of the world, being coherent, beautiful, admirable. That is, it is a broad understanding of harmony. The composer also interprets harmony as a means of implementation of this concept. In the interview conducted by O. Naidiuk, Viktoriia Polova reveals her vision of the relationship between harmony and music:

I trust music, the inexpressible beauty of the world, its incredible harmony, the futility of my attempts to express this harmony, the endless sadness of those who leave this world and the endless hope of being forever with the Creator. (Polova, 2019a)

The colouristic of chord verticals is used to convey a harmonious worldview. That is, the two dimensions of harmony perception are correlated and interrelated.

Luminous Canticles is a work that illustrates the features of Viktoriia Polova's choral skills perfectly. According to the author's definition, this is a choral symphony. The composition is written to be performed by a mixed a capella choir and soloists, and consists of fifteen pieces: Prayer to the Holy Spirit, the Canticle of Simeon, Good King, Good Mother, Holy God, Angel of God, Virgin Mary, Troparion of the Holy Cross, Seeing God wondrously incarnate, Open to Me the Doors of Repentance, The Prayer of Saint Ephrem, King of Heaven, O Gladsome Light, It is Truly Right, May Lord be Risen, Christ is Risen. The composer uses

canonical texts in it that have often attracted the attention of masters (Virgin Mary, Troparion of the Holy Cross, Open to Me the Doors of Repentance, May Lord be Risen, Christ is Risen) and those that are less often put on music (The Prayer of Saint Ephrem). In the work, it's possible to trace the similarity features with the choral concert genre. The definition of Luminous canticles as a choral symphony brings the understanding of musical material to a deeper level. Based on the "classical" interpretation of the symphony as a genre that can convey the most complex philosophical concepts, the use of this term is appropriate. In addition, it can be noted that the Luminous Canticles are full of ritual and spiritual meaning and symbolic messages that require decoding.

However, each phrase and sentence convey a symbolic rather than a ritual meaning. And this feeling of the symbolism of the message is enhanced by the multidimensional musical sequence, numerous allusions and hints that refer to entire layers of European and Ukrainian choral culture. (National Union of Composers of Ukraine, 2018)

In the work, the composer tries to convey the fluidity of the musical whole, which was characteristic of Renaissance polyphonic music. The use of complementary rhythms and isorhythm are its manifestations. The basic principle of the rhythmic organisation of the piece is the use of constant movement in large durations. A homophonic-harmonic style replaces the polyphony only in the cadenza passages. The fluidity of the movement ceases due to the appearance of the exact rhythmic durations in all voices.

In this symphony, there are alternating sections in which the entire choir sings, or individual choral groups do, and so on. The first piece, Prayer to the Holy Spirit, is sung by the whole choir, sounds solemn and sublime and on a major scale. It acts as a kind of prelude to the entire symphony. The tutti of the entire chorus is quickly replaced by a section in which solos begin to come to the fore. The soloists' singing takes place against the background of sustained chorus sounds, similar to an organ point. The pieces associated with the female characters are illustrated mainly through the transfer of the melodic line to the soprano parts. In this case, the piece O Gladsome Light, which is an example of lyrical and extremely harmonious imagery, can be illustrative. The author uses interesting chord consonances that embody the idea of light. Each sound complex, produced during long-term structural formations, has a vivid colouration. It is appropriate to recall the concept of synesthesia — the unity of sound and colour — embodied in the musical culture of the 19th and 20th centuries. In some performing interpretations, the impression of this piece is enhanced by the use of lighting plot, which greatly

enhances the psychological effect of music. V. Kuzyk (2018) also draws attention to this, emphasising that “choral singing is thought of as an angelic voice, a divinely inspired echo of angelic singing. The ideas of sacred silence and meditative listening and contemplation of sound are embodied in the cycle” (p. 337).

The composer mainly uses registers of human voices that are more “advantageous” due to the specifics of the tessitura, the ability to achieve different dynamic shades. But because of the theme of the work, a higher register is used in it, which creates an allusion to angelic singing that sounds in the heavenly dimensions.

In the most dramatic episodes of the work, the composer uses low-register singing, which should emphasise the tragic nature of the content. Another means of achieving such images is the use of clusters, which are a kind of semantic centres, followed by the removal of tension again. Thus, V. Kuzyk (2018) notes that:

Each of her opuses is a search for a compositional and phonic architectonics, marked by a deeply professional refined technique of contemporary writing, aimed at revealing significant conceptual problems of the spiritual life of a creative person and directly their own. (p. 336)

The composer’s authorial style is the point of intersection of two worlds — past and present. Traditions and innovations are intertwined in it. The main purpose of Polova’s music is to find the meaning for human existence, to give people solace in times of suffering.

For the composer, music is a means of healing a person by reconciling him with the world’s imperfections. It can be seen as the concordance of A. Schopenhauer’s philosophy, who emphasised that genius is always in a state of suffering in his work *The World as Will and Representation*. Only the inspiration that takes the form of a piece of music can relieve him from his experiences for a moment: “the creator often experiences suffering and loneliness, and his reward is the art itself, which gives him an advantage over others” (Tormakova, 2009, p. 82). At the same time, musical art can reveal the truths of being. It happens unconsciously. This process cannot be fully argued or explained logically. However, music is the world, and the world is music, for according to Schopenhauer, “Music disclose to us its most secret meaning of all things ... just as well call the world embodied music as embodied will” (Schopenhauer, 1992, p. 259).

CONCLUSIONS

The choral works of leading Ukrainian composer Viktoriia Polova are a unique phenomenon in the context of contemporary national and world musical art.

They act as a bridge between the traditions of the past and contemporary composer techniques. The verbal text is a source of inspiration for the artist, who forms musical fabric based on it. The choice of canonical texts in religious works signifies V. Polova’s creative method. The phonism of choral singing is used to convey sacred and divine images. The turning to the traditions of Renaissance polyphony, Znamenny Chant is combined with sonorous complexes and minimalism aesthetics. The compositional and phonic architectonics aim to reproduce the idea of the harmony of the world, which is implemented by means of choral sounding. Contrasting comparison of different figurative spheres and tonalities is the basis of the composer’s style, in which there is no place for drama and conflict. The colouristic of the harmonic verticals is formed due to the logic of the polyphonic unfolding of the individual vocal layers.

The scientific novelty of the article is in highlighting the specificity of Viktoriia Polova’s choral works and distinguishing the stylistic dominants of her creative method.

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СПЕЦИФІКА ХОРОВИХ ТВОРІВ ВІКТОРІЇ ПОЛЬОВОЇ

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Анотація

Мета статті — проаналізувати специфіку хорових духовних творів української композиторки Вікторії Польової на прикладі «Світлих піснеспівів». *Методологія дослідження* особливостей хорового стилю мисткині потребує залучення аналітичного методу. Порівняльний метод необхідний для висвітлення характеру взаємозв'язку індивідуального творчого начала та попередньої мистецької хорової практики. Метод синтезу застосовується для виділення філософсько-естетичного підґрунтя творчості української композиторки. *Результати*. Хорові твори провідної української композиторки Вікторії Польової є визначним явищем у контексті сучасного вітчизняного та світового музичного мистецтва. Вони виступають у ролі своєрідного містка між традиціями минулого та сучасними композиторськими техніками. Вербальний текст надихає мисткиню на відповідне формування музичної тканини. Вибір канонічних текстів у духовних творах є ознакою творчого методу В. Польової. Фонізм хорового співу використовується для передачі сакральних та божественних образів. Звернення до традицій поліфонії доби Відродження, знаменного розспіву, сполучаються із сонорними комплексами, естетикою мінімалізму. Композиційно-фонічна архітектоніка спрямована на відтворення ідеї гармонії світу, яка втілюється засобами хорового звучання. Контрастне зіставлення різних образних сфер та тональностей є основою стилю композиторки, в якому немає місця драматизму та конфліктності. Колористика гармонічних вертикалей утворюється як результат логіки поліфонічного розгортання окремих вокальних шарів. *Наукова новизна* полягає у висвітленні специфіки хорових творів Вікторії Польової, виокремленні стильових доміант її творчого методу.

Ключові слова: хор; хоровий стиль; Вікторія Польова; сонорика; мінімалізм; стиль; вербальний текст; драматургія

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