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Extended Abstract

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

ABSTRACT

Background

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

On all stages of education, especially at its early stage, the traditional structural-grammatical analysis only in combination with content-based semantic analysis makes it possible to present the pupils with a *holistic perspective* of a musical composition: to immerse into the understanding of ethics, aesthetics, the cultural codes of the respective epoch, to study the composer's musical thinking, musical language and style (Zhurova, E.B. 2015, 10).

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

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

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

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

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

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

The theory of musical content in the understanding of music as an art bases itself upon Asafiev's fundamental definition: “*Music is the art of intonated meaning*” (Asafiev B.V. 1971, 344). Asafiev expressed the thought that the nature music is *not sonic but intonational*, and for this reason musical intonation presents the “*comprehension of sound, the sphere of semantic sound-manifestation*” (Asafiev B.V. 1971, 344), as well as the manifestation of *intonational form* at its most basic level.

The next foundational categories are presented by the “*Specialized and Non-Specialized Content*” of Music (Kholopova V.N. 2014). Here the extra-musical stratum is perceived to be “*non-specialized content*!”. Correspondingly, along with “*non-specialized content*,” we can see that “*specialized content*” is disclosed and characterized as inseparable from music itself (Kholopova V.N. 2014). The latter appellation denotes the content of the musical elements proper of musical sound, timbre, interval, chords, rhythmic formulas, metric organization, texture, counterpoint, melody, musical themes and compositional forms.

Next comes the *dyad of “conscious/unconscious” content*. The perceptible *conscious strata* of content include all the phenomena *expressed by words*: titles, literary programs, the composers' verbal instructions to the music, poetic texts. Research of the domain of the unconscious in the perception of musical content requires the incorporation of psychological methods

(Clynes M. 169-194). Turning to the idea of *Boris Asafiev about music as a language without concepts, albeit a very concrete language*, it may be said that *music is a language, but not everything in music may be reduced to language* (Kholopova V.N. 2014).

Such categories as the **“Three Sides of Musical Content”** (*the emotional, the depictive and the symbolic*) serve as the main criterion for comparison between each other of the chief historical musical epochs of the Early Modern and the Contemporary periods – Baroque, Classicism, Romanticism and 20th-21st century music (Kholopova V.N. 2014).

On the basis of the *“three sides of content”* the special features of each of the four aforementioned main epochs are examined; at that primary attention is paid to the fate of musical emotions – from the formation of the “theory of affects” during the Baroque period to the fixation of the conception of *“feeling”* in the work of the Classicists, towards the understanding of music as the *“language of feeling”* in 19th century Romanticism, up to the *emotional extremities and crises* in the music of the 20th and 21st centuries (Clynes M. 169-194).

The ideas of the theory of musical content have also found their practical manifestation at the elementary stage of musical education in Russia, where since 1999 the new educational course of *“Musical Content”* has been introduced. Upon carrying out experiential-experimental work based on my own original methodology, I have developed a system-generating foundation of a new educational course, which I define as *integral analysis-interpretation (my own term)* (Zhurova, E.B. 2015). **Integral analysis-interpretation** presents a new approach towards analysis of musical compositions in the context of the theory of musical content, since it is fully conducive to the harmonious development of the pupils’ *logical and associative* thinking. For this reason this type of analysis is defined by me as *integral analysis-interpretation of musical compositions*, since it naturally unifies into itself three vectors: *the structural-grammatical, the content-related semantic and the performance-related* (Zhurova E.B. 2015).

Presuming the infinite multidimensionality of the art of music, it must be emphasized that the reliance for the most part only on the foundations of traditional structural-grammatical analysis limited to the circle of the well-known musicological disciplines is perceived as being extremely inadequate.

Thereby, in the late 20th and early 21st centuries there arose the idea of *“another musical theory”*, marked with broader boundaries, extending far beyond the horizon of the traditional type. A conscious interpretation of music as a language, a profound understanding of its semantic implications, determined by cultural-historical contexts of a particular epoch becomes possible only in the conditions of *new content-semantic approaches to analysis of a musical composition*. An effective realization of the approaches described above may be realized upon implementation into musical education of innovative conceptions of Russian musical scholarship.

The aims of the course and musical repertoire studied

The musical repertoire studied in this course is not limited to any particular style or period. Moreover, this method, an interdisciplinary project par excellence, presupposes the implicit connections between music, literature, visual arts and historic narratives.

Methods

The suggested solution presupposes the integration of structural-grammatical with the new so-called ‘content-meaning analysis’ [Russ. *soderzhatel’no-smyslovoi analiz*]. This method belongs to a new paradigm of Russian musicology—the theory of musical content (described in a chapter ‘A Watershed in Analytical Tradition: Valentina Kholopova’s Theory of Musical Content’ in *L’Analyse musicale aujourd’hui*).

Implications

This article describes the features of the new course of ‘Musical Content’ and specifies its interaction with other courses and disciplines of music theory and performance. The author provides the algorithm of its realization in various institutions and an evaluation of its pedagogic effectiveness.

Keywords

Keywords: musical pedagogy; musical content;; content-meaning analysis; theory of musical content; analytical theory; musical signification; Holistic Analysis-Interpretation.

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