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MINIATURES OF SPIRITUAL CONTENT IN THE WORKS BY COMPOSERS FROM THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

Abstract. Music composed on biblical themes and addressing religious texts presents the composer with tasks of the highest order in expressing true devotion to faith, spirituality, and their optimal interpretation through elements of mastery such as intonation, texture, harmony, form, etc., sometimes even through barely perceptible «sounding» pauses, whose role is indispensable: they (pauses) can «open,» enliven, and complement the spoken word, giving it a special power and new meaning, coloring the associative moments in the perception of listeners. Working with spiritual texts, as a direct contact with the Word of God, requires highlighting truthfulness, usefulness, and the necessity of initiating a spiritual dialogue and further development of it, with the composer's professional skill and life principles serving as the foundation.

The author analyzes works by the following composers: Zlata Tkach (*И лишь Земля незыблема вовеки* / *E only the Earth remains unshaken forever* for mixed choir a cappella), Ghenadie Ciobanu (*Tatăl nostru* / *Our Father* for mixed choir a cappella and the chant *Vrednică ești* / *Worthy are You*), Dmitry Kitenko (*O' Beata* for mixed choir a cappella and *Mariengebete* for female choir and sextet), among others.

In the works of Moldovan composers who have addressed spiritual texts, there is a point of reference that determines the specific significance of the events reflected in their compositions. Regardless the way the composers are different in their methods of presenting the musical material, its development, the use of individual compositional techniques, or their understanding of the assigned tasks are, a solid foundation for them is the eternal aspiration towards questions of existence, philosophical reflection on life, and the joy of touching spiritual truth, which is conveyed to the listeners. Such music, in its best examples, continues to embody the most important and universal ideas and emotions across various genres and conceptual frameworks.

Keywords: Religious music; Choral miniatures; Composers of the Republic of Moldova; Zlata Tkach; Dmitry Kitenko; Ghenadie Ciobanu

ХОРОВІ МІНІАТЮРИ ДУХОВНОГО ЗМІСТУ У ТВОРЧОСТІ КОМПОЗИТОРІВ РЕСПУБЛІКИ МОЛДОВА

Анотація. Музика, написана на біблійські сюжети, а також звернена до релігійних текстів, ставить перед композитором завдання найвищого порядку у проявленні істинної прихильності вірі, духовності та оптимальному сприйнятті їх через складові майстерності в плані інтонаційності, фактури, гармонії, форми тощо, а іноді й через ледь помітну «звучащу» паузу, роль якої незамінна: вона здатна «відкрити», оживити, доповнити звучаче слово, що набуває особливої сили та нового тлумачення, розфарбовуючи асоціативні моменти у сприйнятті слухачів. Робота над текстом духовного змісту як безпосереднє дотик до Слова Божого вимагає висвітлення істинності, корисності, необхідності «зачаття» духовного діалогу та подальшого його розвитку, опорою чому служать професійне майстерність і життєві орієнтири композитора. Автором статті проаналізовані твори композиторів Злати Ткач (*І лише Земля незмінна вічно для змішаного хору а capella*), Геннадія Чобану (*Tatăl nostru* (Отче наш) для змішаного хору а капелла і піснопення *Vrednică ești*), Дмитра Кіценка (*O' Beata* для змішаного хору а капелла і *Mariengebete* для жіночого хору і секстету) та ін.

У роботах молдовських композиторів, які звернулися до духовних текстів, присутня точка відліку, яка визначає специфічну значущість подій, відображених у їхніх творах. Як би вони не відрізнялися за способами викладу музичного матеріалу, його опрацювання, застосуванням індивідуаль-

ної композиторської техніки і, нарешті, розумінням поставлених завдань, міцним фундаментом для них служить вічне прагнення до питань буття, філософського осмислення життя і радості дотику до духовної істини, що передається й слухачам. Така музика у кращих своїх зразках і досі втілює найважливіші й загальнозначущі ідеї та емоції у різних співвідношеннях складових її жанрів і концепцій.

Ключові слова: релігійна музика; хорові мініатюри; композитори Республіки Молдова; Злата Ткач; Дмитрій Киценко; Геннадіє Чобану.

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Introduction. Religious choral music constitutes one of the most extensive areas of indigenous culture. Over the centuries, church singing in Moldova has been open to influences of various European cultures. Its origins lie in Byzantine liturgical monody, enriched through Eastern and Western influences by integrating traditions of homophonic-harmonic and polyphonic texture singing.

Religious choral singing marks the history of Moldovan music over several centuries of the existence of professional musical art, being one of the most important, even unique, forms of it. The return of choral art to sacred meanings has led to increased interest in religious choral genres in contemporary music. Indigenous contemporary composers find certain artistic impulses in the field of religious creation. In the last 20 years of the previous century, a series of choral works belonging to religious music genres have been created, which require structural analysis and an understanding of their meanings.

Zlata Tkach *Numai Pământu-i neclintit pe veci* (*Only the Earth remains unshaken forever*) for a mixed a cappella choir

The well-known and highly prolific composer Zlata Tkach rarely turns to the portrayal of Christian motifs in her work, instead more often appealing to Jewish themes.

The feeling of sadness and disappointment, the futility of life without God — these are the ideas that run through Zlata Tkach's piece *Numai Pământu-i neclintit pe veci*, for mixed choir a cappella (1998), inspired by one of the Books of the Old Testament. The musical conception of the work, as well as the correlation of its parts, reflects the structure of Ecclesiastes. When choosing the musical concept of the piece and the arrangement of its parts, the composer modeled it on the structure of the Book of Ecclesiastes, which consists of the following main sections:

Part I. Theme: «Vanity of vanities» is developed based on the events in nature and life.

Part II. Theme: «To everything there is a season». People are powerless to change and influence the unalterable and incomprehensible course of events in the world, and what happens in human life — everything is directed by God. The author

affirms that there is a designated time for all that exists and all that occurs.

Part III. The sad reiteration by Ecclesiastes of the thesis with which this Book begins: «Vanity of vanities».

The choir *Numai Pământu-i neclintit pe veci* (*Only the Earth remains unshaken forever*) is written in a three-part form. In the first part of the composition, the solo alto part conveys the words of Ecclesiastes, while the choir's leitmotif reflects the «immutability of the Earth» musically embodying the philosophical idea of the meaning of life. This gives rise to an organizing principle of «fluidity», employing polyphonic techniques that correspond to the semantics of the «eternal cycle» of renewal in nature. The monological nature of the statement in the alto solo part, with its emphasized recitative style, is associated with an inner voice contemplating what «is», what «was», and what «will be». At the same time, a semantic parallel is created with the chorale in the smoothly moving choral part, in which individual sounds are prolonged or slowly shift. The unhurried harmonic development (in H minor) does not touch on distant tonalities; thus, the exposition is achieved both in form and content.

The second part is contrasting, with a more free intonational expression — designed to showcase the idea in its natural development. The transfer of phrases from one choir section to another, along with abundant alterations, introduces shades of doubt and questioning against the backdrop of persistent monorhythmic repetitions on the es1 sound of the alto section, embodying the inexorable flow of time (noting that the word «Time» serves as their textual basis). The dynamic expansion and layering in the harmonic vertical lead to a climactic declamation of the words «It was what will be tomorrow!» The harmonic devices used — a distant A minor tonality, the interplay of major and minor modes, alteration of the double dominant, enarmonic modulation, as well as register progression indicating a steady ascent toward the melodic peak, and prolonged declamation at the achieved high point — all contribute to making the climax both convincing and sustained.

The decline of the dramatic wave and, following it, the appearance of the choral leitmotif

of «the inviolability of the Earth» and the recitative of the alto, reviving the overall mood of Part I, bring us back to the «eternal circle» (Part III). However, the pessimism of this part is not entirely bleak. The overall rise of the tessitura, the fading and sustained harmonic verticals, the colorful major-minor harmonic coloring, and the concluding affirmation in the form of a broadly elaborated tonic chord all sound as an optimistic note in the philosophical question of being, life, and death. The Book of Ecclesiastes, presenting a picture of the mortal world in all its hopelessness, finally offers hope for a brighter future «to those who fear God and keep His commandments» in its last chapter.

***Tatăl Nostru (Our Father)* by Gh. Ciobanu**

An interesting perspective on the portrayal of the «eternal» in choral spiritual works by Gh. Ciobanu. *Tatăl Nostru (Our Father)* by Gh. Ciobanu (1994), for mixed a cappella choir on a canonical biblical prayer text, was conceived by the composer for a concert performance. The song-like quality specific to the prayer is reflected in the melodic structures of the piece, whose intonational sources undoubtedly originate from authentic liturgical melodies. These prefigure the solemn semantics of medieval mural paintings, embodying the strength of spirit and faith through the prism of archaic, nationally flavored elements, in light of its Byzantine origins — all within a modern musical vision.

The *Sprechstimme* procedure, which according to the author's instructions is close to the *parlando* style of performance, represents one of the major difficulties for the choir members. The conductor must aim for a harmonious choral declamation and clear pronunciation of the text, in conditions of an alternative free meter. Another issue that can become a difficulty in the interpretative process is the indication «divisi» (except for the sopranos), when half of the participants are required to declaim the text, while the other half sings the sustained note of the phrase.

The heterophonic polyphonic texture of this work (with different types of heterophony — pedals, octave doubling, melodic slides in various voices, based on common sound references) marks the individualization of the idea revealed by the composer, within the context of a condensed form of expression and harmonic-intonational integrity. The piece stands out for its harmonious and laconic character of the musical conception.

***Vrednică ești (You are worthy)* for a men's choir by Gh. Ciobanu**

The work *Vrednică ești (You are worthy)* for a men's choir (1990) by Gh. Ciobanu is clearly oriented towards the traditional models of Byzantine church monody, although the author does not reference quotes from specific initial liturgical sources (Mironenco, 2001).

The complex interaction of musical means in this work (modalism), the structure of heterophony with ison notes, the variation of the ascetic melody in predominantly gradual movement, loaded with «slidings» in glissando, the metric alternation, the asymmetrical rhythm, which contribute to the fluid character and the almost improvisational manner of expression (*parlando-rubato*), the dynamic, linear composition with features of conventional repetition, etc., are all oriented, on a stylistic level, towards the idealized creation of the artistic idea in the spirit of Byzantine religious chant.

A particular obstacle to interpreting this work is the harmonious collective singing of the tenor monody, especially in the *glissando* sections. The author of the article believes that the use of this technique, typical for Byzantine chant in the Paphadic style, performed by virtuoso soloists against the background of the ison, represents, within the stylistic context of the chant, a consequence of the composer's reliance on authentic models of church melodies.

***The Motet O'Beata* by Dmitry Kitsenko**

C. Paraschiv, who studied the works by Dmitry Kitsenko, frequently mentions about the composer that «he is a person with profound faith in God... The Spirit and faith determine his way of life and thinking, and this is even more evident in his creations» [Paraschiv, 2002, p. 28]. Furthermore, the author reveals that although the composer is an adherent of the Orthodox Christian faith, as can be seen from the titles of many of his works, most of the genres he utilizes belong to Catholicism. This paradox is explained by the composer himself by the fact that he has formed his conception of religious music as music that belongs to Western culture. According to D. Kitsenko, in the spiritual relations between man and God, there cannot be a close proximity (as it is in Protestantism). One of the methods to maintain this distance is the use of ancient languages — Old Slavonic, Greek, Latin — in his works.

The motet *O'Beata* on a Latin text by D. Kitsenko (1990) is based on a strict polyphonic style, featuring prepared dissonance figures on strong beats, in long durations, with a complementary contrapuntal musical fabric, a predominance of gradual melodic movement, diatonicism, and so on.

The initial theme, presented in an imitative manner (*fugato*), consists of two constitutive elements: a measured descending movement with prolonged durations and the not-too-high «flight» of the octave, which provides an impulse for further development. As for the developing intonations, the most frequently used is a gradual ascending and descending movement within octaves, balanced by extended intervallic motifs taken from the theme.

Each voice, as is characteristic for the motet, bears a specific linear task and participates both in imitation and in free polyphonic variation, within the central intertwining lines that develop within undulating

contours, where, under the illusion of a musical phrase conclusion, an immediate sensation of an alternative version of it appears. The descending and ascending movements, which recur again, the intonational motives that form as local culminations in each voice — all are driven by the fever of polyphonic development, where there is no conflict or opposition between voices. The musical flow tends toward a stabilized resolution on the word «alleluia,» in which the intonational motifs of the «core» theme create new weavings of the musical fabric, converging toward the final, consonant ending of the Motet.

We consider that, given the fairly rigorous adherence to the rules of counterpoint and melody (the character of synthesis, universal in intonations), of the mode (diatonic modalism), of musical-textual correlations, of the process of establishing the form (the strophic principle), and of the syntax (diagonal planning of voice entries and cadences), we can observe a stylization in this motet by D. Kitsenko, of a polyphonic genre from the late period of the Renaissance.

The motet's structure is characterized by great elasticity and diversity regarding the entrances of the voices, which are often grouped in pairs. The interpretative conventions in a polyphonic ensemble rely on maintaining the unity of the overall texture, while also highlighting or subordinating certain voices to the background, all the while preserving their individual intonational character. Additionally, the originality of each melodic line is integrated within the general compositional framework. In the performance process, impeccable diction is essential, as the consecutive entrances of the voices require clear articulation of the pronunciation.

***Mariengebete* by Dmitry Kitsenko**

The original source of D. Kitsenko's work *Mariengebete* for female choir and instrumental sextet (1998) is a medieval canonical sequence (Gregorian chant *Victimae paschali*), which determines the ascetic, measured character of the discourse.

The selection of methods and means of musical expression is deliberate and justified, based on the task at hand — to interpret medieval religion through the prism of modern perspectives, incorporating the contemplative nature of Gothic art and the poetic perception of all that exists. Self-restraint, a refusal to use a colorful orchestral palette, and the sparing use of expressive devices refine the techniques of the composer and hone the method.

The choice of two voices — the leading soprano and the supporting alto, initially performed in unison — allows for the construction of a simple heterophonic texture based on parallel and non-parallel movement of quartal and quintal, ternary, and mixed thickening of the Gregorian melody; the diatonic foundation shapes the melodic structure of the spiritual chant. The motifs performed by the voices are characterized

by cantilena, with the upper main voice featuring Gothic patterns and the accompaniment showcasing variant figurative elaboration. Beneath the apparent simplicity, there is an underlying ecstatic poetic attitude towards the Virgin Mary.

It is interesting to note that the main or final tone in the melody (finalis) does not tire of repeating multiple times, defining the pitch of the natural mode (d), which ultimately enhances the prayerful character of the chant. The reliance on the canons of early polyphony construction somewhat creates allusions to a well-known ancient church dogma and an endless series of musical works based on it, praising the holiness and purity of the Virgin Mary. The form of the text is strophic, continuous, five-part, with varied repetition of the hymn parts and constant transformations in the sextet.

The sextet, in terms of its composition, represents a unity of related timbres: wooden wind instruments (flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon) combined with string instruments — violin and cello. At the same time, they differ significantly in their autonomy regarding their expressive «intervention» into the overall musical texture and their role within the conceived concept of *Mariengebete*. As a result, a new qualitative type of polyphony emerges: with a clear emphasis on the horizontal aspect and the core role of the chorale source in the polyphonic arrangement — the vocal part and the instrumental unity of the sextet evoke an association with *cantus firmus* polyphony. Through the interaction of lines, timbral and ensemble combinations of voices and strings are born, whose musical material is not only background harmony but also a meaningful addition, providing a certain «poetic» highlighting of the choral part.

The wooden ensemble carries a somewhat different semantic load: from the very first measures of the piece, there is a sense of openness in the exposition, with instruments entering alternately, creating a dissolution of boundaries and an infinite reach toward the past and future through the image of Mary's sanctity — a symbol of love and kindness. Subsequently, the idea is subtly «materialized» through a split in the instrumental accompaniment: a contrapuntal line of flute, oboe, and bassoon contrasts with the main melody, while a triplet pulse in the clarinet, blending into the smoothly flowing musical fabric, reinforces the meaning — the exaltation of holiness and innocence. The contrasting material introduced contrapuntally relative to the main melody (measure 2, line 10) sounds scherzando and elegant (staccato technique), complementing the figurative sphere of the strict choral, highlighting its nuances and coloring it emotionally. Against the backdrop of scherzando, another line of the medieval sequence begins to imitate itself through the splitting of each voice into two, forming a four-voice fugato, which is again replaced by a monorhythmic syllabic chant of a choral type, but now in four-voice texture.

This becomes a defining element for a large part of the composition (measures 4–7).

The gradual increase in the tessitura of the melody against the sustained durations in the sextet (in measure 6, the melody sounds an octave higher relative to measure 4) activates the emotional state and leads to a logical climax, after which a sense of tranquility descends on the word «Jesus,» and a return occurs to the melody variant of one of the initial stanzas (see measures 3 and 7). It is presented unison with accompaniment of a transparent instrumental texture reminiscent of a gavotte, which makes it expressive in terms of timbre and emotionally warm.

The «telling» of the melody is still ongoing, while surrounding intonations are already echoing in the orchestra, born at the beginning of the piece. The descending movement in the violins brings a sense of calm, and the triple «Amen» and «Alleluia» dissolve into time. The main tone of the harmony, which «pulled» the melodic movement toward itself, peacefully comes to a halt.

The logic of polyphonic development, the principle of structural segmentation (caesuras, clearly defined phrase boundaries, strict harmonic combinations resolved diatonically in the spirit of medieval counterpoint), the generalized type of rhythm (with few exceptions), as well as the striving for an inseparable fusion of music and spiritual text, give this musical commentary on the original chant source a distinctive character and originality.

A number of features of choral writing in D. Kitsenko's *Mariengebete* can be distinguished. These include the predominance of hymn-like

consonant harmonies in the polyphony (ranging from two to four voices), with equal importance given to consonances and dissonances (i.e., the absence of any resolutions of dissonances); reliance on diatonic structures; four-voice texture often breaking down into two layers: a two-voice setting of the chorale melody against simple two-voice ostinatos, which together create rigid vertical sonorities involving seconds (for example, in measure 4); stepwise motion of the voices (except for the hymn-like voice, which is freer); the principle of syllabic setting (note equals syllable), despite the moderate tempo; prolonged holding of a single dynamic shade; unstressed, asymmetric rhythm; and the syntactic unity of the chorale with its instrumental commentary.

All the listed techniques give to D. Kitsenko's composition a color reminiscent of medieval polyphonic works. More modern expressive devices in the instrumental accompaniment of the chorale (such as elements of polyrhythm, syncopations, staccato, accents), which are not typical for spiritual hymns of the distant past, are used very moderately and do not disturb the overall impression.

Conclusions. The diversity of written works based on religious texts by Moldovan authors is fundamentally centered on the ongoing concern with human existence, the philosophical perception of life, and the joy of being in touch with spiritual truths — all of which are conveyed to the listeners as well. These works differ in methods, for example, in the way the musical material is presented and developed, in the use of individual compositional techniques, and finally, in the artistic treatment of the assigned tasks.

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