

## PIANO ART BY M. GLINKA

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**Abstract:** For the first time, the piano legacy of M. Glinka is examined in detail through the prism of autobiography as the dominant feature of his piano style; through the analytical commentary on fragments of the literary text "Notes" by M. Glinka, the composer's attitude to the piano as an instrument is revealed; the significance of spontaneous improvisations in the piano work of M. Glinka is analyzed; his piano music as a whole and its place in the composer's artistic world is subjected to comprehension. To consider, through the prism of autobiography as the dominant of M. Glinka's piano style, the specifics of his pianism and his attitude to the piano as an instrument. The method of culturological commentary is applied, developed in musicology by S. Tyshko in collaboration with S. Mamaev and G. Kukol. Understanding the place of piano music in Glinka's artistic world allows defining it as a sphere of searching for one's own intonation, an area of creative experiments and a space for the embodiment of personal experiences, and understanding the high degree of its autobiography nature. Glinka's pianism is a special space of meanings and images; the poetics of his piano art resonates with subjective events read in the paradigm of autobiography nature.

**Keywords:** Analytical commentary, Autobiographical meanings, Autobiography as the dominant, Musical text, Glinka's piano heritage, Glinka's piano improvisations, Glinka's piano music, Piano as an instrument.

### 1 Introduction

Glinka wrote piano music throughout his 35-year career (1822 - 1857). Many foreign travels were undertaken by the composer throughout his life, moving from apartment to apartment in St. Petersburg, and Smolensk largely determined the specifics of the composer's piano work. In the presence of a good piano which was not always the case, Glinka played a lot, and from time to time, he played music in the company. He did not write compositions for piano regularly, often improvised, and sometimes spontaneous improvisations took on complete forms and refined and wrote them down.

Thus, we come to the realization of the following data: Glinka's piano art should be considered in the unity of three components: composer's piano work (creative result), his improvisational creativity (a process that has a significant impact on the result), performing manner (largely determining the numerous parameters of compositions, from genre priorities to compositional and dramatic features of plays).

### 2 Materials and Methods

The main materials for the study were the following: "Notes" by Glinka, memoirs of the composer's contemporaries ("Glinka in the memoirs of contemporaries"), as well as a collection of piano works by Glinka, which is a complete corpus of the composer's piano texts. The article uses the method of culturological commentary developed in musicology in the works of Tyshko in collaboration with Mamaev and Kukol [19].

The use of the provisions of the methodology as an analytical commentary on literary and musical texts when combining biographical information and meanings of works, allows determining the principle of autobiography as one of the leading ones for the formation of a composer's piano style, understanding the importance of piano works in Glinka's work.

### 3 Results

For 35 years of his creative biography, Glinka wrote 48 piano works (he fell ill at the beginning of 1857, and the composer no longer wrote - the last piano piece was created in 1856; although its text has not survived, the creative fact itself is known). Almost fifty piano compositions represent a genre heritage, quantitatively rather small [17]. After all, it is known that the list of works by romantic composers, as a rule, good pianists, could

exceed this figure by two or even three times. However, for Glinka, who did not strive for fame as a playing composer-pianist, piano compositions to a large extent became a space of personal meanings, often directly related to the events and impressions of his biography [18, 21].

It is known that Glinka gave preference to the Field's type of pianism (remembering several lessons and the manner of Field's playing), placing it above the performing style of Thalberg and F. Liszt. Glinka devoted a rather detailed commentary to the piano style of Liszt in "Notes": "Chopin Mazurkas, his Nocturnes, and etudes, in general, all brilliant and fashionable music he played very nicely, but with pretentious shades (à la française). <...> in Beethoven's sonatas and in classical music in general, his performance did not have the proper dignity, and there was something somewhat cutlet in striking the keys. The performance of Septuor Hummel sounded with some disdain, and, in my opinion, Hummel played it incomparably better and easier. <...> In general, Liszt's way of playing in finality cannot be compared with Field, Karl Mayer, and even Thalberg, especially in the rocks" [10, p. 304-305].

The standard for Glinka's playing style of Field seemed to him a kind of sample of softness, strength, and distinctness: "It seemed that he did not hit the keys, but the fingers themselves fell on them, like large drops of rain, and scattered like pearls on the velvet" [10, p. 218]. It is impossible not to notice the emotionality of the statement, not so often characteristic of the text of Glinka's memoirs. The composer himself preferred to perform not piano pieces but his own romances. However, in his playing, the listeners noted precisely the distinctness; Serov recalled: "Glinka played the piano without any particular claim to virtuosity; but, for the extraordinary distinctness in the rhythm and sound, for the extraordinary purity of the chord, with the most difficult moves of harmony, he was also a very remarkable pianist" [14, p. 75].

So, Glinka had a good command of the instrument. Still, since the mid-1830s, he no longer aspired to create major virtuoso compositions in pianism, also ceasing to focus on the bravura concert performing style. Of the fifteen fairly detailed pieces of a concert nature, mainly paraphrases, most of them were written before the release of the first opera, "A Life for the Tsar." The rest of his works for piano are mostly dance or lyrical miniatures. Some of them were created under the direct impression of the events of personal fate: acquaintances, meetings, parting, internal experiences - a fact in itself known, but not sufficiently analyzed in musicology [1, 2, 3, 13, 15, 16]. Thus, "Variations on a Theme by Mozart" was written in 1822 for a beautiful harpist: this determined both the choice of theme, key, and texture, equally acceptable for harp and piano. The "Farewell Waltz" of 1831 appeared during an Italian trip as a miniature dedicated to the separation from one of his Petersburg friends, amateur composer E. Sterich; the fact that Sterich was known in St. Petersburg as a composer of waltzes, apparently, determined the choice of the genre.

The composer's comments preserved in memoirs or letters could more fully clarify both the specifics of his piano creative thinking and the degree of autobiographical nature of his pianism. However, in Glinka's surviving literary heritage, his remarks about the piano, an instrument that became universal in the era of romanticism, are extremely rare, as well as discussions about his pianistic heritage are rare. So, it becomes evident that there is a need for an analytical commentary on musical and literary texts when combining biographical information and the works' meanings.

Thus, the following questions should be considered. What were spontaneous improvisations, and what did they mean in Glinka's piano work? What is the Field of piano music as a whole, and what is its place in the artistic world of the composer?

#### 4 Discussion

Glinka's piano art should be considered in the unity of three components:

- Composer's piano work as a result;
- The performing process of spontaneous improvisations;
- The preferred type of pianism.

Glinka's piano improvisations often preceded and often accompanied the process of his writing. Extraverted public improvisational work of Glinka – was accompanied by introverted situations of the composer's spontaneous play: alone, for himself. As a result of fantasy performances, for example, the famous "Kamarinskaya" appeared; a lonely twilight improvisation brought to life the piano "Prayer" of 1847.

The autobiography nature of Glinka's pianism is due to the specificity of the musical thinking of the composer of a bright worldview: the lyrical hero of Glinka's pianism is himself, and the images of his piano compositions are harmonious because even the dramatization of the images of Glinka's piano miniatures is restrained, balanced by an effectively active or reconciling lyrical finale.

##### 4.1 Piano Improvisations by Glinka and their Personal Meanings

Among the memories of Glinka, we will find many references to his improvised performances at musical evenings in salons or in a circle of friends. He often sang, composing romances, or instantly completed a second voice to the melody; often, he indulged in the instrumental embodiment of experiences and emotions on the piano, carried away and obeying his own imagination [5, 6, 7, 8, 11]. In the publication Glinka in the Memoirs of contemporaries, we will find many references to such cases. For example, Vasilko-Petrov writes, "We have heard his brilliant improvisations on the piano more than once" [14, p. 285]. Dubrovsky recalls the composer's stay in Warsaw in 1848: "Sometimes, he sat at the piano and improvised ... You know what a great master he was in this art. Sometimes, it happened that a funeral procession was going on with a long line of Catholic monks of different orders <...> Their sad, loud choir often suddenly interrupted Mikhail's solemn sounds Ivanovich's improvisation. Drowning out this amazing soul singing with strong chords, this deathly de profundis, he hastily left for distant rooms <...>" [14, p. 261-262]. Nikolaev describes one of the Warsaw evenings in romantic tones: "The room took on a strange, fantastic look: the burning flame, shimmering with blue, yellow, or pink light, whimsically painted the guests' faces and threw their wavy silhouettes on the wall. <...> Everyone quieted down as if performing some mysterious ritual and sat down in the back of the room. Unwittingly succumbing to the impression of this situation, I began to sing the recitative of the commander's statue from Don Juan but barely had time to utter the second word when I heard Glinka's lovely accompaniment. The recitative ended, and he continued to fantasize on this topic: a gloomy, sad melody poured in wide waves, engulfing all listeners with its grandiose charm; in this melody, it was as if voices from behind the grave were heard, a timid, helpless complaint, then the groans and sobs of a sore, exhausted soul, and all of them, intertwining with each other, carried the imagination into some distant, mystical area ..." [14, p. 242].

The significance of piano improvisations for Glinka becomes even more distinct from the memoirs of Serov associated with the first half of the 1840s: "... Sometimes, Glinka allowed us to look into the treasure of his improvisational talent. Having conceived to play a "square dance" for dancing, he was carried away by his imagination, improvised whole ballets for us, during which, of course, everyone stopped dancing, and surrounded the piano in a tight crowd, afraid to utter at least one sound from a whole chain of the most beautiful, most free-artistic patterns ballet music" [14, p. 96]. Zenkin writes about Schubert in a similar way: "Throughout his life, Schubert created dances, a huge number of which were improvised at friendly evenings ("Schubertiads")" [25, p. 36].

Let us note that such concert improvisation had certain tasks; Zenkin, considering the specifics of the preludes of the pre-Chopin time, notes that they "served as educational models for improvisation in any key," emphasizing: "At the beginning of the 19th century, every pianist had to be able to improvise" [19, p. 26]. It is known that Liszt was famous for his bright masterful improvisations. Arnold, calling the artist "a genius transformer of piano playing," recalls his concerts in St. Petersburg: "In the fifth concert, "free improvisation on themes asked by the public" was appointed. It goes without saying that for the public of that time, the task of "asking topics" was completely unusual: the majority, of course, did not even know how to write notes <...> the entire audience with indescribably intense attention watched Liszt implementation of the proposed motifs, taken out one by one from the basket, on the piano. <...> The first motive was from "A Life for the Tsar," and it was Vanya's song ("How the mother was killed"); the second motive was Chernomor's march from the opera "Ruslan and Lyudmila." When Liszt played the first theme, unanimous, deafening applause followed throughout the hall, and after the theme of the march, there was even more enthusiastic applause from all sides" [19, p. 218-219].

So, we were talking about the extraverted – public – improvisational work of Glinka. However, even more, interesting are the introverted situations of the composer's spontaneous piano playing – for himself.

Here are two episodes of Glinka's "Notes," belonging to different periods of the memoir text (1826 and 1847): rare emotionally direct confessions of the composer associated with the splash of a strong experience in piano improvisation. As it was many times commented in the literature, both of the composer's remarks are for us his messages of an emotional and psychological connection between immediate experience and creative result; two correlated fragments of a literary text reveal the essence of Glinka's specific relationship to the piano.

##### 4.2 The First Fragment of "Notes"

"In the evenings and at dusk, I loved to dream at the piano ..." - the words of the composer refer to May 1826. Then his piano improvisations were inspired by the "sentimental poetry of Zhukovsky," which moved the composer "to tears" [10, p. 231].

Glinka is 22 years old; at that time, the piano variations "Benedettasia la madre" (the first published work) was already written with a dedication to Liza Ushakova, daughter of relative Ushakov, who provided an apartment for Glinka and his family to live; the family held musical evenings, and the 18-year-old niece played the piano well.

After his sister's wedding (we are talking about the elder sister Pelageya Ivanovna, who married Sobolevsky, whom Glinka calls "a sweet and educated person" [10, p. 230]) and a short trip to Smolensk, the composer returns home to Novospasskoye. Namely, then the voice of the piano was able to convey the vague evening dreams of young Glinka; as a result, two romances were created to the words of Zhukovsky ("The moon shines in the cemetery" and "Poor singer").

The second fragment is from the autumn of 1847. Let us cite it: "... Left alone in the twilight, I felt such a deep melancholy that, crying, I prayed mentally and improvised "Prayer" without words for the piano <...>" [10, p. 330].

This time the trip to Novospasskoye is connected with the engagement of Glinka's younger sister Olga Ivanovna to Izmailov. A sharp deterioration in health forced the composer, without waiting for his sister's wedding, to go to St. Petersburg; however, this trip had to be canceled. So, Glinka ends up in Smolensk; "The local gendarme colonel Romanus gave me his piano for a while," he recalls [2, p. 330]. Namely then the plays "Memories of the Mazurka," "Barcarolle," "Prayer," and "Variations on a Scottish Theme" were composed (Glinka again lives "in the house of relative Ushakov" and devotes a cycle of variations to Elizaveta Ushakova [10, p. 372]), combined when publishing in the cycle "Hello to the Fatherland." Serov recalled

the Smolensk experience recounted to him by Glinka, when "he was under the influence of the darkest mood of the spirit": "From the feeling of turning to heaven in the midst of disaster, these sounds flowed, in which religiosity reigned" [14, p. 98].

Glinka's two emotional remarks are read in an obvious semantic unity, and the amazing coincidences of the episodes of the "Notes" in a peculiar way emphasize their symmetry. The situations depicted are separated by an interval of 20 years, and their similarity confirms the regularity of the described events.

As a result, we see the following: the composer confides in the piano both youthful experiences and the real despair of illness and loneliness. The piano, Glinka's romantic interlocutor, cries with him, grieves, sobs, and offers prayers as if pronouncing a word in musical speech without words.

The two cases described in the memoirs create a semantic unity and testify to the piano sphere's special significance for the composer. At the same time, the fact that Glinka subsequently transposed many works for orchestra or vocal-orchestral composition ("Waltz-Fantasy," "Prayer" on the words of Lermontov) proves not only the power of the artistic concept of the plays, which significantly exceeds the means of the piano but, at the same time, speaks of Glinka's special perception of pianism as an area for the most direct confidential revelations, where spontaneous improvisation is the space of the unrestrained fantasy of a romantic artist.

Commenting on another case of Glinka's improvisation in Baden in 1833 - his lonely emotional outburst of feelings and despair - Tyshko and Mamaev summarize: "It is no doubt that here we face special romantic type of self-expression in a creative and ecstatic state"; noting: "Was the improvisation of 1833 something like a 'prayer without words'...?" [20, p. 268]. This question itself is sufficient and does not require an answer.

### 4.3 Piano Music in the Creative Biography of Glinka

The stages of Glinka's turning to a composition for solo piano, being almost in direct correspondence with the stages of moving to the heights in opera and orchestral overture, in addition to the artistic embodiment of specific creative impressions, each fulfilled their own tasks. The works of the first period, covering the years before and during the first foreign travels and completed with the writing of the opera "A Life for the Tsar" (1822 - 1837), in many ways turned out to be a creative laboratory for mastering the belcanto style and European bravura virtuosity with instrumental means. Namely, then the composer worked in the genre of paraphrase; borrowed operatic themes by Bellini and Donizetti became the intonation basis of variation cycles, impromptu, Glinka's rondo. The pianism of those years is marked by the desire for a brilliant style, with its abundance of virtuoso passages, rich texture, vividly imaginative and genre contrasts, and the cantilene of the nocturne nature of the pre-final episodes. This applies to variation cycles on themes from operas by Bellini, Donizetti, Variations on a theme from the ballet "Kia-King," etc.

The compositions of the second period, accompanying the opera "Ruslan and Lyudmila," were a new awareness of Russian intonation nature; for the most part, the works of these years affirm the creative field of piano dance, in many respects being in a figurative and semantic parallel to the opera "Ruslan and Lyudmila" (1837 - 1847). However, the song-romance sphere of Glinka's piano music of these years is much more influenced by biographical events. "Waltz-Fantasy" and Nocturne "Parting" are examples of the embodiment of personal meanings in the piano genre since both arose as a result of love experiences, life partings, and losses. Namely, the light Nocturnism, inherent in Glinka's early works, is replaced by elegance [23, 24].

Four pieces from the beginning of the third period ("Remembrance of the Mazurka," "Barcarolle," "Prayer," "Variations on a Scottish Theme"), combined into Glinka's only piano cycle "Hello to the Fatherland" in 1847, open up the prospect for new stylistic searches, but not only in piano genres:

the poetics of epigraphs and titles creates a new type of programmatic for Glinka and forms the space of meanings romantic and autobiographical.

Several works of last years have become an echo of the previous lines of pianism, mainly dance-lyrical embodiment, but they are almost entirely - in relation to the imagery and ways of musical thinking of the composer - are directed to the past (for example, "The Original Polka" of 1852, "Children's Polka" of 1854, built on own Glinka's or borrowed musical material from previous years, or "Andalusian dance," addressed to the Spanish impressions of the composer). Stasov recalled this creative period of Glinka as the following: "Finally, in December, he composed a graceful Children's Polka, and dedicated it to his little niece, for whom he improvised dances and songs for whole days, at this time, often playing and dancing with her, with the naivety and carelessness of a cheerful child" [14, p. 276].

So, for almost three and a half decades of his creative career (from 1822 to 1856), the piano remained for Glinka the leading solo instrument, most suitable for initial experiments, searching and refining stylistic syntheses, individual techniques, combinations of means of expression, images and meanings.

In the artistic world of Glinka's pianism, there is neither Schumann's contradictory duality, nor Berlioz's gloomy fantasy, nor Liszt's pictorial or infernal images. However, there is almost no explicit programmaticity embodied in many romantic piano cycles of the 19th century, such as, for example, "The Years of Wanderings" by Liszt, "Carnival," and "Davidsbündlers" by R. Schumann, etc. Glinka's miniature programs always contain understatement, ambiguity, much greater semantic fullness than the clearly emerging spectrum of meanings, realized exclusively by the title of the work. The hidden program, declared in the titles of individual piano pieces, always turns out to be addressed to several levels of cultural meanings, responding to autobiographical themes and connections with his past works and dialogue with musical styles and genre layers of different cultures. It is no coincidence that, in addition to titles, poetic epigraphs also appear in Glinka's late piano miniatures, outlining a wide semantic space of autobiographical, musical, and artistic meanings with dialogical interaction (the cycle "Hello to the Fatherland" in 1847).

In the process of the evolution of the piano style, Glinka gradually moves away from a clearly expressed danceability towards the synthesis of the dance principle with other genres - it becomes not so much an excuse but rather the level of the second plan of the composition. Therefore, in the last period, dancing in piano music is no longer quiet, not only dancing. The beginning of this movement is opened by the elegiac-romance play "Waltz-Fantasy," while the lyrical miniature "Reminiscence of the Mazurka" continues with its danceable and enlightened imaginative spaces and it ends with the "Mazurka Composed in Stagecoach," similar to the record in an album. Dancing becomes the basis and logical principle of musical development, but not the basis of musical and artistic thought. However, despite the overall significant number of such miniatures for the piano, the most significant cultural semantic images of Glinka's pianism are concentrated in the sphere of song-romance lyrics, not related to dance genres or indirectly related to them. This line of piano creativity is already outlined in the early years in "Nocturne" (1828). It leads to the heights of a mature creative stage - Nocturne "Parting," "Barcarolle," "Waltz-Fantasy," and "Remembrance of the Mazurka."

### 5 Conclusion

Having examined two components of Glinka's piano art - stage improvisations with friends and fantasizing at the piano alone - we come to the conclusion that they represent an integral part of his creative process. Experiences that are expressed spontaneously play, apparently, did not always serve as the basis for composing a play; one of these cases, described by Glinka himself, is associated with the famous play "Prayer," which he

later transformed into a cantata on the words of Lermontov in 1855.

Glinka's piano style changes significantly in the process of evolution. Connections and intersections with other genre spheres (opera, symphonic overture, chamber-vocal area) in different periods of creativity acquire different semantics and different meanings. However, the unity of Glinka's style is not expressed so definitely in any genre sphere as in piano music. This is not surprising because, for the composer-pianist, the piano has always remained a combination of universality and intimacy, a means of expressing the most intimate, personal moods.

For Glinka, the piano is a multifunctional instrument. In the early years, the piano can perform the role of accompaniment (in fact, replacing the orchestra) for an expanded cantata vocal-choral work ("Prologue," 1826), function, along with the harp, as a solo instrument, imbued with the specifics of harp performance ("Variations on a Theme Mozart" of 1822, "Nocturne" of 1828 - both works were written for piano or harp). This becomes the area of creative experiments (such as Italian paraphrases of the 1830s using the themes of opera bel canto) and spontaneous improvisational writing ("Prayer" of 1847).

Over the years, the piano creative sphere became for Glinka both a zone of searching for his own intonation and a creative laboratory, as well as the embodiment of musical sociability, acquiring the features of an analogue of literary genres - a diary entry, a friendly message (for example, the "Farewell Waltz" of 1831 is almost a letter to close friend E. Shterich, who left, known in St. Petersburg for composing waltzes; Mazurka of 1825 is known as "composed in a post carriage during a journey from St. Petersburg to Warsaw") [22, p. 435]. Autobiographical meanings often complement the spontaneity of emotion in Glinka's miniatures addressed to other national cultures (mazurkas of different years, "The Andalusian Dance" of 1855), to his own past ("Parting" of 1839, "Barcarolle" of 1847, "The Original Polka" of 1852, "Children's Polka" of 1854), to the romantic themes of European musical art ("Farewell Waltz" of 1831, "Waltz-Fantasy" of 1839). To a large extent, this is due to the typical Russian composer' striving for the artlessness of the utterance, a special degree of sincere expression of feeling, exacerbated to the individually permissible limit. It is not for nothing that the authors of the famous monograph Tyshko and Mamaev wrote about his artistic nature as follows: "... Glinka, through all the obstacles erected by time, carried that inspired, chivalrous, loving attitude to his art, which cannot be questioned or even subjected to detailed, purely formal analysis" [19, p. 7].

The lyrical hero of Glinka's pianism is himself; the space of meanings of his works is the world of the soul, happy and sad, enjoying life and nostalgically experiencing the past. No wonder his friends noted the composer's extreme sincerity and openness in the circle of his relatives; Stepanov, for example, emphasized: "Glinka lived with imagination and feeling"; "Glinka was all expressing himself, his thoughts and feelings were not hidden for friends"; "Glinka was, as he himself said, mimosas"; "I often saw tears in Glinka's eyes" [14, p. 60]. However, his music's images are always harmonious because even the dramatization of Glinka's piano miniatures is restrained in its own way, balanced by an effectively active or reconciling lyrical finale. His world is whole and almost real almost, since a high degree of lyrical poeticization raises the figurative structure of individual miniatures into a sphere of romantic understatement, balancing on the verge of earthly givenness and dreams. This applies primarily to the song-romance sphere of Glinka's pianism, realized in the early period of creativity by the genre of the nocturne and later by genre syntheses of nocturne or waltz with a tangible influence of elegiac interpreted imagery ("Waltz-Fantasy," "Parting").

The piano work of Glinka is a special space of meanings, images, and revelations. The poetics of his piano art resonates with subjective events read in the paradigm of autobiography nature.

In one of his letters to Findeisen, Engelgardt told about Glinka: "I remember once (in the early 50s), after a long singing in our house, at one o'clock in the morning, he went into my rooms and amazingly, superbly improvised on my little organ the work of the well-known Wirth. Liszt was very fond of Glinka's improvisations" [14, p. 319]. Melgunov recalled the young composer: "... In the long winter nights, in the summer St. Petersburg twilight, <...> he indulged in a flight of free improvisation, resting in it from puzzling activities, from student worries. In these sounds, trembling with delight, he expressed his childhood dreams, and his languid sadness, and his living joys <...>" [14, p. 159].

Glinka's piano art is the world of his most direct, sincere emotion. Here the words of Zenkin are appropriate: "<...> The composer does not create music but discovers <...> it in the sounds of the world" [25, p. 95].

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