

# CHAMBER AND VOCAL MUSIC IN THE CREATIVE WORK OF A. SCHNITTKE: FROM ARTISTIC IMAGERY TO THE PRINCIPLES OF CYCLIZATION

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**Abstract:** Based on the musical-historical analysis, the article shows that Alfred Schnittke occupies a special place in the history of Russian music of the Soviet period. Being a composer of the sixties, he became one of the most performed representatives of the Soviet musical culture of the second half of the 20th century in the world. The object of the study is the composer's chamber-vocal heritage in all the variety of text sources available to modern science. Artistic-stylistic and performing characteristics of A. Schnittke's chamber-vocal music are considered. The novelty of the study is the investigation of issues related to the specific methods of performing Schnittke's chamber-vocal opuses.

**Keywords:** Artistic integrity, Artistic form, Artistic image, Chamber vocal creativity, Cyclicity, Musical language, Poetic word.

## 1 Introduction

In the history of musical culture of the 20th century, one of the brightest representatives of the avant-garde movement of the "Soviet" period, which had a significant impact on the work of many composers of the second half of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st centuries, is Alfred Harriyovich Schnittke. The search for new forms and ways of musical art existence, new musical and linguistic manifestations was carried out in difficult socio-cultural and historical conditions of the "transitional era" - the era of "thaw". This period was marked by global changes in the moral self-awareness of society, which was reflected in the work of many cultural figures of that time - composers, writers, theater actors, artists, etc.

Despite decades of cultivated and strictly regulated ideological orientations of artistic activity, the work of sixties' composers demonstrates a return to the circle of the most relevant themes - the theme of moral reflection, the search for truth, the clash of good and evil, spiritual growth, philosophical understanding of reality, which becomes a continuation and development of previously existing traditions of Russian culture, that were so 'diligently' eradicated in the era of the supremacy of "social realism" aesthetics.

The latest achievements in the field of aesthetics and musicology enrich the available musical research tools. The concept of the new "aesthetic consciousness" makes it possible to more clearly interpret the essence of the musical phenomena of the selected period, since namely the aesthetic argument, as it is known, is quite weighty and strong in relation to the musical object. In this aspect, it will be interesting to observe the process of changing aesthetic consciousness at the beginning of the 20th century and trace the extent to which the Russian/Soviet musical avant-garde turned out to be in harmony with the aesthetic categories of classics and non-classics.

## 2 Material and Method

In the process of research, various methods of musicological analysis were used: from a holistic approach, interpreting the composition in the unity of its content and form, to phenomenological - researching the semantic layers of the text, analyzing its intertextual connections. The approach to the topic was determined from the standpoint of the context of the composer's individual style and the era to which he belongs.

The main research methods included the following:

- Comparative-historical method, which made it possible to trace the features of the development of avant-garde and postmodern tendencies in Russian music in some chronological dynamics;
- Musicological method, with the help of which it became possible to analyze the language, problems and poetics of works classified as avant-garde and postmodernism;
- A method of interpretation that made it possible to perceive and understand the phenomena of avant-garde and postmodernism in Russian music;
- An integrative method that enabled using data from various fields of humanitarian knowledge in relation to solving the problems posed in this study.

## 3 Results and Discussion

The turn of the fifth and sixth decades of the 20th century opened a new stage in the history of Soviet music, associated with significant changes in the political and socio-cultural environment. It was in many ways initiated and stimulated by the decisive changes that took place in the social life of the country. These stunning changes seemed to release the energy that had been stored and accumulated for several decades from the long years of the totalitarian system. After the death of J. Stalin in March 1953, Soviet society began to change quite quickly, one might even say, rapidly.

The speed of this process eloquently testified to the deep crisis of Stalin's empire, especially at the end of his reign. Although it took almost three years for the new official government to express an official opinion about Stalin's rule, it still happened at the 20th Congress of the CPSU (1956). In his report, M. Khrushchev sharply condemned the repressions of Stalin's times; the Stalinist regime's totalitarian war against its own people was henceforth defined as a "violation of socialist legality" and was entirely attributed to the "cult of personality". Hopes about the impossibility of returning to the past grew stronger in society, and changes in aspirations and hopes were most fully and directly expressed in the sphere of artistic creativity, including literature and music.

To some extent, artistic creativity and, more broadly, spiritual life activity were intended to compensate for the lack of real social changes, because liberalization, in fact, did not affect either the economic or the political structure of society, which was still oriented towards "communist values". This was related to the halfness and short-term nature of liberalization, which did not have time and did not manage to take root in the Soviet state.

Although the official authorities have not yet given any comment at that time, the hopes for freedom, initially rather vague, have already found their expression in the first works that appeared after Stalin's death. In the May 1953 issue of *Styag* magazine, I. Ehrenburg's novel "Thaw" was published for the first time, whose title and general atmosphere gave a name to the entire cultural and historical period. The feeling of freedom was already felt and began to strengthen, thanks to the new works that appeared in this period. Five years later, in 1958, the charges against many outstanding figures of the musical culture of that time were officially dropped with the issuance of a new resolution - "Regarding the correction of errors in the assessment of the operas "Great Friendship", "From the Heart" and "Bohdan Khmelnytskyi"". This supposedly marked the official end of the ten-year existence of the infamous decree of 1948, but the principled attitude to the "struggle against formalism" was reaffirmed, which caused considerable doubts about this decree among many creative people.

In this atmosphere, a new generation of artists of various creative directions, who did not have direct experience of Stalin's times, and therefore were not infected with fear, became the force that contributed to the emergence of new trends in culture. Namely

they carried a powerful charge of vitality and creative energy, the embodiment and manifestations of which, for the first time in a long time, seemingly was not prevented by anything. It became a time of discovery for young poets, who gathered audiences of thousands in stadiums, and for young artists and composers, who for the first time in a long period had the opportunity to enter into creative communication with the world's artistic experience. All this made the feeling of freedom almost limitless for a while, and the scale of changes seemed quite significant.

At this time, there was beginning of sounding not only the works of modern European composers such as Britten, Onegger, Hindemith, Poulenc, Orff, Millau, but also composers of the first third of the 20th century, the neoclassical and late period, whose performance and study were also prohibited - Debussy, Ravel, Stravinsky. Later, in the Soviet chamber concert halls, one could find the inclusion of the works of Messian, Berg, and Webern in the programs of performers. Schoenberg was played almost exclusively by foreign touring artists (however, "Survivor from Warsaw" was performed once as an anti-fascist piece), but all this testified to the extraordinary interest and strong demand from both composers and performers and listeners for the works of the named composers.

However, the desire for new artistic information was so great at that time that the limitations of the concert repertoire were easily overcome in other ways, especially in a professional environment. The emergence of direct personal contacts with foreign musicians in many ways became the outlet that helped many composers and performers when the "thaw" period was over and the pressure on artists from the new government began to increase.

One of the most vivid exponents of the outlook and moods of his generation was Alfred Schnittke, in whose work, as A. Ivashkin pointed out, one can clearly feel "much of what makes up the spiritual atmosphere of the time; various problems perceived by the artist from everywhere are fused and reflected in them. For Schnittke, there is no such thing as "own" and "alien", old and new - just as these concepts did not exist for Joyce, Einstein, Eliot, Stravinsky, who expanded our ideas about the unity of the world and the universal nature of human culture" [4, p.9].

In the European audience, in addition to the great attention to the work of Alfred Schnittke, an interest in many composers of the 1960s arose, but many European researchers who studied the activities of composers of the "Soviet" period (in particular, Frans Sh. Lemer) emphasize that the creative personality of Alfred Schnittke occupies a special place in world musical culture, because the composer is "the personification of conscience where it seemed that it had no place" [7, p. 9].

Among the literature devoted to the study of the work of A. Schnittke, one should highlight the works of the composer himself, in which he defines the priority directions in the development of the musical culture of his time ("polystylistic tendency in modern music"). The material of the composer's scientific works reflects the artist's own views on the main trends and priority directions in the musical culture of that time, which were of great importance to him and significantly influenced the formation of his own author's style.

In his theoretical studies, Schnittke singles out two techniques, which he calls the "principle of citation" and the "principle of allusion", which have already become the generally accepted musicological terminology. "In the citation, he only differentiates something known (such as the introduction of Bach's chorale in Berg's Violin Concerto) and theoretically introduced for the first time: adaptation - retelling of someone else's musical text in one's own musical language (Stravinsky's "Pulcinella", Shchedrin's "Carmen Suite"), quoting the technique of someone else's style ("Your Faust" Pusser). An important musical concept, called by Schnittke the principle of allusion, is illustrated by an example of Stravinsky's entire work" [6, p. 39-40].

As Schnittke notes, "the principle of citation has long been known and manifests itself in a whole range of techniques - from the

reproduction of stereotypical microelements of the style of another era or another national tradition (melodic intonations, harmonic sequences, cadence formulas) to exact or reworked quotations or pseudo-citations", while "the principle of allusion manifests itself in the subtlest hints and unfulfilled promises at the edge of the quotation - but without going beyond it" [8, p. 327-328].

As the composer points out, the wide use of stylistic hints and allusions in the instrumental theater (Cage, Kagel) or the subtlest fluids of polystylistics in the music of such opposite composers as Boulez and Ligeti, or among the "Soviet" composers - Denisov, Sylvestrov, Gubaidulina, are also indicative [8, p. 329]. The author asks a legitimate question about the difference between general musical associations and special polystylistic associations, and answering his own question, claims that polystylism has become a deliberate technique, a special form of expression.

Polystylistics allows, according to the composer, to significantly expand the circle of expressive means, and the "integration of "low" and "high" styles, "banal" and "refined" becomes possible, that is, a wider musical world and general democratization of style. The subjective passion of the author's statement is reinforced by the documentary objectivity of the musical reality, not only presented individually reflected, but also quoted" [8, p. 330].

Constantly conducting an analytical study of the works of many prominent composers contemporary to him, whose work was previously under a complete prohibition, Schnittke points out that many of them contain collages of quotes, which he perceives as an "apocalyptic reminder of our responsibility for the fate of the world" and a complex of "music documents of different eras", which he compares with documentary film journalism. In addition, thanks to polystylistic moments, "new opportunities arise for the musical and dramatic embodiment of "eternal" problems - "war and peace", "life and death", etc." [8, p. 331]. Therefore, in his opinion, "it would hardly be possible to find as convincing musical means for the artistic expression of the "connection of times" as polystylistics" [8, p. 331].

The activity of composers of the sixties was determined, on the one hand, by the desire for a significant renewal of the musical language and the mastering of technological techniques and artistic principles of composition prohibited by the Soviet ideological censorship, on the other hand - by expanding the possible range of topics that touched on issues of philosophical understanding of the world, the eternal theme of the struggle between good and evil, searching for spiritual landmarks.

Mastering the principles of dodecaphony and serial technique, as well as familiarization with the work and analytical study of the compositional heritage of A. Berg, A. Webern, P. Boulez, L. Nono and many other composers forbidden to be studied in conservatory courses at that time, led to the first "attempt at writing", and later to the active use of the most innovative techniques and methods by sixties composers in their works. Such experiments did not go unnoticed by European and American critics, however, as L. Hakopyan shows, in most cases, despite the positive assessment of the opuses of the "Soviet avant-garde artists" and the clear sympathy for their work, a rather condescending attitude was felt in the assessments of these critics.

In their assessments, the creativity of the representatives of the "Soviet avant-garde" could be regarded as interesting, but largely dependent on a certain model, and, therefore, a secondary phenomenon that cannot be considered as an independent "offshoot of the "great" world avant-garde" that has unique individual features. "For a long time, the foresight of the "big world" was not enough to recognize that the art of these masters is endowed with a deep and completely original metaphysics" [1, p. 29].

In the creative thinking of the composer, the power of the intellect and the depth of the talent revealed a significant and large-scale semantic field of musical and symbolic ideas. S. Slonimskyi wrote about Schnittke: "This is a personality,

extremely deep personality, paradoxically thinking, he thinks deeply, philosophically" [10, p. 186]. E. Barankin and E. Chigareva find the same: "Alfred thought originally, he had a philosophical mindset, and it seemed that he knew absolutely everything" [2, p. 66]; "he was always a thinker looking for answers to the most painful questions ... He was like a vibrating string that subtly responds to the influx of time ... listening to the works of A. Schnittke ... is like living a whole life" [3, p. 194-195].

The composer himself believed that the motivating creative force and generator of creative activity of his thought is doubt, about which he explained – "doubt forces thought to work at the maximum of their intensity. For the artist, namely doubt, dissatisfaction - he may or may not be aware of it - acts as an engine, a catalyst that forces his thoughts, his psyche to work at maximum speed" [11, p. 103]. In this regard, the analytical view of the musical heritage of Schnittke can be presented as endless philosophical searches, painful questions and answers, which took an artistic and sound form. For him, as a thinker, it was natural for the word to surround the sound, continue and concretize it. As V. Kholopova pointed out, "sound without thought is not A. Schnittke".

The semantic content of Schnittke's music is extremely rational. However, the attraction to thoughtfulness and analytical orderliness is always connected in him with inspiration: "intuitive and rational always lend a hand to each other. Inspiration is absolutely inseparable from creativity - and here one must not fall into either hypocrisy or self-deception" [5, p. 64]. The composer, feeling the priority of the rational principle in his work ("the rational is always at hand"), at the same time considered the emotional impulse extremely important and creatively necessary. Schnittke emphasized the inseparability of the categories of sensual and rational, the close interaction of both principles that determine any artistic process, and, therefore, appealed to the concept of "sensual" (from the works of M. Roerich). In the composer's conceptual thinking, both the symbolic aspect and unlimited musical-emotional resources, which reveal the specificity of the content of his music, coexist in the ultimate expression.

The appeal to chamber-vocal genres in the work of Schnittke becomes a permanent feature of his individual authorial style, which is confirmed by the appearance of the first romances written in a traditionalist manner back in the years of his studies at the conservatory, and then, throughout his entire creative biography, the appeal to this genre sphere with special attention to the verbal component of the works, to the exact embodiment of the semantic and emotional embodiment of the literary text in music.

Schnittke scrupulously tries to reproduce in his music all the nuances of the psychological states and artistic images of the heroes of the selected literary works, and following the poetic text, reproduces bright and convincing psychological portraits of the heroes. The composer refers to the poetic texts of M. Tsvetaeva, B. Pasternak, V. Schnittke, Aeschylus (translated into German), F. Schiller, F. Tanzer, H. Narekatsi, and many others, finding a unique musical embodiment for each of the texts, which expresses his personal attitude to the text.

In general, one can say that all of Schnittke's music is autobiographical, connected with certain thoughts and experiences that troubled the composer at the time of working on the piece.

One of the most revealing characteristics and parameters of the artistic integrity of the artist's chamber and vocal music is the close dialogic interaction of its equal components - the verbal and musical levels, which finds its direct expression in the structural-compositional and dramaturgical components of the works.

The instrumental composition of chamber and vocal opuses is very diverse in terms of composition and timbre embodiment, because it includes a wide palette of instrumental voices - from keyboard instruments, including piano, organ, harpsichord, to

electric guitars and bass guitars, which are uncharacteristic for the academic direction of musical art. In addition, string, wind, and percussion instruments become permanent members of chamber and vocal ensembles.

Thus, the interaction of the verbal-poetic and musical levels in chamber-vocal creativity reveals two approaches to solving this problem - in the first one, one observes the most accurate observance of all the nuances and features of the poetic text with the desire for the most complete disclosure of its content-emotional side; in the second, there is a fairly free handling of the poetic text, possible permutations (even replacements) of words, notes, repetition, etc., that is, the composer becomes to some extent a co-author of the poetic text, considers it as one of the means of musical expressiveness available to him.

The appearance of the chamber-vocal cycle "Three poems by Marina Tsvetaeva" in the work of Schnittke is extremely representative, because it is not only the first work in the composer's work written in the genre of "poems with music", but also the first chamber-vocal work in his creativity in general. Characterizing his own work, Schnittke points out that the period 1963-1967 was associated with the active use of dodecaphony and serialism, "when there was a belief in the correctness of the technique" [6, p. 32].

Schnittke calls the main compositional basis of his compositional method "sonorous, ear-controlled technique" in combination with attention to the intonation-textural richness of the musical text [6, p. 23]. He tried to avoid excessive stylistic tightness by introducing allusive hints into the sound fabric, since "his personal musical thinking is characterized by a verbal associative component in the presentation of a musical image and idea" [6, p. 23].

The composer believed that working with verbal-poetic texts is the most difficult, because poetic texts have their own structural-compositional and figurative-semantic logic, which must be taken into account, that led to the almost complete rejection of the dodecaphonic technique in this work. Schnittke considered the combination of a poetic word with dodecaphony to be unnatural, because the use of dodecaphony implies compliance with its strict norms and rules, which will have an extremely negative effect on the verbal and poetic level – "a word does not combine well with dodecaphony, because it itself determines everything else" [6, p. 32].

So, one can say that in the cycle "Three poems by Marina Tsvetaeva" Schnittke consciously departs from dodecaphony, putting forward as his main task the exact observance of all the nuances of the poetic word - both in the structural-compositional and figurative-semantic dimensions.

After the forced emigration, during the period of long wanderings abroad, characteristic words appear in the poet's poetic dictionary: roads and versts, wind and night, insomnia and crying. The general emotional color of the poetic lines also changes - they are filled with dark colors: gray, blue, black, as well as red.

In "Three Poems by Marina Tsvetaeva", Schnittke demonstrates an extremely careful attitude to the poetic word and strives to reproduce it in all the smallest nuances in his cycle. The poems of Maryna Tsvetaeva selected by the composer, although they belong to different periods of the poetess's work, make up a single literary composition. "My simple posture" was written in 1920, "Black as a pupil" - in 1916, and the poem "Cut veins" (Russian: "Vskryla zhyly"), which completes the cycle, was written in 1934. Each of the selected poems carries the mood and thoughts of different periods of Tsvetaeva's life.

As the composer admitted: "... the text created the form here: the repeated lines led to analogies in the music as well, the text contained meaningful climaxes, and, therefore, also the musical ones, and the text gave a connection to all this", so the cycle itself was created "freely and, as it were, involuntarily" [9, p. 41].

So, adherence to visual techniques leads Schnittke to abandon the traditional manner of singing, from belcanto. The composer is more attracted by figurative and intonational contrasts, which are more typical of spoken language. Hence the decision to use all the possibilities of the musical fabric, sometimes creating new characteristic techniques for this: on the one hand, wide jumps to dissonant intervals, on the other - second moves narrowing down to microchromatics. For the voice, as for playing the piano strings, the composer uses an approximate pitch. Singing is carried out on certain sounds, as close as possible to a conversation.

But, of course, such innovations in chamber-vocal creativity could not but cause certain difficulties in the performance of such a text, which arise not only in the field of vocal intonation (wide jumps to intervals across the octave; ornate chromatic turns, etc.), but also in terms of fulfilling the special technical requirements of the composer, determined by the modern musical vocabulary. In this regard, at the end of romances (as in many instrumental opuses - symphonic and chamber), the author provides detailed accompanying explanations regarding the principles and the necessary manner of performance (this applies to both vocal and instrumental parts).

#### 4 Conclusion

The performed analysis allows concluding that the principle of "generalization through the genre", presented in Schnittke's works as a kind of montage of genre models, becomes the leading principle of the musical embodiment of a complex dramatic solution in a polystylistic work. At the same time, it is not the individual composer's interpretation of individual genres that acquires decisive importance, but rather the reconstruction of models of selected genres as intonation-semantic unities that have settled in the process of a long historical and cultural development, giving in crystallized intonation forms an expression of a stable, generally significant content. Based on the genre of the Baroque era, ancient forms, the principle of concert and instrumentation, Schnittke fills his compositions with modern trends and means of expression, which makes it possible for interpreters, listeners and connoisseurs of musical art to re-read the old genre. Schnittke's work represents an extensive material, both from a musicological and performing point of view, and previously unknown vocal works by Schnittke would expand the pedagogical and performing repertoire. To comprehensively study his works, an integrated approach is needed that combines general aesthetic, source study, historical-style and system-genre methods of analysis.

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