

## TRENDS OF MODERN CHORAL CREATIVITY IN UKRAINE: A VIEW IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

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**Abstract:** The article reveals the current state of choral art in Ukraine, as well as analyzes the transformations characteristic of choral performance at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries, and also affirms the fact that the meaningful activity of choirs has always demonstrated a certain systemic nature. The features of creative experiments and genre modalities are considered. The process of expansion of stage space, synthesis of arts, author's interpretations is analyzed. Also, the conclusion is made that one of the directions for further analytical research in the field of modern choral creativity is the revision of pedagogical attitudes and methodological approaches: the interaction of academic education, digital technologies, individual author's methods, and creative experiments.

**Keywords:** Ukraine; choir; modern choral creativity; musical and cultural trends; choral performance.

### 1 Introduction

The history of the development of the choral arts demonstrates the colossal path that choral art and choral creativity have taken, forming numerous performing and conducting schools, stylistic branches, methods of embodying and developing the composer's thought, as well as accumulating choral studies, theoretical, methodical, performance-historical materials and developments.

As N. Belik-Zolotaryova rightly pointed out, the analysis of modern choral studies literature allows concluding that such issues as the interaction of theory and practice in choral performance, the professionalization of choral art, the generalization of experience accumulated over centuries, and the search for new means of expression, both in choral compositional creativity and in choral performance practice, are relevant today [1]. The methodological focus of Ukrainian choral studies is evidenced by the works devoted to the analysis of choral literature, the study of the history of choral performance, issues of interpretation of compositions for the choir, problems of the specifics of working with children's, amateur, and professional groups (V. Zhivov "Choral performance: theory, methodology, practice" (2003), I. Gulesco "National choral style" (1994), O. Bench "Ukrainian choral singing" (2002), L. Butenko "Opera and choral performance" (2002), A. Lashchenko "From the history of the Kyiv choral school" (2007), Yu. Kalyniuk "Spiritual constants of the conductor's creative personality" (2007), Yu. Puchko "Contemporary choral music: to the problem of interpretation" (2007), Ye. Bondar "Modern choral creativity: intonation and expressive dimension" (2018), I. Shatov "Historical and stylistic foundations of the Odessa choral school" (2021), etc.). At the same time, the contemporary period of creation in the choral genre has been little researched and, in our opinion, deserves special and meticulous attention, because a) it is always difficult to analyze things and phenomena that are at a close distance, because from the details, from the partial, the general and the big can be overlooked; b) namely the close distance to the object and the subject of research guarantees the effect of maximum "immersion", and, therefore, provides the possibility of practical justification and understanding of processes "from the inside", instead of operating with abstract and imaginary categories.

Over the last decades of the 20th and early 21st centuries, many high-class choral compositions have been created that could become an object of study for modern musical science. The choral composition is specially studied in a complex way from the point of view of its creation and performance. The specific features characteristic of it are presented in a systematic way. Among them, there are the genre basis, the interaction of musical and verbal series, choral instrumentation, musical material, elements of choral theater. Despite the fact that many scientific

works are devoted to the consideration of genres, shaping, harmonic and polyphonic techniques, composition techniques of the 20th century, the problems associated with the performance of modern music, including choral music, have not yet been fully explored. In thinking about these issues, there are a number of factors to consider regarding the constituents of the concept of choral art (poet, composer, choir, conductor, listeners) and their functional features.

### 2 Materials and Method

The methodological basis of the study implies historical and civilizational approach, as well as study of the essence of the phenomenon of Ukrainian choral art in the context of cultural studies. In the course of the work, the following methods were used: comparative-historical; causal and retrospective analysis of musicological and art history, psychological, pedagogical and methodological literature; critical reflection and generalization of literary, archival, and journalistic sources; analysis, processing and systematization of historical facts; study and analysis of state programs on the subjects "conducting", "choral practice", "choral literature", "choir studies", "choir class", "theory and methods of choral conducting" of music schools, colleges, and universities of Ukraine. The theoretical and methodological basis of the study includes the principles of cognition, reflected in the systemic, cultural, and logical approaches.

### 3 Results and Discussion

The meaningful activity of choral groups has always demonstrated a certain systematicity. In academic literature, it is traditionally defined according to the following positions:

- The principles of functioning, i.e., the charter of the collective, its executive profile. In choral literature, it is customary to distinguish amateur, educational, professional, church, theater (opera) choirs, chapels, song and dance ensembles;
- Type and nature of sound production. It is traditional to single out choral groups and ensembles of the academic, authentic, folklore-reproductive, pop-jazz type;
- The type of choir, which is determined by the qualitative and quantitative composition of voices. Academic choral studies indicate homogenous and mixed choirs, monophonic, two-voice, etc., polyphonic presentations;
- Repertory policy of the team (availability of accompanied and unaccompanied works, spiritual, folk, operatic and choral orientation, etc.).

The analysis of choral works of the last quarter of the 20th - beginning of the 21st century indicates the following essential changes in these specified points:

- The principles of functioning, i.e., the charter of the collective. In practical concert activity, one can say that this boundary is erased (at least according to external signs), because any collective according to these charters - amateur, educational, professional, church - is subject to complex executive tasks. In fact, the defined distinction remains from the side of financial support of the process and in determining the main goal of the team's functioning, but for the listener who came to the concert performance, these details remain overlooked;
- The type and character of sound production (academic, authentic, folk-reproductive, pop) cease to be a significant, definitive feature in determining the collective's sphere of activity. We encounter a movement in which collectives prefer to demonstrate the greatest possible range of performance, and therefore in practical activity we increasingly encounter the facts of mixing/juxtaposition/dialogue of types of sound production. The criterion remains professionalism and mastery in mastering various types of sound production, because the problem of

professional injuries, which is associated with the difference in singing technology and the need for quick "switching", is becoming significant;

- c) The type and kind of choir, which is determined by the qualitative and quantitative composition of voices, also loses its position in determining the meaningful activity of a choral group, because in a concert performance of a separate choral group, works can be performed only by a female (or male) composition, an ensemble, a chamber ensemble, or a full the composition of the choir. Moreover, in the qualitative requirements of individual competitions, there is a mark that a singing group is considered a choir of 12 people (that is, the organizers focus on the minimum number of singers);
- d) Repertoire policy of the collective (availability of works with accompaniment, unaccompanied, spiritual, folk, operatic and choral orientation, etc.) receives the maximum genre and style expansion. We increasingly meet with an opera choir that participates in concert (rather than stage) performance; instead, educational or chamber choirs take part in the staging of stage actions; folk choirs sing Western European classical music (see, for example, "Requiem" by V. A. Mozart performed by the National Academic Folk Choir named after H. Veriovka), etc.

By the end of the 20s of the 21st century, we are witnessing an even greater expansion of all "powers".

While the last quarter of the 20th century opened all the 'floodgates' in choral art and passed under the conditional motto "Surprise me!", the first two decades of the 21st century, in our opinion, not only continued this direction, but also the virtualization of society turned on a new lever - "Interest me!" and as one of the consequences, in particular for virtual projects - "Involve me!". Choral creativity has received a previously impossible range:

- 1) The maximum field for the embodiment of the professional tradition (in the genre field - from the systematic regency work in the liturgical ritual to project choral activity and project competition performances; in the forms of work - from chamber choirs to choral chapel and further to show choirs; in performance and style angles - from a single singing manner to a declaration of the universalism of the chorister's vocal and choral capabilities, etc.);
- 2) Unlimited space for creative experimentation with its exits to the phenomena of artistic and stylistic synthesis, and the emphasized importance of improvisation as a partially intuitive creative decision, or, to put it another way, artistic and creative insight (according to Karl Buhler's terminology).

At the same time, namely this creative range shaped the need to understand both the phenomena that are already taking place and the prospects for the development of choral creativity. Moreover, the analysis and understanding of these new tendencies and trends will mean reaching new levels in the composing, performing, and educational conducting choral field.

In the article of psychologist S. Khilko for 2016, we find: "professional activity /.../ is not only a means of existence, but also the dominant sphere of development and self-realization of an individual who is able to act effectively in modern conditions. And the modern world today can be characterized as quite unmanageable, non-deterministic, unpredictable and uncertain, and the implementation of any creative professional activity is associated with both external uncertainty (social, political, economic problems of society) and internal uncertainty (the search for the meaning of activity, finding clear, defined criteria of activity)" [3].

In modern choral work, the biggest "situation of uncertainty" for both the composer, the performer, and the listener is precisely the openness to any steps and interactions. The situation of uncertainty, according to psychologist P. Lushin [5], implies that at the moment of choice - in our case, a creative choice - it is impossible to understand which option will be more effective, or

successful, or, in the language of art, more impressive and artistically convincing. A number of questions arise: Will the special acoustic arrangement of the choir be successful? Or the involvement of a video series? Or choreography? Or installations? Should we make a virtual choir or a choir clip? And this series of questions can be continued for a long time.

Among the leading trends of choral creativity in the performance field of the beginning of the 21st century, in the pre-pandemic and pre-war period, we identified the following:

- a) Tendency to search for new meanings, new performing versions in the reading of any choral genres;
- b) Expansion of the functions of choristers from the role of a singer-chorister to a performer-actor, a participant in a stage performance; emphasizing the role of the performer as a confident co-author of the artistic text of the work;
- c) Overcoming the general static nature of the choir and the attraction to theatricalization;
- d) "Play with genre" (for example: high-quality vocal and choral reproduction - imitation of orchestral music) and "play with style" or "play in style", where the team's performance demonstrates mastery of stylistic subtleties of music of various directions, a dialogue of singing schools and vocal mannerisms, etc. (see in detail [2]).

In addition, the analysis of the activities of modern successful choral and vocal-choir collectives proved the presence and diversity of extremely interesting interpretive and stylistic techniques and conducting strategies:

- a) On the one hand, there is attraction to the authenticity of the performance, immersion in a certain style (we recall the choir of the project "Musica sacra Ukraina: partesnyi mezion" under the direction of Nataliya Khmelevska), and on the other hand, the rejection of the "purity" of vocal and choral styles, as well as the involvement of techniques of household sound production (let us remind f Yu. Alzhnev's "Singings" performed by the "Kyiv" chamber choir under the direction of M. Hobdych, where both academic singing and folk manners, exclamations, and everyday spoken dialogue were used);
- b) Emphasizing genre modalities that allow the conductor to act as an active co-author in the creation of the Artistic Text of the work, depending on the performance edition, conditions of performance, composition of performers, etc. (for example, the premiere of the mystery "Christmas Action" by L. Dychko at the Odesa Opera in 2015, where the production group led by the conductor Valery Regrut and the director Oksana Taranenko actually managed to blur the boundaries between oratorio, opera, nativity play);
- c) The presentation of the recorded and electronically processed layering of voices as a type of new creativity that destroys the very origins and essence of choral creativity (for example, we recall the diptych of I. Aleksyichuk "Otherworldly Games" (2008) - a mystery-action based on a poem by Olena Stepanenko for a cappella women's choir, an electronic recording, organ, didgeridoo and percussion, or "Requiem-quartet" by E. Petrchenko for flute, violin, cello, piano and a phonogram of authentic singing (2007) or even Janet Cardiff's audio installation "Forty Part Motet" (2015), where the Canadian artist represents a 16th-century motet by Thomas Tully: forty individually recorded voices were played through the same number of speakers arranged around the concert hall);
- d) The interaction of academic (choral, theatrical, choreographic) and relatively new (cinematographic, light, media) forms of art (for example, let us point to one of the first choral music videos - Kyrie by Uusberg Pärt in the creative work of the Zhytomyr "Oreya" under the direction of Oleksandr Vacek or recall a Honda Civic commercial with a soundtrack performed by a large a cappella choir);
- e) The use of computer programs and cooperation with sound engineers as a new alternative reality of creating and being of works for ensemble and choral performance (it is not only about the possibility to create new sounds or the

illusion of live sound, but also the possibility to transform sounds recorded from live sound, integrating these sounds in a composition or a live performance);

- f) The use of the Internet space as a new concert and competition platform with 24/7 access.

The analysis of the peculiarities of the scenic representativeness of works in modern choral creativity reveals a multi-syllabic structure characteristic of music-theatrical productions (performances), namely: author's idea, conductor's and director's vision-reading, vocal-acting embodiment, artistic design (costumes, scenery, props, light) and the corresponding listener (spectator) reaction.

Thus, not only the personality of the composer can be attributed to the category of "author" in the modern creative space. All direct participants in the artistic and intonation process receive a certain role of co-author. In addition, modern choral performance confidently demonstrates the need for choristers with the capabilities of a universal performer, and this already puts new demands on the professional education of a student-choirmaster. In particular, there is a need to revise the settings in the formation and processing of the repertoire of the choral class, classes in the profession, choral solfeggio, vocals, and there is also a need to introduce new subjects that would meet the requirements of the digital space. The most difficult point is the balance, the interaction between the instructions of the choirmaster's academic education and the latest approaches and methods.

It would seem that the specified range of modern choral creativity is so significant that our stated conditional motto for the beginning of the 21st century – "Get me interested!" – can work for a long time. But the social world events of the last two years of the pandemic, and especially the war, created new challenges, first of all, for Ukrainian choral artists.

Analyzing the border between the 20th and 21st centuries, we traced the extraordinary expansion of the performing palette in choral work, pointed out certain changes in the functions of the participants in the creative process, and in fact, briefly outlined it above. But today, at the end of 2022, and especially with regard to Ukrainian choral art, we can say the following: everything has changed and for everyone. Namely:

- Choral collectives of Ukraine have lost a more or less permanent composition of performers (on the one hand, this is connected with the evacuation of people, on the other hand, with the fact that highly qualified choristers and musicians have arrived in some cities and replenished the composition of creative collectives, but again, it is not clear for what period of time);
- All collectives in the pandemic period and some collectives in the war months lost the very fact of systematic collective rehearsal work, and even more so concert or competition one;
- Considering all the above reasons, as well as taking into account the high probability of changes (transport operation, subjective human circumstances, economic levers, etc.), it is not possible to plan the work of teams according to the usual principle, for example for a year;
- The functions of the participants in the process have also undergone significant changes:
- The leader of the choir must show himself as a multi-faceted multi-specialist: already known functions – conductor, chorister, arranger, director, producer, manager, producer – are added with new ones, such as sound and video director, sometimes editor, and also manager and even in some respects a psychologist;
- A chorister, in addition to the fact that he must possess not only a certain vocal and choral technique, singing skills in several manners, acting skills, also must possess the technical skills of recording the part, as well as the skills of analyzing and independently correcting performance and technical errors.

If to focus on what concerns live broadcasting, recorded concerts, or the formation of virtual choirs on the model of E. Whitaker, then the viewer will deal with the screen, and choral art, thus, appears in the same row as other objects of the screen culture, and therefore must "follow the rules" of the genre. For now, it is still unknown whether choral art benefit from that, and whether it will be possible for this art to become interactive.

Let us emphasize that Internet art and interactive art in themselves are a declaration of changes and, at the same time, they are a big question, both in the field of music psychology (in the categories of thinking, influence, dialogue, interaction, etc.), and in the field of choral creativity itself (as "an organized type of detection of singing intonation and artistic activity of a group of people, aimed at creating spiritual values" [2]). At the moment, we are offered a concert action that is localized in time, and not in the space of the concert hall, not "in the moment of presence", but in the Internet space with unlimited access both in time and in the number of repetitions-viewings. It is not yet clear whether this new phenomenon of the Internet, or, in other words, virtual culture, will become specifically choral art.

Modern professional challenges require comprehensive 'skills equipment' from the choir master — the ability to work both with ancient music and with over-expressive author's texts, the ability to build concerts of a band style and choral show-concerts, mastery in mastering purely vocal and choral technology, the ability to think both on stage manner and any other public space manner. The last period dictated new, so to speak, "game rules" and artists, for the most part, responded by expanding their creative palette. In other words, deep professional knowledge becomes the foundation for the development of creative activity in a situation of uncertainty under the condition of acceptance and not denial of a new creative reality or a new artistic request.

In the choral culture of recent years, a complex synthesis approach has gained increasingly more importance. "Synthesis", as V. Tarnopolskyi noted, "is the only way in our time". Synthesis is seen as a general principle reference, attitude. In each specific work, this synthesis can be unexpected. It seems to me that precisely due to this, endless possibilities appear and develop" (cited in [2, p. 318]). In fact, everything that is currently happening in choral work demonstrates a synthesis approach, or a synthesis style.

The interesting question is how does the birth of idea of creating, for example, a "choir project" is carried out. "In any process", writes Ksenia Prykhodovska, "one can observe the change of syncretic, analytical, and synthetic phases. In artistic creativity, they correspond to the stages of preliminary design (syncretism), constructive development of the method (analysis), and final design of the finished work (synthesis)" [6, p. 4]. It is worth pointing out that almost at the same time the first impulse disintegrates into a sketch of the work and a certain "cascade" of sketches for it, in which separate approaches emerge, the means become clearer, etc. And while the process of creating monoart includes a certain number of stages that gradually lead us from the syncretic initial impulse to the concretization of the means of expression of this art form in their unique combination, the process of creating synthesis works will require the ability to realize and detail the entire scope of both organizational and executive means of expression, that is, to create "series of correspondences" of all components. At the same time, the characteristics of these "series" may vary depending on the supporting or additional function of each of them in each specific presentation of the work. In our opinion, it is important for a modern artist to realize that even on the basis of the choral (from the beginning) author's text, readings are possible, where the "supporting" and "additional" can change their accents. That is why today we see a palette of live concerts on the same level with virtual choirs, choral clips and projects that have changed their status from "additional" genre activity of choirs to, sometimes, the only possible one – virtual, which allows staying in the artistic space and, at the same time, on a physical level, to be safe. Yu.M. Lotman, analyzing the thesis about the

experience of negative emotions, notes that namely the withdrawal of one's behavior beyond the framework of the model, the emphasis on the insignificant, becomes one of the main conditions for survival and victory, and the ability to constructive activity in conditions of uncertainty helps it [a person] to survive [4].

So, the well-known activity typology of choral conductors - rationalistic, emotional, intellectual, analytical (hermeneutic), theatrical-game (performance), entrepreneurial (project) – can be added by the latest ones: media director (in other words, the one who has clip thinking and the ability to work in this direction), crisis-creative (able to work effectively in new, unstructured, ambiguous situations, in conditions of lack of information and human resources, show resistance to influence the uncertainty factor of both the external and internal environment).

In addition, given the trends of creating virtual choirs, online concerts, etc., perhaps for the first time we are dealing with a unique phenomenon, when the author and leader of a creative project is not an elected or appointed conductor-choirmaster, but a creative leader who is able to arouse interest in the project and has a vision of the final product and its purpose in the media space, having professional choirs and technical capabilities and skills.

It is possible to enable “order through chaos”, sensitivity to external events and attention to their images in the inner world of a person, erasing any boundaries in the process of uniting the participants of the creative process, organizing conditions for the transition to a new context of self-organization and self-development, and these are the overarching tasks of modern period both for the conductor-choirmaster and for all participants in choral work.

One of the directions for further analytical research in the field of modern choral work is the review of pedagogical attitudes and methodological approaches: the interaction of academic education, digital technologies, individual author's methods, creative experiments is a necessary platform for achieving results in the training of choral students that can meet the requirements for creativity in modern choral art.

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#### Primary Paper Section: A

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