

POST-MODERN MEANING OF MUSICAL ART

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ABSTRACT *Post-modernism which has penetrated every sphere of being found vast space and fertile soil in music. Post-modern music is a qualitatively new event. This is proved by the syntheses of musical vocabulary, different artistic layers and structures.*

KEYWORDS: Post-Modernism, Music, Intertextuality, Double Coding, Eclecticism

INTRODUCTION

The aim of the study is to characterize post-modern music on the bases of those features, that are characteristic of the post-modern epoch.

While discussing the meaning of post-modern music we, at least, at this stage, will rely on the external characteristic features. It must be noted as well that since music due to its specificity differs from other arts, historically its “behavior” is rather “willful” and it is reluctant to walk in step with other arts. Thus, even today, there is an important difference between events which can be labelled as post-modern in literature, painting, architecture or theatre and musical “analogues” of those events.

Therefore it is more justified to speak about post-modern epoch in music and explain the whole variety of events according to the form and type of revealing general characteristic features of the epoch.

As it is known the main characteristic features of the post-modern discourse as well as of the means of organizing the post-modern culture are intertextuality, double coding, eclecticism.

Let’s discuss how they are represented in post-modern music.

It should be noted as well that these post-modern characteristics which are given in various modifications complement each other and turn into each other.

1. Intertextuality as a method of creating works of art is one of the coordinating features of post-modernism when the author deliberately exploits different verbal as well as non-verbal techniques borrowed from other arts.

We should note that intertext is much more than simply a sum of texts; it is a cultural-historical code, a means of perceiving and rendering verbal as well as non-verbal texts. Intertextuality as a method of artistic thinking most fully is revealed in artistic practices of post-modernism.

In musical art the post-modern condition is met by Giya Kancheli’s musical works whose essence and meaning can adequately be understood only in the context of post-

modern characteristics which are given in various modifications complement each other and turn into each other.

Composer Giya Kancheli is the most important Georgian composer of the past 50 years, and one of the most significant international composers of the past century. He is noted for the strong dramatic structure of his ambitious orchestral works, many of which contain deeply spiritual themes. His richly textured music is imbued with influences from Georgian folk music, American jazz, and twentieth-century Russian composers, with musical phrasings that alternate between sparse and climactic. Along with other Soviet-era composers such as Arvo Part, Erkki-Sven Tuur, Alfred Schnittke, and Sophia Gubaidulina, Kancheli was determined to dramatize the oppression endured by artists under Soviet rule, while finding solace and strength in spirituality.

Conceptual character of Kancheli's works is based on lexical and corpus intertextuality which in a range of cases reveals itself not only on the level of particular compositional techniques but on the level of invisible ties with the tradition as well.

Its lexical intertextuality is linked to that sphere of traditional music which is associated with experiencing of sublime, divine-religious and eternal and functions according to the principle of parallel installation due to its initial genre image and emotional tone (e.g. a tape-recorded chant in *magnum ignatum*).

“Alien text” burdened with its original semantics and aesthetics enters Kancheli's works and is nourished by various sources of intertextual relations (I.Stravinsky, K.Penderetski, A.Schnittke, Verdi-Puccini, J.Kakhidze, B.Kvernadze, etc.), and its original artistic attitude stands out through interrelation and communication of these sources. “Art first of all is communication and this communication should be understood not in the aspect of everyday life but as a mark of spiritual relationship and of the necessity to exchange and share ideas”.

This is the attitude accepted by G.Kancheli who strives to embrace the values accumulated by the humanity in synchronic as well as diachronic aspect and, on the bases of his own traditions, compose music which is distinguished by its originality.

2. Double coding is a principle which is characteristic of the post-modern culture and means coincidence and merging of two different and inappropriate verbal codes (in the widest sense of meaning), discourses and stylistics. This notion was introduced into scientific literature by a British architect and art theorist Charles Jencks who emphasized that post-modern architecture is based on merging and coinciding of classical tradition and modern Avant-garde. Such future tendency of art and culture was pointed at by Hans-Georg Gadamer, father of philosophical hermeneutics. He thought that art of the future was to coordinate classics with Avant-garde. Post-modernism speaks the language of such double coding: it at the same time speaks the language of classics and Avant-garde. Nevertheless, it is possible to interpret double coding more widely and present it as combining any verbal codes. In general, it can be said that any eclectic art based on combining of differences, according to its essence is an example of double, triple, four-fold etc. “coding”.

In post-modern music double coding is expressed on the level of the conception and idea of the musical piece as well as on the level of musical-expressive means and is based on the aesthetics and polystilistics of game used as a means and principle of thinking.

Alongside with double coding post-modern music is characterized by eclecticism which on its part is linked to intertextuality as well as double coding.

3. Eclecticism – eclecticism, a word of Greek origin which means “to choose, select”, implies performing intentional operations, “looking for new in old” and is a common thing, for example, in architecture (order styles). “In the age of post-modernism the semiotic border of the problem of eclecticism is associated with presenting an artistic text as having “double code” which is simultaneously given for different levels of perception (listener, reader, and spectator)”. The new attitude to a musical text demanded ready semantically important material from authors. This goal is served by symbolic, semantic personified thematicism, which according to its “genre” and “style” becomes an object of generalization. That is why the most important task of the “directorial” approach of the composer is to choose material – often even “alien” material – which greatly depends on the author’s spiritual and intellectual experience and his/her professional competence. “Playing” with genre and style, selection of ready material in the form of citations, collage, allusions and stylization turn into a specific means in the process of forming author’s conception; stylistic generalization, stylistic pluralism and polystylism make it possible to fully exploit listener’s associative thinking, his/her artistic experience and intelligence.

The mode of organizing the selected material in time – or the dramaturgical and form-creating principle – is an important means of realizing the idea in a musical piece. The composer’s “directorial” conception strives to be original, since musical material as well as the techniques can be “alien” and “second hand”. These specific features of a musical piece together with the individuality of its author are revealed most clearly on the syntactical, morphological level. Musical practice of the past two hundred years demonstrated that in comparison to intonation sphere, the sphere of form-creating is less susceptible to the “novelties” of the epoch. This situation radically changes in the twentieth century since it is just the sphere of the composer, which undergoes cardinal renovation under the influence of different principles of organizing artistic time. The fact that directorial intention of the composer by necessity contains compositional-dramaturgical “novelty” is the result of the described situation.

Thus, in contemporary music, formation of a new artistic language which is based on the new eclecticism typical for post-modernism, does not mean passive exploitation of someone other’s stylistic signs or wide dissemination of the sound norms acceptable for everyone (it is the priority of pop culture). Approaching a new degree of style, in compositional professionalism, means wide scale of development, continuous search of new language and genre forms. It is just in result of their perfection that “new classicism” and accordingly the possibility of individualization of style emerge.

In Jonathan Kramer’s words, ‘postmodernism is a maddeningly imprecise musical concept...

Does postmodernism react against or continue the project of modernist music? Is postmodern art original, or does it recycle older music? Is it serious or frivolous? (Jonathan D. Kramer; 2002. P. 13) He goes on to say, ‘for some critics, postmodernism’s defining compositional practice is its deliberate attempt to reach out by using procedures and materials audiences are believed to relish: diatonicism, singable melodies, metric regularity, foot-tapping rhythms, tonality and/ or consonant harmonies. In the context of the contemporary art music scene in Australia in the 1980s and 1990s, this definition has some merit. One of the main criticisms of the composers on the postmodern side of the argument was that they were pandering to mainstream tastes by using an outdated musical language. Kramer, however, does not accept this definition of postmodernism, instead using the term ‘antimodernist’ to describe composers ‘yearning for the golden ages of classicism and romanticism’. It is perhaps most useful to think of antimodernism as one stand of postmodernism, with the return to classical or romantic musical language being just one possible manifestation of a postmodern outlook. In attempting to define postmodern music, Kramer outlines 16 characteristics, the most relevant to this research being that ‘postmodern music: (1) is not simply a repudiation of modernism or its continuation, but has aspects of both a break and extension; ... (4) challenges barriers between “high” and “low” styles; ... (8) considers music not as autonomous but as a way to preserve and transmit music but also as deeply implicated in the production and essence of music; and (14) encompasses pluralism and eclecticism.’ (Jonathan D. Kramer; 2002. P. 16)

“Contemporary post-modernism acts in the field of tension existing between tradition and innovation, conservation and renovation, mass-culture and high art where those that come second do not mechanically excel those that are the first”. (Nicole; 2002. P. 66). Hence, the contemporary post-modern artists are no less interested in the so-called “mass-culture” or “pop-culture” than in the so-called “high culture” because they think that the latter by no way excels the first and vice versa.

As early as 1938, Theodor Adorno had already identified a trend toward the dissolution of “a culturally dominant set of values” (Beard and Gloag; 2005. P. 141), (Beard and Gloag support this position, citing Jameson’s theory that “the radical changes of musical styles and languages throughout the 1960s [are] now seen as a reflection of postmodernism” (Beard and Gloag; 2005. P. 142 see also Harvey 1990).) citing the commodification of all genres as beginning of the end of genre or value distinctions in music (Adorno; 2002. P. 293–95).

Theodor Adorno (1903-1969) who dedicated many works to the issue of philosophy of music, in particular to philosophy of classic music (Beethoven, Wagner, Mahler), noted that “masses are the most ruthless enemies of the true art”. According to him, “it is the privilege of the minority (Adorno stresses that such a group is “socially unimportant”) to comprehend the really highly artistic while the largest part of the society is a passive consumer of standardized and weakened banalities. Such consumers have neither any real interest towards art nor any creative abilities. They are ballast for music and dangerous ballast in addition, since if on the one hand musical industry intentionally forms such consumers (as loyal consumers of its production), on the other hand, consumers themselves react to musical industry, enhance the process of its standardization, further exhausting art of any thoughts; thus due to these processes music consequently loses its ability to grasp the reality.

Postmodernist music is generally less elitist, than modernist music, much of which appeals to a relatively small audience of initiates –people who know how to appreciate atonality, jagged melodies, irregular rhythms, asymmetrical meters, pungent dissonances, and so on.

But postmodern music rarely achieves the total over-throw of elitism. By incorporating popular music into symphonic compositions, for example, postmodern composers do not really create pop symphonies so much as they embrace pop while preserving its otherness. Its effectiveness in a symphony derives in part from the fact that it does not totally belong there. (Jonathan D. Kramer; 2002. P. 24)

Post-modern art is in search of new forms and neglects its traditional forms and criteria. Specificity of post-modern aesthetics is related to non-classical interpretation of the classical tradition. It is characterized by pluralistic aesthetic paradigm, non-systematism, absence of tenets and rules; it does not recognize rigidity and closeness of conceptual schemes.

CONCLUSIONS

Therefore, in post-modern culture we encounter such events, which do not fit the unanimously admitted norms and consequently do not comply with one “code” of development of artistic creation. In spite of this, they perform a certain “cultural mission” on every stage of development and enhance the process of change and renovation. Contemporary culture and culture of the past century as well as musical art have revealed such layers of artistic thinking which are distinguished by complex and multi-aspect ambiguous interrelations. Pluralism of different aesthetic ideals, creative ideas and artistic styles characteristic of Post-modernism is reflected in contemporary music. This pluralism gave rise to a variety of ambivalent expressive means and methods. Their conceptual premises are “common cultural codes” which determine specific characteristic of the composer’s style and the poetics of his/her artistic system.

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