

**ON WAGNER AND SUBSTITUTE REPRIZES...
HOMAGE TO VLADIMIR AXIONOV — A LECTURER OF THE
HISTORY
OF WESTERN MUSIC¹**

**DESPRE WAGNER ȘI REPRIZELE FALSE...
OMAGIU PROFESORULUI DE ISTORIA MUZICII OCCIDENTALE —
VLADIMIR AXIONOV**

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The essay recollects personal experience of the author as one of the former students of Vladimir Axionov's course "History of Romantic Music". Axionov's style of lecturing and his understanding of the discipline are exemplified by his rendition of Siegfried's Trauermarch from Richard Wagner's Der Götterdämmerung. It discusses Axionov's personal magnetism in combination with his robust knowledge, overwhelming erudition, eloquence and rhetorical talent. The author addresses such prominent merits of Axionov as a lecturer as his pursuing the authenticity and precision in enunciation of musical and verbal text; historicism and an emphasis on social, cultural and aesthetical issues; the ideological aspect of his discussion; openness and professional integrity; and consideration of moral dilemmas and "forbidden" themes. Axionov's "style of music history pedagogy" is thus viewed as one that endeavored to add new dimensions to the discipline's profile.

Keywords: Richard Wagner, "Der Götterdämmerung", music history pedagogy, new musicology, music and ideology, politics

Acest eseu reflectă experiența personală a autoarei, una din fostele studente ale lui Vladimir Axionov la cursul de Istorie a muzicii romantice. Stilul de predare al profesorului V. Axionov și înțelegerea disciplinei sunt exemplificate prin intermediul analizei Marșului funebru al lui Siegfried din "Der Götterdämmerung" de Richard Wagner. Articolul face referință la

¹ Here we follow closely the author's principle of presenting the bibliographical referents

trăsăturile carismatice ale lui V. Axionov, la cunoștințele sale profunde, la erudiția coplesitoare, la elocvența și la talentul său retoric. Autoarea remarcă meritele proeminente ale lui V. Axionov în calitatea sa de pedagog; relevă talentul de a evidenția autenticitatea și precizia atât a enunțului musical cât și a textului literar. Profesorul V. Axionov este apreciat pentru istorismul gândirii sale, pentru dexteritatea de a pune accent pe probleme sociale, culturale și estetice, pentru sinceritatea și integritatea sa, pentru abilitatea de a aborda dileme morale și teme "interzise". Astfel, stilul pedagogiei istoriei muzicii al profesorului Axionov este apreciat ca unul care aduce noi dimensiuni profilului disciplinei.

Cuvinte-cheie: Richard Wagner, "Der Götterdämmerung", predarea istoriei muzicii, muzicologia nouă, muzică și ideologie, politică

...An aggravating exclamation of the Fate motive (Schicksalskunde Motiv) in the low winds accompanies the heavenly sweet replica "Brünnhilde greets me there! ("Brünnhild' bietet mir Gruss!")". Mysterious tremolo triplets and roaring chromatic scales of the Death motive (Todesmotiv) ... Siegfried recollects his awakening of Brünnhilde and dies [1]. Expressive ascending yell of four tubes falls down by doomed diminished fifths back to the low G. *Tremolo* in the low strings — growing tension — and the entire orchestra bursts into the appalling *c-moll* tonic chord repetitions that alternate with rumbling passages. Siegfried's Funeral March forms the interlude between the penultimate and closing scenes of Wagner's *Der Götterdämmerung* (1874); its music recapitulates many of the themes associated with Siegfried and his family (Wälsungen).

Pathetic choir of Wagnerian tubes and trombones accompanies this tragically exalted procession from the forest back to the Gibichung castle where Brünnhilde is preparing to Siegfried's burial and to the immolation ceremony. She issues orders for a huge funeral pyre to be assembled by Rhein, and tells the Rhein maidens (Rheintöchter) to take the Ring once fire has cleansed it of its curse. The fire flares up, and the hall of the Gibichungs collapses; Rhein overflows its banks, and the Rhein maidens swim in to claim the Ring. Flames flare up in Walhall, where the gods are consumed in the flames. Siegfried's death thus symbolizes the total demolishing of the existing world order...

Without throwing a glance on a keyboard, Vladimir Axionov pathetically plays Siegfried's Funeral Music, simultaneously commenting on its musical structure and the motives semantics. The disastrous collapse of civilization, pathos of the Nibelung mythology penetrates hearts and minds, and generations of students leave the classroom persuaded Wagnerians. In my student years, mythos of Axionov teaching Wagner was one of the favorite themes for the students' outdoor informal discussions. This remains my own strong experience from Axionov' lectures on nineteenth-century "foreign" music, as this course oddly had been entitled in the musicological curriculum during the Soviet period.

Richard Wagner, this volcanically controversial figure in the history of Western culture, was one of Axionov's favorite composers, and he had a special talent to inculcate this Wagneromania in his students. Although he succeeded to endow importance and relevance to any subject he taught (starting from individual composers to general stylistic trends and notions), Wagner was the domain where he emanated special academic, pedagogical and personal magnetism. Axionov's manner of lecturing on Wagner will

help us to recollect his pedagogical method and his personal understanding of the discipline.

Vladimir Axionov was an outstanding and charismatic lecture with robust knowledge, overwhelming erudition, eloquence and rhetorical talent. He declaimed his lectures from written conspectus, elaborating this plan with characteristic enunciation and gesticulation. Neck breaking pace of his declamation notwithstanding, the students usually painstakingly summarized every statement, afterwards ‘recuperating’ after such exhausting tachygraphy sessions. Axionov used to lecture playing themes and motives on the piano and creating a true counterpoint of musical illustration with verbal communication. In an age when long play gramophone recordings were the only way to provide musical demonstration to the textual material, such illustrations were especially effective.

The Music History courses were the only ‘lacuna’ in the entire curriculum where extra-musical subjects could be widely addressed, and where any composition could be considered in its multifarious non-textual facets, beyond purely textual descriptions and analytical discussions of its structure, tonality, harmony, syntax, orchestration and other parameters. Thus the astonishing musical beauty and logic of contrapuntal combinations and linear concatenation of the motives in *Der Ring des Nibelungen* served just a basis for addressing the profound aesthetical and ideological issues. Axionov’s lectures took us far away from a traditional view of Western art music as an assemblage of works and composers isolated from their contexts. They leaned on the premise that Western music has its immanent history, regulated by political and social processes, economic, theological, cultural developments and personal circumstances. Axionov preached that all these factors were of primary importance in any approach to musical composition; they affected technical characteristics of any style and practice even more than autonomous rules, laws and strategies of musical language did [2].

Of course, in the “epoch of mature socialism” these historical aspects could be addressed in quite a limited form: any profound analysis of the structure, content and social function of religious texts proved inappropriate; genuine theories of aesthetical and cultural movements were perverted; many important arguments were deliberately faked in order to support the official doctrine. In addition, the ideological obstacles unable to operate such an important component of historical research as source studies and an authentic morphological analysis. While American and European models of musicology lean on a free access to historical elements of research, this field as it was cultivated in the USSR in the 1970–80s, was deprived from the so-called work *in situ*: in world libraries and archives. Notwithstanding these deficiencies, conceivable in given political-ideological circumstances, Vladimir Axionov always emphasized, that in his approach the historical facets are of primary importance. Some of these principles, as mirrored by his teaching Trauermarch from *Der Götterdämmerung*, are exposed below:

1. Authenticity. Axionov pedantically pronounced names of European cities, aesthetical movements, personal names and professional terms in their authentic enunciation: Mannheim, Bayreuth, Leipzig, Weimar, *Verklärte Nacht*, *Sprechgesang*, *Leitmotiv*, *Stabrheim*, *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, etc.

In those years, the entire doctrine of the Humanities did not embrace foreign languages proficiency, and the erratic pronunciation of foreign words was common. In Russian-language sources, the unauthentic spelling and – accordingly – enunciation, were generally accepted in official textbooks and academic literature, as well as on professional meetings. It appears that the erratic pronunciation of foreign names has been preserved until nowadays, as could be exemplified by some diphthongs marked in the following excerpts from one of the recent sources on Wagner:

Под влиянием своего отчима, актера Людвиг Гейера, Вагнер получил образование в лейпцигской школе Святого Фомы... Что касается влияний различных философов, которые испытал Вагнер, то здесь традиционно называют Фейербаха.... Использование лейтмотивной системы в операх после Вагнера стало тривиальным и всеобщим. ... На западе центром культа Вагнера стала так называемая веймарская школа, сложившаяся вокруг Ф. Листа в Веймаре...etc. [3].

This general situation notwithstanding, Axionov obstinately emphasized the correct pronunciation (Маннхайм, Ляйпцих, Ваймар, *Нюрнбергские майстерзингеры*, etc.) so that it was his version that sounded erratic; over and over again, he kept meticulously correcting the students who obstinately used the official enunciation.

2. Historicism. Vladimir Axionov's preached an approach to Music as a part of social history; this breadth of scope most attracted the students. His vision of musicology enabled to embrace music not just as a fixed text but as a human activity. His historicism, based on the cultivation of broad cultural theories, emphasized the importance of economic, political and social factors that preconditioned the creation of music masterpieces in their final state.

In studying *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, for example, such an approach exposed for the students the economic and administrative conditions of Wagner's employment, architectural details of the Festspielhaus construction, expenses of his dramatic productions and many additional notions ostensibly unrelated to music. Axionov emphasized a relevance of any secondary details, such as Wagner's meticulous stage design description in his scores, as is demonstrated by his remarks that accompany the Siegfried's Trauermarch:

The moon breaks through the clouds and lights up the solemn funeral procession more and more brightly as it reaches the height. Mists have arisen from the Rhine and gradually fill the whole stage where the funeral procession has become invisible: they come quite to the front, so that the whole stage remains hidden during the musical interlude. The mists divide again, until at length the hall of the Gibichungs appear...[4].

It is worth noting that in the 1980s, Western musicology experienced stormy debate around the discipline's future: it was a period of a reaction against positivistic side of musicology and its academic spectrum within the humanities. The main track of this dispute was challenging any orthodoxy in applying traditional methods of positivism and formal analysis and redirecting the discipline in favor of criticism and the application of critical theory to the study of music. The "new musicology"—the designation used for this approach—questioned above all the notion of musical autonomy, considering music

from various cultural perspectives, such as social life and politics, gender and sexuality, race and religion. Coupled with general trends in the humanities, this self-examination led to the challenging of traditional assumptions and the opening of new fields in research by relying upon interdisciplinary perspectives. The musicology's greatest value became "to make its impact felt outside its own domains" as a means to communicate outside the traditional vehicles of academic publication [5].

The Axionov's "style of musicology" that endeavored to add new dimensions to the discipline's profile, thus mirrored the general paradigmatic shift within the discipline.

3. An informal fallacy of historical determinism was basically alien to Axionov's pedagogical and academic method. He avoided statements and conclusions that evaluate given musical composition as a harbinger of any future stylistic developments, events or trends. In their stead, Axionov tended to explore musical phenomenon in its "real time" span, taking the impacts from the past but renouncing to treat it as a precursor of the future.

This important quality should not be taken for granted; the mainstream was a mode of historical analysis in which present-day ideas and cultural artifacts are projected into the past. Various historical misconceptions of determinism permeated academic discourse and were encouraged by the official doctrine that championed the progress as an engine of any developments in art and culture [6]. Axionov renounced to employ the historical priority' consideration that proves itself in social history and natural sciences but is irrelevant in the history of human culture.

4. Ideological volume: Wagner's mythology in *Der Ring* was perceived as a microcosm of his vision of Western civilization — with its rise, evolvment and decay. The Wagnerian pessimism and obscurity inflamed imagination and thought of contemporaneous historians and philosophers, starting from Friedrich Nietzsche onwards. In the wake of *Der Götterdämmerung*, concepts of historical pessimism became especially prominent in the post-World War Europe, forming the core doctrines of Oswald Spengler, Oskar Kokoschka, Martin Hiedegger, Thomas Mann, Ludwig Wittgenstein and other authors in the twentieth century. Cultural philosopher Ernst Cassirer delineated this trend in the following way: "At this time many, if not most of us, had realized that something was rotten in the state of our highly prized Western civilization" [7].

Axionov extensively explained both Wagner's role in instigating the eschatological theories, and his unique way of deploying these ideas through the art music medium [8]. In particular, he emphasized the Wagnerian idea of the twilight of civilization as the main source of inspiration for Oswald Spengler's concept as deployed in *The Decline of the West (Der Untergang des Abendlandes)* [9].

Axionov's fascinating manner of demonstrating how Wagner communicated his eschatological ideas through music was especially persuasive. He elegantly systematized Wagner's referential web of leitmotifs, enjoying their marvelous semantic complexities. Axionov proved how various combinations, concatenations and transformations of the

leitmotifs changed their initial semantic or, on the contrary, revealed their innate meaning. For example, his elegant presentation of the combination of the Love Declining (Entsagungs) Motive with the Twilight of the Gods (*Götterdämmerung Motiv*) in a coherent syntactic and semantic unit eloquently pairs a cause matter with the consequence and result. Additional illustration of Wagnerian leitmotive rhetoric as demonstrated by Axionov is an obscure Curse of the Ring (Fluch) motive that encloses the Trauermarch and underlines the true reason of the tragedy.

5. Openness and professional integrity. He did not avoid to touch forbidden themes, such as the discussion of erotic, sexual, or racial implications of the Nibelungs discourse, since it proved relevant to contemplating music. Axionov always found the golden mean between hypocrisy and platitude in accessing such issues, which are unescapable in any discussion of the *Ring* and are crucial for understanding the entire concept.

6. Ethical implications. Axionov interpreted the Trauermarch' overall composition as a freely treated sonata with two similar cycles of narrative and metaphor: the opening cycle recollects the tragic history of the first generation of Wotan's children (die Wälsungen). Concatenation of motives narrates the relationships and tragic fate of Siegmund and his "sister-bride" Sieglinde. Its main *c-moll* theme — a solemn synthesis of funeral march and chorale, performed by the quadruple orchestra with heavy brass, symbolizes a death of Siegfried and his parents. Then follow a transitional section based on a contrapuntal combination of motives: Sieglinde's sympathy and compassion to injured Siegfried (Mitleid-Motiv) — with the painful Grief motive (Wälsungen weh-Motiv), leading to an emergence at their pinnacle of the wonderfully lyrical Love-theme (Liebes-Motiv). Thus, the group of motives associated with the tragic destiny and love of the first generation of Wotan's earthly children forms an exposition of this sonata.

The following cycle — that can be interpreted a new episode in the Development — recalls the heroic motives of a sword Nothung (Schwert-motiv) and Siegfried as a hero-redeemer. These powerful motives, performed by the full orchestra, form a climax of this music. The recapitulation recollects the motive of Siegfried's hunting horn and the marvelous Brünnhilde Love-theme. The piercing fanfare sound of the Curse of the Ring motive in the coda of this metaphorical sonata (which is actually the beginning of the Brünnhilde immolation scene, Act 3 Scene 3) protrudes the full orchestral texture and terminates on a *c-moll* chord, thus creating a convincing tonal unity of the entire piece.

It appears that Axionov based his statement on Wagner's signature formal and dramatic procedure of "substitute reprises" — a method of creating semantic semblance by using non-literal repetitions of themes and motives. Tragic and heroic motives, identified with different protagonists and dramatic situations (Siegmond in the opening cycle — Siegfried the Hero-Redeemer — and Siegfried the Hunter in the proceeding cycles) create a semantic semblance based on their musical characteristic and dramatic function: all these motives are based on a topical characteristics of march, choral, heroic

fanfare, and their synthesis. Lyrical themes, respectively, share common properties — refined melodic line, strident chromaticism with falling diminished intervals, characteristic orchestration by the expanded wood winds group (three oboes and Corno inglese as a solo instrument; three fagots and a bass-fagot, clarinets with a bass clarinet), with an accompaniment by the strings and six harps.

The “substitute reprise” theory is originated from Alfred Lorenz’s major work *Das Geheimnis der Form bei Richard Wagner*; it explains the mechanism of the through-composed scenes in Wagner’s musical dramas (Gesamtkunstwerken) [10]. Lorenz presented this composer’s structural concept as internally articulated by recurring forms such as Bar and Bogen, traditional in the German national repertoires of Minnesang and Meistersang, where the structural principles are based on likeness — but not necessarily literal repetition — of poetic and musical statements [11].

Analysing the Funeral March today, such a structural interpretation of this stunning piece seems quite constrained and hardly supported by tonal structure (*Es-dur* tonality of the entire “recapitulation” cycle deviates from tonal logic of the sonata) and additional formal procedures. At the same time, I choose to opine that Axionov was using the sonata definition in order to emphasize its rhetorical and semantic characteristics as a tool for comprehending the Wagner’s concept.

Given the controversy over Wagner’s own paternity and his lifelong over-occupation with this question, such an interpretation gains additional dimensions. Only in the tetralogy itself (not to mention other works), a moral aspect of genetic identification is elaborated in long and conceptually crucial scenes, such as Siegmund and Sieglinde’s Love scene in *Die Walküre* Act I Scenes 4–5, Wotan and Brünnhilde dialogue from the same work, Siegfried’s conversation with Mime in *Siegfried* (Act I Scene 3). Application of the substitute reprise’ theory to the Funeral March enables to bind together the tragic history of different generations of the Wotan’s progenies (Die Wälsungen) —a facet crucial for the entire concept.

Additional dimension of the conceptual integrity that Axionov used to address was the musical-cultural tradition of the Trauermarch itself. In this context, the music of a solemn procession with Siegfried’ corpse is conceived as a chain in the romantic tradition of funeral music, starting from François Joseph Gossec and Beethoven, and proceeding to Bruckner and Tchaikovsky. Axionov emphasized this line, eloquently illustrating all these pieces on the piano.

7. Moral dilemmas: Siegfried’s Funeral Music was the chief anthem of Nazi mourning during the Third Reich. Although there seems to be no documentation to support claims that his music was played at concentration camps, there is evidence that this precise piece was used in Dachau in 1933-34 in order to ‘reeducate’ political prisoners by exposure to national music. According to Albert Speer, German architect and Minister of Armaments and War Production for the Third Reich, this excerpt was a part of the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra’s last performance before their evacuation from Berlin at the end of World War II [12]. Apart from being performed at various funeral ceremonies of the Reich, this music was used to accompany various mourning ceremonies, including

the Lenin funeral, twenty years earlier. Fervent aesthetic and political battles that have never ceased to rage around Wagner and his political views, spanned over his music in general and Siegfried Funeral March specifically, and provoked such a teeming variety of interpretations, from one end of the ideological spectrum to another [13]. Axionov addressed these issues in his typical restrained manner.

These was the pedagogical output following teaching one of the most stunning and controversial specimens in West-European music; an academic experience supported by the mesmerizing personality and thought-provoking lectures of Vladimir Axionov.

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