

SPECIFIC INTERPRETATIVE PECULIARITIES IN THE ROMANTIC STYLE OF THE CELLO CONCERTO BY ROBERT SCHUMANN

PARTICULARITĂȚI SPECIFICE DE INTERPRETARE ÎN STIL ROMANTIC A
CONCERTULUI PENTRU VIOLONCEL DE ROBERT SCHUMAN

ОСОБЫЕ ИСПОЛНИТЕЛЬСКИЕ ЗАДАЧИ В РОМАНТИЧЕСКОМ СТИЛЕ
ВИОЛОНЧЕЛЬНОГО КОНЦЕРТА РОБЕРТА ШУМАНА

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The article presented further is devoted to the specific aspects of interpretation of Robert Schumann's cello concerto in A minor. In the article we aim to give a complete review of performing challenges, namely comprehension of the integrity of the form, the romantic tempo-rhythm and the specific perception of the musical text when it comes to the romantic style in music. We also analyze the literary origins of the Romantic era in the context of the performer's preparation and practice.

Keywords: Robert Schumann, Romanticism, performance, cello concerto, interpretation, music text

Articolul studiază particularitățile specifice ale interpretării concertului pentru violoncel în la minor de R. Schumann. Autorul aruncă o privire de ansamblu asupra sarcinilor de interpretare: conștientizarea problemei integrității formei, a tempo-ritmului romantic, citirea textului muzical în stil romantic. Originile literare ale epocii romantismului sunt studiate în contextul pregătirii artistice a interpretului.

Cuvinte-cheie: Robert Schumann, romantism, interpretare, concert pentru violoncel, interpretare, text muzical

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Статья посвящена особенностям интерпретации виолончельного концерта Р. Шумана ля-минор. Приведен обзор исполнительских задач: осмысление проблемы целостности формы, романтического темпо-ритма, прочтение нотного текста в романтическом стиле. Литературные истоки эпохи романтизма анализируются в контексте подготовки исполнителя

Ключевые слова: Роберт Шуман, романтизм, исполнительство, виолончельный концерт, интерпретация, нотный текст

Introduction

Robert Schumann is an inspired poet, fiery romantic, heartfelt lyricist, witty and concise storyteller. This is how we perceive the brilliant German composer from the pages of his works. The great composer acknowledged that his creative outlook would be the general direction for the new music. Nowadays modern musicians are brought up on the ideals bequeathed to posterity by Robert Schumann. Composer himself considered music to be the more dignified language of his soul. Robert Schumann's own wish was to be understood only by the chosen, not the general audience. At times he felt abandoned and alone. It seemed to him that none of his works was suitable for public performance. This is the profound difference between Schumann's work and that of his great contemporaries, Liszt and Chopin who enjoyed success, craved recognition of the audience which was a necessary condition for them to continue creating. Liszt desired to see the ecstatic crowds in concert halls, Chopin craved the awe of the intimate select circle in aristocratic salons. On his part, Schumann never sought the recognition of the crowd, did not cater to the tastes of the general audience, perhaps realizing the intensity of his music and its powerful future. Robert Schumann believed a young artist could only serve his true ideal without caring about time and fame. At the dawn of his artistic life, a dedicated artist should spare no effort to regard even the smallest detail, and should be ready to sacrifice everything for the sake of his art.

Robert Schumann's romanticism and performing style

With his romantic elation, keen observation, and the ability to predict new paths for the future generations of musicians to follow, Schumann began his endeavor to defend the true musical culture. As an interpreting musician, Schumann stood for purity and perfection of art and its primary purpose to convey essence and substance of musical works to the listener without distortion.

Romanticism and music are indistinguishable for Schumann. Such natural synergy between musical and romantic conceptions sets performer free from anything predetermined and contrived. Like all romantics, Schumann was keen on showing transformations which exposed the inner dialectics of life, allowing each musical image many variations to be shown. The composer used antithesis among other possible options for revealing such artistic image. Hence the composer's essence of romantic approach to artistic form, his inclination to create free forms which exhibit „hidden” order, forms arising from the depths of the content. However, freedom from the restrictions of musical forms does not preclude the requirement of clarity: „Only when musical form becomes quite clear to you, will the content become clear to you, as stated in the „Rules of Life for Musician” [1 p. 370].

The mastering process for a future performer requires detailed analysis of the musical material. Robert Schumann recommended considering four points when working on the piece: first point is the musical form – complete form of the piece, its parts, periods, phrases; second is the musical composition – defining the style, harmony, melody, texture; third is defining specifics of the composer's main idea; the last point is that of the artistic and performing spirit reigning over the form, musical material and idea.

P. I. Tchaikovsky wrote: „It is fair to say that music of the second half of this century will form a period in the history of art which future generations will call the Schumann's period. Robert Schumann's music opens up the entire world of new musical forms, touches strings that have not yet been touched by his

great predecessors. In it we find an echo of those mysteriously deep processes of our spiritual life, those doubts, despairs and inclinations to the ideal which overwhelm the heart of a modern man" [2 p. 38].

Literature of Romanticism and its influence on Schumann's music

Robert Schumann is one of very few composers who have intertwined music and literature so firmly. Extremely wide range of issues that capture the attention of every performing musician have been approached by Schumann in his critical articles, reviews, and letters. Careful examination of the mentioned articles will be interesting and extremely beneficial for the formation of bright individual personality of each performing musician. Consideration of the above-said materials may also become a tool of extraordinary practical help for students.

Schumann was known as a passionate person. A very special place among young composer's literary preferences belongs to Jean Paul (literary pseudonym of the German novelist Johann Paul Richter): „It was not just an interesting read, an aesthetic joy or a joy of knowledge, writes D.V. Zhytomyrsky. He completely filled personal life of the young man, became his spiritual guide, life mentor, example of artistic creativity" [3 p. 83].

Schumann's connection with the world of Jean – Paul eventuates by the later influence of E.T. Hoffmann, far more significant and ideologically acute phenomenon who established the main trends of romantic literature. Schumann's spiritual affinity with Hoffmann manifested itself later in his music. It materialized in his musical works much greater than in his literary style. Hoffmann's twofold world represented by the critical power of grotesque and concentrated beauty of his ideal images, the sharpness of his characters, their eccentricity, the interruption of narration and the temperament with which Hoffmann castigates everything philistine and asserts freedom and beauty commensurate with Schumann's work far greater than any creation of Jean Paul.

In the course of evolution of his ties with German romantic literature, Schumann invariably pursued modern era. We can easily distinguish Jean Paul, Hoffmann and Heine nascent stage of his spiritual development, last of which may be considered Schumann's turn to Goethe (the late period).

Concerto for cello and orchestra in A minor

The inspirational and touching concerto for cello and orchestra in A minor by Robert Schumann holds a unique and special place in the repertoire of the modern cellist. This concerto may be played in class with the purpose of refinement of performance skills without being performed on stage. However, it proved to be very difficult for any gifted musician to reach the level of perfection necessary for the concerto to be actually performed on stage.

The Cello Concerto (op. 129) was written by R. Schumann in October 1850 in Dusseldorf. It was first published in August 1854 by Breitkopf und Hertel, the cello part (which was submitted to the editor) was anonymous and formed the basis of all subsequent publications, including the academic edition of 1883. The concerto had never been performed during the author's lifetime and had never gained widespread appreciation due to technical difficulties of its performance.

Interpretation of concerto and integrity of its composition

The study and performance of Schumann's cello concerto requires considerable practical effort. This piece cannot be perceived by the performer unless he has lived it through. The said concerto requires the performer to be ample with emotions and intellectually equipped. This dictates careful insight into composer's personality, and makes analysis of his works an absolute necessity. Interpretation in itself is a certain system of connections of various elements and constitutes the whole only on account of interworking between the elements.

The said system covers all fragments of work essential for the performer, including its smallest details. The artist has at his disposal a whole range of performing means of expression such as dynam-

ics, tempo, agogics, articulation, timbre, revealing of various layers of musical texture, the essence of development of the material. The concept of interpretation is based, first of all, on the integrity of the interpreted work. The primary task of the performer is to embody musical work as a single, artistic organism, to find and recreate the features of the composition recorded in the musical text. Such thoughts were frequently expressed by the great musicians. Beethoven „demanded that his students concentrate on the integrity of the musical work” [4 p. 150]. Liszt constantly told his students that, first of all, it is important to recreate the entirety of the piece and to convey the way the idea behind the piece which author held it in the process of creating the work [5 c. 86].

Schumann strives not only for thematic integration but also for constructive unification of the entire cycle. All three parts of the concert are performed without intermission. In the connecting episode between parts 2 and 3 Schumann applies thematic material of parts 1 and 2 in a new figurative content. Careful study of these specific moments is necessary for the performer in order to develop the fundamental sense of movement and musical flow.

Tempo-rhythm in romantic style

The main tendencies of rhythm in romantic music may be characterized by several points:

1. Development of cantilena, endless melody where invigoration of vocal basis of the melody contradicts the metrical rigor and clear accentuation.

2. Predominance of the phonic sound determined by a special realm of musical images. This requires certain texture, various types of movements, intricate rhythmic patterns and figurations. It is essential for the performer to work on the scale of musical colors of his performance and special techniques of sound extraction as well as on refined means of accentuation.

3. Development of musical images, origination of themes, rhythmic patterns and schemes play an important role for the musical form and integrity of it. All aspects mentioned above, depending on the type of texture, harmony and tempo will relate to a certain state, feeling or image.

These tendencies were embodied in Schumann's concerto for cello and orchestra in a minor with the exceptional intensity and distinction. The composer's texture exhibits all possible variants of rhythmic figurations. The performer is required to simultaneously observe a very clear metrorhythmic conduct and possess great performing freedom at the same time. When we speak of performing tempo-rhythm we imply all of the issues mentioned above.

Tempo-rhythmic aspect is of crucial importance for any performance regardless of style of the musical piece or era of its composer. G. G. Neuhaus in his epigraph to the second chapter of the book „On the Art of piano playing” quotes the witty saying of G. von Bulow: „In the beginning there was rhythm”. This capacious saying emphasizes the importance of rhythm, without actually defining tempo-rhythm as a concept.

Although he clearly meant it in a different context: „...the concept of „pianist” entails the concept of „conductor” in my opinion. This conductor is certainly concealed but, nevertheless, he represents the moving power of the process. I strongly recommend that in order to master the most important aspect of the musical piece, its rhythmic structure and the organization of the time process students, when studying a musical piece, do exactly the same as conductor does with music score. I recommend for the student to put the notes on the music stand and conduct the piece from its beginning to the end as if someone else is played it, an imaginary pianist. Imagine that this conductor inspires him with his will, his tempos first of all, plus, of course, all the details of the performance... [5 p. 86]. Tempo and rhythm of the composition must be conceived as its basis. However, due to technical difficulties or for some other reason a student often changes the tempo without any musical grounds for this” [6 p. 37-38]. All of the above certainly is relevant to all cellists!

Tempo-rhythm assumes the near to dominant role when it comes to performing Robert Schumann's music, since the romantic image and its development require a substantial unifying foundation, a core

of the composition. There must be the view of the whole perspective of the development of the musical image, as opposed to just its individual aspects in specific moments.

Schumann's romantic musical image is found not only in the melody itself, but also in the musical texture, in dramatic expressiveness of timbres, and in rich psychological overtones. This acoustic image requires the energy of musical tempo-rhythm encompassing development of the entire material. When the cellist does not have the rhythm at his fingertips, he cannot feel the musical content and the logic behind the development of the melody. However, when it comes to performance, romantic tempo-rhythm requires the knowledge of its precise measure applied to velocity of tempo and distribution of the bow. All of the mentioned aspects depend on the possibility of artistic understanding of the melodic metro-rhythmic and harmonic structure of the piece.

Whenever performer overcomes the temptations of passive-auditory inertia, he finds himself to be the absolute master of tempo. Having acquired the qualities and skills related to tempo-rhythm will serve to great benefits when overcoming various artistic challenges.

Well-known performers show persistent work on creating calculated, consistent tempo-rhythmic solution, both for each segment of the piece and for its entity. They strive to be „the conductors” of their own performance as is mentioned in the quote by G. Neuhaus. The interpreting performer offers its listeners his own living rhythm and the proposed rhythm passes through each of the listeners in the duration of musical piece. When this phenomenon does not take place, performance lacks life, artistic truth, and hypnotic influence on the listener”.

Specific approach to reading musical text of romantic music

Written score sheet music conveys the composer's intention and his logic of creating a musical form and thus becomes every performer's special consideration. The complex process of understanding the sheet music as a special sign system is determined by the personality and artistic aspirations of the performer, by his talent, temperament, general culture, knowledge in the field of art history, musical theoretical and technical skills. Musical notation, which usually ensures an accurate guidance for the performer, is at the same time extremely limited as it can only indicate a certain number of composer's directives. Music recorded on paper and the sound created following the record are two planes which do not intercross. The link between the two develops in the artist's imagination in the process of working on his interpretation of the work. The artistic interpretation is unique in each particular case and is conditioned by the personal will of the performer.

Accuracy in following the author's text, a necessary requirement, is too often considered to be the „word per word reading” of the musical text and may sometimes restrict the artist's creativity, whereas one should look upon the musical text with the view to committing to the idea, musical content, and emotions of the composer. The desire to achieve an academically accurate, objectively correct playing often turns it into dull and spiritless performance.

There is a large number of statements from outstanding composers and performers about the meaning of the so-called „connotation” of the musical work, about creative interpretation of its idea, its emotional and ideological content. The famous musician Pablo Casals recognized the performance devoid of: „...expressiveness and life to be „the greatest insult to art”. Since music notation is a very imperfect way of expressing the musical idea, how could the great masters give all the necessary instructions? Does Schumann himself, or any other composer, give them all?” [7].

Intelligence and the constructive powers of the brain are now valued far more than the power of the „actual perception”, which was highly respected only a short while ago. The increasingly larger role of science in our lives along with the technological progress heavily influenced the perception and the way modern musicians think. Nevertheless, of all the arts, music couldn't be farther from distant reflections. The absence of emotions in the performance, impartiality, passivity does not adorn the performer, whose repertoire includes a work of romantic style – the cello concerto by R. Schumann. A

talented musician works daily with his mind and soul. This work may become routine, but the result of such effort is undisputed success of performing the musical masterpieces of the world's cultural treasure trove.

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