

**MUSIC FOR PIANO BY VICTORIA POLEVA IN THE CONTEXT OF  
UNDERSTANDING THE COMPOSER'S STYLE**

**MUZICĂ PENTRU PIAN DE VICTORIA POLEVA ÎN CONTEXTUL PERCEPȚIEI  
STILULUI COMPONISTIC**

**МУЗЫКА ДЛЯ ФОРТЕПИАНО ВИКТОРИИ ПОЛЕВОЙ В КОНТЕКСТЕ  
ПОНИМАНИЯ КОМПОЗИТОРСКОГО СТИЛЯ**

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*The article analyses the characteristic features specific to the style of Victoria Poleva. In the given article, the composer's work named „Music for Piano” is considered in the context of the intellectual, aesthetic and performing perception of the genre. The author of the article emphasizes the significant role of the principles of programming, theatricality and plasticity in the composer's work. Furthermore, the author carefully examined the exclusivity and relevance of the composer's concept in creating music.*

**Keywords:** V. Poleva, contemporary art, piano, interpretation, theatricality

*Articolul analizează particularitățile caracteristice ale stilului componistic al Victoriei Poleva. Creația „Muzică pentru pian” este studiată în contextul percepției intelectuale, estetice și interpretative a genului muzical. Autoarea pune accent pe rolul semnificativ al principiilor programatic, teatral și plastic în creația compozitoarei. De asemenea, este investigată și subliniată unicitatea și actualitatea convingerilor exprimate de autor în creația muzicală.*

**Cuvinte-cheie:** V. Poleva, artă contemporană, pian, interpretare, teatralitate

*Статья посвящена обзору характерных особенностей стиля В. Полевой. «Музыка для фортепиано» рассмотрена в контексте интеллектуального, эстетического, исполнительского понимания жанра. Раскрыта значительная роль принципов программности, театральности и пластичности в творчестве композитора. Исследована и подчеркнута исключительность и актуальность авторского решения в создании музыки.*

**Ключевые слова:** В. Полевая, современное искусство, фортепиано, интерпретация, театральность

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## Introduction

Victoria Poleva is a Ukrainian composer, member of the National Union of Composers of Ukraine. She is the laureate of the Taras Shevchenko National Prize of Ukraine which was awarded to composer in 2018. Victoria creates her music in symphonic, choral, chamber, instrumental, and piano genres.

The early period of Poleva's work is associated with the aesthetics of the avant-garde and poly-stylistics (ballet „Gagaku”, „Transform” for symphony orchestra, „Anthem” for chamber orchestra, „Epiphany” for chamber ensemble, cantatas „Horace's ode”, „Gentle light”). Since the late 1990s, her music stylistically tends to be identified with „sacred minimalism” (ArvoPärt, PeterisVasks, John Tavener, Henryk. Gorecki). A significant period of the composer's work is linked to the study and embodiment of liturgical texts in music.

As composer, Victoria Poleva exemplifies the concept of a „free artist” who is devoid of academic framework. She creates her work in an atmosphere of absolute freedom. Despite the fact that Victoria finds herself at the apogee of mastery she is still in constant search of finding the way for her music to evolve and advance. The composer describes herself as the „explorer of the world” and emphasizes the complexity of personal self-understanding paraphrasing the above-mentioned description into „the world in exploration of me”. She explains the ease of the creative process as follows: “The music itself creates me. I write unintentionally. I read, I suffer, I love, I write. I am the reflection of music» [1].

## Victoria Poleva's creative work

Victoria Poleva's work is an integral part of Ukrainian modern culture. The composer's vast artistic endeavor has become a keystone in the development of music worldwide. Through her music Victoria relays the substantial and valuable artistic thoughts of the present times. Listening to Victoria's music, we immerse into the depths of the spiritual search for people of different traditions. Victoria Poleva reveals the world of vivid talent and bright intellect and reaches out to the listener through her music. While Victoria's music is compelling for both listeners and performers, it also proves to be the captivating subject for analytical and scientific research.

The musical texts of the compositions go through the constant process of transformations and editing. They evolve to be enriched and complemented in order to enhance the success and effect of each specific and unique performance with the participation of the author.

Victoria Poleva's creative work is a blend and synergy of music, theater, literature, and pantomime. The principles of the genres of theater and ballet inspire the author to create the staged experimental projects, turning concerts into live performances in which musicians and listeners perform jointly. During the performance they read provided texts and sing (opera „Boundless Island”). The great literary erudition of the composer serves as the source of the plots for the programs.

Among the unique features of the Victoria's style in composition, one can distinguish the descriptive character of her music, theatricality and plasticity of it.

## Descriptive character of music

Victoria Poleva's most important and fundamental feature in her composing style is the descriptive character of her music. It is one of the primary aspects of the idea behind all of the composer's works. The descriptive character in music is represented by a certain theme (plot), verbal or often poetic program put to instrumental music. However, the descriptive character of instrumental music does not actually contain a verbal text, and yet is accompanied by a verbal indication of its content.

In the deeply intellectual and capacious titles composer chooses for her musical works, V. Poleva adopts the religious texts and philosophical treatises, as well as her own personal views and contemplations of the world, closely focusing on the spiritual path of human self-knowledge. Victoria finds her plots in literature from antiquity to the present time (for example, poem „Tender Gentle” by O. Mandelstam), she works with primary sources of the ancient materials („Tao”, „Anthony's Sermon to the Fishes” from the ballet „Source”, „Walking on the waters” from the piano cycle („Marginals”),

gets her inspirations from legends („Isolde here” from the opera „Boundless Island”, one-part piano work „Simurg”), and depicts musical portraits of remarkable people („Counting rhyme for Mark and Mary” from the mono-opera „Boundless Island”, „The Flying One „from the piano cycle” Musical Moments”). The composer delineates events and impressions, her own experiences (piano piece „Ischia. Island as a variant of destiny”), uses knowledge in the field of ancient music genres of Eastern and Western European cultures (ballet „Gagaku”, the work „Anthem” for chamber orchestra).

Not all descriptions to Victoria’s works become known to the listener, however it is sometimes possible to hear the main plot line or a verbal outline from the composer herself at the beginning of her work on the projects.

### **Piano works**

Victoria Poleva’s great accomplishment in the genre of piano music has had a large impact on all of her works in general. Chamber, choral, symphonic works and opera originate from composer’s piano compositions. The first steps to becoming a composer can be dated back to the time when Victoria was studying at the school-studio affiliated to the Tchaikovsky Kiev Conservatory majoring in piano. She studied with the guidance of piano professor Olga Liforenko, thanks to whom Victoria gained basic knowledge, professional pianistic skills, and a deep appreciation for the instrument. The considerable number of her piano works has derived from the composer’s piano experience. Victoria regularly performs the piano part herself during her own concerts (for example, in the opera „Boundless Island”). The presence of the piano in other genres of work, the transformation of piano pieces into symphonic, vocal, chamber compositions characterize the peculiar way of the author’s thinking through the piano as the medium. Pianistic way of thinking is an important subject for research. The composer herself agrees with this terminology. „Music for the Piano” (author’s title) is a great part of the composer’s eclectic musical heritage. Pianistic way of thinking as a special kind of musical thinking in the middle of creative process, by composer’s own statement, prevails over the other possible ways of musical thinking. In all genres of Poleva’s works, the music text is easily transcribed for the piano, and it is hardly surprising since a large part of musical material is created at the piano. Such way of composing simplifies the mastery of technical textures for the performing pianist. The transformation of piano pieces into other forms and genres is largely connected to the piano way of musical thinking and indicates the fact that the main forming instrument in the creative process is the piano. For example, the miniature „Merry Mechanics” (2009) grows into an extended part of the cycle „Music for the artist Temo” (2018) and is called „Donkeys Temo”, and gains a whole new meaning and energy. The play „Conversation through the Wind” from the piano cycle „Musical Moments” (1995) acquires a sacred meaning in the cycle for the chamber orchestra „Marginalia” (2019), in which the piano part plays a key role.

### **Theatricality**

One of the special features, which singles out the work of V. Poleva from her contemporaries is penetration of other types of the imitative art, namely theater, literature and drama into the music.

O. Balanco in his article „Underground birds: V. Poleva, at the intersection of genre tradition” writes about the synergy and symbiosis of various genres and emphasizes the importance of theatricality in V. Poleva’s vocal works.

The definition of the word „theater” itself reveals the vast possibilities of enhancing the expression in the imitative arts. Furthermore, such possibilities are significantly expanded in the musical theater. As a result, we achieve the extraordinary visual appeal and flagrancy, eccentricity of performance, deepened impression on the listener and a true fit of passion.

The new experimental methods in instrumental music such as recitation, the play of light and shadows, costumes, video sequences, and most importantly the extraction of unusual sound applied when playing the piano go beyond the academic manner of performance.

In the modern art space composer V. Poleva finds herself at the forefront of the musical performance. This fact itself implies having the theatricality as an integral part of it.

„The extraordinary theatrical thinking is characteristic of Victoria Poleva’s work. The visual realm and experimental ways of embodying composer’s ideas are all reflection of composer’s philosophical view of the world, in which transcendental ideas, her religious and spiritual beliefs hold a valuable place” [2 p. 285].

The theatrical elements integrated into the piano music are represented by the unique composition of the form. The listener witnesses a sound collage effect, in which themes and images quickly replace each other, sometimes unrelated to each other, forming a kind of „set”. Theatricality lies in extracting the special sounds, in achieving the effects of recitation, hissing, whispering and breathing. The refined nature of human sensations and experiences is transformed into an extraordinary piano sound palette. Personal directing of author’s projects, setting tempos, tuning the flow of a of musical piece, the unique atmosphere of each performance which sets in thanks to the explanation and clarification of the musical plot and the main idea behind the work by the author herself - all this creates the exceptional spirit of the event. The fact that the performances begin after the opening word of V. Poleva herself, is another proof of the manifestation of theatricality in the composer’s work.

Pre-initial silence is an important condition for the creation of Victoria’s music on stage. It flows free of pressure of time, in a special setting of the sound of the performance where each member of the audience becomes a performer. Carefully selected locations are the essential part and yet another contribution to the success of the performance. The decorations play the important role in creation of the special atmosphere and enhancement of acoustics, they contain the presence of decorative elements. The location of instruments at the concert venue and selected artistic costumes are just as important. Such performance requirements are also complicit in the action. Theatricality is inherent to Victoria Poleva, it is an integral part of her work.

Plasticity as a characteristic feature is an innovative tendency of V. Poleva’s music which distinguishes the composer from her contemporaries.

### **Plasticity**

„Plasticity (plastic) in art is the quality which is inherent to sculpture, it is the artistic expressiveness of the three-dimensional form. The initial meaning of the multi – meaning term „Plasticity” is emotionality, artistic integrity and figurative persuasiveness of modeling volume in sculpture, a harmony between in the expressiveness of modeling and a sense of weight and internal filling of the form... In the broadest sense of the word Plasticity is sculpturesqueness, convexity, expressiveness (including in poetry, music, literarypresentation) and in general the harmonious unity of the image, a visual, tangible phenomenon of beauty. When applied to works of art, the term is also used in its physical meaning, denoting the ability of the material to take other forms...” [3 p. 131].

In her music Victoria Poleva adapts the expressiveness and convexity of plasticity primarily in her clear, bright, well-rounded images-themes, leit-themes and themes-characters. Plasticity as the implication of the ability to take new forms is also reflected in Poleva’s work in the titles to her musical works, for example composition „Transforma” for Symphony Orchestra. The flexibility of the piano texture in Victoria’s music gradually develops and transforms into other emotional states, which are shown by changes in themes and harmonies, complexity and enrichment of musical material. We may call this process of transformation piano texture the process of plasticity.

Based on the definition of plasticity given by the art historian Cantor Anatoly Mikhailovich, we can use the term to characterize the work of V. Poleva.

Victoria Poleva adapts plasticity as the musical expressiveness and convexity primarily in her clear, bright, well-rounded images-themes, leit-themes and themes-characters. Plasticity as an implication of the ability to take different forms is also reflected in Poleva’s work. It may be found in the titles to her

musical works, for example, of the composition „Transforma” for Symphony Orchestra. The flexibility of the piano texture is often developing gradually and transforming into other emotional states, which are expressed by changes in themes and harmonies, complexity and enrichment of musical material. We may call this process of piano texture transformation the process of plasticity. Victoria Poleva often uses the effect of the endless flow of time and music. It is achieved by concentrated silence, set at the beginning of the musical piece, and at the end of the performance. The deepest pianissimo of slow keystrokes is extracted by the absence of an attack, a specific sound that means a veiled start of the performance. Music appears „out of nowhere” and makes much stronger impression on the listener, achieving the effect of infinity in space. Mirrored endings of musical pieces compel you stay in such state for some time after the end of the piece. The piano texture subsides, freezes on the diminuendo to the quietest, barely perceptible feeling of sound, transmitting only the overtones of the piano strings on the pedals, turning into a concentrated silence. The effect of infinity in space is one of the manifestations of plasticity.

The principle of multiple repetitions is essential and distinctive to Victoria’s music. Monotonous repetitions of the same musical material are used in the miniature „Fun mechanics”. The fact that the performer himself decides on the number of times to replay the material makes the piece yet more intriguing. Such repetitions also give the impression of mechanical, endless movement.

Victoria is completely engaged with the idea of infinity as an important phenomenon of perception of the world. This idea is inherent to all of the composer’s works. It is reflected in the titles and entire projects. For example, in „Boundless island”, „Marginalia”, „Marginalia” are a concept that means written entries and drawings on the margins of books, manuscripts and letters. They are comments and interpretations, thoughts and opinions on fragments of the text which made a strong impression on the reader” [4]. V. Poleva’s „Marginalia” recounts about the infinity of the thought which leaves the listener contemplating the performance long after it has ended.

The effect of Infinity as a kind of perception of Plasticity in V. Poleva’s music is an important insight into the composer’s style.

The transformation of piano pieces into various forms and genres, the enhancement of the piano ideas from miniatures for the piano into large orchestral and chamber forms also indicate the plasticity of the composer’s artistic thought. V. Poleva’s thoughts are in constant search and movement. For example, the first piece of the cycle for the piano quartet „Music for the artist Temo”, „Lacremoso” was turned into part of the opera „Boundless island”. The composer often performs the piano part herself. This is what she says about her work: „Boundless island” is a kind of symbolic action that unfolds in the space of St. Sophia Cathedral, as on an island that has no borders, no boundaries and time has stopped there...” [1].

When it comes to musical performances, V. Poleva’s artistic metamorphoses are endless.

### **Conclusions**

The personal experience of performing V. Poleva’s music in concerts and recordings triggered further study of the process and nature of writing music by one of the most famous artists of Ukraine.

We have considered the essential features of the composer’s style, contemplated on the innovative methods of writing music which are central to this study. We have examined the specific features of the author’s work such as the descriptive character of her music, plasticity, theatricality and the piano way of thinking. The above-mentioned insights into the creative work of V. Poleva will promote further revelation of composer’s music world more vividly.

There have been no previous scientific studies of V. Poleva’s piano work, which makes it much more difficult to rely on authoritative works and opinions about “Music for the piano” and further complicate the process of study and perception of it. However, the personal creative, working and friendly relations, a substantive discussion of the topic of piano works with the composer became the main justification for the above text.

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