

5 MELODIES FOR VIOLIN AND PIANO BY SERGHEI PROKOFIEV – COMPARATIVE ANALYSES

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***Abstract:** Serghei Prokofiev is one of the most prestigious composers of neoclassicism, being considered by the critics of the time a huge artistic phenomenon. In his music one can see the warm and pleasant tones combining with the strong and dissonant ones, thus representing a classic of the contemporary music. Because Prokofiev considered melody the main component of the artistic creation, in December 1920, while he was in California, he composed a set of five melodies without lyrics for the Russian soprano Nina Koshetz. This type of music has not been composed before.*

***Keywords:** periods, phrases, melodies.*

1. Introduction

The premiere of these songs took place in New York on the 27th of March 1921, in their initial form and only in 1925, in Paris, did Prokofiev return to his melodies and arrange them for violin and piano. In fact, the composer did not do anything else but simply editing the line of the soprano for violin. This is how the *5 melodies for violin and piano by Prokofiev* were created, melodies which sound as some miniatures full of a bittersweet lyricism, with contemporary harmonies and tonal – modal combinations in continuous change.

2. Melody 1 - Andante – THREE-PART LIED – (varied piece)

The scheme of these melody is presented in the following manner: **Periods A + B + A’**.

2.1. Period A - Phrase I (a) + Period II (a1)

Phrase I (a) has three bars, being open from the tonal point of view (see the accord from la flat major with a seventh), where the intonation can be interpreted as a facto reality in the context of the vertical poli-intonation, which became harmonic stylistics for Prokofiev, but also the melody situated between tonal, chromatic, intensely modulated and, as we will see later (in Melody III), with intrusions in the modal sphere – the major – minor balance being also included here, which is obvious for the first musical arrangement.

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Phrase II (a1) contains bars 4 and 5 and it is a phrase shortened by one measure, fixed in the tonal center of do (undecidedly fixed, taking into account the harmonic situation with a third in the bass), which could suggest the total closure of the A phrase.

2.2. Period B

Period B is the second period that starts with an *al* in the eighth bar (bar 2, system 3), after two bars of harmonic bridge, a bridge which will represent the harmonic support for the beginning of this section, in anacrusis position (for piano) after the model of the first phrase.

Very interesting for the homophonic thinking of the composer are the verticalities level of this harmonic bridge: Mib – Do – fa – Re 7 – Mib – harmonic blocks, harmonic parallelism, seventh accords unsolved according to the principles of classical harmony (other harmonic horizons), obsessively repeated in the B of the lied on the track of 5 bars (bridge plus three bars from the phrase II of the middle part).

The culmination of melody I is made by the composer at the end of the B (b1 – the last bar of the second system, page three, on three musical levels:

- a) By stimulating the solo discourse, the score for violin being rich in double chords;
- b) By the intense piano turning: modulations, skipping, revaluation of register contrasts etc.;
- c) By adorning the culminations for the violin (appoggiaturas) and the introduction of dynamical stresses.

2.3. Period A'

The last period of the first melody is A' - a varied part that starts after the somehow static bridge bar, personalized only by the

piano by means of a chromatic line on the left hand and a harmonic recitative on the right hand.

Phrase I of the part (three bars) is not recognized but by its sequential feature as coming from the expositive A, being immediately followed in quote Phrase II of A (a1), an identical quote, violin – piano (Mib Major).

The general atmosphere, with the chromatic level intensely reevaluated, reminds us of the greatness of Hendel's verticalities, which were also beautifully caught by Enescu in the first movement (Prelude) from the Suite in old style for piano.

3. Melody 2 - Lento ma non troppo – THREE-VERSE LIED

The structure of this melody is: Verse I – la + Verse II - La + Verse III – la

Melody 2 starts with an arrangement that reminds us of the verticality of a ciaccone, counterpointed undulously on the right hand with sixteenths rhythmical extras, which will accompany almost invariably the solo instrument during the entire lied.

This part contains an introduction which prepares the entry to the lied itself. (We have approached the title of the vocal genre, according to the idea initiated by the author – *Melodies* – idea that brings to mind music with lyrics, the aria (either instrumental – see Bach's aria and not only), the melodiousness, the lyrical discourse etc...

The anacrusis entry of the piano (a re-editing of the model of the first melody), as well as the binary metrics, could lead to the interpretation of the construction of this movement in the manner of the allemande from the Medieval Suite, the difference being obvious on the line of the general scheme, which at the time was mostly made of two parts and there we meet an architecture of three parts (three verses).

3.1. Verse I

Verse I starts with bar 7 – *krusic*, on the discourse background already prepared by the piano, developing a simple, direct melody, diatonic on the sound level, situated on the same line in contrast with the melody of the first movement (M I). The major – minor balance is to be noticed, prepared by the author at the homonyms level (1a – La).

From the formal point of view this verse suggests three phrases whose material is deductive (melody construction technique met since Brahms, presented also in the case of the great Enescu – Prokofiev's contemporary (see Suite I for orchestra in Do), and which appears in phrase 2 is stimulated from the tonal point of view by leading it to the tone centers Do b – La b (as relatives and another type of major - minor).

The third phrase is in fact a part of the first verse, a melody varied recovery on its start, of the expositive phrase.

3.2. Verse 2

Verse 2 makes a sound contrast key signature with 5 sharps without tone precision), of tempo but also of character, although the shown material is clearly originated from the melody of the first verse. Its new feature is given by the change in tempo but also by the variation techniques that bring discourse novelty – the short sound adorned by means of the trill or groups of sixteenths interposed in the score of the violin in order not to ruin the line given by the piano in the first section.

The verse suggests a first phrase of 8 bars, a second one - the melody variation of the first one, symmetrical with the first - and also a third phrase of 10 bars, given as an answer to the interrogation of the first two phrases; the entry to the third verse is made

after two interlude bars – in fact a finish in *extenso* of the middle part (verse 2).

3.3. Verse 3

Verse 3 is in reality, a short remembrance of the first verse, a short part stimulated by the change in register (the acute register of the solo instrument) and in which the initial theme is presented (La minor – major), to which 2 bars of rhythmic complement are added. Extremely interesting seems to be in this second melody the harmonic factor of the accompanying instrument which, apparently static, gives in fact a line as unexpected as the first movement in the lied, the *poli-tone* conception giving contrasts, indecisions and difficulties which are met especially at the impressionist creators and not to the neo-barrocco or the neo-classics such as Prokofiev.

In addition to the aforementioned aspects, we can also see the piano support in the second verse. The content of this melody is proved as one to prepare for the strong modal atmosphere of the following one (from the point of view of the musical material).

4. Melody 3 – *Animato, ma non allegro* – DEVELOPED THREE PART LIED

This melody is in fact a lied with lied and modal base and a slide into the melody structure of the hexatonal scale, focusing on the Sol b sound.

4.1. Phrase A

Phrase A - *Animato, ma non allegro* – suggests 2 periods (a – a1) asymmetrical in their construction, asymmetry made according to techniques professed long before the 20th century (we can think of the Renaissance or even Pre-classicism – see the canons of Bach's Run Aria).

Period I has 10 bars and it is developed as a theme with lied base on the main theme, focused on Sol flat, moved then on the Mi center, on which base it also gives rhythm to the section.

Period II – poco piu tranquillo – appears by the proportional augmentation of the first period for the first 5 bars, followed a free variation line of the themes presented before, variations which increase the duration of the section on the way of the 20 bars - final on Do, followed by 2 bars in *Meno mosso*, which prepare both the atmosphere of the following section, the middle one, but also its tempo.

4.2. Phrase B

Phrase B – *Meno mosso* – is made based on the anacrusis method, and it is a slightly meditative state with contrast value on this line, with the expositive part.

The theme material will be extracted also from the cells from the A of the form, with focus on the balance between crotchets and minims. The section suggests again 2 periods (b – b1), which are in dynamic crescendo – the second being in fact the amplification of the first period from B – so a variation is obtained by: accords to the solo instrument, and the change of registers and counterpoints on the piano (the crotchets line on the left hand for the piano is to be noticed), the theme material being similar to the first period of the B, slightly amplified and modulated, sliding towards a sound center – La flat.

A - Tempo I – represents in essence a short part (theme quote of the first period of the A), architectural idea which has already become conceptual in the constructive game of the 5 melodies. The return to the expositive material in made as a variation from the point of view of the sound, to which the author adds a short ending of 5 bars in the manner of the rhythm complement.

5. Melody 4 – *Allegretto leggero e scherzando* – TRI-PENTA-PART LIED

For the analysis of this movement we can follow the formal instructions given in the score, which are suggestive and pertinent, the tri-penta-part enhancing the following construction: A B A, where A is varied and modular on the inside, B is also varied and the final A is intensely varied by modular amplifications and extensions which highlights the sixteenth group.

B is in tonal contrast but not in theme contrast, its musical material, with all the contrast intention, personalizes in fact a sentence which is in a steadfast (answer) relation to A, its construction technique being rapidly deductive, which is not exactly a new idea in the context of the analyzed work.

The culmination of the lied is made in this last chorus (the A being in stimulation) and especially in the apotheosis of the ending. Taking into account the contrasts which materialize by the variation technique between the two Bs, we can notice the sliding of the tri-penta-part in a shape of a refined rondo (ABACA), where the B varied from the tonal point of view is interpreted as a section C.

We can also notice the first attempt of the composer to make a theme processing between the solo and the accompanying instrument (it can be noticed in the theme processing from the piano score).

6. Melody 5 – *Andante non troppo* – DEVELOPED THREE-PART LIED – A B A A (varied and recurrent)

The last movement starts with a short introduction of approximately two bars.

6.1. Period A

The A expositive develops on two symmetrical periods slightly contrasting, of two phrases each.

Phrase I, focused on the fundamental Si, is made of two phrases (a and a1, anacrusis with similar musical materials being in relation of precedent – steadfast.

Phrase II, focused on the fundamental Mi – so contrasting from the tonal point of view, suggests other two phrases (a2 – a1 varied), the first krusic, the second one which cantons in the material presented in a1, representing in fact a return to the first period; thus we recognize in the general construction of the first section the two part form with a small re-entry (a – a1 – a2 – a1), in this context a2 replacing the b from the two part form with a small re-entry.

6.2. Period B

Period B – Pochissimo piu animato – approaches the same construction as in the case of the first section (an introduction of two bars followed by two periods, thus making an axis of symmetry with the section A.

Phrase I – anacrusis – it is formed of three shorter phrases, almost with motivic value: b – b1 enhanced, so its entire construction highlights a three-part form.

Phrase II - it is separated from the first one by a melodic interlude anacrusis extended on two bars. The musical material itself of this section is originated in A, more precisely in a1 (the steadfast phrase of the first A period), being a processing of themes in this phrase, ending with a melodic extension as a culmination point in the super acute register of the violin, culmination which prepares the re-entry on the theme of the A – the re-entry of this last movement.

6.3. Period A

Period A – Meno mosso – it is in fact the re-entry of the V lied stimulated and varied, in essence a construction which is recurrent to the expositive A, a re-entry

which is short, but which is extended on two phrases, so a unique period to which the composer also omits the introduction.

Phrase I – takes its processing material from a1 (A – the first period), re-presented, enhanced by the doubles of the solo instrument – extension of 8 bars with return to the basic key signature – the amplification technique passes also to the accompanying instrument. We can thus compare te beginning with the start of the re-entry.

Phrase II – the conclusion of the entire architecture – comes after two interlude bars as a theme conclusion of the form – the solo instrument enhanced by doubles with flageolets, the ending nicely settling after an entire series of vertical variations of chromatic and modular type, on the fundamental Si.

The middle chromatic range from the register of the piano is to be noticed, which precedes the last bar close to the pre-central natural resonance – thus the ending highlighting a major type sound more quickly – this is actually a return to the always revealing picardian of the chorister from Thomas Kirche. The analysis of these melodies has partially avoided the examination of the accompanying instrument – the piano, which, from the point of view of this paper brings closer the melodies to the form of an accompanied monody.

7. Conclusions

In the analyses of these 5 melodies of Prokofiev, we can extract several modalities of development of the thematic material of the 5 song written for voice and piano. The most important tonal – modal proceedings are: the use of the vertical poly-tone conception, which gives contrasts and difficulties specific of the impressionist creators. Also, we can

observe the balance between major and minor melodic.

In terms of harmonic point of view, we can remark the chromatic abundance, the harmonic blocks and parallelism.

The variational techniques are the timbral and registral changes, which gives the melodies new aspects all the time.

In terms of formal point of view, Prokofiev chooses to have the first three melodies three – vers lieds and the other two three – penta – part lieds, the scheme of all these 5 melodies being presented in the following manner:

- i. Melody 1 – Andante – THREE – PART – LIED (varied piiese);
- ii. Melody 2 – Lento ma non troppo – THREE – VERSE – LIED;
- iii. Melody 3 – Animato, ma non Allegro – DEVELOPED THREE PART LIED;
- iv. Melody 4 – Allegretto leggiero e scherzando – TRI - PENTA - PART – LIED;
- v. Melody 5 – Andante non troppo – DEVELOPED THREE – PART – LIED.

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