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## Songs about Saint Petersburg by Sergei Slonimsky. On the Question of Interpretation of the Poetic Text

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*This article discusses a cappella choruses by Sergei Slonimsky that clearly represent the creative style of the contemporary master. The choruses written to lyrics of various poets (Bulat Okudzhava and Anatoly Chepurov) are connected with each other by commonality of the image content, the stylistic unity and the presence of a cross-cutting theme. Each of them has a St. Petersburg night scenery imbued with bright mood and embodied by the composer very deeply, emotionally and convincingly. Based on the analysis of these works the article covers in detail the issues of the relationship of a word and music, interpretation of the poetic text, reveals the nature of the relation of the composition, stanza structure and metrorhythmic of the verse with the means of musical expression, studies the melodic, rhythmic and mode-harmonic language of the choruses, their textural organization.*

*Keywords: text, composition, stanza, meter, rhythm, mode, harmony, texture.*

An important role in the works of Sergei Slonimsky is played by the image of St. Petersburg – Leningrad that, for the composer personally, is connected with Russia, Russian and world culture. A multidimensional and complex image of the city on the Neva River is represented in a number of his works. Among them are the cantata “The Voice from the Chorus” to poems by Alexander Blok, romances to poems by Anna Akhmatova and Osip Mandelstam, “The Song about Leningrad” for the bass, mixed chorus and symphony orchestra, “St. Petersburg visions” for symphony orchestra (with the epigraph from the novel of Fyodor Dostoevsky “White Nights”). The composer’s constant attention is attracted by the Leningrad



poets – his father’s contemporaries – L. Lunts, D. Kharms, V. Rozhdestvensky, A. Prokofiev, his contemporaries and friends – Ye. Rein, I. Brodsky, Ya. Gordin.

The genre of a cappella chorus can also include such works devoted to St. Petersburg as the “White Night” to the lyrics of B. Okudzhava and “Leningrad’s White Night” to the lyrics of A. Chepurov. Addressing these poets was not accidental for the composer. There is a lot in common in their lyric poetry: sensitivity to the beauty of nature, the songlike nature of the poems, sincerity and credibility, rhythmic and tonal variety, completeness of the artistic form.

It is interesting that the “White Night” chorus created in 1982, was not written to the lyrics of a St. Petersburg poet, but to the lyrics of the Moscow bard Bulat Okudzhava who was very popular in the 60’s – 70’s. Nevertheless, literary critics have come to the conclusion that Okudzhava “had “simply poems” and “song-poems”, both equally belonging to the professional poetry, written literature” (Novikov, 1997: 39), and their genre “...is not just elegiac, scenery, meditative lyrics, but special, emotionally or, to be more accurate, musically suggestive, where a thought, feeling, association intricately interact with each other giving rise to a multi-layer, “stereophonic” experience” (Zaitsev, 1998: 4).

Bulat Shalvovich Okudzhava (1924 – 1997) entered the history of Russian poetry as one of the pioneers of the genre of the author song. Many of his works written in a poetical and musical form, as well as the songs of Yu. Vizbor, Yu. Kim, V. Vysotsky, A. Galich, A. Rosenbaum, exist only in the author’s performance. They are distinguished by the openness of soul, emotionality, sincerity and trustworthiness. The main thing that made the songs of Okudzhava especially attractive for the audience was quite an organic unity of poetry, music and performance.

Joining the literature circle together with such poets of the 60’s as Ye. Yevtushenko, A. Voznesensky, B. Akhmadulina, Bulat Okudzhava at the bottom of his work was a

poet of the front-line generation; his poetry was formed in brutal environment under fire in trenches and dugouts. The war, relationships, feelings associated with war and tragedy of a man at war were the motifs Okudzhava kept returning to throughout the work. Titles of poems written over the years tell it all: “The first day on the front line”, “The song about the soldiers’ boots”, “Goodbye, boys”, “The song about the infantry”, “Do not believe the war, boy”, “From the front diary” and others. However, an important place in the poet’s work is taken by sentimental characters of bygone eras (gallant men and beautiful ladies), historical fantasies, toponymy of cities. The constituent elements of the poetic world of Okudzhava are childhood, the mother, the father, love and separation, human existence in general.

One of the central images of the lyrics of the poet is his home town of Moscow that he mentions in many of his poems. This can be seen by the titles of his poetical collections – “Arbat, my Arbat” (1976), “Tea-party on Arbat Street” (1996). To the poet Moscow is an inexhaustible source of inspiration, a spiritual world in which the urban scenery and the unique, old architecture, toponymy of Moscow streets, squares and alleys (Arbat, Volkhonka, Ordynka, Neglinnaya), and, finally, people of this city with a rich inner world and generosity of soul are inseparably fused, enveloped in a single mood. Largely thanks to the songs of Okudzhava Arbat St. began to be perceived as a symbol of the spiritual unity of the Moscow intelligentsia.

But, in addition to the poems about Moscow, the poet also devoted a lot of his works to Leningrad – the city on the Neva River, in which Bulat Shalvovich had the fondest memories. It was in Leningrad where the songs of the poet gained the audience’s recognition. After the failure of his first public performance in Moscow in 1959 Bulat Okudzhava (at the invitation of friends) performed in the Leningrad House of

Film in June 1961 before a small audience and had a resounding success, which was unexpected to him. When in December 1961 the poet came to Leningrad once again and performed at the Palace of Arts, he was already famous by that time: his songs were played on the radio, distributed in sound recordings; he was admitted to the Union of Writers.

It is no surprise that the poet fell in love with this city, often visited it and dedicated a whole series of poems to it: “The Leningrad Music”, “Autumn in Tsarskoye Selo”, “Leningrad Elegy”, “House on the Moika”, “Leningrad”, “Neva Petrovna, beside you...”, etc. These also include the poem “White Night” taken as a basis of the similarly-named chorus of Sergei Slonimsky. The poem created and performed in 1964 in the film “Returned Music” was not included in any of the author’s collections of poetry, however, it was set to music by a St. Petersburg composer Vladimir Chistyakov and then was published in the printed music “Listen, Leningrad, I’ll sing to you...” (Songs about Leningrad) in 1969.

Like many of the poet’s works, this poetic miniature belongs to the “poem-song” type created by Okudzhava, the historical origins of which stem from the romance tradition. It fascinates with its musicality. In the very structure of the verse the sound of guitar chords, thoughtful tones of the singing poet, lyrical expressiveness of the old romance can be heard. Here Okudzhava demonstrates a wonderful gift – he can speak about the sublime in simple, clear, unpretentious words without raising his voice. The author conveys the atmosphere of the reverent contemplation of the world, acceptance of life as a precious gift from above very passionately and at the same time naturally.

Plyvut doma, kak korabli, iz dalnikh stran,  
Pod parusa vsekh sozyvaya...

Noch belaya, segodnya ya tvoi kapitan,  
Tvoi rulevoy, tvoya dusha zhivaya.  
[Houses are floating like ships from far away,  
Calling everything under the sail...  
White night, I’m your captain today,  
Your steersman, your soul and faith.]

The structure of the poem that includes four stanzas (quatrain) is a monologue combining two perspectives: a brooding lyrical hero and a night city seen by the poet in the romantic and magical, fanciful and fantastic light. But besides the monologue form the poem also has a dialogic principle, which is very characteristic of the lyrics of Okudzhava. It can be found in many of his poems, even in the monologues. The poet usually refers to an imaginary interlocutor with whom he has a quiet, intimate conversation. In a poetic text this is manifested primarily in a combination of vocatives and imperatives: “Let’s join hands, my friends”, “Do not give up the efforts, maestro”, “Painters, dip your brushes”, “Midnight trolley, rush along the street”. The same poetic technique is used in the analyzed poem: in each stanza the poet refers to the allegorical figure (“White night”) that represents the beauty and mystery of the universe.

Belo vokrug – bely doma, bela reka,  
Vsyo – ot Fontanki do predmestiy...  
Noch belaya, ty otlozhi dela poka,  
Davai poidyom, pobrodim vmeste.  
[Everything is white – the houses, the river,  
Everything – from the Fontanka to the  
outskirts...  
White night, postpone your matters for awhile  
Let’s go and stroll the streets with me.]

It should be noted that the imperative mood in Okudzhava’s poem lacks of an imperative tone. This is not a gesture of the order, preaching or

appeal. In the “vocative” + “imperative” couple the first is much more important to the poet than the second one. It is thoughts and feelings transmitted to another character, or rather, an internal dialogue with yourself, with your own heart.

Ni ogonka, spyat fonari – k chemu oni?  
Zachem ikh slabiy svet dorogam?  
Noch belaya, ostanovis, povremeni...  
Mne khorosho s toboy molchat o mnogom.  
[No lights, the lantern are sleeping – what are they for?  
Why do the roads need their faint lights?  
White night, stop, don't rush...  
It's so good to keep quiet about so much with you.]

The poem is distinguished by the unity of a poetic thought, and, according to the general emotional mood, it is the complete artistic whole. This is considerably contributed to by a kind of technique of altered repetitions typical of Okudzhava's poetics. So, in fact the fourth stanza (with minor changes) repeats the first one:

Kak korabli, plyvut oni iz dalnikh stran,  
Spokoinykh dum ne narushaya...  
Noch belaya, segodnya ti – moi okean...  
Mne po dushe tvoya dusha bolshaya.  
[Like ships they sail from far away,  
Without shattering the calm...  
White night, today you are my ocean...  
Your great soul is after my own heart.]

As we can see, the first, the third and the fourth lines of the four-line quatrain, in fact, are a modified repetition of similar lines of the first stanza. In addition, they are combined by an epiphora of the first and the fourth verses (“Like ships from far away” – “They sail from far away”, “Your living soul” – “Your great soul”) forming a

ring composition, which gives the poem an inner harmony and completeness.

In terms of phonetic, syntactic and composition aspects of the poem the verbal refrain “White night” in the beginning of the third line of each stanza plays a big role. This anaphora creates a structurally meaningful core of the poem – a leitmotif that represents a human's search for the most beautiful, for the “imperishable beauty”.

Thus, in this poetic miniature, as in many other poems, Okudzhava uses musical techniques (modified repetitions, a refrain) that carry a maximum load of meaning without diverting the reader's attention to the structure, which could not be more suited to the poet who said that “Music of the poem is always quiet”.

What is also interesting is a rhythmic and tonal structure of the poem that combines conversationality and melodiousness. This is achieved by the different syllabic length of the lines (the odd ones have twelve syllables, the even ones – nine or eleven) that creates unevenness in rhythm, and by the interlaced rhyme (a b a b) coupling lines of a poem. It also should be noted that a certain rhythmic dialogue is formed – every odd verse with a male clausula is colloquial, but each even verse with a female clausula tends to melodiousness.

In this poem Okudzhava uses the classic metrics: a so-called “free iamb” with constantly alternating six-, five- and four-step lines. This, as well as the frequent intrusion of a pyrrhic and a spondee (extra accent) creates a special internal dynamics and tension leaving no space for looseness and limpness. Thanks to the rhythmic shifts, fluctuations of syllabic duration of lines, the poet attains a natural intonation and the trusting, intimate and sincere tone that is so characteristic of his lyrics.

Referring to this poem, Slonimsky introduces some changes into it generally maintaining its structure. Thus, he rearranges

the words in the second stanza (“White river” – “river is white”), replaces the phrase “matters for a while” by “your matters”. In the fourth stanza, the first line “Like ships they sail from far away” is omitted; instead, the composer insets the start line “Houses are floating like ships from far away”. These partial changes to the poetic text highlights the high demands of Slonimsky to the literary basis associated not only with the artistic imagery, but also with the specifics of a word’s sounding in singing.

The features of the content and structure of the poetic text affected the musical form of the chorus – ternary reprise with the middle of the progressive type: 10 + 15 + 14. The text is partitioned respectively: the first and the fourth stanzas were the basis of the extreme parts, and the second and the third part were in the middle. General outlines, the type of ternary form bring together the chorus of Slonimsky with the poem of Okudzhava: a thematic arch formed by the repetitiveness is a reflection of the ring composition of the poem. In addition, the reprise nature of the fourth stanza is stressed by the composer by means of the repetition of the starting line of the poem.

When comparing the musical phrases with the corresponding poetic lines, the first thing that draws attention is the flexibility of their scale ratio. Thus, in the exposition written in the form of a square period (4 + 4, excluding the two measures of introduction), verse lines of different lengths are placed into 2-measure phrases with identical length. The middle part consisting of two sections is more complex structurally: because of the intrusion of the 3/2 size, as well as the deep caesuras between episodes, the squareness is broken (3 + 4, 2 + 3). The reprise repeats the exposition varyingly fulfilling its purpose of a closing part.

However, the form of the chorus is not devoid of features of a songlike couplet-variational

structure, as indicated by a distinct division of the musical material into stanzas, caesura between them, as well as the “instrumental” links – small set-in ritornello-elements.

The exposition’s theme set out in the form of a square period is distinguished by the lyrical softness and flexibility (m. 3 – 10). Clearly it has the features of the romance melodies, which is demonstrated in the smoothness of the line – except for a few quarter steps there are only tertian and second steps (and repetition of the sound) in the melody. Melodiousness and softness are combined with a wavy, rounded and balanced melodic pattern typical of the lyrical melodies.

Like in other works of Slonimsky the chorus’s subject contains mirror-symmetric relations. Thus, the overall upward movement of the first sentence covering a tenth’s range (*c – es*) meets the downward movement of the second. If the first four-measure starts with an upward tertian intonation (*c – es*), the second one ends with a downward intonation (*es – c*). The elements of retrogression is observed in the structure (both sentences have a principle of summation), rhythm (a combination of the triple and duple pulses) and intonation sets (trichords, arpeggios). In general, the theme has a wide arc pattern: rising to the *es* top of the second octave in the first sentence it goes down smoothly to the accentual *c* sound in the second sentence.

It is noteworthy that the initial intonation (m. 3) that emphasizes the third of the *c-moll* minor key and is a melodic grain of the theme in the culminating point appears as a vertex (m. 5), but harmonically remade intonation (the sixth degree sounds instead of a key-note). Further, it sounds like in the second sentence (m. 8) on the harmony of the second lowest degree, and then is repeated on the key-note for the last time (m. 10), thus, completing the theme. Consequently, by changing the harmonic coloration this tone becomes a key value and one of the significant

factors that combine the melody giving it features of the inner wholeness and completeness.

The melodic line of the middle part develops a theme previously presented. The intonation that, this time, is set out in a major version provides a melody of the first section of this part (m. 12 – 19) that is brighter and serene. In addition to the tertian techniques the composer also uses trichords, quarter skips, singing major degrees of the mode, repetition of sounds.

The melodic line of the second section is also very close to the theme of the exposition (m. 20 – 25). Starting with a trichord set repeating many times in different versions it ends by a melody (m. 23–25), which is, essentially, a modified repetition of the theme of the exposition – it combines the initial two-measure of the first sentence (m. 3–4) and the concluding phrase of the second sentence (m. 10). It should be mentioned that the tertian intonation that does not lose its key value, and by appearing in various forms like the exposition it frames the entire section emphasizing the most significant words of the text.

In the reprise the theme of the exposition is repeated in the new timbre colouring (it is performed by a male group instead of female voices) almost without changing its intonation nature. The four-measure addition that imitates the “instrumental” conclusion successfully completes the chorus highlighting a prevailing musical tone that is shaded by the harmony of the minor dominant and, thus, sounds in a major at the end surprisingly fresh and soft (m. 37 – 39).

It also should be noted that the poem itself with its long lines mostly having unstressed syllables (e.g., seven by two stressed syllables) creates prerequisites for a slow, melodious, free-flowing melody. The composer sensitively captures the structure of the verse, listens to the music of the poetic speech. The semantic completeness of each stanza is emphasized by the cadences, the persistent repetitions of the keynote

(in melody and harmony) at the end of sections, the deep caesuras between the parts of the form. The poetic meter (iamb with different steps) is reflected in the iambic principles of musical phrases, in emphasizing the stressed syllables by accented and relatively accented syllables, large durations (a quarter, a dotted quarter). Pyrrhic feet, as well as the extra stress naturally fit into an unstable duple-triple rhythm, female clausula (weak cadences) in the even lines are highlighted by the melodic cadences – the voice descending by a third.

In addition, we should not forget about the refrain “White night” that is consistently highlighted by the rising quarter or tertian intonation in music of the chorus (m. 6 – 7, m. 15 – 16, m. 22 – 23, m. 31 – 32). All of this demonstrates the composer’s great sense of all composition and rhythm-intonation features of the poetic original.

The modal structure of the composition has distinct specifics. Its basis is a natural and Dorian *c-moll* mostly sustained in the extreme parts of the work. In the middle section the composer uses a same-named major (*C-dur*), and thanks to the plasticity of modal modulations and easiness of mode changing the keynote *C* easily alternates with others. A triad of the second degree (*D-dur*) that contrasts with it swings the modal stability and takes over the role of the tonic centre (m. 15, m. 19). At the end of the middle part there is a return to the main tone of the *c-moll* (m. 23 – 25), which prepares the beginning of the reprise. Just like the exposition it highlights a Dorian mode given versus a Neapolitan chord, as well as an expressive light-and-shade play (major-minor recolouring) favouring the naturalness of the final transition into the similarly-named major.

The harmonic sequence in a cadence (m. 36 – 39) based on the alternation of a major keynote, minor triads of a mediant and a dominant, as well

as a ninth chord (T – VI – T – V – VI<sub>9</sub> – T), creates the effect of a colourful “iridescence”. And the final chord (*C-dur*) with the second and sixth degrees tuned like overtones giving consonance the note of aching sadness symbolizes a faint silhouette of a summer night.

It is interesting that the poetic text of Bulat Okudzhava prompted Slonimsky for an unusual music solution – to use specific “instrumental and vocal” expressive means. With the choral sound the composer reproduces the characteristic features of the genre of the author song – the poet’s singing while playing the guitar. Thus, from the first measures of the score the performing ensemble is divided into two layers: the relief and background. A men’s chorus imitating the typical guitar techniques of phonation, as indicated by the author’s remark “quasi Guitarre” accompanies a group of female voices assigned to deliver the author’s statement. This principle of the texture separation into two semantically individual layers (with the exception of a few measures in the middle) is maintained throughout the work.

From the very beginning the “guitar” opening the chorus (m. 1 – 2) sets the tone for the whole part. Dull sounding of male voices imitates “instrumental” introduction that prepares the main theme of the soprano and alto concentrating the intoned text. A sonorous-ponic task is implemented by the selected syllables “bong, bong” that are constantly repeated in the accompanying group of voices and, along with a melodic and rhythmic formula, imitate guitar strumming. Such a combination in the simultaneity of different types of vocalizations, in addition to the timbre colorization of the score, creates a special image-semantic double dimensionality of the sound. While female voices are speaking from the author, the men’s chorus forms a long dimension reviving intonation bends of the melody by changing harmonic colours.

As can be seen, the composer uses a mixed type of the texture where the female choir performing the author’s monologue is a “thickened” melody (heterophonic layer), and the male group that imitates an accompanying instrument forms the movable rhythmical background exfoliating in two voices.

In the middle part a two-layer texture is occasionally interspersed with the polyphonic chords of the choral character giving the sound the features of light pathos (m. 16 – 19). What is also quite expressive is the effect of a melody’s transfer from soprano to bass with sequential overlaying of voices in the quiet dynamics that convey the sounds of serenity, a romantic idyll of a summer night: “No lights, the lanterns are sleeping – what are they for?” (m. 20 – 22).

In the reprise the functions of voices are changing: the author’s speech is assigned to the men’s chorus and female voices play the role of background, creating a certain shimmering effect between shadow and light that meets with the image instability of the work. Closure of the chorus, as well as the introduction, is a clear illustration of the “instrumental” conclusion, in which subtly expressive and coloristic interchanges of different types of performing ensemble (female, male, mixed) are associated with the last “breaths of the guitar”.

Interestingly, after the creation of the “White night” chorus in 1982, the composer writes a work on the same topic called “Leningrad white night” to the lyrics of the St. Petersburg poet Anatoly Chepurov. And in 1983 the composer draws his attention to the poet’s work twice – for the 280<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his native city he creates the magnificent “Song about Leningrad” for bass, mixed choir and symphony orchestra, and the above-mentioned work for a cappella chorus.

Anatoly N. Chepurov (1922 – 1990) – a poet of his time and generation, the generation whose youth was spent on the battlefield, whose character

was formed during the difficult and heroic period of time. The main theme of his work was military heroism, front-line partnership, international brotherhood, defence of Leningrad. In the army A. Chepurov worked in the newspaper titled "Defeat the enemy", wrote poems, notes about war heroes, reports, essays, satirical sketches, conducted daily propaganda literary work that demanded not only talent, but also the courage and dedication.

After the war, Anatoly threw himself into literary work completely. His books of his poetry got published, in which the poet expressed a deeply personal experience during severe and heroic years: "The road" (1947), "My youth" (1956), "Life line" (1960), "Crossroad of dates" (1962), "One land" (1970). Later, in 1975, having taken a long trip to the Far East, Chepurov wrote a series of poems that are soldered together not only by a lyrical hero who is the narrator, but also by the historical interchange of the events unfolding in them: "Tracks", "Pine trees", "Waves of the Danube", "Bridge", "Treasure", etc.

In addition to the works for the wide audience the poet also wrote many poems pertaining to the philosophical and scenery lyrics. It should be noted that the very nature of Chepurov's poetic talent is lyrical, soft and soulful; its colours are usually unostentatious. According to a literary critic A. Pavlovskiy, "all his poetry can be compared with a lyrical song extended in time and space that is organically made up of many individual melodic verses, almost never distracting from the main soft register. In this respect, of course, it is very close to the most secret element of the Russian national melos" (Pavlovskiy, 1982: 7 – 8).

Poetry of Anatoly Chepurov is different with stylistic clarity, smooth rhythm, watercolour picture and terse expression. According to the poet Vsevolod Rozhdestvensky, "the simplicity of his lyrics is quite complex and meaningful. In

this respect, it follows the principles of Russian classical verse able to combine the clarity and accuracy (and therefore the subtlety) with the significance of the content. In this case the Russian language is connected with truthfulness of the general tone, with the immediacy of experience, and it always is convincing, because it expresses the undeniable truth of feelings" (Rozhdestvensky, 1971: 4).

These true, but outwardly unpretentious lyrical miniatures also include a poem "In the white night" that became the basis for a cappella chorus of Slonimsky "The Leningrad white night". It was written in 1955 and has features of the soulful, intimate tone that is so characteristic of the scenery lyrics of Chepurov where nature is the path to cognition of the heart, character and worldview of the contemporary.

Ya lyublyu v leningradskuyu beluyu noch  
Vdol Nevy pobrodit ne spesha.  
Esli grust donyala –  
Grust unositsya proch,  
I po-prezhnemu zhizn khorosha.  
[In the white night in Leningrad I love  
To stroll along the Neva River slowly.  
If sadness wearies –  
Sadness fades away,  
And still, life is good.]

Indeed, how simple and unshowy this lyrical confession seems to be. The poet draws creative attention to the feelings and experience of the hero, but at the same time recreates the lovely features of his native city. It appears natural and simple, because goodness and kindness are very peculiar to his inner world. The scenery in this case is a way of transmitting emotions of the lyrical hero who always has a loving attitude to the nature.

In a brief, concise work (the poem includes four stanzas in total) Chepurov finds those tones

and artistic images that could convey the author's thoughts more fully and deeply. The poet constantly and skilfully uses the bright vision of the colours of nature, its breath, which is very typical of him. Thus, in the third stanza the "freshness before dawn" "breathed in by leafage", "the first beam on the river silver" is extraordinarily heartfelt and poetic. The poet writes about it excitedly, but not sharply, unobtrusively, which makes poetry gain from the artistic power and convincingness.

No predutrennei svezhestyu dishit listva,  
 Perviy luch na rechnom serebre,  
 I vnezapnoy  
 Studencheskoy pesni slova  
 Uletayut navstrechu zare.

[But the leafage breathes the predawn freshness,  
 The first beam on the river silver,  
 And the words  
 Of a student song  
 Fly to meet the dawn.]

It should be emphasized that the lyrical scenery in this case is not valuable in itself; it is the impetus for reflection and contemplation. The deep meaning of the poem is revealed in the fourth stanza. The warmth of intonations formed by love for their native city in all its modest but spiritualized character results in a concise, aphoristically accurate ending, which is a symbolic statement of beauty of the human soul, glorification of our spiritual and moral unity with our native land.

Skolko srazu v dushe probuzhdaetsya sil  
 V te minuty pod nebom rodnym!  
 Nochi, belye nochi,  
 Kto vas ne lyubil,  
 Ne byl tot nikogda molodym!

[So many powers awaken in the soul at once  
 In those moments under the mother sky!  
 Nights, white nights,

Those who did not love you,  
 Were never young!]

This miniature is distinguished by the orderliness and architectonic completeness of the whole. Its composition clearly discovers the two-part features. The first two stanzas combined by the anaphora "I love" embody the image of the night city. The third and fourth stanzas recreate a picture of the dawn arousing enthusiastic and romantic feelings in the soul of the hero. The key words "I love" and "white night" that first appeared in the starting line of the verse are repeated in a modified version in the concluding verses of the fourth stanza ("Nights, white nights", "those who did not love you"), framing the entire poem and forming the ring composition.

It is interesting that the stanzas of the poem are five-line stanzas, in which the first line includes twelve syllables, the second and the fifth – nine syllables; the number of syllables in the third and fourth lines varies: 6 + 6, 4 + 8, 7 + 5. As can be seen, the nine-syllable verses are framed by the short ones (third and fourth) that would constitute a twelve-syllable line that rhymes with the first, if the poet did not divide them in two lines.

Thus, when combining the third and fourth lines the five-line stanza acquired the appearance of a quatrain with the regulated alternating of odd and even lines: 12 – 9 – 12 – 9. It should be noted that dividing the third line into two short verses, as well as the appearing caesura, draw the reader's attention to a word, syntagma that acquire a certain vividness and expressiveness. In addition, the word transfer to the next line gives the poem features of a sublime, deliberate, slow declamation. This is also contributed to by the cross rhyme (a b a b) with the same masculine cadence, and a trisyllabic meter – the four- and three-meter anapaest that is usually used by poets to create works of an elegiac, meditative character.

Creatively approaching the poetic original Slonimsky used all four stanzas in the music of the chorus keeping them intact. Studying the imaginative and emotional structure of Chepurov's poem, the composer creates a work in the genre of choral songs that is most consistent with the literary fundamental principle stylistically and tonally.

The stanzaical structure of the verse determined the choice of the form – a couplet-variation form consisting of four (according to the number of stanzas of the poem) developments of the theme that are freely varied (not counting a three-measure introduction): 8 + 8 + 9 + 11. Contours of a binary form stand out against the background of the variational basis quite subtly. For convenience the chorus can be divided into two sections that correlate with each other by the length 19 + 20. Although according to the type of development and internal thematic contrasts this one-theme composition does not have a binary form, certain features of the binary form reflect and highlight the real image-informative binary form of the work. While the first two verses describe the beauty of the white night with soft sincerity, the third and fourth not only describe the image of the dawn, but also feelings of admiration and delight of the hero.

The poetic stanza fits into the square period of the subsequent structure consisting of eight measures and which, just as the verse is divided into two couplets, is split into two four-measures, into two musical phrases. Smoothness in the development of the melodic line, the absence of skips, stability of ascending and descending tones, a small range (*g – es*) – all this emphasizes simplicity and naturalness of Chepurov's verse. The culmination nature of the fourth and fifth lines "Sadness fades away and, still, life is good" is conveyed by the composer by means of the Dorian sixth degree harmonized by the major

subdominant that is resolved into the dominant of the key *f-moll* tone.

It should be noted that the singing intonation is pivotal for the chorus melodic line. So, the first phrase is characteristic of a permanent return to the supporting sounds of the mode – thirds and fifths (*as – c*). With a smooth ascent of the melody from the third degree to the *es* top there is a constant resistance in the form of separate melodic steps in the opposite direction (m. 3 – 7). The descent from the top is also accompanied by singing and return to the fifth tone. The same is observed in the second phrase, optionally repeating the first (m. 8 – 11). The ascent to the *d* top (Dorian sixth degree that thanks to the major colouring sounds surprisingly lightly and vividly) is replaced with a descent to the *c* fifth. The melody singing the supporting tones of the mode always returns to the same sounds creating the effect of a continuous circular motion, rotation that is associated with a measured flow of the river, as discussed in the text.

It is noteworthy that the melodic line of the work, as in many choral songs of Slonimsky, is very simple. Its rhythmic, the general contours, accents, long notes are determined by the structure of the verse. One of the characteristics of the relation of the text and music is a paired combination of couplets in a stanza together with a variant repetition of a melodic phrase. (The boundaries of the melody, the scale of its length are determined by a semi-stanza resulting in an exact coincidence of poetic and musical caesuras). Structural completeness of each stanza is emphasized by the cadences.

The composer retains the trisyllabic meter tending to the full stress by using the "barcarole" rhythm (size 6/8), thus achieving the full metrorhythmic equivalence of the poetic text and music. All phrases start because of the measure, which corresponds to two-

syllable anacrusis of anapaest; accented vowels attributable to the strong and relatively strong beats are perceived naturally and organically. An important role is played by the quantitative emphasis: stressed syllables are usually longer than the unstressed ones, especially at the ends of phrases that emphasize the masculine clausulas.

The characteristic genre touches should include the dotted rhythmic figure that appears in almost every measure extending the stressed syllables. In conjunction with the song theme it gives music the features of elegance and grace. In addition, the triple pulse of the eighths chosen by the composer is never interrupted, and it is this “spinning” in the rhythm, as well as in the melodic line, as mentioned above, that is the most expressive.

The mode-harmonic structure of the work is also quite interesting. It is based on the Aeolian-Dorian *f-moll* that contains the first verse of the chorus. It is characterized by modulations of minor-major triads with correlation of the natural and Dorian subdominant. The tonal specificity is combined with the aspiration for continuity, fluctuation of the harmonic motion, which is achieved by the dominant cadences of both sentences (m. 7, m. 11).

In the second verse the pitch degree of the theme that in the tenor and bass parts sounds by a fifth lower from the *des* sound, changes. Smooth mode modulations are very indicative of this variation (Dorian *b-moll* – *As-dur*), as well as the triad of the second lower degree (*Ges-dur*) introduced at the end of the second couplet, resolved into the dominant. This periodic functioning of the side keynotes, as well as a comparison of major triads (*As-dur* – *Ges-dur* – *C-dur*) gives the music features of the tonal duality and instability. It should be noted that both couplets end on the dominant that “requires” continuation and are strengthened by the unity of

mood and general logic of the tonal plan: *f* – *b* – *As* – *f*.

But the third and fourth verses are perhaps the most colourful in the harmonic view, where attention is drawn to bright modulations in the key of the mediant. Thus, in the third verse after the first sentence in *f-moll* the second sentence in the key of the third high *A-dur* sounds surprisingly light and very expressive, which is a clear illustration of lines of the third stanza: “And the words of a student song fly away to meet the dawn!” (m. 24 – 27). Furthermore, in contrast to the first verses the third finishes with the full perfect cadence, but not in the key of *A-dur*, which is expected, but in *F-dur*, which is associated with bright highlights arising in the first rays of the sun.

In the fourth stanza having the value of semantic musical summary of the entire work there is a keynote-mediator tonal relation, but this time only major tonalities are compared. The composer actively transforms the theme that acquires a hymn nature in a major version. Its first sentence is in *F-dur*, and the second one – in *A-dur*.

The idea of the contrast comparison of flat and sharp tonalities finds clear expression in the cadence of the chorus, where unexpected modulation and elliptical shifts sound freshly and expressively (m. 36 – 39). Thus, after the *A-dur* keynote a sudden modulation in *F-dur* is interrupted by a triad of the sixth lowest *Des-dur* degree with the turn to *As-dur*, but the elliptical idiom brings the listener to *F-dur* once again (instead of the functionally preparing *As-dur* keynote). Thanks to these contrasting tonal comparisons the final thought “Was never young!” lights up, sounds expressively and enthusiastically.

Brilliance of the sound is achieved not only by the harmonic means, but also by the timbre and register-based combinations. Thus, in the first

verse Slonimsky uses a mixed type of the texture, where the theme assigned to the female chorus and described by the parallel thirds (heterophonically), which emphasizes and strengthens its lyrical song nature, is accompanied by a male group (tenor, bass). And the accompanying voices singing with mouth closed also form the heterophonical layer (pedals, interval parallelisms), as a result a two-layer texture forms from the first measures, where the lower layer distinguished by the rhythmic pattern creates a soft, moderated background for the melodic relief (m. 1 – 11). In the second verse the features of voices are changing: the theme set by the parallel decimas is assigned to male voices, and sopranos and altos sounding with mouth closed accompany it.

Then, after two episodes with a transparent texture the choral tutti in the third verse (m. 20 – 28) sounds very impressively. The composer uses homophonic-harmonic kind of presentation giving the theme to the leading voice (soprano), with which the other parties sound in the same rhythm, thus, harmoniously complementing it. At the same time it should be emphasized that the musical nature that at first glance seems to be chorale is made up of melodic voices, sometimes active and plastic, sometimes hardly noticeable. Melodic beginning is particularly evident in the middle voices that by turns double the soprano at first in the third or sixth (altos), and then in the decima (tenor). As a result, the traditional (at first glance) four-part texture is very actively penetrated by the elements of heterophony forming an unusually melodic, naturally sounding choral texture close to the folk song polyphony.

The same principle of presentation is maintained in the fourth stanza, where the

texture is divided into two heterophonic layers: in the first sentence it is the women's and men's group (m. 29 – 32) and in the second (m. 32 – 36) – high (soprano, tenor) and low voices (alto, bass). Only in the final measures (m. 36 – 39), both groups in the choir are merged into the chord tutti emphasizing the culmination of all the work.

Thus, during the process of development the thematic material gradually accumulates chords: while in the first two stanzas the melody easily “floated” on the background of sustained pedals, in the third and fourth stanzas it sounds in a heterophonic-harmonic way that in the final measures gives way to the choral one, so that there is a “modulation” from the lyrical meditateness to the solemn, hymn-like pathos.

In conclusion, it should be noted that both works of Slonimsky dedicated to one theme – the beauty of the white nights in St. Petersburg are an example of a sensitive and careful attitude of the composer to the poetic word. Turning to the poetic texts of various poets, the composer creates works in the genre of the choir song, the traditions of which go back to the past centuries – “to the Russian choral and “a capella” culture” (Korableva M.D., 2010: 30). The music that flexibly follows the verse reflects all the features of the poetic original. In these works, despite the self-restraint in the choice of means, Slonimsky achieved significant dynamics of development with laconism and completeness of the form, expressiveness of each part, as well as the balance between words and music, which is indicative of a high artistic taste of the composer, his talent and skills.

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## **Песни о Петербурге Сергея Слонимского.**

### **К вопросу интерпретации поэтического текста**

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*В данной статье рассматриваются хоры а cappella Сергея Слонимского, которые ярко репрезентируют творческий стиль современного мастера. Написанные на стихи разных поэтов (Булата Окуджавы и Анатолия Чепурова), они, тем не менее, связаны между собой общностью образного содержания, стилистическим единством, наличием одной сквозной темы. В каждом из них представлен петербургский ночной пейзаж, проникнутый светлым настроением и воплощенный композитором глубоко, эмоционально и художественно убедительно. На основе анализа этих сочинений в работе подробно освещаются вопросы взаимосвязи слова и музыки, трактовки поэтического текста, раскрывается характер соотношения композиции, строфической структуры и метроритмики стиха со средствами музыкальной выразительности, исследуется мелодико-ритмический и ладогармонический язык хоров, их фактурная организация.*

*Ключевые слова: текст, композиция, строфа, метр, ритм, лад, гармония, фактура.*

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