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Music and Plastic Characteristics of the Comic Characters in the Works of Maurice Ravel

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This article examines the specifics of embodiment of comic images in the subject area of musical-theatrical and vocal works of Maurice Ravel. The most important means of the comic characterization becomes a certain dance genre. The composer uses a wide range of dance prototypes different in historical, ethnic or social origin. Through special artistic techniques Ravel transforms the genre model revealing properties of motor plasticity of each character determined by their nature, temperament, scenic situation. Among these techniques there are different ways of deformation of the metric structure of the dance, the effects of unexpected solutions and paradoxical combination of the "incompatible" implemented both at the image-semantic and structural levels.

Keywords: character in music, motor-plastic intonation, dance prototype, redefining the semantics of the primary genre, deformation of the metric structure of the dance.

The artistic heritage of Maurice Ravel is a bright and unique phenomenon not only of French, but also of the world music. One of the aspects of his multifaceted composer personality is the *theatricality of musical thinking* manifested not only in the musical-theatrical genres, but also in a number of instrumental and vocal chamber works. The influence of the theater in the music of Ravel is found in the influence of the principles of the game logic in the processes of the theme- and structure-shaping, as well as in the portrait vividness of the *characters'* features: real – in musical-theatrical genres, imaginary – in the instrumental and vocal chamber music.

A "character" of the work of art is understood as an artistic image of the subject of the action



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endowed with the characteristic features of appearance and behavior that imprint the diversity of the inner world of an individual. A character can be embodied in a work of art statically, as if staying in a certain state (such imprint is more characteristic of portraiture), and in a time aspect (which is rather peculiar of the subject's characteristics in a certain active situation, often in interaction with other characters).

In the various forms of art the characterological formedness of the character is reconstructed by specific means. In visual arts the appearance of the model as an opportunity to look into the depths of personality is very important for a portrait painter. A literary portrait accommodates informative description both appearance and the emotional-characteristic "core" of the individual. In a theatrical performance an actor transforms into a character through speech, plasticity, gestures, facial expressions, as well as theatrical costumes, makeup, masks. In addition, characterization of the character in literature and performing arts is enriched by the temporary deployment – a string of episodes in which the character somehow takes actions and, thus, reveals himself creating a holistic image.

The embodiment of the character in the music has its own specifics. The language of music does not have straightforward visual associations. External physical parameters of the character may partly be reflected in the musical portrait, but only indirectly, vicariously, and to the extent that they are in harmony with the psychological characteristics of the individual. Music has found ways to implement the properties of characters. According to Ye. Nazaikinsky, the function of a character in a piece of music can be fulfilled by a theme with a distinct sound-intonation look, as well as with any component of the art form distinguished and fixed by the perception (a melody, a textured pattern, an original sound of the instrument, a method of articulation, a

chord, the shortest intonation-motif). Thanks to the many aspects of the musical language elements, they may be endowed with character-based features, and at the same time be assessed as expression of emotion, character, idea, as the detection of the current plot power [Nazaikinsky, 1982: 63]. This is due to the fact [that for each musical figure there is a wide range of different life events, and specification of the subtext is a matter of imagination of a listener and performer, and is suggested by the composer's program guidelines.

Since the characters express themselves by means of speech and moves, their musical equivalents are, respectively, the melodious-declamatory and motor-plastic intonations. This article attempts to identify ways to implement features of the temperament, character, behavior, and characters' states in music reflected in their motor plasticity.



A motor principle is one of the most important extramusical incentives of intonation expressiveness of music. The kinesthetic experience of the individual mediated in a musical tone covers many specific types of motion – from the mundane (gesture, facial expression, step, run, jump, rotation) and labor related with some kind of work processes, to the unusual, poetized (dance moves, pantomime). In the musical practice there were certain mechanisms of "transcoding" of motor plasticity into the elements of musical structure. These processes are most clearly evident in a multifaceted musical rhythm that includes phonic, harmonic, modal, timbre, syntactic and composition rhythmic plans, as well as in the music tempo. The interconnection of a dance move and intonation-rhythm can be found both in the likeness of musical-rhythmic formulas and figures of the dance, and in the indirect form: in the general tone of the sound, the degree of activity and specificity of the rhythm. The

orderliness of dance moves is directly reflected in the musical meter as a system of rhythm organization. The emotional tone of the dance is largely determined by its tempo. Reflection of the motor plasticity also occurs in music by certain properties of pitch, texture, timbre, etc. A pitch pattern of the melody can recreate a nature of the move (evenness, angularity, swiftness, weightlessness, etc.) and its spatial trajectory. Phonic qualities of the texture – density or transparency – are associated with strength, weight, speed of moves and are coordinated with various spatial conditions. The functional side of the texture (constitution, registry arrangement of voices, their pattern, techniques) stimulates associative links with the interaction of the acting characters with the choreographic dance pattern, etc.

Dance is a primordial genre for many of the works of Maurice Ravel. Sustained interest in dance genres is the most important feature of Ravel's creative individuality, which drew attention of many composers, performers, scholars who have written about the great musician. Art of dancing has become the most important way of artistic generalization for Ravel. Inclusion of a certain dance in the context of the work and a specific way to indirectly display its choreographic components in the elements of the musical language are the means of fulfilling the ideological and imaginative conception of the work for the composer. In some cases, the plastic components of the musical tone are the main means of characterization. Ravel attains a special expression, a certain relief of characters' intonation by the embodiment of comic images in the works of musical and theatrical genres and vocal works. The composer achieves vivid individualization in comic portrayal of characters, first and foremost, by recreating their motor-plastic properties revealed in a dance.

In the genre of everyday sketches made in a humorous way, Ravel uses a wide range of dance prototypes different in historical, ethnic or social origin. Among them there are old courtly dances – sarabande, pavane, minuet; a peculiar emblem of Romanticism – waltz; a pop and jazz dance of the composer's era – foxtrot. The composer sees a dance as a very flexible, "plastic" genre that "responds" to any creative task. By using certain techniques of changing (strengthening or weakening of meaning shades) or transformation (rethinking) of the original semantics of a certain dance prototype, Ravel "expands" its semantic boundaries.

For example, the specificity of the reflection of *sarabande* in the opera "The Spanish Hour" – a slow dance of a solemnly-concentrated or mournful nature – is focused on redefining the semantics of the primary genre. Through certain changes in the structure of a genre model the composer achieves a comic effect in the musical characteristics of the pompous and important Don Inigo whose image correlates with a typical theatrical character of the opera buffa (see scenes 7, 9, 19).

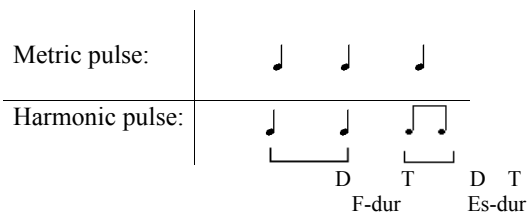
In the text Ravel preserves the most important attributes of the dance prototype: a slow tempo, a triple time, the use of a characteristic rhythm formula of the sarabande  (scene 7, m. 16) and its variant  (ib., m. 2), the allocation of the second beat of the measure by the different types of accent – melodic (m. 1, 10, 12) and harmonic (m. 4, 5, 14, 15). In addition, the composer corresponds with the tradition of glorification of the genre of sarabande going back to the stylistics of sarabandes by Handel, Bach, Beethoven (in this regard, there is the prevalence of dotted figures in a rhythmic pattern, iambic pickup measures, emotional sixth tones in the melody), and, at the same time, "turns" it towards a comedy course. One can find a number of clever techniques turning the perception of the listener

into the field of humor unexpected for the genre of sarabande.

The ironic tone of the author can already be seen in the initial measures of the orchestral theme. It paradoxically combines the strictness of the melody and sensual magnificence, brilliance of accompaniment. The line of the leading voice that, thanks to the smooth movement in a small range, reminds of the melos of spiritual songs, and a parallel movement of counterpoint voices descending in chromaticism, as well as the phonism of an increased triad give the sounding a pompous, overly solemn feature. Therefore, we get a conception of the plasticity of moves of a person that is instinct with consciousness of his own importance. Thereafter, this impression is enhanced by the increasing retardation starting with the measure 14 (author's remarks "A little slower", "expanding", "More slowly"), the change in the 4/4 size.

Other features of the nature and behavior of the character that include restlessness, clumsiness of movements, awkward exaltation are embodied by the composer by means of register skips, sharp tonal comparisons and changes of dynamics, disturbance of the movement regularity. In the latter case, there are short-term "malfunctions" of inertia of a three-time metric pulse due to the change in the harmonic scale. For example, in measures 4, 5, 14, 15 the change of a harmonic rhythm in the sequence creates an accent "interruption" (a harmonic accent sometimes

falls into the second beat, sometimes into the last eighth of the third beat):



Due to the imbalance of the meter and the harmonic rhythm, as well as a literal repetition of the entire phrase, the emotional tone of the ascending sixth intonation is levelled out. In this context, it may be perceived as a ridiculous exclamation or an awkward move.

In another scene of the opera *"The Spanish Hour"* (*Scene 9, Mouvt de Valse*) Ravel uses *waltz* as a means of characterization of the arrogant banker Inigo, thus, continuing the tradition of the interpretation of this genre in a humorous or satirical way. The ironic tone of the author is noticeable in the use of artistic techniques forming such properties of motor plasticity and temperament of the character as slowness and sluggishness. It is noteworthy that Ravel opts for waltz that, on the contrary, is characterized by lightness, easiness and swiftness.

One of the means of embodiment of the plastic properties of the character of the opera is a "slowed" tempo of deployment of the waltz theme that sounds in the orchestra. The impression of slow movement arises from a

Ravel "The Spanish Hour" scene 7



Ravel “The Spanish Hour” scene 9

Mouvt de Valse *mf* desinvolte

Inigo

Tant pis, ma foi, si je de - roge!

Piano

formula of the accompaniment with a pause on the third beat typical for a slow waltz (boston); two-measure breaks between melodic phrases; lengthy occurrence of culmination in the melody (for example, in part 1 of the waltz the ascent lasts for 14 measures, descent – 6 measures). The slowness, heaviness of the dance is also achieved by long stops at supporting tones of melodic phrases and restraint of the auxiliary harmonic idioms (measures 1-3: D → II D → <II>; measures 6-8: M₉⁶-D₉^{+5 -5} – T₉⁶, etc.). Thus, the dance prototype is transformed – loses the original lightness and swiftness.

The incursion of the Inigo leitmotif (a rhythmically transformed melody of sarabande with ponderous accents on every sound – mm. 10-15, 32-37) into a transparent fabric of waltz leads to a contradiction between the textured layers arising from the register-timbre contrast (waltz melody – strings, harp in the high register; sarabande melody – trombone in the low register), incongruence of caesuras and rhythmic accents. The rhythmic and timbre polyphony associates with clumsy and awkward moves of an unlucky admirer (it is a reminder that according to the plot between the sections of waltz the banker barely squeezes himself into the clock that is too narrow for his body). The inner-thematic contrast also arises at the stylistic level. On the one hand, the influence of jazz stylistics (first of all, in harmony)

is quite noticeable, which is comparable with the easiness of movements, legerity and plasticity of the performers of jazz dances. On the other hand, the characteristic features of sarabande topic send the imagination to the ponderous gait of the old, solemn dance. This contradiction may be explained by the ridiculous behaviour of the character of the scene, comicality of the situation. Attempts of Inigo to look dexterous, graceful and cheerful turn to be futile and provoke laughter.

This impression is strengthened by the lack of stability in the ratio of rhythmic patterns of the vocal part and orchestra throughout the scene. The melody of the soloist based on the principle of speech declamation first is subject to a waltz triple-time meter, then is contradicting to it forming polyrhythmy (in mm. 3, 10, 14-15, 26-27, 31-32, 34-35, 39-40 proportions of rhythmic division of different textural plans are not the same).

Ravel's suite for voice and piano "*Nature Stories*" presents the gallery of musical sketches of animals symbolizing various human character traits. From the literary source (a collection of miniatures "Nature Stories" by J. Renard, 1896) the composer selects those fragments that are resolved in an ironic way (exception is the play "Cricket"). In the vocal miniature "*Peacock*" an important means of comic characteristics of a boastful, conceited bird becomes *pavane* –

one of the most majestic courtly dances of the Renaissance.

In Ravel's vocal sketch the soloist party and piano accompaniment keep the genre "autonomy". The main thematic material having dance origins is concentrated in the piano party. The vocal party, as the composer wrote in a brief autobiography, is a "form of peculiar musical declamation that is closely connected with intonations of the French speech" [Ravel au miroir de ses Lettres, 1988: 228]. The melody sounds like the voice of the narrator whose tone is now impartially-narrative, then coloured with the spontaneous emotional response to the events of the plot.

The choice of pavane as a dance prototype is not accidental. The haughty foot of pavane and luxurious costumes of its performers reminded of the habits of an exotic bird with a bright colourful plumage. V. Smirnov drew attention to the wordplay *pavane* and *pavaner* (to peacock, flaunt, boast) that also affected the composer's idea [Smirnov, 1981: 59]. In the extreme parts of the play "Peacock" there are main attributes of the pavane: a quadruple-four time, a measured pace and slow moves, the precise dissection of musical speech, the chord constitution. In addition, some thematic properties associated with the

caricature image of the character transform the genre model.

Thus, due to the abundance of dotted rhythmic figures all beats of the measure are accented almost equally. The heaviness of a figure's long sound is enhanced by the previous short durations and the melodic running start (ascending or descending). All this "exaggerates" a metric pulse and iambic characteristics of motifs. At the same time, an interbeat syncope following the dotted rhythmic figure creates the effect of the movement delays, "jams". As a result, there is the image of pavane that lost the strictness and purity of lines of the choreographic pattern, the grace of movements. The features of the rhythmic evoke associations with the plasticity of the self-satisfied bird that proudly "walks like on the steps of the temple" showing off and enjoying itself.

The absurdity of the character's behaviour is demonstrated by using special techniques in the vocal sketch. The comic incongruity of a smooth one-directional bass line and a broken melodic pattern of upper voices with leaps and sudden register drops should be noted here. In conjunction with the ostinato dotted rhythm it gives sounding the nervous impulsivity, which is inconsistent with a solemn and strict pavane.

M. Ravel "Nature Stories": "Peacock"

Sans hate noblement

Another inconsistency of efforts and the result is found in the logic of thematic deployment. In mm. 1-4 the continuous ascending movement of the lower voice activated by the dotted rhythm, crescendo, and the increase in the harmonic instability (gradual movement to the vivid instability – D) creates a sense of suspense, volitional determination. However, right after reaching culmination (*ff*) the movement suddenly becomes inert; the energy impulse is quickly running out. The forward movement of bass is replaced by “going round in circles” – the repetition of one motif over an extended time period, permanent return to the same seventh chord of the 4th degree. At the end of the sentence the pulse is getting slow and the rhythm is aligned. There is an impression of temporary cessation, closure of the theme, and the 7-8th measures are perceived as a new material. Due to a strict rhythmic, natural accentuation (only strong and relatively strong beats are notable), the archaic sound of “unfulfilled” chords of the fourths and fifths structure this duple time is approaching the pavane to a greater extent than other thematic fragments. The occurrence of this fragment of the theme in the most important moments of deployment of the story (it sounds on the border of the first and second sentences of the exposition – the beginning of the story; before the reprise – a decision to redo the wedding ceremony; in conclusion – the end of the story), seriousness of the tone allows us to associate it with a speech from “the author”.

In the middle section of a ternary form that is based on the alternation of short motifs the method of outlining the character through displaying features of his plasticity gives way to other principles. The sound-imitative techniques that mimic the features of appearance and behaviour of the “hero” of the humorous sketch are brought to the foreground: plumage brightness (harmonic sequence including colourful altered


chords $D_{65} - ^5$ and $D_2 + ^5 - ^5$ on a double organ point, mm. 39-40); “shaking crest” (repetitions on one sound in the rhythm $\text{♩} \cdot \text{♩} \text{♩}$ mm. 21-26, etc.); “diabolical” cry (descending tertian intonation in the “Hungarian” rhythm harmonized by an acerbic consonance – D_{65}/g with a split tertian tone and retardation of m. 32); “ascent to the top” (long and continuous ascending movement in a dotted rhythm mm. 28-30).

In the middle part of the play there is also a situation of non-compliance of the efforts and the result. Two stages of development are completed by retardation zones (the third leads to the theme of the “author commentary”). Stops occur due to long holding of one consonance, against which the short arpeggiated chords separated by pauses are replaced (mm. 27-26-27, 33-34). It is significant that the marked areas of musical development in a prose text correspond to the words about vain expectations of the hapless suitor.

In the opera-ballet “*The Child and the Spells*”, which Ravel called a “lyrical fantasy”, the singing corresponds with choreography. The dance is an essential tool of characterization of the cast in the fantastic extravaganza. The first picture of the one-act opera is solved as a dance divertissement performed by revived things and characters from the books: the Old chair and the Couch dancing minuet, the Kettle made of black china and the Chinese cup dancing foxtrot, the coloratura aria of the Fire sounds in a swift movement of tarantella, the Shepherds and Shepherdesses perform musette accompanied by a rhythmic ostinato of tambourine, the Little old book of problems and Numbers whirl in the round dance.

The scene of the Chair and the small Couch of the Louis XV period (c. 17-21) is written in a comic vein. In this scene Ravel recreates some features of the gallant minuet of the middle of the 18th century complementing them with a variety of ingenious details that give the dance

a grotesque nature. In this case, the attributes of the minuet close to the exquisite Rococo style dances are given in a keen, exaggerated form. For example, in the extreme parts of the simple ternary form the theme's division into equal one-measure motifs emphasizes the frequency of syntactic segmentation and accents on all the beats of each measure clearly identify the regularity of the minuet's rhythmic. Therefore such properties of the dance as steadiness, regularity are exaggerated. >>>

The theme is formed on the basis of alternation of a double statement of the motif **a** and the motifs **b** and **b₁**, the melodic patterns of which are mirror-symmetric. The rhythmic pattern of the melody is "completed" by the replication (accurate or modified) of one rhythmic part: . The Cadential formula of bass V-V↓-I↑ correlated with a suitor's bow becomes the repeated figure in the first part of ostinato. In this regard, associations with the dance formed on the basis of the alternation of the same movements occur. Elegant easiness and laconism typical of the dance language of the minuet are transformed into the monotony and simplicity.




The melody of the piano part that is "thickened" with chords and "overloaded" with grace notes, the broken melodic contour of vocal parts with abrupt skips in the seventh at the ends of phrases give rise to the ideas about characters' angular, somewhat ponderous dance moves lacking grace. The association with an awkward curtsy occurs in the final cadence of the first part (mm. 9-10) due to the "stretching" the dominant and its resolution into the keynote on the weak beat with a sharp dynamic accent and a sharp *staccato*.

At the same time, the priority of ostinato-ness, emphasized regularity of movement, intense phonism of dissonant chords formed on the basis of the enhanced triad, the specific timbre of the

prepared piano (with a sheet of paper on the strings to imitate the sounds of harpsichord) give the sounding a bizarre, mystical tone, create an atmosphere of sinister stupor. According to the observation of N. Bikbaeva, the sounding of the minuet of the Chair and the Couch gives rise to the "aural allusion of another genre – funeral passacaglia or a funeral march" [Bikbaeva, 2004: 398]. Indeed, a slow tempo, a solemn nature of the music (the author's remark *Lento maestoso*), a triple time and a minor key, the repetition of the same formula in bass and the ostinato-ness of the rhythmic figure in the melody relate to the genre of the passacaglia. The regularity of the rhythm and special importance of the dotted rhythm-formula coupled with the repetition of one sound identify the features of a funeral march. Here we can talk about the indirect reflection of the phenomenon of the ritual laughter in a funeral tradition considered in the article of Yu. Gurenkova [Gurenkova, 2012:59]. Obviously, this is due to the mystical nature of the story line. The Chair and the Couch revived as a result of the fantastic transformation are threatening to take revenge on the Boy for the offence and pronounce strange words *in his presence*: "We are free from the evil boy, at last! He is gone! <...> He's not here anymore!"

The polyphonic texture of the middle part (c. 18) is a counterpoint of contrasting thematic elements. One of them grows out of textured formula of the fanfare (octave-unison sounding, dotted rhythm, repetition of one tone) and concludes with two oppositely directed skips to the seventh. At first it is sequently fulfilled in the piano part, and then sounds alternately from a French horn, bass clarinet and contrabassoon in the form of imitation. An active, energetic character of this thematic element implies a corresponding plasticity: sweeping, rough moves inappropriate in the gallant minuet. It can be associated with an impulsive dance of the vexed

Chair that is angry at the “evil boy”. The second element fulfilled by the woodwind and string instruments is based on a conjunct, rhythmically aligned movement, which allows correlating it with the basic step of the minuet – *pas menu*. However, the quickened rhythmic pulse by the eighth, sharp *staccato* and grace notes that adorn every sound reflect the fussy manner of performance and the “fluttering”, bouncing gait of another participant of the dance dialogue – the Couch. The parody effect is reinforced by the glissando of cellos and trombones. Because of the inaccuracy of imitations and the change in the time interval between the individual voices it seems like the dance duo is unharmonized and the choreographic pattern is distorted.

In the reprise (c. 19) the piano’s and soloists’ measured deployment of the theme gets “broken” by spontaneously arising replicas of wind: rapid descending passage of the clarinet, abrupt ascent and tremolo of the flute, nervous repetitions of the piccolo flute, piccolo clarinet and French horn, trombone glissando. These motifs include funny situations that arise during the dance: running, going around in circles, awkward turns and sliding. At the end of the scene (starting from the 29th measure) a comic situation is “simulated” in the music: the Chair and the Couch proclaiming liberation from the evil boy and encouraging the other characters, at the same time, try to finish the minuet. The subdominant chord with a grace note – similar to the initial chord of the motif **a**, but with the multi-temporal entry of bass and upper voices – is repeated several times in the piano part now with long stops (the length of the chord and the following pause  or ) , then in the accelerated movement (the length of the chord ). This causes associations with vain attempts of the dancers to keep up to music and to perform the *pas menu*.

The duo of the Kettle and the Cup from the opera-ballet “**The Child and the Spells**” is

done in the genre of the foxtrot. It can be called a sketch in the music-hall spirit. But the substantial function of the displayed dance genre is not limited to a simple representation. On the one hand, in the framework of the scenic action the music is connected to the actual dance. Therefore, the attributes of the foxtrot, including the inherent features of jazz stylistics are reproduced in the duo quite accurately. On the other hand, the elements of the routine dance are translated by the composer in the perfect plan of artistic associations connected with the poetic world of the fairy tale. The individual properties of the dance abstractive from the mundane specificity are due to the quiriness of the story line (turning inanimate objects into living creatures), the nature of each of the characters in the scene and a touch of good-natured humour inherent in the author’s tone.

The genre prototype is recognizable, first of all, by the main features reflected in the music: moderately fast tempo, quadruple-four time, textured accompaniment formula based on the alternation of bass (strong beats) and chords (weak beats), flexible march-like rhythm.

Some jazz idioms close to the cake-walk and ragtime genres got the original implementation in the duo of the Kettle and the Cup. The intense energy of jazz rhythms is reflected most clearly in the variety of polyrhythmic techniques, the melodic and intonation structure of jazz is fixed by intonations characteristic of authentic blues and jazz dance pieces. In the vocals and parts of brass the performing techniques that simulate some of the specific effects of blues intonation draw the attention: sliding in different forms, tenor singing *falsetto* (m. 66), a very loud scansion of short motifs (in fact, it corresponds with a meaningless set of foreign words) giving rise to analogies with sharp cries that blues singers often use to violate the smooth flow of the melodic tunes (c. 36). In the harmonic language of

the Ravel foxtrot the significant jazz influence is especially noticeable in a bright harmony created by the widespread use of dissonant chords; in the application of the idioms and sequences standard for the functional harmony of jazz. Sometimes the “echoes” of the “flat” temperament of blues can be heard in the tart dissonant consonances with the altered tones. In the orchestral solution the tools most appropriate for jazz practice are brought to the foreground: a group of brass and percussion that, in addition to traditional drums, timpani, cymbals and xylophone, includes such exotic instruments as a whip, a cheese grater and a wooden box. Woodwinds, piano, strings are mainly assigned the function of the pulsating rhythmic background. Timbre vocals (tenor and mezzo-soprano) reminds of the predominance of a pop-jazz vocal of women’s low and men’s high voices.

The implementation of the dance genre in each part of the duo is distinguished with the originality determined by the nature of a certain image-character. In the imagination of the composer the revived kettle is endowed with traits and manners of a self-satisfied and dull boxing champion who flaunts his veneer and physical strength. Ravel ironically alludes to the African-American “origin” of the character: black colour of china (the object of his pride), singing in English with some French words. Perhaps that is why the foxtrot was chosen as the main genre prototype of

the theme – a dance popular in the 20’s that has an American origin. Through certain means of expression the composer focuses on the features of the dance plasticity of the character.

In the Kettle theme the features of the march are clearly revealed: the priority of the dotted rhythm-formula $\text{♩} \text{♩}$ in the melody accompanied by the rhythm-formula of summation $\text{♩} \text{♩} \text{♩}$ that has an iambic orientation in the context; evenness of the pulse associated with a measured step; the same textural density, the massiveness of all beats of the measure. It is significant that the soloist singing is accompanied by the sound of the wind and percussion instruments, as well as the piano. All of this is associated with marches performed by the black brass bands and played a major role in shaping the jazz style. Flexible marching rhythms, as well as mainly high level of volume, prevalence of harsh, abrupt, exaggeratedly accentual sounds (where the connection with the ragtime of S. Joplin can be seen) create a conception about the active, assertive and maybe even aggressive moves of the angry Kettle. However, to some extent the aggressiveness is neutralized by softness and lyricism of the tenor timbre, which reinforces the comicalness of the situation and does not allow taking the Kettle’s anger seriously.

The middle section of the foxtrot that is an animated image of the Chinese cup is resolved by the composer in a spirit of the Eastern exoticism.

I.A. THIERIEP (avec une menace douceuse et des manieres de champion de boxe)

Black and eos-taud, Black and chie, Black, black, black, jol - ly fel - low, jol - ly fel - low black, I punch, Sir

The expressive cantilena melody of the singer unfolds against the background of the light as whisper pizzicato chords in the strings and mysterious and fascinating sounding of celesta in the high register. The celesta melody formed on the basis of the motivic-variational development within the major pentatonic scale and doubled in a quart is associated with “crystal” ringing of the Chinese bells and, simultaneously, with a fancy ornate lettering. The imagination pictures the appearance of the Cup – it is made of precious porcelain exquisitely decorated by arabesques. The sinuous relief of the melody, the essential role of symmetry in its pattern and the whimsical play of accents give rise to the ideas about the subtle, beautiful, graceful dance moves of the character.

The reprise and coda of the ternary form are based on the interaction of the initial sections’ themes that reflects the duet dance. The polytonal dissection of the texture and timbre isolation of themes in the reprise (theme of the Cup – *F-dur*, vibrant sound of trombone; theme of the Kettle – *as-moll*, French horn) emphasize the differences in the plasticity and the behaviour of the characters. An image of the temperamental and eccentric dance in the coda is created by the orchestral tutti strengthening the role of drums, the alternation of contrasting thematic elements and sudden drops in volume.

Thus, in the opera scenes and the vocal miniature the most important means of comic description of the characters is a certain genre of dance. In this case, Ravel transforms the genre model using special artistic techniques identifying the properties of motor plasticity of each character formed by their nature, temperament and scenic situation. Among these techniques there are different methods of deformation of the metric structure: change in the size, violation of balance of the meter and harmonic rhythm, diverse variants of syncopes, polyrhythmy. As a result, the image of dances is transformed in almost

all cases – they lose the austere beauty of the choreographic pattern, the elegance of plasticity: the moves are becoming awkward, angular and fussy. The exception is the foxtrot, for which the “conflict of rhythms” is an organically inherent property coming from the jazz stylistics.

In addition, Ravel often uses the effect of unexpected solutions that is one of the features of the comic in art. It occurs due to the register drops, sharp tone comparisons and switching of the dynamics in the sarabande from “The Spanish Hour”; alternation of contrasting thematic elements and volume levels in the coda of the foxtrot from the opera “The Child and the Spells”; the “alogism” of the process of thematic development in the vocal miniature “Peacock”.

The humorous image is often created by Ravel by another technique characteristic of the comic sphere – a composition of the heterogeneous with the homogeneous, a paradoxical combination of the “incompatible”: a sublimely strong melody and a colourful accompaniment in the sarabande from the “Spanish Hour”; a smooth unidirectional line of the bass and a whimsical melodic pattern of the upper voices in the pavane of “Nature Stories”; the exaggeratedly stressed frequency, regularity of rhythm and syntax in the piano part and a broken melodic relief of the vocals, erratic winds replicas of the wind that violate a measured course of the dance in the scene of the Chair and the Couch; textured layers that contrast in timbre-register, tonal and stylistic aspects in the waltz of Inigo and the foxtrot of the Kettle and the Cup. *In some cases, the moment of paradoxicality is realized in the genre synthesis. Thus, a unique and distinctive character of the music in the scene 9 of the opera “The Spanish Hour” creates a “multi-directional interaction” of genres [Ruch’evskaya, 1977, 41], that are the polar opposites in terms of expressive and motor-plastic qualities: the waltz with its light, swift moves and the sarabande with its slow ponderous*

gait. In the scene of the Chair and the Couch there is the crossing of the semantic characteristics of “funeral” genres (march and passacaglia) and various types of minuet – stately and solemn, gallant, comic.

The author’s interpretation of the semantic-image aspect of the common dance genres in the works of comic nature seems unexpected. In the scenes of Inigo from the opera “The Spanish Hour”, the vocal miniature “Peacock”, the minuet of the Chair and the Couch the image of the noble old dances (sarabande, pavane, minuet) is deformed and their status decreases through the elegant and ingenious artistic techniques. On

the contrary, the foxtrot belonging to the “lower” entertainment genres and traditionally used by the composer’s contemporaries in a burlesque manner rises to the top in the opera “The Child and the Spells”. The usage of the foxtrot genre is connected with the field of the comic, but there is no reduction, “discrediting” of the intonation prototype. Music of the duo is full of good-natured humour, subtle irony, grace and wit and, at the same time, is marked by the charm of the poetic world of wonder and magic. Thus, there is a paradox: the noble old dance genres are descending and “ridiculed”, but the lower genres are ascending.

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Музыкально-пластическая характеристика комических персонажей в произведениях Мориса Равеля

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В статье исследуется специфика воплощения комических образов в тематизме музыкально-сценических и вокальных сочинений Мориса Равеля. Важнейшим средством комической характеристики персонажей становится определенный танцевальный жанр. Композитор использует достаточно широкий спектр танцевальных прообразов, различных по исторической, национальной, социальной принадлежности. Посредством специальных художественных приемов Равель трансформирует жанровую модель, выявляя свойства двигательной пластики каждого персонажа, обусловленной его характером, темпераментом, сценической ситуацией. В числе таких приемов различные способы деформации метрической структуры танца, эффекты неожиданных решений и парадоксального сочетания «несовместимого», которые реализуются как на образно-семантическом, так и на структурном уровнях.

Ключевые слова: персонаж в музыке, двигательно-пластическая интонация, танцевальный прообраз, переосмысление семантики первичного жанра, деформация метрической структуры танца.
