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THE NATIONAL ASPECT VS. "NATIONALISM": HOW "ABSOLUTE" IS GERMAN MUSIC?

Musicologists in Russia and in the West agree on at least one issue: that music of Austria and Germany (after its unification), written approximately between 1750 and 1850, is "supernational" and universal in its style and significance. They often expand this time limit to music of J. S. Bach, from below, and Mahler and Schoenberg, from above. In the literature one can see the term "Austro-Italian style"; in Anglo-Saxon terminology the "common practice period" is widely used as its synonym. "Absolute music" lies in the core of these two categories.

The very fact of existence of such style is hardly debatable, yet the way those who, by the fact of birth, are destined to present it to others varies from an intelligent and weighted suggestion to a rude value judgment, which borders with the idea of racial supremacy. Indeed, why is it that the German music has received the honor to be "absolute," while the Czech, Polish, Hungarian, Norwegian and Ukrainian traditions had to be content with the label "nationalism in music?" Can it be true that the racial supremacy has played its role here? Does racial supremacy really exist?

Upon a closer examination it becomes evident that the "absolute" style rose from certain sources. This question has not been discussed until the recent formation of European Union, in which the cultures, formerly silenced, received a better access to the mass media. Paradoxically, one musical culture that has been silenced for centuries is Italian, or, more precisely, Neapolitan.

Today, it is enough to read the book *La musicadel Sole* by a Neapolitan musicologist Enzo Amato, or to get acquainted with the research of *solfeggi e partimenti* by the Roman theorists Giorgio Sanguinetti, in order to get an impression that it is time to give the credit to the tradition which gave birth to the "absolute" style. Of course, it is difficult to agree with all the statements by Amato, but it is true that when we, teachers of music in the West, offer a course in counterpoint or in music of Baroque, our course materials contain mostly the information from the German books, written by amateurs (like Fux or Mattheson), while Italian music and Italian musical pedagogy is intentionally thrown outboard.

Amato does not miss an opportunity to criticize the Wiener Klassik. However, it is possible that he has a point: indeed, the biography of Haydn started as a copyist of orchestral parts for Niccolò Porpora. Who knows, if not for the financial difficulties, experienced by this great composer of the "music of the Sun" that brought him to Vienna, perhaps, there would be no Wiener Klassik?

German tradition absorbed the *intonational* treasure of Italian music. For the Russian musician, whose ear is trained in *intonational* analysis, it is not difficult to fish

out the snippets of properly German melodicism from the ocean of Italian musical element that gives life to the scores of Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven. These snippets are small (after all, that is why the style is called Austro-Italian), but they play an important role. The actual German component in music was, is and will be such, entirely different from English or French *intonational* lexicon.

Dahlhaus shamefully turns his eyes away from the fact that it was exactly German music (which he calls "absolute") in which the nationalism was introduced for the first time in Western history. Indeed, in all national anthems, the lyrics point to relationship of people with God. The Russian Imperial anthem asks God to save the Tsar. The national anthem of the United Kingdom suggests that God should save the Queen. Canadian national anthem praises the fact that Canadian people remain "under the eye of God." And only the German national anthem promotes the idea that Germany is above all! (Deutschland, Deutschland über alles!) And Joseph Haydn, in his string quartet – this epitome of the absolute style according to Dahlhaus – has used this melody and implied exactly these words.

Yes, it is known that these words mean the drive of the German people toward unification and national identity, but was it the same in Russia, in Bohemia, Serbia, and elsewhere? Why, then, Haydn is acknowledged as the founder of the absolute music, and Tchaikovsky – who also wrote string quartets and symphonies – is obsessively labeled only as the source of "nationalism in music?" In the example with German national anthem, and in many other examples, the austere German national *intonatsia* sticks out from under the glamorous façade of the "all-human music."

As for the French music, it has been loyal to its national roots for more than 400 years. When listening to Debussy's *Pelleas et Mélisande*, one can recognize the whole history of French recitative melody in the very first entrance of Mélisande. On the words "Ne me touchez pas, ne me touchez pas!" the vocal line presents the stack of thirds. The same stack of thirds can be found in the recitative in Lully's *Armide* which saw the light in 1686!

Evidently, the delicate structure of the phrase in a Romanic language is built not upon the sharp and explosive accents but by variation of the length of syllables. It requires a smaller intervallic step in the recitative. That is why the melodic line in recitative moves so exquisitely by step or by third, frequently changing the direction. In contrast, the Evangelist in *St. Matthew Passion* takes off right from the first notes and spirals through the notes of the six-four chord (the same structural notes as in Haydn's anthem, discussed



earlier!). Further into the recitative, his turns and leaps present lapidary fourth, fifth and other wide intervals.

Quite similar are the abrupt shifts and leaps on wide intervals in the Sprechstimme in Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire*. Two centuries separate Bach's music from Schoenberg's, yet the same intervallic ideas control the recitative. Perhaps, again, it is the product of German speech, its explosive accents and sharp transitions from the fricatives to vowels. Just as in speech, in German music the accents formed by the sharp change of dynamics, which is categorically different from the tender sounds of Roman languages.

Recitative exerts the influence on intervallic and rhythmic structure of the aria (in opera, cantata or

oratorio). And from opera to symphony there is just one step. That is how the cardinal difference between French and German music is maintained and continued, easily crossing the boundaries of periods and styles, for 400 years.

The national aspect in art supports the personality of an artist. It gives him or her the wings. There is nothing to be ashamed of in that German, French, English, American and Italian music have failed the examination for the status of "supernational" and "absolute" music. They entered into the same category, as Russian, Belorussian, Polish, Czech, Serbian and Bulgarian. In each of them there are *intonational* formulae which "migrate," but there are also others which like to stay home.

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