



ISSN 2782-3598 (Online), 2782-358X (Print)

## International Division

Original article

УДК 781.41/78.01

DOI: 10.33779/2782-3598.2022.2.094-103

### The Small Contrapuntal Cycle in the Music of Paul Natorp

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**Abstract.** The article examines the musical legacy of German composer Paul Natorp (1854–1924), who has obtained his world recognition chiefly as a Neo-Kantian philosopher. Unlike the other philosophers-composers known to history, such as, for instance, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Friedrich Nietzsche, the name of Natorp the composer has remained virtually unknown to philosophers, as well as to musicians. Among the thinker's greatest influences was Plato, whose attitude towards music was shared by Natorp throughout his entire life. Examining music as one of the fundamental laws of the universe, Natorp placed the principle of harmony at the core not only of his life activities, but also of his philosophical studies and pedagogical innovations. The article presents a scholarly analysis of the small contrapuntal cycle in the musical legacy of the philosopher-composer with the example of Paul Natorp's *Three Preludes and Fugues for Piano*, which revive the baroque tradition of improvisation. Natorp's piano compositions correspond to the influences of his era, which demonstrates a constant aspiration towards the attainment of harmony, balance and clarity in the conditions of the dissolving tonal-harmonic connections and free compositional forms. In his compositions, the art of the future is given a special position as a significant unifying and stabilizing component of musical creativity.

**Keywords:** Paul Natorp, small contrapuntal cycle, prelude, fugue

**For citation:** Volkova P. S., Guo Shaoying, Huang Zehuan. The Small Contrapuntal Cycle in the Music of Paul Natorp. *Problemy muzykal'noj nauki / Music Scholarship*. 2022. No. 2, pp. 94–103. DOI: 10.33779/2782-3598.2022.2.094-103

## Международный отдел

Научная статья

### Малый полифонический цикл в творчестве Пауля Наторпа

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**Аннотация.** В статье рассматривается музыкальное наследие немецкого композитора Пауля Герхарда Наторпа (1854–1924), который в большей степени получил мировое признание как философ-неокантианец. Отмечается, что в отличие от других известных истории философов-композиторов, к которым относятся Ж.-Ж. Руссо и Ф. Ницше, имя Наторпа-композитора остаётся не известным ни философам, ни музыкантам. В числе кумиров мыслителя – Платон, чьё отношение к музыке Наторп пронёс через всю свою жизнь. Рассматривая музыку в качестве закона мироздания, Наторп положил принцип гармонии в основание не только собственной жизнедеятельности, но и философских штудий и педагогических новаций. В статье приводится искусствоведческий анализ малого полифонического цикла в творчестве философов-композиторов на примере «Трёх прелюдий и фуг для фортепиано» Пауля Наторпа, которые возрождают барочную традицию импровизации. Фортепианные произведения Наторпа соответствуют веяниям его эпохи, которая обнаруживает неуклонное стремление к обретению гармонии, равновесия, ясности в условиях разрушающихся тонально-гармонических связей и свободных композиционных форм. Искусству прошлого в его сочинениях отводится особое место как важного объединяющего и стабилизирующего компонента творчества.

**Ключевые слова:** Пауль Наторп, малый полифонический цикл, прелюдия, fuga

**Для цитирования:** Волкова П. С., Го Шаоин, Хуан Цзэхуань. Малый полифонический цикл в творчестве Пауля Наторпа // Проблемы музыкальной науки / Music Scholarship. 2022. № 2. С. 94–103. (На англ. яз.) DOI: 10.33779/2782-3598.2022.2.094-103

*God has given us music so that above all it can lead us upwards... But its principal task is to lead our thoughts to higher things, to elevate, even to make us tremble...  
All humans who despise it should be considered mindless, animal-like creatures.*

Friedrich Nietzsche

In the present day of both the history of music and the history of philosophy the names of at least three professional philosophers are known in whose activities musical composition assumed almost the

most important tradition, along with their philosophical contemplations. We recall the name of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who made his contribution to world culture as the creator of the opera-ballet “Les muses

gallantes” and the opera “Le Devin de Village.” Mention here must be made of Friedrich Nietzsche, who wrote over 70 musical compositions, including music for piano solo, four-hand piano, a quintet for four voices and piano, about 17 songs and other compositions. Igor Ebanoidze acknowledges that it is particularly Nietzsche’s musical inclinations which have determined his engagement in the sphere of philosophy, having stipulated for him the status of “philosopher of formation and life.” [1, pp. 185–195] And, finally, the name of Paul Gerhard Natorp appears as the next philosopher-composer of that era.

While a sufficient amount of literature has been written about the first two philosopher-composers so that the interested philosopher or music aficionado would receive an impression of them as composers, virtually nothing is known to the Russian-speaking reader about Natorp’s musical legacy (with the sole exception of two publications by one of the authors of this article which saw the light of day in 2021 and 2022, respectively). [2; 3] At the same time, Natorp’s instrumental music includes his *Sonata for violin and piano in F# minor*, the *Sonata for cello and piano in D major*, two *Fantasy pieces* for piano (No. 1 in *A minor* and No. 2 in *B minor*), and the *Trio in E minor* for violin, cello and piano. Some of his compositions have been performed by a number of acknowledged Russian musicians as Ludmila Frayenova (violin), Mikhail Shugayev (cello) and Yuri Favorin (piano).

The problem of research which the authors solve in the present article consists in the necessity of opening up the door to the artist’s creative workshop in which his work on musical composition, taking place in close connection with his philosophical quests and pedagogical discoveries,

comprises a single realm of the artist’s spirit, determining the scale of his personality.

The methodology of research is organized based on methods of art study analysis, the principle of intertextuality and comparative analysis.

The musical works of Paul Gerhard Natorp (1854–1924) are known to a very narrow circle of involved people. His name has received recognition primarily in the sphere of social philosophy, within the framework of which Natorp has obtained his authority as a philosopher of the Neo-Kantian school and a teacher. However, his musical compositions are of unquestionable value and thereby may assume a worthy position in the repertoire of performers.

His musical compositions include many works for solo piano or piano with other instruments. The philosopher loved the instrument and knew it very well. The peculiarities of Paul Natorp’s original piano style are revealed in his works for piano solo. The composer’s Strasbourg diary contains reports of him attending the concerts of Clara Schumann, Franz Liszt and Hans von Bülow. The diaries also help us disclose Paul Natorp’s own musical predilections. His musical repertoire ranged from Bach, Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, Schumann and Brahms, to Wagner.

Notwithstanding all of his fondness of music, which manifested itself in his piano playing, in his attendance of concerts and his compositional work, Natorp’s main work of his life was philosophy. Up to the final years of his life, he composed music more as an amateur, pursuing the aim of self-perfection. Let us make the assumption that music in this context was for him a certain type of continuation of his own philosophical quests, which took place under the sign of artistic creativity.



All the more remarkable was the mastery which the composer achieved with his own efforts.

In the early period of his musical creativity Natorp turns to the genres of piano music which were developed by his favorite composers. He recreates certain elements of the styles of Bach and Brahms, combining them in his own compositions, establishing the commonality of their musical language, regardless of the differences of their styles and epochs under the sign of which they composed music. At times there appear intricate connections with Beethoven's piano style and, more indirectly – with that of Schumann. At the same time, it is impossible to speak of imitation or direct derivations. Natorp reflects what is the closest for him in the works of these composers in an original manner.

Among the composer's piano works from his early period, most significant are his *Three Preludes and Fugues*. During the Romantic era not all composers expressed interest in counterpoint. This can be explained by the diverse approaches towards the unfolding of musical content, a different character of figurativeness and a different type of procedurality the new era was characterized for. Nonetheless, for many composers the study of composition was connected with a mastery of the forms of the Baroque era. In this connection, mention must be made of Felix Mendelssohn, Carl Zelter and Robert Schumann, who were actively supportive of attracting the audience's interest in Bach's compositions. For Frederic Chopin Bach's Preludes and Fugues presented the chief material for preparation for performances. Numerous other examples may be cited and augmented in quantity.

The contrapuntal forms, including those of the fugue and fugato, were

actively incorporated by the Classicist composers, especially frequently in the finale movements of their symphonies, sonatas and works for chamber ensemble. Numerous examples may be found in the works of Beethoven, Mozart and other masters. However, the mere incorporation of contrapuntal forms in itself does not connect the works of the Romanticists with Bach. In the conditions of the new style, the textural-compositional technique presents itself as entirely different. For this end, let us cite as examples the Six Fugues on the Theme of BACH by Schumann and the *Six Preludes and Fugues* for piano, opus 35 by Mendelssohn.

In the Romantic era the genre of the Prelude also obtained its well-known independence and self-sufficiency, so features of the baroque style appear in some of the preludes only in a romanticized reflection. At the same time, many of the preludes by Clementi, Moscheles and Beethoven preserve the baroque features of this genre: a through musical form, improvisational qualities and figuration as the basis for motion.

Structurally Natorp's Preludes and Fugues follow the example of J. S. Bach in that the unchanging motivic textural-harmonic idea always lies at the basis of his Preludes, while the subjects of the Fugues are created in correspondence with the prescribed rules. Nonetheless, Natorp never uses these elements from the point of view of stylistic replication. On the contrary, his Preludes turn out to be closer in character to the genres of romantic pieces that are contemporary to him, similar to the intermezzo, while the Fugues are distinguished by a freedom in the construction of the themes and the significant role of homophonic textural forms.

Not infrequently, the homophonic-harmonic structure of the Preludes becomes texturally close to the organ-like instrumental musical statement. This is especially true regarding *Prelude No. 1* in *E minor*, endowed with a *Largo* tempo, in which the thick chordal-octave texture from the very beginning creates a monumental, resonant, capacious sound against the background of the sustained pedal-point in the bass. The homophonic oratorically solemn beginning of the Prelude is close in its style to the introductory sections of Bach's organ toccatas. The composer divides the entire sounding range into two strata. The first plays the role of a powerful support in the form of a deep bass (similar to the organ's pedal) and the thick arpeggios gathering into a chord (against the background of the root pitch *E* the chords *SII<sup>b</sup>* and *DDdim7* are sounded out). The second recreates the pathetic declamatory melodicism of Bach's style, the expressivity of which is strengthened by trills. Additional expression is provided by a massive octave and chordal doubling of the main melodic voice. In addition, the aspiration to recreate the particularities of the organ sound leads to the application of various levels of volume according to the principle of terraced dynamics (without any diminuendos or crescendos). In addition, the registers are juxtaposed in contrasting ways.

The key of *E minor* in Bach has been frequently connected with a lyrical-tragic figurativeness. In the same manner this key also makes its appearance in Natorp's Prelude in *E minor*. However, the figurative structure of the Prelude corresponds not only to the grandeur of Bach, but also that of Liszt with the dramatic sound and the waves of diminished chords characteristic for him. The rhetorical basis characteristic of

the Baroque era can be clearly traced. From the first measures, our attention is drawn by the motive assembled on the basis of a trill, possessed of the meaning of exclamation (*exclamatio*).

In the structure of the Prelude, two sections stand out, delineated according to the principle of the old historical binary form (with elements of the recapitulation present). Within the respective sections the thematic unfolding occurs in stages: the introductory arpeggios with the trills in the melody lead to an unstable balancing on the pedal point *D*. On this stage the imitational motion of the higher and middle voices in the opposite directions appears. In the area of the cadence of the first section the pedal point of the dominant key is established and the initial statement of the musical material returns.

The second section is built in correspondence with the first and on the basis of a consistent transition from the dominant (*D*) through the subdominant (*S*) to the main tonic key of *E minor*. The alteration of the textural designs is similar to the first section, yet more diverse in terms of its contrapuntal writing.

1 section	2 section
<i>E minor – B minor/major</i>	<i>B minor/major – E minor</i>
Pedal point T – pedal point D	Pedal point is absent

The three-voice fugue is built on the basis of the harmonic idea of the Prelude: the initial motive is endowed with a lowered II degree, and, overall, the motivic structure is based on the figure of the *saltus duriusculus* (chromatic intervals and leaps). Such a construction of the fugue subject is declamatory, since semantically it conveys various shades of excited speech (Example No. 1).



Example No. 1 Paul Natorp. *Fugue in E minor* (subject)



The development of the Fugue combines the contrapuntal and the homophonic-harmonic textures. The first episode marks the appearance of arpeggiated chords reminding of the Prelude and comparable to the textural development of the homophonic theme. Prior to the developmental section we hear the homophonic-harmonic retransition with concisely perceptible functions of the chords: the cadential – the dominant – the tonic.

The developmental section presents truncated imitational statements of the fugue subject. At the center of this section a lyrical episode is formed containing a statement of the subject in a duo of the top and the bottom voice, however, on a figured pedal point of the lower voice. The statement of the subject in the top voices, although accompanied by countersubjects in the middle voice, at the same time, also contains a harmonic accompaniment of arpeggiated chords. In addition, the fugue is twice interrupted by pauses which completely halt all motion of the musical material.

The features noted by us testify of a romantic interpretation of the small cycle by Natorp. First of all, the piano in the E minor cycle is interpreted virtually as an organ. The placement of the contrapuntal voices resembles the registral placement of the timbres of the organ, while the density of the chords in combination with the pedal points creates the impression of a large spatial diapason. The abundance

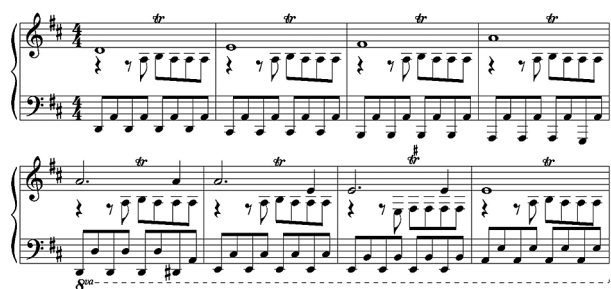
of trills in the melody and of arpeggios in all the voices creates a colorful vibration, the background voices are timbrally diversified, and the doublings are conducive to filling up the space. Such a type of texture is close to Liszt's arrangements of Bach's organ works. Similar to Liszt, Natorp adds accompaniment to the fugue subject, and also disperses the statements of the subjects among fragments in the middle voices. As a result, a unity of rigorous organization and free emotional utterance is achieved.

The piano Preludes are free in their form and endowed with their own romantic means of expression. Certain motivic, harmonic and tonal coloristic tints appear in them, such as, for instance, in the *Prelude No. 2 in D major*. Let us turn our attention to the key, which was used by Bach in the context of bright, elevated, jubilant images. Natorp's interpretation of tonality causes us to remember Schubert and Brahms in their simplicity and graciousness. The song-like basis of the melody in its separate intonations is similar to the utterances of the forest king in Schubert's song "*Der Erlkönig*," especially upon the second statement of the theme (see Examples No. 2; 3).

Example No. 2 Franz Schubert. *Der Erlkönig*



Example No. 3 Paul Natorp. *Prelude No. 2*



In contrast to the first Prelude, here we can also observe the connection with the genre pieces of the Romantic era, for example, Brahms' *Intermezzi*, Schubert's "*Moments musicaux*" or Schumann's lyrical songs.

The fugue subject, intonationally close to Bach's *Fugue in D major (Well-Tempered Clavier, Book I, No. 5)*, punctuates the character of the Preludes by its jocosity and elegance, resembling music for the harpsichord. During the process of development and in the conclusive section of the fugue song-like intonations demonstrate themselves distinctly. At the same time, in the second Fugue the contrapuntal technique turns out to be more diversified, despite the usage of techniques of homophonic writing (the pedal point upon the transition to the recapitulation, as well as the doublings in the conclusive section).

In *Prelude No. 3* in *E-flat major* the Bachian element begins to manifest itself in the uniform motion of the chords of the accompaniment in stepwise rhythm. The main theme of the preludes resembles chorale melodies. Calm, staid, concluding with a characteristic suspension with a trill directed towards the root tone, the melody of the Prelude symbolizes dignity and nobleness. In counterbalance to it, the fugue subject is impulsive, unsteady, permeated with chromatic melodic turns and secundal intonations resembling sings. Just as in

the other Preludes and Fugues, the third cycle makes ample use of ornamentations, rhetorical figures and a full-sounding organ texture. The third Fugue even incorporates a lengthy pedal point resembling the sound of an organ pedal.

The type of counterpoint in all of the Fugues is melodic-linear. The homophonic style penetrates into the fugues, especially the conclusive sections, where at times the sound reaches an orchestral scale and density. The composer makes broad use of extraction of motives from the fugue subject and amalgamates the texture, complementing certain independent voices with added chords. Some of these completions possess the character of improvised cadences (*Fugue No. 3*).

Paul Natorp's small cycles are the result of the composer's contemplative work on his own style, reflecting the characteristic tendencies of the era of late Romanticism. Turning to the music of previous eras, Natorp connects features of baroque and romantic composition, moreover, aspiring towards a sense of organic unity. His artistic ideas brought him towards greater self-sustenance in terms of form and developmental techniques, they are stylistically consistent and compositionally integral.

Stemming from the understanding of music as perceived by the Ancient Greek philosophers, first of all, by Plato, who saw in harmony the basis of concord as the condition for perfection of the spirit, Natorp in his aspiration to cultivate a highly developed personality also counted on the reconciliation of all sorts of contradictions. Moreover, his very life may be viewed as a model of a thoughtful attitude towards himself, the world of nature and world of human beings surrounding him, in order to avoid overt dissonances in his interactions with both worlds.



It is noteworthy that the leading role of the ethical element which Mikhail Karpychev interprets from the position of the transforming function of the art of music,<sup>1</sup> runs like a golden thread through Natorp's entire philosophy of education. This is all the more significant that the ethical component is directly connected with the spiritual formation of the human being, a testimony of which may be found in the research work by Polina Volkova and Victor Shakhovskoy. [4, pp. 187–198] For this reason, in each of his musical works the composer, first of all, manifests a certain artistic idea. That circumstance is self-explanatory that by emphasizing the significance of the ethical directedness of his philosophical-aesthetic works, Natorp turns to the authority of Beethoven, Michelangelo and Rembrandt.<sup>2</sup> In the present context the unity of aesthetic principles penetrating both Natorp's philosophical studies and his musical oeuvres becomes all too apparent. Herein lies the guarantee of the interest towards the German philosopher-composer on the part of Chinese intellectuals, too.

The fact of the matter is that the spiritual-moral experience of human achievement turns out to be within the focus of Chinese philosophy presented by the name of Confucius. It is well-known that for the Chinese philosopher music demonstrated itself as a marker "of the universal law, <...> on account of which the concepts basic for music turn out to be such categories as freedom, measure, harmony, etc." [5, p. 45] It is important to emphasize that the indicated categories correlate with the conception of *jen*, which presents itself in the capacity of the foundation of music, "...for if the human being does not possess *jen*, how could he observe rituals? If a human being is not endowed with *jen*, what music can there be?"<sup>3</sup> Analogously, Natorp connects with

the harmony which determines the essence of the art of music true morality, which also corresponds to Schumann's position. In his valediction addressed to young musicians, Schumann observed that the laws of morality are the same as the laws of art<sup>4</sup>.

To return to the music of Natorp, it must be emphasized that for the composer the ideal during the course of his entire life was formed by the German classics – Bach, Beethoven, Wagner and Brahms. The music by these composers, which is permeated with philosophy, fascinated Natorp, and – unlike Nietzsche, who at first venerated Wagner, and then renounced his icon, – attracted him up to his last breath. It is apparent that in his early works for piano there was a philosophical-artistic reevaluation of the music of the past, and on that basis the composer's own approaches were formed.

Overall, Paul Gerhard Natorp's Preludes revive the baroque tradition of improvisation, and at the same time their character reflects both church and concert or chamber performance. In his Fugues Natorp adheres to the canon only in their expositions, since during the process of development the fugal character of presentment of the musical material is displaced by a freer type, and sometimes new homophonic themes are brought in. These new themes then become contrapuntal in their essence. Frequently the new themes obscure the fugue subject, so that it turns out to be already difficult to highlight it in the dense flow of the sounds. A special characteristic feature is presented by the inclusion of lyrical contrasting episodes into the developmental part of the fugue, similar to the lyrical episodes in the Fantasies of Schumann and Liszt. Such episodes are brought in by the method of contrasting juxtaposition, which demonstrates of the resemblance of these fugues with other genres of the Romantic era.



It would seem that Natorp's piano compositions correspond quite well to the influences of his era, which demonstrated an unswerving aspiration towards the attainment of harmony, balance and clarity in the conditions of the disintegrating tonal-harmonic connections and the looseness of

musical forms. For this reason, in his musical output the connections are discovered more clearly with the Baroque and Classical eras, as well as with counterpoint. Natorp, as well as his contemporaries, Brahms, Bruckner and Reger, realize the important unifying and stabilizing role of the art of the past.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> For more on this question see: Karpychev M. G. Eticheskiy aspekt preobrazuyushchey funktsii muzykal'nogo iskusstva [Ethical Aspect of the Transforming Function of Music]. *Idei i idealy* [Ideas and Ideals]. 2016. No. 1 (27). Vol. 1, pp. 109–123.

DOI: 10.17212/2075-0862-2016-1.1-109-123

<sup>2</sup> “If Beethoven, Michelangelo and Rembrandt had not embedded spiritual might and virtue of formative will into their works,” Paul Natorp writes, “then the simple play of tones, lines and colors, light and shadows would not have exerted such a profound impact on the listeners and the views.” For more on this subject see: Natorp P. *Izbrannye raboty* [Selected Works]. Compiled by V. A. Kurennoy. Moscow: Territoriya budushchego Press, 2006. 384 p. (Universtetskaya biblioteka Aleksandra Pogorelskogo [Alexander Pogorelsky University Library]).

<sup>3</sup> For more on this question see: Guo Shaoying, Huang Zehuan. *Muzyka v predstavlenii kitayskikh mysliteley: pro et contra* [Music in the Perception of Chinese Thinkers: Pro et Contra]. *Iskusstvo kak sotsiokul'turnyy proekt* [Art as a Sociocultural Project]. 艺术以社会文化 项目研究: Collective monograph. Saratov; Moscow: Saratov State L. V. Sobinov Conservatoire, 2021, pp. 16–34.

<sup>4</sup> It possible to become absolutely convinced of the validity of these words by familiarizing oneself with the research work by N. Sayenko, V. Kortunova, P. Volkova and E. Pupysheva which is focused on the search for harmony by a contemporary artist – the protagonist of Takeshi Kitano's film “Achilles and the Tortoise.” For more on the subject, see: [6].

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Received / Поступила в редакцию: 01.03.22

Revised / Одобрена после рецензирования: 28.03.22

Accepted / Принята к публикации: 05.04.22

