

Theatricality in Contemporary Symphonic Music

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Abstract

Research into the transformation of symphonic music is a topical but understudied subject. Since the beginning of the 20th century, symphonic music has changed and somewhat lost its popularity. Contemporary symphonic music has transformed and acquired a different form, while remaining in demand for the theatrical world. The purpose of this study is to investigate modern trends in symphonic music, as well as the works of contemporary composers. This study examines examples of contemporary symphonic music and its performance on theatrical stages. Historical research methods formed the methodological framework of the study. Methods of analysis and synthesis were used to study information about contemporary symphonic music, contemporary composers, as well as their musical works. Contemporary pieces of symphonic music presented on the theatre stage were also considered.

Key-words: Orchestra, Theatre, Musical Art, Composer, Symphony, Contemporary Music.

1. Introduction

At the beginning of the last century, symphony orchestras were more in demand and, as a result, were better financed. In the 20th century, the learning ability of musicians and composers was at a higher level, as a result of which composers created more pieces of music and had ambitions for the further development of this musical genre. It is important to note the great composer Gustav Mahler. Mahler had an innovative approach to writing. In this regard, "Symphony No. 8", one of his

later works, is particularly noteworthy. In his works, Mahler pushed the farthest boundaries of orchestral scale. In the late Romantic era, orchestras maintained the largest forms of symphonic expression. They used shapes with large string sections, used large brass sections, and expanded the range of percussion instruments in their compositions (Dobson, 2010). The invention of recording devices has given rise to new standards and requirements for composers and their works. New, higher standards meant that consumers could purchase the recording, listen to it multiple times, rewind it, and stop it at any time (Radbourne, et al, 2009). For composers, this meant that the listener could notice all the errors and imperfections of sound in the works. With the beginning of the recording era, minor intonation and ensemble errors that might have gone unnoticed in live performances became available to all listeners and critics. Advances in technology, including in the recording industry, have allowed composers to use software for editing sound recordings. On the other hand, advances in technology and recording have enabled composers to present their works to a wider audience. Advances in technology have also influenced professional conductors who adhere to high standards of orchestral performance (O'Sullivan, 2009).

Contemporary academic music has kept the trends set by composers at the end of the 20th century. Genres such as polystylism and eclecticism were preserved. Contemporary academic music, primarily represented by Western composers, can be described by a decrease in differences in the context of musical genres and an almost complete absence of a single key direction. Autonomy, aesthetic purpose, conceptual content and basic genre types are important attributes of academic music (Kramer, 2007). The main genre types of academic music are opera, symphony, concert, major choral genres, and chamber music. Experts often characterise the development of academic music at the beginning of the 21st century as a period of artistic crisis. They attribute this to a decrease in public interest in musical works of this genre. Also, this period of history is described by a long search and the absence of new trends, the transition from the very concept of music in its usual meaning to the so-called sound art, where the creation of soundscapes, sound design, painting with sound, as well as the graphic and spectacular components of a piece of music come to the fore. Modern technology has particularly influenced the academic music of the 21st century (Crawford, et al, 2014). In particular, modern academic music incorporates electronic sounds and sounds of classical musical instruments.

2. Methodology

This study explores the process of transformation of symphonic music, examines the stages from its inception to modern development. The investigation of the subject matter is based on the study of history and literary sources, which describe the stages of development and development of modern symphonic music. In the course of this study, theoretical methods of scientific cognition were applied. The basic methods of cognition allowed to research the concept of symphonic music and a symphony orchestra, the history of the development of modern symphonic music and the work of contemporary composers in Europe and the USA. The following composers were considered: Gustav Mahler, Philip Glass, Michael Nyman, Steve Reich, Louis Andriessen, Gavin Bryars, John McGuire, Pauline Oliveros, Julia Wolfe, Wolfgang Rihm, John Zorn, Henryk Górecki, Arvo Pärt, etc.

Musical styles that influenced the development of trends in modern symphonic music were studied and analysed. In the process of research, methods of analysis and synthesis of information were used to research the most famous composers and their works. The main research methods in this work are generally accepted methods of scientific cognition, such as dialectical method, historical method, periodisation method, method of synthesis and system analysis of data. General scientific theoretical methods of cognition were applied to study and analyse the stages of the development of modern symphonic music, styles and tendencies, as well as the most recognised symphonies and other musical works of contemporary composers.

Historical research method helped study the development of modern symphonic music and its stages up to the present. This method allowed to trace differences in musical styles that influenced the development of modern symphonic music. The periodisation method constitutes a method of scientific knowledge that studies the main stages of development of a particular phenomenon. In this study, the periodisation method was used to explore the main stages of the development of modern symphonic music and a modern symphony orchestra. The synthesis method involves the combination of all components of a certain phenomenon or problem. The synthesis method was used to synthesise data and information about contemporary symphonic music, contemporary composers, and a contemporary symphony orchestra. In addition, literary sources were analysed with the use of the synthesis method. It allowed to study a wide scope of data and develop and original understanding of the development of modern symphonic music.

3. Results

Development and Main Trends of Modern Symphonic Music

In the modern world, classical music is inferior in popularity to other musical genres. However, at present, classical symphonic music has transformed, new styles and musical techniques have begun to emerge. Thus, we can currently observe the history of contemporary symphonic music (Sigurjonsson, 2010). Contemporary symphonic music started taking shape in the 20th century, being influenced by industrialisation, technological development, and other factors. The names of contemporary composers of symphonic music are known and popular only in narrow circles, among particular groups of people. Contemporary composers write music for motion pictures, cartoons, serial films, commercials, teach academic music in philharmonic societies, and also continue writing symphonies and other musical works. Symphonic music of the 21st century is described by its individual style, which has been developed throughout the last century. Music critics point out that most trends in contemporary classical music were developed under the influence of composers and tendencies of the 20th century. The main trend that influences contemporary symphonic music is postmodernism. In the 20th century, the most common styles were minimalism, post-minimalism, and new simplicity. These musical styles continue to evolve to date (Reynolds, 2013). Philip Glass, Michael Nyman, and Steve Reich are considered to be the most iconic representatives of minimalism in contemporary symphonic music, they made the greatest contribution to the development of music and this musical style. Postminimalism is represented by Louis Andriessen, Gavin Bryars, John McGuire, Pauline Oliveros, and Julia Wolfe. The most prominent representative of the new simplicity is considered to be the German composer Wolfgang Rihm.

Nowadays, polystylism and musical eclecticism prevail in symphonic music. Musical works combine elements that have been borrowed from different musical genres. For example, composer John Zorn worked in various musical genres such as jazz, hardcore punk, classical, Jewish folk music. Subsequently, all these musical genres influenced his work, and elements of these genres can be found in his musical works. Julian Anderson's compositions also combine elements of various musical genres, his works contain elements of spectral and electronic music. Moreover, these elements are combined with motifs of Eastern European folk music (Scipio, 2004). His piece of music "The Book of Hours", which was written in 2005 for the ensemble and electronics, received public and critical acclaim. Composer Tansy Davies has also used pop and classical elements in her musical compositions. Some other composers, such as John Tavener, have focused on religious

motives in their writing. Tavener used Orthodox church music and was also inspired by oriental motives. Scottish composer James Macmillan was inspired by Scottish folk and Catholic music. There are also religious associations in the works of Sofia Gubaidulina (Noble, McAdams, 2020). Her symphonies use unusual instruments, church, electronic music, and improvisational techniques. The equally famous composer Péter Eötvös resorted to a combination of many timbres in his works, using advanced techniques and combining synthesised sounds with folk songs.

Contemporary Composers

Contemporary composers who have written their works from the 20th century to the present deserve special mention (Dobson, Pitts, 2011). Below, the study considers composers who write contemporary symphonic music.

One of the prominent contemporary composers is Philip Glass. This is an American composer, originally from the city of Baltimore. He is considered to be one of the most talented composers of the 20th century. He is the author of operas, as well as motion picture soundtracks. Among the most famous operas of Glass are "Einstein on the Beach" (Einstein on the Beach, 1975-1976), "Satyagraha" (Satyagraha, 1978-1979), "Akhnaten" (Akhnaten, 1983), "The Juniper Tree" (The Juniper Tree, 1985), "The Fall of the House of Usher", (The Fall of the House of Usher, 1987), "In the Penal Colony", (In the Penal Colony, 2000), "Galileo Galilei", (Galileo Galilei, 2002), "Waiting for the Barbarians" (Waiting for the Barbarians, 2005), "Appomattox" (Appomattox, 2007), "Kepler" (Kepler, 2009), "The Perfect American" (The Perfect American, 2011), "The Trial" (The Trial, 2014). Philip Glass has been nominated three times for the Golden Globe Award for Best Motion Picture Music. Glass's music is described as minimalistic, with repetitive structures and simplicity. Glass won the 2018 Kennedy Center Award.

Another prominent American composer is John Adams. He has written numerous pieces of music and has been awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Music. Adams's works are in the genre of minimalism, often employing electronic music. The composer used the principle of repetition of "patterns", which is the basis of minimalism. In his works, this principle is combined with the harmony that is inherent in European music, his music is distinguished by forms and a special technique of motivational development. Music experts note the composer's mastery of arrangement (Boerner, Jobst, 2008). He mastered the skill of classical and electronic arrangement. A characteristic feature of Adams's work is the use of synthesiser and electronic special effects in the academic score.

The most famous works of Adams are orchestral pieces "Short Ride in a Fast Machine" and "Chairman Dances", chamber and orchestral versions of the piece "Shaker Loops".

A prominent representative of musical minimalism and contemporary symphonic music is the Polish composer Henryk Mikołaj Górecki. It should be noted that the music written by the composer in his mature years is an example of sacred minimalism. The most famous work that brought the composer worldwide recognition is the Third Symphony for Soprano and Orchestra "Symphony of Sorrowful Chants" (1976). This piece was performed by the London Symphonietta in 1992. The Symphony of Sorrowful Chants has achieved worldwide acclaim, resulting in over a million copies sold worldwide (Boerner, et al, 2008).

Arvo Pärt is a renowned Estonian composer who has written numerous pieces for the symphony orchestra as well as other pieces of music. Pärt wrote works in various musical styles (Thompson, 2006). He attempted to write in various techniques and style models. The composer experimented in such musical styles as isorhythmy, minimalism, seriality, neoclassicism, and sonorics. Having tried numerous musical techniques and models, the composer developed his unique style. The composer metaphorically defines his style, which he developed in 1976, as tintinnabuli, literally the word means "bells". Music researchers refer Pärt's music to the genre of the New Simplicity.

Contemporary Symphonic Music on the Theatre Stage

The symphony orchestra accompanies the theatrical action that takes place on the stage. The orchestra is, first of all, an important part of the opera performance (Kolb, 2001). Choral and vocal parts are performed with the accompaniment of the orchestra. With the help of musical accompaniment, theatre directors set the mood for the entire performance, with the help of music they can convey the character of the hero and the atmosphere in each particular scene.

In the 20th-21st centuries, a considerable number of symphonies for operas and other theatrical performances were written. Below, the study considers the most famous pieces of music by contemporary composers.

Glass's opera "Einstein on the Beach" is an iconic piece of music. This piece of music was written in 1976 and has received wide recognition among the European public. "Einstein on the Beach" was for the first time shown at the Avignon Festival in France on July 25, 1976. In the same year, the production was presented to the public in other European cities. It was staged on theatrical stages in Hamburg, Paris, Belgrade, Venice, Brussels, and Rotterdam. "Einstein on the Beach" is not

a classical opera, it was written for the Philip Glass Ensemble, which is notable for its lack of soloists (Boerner, et al, 2008). In this ensemble, there is only a small choir that performs a meaningless set of syllables. The narrator reads the text of the plot, but the text of the protagonist is absent. The part of the protagonist was written for violin. Critics point out that "Einstein on the Beach", which was first presented to the public over forty years ago, is a masterpiece of music. At the beginning of 2014, another premiere of "Einstein on the Beach" took place at the Châtelet Theatre in Paris as part of the Autumn Festival. Critics noted that despite the variety of productions featured in the festival's programme, this opera was the main event. The production still looks contemporary, causing a standing ovation from the audience.

The equally famous composer Arvo Pärt was recognised by the music community and is one of the most prominent composers of our time. One of the last large-scale works of the composer "Symphony No. 4 Los Angeles". This symphony was first performed in 2009 at the Walt Disney Concert Hall in Los Angeles. The symphony was recorded by an American label and released on disc. The recording won the 2010 Grammy Award for Best Contemporary Classical Composition (London, 2004). The Estonian composer dedicated this work to Mikhail Khodorkovsky, who was unjustly accused of fraud and imprisoned. In an interview, the composer said that he admires Khodorkovsky's courage and fortitude. In his work "Symphony No. 4", the composer addresses all unjustly convicted prisoners in Russia.

Polish composer Henryk Mikołaj Górecki became famous thanks to the "Symphony of Sorrowful Songs", which he wrote in 1976. The composer dedicated this piece of music to his wife, pianist Jadwiga Rurańska. The premiere of the symphony took place in the spring of 1977 in the French city of Royan at the Festival of Contemporary Art. The symphony was performed by the German Southwest Radio Orchestra. This work of the composer was acclaimed by music critics and the public.

4. Conclusions

This study investigated the theoretical foundations of modern symphonic music. The most prominent composers of the 20th-21st century were explored. The development of modern symphonic music was studied, the styles and musical trends that have influenced contemporary composers were investigated. The following styles of contemporary symphonic music were studied: minimalism, post-minimalism, new simplicity. This work examines the most prominent contemporary composers of Europe and the USA.

In the context of this work, European and American composers who are involved in the establishment and development of modern classical music were considered. First of all, the composers of the 20th century and their musical works were examined and analysed. Also, composers and their works in the 21st century were analysed. The study considered the musical works of composers who are recognised as the best in their genre and are awarded. This study reviewed such prominent contemporary composers as Gustav Mahler, Philip Glass, Michael Nyman, Steve Reich, Louis Andriessen, Gavin Bryars, John McGuire, Pauline Oliveros, Julia Wolfe, Wolfgang Rihm, John Zorn, Henryk Górecki, and Arvo Pärt. Significant works for contemporary symphonic music were reviewed. The following symphonies are considered in detail: "Einstein on the Beach", "Symphony No. 4 Los Angeles", "Symphony of Sorrowful Songs". These works were appreciated by music critics and the public.

Analysis of the development of contemporary symphonic music demonstrated that the greatest influence on this genre was made by the composers of the 20th century. For a contemporary symphony orchestra, polystylism and eclecticism are characteristic features. Having studied the information in the context of the themes of a contemporary symphony orchestra, it can be concluded that in the future this genre will move along the same path that was set in the last century. At present, composers incorporate various musical genres in their works. Such techniques of composers can provide modern symphonic music with a new sound and public recognition.

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