

# Content Potential of Genre Decisions in the Diptych-symphony by Oleg Meremkulov as the Key to Performance Interpretation

Natalia Naiko

Dmitry Hvorostovsky Siberian State Academy of Arts  
Krasnoyarsk, Russia  
E-mail: mikinai@yandex.ru

**Abstract**—In the article, the work of the great Krasnoyarsk composer is considered from the point of view of the interaction of genre features of an instrumental concerto and a symphony, a concerto and a prelude. Along with the vivid manifestation of the concerto principle, which determined the significance of improvisation, virtuosity, and the phenomenon of game logic, features of genuinely symphonic development can be found penetrating all parts of the cycle. The most important generic quality of the symphony is traced — phasing, drama of the goal. Special attention is paid to the question of the refraction in the musical theme of the genre features of the song, choral, psalmody, pastoral, folk dance, tunes, church bells, etc., intonation characteristics of the most important themes. The laws of genre and intonation decisions of the leading image and intonation spheres and the roles of solo instruments are determined. A combination of observations allows us to comprehend some artistic and substantive aspects of the Diptych-Symphony, which can serve as a guideline for its performance interpretation.

**Keywords**—O.O. Meremkulov; symphonic works of Siberian composers; modern Russian instrumental concerto; genre synthesis; ringing strings psaltery in academic music

## I. INTRODUCTION

Oleg Ovanesovich Meremkulov (1935-2019) is one of the greatest Siberian composers. The Krasnoyarsk period of his life and work is marked by creative maturity and many artistic discoveries in various music genres. The idea of a major composition for a symphony orchestra with the participation of solo cello and psaltery was first expressed by L.Y. Zhuk. [1]. It was also actively supported by M.L. Kuritskiy, who persuaded the composer to start implementing this idea. There has been creative friendship between O.O. Meremkulov and M.L. Kuritskiy for many years.

The work on the Concerto for cello, ringing strings psaltery and a symphony orchestra in 3 parts lasted from summer 2007 to autumn 2008, including the period in which the composer became familiar with the possibilities of modern psaltery and the first testing of musical material by the performers — the cellist Mikhail Kuritskiy and the guslar Pavel Lukoyanov. The first performance of the new

composition took place in Krasnoyarsk on October 13, 2008, conducted by Roman Belyshev. In April 2010, its premiere was held in St. Petersburg with conductor Maxim Valkov. It became a bright event, under the impression of which the composer plunged into the creative process again. As a result, by the autumn of 2010, a Concert-Prelude was created, which, according to O. Meremkulov, should precede the previously written double concerto. Thus, the Concerto for cello, ringing strings psaltery and the symphonic orchestra is conceived by the author as a part of a larger whole, designated as the Diptych-Symphony. As we can see, on the level of headings the idea of interaction of genres is claimed — the Concert-Prelude and the Double Concerto in 3 parts make up a symphony.

On the one hand, these genres are related, since they belong to varieties of the sonata-symphonic cycle. However, on the other hand, the principles of thinking underlying them, i.e. concerto and symphony, rather belong to antipodes<sup>1</sup>.

## II. CONCERTO ESSENCE IN THE DIPTYCH SYMPHONY

In general, the concerto nature manifests itself in a bright artistic presentation of the material, a spectacular demonstration of virtuosity, in the competition of a soloist and various orchestral groups or individual instruments. All of the above, as a rule, is accompanied by a special elevated and festive tone. Concerto thinking gave birth to the phenomenon of musical playing logic, which E. V. Nazaikinsky defines as the concerto logic, the logic of "the collision of various instruments and orchestral groups, various components of musical structure, different lines of behaviour, which together form the "stereophonic" image of the developing action of theatrical origin" [3].

In the Diptych-Symphony by Oleg Meremkulov, the two solo instruments are the cello and the psaltery. They are responsible for conducting, alternately or simultaneously, the main thematic material, and we can talk about the presence of different figurative and intonational spheres assigned to these instruments, which gives them the features of particular

<sup>1</sup> E.g., M.G. Aranovsky considers the concerto style a natural alternative to symphonism [2].

characters. The brightness and visibility of the thematism ensure its recognizability and easiness of capturing in the mind of the listener, allows you to focus your attention on changes and their direction. This, in turn, creates an eventful effect, enhanced by contrasting section comparisons.

Among the attributes of the concerto genre, we note, first of all, different-scale episodes, similar to cadences, where solo instruments are played one at a time or together. Such "cadences" are intended to demonstrate the skill of the performing musician as a kind of co-author of the composer. In many cases, they require not only extraordinary virtuosity, but also artistic qualities, flexible switching when embodying various images and emotional and psychological states. The dynamism and constant intonation and rhythmic updating of the material testify to the improvisational content of such episodes and implies a truly co-creative participation of the performers, their living every intonational "turn".

It is important to emphasize that this aspect — the demonstration of the instrument's capabilities — affects almost every group of the symphony orchestra. A high level of technical skill is required not only from soloists, but also performers of all major parties. Throughout all parts, replicas of various instruments are periodically brought to the fore or there are relatively detailed constructions performed by separate groups or tutti. The score contains multiple comparisons of episodes that contrast with each other in terms of imagery and intonational material, colour, type of texture, registration, orchestration, tempo, rhythmic organization, spatial and dynamic characteristics. Consequently, features of a concerto for an orchestra are also found in O. O. Meremkulov's work.

The first macro structure does not only synthesize in itself the genre features of the concerto and the symphony. Having designated it as a Concert-Prelude, the author emphasizes the function of the introduction, the preface. The Concert-Prelude, being independent in material and structurally complete (proved by the presence of reprise, both thematic and tonal), at the same time has the qualities of an introductory part. It was there that the initial expressions of the "role" of solo instruments, the imaginative and intonational spheres of the entire work were found, and the thematic "seeds" were planted that would grow in the following parts. The generic quality of the prelude genre is the predominance of procedural and dynamic nature over statics, as well as architectonic balance. This determined the openness of the tonal plan, the meaningful ending of the Concert-Prelude with an ellipsis, a kind of intoned incompleteness.

### III. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SYMPHONIC CONCEPT IN THE CONCERTO DIPTYCH

However, as we have mentioned above, two concertos make up a symphony. Consideration of O. Meremkulov's Diptych from the standpoint of the phenomenon of symphonism requires serious comprehensive analysis. Within the framework of the article, it is possible only to outline some of its vectors.

As we know, a symphony is a conceptual genre, the traditional function of which, according to M. G. Aranovsky, consists in the philosophical comprehension of reality and the construction of a complete picture of the world [4]. The semantic invariant of the symphony is a holistic concept of man. With the passage of time in a series of epochal styles, in the XIX and, especially, in the XX century, it changed and individualized. A.L. Vinogradova-Chernyaeva, in particular, writes about it, revealing a number of invariant features of the new genre being in modern symphonic works [5]. However, even in the new millennium, the considerations expressed by Aranovsky regarding the fact that the symphony plan goes into the extra musical sphere and the essence of the genre is concluded "... precisely in the establishment of links between symphonic and real processes" do not lose justice [6].

M. Aranovsky calls phasing a typological property of symphonic development [7], which defines the process of the formation of a musical theme, and the peculiarities of building sections of a sonata form, and the architectonics of the sonata-symphonic cycle itself. All stages of the process, demonstrating qualitative changes, implement the idea of development. The symphonic development is directed towards a certain goal, with the initial and final points connected by a logical chain of successive changes. The determinism of the logics of cause-and-effect connections finds its musical realization in the symphony. This, according to Aranovsky, gives rise to the "drama of the final goal": in part 1 there is the start of the drama, in the subsequent parts there is a phase movement to the outcome in the final. "In this," the researcher observes, "symphonism is similar to European literature and especially to the principles of theatrical drama" [8].

In the Diptych-Symphony, as mentioned above, several figurative and intonational spheres receive a consistent embodiment. The most important ones of them reveal patterns in terms of timbre decisions and are oriented towards the intonation of solo instruments objectifying in sound matter the edges of the spiritual dispensation of the artistic "Self" of the Author. The intonation content of the cello part and the actual characteristics of its sound enable us to perceive it conditionally as a carrier of the individual human, personality. In the psalter party, the collective, multifaceted musical image of Eternal Rus finds its pre-creation. At the same time, the psalter can be interpreted as the expression of the deep national, folk in the personality of the Lyrical character, his rootedness<sup>2</sup> and, at the same time, the mysterious spiritual depth and memory of his Heavenly Motherland.

From the very first bars of the Concert-Prelude in the cello part, the image and intonational sphere begins to unfold, which is connected with a circle of such states of the Lyrical character as gloomy reflections, passionate interrogations, confusion, impulses, tension of all mental strengths and willpower to overcome doubt and obstacles, striving towards

<sup>2</sup> Perhaps, the feeling of a certain plot as a refraction of the author's understanding of the inseparably intertwined destinies of the Person, People and Native Earth is partly connected with this aspect.

the attainment of Harmony. In the eight-part Cello "Monologue" opening part (see "Fig. 1"), there is a set of intonations that serve as a source for all subsequent episodes of this solo instrument (including the Double Concerto), in which certain aspects of the image of the Lyrical character deepen. The significance of this monologue lies in the fact



Fig. 1. O. Meremkulov Concert Prelude: bb.1-9.

As we can see, the phase wave-like development corresponds to a series of events of a conditional plot. Such variability, intense dynamism of the states of the Lyrical character, in general, has its own direction and, ultimately, demonstrates a new feature only in the final. At the end of the third part of the Double Concerto, the initial intonational tension, having exhausted its potential, is resolved, dissolved in the triumphant chime, crowning the symphony.

As an authentic artistic discovery by the composer, one can regard the introduction to a serious and complex composition of the ringing strings psaltery, whose role in the embodiment of the polysemantic central image of the symphony is paramount. What is important is not only the national colour inherent in this instrument, but also the special, symbolic, connection between the earthly and the heavenly contained in its design and timbre. According to the most ancient Vedic ideas, the psaltery "nourishes space with light, preventing chaos from destroying it, preserving our world and the highest law of being," therefore, "playing the psaltery is the fabric of world harmony" [9].

In the Concert-Prelude, the psaltery, starting at the 9th bar, highlights the tonic harmony with the sound of a major seventh, and then comes to the fore with the fading motif of the song origin flowing from the top of the source (see "Fig. 2"). A melodic movement within a diminished fifth, resembling Tchaikovsky's pentachord<sup>3</sup>, gives it special penetrating expressiveness. The descending fifth ending reveals the national song genesis of this woeful motive, which, optionally transformed, in n. 6,7 grows into a nine-bar chant. The musical plot, outlined in the Concert-Prelude, develops in the Double Concerto — from the first part to the final — according to the laws of conflict drama. On one pole there is Harmony, echoes and signs of the Divine transcendental reality. On the other one — the abyss of darkness and chaos.

The image and intonation spheres are also organized accordingly. The first one is represented by the themes embodying the images of church bells, church chants, the supernatural — "Paradise" — music, anthem praising-chanting, an inspired bright celebration. The episodes of flight-directed dance-tunes, filled with the joy of the fullness of being, the rapture with a feeling of inspiration, are related

that it has the intonation plot of the entire symphony - the movement from a minor (chromatically complicated a-moll) to a tart major (C-dur), connected with tense overcoming where the tonic is complicated by the dissonant interval of the minor seventh.

to the same pole. A significant part of these themes is associated with the timbre of the ringing strings psaltery.

At the very beginning of the Double Concerto, a thoughtfully contemplative "swinging" fourths motive sounds, as if embodying the crystal chime of the heavenly bells (see "Fig. 3"). In our consciousness, it evokes the image of the Russian Land, Russian Motherland, in which the pain of her historical tragedies and raptures of its takeoffs, thoughts about the people's fate of its best sons — prayers, philosophers, poets, musicians, artists, their reverent love and memory of Holy Rus. Opening the first and third parts of the Double Concerto, this theme-symbol serves as a kind of marker for one of the dominants of the consciousness of the Author. It reflects the call of a different — supra world — reality, similar to the bells of the invisible city of Kitezh. The functioning of this theme as a symbol has also defined its static nature: throughout the composition, its pitch position and texture-harmonic arrangement remain almost unchanged.

In the second part of the Double Concerto (n.2, b.4), the church bell ringing motive appears in a rhythmically enlarged form, as if in a different dimension. In n. 4 and 5, new versions of the chime-motive are introduced in quavers, as if refracted by the consciousness of the Character immersed in prayer. The part is completed by a swinging fifth motive in the part of orchestral bells, with a timbre close to the sound of the church bell.

<sup>3</sup> The descending motif within the diminished fifth, about which V. Zukkerman, noting the semantic tint of interrogation typical of this syntactic form, writes that, according to its type, it would deserve the name "Tchaikovsky's pentachord" [10].



Fig. 2. O. Meremkulov Concert Prelude: bb.12-17.



Fig. 3. O. Meremkulov Double Concerto, part I: bb.1-4.

Only in some episodes that recreate the dramatic, full of contradictions, doubts, and despair path of the Character to spiritual renewal, transfiguration, this motive of the psaltery is shaped a little differently, as if the heavenly call is muffled by the confused voices of the earthly vale.

Strictly focused melodies, freely transforming the features of znamenny chant, serve to express not only spiritual composure and strength of faith, but also an objective, impersonal principle. They are like the milestones of the Spiritual path, the connection with Tradition. A smooth mono-voice tune appears for the first time in part 1 of the Double Concerto in n. 9 of the score in a low string instrument part<sup>4</sup> (see "Fig. 4"). The extended pedal at the double bass on the As of the contra octave, informs the sound of a somewhat gloomy, severe as-moll colour. In n. 10 the "singing" grows, expands, covers all groups of the orchestra and forms a full-sound vertical with a palette of other harmonic colours, at some moments spreading with the excruciating pain of a collective — people's grief and occasionally lightened with a touch of hope. Then the "choral" texture is again phased out to unison.

In the second part of the Double Concerto (Lento), the most important stage in the process of the character's spiritual growth is found — the prayer of repentance, without which the purification of the soul is impossible. This part is prefaced by an epigraph — verse 17 of Psalm 50 of David, "Lord, speak up my mouth, and my mouth shall declare Thy praise." In the first bars of Lento, the intonational content of the parties of both solo instruments — "recitation" in one tone and low-second descending moves — evokes associations with psalmody, a genre that is formed, according to V.V. Medushevsky, by the spirit of "concentration, strength, faith, and heavenly" [11]. At some moments (two bars before n. 2), the cello melody acquires a more melodic character, including both short seconds phrases and diatonic motifs with a sixth, fourth, fifth, and third. Descending chromatic moves, completing extended phrases (the bar before n. 3), serve to express spiritual confusion and contrition of the sins by the Character, who turns to the Lord with penitential prayer.

In n. 7, 8, the texture of the brass part is approaching the choral one, which helps to recreate the episode of "choral chants", which has a somewhat gloomy color due to the

medium and low register and the minor mode. Lento ends with an es-moll triad of several bars at violins, flutes and oboes, which is superimposed by the alternation of two concords of orchestra bells — the major third from e1 and fourth from ais1. If the fourth coincides with the tones of a concord in terms of the actual sound, the light of the major third is perceived as a sign opening the perspective of another dimension.

An important role in the Diptych-Symphony is performed by a group of themes that conditionally recreate the atmosphere of the Paradise idyll, embodying the idea of supra-world Harmony. Their tranquility and serenity is determined by a calm tempo, major mode (D-dur, C-dur, Des-dur), lightweight texture, transparent background figurations, sound of medium and high register not only of the psaltery, but also clear timbres of solo wooden instruments (oboe, clarinet, flute), which causes associations with pastoral images.

The Andantino episode in Part 1 of the Double Concerto (n. 11,12) is marked by the gentle glow of D-dur. On the gently rocking background of the strings in the oboe and clarinet party, the melody soars, followed by a solo clarinet and picked up by the solo violin. It combines the chanting, smoothness and a kind of instrumental implementation of the "vocalizations" as an expression of the gentlest delight and quiet rejoicing.

<sup>4</sup> With duplication, first at the low tree (2 bars), then at the horns.





Fig. 4. O. Meremkulov Double Concerto, part I: n. 9 (bb.70-73).

In another episode of the Andantino of the same part (n. 21) there is the colour of Des-dur. Here, a floating melody of wide breathing from a solo flute sounds on the background

of flowing figurations and a singing monotonous line of the psaltery (see "Fig. 5").



Fig. 5. O. Meremkulov Double Concerto, part I: n. 21 (bb.166-171).

In Adagio (n. 28), in the party of the gusli, the crystal figurations of the lower voice outline the harmony of the Des-dur triad, whereas in the upper horn there are highlights of the third of the C-dur<sup>5</sup>, shaded in the bells' party as well. The gentle, ethereal ringing of a triangle creates the illusion of a quiet heavenly call.

The episodes of dancing melodies, primarily related to the timbre of the psaltery, are of particular importance in the composition. They are introduced into the psaltery party in the first part of the Double Concerto (n. 3 and n. 19), as well as in the final (n. 3 — see "Fig. 6" — and n. 19). Sparkling, aspiration-flight dance-tune is perceived as an expression of inspired strength, readiness to overcome any obstacles. The other pole, basically, is the pole of evil — darkness as a collective, symbolic image of everything that is opposite to Light — darkness of spiritual blindness and disbelief, darkness of low passions and hatred. At times vague, spreading out, it can be barely indicated as a shadow of doubt or a gloomy premonition, at some moments it appears as the inevitable power of the fate through a motif resembling the beginning of *Dies Irae*, at others it opens up to hellish abyss, circles the demonic obsession, captures the element of soulless-mechanistic infernal dances, and sometimes it is encapsulated in the implacably imposing formidable procession<sup>6</sup>.

However, as L. Serebryakova writes about Russian composers, "each of them was meant to express the spiritual integrity of Russian culture lost and acquired at various

historical stages, in the contexts of global world catastrophes and human upheavals at the turn of the century and the tragic XX century, lost and regained spiritual unity of the national culture" [12]. In this sense, Oleg Meremkulov is a continuer of high traditions. His Character's longing for spiritual light is so great, and his connection with the family tree of Russian culture is so vivid that he is given the strength to oppose the pole of darkness, overcome the evil and achieve a luminous goal.

One of the forerunners of the final apotheosis, the climax marking the most important stage of the Character's spiritual way, is an episode in the first part of the Double Concerto — *Andante maestoso*, C-dur (n. 25). Its content is the flight inspired melody of wide breathing, which is performed by string instruments at *ff* and duplicated by full sounding psaltery chords. And later, and in part 3 of the Double Concerto (n. 8-9), the diatonic melody in C-dur is performed in the party of the psaltery, the phrases of which resemble the anthem theme from n. 25 of the first part. In the cello part, the diatonic parallel minor seems to reflect the moment of purification of the Lyrical character, freeing him of doubts, finding support.

<sup>5</sup> It resembles the introductory "chime".

<sup>6</sup> In the Concert-Prelude they are n. 8, in part 1 — episodes in n. 5, 15, 16, 17, 23, 24, 26, 31 and others.



Fig. 6. O. Meremkulov Double Concerto, part III: n. 3 (bb. 18-23).

The tonal plan of the entire composition also serves to explain the main idea, reflects the direction and dynamics of figurative development, its analysis allows us to make sure of the through nature of the symphonic process. The edge tonal props of the Concert-Prelude are a-moll and A-dur. Part I of the Double Concerto opens with C-dur / Des-dur colour, and in its last bars, B-dur asserts itself rather unexpectedly. In Part II, the movement from the unstable a-moll to the es-moll is performed. The Final of the Double Concerto begins with a non-steady g-moll, ending with the glow of the D-dur tonality — sunny, golden in N.A. Rimsky-Korsakov's perception [13]<sup>7</sup>.

Thus, each part and the whole composition of the Diptych-Symphony is tonally open, denoting the vector of the Character's Spiritual path — a mature free Personality, who, being the "actor" of history and personal biography, is thought of by B.P. Vysheslavtsev as "knowledge of the value system and the energy of the will, aimed at their implementation <...> the unity of the cognizing, evaluating and acting subject" [15].

#### IV. CONCLUSION

The persuasiveness of the implementation of such a serious intention is based on the most skillful technique, mastery of genre means, the effect of which is manifested in different aspects and at different levels. The concerto essence defined the importance of improvisational character, virtuosity, the phenomenon of performing logics, whereas the generic quality of the symphony — the dramaturgy of the goal — ensured the direction and staged development.

The visibility of the implementation of the main figurative and intonational spheres and the peculiarity of the amplitude of each instrument is achieved by the characteristics of musical thematism, namely, by refraction of the genre features of the song, chorale, psalmody, pastoral, folk dance, melody, church bell ringing, etc.

The genre multidimensionality, variety and complexity of musical material, the vastness of the whole, the dynamics of development — all these features of O. Meremkulov's work create special demands on soloists and conductor. Perhaps some of the observations made will help a deeper insight into the meaning of the art form, serve as an impetus for the disclosure of its other features and patterns.

<sup>7</sup> From the data collected by M.S. Starcheus, it can be concluded that for a number of musicians this tonality was "painted" in yellow (S. Skrebkov, V. Trambitsky, A. Scriabin), A. Kenel "saw" it golden, and for B. Asafiev D-dur was constantly associated with "sunrays and shine precisely as intense light emission" [14].

#### REFERENCES

- [1] E.M. Preisman, "The interaction of the traditions of national instrumentalism and academic performance in modern Russian music" // E.M. Preisman "On music and musicians: time, events": monographic essays and articles. Krasnoyarsk: FSBEI HPE "Krasnoyarsk State Academy of Music and Theater", 2013, pp.146-158.
- [2] M.G. Aranovsky, "Symphonic searches. The problem of the symphony genre in Soviet music of 1960-1975 ". Research essays. Leningrad: Soviet composer, 1979, p. 120.
- [3] E.V. Nazaikinsky, "The logic of musical composition." Moscow: Music, 1982, p. 227.
- [4] M.G. Aranovsky, "Symphonic searches. The problem of the symphony genre in Soviet music of 1960-1975 ". Research essays. Leningrad: Soviet composer, 1979, p. 7.
- [5] A.L. Vinogradova-Chernyaeva, "The genre of a modern symphony from an etymological perspective" [Electronic resource] // News of the Samara Scientific Center of the Russian Academy of Sciences. Social, humanities, life sciences. 2009.Vol. 11. No. 4-6. pp. 1642-1645. URL: <https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/zhanr-sovremennoy-simfonii-v-etimologicheskoy-rakurse> (reference date: 12.03.2019), 1645p.
- [6] M.G. Aranovsky, "Symphonic searches. The problem of the symphony genre in Soviet music of 1960-1975 ". Re-search essays. Leningrad: Soviet composer, 1979, p.119.
- [7] M.G. Aranovsky, "Symphonic searches. The problem of the symphony genre in Soviet music of 1960-1975 ". Re-search essays. Leningrad: Soviet composer, 1979, p.82.
- [8] M.G. Aranovsky, "Symphonic searches. The problem of the symphony genre in Soviet music of 1960-1975 ". Re-search essays. Leningrad: Soviet composer, 1979, p.120.
- [9] S.V. Zhamnikova, "The secret of persecution of the harp" [Electronic resource] URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G9ll6jPUbs> (reference date: 11.03.2019).
- [10] V. Zuckerman, "Expressive means of Tchaikovsky's lyrics." Moscow: Music, 1971, p. 56.
- [11] V.V. Medushevsky, "Spiritual analysis of music." Moscow: Composer, 2014, p. 418.
- [12] L. Serebryakova, "In search of acquired sense. Russian music in the course of time. " Moscow: Agraf, 2017, p. 557.
- [13] O.A. Bozina, "Semantics of tonality in N.A. Rimsky-Korsakov's opera works." Krasnoyarsk: FSBEI HPE KSAMT, 2013, pp. 29, 59, 68.
- [14] M.S. Starcheus, "A musician's hearing". Moscow: Moscow State Conservatory named after P.I. Tchaikovsky, 2003, p. 458.
- [15] B.P. Vysheslavtsev, "Ethics of the Transfigured Eros." Moscow: Republic, 1994, p. 185.