

An Overview of Russian and English-American Studies on Sergey Taneyev's Creative Activity

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Abstract—The article focuses on analysing Russian and English-American musicological literature on Sergey I. Taneyev's creative activity. The author of the article highlights the increased interest in Taneyev as an outstanding representative of the Russian culture at the turn of the 20th century, on the part of both Russian and foreign scientists. Outside Russia, Taneyev is predominantly seen as a musician and musicologist, an expert in polyphony, while, as the present article shows, the works by Russian musicologists study various aspects of Taneyev's creative activity, including composition. The overview proposed in the article allows expanding the range of relevant topics for studying Taneyev's creative activity.

Keywords: *Sergey I. Taneyev, studying Taneyev's creative activity, Russian science, foreign science, Russian tradition*

I. INTRODUCTION

In the article dedicated to the 30th anniversary of Sergey I. Taneyev's death (1856–1915), the great Boris Asafyev wrote: "Only a very few contemporaries recognized the beauty of his soulfulness in Taneyev—the master and Taneyev—the thinker. ... In the 10s of our [20th] century, it was astonishing how indifferently he was treated" [1].

Over one hundred years have passed since the death of Sergey Taneyev, a distinguished composer¹, the first Russian prominent musicologist, music teacher, pianist, and music public figure. With his name deeply respected, Taneyev is recognized as one of the outstanding representatives of

¹ Compositions: opera "Oresteia" (trilogy) (of Aeschylus, 1895); cantatas "Monument" (1880), "St. John of Damascus" (1884), "At the Reading of a Psalm" (1915); 4 symphonies (I-1874, II - unfinished. 1877, III-1884, IV-1898, considered the first), "Overture on Russian Themes" (1882), "Overture "Oresteia" (1889); Concert Suite for violin and orchestra (1909); 2 string quintets (1901, 1904), Piano quintet (1911), 10 quartets (6 published during the composer's life: 1890, 1895, 1896, 1903, 1905, 1906), Piano quartet (1906), 4 trios (1880, 1907, 1911, 1913), Piano Trio (1903), Canzona for Clarinet and String Orchestra (1883). Violin Sonata (1911); Prelude and Fugue for piano (1910), Prelude for piano (1894), Choral varié for organ (1913); 12 choirs (Ya.P. Polonsky, op. 27, 1909), 16 choirs (K.D. Balmont, op. 35, 1913), Spiritual works, 40 romances (except non-published), including "Minuet", "In the Invisible Mist", "Stalactites", "The World is Asleep", "Music", "Mask", "Winter Way", "My heart is a spring", "Fountains" and others.

Russian culture at the turn of the 20th century. In recent years, contemporary scholars and numerous musicians have demonstrated increased interest in Taneyev's creative heritage.

Taneyev is known for his research "Convertible Counterpoint in the Strict Style" (1877–1906) and "Doctrine of Canon" (1901–1903); a music educationalist, who laid the foundations for the modern system of music education, along with his predecessors (V. F. Odoevsky, A.N. Serov, M. A. Balakirev, etc.); the founder of the People's Conservatory in Moscow (1906). Together with Tchaikovsky, he became the head of the Moscow school of composition². He taught S.V. Rachmaninov, A.N. Scriabin, N.K. Medtner, R.M. Glière, A.T. Grechaninov, S.M. Lyapunova, Z. P. Paliashvili, A.D. Kastalsky, A.V. Nikolsky, S.N. Vasilenko, A.N. Alexandrov, A.V. Stanchinsky, theorists B.L. Yavorsky, L. L. Sabaneev S.V. Evseev and others.

S. Taneyev was a performing musician, a public figure promoting classical music and research in history and theory of music. He belonged to a number of societies, including the Society of Church Singers (1885), the Moscow Society for Mutual Assistance of Orchestra Musicians (1905), the Moscow Philharmonic Society (1905), the St. Petersburg Society of Chamber Music (1908), the Moscow Society for the Distribution of Chamber Music (1909), St. Petersburg branch of the Russian Musical Society (RMS) (1909), the founder and active member of the Library of Music and Musical Research (1908). With Taneyev's participation, a community of Russian Music Lovers (1896–1912), known as the "Kerzin's Circle of Music Lovers", was organized in Moscow. Later it developed into a concert organization promoting Russian composers' works.

Being the author of the first prominent study "S. I. Taneyev's creative activity" (published in 1986), L.Z. Korabelnikova had a significant role in changing attitudes towards Taneyev's heritage [2]. In her monograph, she

² 1866–1875 - Taneyev studied at the Moscow Conservatory. There he taught harmony and instrumentation, since 1878; 1881–1905 - was a professor, taught at theoretical classes (including harmony, counterpoint, musical form, composition), orchestral and choral classes (until 1889), 1885–1889 - was a director.

makes an attempt to understand “how an inimitable, yet typical individual style appears at the crossroads of key trends and personality traits of the creator” [3]. She focuses on Taneyev’s highest achievements in particular genres and provides a close-up view of their specific features.

In general, there is extensive Russian musicological literature on the role of S.I. Taneyev’s personality in the history of Russian music and the analysis of his creative activity. The authors focus on Taneyev’s style (L.Z. Korabelnikova, T.N. Levaya, A.V. Lunacharsky, M.K. Mikhailov, S.I. Savenko, G.A. Savoskina, B.L. Yavorsky); the polyphonic principles of the musical structure of Taneyev’s compositions (V.V. Protopopov, N.A. Simakova, S.S. Skrebkov); national roots of the language of music (B. Asafiev, I. F. Belza, S.V. Evseev, V.V. Protopopov, N.A. Simakova); Taneyev’s scientific and pedagogical heritage (F.G. Arzamanov, T.N. Livanova, Yu.D. Engel); his fundamental work “Convertible Counterpoint in the Strict Style” (N.D. Kashkin, P.G. Lvov, Yu. I. Neklyudov), the musical and theoretical concept (T.S. Kuregyan, V.S. Tsenova); and the composer’s biography (G.B. Bernandt, L.Z. Korabelnikova, S.I. Savenko, L.L. Sabaneev, B.L. Yavorsky, V.V. Yakovlev, etc.) [4-9]. However, according to the researchers’ unanimous verdict, Taneyev is an outstanding personality, a great composer and thinker.

Nevertheless, in comparison with the compositions by his teacher, Tchaikovsky, and by his students Rachmaninov and Scriabin, Taneyev’s own compositions appear to be less frequently performed. What is the reason behind this paradox?

II. TANEYEV — THE MUSICIAN VS. TANEYEV — THE SCIENTIST

Mikhail Vasilyevich Pletnev, a recognized musician performing Taneyev’s compositions, explains this paradox in the following way: “Taneyev. Composer and philosopher, my soulmate. This high-power sacred music is seldom heard today. Concert organizers tend to be deterred by the unknown name, the substantial resources necessary to perform Taneyev’s compositions, and associated financial losses. However, I am convinced that this is exactly the music our modern world should listen to and understand in order to achieve harmony, similar to the one they find in church” [10].

Let us not develop the topic of costs of various types, required, for instance, for the theatrical production of “Oresteia” or the performance of the cantata “At the Reading of a Psalm”. Regarding the present article, a different focus is of greater importance: if studying Taneyev’s creative activity fulfills the maieutic function — to lead, to help performers and the audience discover music, which, according to Pletnev, is “worth listening to” — specifically, music aimed at providing harmony. It is interesting, but by this concise description, Mikhail Pletnev managed to express the essence of Taneyev’s philosophy of music.

For a long time, Taneyev’s “harmony of music” has been primarily interpreted from the Pythagorean point of view -

like Mathematics in sounds. Largely, Taneyev himself facilitated it, being a well-known expert in counterpoint.

As Taneyev played a key role in the development of domestic music science, it is natural that there have been some profound studies of his scientific heritage. Therefore, many works by Russian researchers focused on such subjects as the analysis of Taneyev’s fundamental work “Convertible Counterpoint in the Strict Style”, the issues of musical terminology and the scientific language of his theory of counterpoint, and the concept of music theory (for example, N.D. Kashkin, P.G. Lvov, Yu.I. Neklyudov, T.S. Kuregyan, V.S. Tsenova, and A.I. Rovenko).

Remarkably, in English-American literature, the dominating view is of Taneyev as a musician and scientist.

Thus, Paul Richard Grove’s dissertation “Sergei Ivanovich Taneyev’s Doctrine of the Canon: A Translation and Commentary” (1999) [11], the articles by Simon Debrule [12], Christopher Segall [13], and Denis Collins [14] indicate a noticeably increased interest of our modern foreign colleagues in the doctrine of Taneyev’s counterpoint. In their opinion it “generalizes, clarifies and broadens the ideas of previous theorists.

British musicologist Simon Debrule even expressed regrets that many Western European scholars were not familiar with Taneyev’s work “Convertible Counterpoint”. According to him, with this work Taneyev, “pioneered a rigorously theoretical approach to the study of an esoteric contrapuntal device, which substantially precedes parallel thought outside of Russia” [15]. Moreover, he writes about the current scientific value and relevance of this work in terms of understanding the counterpoint technique [16]. “One may argue, therefore, that the Anglo-American environment of music theory is ripe for a reintroduction of Taneyev’s ‘Convertible Counterpoint’, with relevance to both early-music enthusiasts and music theorists. If music theory can find a warm home for neo-Riemann, perhaps could it also welcome a neo-Taneyev?” [17].

It is not unexpected that the assiduous attention Taneyev the scientist paid to music as mathematics, encouraged other researchers to analyse his works from the point of view of his interpretation of polyphonic principles. The most recognized works in this area are those by V.V. Protopopov, N.A. Simakova S.S. Skrebkov, where they emphasize that “strict adherence to the laws of polyphonic composition dating back to the old masters of the Baroque era” in Taneyev’s works “was combined with their transformation and provided traditional forms with new artistic meaning” (S. S. Skrebkov). Thus, the reason for Taneyev to look back to the past is not to imitate it.

Moreover, Taneyev performed one of monumental tasks of Russian art - saving music from danger, and as he said, “the decay of the musical form”, “degeneration of the structure of individual parts and the depression of the general composition” [18]. He developed a concept according to which Russian composers can “on the one hand, contribute to the growth of the European way, but on the other hand,

cultivate our own one. <...> Glinka followed both of these ways. <...> The idea is that over time, Russian features in music will acquire their specific character, which will contribute to the development of a unique style, distinctly different from the European one” [19]. This concept is sometimes neglected by researchers, although it is a key to understanding the style of Taneyev’s musical heritage and Taneyev himself. Its underestimation may lead to erroneous statements of the composer’s cosmopolitan views [20], opposite to Glinka’s, and to claims, that Taneyev’s aesthetics is antithetic to Glinka [21], “owing nothing to the indigenous Russian tradition established by Glinka, and openly disapproving of contemporary nationalist composers” [22].

III. CLASSICISM VS. ROMANTICISM

The concept of “two ways” of creating the Russian style, formulated by Taneyev as a 24-year-old professor of the Moscow Conservatory, eventually became a project of his entire creative life, further on implemented in his scientific, pedagogical and creative heritage.

There is a viewpoint, still widespread, that Taneyev’s dialogue with the age of Enlightenment is connected to the revival of the Apollonian norms of classic art in opposition to romanticism. Taneyev’s Mozartianism is considered a reaction to late romantic phenomena, impressionism, expressionism, and symbolism. Further, N.D. Kovalenko, T.N. Levaya, M.K. Mikhailov, S.I. Savenko, L.A. Serebryakova, A.I. Tikhonova, and I.O. Zacher made an attempt to undermine the idea of Taneyev as a classic composer. Not denying the classicist elements, M.K. Mikhailov emphasises romantic features of Taneyev’s style (thereby emphasising the emotional power of his music). The British researcher Anastasia Belina also observes romantic features in the “Oresteia” trilogy: in her dissertation and the book “Wagner in Russia, Poland and the Czech Lands: Musical, Literary and Cultural” [23], she writes about the Wagnerism of Taneyev’s “Oresteia” [24-25].

In our opinion, the most relevant to Taneyev’s music is the approach of stylistic integration by N.D. Kovalenko, T.N. Levaya, S.I. Savenko, L.A. Serebryakova, I.O. Zacher, and O.A. Steiner.

There is a variety of characteristics on Taneyev’s style: “neoclassicist” (N.A. Rimsky-Korsakov), “pure romantic with great temperament” (N.Ya. Myaskovsky), “Russian Bach” (I.F. Boelza), a representative of “classicized romanticism” (T.N. Levaya), which reflects how the search for Russian-European synthesis, characteristic of the 19th century Russian culture, was interpreted in Taneyev’s way of thinking.

IV. THE NATIONAL AS A RESEARCH SUBJECT

Taneyev (1856-1915) considered rooting professional musical creativity into the national basis to be the central task of his diverse creative activity.

At the age of 19 he set a goal of “promoting the creation of national music” (see “What should Russian composers

do?”), which became the primary focus of his own work. Naturally, a special topic in studying Taneyev’s creative activity is the interpretation of the national in the intonation system of Taneyev’s compositions. This is the similarities between Taneyev and Glinka; the problem of domestic counterpoint, national roots of the language, etc. The “national accent” to the study of S.I. Taneyev was introduced by B.V. Asafyev, S.V. Evseev, partly N.D. Kashkin and J.D. Engel, I.F. Boelza, L.D. Kulichenko, M.V. Nikeshichev, N.Yu. Plotnikova, V.V. Protopopov, and N.A. Simakova.

Their works reject the prevailing stereotype of Taneyev as a Russian “Western composer”, indifferent to the problems of Russian national culture. Indeed, this view, widespread in the Soviet atheist era, does not take into account Taneyev’s own understanding of “the national” in music: the national is not the reproduction of the visible phenomena of Russian life, the features of the Russian character or folk themes in music. As noted by S.N. Bulgakov, “Nationality is valued not as ethnographic material or its outer image”. Taneyev’s reflections on the development of the Russian style, strengthening the national identity of compatriot musicians — this is what makes his aesthetics compliant with the spirit of the Russian culture at the turn of the century. The Christian values of Russian culture could not but affect the national features of Taneyev’s creative activity. In the monograph “S. I. Taneyev’s works in relation with the Russian spiritual tradition” [26], G. Lukina emphasizes that the harmonious combination of national Russian and European classical principles is interpreted in Taneyev’s thinking. The examples of Russian synthesis in Taneyev’s music are the cantatas “St. John of Damascus” (op. 1, 1884) and “At the Reading of a Psalm” (op. 36, 1915), the choral cycle to the lyrics by Ya. Polonsky (op. 27, 1909); a trilogy “Oresteia” (1894), where opera is interpreted as a choral mystery act, the main idea of which is spiritual transformation through repentance. The balance between Russian national and classical European principles, characteristic of the Russian style, takes on a different aspect in Taneyev’s mindset.

According to S.S. Horujy, the contemporary philosopher, the task of Russian synthesis was “the successful transformation of the “alien” into “one’s own; borrowed and patchwork into organic and creative” [27]. The latter explains Taneyev’s desire to comprehend the basics of medieval monody, counterpoint, Bach’s polyphony, the music by Mozart and Beethoven, and the history of church singing. Meanwhile, aimed at finding a solid foundation of the universal experience of intonation construction for Russian music, Taneyev tried to comprehend the wisdom of the past culture and its universal laws: he was deeply convinced that Russian musicians “should remember and face the people; under this condition, we will greatly benefit from getting closer to European art” (Taneyev’s letter to P.I. Tchaikovsky on August 6, 1880) [28].

The research of spiritual topics in Taneyev’s choral compositions have been carried out by N.D. Kovalenko, G.U. Lukina (Aminova), M.V. Nikeshichev, L.A. Serebryakova [29-31], whose scientific works give evidence of how with

his creative and life devotion, Sergei Ivanovich maintained and strengthened the generic ethos of Russian culture, in order to preserve the connections between art and the creativity of the Russian people, as its innermost spiritual source.

What is more, since the end of the 20th century, there has been considerable interest for in understanding the composer's work in the context of culture at the turn of the 20th century (L.A. Skaftymova, I.O. Zacher, O.V. Shevchenko, O.A. Steiner); identifying the place of Taneyev's spiritual works in the history of Russian church music of the 19th century (N.Yu. Plotnikova); the features of Taneyev's creative process (E.V. Vyazkova); worldview and philosophical views (N.D. Kovalenko, G.U. Lukina (Aminova), M.V. Nikeshichev, L.A. Serebryakova, L.A. Skaftymova) [32-38].

The role of modern source study and textology in studying and rethinking S.I. Taneyev's life, creativity and personality is also worth mentioning. Some significant works in this aspect include the following: S.A. Petukhova (on composing the opera "Oresteia"), N. Ganenko (the analysis of the compositions created for the amateur manuscript journal "Zaholustye"), G.U. Lukina (on Taneyev's aesthetic views in relation to the views of Leo Tolstoy; on the poetic style of the choral cycle with lyrics by K. Balmont, Op. 35), P.E. Weidman (on the archives "S.I. Taneyev and P.I. Tchaikovsky: from the history of relationships" of the Tchaikovsky Memorial Preserve Museum in Klin). All these studies were included in the collection of works "In memory of Sergei Ivanovich Taneyev", created for the 100th anniversary of the composer's death (compiled by G. Lukina) [39]. Numerous archive materials included in this collection have been published and described for the first time.

V. CONCLUSION

Over the period from 2015 to 2018, about 60 articles on Taneyev's creative activity were published, two collections of conference proceedings, a monograph by Galima Lukina, and manuals by Nadezhda Ganenko and Nailya Samoilova.

The researchers are looking for new ways to understand and interpret Taneyev's music - the music created with the desire to incorporate Western discoveries into Russian culture and its spirit.

New archive documents made it possible to find the composer's philosophical notes, previously unknown, where he provides his definition of art. According to Taneyev, it is a "spiritual activity ... uniting people by means of love, not violence and providing the sense and joy of unity" [40]. This is the harmony entelechy, which Pletnev meant. Love is the spiritual source of Taneyev's music, the music, which attracts and, we hope, will continue to attract the attention of researchers and performers.

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