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RUSSIAN PHILOSOPHERS ABOUT MUSIC

Abstract

The paper examines the dynamics of ideas about the music of Russian philosophers. In this regard, the status of Russian philosophy, its distinctive face, is being clarified. Russian philosophy is shown to be based on Byzantine philosophical and mystical traditions, but at the same time embodies the basic postulate of Russian culture (Russianness): the affirmation of spirituality as a moral feat – service to creation and resistance to destruction (annihilation). Russian philosophy phenomenon is determined in accordance with the above-mentioned attitude of Russian culture. It is argued that Russian philosophy is the solution to the moral task of victory over death. Russian philosophers' interpretation of music is studied in the context of this understanding of Russian philosophy. It is stated that during the development of the indicated interpretation, Russian philosophers increasingly recognized music as a powerful means of contributing to the victory over death, moreover, evidence of the possibility of victory over death.

Keywords: Russian philosophy, music, spirituality, man, world, God.

What is Russian philosophy?

So we pose the question: *what is Russian philosophy?* It's not an easy question, so let's try to get to the bottom of it.

Initially it is necessary to say that Russian philosophy is inseparably connected with Orthodoxy. This connection has been constantly stressed by Russian philosophers. Let us refer at least to the statement of V.V. Zenkovsky, "Russian thought has always (and always has been) connected with *its* religious environment, with *its* religious ground; *here* was and is the main root of peculiarity... of Russian philosophical thought" [25, p. 18].

Nowadays in the Russian philosophical literature there is an obvious idea that the connection of Russian philosophy with Orthodoxy ("with *its* religious element") does not testify to its originality: Russian philosophy is permanently connected with the Western philosophy, it is a stage of its development (1). On what grounds is such a point of view put forward?

The authors of this approach think that Russian philosophy interacts not with canonical, strict Orthodoxy, but with its innermost core, which is *Gnosticism*. (For example, as I.I. Evlampiev states, "the constant gravitation of Russian philosophy and of all Russian culture toward the Gnostic worldview is beyond doubt. This fact for a long time did not receive due recognition in literature only because of the well-established tendency characteristic of church and Orthodox-oriented authors" [3, p. 9].)

Such scholars believe that the Gnostic mindset has been intensively consolidated in the West since the late Middle Ages: Bernard of Clairvaux, Meister (Johannes) Eckhart, etc., and hence Russian philosophy is related to Western philosophy. But what is Gnosticism?

Gnosticism is a complex phenomenon and not fully defined. According to the German-American philosopher Hans Jonas, an authority in this field, "we can speak of Gnostic schools, sects and cults, Gnostic works and doctrines, Gnostic myths and speculations, and even of Gnostic religion" [9, pp. 47-48]. Jonas concludes that Gnosticism is a peculiar fusion of Hellenistic philosophy and Eastern origins, and notes that "in general, ... the thesis of an Eastern (oriental) origin of Gnosticism has the advantage over ... a Hellenic origin" [9, p. 49].

Thus, Gnosticism is respective a *mysticism* that came from the East. And what is mysticism?

Mysticism is a set of ideas about the direct connection of man with sacred beginnings [18]. This connection provides man with a breakthrough from the earthly, corruptible world to the divine, incorruptible world, and thereby getting rid of the earthly world, getting out of it.

Mysticism lies at the heart of all religions (this is pointed out in the works of famous researchers of mysticism: E. Underhill, R. Otto, S. Katz, K. Schmidt and others), but especially Orthodoxy as the Eastern Church. Moreover, in Orthodoxy mysticism essentially merges with canonical theology.

Thus, according to V.N. Lossky, "Eastern tradition has never drawn a sharp distinction between mysticism and theology, between ... the experience of knowing the Divine mysteries and the dogmas approved by the Church" [16, p. 198].

In Orthodoxy, mysticism is primarily represented by *Hesychasm*.

The homeland of Hesychasm is Byzantium. The most famous Byzantine Hesychists are St. Macarius of Egypt, Diadochus of Photicia, Gregory of Sinai, Isaac the Syrian, and Gregory Palamas. On the basis of Byzantine Hesychasm began to develop in Russia. Therefore it is quite true the statement of

V.N. Lossky that “Russian Christianity is of Byzantine origin” and has together with it a homogeneous character of “spiritual familism” [16, p. 204].

The basis of Hesychasm is the ascetic practice of *inner (silent) prayer, called Jesus prayer, or Mind prayer*.

Prayer aims at gaining, storing, and transmitting the experience of unity of a Christian with God. This unity is the attainment of the Holy Spirit by the grace of God. It is a gift of God.

The Christian’s union with God is the union of the energies of the total (*whole*, in the terminology of the Hesychists) – body-soul-spiritual – of man and the energies of God, which appears as the growth of the energies of man by God’s Grace in the sequence: corporal – mental – spiritual. In this case, according to Gregory Palamas, the energies of God surpass all the energies of man, “not only because He is their cause, but also because the accepted is always only a tiny fraction of His gift” [5, p. 309].

The interaction of the energies of man and the energies of God in Hesychasm is called *synergy*. Synergy provides man to overcome the burdens of earthly life and even death itself. Such overcoming is *salvation*. (“Salvation” is a concept extremely important in Orthodoxy. In fact, the whole life of an Orthodox person is work, which, by the Grace of God, can lead a person to salvation. And this work, as has been wisely observed, consists in “the transformation of the heart” [Macarius of Egypt].)

Hesychasm determined in Russian philosophy its pronounced *anthropologism, metaanthropologism*. S.S. Horuzhy points out this.

Horuzhy emphasizes that, thanks to Hesychasm, in Russian philosophy “man becomes being...; being becomes human... (There arises. – A.K.) a mutual belonging of man and being. The reality of events, taken in the horizon of this mutual belonging, (it is possible. – A.K.) to call it *the reality of man...*” [6, p. 281].

Having the closest connection to the Byzantine mystical-philosophical tradition, above all through Hesychasm, Russian philosophy has always tried to find its own identity in it, to find its own face in it – not by excluding Byzantism, but by mastering and transforming it.

And this face, this “I” of Russian philosophy was predetermined by the peculiarity of Russian culture (in essence, Russianness), about which G.V. Florovsky shrewdly wrote.

According to Florovsky, Russian culture (Russianness) consists of two cultures, as if they were on two floors. On the lower floor there is a culture coming from *paganism*. Florovsky calls it the “night” culture. On the upper floor is the culture coming from *Christianity (Orthodoxy)*, designated by the scholar as the “day” culture. According to Florovsky, “the ‘night’ culture is the area of dreaming and imagination”, it manifests itself “in an insufficient ‘spiritualization’ of the soul, in an excessive ‘soulfulness’ or ‘poeticism’”. “Day” culture (is. – A.K.) the culture of spirit and mind. When we speak of “day” culture, “we are talking about spiritual sublimation and the transformation of the mental into the spiritual” [4, pp. 15-16].

Thus, Russian philosophy’s acquisition of its face, its identity, had two stages. The first stage was the acquisition of itself on the level of “night” culture: soulfulness, and the second stage was the acquisition of itself on the level of “day” culture: spirituality. It is important to remember that *spirituality in Russia from ancient times was understood as a moral feat: service to creation and opposition to destruction (destruction)* [8].

And now, taking into account all of the above, we can try to answer the question: “What is Russian philosophy?”

I think that in the most generalized, summarized form the answer to this question will be as follows: *Russian philosophy is the solution to the moral problem of victory over death*. (L.V. Karasev writes very precisely about this: “There is no problem of Russia, there is a problem of overcoming death” [10, p. 104].) (2).

In Search of the Meaning of Music

Music has always attracted Russian philosophers. We can distinguish the main historical stages, demonstrating the interest of Russian philosophers to music:

1. *Before the 18th century.*
2. *18th century.*
3. *19th century.*
4. *The 1st half of the 20th century.*
5. *The 2nd half of the 20th century to the present day.*

Let us turn to these stages.

Before the 18th century

At this time there already appeared thinkers-theologians, figures of the church, and saintly men who raised philosophical questions. Among such thinkers should be named Clement (Klim) Smolyatich, Kirik Novgorodsky, Cyril Turovsky, but especially – the saint, the Venerable Nil Sorsky.

Nil Sorsky was a follower and successor of the Byzantine Hesychists. For example, he speaks of the state of inner prayer leading to a kind of enlightenment, in which “there is relief in the struggle and calming of thoughts, and the mind, as with abundant food, is satiated with prayer and rejoices, and a certain sweetness unspeakable flows from the heart, and extends to the whole body, and in all the members converts disease into sweetness... Man is then in joy...” [19, p. 170].

Being associated with the Byzantine Hesychists, however, Nil Sorsky displays a certain independence in his approach to their legacy. For example, in his description of the Jesus prayer Nil adds two new moments: *consolation* and *tears*.

Nil Sorsky has remarkable reflections on music, more precisely, on church singing, the basis of which was Znamenny chant (the main type of ancient Russian liturgical singing).

In emphasizing *consolation* and *tears*, the saint emphasizes the same points in the impact of liturgical singing. Nil Sorsky points out: “The gift of tears... those who acquire them... who from what: one – from consideration of the mysteries of the Lord’s humanity (icon painting. – A.K.), another – from reading tales of the life and deeds and teachings of the saints (literature. – A.K.)..., while another is broken by some canons and troparions (choral genres. – A.K.)” [19, p. 168].

18th century

The interest in philosophical problems was reflected in the writings of the clergymen of this time, above all of st. Tikhon of Zadonsky and st. Paisij of Velichkovsky.

At the same time at this time in Russia (in Little Russia, which was then part of the Russian state) an original thinker, Grigory Savvich Skovoroda, powerfully asserts himself, breaking through to philosophy.

Because of this “touch” of philosophy Grigory Skovoroda became the harbinger of Russian philosophy. According to V.V. Zenkovsky, Skovoroda is “the first philosopher in Russia in the exact sense of the word” [25, p. 65]. (At the same time Zenkovsky makes an important clarification, especially in the context of our reflections: “And if Skovoroda is to be associated with the mystics, then not with the Western, but with the Eastern” [25, p. 70].)

Skovoroda talks a lot about music. And this is not by chance, because he was directly related to music: Skovoroda composed spiritual concerts and songs, played many musical instruments: violin, fluttraver, bandura, psaltery, sang beautifully.

In his ideas about music Skovoroda proceeded from the Pythagorean idea of existence of heavenly music – the harmony of the spheres.

The harmony of the spheres, according to Skovoroda, is the embodiment of Cosmic Concord, which he called Symphony. The word “symphony” comes from the Greek word “synphony” – consonance, and the word “synphony” is directly related to the concept of “synergy”.

As Skovoroda believes, heavenly music (Harmony of the Spheres) is God. Skovoroda reflects: “Does not God contain everything?.. He in the tree is the true tree, in the grass is the grass, in the music is the music” [21, p. 134].

Most clearly, Skovoroda believes, the heavenly music is manifested in man-made music – instrumental and singing.

Let us add that Skovoroda was deeply aware of the beneficial effects of music on man. So, through the mouth of a character in one of his dialogues, he says: “Music is a great medicine in sorrow, consolation in sorrow and amusement in happiness” [22, p. 113].

19th century

The 19th century is the establishment of Russian philosophy. At that time a large number of philosophical circles emerged in Russia. The most famous of them was the Society of Wisdom. It included D.V. Venevitinov, V.F. Odoevsky, I.V. Kireevsky, S.P. Shevyrev, A.I. Kosheliev and others. It is Odoevsky at this time most in-depth and writes about music.

His ideas about music Odoevsky actively develops in the treatise “Experience of the Theory of Fine Arts with a particular application of this to music” (this treatise, apparently, originally included two sections – “Existence, or Existence” and “Dwarfs of the 19th century”, later on it branched off).

In this treatise Odoevsky proceeds from the fact that every private phenomenon has its own essence. In turn, there is a certain essence that constitutes the essence of all essences. This, according to Odoevsky, is *Bezuslov (Absolute)*. *Bezuslov* predetermines the harmony of nature and reveals itself to the human soul.

Odoevsky stresses that music is the sound embodiment of nature's harmony – the harmony of living and dead principles. The living and the dead principles "in music are under the form of... consonance and counter consonance (consonantia – dissonantia)" [20, pp. 157-158]. According to Odoevsky, by representing the harmony of nature, music conveys the harmony of the human soul and thus is a *direct expression of the fusion of the soul and the Bezuslov*.

The 1st half of the 20th century

The 1st half of the 20th century saw a rapid development of Russian philosophy, its true flowering within the general "Russian spiritual renaissance" [2].

It is significant that at this time among Russian philosophers found a tremendous interest in music, the recognition of its extraordinary philosophical possibilities. And these possibilities each of the philosophers saw in his own way.

So, with A.F. Losev, music is an exceptional means of ascent to God, a kind of prayer; with P.A. Florensky – the life-giving power of liturgical action, based on rhythm and carried out in accordance with the Typikon (church regulations); N.O. Lossky writes that sound expresses the unity of the visible and invisible; I.I. Lapshin underlines the fusion of music and philosophy – especially in the works of Scriabin But perhaps the most generalized interpretation of music by Russian philosophers at this time is revealed in the works of E. N. Trubetskoy.

Trubetskoy's interpretation of music stemmed from the settings of his main philosophical work, "The Meaning of Life".

In this work Trubetskoy argues that the meaning of life is revealed to man through philosophy, which helps him understand that the meaning of his life is in reunion with God [23, p. 23].

This reunion requires the creative activity of the individual.

According to Trubetskoy, the clearest expression of such activity is music. Trubetskoy concludes that music has unique possibilities for reuniting man with God.

The 2nd half of the 20th century to the present day

In the 2nd half of the 20th century there is a collapse of Russian philosophy as a distinctive spiritual phenomenon.

The collapse of Russian philosophy was also reflected in works that explored the philosophical issues of music. In this case – reflected in two ways: in some works Russian philosophy has been replaced by the dominant at the time, the Marxist-Leninist, in other – philosophical issues have been dissolved in musicology.

And yet in the 2nd half of 20th century, rather at the turn of 20th and 21st centuries, there was a return to Russian philosophy – "renaissance of renaissance" of Russian philosophy. This return has also made itself felt in the field of philosophy of music.

At the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries, the first works on the philosophy of music appeared, once again building on a well-established basis for Russian philosophy. These works belong to M.S. Uvarov. Uvarov views music as a means of confession. He wrote many articles and books on this topic, but his ideas are most concentrated in his article "Music and Confession" [24].

Further development of the philosophy of music in Russia – on the foundation of Russian philosophy – was carried out (and is carried out to this day) by the author of this article.

We have proposed a model of philosophy of music, which we believe today can be seen as the result of the development of judgments about music by Russian philosophers (from the period *before the 18th century to the present day*).

About the model

The model is entitled: "A New Synergetic Philosophy of Music". It has two constituent parts: "Theory" and "Practice".

Theory

In theoretical terms, the model is built on the conjunction of two beginnings: classical ("old") synergetics and Hesychasm. Let's explain.

Emerged in the 70s of the 20th century classical ("old") synergetics was an interdisciplinary direction in science, which studied the characteristics of self-organization of systems in the world. It was found that systems evolve in the direction: from less organized (ordered, stable, reliable) – to more organized

(ordered stable, etc.). According to the German physicist Hermann Haken, the founder of synergetics, he took the word “synergy” for the name of his proposed new scientific branch – “synergetics”.

Hesychnism was mentioned above. Now let us note in it what is especially significant for the proposed model: the reading of prayer by an Hesychast Christian not only led to his unity with God, but also predetermined the transmission of the experience of this unity. What is meant by this?

The point is that *in the process of prayer the Hesychast Christian exercised communion with all people, humanity* [1].

This communion of the Christian Hesychast during prayer with people contributed to the birth of *the desire for unity with God “in the world”* in every human being – a layman. This aspiration was expressed in bodily-soul-spiritual activation of man “in the world” and conditioned the development of the world, according to the principle of self-organization of systems. In our view, the self-organization of systems itself is represented by the following sequence: *nature – society – culture – art – music*. That is, music is *the embodiment of man’s unity with God “in the world”*.

Practice

In practice we proceed from the fact that music is the most powerful instrument of human unity with God. In our opinion, the process of bringing a person to God through music is music therapy.

We have developed a technology of music therapy, designed to ensure man’s ascent to God. How is this accomplished?

We believe there is a structural similarity between man and music. In our opinion, both man and music consist of three mutually correlated levels: the first level of man correlates with the first level of music, the second level of man with the second level of music, and the third level of man with the third level of music.

The levels of the human being: bodily, soul, spiritual.

We call the levels of music, its bodily, soul, spiritual levels, respectively, physical-acoustic (elements of which are rhythm, meter, tempo, timbre, dynamics), communicative-intonational (element of which is intonation), spiritual-valuable (elements of which are mode (tonality), melody and harmony).

Thus, the physical-acoustic level of music (rhythm, tempo, etc.) corresponds to the bodily hypostasis of man, the communicative-intonational level (intonation) to the soul hypostasis, the spiritual-valuable level (mode (tonality), etc.) to the spiritual hypostasis.

Principle of work: during the first sessions, music in which the first level of music (rhythm, meter, tempo, timbre, dynamics) prevails is used. Such music is designed to activate the bodily-plastic component of the person (this, of course, does not exclude the use of other types of sound as well, but it is the material based on rhythm, meter, etc. that is most important).

In subsequent sessions, emphasis is placed first on the second level of music (based on intonation), and then on the third (based on mode, melody and harmony), activating the soul and spiritual hypostasis of the person, respectively. Thus, the music therapy sessions stimulate bodily-soul-spiritual growth of the person, opening to him the Higher dimension of being [12; 14; 15; 17].

Instead of a Conclusion

Consideration of the topic showed that Russian philosophers paid close attention to music, and this attention increased from epoch to epoch. This increase was due to the fact that Russian philosophers increasingly aware of the greatness of music, its unprecedented ability to free people from the misfortunes of earthly existence, all temporal, finite.

And indeed, listening to music, we forget about time, space, we find ourselves in some other “wonderful” dimension of existence – in a new world of unfading beauty, greatness, nobility. This world is eternal being, eternal life. And if this is so, then it means that music helps us to overcome earthly griefs, sorrows – for a while, while it sounds, but thereby strengthens our belief that such overcoming is possible forever. In other words, music testifies that it is possible to overcome death!

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- By the way, such a position is not original. It has been declared before, see: [7].
 - The material presented above is published in Italian and English: [11; 13].