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Viola Sonata by Dmitri Shostakovich in the Art Space of Performance Interpretation

Альтова соната Дмитра Шостаковича у художньому просторі виконавської інтерпретації

Abstract. The paper discusses the Sonata for Viola and Piano op. 147 (1975) by Dmitri Shostakovich in order to generalize the aspects of its instrumental chamber stylistics. The performance version by Fyodor Druzhynin (viola) and Mikhail Muntyan (piano), who were the first performers of this musical piece, was analyzed. Their interpretation may be considered the golden standard, as precise as possible to the author's idea. Shostakovich dedicated his opus to F. Druzhinin, who often participated in the premieres of the composer's works and was familiar with the performing style of his music. The factors that form the musical stage image of Shostakovich's chamber style include the conceptual intention to demonstrate the conflict, the scale of the concept, and conceptuality in interpreting its components during the implementation of the idea of symphonizing the genre. The importance of the Sonata for Viola in the history of this genre and in the history of 20th-century music can hardly be overestimated. The composer expanded the imagery and emotional sphere of the viola performance and used the sound range of the viola to the extreme: all registers of the instrument were involved. The viola part is rich in original effects: cantilena on flageolets, a large number of double notes, and a complex polyphonic fabric with double counterpoints (especially in the Cadences), it requires considerable effort from the performer. The analyzed performance version of the work is quite complete in terms of the performance of the specified characteristics of the author's idea. It can be considered a benchmark in instrumental chamber performance of the 20th century.

Keywords: Dmitri Shostakovich, chamber music, viola sonata, instrumental chamber genre, viola art, sonata form, Fyodor Druzhynin, Mikhail Muntyan.

Introduction. Dmitri Shostakovich's instrumental chamber legacy is a unique phenomenon in the history of 20th-century world culture. The existential multidimensionality of the composer's music is impressive: philosophical lyrics and satire; active protest and opposition to destructive forces and, at the same time, reconciliation and acceptance of the world in his last optimistic works. A subtle understanding of the inner meaning of life, the ability to see it in the everyday routine, and a premonition of catastrophes and upheavals of the future add crystal transparency to some of his works. The conflict between two opposites—the Good and the Evil—reaches unprecedented sharpness and grows into antagonism in his musical pieces. The final works of certain stages have a significant place in his oeuvre, in particular in the context of assessing the artist's role and mission in the discourse of artistic and cultural achievements. One such work is the Sonata for Viola and Piano op. 147, the composer's last gift to his audience. The three-part opus ("Novella" Moderato, "Scherzo" Allegretto, Adagio) combined genre and style attributes of the brightest compositional techniques of the 20th century: extended tonality, serial,

chromaticism, diatonicity, citation. Attention to the specific features of instrumental chamber expressiveness of the later works by Shostakovich on the example of his final composition constitutes the relevance of this research paper.

Literature review. Studies summarizing the artistic value of D. Shostakovich's last opus as a landmark of his late period are the works of N. Savytska (2005, 2007); aspects of a biographical and creative nature were discussed in the publications of S. Khentova (1982, 1986); some questions related to the premiere of the work and its first performer, violist F. Druzhinin, were investigated by N. Pogadaeva (2009), E. Shervinskaya (2001), and B. Tyshchenko (1975); Shostakovich's late period instrumental chamber work was the subject of study of I. Tarasenko and T. Shevchenko (2021), as well as by E. Fedosova (1980).

The **aim** of this paper is to define the features of the stage representation of the piece in its performance interpretation.

Results and Discussion. The issue of the instrumental chamber stylistics of the Viola Sonata is closely related to the general stylistic paradigm of Shostakovich's work. His style is a complex system, the elements of which are

inextricably linked. The composer managed to combine the characteristic features of the so-called intonation vocabulary of his time, which fully absorbed the musical intonations of the everyday life, stage, streets, and elements rooted in musical classics. Interacting with each other, they form a new artistic expressiveness. An example of such interpenetration is the vocal cycle *Satires* to the lyrics by Sasha Chorny, which generously quotes S. Rachmaninoff's romance *Spring Torrents* in an ironic and grotesque interpretation, and the popular children's song *Chizhik-Pyzhik*, which is used as a monothematic motif uniting the entire cycle.

Another characteristic feature of Shostakovich's work is the use of quotations, self-citations and stylistic reminiscences¹. For example, the author's musical cryptogram DSCH (D-mitri Sch-ostakowitsch), which condescends to the composer's characteristic intonations of the diminished fourth, descending minor second, and minor third, becomes a symbol of the artist's work. He used it in the instances when it was necessary to emphasize the special, often deeply personal meaning of the musical events, to provide a multi-faceted integrity to the meaning of the work.

In the musical thinking of D. Shostakovich, homophonic and polyphonic principles of development, the constant interaction of which is a characteristic feature of his author's style, play a significant role. The sources for Shostakovich's polyphony are the polyphony of the old masters, in particular, J. S. Bach, and the polyphonic unfolding of a folk song, which the composer often used in his work. Their combination with the principles of 20th-century polyphony creates the artist's polyphonic style. In this regard, it should also be noted that the principles of polymelodic polyphony by G. Mahler, which were fully absorbed by Shostakovich and are used in many of his symphonic and instrumental chamber works, are of paramount importance to the artist.

In terms of the scale of development, depth of the content and perfection of the form, exceptional skill of embodying bright and multifaceted artistic images in the Sonata for Viola and Piano is on par with Shostakovich's Symphony No. 5, Symphony No. 10, or Concerto for Violin and Orchestra. The sonata was written a month before his death and is marked by "... deeply repressed pain, clearness of thoughts and feelings, consistency and impeccable logic of the idea's movement. The spiritual testament of a genius sounds like a warning ... about the pricelessness of time and the irreversibility of its course. The tragedy of this great music is unique, it is on the other side of life" (Savytska, 2007, p. 205).

The sonata is dedicated to the famous violist Fyodor Druzhinin. The first reference to the work was made in June 1975, when the composer informed Druzhinin that he was currently writing "... a sonata for viola and piano ... It is a full section in length, almost 30 minutes. It has three parts:

¹ At the same time, the quotation often serves as a tool to deepen the content, giving the works ambiguity. In some cases, the composer uses self-quotation, e.g. as an associative metaphor (in quartets No. 8, No. 15, and many other works).

the first is a Novella, the second is a Scherzo, and the third is an Adagio in memoriam of the great composer Beethoven ..." (Poniatovsky, 2007, p. 236). Unfortunately, the composer did not have the opportunity to witness the performance his last work.

An interesting feature of Shostakovich's late period style is the timbre personification of musical lexemes, which reflects the worldview of the artist in a deeply intimate manner of expression of the musical fabric. At the same time, in the composer's symphonies No. 5, No. 7, No. 8, No. 11, and his quartets (No. 13 in particular) the sorrowful monologues were assigned to the viola, as the proponent of internally heightened feelings. The viola appears as a main character of sorts, with tragic semantics of timbre, which creates an active communicative space for the formation and development of drama. Therefore, the paradox of the last work, the viola sonata, where "... the motif of parting with life, is omnipresent, the grief and sadness in the Viola Sonata are easily read. And yet ... the motive of goodness, love, and all-conquering faith in life takes everything else to a level below. The impression is as if an invisible creator put Shostakovich's entire life and work into a unique single form. For that reason, the last work could not be somehow different" (Poniatovsky, 2007, p. 237).

The artistic and expressive possibilities of the viola are fully revealed by the composer in the Sonata. The figurative and emotional content of the composition is inextricably linked with the tonal and expressive palette, and the wide range of techniques, which allow capture as precise as possible the specific nature of the viola sound. The idea of the Sonata itself, in terms of the scale and the depth of its implementation, is much more closely related to a chamber symphony than to a sonata in the classical sense of the genre. In this piece, the composer deliberately continues the line of chamber sonata symphonization, which he started in his violin sonatas. This piece is unique in its intonation. Intonations literally flow into each other, forming an extremely rich thematic context. Semantic spheres seem to be focused on the past and are therefore quite specific in terms of manifestation, which reflects the concepts of Shostakovich's musical world.

The elegant theme of the introduction of the first part of the *Aria* (or *Novello*) — *Moderato* seems to be drowning in the "shaking" of fifths in the alto pizzicato part. It is from this intonation that the musical fabric of *Moderato* originates. In the development, it acquires many semantic shades and associations, in which Shostakovich's figure may be identified (for example, the main part of the Fifth Symphony). That is why performers must find the measure of this lyrical expression, which was intended by the author. At the same time, in the Sonata the objectives of a pianist are not only of the ensemble scale but also "... mainly conductor's tasks, which are based on a virtuoso mastery of time, the form of the work, and the ability to think in a poster-like way" (Tarasenko & Shevchenko, 2021). Then a sharp transformation of thematic happens—reliance on a diminished triad, heavy alteration, plasticity of ascending triad phrases. Such seemingly malicious transformation can be found at the beginning

of the composer's Symphony No. 5, and most prominently in the contours of the descending theme in the Seven Romances on Poems by Alexander Blok. This imagery in Shostakovich is often combined with the characteristic method of "germination" of expressive intonations in the musical canvas of the work, which often symbolizes painful thoughts and suffering.

The elegance of the form of the first movement mainly creates a unity of tempo, combining in one movement all the variety of characters—from cantilena and chorale to climactic explosions and rapid episodes in development. Here, the complex three-part form seems to modulate into a sonata with the elements of a rondo. The dramatic accent of this part is shifted to the zone of a small alto cadence at the end of the part, which seems to summarize the entire narrative and leads to the appearance of a chorale, instead of a reprise. The imagery of the piece is grouped according to the major components of the form: the exposition is a direct emotional protest, the reprise is a release of tension (the same material in parallel tonality), the coda resembles a recollection about the drama.

Scherzo—Allegretto, the second part, is built on a permanent alteration of opposite states: the elegiac and the effective. Here, instrumental and ensemble coloristic findings are harmoniously combined with the depth of artistic conception. It is known that the main thematic material of the second part was borrowed by Shostakovich from his own (unfinished) opera *The Players* (1942) based on Gogol's play. Therefore, attention to the knowledge of the opera score contributes to a more detailed comprehension of individual episodes and techniques from the point of view of their interpretive potential: texture, articulation, timbral and ensemble solutions. Textual agogic accentuation is also important in the context, in which individual motivic elements of the *Scherzo* are felt.

The *Scherzo* of the Sonata is toccato, its rhythmic ostinatos create an ironic image of sharp "ballet" forestrokes that bring the features of the emotional burst, enhanced by the timbre of the viola in the high register. In this grotesque whirlwind, there are fragments of Jewish dance melodies typical of the composer's symphonic scherzos, fragments of Russian romantic romances, and many other images that organically join the "messy" commotion. The rapid tempo of thematic events suddenly is slowed down by descending fifths, which cover a rather wide range. Against the background of various thematic material, the viola recitative is perceived as a quiet culmination-proclamation, typical of Shostakovich. The intonation contours of the opening theme of the finale are gradually shaped within the soloist's rather elaborate statement. Regarding form-creating, the composer implements the technique of a kaleidoscopic scherzo change of themes in a complex three-part form with a polysyllabic episode.

In memory of the great Beethoven—Adagio, the third movement, begins with the viola monologue, after which the motive of the famous *Moonlight Sonata* is included in the Shostakovich's Sonata. This motive becomes

recognizably Beethovenian because of its texture and harmonization of the piano part, while the rhythmic pattern of the theme (alto part)—a dotted line on one note—is quite characteristic of Shostakovich's music of his late quartets¹. The surprising wisdom and maturity of the composer's creative method lie in the development of Beethoven's motto. As Savytska notes, "...in the respectful dialogue between two geniuses, an allusion from the *Moonlight Sonata* emerges and with it—all that deep genre-stylistic pedigree that is hidden in this simple and majestic image. Triplets are replaced by quadruplets, which gives dimension and scope to the movement" (Savytska, 2007, p. 204).

The finale is permeated with pain, tenderness, and endless fatigue, which are conveyed by the low, warm voice of the viola. The melody flows, filling the sound space. The important functions of the piano and the viola are strictly separated: the viola is the voice, the piano is the measured breath of eternity. *The First Stanza*—the exposition ends with a chorale "refrain" and an alto cadence. The form is structured without regard to the sonata principle—the indication of tripartite (contours of the sections of the sonata) are superimposed on the antique monothematic form of free development with rhymes-refrains. The middle—*The Second Stanza*—begins as an inverted counterposition. However, if in the exposition the descending fourth sequence sounded natural and objective, then in the ascending version its affinity with the 12-tone complex is revealed.

It is symbolic that the DSCH cryptogram theme, which appeared for the first time in Symphony No. 10, and was embedded in numerous Shostakovich's compositions, is again present in a hidden form in the Viola Sonata. The author also introduces the theme of time from the Symphony No. 11. The structure with its fifth "emptiness" that reflects wariness and tragic expectations, becomes a meaningful refrain with the mission of the leitharmony in the Viola Sonata.

Shostakovich re-intonates the *Moonlight Sonata* in a peculiar way. However, if the idea of Beethoven's piano sonata is realized through a measured movement and extreme austerity of means and texture (enlightenment—only in harmony, drama—in one interval (nona), development—micro-intonational), Shostakovich's expressive space is a distant transformation of a romantic texture, a special function of the bass, which imitates the timbre of low strings (as at the beginning of Symphony No. 6 or in the third movement of Symphony No. 13). Confluence of worlds is fascinating. In Beethoven's musical piece, the darkness of the "moon" gives birth to giants, because there is a stormy finale ahead. On the other hand, in Shostakovich's Viola Sonata, too little is left to a man: the last ray of sunshine before an eternity of winter. Alfred Schnittke reveals the nature of this phenomenon as follows: "When Shostakovich's images of his personal musical past, in the form of quotes, converge with images of music

¹ Quartet No. 11–4 — and part "Elegy", No. 12 — Adagio of the 2nd part, No. 15 — 3rd part "Intermezzo," 4th part "Nocturne," 5th part "Mourning March," 6th part "Epilogue".

history, an impressive objectification happens, bringing the individual to the universal. And this solves the great task of the artist's life—to influence the world by merging with it" (Schnittke, 1976, p. 227).

The sonata was first performed at the Leningrad House of Composers by Fyodor Druzhinin and Mykhail Muntyan on October 1, 1975. This performance version can be considered a standard because it was approved by the composer¹. This interpretation is based on the optimal approach to the composer's idea and style. The interpreters focused on the dramatic conflict, the scope of the concept, the emotional intensity, the richness of the musical images, and on the attempt to symphonize the genre. The first part, which sounds alienated and courageous, alternately reproduces the graphic curve of melodic development and succinctly outlines the wave-like improvisational development of the main part. In this version, the piano carries a load of symphonic layers, of their mutual development and opposition. Regarding the role of the piano, Skvirsky notes that "... the instrumental interpretation of the piano is linked not only with careful attention to the timbre of the viola but also with the clearly expressed dialogic nature of the sonata. The piano, while preserving its specific qualities, is at the same time one of the voices of the duet, an equal partner of the viola" (Skvirsky, 1989, p. 129).

The rhythm has an active internal potency in this version. In this performance, a shaped rhythmic beginning is evident immediately; an energy-intensive structure of gradual rhythmic variation is revealed: the thickening of the theme in the direction of revealing heterogeneous microstructures—leitthematism—leit intonations—leit harmonies. Interpreters closely intertwine the musical canvas with the intonations of the main theme. What is given is interpreted throughout the work in a graphically constant way (the same rhythmic pattern, the same stroke, the same manner of intonation, and the power of the sound come from the context of the development of the dramatic line). Because of this, in Druzhinin and Muntyan's interpretation, the work sounds like a single straight form, thereby implementing the author's idea of straight development. For performers, it is important to build the smooth contours of the form of the first part employing the tempo unity and with attention to the variety of figurative features and their combination—from cantilena and chorale to climactic explosions and rapid episodes in development. Performers channel the entire dramatic development to a small (but nevertheless important from the point of view of drama) part of the viola cadence as if summarizing the entire previous action, introducing the chorale.

In the second part, the performers skillfully combine instrumental and ensemble coloristic findings with the deep content of the artistic idea. The interpreters deliberately

exaggerate the grotesque characteristics, which are shaded when faced with contrasting episodes. Against the background of various thematic materials, the viola recitative is perceived as a quiet culmination-announcement, typical of the symphonic drama of the composer's symphonic works.

The performers interpret the finale with large-scale meditative waves, where the general prevails over the specific. They deliberately sharpen the elements of quotations related to the figure of Beethoven. In their interpretation, the echo of Beethoven's music appears as a symbol of absolute, immeasurable beauty. In the alto recitative, the silhouette of the fugue theme from the Sonata 31 of the German master is veiled in inversion.

The main theme is led by the viola, which aims to form the climactic zone. A similar approach has already been "tested" in the second part—after the elaborate recitative of the viola, everything returns to normal. In this interpretation, the drama reaches an open, even somewhat hyperbolic expression. The instruments are tessiturally distanced from each other, the viola sounds in an exalted high register and the piano—in a small octave. Only later the calm prevails—the last moment of pleasure before the approaching gloom of death. In the proposed interpretation, the music of the Finale acquires an almost verbal expressiveness. There is no doubt about the presence of hidden symbolic manifest, since behind every quote or allusion there is a certain philosophical subtext, where the thought overcomes the feeling.

Conclusions. The Sonata for Viola and Piano is not only the final work of Shostakovich, his swan song as a composer, but also a symbolic end of the viola evolution for the artist. Deep philosophical reflections are implemented through the viola's timbre-characteristic coloring, the capabilities of which have been used with incomparable skill. Because of its unique sound and timbral flexibility, the viola in the Sonata often goes beyond the sound boundaries of a string instrument, blending the sound of a brass chorale, a harp, and an organ, and in the climax reaching a voluminous *tutti*. As in the many other works of Shostakovich, as noted, there are noticeable features of acute theatricality, almost visible dramatic imagery in the Sonata for Viola. This is manifested in the sharpness of contrasts, and bright interpretation of the timbres of the viola and piano.

The importance of Sonata for Viola in the history of this genre and in the history of 20th-century music is difficult to overpraise. The composer expanded the imagery and emotional sphere of the viola performance and used the sound range of viola to the extreme: all registers of the instrument were involved. The viola part is rich in original effects: cantilena on flageolets, a large number of double notes, and a complex polyphonic fabric with double counterpoints (especially in the Cadences) require considerable effort from the performer. The analyzed performance version of the work is quite complete in terms of the performance of the specified characteristics of the author's idea. It can be rightfully named a benchmark in instrumental chamber performance of the 20th century.

¹ Fyodor Druzhinin often took part in the first performances of Shostakovich's works. In the letter quoted above, the composer asks him to present his work to the public. Unfortunately, Shostakovich died before the premiere.

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Чжан Хань

Альтова соната Дмитра Шостаковича у художньому просторі виконавської інтерпретації

Анотація. Розглянуто Сонату для альту та фортепіано ор. 147 (1975) Дмитра Шостаковича з метою узагальнення аспектів камерно-інструментальної стилістики. У цьому річичці було проаналізовано виконавську версію альтової сонати композитора у прочитанні Федора Дружиніна (альт) і Михайла Мунтяна (фортепіано), які вперше представили цей твір публіці. Ця інтерпретація, на нашу думку, є еталонною, оптимально наближеною до авторського задуму. До того ж, Шостакович присвятив свій опус саме Ф. Дружиніну, який часто брав участь у прем'єрах творів ушлавеного композитора і тонко розумівся у виконавській стилістиці його музики. Серед чинників, які створюють звуковий сценічний образ камерного стилю Шостаковича — скерованість задуму на показ конфліктності, масштабності задуму, концепційності у прочитанні його складових у спробі реалізації ідеї симфонізації жанру. Значення Альтової сонати Д. Шостаковича в історії цього жанру і в історії музики ХХ століття важко переоцінити. Композитор розширив образно-емоційну сферу альтової гри, надзвичайно широко використав навіть сам звуковий діапазон альту: задіяні всі регістри інструменту. Альтова партія багата на оригінальні ефекти: кантілена на флажолетах, велика кількість подвійних нот, складна поліфонічна тканина — з подвійними контрапунктами (особливо в Каденціях) і вимагає від виконавця значних зусиль. Проаналізована виконавська версія твору є досить цілісною щодо відтворення зазначених характеристик авторського задуму. Її можна вважати еталонною в камерно-інструментальному виконавстві ХХ століття.

Ключові слова: Дмитро Шостакович, камерна музика, альтова соната, камерно-інструментальний жанр, альтове мистецтво, сонатна форма, Дружинін, Мунтян.

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