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Ballade for Piano and Orchestra in the First Half of the 20th Century: Stylistic and Form-building elements

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Abstract

This article presents a comparative analysis of creative solutions within the genre of ballades for piano and orchestra in works created by local and foreign composers in the first half of the 20th century, such as L. Różycki, G. Tailleferre, B. Britten, N. Medtner, and I. Shamo. It has been determined that most works are characterised by purposeful inspiration which influenced their style. The basis of the genre lies in the synthesis of various features of the folk ballad and the poetic piano concerto. The first component combines epic song features, parts of folk songs or their arrangements, and declamatory melodies. The second one can be noticed in the different types of cooperation between the soloist (or soloists) and the orchestra, in the combination of features characteristic for single-part and cyclic forms (suite, rhapsody or different types of cyclic sonatas), and in the logic behind juxtaposing contrasting genre features or the figurative transformation of monothematic variants.

Keywords: genre origin of the ballade for piano and orchestra, purposeful inspiration, poetic concerto, features of a folk ballad.

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¹ О. Бегичева, Романтическая баллада в русском музыкальном искусстве XIX-XX вв.: жанровый обзор, "Вестник Адыгейского государственного университета. Серия 2: Филология и искусствоведение", 2018, по. 4, pp. 206–211 [О. Behycheva, Romantycheskaya ballada v russkom muzukal'nom yskusstve XIX-XX vv.: zhanrovыy obzor, "Vestnyk Aduheyskoho hosudarstvennoho unyversyteta. Seryya 2: Fylolohyya y yskusstvovedenye", 2018, no. 4, pp. 206-211]. В. Жимолостнова, Балада й специфіка її перетворення у західноєвропейському музичному романтизмі, (typescript of an art history candidate's dissertation written under the supervision of L. S. Neboliubova, 17.00.03) Pyotr Tchaikovsky National Music Academy of Ukraine, Kyiv 2003 [V. Zhymolostnova, Balada y spetsyfika yiyi peretvorennya u zakhidnoyevropeys'komu muzychnomu romantyzmi, (typescript of an art history candidate's dissertation written under the supervision of L. S. Neboliubova, 17.00.03), Pyotr Tchaikovsky National Music Academy of Ukraine, Kyiv 2003; Н. Пастеляк, Поемність в українській фортепіанній музиці першої половини XX ст. як принцип художнього мислення, (typescript of an art history candidate's dissertation written under the supervision of L. O. Kyyanovska, 17.00.03), Mykola Lysenko Lviv National Music Academy, Lviv 2009 [N. Pastelyak, Poemnist' v ukrayins'kiy fortepianniy muzytsi pershoyi polovyny KHKH st. yak pryntsyp khudozhn'oho myslennya, (typescript of an art history candidate's dissertation written under the supervision of L.O. Kyyanovska, 17.00.03), Mykola Lysenko Lviv National Music Academy, Lviv 2009; М. Ярко, Естетика романтизму та романтичні традиції в українській музичній культурі XX століття: проблеми інтерпретації, [in] Романтизм у культурній генезі: Збірн. матеріалів міжнар. конф. "Німецький романтизм і європейська культура XX ст.", Видавництво Вимір, Дрогобич 1998, pp. 127–133 [М. Yarko, Estetyka romantyzmu ta romantychni tradytsiyi vukrayins'kiy muzychniy kul'turi KHKH stolittya: problemy interpretatsiyi, [in:] Romantyzm u kul'turniy henezi: Zbirn. materialiv mizhnar. konf. "Nimets' kyy romantyzm i yevropeys' ka kul'tura 20 st.", Vydavnytstvo Vymir, Drohobych 1998, pp. 127–133]; S. Northcote, The ballade in music, publishing house Oxford university press, London; N. Y.; Toronto 1942; C. A. Newsom, Pairing Research Questions and Theories of Genre, "A Case Study of the Hodayot. Dead Sea Discoveries", 2010, no. 17, pp. 270–288.

² Т. Невінчана, Невтомний у пошуках, "Часопис Національної музичної академії України імені П. І. Чайковського", Київ 2015, по. 2, pp. 17–31 [Т. Nevinchana, Nevtomnyy u poshukakh, "Chasopys Natsional'noyi muzychnoyi akademiyi Ukrayiny Imenip. I. Chaykovs'koho", Kyyiv 2015, по. 2, pp. 17–31; J. Gelfand, Germaine Tailleferre (1892–1983). Piano and Chamber works, publishing house University of Cincinnati, Cincinnati 1999; J. Kański, Poematy symfoniczne Ludomira Różyckiego. Melodyka i problemy treści, "Muzyka: kwartalnik Instytutu Sztuki Polskiej Akademii Nauk", 60 (1971) 16/1, pp. 21–49; B. Martyn, Nicolas Medtner: His Life and Music, publishing house Routledge, NY 2017.

ballade for piano and orchestra of the first half of the 20th century within the works by composers from different European countries (Poland, France, Britain, Russia and Ukraine) while taking into account common features as well as individual style. The analysis is based on works by the main representatives of the musical art of the period known for their originality and creative solutions in relation to style and form.

One of the first composers who turned to this genre in the 20th century was Ludomir Różycki, a member of the Młoda Polska artists society. The other members of the group were Apolinary Szeluto, Karol Szymanowski, and Grzegorz Fitelberg. The first compositional success for the musician was the symphonic scherzo *Stańczyk* op. 1, performed under the baton of Emil Młynarski at the Warsaw Philharmonic. Early chamber and piano compositions are noticeably influenced by Impressionism, while symphonic works feature rich orchestration, rapid dynamic development akin to Richard Strauss's symphonism.

The *Ballade for Piano and Orchestra* op. 18 was a diploma composition by the composer who was awarded a gold medal at graduation from the conservatory. The work was dedicated to the talented pianist and teacher Jerzy Lalewicz (later on both artists were connected to Lviv through their teaching and performance activities). At the premiere, the solo part was performed by Ignacy Rosenbaum, while the composer himself conducted the student symphony orchestra.

At the style and melody level, the work was influenced by traditional ballades by F. Chopin and by concertos by E. Grieg, S. Rachmaninoff, and I. Paderewski. The piano part draws inspiration from traditional romantic concertos. It is spectacular and expressive, rich in virtuosity, aimed at demonstrating the full capabilities of the instrument. The orchestra part, by contrast, is modest but is characterised by rich timbre and instrumental ingenuity.

The piece by Ludomir Różycki is a freely interpreted sonata. The energetic main movement (*Allegro con calore* in G major) is written in a narrative form, like a song. It is strictly diatonic, abounds in virtuosic passages and is presented as a complete section. In the exposition, the orchestra performs an accompaniment function, except for framing (modest chord entry and passage to the side theme). The side part is contrasted with the main movement in form and tempo (*Andante*, D major) and has a double exposition inherent to concertos alternately highlighting the orchestra and the soloist. When the theme is played by the piano, it is combined with separate melodic undertones of the French horn, woodwinds and low strings. In the development part (*Doppio movimento*, 2/2), the thematic material is transferred to the orchestra. It then transforms from dreamy contemplation into Wagnerian pathos, while the piano performs sonorous, refined, and bizarre figures, which soon become dramatic and grow into cascades of chromatic octave passages. The decline in dynamics and texture richness before the recapitulation move back to a more static character of the

beginning. In terms of tonality and structure, the recapitulation is quite traditional. Both themes consolidate the main tone, in the scale and tempo of the exposition. However, this time the performance of the main part in the main key becomes grandiose and textured. The piece is characterized by an interesting interaction with the orchestra which constantly balances between a duet of voices and pedal harmony support in the strong parts. The side part in the main key generally retains the expositional imagery. However, in the coda (*Grandioso*) both themes acquire a majestic, powerful symphonic sound, and the main tone verges on bold colouring deviations (A-flat major, G-flat major). Its final consolidation appears in the last fading period based on the orchestral introduction.

The *Ballade* for piano by Germaine Tailleferre, a member of the French composers association Les Six, is one of the finest examples of the artist's vast and diverse work. Its prototype (*Morceau symphonique*) appeared in 1920. It was an exceptionally prolific period for the Paris Conservatory graduate and a successful debutant in various genres. She collaborated with iconic composers and performers of her time. The first artist to perform her *Piano Concerto* (1919) was Alfred Cortot. Tailleferre also had extensive contact with Maurice Ravel at his home in Montfort-l'Amaury, and at his insistence took part in the Prix de Rome. Under his influence, the original idea was thoroughly rethought and was completed in 1922 (at that time the author rearranged the composition for two pianos).

The following year, the *Ballade* was performed for the first time by Ricardo Viñes, to whom the work was dedicated. A few years later (1926), in Queen's Hall, the composition was performed rather unsuccessfully by Clifford Curzon, which caused a long-lasting wave of bitter criticism in the English-speaking society. However, the next generation of artists (La Jeune France musical society) considered it necessary to maintain tradition by including this work in their first concert, which was again performed by Ricardo Viñes and the Paris Symphony Orchestra under the baton of Roger Désormière³.

Compared to the first version of the piece, which was composed of three parts (*Modéré – Un peu plus animé – Lent*), the final version became longer and had the following structure: *Modéré – Assez lent – Mouvement de valse – Lent*. It combined orchestral colouring and piano virtuosity.

The first movement (*Modéré*) is written in an impressionist style: it maintains a picturesque and contemplative character with non-periodically variable time signatures (3/4, 5/4, 6/4, 9/4, 2/2), the functions of the melody are replaced by a variable ostinato pattern, which is timbre influenced by woodwinds and high strings. The piano part is melodious and colourful, with many figurative passages. The subsequent movement (*Assez lent*, E-flat minor, 9/4) features

³ G. Haquard. *Germaine Tailleferre, la Dame des Six,* maison d'édition L'Harmattan, Paris 1999, p. 53.

a leading piano part, with a declamatory and narrative melody, as well as a pulsing chord accompaniment, which is occasionally complemented with oboe phrases. The function of the orchestra is reduced to colourful pedal chords in the background. Several waves of growth lead to short culminating bursts, which are then instantly dispersed by a decline in dynamics and the exclusion of most orchestral parts. Small dynamic virtuosic chords lead to the third movement (*Mouvement de valse*, 5/4). Bitonal linear ideas in the orchestra and solo parts, which probably interested the composer in the work of Igor Stravinsky (in 1921 she made a piano transcription of his ballet *Petrushka*), were very effectively used. It is worth mentioning that the composer occasionally turned to similar techniques in the second part of her cycle *Jeux de plein air* (*Cache-cache mitoula'*), written in 1917. Stylistically, the third movement also evokes Prokofiev's neoclassical melodies with a somewhat extended tonality (in particular, the alternation of lyrical instrumental melodies and the agility of a toccata).

The final movement (*Lent*), which features a gradual passage from D-sharp minor to C major, sees a return to the orchestra's resonant pedal chords (with prevailing plagality) against which the soloist performs a slow unison, declamatory melody with a variable metre.

The English composer Benjamin Britten took a completely different approach in the *Scottish Ballad* (1941). The composer was particularly interested in the folklore of different nations, which influenced his compositions: *Canadian Carnival, Songs from the Chinese, An American Overture* and *Quatre Chansons Françaises*. However, this piece was written for somewhat nostalgic reasons during the trip of the 28-year-old composer to California (USA) for a married couple of concert pianists Ethel Bartlett and Rae Robertson, who came from Scotland. The composer dedicated his work to Ethel Bartlett and Rae Robertson who gave the first performance with the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra under the baton of Eugene Goossens. This work is a large-scale piano and orchestra composition, which resembles a monumental fresco. The main themes are related to fables and epic stories, with dramatic plot collisions, typical for the English folk theatre, but the author's ideas are carefully structured and implemented.

The piece is written for two pianos and a large symphony orchestra. In an effort to enrich the timbre and the colour palette of the orchestra, the composer used a triple number of musicians with an expanded brass section, harp, and an increased number of drums, with added cymbals, bongos, and others. The main theme of the solo parts is based on the material from a number of Scottish melodies (*Dundee, Turn Ye to Me, Flowers of the Forest*). The figurative structure of the movements is determined by the content of its song prototypes, so the structure of the work leans towards a contrast-component form.

The variational development of the first theme is grave and tragic (Example 1).



Example 1. B. Britten. Scottish Ballad for two pianos and orchestra. First theme, bars 1–10 bars.

The second theme (*Alla marcia funebre. Lento maestoso*), which is introduced after improvisation chords, bears the features of a mourning procession (Example 2).



Example 2. B. Britten. Scottish Ballad for two pianos and orchestra. Second theme, bars 50-60.

The final movement has the character of an old traditional Scottish dance (*Highland Fling*) but is more of a witty parody. The work is so peculiar mostly due to the variety of genres it draws inspiration from an old Scottish psalm, a mourning march, and a final scherzo-toccata.

Nikolai Medtner became one of the leading composers whose creativity had a significant impact on the works of Ukrainian composers of the first half of the 20th century (Borys Lyatoshynsky, Viktor Kosenko, Ihor Belza). Among his compositions, there is the *Piano Concerto No. 3 in E minor "Ballade"*, which was one of the composer's last major compositions, completed in 1943. It was written during the time he emigrated to London and also after he relocated to Birmingham and Wythall due to hostilities. The composition process included progressive performances on two pianos with the English pianist Edna Iles, to whom the composer presented the score of the newly completed work. The Medtners returned to London in April 1943. The composer dedicated the *Third Concerto* to Jayachamarajendra Wadiyar Bahadur, an Indian prince who had supported Medtner and financed the recording of all his major works with the composer himself performing the piano parts. The premiere of the *Third Concerto* took place in the Royal Albert Hall on February 19, 1944, with Sir Adrian Boult conducting, and the composer at the piano (this was the last year that he performed in public).

The work is purposely inspired. It was commissioned by pianist Benno Moiseiwitsch, one of the most outstanding interpreters of the musician's piano works. According to the composer, the first movement of the concerto was inspired by Mikhail Lermontov's ballad *Rusalka*. The composer extended Lermontov's poem to the remaining movements. He symbolically depicts a Knight (a personification of a human spirit) who awakens from a magical dream, overcomes temptations, walks the path of redemption, and achieves eternal life.

The concerto is written for a double orchestra. The ratio of the solo parts to the orchestra parts is equal. The form of the composition bears the features of a ballade. It is constructed as one movement and sub-divided into three submovements: 1. Con moto largamente; 2. Interludium: Allegro, molto sostenuto, misterioso; 3 Finale: Allegro molto, Svegliando, eroico. The movements are not equal in meaning and scale: the central one serves as an interludium. The first movement (Con moto largamento – Allegretto con moto) shows the personal origin, the melody has a declamatory character of an aria, which grows from a single melodic core (like Berlioz's *Idée fixe*) and runs through the entire composition, bringing vivid figurative changes. The interludium impresses with a paradoxical combination of performance requirements (Allegro, Molto Sostenuto, Misterioso «al rigore di tempo»). It logically leads to a majestically passionate final movement. The finale has a free, improvisational structure, highlighted by changes in tempo and tonal shifts (Allegro molto. Svegliando, eroico – Andante con moto tranquillo – Allegro molto – Coda: Maestoso, ma appassionato). In the main key of E minor, the work maintains a dominant balance between the main and parallel tonalities (G major), but the general coda, the victorious knight anthem (Maestoso, ma appassionato) is in E-minor.



Example 3. N. Medtner, Piano Concerto No. 3 in E minor "Ballade", bars 6-10.

In Ukrainian music of the first half of the 20th century piano and orchestral ballades were formed based on academic genres which in turn were based on folklore (primarily instrumental ballade variations) and poetic concertos. Among many compositions of this kind one should mention Stanislav Lyudkevych's concerto (an orchestral arrangement of different folk ballads), Levko Revutskyi's concerto, and a single-part piece by Mykola Silvanskyi.

In 1951, Ihor Shamo, a student in B. Lyatoshynsky's composition class, composed a concerto-ballade for piano and orchestra which is a good example of the genre in question. The artist's interest in folklore and his previous work on the *Ukrainian Suite* piano cycle (1948) logically led to its creation. The work was a reflection on the events of World War II because the composer entered the conservatory as a combat officer.

The piece was first performed at the graduation concert of the Faculty of Composition of the Kyiv Conservatory in 1951. The piano part was performed by the author. The next successful performance took place in Moscow and was reviewed by the famous musicologist Israel Nestiev who complimented the melodic basis of the concert: "The *Concerto-Ballade* captivates with a wide range of Ukrainian songs in its endless variety – from bold, heroic melodies and mournful kobzar melodies to transparent and bright lively dances."⁴

⁴ И. Нестьев, Достижения и трудности украинской музыки, "Советская музыка", 1951, nr 12, p. 25 [Y. Nest'ev, Dostyzhenyya y trudnosty ukraynskoy muzuky, "Sovetskaya muzuka", 1951, no. 12, p. 25].

I. Shamo's *Concerto-Ballade* is a single-part piece with folklore elements that form the thematic material for the concerto and determine the genre of the composition. What is most peculiar about this single-part work is the poetic structure of the cycle, which contains four movements with a symphonic structure: an intense dramatic *Allegro*, a folklore scherzo, and a slow, recitative and expressive movement, the majestic finale, which combines all the dramatic lines. The composer chose the symphonic type as the basis of the synthetic concerto model, where the piano is presented as an important orchestral voice. The piano part is also close to Rachmaninov's tradition.

Conclusions

The genre of ballades for piano and orchestra in the first half of the 20th century is typical for European composers. Each of the artists finds individual ways for interpreting the genre from a style and form standpoint.

The Ballade for piano and orchestra op. 18 by L. Różycki is a good example for showing the development of Chopin's ballade prototype (free sonata, national colouring of melody without citing folklore, narrative, eventfulness, figurative transformation of themes, framing the work with common material, typical for epic genres) and concerto (virtuosity, alternate exposure of themes, change of roles of the orchestra and the soloist from accompaniment to equipollent and complementary).

The ballade features in G. Tailleferre's work of are shown through large-scale "single-componentness", slow development with frequent dramatic stops, narrative tone of leading melodic lines, eventful and picturesque dramatic development expressed through contrasting style and genre elements, epic features of slow and common framing.

Britten's interpretation of the ballade for piano and orchestra is connected with the relevant folklore and genre indications and contains not only thematic quotations but also refers to the content of the quoted works. This dictates the choice of means of expression and formation principles (variation and rhapsody) as well as the richness of timbre.

N. Medtner's concerto (subtitled *Ballade*) has a number of similar features with the romantic ballade: program, movement, a combination of a single-part work with cyclic form, narrative as the basis for melody, monothematism, free form governed by narrative rules.

I. Shamo's work demonstrates the features of the ballade, as a synthesis of folk genres and poetry in terms of the form. It presents a figurative transformation of leading themes, the contrast between genre and image, united with the general development of the piece.

While there are noticeable differences in style and unique creative decisions, there are also certain common aspects. Most of the works of this genre were created to expand the repertoire of renowned artists who cooperated with the composers. Their works reflected the stylistic palette of the given period or their creative association. To summarise the current trends in the development of this genre, the author presented the origin of works with a romantic prototype by different composers, reviewed the genre varieties, considered their form-building principles, and stated the stylistic priorities of the genre. The origin of the genre lies in the synthesis of features of the folk ballad and the poetic piano concerto. Further research may reveal national or individual stylistic features of different genre varieties and show how they may develop in the postmodern era.

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Gatunek ballady na fortepian z orkiestrą pierwszej połowy XX wieku – aspekty stylistyczne i formotwórcze

Streszczenie

Artykuł jest poświęcony analizie porównawczej twórczych rozwiązań w zakresie gatunku ballady na fortepian z orkiestrą, w dorobku kompozytorów różnych krajów, których twórczość przypada na pierwszą połowę XX wieku – takich jak: L. Różycki, G. Tailleferre, B. Britten, N. Medtner i I. Shamo. Charakterystyczne, że większość utworów ma celowo ukierunkowaną inspirację, co wpływa na ich stylistykę. Geneza tego gatunku muzycznego tkwi w syntezie cech ballady typu ludowego z koncertem fortepianowym typu poetyckiego. Pierwsza z tych składowych łączy cechy gatunku pieśni epickiej, cytaty z pieśni ludowych lub ich stylizacje, deklamacyjność melodii; druga przejawia się w różnych typach współdziałania pianisty z orkiestrą, połączenia cech charakterystycznych dla gatunków jednoczęściowych i cyklicznych (suita, rapsodia czy też sonata cykliczna w różnych odmianach) i w wynikającej z tego połączenia – logiki zestawiania kontrastów cech gatunkowych czy też obrazowej transformacji wariantów monotematycznych.

Słowa kluczowe: geneza gatunkowa ballady na fortepian i orkiestrę, inspiracja ukierunkowana, poetycka forma koncertu, cechy ballady ludowej.