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Some Aspects of Innovative 20th Century Compositional Techniques in the Texture of Latvian Piano Music

Kai kurie inovatyvių XX a. kompozicinių technikų aspektai latvių fortepijoninės muzikos faktūroje

Abstract

The aim of the article is to describe and compare the main tendencies connected with modern stylistic trends of this time in the texture of Latvian piano music before the Second World War. Different aspects of piano texture are considered and analysed in relation of the overall situation in European piano music in the first decades of 20th century. The paper focuses on two polarities of piano texture based to the use of sustaining pedal: colourful illusionary figurative texture and real motoric figurative texture as well as the transition between them – a figurative texture that combines colourful illusionary and real motoric pianism.

Keywords: Texture of piano music, figuration, Latvian piano music, sustaining pedal, piano technique.

Anotacija

Straipsnio tikslas – apibūdinti ir palyginti svarbiausias tendencijas, susijusias su XX a. pradžios modernių stilistinių srovių įtaka latvių fortepijoninės muzikos faktūrai iki Antrojo pasaulinio karo. Aptariami ir analizuojami skirtingi fortepijoninės faktūros aspektai, ieškant sąsajų su bendresnėmis Europos fortepijoninės muzikos tendencijomis XX a. pirmais dešimtmėčiais. Straipsnyje išskiriami ir nagrinėjami du priešingi fortepijoninės faktūros tipai, abu išgaunami naudojant dešinįjį (pailginantį skambėjimą) fortepijono pedalą: spalvinga, iliuziška, įvairiomis figūracijomis papildyta faktūra ir realistinė, motorinėmis figūracijomis grįsta faktūra, taip pat tarpinis tipas – figūracijomis grįsta fortepijoninė faktūra, kurioje dera spalvingas iliuziškumas ir realistinis motoriškumas.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: fortepijoninės muzikos faktūra, figūracijos, Latvijos fortepijoninė muzika, pedalo užlaikymas, fortepijoninė technika.

Introduction

Considering that the origins of Latvian piano music are rooted in the second half of the 19th century, the first piano works of Latvian composers are filled with the unambiguous effects of the romantic style that also appears in the forms and content of the texture. Homophonic and polyphonic textures, as well as the romantic traditions of diverse figurative elements in Latvian piano music dominated till the mid-twentieth century.

In spite of this other stylistic breezes – neoclassicism, expressionism – in the musical language entered into Latvian piano music in first decades of the 20th century with elements of new techniques of composition (for example – dodecaphony etc.).

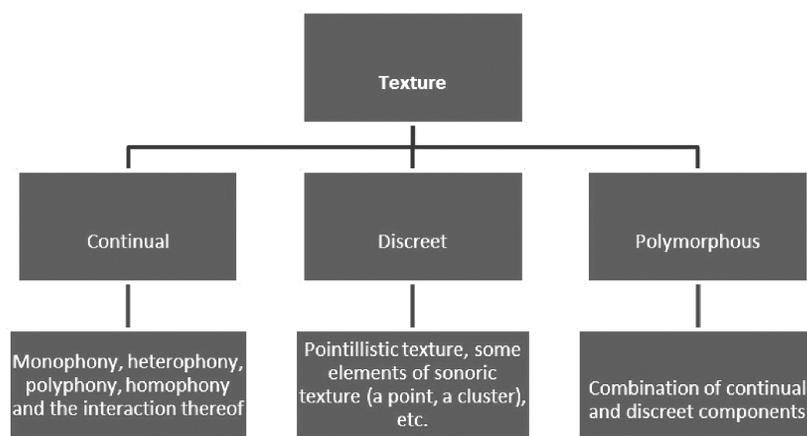
Along with rapid development of compositional techniques in the 20th century, the role and functions of a number of the musical expression means also changed in piano music. For example, in dodecaphonic or serialism circumstances the melody almost disappears, disintegrating into points, or becomes complicated and unperceivable. In the same way, the harmony becomes so complicated that it sometimes loses its form determining function. However, some elements of music, especially rhythm, and, which

is of particular importance, texture revived significantly and came to the foreground. As a result, new theoretical concepts emerged.

1. Some Aspects of the Theory of Texture

The development of musical texture in the 20th century in the context of composition techniques created the need for new classification systems which are based on a variety of relief and background relationships in texture in which the time and space parameters of texture are uncovered through interaction of statics and dynamics. This tendency also contributes to the regeneration of theoretical concepts, because the new texture forms are not always possible to be systematized based on conventional types: monophony, heterophony, homophony and polyphony, but the most important is the classification after intensity of relationships of the textural relief and phone – continual (linear), discrete and polymorphic structures.

Based on the existing studies of the structuring of texture's vertical dimension (for example by musicologists Александрова 1988; Przech 2004; Кюрегян 2005: 175),



Example 1. Types of texture

this diagram presents continuous, discreet (pointillism, etc.) and polymorphous (consisting of linear as well as discreet elements) types of texture.

Despite the fact that the attention is focused mostly on the 20th century, this classification is also active in the analysis of musical texture of different historical periods. The continuous (linear) texture is often used in polyphonic music, but the most frequent type of texture in piano music – homophony – is usually a polymorphic (complex) formation.

Owing to its varied manifestations **figuration** is a technique that stands out among the specific features of the texture of piano works.¹ The frequent application of figurative texture observed in the piano works of the composers of the 19th century, who used to saturate it with broad contents, testifies to a new stage of development of this aspect of texture. The conceptualisation of movement (figuration) encountered in piano compositions from the romantic period reveals a new dramaturgical level in connection with the key trends of the aesthetics of the period – immersed in the inner world and feelings of an individual.

Figuration is one of the key elements of virtuoso pianism. A figurative layer reflects phonic, colouristic and dynamic qualities of texture, uncovers its belonging to a particular genre and style and has characteristic features, including those that determine the artistic interpretation. It is therefore often that performers focus specifically on the peculiarities of the figurations.

Peculiarities of piano texture are closely related to the specific nature of the instrument. Looking back to the history of piano music, two trends can be identified which are mainly related to the development of the instrument in connection with the introduction of the sustaining pedal. The first manner of playing (not involving the use of the sustaining pedal) prevailed before the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century. The second manner, timbrally sonorous pianism, emerged in the Baroque period (it was strongly influenced by the sophisticated and colourful texture with complication of

ornamentation and witty technical inventions of French harpsichordists), while the infinity of its colour palette flourished during romanticism, owing to the opportunities of expression achieved by using the sustaining pedal (invented in 1781). Many authors have written about these two trends in the development of pianism in the context of music in the 20th century, including the Russian musicologists Leonid Gakkel (Гаккель 1990: 8) and Tatiana Roshchina (Рощина 1987: 2).

Although historically the perception of the instrument has changed, the above mentioned trends have consistently survived as pianism developed. In this context the following types of the figurative texture of piano compositions in the first part of 20th century, among which in-between options exist, may be highlighted, i.e.:

1) **colourful, timbrally sonorous figurative texture** which is related to the timbral richness of the instrument, comparing the sound of it to that of a symphonic orchestra. The path of this type of texture further led to the sensitive and timbre colour abundant texture of impressionism and expressionism;

2) **motoric, percussive texture with figurations that are motoric and with precise rhythm and touch** which characterize the piano mainly as a mono-timbral instrument, bringing into the foreground such qualities as a rhythmic and articulately clear accuracy of the touch in a fast, monotonous movement. Because the importance of rhythm is emphasized, this type of figuration prevails in motoric genres: preludes, toccatas, etudes, scherzos, etc. Motoric figurations developed in a different context in the 20th century, in connection with the flourishing of neoclassicism and the attitude towards the piano as a percussion instrument;

3) **the transition between two the trends – texture with elements of coloristic and motoric percussive pianism** in the context of the 20th century gains importance in connection with use of the sostenuto (middle) pedal and is frequently encountered in a dodecaphonic, serial and sonoric texture.

2. Types of Texture of Latvian Piano Music in First Half of 20th Century

2. 1. Colourful, Timbrally Sonorous Figurative Texture

In the Latvian piano works composed until the mid-twentieth century the melodic and harmonic figuration and subtypes thereof are connected to the peculiarities of the harmonic language of romanticism, which are often and variably used. For example the main features of romantic figurative texture are: a figurative texture based on a particular harmony, combinations of several figured voices or texture layers and features of texture which emphasize the colouristic function – arabesques and other embellishments, *al fresco* and colouristic enrichment including the vibrato technique and tremolo (Мишельштейн 1956: 11–29); a characteristic layer achieved by specific figures of genre: in piano works by Jāzeps Vītols (1863–1948), Alfrēds Kalniņš (1879–1951), Arvīds Žilinskis (1905–1993), Ādolfs Skulte (1909–2000) etc.

The key types of **impressionistic figuration**, which are encountered individually as well as in interaction with each other, are diversely represented in Latvian piano music: figurations of a vibrating background; rhythmically clear ostinato figurations, figurations in doubling and illustrative figurations which imitate concrete sources of sound: in piano works by Jāzeps Vītols, Jānis Zālītis (1884–1943), Lūcija Garūta (1902–1977) etc.

For instance, the miniature *At the Sea* (*Pie jūras*, 1913), Op. 43 No. 1 by Jāzeps Vītols with peaceful, movement dubbed in sixth chords in the middle layer, imitated motives in upper register, frequent tonic or dominant ostinato in the bass line creates a calm, peaceful sound painting of serene slowly upward and downward moving waves.

In some miniatures of Harijs Ore (1885–1971), Jānis Zālītis (1884–1943) written in the same time period it is possible to notice the influence of piano works by Alexander Scriabin (1872–1915) with some elements of symbolistic and expressionistic imagery – dissonant harmonic language, dotted irregular rhythms etc.

Example 2. Jāzeps Vītols, *At the Sea* (mm. 40–49)

Example 3a. Jānis Zālītis, *Poeme* (fragment, mm. 10–18)

Example 3b. Lūcija Garūta, *Prelude D-flat major* (mm. 33–40)

Bright examples are *Poeme*, Op. 2 (1913) by Harijs Ore or *Poeme* (1914) by Jānis Zālītis with complex, almost atonal harmonic language. The intense emotional range from deepest frightening darkness to blinding transcendental light in this piano work by Jānis Zālītis is achieved by crescendo of dynamics and the capacity of texture.

There are many other examples of similar colourful, timbrally sonorous texture in Latvian piano music in the 1930s. For instance, the most novatoric for that time and popular in concert life nowadays are some *Dainas* (1921–1963) (cycle of 24 preludes) by Jānis Mediņš (1890–1966) and preludes by Lūcija Garūta (1902–1977). For instance, the *Prelude D-flat major* (1927), as many piano works by Garūta are characterized by a wide range of rapid changes of registers or types of technique with the influence of Romantic virtuoso piano style.

The expressive, emotionally stormy and turbulent nature of the music allows one to establish a parallel with piano works by Alexander Scriabin.

2. 2. Figurative Texture that Combines Colourful Illusionary and Real Motoric Pianism

Focusing on the texture with elements of colouristic and motoric percussive pianism, interesting effects of texture can be reached with the **sostenuto pedal**.² The use of the sostenuto pedal raises the opportunity on the sounding background with both hands to play different sounds,



Example 4. Lūcija Garūta, Etudes for Steinway piano with sostenuto pedal, *Funeral Tune* (mm. 7–8)



Example 5. Lūcija Garūta, Etudes for Steinway piano with sostenuto pedal, *Bells* (mm. 23–24)

chords, passages, *non legato* or *staccato*. In Latvian piano music the bright examples are Etudes for Steinway piano with the sostenuto pedal (1933–1956) by Lūcija Garūta, where also the partiture of pedaling is offered. For example, in etudes *Funeral Tune* (*Sēru melodija*, 1933) and *Bells* (*Zvani*, 1933) on the sounding bass background, fixed with the pedal, are layered different lines or chords with both hands staccato, thus leading to an otherwise unattainable depth and perspective of texture.

Another type of piano texture, which combines at the same time both tendencies of colourful and percussive pianism is related with introducing **dodecaphonic** and serial techniques. The texture of dodecaphonic music was characterized by specific features: its vertical dimension was rich in thematic patterns, instability of the voice structure occurred simultaneously in the horizontal and vertical dimensions of thematic material.

One of first examples in Latvian piano music is an experimental Sonata (1928) by Leonīds Vīgners (1906–2001). In the fourth movement *Finale – Scherzo* from the beginning *Maestoso* in two bars we can see the free use of all 12 chromatic pitches which form the seria used afterwards during all the work. There is a continuously changing character, expression, dynamics, registers, rhythm and tempo due to unsteadiness of texture in this piano work.

Moreover, in the section *Presto* the figurative texture is not based on virtuosity but is rather dependent on



Example 6. Leonīds Vīgners, Sonata, *Finale – Scherzo*, introduction *Maestoso*



Example 7. Leonīds Vīgners, Sonata, *Finale – Scherzo*, section *Presto*

technological regularities. This *Quasi* harmonic figuration manifests itself in a peculiar way, on the assumption that the particular harmony is made up of serial sounds.

2. 3. Linear Motoric Texture

Piano music at the beginning of the 20th century featured an important development trend – in contrast to the colourful pianism of impressionism emphasis was laid on other qualities – a real sound not involving the use of the sustaining pedal.

The linear figurative texture is characteristic for some piano works in the 1930s and 1940s by Latvian composers Jānis Ivanovs (1906–1983), Volfgangs Dārziņš (1906–1962), Mārģeris Zariņš (1910–1993) etc.

An example of linear motoric texture with the use of different ostinato figures and positional passages of arpeggios and scales is the early piano work *Scherzo* (1931) by Jānis Ivanovs.

In this *Scherzo* types of linear figurative texture also characteristic for later piano works by Jānis Ivanovs are used, particularly applicable later in the *24 Esquises* (*24 Skicējumi*, 1966–1973). On the basis of research by the musicologist Igors Ivanovs (Ivanovs 1980: 121–122) among them are:



Example 8. Jānis Ivanovs, *Scherzo*

gradual sequences of short passages or chords (bars 11–12; 15); specific passages of short motives where the outer pitches are forming intervals of octave or seventh and inner pitches – second intervals (bar 16) etc.

Another tendency in Latvian piano music in the 1940s is connected with the stylistics of **neoclassicism**. A linear figurative texture, which bears a relationship with the texture of classical and sometimes Baroque period compositions by stylising, is characteristic of compositions by Volfgangs Dārziņš (1906–1962). Typical examples are *Two preludes in G* (1942).

The first prelude in *g minor* was written in a linear texture with some embellishments – mordents, which show the certain affinity for the neoclassical style. One of the main peculiarities of both Preludes is the use of polymetry. Despite the fact that in first prelude there is a regular eighth notes (quavers) movement, the time signature 4/4 (four quarters) is conditional, because parties of both hands are more subtle and there are different metric pulse with variable structures. In the example of bars 16–24, it can be seen that in the left hand the movement changes 3/8 and 4/8, but the right – on the top line – 7/8, 3/8 and 5/8, while middle line – 3/8, 4/8, 2/8.

The second prelude in *G major* is written in the rapid movement of toccata, but the metre is even more complicated. Irrational metrics can even be heard here, the principles of which later are found also in Etudes by György Ligeti (1923–2006). For example, in the episode before the climax (bars 44–45) in the party of right hand groups of three and four sixteenth are superimposed two to five–sixteenth (semiquavers) groups in left hand on the ascending order.

Latvian musicologist Arnolds Klotiņš analysing unusual approaches of metre and rhythm in piano works by Volfgangs Dārziņš, highlighting the specific emotional effect of this technique, he writes, “great attention to

Example 9. Volfgangs Dārziņš, Prelude in *g G minor* (mm. 16–24)

Example 10. Volfgangs Dārziņš, Prelude in *G major* (mm. 44–47)

Example 11. Arvids Žilinskis, *Fair of St. Laurence* (mm. 34–45)

the structural side of the music highlights the rational, intellectual aspect and therefore excludes the emotional transformations characteristic for the romantic paradigm. (...) The natural progression of music eliminates any “musical story” or extended process of psychological emotions – it is one long lasting emotional condition without tending to a fixed destination.” (Klotiņš 2011: 549–550).

An example of **percussive figurative texture** not involving the use of the sustaining pedal which can be characterized by the *non legato* articulation and *martellato* playing technique, is *Fair of St. Laurence* (*Labrenča gadatīrģus*, 1932) by Arvids Žilinskis (1905–1993).

In some episodes of this piano work, especially at the end, the colouristic effect of noise is more important than the pitch of sound. Figurations are made up from chords and clusters while the repetitive or *martellato* texture could be associated with the percussive nature of the piano. Incidentally, the important Latvian composer and musicologist Jānis Zālītis in this piano work highlighted the parallels with the piano texture of Igor Stravinsky (1882–1971) (Zālītis 1961: 663).

Conclusions

Thus, the rapid development of pianism in the second half of the 19th century marked the start of a thriving of piano technique. This time was abundant in unique individual styles, new repertoires and the richness of texture of compositions. The flourishing of romantic, post-romantic and impressionistic texture and figuration was followed by anti-romantic trends in the context of which the texture of piano compositions featured an increase in the use of real motoric pianism as well as the ostinato and polyostinato principles. In their turn, further stylistic transformations of the texture of piano compositions occurred owing to individual composition techniques in the 20th century.

The specific means of piano music texture which is closely related to the virtuosity of a performer – figuration – interacts with form creation (becoming more sparse or dense through dynamization) and the genre of a composition, and materializes in diverse styles through performing its ornamenting or motoric function. From the beginning of the new compositional techniques in the 20th century, the conventional classification system (based on melodic and harmonic figurations) often fails; instead other features become more prominent: a continuous or pulsing figurative movement made up of repeated structures (in texture with sonoric, minimalistic and repetitive technique elements, etc.) and conceptual avoidance of repetitions, by emphasizing the inherent value of each element of texture (dodecaphonic and serial texture).

From the origins of Latvian piano music in the second half of the 19th century elements of illusionary colouristic figurative texture and the romantic tendency prevail. However, in parallel to it, real motoric figurative texture which is related to the linear and noisy percussive type pianism – appears in the 1930s; the influence of compositional techniques applied in Western Europe and the USA gradually gained significance, as well.

Texture with the innovative elements of new compositional techniques in Latvian piano works continued the traditions of 20th century Western Europe. The modernization process in Latvian piano music started from piano works with elements of expressionism and symbolism by Jānis Zālītis, Lūcija Garūta and then in next decades the influence of other stylistic streams followed – elements of dodecaphonic technique, neoclassicism etc.

As pointed out by Latvian musicologist Jānis Torgāns, only in the period of 1960s and 1970s did the innovative tendencies of the new compositional techniques of first decades of the 20th century fully appear in the works of Latvian resident composers as defined trends, directions of the music language and principles of thinking: atonality, polytonality, dodecaphony, sonoric, aleatoric etc. (Torgāns

2010: 263) This is reflected in the texture of piano music, enriching the existing forms and types.

Since many contemporary Latvian composers use elements of various current compositional techniques in their musical language, it is difficult to single out the types of texture which may be viewed as distinct and often encountered in Latvian piano music. Of course, the uniqueness of particular musical compositions can be emphasized, e.g. attention can be paid to texture of linear chords or application of Latvian folk songs intonations in piano works by Pēteris Vasks (b. 1946), an interesting and distinct interpretation of minimalism and repetitive technique in works by Georgs Pelēcis (b. 1947), a search for a unique sound and sonority in *Impressions of Salvador Dali* (2011) by Selga Mence (b. 1953), *Cimbalom* (2013) by Dace Apešne and *Transparent* (2010) by Santa Bušs (b. 1981), a witty polystylistic cocktail in *Quasi Carmen* (2010) by Andris Vecumnieks (b. 1964), and complex, multilayered polymorphous types of texture in piano music by Gundega Šmite (b. 1977) or Andris Dzenītis (b. 1978). The key thing, however, is that these music pieces reflect a common trend of music in the 21st century – stylistic diversity and representation of the individual artistic idea of each composition.

References

- 1 Figuration (in Latin *figurare* means to create, perform, form or shape) is one of the key means to achieve the vividness and development of texture; it is an active and critical technique applied to achieve the movement and dynamization of a musical material. On one hand, it is much mobile and multifunctional, while on the other hand, it creates the entire texture itself or fuses with texture. Some of the latest and most comprehensive studies on the theory of figurations are doctoral dissertation and a monograph by the Russian musicologist Marina Chernaya on the role of figurative texture in pianism (Черная 2005).
- 2 The Sostenuito pedal was first shown at the French Industrial Exposition of 1844 in Paris, by Boisselot & Fils, but patented by Albert Steinway in 1874. By using this pedal, a pianist can sustain selected notes, while other notes remain unaffected (Davies 1992: 67).

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Santrauka

Nuo XX a. pradžios fortepijoninėje muzikoje susiformavo naujos ir dažnai priešingos faktūros technikos. Jos atspindėjo ir vis labiau individualizuotą kompozitorių meninę pasaulėjautą, ir tolydžio didėjančią stilistinių krypčių

įvairovę. Tai skatina peržvelgti principus, pagal kuriuos teoriškai sisteminami šiuolaikinės fortepijoninės muzikos istoriniai procesai. Viena svarbiausių šiuos procesus atspindinčių ir stiliaus formavimuisi lemiamos įtakos turinčių sistemų yra faktūra.

Nors Latvijos teritorijoje klavyrinė muzika buvo kuriama ir atliekama jau nuo XV a., šioje šalyje gimusių kompozitorių profesionaliosios fortepijoninės muzikos amžius skaičiuojamas tik nuo XIX a. antros pusės. Pirmieji latvių kompozitorių kūriniai fortepijonui buvo glaudžiai susiję su romantizmo estetika ir įprastais to meto muzikinės faktūros tipais.

Žvelgiant į latvių fortepijoninės muzikos faktūros raidą istoriniu ir stilistine perspektyvos žvilgsniu, darosi akivaizdu, kad figūracija yra vienas esminių ir pastebimiausių faktūros elementų, per kuriuos atsiskleidžia faktūros savitumas ir stiliaus transformacijos. Turint omenyje, kad figūracinė faktūra yra vienintelis įmanomas tipas nenutrūkstamos plėtotės polimorfiškoje fortepijoninėje faktūroje, kuri vyrauja latvių kompozitorių kūryboje fortepijonui, straipsnyje išskiriami skirtingi figūracinės faktūros tipai, susiję su spalvingu, iliuzišku arba realistiniu, motorišku pianizmu bei šių tipų sinteze XX a. pradžios kompozicinių technikų kontekste.

Kadangi dauguma XX a. Latvijos kompozitorių į savo muzikos kalbą įtraukia įvairių šiuolaikinių kompozicinių technikų elementus, sudėtinga išskirti faktūros tipus, kurie būtų laikomi gryniais ar dažniausiai aptinkamais latvių fortepijoninėje muzikoje. Tačiau kur kas svarbiau turbūt yra tai, kad šie kūriniai atspindi bendrą to meto tendenciją – stilistinę įvairovę ir kiekviename kūrinyje įkūnijamą individualią meninę idėją.