

## Musicality of Grigory Frid's Painting

The seen music, the heard painting... These have become popular expressions. In fact, painting and music are connected with special bonds, not so much anecdotal ones, as deeply internal. In the centre of the article are reflections on the musicality of Grigory Frid's painting (22.09.1915, Petrograd–2.09.2012, Moscow), one of the oldest composers of Moscow, the author of Monologue-Operas "The diary of Anne Frank" and "The letters of Van Gogh". He left this world on the day of his birthday, on the 22nd of September 2012.

The study of musicality as a characteristic of painting originated in ancient times, in Pythagoras of Samos' research "Harmony (or Music) of the spheres". Much later I. Kepler and I. Newton used his observations in their works and were the first to declare the community in temperament of music and colour.<sup>1</sup>

The problem of musicality of painting caused an everburning interest of artists. E. Delakrua, J. Sera, P. Siniyak, A. Matiss, K. Korovin, I. Kramskoy touched upon it in their memoirs, letters, articles, diaries. So, Delakrua noted that in painting "effects are created by a certain arrangement of colours, the play of light and shadow, in short, by what can be called the music of the picture. Sometimes this effect is caused by the harmony of lines only".<sup>2</sup> The similar thought was expressed by A. Matiss: "When all correlations of tones are found, as a result a live chord of colours should emerge – harmony similar to musical harmony".<sup>3</sup> In his letters Kramskoy wrote: "In impressionists' paintings one sees and feels everything as glimmering, stirring and living. There are no outlines, one notices no light and shadow, but there is something caressing and warm like music".<sup>4</sup>

In Russian literature musicality in painting acquires theoretical basis in the works of A. Losev ("Music as a subject of logic"), P. Florensky ("Analysis of space and time in art-graphic works"), V. Kandinsky ("Dots and lines in the plate", "About spiritual in art", "About stage composition"), N. Volkov ("The colour in painting", "Composition in painting"). In his paper "About spiritual in art" V. Kandinsky reflected: "During several centuries music, with few exceptions, has been the art which uses its means not to portray natural phenomena, but to express the emotional life of the musician and to create original life of musical tones. An artist who sees no point in artistic imitation of natural phenomena, is the creator who wants and should express his inner life. He enviously sees how naturally and easily it can be achieved with music, which nowadays is the least material of all arts. It is obvious that he turns to it and tries to find the same means in his own art".<sup>5</sup>

Creative personalities have in practice realized "the heard" painting, having given the world a composer and an artist in one person: M. Churlenis<sup>6</sup>, A. Shenberg<sup>7</sup>, G. Frid. And while the musicality of Churlenis' and Shenberg's paintings has acquired scientific understanding, Frid's paintings in this respect have become the subject of research for the first time.

Grigory Frid had a constant interest in painting, and made the first steps in 1929 in Irkutsk where his father was sent after Solovki. For a short time the young man studied in the art college, worked as an assistant of the stage designer in the city theatre. Pencil sketches and first paintings in water-colours which he painted during his studies in the Moscow Conservatory were preserved. However, a serious passion for painting came much later, in the middle of 1960s. In one of his speeches Frid told how he came to painting: "I have never been a professional artist, but in 1961 I went on a cruise around Europe and on board the steamer I met several artists and sculptors. Among them were the son of painter Konchalovsky portrayed by his father in a famous picture "Misha, bring the beer", sculptor Gennady Shklovskiy who became my close friend. I kept a notebook where I sketched. And artists being jealous of each other, pointed at me and said: "He is doing well". And as I had a good sense of humour, I pretended to believe them. After the cruise I started visiting artists' studios, and gradually became involved. This is how I "came to painting" already middle-aged, about 60 years old.

<sup>1</sup> БЕЛОУЧКИН, В.Е., 1990. *Кеплер, Ньютон и все – все*. М.: Наука. Р. 103.

<sup>2</sup> ДЕЛАКРУА, Э., 1960. *Мысли об искусстве, о знаменитых художниках*. Москва: Искусство. Р. 222.

<sup>3</sup> МАТИСС, А., 1958. *Сборник статей о творчестве*. Москва: Искусство. Р.17.

<sup>4</sup> КРАМСКОЙ, И., 1965. *Письма, статьи в 2-х томах. Т. I*. Москва: Искусство. Р. 204

<sup>5</sup> КАНДИНСКИЙ, В., 1910. *О духовном в искусстве*. Р. 37–38.

<sup>6</sup> ЦЕСЮЛЕВИЧ, Л.Р. Ключи к творчеству М.К. Чюрлениса. *Восход*. – № 9 (209). – Сентябрь, 2011 [Электронный ресурс]: <http://rossasia.sibro.ru/voshod/article/31142>.

<sup>7</sup> НИЦЕВИЧ, Е.В. 2009. *Синтез музыки, поэзии и живописи в сочинениях Арнольда Шёнберга 1908 – 1913 годов. Автореферат Дис. ... канд. искусствоведения*. Ростов-на-Дону. [Электронный ресурс]: <http://do.gendocs.ru/download/docs-8674/8674.doc>. – Дата доступа: 20.08.2012

РАЙС, М. Арнольд Шёнберг – певец непокорной мысли [Электронный ресурс]: [http://www.all-2music.com/rais\\_shenberg.html](http://www.all-2music.com/rais_shenberg.html).

I consider myself an amateur, as I don't work on a regular basis, but nevertheless I took part in different exhibitions – in Lithuania, Israel, Russia".<sup>8</sup>

Frid had painted more than 150 pictures for the past 50 years. The technique was gradually being perfected, the style was being crystallized. Quite often musical works and paintings were born simultaneously, however their content was not due to the common idea. The most outstanding pictures appeared after the 1970s when Frid – the composer created works which outlined the late period of his creative work: vocal cycle to poems by G. Lorca, viola sonata, six pieces for string quartet, Monologue-Opera "The letters of Van Gogh".

Working on the opera "The letters of Van Gogh" for baritone and chamber ensemble (1975), Frid thoroughly studied the creative work of the Dutch artist. "Why did I turn exactly to Van Gogh? Is it because of the subject of his paintings? His letters? Unique destiny? Can Van Gogh be considered a "musical" artist? – Grigory Frid asked himself in the article dedicated to the creative work of the great Dutch artist. And answered: "The essence of his (Van Gogh's) painting is a huge emotional tension, emotional movement typical of music. Inseparability of events, precipitance, the movement of every dab extended in time. Spirals, lines, strokes, dotted lines, dots... like sounds merging into an entire lively musical substance".<sup>9</sup>

We would not know much about Van Gogh if it were not his letters. The letters of Vincent to his brother Theo (821 letters) are an amazing human document testifying not only the tragic path of the artist, but also the huge work, the spiritual content that stand behind every painting of this person who was unacknowledged during life. Convincing was Frid's idea to create musical and theatrical work on the basis of Van Gogh's letters only, not adding anything to the original text. The opera composed of 20 letters has a minimum of historic facts<sup>10</sup>. The main thing for Frid proved to be Van Gogh's understanding of events that take place and their projection on his personal fate, the moment of birth of philosophic ideas of a number of his pictures. Thus, the forth item of the opera "Potato eaters" is a story of how Vincent Van Gogh's first great painting (1885) was created. Working on it the artist made hundreds of drawings and sketches, staying late until dark in farmers' houses until he could hardly make out colours on the palette. Five Dutch farmers are portrayed in the picture sitting at the table having poor dinner of boiled potatoes and coffee in a village hut. Their faces are lit with a yellow light from the lamp hanging from the ceiling, and they are having some special warmth and Christian charity towards each other.<sup>11</sup> The silent picture of dinner, ascetic in colour, in greenish brown tones determines also the character of music in this opera scene. The strict picture of the vocal part, rhythmical and heavy steps of basses (piano and contrabass), scanty harmonic filling of the musical substance, tipping of the micum drum. The composer, as well as Van Gogh, is not longing to the difference in colour, to flexibility of the rhythmic pattern. Asceticism appears to be a symbol of higher wisdom of farmers' existence.

It is notable that since the 1970s, the time of work on the opera, first mature works of Frid – the painter have appeared. We will draw attention to only some of his paintings outlining the sides of their musicality. We will introduce some theoretical digressions which we will consider by the examples of selected pictures.

***Digression 1.** There is an organic community of means of expression of music and painting. In its basis lies the identity of physical nature of sound and colour. The musical sound has 3 main characteristics: pitch, duration and volume. Colour also has 3 characteristics: tone, brightness and richness.*

*Pitch-fixed organized system of sounds in music is called a key. This definition exists also in painting presenting "hierarchy of all colours in composition" [2, p. 93]. Quite often **colour gamma** appears as a synonym of a key. The purport of colour **gamma** is not to stifle the colour difference making all objects discolored; the unity of **gamma** requires the richest development of colour and light. From the contrast of different colours (they are viewed in such categories as richness, depth, colour tone; intensity, lightness, shine, dullness) the **melodic** of a painting is formed.*

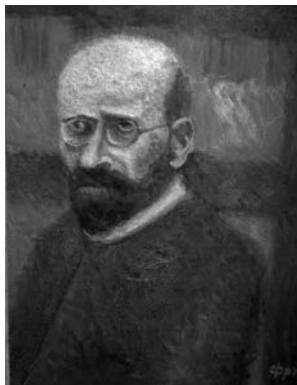
Van Gogh thought colour is symbolic: yellow means joy, warmth and sun ("Sunflowers", "Van Gogh's bedroom"), blue means sorrow and space holes ("Starlight night"). The leading colour in Frid's mature pictures is grey which probably became the symbol of deep reflection, of the time that stopped. In this very key are pictures

<sup>8</sup> ФРИД, Г. 2005. Я стараюсь все время работать... *Культура*. 22/09/2005. [Электронный ресурс]: [http://www.pressmon.com/cgi-bin/press\\_view.cgi?id=1503105](http://www.pressmon.com/cgi-bin/press_view.cgi?id=1503105).

<sup>9</sup> Моноопера «Письма Ван Гога» Г. Фрида [Электронный ресурс]: <http://proarte.ru/ru/calendar/?id=957>.

<sup>10</sup> Frid wrote the opera's libretto, 20 numbers are divided into 2 parts:  
Part 1. 1. In the studio (4.42), 2. An artist (2.37), 3. Meeting (3.55), 4. Potato eaters (4.15), 5. Parable (2.21), 6. Reflection (3.01), Antwerp (2.24), 8. A talk with Christina (2.28), 9. Rain (4.07), 10. Mournful music (3.31), 11. Night (2.48), 12. Peasant cemetery (3.30)  
Part 2. 13. Arl (3.14), 14. Mistral (3.30), 15. A lullaby (2.49), 16. Huts (4.55), 17. A man with a cut ear (3.23), 18. Winter (4.36), 19. St. Paul monastery (4.33), 20. The yellow sun (6.20)

<sup>11</sup> ФЕДОТОВА, Е. *Биография художника Винсента Ван Гога* [Электронный ресурс]: <http://vangogh-world.ru/bio12.php>



**Example 1.** The portrait of Yanush Korchak (1978)



**Example 2.** The portrait of father (1978)



**Example 3.** The portrait of Bethoven (2007)

which are united in the genre of portrait painting: “Self-portrait” (1979), “The portrait of father” (1978), “The portrait of Yanush Korchak” (1978) (Example 1). The name of Ya. Korchak, a great Polish teacher and doctor, director of the orphan’s home for Jewish children became the recollection of the Holocaust for Frid. He turned to this complex theme in 1968 during the period of work on the Monologue-Opera “The diary of Anne Frank”. “The portrait of Yanush Korchak”: a grey shade of the tired face, a beam falls on a large prominent forehead, deeply set grey-hazel eyes behind glasses. Fixed strict stare in full measure determines the style of clothing which is in dull grey and blue colours. Frid does not modulate into another colour key, but finds the development of colour inside it. The picture is penetrated with subtle melodic lines in which there are no wide leaps of colour intervals. The minor melody is flowing slowly, full of strictness and asceticism.

The blue-grey key determines the colour choice of the picture “The portrait of father” (1978) painted as if from the photograph (Example 2). The grey colour in it flashes in a bright day, the lightening of colour fills the picture with breath. The primary for the painter is not the father’s face with expressive eyes and a high forehead, but his stately figure: a proud bearing, calm hands, a straight look reflect the harmony of his soul and confidence. A vista leading into the distance broadens the range of picture’s perception, enriches its colouring with new tints: snow-whiteness, soft blue, dark grey with emphasized forms put into bended lines. And one can hear the melody of a violin which Frid’s father played during musical evenings in a small flat in St.Peterburg. It’s magical sounds as if bring the viewer into a boundless space of human life, spiritual searches... Suddenly the stare is held back by the cemetery wall and closed gates.

***Digression 2.** As N. Volkov notes: “to create an expressive, dynamic melody a composer uses more leaps (rather than an even melodic progression), acceleration, stresses, contrasts, etc. A painter uses the same methods; a complete steadiness, as a rule, is inexpressive... Continuous transition of colour is quite often combined with colour leaps, breaks of colour in places of the highest colour and light tension. These breaks immediately attract attention”.<sup>12</sup> Thus, one of the means of expression in painting as well as in music is **dynamics** matching with the richness of colour. Volume gradation from pianissimo to fortissimo corresponds to increase or reduction of the brightness of a line, for example to the degree of its intensity. In this respect the observation of Kandinsky is interesting: “The force applied to a fiddlestick is absolutely similar to the pressure on a pencil”.<sup>13</sup>*

The characteristic of Frid’s style in painting is the soft transition of colours, middle and low dynamic scale. And only some of his paintings are an exception. One of them is “The portrait of Bethoven” (oil painting, pasteboard) (Example 3). A German composer was Frid’s eidolon, a figure of moral perfection. Nine symphonies of Bethoven which Frid heard at the concerts in Moscow during the years of study in Conservatory, became a self-portrait of a master for Frid. Frid painted a pictorial portrait of the composer in 2007 having chosen an untypically bright palette with the dominance of red tone colours causing sensory vibrations and tension in the viewer. Frid refuses to draw small details and turns to big strokes. Thicker lines, colour contrast, the absence of smooth colour transitions, the play of light and shade. The will power of Bethoven’s spirit consists in it, does it?

***Digression 3.** An important means of expression in music as well as in painting is rhythm. In the opinion of N. Taburkin “rhythm is a form of free movement developing within and on the basis of a composition structure of a work. Rhythm and composition are mutually conditional and functionally depend on each other. Rhythm is a picture, composition is an outline and at the same time an organizing force. Rhythm in a work is the pulse, the pulsing of which turns material elements of a work into live factors of artistic energy and adds musicality to the composition”.<sup>14</sup>*

<sup>12</sup> ВОЛКОВ, Н. Н., 1985. *Цвет в живописи*. М.: Искусство. Р. 95.

<sup>13</sup> КАНДИНСКИЙ, В.В., 2005. *Точка и линия на плоскости* [Электронный ресурс]: [http://philologos.narod.ru/kandinsky/kandinsky-pl.htm#osn\\_pl](http://philologos.narod.ru/kandinsky/kandinsky-pl.htm#osn_pl)

<sup>14</sup> ТАРАБУКИН, Н.М., 2001. *Ритм и композиция в древнерусской живописи. Смысл иконы*. Р. 118.

*Rhythm in a painting appears as an alternation of line bends, in the change of light and dark colours. It is perceived at the level of specific elements (the shape of lines, their alternation allows to speak about rhythmic softness or expression) and their unification into the picture's composition, adding elements to the space (rhythm in a broad sense of the word). A musical work has the same characteristics, in which rhythm is perceived not only at the level of duration, but also in a broad sense of the word: "the rhythm of timbres, spatial movements, pitches, dynamics, harmonic fields, forms, parameters in a certain time proportion".<sup>15</sup> The rhythm of a picture may create the state of peace or set an expressive pace.*

A soft rhythmic organization is typical of Grigory Frid's still-life. One of them is "Fruit-piece" (1980) (Example 4). A modest set of objects in a still-life: fruits (pomegranate, apples, lemons), lying in a bowl and on the table, an opened bottle of wine, a crystal glass and white flower vase. The objects are arranged on a table-cloth which is carelessly put over. Round shapes of fruit are repeated in a soft picture of a vase and are flashing in a glass. Expressive folds of a table-cloth set a romantic pace. The colour spectrum has no sudden rhythmic transitions. The contrast of a dark wine bottle and snow-white flower vase is perceived in the space filled with in a way connecting colour arrangement (like a connecting part of a sonata), smoothly modulating into another colour **gamma**. In the painting the selected pastel colours flashing blue, soft grey, pinkish tints are rhythmically repeated. The system of smooth lines iterations, colour compositions bring harmony to the picture.

**Digression 4.** *Composition scheme (structure) appears as an interaction of space and form both in music and in painting. "Composition is a creative act of drawing up elements into a single whole. This is formation of an idea. This is a process and a result".<sup>16</sup> Making of a complete composition by a painter is related to composing a piece of music work by a composer.*

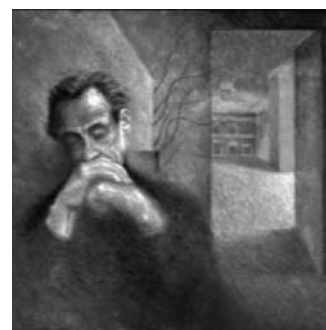
*Musical forms which received their variant reading or author's original musical text in opuses of the composers of the XXth century have been perfected in European music for centuries. The following kinds of compositions are considered in painting: stable (right angles at the intersection of diagonals prevail), dynamic (axes cross at an acute angle; diagonals, circles, ovals predominate), open and closed (images are pulled to the centre of the picture). For a confident state a painter chooses calm schemes, for an unconfident – skewness.*

Stable compositions with a calm scheme of objects arrangement are typical of Frid's painting. A series of the composer's self-portraits of different periods of his creative work are painted in this style. For Grigory Frid as well as for Van Gogh highly honoured by him, portrait was an exploration of a human soul, an attempt to pull out what is hidden in the deep layers of consciousness.

The composer was especially fond of "Self-portrait" of 1979 (Example 5). The figure of a person absorbed in thought: slightly bent head, high wrinkled forehead, closed eyes, hands propping up the chin. A person who went through a big shock... Severe pre-war and war years, the faces of dear people who are gone, are stored in his memory forever. Diverse positive events connected with teaching profession, Musical youth club, warm family circle and close friends can hardly cross them out. Metaphorical are the branches of a bare tree, the bends of lines of which are filled with movement – the movement of thought of a mature person. A picturesque image of bare branches we can see in the picture "The portrait of father". Blue-coloured branches associated with winter nature that had fallen asleep is a symbol of a stopped time, human memory and generations tie. Probably, not by chance Frid had chosen the same angle as in the picture "The portrait of father". But while there in the background is a blind cemetery wall – in "Self-portrait" one can see subtle outlines of Frid's pictures which are in another room behind the half-opened door. And this image is more than once portrayed in Frid's works (one of the pictures is called "An open door", Example 6). A room in symbolic poetry is associated with a human soul. Frid only prefers to open it slightly.



Example 4. Fruit-piece (1980)



Example 5. Self-portrait (1979)



Example 6. An open door (1976)

<sup>15</sup> ЦЕНОВА, В. С. (Ответ. ред.). 2005. Музыкальное время и ритм. *Теория современной композиции: Учебное пособие*. Р. 72.

<sup>16</sup> ЕЛАТОМЦЕВА, И. М., 2007. *Теоретическое основание изобразительного искусства. Раздел 3. Композиционная схема*.



Example 7. *Jerusalem* (2007)



Example 8. *Jerusalem* (1998)



Example 9. *Jerusalem* (2009)

Let us note one more particular detail: both the relief and the background are depicted in one palette. However, the light grey range of colours without using abrupt colour strokes chosen by Frid, does not leave the viewer indifferent due to a special plasticity of light and shade compared with the play of harmonic colours in a piece of music.

From the point of view of composition one more work of Grigory Frid is of interest – “Jerusalem” (2007) (Example 7). This is probably one of few pictures in which the painter portrayed attributes of musical art, the violinist playing music with the head bent towards the instrument. Undoubtedly, exactly this figure drawn close-up is central in the picture. In soft pastel colours of a painting the music is heard – gentle, slow and quiet dispersing in sun beams.

The sounds over ancient Jerusalem which united on its territory the tombs of ancestors and buildings for public worship of different confessions, living quarters and magnificent green park areas which appeared in a desert due to people’s efforts.

The sunny city is inscribed by the painter in a semi-circumference radiating a warm light. Rounded shapes dominate in the picture: the domes of churches, the relief of the country, the crowns of trees, the figure of a musician bent to the sun. One can discover the city, hear the violinist’s music only having gone through the symbolic gates, the gates of souls’ purification. Gates – another subject of Frid’s painting – protect and surround the city just as in a musical composition there are arch constructions in the form of a prelude and a coda. Every viewer will build their own composition of a picture open for reflection, calm in its narrative tone.

Notable is the history of creation of the picture “Jerusalem”. Ten years earlier Frid realized its concept only in the form of an ancient city (Jerusalem, 1998) (Example 8) and 2 years later he drew a picture in which the face of a musician was his own face (Example 9). This is another self-portrait of a painter whose soul will forever remain with us...

The presented analysis is in our opinion one more acknowledgement of interpenetration, the synthesis of painting and music. The theory of analysis of the works of painting is supplemented and enriched by the interpretation of a painting with the help of elements of theory and shaping of a musical art. Research works which have appeared during the last decades indicate this<sup>17</sup>. The essay about Grigory Frid’s paintings by means of tone, melodious, rhythmic, dynamic and composition analyses has allowed not to doubt their musicality.

<sup>17</sup> 1) СУХОРУКОВА, Н. А. 2006. *Музыкальность как свойство живописи: Дис. ... канд. искусствоведения*: 17.00.04. Барнаул. Алтайский государственный университет.

2) ВАНСЛОВ, В. В. Музыка и изобразительное искусство. *О музыке и балете: теоретико-эстетические этюды* [Электронный ресурс] – Режим доступа: [http://independent-academy.net/science/library/vanslov\\_kniga/soderzhanie.html](http://independent-academy.net/science/library/vanslov_kniga/soderzhanie.html) – Дата доступа: 20.08.2012.

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## Santrauka

## Grigorijaus Frydo paveikslų muzikalumas

Straipsnyje nagrinėjama G. Frydo (1915–2012), vieno iš seniausių Maskvos kompozitorių mokyklos atstovų, Rusijos nusi-pelnusio meno veikėjo, Maskvos jaunimo muzikinio klubo įkūrėjo ir nuolatinio vadovo, rašytojo (6-ių knygų autorius), tapyba. Per penkis dešimtmečius Frydas nutapė daugiau kaip 150 paveikslų: per tą laiką buvo išbulinta technika, išsikristalizavo stilius. Neretai muzikos ir tapybos kūriniai gimdavo lygiagrečiai, tačiau jų turinį nebūtinai lemdavo ta pati idėja. Ryškiausi paveiks-lai nutapyti aštuntajame dešimtmetyje, kai Frydas sukūrė muzikinius kūrinius, apibrėžiančius vėlyvąjį jo kūrybos laikotarpį, – tai vokalinis ciklas pagal G. Lorkos eiles, sonata altui, šešios pjesės styginių kvartetui, monoopera „Van Gogo laiška“.

Frydo paveikslų muzikalumas gvildenamas įvairiais aspektais. Štai jie:

- a) toninis sprendimas, spalvinė gama (N. Volkovo koncepcija). Brandžiausiuose Frydo paveiksluose pagrindinė spalva yra pilka, kuri autoriui, matyt, tapo gilių apmąstymų, sustojusio laiko simboliu;
  - b) dinaminė skalė (V. Kandinskio teorija). Frydo paveikslų stiliaus požymis – švelnus spalvinių sprendimų mainymasis, vidu-tinė ir rami dinaminė skalė. Išimtis tik „Beethoveno portretas“ (2007): ryški paletė su dominuojančiais raudono tono atspalviais, tono, kuris žiūrovui sužadina juslinę vibraciją, įtampą;
  - c) ritminė sandara (N. Taburkino tyrimas). Frydo paveikslams būdinga švelni ritminė struktūra;
  - d) kompozicinės schemas, struktūros (I. Jelatomcevos tyrimas). Frydo tapybai būdinga pastovi kompozicija su ramia vaiz-duojamų dalių išdėstymo schema.
- Į mokslinį kontekstą pirmąkart įvedami įvairaus žanro (portreto, natiurmorto, peizažo) G. Frydo tapybos darbai.