

## METHODICAL PERSPECTIVE OF THE MODERN CHORAL REPERTOIRE

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### Summary

The article discusses the methodological aspects of choral music of the XX–XXI centuries, which form the current direction of modern musical pedagogy due to their practical orientation. In the context of the general stylistic settings of the musical language of the 20th century, the specificity of the choral style of works written in sonoristic technique is considered. A number of choral techniques of choral sonoristics are highlighted: speech intonation, glissando, cluster, melodeclamation and noise effects. The main tasks and difficulties of a technical nature that arise in the process of mastering the choir scores of modern composers by the choirmaster and singers are determined. Special attention is paid to the problem of choral intonation (pitch) as the main factor providing a full-fledged artistic embodiment of the composer's intention. Attention is focused on the need for a special theoretical analysis of the choral score in order to identify the parameters that will adequately assess the logic of the formation of the performing interpretation and the principle of selection of choral techniques necessary for the embodiment of the composer's intention. The article proposes a number of methods aimed at overcoming these difficulties (analysis of the mobile and variable components of the choral score in order to determine their dramatic functions, work on the improvisational structures of the musical text and "motive intonation").

**Keywords:** choral style, choral intonation (pitch), choral singing technique, sonoristics.

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### 1. Introduction

Choral music by composers of the XX–XXI centuries occupies an important place in modern choral performance practice and requires a special musicological and performing research. Due to their stylistic features, choral works by K. Penderetsky, L. Nono, D. Ligeti, V. Rim, J. Tavener, K. Jenkins, Tan Dun, S. Gubaidulina, A. Schnittke, E. Denisov, N. Sidelnikov, famous Ukrainian authors L. Dychko, A. Gavrilets, A. Kozarenko, K. Tsepkoenko, V. Polevaya put forward new tasks and requirements for the performers. These requirements are related with the specificity of the musical language of modern choral music, which is fundamentally different from the traditional norms of classical European music. The appearance in the choral music of the XX century of works written in the technique of dodecaphony, aleatorics, sonoristics provided both a new level of development of choral art and new methods of vocal and choral technique. The communicative specificity of such musical opuses excludes melody as the main expressive element of the musical language, it is replaced by more complex phenomena such as a cluster, noise effects and various non-intonable structures.

The practical use of the new choral repertoire requires the theoretical development of its stylistic principles and special methods of working with it. Therefore, an appeal to the declared topic reflects the current needs of modern choral art and has practical value for performing practice. The relevance of the topic is also due to the low degree of popularity of the choral music of the XX–XXI centuries among Chinese musicians, who, nevertheless, are successfully integrated

into the world musical performance. The scientific novelty of this study is also due to its practical orientation: the main goal of the author of the article was to determine those methodological principles of the performing mastery of modern choral music, which open the way to achieving a full-fledged artistic result. View on the special methods of the choirmaster and choral singers working on scores that contain elements of dodecaphony, aleatorics or sonoristics makes it possible to successfully overcome the difficulties associated with intonation, diction, breathing, and the construction of a general drama of a musical work. The research methodology is based on the systematic method in determining the individual elements of the musical language and techniques of musical expression as components of the artistic integrity of a musical work; the method of style analysis is used when considering the style specifics of a musical work; the structural-functional method is involved in identifying the basic methodological techniques and principles of the work of the choir collective and the choirmaster over the performing difficulties of modern music. In the context of the stylistic individualism of the choral art of our time, the musical and pedagogical vector of the study of the choral repertoire seems to be promising, since it is aimed at solving urgent problems of the practical activity of professional musicians.

## **2. Intonation (pitch) as an object of performing practice**

Choral compositions written in musical techniques of the 20th century, such as dodecaphony, sonoristics, aleatorics, micropolyphony, new tonality, modality, formulaic composition, etc., cause difficulties related with the technique of performance. The renewed musical language of modern choral scores is especially challenging for singers and choirmasters: the abundance of intonation manifestations of the new harmonic system found in it, new sound combinations, discordant chords, free chromatisms, many special properties and techniques of articulation, etc.

Modern choral writing includes in its expressive means the most complex vocal technique, complex textured layers, harmonical connections, metro-rhythmic, stroke, diction difficulties, etc. Indeed, the difficulties of performing the latest music are especially great in choral singing, there are noticeably more of them than among pianists and orchestral musicians. This is especially true for Chinese vocalists, because they are brought up in a musical tradition for which choral singing is not a priority. They have to master new techniques of musical expression and the technique of choral singing. In addition, modern choral scores require choral singers to be fluent in intonation (pitch), master complex intervals, and intellectually and emotionally comprehend a piece of music. The avant-garde direction of choral music of the last quarter of the 20th century is a phenomenon characterized by dissonant chords, free chromatism and free rhythm, sonoristic techniques. This trend includes not only dodecaphony and sonor music, but also works representing "new tonal" music, in which the ideas of the literature text are expressed by innovative musical means (choral opuses by A. Schoenberg, A. Webern, K. Penderetsky, L. Nono, D. Ligeti and others). All these facts raise new tasks and requirements in performing and teaching activities: specialists who are well aware of the aesthetic and theoretical foundations of modern choral art and who are proficient in performing practice are needed.

The best examples of choral music by outstanding composers of the XX–XXI centuries enrich the performing capabilities of choral groups, pose a number of complex professional tasks for choirmasters. The choirmaster must understand the artistic idea of the piece, have a high level of conducting technique, be able to solve the problems of breathing, diction and various sound effects. All this is possible on condition of complete mutual understanding with the choir and an adequate communication strategy. In the performance of contemporary music, a number of problematic areas of choral technique are put forward, among which intonation (pitch) is the main one.

The exceptional importance of intonation in musical performance is especially important due to the complexity of the musical thinking of composers of the XX century and today. For the modern choirmaster, the concept of the zonal nature of hearing, developed in the field of musical acoustics in the 1940s by N. Garbuzov, has a great importance (*Garbuzov, 1951*). Performers should use the zonal system, but at the same time be aware that the “zone” is not only a purely theoretical concept, an abstract expression of the pitch, but also a real idea of intonation. An example of the practical application of this knowledge can be the work on “*motive intonation*” as an integral part of choral intonation (pitch) (actively used in the practice of rehearsal work of the Kiev Lyatoshinsky chamber choir under the direction of V. Ikonnik). This method allows performing pieces that are complex in intonation by dividing complex melodic lines into simple, familiar to the ear motives.

Analyzing various aspects of choral intonation, A. Laschenko notes: “The main thing the choirmaster focuses on for the singers is the kinetic orientation of the melodic pattern, that is, the internal tuning of the singers to intonation of the fragment as a complex dominates here... So, on the basis of a preliminary analysis of the thematic material, he practices “isolating” the most characteristic intonations from the context and singing them with the whole choir, thereby creating the necessary dynamic mood for intoning “basics” of the entire structure of the musical stuff” (*Laschenko, 1989: 95*). This method cannot be universal, but it covers the main problems of the technology of the choirmaster, which is necessary for the performance of pieces by contemporary composers. Analyzing the techniques of choral expressiveness in the music of the XX century, the Ukrainian choral conductor E. Belyavsky speaks about the problem of mastering intonational difficulties associated with intonation of accords-chords (*Belyavsky, 1984: 18*). These include clusters and non-functional harmonic complexes, which are an attribute of the musical language of academic music of the XX century and the present.

So, when working on choral intonation, E. Belyavsky suggests dividing this process into several stages. The first stage – preparatory exercises on classical material, repetition and consolidation of “traditional norms of intonation”. At this phase, you need to achieve pure intonation of all types of major, minor and chromatic scales. The next phase is aimed at intoning folk modes and pentatonic scales. Then you can move on to singing tetrachords – this phase is aimed at practicing the free intonation of small intervals. And only then can one proceed to the exact intonation of the chromatic complexes. To practice the skill of intoning complex chord accords, it is possible to recommend using simpler musical material of dissonant sound (for example, various choral voices sing a scale in the interval of a fourth, fifth, second in a parallel direction). The method of pitch layering is also applicable. These methods, according to E. Belyavsky, allow choral singers to “brea” functional-harmonic thinking, quickly “rebuild” and sing polytonal and dodecaphonic music (*Belyavsky, 1984: 17*).

Among the characteristic techniques of modern choral writing is the sequential layering of choral parts, in which, as a result of the progress of all voices, a chord harmony arises. In such cases, intonational inconveniences arise, which can be solved by singing all the singers of the melody that appears as a result of the consecutive layering of different voices. The study of the general melodic line by all members of the choir is very useful, because helps to imagine it progress as a whole and, in particular, the pitch ratio that arises between the initial sound of their parts and the previous sound of the other part. This contributes to the purity of pitch, the timely introduction of voices. Good results are obtained by the method of “mental performance” of the complete melodic line.

In modern scores, often the entire choir texture or one of its layers is a parallel sound of various harmonic complexes. The parallelism of perfect quarts, fifths, different dissonant intervals poses more difficult tasks for the performers than the same performance of thirds and sixths. Octave

parallelisms have become widespread; a variety of combinations of mainly dissimilar sounded voices are used. The evolution of polytonal harmony is also qualitatively new for choral music.

Modern choral writing includes in its expressive means the most complex vocal technique, complex textured layers, harmonic connections, metro-rhythmic, diction difficulties, etc. According to researchers of choral art, when singers realize the justification of all technical difficulties, their artistic function, then there is an interest in overcoming them in order to achieve a conscious artistic result.

Thus, modern choral art requires from singers a high vocal-ensemble performing technique: along with cantilena, there are expressive “instrumental” lines, with a smooth step line – a skip “broken” melody, along with musical intonation – replicas, declamations, dramatic shouts. The complication of the language of the modern choral style, the use of new ways in the field of harmony and rhythm helps choral singers to hone their artistic and technical skills, develop their hearing sensitivity and musical taste. This creates the basis for the creative and professional growth of performers, for the expansion of their musical and artistic worldview.

### 3. Performing tasks in sonoristic choral music

The main idea of the sonoristic technique is the phonic coloration, which explains the specificity of the choral style of the XX century composers, which is characterized by an innovative musical language (K. Penderecki, V. Lutoslavsky, A. Schnittke, S. Slonimsky, V. Tormis, R. Shchedrin, Tan Dun and etc.). The specificities of this language come from the archaic origins of choir singing – those special techniques that create the phonism of the choral texture (approximate pitch, glissando, intonation style that differs from academic singing, speech intonation, heterophonic texture). Accordingly, noise effects, glissandos, clusters and speech intonation play a leading role in the sonoristic technique of choral music. The heyday of choral sonoristics falls on the second half of the XX century. Saturating the choral texture with sonor techniques, the composers set themselves the goal of expanding the expressive capabilities of the human voice and searching for a new timbre of the choral sound.

Ts. Kogoutek defines sonoristics as “music of timbres”, which operates with “sound-timbre layers and lines” (*Kogoutek, 1976: 236*). In the musical theory of the twentieth century, there are also a number of terms that can be used to define the essence of sonoristics as a type of compositional technique: “static composition” (K. Stockhausen), “music of sonorities” (R. Fikker, R. Trimer), etc. Also, the phenomenon of sonoristics is often associated with such concepts as “phonism” and “music of noises”. In relation to choral music, sonorics is considered as a manifestation of the coloristic tendency in the development of the musical language of the XX century, therefore P. Levando, for example, talks about the coloristic techniques of the choral style and mentions singing bass octavists, singing with a closed mouth, singing to a vowel sound, singing to a repetitive syllable, a combination of syllables, “echo”, falsetto, etc., as well as glissando, cluster, melodeclamation and noise effects (shouting, whispering, clicking the tongue, sobbing, exhaling, etc.) (*Levando, 1984: 23*). In speech intonation, we distinguish two main types: sonoric speech intonation, organized by means of meter, rhythm and approximate pitch; melodic sonorous speech intonation, which is intermediate between speech and music.

Speech intonation gives composers the opportunity to enrich the texture of a piece in a rather unusual way of expressiveness in music, often to emphasize the figurative meaning of a verbal text. Noise effects used by composers in choral music make it possible to convey to the listener the picture of what is happening in the music more vividly and realistically. Noise effects, due to their pictoriality, are able to more accurately convey the mood, atmosphere of a place or action, implied by the composer. With the advent of noise effects in choral music, new possibilities have emerged for using sounds of indefinite pitch, ensuring the originality of the choral sound.

Regarding such a sonoristic technique as glissando, it should be noted that its function is very often associated with the enhancement of the expression of emotional and psychological conditions. Cluster is a technique that creates the effect of combining different voices. By itself, this technique is incredibly rich in timbre, because it combines several different timbres of each performer, which conveys a wide range of sound as a whole. Often, composers in the sonoristic technique use a cluster to create the effect of surprise in music, thereby diluting the overall texture of the sound. Quite often in choral music the cluster performs the function of either the background support of the solo part, or the function of a special psychological coloring.

When learning choral works in which the sonoristic technique is used, there is a certain specificity of the performing work of both choral singers and the choirmaster. First of all, this concerns the diversity of the conductor's gesture: the choirmaster is forced to move away from all the usual gestures in order to adequately "translate" the graphics of the choral score into the sound of the choir. The choirmaster is also forced to carry out a detailed study of the piece with the chorus, down to the explanation of the smallest details of the choral score. Thus, the choirmaster's attention is initially paid to the analysis of the methodological and theoretical foundations of modern composition and their further interpretation.

Many sonoristic choral techniques (glissando, chanting, shouting, whispering) use performing improvisation. The historical progress of choral art shows that the following factors can be identified that determine the essence of choral improvisation:

- the interaction of music and poetry, which determined the synthetic principle of choral music. Poetic intonation, a word in a musical piece acts as a full partner of music. The word and the sounds that make up it should be emotional and psychological coloured. Therefore, vocal and choral improvisation presupposes mastery of both musical improvisation and verbal, poetic, intonational in a general sense;

- the main "instrument" of choral art is the human voice. Accordingly, for vocal-choral improvisation, it is necessary to master vocal-choral performing skills (a sense of scale, metrorhythmic stability, intonation freedom, mastery of singing breathing, mastery of the timbre palette, developed vocal and zone hearing, developed voice range, ensemble skills, etc.);

- plasticity and facial expressions of the musician: performance of vocal and choral music is impossible without the participation of facial expressions, hand and body movements in this process. A vocalist-performer is an actor who owns the entire palette of figurative reincarnation, in which his entire body participates. This forms the stage appearance of vocal and choral performing arts.

S. Maltsev, exploring the permissible zone of the performer's creative freedom in modern notation, distinguishes graphic signs that reflect the composer's objective ideas about the sound of the piece (pitch, rhythm) and signs reflecting the composer's subjective ideas about the sound of the piece: (intonation as a psychological coloring of musical stuff, timbre, breathing, phrasing, strokes, agogics, etc.) (*Maltsev, 1991: 88*). In the musical notation of modern scores, the author differentiates between invariant and variable ways of fixing musical text. The choirmaster must also take this moment into account when mastering contemporary choral music.

When working with a choral score, it is advisable for a performer to analyze it in order to identify parameters that will adequately assess the logic of the formation of a performing interpretation and the principle of selection of choral techniques which are necessary for the embodiment of the composer's intention. These parameters are: mobility of form, mobility of pitch material, mobility of rhythmic pattern; features of graphic fixation of musical text; vocal and the verbal component of the expression; concrete pitch and approximate; pure intonation and intonation with the sound of breathing; specific techniques of aleatoric or sonoristic technique;

the presence of author's instructions regarding the use of performing improvisation in the piece; the presence of author's remarks that carry a dramatic and semantic load.

The noted parameters of the choral texture are usually revealed at the intersection of aleatorics and sonoristics in their full or partial appearance in musical material. In modern choral music, the performer is given great freedom in interpreting the text, manifesting his individual understanding of the composer's intention. This affects not only the artistic integrity of the piece, but also the details that make up the whole musical opus.

#### 4. Conclusions

Since the second half of the XX century, the style of choral music has been noticeably renewed: sonoristic and aleatoric techniques of composition are actively penetrating the choral opuses of major composers. Such works are included in the repertoire of most modern choirs. New techniques for creating an original choral sound developed in organic interaction with traditional forms of choral technique. Considering this interaction, arises an illusory idea about the simplicity of sonoristic and aleatoric techniques in comparison with the choral style of classical composers. However, as practice shows, an adequate performance of these techniques in the artistic sense can only be done by a choral group of very high qualifications. The performing of such music by a choir whose members do not have a high level of performing skills can distort and impoverish the composer's intention. Work on intonation, diction, breathing, etc. in the context of the general artistic idea of the choral score, constitutes the basic basis for the communicative interaction of the choirmaster and choral singers. When mastering the choral style of composers of the XX century and nowadays, this basis undergoes significant transformations, because it involves a variation from the traditional norms of choirmaster's and singing technique. The special techniques of choral sonoristics considered in the article (glissando, cluster, speech intonation and noise effects), as well as the general specificity of the musical language of the XX century (atonality, polytonality, polyrhythm, dissonance) pose a number of tasks for the choir associated with overcoming the difficulties of choral intonation and choral ensemble. In this regard, we have identified a number of methods aimed at overcoming these difficulties (analysis of the mobile and variable components of the choral score in order to determine their dramatic functions, work on the improvisational structures of the musical text and "motive intonation"). The methodology of the choir collective's work with the pieces of contemporary composers, proposed in this article, has the prospect of further research with the aim of comprehensively developing the methodological aspects of the performing of contemporary music.

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