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THE GENRE OF PIANO MINIATURE IN GRIEG'S WORKS (BASED ON THE EXAMPLE OF "LYRICAL PIECES" OP. 38)

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Abstract

This article is devoted to the genre of piano miniature in the works of the prominent representative of Norwegian musical culture, Edvard Grieg, using his "Lyric Pieces" Op. 38 as an example. Special attention is given to the study of the dramaturgy of the pieces in the cycle, from the point of view of their genre diversity. A detailed analysis of the miniatures is undertaken to reveal their conceptual and imagery structure, form, as well as the means of musical language. The specificity of the composer's authorial style is explored through the pieces of this cycle.

Keywords: *composer, style, piano, genre, miniature, composition, dramaturgy*

The work of Edvard Grieg is all-encompassing. By engaging with a wide variety of genres, the composer created outstanding examples in each of them. A significant place in the composer's legacy is occupied by piano miniatures, among which the most popular are the "Lyric Pieces." A piano miniature, as K. Zenkin writes: "...is not only one of the most typical but also a genre that is specific to the Romantic and post-Romantic periods, with no analogues in the musical culture of previous eras" (Zenkin, 2019; Levashova, 1974). Grieg, as a prominent representative of the Norwegian compositional school, contributed to the development of the genre, filling it with new content. The folk epic, the images of fairy-tale fantasy, the fiery energy of dance, and the inspired, tender lyricism of vocal melodies – these all found their embodiment in the composer's piano miniatures, represented in the cycle of "Lyric Pieces."

The second volume of the "Lyric Pieces" Op. 38 includes eight miniatures, each of which is a fully independent piece with its own compositional and dramaturgical features, as well as a system of expressive musical means. From a semantic perspective, the miniatures are divided into two groups: the reflection of subjective moods, often correlating with the composer's emotions and feelings, and distinctive genre scenes, sketches depicting scenes of folk life.

The cycle opens with the "Cradle Song." This ternary miniature is written in the key of **G major (*G dur*).** The melody of the first section, calm in character, is based on variant repetitions of the opening lullaby, with characteristic rhythmic syncopation

that creates a rocking effect. The expressiveness of the melody is enhanced by appoggiaturas and the use of arpeggio technique, resulting in a sense of lightness and transparency. Despite the apparent simplicity of the harmonic accompaniment, based on alternating tonic-dominant sequences, the unique coloring is created by the appearance of the raised IV degree, a feature of the Lydian mode, and the use of the major-minor relative modality.

The theme of the middle section is contrasting. It combines two thematic formations. The first one consists of active, energetic motifs, performed more swiftly in a clear rhythmic movement against the backdrop of the tonic fifth of the relative minor. The second formation includes elements of recitation, with a slowing of the tempo and an emphasized natural scale coloring, which softens the tension. The main theme gradually becomes enriched with new expressive colors. While maintaining its structure, its sound becomes more emotional, resembling live speech – tense and expressive. Functionally, this section of the composition is the main culmination, where tender declamatory motifs are replaced by passionate exclamations, conveying emotional intensity. The theme returns to its original form, completing the peaceful narrative. In the "Cradle Song," the composer virtuously conveys a wide range of emotions, building a chain of compositional and dramaturgical development based on a concise, expressive melody.

The second miniature of the cycle, "Folk Tune," impresses with its originality and true Norwegian character. It reveals a rich picture of folk life, combining two genre elements – dance and song – that form the basis of the ternary-quintuple form. The first section presents two thematic formations, and it is through their contrasting juxtaposition that further development is structured. These include a springy dotted eighth-note movement and lively syncopations. The role of accents in the interpretation of the theme is important, as they convey the character of the sound, emphasizing the foundational genre essence of the piece. Despite the relative diatonicism of the key (***E minor/e moll***), the raised sixth degree is introduced into the development, bringing a touch of freshness and special charm to the somewhat darkened minor color. In the textural organization, the three-layered structure of the lines is clearly defined. These consist of the melody, doubled in thirds or sixths, the middle voice based on the ostinato repetition of the fifth degree of the scale, and the bass line, representing the tonic-dominant organ point. The dynamics gradually increase from *p* to *f*, dissolving to *pp* in the final measures.

The tonal coloring changes – the minor key gives way to the parallel major, and at *mf*, the second theme enters. The texture becomes more transparent. Attention is drawn to the predominance of second-based intervals. The melody is enriched by the introduction of triplets into its structure, becoming more delicate and flexible. An unexpected turn in the development occurs with the return of the theme from the first section, but now in the bright sound of ***G Lydian***, where it acquires a hymnal and ecstatic character.

The next miniature, "Melody," written in C major, stands out for its special noble restraint. In terms of genre, this piece most closely resembles an inspired nocturne, exquisite in its subtlety. The miniature is based on a single image, a single theme, in which the national element is expressed quite indirectly. The lyrical melody, with its dreamy and contemplative character, unfolds in a transparent texture of broken chord figures in a subdued p dynamic, and is repeated three times, varying and performing the role of a kind of refrain. The melodic phrases, rich in chromatic intonations, move in an ascending direction toward higher registers. The activation of harmonic development is linked to shifts into related tonalities, creating a sense of blurring the clear, stable foundation. Colorful modulations fill the musical image with romantic expressiveness. The presentation of the main theme is as if continued by constructions with a different textural organization. They are more dramatically agitated, created by a buildup of dynamics and an insistent chromatic triplet movement in the left-hand part. The return of the theme relieves the tension and brings back the initial emotional state. "Melody" is marked by the conciseness typical of Grieg's style. Every musical detail – whether it be subtle register contrasts or harmonic comparisons – possesses high

expressiveness, emphasizing the grace and depth of the piece.

A sharp contrast is introduced by the next piece, "Halling." This solo male dance embodies the strength, agility, and dexterity of its participants, bringing an energetic and lively dynamic to the overall sound. Structurally, "Halling" is a simple ternary-quintuple composition. At its core is a lively, energetic, strictly diatonic theme of folk character, based on fourth-fifth intonations, the stability of which is reinforced by an organ point. Regular accents on each beat of the measure convey activity and assertiveness to the movement, while appoggiaturas on the first beat enhance the expressiveness of the melody.

The subtle detailing of the texture is evident in the interplay of the initial intonational kernel across different register zones. In the combination of voices, polyrhythm is noticeable, arising from the mismatch of accents and different metrical grids – duple meter in the right-hand part and triple meter in the accompaniment. Each layer has its own intonational individuality. In the soprano, this is a simple motif based on descending fourth-fifth leaps in eighth notes with an appoggiatura on the first beat. In the alto, there is a rhythmic variation of the same motif with rhythmic diminutions and the introduction of sixteenth notes, initially outlining the movement through the tones of the tonic triad, and then a trichordal turn in the span of a fourth. In the tenor, the same turn appears, but in rhythmic augmentation. The bass presents a syncopated introduction on the weak beat of the measure, forming the organ point, expressed as a dotted quarter note. The sound is dynamically balanced, creating a series of crescendos and decrescendos. The spirit of Norwegian folk music is enhanced by the imitation of the sound of national string instruments, primarily the violin.

The next episode is the middle section, whose introduction is colored tonally (***B major/B dur***) and dynamically, but overall, built on the same theme, it does not introduce any noticeable contrast. As expressive techniques, one can point out the smooth unisons at the end of each phrase in the second period, contributing to greater fluidity and softness of the sound, as well as the quartal interplays with appoggiaturas, creating a sound-painting effect and enhancing the brightness of the transition to the reprise. A brilliant, fiery reprise of the theme with emotional elevation concludes the dance.

Following "Halling" in the series of dance miniatures is "Dance with Jumps/ Leaping dance." The assertive melody with sharp accents, based on temporal variation and shifting across different beats of the measure, is structured into clear metrical formations, conveying the spirit and character of a folk model. The texture of the piece is distinctive – an enduring fifth in the bass and a melody moving through the tones of the triad, which is enriched with a contrapuntal inner voice. The strictly diatonic repetition of question-and-answer phrases and the square structure are typical features of folk dance genres.

The middle section of the "Leaping Dance" is built on variant transformations of the main theme, demonstrating its expressive versatility and giving the piece dynamic development, in line with the energetic character of the dance. Here, the melody is enriched through ornamentation, the inclusion of auxiliary tones, suspensions, and melismatic decorations. Its rhythmic organization also changes, with the appearance of pronounced syncopated movement. The theme is shifted to a high register and, continuing the third-based chain of tonal organization, now sounds *in **D** mixolydian*. The climax of the piece is emphasized by the powerful sound of the theme at *ff* in a dense chordal texture. Pentatonic motifs, based on the combination of fourth-second intonations and embellished with mordents, the colorful timbral coloring (as an imitation of folk instruments), the predominance of plagal harmonies, soft answering phrases with vivid harmonic accompaniment – based on polyphonic vertical complexes (seventh and ninth chords)—all further enhance the folk character. In the reprise, the main melody acquires new expressive nuances. The bright sound in the middle register, the clarity of the tonic harmony, fill the theme with a peaceful, contemplative, and solemn mood.

The poignant "Elegy" is a miniature of a lyrical nature, where personal experiences and emotions, reflections, come to the forefront. Written in a ternary-quintuple form in a minor key (***A minor / A moll***), it is

imbued with a haze of sadness and sorrow. The main theme of the "Elegy" is colored by Grieg's sorrowful, chromatically descending intonations. The harmonic progressions, containing unexpected turns, are executed in a typically Romantic manner. The combination of colors enhances the feeling of vagueness, fluidity, and at times, impulsiveness. The textural organization of the first section is marked by the differentiation of the individual voices, allowing each layer of sound to be heard, contributing to its polyphonic character. The composer masterfully colors the theme with various timbral hues. Thus, the lyrical flow of the melody in its initial presentation evokes the warm timbre of the violin. In the middle section, its sound shifts to the bass part, calling to mind the rich, deep timbre of the cello (not coincidentally, the composer's marking is *cantabile*).

The middle section of the ternary form is based on the development of the main thematic material, which here is presented in the parallel major. Despite the seemingly homophonic texture – melody and accompaniment – it is intriguing due to the polyphonic techniques used in developing the material: in the first phrase, the theme is played in the bass, then the voice relationship changes, and it is transferred to the soprano; here, a middle contrapuntal voice is also introduced in syncopated ostinato motion. Unexpected resolutions of dissonances create the impression of sliding, shimmering harmonic colors. The concise but vivid climax of the theme conveys a sense of complete exhilaration, a feeling of rapture for life.

The continuation of the lyrical theme follows in the piece after the "Elegy" – the "Waltz." It is a lyrical portrayal of moods, which only carries a general genre designation. The very rhythm of the waltz has a poetic embodiment, reflecting its movement – sometimes light and smooth, sometimes swift and whirlwind-like. The piece (***E minor / e moll***) consists of three sections and is marked by a kaleidoscope of images. Against the backdrop of the waltz rhythm formula in the accompaniment, the elegant first theme enters. The languid, sensual sighs and steady rhythmic beats of the first theme are contrasted with the rhythmic liveliness and plastic, dynamic melodic variety of the second theme. The ostinato-repeated tetrachord melody, forming the basis of the second theme, is varied through reharmonization, bringing a new color to the sound. The synthesis of folk elements is thoughtfully constructed, expressed through characteristic motifs, with the inclusion of expressive appoggiaturas that outline the melodic relief, abundant plagal progressions, and a plastic, melodic development with expressive inner voices in the middle voice.

The beginning of the second section is marked by a sharp tonal shift to the bright ***B major / H dur*** (the dominant of the main key) and a change in tempo (*from* ***Poco Allegro*** *to* ***Presto***). The appearance of brilliant, virtuosic passages recreates the atmosphere of joyful brilliance. Soft, colorful dissonances emphasize the expressive timbre of the sound. The chromatic manipulations of the melody's notes are original. From a dramaturgical perspective, all sections of the piece are structured as rising and falling dynamic waves. The compositional identity of the waltz's structure is easily overcome due to the variety of interpretive nuances, which becomes particularly significant because of the vivid contrast in imagery. For example, the reprise of the first theme can be performed more dramatically, with increased dynamics, accentuating its persistent and determined character in comparison to its initial presentation.

The second notebook of the cycle concludes with the "Canon" (B minor / b moll), the most expansive of all the pieces, serving as the finale. It is characterized by deep lyrical expressiveness, which is evident not only in the complexity of its structural organization (a complex ternary form) but also in the more detailed development of the musical material. In accordance with the contrast in form, two types of lyrical images emerge. In the outer sections (*Allegretto con moto,* ***B minor / b moll***), elegiac lyricism predominates, with a touch of sadness and contemplation, combined with impulsive, forward-driving intonations. The middle section, the trio (*Piu mosso, ma tranquillo*, ***B major / B dur***), presents noble, restrained lyricism, creating an emotional contrast and balancing the overall mood of the piece.

The first section (a simple ternary form) is based on an expressive, soulful theme, which

is imitative in the soprano and tenor. The duet principle of the presentation contributes to Grieg's attempt to vocalize instrumental music, making the instrument "sing." The contrapuntal voices accentuate the relief of the melody, enriching its expressiveness. Emotional tension is revealed in the further development of the melody through the accentuation of introductory tonal tendencies (the middle section), in the tension of chromaticism in the harmony, leading away from stability.

In the trio, a new chorale-like theme appears. It sounds like a hymn to the homeland, to nature, and is characterized by the strict simplicity of the melody and relative rhythmic stability. The clearly expressed diatonic foundation of the melody led to a corresponding harmonic design (alternating major tonic and its parallel, the predominance of plagal harmonies enriched by the lowered 6th degree). With each presentation of the theme, its range expands. Notably, there is an abundance of seventh and ninth chords, adding a tart color. The climax of the trio is reached in the final presentation of the theme, which sounds especially powerful and rich. The return of the main theme – the overall reprise of the piece – restores the previous sense of quiet sadness.

The *Lyric Pieces*, written in a chamber music style, revealed new possibilities for piano expressiveness, stimulating the further development of pianistic art. This cycle rightfully entered the history of world music as one of the brightest examples of lyrical art in the second half of the 19th century. As aptly defined by O. Levashova, the *Lyric Pieces* "became his diary, the 'pages of his life'" (Levashova, 1974). Marked by a unique combination of simplicity and the richness of the tonal palette, vivid imagery, the freshness of harmonic language, and melodic inventiveness, which is brightly manifested in the genre diversity of the miniatures, they hold a worthy place in the concert repertoire not only of esteemed pianists but also enjoy immense popularity in pedagogical practice. Rightly recognized as a magnificent school of piano technique, these pieces are valuable material for introducing beginner musicians to true artistic expression.

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