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SEVEN SPANISH FOLKSONGS FOR VOICE AND PIANO BY MANUEL DE FALLA – A LABORATORY OF PERFORMING CREATIVITY

*Karyakina Liliya Mikhailovna*¹

¹ Department of Accompanist Mastery, State Conservatory of Uzbekistan

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Abstract

The article examines the vocal cycle ‘Seven Spanish Folksongs for Voice and Piano by classic Spanish music by Manuel de Falla (1876–1946)’. It was created in 1914–1915, remained popular on concert stages around the world for 110 years, giving performers the opportunity to reveal their talent. The harmonious interweaving of folk foundations and composer’s skill provides the cycle with a happy performing life, the results of which were many interpretations, starting from the original source, where Manuel de Falla himself with the singer Maria Barrientos gave the start to performing interpretations.

Keywords: *vocal cycle, pianist-accompanist, vocalist, interpretation, performance, laboratory, image, dramaturgy, expressiveness, interaction, concept.*

Introduction

The purpose of the article is to reveal, in the process of studying the vocal cycle, the features of the interaction of the pianist-accompanist with the vocalist, using for this purpose both the recordings of world-famous performers and the experience of the accompanist department of the State Conservatory of Uzbekistan, where the Seven Spanish Songs are enthusiastically studied by pianist students, for whom this cycle is a laboratory for searching of creative experiments.

Revealing various performance interpretations of the cycle, the author uses comparative-contrastive, complex and axiological methods of analysis.

The scientific novelty of the article lies in the experience of performing analysis of

the interpretations of the cycle by outstanding performers of the world and the creation of its own artistic and creative performance concept.

The article has scientific and practical significance in music science, performance, pedagogy, expands the understanding of Spanish music, the work of Manuel de Falla and his remarkable cycle Seven Spanish Folksongs. The features of the figurative content, means of musical expression, psychological interaction of the pianist-accompanist with the vocalist revealed in the work contribute to the improvement of musical performance, the development of the intellect and spiritual culture of performers and listeners, the education of the artistic and aesthetic taste of young people.

The vocal cycle ‘Seven Spanish Folksongs’ (1914–1915) is a classic of Spanish music by Manuel de Falla (1876–1946). It is well-known both in world performance practice and in the musical performance of Uzbekistan. It is included in the curricula and programs of educational institutions of art and culture of Uzbekistan, performed in concerts, and it is also a laboratory of creative searches in its interpretation. Particular attention is paid to the study of the vocal cycle Seven Spanish Songs with student pianists at the accompanist department of the State Conservatory of Uzbekistan. ‘A new approach to the content of training, a fresh look at the attitude to the educational repertoire have been firmly established in the current educational process, which is taking place at the department’ (Kasymova M., 2022. 11).

The study of the cycle ‘Seven Spanish Folksongs’ by Falla represents the richest source of performing fantasy and inspiration. Despite this, it has not been sufficiently studied in the aspect of chamber vocal art. The performing fate of this work has history more than 100 years, and still retains its vitality and attracts performers. The secret of this attractiveness of the cycle lies in the synthesis of national and universal principles, in the hidden plot of expressing feelings of love, experiences, joys and sorrows of life of a person of any nationality. Falla managed to combine the diverse local genres of national folklore of Spain into a stylistically integral thematic work, which has its own figurative dramaturgy. ‘It is known that the reason for their writing was the request of the singer Maria Barrientos, a native of Malaga, to indicate to her several Spanish songs for a concert performance. Around the same time, one of Falla’s acquaintances, a singing teacher, approached him with a request to write accompaniment to some song melodies. Falla was interested in the proposed material and decided to make several arrangements for voice and piano” (Martynov I., 1986. 29). As a result, the remarkable vocal cycle Seven Spanish Folksongs was created. The recording of the vocal cycle performed by Maria Barrientos (soprano) and Manuel de Falla (piano) became an unsurpassed example, a standard of creative interaction between a pianist-accompanist and a vocalist.

In studying of the vocal cycle, it is necessary to pay attention to its poetic text. ‘The composer’s choice of song lyrics is very characteristic. They are laconic, emotionally rich and deep in thought (interestingly, in some cases these are proverbs – the most concentrated expression of folk poetic speech). The tendency to psychologize artistic expression was clearly reflected in the composer’s desire to create something like a suite cycle with a plot line of development from folk song cycles. In terms of content, it is somewhat reminiscent of R. Schumann’s vocal cycle ‘Love and Life of a Woman’ (Alekseev A., 1977. 407). Of course, the heroine here is completely different. Like Salud from Falla’s first opera, she is a generalized type of a strong and passionate female nature, deeply feeling and uncompromising. It was the hidden plot that allowed Falla to combine various local styles of folk music from the regions of Spain into a single whole. In his study of Cante jondo, its origins, meanings, and influence on European art, Falla clearly argued the historical factors, and identified similarities between Spanish folk songs and the ancient chants of the peoples of the East. ‘There are the following analogies between the basic elements of cante jondo and some songs of India and other Eastern peoples’ (Falla M., 1971. 52). The composer found these analogies in the phenomena of enharmonics, sixth ambitus, ostinato, and ornamentation.

It should be noted that in the monodic music of the peoples of the East, ornamentation performed an important decorative function. ‘Even the ancient Indians used the “campa”, a “trembling note”, and its sign was so characteristic that it arose again, already in a horizontal position in the form of a medieval quillism, the predecessor of our modern trill’ (Beyshlag A., 1978. 5).

If ornamentation plays the important role in the vocal part of the cycle Seven Spanish Folksongs, then the textural-background principle dominates in the piano part. Both of these types of presentation of musical material complement each other masterfully. ‘The accompaniment of the songs is pianistic, it complements the main thing expressed in the vocal melody’ (Martynov I., 1977. 223). Based on this, the interaction of performers functions ‘The specificity of chamber vocal

lyrics is in the unification of two related types of art' (Yuldasheva S., 2017. 39).

The problem of achieving unity of performing intentions is the key one in this cycle. 'Of course, it is wonderful when two collaborating artists respect each other – if not sympathy. But this is not an obligatory condition. Many partners would be very nice to me in everyday life,' Gerald Moore says, 'but not in a musical sense' (Moore J., 1977. 97). These reflections of the most experienced mastersinger of piano accompanist art should be taken into account by pianists in the context of psychological training in the master class of accompanist skill. It is advisable to comprehend the relationship between voice and piano in the context of timbre-texture structure. 'Timbre-texture is a special type of texture that takes into account the character and relationship of the timbres that make it up' (Kasparov Yu., 2023. 9). The timbres of the voice and piano in their relationship are revealed at different levels of interaction between the pianist-accompanist and the vocalist, forming unusual timbre mixes.

In the work on the cycle 'Seven Spanish Folksongs', the understanding of the logic of the dramatic development of the artistic content of the songs is especially difficult in achieving interaction between the performers. In this regard, it is advisable to take into account the recommendations of M. Imkhanitsky: 'When highlighting a thought, its most significant words, it is very important not only to stretch or shorten their syllables, but also to temporarily separate, isolate the highlighted syllable from the adjacent ones' (Imkhanitsky M., 2018. 39). The pronounced effect of this performing articulation principle is very clearly revealed in a comparative analysis of the interpretations of 'Polo' by Maria Barrientos and Manuel de Falla and Teresa Berganza (mezzo-soprano) and Gerald Moore (piano), Olga Borodina (mezzo-soprano) and Semyon Skigin (piano). The study of the vocal cycle 'Seven Spanish Folksongs' provides wide opportunities for improving the performance skills of both pianists and vocalists in their interaction.

In the opening song of the vocal cycle, The Moorish Cloth (El paño moruno), the composer revealed the features of Andalusian music, where he masterfully imitated

the most subtle guitar licks. For a pianist-accompanist, the sound embodiment of the piano texture presents a certain difficulty. With a small number of notes and transparency of the instrumental part, the pianist must convey the original Spanish character. The piano introduction *Alegretto vivace* introduces the plot of the cycle. The song 'The Moorish Cloth' metaphorically reflects the deep meaning of the bride's chastity. An anxious and emotionally restrained accompaniment complements the vocal melody. Here, during the interaction of the performers, it is necessary to express a lot, but with a certain emotional restraint.

The sparkling 'Seguidilla Murciana' is also metaphorical. The fickle nature of women is compared here to a coin that can become commonplace, counterfeit and devalued.

The unity of song and dance in 'Seguidilla Murciana' is also inherent in Uzbek folklore. In Spanish dance culture, as in Uzbek, rhythm always remains an important feature. The national originality of traditional music determines rhythm. Falla very vividly captured the essence of the dance Seguidilla Murciana and managed to masterfully convey the rhythmic rolls of the castanets in the piano introduction.

The rhythmic elasticity of the laconic intonations, which echo in the vocal and piano parts, create a sense of endless dance movement. An important expressive role here is played by the accentuation by means of piano texture. 'The texture influences the character of the accent by increasing the heaviness, massiveness of some sounds and making others light and weightless' (Kholopova V., 1971. 71). The whirlwind of rapid movement in the piano accompaniment contains a special technical difficulty of execution. The pianist, maintaining the tempo of *Allegro spiritoso*, must not forget about the sound-creating will of the accompanist and his intuition. Anticipation and emotional control over the quality of sound will help the pianist to achieve success, where it is very important not to suppress the initiative of the vocalist, to complement his singing with sparkling instrumental dance movement.

'Asturiana' – sadness, quiet tears, longing for unfulfilled love, this is how you can characterize this part of the cycle. A conversation

with nature and restrained sadness permeate the entire song. The monotony and uniformity of the piano texture is closely intertwined with a touching vocal melody. In this ancient melodic layer, Spanish folklore appears in the calm flow of melodic phrases, where strict diatonicism is replaced by slight anxiety in the accompaniment of dissonant sounds that quickly find harmonic resolution. The complexity of the song's performance lies in the elementary sound, in the balance of performing forces and capabilities, achieved by a single quiet evenness of sound, a minimum of shades of dynamics in the sound embodiment.

In 'Jota' the composer creatively embodies Spanish song and dance folklore art. After the sadly melancholic 'Asturiana', the fiery 'Jota' carries you into the elemental whirlwind of energetic space, where the piano introduction rushes like a whirlwind in the Allegro-vivo tempo. The repeatedly repeating theme of 'Jota' is coloured with different timbre-texture colours in different dynamic openings from *pp* to *ff*. The piano part accurately conveys the characteristic virtuoso guitar passages, traditional for accompanying folk dance. From the very beginning, the aspiration of temperamental movements and cheerfulness of world perception are created. Vocal stanzas are replaced by instrumental ones. Such alternation is typical for the Aragon Jota. This beautiful song has received many arrangements and transcriptions for various instruments and performers. For example, Yana Ivanilova (soprano) performs 'Jota' accompanied by harpists Ilona Noke-lainen and Elizaveta Simonenko, imitating the sound of a guitar ensemble.

A bright contrast to 'Jota' is the tender 'Nana' (Andalusian lullaby), which expresses mother's love. The song unfolds in one breath, imbued with lyrical feeling. The poet-

ic grace and soft sincerity of the vocal melody are full of emotional charm.

The nostalgic 'Canción' (literally means 'song') is imbued with a light sadness about past love. Feminine sadness and melancholy are replaced by repeated exclamations of 'Mommy, Mommy'. The melodic vocal part is accompanied by a harmonious piano accompaniment. Falla achieved harmony and beauty of lyrical feelings and thoughts about the philosophy of life, the inevitability of human destiny in this song.

The final song of the cycle, 'Polo', has a general character and is the culmination of the cycle. It represents a philosophical theory of life, the unrestrained flow of the elusive running of time and human life. The passionate vocal melody is complemented by an anxious, even dramatically tuned accompaniment.

Conclusion:

Mastering each song inevitably leads performers to the necessity of combining them together in one piece of art. In this direction, there can be different creative approaches and solutions, in particular – through development. 'The principle of cross-cutting development is a broader concept than through form. It is presented in a variety of forms' (Chigareva E., 2023. 40). In the performance of the cycle 'Seven Spanish Folksongs' by Manuel de Falla, the principle of cross-cutting development as a performing dramatic principle allows you to create a holistic compositional structure. Semantic accents can manifest themselves not only in the musical texture, but also in the musical form of the songs. Understanding the thematic content in the interpretation of the cycle is a true laboratory for the creative search of performers, continuous improvement of the interaction of a pianist-accompanist with a vocalist.

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- liliya.karyakina@gmail.com

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© Karyakina L. M.
Contact: liliya.karyakina@gmail.com