

UDC 78.071.2:786.2:78.03

Sukhlenko I.

Kharkiv National Kotlyarevsky University of Arts

PERFORMANCE TECHNIQUE AS A STYLE-FORMING FACTOR OF GLENN GOULD'S CREATIVITY

Sukhlenko I. Performance technique as a style-forming factor of Glenn Gould's creativity.

Keywords: *Glenn Gould, musical style, performing style, performing equipment, piano art.*

Сухленко І. Ю. Виконавська техніка як фактор, що формує стиль творчості Глена Гульда. Сучасне музикознавство активно розробляє проблематику, пов'язану з вивченням індивідуального виконавського стилю, виявленням його стабільних і мобільних параметрів. Ми вважаємо, що стабільним фактором виконавського стилю є тип висловлювання, який визначається домінуючим в індивідуальному виконавському стилі жанрово-творчим началом, котре у свою чергу закріплено в техніці. Вплив інструмента на формування піаністичної техніки проаналізовано на прикладі творчості Г. Гульда. Виявлено, що техніка Г. Гульда гарантувалася на нефортепіанних прийомах гри: точність і незалежність пальцевих рухів, ясність артикуляції, піетет до контрапунктичної будови фактури... Це суттєво вплинуло на репертуарні пристрасті піаніста, концепцію його інтерпретаторських рішень.

Ключові слова: *Глен Гульд, музичний стиль, виконавський стиль, виконавська техніка, фортепіанне мистецтво.*

Сухленко И. Ю. Исполнительская техника как фактор, формирующий стиль творчества Глена Гульда. Современное музыковедение активно разрабатывает проблематику, связанную с изучением индивидуального исполнительского стиля, выявление его стабильных и мобильных параметров. Нам представляется, что стабильным фактором исполнительского стиля является тип высказывания, определяемый доминирующим в индивидуальном исполнительском стиле жанрово-созидательным началом, которое в свою очередь закреплено в технике. Влияние инструмента на формирование пианистической техники проанализировано на примере творчества Г. Гульда. Выведено, что техника Г. Гульда основывалась на нефортепианных приемах игры: точность и независимость пальцевых движений, ясность артикуляции, пиетет к контрапунктическому строению фактуры... Это существенно повлияло на репертуарные пристрастия пианиста, концепцию его интерпретаторских решений.

Ключевые слова: *Глен Гульд, музыкальный стиль, исполнительский стиль, исполнительская техника, фортепианное искусство.*

Formulation of the Problem. Issues related to the interpretation of music are the most relevant in contemporary musicology. This has led to the emergence of a number of works, directly focused on the performing arts (for example, research works of N. Koryhalova, D. Rabinovich, V. Moskalenko, N. Drach, V. Chinaiev) and works where music is regarded as a cross-point of creator's intent and interpreter's concept (Ye. Nazai-kinskaya, V. Kholopova, V. Kudriashov, etc.). So the central problem, in our opinion, is the study of the factors determining the formation and functioning of the individual performance style.

Analysis of recent research. The solution of this task is quite complex for several reasons, the main of which lies in the specifics of performance activity. While working with the composer's piece, the performer acts within the musical language that reflects the identity of the creator. In this kind of dialogue, a talented interpreter, forced to "play by someone else's rules" achieves a unique result when the listener recognizes the author of the composition and, at the same time, realizes who the performer is. Consequently, there is a certain segment of the performance style, which preserves the integrity when turning to the creative work of various composers and eras. We believe that such a stable factor is a type of statement defined by the genre-creative beginning¹ which is dominant in the individual performance style and is fixed in the technique.

Indeed, the interpreter has to overcome technical difficulties, i. e. to have technique, in order to play "text-schemes" (the term coined by V. Moskalenko). Not by chance, the term "technique" is often found in literature on performing arts. However, a generally accepted definition of art does not exist. According to the dictionary, technique (from Greek *technē* – art, craft) is "a set of technical methods applied in some craft or art" [8: 708]. Consequently, piano technique is a certain set of skills and technical methods of playing the instrument: a good command of passages, double notes, pedal, etc. That is how J. Hofmann interprets piano technique: "Technique is a tool box from which the craftsman takes something they need at certain time and for a specific purpose" [3: 84].

However, it is impossible not to pay attention to the fact that "technical characters" (the apt definition of G. Kogan) of great performers are different, and that every performer uses and (most importantly!) plays the same technical formulas that make up mastery of piano technique in general. G. Kogan, taking into account this feature, notes that "... each performance style has its own special 'suitable' types of movements that are as varied as these styles" [4: 51]. Kogan's viewpoint is congruent with the ideas of K. Martinsen, who claimed

¹ For further information – *Zhanrovyyi aspekt ispolnitelskoi intonatsii [Genre aspect of performer's intonation] / I. Sukhlenko // Problems of interaction of arts, pedagogics, theory and practice of education: collection of papers. Issue. 44 / Kharkiv National I. P. Kotlyarevsky University of Arts; ed.-compiler I. Yu. Sukhlenko, M. S. Cherniavska. — Kharkiv : «S.A.M.», 2015. — P. 23–32.*

that “each major type of sound-creating will has its special technical basic setting” [6: 94], and that only when the sound-creative will is provided with the technique appropriate to its type, “the high rank of the performing arts is possible” [ibid].

Thus, the following working definition can be given: “*Technique is a way to present the artistic image, determined by the organization of the performance apparatus and by the level of virtuosity, formed under the influence of personal qualities of the musician and the specifics of their instrument*”.

Objectives. In the context of the theme of this article, the influence of the instrument on technique formation is of particular interest for us.

Main material. Embodying the artistic image, a pianist, as well as other instrumental performers, faces the problem of strength of materials. In order to achieve the desired sound effect, it is necessary to understand the principle of operation of a complex mechanism, and to subdue it to the creative will. Thus, the embodiment of the image requires not just technique, but methods based on playing experience. Undoubtedly, each instrument (even if we talk about the instruments of one type, for example, keyboard-string) has its own, unique acoustic features, which require the formation of a special technique of sound production. Let us remember I. Hofmann’s statement that “a pianist, who plays the organ a lot is at risk of losing subtlety of feeling in fingers when playing, and that can result in reduction of expressive possibilities of their performance” [3: 116].

What distinguishes the technique of playing the piano from the technique of playing the harpsichord and organ? The principle of sound production or touché. As it is known, the power of sound generated from harpsichord or organ, is completely independent of the force with which a performer presses or strikes the keys. That is why the pianist’s technique which has been developed on the instrument, rich in dynamic shades and sensitive to the slightest change in the power of touch, the technique, which involves different muscle groups (from shoulder strength to the whole body weight) is absolutely inapplicable to the harpsichord and organ. The sound produced on these instruments is independent from power and therefore finger technique is placed on the first place. All the movements that are not absolutely necessary are excluded. A so-called organ touché is formed. It is characterized by I. Braudo as follows: “It implies that the entire palette of countless transitions from staccato to legato and vice versa is used on large lines as paint, as a stroke, as a manner. This touché is based on the smallest changes in the way of connecting neighboring sounds; it is a completely individual and characteristic style for the performer” [2: 88].

As you can see, defining the organ touché, I. Braudo relies on the articulation points. Pianists often remain quite indifferent to the subtleties and diversity of articulation. G. Gould is different. In his piano interpretations articulation is the most important defining factor of the whole structure of the piece. This can be

explained by the fact that as a child the future pianist played the church organ, and on December 12, 1945, he debuted as an organist; at the age of 10 he was enrolled to Toronto Conservatoire. He learned to play not only the piano, but also the organ (his mentor was Professor Frederick C. Sylvester).

G. Gould himself pointed out that it was the experience of playing the organ that determined the peculiarities of piano articulation: “Organ had a huge impact, not only on my later taste in terms of repertoire, but I think also on the **physical manner of my playing the grand piano** (my italics – I. S.). It was a priceless experience. I played the organ when I was 9–10 years old. Mainly works by Bach and Handel. I started being interested in them thanks to the organ... I learned that, performing Bach, you make phrases differently than when you play Chopin, where you make crescendo in the middle of a phrase. Phrasing on the organ is achieved with agogics and breathing. You can do it on the grand piano if you develop a very special approach – performance based on sensitivity of fingertips, which can produce an effect similar to the sound of vintage organs. You can achieve it on the grand piano by playing half legato and almost without strong attenuation of sonority, not to mention the exclusion of pedals, which is often used to perform Bach on the grand piano” [5: 15].

Another factor that determined G. Gould’s technique is a “method of finger striking” practiced by his teacher A. Guerrero – this is the exercise to give the absolute fluidity and ease of performing passages that eliminates excessive hand movements. G. Gould’s habit of sitting well below the level of the keyboard was also acquired during his studies with A. Guerrero, who believed that for maximum freedom of hands and fingers, the forearms of a pianist should be placed on the same level with the keyboard. Curiously, this requirement echoes the instructions made for harpsichord players. In particular, J. Rameau advised: “When you realize that the hand has been developed, start reducing the seat height slowly as long as the elbows become a little below the level of the keyboard; in this way the hand is so to say stick to the keys, and that will give the performance the highest degree of connectivity” [1: 38].

From the foregoing, we conclude that G. Gould’s technique was based on non-piano performance techniques and means of expression. Its distinctive features are accuracy and independence of finger movements, with virtually complete exclusion of arm, shoulder and forearm muscles, clear articulation, piety to contrapuntal texture and random accentuation of internal and hidden voices. Having prioritized tactual sensations, the pianist overshadowed the dynamics (in the piano sense), almost completely refused from the use of pedals, giving preference to the complex of expressive means, which are used by organists and harpsichordists: “full-tonal texture, vertical agogics (arpeggiating), use of time as a field where the lasting orotundity as well as reduce of time and increase of strokes can take place” [2: 44].

And if we assume that the “artistic intentions cannot develop in isolation from the technique”, it can be argued that this technique of playing the piano largely determined the intonation image of G. Gould’s world, defined by the pianist himself as “analytical clarity”. In the article “Prospects of Recording” G. Gould binds “analytical clarity” to the acoustic side of music, issues of recording and playing a musical sound. However, this demand for other qualities of sound develops into a problem of creative method and, in particular, extends to the interpretation of musical texture. The ideal of G. Gould is maximum clarity of playing, a kind of sound analysis which reveals the breakpoints of part-singing and textural plans – which he calls “analytical dissection”. Without touching here the issues dealing with Gould’s interest in sound recording, we will point out that the inclination toward texture clarity and transparency reflects both figurative and technical moments – articulation. Knowing that the “articulation concretizes all the features of the sound stream”, we conclude that the performing technique of G. Gould largely determined the peculiarity of original interpretation, in particular, of Bach’s music.

Indeed, the application of the performance principles that are close to the principles of Baroque clavier school, helped G. Gould to find new ways of reading music of that era. Polyphonic music, deprived of dynamic and tempo delights, pedal effects with the real equality of voices (instead of “listening” to the theme), struck the pianist’s contemporaries. The record of Goldberg’s Variations made by the pianist at the Columbia Masterworks studio in June 1955 secured him the lifetime title of an outstanding interpreter of the great cantor’s works. G. Gould has such a high level of polyphonic music performance that the listener, who is not even familiar with the technique of polyphonic writing, clearly hears not only the development of the composition as a whole, but also continuation of individual melodic voices. Each voice lives its own life, has its breathing, its character. All this becomes possible due to the articulating technique.

However, G. Gould’s repertoire included not only I. S. Bach music. So it is very interesting to see how G. Gould’s technique worked in the works of the Classical and Romantic periods, as well as in the music of the twentieth century, especially considering the fact that the pianist’s technique does not change drastically. Rather, it defines repertoire preferences, and the concept of interpretative decisions of the pianist.

Romantic repertoire, with its intense emotionality, colourful interpretation of the instrument, abundance of pedal use, homophonic texture, and lack of interest in the construction of precise and clear architectonic forms hardly attracted G. Gould. 20th century music is quite another deal. It was the second important layer of the piano repertoire that became generally accepted here. In our opinion this is due to the fact that the art of the 20th century, in its search for new means of expression and new development opportunities, addressed art achievements of past centuries, borrowing at the same time both genres, forms and methods of performance.

The neoclassical tendency, which originated at the turn of 19th–20th centuries, was the stylistic background, on which music art of the 20th century developed. This tendency was marked with the selective attitude towards historical periods – preference was given to Baroque era, pre-Baroque and post-Baroque music was less interesting. Thus, in actual practice, neo-classical art was, primarily, neo-Baroque.

20th century composers revived methods polyphonic writing in I. S. Bach and pre-Bach periods, refused from major-minor framework in favor of linearity and atonality. Piano music of that period is characterized by harmonic attenuation of the resonator, release from love for beauty of overtone-pedal atmosphere, lasting homogeneity of timbre. Another factor is toccatness and changes in musical thinking related to it. All these changes in compositional technique inevitably led to a change in intonation and pianistic complex. New features of piano music demanded change in the approach towards the organization of the texture.

Conclusion. Intonation and piano complex of the twentieth century, formed under the influence of neo-Baroque style, is built with a focus on metrorhythmic component as the fundamental one. It is characterized by the prevalence of techniques of “distinguishing” action, dynamic accentuation, stressing the percussive and hammer nature of the piano. All these features enable us to focus on the Baroque art.

No wonder, therefore, that G. Gould known primarily as an interpreter of I. S. Bach’s music is an unsurpassed performer of the 20th century music (in particular, works by the representatives of the Second Viennese School). Keen interest of the 20th century composers in Baroque art, united their works with the works of old masters with a kind of common intonation complex. The art of G. Gould which is initially close to the Baroque art (thanks in part to his technique of playing the instrument) turns out to be very relevant in the music of the 20th century, whose ideal is Baroque.

References:

1. Alekseiev, A. D. (1988). History of Piano Art. Part 1, 2 : textbook. 2-nd ed., enlarged. Moscow : Muzyka Publ. 415 p.
2. Braudo, I. A. (1973). Articulation : (On Tune Playing). 2-nd ed. Leningrad : Muzyka Publ., Leningrad dep. 199 p.
3. Hofmann, J. (1961). Piano Playing with Piano Questions Answered. Transl. from English by G. A. Pavlova]. Moscow : State muzical Publ. 224 p.
4. Kogan, G. M. (1968). Issues of Pianism : selected articles. Moscow : Sov. Kompositor Publ. 463 p.
5. Maikapar, A. (1983). Neznalomyi Unknown Glenn Gould. Music Life. No. 19 (621). P. 15.
6. Martinsen, K. A. (1966). Individual Piano Technique Based on Sound-Creative Will. Transl. from German by V. L. Mihelis. Moscow : Muzyka Publ. 220 p.
7. Moskalenko, V. G. (2013). Lectures on Musical Interpretation : textbook. Kyiv : former ed. : Kliaksa Press. 272 p.
8. Ozhegov, S. I. (1984). Russian Dictionary : about 57 000 words. Ed. N. Yu. Shvedova. 15th ed., ster. Moscow : Rus. yazyk Publ. 816 p.
9. Sukhlenko, I. (2015). Genre aspect of performer’s intonation. Problems of interaction of arts, pedagogics, theory and practice of education : collection of papers. Issue 44. Kharkiv. National I. P. Kotlyarevsky University of Arts. Ed.-compiler I. Yu. Sukhlenko, M. S. Cherniavska. Kharkiv : S.A.M, pp. 23–32.