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## THE THEORY OF MUSICAL CONTENT IN A CONTEMPORARY PEDAGOGY

**Kazantseva, Liudmila P.**

Astrakhan State Conservatoire, Sovetskaya str., 23, 414000, Russia,

### **Summary:**

*The academic subject 'Theory of musical content' is a practical adaptation of scientific ideas that are being developed by a branch of musicology, which was formed in research by Boris Asafiev, Vyacheslav Medushevsky, Valentina Kholopova and others. It has been directing the attention of the learners to the 'musical intonation', the 'musical imagery', the 'musical drama', the artistic 'theme' and the 'idea' of the piece of music, the 'program foundation', and to the question of the author's 'self-expression', intertextual connections between artistic works, and other phenomena that determine the essence of music. The years of practice show that the author's course 'Theory of musical content' equips students with knowledge about the most important aspects of music, experience of its analysis and the need for thoughtful and professional seriously to refer to music. Thus, it effectively promotes formation the personality of musician.*

**Keywords:** *Theory of musical content, artistic side of music, holistic figurative art system of music, the Problem Scientific Research laboratory of musical content*

In recent decades at the Russian conservatories and colleges courses, aimed at studying the content side of music, appear among the traditional disciplines of musicology academic study courses. They are similar in its goals with hermeneutics, but quite different in its method.

There are serious reasons for the introduction of disciplines of musical content orientation to the educational process. One of them consists in the fact that musicology together with aesthetics, philology, linguistics, art history, semiotics and other sciences have accumulated a lot of *knowledge* on the artistic opportunities of music.

In the Russian theoretical tradition the "musical content" (der musikalische Inhalt) presents the last stage in a serious research direction that takes its roots from the works of Boleslav Jaworski and Boris Asafiev. Since its early stages Russian tradition emphasized expressive aspects of music in the form of semantics, hermeneutics and, ultimately, Asafiev's intonatsia [1]. An important concept that contributed much to the theory of content was the so-called *integrated analysis* of Victor Tsukkerman and Leo Mazel [2]. Subsequently, a lot of interesting ideas about musical expressive possibilities suggested by Mark Aranovsky [3], Vyacheslav Medushevsky [4-6], Michael Karpychev [7], Ekaterina Ruchievskaya [8], Tatyana Chernova [9], and others [10]. Thus, the latest development, the theory of musical content, developed by Valentina Kholopova [11-13], Andrey Kudryashov [14], Liudmila Shaimukhametova [15, 16] and me is the result of reflection upon the several generations of Russian tradition.

Another reason is as follows. In the course of music content orientation becomes real fulfillment of the specific theoretical and aesthetic knowledge, *not affected by other academic school subjects*, is the real thing during studying of the musical content. The reality is that some of the fundamental common factors of music, such as the golden section, rhetoric and symbolism, space and time, author's background in the music, intertextuality, peculiarities of the music interaction with other forms of art, can hardly fit into the traditional disciplines of the theory and history of music and often remain almost unknown or completely unknown to the musician. Subjects of the musical-substantial orientation help to fill these gaps.

Knowledge of content, semantic side of music today also are in demand due to the fact that the *technological side* has obviously prevailed in the theoretical segment of the modern curriculum. Detailed elaboration of questions on the structure of the piece of music is significant for it – what tonal-harmonic, polyphonic, compositional and other means have been used by the composer, what performing tricks have been programmed by him. We can note that the theoretical knowledge training is concentrated in the composing technology – what patterns have been developed by the compositional practice. This knowledge, absolutely necessary for any professional musician, however, gives a one-sided view of the music. However, the insufficiency of knowledge about other fields of music is clearly emerging – to the effect that what it is in fact expressing, what does the composer tell to his audience, and finally – for which purpose the piece of music has been composed and how it exists in the society. The subject of music-oriented content is just called to turn the musician to the *artistic side* of music, influencing on the listener. Academic disciplines which study of “*how*” is a piece of music made must be balanced by other ones allowing to comprehend by the young musician “*what*” exactly is by the composer made.

Today in Russia has formed three research and teaching areas, developing complex and diverse problems of the musical content. One of them rooted in the Moscow Conservatory and developed by Dr. Valentina Kholopova. In her scientific concept and the subject "Music as an art form" following positions have become fundamental: about special / non-special music content (about pleasure obtained from the work and – the embodiment of an external world in relation to the sound) and the theory of the three sides of the musical content (emotional, iconic, symbolic). They are treated in the music of the major eras: baroque, classical, romanticism, the twentieth century.

Another branch of research and teaching explore of expressive side of music was formed on the basis of Ufa Academy of Arts. It is represented in the research of Dr. Liudmila Shaimukhametova and in disciplines has developed by her "Musical Semantics" and "Basics of musical intonation." In these disciplines typical intonation formulas are studied, recognized in the music works and are realized in the process of musical performance.

The third branch is based in Astrakhan and Volgograd. She concentrated in the taught for more then 20 years author's academic course "Theory of musical content," destined for students of conservatories and colleges, although some ideas successfully adapted for music schools [17-23]. That's about it and will be discussed further.

Musical content is considered as an artistic essence of work, on the embodiment and detection of which, directly or indirectly, there has been directed everything that it offers in a musical composition. Musical content is understood as an unusually complex *system*, incorporating a number of components (Figure 1). Most of these components relate to this system as levels of hierarchy: the smallest – *tone* – musical unit of work has both physical (acoustic), and expressive qualities. *Music intonation* is generated on the basis of expressiveness of the tone – the smallest relatively limited and self-valuable semantic element of music. Intonation process (change and interaction of musical intonations) delineates by itself the contours of *musical image*. Interrelations of characters solve some artistic *theme*. In its turn, the theme, dropped-down under this or that point of view, crystallizes the artistic *idea* of work, closely associated with it. Thus the next hierarchical “bunch” of content elements of a musical work is lined up. The “nest doll effect” has been applied in the mentioned “coupling” of elements – small elements are included to the larger one, larger ones are jointed to even greater one, etc.

Intermediate position between the components of two lower levels of the hierarchy is occupied by *means of musical expression* or the elements of music (melody, rhythm, meter, tempo, timbre, dynamics, mood, tone, etc.), partly characterizing the sound, but in some kind making out the musical intonation. Special part belongs to the *musical drama*, providing the movement, temporary deployment of musical images or a single musical image. Finally, the structure component of the musical content behaves specifically, called by me as *the author's 'self-expression'*.

The thematic plan of the course is shown according to the structure of the musical content. It includes the following sections:

- Expressiveness of the tone
- Means of musical expression
- Musical intonation
- Musical image
- Musical drama
- Theme and idea of the musical work
- Author's 'self-expression' in the music

Thus, the educational subject forms the view in the students not only on segmental fundamental semantic components, but also – and which is most important – on holistic figurative art system of music.

“Theory of musical content” faces important and responsible *goals*. They are seen as a) providing students with the knowledge in the field of musical content and b) obtaining practical skills of musical content analysis.

The lessons in musical content last two semesters and have a group character, but with a small number of students in a group. Every lesson combines lecture fragments with analytical practice. As a standard form of practical work *analysis of a musical piece* is established. This is a collective analysis, revealing the laws of music content being studied at this stage. Active, starting as a debate, penetration into the music allows us to solve one of the most important tasks of our course, namely the development of independent critical (along with analytical and historical) thinking of the students. A teacher initiates *creativity of students*. A student, put in an active position by a teacher, is forced to think independently about the music.

“Theory of musical content” has a *problematic* nature. It is generated not only by the way of acquiring knowledge, but also by the fact that each course theme requires its own, special approach to a piece of music. If the traditional disciplines (harmony, polyphony) offer students already tested analysis algorithm that needs to be learnt and that may be offered for different styles of music, a student, comprehending musical content, has to seek an optimal analysis algorithm almost in each case. The questions, appearing in each theme, and the answers to them are not polished up in typical methods of musical analysis. They require certain mobility, constant active thinking about music from the students (and, of course, from a teacher).

The peculiarity of the course is the selection of *music matter*. One of the objectives of our course, promoting independent thinking of the musician and his professional maturity, is considered to be *an increase of the range of the music studied*. Here the existing traditions in pedagogical practice of genre-style restrictions to the classic of XIX-th century are eliminated. A special place at the classes of musical content is allotted for the creative work of *contemporary composers*.

When choosing an artistic material it is also taken into account that a prominent place in the repertoire of performers is occupied by all sorts of adaptations, treatments, versions, transcriptions, potpourris, fantasies, etc., and demands of a musician the ability to conceptualize them not only as an isolated phenomenon, but in the cultural correlations. Jazz, popular and rock music, musical phenomena of Eastern cultures also urge to analytical approach. Alongside with known compositions and authors the less familiar layers of music are constantly being analyzed, such as old-time music, religious music.

Many years of practice show that the presently established author's course “Theory of musical content” for higher education music institutions equips students with knowledge about the most important aspect of music, the skills of its analysis and the need to treat music thoughtfully and professionally, and thus – effectively promotes development of personality of the musician. Systematic knowledge of the basics of the basics of music – its content – and analytical skills allow

the musician to rise above the amateurish-spirit of philistine exchange of views at: "I like this work or I dislike it" and judge about music more competently. For the performing musician they become a mainstay in his professional activities. As a method of detecting the musical sense the theory of musical content has proven particularly effective for professional training of performers when searching for musical interpretation.

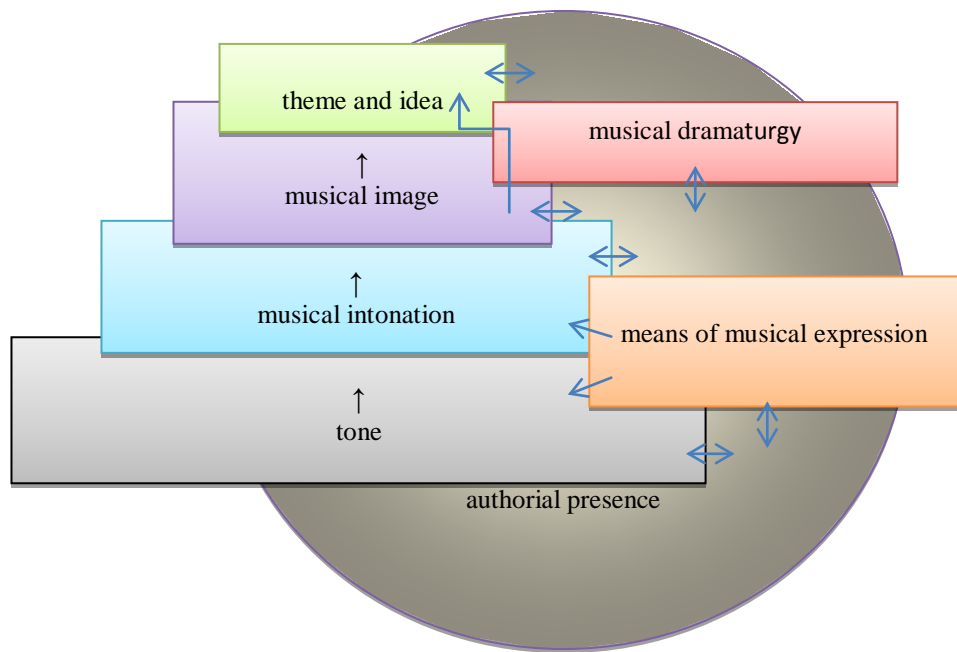
Usually the classes on music content are considered by the students at one and the same time both as promoting general developmental and mastering a certain musician's profession. Naturally a need for their continuation arises. In this regard, for many years of mastering musical content is continued at the request of the students up to the third semester, where the additional taken course "*Musical content in the context of culture*". It emphasizes the fact that the content of musical work is not reduced to the composer's opus. In the latter only a base rod is formed, which is further adjusted by the performer and the listener in the listening and performing layers of the content. The aggregate of the composer's, performer's and listener's layers can only be rightfully called the content of music.

Scientific and educational development of the substantive aspect of music continues. Significant role here in particular is played by the activity of *the Problem Scientific Research laboratory of musical content* to the Volgograd State Institute of Arts and Culture that I am leading. Its member researchers and teachers from all over the country are preparing doctoral and master's theses, articles and reports, guidelines, and other materials, conduct training courses for teachers of music content. The results of the Laboratory's activities are reflected in the collections, compiled on the basis of annual scientific-pedagogical Readings on the musical content, the publication of books and articles, as well as on the website <http://www.muzsoderjanie.ru>. Thus the opportunity to realize both theoretical and practical aspects of the theory of musical content is growing.

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Figure 1. The structure of the music content



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