

UDC 78

THE PREMONITORY POINT AND THE REAL APEX IN RIMSKY KORSAKOV'S OP. 4 NO. 1 ROMANCE

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Summary:

The heritage of Russian literature holds a vital share of historical significance in Russian Romantic vocal music. According to Vasina-Grossman (1956), the Russian romances are exemplary works that use Russian poetry to depict the compositional style of Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov. These art songs allow Rimsky-Korsakov to musically express a variety of poetic elements through the amalgamation of voice and accompaniment. This paper combines the Schenkerian view of harmonic prolongation with analytical system of melodic vertices that draws on Agawu (1984), consisting of a premonitory point that, with the real apex, herald the highest pitches in the vocalist's line. "*What Is It in My Name to You?*" ("*Что в Имени Тебе Моем?*") is Rimsky-Korsakov's early period romance, where the composer aligns both types of vertices with dramatic climaxes that are seen in Pushkin's literature. The premonitory point in m. 22, harmonized by the A-flat ninth chord sets up the melodic expectation that is realized by the established apex at the end of the song in m. 24.

Keywords: music and text; Pushkin; Rimsky-Korsakov; Schenkerian theory

1. Introduction

Russian literature holds a significant amount of influence on the history of Russian vocal music. After all, it is during the onset of Romanticism that Russian composers begin to turn to their native counterparts when searching for appropriate text settings. This is especially true of Russian 19th-century large-scale vocal repertoire, such as, for instance, Glinka's works *Life for Tsar* (1836) and *Ruslan and Ludmila* (1842), both of which are considered as historically-changing masterpieces that serve as a source of inspiration for future Russian composers to continue the tradition of vocal music. While operatic genre is a prominent source of analysis when it comes to bridging the gap between music and text, there are likewise small-scale forms that one can use to find the meaning of literature in music. A romance is one of such small-scale musical compositions that was implemented by literary-minded 19th-century Russian composers, to which the poetry of Pushkin, Lermontov, and other representatives of the Golden Era bring artistic development and provide a variety of innovative ideas. Romance is a vocal and instrumental setting of poetry, containing folk elements, as well as characteristics of songfulness and lyricism [1]. The members of the *Moguchaya Kuchka*, as well as Tchaikovsky and Rachmaninoff are some of the major Russian composers to write music in this genre [2]. The genre of romance allows to define the meaning of poetry through own harmonic language and interpretation. Through this genre, the composers are likewise able to musically express the historical and cultural elements of poetry by using vocal melodic line and complementary piano accompaniment [3].

2. Musical Culmination

Rimsky-Korsakov, an exemplary representative of Russian compositional school, has had a profound influence on Russian Romanticism and the place of Russian music in the history of Western classical arts. Rimsky Korsakov has compiled a diverse set of compositional literature that includes orchestral, choral, and chamber repertoire. The first encounter of Nikolai Rimsky Korsakov with the genre of romances occurs after his time spent at the Sea Cadet Corps, where the composer served as a midshipman between 1862 and 1865 [4]. The romances of Rimsky Korsakov's early period include Ops. 2, 3, 4, 7, and 8, composed between 1865 and 1870 [5]. The five opuses combine for a total of twenty-two songs. From Rimsky Korsakov's compositional output, the romances reflect the greatest amount of artistic value. These are short works, independent from operatic and symphonic thematic ideas, where the composer is able to reflect on the concepts of compositional stylistic creativity and emotional balanced lyricism. As in all of Rimsky Korsakov's early songs accompanied by piano, the composer uses the vocal melody for "evocation", necessary to depict a certain poetic idea as well as to evoke and conjure poetic characterization into the romances [6]. Such balance is revealed through the texts of Russian and foreign poets. Such balance also reveals the bifurcation between Russian and non-Russian stylistic approaches to text interpretation. Rimsky Korsakov's early romances likewise define his picturesque and expressive, yet melodically and harmonically simplistic approach to music composition. The synthesis of poetry and music creates a unique type of art, where the composer is able to reveal own thoughts and ideas based on a particular plot, and where the vocalist and the accompanist are able to present individual-minded interpretation of composer's musical depictions. The four songs from Op. 4 reveal the multiple traces of guidance from the Mighty Five members, particularly from the founder of the group – Mily Balakirev [7]. Just as Balakirev's early songs were influenced by Mikhail Glinka, seen in the waltz rhythms and Italian inspired vocal lines, Rimsky Korsakov correspondingly begins to pick up Balakirev's compositional methods, using them in own ways, revolutionizing them to the best of his abilities to fit his own songs [8].

When it comes to vocal repertoire, one of the significant analytical aspects is the unification of composer's music and poet's text [9]. Various symbolic elements translate from poetry to music, generating a sense of cohesiveness between the two artistic components. Agawu presents an analytical approach that sees poetic climaxes as highpoints, which create a strong emotional impact in the music [10]. The idea of culmination point is one of the main fundamental links that exists between music and poetry. Rimsky Korsakov expands the poetic image of the Russian writers into his early works and presents own interpretation of Russian literature. Rimsky Korsakov considers the poem's meaning to find the crucial points of the text that he proceeds to signify in his own works. In Op. 4 No. 1, Rimsky Korsakov's melodic lines tend to have two pivotal points and based on the critical moments of the poetry, the *premonitory point* with the *real apex* herald the highest pitches in the vocalist's line. While one cannot empirically define the presence of the noteworthy passages in the music, a particular interpretation can lead towards such passages and generate emphasis on certain parts of the song; such passages can be located in both the vocalist's melody and the pianist's accompaniment. The premonitory point and apex help adduce imagery and themes that are concealed below the poetic surface. While the vocalist's line is of most significance here, the harmony likewise plays an important role and ultimately drives the singer's melody towards these points. The premonitory point generates an implication and a sense of melodic expectation through the harmony, creating a need for musical peak and resolution. The melodic apex generates such resolution and realizes the preceding premonitory point. In Op. 4 No. 1, both musical vertices are aligned with the poetic vertices from Pushkin's literature.

3. Analysis

The poem used for Op. 4 No. 1 romance, titled *What Is It in My Name to You*, consists of four stanzas, where each stanza entails four lines. Pushkin's poetry is filled with many examples of Russian traditional values and philosophical thoughts, all of which contain numerous instances of double entendre and multiple interpretive meanings [11]. Furthermore, Pushkin has encountered many romantic adventures that are reflected in his poetry [12]. In *What Is It in My Name to You*, the poet imitates and reflects on his time spent with Carolina Sabanskaya; Pushkin meets Sabanskaya in 1821 while in Kiev and completes the poem in 1830 [13]. The poet is uncertain about what Sabanskaya expects of him, confused regarding her intentions, and indeterminate about her feelings. To approach the theme of 'love', Pushkin begins by stating a question to Sabanskaya and immediately provides an answer in the form of an assumption, as both the query and the response occur in the opening two lines of the text.

Line 1: Что в имени тебе моем? [Eng: What is it in my name to you?];

Line 2: Оно умрет, как шум печальный. [Eng: My name will die as a sad sound].

As evident, Pushkin outlines the significance of a soul rather than the name, as the indirect 'uncertainty factor' between Pushkin and Sabanskaya in the score is reflected in the sudden parallel transformation of G \flat major to E \flat minor in mm. 1-3. The chief tonic harmony of the opening line's chordal progression, supported by the C \flat major subdominant, is abruptly transformed to vi, supported by IV 7 /vi, as seen in Figure 1 [14].



Figure 1: mm. 1-3 of Rimsky Korsakov's Op. 4 No. 1 in G \flat major.

The melody found in mm. 14-18 is composed to the following text: "Твоей душе не даст оно воспоминаний светлых, нежных." This can be translated as "It (the name) won't allow your soul to remember light and gentle memories". The key elements of this phrase consist of two nouns and two adjectives: (1) "душа" [Eng: soul] and "воспоминания" [Eng: memories]; (2) "светлое" [Eng: light] and "нежное" [Eng: gentle]. These elements are the apogees of the poem that likewise influence the meaning of the main turning point of the text. Such key elements can similarly be used to reconstruct the hidden purpose of Pushkin's writing, something that Rimsky Korsakov does in two ways. First, as shown in Figure 2, the identical three-tone chromatic passing motion can be seen in the piano accompaniment in the right hand of soprano melody in m. 16, where C \flat on beat 1 descends to A on beat 3 via B \flat on beat 2, and the middle voice of the right hand in mm. 17-18, where D on beat 1 of m. 17 descends to C on beat 1 of m. 18 via D \flat on beats 2-4 of m. 17. While different from rhythmic standpoint, Rimsky Korsakov uses both structures during the phrasal development in the singer's part in order to generate an alternate pianistic idea to contrast against the main melodic material in the vocalist's line.



Figure 2: mm. 17-18 of Rimsky Korsakov's Op. 4 No.1 in G \flat major.

Second, Rimsky Korsakov avoids the tonic pitch of G \flat in the vocal line of the phrase and substitutes it for G, only revealing G \flat in m. 20 in the next melody, as seen in Figure 3. While the piano accompaniment utilizes the G \flat at the beginning of m. 15, the use of this particular pitch neither represents the tonic or hints a return to one. In fact, Rimsky Korsakov begins the phrase with a G \flat dominant seventh chord, V 7 /IV, which resolves to IV on the first beat of m. 16. Rimsky Korsakov creates a symmetrical chordal arch, where the G allows for E \flat dominant seventh chord to serve as V to link parallel tonalities of B \flat major and B \flat minor in m. 17 with parallel tonalities of A \flat major and A \flat minor in m. 18. While E \flat dominant chord denotes the word "светлых" in the score and refers to clear memories, the word "нежных" is represented by both major and minor keys and refers to gentle memories. Pushkin attempts to hide the memories of his own name and by that, emphasizes on the significance of his soul; this idea is analogous to Rimsky Korsakov attempting to hide the tonic in mm. 14-18, as the composer foreshadows such phenomena with interplay of both major and minor A \flat and B \flat tonalities, utilizing the E \flat dominant seventh chord as a bridge for such connection. The rejection of tonic pitch in this segment signifies Rimsky Korsakov's approach to developing a harmonic pattern in order to enter the reinstatement of the beginning of the song in m. 19. Similarly, the employment of secondary dominant in order to resolve to subdominant tonality, the use of symmetrical chordal arch, and the existence of parallel tonalities are all features that are led by the hidden chromatic line in mm. 15-19, as the lowest note in the right hand of piano accompaniment descends from F \flat towards B \flat .

poco rit.
 даст о . но вос . по . ми . на . ний свет - дых , неж . ных .
 IV Bb Maj & min Eb7 Ab Maj & min
 Tempo I
 Но в час не .

Figure 3: mm. 16-20 of Rimsky Korsakov's Op. 4 No. 1 in Gb major.

Sixteen lines of text are just enough for Pushkin to elaborate on own uncertainties and to recapitulate on his thoughts regarding Sabanskaya. While it is evident that Pushkin was in love with Sabanskaya in the past, the poet does not mention whether the feeling is currently preserved. The poetry ends with an unresolved request found in the penultimate and the final line of the poetry.

Line 15. Скажи: есть память обо мне. [Eng: Tell me, is there a memory of me];

Line 16. Есть в мире сердце, где живу. [Eng: Is there a heart in the world, where I live].

Rimsky Korsakov aligns the premonitory point with the word "произнеси", translated as "pronounce". This is seen in the phrase "Произнеси его тоскуя", translated as "Pronounce it yearningly", with "it" referring to Pushkin's name. As we near the end of the poem, it is evident that Pushkin wishes for Sabanskaya to pronounce his name with the feelings of melancholy, anguish, and suffering. The poet desires for Sabanskaya to be longing for his name and his soul. The real apex, which is established at the very first beat of m. 24, harmonized by tonic chord of Gb major, is the musical arrival point, underlined by the effects of *forte* and *allargando*.



Figure 4: mm. 22-24 of Rimsky Korsakov's Op. 4 No. 1 in G \flat major.

For an analytical approach to dissecting the music, harmonic reduction and the Schenkerian theory can be used to point out various occurrences in the score, in addition to comparing multiple tonal structures in the work [15]. Such approach of looking at the romance from two points of view allow for a better understanding of linkage between the composer's music and the poet's text [16]. In Rimsky Korsakov's setting of the poem, the premonitory point occurs at G \flat in m. 22 on the third beat, harmonized by an A \flat ⁹ chord. The piano accompaniment in m. 22 is characterized by the interplay of V⁹/VII and vi chords, which is seen between the A \flat ⁹ and E \flat minor tonalities. A chromatic descent occurs starting at the final beat of m. 22 in the piano accompaniment, where the highest voice moves down from B \flat to A \flat through B $\flat\flat$. This is followed with a consonant skip before moving towards the apex through the double passing tone in the piano part, while harmonically generating the dominant-tonic resolution of D \flat major to G \flat major. On the contrary, the vocalist's line merely ascends from D \flat to G \flat . The harmonic complexities generated by the premonitory point are resolved in the final apex on the first beat of m. 24, as the means of preparation for the final phrase of the song.



Figure 5: Schenkerian graph of mm. 22-28 of Rimsky Korsakov's Op. 4 No. 1 in G \flat major.

Rimsky Korsakov moves towards the melodic apex of the first song by gradually increasing the melodic range and its respective apogees. Empirically, mm. 1-11 take up almost 40% of the song, creating a range from E \flat to D \flat , covering an interval of a minor 7th. In this instance, the highest points create a chromatic ascending motion before returning to its starting pitch. The C \flat in m. 3 ascends to D \flat via C in m. 4, before returning to the original C \flat in m. 5. Furthermore, mm. 11-18 contain the same range that amalgamates to approximately 30% of the song. Finally, it is mm. 19-28 that contain the premonitory point and the real apex of the work, bring the romance to its resolution.

4. Conclusion

Rimsky Korsakov amalgamates the piano accompaniment with the text in such a way that the music and the poetry coordinate with each other to portray a particular depiction of a scene. Op. 4 No. 1 is based upon contemplations and observations, as Pushkin uses the poem to discuss his place in the world of Sabanskaya. In this romance, Rimsky Korsakov's melody strives towards two crucial passages, reaching the premonitory point with the use of A \flat ⁹ chord before continuing to the tonic of G \flat major that represents the real apex. Both points likewise announce the highest peak of the vocalist's line. While the poetry does not hint of any proceeding consequences or any sorts of poetic resolutions, Rimsky-Korsakov uses the focal points of music to define closure and bring the song to the end. The premonitory point and the real apex can be used for carving a unique musical interpretation, presenting a singer with an opportunity to create a purpose in the music through a connection to Pushkin's text. The premonitory point serves as an implication, creating a dissonant sonority and generating a need for tonal resolution, which is seen in Rimsky Korsakov's upbringing of the real apex.

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