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Ukrainian Pianist Oleksandr Kozarenko

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Abstract

The article is devoted to the creative personality of the modern Ukrainian pianist Oleksandr Kozarenko. It discloses the environment and conditions of shaping the musician, the priorities of his concert as well as contest activity, repertoire peculiarities, methodic and artistic principles of performing style. The article applies the scientific approaches, developed by the Kyiv School's musicologists (Yuri Chekan, Olena Zin'kevych, Valentyna Redia and others), and connected with working out the issues of creative individual's psychology, intonational nature of music art, genre-style analysis, music speech and interpretation. The suggested opinions are the results of continual observation of Oleksandr Kozarenko's activity, a face-to-face communication with the pianist; they are based on the artistic-performing as well as interpretational analysis of his numerous solo and ensemble performances. Some statements are confirmed by the pianist's utterances recorded during a face-to-face communication.

Positioning O. Kozarenko as a representative of the Ukrainian piano school (he is a Kyiv Conservatoire graduate, Vsevolod Vorobyov's class), his deep interest in the Ukrainian repertoire, particularly the works by Mykola Lysenko, the founder of the Ukrainian composer school, professing the principles of melodious pianism as the key idea of the national performing style form the background of the made conclusions.

Keywords: pianism, performing style, theatrical performance, performing genre tendency, melodic texture.

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The Representative of the Ukrainian Piano School

Olexandr Kozarenko began his career as a musician in Kolomyia.

It was by pure accident that I was born in Kolomyia, which was the second Ukrainian cultural centre in Galicia during the Polish period. It was in Kolomyia where the first Ukrainian gymnasium, the first Ukrainian-language publishing houses, and the first secular Ukrainian theatre appeared. I was lucky to catch this synthetic artistic spirit of Kolomyia when I was young. I caught it at the music school where the graduates of pre-war Prague, Warsaw and Lviv Conservatoires worked. Among them there were people who

either spent 25 years in prisons (because of political motives) or whose families lived in exile¹.

The pianist finished Kolomyia music school in 1978. His first teacher was Romanna Volodymyrivna Vohnievovych, Vasyl Barvinsky's graduate in piano and Lidia Ulukhanova's in vocal.

She had the voice appropriate to performing Verdi's operas. When a child, I could not understand that, but later, from my colleagues, from the repertoire, which she sang (because the programs were kept), I realized what a high-class singer she was. I do not remember her showing anything on the piano at the lessons. She sang everything, all the elements of texture. It was very surprising for me. That is, when you approached Romanna Volodymyrivna's classroom, you first heard the song, and then – children playing. Only studying at the Conservatoire, being Professor Vsevolod Mykhailovych Vorobiov's student, I understood what it meant: she enlivened all texture layers, made them change melody, for when you sang them, the texture began to live.

Olexandr Kozarenko is convinced that it is the idea of melodic that forms the basis of his performance.

Melodic principle is the „alpha” and „omega” of my performing style. I was taught it by Vsevolod Mykhailovych Vorobyov, the last who preserved and handed over to his disciples the tradition of the golden Kyiv pianism of the 1920s. I think the idea of melodiousness is one of the fundamental for the Ukrainian piano school, as evidenced by Rada Lysenko and Natalia Kashkadamova, and others.

In Lviv Music College Olexandr Kozarenko was taken to the class of Eugenia Isakiivna Ahroskina, who was Liudmila Uman'ska and Oleh Kryshchal'sky's student. It is she that he primarily attributes to his musical outlook extension, as well as developing his melodic performance skills.

Vocal interpreting the instrument was greatly supported by Eugenia Isakiivna. But her task was to maximally expand the horizons of our musical existence, and in fact it was she who introduced us into the world of the great pianism. In her house, where she has a colossal record library, we listened to the performances of the same work in twenty versions, looking for our own concept at their crossroads.

¹ All O. Kozarenko's utterances, represented here, were recorded during two interviews, held by the author of the article at the Institute of Art of Ivan Franko Lviv National University in summer 2013 and 2014.

The following is said by Olexandr Kozarenko on studying in the class of Vsevolod Mykhailovych Vorobiov, a professor of the Kyiv Conservatoire:

When I got to his class, I stopped playing for six months, I could not, he completely changed my understanding the pianism as the maximum separation of the text into different texture layers, coexistence of these layers and different techniques which had to be found out so that they could coexist. He said, "We are all centipedes and we must work in a circus, because the right hand doesn't know what the left leg is doing", it is such a complicated system of psychophysical correlations. Only now do I begin to slowly realize what Vsevolod Mykhailovych taught us at the conservatoire. I see that from the Kolomyia music school to the Kyiv Conservatoire I did not have breaks; on the contrary, there was one line, though it seemed to me then that there was a movement through "vocal crises". Over the time I began to treat them not as stops, but as the moments of mastering a new quality that was like the negation of negation, that is the proof of the same but on a different layer of development.

The program, with which Olexandr Kozarenko graduated from the conservatoire, included Sonata h-moll by Franz Liszt, Sonata number 32 by Ludwig van Beethoven and Third Piano Concerto by Sergei Prokofiev. By that time he had worked thoroughly at the compositions by Frederic Chopin and Borys Liatoshynsky.

During my study at the conservatoire, I played almost all the piano compositions by Liatoshynsky. It was Vsevolod Mykhailovich who converted me to him. I played Rachmaninoff very little <...> only Piano Concerto №2. I remember we worked at Chopin's works very thoroughly.

Theatre had a great impact on the formation of Olexandr Kozarenko's performing style. It was there, that he realized the significance of the colossal psychological reaction to what is going on in the text.

In the article „Great Actresses of Little Ukrainian Theatres” I described my communication with three actresses – Oksana Zatvarska, a prima donna of Kolomyia theatre, who was the first Honoured Artist of Western Ukraine, Anna Paschenko, an actress of Nizhyn theatre and a Drohobych theater actress Anna Chebotariova. What strikes me the most is that all of them were simple, ordinary people in everyday life, and yet retained the role of versatile actresses, who could perform everything – ranging from frivolous comedies to deep philosophical dramas. Till I live, won't I forget Anna Paschenko in the scene of death in Shevchenko's „Naimychka”, or her look in the scene of meeting with the young man and her admitting that she is his mother. I will never forget Anna Hryhorivna unbinding a kerchief, neither the scene with a broom falling out of her hands. It seemed like a bolt from the blue.

Contest and Concert Programs

Preparation for M. V. Lysenko Republican contest in 1984 was an important step in the formation of Olexandr Kozarenko's piano technique. The requirements were excessive; the program was complex, technically, artistically and by size. According to the pianist, besides polyphony and a large form (he played some of L. van Beethoven's sonatas), it was necessary to perform six etudes in the first round.

I remember that I played Scriabin's fifth etude (№ 3, op. 65 – authors) and Chopin's etude 24, I don't remember what the other etudes were, but there were six of them. In the second round I played the Piano Sonata №2 by S. Prokofiev and Chopin's Sonata in B-flat minor. The latter was very significant for me. To finish with, there were concertos – the first concerto by Tchaikovsky and Lyatoshynsky's Slavic Concerto.

It was just when Olexandr Kozarenko first started playing the compositions by Mykola Lysenko². The contest became the impetus to his special treating the works of Ukrainian classicist. As a result, since 1992, the pianist has gradually prepared a monographic program of his works, played in Lviv, Munich, Trier, and Krakow, as well as in the USA. Moreover, the preparation of the monographic program „the Lysenko music he loves” was caused by the 150th anniversary of the composer's birth. Besides, according to the maestro, this music was imposed by Roxanne Skorulska, the head of the Mykola Lysenko Museum, who introduced him to Valeriy Buymistr and Liudmila Davymukoya. Together, they produced „a luxurious programme in two parts – a vocal Lysenko”.

In addition to the vocal programme, O. Kozarenko has also a programme of Lysenko's piano works in his repertoire.

When I opened Lysenko's piano sonata which hadn't been played by anyone, and which I had never heard, I saw, what a first-rate pianism it was, what an intertextual game filled the text, and how modern it was by thinking. Lysenko can be surely called pre-modernist, because he foresaw the idea of composing a musical text out of ready-made units. It is clear to me, the same as to a western listener. I travelled the whole Germany with this program, played it in Poland, in the United States. When I was approached by the people who first heard the music by Lysenko to such extent they said how highly educated that man was, because he knew Saint-Saens, Grieg and Chopin. All this is heard in his music, and yet it's heard that this is Lysenko – not a compilation, not an epigone, but a man who has reached a new level of understanding a structure of a musical text.

² Before M.V. Lysenko Republican contest (1984) Olexandr Kozarenko, according to his own confession, of all Lysenko's works performed only Rhapsody №2 and „Prelude” from „Ukrainian Suite”.

Another monographic concert program was created by O. Kozarenko in 2009 to mark the 25th anniversary of the M. V. Lysenko Republican contest. It has a symbolic name „25 Moments of Ukrainian Piano Music”. It contains twenty-five works by five composers (five by each) – Five Pieces with Leipzig autograph of 1878-79 by Mykola Lysenko, Five Preludes op. 4, op. 7 by Levko Revutsky, Five Preludes op. 44 by Borys Liatoshynsky, „Five Kolomyikas” by Mykola Kolessa and „Five Pysankas” by Oleksandr Kozarenko. The pianist says:

The panorama of the Ukrainian music from Lysenko to Kozarenko showed some tremendous continuity, the uninterruptedness of our music history. That is, we say the same thing, only in different words. And very often – even the same words, but in a different interpretation.

O. Kozarenko’s repertoire includes more than two hundred works. Ukrainian and foreign music is represented approximately equally in it. Among the foreign one the works of XVIII–XIX centuries are prevailing, presented namely by Austro-German composers J. S. Bach, W. A. Mozart, L. van Beethoven, R. Shuman, J. Brahms as well as by Russian ones – P. Tchaikovsky, A. Scriabin, S. Rachmaninoff, S. Prokofiev and D. Shostakovich.

Ukrainian part of the maestro’s repertoire consists mainly of M. Lysenko’s works and music of the twentieth century. East-Ukrainian and West-Ukrainian schools have approximately equal proportions in it. The former is presented by Dmytro Bortniansky, Mykola Lysenko, Levko Revutsky, Borys Liatoshynsky, Yevhen Stankovych, and the latter one – by Mykola Kolessa Anatoliy Kos-Anatolsky, Myroslav Skoryk, and Olexandr Kozarenko.

As far as the style is concerned, the music of Romanticism and that of the twentieth century is prevailing. In the genre aspect – concerto and sonata are dominant, but there are quite a lot of chamber vocal and chamber instrumental cycles and miniatures.

Olexandr Kozarenko works equally as soloist, both – alone and with the orchestra, as accompanist and in ensemble. In a chamber ensemble his long-term partner is Lydia Shutko, People’s Artist of Ukraine, with whom a number of works by L. van Beethoven, J. Brahms, A. Dvorzhak, B. Liatoshynsky and others have been played.

An important place in O. Kozarenko’s piano collection of works is taken up by seven monographs and genre-themed programmes. They are the following: a clavier concerto by J. S. Bach (d-moll, f-moll and dual c-moll, played with Myroslav Drahan), two Lysenko programmes – piano and vocal (with Valery Buymistr and Liudmila Davymuka), works by B. Liatoshynsky, „25 Moments of Ukrainian Piano Music”, and two chamber music programmes played with Lydia Shutko – D. Shostakovych and „Ukrainian Violin Sonata”.

Characteristic Features of Pianism

While studying O. Kozarenko’s performing style such approaches as intonation-dynamic, genre-texture and historical semiotic were used. The proposed by Olena Markova intonationally-dynamic approach presupposes catching in the integral musical text multiplicity of its performing interpretations, awareness of musical piece integrity, which is determined by three „test points” – its beginning, a series of culminations and conclusion (Markova, 1990: 77). The essence of the genre-texture approach, suggested by Maryna Skrebkova-Filatova, is selecting from many potentially possible genre-texture interpretations of the text that one which best meets

performer's conception. In this way there appears the phenomenon of performing textured tendency, performing genre tendency, performing image-semantic tendency, lyrical, epic, dramatic concepts of the composition (Skrebkova, 1985: 240–248). The objective of the historical-semiotic approach grounded in the article „Three Approaches to Studying a Performance Interpretation of a Musical Text” (Komenda, 2015) is to determine the stylistic-interpretative orientation of specific performance by comparing stylistic performing tendencies of „test points” of a musical text. It is possible to do this by analyzing the peculiarities of sound forming, phrasing, accent dramaturgy, dynamic and tempo characteristics (Komenda, 2015: 159–164).

Among the features that make Olexandr Kozarenko's pianism peculiar is early adoption of the European performance traditions (J. S. Bach's concertos have been in his repertoire ever since studying at school) and tending to the concerto genre. Leadership qualities play a considerable role in the latter. They are caused by the temperament and personality traits – being able to lead, build up a concept, and be supportive while performing. These features are so distinct that become apparent even in not very relevant works, which are the baroque concertos by J. S. Bach, like concerto grosso, and O. Kozarenko's own compositions – „Concerto Rutheno” and „Konzertstück”.

Olexander Kozarenko's performance tends to a dramatic style. His playing is personified, which gives the impression of musical theatrical performance. The main factor of this is the contrast between topics, chapters, parts of the form – the contrast of dynamics, tempi, accents, and sound production ways. In addition, this is facilitated by a performing genre tendency (M. Skrebkova-Filatova's term), due to which the connection of purely instrumental works with musical theatrical ones is highlighted. J. S. Bach's concerto d-moll in O. Kozarenko's performance, for example, is perceived as a typical opera entry. The theatricality of interpretation emphasizes the significant contrast of expressing topics in soloist's and orchestra's parties where the soloist is noticeably highlighted.

A clear component of pianist's performing style is a polymelodic texture interpretation that is reflected both in a hidden polyphony which splits a single tune into lots of subvoices, and in arpeggio which is perceived as a single, although sparse melodic line. While performing his own works – „Concerto Rutheno”, „Konzertstück” – the pianist makes the improvised parts maximally melodic. The presence of hidden polyphony allows making a soloist's part polymelodic, splitting it into several layers – a discrete rehearsal tone and a melodic voice, like, for example, in „Konzertstück”.

A bright example of impromptu deployment and making the texture polymelodic is the beginning of „Concerto Rutheno”, despite the fact that the first part of the work is a partial aleatoric structure, i.e. fragmented graphical symbols. The leading role in this process is played by the soloist, who leads the team along. This example shows that melodiousness is a quality, inherent not only to a written text but a pianist's improvisation as well. Another example of making such a polymelodic texture is the beginning of the piano party in the second part of the „Concerto Rutheno”, where the pianist instantly expands the range of the rehearsal topics due to including the sounds further and further from the center.

A characteristic feature of O. Kozarenko's pianism is a personified interpretation of the musical text, the example of which can be Myroslav Skoryk's sonatas for violin and piano №1 in

his performance together with Lydia Shutko. This is quite noticeable on the material of the secondary party of the first part in the dynamic correlation of soloist' party and that of the piano. This reminds of correlation between the ordinary and foreground plans in the cinema: „the character stepped on the foreground” – „the character hid at the back of the stage”.

Maestro's stage behaviour, facial expressions and characteristic gestures are of great importance. The pianist's facial expression is focused, without tension, but expressing the activity of mind. Occasionally, in dramatic moments, one can see his raised eyebrows, slightly narrowed eyes or a frowned forehead. Sometimes – a subtle smile or a clear sense of satisfaction. The look is never distracted; it is directed either to the keyboard, with his head slightly tilted back, or in some important moments – turned in the direction of a conductor or a singer, but rarely – into the eyes, rather through or over the partner' figure. At certain moments the pianist straightens his shoulders, playing with high, slightly turned back head. Typical movements are light shakings of his head from side to side in time with the metre and rhythm, light, occasional nods connected with accents, tilting the head and leaning the body to the piano. This is especially true for solo performance, when it seems just a visual dialogue between the performer and the piano. In case of ensemble performance the pianist still holds the body straight, not affording to lose sight of a partner or a conductor, although often keeps both in sight with a side look. When a strong sound attack is necessary the pianist's shoulder-spread can be so great that his hand jerks up about a meter above the keyboard and suddenly falls on it. Sometimes at these moments of powerful play the pianist even allows himself a slight "jumping" on the chair. Conversely, sometimes, at the moments of deepest concentration, he makes the impression of holding a deep breath, even falling into a stupor.

The pianist's different behaviour with different repertoire is noticeable. So Bach's concertos are performed most strictly and academically. But, while performing his own works, „Pysankas” for example, maestro demonstrates a much greater freedom of movement, various and energetic behaviour at the instrument. Accompanying in Anatoly Kos-Anatolsky's songs is filled even with some outward showiness and liveliness. His own compositions are performed, in our opinion, most freely and naturally in terms of behaviour on stage. Here everything – facial expression, a great compass and dramatic movements make it noticeable that from beginning to end the pianist remains in the created by him atmosphere of exciting magic shows, gambling game in the deepest philosophical sense.

Summing up, such O. Kozarenko's features of pianism should be noted:

- high quality mastering all the richness of piano strokes and means of articulation (legato, staccato, interval and chord tremolo, pedal, ostinato, trill, etc.)
- mastering various attack and timbre sound hues: the contrast of different types of sound forming – deep, penetrating, strong, supportive and light, as if scattered with colourful overtone play, melodious, gentle and percussion, cutting, sonorous, refulgent and dull like a vague buzz, soft and hard, saturated, rich and bright, transparent;
- the ability to phrase (contrast of long and short phrases), owing to legato and polymelodic texture, based on the idea of vocalizing piano performance, to keep even sounding;

- a wide range use of dynamic possibilities – a smooth transition and a sharp contrast of dynamic gradations, the latter is used as a means of theatricalization and introducing cinema art techniques into chamber performance;
- the ability to construct a performing dramaturgy of the work, comprehending spatial and temporal aspects of composition, keeping the listener's attention with a deep inner, psychological dynamism of sounding and an intense expression as well as concentration of the performance.

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