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THE WORLD OF RHYTHM GAMES OF MAURICE RAVEL

*The game is built in accordance with the laws, which are not defined by norms of mind, duty and truth. The same is true for music.
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This article attempts to analyze imaginative sphere and structure of works of M. Ravel in order to discover common game tendencies both in terms of form making and specificity of interaction between game and music culture. Here game is considered as a structural element and artistic device, immanent for M. Ravel's musical compositions. Ravel's game phenomenon specifies and deepens concepts of music performance interpretive thinking as of a form of game, immediately representing esthetic value.

Keywords: game and culture, medial properties of game, theme of childhood, idea-key, game as esthetic value.

Reasoning about game in its connection with artistic experience result in considerations in relation to *the game essence*, implying not so much behavioral aspects, or state of mind of participants and observers, as a mode of being of the artifact itself, outside the subjectiveness included into the game.

In this context, *definition of concept of game* in terms of *process*, first of all, comes to its ridiculousness for player. This process is connected with the sphere of seriousness only in that “*game has its own and even sacred seriousness*” [5, p. 147].

In actual fact, game has no goal, however, in the behaviour of player there is permanently some goal-oriented correlation with *activity*, peculiar to *being*, defining it and being its integral part. “*The player himself knows, that game is not only game, and it takes place in the world, being defined by the seriousness of goal <...> Since the game process meets its goal, when player is **wrapped up** therein* [5, p. 147]. Therefore, only **seriousness during the game makes it** in the full sense of the word **a game** outside the correlation with seriousness outwards, resulting therefrom.

Here we closely come down to the point of personal factor, defining many correlative processes, taking place at the levels of consciousness and unconsciousness. Unity of personality can unite three spheres of human culture, namely, science, art and life, precisely as a result of their attraction to its unity. Frequently external mechanics of that kind of relation in space and time is not saturated with unity of sense, where collision of these

spheres is formally carried out, but at the same time they remain alienated. Precisely this relation is found out by M. Bakhtin in his reasoning: “When human belongs to the art, he does not belong to life, and vice versa. <...> Art and life is not one thing, but they have to become a single whole in me, in unity of my responsibility” [3, p.5–6]. Therefore, efficient “living art” is possible in case, when the experienced and recognized things in life come to the level of responsibility.

M. Bakhtin’s reasoning about life and art forms in a generalized sense vitally artistic principles, M. Ravel was governed by, starting from the earliest stages of his creative work. More precisely, there is the ideologic similarity of M. Bakhtin’s views to M. Ravel’s ideas. It is clear, that, first of all, we are talking about the same *correlation* (in a perfect world, unity) *of art and responsibility*, that is vividly reflected in the creative work and watchword of the French composer, true supporter of idea of pure art and sublime style.

Talking about *style, art and responsibility* in the context of the personality of M. Ravel, let us mention the fact of intergity of the artistic world of the composer, which often becomes hidden behind the unexpected paradox of manifestations of his creative freedom. Is not this the very unity of art and life, actualized in the “unity of responsibility” of Maurice Ravel?.. But this similar inconsistency inside one personality is a fundamental property of Ravel's thinking, which is realized by means of musical text. “*Our duty is to recognize correctly contradictions, first, as contradictions, and, second, as a pole of some unity*”, said Herman Hesse in his “*The Glass Bead Game*” through the *Master of Music*. And then he added: “... *you can be a severe logician and grammarian and at the same time full of fantasy and music*” [6, p. 122–123]. Precisely in this context it is possible to approach to the disclosure of research trend mentioned above, that is rhythm game, where logic in combination with fantasy allows to disclose some “idea-key” in Maurice Ravel’s creative work [7, p. 176], related to the game principles of *child’s thinking*, which was always peculiar to the composer. This aspect requires individual consideration, however, it will be permanently involved during this research because of closeness of both spheres.

This poses the question: how in the single stream of considerations such a sharp transition is possible from art, responsibility and unity of personality to the paradoxicality of creative latitude and principles of game space ... But immediately in this form Maurice Ravel’s creative will is carried out, where, according to Valeriia Zharkova, “*wisdome*

simplicity and pureness of child's world perception” becomes a kind of “*hidden esthetic program*” of the composer, characterizing peculiarities of his imaginative nature [7, p. 176].

Aiming to logic, clearness and accuracy in presentation of musical material, deeply hidden real law of organization of text, which always present in Ravel's music together with child's children's mystifications, “shifts of clothes” and fantasies, concealing multiplicity of artistic ideas of the composer. This is the very same “old logic” in combination with “fabstasy and music”, whereof Hermann Hesse wrote and Émile Vuillermoz mentioned (one of M. Ravel's creative work researcher) Whose words are contained in the book of V. Zharkova “Walks in Maurice Ravel's Musical World (in Search of Sense of the Master's Message)”. Vuillermoz likens to the outstanding contemporary Ravel – to Claude Debussy, meaning, that the latter “often emphasizes false negligence, while Ravel never loses in his magic uncrushable will. Debussy is a man of poetic magic, Ravel is of faultless one” [7, p. 177].

The composer's manner as well as personal image of Maurice Ravel is marked with combination of elegance and cold irony with hidden heart tenderness and almost childish soul openness. Due to such openness, from one hand, he becomes very vulnerabe, and on the other hand, he finds the key to mysteries, able to be opened only to a child, who really beleives in tales and miracles. He is interested “like a baby” in the world of animals, he is astonished with natural grandeur and beauty, its dynamics, sincerity. It seems, that Ravel observes this external world from the inside at the level of infant view. Due to such an approach he can see much more details, than an adult, who has all “correct answers” to fundamental questions of life.

Thus, among many Ravel's works, where to a greater or lesser degree an element of game is present, an image of his pianoforte play appears, bearing quite specific program name “*Water Games*” (1901). Here besides the verbal, by no means explicit feature of play, game principle is peculiar to the construction of the composition form, and textural (figurative) decision of music fabric, and descriptive sonoristic affect, caused by the sounding of the musical instrument. Possibilities of the latter were always considered by Ravel very boradly, with a view to go beyond the reallyy existing timbre and texture arsenal.

The composer “plays” with tembres, puts wave-like musical layers over one another, strikes them together. And in whole this “whirlpool” there are realistic feelable water motions, playing with light, air, coastal stones, river bottom. Neither two hands of pianist, nor 88 pushbuttons and pedal points, nor crossed trembling strings, but the whole nature of

sounds breaks out of Ravel's mind, lays down by means of the adjusted lines onto the music paper, and playing, strives to reach the ears of listener: now all of them play the game ...

One of the early Ravel's compositions, highlighted with beams of child's imagination and represented by form of rendering - both musical material, and verbal text - *a game in pure form*, is vocal pianoforte composition "*The Christmas of the Toys*" (1905), arose on the basis of a poetic text written by the composer himself. The fact of creation of own verbal text by Ravel, agreed with music one, allows to make sure that for the composer an **element of game** is very important. Therefore, he somehow sets own "rules of game", in which he takes part (by the way, continuation of "the game with own rules" is creation of vocal orchestra variant of this composition (1906, 1913).

A row of ideas and concepts of Ravel's play incredibly accurately coincides with a range of leading concepts, formed by H.G. Gadamer in his work "The Relevance of the Beautiful": "restoration to service", "symbol", that is an opportunity to discover yourself, and, finally, "holiday" as an embodiment of the restored relation between all and everybody' [4, p. 276]. In "Return to the game" Ravel almost mean the "*appealation to game*" as to the form, "symbol", laid down in the choice of idea of plot, reflects some Biblical characters (Madonna, the Christ child), and, finally, "holiday" as feeling and culmination of the entire composition, expressed in the final shouts of the toys "Christmas! Christmas! Christmas!..". And, despite of temporary impermanence, diminutiveness and fragility, "The Christmas of the Toys" already contains all elements of "child's" openness and naivety in the nature of music, in combination with weighted architectonics of form, that will also be peculiar to more mature opuses of Ravel towards the musical mysteries.

Almost in parallel with "The Christmas of the Toys" Ravel composes vocal cycle "*The Natural Stories*" to the words of Jules Renard (1906), who becomes emotional, a little bit impressionistic reflection of Ravel's observancy, comparable to curious child's view to the behaviour of some creatures of the animals' world. An attempt of partial empathy to animal character and image, adhering to the position of an *observer*, allows Ravel to remain at the same *a game player*. Therefore, transformations, peculiar to children when trying to perceive the world of natural phenomena, actualize the experience, obtained as a result of such "research" activity in the sphere of thinking.

Talking about *medial features of game* in implementation of correlation of existence with works of art, H. Gadamer writes: "*Game mode of being, therefore, approaches closely*

to the character of nature movement, that allows making an important methodological conclusion. <...> *Nature*, to the extent it without aim or intention, without stress acts as a **game**, is constantly changing, can appear as something like an example for imitation on the part of art” [5, pp. 150–151]. Probably, Ravel used precisely the mentioned above features of game when creating his music sketches. In the structure of the melody and texture of the piano part of the plays of the cycle, Ravel does not strive for pure sound-representation, on the contrary, through the figurative filling and symbolic generalization of the musical text, along with the stylistic, textural and sonorous effects peculiar for Ravel, he brings the specificity of the correlation between the living natural world and human consciousness. Although the music of this cycle is after all has some onomatopoeia, Ravel provides his plays with the unique effect of participation and sympathy with nature, next to the abstract position of the observer and the “commentator”, where the *game element* is felt with special clarity. Because (completing Gadamer’s thought with his words) “*all sacred games of art are inly faint resemblances of endless game of the world, a work of art creating itself for centuries*” [5, p. 152].

Plays for piano four-hands for children “*My Mother Goose*” (1908-1910) is a real atmosphere of fairy-tale, created by a big palette of tembral and figurative intricacies, keeping clear and not very complicated facture, is an additional “sign” of childhood, which was in due time confirmed by the fact of the opening performance of this composition precisely by children. This world always attracted Ravel; therein he found allies, that is performers, and treated them very seriously in the same way as he spoke to the adult musicians.

Appellation to the characters of performers and as a whole to **the sphere of interpretation** here is not accidental and concerns one more very important element of *game space in art*: the presence of **author, performer and spectator as participants of game**. Roland Barthes writes: “... *there was time, when “to play” and “to listen” made one, almost undifferentiated activity*” [1, p. 421]. While according to M. Bakhtin, “*the very fact, that fundamentally distinguishes a game from art, is principal absence of spectator and author. <...> Game really begins to approach to art <...> when there is a new, indifferent participant - a spectator, who starts to admire the game; <...> immanently in the game itself there is no aesthetic element, he can be introduced right here by a spectator, but the game itself and people playing it<...>here have nothing to do with, during the game this aesthetic*

value is alien“ [3, pp. 67–68]. The statement like that is aligned with a certain character with that form of game, we are talking about, however, therein children act as intermediaries of author and “active observer”, but their “game” (in the sense of interpretation) bears immediate aesthetic value.

“*Representation of art by nature is such, that it is aimed at somebody, even if nobody listens to and watches*, thus finally determines our “socratical dialogue” H. Gadamer in his work “Truth and Method” [5, p. 157]. This statement with incredible accuracy reflects *the principle of implementation of any children's game*. Especially, when we are talking about game of child with himself, with own imagination or, in other words, with imaginary himself”. The game does not lose for him the sense, if nobody watches it. Moreover, it can acquire even more sense, since in this case a degree of interest in the process rises, and the “circle of people initiated” narrows to the player himself and a number of partners allowed by him. Such a “game with oneself” can seize even more, than a game in the circle of “like-minded persons” or “sympathizers”, and a requirement for the latter in this case fades away completely. “*Children play for themselves, even if they play the performance*” [5, p. 157].

An example of such a work of child’s imagination is an idea of “A Child and Magic” (1924) one-act opera-ballet by Maurice Ravel, which both in chronological and conceptual sense crowns Ravel’s “epopoeia of childhood”. Here the composer completely merges with thinking of child, his fears, expectations, wishes, interests and fantasies. Musical text of this composition, in addition to aesthetic component, shows Ravel’s mastery in terms of detalization, even personification of orchestra timbres, their “harmony” with characters and genre sketches. Ravel becomes very explicit in musical embodiment of vulnerable soul of child, through which he shows for certain parts of his own soul. Central figure - a Child - is probably a form of Ravel’s self-identification, nevertheless it does not always coincide with the relevant reaction of spectator, or an actor not always identifies himself with the character being described, since here “*we have only game in life*” [3, p. 66].

Thus, a game itself, as well as **game principles** of forming and thinking, imaginative sphere of childhood and fantasy are very close to Ravel both in the world of phenomena and things, and in the principles of building of musical text, its adaptation to instruments and methods of verbalization. **Game** in this semantic chain is both a structural and artistic device, to which Ravel - immediately and indirectly - refers with pleasure in his numerous compositions. One of the aspects of the phenomenon of Ravel’s game leads to **the**

phenomenon of artistic performance with its interpretative principles, that allows to specify and deepen ideas of musical performance interpretative thinking as of a **form of game**, immediately **representing aesthetic value**.

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