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## EMBODIMENT OF THE NATIONAL THEMES IN THE WORKS OF JOSEPH ELGISER

**The purpose of the article** – is characteristics of works of the Jewish themes in piano and vocal creative works of one of the Bukovinian contemporary composers – Joseph Elgiser. **Methodology.** Methods of historic and culture, theoretic, genre and style analysis have been applied. It permitted to determine peculiarities of works of the Jewish themes in the context of a research of composer's music. **Scientific novelty** lies in treatment of the Jewish themes in music, analysis of works of Joseph Elgiser – a Bukovinian composer, whose creative style has been hardly investigated in the modern musicology. **Conclusions.** The works of Joseph Elgiser are extremely original and unique. A great part of his works is piano music in different genres, where peculiarities of his creative style are disclosed. The main part of the heritage of Elgiser is program music which is closely connected with the composer's life. Especially important theme of his works turned out to be a tragic destiny of the Jewish people. Creating music pictures and portraits in the form of piano miniatures, Elgiser connected them in cycles under common program headings.

**Keywords:** Jewish folk song, interpretation of the Jewish songs, Jewish piano music, piano cycle, composers of Bukovina, works of J.Elgiser.

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### **Втілення національної тематики в творчості Йосипа Ельгісера.**

**Мета статті** – характеристика творів єврейської тематики в фортепіанній та вокальній творчості одного з буковинських композиторів сучасності – Йосипа Ельгісера. **Методологія.** Застосовано методи історико-культурологічного, теоретичного та жанрово-стильового аналізу, що дозволило визначити особливості творів єврейської тематики в контексті дослідження музики композитора. **Наукова новизна** полягає у висвітленні єврейської тематики в музиці, аналізі творів Йосипа Ельгісера – буковинського композитора, творчий стиль якого малодосліджений у сучасному музикознавстві. **Висновки.** Творчість Йосипа Ельгісера надзвичайно оригінальна та самобутня. Більша частина його творчості – це фортепіанна музика, у різних жанрах якої розкрилися особливості його творчого стилю. Основна частина доробку Ельгісера – програмна музика, яка тісно пов'язана з життям композитора. Особливо важливою темою його творчості стала трагічна доля єврейського народу. Створюючи музичні картини та портрети у вигляді фортепіанних мініатюр, Ельгісер поєднував їх в цикли під загальними програмними назвами.

**Ключові слова:** єврейська народна пісня, обробки єврейських пісень, єврейська фортепіанна музика, фортепіанний цикл, композитори Буковини, творчість Й. Ельгісера.

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### **Воплощение национальной тематики в творчестве Иосифа Эльгисера.**

**Цель статьи** – характеристика произведений еврейской тематики в фортепианном и вокальном творчестве одного из буковинских композиторов современности – Иосифа Эльгисера. **Методология.** Применены методы историко-культурологического, теоретического и жанрово-стилевого анализа, что позволило определить особенности произведений еврейской тематики в контексте исследования музыки композитора. **Научная новизна** заключается в освещении еврейской тематики в музыке, анализе произведений Иосифа Эльгисера – буковинского композитора, творческий стиль которого малоисследован в современном музыковедении. **Выводы.** Творчество Иосифа Эльгисера чрезвычайно оригинальное и самобытное. Большая часть его творчества – это фортепианная музыка в разных жанрах, где раскрылись особенности его творческого стиля. Основная часть наследия Эльгисера – программная музыка, которая тесно связана с жизнью композитора. Особенно важной темой его творчества стала трагическая судьба еврейского народа. Создавая музыкальные картины и портреты в виде фортепианных миниатюр, Эльгисер объединял их в циклы под общими программными названиями.

**Ключевые слова:** еврейская народная песня, обработки еврейских песен, еврейская фортепианная музыка, фортепианный цикл, композиторы Буковины, творчество И. Эльгисера.

**The relevance of the research topic.** Among Bukovinian composers of the XX – beginning of the XXI century, a special place belongs to Joseph Elgiser (1929 – 2014) – to a man with great talent and extraordinary destiny. Pianist, composer, surgeon, teacher, musicologist, researcher, public figure, philanthropist Joseph Moiseyevich Elgiser lived a bright and at the same time tragic life. He had to endure difficult childhood, to be a prisoner of a fascist concentration camp and, thanks to music and artistic talent, to survive these terrible years of war. His music is quite varied, multi-genre, combines contrasting themes, imagery. In general, the works of Elgiser have a program character; their special feature is autobiography. The research of works of artists, bright personalities of the past and present is an important task of contemporary musicology. Therefore, any studies in this direction will become relevant in our time.

**An analysis of recent researches and publications.** Composing works of the representatives of Bukovina has not been sufficiently explored. The existing textbooks on the history of music consider the development of musical culture of Bukovina in the context of the general characteristics of West Ukrainian music. However, there is no separate study of the culture of the region, especially its contemporary artists, in musicology literature. In the modern scientific sphere, there are several publications dedicated to the historical past of Bukovina, among which there are two works of historical journalistic character by K. Demochko [1; 2]. A more detailed and informative source about the history of musical culture and education of Bukovina remains the collective work of the scientists of the Department of Music of Yu. Fedkovych Chernivtsi National University [7]. However, in these studies, the style of the composers of Bukovina is not being explored. Y. Elgiser's creativity is not analyzed in the art criticism literature. There are many publications in the periodical press and reference publications about his life, performing and public activities. In 2007 the only book of A. Isaac “The Knight of Music” [5] was published, where attention is paid to the biography of Elgiser, but the journalistic nature of the publication does not allow considering it a thorough study of the composer's creativity. In the same year the thesis of I. Kobyatskaya was defended, in which the piano cycles of J. Elgiser [6] were analyzed.

**The purpose of the study** is to describe the works of Jewish themes in piano and vocal works of Joseph Elgiser.

**Basic presentation of the material.** An especially important and extremely painful theme of Joseph Elgiser's works was a tragic fate of the Jewish people during the Second

World War, as he himself had to survive the tortures of the German ghetto. Almost fifty years later Elgiser would use slavery songs, heard then in captivity, as the basis of his collection **“Jewish Piano Music: Arrangements of Jewish Folk Songs”**. The collection includes works of the Jewish themes, written for piano, arrangements of folk songs. Jewish folk songs recorded by Elgiser from Khany Yarmolinsky, El Bendionovich and Rosa Steinberg from Chernivtsi and were included in the collection, – are quite original works, which are not present even in the “Anthology of Jewish folk song” [3]. Traditions of collecting of Jewish musical folklore lead to the end of the XIX century, when a student of the Moscow Conservatory Engel collected, recording on a phonograph, and studied Jewish folk music. Later, M. Rimsky-Korsakov encouraged the Jewish students of the St. Petersburg Conservatory to study their folk songs and encouraged them to rely on it as the basis of their original national creativity. He showed interest himself in Jewish music, seeing it as a relic of the ancient eastern melos. As one of the studies of the history of the Jewish people notes, “for his own Jewish students, a prominent Russian composer acted in a role similar to that played by Stasov among the Jewish artists” [4, 503]. In the XX century, these traditions were taken up by other composers, particularly by D. Shostakovich, who published a cycle of songs ”From Jewish Folk Poetry”.

A special place among J. Elgiser's works devoted to the Jewish people is taken by “The Jewish Suite”, which was written by the author after visiting the Khotyn Jewish community, where J. Elgiser met people who, like him, had survived in the Nazi captivity. The first part of the Suite “In the Khotyn Community” reveals bitter confession of the former prisoners, their feelings and sufferings. All the tragedy of the situation is concentrated in the development of the melodic line, which slowly, difficultly, gradually rises, makes attempts at reaching a certain peak, which can be compared with the inhuman efforts of the long-suffering people who are trying to get up from their knees. Hard chords of the initial construction, with sharp second layers inside consonances and second rising moves of these vertical complexes, extremely accurately depict a terrible death car of the fascist regime. Rising low-second intonations, with sharpened chromatism, and unrestrained, though heavy and slow, almost imperceptible movement up, one way or another, symbolizes a rhetorical pursuit of light, good, hope and victory. A middle section of a complex three-part form creates a certain contrast with unchanging G-minor tonality. The revival of tempo adds even more excitement. Intentional synchronous underlying by all voices of the texture of the

chased rhythm, which is repeated throughout the first period of this section, creates an impression of a destructive force that can not be overcome. The result is the following construction, where rhythmic syncopes, combined with rigid verticals, depict a picture of cruel torture. A short construction completes the form, which only on the basis of the tempo can be regarded as a reprise. However, pain and suffering of the people are extremely convincingly shown here: a “lame” rhythm in the form of a reverse dotted line, a slow movement of chromatisms, which, like a painful echo, alternates and is eventually interrupted.

The next, the second part of the suite – “Freilechs” is a genre scene of a folk feast. This part of the cycle is a lyrical and dance suspension, contrast between reality and the essence of the Jewish people with their culture, traditions, songs and dances. Freilechs is the most famous collective Jewish dance performed at weddings. While performing freilechs, people are lined up in one line or in a circle and they move to music with a specific set of movements and peculiar procession; circle can move left or right. This dance also has such titles as “Karagod”, “Reidle” and even “Seven-forty”. The main dance character of the play “Freilechs” of Elgiser is not felt immediately, but only due to the characteristic common time (regularly changing  $2/4 + 3/4$ ,  $4/4 + 2/4$ ), genre features are recognized. At the forefront, there is sad and rather lyrical initial intonation of whirling into G-minor which alternatively passes from voice to voice and develops against the background of moderately sustained bass. This theme passes several times in the form, giving features of rondality to the structure of the work. The middle of the first section is closely related to the first part of the cycle, where similar sharp chord verticals with minor seconds in their composition are used. This is some kind of leit-intonation, which passes through the entire suite cycle in the form of vertical structures, then in the form of a melodic “painful” movement. In addition, the presence of syncopes closely connects this section with the first part of the cycle. The middle section of the second part has more vivid nature, despite retention of minor mode (C-minor), whose colors provide restraint. Loud dynamics, unrestrained movement, revival of tempo add to this section features of climax, creating an impression of general dance euphoria. However, with appearance of the theme of whirling from the first section, everything returns to the original emotional mood, reminding of the inevitability of fate.

Lyrical-excited dance part of the cycle is replaced by a dramatic “Reminiscence on the camp past”. The third part of the cycle, its climax, emerges as a dramatically excited and

intense story, in which bitterness, sorrow and sufferings were completely revealed. For implementation of his plan, the composer chose the form of variations, where in two main sections forms combined signs of double variations, variations on basso ostinato and soprano ostinato. In contrast to the previous two parts, which were written in the same tonality, in the third part of the cycle the composer changes the main tone center. The theme, which is the basis of variations has been originally set out unanimously, in low register, reservedly, intensely and tragically. The melodic line of the theme is based on continuous breath and covers eight bars. Phrygian A-minor, rich in chromatic sounds, is the mode basis of the theme. Falling general motion of melody outlines the signs the hidden double-voicedness, where the line of the lower layer vividly depicts a falling rigid movement on chromatisms. Such a symbolic falling movement, corresponding to a rhetorical figure of *passus duriusculus*, was rather widespread during the flowering of variations on basso ostinato (XVI – XVIII centuries), along with the advantage of the falling movement (*katabasis*) and meant climbing, falling, and death. There are similar themes in West European music, in particular the themes of fugues from *The Well-Tempered Clavier* and *Crucifixus* of the High Mass by J. S. Bach that come to our mind. Consequently, the theme from the very beginning creates a continuous flow of expressive intonations that resemble a groan of violently tortured, suffering people. The theme is followed by five variations, where against the background of constant bass, its contrapuntural support varies its. The composer uses different variants of rhythmic transformation of upper voices and partial modifications of harmonious development. The last one, the fifth variation from the variation section on basso ostinato creates a greatest tension, performing the climax function. Changing the texture to the compacted chord presentation with new articulation techniques for the work and octave duplication of the theme, the feeling of the greatest tension and drama is achieved. The end of the construction that forms a period of open type, becomes a logical connection to the next section of the form - variations on soprano ostinato.

As the theme of this section, Elgiser chooses inversion of the theme of variations on basso ostinato, presenting the theme in a mirrored inversion. It shifts to a higher register, and during variation it shifts one octave above. In this type of variation, the theme, still sounds ostinato, but an accompaniment to it changes. The first variation is based on a relatively contrasting double-voicedness, where the counterpoint to the theme becomes an anti-alignment, which with its graphic contours resembles the first version of the theme. Such

“incomplete voicedness” in the form of double-voice conduct, as a means of developing of the first variation, gives an impact to subsequent transformations, to the gradual accumulation of the textual voices and the presentation of the last variation that functions as a coda. The final variation is prepared by a three-tone bunch of improvisational character and returns a variant of the theme to basso ostinato. A grandiose sound is emphasized by a dense chord presentation with a bass grace note, where contours of the theme, which sounds simultaneously in four octaves, appear on the foreground. Such completeness of sound one more time emphasizes significance of thematic material and creates an impression of choral-requiem for the dead ones, executed and tortured Jews on the background of the memorial bell. Such a method of textual presentation resembles similar moments in the works of M. Mussorgsky, and the theme of bells connects this episode with piano sound reproduction of S. Rachmaninov.

The fourth part of the cycle – “Eternal Wanderer” is perceived as a true symphonic finale after a dark, mournful third part. The main theme of the finale is a theme of “an eternal wanderer”, which can be seen as a generalized image of the eternally wandering Jewish people, is used here as a refrain of a five-part rondo. The melody of a refrain is monotonous, accompanied by unstable and altered chords of G-sharp minor. In the first statement the theme grows to a simple three-part form with a dynamic reprise. Smooth enharmonic modulation takes to A-minor of the first episode of rondo, which immerses in the world of romantic lyrics. On the background of the nocturnal texture of the accompaniment there is a sophisticated and patterned melody with a characteristic national color. The second appearance of the refrain is shortened, thematic material is modified, the “wandering” melody is torn between two octaves, which brings a characteristic anxiety. The next episode is relatively slow, suppressed due to B flat minor, which is often associated with tragic images and situations. Development resembles an excited story, which gradually reaches its climax. The form is completed by the main theme of rondo, which sounds quite dynamically here thanks to the dense chord presentation and the almost synchronous rhythm of all the voices of texture. Thus, the finale of the suite demonstrates the doom of the situation associated with the fate of all the Jews, who are forced to roam around the world. In general, the suite is logically built, and it is based on a four-part structure, whereas each part has its own program concept, can claim independence, which is a sign of the genre, and at the same time, the

work is extremely integral, where it is possible to find features of a sonata-symphonic cycle and the principle of symphonic development.

The Holocaust theme is the central theme of the collection **“Jewish Piano Music: Arrangement of Jewish Folk Songs”**. This theme goes, as A. Isak mentions, as a “red thread” through one more piano cycle – **“Reminiscence on a tourist trip to Germany”**. “In all three parts – “In Treptow Park”, “Remember the prisoners of Zackenhausen, the road to death”, “Farewell dinner in the basement of Auerbach” – grief for six million Jews who died innocently in the years of the Second World War sounds”[5, 93].

The first part of the suite “In Treptow Park” begins with a magnificent and restrained marching procession, which symbolizes the stepping by the park where the memorial dedicated to the Second World War is located, the monument to the Soviet soldier and the burial of about 7,000 soldiers. Depressed mood and painful experiences embodied in this play are enhanced by a minor tonality, chord composition of texture, measured duration and dotted rhythm. All these features contribute to the sound of the funeral march. Characteristic rigid consonances, added tones in chords with predominance of second layers, octave duplications in a low register, at the same time, reproduce the image of a granite monument in the center of the memorial and unshakable memory of the victims of the war.

A complicated three-part form, which is the basis of this part of the cycle, reveals in a contrasting manner all the experiences of a sorrowful journey. Solemn and depressed march through Treptow Park is replaced by an extremely expressive and excited middle part, which is formed from two contrasting periods in E flat minor and C major. The first section of the middle is based on the ostinato triplet rhythm in the middle layer of the texture on the background of the tonic organ point, creating an impression of continuous bitter crying. As the voice of the past, a kind of sorrowful choral, a party of the right hand appears, combining the past and the present in a single mourning sound. All development gradually goes down to the lower register, preparing new memories that are extremely vividly represented in the second period of a simple two-part form. Here the composer appeals to sound imaging, where the dotted rhythm, underlined by octave doubling of sounds in the low register, reproduces a knock hoof of a horse. A battle scene is very realistic. The composer creates both the moments of struggle and the sound of automatic queues by musical means. The main tone center is almost not felt, because it is full of all sounds of a chromatic system. A dynamic reprise of the form synthesized signs of a mourning march and a sorrowful episode,

involving a triplet echo of crying from the middle into the general chord texture of the reprise. However, in the final section, it, like continuous pain, whirls in a low register with octave duplications. The part is finished by measured, monolithic chords, symbolizing hopelessness and death.

This depressing mood continues in the next part of the cycle “Remember the prisoners of Zackenhausen, the road of death”, where in a concise simple three-part form all pain and sufferings of people who walked “The Road of Death” were revealed. Hard quarters on sf begin the play, and on their background in the low register a soulless and mechanical theme sounds. Episodes on piano do not relieve stress, because dissonant consonances, repetition of individual intonation turns, rhythmic osintinato figures create an impression of continuous supplication, prays. A reprise of the form becomes a culmination of all the hostile, terrible and soulless.

The last part of the Suite “Farewell Dinner in the Auerbach basement” stylistically differs from all previous material. A play of a somewhat romantic mood with elements of dance, where all components of the musical language are devoid of rigidity. A created image, light, carefree mood that prevails throughout this part, positively completes the entire cycle. Consequently, “Reminiscence on a tourist trip to Germany” recreates an impression of the composer from traveling to Germany, where feelings and memories of the tragic fate of the Jewish people, its past, terrible years of the war and positive mood when the tour finishes with dinner in the famous Leipzig restaurant are closely interlaced. This contrast of images, worries is emphasized by the composer and contrasting of various types of organization of musical fabric, style: the past is highlighted by means of contrast polyphonic thinking, modern - homophonic-harmonic style.

Worries and feelings associated with the tragedy of the Second World War, J. Elgiser conveyed in the play “Babyn Yar”, where, as an epigraph, he chose the words of E. Yevtushenko: “There are no monuments over Babyn Yar / A steep is like a rough tombstone”. The answer to these words was the musical piece by Elgiser and poetic lines of the author: “There are monuments in Babyn Yar / You can’t count them all / There is a trace of the fascist gang / Jewish blood is whiteness of Menorah. / The wax fades by the frozen tears / Descendants remember the Holocaust. / The path is outlined by the rows of ancestors / From Kurinovka there is a ghost of death, / Dogs’ barking and nightmare of atrocities: / In such a way Babyn Yar is defined” [8, 41]. And again the work of Elgiser shows images of



fascism, which he often depicts by means of chord composition with predominance of quarter chords, rigid consonances. The accents of weak or relatively high beats of the bar, unevenness of the rhythmic pulsation create an impression of unexpected strokes, uneven pulse and killer shots. The subject of the work and used epigraph of E. Yevtushenko, connects the composer's idea with the idea of D. Shostakovich in his 13th symphony, where the events of Babyn Yar became the basis of Part I. This work was performed by J. Elgiser in Kiev on the occasion of the 65th anniversary of the tragedy in Babyn Yar.

Along with piano works devoted to Jewish subjects, the composer also worked on the processing of Jewish folk songs. They have different themes and figurative content. Elgiser turned to songs that reveal a hard fate of the Jewish people, love lyrics, household themes: "Manger's Testament", "In a Heder", "Let's Make It Up", "Wedding Dress", "Night Songs", "There is a Town near a Hut", "Martyr's song" and so on. Folk songs which are the basis of the compositions of Elgiser, recorded in different years from the mouths of representatives of the Jewish community (1991, 2001) and missions from Canada at the "Peisa" feast (1996). Depending on the nature and content of the song, musical features of the work changed their characteristics and were enriched by appropriate means. Melodies of the Jewish songs are filled with soft lyrical intonations with characteristic moves on the enlarged seconds, which influenced their organization mode, in the basis of which there is often double harmonious minor. However, most songs are diatonic. In the works of dramatic content the recitation with fractional beats is joined by a group of repetitive notes. The expressive manner of vocal performance is also contributed by the piano party, which absorbed the features of the Jewish music.

**Conclusions.** Thus, among the works of diverse content, a significant place in the creative works of Elgiser is taken by music of the Jewish theme. Folk songs and recollections of slavery solo songs of the wartime collected by his own efforts, the composer puts in the basis of piano suite series and vocal pieces with piano accompaniment. Emphasizing the importance of this theme, Elgiser was extremely sensitive to the implementation of the plan. These works reveal the most striking features of the artist's creativity, where the academic techniques of the composer technique are combined with their own melodic-harmonic style and features of the Jewish folk music.

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