

**Dong Xinyuan,**

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0804-1547>

*applicant of the Department of Music History and musical ethnography of The*

*Odessa National A. V. Nezhdanova Academy of Music*

*OdDongXinyuan@gmail.com*

## **MUSICAL PRINCIPLES OF CREATING AN OPERA CHARACTER IN THE N.A. RIMSKOGO-KORSAKOV'S OPERAS**

**The purpose** of the article is to reveal the musical and linguistic principles of creating an image of an opera character in the works of M. A. Rimsky-Korsakov, as well as to determine the role of the musical beginning in the figurative drama of the operas of Russian composers of the classical age. **The methodology** of the research is determined by the textual and genre-typological approaches. **Scientific novelty** is connected with the allocation of the main principles of constructing the image of the character in the works of M. A. Rimsky-Korsakov and the proof of the fundamental significance of the category of chronotope in his operatic poetry. **The conclusions** indicate that the increase of expressiveness of the melodic thematisation of the operatic text acts as the leading way of personification of the operatic image, including the motive formation of the musical-thematic horizontal and its dense filling with leitmotifs, allows us to create in the operatic text the effect of "infinite melody as one of the characteristic moments of involuntary wagnerism M.A. Rimsky-Korsakov.

**Keywords:** Rimsky-Korsakov, operatic poetics, chronotope, image of the hero, musical dominants of N. A. Rimsky-Korsakov's opera works, musical language, musical thematism.

*Дун Синьюань, здобувач кафедри історії музики та музичної етнографії ОНМА ім. А. В. Нежданової.*

**Музичні принципи створення образу персонажу в операх М. А. Римського-Корсакова.**

**Мета** статті – виявити музично-мовні принципи створення образу оперного персонажу в творчості М. А. Римського-Корсакова, також визначити роль музичного начала в образній драматургії опер російських композиторів класичної доби. **Методологія** дослідження визначається текстологічним та жанрово-типологічним підходами. **Наукова новизна** пов'язана з виділенням головних принципів побудови образу персонажу в творчості М. А. Римського-Корсакова та з доведенням фундаментального значення категорії хронотопу в його оперній поетиці. **Висновки** вказують на те, що збільшення виразових можливостей мелодійної тематизації оперного тексту виступає провідним способом персоніфікації оперного образу, у тому числі мотивне формування музично-тематичної горизонталі і її щільне заповнення лейтмотивами дозволяє створювати в оперному тексті ефект «нескінченної мелодії як один з характерних моментів мимовільного вагнеріанства М. А. Римського-Корсакова.

**Ключові слова:** Римський-Корсаков, оперна поетика, хронотоп, образ героя, музичні доміанти оперної творчості Н. А. Римського-Корсакова, музична мова, музичний тематизм.

*Дун Синьюань, соискатель кафедры истории музыки ОНМА им. А. В. Неждановой.*

**Музыкальные принципы создания образа персонажа в операх Н. А. Римского-Корсакова**

**Цель** статьи – выявить музыкально-языковые принципы создания образа оперного персонажа в творчестве Н. А. Римского-Корсакова, также определить роль музыкального начала в образной драматургии опер русских композиторов классической эпохи. **Методология** исследования определяется текстологическим и жанрово-типологическим подходами. Научная новизна связана с выделением главных принципов построения образа персонажа в творчестве Н. А. Римского-Корсакова и с доказательством фундаментального значения категории хронотопа в его оперной поэтике. **Выводы** указывают на то, что увеличение выразительных возможностей мелодической тематизации оперного текста выступает ведущим способом персонификации оперного образа, в том числе мотивное формирование музыкально-тематической горизонталі и ее плотное заполнение лейтмотивами позволяет создавать в оперном тексте эффект «бесконечной мелодии» как один из характерных моментов невольного вагнерианства Н. А. Римского-Корсакова.

**Ключевые слова:** Римский-Корсаков, оперная поэтика, хронотоп, образ героя, музыкальные доминанты оперного творчества Н. А. Римского-Корсакова, музыкальная речь, музыкальный тематизм.

**The relevance** of the topic and the problem area of research is determined by the fact that all N. Rimsky-Korsakov's works, from "Pskovyanka" to "Kitez", is a direct way of opera reform, due to the composer's desire to create a single universal model of the opera genre. The operatic poetics of Rimsky-Korsakov is a unique example of the systemic logical

unity of all works in this genre in the world artistic practice, when all compositional components are aimed at revealing the spiritual unity of a person. What is usually called the motive of the hero's behavior, the psychological implication of his actions, turns out to be a very broad phenomenon that not only individualizes the character but also allows one to see and understand the states and aspirations common to the human consciousness. The motives that drive the heroes of Rimsky-Korsakov's operas are not accidental; they correspond to those antinomies of being, as the composer reveals the general duality of life in the plots and dramaturgy of his operas [5].

These motives of action reflect the formation of images, become more specific due to their *personification*. In other words, they are perceived not so much as the relation of one hero to another, but rather as its essential definition, as confirmation of the hero's main character trait. For example, Fevronia is in regret and high Christian love for Gregory Kuterma because she is a bearer of the gift of forgiving love. The misfortune of the Dirty is not determined by his selfish love for Martha, on the contrary, his feelings for Martha are absorbed by the fatal gloom of his soul as the main condition inherent in him. Heroes Rimsky-Korsakov's operas are carriers of a certain type of feelings from the very beginning, which they reveal in their relationships. Therefore, it is very important for the composer to deeply develop the character of this feeling, to give it a value definition, to bring it out as an operatic symbol with a broad semantic basis. The musical opera language serves for the refinement, specification, artistic perfection of such symbols.

**The purpose** of the article is to identify the musical and linguistic principles of creating the image of an opera character in the work of N. Rimsky-Korsakov, to determine the role of the musical principle in the figurative dramaturgy of operas by Russian composers of the classical era.

**The main content** of the work. The musical side of N. Rimsky-Korsakov's operas can be called the leading means, the main lever of the basic motifs and symbols interpretation. The symbolism of time and space is among them, which, at the first glance, seems to be a background means, but turns out to be the high and ultimate sign of the demiurgic natural-elemental history in general genre-compositional context, that plunges individual human fates into the cycle of significant events.

Game variability of time - space, as well as a game with a value-complete, absolutely "ready", which is in an island position, relies on the emancipation of time and space as

artistic phenomena by self-contained, so epically determined by the past (in Bakhtin's terminology), that is, on their presentation as "depicted", expressed by artistic and composite means. According to D. Likhachev's observation, "the actual time and the depicted time are the essential aspects of the whole artistic work ..."; this author also notes that "... the problem of depicting of the timeless and "eternal" is in close contact with the problem of the depicting of time..." [2, p. 212, 217, 234]. The specificity of Rimsky-Korsakov's musical poetics is that he introduces as "actual" time as depicted, not only as the time of life (scenic) and the actions of his opera heroes, but also as his own author's musical time — contemporary, updated means of musical expressiveness, those which begin a "dialogue of disagreement" with the traditional, typical material of ritual and folklore genres that carry the epic, that is, timeless, in its pure form. The composer shows this material by means of citation and stylization, but *stylization is extremely similar to citation*, which identifies the author and anonymous collective expression with the subordination of the first to the second, dissolving in it.

Music as an ontological phenomenon (primary folk, round dance genres) opposes the secondary individual author's composition, at the same time realizing as in a certain experience of learning the fundamental principles of musical creativity in it. Between the various musical and temporal dimensions clear boundaries were made, provided by the rhetoric of musical "formulations".

The model of each opera serves to reveal the main idea, the main plot - the "meta-plot" in a specific compositional material. This is a transition from one group of ideas about the world to another in search of the truth about man and his general historical purposes. Each of these groups is represented through a complex of characters. Various compositional ways, methods of compositional implementation of individual opera plots are aimed at identifying this unified semantic basis. We don't speak about a universal interpretation of the compositional and dramatic principles of the opera, but about *the understanding of opera as a universal form of musical creativity, which is capable of understanding, combining all the accumulated, existing material of music, and therefore capable of revealing a common single nature of the human personality*. This very approach to the genre becomes the reform of operatic poetics in the work of N. Rimsky-Korsakov. This work allows us to talk about the discovery of another system of connections between verbal-poetic text as the primary source of the libretto and the structure of the libretto itself, the laws of scenography and

compositional unfolding of the plot, figurative structures and their style treatment, poetic description language and musical language, intonational choice and general semantics of the genre. All these phenomena form the indissoluble circle of the composer's operatic poetics. The composition of the opera serves the connecting level, it acquires typical moves that provide a figurative typology.

The meaning of “motif” becomes general for dramaturgy: this is the expression of a value conditionality of the image, that is, the motif of the action, the hero's behavior, that identifies and unites the fate of a group of characters, and the musical motif itself, the leitmotif with its own specific intonational semantics, refers to the “fate” of the music itself, to the history of musical formation. The latter is connected with the “encyclopedic character” of the opera language of Rimsky-Korsakov. Rimsky-Korsakov also addresses such a typically tragic theme-motivation as “creation-destruction”, which in some cases transforms into “death-rebirth”; the death of the hero or his departure from the real human world is a compulsory plot-compositional course of the opera.

However, the concept of opera in Rimsky-Korsakov's work can not be called tragic, even in case of a reference to a specific historical chronology and its participants (in “Pskovyanka”, “Tsar's Bride”, “Servilia”, “Pan Voyevoda”), the death of positive characters turns out to be “allowed”, justified and “corrected”, transformed into *a compositional conclusion* of the opera, that is transferred into a post-tragic dimension.

“The Legend of Kitezh” becomes a grand synthesis, summing up the entire operatic activity of Rimsky-Korsakov in the direction of a large “serious” epic opera of Glinka's model. At the same time, this is a summing up of history and the entire Russian classical opera, that appeared precisely from Glinka paradigm. We want to note that Rimsky-Korsakov sums up the evolution of the Russian opera twice: sublimely-“memorial” in “Kitezh” and “familiarily”-profanely in “Golden Cockerel”, who performed the auto parody. It is indicative of the composer's creative approach that he doesn't refer to the heroic narratives of the Tatar-Mongolian yoke in “Kitezh”, which have the ready plot models, but to various chronicle-legendary original sources, summarizing them in the libretto, which, in fact, is an independent literary work, that is, allows the composer to express his own rather independent of event-factual prerequisites, idea - a “meta-plot”, a monotheme. The composer still avoids a precisely chronologized historical drama, and the heroes' character and the type of development of the action is explained by the intention to symbolically reveal

those natural properties, human abilities that determine its relationship with the world, the ways of entering the reality. That is why he avoids the individualization of characters; this is especially noticeable in the images of Kitez people (starting with the clearly rhetorical orientation of the verbal text of all the scenes that take place in Kitez) and in even more unified images of the Tatars. The latter are a generalized hostile force without a specific historical “address” and are most clearly embodied in “pure” music — in the symphonic intermission “The Battle of Kerzhenets”. Rimsky-Korsakov convinces that neither the verbal material nor the scene situation can achieve such a degree of semantic integrity as the musical sound.

The desire to show the holistic content of the common event, the action of the individual person and the interdependence of these principles forces Rimsky-Korsakov to choose the chronicle tone, both in the libretto and in the musical composition of the opera, in order to achieve an "organic integrity of moods" and their logical change. The external dramatic dynamics of the “positions” give way to the dynamics of the “states”, feelings. Hence the special character of the musical symbolism of the opera allows us to understand the symbolic functions of musical techniques and illuminates them retrospectively in earlier operas.

“The game of times” appears as a game of musical and style boundaries within the work. The combination of the value-completed epic time and the severity of the experience of the present moment occurs not only in the time sequence of the opera, diachronically, but also in the spatial textural vertical, reflects the filling of the stage space, is carried out simultaneously through "harmonious complications", inclusion of “autonomous harmonious logic”, dissonant diatonic complexes and “extraneous chromatic” [4].

Music is almost always regarded as a temporary phenomenon, because direct sound creates a sense of the passage of time in any piece of music. In the opera, the musical movement creates the effect of continuous temporary deployment, which compensates the contradictions between the scene expandings and time compression that are inevitable of the dramatic work, that is, the music in the opera turns the conditional scene depicted time into the unconditional actual one. But through this “factuality”, temporal immediacy, music appeals to what has already happened in the past by musical means, to fixed, confined in certain genre forms that have become an integral part of a certain cultural-semantic space;

because the attitude of a genre to culture is determined by its *place* in it, in the socio-ideological hierarchy of cultural artifacts.

On the other hand, the musical time of the opera is a reflection of the psychological states of the characters, the dynamics of the main images development, and in a broader sense it is a reflection of the author's worldview, that is, he asserts the present as the leading time aspect. Thus, the operatic poetry includes the temporary antinomy "past-present", the relevance of which is manifested through Rimsky-Korsakov's interest in the fabulously legendary time. A fair remark by D. Likhachev: "Getting out of a fabulous time into the reality happens ... with the help of the narrator's self-exposure: indicating the storyteller's frivolity, the unreality of everything that is told by him, removing the illusion" [2, p. 227]. The endings of late fairy-tale operas are connected with such self-exposure ("Tales of Tsar Saltan", "The Golden Cockerel"); but Rimsky-Korsakov uses other methods of reaching reality. Firstly, this is the final unification of the participants of the stage action in a certain extra-narrative afterword, which carries a relevant moral statement as an indication of the increased seriousness of the author- "narrator" (the second stage of the finals); secondly, the use of far-away fabulous epic material, of a peculiar dissonant sphere that demonstrates the real drama of a musical consciousness being.

The problem of space in the opera is associated primarily with stage space, with the change of scenery. At the same time, this is the amount of the world perception, given to this or that hero. Thus the antinomicity and spatial coordinates of the opera arise as the "two-dimension" of the real - imaginary (illusory), closed - open, final - infinite, historical (domestic) - natural space, that reflects transitivity as a composer's special quality of thinking in a certain way (see about transitivity: [1]).

The reflection of real time and space finds a place in the operas with the most revealed historicism of the plot. (Pskov of the reign of Ivan the Terrible, Alexander settlement in 1572, ancient Rome during the reign of Nero, 67 AD). However, the first opera "Pskovityanka" retreats from the exact chronology. L. May combined two historical events (1510 and 1570) in his drama to achieve greater dramatic tensions; the composer moves away from this tension, colors the opera in narrative "chronicle" tones, abstracts the true meaning of historical events in the form of the hourly struggle between good and evil, which can occur at any time and in any place ...

In some cases N. Rimsky-Korsakov uses a conditional, approximate definition of the place and time: Poland of the XVI-XVII centuries., "half-legendary - half-historical" time of Novgorod, half-Christian - half-pagan Russia. Most often he refers to an imaginary space and time: the mythical pagan time of the dark Kashchei kingdom; the country of Berendees; the mythical Christian time of the fairy tale Dodon's kingdom; time and space in Gogol' operas, the time and space of Gogol's novels, that are already artistic fictional. Finally, the idea of time and space as a category of natural forces that coincide is used. Thus, the seasons in operas are presented as static states, as a given (B. Asafiev draws attention to it for the first time); nature becomes both a time of being and a human dwelling place. So, spring is a place of action in "Snow Maiden", "May Night", summer - in "Mlada", winter - in "Christmas Eve", autumn - in "Kashchei", "Tsar's Bride".

On the other hand, certain natural spaces symbolize the temporary life of the hero; such is the water space in "Sadko", "Saltan", the starry sky, airspace - in Gogol's operas, in "Mlada", the forest - in operas "Pskovityanka", "Snow Maiden", "Mlada", "The Noblewoman Vera Sheloga", "Pan Voyevoda", "Kitezh". A peculiarity of the game interpretation of chronotopes is the free placement of characters, both in time and in space. The composer points out that "the action takes place in the Little Russian village Dykanka, in a palace in the capital and in the airspace" in the subtitle of the "Christmas Eve". We meet the same free movement of heroes in "Mlada", "Sadko", "Kashchei", "Saltan" and in other operas. Comparison of the finite, limited and infinite, unlimited time and space is discovered by the opera "Mozart and Salieri": the time of Salieri is limited by the interval from the idea of the crime to its realization; Mozart's time is identical to the existence of his music. The composer uses the display of a closed space, limited by a room that this character does not leave, to reveal Salieri's inner state, while Mozart, leaving, remains in Salieri's thoughts and in the sound of his music, forever belongs to the creative space that is free from evil thoughts ... The final of "Pskovityanka" turns out to be symbolic: Olga rejects her father's proposal, and her death takes place as a "step to freedom" at the moment when she leaves the closed space of Grozny's tent. A similar idea of destruction, overcoming the narrow space will be leading in the opera "Kashchei the Immortal".

The leading means of the musical characteristics of space are "picturesque"-colouric sonoric that generaty a special figurative thematism, that is the rethought general forms of movement, that are often based on the transformation of a harmonious vertical into a melodic

horizontal.

The nature animated by the human presence and the communal folk being which is associated with the natural principle, always represent only the positive sphere of operas. The musical characteristics of heroes, more often heroines, that are personifying the ability to love-gift, are adjacent to it; their leitmotifs replace the usual themes of love, since the latter usually express a personal feeling, which is limited by it. Rimsky-Korsakov seeks to reveal the universal significance of love as a special “resonant” spiritual state. He chooses song-diatonic themes close to folklore with the same purpose, that influence the generalized typical

interpretations of the beautiful heroines images - Martha, Maria, Fevronia, for whom love-gift is inherent, a natural feature. This is how the motif of catholicity is musically embodied.

In cases where the inner world of the heroine emerges gradually, Rimsky-Korsakov deepens the cantilized song side of their partness as the ability for a sublime love is born and revealed in their images. So, Olga is described in mainly recitative and short musical phrases in the first act of “Pskovytanka”. The first developed cantilena melody appears in her duet with the Cloud, based on the real folk song “Oh, you, the field”. In the “May Night” Oksana’s change of appearance from a capricious and wayward beauty (the first picture) to a deeply loving girl is also “illustrated” by introducing two expressive folk tunes into her party: “The arrow flew” and “Come out, come out, Ivanko” (aria from the ninth scene). The theme of Olga's attraction to her father, the aria of Martha, and the output aria of Fevronia are based on a wide, free song intonation. The folk-song genres, sometimes real folk melodies in the characteristics of Clouds, Levko, Vakula, Ioan Korolevich, Gvidon are similar to this monothematic complex of love-gift.

Nature in Rimsky-Korsakov’s operatic poetics is also “dual”; on the one hand, it is part of the popular life, a positive principle that creates a person; on the other hand, it is characterized as an unusual, miraculous branch that surprises and even scares. It represents the fantastic sphere of Rimsky-Korsakov’s operas. The natural images in their second meaning force the composer to look for unusual expressive techniques, to update the musical language, to introduce a dissonant harmonious sphere, to push two diatonic systems, to create the sections of “autonomous instability”, unresolved functional harmony, that is, to create the “harmonious evil” against which the composer rebelled, showing unwarranted and unprepared dissonances, “wrong” functional sequences in the works of Wagner and



Mussorgsky [3, 4].

This sphere of the musical language of Rimsky-Korsakov's operas forms his new brightest author's rhetoric (along with the thematic of natural human sphere), primarily by designing harmonious innovations in the melodic sphere. In other words, the melodic horizontal line is determined by the vertical mode-harmonious "profile" (harmonized), which significantly distinguishes Rimsky-Korsakov's melodic innovation from Mussorgsky's melodic discoveries: the latter not only followed the vocal-verbal material, but also subordinated the harmonious structure to the melodic combination of intonations (tuned the harmony).

It is the new melodic formulas, *melody themes* that allow the composer to musically express the transition from the miraculous to the destructive, as well as to show the rescue rebirth. For example, the broken passage of a reduced seventh-chord in a high register, in parties of a harp or strings foreshadows the appearance of Pannochka, Volkhova, The Swan Princess, the shadow of Princess Mlada in dreams of Yaromir. This same harmony in a low register, intensified by a tremolo sound, becomes a ominous sign. Thus, in the operas "Pskovytyanka" and "The Noblewoman Vera Sheloga" similar stage situations (a scene in the forest) are emphasized with the help of a prolonged use of a reduced seventh chord on the same words: "And the forest is thick: birches and aspens..." This chord acquires a specially gloomy character in a thunderstorm scene in "Pskovytyanka". A chain of diminished seventh chords appears in Oksana's party who admires the picture of the starry sky with the words "Oh, scary ..." The sequence of diminished seventh chords at the distance of the tritone is used in "scary sequences" in the "Christmas Eve".

Attitude to musical material is manifested in the most frequent way of its presenting by repeated varied repetitions of the initial short motif, that is, in the variant-variational method of thematic formation, which is considered typical for the Five. But Rimsky-Korsakov enlarges the details of a musical utterance, sometimes highlighting one intonation, one harmony or mode color, strengthens the compositional and semantic independence of aphoristically short motifs that are capable of representing various stylistic-genre-stylistic spheres of music (different levels of a musical text), alternates them, approaching the general plot logic in musical development. An example of such a motif-thematic work with a musical material is the third and fourth acts of "Kitezh". Leading short leitmotifs replace each other, and their alternation, which leads to semantic contrasts such as changing the

theme, was called the second fanfare theme of Kitezh or the leit-theme of the salvation of Kitezh, is literally illustrated by the stage action.

Therefore, **the scientific novelty** of the research is associated with the identification of the main principles of character image construction in the works of N. Rimsky-Korsakov and the fundamental importance of the category of chronotope in his operatic poetics.

**Conclusions.** The motif formation of the thematic horizontal and its dense filling with leitmotifs allows to find the effect of “endless melody” in Kitezh, one of the characteristic moments of the composer’s spontaneous imitation of Wagner.

In the composer's work of the nineteenth century, the melody in music acquires new syntactic and formal possibilities, causing a new type of musical theme, a thematic complex, as well as new aspects of the interdependence between the thematism and musical form, this is often associated with the dominant romantic direction. The melody begins to dominate over the textural norms, on the one hand, absorbing the functional dependences of tones, inherent in the harmonious vertical, as if turning into a linearly placed harmony (harmony melody), and on the other hand, subordinating the construction of the harmonic vertical to the intonational purpose of the melodic horizontal, that is, turning the harmony into melody (melody-harmony). The first direction of increasing the expressive possibilities of the melodic thematization of operatic text is indicative of the work of N. Rimsky-Korsakov; the other one conditioned the intonational nature of the musical thematism of the operas of M. Mussorgsky. The operatic poetics of P. Tchaikovsky reveals a harmonious balance of both tendencies of interaction between the melodic and thematic and texture-harmonious plans of a musical opera text.

## ***REFERENCES***

1. Gerasimova-Persian, N. (1994). Russian music of the XVII century – the meeting of two eras. M.: Music [in Russian].
2. Likhachev, D. (1979). Poetics of ancient Russian literature. M.: Nauka [in Russian].
3. Solovtsov, A. (1984). N. A. Rimsky-Korsakov. Sketch of life and work. M.: Music [in Russian].
4. Zukkerman, V. (1975). Musical and theoretical studies. About the musical speech of Rimsky-Korsakov. M.: Soviet composer, Vol. 2 [in Russian].
5. Yastrebtsev, V. (1959). Memoirs. 1866-1897. Nikolai Andreevich Rimsky-Korsakov. L.: Music, V.1 [in Russian].

*Date of submission: 27.09.2017*