

Timbral Diversity of Vocal Chamber Music at the Beginning of XIXth Century

Ioana Luminița VASILE¹

Abstract: Usually, when we hear the phrase „vocal chamber music” pronounced, our thought automatically goes to the lieder with piano accompaniment, but this area is much wider. Throughout the history of music, composers have diversified vocal chamber music by adding new instruments along with piano and voice or even by replacing the piano with other instruments. Today, we can enjoy listening to small musical jewels of a timbre diversity that amazes with creativity, beauty and innovation. This article aims to bring into the public's attention the fact that vocal chamber music means much more than lieder for voice with piano accompaniment and is presented in a diverse timbre palette, and the interpretive issue is, for the same reason, just as varied.

Key-words: vocal chambre music; XIXth century; Romantism; tone color; diversity

1. Introduction

Most often, when the public hears the phrase *vocal chamber music* pronounced, they think immediately at the lieder with piano accompaniment, but this area is much wider. Vocal chamber music has various types of ensembles and the voice can be accompanied by harp, guitar or another instrument instead of piano, or it may be accompanied by piano and a wide range of instruments.

Consequently, today we can enjoy listening to small musical jewels like, for example: *Le rossignol* ILD 48 de Léo Delibes for soprano, flute and piano; the cycle of lieder 6 Gesänge, Op.154 for voice, violin and piano by Ludwig Spohr; *Il sogno* for voice, cello and piano by Saverio Mercadante; *Der Sennin Heimweh*, Op.236 for voice, clarinet or violin and piano by Johann Wenzel Kalliwoda, *Des Wandrer's Nachtlid von Goethe* IHW 3 for voice, clarinet or oboe or violin and piano; *Der Hirt auf dem Felsen* D965 for voice, clarinet and piano or *Auf dem Strom* D.943 for voice, horn and piano by Franz Schubert and the examples may continue.

2. The influence of Romanticism on the vocal chamber music

At the end of the XVIIIth century and the beginning of the XIXth century the wave of political and social transformations in Western Europe, as well as the rapid and unprecedented industrial development, had the effect of increasing and consolidating the social class of the bourgeoisie and even a stratification of it. "No one could deny that poets and writers like Swift, Voltaire and Beaumarchais, Lessing and the young Schiller, or painters and graphic artists like Goya or Daumier contributed to discrediting the ruling classes, the church and the state through their critical attitude towards the order of their age."²

¹ Ph. D candidate "George Enescu" University of Arts, vasilie_ioana_luminita@yahoo.com

² Petzoldt, Richard, *Franz Schubert – Sein Leben in Bildern*, Leipzig Bibliographisches Institut, 1956, traducere în limba română de Iuliu Constantin Spiru, *Franz Schubert - Viața în imagini*, Editura Muzicală a Uniunii Compozitorilor din R.P.R., 1962, p. 3.

The appearance of the printing press and the development of printing houses determined the progressive decrease of the price of books, which were no longer just the prerogative of the aristocracy. The number of schools and people who could read and write multiplied exponentially, and the ideas promoted by the new philosophical-literary currents spread rapidly. These changes have produced a domino effect in all areas of daily life, the arts not being excluded." Compared to the closed economy of the feudal era, capitalism brings the development of economic exchanges and also allows the circulation of spiritual goods."³

Therefore, the cult art, regardless of its form, will manage to transcend the boundaries of aristocratic salons and will become, more and more, an integral part in the lives of as many people as possible, who do not enjoy the privileges acquired by birth, and who, until then, they could only be related to folk art. Music has been no exception to this rule of paradigm shift and will, in turn, manage to cross the boundaries of privileged salons and become accessible to an increasing number of people.

The new bourgeoisie wanted to access the cultural privileges, that until then, belonged only to the nobles, and began to make their presence felt in the performance halls. Due to the high demand, they have multiplied and this fact has also determined the increase in the number of professional musicians to serve them. The workshops and factories that built musical instruments developed and multiplied, also the competition between them and their close collaboration with the great virtuosos of the time led to an improvement of musical instruments, both in terms of sound produced and the ease of handling. Gradually, the instruments become accessible for many people.

The appetite of the new public for cult music gave rise to a new habit in bourgeois families, who encouraged their children to learn to play various musical instruments, in order to prove a solid education. In this broad context, chamber music moved from the halls of the nobility to the concert halls and even to the houses of the bourgeoisie.

The composers, who until then were forced by the socio-political context to engage in the court of a nobleman and, because of this, they did not enjoy full freedom to compose, were finally able to become autonomous. The first composer that was able to demonstrate this fact was Ludwig van Beethoven. "Beethoven, the tribune of freedom and humanity (...) is the first musician to be completely released from the obligation to write exclusively for an aristocratic protector. It is addressed to the wider and wider public".⁴

They began composing chamber creations for groups of professional performers, who commissioned them to perform in shows and tours, or promoted their own compositions in performances to earn from the sale of scores. This was also possible due to the rise of music publishing houses at that time.

The influence of *Sturm und Drang* movement, initiated in literature first, spread to all arts and music in particular. Supported by the great German poets Goethe⁵, Schiller⁶ and Heine⁷, the current promoted originality, titanism, creative genius, return to nature, the expression of affectivity and the robust, vigorous character of art.

³ Brumaru, Ada, *Romantismul în muzică*, Editura Muzicală a Uniunii Compozitorilor din R.P.R., București, 1962, p. 41.

⁴ Ibidem, p. 64.

⁵ German poet, playwright, novelist, scientist, statesman, theatre director, critic, and amateur artist. (28 August 1749 – 22 March 1832) https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Johann_Wolfgang_von_Goethe accessed on 01.05. 2021

⁶ German playwright, poet, and philosopher. (10 November 1759 – 9 May 1805) https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Friedrich_Schiller accessed on 01.05. 2021

⁷ German poet, writer and literary critic. (13 December 1797 – 17 February 1856) https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heinrich_Heine accessed on 01.05.2021

"Poetic images of rare beauty and depth will positively influence composers, stimulating their fantasy, causing a qualitative leap in musical commentary (melodic, harmonic, polyphonic, orchestral, etc.) and creating a new vision of the cult lied."⁸

3. Chamber vocal music in the vision of Franz Schubert

In the late eighteenth century Germany, was born a visionary composer, particularly prolific for his short life of only 31 years, which transformed the vocal music of the chamber by the importance given to the lyrics and accompaniment. His name was Franz Schubert.

If, until then, the voice was the center of attention in this musical genre, Schubert is the first to propose to the public a new approach to the lied, closely linked to his love of literature and passion for the piano: "He composes songs incomparably. His literary education is almost complete; he reads at random and everything inspires him."⁹

Lied, as a form, possesses "a strophic structure, based on repetition, variation or contrast, generating - or adopting - the basic patterns of musical forms. Being related to the text, the lied will adapt its form after the construction of the stanzas."¹⁰ Thus, it can be: simple (monopartite, bipartite or tripartite) or developed (bipartite or complex tripartite), but there are also forms derived from lied obtained by the identical or varied repetition of certain motifs, such as the AB-AB double bipartite lied form or the ABABA three-part lied form.

A lied may be either through-composed or strophic, repeating the music for each new stanza of the poem. Composers often wrote cycles of lieder, all related by a single topic, but giving scope for considerable musical development.

Schubert's vision of this instrumental vocal genre is unitary and egalitarian; he builds the lied starting from the literary foundation: poetry, enveloping the words in a suitable melody, carefully chosen to potentiate their impact on the public and to express it simply and clearly, and the harmonic layer supported by the piano does nothing but takes over the melodic theme of the voice and adds more value and emotional impact to the listener. The pianist participates equally with the vocal soloist in creating the musical impression and in describing the sound image, the two performers supporting each other and complementing each other harmoniously in the interpretive process.

The piano has the role of illustrating aurally, through various effects, the natural landscapes, actions or feelings described by the lyrics. For example, in the lied *Erkönig* (The King of the Fairies) the piano builds a restless, dark and mysterious atmosphere from the introduction, by the octaves and chords of triplet value in the right hand, obsessively repeated throughout the piece, and these triplets repeated on the same sounds, together with the melodic line on the left hand, give the impression of a galloping horse, the one described by Goethe in his verses.

Another eloquent example can be the image of the majestic linden tree with the wind-blown branches of the lied *Der Lindenbaum* (Linden tree) belonging to the *Winterreise* lied cycle (Winter Journey) written on the lyrics of the poet Wilhelm Müller¹¹. The theme of the piano in the introduction, a theme that is repeated throughout the work, describes, with the aid of successive chromatic sixths with the triolets with sixteenth value, the wind blowing through

⁸ Bughici, Dumitru, *Dicționar de forme și genuri muzicale*, Editura Muzicală, București, 1978, p. 171.

⁹ Gallet, Mme. Maurice, *Schubert et le Lied*, ed. Perrin & Cie, Libraires-Éditeurs, Librairie Academique, Paris, 1907, p.18. „Il compose aussi des Lieder incomparables. Son éducation littéraire est à peu près achevée ; il lit au hasard et tout l'inspire.”

¹⁰ Teodorescu-Ciocănea, Livia, *Tratat de forme și analize muzicale*, Ed.Grafoart, București, 2014, p. 125.

¹¹ German lyric poet (7 October 1794 – 30 September 1827) ***Grove's Dictionary Of Music and Musicians Edited J. A. Fuller Maitland, The Macmillan Company London: Macmillan & Co., vol. III, p. 317.

the branches of the old linden tree, each wind blade being delimited at the end by a fixed rhythmic formula: eighth with a dot followed by a sixteenth and a half.

The vast majority of the over 600 lieds composed by Schubert are written for voice and piano, but there are also some works in which the piano and voice are accompanied and complemented by other instruments, such as: the clarinet in *Der Hirt auf dem Felsen* or the horn (the one with valves being the innovation of that time) in *Auf dem Strom*. And in these songs, even if the presence of another instrument intervenes, Schubert treats with equal attention the contribution of each performer in the final image of the work, as a whole. The voice, the piano and the clarinet or the horn work efficiently, they blend harmoniously, and these lieds are composed with great care for details and timbre balance.

In the lied *Der Hirt auf dem Felsen* (The Shepherd on the Rock) the idyllic atmosphere of peace, beauty and harmony on the ridges of the Alps is described from the beginning by the piano and clarinet, through the melodic line that mimics the song of birds and the breeze of the wind. Once the natural sound frame is created, the voice makes its presence felt through a delicious dialogue with the clarinet, which recalls the echo, so present in the mountains. There are large interval jumps, reminiscent of the yodel traditionally used by shepherds in the Austrian Alps, initially as a way of long distance communication. Clarinet interventions are well dosed, highlighting the melodic line of the voice and enhancing the effect of the lyrics, and the piano sustains the entire dialogue and blends harmoniously with both instruments, taking over from both thematic elements and developing or transferring them from one to the other.

Auf dem Strom (On the River) is a lied written in 1828, for voice with horn and piano accompaniment. It was composed on the lyrics of the poet Ludwig Rellstab¹², for the only concert with works only by Franz Schubert, ready to take place on the day of the first commemoration of the disappearance of Ludwig van Beethoven: March 26, 1828. It is known that Schubert was an ardent admirer of the Bonn Titan and this song was composed as a tribute to his memory. For that reason, the choice of the horn, whose sound has long been used as a symbol of heroism and strength of character – is not coincidental in this context.

The song begins with an introductory part supported by piano and horn, in which the piano has the role of imitating the waves of the river on which the main character of the lied travels, the one who shares through the verses the sadness of leaving far from the loved one and the birthplaces. With the help of the triplet arpeggios of the right hand, the piano describes sound wave movements. The horn, through its melodic line, introduces us to the universe of the inner feelings of the main character. During the lied, the horn accompanies and enhances the effect of the voice, it blends harmoniously with it and the piano, the final result being surprisingly emotional and sensitive. The three instruments as a whole manage to convey to the public the whole range of feelings felt by the traveler: the longing for home and the loved one, the regret of having to go far, the inner struggle, but also the love and hope that give him the strength to continue the journey and return home.

The perfect symbiosis between word and music that we find in Schubert's lied made the popularity of the genre grow exponentially. The importance of the deep search for the meaning of the lyrics and its transposition into and through music has represented and represents the essential pattern of the lied, which all the other composers adopted, adapting it, of course, to their own personalities and compositional styles.

¹² German poet and music critic. (13 April 1799 – 27 November 1860) ***Grove's Dictionary Of Music and Musicians Edited J. A. Fuller Maitland, The Macmillan Company London: Macmillan & Co., vol. IV, p. 62.

4. The timbre diversity of the Romantic chamber vocal music

„Romantic music is, in some sense, an offshoot of literature ; a reflex of poetry expressed in musical terms; a kind of impressionism which tends to reject formality, and aims at a direct rendering of its object ; a desire to produce musical effects suggested by natural phenomena ; an art eager, sensitive, impulsive, which seeks its ideal of beauty through emotional expression.”¹³

Following Schubert's example and wanting to add novelty and color to the lieds, German romantic composers frequently used the chamber ensemble consisting of voice, horn and piano. Composers such as Franz Paul Lachner¹⁴, Carl Reissiger¹⁵ or Heinrich Proch¹⁶ wrote even more cycles of such lieds: *Waldklänge* (Sounds from the Forest), *3 Gedichte* (3 Poems), *4 Gesänge* (4 Songs), *4 Lieder* (4 Songs). Others, like Louis Spohr¹⁷, Johann Wenzel Kalliwoda¹⁸ or Carl Banck¹⁹ approached them only punctually: *Lied der Emma* (composed for voice, horn and piano or harp); *Heimweh* (Longing for Home), *Abendruh* (Evening Rest).

This practice of accompanying the voice with other instruments is also found in the chamber compositions of other composers of the time, such as: *Ave Maria* by Giovanni Lucantoni²⁰, for voice, cello or violin and piano, *Airs et Romances* (Aries and Romances), Op.4 by Charles Gabriel Foignet²¹, for voice with piano or harp and violin, *La fille aux oiseaux* (The girl with the birds) by Charles Dancla²², for voice, violin and piano, *Ave Maria* by Ruggiero Leoncavallo²³ for voice, violin and harmonium.

The chromatic richness of chamber vocal music from the beginning of the XIXth century is due to all the changes and innovations in the field of music that happened in that

¹³ Dannreuther, Edward, *The Oxford History Of Music* Vol. VI The Romantic Period , Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1905, p. 2.

¹⁴ German composer and conductor. (2 April 1803 – 20 January 1890) ***Grove's Dictionary Of Music and Musicians Edited J. A. Fuller Maitland, The Macmillan Company London: Macmillan & Co., Ltd. 1906, vol. IV, p. 617.

¹⁵ German Kapellmeister and composer. (31 January 1798, Belzig – 7 November 1859, Dresden) ***Grove's Dictionary Of Music and Musicians Edited J. A. Fuller Maitland, The Macmillan Company London: Macmillan & Co., Ltd. 1906, vol. IV, p. 59.

¹⁶ Well-known composer of Lieder, capellmeister, and teacher of singing (22 July 1809 – 18 December 1878) ***Grove's Dictionary Of Music and Musicians Edited J. A. Fuller Maitland, The Macmillan Company London: Macmillan & Co., Ltd. 1906, vol. III, p. 815.

¹⁷ German composer, violinist and conductor. (5 April 1784 – 22 October 1859) ***Grove's Dictionary Of Music and Musicians Edited J. A. Fuller Maitland, The Macmillan Company London: Macmillan & Co., Ltd. 1906, vol. IV, p. 638.

¹⁸ Composer, conductor and violinist of Bohemian birth. (February 21, 1801 – December 3, 1866) ***Grove's Dictionary Of Music and Musicians Edited J. A. Fuller Maitland, The Macmillan Company London: Macmillan & Co., Ltd. 1906, vol. II, p. 558.

¹⁹ German critic (on Schumann's team at the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*), a singing teacher, and one of the foremost song - composers of the 1830s. (27 May 1809 - 28 December 1889) https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carl_Banck accessed on 01.05.2021

²⁰ Italian composer active as a music teacher in Paris (Rieti, 18 January 1825 – Paris, 30 May 1902) https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Giovanni_Lucantoni accessed on 01.05.2021

²¹ French composer and singer (1750 - 1836). https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_Gabriel_Foignet accessed on 01.05.2021

²² French violinist, composer and teacher. (19 December 1817 – 10 October 1907) ***Grove's Dictionary Of Music and Musicians Edited J. A. Fuller Maitland, The Macmillan Company London: Macmillan & Co., Ltd. 1906, vol. I, p. 660.

²³ Italian opera composer and librettist. (23 April 1857 – 9 August 1919) *** Grove's Dictionary Of Music and Musicians Edited J. A. Fuller Maitland, The Macmillan Company London: Macmillan & Co., Ltd. 1906, vol. II, p. 679.

period. The composers wanted to experience new sound effects by combining various musical instruments, some seemingly contrasting, but which proved to be inspired choices over time. The public also embraced the news more lightly than in the past, and this gave even more courage to the composers in their innovative approaches. The effects of these changes are still felt today, through the constant presence of these compositions on stages around the world, being appreciated by music lovers.

5. Conclusions

The vocal chamber music written at the beginning of the XIXth century brought a timbre and chromatic richness never seen before in this musical genre. The inventiveness and courage of the composers to experiment with new sounds, exposed to the public a sound palette with an extended chromatic. This compositional practice will expand over time and will influence and transcend the boundaries of vocal chamber music. The climax of that influence in other music genres was reached by Wagner, who experimented with new sounds in his works, in accordance with his own vision, even inventing new musical instruments, such as the Wagnerian tuba.

The vocal chamber music is a genre highly appreciated even today by music lovers all around the world. So, when this genre is exhibited in concerts with works that include different types of instrumental ensembles, the audience is all the more delighted.

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