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The National Flavor of Russian Piano Music in the 19th Century

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ABSTRACT

In the 19th century, the eastern and western cultures collided in Russia, and Russia was in the interaction between the two. The tortuous historical process and the special geographical environment created a unique creation background. Under the efforts of many composers such as Glinka, The Five and Tchaikovsky, Russian piano works have a unique national flavor and made contributions to the development of piano in the world. Russian piano music in this period has a strong national flavor, unique creation techniques and tragic style, and the expression of delicate emotion and psychological experience has a new height. Based on the development background of Russia in the 19th century, this paper hopes to gain a deeper and essential understanding through analysis.

Keywords: *The 19th century, Piano music, Nation, Russia*

I. INTRODUCTION

Each nation has its own character, and the character of Russians is more special. Philosopher Nicolas Berdyaev once clearly pointed out: "The Russian spirit is contradictory. The world historical trends of the East and the West collide in Russia, and Russia is going through the interaction between the two." Russia spans Europe and Asia. The Russian nation is neither a pure Asian nation nor a pure European nation, but it integrates the characteristics of Asian and European nations. This duality has become Russia's unique national flavor. Russia's national artistic character is called "Shakespeare" and "perceptual" by aesthetes, which is different from that of Germany, France and other countries like "Schiller type" and "philosophical type". Artists of the Russian Piano School believe that piano performance is neither the leisure enjoyment of aesthetes nor auditory games, but the pursuit of language with rich contents and their own feelings.

II. IMPORTANT COMPOSERS AND THE NATIONAL FLAVOR OF THEIR WORKS

In the early 19th century, Russian composers only introduced folk melodies or national themes

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into their works as decoration. Michail Ivanovich Glinka (1804-1857), the "father of Russian music", ushered in the golden age of Russian folk music. He has been influenced by Russian folk music since his childhood. He once traveled and studied in Western Europe and got acquainted with many famous musicians in Western Europe. In his creation, he combined Russian folk music with western European writing skills and injected patriotism into the form of folk music. *Ivan Susanin (The Life of a Czar)* is considered The foundation work of Russian national opera, including The line: "You have always considered me a traitor, and there is no such person in The land of Russia now and in The future! Here everyone loves their country from childhood, and they will never betray their souls." The national color is very bright, and a French critic once gave this work a high evaluation: "It is not only an opera, but a national epic". The success of this work greatly promoted the development of Russian music art. In the field of instrumental music creation, he created the title and variation of folk songs of roads, Among them, the piano work nightingale is a variation adapted from Russian folk songs. In the variation, the theme appears in different parts in different forms. With the change of accompaniment structure, it expresses the national spirit of positive music view. It is one of the works often played by Russian pianists on the international stage. Glinka's creation absorbs exotic and multi-ethnic music language to enrich Russian music forms, which has a great impact on Russian composers in the future.

In The 1860s, Cesar Cui (1835~1918), Mussorgsky (1839—1881), Balakirev (1837-1910), Borodin (1833-1887), Rimsky-Korszkov (1844—1908) formed a powerful group called The Five. They collected, arranged and adapted Russian folk songs and made great contributions to the study of folk music art.

Balakirev, as a representative of The Five, agrees with the nationality of his piano music. The theme of his fantasy song Islamey is the popular folk dance music "Lezginka" in the Caucasus mountains with fast-paced beats representing courage and belief. The theme of Andante in the middle section is typical oriental lyric and fantasy tone, which forms a sharp contrast with the main part. The end accelerates back to the theme, and the ending is a fanatical clapper. This is Balakirev's masterpiece, which is highly artistic and skillful, and has huge influence on the "Oriental style" of The Five. He also adapted Glinka's vocal work Skylark with the flavor of Russian folk songs into a piano work by variation, which integrates the characteristics of instrumental music. The singing melody and playing difficulty shows the unique beauty of skylark.

Mussorgsky advocated the development of the national music and wrote some artistic songs

and instrumental sketches in the early stage of creation. The middle and late 19th century was also the mature period of his creation. In the field of instrumental music, the symphonic poem *Night on Bald Mountain* is more famous. It is based on folk fairy tales. The author has a text description on the original manuscript: The roar of non-human beings from the depths of the earth. It depicts the emergence of the dark ghost and the subsequent appearance of the dark god, the praise to the dark god and the sacrifice to the underworld. At the peak time of the wild and woolly time, the bell of the country church came from a distance, which dispelled the dark ghost. Dawn broke. This is the composer's free imagination of Russian myths and legends. Later, Rimsky Korsakov completed the orchestration; Mussorgsky also wrote the piano divertimento *Pictures at an Exhibition* in memory of his friend Victor Hartmann. This is a program music work, inspired by ten Hartmann's paintings with Russian realistic aesthetics. The piano style of this divertimento is quite original. It develops the expressiveness of the piano. In the work, we can not only hear Russian folk music, but also enjoy the international music language; there are both the timbre texture of brass instruments and the tone characteristics of the national music instruments. The work takes *Promenade* as the introduction and interlude, and combines *Gnomus*, *The Old Castle*, *The Tuileries Gardens*, *Bydlo*, *Ball of The Chickens in Their Shells*, *Samuel Goldenberg And Schmuyle*, *The Market Place At Limoges*, *The Catacombs*, *Cum Mortuis In Lingua Mortua* *The Hut On Fowl's Legs* *And The Great Gate Of Kiev* into an inseparable whole. *Promenade* mostly adopts functional harmony, while other compositions pursue personalized harmony to a greater extent. For example, the first theme of *Gnomus* is played forcefully in parallel with a dissonant interval in order to express a music image full of complaints; Mussorgsky skillfully uses the syncopation rhythm of chords to express the first sub theme similar to crying; while the second sub theme is composed of a small trio spanning three sound zones to deepen the image in the first sub theme to achieve the poor and miserable effect. At the beginning of *Bydlo*, the main chord in #g minor is used as bass accompaniment to create a custom picture with a heavy atmosphere; in terms of *Ballet of The Chickens in Their Shells* and *The Hut on Fowl's Legs*, a large number of four degree dissonance intervals are added in the bass part; the whole work absorbs the nutrients of folk music in music language and form, and is full of Russian national flavor.

Rimsky Kosakov is an exotic composer in The Five. He is recognized as one of the best "landscape painters of the sea". He sailed with the ship in his youth, and everywhere he went provided fresh materials for his future creation. His works mostly focus on folklore and history. His works have diverse styles. They not only have strong Russian national characteristics, but

also exude the mysterious flavor of the East.

Tchaikovsky (1840-1893) is the most well-known composer in Russian history. The heyday of his creation was the dark period under the rule of Tsar Alexander III. When Leo Tolstoy heard the second movement of his D Major First String Quartet, he burst into tears and said, "I have touched the soul of the suffering people." This work reflects the heaviness and uneasiness of the Russian people under the rule of the Czar. These emotions take root in the hearts of the Russian people and are an indispensable part of the national flavor. Tchaikovsky's *Dumka* can be translated as "Meditation" created by Tchaikovsky in 1886. The work emphasizes the singing of melody, makes full use of the distant and tragic music theme and fast alternating rhythm to shape the contradictory psychology, and presents the mood of the Russian nation to the extreme. Tchaikovsky integrates his strong national sentiments into the work and expresses his love for the Russian scenery incisively and vividly.

The whole song uses 4 / 4 beats and is mainly in natural minor, which is in line with the characteristics of the mode of Russian folk songs, which is mainly in natural minor. Tchaikovsky puts the plucking characteristics of national musical instrument "Gusli" and Slavic dance music together to present the national elements in the works. The work uses the characteristics of small range activities of Russian folk songs to make short repetitions of the melody in the range of four degrees, so as to deepen the impression of the melody and pave the way for the development of the melody. The first part, *Andantino cantabile*, has dark color in C minor and rigorous texture. The left hand uses the playing method of column chord arpeggio to imitate the plucking effect of the Russian folk instrument "Gusli" and the melody of the right hand is like a song, which seems to be the singing form of folk songs. The melody theme sound uses a long-time duration and has a broad breath. The theme melody appears many times in the form of changing rhythm in the whole song, which is the characteristics of Russian ritual folk songs. The second part is the combination of stress and jumping in the elements of Slavic national music to express the cheerful emotions. In Russian dance music, rhythmic stress often appears, forming the alternation of strong and weak beat positions. The stress controls the music rhythm with restraint, making the melody and beat unique. In *Dumka* there are also paragraphs with alternating rhythmic remake, such as the homophonic connection of the high voice part breaking the stable sixteenth note rhythm. This alternating rhythmic remake is one of the characteristics of some tunes of Russian folk songs.

His collection of piano sketches, *The seasons*, is familiar to us. When talking about this work, *negoz*, a representative of the Russian piano school, once said: "it is not so much a piano music

as a collection of pictures and paintings." for example, *July--song of the realers*, which describes the countryside,uses the melody of folk songs,and has the style of chaltas dance music; *November--Troika* adopts the natural scale in Russian folk songs,and the melody is full of vitality. These 12 works are closely related to Russia. It can be said that they are a description of the natural scenery of Russia or the humanistic life of Russia. They integrate the Russian national customs, contain this strong national consciousness and democratic spirit, and are the epitome of society.

III. CONCLUSION

Each nation has its own traditional artistic character. In the process of historical development, it gradually infiltrates aesthetic perception and forms a unique national flavor consciousness. Russian artworks in the 19th century is prosperous. Regardless of Glinka, The Five or Tchaikovsky, composers agree with the expression of national character very much, and even regard it as a responsibility to explore the excellent elements of Russian national culture with keen senses, and express national pride through creation. So they created unique piano music with Russian characteristics, which is of great significance of connecting the past and the future for Russian artistic creation, pushing Russian music to reach an unprecedented height at the end of the 19th century. During this period, Rubinstein brothers, Horowitz, Neuhaus, Feinberg, Goldenweiser, Igumnov, Nikolayev and other outstanding piano players and educators rose. Through their efforts, the Russian piano music with national flavor has developed rapidly and gradually formed the Russian Piano School. Russian senior artists, with their unique national spirit and artistic style, become an important part of the trend of romantic music in the world. In the history of piano music art, they have occupied a position. So far, there are still many unknown masters with high artistic accomplishment in Russian music colleges and universities. Large and small theaters in the city are often full of audience, and the Russian people's enthusiasm for music art has never stopped. The national flavor of Russian piano music is still inherited, which seems to have been carved into the deepest part of the musical spirit.
