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C. Debussy's Vocal and Choral Music from The Aspect of Artistic Dialogue with The Traditions of Ancient Musical Art

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Abstract

The article deals with the study of the cycle *Trois Chansons de Charles d'Orléans* by Claude Debussy. The innovation and genre diversity of C. Debussy's musical heritage requires a thorough study in various aspects, from historical one to genre and style. Among the least studied problems of French musical art in the early twentieth century is the question of the phenomenon of dialogue of musical traditions in C. Debussy's choral work. This determines the relevance of the article. The aim of the research is to comprehend Claude Debussy's creative search in the genre of choral music a cappella in retrospective and perspective senses on the example of a cappella choral work *Trois Chansons de Charles d'Orléans*. The choral genre a cappella in C. Debussy's work is presented only in the cycle "Trois Chansons de Charles d'Orléans". It was created in 1908, during the heyday of the composer's creative talent. The synthesis of ancient French pieces with the a cappella choral genre speaks for itself about the connection of these songs with the traditions of the popular vocal and choral genre chanson.

The main thing in the music of this choral cycle is conveying moods that acquire the meaning of symbols, fixing barely perceptible psychological states caused by contemplation of the outside world. Debussy's choral orchestration is dominated by pure colors, capricious reflections; often used instrumental techniques such as passages (imitation of the harp sound), complex division of the male choir. Ostinato backgrounds are typical and purely decorative, evenly flowing. Rhythmics is sometimes shaky and elusive. The melody is characterized not by rounded constructions, but by short expressive phrases-symbols, and layers of motives. A special freshness to the music was added by the appeal to song and dance genres, the subtle transformation of elements of rhythms, borrowed from French folklore.

Debussy's music of the choral cycle is always national in its character, mood and inner intonation always merges with the depth of the streams of folk songs and French lyrical poetry. Thus, the genre-style constants of C. Debussy's choir composition are the composer's commitment to musical symbolism and the embodiment of symbolist poetry; "musicalization" of the Old French poetry and reliance on French national origins.

Keywords: C. Debussy's vocal and choral music, dialogue, impressionism, genre and stylistic features, traditions.

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Introduction

French musical art of the early twentieth century occupies one of the prominent places in Western European culture. Such new phenomena of the twentieth century as literary naturalism, poetic symbolism, impressionism, were first established in France. Later, they found various reflections in other national cultures.

One of the brightest artistic phenomena of the musical culture of France of this period was Impressionism. It first appeared in painting in the 60s of the 19th century. Impressionist artists saw enriching the techniques of transmission of reality as the main task of their work. The masters who adjoined this trend – C. Monet, O. Renoir, Guido Pissarro, A. Sisley, E. Degas – sought to express their direct impressions of things as accurately as possible, they freed themselves from traditional rules, created new methods of painting. The term “*impressionnisme*” has a French origin and means “impression”. For example, C. Monet called his painting *Impression, soleil levant* (“*Impression. Sunrise*”). The second important name of Impressionism was “chromatism” from the Greek *chroma* that means «color». The play of light and shadow, overflows, sunspots, the atmosphere around objects are the things Impressionists paid all their attention to.

Unlike artistic impressionism, musical impressionism has only one bright representative – Claude Debussy. Such French composers as P. Dukas, F. Schmitt, L. Aubert, Ch. Koechlin, and others can be considered to be Impressionists but with some reservations. Impressionist features are also found in the cycle for piano by M. Ravel *Miroirs* (“Mirrors”).

The founder of musical impressionism was Claude Debussy, who can be called a genius reproducer of the ideas of symbolism and impressionism in music.

C. Debussy’s creative work contains a wide range of genres of musical art. The true recognition of the composer began in 1893, after the performance of *String Quartet* and *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* and reached its fullness in 1902, beginning with the premiere of the opera “*Pelléas et Mélisande*”. Simultaneously with this opera, C. Debussy created vivid impressionist symphonic sketches “*Nocturnes*”, “*La mer*”, “*Images*”.

The composer wrote a large number of vocal and choral works. The most famous of them are *Beau soir*, *Ariettes oubliées*, *Cinq poèmes de Charles Baudelaire*, *Fêtes galantes* and others.

An important part of C. Debussy's creative heritage are works for choir: the mystery play “*Le Martyre de Saint Sébastien*”, the cantata “*L'enfant prodigue*”, the poem “*La Damselle Elue*”, the cycle for the choir a cappella “*Trois Chansons de Charles d'Orléans*”, which vividly embodied the composer’s innovative search in two senses: retrospective (traditions of the past) and promising (innovative linguistic semantics).

The innovation and genre diversity of C. Debussy's musical heritage requires a thorough study in various aspects, from a historical one to genre and style. Among the least studied problems of French musical art in the early twentieth century is the question of the phenomenon of dialogue of musical traditions in C. Debussy's choral work. This determines the relevance of the article. The aim of the research is to comprehend Claude Debussy's creative search in the genre of choral music a cappella in retrospective and perspective senses on the example of *a cappella* choral work *Trois Chansons de Charles d'Orléans*.

Research Methods

The following research methods were used for the study in the article:

- the culture-historical method was used in understanding the stylistic trends in French music of the late nineteenth - early twentieth century;
- a set of art methods (stylistic, structural, semantic, choral analysis) was used to determine the genre and style features of C. Debussy's choral music in the cultural context of the twentieth century.

Literature Review

The general theoretical basis of the work consists of scientific works on music and vocal and choral art, the history of music, some statements of which will be specified in the presentation in the research material.

Considering the style of musical art was based on the findings of Mykhaylov, M (1990), Nazaikinskiy, Ye (2003). The consideration of worldviews and stylistic guidelines of C. Debussy's work in the context of the development of French musical art of the twentieth century is presented in studies done by the following scholars: Hnativ, T. (1993), Golaa, A (1983), Fulcher, Jane (2001), Kokorieva, L. (2010), Kremliov, Yu. (1965), Yarotsyns'kyi, S. (1978), Barraqué, Jean (1994), Halbreich, Harry (1980), Pittion, Paul (1965), Simeone, Nigel (2007), Simon, Trezise (2003), Stephen, Walsh (2018), Taruskin, Richard (2010), Wheeldon, Marianne (2017), Roy, Howat (1983).

To analyze C. Debussy's choral cycle, we used the corpus of choral literature written by Batyuk, I. (1999), Semenyuk, V. (2008).

Results and Discussion

The development of French music art in the first half of the twentieth century was marked by the emergence of the Impressionist style, launched by Claude Debussy. His innovative work had a great influence on the development of vocal and choral music in France. In his creative pursuits, the composer, first, preserved and developed the musical traditions of the French Renaissance; second, significantly updated and enriched the palette of musical means of expression.

In C. Debussy's vocal and choral music, one can observe the phenomenon of musical traditions dialogue, which is manifested on the musical and semantic levels. A striking example of this phenomenon is a *cappella* choral work *Trois Chansons de Charles d'Orléans* (1898-1908). The first performance took place on March 11, 1909 in Paris under the direction of Jane Bathory, then on March 25, 1909 in London and on April 9 in Paris under the direction of the composer. The work was received ambiguously by the public and music critics. Harry Halbreich (Halbreich, 1980:645) noted that critics accused Debussy of so-called *neoclassicism*. In Jean Barraqué's (Barraqué, 1994: 195) study we find the following comment: «Who can ever explain that a musician who is so eager to free himself from the influences of the nineteenth century, <...> trying never to repeat himself, may in various cases be tempted to return to the formulas of the Renaissance or the eighteenth century, which he knew better than everyone?»

Paul Pittion (Pittion, 1960: 267) notes the "archaic style" of the choral cycle, as well as their "new harmonies, as in *Pelleas*" (Halbreich, 1980: 646) notes that the revival of the traditions of the four-part fugue does not mean a step backward in Debussy's musical language in any way.

The characteristic features of the work were the embodiment of the traditions of ancient French instrumental pieces (ballads, dances and scherzo) within the choral genre, which speaks of the reception of the *chanson* traditions of the French Renaissance. Here the techniques of counterpoint are compared with vivid illustration and folk flavor.

At the semantic level, C. Debussy turned to the poetry of the brightest poet, the last representative of the medieval knightly poetry of the fifteenth century, Charles of Orleans. The subtlety of poetic images and their symbolism corresponded as best as possible to the composer's creative aspirations. In the named choral cycle, we can trace the reliance on genre traditions of harpsichordists and attraction to landscape sketches as well as a combination of these traditions with new techniques of a composition. C. Debussy updated the tonal system, opening the way to many harmonious novelties of the twentieth century. Complications and expansions of chord complexes are combined in it with simplification, archaization of system thinking (natural frets, pentatonics, wholetonic complexes). These Debussy's artistic innovations were continued by the next generation of French composers of the twentieth century, such as Maurice Ravel, Francis Poulenc, Olivier Messiaen.

The choral genre *a cappella* in C. Debussy's work is presented only in the cycle "Trois Chansons de Charles d'Orléans". It was created in 1908, during the heyday of the composer's creative talent. The synthesis of ancient French pieces with the *a cappella* choral genre speaks for itself about the connection of these songs with the traditions of the popular vocal and choral genre *chanson*.

"Trois Chansons de Charles d'Orléans" was written after the poetry of the French poet of the fifteenth century Charles of Orleans. The poetic text selected for the choir composition includes elegant ballads, songs and rondos. Charles of Orleans's lyrics are traditional not only in form but also

in the subject matter. In ballads and songs, the poet sings of his Lady, varies the motif “love from afar” familiar to troubadours (this poem is used in the first chorus of C. Debussy’s composition “Dieu qu’il la fait bon regarder”); the motives of sadness and humility permeated the ballads written by the poet after he learned of his wife’s death, who he never managed to see (a poem for the second choir from C. Debussy’s composition “Quant j’ai ouï le tambourin”); landscape allegory (a poem of the third choir from Debussy’s “Yver, vous n’êtes qu’un villain”). Debussy’s appeal to the poetry written by Charles of Orleans was connected with the commonality of worldview interests. The subtlety of poetic images, their symbolism corresponded as best as possible to the composer’s creative aspirations.

The first piece of the series is called *Dieu qu’il la fait bon regarder* (“God, how good it is to watch her”) *Moderato. Sostenuto ed espressivo*, is a ballad resembling troubadours’ ones. In the piece, the poet praises his Lady (in this case, his beloved woman), with whom he was separated due to the circumstances. The choir has an elegiac mood, it has a “traditional” celebration of the youth and beauty of the beloved Lady.

The first piece was written for a mixed 4-voice chorus. Its distinguishing feature is the simplicity of the melodic line, accompanied by iridescent undertones of an ornamental nature. A specific element of this choral miniature is the capricious variability of harmonic language. The main key of H major is clearly heard only in the first bars of the choir and at the end on the dominant function. Throughout the piece, the composer compares major frets with minor ones and uses polylayer. As the form of the choir is strophic, it gives the impression of a continuous flow of musical thought.

Moderato. Sostenuto ed espressivo

О, как от - рад - но со - зер - цать е - е столь доб - рой и пре - крас - ной!

е - е столь доб - рой и пре - крас - ной!

е - е столь доб - рой и пре - крас - ной!

Rhythmically, the score is very shaky and elusive, it is full of short durations, techniques of polyrhythm, often flowing ostinato backgrounds. Different types of presentation are synthesized in the texture of the song as follows: homophonic-harmonic, imitative, harmonic, and the composer occasionally uses the sound of one choral part as well as instrumental techniques, in particular, a passage in descending motion.

In this piece, the entire musical complex is subject to the main artistic task to convey the mood, fixing barely perceptible psychological states caused by contemplation of the outside world.

The musical score is presented in two systems, each with four staves. The first system contains three vocal staves (Soprano, Alto, Tenor) and a bass line. The lyrics are: "- верь, по - верь, ска - жет он бес - при - страст - но: ей рав - ну -". The second system also contains three vocal staves and a bass line. The lyrics are: "- ю ис - кать на - прас - но. Э - то". The score includes dynamic markings such as *p cresc.*, *mf*, and *p*, and articulation marks like slurs and accents. There are also some performance instructions like "3" indicating a triplet.

The second song of the cycle *Quant j'ai ouy le tambourin* ("When I heard the drum/drummer"), *Moderato*, is a genre dance mural. It is written for a mixed three-voice chorus and solo contralto. The second piece consists of three parts with elements of strophic verse.

From the beginning to the end, the ratio of the solo, which intones the main melody, and the chorus, which performs the function of accompaniment and sings to the syllable "la", is maintained. It would seem that the composer imitates singing with instrumental accompaniment (tambourine sound), but by nature this piece is purely choral. Differentiating textural functions as well as a singing method and a single thematic basis allow us to talk about choral instrumentation.

Tempo I poco rit.

Я там - бу - ри - на слышал звон, тот звон на праздник
 ля ля ля ля simile
 ля ля ля ля simile
 звал вес - ной. В ран - ний час, утренней по - рой был в дре -

The composer uses all the typical pictorial means of diatonic sound writing. Among them are fricative colors (comparison of h moll with H dur). In the middle section there are parallel ostinato triads in alto and tenor parts, which "harmonize" the melody. The synthesis of these elements is presented in song II in the lyrical episode ("Good, if you're in love"). To convey the elegiac mood, the composer changes the tempo and rhythmic pattern from Moderato to Poco animato, and also indicates the nature of the musical expression as *dolce ed espress.*

The sound palette, juxtaposition of ostinancy (use of ostinatos) and updating of musical material, finely written line and dynamic details are the distinguishing features of the bottom song piece. We feel the spirit of ancient French music in the interpretation of the New Age composer, who treats traditions with care.

Moderato
dolce ed espress.

ми - лый друг вме - стес то - бой, ря - дом жи.вет мечтой од.
 (с закр.ртом)
dolce ed espress.

The third song of the series *Yver, vous n'êtes qu'un villain* (Winter, you're just a villain), Allegro, is an extremely vivid, highly skilled miniature. In terms of genre, this chorus is a landscape allegory, where the image of the "evil spells" of winter symbolizes the realities of life, with its joys and sorrows.

Piece 3 has three parts (a – b – a). The boundaries of the parts are clearly separated from each other. The second part is more detailed and consists of two periods, contrasting in nature.

The chorus is written for a 4-voice mixed choir, in the bass part of the third part *divisi* is used.

The main tonality is H minor, but there are deviations in A major, E major and H minor. The tone changes are mainly related to pictorial moments. In the first and third parts, the tone of *e moll* symbolizes winter, as a consequence of sadness and trouble in human life: "Winter, you are nothing but a rogue...". The first period of the second part is about a warm summer, which is life-affirming in the understanding of man: "Summer is pleasant and kind, / As May and April can testify, / Accompanying it each eve and morn. / Summer clothes fields, woods and flowers / With his verdant livery, / And many other colours too, / As nature commands." That is why the composer uses the comparison of major-minor – a tense *E minor* is followed by sounds of bright A major and E major. The change of mood affects not only the tonal plan, but also the choral presentation (imitation, harmonic, reception stretta). The choral orchestration changes too: if in the first part the composer used the comparison of pure timbres with the sound of an incomplete choir, then in the second (first episode) – the layering of choral parts (C – A – T – B) and the sound of the whole choir. The rhythmic pattern becomes different – it becomes more balanced and is based on whole, half, quarter and eighth durations. A trio rhythm is also introduced in the performance of the whole choir at the same time.

The image shows a musical score for a 4-voice mixed choir (C, A, T, B) in G major, marked Allegro. The score is written for four voices: Soprano (C), Alto (A), Tenor (T), and Bass (B). The lyrics are in Russian: "Зи - ма, зи - ма, ты злоб_ных чар пол_на! ты злоб_ных чар пол_". The score includes dynamic markings like 'f' and 'mf'. The tempo is marked 'Allegro'. The score is written in a standard musical notation with a treble clef for the soprano and alto parts, and a bass clef for the tenor and bass parts. The key signature has one sharp (F#).

The second period is the opposition to the sunny spring, which is the embodiment of the revival of the warmth of human feelings. The author's thought returns to the "evil" winter, he complains to it: "But you, Winter, you exude / Snow, wind, rain and hail ...". The composer uses intense harmonic sequences (reduced septachords) with a number of tonal shifts: *G* diez minor – *H minor*. To help imagine the author's appeal to winter, the following techniques are used: stretch introductions of the choir (B – A – T – C), various strokes (staccato, tenuto, accents), contrasting dynamics with its moving changes (mf, f, p, cresc., dim.).

Музыкальный фрагмент с вокальными партиями и фортепиано. Динамика начинается с *piu p* и переходит к *cresc. p*. Включены триолированные ноты.

Вокальные партии:
 1. плащ о - де - ва - ют, вол - шеб - ный цве - ту - щий ко - вер
 2. плащ о - де - ва - ют, вол - шеб - ный цве - ту - щий ко - вер

Музыкальный фрагмент с вокальными партиями и фортепиано. Динамика варьируется от *f dim.* до *pp*. Включены триолированные ноты.

Вокальные партии:
 1. солн - це на тра - вах вы - ши - ва ет.
 2. солн - це на тра - вах вы - ши - ва ет.
 3. солн - це на тра - вах вы - ши - ва ет.

The third part is a reprise, in which the main key is *E minor* again, and techniques of choral orchestration and colorful dynamics with touches return. It is in this part of the last bars that the main culmination takes place, which is naturally prepared by the consolidation of the choral texture, the introduction of harmonic presentation, divisi bass part, the inclusion of ostinato musical material, the growth of dynamics from *p* to *ff*.

Музыкальный фрагмент с вокальными партиями и фортепиано. Динамика начинается с *p* и переходит к *marcato p*. Включены триолированные ноты.

Вокальные партии:
 1. зи - ма, ма, зи - ма, ты злоб - ных чар пол - на!
 2. ма, зи - ма, ты злоб - ных чар пол - на!
 3. ты злоб - ных чар пол - на! Зи - ма, ты злоб - ных чар, ты пол - на, зи - ма, ты злоб - ных чар пол - на!

Музыкальный фрагмент с вокальными партиями и фортепиано. Динамика варьируется от *f* до *ff*. Включены триолированные ноты.

Вокальные партии:
 1. зи - ма, ты злоб - ных чар пол - на!
 2. ма, зи - ма, зи - ма, ты злоб - ных чар пол - на!
 3. ма, зи - ма, зи - ма, ты злоб - ных чар пол - на!
 4. зи - ма, ты злоб - ных чар пол - на!

In the choral cycle “Trois Chansons de Charles d'Orléans” by Claude Debussy, a declamatory, recitative beginning is dominating, that is explained by the composer's desire to convey vivid intonations. M. Mussorgsky's style generally strongly affected C. Debussy's music works. But in the cycle, there is no such powerful realistic force, truth of expression, democracy, which are characteristic of the great Russian composer's work. Claude Debussy used some Mussorgsky's techniques and means of expression for another purpose – the disclosure of the mental life of man through expression, conveyed through the techniques of the finest sound recording.

In the analyzed composition the composer widely uses various sequences of septachords and nonachords, combines chromatics with diatonics. In addition to harmony, the score of the third piece is distinguished by the elegance of the drawing, a large number of details. Claude Debussy juxtaposes timbres, different techniques of sound construction, invents colorful combinations. Therefore, the choral score is stunning in its timbre variety, iridescent sonority, and characteristic color.

Conclusions. It is proved that the phenomenon of dialogue of musical traditions can be observed in the work. Among the characteristic features of the cycle, there is the embodiment of the traditions of ancient French instrumental pieces (ballads, dances, and scherzo) within the choral genre, which speaks of the reception of the traditions of chanson of the French Renaissance.

C. Debussy practically abandons thematic development in this choral cycle. Moreover, his very musical thought is represented by a short motive or intonation. It is like in painting, when not the subject itself is depicted, not the thought-theme itself, but the impression of them. And as Impressionist painters, the composer seeks to use the pure timbres of choral voices. In an effort to capture the eternal variability of nature, Impressionist artists involuntarily changed the principles of composition. Debussy also changed the compositional figures, when the equal symmetrical square constructions changed to a fundamentally asymmetrical, free construction, which takes into account only the balance of masses, spots, colors, lighting. The main thing in the music of this choral cycle is conveying moods that acquire the meaning of symbols, fixing barely perceptible psychological states caused by contemplation of the outside world. Debussy's choral orchestration is dominated by pure colors, capricious reflections; often used instrumental techniques such as passages (imitation of the harp sound), complex division of the male choir. Ostinato backgrounds are typical and purely decorative, evenly flowing. Rhythmics is sometimes shaky and elusive. The melody is characterized not by rounded constructions, but by short expressive phrases-symbols, layers of motives. A special freshness to the music was added by the appeal to song and dance genres, the subtle transformation of elements of rhythms, borrowed from French folklore.

Debussy's music of the choral cycle is always national in its character, mood and inner intonation, always merges with the depth of the streams of folk songs and French lyrical poetry. In the field of choral writing, Debussy follows principles that are related to the modal diatonics of the Russian school. This is a variant-singing method, flexibility and plasticity of melodic inversions, clear and strict differentiation of the texture, absence of emotional “take-offs”, restraint of diatonic in the basis, but dissonant on quality verticals.

Thus, the genre-style constants of C. Debussy's choir composition are the composer's commitment to musical symbolism and the embodiment of symbolist poetry; “musicalization” of the Old French poetry and reliance on French national origins.

Author Contributions

O. Batovska conceived of the presented idea. N. Grebenyuk developed the theory and performed the computations. O. Samoilenko verified the analytical methods. O. Batovska encouraged N. Grebenyuk and O. Samoilenko to investigate C. Debussy's vocal and choral music from the aspect of artistic dialogue with the traditions of ancient musical art and supervised the findings of this work.

All authors discussed the results and contributed to the final manuscript.

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