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**PREVIOUSLY UNACCOUNTED
TYPE OF RUSSIAN SONG POLYPHONY**

The type of polyphony is the stylistic characteristic allowing to demarcate regional traditions in Russian folk-singing culture better and more precisely than any other criterion. Neither composition forms, nor modal structures, nor rhythmical formulae could be compared to it in this respect.

Meant by the type of polyphony is usually merely the balance of voices of the singers (vocal parts). Most important here is the presence/absence of differentiation between vocal lines, the character of lower voice (bourdon or well-developed melody). Also it should be considered whether everybody sings the same melody in unison, or someone magadizes the melody/superposes other melody, derivative of the basic one. Vocal-timbre characteristics of singing do not play a type-forming role here (as long as situation in Russian musical science is considered). This may be explained by the fact that the research of traditional polyphony was originally based on the concepts of academic choir where all singers sing in the same academic manner.

When research into traditional polyphony started to be seriously researched in Russia, nothing was known about the possibility of typological research into a vocal timbre as the phenomenon of folk traditions. When Yu. N. Melgunov wrote down one and the same song as sung by different participants of well-coordinated group of peasant singers, he by all means obtained not choir parts, but the individual variants of this song as conceived as a whole by each singer. On this basis, Melgunov came to a conclusion that there is only one principle inherent to peasant polyphony is simultaneous singing of the variants of the main melody (the main melody itself, however, remaining “off-screen”) (Lobanov, 1971: 138).

Strange as it may seem, E. E. Lineva, who gave notations of songs from different provinces, recorded on a phonograph, in her famous collections, did not notice any differences in polyphonic composition. Actually, she only supported Melgunov’s conclusions on the single variant principle of Russian polyphony (Lineva, 1904:XV). Later, when gamelan notations already appeared, Russian polyphony (according to recordings by Lineva) was determined by G. Adler as heterophony (Adler, 1908).

It is clear that, at that time, polyphony was not used as an indicator of specific local features of Russian traditional singing, despite the subject of local features of Russian song had already been opened in scholarly literature (Moshkov, 1890; see also Moshkov, 2003:22-33). At the time of Lineva’s triumph, A. M. Listopadov specified an upper voice in singing of Don Cossacks, which was superposed on the main melody, coloring it (the so called “dishkant”). By calling this part “Cossack underpart”(Listopadov, 1906:178), Listopadov was the first to state the existence of local forms in Russian polyphony. A little later, E. V. Gippius and Z. V. Evald discovered

one more local variant of polyphony in Pinega region, namely contrast register singing in “thick” and “thin” voices (Gippius and Evald, 1937:2). It was probably with these findings that the idea of the existence of different types of song polyphony and their local character appeared in Russian musical folkloristics.

The first attempt of the analysis into the distribution of types of many-voice singing over the territory of Russia was made by T. S. Bershadszkaya in the early 1950-ies. Bearing in mind that at the time the work was written the publications of many-voiced songs, necessary for solving such a formidable task, were too few, and that certain provisions of this work call for revision today, I would say that Bershadszkaya’s research is undeservingly forgotten. The author thinks that each of the types of many-voice singing - heterophony, *podgolosochnost’* (underpart singing), *vtora* (Bershadszkaya’s tribute to N. A. Garbuzov), chordal *sklad* (texture) - can be found both in North Russia and in Middle and South Russia, but with specific features and relative position of voices in each area (Bershadszkaya, 1961: 29-56 and other). This makes some sense at least because it is known that ritual songs, wherever they were recorded, *tend to adhere* to some certain type of polyphony, while lyrical songs tend to adhere to some other type etc.

B.B. Efimenkova and M.A. Engovatova, who also aimed to develop area typology of polyphony, later suggested another variant of such typology.¹ In their opinion, each of polyphony types occupies its own area: heterophony is in North Russia; South Russian type is characterized by bourdon vocal part: in the latter area, and even wider, “sub-voice” singing styles can be found etc. This typology is now universally recognized and, with some additions, given in the new text-book on folk musical creativity (Pashina (Assoc. ed), 2005:494-500).

So, in the ideas on typology of polyphony two components are inseparably interwoven, namely, a) **area**, and b) **interrelation of vocal parts**. No place is left for anything else. But the real picture of folk polyphony traditions is much brighter. And here singing manner should be referred to.

Once, V. A. Moshkov paid his attention to a specific, a bit nasal, timbre of the voices in which young men and women from Old Believer villages of Byelorussia sang, with the pitch rising one octave above the principal part. The highest notes could reach C or D of three-line octave (Moshkov, 2003: 27-28). “Harmonization” as such, that is, non-octave concords, was absent in this singing type. However, the octave arrangement of vocal parts itself, leave alone the timbre, determined the stylistic peculiarity of this singing.

As it became clear from the publication of the fragments from previously unpublished preface to the 1st part of “Songs of Pinezhye” (Lobanov, 1988:30; Lobanov, 1994:233-235), Gippius paid utmost attention to the manner of singing in “thin” voice. He was the first to describe such a vocal technique as female singing not in chest register, as is most common in Russian traditional singing, but in falsetto (head voice). The way this register, widely represented in academic vocal, was used in Pinezhye was, to the scientist’s mind, different from classical singing technique; however, Gippius failed to describe this difference in terms of vocal technique, as did Moshkov before him. Head register was used by women of Pinezhye in the same way

as by Byelorussian Old Believers, namely for creating contrast between vocal parts, their position being relief as such, even if vocal technique is not taken into account. Pinezhye polyphony is perceived as a bright phenomenon of music just due to the combination of vocal parts and their melodic content (unprecise octave doubling).

The case described in the present paper is absolutely different from those described above. This is the type of polyphony peculiar, firstly, in terms of pitch and timbre characteristics, and secondly, by its relatively compact distribution area. And as for position of vocal parts, it is not in any way specific there, just repeating the patterns known in other types of collective singing. Thus, the general classification scheme, with the basis formed by interrelations between the parts without taking timbre into account, does not apply here.

Maybe we should not bring the “timbre+area” phenomenon to the level of type characteristic, but rather retain formal immaculacy of the existing general classification? However, it is the second aspect of the problem (more or less common distribution area) that requires that, in the case described below, singing in a specific timbre and register be considered as a one more type of polyphony. In modern musical folkloristics, typification of multi-voice singing is impossible without geographical attribution.

The first time I supposed I encountered with some special type of singing was in 1972, when during the expedition to Nizhny Novgorod region I had to move from its southern part, where functional two-voice texture within the one-line octave is common, to villages situated near the Volga. (Lobanov, 1977: 252-253; Eremina, Lobanov, Morokhin (Ed.), 1979:14-15). Old women (aged about 65), when singing the upper part, reached e^2 and g^2 of the two-line octave, sometimes managing even A flat of the same octave. Cadence unisons, to which their voices came down, most frequently fell on A of the one-line octave or on adjacent tones.

Position of vocal parts did not possess any specific features. Patterns which in other regions were always within the one-line octave, here were just moved up by a fourth, a fifth, or a sixth. And due to the fact that in those villages everybody sang near the upper limit of singing range, the pitch of the parts did not differ much, tended to unison, and the interval between them never reached the fifth in cadences, live alone octave. Parallel band-like movement of the voices in thirds prevailed here over alternate heterophonic interweaving of vocal parts. In this respect the singing common in the villages near the Volga differed from “thin” voices of “songs of Pinezhye”, where heterophonic “layering” of variants of the melody was observed.

Although the vocal parts, as mentioned above, were little differentiated in this singing type, some difference of the roles could still be observed. Thus, the part of the leading singer adhered to the lower margin of the sound range of the song; at the moment the upper voice started singing, it took over the melodic relief of the tune (Ex. 1, 2).

More specific is the two-level variant of the described polyphony type. Unlike the Russian contrast register heterophony, based on the lower level, where the leading part is, where the main line of the tune is, and where the most dense sound tissue is observed, the two-level singing of the villages near the Volga is characterized by

quite the opposite relative position of vocal parts. The leading role and the most dense sound tissue are observed in upper voices, and one more part is sung an octave lower, either by a woman able to sing in a very low voice, or by a man. This latter part doubles the lower vocal part of the upper level and does not sound during solo singing. Unfortunately, literally single samples of such singing structure were published,² and, by the way, these samples sound a bit non-aesthetic, unfinished, somewhat incidentally, bittily. That is why we have to base our definition of this type of vocal polyphony not on these few samples, but on more frequent singing in the two-line octave (Ex. 3).

To understand the essence of this singing, timbre specificity should be characterized. In his description of “thin” voices, Gippius attributed this type of voice to head-voice. He wrote about the falsetto of Pinega female singers as if describing male voices: according to him, “thin” parts could be sung by the women with very low, rough voices, who forced their voices up somehow (Lobanov, 1994:233). There is nothing special in it, as we can see by today. Female pop singers have low voice with characteristic timbre while singing in chest register; however, in head register they can sound, for example, as soprano. If it is as wholesome as singing of L. Ryumina (the modern Russian singer) in two manners, is another question.

The character of “head” sound, be it natural or treated in academic manner, depends on such vocal techniques as singing in “mute” voice, “mask”, transferring “the properly developed coordination in the operation of vocal apparatus in singing one vowel to all the other vowels” (Dmitriev, 1962: 25) and on many other factors. But possible as well is female singing in head register, not based on academic vocal techniques. And it is such ability to sing in head register that is inherent to authentic folklore female singers.

In the North and North-West of Russia head register is semantized to the utmost. It is connected with genres and tunes somehow incorporating the ideas of ancestor worship. Thus, head register is used in lamentations, where it is often contrasted by chest register, speaking, and wailing at the end of each lament verse (see: Razumovskaya, 1984; Lobkova, 2002:132, 134, 152). Close to lamentations are forest call tunes, which often act as a textless prelude to a lamentation forming inside the mind. This vocalise may have the same melody as that of the lamentation coming after it (Lobanov, 1997:110- 117).

Such forest melody, by the way, can be performed in the sound somewhat close to academic manner. The singer sings the whole melody in the contour of one vowel, namely [u:] (In Russian, this sound is pronounced with the lips extended forward as if pronouncing the [w] sound, unlike flat lip position common in English - *Translator's comment*). In the lamentation, connected with text, this is, of course, lost.

Both textless call melodies and lamentations can be heard in the forest in spring. The woman, hidden by the thick of the wood, cannot be seen. But she wants to be heard, and cares about the power of the sound. In many cases, women refused to sing call melodies indoors, explaining that only in open air the call can sound as it should. Probably they implied not only the acoustic advantages of singing in open air, but the adjustment of vocal apparatus to this environment.

Sometimes head register in these genres is used by women of over 80. But, of

course, one has to have certain physical strength for this. Not any woman of such a venerable age possesses enough physical and spiritual force to lament in the forest or to sing a call melody.

In choir songs the head register of female voice is desemantized. As far as the region of Nizhny Novgorod is concerned, there are no textless forest melodies here. And, although head register is sometimes used in lamentations in regions beyond the Volga, retaining its ritual meaning, its use in local vocal polyphony is by no means connected with the semantics considered above.

In the villages near the Volga, where I encountered female many-voice singing in head register, this singing sounded a bit different from North Russia. Above the transitional sound it is closer to the generally recognized vocal norms than the “thin” voices at the Pinega.

Maybe such colouring of the timbre was influenced by the church chant tradition. But it is hard to say for certain. In the 19th - early 20th centuries, church choirs and choir-masters could be found all over the country. Many village folklore ensembles of the 1970-ies included senior people who sang in church choirs in their childhood and youth, and only then in amateur singing clubs at collective farms. However, although the regulations were the same everywhere, such vocal groups never sounded alike, retaining local traditions.

The said above leads us to a conclusion that the factor of local tradition should not be underestimated in researching the singing in the villages near the Volga. Thirty years ago, when I first wrote about the specific manner of singing in the villages near the Volga in Nizhny Novgorod region, there were not enough publications to understand the level of the phenomenon I encountered. Nowadays there are collected books where the samples of such singing are mentioned. Such samples are singular, but the area which could be outlined according to them is impressive enough. Such singing manner is registered neither in the North and North-West of Russia, nor in Smolensk and Belgorod regions etc. The distribution area of this singing, as is shown by publications and archive recordings available to me, is the North-East of Kostroma and Nizhny Novgorod regions, villages of Ulyanovsk region near the Volga, the South of Kirov, Perm and Sverdlovsk regions (Ex. 4, 5)³. In the centre of this area are the autonomous republics of Volga region. The area, as it has been outlined by today, does not penetrate into the depth of the right bank of the Volga, remaining only in the villages close to the Volga, that is, at the natural borderline between the dialect zones of the language and style zones of culture.

Alongside with singing in the two-line octave, spread over this territory are also other types of polyphony fitting into the framework of general classification, including contrast register singing in “thick” and “thin” voices (Votkinsk).⁴ However, all these types do not contradict with the territorial restriction of the phenomenon which I also suggest, on the basis of this restriction, to consider as a separate type of collective singing.

Notes

¹This typology is given in a number of works of “Moscow” school, out of which the following article should be mentioned in the first place: Gippius E. V. “Problems of Area Research of Traditional Russian Song in the Regions of Russian and Byelorussian Borders” (1982: 6). But in this connection I also remember a bright report by B. B. Efimenkova and M.A.Engovatova, where the typology of polyphony was shown on a wider background of Russian singing culture as a whole. The text of this report is probably lost.

²Eremina V. I., Lobanov M. A., Morokhin V. N. (Ed.) (1979) # 29, #114 (Ex. 1, 2); Ananicheva T., Sukhanova L. (1991) # 15, # 33 (to some extent) – (Ex. 3); Kaluzhnikova T. I., Kesareva M. A. (2001) #2, #4, #11 (Ex. 4), #12, #16, #18, #19 (Ex. 5) and #20 (Kunara village: in this village singers sing solo only in the first verse of the song; all the remaining verses are exclusively choired).

³The following collections could be added to the abovementioned sources: Engovatova M. (1981), # 2, # 4 and others; Travina I. (1978), #15, #16, #18, #20 – 23, and also recordings from Kostroma, Nizhny Novgorod, and Perm regions selected from the phonogram archive of the Institute of Russian Language and Literature of Russian Academy of Sciences.

⁴Travina I. Russian Folk Songs of Tchaikovsky’s Birthplace... # 13, #14, #30, #31 and others.

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მაგალითი 3. პოვოლჟიე, ულიანოვსკის ოლქი. ნოტებზე გადაღებულია ტ. ანანიჩევას მიერ.

Example 3. Povolje, Ulianovsk region. Transcribed by T. Ananicheva.

♩ = 56

Как у кам ня бы лю, ка ме шка, да —
у ка ме шка у го рю че го.

მაგალითი 4. სვერდლოვსკის ოლქი. ნოტებზე გადაღებულია მ. კესარევას მიერ.

Example 4. Sverdlovsk region. Transcribed by M. Kesareva

♩ = 46

(Ой да) уж... уж я да ду ма ю да
я... я спо... ой да я спо ду... (у) ма ю

მაგალითი 5. სვერდლოვსკის ოლქი. ნოტებზე გადაღებულია მ. კესარევას მიერ.

Example 5. Sverdlovsk region. Transcribed by M. Kesareva

♩ = 92

Све чи сан да лыны е я рко го рят. _____

све чи сан да лыны е я рко го рят.