

Preface to the edition of “Dame Pique”, ballet in two acts by Gennady Banschikov.

Published by “Compozitor”, St. Petersburg, 2019

For any composer working with subject matter that has already been visited by a past master is not only difficult, but often risky, as it creates unintentional comparison to the work created by his genius colleague. To express your own point of view on the subject, finding original matters of expression without a desire of being “not worse”, and simply being yourself in music, seems to be the only right way.

Almost 100 years separate Tchaikovsky *Queen of Spades* and Banschikov *Dame Pique*. Tchaikovsky completed his score in the middle of Spring 1890, Banschikov finished his work at the end of 1989. In a relationship between these two compositions there is an abundance of fascinating reversals.

Tchaikovsky wrote an opera, Banschikov created a ballet. The original title of Tchaikovsky *Pique Dame* (*Queen of Spades*) becomes *Dame Pique* in Banschikov score. Tchaikovsky composes a magnificent epic work, based on libretto written by his cousin Modest, where many of the characters and situation are modified. Banschikov, on the other hand, follows the original source by Pushkin, whose story is short yet capacious.

Banschikov himself says - “It was clear before the beginning of the work that it would be foolish to ignore Tchaikovsky. It would be impossible to go without references to Tchaikovsky work.”

In seeking to create a direct connection between the scores by Tchaikovsky and his own music, Banschikov devises a keen solution. Just like Tchaikovsky, Banschikov quotes aria from the opera *Richard coeur de lion* by Gretry, performed in Tchaikovsky’s work by Countess. “Double Quotation” becomes one of the most important musical themes in Banschikov’s ballet, appearing in the most different, sometime unexpected harmonization and orchestration.

Banschikov orchestration style appears to be a unique combination of exquisiteness, simplicity, and inventions. Clear timbers, transparent score, wide use of strings by triple woodwinds create a purely chamber atmosphere, which allows to look at characters and situations as through a subtle, but powerful, microscope. Orchestral tutti are used only in mass scenes, particularly in the ball scenes of first and second act, where personal tragedy of Hermann is brought to everyone’s observation.

Naturally delicate motives of the ballet are very expressive and immediately recognizable. A poignant example occurs at the very beginning of the ballet, where the first motive of bass clarinet stomps around one note, “preventing” the melody from

further development- just like man's thoughts going around a fixated idea failing again and again without a possibility of leaving the enchanted circle.

Another example of the expressive use of motives occurs during the "Card Game" of the first act, where two- and three-beat meters conflict with each other to reflect the competition between the players. Moreover, the same catchy motive is repeated several times, following the rules of card games, where cards are shuffled and given out to the players again and again.

Dramatic development of seemingly simple musical elements is one of the most valuable features of this score. In the above mentioned scene and later Ball, the intensity of the development of thematic elements and growing orchestra bring the first simple motives of strings to a fearsome climax, where the same motives already sound like a foreshadowing of the tragic events to come.

The potential to create additional layers of meaning through number symbolism is an attractive idea for many composers. In case of "Dame Pique," the idea of three cards takes on great significance. The composer attaches the foremost meaning to the fact that there are three main characters, Herman, Countess, and Liza, among whom the whole drama is developed. Beside that, the score is full of variations on the subject "three", such as the central motive of the three cards, appearing for the first time in the introduction with strings tremolo, where the number "three" shows itself in presence of three notes spanning the interval of a third. This motive appears in the ballet several times. Moreover, the idea becomes "contagious" for the whole score. It occurs again in the moment of Countess ghost appearance, where low harp together with timpani again and again repeat the three-notes melodic element on diminished triad (m. 390)

Beside the motive of three cards and mentioned above the "double quotation" of aria by Gretry a ballet has several leitmotifs, appearing through the entire score. Such as for instance the motive of "Golden Woman", tempting Hermann and first drawing attention in m. 65, where melodic line of two solo trumpets appears with the accompaniment of twinkling celesta. Such is the theme of Herman's Sufferings (m. 576) and lyrical motif of Liza (m. 31). Both themes are written for strings and are similar in their mood, orchestration and intensity of melodic and harmonic development.

Lastly, one very special detail of this score is the presence of the narrator, who periodically reads aloud fragments of Pushkin story. Changing his hats, the narrator becomes at times Herman, madly repeating "three, seven, ace", at times Tchekalinsky,

announcing “your queen has lost”, and finally sinister prophet, opening the ballet with a solo quoting of Pushkin’s epigraph “ Dame Pique means hidden malevolence”. The deep masculine voice gives the theatric part a greater mysticism, as a narrator stays off the stage, personifying an invisible character, knowing everything and observing from somewhere), on the other hand gives it bigger theatricality . It seems that a magician placed the characters on the stage and leads them, in a compassionate way.

Dame Pique is a wonderful example of orchestra music of the end of the 20th century. Vivid, “staging” of musical themes, their symphonic development, outstanding orchestration- these are the qualities making this work valuable for several performances in concerts and theaters and able to inspire for creation of new works of not lesser value by many other composers.

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Philadelphia, March 2019

(translated by Nina Siniakova and Kurt Nelson)