The issue of intonations in music in the point of view of Boris Asafiev and their association with the Finale

A Russian composer and musicologist Boris Asafiev in his extensive study on the musical form as a process in music admits that he pondered very long, very much and recurrently over the way to express the manifestation of “the life order”, understood as order, worth, logic and relations. I perceive “the life order” in view of Asafiev’s very suggestive insight into this issue as a name for the manifestation of the expression of human feelings.

In inhumanly difficult transition from the language of speech to the language of music he found a bridge. These are intonations in a broad sense put on the same level as human thought. As a composer of operas, symphonies, songs and ballets, in his book he also signals the existence of the language of gesture as “mute” intonation of movement, the movement that in its nature reveals also the interpsychological states of man. Asafiev writes [...] A thought, to become tone-expressible, becomes intonation, intones. The process of intoning, to become music not speech, either merges into vocal intonation and then the word and music become a unity in rhythm – in word intonation – in tone, or having omitted the word in instrumental music the process uses the operation of “mute “ intonation, the flexibility of human movement (including the “language” of the hand). Then it becomes “musical speech”, “musical intonation”. As a new entity, enhanced with a variety of expressing possibilities it stays for long in established musical forms and thousands years of practice.

Asafiev stresses the fact that musical intonation, giving the form its rightness, never loses contact with the word and the mime of human body. With reference to speech intonation in the ancient tradition of intoning recitation in theatres as well as in the art of oratory he remarks that the traditions of recitation and oratory impart very accurate intoning reliefs to contents of high emotional tension (e.g. astonishment, bewilderment, or sharp questioning).

In view of extensive deliberation and the deep understanding of the relation between music and human life Asafiev writes about the composing process, about what music means to him and how he perceives the music of other composers. [...] Music is psychology and it does not even pretend not to be the music of human hearts. Berlioz, Chopin, Schumann, Mendelssohn, Schubert, Weber, Glinka, Wagner, Tchaikovsky, Verdi, Bizet, Grieg, Brahms (it is only a short list!) - no matter how different their talents, the power of imagination, intellect, tastes, characters, methods of writing – all of them had insight into human psyche invariably posing the question about the sense of life. Berlioz’s programmaticism and “visual symphonism” were his “Ariadne's thread” in the transition from the labyrinth of academicism into the atmosphere of tone colour as intonation. It stayed such a thread for the followers of “the searchers of the language of colour”. However, not every “programmatic symphonist” was among those researchers. In another sphere, opposing to Berlioz’s orchestra, there appeared a star of wisdom and sophisticated taste in the world of pianism. It was Chopin. He proved that the piano by nature is “the speech of tone colours”: tender, cordial, passionate and contrasting in its pathetics. If we “deprive” Chopin’s music of the atmosphere created by the nuances of tones, we cut off its breath and the music wilts. It means that drawing Chopin's charm and power from his excellently and logically “instrumented” piano is the most difficult, more difficult than in orchestral instrumentation, more difficult than any other art of instrumentation because it does not originate in learned diapasons or counted trills from handbooks.

1 Boris Asafiev, pen name Igor Glebov, (1884-19490), “Musical Form as a Process”, Moscow – Leningrad,1947
2 Ibidem p. 149
3 Ibidem p. 3
4 Ibidem p. 4
Pianists know instrumentation by ear and by hearing the tone clarity of intonation, only then does the piano cease to be “a hit instrument”. Asafiev, not without reason, enumerates Berlioz and Chopin first. He notices their intuition of clarity in the language of tones, but at the same time he strongly emphasises the fact that […] Chopin, as a musician who was intellectually more subtle and more astute than Berlioz, consistently searched for expression in the tone, whereas Berlioz was more often interested in the pure beauty of the tone in any musical material [...].

For Asafiev intonations in music as “auditory fields” are traces of the emanating “life order” and simultaneously provide real basis for music. Asafiev frequently enhances his deliberations by stating that according to him music is the art of intonation logics. It is the logics of intonation that gives sense to music. In this meaning the voice timbre is the expression of the psychological sphere of human activity, bearing greater or lesser emotional stress. Both verbal and musical intonations are not a voice characterised by worthless mechanical articulation because it is the brain, intellect, that controls the state of feelings. [...] Otherwise music would be “the art of shout”, and not the art of visual and auditory reflection with the use of the human vocal apparatus and a musical instrument that to a high degree mirror the human process of intonation, especially in creating melody.

It is melody that in its emotional and logical expressiveness reveals the synthesis of human consciousness, states Asafiev. In his deliberations he has in view the meaning of melodies based on the foundation of the strictly determined interval system. The generally established order of intervals, the meaning of the distance or relation between two sounds, is very limited and mechanical, more static, and here it is not the matter of measuring these distances with compasses. Separate words and separate tones, separate musical sound: these are intonational points, “knots”, complexes in continual fluency of speech or music. They are centres in a tangle of words in speech and they are centres in musical sound material expressed by the performer on any instrument. In this sense the verbal or musical “speech” ( with caesuras for taking breath) is uninterrupted. Intonational points, or “knots”, centres, complexes, or still differently supported sounds in accordance with Asafiev's intention, are in my opinion powers, causes, useful reasons to determine the direction of the appropriateness of expression (idea) both verbal and musical. Asafiev as a composer returns to one of the sources of music, taking into consideration intonations as the fields of auditory search...[...To find a sound distance from one intonational point to another, as a result of established imaginary returns, recapitulations, as an action evoking suspense (in the sphere of sensations of auditory quality) is the reason, cause, pre-image of the interval. During further evolution there appeared a system of combinations of sound relations similar to a star map or mental sound-web [...].

In connection with the above thought, especially in the context of Frédéric Chopin's work, I adopt one more point of view on the truth that one of the sources of music is the pain of loss, the pain of loneliness, the pain of longing, the mental pain. Finding intonation in music as the answer, “remedy”, in search of the way out of this “extreme situation”, is maybe, or even for sure, finding “an anchor”, a way to the world that frees man from this pain. Pieces of work come into being for various mysterious reasons and their sources are impenetrable.

Further, Asafiev emphasizes the fact that watching the development of music over the ages he notices that establishing musical order always manifests itself in a logical consequence of intertwining of intervals: from the jump of voice to fill in the given distance and the opposite: from the fulfilment of the distance of the jump to the jump itself. Man realizing the intoned sounds, pronouncing them, both verbally and musically, holding the voice at a certain level, exists in the sphere of his vocal arousal, in other words “tension”. Moreover, this “tension “ is understood by Asafiev as stimulation of vital activity that triggers the desire to express oneself, to express something. He compares the flow of speech to the primary glissando in music as an expression of

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5 Ibidem pp. 124-126
6 Ibidem p. 127
7 Ibidem p. 140
8 Ibidem p. 141
9 Ibidem p. 144
the voice at different levels. Consequently, in his opinion, the principle of all musical speech is to fill in the jump with a continuous flow of tones. This natural aspiration of the human vocal apparatus is a transition from a word to a sentence, from tones and intervals to a continuous vocal and tonal expression. This continuity of sound, called toneness by Asafiev, reflected in an inexhaustible variety of orders as “musical images” of the composing process is at the same time a synthesis of an individual message to convey. [...] In the logical process of shaping the intonation, tones, more or less supported, find their places at various sound pitches, tones to which stick attracted by them as if to the centre sliding sounds. While emotional tension is increased there appear so-called jumps of intonation beyond the specific sound area. If the “jump” is often repeated the intonation becomes well-known and can turn into an independent interval. Then it does not slide to its sound as a former point of support but it can incorporate the closest semitone. Asafiev thinks that the existence of this phenomenon in composers is the operation of their great power of imagination, intuition, intellect and gift in sensing and placing the intonation in specific time periods. He believes that it is not only an intuitive approach but also it triggers in the composer's mind a fully conscious activity consisting in controlling the emotional impact of specific intervals which at that moment become the core of the meaning of what is in music. These matters are not taken for granted in any verbal formula. The process takes place in the context of mental determinants and as such refers consequently and logically to human speech. The meaning of each interval is unlimited and infinite. Asafiev suggests that the life of organized order must be noticed in the shaping and transforming of so-called supported sounds, in sticking, in incorporating the neighbouring sounds and in forming new supported sounds or characteristic “instabilities”, for example in the history of European music intonation, in transformation of a semitone into a tendency tone or in the evolution of tritonicity. Asafiev remarks that the phenomenon of tendency of tones to various scale steps leads to the enhancing of a subtle auditory impression in the differentiating of tones. Then the tension and release components of the European order, the tendency tone and the tritone, operate as a kind of intonational contradiction. They are extremely unsteady and unstable. They cause tension of the highest degree in the hearing and a kind of destruction, simultaneously creating an individual image, a special quality. The hexachord system known in the history of European music was one of a lengthy stage in the victory of octave intonation, as a goal in the meaning of unity, writes Asafiev.

While studying these unique deliberations I realized that Asafiev by describing the phenomenon of intonation, understood broadly in music, researches in the of human expression of feelings, also in the composing process itself. Actually, it is a magical process in which takes place the transition of a piece of the spiritual world, as a dynamic trace of human existence, into a musical experience. Intonation in music is a phenomenon in and of itself not fully clarified because of its elusiveness. It becomes “an area of auditory search” for a composer, and as a later experience also for the performer. In this meaning it could be remarked that the whole work of Chopin is an intonation of his life, and still more closely his imagination, that more often than not it was just a kind of “detachment” from that life. The intonations transformed in the Finale of the Sonata finally become more legible now. In Asafiev's view (who does not write about the Finale of Chopin's Sonata but about intonations in a broader sense in music) their presence manifests in existing intervals against the background of other gliding sounds filling in their distances, which results in the creation of a new quality of relations between dynamically overlapping forces. These intervals, existing in the Finale as the intonations of the themes from the previous movements of the Sonata, intertwine one another against the background of glissando sounds not connected with them, which in the auditory image lead to the destruction of the themes. It is destruction because there is no further intonational development of the “picked out” theme, other sounds glide in, from which and at the same time against the background of which further motives can be distinguished.

On the other hand, if we perform our analysis from such perspective, the Finale as a final movement of a whole cycle, that spiritually penetrates the forces of life and death, seems to be an exposition of themes which might start to develop. I observe an extraordinary concurrence of

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10 Ibidem pp. 144-145
Asafiev's deliberations and conclusions in Chopin's composing process especially in this movement. I made an attempt to point it out in the analysis of the *Finale*, in examples of musical notation, in the description of the analysis of this piece as interpreted anew, as well as in the musical interpretation of the movement.

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