

JĀZEPS VĪTOLS IN EUROPEAN MUSIC HISTORY

Jānis Kudiņš

Summary

Keywords: Jāzepe Vītols, individual style, aesthetic orientation, European music history

Analysing the creative work of Latvian classic Jāzepe Vītols, the issue of the perception of the composer's music in the context of broader processes in the past has become more significant. Altogether, in the research interpretation of Vītols' creative heritage, there is a notable lack of attempts to search for the answer to the question about what place and role does the Latvian classicist hold in Europe and in its entire space of creative thought development that could conclusively be called European music history. How might it be possible to define the creative contribution of Vītols the composer to the dominating aesthetic opinions and characteristic stylistic contexts that were dominant in Europe during his lifetime? While searching for an answer to this question, the author identifies three aspects in this paper.

Firstly, it is a view of Jāzepe Vītols' aesthetic opinions and stylistic orientation in music. The paper stresses the fact that, in Latvian music history alongside the name of Vītols one of the tendencies of the 19th century era of romanticism stands out – it can conclusively be described as a classic academicism in the frames of the romanticism aesthetics. Vītols is not truly considered one of the *pure* 19th century romanticists – this is confirmed by the expressive elasticity of musical form and balanced dramaturgy. In contrast with a romantic world view, which is often characterised by a black and white view and an emotional tension reaching an emotionally raging and fatal incandescence, Vītols chooses reserved emotionality. The basis for this conclusion can be found in critiques of Vītols' music while he lived in St. Petersburg (1880–1918). These critiques are notable for Vītols' affinity for the music of Johannes Brahms and Alexander Glazunov. On the other hand, he was always very reserved or critical towards the music of Alexander Scriabin, Gustav Mahler and Richard Strauss. The similarities of the Latvian composer's views with the expressed viewpoints in the well-known publication *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen (The Beautiful in Music, 1854)* by the 19th century music critic and publicist Eduard Hanslick are also outlined.

Secondly, the paper reviews the Latvian composer's relationship with his personally familiar 19th century romanticism style tendencies and the quickly developing aesthetics of modernism at the beginning of the 20th century. Despite Vītols' cautious views on varied new trends in the stylistic panorama in music at the end of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th century, the composer reflects the aesthetics and

musical language elements of expressionism and impressionism in an individualized manner in his creative work. This allows us to conclude that Vītols should not be considered simply as a creator of music that is academically formally correct and, in the stylistic sense, as someone who is frozen in time – he was a refined interpreter of the new trends that were characteristic of his era.

Thirdly, when attempting to define the place and role of the individual style of Jāzeps Vītols' music in European music history at the end of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th century, the author of this paper observes that the manner of classic artistic expression that Vītols represents is nowadays often considered an element of the music culture environment of his era.

These conditions answer the question why Vītols' music, when evaluating it in the broader context of the historical experience of European music, is not as well-known as the work of other composers. The style and aesthetics represented by Vītols in music are not able to objectively overcome or influence the inertia of the perception and the canons which exist in numerous research papers and in various languages, and are mainly centred on the analysis of diverse aspects of modernism. In the context of his time, Vītols' music was not as innovative or as provocative to listeners as, for example, new works by Antonín Dvořák, Edvard Grieg, Jean Sibelius or Carl Nielsen. Here lies the answer to the question why Vītols' music, when evaluating it in the context of a broader European musical history experience, is not present. Still, there is a reason to predict that active research into Vītols' creative work and aesthetic ideas will produce new conclusions regarding Jāzeps Vītols as a distinguished European classicist.