

THE CYCLICAL FORM FROM A COMPOSITIONAL TECHNIQUE TO A THEMATICISM-GENERATING PRINCIPLE

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ABSTRACT

Although the roots of the cyclical form can be traced back centuries ago, it was the 19th century that claimed the cyclical principle as its full manifestation. Closely linked to the concept of genre and its affirmation in certain patterns, the cyclical form was adopted by composers as a working tool to ensure the unity of a multipartite sonic organism by utilizing a common thematic material that can be found in several parts of the genre. This thematically charged entity can circulate at the macro-formal level in variants without major changes or it can be transformed at the melodic, rhythmic, harmonic or timbral level. Generally speaking, it raises the level of musical thinking and writing, demonstrating the composer’s skill and the complexity of his/her conception. It can also have an effect on the listener by increasing the emotional impact it can provide by reiterating symbolic themes. Beginning with Beethoven and continuing with Liszt, Franck, Berlioz and Tchaikovsky, this compositional technique is concretely applied as a conscious and premeditated act in musical compositions. The twentieth century and composers such as George Enescu extend the acceptance of cyclicity to the level of a principle generative of thematicism by developing an initial theme and metamorphosing it into a resource of rhythmic-melodic material for defining and shaping the other sound characters that fulfill a formal pattern. Thus, the edifice of a thematic entity enunciated in the first part of a work can become an inexhaustible resource and the embryo of several musical individualities, generating the thematicism of the other parts of the whole.

Keywords: cyclic form, compositional technique, thematicism, generative principle, George Enescu.

INTRODUCTION

The cyclical form has as its starting point the conception of a thematic entity that is reiterated at least once more in another part of the work. It thus involves a technique for the inner structuring of a multipart genre with a broad perspective on the whole and with organic interrelations between the component parts, a vascular system of a sonorous organism that pulsates at the macro-formal level common thematic units (theme, phrase, motif, cell). Their circulation unifies the musical material, investing the instrumental writing with a narrative potential. Although, in general terms, it does not necessarily require an assiduous or overly arduous compositional process, it certainly depends on the composer’s clarity, inspiration and ability to borrow, rework (if necessary) and express while engaged in shaping a musical material with a recurring capacity. The phenomenon can reach higher stages of metamorphosis and multiplication to the point of creating new thematic individualities derived from the original. In any case, all the states in which the cyclic form can manifest itself demand subtlety, acuity, finesse and sonorous imagination from the composer.