

# ИСПОЛНИТЕЛЬСКОЕ ИСКУССТВО

## PERFORMING ART



УДК 786.2

DOI: 10.52469/20764766\_2023\_04\_62

**G. RYBINTSEVA, A. TARASOVA**  
*S. Rachmaninov Rostov State Conservatory*

### **“24 PRELUDES AND FUGUES” BY D. SHOSTAKOVICH IN THE CONTEXT OF J. S. BACH’S TRADITION**

In the musical art of the 20th century, there is a tendency to revive the traditions of ancient polyphonic music. The piano cycle by D. Shostakovich “24 Preludes and Fugues” op. 87, which constantly sounds on the concert stage and in the auditoriums of music educational institutions, stands out from the background of the compositions created in this tradition. The demand for the cycle is due to the high artistic value of this work and the wide opportunities that the performing of this cycle and its parts offers to a pianist.

Following the tradition of J. S. Bach’s “Well-Tempered Clavier”, Shostakovich transformed it in accordance with the realities of the musical culture of his century. Shostakovich used the artistic principles of Bach’s polyphony to create a versatile picture of his contemporary era. It is no coincidence that the composer is called the “chronicler of the 20th century”. He significantly diversified the figurative structure – from solemn-epic and lyric-dramatic to humorous, satirical and even grotesque images – as well as intonation and modal basis of his work, filled the structure of the fugue with elements of the sonata form, imparted large-scale quality to the sound of numerous mini-cycles. Being a symphonic composer, Shostakovich transformed fugues into large-scale epic, lyrical or dramatic canvases.

Similar tasks face performers of his music: to revive the experience of performing polyphonic music, transforming it in accordance with the capabilities of a modern instrument and the experience accumulated by foreign and domestic piano schools. Turning to the cycle allows the pianist to reveal the expressive and technical potential of a modern instrument and demonstrate his professional skills, in particular, his mastery of various techniques of sound production, which make it possible to liken the sound of a grand piano to the timbre variety of a symphony orchestra.

Keywords: “24 Preludes and Fugues” by D. Shostakovich, polyphony tradition, J. S. Bach’s “Well-Tempered Clavier”, piano performing art of the 20th century.

*For citation: Rybintseva G., Tarasova A. “24 Preludes and Fugues” by D. Shostakovich in the context of J. S. Bach’s tradition // South-Russian Musical Anthology. 2023. No. 4. Pp. 62-67.*

*DOI: 10.52469/20764766\_2023\_04\_62*

**Г. В. РЫБИЦЕВА, А. С. ТАРАСОВА**  
*Ростовская государственная консерватория им. С. В. Рахманинова*

### **«24 ПРЕЛЮДИИ И ФУГИ» Д. ШОСТАКОВИЧА В КОНТЕКСТЕ БАХОВСКОЙ ТРАДИЦИИ**

Для музыкального искусства XX века характерна тенденция к возрождению традиций старинной полифонической музыки. На фоне сочинений, связанных с этой тенденцией, выделяется фортепианный цикл Д. Д. Шостаковича «24 прелюдии и фуги» op. 87, который постоянно звучит на концертной эстраде и в аудиториях музыкальных учебных заведений. Отмеченная востребованность цикла предопределяется его высокой художественной ценностью и теми широкими возможностями, которые предоставляет пианисту исполнение данного опуса и его частей.

Следуя композиционной схеме «Хорошо темперированного клавира» И. С. Баха, Шостакович переосмысливает ее в соответствии с реалиями современной музыкальной культуры. Художественные

принципы баховской полифонии Шостакович использует для создания разносторонней картины современной ему эпохи. Не случайно композитора называют «летописцем XX века». Он существенно расширяет образный строй (от торжественно-эпических и лирико-драматических до юмористических, сатирических и даже гротескных образов), обогащает интонационную и ладовую основу своего сочинения, наполняет структуру фуги элементами сонатной формы, сообщает видимую масштабность звучанию многих мини-циклов. Будучи композитором-симфонистом, Шостакович превращает фуги в масштабные эпические, лирические или драматические полотна.

Аналогичные задачи стоят перед исполнителями его музыки: возродить опыт исполнения полифонической музыки, трансформировав его в соответствии с возможностями современного инструмента и достижениями отечественной и зарубежных фортепианных школ. Обращение к циклу позволяет пианисту раскрыть выразительный и технический потенциал, заключенный в этом опусе, и продемонстрировать свое профессиональное мастерство, в частности, владение многообразными приемами звукоизвлечения, позволяющими уподоблять звучание рояля тембровому многообразию симфонического оркестра.

Ключевые слова: «24 прелюдии и фуги» Д. Шостаковича, полифоническая традиция, «Хорошо темперированный клавир» И. С. Баха, фортепианное исполнительство XX века.

Для цитирования: Рыбинцева Г. В., Тарасова А. С. «24 прелюдии и фуги» Д. Д. Шостаковича в контексте баховской традиции // Южно-Российский музыкальный альманах. 2023. № 4. С. 62-67.

DOI: 10.52469/20764766\_2023\_04\_62



The 20th century entered the history of art not only by the artists' striving for radical innovation and daring creative experiments, but also by the purposeful return to the traditions of artistic classics, the restoration of melody, harmony, and classical musical form in their rights. "In the classical heritage of the past modernity was looking for a support to confront the tragic discord of the present world", writes in this regard N. Lukyanova [1, p. 134]. The crucial period was the middle of the 20th century, when the creators of art turned to "non-classical interpretation of classical traditions", as a prominent expert on the theory and history of modern art, Umberto Eco, formulated it. The most vivid example of this is the revival of the traditions of baroque polyphony, in particular the creative heritage of Johann Sebastian Bach. In a rather short period, a series of works have appeared, similar in idea to Johann Sebastian Bach's great work – his "Well-Tempered Clavier". These include piano cycles by P. Hindemith ("Ludus Tonalis", 1942), V. Zaderatsky (1937–1938), and later by R. Shchedrin (1963–1970), G. Mushel (1975) and S. Slonimsky (1994). However, the name of "the Third Volume" of Bach's "Well-Tempered Clavier" is rightly held by the cycle "24 Preludes and Fugues" op. 87, composed by Dmitri Shostakovich [2, p. 206].

The enduring artistic value of Shostakovich's work is confirmed not only by the recognition of the audience and the considerable number of works devoted to it by domestic and foreign scholars [see: 3; 4; 5], but also by the unflagging interest in the cycle from the community of pianist-teachers and performers. The greatest musicians perform

this cycle at the best concert halls of the world. The mini cycles that constitute it, along with their Bach analogues, are invariably included in the programs of music competitions, festivals, concerts, and are also performed by young pianists studying at music colleges, art schools and conservatories. These circumstances demand an answer to the question: what is the unusual attractiveness of the aforementioned Shostakovich's work and what explains such a high demand for it? Why does this particular piano cycle bear the high title of "the Third Volume" of Bach's "Well-Tempered Clavier"?

The indisputable merits of Shostakovich's work have been revealed by Russian and foreign musicologists in considerable detail. These include, first and foremost, the inexhaustible richness of his musical images: from the solemn-epic and lyrical-dramatic to the humorous, satirical and even grotesque. The cycle's intonation sphere is entirely in keeping with its varied imagery. Here there are intonations of Russian folk music: majestic and epic chants, lamentations, the Russian epic and ditties. Shostakovich also makes generous use of motifs from Soviet mass songs, as well as elements of operatic cantilena, recitative and declamation. His thematic material is predominantly of a songlike nature, yet the "zone of pure instrumentalism" occupies an important place in the intonational sphere of the cycle. Themes of the instrumental character often have sharp broken lines, with broad "jumps" into sixth, seventh, octave and ninth, which give the images heightened expression. "The Preludes and Fugues became a veritable encyclopedia of Shostakovich's intonation vocabulary", as Lyu Chzhe notes [6, p. 41].

It can be asserted that Shostakovich's cycle is not only as rich in imagery and intonation as its prototype, it surpasses it. This is also facilitated by the multi-layered framework of musical modes. Whereas Johann Sebastian Bach evolved towards the uniformity of the major-minor key system, Shostakovich moves in the opposite direction, moving away from the universalism of musical modes. The composer uses several types of modes: these are the natural major-minor system typical of classical music, the old natural modes that give the cycle a vivid national sound, and also unique "Shostakovich's modes" that bear information about the author's individuality and accustom early polyphonic structures to the present day.

Shostakovich uses the traditions of Bach's polyphony to create a versatile picture of the contemporary age. It is not by chance that the composer is called the "chronicler of the 20th century". Whereas the imagery of Bach's "Well-Tempered Clavier" is commonly compared with events in Holy Scripture, Shostakovich's music "recounts" human history. Shostakovich's cycle is like an aural encyclopedia, reflecting the most varied aspects of Russian and Soviet life at various periods in history as well as individual feelings and emotions associated with historical events. Here the epic and lyrical elements are intertwined and organically complement one another.

No less interesting is Shostakovich's approach to interpreting the genre of the polyphonic cycle. The macrocycle under consideration has a structure similar to that one of the "Well-Tempered Clavier", including 24 mini-cycles (diptychs) that covers all the tonalities of the 12-tone equal temperament. Shostakovich's tonal plan, however, differs from that of Bach: Shostakovich's mini-cycles do not follow semitones but the circle of fifths of parallel major and minor tonalities. Here, the structure of the mini-cycles, similarly to Bach's one, is based on the principle of contrasts: these contrasts are figurative, pace, dynamic and textural. The preludes have a predominantly homophonic structure, while the fugues are strictly polyphonic. "In all twenty-four fugues he uses the same compositional scheme, quite simple and traditional", as L. Gerver writes [7, p. 81].

Speaking of the principles of the development-expansion of the musical material, it is worth noting that Shostakovich's polyphonic thinking is rather close to the traditions of Bach's polyphony. The composer uses a technique of vertical-shifting counterpoint: the theme moves from voice to voice, developing new timbre sounds thanks to changes in register and tonality in full accordance with the tradition of the original source. Unlike his great predecessor, however, Shostakovich interpreted polyphonic forms from the perspective of the 20th

century musician: he organically combines the principles of polyphonic writing and homophonic music. Taking into account the experience of the preceding history of music, Shostakovich enriched the structure of the fugue with elements of later musical forms and, above all, the sonata form (a technique referred to as "sonatization of the fugue"). The synthesis of such different, contradictory formational principles contributed greatly to the deep dramatic and acutely conflictual character of the time of the composer's life and portrayed its multifaceted, complex and contradictory nature.

In the aspect of the specificity of Shostakovich's polyphonic thinking and methods of shaping, it is necessary to mention the polyphony of layers when "the entire fabric is divided into several "layers". "In essence, there is a replacement of one type of polyphonic presentation (imitative) by another (non-imitative), and we are dealing with polyphony of layers", writes V. Zaderatsky in this connection [8, p. 178]. Each voice seems to separate into several melodic lines, acquiring a chord texture; the sounding thus becomes richer and more powerful, and the polyphonic presentation acquires features of the harmonic one. As S. Nadler notes, "Shostakovich arrives at a polyphonic structure where most of the vertical consonances have a clear semantic charge for the listener and the performer, which comes from the symphonic harmony of the 18th and 19th centuries..." [9, p. 69].

The uniqueness of Shostakovich's work is manifested not only in the ultimate figurative variety of his fugue compositions, but also in the expansion of the temporal boundaries of the fugue. Often the sound of the fugue becomes very prolonged through an increase in themes, interludes and the use of additional tonalities. As a symphony composer, Shostakovich transforms his fugues into epic, lyrical or dramatic works on a grand scale. These are, in particular, fugues in B minor, G sharp minor, A flat major, D minor and others. It may be asserted that the cycle op. 87 gravitates towards the composer's symphonic concept in its comprehensiveness, its imagistic versatility, the scale of its individual movements, the intensity of their drama, psychology and conflict nature.

The immensity and originality of Shostakovich's creative idea posed formidable tasks for the performer. Here artistic and imagistic tasks always come to the fore, since each of the diptychs in the cycle undoubtedly constitutes a fully completed work of great artistic value. At the same time, the solution of these tasks always requires both good technical skills and well-developed polyphonic thinking. In this connection the performance of Shostakovich's mini-cycles invariably arouses the interest of young pianists studying at music schools

of various levels. And, no doubt, it helps them to master the minutest details of professional mastery and to gain satisfaction from the results they achieve. As for concert pianists, their performance of the cycle or its parts allows them to create musical images of high artistic sound and demonstrate a wide range of their professional abilities.

In this connection, it should be recalled that unlike Bach, whose cycle was supposed to be performed on stringed keyboard instruments of the 17th–18th centuries (clavichord, harpsichord, spinet, etc.), Shostakovich wrote for the modern grand piano. Of course, the preludes and fugues from the “Well-Tempered Clavier” are nowadays performed mainly on the piano. However, the difference in the instruments for which the works in question were intended implies a difference in their performing interpretations.

Therefore, it is necessary to take into account that the sound of the clavichord was rather soft it was not characterized by bright dynamic contrasts. The sound of the harpsichord, on the contrary, was very bright, even sharp, but not rich in overtones at all. In addition, the harpsichord did not have a pedal, which allowed to increase the duration of sound and to perform a coherent legato. Changing the dynamics on the harpsichord was possible only with two or more manuals, while the clavichord had this ability to a very small extent. Accordingly, the modern performance of Bach’s works requires a special skill – the ability to recreate the sound of early instruments. (Although it is impossible not to mention the existence of the opposite tendency: to perform Bach’s opuses in a romantic manner, without looking back at history.)

As for the sound of the piano, it differs from the early keyboard instruments in its rich overtones, variety of timbres, and wide dynamic range. Its design gives the performer broad opportunities to regulate the duration and intensity of sound (largely thanks to the presence of the pedal) and the use of various methods of articulation: unlike the keyboard instruments of the 17th and 18th centuries, the grand piano lets the performer achieve timbre variety through various methods of sound production. An important feature of this grand piano is its double repetition mechanism: after the strike the hammer bounces off the string immediately, which significantly increases its sounding time. This makes it possible, even without using a pedal, to obtain a deep singing legato, to saturate the sound with colorful overtones. There is no doubt that Shostakovich took all of these innovations into account when composing his cycle of preludes and fugues.

It is well known that Shostakovich himself was an excellent pianist, and, undoubtedly, he made full

use of the entire arsenal of technical and expressive possibilities of the piano. At the same time, there is no doubt that Shostakovich was a symphonic composer by nature of his talent. This could not fail to have an effect on his piano works and inevitably led to a rethinking of the possibilities of the instrument. The sounding of the piano when performing Op. 87 implies a broad timbre diversity: the texture of the preludes and fugues appears to be woven from the timbres of various orchestral instruments. The above makes it clear that Shostakovich significantly expanded the expressive potential of the modern grand piano, enriching its sound with orchestral, that is, with colors that are not peculiar to the piano to the instrument. “In Shostakovich’s works, the timbres of the orchestra are inseparable from the music, from the musical content and form. The composer was drawn not to timbre painting, but to revealing the emotional and psychological essence of timbres which associated by him with human feelings and experiences” [10, p. 279]. This statement fully applies to the piano cycle in question as well. Shostakovich also introduced principles of symphonic development into his polyphonic works that allowed him to recreate the effects of emotional suspense and climactic tension, and to impart a quality of large scale to polyphonic musical constructions. This is facilitated by the register juxtapositions, the variety of voices, and the strata polyphony (which reminds of the orchestral *tutti*).

The indisputable artistic merits of Shostakovich’s cycle place high demands on its performers: knowledge of traditions of the Russian piano school and the potential of the modern piano; mastery of various methods of playing and pedal; the ability to imitate on the piano the timbres of various musical instruments; and intonation sensitivity. Following Shostakovich, who transformed the traditions of Bach, the performer must interpret polyphonic works taking into account the experience accumulated over two centuries by foreign and native performing schools.

In this regard, a performer of Shostakovich’s polyphony needs skills more typical of the Romantic performing tradition – a “heavy” hand and mastery of large-scale piano technique, allowing for powerful sound effects with free movement of the hands and the entire upper arm girdle. Equally important is the ability to use a variety of methods of sound production, especially when performing cantilena, which requires a special touch, “viscous” fingers and flexible, heavy wrists, as well as free movements of the entire hand (in this case the perfect example is the performance of Dmitri Shostakovich himself). Another variant of performance technique is appropriate for the performance of major mini-cycles, close in character to ditties or dances.

In this case, techniques close to the technique of performing on early claviers become relevant. In addition, the pianist must master the skill of reacting instantly to unexpected changes in texture (for example, in the case of polyphonic layers), and not be afraid of using the pedal to achieve powerful sound effects. At the same time, all these skills, which are more typical for performing homophonic music, should not prevent the pianist from highlighting the theme in relief and intoning it in detail, demonstrating to the listener the polyphonic nature of the musical material.

Another difficulty for the performer is the considerable scope of many of Shostakovich's fugues: such an extended polyphonic form demands extreme concentration, the ability to create a dramaturgical plan for the fugue, steadily leading up to the principal culmination and then to the finale. In this connection, it is important to avoid monotony, using various methods of articulation, subtle gradations of dynamics, including the appropriate capabilities of the pedal, filling the sound with overtones and giving it different timbre coloration. Performances of the cycle and its movements help the modern pianist develop many qualities, master various aspects of piano playing technique, and serve as excellent material for the best understanding of the specificity of contemporary polyphony. Moreover,

the particular attractiveness of Shostakovich's cycle (in comparison with analogous works by other 20th century composers) is due to its vividly expressed national sound, close and in tune with the nature of Russian performers.

All of the above makes it possible to answer a question that was repeatedly voiced in music-critical articles devoted to Op. 87: "Why to repeat the Well-Tempered Clavier?" The fact is that Shostakovich did not repeat Bach; he revived the great traditions of early polyphony, transforming them in accordance with the realities of the 20th century. The composer's talent and sincerity, and his keen sense of modernity, made for the tremendous impressive power of the cycle, which reveals all facets of life, soul and feelings of our compatriot. Therefore the cycle is equally valuable for listeners, performers and music students. Its study provides the pianist with the opportunity to master the technique of performing polyphonic works, allows him to reveal his creative individuality and realize the rich experience accumulated by the European and Russian piano schools. Shostakovich's exceptional creative originality together with his bold use of the traditions of early music made his cycle of 24 Preludes and Fugues a vivid musical phenomenon of our era and earned it the honorary title of the "Third Volume of the Well-Tempered Clavier".

---

### REFERENCES

---

1. *Luk'yanova N.* Dmitriy Dmitrievich Shostakovich [Dmitri Shostakovich]. Moscow: Muzyka, 1980. 176 p.
2. *Dolzhanskiy A.* 24 prelyudii i fugi D. Shostakovicha [24 Preludes and Fugues by D. Shostakovich]. Leningrad: Sovetskiy kompozitor, 1970. 260 p.
3. *Blois L.* Tatiana Nikolaeva plays opus 87. In: DSCH Journal. 2009. No. 31. Pp. 64–66.
4. *Blois L.* Shostakovich's Preludes and Fugues: Contexts, Style, Performance. In: DSCH Journal. 2011. No. 34. Pp. 71–73.
5. *Jackson A. P.* The Meaning is the Music: A Brief Analysis of Dmitri Shostakovich's Opus 87. In: DSCH Journal. 2007. No. 26. Pp. 11–16.
6. *Lyu Chzhe.* Perspektivnoe znachenie tsikla "24 prelyudii i fugi" op. 87 v tvorchestve D. D. Shostakovicha [Prospective value of the cycle of "24 preludes and fugues" op. 87 in D. Shostakovich's creative work]. In: Vestnik KemGUKI [Bulletin of Kemerovo State University of Culture and Arts]. 2019. No. 46. Pp. 38–44.
7. *Gerver L.* Chto novogo o polifonicheskoy tekhnike Shostakovicha mogut soobshchit' rukopisi ego sochineniy [What new information about Shostakovich's polyphonic technique can be found in the manuscripts of his compositions]. In: Muzykal'naya akademiya [Music Academy]. 2020. No. 1. Pp. 59–83.
8. *Zaderatskiy V.* Polifoniya v instrumental'nykh proizvedeniyakh D. Shostakovicha [Polyphony in instrumental works by D. Shostakovich]. Moscow: Muzyka, 1969. 272 p.
9. *Nadler S.* Polifonicheskiy mir Dmitriya Shostakovicha [Dmitri Shostakovich's polyphonic world]: monograph: in 4 vol. Rostov-on-Don: Rostov Regional Institute of Skill Improvement and Educationalists Retraining, 2009. Vol. 1. 280 p.
10. *Danilevich L.* Dmitriy Shostakovich [Dmitri Shostakovich]. Moscow: Sovetskiy kompozitor, 1980. 302 p.

ЛИТЕРАТУРА

1. Лукьянова Н. В. Дмитрий Дмитриевич Шостакович. М.: Музыка, 1980. 176 с.
2. Должанский А. Н. 24 прелюдии и фуги Д. Шостаковича. Л.: Сов. композитор, 1970. 260 с.
3. Blois L. Tatiana Nikolaeva plays opus 87 // DSCH Journal. 2009. № 31. Pp. 64–66.
4. Blois L. Shostakovich's Preludes and Fugues: Contexts, Style, Performance // DSCH Journal. 2011. № 34. Pp. 71–73.
5. Jackson A. P. The Meaning is the Music: A Brief Analysis of Dmitri Shostakovich's Opus 87 // DSCH Journal. 2007. № 26. Pp. 11–16.
6. Лю Чже. Перспективное значение цикла «24 прелюдии и фуги» ор. 87 в творчестве Д. Д. Шостаковича // Вестник КемГУКИ. 2019. № 46. С. 38–44.
7. Гервер Л. Л. Что нового о полифонической технике Шостаковича могут сообщить рукописи его сочинений // Музыкальная академия. 2020. № 1. С. 59–83.
8. Задерацкий В. В. Полифония в инструментальных произведениях Д. Шостаковича. М.: Музыка, 1969. 272 с.
9. Надлер С. В. Полифонический мир Дмитрия Шостаковича: моногр.: в 4 кн. Ростов н/Д: ИПК и ПРО, 2009. Кн. 1. 280 с.
10. Данилевич Л. В. Дмитрий Шостакович. М.: Сов. композитор, 1980. 302 с.

**Galina V. Rybintseva**

Ph. D. (Philosophy), Associate Professor, Head of the Department  
of Social and Humanitarian Disciplines, Vice-Rector for Academic Affairs  
S. Rachmaninov Rostov State Conservatory  
Russia, 344002, Rostov-on-Don  
*gvrib@mail.ru*  
ORCID: 0000-0002-5289-4654

**Рыбинцева Галина Валериановна**

кандидат философских наук, доцент, заведующая кафедрой  
социально-гуманитарных дисциплин, проректор по учебной работе  
Ростовская государственная консерватория им. С. В. Рахманинова  
Россия, 344002, Ростов-на-Дону  
*gvrib@mail.ru*  
ORCID: 0000-0002-5289-4654

**Anastasiya S. Tarasova**

Accompanist at the Department of String Instruments  
S. Rachmaninov Rostov State Conservatory  
Russia, 344002, Rostov-on-Don  
*tarasova.a.s.rnd@mail.ru*  
ORCID: 0000-0001-5416-2556

**Тарасова Анастасия Сергеевна**

концертмейстер кафедры струнных инструментов  
Ростовская государственная консерватория им. С. В. Рахманинова  
Россия, 344002, Ростов-на-Дону  
*tarasova.a.s.rnd@mail.ru*  
ORCID: 0000-0001-5416-2556