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Routine as a problem of music performance and inspiration as its hermeneutical solution

Abstract: Music performance involves the relationship between the performer and the text, which takes on various forms and characters throughout the work. One of the acute problems of this relationship is emotional burnout when indifference to the work takes the place of initial enthusiasm. It is generally accepted that the leading cause of this condition is routine based on the principle of repetition. How to break out of the vicious circle of routine? The repetition becomes a coil to the next level only by turning this circle into a spiral. To do this, musicians use various techniques and methods, the principle of which is searching and finding new meanings in the work.

This article discusses the problem of the routine of musical work and its solutions offered by the performers. The concept of inspiration, which is the opposite of routine, and the concept of the new, as a hermeneutic key to inspiration, are also analyzed

Keywords: the hermeneutics of art, hermeneutics of music, philosophy of art.

*“the word **véος** implies that the world is always in process of creation...”*
(Plato, Ion 411e)

Introduction

“La routine – the death of music,” Toscanini shouted at rehearsals when it seemed that the orchestra musicians were not playing their parts with enough inspiration (Antek 2021, 8). Routine and, consequently, indifference to the piece being performed is one of the main problems for musicians. Although, routine acquires its most striking features in orchestras, it is also the problem of soloists, one of whose main tasks is to eradicate the manifestations of routine from the musical work. The paradox is that the performer’s work on a piece tends to turn into a routine in itself. Endless musical exercises, etudes, necessary repetitions of complex passages and fragments – all this work leads the performer’s musical consciousness away from the performance’s very purpose – creating an artistic image of the work.

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Routine

Musicians understand routine in two ways – in a broad and a narrow sense. The first type of routine is not obligatory but a frequent result of the general understanding of music as a particular system or complex of systems: “Routine signifies the acquisition of a modicum of experience and artcraft, and their application to all cases which may occur; hence, there must be an astounding number of analogous cases. Now, I like to imagine a species of art-praxis wherein each case should be a new one, an exception! How helpless and impotent would the army of practical musicians stand before it!... One longs to exclaim, ‘Avoid routine! Let each beginning be, as had none been before! Know nothing, but rather think and feel!’” (Busoni 1911, 41-42). In this sense, any musical system, whether it is the universalization of understanding of music (for example, musical semantics, etc.) or the simplification of technical performance (systems for technical improvement), carries the danger of schematization, mechanization, and the use of templates, which ultimately fetters musical performance, in the words of Busoni, “within four walls” (ibid.) and hinders its development. A “system” is identified with the routine and is perceived by the performers as something dead, contrary to the very essence of creativity – the development: “... There is no one dogmatic system that should be followed throughout life. Everything is changeable, everything is mobile, so why hold on to something unchanging and frozen... When I hear about pianists who have found a ‘system’ I constantly remember Liszt’s words: ‘A good thing is a system, but I could never find it’” (Milshtein, Konstantin Nikolaevich Igunnov 1975, 303).

Theoretical systems in performance are often questioned precisely because they interfere with the implementation of the artist’s thinking in the field of the diversity of interpretation. With the idea that interpretive work on a piece is understood as a process of development, we meet in the statements of many performers: “If a work has grown, as a tree grows...with its own constant character...it is good” (Fischer, 1951, p. 23). Fisher’s thoughts are very close to Casals’ idea that the understanding of music “cannot be static but, like life itself, must constantly grow” (Kahn, 1970, p. 104). A system in performance is almost always static. If a work is a priori felt by the performer as something alive, then any systems, standards, and schemes will be perceived as constricting elements for inspiration and improvisation.

Another type of routine is technical work, which usually includes numerous repetitions of the whole work and its parts. The purpose of these repetitions is the technical perfection of the performance, but they are precisely the routine that reduces the degree of inspiration and interpretive interest. In this sense, each performer is faced with achieving the desired

technical level and not losing the inspiration: “The most difficult thing is to combine enthusiasm and mood with the perfection of performance. Chasing one, you’ll lose the other. And you have to have both”, Svyatoslav Richter used to say (Milshtein, *Questions of the Theory and History of Performance*, vol. 1, 1983, p. 194). It is interesting that here perfection is primarily understood not as the fluency of the fingers and the technicality of the passages, but the elementary fidelity of the text’s transmission (notes, rhythm, nuances, etc.), which is precisely opposed to the inspiration. Suppose it is not possible to maintain a balance between the two. In that case most musicians prioritize the inspiration: “If I had the choice between a performer who plays with inspiration and imagination but treats the text rather arbitrarily, and another performer who is absolutely reliable in his faithfulness to the text but has no imagination and is never inspired, I would generally prefer the inspired but slovenly player” (Schnabel 1964, 217).

Both perfect knowledge of the text and technical perfection in music result from routine hard work. And in this sense, routine is always opposed to inspiration. Moreover, these states are understood as two processes incompatible with each other. Being qualitatively different, they also oppose each other in time, never, even episodically, being synchronous.

Inspiration

Inspiration is, according to the ancient Greeks, the property of a genius and one of the most necessary states for an artist. According to Plato’s *Ion*, it is the only condition for creating a real work of art. Moreover, the creativity itself, if a higher power inspires it, is also considered as an act of interpretation since the poet must interpret what the gods inspired him. Not only the creation of the work but also its performing (by a rhapsode or an aoidos) also had to be inspired. This inspiration also had to have a hermeneutical focus on the interpretation of the work as its comprehension. Socrates says: “Then you may count on this nobler title in our minds, Ion, of being a divine and not an artistic praiser of Homer” (Plato, Plato in Twelve Volumes, Vol. 9 1925., 542b), summing up the argument about the source of inspiration. This vector of philosophy of inspiration, set by the ancient Greeks and Plato himself, has not yet lost its metaphysical component, despite many thinkers trying to exclude it. Aleksandr Pushkin defined inspiration as “the disposition of the soul to the most lively acceptance of impressions, consequently to a quick understanding of concepts, which contributes to the explanation of them” (Pushkin, 1962, pp. 268-269), that can be translated from the point of view of hermeneutics as an emotional and mental ability (“disposition”) to accept the new information (“impression”) and its conceptual processing (“understanding

of concepts and explaining them”). Thus, although Pushkin understands inspiration as Plato understood it, he democratizes the concept of inspiration to a large extent, taking it out of the ancient narrow and metaphysical understanding into a wider sphere of any creative process in general, emphasizing its nature as hermeneutic even more clearly. And although Plato and Pushkin may differ in their assessment of the nature of inspiration, both thinkers agree that interpretation requires a state of inspiration. Plato’s inspiration comes from divine power (often unexpected for a poet or a rhapsode), whereas Pushkin understands this state as a product of the orientation of the soul (that is, in many respects, an artist’s choice). Thus, Plato’s vertical of creativity (God—poet—rhapsodist—listener) later loses its primary link, freeing itself from the very subject of inspiration. One can take one step further and shift the source of inspiration to the object that links all the elements in this chain – to the text. The conductor Bruno Walter expresses this idea: “I understand the inspiration as the never-ending expressive richness of interpretation, the constant change of living sensations generated in performer by musical or dramatic development” (Ed. Edelman 1962, 74). So, Walter, like many other musicians, proceeds from the idea that the artist’s inspiration originates from the material itself – the “musical and dramatic development” of the work. Thus, for the interpreter, the concept of inspiration ceases to have any metaphysical character and becomes only a matter of its relationship with the text. On the other hand, this is a rather productive idea in musical performance since it opens the potential for an endless number of text meanings and an infinity of interpretations.

The interpreter – text relationship has different properties throughout the musician’s work on the piece. In the context of inspiration and routine, stopping at the first stage of this process is necessary since it is naturally illuminated by the inspiration more than any other.

“Everything should be performed as if for the first time” (Milshtein, *Questions of the Theory and History of Performance*, vol. 1 1983, 187), said Richter. In other words, we can say that the performance, throughout its existence, must carry the mood of inspiration of the first meeting of the performer with the work. Acquaintance with the text becomes the primary impression, which, according to musicians, plays a decisive role. It can be said that the entire subsequent life of the work lies in this grain of the first meeting. In this state of inspiration, or as it is called “burning” (Amonashvili 1987, 24), the feeling of novelty is exceptionally productive. Still, at the same time, it is precarious, dulls over time, and often wholly disappears. Music teachers warn about this, as students cannot always recognize that difficult period when the state of inspiration ends and the emotion of boredom and indifference to the work appears: “It is known that the performance, even the best one, of a piece of music, fades with

time; immediacy, the freshness of performance left. We can observe something similar in students, even the best ones, if, for some reason, they play the same piece for a long time. The student then, whether he wants it or not, begins to reproduce the piece mechanically, passively, sluggishly, without initiative ... If you stop finding something new in what you are performing, life will inevitably leave the performance; there will be a scheme that will quickly bore, stop to excite. Performance will turn into something formulaic, and there is nothing worse than this for a student..." (Milshtein, Questions of the Theory and History of Performance, vol. 1 1983, 210). Milstein shows how the routine leads to the loss of inspiration, which can be returned only if "to find something new in the performed." Thus, the key to inspiration lies in the text itself. This key is the "new."

The concept of the new

The concept of inspiration is invariably associated with the concept of genius, whose distinctive feature is originality: "Foremost property of genius must be originality" (Kant 1987, 5:308), said Kant. One of the main features of originality is innovativeness as a quality of the artist's thinking and novelty as a property of the work. Both concepts include the philosophical idea of the new, an exceptionally bright impetus for the development of which was set by the sophists: "The sophists and Socrates played a huge role in creating the very type of ancient philosophy, who put in the foreground the spiritual quest of man, his constant desire for everything new" (Losev, History of Ancient Aesthetics V 2000, 377). This orientation towards the search for the new was laid down by ancient philosophy as an original and productive way of thinking.

Again, one of the dramatic examples of the confrontation between the new and the old is the paradigmatic struggle of the sophists for the right to new thinking and a new interpretation of ancient philosophical ideas. The result of this struggle was a new type of thinking. The new is ontologically connected with the process of development and progression and, as a result, acts as an antagonist of the old and the routine (and, in a sense, of traditionality). Losev says: "History is ruthless: when the truth is held together by the absence of its criticism, and morality and way of life are only habits, then this truth and this life are finished. Here always look for sophists who, destroying the old, create, in any case, something new – the translation of this truth and this way of life into the language of self-consciousness" (Losev, History of Ancient Aesthetics vol. II 2000, 49). Thus, Kant's "genius" manifests itself in this sophist, whose "originality" of thinking brings the renewal through the liberation from the shackles of routine.

And art also has its sophists, and the conflict between traditional and innovative is also dramatic here, and just as in philosophy, a genius plays a vital role in this conflict: “It is no accident that the artist comes to terms with a tension in his work between the expectations harbored by custom and the introduction of new ways of doing things” (Gadamer 1986, 10). In the concept of tradition, there is always a component of routine since the meaning of tradition lies in preserving and conserving a thought. At the same time, innovation, on the contrary, is caused by the desire to overcome the inertia of tradition. As Gadamer rightly points out, it is up to the artist to overcome this tension and conflict. The form which the struggle of opposing forces will take depends on many factors. Still, the main one is the choice of the artist, who captures the new meanings in the old, brings them to life, openly opposes traditionalism to the newness in favor of the latter, understanding the musical performance as a dialectical process, in which the old (the established routine of its performance) meets the new (its rethinking by the artist). The result of this meeting is a more or less successful recreation of the work. What is decisive here is the artistic interpretation and, in a sense, the “newness” of this interpretation.

Creativity itself is identified with the concept of “new”; creation becomes synonymous with seeking and finding the new: “The concept of ‘creativity’ contains the concept of the ‘new’” (Ed. Edelman 1962, 149). From this statement of Busoni, written in the «Selbsi-Rezension», one should not conclude that any creativity at any of its stages is inextricably linked with the new. The feeling of novelty is not a permanent state of the artist in the process of creativity. Moreover, the feeling of newness is so unpredictable in its appearance, so unsteady that this emotional state is often, just like inspiration, defined as something of a metaphysical nature, that is, as a phenomenon that does not depend on the artist. The feeling of novelty and inspiration are concepts very close to each other, interpenetrating and interdependent. Also, we can confidently say that the connection of these phenomena is, to a decisive extent, due to the hermeneutic grounds.

To find a new

It is known that the new is a strong motivating stimulus for the performer. New impressions and knowledge inspire the performance and take it to a completely different level. Moreover, performers strive to find new impressions in and outside the text. Thus, life itself becomes an inspiration for the artist. It is imperative to note the musician’s orientation towards meeting the new, the strong desire for this, the desire to recreate the first feeling of inspiration. A conscious approach is essential when a person globally seeks novelty. Casals said: “It is a rediscovery of the world

of which I have the joy of being a part. It fills me with awareness of the wonder of life, with a feeling of the incredible marvel of being a human being. The music is never the same for me, never. Each day it is something new, fantastic and unbelievable” (Kahn 1970, 8). This is a conscious psychological focus on maintaining interest in life, the basis of which is a sense of novelty. The purpose of this psychological state for the musician is the performance itself. But, even more than this general life attitude, the performance is influenced by the methods of work developed for this purpose, the main idea of which is to renew the perception of the text: “if you find something unexpected in the piece, it will come to life again” (Sokolov 1984, 48), said Igumnov. So, the work “comes to life” when the performer finds something “unexpected,” new, and hidden. Then an act of hermeneutical discovery takes place, which revives and renews the work. This process can be regulated, and the performers develop various working methods and techniques.

Rediscovered text

Most of these techniques are hermeneutical; their main goal is to refresh the perception of the text and to update the interpretation. One such way, for example, is to work from notes without an instrument. The purpose of this is, first, to eliminate the distracting physical factors of the performing process and focus all attention on the text, creating an artistic image of the work in the mind, and second, to change the scope of activity to diversify the perception of the text, thus introducing an element of novelty into the work: “Sometimes I want to just sit with the notes, not playing, to see what elements a work consists of, without bothering myself with either performance, or sound, or fingering, but to imagine only the sound of a piece... In performance, it (music) is immeasurably better than it comes out on the piano; this is the ideal that can never be achieved”, said pianist Grigory Ginzburg (Ginzburg 1984, 234).

Another way is a complete short-term or long-term cessation of any work on the text. Thus, an emotional and intellectual rest from the work is carried out. Konstantin Igumnov said: “... In order to play a piece well, you need to take a break from it for some time... Even if the work is valuable and worthwhile, it can ‘get you bored’ for a while, so you must move away. If you don’t listen to it and don’t play it, the sharpness of perception will be restored again” (Sokolov 1984, 48). Here, the goal is to deceive the routine somehow, to renew the perception, present the old as the new, and thereby return to the original feeling of inspiration. This method gives very productive results, and many musicians use it.

These techniques are based on the hermeneutic idea of return. That is, work on a piece is either stopped for some time or diversified by another

type of activity, to subsequently return to the text and cause its new perception. Thus, with each new return round, there is a more complete and deeper understanding of the work. This is the idea behind the cyclical return of the hermeneutic circle theory. However, in relation to the musical performance, it can rather be called a hermeneutic spiral, since each return initiates a new perception and interpretation: "The path of the performer can be compared with movement not in a straight line, but in a spiral. And sometimes returning to an old piece that has not been played for a long time, its rethinking can bring more joy than working on a new one" (Milshtein, *Questions of the Theory and History of Performance*, vol. 1 1983, 188).

This renewal naturally translates into a change in interpretation. This is paradoxical, but the performance of the same work by the same performer at various times can be radically different. Neuhaus said: "I remember how I heard the Liszt Sonata performed by Busoni twice in four years, and these were such different performances as if almost another person performed" (Milshtein, *Questions of the Theory and History of Performance*, vol. 1 1983, 31).

Conclusion

Among the sequence of emotions, a musician experiences concerning the performed piece, two extreme ones stand out: inspiration and indifference. The fruitfulness of performing work depends on how the musician gets through these emotions. It is generally believed that inspiration cannot be controlled since it is metaphysically conditioned; a 'divine gift' is given regardless of a person's desire. Such is the centuries-old and stable tradition of this subject's understanding. It is also believed that indifference to the work, which appears with the extinction of inspiration, is an unpleasant but indispensable companion of the routine work. The passivity of such a position gives rise to many problems in performance, up to the complete unwillingness of the musician to perform the piece. However, performing practice shows that these emotional processes can be regulated, and many musicians testify to this. The performers frame this problem with the following question: how to keep the inspiration? And since the emotion of inspiration is inversely proportional to the state of the routine, this question often turns into: how to avoid the routine? The performing work suggests that there is only one answer to these questions: only searching and finding something new in the text allows you to return to the state of the initial inspiration. A new look at the text, in general, and in details, even the smallest ones, allows you to break out of the state of routine and enter a new interpretive turn of the spiral. The reverse approach to the work as a solution of purely technical problems leads only to a

routine stagnation of the thought. A constant interpretive activity must be carried out in parallel with the technical. At the same time, it is essential to perceive this work as cooperation with the text, moreover, as cooperation with its countless meanings, the disclosure of which, on the one hand, ensures the continuation of the life of the work and, on the other hand, reduces the routine factor and gives inspiration to the artist himself to continue this work.

“If you stop finding something new in the performed, life will inevitably leave the performance” (Milshtein 1983, 210).

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