

# Unique features of the performing style of Ivan Karabyts

## 24 preludes for piano

### Особливості виконавської стилістики циклу Івана Карабиця

### «24 прелюдії для фортепіано»

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**Abstract.** The article attempts to understand the legacy of Ivan Karabyts from the perspective of modern piano performance, in particular his landmark work *24 Preludes for the Piano* with comprehensive analyses of the composer's creative method, specifics of the artist's stylistic decisions in the field of piano music, interpretive analysis of the piano cycle *24 Preludes...*, which will uncover a wide field for the stage performance of this work and its role in the establishment of the distinctive performance style of Karabyts' works. That is why cycle *24 Preludes for Piano* by Karabyts paints a wide visual and sonic world, which is quite difficult for a pianist to implement. The creative and individualized approach of the pianist should absorb a wide range of figurative and content saturation, often sharply contrasting. For the performer, it remains important to implement the author's concept of the series' pieces by focusing on three fundamental artistic layers — folk-musical thinking and folklore genres, stylistic elements of the music of outstanding masters in a retrospective implementation, some features of those styles that exist and develop in parallel with the so-called serious music (jazz, pop music). In addition, the presence of such a diverse foundation determines not only the versatile coverage of the genre content open for the prelude but also the ramification of cross-semantic connections between the parts of the cycle.

**Keywords:** piano cycle, 24 preludes, Ivan Karabyts, style, concept, performance style.

**Formulation of the problem.** Ivan Karabyts (1945–2002) is a remarkable representative of the Borys Lyatoshinsky school, which traditions became a major component of Ukrainian modernist music. Lyatoshynskyi, the founder of the conflict-dramatic, conceptual type of symphony in Ukrainian music, and the master of the orchestral style had a significant impact on the formation of the creative personality of Karabyts. A desire for cyclicity, a multilayered concept, often tragic with dynamic tension and emotionally explosive are characteristic features of his works.

A prominent representative of the sixties, Karabyts nurtured advanced ideas of composer creativity in his compositions. The creative novelty of his ideas

was fully achieved in cycle *24 Preludes for Piano*. Considerable ingenuity, a bold experiment, and a deep philosophical and aesthetic subtext, where a peculiarly neoclassical worldview and clearly organized neoclassical forms intersect and coexist in the space-time of the stage embodiment are characteristic features of the work. This work of Karabyts plays a major role in the repertoire of many pianists.

The opportunity to understand Karabyts's legacy from the standpoint of modern piano performance constitutes **the relevance** of the paper. The study of his landmark *24 Preludes for Piano* with the comprehensive use of analytics about the composer's creative method, the distinctive features of the composer's decisions, and interpretive analysis of *24 Preludes...*

will open a wide field for a deeper understanding of the significance of this work in establishing Ukrainian miniature of the second half of the 20th century.

**The purpose** of the paper is to study the figurative, stylistic and performance components of piano music by Karabyts in the case of *24 Preludes*.

**Research methodology.** The methodological base of the paper was formed by scientific works, in which the figure of the composer and style features of his piano work were discussed (Olena Berehova, Olena Haluzevska, Galina Iermakova, Oleh Kopeliuk, Svitlana Miroshnychenko, Igor Savchuk, Irina Yagodzinskaya).

**Presenting main material.** *Mourning Prelude* by B. Lyatoshynskyi (1920) is one of the first autonomous preludes of Ukrainian piano heritage. The piece remained unknown for a long time and was published only 52 years after it was written. The study of the composer's archive allows us to conclude that *Mourning Prelude* remains the only known piano piece from the early works of Lyatoshynskyi. It is marked by an intense quest for a way out of the established sphere of the classical harmonic vertical and is the last piano piece from the early period of the composer's work. Twenty years after writing the *Mourning Prelude*, Lyatoshynskyi returned to the piano prelude, creating *Cycle of preludes*, (work 38). The piece marks the beginning of a new period in the evolution of the composer's piano and chamber-instrumental works (*The Second Trio*, work 41, *Ukrainian Quintet*, work 42, *The Fourth String Quartet*, work 43, etc.). This period is marked by the synthesis of international classical traditions with the foundations of Ukrainian folk musical thinking, and the constant use of the principles of this synthesis.

The genre of the prelude reached its peak in the artistic quests of Ukrainian composers of the 1960s. Many of them are students of Boris Lyatoshynskyi's composition class at the Kyiv State Conservatory. There, The students' search for their own expressive systems was encouraged in the field of piano miniatures, in particular — of preludes. This is how V. Ilyin, I. Karabyts, H. Lyashenko, Ye. Stankovych and other young Ukrainian composers entered

musical literature with their first printed attempts at small-scale piano works.

The lyrical and dreamy "Prelude" by Karabyts is interesting in terms of expressive content with poetic and improvisational musical material in the sense of how the musical fabric unfolds. Melodic lines are actively and rhythmically subjected to chromaticization, empowered with altered harmoniums of the tertiary structure. The origins of a stylistic idea, which was later vividly embodied by the composer in his "Concerto for Piano and Orchestra" No. 2, can be traced in this piece: music with romantic expressionism and certain features of genre music was re-interpreted through the newest stylistic determinants of the second half of the 20th century.

However, if a small cycle of piano miniatures, and in particular the preludes, program and non-program pieces of a prelude nature can be found in the body of works of almost every composer, a large cycle is a rather rare phenomenon and requires considerable professional experience, because addressing 24 preludes requires the artist to play a complex "game" with a full tonal spectrum, where each time each "semitone" contributes a new component of internal and external sensations to the overall integrity of perception.

Karabyts wrote a cycle of 24 preludes in 1976. By this time, the composer already had experience in creating large-scale pieces in terms of content and form of other genres (*Concerto for choir, soloists and symphony orchestra*, *Symphony No. 1. Five songs about Ukraine*, *Concerts No. 1 and No. 2 for piano and orchestra*). The first of the six written preludes (I, XVI, III, XIX, XXII, XX in the cycle, respectively) encouraged the author to continue the work and combine the pieces in the sequence of the quarto-fifth circle. Karabyts does not display key signs anywhere (the only exception is the Prelude in G minor). The pieces of the cycle contain rather hints of tonality: the complexity of the harmonic movement and the sophistication of the vertical combinations hide the tonal foundations, but this negates the tonal constancy present in the nodal moments of the forms. Preludes, covering the range

from laconic micro-miniatures (V) to rather elaborate pieces (XIV, XXI, etc.), are carried out mainly in three- and two-part reprise and form-creating formulas and in the form of a period.

In *24 preludes...* Karabyts conveys the dynamics of the hero's existence and uses almost the entire European stylistic legacy not only of the 20th century but also stylistic signs and allusions of the polyphonic, classical, romantic way of arranging the musical fabric. At the same time, the cycle combines colourful musical and psychological gradations, united as a whole, which is subject to development from simple to complex, from obvious to imaginary. The figurative saturation emphasizes the stylistic reincarnations of the overall image. Namely, the stylistic interaction (stylistic layering, stylistic play) constitutes the drama of the cycle, and its psychologism and establishes the main idea woven from "...eternal contradictions — the perception of oneself and the "unreasonable" world, the introverted existential dissonance of the "I" as an attempt to survive, without making any giving into the fierce environment and as a result — the impossibility of any changes in the foundations of eternal Chaos" [5, p. 127].

In general, the imagery content of the cycle can be divided into several areas of image transformation. The first includes Preludes I, IX, XV, and XXII. We can see the transformation of the spiritual and transcendent imaginative state. In this group of preludes, the hero lives in his own world of futile dreams and hopes. Preludes III, VII, XIV, and XVI represent the conflict between the hero and the world. Here, polyphonic stylistic techniques depict the struggle to know oneself. The third figurative and transformational block united XII and XVIII preludes. The choice of these stylistic models is not random — the figure of Shostakovich is too tragic, and using the passacaglia provides an opportunity to saturate the figurative field with mournful features.

The fourth group combined Preludes IV, V, X, XIII, XVII, XIX and XXI. This "clump" of preludes represents the master's faith in the victory of eternal values. The composer's choice of harmonic means to reveal eternal existential characteristics is an attempt

to reproduce the eternal belief in the triumph of the beautiful. But obviously the most extensive, figuratively convex and multifaceted subject to intensive development is the fifth block. Represented by Preludes II, VI, VIII, XI, XX, XXIII, and XXI it is transformed in the most significant way during the development process — from the changeable, capricious, dialogical in Prelude II to an enchanting performance, hypertrophied brilliance in Prelude XXIV which serves as an epilogue.

The embodiment of genre models takes place "... as if concealed — we can judge certain genre borrowings from the author's "hints". A characteristic feature is that the composer can concentrate several genre models or, at least, references to them in a miniature" [5, p. 130]. Thanks to this, the composer significantly diversifies the figurative and meaningful context of the cycle — there are elegiac contemplation and violent drama, household scenes and deep psychological sketches. The composer used an extremely wide palette of musical allusions and intentions: starting with baroque forms, through pop to artistic portraits of great composers. The composer created a full-scale colouristic "show-extravaganza" in which the process of crystallization of the main idea — the reproduction of the rhythm of existence, its stylistic space-time — takes place in a tense dynamic setting. On the one hand, the reflection of artistic personalities who were the idols of the composer — Shostakovich, Bartok, Stravinsky, etc., on the other hand — the stylistic and genre principles, typical to the artistic discourse of the 20<sup>th</sup> century — impressionism, expressionism, neoclassicism, etc.

The music of Karabyts is an important part of the Ukrainian repertoire for many pianists. For decades it has been successfully performed at many concert venues. A characteristic feature of the interpretation of Karabyts music is its ability to change over time. Depending on the historical and cultural context, it acquires new qualities and relevant features here and now. With regard to the stage version of *24 Preludes for Piano*, we should note that the extremely colourful content of this cycle requires from a performer an exquisite pianistic feeling as if he

was a co-creator of the piece along with the author. Let's try to comment on the nature of the performance of this complex (in terms of technique and expression) work from the standpoint of distinct features of the idea implementation.

The cycle opens with a lyrical improvisation with a light melodic chant. The pianist should exaggerate the progress of the imitative-polyphonic unfolding, which takes place against the backdrop of verticals of a predominantly tertiary structure. This will make it possible to reproduce the features of the stylistic manner of the cycle based on the imitation-polyphonic deployment. In Prelude II, the idea of performance is focused on the disclosure of genre transformations and the display of their characteristic features (performer-composer modulation-appeal to caprice). The nature and ultimate goal of the pianist's modulation seem to be exacerbated by the exquisitely emphasized breaks of the melodic line with throws, and parallel tonal shifts, which create (along with the register range of the presentation) a certain capriciousness of the musical image.

Genre modulation is a reference point for the pianist in the X Prelude. Structurally, this can be traced to the alternation of ascetic-majestic chorale music and duma recitation, which arises as a continuation of the primary epic thesis. And if at the beginning and the end of the prelude the recitative supports and develops the narrative, then in the *cadenza* the performer seems to expand its functions. Here, on the one hand, it reproduces the peculiarity of the instrumental accompaniment of duma (repetition of plucking a string), and on the other hand, the recitation is saturated with the pathetic intonation of the human voice, including interval connections that were not used in the practice of kobzar art.

Exacerbation of the techniques of register-colouristic reverberation of the ostinato figure is used in the interpretation of Prelude XIV. The difference is that the materialized (rather than phonic) responses of distant registers in the parts of imitative-polyphonic writing create a long presence in a single sonic world born from the static of a contemplative mood. The play ends with a kind of concise connotation

of fragments from this sound world, having previously gone through the sphere of the dramatic transformation of imagery.

Sharpened ostinatos envelop the next prelude as well. The pianist pays attention to the polyphonic framing of the theme in the interpretation, using this element of the author's construction as a unifying formative element. The performer's attention to the strict simplicity of ancient chanting defines the artistic character, revealing itself in the structure of the melody (repetition of sounds, second-to-second relations of development, narrow range). In the further unfolding of the interpretation, the textural presentation transforms from sparse and transparent into a massive one, changing the image into a branch of bell-beat symbolism.

In Prelude V, the pianist's attention should be directed to an improvisational, uncompressed linear intonation development, reminiscent of Bach's movement organization. However, the movement itself (with the distribution of hand parts in one line) takes place in a completely different intonation environment, typical of modern musical thinking. Another "Bachian retrospection" — in Prelude XII, in the performance field should resemble a kind of reflection-improvisation with features of variation on the ostinato figure of the bass voice.

Features of Scriabin's worldview are reproduced in Prelude XVI. Intonational expressiveness is revealed in the rhythmic imitation of two figuratively developed and independent melodic voices. The beginning of the piece — a conscious appeal to Scriabin's model, which is quite clearly shown in the piano version — naturally leads to the second theme. Here, the intonation structure of the melody, laid out in thirds against the backdrop of the figured accompaniment, creates an even greater resemblance with the emotional sublimity of Scriabin's images, which are so close to the performance manner of the pianist.

The author's textural design of the melody of this theme, which the pianist can only sharpen using Liszt's techniques of sound production, serves as the foundation for the harmonic movement both in the same type verticals and in those complicated

by intervals. It enters into close interaction with the quarto-fifth harmonic foundations (Preludes X, XIX), texturally designs the main themes, their elements (Prelude XIII) and auxiliary melodic lines (IX prelude, etc.), accompaniment formulas in different horizontal layers of the texture (Preludes XIX, XXIII), is used when applying certain technique approaches (figurative passage — Prelude III; scale-like movement of double thirds and chords with a third — Prelude IX; rehearsed chords — Preludes XIV, XXI).

Returning to the group of preludes of the retrospective-stylistic plan, it should be said that the level of retrospection can be both close and distant. Everything depends on how convincingly this or that performance setup can be performed, according to the author's comments. Prelude XVIII is indicative in this context. In the content and character of the pianist's interpretation, one can catch only contour and mediated connections with the figurative and emotional world reflected in the first part of the Fantasy Sonata in C-sharp minor, Op. 27, No. 2 by L. Beethoven. After all, in this work, the theme in low and high registers, and the repetition of intervals are used as essential elements of the musical language. However, these repetitions are veiled, they create a line of undertones cementing intonationally refined phrases in the upward movement of melodic figuration with a third structure.

Prelude VI is a grotesque dramatized march. The pianist deliberately exaggerates the intention of Karabyts, who seems to be inheriting the development of that area of the genre, which in Ukrainian music was first addressed by Lyatoshynskyi in *Mourning Prelude*. In Prelude VII, the pianist consciously emphasizes typical spheres of general stylistic intonation — which is typical for jazz and pop music. It is displayed in combination with the previous one, this time in a reminiscence of the general character with Etude op. 25, No. 7 by Frederic Chopin. The retrospection of Chopin's masterpiece can be traced in the presence of a theme similar in contour to the movement, a narrative-singing, in its placement in the "cello" register, the chordal accompaniment of the right-hand part. At the same time,

the features of the jazz-stylistic plan are introduced into the melody (as well as into individual fragments of harmonic compounds) quite prominently (grace notes), chromatic decoration on weak parts, prolongation of the last sound in the trill). The form of the play is divided into two scale-like improvisations, which play the role of impulses for the next unfolding of the music, a novelistic ballad of artistic content.

From this prelude, two directions of semantic arcs between the parts of the cycle seem to diverge. The narrative determines the novelistic nature of Preludes IX and XV, which in these pieces should gradually transform into a pathetic and sensual effect. As for the third general stylistic landmark, its presence can already be traced in Prelude VIII. The beginning of the play does not foresee such an intrusion. The pianist seems to intensify the humorous colouring of the image, which is perceived in an ordinary way (outside the sphere of jazz music). Only the rhythm and intonation figure exposes another stylistic reference point and closes the characteristic of the material on it. After that, the stylistic nature of the bass ostinato becomes clear.

Subsequently, the imitation of jazz music techniques in a rather veiled form is interspersed in Prelude XXIV— an unfolding piece of dynamic and invading character. The stylistic elements of pop music and jazz, which are used by the pianist as one of the main performance techniques, appear more openly in Prelude XXI.

In Prelude XIII, the pianist inventively plays everyday life in the intonations of the waltz popular in households. The humorous nature of Prelude XXIII is in many respects consonant with the setting and solution of similar tasks in the music of Sergey Prokofiev and Dmitri Shostakovich (laconic texture, unexpected in the intonation-interval structure of the theme, with sharp verticals as a result of the free deployment of voices, combination of constancy and changeability of the metro-rhythm). The similarity in the constructions of these plays is caused by the fact that the humorous element dominates only in the extreme sections of the three-part



form. At the same time, the semantic and genre characteristics of the contrasting middle sections turn out to be different in this interpretation. In one case (Prelude XXIII), the pianist interprets it as an orchestral chorale.

Preludes XI and XIX directly adjoin the sphere of humorous content. The pianist enhances their eccentric imagery. By the way, the development of such characters in music is not an isolated phenomenon. It has repeatedly attracted the attention of composers both in the past and present, taking, in particular, its place in the series of piano preludes by Claude Debussy and Shostakovich. Continuing this tradition Karabyts takes into account the normative criteria necessary for the creation of an eccentric genre: alogism in the reflection of the character's actions, resulting from different and unexpected juxtapositions of his behaviour. Movement in these pieces becomes a factor that cements the contrast of the unfolding of images.

In Prelude XIV, eccentricity is tinged with irony, which clearly manifests itself in the material of different textural presentations: both in scale-like passages and throws against the backdrop of an intermittent ostinato in the middle section, and in the flickering of short flashes in the extreme sections of the form. In Prelude XI, the performer enhances the features of the eccentric accompaniment of pop and circus numbers. Humour and eccentricity are inherent to a certain extent in the content of Preludes XVII and XX. Sharply changing sporadic elements in the pianist's interpretation play a significant role in creating artistic imagery. In the first case, it is of a fanfare-joyful character, based on the tarantella, and in the other case, it is rapid and fiery, alternating with features of exquisitely mysterious colour.

**Conclusions.** The interpretation of the cycle *24 Preludes for Piano* potentially contains a large

number of options for its performance. It is the differences in the performance interpretation that determine the originality and uniqueness of the interpretation. At the final stage of working on a piece of music, the performer already has a clear and defined view of the piece as a whole and partially has formed a personal attitude towards it, the dramatic contours of the interpretation are outlined.

That is why cycle *24 Preludes for Piano* by Karabyts paints a wide visual and sonic world, which is quite difficult for a pianist to implement. The creative and individualized approach of the pianist should absorb a wide range of figurative and content saturation, often sharply contrasting: feelings of joy and sadness, lyrical urges and focused thoughts, fragility and capriciousness, gentleness and sophistication, soft contemplation of sensory and emotional states, humour and eccentricities, as well as epic-narrative, dramatic and colouristic refraction of life.

For the performer, it remains important to implement the author's concept of the series' pieces by focusing on three fundamental artistic layers — folk-musical thinking and folklore genres, stylistic elements of the music of outstanding masters in a retrospective implementation, some features of those styles that exist and develop in parallel with the so-called serious music (jazz, pop music). In addition, the presence of such a diverse foundation determines not only the versatile coverage of the genre content open for the prelude but also the ramification of cross-semantic connections between the parts of the cycle. If the focus on the first two layers is an original continuation of the directions traditional for Ukrainian music in the development of the prelude genre, then the introduction of the third layer into the cycle appears to be a relatively new trend, which can be traced at the current stage of the evolution of some genres.

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#### **Чжан Хань. Особливості виконавської стилістики циклу Івана Карабиця**

##### **«24 прелюдії для фортепіано»**

**Анотація.** Стаття є спробою осмислення з позицій сучасного фортепіанного виконавства спадщини Івана Карабиця, зокрема його знакового твору «24 прелюдії для фортепіано» із комплексним залученням аналітики про творчий метод композитора, специфіки стильових вирішень митця на ниві фортепіанної музики, інтерпретаційного аналізу фортепіанного циклу «24 прелюдії», що відкриє широке поле для сценічного втілення цього творчого доробку і його ролі у річищі формування т. зв. виконавського стилю фортепіанної творчості українського митця. У циклі змальовано широкий образно-звуковий світ, доволі складний для піаністичного втілення. Творчо-індивідуалізований підхід піаніста у прочитанні твору повинен увібрати широкий спектр образно-змістового насичення, часто різко контрастного. Для виконавця важливим лишається втілення авторської орієнтації п'єс циклу за трьома основоположними художніми пластами — народно-музичне мислення та фольклорна жанровість, стилістичні елементи музики видатних майстрів у ретроспективному втіленні, деякі особливості тих стилів, що існують та розвиваються паралельно з так званою серйозною музикою (джаз, попмузика). Наявність такого різнопланового фундаменту зумовлює не тільки різнобічне охоплення можливої для прелюдії сфери жанрового змісту, а й розгалуженість перехресно-сміслових зв'язків між частинами циклу.

**Ключові слова:** фортепіанний цикл, 24 прелюдії, Іван Карабиць, стиль, концепція, виконавська стилістика.