

Interpretation and Performance as Constituents of the Methodology of Analysis at the Moscow Conservatory in the 1970s and 80s¹

Many leading Russian theorists were prominent performers. For example, Victor Zuckerman was a brilliant pianist and a founder of so-called *tselostnui* (integralist) analysis. This method is distinct from traditional *Formenlehre* in that it places emphasis not on form, but on the musical work as a whole, including its performance. This paper focuses on Zuckerman's analysis of the introduction theme of Liszt's Sonata B minor. It also suggests the ways to reconcile the technical approach to analysis with its poetico-aesthetic counterpart. Essentially, Zuckerman introduces interpretation and performance as a necessary constituent of analysis, which is perfectly compatible with deep structural reasoning in theoretical terms.

In the 1970s and 80s, the Department of Theory of Performance played an important role in the academic life of the Moscow Conservatory. The relationship between this Department and the Faculty of Theory and Composition resulted in a number of successful dissertations written by theorists on the subject of performance. It was impossible to ignore performing practice, the strongest aspect of the conservatory curriculum at that time.

Many leading Russian theorists were prominent performers. For example, Victor Zuckerman was a brilliant pianist and a founder of so-called *tselostnui* (integralist) analysis. He was born in Ukraine in 1903, studied piano and theory at the Kiev Conservatory with professors Grigory Kogan, Arnold Alschwang and Boleslav Yavorsky. From 1926 on, Zuckerman taught contemporary harmony, analysis of musical works, and theory of modal rhythm at the Moscow Conservatory. In 1936, he was among the founders of the Department of Specialized Theory (*Kafedra Spezialnoi Teorii*) for theory and composition majors (a format that existed until the late 90s). The peak of his pedagogical career coincided with the period of Thaw and continued well into 1970s and 1980s. Zuckerman demonstrated his methodology in a number of insightful analyses. Together with Leo Mazel, he published a major textbook *Analysis of Musical Works*,² a 500-page monograph on Mikhail Glinka's *Kamarinskaya*,³ a series of books describing

1 This paper was originally presented at the Sixth Conference of the Dutch Society for Music Theory, Utrecht, 21 February 2004. All translations from texts in Russian are by the author.

2 Leo Mazel and Victor Zuckerman, *Analysis of Musical Works: Elements of Music and Method of Analysis of Smaller Forms* (in Russian). Recommended by the Ministry of Culture of the USSR for Instruction at Specialized Departments of Musical Institutions. Moscow 1967, 751 pp.

3 Victor Zuckerman, *Glinka's Kamarinskaya and Its Traditions in Russian Music* (in Russian). Moscow 1957, 495 pp. The title of this monumental research alludes to Richard Taruskin's *Stravinsky and the Russian Traditions*. Both books have similarities in overall structure and the tendency to draw conclusions from an overwhelming number of sources.

different forms and many other groundbreaking texts. Furthermore, he wrote a book entitled *Franz Liszt's Sonata B minor*, which, in a very concise manner, showcases the method of *tselostnui* analysis on a well-known example from the nineteenth-century Western repertoire.⁴

Whereas Zuckerman's work laid a foundation for contemporary Russian music theory, it has evidently not been noticed in the West. The method of integralist analysis is distinct from traditional *Formenlehre* in that it places emphasis not on form, but on the musical work as a whole, including its performance. Leo Mazel, Zuckerman's co-author of the conservatory textbook in analysis, describes this method and the problem in the introduction:

'Nineteenth-century musical science is characterized by dissociation of theory, by its division into a number of technological disciplines poorly connected among each other and by their separation from musical aesthetics. According to this division, the analyses of pieces of music were subdivided into technical and poetico-aesthetic.'

Carl Dahlhaus expressed a similar idea in different terms:

'Theoretically oriented analysis treats a piece of music as a document, as testimonial for facts outside itself or for a rule transcending the single case. Aesthetically oriented analysis, on the other hand, understands the same piece as a work complete in itself and existing for its own sake. To this difference between document and work corresponds, at least roughly, a difference between partial and comprehensive analysis.'⁵

(The similarity to the position of Mazel and Zuckerman ends, however, where it is necessary to make a direct connection between analysis and performance. This aspect is not pronounced in Dahlhaus's writings, while Mazel and Zuckerman's concept is based upon it.) Mazel continues:

'In the nineteenth century there were, in fact, certain attempts to connect both approaches. (...) Successful attempts of this sort are available in works of classics of Russian musicology, such as Valentin Serov. His analyses of Beethoven's Overture Leonore no. 3 and the Ninth Symphony are, in fact, integral analyses that aimed at revealing the basic idea together with the important means of its realization.'⁶

Following this lead, most Russian analyses of the past two centuries adopted a comprehensive approach, in which formal rigor coexists with the breadth of interpretation. This paper will focus on Zuckerman's analysis of the introduction theme of Liszt's Sonata B minor, as an example of Russian integralist methodology. It will also propose ways to reconcile the technical approach to analysis with its poetico-aesthetic counterpart. In the Author's Preface we read:

4 Victor Zuckerman, *Franz Liszt's Sonata in B Minor* (in Russian), Moscow 1984.

5 Carl Dahlhaus (trans. Siegmund Levarie), *Analysis and Value Judgment*, New York 1982 (orig. *Analyse und Werturteil*, Mainz 1970), pp. 9-10.

6 Leo Mazel, 'V.A. Zuckerman and the Problems of Analysis,' in: Victor Bobrovsky and Grigory Golovinsky (eds.), *On Music: Problems of Analysis* (in Russian), Moscow 1974, p. 156.

'This study is a result of many years of pedagogy, lecturing for different audiences. This work helped me to understand that the analysis of this remarkable piece can be of interest for a wider audience outside professional music schools. Hence is the double objective of this analysis: on the one hand, it can provide something useful for musicians majoring in performance, pianists in the first place. On the other hand, since I adhere to my favorite method of integralist, complex analysis, this essay can become a guide into a high-level analytical discourse on large-scale compositions.'⁷

It is important to mention that Russian integralist analysis is based primarily on aural presentation. Since it evades written form, all existent published examples do not fully represent its qualities. This resulted in very few published texts, incomparable with the number of aural analyses. The students of Zuckerman, as well as of Yuri Kholopov, Valentina Kholopova, and Vyacheslav Medushevsky, unanimously agree that published versions appear as light shadows of what was present in lectures, reports and conference papers; but even those few texts that are published strike as very different in style and organisation from most contemporary Western analyses. Zuckerman does not shy away from technical details, yet his analyses traditionally start with larger issues. As he suggests in the preface, his strategy is to begin with the discussion of common topics, the ones that can be related to by a non-professional audience. The political environment of Zuckerman's life dictated that any writing, incomprehensible for proletariat, was unacceptable. However, Zuckerman's strategy was not just an attempt to please the regime. The idea of connecting a musical-technical description with the cultural context of music is older than the communist regime; it is an essential characteristic of Russian theoretical tradition of the nineteenth century.

Russian music theory has always been involved with topics of wide cultural interest, such as dramaturgy, literary issues, critical theory, aesthetics, and philosophy. In this respect, Russian theorists perceive some current analytical methods as lacking a wider historical perspective. This makes them less relevant, notwithstanding their conceptual elegance and originality.⁸ For example, Allen Forte's seminal book *The Structure of Atonal Music* starts with the formulation of pc sets, leaving out the massive problems of methodology. A similar attitude is evident in Joseph Strauss's book *Introduction to Post-Tonal Theory*. These texts neglect the cultural premises of set theory; the development of theoretical concepts *before* set theory remains obscure. It looks like set theory and its subject appeared from nowhere, while the truth is that the atonal paradigm is a result of gradual change of the idea of tonality in the late nineteenth century.

Zuckerman's analysis of Liszt's B minor Sonata opens with a discussion that is pertinent to its performance:

'The B minor sonata dominates all the piano works of Liszt as a mountain peak. It is the largest. Even its length of 760 measures is extreme for a piano work. It is such also in its internal qualities, in its depth of content and problematic. Such a significance of the sonata allows to

7 Zuckerman, *Franz Liszt's Sonata in B Minor*, p.3.

8 For example, Boethius based his triple division of music on late Greek and early Christian views; Rameau had his theory of harmony drawn from Cartesian thought; Riemann supported his ideas on Hegelian doctrine, etc. Zuckerman developed his method under the influence of Marxism, phenomenology and hermeneutics.

compare it with monumental orchestral works of Liszt, his *Faust Symphony* and his tone poems.⁹

Zuckerman writes this analysis for theorists, yet his original intention is to clarify the aspects of performance. He approaches his goal – a technical analysis of a score – in a way that can make Anglo-Saxon scholars suspicious. In contemporary American music scholarship, the division between theory and historical musicology remains quite significant. In this style of theory, larger issues sometimes appear in the beginning of the analysis, but then the discussion quickly switches to technical matters. It is also noteworthy that these preliminary ideas come from general scientific discourse and theorists rarely question their validity. A few positivistic concepts serve a wide variety of musical styles, forms and genres. For example, Schenkerian doctrine covers the whole field of tonal music. Very often scholars directly associate these two: tonal music *means* Schenkerian analysis. The fact that the analysis of tonal music has been developing intensively well before Schenker does not seem to concern the academic community.

If one has to accept such model of analysis, certain areas of repertoire, including works of Liszt, will have no prospect of survival. Since in Schenkerian terms music of Liszt 'lacks voice-leading' (due to the prevalence of mediant relationship in harmony, which causes broken lines), theorists nowadays make no significant attempts to analyse the B-minor piano Sonata. The existent literature on this sonata is predominantly musicological.

For Zuckerman, Liszt's Sonata represents the greatest achievement of nineteenth-century style and an ultimate example of classical sonata allegro form. Zuckerman treats form as a hieratical phenomenon, which includes historical and socio-political components. Nevertheless, he is a theorist and not a musicologist. Zuckerman remains a symbolic figure in Russian music theory. He established the specialized department at the Moscow Conservatory and published a major textbook in analysis, which led to the common perception of his work by Russian scholars as purely theoretical.

Zuckerman calls the themes in the sonata 'main active forces.' One of them is the theme of the introduction.

'The beginning of the action is preceded by an image, which is brief but significant. In the form of the whole it functions as a introduction theme. Its role in the future development is important: it will sound not very often, but only at the most significant moments, coinciding with the turning points of the development of the action. Therefore, we have the right to consider it as an image of some superior force, a realization and even the determinant of human fate. (...) In the sonata-symphonic music of the nineteenth century, some themes play an exclusive, determinant role. The approaches to such themes can be seen in Beethoven's, as well as in Schubert's and Tchaikovsky's symphonies. They are not leitmotifs (like those of Harold in Berlioz, or of Manfred in Tchaikovsky, referring to the personality of a protagonist). These themes are different in that they are above the action. They determine the fate of a hero (*fatum* in Tchaikovsky's terms). In the realization of these themes one can see the unity of musical form and content: they both demonstrate the stages of development of an idea and mark the segments of the form. In the conditions of complex image-theme interaction, these themes regulate the development and clarify the form. (...) They usually appear in the critical moments of the content (during the *peripeteia* in classical sense, as a sudden break, trope, or a complication in the plot); they often

9 Zuckerman, *Franz Liszt's Sonata in B Minor*, p. 4.

serve as a kind of screen, on which, due to the transformation of a theme, one can see the features of the next segment of form. Exactly such is the 'super-theme' which is used in Liszt's B-minor Sonata in the beginning and at the end. (...) The theme has two elements. The first is introduced three times and presents a double combination of abrupt-sounding octaves, placed very low, dimmed to *sotto voce*, and taken between the main beats of a measure, outside of metric pulse. A combination of all these characteristics creates an impression of rigor, gloom, and of mysteriousness and stealth.¹⁰

The translator of Zuckerman's prose faces a tremendous task of presenting the depth of language of Pushkin in the idioms of the language of Shakespeare. Otherwise, an average English translation would lose much of the splendor of Zuckerman's text. Therefore, a theorist has to be a poet; he or she has to be able to find semantic connections between creative descriptions, appropriate for a performer, and technical devices, commonly used by theorists. The task of translating Zuckerman's book into English is, paradoxically, similar to his view of the task of theory. One of the postulates of Zuckerman's pedagogy is the demand for poetic quality of the analytical prose and the requirement for all his students to master the forms of poetic expression. What makes it difficult to translate Zuckerman's book is the problem of interpretation, which might seem auxiliary in some aspects of theoretical research. However, since Zuckerman, interpretation has become an obligatory constituent of analysis and exigency in Russian musical tradition in general.

Zuckerman continues:

'Such a maximum reduction of the means of expression to the double octaves can also be interpreted as a "symbol of attentiveness, a call for attention and silence."¹¹

Here, Zuckerman refers to Jakov Milstein, a famous Russian pianist, professor of the Moscow Conservatory and the author of a two-volume monograph, entitled *Liszt*.¹² In a sense, Zuckerman needs a support from a pianist, whose opinion on Liszt remains irrefutable among Russian musicians:

'By the analogy with the beginning of the tone-poem *Les Préludes*, it seems reasonable to play these octaves *quasi pizzicato*. However, in his comments to the edition of B-minor Sonata, Jakov Milstein refers to the recommendations of Liszt's students, who insisted that "the octaves should sound as muffled strikes of timpani, so that the sound would acquire a dark, grim color."¹³

Zuckerman never tires to refer to Milstein and other performers, such as the famous Russian organist and professor of the Conservatory, Leonid Roizman. The opinions and interpretations of performers are in the core of Zuckerman's method of analysis:

'In addition to these interpretations, the fact that the motive is shackled to a single note (which will prove to be true in later entrances of the introduction theme as well) alludes to an

10 Ibidem, p. 13.

11 Jakov Milstein, *Commentary to the Edition of Piano Works of Franz Liszt*, Moscow 1960, vol. 1, p. 205, quoted from: Zuckerman, *Franz Liszt's Sonata in B Minor*, p. 14.

12 Jakov Milstein, *Liszt*, 2 vols., Moscow 1970.

13 Zuckerman, *Franz Liszt's Sonata in B Minor*, p. 14, footnote.

attribute of a *fatum* theme, of the theme of destiny. (...) The second element of the introduction theme is a descending seven-note scale. The first element is not lost here: it becomes a sustained background for the second element, adding to the latter the depth of sound. Hesitant and evenly descending motion along the minor scale in a bass tessitura, this feature of the second element of the introduction *fatum* theme, symbolizes a certain inevitability, irreversibility of the events. The scales are imprisoned by the note G, they are enclosed airtight by the octave G-G from above and from below; they are submitted to these G's as the point of departure (Example 1).¹⁴ (...) For the same reason, the G absorbs them. This creates an atmosphere of something unavoidable and predetermined. Noteworthy is the dotted pattern, with the elongated second note at the expense of the third (Example 2)¹⁵ (...) This gives a slight impetus to the downward motion, together with slight increase in the dynamics. It also hints at the dotted pattern of the Main Theme....The character of the two scales is remarkable. The first is Phrygian minor, the most grim-sounding among all minors. It is possible that Liszt alluded to a church mode as a symbol. The second scale brings the Hungarian national color. However, its low register indicates something more vicious than a folk tune: instead, it has a Mephistophelian aspect.¹⁶ Liszt characterized himself as a Hungarian, inclined to religion, but also having demonic traits. *Zu einer Hälfte Zigeuner, zur anderen Franziskaner*. The introduction theme, therefore, is somewhat autobiographical. (...) The last feature of the introduction is the reprise of the two octaves. The circle is thus closed. Liszt suggests that everything is predetermined; the outcome has been decided in the very beginning. Evidently, Liszt understood the introduction theme as something that for a while was outside the peripeteia of life's struggle and human endeavours. It stood alone, but was ready for further development. The complete closing of the circle in the introduction tells us that the theme is usable as a closing theme of the sonata as well.¹⁷

Lento assai

p sotto voce

Example 1

Liszt, *Sonata in B Minor*, mm. 1-7.

Example 2

14 The example is from Zuckerman, *Franz Liszt's Sonata in B Minor*, p. 16.

15 *Ibidem*, p. 15.

16 Here, of course, a contemporary theorist could refer to the works of Richard Taruskin and Pieter C. van den Toorn on the essence of octatonic and other artificial collections in musical depictions of magic world. See Pieter C. van den Toorn, *The Music of Igor Stravinsky*, New Haven 1983; Richard Taruskin, *Stravinsky and the Russian Traditions: A Biography of the Works Through Mavra*, Berkeley 1996.

17 Zuckerman, *Franz Liszt's Sonata in B Minor*, p. 17.

These long quotations from Zuckerman's book provide a demonstration of a method most commonly accepted in Russia. Some similarities with the style of Donald Tovey come to mind, as well as the analogies with the early hermeneutics. Indeed, all these sources were known to Russian theorists and had affected the Russian method in some degree. Yet, looking at its fine balance of technical and aesthetico-poetic elements, one might assume that the method of Zuckerman is unique and independent. Zuckerman, as many of his predecessors in Russia, refers in his analytical technique not to the Anglo-Saxon, but to the Continental tradition. For example, the teaching of form, which Zuckerman accepts in its entirety and follows very carefully, comes from Adolf Bernhard Marx and Hugo Riemann. The concept of tonality in Zuckerman's analyses derives from the well-known Riemannian system of tonal-harmonic functions. However, such restrictions and his adherence to classical theory do not keep Zuckerman from adding interpretation and philosophical reflection to his analyses. The Russian theorist introduces interpretation and performance not as a critique or negation of theory (which is often the case in current musicology), but as a necessary constituent of analysis, perfectly compatible with the deep structural reasoning in theoretical terms.