“Yapurai” Kazakh Folk Song in the Aspect of Connecting with Creativity of Sergei Rachmaninoff

Abstract

The article is aimed at determining the reliability of the information available on the Internet and in the Yapurai documentary film, shot by the Kazakhfilm Kazakh State Television and Radio Broadcasting Company in 1992, that the great Russian composer Sergei Rachmaninoff used in his last opus – Symphonic Dances – the melody of the Yapurai Kazakh folk song in modern Kazakh musical practice, this striking example of Kazakh folklore has occupied a special place and, due to its wide popularity and frequent use as a source for adaptation, has acquired the status of a “symbol” of Kazakh lyrical song. The song was first recorded by the famous musical ethnographer Alexander Zatayevich and published in his musical and ethnographic collection “1000 Songs of the Kazakh People” in 1925.

Study of archival materials and correspondence between Sergei Rachmaninoff and Alexandr Zatayevich made it possible to verify that Alexandr Zatayevich, driven by the idea of giving unique examples of Kazakh folklore “worldwide expansion”, sent out his collection to the most famous musicians and cultural figures of his time. Among them was S. Rachmaninoff who had friendly relations with him and a long-term communication. The ethnographer’s archival statements confirmed that the figure of S. Rachmaninoff had to occupy the key place in solving the problem of the widest dissemination of Kazakh folk songs. The musicological analysis undertaken in the article of the musical texts of the Symphonic Dances and the Yapurai folk song recorded by A. Zatayevich revealed the presence of common intonations in them. The study of the ideological content of Rachmaninoff’s last opus confirmed that the conscious “reference” to Yapurai in the alto saxophone theme from the first part of the work is quite real and corresponds to the general concept of the final work of the Russian composer.

Keywords: Sergei Rachmaninoff, Alexander Zatayevich, Yapurai Kazakh folk song, Symphonic Dances, “1000 Songs of the Kazakh People”.

The topic of the article appeals to two seemingly distant artistic phenomena: the famous *Yapurai* folk lyrical song which is rightfully called the lyrical song symbol of the Kazakh people [Daulbayev] and to the work of Sergei Vasilyevich Rachmaninoff, the great Russian composer, who, in turn, is rightfully considered “the world symbol of Russian music” [Commemorative coin of the Bank of Russia]. The connecting link between them is the famous collector and researcher of Kazakh musical folklore Alexander Viktorovich Zatayevich who has been in close friendly and creative contacts with Rachmaninoff for a long time. This fact is proven by the correspondence of two musicians. Some Internet sources also mention the fact that S. Rachmaninoff referred to the *Yapurai* song recorded by Zatayevich as an intonation source in his famous work *Symphonic Dances* [Yu. Aravin; *Yapurai*, Documentary], however there is no evidence to prove the authenticity of this information. The purpose of this article is to rely on archival sources, epistolary heritage and the results of musicological analysis of musical samples – the *Yapurai* song and Rachmaninoff’s *Symphonic Dances* – to answer the question of whether the Russian composer could really use the musical material of the Kazakh folk song in his a symphonic opus that concludes his creative path.

As you know, the *Yapurai* folk song was first recorded by the outstanding ethnographer Alexander Viktorovich Zatayevich and published in his famous work “1000 Songs of the Kazakh People” in two versions (No. 348 and No. 999) [Erzakovich, pp. 182, 468]. A. Zatayevich recorded it under the title “I, Perim-Ai”. This version of the name is one of the variants of a typical Kazakh colloquial expression associated with an appeal to higher powers, to God and expressing different shades of emotions – surprise, delight, loss, prayer, etc. In everyday practice, this expression had numerous synonymous pronunciation options: “apyr-ai”, “apyr-au”, “apyr-ai”, “oopyrym-ai”, “oopyrym-ai”, “yapyr-au”, “yapyrmayau”, “yapyr-ai”, “yapyr-ai” etc.

The life story of the *Yapurai* song in Kazakh culture is amazing. We see its high activity both in the performing tradition of the 20th century and in composer practice as well as in the mass musical culture of the 20th–21st centuries. The performers of *Yapurai* were famous Kazakh singers of their time – Isa Bayzakov (1900–1946), Kurmanbek Zhandarbekov (1905–1973), Garifolla Kurmangaliyev (1909–1993), Rishat Abdullin (1916–1988), later Ermek Serkebayev, Bekbolat Tleukhan, Omirkul Ainiyazov, Saken Maigaziyev, Shaba Adenkulkyzy and many others. The song attracted the attention of many Kazakh composers who used it as thematic material for their folklore arrangements and quotations in their author’s opuses of various genres. Among the composers who used it were B. Erzakovich, M. Tulebayev, E. Rakhmadiyev, G. Zhubanova, Kh. Seitkov, A. Tolykpayev, B. Zhupashev, K. Sadvakassov and others. In the sphere of modern mass culture, over the past decades alone, more than 45 adaptations have been created based on *Yapurai* for various performing groups including purely instrumental versions for a wide variety of instruments as well as choral, ensemble, and vocal-instrumental versions. At the same time, it is significant that most interpretations of the *Yapurai* song go back not to A. Zatayevich’s version, but to the recording of the song made by B. Erzakovich in 1932 from the famous folk singer Tamti Ibragimova [Erzakovich, Song Culture of the Kazakh People, p. 95].
The intonation profile of the version of *Yapurai* in B. Erzakovich’s recording is, in general, close to A. Zatayevich’s recording No. 348, although there are differences in the rhythmic plan of the recording:

Within our study, the most interesting is the version of the song recorded by A. Zatayevich—through whom S. Rachmaninoff could get familiarized with this unique example of Kazakh folklore. As you know, in the first and second volumes of the 3-volume edition “S. Rachmaninoff. Literary Heritage” [S. Rachmaninoff, Literary Heritage, V. 1; 2.] a total of 27 letters from the composer to A. Zatayevich were published. The dates of the letters suggest that the correspondence lasted for at least two decades: the first published letter dated on November 2, 1896, the last one dated on January 4, 1914. Studying the contents of the letters allows us not only to trace the content of the communication between the two musicians but also to see the evolution of their relationship.

S. Rachmaninoff’s first letter to A. Zatayevich, dated on November 2, 1896 [S. Rachmaninoff, Literary Heritage, V. 1, p. 252]. This letter represents the composer’s reaction to the manuscript of two mazurkas by A. Zatayevich, which, according to the testimony of Zatayevich’s daughter Olga Alexandrovna, came to him during the first meeting that took place in 1895. An excerpt from a conversation with the daughter of the great musician-ethnographer is given by the author of the documentary story “Living Jewels” by I. Levitskaya: “... the next day after the concert, the father came to Rachmaninoff’s hotel and, while talking, quietly put the mazurkas in the composer’s open suitcase” [Levitskaya, p. 43]. The content of the letter clearly indicates that the initiator of the correspondence was Rachmaninoff, who wrote:

“I don’t know your name and full name – I lost your business card. I don’t know your address. By the way, I also don’t know what province Petrokov is in (I’ll find out about that now). I seriously
doubt that this letter will reach you – but still I am writing and want to tell you that half an hour ago I came across your two mazurkas, I played them and I liked them. You really have talent. I would like to ask you, from time to time, to send me something of yours, or to give me, perhaps, news about yourself, from which I would find out whether you continue your activities or not. My advice to you is to continue. Send me a few things for piano or voice (romances) and maybe we can arrange for them to be published; if not everything, then at least one thing.

Please, forgive me for intruding on you, bothering you, but, my God, I liked your things.

Sincerely, S. Rachmaninoff.”

The content of further correspondence between the musicians allows us to identify two main leitmotifs of their communication. The first is associated with Rachmaninoff’s patronage of the publication of Zatayevich’s several piano miniatures in the Jurgenson publishing house, the second is with the persistent desire of the Russian composer to stimulate Zatayevich’s compositional activity. These two cross-cutting themes are present in a number of letters but only one finds a logical conclusion: after eliminating Rachmaninoff’s detailed comments about Zatayevich’s mazurkas, the Jurgenson publishing house publishes them (until 1915, Zatayevich published 4 opuses from Jurgenson in total). The Russian composer’s repeated calls to engage in composition more systematically were never implemented by Alexander Viktorovich, who in 1904 moved to Warsaw and became closely involved in music-critical activities. During the Warsaw period, he dedicated 23 printed materials to his friend Sergei Vasilievich including announcements of Rachmaninoff’s upcoming concerts in Warsaw, premieres of his new works, etc. [Zatayevich, p. 28].

Judging by the contents of the letter dated on April 7, 1903, in which Rachmaninoff makes excuses to Zatayevich due to a misunderstanding of his sincere intentions to encourage Zatayevich to more serious studies in composition, there is some emotional decline in the relationship between the two musicians, the letters are becoming less frequent, and their content – more formal. Here is a fragment of the turning point April letter:

“<...> I received your letter with joy and read it with pleasure and I want to thank you from the bottom of my heart for your memory. The only thing I dislike is that part of your letter where you quote excerpts from my letter to you about your latest works for piano, so it’s not your letter that I don’t like but rather my own. I don’t remember the whole text and I don’t remember cursing you the way you write. Apparently, I didn’t express myself as I wanted and thought, and because of this I sat down to answer you immediately. What I didn’t like most about your things is that, in my opinion, they are somehow not finished, not refined and somehow not finalized in particular. One might think that you wrote them hastily. This upset me most of all, since I knew that there was no rush, since these three small things took almost a year and a half to write. Is it true that I also didn’t say a single “encouraging word” to you, as you write? This is wrong on my part, and I hasten to apologize now. In these things, just like in your previous ones, I saw beautiful and original passages for which one should not only encourage, but simply praise them.
I definitely found fault with the fact that these passages are either not connected clearly enough with the previous one, or have an unreal cadenza, forgot to praise the beautiful middle and began to criticize the unsuccessful finals. And in general, apparently, I didn’t write at all what I wanted, or you didn’t understand at all what I wanted to explain to you, which is most clearly proven by the fact that you decided to quit composing completely. Regarding this, I firmly and boldly assert that this conclusion of yours is diametrically opposed to the conclusion that I wanted you to achieve: that is, I wanted and proved to you that you need to adjust and finish your compositions as much and as best as possible, in other words, in my opinion, you need to devote more time to your compositions. You concluded, quite unexpectedly for me, that you need to stop composing completely. I repeat that you decided this but not me! I am still very happy to receive your new things and always asked you to send me more of them, but you decided not to send them to me at all now.” [S. Rachmaninoff, Literary Heritage. V. 1, pp. 330–331].

Further, in only one letter dated on January 9, 1906 – Rachmaninoff touches on the topic of writing, but everything is limited to the formal phrase “I was very glad to receive a letter from you and to learn that you wrote something” [S. Rachmaninoff. Literary Heritage. V. 1. p. 364]. In the remaining eight published letters, small in volume, S. Rachmaninoff does not express interest in the work of A. Zatayevich. Their content is centered around the concerts of the Russian composer, which took place not only in Poland, where A. Zatayevich was by that time but also in other countries. After January 4, 1914, correspondence was interrupted.

While serving as head of the music department of the Warsaw Bulletin newspaper, from 1904 to 1915, Zatayevich wrote and published 1,189 articles, notes and feuilletons about music and musicians including numerous premieres of works. This made it possible in a short time to establish close contacts with many outstanding creative personalities – F. Chaliapin, L. Sobinov, A. Kastalsky, K. Igumnov, S. Taneyev, M. Balakirev, K. Stanislavsky, V. Nemirovich-Danchenko and others. Being at the center of the artistic movements of his time, he actually completely moved away from composition. In 1920, A. Zatayevich moved to Orenburg, where an important page opened in his creative biography related to the collection, recording and study of Kazakh musical folklore. He himself assessed this stage as “… the most fruitful period of his musical activity”¹ “and that no musical work ever seemed to him more important than the one that he became interested in the last years [Zatayevich, p. 8].

Working at Kirnarkompros as a research assistant for recording folk songs, he managed not only to organize work on recording folklore in Orenburg itself, that is, without traveling to the regions, but also, thanks to his high human qualities and charm, managed to win the love and respect of ordinary people who selflessly brought him more and more respondents. The first collection “1000 Songs of the Kazakh People” which became a big event, was published already in 1925. In the periodicals of that time, many reviews, feedbacks and other editorial materials appeared in his support including from M. Gorky, B. Assafiev, R. Rolland

¹ Glinka Central State Musical Museum, f.6, inv. No. 151 and 152.

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and others [Zatayevich]. His own creativity which S. Rachmaninoff was so worried about in his letters, went into a new direction: Zatayevich became interested in the “artistic and harmonization adaptation” of Kazakh folk songs, as he himself called this direction of his activity. According to archival data, he started it already in 1920, as soon as the first examples of Kazakh folk music became known to him. And judging by the pace, he liked this work much more than composing his own plays: Rachmaninoff repeatedly reproached him that in two years he wrote only three plays, while in one year Zatayevich created 50 folklore adaptations for piano. He was a pioneer in this field, and as a researcher V. Dernova rightly wrote, “he single-handedly and for the first time in the history of the Kazakh people had to resolve the most difficult problems of creating a polyphonic texture for folk melodies” [Dernova, p. 99].

From archival materials it is known that Zatayevich insisted to the leadership that all the advanced musical circles of the Composers’ Union had to get familiarized with the “1000 Songs” collection. “… On March 17, 1925, A. Zatayevich compiled a list of persons and periodicals for the Kazakhstan Study Society for the distribution of the “1000 Songs” collection. The list included 50 recipients. Among them are the largest Russian composers: S. V. Rachmaninoff, M. Ippolitov-Ivanov, N. Ya. Myaskovsky, R. M. GliYer, A. K. Glazunov; musical ethnographers – V. V. Paskhalov, Ya.V. Prokhorov, S.L. Tolstoy; music scholars and critics – B. Assafiyev, S. A. Boguslavsky, E. K. Rosenov; artistic figures K. S. Stanislavsky, V. I. Nemirovich–Danchenko, Gr. P. Lyubimov; foreign figures – Romain Rolland, E. Mlynarsky, G. Fitelberg and others.”

On November 16, 1927, he again applied to the Kazakhstan Study Society to issue him an additional 10 copies of the “1000 Songs” collection for distribution to addresses. This time the list of names included Maxim Gorky, Julien Tiersot, Sergei Prokofiev, Igor Stravinsky, Maurice Ravel, Calvacoressi, Alfred Casella, Bela Bartok [Zatayevich, p. 249].

This information gives grounds to assert that S. Rachmaninoff became familiar with the historical work of A. Zatayevich and had access to the notation of the Yapurai song after 1925. But from the Yapurai documentary film produced in 1992 by the Kazakhfilm Kazakh State Television and Radio Broadcasting Company based on archival materials and eyewitness information, we learned that Sergei Vasilyevich who moved to New York in 1918, sent a letter to A. Zatayevich stating the following “Dear friend, Alexander Viktorovich! Thank you very much for the miniatures you’ve sent on Kazakh themes. I used some of them with pleasure in my Symphonic Dances, especially the beautiful Yapurai”. This letter is not in the 3-volume epistolary book by S. Rachmaninoff, where the last letter, let me remind you, is dated on 1914. In her conversation with journalist I. Levitskaya, Olga Aleksandrovna Zatayevich confirmed: “… not all of Rachmaninoff’s letters have survived. It turns out that the mother, for some unknown reason, decided to destroy the father’s archive. Some things couldn’t be saved. In all likelihood, part of Rachmaninoff’s letters also was destroyed” [Levitskaya, p. 43].

From the content of the excerpt from the letter voiced in the film, it is obvious that 2 TsGAOR KazSSR, f.693, opr.1, d.54, l.1101.

2 Text from the “Yapurai” documentary film by the “Kazakhfilm” film studio, 1992.
that Rachmaninoff became familiar with *Yapurai* not through the collection “1000 Songs of the Kazakh People”, but through adaptations – “miniatures on Kazakh themes”. Zatayevich began to create them actually, in parallel with the beginning of folklore recordings, that is, from 1920. In this regard, researcher V. Dernova makes the assumption: “It is possible that by making the first recordings and immediately, or soon adapting them for piano, Zatayevich only sought to continue his composing activity, which Rachmaninoff had blessed him with about a quarter of a century before” [Dernova, p. 97]. Be that as it may, even before the release of “1000 Songs,” Zatayevich created a fairly large number of adaptations but only some of them have survived to this day. He dedicated all the songs from the series of adaptations published by the folklorist to the folk musicians from whom he recorded these samples, or to his musician friends. The archives contain information that the third series of adaptations is “… musically the brightest of all… published”– A. Zatayevich dedicated to S. Rachmaninoff who, in his opinion, could easily “give them worldwide expansion.” But Rachmaninoff’s name was not mentioned in the title of the publication.

If we combine an excerpt from the letter in the documentary with this archival statement by Zatayevich, a logical picture emerges that Rachmaninoff finally reached the miniatures of his “dear friend” Alexander Viktorovich. But was the idea of “worldwide expansion” of Kazakh musical folklore, expressed by A. Zatayevich, heard and accepted by the great Russian composer and how realistic is the fact of using the *Yapurai* song in Symphonic Dances, considering the fact that S. Rachmaninoff’s New York letter of 1918 before our days have not survived?

In our opinion, an analysis of the musical text of the work can lift the veil of this secret. Closer attention should be paid to the theme of the alto saxophone in the middle section of the first part of the work, at the moment when the colossal tension and pressure that arose in the previous sound is replaced by a pastoral lyrical sound. Comparison with notation A. Zatayevich demonstrates an obvious intonational connection between the two themes. And, first of all, complete identity is revealed in the intonation “highlight” of the *Yapurai* song – a characteristic downward movement along the sounds of the natural dominant and then the tonic triads at the end of two successively developing musical phrases. Such melodic moves, in general, are atypical for Kazakh folk songs but are found in some cases in song samples of the Western Kazakhstan region.

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One can recognize an ascending fourth leap followed by filling at the beginning of the second musical phrase:

The commonality of the two themes is also manifested in the general rhythmic dimension, progressive movement with a predominance of leaps no wider than a quarte, and a wave-like melodic profile developing from the zone of the upper tonic to the lower. But there is no reason to talk about quoting: despite the presence of common melodic figures, the melody of the alto saxophone is a different theme, and very organic and typical of Rachmaninoff’s musical style as a whole. Being one of the foundations of the thematic material of the first part, the saxophone theme receives intense intonation, mode-harmonic and register development and leads to a bright culmination in the strings. A picture of deep inner experience and emotional openness of feelings is created. This expressive lyrical mini-culmination of the 1st movement is often associated by musicologists with the image of the Motherland abandoned by Rachmaninoff and his endless longing for it.

And yet, the description of the historical context undertaken above, testifying to the close friendly ties of the two musicians as well as A. Zatayevich’s documented intentions to show S. Rachmaninoff the beauty and richness of Kazakh song folklore through a musical-ethnographic collection and his own adaptations of folk songs, do not completely deny the connection of the theme from part 1 of *Symphonic Dances* with the Yapurai song. Moreover, if we consider the ideological concept of Rachmaninoff’s last opus.

As most researchers note, S. Rachmaninoff’s *Symphonic Dances* are distinguished by their figurative and semantic complexity, ambiguity, and pronounced allusiveness of the musical material [Lyakhovich, Kravtseva, Grachev, Fisk, Walsh]. Musicologist A. Lyakhovich writes in this regard: “The works of the late period of Rachmaninoff’s work... are interpreted as a complex... symbolic structure-cipher, requiring conscious hermeneutic decoding” [Lyakhovich, 26]. In relation to the *Symphonic Dances*, this property is associated, among other things, with its final, “farewell” character, which determined the appearance of thematicism in it, which was important for the composer in terms of meaning throughout his entire creative career. That is why the musical line of the “Dances” is woven from a large number of autoquotations, allusions, “references” to the author’s and non-author’s material, most of which has already been “identified” by experts in Rachmaninoff’s work. This is the Dies Irae Medieval Gregorian Sequence; two Znamenny
polyphony – “Lord is Blessed,” and “Blessed be the Name of Lord from Now on and Forever”; theme of the First Symphony of S. Rachmaninoff himself [Kravtsev].

“The encrypted character” of “Dances” is another additional argument in favor of the fact that the identified intonation matches, dispersed over two musical phrases and refracting the “zest” of the Kazakh folk song through typical Rachmaninoff thematics, is no accident. In our opinion, the alto saxophone theme is a consciously realized “reference” by the composer to Yapurai in Zatayevich’s recording, a tribute to his “dear friend”. Acceptance of this fact allows us to put a positive “full stop” in the history of friendly relations between two great contemporaries and confirm, through purely musical means, their spiritual closeness and selflessness in serving their true life purpose – music.
References


Гулнар Әбдірахман

Құрманғазы атындағы Қазақ ұлттық консерваториясы (Алматы, Қазақстан)

«Япурай» қазақ халық ані Сергей Рахманинов
шығармашылығымен байланыс аспектісінде


С. Рахманинов пен А. Затаевич арасындағы мұрағат материалдары мен хат-хабарларды зерттеу қазақ фольклорының зерттеу үлгісін, ұлы орыс композиторы Сергей Рахманинов өзінің соңғы шығармасы - «Симфониялық билерде» Қазақ халықының аруының зерттеуіне қол болған, ол оның құпиялығын, өңдеу көзі ретінде және қазақ фольклорының құрылысын құрыстығын, шығармашылық құрылысын, әндітің жарқының құрылысын, әндітің әнді құру және әнді әрекетті құру үшін қолданылатын сәйкес құралдарды тақырыптарға енгізеді.

Тірек сәттер: Сергей Рахманинов, Александр Затаевич, қазақ халық ані «Япурай», «Симфониялық билер», «Қазақ халқының 1000 ані».

Гульнар Абдрахман
Казахская национальная консерватория имени Курмангазы (Алматы, Казахстан)

Казахская народная песня «Япурай» в аспекте связи с творчеством Сергея Рахманинова

Статья нацелена на определение достоверности имеющейся на просторах Интернета и в документальном фильме «Япурай», снятом в 1992 году Казахской государственной телерадиовещательной компанией «Казахфильм», информации о том, что великий русский композитор Сергей Рахманинов использовал в своем последнем опусе — «Симфонических танцах» — мелодию казахской народной песни «Япурай». В современной казахстанской музыкальной практике этот яркий образец песенного фольклора казахов занял особое место и в силу своей широчайшей популярности и частого использования в качестве источника для обработки приобрел статус «символа» казахской лирической песни. Песня была впервые записана известным музыкальным этнографом Александром Затаевичем и опубликована в его музыкально-этнографическом сборнике «1000 песен казахского народа» в 1925 году.

Изучение архивных материалов и переписки между С. Рахманиновым и А. Затаевичем позволило убедиться в том, что А. Затаевич, движимый идеей дать уникальным образцам казахского фольклора «всемирное распространение», разослал свой сборник самым известным музыкантам и деятелям культуры своего времени. В их числе был и С. Рахманинов, который состоял с ним в дружеских связях и длительной переписке. Архивные высказывания этнографа подтвердили, что фигура С. Рахманинова должна была занять ключевое место в решении задачи по широчайшему распространению казахских народных песен. Предпринятый в статье музыковедческий анализ нотных текстов «Симфонических танцев» и народной песни «Япурай» в записи А. Затаевича выявил наличие в них общих интонаций. Исследование же идеологического содержания последнего рахманиновского опуса подтвердило, что сознательный «намек» на «Япурай» в теме альтового саксофона из первой части произведения вполне реален и соответствует общему замыслу итогового произведения русского композитора.

Ключевые слова: Сергей Рахманинов, Александр Затаевич, казахская народная песня «Япурай», «Симфонические танцы», «1000 песен казахского народа».

Гульнар Бахыткызы Абдрахман – кандидат искусствоведения, профессор кафедры музыковедения и композиции Казахской национальной консерватории имени Курмангазы (Алматы, Казахстан)
ORCID ID: 0000-0001-9803-0969
email: gulnarabd@mail.ru

Gulnar B. Abdirakhman – PhD in Arts, Professor, Musicology and Composition Department, Kurmangazy Kazakh National Conservatory (Almaty, Kazakhstan)
ORCID ID: 0000-0001-9803-0969
email: gulnarabd@mail.ru