

Teaching the rondo and variation form in the textbook of music for the 5th grade of the Bulgarian general education schools

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Abstract: The responsibility of producing educated listeners of music with a positive attitude and interest towards the valuable phenomena in the tonal art falls mainly on the general education school. For this reason, in the textbooks of music by the publishing houses “Riva” and “Azbuki-Prosveta” in Bulgaria (the author collective is the same) special attention is given to criteria, such as presenting the information in an intriguing way, the inclusion of creative tasks, exemplification; rich, aesthetically pleasing and clear illustrative material. In order to justify these statements, I will discuss examples from the textbook of music for the 5th grade by the “Riva” Publishing House [2]. In one of the exercises on the subject of the musical form “Rondo”, where four distiches on the theme “Autumn” are included (the theme “Rondo” is taught in the autumn), the students are asked to point out how the distiches have to be arranged so that they result in a structure corresponding to the “Rondo” form; which distich is most suitable for the theme and which of them will be used as episodes. In order to make the decision, the pupils have to take into account that the laconic first distich in duple meter is clearly divergent from all the others, which are more descriptive, i.e. it is in a distinct contrast with the other three. This makes it suitable for a Rondo theme, which, in the same way, is in a relation of contrast with the episodes. Consequently, the students have to speak out loud and rhythmically the poetic text and to compose for it an appropriate for the character of the verses accompaniment on percussion musical instruments for children. In this textbook: The definitions are not provided without any effort required, but have to be reached through observation. This gives place to a certain discovering. The exercises, accompanying and facilitating the learning of the information being taught, are focused on: stimulating creativity through changing the conditions, in which the new information functions; creating a new product; providing models of anaxiomatization, whose structure is applicable to future mental operations. The illustrative material has several functions it provides additional information, related to the lesson; facilitates grasping the character of the music, heard during a specific class session, through the emotional impact of the images; it provides creative methods of encoding information, which the students can use as a model in their future work.

Keywords: Music, Music Education, General Education School, Variation Form, Rondo

1. Introduction

The tremendous educational value of music is incontestable and has been acknowledged as early as the Antiquity. Since music is an abstract art, i.e. for a full comprehension of a tonal work, a certain training of the perceiver is necessary; it is of great importance how this training will be achieved. This means that the way of presenting the information, related to music, is of significant importance of whether this music will be understood and loved. The responsibility of producing educated listeners of

music with a positive attitude and interest towards the valuable events in the tonal art falls mainly on the general education school. For this reason, in the textbooks of music by the publishing houses “Riva” and “Azbuki-Prosveta” in Bulgaria (the author collective is the same) special attention is given to criteria, such as presenting the information in an intriguing way, the inclusion of creative tasks, exemplification; rich, aesthetically pleasing and clear illustrative material. In order to justify these statements, I will discuss examples from the textbook of music for the 5th grade by the “Riva” Publishing House [2]

2. Subjects, Aims and Tasks of the Study

- The subject of the present study is the educational units “Theme of a Musical Work. Rondo” and “Theme with Variations”, included in the educational contents of the textbook “Music for the 5th Grade” by the “Riva” Publishing House” [2].
- The aim of the study is to prove the existence of forms of presenting the educational material that incite creative thinking in students.
- The tasks, which the realization of this aim calls for, are:
- Analysis of the methods of presenting the musical forms “Rondo” and “Theme with Variations”.
- Analysis of the tasks, related to the assimilation of new information.
- Analysis of the illustrative material for the two educational units.

3. Introducing the Musical Form “Rondo”

The curriculum for fifth graders (of the age 10-11) provisions their acquaintance with the musical forms Rondo and Theme with variations. The introduction to the “Rondo” form begins with listening through to the theme of the piano piece “Für Elise” by Ludwig van Beethoven. This is followed by learning the main theme by ear, so it could be recognized at the next listening of the musical example. When learning the melody by heart, its emotional content is also defined – the theme “is gracious, ethereal, elated” (темата „е изящна, ефирна, развълнувана”) [2, p. 16]. For the purpose of a more intent listening to the piece when they are first introduced to it, the students are given the task to raise their hand at every appearance of the already familiar theme and to point out whether it has sounded unchanged or a change has been heard. Only after they realize that they are listening to a work, in which a single theme returns several times, with a different melody sounding after each of its appearances, the pupils are given the definition, as well: “Rondo is a musical form, in which the main theme sounds at least three times, alternating with other themes, called episodes. The episodes are more or less contrasting with the main theme. The Rondo form can be found as an independent piece or as a part of a bigger work of art” („Рондо е музикална форма, при която главната тема прозвучава най-малко три пъти, като се редува с други теми, наречени епизоди. Епизодите са повече или по-малко контрастни на главната тема. Рондо формата се среща като самостоятелна творба или като част от по-голямо произведение”) [2, p. 16]. This shows that the definition is not given right away, but via the heard musical example and the conclusions made from what has been perceived, lead the students to the most characteristic features, brought out clearly and in a short form.

At the next listening, the exercise is further elaborated – the students are asked to point out how many intermediate

episodes are heard and to make a characteristic of each of the episodes, choosing from the two groups of adjectives given: “mysterious, hushed, anxious” („тайнствено, приглушено, тревожно”) [2, c. 16] and “cantabile, with a lot of tenderness, gentle” („напевно, с много нежност, ласкаво”) [2, c. 16] – which of the two groups relates to which episode.

The next task is related to comprehending the information about the Rondo form and to the gradual introduction into the emotional palette of the piece. Four distiches are included on the subject of “autumn”. Since the Rondo form is being taught in the beginning of the school year, i.e. autumn, the verses are in sync, not only with the character of the musical work being discussed, but also with the surrounding natural scenery. The initial text is more concise:

“Golden, golden autumn!

Sad song of mine!”

(„Златна, златна есен!

Моя тъжна песен!”) [2, p. 17]

The next verses paint an autumn picture, but are with a different foot (different meter):

“The songbirds fly south.

How lonely we are here, without their song!

In gold and ocher the forest is adorned,

Like tears, the leaves are shedding and falling...

Clouds veil the golden face of the sun.

The husky voices of crows and magpies can be heard.”

(„Пойните птици отлитат на юг.

Без тяхната песен самотни сме тук!

В златисто и охра пъстрее гората,

кат сълзи се ронят и капят листата...

Облаци забулват златен слънчев лик.

На врани и свраки се чува дрезгав вик.”) [2, p. 17]

The students are asked to find what arrangement of the four distiches will result in the form “Rondo”, as well as “which verses are most appropriate for a theme and which – for episodes” („кои стихове са най-подходящи за тема и кои – за епизоди”) [2, p. 17]. In order to make this decision, the pupils need to recognize that the more concise and laconic first distich is different from all others in its rhythm, i.e. it is in clear contrast with all the rest. This makes it suitable for the theme of a Rondo, which is also in a relationship of contrast with the episodes. The more prominent students could comment that the first distich is not as descriptive, as the next three, but has a more concise language and unites semantically the others. Having received such an answer, the teacher should add that very often musical themes are more laconic, so they can leave opportunities for subsequent development.

This exercise is further enriched, as the students are prompted to rhythmically read aloud the poetic text, and to compose an appropriate to the character of the verses accompaniment on musical percussion instruments for children. The set of musical percussion instruments for children, provided by the general education schools of Bulgaria, includes maracas, a small drum, small cymbals, a tambourine, a triangle and other instruments. The little “composers” are directed to choose percussion instruments

with a softer sound, because the nature scene recreated through verses is more elegiac and the sharp timbres would contradict its character (i.e. they are guided to find and use the emotional shades of timbres). Speaking out loud the text needs to be done in quieter dynamics and a slower tempo so it is closer to the emotional sense of the task – to depict a quiet autumn picture, marked by despondency. The main theme is always presented with the same accompaniment, while in the episodes – the other verses – we are looking for a way to diversify the action – accompaniment with new in timbre percussion instruments, with a new, more diversified rhythm, with small changes in the tempo of speaking and the dynamics, after which the main character of the verses, chosen for theme, returns. In this case, the information of the structure of the musical piece is being applied on a new “tissue”. One of the aims of this change is to help the students acquire the ability of using creatively the newly perceived information, to apply the just learnt knowledge in new circumstances (on a new material for work – verses).

The second aim is to make the suggestion that every art (in this case, poetry and music) affects the emotional world of people with its contents and the form of its products; that the means of expression are similar – for example, we talk of rhythm in music, poetry, architecture, dance, i.e. the impact of different arts is uniform, what changes is only the specific material.

According to I. Roset, one of the forms of creative thinking is “anaxiomatization” („анаксиоматизация”) [4] – ignoring some of the elements of the term of a task, which would have no solution if the formulated conditions are followed strictly, in order to reach a solution. The changing of the work “tissue” – in this case, of music (a more abstract art, with a language of expression that is harder to comprehend, and from there for some students – it also provides “insufficient information” to execute a solution) with poetry (a more accessible, more concrete) art, has exactly this function – to find matter, with which it would be easier to work – in this case, distiches – to apply the new information to it (still during the process of apprehension). The above-discussed task actually is used to provide a template, a model of guiding mental operations, which the students can follow. The long-term aim of tasks like this one is to train creative thinking in the students.

The schema of the Rondo form, its version with which the students have been introduced to in the class – “A B A C A” [2, p. 16] is presented not only clearly, but in the way and with the markings, used by musicologists, i.e. the information is presented simultaneously in an accessible and strictly professional manner.

The next exercise illustrates the taught information about the specific musical construction by visual means. Four images are provided, again on the subject of autumn. This time the students have to arrange the indicated photographs in such a way as to create a “Rondo” structure. They need to decide which picture will be repeated when building the Rondo (i.e. which of the images most pronouncedly contrasts with the other three), to fulfill the role of a “main

theme”. While the last version of the previous task is collective – a group of students performs the text of the theme, another group plays the accompaniment of the distich-theme, a third group reads out the verses-episodes, a fourth group “accompanies” their declamation, everyone being free to suggest a suitable rhythm for the accompaniment, the new task is performed individually by each pupil, who, on the basis of the already understood information, creates their own structure.

A creative way is found for the knowledge, acquired through the above-discussed schema, to be consolidated and at the same time for the possibility the diversifying the Rondo form by adding new episodes (in this case – a single, third episode) to be explained. This is done as the students are required to arrange the four images printed on page 17 (Figure 1) so that they form a “Rondo” structure.

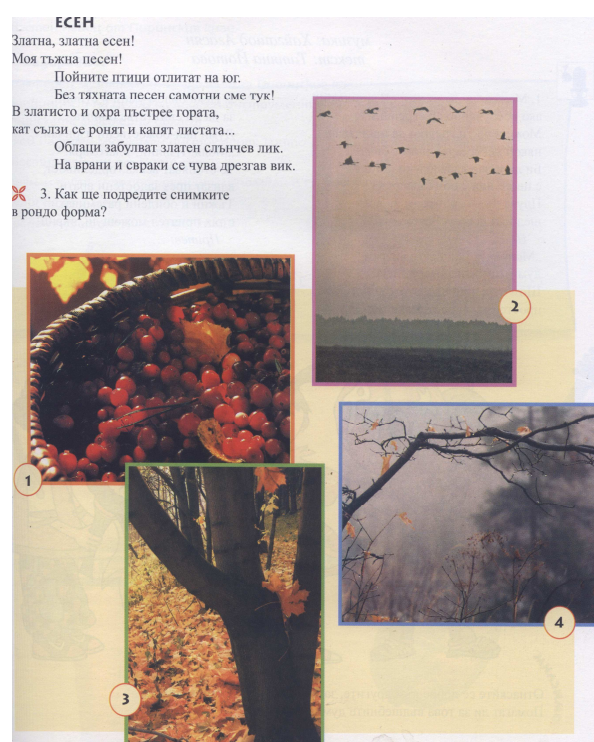


Figure 1. The pictures that have to be arranged to create a “Rondo” structure

The students have to do this on the figure, located under the four images (Figure 2). Even at the initial look on the figure of this exercise, the students find that they have to arrange the numbers of the four pictures in the seven circles, i.e. some of the pictures will have to be repeated.

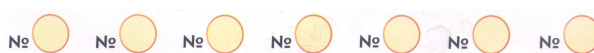


Figure 2. The circles where the numbers of pictures have to be placed

The second step requires determining which image will be repeated, i.e. will be the “theme”. It has to create the most prominent conflict with the other three images and at the same time to unite them semantically. Such picture is N 1 – with a different color scheme (the bright orange prevails), it

depicts a fruit (nature mort), and not a landscape, the character of the photograph – amber orange grapes in a woven basket, with distinct glares, which suggests bright light, is associated with bountiful fertility, abundance, while the other three photographs have a more subdued color scheme. Additionally, the dry branches (picture N 2 of Figure 1), the fallen leaves (N 3) and the flying off birds (N 4) invoke pessimism. Even the thin frame of photograph N 1 is in a warm color, as opposed to the frames of the other three images. Placing N 1 in the first, third, fifth and the seventh circle, and N 3, for example, as the closest in palette theme – on the second place, N 4 – on the fourth, and N 2, the most pessimistic one – on the sixth place, the students will achieve a figure, which clearly illustrate a different, more expanded variety of the form “Rondo” – with three episodes. This is a way to consolidate again the most characteristic feature of the Rondo structure – the main theme can be heard in the beginning, the end of the work and after each episode (regardless of the number of episodes).

Additional information to the lesson theme “Rondo”, included in the section “Yet something else” (such additional information for students with greater interest in the musical art is offered with each lesson) connects the musical structure, which has been just explained, with another type of art – dance. It is explained by the following text: “The name “Rondo” (from the French *rond* – circle) is derived from the old French dance Rondo. When the main melody – theme – is sounding, the dancers dance in a circle, and when the new melodies – episodes – appear – they dance in pairs.” („Названието „рондо” (от френски *ронд* – кръг) произлиза от старинния френски танц рондо. Когато прозвучава основната мелодия тема, танцьорите играят в кръг, а при появата на новите мелодии епизоди – танцуват по двойки.”) [2, p. 16] The information is presented in such a way that through it not only the imagination of the students is being provoked to picture the different figures, formed by the dancers, but also, on the basis of these images, to again underline the main contrast, characteristic to the Rondo form – the one between the theme and the episodes.

4. Introducing the Musical Form "Theme with Variations"

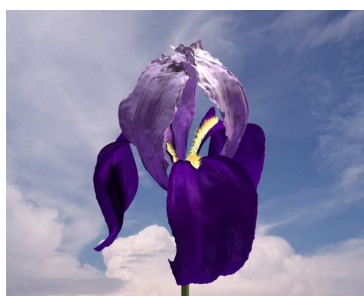
Even more flexible pedagogical approaches are offered when introducing the musical structure “Theme with variations”. At first, several basic explanations are provided – “Remember well the theme. This will help you discover that in its subsequent sections the musical piece consists of a repetition of the theme, but with changes. The modified repetitions are variations of the theme” („Запомнете добре темата. Това ще ви помогне да откриете, че по-нататък произведението представлява повторение на темата, но с изменения. Изменените повторения са вариации на темата”) [2, p. 30]. After the explanations and after learning the main theme of the musical example – “Theme with

Variations” by W. A. Mozart, its development is traced, listening again to the work. The definition of the musical structure “Theme with variations”, as before, of the “Rondo” form, is given after several characteristic features of the cycle being heard have been found, i.e. we arrive to the contents of the definition again by observation and summarization of the newly acquired practical experience. The brief analysis of the theme shows that it sounds calm, in a moderate tempo and dynamics, with a more modest accompaniment. It is explained that in the Variation forms the more “schematic” view of the theme provides more opportunities for future varying – the changes in the melody (for example new ornaments), in register, in rhythm, in accompaniment. Through the appropriate questions by the pedagogue, the students find also that variation, whose distinctly different character leads to a contrast in the development. After illustrating and defining the essence of the taught information – the musical form Theme with variations, the students receive also a creative task – to compose variations, on a new, rhythmically simplified musical theme, by changing the meter in such a way so that every subsequent variation represents a new Bulgarian folk dance. The theme is intonationally close to a Bulgarian folk melody. This allows the metric variations to sound as the most popular Bulgarian folk dances, for example: I variation $\frac{5}{8}$ (“Paidushko Horo”), II variation – $\frac{7}{8}$ (“Rachenitza”), III variation – $\frac{9}{8}$ (“Daichkovo Horo”). The creative participation of the students, however, does not end with this, it continues, as the performance of each pupil, who has suggested a variation of the theme in the desired by them meter, is joined in by the other participants, who compose and perform an accompaniment to this variation with the percussion musical instruments for children. After the suggestions for variations of the melody are complete, the whole “work” of the schoolchildren is performed with the composed rhythmic accompaniments – a colorful variation structure of Bulgarian folk dances.

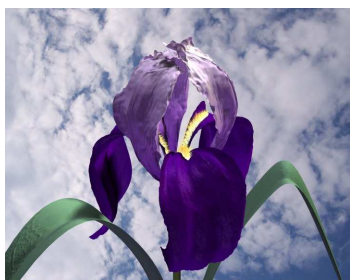
Since the schematic representation of the musical form “Theme with variations”, which is used in musicology, is rather simplified and does not allow illustrating of one of the essential characteristics of the musical structure discussed – the diversity of changes, the schema “a a1 a2 a3 a4”, etc. has been skipped. In its place, a sequence of images of iris flowers appears in the textbook:



Theme



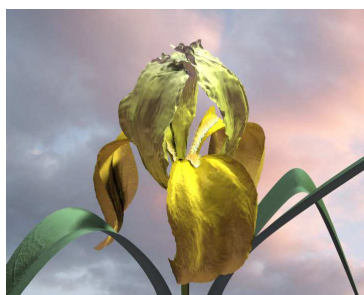
Variation 1



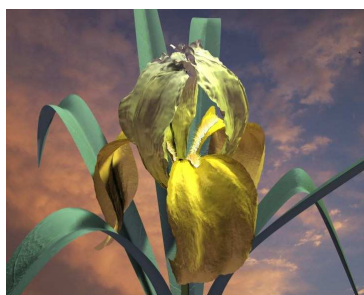
Variation 2



Variation 3



Variation 4



Variation 5

Figure 3. Explaining the Variation musical form through purposefully changed images

On the first image, which represents the theme, the flower is violet in color, depicted without green leaves and on a white background. This illustrates the simplified, laconic character of the theme, which gives an opportunity for further development and changes. As in the Variation musical form, so in the flower “scheme”, the image, which represents the first variation is the most similar to the “theme”. The change involves only the background, which now is a blue sky with three white clouds. On the next “variation”, a greater enrichment of the main image is shown – two green leaves are added, while the clouds on the background are significantly more detailed. The fourth image – “third variation” – introduces a tangible change in the character – on the front plane, a new, darker green leaf has been added, the highest petals of the bloom are now white, and the clouds on the background – yellow and dark grey, lit from below; this adds a more dramatic character. This way of visualization illustrates the two typical directions of varying – enrichment and change in character. The next picture – “fourth variation” shows the iris in yellow. Through it, another characteristic trait of the processes in the frame of the Variation structure is shown – a blunt, substantial change to the theme. Yet another possible type of varying is presented on the last “fifth variation”. Since the flower on this image is again yellow, i.e. it is more reminiscent of the previous “variation”, than of the theme, in this way the possibility of varying the previous variation in a Variation cycle is being illustrated. On this image, a further darkening of the sky is shown – to orange and dark gray (which indicates a further change in character), and behind the bloom, three more green leaves appear, i.e. enrichment is present. From this comment it is clear that an opportunity has been found to show in a comprehensive, elegant and pleasant way not only the main types of approaches of varying (enrichment and change), but also another especially important semantic feature of the structure “Theme with variations” – that the development of the work represents something of a “study” of the main image – theme – placing it in different conditions, taking away a certain one of its characteristics, replacing it with another, until, through these trials, the basic, invariant, essential of the image is found and distinguished (it’s not a coincidence that many variation cycles end with a literal repetition of the theme, the way it appeared when it was initially heard).

The creative participation of the students when learning the some means of expression in music allows:

- Activeness in understanding the new knowledge;
- Learning the information through various means of illustration – tonal, verbal and visual;
- Multi-aspect apprehension of the information through varied methods;
- Fully experiencing the emotional impact of the new means of expression with its specific meaning in the musical work of art;
- Facilitating memorization, because the new information is in the position of object of the activity;
- Expanding the basis of musical auditory experience,

which will be used when perceiving new works;

- Enhancing the emotional response of the perceiver of the musical work;
- Stimulating the individual need of the person to express their creativity when presenting and applying the knowledge learnt.

5. Conclusions

1. The definitions in the textbook are not provided without effort required, but are reached through observation. This gives place for a certain discovering even in the most basic of the three musical activities – perception of music.
2. The exercises, accompanying and facilitating the comprehension of the information being taught, are focused on: stimulating creativity through changing the conditions, in which the new information functions; creating a new product; providing models of anaxiomatization, whose structure is applicable to future mental operations.
3. The illustrative material has several functions – it provides additional information, related to the theme of the lesson; it facilitates in depth understanding of the character of the music being heard in the specific class session through the emotional impact of the images; it provides creative methods of encoding the information, which the students can use as a model in their future work.

When a musical work of art is fully perceived, i.e. its structure is realized and understood and its emotional content is faithfully reflected in the mind of the listener, this perception is added to their auditory experience pool, which in its turn influences each new perception. When conditions have been created for the expression of creativity in perceiving, comprehending and applying the received information, this not only facilitates its understanding and long-term memorization, but, by means of inciting in the person their need of creativity and self-expression, leads to a positive attitude towards the very activity of perception, this attitude being transferred also to the object of this activity – the sounding music.

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