

# *The Semiotics of Spiritual Space in the Choral Music of Georgy Sviridov*

PhD OKSANA ALEKSANDROVA

Associate professor at Kharkiv Humanitarian Pedagogical Academy

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Throughout the history of human thought, the concept of “spirit” and its derivatives (“spiritual”, “spirituality”) were accompanied by an attempt of understanding their transcendental nature by the experience of naming the levels of existence, which, being the highest for a human, does not belong to him and is beyond human life abilities. The spiritual symbolics is not invented by someone, it does not arise through conditioning, it is opened by a spirit in the depths of our being. Sviridov’s music is a bottomless art world, where the composer’s creative thought searches, selects, and asserts itself on the way of realization of deep foundations of existence.

*Keywords:* semiotics, spirit symbols, art, methodology of analysis, choral works.

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*The thought of composer achieves “transfiguring” strength in the idea of everlasting growth, in ascension, in spiral (as a symbol), but not in circle*  
(Асафьев 1970: 118).

## INTRODUCTION

Every national culture is a spiritual space that develops under *its own* laws and that could be estimated only by its inner criteria. National consciousness and spiritual experience of a nation, ideals and its whole culture reference points are formed to the extent of this space.

Musical sound is a unique message-code whereby God *talks* with human and vice versa. Music is a unique bridge between the earthen and the divine. Music is the highest form of the immediate perception of Truth. The phenomena of spiritual harmony are more delicately transferred by musical methods which from the second part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century are perceived as scientific synergy of the human and God. The value of spiritual experience of music is in discovery and mastering of human-creator’s unity.

Throughout the course of history of human thought and music, the notion *spirit* and its derivatives (*spiritual, spirituality*) escorted the understanding of their transcendental nature by experience

of giving names to that rival of being which, by being the highest for the human, does not belong to him and is beyond human possibilities of perception. On the one hand, the spiritual is determined as a life-giving source, a godlike attribute, The Spirit; on the other hand, is an attribute of God-like in human individuality, consciousness (property of human consciousness which is different from *affection*).

Topicality of the research theme is dictated by hot-button necessity of further goal-seeking developments in musicology according to the problems of spiritual content analysis taking into account the experience in musical semiotics. The comprehension of Sviridov’s art senses in the aspect of spiritual symbolics and choral music connection is the most important task of musicology of the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Degree of knowledge. The priorities of spiritual categories of *Divine Liturgy* and *Vespers vigil* in modern time-space are defended by Nina Gerasimova-Persidskaya (Герасимова-Персидская 2012); Natalja Gulyanitskaya (Гуляницкая 2002) reconstructs the panorama of genres *nova musica sacra*. Ljudmila Shapovalova (Шаповалова 2010) confirms liturgy as *archetype of homo credens* art. Ljudmila Romenskaya (Зайтцева) develops the discourse of Christian anthropology (Роменская 2010). The synergy conception of musical work in view of the accordance of world scientific aspect to composer’s art and outlined synthesis

of exact sciences and humanities of the 2<sup>nd</sup>–3<sup>rd</sup> millennium frontier is stated in Nadezhda Varavkina-Tarasova's dissertation. However, the methods of spiritual investigation are not taking up the priority position in research; they are not appreciated as generally evidentiary and thus, have not entered universally the academic activity of musical establishments. The comprehension of Sviridov's music in the aspect of the connection of spiritual symbolics in vocal-instrumental works with Christian tradition is the aim of the present article.

Semiotics is a cross-disciplinary science that gives an opportunity to analyse absolutely dissimilar objects. Semiotics analyses cognitive structures that are operated by human. Spiritual symbolics is not thought out by whomever, does not appear at random, it is opened as a spirit in the depths of human consciousness. The basis of symbolics is a secret nature of the human creature: the language of symbols is behind the creative person, it is an integral part of his nature a priori. The universalism of symbol as art category has religious basis; therefore it should be explained in prorated context. In every religious tradition (incidentally in Orthodox), a symbol is not only semiotic but also an ontologistic category, the sense of which (as stated by Pavel Florensky: Флоренский 2010) is that *every existence is space and symbol*. As far as existence manifests itself as a symbol, in so far as the symbol is *a method of Existence perception: a human as spiritualized and sensual creature has to do with only one reality which is A Symbol* (Ефимова 2008: 159). *In the same way that easy words acquire symbols' meaning, in such a way easy sounds should convey the symbolical* (Свиридов 2002: 162).

Body of the paper. At the beginning of the 1990s, Sviridov proposed the following classification in his diary notes: *Music is: a) ecclesiastic (is destined for execution in Church and is a part of canonical, traditional, strictly institutive ceremony); b) secular (is performed in a concert or theatre); c) spiritual (a combination of both. Music which is marked by influence of the Holy Spirit, spiritual art in secular forms. A very solemn spirit of Orthodox divine worship prevails in it* (Свиридов 2002: 205). Many of the composer's works refer exactly to the third category.

The spirituality of Sviridov's music is based on religious feeling which is impressed in his choral music stylistics. For example, the demonstration of spiritual connections with the Orthodox culture is felt in the synergism of Old Russian cantus (for which inseparable unity of Logos-Word

and melody is typical) in new sociocultural and genre-stylistic conditions. The prayerfulness of choral singing restores, in its turn, the spirit of unity which is a keynote of Slavic culture spiritual life. Unity as a world outlook principle, which is realized at the level of musical *genotype* (which includes Sviridov's music), is a special method of spiritual communication that is based, on the one hand, on interpersonal communication (choir – listeners) and spiritual vertical of communion with God on the other hand. Within the boundaries of the only creative method, Sviridov managed to accomplish *modulation* from the secular culture sphere (the poetry of Alexander Pushkin, Sergey Yesenin, Alexander Blok) into the temple-religious sphere of art where spirituality is understood as life in God and deisis in front of Him.

The artistic entirety of Sviridov's compositions is determined by straight or mediated submission of all the ways of musical composition. The synthesis of word and music (structural and semantic simulation of the world – spiritual reality) is life and artistic credo for the composer. This is determined by the composer's worldview position which he posed in such a way: *I am favoured to word as the beginning of beginnings, a secret essence of life and world* (Свиридов 2002: 47). The cycle *Chants and Prayers*, which belongs to the late period, is a key to understanding the whole conception of Sviridov's art. The words of Saint John Chrysostom reveal the composer's attitude to Christianity: *Holy Bible is spiritual food which beautifies mind and makes soul strong, determined and wise* (cit. by Гилярова 1994: 112). The cycle *Chants and Prayers* by Sviridov is the evidence of the spiritual understanding of the world: music of the last work of the great Russian musician-visionist besides sensually tangible intonation imagery discloses something greater which is spiritualized reality.

The difficult dialectics of *spiritual* and *secular* is observed in the history of European music tradition. On the one hand, the contrast in the worldview paradigms between them is obvious, on the other hand, their one-wayness in the move to spiritual vertical is found. Analytical argumentation in the sphere of secular tradition is based on the search for music sense at primary, certain level in the sphere of semantics. All the additives of musical language – melody, harmony, rhythmic, composition, syntax – line up autonomous laws of movement and the logics of cooperation towards seeable, deep-felt intonation. Intonation

is able to create portraits and space, events and different types of moves.

Musical sound refers to the world of human culture symbols: musical work is a peculiar message-code. With the help of music a human communicates with the spiritual world. Music is a peculiar bridge between the material and the celestial. Spiritual symbolics codified in musical work most frequently are delivered with the help of the same kind of lyrical modus of statement, not in horizontal (interpersonal) communication, but rather in prayerful, cold-water and ascetical focus on the Other-in-Oneself (God). The methods of analytical detection of musical semiotics are determined by such components as melos, syntax (a kind of breathing which naturally follows the musical speech); metro-rhythmic modes, fret harmony, textural-timbre complexes.

The symbols in Sviridov's music are rather complicated and sometimes cannot be interpreted unambiguously. Thus, the character of Christ is a symbol of general life renewal, spiritual transformation. Exactly in such meaning it appeared in the cantata *Light guest*. The character of revolution is interpreted as a symbol of spiritual fight with the *old world* and aiming to the *new world*. The choir *Peace with the Saints* in the middle of *Pathetic Oratorio* opens a deep sense of the work, raising hymn sounding to spiritual symbol altitude.

Creativity psychology, internal world of music is integral of the author's intonation. In this case we perceive contradiction between creative function of self-consciousness (*I* of creator) and spiritual altitude of music as the language of communion with God and knowledge of God. In this context Sviridov's music as the art of one of the greatest composers, philosophers and visionists of the Newest history of musical culture, claims scientific grounding from adequate constructive methods positions which is spiritual analysis of music based on the experience of humanitarian sciences and spiritual practices (philosophy, semiotics, theology, liturgics).

The cycle *Chants and Prayers* of Sviridov, in spite of sensuously tangible intonation imagery, reveals something more which is *spiritual reality*. The spirituality of the composer's music is based on religious feeling, which is fixed smoothly by the composer in choral writing and is revealed in art stylistics. For example, the manifestation of the choral music spiritual connections with Orthodox culture is felt through the synergy of Old Russian *znamenny* chant, for which the inseparable unity of Word-Logos and chant is typical.

The prayerfulness of choral singing, in its turn, renews the spirit of unity as the keynote of Slavic culture spiritual life. Realized at the level of *genotype*, unity is a special method of spiritual communication which is based, on the one hand, on the interpersonal communication (choir – listeners) and the spiritual vertical of communion with God (human – God) on the other hand.

The opening phase of the musical work sets the tone to the whole further exposition as a key initial *program* of perception. Many cases of writer's or composer's special anxiety about the first *accords* of their work confirm the foregoing. The equal periodic syntax, especially in the unhurried movement, creates *regular breathing*, brings in distanced and ethical narrative to tone presentation. As an opposition to it, the changeable syntax, which is uneven breathing, is connected with transfusion and split.

Pavel Florensky has mentioned that *genuine great work has a special energy of genuine Fairness (as the centre of attraction and justification of the rest) in spite of all the additives sum* (Флоренский 2010: 25). Consequently, sensuality and affection do not possess fullness. In the best works not only aesthetic (hedonistic, at bottom) form of fairness, but also its ontologic depth is exuded. The phenomenon of this Fairness is no longer semantic, but symbolic in the religious context of this word. Its evidence depends on both the logos which is included in text as well on researcher's skill to hear spiritual space which is disposed by musicologist *over* a work, transforming many particulars of the text, opening the new capability to art transformation. Everything in great musical works is filled with manifested and discovered glory of Fairness: it is the symbol of genuine perfection, freedom and beauty. Temporary expansion of music testifies to spiritual transformation by virtue of special kind of musical works finishing which symbolizes personal spiritual feat of the human which is the transformation of corporality, its spiritualization.

The mental disallowance of the author from the sensuous narcissism allows building a special symbolic space in sacred music. This is not the art symbolic, but authentic religious-mystical space and imagery. The denial of the sensuous at the moment of prayerful singing (or icon contemplation) is the departure from artistic aura of work of art and standing immediately in front of God's face. This departure outwards the sensuous is not only the psychological condition of prayerful soul. The religious chastity of chant, which

is coordinated with courageous and generous way of thoughts, is approved in the removal of the sensuous. Intonation generality of themes (voices) in sacred music genres forms a special spatio-temporal development which differs from goal-setting of musical development in secular conceptual genres (symphonies, sonatas) with their transparent way of moving to the final.

In the context of sacred music, the notion *symbol* is used in connection with ecclesial (Biblical) allegory. Choral texture in sacred works, which symbolically sounds religious, world outlook fills the sounding voices with special sense through vertical and hierarchal structure of space and time. Horizontal reading of the sense is difficult; the sounding of melodic lines of voices is in the general texture context. In such conditions hearing fixes the fact of voices prelude, changes of texture exposition. Such are the antiphons, the vertical correlations of which are symbolical, filled with religious sense.

The sense of music is concentrated not only in the theme, but also in the idea of hierarchic sequence by vertical. The theme serves not as artistic information, but rather its formulas that provide the subject of *conversation* are a combined, communal praying-expression. One might note the intonation *clarity* of the theme which points at *other*, becomes a sort of entrance of spirituality without accenting attention on itself. From here the mood of singing soul is not accented at the acrostically visible voice-theme but rather at the individual coherence with the World.

As far as it is known, from the religious point of view, spirituality is not a refusal of body but its transformation. In musical space of sacred works a special method of conciliar statements is manifested while maintaining personal-intonational (spiritual) singing which is a sort of complementariness: vociferous texture combines all the singular statements into one harmonic unit. The artistic-philosophical depth of choral texture as a sound-proof of spiritual space is seen in it.

The intonational analysis of sacred music proves that almost every work of Russian sacred music (on the grounds of *znamenny chant*) evolves on the basis of the single intonational *code*. The whole melodic development is based on the given intonational complex, creating the infinite set of variants-combinations concerning the theme that is ideally conceivable in consciousness. Every voice, every chant amounts to variative transformation of the “invariant” code.

The variation of melodic movement of sacred music harks back to deep antiquity, to the system of eastern Christian eight church modes, by laws of which *canto gregoriano* was based on. The symbolic structure of Gregorian Choral is connected with the technique of combining the variant (*modus*) which lives in inner space. The melodic material of voice in eastern Christian church is also chanted in different ways depending on office categories and celebrations. This melodic hierarchy, as Vladimir Martinov writes, *distributes melodic material of voice on different complexity levels, beginning with the easiest psalmodies on one sound and finishing with extremely developed melodic constructions with the involvement of individuals and fits* (МАРТЫНОВ 1997: 13). In eastern European church prayerful singing holds in storage the dialectics of *seen and unseen*.

*Chants and Prayers* is a spiritual devise of the composer, however, it was not written immediately for using during Divine offices. Choirs are suffused with deep prayerfulness, but it is not stylization. Liturgical influences in his music manifest themselves in connections with genres and ways of writing footing on ecclesiastic chants, which, by remelting in genius artist's life experience, are reflected in inimitable spiritual beauty of Sviridov's style intonation.

The linchpin in Sviridov's music is the character of Messiah that is introduced as a set of predicatory choirs which discover teachings of Christ and Messiah's character that had appeared in secular works of the composer. One should only think about *These Poor Settlements* (to the words of Fyodor Tiutchev), that is why *Sailed Away Russia* and cantata *Light Guest* (to the words of Sergey Yesenin). In the majority of these works the character of Christ is constantly connected with the character of Russia. His presence is constantly thought in its space, among poor settlements and endless horizons. From here comes the unity of Sviridov's music and symbolic unity of God and human (spiritual/sacred vertical) for which all the stylistic methods “work” to reflex the spiritual centre of Orthodoxy.

The Christian system of values passes historically formed spiritual semiotics that consists of characters and symbols and art characteristics which are fixed in mental structures of liturgy to next generations. *The structural-semantic characteristics which are all rolled into one, allow to realize their paradigmatic meaning in relation to human creativity*, mentions Ljudmila Shapovalova (Шаповалова 2010: 98). In this context

it is difficult to separate Sviridov's sacred works from the secular ones. The evidences of this are the presence of evangelic figures and characters, quotations from Psalter and New Testament, religious symbolics and motives in the poem *Sailed Away Russia*, the cantata *Light Guest*, the choir *A Soul is Sad about Heavens* (all to the words of Sergey Yesenin), in the choral cycle to the words of Alexander Blok *Songs of Timelessness*.

The first work, which could be referred to a kind of "liturgical music" with good reason, is the draft titled *Cant* (1949), which was mentioned by Alexander Belonenko (Белоненко 2001). Later, according to the researcher, Sviridov reproduced by heart the theme *Cant* in the choir *Saint Love*, which was included into the music to incidental music of Aleksey Tolstoy's stage play *Tsar Fedor Ioannovich* in the Maly theatre (in addition to two of the other ones, in the late 1960's). The text of *Penitential Poem* served as one of those texts that are examples of Russian sacred lyrics of the 16<sup>th</sup>–17<sup>th</sup> centuries, the words of other one are taken from the liturgical text *Songs of Most Holy Mother of God*. As such, Sviridov's *liturgical music* begins upon "Three choirs" from the music to the tragedy of Aleksey Tolstoy "Tsar Fedor Ioannovich" (1973) (Белоненко 2001: 2).

One of the fundamentals of spiritual/sacred symbolics is the use of mainstream scale in works that are absolutely not involving the revelation of ecclesiastic imagery. Such manifestations are especially meaningful from the point of view of the exposure of national-original sources of the composer's music. Thus, the community with extended everyday system is visible in modal organization of such works of Sviridov as *Pathetic Oratorio* which are far away from religious attitude.

The savor of the key intonation in Sviridov's sacred works is its draft semantics which is focused on a human's conscious self-determination. The expansion of intonation in the choir *It is truly meet* determines it as figurative and sense bearing keynote of the conception of the work. The dynamism of processual aspect of the form achieves the principle of *chain* intergrowth with constant intonational renewal which is broadly analogous to melodic principle of varied anaphora in znamenny chant. Suchlike intonational expansion symbolizes the process of spiritual searching, a way to inner human essence and his soul perception.

One of the most significant sides of musical and sense-bearing semiosphere of Sviridov's

works is that it sounds like a bell; its semantics is connected with Orthodox world, with the character of dear land. *Peal of bells*, Sviridov mentioned, *is not material sounds: it is a symbol, sounds which are filled with a deepest spiritual sense that is beyond words* (Свиридов 2002: 40). Sounding-like-bell in Russian worldview is *A Word and Conscience at one time* (Бекетова 2004: 65). The effect of sounding-like-bell is reached by means of using different methods of textural-harmonic complex significance. It personifies a single sound as well as an interval, common chord, seventh chords, chords with side tones, and polyharmonic verticals. An example is the cycle *Kursk Songs*: No. 1 *Green Oaklet* – the timbre decision of bell peals are the piano, the harp, the celesta; No. 2 *You Praise* – ostinato solos in high range (flutes, trumpets) are simulated by trichord bells with major second (c–d–f–g); No. 3 *Bells are Ringing in the Town* – an organ point on *d* in low register is present in the harp, the piano, the tom-tom, the cello and the contrabass during the whole performance.

Another example is *Poem to the Memory of Sergey Yesenin* – No. 8 *Peasant Boys* is a peal of bells with couplet elements; No. 10 *The Sky is Like a Bell* a peal of bells sounds like global Chime (*the poet clangs a bell of creation*, according to the words of the composer). The archetype of bell-likeness has its own associative array that determines the general keynote of artistic intention beyond the specifics of its particular details.

Symbolics appears in the nature of peal of bells, in its function of determining something metaphysical, which is inexpressible by any other methods, and *brings the Good News*. A bell is a symbol of informing, of Chime. *A peal of bells is absolutely not material sounds, it is a symbol, sounds which are filled with deepest spiritual content which is beyond words* (Свиридов 2002: 128).

Bell-likeness has united nature, *a bell is generally valid; its signal always announces something equally important for everyone, beyond statuses and classes; the addressee of bell signal is the whole Generation as entirety* (Свиридов 2002: 128).

In general, all the above-mentioned is relevant to Sviridov's musical policy. It would be a simplification to search for some single *narrative* figure of bell-likeness. The innate possibility of ostinato repeating symbolizes endless repeat/renewal of the Existence. The thematic complex, which simulates a peal of bells, is a musical symbol

denoting impersonal generally valid events, a code of Christian world in the context of national worldview.

Let us systematize the thematic signs-symbols which are deduced from the choral works by Sviridov in the 1950–1970s (secular kind): a symbol of time and Eternity; genre (dignifying, requiem); prayerful (the Lord's, Magnificat); a lot of psalms; nature = Existence; sun (the sun of the Truth); light; spatial ones. Thus, the architecture of cross-domed temple unites two very important moments: the cross (a symbol of Christianity) and the dome (the centre or the head of composition, the personification of Christ as the head of the church). The sky is the personification of temple dome.

By learning to comprehend “the past in the present”, the composer searched for creatively adequate reading of the Word of God. Thus, *ostinato* contains properties of the spiritual symbol of *circle*. In the choir *Snow Falls* from the cantata, compositional form is based on closed harmonic turnovers, on the structure adequacy and strict proportionality, culmination of harmonic kind.

On the grounds of repeatability as the principle of development in sacred music of Sviridov the procedures of working with musical material (variational repeatability, *ostinato*) are formed. Variation technique is observable in the inner decoration of Orthodox temple, where numerous variants of images of Messiah, Holy Mother, Saints, adders, walls of temple are included into the composition of iconostasis. The principle of variation technique promotes the abstracting from specifics of the substantial world and educates atemporal essence of spiritual phenomena.

The type of polyphonic development, which consists of thorough progress of variationally renewed musical material, is often used by the composer. A parallel could be drawn between identity, residence in a single sound space with the visage of Orthodox temple which does not remain from the selected point of view and always remains identical to itself. It is the idea of Eternity, out-of-timeness, celestial figure of the world. He gathered the energy of transformation in secular genres and at the new coil of history, at the new boundary of centuries, as Rachmaninov, he revives Old Russian singing tradition in *Chants and Prayers* (and other works on spiritual/sacred thematics).

Active absorption of Pushkin's heritage meant a house to the secret of *Russian word as revelation of spiritual life* for the composer. Through the poet's personal spiritual search the experience

of transformation of Russian existence was accustomed: *to live in the deepest integrity and sincerity, to live by godlike content in a perfect form* (Ильин 1993: 57). Natalja Beketova proposes *the conception of Transformation as a fact of secular Orthodox culture*, from its roots directed to the problem of *inner human*; summarizes its stages: from initial *material – celestial, peculiar – other* to qualitative bounce (the transference from the other to the foreign) and to the resulting coping the foreign by the general, the secular by the sacral (Бекетова 2001: 110). Alike Rachhmaninov (according to Beketova), the personality of Sviridov, to our mind, is also the symbol of cultural mind (Бекетова 2001).

## CONCLUSIONS

Sviridov's creativity is genial with its easiness and the depth of its expression, musical interpretation of figures and plot that are connected with Christian ideology. By trying to understand and explain its main ideas, we encroach on the secret sphere of creativity (to *the most holy*) where the composer meets God and where a symbol rules in the polysemy of senses. Spiritual symbols are conveyed in living language of music, in intonation and dramaturgic organization of musical works. The whole creativity of Sviridov could be accounted for as the way of spiritual ascension: to the holy Lap of its Orthodox egress, from the secular treatment of spirituality to Christian-Orthodox.

A special point in Sviridov's interpretation of the Prayer book is the selection of prayers of *absolution* only. The choral Christology is one of the most visible occurrences among all the liturgical music of the composer. The definite expression of features of united thinking in the poetics of Sviridov's choral creativity is characterized by the presence of the Transfiguration concept, the prototype of which is the Theandric feat of Christ-Messiah.

The penetration to the sense of Sviridov's music is an endless process and the given article is only an experience of personal *involvement* in it. It is clear that the understanding of his music as an event of national self-consciousness of Orthodox culture is impossible without appealing to spiritual analysis as a cognitive method of musicology.

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