Современные проблемы музыкознания / Contemporary Musicology

2025/9(4)

eISSN 2587-9731

Shostakovich in Memoriam

Original article
UDC 78.01; 784.3
https://doi.org/10.56620/2587-9731-2025-4-170-225
EDN LITHZK

Resonances of absence: Voice, nostalgia, and memory in Dmitri Shostakovich's *Seven Romances on Verses by Alexander Blok*

Dr. Ivana Petković Lozo
University of California,
Riverside, USA,
✉*ivanarpetkovic@gmail.com*
https://orcid.org/0009-0003-4847-3077

Abstract. Dmitri Shostakovich's *Seven Romances on Verses by Alexander Blok's op. 127* (1967), is a profound meditation on voice, nostalgia, and memory, set against the backdrop of Russian Symbolism and late Soviet aesthetics. By setting seven of Blok's poems for soprano, violin, cello, and piano, Shostakovich crafts a work where the voice is simultaneously central and destabilized, dissolving into fragmented musical textures. This article explores the cycle through Jacques Derrida's critique of *phonocentrism* and *différance*, Roland Barthes' *le grain de la voix*, Svetlana Boym's typology of nostalgia,

and Peter Kivy's philosophy of musical expressivity. These perspectives reveal how *Seven Romances* embodies a deeply philosophical engagement with absence, longing, and the instability of meaning. Blok's poetry, marked by mystical longing and existential uncertainty, finds an ideal counterpart in Shostakovich's late compositional style, where silence and fragmentation speak as powerfully as sound. The soprano's voice, often disrupted or absorbed by the ensemble, reflects Derrida's *trace*, where meaning is continually deferred, resisting stable presence. At the same time, Barthes' *grain of the voice* comes to the fore, as the raw, tactile qualities of breath, tone, and articulation emphasize the materiality of sound over textual clarity. This interplay between presence and disappearance renders the voice both expressive and spectral, echoing something irretrievably lost. Kivy's enhanced formalism offers another lens, suggesting that music's expressive power arises not from extramusical meaning but from its internal structures. In *Seven Romances*, Shostakovich exploits these structures, using harmonic instability and vocal dissolution to evoke emotions that resist direct representation. Nostalgia shapes the cycle's structure and emotional depth, aligning with Boym's concept of *reflective nostalgia*, which acknowledges the impossibility of return. Rather than reconstructing a lost past, *Seven Romances* lingers in the fractures of memory, particularly in the final song, Music, where the voice dissolves, leaving only instrumental echoes. In this way, Shostakovich does not merely set Blok's poetry to music — he enacts its themes, creating a sonic landscape where time, history, and identity blur into a haunting meditation on impermanence.

Keywords: Dmitri Shostakovich, Alexander Blok, *Seven Romances on Alexander Blok's Verses*, Russian Symbolism

For citation: Petković Lozo, I. (2025). Resonances of absence: Voice, nostalgia, and memory in Dmitri Shostakovich's *Seven Romances on Verses by Alexander Blok*. *Contemporary Musicology,* 9(4) 2025, 170–225. https://doi.org/10.56620/2587-9731-2025-4-170-225

Памяти Д. Д. Шостаковича

Научная статья

Резонансы отсутствия: голос, ностальгия и память в «Семи романсах на стихи Александра Блока» Дмитрия Шостаковича

Ивана Петкович Лозо
Калифорнийский университет,
г. Риверсайд, США,
✉*ivanarpetkovic@gmail.com*,
https://orcid.org/0009-0003-4847-3077

Аннотация. «Семь романсов на стихи Александра Блока» соч. 127 (1967) Дмитрия Шостаковича для сопрано, скрипки, виолончели и фортепиано — сочинение о рефлексирующей ностальгии и памяти, связанное с русским символизмом и позднесоветской эстетикой. Голос в нем одновременно занимает центральную позицию и дестабилизируется, растворяясь во фрагментированной музыкальной ткани. В статье цикл рассматривается через призму критики «фоноцентризма» и *différance* Жака Деррида, концепцию «зерна голоса» Ролана Барта, типологию ностальгии Светланы Бойм и философию музыкальной выразительности Питера Киви. Эти подходы показывают, как «Семь романсов» воплощают глубокую философскую вовлеченность в тему отсутствия, в нестабильность смысла. Поэзия Блока, пронизанная мистической тоской и экзистенциальной неопределенностью, находит идеальный отклик в позднем стиле Шостаковича, где тишина

и фрагментированность заявляют о себе столь же мощно, как и звук. Сопрано, нередко прерываемое или поглощаемое ансамблем, отражает «след» Деррида, где смысл все время ускользает, сопротивляясь постоянному присутствию. В то же время на первый план выходит «зерно голоса» Барта, поскольку первозданные, осязаемые качества дыхания, тембра и артикуляции подчеркивают материальность звука, а не ясность текста. Эта игра между присутствием и исчезновением делает голос одновременно выразительным и призрачным, отражающим нечто безвозвратно утраченное. «Усиленный формализм» Киви предлагает еще одну точку зрения, предполагающую, что выразительная сила музыки возникает не из внешнего значения, а из ее внутренних структур. В «Семи романсах» Шостакович использует эти структуры, применяя гармоническую нестабильность и вокальное истаивание, чтобы вызвать эмоции, которые сопротивляются прямому представлению. на строение цикла и его эмоциональную глубину влияет ностальгия, соотносящаяся с концепцией *рефлексирующей ностальгии* Бойм, предполагающей невозможность возвращения. Вместо того чтобы реконструировать потерянное прошлое, «Семь романсов» концентрируются на изломах памяти, особенно в финальной песне «Музыка», где голос растворяется, оставляя только инструментальные отзвуки. Таким образом, Шостакович не просто пишет музыку на стихи Блока — он воплощает его темы, создавая звуковой ландшафт, где время, история и идентичность сливаются в завораживающую медитацию о преходящем.

Ключевые слова: Дмитрий Шостакович, Александр Блок, «Семь романсов на стихи Александра Блока», символизм, меланхолия, память

Для цитирования: *Петкович Лозо И.* Резонансы отсутствия: голос, ностальгия и память в «Семи романсах на стихи Александра Блока» Дмитрия Шостаковича // Современные проблемы музыкознания. 2025. Т. 9, № 4. С. 170–225. https://doi.org/10.56620/2587-9731-2025-4-170-225

Introduction

This article explores Dmitri Shostakovich's (1906–1975) *Seven Romances on Verses by Alexander Blok* op. 127 ("Семь романсов на стихи Александра Блока", соч. 127), as a profound meditation on voice, memory, melancholy, and absence. Composed in 1967, near the end of the composer's life, the cycle marks a deliberate turn away from the monumental language of Soviet musical ideology toward an introspective, ascetic chamber idiom. In this late style, the expressive weight shifts from rhetorical assertion to fragment, silence, and resonance—elements that cultivate poetics of memory and mourning. Scored for soprano, piano, violin, and cello, *Seven Romances on Verses by Alexander Blok* invites an intimate listening space in which the instrumental ensemble does not simply accompany Blok's poetry but acts as a constellation of spectral interlocutors—alternately echoing, shadowing, or resisting the presence of the voice.

Theoretical and Philosophical Framework

To interpret the multidimensional resonances of the cycle, this study adopts an interdisciplinary methodological framework, integrating insights from musicology, literary theory, and philosophy. Richard Louis Gillies's *Singing Soviet Stagnation*: *Vocal Cycles from the USSR, 1964–1985* [1] (which provides the interlinear translation of Blok's poems) remains the most comprehensive scholarly study of *Seven Romances on Verses by Alexander Blok*, its interpretive horizon is shaped primarily by historical, stylistic, and cultural concerns. Gillies offers invaluable insights into motivic design, tonal and structural organization, and the broader context of Soviet vocal cycles of the late twentieth century and mid-twentieth century. His work provides an essential analytical foundation for understanding Shostakovich's compositional strategies.

The present article acknowledges this contribution yet proposes a fundamentally different orientation. It turns toward questions that remain underexplored in existing scholarship: the philosophical status of the voice, the spectrality of memory, the phenomenology of disappearance, and the poetics of affective stasis. By bringing a few philosophical concepts, which will be discussed below, into dialogue with the musical text I aim to show

that *Seven Romances on Verses by Alexander Blok* articulates a more radical meditation on presence and absence than has previously been discussed.

Thus, the novelty of this article lies not in offering another structural analysis, but in repositioning the cycle within an interdisciplinary field—one that reads the music as a site where voice fractures, memory erodes, and meaning becomes suspended. In this respect, Gillies's work serves as a point of departure, while the current study expands the conceptual framework through which the cycle may be understood.

Drawing on Jacques Derrida's theory of the "trace" and his critique of "phonocentrism" [2; 3], the analysis considers how the voice in *Seven Romances on Verses by Alexander Blok* performs its own erasure—how it haunts rather than asserts, revealing presence through its deferral and disappearance. Roland Barthes' concept of "le grain de la voix" [4] serves as a complementary lens for examining the corporeal and affective textures of vocal sound, particularly where expressivity transcends semantic clarity. In parallel, Svetlana Boym's notion of "reflective nostalgia" [5] frames memory not as a retrieval of the past, but as a lingering meditation on its irretrievability, suspended in sonic time.

Philosophical reflections on musical meaning further deepen this analysis. Peter Kivy's formalist conception of musical expressivity [6; 7; 8] foregrounds the emotional power of structure, gesture,[1] and form over representational content—an idea particularly resonant with Shostakovich's late style. Meanwhile, Paulo C. Chagas's understanding of melancholy as a structuring mood [9] offers a framework for considering how emotional lucidity, artistic restraint, and existential clarity emerge not in catharsis but in a stasis of mourning. These perspectives together illuminate a music that listens inwardly, that voices not triumph but tremor, and that sustains a space of unresolved longing.

[1] Throughout this analysis, the term *gesture* is used in an expanded sense—drawing from musicological, phenomenological, and semiotic frameworks—to refer not only to physical or performative motion but also to expressive acts that mark or orient meaning without fully determining it. A *gesture* may be sonic, structural, poetic, or philosophical: a motion toward significance, a trace of intention, or a suspension of expression. In this context, *gesture* often names a moment of articulation that remains open, provisional, and affectively charged.

Rather than reading *Seven Romances on Verses by Alexander Blo*k as a straightforward setting of Symbolist verse, this article approaches it as a musical essay in "spectrality"—as theorized by Jacques Derrida in *Specters of Marx* [10]. "Spectrality" refers to the presence of something that is no longer fully present yet not absent, like a ghost or an echo. In Derrida's philosophical thought, "spectrality" is also related to the trace: the idea that meaning or presence is constantly haunted by what came before and by what's missing. In this sense, something "spectral" is a lingering absence that still speaks. It describes the condition in which the past continues to affect the present through traces, such as fragments, faded voices, temporal dislocations, or lingering atmospheres. In this reading, memory emerges not as linear recollection but as echo, erosion, and recurrence. The voice, too, is never fully anchored but hovers, dispersed, absorbed into instrumental timbre, or suspended in psalmodic stasis. The cycle becomes a sonic palimpsest in which speech is destabilized, and presence is transformed into trace. "Spectrality," then, is not a theme but a structural condition: the music's unfolding is haunted by what is lost, what no longer speaks, yet still resonates. It is in this space of textual and sonic liminality that *Seven Romances on Verses by Alexander Blok* reveals its deepest character—not merely as an elegy for a vanished world, but as a haunting meditation on the fragility of the self, on what it means to speak—or sing—when language, time, and certainty have already begun to fade.

Thus, the interpretive approach adopted in this article integrates deconstruction, semiotics, aesthetics, and phenomenology to illuminate the philosophical resonances of voice, nostalgia, and memory in Dmitri Shostakovich's *Seven Romances on Verses by Alexander Blok*. Drawing on the thought of Jacques Derrida, Roland Barthes, Svetlana Boym, Peter Kivy, and Paulo C. Chagas (in dialogue with Eduardo Lourenço), I propose a framework that foregrounds the spectral, fragmentary, and affective dimensions of Shostakovich's late vocal *écriture*. This conceptual apparatus is not merely a set of methodological lenses but a necessary interpretive infrastructure for understanding how Shostakovich's vocal cycle stages the very instability of musical meaning, vocal presence, and historical memory.

Between Symbolism and Late Style: Shostakovich Meets Blok

Seven Romances on Verses by Alexander Blok was written for soprano Galina Vishnevskaya, her husband, the cellist Mstislav Rostropovich, violinist David Oistrakh, and pianist Moisei Vainberg. The cycle was premiered privately in October 1967 and later performed publicly in January 1968 [1, p. 84]. The choice of an ensemble consisting of soprano, violin, cello, and piano—an aspect already mentioned above—reflects Shostakovich's move away from the expansive orchestral canvases of his earlier works, especially the war symphonies. It indicates a later shift toward more intimate, formally concise idioms. In other words, the cycle embraces a chamber aesthetic marked by extreme formal economy and textural subtlety.

Its seven songs—*Song of Ophelia*, *Gamayun*, the *Bird of Prophecy*, *We Were Together*, *City Sleeps*, *The Storm*, *Secret Signs* and *Music*—create a dramaturgical arc of emotional and formal attenuation, traversing affective states of longing, estrangement, foreboding, and dissolution. As Richard Louis Gillies notes, *Seven Romances on Verses by Alexander Blok* evokes memory not through direct thematic recurrence but through recursive transformations, intertextual allusion, and spectral resonance that unfolds across the cycle as a whole [1, pp. 82–88]. This dramaturgy, grounded in motivic contraction (e.g., perfect fifths to perfect fourths), modal ambiguity, and rhythmic ostinati, fosters a poetics of reflective listening and temporal recursion.

Stylistically, *Seven Romances on Verses by Alexander Blok* exemplifies what Edward Said, drawing on Adorno, termed a "late style" [11, p. 7]—aesthetic idioms of irreconcilability, restraint, and unresolved tension. In this sense, Shostakovich's compositional voice shifts from resolution toward music that resists closure. Silence, fragmentation, and the suspension of tonality are not merely dramatic devices but serve as existential and philosophical gestures. The voice, rather than asserting itself as a sovereign melodic force, becomes increasingly absorbed into or dissolved by the ensemble, reflecting not only expressive fading but also a more profound meditation on the limits of utterance, memory, and the self.

This late aesthetic resonates directly with what Tijana Popović Mlađenović [12, pp. 17–48] identifies, in the context of Shostakovich's string quartets, as the chronotopic focus of his music: a shaping of musical time that foregrounds duration, recursion, and reflective temporality over linear progression. In *Seven Romances on Verses by Alexander Blok*, musical time is not a vehicle for dramatic teleology but a medium for memory. Each song unfolds as a fragment within a recursive structure that evokes recollection rather than narrative continuity. The principle of *forme formans* [12, pp. 20–21], where musical form emerges organically through a process rather than through fixed structural templates, supports this orientation: gestures evolve through subtle variation, rather than through thematic exposition or climax.

Moreover, the reduction of expressive means—another of Popović Mlađenović's defining characteristics in the context of Shostakovich's string quartets—underscores the emotional restraint of the cycle. Shostakovich's limited use of motivic material, sparse textures, and attenuated dynamics exemplifies a poetics of subtraction. Expressivity emerges not through contrast or accumulation, but through controlled transformation [12, pp. 17–48]. This aesthetic of reticence parallels the philosophical concept of deferred presence: musical meaning is not immediate but suspended, spectral, always arriving just beyond the moment—a phenomenon that aligns closely with Derrida's "trace" and the intensification of musical "futurity" [12, pp. 22, 24].

The cycle's variational-polyphonic logic [12, p. 28]—especially in the treatment of contracting intervallic motives and textural layering—reinforces its inward, reflective structure. Musical development here is not oppositional but accretive: memory is shaped not through new material but through the reworking of old fragments. This compositional logic, based on "change through repetition" [12, p. 29], transforms fragmentation into continuity, not by resolving discontinuities but by sustaining them as expressive forces (cf. [12, p. 36]). In this way, Shostakovich's *Seven Romances on Verses by Alexander Blok* enacts a late style that is both formally open and emotionally saturated, where absence, silence, and spectral resonance become conditions for musical and existential meaning.

The poetic voice of Shostakovich's cycle is that of Alexander Blok (1880–1921), the preeminent figure of Russian Symbolism and a central presence in the cultural efflorescence known as the Silver Age. Blok's poetry is infused with metaphysical yearning, visionary intensity, and historical anxiety. His verses summon liminal figures—muses, prophets, angels, spectral women—who hover between transcendence and dissolution. These presences inhabit a mystical, often fractured world, permeated by recurring images of mist, twilight, fire, and silence [1, p. 39]. Such cycles of imagery do not merely ornament the text; they enact a poetics of inner dislocation and mystical anticipation—a constant deferral of meaning toward an unreachable elsewhere.

For Blok, Symbolism was never reducible to a style or literary school; it was a "total worldview" grounded in a "search for spiritual meaning in the phenomena of the visible world" [13, p. 6]. In this metaphysical framework, poetry becomes a medium of revelation: a site where the invisible flickers through the visible, and the material world becomes charged with transcendent resonance. This aspiration to spiritual synthesis—to a reconciliation between art, philosophy, and life—is what grants Symbolism its utopian character. As Irina Paperno and Joan Delaney Grossman emphasize, the Russian Symbolist movement constituted an "aesthetic utopia" [14; 15], a dissenting current opposed to the rationalist, utilitarian ethos that shaped much of early twentieth-century Russian modernity.

Shostakovich's decision to set Blok's poetry in 1967—a moment of political and personal precarity—was therefore not merely an aesthetic homage. It was a deliberate act of cultural memory and philosophical alignment. By invoking Blok's Symbolist idiom, Shostakovich activates a repressed tradition that stood in quiet opposition to Soviet materialism and ideological formalism. He retrieves from Blok a vision of art as a site of metaphysical inquiry—an act of remembering that is itself resistant to historical closure.

The correspondence between Blok's poetic cosmos and Shostakovich's late style is not illustrative but structural. Just as Blok's lines dissolve into ellipsis, ambiguity, and apocalyptic vision, so too does Shostakovich's music eschew linear development in favor of fragments, echoes, and suspension. The soprano's voice

hovers between invocation and retreat; instrumental timbres acquire symbolic resonance—bells, laments, and whispers that haunt rather than resolve. In this respect, the cycle functions not as a traditional song setting but as a musical transposition of Symbolist metaphysics. If Blok's poetry articulates a temporality of prophecy and disappearance, Shostakovich's score renders that temporality audible, tracing the unstable threshold where memory becomes loss and voice fades into silence.

Voice as Trace and Material Grain

Jacques Derrida's critique of phonocentrism provides a crucial foundation for interpreting the status of voice in *Seven Romances on Verses by Alexander Blok*. As Derrida argues in *De la grammatologie* [*Of Grammatology*], the voice is not a site of immediate self-presence but is already implicated in the spacing and deferral of meaning: "The signified always already functions as a signifier" [2, p. 11]. This conceptualization of *différance*—where temporal postponement and spatial displacement render all meaning inherently unstable—enables a reading of the soprano's voice in Shostakovich's cycle not as a vehicle of semantic clarity, but as a sonic trace. The voice here does not affirm presence but signals its own erasure, what Derrida describes as follows: "The trace is not a presence but is rather the simulacrum of a presence that dislocates, displaces, and refers beyond itself. The trace has, properly speaking, no place, for effacement belongs to the very structure of the trace…" [16, p. 156]. In other words, the trace could be understood as the erasure of presence (cf. [3, p. 24]).

Musically, this dynamic is enacted in the frequent dissolution of the voice into instrumental textures, the silencing of the singer at structural peaks, and the articulation of fragility through suspended or interrupted cadences. Far from expressive plenitude, the voice becomes a fractured conduit of meaning, a residue rather than a revelation. This framework allows us to interpret the vocal writing not as an expressive utterance in the traditional sense, but as an acoustic manifestation of deferred subjectivity.

Roland Barthes' concept of "le grain de la voix" complements this deconstructive view by shifting the analytical focus from linguistic content to the physical and affective qualities of vocal sound. Barthes describes grain as "the body in the voice as it sings…" [4, p. 188]—a frictional site where meaning gives way

to materiality. In *Seven Romances on Verses by Alexander Blok*, the soprano's utterance often seems to exceed or evade the poetic text, projecting a sonorous tactility that aligns with Barthes' notion of the voice's grain. Particularly in songs such as *Gamayun*, the *Bird of Prophecy* or *The Storm*, breath, vocal timbre, and inflection become primary expressive agents. They do not signify in the semiotic sense but rather impress themselves upon the listener as affective phenomena. This reading underscores the extent to which Shostakovich's treatment of voice dramatizes not semantic transmission but the very limits and textures of human utterance.

Nostalgia, Melancholy, and the Poetics of Time

The conceptual distinction between "restorative" and "reflective nostalgia," elaborated by Svetlana Boym in *The Future of Nostalgia*, is especially illuminating for interpreting the temporal aesthetics of *Seven Romances on Verses by Alexander Blok*. "Reflective nostalgia," Boym writes, "dwells in *algia*, in longing and loss, the imperfect process of remembrance" [5, p. 41]. It resists closure and eschews reconstruction of the past, preferring instead to linger in the ruins of memory. The structure of *Seven Romances on Verses by Alexander Blok*, and especially its culmination in the final song *Music*, epitomizes this mode of nostalgia. The soprano's voice is gradually effaced, yielding to instrumental afterimages. What remains is not recollection but resonance: the echo of what has been lost. This dissolution is not a theatrical gesture but a temporal condition—an acknowledgment of the impossibility of return and the fragility of voice as a bearer of memory.

This interpretive trajectory finds further resonance in Paulo C. Chagas's reflections on melancholy, developed in 'dialogue' with Eduardo Lourenço. Chagas conceives melancholy as a temporal disposition rather than an emotional affect, a form of being inhabited by the past in which memory becomes a resonance of absence rather than a retrieval of presence [9, pp. 6–34]. Such a conception reframes silence, suspension, and fragmentation not as expressive failure but as the sonic markers of a melancholic temporality. In Shostakovich's vocal cycle, the music's repeated evocations of stillness—via sustained pedal tones, empty intervals, and blurred harmonic resolutions—articulate precisely this temporality. The listener is invited not to recall but to inhabit a temporal dislocation, to perceive absence not as void but as acoustic contour.

What emerges from this perspective is a more nuanced phenomenology of melancholic listening. As Chagas suggests via Lourenço, melancholy operates as a "game inside memory, bringing out things that are more alive than things in the present, yet still intangible. Melancholy addresses the *unsayable*, it speaks of things that are outside the empirical realm…" [9, p. 8]. Music, in this context, becomes not only the medium through which melancholy is expressed but the condition for its perceptibility. Because of its intimate relation to time and memory, music renders the metaphysical dimensions of melancholy audible and affectively tangible. It allows listeners to traverse the "lost eternity of ourselves" [9, p. 8], to capture and momentarily rescue what has been erased by linear time. In Simone Weil's evocative words, music is "an image of eternity, but it is also a substitute for eternity" [17, p. 19] (as cited in [9, p. 8])—a double gesture that gives form to the formless, voice to the absent, and time to the timeless.

Thus, both Boym's "reflective nostalgia" and Chagas's concept of "melancholic time" elucidate the poetics of temporal rupture that governs Shostakovich's musical language. They legitimize a reading in which form, gesture, and silence function not as decorative or rhetorical elements, but as epistemological signs of a world in which voice, memory, and subjectivity are radically unstable.

Expressivity Through Form: Peter Kivy's Enhanced Formalism

Peter Kivy's theory of "enhanced formalism" provides an indispensable counterbalance to approaches that seek extra-musical meaning in programmatic or biographical content. In *Introduction to a Philosophy of Music*, Kivy contends that music's expressive content arises from its internal structures: "what the music is expressive of, in any given instance—if, that is, it is expressive of anything (which need not necessarily be the case)" [18, p. 31]—depends entirely on its internal musical features. This insight is crucial for understanding how Shostakovich's cycle conveys emotional states, such as longing, anxiety, and resignation, without recourse to overt mimesis or narrative. The expressive effect emerges through the interaction of compositional elements: dissonant counterpoint, modal ambiguity, rhythmic instability, and the unstable role of the voice within the ensemble. Crucially, Shostakovich's techniques privilege processes of "change

through repetition" and gradual continuity, rather than abrupt formal contrasts. Expression unfolds through an accumulative logic of subtle variation and internal transformation. Such strategies redefine fragmentation not as rupture but as becoming—processual, layered, and introspective. This formal ethos reinforces the affective depth of the work without relying on dramatic affirmation, aligning closely with Kivy's claim that music's expressive content arises from within its own internal grammar.

In this light, for example, Shostakovich's harmonic strategy—his frequent use of tonal centers that resist resolution, the juxtaposition of modal and atonal idioms—does not merely illustrate nostalgia or melancholy but constitutes them. These are not externalized emotions applied to the music; they are enacted through its very fabric. The soprano's fragmentation and eventual disappearance are not symbolic gestures but structural articulations of disintegration and spectrality, shaped by time-bound musical processes. Kivy's aesthetic formalism affirms the autonomy of these techniques while acknowledging their profound capacity to elicit affective resonance. It grounds interpretation in the materiality of sound, without reducing it to technical mechanics, and thus reinforces the philosophical claim that musical form itself can be a mode of expression.

The Cycle as Philosophical Form in-between Structural Binaries: Self vs. Other

Seven Romances on Verses by Alexander Blok is not merely a song cycle, but a deeply layered aesthetic architecture in which each song operates both as an individual utterance and as part of a recursive, symbolic whole. The cycle unfolds as a philosophical arc, moving from the *Self* to the *Other* and ultimately toward dissolution, reflecting themes of memory, melancholy, and existential transformation through musical form, poetic imagery, and expressive restraint.

Drawing on Eero Tarasti's theory of existential semiotics [19; 20; 21], the work can be understood as a dramaturgy of shifting subjectivity, where each musical gesture participates in a broader semiotic process of becoming. Tarasti's model provides a powerful framework for understanding how these musical oppositions articulate

modes of being. In his existential semiotics, musical signs are not merely syntactic entities but rather existential acts: articulations of subjectivity, intention, and transformation. As he states:

> It starts from Hegelian logic and its categories of being: *an-sich-sein* and *für-sich-sein*. The former means being as such without any determination, and the latter means being for someone else, as observed and limited by someone else; therefore, it is something social. When we add these categories of Me and Society (*Moi* and *Soi* in French), we get a field of four terms: *an-mir-sein*, *für-mich-sein*, *für-sich-sein*, and *an-sich-sein*; or being-in-myself, being-for-myself, being-for-oneself, and being-in-oneself. These terms can be placed into the semiotic square of the semiotic school of Paris (Greimas), which stems from linguistics [...]. When one makes a semantic investment there, remembering that what is involved here is the human mind after all, we obtain the following cases: 1) body, 2) person or actor, 3) social practice, and 4) values and norms. In other words, we move from the axis of the *sensible* in Lévi-Strauss' terms to the new dimension of *intelligible* or to Adorno's categories of Me vs Society. I call this model zemic because it is a) emic in portraying the world from within; it is phenomenologically experienced, and b) there occurs Z's movement in two directions: either the body gradually sublimates (Freud!) into values, or values gradually concretize into a body (in English, I use the terms "sublimation" and "embodiment," respectively). In this manner, I also resolve the problem of the Greimassian/Cartesian tough, achronic and rigorous system, which evolves into a temporal and dynamic process, better corresponding to what happens in the *Dasein* in reality. The model, therefore, depicts the elements that comprise the human mind [21, p. 251]. (see *Figure 1* and *Figure 2*)

In other words, Eero Tarasti's *zemic model* of existential semiotics reinterprets the classical semiotic square through a dynamic, temporally grounded understanding of subjectivity. Drawing on Hegelian categories (*an-sich-sein*, *für-sich-sein*) and the relational opposition between *Moi* (inner self) and *Soi* (social self), Tarasti constructs a fourfold field of being that traces the subject's negotiation between embodiment and value. These states are not static but unfold as processes of sublimation (body—values) and embodiment (values—body), thus rendering semiosis as a lived, temporal experience. In this context, every utterance in music

is positioned within a modal tension between ego (the self as agent) and non-ego (forces of alterity, exteriority, or fate), forming what Tarasti terms a "modal narrative of being" [19, pp. 70–74].

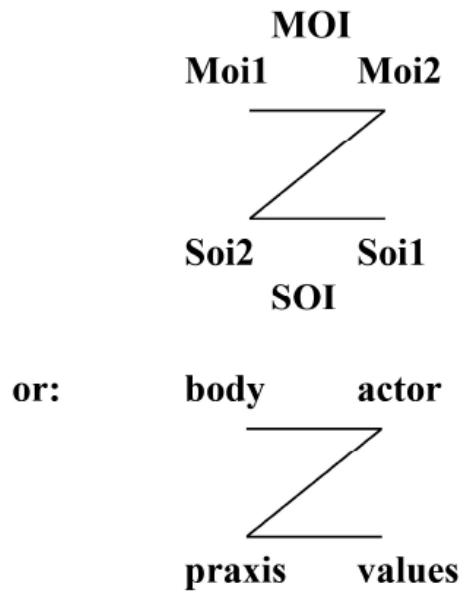


Figure 1. The *SOI/MOI* model, according to Eero Tarasti [21, p. 252]

In works like Shostakovich's Seven Romances on Verses by Alexander Blok, these processes are audible: voice and instruments continuously move between poles of inwardness and external pressure, personal utterance and societal encoding. Tarasti's model thus offers a valuable tool for understanding how music constructs subjectivity not as a fixed essence, but as an evolving interplay between self, sound, and symbolic order.

This dynamic finds concrete realization in the first four songs of the cycle—*Song of Ophelia*, *Gamayun*, the *Bird of Prophecy*, *We Were Together*, *City Sleeps*—which articulate an evident dramaturgical dialectic, one rooted in the tension between the *Self*, the personal, the intimate, and the *Other*, the alien, the supra-personal. This structural binary is not merely thematic but also semiotic and existential, enacted through instrumentation, tonal centers, and vocal texture.

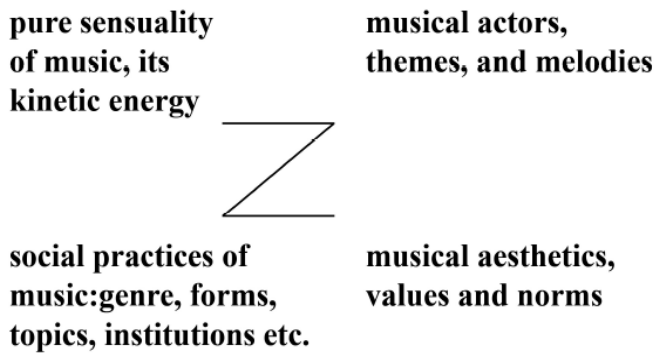


Figure 2. The zemic model, according to Eero Tarasti [21, p. 252]

In *Song of Ophelia* and *We Were Together*, Shostakovich positions the voice within a close, dialogic space with a solo string instrument—cello in the former, violin in the latter. These songs embody Tarasti's ego-modal conditions: moments where the subject (the voice) acts within a familiar, affectively resonant space. The harmonic language is mostly stable, the textures are spare, and the frequent use of contracting intervals (perfect fifth to perfect fourth) becomes a musical emblem of inwardness and reflective intimacy. Here, memory is embodied, close, and melancholically self-aware.

By contrast, *Gamayun*, the *Bird of Prophecy* and *City Sleeps* displace the voice into alien environments dominated by *quasi*-mechanical piano textures and unresolved dissonance. These settings reflect non-ego modalities: states in which the voice is acted upon rather than acting, where the musical environment becomes uncanny, cold, and disembodying. The voice no longer speaks from within, but witnesses from without—proclaiming prophecy (*Gamayun*, the *Bird of Prophecy*) or surrendering to fate (*City Sleeps*). Tarasti's model helps articulate

this shift: the subject becomes fractured, reactive, caught in an ontological condition of the *Other*, of not belonging.

The transition to the final three songs—*The Storm*, *Secret Signs*, and *Music*—marks what Tarasti would describe as a "transvaluation": a shift in existential modality where the subject's positioning begins to change. These songs are performed *attacca*, without break, suggesting an unfolding transformation. Rather than a return to ego-centered expressivity, the cycle moves toward an aesthetic synthesis where the polarities of *Self* and *Other* begin to intertwine. The *Self* is no longer isolated nor effaced, but dispersed within a sonic field of empathy, memory, and dissolution.

In *Music*, the final song of the cycle, this process culminates with the vanishing of the voice altogether—a gesture that, in Tarasti's terms, represents the final modal shift: a transformation from subjective utterance to "pure aesthetic being." The music becomes the "trace" of the *Self*, no longer voiced, but resonating. The disappearance of the voice does not signal silence but rather a different modality of presence, one that echoes beyond articulation (see *Table 1*).

The first two songs occupy an ego-modal space of personal intimacy; the middle two songs shift into non-ego states marked by estrangement and alienation. The final three form a progressive arc: from transition, to the intertwining of self and other (intermodality), and finally to transvaluation—the dissolution of subjectivity into "pure aesthetic being."

Tarasti conceptualizes "pure aesthetic being" as a non-representational ontological mode that emerges when the subject enters a state of aesthetic totality—an absorption in form and expression that suspends functional, discursive, and narrative identities. In this state, musical semiosis is no longer governed by ego intention or referential meaning but by the immanent logic of aesthetic experience. The *Self* dissolves into the sign process, not as a stable referent, but as a becoming—an existential resonance within the musical flow. This condition finds an intriguing parallel in Derrida's notion of the "trace," which posits that meaning is never fully present but always mediated by what is absent, deferred, or lost.

Table 1. A visual representation of the modal trajectory in *Seven Romances on Verses by Alexander Blok*, based on Eero Tarasti's existential semiotics

Song of Ophelia: Ego-modal (Intimate *Self*)
We Were Together: Ego-modal (Intimate *Self*)
Gamayun, the Bird of Prophecy: Non-ego (Alien *Other*)
The City Sleeps: Non-ego (Alien *Other*)
The Storm: Transition (Modal shift)
Secret Signs: Intermodality (*Self* and *Other*)
Music: Transvaluation (Aesthetic *Being*)

Although Tarasti and Derrida approach from different epistemological grounds—phenomenology and existential semiotics in the one case, deconstruction in the other—they converge on the idea that aesthetic subjectivity is inherently unstable. For Tarasti, "pure aesthetic being" suspends rather than affirms an autonomous Self, situating it within a temporal, performative field of signs. Derrida's notion of the "trace" likewise denies the possibility of a fully present subject, replacing it with a structure of continual deferral.

Both frameworks help us understand how in *Seven Romances on Verses by Alexander Blok*, especially in the later songs, the voice ceases to affirm identity and becomes, what we could name, a "spectral remainder"—a site of dissolution rather than expression. The aesthetic subject does not proclaim but disappears, becoming legible only through the after-image of tone, silence, or harmonic shimmer. In this shared horizon, Tarasti's "aesthetic being" and Derrida's "trace" both offer ontologies of vanishing: ways of being that are constituted not by presence, but by disappearance.

From the perspective of "voice," this has significant implications. In vocal music—especially in the context of Shostakovich's cycle—the voice often oscillates

between utterance and erasure, between meaning and pure sonority. In moments where the voice dissolves into texture or silence, or is absorbed into instrumental resonance, it enters a state akin to Tarasti's "pure aesthetic being": no longer an agent of linguistic communication, but a site of sounding presence without referent. This vocal erasure parallels Derrida's *différance*, where the voice becomes a trace of subjectivity rather than its affirmation.

Moreover, nostalgia, as articulated by thinkers like Svetlana Boym, is not simply the longing for a past presence, but the inhabitation of temporal rupture. In Tarasti's "aesthetic being," the subject is detached from narrative time, suspended in a timeless now that resists historicity. This echoes "reflective nostalgia," which does not seek restoration but dwells in temporal disjunction. The musical voice, in this state, becomes a vessel for memory not as recollection but as *resonance*—a "spectral remainder" that speaks without fully returning. Thus, Tarasti's notion of "pure aesthetic being" not only aligns with philosophical concepts of the "trace" and "reflective nostalgia," but also provides a phenomenological account of how the voice, in specific musical contexts, transcends communication and becomes a medium of ontological exposure, where the subject both disappears and resonates.

'Song of Ophelia': Fragmentation, Semitonal Dissonance, and the Poetics of Melancholy

The opening song of *Seven Romances on Verses by Alexander Blok*, *Song of Ophelia*, functions as a microcosm of the entire cycle—an elegiac space in which the voice is both invoked and destabilized, where memory begins to fracture, and a melancholic aesthetic is established through subtle disruptions of tonality and form. At the heart of this song lies the poetic theme of separation—emotional, spatial, and ultimately metaphysical. The cello's opening five-measures introduction, fragmentary and cadential, destabilizes the tonal centre through the intrusion of non-diatonic tones (D-flat and then G-flat in the sixth), resisting the gravitational pull of C minor—a phenomenon also noted by Gillies, who highlights the same "fragmentary, almost cadential motif" and its "slippery semitonal disruption" [1, p. 40]. These recurring semitonal intrusions

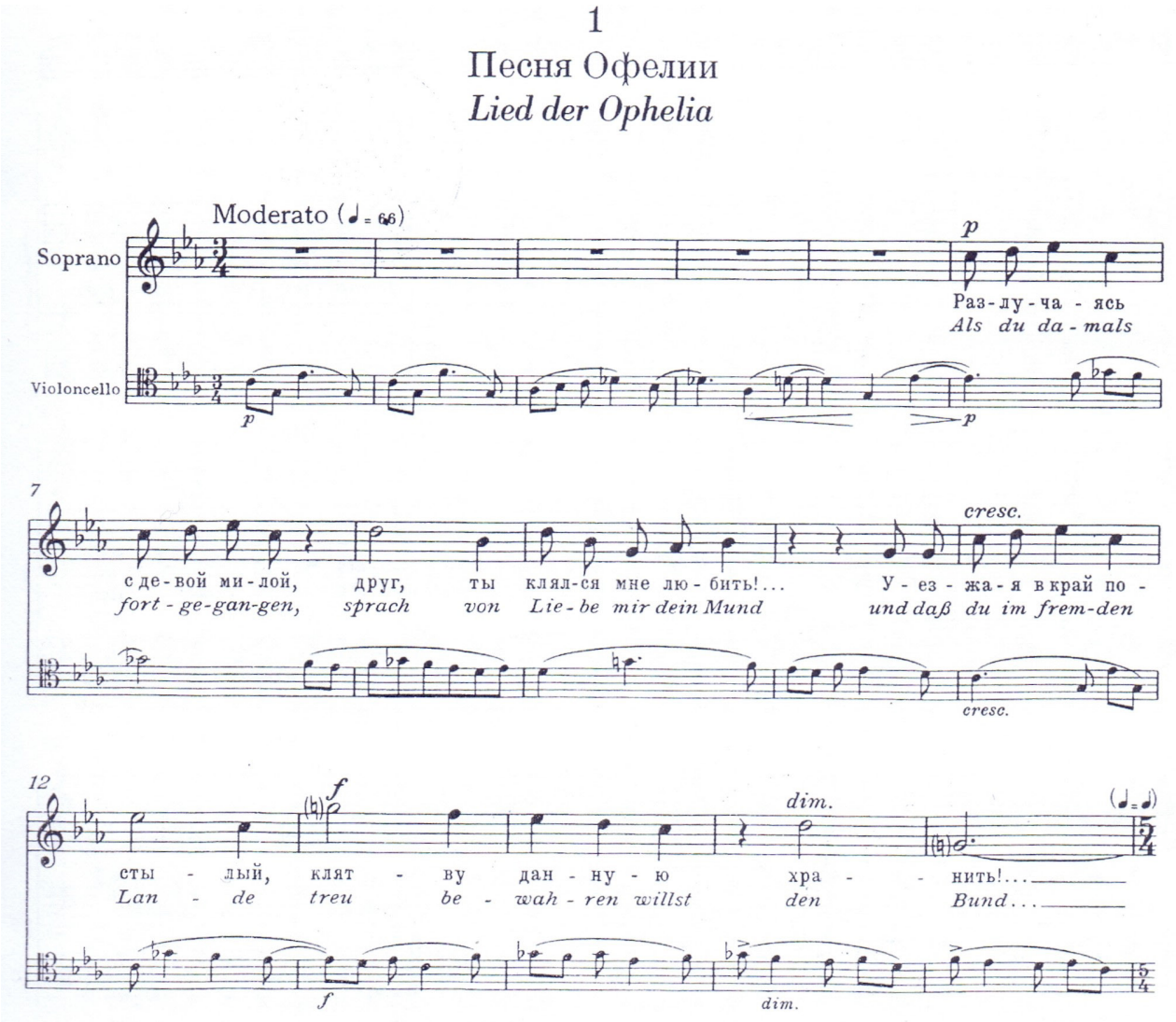
function as musical emblems of dissonance and doubt, resonating with what Chagas describes as a melancholic aesthetic in which beauty is inseparable from loss—never pure, but always shadowed by its own fading [9, pp. 19–21].

The voice enters not as a commanding lyrical presence but as a vulnerable participant in a dialogue with the cello. This dialogue will become the structural and expressive foundation for the entire cycle. The early climactic moment ("…*Клятву* данную хранить!.." / "…To keep the *vow* you gave!..") is articulated through a rising G natural in the soprano line, underscoring the emotional apex of fidelity and union. Yet this assertive ascent is immediately shadowed by the cello's return to G-flat, creating a stark semitonal clash. This dissonance functions not merely as a harmonic tension but as a sonic metaphor for creeping doubt and internal collapse. As Gillies notes, "the vocal line […] tries to drive away the creeping doubt injected by the cello's non-diatonic notes," yet ultimately "the invidious lure of the G flat begins to drag the vocal line down with it" [1, p. 42] (see *Example 1*).[2] This musical trajectory mirrors what Paulo C. Chagas, via Eduardo Lourenço, describes as the "melancholic mirror of memory" [9, p. 7]: a consciousness shaped not by affirmation but by recursion, contradiction, and the quiet impossibility of wholeness.

The cadential motif introduced by the cello expands from semitone to sixth (see *Example 2*), echoing the theme of growing emotional distance. Yet, it is eventually answered by a contracting intervallic gesture—a descending perfect fourth that will recur throughout the cycle. This contraction, which Gillies has identified as a "key motive" [1, p. 42], becomes a musical emblem of the *Self* (*svoj*), or the intimate. It carries associations of togetherness, memory, and quiet transcendence, standing in contrast to the disruptive external forces embodied by the *Other* (*ne svoj*)—those violent or alienating moments heard most powerfully in *Gamayun*, the *Bird of Prophecy* and *City Sleeps* [1, p. 46].

In this opening song, we already see the emergence of Shostakovich's philosophical form: a music that moves not toward catharsis but toward a deepening awareness of "spectrality," where even expressive outbursts are soon absorbed into ambiguity. As the voice descends into pianissimo for the final stanza, the cello reprises its earlier gestures with altered nuance, threading together themes of love, fidelity, and loss into a cadence that resists resolution. Rather than resolving,

[2] All score examples, except *Example 2*, are taken from the following edition Schostakowitsch, D. (1970). *Romanzen-Suite op. 127: für Sopran, Violine, Cello und Klavier*, Deutsche Nachdichtung: Manfred Koerth. VEB Deutscher Verlag für Musik.



Example 1. Dmitri Shostakovich. *Seven Romances on Verses by Alexander Blok* op. 127. *Song of Ophelia, Moderato*, mm. 1–16

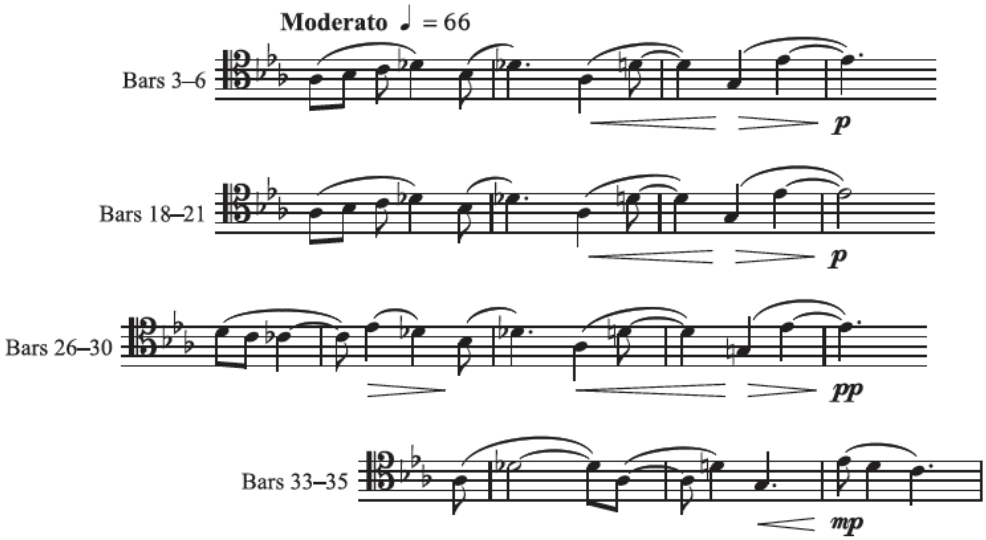
the music hovers around a half-diminished sonority, suggesting not tonal finality but harmonic memory. This cadence evokes, without repeating, the earlier dissonances, now dissolved into a spectral echo. The harmony thus serves as a resonance of past affect, not as structural closure but as a lingering, fading presence (see *Example 3*).

This closing moment becomes a palimpsest of affect, in which Blok's poetic symbolism takes on musical life as semiotic remains. The intervallic motion itself—rising fifth (see: voice, mm. 39–40) followed by falling fourth (see: cello, mm. 41–43) [1, p. 44]—marks the turning point from separation to introspective reconciliation, suggesting that while unity may not be restored, its echo remains audible. In this way, *Song of Ophelia* does not merely introduce motivic or textual material for the cycle. It inaugurates the work's sonic philosophy: the voice as a space of melancholic diffraction, the cello as memory's double, and musical form as a mirror reflecting the instability of presence. As such, it affirms the central claim of this article: that *Seven Romances on Verses by Alexander Blok* is not only a composition but a meditation on the conditions of utterance, listening, and impermanence.

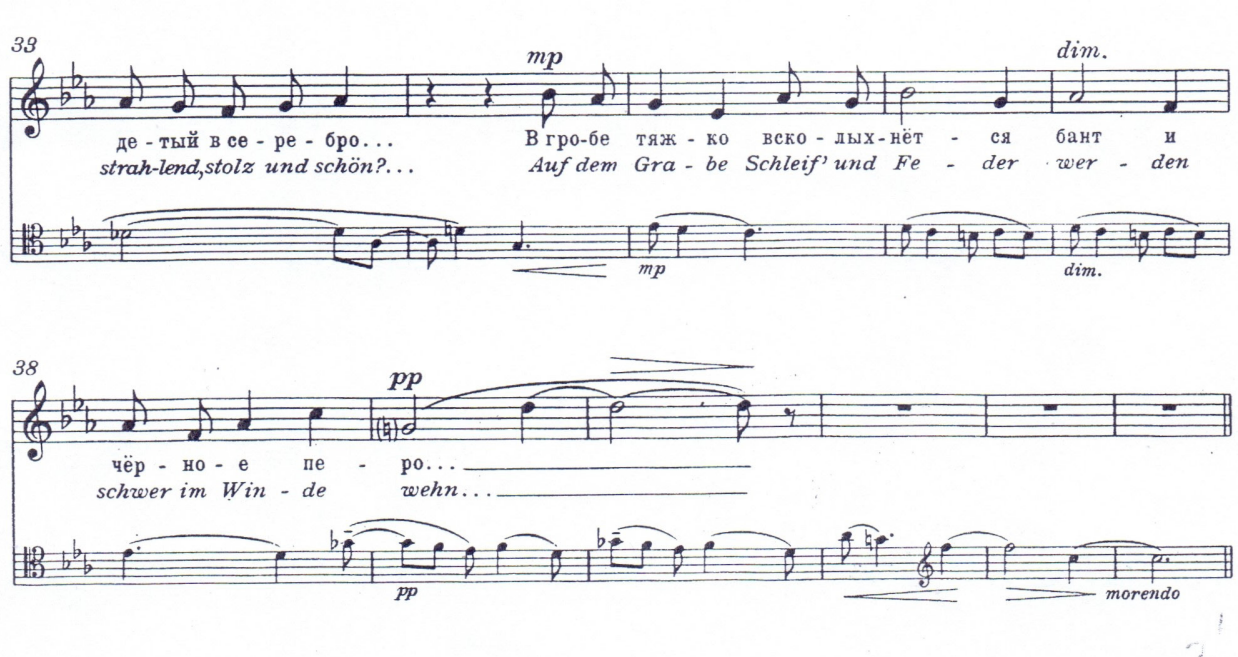
'Gamayun, the Bird of Prophecy': Prophetic Dissonance and the Crisis of Voice

If *Song of Ophelia* introduces a sonic world of intimacy, fragility, and elegiac reserve—of *Self*—then *Gamayun*, the *Bird of Prophecy* performs a violent rupture. It tears the cycle out of its chamber-like inwardness and thrusts it into a zone of mechanistic prophecy and symbolic violence, what can be called a space of *Other*. The voice is no longer reflective but apocalyptic—delivering a message so burdened by horror that the music itself threatens to collapse under the weight of its utterance.

Shostakovich's setting of Blok's poem—subtitled "[*After*] *V. Vasnetsov's Painting*"—immediately evokes the Symbolist fascination with mystical vision, mythic temporality, and metaphysical destruction. The contrast with *Song of Ophelia* is not merely emotional or textual—it is structural, rhythmic, and timbral. The violoncello's *pianissimo* murmur at the end of the first song is obliterated by the piano's *fortissimo* entrance, which surges forward with unrelenting rhythmic rigor and outlines E minor against the soprano's B minor—already dislocating



Example 2. Dmitri Shostakovich. *Seven Romances on Verses by Alexander Blok* op. 127. *Song of Ophelia, Moderato,* motivic variation of the cadential motif, according to Gillies [1, p. 42]



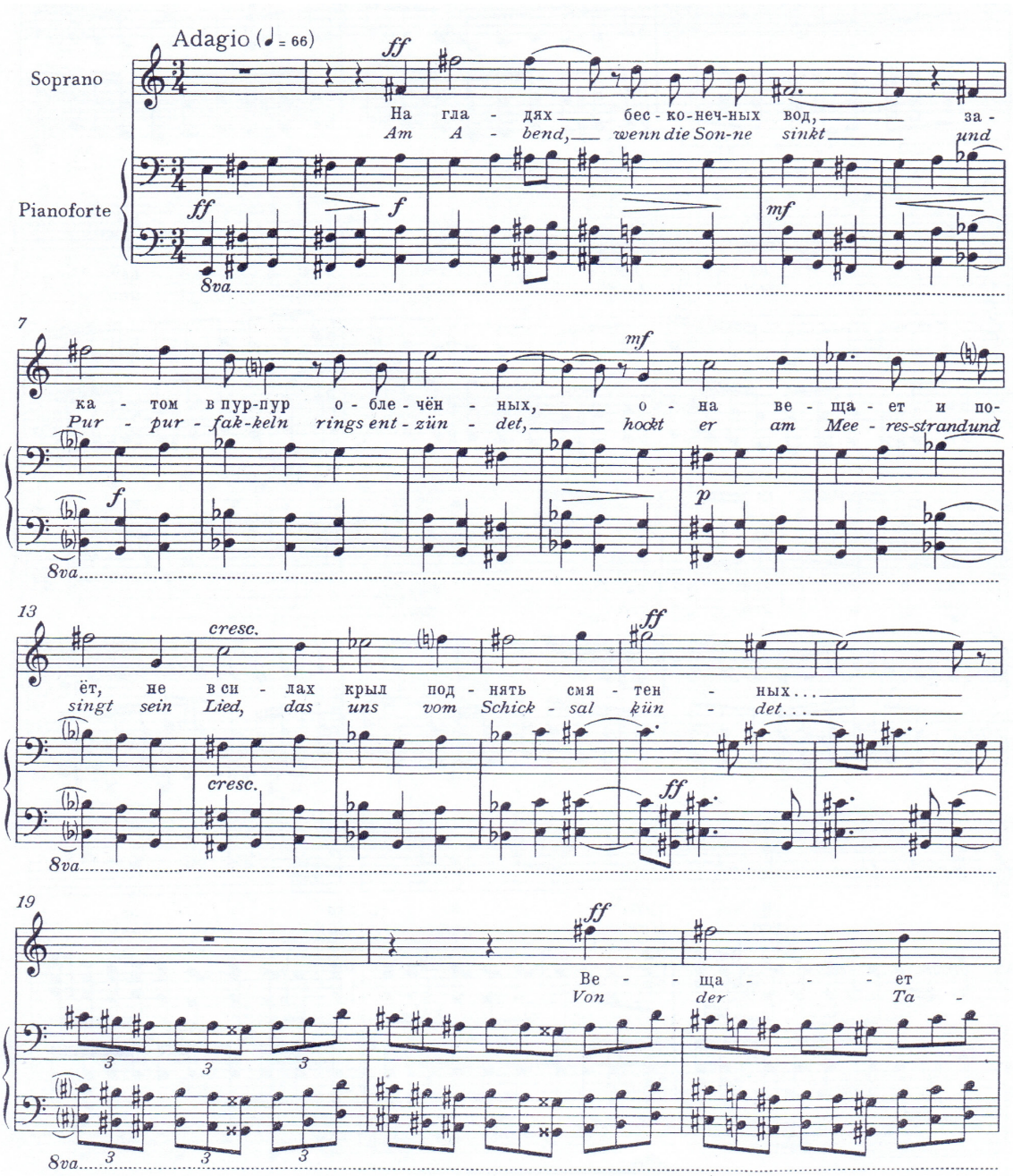
Example 3. Dmitri Shostakovich. *Seven Romances on Verses by Alexander Blok* op. 127. *Song of Ophelia, Moderato,* mm. 33–43

the voice from its harmonic footing. This friction marks a collapse of Ophelia's intimate dialogism, establishing a new regime: alienation through musical force (see *Example 4*).

This conflict is not merely harmonic but existential. The soprano and piano do not speak together; they struggle against each other, mirroring the duality between the personal and the supra-personal, between what is "one's own" and what is foreign, imposed, or cosmic. In Chagas's melancholic and aesthetic terms, *Gamayun*, *the Bird of Prophecy* enacts the inversion of the mirror: not a gentle reflection of memory but the shattering of its surface.

Semitonal dissonances—first introduced subtly in *Song of Ophelia*—now return in a more radical form. As Gilllies notes: "the serpentine D flat / G flat pull which planted the first seeds of doubt in 'Song of Ophelia' becomes the very focal point of the 'eternal horror' and declamation of 'righteous prophecy' at the end of 'Gamayun' as they are enharmonically re-spelled to F sharp and C sharp and hammered out against a *fortissimo* C minor chord in a delayed musical reaction to the text. Where the disquieting semitonal lilt of 'Song of Ophelia' merely unsettled the musical flow, here it brutally assaults, jolting the narrator, the audience, and the performers from the hypnotic music of the preceding measures back to the horror of the prophecy and the poetic text" [1, p. 51]. This enharmonic transformation—from the destabilizing D-flat/G-flat to the violently reiterated C-sharp/F-sharp—marks a shift from suggestive unease to direct confrontation. No longer merely a harmonic inflection, the semitone becomes an agent of textual rupture and psychic shock, intensified by its opposition to the fortissimo C minor chord. The semitone's recurrence across songs thus creates a motivic thread that is not developmental in a traditional sense, but symbolically charged: a sonic sign of intrusion, fragmentation, and foreboding. Its evolution from a "serpentine" [1, p. 51] pull into a hammering insistence embodies the narrator's growing destabilization—from inner doubt to prophetic horror.

At the very end of this song, in *Coda*, the relentless piano propulsion, and tonal ambiguity between E minor, C minor, and octatonic overlays create a sound world that resists grounding, reflecting the "eternal horror" in Blok's vision. *Gamayun*, the *Bird of Prophecy* abandons climactic energy and reverts to an unsettling tread. The soprano hovers on F-sharp, a pitch enharmonically related to the G-flat of *Song of Ophelia*—a "spectral" return of instability. The music does not resolve but



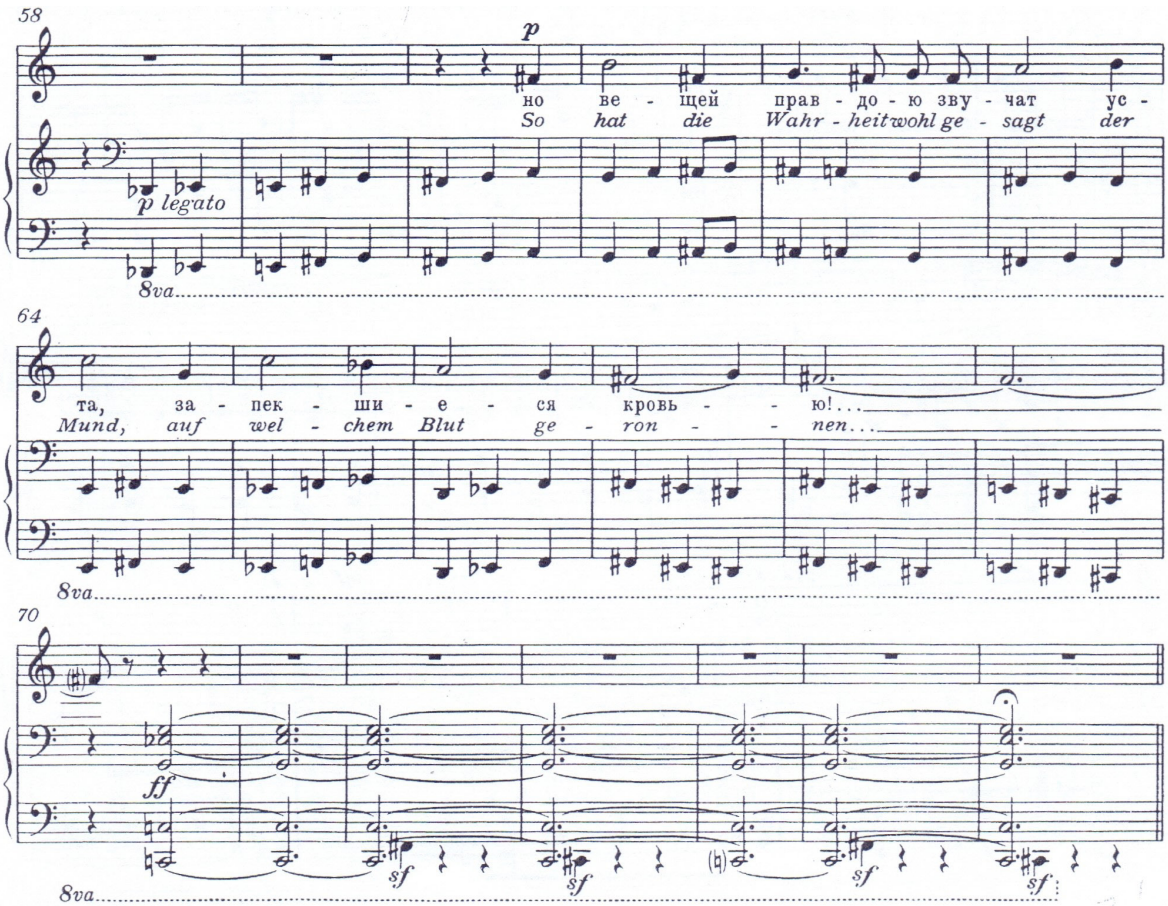
Example 4. Dmitri Shostakovich. *Seven Romances on Verses by Alexander Blok* op. 127. *Gamayun, the Bird of Prophecy, Adagio,* mm. 1–21

rather recedes into a hypnotic uncertainty, haunted by its own pronouncements. This reflects Derrida's "trace": the voice does not declare meaning—it leaves, what might we call, a *scar of signification*, a remnant that can never be fully retrieved (see *Example 5*).

Gillies interprets *Gamayun*, the *Bird of Prophecy* as one of the most crucial dramaturgical pillars of the cycle [1, p. 51]: it ruptures the internal continuity established in the first song. It projects the work both backward and forward. Musically, it looks back to the G-flat induced unease of *Song of Ophelia*, now weaponized. Philosophically, it foreshadows the spectral emptiness of *Music*, the cycle's final song. While Gillies identifies a literal overtone phenomenon—"a very strong overtone that reverberates as a B-flat above middle C" and anticipates the closing open fifth of *Music* [1, p. 51]—my reading emphasizes a broader tonal prefiguration, particularly the recurrent B-flat/E-flat open fifths and the modal descent into a prophetic trance.

The voice, though soaring to expressive heights, is not victorious. Its climactic A-flat—the emotional peak of the song—is swiftly followed by a collapse into lethargy and low-register murmur as if drained by its own vision. The mouth, "clotted with blood," no longer speaks truth in triumph but in melancholic compulsion, echoing Chagas' notion of the voice as haunted by its own impossibility. Meaning emerges here not as presence but as interruption.

In this song, Shostakovich composes prophecy as rupture, memory as violence, and time as a recursive trauma. Blok's mythic bird, radiant and bloodied, sings not to affirm truth but to bear witness to the collapse of the human order into eschatological delirium. The symbolic dislocation of this song establishes the foundation for the cycle's philosophical arc: from intimate remembrance to spectral disintegration, from lyrical voice to silence. *Gamayun*, *the Bird of Prophecy*, in this light, is not just the second movement—it is the axis of foreboding around which the entire structure rotates.



Example 5. Dmitri Shostakovich. *Seven Romances on Verses by Alexander Blok* op. 127. *Gamayun, the Bird of Prophecy, Adagio,* mm. 58–76

'We Were Together': Memory, Intimacy, and the Violin as Voice

Following the psychic rupture and apocalyptic upheaval of the second song, the third one, *We Were Together*, offers a moment of luminous stillness. This song represents not merely a tonal or emotional contrast within the cycle but a return, however fragile, to the sphere of "reflective nostalgia," one filtered through the delicate interplay of memory and intimacy. Where *Song of Ophelia* opened a melancholic space of separation, and *Gamayun*, the *Bird of Prophecy* ruptured it with prophetic violence, *We Were Together* stages a momentary reconfiguration of the *Self* in recollection.

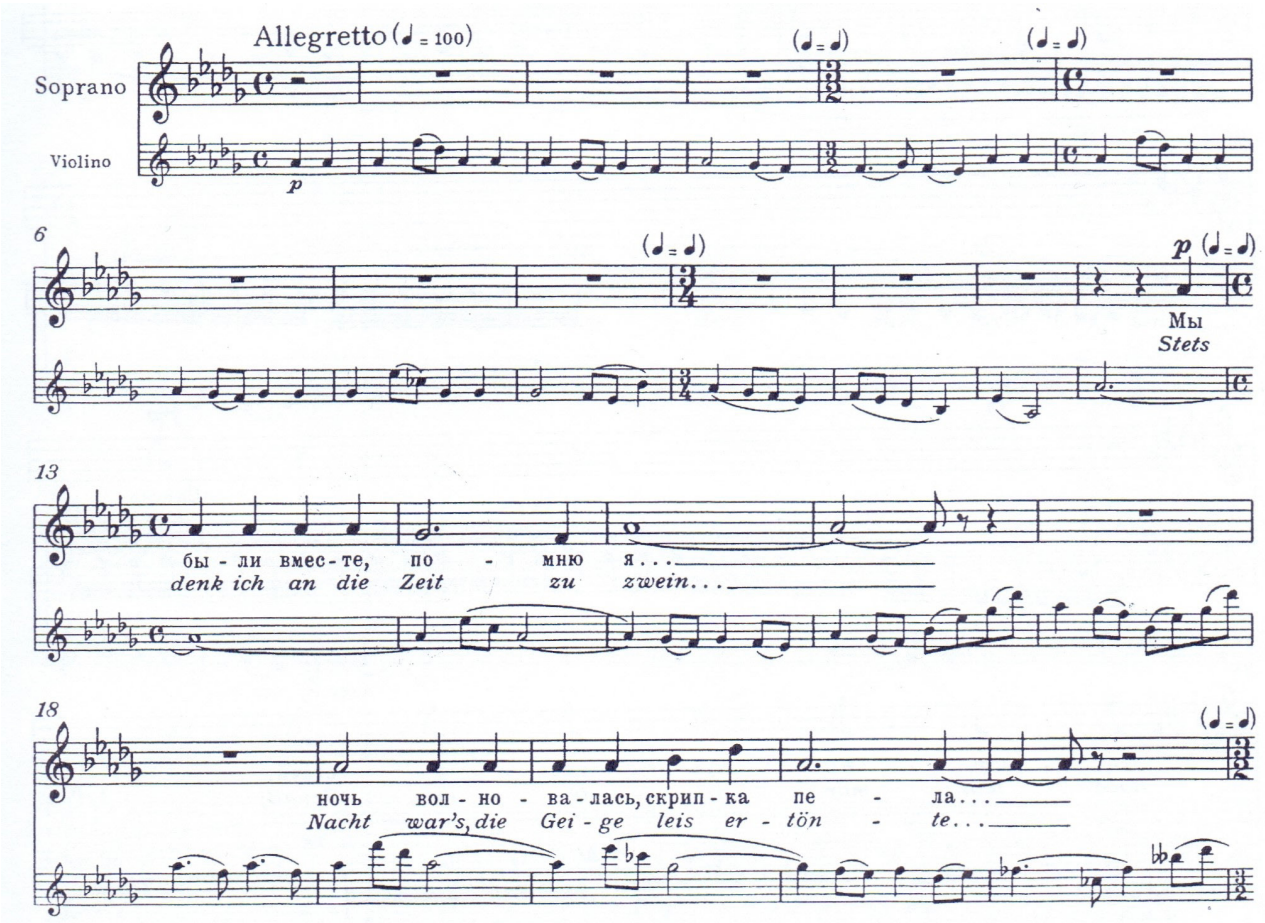
Blok's poem touches more gently on loss and distance. Its mood is suffused with nostalgic warmth; its lyricism tinged with the ephemeral beauty of remembered union. Shostakovich's decision to accompany the voice with solo violin is both symbolically and sonically resonant: it honors the poem's reference to the sound of violins [1, p. 53] while simultaneously enacting an inner voice of memory, less a musical counterpart than a sonic extension of the narrator's subjectivity. In other words, the violin becomes memory's echo. The voice is restrained, declamatory, psalmodic, built on repetition and near-monotone phrasing that foreshadows the ritualistic austerity of *Music*, the final song [1, p. 52]. The voice is a trace rather than an expression through which intimacy lingers without resolution. This song marks a turning point, as it introduces the static vocal style that reappears in later songs, framing memory as a suspended time.

Also, this compositional device—monosyllabic, declamatory, emotionally still—is not expressive in the romantic sense but rather in the philosophical. It invites listening as a remembrance. It frames memory not as a narrative but as a stillness in sound (see *Examples 6* and *7*).

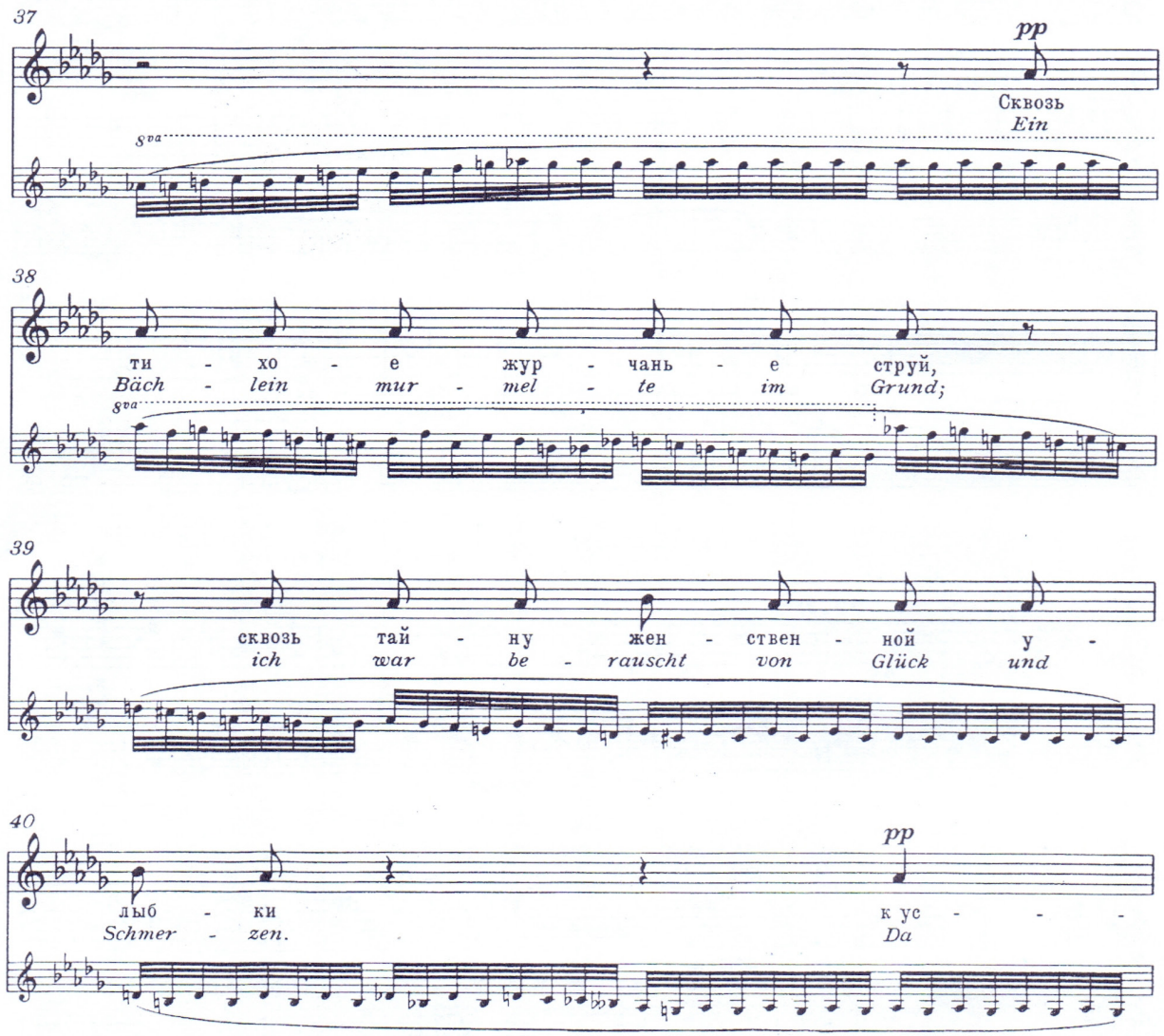
Against this suspended vocal field, the solo violin animates the texture—not as mere accompaniment but as a sonic embodiment of the poem's imagery. It mimics the "quiet murmur of streams" (see the second stanza: "Through the quiet murmur of streams") [1, pp. 53–54], transforming textual memory into sound. The boundaries between voice and violin, between speaker and recollection, begin to dissolve; the violin does not comment—it remembers. Only then does the voice become more than narrative: it becomes texture, corporeality. In this way, the song powerfully enacts what Roland Barthes called the "grain of the voice"—not florid expressivity but the material body of sound: breath, friction, softness, and time. Here, the grain is gentle but resonant, a sonic imprint of loss that is no longer painful, only quietly persistent.

This song also plays a pivotal role in the temporal architecture of the cycle. As the first song to feature this suspended vocal line, anticipating *The City Sleeps*, *Secret Signs*, and *Music*, *We Were Together* marks the moment when memory begins to solidify as a musical language. Stillness, repetition, and intervallic contraction establish

a poetics of reflective memory: not to recreate the past, but to signal its irrevocable distance.



Example 6. Dmitri Shostakovich. *Seven Romances on Verses by Alexander Blok* op. 127. *We Were Together*, *Allegretto*, mm. 1–22



Example 7. Dmitri Shostakovich. *Seven Romances on Verses by Alexander Blok* op. 127. *We Were Together, Allegretto,* mm. 37–40

Finally, the use of solo violin, rather than cello, introduces a subtle but significant sense of detachment. While the cello might mirror the human voice in timbral depth, the violin floats above the voice, thin and fragile, as if already removed from the body. It does not double speech but hovers beside it, suggesting memory rather than presence. Where the piano in *Gamayun*, the *Bird of Prophecy* articulates rupture and alienation, the violin in *We Were Together* murmurs with spectral distance, inaugurating the emotional strangeness that will deepen in the later songs. It evokes not empathy but the "trace" in Derrida's sense.

From the perspective of Tarasti's existential semiotics, this song exemplifies a modal state of *being-for-myself* (*für-mich-sein*)—a moment in which the subject, through memory, regains an interior mode of existence not defined by external forces but by reflective presence. The voice, suspended in monotone, does not assert egoic agency but enters a state of aesthetic stasis: what Tarasti would call a passage toward "pure aesthetic being," where utterance ceases to function as discourse and becomes an existential trace. The violin's line, subtle and introspective, acts not as accompaniment but as an extension of the subject's inner temporality—sublimating memory into sound, and thus embodying what Tarasti describes as the transformation from corporeal resonance to symbolic value.

In this configuration, the voice no longer speaks—it lingers. It becomes, in Derrida's terms, the residue of a presence that can no longer affirm itself but remains sonically inscribed in time. The nostalgic modality here is not restorative but reflective, as described by Boym, anchored in the recognition that the past cannot be recovered—only echoed. The song thus realizes an ontological space of memory where identity, voice, and time are suspended within a poetics of stillness. It is precisely in this stasis, where expression contracts into breath, where the violin murmurs instead of declares, that Shostakovich renders absence as presence, and voice as both spectral and intimate.

'The City Sleeps': Alienation, Passacaglia, and the Weight of Prophecy

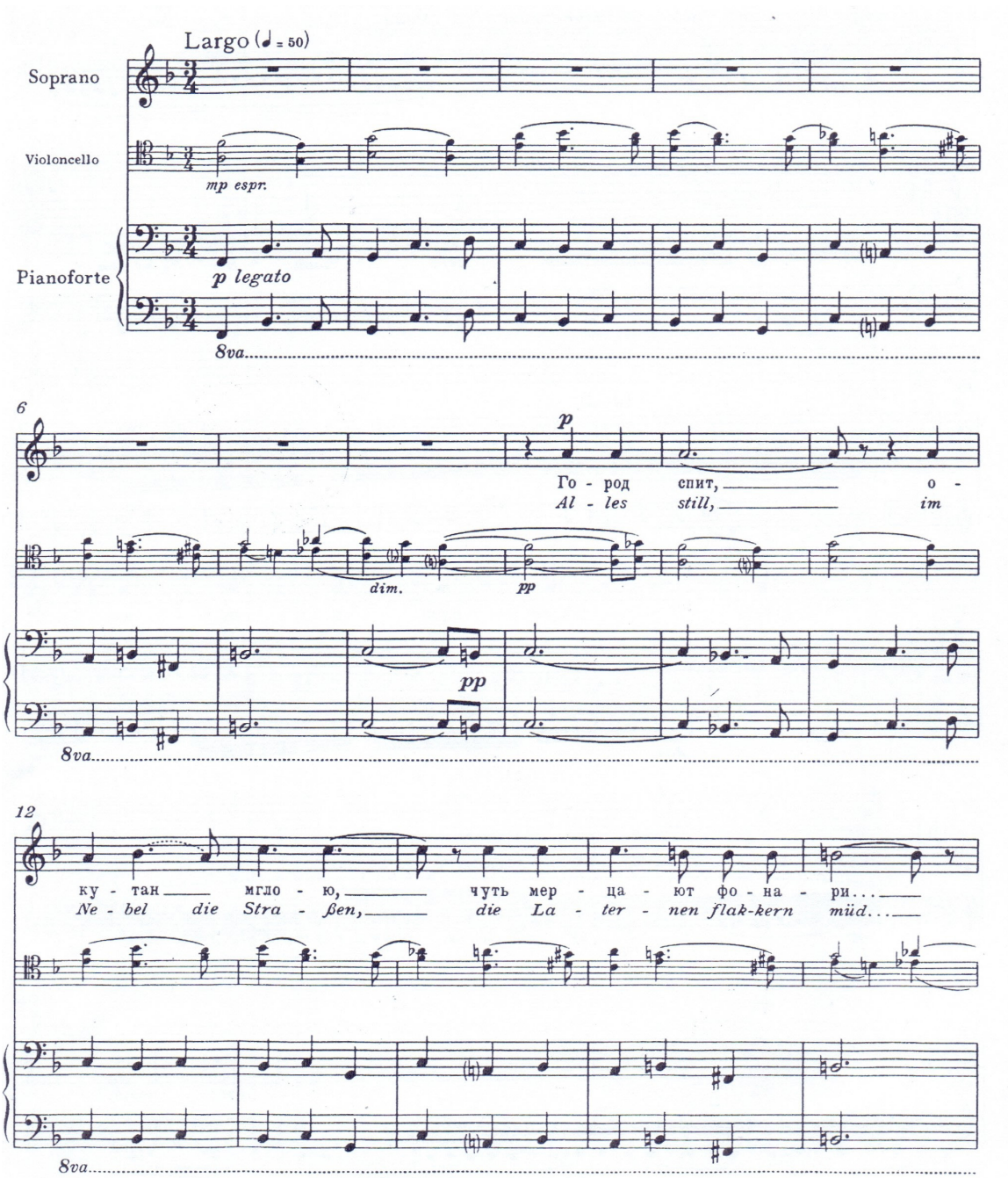
If *We Were Together* shimmered with the warmth of memory and the tentative return of Self, *The City Sleeps* shifts us once again into the sphere of estrangement—

the *Other*. Formally constructed as a modified passacaglia (as Gillies points out [1, p. 55]), this movement evokes a sense of inexorability, loneliness, and psychic stasis. "The repetitive ostinato bass line (and, for that matter, the whining cello line) of '*The City Sleeps*' evokes a similar mechanical tread," but "less violent and crushing than 'Gamayun'" [1, p. 56]. It also evokes the absence of the contracting interval motif, which points to a re-emergence of the *Other*—the impersonal, the "spectral," *ne svoy*. In other words, the song loops in melancholic stasis. Its ostinato and lack of intimacy signal a voice detached from the *Self*. This is not a response, but a suspended mourning (see *Example 8*).

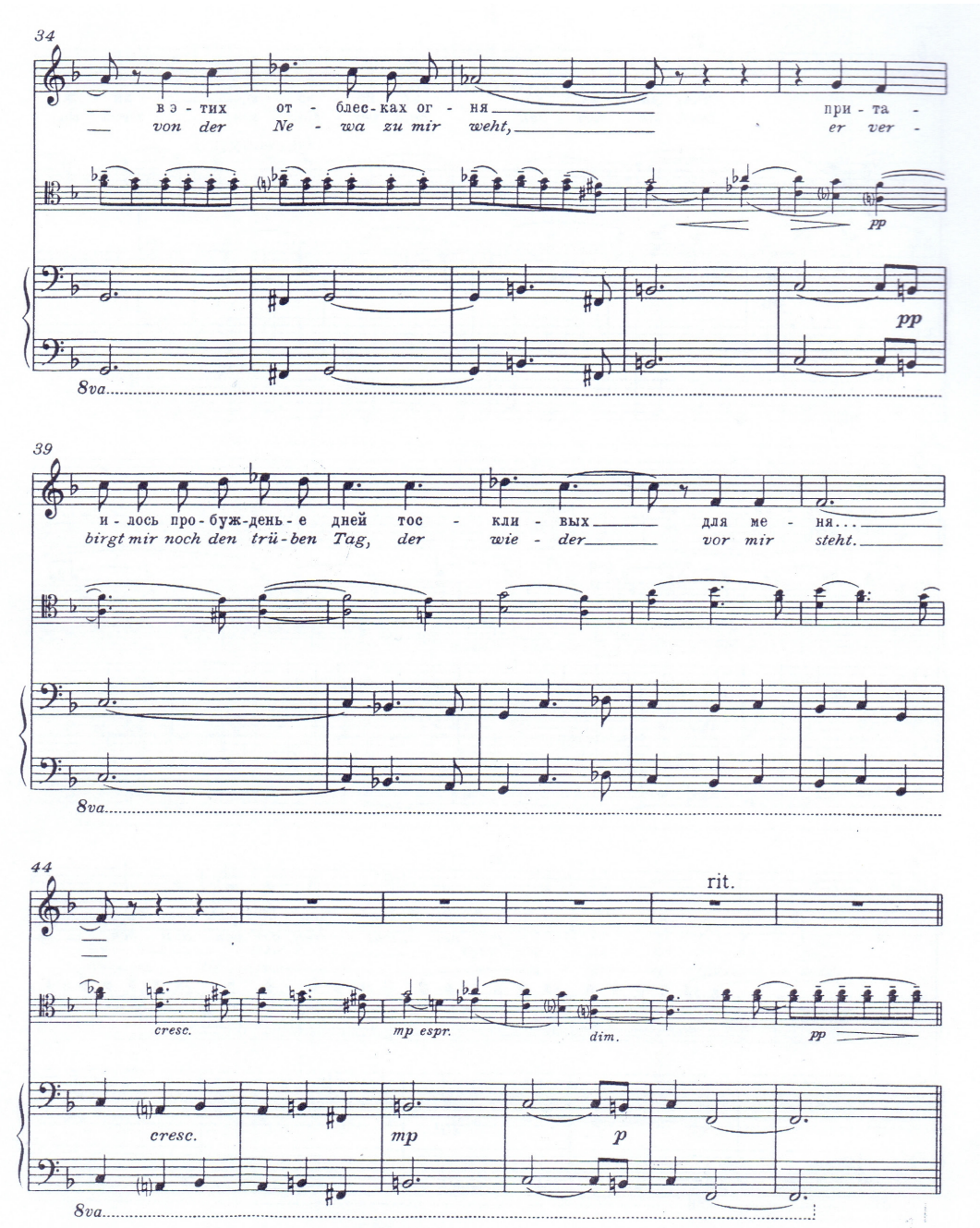
Shostakovich's use of the passacaglia form here is not incidental. In his compositional vocabulary, this structure often carries associations with solemnity, death, and emotional paralysis, as evident in his *Piano Trio No. 2*, *Symphony No. 8*, and *Lady Macbeth* of the *Mtsensk District* [1, p. 55]. In *The City Sleeps*, the passacaglia functions as a mechanism of melancholic repetition—the recurrence of a condition that cannot be changed. This is a memory not as a warm recollection but as ritualized sorrow, caught in a loop of deferred mourning.

Blok's text, with its imagery of mist, distant flames, and glow of dawn, dovetails with Shostakovich's musical language of obscuration and displacement. The poem's closing lines—"the awakening / Of days, so dreary for me"—are enveloped by the returning passacaglia theme, suggesting that dawn brings not hope but the return of inescapable suffering. The light is not redemptive; it is reflective of an earlier horror. In this sense, *The City Sleeps* is intimately connected to *Gamayun*, *the Bird of Prophecy*, both musically and thematically [1, pp. 55–56] (see *Example 9*).

Just as *Gamayun*, the *Bird of Prophecy* articulated the trauma of prophecy, *The City Sleeps* enacts its aftershock. Its mechanistic ostinato echoes the relentless piano motor of *Gamayun*, though here subdued and funereal. The cello, strained in double-stops, lends a tension of its own—not expressive, but suspended, muffled. The absence of the contracting interval motif, mentioned earlier, is profoundly felt. This absence is not simply musical but ontological: the voice here is no longer a locus of selfhood but a subject drifting in the haze of estrangement.



Example 8. Dmitri Shostakovich. *Seven Romances on Verses by Alexander Blok* op. 127. *The City Sleeps, Largo,* mm. 1–16



Example 9. Dmitri Shostakovich. *Seven Romances on Verses by Alexander Blok* op. 127. *The City Sleeps, Largo,* mm. 34–49

This dichotomy reinforces the larger binary that underlies the first four songs: a psychological and philosophical opposition between *Self* (the personal, intimate, remembered, *svoy*) and *Other* (the impersonal, fractured, ne svoy, and prophetic). While *Song of Ophelia* and *We Were Together* frame the self in intimate dialogue with its own memory, *Gamayun* and *The City Sleeps* externalize voice into alien sonic territories—fields of mechanization, detachment, and foreboding.

Ultimately, *The City Sleeps* crystallizes the thematic and structural tension of the cycle. It does not resolve; it reiterates, looping voice and ensemble into a muted procession of melancholic return. The listener is invited not into catharsis but into the recognition of stasis—a recognition shaped by melancholy as an aesthetic of suspended time, as Chagas has described. What *The City Sleeps* offers is not a song of dreams but a sonic cartography of deferred awakening, where the city does not rise but trembles and where prophecy no longer shouts but lingers beneath the skin of sound.

This state of suspended subjectivity—where the voice no longer articulates identity but drifts in mechanical repetition—can be read, in Tarasti's terms, as a descent from *being-for-myself* into a depersonalized *being-in-itself*, a semiotic condition where the subject becomes pure function, devoid of agency, caught in an alien temporal loop no longer shaped by expression but by structural inevitability.

'The Storm': Compassionate Dissonance and the Threshold of Synthesis

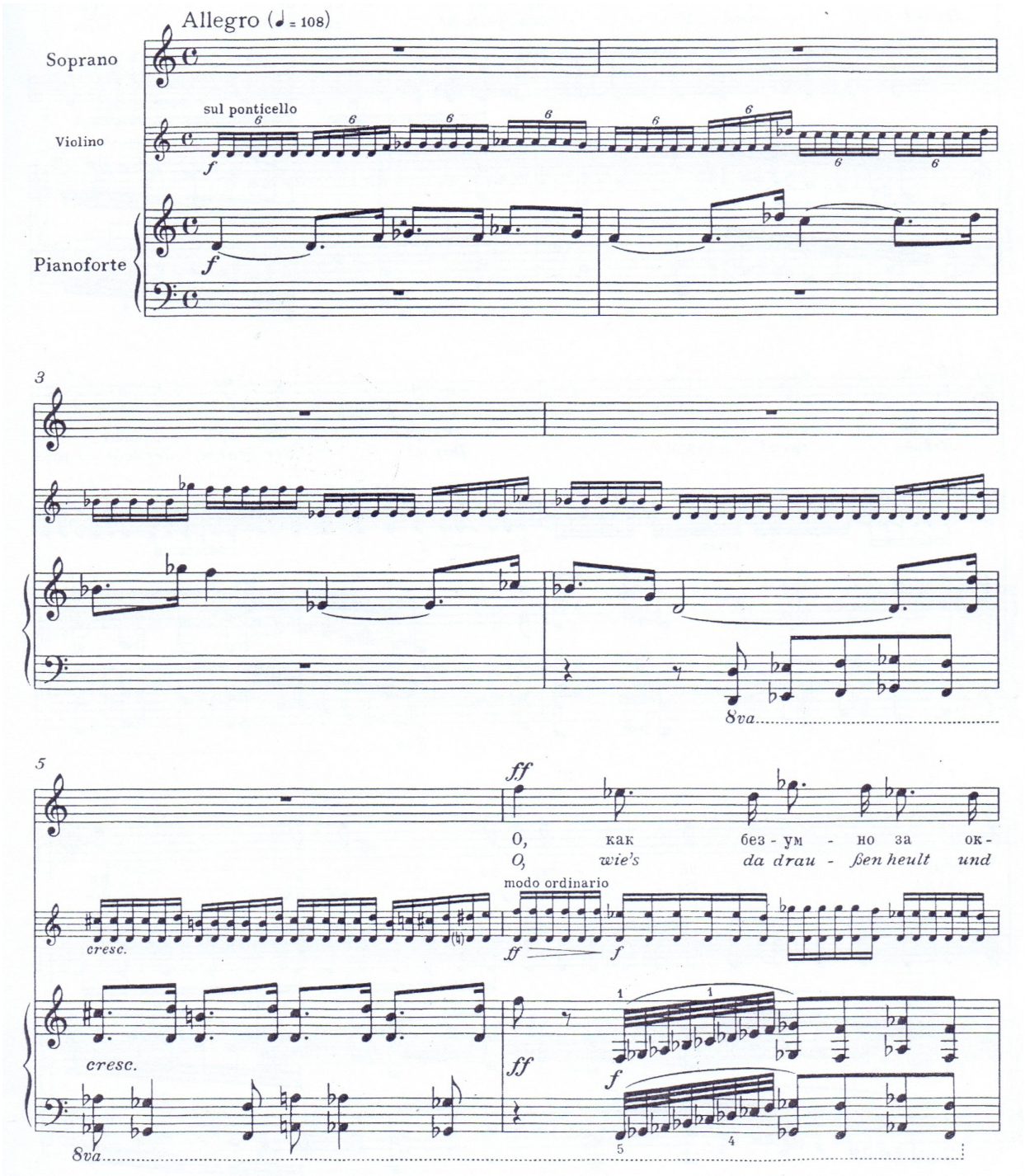
The Storm occupies a pivotal position in the architecture of *Seven Romances*. It is the first song in the cycle to move beyond the rigid binary of *Self* and *Other*. While the first four songs establish a dialectical structure—*Song of Ophelia* and *We Were Together* evoking memory and intimacy, *Gamayun* and *The City Sleeps* suggesting fragmentation and mechanistic dislocation—*The Storm* initiates a turn. It marks a threshold where oppositions begin to dissolve and a deeper mode of relation becomes possible. Here, empathy arises not as a sentimental expression but as a structural necessity: a sonorous response to alterity. In this sense, the song enacts what Jean-Luc Nancy calls a "being-with" (*être-avec*), in which subjectivity is always already exposed to and constituted by its relation to others through "resonance"

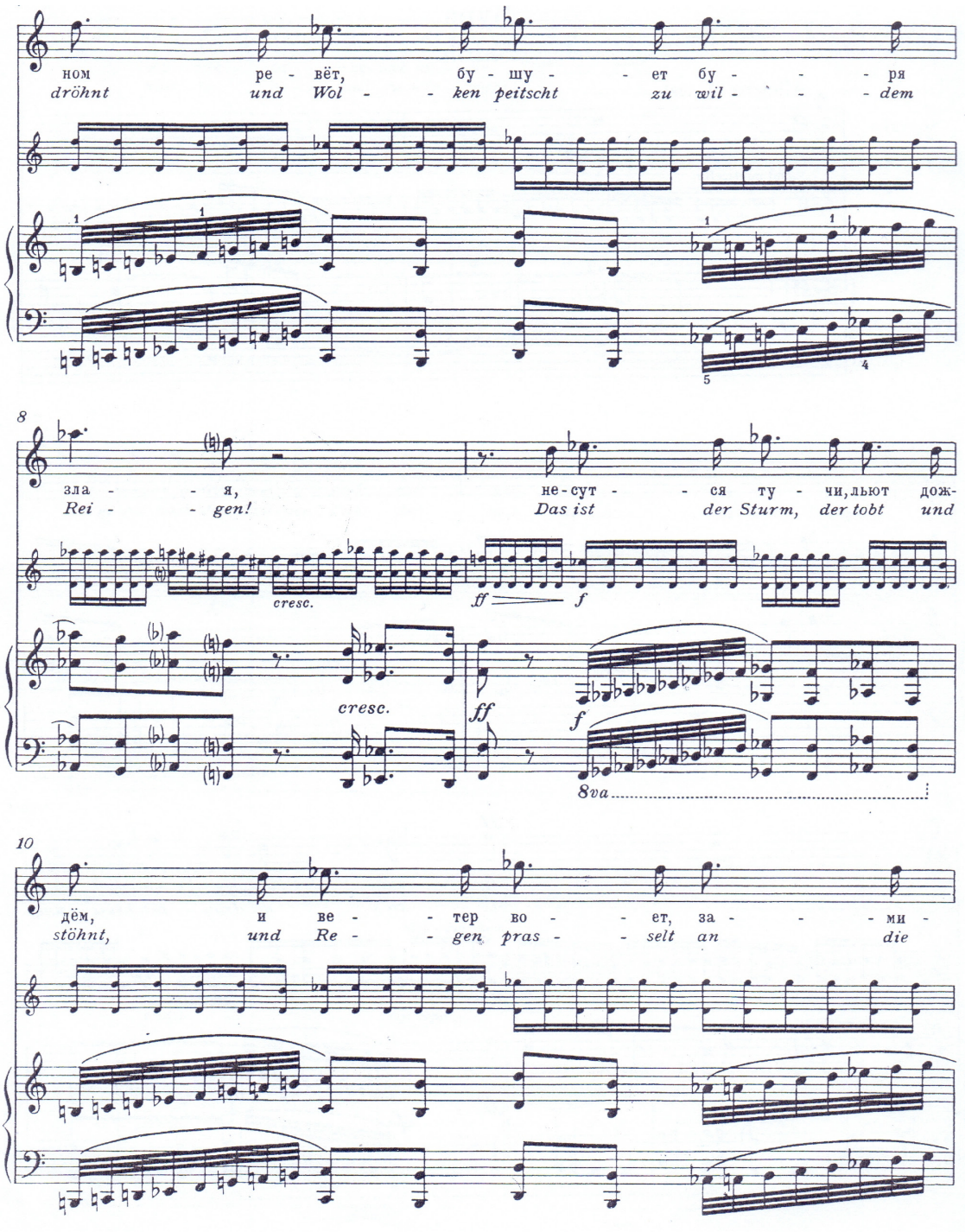
and “co-presence” [22, pp. 14–15]. Similarly, in the explosive emergence of polyphonic texture and harmonic instability, we hear what Emmanuel Levinas describes as the ethical imperative to respond to the face of the *Other*—an interruption that dismantles totality and calls the self into ethical relation [23, pp. 194–197]. Through this sonic configuration, *The Storm* becomes a moment of ethical mediation: not a resolution of tensions, but their recognition as necessary conditions for being in relation.

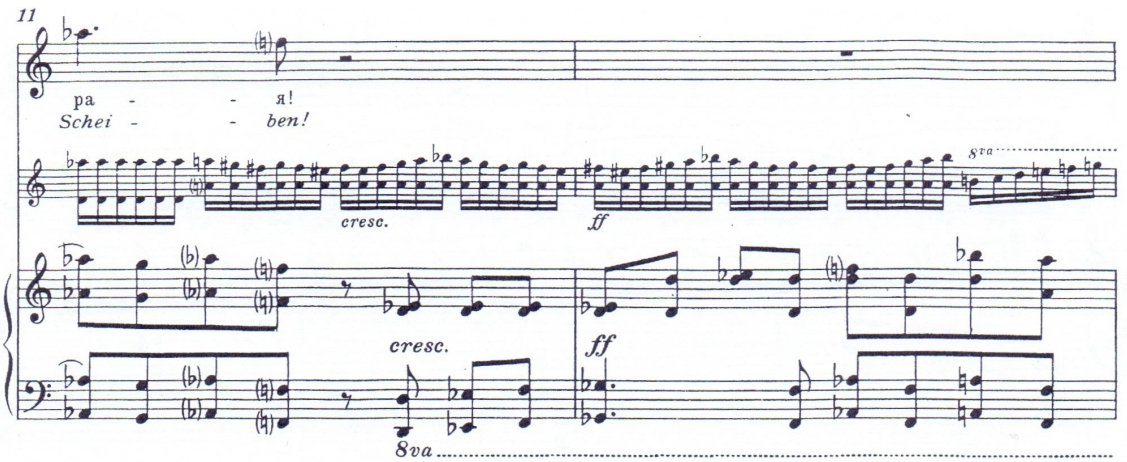
Shostakovich’s choice to title this untitled Blok’s poem *The Storm* intensifies the externalized turbulence evoked by the text. Still, the deeper function of the song lies not in its imagery alone. The narrator does not merely observe suffering; they feel compelled to enter into it, to dissolve the boundary between inner reflection and collective experience. This act of voluntary submission to the storm becomes a metaphor for what Paulo C. Chagas, through Eduardo Lourenço, might describe as melancholy with ethical agency (cf. [8, pp. 10, 14]): a listening that is no longer passive but compassionate and participatory.

Musically, the song oscillates between extremes. The violin and piano create a violent, swirling texture of *sul ponticello* tremolo in minor seconds, recalling the destabilizing storm tropes from *Gamayun* but now turned inward. The violin’s fluttering, once suggestive of the “quiet murmur of a brook” in *We Were Together*, has turned icy and brittle (cf. [1, p. 60]). The opening measures are especially telling: in measure 4, the violin repeats the open D string, anchoring the low register and opening into stark double stops built on the open D and A strings (*Example 10*).

These unfretted, resonant tones are not shaped by expressive vibrato or lyrical line; they speak instead through physical presence—the raw grain of the instrument. This sonic measureness, grounded in the violin’s body and resonating wood, invokes a dimension of material embodiment that recurs throughout the cycle. Where earlier songs explored the voice as a site of memory or absence, *The Storm* returns to the body through the friction of bow on string, the resonance of open intervals, and the chant-like delivery of the vocal line. The voice itself assumes a psalmodic, incantatory tone, most notably in the haunting declamation: “To struggle with the darkness and the rain, / The sufferers’ fate to share…” In this moment, embodiment is not lyrical but somatic—an affective convergence of breath, bow, and elemental resistance.


Allegro (♩ = 108)
Soprano
Violino
sul ponticello
Pianoforte
f
3
8va
5
ff
О, как без - ум - но за ок -
O, wie's da drau - ßen heult und
modo ordinario
cresc.
ff
f
1
8va


ном ре - вёт, бу - шу - - ет бу - - - ря
dröhnt und Wol - - ken peitscht zu wil - - - dem
8
зла - - я, не-сут - - ся ту - чи, льют дож-
Rei - - gen! Das ist der Sturm, der tobt und
cresc.
ff f
cresc.
ff
f
8va
10
дём, и ве - - тер во - - ет, за - - - ми -
stöhnt, und Re - - gen pras - - selt an die



Example 10. Dmitri Shostakovich. *Seven Romances on Verses by Alexander Blok* op. 127. *The Storm, Allegro,* mm. 1–11

Here, Shostakovich reprises a strategy first introduced in *We Were Together*: a suspended vocal line that does not soothe but intensifies emotional weight. What initially appears as stillness becomes a form of internal tension. At the harmonic core of the piece is the diminished fifth (D to A-flat), which recurs obsessively and anchors the song's expressive fabric. This interval is inherently unstable—neither consonant like the perfect fifth (D–A), which traditionally symbolizes cohesion and tonal stability, nor compact like the perfect fourth (D–G), often associated with containment or intimacy, as introduced in *Song of Ophelia* [1, p. 62]. The diminished fifth, instead, is poised between these poles, both spatially and functionally. It evokes a psychological tension: the desire to reach toward another (the openness of the fifth) is thwarted by dissonance; the wish for closeness (the fourth) collapses under strain. In this way, the diminished fifth becomes a sonic metaphor for the emotional paradox that recurs throughout the cycle—the simultaneous longing for connection and the impossibility of achieving it. "In terms of thematic typology and psychological development, it hovers between togetherness and separation, between alienation and empathy, between *svoy* and *ne svoy*" [1, p. 65], it does not represent the resolution of alienation and intimacy, but rather the persistent, dissonant effort to negotiate their distance.

In this way, *The Storm* stands as a liminal movement. It is neither solely intimate nor entirely impersonal; rather, it is a movement of traversal, *in between*. As such, it represents the first clear gesture toward synthesis in the dramaturgical arc of the cycle. The voice does not dissolve, nor does it dominate. It emerges, full of melancholic agency, aware of the horrors outside but refusing to remain untouched. The ethical tone of this music is not only lyrical—it is aesthetic in its responsibility, echoing Boym's concept of "reflective nostalgia," which does not seek restoration but dwells within the fractures of time and feeling with open attentiveness.

The song's unresolved ending—anchored by a sustained D in the violoncello set against A-flat in the piano and violin—leads directly into *Secret Signs*, forming an *attacca* transition that blurs the boundary between the two [1, p. 65]. This seamless passage is more than a technical link; it functions as a structural and expressive bridge. Harmonically unresolved and emotionally suspended, *The Storm* becomes a moment of liminality—a space between rupture and recollection. It does not resolve the tensions of the preceding songs, nor does it yet settle into the meditative stasis of what follows. Instead, it suspends the subject in a state of transit: between *Self* and *Other*, interior and exterior, memory and presence. In this sense, *The Storm* is not only about weather, turmoil, or compassion. It stages a transformation in the condition of voice itself—its attempt to reach beyond its own echo chamber, to resonate with an *Other*. By doing so, the voice recovers its own fragility, re-sounding not as sovereign subject but as part of a shared acoustic fabric—an embodied trace of human vulnerability and memory. The transition here is thus not only musical but existential: a threshold the voice must cross in order to reimagine relation.

'Secret Signs': Fragmented Memory, Symbolist Palimpsest, and the Threshold of Silence

Secret Signs becomes the chamber in which that rupture is internalized, dismantled, and reconfigured. Where *The Storm* projects its turmoil outward through sonic violence and ethical urgency, *Secret Signs* draws that tension inward, suspending it in a sound world of disintegration, repetition, and spectral quietude. In this shift, the possibility of synthesis is neither affirmed nor deferred, but displaced into a zone of haunted reflection. It is a song of "ghosts": of refracted themes, disassembled motifs, and poetic prophecy. At this point in the cycle,

we have entered the threshold space between rupture and transcendence, where language begins to dissolve, and sound transforms into a symbolist palimpsest of memory.

Shostakovich's decision to name this setting *Secret Signs*, where Blok offers no title, is revealing. The allusion to the *Book of Daniel* and the mysterious prophetic inscription, decoded as the fall of a kingdom, embeds the poem within the semiotics of the apocalypse. Blok's vision is filled with spectral imagery: poppies suspended in dreams, golden braids on the pages of a frozen book, and celestial chimeras staring through cosmic mirrors. It is a symbolist text *par excellence*, demanding a musical language that is equally destabilized and allusive. Shostakovich responds by deploying his most unstable material: a twelve-tone row, not in strict serialism but as a form of harmonic exile, a no-man's-land in which tonality is evacuated and motifs float as dislocated fragments.

Composer's use of twelve-tone material in *Secret Signs*—the penultimate song of *Seven Romances*...—introduces a stark break in the otherwise impeccably tonal landscape of the cycle. As Levon Hakobian clarifies, Shostakovich does not employ dodecaphony in the orthodox, Schoenbergian sense of organizing both horizontal and vertical dimensions according to serial technique. Instead, his twelve-tone writing consists of linear segments—configurations of twelve non-repeating tones—that are inserted into or set against a tonal background. In *Secret Signs*, this twelve-tone theme recurs like a musical cipher, tied explicitly to the sinister signs mentioned in Blok's poem. Hakobian notes that this association of the twelve-tone idiom with something alien and uncanny recalls the composer's earlier treatment of atonality in *Fears*,[3] where chromatic disintegration evokes forces so disturbing that they compel the listener to "close your eyes out of fear" [24, pp. 271–272].

Peter Schmelz similarly reads this passage as "a catalyst of harmonic instability and atonality" [25, pp. 232–233] (cf. [26, pp. 303–354]), yet it is not instability for its own sake. In the context of *Seven Romances*..., the twelve-tone row does not signify modernist progress, but symbolic estrangement. It marks a shift from tonal

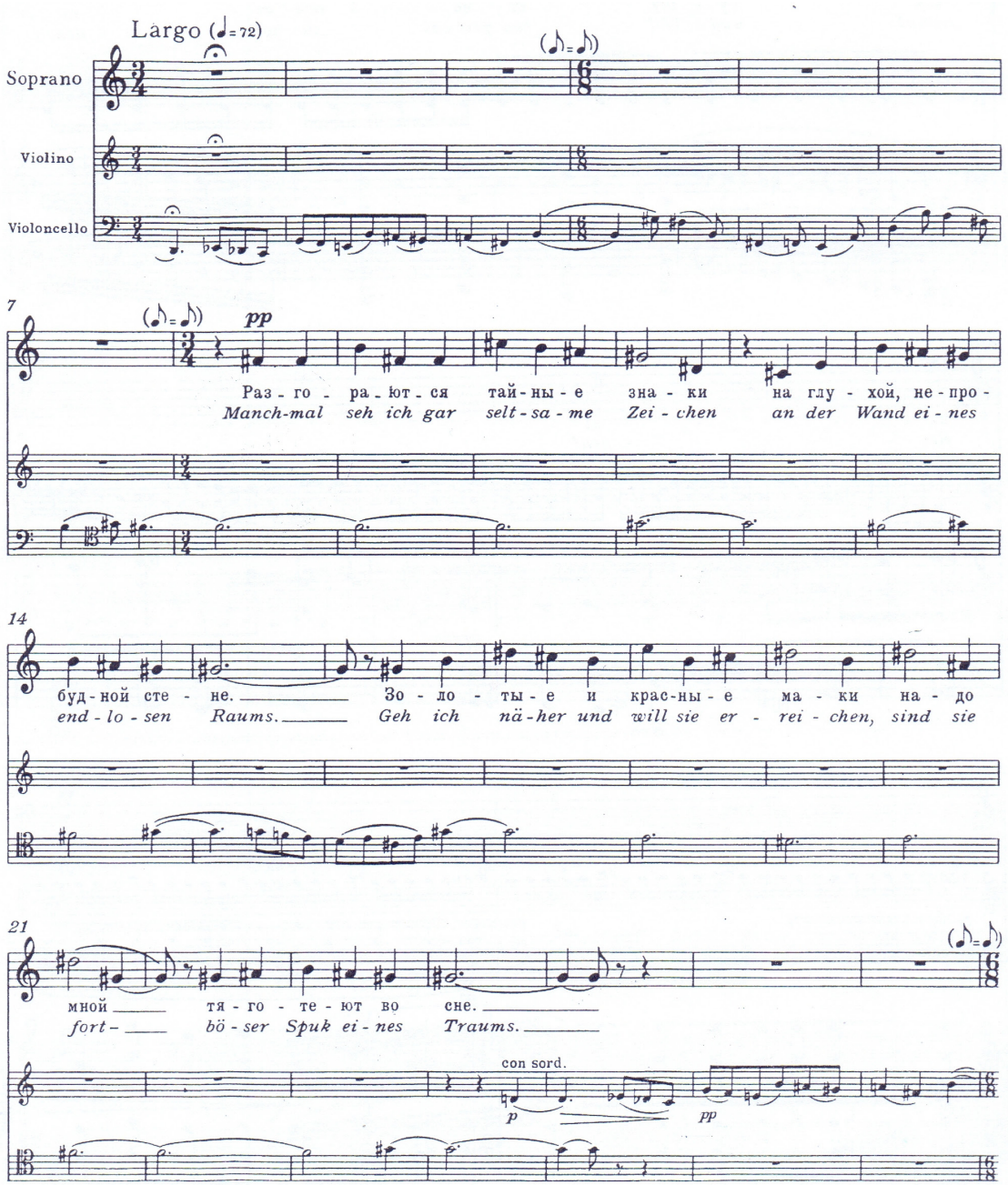
[3] The fourth movement of Shostakovich's *Symphony No. 13*.

clarity to semantic opacity, functioning as a musical emblem of the untranslatable—not in the literal linguistic sense, but in the sense of that which resists stable meaning or expressive containment. In this context, the twelve-tone row operates not merely as a compositional device but as an expressive metaphor: an embodiment of spectral memory, of signs that no longer refer, of language whose meaning has faded or become inaccessible through temporal distance. The row's internal logic—closed, abstract, and non-referential—evokes a space where expression becomes haunted by its own failure, or by the impossibility of fully rendering grief, memory, or presence in sound.

The alternation between soprano and cello is particularly striking: when the voice enters, the cello retreats into long, sustained tones; when the voice falls silent, the cello re-emerges (see *Example 11*). This antiphonal texture creates not a dialogue, but a delicate interplay of presence and absence, where the two lines never fully coincide. Rather than supporting each other in harmonic or rhythmic unity, they appear to take turns holding space, as if embodying memory in its fractured, elusive form. In this way, the alternation mirrors the thematic core of the piece: the impossibility of simultaneity between self and other, sound and silence, past and present. Each line seems to remember the other, but only in absence. This structural restraint enhances the atmosphere of spectrality already suggested by the twelve-tone row, deepening the sense that we are hearing voices that no longer fully belong to the present.

This aligns with the cycle's larger aesthetic of "reflective nostalgia" Shostakovich's twelve-tone line is precisely such a fragment: it remembers nothing clearly, but it haunts the tonal field with the residue of something once coherent. The result is not merely a landscape of harmonic instability, but a sonic experience of fragmentation and uncertainty—one in which meaning flickers, slips away, and resists anchoring. In this suspended space, the listener is drawn into a state of attentiveness that borders on withdrawal, as if compelled to close their eyes not to see better, but to listen more deeply to what is barely there.

In this sense, *Secret Signs* enacts what Derrida calls *différance*: not simply delay or difference, but a structural condition in which meaning is constituted through temporal deferral and absence. It is not that musical



Example 11. Dmitri Shostakovich. *Seven Romances on Verses by Alexander Blok* op. 127. *Secret Signs, Largo,* mm. 1–27

ideas are repeated or developed in a teleological way, but that they return as traces—fragments suspended between presence and disappearance. The past songs do not reappear in their original form; rather, they resonate spectrally, as if remembered by the music itself. The violoncello evokes *Gamayun* not through direct quotation but through timbral memory; the violin gestures toward *Song of Ophelia* and *We Were Together*, now emptied of lyricism; the voice, increasingly subdued and flattened, anticipates its silence in *Music*. In this sound world, meaning flickers but never stabilizes. As in Derrida's formulation, every sign arrives already haunted by its difference, by the echo of what it is not, and what it can never fully be [2, p. 65; 3, pp. 17, 26].

The voice's spectral stillness—its hushed, nearly motionless presence—intensifies the effect of poetic imagery. This stillness is not simply quietness, but a haunted quality of sound, as if the voice itself were no longer fully embodied, already fading into memory. Its psalmodic recitation, barely rising above a breath, is often misaligned with the syntax of the poem, suggesting not speech but trance [1, p. 70]. This detachment is not expressive in a traditional sense—it is suspended subjectivity, a form of musical melancholia that hovers rather than declares. Roland Barthes' "grain de la voix" is transformed here into "grain de la mémoire": what we hear is not the voice of emotion, but the textural residue of remembrance, fragile and fragmentary, breaking and reforming in time.

Scattering is key. Motifs from earlier songs reappear and evolve: the "golden braid" recalls Ophelia's vows, now frozen into object-memory; the cello's crawling bass figures echo the mechanistic march of *Gamayun* and *The City Sleeps*, yet now they are slower and dimmer, as if remembered from a great distance. Even the jagged diminished intervals central to *The Storm* begin to soften into perfect fourths and fifths, heralding the emergent consonance of the final song.

Indeed, *Secret Signs* is best understood as a transitional membrane—not only between *The Storm* of the previous songs and the suspended resonance of *Music*, but between sound and silence, voice and its dissolution. Its final passage,

where violin and cello intertwine over a pure F-sharp two octaves apart, establishes a new kind of harmonic and psychological space: narrowed, transparent, and disembodied. This is not resolution but concentration—a distillation of gesture and memory into a suspended sonic trace.

In this symbolic and affective liminality, Secret Signs functions as the philosophical heart of the cycle. It prepares the listener by dissolving the voice into its spectral remnants. In existential semiotic terms (Tarasti), this song hovers between für-mich-sein (being-for-myself) and an-sich-sein (being-in-itself): a space where subjectivity begins to detach from agency, and sound no longer communicates, but traces the fading outline of what once was.

'Music': Transcendence, Trace, and the Final Silence

The final song of the cycle, *Music*, serves as the culmination of the philosophical and expressive tensions woven throughout *Seven Romances on Verses by Alexander Blok*. If *Secret Signs* signifies the site of fragmentation and dissolution, *Music* emerges as a tentative gesture—understood here as a suspended expressive act—toward synthesis, not in the form of resolution, but of resonance. The text, drawn from Blok's untitled 1898 poem, blends religious mysticism, ecstatic vision, and sacrificial imagery into an offering of self-erasure. In this context, Shostakovich composes not a closure but an echo chamber: a space in which musical, poetic, and philosophical motifs are gathered, reformed, and gently dissolved into memory.

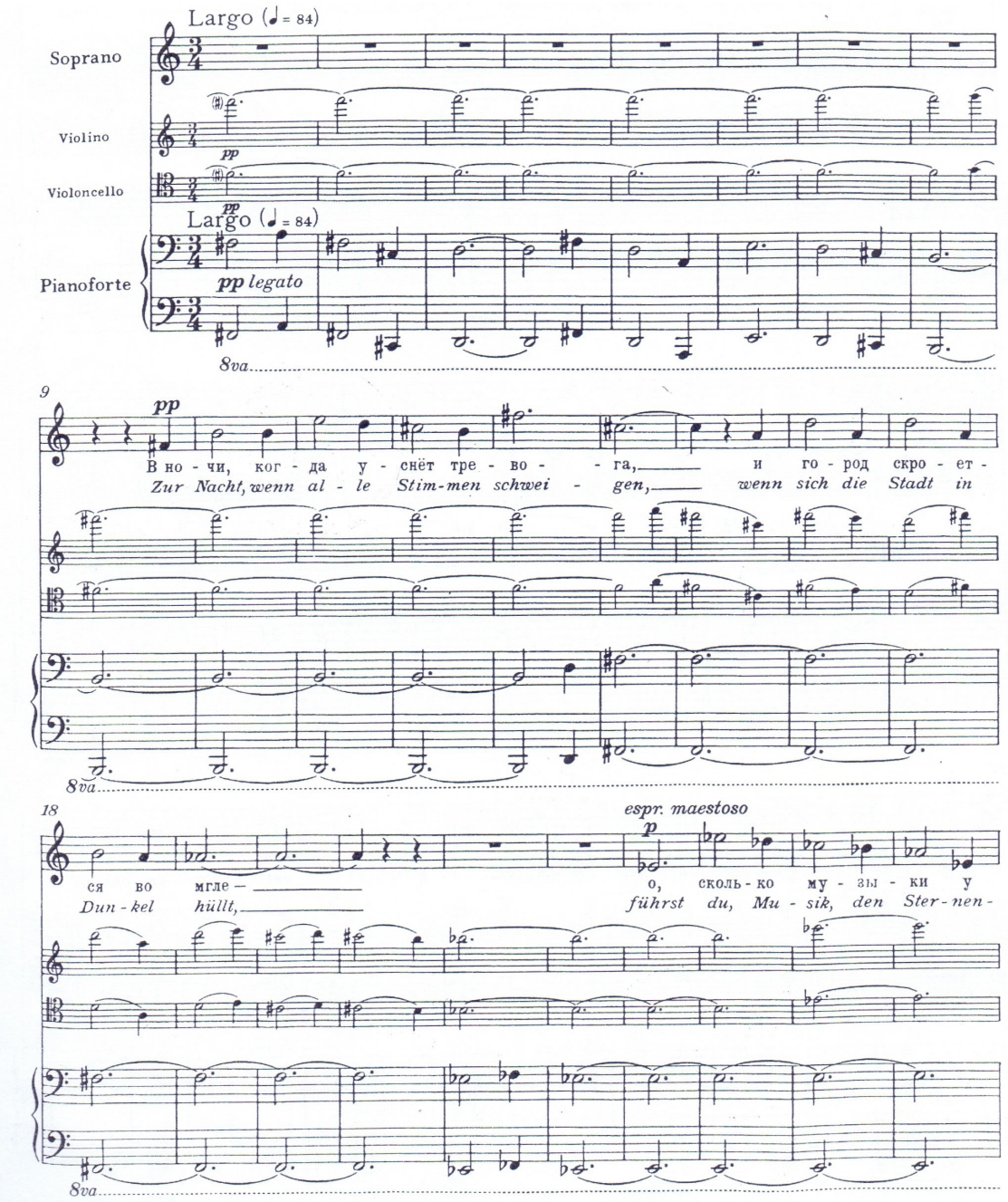
From the outset, the musical setting cultivates a sense of otherworldliness. The held F-sharps in the violin and cello, which link *Secret Signs* to *Music*, are more than tonal bridges—they are traces of tonal memory. As Schmelz notes, the introduction of twelve-tone material in *Secret Signs* serves as a destabilizing force that disrupts the tonal field [25, pp. 232–233]. While he does not explicitly foreground the F-sharp, its emergence within the row may be understood as a latent tonal anchor. This gesture also inverts the motivic expansion from fifths to fourths, which has recurred throughout the cycle. It is a spatial contraction—a gravitational pull toward unity [1, p. 74]. Barthes' concept of "grain de la voix" is here extended metaphorically into what might be called a "grain de l'espace sonore": a resonant texture not of vocal emission but of sonic presence itself, a texture that listens rather than speaks.

The vocal line, emerging in pianissimo with intervals from fourths and major seconds, evokes the serenity and detachment of chant. Here, musical language is pared down to its elemental state, divested of the dissonant, mechanistic energies that once dominated *Gamayun* or *The Storm*. The piano, which earlier acted as a site of violent subversion (*The City Sleeps*), now responds delicately to the voice's harmonic suggestions, following rather than leading [1, p. 75]. For the first time in the cycle, voice and instruments converge not in conflict but in gentle, breath-like weaving (see *Example 12*).

In Tarasti's existential semiotic terms, this final withdrawal of the voice may be understood as a modal descent—from *being-for-myself* into *being-in-itself*—where subjectivity is no longer voiced but remembered, where agency gives way to symbolic resonance. What remains is not expression but the trace of expression, a transition into pure aesthetic being where sound no longer speaks but simply is.

This fragile equilibrium is broken, however, by the setting of the poem's final stanza. The ritualistic intensity of Blok's imagery—"Through blood, through torment, through the grave…"—triggers a musical eruption. The voice strains against rhythmic asymmetry, pitch instability, and harmonic chaos, accompanied by tremolo strings and clashing intervals. The *Self* offers itself up—no longer as presence but as a sacrificial gesture, a final act of musical ekstasis. The symbolism echoes back to *Gamayun*, to *Song of Ophelia*, to *Secret Signs*—but now it is uttered in a register of acceptance rather than terror. The voice then vanishes.

What follows is the most profound musical statement in the cycle: an extended postlude of instrumental memory. The trio resumes the intervals and rhythms first articulated in *Song of Ophelia* and *We Were Together*, but now they are transformed—more spacious, less fractured. The cello and violin share melodic duties once assigned to the voice, enacting what Naomi Cumming describes as a subjectivity constituted not through unified expression but through distributed sonic gestures [27, pp. 115–132]. As she suggests, the musical subject is not unified but "multiple, situated, and shifting" [27, p. 218]. In this sense, what might be called a "sonic self in dispersion" refers to a subjectivity

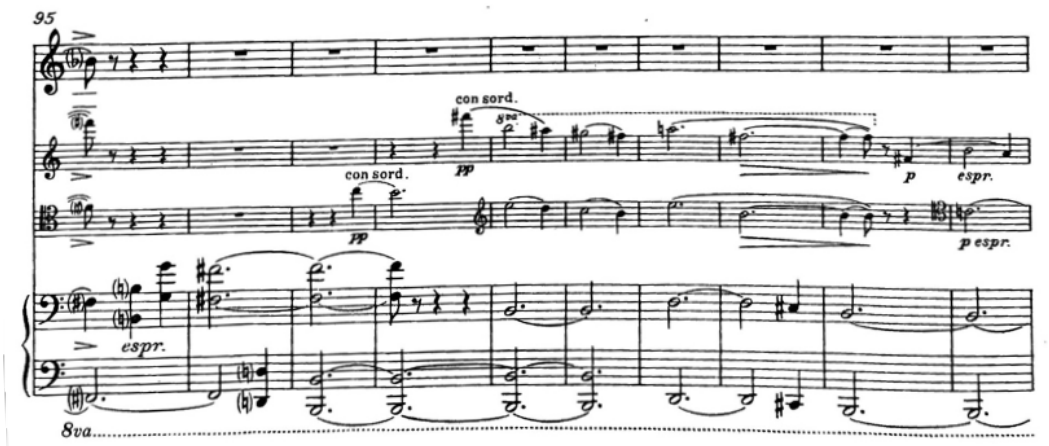


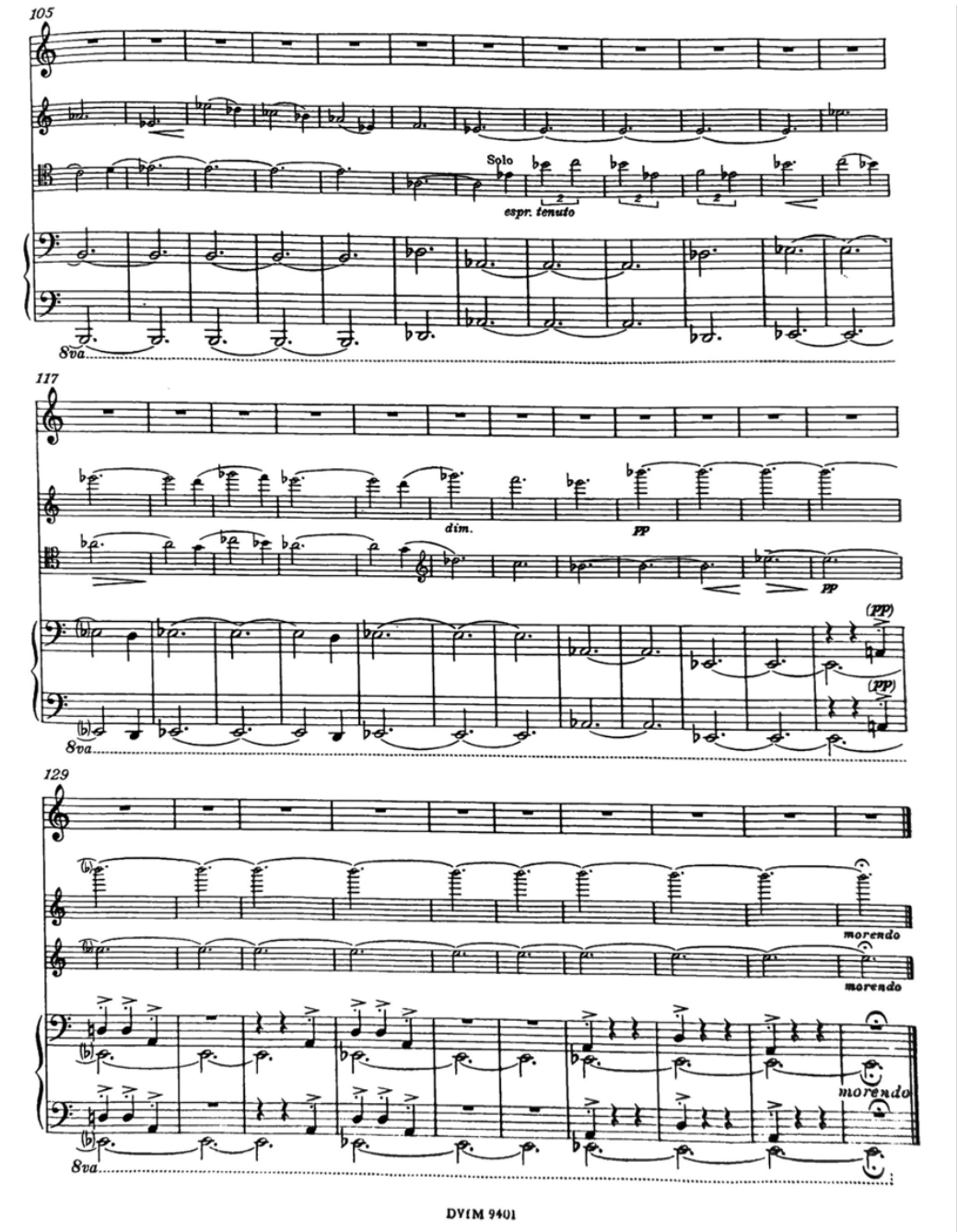
Example 12. Dmitri Shostakovich. *Seven Romances on Verses by Alexander Blok* op. 127. *Music, Largo,* mm. 1–21

that resonates through fragmented intervals, timbral traces, and memory, without coalescing into a single expressive center.

The final cadences are built on open fifths and fourths, gradually collapsing into unisons. Even the previously dissonant intervals from *Gamayun* return—this time *pianissimo*, low in the piano register, not as threats but as distant memories. This is the logic of "spectrality": recurrence without reanimation, presence without presence. What we hear in these final tones is not resolution, but something closer to what Roland Barthes describes as "le bruissement de la langue"—a sonic texture that bypasses semantic clarity and instead evokes a continuous shimmer of meaning, never fully formed, never fixed [28, pp. 76–79]. In this context, the music does not signify in a traditional way; it resonates—as memory, as loss, as the trace of what has been voiced and is now fading (see *Example 13*).

Thus, *Music* becomes not an ending but a final withdrawal. It avoids culmination, entering instead a state of harmonic and expressive stasis. Rather than projecting narrative resolution, it sustains a modality of stillness. This aligns with Eero Tarasti's concept of the modality of *être* (being), which characterizes moments of musical stability, existential contemplation, and non-action. In contrast to the dynamic modality of *faire* (doing), which drives musical progression, *être* manifests as a suspension of teleology, a state in which "no action is performed" and where meaning resides in being itself [29, pp. 90–91]. In *Music*, this mode is achieved through static textures, open intervals, and the gradual dissipation of voice, suggesting not resolution, but a lingering presence beyond articulation.





Example 13. Dmitri Shostakovich. *Seven Romances on Verses by Alexander Blok* op. 127. *Music, Largo,* mm. 95–138

Shostakovich thereby completes the poetic logic of the cycle: not by representing memory or grief, but by inhabiting their silent aftermath.

Conclusion: Echoes of the Irretrievable

Seven Romances on Verses by Alexander Blok by Dmitri Shostakovich is not simply a cycle of songs; it is a meditation in sound—on time, on memory, on the impossibility of return. In this work, the composer does not set poetry to music in the conventional sense. Rather, he composes around the voice, treating it not as a source of presence but as a site of disappearance, of vanishing. The cycle's expressive language is not one of affirmation or narrative clarity but one of fragmentation, silence, "spectral" return, and philosophical hesitation.

Through the lenses of Derrida's "trace," Barthes' "grain," and Boym's "reflective nostalgia," we have seen how the music speaks by deferring, by fraying, by echoing what has been lost. The voice in *Seven Romances on Verses by Alexander Blok* does not articulate identity; it gestures toward it and then dissolves. Meaning is not declared—it is postponed, hinted at, and most poignantly, withheld. The formal structure itself mirrors the instability of memory, with motifs returning in altered, softened, or distorted shapes. What remains is not a message but a residue.

In this sense, Shostakovich's work may be understood as a sonic enactment of melancholy, not as an emotional posture, but as an aesthetic structure, in the sense developed by Paulo C. Chagas through Eduardo Lourenço. Melancholy here is not passive grief; it is active listening, a way of inhabiting time as fragmentation and echo. It is, as Chagas writes, a "mirror of memory," one that reflects not what was but what cannot be reclaimed. *Seven Romances on Verses by Alexander Blok* composes this mirror—not with surface reflection, but with depths of recursion, shadows of the voice, and the quiet shimmer of vanishing sound. In that sense, the concept of melancholy introduced by Chagas—as a philosophical tension between the desire for unity and the reality of disintegration—finds its perfect sonic analogue in Shostakovich's treatment of the soprano. The voice is never stable; it is always in retreat, always drawn into the ensemble, until in the final movement, it ceases altogether. What follows is not silence but a trace sustained by instruments that no longer accompany but remember. The music does not resolve; it listens.

In this way, *Seven Romances on Verses by Alexander Blok* articulates an ethics of disappearance. It offers no heroic closure, no synthesis of past and present. Instead, it allows the listener to dwell in the echoes of the irretrievable, where absence becomes audible and silence becomes expressive. It is a music of mourning but not of despair—a music that, like melancholy itself, finds form in fracture, beauty in distance, and meaning in something that might be the resonance of what is no longer there…

References

1. Gillies, R. L. (2022). *Singing Soviet Stagnation: Vocal Cycles from the USSR, 1964–1985*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429274077

2. Derrida, J. (1976). *Of Grammatology* (G. Ch. Spivak, Trans.; 2nd ed.). Johns Hopkins University Press.

3. Derrida, J. (1982). *Margins of Philosophy* (A. Bass, Trans.). University of Chicago Press. (Original work published 1972)

4. Barthes, R. (1977). *The Grain of the Voice* (S. Heath, Trans.). In Image–Music–Text (pp. 179–189). Hill and Wang. (Original work published 1972)

5. Boym, S. (2001). *The Future of Nostalgia*. Basic Books.

6. Kivy, P. (1989). *Sound Sentiment: An Essay on the Musical Emotions*. Temple University Press.

7. Kivy, P. (1990. *Music Alone: Philosophical Reflections on the Purely Musical Experience*. Cornell University Press.

8. Kivy, P. (2007). *Music, Language, and Cognition: And Other Essays in the Aesthetics of Music*. Clarendon Press.

9. Chagas, P. C. (2016). Mirrors of Melancholy: Lourenço on Music and Musical Understanding. *Revista Portuguesa De Musicologia, 3*(1), 5–34. https://doi.org/10.57885/rpmns.286

10. Derrida, J. (1993). *Spectres de Marx: l'état de la dette, le travail du deuil et la nouvelle Internationale*. Éditions Galilée.

11. Said, E. (2006). *On Late Style. Music and Literature Against the Grain*. Pantheon Books.

12. Popović Mlađenović, T. (2007). Projections of Time in String Quartets of10 Dmitri Shostakovich. *Zbornik matice srpske za scenske umetnosti i muziku*, (37), 17–48.

13. Pyman, A. A (1994). *History of Russian Symbolism*. Cambridge University Press.

14. Paperno, I., & Delaney Grossman J. (Eds.). (1994). *Creating Life. The Aesthetic Utopia of Russian Modernism*. Stanford University Press.

15. Elsworth, J. (1994). Creating Life. The Aesthetic Utopia of Russian Modernism. A History of Russian Symbolism. *Slavonica*, (1/2), 98–101. https://doi.org/10.1179/sla.1994.1.2.98

16. Derrida, J. (1973). Difference (D. Allison, Trans.). In D. Allison, & N. Garver (Eds.), *Speech and Phenomena: and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs* (pp. 129–160). Northwestern University Press. (Original work published 1968)

17. Weil, S. (2002). *Gravity and Grace*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203168455

18. Kivy, P. (2002). *Introduction to a Philosophy of Music*. Clarendon Press.

19. Tarasti, E. (2000). *Existential Semiotics*. Indiana University Press.

20. Tarasti, E. (2021). Existential Semiotics and Its Application to Music: The Zemic Theory and Its Birth from the Spirit of Music. In P. C. Chagas and J. C. Wu (Eds.), *Sounds from Within: Phenomenology and Practice* (pp. 29–56). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-72507-5_2

21. Tarasti, E. (2024). Krzysztof Penderecki: An Existential Semiotic Study of His Sonoristic Works and Cello and Orchestra Concerto No. 2. *Roczniki Humanistyczne, 72*(12), 249–278. https://doi.org/10.18290/rh247212sp.19

22. Nancy, J.-L. (2007). *Listening* (C. Mandell, Trans.). Fordham University Press. (Original work published 2002)

23. Levinas, E. (1969). *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority* (A. Lingis, Trans.). Duquesne University Press. (Original work published 1961)

24. Hakobian, L. (2016). *Music of the Soviet Era: 1917–1991*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315596822

25. Schmelz, P. J. (2009). *Such Freedom, If Only Musical: Unofficial Soviet Music during the Thaw*. Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195341935.001.0001

26. Schmelz, P. J. (2004). Shostakovich's 'Twelve-Tone' Compositions and the Politics and Practice of Soviet Serialism. In L. E. Fay (Ed.), *Shostakovich and His World* (pp. 303–354). Princeton University Press.

27. Cumming, N. (2000). *The Sonic Self: Musical Subjectivity and Signification*. Indiana University Press.
28. Barthes, R. (1989). *The Rustle of Language* (R. Howard, Trans.) University of California Press. (Original work published 1984)
29. Tarasti, E. A (1994). *Theory of Musical Semiotics*. Indiana University Press.

Список литературы

1. *Gillies R. L.* Singing Soviet Stagnation: Vocal Cycles from the USSR, 1964–1985. Abingdon: Routledge, 2022. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429274077
2. *Derrida J.* Of Grammatology / trans. by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976.
3. *Derrida J.* Margins of Philosophy / trans. by Alan Bass. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982.
4. *Barthes R.* The Grain of the Voice // Image–Music–Text; trans. by Stephen Heath. New York: Hill and Wang, 1977. P. 179–189.
5. *Boym S.* The Future of Nostalgia. New York: Basic Books, 2001.
6. *Kivy P.* Sound Sentiment: An Essay on the Musical Emotions. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989.
7. *Kivy P.* Music Alone: Philosophical Reflections on the Purely Musical Experience. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990.
8. *Kivy P.* Music, Language, and Cognition: And Other Essays in the Aesthetics of Music. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007.
9. *Chagas P. C.* Mirrors of Melancholy: Lourenço on Music and Musical Understanding // Revista Portuguesa de Musicologia. 2016. P. 5–34. https://doi.org/10.57885/rpmns.286
10. *Derrida J.* Spectres de Marx: l'état de la dette, le travail du deuil et la nouvelle Internationale. Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1993.
11. *Said E.* On Late Style. Music and Literature Against the Grain. New York: Pantheon Books, 2006.
12. *Поповић Млађеновић Т.* Пројекције времена у гудачким квартетима Дмитрија Шосткаовича // Зборник матице српске за сценске уметности и музику. 2007. N 37. С. 17–48.
13. *Pyman A. A* History of Russian Symbolism. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

14. Creating Life. The Aesthetic Utopia of Russian Modernism / ed. by I. Paperno, J. Delaney Grossman. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1994.

15. *Elsworth J.* Creating Life. The Aesthetic Utopia of Russian Modernism. A History of Russian Symbolism // Slavonica. 1994. No. 1/2. P. 98-101. https://doi.org/10.1179/sla.1994.1.2.98

16. *Derrida J.* Speech and Phenomena: and other essays on Husserl's theory of signs / trans. by David Allison. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973.

17. *Weil S.* Gravity and Grace. London; New York: Routledge, 2002. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203168455

18. *Kivy P.* Introduction to a Philosophy of Music. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002.

19. *Tarasti E.* Existential Semiotics. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000.

20. *Tarasti E.* Existential Semiotics and Its Application to Music: The Zemic Theory and Its Birth from the Spirit of Music // Sounds from Within: Phenomenology and Practice; ed. by P. C. Chagas, J. C. Wu . Cham: Springer, 2021. P. 29–56. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-72507-5_2

21. *Tarasti E.* Krzysztof Penderecki: An Existential Semiotic Study of His Sonoristic Works and Cello and Orchestra Concerto No. 2 // Roczniki Humanistyczne. 2024. Vol. 72, No. 12, Special Issue. P 249–278. https://doi.org/10.18290/rh247212sp.19

22. *Nancy J.-L.* Listening / trans. by Charlotte Mandell. New York: Fordham University Press, 2007.

23. *Levinas E.* Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority / trans. by Alphonso Lingis. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969.

24. *Hakobian L.* Music of the Soviet Era: 1917–1991. London; New York: Routledge, 2016. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315596822

25. *Schmelz P. J.* Such Freedom, If Only Musical: Unofficial Soviet Music during the Thaw. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195341935.001.0001

26. *Schmelz P. J.* Shostakovich's 'Twelve-Tone' Compositions and the Politics and Practice of Soviet Serialism // Shostakovich and His World; ed. by L. E. Fay. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004. P. 303–354.

27. *Cumming N.* The Sonic Self: Musical Subjectivity and Signification. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000.

28. *Barthes R.* The Rustle of Language / trans. by Richard Howard. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989.

29. *Tarasti E.* A Theory of Musical Semiotics. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994.

Information about the author:

Ivana Petković Lozo — PhD, Visiting Scholar, Department of Music, University of California.

Сведения об авторе:

Петкович Лозо И. — PhD, приглашенный научный сотрудник кафедры музыки, Калифорнийский университет.

The article was submitted 25.07.2025;
approved after reviewing 02.10.2025;
accepted for publication 15.10.2025.

Статья поступила в редакцию 25.07.2025;
одобрена после рецензирования 02.10.2025;
принята к публикации 15.10.2025.