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INTERTYPE EVOLUTION OF THE BLACK DOG COMPOSITION IN ROBERT PLANT’ MUSICAL LEGACY

ANNOTATION

Paliy Iryna. Intertype evolution of the Black Dog composition in Robert Plant’ musical legacy

The article is devoted to the analysis of Led Zeppelin’s composition Black Dog and its compositional and performing versions. This musical material is a good example of the interaction of music in fundamentally different areas – rock music and ethnic music of Africa. Initially having related directly to rock music, the Black Dog composition in the 21st century became the object of numerous author interpretations that transformed this composition into an ethnic format. The article traces the process of such a transformation over a long period and reveals a definite pattern. The degree of interaction of the elements of the musical language of two different areas is increasing towards the predominance of the ethnic field in the most recent versions of the composition. To determine the degree of mixing ethnic and rock music, expressive means are differentiated in three levels: intonation, timbre and composition.

Key words: intertype interaction, rock-music, ethnic music, interpretation, evolution.

АНОТАЦІЯ

Палій І. О. Міжвидова еволюція композиції «Black Dog» у творчості Роберта Планта

Статтю присвячено аналізу композиції «Black Dog» британського гурту «Led Zeppelin» та її композиторсько-виконавським версіям. Музичний матеріал, що аналізується в статті, є яскравим прикладом взаємодії та взаємопроникнення музики принципово різних сфер – рок-музики та етнічної музики Африки. Композиція на початку мала цілком рок-характер, але у ХХІ сторіччі стала об’єктом чисельних авторських інтерпретацій, що трансформували її до етнічного формату. У статті прослідковано процес подібної трансформації протягом довгого часового відрізка та виявлено певну закономірність. Ступінь взаємопроникнення елементів музичної мови двох різних сфер посилюється у бік переваги етнічної сфери у найбільш пізніх версіях композиції. З метою визначення ступеня змішування етнічної та рок-музики виразні засоби диференціюються за трьома рівнями – інтонаційним, тембровим та композиційним.

Ключові слова: міжвидова взаємодія, рок-музика, етнічна музика, інтерпретація, еволюція.

АННОТАЦІЯ

Палий І. О. Межвидовая эволюция композиции «Black Dog» в творчестве Роберта Планта

Статья посвящена анализу композиции «Black Dog» группы «Led Zeppelin» и её композиторско-исполнительским версиям. Данный музыкальный материал является наглядным примером взаимодействия и взаимопроникновения музыки принципиально различных сфер – рок-музыки и этнической музыки Африки. Имея изначально прямое отношение к рок-музыке, композиция «Black Dog» в XXI веке стала объектом многочисленных авторских интерпретаций, которые преобразовали её в этнический «формат». В статье прослежен процесс подобной трансформации на протяжении длительного промежутка времени и выявлена определённая закономерность. Степень взаимопроникновения элементов музыкального языка двух различных сфер усиливается в сторону преобладания этнической сферы в наиболее поздних версиях композиции. Для определения степени смешивания этнической и рок-музыки выразительные средства дифференцируются по трём уровням: интонационному, тембровому и композиционному.

Ключевые слова: межвидовое взаимодействие, рок-музыка, этническая музыка, интерпретация, эволюция.

The article is devoted to the composition of the Black Dog by Led Zeppelin and its compositional and performing versions. The musical material chosen by us is interesting because, having originally a direct relation to rock music, in the coming 21st century became the object of numerous author's versions that transformed this composition into an ethnic format. The idea of such a transformation belongs to the Led Zeppelin vocalist Robert Plant.

The object of this article is a music interaction of the totally different types (ethnic music and rock music). The differences of these types are in organization principles of musical elements. **The subject** of this study is the original composition Black Dog of British rock band Led Zeppelin and its different versions. **The aim** of this article is to view the process of transformation of the composition Black Dog from rock music to ethnic music domain.

Robert Plant's musical career covers a time span of more than 45 years. After the group Led Zeppelin ceased to exist in 1980, its vocalist took up solo work, which in fact did not go beyond the scope of rock music. Nevertheless, in the new millennium the musician decided to change radically the genre and style base of his albums, turning to the interaction of rock

music with ethnicity. Under an *Interaction* we assume mixing different language elements of totally different musical domains – ethnic, classic, jazz and rock¹. The band Led Zeppelin has always been close to the music of the ethnic East: many of their compositions contain the musical elements of Asia and Africa, both in the harmonic and metro-rhythmic aspects². Throughout the last two decades of the twentieth century, R. Plant's interest to the ethnic field has increased. In 1982, the album "Pictures At Eleven" in one of the songs uses a riff based on the Cairo scale. Then in 1994 and 1998, in projects with his Led Zeppelin companion, guitarist Jimmy Page, Plant's treatment of the ethnicity was more extensive. The abundance of ethnic musical means of expression is continued in Plant's solo album "Mighty Re-arranger" (2005). This album fully reveals the potential of R. Plant's "ethnic musical base" both in composer and in the performance plan: the album shows the interaction of fundamentally different musical "types" – ethnic and rock music.

However, the most vivid "intertype interaction" is manifested in the composition Black Dog. To trace the transformation of the rock composition into an ethnic one, we will analyse the original source – the original composition Black Dog, as well as three particularly vivid examples of its versions, which are separated by a time interval of almost 35 years (counting from the time of writing the original composition). It is interesting that all versions of this composition were performed only at concerts as they do not exist in album records.

Black Dog is the composition of the band Led Zeppelin, written in 1971 that opens their album Led Zeppelin IV. According to the Led Zeppelin's researcher Chris Welch [8, p. 70–71], participants of the band say, that some elements of Black Dog arose from the inspiration of the song "Oh, Well", written in 1969 by Fleetwood Mac. This is a fairly large scale song lasting 9 minutes. Its musical material is built on the principle of "call and response" structure between the vocalist and the instruments of the group. This type of construction refers to African ethnic music, when one voice

¹ The full version of the syntactic characteristics of the musical language is written in L. Bernstein's lectures [1] and in A. Patel's [6] work.

² For example, in the compositions Kashmir, In the Evening, Friends, Four Sticks you can observe Indian and Middle Eastern scales, as well as timbre imitation of folk instruments of the East.

sings a melody, and the choir “answers” it¹. In “Oh, Well”, the “dialogue” takes place in the reverse order: the instrumental riff sounds first, and then all the band members stop and the singer sings his part acapella. It should be noted some similarity of the compositions “Oh, Well” and Black Dog, both in the melody of the vocal part, and in the riff, which will be further demonstrated in the example. Nevertheless, in Black Dog there is a tendency of the complexity of the musical material in the rhythmic and phrasing aspects. In addition, a significant difference between the two compositions is due to the long psychedelic episode occupying the second half of “Oh, Well”. It dramatically changes the nature of the presentation: texture, timbre (acoustic instruments predominate and a flute is added), tempo and rhythm. The active, impetuous rock sphere is replaced by ballad features.

Getting back to the main focus of our study, Black Dog is written in a verse form and consists of four verses, three choruses, two connecting episodes and an electric guitar solo. The sound at the beginning of the song is similar to warming up on the electric guitar. The musical material of the verse is based on the question-answer structure as a vocal-instrumental dialogue. It begins with the stanzas represented in the vocal part without accompaniment of other instruments of the group and forming a two-bar musical phrase. This phrase is in 4/4 and consists of syncopated patterns:

In addition to syncopation, the effect of the “instability” of the melody is achieved due to interval jumps to a fifth up and a fourth down. The vocal part is followed by an instrumental play, based on a “sinuous” guitar riff in various times – 2/4, 4/4, 5/4:

¹ A similar structure is also present in the composition “Young Man Blues”, which was written around 1959 by the jazz and blues musician Mose Allison. Here the vocalist performs two stanzas of a cappella, and the vocal part is based on the blues scale, and then the piano plays its “response” musical material, which already contains jazz intonations. The fame of “Young Man Blues” was acquired by the interpretation of The Who, made in 1970 (that is, one year before the appearance of Black Dog). The composition has undergone significant changes in the timbre aspect: in the performance of The Who the vocal part also sounds unaccompanied, but the piano part is performed on electric instruments and drums with more measured rhythmic groupings, which makes the sound typical of rock music. Thus, the acoustic version was transformed into an electric version.

As the example shows, the riff melody is less syncopated and almost does not contain jumps at wide intervals (only one jump to a minor sixth), although intonation instability is present here. It is achieved through braces of guitar strings – “bands” on the supporting eighths durations. Thus, the intonation is increased in the micro – interval range from a quartertone to a semitone. The question-answer block is repeated 3 times, and for the third time the instrumental part is expanded: the riff phrase sounds again in the key of the dominant, and then again returns to the original key. Then a chorus sounds, in which the vocal and instrumental parts unite. This is a new musical material, representing a measured long phrase made out four motives, in which weak parts of the beat are accented. Then again the verse follows, but in a slightly abbreviated form: the question-answer block is repeated only twice instead of three times. After the verse, a new episode appears, which lasts only 3 bars. It consists of only four notes, forming two intervals – a descending minor third and an ascending major second. These intervals sound in a vocal part, there is no poetic text in it, each syllable has a syllable “Ah”: Other instruments at this time play the sustained notes, creating a background for the vocals (the drum kit rests at this time). The entire episode is perceived by the listener as a current stop in motion, since this musical material is not spurred on by various rhythmic figures.

Ah ah ah ah ah ah ah ah

Next, a “chorus-verse-chorus-verse” bunch is held, after which a “hang-up” episode arises again. Then an electric guitar solo sounds with a length of 24 bars, demonstrating a variety of technical performing techniques. It uses a specifically converted sound. In the album recording, the solo was constructed from four overlays of guitar parts. At the same time, the accompaniment of the rhythm section of the group – percussion and bass guitar – is based on the refrain material. A virtuoso solo completes the composition, gradually reducing the dynamic nuance.

Thus, in the composition of *Black Dog*, there are typical features of rock music found. They include numerous syncopations, shifts of emphasis from strong to weak, riff base, heavy sound of electric instruments, density of texture in the chorus, blues intonation elements, guitar solo, pronounced melodic thinking where horizontal way prevails over the vertical, etc. It should be noted that in the live performance at the concerts the members of the Led Zeppelin band often made significant changes to their compositions. *Black Dog* in this regard is no exception. An interesting example is the appearance at a concert in New York in 1973: the composition begins with a riff of a completely different song, “Bring It On Home”, followed by *Black Dog* in a slightly abbreviated version and improvised elements in guitar solos. After the solo, which completes the original, in this version there is a riff from “bring It On Home” again. Similar trick of the concealing of one composition inside another, or the placement of several compositions into one, due to which it can acquire into a large scale (at concerts such performances can last for 45 minutes!) is very common in the performing practice of Led Zeppelin. The most famous such “extended” compositions are “Whole Lotta Love”, “How Many More Times” and “Dazed And Confused”.

The next version of the 2005 *Black Dog* is an intermediate link between the original in a typically “fatal” manner and a version performed in 2014, which is a vivid example of the psychedelic ethnics. Musicologist Gunther Schuller, the inventor of the concept “third stream”, which describes an interaction of classical music with jazz, votes against the term “interpretation”. Quoting him, “incidentally, I firmly reject the term “interpretation”. I much prefer the term “realization. I can cite too many instances in which realization of the composers blueprint is what is needed, not interpretation and certainly not re-interpretation” [7, p. 250]. It is in this “realization” that the same transition is observed, both on the genre and style levels in the “inter-type interaction”. And in this case we are talking about a collective composer and performance version, because all the band members along with its leader

Robert Plant are co-authors and performers. Black Dog-2005 does not start with the a cappella vocal solo part, as in the original, but with the modified riff, which performs the original “answer” function. It retains only the first phrase and adds a new ending to the riff. The resulting musical site is looped, thus, there is no development of the phrase, as it happens in the original. This material is performed on an electric guitar with a monotonous rhythm section that complements it, which creates a “fatal” character.

The question-response structure of the composition is preserved, but less pronounced, and in the vocal part the recitative element is strengthened, it is less melodic and smooth. Further, as in the original, there is a connecting episode (between the verse and the chorus), and then the refrain itself, while preserving the manner of rock music. It is noteworthy that the second chorus is an instrumental, as the vocal part is absent in it. After an instrumental play, the musicians make a general pause, and then a new material sounds – a melodic pattern with elements of eastern intonations alternating with the main riff.

After several repetitions, the dynamic nuance is weakened and the composition ends, almost merged. The listener gets the impression of “blotting out” of ethnic musical material, although so far only at the intonation level. As a result, the 2005 version of Black Dog contains minor changes, the form is practically preserved, except for the final new material. In the timbre plan, the instruments correspond to the rock band and there are no ethnic instruments. Due to the simplification and fixation of the main riff, the composition acquires a monotonous, psychedelic style.

Finally, the new “look” of the composition Black Dog with a strong bias towards the ethnic side was presented by R. Plant and his band Sensation Space Shifters at the Glastonbury festival in June 2014¹. It is preceded by an introductory solo on the African folk two-stringed instrument – the *cologo*. The soloist is Juldeh Camara. It’s a riff-like melody with numerous syncopations and a constantly changing meter. In the process of development of this musical material, the tempo is noticeably accelerated, the culmination point is a sharp chord and a general pause. Then, on this same instrument, a monotonous accompaniment begins, and then the part is conducted, along with which other instruments of the group enter: bass guitar,

¹ Material for analysis in this article is taken from the live recording of the R. Plant’s concert at the Glastonbury festival 28.06.2014. URL : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s12jK47CUeo>.

electric guitar, keyboards and drums. All these instruments, however, perform a background function – they are entrusted with the sustained sounds of chords that form harmony. After 14-bar play, the vocal part of R. Plant sounds, which is absolutely different from the original in the melodic plan.

The rhythm in the vocal part is not changed in comparison with the original, but the pitch changes. The question-answer structure, on which the original composition is based, is absent. In the vocal part, phrases are sequentially played without the reciprocal insertions of the instrumental passage, the basis of which in the original was a guitar riff. All this time, the accompanying instruments perform a rhythmic pulsation with uniform eighths' durations. After the connecting episode, the character of the composition changes dramatically, including at the genre level, the song turns into a dance.

Fast tempo, rhythmic dance character is preceded by accelerated recitation by Robert Plant without pronounced pitch characteristics, with a dominant rhythmic organization. Juldeh Camara, a performer on ethnic musical instruments, enters on the *cologo*, but already plays on it with a bow. The part of this instrument is leading throughout the entire dance episode. Plant himself at this time is playing a *bendir* – an ethnic percussion instrument. It should be noted that the role of the drums in this part of the composition is also significant. Simultaneously with the solo instrument, the singer sings small motifs in the Fulani language (the habitat is Central Africa, West Africa, Sudan and Egypt), which adds ethnic musical elements and greatly enhances the spirit of African music. It is important to note that the nature of the rhythm in African music is due to the specific rhythm of this or that African language. As noted by the researcher of African music K. Nketia [5], such grammatical units of structure do not have to be of the same length; however, where a song is in strict rhythm, a number of adjustments are made in the length of the verbal units to achieve symmetry and balance. For example, where the verbal text of a musical phrase is shorter than the basic time span, it may be followed by a phrase which makes up for this. It may also be extended by means of nonsense syllable or number of such syllables, or a vowel, which can be prolonged to the required duration. Alternatively, it can be preceded or followed by a rest, which makes up the required length. Conversely, where a verbal text is longer than the basic time span, the preceding unit or the next one must be proportionately reduced to achieve balance.

This is evidenced by the construction of the melody and the very nature of the performance. Later, these motives are joined by a vocal part. After several

passages, an electric guitar comes in. It is noteworthy that until this moment the whole dance episode did not contain the timbres of any electric instruments, without which the rock music is inconceivable. The same applies to the rhythm, and to the overall structure of the musical material. That is, this episode is completely ethnic, it is built according to the rules and laws of music of the ethnic "field". The electric guitar, participating in the general jam, plays a colourful riff. In this atmosphere of total improvisation, the composition ends.

Conclusions. So, the main differences between Black Dog-2014 and the original are: the absence of the electric guitar riff, the lack of a question-answer structure, the change in the melody of the vocal part, the lack of drum parts inherent in rock music (the predominance of emphasis on the strong beat parts at 4/4). The square structure is also absent. In the version of the song after 2010, there is a change of genre from song to dance. The dance part is performed in the manner of African music making. Black Dog sample of 2014 is permeated with ethnic character, starting from the timbres of specific instruments and ending with vocal techniques. So, in this version of Black Dog-2014 you can see the following interpretive changes: intonation, timbre and composition. We decipher the signs of manifestations of changes at the composition level: this is a change in the structure, as well as the presence of a dance improvisation piece performed according to the principles of ethnic music in Africa.

The analysis of the composition of Black Dog and its versions allowed us to reveal numerous differences from the original and to determine the degree of penetration of ethnic musical elements into the sphere of rock music. Thus, it made it possible to trace the interstream evolution of musical material at different stages. These stages form a kind of "bridge" in space-time between the starting point – rock music and the end point – a sample of ethnic musical culture.

It is interesting that recently in the composition Black Dog there is a shift of the "centre of gravity" from the ethnic musical sphere to Rock. Thus, at the Plant's concerts with the group Sensational Space Shifters, which took place in a number of European cities in July 2016, the distance from the ethnic principle of playing music is manifested in the weakening of the role of African folk instruments, as well as rhythmic organization of durations. The composition begins with the usual introduction of the vocal part, in which the performer varies the pitch sequence: the phrase sounds differently at each concert. The previous Rock riff follows up, however, it sounds in a shortened version. It contains only two motives from the entire

phrase of the original, alternating with each other. The tempo in the composition Black Dog sample of 2016 is moderate (Andante), because of which the product takes the form of a slow march, a heavy step. From ethnic musical elements there was a solo episode at the end of the song, performed at an accelerated pace and giving the music a dance character.

In parallel with the *cologo* and *fule* instruments of the solo part and the rest are the electric instruments of the group. Due to this reception, the sound inherent in rock music equalizes with ethnic timbres, while in the versions of 2014 ethnic colouring clearly dominates. Thus, the metamorphoses that take place with the composition of Black Dog for 45 years lead to the consolidation of two beginnings in it – rock music and ethnic musical material. The proportions of the content of the linguistic elements of these two fields change from time to time. To date, in the Black Dog elements of the musical languages of rock and ethnics are approximately in equal numbers. However, given the desire of R. Plant to the constant development, it is possible that the “vector” of his creativity can change again or perhaps, it might enter the next new dimension.

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