

“INTERESTING” HARMONIC AND TONAL SOLUTIONS IN PYOTR ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY’S ALBUM FOR CHILDREN, OP. 39

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SUMMARY. The present paper analyses, from a harmonic and tonal point of view the first piece (*Morning Prayer*) of the cycle *Album for Children*, op. 39 by P. I. Tchaikovsky. After the presentation of the historical and creative conjuncture in which the author wrote the pieces of this cycle, this is followed by the presentation of the shape. Then, within the formal sections are discussed the tonal and the harmonic solutions adopted by author. We ask to pay attention to the degree of complexity and the internal logic which may attain a Romantic miniature piece, composed in a choral style.

Keywords: Tchaikovsky, Album for Children, musical form, harmonic, tonal, romantic, miniature, piece, op. 39

In an assessment, usually we use the word “interesting” when we cannot find anything noteworthy concrete positive or negative, on the subject of the analysis.

In the context of this paper I am using in the title the word “interesting” in its real sense that is published by the *Explanatory Dictionary of the Romanian Language*²:

“INTERESTING”, adj. Which are interested, are of interests, noteworthy ♦ which draws attention; unusual, strange, bizarre, unique. From Fr. *intéressant*.

What is actually the interest? The significance we refer is the following: “*INTERÉS (...) 6. The quality to arouse the attention, to arouse curiosity by the importance, beauty, the variety of thing, of problem, of action, and so on? Attraction.*”³

General considerations

Concerning the piano literature we note that “Albums for Children” are of two kinds:

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² Dicţionarul Explicativ al Limbii Române, Ed. Academiei RSR, Bucharest, 1975, p. 434.

³ idem

1. Albums written by composers with the purpose to be sung by children;
2. Albums written by composers with the purpose to be sung by adults for children, in form of an audition.

The present album belongs to the first category, as it is a cycle of pieces written to be sung by children. The analyst has to appreciate what the composer has used into the technical means of the instrumental expressing, as well as the tonalities used and they must take into account the didactic aspect pursued by the composer – namely the degree of the technical and tonal facility. It should be noted as such, the fact that the author does not use basic tonalities, which have more than 3 alterations. Therefore, the pieces were conceived with the purpose of being introduced in the piano repertoire of the beginner instrumental classes.

The way in which this album was born, is told in the following quote: “In late April of 1878 (Note of Gabriela Coca: Tchaikovsky) returns in Russia. First he is traveling in Kamenka, and then he spends more time on the estate of Brailov of Nadezhda. Of course, Nadezhda - somewhere else! The beautiful Russian Spring and the carefree summer stimulate the make of new creations. He finalizes the two works aforementioned (note of Gabriela Coca: Sonata for Violin and Piano „*Souvenir d’un lieu cher*” and 12 Pieces for Piano – a composition in romantic style started in Italy) then compose songs. Also now he is mostly influenced by the world of ideas of Schumann, and under this influence he composes 24 small pieces (“Album for Children”).”⁴

In 1878 the composer was 38 years of age. He started studying composition at the age of 25 years, in 1865. In 1878 the author has an experience of 13 years of creative musical activity. How mature was his creative style at this time can be imagined by the works that precede the composition of the cycle “Album for Children”, as well as by those that are born in parallel with it and immediately after it.

Table 1

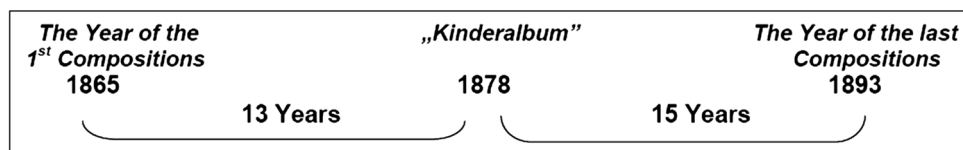
1874	Piano Concerto in B flat minor	Op. 23
1876	The Swan Lake - ballet	Op. 20
1877	<i>Valse scherzo</i> for Violin and Orchestra	Op. 34
1877	Sonata in G major for Piano	Op. 37

⁴ Falk, Géza, *Tchaikovsky's unusual life*, Ed. Rózsavölgyi & Co., Budapest, Hungary, 1940, p. 129.

1877	<i>The Seasons</i> for Piano	Op. 37a
1877	The Fourth Symphony in F minor for Orchestra	Op. 36
1878	<i>Yevgeny Onegin</i> - Opera	Op. 24
1878	24 Pieces for Piano „ <i>Album for Children</i> ”	Op. 39
1878	Violin Concerto in D major	Op. 35
1878	Liturgy of St John Chrysostom	Op. 41
1878	1st Suite for Orchestra	Op. 43
1879	Piano Concerto in G major	Op. 44
1880	Italian Capriccio for Orchestra	Op. 45

From the total of 80 opuses, op. 39 is situated about the middle of the road. The same situation indicates us also the structure on years of his creative path:

Table 2



These are only gleanings from the works with opus numbers of this period, but these are sufficient to figure out what the author is at this time in the fullness, in the middle of his creative activity.

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The reason I approached the analysis of the pieces is the fact that it was elected by one of my students as a subject of a graduation paper. As it can guide and also verify him, I must first analyse the musical pieces. The interesting tonal and harmonic solutions, whose observation, correct appreciation and statement exceed the level of training of a student graduating the music teaching subject, it is a pity to loose, because these pieces are small musical jewels, reflecting the composer's soul, who recalls nostalgically, in this context, his own childhood. At the same time, by the present work, I want to give a model of harmonic and tonal analysis, and a model of the construction of small strophic musical forms.

The analysis of the piece no. 1 of *Album for Children: Morning Prayer*⁵

E.g. 1

The image displays a musical score for the first piece of the 'Album for Children: Morning Prayer' by Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky. The score is written for piano and is divided into three systems of eight measures each. The tempo is marked 'Andante' and the time signature is 3/4. The score is annotated with structural labels: 'A' at measure 1, 'Av1' at measure 8, 'B' at measure 16, 'C' at measure 10, 'd' at measure 16, and 'e' at measure 22. The notation includes treble and bass staves with various musical symbols such as notes, rests, and dynamics like 'p' and 'pp'.

Already in the debut measures of this first piece, the composer surprises us with a full plagal cadence: I – V – IV – I, a succession what is not specific to the Romantic style. The piece is conceived as a BAR shape, with the structure **A Av¹ B**. The 24 measures of the piece are divided symmetrically in three musical periods, each of 8 measures. The piece appearance is a choral of 4 voices, in which the author embrace a Romantic style of harmonization, however framed in classic board of cars. The tempo and the metric are constants, *Andante*, 3/4. Within the 24 measures of the choral the melodic line is situated at the upper voice. The lower voices are the completion voices of the harmonic sonority.

⁵ The present analysis I made it based on the score edited by Anatoly Drozdov: "P.I. Tchaikovsky: Complete Collected Works", vol. 52, Ed. Muzgizh, Moscova, 1948, p. 139-170, Urtext Edition.

The first phrase is musically formulated as puritan as possible. Here are inline chords in a fundamental position. A variety in the context brings only the sixth chord of the 2nd degree in *G major* - the main tonality of the piece, and the authentic half close at the end of the phrase, achieved through the secondary degrees: VI – II₆ – III_# and with Picardy third in the 4th measure. The debut tonality - *G major* – is therefore a light coloured sound, through the *B major* chord (a third relationship specific to Romanticism) – an altered chord in *G major* – representing in this framework the dominant (the 5th degree) of the *E minor* tonality.

The second phrase (**b**) of the section **A**, in her 4 measures brings 4 chromatic modulations. So, we are witnessing a tonal agglomeration. Four tonalities in four measures constitute already a harmonization in a Romantic style. The chromatic chords by means of which Tchaikovsky achieved the modulations are the following:

Table 3

E minor: I _# ⁶ ₅ L ₄ = A major: V ⁶ ₅	A major: I ₄ ² = D major: V ₂	D major: I ₅ ⁶ L ₄	G major: II _# ⁶ ₅ = D major: V ⁶ ₅
Ms. 4	Ms. 5	Ms. 6	Ms. 7

In three of four cases Tchaikovsky alter the tonic chord of the 1st degree and only in one case the subdominant chord of the 2nd degree, with the purpose to arrive to the next dominant tonality.

In terms of dynamic, the composer highlights and blurs the modulations by waves of *crescendo* and *decrescendo*, the end of first section (measure 8) tapping the maximum dynamics of the first section. – *mezzoforte*.

The Av₁ section (measure 9-16) in her two phrases keeps the intense modulation profile of the previous phrase, the tonal changes are, however, more smooth. The author also uses here diatonic modulations. So:

Table 4

D major: IV = G major: I	D major: IV = G major: I
Ms. 9	Ms. 14

The chromatic chords used by Tchaikovsky are the following:

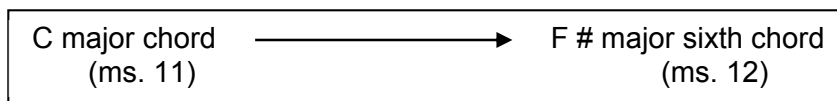
Table 5

G major: I_2 = C major: V_2	C major: $IV_2^{6\#}$ = B minor: V_6	B minor: $I_2^{4\#}$ = E minor: V_2	E minor: $IV_2^{4\#}$ = D major: V_2
Ms. 10	Ms. 12	Ms. 13	Ms. 13

We see here that the author performs modulations or through alteration the first degree in the main tonality, in the same as in the first section of the form, or through alteration the 4th degree.

The middle of this section represents also the point of symmetry of the entire piece (measure 12) – marked by the author by accent (>) and dynamic climax (*forte*). Harmonically, this climax adjoins two chords under axial (pole – anti-pole) relationship:

Table 6



After 2 measures without any alteration (ms. 10-11) in *crescendo*, the sixth chord in F # major in *forte*, as the 5th degree of the B minor tonality is a real audible surprise.

Starting from this, the climax points to the end of the dynamic profile and it draws a continuous *decrescendo* up to *piano* (ms. 16), then *diminuendo* up to the end.

The **B** section is emerging as an outcome of the two previous sections. A real *Abgesang!* As if by symbolizing a bow, the author composes a descending motif of G5 to G4, which he repeats sequentially one octave below, of G4 to G3. The last four measures of the piece, which are in a constant *diminuendo*, from G3 rise up to D5.

Except for the last 3 measures, in the entire section B pulsates in the bass a rhythm pedal in equal quavers on the G2. In the last 3 measures, the pedal point stops on the G2 sound, which is kept long.

In terms of tonality this is the most stable section. It begins in G major and out of its 8 measures only one measure modulates in D minor (ms. 21), then returns in G major. The modulation in D minor is made by altering the four-three chord of the 4th degree:

Table 7

G major: IV^{4#}_{3b} = D minor: VII⁴₃ - ⁴₂↳

From D minor the author returns in G major also by means of the 4th degree, whose third alters ascending.

Table 8

D minor: IV ↳ = G major: I

In this section Tchaikovsky uses altered chords without modulation purpose (having only a sound coloristic role), in the form of 6b – 5 retardations, the 6b’s maintained in full measure. The complete chord is:

Table 9

G major: I⁷_{6b} ----- ⁸₅
4 - 3 - 2 - 3

We see these harmonic solutions in the measures 17th and 19th.

As a conclusion, we note that a small three-strophic piece, practically can adopt a highly complex harmonic and tonal structure. These miniature pieces for children are true small musical jewels, and in these compositions the author felt the same creative pleasure, which an analyst feels when he discovers the inner logic of the work.

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