

Theatrical Overtures by Thomas Augustine

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ABSTRACT

Research of the overtures to the operas and masques of the English composer of the XVIII century Thomas Arne. Implementation of genre and composition types of Italian, French and one-part sonata overtures.

Keywords: Thomas Arne, opera, masque, overture.

Introduction

Thomas Augustine Arne (1710–1778) is a great English theatre composer in his generation who developed the national traditions in the conditions of prevalence of the Italian opera at the English stage and who is still not so well-known in the Russian musicology. In Great Britain he is considered to be an outstanding figure of the music and theatre art and one of the main figures of the history of the English music. He is an author of about 100 stage works (30 operas and 12 masques are among them), he collaborated with the leading London Theatres such as ‘Drury Lane’ and ‘Covent Garden’ and he also worked due to the orders of the Dublin Smock Alley Theatre, thereby contributed greatly into the history of the music theatre of Ireland. The great majority of Arne’s theatrical music appeared to be lost, but the scores of some works were saved wholly, the rest is going to exist as separate items in vocal collections. Our attention is directed to eight works made by the composer within 33 years and presenting a section of different genres shown at the English stage of the XVIII century: masques ‘Comus’ (1738), ‘Rule Britannia’ (1755), ‘Alfred’ (1740) and ‘The Fairy Prince’ (1771), operas ‘Eliza’ (1754) and ‘Artaxerxes’ (1762), comic opera ‘Thomas and Sally, or The Sailor’s Return’ (1760), pastiche ‘Love in a Village’ (1762).

Due to the studying of the history of their creation and stagings we can suppose that the works were made at the similar conditions (performing line-up, production place) and kindred genre models — a masque and an opera — up to the time of their making [2, 65]. However, while exploring them in more details there are clear differences among the compositions created on the basis of one genre model and increasing due to the degree of complication from earlier to later opuses, which are probably connected with the evolution of the composer’s works. It is rather clear on the basis of the analysis of the overtures. The overtures to the theatrical productions were made by Arne due to the different models without attaching them to a separate genre of a work. Taking eight compositions under studying all overtures there are going to be divided into three groups

according to the type of the composition model: Italian type, French (or French-Italian) type and onepart sonata overture. The Italian model includes the overtures of such masques as 'Alfred' and 'The Fairy Prince', opera seria 'Artaxerxes'. Its main characteristics are a three-part form, tempo contrast of parts 'fast-slow-fast', active type of music of the first part made on the basis of sonata logics, restrained lyrics of the second part and a dance final.

Arne used this model during different periods of his creative work and at different stages of the history of the Italian overture. 'Alfred' is referred to the period of the first success of the composer and the period of the model stabilization. The flourishing of the creative work of Arne ('Artaxerxes') coincides with domination of the Italian overture at the European stage. The creation of 'The Fairy Prince' was at the time of the composer's creative maturity and simultaneously exclusion of the model by one-part sonata overture. The overture to the masque 'Alfred' is made due to the Italian model 'fast-slow-fast', its composition characteristics are typical to the overture of such type. The form is considered to be organized in a complex way as each of three parts is represented as a finished structure. The first part (Es-dur) is written in the sonata form, i. e. having two themes of non-contrasting content and being differentiated due to the movement type; the second theme is held for the first time in the key of dominant (B-dur), appears in the development section and then in the reprise it sounds in the main key (B-dur). The development section is concentrated around the keys of the close kindred — B-dur and g-moll.

The second part (c-moll) — Andante — represents a simple three-part form with the middle of the developing plan. At its end there is a small final part representing some transfer between the parts where the main key is going to be returned. The third part (Es-dur) being a lively and impetuous final in the minuet genre is created due to the complicated three-part form with the shortened reprise and the developing middle part, where the first part is a simple threepart form with the modulation to the key of dominant B-dur with further returning to the main one in the middle section. In respect to the theme the parts are rather traditional. The main character of the theme of the first part is a heroic pathetic element expressed in the dotted march rhythm, duple metre, fast beat, impetuous movement of the sixteenth rhythmic values being periodically 'broken' by syncopes (especially in the second theme). The second part is a contrast to the first one not only due to the beat, but also to the theme which is rather close due to its content to the vocal music, it is full of trills and grace notes and it is intricate due to the rhythm. The minuet represents a sphere of the genre and dancing theme being joyous and impetuous, the beat is getting faster with the help of the change of 4/4 metre to 3/8 metre and constant pulsatile movement of the sixteenth rhythmic values.

The overture to the opera 'Artaxerxes' is also related to the Italian model, though the composer deviates from the permanent correlation of the tempos. The first part has an indication of Andante, but with the themes of the cheerful type which becomes solemn and exalted within the unhurried movement. Such beginning of the overture is probably connected with the plot of the opera talking about the royalty's hard fortune and too fast

tempo is inappropriate here. Due to the form the parts are made analogically to the parts of the overture to 'Alfred': the first one is a sonata form with a rather detailed development section, the second one is a simple three-part form and the third one is a complex three-part form with the contracted reprise. The only thing which differentiates this overture is considered to be continuity of its parts while performing as in the score the last note or the consonance of the previous part become the first ones in the beginning of the next one. According to it an *attaca* effect appears between the parts. The French model is represented in the overtures to the masques 'Comus', 'Rule Britannia' and the opera 'Eliza'.

According to our opinion it is explained by the fact that at the year of creation of 'Comus' the French overture was the leading type, but in the 1750s ('Eliza' and 'Rule Britannia') this type of the overture was restrained under the great influence of Handel. The typical peculiarities of the French overture are opposite to the Italian one: a tempo contrast 'slow-fast-slow', the main semantic accent is transferred to the second part generally being fugue. In that case the first part is probably taken as the slow entrance to the second one, and a slow coda usually balances the composition. As a variety there is a four-part 'French-Italian' (Y. S. Bocharov) overture [1, 188] which represents an overlay of the Italian model onto the French one: instead of the slow coda two sections such as slow and fast are introduced. The peculiarities of the French model also include an even metre and dotted rhythm of the first part, perfection of the second polyphonic section. The overture to the masque 'Comus' is made on the basis of the French model having slight differences in some details.

The tempo contrast is followed inaccurately: the second and third parts are written at the same *allegro* tempo, but the third part sounds more regular due to the change of 4/4 metre into 3/2 metre and it can be regarded as relatively slow. The forms of the parts and their interrelation are quite traditional: the first part is a simple three-part form in the quadruple metre being compact due to the scope, but it is supposed to perform it in the slow *largo* tempo; the second part is a fast triple fugue for 4/4; the third part is a complex three-part form. The theme of the overture is very interesting. The whole composition is held at the same key — D-dur. The music of the first part clearly reminds slow solemn processions being full of dotted rhythm forms and rare, but lively leading passages. The fugue of the second part is based on the active theme in the form of the folk music-making with the alternate development. The overture to the opera 'Eliza' represents mainly that French-Italian variety (it is also connected with the type of Italian *sonata da chiesa*) where four parts are located according to the principle 'slowfast-slow-fast'. Nevertheless it should be considered as a branch of the French overture as the main meaning here as well as in the previous case is based on the second part — fugue, but the rest parts probably fulfill the function of balancing of the composition more than its conceptual ending. The first part (F-dur) — *Largo* is written in the simple two-part form modeling into the key of *dominanta* (C-dur) in the second section.

Due to the theme type it reminds slow solemn processions, moreover the score composition corresponds to it — octet of string and wind (French horns and oboes)

groups. The second part of the overture (F-dur) is a developed four-voice fugue for two themes which main development includes holding due to the keys of the relation in the first degree. The third part (to be exact, section) is very small according to the scope — there are only 9 bars. However, due to the Grave tempo of 4/2, large rhythmic values (half, whole and double whole notes) and modal contrast in relation to the surrounding parts (f-moll) it is like an intermediate link between the fast second part and the fourth part in the medium tempo (but in comparison with the third one which is fast enough). The fourth part (F-dur) is a minuet in a three-part form which serves as a final genre. The model of one-part sonata overture can be found out in the comic opera ‘Thomas and Sally’. This type of the entrance part became popular in theatrical works of the 1770–1780s removing the Italian overture from the leading positions. However ‘Thomas and Sally’ was written in 1760 when the Italian type of overture was the main one. It is obvious that the composer anticipated the tendency having made the overture significantly shorter and given it mainly the function of the entrance preparing the performance, but not the music during which people should take their seats in the hall and have small talks.

The overture is made analogically due to the sonata parts of Italian overtures: presentation of short themes where the second theme is derivative from the main one, existence of the development section where the main theme is developed in a key way and then there is a production of the main and second themes in the main key — D-dur. So not the usage of the sonata form is rather unusual here, but the fact that it becomes independent, short and ample at the same time to fulfill the function mainly of the entrance to the opera. At the end of the development section there are two measures of the closing type where the tempo becomes slow abruptly that has to attract the spectators’ attention to the beginning of the opera acting. Thomas Arne worked in the sphere of theatre music in its different genres. The part of his compositions was dictated by the orders of the management of the theatres with which he collaborated, some compositions were made by the composer being in the artistic union with the librettist who made the composer be interested in him or with the libretto inspired him. But we can suppose that the liberty of his creative work involved not only the choice of the genre of the composition, but the choice of the type of the overture and its specific structural realization.

References

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