

UDK 782/784 (575.1)

**STYLISTIC TRANSFORMATIONS OF MUSICAL GENRES IN THE 20TH CENTURY  
AND THEIR SOCIO-AESTHETIC FOUNDATIONS**

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**Annotation:** This article examines the concept of genre in twentieth-century musical art, its development, and its role in musical creativity. Theoretical views of various art scholars are analyzed and evaluated through the lens of socio-aesthetic transformation. The study highlights the evolution of musical genres, their mutual influence, and the emergence of hybrid forms under new cultural and ideological paradigms of the twentieth century.

**Keywords:** genre, genesis, style, composer, form, category, sonata, vocal music.

## 1. Introduction

The problem of musical genre has become one of the central and urgent topics in modern music theory. In the twentieth century, rapid stylistic changes, cultural pluralism, and technological innovations led to the transformation of traditional genre boundaries. The interaction and synthesis of genres resulted in the emergence of new forms, attracting the attention of many musicologists.

Although scholars such as B. Asafyev, A. Alshvang, L. Mazel, V. Sukkerman, A. Dolzhanskiy, V. Konen, A. Sokhor, and M. Lobanova contributed significantly to the study of musical genres, there is still no unified definition or system for understanding the nature and function of genres in music.

In contemporary music theory, the problem of genre has become one of the central and most relevant topics of research. In particular, within the musical creativity of the twentieth century, the interaction among genres, the gradual disappearance of clear boundaries, and their development and synthesis gave rise to new genres — a process that has drawn considerable attention from musicologists.

Today, new theoretical perspectives have emerged regarding the evolution and developmental stages of musical genres. Although the issues of genre and genericity have been reflected in the research of B. Asafyev, A. Alshvang, L. Mazel, V. Sukkerman, A. Dolzhanskiy, V. Konen, A. Sokhor, and M. Lobanova, there is still no unified conclusion concerning the definition and essential features of genre.

For instance, if we take vocal creativity as an example, vocal music is considered a genre alongside instrumental music, while the romance is regarded as a genre parallel to the song. Moreover, mixed genres and forms such as fugue and variations are also used as compositional structures within various genre categories. Based on this, many musicologists deny the existence of rigid boundaries in defining the concept of genre. As Dolzhanskiy stated, “A genre is a type of

musical work characterized by various features such as structure, the composition of performers, the character of the piece, and the conditions of its performance.” [1].

Another group of scholars, such as L. Mazel and V. Sukkerman, emphasize the necessity of a comprehensive analytical approach, taking into account the structural organization of a musical work, its social function, as well as the conditions of performance and perception.

## 2. Methods

This research employs a comparative-analytical and historical-descriptive methodology, analyzing theoretical approaches and typological classifications of musical genres in the works of Russian, German, and Central Asian scholars. The study systematizes previous findings and evaluates them from a socio-aesthetic perspective, emphasizing the relationship between genre evolution and cultural context.

Primary theoretical sources include the writings of Asafyev (1973), Besseler (1978), Lobanova (1990), Nazaykinskiy (2003), Popova (1954), Sokolov (1994), and Sokhor (1971). The study also integrates historical evidence from European and Central Asian musical traditions to assess stylistic and structural

## 3. Results

The term genre (from French genre, Latin genus – kind, type) designates a class of musical works characterized by specific features of structure, performance, and artistic purpose. Historically, genres have evolved as stable categories of musical creativity reflecting social and cultural needs.

According to Dolzhanskiy, a genre represents “a type of musical work distinguished by its structure, performing ensemble, character, and performance context.” Mazel and Sukkerman emphasize that the analysis of genre must include social function, compositional structure, and the conditions of performance and perception.

Asafyev proposed a sociological division of genres into two main groups:

1. **Specific genres** – where performer and audience roles are clearly distinct;
2. **Mass genres** – where performer and listener merge into a single artistic community.

Classification Systems

Throughout history, various systems of genre classification have been developed.

1. **Besseler (1978)** proposed a chronological-functional model, distinguishing between presented (concert) and everyday (dance, religious, or labor) music.
2. **Popova (1954)** and **Sokhor (1971)** expanded this approach by analyzing genres according to performance conditions and social purpose.
3. **Sukkerman (1981)** grouped musical genres into three structural categories:
  1. **Lyrical genres** – song, nocturne, lullaby, serenade;
  2. **Epic genres** – hymn, ballad, rhapsody, overture;
  3. **Motor or dance genres** – march, etude, toccata, scherzo.

In contrast, Sokolov (1994) suggested a four-part typology based on artistic and functional criteria:

1. Pure music (instrumental, non-programmatic);
2. Applied music (ritual, functional);
3. Inter-artistic music (combined with text, drama, or choreography);
4. Applied-interactive music (vocal-dance, screen music).

From the late nineteenth to the twentieth century, many classical genres lost their typological stability. The Baroque principle of **in mixto generi** (Lobanova, 1990) – the mixture of styles and genres – reemerged with new vigor.

The informational explosion and technological progress of the twentieth century contributed to genre hybridization, the fusion of popular and academic music, and the expansion of cross-genre practices such as musicals, film scores, jazz symphonies, and electroacoustic works.

During this period, opera gradually ceded its dominance to symphonic and chamber forms. New hybrid genres such as chamber symphony, micro-symphony, and musical theatre emerged. Composers explored individual stylistic languages, redefining traditional tonal and formal systems.

Genre (from the French genre, Latin genus — kind, type) refers to categories of musical works distinguished by a specific set of characteristic features. The most general classification of genres divides all music into vocal and instrumental forms. However, like style and form, the concept of genre is polysemous and encompasses multiple meanings. The terms type, kind, and form can often be used as synonyms or near-synonyms for genre.

For example:

A) To distinguish a work within a group, terms such as variant, isotope, or isomer may be used;

B) To include a work within a broader group, one may use class, group, or family.

Nevertheless, none of these terms has retained as stable a significance in musical morphology as genre, which has become the central and defining concept.

The term genre entered Russian musical terminology through French traditions. Its root, *genos* (γένος), originates from Greek. Numerous related terms derive from this root, such as gene, genetics, eugenics, genesis, genealogy, genotype, gene pool, autogenic, homogeneous, and others. In French, *genos* is pronounced similarly to genre and corresponds to the Russian concept of *rod* (kind, category).

Genres, therefore, are historically formed and relatively stable types of musical works, which embody a number of criteria, including:

- a) a specific purpose (social, domestic, or artistic);
- b) particular conditions and means of performance;
- c) distinctive structural form and expressive character.

Thus, genre represents a complex system that integrates both structural and functional aspects of musical creativity [4].

In the above definition, we can observe that the emphasis is placed not so much on the genre itself, but rather on its underlying essence in a general sense.

If we consider genre as a single artistic category, it can be defined as follows:

Genre is a distinctive matrix (template) possessing a complex, genetically interconnected structure that forms a certain artistic integrity.

Through this formulation, it becomes possible to differentiate genre from the notions of style and form. For instance, style refers to the source or the author's creative manner, while genre answers the question of how and according to which genetic scheme a work is constructed. In this sense, genre functions as the model, matrix, canon, or foundation of a concrete musical composition.

It should be noted that genres originated from the real interaction between music and life, representing an artistic phenomenon that reflects various means of musical expression.

Genre plays a crucial role not only in composition, performance, and pedagogy, but also in the history and theory of music. The primary purpose of studying genres lies in their ability to determine the aesthetic value of music and to serve as a fundamental analytical basis for identifying the style of a specific work or composer.

Nevertheless, the theory of genres has been explored less extensively compared to the problem of musical form, and it is traditionally divided into three main groups. [4,118]:

1. The first group concerns the historical evolution of specific (concrete) genres, their structure, and expressive methods, which are studied directly through musical practice. This includes genres that emerged during the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, and the Baroque period, as well as those found in both professional and folk creativity, and even those that have appeared before our eyes in recent times. According to the encyclopedic dictionary published in Moscow in 1991, the number of such genres amounts to nearly 350.
2. The second group in the theory of musical genres deals with the problems of classification. The system of classification reflects the cultural and national characteristics of a given historical period.
3. The third group studies the fundamental essence of genre — that is, the prototypes and analogues of genre units found in other art forms, as well as their theoretical foundations beyond the field of music.

In addition, it is important to study genres from the perspective of terminology and conceptual systems.

From the standpoint of the first group, traditional classifications are still maintained. In theatrical and concert music, these include opera, ballet, operetta, sonata, symphony, concerto, oratorio, cantata, quartet, romance, and others. In the category of popular, domestic, and religious ceremonial genres, one may include the waltz, polka, folk and ballroom mazurkas, lapar, and chastushka. Although such genres are also present in professional musical creativity, many of them originated in everyday life and belong to folk traditions, often with anonymous authorship. The unifying feature that allows works from these two groups to be regarded as genres is their status as independent artistic compositions. Both groups intersect in certain ways; for example, the waltz may function both as a domestic dance and as an instrumental composition, or even as part of a symphonic work. Likewise, the internal laws governing each genre are not always strictly delineated. For instance, although the romance is an independent vocal work, it also appears within operas as various forms of arias. Conversely, while the aria is a component of opera, it also constitutes an independent genre in itself.

The use of such diverse terms in different contexts, along with the lack of precise and unified conclusions, makes the classification of genres a rather complex and multifaceted problem in contemporary musicology.

#### **4. Discussion**

The evolution of musical genres in the twentieth century demonstrates the dynamic relationship between artistic form, social function, and aesthetic ideology. Genre boundaries became increasingly fluid as composers sought new expressive means. The hybridization of genres not only reflects stylistic innovation but also the broader cultural transition toward postmodern pluralism.

According to Nazaykinskiy (2003), understanding a specific musical work requires a flexible methodological approach—combining social, structural, and aesthetic analyses. Genre thus functions as a matrix that unites compositional design, stylistic identity, and cultural semantics. Twentieth-century composers—from Stravinsky and Shostakovich to Schnittke and Pärt—demonstrated that genre synthesis could serve as both a creative tool and a philosophical statement about the interconnectedness of musical traditions.

Based on the above discussion, Nazaykinskiy identifies two main principles to be considered when analyzing a specific musical work.

1. In studying genres, one should select any criterion or research method depending on the intended purpose. For example, when examining the social nature of music, it is advisable to take into account the methodologies of G. Bessler, T. V. Popova, or A. N. Sokhor; while in the study of music in relation to other arts, the research approaches of Sokolov should be considered.

2. In order to obtain a complete and comprehensive impression of a musical work, it is necessary to make use of all classification systems, as they do not interfere with one another but rather complement each other.

Almost all classification systems are organized in a step-by-step (hierarchical) manner according to their position and level within the genre system. By the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, many musical genres had lost their typological stability, and new types of music began to actively influence one another. In Baroque musical culture, numerous hybrid (mixed) genres emerged, including the aria-concerto, arioso-concerto, choral concerto, and monodic chorale. In short, from the mass to the opera, we can observe the mutual influence of genre styles across virtually all forms of music.

M. Lobanova refers to such mixed types as “in mixto genri.” The term “in mixto genri” denotes the Baroque composers’ idea of uniting various styles and genres through technical means. This genre structure is typically built on contrasting principles such as “old – new” and “strict – free.” Furthermore, the gradual transformation and disappearance of classical artistic criteria in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries led to the emergence of a new concept of genre — the mixed genre, which complemented and enriched the purely “closed” genres.

The informational explosion of the twentieth century, accompanied by a rejection of universal traditions and classical models, encouraged the implementation of individual experiments in musical practice. Such transformations of genres can also be observed in the reinterpretation and re-creation of earlier works. In general, during the twentieth century, the opera — which had held a central position in the Romantic era — gradually ceded its place to instrumental and symphonic compositions, giving rise to new forms such as chamber symphonies, small symphonies, and musicals.

## **5. Conclusion**

The twentieth century marked a turning point in the history of musical genres. Traditional classifications were redefined as new hybrid and experimental forms emerged. The genre became not merely a structural unit but a cultural symbol of artistic innovation and individual expression.

Although the notion of genre remains complex and multifaceted, its evolution continues to shape modern musical thought. Future research should therefore integrate historical, cultural, and technological dimensions to fully understand the socio-aesthetic function of genre in contemporary music.

In conclusion, during the twentieth century, the concept of genre — which had not yet been fully established — became increasingly complex, reaching the highest stage of genre hybridization. This process has become even more evident today, as distinguishing between different genres poses significant challenges not only for listeners but also for professional composers and performers.

The main objectives and tasks of the new generation of composers have gradually shifted toward enriching contemporary music, reworking its means of expression, enhancing harmonic color, and fundamentally reforming the system of genres. Indeed, while the individual style, research, and creative explorations of each composer hinder the formation of a unified and definitive

conclusion about genres, they simultaneously contribute to the emergence of diverse and innovative genre forms within music.

These composers effectively utilized almost all musical means in an individual and creative manner, contributing to the creation of priceless masterpieces of musical culture and the birth of numerous new genres. In short, through their distinctive artistic activity, they succeeded in building a new form of classicism — the classicism of the twentieth century.

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