



The Semantic Space of Ukrainian National Universals in Olena Lys' Choral Diptych “By the Stairs to Heaven...”

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Abstract

Since 2014, the work of Ukrainian composers has held a mirror up to the events of the Russo-Ukrainian war. A piece from early 2014 by contemporary composer Olena Lys is considered in this article. The piece begins with the composer's reflection on the events of Maidan in winter 2014 in the form of a choral diptych based on Vasyl Dovzhyk's poem “By the Stairs to Heaven...”. In its two parts, it illustrates the death of the Maidan defenders (in the first part) and the mother's prayers for her dead son (in the second part). The present article focuses on a semantic analysis of Ukrainian symbols in both the libretto and the musical text, ultimately suggesting that Olena Lys and Vasyl Dovzhyk do not reconstruct the past: they comprehend the spiritual values of the Ukrainian people in the contemporary context in a new way.

Keywords

Olena Lys' works; Vasyl Dovzhyk's work; the poetic text; choral music; the image of mother

Introduction

The study of art by detecting the universal categories present in it has generally been represented in the humanistic fields of philosophical, culturological and literary knowledge. This approach is connected to defining the phenomenon of humanity, and it has gradually become a methodological model in the field of

musicology as well. Indeed, this appeal to universal categories broadens musicological interdisciplinary connections within the humanities.

The term “universals” began to be used in the 1920s and is connected to the names of scholars such as Donald Brown, Clifford Geertz, Georg Murdock, and John Passmore. Brown, for example, considers universals in the cultural, social and behavioural realms, as well as in the realms of language and the mind, and notes: “In the cultural realm, human universals include myths, legends, daily routines, rules, concepts of luck and precedent, body adornment, and the use and production of tools; in the realm of language, universals include grammar, phonemes, polysemy, metonymy, antonyms, and an inverse ratio between the frequency of use and the length of words.”¹

Within the academic discourse in Ukraine, the ideas from the theory of universals are best represented in the works of Olena Kolesnyk, Serhii Krymskyi, Oleksandr Kyryliuk, and Myroslav Popovych. In discussing universals as cultural forms that are prevalent in social practice and common for different societies, scholars use synonyms such as “the invariant structures,” “the worldview constants,” and “the constants of existence.”

Each people or nation, so long as it exists, accumulates its own national symbols and signs which realise a national or ethnic identity in the context of universal components. The remark of the Serhii Krymskyi’s concerning differentiation of the national and the universal is thus quite reasonable; on his view, the assimilation of general human values characterises the path of national development.² Among the national universals of Ukrainian culture, Krymskyi names the wisdom of life (spiritual mind) and the humanistic values of the baroque epoch (the conception of the value of the free personality, the heroic-adventurous spirit of the Cossack state and the understanding of a person as a separate world or a centre of a special symbolic world order), which have, in due course, been realised in the national culture and art.³

The appeal to eternal images is not a reconstruction of the past but rather a wish to relive and rethink the constants their worldview. Traditionally, knowledge about the past is consonant with the present. Ukrainian national universals, coded in the musical and verbal texts of the choral diptych, are presented in the contemporary cultural space as spiritual values of Ukrainian people.

In this article, we consider the manifestations of Ukrainian culture as an integral text that contains its own signs and symbols, ultimately signifying the culture’s national code. In the context of this approach, we analyse Olena Lys’

¹ Donald Brown, “Human Universals, Human Nature & Human Culture,” *Dædalus* 133, no. 4 (fall 2004): 47.

² Serhii Krymskyi, *Under the Sign of the Wisdom* (Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, 2008), 315.

³ *Ibid.*, 315.

choral diptych "By the Stairs to Heaven..." and assess presence of symbols expressing the details and uniqueness of Ukrainian culture on the various levels of verbal and musical language.

Olena Lys and Vasyl Dovzhyk – Creators of the Diptych

The results of the collaboration between Olena Lys and Vasyl Dovzhyk include the opera *Esther* (based on the biblical story, the libretto by Vasyl Dovzhyk), the cycle *The Seasons*, a choral diptych "By the stairs to Heaven...", choral works for children, and the song "Reeds write on water." Dovzhyk wrote the libretti for three operas; while the lyrics for the choral works were written in partnership with Volodymyr Zubyt'skyi, Olena Lys, Oleh Marzynkiv'skyi, Liudmyla Matviichuk, Kyrylo Stetsenko, and Viktor Stepurko. He has also translated twenty theatre plays, while a considerable portion of his oeuvre is dedicated to children. Dovzhyk's creative activities cover more than half a century of cultural formation of the Ukrainian mentality. Indeed, on its own, it could constitute a special research subject. In the context of this article, we characterise his literary and poetical patrimony, because the poetic text plays a crucial role in understanding the content of a choral work.

Popular lyrics, deep philosophical works, rhymes for children and stirring love poetry constitute Vasyl Dovzhyk's multi-genre poetic palette. Each of these genres strikes with the power of words – sincere, metaphorical and free of traditional poetic forms. His creative activity began in 1970s, yet his poetry is deprived of the conjuncture characteristic of the time. Another specific trait of his style is an amazing and nearly folk melodiousness. Separate poems, as well as the lines in those poems, overflow into each other like breath. The soul of long-suffering Ukraine is reflected in them. His poetic works are marked by sincerity, honesty, and intransigency. The poet himself has argued that all that is reasonable, kind and eternal, germinating in the wisdom of the people, in art and in poetry, is of the utmost importance to him. In March 2022, because of the Russian invasion to Ukraine, Vasyl Dovzhyk evacuated to Brandýs nad Labem-Stará Boleslav (the Czech Republic), where he died on May 30th, 2022.

The fact that Olena Lys chose Vasyl Dovzhyk's poetry indicates her personal high level of culture, defined civil position, philosophical attentiveness, and positive attitude towards nature, the surrounding world and people. Her⁴ choral

⁴ Lys Olena Volodymyrivna (born in 1978) is a contemporary Ukrainian composer, pianist and teacher. She graduated from Tchaikovsky National Music Academy of Ukraine (L. Kolodub's class of composition and orchestration), then completed a guiding assistantship there as a post-graduate work (Yu. Ishchenko's class) and received the O. Steblyanko Award (1996). Her works are performed at the festivals of classical and contemporary Ukrainian music ("Premieres of the season," "International Forum of Young Music," "Kyiv-music-fest," "Musical Tribune of Kyiv

diptych “By the Stairs to Heaven...” (with lyrics by Vasyl Dovzhyk⁵) is dedicated to the Heroes of Heavenly Hundred. They created it during the Maidan period of 2014. As the composer remembers, the musical idea came first, and then Vasyl Mykhailovych picked it up and wrote two separate poems: “By the Stairs to Heaven...” and “May You Cover the Ground, Periwinkle...” As Lys states in a personal conversation, “It is always difficult to aestheticise death, you have to lay into the ground to get to the Heaven” (Olena Lys “Alien”).⁶ The premiere of the choral diptych took place on June 8th, 2014 at the Ruthenia Festival, where it was performed by the Khreshchatyk academic chamber choir conducted by the artistic director of the collective, Honoured Artist of Ukraine Pavlo Struts.⁷

The two artists created the verbal and music texts in parallel, but in close interaction. The syncretism of the music and the lyrics, which reinforce each other, is thus quite perceptible in the sound of the choral score. Dovzhyk’s poetry is deep and philosophical, while reflecting his boundless love for his land and people. Contemporary readers and listeners compared it to the poems of Hryhorii Skovoroda, as Dovzhyk’s texts are sincere and open: they resound on a “bare” string. He always sympathises his people’s tragedy, while comprehending the historic events in Ukraine.

The stylistic features of the musical score include extraordinary melodic expressiveness, “timbre personification and symbolisation, increased attention to the harmony’s sound, and, in the same time, assimilation of deep intonation features of Ukrainian Melos and their synthesis with the achievements of contemporary composition techniques.”⁸ In her vocal music, Lys prefers Christian spiritual texts and the texts of contemporary Ukrainian poets. She thus exhaustively reveals the person’s emotional and psychological world by detecting the multiple meanings of the literary text.

Youth,” “Ruthenia,” “Askoldiv Glas” [“Askold’s Voice”], etc.). She now lives and works in Prague (the Czech Republic).

⁵ Vasyl Dovzhyk (Vasyl Mykhailovych Dolzhykov, 1943–2022) is a Ukrainian poet and prose writer, translator, dramatist, theatre and cinema actor; prominent in the leading literary programmes of the National Radio Company of Ukraine; member of the National Union of Writers (1980) and of the National Union of Theatre Workers; he was also the Honoured Artist of Ukraine (2006), as well as recipient of the literary prizes named after: O. Kopylenko, O. Vyshnia, V. Yukhymovych, Lesya Ukrainka, S. Oliinyk, and M. Starytskyi. Finally, he was the recipient of the International Prize “For Charity” from the International Charitable Foundation “Ukrainian Hut” (2013).

⁶ From a private conversation with Olena Lys March 11th, 2024.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Olena Nemkovich, “Lys Olena Volodymyrivna,” in *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Ukraine*, 2016, <https://esu.com.ua/article-54795>.

"By the Stairs to Heaven..." – the First Part of the Diptych

In the lyrics and in music we can perceive the great spiritual transformation of the Ukrainian, who overcomes terrible trials, accepts them and thanks God for them. He dreams of a happy Ukraine, for whose sake he goes out to Maidan. This figure is a personification of the people of Ukraine, who are going to Calvary and, for centuries, have been putting their lives on the altar to ensure their native country's bright future. The first piece of the choral diptych can conditionally be divided into two parts. The first two couplets trace the steps of the 2014 Maidan defenders and their ascent to Heaven. The third couplet declares Ukraine as paradise on Earth.

Lyrics in the First Part of the Diptych

The semantic space of the lyrics reveals the significance of the basic archetypes of the Ukrainian mentality – that is, of personal freedom, hero, home, field, temple, and motherhood (Ukraine). The archetype of personal freedom signifies the freedom-loving spirit of the Ukrainian people. This results in a lack of acceptance of any influence, imposed from the outside, and asserts the person's own responsibility for himself. This psycho-behavioural reaction during periods of crisis differentiates the Ukrainians from other peoples. It is a manifestation of the adventurous-Cossack reaction, which proved to mobilise spiritual and physical resources. The Cossack state in the seventeenth through eighteenth centuries and the revolutions of 2004 and 2014 during Ukraine's independence were bright manifestations of the love of freedom. The archetype of the hero, actualised in 2013–2014, is also connected to freedom. Dovzhyk portrays the Maidan heroes' highest degree of courage in the first two couplets ("A step, and another step – these are steps by the stairs to heaven... another silent cry will burn the heart... the blood is boiling in the temples, counting the time!").

In the semantic space of the third couplet, the symbols indicating the archetypes of Ukrainian culture such as home, field, temple, and light manifest brightly. The archetype of home appears as the parental home, the small home-stead ("A cherry-tree is blooming near the hut under the rainbow, and the God is bearing sweet honey of goodness and the perfumes of study.") and also one's self-awareness as part of a family in a chain of generations ("The daily bread and running of fertile years!"). The archetype of the field is connected to the life topos ("The falcon is still sucking the juice of earth for his flight... The sunflower is knocking more and more years out of its kettledrums"). It is fragile, because Ukrainian culture is signified by periods of loss of identity ("Forgive me, country of Ukraine, dear mother!"). This problem then became reality again because of the events of Euromaidan. The archetype of the temple signifies a sacral place

(“My land, a Paradise of happiness and warmth!”). It contains spirituality (“And paradise defended does not calm my heart...”) and morality (“I thank you for joys and tortures!”), as based on Christian ethics. The archetype of light signifies strength of spirit, heart and love (“Great God, Light God, thank You!”).

The expressiveness that is characteristic of the poet is present in these lyrics. This includes assonance and alliteration on the phonetic level. On the level of punctuation, the use of exclamation point or ellipses is notable. The ellipsis at the end of each line of the first couplet indicate uncertainty, an unexpected situation and a frozen reaction in assessing terrible events. The exclamation points finish all the sentences of the second and the third couplets. In the second couplet, they have the character of affirmative speech about the actions of the Maidan defenders (“The ‘Forward march!’ is still frightening as a raven’s or vulture’s cry! The blood is boiling in the temples and is counting the time!”), while in the third, they signify emotional enlightenment and the lifting of spirits (“My homeland, a paradise of happiness and warmth! I thank you for joys and tortures!”).

The assonance in the lines “The falcon is still sucking the juice of earth for his flight” (“Shche sokil sik zemli usotue v polit”), “The sunflower is knocking more and more years out of its kettledrums” (“Shche lit i lit v litavry soniakh vybyvaie”), and “The daily bread and running of fertile years” (“Shchodennyi khlib i plidnykh rokov big”) gives the lyrics a musicality through the fusion of sound. The alliteration in the lines “The ‘Forward march!’ is still frightening as a raven’s or vulture’s cry!” (“Shche krukom ‘Krokom rush!...”) and “The blood is boiling in the temples and is counting the time!” (“U skroniah krov kypyt vidlikiuchy lik”) sharpens the pronunciation, echoing the steps of the defenders on earth and on their way to heaven. This ascension of the heroes to is associated with a baroque comprehension of human life as a spiritual path from the self to God, as well as with acceptance of one’s destiny as a transition to the next rung on the path to the Almighty. Therefore, at the end of the song, Dovzhyk repeats the appeal to the God twice in the vocative: “Bozhe! Bozhe” (“O my Lord! My Lord!”), as if to emphasise the turning point the person has reached. In the concluding lines, the archetype of light is beaming, which signifies rebirth, enlightenment and life. The name of God in this context is associated with light itself, which the defenders and the song itself have reached.

The Musical Text in the First Part of the Diptych

The details of the organisation of pitch elevation rely on a sound production that is smooth. It is rare to encounter ascending perfect fifths at the beginning of phrases as an impulse to the spiritual ascent (Example 1).

Example 1 "By the Stairs to Heaven..." measures 1–7

Сл. Василя Довжика Муз. Олени Лис

Andante con moto

Soprano *p* І крок це кро-ки схо-да-ми до *mp* не-ба...

Alto *p* Ще крок... схо-да-ми до *mp* не-ба...

Tenor *p* Ще крок-це кро-ки схо-да-ми до *mp* не-ба...

Bass

4

т. *p* Ще зойк ні-мий вог-не-нно сер-це об-пе-че... Нур-

лт. *p* Ще зойк ні-мий вог-не-нно сер-це об-пе-че... Нур-

п. *p* Ще зойк... вог-не-нно сер-це об-пе-че... Нур-

с. *p* Не-ба... Об-пе-че... Нур-

The culminating phrase "Great God, Light God, thank You!" begins with an ascending minor sixth in the soprano part, which signifies the next stair on the spiritual way. The widening of the choral score's diapason, first in the upper voice, points to the ascent, breakthrough and the way to the light (Example 2).

Example 2 “By the Stairs to Heaven...”, measures 54–59

53
ра - до - щі і му - ки! Ве - *ff* ли - кий Бо - же
ра - до - щі і му - ки! Ве - *ff* ли - кий Бо - же
щі і му - ки! Ве - *ff* ли - кий Бо - же
ра - до - щі і му - ки! Ве - *ff* ли - кий Бо - же

57
світ - лий, *mf* дя - ку - ю То - бі! Ве -
світ - лий, *mf* дя - ку - ю То - бі, Бо - же! Ве -
світ - лий, *mf* дя - ку - ю То - бі! Ве -
mf

The juxtaposition of tonalities (more often at a distance of a minor third, that is, C# minor, A minor, E minor, Bb major [G minor], D minor) is characteristic of modal-harmonic filling. In the culmination of the piece, the composer goes to her favoured flat keys (Bb major [G minor]), ultimately finishing the piece in D minor. Notable here is the changing of the mode from minor to major, which is a sign of glorification and thankfulness to the God – that is, man’s achievement of the light.

**“May You Cover the Ground, Periwinkle...” –
the Second Part of the Diptych**

The second part of the diptych “May You Cover the Ground, Periwinkle...” is written for a mixed choir and soprano solo. The composer defines it as a metaphoric prayer-lullaby. It is a mother’s monologue, her prayer to the God for the

son throughout his life and after his death. The mother's unspeakable pain is perceived in this part of the diptych. Pavlo Struts, the conductor of the Khreshchatyk chamber choir, had to change the soloists several times because they were not able to sing the lullaby to the end without tears.⁹

Images-symbols in the Second Part of the Diptych

The symbolism of the second part of the diptych is obvious in the very title of the piece, because the periwinkle is a symbol of Ukrainian culture and has several meanings. First, the plant is a sign of the eternity of existence and the vital force – it is the herald of the spring. Second, it is associated with a handsome young man ("And behind her Ivanko, how the periwinkle curls;" "Oh, Yanku, my Yanku, the cross periwinkle"). The third meaning is the memory of the dead (hence the cross periwinkle beneath the cross on the grave). The plant is also a symbol of the nation, which it protects from evil forces and witchcraft. The periwinkle was embroidered on shirts and towels for good luck and to ensure unfading love. All of these meanings are present in the lyrics to the second part of the diptych.¹⁰

The second symbol that appears in the piece is the image of mother. This is not new in Olena Lys' works. In her song "The Left Leg Falls Asleep" (lyrics – Hryhorii Falkovych) a tender and loving mommy is portrayed brightly in the music and lyrics. The composer reveals feminine images in her vocal pieces with various semantic content in "The Alien" and "Dawn Tenderness." The latter resembles "The Left Leg falls Asleep" in character: a young woman, inspired by the beauty of nature, is depicted. She is happy, full of energy of life and full of love for all that lives. "The Alien," where the war plot is developing, is reminiscent of the second part of the diptych in its emotional-figurative plot.

The image of the mother is deeply respected by Ukrainian artists. It has become archetypal in Ukrainian culture, and this archetype emerged under the influence of humanity's magical connection to the earth, which is strong in the Ukrainian ethno-mentality. It is also associated with the cult of woman, mother, guardian (Berehynia), earth, and Ukraine and defines the respectful treatment of women in the family and society. In the sacral sense, the archetype of mother is embodied in the image of the Mother of God, which is respected in Ukrainian culture.

Lyrics in the Second Part of the Diptych

The affinity with folk sources, filled with the symbols of Ukrainian mentality, is present in both the lyrics and the musical text. Dovzhyk's lyrics are extraordinarily

⁹ Conversation with Olena Lys November 3rd, 2024.

¹⁰ Vitalii Zhaivoronok, *Signs of Ukrainian Ethnoculture: Dictionary-Reference* (Dovira, 2006), 27.

expressive using lexical, word-forming, grammar, and stylistic means. The text of the song consists of folklore lexemes based on typical semantic-associative connections. The word combinations comprise epithets and lexeme-symbols and create folkloric phraseologies: “green periwinkle, honey lips, cornflower eyes, give the years of happiness in love and hope, give, God, give!” They are endowed with expressiveness and reveal the aesthetic ideals of the Ukrainian national image of the world.¹¹ Stylistic expressiveness, as in folk sources, is reinforced by affectionate diminutive nouns, which gain lyrical colouring: “barvinochku” (“little periwinkle”), “synochku” (“dear little son”), “ochka” (“dear charming pretty eyes”), “vustonka” (“lips”), “sokolyku” (“falcon”), “leliie” (“lily”), “slidochku” (“trace”), and “sadochku” (“garden”). Dovzhyk uses most of the nouns in a diminutive form. It gives the text exceptional warmth and soulfulness, because the diminutives create emotional colour reminiscent of Ukrainian lyrical folk songs.

The next characteristic of the lyrics in the context of the peculiarities of semantic space that is natural to the Ukrainian mentality is the use of the vocative. This has both semantic and syntactic functions in the text, as well as expressive, axiological, emotional, and emotive ones. It helps to establish contact. The use of the vocative case is also a feature of folkloric texts, which indicates its ancient origins. It is an interesting characteristic of the Ukrainian language and gives the language a certain harmoniousness. Dovzhyk uses the vocative case with lexical and grammatical diversity: “do Boga, syna, barvinku.” The poet’s use of metaphorical language broadens the lexical diapason of the vocative case, in particular, in personified forms (“sokolyku,” “barvinochku”), and some become expressive lexically (“leliie”).

Let us dwell separately on the vocative “Dai, Bozhe, dai!” (“Give, Lord, give!”). Syntactically, it functions as a refrain, because it is repeated at the end of the first two couplets and so acquires the character of an incantation. Repetition of the verb in the imperative form reinforces the mother’s request. This stable word combination for expressing wishes has religious roots. The Ukrainians, as a people absorbed in Christian morality, use the expression as an appeal to God for blessing and help. In the mother’s mouth it becomes a symbol of hope and her desire to protect her son throughout life.

The Musical Text in the Second Part of the Diptych

In the musical text of the second part of the diptych, the affinity with folklore is revealed in variable meter, flexible rhythm, agogics, rubato, chromatic sounds and metro-rhythmic organising of melodic movement in choral parts and the

¹¹ Halyna Mykytiv, “Expressive Symbol in Ukrainian Folk Lyrical Songs,” *Current Problems of Slavic philology* 23, no. 4 (2010): 243.

soprano solo. The details of the organisation of pitch elevation rely on smooth voice guidance. Lys prefers movements of the melody based on the seconds and thirds. The line of the bass is smooth, too, which enhances the general lyrical context of the choral score (Example 3).

Example 3 "May You Cover the Ground, Periwinkle...", measures 1–8

Сл. Василя Довжика для змішаного хору Муз. Олени Лис

♩ = 50

Soprano *p* Сте - ли - ся, бар - ві - но - ку! Рос - ти, рос - ти, мій си -

Soprano *pp* М -----

Alto *pp* М -----

Tenor

Bass

Sopr. *mp* 3

Sopr. *p*

Alt. *p*

Ten.

Bas.

ноч - ку! В те - бе оч - ка во - лош - ко - ві, в те - бе вус - тонь - ка ме - до - ві...

The organising of metro-rhythmic structures, the short duration of the notes and melisma link the piece with lamentations, which is characterised by rhythmical flexibility and *rubato*. Long-lasting notes in choral parts create a harmonic pedal and make the rhythmically diverse solo soprano melody more expressive. The harmonic development is connected with the musical structure of the piece. It is realised on both the macro- and micro-levels. Modal and tonal changes happen during the second and third couplets. The quantity of such changes always augments in the next stanza. Thus, the first couplet is kept in a single tonality (E minor), the second one in F minor and E minor. In the third couplet, modal and tonal fullness becomes more complex: G minor – E minor – C# minor – G# minor – A minor – G# minor. This is not only connected with the dramatic development, but also with the increase in the emotional tension of the mother's prayer. The general tendency in all of the couplets is an absence of any reliance on the tonic. The melody seems to be in a constant state of searching for stable tones. The choral blending does not give the melody any such support, either.

The ends of the musical structures (phrases, periods, couplets) have interesting harmonic decorations. Here long-lasting harmonic verticals of distant kinship appear (Eb major, Ab major) on the words “Dai, Bozhe, dai!” (“Give, Lord, give!”) (Example 4).

Example 4 “May You Cover the Ground, Periwinkle...,” measures 9–14

2/4

Sopr. дай, Бо-же, дай! *fp* > *mp* Да-руй лі-та шас-ли-ві-ї у лю- *mf*

Sopr. *fp* > *p*

Alt. *fp* > *p*

Ten. *p*_M.....

Bas.

12

Sopr. *mf* бо - ві і на - ді - ї, *mp* дай, *mf* Бо - же, *p* дай!

Sopr. *mp* *p* *mf* *p*

Alt. *mp* *p* *mf* *p*

Ten. *mp* *p* *mf* *p*

Bas. *mp* Бо - же, *p* дай! *mf* *p*

Those stoppings sound like bright flashes in the texture of the choral score. They are perceived as guidelines to movement, not only in the musical text, but also in life: they are guidelines of the movement towards God – the highest spiritual authority and the rule of human life. The modal change in the final zone (the transition to the flat tonal sphere) resembles the first part. This harmonic contrast highlights the mother's anguish and directs our thought to the Almighty. On the micro-level, the development of the harmony is connected to the composer's use of chromatic degrees (VI \sharp , IIb) characteristic of folk scale modes. The absence of tonal stability and the gravitation to modality signify the mother's excitement semantically, her worry for the son's destiny, her indescribable sorrow and her longing for the dead child. This psychic pain achieves its climax in the third couplet, where each phrase is signified by a change in the modal and tonal centre. The phrases "Where are you, my son? My falcon, my lily, who has pity on you now, my son?" achieve the highest degree of emotional tension and recreate the mother's pain and her sorrow for her dead son.

The ascending perfect fifth serves as a unifying principle for all three couplets. It begins all the couplets of the song. The last motif of the mother's prayer "My son?!" (G \sharp – D \sharp) is built on it. The leitmotif gives intonation and dramaturgical integrity to the piece. So, with the help of verbal and musical expressive means, the authors have created the image of a mother praying for her son throughout her life. This image is similar to the that of the Mother of God created in the Lenten chants "Stabat Mater."

Conclusions

The choral diptych “By the Stairs to Heaven...” by Olena Lys (with lyrics by Vasyl Dovzhyk) is characterised by its deep content and the use of symbols of Ukrainian ethnic culture. Grounded in the folklore tradition, the authors organically reflected these symbols in the choral score. The audience feels in its sounding the syncretism of the words and the music, which enhance each other. The Christian morality, which is set deep in Ukrainian mentality, is realised in the conceptual space of the first part. It is first a confession (“Forgive, the country Ukraine, our dear mother”) and then – a thanksgiving (“Great, lightful Lord, thank You!”). This consequence in the dramaturgy of the poetic text is associated with the baroque spiritual path – the motion from awareness of one’s own self up to God, to the highest authority, an achievement of the peak of earthly life and therefore of humanity’s grasping after the meaning of existence. The image of the mother praying for her son appears in the second part. In its emotional content, it is similar to the image of the Mother of God praying for Jesus as she stands under his crucifix. The appeal that Olena Lys and Vasyl Dovzhyk make to eternal images is not a reconstruction of the past; rather, it is a desire to experience and comprehend the Ukrainian people’s spiritual values anew in the context of contemporary events.

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