

ŠTĚPÁN RAK'S GUITAR CREATIVITY IN THE CONTEXT OF INTERNATIONAL INTERACTIONS

Stryzhyboroda Petro

A striking page in European guitar art in the second half of the XX – beginning of XXI centuries was Štěpán Rak's art, a Czech guitar player of Ukrainian origin. His multifaceted activities, covering solo performance, art of the composer and arranger, teacher and supervisor, have repeatedly been noted by contemporaries, music critics in many countries. Due to his talent, incredible hard work, perseverance and originality of guitar playing technique, variety of themes and stylistics of performed works, he became one of the most popular performers and educators in the modern guitar world. However, to date, the achievements of Š. Rak have not been properly evaluated and put into scientific circulation in musicology.

The artist's personality and art have long been unknown to the Ukrainian listener, as information about his Ukrainian origin has only recently been revealed. The artist is only briefly mentioned in leading editions by modern scholars of academic guitar art¹.

For the first time the information about Š. Rak was revealed in Ukraine in speech at the International conference «Ukrainian Diaspora: Problems of Research» at the National University «Ostroh Academy» in 2010 by the famous Ukrainian scientist, philologist and folklorist Mykola Mushynka (Prešov, Slovakia), who later published the incredible history of Ukrainian origin by Š. Rak². Later, Russian-language publications of Daria Rokosovskaja's interview with Š. Rak were published, which summarized his activities.³

Performances with solo concerts in Uzhgorod, Khust (Transcarpathian region), Kyiv, planned tour around Ukraine lead to a detailed analysis of the guitarist's creative activity, introduction to the scientific circulation in Ukrainian musicology of his artistic – performing, composer, pedagogical and methodological achievements, require generalization and theoretical processing.

The sources of the study were materials from the artist's personal web site⁴, sheet and sound documents. Some conclusions emerged from personal communication with the guitarist in the Czech Republic⁵.

The purpose of the article is a general work analysis of Štěpán Rak, the guitarist, which covers the performing and composer aspects in the pan-European context of the guitar art development in the second half of the XX – beginning of the XXI centuries. Priority is given to the expression of Slavic features in the artist's creativity. It has to be outlined that the guitar, as an ancient instrument of the lute type, developed most in Western European countries in the Baroque and Romantic era. Instead, in the Slavic countries, it began to spread actively in the XIX and XX centuries, when it became one of the popular instruments of home music, later

¹ Davydov M. (1998). *Problemy rozvytku akademichnoho narodno-instrumentalnoho mystetstva v Ukraini: Zb. statei*. K.: Vyd-vo im.O.Telihiy. 207 s.; Ivannikov T. (2018). *Hitarne mystetstvo XX stolittia yak fenomen tvorchosti: monohrafiia*. Kamianets-Podilskyi: PP. Zvoleiko D. 392 s.; Fan Din Tan (1999). *Hitara v sovremennoj muzykalnoj zhizni*. Naukovyi visnyk NMAU im. P.I. Chaikovskoho: Muzychne vykonavstvo. Kyiv. V. 3. S. 154–161.

² Mushynka M. (2010). *Vsesvitno vidomyi hitaryst Stepan Rak i yoho biolohichna maty Vasylyna Slyvka*. Naukovi zapysky Natsionalnoho universytetu «Ostrozka akademia». Istorychni nauky. V. 15. Ostroh: Vydavnytstvo Natsionalnoho universytetu «Ostrozka akademia». S. 162–176.

³ Rokosovskaja D. (2015). *Interviu so S. Rakom*. I. Ni razu v Belarusi..., <http://queenguitar.by/content/ni-razu-v-belarusi-chast-1>; II. Ekstraordynarnost' i kontsert dlia ovets..., <http://queenguitar.by/content/ekstraordinarnost-i-koncert-dlya-ovec-chast-2>; III. Vdokhnovenye v astrolohyi..., <http://queenguitar.by/content/vdohnovenie-v-astrologii-chast-3>

⁴ Štěpán Rak (Homepage), <http://www.stepanrak.cz/>

⁵ Stryzhyboroda P. (2018). *Materialy interviiu zi S. Rakom*.

established itself in the academic professional culture.

«The guitar art of the Eastern European countries assimilated the cultural traditions and achievements of the leading Western European guitar schools, first of all, the Spanish», – says T. Ivannikov⁶. The first were the achievements of the countries close to Spain, Italy, France – the Balkan Peninsula, later – Polish, Czech, Russian, Ukrainian schools. These traditions were actively developed in the XX – early XXI centuries in the context of academic music. The creative activities of the leading contemporary artists of these regions – Jan Yurkovsky, Martin Zalewski, Jan Kowalczyk (Poland), Dushan Bogdanovich (Serbia), Rossana Balkanski (Bulgaria), Kosyantyn Smaha, Jan Pukhalsky, Mykola Mykhaylenko, Volodymyr Dotsenko (Ukraine). Among the Slavic country guitarists, the work of Štěpán Rak is particularly distinguished – a guitar virtuoso of world importance, a professor at the Prague Academy of Fine Arts, a Czech guitarist and a composer.

He was born on August 8, 1945 in the Ukrainian village of Oleksandrivka, Khust district of Transcarpathia, at the end of World War II. His real last name is Zakoliansky. He moved to Prague (Czechoslovakia) with his mother, Vasylyna Slyvka, but due to an unfortunate coincidence, in the fall of 1946, he remains without guardianship, falls into an orphanage, and was later adopted by the Rak family – Maria and Joseph⁷. His foster-mother admitted only before her death in 1989 in a farewell letter (with an order to send the letter to Štěpán-Štěpán only after her death) that he was the son of Transcarpathian Ukrainian Vasylyna Slyvka, a nurse of the General Ludwik Svoboda's First Czechoslovak Army Corps and an officer of the same corps Zakoliansky (who «went missing»)⁸. The son never saw his mother, and only in 2009 was able to meet live broadcast of «Wait for Me» on the TV channel «Inter» with his half-brother Vladimir. Only then the information about the Ukrainian origin of the artist was entered on the Wikipedia page⁹.

Štěpán Rak studied at the Prague School of Fine Arts (1965–1970), and after graduating, he continued his education in the Prague Conservatory, as a guitarist in the class of Štěpán Urban. He later became a composer at the Prague Academy of Arts since 1975. His teachers were renowned composers Jiri Dvoracek, Vaclav Kuchera and Karel Janacek.

As early as his studies, Štěpán Rak began his creative self-realization not only as a guitar performer but also as a composer. In 1973, his symphonic composition «Hiroshima» won the 2nd place in the Czechoslovak National Competition for Young Composers.

Since 1975, Š. Rak has received an offer to teach at the Jyvaskyla Conservatory (Finland), where he worked until 1980. Rak's guitar compositions received a dozen of positive reviews and wide appreciation of performers and pedagogues. He has participated in many international festivals and recorded several music albums in Czechoslovakia and the United Kingdom.

In 2000, Štěpán Rak was named the first university professor of guitar in the Czech Republic, the title of which was given to him by President Vaclav Havel. In 2003, a book by Jaroslav Urbanova and Štěpán Rak «KYTAR» was published, and was dedicated to the great personality, the founder of the Czech guitar school, professor Štěpán Urban.

During his creative career, Štěpán Rak has visited over 70 countries, including the Far East, Japan and China, as well as Australia and New Zealand. In March 2004, he became a guest of the International Guitar Music Festival in California, USA.

In November 2006, Štěpán Rak received a unique work by sculptor Jan Sheerich – a marble

⁶ Ivannikov T. (2018). *Hitarne mystetstvo XX stolittia yak fenomen tvorchosti: monohrafiia*. Kamianets-Podilskyi: PP. Zvoleiko D. S.63.

⁷ Mushynka M., 2010. *Vsesvitno vidomyi hitaryst Stepan Rak i yoho biolohichna maty Vasylyna Slyvka*. Naukovi zapysky Natsionalnoho universytetu «Ostrozka akademia». Istorychni nauky. V. 15. Ostroh: Vydavnytstvo Natsionalnoho universytetu «Ostrozka akademia». S. 163.

⁸ Bench O., 2009. *Vydatnyi cheskyi muzykant*, <https://www.facebook.com/olga.bench.9/posts/200948392602459/>

⁹ Štěpán Rak. https://cs.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C5%A0%C4%9Bp%C3%A1n_Rak

guitar. This Spanish full-fledged guitar consists of the Verde Guatemala – marble base material. The joints are made up of five stone hoops that are connected with stone cement. The bottom plate consists of two pieces of this green marble, an eight-part bulkhead about 2 mm thick, also reinforced with stone fittings. However, the fingerboard and guitar threshold are wooden like in a classic guitar. This guitar has absolutely exceptional resonant features that Štěpán Rak uses in his project «KYTAROTHERAPY» – guitar therapy, treatment with guitar music timbre.

Štěpán Rak has written a large number of chamber and symphonic works. Most chamber ensemble works contain a guitar music.

His compositions for classical guitar solo, performed by the author himself and entered into a permanent concert repertoire of leading world performers, received special recognition. His works are striking in their breadth of themes, inspired by literary, visual and landscape impressions. Their spectrum covers both European and Slavic sources, as well as Asian, Oriental ones. Among his most famous solo works is «The Memories of Prague», dedicated to his home town of residence and study; «Czech fairy tales» are written on children's impressions; «Williamsiana» (based on ideas from guitarist John Williams), «Suite», «Variations on Jaromir Klempeř», a series of variations dedicated to the famous Karl's Bridge in Prague; suite «Terra Australia», considered one of the longest-running guitar-written compositions (about two hours). Author's works by Š. Rak are published in collections and audio recordings both in the Czech Republic and abroad.

Most of the works of the guitar composer are written under the influence of certain impressions of events, natural landscapes, communication with people. The composer is especially impressed by exotic countries – Finland, Spain, China, Japan, Mongolia, Australia, but does not abandon the Slavic motives. A very original musical language is the 2005 cycle, recorded on an audio CD – «Praise Tea» (about one and a half hours of music), covering 22 pieces of stylized ethnic music. The stylization of works is not only about intonation and composition, sound and timbral characteristics are also being differentiated. Thus, each of the parts imitates the string-plucked instruments, which are characteristic for these countries – Indian sitar, Russian guitar, Turkish saz, Japanese lute semamisen, Vietnamese thap-luk (zither type), Ukrainian kobza-bandura and others. Their sound extraction, game techniques and texture are being stylized. Among typically oriental pieces that are close to the music of China, India, Ceylon, England, Ireland, Japan, Vietnam, Taiwan, Tibet, Turkey, also Slavic-themed pieces may be found. The closest to Czech and Slovak music is the part called «Grandmother's Garden», which reflects «cozy», soothing children's motifs-memories, related to lullabies. The small excited middle part depicts children's experiences and fears, which in reprise are balanced by grandmother's stories and songs. The composition «Rusyn Thought» features a distinct Ukrainian melody with orientalisms that bring the work closer to the *duma* intonation (augmented IV degree of minor), characteristic for bandura – tremolando and general epic historical and narrative aesthetics. Another Slavic piece – «The Russian Caravan» – contains samples of melody and typical guitar texture of Russian romances of the late XIX century with elements of «gypsy» music. Thus, we observe the introduction of Slavic motifs to the typically Oriental tea-drinking tradition. The original of the language is one of the last guitar cycles of the composer and performer – «David's Songs» (2010). It includes new variants of compositions on oriental themes, as well as some works of Slavic origin. «Hey, near Levoche» – a paraphrase on the Slovak folk theme, «Memories on Prague» using the lyrics of V. Nezval – as a musical and literary composition. «On the Long Road» is an elaboration of B. Fomin's famous song with elements of a gypsy romance. It gained popularity thanks to Alexander Vertinsky, was distributed among Russian emigrants. This work by Š. Rak – author and performer – dedicated his biological mother, Vasylyna Slyvka. Here we see Š. Rak's perception of Ukrainian culture as a component of Russian culture. Another piece of Russian-Gypsy origin – «Goodbye», text by Sergei Yesenin, the singing belongs to the son of the artist – Matej Rak.

Among the solo guitar works are also compositions of small and large form of mostly generalized program character – two guitar sonatas (1969, ed. 1978), Suite (1974), Simple Partita (1974), «Guitar Square» in memory of F.G. Lorka (1971), «Hiroshima» (1973), «Finnish Tale» (1977), «Czech Choral» (1978), «Renaissance Suite» (1983), «Last Disco» (1982), «Variations on Nikita Koshkin» (1982), 5 concert sketches (1986) and others.

Also, between the late 1960s and early 1990s, many works were written for guitar ensembles and chamber ensembles with the participation of guitar. Among them we see the composer's periodic appeal to Slavic, including Czech, Bohemian and Russian motifs.

In addition to purely instrumental, original are the projects of the composer, which are a kind of literary and musical compositions or melodeclamation accompanied by music. Among them is «Vivat Comenius» (1988), a unique project by Štěpán Rak, performed with the famous musician Alfred Streichak, dedicated to Jan Amos Komenský (1592–1670), a prominent Czech reformer theologian, philosopher, teacher, and politician. He spoke and was able to write on ten European languages. His most distinguished work was the Latin-speaking «General Council for the Correction of Human Affairs», whose manuscript was found in 1934 by a Ukrainian scientist, Dmitry Chizhevsky, at an orphanage in Halle, Germany, and took care of its publication. The Latin book has been translated and published in Czech. In the period of the Czech people's loss of independence, Komenský was driven by a great desire to help him preserve the cultural heritage left by his ancestors, and most importantly, to improve the education and training of youth, in which he saw the pledge of his country's future. He called for all young people to receive a broad, universal education and considered it necessary to link education with learning languages – first native, then Latin – as the languages of science and culture of the time. Comenius's quotes from this work are very relevant to the present day, which is why they formed the basis of the concert. The project was initiated by Alfred Streichak, who wrote the screenplay and invited Štěpán Rak to the musical collaboration. The premiere took place in Prague, with a total performance of 34 countries, recorded on an audio CD. The project received the highest award – «The UNESCO Award». It is this philosophical-pedagogical-music project that testifies to the spread of the ideas of an outstanding teacher for European culture in general and Slavic in particular. In general, Š. Rak's composing and performing art meets the basic characteristics of the guitar art development in Eastern European countries, which assimilated the «cultural traditions and achievements of leading Western European guitar schools» and contributed to the development of national centers of guitar performance¹⁰. Important in this process, as noted by T. Ivannikov, was «the formation of performing elites – the generation of virtuosos who represent the national traditions of guitar art of different countries in the world»¹¹. Š. Rak is regularly invited to concert and lecture tours at leading universities in the world (Australia, USA, England, Canada, Germany, Finland, Sweden, South Africa, New Zealand).

«In the world of classical guitar, there are bad guitarists, good guitarists, outstanding guitarists and Štěpán Rak», – a quote from an article by world-renowned critic John Button in the New Zealand newspaper *The Domino* of January 23, 1992¹².

Štěpán Rak became the first guitar teacher in the history of the Prague Academy of Fine Arts, where he has been teaching since 1982. In 1996, Štěpán Rak was awarded an extraordinary grant from CAIP (Chicago Artist International Program), under which he, along with masters in other fields He was invited to attend the Chicago International Art Forum in Chicago as the only musician in Europe, where read a series of lectures and give a number of concert. Š. «Š. Rak is like Paganini in the guitar field» – wrote the Australian newspaper «The Courier-Mail»

¹⁰ Ivannikov T. (2018). *Hitarne mystetstvo XX stolittia yak fenomen tvorchosti: monohrafiia*. Kamianets-Podilskyi: PP. Zvoleiko D. P. 263.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Stryzhyboroda P. (2018). *Materialy intervju zi S. Rakom*.

on March 11, 1992¹³.

Particular importance for modern guitar art are the methodological and pedagogical principles of Š. Rak. Thus, the term «Rak's tremolo» in guitar art has become synonymous with absolute performance excellence¹⁴. Other critics are of the opinion that the effective performance of Rak disproves the reality of only six strings on the instrument and ten fingers on the performer's hands. «We can assume that the next generation of guitarists will consider Š. Rak as one of the great geniuses of our era», – writers of the British magazine *Classical Guitar* (1984) wrote.

During his travels abroad, Štěpán Rak also performs on television and radio programs. In an interview, Štěpán Rak presented the peculiarities of his work and the pedagogical principles of guitar teaching¹⁵. According to the artist, his method of teaching continues the characteristics of the school of his teacher – Štěpán Urban, who helped him not only in the play, but also in stage performances, psychological and philosophical aspects of music¹⁶.

Conclusions

Štěpán Rak became one of the leading artists of modern European music culture thanks to his unique technique of playing guitar, composing and performing activities. Today, Matthew's son and numerous students in Western Europe continue his principles. Štěpán Rak's activities are aimed at popularizing guitar art through concert performances, numerous workshops, interviews. Ukrainian origin of the artist, education and training within the Czech culture, detailed study of the music characteristics of different nations of Europe and Asia to determine the specific creativity of the artist – both composing and performing.

References

1. Bench O. (2009). *Vydatnyi cheskyi muzykant*, <https://www.facebook.com/olga.bench.9/posts/200948392602459/>
2. Davydov M. (1998). *Problemy rozvytku akademichnoho narodno-instrumentalnoho mystetstva v Ukraini: Zb. statei*. K.: Vyd-vo im.O.Telihiy. 207 p.
3. Ivannikov T. (2018). *Hitarne mystetstvo XX stolittia yak fenomen tvorchosti: monohrafiia*. Kamianets-Podilskyi: PP. Zvoleiko D. 392 p.
4. Mushynka M. (2010). *Vsesvitno vidomyi hitaryst Stepan Rak i yoho biolohichna maty Vasylyna Slyvka*. Naukovi zapysky Natsionalnoho universytetu «Ostrozka akdemiia». Istorychni nauky. V. 15. Ostroh: Vydavnytstvo Natsionalnoho universytetu «Ostrozka akdemiia». P. 162–176.
5. Rokosovskaja D. (2015). *Interviu so S. Rakom*. I. Ni razu v Belarusi..., <http://queenguitar.by/content/ni-razu-v-belarusi-chast-1>; II. Ekstraordynarnost' i kontsert dlia ovets..., <http://queenguitar.by/content/ekstraordinarnost-i-koncert-dlya-ovec-chast-2>; III. Vdohnovenye v astrolohyy..., <http://queenguitar.by/content/vdohnovenie-v-astrologii-chast-3>
4. Stryzhyboroda P. (2018). *Materialy intervui zi S. Rakom*.

¹³ Stryzhyboroda P. (2018). *Materialy intervui zi S. Rakom*.

¹⁴ Mushynka M. (2010). *Vsesvitno vidomyi hitaryst Stepan Rak i yoho biolohichna maty Vasylyna Slyvka*. Naukovi zapysky Natsionalnoho universytetu «Ostrozka akdemiia». Istorychni nauky. V. 15. Ostroh: Vydavnytstvo Natsionalnoho universytetu «Ostrozka akdemiia». P. 163.

¹⁵ Stryzhyboroda P. (2019). *Tvorchist Shtepana Raka v konteksti rozvytku hitarnoho mystetstva druhoi polovyny XX – pochatku XXI st. Muzychne mystetstvo XXI stolittia: istoriia, teoriia, praktyka*. Issue 5. Drohobych: Posvit. P. 436–444.

¹⁶ Štěpán Rak. https://www.facebook.com/%C5%A0t%C4%9Bp%C3%A1n-Rak-official-projects-151067735094480/?ref=page_internal

5. Stryzhyboroda P. (2019). Tvorchist Shtepana Raka v konteksti rozvytku hitarnoho mystetstva druhoi polovyny XX – pochatku XXI st. *Muzychne mystetstvo XXI stolittia: istoriia, teoriia, praktyka*. Issue 5. Drohobych: Posvit. P. 436–444.
6. Stryzhyboroda P. (2020). Guitar art of Stepan Rak: genre and style, image and theme aspects. *Bulletin of KNUKIM. Series in Arts*. Issue 42. P. 141–147. doi: 10.31866/2410-1176.42.2020.207643.
7. Štěpán Rak (Homepage), <http://www.stepanrak.cz/>
8. Štěpán Rak. https://cs.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C5%A0%C4%9Bp%C3%A1n_Rak
9. Štěpán Rak. https://www.facebook.com/%C5%A0%C4%9Bp%C3%A1n-Rak-official-projects-151067735094480/?ref=page_internal
10. Fan Din Tan, 1999. *Hitara v sovremennoj muzykalnoj zhizni*. Naukovyi visnyk NMAU im. P.I. Chaikovskoho: Muzychne vykonavstvo. Kyiv. V. 3. S. 154–161.

ŠTĚPÁN RAK'S GUITAR CREATIVITY IN THE CONTEXT OF INTERNATIONAL INTERACTIONS

The study offers a general work description of the famous Czech guitarist of Ukrainian origin, Štepan Rak (1945). The achievements of the artist in performing, composing, translation, and pedagogical directions are being determined. The pan-European context of the guitarist's work is being revealed. The aesthetic and artistic priorities of Š. Rak's multi-vector activity are being outlined. The artist's creative work is being analyzed through the prism of Slavic musical cultures influence on the subject, genres, forms and stylistics of guitar creativity. The interaction between Slavic folklore traits and academic performance in Š. Rak's guitar work is being revealed. The genre and style characteristics of the composer's guitar works (for solo guitars and ensembles with guitar) are being determined in accordance with the main modes (varieties) of programmability – onomatopoeia, folklore, genre, paraphrasic, psychological, memorial, fine arts, literary, religious etc.