

Vladigerov's Vardar as National Rhapsody / Anthem

This article focuses on the detailed analysis of the piece itself, observing the compositional techniques, folk music/dance tradition and Vladigerov's unique innovations. The original violin and piano version and the orchestral transcription are compared in terms of originality, performance and perception through the decades.

The opening of the piece begins with Hristov's Macedonian-type song of 16 bars. Without having seen the author's song in advance, Vladigerov used a 5/16 time signature rather than the original 5/8. Moreover, an amateur singing of that particular song can easily be perceived in 8/8 time, typically for Macedonian folksongs. Due to the fact that the composer used the song in the opening and the recapitulation, he decided to revise the original melodic structure (in bars 2, 4, 8 and 10), which made it partly lose the Macedonian spirit. In comparison, both 5/8 and 5/16 are in a slow tempo, which avoids the dancing feeling of the typical Bulgarian dance "Paydushko" (in 5/8). However, this is a treat, especially with the accents on 4th beat of 5/8, which strongly deceives the listener of hearing 8/8 instead of 5/8. In order to avoid that, Vladigerov's conception needs to be performed as an irregular three-part bar of 2+1+2 quavers. This was the first time he used an irregular-time song from the endless fountain of Bulgarian folklore.

The first version of Bulgarian Rhapsody Vardar from 1922 is introduced by a four-bar hymn-tune with full solid harmonies on the piano, joined by the violin on low G string exploring the main theme. This is repeated on the violin an octave higher in double stops, expressive melody, 'heavy' rhythm and rich harmonies. Then, there are a few fluctuations in tempo as it speeds up, the rhythm becomes more emphatic and the violin stands out with a highly lyrical utterance of the song theme. The big ritardando marking and the very quiet dynamics at the end of this first section suggest some calmness but also anticipate the vivid mood to come. It begins in 2/4 Allegro vivace in the same key of E as the opening section but this time in minor. The second section brings the typical dancing themes, characterized by rapid changes. When a folk musician starts playing, excited by the nature of improvisation, the moving and spirited dances ('hora' pl.) come one after another successively and connectedly. In such manner, Vladigerov mixes a cluster of colourful melodies. The medley of folksong themes varies between 5/8 and 13/16 in time signature. The contrasting inner episodes number six in total and operate as open structures ABCDEF, typical of Bulgarian folk music

The innovative acoustically-rhythmic effect grabs attention Vladigerov did, consisting of right hand's thumb knocking over the ribs of the violin on the first and the third quaver beats, varied by pizzicato on second and fourth. The following cheery episode marks the start of a process of merging several folkdance tunes, which proliferate through imitative techniques between piano and violin in a manner typical of folk style. Features, such as ornamentation (short grace notes, mordents, trills), constant jump from the melodic oscillations, pizzicatti in chords (imitating playing on the Bulgarian instrument tambura), enrich the violin's part. Another Bulgarian feature is found in the following passages. Vladigerov had another very innovative idea half way to the dancing section. While the piano is given a connecting passage, the violin is busy with a descending tremolo glissando down to low G and D on the open G and D strings respectively. Then, the player is instructed to tune the G string lower by the pegs with the left hand down to the note of E. However, this must happen

without stopping the movement of the bow over the strings in tempo *Vivace* for two bars. In order to make the effect work, the tuning needs to be done gradually between F and E, going along with the harmonic changes in the piano. The function of the low E is to keep sounding for a long time as a rhythmic pedal note to the melody on top. The reverse tuning effect back to G is approached 40 bars later, again while playing: "This original impulse of the composer undoubtedly has a connection with the Bulgarian instrumental folk music, being performed on the traditional instruments like gadulka, gaida [bagpipe] or tambura, where there is a constant sounding low isotone". This device facilitates the modulation from G major down a minor 3rd to E major and back to G, giving a virtuoso solo part to the violin. The exciting medley of several dancing episodes reaches its end with a big dominant climax which flows into the major peak of the piece – the third section with the repeated and partly further developed main theme. A single cry is heard as a recapitulation, bringing a triumphal glorifying the beloved country. The piece ends with a coda in 2/4, gradually developed and sped up with final virtuoso brilliance.

The Bulgarian Rhapsody was published by Universal Edition in 1924 as well as later released on Gramophone plate in Berlin by Polydor. After its success, Vladigerov decided to orchestrate the piece in 1928. This contributed to its status as one of the most significant creative works of the Bulgarian classical music heritage. The orchestral version has the same structure as the original. The opening starts in the whole orchestra, producing the first passage of the main theme for four bars. A tutti statement of the theme develops into the fanfare in the key of E-major with violins in low register and woodwinds, cor anglais, clarinet and bassoon. With the second return of the Macedonian-type theme, the whole orchestra explodes in grand gestures, supported by the trumpets and the rest of the brass instruments. That merges into a more lyrical and even nostalgic repeat of the theme. A few imitating inner-voices are allocated to various instruments in quiet dynamics leading to the calm ending of the Rhapsody's first section. The following middle section (*Allegro vivace* in 2/4) brings several new subjects, based on diverse folk and art songs and developed very delicately and precisely. When composing medleys there is always a potential danger of the music disintegrating into separate components but the author avoided that by building up and wisely combining rhythms, harmonies and tunes of folk-dance. Even more, the difference between folk-like and creative artifice is annulled, as if Vladigerov's thinking merged authentically into the roots and principles of people's music and dances. As such, this whole melodic unification contributes to a sonic image of Bulgarian folk identity. Particularly this tempered folk connection of his "defines to the biggest extent the significance as well as the truths of conceptually-emotional imagery".

The idea of the whole section underlines the bringing of more impetus and vitality to the suffering but energetic and optimistic Bulgarian people. A grand summary of the rhapsody, following the splendid medley, takes place in the last section with a new ringing out of the central patriotic melody. In order to finish the entire piece triumphantly, Vladigerov used the full capacity of the orchestra to emphasize the grand, powerful, joyful hymn-tune and thus to unify and elevate the feelings of love, magnificence and virtue to his beloved homeland. The premiere of the rhapsody's orchestral version was on 26th March 1928 during the 'Bulgarian music celebrations' in Prague under Frantisek Stupka, achieving a major success. Vladigerov had already performed his piano and violin version in the first edition of 'Folk music celebrations' in Varna 1926 (now 'Varna Summer International Festival' – the oldest in Bulgaria), but in 1929 during the fourth festival he conducted and premiered the orchestral Vardar in Bulgaria, which has been the Festival anthem ever since. There was a violin and orchestra transcription of Vardar (1951), premiered in Bulgaria, but it did not

gain much popularity in this version. For orchestra, it was performed in cities such as Berlin, Salzburg, Dresden, Philadelphia, New York, Chicago, Turin, Vienna, Budapest, Paris, Belgrade, Ljubljana, Athens, Bucharest, Oslo, Moscow, Hamburg and others, being published in Vienna, Sofia and Moscow.

The strong musical character, textural interplay and public success of the piece became key factors in Vladigerov's decision to orchestrate it. In particular, these two versions of Vardar have been equally popular over time. While splendid concert virtuosity is displayed in the original, the orchestrated version stands out with strong elements of patriotic hymn-tune enthusiasm and programmatic 'description' of nature and ordinary people's life. Moreover, this transcription leads to the Golden Age of Bulgarian symphonism, contributing with its nationalistic structure, self-conscious belonging and freedom to the 'first generation' of Bulgarian composers. Its existence is even more than just that because it was established as the crucial influence on the future of Bulgarian symphonism. This piece of work is the Bulgarian equivalent of the remarkable rhapsodies of Liszt, Dvořák, Enescu and Ravel; the folk-based symphonic compositions by Glinka, Rimsky-Korsakov and Balakirev; the capriccios of Tchaikovsky and the exoticist dances by Borodin.

European musical taste of the 20th century, with its complicated modal basis can be seen as an influence in Vladigerov's compositions. The composer was not afraid of using various modal systems. Many of the Bulgarian folksongs were created in ancient modes. As mentioned above, his predecessors also employed ancient modes in their creative pieces, but in a far more elementary manner, due to historically-political circumstances. In Vardar a clear hint of Aeolian mode appears in the beginning of the second section, while in that mode, chords with a dominant function lose the sharpened leading note which is typical in classical harmony.

Within this particular specification, the harmony matches authentic sequence with features of Bulgarian folksongs, without the limiting need to alter the leading note. The dominant minor seventh chord is a particular example of this. The parallel repetition of several successive harmonic chords and the way of connecting them "may create a parallel with ostinato form, which is exactly how the authentic cadence works in the middle section's beginning".



In addition, Vladigerov seems to enjoy using a natural Aeolian mode in longer harmonic progressions. These chord movements here are related to each other in fourths with a minor dominant seventh feeling, different from the typical perfect cadence due to this mode's nature. The composer's thinking goes even further with the use of the chord on the supertonic, which effectively 'cheats' the listener to hear the subdominant.

A very common contrivance for Vladigerov is preparing the audience for a forthcoming musical development by involving open constructions resolving on imperfect cadences, staying in the diatonic area. The opening 4-chord progression of the rhapsody exemplifies this practice. In parallel, the ostinato harmony is combined in this opening which contributes to the development of the musical utterance – i.e. the dramatic tension is organized not only by chord progression, but also by its repetitive harmonic function.



This imperfect cadence may also have the purpose of summarising the diverse harmonic ideas of a piece such as the final few bars of Vardar – the chord harmonic rotation from the second section merges into the ostinato harmony from the opening, reproducing for the last time in the piece the gradual tempo acceleration. What could also be said is that the tonal plan takes an important place in Vladigerov's forms. This gives a strong basis, which makes his form more easily perceived and brings a clearer aesthetic. The Rhapsody, consisting of a complex 3-part form, exemplifies such tonal plan. The clear exposition is constructed in the main key of the piece - E major. Then, the rich and colourful middle section, exposing the medley of serial dancing-like theme-tunes, stays mostly in the tonic E minor. This was the perfect place for the big show-off deploying modal diversity, which is the composition's generic signature.