

## **“Nikolai Kapustin’s Piano Oeuvre in a Jazz Music Perspective”**

Nikolai Kapustin’s work is unique in its use of classical and jazz music structures, while keeping a distinct Russian style. It is all the more important to take a closer look at the times in which Kapustin’s personality as a musician and composer was formed. A deeper insight explains how such a combination of styles occurred in his compositions and to what extent the artist is established in the world of both classical and jazz music. A historical perspective prevents him from being labelled as “crossover” or “third stream”.<sup>1</sup>

More academic papers, articles and general information about the composer can be found in foreign literature (especially American and Russian) than in Polish sources. This is why I feel it is worth promoting the work of this artist.

In this thesis, I try to answer the question whether Nikolai Kapustin is a jazz or classical composer, by analysing his musical oeuvre as well as looking at a historical context. To what extent his work is influenced by geniuses of classical music (from J.S. Bach to I. Stravinsky) and leading jazz musicians such as Art Tatum, Oscar Peterson or Chick Corea?

Even though the borders between classical and popular music as well as classical and jazz music are fading, there are often fundamental differences which make them separate genres. Differences between classical and popular music slowly began to melt in the twentieth century and Kapustin’s work had an important and interesting role in this process.

When looking at his particular compositions, one can notice that he mainly chooses classical forms – sonatas, études, preludes, suites, etc., but their subject matter is built around the jazz style with the use of all types of related techniques (stride, boogie-woogie, swing or syncopation). Besides the approach to form itself, what makes Nikolai Kapustin’s work classical, is a lack of improvisation (which is the essence of jazz) and the fact that his pieces are performed mainly by classical musicians. After many encounters with both jazz and classical musicians who had the chance to read Kapustin’s scores, it turned out that some jazz artists would not attempt to perform “this kind of jazz”, with scores written down from the first to the last note. For classical pianists however, Kapustin’s scores are as interesting and complicated as Chopin’s études (based on my experience of performing Concert Études op. 40), which is why they are far more likely to include his compositions in their repertoire. When analysing the piano work of Kapustin, it is hard to overlook what a great classical

<sup>1</sup> The term “third stream” was created by Gunther Schuller in the 1950s

pianist he is (he graduated from a piano class at the Moscow Conservatory) and the level of technical difficulty in his work as well as his phrasing are worthy of Rachmaninoff himself.

Kapustin's outstanding ability to merge classical music and jazz resulted in the creation of a unique musical genre which is heard increasingly often in the world's biggest concert halls.