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**THE EXPRESSIVE POTENTIAL OF THE PIANO PART IN THE
VOCAL CYCLES OF M. RAVEL**

ABSTRACT OF THE DOCTOR OF ARTS THESIS

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CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF THE RESEARCH

Relevance and significance of the research problem. French chamber vocal music at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries represents a unique phenomenon within the world repertoire. The vocal miniatures and cycles by C. Debussy, M. Ravel, G. Fauré, H. Duparc, and E. Chausson reveal a new approach on the part of composers to the selection of poetic texts, the relationship between the vocal and instrumental components of the ensemble, the structure of the vocal melodic line, and the treatment of the piano texture. The modern character of their musical expression is grounded in firmly established national traditions—the Renaissance *chanson*, the Baroque *air de cour*, and the Romantic *romance de salon*. Through these traditions, this music demonstrates a profound rootedness in the French “artistic soil”, while at the same time shaping a distinctly “French” vision and perception of the world, the need to affirm which was keenly felt in the society of the time. These vocal works, bearing the stylistic imprint of late Romanticism, Impressionism, and early Neoclassicism, were composed predominantly to texts by French poets, including S. Mallarmé, P. Verlaine, Ch. Baudelaire, and others. Even texts originally written in other languages were used in French translation.

The works of M. Ravel occupy an important place in the French art-song repertoire of the period under consideration. Throughout his life, the composer created a number of vocal miniatures that have become part of the enduring legacy of the world’s musical repertoire. Among them are *Ballade de la reine morte d’aimer*, *Un grand sommeil noir*, *Manteau de fleurs*, *Noël des jouets*, *Les grands vents venus d’outre-mer*, *Rêves*, and others.

Alongside individual works for voice and piano, M. Ravel’s compositional output includes vocal cycles distinguished by the strong imprint of his artistic personality and by the remarkable originality of their artistic conception. Thus, *Chants populaires* and *Cinq mélodies populaires grecques* display a folk-inspired character; *Trois poèmes de Stéphane Mallarmé* contains Impressionist nuances; *Shéhérazade* and *Chansons madécasses* are characterised by an Oriental colouring, while *Histoires naturelles* takes the form of a series of distinctive musical sketches. At the same time, although the vocal part in M. Ravel’s cycles is predominantly accompanied by the piano, other instruments, ensembles, or orchestra are occasionally employed for the accompaniment.

M. Ravel’s vocal works maintain a lasting presence on major international concert stages. There is also a substantial body of audio recordings by distinguished vocal artists of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, including Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, José van Dam, Gérard Souzay,

Gabriel Bacquier, Régine Crespin, Dmitri Hvorostovsky, Sabine Devieille, and Gerald Finley. Renowned pianists and accompanists, including Dalton Baldwin, Jacqueline Bonnot, Aldo Ciccolini, Janine Reiss, Alexandre Tharaud, Julius Drake, and Mikhail Arkadiev, have made significant contributions to the performance tradition of French chamber vocal music.

In the Republic of Moldova, M. Ravel's vocal works are less frequently included in performers' concert programmes. The need to address this gap in the repertoire, together with the need for a scholarly and practical understanding of the French vocal classics, determined the direction of the present study. A further impetus was the aim of establishing a methodological framework for performers engaging with this repertoire. In this respect, the analytical studies presented in the thesis draw upon a synthesis of the author's own performance experience and a comparative analysis of audio recordings by distinguished performers of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

The choice of the scholarly and practical focus of the study is rooted in the author's professional activity as a pianist and accompanist. This professional background determined the need for a comprehensive investigation of M. Ravel's chamber vocal works for voice and piano from the unified perspective of two interconnected dimensions: the theoretical and analytical dimension, involving musicological analysis, and the practical dimension, involving an understanding of the musical text in the context of concert performance. The focus on cyclic compositions is determined by their systemic artistic organisation. These structures are approached as complex macroforms, each of their constituent elements fulfilling a specific compositional and dramaturgical function within a continuous emotional and semantic trajectory.

The interpretation of vocal cycles requires not only an accurate "reading" of each individual piece, but also an understanding of its place within the overall artistic conception. Performers must consistently focus on the subtlest nuances of the poetic text, its literal semantic features, the interaction between the word and the vocal line, and the role of the piano part as an equal partner in the ensemble, while also establishing continuous connections between the individual pieces so as to ensure an uninterrupted progression from the beginning to the end of the work. Accordingly, the thesis is devoted to the study of M. Ravel's vocal cycles originally composed for voice and piano: *Épigrammes de Clément Marot*; *Cinq mélodies populaires grecques*; *Histoires naturelles*; *Chants populaires*; *Deux Mélodies hébraïques*; and *Don Quichotte à Dulcinée*.

The achievement of the proposed aim involves a comprehensive analysis of the selected compositions from an integrative perspective encompassing several lines of inquiry: consideration of the poetic source in the unity of its lexical, syntactic, and semantic parameters; identification of the principles governing the synthesis of speech and musical intonation; and examination of the textural and ensemble interaction between the vocal and piano parts. The comparison of several performance interpretations made it possible to assess the artistic potential of these works and to develop a coherent overall view of their aesthetic nature. At the same time, this provided a solid foundation for developing the author's own well-grounded interpretative conception, which, in turn, led to the formulation of methodological recommendations substantiated by artistic practice and intended to support vocalists and pianists in their work on the compositions discussed above.

The audio recordings, selected from a substantial body of available recordings, feature musicians renowned for their distinguished interpretations of nineteenth- and twentieth-century chamber vocal classics. These include the duos of G. Souzay and D. Baldwin, G. Souzay and J. Bonnot, G. Finley and J. Drake, D. Fischer-Dieskau and K. Engel, J.-C. Benoit and A. Ciccolini, J. van Dam and D. Baldwin, C. Bartoli and M.-H. Chon, S. Devieille and A. Tharaud, B. Laplante and J.-Y. Vaillancourt, T. Berganza and D. Baldwin, and N. Dorliak and S. Richter.

Although the present study adopts a multifaceted approach to the analysis of M. Ravel's vocal cycles, allowing their characteristics to be considered in their full complexity, its primary focus remains the piano part.

Field of study: French chamber vocal music.

Aim of the research: to investigate the expressive potential of the piano part and its role in conveying the artistic conception of Ravel's vocal cycles, based on an analysis of the musical text and performance interpretations.

Research objectives:

- to analyse the principal features of the content, form, and musical language of Ravel's chamber vocal cycles *Épigrammes de Clément Marot*, *Cinq mélodies populaires grecques*, *Histoires naturelles*, *Chants populaires*, *Deux Mélodies hébraïques*, and *Don Quichotte à Dulcinée*;
- to characterise the role of the piano accompaniment within the voice-and-piano ensemble with a view to developing a convincing interpretation of these cycles;
- to reveal the distinctive textural features of the piano part;

- to identify and systematise the most significant challenges arising in the artistic interpretation of the selected works;
- to compare representative performance interpretations of these works, highlighting the specific approaches to the composer's text within different artistic traditions;
- to substantiate practical recommendations for overcoming the artistic and technical difficulties encountered in the performance of the vocal cycles under consideration.

Scholarly and practical novelty and originality. The novelty and originality of the thesis lie in the integration of the practical (artistic) performance of Ravel's chamber vocal works with their theoretical study. For the first time in Moldovan musicology, Ravel's vocal cycles are examined within the specific cultural and historical context of the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and from the perspective of contemporary performance traditions. The practical component of the thesis was realised through a series of concerts featuring chamber vocal works by Ravel and other French composers, including works rarely performed or presented for the first time in the Republic of Moldova.

Methodological framework of the thesis. The methodology of the thesis encompasses a range of approaches that enable M. Ravel's vocal cycles to be studied from an integrative perspective, with particular attention to their Impressionist features and Neoclassical tendencies. The application of a historical approach has made it possible to analyse these works as an integral part of French culture at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, while also demonstrating their artistic value from the perspective of modern performance strategies. The theoretical investigation is based on a systemic and structural approach to these works, involving the study of the piano part in the vocal cycles as an integral component of an artistic whole—the chamber vocal ensemble.

The empirical component of the research draws on information obtained through personal conversations with the pianists S. Constantinov, S. Kovalenko, T. Savelieva, A. Lăpăduș, and O. Iuhno; the vocalists A. Lavrov, S. Pilipețchii, V. Dragoș, D. Axenti, L. Șolomei, and Gh. Severin; as well as I. Sinița, a teacher of French vocal phonetics. The author also draws on her own professional experience as a collaborative pianist at AMTAP and at the “M. Bieșu” National Opera and Ballet Theatre.

The research methodology combines general scholarly and specialised methods, including analysis, induction, and deduction. The comparative method was employed to identify stylistic

parallels, while comprehensive and interpretative methods of analysis provided a multi-level reading of the artistic text of M. Ravel's works.

Theoretical framework of the thesis. The theoretical framework comprises publications addressing a range of relevant topics. First, there is an extensive body of musicological scholarship devoted to M. Ravel's biography and artistic legacy, including studies of his chamber vocal compositions. Published in French, English, Romanian, and Russian, these studies constitute a substantial body of scholarly literature in terms of both scope and content. They include books published in the second half of the twentieth century by authors such as S. Zank, R. Alexandrescu, M. Gerard and R. Chalu, I. Martînov, V. Smirnov, L. Sabaneev, and V. Iankelevici. This group of sources also includes studies by contemporary M. Ravel scholars V. Jarkova and E. Kornienko.

The methodological framework of the study also draws on sources addressing the interaction between ensemble partners and the dialectics of interpretation within the ensemble. Central to this group are works by two distinguished twentieth-century accompanists, J. Moore and E. Shenderovici. Another key reference for the thesis is the book *The Interpretation of French Song* by the French baritone P. Bernac.

Another component of the musicological framework of the thesis comprises textbooks and reference works dealing with musical forms, the means of musical expression, and issues of musical genre and style. This group includes works by O. Kolovski, I. Tiulin, V. Tükerman, L. Mazel, and others. Of particular importance to the detailed analysis of the musical text of M. Ravel's vocal cycles were V. Vasina-Grossman's studies of the interaction between music and words, the relationship between the vocal line and the piano accompaniment, and the distinctive features of chamber vocal genres.

Validation of the research results. The research results were discussed at meetings of the AMTAP Doctoral School and presented at scholarly conferences in the field of musicology. **The practical component of the thesis** was presented in three concerts held in the Grand Hall of AMTAP, in which the author performed the piano parts in M. Ravel's vocal cycles *Épigrammes de Clément Marot*, *Cinq mélodies populaires grecques*, *Chants populaires*, *Deux Mélodies hébraïques*, and *Histoires naturelles*, as well as in the *mélodies* *Ballade de la reine morte d'aimer*, *Manteau de fleurs*, and *Rêves*. The programmes also included M. Ravel's choreographic symphonic poem *La Valse*, in the composer's arrangement for two pianos, and the suite *Ma mère l'Oye* for piano four hands. In addition, the programmes featured *mélodies* by G. Fauré (*Cygne sur l'eau*, *Les Berceaux*,

Mandoline, Clair de lune), C. Debussy (*Romance, La mer est plus belle que les cathédrales*), E. Chausson (*Le temps des lilas*), and F. Poulenc (*Au bord de la mer, Cette belle nouvelle, Les Chemins de l'amour*, and the vocal cycle *Chansons gaillardes*).

The concerts featured the sopranos Natalia Moscovciuc and Anastasia Slobodianiuc, the bass-baritone Gheorghe Severin, the cellist Dmitri Popușoi, and the pianist Serghei Constantinov.

The main results of the theoretical research are reflected in 8 publications in scientific journals and collections of scientific articles, of which 3 – in scientific publications recommended by the National Council for Accreditation and Attestation and 5 – in the proceedings of various scientific forums. The thesis materials were presented at 6 national and international scientific conferences:

the International Scientific Conference *Arts Education – Cultural Dimensions* (26 April 2024, AMTAP; 2–3 April 2026, AMTAP);

the National Scientific Conference of Doctoral Students and Doctoral Supervisors *Culture and Art: Research, Valorisation, Promotion* (3rd edition, 8 December 2023, AMTAP; 4th edition, 6 December 2024, AMTAP);

the International Scientific Conference *Multidisciplinary Perspectives in Music Research* (25 April 2026, Oradea, Romania);

the 13th Russian Scientific and Practical Conference (with international participation), *Dialogues on Culture and Art* (18–20 October 2023, Perm, Russian Federation).

The findings and results of the research were further validated through the author's teaching and concert activities.

Practical applicability of the research. The results of the study may be applied within the courses *Accompaniment Studies, Solo Singing, Chamber Singing, History of Western Music, Pedagogical Practice*, and *Accompaniment Practice*. The research findings may also be used by performers in preparing for concerts and competitions, in independent study, and in their ongoing teaching activities.

CONTENT OF THE THESIS

The thesis comprises 102 pages of main text, including the Introduction, four chapters, General Conclusions and Recommendations, a bibliography of 155 sources, and three appendices.

The Introduction provides a rationale for the choice of the research topic, outlines its relevance and scholarly novelty, and presents the methodological and bibliographical frameworks of the study.

Chapter One: General Characteristics of M. Ravel's Vocal Cycles. Section 1.1 presents French chamber vocal music at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and assesses the place of M. Ravel's works within this repertoire. Section 1.2 examines M. Ravel's vocal cycles within the genre system of his compositional output. Section 1.3 presents conclusions summarising the principal ideas of the first chapter.

The turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was a period of major transformation in French musical culture. Alongside the continuing development of Romanticism, Impressionism and Neoclassicism emerged, radically transforming the language of European art. G. Fauré, V. d'Indy, C. Debussy, P. Dukas, A. Roussel, and M. Ravel are regarded as major composers of this period. French chamber vocal music was experiencing a veritable “golden age”, at the heart of which stood a distinctively French vocal genre – the *mélodie* – one of the major achievements of Western European musical culture. Originating in the works of H. Berlioz, the *mélodie* reached its height in the works of C. Debussy and M. Ravel and continued to develop in those of F. Poulenc, D. Milhaud, and J. Ibert. Composers turned to the subtle poetry of P. Verlaine, S. Mallarmé, Ch. Baudelaire, and other French Symbolist poets. In contrast to the German *Lied*, the French *mélodie* tends to avoid turbulent displays of passion and is characterised instead by contemplation, restraint, and refined musical writing.

The evolution of the *mélodie* genre manifested itself not only in the transformation of the means of musical expression, but also in the transition from the individual song to the vocal cycle – of greater or lesser dimensions – as a form that brings together several songs through a shared atmosphere or narrative. In contrast to individual *mélodies*, the French vocal cycle of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries displays a deeper artistic unity, characterised by stylistic refinement, associative imagery, and heightened attention to the intonational qualities of the French language. Poetry and music function as equivalent components, contributing equally to the integrity of the genre.

M. Ravel's engagement with both standalone *mélodies* and *mélodies* incorporated into vocal cycles reflects the direction of his creative aspirations and demonstrates his profound interest in the development of French national art. The composer wrote vocal cycles throughout his career, and each of them is therefore associated with a particular stage of his artistic development and

corresponds to the instrumental and stage works of the respective period. The *mélodies* brought together in cycles during M. Ravel's early creative period reflect the formation of his individual style, marked by refined harmonies, Symbolist imagery, and close interaction between the vocal and piano parts. *Histoires naturelles* marks the beginning of the composer's mature creative period, characterised by a high degree of compositional mastery, while *Don Quichotte à Dulcinée*, written during his late period, represents an original culmination of his artistic legacy.

In all of M. Ravel's *mélodies* and vocal cycles, the piano accompaniment carries substantial intonational and thematic significance, serving to create musical scenes and landscapes and to delineate psychological states in greater detail. In a number of *mélodies*, M. Ravel creates piano accompaniments that evoke the sonorities and timbres of orchestral or traditional instruments, thereby enhancing the music's expressive qualities and the national colouring of the works. Some of his compositions extend beyond conventional conceptions of the chamber genre: the cycle *Shéhérazade* displays orchestral characteristics; *Histoires naturelles*, *Cinq mélodies populaires grecques*, and *Don Quichotte à Dulcinée* exist in two versions prepared by the composer – one for voice and piano and the other for voice and orchestra – while *Trois poèmes de Stéphane Mallarmé* and *Chansons madécasses* are scored for voice and an expanded instrumental ensemble. Thus, the expansion of the timbral palette within the chamber miniature also broadens its generic framework, demonstrating the composer's search for new forms of artistic expression in vocal music.

For singers and pianists, M. Ravel's *mélodies* and vocal cycles offer broad interpretative possibilities, associated both with the realisation of refined poetry, expressive melodic writing, and sophisticated harmonies, and with the opportunity to achieve a distinctive quality of performance embodied in a balanced musical dialogue between the two performers. For listeners, these works offer an insight into the world of French culture, bringing together music, poetry, and aesthetics.

Chapter Two: Characteristics of the Piano Part in Vocal Cycles Based on Folk Material.

Section 2.1 analyses the vocal cycle *Cinq mélodies populaires grecques*. Section 2.2 is devoted to *Chants populaires*, while Section 2.3 examines *Deux Mélodies hébraïques*. Section 2.4 presents the conclusions drawn from the analytical studies undertaken.

Cycles based on arrangements of French, Spanish, Italian, and Jewish folk songs occupy a special place in M. Ravel's compositional output. In these works, the composer incorporates specific examples of folk material, thereby endowing them with a distinct ethnographic identity. The accompaniments composed for the folk melodies develop the source material, resulting in works

that combine national authenticity with the composer's individual artistic voice. M. Ravel adopts a creative approach to the piano accompaniment: through the subtle use of instrumental resources, he emphasises the expressive meaning of the poetic text. Accordingly, the composer most often favours a simple chordal texture, which serves to highlight the modal and tonal structure of the music and its rhythmic organisation. In several songs, the piano accompaniment evokes the sonorities of folk instruments, such as the guitar, harp, and tambourine, thereby enhancing the national colouring of the music.

Ultimately, each song constitutes an original miniature, distinct from the others in character, form, dramaturgy, and artistic language. In the vocal cycles under consideration, the composer demonstrates exceptional sensitivity to the expressive qualities of the verbal component. M. Ravel subtly captures the style and form of the text, skilfully translating them into musical language. The composer integrates the songs into a suite-like whole through such cohesive factors as the shared national identity of the material, similarities in the melodic ranges and modal structures, concision and precision of textural detail, and the unifying role of the piano accompaniment.

A comparative analysis of three performance interpretations of the vocal cycles based on folk melodies reveals a wide range of approaches to these compositions. Each interpretation represents a distinct artistic statement reflecting its own perspective on M. Ravel's music. Singers select the keys most appropriate to their voices and determine the tempo, agogic nuances, and other means of musical expression, while pianists adapt their instrumental touch to the voice type of their performing partner. The diversity of vocal timbres creates a broad palette of emotional nuances, while variations in tempo and dynamics generate different expressive states. Pianists highlight the multifaceted nature of the instrumental part: some place greater emphasis on its rhythmic support, while others foreground the colouristic potential of the harmony.

The distinctive artistic value of the vocal cycles under consideration has secured them an enduring place on the concert stage: they feature both in the repertoire of recognised masters of chamber vocal performance and in the concert programmes of emerging musicians. Performers' knowledge of the distinctive characteristics and folk sources of these works contributes to a convincing and coherent realisation of the composer's artistic conception.

Chapter Three: *Characteristics of the Instrumental Accompaniment in Vocal Cycles Based on Original Poetic Texts.* Section 3.1 is devoted to the study of the vocal mini-cycle *Épigrammes de Clément Marot*. Section 3.2 focuses on the cycle *Don Quichotte à Dulcinée*. Section

3.3 synthesises the findings presented in this chapter by highlighting the principal characteristics of M. Ravel's vocal cycles composed to original poetic texts.

The composer's initial task was to create a vocal melody corresponding to the content and structural features of the poetic text. Both cycles bring together two characters: a beautiful lady and her knight. Both are written for baritone, a choice justified by the fact that the narrative is presented from a male perspective: in *Épigrammes de Clément Marot*, the male protagonist is a gallant courtier, while in *Don Quichotte à Dulcinée* he is a courageous knight. To portray these characters, the composer employs the expressive resources of vocal melody: while the former work is more intimate in character and the latter more emotionally impassioned, both are characterised by a recitative-like manner of vocal writing. At the same time, the entire intonational and rhythmic organisation of *Don Quichotte à Dulcinée* is marked by a pronounced Spanish colouring. In both cycles, the composer emphasises poetic caesuras through the articulation of vocal phrases, while the musical form is organised into stanzas that serve as structural pillars.

The two cycles originated under different circumstances. In composing *Épigrammes de Clément Marot*, M. Ravel drew upon principles inherent in musical discourse: the tempo relationship between the movements follows a slow – fast pattern, while the tonic – dominant tonal relationship reinforces the unity of the whole. *Don Quichotte à Dulcinée*, by contrast, originated in the context of M. Ravel's work on music for film and was conceived for a particular singer.

In shaping the musical form of *Épigrammes de Clément Marot*, M. Ravel draws upon the structure of the poetic source while also incorporating the principles of a simple ternary form. The relationship between the vocal and piano parts, each individualised in intonational and thematic terms, reveals their complementary nature. The syllabically structured vocal lines are recitative-like in character. The instrumental accompaniment fulfils an expressive function while also playing an essential role in shaping the musical form: the intonational material introduced in the opening returns in the coda, framing the principal sections and contributing to the unity of the whole. In the second *Épigramme*, the piano texture imitates the sonority of the harpsichord, which has led some performers to present the work with harpsichord accompaniment.

M. Ravel's distinctive style in *Don Quichotte à Dulcinée* emerges through a synthesis of the French vocal tradition and allusions to Spanish musical idioms. The piano part evokes guitar techniques and the sound of castanets and incorporates stylisations of the *guajira*, *zortziko*, and *jota*. Each song embodies a particular facet of Don Quixote's character: in *Chanson romanesque* he

appears noble and gallant; in *Chanson épique*, prayerful and heroic; and in *Chanson à boire*, cheerful and down-to-earth. A comparison of interpretations of the two vocal cycles reveals a wide range of approaches, from intimate and subjective readings to more restrained and academically oriented ones. At the same time, this diversity of interpretation demonstrates the broad artistic scope of the compositions and their capacity to accommodate different interpretative perspectives.

Chapter Four: *The Role of the Accompaniment in the Vocal Cycle *Histoires naturelles*, Based on a Prose Text*. Section 4.1 analyses the first number of the vocal cycle, *Le Paon*. Section 4.2 is devoted to the second miniature, *Le Grillon*. Section 4.3 examines the third number, *Le Cygne*. Section 4.4 explores the characteristics of the following piece, *Le Martin-Pêcheur*. Section 4.5 examines the final *mélodie*, *La Pintade*. Section 4.6 summarises the conclusions reached in the course of the chapter.

The cycle *Histoires naturelles* stands as a landmark work in French chamber vocal music of the early twentieth century, distinguished by its setting of a prose text by a contemporary author. J. Renard's text displays a complex genre structure combining elements of free verse, fable, and the satirical essay. It is difficult to determine what prompted M. Ravel to select these particular texts from the considerable number of short pieces by this author. The composer may have been attracted by the contrast between the images, as well as by the possibility of creating a semantic frame through the outer pieces – the first and the last – thereby reinforcing the unity of the cycle as a whole. Several scholars of M. Ravel's works interpret this feature as a distinctive framing device that ensures the integrity and balance of the cycle's overall form.

The sequence of pieces unfolds in a manner analogous to the movements of a suite, following a continuous line of dramatic development: after the solemn procession of *Le Paon* (No. 1), the chirping depicted in *Le Grillon* (No. 2) is striking in its delicate refinement; the idyllic *Le Cygne* (No. 3) serves as the lyrical centre of the cycle; while the picturesque *Le Martin-Pêcheur* (No. 4) functions as a moment of repose, a pause before the spectacular finale, *La Pintade* (No. 5).

It is difficult to identify unifying factors among the wide range of musical means employed in the miniatures of *Histoires naturelles*: there are neither intonational connections between the pieces nor close tonal and harmonic relationships. Nevertheless, the coherence of the cyclic structure emerges at a higher, stylistic level and can be identified in the treatment of the verbal text, the organisation of the vocal melody, and the approaches to pianistic interpretation. The voice is treated by the composer as an equal component of the ensemble, conveying the full range of nuances and

subtleties of the literary text. While maintaining the continuity of the verbal flow, the composer also pays close attention to the expressive potential of each syllable. Declamatory in character, the vocal part fully conveys the twists and turns of the narrative discourse. At the same time, it displays affinities with melodramatic declamation unfolding against the background of the piano accompaniment. The melodic line consequently assumes the form of a melodic recitative characterised by the absence of periodic phrase structures. These features of M. Ravel's vocal writing in *Histoires naturelles* were subsequently developed further in his opera *L'Heure espagnole*.

The texture of the piano part in this cycle is dense and, in places, may even suggest an independent instrumental work, recalling certain passages from M. Ravel's works for solo piano. It is the accompaniment that plays an essential role in shaping the expressive character of the music, while also determining the architectural design of each piece in the cycle. Through descriptive techniques, the piano evokes vivid images of the natural world and contributes to the unification of formal sections through changes in harmony, dynamics, and types of texture.

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The research aimed to provide a theoretical understanding of artistic and scholarly experience in the field of chamber vocal performance, to expand existing knowledge of French vocal music at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and to critically assess the performance achievements of recognised chamber vocal ensembles. The practical component of the thesis was presented in three concerts in which the author performed the piano parts in M. Ravel's vocal cycles and selected *mélodies*. The programmes also included chamber vocal miniatures by F. Poulenc, G. Fauré, E. Chausson, and C. Debussy, as well as other works by M. Ravel for two pianos and for piano four hands.

The theoretical component of the study establishes the place of M. Ravel's chamber vocal works in the development of French music at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and provides a general overview of his cyclic compositions for voice and piano. A detailed analysis was undertaken of six vocal cycles written for this combination of performers: *Épigrammes de Clément Marot*, *Deux Mélodies hébraïques*, *Chants populaires*, *Cinq mélodies populaires grecques*, *Don Quichotte à Dulcinée*, and *Histoires naturelles*. Thus, the aim of the thesis was achieved: the expressive potential of the piano part in M. Ravel's vocal cycles was investigated on the basis of an analysis of the musical text and performance interpretations, with particular attention to its role in

conveying the artistic conception of these works. The achievement of this aim led to the following conclusions:

1. For the first time in the Republic of Moldova, the thesis provides a detailed analysis of Ravel's vocal cycles as a distinct genre within the context of his chamber vocal legacy. Although there is now an extensive body of research on the works of the French composer, the principal theoretical studies devoted to Ravel's vocal music have been produced by scholars from other countries, including musicologists from France, the United Kingdom, Russia, and Romania. The aspects of the synthesis between word and music examined in the present thesis through the study of Ravel's vocal cycles—including intonational structure, compositional and dramaturgical organisation, and genre characteristics—have not previously been addressed in Moldovan musicology in relation to the works of French composers.

At the same time, the fundamental issues involved in coordinating the vocal and piano parts in concert performance, as examined in the thesis, have made it possible to supplement the observations of distinguished musicians on this subject available in the specialist literature. To facilitate a deeper understanding of the research issues outlined above, these theoretical and methodological materials provide a foundation for supplementing, expanding, and updating existing scholarly perspectives with new insights derived from the continuing practical engagement with French chamber vocal music, both in concert performance and through theoretical research.

2. A deeper understanding of the artistic world of M. Ravel's cyclic works for voice and piano is facilitated by an examination of the principal genre of French chamber vocal music at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—the *mélodie*. Rooted in the works of H. Berlioz and acquiring clearly defined artistic features in the compositions of Ch. Gounod, G. Fauré, H. Duparc, and E. Chausson, the *mélodie* reached its culmination in the music of C. Debussy and M. Ravel. One of its distinctive features is the primacy of the poetic text, whose content and form influence the choice of musical means of expression in both the vocal and piano parts. The music not only gives sonic expression to the text, but also conveys the particular refinement of its linguistic structure and reveals its deeper layers of meaning.

The *mélodie* is also distinguished by the essential role of the specific interaction between voice and piano. The recitative-like vocal line imitates the inflections of spoken language – narrative, interrogative, or exclamatory – while the instrumental part often contains the principal intonational and thematic material, creating textures characteristic of the respective imagery,

shaping the tonal and harmonic dramaturgy, and at times producing the effect of orchestral sonority. The piano part reveals a wide range of possibilities for musical representation, evokes images of the surrounding landscape, and subtly conveys psychological nuances that deepen the artistic content of the works. As a result, voice and piano form an inseparable unity: when separated, both lose something of their expressive substance and no longer retain the distinctive qualities they possess as part of a living artistic whole – a principle vividly embodied in M. Ravel's vocal cycles.

3. The study of M. Ravel's vocal cycles for voice and piano has revealed a profound connection between the timbral character of the accompaniment and the composer's innovations in genre. The incorporation of the acoustic properties of orchestral and folk instruments into the piano texture serves not merely as a means of creating musical imagery or evoking national colouring, but also as a factor in the construction of musical meaning. From this perspective, the instrumental writing expands the traditionally "intimate" framework of chamber music, demonstrating the composer's intention to renew and substantially enrich the architecture of vocal genres through the assimilation of new expressive possibilities.

4. Taking as its point of departure the importance of the verbal component in M. Ravel's vocal music, the research proposes an original principle for grouping his cyclic compositions according to their distinctive characteristics. The cycles are divided into three groups. The first comprises works based on arrangements of the folk music of different peoples; the second includes works composed to original poetic texts; and the third is represented by *Histoires naturelles*, based on the prose texts of J. Renard and regarded as a distinct phenomenon within the composer's chamber vocal legacy, including at the conceptual level.

5. An analysis of M. Ravel's vocal cycles based on folk material (*Cinq mélodies populaires grecques*, *Chants populaires*, *Deux mélodies hébraïques*) leads to the conclusion that the composer deliberately preserves the authentic contours of the folk melodies through their faithful quotation. This approach ensures the ethnographic authenticity of the intonational sphere and creates a distinctive national colouring. At the same time, M. Ravel goes beyond the mere reproduction of folk material: on the basis of these quotations, he shapes a complete artistic form in which the elemental simplicity of the folk song enters into an organic dialogue with the sophisticated harmonic and textural language of the composer's accompaniment.

The composer's exceptional sensitivity to the speech-derived intonational character of the poetic text and to the flexibility of the verbal component in these works is reflected in the discreet

expressiveness of the piano part, which serves to emphasise the semantic and intonational nuances of the poetry. The predominance of a simple chordal texture helps to clarify the tonal organisation and rhythmic structure of the musical discourse. The principal factors integrating the folk songs into suite-like cycles are the shared national origin of their source material, the distinctive contours of the vocal melodies, and the stylistic consistency of the composer's piano writing.

A comparative analysis of three performance interpretations of each of the cycles *Cinq mélodies populaires grecques*, *Chants populaires*, and *Deux mélodies hébraïques* reveals a considerable range of interpretative approaches. Each interpretation reflects the singer's and pianist's individual understanding of the composer's style. At the same time, the realisation of the composer's artistic conception is directly influenced by the particular characteristics of each singer's voice. The choice of key, tempo, and agogic nuances takes into account the singer's technical capabilities and vocal range; these choices, in turn, shape the approach to the instrumental part. In response to the specific qualities of the soloist's voice, the pianist skilfully adjusts the manner of sound production and selects an appropriate instrumental touch in order to achieve the desired timbral balance.

6. M. Ravel's vocal cycles based on original poetic texts arose from different creative impulses. *Épigrammes de Clément Marot* brings together two pieces composed at different times, recreating the refined atmosphere of Renaissance courtly poetry through their affinities of content and style. The cycle *Don Quichotte à Dulcinée*, to poems by P. Morand, has an entirely different genesis: it was commissioned as part of a film project and was conceived for a particular voice. Within this cycle, the French *mélodie* undergoes a dialectical development through the incorporation of elements of Spanish folk music: the piano accompaniment not only imitates the sonorities of traditional instruments such as the guitar and castanets, but also thoroughly assimilates the rhythmic patterns of the *jota*, *zortziko*, and *guajira*.

Both cycles based on original poetic texts are written for baritone, since the narrative is presented from a male perspective. They feature a pair of characters typical of the poetic tradition—a gallant gentleman and his beautiful lady. By comparison, in the vocal cycles based on arrangements of folk material, the composer worked with a pre-existing melody, whereas in the cycles based on original poetic texts, the compositional task involved creating a vocal line organically related to both the content and the structure of the poetic text. The instrumental accompaniment is conceived as an integral element in completing the artistic image.

A comparative analysis of a range of performance interpretations of *Épigrammes de Clément Marot* and *Don Quichotte à Dulcinée* has demonstrated, as in the cycles based on folk material, the presence of a broad spectrum of approaches, ranging from intimate, chamber-oriented interpretations to brilliant, concert-oriented readings. The diversity of these interpretations confirms the multifaceted artistic nature of the works and their capacity to inspire a wide variety of distinctive performance realisations.

7. The distinctive characteristics of *Histoires naturelles* establish the cycle as an exceptional phenomenon in French chamber vocal music of the early twentieth century. The setting of J. Renard's prose texts determines the complex nature of the verbal component, which combines features of prose and free verse with elements of the fable and the satirical essay. In the absence of direct intonational and thematic connections between the individual pieces, the architectural integrity of the work is ensured by its overall stylistic unity. In this case, the principal integrating factor is a consistent approach to the treatment of the literary text, reflected in the shaping of the vocal line and the use of recurring textural techniques. The composer grants the piano part a degree of autonomy comparable to that of the instrument in a solo work, while its importance in shaping the overall architecture is manifested in the imaginative use of harmonic and textural resources.

8. The study of the French *mélodie* in general and M. Ravel's vocal cycles in particular leads to the conclusion that an in-depth knowledge of the French language on the part of both singers and pianists is particularly important for fully engaging with the artistic atmosphere of these works and developing an individual performance interpretation. Singers require linguistic competence not only to ensure the correct phonetic pronunciation of the poetic text, but also to gain a deeper understanding of the author's intention, since the musical fabric of the *mélodie* is closely connected with the unfolding of the poetic thought and often serves as its direct musical expression. For pianists, too, a precise understanding of the meaning of each word is of considerable importance. Rather than perceiving only the general semantic content of a phrase, such an approach enables performers to convey the artistic conception of the work more convincingly, since in M. Ravel's vocal cycles the sonority, texture, and dynamic characteristics of the accompaniment are often shaped by key words and poetic images. In addition, listening to a variety of performance interpretations in recordings by renowned artists can be particularly valuable for performers, enabling them to develop and substantiate their own artistic vision.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- continuing to expand the analytical tools employed in the study of related areas of the international and national chamber vocal repertoire;
- strengthening the methodological framework by fostering a creative dialogue between musicological theory and performance practice;
- developing the findings of the present research into teaching materials for singers and collaborative pianists, aimed at developing an understanding of the distinctive stylistic features of the French *mélodie*;
- continuing the comparative study of M. Ravel's vocal cycles from the perspectives of the evolution of musical language, the structural characteristics of texture, and the distinctive approaches to the poetic text;
- promoting M. Ravel's chamber music legacy by integrating his works more extensively into contemporary concert practice;
- validating and implementing the research findings within the curricula of specialised courses, including *Chamber Repertoire*, *Accompaniment Studies*, *Solo Singing*, *History of Performance Art*, and *Accompaniment Practice*;
- organising a series of masterclasses and coaching sessions at AMTAP, involving leading specialists in the French repertoire, with the aim of strengthening performance traditions;
- initiating international partnership projects for the exchange of experience in the performance of the vocal music of M. Ravel and his contemporaries.

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PRACTICAL COMPONENT OF THE THESIS
(PROGRAMMES OF THE AUTHOR'S SOLO RECITALS)

CONCERT PROGRAMME No. 1

Academy of Music, Theatre and Fine Arts
Grand Hall, Building 2

2 December 2024

1. G. Fauré, *Cygne sur l'eau* from *Mirages*, Op. 113, No. 1
2. G. Fauré, *Les Berceaux*, Op. 23, No. 1
3. G. Fauré, *Mandoline* from *Cinq Mélodies de Venise*, Op. 58, No. 1
4. G. Fauré, *Clair de lune*, Op. 46, No. 2
5. G. Fauré, *Élégie* for cello and piano, Op. 24 (C minor)
6. M. Ravel, *Deux épigrammes de Clément Marot*:
 - *D'Anne qui me jecta de la neige*, M. 21
 - *D'Anne jouant l'espinette*, M. 10
7. M. Ravel, *Ballade de la reine morte d'aimer*, M. 4
8. M. Ravel, *Manteau de fleurs*, M. 39
9. M. Ravel, *Rêves*, M. 79
10. F. Poulenc, *Chansons gaillardes*, FP 42:
 - La Maîtresse volage*
 - Chanson à boire*
 - Madrigal*
 - Invocation aux Parques*
 - Couplets bachiques*
 - L'Offrande*
 - Sérénade*
 - La Belle jeunesse*

Performers:

Natalia Moscovciuc (soprano)
Gheorghe Severin (bass-baritone)
Dmitri Popușoi (cello)

CONCERT PROGRAMME No. 2

Academy of Music, Theatre and Fine Arts
Grand Hall, Building 2

30 June 2025

1. M. Ravel, *Cinq mélodies populaires grecques*:
 - *Chanson de la mariée*, A. 9
 - *Là-bas, vers l'église*, A. 10

- *Quel galant m'est comparable*, A. 4
- *Chanson des cueilleuses de lentisques*, A. 5
- *Tout gai!*, A. 11
- 2. M. Ravel, *Chants populaires*, A. 17:
 - *Chanson espagnole*
 - *Chanson française*
 - *Chanson italienne*
 - *Chanson hébraïque*
- 3. M. Ravel, *Deux mélodies hébraïques*, A. 22:
 - *Kaddisch*
 - *L'Énigme éternelle*
- 4. M. Ravel, *Vocalise-étude en forme de habanera*, M. 51
- 5. M. Ravel, *Les grands vents venus d'outre-mer*, M. 48
- 6. C. Debussy, *La mer est plus belle que les cathédrales*, L. 81
- 7. C. Debussy, *Romance*, L. 79
- 8. E. Chausson, *Le Temps des lilas*, Op. 19
- 9. F. Poulenc, *Vers le sud* from *Calligrammes*, FP 140
- 10. F. Poulenc, *C'est le joli printemps* from *Chansons villageoises*, FP 65
- 11. F. Poulenc, *Les Chemins de l'amour*, FP 106

Performers:

Natalia Moscovciuc (soprano)
Gheorghe Severin (bass-baritone)
Anastasia Slobodianiu (soprano)

CONCERT PROGRAMME No. 3

Academy of Music, Theatre and Fine Arts
 Grand Hall, Building 2

1 December 2025

- 1. M. Ravel, *Histoires naturelles*, M. 50:
 - *Le Paon*
 - *Le Grillon*
 - *Le Cygne*
 - *Le Martin-pêcheur*
 - *La Pintade*
- 2. M. Ravel, *Ma mère l'Oye*, M. 60
- 3. M. Ravel, *La Valse*, M. 72

Performers:

Gheorghe Severin (bass-baritone)
Serghei Constantinov (piano)

SCIENTIFIC PUBLICATIONS RELATED TO THE THESIS SUBJECT

2. Articles in scientific journals

2.3. In the journals included in the National Register of Specialized Journals (with indication of category):

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<https://akademos.asm.md/index.php/akademos/ro/article/view/317/414>

2. Краснова-Северин, Е. Вокальный цикл М. Равеля *Пять греческих народных мелодий*: исполнительский потенциал трактовки авторского текста. В: *STUDIUL ARTELOR ȘI CULTUROLOGIE: ISTORIE, TEORIE, PRACTICĂ*. № 2 (47), 2024. Chișinău: Notograf Prim, 2024, с. 56-62. Revista științifică, **tipul B**. ISSN 2345-1408.

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3. Краснова-Северин, Е. *Chants populaires* М. Равеля: образец композиторской работы с народными мелодиями и исполнительские возможности их интерпретации. В: *STUDIUL ARTELOR ȘI CULTUROLOGIE: ISTORIE, TEORIE, PRACTICĂ*. Chișinău, Notograf Prim, 2026, № 1 (50), с. 103–110. Revista științifică, **tipul B**. ISSN 2345-1408.

[https://revista.amtap.md/wp-](https://revista.amtap.md/wp-content/files_mf/178688120615.CrasnovaSeverin_Chantspopulaires%D0%9C.%D0%A0%D0%B0%D0%B2%D0%B5%D0%BB%D1%8F.pdf)

[content/files_mf/178688120615.CrasnovaSeverin_Chantspopulaires%D0%9C.%D0%A0%D0%B0%D0%B2%D0%B5%D0%BB%D1%8F.pdf](https://revista.amtap.md/wp-content/files_mf/178688120615.CrasnovaSeverin_Chantspopulaires%D0%9C.%D0%A0%D0%B0%D0%B2%D0%B5%D0%BB%D1%8F.pdf)

3. Articles in scientific proceedings

3.2. Collections of articles based on materials from international conferences: culegeri de lucrări ale conferințelor internaționale:

4. Краснова-Северин, Е. Общая характеристика вокального цикла М. Равеля *Две эпиграммы Клемана Маро*. В: *Învățămintul artistic – dimensiuni culturale*: Conferința științifică internațională, 26 aprilie 2024. Chișinău: AMTAP, 2024, с. 76–84. ISBN 978-9975-176-05-7.

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6. Краснова-Северин, Е. Вокальные циклы М. Равеля в творческом наследии композитора. В: *Cultura și arta: cercetare, valoficare, promovare: Materialele conferinței științifice naționale a doctoranzilor și conducătorilor de doctorat, 8 decembrie 2023*. Chișinău: AMTAP, 2024, с. 36-43. ISBN 978-9975-176-04-0.

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3.5. Collections of articles based on materials from conferences with international participation abroad:

8. Краснова-Северин, Е. Содержательный аспект анализа романа А. Дюпарка *Приглашение к путешествию*: варианты исполнительского прочтения. В: *ДИАЛОГИ О КУЛЬТУРЕ И ИСКУССТВЕ*. Материалы XIII Всероссийской научно-практической конференции (с международным участием). Пермь, 2023, с. 468-474. ISBN 978-5-91201-446-8.

ANNOTATION

Crasnova-Severin Ecaterina. The Expressive Potential of the Piano Part in Maurice Ravel's Vocal Cycles. Thesis for the degree of Doctor of Arts in the field of 021.5 – Music, PhD program – Musicology (653.01), Professional Doctorate, Chişinău, 2026.

Thesis structure: theoretical research: Introduction, four chapters, General Conclusions and Recommendations, a bibliography comprising 156 titles, and three appendices; 101 pages of analytical text and 30 pages of appendices. **Artistic component:** three concert programmes recorded on USB media.

Keywords: Maurice Ravel, vocal part, vocal cycle, chamber vocal ensemble, *mélodie*, folk song, poetic text, piano part.

Field of study: French chamber vocal music.

Purpose and objectives of the thesis. The aim of the research is to investigate the expressive potential of the piano part and its role in conveying the artistic conception of M. Ravel's vocal cycles, based on an analysis of the musical text and performance interpretations.

The objectives of the study are: to analyse the principal features of the content, form, and musical language of Ravel's chamber vocal cycles *Épigrammes de Clément Marot*, *Cinq mélodies populaires grecques*, *Histoires naturelles*, *Chants populaires*, *Deux mélodies hébraïques*, and *Don Quichotte à Dulcinée*; to characterise the role of the piano accompaniment with a view to developing a convincing interpretation of these cycles; to reveal the distinctive textural features of the piano part; to identify and systematise the most significant challenges arising in the artistic interpretation of the selected works; to compare representative performance interpretations of these works; and to substantiate practical recommendations for overcoming the artistic and technical difficulties encountered in the performance of the vocal cycles under consideration.

The scholarly novelty and originality of the thesis lie in the comprehensive approach to the research subject, combining performance practice with theoretical investigation. For the first time in Moldovan musicology, M. Ravel's vocal cycles are analysed within the cultural and historical context of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and from the perspective of contemporary performance traditions.

The novelty and originality of the artistic conception of the thesis are demonstrated through concerts in which new performance approaches and interpretations of chamber vocal works by French composers were presented in artistic practice, including works rarely performed or presented for the first time in the Republic of Moldova.

The practical applicability of the thesis lies in the possibility of using the research findings in university courses such as *Accompaniment Studies*, *Solo Singing*, *Chamber Singing*, *History of Western Music*, *Pedagogical Practice*, and *Accompaniment Practice*. The findings may also be valuable to performers in preparing concert and competition programmes, as well as in individual study and professional teaching practice.

Implementation of the research results. The practical validation was carried out during three concerts held in the Great Hall of AMTAP. The research results are reflected in 8 publications in scientific journals and collections of scientific articles, and were also presented at 6 national and international scientific conferences in Moldova, Romania and Russia.

ADNOTARE

Crasnova-Severin Ecaterina. Potențialul expresiv al partidei de pian în ciclurile vocale ale lui M. Ravel. Teză pentru obținerea titlului științific de doctor în arte în domeniul 021.5 – Artă muzicală, Program de doctorat – Muzicologie (653.01), doctorat profesional, Chișinău, 2026.

Structura tezei: cercetarea teoretică: introducere, patru capitole, concluzii generale și recomandări, bibliografia ce include 156 de titluri, 3 anexe; 101 pagini ale textului analitic, 30 pagini de anexe. **Componenta artistică:** trei programe de concert, înregistrate pe suport USB.

Cuvinte-cheie: Maurice Ravel, partida vocală, ciclu vocal, ansamblu vocal de cameră, *mélodie*, cântec popular, text poetic, partida pianului.

Domeniul de studiu: muzica vocală de cameră franceză.

Scopul și obiectivele lucrării. Scopul cercetării constă în investigarea potențialului expresiv al partidei de pian și a rolului acesteia în realizarea concepției artistice a ciclurilor vocale de M. Ravel, în baza analizei textului muzical și a versiunilor interpretative.

Obiectivele investigației: a analiza principalele trăsături ale conținutului, formei și limbajului muzical al ciclurilor vocale de cameră *Epigrammes de Clément Marot*; *Cinq mélodies populaires grecques*; *Histoires naturelles*; *Chants populaires*; *Deux Mélodies Hébraïques* și *Don Quichotte à Dulcinée* de M. Ravel; a caracteriza rolul acompaniamentului pianistic în vederea elaborării unei versiuni interpretative relevante a acestor cicluri; a dezvălui particularitățile specifice texturii partidei pianistice; a releva și sistematiza cele mai importante probleme care apar în procesul interpretării artistice a lucrărilor selectate; a compara versiunile interpretative reprezentative ale lucrărilor date; a fundamenta recomandări practice pentru depășirea dificultăților artistice și tehnice întâmpinate în procesul de realizare interpretativă a ciclurilor vocale analizate.

Noutatea și originalitatea științifică a tezei sunt determinate de abordarea complexă a obiectului cercetării, care îmbină practica interpretativă cu investigarea teoretică. Pentru prima dată în muzicologia națională se realizează analiza ciclurilor vocale ale lui M. Ravel în contextul cultural-istoric de la sfârșitul secolului XIX – începutul secolului XX, în contextul tradițiilor artei interpretative contemporane.

Noutatea și originalitatea conceptului artistic al tezei se evidențiază prin concertele în care au fost demonstrate noi abordări și concepții interpretative ale unor lucrări vocale de cameră ale compozitorilor francezi, prezentate mai rar sau cântate în premieră în Republica Moldova.

Valoarea aplicativă a tezei constă în posibilitatea utilizării rezultatelor cercetării în cadrul cursurilor universitare, cum ar fi: *Măiestrie de concert*, *Canto*, *Lied*, *Istoria muzicii universale*, *Practica pedagogică*, *Practica de corepetiție*. Ele pot fi, de asemenea, valoroase pentru interpreți în pregătirea concertelor, programelor de concurs, în studiile individuale și activitatea pedagogică profesională.

Implementarea rezultatelor științifice. Validarea practică a fost realizată în cadrul a trei concerte susținute în Sala Mare a AMTAP. Rezultatele cercetării sunt reflectate în 8 publicații în reviste științifice și culegeri de articole științifice, precum și prezentate la 6 conferințe științifice naționale și internaționale din Moldova, România și Rusia.

Declaration of responsibility

I, the undersigned, Crasnova-Severin Ecaterina, hereby declare under my personal responsibility that the materials presented in this doctoral thesis are the result of my own research and scientific work. I am aware that, in case of otherwise, I shall bear the consequences in accordance with the applicable legislation.

Crasnova-Severin Ecaterina

Signature

CRASNOVA-SEVERIN ECATERINA

THE EXPRESSIVE POTENTIAL OF THE PIANO PART IN

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DOCTORAL FIELD OF STUDY 021.5 MUSIC
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