

## THE HISTORY OF VOCAL MUSIC IN SLOVAKIA

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### Abstract

This study is focused on the history of vocal music in Slovakia starting in the prehistoric era all the way to the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It describes the characteristic features of particular historical periods from the vocal music aspect. It covers different kind, forms and genres of sacral and secular music.

**Keywords:** song, religious song, folk song, art song, Slovakia, hymnal, song collection, music.

### 1 Introduction

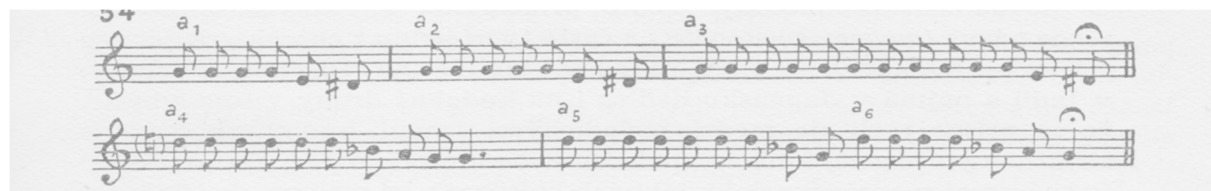
Vocal music is an essential part of people's lives. As the human society was developing, vocal music was changing accordingly. Since the prehistoric era and its simple vocal expressions, music has come a long way. Gradually, it was improving, and becoming more and more sophisticated and complicated - the number of voices was increasing; the accompaniment of musical instruments was added... Composers began to write works of various styles, forms and genres: songs for solo voice with or without the accompaniment of instrument(s) (and their various combinations), pieces for choirs a cappella and with different accompaniments, works for solo voice(s) and orchestra, cantatas, oratorios, requiems, Masses, even stage works - operas, operettas, music dramas, musicals, etc.

At this point, it seems to be necessary to illuminate the term vocal music. We chose Emanuel Muntág's (the author of the typo-documentation of T. Andrašovan) classification criterion, according to which the construct vocal works refers to all compositions for singers, including those, in which instrumental music sounds. However, we exclude large music-dramatic and stage compositions, and the film music. Above-mentioned types and genres of "classical" music ordinarily exist in written form.

In addition to the written form, vocal music has been also spread by oral transmission – in Slovakia it was mainly a folk song.

### 2 Prehistory

In the earliest stages, vocal music in Slovakia was, like in the other cultures, monophonic. The melody was built on the material containing only a few tones in a small interval range. The most remarkable element was undoubtedly the rhythm; its dominant position corresponded to the then main functions of music, which was created for ritual and work purposes. Presumably, the shortest units (the motifs) were repeated many times – unmodified or simply varied, thereby creating longer passages and eventually complete musical productions. In folk music, simple musical forms with one motive have been preserved, one of the most typical of which is "plačky" (Lament) expressing the sorrow and grief for the dead:



**Fig. 1** Plačka (Lament) from Žakarovce [1, p. 129]

A large body of research in Music History and Musicology has shown that a music performance could have been done in several forms: solo recitation, responsorial interpretation (alternation of a soloist and a group of several performers in the form solo - tutti), litany recitation (ostinato repetition of the motif, each time with new text), recitation in unison, and performance in the heterophony.

### 3 The Middle Ages

In the Slovak history of music, the medieval period lasted almost five hundred years (9th-14th centuries). It began with the short existence of Great Moravia, during which, in addition to liturgical singing, religious songs, spiritual/sacral, and folk music, also secular music appeared. Unfortunately, no primary music sources have been preserved. Today, there are no manuscripts, notated materials, original liturgical texts, or reports concerning music in Great Moravia.

Two precious artefacts which are believed to be the copies of the original texts from Great Moravia are dated to the tenth and eleventh centuries. They are referred to as Kijevské listy (Kievan Letters) from the tenth century, and Sinajské euchológium (Euchologium Sinaiticum) from the eleventh century. In both of these documents, graphical symbols are placed above the text lines. These symbols were used to indicate the intonation when reciting the texts. Up until now, they have not been fully deciphered.

Regarding music after Great Moravia, Richard Rybář noted, "... the picture of a vigorous and exceptionally interesting medieval music begins to emerge in front of us. ... It can be stated that the musical culture in Slovakia was not having a peripheral character during the 10th-14th centuries. It was not less valuable, decadent, or more primitive; it is just less documented by the original historical sources than the musical cultures of big nations" [2, p. 25].



**Fig. 2 Bratislavský antifonár II (Antiphonary from Bratislava) II [3, p. 283]**

Many medieval codices with notated Gregorian chant document that music in Slovakia after Great Moravia was represented by the Latin liturgical chant. They were preserved mainly in monasteries. The most valuable documents from this period are Spišský graduál (Gradual from Spiš), Spišský antifonár (Antiphonary from Spiš), Bratislavské misály (Missals from Bratislava), and Bratislavské antifonáre (Antiphonaries from Bratislava).

Also, the development of the polyphony and religious songs started to accelerate.

Historical sources documenting religious songs in Slovakia are very scarce. The reason is prosaic – there was no one to write them down, because they were sung in the folk environment and the folk were illiterate. Unfortunately, the scholars - intellectuals had no interest in recording them. Some records appeared in the codices, but they focused primarily on capturing the text, not the tune. Only assumptions, which are more or less justified, are available about

the form of the musical aspect of religious songs. One of the most valuable songs is *Hospodine, pomiluj ny* (Lord, Hear Our Prayer).

Interestingly, the relationship between the melody and the text was not very tight in the Middle Ages. Therefore, new melodies (counterposits) could be created on already existing texts, or different texts (counterfacts) could be written on existing melodies. Slovak religious songs were sung not only during religious services in the church, but also during pilgrimages, processions, and various celebrations outside the church. They were sung in vernacular and Czech languages. However, they got also influenced by the German and Hungarian languages.

Initially, multi-voice music was polymelodic, rather than polyphonic, i.e. two or more simultaneously sounding melodies could have been created spontaneously, naturally, or purposefully in the simple improvisation process. Singing in parallel fourths and fifths, typical for "organum", was a more advanced form of the polyphony. Seemingly, it was not written down using musical notes; only a simple remark "organum" was added to the monophony and a singer improvised in accordance with general praxis of that time.

Secular music was a widespread phenomenon in medieval people's lives. It sounded in almost all milieus and all social classes, regardless of the social status, region, wealth, or possession. It was heard among folks as their own folk songs, and transmitted by the musicians who travelled from place to place. It held an important place also in the feudal residencies, the castles, and the nobiliary courts, which were often visited by wandering musicians from Slovakia and from abroad. It was widely spread in towns: on fairs, in pubs, and at different assemblies. The carriers of secular music in Slovakia were the *igrics* (the term is derived from the Old Slavonic word *igrati* = play). They performed by heart, and naturally, their songs and instrumental pieces were never written down. Thus, secular music was then known through oral transmission.

#### 4 The Renaissance

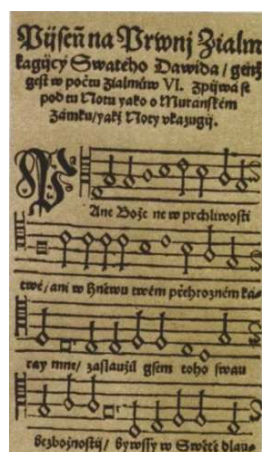
"From the historic perspective, music is a product of a human being, therefore it could be stated that it is developing in accordance to the development of a human society" [4, p. 80]. During the Renaissance, vocal music had favourable conditions for strong growth, particularly in the area of religious songs and polyphony.

Real flourishing of religious songs - songs of the folk and for the folk - was prompted by two Reformation movements: first, the Hussite, and a hundred years later, the Protestant. Religious songs were almost exclusively monophonic pieces. Although hundreds of them have been preserved, only very few of them are backed with the notes. Mostly, only the text contents are available.

Religious songs on the Slovak territory came from four main sources:

1. Slovak religious songs - original production of local authors (numerically, they are the least represented).
2. German religious songs - included in German hymnals. They were sung mainly in the cities with the German population (preferably in mining towns).
3. Czech religious songs - found in Czech hymnals. Their occurrence was significant and natural, whereas the Czech language was the liturgical language in Protestant churches.
4. Latin songs - psalms, hymns, antiphons ... translated into Slovak language (were based on the Gregorian chant).

A rare historical document is the songbook of Ján Silván (1493-1572) "*Písne nové na sedm žalmů kajících i jiné žalmy*" (The New Songs on Seven Penitential Psalms and Other Psalms). Silván's religious songs were closely associated with folk songs and secular historical songs. Several of them were based on the principle referred to as "countertexture".



**Fig. 3** Ján Silván: "Písně nové na sedm žalmů kajících i jiné žalmy" (*The New Songs on Seven Penitential Psalms and Other Psalms*) [5, p. 763]



**Fig. 4** Kódex Anny Hansenovej - Schumanovej (*Codex of Anna Hansenová-Schumanová*) [6, p. 126]

The most important centres of polyphonic music were churches. Polyphony was performed by active church choirs that made it available to the general public and simple folk people in liturgical and extra-liturgical productions.

Historical reports indicate that both vocal and instrumental polyphony were very common on the Slovak territory. They were produced in the Catholic, and since the mid-16th century also in the Evangelical communities. The works of prominent international authors represented the majority of the Renaissance repertoire; it is assumed that it was almost ninety per cent.

The extraordinary historical source of a great value is *the Kódex Anny Hansenovej - Schumanovej* (Codex of Anna Hansenová-Schumanová).

Anna, the widow of the burgher Hans Schuman from Bratislava, donated the Codex to the St. Martin's Cathedral in Bratislava in 1571. This extensive handwritten work contains 239 polyphonic songs for 3-6 voices that were interpreted, as evidenced by the additionally inscribed comments, by the church choir.

It is noteworthy that a special attention was paid to singing at schools. Singing class was taught five times a week, Monday through Friday from 12.00 (am) to 13.00 (1:00 pm). On Saturdays, the musical notes were copied and the songs were rehearsed for the Sunday worship. The pupils had to sing both the polyphony and the monophony. The school choirs were so advanced that they could perform 4-, 5-, and even 8-voice pieces without difficulties. For example, in the Latin school in Kremnica, eight-voice songs were included in the program at assemblies. In Banská Bystrica, pupils sang four-voice hymns at the beginning and at the end of each school day.

## 5 The Baroque

Slovak Baroque music is tied to the 17th and the first half of the 18th century. The first decades of the Baroque overlapped with the previous ceasing Renaissance period and the last decades were influenced by upcoming Classicism. Despite its relatively small territory, the Slovak Baroque style was not homogeneous: it was different in Bratislava, which had close contacts with advanced Vienna, in the mining towns affected by the import from Germany, in the cities with a Catholic tradition, or in Protestant areas; furthermore, it developed very differently in particular composers' style.

Pastorelas, plays on Christmas topics, became a precious contribution to the treasury of Slovak national music and they are considered to be a distinct manifestation of the Slovak

Baroque. Pastorela is a very broad term that encompasses religious songs, cantatas, simple arias, cyclic masses, carols, Bethlehem plays, and many others.

Music and text elements in folk pastorelas were quite simple and plain, yet they sincerely expressed the mystery of Christmas and the joy of the biblical "And the Word became flesh".

The most valuable works were created by members of the Franciscan order: Georgius Zrunek (he combined art- and folk-music, alternated the sections on Latin and Slovak texts, and included folk musical instruments in his compositions), Edmund Pascha (he used literal quotations of folk songs and imitations of pastoral folklore) and Paulín Juraj Bajan (he connected the Baroque elements and the elements of early Classicism with the folk music culture).

The Baroque provided excellent conditions also for the growth of religious songs. Many songbooks, collections, and hymnals were created. They were spread around in handwritten (manuscripts) or printed form. Religious songs, with the texts written in German, Latin, Czech, and Slovak languages, existed in both the Lutheran and the Catholic communities. The unnotated songbooks and tablatures which included the monophonic songs and the multi voice arrangements were copied; the instrumental interludes and instrumental accompaniment were added. The interreligious relationships and influences were formed...

The most valuable historical sources of the Baroque period are *Cithara Sanctorum*, *Cantus Catholici*, *Vietoris's tablature*, and *Pestrý zborník* (Varied Collection).

*Cithara Sanctorum* (1636) is the first hymnal of Slovak Lutherans. Moreover, it is the first notated songbook printed in Slovakia. Its author, Juraj Tranovský, included songs from a number of sources in it: Gregorian chant, medieval hymns, religious songs of the German Reformation, and Czech religious songs.

*Cantus Catholici* (1655) is the first printed hymnal of Slovak Catholics.



Fig. 5 *Cithara Sanctorum* [7]



Fig. 6 *Cantus Catholici*, cover [8, p. 32]

It was created by Benedict Szöllösi with the purpose to "compete" with Protestant hymnals. It contains Latin and Old Czech songs, recatholisation songs, and local religious songs. Several pieces from this hymnal were subsequently inserted in *Jednotný katolícky spevník* (Unified Catholic Hymnal).

*Vietorisova tabulatúra* (Vietoris's Tablature) is a practical guide for everyday use. In the hymnal, Catholic religious songs arranged according to the church year (Advent, Christmas, Easter...) are included, along with a wide repertoire of instrumental pieces. Since the tablature was intended for the aristocracy, it became a representative example of religious practice and taste.

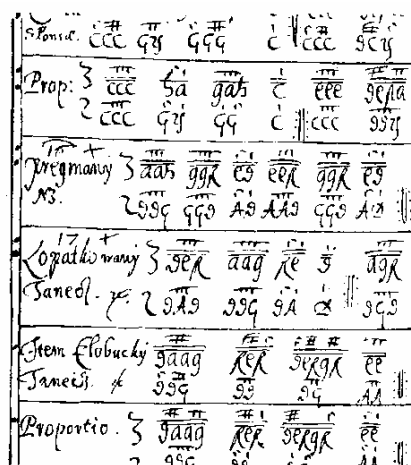


Fig. 7 Vietoris's Tablature, manuscript [9, app.]

*Pestrý zborník* (Varied Collection) originated in Spiš in a Protestant environment, which was influenced by the German culture, by music of neighbouring Poland and Ukraine, and by Viennese aristocratic culture. It contains also religious songs: some in the instrumental form, others in the form of monophonic or polyphonic arrangement – accompaniments to the solo voice.

Preserved vocal works and song fragments confirm that the polyphonic and polychoric technique was used when composing music in Slovakia.

Protestant and Catholic composers created local works. The most important were:

- Paulín Juraj Bajan - he composed Slovak religious songs with a strong folk coloring.
- Samuel Friedrich Capricornus - modern composer fully aware of Italian, German and Austrian music, holds an important position not only in Slovak, but also in European sacred music. He created his own compositional style based on the achievements of European music.
- Ján Kusser - he included technically challenging passages in his vocal works. He wrote valuable religious concerts for vocal ensemble, solos and instrumental ensemble.
- Edmund Pascha - he became one of the representatives of the Slovak Baroque pastorelas.
- Ján Francisci - "significant musician in a global context".
- Ján Šimbracký - his works manifest the ties with the European trends.
- Zachariáš Zarewutius - inspired by the Italian and German polyphony, he composed mainly vocal works for more than one choir.
- Pantaleon Roškovský - the most important figure of late-Baroque music in Slovakia.

The composers were often limited by the interpretive apparatus (vocal and instrumental) which was available at that moment. In this respect, the situation in the major cities and large musical-cultural communities was favourable. The convenient conditions were created also in smaller towns.

## 6 Classicism

Slovak territory covered about one-fifth of the Hungarian Empire, where almost a quarter of the total population (of German, Slovak, Hungarian and Croatian nationalities) lived.

While the Classicism in European music spanned the period of 70 years and went from 1740 to 1810, the classical period in Slovakia was postponed for about two decades. Its fading was even longer in some areas. The "relationship" between Slovakia and Europe was being intensified during the period of Classicism:

- Works of foreign composers held a unique position and often played a formative role in the music repertoire in Slovakia. Famous musicians (L. van Beethoven, J. Haydn, W. A. Mozart, F. Schubert) visited Slovakia, gave concerts and presented their own works.
- From Slovakia, musical impulses were spread and applied in the neighboring countries.

Although the trend was clearly directed from church music to secular music of the aristocracy and bourgeoisie, the vocal music held a dominant position in the church music. "In the temples of big cities as well as in towns and villages, the challenging works for soloists, choir, and orchestra sounded: Masses, litanies, graduals, Te Deum,..., and also the distinctive pastoral masses and pastorelas, ... arias for solo voices with organ" [10, p. 29].

In the aristocratic palaces and city theaters, operas and singspiels were played; at concerts, popular art songs were heard; and folk songs were entering the bourgeois and aristocratic society.

Prominent composers of that era were: Anton Aschner, Juraj Družecký, Anton Július Hiray, Johann Nepomuk Hummel, Heinrich Klein, Franz Paul Rigler, Johann Matthias Sperger, František Xaver Tost, Anton Zimmermann, František Xaver Zomb.

## 7 The 19<sup>th</sup> century

"Two historic, style-making and research areas come to the fore when trying to interpret the history of music in the 19th century:

1. musical values bound to the period of ceasing Classicism and
2. music phenomena and facts relating to the birth of the Slovak national music" [11, p. 9].

Late Classicism was closely associated with the European trends in music and it was gradually replaced by the orientation on Romanticism. The development of Slovak national music was passing through several phases; nevertheless, it was always confronted with folk songs and folklore.

A typical feature of the 19th century is the emergence of national culture. It was preceded by complicated processes in the political, economic, and social spheres which were related to the Enlightenment ideals and to the reforms of Maria Theresa and Joseph II. Slovak ethnic group in the Hungarian Empire fought for national and cultural autonomy and formed its first national and political program "Requests of the Slovak nation."

The development of Slovak nationality was naturally linked with an interest in the history of Slovaks and with a focus on folk traditions. "Everywhere, the musicians proudly, even uncritically emphasized the unusual, specific character of a folk song, considering it a rare, untouchable gem ... They romantically considered the Slovak nation to be musically most gifted of all nations; according to them, its spirit and character was reflected exactly in folk songs" [10, p. 41]. In the next phases of Slovak National Revival, the opinions about how to work with the folk song changed significantly. For example, Svetozár Hurban - Vajanský asked composers "not to get satisfied with a rough diamond, but to process it artistically ... Songs are not works of art, they must pass through the crystal of artistic conception" [12, p. 271]. Musical representatives of the national revival process in its next phase were patriotic songs. They were published in collections called "venčeky (Wreaths)". Subsequently, many of them have become hymnal songs which have been preserved to this day: Hej, Slováci (Hey, Slovaks), Kto si rodom Slováč (Who Is Born Slovak), Kolo Tatier čierňava (Blackness Around Tatras), Kto za pravdu horí (Who Burns for the Truth), Hej, pod Kriváňom (Hey, Under Kriváň), and the current national anthem Nad Tatrou sa blýska (Above Tatra Bolts of Lightning).

The text of the song Hej, Slováci (Hey, Slovaks) was written by Samo Tomášik in 1934. He used the melody of the Polish song Jeszcze Polska niezgyniela. The song was "...included in all of the Czech and Slovak (both notated and un-notated) social songbooks" [11, p. 40]. Hymn

Hej, Slováci (Hey, Slovaks) was known also in different textual variants, e.g. Hej, Slované (Hey, Slavs).

Text by S. TOSTÁŇIK. Polish Melody. Harmonised by JOSEPH LÖW.

Up ye Slov-aks! still is liv - ing our true Slov'ak lang-uage While our loy - al  
 Hej Slová - ci! aš - te na - ša Slovácky ved' ži - je! Dokiaľ' na - ša že  
 hearts are beat - ing tru - ly for our nat' ion - living living yes and deathless  
 verne srd - ce za naš' pe - rod ži - je! žije duch slovácky.  
 is the Slov - ak Spir - it Hell and light - ning Hell and light - ning ragam-wag  
 bide žit' na va - ky Hroma pe - klo mrače va - še proti nám sú  
 ainst us Hroma pe - klo mrače va - še proti nám sú vzteky! -  
 vzteky.

Fig. 8 Hymnic song Hej, Slováci (Hey, Slovaks) [13]

The Slovak national anthem Nad Tatrou sa blýska (Above Tatra Bolts of Lightning) was not composed on the original melody, either. It was created in 1844 by combining the poem by Janko Matuška with a Slovak folk song Kopala studienku (She Was Digging a Little Well) that "was played on the guitar by the poet's friend Joseph Podhradský" [12, p. 277].

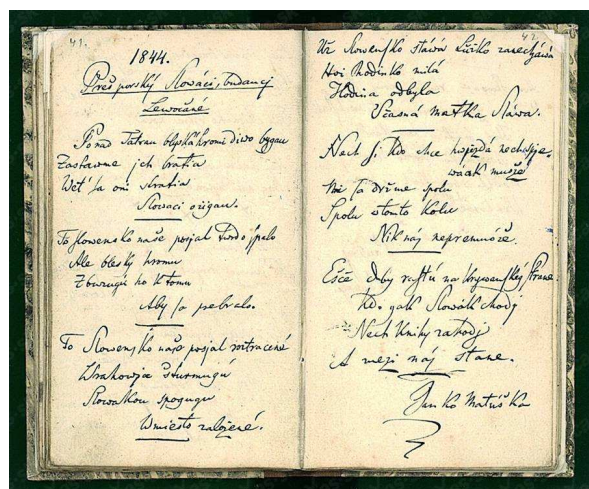


Fig. 9 Text by Janko Matuška, the oldest manuscript, 1844 [14]

Risoluto (♩ = 88)

Nad Tatrou sa blýska, hromy divo bi - jú,  
 nad Tatrou sa blýska, hromy divo bi - jú,  
 zastav - me ich, bratia, veď sa o - ny stratia,  
 Slováci o - ži - jú. Slováci o - ži - jú.

Fig. 10 The national anthem of Slovak Republic [15]

Lyrics: "Above Tatra bolts of lightning, thunderstorm pounds wildly.  
 Above Tatra bolts of lightning, thunderstorm pounds wildly.  
 Let's stop them brothers, they will be lost, Slovaks will rise alive.  
 Let's stop them brothers, they will be lost,  
 Slovaks will rise alive.  
 Our Slovakia was in deep sleep until now.  
 Our Slovakia was in deep sleep until now.  
 But thunder's lightning is shaking it to its revival.  
 But thunder's lightning is shaking it to its revival" [15].



The prominent figures of the National Revival who managed to cross the boundaries of creating amateurish folk songs collections and writing simple harmonizations were: Ľudovít Vansa, Štefan Fajnor, Milan Lichard, Michal Laciak, Karol Ruppeldt, Ján Kadavý, August Horislav Krčméry, Ján Meličko, Ľudovít Izák...

They opened a new dimension in Slovak music of the 19th century and made a valuable contribution to the formation of national music by writing patriotic songs, and later on, art songs.

## **8 The 20<sup>th</sup> and the 21<sup>st</sup> centuries**

Slovak vocal music in the first two decades of the 20th century was marked by lingering practices of "venčekári" (music amateurs creating venčeky) and by strong folklorism.

The self-identification phase with revivalist and patriotic tendencies was replaced in the 30s by acculturation movement which sought to enhance the professionalism and to direct the focus on the musical culture of other countries. New generation of composers emerged - representatives of national modernism - which created "the synthesis of domestic inspirational sources, achievements of Post-Impressionist music, and Early-Expressionist elements" [16, p. 39]. Composers of vocal works eliminated the idyllic-romantic connection to local folklore and subsequently, they turned away from the stylish base of Impressionism and Expressionism.

In the 60s, a platform of using the human voice in solo, choral, and especially in the vocal-instrumental works has significantly expanded. Characteristic features of new compositions were unique sound effects, unconventional combination of voice and musical instruments, and inspiration in compositional techniques of dodecaphony, aleatory, punctualism, counterpoint...

Since the 80s, Slovak music has been showing considerable signs of stylish pluralism. Many composers combine different genres and write works that are polystylistic. They follow the tradition of both European and non-European music (Gregorian chant, Gothic, Renaissance ... and the folklore). Vocal music is often written on asemantic texts. Stereotypes of "classical" art music modify the elements of jazz, rock, beat, and so on.

To create a synthesizing and global view of music of the 20th century is very complicated. Individual composers' styles are in fact so original and diverse that any effort to create a list of their generalized characters would result in reduced and biased picture.

The paper is the modification of the selected chapters from the publication Notes on vocal works of Slovak composers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century [17].

## **9 Summary**

Vocal music in Slovakia took a long way: from the prehistoric times to the 21st century, its content, structure, form and methods of interpretation have been changing. In the prehistoric period, the simple motives dominated; in medieval era, the religious music was most important; in the Renaissance, various collections containing vocal music were formed; in the Baroque, folk pastorals, Lutheran and Catholic hymnals and collections appeared; in Classicism, Slovak vocal music was exported to Europe and European works sounded in Slovakia; in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, patriotic songs that promoted national revival dominated; in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, composers wrote polystylistic works in various genres and forms, and they also employed the elements of jazz, pop and rock, beat and folklore in their works. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, vocal music keeps developing following these trends.

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