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PLASTIC EXPRESSION AS ONE OF THE COMPONENTS OF RHYTHMIC GYMNASTS' SKILL

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Abstract. The main difference of rhythmic gymnastics is that its greatest role is attributed to its plastic component, i.e. the beauty of performed exercises. When analyzing competitive compositions in rhythmic gymnastics, experts and judges often conclude that the majority of female athletes should manifest integrity and cohesion in their movements and should be able to demonstrate plastic expression and emotionality typical to gymnastics. This article considers the main components of plastic expression, as well as views of different authors on the interpretation of the concept of this phenomenon.

Keywords: rhythmic gymnastics, plastic expression, emotionality.

Introduction. A rich and controversial legacy of several centuries lies at the basis of rhythmic gymnastics' originality. A researcher discovers a vivid palette of diverse schools and systems (gymnastic, rhythmic, plastic, dance), which have a significant value in terms of finding the origins of specificity in the self-definition of the sport. Distinctive features are stated in the very name of rhythmic gymnastics. The term "rhythmic" means "maximally expressive" [1]. Most leading experts in this sport share an opinion by B.G. Bataen and E.V. Avsenev [2] that a rhythmic gymnast should be distinguished by "perfection, completeness, expression, elegance, originality of execution of movements and exercises as a whole". It's no coincidence that T.S. Lisitskaya [3] suggested the "art of expressive movement" as an object of study and assessment in rhythmic gymnastics.

Therefore, expression of performances takes a substantial place among other components of gymnasts' sportsmanship, and their training is considered as one of the most important tasks of theory and practice in rhythmic gymnastics [4]. In order to solve this task, we need to study content, structure, main signs of plastic expression and methods of its formation.

The purpose of the study: an analysis of the plastic expression's components and different views of authors on the chosen quality.

Methods and organization. We have studied and analyzed the available data of domestic literature on applying the method of forming plastic expression during training. We used content analysis of references, scientific and methodological literature.

Results and discussion. Plastic expression refer to very capacious phenomena, which have not yet been defined [5]. Meanwhile, traditional (classic) aesthetics define it as an expression of the internal (feelings, thoughts, movements) as the external: in sounds, body movements, speech etc. [6]. Because of that, expression is a significant characteristic of an artistic form. B. Lowe suggested another definition: "a sport of expressive form" [7]. In other words, art implies an impressive expression of the content in the form of a piece. Since in rhythmic gymnastics a piece of art has a bodily character, plasticity acquires a special artistic significance.

In rhythmic gymnastics, plasticity is the only original "language" fit to perform an exercise and express different feelings and ideas [6]. This is the reason why plasticity is considered as a combination of body movements in a gymnast's exercise that correspond with their character and manner [8]. It is a special group of expressive measures (it is often called "expressive plasticity", "free plasticity", or "specific movements"), which includes waves, wave-like movements, swings [9].

A term “plastic expression” (a synonym for “body expression”) has firmly entered the lexicon of theater and sports to evaluate the plasticity of a performer in a role or during a performance [10]. A phenomenon of plastic expression in rhythmic gymnastics has deep psychological roots. Only the movement that is filled with a specific feeling or thought becomes an expressor of the human condition.

M. Eremina points out a historically formed connection of dance plasticity of a performer with their emotions [11], saying that “a primal dance was created from emotions and was directly connected with strong experience”. Music lies at the fundamental of such connection [9]. According to Z.D. Verbova [5], in a music piece, “in addition to the rhythm, there are also the composer's emotions, moods and shades of experience. Music is not only the soul but also a dance's matter”. Which is why in an effort to give expression to the movements, the essential point is to perform them in accordance with the character of the music [4].

According to M.V. Pristavkina [12], personal factors influence on manifestation of expression and its scope, such as psychological makeup, temperament, general and motor skills, knowledge, age. Largely due to this reason, a gymnast at a certain stage of achieving perfection becomes capable of delving deep into the music, begins to show a predisposition to music and movements of a certain character (to the so-called emotional expression according to M.V. Pristavkina) [12].

Another significant side to this phenomenon is the so-called “technical expression” [9]. When comparing the concepts of internal and technical expression, it is inappropriate to give the latter only a secondary role to achieve true plastic expression. Z.D. Verbova gives a solid proof in favor of this thought [5]. She suggests that “ability of have emotional experiences is not expression, since the manifestation of emotionality should have a beautiful rhythmic form. If there is no form, emotionality will not have its manifestation”. Therefore, a gymnast should have an ability to think through a sound of each element and exercise as a whole, considering them not only as a demonstration of technical prowess, but also as a “speechless” language, as

a way to express different shades of feelings [5].

This is the reason why close attention to technical training is needed in terms of forming plastic expression. In this context, it is not enough to possess a “skill of external artistry” while including several learned decorative elements in a performance program [10]. When it comes to a gymnast's true plastic expression, any movement action of an exercise combination, without regard to its level of difficulty, must be mastered at a radically higher level of “expressive movement skill”. According to T.S. Lisitskaya [9], the exercise should be brought to that degree of technical perfection when it is capable of conveying a certain emotional and semantic connotation.

In the current rules for judging rhythmic gymnastics competitions [13], several of the main requirements to exercises without an object include dynamicity and dancing character of their performance. Therefore, this is a direction, in which young gymnasts should perform.

Integrity, according to a definition of many experts in rhythmic gymnastics, means participation of all body parts in a performed motor action [3]. Modern rhythmic gymnastics follow the rule of “polyphony” of movements of different body parts, which gives them softness, plasticity and femininity, according to Z.D. Verbova [5]. In other words, signs of integrity are, on one hand, simultaneous performance of the main and additional movements, on the other hand – their ability to fuse (the following movement begins when the previous one is not yet finished). One of the interesting approaches is one developed by V.S. Tikhomirov, who considers plasticity as an important element of stage dance, making the movement complete. In order for the movement to become plastic, to be perceived as a whole, a performer should “make a continuous line in motion”.

As a result of analyzing performance technique [14], we may conclude that the best example of integrity among means of rhythmic gymnastics are specific movements, such as waves, wave-like movements and swings. Zh. Shishmanova [15] implies that “any gymnastic movement that pretends to be rhythmic should

begin with movements of the head and arms". According to results presented by V.B. Korenberg [16], amplitude head movements in integral elements of expressive plasticity significantly increase the requirements for coordination and distribution of the gymnast's attention. However, T.V. Tikhonravova implies that [14], "the head cannot remain "inanimate", it "involves" arms in movements". In turn, arms are the most melodic body part of a gymnast [14]. It proves the point that arms plasticity takes a leading role in creating body movements' intonation, i.e. in emphasizing the emotional state of a gymnast.

The data from the gathered material points out that currently experts do not have a common understanding of plastic expression and therefore its full definition. Results of the survey of rhythmic gymnastics coaches also serve as an evidence. Most often they choose "artistry" of movements, their integrity, completeness, unity, "sense of movement", "sense of line", "sense of pose", "movement culture" as characteristics of plastic expression. It means that the experts point out only separate components of this phenomenon, completely missing the point of it.

Along with that, the reference analysis underlines a comprehensive structure of plastic expression in rhythmic gymnastics. Thus, there is an author's view on the issue that expression of performing gymnastic exercises is achieved when its internal and external, technical components are interacting, i.e. when a gymnast's sensuality and mastery of motor skills to express this sensuality are harmonically fused in a performance[9].

In terms of this approach, definitions of plastic expression were given by M.V. Pristavkina [12], A.B. Nemerovskij [17], G.V. Morozova [18]. All of them define it as an ability to convey a certain emotional state in movements. It is important to note that such interpretation has a general character. A more detailed definition in terms of its originality of plastic language was given by Z.D. Verbova [5]. According to her concept, it is "a quality that is shown in proper technique, school of movement, "aplomb" and tempo of rotations, elegance, great amplitude, with full clarity of

the emotional component". However, this explanation lacks the structuring of its aspects.

Taking the aforementioned issues into account, there is a need to clarify the definition of plastic expression. In this regard, it is appropriate to consider plastic expression as an ability to convey the emotional and semantic component of a music piece by means of a holistic, dynamic, dance character of the exercise performance.

In order to form this ability a more detailed study of its both motor and psychological components is required.

In the Aerial and Aesthetic Gymnastics Federation (Sochi) the training process of young gymnasts includes a method of forming plastic expression, which included specific ways to learn this ability. The main measures are as follows:

- 1) correction of a gymnast's movement with explanation, demonstration, physical assistance and music;
- 2) self-control with/without a mirror;
- 3) assessment of the performance's quality by a coach;
- 4) contrasting performance and perception of movements (right/wrong, beautiful/not beautiful);
- 5) "imagination" games;
- 6) improvisations of a gymnast to music;
- 7) watching video footage of one's own performance and performances of professional gymnasts;
- 8) showcase;
- 9) assessment of the performance's quality by a student;
- 10) choreography.

The preparation part includes combinations of dance and gymnastic steps, elements of expressive plasticity: wave-like movements of arms and body, swings, relaxation exercises. Coaches of the Federation also combine these exercises with object manipulations. The used method of conjugate influence has a positive effect on coordination and associated with them abilities of training gymnasts (an ability to keep balance in case of increased vestibular activity, an ability to control muscle stress and relaxation in movement).

Exercise lessons also contain a combination of exercise performance with psychotechnical games and tasks. These distracting tasks, aside from their main goal to optimize muscle tone, also become an effective way to improve the psychomotor control level (differently speaking, training for concentration, attention switch and distribution) and develop such mental processes, as logical thinking and imagining:

- to call off without “forbidden” numbers;
- to catch a ball or other gymnastic equipment when hearing one’s own name;
- to come up with the greatest number of ways to use the named equipment;
- to “draw” an imaginary geometric figure with spatial imagining when interacting in a group;
- to find as many common features of two randomly selected words as possible;
- to find as many objects as possible that possess the set feature.

When choosing these tasks as active leisure between repeats, coaches make sure to maintain proper level of mental working capacity during the whole training session.

Conclusion. Consequently, the most important component of performance prowess in rhythmic gymnastics is plastic expression.

Conflict of interest. The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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It is revealed as an ability to convey emotional and semantic content of a music piece by the means of integral, dynamic, dance character of performing an exercise. Formation of such ability is one of the primary tasks of training from the initial stages to the exercise one [19].

The experts have concluded that a relatively low level of plastic expression is attributed to both young and highly qualified gymnasts. At the same time, there is no significant increase in this level with the growth of sports qualification of athletes. A high level of plastic expression was registered only in world-class gymnasts. At the modern stage of development of rhythmic gymnastics, in coach practice there is not enough attention given to formation of plastic expression at the stage of initial specialized training. Most experts solve this issue at the stage of athletic perfection, which does not always leads to expected results.

Achievement of plastic expression depends on an array of factors: technical prowess in performing specific elements without equipment, coordination fitness (development level of abilities to precisely regulate spatial, dynamic parameters of movement, maintain static and dynamic balance in complicated conditions, to relax muscles rationally), psychological features of a gymnast [20].

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