

FOLKLORIC LANGUAGE MIRRORED IN THE ROMANIAN INTERWAR MUSICAL CREATION

D. PEPELEA¹ A. VARDI²

Abstract: *The decline of the tonal-functional system has led to re-actualizing the interrupted “historical thread” of modal musical thinking. The restoration of this thread is due to the first wave of the national musical schools (the second half of the 19th century) and, subsequently, to the second wave (the first half of the 20th century) with their aesthetics oriented towards folkloric cultures. Materialized in the “reaction to the leading tone”, it brings about the creation of new modes for organizing the musical language. This way, the representatives of the Romanian musical school introduce within the musical creation the folk melodies, with their diatonic scales, intuiting the peasant’s authentic folklore, as well as the modal harmony.*

Key words: *Romanian musical school, folklore music, modal harmony.*

1. Introduction

Once with Debussy, the consistent operation in the musical-composition practice of some anhemitonic diatonic structures (such as the pentatonic or the hexatonic scale) becomes systematic, laying the tolls of an unmistakable stylistic unity. The Modalism of the representatives of the Russian musical school (Borodin, Mussorgski or Rimski-Kosakov) can therefore be caught a glimpse of, in its new harmonic attire or in the capacity to “forge” new modal structures, non-traditional, precursory to the synthesis modes (tone-semitone scale, lied mode with increased quint, etc.). Debussy’s

experience, as well as the one of the Russian musical school’s representatives is taken over and carried forward in some 20th-century composers’ creation. This way, Messiaen elaborated a modal technique of great actuality, which opens the access paths towards:

- Introducing the particular ethos of oriental exotic modes and of natural modes, detached from the chirping chant of the birds.
- Including the synthesis modalism within creation.
- Working procedures with “low density” modes” [7].
- Serializing the modes.

¹ Dept. of Performing Arts, *Transilvania* University of Braşov, Romania.

² Highschool of Music, University of Akron, Ohio, USA.

- Resorting to modes with limited transposition.

2. The premises of an original creation

The issue of the folkloric-essence modalism started to arouse the Romanian composers' interest, as a new concept upon the rural musical folklore became conspicuous in the cult musical creation. However, beside the *Prelude to Unison* by G. Enescu (1903) and of Kiriac's choral creation, this concept will only bear full fruit starting with the third decade of the 20th century. The innovations brought to the creation by the two precursory composers are connected to the use of new scales of chromatic sounds with increased second (Kiriac) or with mobile steps (Enescu), or of systems with fewer elements. An example of subtle interpenetration of some old pre-pentatonic modal systems with the tonal world is constituted by the *Prelude to Unison* from the *Suite I for Orchestra* by George Enescu, wherein there may be seen how the heptatonic is formed through interpenetrations of pre-pentatonic modes [2].

The generation of modern Romanian composers manifested modal preoccupations connected to:

- Folkloric modal diatonism (Sabin Drăgoi) or Byzantine (Paul Constantinescu).
- Modal chromatism resulted from procedures such as *tetra-chord scordatura* (P.Constantinescu) or from the use of the modes with increased second (Mihail Jora).
- Interweaving the modal with the serialism (Filip Lazăr, Zeno Vancea, Constantin Silvestri).

Intense modal preoccupations were registered in the wave of Romanian composers after 1950. New modal solutions were thereby reached, as Wilhelm Berger proceeds with the Fibonacci sequence (1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21,

etc.) or Anatol Vieru with the string of prime numbers (1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 11, 13, etc.). Through translating these numeric proportions, or some geometrical schemes, in elements of musical range, new modal systems were obtained and creatively applied, named synthesis modal systems.

3. Stylistic directions in the interwar Romanian music

The important changes occurred in the composition thinking on the realm of the musical language, the alert rhythm that characterizes the evolution of music during the first half of the 20th century led towards a wide palette of the orientations and tendencies outlined within this time interval. Octavian Lazăr Cosma remarks that, unlike the previous epochs, wherein every composing personality fit within the limits of a current, during the contemporary epoch, there become more characteristic the lack of fitting, the inclusion of the attributes specific to several currents, directions, in one's own style, the evolving appeal to different modalities, often situated at other composition pole. During this period, when the oscillations are striking, "the need is felt more than ever to find that spine, that axis, which, in the plurality of the stylistic directions, should confer a relative stability, through the connection to the same point" [1]. This role of polarizing factor of all stylistic directions adopted by the Romanian composing art is assumed by the inexhaustible folkloric collection. This way, although there are stylistic differentiations on the level of every creator's signature language, there cannot be stated that none of them has resorted to this valuable and original source, even if this one does not assert itself to the same extent in every one's creation. The perimeter of our composing art is inevitably focused on oscillating towards

sheer folklore and new directions, in a superior synthesis. Leaning on the suggestions proceeding from currents of wide circulation, our music assumes Impressionist, Neoclassical, Neo-Romantic, Expressionist impulses, remelting them in the stylistic matrix of the autochthonous folklore.

The adopted stylistic directions solve the issue of the conciliation between universal and national, between tonal and modal, between the vertical-harmonic and horizontal-melodic conceptions, finding authentic solutions in the instrumental creation of the period we have tackled. The integration of the Romanian composing art in the European national schools' contemporaneity will be done, in this stage, through modelling all components of the musical discourse – melody, rhythm, harmony, polyphony – and, under a more dissimulated guise, of the form. According to the musicologist Cl.L. Firca's opinion "it is eloquent, for instance, that within the creation laboratories, there are «processed» and fructified together, in different association and synthesis formulas: the suggestions offered by the popular monody and heterophony, the solutions of modal harmony and polyphony (deduced in their turn from the Romanian folkloric or liturgical modalism, from the still «ruling» one of Impressionist source or even from some neighbouring national schools' experience in the field of the modal technique), the hyper-chromatic tonal harmony and the imitative, Neo-Baroque-type or even linear-type polyphony, the style norms and the Classical or Neoclassical architectonic principles and the formal and genre particularities of the folklore, the asymmetrical rhythms and the laws of the *parlando* system from the folklore and, on the other hand, the expressions that the rhythm acquires at Stravinski (*ostinato*, polyrhythmic complexes etc.), the recitative of the ballad

and of the doina and the types of musical declamation, starting from Wagner and Debussy, Bartók and Janáček, up to the schönbergian *Sprechgesang* etc." [2].

The classical valences of the Romanian folklore (the symmetry of the popular dance and of the children's songs or of some species of the urban folklore, the *giusto* cadency of the carol, the diatonic, the motion and character contrast *doina-dance*, the major-minor parallelism) stand for the premises of the orientations in the composing art's modalities of Drăgoi, Andricu, Filip Lazăr, and, later on, Zeno Vancea or Paul Constantinescu. However, these classical coordinates characterizing the interwar Romanian composing thinking are differently materialized in the spirit of sobriety, equilibrium and symmetry illustrated by the composers' individual styles. At Sabin Drăgoi, they are enhanced through the miniature character of the creation, holding it within restrained formal dimensions, through observing the structural integrity of the popular melody, through initiating a modal harmonic language; his works for piano (miniatures, carols, doinas), for chorus, for voice and piano are a genuine "practical textbook of harmony" of the popular melody from the South of Ardeal, which proves the variety of possibilities that the folklore offers to musicians [5].

The aspect of the consistently quadric-vocal harmonic-polyphonic joints pertaining to these musical pieces proves the transfer of the choral writing into the instrumental-orchestral one. Succeeding to Bartók's remakes and harmonisations of popular songs – whereof also Romanian ones – Drăgoi will set correspondence relations among the Romanian and Hungarian creations of this style.

The manner of reflecting the folkloric valences in the neoclassical vision will prove to be characteristic to Filip Lazăr's musical nature. His concertos for piano,

the *Three Romanian Dances for Violin and Piano*, *Sonata for Piano*, *Sonata for Violin* will join to the same neoclassical direction that Ravel, Bartók, Prokofiev followed. The economy of means, the maximum concentration of the form, the contour clarity and precision of the themes “are – Cl.L.Firca states – a few of the metamorphoses that, sometimes, rather from an anti-Romantic or anti-Impressionist reaction than from the preoccupation of «returning to the Classics», an entire contemporary musical literature seemed to have imprinted on the classical concept” [2]. Liberally found in F. Lazăr’s creation, the neoclassical echoes may be also detected in creations by Dinu Lipatti or Marţian Negrea.

The direction of treating in the spirit of the Neo-Baroque polyphonic rigor (imitation, canon) the popular-origin set of themes has been joined, ever since the fourth decade, by composers such as Zeno Vancea, Sigismund Toduţă, Ludovic Feldman etc.

Restoring the thread of Kiriac’s tradition, we may speak, also like about a *Neoclassical phenomenon*, not rooted in the Western tradition, but in a rich “autochthonous musical-poetical tradition” [2], about the reappraisal of the Byzantine patrimony, a fact especially enhanced in Paul Constantinescu’s “Byzantine-style” creations (the two oratorios, a trio of strings, *Byzantine Sonata for Soloist Violoncello*). In P.Constantinescu’s case, the psalm melody stands for the source of a vocal-type instrumentalism and constitutes a reply of the popular vocal collection of melodies, which makes up the source for the vocality of Sabin Drăgoi’s instrumental-orchestral language.

The Expressionism’s penetration in the Romanian music (through creations of Rogalski, Jora, Lazăr) materializes in works with obvious programmatic nuance, directed towards exploiting some exotic,

picturesque valences (*Gypsies* by F. Lazăr), in the direction of the grotesque-nuance comic (*Two Symphonic Sketches* by Th. Rogalski, *At the Market* by M. Jora, the operas *Words from Matthew* by I. Nonna-Otescu and *A stormy Night* by P. Constantinescu). M. Jora is deemed the composer who installed within the Romanian music, the Expressionist orientation, expression of the humour, sarcasm, grotesque. This tendency was led farther by his disciples C. Silvestri, D. Lipatti, P. Constantinescu. The musical implications of this orientation are achieved through a melodic language inspired from the urban folklore (romance, fanfare music, oriental-coloratura or pop-music and entertainment music etc.), through musical portrayals, through the verve of that typical rhythmical ostinato (stravinskian motor), representing an ornamental amplification of the popular *accompaniment*, through the harshness of the orchestration or the tension of a chromatic harmony, on the line of Bartók’s or Stravinski’s anticipations.

We may talk, in this stage, of the perpetuation of an Impressionist direction in the Romanian school, direct descendant of Alfonso Castaldi’s composing school (among his students, there are D. Cuclin, I. Nonna-Otescu, A. Alessandrescu, M. Andricu), the symphonist who cultivated both the post-Romantic tradition (in Wagner-Strauss filiation) and the Impressionist one (separately, or realizing a mediation line between them) [2].

The thread of this Romanian-print Impressionism may be followed in some Marţian Negrea’s scores (suite for piano *Impressions from Countryside*), M. Jora (first part of the suite *Landscapes from Moldavia*), T. Rogalski (the first of the *Two Caprices* for orchestra) and, later on, in musical works by Dinu Lipatti, Constantin Silvestri etc.

4. Stages in enhancing the folkloric language in the interwar musical creation

The connection with folklore not only meant a limitation to the stage of simply remaking popular creations; the enhancement of the folkloric language within Romanian music has gone through an entire history in cult creation, which materializes once with Enescu's musical pieces (*Romanian Poem* and *Rhapsodies*) and continues nowadays. An important step for the interwar autochthonous creation, achieved in the direction of deepening the folklore's enhancement, is constituted by the establishment of the Romanian Composers' Society, during the year 1920, society that will patronize the Romanian musical movement, raising it to the summit of the musical „avant-gardism” through retrieving some universal-provenience phenomena, such as poly-tonalism and poly-modalism, the negation of the modal diatonic and the achievements of chromatic order. Composers of the generation that was just beginning to rise, Filip Lazăr, Zeno Vancea, Constantin Silvestri, Marcel Mihalovici made successful attempts of creating worldwide recognized compositions.

As regards the specific character of the Romanian music, three directions existed, whereof two resort to enhancing the popular source and a third one, formed of the so-called *universalists* (D. Cuclin, C.C. Nottara, A. Alessandrescu), neither rejects the autochthonous formulas, nor considers them an absolutely necessary condition. As regards the first two directions, one of them, represented by M. Jora, F. Lazăr, Z. Vancea, C. Silvestri, M. Mihalovici, gingerly resorts to folklore, avoiding the quotation, which would convey the creation a regional character and the other one, represented by S. Drăgoi, M. Negrea, T. Ciortea, P. Constantinescu intensely

uses folkloric formulas, even quoting them, developing the popular-essence modalism.

There is interesting to remark that the stages undergone by the folkloric orientation are stylistically superimposed on the rhythms of Enescu's creation, from using the quotation, to remaking or composing in the spirit of the Romanian popular music, to essentializing, to extracting archetypal elements from an old tradition which may be projected in universality. The first stage, of directly using the pre-existing folkloric datum, in guise of quotation [6], may be noticed in some works by Sabin Drăgoi (*Suite of Popular Dances for Piano, Rustic Entertainment* etc.), or Zeno Vancea (isolated, in *Covers*), or Mihail Andricu (*Three Symphonic Pictures*); the second stage, of faithfully imitating folklore, may be noticed at Filip Lazăr (*Entertainment for Orchestra*), at Z. Vancea (the ballet *Werewolf*), or in the cycle of the suite and of the miniature for piano, at M. Andricu, M. Negrea, P. Constantinescu etc., and the imitation achieved from a certain distance may be noticed in the orchestral suites of F. Lazăr or M. Jora (*Landscapes from Moldavia*); the third stage, of imprinting the folklore-intrinsic musical characteristics, through loans or thematic influences transferred to cult creation, which acquires thereby a specifically Romanian content, imposes popular genres with evoking, suggestive content, with programmatic virtues (carol, dance, doina, wail, long song) even in the pure, non-programmatic musical creation: *Sonata III for Piano and Violin* by G. Enescu, *Sonatina for Piano* by M. Negrea, *Quartet of Strings Op.9* by M. Jora, *Sonata for Piano Op.15* by F. Lazăr. These stages, of enhancing the folkloric language in the cult creation, sensitively materialize in every composer's individual style. The outlook disparities in the composing conception of

the representatives for the period we deal with, start, first and foremost, from every one's vision, focused on an either melodic-polyphonic or harmonic thinking. Doru Popovici frames P. Constantinescu, Ion and Gh. Dumitrescu within the post-Enescu composers who are representative for the harmonic modal-folkloric conception, unlike the polyphonic conception, represented, he dares say, by Z. Vancea, S. Toduță, T. Ciortea [4]. Marțian Negrea and Mihail Jora are harmonist by excellence, of post-Romantic origin, Impressionist in the first case, Expressionist in the second. The extreme tension of the harmonic language is a particularity of Jora's language, which brings him near to another contemporary creator, F. Lazăr. Pascal Bentoiu deems to be defining for certain creators, such as Mihail Jora, Filip Lazăr, an "abrupt harmonism, effect of the polytonal conglomerates and even of enclosing the chromatic whole", mirroring "the boundary feature between the post-Romantic world, intensely chromatic, and the Expressionist one, technically doubled by atonalism" [2].

5. Conclusions

The ever-evolving studies upon handling the folkloric language subordinate to the stages that our music from the first half of the 20th century has gone through during its crystallization process. In this respect, Vasile Herman voices the following: "as the entire first half of the century, Romanian music was dominated by George Enescu's overwhelming personality, settling the limits of this great period must consider the very limits in time of his existence and creation. We deem therefore to be extreme dates the years 1899 – moment of indefeasible self-assertion of Enescu's creation, through the apparition of the *Second Sonata in F minor for Violin and Piano, Op.6* – and 1955, the

year of George Enescu's death" [3]. As the end of the interwar stage in music is deemed to have occurred only in 1949, and not in the years subsequent to the War's end, but once with the stylistic turning point befalling under the influence of the new social-historic changes, we deem that the period we have dealt with covers, under a relatively unitary aspect, almost 30 years of Romanian music.

References

1. Cosma, O.L.: *Coordonate ale unității de concepție și diversității stilistice în muzica românească (Coordinates of Conception Unity and Stylistic Diversity in Romanian Music)*. In: *Muzica* magazine (1971) No. 5, p. 9-12.
2. Firca, Cl.L.: *Direcții în muzica românească, 1900 -1930 (Directions in Romanian Music)*. Bucharest. Academy Press, 1974.
3. Herman, V.: *Formă și stil în noua creație muzicală românească (Form and Style in the New Romanian Musical Creation)*. Bucharest. Musical Publishing House, 1977.
4. Popovici, D.: *Tradiție și inovație în muzica românească contemporană (Tradition and Innovation within Contemporary Romanian Music)*. In: *Muzica* magazine (1974) No. 2, p. 1-4.
5. Rădulescu, N.: *Sabin V. Drăgoi*. Bucharest. Musical Publishing House, 1971.
6. Vancea, Z.: *Creația muzicală românească, sec. XIX-XX (Romanian Musical Creation, 19th-20th Century)*, Vol.1. Bucharest. Musical Publishing House, 1968.
7. Vieru, A.: *Cartea modurilor (Book of Modes)*. Bucharest. Musical Publishing House, 1980.

See more of Romanian Folkloric Ensemble "DATINA" Seattle on Facebook. Log In. or. Create New Account. See more of Romanian Folkloric Ensemble "DATINA" Seattle on Facebook. Log In. Tom was one of the founders of Radost Folk Ensemble, and he's been promoting traditional Balkan music and dance, including Romanian, in the Seattle area for more than four decades. We had the honor of sharing the stage with Tom ever since one of Datina's first performances, in 2014. Radost was showcasing a Bulgarian dance at that event, but Tom impressed us backstage by reciting shouts in Romanian and showing us intricate Romanian dance steps he'd learned in the 1980s, after visiting our country. He's been a model over the years and we will miss his kind words and passionat