

“Everything in us and around us is a reflection of the spirit”. Wladimir Pantchev – A Compositional Portrait

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Abstract: *This paper investigates Wladimir Pantchev’s work from the perspective of the musicologist and singer Albena Naydenova, Wladimir Pantchev’s widow, focusing on stylistic aspects. The author presents firstly the three generations of Bulgarian composers, who created the compositional school in Bulgaria. The assimilation of the Western compositional techniques with which the composers model the folklore is common in the East countries. This is obviously in Pantchev’s works. The importance of the folk quote is underlined by the author. The quoted folk melody is treated by Pantchev in heterophony: the interpreters have to improvise simultaneously variants of the folk melody. The composer used the controlled chance principle creating a texture, which he named “sound-carpet”. Two works of the composer are discussed: Concerto for double bass and ensemble on old church songs (2001-2002) and “Lieder und Musik meiner Vorfahren”/ “Songs and Music of my Ancestors” for voice and live electronic (2008).*

Key-words: *mode, rhythm, heterophony, sound-carpet, composer generation*

1. Introduction

As widow of Wladimir Pantchev with whom I was 48 years happily married, I decided to present him and his compositional style, regarding some works.

Wladimir Pantchev was born in 1948 in Sofia, in Bulgaria, and died in 2021 in Vienna. He studied piano, conducting and composition with Konstantin Iliev and Vasil Kasandjev at the Bulgarian Music Academy in Sofia (Valchinova-Chendova, Naydenova 2008, 9-15). Later his composition professor was Edison Denisov in Moscow.

I want to do a short introduction about the development of the Bulgarian Compositional School, which belongs to the youngest schools of European music history.

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The Bulgarian history of music has begun in 1878 after the liberation from Turks. In our musicology the notion of 'composer generation' is common.

The First Generation after 1878 was represented by: DOBRI HRISTOV (1875-1941), PANAJOT PIPKOV (1871-1942), ANGEL BUKORESCHTLIEW (1870-1950), NIKOLA ATANASOV (1886-1945), among others. These composers were interested in the folklore of the country and composed music for choir and instruments, where they used quotes of authentic folklore. In the same time, the music language is related to the characteristics of the classic major-minor system.

The second Generation is the one after the First World War and was represented by: LYUBOMIR PIPKOV (1904-1974), PANTCHO VLADIGEROV (1924-1899); MARIN GOLEMINOV (1908-2000); VESELIN STOJANOV (1902-1969). This generation used the technique of an extended major-minor system and created interesting works on a European level in all musical genres.

The third Generation is represented by: KONSTANTIN ILIEV (1924-1988), LAZAR NIKOLOV (1922-205), GEORGI TUTEV (1924-1994), later VASSIL KASANDJIEV (*1934), IVAN SPASOV (1934-1996). These composers used as musical language the atonality, dodecaphony, and serial technique. Wladimir Pantchev learned from this third generation.

Now, active in Bulgaria are GEORGI ARNAUDOV (*1957), LYUBOMIR DENEV (*1951) and STEFAN DRAGOSTINOV (*1948).

From the Third Generation VASSIL KASANDJIEV is still active (Danova-Damyanova 2009, Iliev 2024, Krastev 1977, Palieva 2006).

2. The composer Wladimir Pantchev (1948-2021)

In 1991 Wladimir Pantchev moved to Vienna, where his works have been often performed. He worked for Universal Edition, organized concerts and courses of New Music. Between 1998-2013 he was vice-president of Ensemble Wiener Collage. Beside Austria, he has been performed in other countries. Pantchev composed in all genres. His works are mentioned in the Wikipedia (https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wladimir_Pantchev) so I will renounce to list them, focusing only on few ones (Valchinova-Chendova 2003, 202)

One of the characteristics of his compositional aesthetics is the close connection to the Bulgarian folklore and later to the folklore of other countries, especially to the Indian one. The quote of the folk song has the role of a cantus firmus, as the musicologist Neva Krasteva has noticed (Krasteva 2003, 302-309). In the works that are close to the folklore, he used the heterophony: starting from a melody of a folk song, he generated vertically more variants of it, frequently using

the controlled chance principle: the performers have to improvise close to the original folk melody. In the context of contemporary composition techniques, the improvisation becomes a multi-layered picture reflecting the world in its complexity, where the relation Time-Space forms an absolute trinity Past-Present-Future. The result is a block due to the crossing “sound carpets”, as the composer named them. He said about his works:

“My works are composed after an authentic and archaic material of multiethnic songs and instrumental pieces, of popular or sacral music. I often use as a composition principle the heterophony that I could describe as a sound-carpet consisting of woven layers of micropolyphonic structures, in G. Ligeti’s meaning. A composer is in every work on searching. In every work the search continues. As an artistic process, music unfolds and this process has never been totally completed, but can always and again give fruits. Performers also contribute to this, bringing good, original ideas and big visions. Then the listeners were immediately involved in the musicality and the spark jumps over.” (*Dialogue between the article author and the composer*, April 2020)

Concrete examples for what has been mentioned are his works composed for different ensembles and in different years. I want to discuss two of them, presenting the characteristics of his compositional thinking, which was born after 2000.

3. *Concerto for double bass and ensemble on old church songs* (2001-2002)

The ensemble consists of the same instruments as in the *Serenade* op. 24 by Schoenberg, but in this piece Pantchev added the piano. The sound spectrum makes the Bulgarian church songs sounding very clear in the double bass part and in the ensemble instruments that are treated solo. The interweaving of the modal rows of different densities, which builds the polyphonic nature of the composition, determines the inner expressivity of the discourse. This expression is created through the memory of Bulgarian and Slavic songs. The technical capacities of the double bass are used to maximum. This is due to the interpreter, Michael Seifried, one of the best double bassists of the Viennese scene for contemporary music: Wladimir dedicated him the work and was consulted by him (Figure 1):

Fig. 1. Wladimir Pantchev: "Concerto for double bass and ensemble" on old church songs (b.27-30)

4. "Lieder und Musik meiner Vorfahren"/"Songs and Music of my Ancestors" for voice and live electronic (2008)

The work is related to Wladimir's spiritual interest for his ancestors, in this case for his grandmother, Elena Pantcheva. In this work Vladimir made her voice sounding through centuries. The recording of four Bulgarian songs, which Wladimir had, was made in 1906 by Gramophone Company Limited. Starting from this recording, the composer had the idea to put two female voices (of his grandmother and of his wife, Albena Naydenova) and to project them using live-electronic. My voice was in live-performance in a dialogue with the voice of Elena Pantcheva from the recording, embedded in a diverse range of sounds of different electronic effects. The idea is unique, because only a few composers can enjoy this musical richness that has stood the test of time. Something old has come to life in the present.

promising work stands before his future researchers, which displays all his creativity and personality, and grants him a worthy place in the Bulgarian music culture, our Balkan Peninsula, and from here – perhaps in the world music history.

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