

The musical language in the piano sonatina by Carmen Petra-Basacopol

Corina IBĂNESCU¹

Abstract: *In the 20th century, according to the "modern moderate" concept launched around 1950, Romanian composers from the period after Enescu consolidate their creations in different genres by referring to tradition. In the foreground of the whole creation of this period, in the sonatina genre there are particular aspects of modal and polyphonic writing in an experimental note, with very varied rhythms, polyrhythmic structures whose essence comes from the richness of the folk song and dance. In the landscape of Romanian post-Enescian music, one can distinguish the particularly vast creation of one of the most prolific Romanian composers, Carmen Petra Basacopol. The work we are analyzing is the tripartite sonatina, composed in 1978, in which the same three sections of the sonata are clearly distinguished, but reduced to the size of an instrumental miniature. From a didactic point of view, it is a means of familiarizing the pianist "apprentices" with the form and genre of the classical instrumental sonata, but also with the outline of the expressive language in the interpretation of the works dedicated to the piano.*

Key-words: *sonatina, genre, form, piano, musical language*

1. Introduction

The multitude of trends and stylistic orientations that crossed the 20th century in the period after Enescu will be found in the musical creations, as well as in those from the theoretical-musical sphere, through the attraction manifested by the composers towards the *traditionalist* pole or, on the contrary, towards the expansion towards new compositional horizons. Thus, according to the concept of *modern moderate* launched around 1950, composers such as Mihail Jora, Tudor Ciortea, Pascal Bentoiu, Wilhelm Georg Berger, Theodor Grigoriu, Dumitru Capoianu, Dumitru Bughici, Carmen Petra-Basacopol, etc., will consolidate their creations in different genres referring to tradition.

¹ Dept. of Performing Arts, Transilvania University of Braşov, i_corina@unitbv.ro

The entire creation of this period in the sonatina genre brings to the foreground particular aspects of modal and polyphonic writing, along the lines of frugal searches that encompass modal technique and randomness, giving the writings an experimental note, with a generous, expressive melody, with very different rhythms, polyrhythmic structures, with a robust contouring role of themes, whose essence comes from the richness of the folk song and dance. Elements of musical language, blended in a personal way according to the creative style of each composer, can be found in the piano sonatinas of Romanian composers from the second half of the 20th century.

2. The musical language in the piano sonatina by Carmen Petra-Basacopol

In the landscape of Romanian post-Enescian music, one can distinguish the particularly vast creation of one of the most prolific Romanian composers, Carmen Petra Basacopol. The work we are analyzing is the tripartite sonatina, composed in 1978.

The first part of the sonatina - *Allegro con spirito* - built in the form of a tripartite lied A-B-A, brings to the fore a series of elements of modal writing evident from its beginning. As we can see from examples Figure 1.a (empty quint chord), Figure 1.b (eolian scale with ending on the A sound) and Figure 2, against the background of the eolian mode with the ending on the A sound, where the A melody is played, the sonatina starts with an empty quint chord - A-E-A - element specific to modal music.



Fig. 1a



Fig. 1b

C. P. Basacopol – „Sonatina – A part 1, System I, bar 1”

Moving on the background of a melodic pedal made by the left hand, the melody is revealed in its simple and clear evolution, without dramatic contrasts that disturb its atmosphere, bringing into the sound level the innocence of children's play.

A closer attention to the level of the left hand reveals the author's interest in the plagal relations - strongly modal element - of a descending quart, such as IV-I, VII-IV, as we can see in Figure 2, where the second phrase (bars 4-8) has a dorian perfume due to the appearance of the plagal relation IV-VII (or I-IV if we consider a modulatory inflection within a dorian on the sound of D). Also from this example is the asymmetrical arrangement of the two phrases that make up the first period, the first phrase having only three bars, while the second one is extended to five bars (Figure 2).

Allegro con spirito

I IV I IV I IV VII IV I IV I IV I IV I IV I IV I IV

(dorian: I IV)

Fig. 2. C. P. Basacopol – „Sonatina – A part I – Systems I-III, bars 1-8”

Looking further at the example above, we notice that the melody has a narrow ambitus, falling within the limits of a Doric-eolic tetracord on the A-H-C-D sounds in the first phrase (bars 1-3), then transposed into the second phrase (bars 4-8) on the C-D-E-F sounds that form a ionic tetracord. Interesting in this example is that search and return to the A sound and then, transposed, to the D sound, which, within the empty quint chord construction, always brings stability, on the auditive level. We can liken this to the tendency of the child not to move too far from the parent - the stable element - in feeling and exploring the unknown stranger, and returning quickly to him after each step farther.

Moreover, from the same example, we observe the circular drawing described by the sub-motifs on the second beat of the binary bars, with which the author "plays", reversing their place in the unfolding of the second phrase (Figure 3).

Allegro con spirito

Fig. 3. C. P. Basacopol – „Sonatina – part I, Systems I- II, bars 1-2, 4-5”

And, as a short and concise auditive conclusion of the path traveled and explored in this section, the pentachord A-H-C-D-E (bar 12) unfolded in both directions - ascending-descending - formed by two tetrachords - one ascending from the A sound, the other formed by the inversion and transposition of the first, started in the downward direction from the E sound, on the harmonic background of the empty 2nd added.

The entire middle section brings an obvious contrast, on the one hand by changing the meter (from 2/4 to 3/8 alternated with 5/8), on the other hand through the unison created by doubling the melody, the author resorting, from the melodic point of view, to a frigid pentachord. The tension gradually increases, ensuring a clear contrast compared to the first section of the part. Thus, against the background of a continuous crescendo, the author uses the unison between the medium and the acute register, initially at a distance of two octaves between the two hands, then creating a sound effect and a much more tense timbral contrast by widening the distance to four octaves, invigorating more and more by introducing the cluster, also called "white" diatonic chord (Buciu 1971, 60) on a syncopated rhythm together with the indication "poco stringendo" (Figure 4.a and Figure 4.b).

Fig. 4.a. C. P. Basacopol – „Sonatina – part I, Systems IV-VII, bars 15-30”



Fig. 4.b. *Frigian pentachord centred on the sound E*

Although in stark contrast to the first section, bringing great sound effects from extended registry, syncopated rhythms, metrical changes, the use of the "white" diatonic cluster (Buciu 1971, 60) and the agogical diversification, this section does not depart from simplicity and clarity, specific to the whole sonatine, these elements being, as easily identifiable, as efficient in terms of the sound and expressive result. The return of the first section in the acute register, at a distance of one ascending octave as against the beginning of the sonatina, brings us the melody in a new, more crystalline and innocent light, due in particular to the author's choice to have it voluntarily in the discenter, where the expressive possibilities of the instrument can bring a glow to the discourse. Here is, as a comparative, self-evident example in this regard, systems I-III, bars 1-8 and systems VIII-IX, bars 31-37 in Figure 5.a. and Figure 5.b.:

a tempo

Fig. 5.a. C. P. Basacopol – *Sonatina* – „part I, Systems VII-IX, bars 31-37”

Allegro con spirito

Fig. 5.b. C. P. Basacopol – *Sonatina* – „part I, Systems I-III, bars 1-8”

The finale is mobilizing, energized by "stringendo", in a vivid descending movement, which covers the entire timbre palette and instrument registers against the background of a continuous crescendo, where again the A sound tends to be implemented in the auditory consciousness, clearly coming from the frame of the empty 2nd added, as well as from the melodic discourse arranged in motif imitation at a descending octave.

With the same innocent simplicity, the second part of the sonatina is built, the composer marking this on the one hand by the term of expression that accompanies the agogical indication - *Andantino semplice* - and on the other by the light, rarefied writing, creating an atmosphere of intimacy, similar to the cradle song. Also opting for a tripartite lied form, the author builds the song on a lydian pentachord, in A having a center on the sound of G (Figure 6 and Figure 6.a), and in the B of the part being transposed on a modal center of B, as shown in Figure 7 and Figure 7.a.



Fig. 6. C. P. Basacopol – *Sonatina* – „part II, Systems I-II, bars 1-6”



Fig. 6.a. *Lydian pentachord centred on the sound G*



Fig.7. C. P. Basacopol – *Sonatina* – „part II, Systems III-IV, bars 11-14”



Fig. 7.a. *Lydian pentachord with modal centre on B*

The last two bars bring a 6th tone chordal construction added in the context of an effectively dissonant delay, the long-lasting sound effect of the 6th keeping us in the meditative atmosphere of this part (Figure 8).



Fig.8. C. P. Basacopol – *Sonatina* – „part II, System V, bars 18 (beats 2 and 3) -21”

The third part - *Allegro giocoso* - jovial and childish, returns to the optimistic tone of the game, unfolding in an engaging tempo. Constructed in the form of a small A-B-A-C-A rondo, with a clear meter change in section C (as the composer also used in the first part of the sonatina) as we could see from example 4, the beginning of the end of the sonata shows a melody made up of trichords framed on a modal scale built on the La-Si-Do # -Mi-Fa # sounds. As we know, Romanian folklore abounds in pentatonics, these modal scales being studied and cataloged by Romanian folklorists, musicologists and theoreticians Gheorghe Ciobanu, Constantin Brăiloiu, George Breazul, noting altogether the existence of no less than 16 types of hemitonic and anhemitonic pentatons, with the possibility to have a cadence on any of the sounds of the scale. In our case, reporting the La-Si-Do # -Mi-Fa # pentatonic scale on which the melody is performed at the first of the five anhemitonic pentatonic stairs cataloged by Constantin Brăiloiu - Sol-La-Si-Re-Mi, with a cadence on Sol sound - we notice that La-Si-Do # -Mi-Fa # is the large 2-nd transposition of the no.1 scale, one of the most used pentatonic scales in the Romanian folk music (Figure 9.a and Figure 9.b).

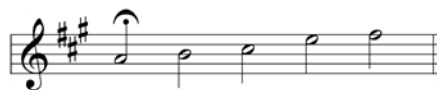


Fig. 9.a. *Anhemitonic pentatonia* (C. Petra)



Fig. 9.b. *Pentatonic scale, nr. 1* (Brăiloiu)

Regarding the composer's option to resort to the rondo form for the end of the sonatina, we cannot overlook the full harmony created between the dance character of the melody, with slightly "sad" short episodes, which again lead us to the children's play - optimistic and exuberant. As Dumitru Bughici also points out, in the universal musical creation it is obvious "*The composer's predilection to use the rondo form, especially as a final in a cyclical work, such as in symphony, sonata, concert, quartet, etc. [due] to the character of this form, most often close to the lively, luminous content, of good humor of the folk popular songs and dances.*" (Bughici, 1974, 290). Thus, the composer achieves the dancing, leaping and lively effect by amazingly simple and clear means, but with great impact on expressiveness, resorting to the ostinato melodic pedal that accompanies the melody. The first couplet (B) brings to the fore elements of bimodalism, by superimposing a ionian on La with cadence on the sound of Fa # with a melodic pedal on the sounds of Fa # -Do # (Figure 13), as in the second couplet, where a eolian pentachord is superimposed on the Do # -Re # -Mi-Fa # -Sol # sounds with the melodic pedal on the La-SOL # -Do # sounds.

The luminous end of the sonatina reveals the author's preference for dynamization by motif imitation to the octave, if in the first movement the coda brought us a lively descending movement to the grave register in the identical repetition of the same successive motif to descending octaves, the coda of the third part brings us the same procedure, but in the opposite, ascending direction, to the acute register, again supported by a 2nd chord added, as shown by the joining of the examples below (Figure 10.a and Figure 10.b):

Fig.10.a. C.P. Basacopol – Sonatina – „part III, System XII, bars 43-47”



Fig.10.b. C. P. Basacopol – Sonatina – „part I, System X, bars 38-41”

3. Conclusions

The piano sonatina of the composer Carmen Petra-Basacopol, highlights the modal character, both through the interest shown for the use of the melodic pedal in the accompaniment performed by the left hand, and through the special sound effects (discreetly sprinkled in the musical discourse), conferred by the extended registry, syncopated rhythms, metric changes, use of the *white* diatonic cluster and agogic diversification. It seems that the composer synthesizes, in the sonatina pages, Berger's theoretical suggestions, which underline the need for the permanent relationship between *“the science and the intuition of the music inventor to confer expression, beauty, power of communication and artistic meaning”*, concluding that *“The musician's mission consists in the imagination, performing and communicating artistic messages and events of profound and authentic human significance”* (Berger 1979, 271).

From the point of view of the form, the same three sections of the Sonata are clearly distinguished, but reduced to the size of an instrumental miniature. The composer's sonatina represents, from a didactic point of view, a means of familiarizing the pianist "apprentices" with the form and genre of the classical instrumental sonata, but also with the outline of the expressive language in the interpretation of the works dedicated to the piano, belonging to the 20th century Romanian music. We can say that this inspired work is on the road opened by George Enescu in 1898 in Paris (the year of his compositional debut with the Romanian Poem), which marked "the entry of Romanian music into the universal constellation ... inaugurating a new stage in the evolution of Romanian music, pointing to the moment of recognizing its universal value" (Lazăr-Cosma 1980, 8-9).

References

- Berger, Wilhelm. 1979. *Dimensiuni modale* [Modal Dimensions]. București: Editura Muzicală.
- Buciu, Dan. 1971. *Elemente de scriitură modală* [Elements of Modal Writing]. București: Editura Muzicală.
- Bughici, Dumitru. 1978. *Dicționar de forme și genuri muzicale* [Dictionary of musical genres and forms]. București: Ed. Muzicală.
- Lazăr-Cosma, Octavian. 1980. *Hronicul muzicii românești* [Chronic of Romanian Music] vol. V, București: Editura Muzicală.
- Petra-Basacopol, Carmen. 1985. *Sonatine pentru pian de compozitori români* [Sonatinas for piano by Romanian composers]. București: Editura Muzicală.

(English version by Gilda Cristina Marinescu)