

## Elements of modal harmony in Romanian choral works of some representatives of the genre

Liviu Ioan IOSIF<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** *Claude Debussy imagined a tonal-modal language which changed the melodic harmony. New (nonfunctional) tonalities emerged, one of them being the tonal-modal system which will be referred to in the present paper in connection with the modes in Romanian folklore, namely in choral compositions of the most representative Romanian composers such as: Vinicius Greffiens, Sigismund Toduță, Tudor Jarda, Dan Buciu, Tiberiu Olah, Dan Pavelescu Two aspects will be analysed: harmonic and melodic modes.*

Key-words: *modal harmony, melody, choral compositions, chords,*

### 1. Introduction

When Claude Debussy made his entrance onto the stage of international music, he caused “traditional” music to change, i.e. the organized system of tones underwent major changes: he imagined a tonal-modal language which changed the melodic harmony (Buciu 2013, 11). It was the dawn of modern music and hundreds of composers would contribute to the enrichment of the “obsolete” modal-functional system with new means of expression of an infinite variety. New (nonfunctional) tonalities emerged, one of them being the tonal-modal system (Rîpă 2001, 87) which will be referred to in the present paper in connection with the modes in Romanian folklore, namely in choral compositions of the most representative Romanian composers. Two aspects will be analysed: harmonic and melodic modes.

---

<sup>1</sup> Transilvania University of Braşov, [liviu.iosif@unitbv.ro](mailto:liviu.iosif@unitbv.ro)

## 2. Discussion

In the seven sequences for mixed choirs "De urări și datini" (Wishes and Customs) Vinicius Grefiens employs both traditional chords and modern modes.

Chords of conjoint or disjoint quartes (Firca 1988, 305):

Fig. 1. V.Grefiens, "La fereastră" (At the window)

*E-A-D-G – chord of conjoint quartes  
And E-B-E – empty quinte chord*

*D-G-C-F quadruple delay for the  
E-A-B-E, disjoint quarte chord*

Chords with added sounds:

Fig. 2. V. Grefiens, "La fereastră" (At the window)  
"Sculați gazdă" (Come awake host)

*E-F#A-B-D-E seventh chord, elliptic of third with second and fourth added (F#,A)- . La fereastră (At the window)*

*D-A-D-F-A-B, where A is and added second-. La fereastră (At the window)*



Fig.3. V. Grefiens, “La fereastră” (At the window) – Parallelism of tritones

A master of polyphony, Sigismund Toduță will rarely use an overlaid harmonic language, as in the carol “Nainte-mi de curți”, although the superposed bichord will be brought as an imitation.



Fig. 4. S. Toduță, “Nainte-mi de curți”

Thus a line of  $\alpha$  chord is obtained (shortened octave chord), a major-minor chord with a minor seventh Eflat-G-A# (Bflat)-C#(Dflat)-F#(Gflat)- G geometrical (Rîpă 2001, 275)- nongravotational chord. In the lower strata, this chord will be superposed by a F; thus, the following results: Eflat-F-G-A#-C#-F#-G

Much like in the case of Sigismund Toduță, in the compositions of Tudor Jarda, the “polyphonic armour” will, occasionally, be “broken” by moments brought by superposed bichords.

The image shows a musical score for four voices: Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass. The music is in 2/4 time. The Soprano part has a melodic line with some rests. The Alto part has a more active line with many eighth notes. The Tenor part has a line with many chords and some eighth notes, ending with the word "ETC.". The Bass part has a line with many chords and some eighth notes.

Fig. 5. T.Jarda, "La casa di peste drum" (*The House Across the Road*)

The G-A-C#-D-E-F (elliptical in the A-B second) cluster is, in fact the scale of the acoustic module 1 on G, elliptical on the 3rd level, followed by an added seventh and fourth chord: E-A-B-D-E-G. The composer seems to have a bias for elliptic clusters:

The image shows a musical score for four voices: Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass. The music is in 2/4 time. The Soprano part has a melodic line with some rests. The Alto part has a more active line with many eighth notes. The Tenor part has a line with many chords and some eighth notes. The Bass part has a line with many chords and some eighth notes.

Fig. 6. T. Jarda, "Pe dealu cu stânjenei" (*On the Hill with Irises*)

Deliberately searching for dissonances, the composer Dan Buciu will harmonise his themes on the lyrics of Tudor Arghezi. Thus, vertically, we have only modal structures, of various types, the major or minor tritons are excluded. In fact the chords come from the superposing of cells, motifs and pedals, the compositions being, mostly, polyphonic.

One of the most frequently used chords is the short octave – segments of the  $\alpha$  chord where, often, the short seventh will be replaced by the long seventh.

Fig. 7. D. Buciu

<i>"Arici Bogorici"</i> <i>The Hedgehog</i>	<i>"Arici Bogorici"</i> <i>The Hedgehog</i>	<i>"Mâța"</i> <i>The Cat</i>	<i>"Bănuțul"</i> <i>The Penny</i>
<i><math>\alpha</math> chord</i> <i>G-C- (B)-G-B</i>	<i>octave chord</i> <i>shortened</i>	<i>parallelism of octaves</i> <i>shortened with</i> <i>added second (E)</i> <i>octave chord</i> <i>shortened</i>	<i>octave chord</i> <i>shortened</i>

Also, chords with two quarts, one perfect, the other lengthened (short fifth) or bichords of fourths or fifths with an added short second (either within the bichord, or outside of it) appear quite often in the three parts of the trilogy.

In his "Four Madrigals", Tiberiu Olah will employ both melodic and harmonic writing, the Messiaen mode 2, so close to the no. 1 acoustic chromatic. As a result, we have a variety of vertical structures with  $\alpha$  chords and added sounds.

The musical score consists of two systems. The first system features three vocal staves and a bass line. The vocal parts enter with the lyrics "Un voi nică la re, Tre-ce pe că-re". The first vocal part is marked *sf mp*, the second *sf mp*, and the third *sf mp*. The bass line is marked *pp legatiss. marc.* and *mp legatiss. marc.*. The second system continues the vocal lines with lyrics "că la re. a", "că la re. a", and "că la re a". The bass line includes the lyrics "re," and "Tre-ce cîn-fînd de zor, Tre-ce". The score includes dynamic markings such as *poco sf p*, *a poco cresc.*, *sf*, *pp*, *mp*, *f*, and *risoluto*.

Fig. 8. T.Olah, "Pasărea măiastră" (The master bird)  
octave chord quarte with difference in duration



Fig. 9. T. Olah, "Pasărea măiastră" (The master bird)

chord with added quartet  $\alpha$  chord C-Eflat-AflatB(Cflat)

Chord with added second (F)  
C-Eflat-F G#(Aflat)

In the context of modal-harmonious compositions, the last section is that of satirical extempore verse, remarkably expressive (the clumsy wife mocked by the owl for the manner in which she does the laundry), perfectly illustrated by the music – oligo-cordic scales for the four voices, note versus note, creating a vertical, harmonically unresolved sound (polyphony).



Fig. 10. T. Olah, "Strigătura" (The shout)

In “Maică, inimă de piatră” (“Mother, heart of stone”), the composer Dan Pavelescu pentachord will employ the scale 1:D-E-F-G#-A, in the form of a cluster.

The image shows a musical score for four voices: Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass. The tempo is marked as ♩ = 80. The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 2/4. The lyrics are: Soprano: "Mai - că i - ni - mă de pia - tră Hai -"; Alto: (no lyrics); Tenor: "Mai - că, i - ni - mă de pia - tră Mai - - - că Hai și"; Bass: (no lyrics). Dynamic markings include *f* (forte) and *p* (piano). The score features a complex harmonic structure with clusters and a pentachord (D-E-F-G#-A) as mentioned in the text.

Fig. 11. D. Pavelescu, “Maică, inimă de piatră” (Mother, heart of stone)

### 3. Conclusions

All of the above mentioned composers used the pedal point as element of polyphony: simple melodic pedal, double, triple, melodic or harmonic pedal groups, often an ostinato, or leitmotiv character. The employment of several modes superposed synchronously or by imitation, while simultaneously using the pedals resulted in the birth of bitonality or polytonality.

### References

- Buciu, Dan. 2013. *Mic tratat de scriitură modală* [Small Treatise of Modal Harmony]. București: Editura Grafoart.
- Buciu, Dan. 1981. *Coruri* [Choirs]. București: Editura Muzicală.
- Firca, Gheorghe. 1988. *Structuri și funcții în armonia modală* [Structures and functions in modal harmony]. București: Editura Muzicală.
- Rîpă, Constantin. 2001. *Teoria superioară a muzicii*, vol. I [Superior Theory of Music-vol.I]. Cluj-Napoca: Editura MediaMusica.