

Poetic aspects in the Chamber Music of Adrian Pop

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Abstract: *First-rank representative of the Cluj Composition School, Adrian Pop (b. 1951) always makes a strong impression on his receivers, both listeners and music theorists, through his refined way of revealing an artistic message, as well as his inspirational sources. The poetic background occupies a special position within his oeuvre and the following analytical thoroughgoing study points out some aspects related to the way in which Adrian Pop renders some lyrical meanings, focusing, in this particular case, on the love feeling as a central theme.*

Key-words: *inspirational sources, love theme, compositional techniques, style, modernity, word-music connections, structure, timbre*

1. Argument

Found within the contemporary music context, Adrian Pop's personality not just encompasses the 20th Century Cluj Composition School characteristics born under the guidance of Maestro Sigismund Toduță, but also individualizes itself as a result of the particular way of bringing together the numerous creative techniques provided by the European Modernity and Avant-garde, and the preceding stylistic background, therefore revealing a fully legitimate and meaningful music.

The analytical studies already undertaken upon Adrian Pop's symphonic, concert, chamber and choral oeuvre highlighted his predilection for two great inspirational sources: poetry and Romanian folklore, whose features, simple or complex, are being successfully transferred within his musical discourses. The strongest confirmation of this fact resides in the way these musical discourses and the receptor's conscience "resound together".

Going forward with the analytical process upon the creative techniques found within the art of Adrian Pop brings a significant contribution in establishing

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our national and artistic identity, besides musicological and performing benefits. Researching upon a music that, albeit being born in the actual context of overcoming Modernism and Avant-garde, of free “past” and present resources usage, brings an exceptional aesthetic and intellectual contentment, stands as a worthy aim.

2. Adrian Pop – Life and Oeuvre

Adrian Pop was born in Cluj-Napoca (September 10th 1951) and commenced his musical training under his father’s – the highly-regarded conductor and composer Dorin Pop – guidance. After graduating a Real Profile High School, in 1970 he became a Composition student at the Cluj Conservatory. Beside studying along masters such as Sigismund Toduță, Cornel Țăranu and Vasile Herman, Adrian Pop improved his skills by participating in various masterclasses held in Romania and abroad (Bayreuth Live-Electronic Courses, Burgas and Amsterdam Composers’ Workshops etc.). He began his didactic career at the Art High School and Folklore Art High School in Cluj-Napoca, soon afterwards joining the academic community of “Gheorghe Dima” Conservatory, where he currently teaches Composition and serves as a Ph.D. Coordinator. Besides his pedagogical activity, he also brought significant contribution to the Cluj Artistic life, as Music Secretary (1983-1991), Director (1991-1995) and Art Consultant (1995-2004) within the “Transylvania” State Philharmonic. He is a UCMR (The Union of Composers and Musicologists of Romania) and ISCM (Romanian Section of the International Society for Contemporary Music) member.

Adrian Pop has also been undertaking a notable musicological and research activity as he published *Recviemul românesc* (Romanian Requiem, 2005), *Stilistica creației muzicale* (Music Works Style – course handbook, 2012) and his recently *Dorin Pop: în oglinda amintirii* (Dorin Pop: A Mirror for Remembering, 2017), a volume dedicated to his father.

Albeit Adrian Pop’s didactic and musicological progress seems to be quite impressive, we will take a closer look to his compositional trails, which deserve special attention. Beside the unique style he has been developing over the years, multiple composition prizes won at international composition contests come as a confirmation of his talent and inspiration.

Following his debut in 1973, during the concert season of the “Gheorghe Dima” Music Conservatory, Adrian Pop’s oeuvre enjoyed great success within Romanian cultural and artistic context, being added to some significant festival repertoires, such as “George Enescu” International Festival, International Week of

New Music Bucharest, “Cluj Musical Autumn” Festival and by some prestigious music ensemble within the Romanian borders and abroad. The chronological list of Adrian Pop’s works reveals a multilateral approach of the creative act, both regarding the genre variety and the inspirational sources he focused on. The choral ensemble became an appropriate channel not just for spreading patriotic messages, but also during the process of promoting Romanian folklore, Romanian and World literature. As for the symphonic and concert genres, some highly regarded works are the *Concert for cello and Orchestra*, dated 1975 and reviewed in 1987, *Etos I* (1976) which received the UCMR prize in 1978, *Solstițiu* (Solstice, 1979) and *Triptic* (Triptych, 1998). Both *Etos I* and *Solstițiu* came as result of Adrian Pop’s strong interest in the Romanian Folklore background (Gelman 1985, 14), the first work being built upon the well-known mioritic space idea (Popovici 1979, 10) belonging to Lucian Blaga, while the second one originating in the Bihor carols repertoire. Adrian Pop also approached the electronic music resources, finding himself, most likely, under the influence of his visits to Bayreuth Electronic Studios (Ulpiu 1982, 12).

An even clearer reflection of Adrian Pop’s artistic sensitivity can be found within his chamber works. It seems that the standard timbre configuration of voice and piano duo or string quartet, as well as unusual sound combinations in smaller ensembles have secured the ideal frame for developing complex philosophical and social themes gathered from the Romanian literature (provided by poets such as Lucian Blaga, Ion Minulescu etc.) or World Literature bearing the signature of Pablo Neruda, Christian Morgenstern, Rainer Maria Rilke, and Tristan Tzara. From the playfulness of the *Eight Bagatelles* for string quartet (1996, lyrics by Christian Morgenstern) to the solid psychological component found within the *La seda y el metal* string quartet (2011 – 2013, lyrics by Pablo Neruda), or the romanticism crossing the *5 Liebeslieder* series on Rainer Maria Rilke’s *Traumgekrönt* lyrics (2006), Adrian Pop uses in an ingenious and responsible manner the timbre, stylistic and technical resources, engaging all of them in a unique and captivating process of artistic communication.

One of the recurrent subjects found in the chamber Adrian Pop’s oeuvre is the *love* theme and its implicitly social, psychological, philosophical and emotional aspects, revealed by the composer through three significant works: *Sept fragments by Tristan Tzara* for medium voice and piano, the *5 Liebeslieder* series featuring Rainer Maria Rilke’s lyrics, and last, but not least, *La seda y el metal* quartet on Pablo Neruda’s lyrics in a Romanian translation of Aurel Covaci.

2.1. “Sept fragments de Tristan Tzara” for medium voice and piano (1995)

Built as a continuous succession of seven pieces with varying dimensions, the *Sept fragments de Tristan Tzara* cycle was composed as part of the “100 years since Tzara’s birth” celebrations, on *40 Chansons et déchantons* posthumous volume verses. Albeit the poetic source belongs to one of the main representatives of the *Dada* nihilistic movement² founded in Zürich during World War I, which was considering total structural and meaning cancellation of the *word* as language’s fundamental cell, the seven songs based on them plainly unveil, according to the composer’s statement, the sinuous love states, such as lyricism and effusion, lust, sadness, as well as ironic, even sarcastic dissimulation.

The initial state of mind, reflected through an aerated and balanced writing undergoes multiple stages defined by certain *tempo* levels, tonal system lability, dynamic accumulation or dissolution, music gestures and sound effects. For example, the volatile presence of the loved one is being paralleled, in the first piece, by a general amplification upon the repeated succession of four essential attributes – *souple, rapide, pesante, riante* – involving agogic, tempo acceleration, vocal register and timbre (m. 20 – m. 28), the piano accompaniment joining the main discourse by quick *arpeggios* or scale fragments.

Another moment of great power of suggestion can be found in the second song – ... *j’ai un cheval dans ma tête...*, where the subject seems to find himself in a fable, whose main characters are the horse (most probably a symbol of human stubbornness) and the bee (a delicate, but also dangerous element). Abruptly following the paroxysm of the first music stanza, where the severity of the vocal line, bearing *sprechgesang* declamatory effects so typical to the 20th Century Romanian and Cluj Music School (Nedelcuț 2009, 32), is being supported by *toccata*-like piano accompaniment (m. 67 – m. 101), the second one (m. 67 – m. 101) brings an enormous contrast through its sheer music texture, built upon the expressive recitation of the verses, atonal piano monodic phrases filled with various sound gestures (*trill, ison, glissando, accents* etc.).

Then, the idyllic setting and thoughtful state of the lyrical self within the third song – ... *il a pris la clé des champs...* –, where the fluent vocal line is being nuanced by the fifth piano-pedals in the high register is soon to be replaced by the melancholy of the next, extremely short pieces, featuring common melodic elements.

² Although a *Dada* nihilistic revolutionary movement founder, around 1930s, oversaturated by desintegration, Tristan Tzara shifted his focus on Surrealism. At the same time he joined the Communist Party and, subsequently, the French Resistance. Social harsh experiences contributed to his maturing process, bringing him closer to a lyrical approach. As a result, the anarchic word series were replaced by a more difficult, but humanised, language

The *attacca* beginning of the sixth song – ... *que c'est drôle...* – instantly transfers the listener in a fairy-tale land, where three girls come “in sight” bringing a pronounced sense of regret, despite their joyful singing. Its humorous background can be easily remarked as from the title – ... *que c'est drôle...* –, being subsequently confirmed by the triplets flippancy, and residing in the real life love aspects. The two stanzas mark the coexistence of the frame story, rendered through a tonal, speedy, discourse under frequent time signature changes, and the emotional dimension of the lyrical self, easily perceptible during the middle stanza, where movement (“*sont venues*” and “*me mettre en tête*”) involving agogic, dynamic and gesture reaches paroxysm in the 64th measure. Finally, the fairy-tale is resumed, but just to bring the end immediately after pronouncing the first of the previous recurrent *ça* syllables.

The last song – ... *ainsi va et vient...* – completes the love evocation by bringing one of its harshest sides. The imperative which opens it, carrying a great amount of rejection, is to be replaced, right in the following measure, by a sensuous, unprecedented pleading, conveyed by an extremely emotional, wavy melodic line, underlined by a clear and flexible piano accompaniment. The short pianists dissonant chords intervention (m. 31 – m. 38) which sounds like a hesitation, anticipates, in an effective manner, the conclusion regarding the eternal, ceaseless love feeling.

By the means of which he merges the poetic source and the music language elements – structure, tonal system, music gestures, texture, Adrian Pop successfully provides both the central love theme, covering some overwhelming philosophical and emotional areas, and the way its author – Tristan Tzara, a former *Dada* proponent – revealed it through a fragmentary, though broad and original portrayal.

2.2. “Fünf Liebeslieder auf Verse von Rainer Maria Rilke’s Traumgekrönt” (2006)

A second song series, which confirms the composer’s interest regarding the love feeling, as well as the German composer Rainer Maria Rilke, is the *Fünf Liebeslieder* on *Traumgekrönt* (“Dream-Krowned”), elaborated during multiple stages and the result of some previous creative attempts (*Fünf Liebeslieder* for voice, clarinet and piano on the same Rilke texts in 1997, kept in an intermediate form).

The five poems found within the songs cycle feature the particular erotic touch of Rilke’s youth writings, but also their moral and philosophical emphasis. The songs follow the dramaturgical layout of the adolescent love, revealing its

enchantment, but also a nostalgic, marked by the regret retrospective view when it is passed: *Und wie mag die Liebe, Mein Mädels, Rot war der Abend, Wir sassen beide, Es ist lang...*

Thus, the question raised as far back as in the title of the first song – which keeps a static and meditative background, abolished, from time to time, by ecstatic outbursts – carries the listener between the inner universe of the lyrical self and the reality of his sweetheart's presence.

The mystery that surrounds the birth of love, the nocturnal frame of the third song – *Rot war der Abend* –, or the somberness of the final one – *Es ist lang* – which features recurrent music elements, proving the cyclic nature of the series, are being conveyed through a dissonant background and a slow *tempo*, while the clear stanza structure and the particular melodic themes conducted, mostly, within the tonal system and fast movement, occur in the second (*Mein Mädels*) and the fourth (*Wir sassen beide*) songs. Here, the cheerfulness and charm of the lover are being shared through diverse rhythmic patterns and time signature changes.

The piano accompaniment acts as an indispensable resource in the process of poetic imagination configuration, the composer granting it both the vocal supporting, imitating role, and the solistic one, found during the introduction or *interludium* segments. The logical structure and programmatic cohesion of the five songs, as well as the strong text-music connection prove a remarkable capability of deepening the poetic meanings and reorganising them within a music-lyrical context, according to the timbre, technical and aesthetic means of the voice-piano duo. From a stylistic point of view, we can identify a strong balance between the romantic and post-romantic song, but also the fine integration of modern elements.

2.3. “Silk and Metal” (La seda y el metal) for string quartet (2011-2013)

Albeit within the already exposed chamber works, but also generally speaking (within the vocal-instrumental, vocal-symphonic and choral genres), the text has a significant contribution in the process of artistic communication, the composer Adrian Pop does not seem to depend just on this main resource. It is what one can see in his instrumental oeuvre and, particularly, his string quartet – *Silk and Metal* –, whose subject is still love, but with a strong emphasis on the *feminine-masculine* relation dynamics, involving various affective states, such as tenderness, passion, coolness, threatening, hatred, forgiveness.

The macro- and micro-formal aspects are built upon the two antagonist, as well as connected, entities. Following the Rondo (Jucan et. al 2012, 55) alternation and recurrence principles in a more liberal manner (A – B – Av1 – C – Av2 – D – Av3), the composer provides the proper context for the *feminine-masculine, silk-metal* confrontations, which mostly occur during refrains, while the couplets offer an appropriate background for the increasing tension.

Neither historical, social, nor philosophical dimensions of the subject are missed. Thus, in the last Rondo episode (D, m. 451 – m. 506) we can find an evident referral to the Renaissance (*Adagio religioso – Chiesa del Palestrina*) and Baroque eras (*Pequeña chacona de los recuerdos*).

As for the music language, the tonal system finds itself under dissonant/consonant combinations, as well as polarity and stability, when the two main characters “come to a temporary agreement”. The texture varies from unison to accompanied monody, homophonic, polyphonic and other Baroque writing techniques (such as imitation, *chaconne*), while the multiple music gestures and the dynamic range provided by the four strings-instruments prove to be essential in the process of diversifying conveyance, as well as the “synthesis coherence” transfer.

3. Conclusion

Following the analysis of Adrian Pop’s way of approaching and developing, within the song or quartet context, an essential and overtreated social, historical, philosophical and artistic subject, such as *love*, one can definitely conclude on his original, complex, and integrative compositonic art. More than revealing an extensive technical and stylistic knowledge, the engaged resources unveil a high and refined sense of bringing modern, expressionist, post-romantic, symbolist, up to Renaissance elements together, while the outcoming music captivates the listener’s sensitivity, intellect and imagination.

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