

Structural and Performing Milestones in the Work of the Composer *Iacob Mureşianu* (I. The Lied *Return to the Homeland*)

Gina-Mihaela PAVEL¹

Abstract: *The idea of deepening the knowledge on Iacob Mureşianu's personality through a research series came to me in the spring of 2017, when we commemorated a hundred years since the death of the composer from Brasov on May 25th. I handled the piano accompaniment of some vocal-instrumental miniatures composed by him, I discovered the beauty and sensitivity of some works like Return to the Homeland, Searose Flowers, Don't Weep, The Young Horse, What It Wouldn't Have Been Like, and What Has Been, Has Been etc., unrightfully unknown. As for the lied Return to the Homeland, the composer proves extraordinary intuition in creating the lyrics-music relationship, so that the musical form takes on a stanza-like aspect, being in complete symbiose with the lyrics.*

Keywords: *the composer Iacob Mureşianu, composing style, vocal chamber works, the lied Return to the Homeland*

1. Centenary of *Iacob Mureşianu* (1857-1917)

The idea of deepening the knowledge on Iacob Mureşianu's personality through a research series came to me in the spring of 2017, when we commemorated a hundred years since the death of the composer from Brasov on May 25th. To highlight this event², *the Casa Mureşenilor Museum in Braşov* proposed that we organise a recital of lieds composed by the illustrious member of the Mureşianu family. The recital was coordinated by lect. Mihaela Buhaiciuc, PhD, with participation of the canto class students within the Music Faculty in Braşov.

At this event I had the joy to handle the piano accompaniment of some vocal-instrumental miniatures, at the same time discovering the beauty and

¹ Faculty of Music, *Transilvania* University Braşov, mighellini81@yahoo.com

² To find out more details about this event, you can access the page: <http://muzeulmuresenilor.ro/2017/05/13/centenar-iacob-muresianu-1857-1917/> (accessed on August 31st, 2018)

sensitivity of some works like *Return to the Homeland*, *Searose Flowers*, *Don't Weep*, *The Young Horse*, *What It Wouldn't Have Been Like*, and *What Has Been, Has Been*, unrightfully unknown (the famous canon-like duets that were awarded the Mendelssohn-Bartholdy prize within the Leipzig Conservatory in 1882), or the aria of *Cerna* in the folklore ballad *Erculean* for soloists, mixed choir, and piano. I also mention that the recital took place in the festivity hall of the *Andrei Șaguna* National College on May 16th, 2017, a prestigious education institution of Brașov, where *Iacob Mureșianu* worked as a music teacher between 1883 and 1885³.

2. A Brief Introduction to *Iacob Mureșianu's* Life and Work

The Romanian composing school was in a crystallisation stage in the second half of the 19th century, in which Classical-Romanticist elements were combined with national ones, which shows that the musical phenomenon in this territory of cultural confluences, specific of the old Romanian Provinces, was growing more European. This process takes place as a consequence of the transformations that occurred previously in this space: the emerging of the first musical education institutions, the first opera shows in Romanian, Romanian folklore collections, publications, and cultural societies. Here we also need to mention that many young people are schooled at prestigious European education centres.

This is, by and large, the social and cultural environment in which the artistic personality of the teacher, composer, pianist, folklore specialist and publisher *Iacob Mureșianu* will develop. I will not insist much on his artistic or pedagogical career, as his entire life and work have already been described at large in the biography written by *Gheorghe Merișescu – Iacob Mureșianu (Life and Work)*⁴. However, I will highlight that when he returned to his home country – after the four years of hard studies at the *Königliches Conservatorium der Musik Leipzig*, but also after his years as a teacher in Brașov – *Iacob Mureșianu's* artistic personality seems not to have had the favourable frame to develop to its full potential anymore.

Although his activity kept on being complex and rich, the far too intense didactic duties at the Greek Catholic confessional schools in Blaj, where he chooses to teach, became too tiring. Furthermore, Blaj did not provide an artistic milieu back then, which could have favoured the evolution of a talent like *Iacob Mureșianu's*, as musical life was almost non-existent there. Thus, the composer had to build up a choir and orchestra by himself, which were needed for performing his

³ Here he succeeds Ciprian Porumbescu as a teacher.

⁴ Merișescu, Gheorghe, 1966. *Iacob Mureșianu (Life and Work)*. Bucharest: Musical Publishing House of the Composers' Union of the Socialist Republic of Romania.

own works. The ballads⁵ for choir, soloists, and orchestra *The Argeș Monastery*, *Erculeanu*, *Brâncoveanu Constantin*, *The Ghost*, *Brumărelul*, *The Young Woman in Brașău* remain unpublished. All these aspects are justly underlined by his two students, Tiberiu Brediceanu and Guilelm Șorban, in the *Musical Appendix to the Journal „Evening Star”* in 1911⁶. In all these aspects we can probably find an explanation for the fact that *Iacob Mureșianu* – „first-rank composer, with... outstanding musical training”⁷ – did not succeed in fully rendering the measure of his talent to us, which is why he unrightfully still lies in the shadow until today.

But we need to also admit that *Iacob Mureșianu’s* presence as a pedagogue in Blaj had important consequences for the entire Romanian musical life that followed. He built up serious musical education for his students, many of them becoming renowned composers later on⁸, but *Mureșianu* also succeeded in shaping a favourable milieu for the development of an authentic musical life there, which could rise up to the value of Western European cultured art.

3. Vocal Chamber Works⁹ and Composing Style

As we can read in the very text of the diploma from the *Royal Conservatory of Music in Leipzig* (May 8th, 1883), *Iacob Mureșianu* graduated “with distinction... the music theory, composing, piano solo, and ensemble (chamber music) courses, ... music history and aesthetics, being supported by his remarkable talent. He also proved an acknowledged technical ease in the accompaniment, combined with well-understood musical performance.”¹⁰ Thus, with complex musical knowledge, the composer is entitled to engage in approaching the most diverse compositions.

If until the time of his years in Leipzig, *Mureșianu* focused more on composing piano works, after this stage of assimilations, the composer will focus on *vocal music* – especially *choruses* – and *vocal-symphonic*, genres in which his

⁵ *Iacob Mureșianu* is the very first Romanian composer who gets inspiration from this epic work and renders its musical pendant.

⁶ Brediceanu, T., and Șorban, V. 1911. *Iacob Mureșianu*. *Lucafařarul*, no. 15-17, p. 1 (journal accessed on the website of the Central University Library in Cluj on September 03rd, 2018 http://documente.bcuccluj.ro/web/bibdigi/periodice/lucafařarul/1911/BCUCLUJ_FP_280091_1911_010_015_017.pdf)

⁷ Brediceanu, T., Șorban, V. *quoted work*, p. 1.

⁸ We already mentioned Tiberiu Brediceanu and Guilelm Șorban, next to whom we add Nicodim Ganea, Leonida Domide, Augustin Bena, or Iuliu Mureșianu (his son).

⁹ The entire work of *Iacob Mureșianu* can be found mentioned in the biography written by Merișescu (*quoted work*) at pages 186-193.

¹⁰ Translation that exists in Merișescu, Gheorghe, *quoted work*, p. 184.

talent would create the most valuable works. Through my activity as an accompaniment pianist and because the lieds of *Iacob Mureșianu* are not approached enough in recitals or research, I chose to analyse the *vocal chamber*¹¹ music segment.

Firstly I need to also mention that *Iacob Mureșianu*, next to *Gheorghe Dima* and *George Stephănescu*, are the first composers who created *Romanian lieds* (as they also created the first Romanian vocal-symphonic works). The *song for solo voice and accompaniment* – pendant of the German *lied*, of the French *melody*, of the Russian *romance* etc. – was created out of the composers' wish to find a Romanian equivalent of this musical miniature, typical of the Romanticism. However, I chose to call it *lied*¹², also thinking of *Iacob Mureșianu's* attempts to bring Romanian music closer to Western European traditions, but also because the elements of the musical language used are not completely of folklore origin.

Ever since a first look over the list comprising the works of *Iacob Mureșianu* we notice his proneness to works for the human voice, be they vocal-chamber, vocal-orchestral, *a cappella* choruses, small operas or sacred music works. We also need to mention that in Leipzig the composer also took canto classes. Adding his qualities of good accompaniment to this experience, as well (as also revealed by his graduation diploma¹³), we can find here the explanation that, in this period, he composes the great majority of his lieds for voice and piano (33 pieces¹⁴), works that remarkably succeed in rendering the emotion and finesse of the chosen poetry.

Iacob Mureșianu's composing style is typical of the *early Romanticism* and reminds of the musical language of Mendelssohn or Weber. His *melody* is rich and elegant, full of candour and frankness. The *rhythm* is built in a fluent and relaxed way, with a fully natural unfolding. The composer chose tonal *harmonics* in his works, without recurring to modal systems, typical of folk music (however, let us not forget that we are only in the *early musical Romanticism!*). And we may probably suppose, as we mentioned earlier, that *Iacob Mureșianu* wished to align to the Western European current. Even if he was no innovator at harmonic level, the composer knew, however, to take advantage of the musical „opportunities” that the *polyphonic* composing can provide through the leading of voices, using this technique mainly in the choral works. An excellent master of counterpoint, *Mureșianu* combines the melodic lines to create a dense, but natural and relaxed musical structure, all superposed on *musical forms* that show rigor. Also acknowledged as a very good pianist, *Mureșianu* presents a *composing style* that

¹¹ I wish this article to be just the first of a series of research on the lieds of *Iacob Mureșianu*.

¹² Within the repertoire list presented by Merișescu in his biography (*quoted work*, p. 189), the works for voice and piano are noted simply: *pieces* for voice and piano.

¹³ He even accompanied the violinist *Joseph Joachim* within a recital at the famous Gewandhaus hall.

¹⁴ Of these works, two are actually duets, and one is a trio.

also clearly proves his instrumental abilities. His piano composing, of true descriptive nature, is typical of the style of his epoch, with improvisation features that remind us of the Romanian ballroom romances.

4. Structural Analysis and Performing Visions in the Lied *Return to the Homeland*

Although he built his works by generally using elements of the Classicist-Romanticist musical language, as we underlined above, *Iacob Mureșianu* considered, as the other Romanian composers of the late 19th century, that the national specificity must be inserted in his works for building a true *Romanian national musical school*. In this respect, probably the most obvious aspect of Mureșianu's vocal works is the frequent choice for his works of lyrics written by *Vasile Alecsandri*, the famous poet who aligned to the Romanticist trends of coming closer to folklore creation.

The poem *Return to the Homeland*¹⁵ was written by Alecsandri in the last days of December 1849, when returning from the exile that followed the 1848 Revolution. First published in 1853, the poem is representative for the Romanian 1848 literature, brimming with typical *Romanticism*. *Iacob Mureșianu* composes the music of this lied during his university studies in Leipzig¹⁶. The composer proves

¹⁵ Below we render the lyrics of Alecsandri's poem for a better understanding of the meanings of the music:

*Lightly gliding on precipice edges, I flew besides the winter ravens.
My small sledge, my white horse, were leaving traces on the white snow.
We flew like the thoughts hovering around me; my thought flew in the skies, like me.
I swiftly crossed mountains of snow, it left long rows of clouds behind,
As I was going far away... it toward a star, I, the foreigner, to my homeland!*

*The trees bowed their branches in vain and threw the snow in my way, one by one.
The sky stirred winds in vain and laid fields of snowflakes through the darkness.
The wolves hunted me away in vain, roaming the woods and howling with the harsh winter wind.
The howling wolves, the mute trees, too, remained lost in the thick darkness,
Since I hurried on... it toward a star, I, the foreigner, to my homeland!*

*In my sweet homeland there are flowery roads, fly to my sweet homeland, my horse, fly
In the soft evening star I have a kind angel, o, rise to it, o, my sad thought!
The homeland is not far; I can feel and see it! Heaven is blooming in my soul.
The star shines in the clear sky. The angel of love smiles to me softly.
Begone, thick darkness! Here is the sweet star! Go away, foreign land! This is my homeland!*

(1849)

¹⁶ He then also composes *Searose Flowers*, also on lyrics by Vasile Alecsandri. The lied's score can be found in Mureșianu, Iacob. 1958. *Selected Works*. Bucharest. Musical Publishing House, pp. 23-30.

extraordinary intuition in creating the lyrics-music relationship, so that the musical form takes on a stanza-like aspect, being in complete symbiose with the lyrics.

	I	A	B	C	transition
Periods		A A			
Phrases	<i>i i</i>	<i>a av a av</i>	<i>b b₁</i>		
Dynamic indications	<i>Vivo</i>			<i>meno mosso</i>	<i>Tempo I</i>
Bars	1-12	13-28	29-44	45-52	53-63

Table 1a. *Structural analysis of the lied "Return to the Homeland"*

	A	B	C	transition	D	E	Coda
Periods	A A						
Phrases	<i>a av a av</i>	<i>b b₁</i>			<i>d dv</i>	<i>e ev e₁</i>	
Dynamic indications			<i>meno mosso</i>	<i>Tempo I</i>	<i>a tempo</i>		
Bars	64-71	72-87	88-95	96-105	106-125	126-157	158-166

Table 1b. *Structural analysis of the lied "Return to the Homeland"*

Although the work is designed in the *e minor* tonality, the *Introduction* – I – starts with a left-hand rhythm pattern built on the 2nd and 5th steps (*f#* and *b*). This rhythm cell is present in the piano accompaniment almost during the entire miniature, rendering unity to the work, but also providing it with a motricity, closely related to the piece's title.

The right-hand musical unfolding is laid down through two identical phrases, built on a diminished chord that starts from the 4th step and with a unique material which will no longer occur in the piece. Ever since the beginning, the piano-playing skills of the instrumentalist composer are proven. The dynamics and agogics indications are present, as we will notice, during the entire lied, and they make for important clues for the two performers in order to build up the miniature's musical dramaturgy. Thus, the piano will build two dynamic arches ever since the beginning (until the nuance *f* and back to *p*) within the two introductory phrases, then preparing the entrance of the vocal line.

The voice emerges in bar 13 – A – exposing a simple melodic line in *mf* and in the *e minor* tonality, at first almost static and repetitive, with a reduced ambitus (of just one sixth). The rhythm present in the unfolding of the voice is the same with the left-hand piano rhythm, taking it over from this one, but providing it with a different character (the piano showed it in *staccato*, slightly stressing the hard beats, and the voice will render it more *legato* and without the eighth pause). As for the dramaturgic function of the first two musical ideas, we notice the "classic

pattern” of the open phrase (completed on the 5th step) and closed phrase (on the 1st step). The first period *A* is then taken over again, musically identically, but following the thread of the poem’s lyrics.

Starting with bar 29 (**B**) the atmosphere lightens up temporarily (*D major*), the melodic line of the voice becomes more linear and fluent. The piano accompaniment also changes, the left hand brings a *staccato* course on the newly installed arpeggios (*D major with a seventh, G major with a ninth, E major with a ninth, a minor* etc.), while the right hand carries out a series of chords that also comprise the notes of the vocal line, supporting it.

Within the work’s dramaturgy, the two performers will bring a *ritenuto* towards the end of the two phrases, announcing a new small section with a refrain aspect – **C** (will occur once more at the end of the second stanza). Announced by the *meno mosso* tempo indication, this new section brings the basic tonality (*e minor*) again and also changes the character of the work, as the atmosphere now becomes dreamy, contemplative (also given by the *arpeggiato* chords), also building up the first climax.

At the *Tempo I* indication we enter a transition zone, where we are reminded of the rhythm cell in *staccato* of the initial accompaniment. After a small *crescendo*, immediately followed by a dynamic decrease that insists, like in the beginning, on the notes *b* and *c*, the first section is brought again. Musically and dramaturgically we have the same unfolding (**A – B – C – transition**), but the lyrics follow the poem’s second stanza.

In bar 96, the same **transition** leads the musical discourse to the major homonymous scale of the initial tonality this time – *E major* (**D**), as the atmosphere transforms radically. Following the course and meaning of the lyrics, *Mureșianu* now brings a mix of hope and nostalgia in his music, that specifically Romanian longing. The musical unfolding also shifts its configuration, as the piano evolution somehow takes on the aspect of a waltz (by separating the melody from the chord accompaniment, both present at the right hand). If at first the voice ambitus was very reduced, now it gets to cover the interval of a tenth, also reaching the lied’s highest sound for the first time (*g* from the second octave).

The tonality changes again, as the unfolding modulates to *C major* in bar 125 (**E**), both the musical discourse and the lyrics bringing enthusiastic optimism. If in the previous section the indications in the score suggested a more intimate *p* nuance, now, also pushed by the contextual meaning, the performers will choose a wider, richer sound. The last phrase (*e*) brings a dramatic note, where the hero seems to be awakened from dreaming (harmonically the initial tonality – *e minor* – is brought back). The piano accompaniment also becomes richer through an

agglomeration of chords and the shortening of the note values, building up the most emotionally charged moment of the piece.

The coda (bar 157) brings back the initial atmosphere through the generating rhythm cell we mentioned in the beginning. We have no dynamic indication, but we may suggest a *decrescendo* in the end, as the image is like the figures who have built the lied's dramaturgy are drifting away.

Although apparently easy because it does not bring up big technical and performing issues, the dramaturgy of the lied *Return to the Homeland* must not be treated with indifference, as the simplicity and naturalness of both message and lyrics, as well as music, bear a deep substrate.

5. Conclusions

Thus, we notice that the main feature of *Iacob Mureșianu's* music lies in creating his own melodies with a national flair, having only a few folklore inserts, however, without containing modal quotations or harmonies (even if he also was a tireless folklore specialist). This melos, very harmoniously integrated in the composing techniques he assimilated in Leipzig, helped *Mureșianu* on his way to creating a Romanian style.

The composer's merit (as that of *Gheorghe Dima*, *George Stephănescu* a.o.) was that he prepared the ground needed for later evolutions. At the same time, however, he succeeded in taking the national music from its "daily lulling", as he himself asserted. He succeeded all this as he also was a tireless organiser of the musical life in that period.¹⁷

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¹⁷In his frequent travels through the country, within the various concerts or recitals, *Iacob Mureșianu* also promoted his own composition works. His lieds were sometimes performed even by his sister Sevastia or by his brother Traian. In July 1888, the baritone Traian Mureșianu performs *Return to the Homeland* in the town of Abrud.