

## The Prayer-Chant *Our Father* in the vision of the Composer Constantin Arvinte

Gianin-Cristian OPREA<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** *The choral work a cappella Our Father, written in 2008 for mixed choir and soprano soloist by the composer Constantin Arvinte, is one of the reference works of the maestro's religious works. A folklorist, a conductor, a professor and a composer, having reached full artistic maturity, he has structured his own musical language that combines the tonal with the modal, his composing style being distinctive. His conductive experience is displayed in the construction of the melody and in its harmonic-polyphonic array. The prayer-chant 'Our father' organizes in musical images the Lord's Prayer given by Jesus Christ in his Sermon on the Mount, as it appears in the Gospel of Matthew (6:9-13).*

Keywords: *chant, prayer, tonal, modal, a cappella.*

### 1. Introduction

A folklorist, a conductor, a professor and a composer, Constantin Arvinte was born on 21 may, 1926, in the Voinesti Village, Iaşi County. He has written scene music, vocal-symphonic music, symphony, fanfare music, chamber music and secular and religious choral music. The professor has, also, remade carols and has written, among others, liturgical chants, like 'Our Father', which is a work for a mixed choir and a soprano soloist- a cappella.

The religious choral music from the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century vanished almost completely because the accent was put on the secular creation, while the public religious displays during the communist regime regardless of the cult could only be made outside the church (Doroşinca 2013, 11).

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<sup>1</sup> Archdiocese of Buzău and Vrancea. Email: giancris90@yahoo.com

## 2. Discussion

The profound meaning if the Lord's Prayer text enables the composer to compose some musical images in which the moments of harmonic-polyphonic tension mingle with consonant chords which give away an inner peaceful and balance state, both for the one who sings, as well for the one who listens.

The chant 'Our Father' is being sung by the kliros or by the choir at the end of the Holy Liturgy and reveals the ensemble's vocal virtuosity. Many composers and psalm singers have been looking in the Romanian liturgical music musical expressions for this important end of the liturgical drama. One could only mention the most important ones, starting with Anton Pann and continuing with Gavriil Muzicescu, Gheorghe Cucu, Ioan D. Chirescu, Ion Vidu, Dragoş Alexandrescu, etc. Among them, one can, also, mention, Constantin Arvinte.

In the vision of the maestro Arvinte, the work that we have studied in the manuscript is built on a permanent dialogue between the soprano soloist and the choir.

The musical score for 'Tatăl nostru' (Our Father) by Constantin Arvinte, measures 1-6, is presented in a five-staff format. The top staff is for the soprano soloist, and the lower four staves represent the choir. The tempo is marked 'Larghetto (♩=60)'. The score begins with a mezzo-piano (*mp*) dynamic. The lyrics are: 'Ta-tăl nos-tru, Ca-re-le ești în cer, sfin-țeaș - că - Ta-tăl nos - tru, Ca-re-le ești în cer, sfin- Ta-tăl nos - tru, Ta - tăl nos - tru, Ca - re-le ești în cer, sfin - Ta-tăl nos-tru, Ta - tăl nos - tru, Ca-re-le ești în cer, sfin - Ta - tăl nos - tru, Ta-tăl nos - tru, Ca - re-le ești în cer,'. The score includes dynamic markings like 'mp' and 'p'.

Example 1, "Tatăl nostru" ["Our Father"], measures 1 – 6

One can note the motivic structure of the melody and the usage of imitation as a composing method (measures 4, 5 and 6), where the choir takes over the melodic idea of the soloist. The musical speech of the choir is, also, divided in two sonorous planes, which suggest the isonic chant, as it results from the above example. The diatonic character of the melody is clearly built in ascendance, while the cadences on major chords are meant to create a bright vibe for the sonorous images.

In general, the melody is poorly enriched, having simple rhythmic formulas and being gradually built. The intervallic leaps are prepared and resolved, being, usually, in ascendance, while the resolution to a melodic is descendant.

As a composing procedure, one can note the embroideries, the appoggiaturas noted with real durations and other varied procedures that enrich the melody. Harmoniously, one could note the pace of the pair-voices at imperfect consonant intervals (the third and the sixth)- see measure 5 from the above example. The soprano and the tenor sing in parallel at the interval of a sixth, while the bass voices intonate as a pedal point, the tonic of the work being in E.

The soprano soloist lets herself admired, while the choir softly steps from the major onto the minor.

The musical score shows five staves. The top staff is the Soprano line, followed by Tenor, Alto, Bass, and a Bassoon/Double Bass line. The lyrics are written below each staff. The music is in 4/4 time with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The lyrics are: '-se nu - me-le Tău, vi - e' (Soprano), '-țeaș - că-se nu - me-le Tău, vi - e,' (Tenor), '-țeaș - că-se nu - me-le Tău, vi - e,' (Alto), '-țeaș - că-se nu - me - le Tău, vi - e,' (Bass), and 'nu - me - le Tău, vi - e,' (Bassoon/Double Bass).

Example 2, "Tatăl nostru" ["Our Father"], measures 7 – 9

The text of the prayer comprises seven requests that the ones who sing address them to the Holy Father in the name of every one of those who are present in the church at the Holy Liturgy. Architectonically, the work is bipartite. The author often uses crescendo and decrescendo meant to emphasize some ideas from the literary text.

*poco rall.*

pre-cum în cer, a - șa și pre pă - mânt.

Ta, pre-cum în cer, a - șa și pre pă - mânt.

Ta, pre-cum în cer, a - șa și pre pă - mânt.

Ta, pre-cum în cer, a - șa și pre pă - mânt.

Ta, pre-cum în cer, a - șa și pre pă - mânt.

Example 3, "Tatăl nostru" ["Our Father"], measures 14 – 18

The cadence of the first period is recitational and ends in tonic E minor chord.

The second period, which is more dynamic, expands the sonority of the musical images, increasing the intervals and the rhythm of the generating motive of the first period.

*poco piu mosso mp cresc.*

Pâi-nea noas - tră

*mp* Pâi-nea noas - tră, pâi-nea

Pâi - nea noas - tră, pâi-nea

Example 4, "Tatăl nostru" ["Our Father"], measures 19 – 21

Gradually are being succeeding musical sequences that create a sonorous climax (E 2, F-sharp 2). One could, also, note the occurrence of some chromatic notes that do not alter the tonal centre.



Example 5, “*Tatăl nostru*” [“Our Father”], measures 22 – 27

The entering in stretto between the soloist and the choir also has the role of making the musical speech more dynamic (see the above example). The voice pairs change, thus, alternating the sonorous planes.



Example 6, “*Tatăl nostru*” [“Our Father”], measures 29 – 35

Owing a skilful manner of composing, the author prepares the climax of the section and of the entire work ( G 2), intonated by the soprano soloist and strengthened by the isorhythmic intervention of the choir, this time, a moment of sonorous tension, also confirmed by the pause on a minor seventh chord.

noi în is - pi - tă, ci ne iz - bă -

noi în is - pi - tă, ne iz - bă -

noi în is - pi - tă, ne iz - bă -

noi în is - pi - tă, ne iz - bă -

-ce pre noi în is - pi - tă, ne iz - bă -

Example 7, "Tatăl nostru" ["Our Father"], measures 39 – 41

This sonorous sequence underlines the dramatism of the request "And lead us not into temptation". The sonorous sequence is amplified on the following request "But deliver us from evil", the last of the seven "requests", addressed to our Heavenly Father. The final cadence is plagal (subdominant-tonic) and stabilizes the musical speech on the tonic of E major chord., the word from the cadence "Amen", a word of Hebrew origin, meaning "so be it!". One could remark the continual variation of the intensity of the sonorous images that oscillate between a mezzo-forte and a piano.

*poco rit.*

-clean. A - min.

de cel vi - clean. A - min.

Example 8, "Tatăl nostru" ["Our Father"], measures 44 – 46

### 3. Conclusions

In conclusion, one must state that the author has written a score accessible to all the mixed choral ensembles, being aware of the fact that many choral ensembles that activate in the cathedrals and the churches from the big cultural cities and from other smaller places are differently made up, having a musical and cultural grounding. It is about the vocal range, the simplicity of the melody of the rhythm, the usage of some chords usually built on the main steps of tonality. The voices support each other via the entire melodic and harmonic-polyphonic construction, as it is shown in the cited examples.

The vision of maestro Constantin Arvinte for this prayer-chant is full of musical sensitivity and simplicity in what concerns the musical speech and the concordance with the semantic of the text, without making it simplistic. The inner feeling, that finds its correspondent in the entire work, combined with the full mastery of the composing and conducting technique makes the score known to religious music interpreters from Romania and the Republic of Moldova. As one can find out from the manuscript, on the 19<sup>th</sup> of November it will be ten years since the maestro has completed this work, and it is our duty towards him to make it known

to the entire musical world from Romania and not only, by using the above mentioned examples, being known that the Lord's Prayer "Our Father" is part of every Christian cult's life.

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