

Liviu Dănceanu, musicological dimensions of his aesthetics

Petruţa-Maria COROIU¹

Abstract: *Liviu Dănceanu was one of the most important, but discreet, Romanian composers, conductors, musicologists, teachers, essayist and journalists, at a time of pointless agitation and unfounded self-praise. Born on 19 July 1954 in Roman, he passed away (too early for us, at the right time for the Lord) on 26 October 2017, in Bucharest. The founder and artistic manager of the “Archaeus” Contemporary Music Ensemble, which tackled works by contemporary (Romanian and foreign) creators, but also his own repertory, Liviu Dănceanu devoted his life to the art of his time, both to its creation and to its interpretation and understanding. He was an atypical teacher, encouraging high quality professional and moral education, but also freedom of thinking; he was attentive to details and he supported the representatives of the younger generations in reaching the highest cultural positions. He taught classes in music history, aesthetics, the Baroque, at the National Music University in Bucharest, starting with 1990.*

Key-words: *aesthetics, musicology, Romanian composer*

1. Introduction

Liviu Dănceanu was one of the most important, but discreet, Romanian composers, conductors, musicologists, teachers, essayist and journalists, at a time of pointless agitation and unfounded self-praise. Born on 19 July 1954 in Roman, he passed away (too early for us, at the right time for the Lord) on 26 October 2017, in Bucharest. The founder and artistic manager of the “Archaeus” Contemporary Music Ensemble, which tackled works by contemporary (Romanian and foreign) creators, but also his own repertory, Liviu Dănceanu devoted his life to the art of his time, both to its creation and to its interpretation and understanding. He was an atypical teacher, encouraging high quality professional and moral education, but also freedom of thinking; he was attentive to details and he supported the representatives of the younger generations in reaching the highest cultural positions. He taught classes in music history, aesthetics, the Baroque, at the National Music University in Bucharest, starting with 1990.

¹ PhD Transilvania University of Braşov, Faculty of Music, maniuipetru@yaho.com

After having graduated from the above mentioned institution, where he would also teach and where he studied composition with Ștefan Niculescu, Liviu Dănceanu created over one hundred opuses, published in the 1980s, among which we mention: Palimpsests (a series of works for a vocal-instrumental ensemble), Syntiphonia for synthesizer Korg Wavestation op. 57, Symphony no. 2 for soloist instrument, choir and orchestra op. 59 (1992), Religious music for orchestra op. 67 (1995), Parallel Music for cello and typewriter op. 68 (1995), History 2 op. 75 (1998), Tachycardia op. 81, 5 of Millennium for orchestra op. 98 (2003), Exercises in Admiration op. 101 (2004) – for the “Archaeus” ensemble, *Cette lancinante douleur de la liberté* (for clarinet and piano) op. 113 – work for theater-ballet Eva (2013).

A remarkable musicologist and essayist, he infused his academic and scientific work with the freedom of the genius writer, but also with the delicate honesty of his personal thoughts on the musical phenomenon, in the public space. Out of his writings gathered in volumes, it is worth mentioning: *Anotimpurile muzicii* [The seasons of music] (an elliptic and didactic history of classical music (vol. I “Spring”), *Cartea cu dansuri* [The book of dances], *Cartea cu instrumente* [The book of instruments], a series of volumes *Eseuri implosive* [Implosive Essays] – which reflects the brilliance of his profound and sophisticated writing. His doctoral thesis, entitled *Contribuții la epistemologia muzicii* [Contributions to the epistemology of music] was subsequently published.

2. Discussion

Never losing himself in what he called “the corrupt chaos of life” (Dănceanu May-June 2010), treating the cruel reality with “inhibited naiveté, stemming from spiritually discouraging experiences, but also with exhibited generosity, based on his confidence in his fellow men, which, as a rule, prevents us from missing out on the great chances of the heart” (Dănceanu May-June 2010), Liviu Dănceanu was aware of his artistic and human status in a universe in which he managed to make his voice so well-heard. His entire activity was aimed at, in his own words, “reconnecting and reconstituting goodness, beauty, and truth in a world where these three sovereign values were pushed into a non-gravitational space, incapable of gathering them: a world in which we are, beyond any doubt, maladjusted, inadequate, and incoercible. Nevertheless, our banner is the adaptation, adequacy, and coercion of the aesthetic dimension to the ethical one” (Dănceanu 2010).

At an aesthetic level, Liviu Dănceanu had strong opinions on the concept of beauty – distorted nowadays to such an extent that it has become unrecognizable: “the greatest insult that can be brought (to music) is to say it is only beautiful, because its assessment, in the modern (or fashionable) critical and aesthetic isolation related to the area of tastes and pleasure, is not only denigratory, but at least completely inappropriate. The composer does not create music for someone’s

pleasure. This does not necessarily mean that he abandons beauty, but he aspires to a state in which the aesthetic is not isolated from the rest, that is from what defines it” (Dănceanu, May-June 2010).

He sanctioned whenever he could – but detached as one who cannot be touched by minor things - “the ignorance of this prolific principle in many public or private calamitous creations” (Dănceanu, May-June 2010).

He spoke like no one else about “the gentle friendships, which have nothing to do with the appreciative pat on the back or the circumstantial logrolling, about the education which is still fortunate to be part of the economy of life and of survival, about life that can be salvaged only by living through culture with authenticity and despair” (Dănceanu May-June 2010).

Investigating the topics he chose for the essay which opens the main professional publication in the field of music in Romania, we can identify some of the areas of interest of Maestro Liviu Dănceanu.

He also dealt, in an elegant but disturbing manner, with some of the musical realities of the communist period: “the state of despair, the cult of weariness, this feeling of powerlessness which should be reconsidered through the national project. The Romanian composers served through their creations the three paradigms of patriotism: the hard patriotism (excessive discourse), the soft or cool patriotism (defining the individual or collective self in a more relaxed way), and the exclusive patriotism (the force of tribal clichés, the biological racism, or the angry nationalism). After 1989 a new type of patriotism emerged built on the atrophy of hope, the decline of the love for people and country” (Dănceanu September 2017,1).

Liviu Dănceanu analyzed the musical phenomenon both from an anatomical-biological perspective, and from the spiritual one: “the emergence of music in men is more difficult to understand. Music is not fundamentally linked to the evolution of the human species. Music has no center in the human brain, instead it relies on many networks in the grey matter. It is a non-adaptive change. Nevertheless, we are a musical species. Unlike the other languages, music (because it has no precise source at the brain level) is ubiquitous, being recorded both in the left hemisphere (which controls the sequential activities: reason and logic), and in the right one (in charge of intuition, feelings, emotions). The art of sounds is based on thinking and at the same time on feeling. Music does not have an evolutionary substratum, it is divine essence“.

He did not refrain from discussing the reevaluations of traditional music, such as Chopin’s music (“what emanates from his [Chopin’s] mazurkas or polkas must be contemplated with humble penitence, like a miracle of an inner equinoctial thaw” (Dănceanu April 2010)), but also of the music he had direct contact with – as a disciple: “Ștefan Niculescu: a passionate scholar and humanist, (...) who reveals the intimate mechanism of wholesome thinking around a reference point: the composer’s place in the world. He knew that, without the respect axiom, culture will not coagulate and will scatter as a result of countless denials. The search for

meaning was decisively more influential than bibliographic exhibitionism. The balance was tipped by the sobriety of clerical life, the redemption from the swamp of materiality, the state of grace and the relocation of the great spiritual truths” (Dănceanu, August 2017, 1).

Liviu Dănceanu had the freshest, most lively and out of the box visions about music and the democratic practice in the art of sounds: “the democratic exercise is also present in music: the so-called classical music can be compared with a totalitarian democracy, the modern music bears the traces of an individualist democracy (the composer being a solitary explorer and inventor of the avant-garde). It is productive to alternate selfishness and individualism in the creative process” (Dănceanu July 2017, 1). Another similar masterpiece essay is a metaphor which compares music to clothing: “music is like cloths. Whether we like it or not, today we can hardly take them off, we are all wrapped up. It is out of our hands: our invasion by the immense armies of all types of music results in the loss of sincere, genuine attachment. In its defense, the main argument of music is the variety of materials which compose it: the Terylene music of the Middle Ages is somber; at the other extreme, we find the gabardine music of the Renaissance, (...) the brocade music of the Baroque, the silk or satin music of Classicism, the velvet music of the Romanticism or the Melana music of Modernism” (Dănceanu March 2017,1).

Liviu Dănceanu investigated the musical phenomenon from all the possible angles, because he had the versatility of a man of culture completely and deeply educated. The creation is commented upon in a transparent and subtle way, from the perspective of the person aware of the effort it implies, highlighting the spiritual nature of the work of art: “a scholarly composer infers the corporeal root of language; it struggles to fly, beyond the articulated and decanted codes, it covers first the space of the inform, then it settles in its concrete bed, celebrating the ecstasy of discovering the world. The magic of the creation cannot be ignored. Any composer is a nomothete who gathers and filters canons to catch and contain the world. Composers can be grouped in two classes: innate (they forge the grandiose and capricious sonorous complexity, due to their talent or instinct capable of avoiding the corruption of the sonorous material and of the artistic message) and self-made (they forge their success through a forced occurrence and a dubious treatment of the sonorous magma, precariously processed). There are two other groups of composers: the visible (assiduously supported by the mass-media, rather for non-axiological and extra-aesthetic reasons) and the invisible (those who plough the field of creation discreetly and modestly aspiring to the crop)” (Dănceanu June 2017,1).

Interpretation is seen from the perspective of the one who does not meet the real qualities to be the mediator conveying the creator’s ideas to the public: “in a musical opus the sounds are like the inhabitants of a fortress: each with his position and rank, with his rights and obligations. Sounds, like people, establish various relations such as collaboration, division of labour, or subordination, separating into

leaders and followers, according to general imposed and assumed laws. Certain musical fortresses are structured democratically, others dictatorially. Any sound has the right to life. Only that, sometimes, the mediator's will follows a different path than the composer's, or of the music itself. Thus, a continuous revolution which suspends the rule of law for sounds, disturbing the organic connections among them or destroying the harmony among the individuals who populate a musical opus: anarchic interpretations, in which the sonorous objects are isolated, even pitted against each other. Contemporary music in particular is deprived, through restitution, of its essence when sounds are secularized and mortgaged to the ignorant or damned spirit" (Dănceanu May 2017, 1). Musical critics were also... criticized for the lack of spiritual and professional strength of their style: "not only the critics, but also the elite Romanian composers (Niculescu, Stroe, Vieru, Nemescu) engaged in debates, (...) discussing the ideas and obeying protocols which involved showing respect to the opposition. Far from those days, musical journalism has no polemic spirit (which should result from value judgement, as an instrument available to the critic in his fight to assert the truth) and no satirical spirit (a sign of spiritual youth). Who would take the chance today on such endeavours? Not the critics on call anyway, they are also adrift, in a state of derision and annihilation, with no philosophy, they are not even irritated or irritable anymore. We should fine the critics whose neutral attitude has turned polemic into a deserted cathedral. (...) A polemicist is either strong or nothing at all". (Dănceanu April 2017, 1).

A privileged position is occupied by the meditations on the precarious destiny of national (and not only) contemporary music, from a delicate cultural and spiritual perspective: "everything seems to come down to the difference. For instance, the one between earning and wasting, between safety and uncertainty, or between patience and impatience shows a lot, but it hides the essential" (Dănceanu April 2010). But the bitterest tone is used in the retrospective of the year he knew he will not finish among us: "there is a certain joyfulness of the spirit imbued with the contempt for random things. People live with given ideas and ignoring them is an impiety. We are walking around in a circle where we are trapped without escape. What we love more in an event or accident is our own thoughts and options. Bygones".

3. Conclusions

Liviu Dănceanu deserves serious and thorough research concerning all the aspects of his activity as a composer, but also as an essayist and journalist – callings which he honoured like no one else, and that we used to pay homage to him at the time of his departure.

4. References

- Dănceanu, Liviu. 2010. "Swing Chopin." *Dilema veche*, 15 April. Available at: <http://dilemaveche.ro/sectiune/muzica/articol/swing-chopin>
- Dănceanu, Liviu. 2010. "Ieșirea din reclusiune" [Emerging from reclusion]. *Dilema veche*, nr. 328, 27 May - 2 June.
- Dănceanu, Liviu. 2017. "Muzici, stofe, croieli [Music, textiles, cuts]." *Actualitatea muzicală*, no. 3, March.
- Dănceanu, Liviu. 2017. "Unde ne sunt polemiștii? [Where are our polemicists?]." *Actualitatea muzicală*, no. 4, April.
- Dănceanu, Liviu. 2017. "Rea-voință sau ne-putință? [Malice or impotence?]." *Actualitatea muzicală*, no. 5, May.
- Dănceanu, Liviu. 2017. "Compozitori între paranteze [Composers between parentheses]." *Actualitatea muzicală*, no. 6, June.
- Dănceanu, Liviu. 2017. "Muzică și democrație [Music and democracy]." *Actualitatea muzicală*, no. 7, July.
- Dănceanu, Liviu. 2017. "Erudiție și umanism [Knowledge and humanism]." *Actualitatea muzicală*, no. 8, August.
- Dănceanu, Liviu. 2017. "(N-)am compus cântece patriotice [I wrote no patriotic songs]." *Actualitatea muzicală*, no. 9, September.