

Musical particularities in Paul Constantinescu's *Oratorios*

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Abstract: *Paul Constantinescu's efforts to process and draw attention to the potential of the Romanian Byzantine monody would reach their pinnacle in his two masterpieces that belong to the vocal-symphonic genre: “The Passion and Resurrection” Byzantine Easter Oratorio (1946-1948), and “The Nativity” - Byzantine Christmas Oratorio (1947), the same works that would earn him the title of “father of Romanian Byzantinism.” These works represent, beyond the equanimity, sobriety and humanity of their musical expression, the materialization of a brilliant creative enterprise, set to realize a double cultural-musical symbiosis between musical art and the Byzantine church chants on the one hand and between the Byzantine musical tradition of the East and the European musical culture on the other hand, with the well-defined goal to bring the man closer to his Creator through music.*

Keywords: *Paul Constantinescu, Byzantine music, Heterophony, Resurrection, Nativity*

1. Introduction

Paul Constantinescu (1909–1963) is counted among the most ingenious representatives of the Romanian national music in the XXth century, alongside great names like George Enescu. Focused on four aesthetic directions: folklore, Byzantine music, Neoclassicism and musical comedy, he brings a substantial number of valuable works as his contribution to the local musical heritage.

The psychological artistic character of the Romanian musician is depicted as:

“Far from being the Romantic creative type, Paul Constantinescu has gained his reputation through his exacting self-control, exigency and professional integrity. More than a few of his scores have gone through a process of successive remakes in time, and their final form took shape only as a result of a meticulous elaboration. As an advocate of a concise, terse style of discourse, Paul Constantinescu has remained a creator of nude simplicity. The sonorous themes and motifs of his scores carry a kind of

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«Mozartian» expressiveness, as Paul Constantinescu possesses the «boldness of simplicity», which is characteristic of Romanian folklore.”
(Cosma 1999, 45).

The creation of this great composer impresses at first by its diverse approaches of a wide variety of musical composition genres, from the easier accessible ones such as dance, suite, rhapsody and chorale, on to the new complex forms of symphonic and chamber music, of the dramatic genre and of the stage and film music.

His first compositions, which are generically entitled *Two Byzantine studies for a chord trio* (1929-1930) and *The Romanian Suite* (1930-1936), define the two important sources of inspiration and interest of the composer, Byzantine music and the Romanian folk song. After having greatly influenced his entire work, these two sources crystallized into two well fashioned compositional trends that bring forth the same desire of the composer, that is to rediscover the value of the local musical tradition, both folkloric and Byzantine, and to amplify and enrich these treasures by a harmonic processing of the musical material in his creations. In doing so, he also managed to define his very own specific compositional style. (Pepelea 2007, 27-28)

Thus, his entire creation presents, “*in a constant and clear manner, that permanent characteristic which is rendered by the Romanian people's ethos and spirituality, aptly intertwined - particularly in the religious pieces - with that specific Byzantine ornamentation that is often found in the works of the greatest Romanian painters*” (Bădulescu 1999, 155).

Paul Constantinescu's efforts to process and draw attention to the potential of the Romanian Byzantine monody would reach their pinnacle in his two masterpieces that belong to the vocal-symphonic genre: “*The Passion and Resurrection*” *Byzantine Easter Oratorio* (1946-1948)², and “*The Nativity*” - *Byzantine Christmas Oratorio* (1947), the same works that would earn him the title of “*father of Romanian Byzantinism.*” While these two serve as expressions of the maturity his creation reached and a peak point in the vocal-symphonic composition, just as the *Triple Concerto for Violin, Cello and Piano* (1963) represents the peak point of his sinfonia concertante creation, they also epitomize an apogee of a certain stage in the Romanian Byzantinism. This creative inclination towards using the melodic of Byzantine extraction in the cultivated creation is, after all, another “*Neoclassic phenomenon that is not anchored in the Western tradition, but rather in a rich local musical-poetic tradition...*” (Firca 1974, 126).

On the problem of harmonising Psaltic music, Paul Constantinescu states:

² On the two versions of the Easter Oratorio and on the argument following them, see: Fr. Costin BUTNAR, “The Dispute between Paul Constantinescu and I. D.Petrescu on the *Lord's Passion Oratorio* [in Romanian], in *Theological Revue*, [in Romanian], no.2/2009, pp.189-200. The recent retrieval of the original version of the Easter Oratorio was mentioned in the article: Fr. Stelian Ionașcu, “*The Jewel hidden in the field...*” or the *Phoenix bird*, [in Romanian], in *Muzica Magazine* [in Romanian] no. 1/2010, pp. 3-15.

“...herein, things become really subtle, because not every polyphonic garb can dress these fragile melodies, but only that one that fits onto their structure. There are certain melodic textures (*tropoi*), rhythmic combinations, colours and ethos, as well as fixed musical forms which could, at one point, reshape our future cultivated music; but then again, this is a concern of the future...” (Tomescu 1967, 244).

Similarly, Doru Popovici considers that, unlike the remarkable works of the XXth century whose Mediaeval thematic is of Gregorian inspiration, Paul Constantinescu's *Oratorios* distinguish themselves by the way they approach a new source of inspiration pertaining to Romanian Byzantine music, and moreover, through the cultural-musical synthesis that the composer succeeded to instill in them, thus managing a real *geographic transgression – between Orient and Occident* (Popovici 1970, 249). This synthesis involves the interweaving and merging of two different musical traditions, i.e. of the holdings - the psaltic monody, specific to the Orthodox East, and the form of musical, harmonic, polyphonic and orchestral expression, specific to the Western musical sphere (Tomescu 1967, 244).

The musical language of the two *Oratorios* prove a unitary stylistic vision of the composer, who managed in both cases to balance the epic and lyric elements, as well as the vocal melodic and the choral-orchestral harmonic ones, by investing the orchestration with a coloristic and monody potentiating function. At the same time, he strived to preserve a diatonic aspect in the melodic by avoiding the augmented second, and to process the psalmodic recitative without departing from the specific practice of the church, which led him to another fusion, a harmonic synthesis between the Western and the Byzantine modal tradition (Pepelea 2007, 38-39).

As far as the musical sources of these oratorios are concerned, it is worth mentioning that Paul Constantinescu was a very diligent self-taught scholar in the field of Romanian psaltic music, and his choice of musical themes were inspired from the following publications: Petros Efesios, *Syntomon Doxastarium* (from Peter the Lampadarios, Bucharest, 1820); Hieromonk Makarije, *Irmologion or musical collection of Katavasiae*, Vienna, 1823; Anton Pann, *Irmologion or Book of Katavasiae*, Bucharest, 1846; Dimitrie Suceveanu, *Idiomelarios I-III*, Neamț, 1857; *The Lamentation at the Tomb*, Bucharest, 1896; Carol Göbl; *Religious chants translated and composed by Hieromonk Makarije, Anton Pann and other authors*, Bucharest, 1909; I. Popescu-Pasărea, *Chants of the Triodion*, 1925; Stupcanu, *Anastasimatarion*. He has also used as reference notations from musical compositions of Filotheiu sâ n Agăi Jipăi (1713-1714) and Petros Peloponnesios.

Among these, Makarije's *Irmologion* provides a great part of the musical sphere of the two oratorios, just as it can be observed from both their beginnings:

- the first choir, *Hallelujah* from the Easter Oratorio is based on a Byzantine theme that is augmented, rhythmically varied and then processed harmonically in *E* aeolian, and which starts in *fugato* style:

- Fragment from Hieromonk Makarije's melody (Ex. 1)

96
A — li — lu — i — a

A — li — lu — i — a

Musical Example 1

- *Hallelujah* from the Byzantine Easter Oratorio (Ex.2):

♩=75

p semplice

A - - -

p semplice

A - - - li - - -

p semplice

A - - - li - - -

T *p semplice*

A - - - li - - - li - - - i - - -

Musical Example 2

- also, on the melody of a tone IV troparion, the composer produces grand aural moments in the *Annunciation Megalyrnarion of the Theotokos*, which opens the *Christmas Oratorio* (Ex.3):

The image displays a musical score for a vocal and instrumental piece. It consists of five staves. The first two staves are vocal parts, and the last three are instrumental parts (piano and cello/contrabass). The music is written in a key with one flat (F major or D minor) and a 4/4 time signature. The tempo and style are marked as *pp* *semplice e legato*. The dynamics include *pochiss. cresc.* and *pp* *semplice e legato*. The lyrics are in Romanian and are as follows:

5 *pp* *semplice e legato* *pochiss. cresc.*
 Bi - ne ves - teș - te pă - mân - tu - le bu - cu - ri -
pochiss. cresc.
 pă - mân - tu - le bu - cu - ri -
 10
 e ma - re; lă - u - dați ce - ruri mă - ri -
 e ma - re; lă - u - dați ce -
pp *semplice e legato*
 lă - u - dați ce - ruri mă - ri -

Musical Example 3

This process of transforming the Byzantine musical material from its original monodic state into the multivocal-polyphonic state represents one of Paul Constantinescu's favourite endeavours, in which he was able to manifest his creative originality, by masterfully associating the psaltic monody with the vocal-orchestral harmony, on various levels of fusion. The result of this creative process that combines in an organic manner the monody, the polyphonic linearity and the homophony, was defined by Valentin Timariu as *modal pluriphony* (Timariu 1984, 402). In Paul Constantinescu's vocal-symphonic creation, this correlation between monody and *pluriphony* is conceived as a transfiguration of the Byzantine music, as a process that does not involve the alteration of syntactic structures, but rather emphasizes or stylizes them. This is also accomplished using some specifically modal procedures such as: unison, heterophony and mixture on the one hand, and the ison and ostinato, on the other (Pepelea 2007, 218).

Unlike the other representatives of the Romanian composition school, Paul Constantinescu tends to employ the *unison* mostly in the Byzantine inspired religious creation and not in his folklore processing work. Also, it is very interesting that the key role of the unison is not necessarily that of hallmarking an incipit, but rather to highlight a culmination of maximum tension, as an expression of certain extreme psychological states of dramatism or exaltation.

The most well-known parts of choral unison, where these extend from a few measures to almost an entire section, are:

- *Oh, divine* - Easter Oratorio (Ex.4):

66

Pre ca-re-le în-tă-ri-re de nă dej - de cre - din - cio - sii a - vân - du-l

Pre ca-re-le în-tă-ri-re de nă dej - de cre - din - cio - sii a - vân - du-l

Pre ca-re-le în-tă-ri-re de nă dej - de cre - din - cio - sii a - vân - du-l

Pre ca-re-le în-tă-ri-re de nă dej - de cre - din - cio - sii a - vân - du-l

poco a poco cresc.

Musical Example 4

- *Thou who art the Life* –Easter Oratorio (Ex. 5):

S. *ppp* În mor-mânt vi - a-țã pus ai fost Hris-toa-se

A. *ppp* În mor-mânt vi - a-țã pus ai fost Hris-toa-se

T. *ppp* În mor-mânt vi - a-țã pus ai fost Hris-toa-se

B. *ppp* În mor-mânt vi - a-țã pus ai fost Hris-toa-se

S. Șis-au spăi-mân-tat os-ti - ri-le în - ge-resti ple-că-ciu-nea-ta ceamult-tă

A. Șis-au spăi-mân-tat os-ti - ri-le în - ge-resti ple-că-ciu-nea-ta ceamult-tă

T. Șis-au spăi-mân-tat os-ti - ri-le în - ge-resti ple-că-ciu-nea-ta ceamult-tă

B. Șis-au spăi-mân-tat os-ti - ri-le în - ge-resti ple-că-ciu-nea-ta ceamult-tă

Musical Example 5

- *Christ is risen (final)* - Easter Oratorio (Ex. 6):

Hris-tos a în-vi-at din morți
 Hris-tos a în-vi-at din morți
 Hris-tos a în-vi-at din morți
 Hris-tos a în-vi-at din morți
 A-li-lu-i-a
 A-li-lu-i-a
 A-li-lu-i-a
 A-li-lu-i-a

Musical Example 6

- *The IXth Katavasia of the Nativity* - Christmas Oratorio (Ex. 7)

S *ppp* *sotto voce, semplice*
 A
 T *ppp*
 B *sotto voce, semplice*
 Mă-reș-te su-fle-tul meu pre Cel din Fe-cioa

Musical Example 7

- *The Ist Katavasia” of the Nativity - Christmas Oratorio (Ex. 8):*

The musical score consists of four vocal staves (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) and a piano accompaniment. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 2/4. The Soprano part starts with a rest followed by a note with the dynamic *molto legato* and *ff*. The Alto and Bass parts enter with a rest followed by a note with the dynamic *ff*. The lyrics are in Romanian and are repeated across the vocal parts.

Musical Example 8

Therefore, the unison holds a very important place in the architecture of the two oratorios and it is used by the composer to highlight those monodies that have a rich semantic charge, with free-standing meanings that do not require additional adornments (Pepelea 2007, 220).

Another procedure that implies an evolution from unison to plurivocality is *heterophony*, which uses its own agent, the monody, by engaging it in a process of dephasing. These dephasings are sometimes used in the case of imitative regulations that are free from a rhythmic point of view, and they fit very well with the processes of anticipation or belatedness in the harmonic construction (Firca 1988, 402-403).

Paul Constantinescu uses heterophony in order to bring out the Byzantine essence of his creation, by reducing the dephasings to the maximum and by employing processes of augmentation and diminution. Although they are rather an isolated phenomenon and do not represent a fundamental compositional procedure, the most frequent are the reductive heterophonies in which the theme overlaps the modal pillars that are accentuated by low-pitched voices.

- *The IXth Katavasia of the Nativity* - Christmas Oratorio (Ex. 9):

rea s'au cul - cat cel ne - în - că put, Hris - tos Dum - ne - zeu. pre
 rea s'au cul - cat cel ne - în - că put, Hris - tos Dum - ne - zeu. pre
 ca - re - ie lă - u - dăn - du - i il mă riu. m.
 ca - re - ie lă - u - dăn - du - i il mă riu. m.
 dăn - du - i il mă riu. m.
 dăn - du - i il mă riu. m.

Musical Example 9

- *Hallelujah* - Easter Oratorio (Ex. 10):

A - li - lu - i - a
 A - li - lu - i - a
 A - li - lu - i - a

Musical Example 10

Alongside these, another compositional technique focuses on the relationship between monody and mixture, that presupposes simultaneous intervallic or chordal recitations, by which the monody is thickened and substantially augmented. Habitually, mixtures belong either to the counterpoint, to the harmony, or to the theme that has additional doublings, leading the composer to make polyvalent harmonizations in the various re-takes of the melodic line.

- *The Ist Katavasia of the Nativity* - Christmas Oratorio (Ex.11)

The image displays two systems of musical notation for a four-part vocal setting. Each system consists of four staves (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass). The lyrics are 'a - li - lu - i - a'. Red arrows indicate the movement of the voices between the two systems, showing both parallel and contrary motion.

Musical Example 11 (parallel and contrary mixtures)

- *Christ is risen* - Easter Oratorio (Ex. 12):

The image shows a musical score for a four-part vocal setting. The lyrics are 'A - li - lu - i - a, A - li - lu - i - a'. The score is written in a key with three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and a common time signature. The voices move in parallel motion.

Musical Example 12 (parallel mixtures)

Like the unison, the mixtures represent a particular inclination of the composer, who associates them to certain increasing emotional states. In the same way we may consider the numerous cases of conducting the voices within parallel intervals:

- *Hallelujah* - Easter Oratorio (Ex. 13)

Musical Example 13

In contrast with these procedures that focus on a thickening of the melody, Paul Constantinescu uses other techniques, such as the *ison*, that potentiate the monody in a unique way. This is a background that accompanies the melody, just like the *gold background of the icons* accompany the image, and endows it with an extra dimension that is, however, part of another harmonic plane. Although it looks like a *rudiment of vocality*, the *ison* underlines by its static character the genuine monodic character of the melody, and thus it becomes a deciding factor between the planes of musical discourse (Firca 1988, 397-398)

Characteristic to both the Byzantine and the folkloric tradition, the *ison* is placed in the background of the melody - on the finale or sporadically on the fifth, yet rather often on both modal pillars - and is massively used in both Oratorios' orchestration of the evangelist. The most significant role of the *ison* is that of becoming first a starting point and then a component of a harmonic structure, in which the creative genius of the composer comes to the forefront (Firca 1988, 399).

- *It was the governor's custom at the feast...* - Easter Oratorio (Ex. 14)

Musical Example 14

- *In the sixth month...* - Christmas Oratorio (Ex.15):

Evangelistul (tenor)

p

Iar în lu-na a şa-sea, tri-mis au fost În-ge-rul Ga-vri-il de la Dum-ne -

Musical Example 15

Another type of background that appears as a result of processing the ison through different melodic and rhythmic variational methods is the *ostinato*, whose dynamic rhythmic nature acquires in Paul Constantinescu's creation a profound melodic character that consists of repeated modal structures which create a particular atmosphere.

- The best known is the beginning of the Christmas Oratorio:

Pian

pp

Bi - ne ves - teş - te pă - mân - tu - - le bu - cu - ri -

pă - mân - tu - - le bu - cu - ri -

pp semplice e legato *pochiss. cresc.*

Musical Example 16

- *None should come...* - Easter Oratorio (Ex. 17)

The image displays two systems of a musical score for four voices: Soprano (S.), Alto (A.), Tenor (T.), and Bass (B.). The music is written in a key with two flats (B-flat and E-flat) and a common time signature. The first system shows the vocal lines with lyrics in Romanian. The Soprano part has lyrics: "- piã" and "Cu iu - de - ii". The Alto part has lyrics: "ci - gas" and "a a". The Tenor part has lyrics: "- piã" and "Cu iu - de - ii". The Bass part has lyrics: "- ci - gaș" and "Cu iu -". The second system continues the vocal lines. The Soprano part has lyrics: "ve - se - lin - - du - se Și cu a - pos -". The Alto part has lyrics: "a a a a a a a a". The Tenor part has lyrics: "ve - se - lin - - du - se a a a". The Bass part has lyrics: "- de - ii ve - se - lind Cu a - pos". The music features repeated modal structures in the Alto and Bass parts, as indicated by the caption.

Musical Example 17 (repeated modal structures in Alto and Bass)

As far as the Byzantine Oratorios are concerned, Paul Constantinescu's approach is clearly inclined towards the valorisation of traditional harmony, which acquires numerous modal potentialities in order to render the Byzantine distinctness of the musical discourse. This classicist spirit of harmonic processing, with which the Byzantine Oratorios are impregnated, represents one of the most relevant aspects of the unmistakably specific style that established Paul Constantinescu, alongside George Enescu, among the lot of great Romanian composers.

2. Conclusion

To conclude, the two Byzantine Oratorios: *Passion and Resurrection* and *Nativity*, represent, beyond the equanimity, sobriety and humanity of their musical

expression, the materialization of a brilliant creative enterprise, set to realize a double cultural-musical symbiosis between musical art and the Byzantine church chants on the one hand and between the Byzantine musical tradition of the East and the European musical culture on the other hand, with the well defined goal to bring the man closer to his Creator through music.

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