

Nicolae Teodoreanu – The Ages of Sound (ethnomusicological studies and componistic concepts)

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Abstract: *To commemorate three years from the passing of the composer, (ethno)musicologist and teacher Nicolae Teodoreanu, this paper will focus on the ideas that represented the foundation of his universe of thought as reflected in the volume VÂRSTELE SUNETULUI [The ages of sound]. We will examine his musicological activity by discussing some of the coordinates of his ethnomusicological creation. We also investigated the work Ages of Time, composed for orchestra, in which the author draws a creative parallel with the ethnomusicological concepts analysed and presented in the posthumous volume.*

Key-words: ethnomusicology, modernity, composition, style, originality.

1. Introduction

To commemorate three years from the death of the composer, (ethno) musicologist and teacher Nicolae Teodoreanu, we will focus on the ideas representing the foundation of his thinking as reflected in the volume VÂRSTELE SUNETULUI [The ages of sound]. This paper will examine his musicological activity as reflected by some of the coordinates of his creation in the field of ethnomusicology. “Applied ethnomusicology is practiced now in many regions of the world, it has developed differently in various times and places, just as ethnomusicology itself has” (Pettan 2015, 3); Nicolae Teodoreanu's mission had remained, until this moment of publishing the volume, a desideratum in progress.

Educated by the greatest musicians of the Conservatory in Bucharest, Nicolae Teodoreanu had the chance to an excellent musical training guided by Stefan Niculescu, Aurel Stroe and Anatol Vieru, but he also had contacts with the great musical schools and festivals of Europe.

His activity as a researcher was doubled by that of the composer, promoting his compositional ideas in creations which span almost all of the genres of

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contemporary music, most of which unknown even to music lovers. His teaching career was supported by the idea of sharing the values he believed in, as lecturer in ethnomusicology and computer assisted music at the National University of Music Bucharest.

Ethnomusicology is the silver thread that runs through his musical activity as researcher at the Institute of Ethnography and Folklore as well, uncovering new aspects of the universe of Romanian traditional music, but also of Byzantine music (which he mastered from a religious perspective).

2. The issues: presentation of the volume *The ages of sound* (Nicolae Teodoreanu)

After his early demise, the posthumous volume, entitled *VÂRSTELE SUNETULUI: STUDII DE ETNOMUZICOLOGIE* [The ages of sound: studies of ethnomusicology], was published by the Musical Publishing House in Bucharest in 2020, under the supervision of Mihaela Nubert-Chețan. The studies in this 270 pages volume cover almost all of his research in the field of ethnomusicology.

The volume is built like a musical composition: his colleagues at the institute conceived the structure to pay homage to him, as he did not have the chance to gather all of his studies in one volume. The introductory section, *Praeludium*, precedes two main chapters: *Themes with variations, rhythm, sound and structure* (from Constantin Brăiloiu to electroacoustic research) and *Passacaglie*, collection and archiving (from D. G. Kiriac to the digital era).

The studies in the first part refer to Constantin Brăiloiu and the hypothesis of music universals, to Methodological problems in approaching the musical rhythm in folklore, then to the Blacksmith's ear for music or the implication of acoustic elements in the technology of processing iron (experimental study), to Electroacoustic means and statistical methods in the ethnomusicological research of the international systems, to the Sound of music – as a mediator between two worlds – unusual acoustic phenomena in the music of oral tradition. The section ends with the two parts of the ample study entitled *The Ages of Sound* – the place of folklore in the world music.

The second section of the volume is dedicated to the archiving of recordings at the Institute, their conservation through digital technologies – technical aspects which allow the preservation of a set of priceless confessions about Romanian folk culture. The volume coda includes *Aspects of the ethnomusicological research reflected in the composer's own creations*, as well as a final chapter dedicated to the author, whose portrait is sketched in memorable words by his colleagues.

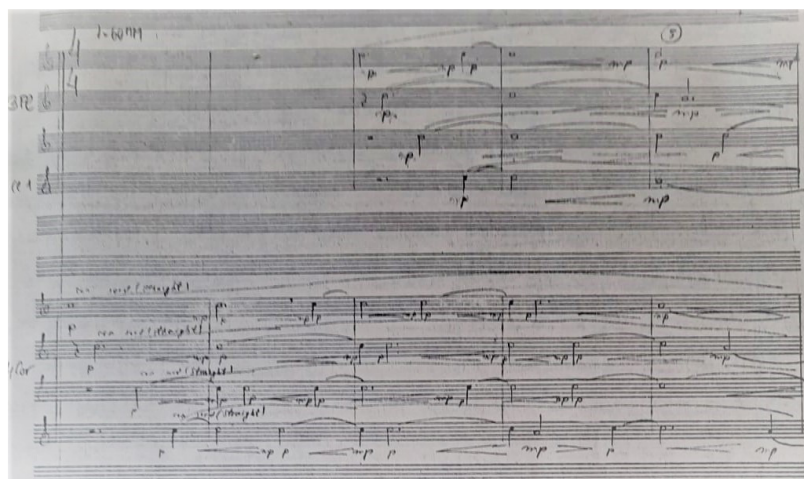
The title of the volume "suggests the materiality and progressive order of the elements of musical language" (our translation, p. III), covering even a study which demonstrates that creation and research potentiate each other: VÂRSTELE SUNETULUI [The ages of sound] (2010-2011, which treats the materialization and progressive coordination of the musical language) is inspired by the opus for big orchestra entitled VÂRSTELE TIMPULUI [The ages of time], composed nearly 20 years before.

Music is an atemporal art, which makes its message even more difficult, more subtle and more evanescent, contributing to its deeply abstract dimension (despite its universality). The research of temporality is an especially difficult academic endeavor; the same is true for the attempt to describe modalism (especially the non-vocal one – that the author studied in depth in his doctoral thesis). These are the axes of the scientific (but also musical, sonorous) creation of this great theoretician of the musical phenomenon, who would have had more to say had he lived longer. This may be one more reason why all of these aspects we inherit from him should be valorized to the full, as high quality confessions.

In the study VÂRSTELE SUNETULUI [The ages of sound], Nicolae Teodoreanu analyzes the temporal evolution of the essential formulations of sound in classical music and beyond, in four stages: childhood is the period dominated by notions such a indeterminacy and the continuum, whereas youth still preserves elements of relative indeterminacy, with syntactical flexibility: "in the beginning, the man-musician seemed to be utterly under the hold of the forces of sounds" (Teodoreanu 2020, 154).

Maturity is the stage of conscious determination, marked by clarity, functional hierarchy and stability, while old age concludes the deterministic aspects of the sound phenomenon, but it also opens new perspectives on its indeterminacy: "eventually, man will either be the subordinate of sound routes or he will rediscover the power of sound, without being overwhelmed by it" (our translation, p. 154).

The composer's family has been kind enough to allow us access to the work VÂRSTELE TIMPULUI [The ages of time] for orchestra. It follows the same compositional pattern, it starts by alluding to the first period through evanescent melodic elements, which are prolonged values, of the accompaniment type, presented by the wood and brass wind instruments, suggesting the ephemeral atemporal dimension, which had a beginning and will have an end.



Example 2. Nicolae Teodoreanu – *The ages of time for orchestra measure 1*
(the author's manuscript, measure 1)

The childhood, as a first section, contains a discourse which is gradually configured through successive thematic entrances for measures 1 (brass wind instruments), 3 (wood instruments) and 8 (string instruments). Youth (measure 51) proposes reduced thematic segments based on articulated writing in various types of musical syntax (monody, polyphony – including imitative, homophony, heterophony).

The sonorous metaphor of the maturity starts with measure 132, when we also notice important metro-rhythmical changes in the musical discourse: there is a constructivist approach typical of classical Romantic forms, within which the climactic moment is articulated, with great inner intensity.

The frenzy of the central section (the most ample of the entire composition) crumbles in the final segment, corresponding to old age, which starts on measure 251, through prolonged sounds and more concentrated motives, meant to turn tension into a state of balance which is also confirmed by a general pause (measure 255).

A segment performed *con sordino* precedes a final call of all the instruments (also on the sound of the second octave), gesture which is gradually diminished until the evanescent final. The old age is the segment of maximum stability, to which the composer returns after oscillations in types of fragmented, subjective, elastic and diverse discourse: the musical phrase fades out in the silence of the minimalist compositional gestures, essentialized to unison.

This study is not the only one to valorize the problem of time in musical art; there is another moment (included in the volume) in which he analyzes in depth the temporal dimension of the traditional art (A methodological problem evidences the detailed research of the musical tense in the traditional art and beyond). It is also significant that Nicolae Teodoreanu felt the need to valorize his ethnomusicological composition studies, proving once more the artistic maturity and complexity manifest in his personality. One of the studies in the volume we are presenting here valorizes his doctoral thesis (defended in 2002), published in 2015 under the title *Intonation systems in the Romanian vocal folklore*.

Nicolae Teodoreanu was an integrating personality, who did not separate artificially the fields in which he was active and which reflected his synthetic, carefully arranged work – reflex of an "olympian, noble and calm spirit" (Dan Dediu, our translation, in Teodoreanu, 2020, 4th blanket). Preoccupied by the idea of time and that – correlated – of age, the author approached this theme (probably the most complex and ample in human history) in multiple studies and compositions. Music was for him a matter of knowledge of the world and of himself: "whatever it may be, all of these ages of the musical structure only describe the avatars of a road of knowledge, the knowledge of the world and self-knowledge" (our translation). This is an advanced ontological conception of music, which goes beyond entertainment, reaching the fundamental meanings of music.

3. Conclusions

"Ethnomusicology is seen as the study of people making music. People make sounds they call music, and they also make ideas about music (...): they include what music is and is not; what it does and cannot do; how it is acquired and how it



Example 3. Nicolae Teodoreanu – *The ages of time for orchestra, measure 251*

should be transmitted; what value it has; what it should (and should not) be used for; what it has been in the past and what it will be in the future; whether it should be encouraged and supported, or discouraged and repressed” (Titon 1992, XXII).

Profound and serious ethnomusicologist, described as “a gentle and humble man, the embodiment of discretion and distinction, like his patron saints, Saint Nicholas and Saint Dimitrie, but who did not hesitate to be categorical and trenchant, even harsh, when confronted to moral, ethical problems related to honesty, fairness, honour and faith” (Constantin Secară, in Teodoreanu 2020, 268), Nicolae Teodoreanu remains also a human landmark and, at the same time, a rigorous scientist.

4. Proposals

We believe that it is essential to know the importance of his creation given that he did not insist on making it visible, as he was characterized by modesty which remained proverbial among those who knew him.

Also, another important direction which is necessary consists in publishing his other studies (in ethnomusicology or general musicology), in an attempt to offer to those interested a new perspective on Nicolae Teodoreanu. Only in this way we will have a complete basis to discuss his ideas, which deserve our full attention because of their depth, and their author’s professionalism and personal approach of the topics he studied.

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