Wilhelm Georg Berger's Music: Elements of compositional style and instrumental techniques necessary for the public performance

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Abstract: *The present paper approaches a part of the vast creation of a musician of certain value, to whom generations of players have a moral duty. The analyses of Wilhelm Berger's sonatas for viola come to the help of those set on the road of an interpretative effort projected over these opuses. The purpose of this brief research is to investigate several elements of the metamorphosis of the compositional phenomenon in two of Wilhelm Georg Berger's works: The Sonata for viola and piano op. 3 (1957) and the Sonata for solo viola op. 35 (1968). The particular way of processing the musical material originates from his analytical and philosophical thinking. Berger's compositional technique preserves the principles of the sonata genre structure in both works, using a totally different musical language in the Sonata Solo, 11 years later. The ethos of the music changes, therefore a series of instrumental techniques corresponding to musical expressions encountered in the text are proposed for a better understanding and performing Berger's music.*

Key-words: *tonality, modalism, serialism, compositional techniques, instrumental techniques*

1. Introduction

The remarkable personality of Berger and his vast activity compel to detailed and profound research and reveal his role in promoting and developing the Romanian musical culture during the post-war decades. The complex personality of Berger associated with an immense curiosity that triggered his relentless search and learning created an image of a "phenomenon" (Bentoiu 2004, 139) characterized him. His determination to understand the various facets of musical art – historical, esthetical, compositional, interpretative or scientific– seconded by a profound and sensitive intelligence resulted in a monumental creative work of a rare amplitude:

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"[…] repetition is the initial step, variation and development, the superior evolutionary step[…]" (Schonberg 1931, 571).

The selection of the subject of the present paper presents two folds: first stays the artistical practice itself, considering that viola is presently an indispensable instrument in any symphony or chamber orchestras, or, as a stand-alone instrument with good solo qualities and valuable technical and expressive potential that are worth to highlight; on the other hand, the author of the present paper considers that the creation of a great Romanian composer as Wilhelm Georg Berger, has a limited presence both in the concert halls and research papers altogether; therefore, it is appropriate to bring back in the attention the creation of Berger; the present study focuses on two viola sonatas, opuses that represent only a limited part of composer´s work.

2. The personality of Wilhelm Georg Berger

The evolution of Berger as a composer presents a specific discipline with two dimensions; the first one relates to his sensible approach towards the musical phenomenon in the thinking of the performer; the second represents the profound observation of tendencies, mentalities and musical trends. This analytical profile is demonstrated by his work published between 1965 and 1979, work that describes and analyses various particular musical genders in a chronological order.

The result of his propensity for detailed scrutiny is materialised by the Aesthetics of Sonata series published in a relatively short period of time, between 1981 and 1985. The only exception from the chronological rule is represented by the Aesthetics of Baroque Sonata that was last published in 1985. Relentless and curious, Berger has an authentic need to get to the essence of things, thus, The General Theory of Sonata and The General Theory of Classical Composition emphasise the genre of sonata as synthesis of principles that are applicable to any musical trend and to any musical thinking of a specific style.

There are relatively few biographic materials that present Wilhelm Georg Berger, despite the complexity of his personality. His activity as a Romanian musicologist, composer, conductor and violist spans several decades. In the beginning of his carear he dedicated a significant period to this last feature of his musical personality performing as violist in the George Enescu Philharmonic Orchestra and in the Quartet of the Union of Composers as a founding member (Cosma 1996, 72).

In his entire creation, Berger assigns an important role to viola, dedicating a large part of his instrumental work to this instrument. Not coincidentally, the first instrumental concerts composed by Berger are dedicated to viola: Concerto no. 1

for viola and orchestra op. 12 created in 1959 and in 1961 Concerto no. 2 for viola and orchestra, op. 16. Towards the end of his career, he returns to this permanent attraction of his life with the Solo Concert for viola in 1990. His creation dedicated to the sonata genre includes four opuses for viola in a total of eleven. In 1957, Berger composes the Sonata for viola and piano op. 3, a creation that maintains the classical principles for tonal musical structure and organization. In 1968 his new creation, Sonata for viola solo op. 35, presents a metamorphosed version of the genre. Thus, the present paper presents several analyses of the musical architecture from the bi-thematic classical format of sonata to the poly-thematic structure in the twentieth century, from tonalism to serialism.

3. Sonata – musical genre

The notion of sonata itself reveals an open nature. Berger says that "its elements horizontally, vertically and diagonally transverse the last four centuries of history in the art of sounds [...] The continuity of artistic development aims the never-ending, drawing the winding of advancement […], suggesting the meanders themselves of newer and newer ways of being" (Berger 1987, 75).

The musical conscience defined through the sonata genre opens a vast area for research and study. Born in the dawn of instrumental music, the sonata will develop into musical genre with a constant presence in the creation of any composer from the Baroque onwards. Each period of creation aimed to express a specific content, on a specific moment, using specific language and means; consequently, the evolutionary process holds an accentuated feature of development, transformation and metamorphosis of the sonata notion (Encyclopedie de la musique 1961, 716).

To communicate any type of message, a specific order and structure of ideas is required, and the form is the foundation of any musical genre. In relation with sonata, the musical discourse has a specific order of the sound material. Organizing the sound material generated various structures that will follow the same metamorphosis process: from the uncertain form of the first sonatas to the Baroque single theme sonatas, to the Classicism bi-thematic form and the poly-thematic form of Romanticism and finally to the structural variety of the creation in the twentieth century (Rousseau 1824, 196). However, none of the above enumerated stages do not represent meliorations of the previous, hence a transformation of the expression methods.

The evolution of the sonata has been accompanied by a secondary process that involves an improvement aspect that targets the consumer: the audience

capacity of understanding a musical discourse had been developed through the education – conscious and subconscious – and progressive acquaintance with the more and more complex musical language and syntaxis. In parallel with this development process of audience understanding, composers begun to introduce more complex language elements, novel or experimental solutions, allowing themselves to give up on certain methods (Migot 1946, 28-30).

4. Viola – the solo features of the instrument

The history of viola as musical instrument covers a period of approximately five centuries during which the construction, the technical and expression potential of the instrument have changed in parallel with its role in the interpretative practice and the attitude towards this instrument. The path taken by viola to the status it has today has been winding with periods of ascents and decline.

A first argument that explains the long history of viola positioned in the second category of instruments it is its particular construction. Some people consider viola's timbre as pale and nasal, others perceive it as melancholic and profound; however, the master craftsmen made countless trials over the centuries to find the ideal size of the viola in order to preserve its flexible handling and particular sound (Vienna Symphonic Library, online).

A second reason for the sinuous path of viola consists in the role or function that this instrument fulfilled during the history, paradoxical, to a certain extent: predominantly orchestral instrument with an accompanying role. The sound qualities that viola possesses have been exploited to a lesser extent, therefore the specific Classic and Romantic repertory is not so vast. Many of the works belonging to these musical styles are included in the literature only by transcription. Consequently, this classification and attitude of composers towards viola generated a relatively indifferent attitude on behalf of musicians.

However, the profound, vibrant and nostalgic sound of viola inspired the composers during the history in their permanent search for more original expression means, for refreshed sonorities, including through new timbre solutions. Nevertheless, the most valuable contributors to the viola repertory enrichment are the composers from the twentieth century: Reger, Shostakovich, Hindemith, Britten, Milhaud, Poulenc, Martinů, Bartók Schnittke, Kancheli or Penderečki. In the same distinguished group, several Romanian composers who significantly contributed in the enrichment of viola repertory must be mentioned: Enescu, Jora, Capoianu and especially Berger, himself a violist with a rich concert performance and who is the composer of sonatas analysed in the present paper.

5. Tradition versus Modernism

The Sonata for viola and piano op. 3 belongs to the early creation when Berger is influenced by his experience as instrumentalist. Therefore, similar to the other works created between 1954 and 1960, sonata is located within the perimeter of the creation for solo instrument with piano or string quartet and reveals a meditation feature. From the structural aspect, the cycle contains three movements, folded in the classical sonata pattern.

EXPOSITION						
T1			Bridge		T2	Conclusion
s1	s2	s3	s1	s2		
1	11	19	31	47	73	89

DEVELOPMENT			
S1	S2	S3	S4
105	117	129	145

RECAPITULATION		CODA
T1	T2	
153	175	207

Fig. 1. *Sonata form of the 1^(st) movement*

A			B		A abbreviated	Coda
a	*b*	*A*	S. I	S. II		
m. 1	6	18	22	26	30	38

Fig. 2. *Lied form ABA + Coda of the 2^(nd) movement*

Exposition							Development	Reprise	Coda
T 1				Bridge	T2	Conclusion			
S. I		S. II							
f.1	f.2	f.1	f.2						
1	4	28	37	= 37	42	56	72	109	195

Fig. 3. *Sonata form + Coda of the 3^(rd) movement*

The confluence of two worlds is present in all three movements: on one hand, the lyricism of folkloric emanation, is present especially in the parts with improvising and recitative specifics, where parlando-rubato characteristics prevail (Vancea 1978, 220). On the other hand, the influences of objective essence, originating from the creation of Johan Sebastian Bach, are of solid presence in the rigorousness of the polyphonic work.

The melodic – harmonic component is inscribed within the tonal sphere; however, some particularities are present, for example Phrygian second (bar 10), mixolydian seventh or the major-minor third that sometimes creates the instability of the major – minor mode.

The composer creates the modulations in a very personal manner, by introducing an intense chromatic of the tonal sequences of Baroque origin (second part). In the third movement, the *fuga* section, preserves the typical succession of the voices having the following thematic entries: viola – F minor, piano right hand – C minor, piano left hand – G minor, although the respective tones are of high chromatic intensity. All those elements anticipate the transformation of tonal musical thinking in the favour of the modal – serial system that will be found in the *Sonata for viola solo*.

The creation of Berger has been considerably enriched with works of different genres works during the following eleven years when he composed the *Sonata for viola solo op. 35.* This piece reveals a deep philosophical thinking (movements titles) and a new approach of the composing art with new techniques.

Modal – harmonical structures are present like an embroidery on the frame of diminished octave: A – B flat – D – F – G flat – A flat or C – D – F – A flat – C flat; the axis of these tunes/ chords is represented by the diminished 4th or by the augmented 4th. The superposition of the modal elements creates classical harmony structures in a transient manner, such as the major chord with minor 7th on E flat, only to recede to major – minor chords.

The sonata is placed within the same sphere of lyric of folkloric inspiration as the op. 3 due to the specific ethos such that the creation presents a significant unconstrained characteristic, close to impromptu in the first two movements. The musical discourse is often interrupted by long moments of interlude as part of the musical act. The last part presents itself in a completely opposite format, as an accurate, almost mathematic construction of the adopted style, Ciaccona.

In the area of intonational systems, the contrast between lyricism and objectivism is realised by the influence of modal in serial whilst in the area of stylistic manner by the congruency between the Romanian folkloric elements and the rigorous technics of the German Baroque genre.

The cycle contains the same number of three movements with already consolidated forms. In addition to the titles given by the composer, the inner structure of each reveals several particularities.

Movement I – Thesis - has a palindrome or arch form, following the ABCBA pattern. This type of structure also might be considered as forms of sonata and lied: exposition (AB) – development (C) – recapitulation (BA) for sonata, respectively main section (AB) – median section (C) – main section (BA) for lied.

Palindrome form	A		B		C		B	A
	a	c	a	c	a	*c*		
	1-10	11- 19	20-30	31-42	43-58	59-66	67-80	81-end
Sonata form	Exposition				Development		Recapitulation	
Lied form	A				B		A	

Fig. 4. *Palindrome/Sonata/Lied form in the 1ˢᵗ movement*

Movement II – Antithesis – opens with an introduction in two segments (bars 1-4 and 5-13) both with a manifest improvisational feature. Upon imposing a new characteristic, *misurato*, the intrinsic lied structure, A – B – A begins.

Introduction		A			B		A		
s. 1	s. 2	*A*	*b*	*a*	s. 1	s. 2	*a*	*b*	*a*
m. 1-4	5-13	14-17	18-25	26-30	31- 50	51- 63	64-69	70-77	78-end

Fig. 5. *Lied form with Introduction in the 2ⁿᵈ movement*

Movement III – Synthesis – presented in a ciaccona form, an architecture of Baroque origin, conjugates the variations with the polyphonic techniques.

Theme	Var. 1	Var. 2	Var. 3	Var. 4	Var. 5	Var. 6	Var. 7	Coda
m. 1	11	18	24	27	32	36	45	51

Fig. 6. *Ciaccona form in the 3ʳᵈ movement*

Since there is no particularity in the formal structure, Berger's style is revealed in the melodic aria. The theme and the variations are designed in the serial – twelve-note style, respectively 4 and 8 tones series, alternatively, as fragments of the initial series. Often, a

unique sound is highlighted as a gravitational centre and various modal scales are built around it each of them with own transpositions. The composer creates his own ways insofar they serve his purposes of expression.

Theme	C – A flat – C flat - E flat - G flat - F – A – D – D sharp – E - B flat - G	serial of 12 tones

Fig. 7. *Ciaccona theme series*

Variation I	C -A-B-F	series of 4 tones
Variation II	F-D flat-F flat- A flat-C flat-B-D-G	series of 8 tones
Variation III	E – B flat – D flat - B	series of 4 tones
Variation IV	E sharp – B – G sharp – A – F sharp – E – C sharp – B flat	series of 8 tones
Variation V	C sharp – B flat – E – G sharp	series of 4 tones
Variation VI	E flat – D – E – C – F sharp – A – C sharp – B flat	series of 8 tones
Variation VII	B sharp – F sharp – D – D sharp – B – G – C sharp - A	series of 8 tones

Fig. 8. *Variations series*

The present analysis considers the serial segments in line with the principle of non – repeatability of tones. The serial fragments present alternatives of four or eight sounds granting the composer the possibility of creating various harmonical structures, including those adjacent to the classical ones. Inside of the variations, the serial segments mentioned above, are presented in a harmonised counterpoint format, specific to the *Ciaccona* genre.
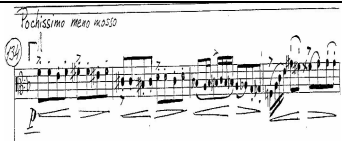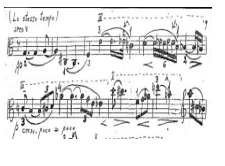
Sonata op. 35 is a creation of syntheses. In the area of intonational system the creation presents itself as a superb combination between serialism and the very personal composer´s modalism, realised with great virtuosity. In the kinetic area, the creation is a perfect twinning between a complex versification and a real richness of rhythmical formulas. In respect of the composing pattern, the stratification of voices incites the decoding, both vertical (harmonical dimension) and horizontal (polyphonic dimension). Ciaccona itself possesses a synthesis format agglutinating the principle of counterpoint with variational principle on the *cantus firmus*.

Sonata for viola solo in its whole (I – Thesis, II – Antithesis, III – Synthesis) represents a compendium of composing styles and techniques, a real manual of musical creation.

6. Technical means and realisation of musical expression

The musical interpretation incurs attention on two dimensions: instrumental technique and realisation of musical expression. Interlacing the two dimensions is always required instead of a chronological order. The replacement of instrumental techniques in line with the newly identified significancy and messages is often adopted when more adequate to the expression.

The tables below methodise several technical procedures that facilitate the musical expression according to the type of the phrase, the indicated dynamics and correspondence with specific colours. The references represent the perspective of string instrumentalist with an acceptable experience in stage performing.

Technical methods	The feature obtained	Colour	Sonata op.3	Sonata op.35
Short strike, bounce, small bow	giocoso, leggiero, scherzando	Light blue		There is no such expression
Long strike, bounce, large bow	Energico, dramatic	Violet		
Strike alla corda, large bow	Declamation	Red		
Strike alla corda, small bow	Esitando, tenero	Blue		
Short incisive strike	brillante	yellow-orange		There is no such expression

Technical methods	The feature obtained	Colour	Sonata op.3	Sonata op.35
Long incisive strike	marcato, deciso	Red		
Bold, heavy strike	funebre	Black		

Fig.9. *Technical procedures and musical expressions*

Vibrato type	Character expression	Colour	Sonata op. 3	Sonata op.35
High frequency, limited amplitude	stirred	Brown		
High frequency, large amplitude	dramatic	Cherry		
Low frequency, large amplitude	Warm, gentle	Light grey		

Low frequency, limited amplitude	Mysterious	Dark grey		
Non vibrato	Cold	Silver white		

Fig.10. *Vibrato type and character expression*

7. Conclusion

The twentieth century represents that period in the music history when diversity and free- will lead and rule the choice of musical language, styles of expression, trends, orientations; it is in the same time, the era of avant-garde tendencies with frequent changes that induce instability: "Simultaneously with the impressionism, the avant-garde becomes official, projecting a faster and faster movement of position changes, a permanent unsteadiness: the scale in tones, the poly- tonality, poly-modalism, polymetry, serialism, the often changes of the tempo, the infinite possibilities to structure the musical form, the trend towards randomness" (Nemescu 1/2010, 4).

Possessing a strong knowledge on the Occidental avant-garde techniques Berger promotes composing techniques by using a tonal-modal thinking or serial-modal syntheses, through the minimalist modalism, through artificial methods and rigorously calculated musical constructions or twelve-note serial origins. In his neo-classic, neo-romantic or neo-baroque creation Berger valorises old traditions using the dedicated techniques.

With a personality that makes him unique in the Romanian musical culture of the last century, Wilhelm Georg Berger proceeded with the musical composition after a thorough and profound investigation and research of the musical phenomenon; his work as a whole is structured on chronological cycles in line with the specific pursuits and related period of creation8. The combination of the modern musical language and the rigorous patterns, his music preserves specific

classical features as well as the clarity of formats and phrasing. His music by far a music of syntheses than a music of contrasts.

Despite the certain value and richness of the Romanian creation, it's not sufficiently present in the contemporary musical world. The Enescu generation, the composers from the middle of the last century and the contemporary creators, augment the Romanian artistical heritage with works of high value where the national spirit merges with the European one and the traditional cultural wealth merges with the modern one.

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