

Influences of poetic art on the composing architecture in the Donceanian Vocal Chamber music

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Abstract: *The poetic expression is the main selection criterion used by composer Felicia Donceanu in her vocal chamber music creations. It is the basic background in constituting composing architecture. The architecture or form of her creations are generated by building the poetic verse, respecting the literary sentence and its artistic meanings, leading in most cases to creating some free patterns which sometimes alternate with classic and romantic ones. “The form of Felicia Donceanu’s work is concise and has an appreciably sense of proportions; this is one side of the Latinity of her work.”²*

Key-words: *Poetic art, composing language, matter, meaning*

1. Tendencies in Romanian contemporary music

The compositions in the second half of the 20th century strongly stand out in the context of the other musical periods due to their tendency to extrapolate from musical laws towards other scientific fields, using different organisation or expression systems of linguistic nature (combining the word with the musical sound in various musical genres), mathematic nature (serialism, aleatoricism, stochastic music, punctualism or minimalism), physical nature (electronic music, spectral music) or logical nature etc, and therefore succeeding to consolidate a macrosystem of the artistic expression, with the sound system as its main background.

2. Donceanian composing theories subordinate to poetic architecture

“For me this matter of the connection between text and music is an obsession indeed... So the poetry is sublime, however we take our inspiration from poems to render more, to explore all meanings and all depths of the implications and feelings which we obviously assume and convey so as to communicate them better than the poet’s words may” (Donceanu, 2008).

Making a metaphorical parallel with physics and electronics, one may say that composer Felicia Donceanu’s vocal chamber musical works may be “interpreted” as

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² Doru Popovici, Article published in newspaper *România Mare*, Feb 23 2001

an “interaction of some electrically charged particles” or a “movement of ions and electrons in different environments”, such particles originating in various microstructures of psychological nature (specific of her personalities), linguistic, mathematic, plastic, logic, philosophical, composing nature etc., their blending generating the individuality of her composing macrosystem.

The linguistic field has always been the science which has significantly influenced structures (form and content) and significances (meaning of the artistic expression) of composing laws (techniques). It has turned time and again into a potential model of “organisation and functioning for other languages as well” (Rădulescu 2006, 29). Analysis of the natural language coordinates enables us to observe that they have two functions: the function of expression or reflection of different (own or external) ideas and the function of communicating a specific message. These two functions exist in all types of language, including musical.

The poetic universe reflected in the vocal chamber musical creations of composer Felicia Donceanu comprises different factual psychological and human aspects, fictively trailed by each poet chosen by the author, and reconstructed in its turn in a new artistic composing space.

“The domain of the poetic is a text, a formal separate unity which carries an imaginary content and gives birth to an expression.”(Călinescu, 59). Similarly to the linguistic field where the “poetic function is the expression, namely the fact that <a poem> is one and the same as the production of a singular entity of a unique non-repeatable text” (Manolescu 1987, 58), in the musical domain the composing function is also the expression, i.e. emphasize of some unique non-repeatable sound structures, built through means and techniques acquired throughout time, falling under certain structures or forms which encompass the variety of the melodic, rhythmic, harmonic, dynamic, agogic and timbral chaining. One should add that the interpreter brings their own contribution to building the composing expression, being the one who plays the part of discovering and transposing for the listening audience’s hearing the semiography of the score and implicitly the composing intention.

“My scores seem simple and easy, they are not crowded with legends or indications, they have no signs... I believe that it is the music Itself! Itself which has to say what I meant, through its melodic content, through that harmony or instrumentation... If it manages to communicate... It is important to gain my interpreter! It is the interpreter whom I have to gain! This is of utmost importance! If he or she likes and vibrates on the same wave as I do, then I am convinced that the public will also be captivated.”³

The composing language used by Felicia Donceanu in the vocal chamber musical creations exploits technical structures similar to the laws of vocality. Even the instrumental writing is led in the same manner as the vocality criteria. Most

³ Felicia Donceanu, in the TV programme *Masters* presented by Beatrice Lupu, 1996.

instrumental interpreters (piano, harpsichord, viola da gamba, flute etc.) play scores built on techniques similar to the vocal technique.

3. *Matter* – the cell of the artistic, poetic and composing lead

“When a work exists, it starts to affirm its content which is not the matter from which it originated, but the fictive life that it starts”(Călinescu, 76) *matter* meaning for George Călinescu the plan of the real life or “the objective reality existing outside and independently from the human consciousness and reflected by this consciousness”⁴, whereas the phrase *fictive life* is cleared up for us with the help of an inspired comparison of the same author: “The poetry has its own universe, just like a continent has its own fauna and flora. It represents a separate world, with its own order” (Călinescu, 103). Just as the poetic domain builds its own universe, born from “matter or objective reality”, the composing universe covers the same route, the route of “matter reconstruction” inspired from poetic criteria chosen on the basis of the sound weaving under the form of a duet (voce and piano) or other vocal and instrumental combinations (soprano, hautboy, clarinet, harp, percussion etc.).

Each and every vocal – instrumental (chamber) work has practically its own universe of ideas, put together under the direct influence of the reality turned into poetic ideas, ideas metamorphosed into another sphere, overlapping the composing language. “(In our imagination) the universe starts in a genetic moment, reaches a point of juvenile vitality, goes further through a variable phase of development, then declines, fades and stops. Our symbols define the most characterising moments through all means of sensitivity and fantasy” (Călinescu, 104-105). This road of “the poetic matter transfiguration” in the musical domain is many times wrongly interpreted in literature, as it is rather attributed to descriptive structures in the detriment of the re-interpretative structures, created in the context of free imagination. However, the composing works relying on the *word* fight this idea and display in a superposed form their own expressive system, which, comprised in the expressivity of the poetic, manage to project a new reorganized variant of the reality or the starting point. Most times, the poets enlarge the dimensions of the reality which inspires them. The same goes for the sound sphere, where the creations show us new, ample modalities to reunify the poetic landscape. Composer Felicia Donceanu brings this aspect to the forefront in her vocal – instrumental creations, using numerous composing expressive means.

“There are poems which, when read, seem to be the ones, the ones asking to be expressed through music too. Expressed, not only interpreted, meaning that I have one more thing to add over and above what the poet said, meaning to create a

⁴ See: <http://dexonline.ro/definitie/materie> (accessed on 6.05.2012).

dimension, a colour, a scenery... If you want, this tendency of <syncretism> again, to create one more movement for it, to create a setting, to achieve it sonorously.”⁵

The poetic expression belongs to the domain of language and poetry, of collective or individual expressivity, its components: “the form of the text, which we defined as a certain order of the language (prosody), of the one hand, and a relation between similar structures, of the other hand, a relation of subordination to a genre (intertextuality); the content of the text, namely its intrinsic and fictive universe, inexistent prior to and outside the proper, prosodic, intertextual form; the expression, which is the function of the text, which turns it into a concrete, singular and non-repeatable poem, manifestation of the poet’s particular truth” (Călinescu 1987, 59), all layered in line with the four logical criteria, naturally evolved: matter – form – content – meaning.

4. Birth of Donceanu music under the influence of the Poetic

The evolutive model of the poetic language components and its logic – natural layering is taken over at the subconscious level in her vocal chamber creations by composer Felicia Donceanu. She transposes it at the level of an algorithmic formula giving birth to her artistic works.

As defined and presented by the literary critic and historian Nicolae Manolescu in his treaty *On Poetry*, the *matter* represents a cluster of physical formations constituting in fact the foundation of reaching a certain goal. This cluster of physical formations is structured or arranged in a certain order and this order is in its turn classified in a pattern, structure or form; it is evident that when one speaks of form speaks also of content. The coexistence of the three constants: matter – form – content – generates the goal established from the very beginning, which is to communicate, to create an expression and a meaning. “The musical meaning is verbalised in its general psychological aspect and not verbalized in the individual specificity (pure musical acts are impossible to verbalise, and this is where the ordeal of metalanguage starts)” (Rădulescu, 37).

This evolutive development is valid in all and any system of artistic thinking, including in the composing system, cell – musical motif – musical sentence – period – section – composing speech – these are the main syntactic structures on which the composer relies in order to reach the goal established at the beginning.

In general, composer Felicia Donceanu stays in close contact with the evolution of the poetic verse, with the interior constructions of the basic form, such as the lied, and she adapts to the linguistic development. The combinations of words or lexemes (the concept of *lexeme* is often used in literature to highlight the meaning of the word) represent the main background of the cell or the musical motif, the

⁵ Felicia Donceanu, in the TV programme *Masters* presented by Beatrice Lupu 1996.

associations of words or of lexemes standing for the structural background of the musical sentence, while clustering several word connections comprise the diagram of a musical period, of a section or of the entire composing speech.

This idea of creating the musical speech under the influence of the linguistic model was also debated by the musicologist and composer Dinu Ciocan in his work *A Semiotic Theory of Musical Interpretation*, where he points out the potential interferences between the two artistic musical and literary domains and makes a “parallel between the natural language and the musical language as follows”: “Different levels of language represented by *letters – words – sentences – texts* find their correspondents in the *musical sounds – elementary homogenous musical enunciations* (the minutest indecomposable phrases – melodic intervals and different basic rhythmic formulas) – composed heterogeneous musical enunciations (motif, sentence, period, sections or parts of different musical forms, lied, rondo, sonata etc) – *musical pieces* (individual enunciations, independent in terms of musical language, style, aesthetics)” (Rădulescu, 51). Basically, each musical composition of which basis is the *word* exposes two artistic compartments, literary and sonorous, each of them having their own construction laws and meanings, the musical domain being directly influenced by the structures of the linguistic model.

5. Conclusions

Composer Felicia Donceanu’s vocal chamber musical compositions came to life after the fusion of the poetic and musical meaning and expression, in a symbolic superdimension. “Roughly speaking, when playing her music, one may say that Felicia Donceanu cultivates the confessional tone, in other words, the confessing tone, wrapped in a refined sonorous language, as if a splendid background music for a painting by Andreescu, one of her favourite painters. Moreover, Felicia Donceanu reveals talents of both authentic writer and extremely gifted plastic artist”.⁶

Additionally, the author succeeds in highlighting the meaning of the poetic verse in a perfect “harmonisation” with her soul valences, in vocal instrumental works forged firstly to emphasize the pureness of the literary meaning, and secondly to cultivate a symmetry ratio between the two plans: text and music. Another significant facet of these works are represented by the “homogenisation” of the vocal - instrumental plan and the poetic plan until a common connotation of the two coordinates - music and text – is reached. In other words, the Virtuoso primarily “respects the plastic specific to the word”, as composer Arthur Honneger expressed his “ideatic creed” in his treaty *I Am a Composer*.⁷

⁶ Doru Popovici, Article published in newspaper *România Mare*, Feb 23 2001.

⁷ Arthur Honneger, *I Am a Composer*, by A. Honneger – Bernard Gavoty, *Je suis compositeur*, Paris, 1951, translation and note by Adina Arsenescu, Bucharest, 1966, page 80.

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