

## **Melodramas on the Book of Job - a cultural act at *Antim* Monastery: Unknown musical testimony of the BURNING BUSH**

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**Abstract:** *Musical discourse, and all its important events (thematism, repetitions, interior articulation, elements of diversification and motivic development etc.), must be conceived at the moment of creation within the time frame in which they will take place when the piece is interpreted, in other words, the composer must be capable of imagining a realistic positioning of his work in the time that takes music in its flow. The composer must have a special sense of time, he/she must surpass the reality of the composing time (a much extended reality) and position himself/herself at every moment in the time of the interpretation of his/her work.*

Key-words: *time, organisation, meaning, symbolism, functions.*

### **1. Preliminary considerations on terminology**

The century that ended and marked the history of Romania through the very dark times of communism offered us a painful lesson: that of survival through beauty, faith, forgiveness and love. The impressive masterpieces of our national art, creations of personalities who knew to face the deformed present through the authenticity of the values in their art speak of those times, beyond words, without words. Fr. Dumitru Stăniloae, the most important Romanian theologian, spoke of man as “a subject of divine intentionality“ (Diaconescu and Mihail 2009: XV), valorising the privileged position of man as an active instrument of conveying a certain message of divine origin. The artist (this privileged person) devotes himself/herself unconditionally by virtue of values above himself/herself, in order to offer assurances from beyond the contingent of our daily life.

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## 2. Theoretical perspectives

Aurel Stroe had such a vision of life in the first years of his composing career, which was to bring so much honour to Romanian culture: his creation is so outstanding, so vanguardist for his times. Born in Bucharest, in 1932, he studied until 18 years old with Marțian Negrea and he subsequently became student and professor of the Conservatory in Bucharest. Iosif Sava counts the personality of Aurel Stroe among the composers who opposed the communist regime: “A. Stroe aspired at the essence of musics of different source, historical and geographical” (Dănceanu 1983, 49).

His only work that probably never benefitted from a first hearing (not even partial) is a part of the trilogy dedicated to the one of the most representative personalities of the Old Testament: Job. The Book of Job “is part of the didactic-poetical books of the Old Testament” (Semen 2000, 324), together with the Psalter, the Book of Proverbs, the Song of Solomon, the Ecclesiastes and the Lamentations, and some modern exegetes state that it was written in the flourishing period of sacred literature. Job was regarded by Saint John Chrysostom as “the form of Christ who fulfilled the commandments of the Gospel before the Gospel” (Saint John Chrysostom 2012, 27).

*Melodramas, interludes and symphonies for the Book of Job* is, according to the notation of the author, *a mimodrama with music* that pertains to the spiritual-cultural setting at Antim Monastery, where the young student was called to draft this work, initially without text (the explicit lack of words wouldn't have caused direct suspicions related to the political suspicions aiming at the “Burning Bush”). An early work, it caused a dramatic episode in the life of Aurel Stroe, especially for the one who stated, every time he had an occasion, that freedom was the most precious thing for him: when they began to arrest the participants in the „Burning Bush” in turns, the young student fled to the mountains, hiding somewhere near Brașov and remaining there for a few months, while living the nightmare of possibly being arrested.

## 3. Analytical perspectives: Beethoven's Fifth Symphony (part I)

The first section (Tranquillo) presents the dialogue between a Teller (Reciter) and the soprano saxophone. The teller renders exactly, in the German language (in the manuscript I own from the author), the first words of the Old Testament Book about “a man who was perfect and upright and one that feared God (<http://www.bibliaortodoxa.ro/vechiul-testament/42/Iov> (Book of Job 1: 1): “There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name *was* Job; and that man was perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed evil. And there were born unto him **seven sons and three daughters**... And this man was the greatest of all the men of the east”), whose name was Job” (“Job is a symbolic name and the book is a long

didactic discourse, integrated into a story in prose whose main theme is the reason why the righteous suffers, Job being an example of patience in suffering”) (Semen 2000, 333).

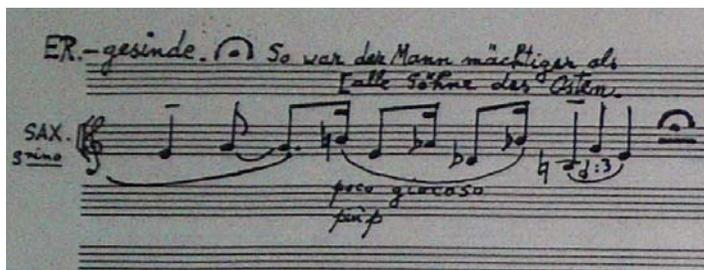
The love of the righteous Job for God and for his children, for whose spiritual purity he would offer offerings *continually*, is depicted. It is not by accident that the theme of suffering (as a sanctifying sacrifice) is approached precisely in the context of the Burning Bush at Antim Monastery, a spiritual-cultural movement of great depth, which was to be crowned with the acute suffering of all its members.

The work begins with the prologue unfolding in expressive nuances (circumscribed by terms such as *dolcissimo*, *lentissimo*, *tranquillo*, *senza trascinare*), whose main theme belongs to the second violin. “The prologue describes the happiness and piety of Job, a righteous man and fearing God, who always offers offerings for him and for the presumed sins of his sons” (Semen 2000, 333).

The image shows a page of handwritten musical notation. At the top, it reads "MÉLODRAMES, INTÉRAUDES ET SYMPHONIES SUR LE LIVRE DE JOB." followed by "— PROLOGUE —". Below this, the tempo is marked "THEMA: LENTISSIMO d=50". The score is written for Violin I (Vln I), Violin II (Vln II), and Xylophone. The Violin parts feature a melodic line with various rhythmic values and rests, while the Xylophone part provides a rhythmic accompaniment with similar values. The notation includes dynamic markings like *mf* and *mfz*, and performance instructions such as "p ma cantabile e sereno" and "accents imp".

Ex. 1. *Prologue, theme (lentissimo)*

Chapter one of the Old Testament Book begins with the moral description of the main character, the final phrase being musically calibrated in a very suggestive way (by using metro-rhythmic formulas with unequal values, with leaps that evolve from third major to fourth diminished and subsequently to perfect fifth, ending by sixth minor): “and this man was the greatest of all the men of the east”.



Ex. 2

In the Rigorosamente (*ancora piu mosso*) section, we also distinguish the fragment dedicated to the prayers of the father for his children, reflected in a musical discourse in which prevail the (trombone) sounds marked by anxiety, by inner tumult that the ardent prayer supposes, together with significant interval leaps, separated by pauses rendering the tension of the moment: “when the days of their feasting were gone about, Job sent and sanctified his sons, and rose up early in the morning, and offered burnt offerings”.

The composer Aurel Stroe then passes over the thick fragment of the dialogue between Job and his wife and his three friends, highlighting in his work only the dialogue of the righteous Job with God (the superior, extramundane level of the action). Part two is a structural palindrome<sup>2</sup> sung by divided choral voices: a complex musical composition, with strong symbolic significances, followed by a choral of six trombones (instruments acquiring the significance of characters in the musical art of the master) and an ample unfolding of ascending instrumental courses of the entire orchestra. The tension of the entire section reaches its peak with the occurrence of a two-voice polyphony, played by a synthesiser that has to render the tone qualities of a clavichord and of a harpsichord, in a *presto, rigorosamente* dialogue.

Ex. 3, part II: *choral section*

<sup>2</sup> A word, phrase, number, sequence of symbols that reads the same backward of forward

The harmonical structure of the six trombones shifts the wailing discourse to the LEGGIERISSIMO segment, that reaches its peak at a point of maximum inner tension (Presto), supported by percussion instruments and string instruments.

Ex. 4. *Presto*

The inner drama of Job is rendered by very suggestive, strong instrumental means, and this section is followed by a slow segment (*Andante, legato, dolce*) where the choral voices perform an a-o sounds vocalisation (that can be interpreted as a strong wailing that renders the state in which Job found himself, temporarily deprived, for trial purposes, of the gifts that God had bestowed on him) .

Ex. 5. *Andante (dolce)*

Another contrasting section appears starting with the Dramatico-energico indication, proposing a few bass-pedal sounds played by low wind instruments, accompanied by the sharp rhythmic formulas of tymbals and contrabasses.

The dialogue between God and the devil (rendered by the reciter) highlights the temptations that Job has to surpass in order to be that ideal example of faith, love for the Creator, patience, gratitude and humility. An impressive orchestral discourse unleashes in Presto, where the equal values foreshadow as acute, violent, sonoro, energico (forte) in order to suggest the dramatic character of the rendered situation: “one day the angels came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came with them... The Lord said to Satan: Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil. Does Job fear God for nothing? Satan replied... Now stretch out Your hand and strike everything he has. The Lord said to Satan: Very well, then, everything he has is in your power, but on the man himself do not lay a finger.” The temptation (presto) is shaped through an atmosphere of agglomeration of sound events, supported through the isorhythmic repetition of short and equal six-voice values, in the forte fortissimo nuance.

Ex. 6. *Presto*

Part three is a Recitative, a six-sound symmetrical structure whose textual base (rendered by the teller) is the moment when the sons and daughters of Job died: strong dissonant accords interrupt the spoken discourse, by nervous, terrible accents. We witness a genuine instrumental theatre, in which the musical figures become characters, lines that generate the plot. The temptations triggering the death of the

sons and daughters of Job are rendered through convincing and significant instrumental means: dissonant harmonical structures organised as fourths and seconds (where the percussion instruments such as glockenspiel, piatti sospesi and gongs have an almost mystical role): “...suddenly a mighty wind swept in from the desert and struck the four corners of the house. It collapsed on your sons and daughters and they are dead” (ascending chromatic structure).

The Mesto section renders the entire grief of the father left alone in his suffering, the last section being made up of a series of seven variations (funeral music – mesto e pesante): “then Job... fell to the ground in worship and said:... The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised.” Aurel Stroe writes down on the score (like on so many other occasions, in which his manuscripts present mystical notations that need to be decrypted): “the gate of suffering” - a correspondent of the biblical words: “in all this, Job did not sin, nor charged God foolishly”.

In the second chapter of the Old Testament book, the dialogue between God and the angels (rendered at the sound level through a two-voice CHORUS ANGELORUM – alto and tenor) is presented: “on another day the angels came to present themselves before the Lord”.

Ex. 7. *Chorus angelorum*

The score of the manuscript is incomplete starting with page 63, the moment when the last and most awful temptation that falls upon Job, that of the illness that seized him, was rendered: “So Satan smote Job with sore boils from the soles of his feet to the crown of his head”.

#### 4. Conclusions

In conclusion, “for much patience and trust in God, Job is eventually rewarded double and finds happiness again, the conception of Jews that the one who suffers deserves one’s fate because of one’s sins being rejected” (Semen 2000, 335). The problem of suffering was not at all a new one, but it was an ever essential theme of mankind, “being briefly approached in some of the Psalms of David” (Semen 2010, 91-92). The eschatological ideas refer to the fate of man (death makes all people equal), to the faith in the Redeemer who is to come, in the immortality of the soul (that will be with God after the earthly life), in the resurrection of the body (through which the soul will have to contemplate God), in the certainty of the final judgment of man (when each and everyone will be recompensed according to their deeds). The epilogue is written in prose within the Old Testament and shows “the appointment of Job to a happier state than the initial one” (Usca and Traia 2008, 6).

“The beauty in the world and in the creation is divine in itself, it is the original, transcendental beauty” (Diaconescu 2009, 26), and Aurel Stroe proves to be a representative of art with deep spiritual significances even from the times of adolescence and youth, assuming discreetly the indirect contribution to the message of the Burning Bush of Antim Monastery through a work like a confession of faith, that deserves to have a first hearing as soon as possible.

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