

# SEMIOGRAPHY AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE IN *IMPROMPTU CONCERTANT* FOR VIOLIN AND PIANO, BY GEORGE ENESCU

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**Abstract:** *Among all the Romanian composers of all time, George Enescu was the one who excelled in the very meticulous notation for each musical intention, using a special way of artistic communication. It was called musical semiography and has been extensively studied by the music critics of the time.*

**Key words:** *semiography, graphic sign, violin, piano.*

## 1. Introduction

"The value of Enescu's semiography can be rendered in a pentagonal perimeter", said Marcel Franduş, referring to the framing of semiography among five clear perspectives of analysis. The first side of Franduş's pentagon refers to the unity in diversity (variety) within the notation system. The second side is represented by the contribution that each performer brings when creating the artistic act [2].

"Absorb the composer's ideas and then try to communicate with your audience, while you dim yourself as much as you can in favour of the work represented, allowing the composer's ideal to speak for it. Keep in mind, despite what I said, the spontaneity, which must remain intact." - said George Enescu regarding the contribution that each artist should have to the work interpreted on stage ("The Washington Star – 1934 - cited in "George Enescu" – The Romanian Academy, 1967, pag. 7) [3].

The third side of semiography refers to the fact that it expresses the composer's true intent and view, being very scrupulous in marking every little detail, to be useful to the performer, in order for him to be as close to the idea that the composer wants to express through his work as possible [1].

The universal value, so varied and rich, is the fourth side of Enescu's semiography, followed by the fifth, which represents the novelty and the originality overlapping on a conventional background that exists in musical notation.

## 2. The graphic sign in Enescu's workstructions for Editing

The musical graphic sign is the means of communication that is included in each composer's musical score. Looking at Enescu's score dedicated to the violin, Marcel Franduş identified and divided the graphic signs in two groups: iconic signs (the conventional signs that suggest the resemblance to the reality without the

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existence of the word) and linguistic signs (common signs, using words and verbal expressions, they will describe the aesthetic and emotional feeling of the artistic interpretation area).

## 2.1. The iconic signs in "Impromptu concertant" by George Enescu

The iconic signs can also be divided into two categories: **general musical iconic signs**, which are present in the field of music history and **instrumental specific signs**, which may be encountered in the field of instrumental practice and are specific to each musical instrument, with distinct features [2].

The work "Impromptu Concertant" for violin and piano" in G flat Major, was composed by George Enescu in October 1903, in Paris. The original score is in the private collection of Mr Romeo Drăghici and appeared in the supplement of the "Music" magazine, no. 7 of 1958. Arousing a particular interest, this work has a deep improvising feature, a fluidity that creates a continuous sense of flowing and fluency, rhythm and different timbres, variety and poetic colouring.

### 2.1.1. The Legato

One of the graphic signs in the studied work is the legato, which suggests the fluidity and continuity of the musical discourse. This sign can connect multiple sounds or it can be short, only joining two notes of a string of sixteenthths, which are played in pairs. The legato appears at the very beginning of the work, in the first bar, where it connects two sounds and it is followed by another legato made up of five notes and then three legatos made up of two sounds.

These graphic signs are used to highlight the nature of the theme, which appears in a strong *f* nuance, full of enthusiasm (*avec élan* - as George Enescu points out at the beginning of the score).



Fig. 1. Meas. 1-2, violin score

Thus, the greater legato not only connects a large number of notes, but also leads to the creation of a fluid, continuous phrase.



Fig. 2. Meas. 15, violin score

### 2.1.2. The tailing of a sound

In the violin score, within the "Impromptu concertant" work, this iconic sign is not specified, as it appears in other reference works for George Enescu's creation. Nevertheless, it is present in the piano score:



Fig. 3. Meas. 14, piano score

This sign is represented by a legato between a sound and the pause that follows it. In this way, the pause will be a small breath as the legato ensures the continuity of the phrase.



Fig. 4. Meas. 43-44, piano score

Using the legato that ends in a pause indicates, in the piano score, "a tenuto tailing of a sound and the necessity for a "refined touche".

The expression legato (which connects two sounds) is the upper arc and for the legato that ends in a pause, which is the tailing of the sound, the concavity of the arc is drawn backwards (up).



Fig. 5. Meas. 18, piano score

### 2.1.3. The Portato

The specific instrumental iconic sign "portato" is used in this work both for the violin and for the piano (although for piano it only appears twice). The aim of using this portato is to detach a single value from the legato, offering a voice expression to the melodic flow. As said, on the piano it only appears twice, the first time in bar 3, on the right hand.



Fig. 6. Meas. 3, violin score

We notice that this portato is marked on the second sound of the two from the connection, and in the next example we will have a situation where the portato appears on the first note of the connection.



Fig. 7. Meas. 48, piano score

These indices are very important, they make the distinction regarding the interpretation of each passage separately.

In the violin score, the portato appears in bar 12, on the last sound, with a very short demisemiquaver value, within a 3-sound connection. The composer's intention was that through this portato, the short value should gain both importance and clarity, by separating it from the other sounds in the connection.



Fig. 8. Meas. 12, violin score

The portato sign appears in the violin score another five times, connections of two sounds being also present, on both of them. This is an attempt to create a contrast between the two sounds in clear legato and the portato of the other sounds that form the next legato.



Fig. 9. Meas. 34, piano score

This contrast provides a feeling of melancholy song sigh, specific to Enescu's style.

### 2.1.4. The Tenuto

The iconic sign is generally marked as the portato, with a horizontal line above the musical note, but it has a different function, namely to maintain the duration of the sound and even to highlight it.

Fig. 10. *Meas. 9, violin score*

In the piano score, the graphic sign for "tenuto" is associated with the one that indicates "arpeggiato" on the right hand, when on the left hand the tailing of the sound sign appears (the legato ended in a pause). This combination is used to emphasize the sound that appears at the top of the arpeggio chord, especially when there is an overlap with a "tenuto" sound with the same value, in an *ff* nuance, on the violin.

Fig. 11. *Meas. 18, piano score*

In this bar (18) the presence of the tenuto is marked on the notes in movements 2, 3, 4, on the violin, but also on both hands on the piano. The two instruments have a gradually descending line in a decrescendo nuance (*cedez et diminuez*), starting with an *ff* nuance.

### 2.1.5. The Accents

The graphic sign for accent marks the effect or a sound or chord with distinctive intensity. It can occur alone or in combination with other iconic or linguistic signs. In the Impromptu concerto, it appears both on the violin and on the piano on the right hand in bars 42 and 43.

Fig. 12. *Meas. 42-43, violin and piano score*

An interesting combination can be seen here: on the right hand of the piano there is an emphasized crotchet, as well as on the violin, and on the left hand there is a note ending in a pause, completed by sixteenths in movements 1 and 2 of the bar. There are accents in bars 55, 56 and 57, on both instruments. In these times of overlapping accents, an atmosphere of tension and dynamic – timbre contrast is created.

### 2.1.6. The dynamic signs

The general iconic signs of the progressive dynamics are crescendo and decrescendo and are marked by < and >. They are very numerous compared to the linguistic signs that could be used in the notation of the same nuance. The forks (as they are called in the common instrumentalists' language) occur in various situations: simple, cascading << (there are none in this piece of work) combined, with or without specifying the nuance from which it starts, or the one which must be attained, with or without inner nuance (in the case of the combined ones, "the double fork"): <<; >>.

Fig. 13. *Crescendo by specifying the nuance to be attained*



Fig. 14. *Decrescendo from an unspecified nuance. It goes down to mp and then it goes up to mf.*



Fig. 15. *The nuance to be attained at the tip of the fork is not specified, but the nuance is marked at the end of the decrescendo (mp) instead.*



Fig. 16. *No nuance is marked.*

The crescendo is sometimes accompanied by expression and movement terms, which gradually modify the tempo.



Fig. 17. *Meas. 77-78, violin score*



Fig. 18. *Meas. 18, violin score*



Fig. 19. *Meas. 20-22, violin score*

### 2.1.7. The transposition to octave

The general iconic sign for the transposition to octave is found in the violin score on a longer passage, covering seven bars (bars 60-67), in the piano score, in bar 20, on the right hand and in bar 66-71, also on the right hand.

### 2.1.8. The obligato string

The timbre unity is kept by interpreting the melody on a single string (the obligato string), marked on the violin score by a dotted line starting from the Roman numeral that indicates one of the strings of the violin, or (as seen in the "Impromptu concertant") by a line that indicates the required string.



Fig. 20. *Meas. 32-33, violin score*

### 2.1.9. Removal of the forte pedal

The iconic sign specific to the instrument for the removal of the piano *forte* pedal is frequently marked and it is not specific to Enescu's notation. This sign is preferred to the linguistic "senza pedale" and it appears in the piano score 101 times, sometimes being present on each of the 4 movements of the bar, creating special timbre effects.



Fig. 21. *Meas. 9, piano score*

### 2.1.10. The cautionary accidentals

As their name suggests it, they are marked on the score as a simple caution, to remind the performer that the key signature has changed, or that there is an accidental in the score, which can be forgotten. These cautionary accidentals are numerous within "Impromptu concertant", mainly due to the frequent modulations and changes of the key signature.



Fig. 22. Meas. 23-26, violin score

### 2.1.11. The change of the key signature

Changing the key signature occurs 3 times throughout the work. It is marked by a double line, after which the new accidentals are written.



Fig. 23. Meas. 32-34, violin score

### 3. The linguistic signs

In Enescu's semiography, the linguistic sign is as important as the graphic one, the word being a very important tool, used to achieve the compositional and interpretative intentions. In the Impromptu concerto, all the terms of expression, movement and timbre are designated in French: with the exception of the dynamic terms, expressed

(abbreviated) in Italian, traditionally. Consequently, there are 140 musical terms and 28 different types (23 primary and 5 auxiliary). Regarding Enescu's dynamics in this work, there is a preponderance of the *f* nuance.

### 4. Conclusions

In his acceptance speech, delivered during the Academy session, in 1933, George Enescu said: "music is a language that can reflect without any pretence the mental faculties of man, of nations. This is the definition of the aesthetic and philosophical thinking." [4].

By means of the semiography items presented above, the ethos of Enescu's music, of the Romanian folklore music can be felt. Therefore, the differentiation among similar affective states, excitement and joy, sadness and anger, etc., is based on the sound sign, through the graphic one.

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