

Aurel Stroe and the religious theme- his musical inspiration

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Abstract: *Aurel Stroe had such a life vision in the early years of his composition career, which would do honour to the Romanian culture, being so unusual, so avant-gardist, for its time. Never sung, never published, I had the unique opportunity to see the manuscript of Melodramas and to hand it to the Library of the National University of Music in Bucharest. In the hope that the work will ever acquire its auditory version for which it was created, as a musicologist passionate about the creation of Master Stroe, I owe to bring to light a masterpiece of which many know nothing, especially as part of the field of religious music.*

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1. Introduction-the personality of master Aurel Stroe

Beyond words, the impressive masterpieces of our national musical art speak without words; these are the creations of personalities who knew how to face the distorted present through the authenticity of the values expressed in their art. These days we forget increasingly often the true values which animate authentic art: the pathology of the times we live in reveals a terrible diagnosis reflected fully in our consciousness. In the absence of an authentic assumption of the true values which represent the spine of our art and life, we are in danger of depersonalization, of losing our moral and cultural identity which defines any man, any people.

Pr. Dumitru Stăniloae, the most important Romanian theologian, spoke about man as the “subject of divine intentionality”, highlighting the privileged position of man as an active environment for transferring a certain message of divine origin and value. The artist reminds the entire world, especially in times of crisis, that the world is beautiful. The artist gives himself completely, based on values higher than him, in order to offer certainty beyond our daily life. This truth is fundamental in the process of self-knowledge, for art which reflects a responsible

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attitude towards life. Man exists as a creature “in God’s image and likeness”, so all of his creations must follow the same requirements in order to truly live up to an expression filled with authentic value. “The creation of man in God’s image and likeness is the true basis for his completeness in God’s likeness”, and art as his plenary manifestation should be at the same level from the point of view of its expression and organization.

Authentic art involves not only positive, mathematical and numerical knowledge (cataphatic, intellectual, analytical, systematic and discursive knowledge), but also “its apophatic component, expressed through the experience of the community with God, through the ineffable evidence of His presence, through the participation in His life”.

Art has undeniable virtues of entertainment and relaxation; however, these do not stand out in authentic art, but in its lower segment – often subcultural. In its authentic hypostases we can talk about “the denial of the autonomy of art’s aesthetic value”: art has no value in itself, its value resides in the message it conveys and the way it becomes the privileged carrier of a message above itself. Art exists only as a means of communion, of communication of something essential; art is a tribute, joy, doxology, catechization, deaconship, spiritualization and freedom. The purely aesthetical value is only what is added to authentic art and offers visible beauty to invisible communication.

Just like man’s moral improvement entails his ontological restoration, the art created by man must encompass the requirements of a full, unitary ontology, which tends towards the perfection of its originally divine model. Authentic art has a theandric, dynamic, spiritual nature. Truth is transcendent, thus a masterpiece must also have its truth of the same transcendent, transfiguring nature. An artistic masterpiece is more than the expression of a certain moral, more than a philosophy: its theology, ontology, life vision in the context of eternity.

2. Aurel Stroe - Melodramas, interludes and symphonies for the Book of Job

Aurel Stroe had such a life vision in the early years of his composition career, which would do honor to the Romanian culture, being so unusual, so avant-gardist, for its time. Authentic art is in the realm of the inexpressible, making more difficult and more subtle the intervention of the artist who wishes to materialize this message, in order to share his values with others. “The source of poetry is the deep feeling of the inexpressible”; beauty conquers matter, it is not constraint by the contingent, by quantity, by image and publicity.

As early as the 3rd century, Plotin stated that art is just a part of the world's beauty, which leads to the beauty of God – the creator of the world. Creation reflects his maker. In art, beauty is a much higher level than the aesthetic one, because original beauty is not reflected entirely in the creation, it is not transferred (it cannot, actually, be completely and directly transferred), so what can be transferred is a derived diminished beauty. "Beauty in the world and in creation is in itself divine, it is the original beauty, transcendent", the one which becomes accessible only through the powers of faith, trust and love.

Born in Bucharest, in 1932, Aurel Stroe grew up in a special family, his father, a renowned doctor, was passionate about music. The composer who would become one of the most important creators of Romanian music in the 20th century spent his childhood listening – from the age of eight or nine – to the concerts of the Philharmonic Orchestra of Bucharest, accompanied by the music sheets – which were used very early on for studies and analyses. When he was eleven years old, he decided to become a professional musician, asking himself a fundamental question, precocious for a primary school child, namely: where do I find the fulfilment of my spirituality?

Until he turned 18, he studied with Marțian Negrea, in private, focusing on polyphony, studying complex orchestra sheet music. He was also preoccupied by the study of the piano, especially as a composer (he went through all Bach's inventions for two and three voices, guided by his mentor): "if Marțian Negrea taught me music, Mrs. Maria Fotino taught me musicality". At the Conservatory he studied composition with M. Andricu and began by creating a classical Suite in E flat major and was able to finish, during his studies, his first Concert for orchestra (which he presented to C. Silvestri). He continued his education with M. Negrea (harmony and counterpoint) and T. Rogalski (orchestration), and then he taught at the same higher musical institution in the intervals: 1962-1975 (orchestration) and 1974-1985 (composition).

The modern Romanian creation school was supported in the beginning by G. Enescu, P. Constantinescu and M. Jora, then by classical names of the native art, such as A. Vieru, T. Olah, Șt. Niculescu and Aurel Stroe. Iosif Sava, in one of his many works, lists Aurel Stroe among the composers who resisted against the communist regime, through his composition "Orestia II". Those years meant for T. Olah, Șt. Niculescu and A. Stroe the exploration of a personal expression formula: "A. Stroe aspired to the essence of musical creations of different historical and geographical origins". "Next to Scelsi, we believe that Aurel Stroe's major ideas in the contemporary aesthetics (the morphogenetic music, the theory of composition classes and the on-evolution concept) should raise great interest" [our translation].

Aurel Stroe is a composer whose work proves that the only important creation is the one stemming from necessity, from an inner need: the rest is completely useless. Emil Cioran's verdict touches the consciousness of those who failed to implement – in a creative way – their love of art: "I am only interested in spiritual works; the souls that count are the ones which cultivate absolute exigency or the exigency of the absolute" [our translation].

The only creation which had no first audition (not even a partial one) is a part of the trilogy dedicated to one of the most representative personalities of the Old Testament: Job. Melodramas, interludes and symphonies for the Book of Job begins with a prologue with expressive nuances from the range covered by terms such as *dolcissimo*, *lentissimo*, where the main theme belongs to violin II. The Book of Job (the composition itself) is, according to the author's notation, a mimodrama on music belonging to the spiritual and cultural tradition of the Saint Antim Monastery, where the young student had been called to compose this mimodrama (the explicit lack of words would not have given rise to direct doubts concerning the political suspicions surrounding the Burning Bush). This youth composition by Aurel Stroe led to a dramatic episode in his life, especially for the one who stated, on every occasion, that freedom is the most precious thing: when the participants to the Burning Bush started to be arrested one at a time, the young student took refuge in the mountains, somewhere near Brasov, and stayed there for dozens of months, fearing a possible arrest.

The first section (*Tranquillo*) presents the dialogue between a Storyteller and the soprano saxophone; the Storyteller says, in German (in the manuscript we used), the first words of the Old Testament about a virtuous, honest, God-praising man, whose name was Job. It describes the love of righteous Job for God and his children, for whose spiritual purification he made sacrifices all the time.

The second part is a Structural Palindrome sang on divided choral voices, a complex music composition (typical for Maestro Aurel Stroe), with strong symbolic connotations, followed by the choral of six trombones (instruments acting as characters in the Maestro's musical compositions) and an ample construction of ascending musical routes for the entire orchestra. The tension of the whole section peaks at the introduction of a polyphony on two voices, interpreted by a synthesizer which has to render the timbers of a clavichord and a cembalo, in a *presto*, "rigurisamente" dialogue. Job's drama is rendered through very suggestive, powerful instrumental means, and this section is followed by a slow segment (*Andante*, *legato*, *dolce*) in which the choral voices produce a vocalization using the sounds a-o: an extreme lament which renders Job's state after he lost God's gifts.

Another contrasting section starts on page 24 (*Dramatico*, *energico*), bringing forth some pedal-sounds played by the low wind instruments, accompanied by incisive rhythmic formula of the kettle drums and of contrabasses. The dialogue

between God and the devil (as told by the Storyteller) highlights a temptation that Job has to overcome in order to be the ideal example of faith, of love for his Maker, of patience, of gratitude and humility which marks the Old Testament. An impressive orchestral discourse begins in Presto, in which the equal values are reflected acutely, violently, sonoro, energico (forte), to suggest the dramatism of the situation depicted.

The third part is a Recitative, a symmetrical structure of six sounds based on the text (also told by the Storyteller) describing the moment Job lost his sons and daughters: strong dissonant chords stop the hot-tempered shattering discourse. We witness a real instrumental theatre in which the musical instruments become characters, remarks which build the plot.

The image shows a handwritten musical score for six flutes, labeled "6 FLAUTI" and "CHOROÏ". The score is in 3/8 time and marked "mf tenuto". It shows six staves with notes and rests, and a tempo marking "lo stesso tempo ♩=60" at the top. The notes are mostly quarter notes and half notes, with some rests. The first staff has a quarter note G4, a quarter note A4, and a quarter note B4. The second staff has a quarter note G4, a quarter note A4, and a quarter note B4. The third staff has a quarter note G4, a quarter note A4, and a quarter note B4. The fourth staff has a quarter note G4, a quarter note A4, and a quarter note B4. The fifth staff has a quarter note G4, a quarter note A4, and a quarter note B4. The sixth staff has a quarter note G4, a quarter note A4, and a quarter note B4.

Fig. 1. Aurel Stroe-Concerto for accordion and orchestra ("coral-insertion", composer's manuscript)

Following the musical career of the most important Romanian musicians and the continuing creation during nefarious times for making their masterpieces public, we cannot help wondering: "why did composers as important as Vieru and Stroe feel the need to write composition which had no chance of being represented on stage?" [our translation]. The tragic nature of the creation which cannot become public characterizes many men of culture who were active in communist Romania: the tragic consciousness has the virtue of being the most attentive and skilful guardian of our moral freedom. You show the strongest inner freedom when you can create beauty in a world where everything is an adventure with an uncertain end.

According to the theory of morphogenetic disasters, which he applied in music throughout his creation, the master used speech interruptions with poetic

function, tension modeling. Examples of this kind will be found in representative works such as *Mandala* (choral, Crucifixus) and *Concert for accordion and orchestra* (in “choral-insertion”), but in *Livre de Job* too.

3. Conclusion

The future of musical art? “Many creators fear this crossroads and turn back, landing at different points in the history of art and thought, even by denying lifelong ideas. Few are those with true visions, who still believe in them, who have that prophetic courage associated with art as a conscious or unconscious premonition of the times to come” [our translation].

Never sung, never published, I had the unique opportunity to see the manuscript and to hand it to the Library of the National University of Music in Bucharest. In the hope that the work will ever acquire its auditory version for which it was created, as a musicologist passionate about the creation of Master Stroe, I owe to bring to light a masterpiece of which many know nothing, especially as part of the field of religious music.

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