NEOCLASSICAL VALENCES REFLECTED IN PAUL CONSTANTINESCU'S CREATION

Roxana PEPELEA[1]

Abstract: *The current Neoclassicism in Constantinescu's creation belongs to the area of syntheses: between the Neoclassical (Neo-Baroque) and folk styles (Three Musical Pieces for Piano, Sinfonietta, Prelude for Piano Solo) – a synthesis achieved by most Romanian creators of the time; between the Neoclassical and Byzantine styles (Liturgy, Oratorios) – an unusual synthesis in the Romanian musical creation, but typical of world music – as, for example, the fusion between the Neoclassical (Neo-Baroque) and Gregorian intonation (Respighi, Hindemith, Stravinsky and so on); between the traditional form and the innovative modal language involved by the folk-Byzantine direction (Symphony, concertos).*

Key words: *Paul Constantinescu, folk, Neoclassicism, Byzantine style, modal language.*

1. Introduction

A defining aspect of the contemporary Romanian creation, including Paul Constantinescu, materializes in its Classical spirit. "There is about one of the most relevant aspects – we dare say – of a certain East-European national school phenomenology and, withal, about the phenomenon having partly consecrated the contributions of composers such as Enescu and Bartók to the patrimony of universal music, if one considers that Neoclassicism based on or inspired from folk, promoted by creations such as orchestra suites or *Piano Sonata no.3* by George Enescu, or, from the Hungarian composer's production – containing a significant percentage of works subject to the Classical architectonical rigours – creations such as

Sonatina for Piano, concertos for piano and orchestra, *Divertimento for String Orchestra, Concerto for Orchestra"* – Cl.L.Firca notes[3].

This spirit that, as Clemansa Firca states, we might call *Classical,* "far from being confused with the refuge in academic precepts, emanates first from a land Classicism of popular music itself" [3].

2. Classical valences of Romanian folklore

The *Classical* valences of Romanian folklore (symmetry of the popular dance and children songs or of some urban folklore species, *giusto* rhythm of the carol, diatonic scale, movement and character contrast between *doina (elegiac song typical of Romanian lyrical folk*

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[1] Dept. of Musical Pedagogy, *Transilvania* University of Braşov, Romania.

music) and *dance*, major-minor parallelism) are the premises for the orientation of the compositional methods of Drăgoi, Andricu, Filip Lazăr, and later on Zeno Vancea or Paul Constantinescu.

According to the musicologist Clemansa Liliana Firca's note, "the work of some (such as Filip Lazăr, and later on Zeno Vancea or Paul Constantinescu) only partially falls under the very general, supra-stylistically Classical determination /.../. There is however unanimously felt in these creators the tendency to consolidate, expand and fertilize a compatibility field «between the intimate formal structure of the folklore and the one of Western /.../ music» Classical (or Neoclassical)" [3].

But, these Classical coordinates of the interwar Romanian compositional thinking differently materialize in the spirit of sobriety, balance and symmetry illustrated by the composers' individual styles.

In Sabin Drăgoi'a case, for instance, Classical characters are enhanced through the predisposition towards miniature forms, which observe the small size and structural integrity of popular melody, combined with the initiation of a modal harmonic language; his works for piano (miniatures, carols, elegiac songs), for chorus, for voice and piano are a genuine "practical textbook of harmony for the South-Transylvanian Romanian popular melody, demonstrating the variegated possibilities offered by folklore to musicians" – as stated by N. Rădulescu [5].

The aspect of the consistently quadrivocal harmonic-polyphonic connections pertaining to these musical pieces proves the transfer of the choral into instrumental-orchestral scoring. Succeeding to the processing and harmonization of folk songs – whereof also Romanian – of Bartók, Drăgoi will determine that correspondence relations should settle between the Romanian and Hungarian creations of this nature. However, while Drăgoi "confines himself" to observing the formal integrity of the popular melody, likewise applying the "limits" of the vocal character to instrumental scoring, Paul Constantinescu will exhibit more pronounced amplifying tendencies, a predisposition towards the effect of the instrumental-orchestral virtuosity and an increased variety of the sonorous densities as outcome of dealing with the used assemblies on groups.

3. Neoclassicism in interwar Romanian composition

The modality of emphasizing the Classical characters of folklore consists, in the Neoclassical vision, of the tendency to amplify these original valences, with the processing procedures pertaining to the Classical or pre-Classical arsenal of cultivated nature. This vision will prove suitable to the musical nature of composers such as Dinu Lipatti and especially Filip Lazăr; the latter's works, concertos for piano, *Three Romanian Dances for Violin and Piano, Piano Sonata, Violin Sonata* will fall into the Neoclassical orbit of Ravel, Bartók or Prokofiev. The economy of means, the maximum concentration of the form, the precision and contour clarity of the themes "are some of the metamorphoses that, sometimes, more of an anti-romantic or anti-impressionist reaction, than of the preoccupation for the «return to the Classics», an entire contemporary musical literature seemed to have imprinted on the Classical concept" – Cl.L.Firca adds[3].

As particular case of this direction, the spirit of the *Neo-baroque* polyphonic rigour (imitation, canon, counterpoint) of the popular-origin set of themes has slipped, ever since the fourth decade, into the creation of composers such as Zeno Vancea, Sigismund Toduţă, Ludovic

Feldman etc. The tendency is explained by I. Anghel: "If Neoclassicism itself contains its reference in the recovery of the Classical compositional forms and techniques, /.../ the focus on the forms of musical Baroque, their update as well as the use of the polyphonic techniques for elaborating the sonorous discourse, defines, in the framework of the same orientation, the *Neo-baroque* style/.../. There is not about an actual return to Bach in the sense it was postulated, as Adrian Rațiu draws the attention, but about the «retrieval of a polyphony spirit applied to the Romanian ethos»" [1]. This does not elude the beginnings of Constantinescu's creation, dating back, as seen, in this period (decades 4-5). In *Prelude for Piano* (1934), the theme, taken over in fugue-type imitation, sends, by isochronous pulsation of sixteenths (in rhythmical continuum) also the polyphonic latent aspect, at moments of the *Suite II for Orchestra* (1915) by George Enescu; Paul Constantinescu's innovative contribution consists in the modal-origin language, focused on the characteristics of the mixed Lydian.

Ex. 1, *Prelude for Piano*:

The Neo-baroque polyphonic rigour, not consistently followed by the other works in this line – in *Burlesque for Piano* (1937) is rather suggested by the subtitle *Fantasy and Fugue,* than pursued, excepting the final of the *Symphony* (1945), a *passacaglia (Andante sostenuto)*, reckoned by V.Tomescu "among the first pages of our polyphonic-type symphonic thinking" [6] – becomes representative for the Byzantine-oriented works – free counterpoints or *fugato*-s of the Liturgy (1936) and Oratorios (1946-1948), the imitations of the Byzantine Studies (1929), *passacaglia* of *Byzantine Sonata* (1940).

If this type of Neo-baroque rigour is not generally associated to the folkloric-orientation musical pieces – let us remind here, however, the variation processing with different counterpoint types of the *Song* from *Three Pieces for Piano* (1952) – there must be concluded that, in exchange, Paul Constantinescu's significant element is his perseverance (and consistency) in maintaining himself on a position of the *folkloric-Neoclassical synthesis*. The same language, underlying the folkloric-orientation works, will be cast, now, in more rigorously and elaborately drafted patterns, of an instrumental or symphonic-type Classical traditional architecture (sonata, symphony, concert), characterized by an increased metro-rhythmical symmetry. Note that the Byzantine direction, being infused Classical features (that *autochthonous* Classicism discussed by Cl.L.Firca) [3], has been provided by the author with the frame or at least atmosphere of Western-tradition forms (oratorio, Baroque sonata etc.).

Therefore, the peak attained by the composer in this line of the Neoclassicism – *Triple Concerto for Violin, Cello and Orchestra* (1963) – includes this synthesis, being withal the peak of the autochthonous modal thinking (with its double folkloric and Byzantine specificity), the point wherein the composer's thinking reached

its Neo-modal phase. As likewise shown by Ulrich Dibelius (in *Moderne Musik)* [2], the period 1945-1965 is marked by similar tendencies at universal level. This way, the path towards a complex musical language, evolving towards chromatic completeness, passes through Neoclassicism or Neo-baroque. The author justifies its statement with examples taken from some German composers' creation, such as Wolfgang Fortner; his early works – *Sonata* or *Violin Concerto* (1945) – emphasize Neoclassical stylistic particularities.

3. Neoclassicism in Paul Constantinescu's creation

Which are, in this context, the Neoclassical-type parameters of Paul Constantinescu's creation?

1. Rhythmical symmetry and concordance between rhythm and metrical accents; divisionary rhythmical aspect in *Symphony* (1945), in *Piano Concerto* (1952)*,* symmetry in *Triple Concerto,* mono-rhythmical-ostinato in *Concerto for String Orchestra* (1947)*, Violin Concerto* (1957), situated in the perimeter of a dance-type symmetrical rhythmical character, in *Concerto for Harp* (1960)*.*

2. Patterns of traditional forms. The modal, as new frame for the development of a certain language (with diatonic, chromatic, polymodal, neomodal elements), replacing the tonal focus and the former determining relations of the phrase symmetry and form articulations, can provide fertile ground for remodelling as regards the statutory principles of the former patterns. Nevertheless, the concert literature and *Symphony* (1945) broadly comply with the traditional schemes, especially visible in the extreme parts, elaborated in complex sonata forms. Likewise, there are observed the basic principles of gradation, thematic contrast (of expression) or of development, which slip into all sonata-form moments and not only in the *treatment* sector. These sonata-reformulation tendencies also mark the universal Neoclassical creation, including the achievements of the 7-th decade serialism and randomness 7.

3. The thematic character*,* which derives from dealing with the folkloric melody (quoted or created) as *generating-theme*, is kept, even displaying symmetry models, which start from:

   • archetype of the square construction (4+4 beats), in the rigours of the playable melodic type:

Ex. 2, *Concerto for Harp, p. I, theme II*:

Note the originality in the colouring-modal harmonization of the theme – melody in *eolian A* and *Sicilian* rhythm, in fact a Vulpian-collection antique Romanian round dance – with stereotypes consisting of elements *ajouteés;* the Phrygian melodic cadence bears the harmonic suspension of the bass on the

sound *D #,* as element *ajouteé* situated under the fifth of the mode and in polar relation to the end of the melody (*D #↔A),* with stridencies of *false bass* [4].

- or figuratively, in toccata character:

Ex. 3, *Violin Concerto, p. I, theme I*:

- until the double periodic model (8+8 beats):

Ex. 4, *Violin Concerto, p. I, theme II*:

The consequent variedly reiterates the material of the antecedent, by the bilateral extension of the acoustic tetrachordal skeleton; the mixture in sixth-interval of the theme denotes the reference to the folkloric rudimentary pluriphonic characters.

4. Modality of conferring upon the main themes, figurative prolongations with sequential-evolution aspect (of generating cells composed of specifically modal intervals) which will become the evolutionary basis for other formal sectors (bridges, transitions, re- transitions etc.). These cells will be cyclically repeated in one and the same musical piece, or, furthermore, will be reiterated in pieces of varied content. Here it is, below, the broad-interval cell – *x* - (constituted within the octave or seventh, by symmetrical or asymmetrical division), or the narrow-interval cell – *y* - (semitone) repetitively and sequentially emphasized:

Ex. 5, *Violin Concerto, p. I, theme I*:

5. Exceeding the motive-filled thematic character and inauguration of a chromatic modal world, underlain by the use of the figural-cellular structures, in *Triple Concerto* (1963)*. The phenomenon has been anticipated ever since the *Concerto for Stirng Orchestra* (1947)*, or *Symphony* (1945) and is based on the variegated hypostases of the modal archetypal cell, applied in guise of:

• Constitutive element of thematic interval, as the inferior embroidery appears in the construction of the thematic incipit in *Symphony*;
• Background figurative element (*ostinato)*, in *Concerto for String Orchestra*, or in *Triple Concerto.*

Ex. 6, *Triple Concerto*:

6. Operation with the cyclical principle, basis of the musical discourse and form achievement. Thus, for instance, in part I, as sonata of the *Triple Concert* (1963)*,* the generating cell (example 6) is the substance of the ostinato background of the main theme, thereafter is embedded in the free elaboration within the bridge, is imposed in the stages of the treatment (stages II, III, IV, VI, VII, VIII), discreetly slips into the construction of the II-nd theme and in the *treatment* of the sonata form in the end of the concerto.

4. Conclusions

To draw a conclusion, the stylistic direction of the extant Neoclassicism in Paul Constantinescu's creation falls under the syntheses:
• Synthesis between the Neoclassical and folkloric styles, performed by most Romanian creators of the time;
• Synthesis between the Neoclassical and Byzantine-psalm styles, less common in the Romanian creation, but universally performed in a similar fusion between Neoclassicism or Neo-baroque and Gregorian intonation (Respighi, Hindemith, Stravinski etc.);
• Synthesis between the traditional form and the innovating modal language.

Therefore, in Paul Constantinescu's case, Neoclassicism is not an actual direction, but acts as a tendency, as an orientation applied to the other two main directions of his creation: Folklorism and Byzantinism.

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