

# FELICIA DONCEANU - THE POETIC UNIVERSE OF HER VOCAL AND CHAMBER WORKS

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**Abstract:** *The affinity for vocal and chamber contemporary music is a topic that has wide audience among Romanian composers. Among them there is Felicia Donceanu, a creative representative from the gallery of Romanian creative women, starting with Ioana Ghica Comanesti, continuing with C.P. Basacopol, M. Marbé, I. Odăgescu, M. Ciobanu and more. In her music, Felicia Donceanu offers us an impressive creative variety of works, from extensive vocal-symphonic works to stage music, vocal (voice and piano), choir, children's music, instrumental theater, soundtracks and entertainment music and especially vocal and instrumental chamber music and instrumental music. Therefore it is an extensive creation, atypical, fluid, in a wide stylistic range, not only on the horizontal line of improvement of componistic elements but also on the personal level, specific to her extra musical personality.*

**Key words:** *poetic, stylistic, metaphore.*

## 1. Introduction

The choice of the theme is due to the particular way of receiving Felicia Donceanu's work, which is proposed as arising from "her lifestyle" become the universe of meditation and inspiration.

Therefore, the composer's confession becomes a part of her work and a direct reference to the essence of each work's atmosphere. "Creation is for me a relationship of personal attitude towards the phenomena of my personal life, an adjustment to the proposed topic, a personal attitude on social phenomena, my way to receive and comment on a particular issue, my vision of life, the need to communicate.

I have a vivid imagination and I focus it upon my music, it helps me in this context my two skillful hands, eyes, mind, the color state, the restlessness to create, to combine with my hands, mind, soul ... everything is passing through <my oasis>, my environment. All these happen strictly in my environment, but I am very careful with what goes on outside my house" (Felicia Donceanu – dialogue with the author, 2.04.2013).

The investigation of the poetic universe of the composer reveals the profile of a creator who dreams freely when ideates, uniting the hidden meanings of the work with her strong feelings, which gives her creation a personal touch, and makes it also very unique. „Felicia Donceanu, born in Bacău in 1931, is undoubtedly one of

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the finest Romanian song composers, an accolade accorded her by fellow Romanian composers. Most of her forty-six skillfully and imaginatively crafted songs are masterpieces. Donceanu sets most of her songs as cycles and prefers they be performed in their entirety".[1, p. 981]

The creation of Felicia Donceanu, especially the vocal and chamber music, where the lyricism is utterly found, stands out as a different universe of many fellows composers and to the aspects (the one at the first sight) of her works. „Fiercely independent and self-assured, she has adamantly resisted pressure to conform to society's personal and professional expectations of her.”[1, p. 981]

"The Secrets" of Donceanu's creations can't be perceived from the first contact, nor the symbols' richness or the ideology do not appear instantly; the mystery of the artistic universe being discovered and completed with every hearing of her works. Educated in the great teachers' school of the interwar period and culture, sipping from Mihail Jora master talent, Felicia Donceanu assimilated the tradition message in her artistic creed and ideas in which nothing remained unmelt and then was poured into her own forms of expression. For this reason, she is a creator with enormous unique features, reflected both musically and poetically, plastic, expressively and, fortunately, in her human side.

Such composer with an artistic personality also reveals the particularities of her universe only after a concentric approach, where the lyrical, meditative and philosophical aspects are captured and revealed as we go deep in the senses and meanings of the work. Analytical difficulties and at the same time, the beauty of stylistic development is that the author has composed for voice and instruments ingeniously combined, often skipping traditional compositional rules,

avoiding common sound zones and permanent revealing the size of her originality.

## 2. Stylistic and Aesthetic Highlights of Vocal-Chamber Creation

„The talents of this extraordinarily gifted composer encompass painting and sculpting, theater, poetry and composition. With her deft musical instincts each gift meshes inextricably in her art song, triggering visual images of colors or styles of painting, yielding immensely satisfying songs”[1, p. 983]. In the chamber area, the composer evolves from solo instruments to instrumental groups, vocal music, and then the choral, vocal and instrumental (vocal-symphonic and vocal-chamber), film music and entertainment. The stylistic part of this work is extensive and extremely complex, with particular reflections, often reaching the edge of styles' variety.

The literature and the poetry are not a secondary source of inspiration or expression, but the foundation of his lyrical and musical creations. The cycles of lieder or vocal chamber works, stage music, her scenarios and the choral music and the one especially dedicated to children (eg. the libretto for "The box of surprises ... and for frowning people" or of "The Smart bell") explores the personal and poetic art by deepening its artistic direction in order to obtain the metaphorical dimension of music. “Together with many other Romanian composers Donceanu shares an interest in composing for children. During the Communist regime operas composed specifically for children, frequently utilizing child performers, were performed Sunday mornings in Bucharest”[1, p. 983]. Besides the significance of the lyrics, figurative expressions, metaphors, figures of poetic construction, the author is in

constant search of metaphorical nature of music.

The linguistic field has always been the science that strongly influenced structures (form and content) and the meanings (the meaning of artistic expression), composition methods (techniques), often becoming a possible model "of organization and operation for other languages". Analyzing the coordinates of the natural language we notice that they realize two functions: the expression or reflection function for different ideas (own or from others) and the function of communication or transmission of a message, the two features are meeting in any language type, implicitly in the music. The poetic universe reflected in the vocal-chamber creations of the composer Felicia Donceanu, covers various aspects of the psychological – human reality, reconstituted in a fictional way by each poet chosen by the author, and rebuilt into a new artistic and compositional space. As George Călinescu says in the treaty *Tehnica criticii și istoriei literare (Principii de estetică) – (The Technique of Literary Criticism and History) (Principles of Aesthetics)* - "The poetic area is a text, a formal independent unity bearing an imaginary content and gives rise to an expression"[2, p.59]. The poetic expression is the main criterion for selection of the composer Felicia Donceanu to be rendered in her vocal-chamber creations, this is the basis for the construction of the evolutionary compositional design. As in the field of linguistics, „the poetic function is the expression, meaning that <a poem> is one and the same thing with the production of a single entity, of a unique and unrepeatable text”[3, p.58], in the musical field the compositional function is also the expression, that is the emphasis of some unique and unrepeatable sound structures, constructed by means and techniques acquired over time, assigned to

specific structures or forms that incorporates the melodic, rhythmic, harmonic, dynamic, agogic and timbre variety deployments. It should be stated that in the construction of the author’s compositional expression, also the interpreter contributes, as he is the one that is supposed to identify and implement it in the acoustic plan, the music sheet’s semiography, implicitly the compositional intent.

Despite being secluded in her own universe of creation, the composer, is far from being an unknown creative to the public, listeners or interpreters, or "forgotten" by criticism. As evidence there are many references of fellow musicians, of radio and television editors with a cultural profile showing interest in a creator so special on the Romanian composing stage.

The characteristic feature of the composer Felicia Donceanu lies in its integration in the poetical-musical and plastic inspiration environment, up to interior decoration and musical instruments manufacture from her own imagination, in "Donceanu house" where she creates, in cycles of works, opus by opus, seeing each work as a part of a performance integrated in a stage action coordinated by a director, included in an impeccable artistic construction.

One of the explanations of the author's preference to express sound most often in the lied and the voice-chamber manner, one may be offered, perhaps unconsciously remembering the mother's voice, Elena Donceanu, the one who sang many times, in the family, accompanied by the piano, providing at the same time many classes of vocal-piano lessons to those who were interested in it. Also, the unconscious plastic-psychological perception of the flute timbre of his father, Alexandru Donceanu, in partnership with the mother's voice and piano gave the author the first

merge compositional model, which she later exhibited in the creations mentioned above. Her directorial, choreographic, pictorial, literal talents etc., observed since childhood, are also important points that have shaped the aesthetic and personnel stylistic system, system that stands out in the universal musical landscape by great originality and aesthetic and stylistic freedom.

Because Felicia Donceanu always loved the "beautiful, moral, ethical and spiritual" has chosen most of the times the "word" support in the composition of her works, its expressive force contributing, along with the entire acoustic body, to create "meaning" of each paper. The power of poetic meaning on music is strongly felt beyond the compositional pages in which the voice is used, the most instrumental works revealing impressive poetic horizons, most often personal.

Lieder and vocal-chamber creations of Felicia Donceanu expose multiple universes of poetry, channeling them and completing the artistic meanings in her own aesthetic system - developed and constantly filled with new musical textures. Basically, every poetic idea found in this acoustic space demonstrates and reinforces her own existential beliefs and attitudes, "harmonized" in a personal note of her compositional system. The value system of poetic verse used in lieder and vocal chamber creations include both the author's own lyrics (eg. Lieder "Lacrimi") and anonymous folk poetry, religious or belonging to Romanian and universal poets (eg. Tudor Arghezi, Lucian Blaga, Ion Barbu, Mihai Eminescu, George Bacovia, Alexandru Macedonski, Tristan Tzara, George Călinescu, Mihail Crama, Rusalim Mureşan, Miha Dragomir, Dumitru Popescu, Maria Simion, Adela Popescu, Aurelia Diaconu, George Coşbuc, Ienăchiţă Văcărescu, Mariana Dumitrescu, Virgil Stoenescu, Barbu Ştefănescu –

Delavrancea, Victor Eftimiu, Grigore Sălceanu, Alexandru Davila, Alexandru Popescu, Alexandru Voitin etc.). The poetic universes selected by the author for this compositional section capture an unusual dramatic and metaphorical sense, revealing her own artistic identity, genuine by her contour on the Romanian and universal currents and stylistic guidelines in the second half of the twentieth century.

Most of the vocal chamber creations using lyrics from the lyric genre, lyrical meditative / philosophical (sometimes even of dramatic character), selected from old, religious, folk, medieval, romantic, symbolist and modernist poets. Once the text influences the compositional typology of each work, this also has a major influence, upon all the stylistic and aesthetic compartments established by the specialty literature: sonority (song), harmony, rhythm, timbre, agocic and dynamics, form/architecture, including the micro and macro structural elements that compiles the work itself – motif cell, motif, phrase, period.

### **3. The Influences of the Poetic Art upon Felicia Donceanu's Musical Language**

„While each poet stimulates a unique musical response in Donceanu, a penchant for linguistic evolution and poetic scenes evoking ancient rites or civilisations recurs in her songs”[1, p. 984]. Verses inspired from religious and folkloric literature always generate in the creations of Felicia Donceanu modal general masterpieces (folkloric and religious), sprinkled with impressionistic character sequences, especially in vocal chamber works which are bond together by various instrumental timbres to create a particular colored acoustic of popular or religious atmosphere; classic verse pierces the creations dedicated to children in particular, where the music is tonally

stable, balanced in terms of compositional writing, without excessive moments of modulations, chromatising, or excessive moments of musical rhythm and metering, with a well-defined form, in which repetitive moments like verse-chorus are very common; the verse of romantic inspiration generates works of romantic character sprinkled with impressionist moments, the feeling of love, descriptive images of nature, night, heavenly stars etc.; symbolist verse generates works of an extreme expressiveness, harmonic unstable, sometimes with an expressionist or impressionist character with modal as support, this being the acoustic zone in which Felicia Donceanu communicates the deepest conflicts, inner tensions, concepts, philosophical attitudes or metaphysical vision of life.

#### 4. Conclusions

The composer reasons in artistic equivalences, identifying her own means of language for each masterpiece (music, painting or poetry), however, all having a common universe and a common goal. In her creation, the composer blends modalities of expression in a perpetual and abundant alchemy, obtaining genuine and vibrant acoustic substances so closed to her own structure. Being concerned of instrumental and vocal colors, and their varied interweaving and melodic overlay technique - leading the listener into a subtle and elevated polyphony, the composer placed music on a inhomogeneous metric, imbued with fantasy, inspiration and expressiveness. Using a conventional and sometimes unconventional writing (eg. the lieder "Lacrimi" and the vocal chamber music "Ponti Euxini Clepsydra – Schițe în laviu") the composer, evolves from multi-styling to her own timbral-expressive signature, so that every creation is a synthesis of the

means of expression which serve her inspiration and the chosen theme.

Selecting "the expressive and symbolic word" as a partner of her intense music, the composer Felicia Donceanu is the testimony of a huge artistic potential, with an intense inner life being poured out in a kaleidoscopic creation, being present in Romanian and international musicians' repertoire. „Donceanu's music reveals her personality in its expansive range of expression, an inner energy, a zest for life, a childlike awe of nature, a deep spirituality and humor. The lyric and intimate moments are deeply moving, intense, sincere and expose depths of personal suffering. Her works often display a broader and more intense emotional range than found in most Romanian songs.”[1, p. 984]

Dedicating her opus both to the audience leaning towards meditation and philosophy but also to the clean universe of the children, Felicia Donceanu experiences the joy of feedbacks such as: "I was told that my music makes people feel good!"[4]

Her creation comes from an inexhaustible imaginary and a proper living environment-which is a true source of feeling and artistic impression. Discrete and introverted, the composer continues to operate beyond the fleeting noises of the street, creating and dreaming of music heard only by her, as well as deepening-by poli-artistic metamorphosis - the secrets of her nature and existence.

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