

## **CHANTS NOSTALGIQUES BY CONSTANTIN SILVESTRI – AN OASIS OF PIANO REFINEMENT**

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**Abstract:** *The aim of this article is to show Chants nostalgiques by Silvestri music can be of highest refinement level in approaching the instrument. And that this work implying levels of dynamic refinement piano music can be and should be considered as recommended didactic aids because of how could possibly help the performer to eventually get an ultimate improvement of musical expression. The fascinating Silvestri's personality appraisal should be a constant for the Romanian music school for his expressive piano work he left.*

**Key words:** *Constantin Silvestri, fine piano approach, wide piano dynamic range.*

### **1. Introduction**

Regarded as a vanguard composer the special pianist, conductor and improviser Constantin Silvestri distinguished himself as a brilliant personality among the most important Romanian musicians of his time like for instance Dinu Lipatti, Ionel Perlea and the leading personality of George Enescu. And there is to be mentioned last one has been performing some of Silvestri's chamber music works.

There was Silvestri's exceptional conducting charisma which impelled him on an international trajectory therefore as a remarkable skilled pianist he missed the opportunity to excel. But before that Silvestri's talent as a brilliant piano improviser and performer has been acknowledged through his inspired piano

works. He piano works list is formed by: Two Suites op3 No.I and No. II of a programmatic character - 'Children plays'; Sonatina op.3.nr 3; Suite No III for piano, op.6 nr.1 whose last piece is the famous 'Baccanale' which has been issued separately as well by the Editura Uniunii Compozitorilor în 1956 due to it 's far-reaching qualities; it follows Passacaglia composed apparently before 1941; Sonata for piano, Op.19 No 2; Three Piano Concert Pieces Op.25; Chants nostalgiques' op.27 No 1; his last opus is Op28, a Rhapsody for piano. Among them 'Chants nostalgiques' is representative and enjoys recognition and appreciation both in its country and abroad. The work was conceived in Silvestri's moments of sadness, melancholia or despair feelings which mostly were caused by the new

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political regime behavior towards him. In this work it can be told that piano was Silvestri's confidant at that moment.

Starting with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Suite op.3 Silvestri wrote for piano one can notice an increased diversity of piano approach suggested also by a great number of indications. Some of them look more like precautions of composer much preoccupied with facilitating the right understanding of the performing way of his music where impressionistic sounds blends with their opposite like as the typical sounds for the expressionistic area.

In addition there is to be remarked the pedaling approach of Silvestri's piano music which requires an increased finesse and subtlety of using it. His exceptional piano skills were remarkable through his outstanding ability of reaching a wide range of sounds qualities which could find their resemblance in the Enescu's artistry [2]. In this way musical terms like: *quasi pizzicato in pianissimo, senza Ped (s.Ped), glissando, secco*, etc. give a glimpse of Silvestri's wide range and far-reaching palette. Further his stunning piano imagination among the modernist composers granted him no doubt as one of the most outstanding conductors of his time and helped him to reach a unique and rich orchestral perception.

The three 'Chants nostalgiques' typifies an extremely useful and valuable pedagogical and piano teaching aids as well, owing to Silvestri's piano artistry of fine and great dynamic scale. Silvestri's piano music opens the door for the world of the highest piano expressiveness and therefore it leads the pianists to reach the finest piano skills all guided mostly by his infinitesimal graded dynamic scale. In this respect at the end of the second piece of the Suite the composer has displayed a dynamic and intensity range panel as a study of them all. This is a testify more of the far reaching piano skills and piano

imagination of the composer as a challenge for the other pianists to think more about and over the piano wide range of finest subtleties.

Both as a musician and a human Silvestri unfortunately faced many adversities all top up by his health difficult problems increased by the moral ones coming from the political regime party. 'Chants Melancoliques' is a mirror work of his intense sufferance which continuously eroded away his sensitivity and inner strength. A part of Silvestri's inner stirring, or troubles and worries found their plastic expression through this Suite as three musical paintings. Their aesthetic register seems here to be in the borders of characters like: meditation, melancholy, thoughtfulness ('Pensieroso' - in the 1<sup>st</sup> piece), mystery ('Misterioso' - in the 3<sup>rd</sup> piece).

## 2. Stylistic and interpretive considerations

### a) *Chants nostalgiques* No I

The form of this opening piece of the Suite is structured more on an **ab** form with a small Recapitulation followed by Coda. It displays a musical material of atonal filiation bringing to mind some connections to Schoenberg's piano repertoire like for instance Klavierstück op.11. Written in contrapuntal structures the musical text uses some serial techniques as well. In this respect the architecture of the section **a** (bars1-8) is divided on two levels. First is the bass level containing a slow movement melodic line because of its large rhythmical values suggesting an organ point character.



Fig. 1

This one projects in a way the soprano voice together with its harmony accompaniment on a second importance level, more like a hypotaxis plan in relation with the bass. The large rhythmical values of the bass in a cantabile character moving in a slow movement and the 'cantando, penseroso' indications for the soprano voice create altogether the character and an emotional atmosphere of a chaconne. The structured three levels are thoroughly described in the music by three different dynamic levels of the piano intensity.

In these circumstances it seems rather impossible to accomplish composer's dynamic indications so as the pianist has to find some other means to help out this. We suggest here that the three tight dynamic levels could be better solved through a good use of different tone colours. Creating the image of three different musical instruments timbre, like for instance the organ for the bass line, can be of a great help in the context of a unique general piano dynamic. Therefore for the three different instrumental timbres a pianist would imagine three slightly different piano touching ways.

In the **b** part of the form there are assembled together impressionist sounds and piano means with expressionist elements like clusters or seventh major intervals. The colour expressiveness of the **b** is defined by the mysterious sounding of the first cluster appearing in the left hand. Coming out from the suspense of its character and corresponding to a **pp** dynamic level (as is suggested in the score) the musical discourse of the right hand gets further to a Debussy type character: its musical speech in the upper register of the piano brings a static figuration of seventh major intervals- an interval much preferred by the expressionist composers. In this way the **piangendo** – **ben p** voice expression, put in the left hand level, is being fully

outlined. There is to be remarked too that the seventh major intervals are a permanent presence until the melodic line finishes. The resultant sounds coming out from the performing ways of the seventh intervals remind somehow of the Webern pointillism of Variations for piano op.27.

Performer is called to use two different ways of approaching the piano: the static both expressionist and impressionist line in the upper register requires diagonal movements of the palm completed by distinct movements of the fingers while the Debussy, flute-like main melodic line in the left hand requires a more gentle approach.

Musical expressions like: **con dolore**, **piangendo** etc. are on the same emotional level requiring the pianist to detect their sighs musical effects in the score. The last bar, for instance, represents an extended musical sigh which shrinks all the musical discourse to a single diminished chord with diminished seventh: fa#- la-do-mi b. Its character opens the way for the next piece through its interrogative tension.

#### b) *Chants nostalgiques* No II.

The musical content of this piece is structured on a ternary form - **aba** with a Coda. The Brahms influence from Klavierstücke op. 116, 118, 119 seems to be quite powerful. It can be easily remarked both in the syntactic and morphological structures of the piece. **a** is formed by the structure of a diminished chord: fa sharp- la- do- mi flat- mi natural, with minor and diminished seventh altogether, brought in simultaneity.



Fig. 2

The rhythmic and melodic pattern of the Brahms's Intermezzo No 1 op.119 is quite obvious in the equal rhythmical values downward arpeggio. It tells that just the incipit of Brahms above It seems that Silvestri assumed just the incipit of the Brahms above mentioned piece as a model.

To the **b** (bars 6-18) suit elements and sounds of brahmsian influence as well which can be noticed in the melodic line doubled in octave intervals and in the false relations between it and the contrapuntal melody.

Another aspect to be mentioned here is about the indication of the inner melodic line marked by the term **febrile**. This would lead to a general cantabile lamento character which would be mirrored or reflected in the emotional character of the main voice.

Bar 19 brings back the **a** without its aufact and leaving away the opening tempo it keeps now the 50 value of the metronome scale ( in the opening was 69-70). This situation leads to a change of the aesthetic implication and that's about the initial **espressivo** turning now into a **tristamente** character.

In the bar 22 there is a transition towards Coda and tempo goes slower towards the 36 metronomic value of the crotchet. **Come un coro** suggests the human voice expression and indications like **lontano, triste, espr., dolorosamente** describes some emotional borders of this section.

At the bar 28, for the Coda, music clears up towards malinconico expression after the sadness and the feverish musical tension.

#### c) *Chants nostalgiques* No III

The last piece structured on a bipartite form **ab** with introduction and Coda retakes a big part of the melodic and

harmonic elements from the first piece. Tough its initial indication **misterioso** puts this piece in a different expression area, mostly in **a**.

One can notice the predilection for the atonalism and heterogenous metric.

The Introduction, **appena toccata** (scarcely touching) marks a recto tono recitative requiring no pedalling.

### 3. Conclusions

In the brief comments and remarks we made over the work approached, we tried to reveal different and unexplored before piano expressive aspects this music is greatly embracing. This work represents both a challenge and an artistic statement of the brilliant pianist Constantin Silvestri on what a piano performer may fetch and expect to from its instrument.

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