

PAUL CONSTANTINESCU'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE PROGRESS OF THE ROMANIAN MUSIC

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Abstract: *Constantinescu's contribution to the progress of the Romanian composition school, will register two stages: one of an absolute genuineness, in which the composer has the upper hand, in a double image - the initiator of the modern direction promoting the Byzantine background and the creator of the Romanian comical opera - and one with his own vision in approaching the folk direction - through new modalities of implementing folk music at a high-level (melodic, harmonic, polyphonic, instrumental-orchestral, formal). In close connection with the style directions, the field of modal innovation oscillates, and affects one or another parameter of the musical flow.*

Key words: *Paul Constantinescu, folklore music, modal language.*

1. Introduction

The starting point of this essay is to settle the place of Paul Constantinescu in the Romanian modern composition school, during a period of over three decades (1929-1963).

According to Vasile Herman's attempt of dividing the Romanian music, the following stages in the composer's creation are suggested: I. 1929-1939 – marks the opening of directions and establishing the parameters of genuine creation. II. 1940-1948 – rounds up the final affirmation of his creation. III. 1949-1956 – settles the maturity of his style and language. IV. 1957-1963 – marks the

delimitation of a new vision on the modal treatment [4].

2. The opening of the directions and the establishment of an original creation (1929-1939)

From his very first works, *Two Byzantine Studies for String Trio* (1929-1930) and *The Romanian Suite* (1930-1936), Paul Constantinescu defines two of the sources which are of outmost importance for his creation: the psaltic music and the folk song. Both the composition reevaluation of the Byzantine and of the folkloric musical background are specific phenomena for the end of the third decade of the XXth century.

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With *Four Fables*, orchestrated in 1936, Paul Constantinescu opens another specific direction of his creation – besides the paths already traced, those of Byzantinism and folklorism – that of the musical comic, the humouristic, which will later acquire renewed and deepened aesthetic meanings.

Situated in the same line which mirrors a tiny world, seemingly resulting from the spirit of Topârceanu, Arghezi, Jora, Paul Constantinescu's humour will nourish the cycle of lieds on the verses of Tudor Arghezi (1929-1932), composed at the same time with the fables for the piano. Consequently, a continuer of his own way, traced from his study years, the first lied, *Lullaby for Mitzura (Cântec de adormit Mitzura)* is, in fact, another opening – Paul Constantinescu proves to be a true follower on the road which Mihail Jora had opened for the Romanian lied. Not long after, in 1935, with the cycle of *Two Songs* on the verses of D. Ciurezu, Paul Constantinescu is again drawn toward the musical joke, interwoven with the miniature universe, especially in the second lied, *The Ladybird (Gărgăriţa)*.

His contact with the „live” folk music or that from the collections of that time (Bartók, Breazul, Brăiloiu, Drăgoi) and particularly from those of Anton Pann, allowed him to get deeper and deeper into the phenomenon and, especially, a continuous broadening of his sphere of inspiration and of the modal processing resources. Thus, influencing Paul Constantinescu's creation ever since the string trio, Anton Pann's world, one of his most substantially represented melodic sources, is mirrored in two other debut „trials”: *Quintet for Violin and Winds* (1932) and *Sonatine for Violin and Piano* (1933). The neoclassical spirit of the two works continues to materialize itself in pieces like *Prelude for Piano Solo* (1934) and *Burlesque for Piano – fantasy and fugue* - (1938), which are less

representative for his work, but which will give birth, together with the series of maturity concert works, to a real stylistic tendency, that of the neoclassicism of his creation.

The comic direction anticipated by the four fables is diverted towards parody, satiric-dramatic, in the three musical caricatures, with asperities and sharp tones, *From the Military (Din Căţănie)* – suite for winds, battery and piano (1932-1933). *Two Romanian Dances for winds, battery and piano at four hands* (1926) or *Two Symphonic Sketches* (1929) by Theodor Rogalski, the work slips, through the effects of certain stereotype formulas (fanfare signals, hand organ effect on the piano), toward the Stravinskian driving expressionism or the Ravelian orchestral brilliance.

His first compositional climax so far, the opera *A Stormy Night (O noapte furtunoasă)* (1934, revised in 1950), is situated in the line of capitalizing the melodic material of city folklore and, again, the picturesque of Anton Pann's world, combined with the comic-satiric increased canopy in the three sketches toward the grotesque, trivial, mocking, P. Constantinescu thus becoming the initiator of the Romanian comic opera. On the musical sources of the opera, the author himself has left us testimony: “I first needed illustrative themes and motives of the epoch /.../. The neo-Greek musical culture was flourishing. The melismatic style of the music strongly pointed at the oriental influence. /.../ there were also some timid infiltrations of western music, such as the waltz. /.../ I found the leading theme, that of the *Iunion*, which traverses the work from one end to the other, in Anton Pann's collection, *Love Hospital (Spitalul Amurului)* [2].

Contemporary with Mihail Jora's *Six Songs and a Rumba (Şase cântece şi-o rumbă)* (1932), Theodor Rogalski's *Three*

Ballads for Tenor and Orchestra (1940), related to these through a number of features, two more of his works, on Ion Barbu's poetry foundation (1936), musically transplant the aesthetics of *balkanism*, already anticipated by his works of burlesque tone, *From the Military* and *A Stormy Night, Isarlík*, a burlesque poem for voice and wind orchestra, percussion and piano, doubles Ion Barbu's aesthetics with Anton Pann's omnipresent spirit, achieved through evocative-oriental methods – the presence of the enlarged second, the melismatic character, the Phrygian mobility of the second. *King Crypto and Lapp Enigel (Riga Crypto și Laponia Enigel)*, a short ballad for reader, soprano solo, alto solo and small orchestra, combines the modal-diatonic character of the medieval ballad and the modal cadences (Phrygian, with undertone), the temporary heterophonic voice leadings or the specific rhythms of our old songs, in an anticipation of modern synthesis, all in a chromatic colour of spicy consonance harmony.

In the same year, 1936, the composer resumes the folk line inaugurated with the *Romanian Suite*. With a more pronounced ethnographic and entertainment tint, the suite of *Romanian Folk Dances* on tunes from the collections of Dimitrie Vulpian, *Girdle Dances (Jocuri de brâu)* and Pompiliu Pîrvescu, *Round Dance from Cartal (Hora din Cartal)* does not transcend the chamber character and the diatonic structure of a simple harmonization which keeps the original construction of tunes unaltered.

The folkloric direction of Paul Constantinescu's creative conception records two important youth achievements with *Simfonieta* (1937) and the ballet *Wedding in the Carpathians (Nuntă în Carpați)* (1938). These are works of reference by the fact that, in the first piece, the author attempts, for the first time, at a

major orchestra, to achieve a synthesis between the symphonic principle and the authentic folk origin of the tunes and, in the second one, to transfigure artistically the specific substance of the folk dances which are thus „being endowed with values of an unexpected expressive novelty, without letting their musical substance be forgotten, destroyed”, states G. Breazul [1].

Returning to the Byzantine-style creation line (after the two studies) before his creative maturity peak, when he will reach the culmination in this direction through the two oratorios (1946-1948), the composer's musical experience has been enriched with several plunges, in „waves”, into the Romanian psaltic melos: *Liturgy in Psaltic Style* (1936), *Free Variations on a thirteenth-century Byzantine Music for Cello and Orchestra* (1939) and *Byzantine Sonata for Cello Solo* (1940).

Continuing the experience of the Romanian precursors of the genre (D. G. Kiriac, N. Lungu, S. Drăgoi, Z. Vancea), the *Liturgy* opens the way to modal harmonization and polyphony of the lectern singing, methods developed in the great oratorios. Remaining in the diatonic area of oriental church modes, the *Liturgy* recovers techniques belonging to early polyphony. Specific for the work in question, unlike the other composers' solutions and his future accomplishments in this genre, is the fact that Paul Constantinescu has used own themes, composed in a psaltic style.

Regarding the issue of psaltic music harmonization, Paul Constantinescu states the following: „here it all becomes very subtle because not every polyphonic apparel is fit for these fragile tunes, but there is only one to suit their structure. There are certain melodic textures (tropes), rhythmic combinations, colour and ethos, as well as fixed musical forms which, at a certain point, in the same way the

Gregorian song gave the musical forms in western music, to give other new forms to our classical music to come; but this is a matter of the future [7]. The same result, but applied to folk music, is also mentioned by Enescu in a letter to S. Drăgoi: „A tune and especially a folk tune has its natural harmony, the only one that completes it. Any other harmony risks to alter its character, to change its significance” [6].

3. The definite affirmation stadium of Constantinescu's creation (1940-1948)

The climax of Paul Constantinescu's interest in the capitalization of the psalitic melodic potential will be reached with the two works of the vocal-symphonic genre: *Byzantine Easter Oratorio* - "Passion and Resurrection" (1946) and *Byzantine Christmas Oratorio* - "Nativity" (1948) [10]. Doru Popovici believes that, unlike the outstanding oratorios of the XXth century, those of Stravinski, Honegger, etc., Gregorian-inspired medieval themed, Paul Constantinescu's creative contribution is the source of Byzantine inspiration of the medieval theme, „geographical transgression – transition from East to West” [6]. The synthesis he makes within this genre refers to: the documentary element – Byzantine monody, classical form and modal-tonal solutions at the level of harmony, polyphony and orchestration. An expression of the Romanian Byzantinism, the two oratorios have resolved the style unity through the balance between the epic and the lyric element, keeping the psalmodic recitative within the limits of religious recitation (and not following the western model), keeping the diatonic aspect in the melody (avoiding the enlarged second), balance between the melodic vocal factor and the harmonic

choral-orchestral one, the harmonic synthesis between the Western tradition and the Byzantine modal specific, the synthesis between the polyphonic linearism and the vertical-harmonic conception, investing the orchestration with both a chromatic function and that of exaggerating the monody.

Symphony (1944-1945, reorchestrated in 1955), the only major work of this genre, proves to be a continuation of the recent date Romanian symphonism (M. Andricu, A. Mendelsohn, Gh. Dumitrescu, M. Jora, D. Cuclin – *Symphony IV* –), as well as of his own *Simfonieta*. Its musical substance extracts from the folk modal potential Doric, Ionic, Phrygian, Lidic, Aeolic elements, chromatics with enlarged second, achieves modulation by tetrachordal transposition, mutations at adjacent steps, scordatures, illustrates the presence of the undertone in cadences, adding them to the classical construction principles. The author tries to accomplish the thematic and stylistic unity from the combination of folkloric melodic creation and own thematic relief, adjusted to the genre tradition, through classical methods (sequencing, repetition, joining by means of transition), methods which, sometimes, have degenerated into eclecticism.

The reference point for the stage reached by the composer in the folkloric direction, correlated with the neoclassical trend is the *String Quartet* (1947, transformed, in 1955, into the *Concerto for String Orchestra*). After the phases of quoting and creating a folk topic in the *String Concerto*, Paul Constantinescu reaches the verge of a new quality; that of essences extracted from specific folk intonations, thus meant to personalize the stylistic data of a certain language type. The key to safe understanding the style of this work is offered by these lines spoken by the composer in a radio broadcast interview the very year of the concerto's first

audition: „The *Concerto for String Orchestra* is completely liberated from the authentic folk song, but without being unaware of its spirit. The themes are personally created in the structure and elements of the folk song, leaving only vague allusions to the melodic forms and cadences, also using more evolved and more daring harmonic, polyphonic and construction methods” [7].

Simultaneously, the classical principle in a tripartite form is perpetuated, in the revaluation of certain archetypes (sonata, rondo) and of certain methods with a developmental function (thematic sequences), as well as by keeping the frameworks of the *giusto* rhythm.

4. The stabilization of style and language; the orientation towards a certain mass-musical culture (1949-1956)

The *Concerto for Piano and Orchestra* (1952) falls in the same line of synthesis between the folkloric source of inspiration of the themes and the classicism in form. By certain features resembling the string quartet, it opens the series of remarkable neoclassical instrumental concertos, announced, sporadically, with the *Piano Burlesque* (1938) and, recently, with the *Outlaws' Ballad for Cello and Orchestra (Balada haiducească pentru violoncel și orchestră)* (1950) and continued with the concerts dedicated to the violin and harp.

In adapting the folk song to the the rigours of the classical forms (sonata, rondo, etc.) applicable to the concert genre, the most authorized explanations are given by the composer himself: „In the *Concerto for Piano and Orchestra*, out of the need for having open dramatic themes, which can lend themselves to conflict and development, the quoted folk tune takes less space and only when it concerns the more static musical episodes or lyric

emotions. The key-elements which, here, according to P. Constantinescu, „dynamize the music” until „that *music language* which is liberated from direct quoting” are: the prefiguration of a harmonizing system about which, says the author, it is still early to talk and which is not „in discrepancy with the classical harmonization, but only broadens its frames” and, especially, modulation, carried out „either by the harmonic sensitives or by other characteristic elements” [2].

Defining for the so-called modulator of the concerto is the surprising semitonal sliding of the tetrachordal entities in cadences – *tetrachordal scordatures* – based, according to Z. Vancea, „on a method borrowed from our lectern singing: the transposition of a motive, of a melodic line from a tetrachord that is proper to a certain mode, onto the tetrachord of another mode, without a modulation, and so without leaving the tonality” [9].

Around 1950, Paul Constantinescu's concern towards the capitalization of folklore in the musical creation is animated by his will to increase impact on the uneducated public, in accordance with the requirements of the new regime, which ask for an aesthetic and educational purpose of art; in these circumstances, accessibility was becoming its primary attribute. Succeeding to comply with the new requirements, but without restriction, the author creates several groups of works in which, within assumed accessibility, not to violate the ballance of the form, not to minimize the ideatic core of the content or affect the artistry of the processing. We here include *Rapsody II* and the first cycle of *Romanian Dances* for orchestra (1949-1951) – *Olteneasca (From Oltenia)*, *The Shepherd Boy (Ciobănașul)*, *Leanca's Song – An Aromanian Dance (Cântecul Leancăi)*, *A Dance from Oaș, Girdle Dance (Brăul)*, the second cycle of dances (1952-1954) – *Huțulca, Mărânghiile, The*

Serb (Sârba), the coreographic picture *Fair on Mount Găina (Târg pe muntele Găina)*, the cycle of choral works on folk tunes (1950-1952), the *Three Pieces for the Piano* (1952), as well as the concert work - *Outlaws' Ballad for Cello and Orchestra* (1950).

The sequence of these works (written for orchestra or piano) ends in 1952, with the *Three Pieces for the Piano*. The most played one of the cycle is the *Toccata – A Dance from Dobrogea (Joc dobrogean)*, which, alongside with the piano brilliance reveals a motive-ostinated rhythmic pattern which will be revalued in the *Violin Concerto*.

Before being transposed into the great creations, the spirit of archaic ballads rests in the folkloric choral work with a predominantly lyric touch. We are referring to the masterpiece of the choral epic genre – *Miorița*. The *a cappella* choral poem (1952) is based on the processing of three tunes – out of the multiple variants, over a thousand, in circulation – as balladă or carol, in various regions of the country; it is a fortunate example of the use of a modalism which capitalizes the colour of the mobile scales.

Paul Constantinescu's second work, *Pana Lesnea Rusalim*, is found, ten years later, in the valorisation line of outlaw songs, this time invested with the attributes of the dramatic genre. Different in both its stylistic accomplishment and dramatic substance from the comic opera, this social-historical fresco has paid a substantial tribute to the too much sought accessibility and educational message. The symmetry of the periodical closed forms, cantability of themes, the melodic generosity of a stable modal nature, give the work a less personal character.

The solution of a large accessibility pursued with urgency and not without a momentary abdication from the principle of exemplary sacrifice on the altar of self-

exigency, has only partly generated that freshness, depth and authenticity of content and originality of language so fully present in the fruits of Paul Constantinescu's works [7].

Much less numerous than the instrumental works are the ones dedicated to the voice, songs on the verses of our great poets, especially the cycle of *Four Madrigals on the Verses of Mihai Eminescu* (1953) for vocal quartet with piano – the first experience of this kind in the Romanian music.

Improperly referred to as *madrigals*, the author not wanting to revive the spirit of the old form, but, at most, by means of counterpoint or imitative methods of development of the musical phrase, these works, through a specific range of the melody (quart, seventh, octave), refer back to the romance, except the third piece, which reveals the simplicity of a folk song. The composer confesses: „I tried to harmoniously blend the romanticism of the four poems by Eminescu with the folk song, treated, of course, in a polyphonic manner corresponding to the madrigal technique. It was an interesting experience which I had long wanted to achieve” [2].

5. The marking of a new vision of the modal treatment (1957-1963)

His work for voice and piano culminates in its next stage, after 1955, with the cycle of *Seven Songs From Our Lane (Şapte cântece din ulița noastră)* (1959), considered the most valuable of the composer's vocal chamber works. At this stage, we can already speak of the composer's more chromatic style, which characterizes this entire creation period. The specific of these works consists of their epic-dramatic features: the scenario which is sustained vocally-instrumentally by plastic-descriptive means and the dialogues which are musically transposed,

being both attributes of the musical opera; therefore it has been rightly said that these works outperform the previous work, *Pană Lesnea Rusalim*, in artistic mastery.

Following the piano concerto, the *Concerto for Violin and Orchestra* (1957), avoiding the romantic tint of the first, gives a glimpse of the new direction the composer was heading to in the last stage of his creation. Without reaching the depth of expression of the *String Concerto*, the work is an admirable blend of tradition and innovation, between the classical concert spirit and the distinctive aspect of modalism. The fluidity and organic shape are also particularly successful: the first part is a prelude with the appearance of ostinato-Toccata (rhythmic continuum, *perpetuum mobile*) in a sonata form, the second part has the form of a lied, with a small median part *scherzo*, and the last part combines the pattern of a rondo-sonata with the principle of the fugue imitation.

The *Concerto for Harp and Orchestra* (1960), with a predominantly diatonic structure with frequent modal inflexions, allows to discern, in certain places, those essential stylistic changes which will characterize the composer's last work. Thus, the main theme of the *Allegro* in a sonata character has a figurative character (resembling, from this point of view, the similar theme of the violin concerto), but possesses, as a characteristic profile, a wide range of intervals within a generous ambitus, of an instrumental type, with the mobility of certain steps. Z. Vancea notes that such themes, „with a large ambitus and a modulating melodic structure are a unique feature of Paul Constantinescu's melodic thinking, a definite indication of certain essential changes in the style which would have occurred in his creation if death had not ended before his time the composer's activity in full progress" [8].

Completed in the year of the composer's death, the *Triple Concerto for Violin,*

Cello, Piano and Orchestra is the culmination of Paul Constantinescu's creation, marking the moment when the composer's thinking reached the phases of *essentiality* – conception of own thematic material of folk-Byzantine resonance, *sublimation* – internalized content and formal concision, *synthesis* – between the local modal potential source of inspiration and his means of processing music. The last work is a turning point in the composer's musical thinking, a bridge with large openings to the future of the Romanian composers, of paramount importance for the Romanian concert and symphonic repertoire. The modal language of the composer, past the diatonic or diatonic-chromatic phase, shows an almost exclusive interest in the chromatic aspect, selecting from the Byzantine modal space scales belonging to the chromatic or enharmonic genre and retaining from the folklore those dynamic principles of the *diatonic chromatics* whose laws have been synthesized by Gh. Firca [3].

It is thus possible to say that a high level of the use of chromatic modalism is reached, but developed on our local modal background, which the composer organically assimilated. So, with the help of *composing* operations of small modes, the composer reaches to the same modal results rich in elements which have been also reached in the folkloric or classical practice: *the acoustic modes, the tone-semitone mode, the tone scale or the dodecaphonic scale*. As a starting point for achieving these true structural models, the following methods can be mentioned: the intensive use of the Lidic quart and the Lidic tetrachord (centers of the tone scale), of the acoustic tetrachord and of the Locrian or Istrian pentachord, tetrachordal scordatura (modal premises for the tone-semitone mode), mobility of the second (in the reversed chromatic formula or in the whole chromatics). For all these tendencies

manifest in the composition of this last work, we can consider the *Triple Concerto* as a piece lying on the border of the two major modal systems: the natural - folkloric - modal system, and the artificial – synthetic - modal system.

6. Conclusions

This brief overview of Paul Constantinescu's creation, illustrating all musical genres, can show the place which Zeno Vancea has reserved for the composer in the pleiad of the representatives in the post-Enescu generation, that of assuming the „mission of great importance to create a musical art with powerful national features. Nurtured by the folk song and dance, their art blends the direct expressiveness of the folk tune – often of archaic forms – with the complexity of the contemporary composition technique” [8].

The conclusion is that the innovative contribution of Paul Constantinescu to the progress of the Romanian music become real in: enlarging the processing area of the folk music with regard to the contemporary folk trend, building the foundation of his creation in Byzantine style, the intuition of the peculiarities regarding the comic musical elements and molding this material in the forms and types specific of the cultured art, by means of processing techniques adequate for a personalized modal language.

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