

## EXPRESSIONIST TENDENCIES IN PAUL CONSTANTINESCU'S CREATION

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**Abstract:** *Expressionism (Balkanism, Orientalism) represents for Paul Constantinescu, a modality to express a folkloric background. Adapting this universal tendency to the autochthonous specificity and framing it within the Carpathian-Danubian space outline the so-called Balkanism or Orientalism. One of the features of this direction is the comic which, for Paul Constantinescu, depicts differentiated expressions: the humor, the grotesque, the transcendent comic (directed towards philosophical spheres), each nuance being musically underlain by certain procedures, detached from the sphere of the modal. The works inscribing in this direction stand for music with text, or, at least programmatic.*

**Keywords:** *Paul Constantinescu, expressionism, comic direction, modal language.*

### 1. Introduction

Adapting this universal direction to the autochthonous specificity and enhancing it in the creation outline the second facet of the Romanian spirituality, beside the smothered feeling. Framing within the aesthetical limits specific to the Balkanic-Danubian space, the denomination of *Balkanity* or *Balkanism* was conveyed to it [1]. The specific category of aesthetic Balkanism is the comic, as the artist's detached, observing attitude towards its own human condition. Most works inscribing within aesthetic Balkanism stand for music with text or, at least, based on a literary support or on a programmatic argument. The originality of these works mainly resides in the manner of sonorously appareling the literary text. Through this

orientation, the tendencies of artistically enhancing the attributes of the popular chant may be doubled by a more lucid, more realistic perception modality.

The composer who instituted within Romanian music, the autochthonous expressionist orientation, expression of the humor, sarcasm, grotesque, is deemed to be Mihail Jora. This orientation was taken over and carried on by his disciples: Constantin Silvestri, Dinu Lipatti, Paul Constantinescu.

### 2. Facets of the comic in Paul Constantinescu

Considering the critical message of Caragiale's oeuvre to be of maximum actuality, the musicologist Clemansa Liliana Firca perceives and records its

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capacity to allow being “not only «discovered», but also acquired” [3]. There is about creating an entire literary, musical, plastic vein, which, both for literature (Filimon, Caragiale, Barbu, Urmuz, Ionescu, Sorescu), and for music (Otescu, Mihalovici, Jora, Constantinescu), started, at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, from the same forerunner – Anton Pann. The source of inspiration merges with a certain layer of folklore, town-like, strongly colored by the Greek-Oriental influences of the time. Therefore, the creators having stylistically perpetuated this source were framed by the researchers within the so-called *Orientalism*. The musical implications of this orientation can be detected on the level of a melodic language inspired (or even quoted) from the vocal or instrumental-fiddler’s town-like folklore: romance, fanfare music, funeral march motives, oriental-coloratura melodies or pertaining to the soft and entertainment music following the epoch’s trends, musical portrayals, ostinato motor rhythms, orchestration stridencies, tension of chromatic harmony.

As Cl. L. Firca notices, the aesthetics of the creations of this orientation is pre-eminently achieved in the sphere of the caricature-like, comic-grotesque representations and, consequently, musically manifests on the level of the technical modalities [3]. In Paul Constantinescu’s creation pertaining to this orientation, the comic embodies several nuances, each of them being musically underlain by certain procedures; detached from the sphere of the modal, they manifest themselves in the melodic, harmonic language (chromatic advanced), or polyphonic-linear (where poly-modalism may be noticed as avant-garde procedure).

Consequently, the expressions that the comic embodies in Paul Constantinescu, in close correlation with the literary-

programmatic argument, are: humor, grotesque and transcendent comic. Each of them, however, will illustrate personalized nuances, with slight shifts towards related expressive spheres.

## 2.1. Humor

There looms in the portrait sketch – *Four Fables for Piano* (1929-1932), the Arghezi-type miniature – *Songs* on lyrics by Tudor Arghezi (1929-1932), *Mice Round Dance* on lyrics by Arghezi (1962), *Songs* on lyrics by D. Ciurezu (1935).

Pre-eminently cultivating this expressive sphere (mostly bent towards caricature and irony than towards grotesque) likewise pertains to Mihail Jora, as regards the miniature piano style, being obtained through special techniques of musical scoring. The caricature style is the effect of the musical contradictions, of the mismatches generated by the false relations, surprising scordaturas, accord layers etc. Modal vision is, here, placed at the service of a clearly expressed programmatism. If Jora, under the auspices of this aesthetics, also conceived musical works wherein the Romanian folkloric element is, in general, absent – *Joujoux pour Ma Dame* and *Cortège* (1925), some *Pictures and Pranks* (1948, 1959, 1963), we cannot say the same about Paul Constantinescu. As far the latter is concerned, beside neoclassical tendencies, the expressionism is a modality of expressing a folkloric basic fund. *Fables for Piano*, *Songs for Voice and Piano* have a Romanian resonance, being constructed on a melody created in folkloric spirit. Deviating this melodic spirit towards the comic, humoristic factor is achieved through specific procedures:

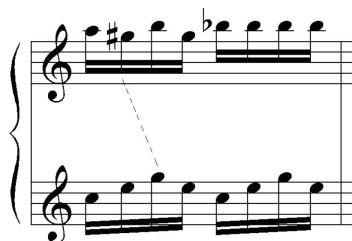
- Jamming formulas that create disequilibria (scordaturas, decomposition of the internal

equilibrium of the accord, modal complementariness).

- Portrayals with musically specific procedures.
- Comical use of some attack manners.

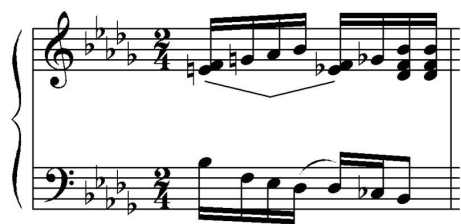
The apparition of the scordatura in the melody, in contradiction with the static harmonic plan, may result in the false relation, as it appears in the example below, extracted from the Fable no.4 for Piano.

Ex 1:



Sometimes, its sudden apparition in the harmony results in almost instantaneously changing the mood – a phenomenon pertaining to the world of childhood, characterized through psychological instability (ex. 2 – *Mitzura's Sleeping Song*).

Ex. 2:



Decomposing the internal equilibrium of the accord is one of the 20<sup>th</sup> century's

searches for equilibrium, also present in the Romanian creation. One of the materializations of this tendency consists in adding the *ajoutées* elements, meant to color, to dissimulate, to refresh the basic sonorities. Places above or beneath the basic layer, these elements often convey to the accord, a percussive effect (ex. 3 – Fable nr.4 for Piano).

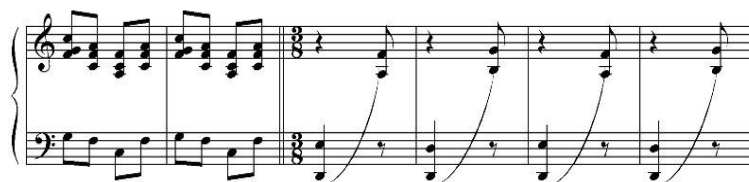
Ex. 3:



We subscribe, here, to the remark uttered by the musicologist Gh. Firca: “What was recognized in tonal harmony as melodic note, consequently as transient second between the functions of the accords, was treated as foreign from these accords. The reverse is valuable for modal harmonization, [...] which proves, once more, the determination from the melody of the modal harmony.” [2].

The portrayals achieved with musically specific procedures resort to rhythmical-harmonic entities with pronounced characterological sense. For instance, the lied *The Bugler* (lyrics by Al. O. Teodoreanu) is constructed on the opposition of the two basic elements: the motive-signal (the bugler) versus the dancing figure (the princess).

Ex. 4:



The special use of some attack elements, as *staccato*, becomes, sometimes, a musical pretext for illustrating the comic (ex. 5 *Mitzura's Sleeping Song*).

Ex. 5



## 2.2. Grotesque

It is present in the works *From the Army* (1933), the lied *The Bugler* (1955), partially in *Seven Songs from Our Lane* (1959) and especially in the parody *A Stormy Night* (1934).

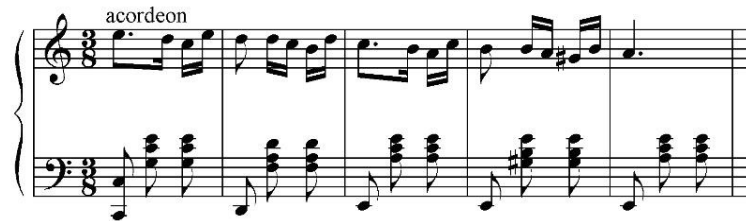
In guise of musical transposition of a playwriting of the closed space, of a petty world, deprived of signification, deprived of ideals, Paul Constantinescu's grotesque-oriented creation will resort to comic procedures within the scope of bantering; the characters' taking into laughter, mockery, derision, irony could not be more adequately achieved than through "characterizing music", mockingly used, in association with the characters' features. The techniques of the mocking "musical props" resort to deforming, disfiguring, distorting musical elements. They usually pertain to the harmonic field, through mismatches between the melodic diatonic (sometimes downright trivial, frivolous, as

it appears in the "fashionable" melodies) and the harmonic chromatics (modal or, still, tonal). "This violent and spectacular music succeeds, however, on the level of a shocking aesthetics and under the appearance of some language «extravagancies» which troubled their contemporaries, to appropriate, as national art, an aesthetic and technical set of issues, at the same time European and modern" – Cl. L. Firca posits [3].

Among the means used by Paul Constantinescu to mockingly materialize his intentions, there is worth noticing the enhancement of the antiquated character of some melodic typologies: waltz, romance, chansonette. The composer proceeds to modifying (altering) the initial character of these circulation melodies, through artifices from the arsenal of the musical parody. Hence the mechanistic nature of some musical clichés, particularized through standardized marches (detached, for instance, from Ziţa's waltz of slum, suggesting, through returns, the monotony and the inertia of the petty-bourgeois social environment of the oeuvre *A Stormy Night*, ex. 6).

Resorting to stereotype accompaniment manners, in mannerist formulas, of character (waltz, marsh), also creates hilarious moments in other musical works, such as the suite *From the Army* (ex. 7).

Ex. 6



Ex. 7



Another mocking modality is the appeal to a rich poly-modal universe (harmonic layers, added seconds – “sonorous clusters”, as Terényi E. calls them [4]), illustrated in the example extracted from the oeuvre *A Stormy Night*.

Ex. 8

Actul II, Scena V



Faithfully following the text, embodying it in the melodic outlines, enhancing it through the profiles whose rhythm observes the laws of prosody, integrated in a crescendo conform, in the oeuvre *A Stormy Night*, to the tensional rise of the action. The sequences (often fragmented) orientated towards culminations, sometimes invested with suggestive-onomatopoeic senses, such as the interludes of the orchestra, which precede

or succeed to the opening / closing of the curtains, genuine “eddies in a glass of water” – as A. Vieru calls them [5] give rise to a superposition of motives, themes, melodies. In the spirit of such musical procedures, a reply to those used in literature, plastic or visual arts, cinematography, I. Anghel deems that “the stimulus of the Balkan attitude” is Urmuz [1]. As regards his style, A. Vieru plastically expresses when he deems that “every phrase is in itself a collection of fragments which, gathered, would like to trigger laughter; it is discontinuous, it breaks into smithereens and it has in its movement an emergency, much as the one from the silent film” [5].

### 2.3. Transcendent comic

Starting from I. Anghel’s observation: “Another manner of referring to Balkanism may be the one that the poet Ion Barbu arouses at the borderline between the playful, narrative spirit and the transcendent, philosophical essence of his versified epos.”

[1]. Here too, the reference to Orient may be reminded, its “alluring ambience” [1]. It is not by chance that Paul Constantinescu resorts to Ion Barbu’s lyrics in two musical works: *Riga Crypto and the Lappish Enigel* – small ballad for lector, soprano solo, alto solo and small orchestra, and *Isarlík* – burlesque poem for voice, brass orchestra, xylophone, battery and piano (1936). The reference to Orient is musically achieved through procedures that enhance a certain ethos: specific scales and intervals (augmented second, diminished intervallic), melismatic rhythm. The caricature effect is doubled by a playful spirit, enhanced, in its turn, through minimal (pentatonic) scales, the play of the mobile steps, typified harmonic formulas, “beats” of second.

Transcending the comic towards the philosophical essence brings along the germ of the tragic-comic, consisting in the impossibility of materializing the love between two incompatible partners – such as the couple Riga Crypto-Lappish Enigel – love which remains ideal. The same philosophical message is detached from the other programmatic musical work for voice and piano *The Bugler*, on Al. O. Teodoreanu’s lyrics.

### 3. Conclusions

Focused on enhancing the musical comic, the expressionist tendencies of Paul Constantinescu’s creation reveal noticeable differentiations on the level of the expression and modalities of musical backing. This way, the humor (caricature) refers to a miniature-type programmatism (*Four Fables for Piano*), specific to Arghezi (*Songs for Voice and Piano*, on lyrics by Arghezi, Ciurezu etc.). The grotesque acquires tragic-comic, absurd nuances (*From the Army*, *The Bugler*, *Seven Songs from Our Lane*), or frivolous, mocking, realist-critic, specific to

Caragiale (*A Stormy Night*). The transcendent comic directs the Balkanic spirit to the borderline of the sublimated play, of the playfulness with Turkish-Orient elements (*Isarlík*), combined with the philosophical essence of Ion Barbu’s lyrics (*Riga Crypto and the Lappish Enigel*). Under Anton Pann’s tutelage, the inspiration source merges with the town-like folklore, colored by the Greek-Oriental influences of the time. On technical musical level, the humor is rendered through jamming formulas, which create disequilibria; the grotesque is obtained through enhancing the antiquated character and through disfiguring some circulation melodies and the transcendent comic is brightened by the oriental color in the potential of the intonation and by elements which enhance the playful spirit.

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