

## Co(ho)quet(us) for two flutes by Diana Rotaru: Performing Peculiarities

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**Abstract:** *This article is dedicated to the analysis of the piece “Co(ho)quet(us) for two flutes” written by Diana Rotaru, a young-generation Romanian composer, in 2011. It examines the new methods of sound production on the flute, linking them with musical language, the architectonics of the piece, as well as the composer's explanations and remarks about the flute's role in her oeuvre, the significance of these new sound production methods, and her relationships with famous contemporary flute performers. Emphasis is given to modern flute playing techniques such as Aeolian sounds, slap-tongue, and tongue-ram.*

**Key-words:** *Flute, duo, Aeolian sounds, slap-tongue, tongue ram, modern sound production techniques, performance*

### 1. Introduction

Diana Rotaru<sup>2</sup> (born 1981) was part of the young generation of Romanian composers. Representatives of this generation, on one side, inherit the esteemed traditions of the Romanian composition school of the 20th century (it is important to mention that Diana Rotaru's mother is Doina Rotaru, who is also a distinguished author both nationally and abroad).

Simultaneously, Diana Rotaru integrates into her compositions, various contemporary innovations, seamlessly blending musical art with other art forms and domains. She uses new technologies, creating music for dance shows, multimedia projects, and short film soundtracks, among others. From this point of view, she is undeniably a “child” of the 21st century.

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Approaching the conceptual components of the author's creative works, within them, as posited by scholars, we can discern a fusion of the most relevant ideas and concepts: hypnagogia, which research into the transitional states between sleep and wakefulness; the perception of unconscious imagery; female psychology; humor; and a distinctive interpretation of folklore.

## 2. Diana Rotaru's Genre Palette

Diana Rotaru's compositional domain tends towards chamber music. Even the opera genre, in her interpretation, becomes a chamber composition. An example of this is the mini-buffa opera "Three Lears", written in 2018 and performed by three musician-actors: viola, horn, and trombone players. Another example is the chamber opera "În trup" (In the Body) from 2016, for soprano (or mezzo-soprano) and instrumental ensemble which includes oboe, clarinet, violin, viola, cello, percussion, and piano. To this list, we can add the opera "Oculus Scene 8 from OPERA 9" (2017) for mezzo-soprano, bass, and ensemble (oboe, clarinet, violin, viola, and piano), in which the author uniquely treats a symbolic theme in Romanian music – the Oedipus myth.

The composer's instrumental chamber works, which actively involve wind instruments, make up an extensive list: "Unevensong" for ensemble (2010) for flute, oboe, clarinet, mandolin, guitar, harp, piano, violin, viola, cello, and double bass; "Oul" (The Egg) for alto saxophone, trombone, violin, and cello (2011); "Wonderland" for solo clarinet and clarinet quintet (2019); "Red Hot" for violin, clarinet, cello, and piano (2015/2017); "Silence is Ornament" for oboe, clarinet, violin, cello, and percussion (2011), among others.

However, a significant part of the composer's work consists of compositions for flute and chamber instrumental ensembles that feature the flute. For this solo instrument, the composer has crafted works like "Vorace" for flute, and "Solomonarul" for alto flute (2018). Among the pieces written for flute duets or flute paired with other instruments are: "Co(ho)quet(us)" for two flutes (2011); "The Rite of Seduction" for flute and tape (2006); "Play!" for flute and harpsichord or piano (2007); "Meanders" for bass flute and alto saxophone (2009); "2 little whos" for soprano and alto flute (2014).

For chamber configurations that include the flute, Diana Rotaru created works like "Symplegade" for flute, piano, and percussion (2003); "Shakti" for saxophone and large ensemble (2004) which includes flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon, trumpet, trombone, tuba, harp, piano, percussion, two violins, viola, cello, and

double bass; "What lips my lips..." for mezzo-soprano, flute, and two percussionists (2006); "Tremurcutremur" for flute, violin, cello, and piano (2008); "Hypnos" for ensemble (2008), which consists of flute, oboe, clarinet, harp, trumpet, trombone, percussion, violin, viola, cello, and double bass; "Hipnagogie" for soloists, ensemble, and tape (2011); "Aud" for noh voice, tape recorder, and bass flute (2015); "Verde" for C flute and bass flute, violin, cello, and piano (2015/2017), among others. The ensemble composition is as follows: soprano, flute, bassoon, flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon, trombone, two violins, viola, cello, double bass.

A smaller, distinct group consists of orchestral works, exemplified by the composition "Corale și Cutii Muzicale" (2005) for a pair staff of the orchestra: two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, two trumpets, two trombones, tuba, harp, cello, piano, three percussion instruments, 1st and 2nd violins, violas, cellos, and double basses. The pinnacle of the composer's interest in the timbre, technical, and expressive capacities of the flute is embodied in the unique composition "Play/Stop/Rewind" for flute orchestra (2007), comprised of 8 C flutes, 6 alto flutes, 6 bass flutes, and 4 octobass flutes.

### **3. The Importance of the Flute in the Composer's Work**

The information provided above allows us to conclude that the flute holds significant interest for the composer. It is included in a variety of genres - from solo pieces to ensembles or orchestral compositions. The first example is the unprecedented work "Redare/Oprire/Înapoi" (Play/Stop/Rewind), specially created for a flute orchestra. Moreover, the author is equally intrigued by the performance capabilities and expressive potential of the entire range of instruments within the flute family – from the piccolo to the bass flute.

This conclusion is further confirmed by the statements of Diana Rotaru herself. Here's how the composer explains her interest in this instrument: "I don't particularly gravitate towards the flute, but fate has led me to extraordinary musicians, masters of this incredibly versatile instrument. I first mention my "musical godfather", Ion Bogdan Ștefănescu, who first performed a work of mine. I was in the tenth grade when he played "Rhoë" for solo flute, my first completed piece, on the stage of the Cantacuzino Palace Museum Hall. It was a dreamlike experience - I was overwhelmed with emotion in the audience, and Ionuț performed wonders with my piece. He gave it wings I never even imagined I could have, thereby giving me the courage to continue on this fascinating, sometimes

frustrating, but always joyous path of creation. I also want to mention the collaboration and profound friendship with Ana Chifu<sup>3</sup>, along with engagements with Matei Ioachimescu and the brilliant Mario Caroli, a performer unique in the world, known for his phenomenal soulful dedication to his stage performances, to music and to sound. I am sure many more collaborations will emerge. The flute is a fabulous instrument due to its versatility, its wealth of effects and colors, and the nearly infinite palette of emotions it can convey to the audience."

At the center of our attention is the piece "Co(ho)quet(us)" for two flutes, written in 2011. The work is dedicated to Ana Chifu and Zacharias Tarpagos<sup>4</sup>, who were its first performers. The premiere took place in April 2011, in the concert hall of the George Enescu Museum in Bucharest. It's worth noting that Ana Chifu is one of the most recognized flutists of the younger generation, actively promoting contemporary music in Romania, Greece, and other European countries.

Zacharias Tarpagos, like Ana Chifu, belongs to the young generation of musicians. Graduated of the University of Thessaloniki and the Greek Conservatory in Athens, he further his skills at the Royal Academy of Music in London. His artistic biography includes performances in top concert halls across Europe and the USA, collaboration with the Greek Radio Symphony Orchestra, and conductors Vladimir Ashkenazy and Theodore Kurrentzis. The artist also pays special attention to the interpretation of contemporary music. It's worth adding that in the Republic of Moldova, the piece was performed for the first time on October 18, 2021, during the international festival "Zilele Muzicii Noi", with the flutists being the author of this article and Maria Serbinov.

#### **4. Artistic Conception of the Composition and Treatment of the Work's**

It is essential to pay special attention to decoding the title. The author points to the base word "coquet", which can be translated as "coquette". If we consider the first of the syllables enclosed in brackets, this part of the word translates as "hiccup". The ultimate meaning of the last word can only be explained by the author herself. However, we can cognize of the presence of "us" (in Romanian "noi") suggests the idea of mutual flirtation. This hypothesis is supported by two arguments: the fact that the piece is performed by flutists of

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<sup>3</sup> Ana Chifu at <https://www.academia-sighisoara.com/en/Artist/chifu-ana>

<sup>4</sup> Zacharias Tarpagos at <https://www.principalchairs.com/flute/zacharias-tarpagos/>

different genders and the author's note at the beginning of the musical text: "Allegro giocoso, delicately flirting". This idea corresponds to other observations of the author that appear in different sections of the work – "sensually" (m. 24) and "Tempo I, very fluid and playful" (m. 80).

However, let's seek the author's explanation regarding the significance of the piece's title, which we took from an interview conducted by the author of this article on October 10, 2023. Here are the explanations provided by the composer: "The work is a playful miniature written for a pair of dear flutist friends: Ana Chifu and Zacharias Tarpagkos, who performed it in its premiere in 2011. The title combines the words 'coquette' and 'hoquetus', suggesting a playful, flirtatious attitude – sometimes more hesitant, more shy, sometimes bolder –, but also the clock-like rhythmic precision required of the two performers, who 'pass' melodic fragments to each other using the medieval technique of alternation. The measure bars represent nothing more than a motivic breakdown and a guide for the synchronization of the performers."

## 5. The Architectonics and Musical Language of the Piece

The architectonics of the work is constructed from several "blocks" that differ in terms of their musical texture. Thus, the initial section spans the measures 1-13, the second one measures 14-27, and the third one covers measures 28-48. Following this is a section that includes measures 49-58. Another section ranges from measures 59-64. The final section, with the composer's indication - Tempo I, is presented in measures 65-83. This is similar to the initial section in terms of its texture and melody characteristics and theme, while the other sections introduce new musical material. Consequently, the structure of this work appears to be complete, framed as a b c d e a, organically combining two contrasting principles – the reprise and the absence of a reprise (non-reprise).

Here are some examples from the scores for each section:

## Section a:

Allegro giocoso, Delicately flirting ♩ = 120

Flute 1  
 Flute 2  
 slap-tongue  
 tongue-ram  
 aeol. + key perc.

Fig. 1. Diana Rotaru – Co(ho)quet(us), mm.1-6

## Section b:

Fl. 1  
 Fl. 2  
 Fl. 1  
 Fl. 2

Fig. 2. Diana Rotaru – “Co(ho)quet(us), mm.14-17”

## Section c:

A tempo, very rhythmical, like a precise mechanism

Fl. 1  
 Fl. 2

Fig. 3. Diana Rotaru – “Co(ho)quet(us), mm.27-30”

## Section d:

Fig. 4. Diana Rotaru – “Co(ho)quet(us), mm.48-50”

## Section e:

Fig. 5. Diana Rotaru – “Co(ho)quet(us), mm.59-62”

The musical language of the analyzed creation is quite complex for performers, both rhythmically and intonationally. Rhythmically, it is filled with complex rhythmic patterns that recall the rhythmic thinking of Olivier Messiaen and other 20th-century composers. Intonationally, the dominant role of the third interval is notable, a fact even confirmed by the composer: “The obsessive third (alternatively minor and major) resembles either a bird song or an insistent bell, transforming into a continuous mechanism in the second section of the piece, and then into ornamentation that synchronize and phase-shift successively. The performers chase each other always in the same register, and the theatricality they must

exhibit is an essential factor in the piece's concept; however, this doesn't mean rhythmic freedom, quite the opposite. The amorous play — and consequently, the stage play — has its fixed rules.”

The relationship between the parts is dialogical, due to which quasi-polyphonic techniques are found in the score: repetitions of motifs and elements, generating a canonic imitation effect. The parts are interdependent, what in psychology is called “mirroring”, where each participant carefully perceives the other's part, reacts to it, and “speaks its language.” This observation aligns entirely with the conceptual aspirations of the composer, who is interested in the psychological characteristics of modern human thought. On the other hand, the music is very spectacular, theatrical; behind the flute pieces are characters with their own nature. It is essential to note that the three elements of musical language — pitch, rhythm, and dynamics — are written in great detail and require the same precision in performance.

## **6. Interpretive Characteristics in the Context of Modern Musical Notation Techniques**

The specificity of this opus lies in the active involvement of modern musical notation methods and sound production techniques. The use of modern techniques and methods of sound production is a characteristic feature of Diana Rotaru's style. Here is how she comments on her passion for so-called “extended interpretative techniques”: “Why do I use extended techniques in general, not only in the case of the flute? – the composer asks. – Because I love unconventional 'different' sonorities, I adore their extraordinary emotional contribution; these 'effects' are never used in a 'gratuitous' or purely spectacular manner but are charged with meaning and emotion. In general, the explosion of colors, the timbre spices of the 20th century fascinate me, and I try to explore them as much as possible.”

From the perspective of a flute player, we must point out that analyzing modern techniques and flute-playing modalities has its own characteristics and challenges. Delving into the history of the issue, it should be emphasized that there is no unified system of these techniques. The first attempt to systematize and decipher the numerous modern flute-playing techniques was made in the 1950s by the Italian author Bruno Bartalozzi in his work “New Sound for Woodwind”, aimed at woodwind instrument players.

Even though some of the theses set out in this work are now outdated, it served as a catalyst for other authors to further develop this topic. In the 1980s-



90s, Pierre-Yves Artaud's works – “Flûtes au present”/ “Present Day Flutes” and “La Flûte” appeared, and in the 2000s – the work of K. Levine and K. Mitropoulos-Bott, “The Techniques of Flute Playing”, among others.

Of course, today much information can be found on the Internet, but a unified system has yet to be created. Moreover, different composers define modern flute-playing techniques in varied ways, making these creations harder to understand and perform. Often, more time and effort are spent trying to understand the composer's intent than studying the musical text itself (especially if there's no possibility for dialogue with the author and collaboration in working on the creation).

Regarding the techniques used by Diana Rotaru in this work, let us focus on the author's indications, represented by triangles, which can be found in measures 6, 11, 77, 78. This procedure is sometimes indicated by hollow round notes, but here the composer uses triangles. As a result, a written explanation and commentary on how to execute these notations are often necessary, which could aid in facilitating the interpretation. Ideally, an application with a detailed description of each technique for the performer would be necessary. However, this situation also has positive outcomes, stimulating the performer's thinking and creativity, granting them a degree of freedom in treating expressive means.

The group of procedures used by Diana Rotaru pertains to noise techniques. There are two flute positions where it is possible to play with air noise – open (classic) and closed (when the instrument's hole is completely sealed). In measure 6, we note the author's remark “aeol.” These are open sounds; the flute is held in a classic position, but the noise of the air is utilized: the keys are closed, but the sound does not resonate fully, leaving only a rustling.

In O. Tantsov's work, “Новые приемы игры на флейте” (New Techniques of Flute Playing), the following definition of Aeolian sounds is given: “Aeolian sounds are a playing technique where only the breath can be heard. The name derives from the ancient Greek god of the wind, Aeolus. Just as the strings of an Aeolian harp sound from the wind, so too does the flute begin to resonate from a stream of air directed towards its barrel. In this case, the actual flute sounds should not be heard” (Танцов 2011, 18).

It is important to emphasize that in the analyzed work, Diana Rotaru uses Aeolian sounds in conjunction with key valves. This technique is marked in the score as key perc. (see m. 6, 11), which implies a synthesis of noise and the clicking sound. According to O. Tantsov, key clicking is “a very widespread effect in modern literature for woodwind instruments. This technique was first employed on the flute by E. Varèse in his famous piece ‘Density 21.5’” (Танцов 2011, 19).

According to the author, there are two options for interpreting this technique. "Firstly, the finger simply falls firmly on the key of the corresponding note after any other. For the second - any free finger strongly taps the key (for example, the second finger of the left hand) while playing notes, even with the other hand. The same thing is possible when playing a long note, and the other hand taps the keys" (ibidem).

It should be added that in the open position, various gradations of noise and sound are possible. In m. 46, 72, and 74, the Aeolian sound is used in combination with the traditional sound production technique; thus, in measure 74, on the notes b, des, b a combination of both techniques is used, while in the second half of the measure – the Aeolian sound with the addition of flutter tonguing. A similar example (Aeolian sound used together with flutter tonguing) can be found in measures 75 and 77, and in m. 78 - the Aeolian sound is combined with a key tap.

Thus, the composer uses the Aeolian sound in combination with various other techniques. As a result, the piece presents different versions of the relationship between noise and sound: sound alone, noise alone, and multiple intermediate version involving both techniques. A smooth transition from noise to sound is possible or a combination - half noise, half sound. It should be emphasized that towards the end of the work, there is an intensified tendency to combine various new sound production techniques.

Among the percussive effects, the composer uses slap tongue. This technique was popularized by jazz saxophonists and clarinetists beginning in the 1920s. O. Tantsov writes: "The term slap-tongue itself (disambiguation "slap of the tongue") is not entirely suitable for the flute, but it spread due to the "light touch" of B. Bartalozzi. It would be more appropriate to use the term pizzicato" (Танцов 2011, 16). The execution of this technique is accomplished by the movement of the tongue, pronouncing the soft syllable "te" (...); in this case, the air does not enter the instrument. A rapid pizzicato is possible using the soft syllable "ke" (...). This leads to the double pizzicato (teke-teke) and triple (tekeke-tekeke)" (Танцов 2011, 16).

The interpretation of this technique is associated with breathing challenges. As the previously cited author states, "The breath holding that occurs in this case is, of course, unfavorable for the performer, so long-term use of this technique without the possibility of breathing is not recommended" (ibidem).

Another modern performance technique is the tongue ram. According to O. Tantsov, this term translates to "thrust tongue." "To perform the tan-rem (...) you have to close the embouchure with the tongue, very tightly, with force. At this time, the flute is turned inward, and the tongue goes deep into the embouchure.

The air, which is forcibly sent into the instrument, produces a sound a major seventh lower than the used fingering. It is recommended that this technique be used in the low register (Танцов 2011, 16).

In this composition, this procedure is used primarily in the first octave, as it does not sound in other octaves (mm. 1, 75, 78, 80). Tongue ram is used in a closed position, meaning, the flute's hole is entirely "turned" towards the performer: thus, the written note sounds a seventh lower. For example, if we press the note c with the finger, we obtain a sound a seventh lower (d, m. 4). This technique can be found in measures 7, 8, 9, 10, 14. It is particularly successful, especially when performed on the bass flute, as the click is heard very clearly.

According to O. Танцов, "...to execute the 'tan rem' (TR), one must forcefully close the embouchure with the tongue. In this case, the flute is turned inwards, and the tongue deeply penetrates the embouchure. The air, which is forcefully sent into the instrument, produces a sound a major seventh lower than the used fingering... Another version of this technique is based on moving the tongue forward, but with a stop on the palate" (Танцов 2011, 17).

Among other performance techniques that flutists should be attentive to, we note the trills in m. 44-48, which have their own characteristics: the graphic differences within the trill indicate the speed of the trill – slow or fast. In m. 47, the frullato technique is used, a rather typical, common technique that does not pose challenges to performing artists. Another technique is glissando, graphically indicated as a small line connecting two close notes (m. 38).

## 7. Conclusions

To summarize, the piece for two flutes, Co(ho)quet(noi) by Diana Rotaru, a Romanian composer belonging to the younger generation, is an extremely modern composition in terms of musical language, harmonious and well-thought-out regarding its structure, based on the integration of modern sound production techniques. The various techniques – Aeolian sounds, Aeolian sounds combined with key percussion, slap tongue, tongue ram, and others – create a unique, individual sound universe of the composer's creation, reflecting her ideas about the world, music, and significant concepts of human existence.

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