

General aspects of *Dumitru Capoianu's* music in the feature film *Adventures in the Danube Delta*

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Abstract: *Romanian film music of the 20th century was a very well-developed field, especially in terms of symphonic music. However, research and musicology studies on this cinematic period are at the beginning, as there is little information on this area. Dumitru Capoianu is among the composers with an already established career in concert music who have also taken the step towards film music. Its adaptability to the script was realized in soundscapes of extended durations or in melodic themes that became a sound exponent of the characters and the action, transposing in them moral valences, particularities of age, tensions and also musical illustrations of the video landscape. All these qualities and the compositional patterns that he and other Romanian composers followed can also be observed in the feature film *Adventures in the Danube Delta* (1973), part of the particularities of the musical language elements used closely related to the script being presented and analyzed in this article.*

Keywords: *Romanian film music; Dumitru Capoianu; symphonic music; film music techniques*

1. Dumitru Capoianu - short profile of the film music composer

Romanian film music is still an under-researched field and there are some modest attempts to bring this branch of musicology out of the shadow cone in which it is. Composers who wrote music for Romanian films before the 90s had also illustrious careers in concert music, including *Dumitru Capoianu* among them. Although he had a remarkable career in concert music, in the case of film music too little is

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known about his work, this being a consequence of the low importance that was generally given to this field before from the 90s in Romania. However, the quality of his scores for cinematographic projects cannot be contested, the lack of research on his work in this regard being an existing reality for all Romanian composers of film music. In cinematography, he was a frequent collaborator of directors *Ion Popescu Gopo* - both for animated short films and fiction feature films with actors - but also for *Gheorghe Naghi*.² The successful duo *Capoianu-Gopo* was emphasized and appreciated by the director, declaring in his book *Films, films, films, films* (1963) that "The music was composed by a composer on whose piano there are more screws than musical notes. The composer is *Dumitru Capoianu* with a rich imagination, always modifying and improvising chords, even during the recordings..." (Roman 1964) He composed music for more than 30 different genres movies as: animation, fantastic short film, fantastic feature film (with actors), comedy, political film, drama, musical, children's film, adventure movie.

The articles and film chronicles of those times are of great importance and relevance for researchers who want to form an overview of the general atmosphere existing at that time, but also of the style approached by the composers for each individual project. For example, a certain film can constrain the final result of the soundtrack due to the director's vision, the editing, the censorship or a script that lacks dynamics. In this situation, the musical score suffers, a fact often recorded in the chronicles of those times, specialists noting in the case of some composers the deviation from their established style. *Dumitru Capoianu's* vision about film music is relevant, stating that "film music does not have its own laws as music, it is a fusion, a result, the composer having to bring with him to the casting platform baggage in which to he learns dance, pop, chamber, choral, especially symphonic music, while taking care not to become discordant with the film." (Roman 1964)

2. *Alarm in the Danube Delta* (1975) - general data on the film

The complexity of information and the adaptability that a composer of film music had to possess are what characterized *Capoianu's* career as a film music composer.

² The stable collaboration he had with *Gopo* and *Naghi* can also be seen through the list of his films available at <http://aarc.ro/cineasti/cineast3090>

He used melodic themes raised sometimes to the status of *leitmotif* personalizing timbrally, rhythmically and agogically these ideas according to the given situation. It is also the case in the music of *Ion Popescu-Gopo's* films with *The Little Man*, where he used only three musical notes: C, B and B \flat (Mânzat 2019). In the case of feature films, his melodic themes became the sound exponent of the characters and the action, transposing in them moral valences, particularities of age, tensions, suspense, anticipation of danger, but also in musical illustrations of the visual landscape. All these qualities can also be seen in the feature film *Alarm in the Danube Delta*, categorized by the critics of those times as a children genre (Căliman 2000, 297). However, the composer managed, through a language that is not specifically addressed to children, to complete the image, giving it even more meaning, especially in crucial moments (Sîrbu 1976).

Although it is a children's film intended to highlight the courage of the two young men *Voinicel* and *Azimioară*, we can still identify the presence of communist propaganda. This direction of propaganda is generally valid for all the production of Romanian films from the communist period (Tudor Popescu 2011, 11), a fact that made the compositional environment and conditions more difficult for composers. Moreover, in addition to the descriptive images of the Delta and nature, points of industrial interest are also presented, the children being heroes who know how to handle both variables. Their courage transcends both the unpredictable nature of the Delta and the technical peculiarities of the pumping station, easily navigating between the two poles to achieve their goal of punishing criminals. The fact that this goal is fulfilled by some characters at a young age gives the audience a heightened sense of patriotism and nationalism, making the film suitable for both children and adults. Moreover, the hope they have in the police officer named *Nenea Vlad* creates a pure image of the authorities, reinforcing the idea that they represent justice and any honest citizen can put all his trust in justice. The personality that the two young people have is an example of the perfect citizen, regardless of age. This film is sometimes viewed in comparison to another successful feature film of those times, *Adventures in the Danube Delta*, in *Alarm in the Danube Delta* instead, the children's adventures being more ingeniously thought out, with more fantasy, more humor (Georgescu 1976).

3. The Heroic Theme

The score that *Dumitru Capoianu* composed for this film is one that derives from the image and action, the symphonic language used being in full agreement with the scenes that accompany them. Even if the composer's style differs from one artist to another, we can observe certain general directions that Romanian and Hollywood composers follow in the films, directions also found in *Capoianu's* work. Among them we mention: anticipating the general atmosphere of the action starting from the *Main title*; assigning melodic themes to some characters or situations and their changing in terms of *timbral*, *agogic*, *dynamic*, *rhythmic* or *melodic* elements, depending on the evolution of the action, gestures and the psychological plan of the characters (London 200, 88); the use of musical illustrations to mark important moments - the illustrations may sometimes consist of only a single sound but which is placed in the appropriate sound register for the action. For example, the same musical theme can be used for two different types of characters, representing both evil and good, innocence and courage. The differentiation on the valences that the theme carries is done with the help of timbrality (Prendergast 1992, 216) and the sound register in which it is interpreted and with the help of *tempo* and *rhythm* parameters. This is also the case with the main theme used by *Capoianu* in this film, named the *heroic theme*³, which accompanies both child heroes and criminals, being the sound *leitmotif* of the film.



Fig. 1. "The heroic theme", part A, played by flutes, m. 22-27, "Main Title" score part

³ This name is given by me following the analysis of the overall score of the film, the identification of the main melodic themes and their correlation with the moments of the action in which they are placed. There are situations in which the names of the themes or musical scenes are given by the composers themselves and noted in the score, but in this case no sign to this effect made by *Dumitru Capoianu* was identified.

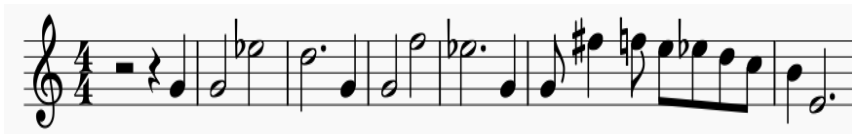


Fig. 2. “The heroic theme”, part A, played by trumpets, m. 27-33 “Main Title” score part

The composer keeps the same rhythmic pattern in both cases, the melodic construction of the theme being based on intervallic ascending leaps starting with a sixth, gradually reaching a minor seventh, the tonic being brought to the trumpets at the end, by a descending leap this time.

The theme is introduced right from the *Main Title* (00:00:16 – 00:01:57), being the sound idea that stands out within a musical moment with double valence, both illustrative and anticipatory. Thus, the alert *tempo* that the entire soundtrack contains and marked with *allegro* in the score, can foreshadow the suspense and the continuous running between the robbers and the children, each seeking to fulfill their goal. At the same time, the *spiccato* frenzy from the strings in combination with the duet they have with the brass can represent the biodiversity of the Delta that is visually represented during a robbers' boat ride. Here we find two timbral representations of the theme, the first in the interpretation of the flutes and the second exhibited by the trumpets. Thus, we can deduce that the two typologies of characters are delimited: children represented by the timbre of flutes and robbers represented by trumpets, the delimitation of age between them also being done through sound registers – *high* for children and *low* for men. At the same time, the exposure of the theme by two instruments with different timbres can also denote the two situations in which the children are placed: the first is that of childhood innocence presented by the flute and the second is that of the courage they show through the shrill timbre of the trumpet. This melodic theme will accompany children throughout the film in various situations.

The metamorphosis of the theme takes place during the film in several moments, one of them being the one called by the composer *The dead carriage*. Here we encounter a new timbral but also rhythmic exposure of it, which denotes not so much the seriousness of the moment as its intimacy and the suffering that will be caused by the crime committed. For the first time, a B part of the *heroic*

theme is also introduced, in the interpretation of the English horn, while the previously exemplified A part is interpreted by the oboe, with augmented note values compared to the first version presented in the *Main Title*. The composer gives clear *dynamics* indications too - *mezzoforte* with *crescendo* and *decrescendo* on ascending leaps. In the B part the bass clarinet has an accompanying role, suggesting the rippling water through an *ostinato* downward and upward built on an *arpeggio* of a fifth interval. This musical illustration of the water finds its justification in the images on the screen, the body of the deceased being carried in waters of the Delta.

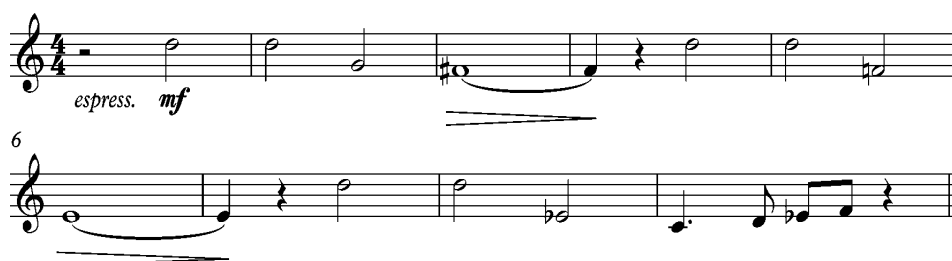


Fig. 3. "The heroic theme", part B played by flutes, m. 27-33, "The dead carriage" score part

Immediately after this moment whose intimacy is emphasized by timbral methods, there follows at 00:05:45 a new brief exposure of the *heroic theme*, part A performed by trumpet in C, this time characterized by stridency and suspense. The theme is introduced by a descending chromatic passage of the double bass on a perfect fifth (B-E). There is still a special emphasis on *dynamics*, with the double bass moving from *forte* to *sforzando* and the trumpet from *mezzoforte* to *pianissimo*. The use of this combination of shrill timbres in the low register emphasizes the seriousness of the situation on screen, as the plant employees are captured and threatened at gunpoint. Thus, compared to the previous moment, we find a new situation in which things are not done secretly and the purpose of the criminals is revealed. Under these conditions, the heroism of the theme serves to emphasize the beginning of the struggle for justice being made, brasses being often used for this purpose in the army and battles.

In order to be able to better observe its evolution, I propose a method of research based on a table⁴. This method can be used to follow the important moments in which a musical theme is heard and some particularities that it presents depending on the situation. In this example are not included all the representations of the *heroic theme*, part A, within the film. This method of observation is one of my own, discovered after extensive studies done during my PhD on Romanian film music, and it is a method that helped me in observing in depth the evolution of some sound ideas.

The time	The description of the moment and the symbolism that the theme carries
00:00:48	<i>Main Title</i> . The theme is performed twice, once by the flutes followed by the trumpets. It thus represents the two age divisions – children and robbers.
00:04:07	<i>The dead carriage</i> . The theme is performed by oboe and is followed by the B part. The timbral meaning leads to softness, intimacy and sadness.
00:05:50	<i>The gun threat</i> . The timbre of the brass induces the seriousness of the situation.
00:07:24	An extended musical moment when the two boys stay at home after the ferry leaves. The <i>heroic theme</i> is performed by several instruments ending with the violin, the aim being to reproduce the calmness and tranquility that the boys have in their familiar environment.
00:31:36	<i>Sunrise</i> . Even though the boys are captured, the theme played by the brass and synchronized with the sunrise signifies the children's hope and courage.
00:33:47	<i>The boys swim underwater</i> . The theme is synchronized with the aquatic vacuum, being performed by the piano in dissonant chords.

Table 1. *The evolution of the heroic theme part A in the film*

⁴ The online version of the film was watched to create this table. This is available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TCHpsGm6n9s&ab_channel=CristiNicuNisiparu

4. Other compositional techniques

The use of melodic themes is not the only compositional technique used by *Capoianu* in this film and there are other patterns that he introduces right from the *Main Title* or gradually, in other moments of the action. Although it functions as a single musical moment, the *Main Title* contain several these type of patterns that the composer uses throughout the film to accompany a particular situation or symbol.

Two of these situations that are musically represented are:

1. The passage of time; The passage of time is constructed in two ways within this soundtrack *Main Title* moment:

- Only by the double bass in the first part of the credits, accompanying the fast chromatic passage of the violins. Here the composer explores the ascending and descending *chromatic progression* within a tetrachord keeping the rhythm on quarter note values.
- By the entire string department accompanying the *heroic theme*. Here, the use of *ostinato anapest* creates the impression of a punctuated, bouncy and playful rhythm, specific to childhood. However, the valences of innocence are overcome by the harmonic construction on a *cluster* where bitonal collisions and the distance of the fourth prevail.

2. The musical illustration for the frantic movement. The musical illustration in *allegro tempo* contains also two patterns that follow rhythm and melody aspects that the composer uses on other occasions throughout the film. Thus, he uses *ostinato* rhythmic formulas of four sixteenths each, and *chromatic* passages with the initial range of a tetrachord. Combined together in the same formula, they represent the way in which *Capoianu* reproduces the restlessness but also the suspense.

Using signals to aurally emphasize brief moments that still abound in suspense and tension is another technique used by the composer in this film. Such a situation occurs at 00:03:30 when the brass (horns in F, trumpets in C, tubas) and percussion (bongos and piatto) marked the moment when the gun is taken from the case to later threaten the employees of the plant. The tension is achieved primarily with the help of the shrill timbral sonority and the *dynamics*. There is a progressive but rapid increase in the prolonged sound from *pianissimo* to

fortissimo and by the dissonance produced by the tritone Eb – A played by the tuba.

Emphasizing the suspense through sound registers – the high register overlap with the low register is still a technique used not only by *Capoianu* but also by other Romanian composers in their film soundtracks. In *Alarm in the Danube Delta*, at 00:08:55, there is such a moment when *Azimioară* is talking on the phone with his sister, but he does not suspect the danger in which she is. The sound signals are placed in two registers: high and low. Tritone dissonance sustained by the tuba on extended notes is complemented by the *chromatic* descending passage of the double bass and bassoon, and bitonal clashes at the xylophone in high register. Another interpretation can be given by the symbolic representation of femininity and masculinity, the high register representing the despair and fear of the woman while the low register represents the firmness and determination of the man.

5. Conclusions

Film music occupied an important part of *Dumitru Capoianu's* life. Although the interviews of Romanian composers in which they mention their work as music film composers are rare, we find out some details with the help of *Capoianu* himself who declared in an interview that “being a composer of film music means activating within the limits of a special job. If you want to achieve something in film music, you have to devote yourself to it with body and soul”. (Roman 1964) He also appreciated that a film music composer must know all the phases that the film goes through, but having the obligation to be a specialist in sound issues too. The soundtrack he composed for *Alarm in the Danube Delta* added value to the film, the composer aiming to be in full agreement with the script and the action on the screen. The music is the bearer of symbols through the compositional techniques *Capoianu* used. The aspects presented in this article are only some of the important aspects of the score. For a complete and more complex analysis a study of extensive dimensions is needed to cover all the essential aspects of the musical language elements and of the symbolism they carry.

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