

## **A stylistic approach to Mihail Jora's pianistics as reflected in the cycle *Five Songs for Voice and Piano* on *Poems* by Octavian Goga, op. 11**

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**Abstract:** *Jora's songs are musical architectural miniatures with a significant dramatic component, carefully wrought with regard to prosody and diction. The performer's stage presence, gestures attitude next to sound and word are constitutive parts of the musical discourse. The philosophical state that the composer projects in his sonorities is specific to the early 20th century. His interest in philosophical concepts and his views on life, the attention to love, nature and symbolism are found in the selection of the lyrics alongside compositional means, prosody, the art of singing and that of piano playing.*

Key-words: *life, death, pianistics, vocality, relationship*

### **1. Introduction**

The cycle was written in the third decade of the 20th century, at a time when Romantic and Impressionist influences were already shaped as a result of Jora's studies in Leipzig and Paris.

Traits of Jora's cultural personality already distinctly show: the predilection for successive perfect fourths, tonal-modal sonorities, functionally conflictual superposed chords – for example simultaneous dominant and tonic chords – or the equivocal major-minor, with the chromatic mobility of the third. The prophetic tone strikes from the beginning in the poetry of Octavian Goga (Călinescu 2001, 218).

The analysis of each lied starts with establishing the poetic direction, then the parameters of writing, voice range, tonality or mode, metric and tempo markings follow, as well as the song's architecture (Niculescu, 1995). The two key words of this song cycle are *life* and *death*, as the work treats the phases of living as transversal sections of the passage of time, from *love* in the first work *Tu n-ai la uşa ta zăvor* (*Your Door Has No Bolt*), passing through various sides of death in *Mor azi*

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*zâmbetele mele (Today My Smiles Die), E-ngropare azi la mine (There is a Funeral In Me Today), Atât de veche-i îngroparea (Burying Is So Old)* and concluding with rebirth, a coming to life proposed by the last song of this cycle, *Primăvară, primăvară (Spring, Spring)*.

## 2. Analyses and discussions

Each lied has a tempo marking accompanied by an indication with regard to its character or just this latter followed by the metronome marking. Traits of Jora's cultural personality already distinctly show: the predilection for successive perfect fourths, tonal-modal sonorities, functionally conflictual superposed chords – for example simultaneous dominant and tonic chords – or the equivocal major-minor, with the chromatic mobility of the third. The analysis of each lied starts with establishing the poetic direction, then the parameters of writing, voice range, tonality or mode, metric and tempo markings follow, as well as the song's architecture.

**2.1.** The concept of the first of the five songs based on Octavian Goga's poems - ***Tu n-ai la ușa ta zăvor*** - is unconsummated love. Love is at the same time the most beautiful of human affections, under all its forms of fullness. Jora aims to bring the piano writing closer to the timbre of the human voice.

The image shows a musical score for the first three measures of the song "Tu n-ai la ușa ta zăvor". The score is written for voice and piano. The key signature is G major (one sharp). The time signature is 2/4. The tempo is marked "Moderato comodo" with a metronome marking of quarter note = 88. The dynamics are marked "p" (piano) and "tenderamente" (tenderly). The lyrics "Tu n-ai la u-șa" are written under the vocal line. The piano accompaniment features a series of chords and moving lines in both hands.

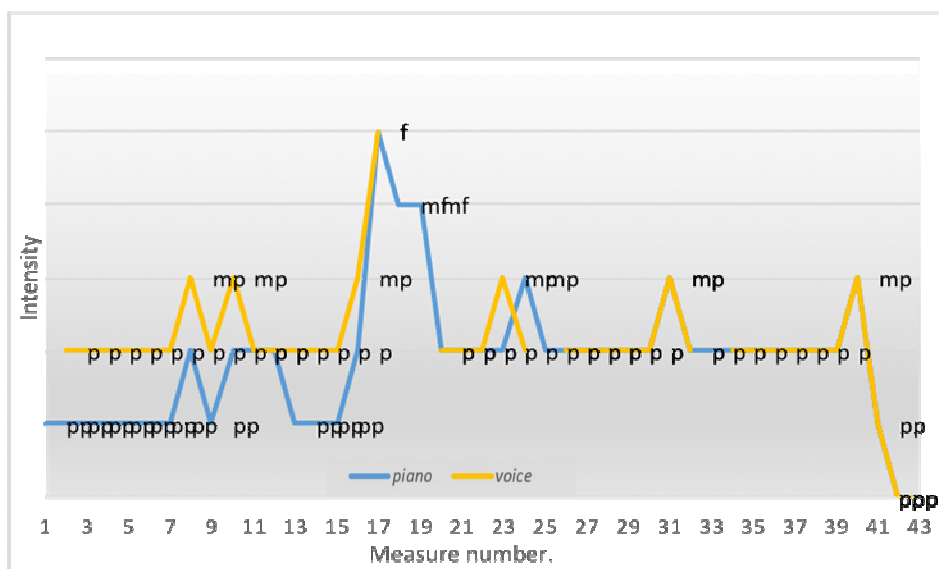
Exemple 1. "Tu n-ai la ușa ta zăvor" (Your Door Has No Bolt) Measures 1-3 (Jora 1957, 3)

The challenge consists in maintaining the balance on two planes: individual balance, the right attitude to communicate the artistic meaning, and the balance between the two performers, with tuned frames of mind, dynamics, tempi. Just as the structure of the motifs and phrases is developmental, so the dynamic planes of the two sequences draft two progressive culminations, section A with its maximum

in *mezzo-forte* and section B in *forte*. The coda represents another appearance of the introductory motif, with the feeling of uncertainty given by the harmonic functional instability. Such hesitation sends us to another possibility, just as the nucleus appears in a novel form. The conclusion is a new genesis from the same seed of an idea prevented from fructification.

**2.2.** The poet and the composer evoke in *Mor azi zâmbetele mele* the song of a passing into timelessness which persists after even the strongest laws of nature expired and only the memory of the days of the week or holidays remains steadfast. The poem unfolds under the sign of the fate befalling the beloved village and its surroundings, in a natural blend of the metaphysical with the native places and customs. Jora found the sonic equivalence of the poem by a modal writing on E-flat, altering the minor sonorities from the Aeolian mode with the major-like atmosphere from the Mixolydian mode. The final section is Dorian, as two Aeolian tetrachords from the initial modes are placed in succession. Similar motifs become a vibration over which the melodic line of the voice meanders, with subtle insidencies in phrases *aanda1*, then lamenting in phrase *a2*.

The piano is suave, as a background of a fresco depicting the village's life and death on the humid walls of the church. Concepts then become stronger and stronger, *poveștile de la șezătoare* (*stories as told at gatherings*), *o stea (a star)* and the culmination – *iubirea noastră (our love)*.



Graph of the dynamics – “*Mor azi zâmbetele mele*” (*Today My Smiles Die*)

The conclusion of this song is in the undulating and perpetual motion of the pulsating motif, perfect musical illustration of the words: *Eu rămân să țes statornic cântecul de îngropare (I remain to weave steadfastly the burial song).*

The song began by stating the time, the present, and, in the same spirit, the poet concludes by showing that weekdays and holidays have passed into nothingness, days differing from one another precisely because of the fragile life elements which give meaning to the notion of time.

**2.3. *E-ngropare azi la mine*** is the song which induces the sad rhythmic cadence of a funeral convoy. Dreams are buried in this sombre procession and, with the awareness of this fact, the meaning of the lyrics becomes rich with possible new connotations. The construction of the first motif is marked crescendo until bar 2, first beat, on the word *azi* (today), and then decrescendo, protasis – apodosis determined by the prosody.

On the piano, the same principle governs the mental construction of the motif, thus going beyond the barrier of the instrument's technical and mechanical possibilities. In the absence of the word, in strictly musical conditions, the anabasis-type culmination called emphasis and then the katabasis effect obtained through the decrease in loudness are communicated via the tension-relaxation at the foundation of life.

We can suggest this sensation by thinking of these two chords as of breathing and its two phases, inspiration and expiration, or as the cardiac cycle poetically called heartbeat, with the systole and diastole.

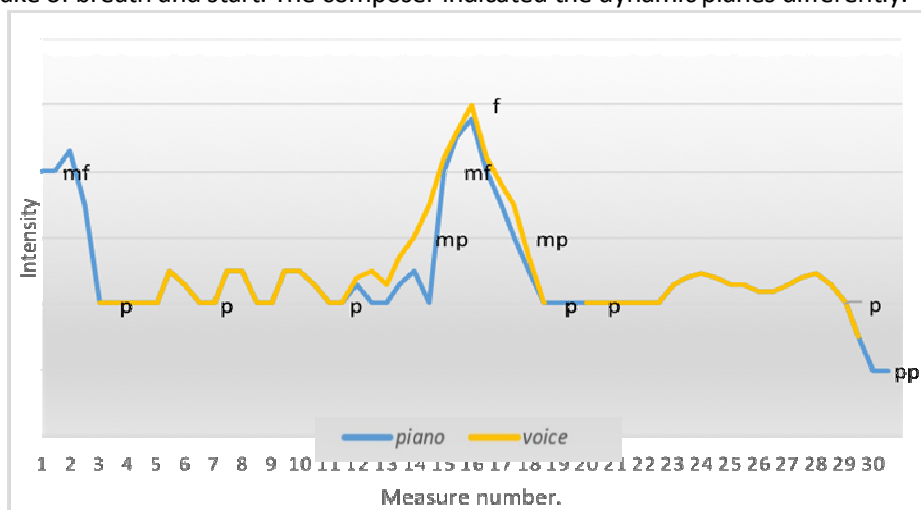
The image shows a musical score for the song "E-ngropare azi la mine". The title is "Andante funebre" with a tempo marking of quarter note = 72. The score is in 4/4 time and E-flat major. The melody is written in the treble clef, starting with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The lyrics "E-n-gro-pa-re azi la mi-ne." are written below the melody. The accompaniment is written in the bass clef, starting with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The score shows two measures of music.

Exemple 2. *E-ngropare azi la mine* (There is a Funeral In Me Today) Measures 1- 2 (Jora 1957, 8)

The vocalicity of this moment makes us think of a lamentation, and from bar 21 onwards, with the *forte appassionato* marking, it becomes a cry in the higher register, using an accentuated emission interrupted by *marcato*, *largamente* at the end of the bar. The voice rather seems to cry, sigh and recite, than to sing. The tomb is most often the place of lamentation and of unanswered, *why?*- type of questions. Such question as raised by the poet is free from the burden of person or possession, and without being a *why me*, or *why is this happening to me, mine*, its subject is the high affective involvement. Moreover, burial represents the time and place for introspection. If this song places me at the grave of my dreams, the spiritual concern carries among its meanings some traces of responsibility too, of remorse perhaps, because of the death of my dreams only my soul can be found guilty.

**2.4.** The authors propose an evocation of remembering in *Atît de veche-îngroparea*, at peace and resigned, old precisely because only time can heal a pain so great as that of losing someone. The voice states the words and the diatonic melodic line hymn-like. This character is given by the rhythmic structure of each phrase. Convulsive affections are suggested by the melody placed over the piano's chromatic motion in eighth notes. The introductory motif, that transitional and the Coda are related by their meaning.

A hymn presupposes a limpid introduction, so that singers can easily join in with the tonal frame and the rhythm. The fermata on the last sound is part of hymn practice, where, after the introduction, a resting moment allows the choir a common intake of breath and start. The composer indicated the dynamic planes differently.



Graph of the dynamics 2. *Atât de veche-îngroparea* (*Burying Is So Old*)

The first motif appears in mezzo-forte, the second, meant to prepare section A', is in piano. The two moments each put the same sonic material in a different light. The compositional means by which Jora obtains this effect are the distinct dynamic planes and the subtly differentiated phrasing of the eighth note chromatic motion in the left hand. The composer placed the song's culmination there where words free the mind from the human limits. The spirit's supremacy and the liberation from the fragile and ephemeral body are suggested by the image of the odd bird flying over the graves. All section conclusions are on a stable, ascending harmonic support, on G-major, A-minor, G-major chords.

One talks to oneself in this song, and Jora achieved this effect through the dynamic planes and the convulsive inner sensations expressed by chromatic eighth notes on the accompaniment. The voice ends with the interrogating pentatonic anhemitonic ascending motion, in the spirit of the words with which the poem ends: *Nu-ți par și zîmbetele noastre ca două flori de țintirim?* (*Don't you find that our smiles are like two grave flowers too?*) The coda, on the piano, on an E-major pedal, is marked *meno mosso*, and brings resignation through the conclusion-like writing in a minimal sonority fading into silence.

**2.5. *Primăvară, primăvară* (Spring, spring)** is a lyrical reflection on the cycle of life and the vital force which calls each year to life the whole nature. The miniature has the lightness of a breeze, as it exposes a single idea, and the depth of a philosophic construct based on the existential laws. Voice and piano begin simultaneously, in forte, with the rhetorical exclamation *Primăvară, primăvară* (*Spring, spring*) placed over a descending melodic figure which describes the E Aeolian. The harmonic fundament is a representation of the natural frequency, without the modal or tonal certainty of the third.

Con anima ♩ = 92

*f*

Pri - mă - va - ră, pri - mă - va - ră, —

*f*

Exemple 3. "*Primăvară, primăvară*" (*Spring, spring*) Measures 1-2  
(Jora 1957, 12)

The vocality of this song borrows stylistic and performance-related techniques of the *doina* folk genre, specified by particular phrasings, accents, motifs concluding with the dotted iambic rhythm, with the short duration on the main metric accent in *staccato* and the long duration augmented, *marcato*. The approach to this lied is closely related to the folk type of singing, the notion of longing, *doina*, and communion with nature. The piano describes harmonic support pillars for the voice's melody, enriching hesitations, suspensions and harmonic resolutions with meaning. Piano and voice phrasing fully match, and as such pianist and singer will breathe and congruently build the song together. Other elements of communion are the initial simultaneous attack and the single sonority homogenously fading out at the end.

The song concludes with the rhetorical question *Va mai fi și pentru tine primăvară?* (*Will spring come for you too?*), highlighted by the ascending melody and the dynamic itinerary in *crescendo*. The personification of the musical instrument sends to that secret place in the personality of the individual whose destiny is to sing. From among the colours that artists associated with spring, the poet chose to use the tones of yellow, with yellow butterflies and roses, the blonde moon, and the straw gutter part of the colour as found in nature and the abandoned guitar an image of interior yellow. This monochrome composition does abound in details and subtle nuances. Jora's music has the simplicity of a children's song in all the purity and beauty described by the innocence of the little ones as well as the refinement and stylistic punctiliousness of a jewel.

### 3. Conclusions. Proposals

There is a felicitous combination of the purity of national timeless song and new compositional, analysis and synthesis techniques as proposed by the composer, a figure in Romanian music. The accompaniment has its own poetics, suggests frames of mind via touch, dynamics or tempo. Poetry as such does not need music (Bentoiu, 1995, p. 48). Thus, the music and the verse are full and sufficient, Jora's music does not illustrate poetry or vice versa, but are corresponding by specific means.

Tempo, dynamics, and meter are carefully noted in Jora's scores, giving interpretative imagination free rein regarding timbral colour, planes differentiation through touch. The dynamic skills of the pianist claim a wide range of expression, multiple ways to achieve small sounds and fine control of sound quality in wide sounds. Jora's writing denotes his early preoccupation with the piano, through the lightness of the ways of expressing states in piano procedures. Good piano writing requires the skilful use of the three pedals, in order to sometimes surprisingly timbre different sounds. Because it frequently uses register overlays, the support

pedal is used to maintain the harmonic frame or long sound of the bass register without overloading the chromatic gait of the mid or high register. Jora's notations explain in detail if the resonant pedal is necessary, is used half or airy, or fully captures harmonic blocks with individual or relationship role.

The human and philosophical resonance area in which the musical duo moves has a particular dynamic. The two protagonists – the voice and the piano – have moments of congruency, separate planes and even conflictual zones, the exploration of their role being constant in the understanding the whole message, concentrated in these miniatures.

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