

## Wilhelm Georg Berger – Sketching a Portrait

Ana SZILAGYI<sup>1</sup>, Iuliana ISAC<sup>2</sup>

**Abstract:** *The aim of this article is to reveal the great personality of Wilhelm Georg Berger (1929-1993), attempting to create a short portrait of him through describing and discussing his huge activity unfolded on multiple plans: as a composer (author of 24 symphonies and 21 quartets, concerts, masses and chamber music works), as a theorist (he invented a complex modal theory, based on the golden section and on Fibonacci sequence), as a musicologist and esthetician (he published many volumes about symphonic and instrumental music focusing on the baroque, classic, romantic and modern eras, including Romanian music), violist, conductor and guide for young musicians.*

Key-words: *modes, proportions, golden section, Fibonacci sequence, synthesizing vision*

### 1. Introduction

**Wilhelm Georg Berger** (1929-1993) has a special place in the Romanian history of music. His vast culture, his ability to assimilate and to synthesize, and his workforce were manifested in a huge heritage as a composer and a musicologist. Both his compositional and musicological works testify the anchorage in the Western European music tradition, referring to the Baroque, Classicism, Romanticism, Modern and present eras. His interests focused on symphonic and chamber music, the genres of symphony, strings quartets, sonatas being experimented by the composer and theorized by the musicologist. He tried to enlarge his symphonies with architectural and expressive elements, exploring sides that have not been explored by the predecessors, as will be further showed.

Beside being a successor and in the same time an innovator of the Western European music tradition, an expert of its styles and aesthetics<sup>3</sup>, a particularity was

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<sup>1</sup> Transilvania University of Braşov, [ana.szilagyi@unitbv.ro](mailto:ana.szilagyi@unitbv.ro)

<sup>2</sup> Transilvania University of Braşov, [iuliana.isac@unitbv.ro](mailto:iuliana.isac@unitbv.ro)

<sup>3</sup> Between 1981-1985 he published 5 volumes about the aesthetic of the Baroque, Classical, Romantic, Modern and Contemporary sonata.

added: the Romanian tradition, centered on the modality. Two directions has been present in the Romanian modality: the influence of the popular modes and the artificial modes. W. G. Berger went the second way, as Olivier Messiaen (1908-1992) and his colleague Anatol Vieru (1926-1998)<sup>4</sup>, and invented a theory of modes based on Fibonacci sequence and golden section, which will be further discussed.

In order to understand the complex personality of W. G. Berger we have to describe his formation, education and the environments in which he lived, including the impact of the communist government on Romanian culture, in general.

In this regard, insightful are the research works developed by Valentina Sandu Dediu, Irinel Anghel, and more recently, Carmen Chelaru, studies that describe important events that influenced the course of music in the Romanian space, and which classify the composers' creations into directions and subdirections.

## 2. Wilhelm Georg Berger in the context of Romanian music

In the chapter entitled *Musical Ideologies in 20th-Century Romania* from *New Histories of Romanian Music: Ideologies, Institutions, and Compositional Directions in Romanian Music from the 20th-21st Centuries, Volume II*, Valentina Sandu-Dediu (b. 1966) focuses her narrative around the transitions, consolidations, and ideological pressures that had an overwhelming impact on the musical life in the Romanian space. She discusses the impact of socialist realism on musical creation during the period 1944-1965, the ideological liberalization and the restrictions imposed by the regime, as well as the tension between the national and the universal that marked the period 1965-1989. She also examines the consequences of the fall of the communist regime and the state of musical culture after 1990, along with the new generation of composers who emerged after 2000.

In the context of explaining the impact of socialist realism on the Romanian compositional school, Valentina Sandu-Dediu mentions the existence of a formidable generation of composers who followed two directions.

The first one is that of *radical modernism* – see Anatol Vieru, Ștefan Niculescu (1927-2008), Tiberiu Olah (1928-2002), Aurel Stroe (1932-2008), Cornel Țăranu (1934-2023), Dan Constantinescu (1931-1993), Myriam Marbé (1931-1997). These composers enthusiastically assimilated the models of new music and passionately pursued the modernity of George Enescu (1881-1955), the works of Béla Bartók

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<sup>4</sup> Anatol Vieru developed a compositional theory of modes based on the set theory exposed in *Cartea modurilor (The Book of Modes)*, Musical Publishing House, Bucharest, 1980.

(1881-1945), as well as those of Arnold Schönberg (1874-1951), Alban Berg (1885-1935), Anton Webern (1883-1945), Paul Hindemith (1895-1963), Olivier Messiaen and Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971).

The second direction is that of a *moderated modernism* – see Theodor Grigoriu (1926-2014), Carmen Petra-Basacopol (1926-2023), Pascal Benteoiu (1927-2016), Dumitru Capoianu (1929-2012), Felicia Donceanu (1931-2022) and Wilhelm Georg Berger (1929-1993). Its promoters prefer the post-Enescian aesthetic line, which proposes a balance between the old and the new, that is, between the universal symphonic tradition and the principles of Romanian folk music (Sandu-Dediu 2020, 45).

Certainly, the author emphasizes that the distinction between *radical* and *moderated modernism* has its limitations. In this regard, the name of composer W.G. Berger draws attention. Although he is placed in the second category, the musical aesthetics he proposes and his compositional approach bring him closer to Anatol Vieru (the latter belonging to the first category).

Another reference work belongs to Irinel Anghel (b. 1969), namely *Orientations, Directions, and Currents of Romanian Music in the Second Half of the 20th Century*. This book presents itself as a map that guides the reader through the multitude of trends that emerged during the mentioned period. The author describes a true network of projections that faithfully reflect the historical reality of Romanian compositional school, as follows: the first three chapters trace the formulation of a genealogy – *I. National music of folk inspiration, II. Music of Byzantine inspiration, III. Aesthetic Balkanism*, while the last two propose highlighting the trends that align with the musical thinking of Western Europe – *IV. Influences of Western music. Interferences. Compatible aesthetics* and *V. Original aesthetic contributions of contemporary Romanian music*.

The composer Wilhelm G. Berger is associated with the first subchapter in the section dedicated to aesthetics compatible with Western music (Chapter IV) – *Neomodal Music*. Here, the author mentioned the existence of **categories** or **variations** of *modalism* present in contemporary musical creation.

The first is modalism of a folkloric essence (both national and extranational) and religious (especially of Byzantine origin) – see Mihail Jora (1891-1971), Sabin Drăgoi (1894-1968), Tudor Ciortea (1903-1982), Liviu Comes (1918-2004), but also Pascal Benteoiu, Doru Popovici (1932-2019), Dan Buciu (b. 1943), Liana Alexandra (1947-2011), Carmen Petra-Basacopol and others; within this aesthetic direction, there is also the archetypal minimalist modalism – see Tiberiu Olah, Adrian Rațiu (1928-2005), Maia Ciobanu (b. 1952), Ulpiu Vlad (b. 1945), Doina Rotaru (b. 1951) and Octavian Nemescu (1940-2020).

The second category is represented by artificially created modalism – see Anatol Vieru, Aurel Stroe, Vasile Herman (1929-2010), Liviu Glodeanu (1938-1978), Sorin Vulcu (1939-1994), and others. This movement proposes the approach of sound constructions resulting from rigorous mathematical calculations (Varvarichi and Nauncef 2021, 98) that correspond to the idea of symmetry or exploit different proportions. In this context, the name of Wilhelm G. Berger serves as a reference. His concern with the domain of calculated asymmetry is also reflected in his writings, with his work *Modes and Proportions* being an incontestable theoretical contribution in this regard.

One can also observe *extraction modalism, of serial-dodecaphonic origin*, which represents a particular case of *artificially created modalism*. Among the composers associated with this approach, we mention Tiberiu Olah, Dan Constantinescu, Cornel Țăranu, and Liviu Glodeanu.

Regardless of the proposed variant, it is clear that the reintroduction of the modal coordinate at the center of modern composers' concerns has reinvigorated this system, which is so universal, profound, natural, and inherently archaic.

Thus, even though Wilhelm Georg Berger explored the direction of modern techniques, his music remains within the coordinates of traditional creation. In fact, his music represents an integration of innovative trends, with the clarification that these techniques underwent a rigorous process of personal synthesis, in an environment that is, by excellence, traditionalist in sound. Ultimately, his music proves to be more a *music of syntheses* than a music of contrasts (Varvarichi and Nauncef 2021, 108).

In turn, Carmen Chelaru discusses postwar creation and the openness of some composers toward new *syntheses* between *the national* and *the international*, between *unity* and *diversity*, against the backdrop of a *balanced originality* that places artistic expressiveness at the forefront (Chelaru 2020, 388). She describes Wilhelm Georg Berger as a *modern neoclassic* due to his preference for classical genres – symphony, concerto, string quartet, organ music and religious vocal-symphonic music. His musical discourse is characterized by a balance in construction that tends toward monumentality and the application of mathematical procedures in music, a reference trend for Romanian musical creation in the second half of the 20th century (Chelaru 2020, 465).

The name of composer W.G. Berger is of particular interest in the development of *the modern Romanian musical school*, especially for chamber instrumental music. Here, Chelaru describes the following stylistic directions: *neoclassical influence in synthesis with folkloric or Byzantine elements, impressionistic and expressionistic*

*orientations in synthesis with elements of folklore and multiple syntheses*. The composer is placed in this last category (of *multiple syntheses*).

Subsequently, C. Chelaru expands on the principles developed by Berger and discusses the modal synthesis structures, a system of spatial-mathematical thinking, and the adaptation of the European language to an indigenous modal-serial vision (Chelaru 2020, 394).

### 3. Biography

His German roots gave him a solid theoretical basis. In his family chamber music was cultivated, especially literature for string quartet was played. This gave him the opportunity to know the universal music. Berger learned violin and as a Lutheran, the organ. This beginning was important in his further compositional carrier, when he concentrated on string quartets and organ pieces, beside the symphonies. He also conducted the choir in the church and learned from his uncle, Konrad Kramberger, „the history of music as a history of styles”, as he said in an interview with Laura Manolache (Manolache 2002, 12). The result was that he appropriated theoretically and practically in details the musical language of every style. Coming to Bucharest the young musician of 18 years experimented another reality. He acclimatized with the new musical flourishing environment and he evolved beside his colleagues, with whom he had a good relationship.

Between 1948 and 1952, he studied at the Bucharest Conservatory. Among his professors, we can mention Alexandru Rădulescu (viola), Theodor Rogalski (1901-1954, orchestration), Zeno Vancea (1900-1990, history of music) and Ion Șerfezi (music theory and solfeggio).

Starting in 1948, he began private lessons with Cecilia Nițulescu-Lupu and Anton Adrian Sarvaș (violin), as well as with Benjamin Bernfeld (1928-2011, chamber music). However, in terms of composition studies, Berger acquired knowledge in a self-taught manner, particularly from Heinrich Koch's three volumes, *Initiation in Composition* (1782, 1787, 1793).

Since his student years, he worked as a violist in the A. A. Sarvaș String Quartet (1948-1951), in the *George Enescu* Philharmonic Orchestra in Bucharest (1948-1958) and was a founding member of the Union of Composers' String Quartet (1953-1958).

As a violist in many quartets he played much Romanian contemporary music, many quartet works as first performances. He knew and admired the Romanian composers of the old generation, who built a composition school, as Mihail Jora

(1891-1971), Dimitrie Cuclin (1885-1978), Paul Constantinescu (1909-1963), beside George Enescu (1881-1955). As a member in the Bucharest Philharmonic he also played in symphonies, concertos, sonatas by Romanian composers, an example being the *Christmas Oratorio* by P. Constantinescu. Thus, Berger came into contact with music not only from scores, but also hearing and playing it. In him were webbed the interpret, the composer and the musicologist.

Regarding the musicology, the professor and ethnomusicologist George Breazul (1887-1961) influenced him, because he learned from him „what means polemic in musicology, what means consistency in musicology, what means systematic in musicology, and, actually, what means love of knowledge, in a Romanian vision” (Manolache 2002, 18). From this quote one can see that W. G. Berger was a deep person, who wanted not only to know the evolution of the Romanian music, but also to catch the spirit of the Romanian people and its culture.

W. G. Berger carried out an extraordinary activity within the UCMR (Union of Romanian Composers and Musicologists), serving as the secretary of the symphonic music section for more than two decades (1968-1990). Starting in 1991, he became a corresponding member of the Romanian Academy and a professor at the Bucharest Conservatory.

Throughout his life, he hosted numerous radio and television broadcasts, conferences, and scientific presentations, both in the country and abroad. He also frequently published essays, studies, and articles in publications such as *Muzica Journal*, *Musicology Studies*, *Rumänien heute*, *Neuer Weg* and *Volk und Kultur*.

Towards the end of his life, he resumed his performance activity, giving numerous concerts in the country as an organist and conductor (Pavel 2018, 21).

He was awarded the Prince Rainier III Prize of Monaco (Monte Carlo, 1964), first prizes at the *Concours international de composition d'œuvres pour Quatour à cordes* (Liège, 1965) and the *Concours international Reine Elisabeth de Belgique* (Brussels, 1966), as well as two awards from the Romanian Academy (1966, 1985), 6 prizes from the Union of Composers (1967-1990), the *Meritul Cultural* Order, class IV (1967), class III (1969), class II (1974) and the *23 August* Order (1979).

Further we will briefly discuss the compositional style of W. G. Berger determined by his artistic credo, his modal theory, with a short view of his creation and an analysis of an organ work, as well as his musicological heritage.

#### 4. Wilhelm Georg Berger – the musicologist

Constantly concerned with defining his own system, W. G. Berger is one of the composers in whom a close connection between the act of creation and his theoretical interests, between musical thinking and thinking about music, can be observed (Sandu-Dediu 2002, 152). A proof of this is his interest in exploring the modal world, which was concretized in the book *Modal Dimensions* (1979), a collection of studies previously published in the journal *Muzica* (between 1963 and 1977) (Pavel 2018, 19). In this work, Berger focuses his entire approach around the application of the principle of harmonious proportion – *sectio aurea*<sup>5</sup>; the composer discusses an important aspect related to the harmonic aspects of sound structures<sup>6</sup> and proposes, as an expansion of the theory of *fully chromatic chorales*<sup>7</sup>, *the system of fully chromatic modes*<sup>8</sup> – for more details, see the next chapter.

One aspect that the composer emphasizes is that a music inventor should always be focused on the emotional content of the musical creation, on expressiveness, and on the artistic message, regardless of how they choose to organize the sound material. In the same vein, „the definition of the mode incorporates the entire musical process from the composer to the listener, the material foundation and psychological impact, a syntax and semantics tightly interwoven and interdependent" (Sandu-Dediu 2002, 57)

Moreover, W. G. Berger stands out as a distinguished aesthete – he produced an impressive number of musicological syntheses in which he either intertwined aesthetic data with stylistic elements (from the Baroque period to the Modern era), or he outlined clear, well-developed images, the result of thorough research, for different musical genres and forms (sonata, quartet, symphonic music).

The **five Guides for Symphonic Music** that the composer elaborated are particularly instructive: *Symphonic Music (Baroque-Classical)* (1967), *Romantic Symphonic Music, 1830-1890* (1972), *Romantic-Modern Symphonic Music, 1890-1930* (1974), *Modern-Contemporary Symphonic Music, 1930-1950* (1976) and *Contemporary Symphonic Music, 1950-1970* (1977).

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<sup>5</sup> He describes the diatonic and pentatonic modes, whose proportions follow the laws of the golden section, as well as the modes constructed based on this principle, clearly following certain constructive procedures.

<sup>6</sup> In Berger's system, the modeling of sound simultaneities with a modal profile results in primary chord types with proportioned intervals.

<sup>7</sup> The application of combinatory techniques of a contrapuntal nature at the level of consecutive harmonic columns.

<sup>8</sup> It becomes a reference unit for circuits of variations and transpositions.

The works have an extremely clear structure, they are well-organized and meticulously treated. Generally, the researcher provides an introduction that familiarizes the reader with the subject being discussed, and then leads the reader step by step through the journey of knowledge – describing starting points, concepts, perspectives, theories, directions, culminating points, convergences, and symbioses, as well as nuances and particularities. Regarding the final chapter, it serves as a synthesis of the topics discussed or as a bridge, an invitation (if applicable) for the next volume in the series.

Extremely important are the **five volumes dedicated to the sonata**: *The Aesthetics of the Classical Sonata* (1981), *The Aesthetics of the Romantic Sonata* (1983), *The Aesthetics of the Modern Sonata* (1984), *The Aesthetics of the Contemporary Sonata* (1985), *The Aesthetics of the Baroque Sonata* (1985). The series is completed by **the synthesis work**, *The General Theory of the Sonata* (1986).

As can be noted, the series of five volumes dedicated to the sonata was completed in a short period of time (1981-1985). It is worth highlighting the conclusion of the cycle with a work that, in essence, represents the earliest period chosen for investigation, within the series of works elaborated.

The works prove their value even more so as the *General Theory of Classical Composition* emphasizes the *sonata genre* as a synthesis of principles applicable to any musical movement and to any musical thinking specific to a particular style (Varvarichi and Nauncef 2021, 107).

For Berger, *aesthetics* is a *philosophy of sensory experience*, it is *the science of sensible knowledge*; it is, therefore, a *philosophy of art*, the *art of thinking beautifully* (Encyclopedia 2004, 296). By observing and understanding the musical experiences offered by composers from different eras, the researcher provides support in understanding the musical phenomenon, the function a creation serves, and the purpose of a work of art. He can guide the reader through the vast realm of sensory experiences.

For the composer, the *knowledge* and complete embracing of every aspect of music, the *organization* of ideas, principles, techniques, styles, and all the content details that have been and can be associated with the musical phenomenon, will open new creative perspectives and shape a perfect profile for future artistic creation. It will propose a luminous, sensitive, and otherworldly sound universe, one of unreal beauty. Berger understood that through knowledge, we lay a solid foundation for any future construction.

He speaks about the concept of *artistic order*, which emerges as a principle of *knowledge*, and discusses the artistic meaning and purpose, which are intertwined



in a certain organic order; about the principle of harmony and how we can emphasize expressiveness in construction, and how we can individualize the form of art (Berger 1985, 281).

Equally important are the **works dedicated to chamber music**: *The Guide to Chamber Instrumental Music* (1965), *The String Quartet from Haydn to Debussy* (1970) and *String Quartets from Reger to Enescu* (1979). His **latest published** volumes include *Classicism from Bach to Beethoven* (1990) and *Mozart – Culture and Style* (1991). These works complement the picture of the major genres to which the composer devoted a significant place in his artistic creation, providing valuable information that significantly contributes to the understanding of the musical phenomenon.

Aware of the complexity of musical art and the overwhelming musical experiences left as artistic legacies by his predecessors, Berger seeks, through his research, to fulfill his vision of a whole (understood as a musical phenomenon) in continuous development and expansion (Berger 1974, 338).

In this context, the vocation for synthesis constitutes an unmistakable hallmark of the Bergerian style (Pavel 2018, 22). Additionally, the dual role of composer and musicologist reveals an aspiration toward a unified principle of philosophical thought, expressed through both words and sound. His musicological writings are characterized by a German precision, an attention to detail, an elegant style of expression, and a clarity of the ideas presented. This aspect is complemented by the lyricism of his creations, which sequentially embrace the **epic**, the **tragic**, the **dramatic** and the **solemn** (Vasile 2011, 4).

## 5. Wilhelm Georg Berger – the theorist

W. G. Berger created his modal system based on the proportions of the golden section (where the total distance is divided in two sections, so that the ratio between the small section and the big section is the same as the distance between the big section and the total distance) and of **Fibonacci sequence** (where each number is the sum of the two preceding numbers), the intervals that the modes contain being proportional each other. As we have seen, Berger is interested in the rational, mathematical part of music, but in the same time in the emotional part of it, in the perception of the musical content. This can be seen in his definition of the mode: „Mode means sound material framed in a certain order with an artistic aim [...]. The logical organization of the sound material creates in the same time the premises of auditory-emotional perception by the listener, who perceives the artistic message”.

And other quote: „We should not forget that a mode represent only a mean and not a goal. The goal can be only the living, expressive music” (Berger 1964, 32). Why a mode theory? Because he wanted to define himself in the context of the Romanian school and – here one can see his generosity – to be useful for others (Manolache 2002, 23). It is well-known that the composer Aurel Stroe applied Berger’s modal theory in his piece, *Arcades* for orchestra, after having studied Berger’s article „Modes and Proportions”, published in 1965 in *Musicology Studies* (Volume 1). Equally, Myriam Marbé was fascinated by the beauty of the structure based on the modal principles developed by the composer.

Berger created new modes, which he named „synthetic” modes, adding elements to the traditional modes, which he named „organic modes”, as pentatonic and diatonic are, where he noticed proportions (they are based on major second and minor third, which correspond to 2 respectively 3 of the Fibonacci numbers), where the unit is the half-tone. In this way his modality encompasses tonal-modal relations, modal serial relations, partial modes, complementary modes, modes with mobile degrees, chromatic modes (Ursu 1990, 28). As we have mentioned his modes are based on Fibonacci numbers, 2, 3, 5 (perfect fourth), 8 (minor sixth), 13 (minor nine), 21 (major thirteenth), where the unit can be a half tone, a whole tone, a whole tone and half, two whole tones etc. – up to 6 whole tones, so he organized the modes in **12 species**, each species in **2 groups**, the first reporting its intervals to the first tone, the fundamental one, the second reporting the same proportions as in the first group, but applied from degree to degree. There are also for every group **types**, that means how many elements they are in a mode, for ex. type a, 3 tones, that are in the relation 2, 3; type b, 4 tones, in the relation 2, 3, 5; type c, 5 tones, in the relation 2, 3, 5, 8.

Influences from the Viennese School with the twelve-tone technique in the configuration of the modes are visible in the serial treatment (similar to original, inversion, retrograde, retrograde-inversion of the original row) of his modes and his inclination for the symmetries: each mode has its descendant inversion from the highest tone, its descendant distribution from the first tone, which he named fundamental – he did not renounce to a tonal center and the functionality –, its ascendant inversion from the lowest tone of the descendant distribution (Berger 1965, 312). Where the intervals of the modes are too large, one can fill them with tones, respecting the same proportions. In this way Berger can generate an amount of modes. As Benedicta Pavel writes, Berger created a generative grammar (Pavel 2021, 114). We show all the variants of the mode from the second movement of the *Fantasia modalis for organ*, which be further analyzed (Figure 1).

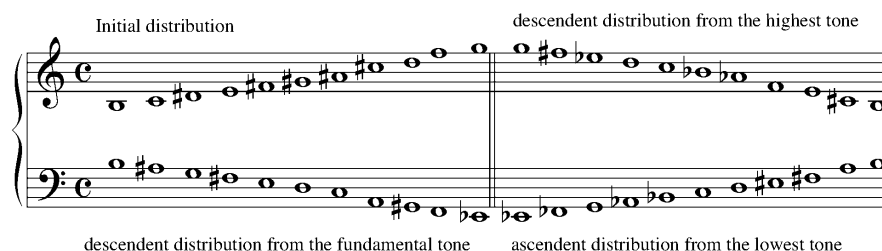


Fig. 1. *The four distributions of the mode in the second movement, „Subiectum II (Tuba mirum) of Fantasia modalis” by W. G. Berger, m. 85-90*

Regarding the harmony, he used the modal models for creating chords, which he built symmetrically up and down starting from the same tone, this being a fundamental, as a tonal center. He exhaustively exposed (today this work can be done by the computer) and explained in the article „Structuri sonore și aspectele lor armonice”/„Sound structures and their harmonic aspects” (Berger, *Muzica* 9,10/1969) the chords resulting from the proportional symmetrical modes with musical examples. The particularity is that he took in account their different sonorances, regarding their consonant, dissonant and neutral character, the chords having cantitative and qualitative features, the last ones regarding our subjective perception of them (Berger 1979, 53-54).

Perfect fourths and fifths are neutral, what means the suspension of the opposite qualities, i.e. of the consonance or dissonance (Berger 1979, 56). Pure neutral is only the relation between two sounds. The overlapping of more fourths or fifths gives secondary qualities, belonging either to the consonance or to the dissonance. He tried to do a modal harmonization giving functions to the harmonic relations, possible in his opinion only through a melodic logical thinking in the context of modal poly-melody (Berger, *Muzica* 10/1969, 12). He disposed the tones of his modes in chords and built chorales, a genre he used with generosity, as an organist and a Lutheran.

However, Octavian Lazăr Cosma mentioned the different functions of Berger’s chorales: contrast, prolongation of an atmosphere, substitute of themes in the form construction, stressing a composition method as the serial modality or accompanying role (Cosma 1979, 68). In this way, he did a synthesis between the Baroque era and the modern one, using in his „integral-chromatic chorales” the chromatic total, which hints to the dodecaphonic serialism. Every voice of the chorale has a mode of 12 tones.

## 6. Wilhelm Georg Berg – the composer

The composer stands out through the complexity of his thinking and by demonstrating a special attention to systematization, order, and harmony; the grouping of compositions and theoretical works into cycles highlights his pursuit of balance between the components of a system (Sandu-Dediu 2002, 152).

The composer's dual role as an instrumentalist (violinist and organist) is reflected in his compositions through a preference for certain genres: the symphony (he composed 24 symphonies), the string quartet (with a total of 21 string quartets), and the instrumental concerto, on one hand, which hints to the dodecaphonic serialism. On the other hand, his works for organ and vocal-symphonic music reveal the deeply religious dimension of the composer, with a religious attitude closely aligned with the Protestant-Bachian tradition. He did not compose opera.

A great master of polyphony and a theoretician of the modal system, the composer is an advocate of monumental symphonic constructions, but also of chamber music refinement, where his imagination has proven to be overflowing (Vasile 2011, 6).

Regarding the architectural schemes used in organizing the sonic material, they illustrate unity in diversity; the assimilation of the structural traditions of the 17th-19th centuries results in the development of juxtapositions between fixed forms and improvisatory ones, achieving a balance between rigor and freedom, a defining aspect of Berger's compositional style (Pavel 2018, 25).

The chamber music repertoire includes **string quartets**, a quintet with two violas (op. 13, 1959), a piano quintet (op. 41, 1971), **sonatas** for various instruments accompanied by piano: violin (op. 7, 1958; op. 50, 1977), viola (op. 3, 1957), cello (op. 21, 1963), as well as **sonatas for solo instruments** – organ (op. 58, 1979), flute (op. 69, 1985), viola (op. 35, 1968), cello (op. 28, 1965), violin (op. 24, 1964). The list is completed by **duos** and **trios** – Sonata for viola and cello, op. 18 (1962), Sonata for flute, viola and cello, op. 27 (1965), Partita for solo violin, op. 62 (1983), and Fantasia for solo organ, op. 72 (1986).

The understanding of the **string quartet** from the perspective of the practitioner, the performer tasked with solving instrumental and stylistic techniques, complemented the musicologist and composer's interest in this musical genre (Cengher 2010, 8).

He composed **21 string quartets**, grouped into cycles of four or six works: Cycle 1 of string quartets, op. 25 (6 quartets, 1954-1964), Cycle 2 of string quartets, op. 32

(6 quartets, 1965-1967), Cycle 3 of string quartets, op. 44 (4 quartets, 1979-1984) and Cycle 4 of string quartets, op. 73 (4 quartets, 1986). In addition to these cycles, there are also Divertimento No. 1 for string quartet, op. 2 (1954), Divertimento No. 2 for string quartet, op. 2 (1956) and String Quartet No. 21, op. 82 (1988).

It is important to highlight that W. G. Berger often created a bridge between the **string quartet** and the **symphony**, presenting certain issues in his quartets that he later amplified in his symphonies. Regarding the last ones, he composed **24 works** (op. 14, 1960–op. 88, 1989). Each symphony stands out with a monumental presence due to its specific structure and a symbolic feature suggested by its subtitle: *Epic, Dramatic, Tragic, Solemn Music, Harmony, Energy, Evening Star, Fantasia, Credo, Sarmizegetusa, To the Star, Solemn Symphony, B.A.C.H., Metamorphoses, Why, And if, The year 1918, Infinite Songs, Toward Joy*<sup>9</sup>.

From the very beginning, it is noticeable that his symphonies propose a programmatic orientation with very general values, different from those typical of Romantic music tied to literature. In quartets, as well as in other chamber works, such indications are absent. The consistency of placing the discourse of his quartets in an abstract zone of pure ideas is evident even through this simple comparative exploration between his symphonies and quartets (Cengher 2010, 10).

Moreover, Berger groups his symphonies into programmatic cycles: *Open Dimensions* (Symphonies No. 16-21) and *Finite Dimensions* (Symphonies No. 22-24). The programmatic character facilitates access to the semantics of each symphony, while the grouping into cycles once again highlights the constant need for systematization, as well as the monumental scale in which the works unfold.

Conceived over the course of three decades, the symphonies reflect the transformational compositional journey undertaken in their development. In Symphony No. 6, *Harmony*, the proportional modes theory is applied in synthesis with serial technique. In Symphony No. 7, *Energy*, architectural and thematic elements rely on mathematical principles, while in Symphony No. 14, *B.A.C.H.*, a tension arises from the antithesis between the old and the new.

Guided by literary creation, the composer takes inspiration from Eminescu's poetry to create Symphony No. 8, *Evening Star*, with mixed choir, op. 40 (1971), Symphony No. 12, *To the Star*, for string orchestra, op. 49 (1978), Symphony No. 16, *And if*, op. 76 (1986), as well as *Among hundreds of masts*, a lyrical cantata for mezzo-soprano, women's choir and orchestra, op. 43 (1973). Other works that incorporate the lyrical texts of writers from the Romanian cultural space include: *The year 1848*,

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<sup>9</sup> An exception is *Symphony No. 18*, written for the Centennial of the Romanian Athenaeum.

an epic cantata with lyrics by Vasile Alecsandri, op. 43 (1977), the song cycle *Hunting* for baritone and piano with lyrics by George Topârceanu, op. 6 (1958), *For peace*, a cantata for mezzo-soprano, baritone, mixed choir and orchestra with lyrics by Radu Boureanu, op. 5 (1958), *Ștefan the Storm*, an oratorio for tenor, baritone, mixed choir and orchestra with lyrics by George Dan, op. 11 (1959), as well as *Three evening songs* for mezzo-soprano, string quartet and piano, op. 51 (1977) and *Four lieds* for mezzo-soprano, flute and organ, op. 65 (1984), both with lyrics by Klaus Kessler (Cosma 1989, 123).

Equally, the composer draws upon universal lyricism. Notable examples in this regard include the song cycle *Petrarca's sonnets* for baritone, flute, horn, viola, cello and piano, op. 9 (1959), *Ifigenia in Aulida*, an orchestral fresco for Euripides' tragedy (1964), the symphonic drama *Faust*, based on the second part of Goethe's *Faust*, op. 61 (1981), Symphony No. 16, *Why*, after Goethe, op. 75 (1985) and Symphony No. 21, *Toward Joy*, after Schiller, op. 80 (1986).

Works that imagine spaces or representative figures of Romanian culture and tradition include *From children's fairy tales*, a suite for orchestra, op. 19 (1963), *Tândală and Păcală*, two sketches for piano, op. 2 (1974), Symphony No. 11, *Sarmizegetusa*, for vocal quartet and mixed choir, with lyrics by Wilhelm Berger, op. 48 (1979) and the symphonic poem *Horia*, op. 69 (1985).

A special place in his creation is held by sacred music, with undeniable evidence in the impressive number of works accompanying various religious ceremonies (referring to masses) or those designed purely instrumentally, aimed at creating a solemn, intimate and austere atmosphere in which prayer is to be recited: Symphony No. 5, *Solemn Music*, op. 37 (1968), Symphony No. 10 with organ, *Credo*, op. 47 (1974), Symphony No. 13, *Solemnis Symphony*, op. 56 (1978), *Abendmahl-Messe* (Holy Communion Service) for organ, string quartet and soprano, op. 73e (1986), *Credo-Messe*, a service for any day of the liturgical year, for string quartet, organ and soprano, op. 73f (1987), *Weihnachtsmesse*, Christmas Mass, for string quartet, organ and soprano, op. 84 (1989), *Missa brevis* for solo organ, op. 93 (1989), *Ostermesse*, Easter Mass for organ, string quartet and soprano, op. 85 (1989), *Messa da Requiem* for choir and symphonic orchestra, op. 95 (1991), *Missa solemnis* for choir and symphonic orchestra, op. 96 (1991), *Litany* for solo organ, op. 101 (1992) and others.

Since it represents an important component of his life, Berger assigns a significant role to the **viola** and composes a series of valuable works in which the special relationship he has with the instrument is evident: Concerto No. 1 for viola and orchestra, op. 12 (1959), Concerto No. 2 for viola and orchestra, op. 16 (1961),

Sonata for viola and piano, op. 3 (1957), Sonata for viola solo, op. 35 (1968), Solo Concert for viola, op. 94 (1990); see also Sonata for viola and cello, op. 18 (1964), Sonata for flute, viola and cello, op. 27 (1965), Sonata for violin and viola, op. 55a (1968), Concerto for violin, viola and orchestra, op. 55 (1978).

Equally important is the **organ**, the instrument that marked his childhood. For it, Berger created a significant number of works, integrating it even into his symphonies, either in a soloist role (Symphony No. 10 for organ and orchestra, and Symphony No. 18 for string orchestra and organ) or in an accompanying role (Symphony No. 5, *Solemn Music*, Symphony No. 9, *Fantasia*).

Other important works that he composed for various instruments include **concertos** for violin (op. 29, 1965; op. 63, 1983), cello (op. 31, 1967), clarinet (op. 57, 1979), piano (op. 74, 1986), organ (op. 60, 1981), **double concertos** – violin and cello (op. 53, 1977), two violins (op. 36, 1968), a **triple concerto** for violin, cello and piano (op. 64, 1984), all accompanied by the orchestra, *Concert Music* for flute and orchestra, op. 42 (1972) and *Concerto for first violin and two string quartets*, op. 45 (1975).

One can say that in W. G. Berger there were two worlds, the German one, in which he was upbrought and educated, and the Romanian one, taken over from the new ambient he lived, from Bucharest. Attempting to have an equilibrium in all, he founded the modality as a binder between these two cultures. The German musical culture was represented by M. Reger, P. Hindemith, A. Schönberg. Regarding the Romanian musical culture, Berger was witness of its evolution, as we have mentioned before, understanding the interest of the Romanian composers for G. Enescu's and B. Bartók's scores, fed by the folklore, where the modality is an important component. In this way, Doru Popovici wrote about Berger's style „it stands out Enescian filiations, as well as ramifications of music by Reger or Hindemith” (Popovici 1970, 192). As a religious person he also assimilated the Lutheran musical culture, the chorale being a feature of its compositions, as well as the Byzantine chant. In this way, in his first cycle of songs for soprano and organ, *Lobgesänge in der Nacht* (1951), on text by Maria Scherg, he firstly applied his modal principle, the songs being Protestant chants, with a Byzantine substrate. It is a synthesis between the Byzantine melody and the Lutheran ethos (Manolache 2002, 24), both elements having the same value.

Inclined toward order and organization, Berger wanted to systematize and reconsidered the great European music tradition. He especially cultivated the sonata form in Beethoven's acceptance of this form. For Berger the sonata form is a balanced form, where the third term, the recapitulation, binds the first two ones,

the exposition and the development (Manolache 2002, 28). On other side, as a Lutheran, he used the chorale and, as a successor of J.S. Bach, he was a master of the polyphony, the fugue form having an important place in his works. His inclination towards the emotional content and towards program music gives him a romantic feature. He characterized himself in the following way: „I camped bound in some way to the great universal romantic tradition, to the classic spirit, but to the baroque rigor” (Manolache 2002, 28).

About the humanistic part in Wilhelm Georg Berger has not been spoken enough, because his exegetes focused on his rational ability, which he demonstrated in his modal theory, created on mathematic bases. Taking in account the emotion and the communication of a message by a musical work, he avoided the radical avant-garde. As he said, „I wanted that every work of mine carries a human vibration that goes from sensitivity to sensitivity, to communicate an emotion and this satisfaction, given by art, manifested in a beautiful form. And I am the conservative, who took distance from all those solutions and techniques that incumbents the accession to an aesthetic of the ugly, I am the one who searched both an aesthetic of the form and of the content in the most noble acceptances of beauty, who searched more classic, cyclical forms, that allowed to expose a message of poetic-philosophical foundation” (Manolache 2002, 31).

## **7. An analytical view on the organ piece, *Fantasia modalis*, op. 81**

*Fantasia modalis* for organ solo, op. 81 (1988) is a work full of meanings, which involves more musical eras, genres and functions. At a first view one can see that the composer applied his modal theory in an organ work, but reading the subtitles – *Concerto ecclesiastico. Come una missa in cantu instrumentalis* – it is obvious that this work has a ritual function, it has to be played in the church, and looking to the 7 movements, one understands that it is a Requiem Mass. Thus, it is a synthesis between a **piece** (fantasy), a **concerto**, the organ having the role of soloist, and of the orchestra, and between a **mass**, the organ taking also the role of the choir and of the vocal soloists. *In cantu instrumentalis/in an instrumental chant*, this could be an instrumental vocality. It lasts 46 minutes and 13 second, as it is written by the composer on the score.

The combination of forms and genres are not new in Berger’s creation. Ileana Ursu has written about this style characteristic, analyzing his 15<sup>th</sup> symphony, *The Year of Peace* (1986), noticing in the first movement a new exposition after the



beginning of the development, with a toccata in sonata, rondo-sonata and passacaglia forms, in an „integral sonata form” (Ursu 1986, 17,18).

The 7 movements are: *Introitus = Requiem*, *Subiectum = I*, *Tuba mirum*, *Subiectum II = Recordare*, *Centrum = Lacrymosa*, *Subiectum III = Hostias*, *Subiectum IV = Sanctus*, *Exitus = Benedictus*. From the titles one can suppose the polyphonic treatment, as well as the core of the work, *Lacrymosa*, which certainly has a connection with the famous *Lacrymosa* in the *Requiem* by W.A. Mozart. We know that Berger wrote a book dedicated to Mozart: *Mozart – cultură și stil / Mozart – Culture and Style* (București, Editura Muzicală, 1991). Otherwise, Berger was inspired by Mozart’s *Requiem*, *Tuba mirum*, *Recordare* and *Lacrymosa* being in the *Sequentia* by Mozart too.

*Introitus (Requiem)* begins with an ison, a typical element for the Byzantine music, which Berger used in his compositions as simple, double or triple (the last being often a minor chord in the second inversion in this work – fourth = 5, sixth = 8) to strengthen the modal center. The tones of the mode are gradually added, the mode of 11 tones being showed in the pedal and in the manual beginning with bar 46, with its descendant inversion from the highest tone (8 bars before) (Fig. 2.)

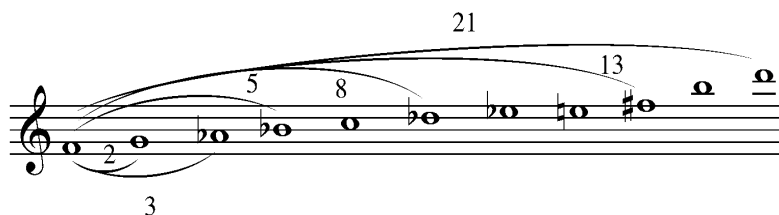


Fig. 2. Mode in the first movement, „Introitus” from „Fantasia modalis” for organ by Wilhelm Georg Berger, m. 46

One notes the background intervals from the F as Fibonacci numbers: 2 = major second, 3 = minor third, 5 = perfect fourth, 8 = minor sixth, 13 = minor ninth or augmented octave, 21 = major thirteenth. The big distances (intervals) are filled with other tones, so that resulted the chromatic total without tone A.

A generator cell is present in the whole work – F, G, Ab –, the first 3 tones of the mode.

In bar 67 the 11 tones of the mode build a choral-melody in the highest voice, the alto having a syncopated counterpoint, hinting to Bach’s varied chorales. In bar 71 he changed the meter to 7/8, the assymmetrical meters belonging to his style. A Romanian popular influence could be seen, but he used these meters in traditional styles as the Baroque one. This chorale theme is exposed in the manuals and then

varied. The last time the chorale is to 4 voices in the manual, in a countertime-syncopated rhythm, moving away from Bach. Then follows the climax on unison between manual and pedal, with the tones C and D, as a beginning of a folk song. This will not rest isolated, in the *Lacrymosa* there are similar hints on the generator cells, marked by portato. *Introitus* ends (Fig. 3) with a countertime-syncopated chorale, with a double ison, on G and C, C being the gravitational modal tone of the whole work.

Fig. 3. Chorale of the „Introitus” from „Fantasia modalis” for organ by Wilhelm Georg Berger, m. 152-164

*Subiectum I (Tuba mirum)* can be divided in an introduction, a free fugato to two voices and a chorale. In the introduction the isons are preserved and multiplied (up to four), then the new mode is ascendently and descendantly presented. In the fugato the tones of the modes are, as in the first movement, gradually added, the answer being the inversion. From measure 85 the modes appears in all its variants in the manual, the chorale being heard in the pedal as in Fig. 1. The chorale theme will be audible then in manual in *ff* (tutti), illustrating the trompette (tuba mirum) and once again in a choral at the end, in a countertime-syncopated rhythm.

*Subiectum II (Recordare)* begins in a meter of 5/8 with large phrases in pedal, the manuals having a reduced material: minor thirds and sixths. The ascendent phrase, which ends the sections (bar 29), could represent the soaring soul. The confirmation of this is the registration, which follows, aethera 4 x 2 2/3', as well as the soft dynamic. The isons, which have become constitutive elements of the piece arrive up to 10 voices in the manual (bar 46-48). The pedal continues with the isons (49-77) on the inversion of the mode exposed (bar 31-36). In this time the upper voice sings the chorale melody from the *Introitus*, which was there at the end, but here transfigured: other meter – 5/8 and articulation – legato, meanwhile the middle voice has a syncopated counterpoint.

*Centrum (Lacrymosa)*, the core of the work, has the indication *p semplice e nobile, con intimissimo sentimento* and the densest polyphony, a fugato to 5 voices. In contrast to the rigour of a traditional fugato or fugue and of the chorales from the other sections, the subject forms an unbroken line, rhythmically asymmetrical. Unusual is the answer, respecting the direction of the subject, but not the intervals. The third voice has the free inversion of the first voice and the fourth voice, the free inversion of the second voice. We have already mentioned the folklore hints in the counterpointal voices. This statement could be confirmed further by the mordents (bars 61, 64 and 66). The pedal brings the subject in pedal, but the other voices sing isorhythmically with it, i.e. the polyphony ends in homophony. An inclination to rhetoric is in bars 73-84, the upper voice having a kind of recitativo. As other movements, this also ends with a chorale.

*Subiectum III (Hostias)* makes more visible two different traditions, on the one hand through the imitations, which refers to the traditional polyphony, on the other hand through the double isons, which refers to the Byzantine tradition. The 7/8 meter fits with a kind of folk melody transfigured through the registration (again aethera) and dynamics (*pp*). The isons amplify, in the next movements being to 10 voices. *Lacrymosa* was the only movement without isons.

*Subiectum IV (Sanctus)* is a festive passacaglia with six variations. The theme in the bass creates a heterophony with the manual. The bass firstly brings the theme broken by rests in *f*, while on the manual are polyphonically built multiple isons, brought in *pp*.

*Exitus (Benedictus)* exposes unisons on the central tones – E, G, C –, which form a major triad, being in the background in Berger's thinking, because it allowed a functional thinking. This movement is a synthesis of all the previous movements. The generating cell is played in ostinato and its intervals are amplified. Polyphonic passages are combined with homophonic ones, with the cantus firmus in pedal and with isons.

This analysis has tried to give a view in the compositional labyrinth of Berger, of luxuriant musical ideas, which are exposed in *the Introitus* and elaborated in the other movements. The isons and the chorales (almost in every movement) give the unity of the whole work, as well as the generating cell and the initial mode, which generates the others. Genres and forms as passacaglia, chorale, fugato are suitable for a concerto ecclesiastico and in the same time for an instrumental mass, where the organ has the soloist role, the role of the orchestra and of the choir in each liturgical movement of the Requiem Mass.

## 8. Conclusions

Wilhelm Georg Berger describes faithfully the prototype of the complex musician, always concerned with the renewal of sonic art, connecting the living past to modernity, and the interplay between the theoretical and practical aspects of music.

He remains a composer with an authentic balance of large forms, built on solid foundations, an important representative of the integration of mathematical thinking into music, whose creation is based on „a modal ground of luxuriant diversity and inexhaustible solutions offered, with an emphasis on modalism derived from tonal-modal extraction” (Stoianov 2023, 6). For him, the primacy of emotionality, the musical message, does not exclude the presence of a massive sonic architecture, featuring large and wide curves of structural forms (Cosma 1989, 124).

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