

About *Trois Pastorales* for voice and piano by Romanian composer Filip Lazăr

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Abstract: *There are rarely highlighted works and stages of composition, part of the evolution of any composer, both in exegesis and in the auditory memory of the public. In consequence, a presentation and analysis by several perspectives (stylistic-musical, historical, social, monographic) is always a welcome restoration act. The creation of the Romanian composer Filip Lazăr is one of international interest, with diverse stylistic spacing, part of it, developed on the line of the European interwar Avant-garde or following an edification of the National Spirit in musical writing, not by cited fragments but by subtly integrating both the genre and the internal archaic structures of the folk song. In this study, I propose a brief look at *Trois Pastorales* for voice and piano, a cycle of songs coming out from a young master of music's pen, composed a year before the separation of both the natal space and of the idyllic sound representations, in a modal-tonal space, enlarged with Romanian sound iridescences.*

Key-words: *Romanian vocal chamber music; Filip Lazăr; Pastoral cycle; Neo-classic folk related*

1. Introduction

Unfortunately, few musicians are familiarized with the Romanian composer's profile of *Filip Lazăr*, even less it is known about his early musical creation, before his final settlement in France, Paris (Bejan 2018, 1).² Once, because it belong to a period that marks a compositional and divergent stylistic hypostasis (compared to its

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² "*Filip Lazăr's creation remains one of the enigmas of Romanian music from the first half of the 20th century, being largely unknown (due to the composer's establishment in Paris, as well as his untimely death at the age of 42)*" [my translation from Romanian language].

subsequent development³) and from another point of view, both in the country and abroad, for reasons difficult to understand, consequently republishing these early but valuable works (in recent editions) it still remains a *desideratum*. Before his 35 years anniversary, he was a sensation in Europe's musical avant-garde circle; some of his works were already published by the greatest European houses of the time (*Durand, Salabert, Heugel* and *Max Eschig*) and he was one of the few European composers promoted in USA, by important conductors such as *Serge Koussevitzky* and *Charles Munch*.

At only 26 years old (1920), we find this promising young virtuoso pianist⁴, descendant of a family of certain musical interests, in an intrigued compositional pole position profile, part of the asserted, enthusiastic and deeply reforming panoply of Romanian interwar musical elite group, as a founding member of the *Romanian Composers Society*, the first and only Romanian professional guild of creative youth gathered at Bucharest, around the international renowned visionary and mentor, *George Enescu*.

Before being one of those European musicians pushing the boundaries of what was accepted as the *status quo* in the musical realm of the second and third decades of the XXth century⁵; in consequence- until his 25 years anniversary(!)- the active and talented *Filip Lazăr* was already a graduated student of the Bucharest Conservatory piano and composition classes, continuing composition studies (by *Stephan Krehl's* classes) and piano training (in the class of the famous German professor *Robert Teichmuller*) at the *Leipziger Konservatorium*, a returning to Romania as concert pianist (in 1915), and a two years military combatant service, paying his duty to the country, fighting on the Eastern front in the First World War.

In addition to the key-figures mentors and the meaningful education profile mentioned earlier, *his up front position in the group of young talented Romanian*

³ *Filip Lazăr*, Romanian *avant-garde* composer (*Neo-classicism; Serial and innovative experiments in music periods of composition*) and virtuoso pianist, (6 of May 1894, Craiova, Romania-3 of November 1936, Paris, France), nowadays, almost forgotten charismatic musical personality of the European inter-war period.

⁴ After the First World War, the Romanian composer continued his career as a concert pianist, too (in Romania, France, Switzerland, Austria, and United States of America). In parallel, he taught music theory and private piano lessons (in 1937 at Davos, Switzerland is visited, for professional reasons, by the young 20 years old virtuoso-pianist, *Dinu Lipatti*) (Tomescu 1963, 20).

⁵ After a short nationalistic neoclassical period, followed by a *Second Viennese* twelve tone school technique one, he joined the *Parisian Avant-garde* (1928), under the influence of *Igor Stravinsky*, *Marcel Mihalovici*, and *Francis Poulenc* and composed several astonishing *postmodernist* experiments, such as *The Ring* (1928), and *Music for Radio* (1931). After their premiere, both works entered in the repertoires of important European conductors (Tomescu 1963, 26).

*composers*⁶ is increased by the important professional credit offered by *George Enescu's* double awarding choice in the *Annual Composition Prize*, (with a Musical Distinction and the Second Prize for 1915 and 1919 editions).⁷

2. Issue and Objectives

In this study, we bring to the public attention, a musical creation and a compositional personality about which little is known today, especially in Romania. The early residence in Paris, the sudden loss, since his mature age, of this very talented Romanian musician weakened the interest of current critics to periodically investigate his works, even if its impact at the time was one to consider. Frequent past validations from great personalities (European brand composers and compatriot G. Enescu) are an additional guarantee of these necessary restorations.

In addition to this aspect, the analysed chamber creation, *Trois Pastorales* song cycle, knows few musical publications and for this reason, even fewer opinions have emerged on it: both among performing musicians and musicologists.

Another important aspect is the crossroads in which these works were composed, a year before immigrating to the international space - after a previous compositional accumulation, worthy of appreciation, in a musical style that aimed *to re-create based on the element's structural extracts from the form and essence of the authentic folk song*. Because the Enescu's experiment -structural recreation of a music with elements extracted from the folk song- stimulates a whole generation of young Romanian composers (for some, in certain stages of creation before moving on to other aesthetics and stylistic writings), is an overwhelming one and reaches the interest of many young Romanian composer *Filip Lazăr, Tudor Ciortea, Sigismund Toduță*, and many others, to come with their own approaches.

⁶ *Famous musician in Paris, [...] opened to the new trends of the Era, Filip Lazăr sought from the beginning his own way of assertion in the stream of Modern Aesthetics.* [my translation from Romanian language] (Tomescu, 1963,176).

⁷ It is about the *National Composition Prize*, initiated and sponsored in 27 editions (1913-1946) by *George Enescu*. Besides the mention from 1915 and the second prize in 1919, *F. Lazăr* obtains a *First Prize* in 1924. "*Most of the first prizes awarded confirmed truly special works, subsequently imposed in the repertoire of Romanian musical life, which attests to the axiological clairvoyance of the commissions chaired by Enescu, a will not to be limited to a simple act of encouragement.*" [in my translation from Romanian] (Văidean 2020, 295).

3. Material and methods

Composed in 1927, the cycle of songs *Trois Pastorales* for voice and piano (on the lyrics of the Romanian Poet *Șt. O. Iosif*⁸ collection of verses in Folkloric style, named *Songs and Ballads*), has a dedication to a confrere, a generation young colleague, too (the composer, conductor and music critic *Alfred Alessandrescu*). The poet was a close friend and collaborator of Filip Lazăr, a prolific contributor of many literary magazines, the author is preoccupied in his poems with the treatment of specific themes - the village, uprooting, actually creating a very sensitive poetry of rustic atmosphere.

This work was presented in the first absolute audition, on February 9, 1930, in its French textual version (translated by *Emanoil Ciomac*) with orchestra accompaniment, in *Paris*, in the *Sarah Bernhardt Theater Hall*, under the direction of *Gaston Poulet*. The other few public presentations were in the Romanian version (lyrics), a version which reached us, through publication. For this occasion Filip Lazăr is already a resident (for 2 years) in Paris, in the company of his compatriot and friend *Marcel Mihalovici*, establishing connections with the artistic environment of the international avant-garde. In 1932 we find, both of them, on the list of active founding members of the *Triton*⁹ *Society for Contemporary Music*,¹⁰ an artistic guild attended or honorary presided by the most important European musical figures of the moment.

This decision is strongly influenced by the existence in the Parisian environment of a compact Romanian group of elites (in most fields of art and science), being well

⁸ *Ștefan Octavian Iosif* (1875, Brașov, Austria-Hungary - 1913, Bucharest, Romania) was a Romanian poet and translator, founding member of the *Romanian Writers' Society* in 1908. Prolific collaborator of many literary magazines, the author is preoccupied in his poems with the treatment of specific themes - the village, uprooting, actually creating a very sensitive. poetry of rustic atmosphere.

⁹ *Triton* refers both to a dissonance (a triton being the "diabolical" augmented quarter interval that musical modernism used profusely in its crusade against traditional harmony) and a force (the company logo will be in effect as a newt of Neptune's strike, the greek God of Waters (Lazzaro 2020, 1).

¹⁰ *Pierre-Octave Ferroud* has the idea of grouping the artistic interests of the asserting group of the innovative artists who had merged in Paris, into a chamber music company named *Triton* (1932-1939), founded to promote new music. The executive committee includes composers including *Darius Milhaud*, *Arthur Honegger*, *Francis Poulenc*, *Sergey Prokofiev* and *Bohuslav Martinu*. *Richard Strauss*, *Igor Stravinsky*, *Albert Roussel*, *Maurice Ravel*, *Arnold Schoenberg*, *Karol Szymanowski* and *Béla Bartók* agreed to be on the honorary committee. The Society's concerts were held at the *École Normale de Musique*, and the first event took place on December 16, 1932 with the European premiere of the *Sonata for two violins* by S. Prokofiev and the absolute premiere of the *Sonatina for violin and cello* by A. Honegger. *Bartók*, *Paul Hindemith* and *Olivier Messiaen* (with *Chants de terre et de ciel*, entitled *Prisms*, the absolute premiere on January 23, 1939) sent works to present to the public through this Society (Lazzaro 2020, 2).

known the predilection, since the previous century (Nineteenth century) of the local intellectual class, to focus on affirmation or just infusion with the news of the time, either to the French space or to the German space (Leipzig, Berlin).

From the musical chronicle of the French premiere, the critic *Louis Aubert* tells us the first impressions about a music that the French public felt about a strong, authentic- ethnic (Romanian) folk scent,- in which refers specifically to the possibility of having a musical discourse that seems to inexplicably recreate some structure of old layers folk songs. How is this possible? "There is nothing in these pages that accurately recalls folklore, and yet it is as if Filip Lazăr is creating again, for us, a Popular Expression. His style is full of sap, without harshness, which waves like the story of a peasant, the freshness of inflections and the way he understands to use the organ points, everything in these collection, insinuates itself in its own sensitivity to arouse an echo: everything here moves [...] with the impression of not moving." (Tomescu 1963, 84).

The approached theme (*Pastoral + lyrics' meanings*) is one that also touches the sensitive chord of an oppressive lyricism that wears strong social signification (especially, in the second song). From pastoral images, as if evoking moments descended from the landscape of an archetypal structured ballad like *Miorița*,¹¹ those paintings of the tragic suffering of the peasantry burdened by the hardships of existence are also evoked. This expansion of emotional content, musically involved a substantial extension of the palette and compositional means, compared to other cycles in the composer's creation. As the Romanian musicologist *Vasile Tomescu* states in his monograph dedicated to Lazăr, this cycle "approach the dramatized song, foretelling the satirical song and the lament, from our contemporary creation." (Tomescu 1963, 86).

The first pastoral (*Tempo rubato*) a sectional- ternary (A-B- varied A'), begins with an introduction addressed to the instrumental compartment, which is part of a nonoctavian scalar development (B flat-A-G-F-E-D- C sharp- B natural), which sums upwards, two lines formed by tetrachords (Major tetrachord and Dorian tetrachord). Here, is the first musical idea, articulated in musical distinct motifs. The constant support of the sound, imprints the same *indefinite and pastoral state* (suggesting a sound imaginary universe, specific to the Romanian

¹¹ The text is evocative, very connected as story to the famous folk Romanian ballad *Miorița* (lyrics in my translation, from Romanian): "Alone as an outlaw; In exile like the cloud; Searching for tomorrow to go away; and leaving behind my precious one. Tomorrow I leave at dawn; But until tomorrow; come closer, my day; My Doina (song), my master! Doina (song) and the Shepard; When the flock had perished; And he went on, singing; To lose his trace.".] (The First Pastoral's lyrics- Șt. O. Iosif-Cântece și Balade, I).

lands, comparative to Enescu's experiments in the 3rd part of the First Sonata for piano in F minor minor, for example).

The vocal line is insinuated over the accompaniment landscape, in a Phrygian scale, with a fluctuating 6th tone (sometimes up or back to natural), but which will evolve towards a chromatic musical motion, combined with augmented seconds. All that, takes place on a chordal structure that further diversifies the previous harmonic plane (by displaying as leading- tones to the third- F diesis, to the seventh, to the inverse leading- tone of the tonic E natural) all simultaneously with the real sounds of chords (E flat, G and B flat) acting as a Phrygian cadence. Section B is dynamic (*poco piu vivo*) and brings a mixolidic exposition in canon writing (for the accompaniment score), in a compact package with the vocal line. The return (varied A) restores the previous harmonic and sound climate, maintaining the pastoral character of the melody, who relates so credible, empathetically, to the sorrow of the hopeless Mioritic Shepherd (peasant).

The final chord (conglomerate of 7 sounds) maintains a modernist and modal harmonic situation by superimposing over the bass fourth, a Doric sixth.

The second song (*Molto pesante*) without a specific title, presents in a pictorial image, one of the hypostases of the rural rhythms of the Romanian village atmosphere: at the end of the day, the return to home of the loaded carts pulled by oxen after a tiring work in the fields. By combining the lyrics¹² with the music imagined by F. Lazăr, the artistic message it is almost pictural, and has a special plasticity, sending directly as connection, to the iconic image of the painter Nicolae Grigorescu's famous XIXth Century painting .¹³ (Rădulescu 2021,1)

Like the lyrics, which send to a poetic image of an oppressive, sad atmosphere, the piano accompaniment abounds in tenuto indications, on each part of beat (metric beats), these are grouping in ostinato formulas, appropriated formulas to suggest monotony, the weight of life over the poor hard-working peasants. The dynamic spectrum is monotonous, the song's dynamic range is being kept in an oppressive *mf sempre*, almost impersonal.

The third song (*Molto lento*) ends the cycle and is a fleeting image, very short moment of music, filled with warm thoughts of farewell to the Nature, to the homeland. As we observe, in this cycle there are three hypostases of the rural archaic

¹² In my translation from Romanian, the second Pastoral lyrics *The oxen are obedient to the yoke; Ready to leave; Unhappy carriers; They go by carts;The heavy carts; Squeaks under the load; Yesterday as today and today as yesterday. Wind and cold and rain; The road is rough and difficult; Darkness sets in. "Good God knows if we reach home!"* (Șt. O. Iosif- Cântece și Balade, III).

¹³ See Nicolae Grigorescu, *Car pulled by oxen*" [Car cu boi] (oil painting on wood, 1897), a representative painting of the Romanian Art, emblematic image with social impact, who gained immediately popularity among the art-loving public.

universe of the rhythms and ubiquity of an ancient and current Romanian society of the composer's times: the shepherd's life with the flocks of sheep; of farmers who are tired and exhausted by hard work alongside their ox-carts; of the deep forest, the place of refuge and communion with nature of the Romanian of all times.

The vocal line, a monody built on an old Romanian folk structure (a hexachord with movable steps) accentuates the state of insecurity, difficulty and despair of the illustrated painting, through music. The piece is small, quite elliptical, consisting of two sections (A and A' varied) that outline from an harmonic point of view, the state of pressure that is suggestively marked by the loaded chords texture, with almost gloomy accents.

This Pastoral re-transpose into the first one atmosphere, cyclically concluding a pastoral journey on the hills and plains of transhumance.

In the same time, with the last verses,¹⁴ indirectly and subtlety, in the same manner as are the musical lines, those announces the regrets of the composer himself, about leaving his natal country, going to present to the world, the Romanian talent, his potential in musical field, but feeling that the heart remained incastred within this realistic and dear to him [Romanian] places and times.

It begins with the quasi-arpeggius development of the piano's score on the sound space of a hexaton archaic scale (held chordally in the pedal on certain sections).

This sweet monody takes place slowly, timelessly, in a serene atmosphere, to the rhythm of the trochaic formulas and the variation installed by the mobility of the tones, using a tonal-modal approach. Again, structural elements of popular language organizing the vocal line, which makes the whole discourse to be assimilated, from an auditory point of view, *as an original re-creation of the popular type*. The vocal solo melody is mainly composed of chromatic developments on chordal structures, also their fundamental sounds being found as support in the accompaniment part.

In some places, there is a state of anxiety, of inner turmoil. The instrumental harmonization is a reduced one, registering on the line of simplicity (a pedal chord of fourths, pulsing every time) ensuring a comforting point of support to the voice, that slides transparently through a melismatic line, but which at the end reaches a climax on the sound A natural and goes out with a clear cadence and appoggiatura in a folk style, on the main tone.

¹⁴ In my translation from Romanian, the third Pastoral lyrics: "Dear Deep Forest, I leave you; I go on foreign roads; I have a guarantee left; My heart to you; Dear Deep Forest!" [Romanian: *Dragă Codrule, te las; Plec pe căi străine; Chezășie mi-a rămas; Inima la tine; Dragă Codrule*] (Șt. O Iosif-Cântece și Balade, IV).

4. More Conclusions

On the line of realignment with the current musical aesthetics of Europe, all the more so through this small cycle, but addressed to a musical genre of wide popularity (the accompanied vocal genre, with two versions for piano and orchestra accompaniment), F. Lazar, brings in juxtaposition modern and original ways of structural reconfiguration of the national (popular) element.

In sintonicity with Enescu's example through his personal neoclassical vision, also with this work, is one of the young ones, who realized the concretization of the efforts of his generation to reconcile the wanted European synchronism with the Romanian autochthonism.¹⁵

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¹⁵ This tendency is also noticed by the musicologist *Valentina Sandu-Dediu* in the *New Histories of Romanian Music* in the chapter dedicated to the Musical Ideologies of the 20th century in Romania (Sandu-Dediu 2020, 18).