

## ***Pastorale* by Naji Hakim – A Stylistic Approach**

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**Abstract:** *In the musical field, Lebanese composers represent a living proof of a different approach to cult music, a symbiosis between tradition and avant-garde, between modern and oriental elements, folk music with melisma typical of traditional Lebanese music and western classical music of French inspiration. (this is due to the specialized studies carried out in France and here I would mention the Francophone contribution underlying the institutionalization of education in Lebanon). The privilege of performing *Pastorale* for bassoon solo by Naji Hakim, a work that was dedicated to me by the author and was experienced to its final sound value, gave me unforgettable moments from an interpretative point of view and a special honor to participate in such a collaboration.*

Key-words: *bassoon, Lebanon, style, performance, tradition*

### **1. Introduction**

*“Time and history flow with us, so all we have to do is observe, inform and judge ourselves”* (Chelaru 2020, 258). Thinking deeply about the situation of contemporary music and the condition of today’s composer, we can say the following statements: the contemporary composer is forced to overcome the audience’s saturation, which comes from this pressure of the excessive power of consumption which exists in all entertainment, including music. There is an almost hellish constraint in which contemporary composers find themselves.

The composer can help herself in this case, by exploring some psychic spheres as extravagant and bizarre as possible, moreover “he will look for solutions in finding spiritual patrons outside to art” (Bentoiu 1971, 209). Thereby, thinking components proven in other fields such as mathematics, linguistics, will be involved in order to capture the interest of an audience.

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## 2. Objectives

The contemporary composer formulates his musical truths in a distinct nonconformist manner, which will attract the audience by producing privileged states (which can achieve ecstasy, joy, inner fulfillment). Let us not forget, however, that contemporary music does not always prove to be understood and that the appreciations of contemporaries do not represent the final judgment, after all it will be denied and decanted on numerous occasions by history.

Style, through the etymology of the word, can designate the characteristics of a collectivity, of an epoch, can designate the properties of a string of objects that relate to an ideal pattern. The style contains semantic meanings necessary for any author, applicable to any interpreter and implicitly is found in the result of their work concentrated in an interpretative act. Style can also be the representative and etiquette of a nation and an era.

The performer comes to identify with the composer, with the creator of musical works. An ideal interpretation of contemporariness is the representation of all the technical means from which the ideational content will be highlighted through the prism of the creative artistic personality, which is subordinated to the aesthetic climate of the composer.

Music is an integral part of religious practice and represents often the sources of scientific music. Lebanon is a corner of the Middle East where no less than seventeen different religious communities merge. Each religion has its own musical traditions that sometimes date back to their beginnings and have been transmitted orally for centuries. If we open our curiosity to examine Christian religious music we could notice Maronite and Byzantine music; to which we would add the religious music of Islam.

Father Bady 'Hajj, one of the great scholars of Maronite music recognized today, explains the correlation between the traditional Lebanese song and the Syrian-Maronite song from a linguistic, poetic and musical point of view – Père Badî 'Hajj - “The Traditional Song of Lebanon” (Tannous 2008, 275-284).

Many musicologists have studied traditional Lebanese song, including Father Bady 'Hajj who distinguished three main categories: melismatic song (a syllable can be sung on many different notes), syllabic song (each syllable corresponds to a different note) and the mixed song that mixes the two previous forms (Hajj 2008, 277-283).

In an unpublished text entitled *Prelude to Lebanese Music: Maronite Music* (Personal Archives of Jean-Louis Mainguy, Son of Marc-Henri Mainguy), the musicologist Marc-Henri Mainguy states that Lebanese music is certainly “initially dependent on many foreign influences”, but that it is absolutely essential to note that the primordial element, the most enduring and important is religious music.

Music can be considered the supreme product of a civilization, as living proof of the generations that have succeeded over the centuries. Although we do not have written evidence, we know that one of the earliest musical notation is due to the mathematician Pythagoras, who lived in Sidon in the sixth century before Christ. However, a few fragments of information tell us about how music has manifested itself in this part of the world since ancient times.

Among the historical sources of Lebanon, a nation of Phoenician origin, we find some allusions to the mourners of Adonis and to the songs of Achtarut (Marc-Henri Mainguy 1968) to the musical instruments that already existed – the harp and the lute – or even the context in which the main purpose of the music is presented: covering the cries of those who burned as a sacrifice to the gods (Tannous 2008, 257-272).

The Bible itself alludes to the role played by music in Phoenician cults. Ahiiram, king of Tyre, offered Solomon wood to make harps, and when the prophet Ezekiel threatened the city of Tyre with destruction he said: "I will put an end to the harmony of your songs, and the song will no longer be heard with the sound of the zithers" (Ezekiel, 26-13). The names of the Phoenician musicians are even mentioned: Plautus, Juvenal, Horace, Adrian (Sachs 1943, 102). The musicologist and composer Walid Gholmieh (1933-2011), in his unique study *Al musiqa fi lubnân*, states that the Greeks used the musical instruments of the Phoenicians such as cedarwood flutes.

In the four hundred years of the Ottoman empire's domination, music was mostly traditional and its transmission was oral. At the same time, in the region of Mount Lebanon – which enjoys political and cultural autonomy - the development of its own music, belonging to the folk, folk style, was lost. This musical legacy will then evolve over time and will form the basis of the improvisational character. Thus, we offer some examples: 'Ataba (means complaint and is generally sung a cappella), Mijâna (chorus of 'Ataba), Zajal (authentic poetic oratory that is usually practiced around the table, often accompanied by dance), Dabka.

Among the most used specific musical instruments we mention the nay – six or seven-hole wind instrument made from cane, daff – percussion instrument that can be worn on the shoulder, 'ûd – oriental lute, mejwez – double-reed instrument, qânûn – Arab cithare, ancestor of the psaltirus, himself at the origin of the harpsichord, and kamanje – oriental violin.

If Arabic music in general had its great theorists between the ninth and thirteenth centuries such as al-Kindî (801-873) or al-Farâbî (872-950), Lebanese music in particular began to be theorized only in the nineteenth century by Mikha'îl Michâqa. The document he wrote in 1848, entitled *Letter on the musical art* dedicated to Emir Bashyr, was to become a milestone in the analyses of modern

Arab music. Published in 1899, this Letter proved to be the first attempt at musical theorizing and, at the same time, a real starting point that opened the horizons of many musical polemics on the oriental space.

At the end of the nineteenth century, two members of the priesthood: Father Paul Achqar (1881-1962) and Father Louis Hajj (1938-2010) revolutionized this music through harmonization and transcriptions and the mastery of composing, providing Maronite music with well-deserved scientific credentials. The migration and invasion of the peoples of the Middle East on the territories of Europe gives rise to a new composing orientation, the so-called "citric acid of music", an orientation that ensures the interest in integration into the great culture, but also the promotion of the national specificity.

In Lebanon, names of international musical importance grew, developed, and flourished, although the country did not seem like a favorable or ideal place for this side of cult music. Music education was not so accessible and comprehensive in the direction of pedagogic formalization of the artistic field as opposed to Western education. But what turned out to be an obstacle became the lever of the will of some generations, the germ from which the irresistible desire to expand knowledge flourished. If we judge from the perspective of the musical influences that have crossed the Lebanese land: Byzantine, Syrian, Persian, Ottoman and taking into account that this "metesa" (mixed music, as Gabriel Yared calls it in his interviews) has come to be reflected in Lebanese music, we can practically consider the Lebanese musical culture as a reflection of eclecticism.

Making a brief inventory of Lebanese composers we discover a musical life with its riches and shortcomings, artists and institutions, impulses of great magnitude sometimes cut off from short periods of periods dominated by conflicts or even wars, but also the revival of the artistic spirit in a miraculous way.

In the hope of not falling in the direction of cliché about the country's conflicting political status, we want to outline the side at the opposite pole of this country – creativity, the compositional quality, the interpretive artistic side, but also the existence of unsuspected musical dimensions on Lebanon ground. Being a platform in the field of musical-artistic compositions less approached on the European territory (especially our country) I chose to exploit and capitalize on the contribution of composers from Lebanon who understood, through their specific national altruism, to direct their energy in the sense of integrating culture into the European concept.

The mystery of these composers is born in the oriental spirit, there is in them this authentic ethos, they grow and develop in this plausible traditionalism. Their hearing is constantly fertilized by oriental music with quarter-tones, melisms, rhythms and characteristic timbres and everything related to the Arab spirit to

which is added the folklore located at a pole totally opposite to that of the West. The mystery lies in the fact that they are born with oriental melody (almost impossible to be appropriated and absorbed at its authentic odds), over which is added western composing art and not the other way around.

This synthesis between national and European is also an ability to harness the advantages of ethnicity: “You must be prepared to understand the talent with which you are endowed”, said the great Lebanese artist, composer of film music G. Yared, winner of the Hollywood Academy Award. Through gene and traditionalism, they have additions of melodicity, and oriental music is not yet capitalized on its so tender odds. The mating of ethnicities will always give exceptional results, and when applied at the level of creation it will generate effects in fabulous contours. The symbiosis of the Mediterranean geographical horizons – from which influences emerge, promotes invasions and opens the mind to escape – with sacred music (a tradition deeply rooted in Lebanon) has remained anchored in the music of Lebanese artists.

Making a brief inventory of Lebanese composers we discover a musical life with its riches and shortcomings, artists and cultural institutions, large-scale impulses sometimes cut off from short periods dominated by conflicts or even wars, but also the revival of the artistic spirit in a miraculous way. Lebanese composers are no exception in the context of international musical hieratism, their mission being not at all easy in that they had to recover, in just a few decades, important artistic conquests that in the West were formed and established at a natural rhythm over the centuries.

“Regardless of the present and future performances of intelligent machines, art remains in the account of the Human!” (Chelaru 2020, 228). Art will remain under human significance, will unfold, evolve and transmit perpetually under the auspices of the chromosomal need of the genesis of humanity and of the intrinsic need to share and express sensitivity and states of mind, this elevated level of evolution that differentiates us between living things.

### **3. Discussions: Naji Hakim – outstanding personality of the Lebanese musical life. *Pastorale* for bassoon solo**

Naji Hakim, a composer and organist born in Beirut on October 31, 1955 and settled in Paris since 1975, is regularly scheduled in Lebanon to the delight of his music-loving compatriots, but is also a star in Northern Europe where organistic tradition is very present and where he is regularly invited to sing and perform his work.

After studying music at the Conservatory of Beirut, Naji Hakim left Lebanon travelling to France to complete his engineering studies at the *École supérieure des télécommunications* in Paris. But the lack of music became unacceptable to him; thus, his journey led him to enrol at the prestigious National Superior Conservatory of Music in Paris, where he was awarded no less than seven first prizes. Hakim later won over ten first prizes at international organ and composition competitions. He was awarded the Medal "Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice" by Pope Benedict XVI in 2007, and from 1985 to 1993 Hakim was organist at the *Basilique du Sacré-Coeur* Church in Paris, then organist at the Church of *Sainte-Trinité* in Paris (1993-2008), where he was the successor of Olivier Messiaen.

Hakim is now an absolute reference name for organists around the world; some travel from distant countries to Paris to listen to him sing and improvise in the chapel of the Trinity. Aside from performing, he is also a prolific composer of symphonic, concertante, vocal, solo, and chamber music works. They combine Gregorian, Syrian, Maronite, and folk music, rendering a creation with a rich colorful palette on a modern tonal language. He is also and a respected teacher. (His analysis course at the National Conservatory in the Boulogne-Billancourt region, near Paris, is one of the most popular in France). The so-called "Armiral" of the Lebanese musical heritage, Hakim is one of those artists who managed to free himself from his tradition but, at the same time, without denying it, he remained faithful to him.

His creation integrates into the aesthetics of the sacred, a fundamental aspect that crosses his creation. To the question "Which of the composers have aroused a special interest in you and inspired you as a style?" the composer admitted that it was a difficult choice, since influence and passion are constructly changing with the passage of the years. Still, he named Glazounov, Fauré, Debussy, Ravel, Stravinsky, Bartok, and Gershwin. The life of a contemporary composer nowadays is, first of all, a comprehensive human consciousness of thoughts and facts related to the past that transport and incorporate the influences and experiences that then become memories, passing through the seemingly controllable present through actions that compete with the reality of thought from which the future is reflected that encompasses infinite levels of aspiration.

Maestro Naji Hakim's *Pastorale*, a work dedicated to me, employs elements of aesthetic resizing and reassessment that will reach unsuspected heights in both creation and interpretation. The belonging of the title of for bassoon solo accesses a compositional platform with a perfect mastery from a bassoon technic point of view, which gives voice to the aesthetic message contained in the work through a vision mirrored in its own style and, projected in a future of the affective means of expression, through the specificity and freedom of each interpretive approach in part.

The piece does not reverberate with the authentic contemporary style, missing the “tools” in his composition workshop on the direction of contemporary semiography, which is reflected in the elliptical of the innovative-musical effects specific to the XXI century. The work is strongly marked by the influence of the French school through the structure of the melodic lines that do not use the typology of the modes specific to the oriental culture; there are even similarities with the concerto for bassoon and the orchestra by Jean Françaix (by using the large intervallic jumps that put to the test the technical-instrumental perfection of any bassoonist, through melodic expansiveness built on formulae of exceptional divisions, and by framing the musical text into serialistic phrases as compositional techniques). All these characteristics reinforce the idea of French-type influence in the architectural structure of the work. The modal intimacy, the architectural novelty, but also the special organizational concept of the audible material bring to the compositional plan both elements of resizing and aesthetic re-evaluation that ensure the originality of the work.

The composition is organized on a structure of thesis-antithesis and synthesis, the *pastorale* term being the representative of musical images of great plasticity and evocative emotional force. The genre was brought to a high level of craftsmanship by names of resonance in the history of music: Antonio Vivaldi – “Dance Pastorale”, Domenico Scarlatti – “Pastoral Sonata”, Ludwig van Beethoven – The Sixth Symphony “Pastorale”, George Enescu – Suite no. 3 “Village”, “Impressions from childhood”.

The debut of the work is made in the pianissimo dynamic range through a melodic line based on a generating motif – an aerated structure based on a lower embroidery with double appoggiatura and an intervallic jump of diminished seventh. The first section, A, comprises two contrasting themes, a structure that is at the core of the entire musical discourse of the work. The debut segment of the thesis is double exposed, the first time in the scale of F major, the second appearance being displayed on an ascending halftone (F# major). Being delimited by a complete measure of rhythmic formulas on an ascending gait, it keeps the same intervallic ratio that materializes the narrative idea of *pastorale* with the help of lyricism and the tragic melodic lines. The antithesis is opposed in terms of character - from introductory lyricism to the tragic and alert tumult exposed by the conglomeration of exceptional divisions, opulence highlighted also on the dynamic range, from the introductory nuance narrated in *pp* to the dynamic plane *f*.

The synthesis is a symbiosis between the components of previous sonorous features, a beautiful hatching between dynamic plans and generating cells. Thus, in the rhythmic plan we notice the preponderance of the iso-rhythmic writing on optimal values, the triolet as an exceptional division and the pulsate values of the

quarters (component elements of the thesis) among which the subdivisions of thirty-second-notes are slipped (elements of antithesis). From an intonational point of view, we observe the use of modal melodic lines that give the feeling in some places of tonal stabilizations: D Flat Major, D Major.

In this section we can see the discrepancy achieved by the increasingly highlighted dynamization of the intervallic jumps (comprising the three generous octaves of the bassoon), offering the possibilities of the performer to show off his technical-expressive and musical interpretative means. The character of this section points out the presence of the two dichotomous typologies: the energetic dancing (staccato, accents, *fp*) and the melodious (legato, the variation of exceptional rhythmic divisions – fifth, sixth, ninth) offering the plasticity of a contradictory discourse in its fullness.

Fig. 1. Naji Hakim: "Pastorale", m.136-141

The Thesis unit subsequently returns to the Major ascending third, keeping the intervallic relations that configure the use of module 111 (according to the table in the Book of Modes by Anatol Vieru). The second exposition of the main theme will be varied and will transit to the appearance of the coda. In the end, the coda will have a cadenced structure, preceded by augmented rhythmic formulas deployed on perfect octaves where the instrumental technique of the bassoon becomes permissible in favor of emphasizing an idea to the point of ostentation. The final phrase is outlined by a push from the low register to the high one, which will stop the musical tumult on a Fermata, in the dynamic of *ff*, following that the descending gait consisting of superior embroidery on the skeleton of a pentatonic scale will end in the low register, thus completing the work.

Pastorale, through the etymology of the word of Italian origin, defines the permanent human delight in front of nature, that rustic flavor of shepherds' lives, as well as the human feeling in the middle of nature. As for the melodic structures of the themes, they are most often highlighted as modal entities, exactly the



sonority of this work remaining one of French influence, in which the composer lets some tonal scales be glimpsed, and finally the influence of the twentieth century puts its predominant mark on the musical discourse.

The work is freely organized, combining the features of rhapsodical forms on the ternary meter into a moving tonal polarity. The pluritematic, rhapsodical material is covered by the exhibitions and recapitulation of the theme, the inspiration being multiple, complex, often mysterious, secret, inexplicable, unknown. Hakim, in his recent *Pastorale* composition, does not seek a new sound for bassoon but builds imaginary sonorities, paving a path to perfection and fulfillment. Olivier Messiaen, his teacher, instilled in him that a musical-artistic interpretation involves not only hearing but all the other senses that remain partakers of a communion of mutual existence.

Maestro Naji Hakim, sharing his personal opinion on his work in an open interview, stated that “*Pastorale* can be a folk, choral, Gregorian song, a person, a landscape, a country... My first priorities are the Glory of God and the joy of mankind, I desire this to the death. Let the fire that we have kindled on the ground be consumed” (personal interview).

A perfect performer will never try to amaze by his virtuosities and abilities, because an interpretation represents the equivocation of the creation of those means that can bring to the surface undisturbed by the personality of the performer, the virtues of the creator. A musical discourse includes a communication at the artistic level that unites 3 pillars of fatal importance: the composer – the interpreter – the audience, without which the artistic act does not arise, does not occur and is not intercepted, is not perfect, and the value of the musical act lies in the hand of the three alike, this link being able to potentiate or diminish the masterpiece.

#### **4. Conclusions**

The semantic investment of what the performer can offer, in addition to the genius of any composer who brings the sonorous material on the sheet, concludes the maximization of the work of art, it can signify the contribution of the genius performer. Through the vision of a composer, music is due to the voice that does not come to terms with the destiny of mankind, because they still have “something” to say, and the musicians are those who often close their eyes to see what the senses cannot solve, finally the music will belong to those who can look “inside, which only apparently happens outside”.

To live this special feeling of the unfolding of the moment when you receive as a gift a musical work of a contemporary composer nowadays, coincides with the

feeling of joy of obtaining a musical offering, of a portrait to which you have the only opportunity to contribute for the final modeling. Thus, we can say that “a product”, if it is served to society at a key moment, undoubtedly demands its repeatability, becoming a necessity, lifestyle incorporated in the “fantastic adventure of the search for the human condition” (Iliuț 2008, 46).

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