

THE SYMPHONIC MUSIC OF THE NATIONAL SCHOOLS IN 20TH CENTURY EUROPE IN THE REPERTOIRE OF THE PHILHARMONIC OF CLUJ (1955-1989). CREATIVE PERSPECTIVES OF C. SILVESTRI'S *CHANTS NOSTALGIQUES* OP. 27 NO. 1

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ABSTRACT

The present work focuses on the national cultures of the early 20th century in several European countries, such as Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary, Spain, Russia and Romania. Since my PhD thesis analyses the evolution of the Philharmonic "Transilvania" of Cluj between 1955-1989, there will be a thorough statistic of the concerts which were held during that period in which the orchestra performed musical pieces of the composers mentioned in this essay. For some concerts, there will also be stated the date when the concert took place, as well as the conductor who was invited to Cluj. There will also be an analysis of a piano work of the Romanian composer Constantin Silvestri (*Chants Nostalgiques* op. 27 no. 1) which I personally played a few years ago. The study will contain a musical bibliography, as well as several footnotes stating the documents found in the archives of the Philharmonic of Cluj.

Keywords: music, cultures, national schools, composers, conductors, artists.

INTRODUCTION

The early 20th century was characterized by the specific aggressive music of atonalism and expressionism, but also by the contemplative sounds found in the works of the impressionists and neoclassical composers. However, a surprising event would scandalize Paris in 1913: the first performance of the ballet *The Rite of Spring* by Igor Stravinsky which made quite an impression due to its rhythms and musical intonations evoking ancient rites. Prior to this resounding event, the West was already familiar with the folk inspiration of the first national schools, already knew and applauded enthusiastically the signs of revival by first audition of George Enescu's first mature work called *Poema română* and of the Romanian Rhapsodies. But not only Enescu carried out with fiery will the torch of the folk inspiration, his contemporary composers in the eastern part of Europe did the same.

Europe entered the 20th century with a euphoric optimism, hopefully positive about the future.³¹ Mostly during that period, it was all about what we nowa-

31 Morgan, R. P. (1991). *Twentieth Century Music. A History of Musical Style in Modern Europe and America*. New York, Norton&Company Editions, p. 11.

days call *the new spirit*, which inevitably led to spectacular and profound cultural transformation, as the French poet Charles Péguy said at that time: "The world has changed less since the time of Jesus Christ than it has in the last thirty years."³²

Music might be integrated into world culture as a form of expression, its purpose being to spread an infinite range of sensory and affective emotions. In its historical evolution, music has shown the ability to be the only way in which the human spirit can manifest its thoughts, feelings and choices concerning the material and spiritual reality.

Within time, it may happen that the artist or the performer's attitude towards the semantic sphere of the same work would suffer changes. It is also understandable that the interpretation of the same work by different musicians implies inevitably the artist's personality and style, having the right to interpret the musical material as he wishes; however, his vision of the work must not violate the limits imposed by the composer and stylistic details which intrinsically, every piece contains.

1. CZECHOSLOVAKIA

In the Czech and Slovak national musical cultures after Bedřich Smetana and Antonín Dvořák, a great number of composers have set as the main purpose of their creative activity the use of folk songs and music dances. Leoš Janáček (1854-1928), Josef Suk (1874-1935) and Bohuslav Martinů (1890-1959) are some of the personalities who have promoted the introduction of national themes in the dramatic-musical works with historical subjects or extraordinary stories of people's lives.

Leoš Janáček was the dominant figure of the school at that time due to his compositions from the Moravian folk song whose melodic-rhythmic features get into the smallest details. Developing the line established by Modest Musorgsky, he composed music filled with energetic accents, primarily concerned with the expression of the truth. The musical discourse, which Janáček started from folk song structure, is far from the type of the romantic songs by its short, dynamic motifs, closely linked to the intonations of speech in Czech. The contents of these reasons conducted on a small area but full of substance, follow the strict principles that the author requires: simplicity, expressiveness and plasticity. An assiduous collector and national folklore researcher, Leoš Janáček discovers within the ethos and the folk music the elements which have always revealed the deepest truth.

His work is characterized by an original harmony, unfettered by rules, colourful orchestration of rather unusual sounds for those years and sometimes overcome any barriers imposed by the traditional or classical patterns of construction. He composed works for orchestra (*Lachian Dances*, *Simfonieta*, the rhapsody called *Taras Bulba*, the symphonic poem entitled *Ballad of Blaník*), chamber music, choral works, folk songs but the kind of music where he excelled was the opera: *Šárka*, *Jenůfa*, *Káťa Kabanová*, *The Cunning Little Vixen* or *From House of the Dead* make Leoš Janáček an outstanding personality of European music.

³² Morgan, R. P., *op. cit.*, p. 17.

Between 1955 and 1989, the works of Bedřich Smetana were performed in 14 symphonic concerts: on December 28 and 29, 1957, with a foreign conductor (Miloslav Bervid from Czechoslovakia), the orchestra from Cluj played Smetana's Symphonic poem *Sarka*. His poem *Moldava* was performed three times (in 1960, once a year after and once at the end of 1984, with a Czech conductor, Josef Hrnčíř) and the symphonic poem *Vltava* twice between 1966-1968. However, the orchestra seemed to have appreciated very much the overture from *The Bartered Bride*, given that they performed it six times during the period 1975-1989. The orchestra played several works of Czech composer Antonín Dvořák within 33 years, in 66 concerts. The most played piece was his 9th Symphony in E minor, also known as *From the New World*. They also toured Austria and Germany in 1979 performing among other works Dvořák's Concert in A minor for violin and orchestra.

Leoš Janáček's works *Taras Bulba* and *Adagio for the orchestra* were played in Cluj twice, in 1958 and in 1963, the last concert being conducted by the same Josef Hrnčíř. However, the Czech violonist Josef Suk, the grandson of Josef Suk (the composer) performed Beethoven's Concerto in D major for violin and orchestra on January 3, 1960, with the orchestra in Cluj with the great Antonin Ciolan as the conductor, who actually created the philharmonic in 1955. Bohuslav Martinů's *Memorial to Lidice*, *Tre ricercarii*, *The Frescoes of Piero della Francesca*, as well as the Symphonies no. 4 and 5 and the Concerto for oboe and orchestra were performed in 6 magnificent concerts in Cluj.³³

2. POLAND

In Poland, the entire musical creation is guided by a strong sense of patriotism which plays an important role in the fight for national independence. After Stanisław Moniuszko, the founder of the national music school, Polish national musical culture is represented by three prestigious composers: Władysław Żeleński (1837-1921), Ignacy Jan Paderewski (1860-1941) and Karol Szymanowski (1882-1937). Initially, Karol Szymanowski, who was formed in the spirit of German music and a great admirer of Alexander Scriabin felt attracted neither by the national tradition of Moniuszko, nor by the Polish folklore he did not know that well. He claimed that only Chopin should be followed in the Polish music, a stylistic argument impregnated in his first eleven opuses dedicated to the piano (preludes, studies, variations). Later, in the works of many genres (lieder cycles, the first two piano sonatas and the first two symphonies), Szymanowski will compose either under the influence of Austro-German language of Richard Wagner, Johannes Brahms, Max Reger or Richard Strauss, either being conquered by Impressionist aesthetic orientation (such as *Studies for piano op. 33*, *Concerto for violin and orchestra op. 35 no. 1*, *Sonata for piano op.36 no. 3*, *Quartet for strings op. 37 no.1*). After the end of World War I, once with the reunification of Poland, the composer devoted all his creative and artistic activity to the resurrection and reaffirmation of Polish musical culture in the world. The first step to this end is the work called *Five Songs op. 46 bis* in which, starting from the meanings, prosody and melody of the popular Polish

33 The concerts were mentioned in the existing documents of the archives of the Philharmonic of Cluj.

language, he will seek the expression and the most appropriate musical language. The same principle will be the foundation of the cantata *Stabat mater* op. 53, in which Szymanowski will use the peasant ritual songs and the austere style of the Polish Renaissance polyphony. The second step was the use of the folk quotation, due to the knowledge of the songs, dances and customs of Polish peasants of the Podhale region, achieved by writing the ballet *Harnasie* op. 55. Simultaneously with these two creative experiences, he tends to create his own language in Polish cult character, purpose which will find its highest expression in the last four opuses: *Litany* op. 59, *Symphony no. 4* op. 59, *Concerto for violin and orchestra no. 2* op. 61 and *Two Mazurkas for Piano* op. 62. "The prodigal son" of Polish music from the first half of the 20th century was a model of serving the art music of his homeland. Considering himself a national composer, Karol Szymanowski was convinced that any creator must return to their homeland, in order to use the cultural treasures of the national folklore.

Unfortunately, between my research period with the philharmonic of Cluj (1955-1989), the orchestra did not include these great composers in the repertoire, probably because of the political regime which controlled every piece they performed.³⁴

3. HUNGARY

The Hungarian national musical culture in the first half of the 20th century enjoyed a unanimous recognition in the world of music by Béla Bartók (1881-1945) and Zoltán Kodály (1882-1967), its notable representatives. Rejecting the theories of the Viennese school, which at first they were attracted to and dominated by the idea of promoting the folklore, the two composers imposed a new spirit for the Hungarian music, giving it a national character. By using the folk music, they set a new personal style that had also become a guiding line for the 20th century music. Béla Bartók was known in musical life as a pianist, composer and teacher, but also as an assiduous researcher of the Romanian, Slovak, Serbo-Croatian, Bulgarian folklore, as well as of the native peoples of North America or the Far East. Faithful to his aesthetic ideal of refreshment of the cult music with the originality, diversity and beauty of the peasant music kept intact over the centuries, the composer creates his own songs inspired by multi-national folk cultures, filtered through his mind and sensitivity and crystallized by his original creative personality. In terms of the construction of his musical language, Béla Bartók manages to combine the elements provided by the inexhaustible resources of folk with the melodic, harmonic and rhythmic structures found in the techniques of composition of Johann Sebastian Bach, Ludwig van Beethoven and Igor Stravinsky. His work is characterized by having approached all creative genres, excluding however the church genres, as well as Enescu did.

The six string quartets, three concertos and a rhapsody for piano and orchestra, two concertos for violin and orchestra, a concerto for orchestra, sonatas for violin and piano, two suites for orchestra, the Symphony *Kossuth*, the opera *Bluebeard's Castle* and over 153 piano works are undoubtedly an eloquent proof of

³⁴ No concerts were registered in the documents of the archives.

the talent this great prolific musician was born with. Due to his contribution to the enrichment of the national music, to having increased the possibilities of the musical language and by the synthesis between the national folklore and also the multi-national one, Béla Bartók strongly shines among the personalities from the European music of the 20th century.

As for the Hungarian music, the philharmonic in Cluj performed some of Béla Bartók's works in 48 symphonic concerts through the years, delighting the public with the sounds of the famous Hungarian composer. They also played Zoltán Kodály in 10, among them being *Dances of Galánta*, the *Háry János* suite and the *Peacock* variations.³⁵

4. SPAIN

The Spanish national musical culture is known in the consciousness of the first half of the 20th century as a result of the theorist, folklorist and composer Felipe Pedrell (1841-1922) who saw two inexhaustible and perennial sources of the Spanish musical tradition: the immense folkloric tradition and the Spanish music culture of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. By his article *Por nuestra musica*, he recommended the Spanish opera composers to feed from the quintessence of the folk song, to assimilate it, to clothe it with rich but delicate forms, thus emphasizing the local colour of that age. The man who aspired to become the creator of the Spanish national opera through the trilogy *Los Pirineos* thus declared open battle against the Italianism and the Wagnerism. He would later be followed by his three disciples, trained in the spirit of the French school: Isaac Albeniz (1860-1909), Enrique Granados (1867-1916) and Manuel de Falla (1876-1946).

While the creation of the first two was limited to piano works written as suites of dances or with a programmatic aspect, the one of Manuel de Falla, includes zarzuelas, piano and guitar works, the operas *The Brief Life* and *Master Peter's Puppet Show*, the ballets *The Bewitched Love* and *The Three-Cornered Hat*, the symphonic suite for piano and orchestra *Nights in the Gardens of Spain*, a Concerto for harpsichord and five instruments as well as the cantata *Atlantis*, a work left unfinished. If at first his work resembled those of previous composers of national inspiration and were based on melodies and rhythms of Andalusia, flamenco or variations of Spanish melody, later his style underwent a marked change under the strong neoclassical influence of Igor Stravinsky.

Master of sonorities obtained by combining instrumental timbres, the adept of clear and concise forms where all elements of the original musical language come together in a perfect logic, Manuel de Falla avoided high intensity sounds and using a large orchestral apparatus. The concept of composing works of Spanish folk character consists in the ideas of Pedrell, in all of his work using the inexhaustible Iberian folklore. Therefore, his work is an inalienable part of multi-national heritage of the European art music of the 20th century and offers a perennial reply to the aestheticians and musicians who deny the virtues of folk music cited as a source of renewal of contemporary music.

35 According to the documents of the archive of the Philharmonic of Cluj.

Five years after it was created, the orchestra of the Philharmonic of Cluj prepared for the public a concert which took place on June 11, 1960, including De Falla's Suite entitled *El amor brujo* (the English translation is *The Bewitched Love*) which was conducted by Ivo Cruz from Portugal. Furthermore, they played twice in 1988 under the Spanish conductor Ramon Torre Lledo the second suite of the ballet *The Three-Cornered Hat*, as well as *Nights in the Gardens of Spain*. Summarising the performances, there were 8 concerts in which the delightful music of the Spanish composer Manuel de Falla was heard.³⁶

5. RUSSIA

The Russian national musical culture developed on the basis of traditions of the illustrious representatives of the national school: Mikhail Ivanovich Glinka (1804-1857), Alexander Sergeyeovich Dargomyzhsky (1813-1869), Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893) and members of the group entitled *The Five*: Mily Alexeyevich Balakirev (1837-1910), César Antonovich Cui (1835-1918), Alexander Porfiryevich Borodin (1833-1887), Modest Pyotrovich Mussorgsky (1839-1881), Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov (1844-1908). At the end of the 19th century, in San Petersburg (1862) and Moscow (1866) two music conservatories were built, true houses of culture, in which the composers who raised the highest peaks of the Russian musical culture were formed: Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971), Sergei Prokofiev (1891-1953), Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873-1943), Alexander Scriabin (1872-1915), Dmitri Shostakovich (1906-1975), Aram Khachaturian (1903-1978).

Among their works, there are the following: symphonies, instrumental concertos, symphonic poems, operas and ballets, sonatas, quartets etc. The musical language commonly used corresponds to the traditional aesthetics. The folklore of the most archaic layers invigorates the compositions of the Russian creators, giving them a distinctive note with specific local features, which succeeds in attracting the attention of the general audience. Composer Igor Stravinsky marked a crucial step in the development of musical art, his work, of exceptional variety being rightly considered as one of the phenomena of the utmost importance in the music history. Having lived in an era in which many stylistic tendencies coexisted, he assimilated all, demonstrating an impressive mobility in creating a number of styles and methods of composition, in a work whose main feature was universality. The first period of creation, called "the Russian period" is crossed by the visible influence of composers Rimsky-Korsakov and Scriabin. Striking elements of Russian folklore, one of the main veins of inspiration for his art and music are amply represented in the ballets *Firebird*, *Petrushka* and *The Rite of Spring*. By the end of this period, Stravinsky wrote *Three Japanese Lyrics*, the opera *The Nightingale* and ballets *The Fox* and *The Soldier's Tale*, works full of sarcasm and irony which would accompany some of his next opuses. A new stylistic period is opened by the ballet *Pulcinella*, for a group of singers and an instrumental chamber ensemble. During this period called "neoclassical" he wrote the opera *Mavra*, the oratorio *Oedipus Rex*, the *Symphony of Psalms*, the *Symphony in C major*, the *Concerto for violin and orchestra* etc. Furthermore, the ballet *Agon*, the *Cantata for soprano, tenor, choir of women and five instruments*, *Three Songs from William Shakespeare*, *Canticum Sacrum*

³⁶ *Idem.*

etc, completed the work of one of the most prestigious composers of the last century, whose art is definitely a part of the universal musical heritage.

The orchestra performed Glinka's overture from the opera *Ruslan and Ludmila* on April 24, 1959 with the Romanian conductor of German origins Erich Bergel. They also included the opera *Ivan Susanin* in their repertoire, with a total of 15 concerts. Nevertheless, they stunned the public of Cluj with 178 concerts in which the orchestra played numerous works of the Russian great composer Tchaikovsky. The famous and talented Japanese musician Michi Inoue was invited as a guest conductor on February 14, 1976, when they played together Scriabin's *The Poem of Ecstasy* (they later had 5 concerts with Scriabin's music). Other Russian composers were praised in the concerts held in Cluj: Borodin (4), Mussorgsky (24), Rimsky-Korsakov (28), Stravinsky (46), Prokofiev (66), Rachmaninoff (57), Shostakovich (29), Khachaturian (37).³⁷

6. ROMANIA

The Romanian national musical culture of the early 20th century is marked by two divergent directions: on the one hand, the recovery of two centuries of European tradition in the art of composition and, on the other, achieving national specificity and folklore for the creations. The works belonging to the first generation of Romanian composers of this period were located therefore on an eclectic field, initially classical-romantic, and then romantic-impressionist. The predominant role in the second orientation is held by the creations of the composers whose aesthetics tend towards the accomplishment of the stylistic individuality of national character. Alfred Alessandrescu (1893-1959), Dimitrie Cuclin (1885-1978), Mihail Jora (1891-1971), Sabin Drăgoi (1894-1968) and George Enescu (1881-1955), musicians who have perfected their technique in Romanian or European schools, have approached both the symphonic, chamber, choral and lyrical genres. They harmoniously combined the tradition of the universal music with elements of the Romanian folklore.

A complex personality in all its manifestations, George Enescu was the first European composer who created a sonata with a Romanian folk character and his aesthetics, profoundly innovative, was the result of his patriotic ideals and visions. For the author of the 33 opuses, the primary principle of artistic conception was based on the idea that the originality of the music should be found in the folk music. The interest of the artist to approach all genres, a very serious training and the knowledge of the phenomenon of composition of the late Romantic era, they all cross his entire creation, including the work called *Poema Română op. 1*, *the Chamber Symphony op. 33* or the two rhapsodies. His last creation represents the conclusion of his entire existence, the philosophical synthesis from the poem *Vox maris op. 31*, making Enescu, who was also called the "Moldavian Orpheus" a prominent music composer in defining the first half of the 20th century.

During the communist period (and not only then), there was a great interest in the Romanian music. Therefore, the orchestra played several works of Alessandrescu in 9 concerts, Cuclin in 3, Jora in 27, Drăgoi in 11 and the great Enescu in an impressive number of 284 concerts. Between 1970-1987, the philharmonic had

37 *Idem.*

10 concerts in which they played the *Prelude and Fugue* for orchestra, *Tocatta and Fugue* for orchestra, *Three Pieces for Strings*, as well as the *Romanian Dances* from Transylvania by composer Constantin Silvestri.³⁸

The entire existence of C. Silvestri (1913-1969) was marked by his devotion to music, as a composer, pianist and conductor. Colleague and friend of Dinu Lipatti (1917-1950), Silvestri studied under the guidance of illustrious teachers as Zeno Vancea (1900-1990), Mihail Jora (1891-1971) and Florica Musicescu (1887-1969), was highly appreciated by George Enescu and, in turn, he taught at the Bucharest Conservatory (1948-1956), where he created a valuable conducting class.

Unconventional character, familiar with the early avant-garde music, particularly interested in Janáček's and Bartók's creation, Silvestri has expressed views similar to those of Romanian composers of the same generation, considered by his fellow composers as an eccentric due to his innovative options. Most of his works for piano were composed between 1929 and 1955.

Chants Nostalgiques op. 27 no. 1 was composed in October 1944 and immediately published by the author. The work consists of three relatively small sized musical pieces that according to the author himself, they may be played also separately.

The first *chant* abounds in dynamic and expressive indications accompanying the score: various nuances of piano and pianissimo gradations (*ben piano*, *molto piano*, *subito pianissimo*, *poco piano*, *sempre pianissimo*). Even from the beginning, there is an atmosphere of deep depression which, frequently through the piece, the musician feels:

No. 1

$\text{♩} = 54$ cca
pensieroso

$\text{♩} = 50$

One of the features of Silvestri's creation of that time consists in the difficult definable harmony, generally having a supporting role on which music develops.

No. 2

$\text{♩} = 50$

molto p, sensibile

ben pp

pp

senza 2d.

The culmination of the work is considered to be the section below, with the indication *con dolore*, the sudden attack of the *mezzopiano*, along with the three dissonances of the left hand and the cry of despair expressed by the small intervals played by the right hand.

No. 3

The atmosphere full of pain and helplessness in the face of the hostile destiny is strengthened by the singing of the two elements in alternation, considered to be a dialogue that evokes deep depression.

The composer ends the piece by a tense musical structure. The message that the author seems to transmit seems more like one of the verses from Eminescu's poem: "Still how sad is the world..."³⁹

No. 4

EPILOGUE

At the end of this work, I need to confess that when I am about to decipher one of these great creations, I try to understand its laws profoundly, always feeling as if I were standing in front of a miracle. And this, not only because the ideal interpretation of a repertoire has to be thoroughly thought and felt, so that the works could become at some point a personal gain of the performer, but also because he has to pass to the public the composer's artistic intentions as if they were his own, as the pianist Cella Delavrancea once said: "A vision and a fair interpretation of a musical text requires the pure expression of the artistic truth, a mix between the logic and the grace, the fusion of the intellect with the sentiment".⁴⁰

39 Eminescu, M. (1977). *Poezii* [Poems]. Bucharest, Minerva Editions, p. 66.

40 Delavrancea, C. (1984). *Trepte muzicale* [Musical Steps]. Bucharest, Eminescu Editions, p. 73.

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