

POSSIBLE LINKS BETWEEN *THE HISTORY OF SOUND AND THE PERSONAL HISTORY OF A COMPOSER*

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Abstract: *‘The history of sound’, a notion which belongs to the composer Aurel Stroe, finds its correspondence in the temporal envelope of the acoustic sound and it refers to its evolution in time, going through the three stages of its existence: attack, sustainment and decay.*

Key words: *Stroe, history of sound, tuning systems, micro-intervals.*

Aurel Stroe shared with me, during some discussions at the Busteni villa, some of his thoughts, which resonate beyond art. In his opinion, “the human being lays his personal history, under multiple shapes, in his creation”.

According to this affirmation and having a proper knowledge of the semantic fields, Stroe operates with the ‘multiple shapes’, which could be the *forms of sounds, their history*’.

The forms of sounds cannot be imagined by Stroe as predestined monads, which are condemned to temperance. For him, they are ‘tunings’, and the composition technique through which the tuning of a sonorous structure changes, in many of his works, is interesting. The distinctive patterns of these ‘tunings’ are described by the musical microtonal intervals of different sizes, among which the most preeminent are the commas.

To reinforce the argument about the ‘tuning’ technique, we need to mention that the composer calls on the sources of inspiration coming from his childhood, a period in which he found himself, through predestination, accompanied by music:

“I listened in my childhood many times to the peasants singing. In Urlati. There were some girls, a group of 5-6 girls, coming to the mountains for vintage, and oh they sang, sir: some of them had more *vibrato*, some others had less *vibrato*... some of them simply attacked and held the sound. This influenced me a great deal. You can find all these influences in my *Oresteias*, in *Choephoroi*...”

Stroe later transformed the experiences of sound perception from the times of his childhood into skills and the craft of creation. He understood and reevaluated the fact that through the oscillations of intensity and frequency, shown in ‘the history of sound’, its pitch will distort the sound: “if one heightens or lowers [the pitch], the fact that something is not tuned will be heard”. If, for example, a structure carries on, at the beginning, in a normal tuning, through these oscillations, at a certain moment, in the same structure, another tuning can be encountered, and this one could fit a well known tuning such as: the Pythagorean, the Tibetan, or the Zarlinian tuning.

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An important influence for the creation of Stroe was the music of George Enescu. In his scores, especially in his latest works for piano and violin such as the suite “*Childhood Impressions*” (in this context, look for fragments from “The Well’s Spring” or “Cradle Song”), or the Violin Sonata No. 3 “*In Folk Romanian Character*”, Stroe explores the meanings of ‘history’. In some fragments of these works, the ‘histories’, transformed into color, have the permanent capacity of narrating something new.

The *Violin Sonata No. 3* seems to be among the first works in the history of music which expects the interpreter to create a ‘personal history’; the musical work has the interpreter look for a certain sound through his fingering technique. In this way, the interpreter has the possibility to touch the pitch and the color a priori imagined.

In his pages, Enescu changes with great ingenuity the techniques of attacking the sound, maintaining it within the same parameters, and accessing a microtonal interval zone, in its interior. For example, he succeeds to modify the effect of a passage evoking the blowing of the wind through attacking the sound each time in a different way, diversifying thus, different parameters in ‘the history’ of a particular sound.

The impregnation of sound with liveliness, with ‘history’, cannot appear but within this compositional option. In the tonal, or serial (dodecaphonic) music, where its form is almost callous, through the conviction to temperance, the ‘history’ is absent.

In musical practice, the conception and the performance of music uses only unchangeable, standard tones, *c, d, e, f, g, a, b*; thus, it is possible to play only on 7 steady pitches (or *swaras*, as musical notes are named in Indian music). This is already known since the researcher Alain Danielou presented in his work “*Le semantique*

musical” a table of the subtle intonation deformations, which, according to Danielou, are perceived by our psyche as *privileged points* (easily perceivable), and which are situated on the axe of the sonorous continuum. He discovered and determined the existence of a multitude of *swaras*, classifying and placing in the table all the existing intervals in the European and extra-European musical practice. Sustaining the existence of perception at the level of our psyche, the author gave them a formal model, showing that these could, in fact, be constructed by the Pythagorean relations (which are easiest to be remembered by our psyche: the multiples of 2, 3 and 5). He affirms that the sounds of the temperate European system are lifeless, and illusory.

This assertion seems somewhat hilarious, since we know that people have operated for centuries with such “illusory” sounds, these standing at the foundation of the master sonatas of Beethoven, Brahms and other composers of temperate, tonal works.

The traditional vocabulary and grammar references (tonal, serial and neo-modal references) do not allow the composers to trouble themselves to use more than 12 sonorous elements; nor do these references allow to attain the ethos of these elements completely. Following the deadlock, which resulted as a consequence of the uniformity of the vocabulary, composers try to make up for the deficit of the ‘temperate’ ethos, through the emphasis of secondary parameters in the sound’s instrumentation like, for example, its emission with a certain intensity and a certain attack modality (sweet or less sweet sound). This produces in the sonorous conscience of the listener the specific difference, afferent to a certain affective zone (zone present in the interaction among these vocabulary elements).

Classical and dodecaphonic composers present, through their scores, a unidirectional mode of conceiving and perceiving sonority. It is, thus, clear that a temperate *d* sound will sound different from an attacked *d*. But through this distinction we can discover only half the truth because, in fact, none of the composers using this vocabulary has started the rigorous work of studying all sounds under the aspect of their 'history', and no scientific research has been led to permit the exact observation of quality.

A supplementary explanation to Stroe's assertion that "the human being lays his personal history, under multiple shapes, in his creation" permits us to imagine what meant for George Enescu the experience of those times, of the contact with the fiddlers' song, either when he listened to them on his native lands, or when he was around them during his stay in Paris. The fact that violins produce, above all, non-temperate sounds is well known; for a violin, music is represented by the notes B, C, D, E, F, G, A, H, which are the same notes used by any European musician. Each time they play what they have to play, however, through deviation, they put together, on an ad hoc basis, a multitude of *swaras* which results from the specific notes. In the interstice between the formal object (represented by notes) and the real sonorous image, the special ethos can be found, which the violinists drag to the surface in a matchless way.

Starting from the reality given by the non-temperate entities, in the two works of Enescu appear some features of the musical form: the differentiation between *note* as a musical notation element and *sound*.

It is necessary to understand that *notes* are poorer in meaning than *sounds* because they always appear schematically (as any written sign). We can say that a note is the formal expression of a sound (translated

into sound; a note can become a sonorous image). The notes cannot be 'music' but in the moment of instrumentally displaying the structure the notes describe, the sonorous restoration occurs only through notes transformed into sounds.

The sounds themselves take a completely different meaning, which is the effect of the translation of notes into sonorities. The sound appears in the act through 'history', succeeding in this way to control through analyzing the temporal envelope (which can be pictured as an oscillograph giving the frequencies' coordinate system to the intensities of the partial components of that sound).

In all the scores of the past centuries, but also in many contemporary scores, a sound can only be fixed through a note. From here results the distinction appearing in the German theoretic interpretation, which associates a musical tone (der Ton) to a written note (in whichever sonorous system), while a sound (der Klang) is viewed as a sum of associated notes, a configuration made up of multiple sonorous elements. Thus, the "Klang" notion can be attributed to a chord or cluster, but it cannot be mistaken for a "Ton", which follows a singular sound, its given image through a written note. The reality, according to which, in classical composition, the sound we hear is equal to the written note on the paper, has not been conceived only for the practice of composers, but also for the manufacturers of musical instruments. The manufacturers wanted to temperate the intervals, which had been, until that time, non-temperate (it suffices to mention only the ones belonging to the Zarlinian intonation system). Through tempering all intervals appeared the possibility of writing on paper the chromatic scale, which represents all notes which can be used by a European composer. We point out the fact that 'the personal history' of the composers

that subscribe to using the temperate-chromatic scale is, in general, a history of the fixation of a sonorous construction.

We have mentioned already the connection between the written note and the sound in the music of any given composer (Bach, Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven). It is the prototype of the composer that draws up the sounds of tonalities through notes (and other signs). The composers of those times could not, however, fix into scores the ethos associated to the notes, which is, in fact, part of the sounds. Grammar gave them only the possibility to write some of these notes (the most important ones).

The ethos of sonorities can, however, be imagined and deduced from notes in different ways: the formal structures, which are generally dynamic, are suited to be analogized to some play characters; these characters do not have an existential status only because they are built on temperate-chromatic pitches criteria. They are ontologisms, 'histories', because they exhibit the formation of a great idea (of existential, philosophic, religious nature).

Thus, in the art of sounds, a familiar way through *which the human being displays, concerning the great classics, his personal history', under multiple forms* can be, for example, the multiple ways to present the musical material: the expositive sonata forms in which, in the real execution, deviations from the composer's tablature use to take place.

One can easily observe that 'the personal history' of the classical creator recurs to the myth of 'the eternal coming back'. The procedure of the imitative polyphony is an example for this, with the models held by the *fugue* form. Some other examples are offered especially by the sonata and symphony genres, in which the extreme movements (Allegro) have a sonata form, and where the expositive section is repetitive.

One can observe in instrumental sonatas, rather than in symphonies, how frequent the manner of perturbation of the initial model appears. In the moment in which the exposition continues (when the music begins again, after the repetition sign), it continues the harmonic-melodic pattern of the first exposition, but with small transformations of the relations between notes, and thus, by changing sounds. Here appears, in continuous emancipation, the procedure of ornamental variation.

The skill of the classic creators, to handle the pattern of discourse (the 0 moment and the final 'coming back', at the same moment), belongs to the attributions of the musician interpreter (either conductor or instrumentalist); we recognize the source of this practice from the experiences described by the history of music: an array of harpsichord and violin players, like those from the 17th century (Giuseppe Tartini, Pietro Locatelli and others), created in time (until the moment when Nicolo Paganini appeared as an excellent virtuoso) schools specialized in instrumental improvisation.

Concerning the act of vocal performance, related to the 'sound as searching typology' (which is to be discovered by Enescu and some of his contemporaries), we want to give another example which differs from the norm: the graphics of the pitches from the scores. In the time of the classic opera composers Vincenzo Bellini, Gaetano Donizetti and Giacomo Puccini, singers knew how to attack a sound, even if they had to look on a score with notes written in the temperate system.

One can, therefore, assume that interpretation has always belonged to the nature of artist. By modifying indications appeared the tiny differences among the above mentioned 'swaras', differences between the pitches of notes. Since then, there have been respected, through tradition, some rules for sounds which *do*

not exist for notes; the simple notes (B, C, D, E, F, G, A, H) are those which reiterate in whichever intonation system (be it non-temperate or temperate). The ethos of a melody modifies unconditionally from one ,tuning' (intonation system) to another, which makes perceivable the fact that the sound has always been a variable which can take multiple possible values, while the note has remained the invariable element to which multiple sonorous correspondences can be attributed. This is only perceivable during interpretation, when the artist on stage defines the dogma given by the grammar and vocabulary of the temperate system, a grammar and a vocabulary of notes, especially. Under this aspect, the classical grammar can be considered imperfect or incomplete.

We must bind the constructive consistence of the musical form, encountered at the classics, with the interpretation of the musician that steps into the concert hall with his own ,history'. Through his level of understanding, the musician gives life to the notes, to the ,personal histories' displayed by them: the ,Bachian', ,Mozartian' or the ,Beethovenian' history. The transfer from notes to sounds can manifest in different ways. This can only be possible through the fact that the interpreter mentions an authentic dictionary of ,sounds-ideas', which are only his, transforming the existence of *the written form* in the existence of *the sensible form*, musically accurate and dynamic. Through the interpretation that he offers, there can be made qualitative analogies and differentiation among the types of ,personal histories' of the composers displayed in the scores.

The integration of the interpretative act in the codified creation by a score of notes leads us to discovering another face of Aurel Stroe's statement, for whom there is a singular form of thinking: that of

fixation, univocal and ,temperate', through which the ,personal history' becomes objective. Through the interpretative act, the sound modifies constantly, detaching itself from the notes (from the starting schemes), even if the reality of the score is presented in the relation note-sound.

Without an authentic interpretation, they could seem ,poor', but confronted with an abstract projection, with a virtual, more suggestive image, which is richer in semantics, another image is invented by the intelligence of the modern musician in the 20th century. Pictured in this way, presented by a more complex grammar than the classic one (which would have enabled another kind of enrichment field for these ,histories'), the ,personal histories' of a composer could manifest in a different way at the level of what is noted and given than at the level of musical semantics.

An envy-sparking fact is to be remarked, which is almost unbearable for the need of the modern-day creator: without the ethos of the ,musical words', the 18th, 19th and, partially, 20th century composer subdued to the univocal construction relation existing between note and sound, which enclosed him; he laid his ,personal history' in manuscripts of a remarkable conceptual consistence, turned immortal through their strength of expression.

In the 20th century, however, a change occurred, concerning the interpretation of the noted work and ,the personal history' of an artist. Following the appearance of the interest for ethnomusicology and folklore, the composers of the national schools and the folklorists discovered in their research field a multitude of melodies which could no longer be noted according to the exact correspondence note-sound, present at the classical composers.

An example of this new perspective is encountered at Béla Bartók, who wrote the pitches of the sounds with special

alterations, looking for additional notations. Already at Bartók, the relation between note and sound does not resemble anymore to the one employed by the grammar of the classical composers. This is due to the wave of oral tradition in written creation (look for the functional notation of the micro intervals in his *Carrols*). We can argue that Bartok bridges the natural gap between the interpreter's intuition and the composer's strict way of noting. Alike George Enescu, Bartók explains the preexistent notation system. Being very close to the artist's conscience, he no longer writes notes in his scores, but intentional notes (semantics of the micro intervallic type).

Bartok's 'personal history' infiltrated in a creation situated at the balance of synthesis of certain traditional languages accustomed with the renewal generated by archetype-folkloric Weltanschauung. It appears as different, as very individualized, in comparison to the 'predestined' histories of Bach, Mozart, Beethoven and Wagner; in this context, we only have to think of the last three Bartokian string quartets.

Coming back to the *Sonata No. 3 for Piano and Violin* by George Enescu, we can observe that the relation note-sound appears in a special way, the massive share being given by the interpretation of the text, which leads to the necessity of a careful analysis of the construction aspects of the work. Its structure resides in a multitude of shapes acquired by sounds. Here, we can distinguish sounds that are imprecisely attacked, and which filter their pitch on the way, as well as sounds which are clearly attacked, which then lose themselves in a flow, through sinking in the continuum from which it came from: we observe sounds which are clear from the beginning to the end and, of course, there are also the *imprecise* sounds. Apart from these, some other sound categories can be observed.

A moment from the third part can be taken as an example, in which a *sound noted with a quarter of tone* is discovered and played on the *d* chord a little higher. Through its position and the fingering technique, chosen deliberately by Enescu, this sound fluctuates, and produces a sonority that, in our psyche, is intercepted as a turbid feeling, as something reaching for clearing.

Here appear micro-intervals, a category of sonorous pitches, whose 'inhabitants' take on *morphism*, applied between the steps of the intervals, which had been codified from the 17th and 18th century in the temperate European music, and which have been used by all classic composers (being then considered an ultimate clarification of the ultimate acoustic construction process of the vocabulary that a musician could use).

Aurel Stroe links this morphism to the revolutionary cultural-historic phenomena which take place in music, and which have established a perception and assimilation paradigm, different from the classical one:

"The discovery of some extra-European musical traditions: Asian, African music, the music of the two Americas, led to interesting observations concerning the formation of musical scales, which all seem to be different from the so-called 'temperate' scale used by the European musician. Surely, European music has gained a lot through temperateness, especially from the construction point of view: we couldn't have imagined neither the symphonies of Mozart, nor Beethoven's string quartets, nor Richard Wagner's dramas, without a preliminarily temperateness, without a precise codification of sounds with which the composer works. In the extra-European music there is a greater variety of sounds and, in addition, there is something very important: the power to create semantemes - minimal unities significant at the level of

relation between two sounds - and this is obtained precisely through these micro-intervals. Said in a simple manner: on a piano, between the *C-D* notes only *C sharp* exists, respectively *D flat*. In the extra-European music, however, we encounter other notes in the *C-D* interval, other beside *C sharp* and *D flat*. This fact has long been preserved in the European music as well when certain instruments used to be played like the violin, the cello, the flute, but this was lost with time. But it appears frequently in the extra-European music being not just an empty virtuosity, but linked - as I was saying - to powers to signify at very small levels".

Looking at the quarter of tone categories from the Sonata in *folk Romanian character*, which presents an intonation grammar through which the 'histories of sound' are being pushed towards successive formation stages until their last definition, Stroe makes certain observations to Enescu's mentality in relation to those of other quarter of tone theoreticians (who eluded the possibility of the creation of *semantemes* through a static, roughly productive division of tone):

„The Third Sonata seems the reappearance of the micro-intervals after several centuries of absence. I don't know exactly if Enescu is the first one to use them again, my impression is that the Czech Alois Haba intended this some time before and I think that the Frenchman Wyschnegradsky also. But these two scholars started from an initial mistake: they made a temperance based on quarters of tones, this establishing certain errors which make the perception of the sonorous material difficult and destroy the semantic effect concerning micro levels. These errors appeared- let's say- doubled, thus multiplied in comparison with those of the classic temperance. Enescu - maybe in an intuitive manner - but with a vision out of the ordinary - manages to use these micro-

intervals not as some temperate intervals but as producers of new effects, as producers of meaning at a very tiny level.

A quarter of sharp - for example - by Enescu, doesn't necessarily mean that the specific note climbs up with the quarter of temperate tone, but that the instrumentalist is invited to look in that moment (in that very moment when he plays the violin) a certain point in which a musical interval is happening - meaning that the pitch relation between two sounds in which a new expressive effect appears, like - let's say - an 'unusual word', never before used until then, and this 'word', maybe evidently turn upside down at the highest levels the whole grammar of the respective section."

The study of this aspect should also be integrated into a sonorous structure analysis: it is the material with which the composer works and which represents the 'history' enciphered by him.

"If for the classical music the sound is a given thing, a constant lasting as long as the sound, in Enescu's music the sound becomes a variable, it becomes more flexible. A sound can be attacked higher, then lowered, then again risen - and not necessarily in glissandi forms, schematically enough - (as modern music sometimes teaches us), but in some fine undulations, very rich - in the length of a sound. From electronic music we know the fact that a sound can be changed from multiple points of view: it can be changed as attack, it can be changed as form, thus it can fluctuate from diverse points of view in a given time; it can be changed from the point of view of its relation with the surroundings - in which it manifests itself, and thus the outer envelope ('history') of the sound can be changed, factors like its intensity can be changed, timbre variations can be obtained on the same sound, and evidently, from all these variations different combinations can rise, which practically leads to endless possibilities to

modify, to vary, to give life to a sound. This leads to some sort of continuum in this variation, continuum which links to the idea of psychological continuum created by its musical form. He creates sonorous forms, lied-forms, he makes variation-forms, - all kinds of forms (having a predilection though for the sonata-form). But his forms never appears obvious when listened to, the cuts (discontinuities) are blurred by the continuous flux.”

Alike Aurel Stroe’s saying, from which I started, the way to grasp the semantics of the art work and the complexity between

,the history of sound’ and ,the personal history’ of the composer (both contained in different quantities in the musical work) have to be rethought and completed again ontologically, at multiple levels, together with the content of the score, to reestablish, through the dynamism of conscience, the musical composition identity.

References

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