

## PAUL CONSTANTINESCU – A REPRESENTATIVE OF THE ROMANIAN MODERN COMPOSITION SCHOOL

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**Abstract:** *Paul Constantinescu distinguishes himself as a representative of the folk trend as well as the father of the Romanian Byzantine style; he also discovered the comic stream of Romanian spirituality and acquired a prominent place among the neoclassic Romanian composers. These four directions outline the stylistic tendencies reflected in his creation.*

**Key words:** *Paul Constantinescu, modal, neo-modal, diatonic, chromatic.*

### 1. Introduction

The entire modern national school of composition is centred on the folk-Byzantine axis that sets its traditional nuances, being permeable to worldwide trends like the Expressionism or the Neoclassicism. Displaying a unitary character, Paul Constantinescu's creation sets itself in this traditional reality by particular aspects.

### 2. Content

The folk direction goes along the steps of Enescu's creation, from using the quotation, through the creation in folk or Byzantine vein, to the stage of essentials and extraction of archetypes. With P. Constantinescu, the existence, between these steps, of some transition phases related to the elaboration level of folk data is to be noted: the harmonization of folk melody (*the Romanian Suite*, the Symphonic dances, *Three Pieces for the Piano*), its utilization as a theme generator

for larger forms (*Symphonietta*), the amplification of folk motif by pasting other citations or personal motives (*the Romanian Suite*, *the Concerto for the String Orchestra*), the creation of some more complex modal melo-rhythmic structures (*the Symphony*), the formation of melodic profiles of folk essence based on the utilization of the whole-step and half-step structure (*the Concerto for the String Orchestra*, *the Piano Concerto*), the application of the cyclic principle (*the Symphony*), the exploitation of the modal archetypal cell as a generating element (*the Triple Concerto*).

The Byzantine direction registers only the first two steps of processing (the same as with folk music). If the folk creation follows a method towards complexity, the Byzantine one comes to simplification, from the instrumentalism and chromaticism of the *Two Byzantine Studies* to the diatonic aspect of the *Byzantine Variations for Cello and Orchestra* and the *Byzantine Sonata for Cello Solo*, finally reaching the vocal style of the *Psaltic*

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*Liturgy*. Thus, the peak of this direction, the Oratorios in Byzantine style, represents *the most faithful expression of the composer's modal diatonicism*. The utilization of a common potential of intonations, with *cantus firmus* individuality, taken over, probably, from Macarie, is remarkable for proving the unitary character of the Byzantine style.

The neoclassic direction originates, on the one hand, in the recovering of some classical valences (symmetry, equilibrium) of the Eastern European folklore, and harmonizes, on the other hand, with a worldwide tendency of the epoch – recovering and applying the classic composition forms and techniques to the Romanian ethos. The Neoclassicism in Constantinescu's creation belongs to the area of syntheses: between the neoclassic (neo-baroque) style and the folk one (*Three Pieces for the Piano, Symphonietta, Prelude for the Piano Solo*) – a synthesis achieved by most Romanian creators in this epoch; between the neoclassic and the Byzantine style (Liturgy, Oratorios) – an unusual synthesis in the Romanian musical creation, but typical of the world music – as, for example, the fusion between the neoclassic (neo-baroque) and the Gregorian intonation (Respighi, Hindemith, Stravinsky etc.); between the traditional form and the innovative modal language involved by the folk-Byzantine direction (Symphony, concertos).

The expressionist direction, for Paul Constantinescu, is another modality of expression of a basic folk mode, as opposed to other composers who, within this esthetics, also conceived works that generally lack the Romanian element (M. Jora, *Joujoux pour Ma Dame*). The works belonging to this direction are either melodies with a text, or they are based on a literary theme or a programme argument. One feature of this direction is the *comic* nuance, which for Constantinescu takes on

separate expressions: *the humorous, the grotesque, the transcendental comic* (with a view to philosophy). The humorous expression (caricature) refers to a miniature type programme music (*Four Fables for the Piano*), or it is in Arghezi's manner (*Cântece pentru voce și pian, lyrics by Arghezi, or Ciurezu*). The grotesque receives tragic-comical, absurd (*Din cătănie, Gornistul, Șapte cântece din ulița noastră*), or frivolous, parodic, realistic-critical nuances, or nuances in the manner of Caragiale (*O noapte furtunoasă*). The transcendent humour directs the Balkan spirit to the border of sublimated play; it is of ludicrous subtlety, and combines elements of the Turkish Orient (*Isarlık*) with the philosophic essence of Ion Barbu's poetry (*Riga Crypto și Laponia Enigel*). Under the influence of Anton Pann's style, the source of inspiration is confounded here with a certain level of folklore (the urban type) robustly coloured with the Greek-oriental influences of the time (augmented second, diminished third, rhythmic melismas), used as fashionable quotation, often superimposed in the palimpsest technique. The tendencies of bringing out the value of the artistic attributes of the folk song require currently clearer and realistic (even naturalistic) ways of perception, encountered at the level of melodic procedures and of harmonic-polyphonic, or orchestral techniques (leitmotifs, violent harmonies, polymodality, ostinati, mixtures, aggressive brass band sonorities or folk instruments). The presence of the programme argument oriented to expressive spheres is observed in the songs on lyrics by Eminescu, Șt. O. Iosif, and C. Theodorescu, in which the composer employs the following modal techniques: the use of minimal scales, the superimposition of the melody elements, fourth chords, the modal complementarity etc.

Overall, the composer's style demonstrates a unitary aspect with a high extent of musical language consistency. The evolution of Paul Constantinescu's composition language had not undergone spectacular changes of optics; it consists of the steps he took on the modal domain, from diatonicism towards chromaticism.

An attempt of *dividing Constantinescu's creation into periods* suggested in this thesis will refer to the temporal subdivisions, according to Vasile Herman's attempt of dividing the Romanian music in *Formă și stil în noua creație românească* (Editura muzicală, București, 1977). Therefore, the following stages in the composer's creation are suggested: I. 1929-1938 – marks the opening of directions and establishing the parameters of genuine creation. II. 1939-1948 – rounds up the final affirmation of his creation. III. 1949-1956 – settles the maturity of his style and language. IV. 1957-1963 – marks the delimitation of a new vision on the modal treatment. The first period represents, besides his debut, the moment of certain openings – within the modal spheres of the folk and Byzantine style, even with touching some stability points (the *Psaltic Liturgy*, 1936), or anticipations (*Nuntă în Carpați*, 1938), marks an apogee (*O noapte furtunoasă*, 1934) and a final point (*Riga Crypto and Lapona Enigel*, 1936) of the comic tendency, musically doubled by expressionist techniques, anticipates neoclassical tendencies (*Sonatina*, 1933, *Symphonietta*, 1937, *Prelude for the Piano Solo*, 1934 and *Burlesque for the Piano*, 1938). The second period represents the fulfilment of a creation cycle of Byzantine inspiration (the composer will only once come back this direction, in 1963, with *The Triple Concerto for the Violin, Cello, Piano and Orchestra*, but in a new mode), and the masterly opening of the performing section of his creation, the most important

from now on. The third period is that of "compromises" that the composer makes on the ground of accessibility, to educate the "taste" of the masses, on the aesthetic patterns of the newly-installed regime in power (the dances for the orchestra, the instrumental and choral pieces). In the following concerto literature, we notice an evolution of the modal language towards chromaticism (*The Piano Concerto*, 1952). The fourth period, containing the composer's last opus – *The Triple Concerto for the Violin, Cello, Piano and Orchestra* - overtakes the prerogatives of the culminating moment of his whole creation, the synthesis of all composition procedures, excepting the comic aspect.

The unity of Paul Constantinescu's creation is determined, first, by the tendency towards a common specific potential of intonation, which marks the constants of the inspiration sources of the theme. Based on these constants, works belonging to different expressive spheres, or to different style directions, achieve the unifying element, reaching, through generalities, the possibility of establishing certain parameters, between which Constantinescu's modal thinking retains certain melodic types. This common potential of intonation can be detected in: I. the melodic source of Anton Pann (quotation from *Spitalul amorului* or *Cântece de lume*) – a unifying element between the folk and the Byzantine Neoclassicism and the comic-parody creation with Greek-oriental nuances; II. Macarie's *Irmologhion* – a unifying element inside the Byzantine creation (the Byzantine Studies, the Oratorios and the Liturgy); III. the occasional folk species, for example *Doina recrutului*; in the comic creation (*Din cătănie, O noapte furtunoasă*), and also in the neoclassical creation (*The Piano Concerto*); IV. the melo-rhythmic style, common for themes proceeding from an archaic folk level,

developing an identical ascending-descending tetrachordal profile (the slow parts from *Symphonietta*, *the Concerto for the Violin* and *the Concerto for the Harp*); V. the archaic type of melody, laid on octosyllabic meter, used for outlining epic themes; VI. the improvisatory type of melody, illustrating the *rubato* principle, polyphonically distributed in unison or octave, regarding the atmosphere of slow movements (*the Concerto for the String Orchestra*, *the Triple Concerto*); VII. the Dorian-Phrygian cell in association with the subtonic relation of modal harmony – a unifying element placed above the thematic spheres or style directions (with examples from *Mioriţa* or *Riga Crypto și Lapona Enigel*).

### 3. Conclusions

Constantinescu's contribution to the progress of the Romanian composition school registers two stages: one of an absolute genuineness, in which the composer has the upper hand, and a second one, displaying him as the initiator of the modern direction promoting the Byzantine background. The second stage also displays him as a creator of the Romanian comical opera, having his own vision in approaching the folk direction - through new modalities of carrying out folk music at a high (melodic, harmonic, polyphonic, instrumental-orchestral, formal) level. In close connection with the style directions, the field of modal innovation oscillates, and affects one or another parameter of the musical flow.

Therefore, following the new stylistic directions, the composer's mind probes in the depth of modal monody, while other directions represent (in his modal conception) the domain of harmonic, polyphonic or instrumental-orchestral innovation. Therefore, the conclusion is that the originality of Paul Constantinescu's creation regarded from the perspective of the analyzed melodic, harmonic, and polyphonic parameters becomes real in enlarging the processing area of the folk music regarding the contemporary folk trend, in building the foundation of his creation in Byzantine style, in sensing the peculiarities regarding the comic musical elements and in molding this material into forms and types specific to the cultured art, by processing techniques adequate for a personalized modal language.

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