

ORIGINALITY OF APPROACH TO THE PSALMODIC MELODY IN *LITURGY IN THE PSALMODIC STYLE* BY PAUL CONSTANTINESCU

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SUMMARY. “Liturgy in the Psalmodic Style” by Paul Constantinescu is the expression of an original style based on the archaic Byzantine melody. This is concert music which differentiates it from the other liturgies created by Romanian composers for the Orthodox Church. The approach to the psalmodic melody in the harmonic-polyphonic context is an original one, the fusion is achieved by skilfully combined methods, thus we can notice Paul Constantinescu’s ability to synthesize the two-musical direction – the western and the eastern. The polyphonic choral composition fully enforces the Byzantine melodies, and the modal harmonies used are a bridge between the two musical systems – the tonal functional one and the eighth mode one in the psalmodic music. The techniques, such as the accompaniment, the modulation according to the wheel principle, the rhythm supporting the word are specific for the Byzantine melody, but they are integrated in the mixt choral texture proposed by the composer without diminishing their value or purpose. On the other hand, the strict or liberal imitation and the modal or tonal-functional harmony of the psalmodic melodies do not affect the richness of the Byzantine language; on the contrary, they enrich it. The Romanian spirituality is reflected in the composer’s musical creation, although he managed to by an universal musician through his widespread musical language.

Keywords: liturgy, psalmodic, polyphony, choir.

1. Introduction

“Liturgy in the Psalmodic Style” by Paul Constantinescu was composed in 1936, two years later the composer received the Creation Award from the Romanian Patriarchy. All of his Byzantine inspired creations include in their title “Byzantine style” (“Two studies in Byzantine style”, “Free

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variations on a Byzantine theme from 13th c.”, “The Byzantine sonata”, “The Easter Byzantine Oratory”, “The Christmas Byzantine Oratory”) with the exception of this choral piece which is characterized by the words “in psalmodic style”. Because Byzantine music represents the entire musical art of the Byzantine Empire and the similar one after the fall of the Empire, it is clear why Paul Constantinescu emphasized the title of this composition, church music or the art developed by church singers being strictly musical-religious. In addition, this music composition embodies the experience of the Liturgy, being composed for mixed a cappella choir.

Paul Constantinescu’s *Liturgy* has eight musical parts, structured according to the example of the Catholic Mass, including only some of the important moments of the liturgy. Also, this composition is a concert, and will not provide the answers to prayers, religious choral music or final answers (*Our father, He is blessed, I saw the light*).

2. Means of compositionally processing the psalmodic melody in the component parts of “Liturgy in the Psalmodic Style”

2.1 Lord, Have Mercy

“Liturgy in the Psalmodic Style” starts with the equivalent of the Kyrie eleison sections in Catholic religious works, “Lord, Have Mercy” being a concert piece which gathers the believers’ answers in Orthodox prayers. Written in polyphonic style, the theme of the first section in “Liturgy in the Psalmodic Style” is not recognizable in today’s church songs, which suggests it was taken over from the old Byzantine music (12th-13th c.) or is a personal creation in psalmodic style.

The method used to construct this musical piece with a prayer atmosphere is the 5th mode based on C. The theme and the entire musical piece evolve on the wheel principle in the Byzantine music towards the two dominants of the 5th mode, F and G. The generating reason fully displays a modal nature through the lack of sensitivity and exploiting the sub tone relationship as shown in the following example.

E.g. 1

Papadic

B. 

Doa - mne mi - lu - ieș - te

Paul Constantinescu creates an imitative composition in which the tension increases gradually. The second section of “Lord, Have Mercy” is built around the modulation of the two dominants of the 5th mode. We notice in this part of tension development and build-up the instability of the chord in contrast to the clarity of the first imitative part. The original treatment of the psalmodic melody is evident from the first part of the liturgy, with varied types of harmony for mixed choir.

The climax of the score is represented by the overlap of the second section with the varied come back of the first section. The third part of “Lord, Have Mercy” is a variant of the first part, the conclusion of the prayer which opens the concert liturgy.

Paul Constantinescu considers permanently the harmonization of the melodic accents with tonic and expressive ones³ thus the rhythmical intensification generally occurs in areas of melodic culmination. From the point of view of the movement, in addition to the words “Andante tranquillo” there is also the terms “Papadic”. The latter refers to a serious, rare, sober movement⁴. The tempo chosen by the composer is in close connection with the repeated text which gives the impression of personal continuous prayer in the polyphonic parts, but of collective one in the monody and homophony sections.

2.2 Holly God

The second part of the “Liturgy in the Psalmodic Style” is “Holy God” or the Trisagion Hymn. The composer used as a source of inspiration for this section a Paleologists’ Hymn, as it is specified in the subtitle. In the Byzantine Empire, in addition to church music, there were also acclamations, ceremonial music dedicated to the patriarch, emperor or dignitaries. Thus, Paul Constantinescu uses such an acclamation⁵ as inspiration for a solemn hymn for the Holy Trinity.

The score begins with a full A Eolic chord intoned on all voices forte and repeated, which conveys a solemn atmosphere. After the first “holy” intoned with supplication, there is a simple melody ascending in parallel octaves for the men’s voices, made up of three sounds which represent the symbol of the Holy Trinity framed by the word “God”.

“Holy God” has three sections, each line of the hymn combining the chord technique and the melodic one in different ways.

³ Ciobanu, Gh, *Studii de etnomuzicologie și bizantinologie (Ethnomusicology and Byzantinology Studies)*, Editura Muzicală, Bucharest, 1974, p. 74.

⁴ Ionașcu, Stelian, *Teoria muzicii psaltice (The Theory of Psaltic Music)*, Editura Sophia, Bucharest, 2006, p. 94.

⁵ *The Hymn of the Paleologues* was dedicated to the Paleologue dynasty, the last in the Byzantine Empire.

2.3 Cherubic

A musical section of "Liturgy in the Psalmodic Style" which highlights the mysterious and supernatural atmosphere of the liturgy is "Cherubic" or *The Cherubic Hymn*. The Christians confess they discard what is worldly in order to receive Jesus properly; the church-goers resemble the Cherubim who tirelessly bring praise. Paul Constantinescu's "Cherubic" resumes the move of the first part, "Lord, Have Mercy", this hymn being an example of church music written in the "papadic" rhythm in which the slowest move is subject to ample melismatic development.

The work was written in the 5th mode for A, a minor mode which suggests the calm atmosphere of humble prayer. Paul Constantinescu uses again the polyphonic imitative composition.

2.4 That we may receive the King

The Cherubic Hymn consists of two sections divided by the remembrances uttered by the priest during The Great Entrance: "Cherubic" itself and "That we may receive the King" – solemn hymn-like song.

Paul Constantinescu suggested relating the two sections of "Liturgy in the Psalmodic Style" by using the same thematic material. The theme approached in the 5th mode in "Cherubic" is this time exposed in a major, luminous and solemn way, the 8th mode on A. Comparing the two generating themes we can notice that their melodic development is the same, the differences occur in the case of melodic notes and ornamental formulas. Also, the tempo and the method render the two songs different from the point of view of their atmosphere and style. Paul Constantinescu chose to compose "That we may receive the King" in sticheron with the mention Moderato, the movement is more energetic in order to highlight the text "That we may receive the King of all, invisibly escorted by angelic Hosts. Alleluia. Alleluia. Alleluia".

Structurally, we can distinguish three sections: the first one, built on the words "That we may receive the King of all", is a polyphonic part in which the theme is exposed in the 8th mode based on A and developed in the 8th mode based on F, the second section uses a different sonorous material in the 6th mode on G, a theme with the same sinuous ascending melodic profile but with several melodic notes, the words used are "invisibly escorted by angelic Hosts", whereas the conclusion is a coda in the 8th mode on A, which partially resumes the initial topic and, in its turn, has a tripartite structure, model-sequence-rhythm, expressed through the words "Alleluia. Alleluia. Alleluia.". The first two sections are polyphonic, while the coda suggests the union of all the voices in solemn praise to the divinity, the homophony and the chord technique being used in the composition.

The accompaniment is skilfully employed in a rich polyphonic creation, Paul Constantinescu suggesting the psalmodic accompaniment technique by long notes intoned by the four voices, in the first section, as well as by the rhythmic pedal in the polyphonic melody of the second section.

2.5 The Great Responses

“The Great Responses” represents, from the musical point of view, a five-part composition which reaches the climax of the Liturgy, each part being preceded by the priest’s words. The first three choral answers are short confessions of faith that Paul Constantinescu fully enhanced through the Byzantine melody. The next two songs are long and praise the Holy Trinity.

“The Mercy of Peace” opens the moment of the participants’ confession of faith at the Liturgy through “The Great Responses”. Everybody shows praiseworthy mercy, peace and sacrifice. For this short musical answer, Paul Constantinescu used a melody in the 2nd mode based on E, the chromatic harmony was created naturally, by using the diatonic semitones, not chromatic ones. This part starts with a monody intoned by all the voices of the mixed choir, and then there is a moment of homophony in which all the chromatic notes are treated as melodic notes (ornaments, passage, and appoggiatura).

“And with your wisdom” is the second musical answer which stretches across three measures, the sonorous material used is common to the previous melody. This time, Paul Constantinescu uses the 2nd mode, with a descended sixth level. The homophonic composition displays again an equal rhythm of quarter notes and half notes, the accompaniment on the basic sound of the alto voice and the one introduced through a passage from the bass voice strengthen the Byzantine flavour.

The third answer is “We have onto God”, a musical part which continues the hieratic atmosphere through the same rich chromatic. Paul Constantinescu enriches the chromatic range through the interferences between the 2nd and the 6th mode.

“Worthily” brings praise to the Holy Trinity. Paul Constantinescu chose to change the register he had used previously by passing from the modal chromatic universe to the diatonic modal tone one. Also, the homophone composition is enriched by the polyphonic one, the latter being non-imitative figuratively choral. The diatonic modulations in the Bach style are joined to the Byzantine style used previously, which leads to a unique diversity in the area of Romanian sacred music.

The last part of “The Great Responses” is the seraphic Trisagion “Holy is, Holy is, Holy is the Lord of Sabaoth”. Through this score, Paul Constantinescu draws away from the restrained Byzantine melody and approaches the grandeur of western religious music (Sanctus and

Benedictus). From a formal point of view, the composer guides himself by the lyrics and builds three sections based on the following words: the first section is built on the literary text “Holy is, Holy is, Holy is the Lord of Sabaoth. The sky and the earth are full of Your praise. Hosanna for the ones above!”, the second one presents the text “Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord”, and at the end, the third section glamorously concludes “Hosanna, Hosanna, Hosanna for the ones above!”.

2.6 We Praise Thee

The central prayer of the Holy Liturgy uttered in private, the epiclesis, overlaps with the musical moment of “We Praise Thee”. Together, these two tensed moments lead to invoking the divine power to change the bread and wine into the Saviour’s Body and Blood.

Paul Constantinescu rendered musically this moment full of mystery in a monopartite score made up of three ample phrases which skilfully combine the homophonic composition with the polyphonic one. It is not an accident that the composer chose to use the alto voice for the first theme, in a monody in the 5th mode, the register and timbre he uses give balance and create an atmosphere suitable for prayer. The soprano brings extra tension by an imitation of fifths in *stretto*. The masculine voices deepen the state of prayer by interventions in the accompaniment technique.

E.g. 2

Pre Tine

The musical score for "Pre Tine" is presented in two systems. The first system includes staves for Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass. The Soprano part begins with a rest, followed by a melodic line with lyrics "Pre Ti ne". The Alto part starts with a rest, then enters with a melodic line and lyrics "Pre Ti ne Te lă". The Tenor and Bass parts have rests. The second system continues the vocal parts. The Soprano part has lyrics "Te lă u - dăm, Te lă u - dăm, Te lă u - dăm, Te". The Alto part has lyrics "u - dăm, Te lă u - dăm, Te lă u - dăm, Te". The Tenor and Bass parts have rests. The score is marked "Papadic" and "pp".

2.7 Hymn to the Holy Virgin

“Hymn to the Holy Virgin” is dedicated to the Virgin Mary; this song requires virtuosity in the interpretation of the psalms, with a wide ambitus and an irmologic or sticheron tempo. Also, the decided interpretation makes the difference between this hymn and the previous song which suggests a peaceful atmosphere of private prayer.

The score in Paul Constantinescu’s concert liturgy is built on the forth leghetos voice; the melody of this voice is diatonic based on C; it also has a moved tempo – irmologic. The specific element brought by the composer consists in combining the processed motives and the polyphonic style, on a harmonic modal support. In order to preserve the psalmodic specificity, the composer adopted techniques such as the accompaniment, consecutive fifths and octaves, the melodic chromatic which display the ornamentation in the psalmodic notation.

2.8 Psalm XXXIX

“Psalm XXXIX” or “The Liturgy Concert” represents, from a musical point of view, the climax of the “Liturgy in the Psalmodic Style”. This score, The Hymn of the Holy Communion, which is intoned when priests receive the Holy Communion, has a modally instable melodic structure, thus constructing a “lyrical-invocative”⁶ atmosphere of high tension. Structurally, the concluding part of the concert liturgy is different from its other parts because it contains a first section of soloist voice with choral accompaniment. This part is developed in a Motet and then a Halleluiah under the form of a fugue.

In the choral composition of the psalm, the composer uses the chromatic movement generated by the principle of sound attraction, the change of the sonorous centre in order to ensure higher fluidity; we also notice the use of fifths elliptic harmonic structures or dense parallel constructions which give a state of suspension of the sonorous centre. All of these are combined in a varied atmosphere in a text full of meanings, the one of psalm 39, verses 13, 14 translated by Vasile Radu and Gala Galaction.

3. Conclusions

The “Liturgy in the Psalmodic Style” is an example of an original approach to the byzantine melody. The musical techniques used for this composition are uniquely combined; the traditional and ancient chant of the

⁶ Ionașcu Stelian, *Paul Constantinescu și muzica psaltică românească (Paul Crnantinescu and Romanian Psaltic Music)*, Editura Institutului Biblic, Bucharest, 2005, p 139.

Orthodox Church is enriched by the eastern musical elements. The Romanian spirituality is reflected in the composer's musical creation, although he managed to by an universal musician through his widespread musical language.

In his work, "Liturgy in the Psalmodic Style", Paul Constantinescu succeeds in integrating the church Byzantine monody in an ensemble of methods used in choral composition, the synthesis he performs between the western style of choral pieces and the psalmodic one is rare and exceptional. The stylistic vision is original; the religious feeling is preserved and developed in a personal way.

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