

## **SYMPHONIC VARIATIONS FOR ORCHESTRA BY SIGISMUND TODUȚĂ – HISTORICAL AND STYLISTIC CONSIDERATIONS**

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**SUMMARY.** In 1940 when S. Toduță composed The Symphonic Variations on a folk song "Trecui valea", he was at the beginning of his career. He was a tenured teacher at the St. Vasile College in Blaj, he had 6 diplomas, three, including that of Doctor in Musical stylistics, obtained at the Pontifical Institute for Sacred Music In Rome. The second prize at the „G. Enescu” composition competition, which he gratefully received from the Commission chaired by G. Enescu himself, was „the first big impulse for the continuing” his creative journey, as he said himself. The work could be called in terms of the recognition of his talent, his number one opus. It followed other and other awards, his musical creation touching the stylistic maturity in the fifth decade of the twentieth century. The paper aims to highlights the existence of stylistic elements which anticipates the future great symphonist and creator of musical beauty which was S. Toduță, in the troubled context of the historical events of those years in Transylvania.

**Keywords:** S. Toduță creation, Transylvanian composers, 1940, Symphonic Variations

In 1940, when he composed the Symphonic Variations for orchestra on a folk song, "Trecui valea", S. Toduță was at the beginning of his career. He was a tenured teacher at the St. Vasile College in Blaj, he had 6 diplomas, three awarded by the Music Conservatory in Cluj-Napoca and three, including that of Doctor in Musical stylistics, obtained at the Pontifical Institute for Sacred Music in Rome. He was in his prime, having just married, in April, Ana-Maria Suciu, a graduate of the Faculty of Letters in Cluj<sup>2</sup>. He had a successful career, he led the choir, the school orchestra, two fanfares, he was a composer, a piano teacher and concert pianist, wrote articles for the school paper which he had founded together with a group of enthusiasts, he had ideals and was much loved and appreciated by students, colleagues and the people of "little

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Roma” as Blaj was named at the time. Privileged from the point of view of geographical position, Blaj had been sheltered from the catastrophic events initiated in the “black Friday” of Romanian history, when, in just three months (June-August), due to political short-sightedness and war, Russia took over Basarabia and Bucovina, Hungary occupied the north of Transylvania and Bulgaria took the Quadrilater (southern Dobrogea)<sup>3</sup>

Image 1



The government gave in, without a fight, to external pressures, when Romania had more than 1.260.000 soldiers and “they wanted to fight”<sup>4</sup>. This was followed by the great human drama of taking refuge from Russian and Hungarian troops and the educational and cultural institutions shared the same faith. The professors of the Cluj University and Conservatory as well as the artists of the National Opera House took refuge in Sibiu and Timișoara. Blaj also received refugees from the north and west and S. Toduță mentions them: Ambrosiu Iluțiu, Leonida Domide and Francisc Hubic, but also students and among them, Vasile Herman, future composer and Toduță’s disciple. One year later, when he is named assistant and accompanist at the Cluj Conservatory refugee in Timișoara, S. Toduță will experiment himself “the bitter taste of

<sup>3</sup> 33% of Romania, 100913 km<sup>2</sup> and 33,3 % of the country’s population, 6.777.000 inhabitants – Gabriela Vasilescu, *Anul 1940, an de cumpănă în istoria românilor (1940, a Milestone in the History of Romanians)* in the online journal Art-Emis Academy, [www.art-emis.ro/istorie/540-anul-1940](http://www.art-emis.ro/istorie/540-anul-1940)

<sup>4</sup> Idem (4)

refuge”<sup>5</sup>. We do not know the echo of those dramatic moments in the composer’s heart. Nevertheless, despite the maestro’s discretion and prudence regarding political and historical comments, his answers inevitably can be found in his aesthetic interests and in his artistic ideals. His attachment to the country and to the Romanian values can be found in the emotion with which he transmits, through sounds, of his forerunners<sup>6</sup>, of the roots of Romanian music, as well as in the warm lyricism of folkloric thematic. In 1944 he was wounded in the war. In a letter to the Director of the Cluj-Timișoara Conservatory, he expresses his joy to be well again<sup>7</sup>: “Providence has been kind to me, in exchange for a difficult trial, it allowed me to find myself among the living today”<sup>8</sup>. He also expresses his wish to go back “to school and to the Opera, institutions from which I temporarily parted to do my duty as Romanian on the front”<sup>9</sup>.

## Image 2



**S. Toduță – wounded, in the Blaj Hospital courtyard**

<sup>5</sup> Despina Petecel, *Muzicienii români se destăinuie (Confessions of Romanian Musicians)*, vol. II, p. 77-78

<sup>6</sup> Even his symphonies are homage to famous forerunners: Ovidius Publius Naso (The 3<sup>rd</sup> Symphony), George Enescu (The 2<sup>nd</sup> Symphony)

<sup>7</sup> and that of having found his family, until then refugees in Bucharest, safe and sound in Blaj

<sup>8</sup> From 6 of June 1944 from the hospital yard, the composer is in center, *S. Toduță, destăinuiri, documente, mărturii (S. Toduță, confessions, documents, testimonies)*, coord. Ninuca Pop-Oșanu, Ed. Casa Cărții de Știință, Cluj-Napoca 2008. p. 59

<sup>9</sup> Idem

**Image 3**



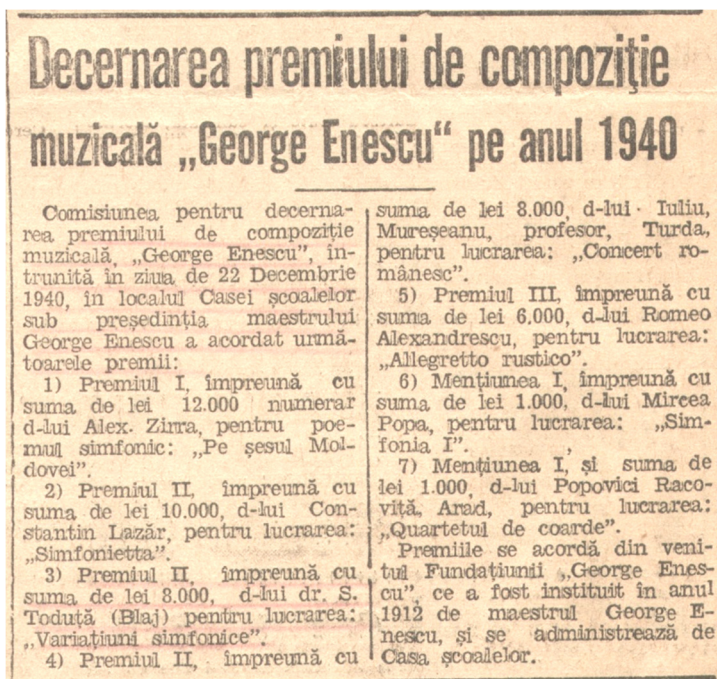
**S. Toduță – officer in Romanian Army**

What we can say with certainty about 1940 is that his activity was flourishing, compositions multiplied and national recognition was soon to come: “My big moment came in 1941, when, to my surprise, one of my beginning works, invested with all the clumsiness and lack of artistic mastery, *Variations on a Folk Theme “Trecui Valea”*, obtained the George Enescu award. This first contact, through which the maestro took notice of my humble existence, was the first great stimulus to continue on the same road”.<sup>10</sup> The winners of the Enescu award in 1940 were announced by national newspapers at the end of January 1941<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> Interview with S. Toduță taken by Vasile Bogdan in November 1983 in Timișoara and published in *Ei l-au cunoscut pe Enescu (They Met with Enescu)*, Ed. Ion Creangă, București, 1987, p. 106-108, apud S. Toduță, *destăinuirii, documente, mărturii (S. Toduță, confessions, documents, testimonies)*, Ed Casa Cărții de Știință, Cluj-Napoca 2008. p. 46.

<sup>11</sup> Fragment from the newspaper *Universul* of January 30, 1941, year 58, no. 26, which mentions that S. Toduță received the 2<sup>nd</sup> prize and 8000 de lei, just like Iuliu Mureșianu and Constantin Lazăr.



Setting on the search of S. Toduță's origins of symphonism, accomplished in the 4 symphonies composed in the 50s (Symphonies 1, 2 and 3: 54'50-56'57), the 60s and the 70s (Symphony no. 5 1962-76), we have tried to establish the previous symphonic works as well as the common stylistic coordinates which precede them. S. Toduță mentioned in this respect that the *Variations on a Folk Theme "Trecui Valea"* was his first significant opus and, therefore, we considered it, hypothetically, opus 1. The other symphonic works, preceding the variations, are: *Egloga pentru orchestră – Eglogue for orchestra*, 1933 and *Trei schițe simfonice pentru orchestră mare – Three Symphonic Sketches for a Great Orchestra* (1936)<sup>12</sup>. Nevertheless, in the library of the S. Toduță Foundation there are two more orchestral works, untitled, mentioned

<sup>12</sup> *Lucrări de Muzicologie (Musicology Papers)*, vol. XIV, 1979 only publishes the *Egloga - Eglogue*, 1933; the same, Hilda Iacob, 2002, *Egloga – Eglogue 1933-35*; *Studii toduțiene (Studies of Toduța)*, 2004, publishes: *Egloga – Eglogue, Suita pentru orchestră mică - (Suite for a small orchestra) n.a., Lucrare orchestrală fără titlu, f.a. – (Untitled orchestral piece n.a.), Trei schițe simfonice ptr. orch. mare – (Three Symphonic Sketches for Grand Orchestra)*, around 1940; Romeo Râmbu, 2012, shortly analyzes the *Eglogue*, 1933, *Three Symphonic Sketches*, 1936.

in the volume *Studii toduțiene – Studies on Toduța*, one of them being an orchestral suite for a small orchestra. In the report published in the Official Monitor no. 181 of 1943, after the tenure exam of S. Toduță at the Cluj-Napoca Conservatory in refuge in Timișoara, we find the *Egloga* among the compositions, dated 1936 together with a work entitled *Ruralia Transylvania* for a small orchestra, dated 1940. Later research will establish whether the two works could be sketches this *Ruralia Transylvania*, or are independent works

Despite the maestro's modest declarations, the fact that the Symphonic Variations *Trecui valea* were considered valuable enough to be presented to audiences is confirmed by the first performance at the Ardealul Philharmonic Orchestra, on May 12, 1946, conducted by the composer himself. Daily newspapers *Tribuna Nouă* and *Igazság* have commented extensively on the work prized by Enescu.

“... today's piece shows us that, essentially, apparently simple motives can be – when influenced by the composer's personality – the mobile of most accomplished performances and can serve as themes for savant orchestration” signed I.M. Tribuna Nouă, Cluj, Year II, no. 161, May 16, 1946, p. 2.

“...The entire piece bears testimony of the profound relation with folk music. Bright colors, progressive, characteristic (...to Toduță...) musical language, all rendered with finesse and precision by the orchestra. We appreciate the artistic solo of flutist Pop Dumitru.<sup>13</sup>

The theme of the variations is a love song, *Trecui valea*, probably taken from one of his students in Blaj, as the composer declared he had learned many songs from his students<sup>14</sup>. The folk song has a tetra-strophic form, type A -Av + A1- A2(refrain)<sup>15</sup> and a fluctuant modal structure, either of Phrygian with the end note on the 4<sup>th</sup> degree or hypo-Aeolian in the first two strophes, or of Aeolian with final Phrygian cadence in the refrain. From the point of view of the structural analysis of form, we can identify a by-strophic A-Av = 16 bars.

<sup>13</sup> The concert of the Ardealul orchestra, archive document, the S. Toduță Foundation. The work has only been performed once since, in 2004, by the students' orchestra at the “Gheorghe Dima” Music Academy, conducted by Emil Aluș.

<sup>14</sup> “... I have had the joy to learn from my students - (poor peasant children) – hundreds and hundreds of ancient melodies from the Romanian musical folklore”, in *S. Toduță, destăinuirii, documente, mărturii* (S. Toduță, confessions, documents, testimonies), p. 47 apud Despina Petecel, op. cit. p. 72

<sup>15</sup> Analyzed according to the structure of original verses found in Romanian southern folklore, for example in the repertoire of Benone Sinulescu – the verses are catalectic, octo-syllabic: *Trecui valea mort de sete/ Mă-ntâlnii cu două fete/ Îmbrăcate-n haină nouă/ Sărutale-aș pe-amândouă*, with the refrain sung on syllables *lai-lai*.

E.g.1

bars 1-8 A

E.g. 2

Phrygian or Hypo-Aeolian

Despite its novel character, possibly of semi-cultured origin, the composer noticed<sup>16</sup> its variation potential. In the first phrases of period A, the theme is exposed monodically, by the strings, motive  $\alpha$  being made up of two cells:  $x$ , circumscribing a fourth and  $y$ , a descending third. These intervals will play a significant part in the configuration of variations. The gradual, back-and-forth motion of the pentachord in motive  $\beta$  also holds a cyclically-forming importance:  $z$  – oscillatory,  $w$  – descending trichord / descending pentachord.

In the refrain, or second period, exposed by the woodwinds, we notice the cellular relation with the first phrase by the transposition and reversal of intervals and cells:  $yvi$ , transposed third and fourth, the other motives being identical. The final, Phrygian, cadence also condenses the oscillatory  $z$  cell with trichord  $w$ .

E.g. 3

Bars 9- 15 only bassoon, clarinet and oboe 1-2

<sup>16</sup> Hans Peter Türk mentioned the emphasis Professor Toduță placed on “the ways to perceive a coherent musical discourse, essentially based on the logical development of an initial musical impulse” H.P. Turk, *De la evoluția motivică la variația continuă în creația lui S. Toduță (From Motivic Evolution to Continuous Variation in the Work of S. Toduță)*, in *Musicology Papers*, vol. XXVI, no. 1 / 2011, p. 11.

The second scale Aeolian G #, the second degree fluctuant at cadence:

E.g. 4



Aeolian

The basic cells have generative force in all of the 10 free variations of the work, being the result of their metamorphosis, of their “shaping” within the continuous evolutionary process. Thematic evolution, growing more and more apart from initial models will generate new physiognomies, which will impose the different character of the variations. We only present several of the thematic transformations which are to impose the variations’ character:

E.g. 5



Passacaglia on basso ostinato in Var. 3 theme  
+ Synthesis refrain cello p. 11 bars 49-52

Folk dance with 2 different themes in Var. 4, theme 1:

E.g. 6



Theme 2

E.g. 7



Folk dance with burlesque character in var. 6:

E.g. 8



Var. 6 general score bassoon solo, bars 138-139

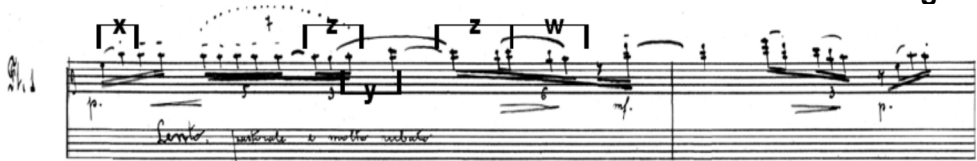


E.g. 9



Choral of woodwinds, variation 7

E.g. 10



Solo monody of the flute – or Aulodia in Var.

E.g. 11



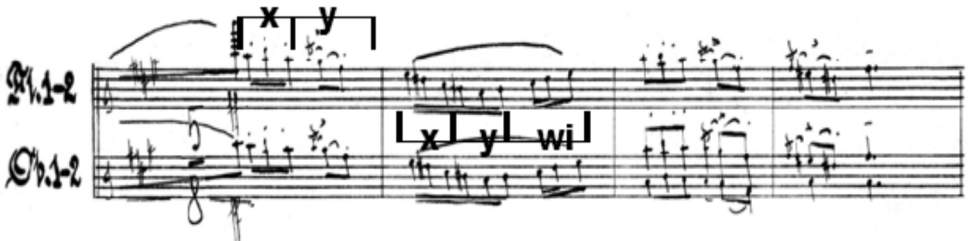
Refrain, p. 53, bars 233-234

E.g. 12



Var. 9 p. 62, bars 268-271 bassoon

E.g. 13



Var. 10 p. 69, bars 302-305



**Refrain p. 74, bars 330-335, only violin 1.**

The variational, harmonic, tonal-modal, melodic, rhythmic, metric procedures, as well as those of syntax determine the special character, the musical personality of each variation, as it can be seen in the following table:

**Table 1**

Variations No. of bars	Language elements	Syntax/ texture	Character
Var.I - 20 bars	G# - Aeolian Bimodalism, Modal Harmony-chromaticism mixtures Scordatura	Polyphonic – imitative texture strettii	ORNAMENTAL VARIATION
Var.II – 11 bars	Motivic disintegration Continuous tonal fluctuation bimodalism Mixtures of Fourth	Polyphonic-imitation – stretto	MOTET
Var. III – 19 bars	G – C# Four basso ostinato variations Clusters harmony, ajoutée chords, notes from mode	Polyphonic – basso ostinato	PASSACAGLIA
Var. IV – 54 bars	A-F#-C#- H-E Bithematism, ostinato pedal T1-T2-T1- T2 tutti T2 T1	Double counterpoint	DANCE
Var.V - 13 bars	E-C#-G etc. Continuous tonal fluctuation due to the imitative orchestral dialogue	Polyphonic – imitative texture	EPISODE-Fugatto

SYMPHONIC VARIATIONS FOR ORCHESTRA BY SIGISMUND TODUȚĂ...

<b>Variations No. of bars</b>	<b>Language elements</b>	<b>Syntax/ texture</b>	<b>Character</b>
Var. VI - 49 bars	F#- modal fluctuation Three themes First Theme-Bassoon contretemps-pedal accomp. T1 - T1 - T1 tutti T2 T3	Monody ostinato contretemps pedal and Polyphonic texture	DANCE (old men dance) Burlesque character
Var. VII - 32 bars	E Ternary form Theme-Refrain-Theme, Harmonic dialog Woods-Brass-Woods	Homophony – Polyphony	CHORAL- winds
Var. VIII – 25 bars	A Aeolian- E Aeolian Flute <i>parlando rubato</i> solo Ternary form with reprise Th.-Refr-Th.	Soloistic Monody	AULODIA
Var. IX - 54 bars	Bitonalism G-G# Figurative accomp.- imitative dialogue to the winds - final unisono	Imitative strettii, unisono	REPRISE- FUGATTO ON THEME (A)
Var. X - 27 bars	A tonal fluctuation Unisono Dance Theme Ternary form dance- refrain-dance	Unison – polyphony	DANCE REPRISE ON REFRAIN (AV)

The conclusions on the musical language and the compositional procedures used in this work converge towards the idea of a neo-classical style, already complete and mature in its expression, characterized by:

- Evolved procedures of metamorphosing the motivic cellular material, anticipating the compositional skill of thematic or developing sections of symphonies,
- Procedures of using the harmonic and tonal-modal language present in the works of the representative composers of neo-modalism: bi- poly-modalism, scordatura, mixtures of fourths-fifths (parallelisms), chordic mixtures, harmonization with the elements of the mode, tri-tetra-pentachordic modal scales, or modes with mobile structure, reversed or sloped chromaticism, clusters of chords with *ajoutée* notes, bi-functional chords, ostinato pedals, tonal-modal continuous fluctuation etc.

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Here are a few examples illustrating the use of variational procedures of modern, neo-modal origin: Ex. bi-modalism

E.g. 15

Var. IX. *M.M. = ca 76* *Andante, con una certa morbidezza.*

The score is written on three systems of staves. The first system shows a piano introduction with a 2/4 time signature and the instruction "legato sempre". The melody is written in a treble clef, and the accompaniment is in a grand staff (treble and bass clefs). The second system continues the piece, showing a change in key signature to one sharp (F#) and a change in time signature to 3/4. The third system shows further melodic and harmonic development, including a triplet of eighth notes in the melody.

Var. IX - Piano reduction

E.g. 16

The score is written on three systems of staves. It features a complex texture with multiple overlapping melodic lines. The first system shows a treble clef with a melody that includes a triplet of eighth notes. The second system continues the piece, showing a change in key signature to one sharp (F#) and a change in time signature to 3/4. The third system shows further melodic and harmonic development, including a triplet of eighth notes in the melody.

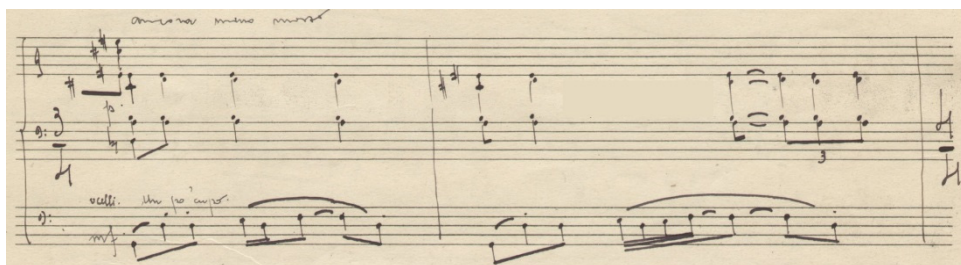
Three modal structures, overlapped

E.g. 17



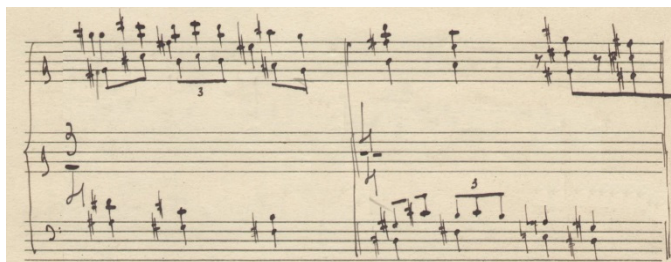
Scordatura reduction

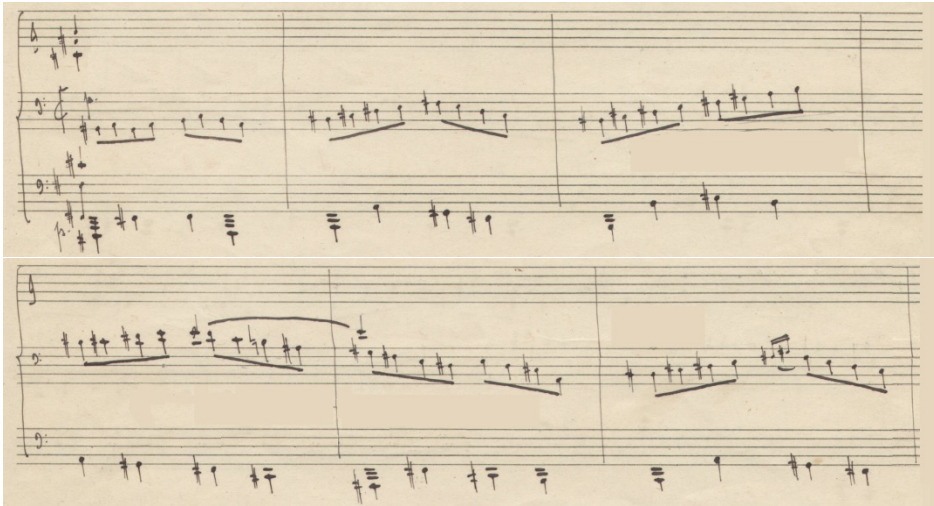
E.g. 18



Mixtures of fourths, reduction, overlapped fourths in cluster

E.g. 19





**Mobile modal structures, p. 11, only the melodic line var. 6**

Other stylistic and language elements to be found in symphonies during the following decades:

- the (neo) Baroque, mostly polyphonic, referential, syntax, as well as the corresponding models of form and genre - monody or unison (the song), free counterpoint (episode), imitative polyphony in stretto, fugatto, double counterpoint (motet - fugue), the choral - basso ostinato (variations) etc.
- The configuration of certain thematic forms or of forms with reprise within the variations, anticipating the combination of the principles of form inside the sections of symphonies <sup>17</sup>
- The synthesis of the counterpoint, neo-Renaissance-Baroque compositional techniques and the specific of the folk song by: folkloric quotation, themes which are conceived or adapted to the archetypes of folk song or dance.

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<sup>17</sup> Mirela Mercean-Țârc *Articularea formei în simfoniile compozitorilor clujeni (Articulation of Form in the Symphonies of the Cluj Composers)*, Ed. Univ. din Oradea, 2007, p. 31 (such as the development of the sonata, for example, in the 2nd Symphony, the stages of development are based on a double fugue – T1 fugatto, T2 choral, T1 fugatto, T2 6 variations on ostinato, double counterpoint. synthesis T1/T2)

The doina-like song with the entire series of ancient nostalgia appears in var. 8 through the parlando-rubato monody anticipating the appearance of aulodias in the composer's symphonies, as well as in other vocal-instrumental works. The aulodia archetype was identified by composer V. Herman in „... *the ancestral aulodias of the Carpathians, which, penetrating time, come from the Greek Antiquity which also named them. But what are they if not the archaic, ancestral Romanian doina, this long song so specific to this space, where it exists and manifests from the Neolithic to our days?*”<sup>18</sup>

The dance archetype, present in variations 4, 6 and 10, is represented through typical musical drawings, through cadential formulas (Phrygian, Aeolian or of sub-tone), through the modal frame, but especially through the specific rhythm and accompaniment: ison pedal, ostinato pedal in countertime, imitating the folkloric ensemble. Emerged from the joy of original dance, variations of this character, of giocoso archetype<sup>19</sup> (Cl. Liliانا Firca) change their ethos through modern, geometric harmonization and polyphonic processing, changing the initial meaning of expression and turning it towards the dramatic or tragic color. Furthermore, this tense dramatic sonorous “clothing” appears in approximately every variation, even in the chords accompanying the dancing flow of the finale, weaving the colors of the chromatic, tense, menacing ethos with the lyricism and serenity of modal diatonic patterns, the thematic coherence of sonorous patterns with the dissolution, the disintegration, the dissipation, the loss of thematic identity. The gradation and contrast realized in opposing alternation at the level of writing, character, orchestration and tempo announce some of the important compositional strategies of symphonies.

## Conclusions

The work reflects, without a doubt, a vision on historical and life presence, possibly experimented by the composer in the year he wrote it, oscillating between the sonorous lyricism of longing and despair, embodied by the doina-like song, and the telluric joy of dancing. It is the unspoken tale of “silver linings”, of hope beyond darkness, which will appear, in various hypostases, in the message of the grand ideas expressed in the symphonies to be created in the following years.

<sup>18</sup> V. Herman, *Formă și stil în creația compozitorului S. Toduță (Form and Style in the Works of Composer S. Toduță)* in *Studii toduțiene (Studies on Toduța)*

<sup>19</sup> “... a large number gives chamber and symphonic works with thematic structures (...) connected with the rhythmic or rhythmico-melodic structures of Romanian dances, embody indeed, in the interwar composition ... a giocoso archetype of equal Romanian, universal and modern importance.” Cl. L. Firca, *Modernitate și avangardă în muzica inter și ante-belică a secolului XX (Modernity and Avant-garde in 20<sup>th</sup> Century Music Before and Between the Two World Wars)*, Ed. Fundației Culturale Române, București, 2002, p. 35

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