

## THE IMPORTANCE AND SPECIFICS OF THE VOCAL-CHORAL ANALYSIS IN A CHORAL WORK

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**SUMMARY.** In the survey “The Complexity and Specifics of Choral Art”, I have discussed about the three stages a conductor undertakes in the process of discovering and studying a choral work. These three stages are: SMA - the syntactical- morphological analysis of the work, VCA - the vocal-choral analysis and MC - the mental concept (MTC and MIC). In this study, we set out to present the second stage, the vocal-choral analysis (VCA), in a detailed approach. The choral piece I have used in making this analysis is “Mă luai, luai” by Tudor Jarda.

**Keywords:** The Vocal-Choral Analysis of the work (Stg II – VCA), analysis of the musical work, individual study, choral work

*“The Vocal - Choral Analysis* comprises:

- identifying the conductor’s melodic line (the melodic line that carries the musical theme, with the entries of the choral parts).
- identifying the range of the voices, the vocal registers used frequently;
- establishing the vocality of the text and the vocal emission problems;
- identifying the breath marks and the *caesurae*;
- articulation and diction;
- the study of all the voice parts;
- identifying the conducting gestures;
- assessing the difficulties posed by the work: 1. during the individual study of the work; 2. while studying the score with the choir; 3. issues of prosody;
- the preparations for rehearsals (making up a plan to choose vocal exercises that would help solve the problems posed by the musical work, setting up a plan of studying the works, depending on the difficulties encountered, on the type of writing, etc.).

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This is a degree in which the conductor's analytical abilities are developed. After this stage, the conductor attains a clearer view of the musical work".<sup>2</sup>

In the following section, we are going to undertake all the stages of the vocal – choral analysis in the case of “*Mă luai, luai*” by Tudor Jarda.

The choral work “*Mă luai, luai*” is based on a folkloric theme. The composer wrote a melody with folkloric resonance, with a modal-chromatic structure, built on the augmented-fourth Dorian mode – a chromatic mode largely used in Romanian composition. The melody comprises the vocal range of a major sixth and an 8-bar structure.

The choral piece starts off with the male voices (T+B), through a pedal rendered on fifths. The conductor shall address to the male voices with the aid of the preparatory upbeat gesture (German *Auftakt*), in the beginning – a precise, clear upbeat gesture, carried out with a low amplitude, according to the dynamic indication written in the score (*ppp*).

On this sonorous continuum, the melodic line is introduced in the *alto* (bars 3-10).

### E.g. 1

**Lento**

Soprano

Alto

Tenor

Bass

*ppp*

*p*

Mă lu - ai, lu - ai, \_\_\_

Mă lu - ai, lu - a - iu Joi de di - mi - nea - tă Sus pe la  
(I went out on a Thursday morning)

*ppp*

Mă lu - ai, lu - a - iu Joi de di - mi - nea - tă Sus pe la

### T. Jarda - *Mă luai, luai* (bars 1-3)

Hence, after the two introductory bars, in the third bar, the conductor shall direct their focus towards the alto section.

<sup>2</sup> Gutanu, Luminita, *The Complexity and Characteristics of Choral Art*, in *Studia UBB Musica*, LIX, 1, 2014, Cluj University Press, pg. 76.

At this point, the conductor shall attract the attention of the altos by means of his/her associated gestures (mimicry, the directing of the hands), and then he/she is to make the Upbeat gesture.

During the eight bars in which the theme is stated, the conductor shall pay attention to both planes: the main plane – the theme in the altos, the secondary one – the male pedals.

The thematic exposition is made on an 8-beat pulsation, based on three cells (the first one – binary, the other two – ternary).

After the thematic exposition in the alto, the theme will shift to soprano (bar 11). Through this means of expression, the composer puts both vocal timbres to value.

### E.g. 2

10 *mp*  
Mă ple - cai, ple - cai Mă - nun - cheș să - mi - tai  
(I bent down to cut a bundle,)

La hol - da de grâu.  
(to the field of wheat.)

*p*  
de grâ - u. Să - mi gat cu - nu - na

*p*  
de grâ - u. Să - mi gat cu - nu - na

### T. Jarda - *Mă luai, luai* (bars 10-12)

This is the first entrance of the soprano voices; therefore the conductor must emphasize it, by means of the upbeat gesture.

The theme is stated here throughout 8 bars, keeping the conductor's attention on the main plane; however, the conductor must also follow the secondary plane carefully, as changes in the musical writing are occurring.

In the first four bars (11-14), we have an *ison* (a drone note) in the alto and pedals of fifths in the male voices. In bars 15-18, in addition to an increase in dynamics, we have a simultaneous development on four levels (a harmonic exposition, as well as an isorhythmia, *from the rhythmic standpoint*), which the conductor shall also have to emphasize through gestures.

The theme stated by the sopranos shall remain in the spotlight.

10 *mp*  
Mă ple - cai, ple - cai Mă - nun - cheș să - mi - tai  
(I bent down to cut a bundle,)

La hol - da de grâu.  
(to the field of wheat.)

*p*  
de grâ - u. Să - mi gat cu - nu - na

*p*  
de grâ - u. Să - mi gat cu - nu - na

13 *mf*  
Să - mi gat cu - nu - na Ca să pot ple - ca. Și - mi a - flai, a - flai  
(to finish my sheaf, and go home.) (And I found)

*mf*  
Și - mi a - flai, a - flai

*mf*  
Ca să pot ple - ca. Și - mi a - flai, a - flai

*mf*  
Ca să pot ple - ca. Și - mi a - flai, a - flai

### T. Jarda - Mă luai, luai (bars 10-15)

The middle part of the work shall start off with an upbeat gesture towards the two male sections plus alto (bar 19).

After the first binary formula (“*De jos...*”), the conductor shall address to the sopranos (bar 19 – “*De jos o ...*”). The next bar must follow the same principle (bar 20).

It is recommended that, throughout the two bars, the student conductor focus mainly on the theme (alto), while maintaining the pulsation of the entire sonorous edifice. The addressing to the altos, in bar 21 (the continuation of the theme) shall serve as closing for the sopranos (a double-function gesture), followed by an upbeat gesture towards the same voice (soprano, bar 21).

E.g. 4

19

De jos o lu-ai, de jos o lu-ai, De colb o su-  
 uniti  
 De jos o lu-ai, de jos o lu-ai, De colb o su-flai  
 (I picked it up,) (blew off the dust,)  
 De jos o lu-ai Și-n sân o  
 De jos o lu-ai Și-n sân o

T. Jarda - Mă luai, luai (bars 19-21)

At bar 22, on the first binary formula, we must emphasize the alto line (“În sân o....”); on the first ternary formula – the sopranos (“Și-n sân...”); on the second ternary cell – the tenors (“Floarea bu....”). Each addressing to the voice parts mentioned above shall be made with the aid of the upbeat gesture. At the end of this measure, the conductor shall make a closing gesture towards the bass section.

Bar 23 – on the first binary formula, the alto part must be highlighted, with a double-function gesture (highlighting the alto and closing the soprano part), to then come back with an upbeat in soprano, on the second ternary formula (on the first of the three eighths, the conductor shall address to the tenor, and then to the soprano).

E.g. 5

22

flai Și-n sân o bă-gai. Floa-rea bu-ci-na-ră,  
 Și-n sân o bă-gai. Floa-rea bu-ci-na-ră, floa-rea bu-ci-na-ră,  
 (and put it in my bosom.) (The flower cried out,)  
 bă-gai. Floa-rea bu-ci-na-ră, floa-rea bu-ci-na-ră, Mun-ții tre-  
 bă-gai. Floa-rea bu-ci-na-ră,

T. Jarda - Mă luai, luai (bars 22-24)

Bars 24 – starts off with an upbeat towards the bass section, on the first binary formula (“*Floarea bucinară...*”). Afterwards, we must emphasize the tenor, on the last ternary formula, with the syntagm “*Munții tremurără...*”, a statement that this vocal part anticipates and we find it in the following measure (bar 25), in the other three voices (S, A, B).

In bar 26, in addition to highlighting the theme stated by the alto, the student conductor shall give an upbeat to the soprano section, on the second ternary formula.

In the third part of the work (bar 27), the composer maintains the theme in the alto, throughout four bars, being followed by the other three voices (soprano – *ison* and the male voices - pedals of fifths).

## E.g. 6

## T. Jarda - Mă luai, luai (bars 25-27)

At the end of bar 30, a closing gesture must be made toward the feminine voices, which is a double-function gesture – closing (S+A) + upbeat towards the sopranos, which take the theme over from the altos.

## E.g. 7

**T. Jarda - Mă luai, luai (bars 25-30)**

In the last bar, the conductor is to display the complementarity of the male voices, in a low intensity, of course, and then he/she shall make a closing gesture toward the sopranos, followed by the final closing of the choral piece, by the male vocal parts. The melodic trajectory of each voice part is built on a low vocal range.

The sopranos' vocal range of this choral piece spans a ninth (D4 – E5).

Sopran

The vocal range of the alto part spans a seventh (C4 – B4).

Alto

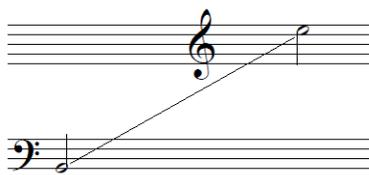
The vocal range of the tenor part spans a ninth (D3 – E4).

Tenor

The vocal range of the bass part spans an octave (B2 – B3).

Bas

The general vocal range of the choral work:



The vocal registers employed by the conductors throughout the entire choral work:

- Soprano – lower and middle;
- Alto – middle;
- Tenor – lower and middle;
- Bass – lower and middle.

From the vocal standpoint, the score is written in the comfort zone of the voice. This choral piece is a genuine moment of musical dramaturgy.

It is built on a theme of folkloric resonance, dressed in various types of writing, with pretty important timbral events. The piece is characterized by the expressive force and originality that the composer uses in its development. It is conceived in the form of an arch.

Vocal timbres are used wisely. The composer harnesses each of the vocal parts; for instance, while the theme is stated by one voice part, the others act as a harmonic support (creating the atmosphere). The timbral algorithm is inspiringly used.

The composer operates with a wide range of techniques and means of expression:

- changes in the musical dynamics;
- changes in tone color;
- pedals;
- *the ison*.

All these elements are rendered with a syntactic purity and consistency. The dynamics and timbrality are essential in this choral work.

Tudor Jarda gives great importance to the relation between text and music, as he harmoniously blends the melodic accents with the tonic ones. Hence, the work does not pose any prosody problems.

“*Mă lui, lui*” is conceived as a whole, with an arch-like construction (both on the architectural and dynamic planes).

It must be performed according to the principle of individual breathing, as the only plausible *caesura* (breathing place) can appear at the demarcation between the two parts (A-B, bars 18-19).

16

Da eu ce-mi a - flai? O floa-re din Ra - iu Cres-cu - tă pe plai.  
 (— what did I find?—) (a flower from Eden, grown in the field.)

div.

Da eu ce-mi a - flai? O floa-re din Ra - iu Cres-cu - tă pe plai.

Da eu ce-mi a - flai? O floa-re din Ra - iu Cres-cu - tă pe plai.

Da eu ce-mi a - flai? O floa-re din Ra - iu Cres-cu - tă pe plai.

19

De jos o lu-ai, de jos o lu-ai, De colb o su-

uniti

De jos o lu-ai, de jos o lu-ai, De colb o su-flai  
 (I picked it up,) (blew off the dust,)

De jos o lu - ai Si-n sân o

De jos o lu - ai Si-n sân o

T. Jarda - *Mă luai, luai* (bars 16-21)

There could be an additional *caesura*, extremely short, before the last bar of the score (bar 35 – the complementation of the male voices), but that is up to the conductor (depending on their own mental interpretative concept).

## E.g. 9

34

La hol - da de grău. rit.

PPP

Joi de di - mi - nea - ță.

PPP

Joi de di - mi - nea - ță.

T. Jarda - *Mă luai, luai* (bars 34-35)

Assessing the potential problems that may arise:

During the individual study of the work, the student conductor may encounter the following issues:

- for starters, they might have problems related to the metric pulsation of the work (8/8, the asymmetrical *aksak* rhythm), when combining the uneven formulas (binary + ternary + ternary);
- maintaining the same tempo throughout the entire score;
- Some serious problems may arise in the middle part of the score. We could call it “the weak point” of the score. The difficulty lies in the vocal entries that the student conductor must execute, but also in the small inadvertences in the overlapping of the rhythmic formulas (e.g.: bar 19 – the soprano-alto relationship).

## E.g. 10

19

De jos o lu - ai, de jos o lu - ai, De colb o su -

uniti

De jos o lu - ai, de jos o lu - ai, De colb o su - flai

(I picked it up,) (blew off the dust,)

De jos o lu - ai Și-n sân o

De jos o lu - ai Și-n sân o

T. Jarda - *Mă luai, luai* (bars 19-21)

All these issues can be solved by practicing and understanding the importance of the metric pulsation of the work.

Other potential problems that may arise while working with the choir shall be assessed in accordance with the level of training of that particular ensemble.

Here are some further general issues:

- The fifth interval leap from the beginning of the melodic trajectory in the alto part (bar 3);

E.g. 11

The musical score shows four staves: Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass. The time signature is 8/8 and the tempo is Lento. The Soprano part is mostly rests. The Alto part has a melodic line starting in bar 3 with a dynamic marking 'p'. The Tenor part has a melodic line starting in bar 1 with a dynamic marking 'ppp'. The Bass part has a rhythmic accompaniment starting in bar 1 with a dynamic marking 'ppp'. The lyrics are: 'Mă lu - ai, lu - ai, lu - a - iu Joi de di - mi - nea - ță Sus pe la (I went out on a Thursday morning) Mă lu - ai, lu - a - iu Joi de di - mi - nea - ță Sus pe la'.

**T. Jarda - Mă luai, luai (bars 1-3)**

- While working with the choir, the middle part of the score may also pose some particularly rhythmic problems, up to the point where they are solved.

- The sonority of the choir must be addressed. The conductor must work on the tone color required by this choral piece. They must also calibrate the dynamic plane properly.

In resolving these issues, the procedures of working with the choir are vital.

**REFERENCES**

- Gutanu, Luminita, *The Complexity and Characteristics of Choral Art*, in Studia UBB Musica, LIX, 1, 2014, Cluj University Press, pg.76.  
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