STUDIA UBB MUSICA, LXVIII, Special Issue 2, 2023 (p. 55 – 67)
(RECOMMENDED CITATION)
DOI: 10.24193/subbmusica.2023.spiss2.04

HIDE-AND-SEEK BETWEEN THE SERIAL AND THE MODAL IN ANATOL VIERU'S CONCERTI

OLGUȚA LUPU[1]

SUMMARY. After first employing the 12-tone serialism, Anatol Vieru turned to folklore for inspiration and then wrote works based on artificial modes. I was interested in the possible correlations between these periods of his oeuvre. More precisely, I wished to analyze Vieru's concerti as to their use of 12-tone structures and the relations they establish with non-serial configurations. I noticed that, even if he uses the chromatic total and respects the rules of serialism only in a first stage, Vieru very much kept in contact with it, albeit by converting it from a point of departure to a destination, the *direction* of a route seeming to often coincide with the obtaining of the chromatic total or with an asymptotic aspiration towards it. An interesting intersection is thus created, where the modal takes over the serial while the latter will still discreetly remain woven into the former.

Keywords: Anatol Vieru, Serialism, Serial, Modes, Concerti

Introduction

Modal, tonal, serial, and back to modal. The synthetic opening chapter of Anatol Vieru's *The Book of Modes*[2] grasps the main archaeologic strata of the history of music. But these strata are not distinct. Nothing of what has ever existed disappears or is driven into the background without leaving a trace. The archaic pre-pentatonic or pentatonic layer remains visible in the heptatonic folk output, the *G – E* bitonic scale supports the minor

[1] *Professor at the National University of Music, Bucharest. E-mail: olguta.lupu@unmb.ro*

[2] Anatol Vieru wrote this authoritative work of Romanian musicology, entitled *Cartea modurilor (The Book of Modes)*, vol. I, Editura Muzicală 1980; *The Book of Modes*, vol. I-II, Editura Muzicală, 1993.

third intervallic tie between relative keys. The harmonic essence of tonal functionality reverberates over Messiaen's neo-modal thinking, for instance. And echoes of the serialist-dodecaphonic logic are also felt in music governed by other principles.

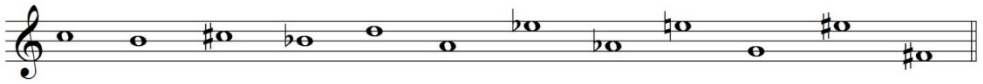
Below is an attempt to investigate the intersections between the 12-tone technique and the modal language in Anatol Vieru's works for solo instrument and orchestra, belonging to different periods. I found such intersections in four of the seven analysed works[3]: *Flute Concerto*, 1958; *Violin Concerto*, 1964; *Concerto for Violin and Cello,* 1979; *Concerto per due for Saxophone and Percussion*, subtitled *Wrestling*, 1987.

1. 12-tone Structures

In the whole of Vieru's works for solo instrument and orchestra, 12-tone structures occur very rarely. In fact, they are featured only in his first Concerto, for flute.

All its four movements are built starting from a single series functioning as a theme (Figure 1), which presents four distinguishing features:

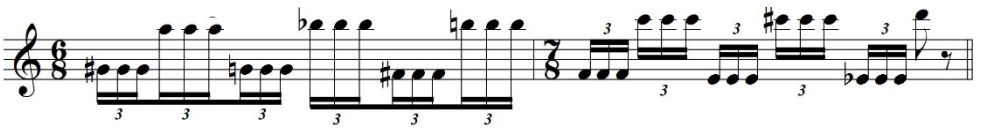
Fig. 1



Anatol Vieru, *Flute Concerto,*
12-tone series extracted from mvt. 1 (b. 1-6)

i. it exhibits a spiral configuration, in gradual intervallic augmentation (explicit – E.g., 1, or compensating by intervallic compression in the last third part of the series – E.g., 2).

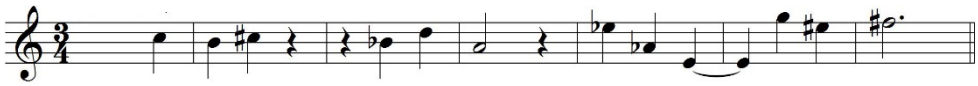
E.g. 1



Anatol Vieru, *Flute Concerto,* solo flute, mvt. 1, [11]

[3] *Flute Concerto*, 1958; *Cello Concerto*, 1962; *Violin Concerto*, 1964; *Clarinet Concerto*, 1974; *Concerto for Violin and Cello,* 1979; *Symphonie concertante for Cello,* 1987; *Concerto per due for Saxophone and Percussion*, subtitled *Wrestling*, 1987.

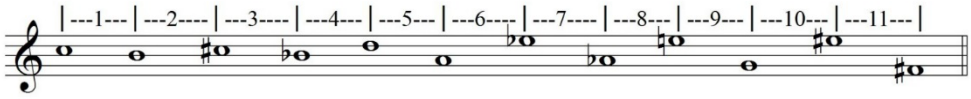
E.g. 2



Anatol Vieru, *Flute Concerto,* mvt. 1 (b. 1-6)

ii. it comprises all simple intervals, ordered by the number of half steps they contain, from the minor second to the major seventh (Figure 2).

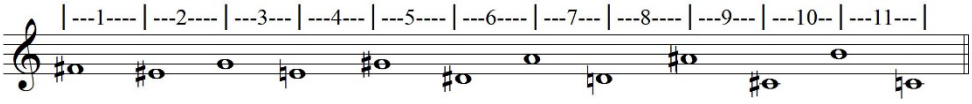
Fig. 2



Anatol Vieru, *Flute Concerto,* the same 12-tone series, with the number of half steps of each interval

iii. if read backwards using the intervals' complementarity, the series proves to be non-retrogradable, the prime and the retrograde version being identical as concerns interval succession (Figure 3).

Fig. 3



Anatol Vieru, *Flute Concerto,* the same series in retrograde form, read with complementary intervals

iv.the spiral configuration determines a 2-tone micro-units segmentation (see E.g., 1); Vieru often also uses a 3-tone micro-units segmentation (see E.g., 2).

I find it remarkable that in 1958, one year before Nicolas Ruwet's criticism of serialism[4] and 30 years before Fred Lerdahl's study[5], in which the American scholar talks about cognitive constraints justifying the existence of

[4] Nicolas Ruwet. "Contradictions du langage sériel" *("Contradictions of the Serial Language"*). In *Revue Belge de Musicologie*, 1959, vol. 13, no. 1/4, pp. 83-97.

[5] Fred Lerdahl. "Cognitive Constrains on Compositional Systems" (1988), republished in *Contemporary Music Review* no.6, part 2, 1992, pp. 97-121.

several viable music writing systems, Vieru avoids or sensibly lessens the difficulties caused using serialism. For example, the segmentation (of Webernian extraction) in 2 or 3-tone micro-units answers to Lerdahl's first condition, which demands that the musical surface be discretized in a sequence of events, based on audibly discernible changes[6]. And, by the way he geometrizes[7] the series, the Romanian composer not only borrows the Webernian model, but adds a clearly audibly discernible evolution within the theme, creating two divergent planes. Webern uses, as we know, cells which are the inversion, the retrograde, or the retrograde inversion of one another[8]. The transformations thus obtained are rather static, of the permutation type, and don't form an evolutional arch. Vieru creates, by the intervallic amplification followed (in most of the forms in which the theme is exposed) by a retreat (see E.g., 2), a *logic of becoming* easily perceptible, based on the implied polyphony principle, as a well-outlined melodic arch, as a whole integrating micro-items, through which the series gains considerable poignancy and recognizability, making at the same time possible a hierarchical structuration formulated by Lerdahl as a second constraint, namely, that the series' culmination should occur in the moment of maximum intervallic amplification[9]. The reiteration of the same evolutional logic every time the series (the theme) is repeated results in the solution, to a great extent, of the problem of time irreversibility signaled by Ruwet as a contradiction of serialism. As underlined by the Belgian linguist, to detect the differences or similarities in relation to structures' return *en-temps*, it's necessary that these be subsumed to an *hors-temps* common pattern[10]. Vieru's series abundantly meets this requirement, since its forms (prime,

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[6] "The musical surface must be capable of being parsed into a sequence of discrete events" (Lerdahl, p. 104).

[7] The preference for geometrization and for imagining various types of symmetries would become a characteristic of his writing style.

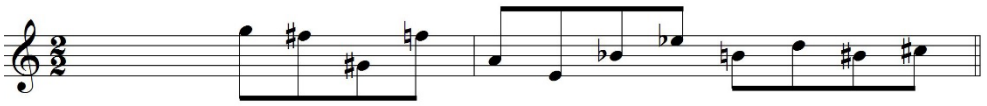
[8] For example, in his *Concerto for Nine Instruments*, op.24.

[9] "The musical surface must be available for hierarchical structuring by the listening grammar" (Lerdahl, p. 104).

[10] "Etant donné que la musique se déroule dans le temps, une reprise ne peut jamais être considérée comme une pure et simple répétition. En musique, A n'est jamais égal à A. /.../ Sur le plan de la langue, du système, A est égal à A /.../ sur le plan de la parole, il ne l'est plus. C'est seulement s'il y a des identités sur le plan de la langue qu'il peut y avoir des différences sur le plan de la parole, c'est-à-dire un mouvement, un devenir. A vouloir créer une musique absolument irréversible, on abolirait en fait le mouvement lui-même" („Since music unfolds in time, a reprise can never be considered a pure and simple repetition. In music, A is never equal to A. (…) On the level of language, of the system, A is equal to A (…) on the level of speech, it is no longer so. It is only if there are identities on the level of language that there can be differences on the level of speech, that is to say a movement, a becoming. Aiming to create an absolutely irreversible music, in fact that would abolish the movement itself"). (Ruwet, pp. 87-88).

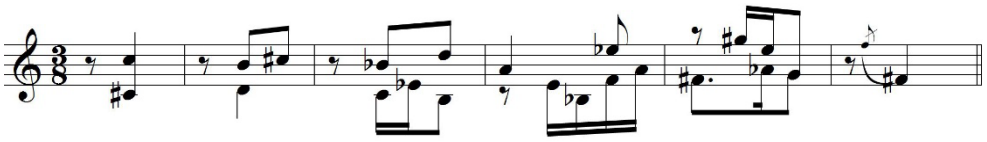
retrograde, inversion) are extremely related, and can easily be recognized as belonging to the same class of events. As such, by using the series in all four movements (E.g., 1-6), Vieru creates landmarks (or returns) which are requisite on the macro-form level and thanks to which group hierarchization (supported by Lerdahl also)[11] and the comprehension of the whole are possible, although non-repeatability (one of serialism's most important desiderata) is observed.

E.g. 3



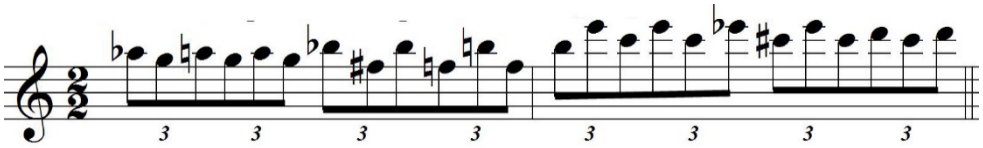
Anatol Vieru, *Flute Concerto,* mvt. 2 (b. 2-3)

E.g. 4



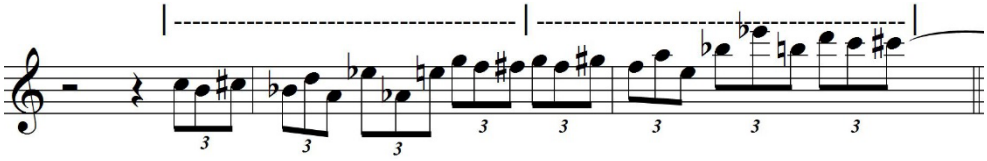
Anatol Vieru, *Flute Concerto,* mvt. 3 (b. 1-6),
prime and inverted form of the series

E.g. 5



Anatol Vieru, *Flute Concerto,* mvt. 4 (b. 9-10),
exposition of the series with the repetition of some of the tones

E.g. 6



Anatol Vieru, *Flute Concerto,* mvt. 4, [23] + 1

[11] "*Constraint 4:* Projection of groups, especially at larger levels, depends on symmetry and on the establishment of musical parallelisms" (Lerdahl, p. 105).

Vieru then went on to replace 12-tone structures relatively quickly with melodic structures based on traditional modes. A first and very good example is the incisive theme of his *Cello Concerto*[12], containing the specific intervals of acoustic mode 1 (Lydian-Mixolydian). Vieru would later favor melodic structures based on artificial modes, in whose organization his preference for symmetry and geometrization is felt.

2. The Chromatic Total as Ultimate Aim or... "Hide-and-Seek" Around an Idea

In the dodecaphonic serial system, the totality of the tones used in the European equal temperament system represent both the work's starting point and its constant.

Although he uses the chromatic total in the construction of a theme only in the first phase, Vieru very much kept in contact with it, albeit by converting it from a point of departure to a destination or landmark. He would base his 1980 *Book of Modes*[13] on this idea. So that, and as he in fact recommends,[14] in his mature works the chromatic total is reached on larger surfaces – another way of using it, inspired by the music written during[15] or even prior[16] to this current, in which, even when the twelve tones are present (intentionally or not) on relatively small areas, these contain the repetition of some elements, and therefore structure sound information differently.

The procedure is followed, for instance, in the *Concerto for Violin and Cello* (1979), completed just one year before *The Book of Modes* was published. In the first movement, the cello exposes an incisive motif, based on a minor seventh chord (b. 176-188). The motif is transplanted in various steps, the transpositional process ending when the chromatic total is reached (E.g., 7).

[12] The work was awarded the prize Reine Marie-José (Geneva, 1962).

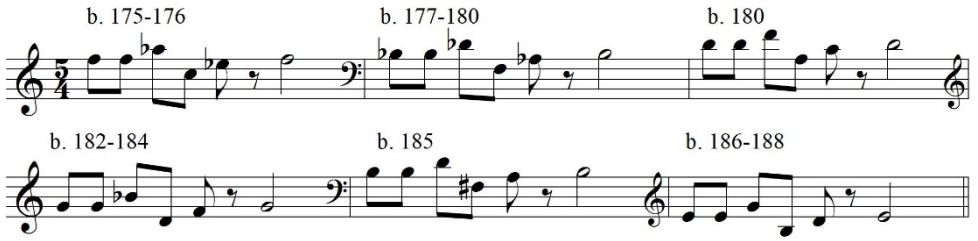
[13] In which the sounds and intervals of the equal temperament system represent residue classes of modulo 12, and the modes are sets of residue classes (A. Vieru, *The Book of Modes,* Editura Muzicală, 1993, p. 19, 40), the chromatic total being the reference set (p. 41).

[14] Vieru, *The Book of Modes,* p. 41.

[15] Vieru illustrates this with a fragment from Varèse's *Octandre* (*The Book of Modes,* p. 41).

[16] Another example might be Mozart's *Fantasy in C minor,* K. 475, where the chromatic total is reached after only 10 beats.

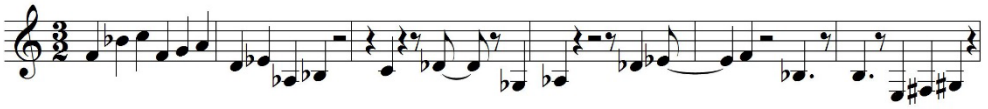
E.g. 7



Anatol Vieru, *Concerto for Violin and Cello*, mvt. 1 (b. 175-188)

His *Concerto per due* (*Wrestling*) for baritone/alto saxophone in E-flat and percussion (1987) contains, in the middle section (b. 136-141, reprised rhythmically varied on vibraphone and alto saxophone, b. 142-148), a theme which sounds quasi-diatonic, built based on the motivic variation technique. The center continuously shifts, and so the chromatic total is reached in just a 6-bar phrase (E.g., 8).

E.g. 8

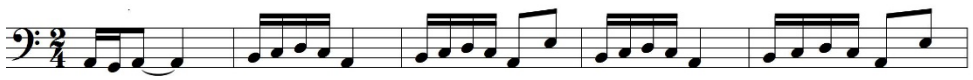


Anatol Vieru, *Concerto per due* for baritone/alto saxophone in E-flat and percussion (b. 136-141, alto saxophone)

To avoid excessive stiffness and systematization, Vieru's playful spirit at times steps in. As such, the chromatic total is still aimed at, but asymptotically.

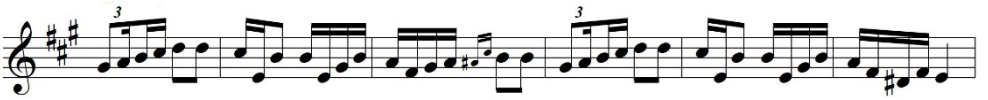
We find such examples in his 1979 *Concerto for Violin and Cello*. In the third movement, by reuniting the pitches of the two diatonic themes exposed by the cello (a theme inspired by the Romanian folk dance *sârbă*, bar 6) and the violin (bar 14), respectively, a scale of 11 tones is obtained (E.g., 9-10 and Figure 4).

E.g. 9



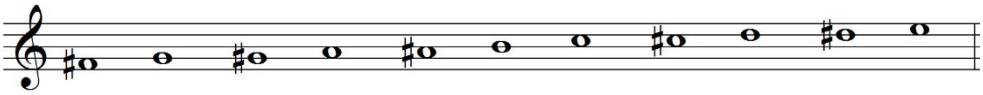
Anatol Vieru, *Concerto for Violin and Cello*, mvt. 3, cello (b. 6-10)

E.g. 10



Anatol Vieru, *Concerto for Violin and Cello*, mvt. 3, solo violin (b. 14-19)

Fig. 4

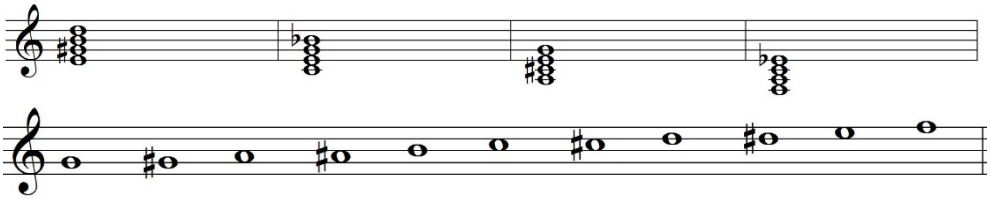


Anatol Vieru, *Concerto for Violin and Cello*, 11-tone scale extracted from mvt. 3 (b. 19-23)

The intention to reunite the sound material of the two melodies is reinforced by the way they are presented: not just as juxtaposition, but also as superposition, b. 19-23, in a typically Bartókian manner of creating polymodal chromaticism through the appearance of diatonic (distantial) chromaticism.

In the second movement, in section B, the major minor seventh chord appears on the solo violin in a way reminiscent of the modal universe (like *tulnic* signals from the Apuseni Mountains) and transplanted from third to third in a manner close to the axis system theorized by Ernő Lendvai in Bartók's oeuvre. A total of eleven tones is reached from this shift (Figure 5). The "missing" sound (F-sharp) does exist in the solo cello's pentatonic scale, over which the solo violin is placed.

Fig. 5

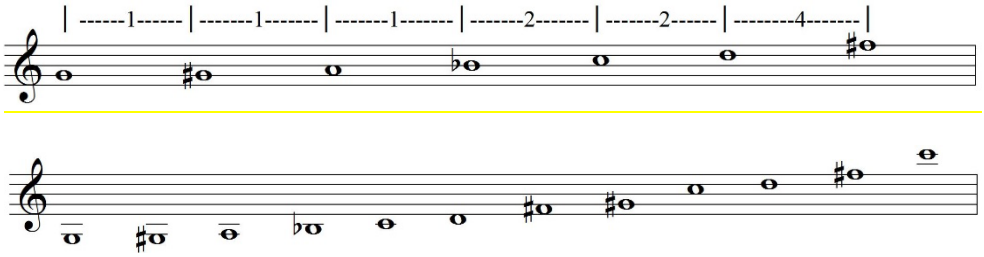


Anatol Vieru *Concerto for Violin and Cello*, chords extracted from mvt. 2, solo violin, section B (b. 31-33), and resulted scale

If using this technique just a year before the release of The Book of Modes is predictable, its presence in a relatively early work, the Violin Concerto (1964) comes as more of a surprise. In a time when folk music scales dominated Vieru's concerti, the first violin's theme is built on a heptatonic mode with the structure 111 22 4 – another quasi-symmetrical

structure (mvt.1, b. 2-5), in which the concept of intervallic amplification is reprised (Fig. 6)[17]. Vieru builds the second movement (which starts at b. 61) by superimposing different transpositions of this theme, in its amplified version, presented in the recapitulation of the first movement (Fig.6).

Fig. 6



Anatol Vieru, *Violin Concerto*, the pitches of the theme, extracted from mvt. 1, solo violin, initial and amplified version, respectively (b. 2-5; b 51-60)

The pitch distribution (Table 1, b. 61-96) reveals that the sonic information is gradually augmented and contracted, resulting in "waves" made of different pitches, like high and low tides. On the one hand, almost every transposition is *densified* by the canon technique, the main tool that gives the process an oblique dimension, by maintaining or repeating certain pitches (which creates zones where certain pitches prevail). On the other hand, the exposition of the different transpositions is quite *rarefied* in time, so that the chromatic total is both avoided (Table 1, b.75-96, 11 pitches, G# being the missing pitch) and eventually achieved, but over quite large areas (Table 1, b. 61-71 or b. 67-74).

The densest surface results from the superposition of four versions of the theme: 1. on F, inverted, in three-voice canon, b. 96-114, v-ni I; 2. on C, in three-voice canon, b. 100-113, v-ni II; 3. on C, inverted, b. 101-119, vlc. 5-6, then cb. 3-4 (Fig. 7); 4. on G, b. 101-106, cb. 1-2, then vlc. 1-2 (see Fig. 6).

[17] The idea, present in the construction of the dodecaphonic theme in the *Flute Concerto*, would return in the *Clarinet Concerto* (1974).

Anatol Vieru, *Violin Concerto*, pitch distribution in b. 61-96 (see explanations below)

PItch	Bar Number																																		
	61	62	63	64	65	66	67	68	69	70	71	72	73	74	75	76	77	78	79	80	81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89	90	91	92	93	94	95	96
C	v	z			z	z								z	z	z	z							x			x			x				x	x	x
C#	v	v	v						z	z			v				v						z	z	z									z	z	
D	z	v	v	v	z				z	z	z			x				z						x			x									
D#			v	v		v								x					x					x												
E								x						x					x												x		x			
F				v		v		x	v								v		x	z	z	v				z	z			x						v
F#							z	z					v				z	z														x		x	x		
G						v			v								z	z	z	z	z	v	z					v	z	z	z						
G#							z	z				z	z	z																							
A											z																	z							x		
A#											z																x	z		x		x				
B									v				v				v				z				z			v			z	z	z				

Anatol Vieru, *Violin Concerto*, pitch distribution in b. 96-119 (see explanations below)

Pitch	Bar Number																								
	96	97	98	99	100	101	102	103	104	105	106	107	108	109	110	111	112	113	114	115	116	117	118	119
C			x	x	xv	w		y	x			x			y				x			z	z	y
C#				x	v			v		v							v	v			w	z		w
D		x	x					v	y	v		z	v		z	z	y	z						
D#		x	x							v			v	v										
E	x	x					x		x															
F	x												v	v		v		v	v	w			w	
F#					x		x		x	y					x					y				
G						y		z		z		z		v		v	v	vw	z	z		z	w	w
G#							y					y												
A							y									w				z				
A#				x	x		xy					x	w		x									z
B										w						v	v	v				w		

Explanations:

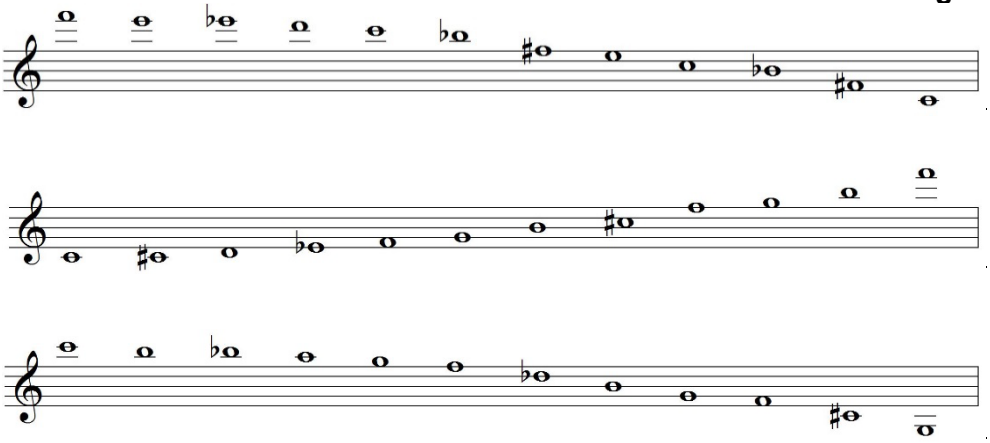
v - theme on C; w - theme on C, inverted; x - theme on F, inverted; y - theme on G ; z - pitches from other sources (marked only if they are different from any exposition of the theme).

In bar 96 only the pitches that end the two expositions (direct on C; inverted on F) are marked; there is also an E, not marked, as F represents both the end of the theme on C and the beginning of a new exposition of the inverted theme on F.

In bar 107, " G" in the score is probably an error, as the theme's on G next pitch is " G# " .

Table 1

Fig. 7



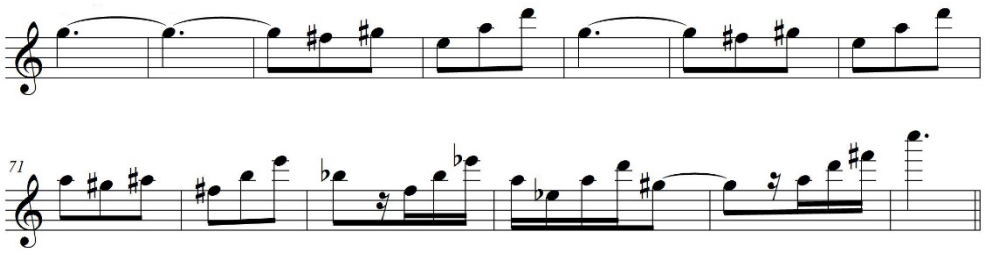
Anatol Vieru, *Violin Concerto*
1. pitches of the theme on F, inverted (v-ni I, b. 96-114)
2. pitches of the theme on C (v-ni II, b. 100-113)
3. pitches of the theme on C, inverted (vlc. 5-6, then cb. 3-4, b. 101-119)

Even during this dense surface (Table 1), the chromatic total is still reached over fairly large time intervals (the shortest being between bars 96-105, 100-108, 104-111), and it remains ambiguous, almost elusive, since the 12th pitch occurrence is avoided for long periods (b. 96-104, 100-107, 104-110, 105-119) and the completion of the chromatic total does not coincide with the beginning or the end of the theme exposition.

Upon closer inspection, we see that this "hide-and-seek" game Vieru plays with the dodecaphonic system is present as early as the *Flute Concerto*, a work built on the series presented at the beginning of this paper. There, Vieru not only adapts the 12-tone system, emending some aspects likely to cause the listeners problems in their perception of it, but applies both procedures detailed above: reaching the chromatic total on larger surfaces, and an asymptotic tendency towards it.

In the third movement (*Aria*) of the *Flute Concerto*, even if the orchestra begins by exposing the series, the solo instrument contradicts the expectations, for although it appears to conform to them in its reiteration of the series' incipit, it evolves in a classical manner, by repeated variations, sequencings or developments through elimination (E.g., 11), the tones' reunion leading to a total of 11 (without *C-sharp*).

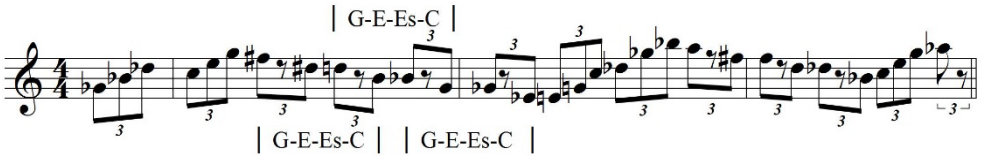
E.g. 11



Anatol Vieru, *Flute* C*oncerto*, mvt. 3, [1]

The work's finale also evades the serial universe[18], as Vieru uses not just the series, but also playful alternations between diatonic elements (major or minor arpeggios) and Enescu-flavored chromatic intonations (various transpositions of the *G-E-Es-C* motif, a musical cryptogram frequently used by Enescu[19]), from which he obtains the chromatic total in about three bars (E.g., 12).

E.g. 12



Anatol Vieru, *Flute Concerto*, mvt. 4, [24] + 2

3. Serial and Modal - Intersections

To conclude, it should be noted that, by the way he uses the 12-tone technique, Vieru avoids many of the system's traps, succeeding in adapting it, to a great extent, to the cognitive constraints, especially as regards the series' construction, based on symmetry but also on evolutional logic, and helps the listener's perception by the aural similarities between the series' forms.

[18] Avoiding being stuck in a certain system can be considered a particularity of the composer, Vieru going on to cultivate a sort of "hide-and-seek" game with his own rules.

[19] G(eorge) E(n)EsC(u).

On the other hand, Vieru creates spaces in which he distances himself from the 12-tone logic. The "hide-and-seek" game he plays with the series is present as early as a 1958 work (the *Flute Concerto*), in which we encounter non-serial islands, from which the serialist principle has withdrawn but which are still governed by the notion of the chromatic total.

Separation of the serial principle from that of the chromatic total underlies the fundamental theory that Vieru builds in *The Book of Modes*. In fact, he moves away from 12-tone "time" and settles in the chromatic total's "*hors-temps*". For the difficulties of the 12-tone system are born only from the sound material being placed in time, and not by the sound material as such.

The archaeological strata Vieru identified in the history of music are thus interwoven in his oeuvre too. The modal takes over the 12-tone territory, and serialism remains inconspicuously infiltrated in the modal world. That is, the influence of serialism is only maintained as a permanent relation with the 12 aural entities which form the sound material of European art music.

From a point of departure and a constant, as it had been in the 12-tone system, the number 12 turns, with Vieru, in an end, an achieved goal or an asymptotic aspiration towards it. The *direction* of a route often seems to coincide with the obtaining of the chromatic total, and this process is sometimes transformed in a play between the impossibility of comprehending the whole and the irrepressible need to reach it.

English version by Maria Monica Bojin

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