

## ELEMENTS OF THE MUSICAL DISCOURSE IN *FUM (SMOKE)* BY DOINA ROTARU

ȘERBAN MARCU<sup>1</sup>

**SUMMARY.** The present study is an analysis of the work entitled *Fum (Smoke)*, for clarinet solo, written by the Romanian composer Doina Rotaru in 1996 and dedicated to the clarinetist Emil Vișenescu. The study enhances the author's preference for ancient musical archetypes, such as the aulodic timbral archetype, the archetype of suspended time, the archetype of the ornament or that of the *glissando*. We also highlight the articulation of musical discourse in relation to symbolic structural principles: circular or spiral shapes, sacred numbers. The structural analysis also emphasizes the continuous variation process, starting from a generative motive which includes almost all elements of language the work is based on: *Rubato* rhythm, chromaticism, Enescu's "x" cell, *glissando* and appoggiatura.

**Keywords:** Rotaru, *Fum*, clarinet, solo, analysis, structural, archetypes.

The clarinet, introduced in the symphonic orchestra later than the other woodwinds (flute, oboe, bassoon), exerted extraordinary fascination on 20<sup>th</sup> century composers. Considered to have, among the instruments previously mentioned, the most extended technical and expressive possibilities – very ample range, large dynamic extent (possibility to attack a sound in an almost unperceivable *pianissimo* nuance), spectacular effects belonging to extended technique (diverse and abundant multi-phonics, *frullato*, sonorous *slap tongue* etc.) – the clarinet passed from soloist in instrumental concerts or partner of the piano in chamber works to being a solo instrument, as musical literature constantly became more rich in works for clarinet which later became reference titles for any clarinetist's repertoire.

---

<sup>1</sup> Music Academy "Gheorghe Dima" Cluj-Napoca, lecturer. E-mail: serbaan@yahoo.com

Romanian creation is no exception; a systematization<sup>2</sup> of the works having the clarinet as the main character, made by Cosmin Teodor Hărșian<sup>3</sup> in his doctoral thesis counts no less than 125 authors and 219 titles among which 33 for clarinet solo. Among the works for clarinet solo some remained “classics” becoming frequent appearances on posters of clarinet concerts and recitals: *Martie (March)* by Marțian Negrea (1957, ar. 1958), *Sonata for clarinet solo* by Tiberiu Olah (1963), *Incantatio* by Myriam Marbé (1964), *Măguri II* by Liviu Comes (1980), *Dionysies VI - Carnyx* by Șerban Nichifor (1984), *Sempre ostinato I* by Cornel Țăranu (1986) and *Fum (Smoke)* by Doina Rotaru (1996).

Doina Rotaru is an important personality of Romanian and international musical life, not only as a composer present on the most important concert stages with works covering almost all musical genres, but especially chamber and orchestral music, but also as an educator, director of department and professor of composition at the National University of Music in Bucharest, co-author together with Liviu Comes of the *Treaty of vocal and instrumental counterpoint (Tratat de contrapunct vocal și instrumental)*.

Doina Rotaru's music has a pronounced lyrical character, deeply rooted in the deepest layers of Romanian folklore and archaic cultures of the world. Doina Rotaru resorts to ancient musical archetypes and updates them, filtering them through her own sensitivity: the aulodic timbral type, *doina*-like, reflected by the numerous works for wind instruments (among them, the flute is Doina Rotaru's favourite and not the clarinet – suffice it to mention *Florilegium* for solo flute(s) and flute orchestra), the archetype of suspended time, *rubato*, that of the endless time flow, the archetype of the ornament (represented by appoggiaturas, *glissandi*, trills etc.), present in all traditional musical cultures, numbers and geometrical shapes with magical meanings etc. The author herself confesses on her website: “I've used structural principles of symbolic values and functions – like circular or spiral shapes, sacred numbers and so on. The symbol becomes an idea of composition, and this idea generates the structures, the musical time, the syntax, the architecture and the expressions of the work. I've also used

<sup>2</sup> Doctoral thesis „*Contemporary Romanian Music For Unaccompanied Clarinet*” by Cosmin Teodor Hărșian, submitted to the graduate program in the Department of Music and Dance and the Graduate Faculty of the University of Kansas in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Musical Arts., dated 04.21.2009, annex 2 (p. 59-69) ([http://kuscholarworks.ku.edu/dspace/bitstream/1808/5343/1/Harsian\\_ku\\_0099D\\_10328\\_D ATA\\_1.pdf](http://kuscholarworks.ku.edu/dspace/bitstream/1808/5343/1/Harsian_ku_0099D_10328_D ATA_1.pdf) (site visited on 12.03.2011)).

<sup>3</sup> Cosmin Teodor Hărșian teaches clarinet at the Western University in Timișoara, he is graduate of the Music Highschool in Baia Mare (1999) and of the Western University in Timișoara (2004), he obtained his Master's degree at Northern University in Illinois, DeKalb, Illinois (2006) and his DMA in musical performance at the University of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas (2009), under the guidance of Professor Paul R. Laird, with the paper entitled *Contemporary Romanian Music For Unaccompanied Clarinet* (<http://www.muzica.uvt.ro/CV/harsian.pdf> - site visited on December 3, 2011).

elements from ancient Romanian folklore, where almost every sound is enriched with ornaments, *glissandi*, micro-tones, overtones and, of course, heterophony. The expression of Romanian ancient folk music is very nostalgic, creating a melancholic atmosphere and the feeling of a painful beauty.<sup>4</sup> The clarinetist Cosmin Teodor Hârșian writes about Doina Rotaru's composition style: "The composer shows special interest in achieving a variety of tone color through different styles of articulation, extended techniques, rhythm, extreme ranges and the use of the instruments in a non-traditional way. On a larger scale, some of her formal choices include motivic variation, arch and cyclic forms, spiral forms and free forms. On a smaller scale she avoids organizing her musical material through mathematical means, preferring the oscillation between diatonic and chromatic and showing interest in the repetition of the same note or emphasis on selected intervals"<sup>5</sup>.

The work *Fum (Smoke)* was written in 1996 and is dedicated to Emil Vișenescu, the principal clarinetist of the "George Enescu" Philharmonic Orchestra in Bucharest. The music not only describes, in imagistic, simple, naturalist manner, smoke, but also refers to the more profound meanings held by smoke in traditional cultures: the smoke from a burning candle as a symbol of prayer rising to the Supreme Being, the frank incense smoke as a protector against sin or Evil, smoke as an intermediate state between the material and the immaterial, mystery filled smoke, smoke and the spiral shapes it produces. The smoke theme is not singular among Doina Rotaru's works, as only a year later she wrote another work on the same theme, *Templu de fum (Temple of Smoke)*, title given before her visit to Japan (as we find out from an interview given to flute player Ion Bogdan Ștefănescu<sup>6</sup>) and before learning that at the entrance of Buddhist temples visitors were purified by a smoke bath.

The work is written *senza misura*, with the shorter durations noted in conventional manner with strings of semiquavers, most of the times cut at one end ("as quick as possible") and the longer values with note heads, either filled or empty, followed by lines approximately suggesting the duration of corresponding sounds. Although several sections can be identified, the piece essentially articulates in a single, ample respiration, beginning in a calm atmosphere (tempo indication *Lento, calmo, rubato*), gradually passing towards a slightly more agitated area (*Poco a poco nervoso*), then returning to the initial calm (*Calmo*), later reaching a clearly contrasting section (*Nervoso*) and finally returning to the calm atmosphere (*Lento, calmo, dolce*). The passages from one section to another are very mild and that is the reason why we consider that the piece should be regarded rather as a monolith with discrete changes of lighting than as a strophic structure.

<sup>4</sup> Quotation from <http://www.freewebs.com/doinarotaru/> (site visited on December 3, 2011).

<sup>5</sup> Hârșian, Cosmin Teodor, op. cit, pp. 48-49.

<sup>6</sup> <http://ionbogdanstefanescu.ro/si-doina-doina-se-facu/> (December 3, 2011).

The general expression of the piece is lyrical, filled with mystery. The starting point is a generative motive made up of a long rhythmical value, on  $e^3$ , followed by a group of short notes ( $f^{\sharp}sharp-f^{\flat}-e^3$ ), another long value ( $c^3sharp$ ), graver than the first one, followed by an ascending *glissando* and a final long value ( $c^3$ ), a semitone below the previous one, ornamented by an interior *glissando*, first descending and then ascending:

Ex. 1



Incipit

This “incipit” presents, *in nuce*, the language elements which define this work: the *rubato* rhythm, made up of alternations of long, isolated values and groups of short values, the chromatic melodic (not dodecaponic chromatic, but one where chromatics seems to enrich an original, oligochordic, diatonic structure), represented by inverted chromatics, Enescu’s “x” cell, containing a minor second and a minor third, the *glissando* and the appoggiatura (that is, the folkloric ornaments). There are few elements of language in this work not to be found in this initial generative motive: the multi-phonics (appearing not much later), the trill, and the *frullato* (which will contribute to the formal delimitation of the more ample *Nervoso* section from the rest of the work).

The motive is immediately followed by its varied repetition, procedure standing at the basis of the entire work, the so-called continuous variation: the music is permanently weaved by the variation of what has already been said, up to the point where the distance from the original is so great that another musical nucleus is generated, being itself also submitted to variation processes (this type of articulation was already described in our previous study on *Martie (March)* for clarinet solo by Marțian Negrea – at that point, we poetically called this musical procedure “budding”<sup>7</sup>).

Interior cadences on longer values are, most of the times, on sounds one semitone apart (during the first musical “respiration” on  $c^3sharp$  and  $c^3$ , during the second one on  $b^2$  and  $b^2flat$ , then on  $f^2$  and  $f^2sharp$ ), probably also in relation to Enescu’s “x” cell ( $e-e flat-c$ ). The rapid sequences of short rhythmical

<sup>7</sup> *Elemente de structurare a discursului muzical în lucrarea Martie pentru clarinet solo de Marțian Negrea (Elements of the Musical Discourse in Martie (March) for Clarinet Solo by Marțian Negrea)*, p. 2, study written in November 2010, to be published in the journal *Studia UBB Musica* of the Babeș-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca.

values are entirely made up of cursive melodic profiles, realized with movements of minor or major second, rarely minor third, and are probably the most “figurative” part of the musical imagery of smoke. We also find here a musical representation of the spiral, slightly irregular, a “smoke spiral”, undoubtedly present even from the first musical articulations of the work, musically rendered by an alternation of descending minor seconds with ascending major seconds:

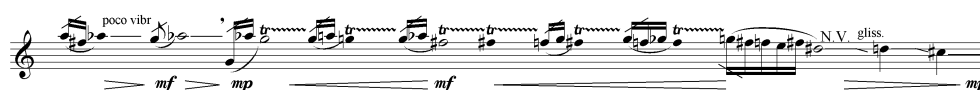
**Ex. 2**



**Spiral melodic profile (staff 2 in manuscript)**

The general melodic profile is descending. The interior cadences previously mentioned are realized on graver and graver sounds. The first more agitated moment, *poco a poco*  $\square$  *ervosa*, brings the opportunity of regaining the acute register through a culminating moment on  $d^3$ , therefore without surpassing the starting point of the work ( $e^3$ ). This section, slightly contrasting the atmosphere in the beginning, is filled with trills, introduced as fresh elements of expression.

**Ex. 3**



**Descending general melodic profile (staves 4-5 in manuscript)**

The second peaceful section, *Calmo*, develops entirely in the medial and then grave registers of the instrument (in the end, the gravest sound of the clarinet,  $e$ , is touched), bringing the micro-tone, an apparently new element, but in fact resulted from the placement of a *glissando* not on a long value, but on a sequence of short values. The *glissando* is intensely used during this segment.

The medial section, *Nervoso*, exploits, as we have already briefly shown, the expressive virtues of the *frullato*, in combination with the grave register of the instrument. It debuts with a *frullato*, appearing unexpectedly on a long  $e$ , previously mentioned. Therefore, a new segment of form begins inside a held note, attesting the formal organicity of this work where, we repeat, formal delimitations are very discrete. Together with agitated *frullatos* (which are initially only found on long notes, but end up also “contaminating” the groups of short

notes), the smooth melodic flow is perturbed by upper appoggiaturas with *sforzando* and accent, appoggiaturas found at large and dissonant melodic intervals: minor seventh and major seventh (sometimes noted as diminished octave). These melodic gestures increase agitation, in the context of a melodic profile which is again (as in the previous *Nervoso* section) ascending.

**Ex. 4**



**The beginning of the *Nervoso* section (staves 6-7 in manuscript)**

The passage towards the final calm section (*Lento, calmo, dolce*) is realized, as expected, by gradual “melodization” of the groups of short notes (by “melodization” we understand the return of the minor and major second intervals) and by the gradual transition from the acute register, first to the medial and then to the grave one. The final section (psychologically assimilated as a reprise, although the music only resembles that in the beginning from the point of view of atmosphere and, to a smaller extent, as a sequence of gestures) begins with a sudden breach of register, two octaves upper than the closure of the previous section. During this final segment the highest point of the register is touched (*gb*<sup>3</sup>), followed by the gradual descent and extinction of the musical discourse, evoking in a totally different atmosphere the appoggiaturas characteristic to the *Nervoso* section. The final gesture of the work is a descending *glissando, al niente*. It is perhaps not without meaning the fact that the work begins with *e*<sup>3</sup>, in the acute register, and ends with *b flat*, in the grave register, therefore in a pole-antipole relation so characteristic to 20<sup>th</sup> century music.

It is very important to mention the author’s indication in the beginning of the work: “the work can be performed very close to an open piano, with the right pedal depressed”. This pseudo-accompaniment, optional, as it results from the fragment above, can contribute, due to the curtain of sounds naturally resonating with the free strings of the piano, to maintaining the charmed atmosphere of floating, magic and mystery conveyed by this work and maybe better expressed only by the flute. Since its publishing (1996), *Fum (Smoke)* for clarinet solo became not only one of the milestones of any experienced clarinetist, but also an example of work which, by condensing the oldest and most durable musical archetypes, can be equally Romanian and universal.

Translated by Roxana-Paula Huza

## REFERENCES

Hărșian, Cosmin Teodor, *Contemporary Romanian Music for Unaccompanied Clarinet*, doctoral thesis dated 04.21.2009, under the guidance of Professor Paul. R. Laird in the Department of Music and Dance at the University of Kansas.

Marcu, Șerban, *Elemente de structurare a discursului muzical în lucrarea Martie pentru clarinet solo de Marțian Negrea (Elements of the Musical Discourse in Martie (March) for Clarinet Solo by Marțian Negrea)*, p. 2, study written in November 2010, to be published in the journal *Studia UBB Musica* of the Babeș-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca.

<http://www.freewebs.com/doinarotaru/>

<http://ionbogdanstefanescu.ro/si-doina-doina-se-facu/>

The score of the work *Fum* by Doina Rotaru, copy after the manuscript