

**REPETITION AND FANTASY IN *SPRING*,  
POEM FOR SOPRANO, CLARINET AND PIANO,  
BY CARMEN PETRA-BASACOPOL**

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**SUMMARY.** The present study, part of the research grant *The artistic and social impact of the contemporary music of the 21st century from the perspective of the relationship composer-performer-audience* (project director Assistant Professor Cristian Bence-Muk, D.Mus.) investigates the structural and rhetoric aspects in the poem *Spring*, for soprano, clarinet and piano, by Carmen Petra-Basacopol, on the verses of poet Mariana Dumitrescu. The analysis focuses on the relationship between musical techniques (tonal systems, rhythm, timbrality) and the literary text, highlighting the oscillation between rigour (leitmotifs, ostinatos, elements of reprise) and fantasy (improvisational writing – especially for the clarinet –, the madrigal-type discourse)..

**Keywords:** Carmen, Petra, Basacopol, Mariana, Dumitrescu, *Spring*, soprano, clarinet, piano, analysis

The research grant financed by the National Board for Scientific Research in Higher Education (Consiliul Național al Cercetării Științifice din Învățământul Superior - C.N.C.S.I.S. - presently C.N.C.S.) and the Executive Unit for Financing Higher Education and University Research (Unitatea Executivă pentru Finanțarea Învățământului Superior și a Cercetării Științifice Universitare - U.E.F.I.S.C.S.U. - presently - U.E.F.I.S.C.D.I.), *The artistic and social impact of the contemporary music of the 21<sup>st</sup> century from the perspective of the relationship composer-performer-audience*, project director Assistant Professor Cristian Bence-Muk, D.Mus., engendered a series of diverse activities, bringing to the attention of the musical world in Cluj the old and new musical works for clarinet. Concerts were organized with the works of the most representative composers of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century such as Marțian Negrea, Tiberiu Olah, Cornel Țăranu, Doina Rotaru, Valentin Timaru, Hans Peter Türk, Dan Voiculescu, the young generation of composers in Cluj (Cristian Bence-Muk, Răzvan Metea, Ciprian-Gabriel Pop and myself) composed pieces for clarinet in its various stances (as a solo instrument and

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as a member of chamber or vocal-instrumental ensembles), lesson-concerts and composition and music analysis competitions were arranged. All these activities had the purpose of bringing back into the limelight valuable works from the past, as well as encouraging the composition of other pieces.

The concerts with the works of the past century masters were wonderful occasions for analytic reflection, materialized by the members of the research grant into musicological studies discussing structural, rhetoric and stylistic elements and revealing significant aspects which are more difficult to be distinguished in the concert hall. The author of these lines has contemplated, in previous analyses, a few masterpieces of the Romanian musical creation: *Martie (March)* for clarinet solo by Marțian Negrea, *Fum (Smoke)*, also for clarinet solo, by Doina Rotaru and *Trei cântece de toamnă (Three autumn songs)* by Dan Voiculescu, for soprano and instrumental ensemble, on the verses of Emil Isac.

The work considered for the present analytical approach combines the creative virtues of two ladies. *Primăvara (Spring)*, with the subtitle “poem for soprano, clarinet and piano”, belongs to composer Carmen Petra-Basacopol<sup>2</sup>, and converts into musical sounds the verses of poet Mariana Dumitrescu<sup>3</sup>, presented here:

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<sup>2</sup> Carmen Petra-Basacopol (born in 1926 in Sibiu) majored both in Philosophy, at the University of Bucharest (1945-1949) and in Composition, at the Music University in Bucharest, with teachers such as Paul Constantinescu and Tudor Ciortea. Carmen Petra-Basacopol exercised her creative talent in various genres, from the most intimate ones (lied, music for instrument solo, chamber music – she is a well-known composer for harp music) until the ample, symphonic and vocal-symphonic ones (ballet, opera, symphonies etc.). She obtained her PhD title at the Sorbonne, with the thesis *L'originalité de la musique roumaine à travers les oeuvres d'Enesco, Jora et Paul Constantinescu (The originality of Romanian music in the works of Enescu, Jora and Paul Constantinescu)*. She had all the academic ranks while at the Department of Forms of the Music University in Bucharest. Close friends with Mariana Dumitrescu, she wrote several works on her poems, such as *Zorile-ți mână cerbii de foc – The dawn sheperds its fiery stags* (1959), *Cinci lieduri pentru tenor și harpă (Izvorul, Harfele confluentei, Bătaia inimii, Rădăcinile, Pietrele) – Five lieder for tenor and harp (The wellspring, Harps of confluence, Heartbeat, Roots, Stones)*, op. 22, no. 1 (1963), *Două lieduri pentru bas și harpă (Cântec bizantin, Chiot) – Two lieder for bass and harp (Byzantine chant, Yowl)*, op. 22, no. 2 (1971) etc.

<sup>3</sup> Numerous composers such as Mihail Jora, Carmen Petra-Basacopol, Marcel Mihalovici, Diamandi Gheciu, Mansi Barberis chose to write vocal-instrumental and choral works on the verses of Mariana Dumitrescu (1924-1967, wife of composer Ion Dumitrescu, graduate of the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy of the University of Bucharest and of the Conservatory of Music and Drama). Literary critic Șerban Cioculescu paints, in the preface to the volume *Poezii (Poems)* by Mariana Dumitrescu, published in 1967 at Editura pentru literatură, the following portrait of the artist: “Mariana Dumitrescu sings, with heartrending joy, the spectacular or secret beauty of Cosmos, its perishing, along with our own, the nothingness we are in this eternal and feeble world”.

*Sstt... Sstt... Tăcere... Tăcere...  
Să auzim cum bate clopotul din gura pământului...  
Pentru dezlănțuirea primăverii,  
A izvoarelor albe și-a caldului vântului.  
Ce horă drăcească-ncins-au păsările mici,  
Gândacii ca o cruce de arnici,  
Și șerpii de casă, născuți azi-noapte-ntre urzici...  
Clocotesc văile și ponoarele...  
Râde îngerul cu aripa-ntinsă pe cer, râde soarele...  
Mă aplec către păsările mici,  
Către gândaci și șerpii ca ațele de-argint  
Și tuturor le spun:  
Sstt... Sstt... Tăcere... Tăcere...  
Să auzim cum bate clopotul din gura pământului.*

*[Sstt... Sstt... Silence... Silence...  
Let us hear the bell toll from the chasm of earth...  
For the breaking of spring,  
Of the white wellsprings and warm winds.  
O, the devilish hora of the little birds,  
Cross-stitch-like bugs,  
And, newborn in the nettles, household snakes...  
Ravines and valleys bristle and flare...  
The angel with its wing brushing the sky is laughing with the sun...  
I bow towards the little birds,  
The bugs and silver chain-like snakes  
And say to all:  
Sstt... Sstt... Silence... Silence...  
Let us hear the bell toll from the chasm of earth.]*

The work, though brief, suits the literary text by a very suggestive, modal-chromatic musical discourse, a madrigal-type conception of musically “painting” the poetic content step by step. The reiteration of the first two verses in the end of the poem is musically rendered by a reprise of the first section, the only part where the vocal soloist diverts from singing, presenting the text in speaking (whispered) voice, with the rhythm of their choice. The vocal soloist’s declamation is accompanied, at first, only by the piano, which plays a double *ostinato*, mixtural, in *pianissimo*, in the far ends of the register, in 9/8 bar, the empty fifths in the bass being, surely, the right image to musically suggest “the bell tolling from the chasm of the earth”. The two *ostinatos* evolve at different speeds, one constant (in the upper plane of the piano, in equal eighths), one in noted *accelerando*, by gradual diminishing of the note values, entering therefore “in agreement” with the discant of the piano. The melodic level is filled with reversed chromaticisms and this entire accompaniment exudes a marked atmosphere of mystery.

Ex. 1

Bars 1-4, beginning of the work

**Maestoso** ♩ = 46-48

Soprano

*Sstt... Sstt... Tăcere... Tăcere... Să auzim cum bate clopotul din*  
*Chut... Chut... Silence... Silence... Écoutons battre la cloche infinie*  
*Sstt... Sstt... Schweigt stille.. Schweigt stille... Hört hier nicht, wie die Glocke klingt,*

Piano-forte

*pp* *cresc. poco a poco*

S.

*gura pământului... Clopotul din gura pământului...*  
*aux tréfonds de la terre... La cloche aux tréfonds de la terre...*  
*die aus den Tiefen zu uns dringt?... Die Glocke aus den Tiefen...*

*f*

The sequence of eights is interrupted by the entrance of the clarinet, foretelling a rhythmic motive which will become essential: the rhythm of the “hora”. The clarinet alternates normal emission with the *slap tongue* effect, resulting in a percussive effect, also emphasized by the dynamic indications:

Ex. 2

Bar 5, hora rhythm

Cl. in B

*slap. ord. slap. ord. slap. ord.*

*p mf p mf p*

*p subito*

The musical development between these two whispered moments (the one in the beginning and the one in the end) concatenates a series of short, colourful musical images, which follow one another in an alert rhythm, the first one being a clarinet solo with a detached, improvisational aspect, alternating at the melodic level with consonant intervals and parts of arpeggios with dissonant intervals (augmented fourths, major sevenths). The soprano accompanies, from 218

a certain point, the solo development of the clarinet, with a recitative discourse. The entrance of the soprano is accompanied by an ample melodic “arch” of the clarinet, with a distinct succession of intervals (alternations of major thirds and major sevenths in ascending, then descending movement), a “solar” gesture, an explosion of light (not accidentally associated with the text “for the break of spring”), which will return as a leitmotif, four times (the returns only cover the ascending part of the “arch”).

Ex. 3

Bars 12-14, leitmotif clarinet

S. *p dolce*  
 din gura pământului. Pen-tru dez-lân-țu - i - rea pri - mă - ve - ri, A iz - voa - re - lor al - be  
 aux tréfonds de la terre. Ca - ril-lon du prin-temps doux qu'on dé-chai-ne, Des tor-rents blancs d'e - cu - me  
 zu uns dringt? Den neu er-wach ten Früh - ling läu - tet sie ein, Mit sei-nem weis-sen Quel len

Cl. in B  
*espress.*  
*mf > mp sub.* *p*

The hora rhythm from the musical discourse of the clarinet is adopted also by the soprano, in dialogue with the clarinet, becoming the central element of the following picture, this time on the text “the devilish hora of the little birds”. In a more lively tempo, (*più mosso*,  $\text{♩} = 72$ ) the piano opens this section with an accompaniment imitating the hammered dulcimer: notes in *staccato*, harmonic intervals of major and minor second, hora rhythm. The composer relinquishes the recitative writing for the soprano, adapting to the general, dance rhythm. The lively moment ends on a dissonant chord of the piano, in *mp*, accompanied by the leitmotif of the clarinet mentioned above.

Ex. 4

Bars 20-21, “hora”

S. *mf giocoso*  
 Ce ho - ră dă ceas - că-n - cin - s-au pă - să - ri - le mici,  
 La ronde en dia blée que cel - le des pe tits oi - seaux,  
 Klei-ne Vö gel tan - zen, sprin - gen toll im wil den Kreis,

Cl. in B  
*mf*

The following picture is of a more expressionist nature: the hora rhythm remains in the vocal discourse, but it is accompanied by a *tremolo* of clusters in *crescendo* which migrate from the medium register of the piano to its grave end, musically illustrating the text “ravines and valleys bristle and flare”, with the indication *poco agitato (rubato)*. The descending melodic gesture of the piano is counterbalanced by the already familiar, ascending melody of the clarinet, this time finalized with a *tremolo*.

Ex. 5

Bar 27, tremolo of clusters

Musical score for Bar 27, "tremolo of clusters". The score is for Clarinet in B (Cl. in B) and Piano. The tempo is marked "poco agitato (rubato)". The piano part features a tremolo of clusters, starting in the medium register and moving to the grave end. The clarinet part is an ascending melody. Dynamics range from *mf* to *ff*.

“The wing brushing the sky” is also “painted” by the author with the help of an element of discourse specific to modern language: the scale alternating tones and semitones<sup>4</sup>, in an ascending movement of the clarinet, accompanied by a descending *glissando* of the piano.

Ex. 6

Bars 32-33, “the wing brushing the sky”

Musical score for Bars 32-33, “the wing brushing the sky”. The score is for Soprano (S.), Clarinet in B (Cl. in B), and Piano. The soprano part has lyrics in three languages: Latin, French, and German. The clarinet part is an ascending scale. The piano part is a descending glissando. Dynamics range from *mf* to *f*.

Lyrics:

a - ri - pa-n-tin - să pe cer,	Ră - de soa -
ai - les ten-dues dans le ciel;	Ri - res dans
wei - ten Flü - geln vom Him-mel hoch,	Und die Son -

V. N.

<sup>4</sup> This scale was theoretically presented by Olivier Messiaen in his treatise *Technique de mon langage musical (The Technique of my Musical Language)* and classified as “mode 2 of limited transposition”, but had been intuitively used ever since Romanticism, in works by Liszt, Borodin, Rimsky-Korsakov etc.

The following clarinet solo prepares the reprise of the first section of the vocal-instrumental poem, by bringing clear echoes of the solo, improvisational moment in the beginning. From a psychological point of view, elements of musical reprise are perceived even from the indication *tempo primo*, although the composer will later introduce a clear reprise, a quasi-identical reiteration of the beginning of the work. Certain variations can be noticed though, as opposed to the first section: the more dynamic *ostinato* plane, in eighths, is adopted by the clarinet, the plane in dotted quarter notes belongs to the piano, while the solo voice conveys a third plane, which brings back, more discreetly, the hora rhythm.

Ex. 7

**Bars 39-40, reprise**

*mp sensibile*

S.  
 Mă a - plec că - tre pă - să - ri - le mici, Că - tre gân - daci Și șer - pii ca  
 Je me penche vers les tout pe - tits oi-seaux, Vers les in - sectes Et vers les ser  
 Zu al - len klei nen Vö-geln beug ich mich, Neig zu den Schlan - gen mich, die wie

Cl. in B

The reprise follows this triple *ostinato* plane, with the two verses whispered by the soprano. There are differences as opposed to the beginning here also: the noted acceleration from the grave *ostinato* plane of the piano is replaced, this time, by a noted deceleration, involving the acute *ostinato* plane, finalized with the complete disappearance of this plane. The last bar brings, above a *B flat* from the counter-octave of the piano, the ascending leitmotif of the piano, with *decrescendo* to *pp*.

We may wonder, at the end of this analytical process, whether the clarinet is a necessary presence in this instrumental ensemble. Wouldn't it have been sufficient timbral variety only by the use of the couple voice-piano, validated by 200 years of evolution of the lied? Could the score of the clarinet have been successfully adopted by the piano? We consider the clarinet necessary, as it is impossible to obtain its aulodic *legatissimo* sound, with a piano. On the other hand, we can notice that some of the most important elements of discourse, essential for the unity of the work (the hora rhythm, the ascending leitmotif described above) never migrate from the clarinet to the piano, remaining each time in association with the timbre of the former. Finally, we make note of the two "duo" soprano-

clarinet moments, the first one more ample (a fragment is presented in ex. 3), the second, indeed, shorter, a quasi-intuitive game (“the angel with the wing touching the sky is laughing”), sections which value the common timbral points between the human and the instrumental voice.

The poem *Spring* by Carmen Petra-Basacopol impresses by concision, by density of events and feelings crafted with the help of timbral, melodic, harmonic and rhythmic resources, as well as by the parsimonious use of the musical material. Discourse oscillates between rigour (*ostinato* planes, melodic and rhythmic elements with leitmotif character, elements of reprise) and spontaneity (in the solo writing of the clarinet, in the general madrigal-aspect), condensing in a little over three minutes a multitude of extremely evocative sonorous images.

**Notice:** “This article (specialty study) is part of the TE research project *The artistic and social impact of the contemporary music of the 21<sup>st</sup> century from the perspective of the relationship composer-performer-audience* (Project director: Lect.univ.dr. Cristian Bence-Muk), project financed by C.N.C.S.I.S. – U.E.F.I.S.C.S.U. with the contract no. 5/5.08.2010.”

Translated by Roxana Huza

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