

AESTHETIC TRENDS AND DEVELOPMENTS IN BESSARABIAN OPERA MUSIC OF 20th CENTURY

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SUMMARY. The opera in Bessarabia displays a wide range of concepts, styles and techniques. Thus, the composition spectrum in Bessarabia tackles various coordinates for the structuring of aesthetic concepts. The work of Bessarabian composers (the lyric genre) convincingly illustrates the interdependence between trends, which forms a heterogeneous aesthetic musical field. The composers' interest constantly lies in musical sources of folk origin. The musical discourse comes into being under the influence of folk melodies, which imprints a *variational* character on the sound developments, facilitated by the episodic repetitions of the form of *rondo* (D. Gherschfeld, Zlata Tkach), as well as an *improvisational* character (Gh. Mustea). Folklore is the groundwork underlying the formation of the lyric genre in Bessarabia. The Bessarabian composers attempt to create musical value from the very substance of Romanian folklore. In addition to the „folkloric source“ and/or the phonetic basis of folklore, these composers' language also encompasses heterogeneous elements. Essentially, opera in Bessarabia presents the attributes of a heterogeneous, mixed language, integrating the traditional resources of Romanian folklore into the dynamic reality of European music aesthetics, but also retaining important influences from the Russian epic opera music (M. Mussorgsky, N. Rimsky-Korsakov) as well as from the former Soviet music (D. Shostakovich, S. Prokofiev).

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In the second half of the 20th century, the acknowledgement of the value of folklore to the composition of opera music deepened even further. The Romanian folklore would thus be imprinted in the conscience of Bessarabian composers, in the monadic and vocal lines, becoming one of the main characteristics of the lyric genre.

Consequently, the gradual character of the autochthonous language was to be clarified, through a musical validation, an outcome that could already be depicted in the late 20th-century music.

The variety of sources of musical ideas resulted in a stylistic diversity in the lyric genre. Bessarabian opera reveals two stylistic paradigms that constantly alternate *tradition* (pertaining to the great stylistic trends from Western European music) and *innovation* (pertaining to the Romanian folklore music).

The originality of the opera works lies in the perception of the sound parameters through folklore. They are characterized by a tonal-modal and modal-chromatic thinking.

From the musical language standpoint, the second half of the 20th century can be structured into two stages:

- *The first stage* – represents a time of uncertain attempts and combinations of the folkloric and Western syntaxes, although the latter entails patterns and adjustments that were consequently considered unacceptable in the internal organization of folkloric modals.
- *The second stage* – in this stage, the already existing clichés lingered, but with the usage of a much more advanced language. Composers sought to find a point of convergence with the trajectory of Romanian folklore, in the attempt to create their own style.

Stepping up into the tonal zone with modal suggestions, one gets to use a series of new polychrome methods in terms of language. The new areas of expression refer to various parameters of the musical discourse (melody, harmony, rhythm, intervals, timbre, agogic, metrics, etc.), all these deriving from the composers' inherent intention to bring forth a personal approach to Bessarabian music.

The processes that define the composition-related thinking in Bessarabia can be structured into four distinct directions:

- *Tonal with modal suggestions* (D. Gherschfeld);
- *Tonal - modal* (A. Stârcea, Gh. Neaga, M. Copytman, V. Poleacov, V. Verhola);
- *Diatonic - modal* (with chromatic elements) (Zl. Tkach, Gh. Mustea, T. Zgureanu);
- *Modal - chromatic and the orientation towards the chromatic total* (Gh. Mustea).

Out of the multitude of modal hypostases, let us mention the following endeavors:

- *poly-modalism* (Zl. Tkach, T. Zgureanu, Gh. Mustea, V. Poleacov);
- *heterophony* (V. Verhola, Zl. Tkach, V. Poleacov, Gh. Mustea);
- *modalism with tonal insertions* (A. Stârcea, Gh. Neaga);
- *modals with chromatic insertions* (Zl. Tkach, Gh. Mustea, T. Zgureanu).

The predominantly modal conception of the composers of the last two decades of the 20th century was to have repercussions at the level of both morphological and syntactical organization of the musical discourse.

The Bessarabian opera is built upon a thematic structure deeply folk-influenced, an element that catalyzes the expression. As the great musician, B. Bartók used to say about the beauty of the folk song: „folk melodies are, without exception, genuine models of artistic perfection. In their low-scale framework, they are masterpieces, just as a Bach Fugue or a Mozart Sonata is, in universal music. Such melodies are classical examples of how a musical idea can be expressed in a concise, lapidary form...”²

The reflection of the folk ethos into opera works is attained through various solutions tackled by composers, such as: *direct citation*, *micro-citation*, *re-intonation* and *the creation of melodies* in the spirit and style of the Romanian folklore.

In terms of aesthetic considerations, the connections with folklore are made at the level of all musical discourse parameters. Hence, the vectors, which appear to be compelling for the archetype of folk songs, are:

- polyrhythm;
- poly-metrics;
- poly-modal;
- heterophony;
- the procedure of improvisation (the improvisational quality of the musical discourse and the preoccupation for colour).

² Bartók, Béla, *Notes on the folk song*, “Editura pentru literatură și artă” Printing House, Bucharest, 1956.

The Bessarabian composers assimilated stylistic structures focused on the plurality of folk sources (A. Stârcea, Zl. Tkach, etc.). This orientation resulted from the national folk particularities of the musical sources. Given the context of that period, we must remind that the folklore in Moldova also comprises elements from the co-inhabiting nationalities – Gagauzes, Bulgarians, Russians, Ukrainians, Jews, the Roma, etc.

The identity of style of the musical creation in Bessarabia does not limit itself to the exploitation of the melodic concept; on the contrary, starting from it, it concerns the entire structural palette of music.

The harmonic language reveals the presence of three types of aesthetic hypostases:

- of *tonal* origin;
- of *modal* origin;
- of *composite* origin (tonal-modal).

Let us mention a few methods used by the Bessarabian composers when organizing the vertical outline:

- saturating the ensemble of means of expression with chords in the harmonic tonal-functional system, while enriching the acoustic spectrum with elements of dissonant essence (D. Gherschfeld);
- the harmonization in the style of a folk orchestra;
- through poly-phonisation, the musical discourse follows the horizontal projection into the vertical level (A. Stârcea, Zl. Tkach);
- the use of heterophonic elements (V. Poleacov, Zl. Tkach, V. Verhola, Gh. Mustea);
- attaining ambiguity of harmony (Gh. Mustea, T. Zgureanu);
- the use of chromatics, which cease to be subordinated to the diatonic structure (Zl. Tkach, Gh. Mustea, T. Zgureanu);
- the use of the random concept (Zl. Tkach);
- harmony with modal aspect (movements in fourths or fifths, chords of fourths and fifths, cluster-type chords, chords with “ajoutées” elements, acoustic conglomerates, etc.) – (Zl. Tkach, Gh. Mustea, T. Zgureanu).

At last, we can conclude that the Bessarabian lyric genre is mainly characterized by heterogeneous stylistic spectrum.

The opera *Decebal* by Teodor Zgureanu - the last opera of XX century: The entire score is built upon a bipolar arching, according to the principle *arsis*³ and *thesis*⁴, in which the sound images carry a poetic load that adds to the meanings and density of the poetic text, thus doubling the effect. The work evolves gradually from contemplation to the dramatic and then again

³ *arsis* – ascent, fulfillment

⁴ *thesis* – gloomy, burdening, painful atmosphere

to contemplation. In his work, the musical outline takes shape from quasi-relaxation and from the build-up of states of conflict. In a structural sense, the composer institutes his musical languages in obvious morphological units (themes, motifs, musical phrases).

His entire work proves to us the permanent complementarity of the horizontal outline (the melody) with the vertical one (the harmony), parameters meant to ensure the homogeneity and cohesion of the language elements used by the composer. We must emphasize here the cohesion and interaction with the other language elements, as well – polyphony, rhythm, meter, etc. – within the entire whole represented by Zgureanu's work. In consequence, these types develop into some of the most important stylistic tools met in the composer's work.

Teodor Zgureanu acts as a musician that has found his own style, his own way of expression, thus bringing an original voice to the Bessarabian music. The author expresses interesting spiritual depths and inner tensions built upon the sonorous framework of the Romanian specificity. Resorting to the folkloric substance is one of the constant features in Zgureanu's work. He mainly uses rhythmic and melodic elements that are specific to the folk melody, which he decants by subjecting them to his own, unmistakable language.

By synthesizing, in his own original way, the innovations of universal and contemporary music, Zgureanu has revealed the artistic profoundness of the Romanian musical folklore, by adapting stylistic elements that make a synthesis between the moralist of folk music and the modern intonation trends. The entire language of this opera presents different rapports of the composer towards folkloric creation, from the transfiguration of the authentic melody up to a personal account of the atmosphere characteristic to the national sensitivity.

He has created a score whose content abounds in means of expression deriving from folk music.

The melody has a complex profile; it travels from one sound register to another with great ease, gradually, through interval leaps, dynamized by triplet or in passages often enriched with melismata. The melodies have both a traditionally classic specific and a folk one, even modal, which is characteristic to the folk culture. The intervals are used in accordance with the affective expression, which imposes the use of chromatic intervals that outline folklore motifs. Especially, the composer predominantly uses intervals of augmented and diminished fifths and fourths and of augmented second, an interval deemed chromatic in all tonal-modal systems. The author resorts to diatonic and chromatic modal sound lines. Underlying the entire sound edifice there are musical scales which, both through their construction and especially by the way the composer uses them, make a tangential connection to the Romanian folklore, reproduced in a progressively stylized and essential form.

Throughout the entire score, we can mark out two types of themes, as follows:

- a) *Reflexive*, interiorized themes, in a sphere of ideas, and
- b) *Extensive* themes, which linger in an outward sphere, with tinted states of conflict.

It is obvious the composer's interest in perfecting and strengthening the meaning of the text through the character of the music, the latter evolving in accordance with the words' expressive dimensions, considered not separately, but as parts of a whole (the stanza). This unity between verse and melody is evident.

In drawing up his harmonic language, a decisive role was played by the multiple influences of local folklore.

The main characteristics of the harmony used by the composer are:

- chords with the third missing;
 - chords with valeurs ajoutées;
 - simple harmonies, used inventively;
 - secundal chords – which define the composer's style;
 - sonorities created by conglomerates of seconds (clusters)
 - cluster-type chord
 - quartal chord (chord of fourths)
 - quintal chord (chord of fifths)
 - the juxtaposition of the same rapports (fourth-fifth)
 - sound conglomerates, chord mixtures
 - tonally ambiguous areas
 - amongst the chords, we can find frequencies based on octaves and unisons
 - harmonic pedals
 - the lack of prejudice regarding the prevalence of a certain chord.
- These stratifications are often affected by the presence of added seconds.

His harmonic language reflects processes of continuity of the traditional structures and of elements of selective build-ups from the contemporary musical language.

We can also notice the tonal-modal thinking. A modal of colour, a recreation of folklore can be sensed throughout the entire score. Hence, the folk-influenced thinking can be seen through the use of:

- musical scales specific to folklore;
- modes with mobile chords (degrees);
- augmented seconds
- plagal harmonies (plagal cadences).

Zgureanu's entire work is influenced by the folkloric ethos. The resort to the folkloric substance is one of the constant features of his work. For the most part, he uses rhythmic-melodic elements specific to the folkloric melodic, elements that draw their essence from the century-long experience of the folk artist, which he decants by subjecting them to his own, unmistakable language.

On a first look, we can notice the special attention the author pays to the orchestral and choral makeup in the opera, meant to emphasize some special effects of the intended message.

The choice of instruments or of the vocal groups (in various combinations) is made according to the distinct timber of each of them, and their assembling in *tutti* requires the balancing of sound colour, starting precisely from the timber particularities. Hence, he attains a well-balanced sonority, but also a specially designed colouring in creating the atmosphere of his work. The orchestration is refined, abounding in various combinations of timbers, rhythmic and ornamental variations, orchestral colours that evoke sonorities of folk instruments. Consequently, the Romanian *alphorn* is rendered by the use of *horn*, the *lyra* by the *harp*, the *long shepherd's pipe* by the *clarinet*.

The composer has also resorted to choreography, as an important element in binding the word to music through gestures. As a result, he created folk-inspired dances, their melodic and rhythmic structure being a stylization of folklore. Here is an entire array of methods the composer uses to achieve superior means of expression.

The multiple-level contrasts (dynamic, rhythmic, timbre, of registers), the vitality, energy, tension, harshness and density are the main characteristics of this opera, in which we find clarity and self-confidence in composition, build-ups and tensions disrupted by breaks or by contrasting sections, but also a persistency in using melodic-rhythmic cells of folk origin. It is a style the composer has perfected with great toil, characterized also by timbre refinement and subtlety in the game of nuances. The entire structure is built either upon agglomerations or rarefactions, or upon sudden disruptions and contrasts.

Conclusion

The stylistics of Bessarabian opera is heterogeneous. G. Călinescu finds an eloquent fact, extremely important to the analytical endeavour that we have undertaken, namely that "in reality, there is no pure artistic phenomenon", most of the artistic trends and authors bringing to light "structural impurities".⁵

Of course, eclecticism is not a measure of value. But it is, certainly, a sign of the "circle that closes and opens itself", as Constantin Noica would have said.

⁵ Călinescu G., *Notes on Spanish Literature*, "Editura pentru Literatură Universală" Printing House, Bucharest, 1965.

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