

EXPRESSIONIST ECHOES IN 3 AUTUMN SONGS BY DAN VOICULESCU - STRUCTURE, STYLE, LANGUAGE

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SUMMARY. The present study advances for analysis the lieder cycle 3 Autumn songs for soprano, oboe, two clarinets and violin from composer Dan Voiculescu's youth. The three lieder are based on poems Autumn song and Song by Emil Isac and Autumn by Nicolae Labis. The analysis reveals technical, stylistic, aesthetic and rhetoric elements characteristic for this stage in the creative trajectory of the composer, such as the choice of Symbolist poetry and the use of post-Expressionist language, represented by the intensely chromaticized melodic, the preference for dissonance and the feeling of temporal suspension generated by rhythm abounding in suspensions and exceptional rhythmic divisions.

Keywords: Voiculescu, Isac, Labis, songs, autumn, soprano, analysis

Composer Dan Voiculescu² is remembered by the Romanian musical world as one of the most important composers, musicologists and teachers of the second half of the 20th century. His musical creation stands as a token of his greatness, encompassing a diverse variety of genres, from music with an educational character (the three volumes of miniatures for piano entitled *Carte fără sfârșit – Neverending book*, which are part of the curricula in art elementary and middle-schools), to instrumental music (the sonatas for flute solo, the cycle *Canonica* for piano etc.), choral – a significant part of his creation (most of his works are destined to children's choirs - 5 volumes -, but also *Liturghia modală – Modal liturgy* for choir of equal voices or the works

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² Dan Voiculescu was born July 20, 1940, in Saschiz, Mures County. He graduated the Conservatory in Cluj, after having majored, in parallel, both in Piano (1958-1963), with Magda Kardos and in Composition (1958-1964) with Sigismund Toduță. He participated in training stages in Venice (1968) with Virgilio Mortari and in Köln with Karlheinz Stockhausen (1971-1972). He attended the new music courses of the Darmstadt Festival (1972, 1978). His doctoral thesis, coordinated by Professor Sigismund Toduță and entitled *Aspecte ale polifoniei secolului XX (Aspects of 20th century polyphony)*, was publicly defended in 1983. He developed his career at the "Gheorghe Dima" Music Academy in Cluj-Napoca (1963-2000), at the Counterpoint department, then choosing to pursue his activity as a Professor at the National Music University in Bucharest (2000-2009). Alongside his activity as a composer and teacher he also conducted an intense musicological activity, as a well-known specialist in Renaissance, Baroque and contemporary polyphony. He passed away on August 29, 2009.

for mixed choir, most of them based on Romanian folklore), to lieder (many on verses by Nicolae Labis, Emil Isac, Lucian Blaga), and, finally, to the symphonic works (*Simfonia ostinato* or *Suita din Codex Caioni – The suite from Codex Caioni*, which can often be found in the program of concert organizing institutions), vocal-symphonic genre (represented by a single work: *Cantata Patriei*, on verses by Alecu Russo) or opera (*Cântăreata cheală – The bald soprano*, based on Eugene Ionesco's famous text). The works mentioned above are but a few examples which, together with many others, written in his mature years, reveal more than enough the mastery, the talent and imagination of this creator who was able to balance in his works lyricism and playfulness, but also the mastery of polyphonic writing with the subtlety of vertical structures, together with music accompanied by words in lieder and choirs with the absolute music in the chamber music or symphonic area; they are the proof of a happy union between native gifts and the solid composition education received at the Conservatory in Cluj-Napoca from the great composer, musicologist and teacher Sigismund Toduță.

However, we did not chose to study any of the works mentioned above (many of them already subject to reviews, studies and musicological analyses), but a less famous work, from the debut of Dan Voiculescu's creative journey. It is a three-part cycle composed in his last year of composition study (1963) and entitled *3 Cântece de toamnă (3 Autumn songs)*³, for soprano solo, oboe, two clarinets and violin. The three lieder are based on two poems written by Emil Isac⁴ (*Cântec de toamnă – Autumn song*⁵ and *Cântec – Song*⁶)

³ The first performance was on December 19, 1963, with soprano Kriza Agnes (a 4th year student at the time) together with Marton Szöverdi (oboe), Gheorghe László (clarinet), Sabin Țolea (clarinet) and Alexandru Barabas (violin). The work was recently performed in public, on June 18, 2012, in the Concert Hall of the "Gheorghe Dima" Music Academy in Cluj-Napoca, in the concert *An evening of contemporary music – Works for clarinet and vocal-instrumental ensembles from the universal creation of the 20th century*, with soprano Daniela Păcurar together with Răzvan Poptean - clarinet 1, Mihai Toader - clarinet 2, bass clarinet, Adrian Cioban - oboe and Rafael Butaru - violin, conducted by Vlad Agachi.

⁴ Emil Isac (1886-1954) was a Transylvanian poet born in Cluj, representative of Symbolism and Modernism.

⁵ „Câți nu te-au cântat, câți nu te-au iubit? / Tu, veșnică veștejire! / Și atâtea cu tine-au veștejit!

Aducătoare de ceață și vânturi, de ploi și de jale, / Toamnă, ești tristă doamnă, / Ce te plimbi pe a veșniciei cale.

Duci cântecul și floarea și aduci plânsul pădurii. / Ești blestemul urii. / Culoarea ți-o scrii pe buzele murei.

Aducătoare de tristețe și îndemn ne închide în casă, / Ești stafia ce stă la masă, / Ești zâmbetul de suferință al gurii. [this stanza is missing in Voiculescu's lied]

Câți nu te-au cântat, câți nu au murit / Cu tine? / Toamnă! fii bună cu mine!" (poem published in 1946 in the volume *Opere – Selected works*)

⁶ „Vine toamna, ploi și vânturi, / Vine amorțirea, / Lacul poartă frunze moarte, / Eu port amintirea. Amintirea unui cântec / Ce s-a dus din lume, / Prea frumoasă-a fost cântarea / Ca să-l spui pe nume.” (poem published in 1936 in the volume *Poezii - Poems*)

and one belonging to the famous and regretted poet Nicolae Labis (*Toamnă - Autumn*⁷).

The three poems are in “harmony” with one another, breathing the same Symbolist atmosphere: bringing rain and wind and associated with sadness, loneliness and death. What is surprising, though, is the very different length of the poems, leading to three lieder with very different time extensions, from the ample dimension of the first one (*Cântec de toamnă – Autumn song*), to the aphoristic appearance of the third one (*Toamnă - Autumn*). The reduced length of the last “song” leaves the listener into a state of expectation and unfulfilment. The disproportion is only an impression though, as all three lieder actually form a single “song”, segmented by two respirations. The musical material of the first lied is reiterated in different forms in the subsequent lieder, sometimes quoted *ad litteram*, other times only by the use of the same type of discourse and the same sonorous ambiance.

Instrumentation is also interesting: in order to dress the soprano voice, the composer chooses four instruments, all monodic (the violin is the only one who could be considered to have harmonic possibilities, though reduced) and all situated in the medial-acute area of the register (with the exception of certain short interventions, especially in the third lied, of clarinet 2 which progresses to bass clarinet – both the two clarinets and the bass clarinet are in *b flat*). This timbral option generates a floating, vaporous, diffuse sound.

The writing of the three lieder belongs predominantly to free polyphony. The soprano solo describes an ample recitative, in perfect concordance with the verses and masking the bars by frequent, exceptional rhythmic divisions and syncopations. Therefore, without using notation *senza misura*, the author articulates, through precisely notated rhythm, a fluid, lyrical music, where the pulsation of the beats can barely be felt. The four accompanying instruments have, each in their turn, a leading melodic function, overlapping from time to time the melodic line of the soprano, not in parallel though, but by intersecting it in a discretely-heterophonic writing, therefore creating an intonational discontinuous support for the solo voice. Both the solo soprano and the accompanying instruments convey a post-Expressionist, achromatized melodic, abounding in non-octavian developments and reversed chromaticisms, but retaining the cantability and lyricism, by avoiding agglomerations of dissonant melodic leaps. The recitative melodic of the soprano is also adopted in the sections with solo characteristics of the instrumental group.

⁷ „Câte doruri, câte vise, / Câte suflète ucise / S-au pornit să mai petreacă-n / Crângul galben de mesteacăn!” (the poem bears the subtitle *Epitaf - Epitaph* and was published in 1956 in the volume *Primele iubiri – First loves*)

Verticality is subject to the same stylistic coordinates, as it can be seen in the example below; compensating by dissonance what was in the melodic planes much more faded and discreet. The five voices (taking into consideration the soprano also) often collide, at intervals of second, seventh or ninth, reminding us of the works belonging to the masters of the second Viennese School. This aspect of the writing, predilection for dissonance is, according to musicologist Bianca Temes-Tiplea⁸, a characteristic trait of the composer's first period, while still influenced by university studies and his master. This propensity for dissonance, more reduced at the melodic level and stronger at the harmonic one (never leading to aggression, though), is fully justified by the aesthetic of the chosen poems.

Ex. 1

The musical score for 'Autumn song, m. 16-19' is presented in a five-staff format. The top staff is for Soprano, with lyrics in Romanian: 'Câți nu te-au cân - tat? _____ Câți nu te-au iu - bit? _____'. The music is in 3/4 time and marked *mp*. The second staff is for Oboe, marked *p*, with a trill *tr (b)* in the final measure. The third and fourth staves are for Clarinet 1 and Clarinet 2, both marked *p*. The bottom staff is for Violin, marked *p* and *mp*, with a *V* (vibrato) marking. The score shows complex harmonic textures with dissonances between the instruments.

Autumn song, m. 16-19

The first lied, *Autumn song*, debuts with an instrumental introduction which places in opposition the lyrical cantilena of the oboe, carrying the indication *malinconico* and discretely accompanied by the two clarinets, with the sudden intervention, in *forte*, *capriccioso*, of the violin. The solo of the violin is rough, based on harmonic intervals of major seventh and perfect and augmented fourth (intervention which, as we will see, has cyclic characteristics).

⁸ Temes-Tiplea, Bianca, *In memoriam Dan Voiculescu*, in: "Muzica" journal no. 4/2009, Editura Uniunii Compozitorilor si Muzicologilor din România, Bucuresti, p. 40.

Ex. 2

Autumn song, m. 7-9

Each poetic stanza generates a musical strophe, short instrumental interludes making the transition from one to the other. The culminating point is reached in the third strophe, where, following a lyrical section a lyrical section (*Molto calmo e semplice*), where the soprano and the oboe lines are embedded, above a syncopated *ostinato* of the clarinets, discourse gains suddenly in harmonic tension and dynamics and explodes on the text “esti blestemul urii!” (You are the curse of hatred!), in *fortissimo*; here is the only time in this work that the composer uses an emblematic discursive manner of the Viennese musical expressionism: *Sprechgesang*.

Ex. 3

Autumn song, m. 51-55

The reappearance of the verse “Câți nu te-au cântat?” (How many have sung you?) brings with it a natural varied reprise, rounding the structure of the most ample lied of the cycle (more extended than the other two together).

Although, as we previously mentioned, the musical material of the three lieder uses the same type of discourse, the contrast between the first, *Autumn song*, and the second one, *Song*, is most obviously expressed through the density of instrumental writing. While in the first lied the composer frequently uses 3-4 instruments simultaneously, here the expressive potential of the solo instrument or of the duo is mostly used. The work begins by an introduction

made by the two clarinets, on a generally descending melodic trajectory, clarinets which will also accompany the soprano voice during the first poetic verse. The violin takes gradually over (in *pizzicato*) as well as the oboe, whose first musical intervention has the same rhythm as clarinet 1. The second verse is followed by a violin solo, which we recognize as strongly related to the solo violin intervention in the first lied and which is performed, not at all accidentally, right after the text “Eu port amintirea” (I bear the memory).

Ex. 4

The musical score for Example 4, titled "Song, m. 20-24", is presented in three staves. The top staff is for the Solo voice, the middle for the Oboe (Ob.), and the bottom for the Violin (VI.). The key signature has one flat (B-flat) and the time signature is 3/4. The lyrics "Eu port a-min - ti - rea." are written under the voice staff. The violin part begins with a *pp* dynamic, marked "arco" and "sul ponticello". It features a melodic line with a triplet of eighth notes and a final note with a fermata. The oboe part has a melodic line that mirrors the violin's initial gesture.

Song, m. 20-24

Another musical gesture of the violin which can be connected to the first lied is a succession of perfect fifths, in its grave register. The lied ends with echoes from the violin solo, which has, up to this point, proven its cyclic characteristics (it would probably be overstated to speak of a leitmotiv).

The third lied, *Autumn*, with the role of an epilogue, begins abruptly, without an introduction, with the voice of the soprano accompanied by the two clarinets realizing a pedal of major second, chromatically sliding from *d-e* to *c-d flat*. The chromatic discourse and the descending melodic gesture are associated with the text “Câte doruri, câte vise, câte suflete ucise!” (So many longings, so many dreams, so many killed souls). The soprano score is segmented in two by a violin solo, with the same rough sonority, but not citing its interventions in the previous two lieder. It is only in the last two verses of the poem that we recognize, in the following short solo moment, the musical segment thematically uniting the three lieder, though this time it is “de-vitalised”, as instead of *capriccioso* we have the indication *malinconico*, instead of *forte* only *mezzoforte* and, instead of normal playing, the technique *sul ponticello*. As the text of the poem does not give the possibility of a reprise, the composer chooses to reiterate the first verse, “câte doruri, câte vise, câte doruri...” (so many longings, so many dreams, so many longings...), in *decrescendo*, on an instrumental background presenting musical “decomposition” of the gesture, once incisive, of the solo violin, accompanied by the clarinets in the grave register and by an ascending gesture, like a final sigh of the oboe.

Ex. 5

Meno mosso, malinconico

Solo
Că - te do - ruri, câ - te

Ob.

Cl. 1

Cl. 2

VI.
sul ponticello
mf

Solo
placando
vi - se, PPP Că - te do - ruri...

Ob.

Cl. 1

Cl. 2

VI.
pizz. arco
dim. ppp

Autumn, m. 14-19

In conclusion, we can state that the present work, from Dan Voiculescu's youth, is a convincing premise for what he was to become. Although limited to post-Expressionist aesthetic, most certainly due to the composition school about to be graduated, the cycle *3 Autumn songs* proves both the composer's sensitivity and technical mastery; he later found his true personality in other aesthetic territories, such as the ludic (the choral or piano works for children), the absurd (the opera *Cântăreata cheală – The bald singer*), the nostalgia of laic Renaissance (*Suita din Codex Caioni – Suite from Codex Caioni*) or of the religious one (*Liturgia modală – Modal liturgy* for choir on equal voices), and these are but a few of the many directions where his imagination and talent were fully expressed. It is due to remember as often as possible this complex musician, whose professional exigence can be easily noticed in the details of each composition, of each written book and is certainly remembered by all those who were his students.

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