

CORNEL ȚĂRANU – VALENTIN STREINU: MUSICAL-POETIC CONNECTIONS

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SUMMARY. The present article offers a brief overview of the ways poetry is mixed with music in the work *Saturnalia* (Romanian: *Saturnalii*) by Cornel Țăranu. A non-exhaustive analysis is thus featured of the particular methods leading to the melody-lyrical results. The analysis focuses on the following coordinates: the idea of continuous variation as a developing principle of musical discourse; the idea of sonorous material – from the point of view of its development, of rhythm, of form used to elaborate on structures and of the type of accompaniment as supporting the poetic aura.

Keywords: poetics, lieder, continuous variation, accompaniment

1. Introduction

The work of Cluj-based composer, Cornel Țăranu (b. 1934), covers all areas and genres of classical music. Chamber music compositions are written for a wide variety of ensembles, with innovative, yet efficient timbral combinations especially in focus. The piece *Saturnalia* (Romanian: *Saturnalia*) is a cycle of four works for ensemble and it has two variants. The first of these, finished in 1998, is written for an ensemble made of: deep voice, piano, string trio and bass clarinet. In the second version, the ensemble is reduced to deep voice, piano and bass clarinet, with the timbral reduction not influencing the rendering of the verses lyricism in the songs' music.

The literary works of Vladimir Streinu (1902-1970, real name – Nicolae Iordache) include both poetry and literary criticism, with the author having written countless articles in contemporary publications: *Kalende*, *Cugetul românesc*, *Adevărul literar și artistic*, *Convorbiri literare* etc. The poetry of Streinu is appreciated by Eugen Lovinescu: "In a literature of affable breadth, his poetry abounds in low-key reservation and elaborate crystallization (...); although passionate, it does not overflow directly but is distilled – not in symbols but in concentrated substances of which we are separated by the flask's cold glass."

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The verses of Vladimir Streinu, for their greater part published posthumously by his daughter in the volume *Ritm immanent (Immanent rhythm)* (Eminescu Publishing House, 1971), were all collected (64 poems) by George Muntean in 1983, at the same publishing house, in a critical edition including commentaries, notes, variants and translations.

The poems of Valentin Streinu were the literary pretext for the music in the *Saturnalia cycle* where composer Cornel Țăranu unveils to the listener the lyrical qualities of the poet's realm through the musical highlighting of verses.

A multiple levels analytical approach is undoubtedly necessary for the understanding of the creative intentions of both artists, especially regarding the last lyrical „finishing” of the poetic text: music. This is not intended to be an exhaustive analysis but an approach from the point of view of creative endeavours.

2. Continuous variation – developmental principle

One of the frequent musical devices in the work of Cornel Țăranu, variation, is used as a generating principle throughout the whole cycle. Starting with the first piece, *Ritm immanent (Immanent rhythm)*, one notices that variation, continually manifest, is applied to a generating nucleus that will later reappear in various instances. Here is the variational evolution of the nucleus:

Ex. 1

The image shows a musical score for a vocal line. The lyrics are "Ne - gre și-a-vân - ta-te spre mi - ne". The music is divided into three distinct sections, each enclosed in a colored rectangular frame: a red frame around the first three notes, a green frame around the next two notes, and a blue frame around the final two notes. The tempo marking "Moderato" is placed above the third section. The first section starts with a forte dynamic marking "f".

The „basic” nucleus – made up of three elements: an x cell, containing a melodic oscillation (red frame), a second cell, y, circumscribing a specific descending contour (green frame) and a third cell, z, with an equally descending interval with a *glissando* (blue frame).

All these elements will be also featured in most of the variational instances of the nucleus that form the bases of the first lied.

In the first variational instance, the x cell is almost identical to its prototype, while the y cell is enriched with pre-existing sounds (Bb and C), functioning as a „sound springboard”. The rhythm of the y cell is altered to adapt to the literary text and the z cell is minimally altered by the changing of the final C in a Bb.

Ex. 2

meno
f
zbor... pe-te ne - li-niști ri - di - că...

In the second variational instance, the oscillation and sounds of the x are modified, with the variation appearing in the amplifying of its melodic contour. The y cell is also somewhat varied (and doubled) as compared to the previous instance. Supporting pitches (the previous „sound springboard”) are changed and while intervals resemble the models, rhythm is augmented. The z cell is only slightly changed by an ornament, an element of rather expressive than structural quality:

Ex. 3

mf
lin... des-fă - cu-te sprân- ce - ne-le-li li - - ne

In the third instance, oscillations of pitches in the x cell are enriched by different intervals and the y cell the sequence of sounds is different from the model and from previous instances. Except from the different interval, the z cell resembles the model, both regarding the melodic contour and the attack mode:

Ex. 4

mp
a - ripi pre - lun-ge de rân - du - ni - - - că

The fourth variational instance begins with both rhythmically and pitch-wise varied x cell. The y cell features an already familiar rhythm and the z cell is simplified, being reduced to a single pitch:

Ex. 5

mf Andante senza rigore Moderato
Da-că-n lă - un - tri - ca ma-re m-ê fund...

The fifth variational displays, besides the use of the x cell identically with the previous instance, a double variation of the y cell. Also, the *glissando* in the z cell is renounced:

Ex. 6

A sixth variational instance is more different from the model by the discarding of the x cell and the varied repetition of cells y and z. This variation begins with the y cell having a slightly altered pitch sequence than the original melodic contour (B-G-Bb replace the original A-F#-Bb); this is followed by the z cell without the *glissando* on different pitches but close to the model (A-Bb replace G-C); this sequence is immediately repeated variationally:

Ex. 7

The x cell reappears in the next instance, with a rhythm variation followed by a repetition of the y cell with varied intervals. The z cell is identical to the original model, both regarding the pitches and regarding rhythm and attack.

Ex. 8

The eighth instance is paired with the previous one: the x cell is identical, the y cell (doubled) is only rhythmically varied, with only the z cell being different:

Ex. 9

The following instance renounces the x cell while presenting the y cell three times, in a joint, varied way. The z cell preserves its melodic contour and attack mode:

Ex. 10

du - cem a - lă - tu rați în spre moar - te.

In the last instance (the tenth), the x cell only preserves the first sounds of the oscillation while the y cell (once again variationally doubled) presents strong differences from the original model. The z cell once again displays only variations of pitches in the model.

Ex. 11

sin - guri sin - gu - ră - tăți fe - re - ca - te.

This compositional device is also present in the following lied. In the song *Dar (Gift)* variation is much more complex, apparently suggesting a musical discourse made of new themes. Nonetheless, intervals, intervallic sequences and rhythmic-melodic cells attest the connection of the material with a model.

The next song, *Noul Saturn (New Saturn)*, bring forth undoubtedly the method of continuous variation. This is also used in the motivic development in a freer manner here than in the previous song.

In this model, the first verse of the lied

Ex. 12

I - ni - ma co - dri - lor sa - cri nici ea

will become, through variational evolution, in:

Ex. 13

Că - te văr - tel - - niți de timp sunt pe cer

finally returning to its initial form:

Ex. 14

Mul - tă-a ro - ti - ri - lor mu - zi - că li - nă

The lied *Duplex* also employs the above mentioned method, with a far narrower, reduced generating nucleus but of great expressive potential:

Ex. 15

Pe-a-ce-lași pisc

with a first variational instance closely following its statement:

Ex. 16

pe care din-tre cre-meni

3. Sound material

The modal scale of the first lied develops as a result of continuous variation, in an evolutionary manner. Thus new sounds appear naturally during the intervallic development, without striking as aggressive and laying the modal structure on which the lied is built:

Ex. 17

Numărul măsurii
în care sunetul
apare prima dată:

1 16 2 10 32 1 1 1 16 11 45 42

Ocurențele
sunetului în
întregul lied

32 8 8 3 5 18 31 31 4 11 3 3



It is noteworthy that these pitches are fixed, they do not occur in different registers (with the following exceptions: Bb, B and C).

The second song, *Dar (Gift)*, employs modal material with mobile steps that develop gradually, as in the first lied.

The sound material of the third lied is built on a supporting sound A, with other upper harmonic sounds gravitating around it, leaving an impression of a tonal-modal scale in A. The impression of tonal-modal is also strengthened by the pseudo-dominants appearing at each verse or stanza end. During the last bars, this scale is also enriched by pitches from the upper harmonics range.

The last song is built gradually, through the introduction of passages that make up a finally chromatic whole.

4. Poetic rhythm

The music of the songs in this cycle naturally intertwines with the special atmosphere of the poetic text. The musical discourse is adapted to the natural, recitative rhythm of the poetry and to the atmosphere created around the suggested lyrical images. One may thus imagine a simple experiment where the vocal performer is recorded reading and interpreting the poems, without seeing the musical score. When later listening to the recording and following the score, one will notice that the rhythm in the recording is extremely close to the musical rhythm. One will rapidly observed the extreme carefulness in the selection of rhythm in this song (and all throughout the cycle), to match the poetic rhythm that is oftentimes regarded as a mere and momentary result of stage interpretation. As opposed to many vocal pieces, where the musical rhythm not only doesn't follow but contradicts accents and specific durations of spoken language, in these songs the naturalness of poetry reading is practically transposed in durations and fixed in the score in such a manner that, a performer of any nationality, ignorant of the specific organization of durations and rests in Romanian, will be able to deliver a performance very close to the lyrical content of the poems. Rhythmic structures (including the frequent meter changes) in the score that may at first come as strange, need to be regarded as such – as transpositions of poetry reading in durations that may, when satisfactorily interpreted, draw the public closer to the composer's internal hearing.

The following three examples from *Dar (Gift)* demonstrate, both in the *libero* section and in the specified metric sections the usage of „suggestive notes” - stem less notes – that force a precise duration but faced with which, any performer is directed to associate with values close to crotchets, not in connection with the idea of precise beats but, rather, with ineffable, impossible to demonstrate „musical common sense”.

Libero

Bră - ț a - ra al - bă de-o pri-vesc ori - când

de-o-n-clin ori-cum ea, rând pe rând e glez-nă, coap-să, u - măr

Pe braț îmi pu - ne cear-cân de lu-mi - - - nă

5. Architecture

The structure of the four lieder is marked by the three stanzas as an element of symmetry.

The first song adapts to the suggestions of the literary text, so besides the three stanza form, a new element is juxtaposed, serving as a conclusion.

The structure, based on a variational principle, will look as follows:

Tab. 1

A	Av1	Av2	Conclusion
b.1	b. 22	b. 32	b. 45

The second lied displays a variational reprise:

Tab. 2

A	B	Av
b. 1	b. 17	b.41

In the third song, *Noul Saturn (New Saturn)*, the musical material in the first stanza is varied over the next two stanzas, generating the following structure:

Tab. 3

A	A _{v1}	A _{v2}
b. 1	b. 16	b.58

In the last song, *Duplex*, the median stanza introduces new musical material, followed by an instrumental interlude. A last stanza beginning with material from A concludes the *Saturnalia* cycle:

Tab. 4

A	B	interludiu	C
b. 1	b. 25	b. 45	b.57

6. Accompaniment – support and atmosphere

In the first lied, instrumental (piano only) accompaniment is very mild, functioning as a mere quasi-harmonic support.

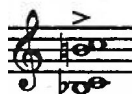
For the first part, between bars 1 and 19 there are two sound structures:
The first, developing horizontally:

Ex. 19



The second, developing vertically:

Ex. 20



Both structures undergo only minor variations throughout the musical discourse.

Beginning with the second stanza, a new sound structure appears in the instrumental accompaniment that will be used in different varied forms until the song's end:

Ex. 21

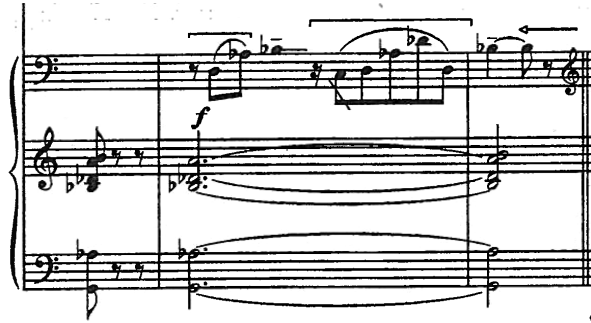


A special timbre element is the use of a sound object made of three fast beats (16ths) in the piano's body (may be performed by the clarinetist).

The accompaniment in the following songs is also discreet, mainly fulfilling a harmonic support role.

The accompaniment of the lied *Dar* only involves twice the bass clarinet. The two moments mark the ending of the first and the second stanzas.

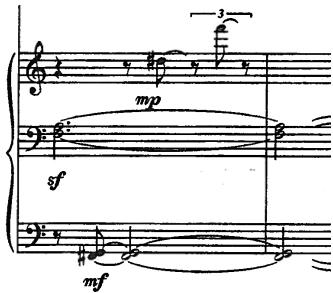
Ex. 22



These interventions of the clarinet do not render the discourse polyphonic as it has more of a “colouring” of the accompaniment, in a highly “clean” and efficient manner.

This lied also uses only three accompaniment structures:

Ex. 23



which may evolve in chords:



The second and the third structure introduce horizontal chords and a tremolo effect in the piano:

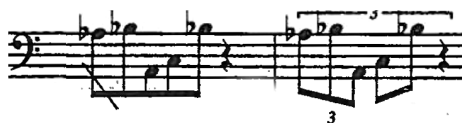
Ex. 24



The following lied - *Noul Saturn (New Saturn)*, in his modal appearance, introduces a discreet accompaniment, with a modal support role, so that the main accompaniment formula is built on the first scale degree of the mode and on its fifth, with the seventh, the upper and lower leading tones and supporting fourth appearing later along the musical discourse, all related to the first scale degree, almost always present in the bass. The accompaniment is performed only on the piano.

The last lied, *Duplex*, displays the most complex accompaniment, with the two instruments entertaining a dialogue of sound objects. Here too, only two accompaniment formulas are to be found, in the same extremely economical manner. The first chordal formula, played by the piano, is present both in a semi-expanded or chorded – with short, incisive or long durations – and rhythmized – a method adding a lot of tension to the musical discourse. The clarinet introduces the second accompaniment formula: oscillations with equal notes and intervals of up to a major second followed by large interval leaps – seventh, octave etc.:

Ex. 25



Although discretion and economy are the main features of accompaniment in all four songs, the efficiency of the atmosphere thus obtained is indispensable to the extraordinary pensiveness of the poetic text.

7. Conclusions

We may conclude that the writing of these lieder economically uses the continuous variation of sound nuclei in the vocal score, discretely and equally economically sustained by the accompaniment – with few accompaniment structures that masterfully deliver an aura required by the poetic text. Timbrality is acquired through combinations of chords and intervals where certain preferences are obvious.

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