

THE CHORAL OUTLINE IN THE OPERA “ALEXANDRU LĂPUȘNEANU” BY GHEORGHE MUSTEA

LUMINIȚA GUȚANU¹

SUMMARY. The music of Gheorghe Mustea displays a heterogeneous style, richly inspired by the compositional manner of the great composers of this genre (M. Mussorgsky, George Enescu), with elements of folk origin, of a special charm and richness. The most diverse sources present him to us in just as diverse creative states, in which the stylistic suggestions derive mainly from the Russian opera, namely “*Boris Godunov*” by M. Mussorgsky (through the grandeur in displaying the crowd scenes) – or from the Romanian folklore (by using the tonal-modal alternance, the intense chromaticization of the music, the presence of local color touches, or the infusion of liveliness transposed into both rhythmic and intonational musical patterns). The composer has used elements of folkloric style in cult traditional musical forms, thus creating music pages of a strong national legitimacy. The characteristic of this opera that really stands out, in particular, is the impressive number of choral scenes. They are largely developed in this opera, in addition to the fact that they integrate the general atmosphere of the action, rather than outlining various personalities or feelings. When writing the choral score, the composer uses the sound calligraphy of folklore (particularly through melismas, appoggiaturas, glissandos, etc.), as well as rhythmic patterns specific to folk music. In dealing with the crowd scenes, the composer employs the entire sound potential provided by the choral voice parts, especially in the moments of climax and synthesis.

Keywords: Opera, Gheorghe Mustea, choral outline, bessarabian opera, Alexandru Lapusneanu.

Introduction

In their opera, “*Alexandru Lăpușneanu*”, the composer Gheorghe Mustea² and librettist Gheorghe Dimitriu have attained a profound psychology-

¹ Univ. Lecturer, PhD, Faculty of Arts, Departament of Arts, Spiru Haret University, Bucharest, Romania, E-mail: luminitagutanu@yahoo.es

² Gheorghe Mustea: Flute player, Romanian panflute player, conductor, teacher and composer, Ghe. Mustea was born on May 1st 1951 in the village Mândrești, in Telenești County. He studied with Prof. Alexei Bivol (flute) at the „Ștefan Neaga” Secondary Music School in Chișinău (1966-1970) and at the „Gheorghe Musicescu” Institute of Arts in Chișinău (1970-1975 and 1975-1980) with professors Vladimir Rotaru (Flute), Vasile Zagorsky (Composition), Isai Alterman (Orchestral conducting), Mihail Caftanat (Score reading), Zidia Axionov (Folklore),

zation of the musical-dramatic action. Both the libretto and the music closely follow the development of the action from Negruzzi's short story. In essence, the music of the opera is psychological, with a theatrical plasticity and power of suggestion, determining the pulse and dynamics of the feelings. In general, the entire score is tackled in a profound manner and the rich palette of musical expression is used. Each scene is based on a center of gravity related to the literary side of the opera, brought to life by edifying replies.

Similarly, each scene is based upon a musical theme which provides it with a specific color. Hence, the theme of Alexandru Lăpușneanu's soul is predominant in the first scene; the ballad is the theme of the second scene and the oriental dance – of the third.

In this opera, the relation between text and music is very clear. This is not merely a simple vocal-instrumental score, but also a perfect fusion between the message of the text and the music.

The structure of the musical material is based upon a thematic contrast and it displays strong folk characteristics. Mustea skillfully employs the opera-specific forms: the aria, the monologue, the *arioso*, the duet, ensembles, as well as some less specific ones, such as the *doina* (a Romanian musical tune style, which can be found in Romanian folk music) and the Romanian folk *ballad*.

One is impressed by the relentless variation in tempo and rhythm, throughout the entire opera. Thus, the alternation of the tempos stimulates an increase in the force of communication in rendering the conflict. In its turn, the metric variation helps at creating and stirring up the atmosphere.

As regards the melodies of the opera, they prove to be greatly inventive, aiming to attain effects of timbral colors found in the ornamental mantle.

Regarding the orchestral aspect, Mustea employs free improvisations and heterophonic elements and he actively writes counterpoint over the sound texture.

The style of the opera "*Alexandru Lăpușneanu*" corresponds perfectly with the style of the époque in which it was written – the eclectic style. Little by little, we can notice a synthesis of some already formulated trends, as well as the use of experiments and the assimilation of various contemporary suggestions.

Lev Adam (Polyphony), Galina Kocearova (Music theory and solfège). He took advanced courses of orchestral conducting with A.S. Dimitriev in Leningrad. He worked as a flutist and panflute player between 1969-1970, then musical director and conductor of the "Folk Dances Ensemble" Orchestra at the „Șt. Neaga" Secondary Music School (1973-1975; 1978-1980); Professor with the „G. Musicescu" Music Academy in Chișinău (1980-1983 and since 1989), conductor of the Philharmonic Symphonic Orchestra in Moldova (1983-1989); First conductor of the National Radio Symphonic Orchestra (since 1989), Rector of the State University of Arts (between 1999-2002). He was awarded the titles of Honoured Master of Arts of the Republic of Moldova (1989), People's Artist of the Republic of Moldova (1980) and the Glory of Work (1998); he was a State Prize Laureate (1990) and a member of the Musicians' Union in Moldova. He wrote scenic, vocal-symphonic, choral, vocal, chamber instrumental and film music works.

In its language, it integrates heterogeneous stylistic elements. Thus, we can notice the influence of some Russian composers, such as: M. Mussorgsky, S. *Shostakovich*, as well as other influences of folk origin, since his style is deeply rooted in folk music and cemented in contemporary expressions. "In fact, the opera in Bessarabia displays a wide range of concepts, styles and techniques. Thus, the Bessarabian compositional spectrum tackles various coordinates for the structuring of aesthetic concepts. Essentially, the Bessarabian opera 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 or S. Prokofiev).(4)

Through his opera, Gheorghe Mustea proves once again the viability in using the traditional forms and the possibility to adapt them to the contemporary languages.

Out of the multitude of modal situations, we can mention the following strategic endeavors:

- It is a predominantly modal work, but occasionally we can encounter remainders of tonal thinking;
- A modal strategy of maximum efficiency – *polymodalism*;
- The dense chromatization, almost reaching the threshold of total chromatization.
- Heterophony – a method used to discretely but efficiently enrich the existing sound material;

We can thus conclude that the author has attained a synthesis in the usage of the musical modes:

- diatonic modalism;
- chromatized modalism and the orientation towards total chromatization.

The element which catalyzed expression, becoming the dominant factor, beyond the harmonic and polyphonic language has proven to be the author's use of folk-rooted themes and his composing "in spirit and in style" - the so-called „imaginary folklore“, which he skillfully created and practiced, thanks to a deep study and knowledge of it.

Consequently, there are two major ideas that transpire from the opera "*Alexandru Lăpușneanu*":

- the existence of a major line of imaginary folklore;
- the predominance of a modal diatonic thinking, "attacked" by an intense chromatization, at the brink of total chromatization.

In this opera, the game of „moods“ helps create some complex emotions. Let us mention here the author's interest in the plasticity of musical images. Amongst his compositional techniques, we can mention the method of improvisation.

Briefly, the structural particularities of Mustea's musical language are the following: *melodics* based on a modal-folk (chromatized) foundation; a complex and tensioned *harmony*, intensely chromatized, up to the point of reaching total chromatization, but with necessary moments of consonant relaxation; the presence of *heterophony*, *polytonality*, *polymodalism*, *polyrhythms*.

The choral outline in the opera “Al. Lăpușneanu” by Gheorghe Mustea

The one thing that sets apart the music of this opera is its impressive number of choral scenes. They are largely developed in this opera and integrate the general atmosphere of the narrative, rather than outlining various personalities and feelings. When writing the choral score, the composer used the sound calligraphy of folklore, particularly through melismas, appoggiaturas, glissandos, etc., as well as rhythmic patterns specific to folk music.

In dealing with the crowd scenes, the composer employs the entire sound potential provided by the choral voice parts, especially in the moments of climax and synthesis.

The composer resorts to the diversity of choral music, by using:

- a) the overlapping of two equal-voice choirs;
- b) the overlapping of two choirs (one in the backstage and one on the stage);
- c) the overlapping of a female choir with an 8-voice female choral group;
- d) “*a cappella*” choirs;
- e) equal-voice choirs with divisions;

From a dramatic standpoint, the functions of the choir diversify themselves. Hence, the choir is assigned the function of:

- 1. *expository choir*;
- 2. *attribute of the background sound*;
- 3. *paying homage cases*;
- 4. *choirs of dramatic action*;
- 5. *commentator*;
- 6. *the choir that symbolizes the people (the role of the crowds)*.

The composer mainly uses groups that detach themselves from the choral ensemble and even solo voices.

Within each of the choral parts, the vocal procedures are used differently. The composer employs:

- speaking (e.g.: A fragment from the Army Chorus – "From Thy Glory Above", Act I):

Ex. 1

Fragment din Corul oastei (*Din slava ta de sus*), act I

Andante molto rubato
poco a poco crescendo cca. 10 sec.

T
I
II
III
IV
V
VI

B
I
II
III
IV

- sotto voce (e.g.: A fragment from "Come, ye, sisters, come", Act I):

Ex. 2

Fragment din *Veniți suratele, veniți*, act I

Allegro
sotto voce

S I
II

S III
IV

A II
III

la poar-ta ia-du-lui pri- viți

ve-niți su-ra-te - lor ve-niți

- a combination between parlando and sotto voce (e.g.: A fragment from "Come, ye, sisters, come", Act I):

Ex. 3

Fragment din *Veniți suratele, veniți*, act I

Allegro

Ai să dai sa-mă doam - nă

Ai să dai sa-mă

Ex. 4

– shouts (e.g.: A fragment from the scene “We want Moțoc’s head!”, Act II):

Scena Capul lui Moțoc vrem, act II

Allegro *f*

S. el e tră-dă-tor Mo-țoc e hoț

A. Mo-țoc să moa-ră

T. -țoc să moa-ră

B. pre Mo-țoc

moa - ră

sempre simile

– murmur (the author’s indication, *mormorando*, intensifies the piousness of the expression).

E.g.: A fragment from the Army Chorus - “From Thy Glory Above”, Act I):

Ex. 5

Corul oastei (Din slava ta, de sus), act I

Andante molto

Alah

Doamne de sus

Doamne! din slava ta de sus

murmurando

One can notice three manners of interpretation:

1. in the style of folk songs;
2. antiphonally;
3. responsorially.

In the choral part, there also appears a psalmodic melody, whose filiation with the singing of psalms is certain.

Ex. 6



The crowd scenes confer variation and balance to the opera.

This opera comprises authentic pages of choral music. Its multitude of practices and diversity of compositional techniques lead to the success of this musical work and to a unique, individualized style.

Throughout the discourse of the choral fragments, we can notice the usage of the following techniques:

- the game of timbres;
- the dynamic plane, which is very expressive;
- alternative metrics;
- contrasts of tempo and dynamics;
- unisons;
- pedals;
- divisions;
- the creation of sound conglomerates vertically;
- imitation;
- a series of vocal procedures, such as: free speech, the speaking voice, the terrified shout;
- polymodalism;
- heterophony.

In the following pages, we will try to analyze a few choral fragments, pointing out the most important figures of speech and compositional techniques.

The Army Chorus (The bedtime prayer "*From Thy Glory above*", Act I)

This choral episode has a bipartite formal structure.

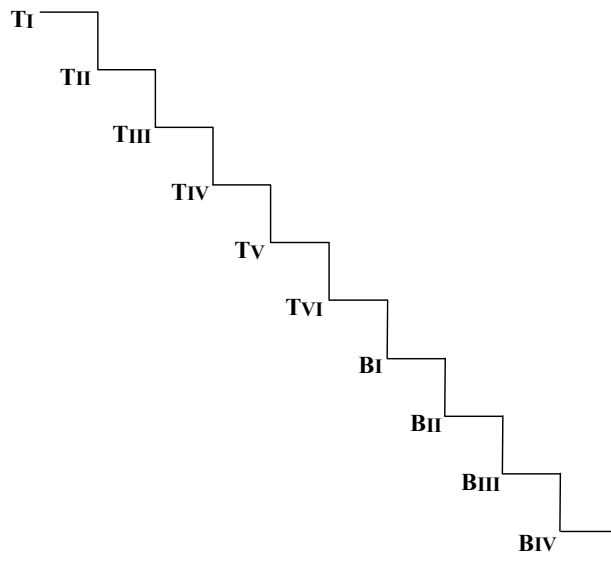
Each choral part delivers a certain melodic idea in an open structure, which becomes part of a continuous flow (*section A*). The ideas gradually

overlap (voice by voice), after a certain time interval, thus creating a heterophonic, multi-melodic *sound block*, comprised of 10 melodic ideas that progress in a *game of modes* (the alternation between the mode of E natural minor and E harmonic minor), with no instrumental support (*a cappella*).

Here is the graphic representation of the incipits of ideas:

Section A (exposition through equal voices)

Fig. 1



This causes a fierce mixture of ideas, though the vocal range does not exceed the perfect octave. In its turn, the orchestral ensemble brings its own contribution to the final establishment of this “*ideological mixture*”, through the overlapping of two musical constructions (**MC**):

Primo – **MC¹** – we can notice an incipit that starts with a perfect fourth, followed by two ascending seconds (2M+2m), then by two descending seconds (2m+2M) (on a mode of E Aeolian).

Secundo – **MC²** – a musical idea that stretches over two tetrachords (ascending-descending) on an E Aeolian mode, with lowered fourth and fifth.

At a first glimpse, a state of tonal indecision is produced through the overlapping of the two modes in the choral partition (mode of E natural minor and E harmonic minor – raised seventh) and of other two modes in the orchestral foundation (E Aeolian and E Aeolian with the fourth and fifth lowered), which actually proves the presence of polymodalism.

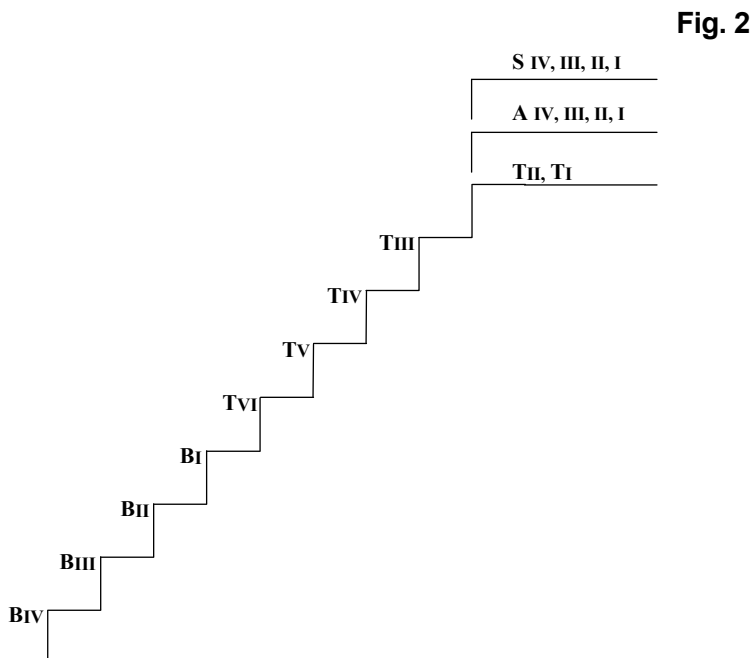
On this basis of sound constellations, there suddenly occurs an *insertion* (which interrupts the first musical construction – MC^1); namely, it is a *solo* fragment delivered by the first and third horns, comprised of ascending and descending leaps of perfect fifth intervals, intersected by an ascending leap of perfect fourth (the entire exposition takes place within the range of an octave: $Eb - Eb$). After this solo insertion ends, the MC^1 fragment returns.

In terms of the tonal parameter, we can notice a mode of *E flat (major/minor)*, with no third. Hence, harmonically speaking, some polymodal structures can be found at the overall level (*choir + orchestra*) and a state of bi-tonality - at orchestral level: *E Aeolian – E flat (major/minor)*, playing a subtle, "clear – obscure" game.

Underlying section B, there is a thematic material based on the exposition of the choral syntagmas in *parlando* (with a peaceful expression of „demand“), on undetermined pitches, built upon the same principle used in *section A*.

Here is the graphic representation of the musical incipits:

Section B (mixed exposition)

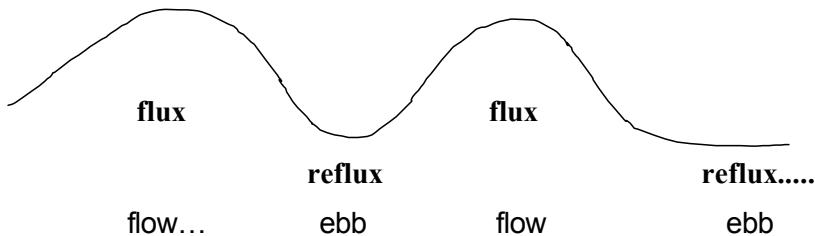


The choral section starts out with an "*a cappella*" fragment, up to the syntagma „we, the sinners“ (in Romanian: „noi păcătoși“) (the incipit of Tenor VI); from this moment on, the orchestral ensemble adds on – through a harmonic

pedal (“*lunga al fine*”) that consists of two overlapped fifths *E-B* (5^p) and *E-B flat* (diminished 5th), representing a reminiscence of the two modes from section A (E Aeolian and E Aeolian with a lowered 5th).

Both sections unfold in a continuous dynamic contrast, which swings between ***pp – f – pp***, with a decrease that goes on up to the point where it suggests redemption; thus, we obtain the following graphic of the dynamic, “ebb and flow” trend:

Fig. 3



Thanks to its complexity, this choral edifice gains a force equally dramatic and dynamic, even when expressed *a cappella* (it is usually known that the orchestral factor amplifies the expression of the dramatic force).

In this fragment, the author manages to create a general “modal ethos”.

The Chorus “We want Moțoc’s head!” (in Romanian: “*Capul lui Moțoc vrem*”) from the scene with the same name (Act II)

This chorus (choir fragment) reveals a chain form and the entire exposition delineates a formal block of an ample breath.

It is an admirable scene, with various levels that reveal the psychology of the two characters (*Moțoc and The Crowd*), as well as the direct conflicts between them. The composer describes the scene through a variety of means (from the classical sound-related ones to *speaking, shouting and exhalation*), thus creating - out of a series of moods and feelings - a specific atmosphere, on several levels.

The chorus starts off with some solo insertions (voices of the people), crying out the words: “We want Moțoc’s head” (*in Ro: “Capul lui Moțoc vrem”*), thus directly addressing the subject of the given scene. The tempo of the solos accelerates every two bars (bars 1-2 = 80; bars 3-4 = 88; bars 5-6 = 96; bars 7-8 = 96), eventually reaching the tempo of 132.

This incipit is surprising due to the change in meter and also, to a rather abrupt, threatening beginning of the musical discourse. From a dramatic standpoint, this incision, filled with tension, closely corresponds to this scene:

Ex. 7

Ad libitum
 $\text{♩} = 80$ $\text{♩} = 88$ $\text{♩} = 96$

Soprano
 Alto
 Tenor
 Bass

ff solo *2 soli* *4 soli*

Ca-pul lui Mo-țoc vrem

Allegro
 $\text{♩} = 132$

tutti *f*

Ca-pul lui Mo-țoc vrem

In this choral-instrumental fragment, one can notice an interesting blend of the elements listed below:

- a quasi-recitative exposition;
- an inversion of planes (levels);
- a simultaneous exposition (in blocks);
- the usage of interval mixtures (seconds, thirds, fifths, sixths);
- a chromatic progression (movement).

All these elements are rendered with syntactic purity and consistency in their occurrence. Their simultaneity leads to an acoustic conjunction that does not annihilate, however, the personality of any of these elements.

Underlying this musical construction, there are two motifs – one in the high-range voices (*soprano and tenor*) and the other – in the low-range voices (*alto and bass*).

The motifs take shape with the aid of some specific intervals: the *prime*, the *major second*, the *perfect fourth* and the *perfect fifth*.

Let us follow the interval route of each motif:

Ex. 8

Motif no. 1:
 (soprano or tenor)

Motif no. 2:
 (alto or bass)

1p 1p 1p 1p 4p 5p

2M

*Alto se va interpreta la octavi

We can find the same interval pattern in both of these cases: the motifs start out in unison, then go through a *bipolar development* process, expanding both *upwardly* (the high-range voices), as well as *downwardly* (the low-range voices), through a bilateral leap of a perfect fourth.

Both motifs are rendered in parallel, in two different components:

a) *feminine*, **A** [*Soprano* (m^1)³ + *Alto* (m^2)]

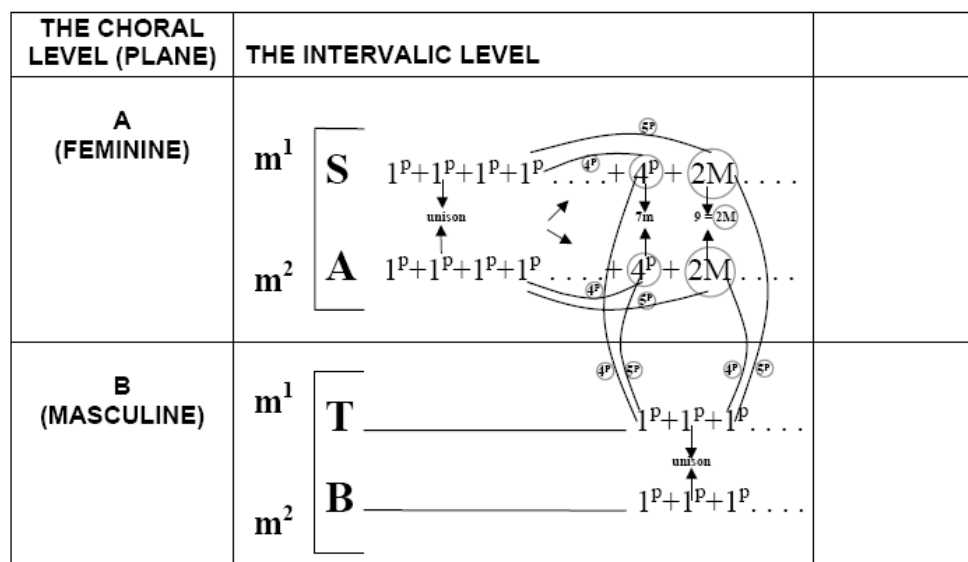
b) *masculine* **B** [*Tenor* (m^1) + *Bass* (m^2)].

The energies unleashed by these motifs are capable of continuously sustaining an ample development, even reaching the sound of acoustic blocks (through a harmonic-chordal delivery – reference point no. 74).

The motifs represent a rhythmical, quasi-recitative „outcry“, in a rhetorical, speech-like manner; a “game” of musical intervals is also present, both horizontally and vertically.

Here is a graphical image of these interpolations of musical intervals:

Fig. 4



We can notice here the presence of intervals like the major second, perfect fourth and perfect fifth, both at microstructural level (horizontally) and at macro-structural level (vertically – between the choral planes). E.g.: reference point no. 72.

³ Motif no. 1, idem m^2 – motif no. 2.

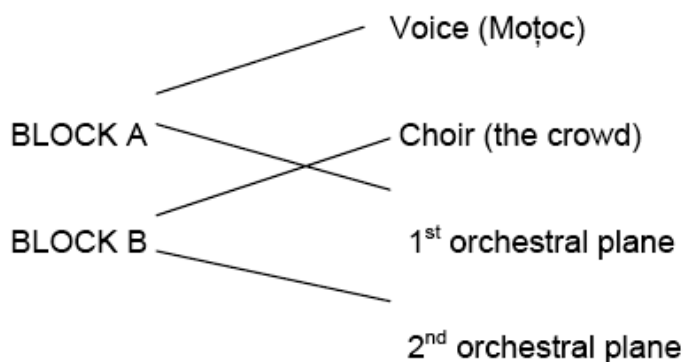
This sound stream is intermittently intersected by the orchestral ensemble through a quasi-*ostinato* chord, comprised of two overlapped fourths (*A – D – G sharp*), which plasticizes the restless reverberation of this episode.

Starting from reference point no. 72 (the intervention of the soloist – *Moțoc*), two sound blocks appear:

- **block A** – *solo + orchestra*;
- **block B** – *choir + orchestra*.

The graphic representation shall be as follows:

Fig. 5



The orchestral construction of this fragment generates two planes, by synthesizing two types of musical writing (it is a fragment with a two-plane development section):

- *chromatic movement* – (**plane I**) – it doubles the solo choral part in unison;
- *harmonic "pace"* (**plane II**) – it sustains the choral voice part, consisting of a two-fourth chord.

It is about a cleavage in which one can notice the two musical expositions mentioned above.

The incipit of reference point no. 75 marks the moment of *junction* between the two sound blocks, resulting in the use of new intervals (thirds, seconds, fifths).

The scene "We want Moțoc's head!" is a purely descriptive episode, the author managing to outline an image as adequate as possible for the two characters, *Moțoc* and *The Crowd* (the people).

Conclusions

Concerned with finding an adequate way of combining the elements of perennial tradition, both European and domestic, Gheorghe Mustea has composed an opera with a vision of synthesis, which brings these elements together into a way of thinking marked by the musical traditions of the Romanian folklore, thus creating a musical osmosis.

The composer uses only one folklore quotation. The rest of the thematic material is created in the spirit and atmosphere of the Romanian ethos.

The work proves to be a well-articulated organic whole, with expressive dramatic features, whose sound leaves the impression that it is being contemplated from ever-changing angles and perspectives, just like a kinetic sculpture, gradually revealing emotions like fear, suffering, impulse, inertia, desire and the need of harmony.

One can discover a harmonious correlation of shape and meaning, which ultimately denotes the author's intuitive accuracy.

Gheorghe Mustea puts all the musical parameters to full use (rhythm, timbres, registers, agogical -dynamic elements, etc.), with the manifest intention of using as many potential expressive resources as possible, all compressed into a rich stylistic presentation.

Translated by Raluca Stoica

REFERENCES

- ***, *Compozitori și muzicologi din Moldova (Composers and Musicologists from Moldova)*, Bibliographic lexicon conceived by: Gleb Ceaicovschi-Mereșanu, Universitas Printing House, Chișinău, 1992.
- Anghel, Irinel, *Orientări, direcții, curente ale muzicii românești din a doua jumătate a sec. XX, (Directions And Trends In Romanian Music in the Second Half of the 20th century)*, Editura Muzicală Printing House of the Union of Composers and Musicologists from Romania, Bucharest, 1997.
- Buzilă, Serafim, *Enciclopedia interpreților din Moldova (Encyclopedia of Moldova's Interpreters)*, Second edition (Revised), ARC Printing House, Museum Printing House, Chișinău, 1999.
- Gutanu, Luminița, *Aesthetic Trends and Developments in Bessarabian Opera Music of 20th Century*, in: *Studia UBB Musica*, Cluj-Napoca, Cluj University Press, 1/2011, p. 59.
- Kuzimina, Galina, *Elements of Musical Folklore in Opera*, in: *The Musical Folklore in Moldova as found in Compositional Works*, "Știința" Printing House, Chișinău, 1993.
- Mustea, Gheorghe, *Alexandru Lăpușneanu – Reduction for piano* (manuscript), 1988.
- Mustea, Gheorghe, *Alexandru Lăpușneanu – score* (manuscript), 1988.