

ASPECTS OF THE HARMONY OF CULTIC CHOIRS FROM *OEDIPUS* BY GEORGE ENESCU

CONSTANȚA CRISTESCU¹

SUMMARY. It approaches to analysis some choral moments of cultic ritual of George Enescu's opera *Oedipus*, in the light source of inspiration to those of ancient Greek and Byzantine succession. The concept of harmony it is used in both meanings, given in Greek antiquity and in contemporary Enescu's. The case study is conducted on the four moments of the old Athenian cultic invocation of Act IV. It shows that the modal structures that Enescu uses are found in the diatonic and chromatic harmony of the ancient modal system, having continuity in the modal systems of Byzantine succession, until today. Also it is demonstrated the use by George Enescu of the ancient system of modulation (*metabolos*), used in the harmonic plane, integral, horizontal and vertical through innovative solutions.

Keywords: Ancient cultic choir, harmony, monody, para-phonic, refrain, unison harmony, mode, heterophony, poli-chorded structures, hromatikons, ancient Greek *metabolos*, Byzantine music.

Byzantine singing is, according to Amedé Gastoué, "l'intermédiaire entre l'antiquité et notre art occidental." Creative treasury, interpretative art and musical theory - Vasile Tomescu says -, Byzantine singing will know in Romania, the only Latin country that adopted it, successive and brilliant contributions of some song composers, then of the composers who made present the mixed character of the folklore, anonymous, "objective", and the one of the scholarly art, "subjective".² Among these composers it is placed also, incredibly, George Enescu.

George Enescu is one of the greatest thinkers of music, who created a masterpiece of artistic meditation about *Oedipus's* myth, capitalizing in an innovative stylistic synthesis the patrimony of European musical culture for over two millennia.³ The *Oedipus* work have been carefully studied by various

¹ Bucovina Cultural Center (CCB), Suceava, Str. Universitatii nr. 48, Jud. Suceava, Romania, musicologist (artistically consultant), e-mail: cristescu_constanta@yahoo.com.

² Tomescu, Vasile, *Muzica românească în istoria culturii universale (Romanian Music in the History of the Universal Culture)*, vol. 1-2, Bucharest, Musical Publishing House, 1991, p 28.

³ I had access to the score of the Enescu's opera through George Enescu Mediateque of the Metropolitan Bucharest Library, that gave me access both to the big score of the opera published by the Musical Publishing House of the Composers' Union from R.P.R. in 1964, and to the reduction for piano of Henry Lauth, published by the Musical Publishing House of the Composers' Union from R.P.R. in 1965.

exegetes, among them being Octavian Lazăr Cosma, who is imposing himself with a peerless volume, which is a permanent bibliographic reference source for any attempt of musicological approach of this innovative work in the Romanian and international landscape of composition.⁴ The restoration of the exegetic path made by the musicologist with the score in front, offers the chance of some further studies. Within these, sits the case study I'm proposing here, trying to highlight millenary structures and techniques, masterly recovered by George Enescu in the cultic ritual acts from the opera.

About *the sources of choral style in Enescian Oedipus*, Octavian Lazăr Cosma says "If we search the Enescian sources, regarding the choral treat, we will identify common points in the monumental and oratorical character of Bach and Händel creation, in the statuary force of Gluck's works, in the great plasticity and in the collective dynamism expressed in Mussorgsky's works. /.../ More, Enescu fructifies, in his brilliant score, in the right moments, the Romanian folk melos germs and those of the local choirs' creation, especially the cult one, with deep roots in the ancient times, in Byzantine models." [p. 240] about the using of the choirs from ancient drama, the musicologist only specifies that they are often used with the role of dramatic commentator.

About *the cultic ritual choirs of the old Athenians*, Octavian Lazăr Cosma says, "The intonational structure reveals the austerity of the great values. In fact, in the conformation of this theme, the roles are equal, both of the intervallic line and of the rhythmical divisions. Starting from recto tone intonation, it comes to a generous singing style, with intervals easy to sing, preferably arranged in progressive successions. The rhythm knows a variation, even if the accurate replays during an action are not excluded. The variation will easily affect the second, by introducing a triolet in different segments of the period, asynchronous and mobile. The refinement harmony is derived from diatonic modal chains, from overlapping of thirds, pedals and empty quint; the leadership of the voices always starts and ends in a common point. *The chorded dislocations are the effect of the heterophony which facilitates the instability of the cadences, the apparently free improvisation course.*" [p. 252] At page 253 there are tonally analyzed the modulations from the plan of the ritual melody replays and from the last return of the ritualism invoking act dramatically developed.

Using Byzantine background music in Enescian creation seems vague and goes almost unnoticed, the master not using liturgical quote, but the musical structures and compositional techniques specific to the Byzantine music, and not only to it, but also specific to other previous musical cultures of millenary confluence. Enescu uses and creates, in fact, structures of cultural

⁴ Cosma, Octavian Lazăr, *Oedip-ul enescian (Enescian's Oedipus)*, Bucharest, Musical Publishing House, 1967, p. 240–241, 252–253. See also Bentoïu, Pascal, *Capodopere enesciene (Enescu's Masterpieces)*, Bucharest, Musical Publishing House, 1999, p. 244 –303.

synthesis, using them by recreating in the character of those elements cut into cell reasons sections of Byzantine specificity or Romanian folklore specificity. It is considered, for example, that Enescu has taken micro tonic language from Romanian folklore and from some Byzantine enharmonically and chromatically structures. However, just as well, the structures that fascinated the music world through the originality of Enescu's usage could be replicated also from the enharmonically and chromatically ancient Hellenic world, which, surely, The Master studied from bibliographic sources of the time, very carefully.

In some previous studies I have shown how to use some of the modal structures of the Byzantine succession in Enescian creation in general, and in some vocal parties from the work *Oedipus*, starting from the assumption that the family circle formed the great musician⁵ and his outstanding ability of perception and stylistic synthesis.

Oedipus work places itself as an action in the Byzantines area of conservation over centuries, through the recreation of some ancient structures in new cultic metamorphosis, a space propitious for multicultural synthesis over millennia. The goal of the present study is to capture the techniques of harmonization, which Enescu has chosen for the moments of sacred ritual inserted into opera, in terms of ancient Greek and Byzantine inspiration source.

I'll stop on a case study: the harmony of the ritual-cultic choruses. These structures will be revealed during the analysis of the ritual segments.

Before we start the analysis, it must be mentioned the difference in content that the term **harmony** has it in Hellenic antiquity and in contemporary times. Remember that in Greek antiquity "**the harmony**" meant, first, *the melodic sound organization*, so the singing mode - opposite to the current one -, and on the other hand, it expressed the same thing with the notion of musical scale.⁶ Therefore, I define the harmonic concept by the two coordinates that refers to the two concepts: **ancient** and **contemporary** to Enescu. From this perspective, the analytic scoring target refers to the two coordinates of choral speech: 1) horizontal coordinate - monody, in virtue to the ancient concept of harmony - and 2) vertical coordinate - in virtue to the modern concept of harmony. The vertical coordinate is reflected in 2.1.) Unison harmony and 2.2.) interval and chorded harmony.

⁵ Cristescu, Constanța, *Enescu și muzica românească de tradiție bizantină; Considerații asupra spiritualității enesciene (Enescu and the Romanian Music of Byzantine Tradition; Considerations about Enescian spirituality)*, in: *Crâmpeie din cronologia unei deveniri (Fragments from the Chronology of a Becoming)*, vol II, Musical Publishing House, Bucharest, 2005, ISBN 973-42-0406-8, p. 196 and 216; Idem, *Influente bizantine în opera Oedip de George Enescu (Byzantine influences in Oedipus Opera by George Enescu)*, in: *Studii și materiale muzicologice achiziționate de UCMR în anii 2005-2006 (Studies and musical materials purchased by UCMR in 2005 – 2006)*, Bucharest, 2006, ISBN (10) 973-0-04765-3; (13) 978-973-0-04765-3, p. 6.

⁶ Giuleanu, Victor, *Tratat de teoria muzicii (Treaty of music theory)*, Bucharest, Musical Publishing House, 1986, p 280- 299. Panțiru, Grigore, *Notăția și ehurile muzicii bizantine (The notation and the models of byzantine music)*, Bucharest, Musical Publishing House, 1971.

In this way, the ritual choral scores from Oedipus are revealed as models of unison and refrain harmony, the last one being projected in the orchestral plan.

The choir harmonizes the para-phonic ritual monody in ply multiplied, generating chorded structures in parallel successions. Thus, the horizontal parallelism is projected vertically in an accorded parallelism of great acoustical and structural simplicity, with archaize effect. The tritons are capitalized in the parallelisms, the elliptical chords of quint with the fundamental doubled, the nona chords in restricted positions by inverting nona and placing it in tenor over the fundamental generating the second beat specific to the polyvocally of Byzantine succession, and also the block chords.

The projection of "ison" harmonic accompaniment is made in orchestral match, which through the function of "ison" is vocalized.

The moments selected for the demonstrative analysis are the choirs of old Athenian invocation rituals from Act IV, p. 453 [324] - 454 [325], p. 460 [329] - 461 [330], 497 [358] - 500 [360].

The summoner choir of old Athenians evolves ritually on a syllable melody which configures a melodic concave profile, suggesting the ancient Octavia diatonic structure of the hypo-Frisian. On caesura the cadence step slides to the next superior step which is in a report of inferior quart given the base of the mode, in order to add one more post-final formula with a sinuous profile built on the symphone interval (block) and emmeles (third) – D – A – F # -B - which ends the song based on the mode.

This ancient melodic structure is found among the structures of media Byzantine voices, being represented by the mode IV mixo - Lydian, so in the Byzantine system corresponds to voice VIII after Trifon.

The song is interpreted *Monod, in unison*, with temporary divisions on small spaces, outlining heterophony through interval symphone deviations (at the quart and lower quint, sometimes at the octave) and emmeles (mainly to the third and sometimes to the second) of the ritual melody.

Invocation No. 1 from the Act IV "Binevoitoarelor" p. 453 [324] - 454 [325] Moderato, alla breve plays the petrified ritual song counter pointed in harmony range, where the share is owned by the emmeles intervals (third, second) compared with the symphone ones, which dominate the other musical ritual moments. The counterpoint proves a synthesis of Renaissance and Impressionist techniques through exploiting the delayed notes, of exchange, of passage and appoggiated. The oscillatory exchange notes, as well as the recitative recto tono and tuned, are specific to the Byzantine Monody. In the choral harmony of this summoner episode, these processes are designed both in the plane of the horizontal harmony - Monod, and in the plane of the vertical harmony.

Characteristic to the attack of the post final formula, which cadences on the initial step of the hypo-Frisian mode and it is the paronymic dubbing to the octave and the symphonic one to the inferior quart.

The choir evolves alone, the orchestra interfering with only a few faint ambient sound effects.

Ex. 1

Handwritten musical score for "Oedipus" by George Enescu, featuring a choir and orchestra. The score is divided into two systems. The first system (measures 24-28) is marked "Moderato (♩=63)" and includes parts for Grand Flute, Bassoon, Clarinet in F, Violoncello, Double Bass, and a choir of "Les Vieilles" (Tenors and Basses). The second system (measures 29-32) includes parts for Violins 1 and 2, Viola, Cello, Double Bass, and the choir. The score is written in G major (one sharp) and 3/4 time. The choir parts have French lyrics. The orchestral parts include various dynamics and performance instructions like "col tutti" and "arco".

System 1 (Measures 24-28):

- Gr. fl.** 1. 2. (F major, 3/4)
- Bns.** 1. 2. (F major, 3/4)
- C. (fa)** 1. 2. (F major, 3/4)
- Viol.** 1. 2. (F major, 3/4)
- Altos.** (F major, 3/4)
- Les Vieilles:**
 - Ténors:** Je, Vieillard, Athénien, au loin, se rapprochant peu à peu. Soles ma mare. Bien-veil-lan-tes! Bien-fai-sin-tes! Tous che-mi-nons pour vous prier.
 - Basses:** Soles ma mare.
- Viol.** (F major, 3/4)

System 2 (Measures 29-32):

- Violins 1.** (F major, 3/4)
- Violins 2.** (F major, 3/4)
- Viola.** (F major, 3/4)
- Cello.** (F major, 3/4)
- Double Bass.** (F major, 3/4)
- Les Vieilles:**
 - Ténors:** Les Vieilles se retirent avec phébus, en chantant. Ils ont tous des voix pour quelques uns portant des torches allumées. Les autres, bagués.
 - Basses:** Les Vieilles se retirent avec phébus, en chantant. Ils ont tous des voix pour quelques uns portant des torches allumées. Les autres, bagués.

Invocation No. 2 from the Act IV, 460 [329]-461[330] retakes immutably the hypo-Frisian melody played in invocation No 1, strictly respecting the character par excellence Monodic of the ancient Greek cultic and ritual song. The vertical harmony is performed at octave, at unison. This oral practice of unison and heterophony harmonization has been perpetuated until the present time, in the Byzantine liturgical practice and in the folklore.

The orchestra accompanies the choral music through “ison” at the violins group and the viola (at the tongue), with isonic figurations at flutes and oboe.

Invocation No. 3 of the old Athenians choir at p. 497 [358]-500[360] replays ritualistic music without melo-rhythmic variations, making an elision at the post final formula previously reported. The variation occurs in the heterophony - harmonical vertical deviations, from the melody unison started. It is created a para-phonic harmony in every third quart interval, projecting two melodic plans through varied dubbing. Thus, it appears a second voice as derived from the ritual immutable song.

I must remind here that para-phone used to be one of the most rudimentary techniques of poly - phonisation and in the same time the oral harmonization in folk and cultic music, which has been perpetuated in the Byzantine tradition to this day, currently being used excessively, to the detriment of the monody. Enescu saw this multi-millenary oral practice in the Orthodox Church tradition and he masterly improved it in Oedipus, in the choral parts of cultic ritual, but also in those of laic ceremonial ritual.

This time the song is unison orchestral doubled by the horn in F and isonic accompanied by an amplified orchestral device. The rhythmic ison marks the centres of modal weight (B, D). The second voice suggests also the idea of a rudimentary counterpoint, which strictly respects the ancient preferential interval.

Invocation No. 4 of the old Athenians choir after Oedipus passes the copper wall p. 538 [386]-559[389] + 7 transpose the song ritual invocation to the upper third with rhythmic variations, but also melodic ones - especially at cadence - determined by adapting the song to another text and the variability of traditional ritual music. The song, transposed in the virtue of the oral variability of the performance records, begins at unison, in order to be dramatically developed, in apologetic consecrated sequences, sanctified, modulating, vertically harmonized with modern modal tonal harmonic structures generated by heterophony. The process of dramatising through *metabolus* is a practice both ancient and modern, which Enescu used in the final ritual of sacralisation of Oedipus. Therefore, in the last invocatory sequence, Enescu reveals one more side of the ancient and Byzantine traditional cultic song, namely the variability of the petrified melodic patterns, and this in the virtue of the variation principle, through the adaptation of the melodic model to other texts and through transposition.

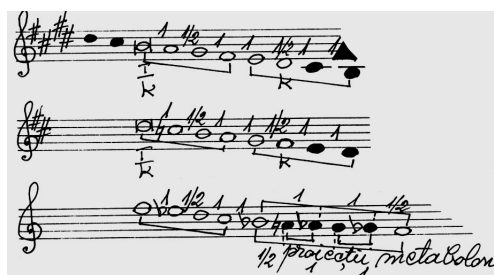
The Hellenic thinking knew multiple and refined **modulation processes** (*metabolos*), which Enescu has capitalized in a personal synthesis of the contemporary harmonic language.

It is known that at the ancient Greeks the concept of *modulation* (*metabolos*) was more extensive than now, covering multiple aspects. In this sens, it can be said that the *nomos* rhythm variation itself from an invocation to another is *metabolos*, as well as the changes of the records, the changes of the stamped configurations, the dynamic variation. I will refer only to the melodic modulation.

Invocation no. 4 brings a type of *metabolos* as metabolic modulation per tonum, in relation with the *nomos* invocations no 1, reproduced according to ancient Greek tradition in the invocation no. 2 and no. 3. The modulation per tonum is made through transposition to the upper third in the upper register.

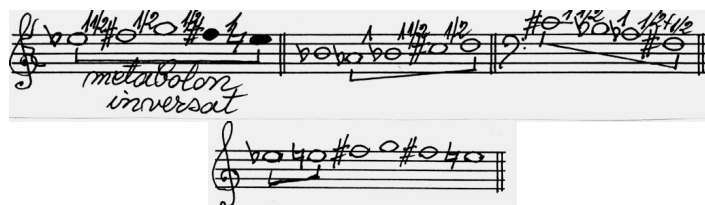
Invocation no. 4 escapes from un-modulated ancient choral tradition through modulated character. Enescu's modulation processes from this final invocation prove the Master's concern for the increasing of the ancient coral design by *metabolos*. From the second period, modulation per tonum combines with modulation per systima, the structure of the second tetra cord of the descending scale being a tetra cord *synememnon* produced through introducing the *metabolon* sound. The lower tetra cord of the scale then modifies into a *lydisti* structure. The ancient intense hypofrigic (*syntonoiasti*) transforms itself through *metabolos* into a complex mode with fluctuant steps, which it is found in the universal poli-cord structures, in the same time cult, Byzantine and folkloric.

Ex. 2



At the level of horizontal harmony, there can be distinguished in the plan for joint reasons and phrases of different voices the *hromatikons*, consisting of chromatic structures, trichordical, tetra-chorded and pent-chorded, where it is required the second to be increased, sometimes together and with movements of fluctuating steps, which suggest us a free use of the concept of *metabolon*: inverted, dispersed.

Ex. 3



In the vertical harmony, there is the preference for the same interval structures used in horizontal harmony. The chords parallelisms arise, resulted from movements in third para-phonics at tenor and bass, then the oscillating chorded movements occur, which improves the melodic profile specific to the Byzantine traditional music, it occurs chords of quart, chords without quint, only with third and the doubled fundamental octave in unison projection, chords of nona and undecima in close positions, realizing between bass and tenor that beat of seconds distinctive to Byzantine music. More than that, the chord of nona and of undecima from the cadences of invocation no. 4 are used in 2 ways of the fluctuant third through metabolon - it passes from the big third to the minor third. The chord with the beat is preferred by Enescu even with the function of cadence – e.g.: reper [387]+3; [389]+3 -. The chord of nona is included in the final cadence formula, resolved by a reversed triton and then by a unison movement which impose the fundamental to the mode - [389]+5.

The ancient Greek metapodus is projected in the plan of vertical harmony, in an integrated harmonic vision.

Ex. 4



As it comes out from the above analysis, the invocatory choirs reveals a profound analysis and understanding of the ancient Hellenic cultic musical tradition and then the Byzantine tradition which followed, Enescu skilfully taking advantage and using the potential for more complex science of harmony in the vertical variation process caused natural by the oral collective singing.

REFERENCES

- Bentoiu, Pascal, *Capodopere enesciene (Enescu's Masterpieces)*, Bucharest, Musical Publishing House, 1999.
- Cosma, Octavian Lazăr, *Oedip-ul enescian (Enescian's Oedipus)*, Bucharest, Musical Publishing House, 1967.
- Cristescu, Constanța, *Enescu și muzica românească de tradiție bizantină; Considerații asupra spiritualității enesciene (Enescu and the Romanian Music of Byzantine Tradition; Considerations about Enescian spirituality)*, in: *Crâmpoie din cronologia unei deveniri (Fragments from the Chronology of a Becoming)*, vol II, Musical Publishing House, Bucharest, 2005.
- Cristescu, Constanța, *Influente bizantine în opera Oedip de George Enescu (Byzantine influences in Oedipus Opera by George Enescu)*, in: *Studii și materiale muzicologice achiziționate de UCMR în anii 2005-2006 (Studies and musical materials purchased by UCMR in 2005 – 2006)*, Bucharest, 2006.
- Giuleanu, Victor, *Tratat de teoria muzicii (Treaty of music theory)*, Bucharest, Musical Publishing House, 1986.
- Panțiru, Grigore, *Notația și ehurile muzicii bizantine (The notation and the models of byzantine music)*, Bucharest, Musical Publishing House, 1971.
- Tomescu, Vasile, *Muzica românească în istoria culturii universale (Romanian Music in the history of the Universal Culture)*, vol. 1-2, Bucharest, Musical Publishing House, 1991.