

EQUINOXES BY TIBERIU OLAH

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SUMMARY. "Overwhelming dramatic tensions, lyricism going up to the inner tear, fine humor with a touch of malice, overflowing colourful imagination, all embedded in a whole managed with unrivalled sense of time: a music you cannot pass by, which turns you upside down and brings you closer to the deep meanings of existence" (Olguța Lupu)². Not unlike grand personalities, Tiberiu Olah understood music on large areas and ample dimensions of time. He thoroughly researched and applied very well the expressive means of popular and classical instruments, as well as those of the human voice, but he especially explored Romanian folk dances and mainly their rhythm, suggestively expressed by the hidden language of modern percussion. The composer creates a world of celestial sonorities where musical time and space are very well outlined.

Keywords: composition, time, technique, interpretation.

Tiberiu Olah – biographical aspects

Tiberiu Olah was born in December 1927, in Arpăsel, Bihor County and lived until 2002. He graduated the "E. Gojdu" Highschool in Oradea (1946) – where he met E. Szalay who helped him discover the new music, the Music Academy in Cluj-Napoca (1946-1949) - M. Eisikovits having played a defining role in his musical formation and the "P.I. Ceaikovski" Conservatory in Moscow (1949-1954), the composition section, having Evgheni Messner as his teacher.

He participated in various courses, winning scholarships, among which we mention the electronic music courses – the "Siemens" Foundation in Munich – 1966; Internationale Ferienkurse



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für Neue Musik, Darmstadt: 1967-1969; a stage of creation (composer-in-residence) in the Berliner Künstler programm, West Berlin (1969-1970); the creation scholarship "Koussevitzky": 1971; research stage in the field of musical time and space, as a guest of DAAD (Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst), West Berlin – 1978-1979.

He taught orchestration and composition at the National Music University, Bucharest (1954-2001) and received his title of Doctor in Music (1978) in Cluj-Napoca, with the thesis "Unele probleme în legătură cu timpul și spațiul muzical" ("Certain Aspects Regarding Musical Time and Space").

He composed more than 120 titles comprising all musical genres (symphonic, vocal-symphonic, chamber music, choral, film music, stage music etc.)³. His subjects of meditation, transposed in sonorous images, were the visual arts, literature and historic events.

Musical analysis of the work

Equinoxes is a trio for voice, clarinet and piano composed in 1957 and considered to occupy one of the first places in the hierarchy of Olah's works. With this work the composer presents different stylistic trajectories connected to variational techniques, as well as to the modal world, deepening research in the area of rhythm and of the timbral novelty. At the same time, he innovates certain musical patterns of form. His language is complex and reaches modal principles resembling those of O. Messiaen, generating the chromatic total.

³ Among them we mention: Sonatina pentru pian – Sonatina for piano (1953); Cvartetul de coarde – String quartet (1952); Sonatina pentru vioară și pian – Sonatina for violin and piano (1953) which was awarded the 1st Prize of the Romanian Academic Society; Trio pentru vioară, clarinet și pian – Trio for violin, clarinet and piano (1954); Simfonia I – Symphony I (his BA thesis), II, III (1955, 1986, 1989); Cantata pe vechi versuri ciangăiești- Cantata on Csangos verses (1956) which won a prize at the Youth Festival in Moscow (1957); Echinocții – Equinoxes (1957); the cantata Prind visele aripi – Dreams get Wings, on lyrics by Maria Banuș (1959); the oratorio Constelația Omului – Constellation of Man, on lyrics by Maiakovski (1960); the Brâncuși cycle - Coloana infinitului – The Endless Column (1963), work which obtained the Koussevitzky prize for recording (1967-68), Sonata pentru clarinet solo – Sonata for Clarinet Solo (1963), Spațiu și ritm – Space and Rhythm (1964), Poarta sărutului – The Gate of Kiss (1965), Masa tăcerii – Table of Silence (1968); Translații I, II – Translations I, II (1968, 1973); Perspective - Perspectives (1969); Sonata pentru violoncel solo – Sonata for Cello Solo (1970); Simfonia pentru orchestră de coarde – Symphony for String Orchestra (1970); Invocații I, II – Invocations I, II (1971, 1975); Armonii I, II, III, IV – Harmonies I, II, III, IV (1975, 1976, 1978, 1981) etc. He also wrote film music, ballet and choreographic transpositions among which we mention Răscoala – The Rebellion (1965), Mihai Viteazul (1970), Pe aici nu se trece – Trespassing Forbidden (1975), Poarta sărutului – The Gate of Kiss and Coloana fără sfârșit – The Neverending Column in the choreographic version of Vasile Marcu etc.

Considering the strict meaning of the word *equinoxes*, the present title refers to those moments when the day is equal to the night and proposes special attention to the notion of equality, so characteristic for Olah's way of thinking. This equal succession, night followed by day, brings the idea of cosmos, outlined by allusions to a pagan ritual of worshipping the stars through the titles of the four parts: *Luceafărul (The Morning Star)*, *Descântecul Lunei (The Moon Spell)*, *Eclipsa (The Eclipse)* and *Descântecul Soarelui (The Sun Spell)*.

The total darkness, the absolute blackness in the *Eclipse* is followed by an opening towards light in the final part, a moment charged with meaning. This final opening towards light will be a sort of a defining axis for the personality of Tiberiu Olah in his future works due to the fact that the philosophical meditation rendered by the musical discourse will remain in the mind and conscience of the audience when the music ends.

The relation man-universe is described by the humanization of the cosmos in the 3rd part, created by the absence of the human voice. The direct continuation of this idea can be found later, in the oratorio-fantasy *Constelatia omului (Constellation of man)*, considered to be the beginning of the Brancusi cycle, in its turn the promoter of an infinite music because of its conception. Even though in the 3rd part we can find an apparent decrease in interest, contrary to appearances, an accumulation of tension is produced here, which will permanently evolve, culminating towards the finale.

Even from the beginning of the present work, the composer misses on specifying for which voice he wrote, but, judging by range, we can infer it is for a soprano or a tenor, and the entire musical discourse develops on vocals and consonants.

The predominant intervals are the minor seconds, easy to sing and very expressively connected, leading us into thinking of a Romantic technique, with the help of which the vocal soloist creates the musical discourse. Dynamic nuances, the idea of elevation towards the sky, as well as the repetition of certain melodic formulae under different aspects (identical or not) also contribute to the articulation of the melodic line.

As the musical language is modal, we notice numerous modal pedals, with various chords in different states.

From this point of view, we note certain symmetry of the four parts, part 1 with part 3 and part 2 with part 4, respectively.

In part 1 and 3 the modal structures have dodecaphonic tint, all the sounds in the chromatic total being equally important, but treated in the spirit of a larger metric freedom. The order of the apparition of sounds is strictly respected and we can consider these two parts as variants of equal importance of the same sonorous material, finding each other in one another, but each with its own specificity.

ECHINOCTII

Trio pentru voce, clarinet și pian

I LUCEAFĂRUL

TIBERIU OLAH

Calm $\text{♩} = 60$

Voce

Clarinetto in do

Piano

III ECLIPSA

l'istesso tempo

Clarinetto in do

Piano

beginning of part 1 and 3

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As a contrast, in par 2 and 4 we find fix micro-modal patterns, but with the metric alternation of longer values, imbedded with small interjections with shorter values.

Ex. 2

II
DESCÂNTECUL LUNEI

l'istesso tempo, ma poco agitato [45]

IV
DESCÂNTECUL SOARELUI

l'istesso tempo

beginning of part 2 and 4

A novel aspect of this work is given by the tempo (fourth = 60) identical in the four parts, highlighting the idea of continuation and infirming the idea of cycle or of macro-form presupposed by the subtitle *Trio*. This is not a trio in the classical understanding of the term, where the instrumental ensemble is related to a certain pattern of form, which could have been built on archetypal data; this is music written for three executants.

Beginning from this way of thinking, the idea in *Equinoxes* will be later developed in *Invocatii – Invocations*, *Translatii – Translations* etc. returning to the tempo, we notice increased attention given by the composer to the progress of sounds as well as to the rubato character, without an inch of monotony. We also note here various overlapping melismatic patterns in voice and clarinet.

Ex. 3

2nd part, bars 50-52

In the present work, the innovative solutions offered by Tiberiu Olah are more apparent in the area of melodic, while they can be found, even though less, in the stage of not completely realized intention, in the rhythmic segment and very little in the area of patterns of form. By clearing them gradually we reach a superior synthesis from which a personal system, with rigorous aesthetic basis, will result.⁴

⁴ Our analytical vision is based on the very pertinent observations of Mrs. Carmen Antoaneta Stoianov, in the study *Tiberiu Olah*, in *Muzica* journal, no.II/1978, p. 7-17.

Short interpretative analysis

We will refer here especially to the large diversity of dynamic indications (raising problems of technical and expressive realization for the interpreters), as well as to those aspects of instrumental writing which could represent nodal points in the performance of the work.

Part 1, *Luceafărul (The Morning Star)*, debuts in a simple manner, by a quasi-counterpoint movement of the question - answer (voice - clarinet) type on a pedal (piano), (see **Ex. 1**) with accumulations of planes and tensions lasting up to bar 16, the role of the instruments remaining moderate. Beginning with bar 17 the musical discourse evolves towards the culminating point (bars 25-28), with rhythmic incursions on the piano showing technical virtuosity and rhythmic precision. This entire culmination creates an accentual impression.

Ex. 4

The musical score for Ex. 4 is presented in two systems. The first system, labeled '25', shows a piano part with a dynamic of *f cresc.* and a *piu cresc.* marking, leading to a fortissimo (*ff*) section. The second system, labeled '30', begins with a pianissimo (*pp dolce*) section, followed by a fortissimo (*fff*) section, and ends with a pianissimo (*pp*) section. The score includes various rhythmic patterns, slurs, and dynamic markings throughout.

bars 25-28

In this section we have a very large dynamic variety, from pianissimo (*pp*) to forte fortissimo (*fff*). The composer's pianistic mastery can be observed in the end of this section by the *decresc.* Effect written in the last 5 bars; we have a fourth – a flat, *d flat* - with legato until the end, while the sound diminishes (*decresc.* realized by legato).

Ex. 5



bars 38-42

The composer uses all the registers of the piano, from F sharp 4 (bar 26) to F sharp 1 (bar 28), which makes us think of the Romantic mobility of changing registers (see **Ex. 4**).

In the 2nd part, *Descântecul Lunei (The Moon Spell)*, when compared to the 1st part, from a dynamic point of view, we note that the balance is kept more on the nuances of piano, with abrupt exits towards forte and fortissimo and returns by subito to the basic nuance, piano. We also notice plays of trills on the piano and the finale of this part is realized constantly, with the same diminishing by legato (similar to part 1).

Ex. 6

bars 68-71

The third part, *Eclipsa (The Eclipse)*, although the shortest and missing the voice, is the most challenging from the technical point of view, due to the use of small values in increased tempo. The composer uses a pretentious rhythm (bars 78-85), which compels, especially the pianist, to refer to various “tricks”, requiring him/her to use creativity in distributing the sonorous material to the two hands (reminding of Scarlatti’s technique), as well as much practice in the synchronization with the clarinet.

Ex. 7

bars 78-81

In the final part, *Descântecul Soarelui (The Sun Spell)*, on the piano, there is the problem of the simultaneity of the two hands on the triplets, but also that of the touch with respect to clarity while for the clarinet rhythmic precision is primordial. Tiberiu Olah treats very carefully the notation of nuances which support the phrasing of the voice and the dynamic unity of the musical discourse.

Ex. 8

bars 130-132

The composer resembles Enescu from this point of view due to the importance he gives the dynamization of every sound. Maintaining this idea, Olah comes to meet the pianist by using the triplets passage in a fast tempo, in an acute register.

bars 116-117

The present work has a moderated writing from the perspective of instrumental difficulty, but raising, in certain places, vocal difficulties.

Considering all of the above, the conclusions of our study can be summed up by the following phrase belonging to Tiberiu Olah:

“In order to be a composer, you have to be a pioneer to a certain extent, meaning that you have to be able to discover characteristics of the material you are working with, by selection and intuition”⁵.

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Translated by Roxana Huza

⁵ Olah, Tiberiu, *Originalitatea în muzică (Originality in music)* in: *România Literară*, 3.III.1977

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