

ELEMENTS OF THE MUSICAL DISCOURSE IN *MARCH* FOR SOLO CLARINET BY MARȚIAN NEGREA*

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SUMMARY. This study analyzes a Romanian well-known work, entitled *March*, by the Romanian composer Martian Negrea, originally written for flute and reciter and then adapted for solo clarinet by the author, in collaboration with the Romanian clarinet player Aurelian Octav Popa. The piece is based on the homonymous poem of Lucian Blaga, from his debut volume *Poems of Light*. The study focuses on describing the structure of this piece, made up of three generating musical motives, which, through continuous variational transformations, give rise to other structural entities, themselves subject to further variations. This method of achieving musical discourse, of extreme economy of thematic material, produces, paradoxically, images of extraordinary musical spontaneity and naturalness, which leave, at first glance, the impression of a continuous improvisation. This musical image, explosive and spontaneous, is certainly in relation to the lyrics of Blaga, who suggests the rebirth of nature with the arrival of spring. The poem is heard as a spoken text in the flute version, but it's only a literary reference for the solo clarinet version.

Keywords: Negrea, March, clarinet, solo, structural, analysis

The work *March* for clarinet solo composed by Marțian Negrea is one of those happy cases where, just as in Modest Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition*, for piano, arranged by Maurice Ravel – within proportion, of course – the transcription becomes more popular than the original. Part of the Romanian clarinet players' repertoire for half a century, it continues to raise the interest of performers and analysts as a small, charming piece of jewelry.

Although Marțian Negrea's complex personality is well-known, it is only proper to remind our readers several significant facts about him: he was born in Vorumloc (nowadays Valea Viilor), Sibiu, in 1893, he attended the Hungarian Roman-Catholic High school in Odorhei (1909-1910) and the Andreian Pedagogic Seminar in Sibiu (1910-1914), where he studied vocal music and church singing

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with Timotei Popovici. He pursued his studies at the Music Academy in Budapest (1917-1918), where his harmony teacher was Zoltan Kodály. Then, he studied at the Academy of Music and Arts in Vienna with the most prominent personalities of his time. It was there that he assimilated the strong European cultural tradition, represented by the most important stylistic directions in the beginning of the 20th century (post-romanticism, impressionism, expressionism, chromatic neo-modalism), which blended with his Transylvanian sensitivity. His entire artistic creation shows that the Transylvanian folk melody, made essential and suppressed, grafted on the most refined and subtle methods of developing musical discourse that peaked in European music. Back home, Negrea uses the knowledge gained during his studies first as a professor at the Conservatory in Cluj, then as artistic director of the Gheorghe Dima Philharmonic orchestra. He moved to Bucharest during the Second World War, taught harmony at the Conservatory there until 1970 and passed away in 1973. Among his compositions, not very numerous, but varied, chamber music holds a significant place, both by his works for solo instruments (piano, harp, flute) and by the *String quartet* op. 17 (1949) or the *Suite for clarinet and piano* op. 27 (1960).

March was, in the beginning, part of the cycle *Ten songs on lyrics by Lucian Blaga*, composed in 1957, but published only in 1969. While the first nine "songs" are written for voice and piano, the last one is for flute and the one reciting.

The adaptation for clarinet – a very inspired idea, taking into account its expressive possibilities, far superior to those of the flute – was written in cooperation with the clarinet player Aurelian Octav Popa, then a young virtuoso, in view of presenting it to the *Spring in Prague Festival* in 1959, where the musician won the second prize. This adaptation was later promoted by the *Clarinet method* in two volumes belonging to the teachers Dumitru Ungureanu and Eugen Radovici, which is still being used today.

The cycle *Ten songs on lyrics by Lucian Blaga* is not Marțian Negrea's first contact with Blaga's poetry: it was preceded, in 1955, by another cycle, this time *Eight songs on lyrics by Lucian Blaga* op. 9. Choosing Blaga's poetry was bold as, only a few years before, in 1948, Lucian Blaga had been dismissed from the Philosophy of Culture Department of the University in Cluj, his poems were banned from publishing and he had taken refuge in working at translations and in his librarian activity. The *Ten songs...* were only published, as we mentioned above, in 1969, when Lucian Blaga was posthumously rehabilitated. The poem *March*, whose lyrics can be heard in the version for flute, but indulge in only floating among melismas, discretely suggesting poetic images in the clarinet solo version, is part of the poet's debut volume, *Poems of Light*, published in 1919 and dedicated to his wife, Cornelia Brediceanu.

Without venturing into a literary analysis, we limit ourselves to including the text of the poem in the present paper, leaving the interpretation of Blaga's

tropes to those who are competent to do so. We can notice though the use of blank verse, leaving a strong impression of spontaneity and freedom:

March

From tangled cloud fleece
wind spins
long rain threads.
Flighty snowflakes
would lay on mud,
but as they loathe it –
up they go again
and fly to find
nest in boughs.
Wind and cold –
and light avid
bourgeons
prick up their ears in collars.

Negrea's music doesn't just paint, in a madrigal manner, step by step, word by word the poetic text, but it musically captures the essence of this moment, of winter's end, of the coming of spring with the slow rebirth of nature. Undoubtedly, the right word to describe the musical rendering of the text is "sprouting", as Negrea manages, in this miniature of just one page, to use the motivic material with maximum of parsimony, at the same time leaving the impression of free, improvisation-like music.

The work bears the tempo indication *Larghetto* and it unravels in a measure of three fourths (with two exceptions, where there are diversions towards two fourths and four fourths). Although it doesn't explicitly have the indication *rubato*, the metric interpretation of the music would be utterly absurd. The atemporal character of this music is given by the very diverse metrics, alternating long durations (half note, double dotted fourth note etc.) with clusters of very short durations (semiquavers and demisemiquavers). Negrea decisively avoids any tonal centering or balance point, maintaining the melodic discourse in a chromatic imponderability of both modal (in relation with the Eastern-European folklore, difficult to identify in easy to recognize situations, but rather present as a suggestion) and atonal origin (in the tradition of the second Viennese School expressionism). From the interval point of view, we remark the abundance of the chromatics, of intervals like augmented fourth, augmented seventh and diminished ninth. Several times, along with the explicitly present sevenths and ninths, we find successions of two or three intervals circumscribing the augmented seventh and the diminished ninth.

Ex. 1

11

mf *f* *mf* *p*

or

34

f *mf* *f* *mf*

The work is assembled starting from three rhythmic-melodic evolving incisions (for a more comfortable study of the material, we will use the term “motive”) which we will name motive 1, motive 2 and motive 3, present even from the beginning, in succession:

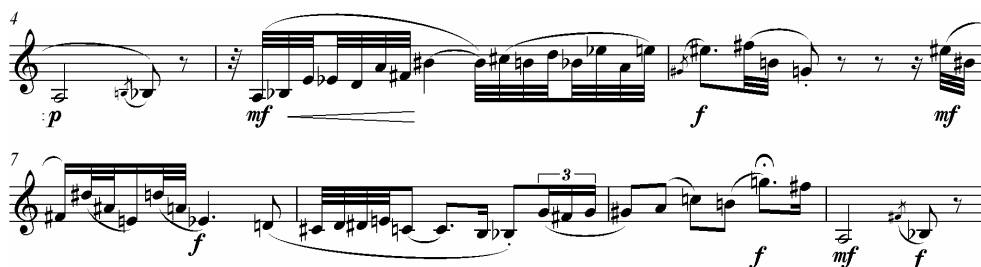
Ex. 2

p *mf* *p* *f* *p* *p*

motive 1 motive 2 motive 3

Motive 1 is a crusic rhythmic-melodic structure, formed, as it can be noticed, from a long value, tied with a second, short one, at an interval of minor second, with *staccato*. The second motive has an anacrusic structure, made up of a group of demisemiquavers – a chromatic melody with an ascending general profile – followed by a note with a double dotted rhythmic value, continued with a short gesture, of two notes at a descending interval of major seventh. Finally, motive 3 is also an anacrusic structure, made up of an ascending arpeggio (triplet of semiquavers) with a stop on an eight with *staccato*, followed by a reiteration of the short gesture in the end of motive 2, this time with the interval of minor ninth. Although we named the three motives with different numbers, in order to follow their later development more easily, it is clear that they are somewhat related: ascending melodic gestures, finalized on short, high notes, abundant chromatics. We can consider that the fragment above, made up of the succession of the three motives, represents the “theme” (pushing a bit the notion) of the entire miniature, as what follows is nothing but its repetition five times, with little to very heavy variation. We will further on present how the “sprouting” of the first section gives birth to the second one.

The first repetition of the “theme” starts, by conjunction, on the very last sound of motive 3. If motive 1 enriches, discretely, only with an appoggiatura (which can be considered merely an ornament), motive 2 has an “excrecence” (motive 4), right in the middle, with the role of interior enlargement, “funnel” like, generated by the multiplication with step by step intervallic enlargement of the reversed chromatics of the varied motive 1. This “excrecence”, which now seems only an element of development, will become a pretext, in its turn, for variations, for example in measures 29-30. The final short gesture of motive 2 is also amplified, fragmenting the leap of seventh in two intervals (perfect fifth and major third). This final gesture (which will be called “motive 5”) is immediately followed by echoes (approximate from the intonation point of view, but rhythmically precise, which makes the resemblance undeniable), in descending semitone sequences. These sequences are followed by a short moment of improvisation, where a small fragment of ascending chromatic scale (motive 6) becomes a “bud” for later in the musical discourse. This quasi-improvisational moment ends with the final gesture of motive 3 (apparently that is all that is left of it), but amplified from a minor ninth to a major thirteenth. The end of the first reiteration of the “theme” coincides, again, with the beginning of a new “variation”. One can see all these metamorphoses in the example below:

Ex. 3

We will revise the elements of variation for a better understanding:

- m. 4, appoggiatura
- m. 5, beat 3, “funnel” (motive 4)
- m. 6, beat 1, fragmentation of the major seventh (motive 5)
- end of m. 6, beat 1 of m. 7, sequencing of the fragmented seventh
- m. 8, beat 1, appearance of the fresh melodic element, with ascending chromatics (motive 6), followed by a descending leap of third and descending chromatics
- end of m. 9, first beat of m. 10, the final gesture of motive 3, amplified from a minor ninth to a major thirteenth

It is worth showing how the small and discreet chromatic cell multiplies itself, at a rather long temporal distance (in measures 17-22), generating an ample section:

Ex. 4

17 *mf* *ff* *espressivo molto e dolente*

20

22 *f* *ff* *mf*

In the whirlpool of continuous variations, musical fragments originally belonging to different motives end up resembling one another (as it happens in the end of motive 4 – the “funnel”, born from the ending of motive 2 – which, by fragmentation, ends up related to motive 3).

We don't wish to continue the “note by note narration” of the variational development, holding that Negrea's method of processing the thematic material was sufficiently explained. We attach the entire score, with sketchy markings of the elements of construction and of the way they “develop” from one another. We wish to conclude the analysis as we began it, with several general considerations that we consider useful for the understanding of the artistic message.

Even at a simple glance at the score, the obvious disproportion between expansive and depressive alterations draws attention, in favour of the first ones. In an atonal melodic context we would have expected a balanced notation, with the choice of the most “handy” notation type. Still, the abundance of sharp notes (there is even a double sharp note) leads us into thinking that Marțian Negrea relates the chromatic expansiveness with the brightness and optimism of Blaga's poems, with the hopeful and energy giving arrival of spring (let us not forget that the poem belongs to the volume *Poems of Light*). Though maybe an uncomfortable reading (instead of e sharp and b sharp would have surely been easier to read f and c respectively), these alterations give the interpreter, and, through him, the listeners, a strong impression of light. Also, with the exception of certain moments (previously mentioned) of descending sequences, the melodic profiles are also ascending, probably in order to render the same idea, of spring brightness.

Another aspect to consider is the fact that, although a monadic work, there are very many harmonic latencies especially referring to the vertical structures of the Second Viennese School – we already mentioned the successions of intervals circumscribing the major seventh or the minor ninth. We present bellow a short selection of melodic structures with arpeggios that offer clear harmonic suggestions (the second example contains the sequencing of the harmonic structure of juxtaposed fourths, one perfect and the other one augmented, called in European musicology the “Viennese trichord”):

Ex. 5

Finally, as a conclusion, we wish to acknowledge the remarkable power of suggestion of Lucian Blaga’s poetry, which, by the poem *March*, was surely the spark to give birth to this charming miniature, as well as to remind the fact that Blaga’s poems served as literary support and inspired many works belonging to composers from Cluj, sufficing it to mention Sigismund Toduță and Tudor Jarda or, from the following generation, Cornel Țăranu, Valentin Timaru or Eduard Terényi. In fact, any enumeration of names is superfluous, as Blaga was an obsession for the entire School of composition in Cluj, an obsession carried on from the generations mentioned above to the youngest composers.

(Translated by Roxana Huza)

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Martie (March)

musical adaptation after Marțian Negrea

Larghetto

Clarinet in B \flat

motive 1 motive 2 motive 3 motive 1 var motive 2 with motive 4 inserted

p < *mf* *più f* *p* < > *p* *mf*

motive 5
(fragmenting of the
motive 2 finale)

motive 5 sequenced

motive 6 and quasi-improvisation

finale
motive 3 var motive 1 var

6 *f* *mf* *f* *f* *mf* *f*

motive 2 var

motive 3 var

derivation from
motive 6

motive 4

11 *mf* *f* *mf* *p* < *f* *ff* < *f*

motive 5 massively sequenced

derivation from motive 6

motive 3 var motive 1 inversed

16 *mf* *ff*

motive 6 sequenced

19 *espressivo molto e dolente*

derivation from motive 3

motive 1 var

motive 2 var

22 *f* *ff* > *mf* *f*

motive 3 var

motive 1 var

motive 2 var

motive 4 var

27 *mf* *f*

quasi-improvisation, culmination, based on the inversed motive 6

final of motive 4 var

31 *ff* *f*

motive 1 var

motive 5 var

motive 3 var

final of motive 2

34 *f* *mf-f* *mf* > *p* *perdendosi*

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