

THEODOR GRIGORIU'S ORATORIO *CANTI PER EUROPA**

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SUMMARY. Theodor Grigoriu's oratorio *Canti per Europa* has four parts called frescos, it is based on a libretto containing verses of several poets from various times and spaces and it musically renders the antagonism from the creative and the destructive capacity of Europe. The creative impulse can be found in the image of a huge crater, where Dresden Opera House used to be before being destroyed by the bombings. The methods of analysis – historical, systematical etc. – had their main purpose the enhancing of the complex thorough musical writing.

Keywords: Vocal-symphonic, oratorio, fresco, antagonism

1. Introduction

Theodor Grigoriu's oratorio for choir and orchestra *Canti per Europa* written in 1976 has a libretto based on the verses of Rimbaud, Eminescu, Shelley, Garcia Lorca, Rilke, Pushkin and Dante and it has as a *motto* the following expression *To a world of harmony, light and peace*. The work has four great moments, called frescos: *Abduction of Europa*, *The Childhood of the Demiurges*, *Weeping of the Muses* and *Hymn to Apollo*.

The author clearly defines the notion of fresco with three constitutive elements. They belong to paintings without frames, to an ensemble composition with direct contact with the receiver, where details are naive and even scholarly due to the clear intention of the author.

The initial impulse, which triggered the composition of this oratorio, was the tragic image seen by the composer in Dresden after it had been destroyed by the bombings only in one night. Theodor Grigoriu recalls the image of the Dresden Opera House – where masterpieces of music history were first performed, *Freischütz* by Weber, *The Flying Dutchman* by Wagner or *The Knight of the Rose* by Richard Strauss – destroyed by the bombings leaving only a huge crater behind.

* Acknowledgement:

The present paper was carried out within the research project type Post-Doctoral, code 468/2010, *The Research, Systematization and Promotion of the Genre of Oratorio in Romanian Music of the 20th Century*, project director Lucian Ghișa, financed by C.N.C.S.I.S.

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The author can see and he musically renders the immense capacity Europe has for edification, as opposed to the important destructive force; an antagonism that is perfectly expressed in the libretto.

The first part – *The Abduction of Europa* – is exclusively based on the verses of Rimbaud presenting the myth of Zeus, disguised as a bull, abducting Europa. The second fresco, called *The Childhood of the Demiurges*, is characterized by movement as the choir scans the names of European cities where battles took place, while in the final section the author calls again on Rimbaud's lines artistically describing the image of war: *Puddles of blood, burning embers, thousands of dead...*¹ the third fresco is in opposition to the previous one due to its slow tempo, evoking, in separate sections, the crying of muses Uta or Music, all based on the libretto containing poems by Eminescu, Shelley, Garcia Lorca, Rilke and Pushkin. The final part of the oratorio is entitled *Hymn to Apollo*, based on the verse from the *Divine Comedy* by Dante.

The oratorio was first interpreted in Bucharest, on June the 4th 1978, by the symphonic choir and orchestra of Romanian Radio and Television Society and conducted by Iosif Conta.

The work is based on an innovative principle of composition by using sonorous segments, a technique developed by Theodor Grigoriu in a characteristic manner. The principle is not entirely new, as it is deeply rooted in the area of the accompanied monody, or, later on, in the orchestral pedals used by the classic composers. The 20th century develops the principle of composition, extending it and fitting it closely on the diversity of genres specific to the Avant-garde.

This is not the first attempt of the composer, as Pontic Elegy, preceded it on verses by Ovid, in 1969 and by *Tristia* for strings and brass, composed in 1973; therefore, the oratorio belongs to a cycle dedicated to this composition technique. It offers the composer multiple possibilities including the overlapping of continuous or discontinuous lines, of melodic lines, of harmonic or dynamic blocks etc. Due to the development of this technique by Theodor Grigoriu, a new term invented by him was implemented here "*tectonica*" (*tectonic*) – derived from "*arhi-tectonica*" (*archi-tectonic*). The author defines this term as a structure, an ensemble of insufficiently developed elements, without clearly established laws for organizing the sonorous material.

The oratorio develops in a linear manner, the proposed scenarios is presented, with clear intentions for understanding the text and the choir as the main character of the entire dramatic pursuit. The musical principles are from the area of permanent development, without using the reprise technique.

¹ n.trad.

2. The Score

The score of the oratorio, printed in excellent graphic conditions by Editura Muzicală in 1979, contains a dedication: *To all lucid people who fight for a world of harmony, light and peace.*

The entire libretto is then presented, with its four-part structure.

An important segment is reserved to technical indications and conventional signs, which are thoroughly explained for an exact rendition of the composer's intentions. The score also mentions the exact placement of choir and orchestra and a few suggestions for the conductor; all these show not only the minuteness of the composer in writing this piece, but also his wish for the text to be better understood and perceived.

The orchestra is impressive: 13 woodwinds, 14 brass instruments, 2 pianos, harp, organ, a massive percussion section, a choir made up of minimum 80 persons and the string orchestra containing 44 musicians.

One can notice the attention for every detail in the guidelines offered to instrument players: the pianos must be without the lid, the clarinet has to be a bass clarinet, the counter-bassoon and the bassoon are seated in front of the double basses, separate from the woodwinds, the organ has a special registration adapted to the organ of the Romanian Radio and Television Society etc.

Theodor Grigoriu declared regarding the launch of his own score: "I thought that the printing of the *Canti per Europa* shouldn't have been done anyhow, anyway. Every author has the legitimate wish to see his name on a book with a beautiful graphic presentation, but here, as it is about Europe, who gave us Gutenberg, the print was a component for *long lasting*, beyond the author and his work, both of them frail. The fact that I've always been impressed by graphic art helped me design a balanced book, filled with light [...]"²

In the end of the score, the composer chooses a new *motto*, belonging to Michelangelo, which emotionally and aesthetically completes the oratorio:

*"Precious is sleep, better to be of stone,
while the oppression and the shame still last;
not seeing and not hearing, I am blest;
so do not wake me, hush! Keep your voice down."³*

² Grigoriu, Theodor, *Muzica și nimbul poeziei (Music and the halo of poetry)*, Bucharest, Editura Muzicală, 1986, p. 448.

³ Translation by Creighton Gilbert, in: *Complete Poems and Selected Letters of Michelangelo* by Michelangelo Buonarroti, edited by Robert N. Linscott, Princeton University Press, 1980 – source: http://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/182763.Michelangelo_Buonarroti (n. trad.)

3. Fresco I – The Abduction of Europe

The first section of the oratorio is made up of two distinct moments: the beginning – with the role of a prelude and introduction of the audience to the general atmosphere; the second part of the first fresco brings the choir to the centre of the discourse in order to present the first poetic fragment of Arthur Rimbaud – from the poem *Chaire et soleil* – describing the ancient myth of the abduction of Europa by Zeus.

The piece begins in a tempo *Moderato*, with successive entrances of the woodwinds, with simple, double or triple appoggiaturas, in a pointillist form, all on a pedal of the violins:

Ex. 1

Canti per Europa – Fresco I – beginning:

Moderato

2

5

VI 1-20
ppp

The first entrance of the choir is dedicated to feminine voices, soprano and alto, on the vowel A, with a restricted range, by clusters, with highlighted sounds. This has the role of completing the static, but tense, atmosphere of the moment.

Ex. 2

Canti per Europa – Fresco I – first entrance of the choir:

Gradually, the range and the dynamics grow due to the intervention within the same linear technique, of the pedals of all the instruments in the orchestra. Percussion helps the uproar created and the increase of dramatic tension of this prelude, while the culminating moment is marked by the *tutti* of the orchestra in *ff*, highlighted by the cry of the choir – which has reached an extreme range (cluster made up of *g 2*, *a 2* and *b 2*). If until this first climax moment, the entire musical pursuit had an ascending direction – anabasis – the end of the introduction stands under the sign of katabasis, of dynamic and dramatic collapse of musical discourse.

The second moment of the first part uses the same techniques of composition, with a novelty in the fact that the choir now presents A. Rimbaud's text. The entire moment concentrates on the linear development of the text.

Ex. 3

Canti per Europa – Fresco I – linear development of Rimbaud's text:

Musical score for Ex. 3, showing four staves of music with lyrics: și ZE - US - TA - UR DU CE - CA-N LEA GĂN.

The dramatic expression of the text is emphasized by specific musical elements. On the text *cu ochii închiși ea moare* (*with her eyes closed, she dies*⁴) the choir does a descending *glissando* on the duration of a minor seventh.

Ex. 4

Canti per Europa – Fresco I – descending glissando emphasizing the expressiveness of the text:

Musical score for Ex. 4, showing four staves of music for Soprano (S), Alto (A), Tenor (T), and Bass (B) with lyrics: EA MOA-RE.

The text is incompletely reprised, growing in range and dynamics; the climax of the segment is right on *Europa goală, ce brațul alb și-l prinde* (*Europa naked, holds on to her white arm*⁵). The segment ends with a chord on D in the choral compartment, underlining the word *divină* (*divine*). The tonality – which will later become specific to the oratorio form – is not chosen by chance, as we can notice the antagonism between word – divine – and the meaning of D, here suggesting the telluric.

4. Fresco II – The Childhood of the Demiurges

The second part of the oratorio represents the point of maximum intensity of the piece, an energetic protest, suppression, but also an urge for the peace. This section is divided into three fragments: the first one is dedicated

⁴ n. trad.

⁵ idem

to the orchestra and repeated sounds and ample melodic discourses are predominant; the second fragment accumulates tension, the atmosphere becomes dramatic due to the choir scanning the names of the cities where bloody battles took place along history; the third section reprises Rimbaud's text, where one can notice the pathetic appeal to stop all wars.

The fresco begins in *Allegro ben ritmato (quasi una toccata)* by a very intense moment, where the entire orchestra helps the thrilled development of the musical discourse. This rush is created by using repeated sounds, strong accents, clusters, successive entrances of instruments, preponderant use of the minor second as an interval generating the entire segment, tremolo, the already well-known pedals, polyphony of attacks inside the same group of instruments or in different groups and, of course, the percussion instruments play a very important role here.

Ex. 5

Canti per Europa – Fresco II – polyphony of attacks clusters:

In this chaos, in this lack of organization, we can notice the perfect organization of the musical writing, where every element is precisely mentioned in the score. "In order to lead a battle, everything has to be well organized; afterwards, there's always reorganizing taking place. Organizing, reorganizing, in order to disorganize the rival – an effort requiring logic and long-time thinking, for a very absurd goal. [...] sounds can suggest incoherence, sterile organizations, and useless activity. All this is made by the accumulation of a sonorous tension acting in all the registers of the orchestra, with the help of colours, melodic and rhythmic figures and of a psychological strategy."⁶

⁶ Doinaş, Ştefan Augustin, *Canti per Europa*, in: Grigoriu, Theodor, *Muzica și nimbul poeziei (Music and the halo of poetry)*, Bucharest, Editura Muzicală, 1986, pag. 453.

The second segment of the fresco is dedicated to the choir scanning the names of the cities where bloody battles took place. The indication given by the composer, which can be found in the score, comes to baffle even more the musical discourse: "In fresco II, the European cities of war have to be scanned with accents as asymmetric as possible and in a dramatic voice." Attention is directed exclusively towards the reciting of the choir, while the entire orchestra minimalizes its activity. The scanning is only interrupted by the signals of the trumpets, with obvious warrior accents.

Ex. 6

Canti per Europa – Fresco II – choral scanning:

235 A, AR - GOS, PLA - TE - EA, AN - FI - SA, CRA - NON, 240

The final segment of this part intervenes abruptly and in that moment the author calls again upon Rimbaud's poetry, insisting upon the stop of armed conflicts: *Republici ale lumii, imperii, regi, popoare, coloane, regimente, stați!* (*Republics of the world, empires, kings, peoples, columns, regiments stop!*)

From the point of view of musical pursuit, this moment uses an energetic writing, where the choir – in a unison soprano-tenor and alto-bass – presents an incisive melodic line gradually developing towards the pathetic cry of the solo tenor – *stați!* (*stop!*)

Ex. 7

Canti per Europa – Fresco II – a) melodic line of the choir; b) cry of the solo tenor.

a) BĂLȚI DE SÎN - GE, AR - ZÎND JĂ - RA - TEC, MII DE MORTI, UN

b) Ten solo fff STAȚI!
RE - GI - MEN - TE,

Fresco II ends abruptly with the appeal for peace and avoidance of all armed conflicts, in order to leave room for the third part of the oratorio, perceived as a requiem for the arts.

5. Fresco III – Weeping of the Muses

The third part of the work wishes to be a description of Europe devastated by wars. This is made by the presentation of several panels where muses are evoked one by one: the muse of arts, the muse of architecture, and the muse of poetry that of music and of that of sculpture, as their incompatibility with the armed conflict that is very well known:

- panel 1 – **Prelude** – on verses by Mihai Eminescu – the muse of poetry;
- panel 2 – **Evocation of the Voronet monastery** –orchestral moment – the muse of architecture;
- panel 3 – on verses by Shelley – the muse of poetry – symbol of the Earth;
- panel 4 – **Evocation of the beautiful Uta** – on verses by Mihai Eminescu – the muse of sculpture;
- panel 5 – on verses by Garcia Lorca – the muse of poetry – symbol of the Earth;
- panel 6 – **Evocation of music** – on verses by Rilke – the muse of music;
- panel 7 – on verses by Pushkin – the muse of poetry;
- panel 8 – **Evocation of *Spring/Primavera* by Botticelli** – the muse of painting.

Tab. 1

Fresco III – Weeping of the muses – parts

Fresco III – Weeping of the muses							
Prelude	Evocation of the Voronet monastery		Evocation of the beautiful Uta		Evocation of music		Evocation of <i>Spring/Primavera</i> by Botticelli
Panel 1	Panel 2	Panel 3	Panel 4	Panel 5	Panel 6	Panel 7	Panel 8
The muse of poetry	The muse of architecture	The muse of poetry	The muse of sculpture	The muse of poetry	The muse of music	The muse of poetry	The muse of painting
M. Eminescu	Orchestral moment	Shelly	M. Eminescu	Garcia Lorca	Rilke	Pushkin	Orchestral moment

Practically, the arts are evoked: architecture, sculpture, music, painting and poetry. The poetic art is the one connecting the panels, by the constant return to its evocation and by the author's choice to use verses with a clear symbolic of the earth.

The first panel of the third fresco presents M. Eminescu's verses – suggesting the muse of poetry – in a static, quasi-recitative manner, with long notes in the grave register of the basses, with a continuous descending chromatic profile – which can go until *passus duriusculus*.

Ex. 8

Canti per Europa – Fresco III – panel 1 – prelude – recitative of basses, descending profile:

S
A
T
B

Coro

ni - MI - CUL, LIN - TO

The second panel is dedicated to the evocation of the Voronet monastery – an exclusively orchestral moment, where the groups of instruments are in a permanent dialogue. Again, the second – in its various qualitative forms (minor, major, augmented etc.) – becomes the interval generating the entire segment.

Ex. 9

Canti per Europa – Fresco III – panel 2 – Evocation of the Voronet monastery – dialogue between the groups of instruments:

Fl 1
Clp
Cl 1
Cl 2
Fg 1
Fg 2
Cor 1
Cor 2
Glk
VI 1-4
5-8
9-11
12-14
15-17
18-20

mf cantando

25

The third panel brings again to our attention the muse of poetry and the symbol of the earth, by the verses of Shelly. Only addressed to the bass and alto, the text of the poet presents a tragic image of the wounds generated by armed conflicts. From a musical point of view, we notice the same recitative technique, which offers the possibility of a strong assimilation of the text. This time the third becomes the generating interval, used in all its qualitative variants.

Ex. 10

Canti per Europa – Fresco III – panel 3 – third – generating interval

The musical score for Ex. 10 is a choral setting for four voices: Soprano (S), Alto (A), Tenor (T), and Bass (B). The lyrics are in Romanian: "PĂ - MÎN TUL CE NU VĂ DĂ PÎI NE". The score is written in a recitative style with a common time signature. The lyrics are placed below the vocal staves, with horizontal lines indicating the phrasing of the text. The Soprano and Alto parts are marked with a dynamic of *mp* (mezzo-piano). The Tenor and Bass parts are marked with a dynamic of *mf* (mezzo-forte). The score is divided into four measures by vertical bar lines.

The following segment evokes the muse of sculpture by the musical presentation of beautiful Uta – sculpture found in the cathedral of Naumburg. This time, the choral voices of the soprano and the tenor would present in a linear way, Eminescu's text, and the orchestra playing the role of harmonic support in the form of the well-known pedals.

The fifth panel presents the verses of Garcia Lorca, reiterating the symbol of the earth. From a musical point of view this moment is for the bass, this becoming a leitmotif for the muse of poetry and the telluric symbolism.

The sixth panel, symbolizing the muse of music, represents a special moment – as it is only normal –. Rilke's verses are used as they are very inspired in evoking music: *O, Muzică: suflu-al statuilor, Tăcere a imaginii, Tu grai, unde graiuri sfârșesc* (*O, Music: breath of statues, Silence of image, You voice, where voices end*⁷).

There are three complementary planes here: the plane of the grave instruments, intoning together the pillars of the grave register in *Symphony in g* by W. A. Mozart, the plane of acute instruments which mark the changes appeared in the grave register and the plane of voices, presenting Rilke's text in a new manner, the composer using a polyphonic technique, with successive, almost imitative, entrances – a quasi-fugato. In addition, the intervals of wide respiration – sixths, sevenths and ninths give this moment a special air.

⁷ n. trad.

**Canti per Europa – Fresco III – panel 6 – Evocation of music –
entrances in imitation of choral voices:**

The musical score shows four vocal parts: Soprano (S), Alto (A), Tenor (T), and Bass (B). The lyrics are 'O, MU - ZI - CĂ:'. The Soprano and Tenor parts have short vocal interventions, while the Alto and Bass parts provide a linear development of the text. The score includes dynamic markings like 'mp' and 'p'.

The muse of poetry is evoked again by calling upon Pushkin's text in the following panel. The voices of bass and alto have the role of a linear development of the text – the melodic development combines close intervals (seconds and thirds), with intervals of wide respiration (sevenths and ninths). The soprano and the tenor have short interventions (only vocal) marking the most important words in Pushkin's text: *handcuffs, whips, passions, commandments, slaves*.

The third fresco ends with the evocation of the muse of painting distinguished by Botticelli's painting, *Spring/Primavera* – a very complex painting, with a special symbolic. From the musical point of view, this moment is exclusively orchestral and combines several planes: the solo violins, playing an ample melodic line, of wide respiration and symbolism, the second plane of the flutes and clarinets, which, by their trills in the acute register, suggest the song of birds and the third plane realized by the pedals of the grave strings and of the brass instruments.

Therefore, the third fresco of the oratorio ends in a relaxed register and atmosphere, nevertheless suggesting the idea of a requiem for the entire range of arts.

6. Fresco IV – Hymn to Apollo

The final part of the oratorio is entitled *Hymn to Apollo* and has as a literary support Dante's verses from the *Divine Comedy*. Four tercets are taken and as they act as a base, the composer will develop for every verse a harmonic support specific for this moment, which has not been used in the entire oratorio. The composer entitles them "harmonic baths" and they cover almost the entire chromatic interval. The final verse of the *Divine comedy* – *L'amor chem ove il sole e l'arte stelle (Love, moving suns and stars⁸)* – is

⁸ n. trad.

also taken and “harmonically arranged” in D, considered to be “the tonality of the earth”, therefore the symbol of earth becomes generative and unifying for the entire oratorio.

The fourth fresco is built on a motive from a hymn from the old temple of Eleusis – found and taken by the composer from a musical collection in Paris – symbolizing and suggesting the golden colour of the light by means of sounds.

From the point of view of musical construction, we have a very ample orchestral development, where we can distinguish a couple of levels; the dialogue between the acute instruments and the choir and a second level made up of the pedals of the other instruments making the harmonic background specific to this section.

The hymn dedicated to Apollo begins with a short prelude, the musical discourse covers three of the four tercets and before the fourth one, there comes a new orchestral moment, followed by the covering of the fourth tercet.

The final verse of the *Divine Comedy* brings the harmonic stability so much sought after together with the entire musical pursuit of the oratorio. The D tonality, appearing for the first time in the end of the first part, comes back now and makes for a harmonic leitmotif of the work.

Ex. 12

Canti per Europa – Fresco IV – finale – harmonic stability – D Major:

The image shows a musical score for four vocal parts: Soprano (S), Alto (A), Tenor (T), and Bass (B). The lyrics are: IŪ - BĪ-REA CA RE MIȘ-CĂ SORI ȘI STE LE. The score is in D Major and features a complex harmonic structure with many accidentals. The lyrics are written below the vocal lines, with some words like 'IŪ' and 'BĪ-REA' appearing to be stylized or misspelled versions of 'Iu' and 'Berea'.

7. Conclusions

The message expressed in the oratorio *Canti per Europa* can be found in the two antagonist capacities of the Europeans: creation as opposed to the destructive force. The telluric is the predominant symbol in the entire oratorio, being present not only in the poetic texts, but also dissimulated in the specific harmonic construction.

The work is made up of four frescos, a term taken from the art of painting, thus syncretism of the entire oratorio is completed by this special terminology.

LUCIAN GHIȘA

From a musical point of view, Theodor Grigoriu uses the technique of the pedal and that of the sonorous segment. The intervals of second, in their various qualitative expressions, become constitutive elements of the melodic construction. From a vertical perspective, the music develops most of the times in clusters, moments of polyphony being rarely used, as the main goal is the perception of the message and of the very valuable texts so skilfully chosen by the composer.

(Translated by Roxana Huza)

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