

## DODECAPHONY IN THE ROMANIAN MUSIC OF THE 20th CENTURY: MUSICOLOGICAL NOTES

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**SUMMARY.** Romanian music has a substantial compositional typology. The second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century has modern vision and is preoccupied with spectral music, meditation music and original sounds, using Romanian folklore as basic compositional principle and defining assured archetypes, in order to integrate randomness regarding control, minimalism, instruments spectrum and electroacoustic music. Well-known composers such as Dan Constantinescu, Aurel Stroe, Wilhelm Berger, Ștefan Niculescu, Anatol Vieru, Myriam Marbé and so many others used dodecaphonic technique as a demonstration of cultural integrity, a system searching the balance between the traditional music and modern concepts such as that all of the music should arise from a single compositional element: the 12-tone row.

**Keywords:** dodecaphony, Romanian music

### 1. Introduction

The first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is most likely “the most revolutionary decade in the recorded history”<sup>2</sup> (our translation): it is the decade marked by deep transformations of perspective within many domains of art and science. At the beginning of the century, Freud published one of its volumes which would propose a new perspective on the human mind; Max Planck published his quantum theory, questioning Euclidian geometry and Newtonian physics, while Albert Einstein – in 1905 – put forth his special theory of relativity. A short time before, the Wright brothers had shown that it is possible for an object heavier than the air to fly, while Arnold Schonberg, in 1908, published the first ideas which would dynamite the inside of the tonal system. In painting, at the end

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<sup>2</sup> Schonberg, Harold, *Viețile marilor compozitori (The Lives of the Great Composers)*, Ed. Lider, București, 2008, p. 578.



of the first decade Vassily Kandinsky experimented with non-representative painting, so it is no wonder that during the second decade the great reverberations of these concepts would influence even music. Reaching maturity, his style was equaled in *Ulysses* by J. Joyce and in *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* by Picasso.

“The 20<sup>th</sup> century represents a crossroads of **several essentially non-tonal concepts (atonalism, serialism dodecaphonic, micro-tonality), concerning the exploitation of popular modes** (the combination between tonal and modal, attempts to functionalize the modal harmony, using partial modes, mobile scales, complementary, with octaves or non-octaves, all of these techniques are framed within the organic modes resulting in a complex synthesis language – as featured in the compositions by Bartók, Enescu, etc)”<sup>3</sup> (our translation). The tension of these impossible meetings gave rise to a new type of music, beginning with one of the most controversial moments, i.e. the dodecaphonic music.

After debuting in freer atonal composition (A. Schoberg: 1908–1923), also reflected in certain compositions by A. Scriabin, I. Stravinski or Béla Bartók (Bagatelle no. 3), in 1923, A. Schoenberg perfected for the musical world a new system of melodic organization, called “Method of Composing with Twelve Tones Related Only with One Another” (or dodecaphonic, which supposes equality among all the sounds and their non-repeatability), producing a system that “corresponds to the principle of the absolute and unitary perception of musical space”<sup>4</sup>. Thus, the music grows farther from the harmony specific to Romanticism, and closer to the mainly melodic music (which characterizes the second Vienna School). The 1950s would impose this technique (so significant at the semantic level also – which gave it its true value) in the European and American area, as well as in Romania: Luciano Berio, Pierre Boulez, Luigi Dallapiccola, Igor Stravinsky are just a few composers who joined this movement, expanding it at the level of its durations, ways of attack and dynamics.

## 2. Discussion: Serialism/ Dodecaphony in the Romanian Music in the Second Half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century

The musicologist Valentina Sandu-Dediu describes the ways in which the Romanian music survived during the communist dictatorship **in the period 1965-1989** as follows: “the changes within the Romanian Communist Party, which occurred in 1965 after the death of Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej and the

<sup>3</sup> Sandu-Dediu, Valentina, *Muzica românească între 1944-2000 (Romanian Music between 1944 and 2000)*, Editura Muzicală, București, 2002, p. 57.

<sup>4</sup> Schonberg, Harold, *Viețile marilor compozitori (The Lives of the Great Composers)*, Ed. Lider, București, 2008, p. 588-589.

ascent to power of Nicolae Ceaușescu, naturally led to changes in the Romanian lifestyle. (...) In fact, certain liberalization was felt around 1965 (...). The illusion lasted only a few years, because, after his visits to North Korea and China, in 1971, Ceaușescu was “inspired” to imitate the Asian model of the Communist regime, adapted to a specific model (...). This is the beginning of a continuous degradation of the social, material, cultural life, which would acquire tragic accents in the ninth decade”<sup>5</sup> (our translation).

“If at the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s, the artists’ visits abroad, their access to cultural information seemed to be signs of liberalization, which in the subsequent years would become increasingly difficult, closely controlled, openly or not, by the *Securitate*. Many composers chose the path of the exile, forming a Romanian diaspora whose works would be recovered and become known after 1990. Others found ways to survive artistically within the country, depending on their own moral and aesthetical decisions (...). Anyway, it is clear that art, culture were not completely under the control of the official politics and ideology, finding ways to evade them”<sup>6</sup> (our translation).

The period 1965-1977 was characterized by the political system opening and closing successively, while coagulating its destructive resources which it would demonstrate in a short while: “to the generation mentioned previously, which started at the end of the 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s, new series of young composers, born between 1935 and 1945, many of whom proposed, in the seventh and eighth decades, orientations: towards the spectral music, with a focus on an original sound, towards the meditation incantation music, towards extracting certain compositional principles from the morphology of the Romanian folklore, defining certain archetypes, towards various methods of integrating randomness (more or less controlled, minimalism, the instrumental theater or the electroacoustic music. (...) The opposition between traditionalists and avant-gardists remains a source of debate even at the end of the 1960s”<sup>7</sup> (our translation). Among these major directions, the serial one (and the dodecaphonic one) have ample consequences in the Romanian musical culture.

Valentina Sandu-Dediu (the author of the most ample synthetic work dedicated to the Romanian music of the 20<sup>th</sup> century) also highlights “a certain feature which unifies the music from the former communist countries: the implicit protest – manifested through postmodern attitudes – against the official ideology”<sup>8</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Sandu-Dediu, Valentina, *Muzica românească între 1944-2000 (Romanian Music between 1944 and 2000)*, Editura Muzicală, București, 2002, p. 30.

<sup>6</sup> Idem, p. 31.

<sup>7</sup> Sandu-Dediu, Valentina, *Muzica românească între 1944-2000 (Romanian Music between 1944 and 2000)*, Ed. Muzicală, Bucharest, 2002, p. 35.

<sup>8</sup> Idem, p. 206.

(our translation). The Romanian modern school of composition emphasized the connection between the dodecaphonic technique and the modal one. Starting from the fact that the sum of the partitions of the module with the cardinal 12 (chromatic total) can give the following result:

- either a sum of (sub)modes (with a cardinal lower than 12) included in the broadest mode (the dodecaphonic series)
- applying the 12 series to itself (involving the intensive use of the maximum amount of 12 sounds)

## **2.1. Practical, Compositional Elements**

The dodecaphonic compositional technique can be subtly integrated in the proletarian culture of the time, being used in disguise in the 1950s, 1960s, 1970s in the Romanian cultural space. The dodecaphonic language in Romania was borne as a reaction to the mass culture (Jdanov's regime). Many composers viewed the use of the dodecaphonic technique as a way to protest against social, political and especially cultural realities which limited artists' work.

### **2.1.1. Main Dodecaphonists**

Dan Dediu describes the direction based on serialism, mentioning the following composers: "Ludovic Feldman, Zeno Vancea, Dan Constantinescu, Adrian Rațiu, Mircea Istrate, Doru Popovici, Carmen Cârnelci, Cristian Misievici"<sup>9</sup>.

**Dan Constantinescu** promoted a serial concept in almost all of his compositions, treating it as a fundamental creation concept: in his Sextet for strings, the composer proposes a random melodic modal behavior. The *Concerto for piano and string orchestra* reveals a classical architectonic perspective (the three constant movements, the form of sonata, lied or theme with variations as construction landmarks), "a modal serial thinking and composition and a harmonic palette mostly polytonal"<sup>10</sup> (our translation).

**Aurel Stroe** took advantage of the opening offered by Mihail Andricu's composition class: "there were musicians who supported the opening of the young towards the avant-garde, like Mihail Andricu, in whose house we could

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<sup>9</sup> Dediu, Dan, "Contribuții componistice românești după 1960" (Romanian Compositional Contributions after 1960), in *Noi istorii ale muzicilor românești (New Histories of Romanian Music's)*, vol. II, Editura Muzicală, București, 2020, p. 385.

<sup>10</sup> Bughici, Dumitru, *Repere arhitectonice în creația muzicală românească contemporană (Architectural Landmarks in Contemporary Romanian Musical Creation)*, Editura Muzicală, Bucharest, 1982, p. 181.

listen to the “decadent” and “formalist” music from the west of Europe, which was not included in the official courses at the Conservatory”<sup>11</sup> (our translation).

“For several years, their names, along with those of Ștefan Niculescu, Myriam Marbe, Dan Constantinescu, Aurel Stroe, Doru Popovici, Adrian Rațiu, Mircea Istrate, Cornel Țăranu from Cluj, will form a compact, unitary group, animated by the same interest for the new music. Most of them claimed to continue George Enescu’s modernity from his last compositions: the chamber symphony, seen by some more conservative composers as a departure from the national music (because of its chromatic side), as a way which should not be taken as a model by the young generation. (...) In 1958 some important modern compositions began to be heard, authored by Berg, Stravinsky, Prokofiev, and there are experiments with serialism in new formulae (...). It is interesting to place the type of serialism they implemented in the international context: it can be compared to what Milton Babbitt was working on in the USA rather than to the integral serialism of Boulez or Stockhausen in the European music”<sup>12</sup> (our translation).

In **Sonata no. 1 for piano**, Aurel Stroe chose to work with the first of the solutions previously mentioned (a) starting from the chromatic whole (apparently a series), but distributing its partitions (the subsets of the whole) in several groups of sounds (modes) in a sonorous structure, he managed to ‘hide’ the series (string of the total set) by fragmentation. In his themes in Sonata 1 (1955) he distributed a (sub)mode for the plan of the melody and another for that of the accompaniment: these 2 complementary modes (whose sum gives the chromatic total) managed, through a theme of folkloric origin, to use the series (from the perspective of the total involved set) and, at the same time, not to use it: the technique of the operations with (sub)sets of elements is a modal composition technique. See the *Book of modes*, top of the series and chromatic total, which discusses the differences in the treatment of the total mode (12 sounds):

- as a SERIES (dodecaphonic string): techniques from polyphony (reversal, recurrence, recurrence reversal) are used.

- as a MODE: operations with sets of sounds (see the theory of sets: sums, intersections, symmetrical difference, inclusion, Cartesian product) are used.

In this case, “Aurel Stroe approaches serialism, starting from modalism (...). Aurel Stroe freely uses both modes, so that sounds of mode 2 are present in the first theme of part I - in the second theme. In this way, he maintains a balance, smoothing out the modal contrast within the formal contrast”<sup>13</sup>.

<sup>11</sup> Sandu-Dediu, Valentina, *Muzica românească între 1944-2000 (Romanian Music between 1944 and 2000)*, Ed. Muzicală, Bucharest, 2002, p. 23-24.

<sup>12</sup> Idem, p. 25.

<sup>13</sup> Szilagy, Ana, *Incomensurabilitatea în opera-trilogie Orestia de Aurel Stroe (Incommensurability in Aurel Stroe's Oresteia Trilogy)*, Editura Muzicală, București, 2014, p. 31.

**Wilhelm Berger.** The Completely Chromatic Choral, Wilhelm Georg Berger and Pascal Bentoiu free serialism especially in symphonies. Symphony no. 6 *Armonia* applies the theory of proportional modes in synthesis with the serial technique, in Symphony no. 7 *Energia*, the composer resorts to mathematical principles at the architectural and thematic level. In Symphony no. 14 *BACH* there is a tension resulting from the antithesis between the old and the new<sup>14</sup>. Here, the modern compositional procedures – heterophony, the modal resources or the dodecaphonic series – combine with Bach's polyphony in praise of the German composer<sup>15</sup>. Within the Concerto for violin and orchestra by W. Berger, "the composer's merit consists in the personal way in which he shapes the sound matter through the well-defined expressive themes, combining modal elements (the general use of the chromatic complex), by combining the homophonous and polyphonic principles for entire areas and, at the microstructural level, through the presence and overlap of several tonal centers, through the metro-rhythmical variety"<sup>16</sup> (our translation).

**Anatol Vieru.** "His diverse and rich compositional creation fascinates through its originality, high level, innovations, and sound fantasy. As a representative of modalism, of a new modal technique that benefits from serial experiences, Vieru prefers to use subtle mathematical procedures"<sup>17</sup>. The Concerto for flute and orchestra (1958?) is the only dodecaphonic work by the composer; received with hostility by UCMR [the Romanian Union of Composers and Musicologists], it presents an interesting dichotomy between the dodecaphonic technique which describes a certain way of creating music (see the Schonberg's twisted melody) and the soft melody of A. Vieru (who uses the series in a melodic way).

"The systematization of octave modal scales according to the model of the algebraic group represents an amazing theoretical performance by Anatol Vieru, comparable with that of Allen Forte, who, in the United States of America, had created the theory of the pitch-class set. However, Vieru's thinking is

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<sup>14</sup> Sandu-Dediu, Valentina, "Înainte și după neoclasicism: Max Reger și Wilhelm Georg Berger" (Before and After Neoclassicism: Max Reger and Wilhelm Georg Berger), in *În căutarea consonanțelor (In Search of Consonants)*, Editura Humanitas, București, 2017, p. 52.

<sup>15</sup> "Rațiu, Adrian, în interviul semnat de Despina Petecel" (Rațiu, Adrian, in an Interview by Despina Petecel), In *Revista Muzica*, 2/1991. p. 2.

<sup>16</sup> Bughici, D., *Repere arhitectonice în creația muzicală românească contemporană (Architectural Landmarks in Contemporary Romanian Musical Creation)*, Editura Muzicală, București, 1982, p. 149.

<sup>17</sup> Sandu-Dediu, Valentina. "Rectorul Universității din Viena la decernarea premiului Herder" (The Rector of the University of Vienna at the Herder Prize Award Ceremony), 1986, in Sandu-Dediu, Valentina, *Muzica românească între 1944-2000 (Romanian Music between 1944 and 2000)*, Editura Muzicală, București, 2002, p. 259.

intervallic, the set of what remains from modulo 12 being reported to musical intervals (0=first, 1=minor second, 2=major second, 3=minor third), while for Forte the thinking is connected to heights. Mathematical and musical arguments are used to demonstrate the algebraic group structure of the tempered system, its characteristics (...) and to treat modal scales"<sup>18</sup> (our translation). Between the emancipation of dissonance (1910) and that of consonance (1970), Anatol Vieru discusses postmodernism as a "period following the exhaustion of the avant-gardes, after the great languages of the past had lost their predominance, and after serialism – sovereign in the 1950s – had remained more of a manner"<sup>19</sup>.

**Liviu Glodeanu - *Studies for orchestra*** contain serial elements: especially in the third section (*Regroupings*), where the musical discourse is spaced over broader temporal areas, allowing for a kind of musical pointillism by assigning a prolonged sound to a different timbre each time.

E.g. 1

**REGROUPAJE  
III**

Moderato ♩ = 96

85

The image shows a page from a musical score titled 'REGROUPAJE III'. At the top, it specifies 'Moderato' with a tempo marking of a quarter note equal to 96 (♩ = 96). A box with the number '85' is present. The score is written for a large orchestra, with staves for Flute 1 and 2, Piccolo, Oboe 1 and 2, Cor Anglais, Clarinet 1, 2, and Bass, Fagott 1 and 2, and Contrabass. The music is characterized by long, sustained notes and complex rhythmic patterns, typical of pointillism. Dynamics like 'pp' (pianissimo) and 'ff' (fortissimo) are indicated throughout the score.

**Liviu Glodeanu, *Studies for orchestra*, part 3, Regrupaje (Regroupings)**

<sup>18</sup> Dediu, Dan, "Cu Anatol Vieru prin meandrele timpului lung" (With Anatol Vieru through the Twists and Turns of Time), in *Siluate în mișcare. Eseuri despre compozitori români (Silhouettes in Motion. Essays on Romanian Composers)*, Editura Muzicală, București, 2021, p. 55.

<sup>19</sup> Sandu-Dediu, Valentina, *Muzica românească între 1944-2000 (Romanian Music between 1944 and 2000)*, Editura Muzicală, București, 2002, p. 206.

Excellent representative works on the subject are those signed by ȘTEFAN NICULESCU ("Synchrony 4" for clarinet, percussion and piano - 1987) and TIBERIU OLAH (The time of the deer). We mention too Wilhelm GEORG BERGER's and PASCAL BENTOIU's free serialism, especially in some symphonies. LUDOVIC FELDMAN composed dodecaphonic music his entire career, especially in the 1970s; THEODOR GRIGORIU could enter in the same area of interest.

**2.1.2. Secondary dodecaphonists:** The serialism elements are found in the musical expression of composers such as Zeno Vancea and Adrian Rațiu<sup>20</sup>.

**Carmen Maria Cârneli, *The work Trojza for 15 Players*** (1989-1990), published by Pfau Verlag in 1995, was well received at its premiere at the Musik des XX. Jahrhunderts Festival in Saarbrücken (Germany). The piece (which had its world premiere in 1993) was analyzed by Wolf Frobenius in the work "Carmen Maria Cârneli's Trojza für 15 Spieler (1989/90): Zur Genese des Stückes (fragmen: Beiträge, Meinungen und Analysen zur neuen Musik)".

**Dan Buciu**, in the ***Sonnet for choir, flute and organ***, using lyrics by R. M. Rilke, lists in the introduction a dodecaphonic melodic string, and the composer immediately abandoned its treatment using dodecaphonic principles, and subsequently developed other musical material. Only at the end of the piece he returns to the series he introduced initially, without treating it according to the technique this time either. In this composition, the dodecaphonic technique is only illustrative: it occurs, but it does not have a generative function. The series (the first 12 sounds) occurs first for the flute, then for the organ; when the voices come in, the dodecaphonic string disappears. Then the composer only uses fragments from it (thus adopting a modal approach), with the aim of generating modal harmonies. Dan Buciu does not actually use the procedures for treating the series, he only gives hints to the serial idea.

**Tiberiu Olah:** "his stylistic path starts from post-serialism and leads to a new diatonic style, initiated under the influence of Webern's extremely detailed analyses..."<sup>21</sup> (our translation). **Doru Popovici** could be enrolled in the same analytical framework.

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<sup>20</sup> Dediu, Dan, "Contribuții componistice românești după 1960" (Romanian Compositional Contributions after 1960), in *Noi istorii ale muzicilor românești (New Histories of Romanian Music's)*, vol. II, Editura Muzicală, București, 2020, p. 376.

<sup>21</sup> Dediu, Dan, "Cu Anatol Vieru prin meandrele timpului lung" (With Anatol Vieru through the Twists and Turns of Time), in *Siluețe în mișcare. Eseuri despre compozitori români (Silhouettes in Motion. Essays on Romanian Composers)*, Editura Muzicală, București, 2021, p. 32.



## 2.2. The Theoretical Elements

**2.2.1. Anatol Vieru** theorized the series (as strings of sounds, not related to O. Messiaen's integral serialism); the **Book of Modes**. "Anatol Vieru believed in the untapped resources of the modal domain, applying them equally to composition and to exegesis. Anatol Vieru's theoretical interest was marked by his training as a composer. His theoretical contribution (...) is the result of the superior need to explore and define the field of composition, and an investigation of the virtual possibilities of expression. The Book of modes (1980) uses as a working method the logical-mathematical modeling (...) as an efficient tool of organizing and explaining a theoretical demonstration"<sup>22</sup>.

At the intersection with the American concept "pitch class set"<sup>23</sup>, A. Vieru adapts everything to the modal world, and the "tempered system becomes isomorphic with the set of integer numbers, within which each element belongs to a class of rests. The sounds and intervals of the tempered system are representatives of the classes of modulo 12 rests (...). In the new context, the mode is represented as a set of classes of rests which stands operations such as intersection, reunion, states such as inclusion, complementarity of two modes"<sup>24</sup> (our translation). "Since 1967, I have been working on fundamental research on modal musical thinking (...); the work has crystallized as a model (logical-mathematical) that aims to encompass as many features of modal musical thinking as possible".

**2.2.2. Gheorghe Firca.** His complex theoretical system requires a separate chapter for musicological analysis, but we mention it on this occasion for the sake of accuracy.

**2.2.3. Wilhelm G. Berger:** The Completely Chromatic Choral Music of 12 sounds.

After 1957 new stylistic orientations were visible in the domain of composition in Romania. Wilhelm Berger was among those composers, including Pascal Bentoiu, Nicolae Beloiu, Dumitru Capoianu or Theodor Grigoriu, who approached an aesthetic close to that of Enescu, from the direction of the 'moderate modernism', searching from the balance between the old and the new, between the Romanian folkloric principles and the universal symphonic tradition (especially from the French tradition)"<sup>25</sup> (our translation).

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<sup>22</sup> Sandu-Dediu, Valentina, *Muzica românească între 1944-2000 (Romanian Music between 1944 and 2000)*, Editura Muzicală, București, 2002, p. 60.

<sup>23</sup> Vieru, Anatol, "Teoria modernă a modurilor și atonalismul" (Modern Theory of Modes and Atonality), in *Review Muzica*, oct.1986, p. 4.

<sup>24</sup> Sandu-Dediu, Valentina, *Muzica românească între 1944-2000 (Romanian Music between 1944 and 2000)*, Editura Muzicală, București, 2002, p. 61.

<sup>25</sup> Idem, p. 25.

“Berger is part of the original theoretic tradition, which started in 1960, and which gives increased importance to systematizing compositional procedures and means. The increased preoccupation for the modal system places Berger (with the volume *Dimensiuni modale* [Modal Dimensions], 1979) next to his colleagues such as Anatol Vieru, Ștefan Niculescu, Myriam Marbé, Dan Constantinescu, Doru Popovici, Cornel Țăranu, Tiberiu Olah, Theodor Grigoriu, Adrian Rațiu”<sup>26</sup> (our translation). Based on solid and logical arguments, Berger transposes Fibonacci’s string to music, generating species and modes, but also a theory of the completely chromatic choral music. (...).

In an early study, W. G. Berger proposes a model for the analysis and systematization of possible modal structures conceived based on the golden ratio (*sectio aurea*), taking into account various units of measurement that give organization to these structures by species: “the semitone as a unit of measurement (species I), the tone as a unit of measurement (species II), up to 6 tones as a unit of measurement (species XII). The results affirm a unique interval. The uniqueness of this interval ensures the cohesion of the entire sound material (...). These modes do not represent sequences in the manner of the serial dodecaphonic concept, but modes based on the recognition of a sound center (the tone) to which all sounds are related”<sup>27</sup>.

### 3. Conclusions

The Romanian compositional typology is today extremely rich and varied: “the approach to large instrumental-symphonic genres, based on the principle of developing melodies with national character, presented composers with the challenge of finding appropriate harmonic and polyphonic solutions for a specific rhythmic-modal structure”<sup>28</sup>. “In the 20th century, music began to realize its potential as the most universal medium of communication. Music is a way of transmitting and reflecting emotion”<sup>29</sup>; twelve-tone music seemed to contradict this general ideal of sound art, and that was precisely the challenge it had to face as a musical style.

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<sup>26</sup> Idem, p. 57

<sup>27</sup> Berger, W. G., „Moduri și proporții, studiu monografic” (Modes and Proportions, Monographic Study), in *Studii de muzicologie (Musicology Studies)*, vol. 1, Editura Muzicală, București, 1965, p. 337-338.

<sup>28</sup> Tomescu, Vasile, “Specificul concepției și diversitatea de stiluri în muzica românească” (The Specificity of Conception and Diversity of Styles in Romanian Music), in *Studii de muzicologie (Musicology Studies)*, vol. I, Editura Muzicală, București, 1965, p. 218.

<sup>29</sup> *Encyclopedia of Music in the 20th Century*, ed. Lee Stacy and L. Henderson, Routledge, London, 1999, p. 5.

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