

NEMESCU'S IMAGINARY MUSIC AND THE ARCHETYPAL DIMENSION OF CREATION

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SUMMARY. Octavian Nemescu (1940-2020) played a decisive role in the emancipation of the avant-garde movement within the Romanian compositional landscape. He may be situated within the second generation of modernist composers, the one that advanced and legitimized postmodernist ideas in the art of sound. *The recovery of music's origins as ritual* constitutes the defining element that most accurately encapsulates his entire creative activity.

Keywords: imaginary music, archetype, ritual, meditation

Introduction

European music of the first half of the twentieth century is characterized by its *spectacular* dimension and by the attainment of its highest degree of abstraction. This orientation negatively affected the relationship between the creator and the listening public, ultimately producing a void between them. Composer Octavian Nemescu proposed an alternative to “the aestheticization and predetermination of the creative act, to the offensive of intellectualism detached from affectivity”². His vision aimed at *recovering the universal dimension of music and returning to its origins*.

Spectral music, repetitive or minimalist music, process-based music, conceptual music, ambient music, the notions of *spatial* and *temporal expansion* or *condensation*, *polytemporality*, *world music*, *the nature-culture relationship* and the application of the *Total Archetype* represent distinct approaches through which the composer sought to achieve his goal: *reconnecting* with primordial, access to essences, to *archetypes*.

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² Dănceanu, Liviu. *Introduction to the Epistemology of Music (Organizations of the Musical Phenomenon)*. Editura Muzicală, Bucureşti, 2003, p. 156.



Most importantly, all these sound energies converge in the same direction and become indispensable components in the realization of a consummate, ideal, ultimate art, since Octavian Nemescu persistently strove to restore to music its primary function – to once again become a “means of meditation, active contemplation and purification”³.

Imaginary music

Towards the end of the seventh decade of the last century, composer Octavian Nemescu introduced an original concept, namely *imaginary music* – an extension of his preoccupations with *archetypes*, oriented toward a form of *sacred minimalism* and with clear intentions of **recovering sound symbols**.

With regard to the score of such a work, it must include an ensemble of musical and extra-musical notations (images, drawings, texts), as well as detailed guidance from the composer, enabling the *practitioner to imagine the music* suggested by him – so the *imagination* is not left free, it is led by the composer. And, by implication, the result is not meant to be heard⁴.

To create *imaginary music*, the author may further suggest usual timbres (classical orchestra instruments, traditional instruments, the voice) or some modern sonorities (electronic sources). In addition to these, however, he chooses to integrate sounds from the natural environment (thunder, vibrations of mountains, of crystals etc.). Moreover, all gustatory, olfactory, tactile and visual sensations are metamorphosed into *imagined sounds*; the sense organs behave like musical instruments, and the score is represented by the everyday ambient, by the surrounding environment⁵.

It is very important to emphasize that, through inner practice, the individual becomes receptive to inspiration from *the unconscious*. Likewise, he becomes aware of his emotions, his states, his more or less dark parts. For the process to be complete, it is necessary for him to meditate on the meaning of these *symbols*. And, of course, as a final stage, he must integrate the information transmitted by *the unconscious* into his individual reality.

Imaginary music is therefore a form of *active art* that facilitates *inner transformation*, so, naturally, the creation will be sprinkled with various *sound weapons* that will help *the practicing subject* confront his dark parts, facilitating his path toward evolution, emancipation and enlightenment.

³ Sandu-Dediu, Valentina. *Romanian music between 1944-2000*. Editura Muzicală, București, 2002, p. 69.

⁴ Anghel, Irinel. *Rediscovering Imaginary Music*. In Revista MUZICA 7, 2020, p. 33.

⁵ Nemescu, Octavian. *Imaginary Music*. In Revista MUZICA 3-4, 2015, p. 4.

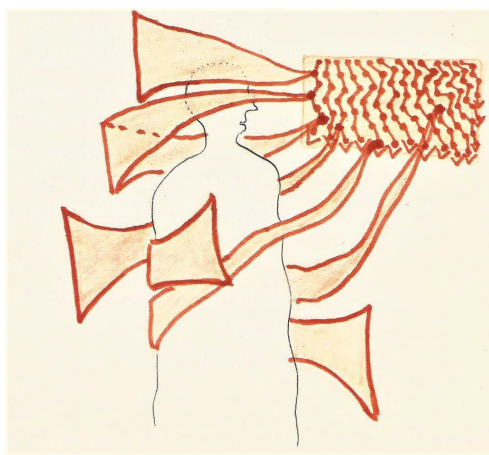
And, since it is a profoundly *individual inner ritual*, *imaginary singing* belongs to *the non-spectacular segment* – the performing-emitting individual is also the recipient of the message; in this case, there are no spectators or critics⁶.

In fact, this is the main objective pursued by Octavian Nemescu: to return to the function of music that transcends the conventional and (re)becomes a form of profound communication with oneself, with nature itself, with the entire Universe; it is a kind of “search for *the sound essence*, the fundamental sound, the protoplasm of vital force”⁷.

Cromoson or Singing Objects (1974-1975)

The score (E.g. 1) comprises an ensemble of musical, pseudo-musical and extra-musical notations (graphic drawings and texts suggesting the timbre of musicalized objects, a vocabulary of correspondences between the real color or the imaginary musical symbol) through which the practitioner is guided *to imagine* the music.

E.g. 1



Octavian Nemescu. *Cromoson* (fragment)

A significant contribution to the triggering of *sound images* comes from *visual sensations* (resulting from contact with the objects surrounding the person initiated in this complex process) and, of course, the corresponding colors which activate certain coordinates of the sound spectrum – violet-blue

⁶ Nemescu, Octavian. *Imaginary Music*. In Revista MUZICA 3-4, 2015, p. 5.

⁷ Tartler, Grete. *Melopoetica*, Editura Eminescu, București, 1984, p. 200-201.

accesses the fundamental and nearby harmonics in the low register, green corresponds to harmonics in the mid register, while the high harmonics are accessed, depending on their distance from the fundamental, by the colors yellow, orange and red (the latter color corresponds to the most distant harmonics) (Table 1). Based on the coloristic aspects identified in the objects around them, the subject can imagine various musics⁸.

Table 1

| Visual sensations/ Object color | Imaginary sounds (sound harmonics) / Musical correspondent |
|--|--|
| Blue | Harmonics 1–5 (low register); static stance |
| Green | Harmonics 6–11 (middle register); slow, ascending movement; chords in major tonality |
| Yellow | Harmonics 7-13 (middle register); moderate ascending sound movement; a melodic line based on minor thirds and major seconds (reminiscent of Far Eastern music) |
| Orange | Harmonics 8-16 (high register); fast acoustic dynamics; “more whimsical chromaticisms” (2 or 3 chromatic notes followed by intervals of a third and a fourth) ⁹ |
| Red | Starting from the 10th harmonic (very high register); ultrafast sonic agitation; melodic line containing serpentine chromaticisms |
| White | The melody’s sounds flow therapeutically from the aura to the feet: E (aura), D (brain), C (eyes, ears), B \flat (nose, mouth), A (hands), G (heart, lungs), F \sharp (viscera), E (feet); absorption occurs ascending, from the level of the eyes (C) toward the aura (E), and descending, from the eyes to the feet (E, one octave lower than the first) |
| Black | Aggressive cluster |

Cromoson. Conversion of visual sensations into imaginary sound symbols¹⁰

⁸ Another instruction from the composer concerns the melodic line. Depending on the type of light present in the setting, it may have the following directions: *ascending* (sunlight, i.e., daylight), *ascending-descending* (although it is day, shadows appear), *descending* (artificial illumination of a surface, evening).

⁹ Tartler, Grete. *Melopoetica*, Editura Eminescu, București, 1984, pag. 202.

¹⁰ Nemescu, Octavian. *Imaginary Music*. In Revista MUZICA 3-4, 2015, p. 6-19.

Awareness of the significance of *images* and their corresponding colors can have a strong impact on *the practitioner*, for the process to be complete, it is necessary for him to understand and meditate on their *symbolism*¹¹. By knowing the meanings of colors from a Jungian perspective, the subject can intensify his states and emotions, or connect more profoundly with everything that resides within him.

The Jungian analyst relates colors (primary, secondary and non-colors) with various popular expressions, *mythological motifs*, aspects of the natural sciences or considers them from the perspective of the *archetypal experience* that comes into direct contact with nature. Since the duality of *hypothesis–opposite hypothesis* is essential in discovering the meaning of an *image*, in what follows we take into account the mode of manifestation – positive or negative/constructive or destructive – on the subject's psyche (Table 2).

Table 2

| COLOR | CONSTRUCTIVE MANIFESTATION | DESTRUCTIVE MANIFESTATION |
|-----------------------------|--|---|
| BLUE ¹² | Introversion, Receptivity, Order, Spirituality, Sense of continuity (sky), Calm, Depth (water), Orients toward a sense of eternity | Loss of reality, Cold, Rigid order Possession of the spirit, Ice, Coldness (air) |
| GREEN ¹³ | Growth, Hope, Rebirth, The flowing force of the <i>unconscious</i> , Nourishing energy, Mediating color <i>The spirit of vegetation</i> | Excessive growth of vegetation Suffocation, Devouring |
| YELLOW ¹⁴ | Redemptive, Clarification Eternal inner psychic center (gold) | Life-destroying, Excessive clarity, Harmful states, Illness, Lack of courage |
| ORANGE ¹⁵ | Energizing, Captivating, Illuminating Playful, Mediating color The wisdom of spiritualizing passion | Aggressiveness, Discordance, Instability Possessive, Demonic, Irritating |

¹¹ Abt, Theodor. *Introduction to the Jungian Interpretation of Drawings*. Editura TREI, București, 2019, p. 45.

¹² Associated with the sky, air, water, waves, the spirit, the *unconscious*.

¹³ Associated with nature, spring, vegetation, the flow of life.

¹⁴ Associated with the sun, moon, stars, light, gold, *consciousness*.

¹⁵ Associated with the flame of fire, the god of war – Mars, the robes of Hindu monks; considered a signal color.

| COLOR | CONSTRUCTIVE MANIFESTATION | DESTRUCTIVE MANIFESTATION |
|---------------------|---|---|
| RED ¹⁶ | Warmth, Unity (Venus), Rebirth The color of love and passion | Burning heat, Separation, Devil, Destruction, Aggressiveness, Animosity |
| WHITE ¹⁷ | Purity, Life, Light, Immortality Transition toward the new | Death, Annihilation, Detachment Absence of feelings |
| BLACK ¹⁸ | Return to the origin, Preparation for renewal, Conception of new life, Regeneration | Depression, Death, Misfortune, Destructiveness |

The Symbolism of Color¹⁹

Certainly, the positive aspects of these colors are of particular interest, but the opposite should not be neglected. In fact, introspection means stirring, and stirring means recognizing, balancing and reconciling opposites (positive/constructive and negative/destructive). At the end of the experiment, the practicing subject will accept and integrate what he has discovered.

Essentially, this refers to *the journey of the mythic hero*, which most often appears to take place externally, yet it is actually realized “within, in the depths where obscure resistances are overcome, and long-forgotten powers are revived, to be made available for the transformation of the world”²⁰; for the hero is reborn and returns magnificent, full of creative force. Inner experiences are intense and serve to ensure lasting psychic growth, that is, they ensure the maturation and deepening of the individual personality.

It is also interesting to note that Octavian Nemescu provides a certain elasticity to the act of musicalization in terms of duration – it can take place over a few seconds, minutes or hours, but it can also be realized over a day, a week, several months or even a few years. Furthermore, he does not exclude the possibility of continuous performance throughout one’s life.

¹⁶ Associated with blood, the blazing fire, the Devil, the goddess of love – Venus; considered a signal color.

¹⁷ Associated with snow, ice, milk, salt, dead bodies, bones, the garments of rites of passage (baptism, communion, marriage, death).

¹⁸ Associated with lack of consciousness, chaos, fear, resurrection and possible rejuvenation (when new light emerges from black), Saturn – the god of connection to the earth, limitation and depression.

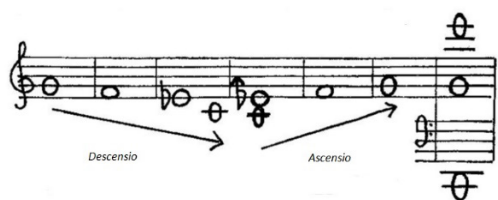
¹⁹ Abt, Theodor. *Introduction to the Jungian Interpretation of Drawings*. Editura TREI, București, 2019, p. 114-145.

²⁰ Campbell, Joseph. *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Editura Herald, București, 2020, p. 33.

In fact, this constitutes the composer's personal imprint – the practice of music (integral or not) with the aim of improving one's own being. This is also the reason why many of his works present a non-spectacular variant – see, for example, *Metabizantinirikon*, for which the composer provides an actual score (*spectacular version*, 1984), as well as one practiced by listening over a period of nine months (*post-spectacular transcultural practice*, 1985), and also the works *Centrifuga* (1986), *Alpha – Omega* (1988), *Nonsimfonia V* (1992), *Presimfonia VI* (2000), *Multisimfonia I* (2002) and *Postsimfonia II* (2003) for which he also allows the possibility of individual ritual practice. These, too, unfold over precise time intervals (from one second or a minute – *Multisimfonia I* to several years – *Presimfonia VI*).

The work *Do You Think You Will Be Able Alone?* (1976) is also a journey of the *practitioner* toward the fulfillment of *the personal myth*, a *process of individuation*. Once again, the composer becomes the guide for *the practicing subject*, and to help *imagine* the ritual path that the subject is to embrace, he employs *the archetype of the ladder* – in the first half highlighting a *descensio*, and in the second an *ascensio* (E.g. 2).

E.g. 2



Octavian Nemescu. *Do You Think You Will Be Able Alone?*²¹

Next, the composer guides the interpretation (in the sense of imagining) of each sound. Thus, the sounds in the *descensio* receive the following visual images: G represents the river, the waterfall, but one can also imagine a strong wind or a blazing flame, while F is like the vibration of a crystal stone. Then E \flat and C, respectively the harmonic interval C–E \flat , indicate the practitioner's confrontation with negative impulses (an *individual, inner ritual*).

This is followed by the *ascensio* path with the note F, imagined as a shirt that the practitioner puts on, then the note G, symbolizing the flame in the heart and finally the C–G–E chord, which depicts a tree with the root at

²¹ Nemescu, Octavian. *Imaginary Music*. In Revista MUZICA 3-4, 2015, p. 22.

C, the trunk at G (in the heart area) and the crown at E (aura). This moment marks the climax of *the ritual*, when the practicing subject identifies with the Higher Self.

The presence of the IV–V–I cadence, which gives the work a *metatonic* status, as well as the major trison (the Archetype of the Trinity), is noteworthy.

Each proposed sonority (singular or in a synchronic aspect) should be imagined over 7 minutes, 7 hours, 7 months or 7 years.

Rediscovering Imaginary Music

Rediscovering Imaginary Music is a cultural project funded by the Ministry of Culture in 2020, which materialized in a collection coordinated by Irinel Anghel and dedicated to Octavian Nemescu.

The realization of the collection confirms the position of other composers regarding the perspective proposed by Octavian Nemescu and provides, in addition to diversity of content, continuity and validation in contemporary times. It is a form of art and, at the same time, a method of introspection that functions and responds to the spiritual, psychic and personal needs of individuals within today's society.

For the *imaginary music* collection²², Diana Rotaru proposes *Choreosymphographia*, a mini-lexicon choreographic score for a one-man orchestra. Then, Corneliu Dan Georgescu conceives a narrative-score with meaning – *Harmonia Universalis in Musica per Octabis/Universae Harmonia Musica per Octabis/Homage to Octavian Nemescu*. Its practice is aimed at a composer-dancer or dancer-composer, with the note that the practicing subject does not need to perform professionally in the respective fields.

For the same collection, Maia Ciobanu creates the work *...!*. The starting point of the individual musical-imaginary *adventure* is a poem by her son, Tudor Mihai Cazan. The work addresses other layers of composition – the formal layer and that of musical expression.

Then, Diana Gheorghiu proposes a mirror-score. *Insert mirror here* incites a practice of imaginary sound self-exploration, which the author guides through her instructions.

Mihaela Vosganian, through the graphic-frequency score of the work *Towards My Unnamed Planet*, invites the *practitioner* to experience an *imaginary performance* in five scenes (an astral journey).

²² Anghel, Irinel. *Redescoperind muzica imaginară* în Revista MUZICA 7, 2020, p. 36-50.

Between notation, natation, meditation and rotation, Gabriel Mălăncioiu's *Riotația* proposes to *the practitioner* the musical rendering of a mountain river's course, whose steep bed shapes the sound waves and their dynamics as they approach and recede from the subject. The score thus indicates a specific practice location, as well as a time of day (early morning).

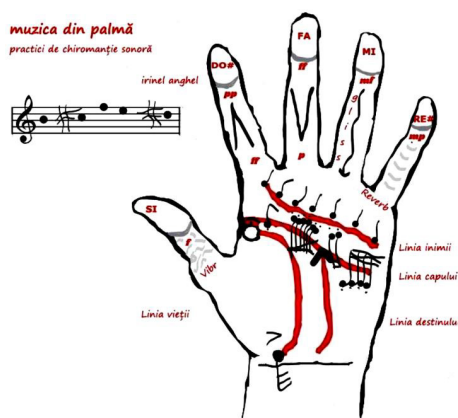
Sabina Ulubeanu proposes a postmodern, polystylistic imaginary score titled *The Imaginary Music of the Mountain*. During the journey up a mountain, the changes in the landscape encountered on the ascent bring stylistic shifts to the practitioner's imagination, drawing on music recovered from their cultural memory.

Furthermore, Darie Nemeș Bota completes the collection of *imaginary music* scores with *Urban Shell*, which proposes a polyphonic sound experience, while Constantin Basica, in the score *Eight Views with Samples of Imaginary Music*, offers *the practitioner* a series of eight postcards containing an image on the front and the author's guidance on the back.

A special approach is also proposed by composer Sorin Lerescu. Through the variants of his score *The Evening Horizon*, he addresses both non-musicians and musicians, the two options not necessarily excluding each other. The *imaginary music*-generating power of an *image* is realized in different timbral versions that bring together heaven and earth, two extremes that complement each other and give meaning to one another.

Last but not least, Irinel Anghel proposes two works. The first is *Music in the Palm. Practices of Sonic Chiromancy* – the body-score or score-body; it requires a dual practice: immobile (contemplative) and mobile (active) (E.g. 3). The second, *Cosmusic*, appears in the form of a score – a cosmic map – keyboard.

E.g. 3



Irinel Anghel. *Music in the Palm. Practices of Sonic Chiromancy*

Conclusion

Nemescu's creation responds to the acute needs of the modern individual, who is exhausted, depleted of substance and spirituality; it addresses the need for balance, stability and connection with immutable truths.

Imaginary music is a striking proof in this regard. Although it represents an intellectual challenge, it is also a defense mechanism against criticism, judgment, vulnerability and frivolity. And even though it requires a map previously established by its author and comes with a set of instructions, the final result acquires strong personal nuances; practicing it means creating an episode of *deep meditation* that takes on an intimate, individual and unique character.

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