

A SYSTEMATIC APPROACH TO MODAL THINKING OF PAUL CONSTANTINESCU

Roxana PEPELEA¹

Abstract: *The area of this analytic approach to Paul Constantinescu's creation has been delimited according to an innovative contribution of the modal conception. Therefore, the modal diatonic is characteristic, with only few exceptions, of the Byzantine creation, the modal synthesis is obvious in Concerto for Strings, the diatonic chromaticism, in Triple Concerto, a certain modulated pattern was generalized starting with the Piano Concerto, the chromatic harmony spices the comic-grotesque creation. Highlighting them on levels (melodic and harmonic) they offer a synthetic image on the modal process that acts at the point of each parameter.*

Key words: *Paul Constantinescu, folklore music, modal language.*

1. Introduction

In the Romanian, like in the world musical creation, the modal dimension points out the existence of two levels: the folk-religious level (the genuine level) and the neo-modal, synthesis level (the artificial one). Their use in the Romanian musical creation is related to the imposition of the rural folk music and the Byzantine one, in the 1930's. The modal concept finds a substantial application in the musical creation of Enescu's generation and their posterity (Jora, Negrea, Drăgoi, Vancea, Constantinescu, Ciortea, Toduţă a.s.o.) [3]. In this context, Paul Constantinescu distinguished himself as a representative of the folk trend as well as the father of the Romanian Byzantine style; he also discovered the comic stream of Romanian spirituality and acquired a prominent place in the range of neoclassic Romanian composers. These four directions outline the stylistic tendencies

reflected in his creation [4, 6, 7]. The opportunity of this essay needs to be specified - a systematization of the composer's modal language parameters. The topic approaches the *systematic criterion* – targeting the setting up of the stylistic features.

2. The diatonic concept

2.1. The modal intonational sources of the theme

The unity of Paul Constantinescu's creation is determined, first, by the tendency towards a common specific potential of intonation, which marks the constants of the inspiration sources of the theme. Based on these constants, works belonging to different expressive spheres, or to different style directions, achieve the unifying element, reaching, through generalities, the possibility of establishing certain parameters, between which

¹ Faculty of Music, *Transilvania* University, Braşov .

Constantinescu's modal thinking retains certain melodic types. This common potential of intonation can be detected in: I. the melodic source of Anton Pann (citing from *Spitalul amorului* or *Cântece de lume*) – a unifying element between the folk and the Byzantine neoclassicism and the comic-parody creation with Greek-oriental nuances; II. Macarie's *Irmologhion* – a unifying element inside the Byzantine creation (the Byzantine Studies, the Oratorios, the Liturgy); III. the occasional folk species, for example *Doina recrutului*, selected in the comic creation (*Din cătănie, O noapte furtunoasă*), and also in the neoclassical one (*Piano Concerto*); IV. the melo-rhythmic style, common for themes proceeding from an archaic folk level, developing an identical ascending-descending tetrachordal profile (the slow parts from *Symphonietta, Violin Concerto* and *Harp Concerto*); V. the archaic type of melody, laid on octosyllabic meter, utilized for outlining the epic themes; VI. the improvisatory type of melody, illustrating the *rubato* principle, polyphonic distributed in unison or octave, with regard to the atmosphere of slow movements (*Concerto for Strings, Triple Concerto*); VII. the Dorian-Phrygian cell in association with the subtonic relation of modal harmony – a unifying element placed above the thematic spheres or style directions (with examples from *Miorița* or *Riga Crypto și Lapona Enigel*).

2.2. Modal scales/structures

Paul Constantinescu's creation is based on the alternation between a melodic potential with aspects of modal stability, as a result of the steady handling of certain scales/structures and another one, with aspects of instability, as a result of modal interference. The aspects of stability are, most of the time, associated with the use of modes with a large number of elements;

within this category, we can mention analytical, immutable scales, with pure diatonic or variable scales, resulting from the diatonic chromatic movements [2]. The pure diatonic, meant to illustrate a clear, stabile ethos, is to be found in the monodies of quoting type (*Three Pieces for the Piano*, the Symphonic dances). The hypostases of the first diatonic mode (Dorian) are illustrated in *The Triple Concerto*, resulting from the application of *phthorai* (to accentuate the depressive – Phrygian, expansive – Lydian characteristics); a specific procedure of alternating the diatonic aspects which is characteristic in *Four Madrigals on Mihai Eminescu lyrics* is exemplified; in the second piece – *La mijloc de codru des* – a potential of seven homonymous modes situated on the final C (Acoustic I, Mixolydian, Acoustic II, Phrygian, Acoustic IV, orderly from expansive to depressive) is discovered. In *Christmas Oratorio* the authentic or plagal aspects of the diatonic modes are brought, the cases with mobile scale degrees being also mentioned. In addition, one has noticed the large availability of the melody to undergo frequent and unexpected shifts from one mode to another, preserving the diatonic aspect. These inter-modal oscillations are due to facts such as: modulation, based on transposition or on the rotation of elements of a modal system; micro-modulation achieved through mobile scale degrees (or through psaltic practice of *phthorai*), from which the homonymous modes sometimes emerge.

3. Synthesis systems (diatonic-chromatic)

The whole-step and half-step structure: the formation of this emblematic mode [1] represents a process that registers three stages: I. anticipations of the mode constitution (first stage of creation); II. stage of the constituted mode (second

and third stages of creation); III. decomposition of the mode in subunits (fourth stage of creation). The modal anticipations of the first stage are based on two procedures: the modal amplification applied to archetypes (Phrygian, Acoustic formations) that already reveal the tone-semitone periodicity (1, 2) and the filling of the minor third in the defective systems that have this specific periodicity (characteristic procedures of the Miniatures for Piano). On the second stage we notice, with priority, the system formative role (with limited transposition) of the tetrachord, through the typical procedure of connection to the semitone, similar to the Eastern European tetrachordal principle. As a representative work, *Concerto for Strings* (1947) is mentioned, a creation in which the whole-step and half-step structure constitutes the thematic base [1]. The same synthesis modal structure represents the emblem of the main theme in *Piano Concerto* (1952) [8]. On the third stage, which corresponds to the last stage of the composer's creation, the phenomenon is developing on smaller surfaces, being characterized by a number of pre-modal system combinations, prepentatonic, a fact that leads to an accentuation of the chromatic discourse. The representative work for this phase is *Triple Concerto* (1963). The whole-step and half-step structure operates, in this case, as a virtual frame, analogous to the tonal-functional one. For this reason, it represents the reunion of some minimal structures, of which formulary aspects reveal the predominance of primary intervals like fourth or fifth, as stabile elements, tetrachordal or pentachordal pillars, as it appears in the *Bali sub-mode* – a Bartók typical formula - composed of two perfect fourths reunited in a semitone (5, 1, 5); this structure emerged from chunking the whole-step and half-step structure.

4. Operational principles at the chromatic concept level

The chromatic concept has a double reference: a horizontal one, achieved through procedures like the chromatic mobility of the sounds situated inside fixed diatonic pillars, diatonic-chromatic oscillations based on one fixed modal pillar, major-minor oscillation, transposition of the microstructures with diminished octave implication, applications of the *sectio aurea* law, i.e. representations of the horizontal polimodality; a vertical one, resulting from the vertical polimodality, modal-harmonic polyvalence, vertical integration of the melodic intervals a.s.o. The extraction of some principles referring to the horizontal parameter can serve to establish the origins of the composer's chromaticism.

I. The principle of modal mobility, as a dynamic principle of modal elaboration emerges at the microscopic level, implying development through variation, which can lead, in the end, to touching the total chromatic system. This often acts in the interior of the tetrachordal pillars, taking the Byzantine modal suggestions (the *enharmonic phtorai: Hisar, Nisabur*); it has been applied in the melodic flow or at a cadence, creating leading tones. The voidance of some modal areas and sudden establishment of differentiated attraction poles, as an effect of the mobility of scale degrees, is an advanced phase that belongs to the contemporary neo-modal thinking. With Paul Constantinescu, this marks a new stylistic stage, achieved in his last work, *Triple Concerto for Violin, Cello, Piano and Orchestra*. Steadily applied upon certain preferential intervals, like the second or the third, having as a result the specific variations of the *inverted chromatic formula*, this principle determines the hypostases of the *generating cell* (similar to the *x cell* in

Enescu's creation), which develops the obstinate background of the main theme, coming back, in more or less dissimulated formulas, in all the movements of the concerto.

II. The principle of juxtaposition of minimal structures, with broad applicability in the modal-chromatic thinking of the *Triple Concerto*, consists in achieving the large chromatic-modal "compass" from the concatenation of the microstructures through different procedures.

III. The concatenation of tri-, tetra-, pentachordal cells: the tetrachordal structure weighs in a most decisive way; mixing these basic structures is specific of the Byzantine music, determining the modal aspect of some scales, made up of symmetrical tetrachords (Byzantine diatonic modes I and II), or asymmetrical ones (*Hisar, Muştar*). Here are some types of non-homogenous tetrachordal concatenations found in the *Triple Concerto*: Lydian + Acoustic, Lydian + Dorian, Ionian + Chromatic, Dorian + Chromatic a.s.o.

IV. The transposition of tri-, tetra-, pentachordal structures has its roots in the *wheel principle (trohos)*, specific of the Byzantine music. This procedure can be noticed right from the beginning of the first part of the *Triple Concerto*; the anacrusis that leads to the attack of the first theme is, in fact, a sequence of five disjunctive Phrygian tetrachords, which, in ascending transposition, gains expansive alterations. Thus, through the status modification of the same scale degrees, placed in different octaves, diminished-octave formations emerge. The procedure becomes a basic stylistic coordinate of the composer's language, incrustated not only in the Byzantine creation – the first choral section from the *Easter Oratorio (Alleluia)*, or the first part of the *Psaltic Liturgy* is based on the disjunctive system

of five Dorian tetrachords – but also in *Sonatina for Violin and Piano* and stands together with the other syntheses of the language, such as *the whole-step and half-step structure (Concerto for Strings and Piano Concerto)* or *the whole-tone scale (Triple Concerto)*.

V. The intersection of microstructures (tetrachord, pentachord) creates a wider variety by highlighting the chromatic structure and instability of the musical discourse. An illustrative application on this principle can be identified in the variations on the main theme from the second part of the *Triple Concerto*, as a result of the Acoustic tetrachord rotations. The procedure is accompanied by the mobility of the elements placed inside the tetrachord. This mobility can be internal - comprised in a stable *diapason* (with fixed pillars) or an elastic one, with the elements fixed by a sound-pivot placed in the acute or the grave - or it can be external, engaging tetrachordal transpositions which keep the intersection. An interesting moment is represented by the intersections of the *Bali* sub-mode transpositions (1, 5, 1), considered as a hypostasis of the *generating cell*, in transition of the first part from the *Triple Concerto*, which lead, on a different way, to the initiation of *the whole-step and half-step structure*.

VI. The reunion of microstructures complementary in the chromatic as a whole or in partial chromatic scales is achieved in the case in which the modal cells do not present common elements anymore (they intersect in the void set). Thus, the total chromatic exposed in scale in the first part transition from the *Triple Concerto* can be considered the reunion of the tetrachordic aspects, in which the *fourth*, as primary interval, is filled with *piens* in a sliding movement. These structures constitute the limit of the chromatic system; the same as *the whole-tone scale* (the effect of the Lydian

tetrachord amplification) represent the limit of the modal diatonic system.

VII. The displacement of modal centers through ulterior mutations of an initial modal structure extends the transposition principle at the macro structural level (architectonic level). In this respect, we can cite the ascending minor second relation, situated at the re-exposition of the main theme of the second part from the *Triple Concerto (C-Cis)*. In this way, the modal with chromatic elements bans the old tonal relations established between the articulations of a form, demanding new connections that the composer adjusts on the purpose of remodeling certain classical types.

5. The reflection of modal thinking in harmony

I. The re-evaluation of the traditional harmonic conception with the predominance of the diatonic aspect is consistently remarked, in the entire Byzantine creation from the first two stylistic periods. For this reason, an application of the harmonic analysis on the choral-symphonic liturgical creation – Liturgy (1936), Oratorios (1946-1948) - can be relevant. Following this line, the harmonic relations certifying a particular modal language - cadence with subtone (the Aeolian, Mixolydian and Dorian aspect), the Phrygian and Lydian cadences and the *Machaut cadence* - have been met. The harmonic relations illustrate the substitution of the *fifth* with those of the *second*. Quite frequently, they develop in bass movement, *the scale-type* melodic formula, *step by step* (tetrachord, pentachord). The intervallic relation of the second is simultaneously implemented in modulations (*Luminânda* of the *Easter Oratorio* or *Axion* from the *Christmas Oratorio*). The *third relations* are those which, in various cadences, can highlight

the typical major-minor oscillation. In certain points, even the polar modulating relation (of *Tritone* fourth) appears. One can notice tonal-functional harmonic moments, where the authentic relations (of fourth, fifth, second) are outstanding, as compared with the plagal ones (*Plângerea mironositelor* from the *Easter Oratorio*, or *Răspunsurile mari* from the *Psaltic Liturgy*). A harmonic procedure frequently used by Paul Constantinescu is the polyvalence of cadences. In *Miorița* (1951), the same Phrygian cadence is harmonically represented in various hypostases, involving leading tones or subtone. In conclusion, the re-evaluation of the harmonic tradition in the composer's outlook is implemented in the persistent third structures, in relations based on other principles than in tonal functionalities.

II. The deduction of harmony from the melody is a principle that dominates the neo-modal thinking of the composer. At the base of this thinking he placed the intervallic structures emanated from other intervals than the traditional thirds. The extraction and systematization of these prototype-structures in examples brought from the comic creation and from the Oratorios doubles the intention of illustrating the complexity of the phenomenon with a demonstration of its spreading in his entire creation, irrespective of the style direction: the added harmonic elements, the superposing of the *accord strata*, the simultaneity of the modes having the same final (polyvalent superposing) [5]. Other representative structures for the composer's creation: the major-minor triad (*Triple Concerto* – re-transition); fourth/fifth or second chords emanated from the specific modal intervals (*Concerto for the Strings* – transition, *Nuntă în Carpați*, - *De doi, Alaiul, Hora fetelor, Jocul cumetrelor*); clusters (Oratorios); the harmonies with simultaneous material of some synthesis

scales (*Concerto for the Strings*, the Acoustic scale, *Sonatina* – second part, the Acoustic tetrachord). Figured out from the vertical integration of the melodic principles, the neo-modal conception of Paul Constantinescu, which enriches the harmonic chromaticism in the composer's language, is frequently materialized, in special types of musical writing for the modal folklore: the mixture, *ostinato*, pedal and heterophony. These are, along with the harmonic structures, the manners in which, on the vertical dimension, he brings in a refreshing air.

6. Conclusions

Briefly, the melodic and harmonic criteria inserted in this section illustrate a specific modal typology, rebuild the harmonic paths leading to the new context of cadences and synthesize new structures resulting from the application of vertical integration to the horizontal principle. Therefore, the conclusion is that the genuineness of Paul Constantinescu's creation regarded from the perspective of the analyzed parameters – melodic and harmonic - become real in enlarging the processing area of the folk and byzantine music, by means of processing techniques adequate for a personalized modal language.

References

1. Constantinescu, P.: Modulația după procedeul mutației tetracordurilor (Modulation by Tetrachord Mutation). In: *Despre „poezia” muzicii (On Music “Poetry”)*, Hîrlav-Maistorovici, S. (ed.). Premier Publishing House, Ploieşti, 2004, p. 18-24.
2. Firca, Gh.: *Bazele modale ale cromatismului diatonic (Modal Fundamentals of Diatonic Chromatics)*. Bucharest. Musical Publishing House, 1966.
3. Herman, V.: *Formă și stil în noua creație muzicală românească (Form and Style in the New Romanian Musical Creation)*. Bucharest. Musical Publishing House, 1977.
4. Popovici, D.: *Muzica românească contemporană (Romanian Contemporary Music)*. Bucharest. Albatros Publishing House, 1970.
5. Terényi, E.: *Armonia muzicii moderne (The Harmony of Modern Music)*. Cluj-Napoca. Gh. Dima Conservatory Press, 1980.
6. Tomescu, V.: *Paul Constantinescu*. Bucharest. Musical Publishing House, 1967.
7. Vancea, Z.: *Creația muzicală românească, sec. XIX-XX (Romanian Musical Creation, 19th-20th Century)*, Vol.1. Bucharest. Musical Publishing House, 1968.
8. Vancea, Z.: Concertul pentru pian și orchestră de Paul Constantinescu (The Concerto for Piano and Orchestra by Paul Constantinescu). In: *Muzica magazine* (1953) No. 3, p. 62-64.
9. http://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paul_Constantinescu. Accessed: 20-04-2012.