

Alexandru Lăpuşneanu – as a musical character

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This study is intended to outline the multilateral and contradicting portrait of Alexandru Lăpuşneanu, presented as a musical character by the composer Gheorghe Mustea. He places the emphasis not on the historic episode, but on the human situations generated by the main character, Alexandru Lăpuşneanu, thus highlighting his psychological, theological, philosophical and moral profiles, as resulted from the hero's behavior.

Key-words: *Alexandru Lăpuşneanu, Gheorghe Mustea, musical character, bessarabian opera music.*

“In their opera, ”*Alexandru Lăpuşneanu*”, the composer **Gheorghe Mustea*** and librettist Gheorghe Dimitriu have attained a profound psychologization of the musical-dramatic action. Both the libretto and the music closely follow the development of the action from Negruzzi's short story. In essence, the music of the opera is psychological, with a theatrical plasticity and power of suggestion, determining the pulse and dynamics of the feelings.

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* **Gheorghe Mustea**: Flute player, Romanian panflute player, conductor, teacher and composer, Ghe. Mustea was born on May 1st 1951 in the village Mândreşti, in Teleneşti County. He studied with Prof. Alexei Bivol (flute) at the „Ştefan Neaga“ Secondary Music School in Chişinău (1966-1970) and at the „Gheorghe Musicescu“ Institute of Arts in Chişinău (1970-1975 and 1975-1980) with professors Vladimir Rotaru (Flute), Vasile Zagorsky (Composition), Isai Alterman (Orchestral conducting), Mihail Caftanat (Score reading), Zidia Axionov (Folklore), Lev Adam (Polyphony), Galina Kocearova (Music theory and solfège). He took advanced courses of orchestral conducting with A.S. Dimitriev in Leningrad.

He worked as a flutist and panflute player between 1969-1970, then musical director and conductor of the “Folk Dances Ensemble” Orchestra at the „Şt. Neaga“ Secondary Music School (1973-1975; 1978-1980); Professor with the „G. Musicescu“ Music Academy in Chişinău (1980-1983 and since 1989), conductor of the Philharmonic Symphonic Orchestra in Moldova (1983-1989); First conductor of the National Radio Symphonic Orchestra (since 1989), Rector of the State University of Arts (between 1999-2002). He was awarded the titles of Honoured Master of Arts of the Republic of Moldova (1989), People's Artist of the Republic of Moldova (1980) and the Glory of Work (1998); he was a State Prize Laureate (1990) and a member of the Musicians' Union in Moldova. He wrote scenic, vocal-symphonic, choral, vocal, chamber instrumental and film music works.

In general, the entire score is tackled in a profound manner and the rich palette of musical expression is used. Each scene is based on a center of gravity related to the literary side of the opera, brought to life by edifying replies ** “.

Throughout the opera “Alexandru Lăpușneanu”, composer Gheorghe Mustea fully reveals the psychological traits of the characters and the dramatism of the situations, based on the intonations of folk music. The music not only portrays the characters, but it also tends to picturesquely illustrate the psychological structure of the characters. Hence, it vividly outlines the multilateral and contradicting portrait of Alexandru Lăpușneanu.

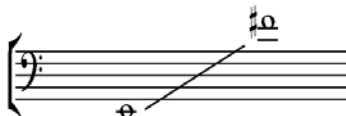
As already mentioned, the emphasis of the opera is put not on the historic episode, but on the human situations experienced by the main character – *Alexandru Lăpușneanu*, the ruler of Moldova in the fierce 16th century.

In the opera, the psychological, theological, philosophical and moral aspects are fundamental, we can feel them everywhere, being recomposed based on the hero's behavior.

With great skill, Mustea outlines the entire human profile of the ruler's personality. Indeed, it is an assessment in the lyrical genre, taking into account the complexity of the character. He is impulsive, easily angered, but also lucid in assessing the country's exact situation.

In the composer's view, the voice part of the main character goes through different stages, from the local, classical form up to a free declamation, in correlation with the trigger of the psychological conflict, which is followed by a conflict of situations. Naturally, the vocal part of Alexandru Lăpușneanu is tackled with depth and a special care when describing the character's traits and the palette of vocal expression is richer than that of the other characters. The composer presents him in various scenes, in multiple circumstances, reacting differently from situation to situation. Mustea manages to find dramaturgical solutions and specific procedures meant to particularize the image of the character. In fact, he intended to attain an organic emotional context.

His vocal range is the largest in this score, spanning more than two octaves (*E2* from the great octave – *F#4* from 1-line octave).



Throughout the entire score, the composer frequently uses the high register of the bass voice (*E flat4*, that is E above middle C, *E4*, *F4*, *G4*). Every time, the semantics are fit to the musical-dramatic action:

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1. illustrating the hero's states of mind; examples:

a) *anxiousness;*

Adagio mp

în ju- rul meu în- tin- să cât e za- rea eu simt
(all around me, as far as the horizon, I feel...)

b) *delight* (the pleasure that followed on the day of revenge);

ne în- du - ra - tă-i zi - ua răz- bu - nă - rii
(the day of revenge is merciless...)

c) *the love for Ruxanda*

lu- mi- na și căl- du- ra mea de ti- ne i- ni- ma mi- e pli- nă
te- mbră- ți - șez cu drag
(You, my light and warmth...my heart belongs to you, I embrace you dearly...)

d) *the state of delirium;*

Allegro moderato

o- tra- va pli- nă de tă- ri- e a ce- lor șap- te ne- bu- nii
(the strong poison of the seven acts of madness...)

2. emphasizing the key words of the phrases; examples:

a) *you, cunning people!* (in Romanian: “*viclenilor*”) = you, boyars!;

Adagio

vi- cle - ni - lor și cru- zi - lor
(You, cunning and cruel men...)

b) *storm* (in Romanian, „furtună”)

Allegro

să nu cu - legi fur - tu - nă da - că sa - meni vânt
(You're going to reap just what you sow...)

c) *today* (in Romanian, „astăzi”) – it seems like a hint to what is to be done – the massacre;

Ad libitum

Bo-ieri dum-nea-voastră delavenireameacuo-ua dom-ni-e și pâ - nă as - tăzi
(You, esteemed noblemen, since my return for the second rule and until today...)

d) *a long time, maybe too long* (in Romanian, „amar de vreme”)

Andante

sub cât a - mar de vre-me se as - cun - de
(it hides behind such a long time...)

e) *honest commoners*;

Andante

no - ro - dul meu cin - stit și răb - dă - tor
(my honest and patient commoners...)

3. The use of negation

Poco animato

mf Nu e-a-de-vă-rat
(No, it is not true...)

Detailed description: A single staff of music in bass clef. It begins with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. The tempo marking is 'Poco animato'. The music starts with a half note G2, followed by a quarter note A2, a quarter note B2, and a quarter note C3. There is a fermata over the C3 note. The dynamic marking is 'mf'. Below the staff, the lyrics are 'Nu e-a-de-vă-rat' and the translation '(No, it is not true...)'.

4. Question

Allegro

nu mă vrea țara? Dar oa-re vor ve-ni bo-ie-rii
(Doesn't the country want me? I wonder, will the boyars come...)

Detailed description: A single staff of music in bass clef. It begins with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. The tempo marking is 'Allegro'. The music features a triplet of eighth notes G2, A2, B2, followed by a quarter note C3. There is a fermata over the C3 note. The music continues with a quarter note D3, a quarter note E3, a quarter note F3, a quarter note G3, a quarter note A3, and a quarter note B3. There is a fermata over the B3 note. The music ends with a quarter note C4. The dynamic marking is 'mf'. Below the staff, the lyrics are 'nu mă vrea țara? Dar oa-re vor ve-ni bo-ie-rii' and the translation '(Doesn't the country want me? I wonder, will the boyars come...)'.

5. An impulse, an order

Andante

Stâr-piți în-șe-lă-ciu-nea
(Exterminate deceit!..)

Detailed description: A single staff of music in bass clef. It begins with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. The tempo marking is 'Andante'. The music starts with a half note G2, followed by a quarter note A2, a quarter note B2, and a quarter note C3. There is a fermata over the C3 note. The music continues with a quarter note D3, a quarter note E3, a quarter note F3, and a quarter note G3. The dynamic marking is 'mf'. Below the staff, the lyrics are 'Stâr-piți în-șe-lă-ciu-nea' and the translation '(Exterminate deceit!..)'.

The composer increases the tension by successively shifting from the *cantabile* style to *parlando*. Example:

A tempo

Ei... pu-să-i toa-te la ca-le

Andantino *Parlando* *Cantabile*

cu pie-lea crea-ță și ră-ci-tă pe spi-na-re

Piu mosso *ff*

să-i toa-ce cu to-po-ru-n mici fă-râ-me fă-râ-me fă-râ-...

Detailed description: Three staves of music in bass clef. The first staff is marked 'A tempo' and contains the lyrics 'Ei... pu-să-i toa-te la ca-le'. The second staff is divided into three sections: 'Andantino', 'Parlando', and 'Cantabile', with the lyrics 'cu pie-lea crea-ță și ră-ci-tă pe spi-na-re'. The third staff is marked 'Piu mosso' and 'ff', and contains the lyrics 'să-i toa-ce cu to-po-ru-n mici fă-râ-me fă-râ-me fă-râ-...'. The music features various rhythmic patterns and dynamics, including a fermata over the final note.

(Well, I have planned everything...with shivers down their spine, let them be cut with the ax, into pieces, into pieces...)

The vocal line represents a connection between *diatonic* and *chromatic*. Example:

Andantino

f cu pie - lea crea - ță și ră - ci - ță
(with shivers down their spine...)

The perfect intervals are predominant throughout the entire musical discourse. The composer uses leaps of major seventh, minor seventh, perfect octave and perfect fourth, quite frequently. E.g.:

Allegro

n-am fă-cut bi - ne că am mân-tu-it
(I was wrong to redeem...)

We can also notice leaps of 4+, 5-, 4-, and ninth. Example:

Poco animato

Și du-pă mi-ne poa-te Dum - ne - zeu
(After me, maybe God ...)

In this example, the personality of the ruler is emphasized through the ascending leap of an augmented fourth. The state of uncertainty is expressed through the descending leap of a diminished fifth (5-).

In the following example, we have an alternation between 4- and 4p:

Allegro

Nu mă vrea ță - ra? Voi nu mă vreți!
(Doesn't the country want me? It is you that don't want me!)

The composer uses the diminished fourth for asking the question, whilst the perfect fourth is used for the firm answer.

In this vocal line, we also encounter the technique of successiveness of intervalic leaps *from small to large*, having the same pitch as basis.

Animato



S-a - ud cum ge - me car - nea cum ur - lă și cum plâ - ge când fie - rul crunt se scaldă în va -

Some phrases are structured by the composer into *cantabile* intervals and spoken intervals, pronounced quickly on contrasting note durations, namely on either large note values, or on short, incisive ones.

A tempo



Și ca semn de - npă - că - ciu - ne astăzi bo - ieridumnea - voa - stră vă po - f - tesc la os - păț.

In fact, the composer uses various means of expression throughout the entire vocal line:

a) in cases of ardent tension, he uses *the shout*:

Andante



ff Ab

b) phrases with precisely indicated accents, in order to mark the meaning of every word.

Andante



ff

c) pitch followed by *glissando*, expressing a diverse intonation, according to the context:

Question:

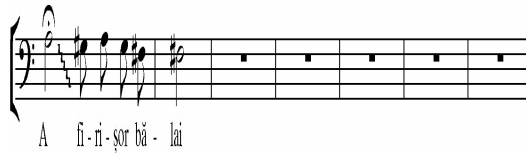
A tempo



Ei pu - să i - toa - te la ca - le

Revelation:

Meno mosso



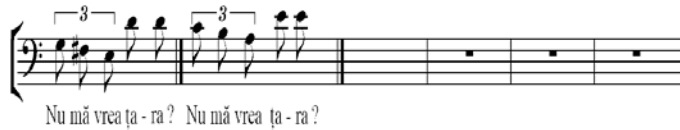
Despair:

Ad libitum



d) when repeating the same question, he uses the sequence method.

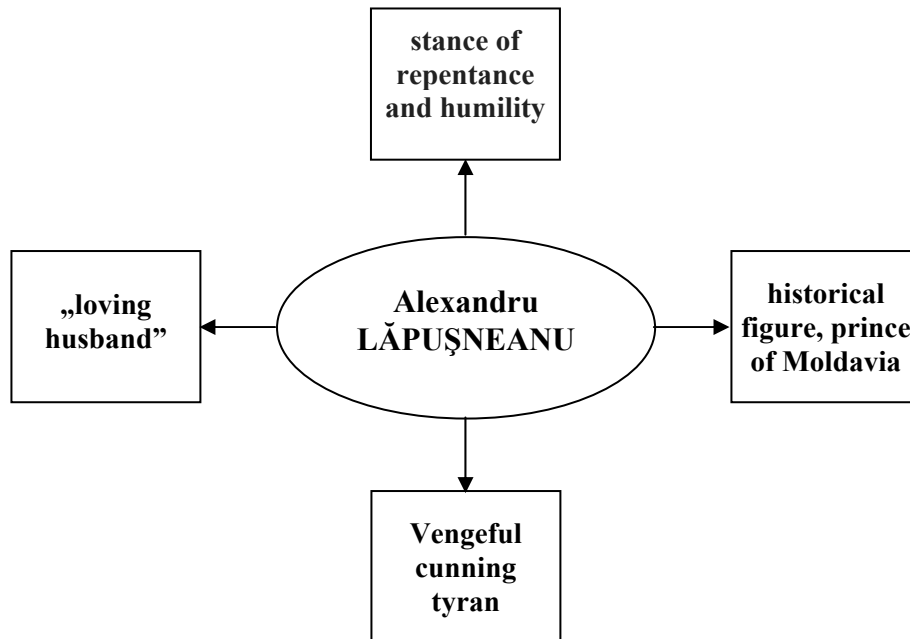
Allegro



The vocal writing is determining and it defines the character in a few characteristic postures:

- **Alexandru Lăpușneanu – the historic figure, ruler of Moldova.**
- **Alexandru Lăpușneanu – the „tender“ husband.**
- **Alexandru Lăpușneanu – in a state of repentance and humbleness.**
- **Alexandru Lăpușneanu – the cunning, revengeful tyrant.**

Here is a graphical representation which presents the four postures, which outline, in our opinion, the four essential traits of *Alexandru Lăpușneanu*, his **cross**, or destiny.



For starters, the composer expresses the hero's state of mind by using the folk ballad “*Eu mă duc, codrul rămâne*” (“*I wither, but the forest lingers on*”). By not using the orchestra, the composer assigns the solo voice the difficult task of revealing the entire image of pain, loneliness, isolation and sadness.

Ad libitum dolcissimo
mp

Eu mă duc co - drul ră - mâ - ne

Moderato

plă-ge frun-za du-pă mi - ne măi do-ru - le măi.

(*I wither, but the forest lingers on, the leaves weep after me...*)

This is one of the most significant examples found in this work of integrating folk music into erudite music. It is a musical piece of a particular expressiveness, richly ornamented.

In the following scenes¹, the main character appears as an authoritative ruler, living under the impression of the events occurred recently, during his first reign. The entire scene is alert and precipitated, thanks to the change in tempo and rhythm, especially by using triplets.

This is the moment when the ruler begins to plot his revenge plan:

Un poco animato

pu-ne la ca - le să ne pre-gă - teas - că un - păț că mîi-ne dauma-să

Here, he acts as a cunning politician, cultivating an impeccable image among the common people and directing the crowds' discontent towards the boyars.

However, up to the moment of his cruel revenge, Lăpușneanu manifests another one of his qualities – his human side, his kindness and tenderness towards his wife. This characteristic is illustrated in the ballad „*Floare rară, floare scumpă de alior*” (“*You, rare flower, dear milkweed flower*”), based on a lyrical melody with a diatonic and chromatic structure similar with that of folk melodies, as well as in the *duet* between Ruxanda and Lăpușneanu. Example:

Largo e molto rubato

mf Floa-re ra-ră floa-re scum - pă de-a-li-or rân-du-ni-că
poco a poco accel. e cresc. *rit. e dim.*
 doa-mnă *p* al-bă Co-sân-zea-nă la-cri-mă pe gea-nă mai că din i-coa-nă fă-ră de pri-ha-nă

Yet, the ruler's tempestuous nature appears here, as well. In an anger outburst, when his wife makes an attempt to stop the slaying of the boyars, he instinctively puts his hand on his dagger, but still manages to control himself, saying:

Animato

mul - ță - meș - te ce - ru-lui ca - re mi-a a-min-tit
 că ești ma-ma co - pi - i - lor noș - tri.

(*You should thank the Lord, who reminded me that you are the mother of our children ...*)

Through the ballad "*You, rare flower, dear milkweed flower*" and the folk song "*I wither, but the forest lingers on*", composer Mustea allows us to catch a glimpse of the delicacy, tenderness and glimmer of purity in Lăpușneanu's soul. At the same time, in his discourse towards Ruxanda, he has an outburst that reminds us of his other, non-tender side. Hence, the composer shows us once again the hero's normal nature – as D. Popovici used to call it – "his bloody nature".

It is very possible that, at this point, through the promise made to his wife to find "a cure against fear", he may have decided to put into action the idea of murdering the boyars.

Another state of mind that defines our character is that of **repentance** and **humbleness**. In fact, this pretense is only a part of his revenge plan, as he counts on his ability to impress and convince the boyars.

As a perfect actor, Alexandru Lăpușneanu manages to convince all the boyars, except Stroici and Spancioc, who are very wary. In fact, the despot's generosity is nothing but a diversion, a method largely used for hiding the reality.

In the next episode – *The feast scene* – another side of Lăpușneanu's character emerges: **his cruelty** and **violence**. Here he reveals his ability to put on a show and his „skillfulness” in torturing, both morally and mentally. He appears both as a "cunning, revengeful tyrant", as well as a "clever politician". He is clever because not only does he solve a personal grudge, but he also makes a political move that consolidates his reign. He gives satisfaction to the crowds, explaining that they are "*stupid, but many*".

Here, Lăpușneanu reminds us of the Roman emperor Nero, as he built the pyramid of heads with his own two hands, after the headless bodies of the boyars had been thrown out of the window. He built the pyramid according to the existing hierarchy, placing the head of the Chancellor on top. All these gestures were made with ease and self-control, leaving the impression that he was preoccupied with maintaining order and discipline.

Lăpușneanu's portrayal through music in this episode is made solely with the orchestra. This was possible thanks to the composer's ability to use all the orchestral possibilities.

Throughout the entire episode, the composer employs color effects and creates a special rhythmic universe, with an emphasis on the selection of pure timbres.

The feast scene excels through the rhythmic pattern, which sustains the musical action and the changes in tempo.

The entire scene is alert. The orchestral development precipitates during the peak moments and the timbral and rhythmic planes become more and more crowded.

By using the metric variation, assigned to different indications of tempo, the composer creates a specific atmosphere. The music is thus able to suggest the given

situation and to outline the characters' personality. The feast scene is a vivid, colorful page, with a great force of penetration into the audience's conscience.

Another scene that reveals Lăpușneanu's personality is the latter one, namely the „*Falling ill*” scene. It is the last great act of the hero's spiritual process, with so many shifts from one extreme to the other. Faced with the imminence of death, the ruler feels the need to repent, to seek comfort in God, as he is being tortured by nightmares.

Here, the librettist and musician, altogether, have highlighted the **weakness** and **vulnerability** of the ”cunning, tyrant ruler“. The melodic line is cantabile, with tendencies of lamentation and with a lyrical-meditative expression.

Meno mosso



A fi - ri - șor bă - lai cân - ti - ccl de nai co - pi - lă mân...

Thanks to the rhythmic configurations and to the chromatic structure, the melody acquires a folk character.

After this short fragment of restless, resentful meditation, the ruler regains his strength, and, at the same time, the old Lăpușneanu comes back to life, with his hatred and his promises of revenge:

Andante




și de mă voi în-drep-ta pre mulți am să po-pesc și eu !
(and, should I get better, there will be many that I will strike...)

In terms of expression, this episode is a little more tense and illustrates a state of restlessness. The ensemble becomes dynamic, as if foretelling the denouement: the death of Alexandru Lăpușneanu.

Here, the composer manages to create a truthful image of the ruler, by using various vocal techniques, such as:

1. *a hoarse voice*

Andante



2. *with violence*

Andante

M-ai o - tră - vit
(You have poisoned me...)

Detailed description: A single staff of music in bass clef, marked 'Andante'. It begins with a treble clef-like symbol and a key signature of one flat. The melody consists of a few notes: a quarter note G4, a quarter note A4, a quarter note B4, and a quarter note C5, followed by a rest. There is a small 'x' above the first note.

3. *free speech*

Ad libitum

scor-pii cu caf-tan și li ce vân - du - te și spur-ca-te boai-te i - po-cri - te

Detailed description: A single staff of music in bass clef, marked 'Ad libitum'. The melody is more complex, featuring a triplet of eighth notes and a quintuplet of eighth notes. The lyrics are written below the staff.

4. *the horrified shout*

Piu mosso con ira, parlando, espressivo

mf m-ai - ni - le *f* m-ai - ni - le
(the hands.. the hands...)

Detailed description: A single staff of music in bass clef, marked 'Piu mosso con ira, parlando, espressivo'. The tempo is 9/8. The melody is marked with 'mf' and 'f'. The lyrics are written below the staff.

5. *terrified*

$\text{♩} = 84$

Oh mă în - tu - nec iar mă cu-fund în în - tu - ne - ric
(Oh, I'm sinking into darkness again...)

Detailed description: A single staff of music in bass clef, marked 'terrified'. The tempo is 84. The melody is marked with a triplet of eighth notes. The lyrics are written below the staff.

His vocal declamation resembles either the singable melody, or the *parlando* style; thus, the composer combines the attributes of the *melodic* recitative with the *spoken* one, for example:


Piu mosso

să-i toa-ce cu to - po-ru-n mici fă - ră-me fă - ră - me fă -râme
(Let them cut them in small pieces with the ax... into small pieces..)

Detailed description: A single staff of music in bass clef, marked 'Piu mosso'. The melody is marked with a key signature of one flat and a 4/4 time signature. The lyrics are written below the staff.

He also uses the *dramatic recitative, with exclamations.*

Ad libitum



u - ciși tre - bu-iesc u-ciși cu to-ții A-a-a
 (They must all be killed...)

In truth, the composer has used the innovations introduced by Arnold Schönberg in terms of the possibilities of vocal expression, as well as the sung declamation (in German: *Sprechton*), the parlando style and spoken singing (in German: *Sprechgesang*). These dramaturgic methods and specific techniques ensure the individualization of Alexandru Lăpușneanu's image.

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