

## Folk modalism expression in George Enescu's works

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**Abstract:** *This study highlights some aspects of the Romanian folk modalism used by the Romanian composer George Enescu (1881-1955) in the suite “Impresii din copilărie op. 28” pentru vioară și pian (“Impressions from Childhood Op. 28” for Violin and Piano). The thoroughly conducted analysis is meant to identify and accurately focus on the wealth of modal formations, which are not only the conceptual-aesthetic foundation on which the composer places the musical ideatic background, but it is the source of multicoloured expressiveness which animates this piece emotionally. The wealth of the Enescian modal inspiration, based on the modal melodic expressiveness, exploits all the resources of linearism and latent polyphony, becoming representative as an essence of Romanian folk musicality poured into instrumental interpretative formulas of Western influence.*

Key-words: *analysis, Enescu, folk modalism, suite, violin and piano*

### 1. Introduction

George Enescu's last return to his parental home of Liveni was in 1940, in a moment of the twilight of the composer's life. It was a moment of great drama for both the country - the suffering of the Second World War - and for the great musician as well, who was under an increasingly poor health condition due to his heart and spinal cord diseases. Once inside the back garden, Enescu asked those who accompanied him to allow a moment of solitude. When he returned, he was depressed and melancholic: ” Then he went to the cemetery in Dorohoi where his father was buried and to his mother’s grave in Mihăileni, where he was visibly disturbed by emotion” – recalls Romeo Drăghici (Dickerson).

Only two years later, in 1942, he performed the piece for the first time, playing the violin while the musician Dinu Lipatti was playing the piano.

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## 2. General aspects

The ten programmatic pieces which make up the suite are a living picture, depicted by musical means, of an era at the beginning of the composer's life, suggestively depicted by the following titles, that we also take over, similarly to Pascal Bentoiu, the translation provided by Emanoil Ciomac (Bentoiu 1984, 448):

- I. *Ménétrier* (The Fiddler)
- II. *Vieux mendiant* (The Old Beggar)
- III. *Ruisselet au fond du jardin* (Spring at the back of the garden)
- IV. *L'oiseau en cage et le coucou au mur* (The Bird in the Cage and the Cuckoo in the Wall)
- V. *Chanson pour bercer* (Lullaby)
- VI. *Grillon* (The Cricket)
- VII. *Lune à travers les vitres* (The Moon Pervades the Window)
- VIII. *Vent dans la cheminée* (Wind in the Chimney)
- IX. *Tempête au dehors, dans la nuit* (Night Storm Outside)
- X. *Lever du soleil* (Sunrise)

From a musicological point of view, this suite has been approached less than other works by Enescu from different perspectives: the few references to this piece, the most consistent input has been provided by the composer Pascal Bentoiu, in his work *Capodopere enesciene (Enescu's Masterpieces)* (Bentoiu 1984: 449), where he mainly refers to the mosaic like fabric of cells representative for the style "in Romanian folk character", greatly settled by Enescu in *Sonata pentru pian și vioară nr. 3, în la minor, în caracter popular românesc*, op. 25 (*Sonata for Piano and Violin No. 3 in A minor, in Romanian Folk Character*, Op. 25), composed in 1926.

The work is a masterpiece of the genre, which - although not homogeneous from a stylistic point of view - illustrates sonorously, faithfully some strong coordinates of Enescu's musical senses and sensitivity. Without denying the gains of including modal folk features in his thinking, G. Enescu demonstrates again a refined processing of the sonorous input that combines the modal with the tonality. Therefore, we approach *Impresii din copilărie (Impressions from Childhood)* in hope for understanding some aspects of how the great composer manages the tonal-modal language around the last decade of his life. Of the suite of the ten pieces, this focuses on revealing the peculiarities of the tonal-modal language of folkloric nature, included in the first one *Ménétrier* – considering it the most illustrative one from *Suita pentru vioară și pian op. 28 (Suite for Violin and Piano Op. 28)* from this respect and the second piece - *Vieux mendiant* - whose melodic and harmonic tonal-modal melodic and harmonic are meant to be emphasized.

## 2.1. Ménétrier

Since the beginning of the first piece, that "characterised theme" P. Bentoiu refers to (Bentoiu 1984, 452), which also opens the piece, creates different interpretations in terms of what we are concerned about: while the exegete quoted sees in this theme a development "from the initial *D major* (with cadences on the 6th step, *B*) to a potential *A major* (measure 11) to a potential *C* [...]" (Bentoiu 1984, 452), we consider that, on the contrary, the centre *B* is well established since the beginning, initially in a *pentatonic hemitonic* context of IV<sup>th</sup> stage, in measure 1 and measure 6 (for all the references to the musical score, the tonal-modal analysis at the end of the present study should be considered) and then within the cell development in measures 2-5 and measure 7:

**MÉNÉTRIER**  
Allegro deciso, non mosso (♩ = 96)

VIOLON

*f* *giocoso* C2.1 *un poco più dolce* (♩ = 96)

H pentatonic hemitonic Aeolian B

6 (♩ = 96) *di nuovo giocoso* C2.1 *un poco più dolce* (♩ = 96)

B pentatonic hemit. st.VI

H pentatonic hemitonic Aeolian B VI H min.V VII IV

Example 1. *Ménétrier*, measures 1-10, violin and piano

Our opinion is based on the intonational configuration itself of the *pentatonic* quoted, where the key-element (*A*) is missing to make reference to the potential *D* centre. In exchange, even the rhythmic deployment turns *B* – when it first occurs – into an important point of the statement, which will also appear five times along the measures 1-6 – in rhythmical values which become fruitful within the context. The mere utterance sound *D* at the end of the anapestic rhythmic cell followed by the quarter (measures 1, 2 and 6) is not meant to impose the *D* center, as it is not supported from a cadence point of view by the key element mentioned above. Moreover, this key-element *A* is avoided by the composer, as it appears only in the third measure on bar 3.3 (a type of shortening the metrical distribution: the first figure before the point represents the bar, while the one after the point represents the bar's beat), then it will later appear only within the subtone cadence (measure 4.1,

5.1, 6.1). The discontinuous *G* (measures 2.3, 3.3) represents the pedal taken over from measures 1.2 and solved in *F #* – the dominant element of the *Aeolian B* in which a great part of this theme develops – which makes the *cell Y* in measures 2.3 and 7.3 appear as a consequence of the latent polyphony which causes the presence of the increased fifth. This is not the *Lydian mode* – which we fully agree to the composer P. Bentoiu – but an indirect, accidental consequence, which was convenient to the composer due to its peculiar sonority, which makes it "the anxiety cell" (Bentoiu 1984: 454). *Aeolian B* appears again for a short time (measure 7) to make room to the *F # Aeolian* mode with mobile steps which lead to the Dorian embellishment (*D #*) and the *Phrygian* one (*G natural*).

The formal reprise (*A<sub>v</sub>* – measure 49) brings again the thematic path also centred on *B* in an harmonic deployment meant to create the modal variation intensively used by Enescu.

49 *Tº più largamente* *mi γ* *si (tetr. sup.desc.)* *(♩ = 72)* *(♩ = 66)*  
*ff molto espress.* *<rfz* *dim. poco a poco* *pf cant.*

D IV min. VII 6# 4#  
H II 6# min. I V I I 5 II VII I IV VII VII  
(H III) (HVI III)  
maj. # min.

53 *poco rit.* *un poco lento* *(♩ = 80)* *pp* *pizz.* *f* *ff*  
VII I IV III VII V I V I VII III

57 *Calando-a Tº* *(♩ = 80)* *gettando l'arco* *simile* *Pizz. m+s* *Arco m+s* *lunga*  
*tranz.* *pp* *p* *ppf* *ppf* *p* *f* *lunga*

VI III...  
(VII III)

Example 2. *Ménétrier*, measures 49-62, violin and piano

The end (measures 56-60) could be confusing as regards the modal centre of the thematic statement: the harmonic fifth established on  $D^I$  does not represent the end on the modal centre mentioned above, but a modal opening to the second piece of the suite, as it is about a polyfunctional construction (*Aeolian B VII/III*) – which can be noticed in the independent development of the superior voice above the  $D^I$  accompaniment measures 56-57). So, the harmonic fifth under discussion represents the overlapping of two voices – therefore two functional entities – not only a singular functional unit. We should also add that the alternating harmonic fifths at the end of the short development (measures 47-48) have a different meaning, each of them representing a distinct function (I, V).

Coming back to the initial pentatonic statement, it should be pointed out how the composer gives to it new modal valences by placing it in various modal contexts and by its different end within modal background: in measure 11, although it describes *Dorian Bb*, it still ends in *Ionian C*, as compared with the same presence in measure 26, but with an end in a *Phrygian hexatonic* on  $F$ ; in *Aeolian B* in measures 21-23; in  $F \#$  (suggested *Aeolian*) in measure 30 or in *C hemitonic pentatonic of IV<sup>th</sup> state* in measure 32, the latter one creating the feeling of a *Lydian C* as related to the fragment it precedes. Not all the developments of the pentatonic statement are ascending: in measure 9 it appears developed descending, following the patterns *B hemitonic pentatonic in VI<sup>th</sup> state*:

11 (---#96)  
*di nuovo giocoso.*  
 (B $\flat$  dorian)\* C ionian (V) I  
*f marc.*  
 B $\flat$   $\alpha$  A  $\flat$   $\alpha$   
 A V (I) G min. V (I) do V  
 E min. V (I) D min. V (I)  
 \* anticipation

Example 3. *Ménétrier*, measures 11-14, violin and piano

In *Ménétrier* one can also notice other heptachordic formations relatively well established together –  $F \#$  *Phrygian* (in measure 16), with figurative element – the leading note  $E\#$  – also due to the latent poliphony –,  $F\#$  *Aeolian* with the VII<sup>th</sup> step mobile (measure 30), *chromatic mode 2 of „i” structura F* (measure 42) – together with other ones of smaller values, like  $C\#$  *Locrian hexatonic* /  $B$  *Aeolian hexatonic* – a possibility of plurivalent modal interpretation due to the high ambiguity specific to Enescu's work, which gives special modal nuances in terms of the expresiveness of the musical discourse (measure 16) or *Phrygian F hexatonic* (measures 26-27) – to note these modes, we use the systematisation of the chromatic modes present in Gh. Oprea and Larisa Agapie's work (Oprea and Agapie 1983: 127):

Example 4. *Ménétrier*, measures 15-24, violin and piano

George Enescu creates special modal colours due to the peculiar modal formations, like the *Histrion pentachord* which appears in measures 13 and 14, whose element – short superior appoggiatura – generates together with the inferior level of the latent polyphony geometrical rapports (*Bb*  $\alpha$  – measure 13 – and *A b*  $\alpha$  in measures 14). Otherwise, a melodic segment of type *alpha* also appears in measure 29 (*F*  $\beta$ ) as a consequence of the ”abrupt” consequence *F* # *Aeolian* – *A* (suggested by the *tetratonic scale*  $C^3-A^2-G^\sharp-E^2$ ), and in another one, *E*  $\gamma$ , appears the false relation in measure 50. The presence of these *alpha* segments is not accidental in Enescu’s work, as the composer also uses consciously in other pieces the expressive resources of the geometrical rapports.

Another important modal element in Enescu’s musical language – which can also be found in this piece – is the modal major-minor exchange, taken over from the Romanian folklore. Rather great in number, some of these have a strong modal connotation (*F* - *f* – measure 43; *G* - *g* – measure 44), others are the result of some harmonical developments of tonal origin (measures 35.2-35.3: *A*  $V_4^6$ -*D*  $V_7$ , the element mentioned in the musical example M3rd-m3rd). Others are graphically hidden by enharmonicals (measures 44.2-44.3: *C* # - *c* #). The same area of modal ambiguity also includes the indecisions of the sonorous centring present in measure 29 (*f* #/*A*), in measure 40 (*G*/*g*), the latter one is due to the depressive modal path which – once in a modal path of minor state (*A* – measure 37) – requires a depressive continuation as well, without excluding an effusive option (*d*/*D* – *g*/*G* – measures 38-40). This is the right moment to mention the polymodalism present in certain moments, like the stratification *A*/*F* # (measure 33).

We also outline the jointure between the modal and the tonal, visible in the inclusion of some functional rapports taken over from the tonality system, like the determination V-I present, for example, intensively in measures 34-36, but also

other functional relations which, even if they are taken over from the tonal harmonical-functional typology were turned into modal functional instruments:

Example 5. *Ménétrier*, measures 25-61, violin and piano

## 2.2. Vieux mendiant

Since the beginning, Enescu puts us into a minor chord on *D*, on which he lingers for three times and longer – in tempo *Un poco andante, malinconico* (M.M. 54) –, due to the *fermata*, which creates a depressive mood, somewhat static. The harmonic novelty occurs in the introductory statement of the piano, in the second measure, when surprisingly, the composer impresses the listener emotionally, by the deepening of the drama due to the polyfunctional stratification  $II\#/III$ , whose performance can also be of minorised accord of the superior mediant with seventh ( $III^7_b$ ), but also a fifth delay (5-4) in the accord of the counter dominant with the ninth (!) in bass (a performance also supported by the preservation of the harmonic

construction in measures 3-4). The meaning of deep suffering is of high impact due to the mixtural harmonic succession at high third  $F^1/A^1 - E^1/G^\sharp - F^1/A^1 - E^1/G^\sharp$  (circled in example 1). Modally, due to the appearance of  $B$  in measures 2 and 3, the mode clarifies as *Dorian D*:

The motif with which the violin intervenes is set on a decreased tetrachord ( $B-C^1-D^1-E b^1$ ) which centres minor on  $C$ , reaching a maximum degree of expressive depression. If the composer had resorted to a natural  $E$ , then the psychological impact wouldn't have been so strong, as the Phrygian tetrachord is set in *Dorian D*, previously crystallised. The motif of the violin expressing the ethos of a mode of minor state on  $C$  achieves by  $E b^1$ , a polymodal *Dorian D/C* with incredibly tragic expressive effect due to an effect expressive. More than that, the polyfunctional harmonic construction reaches the sonorosity of a geometrical fabric in which appears an *alpha* segments.

VIEUX MENDIANT  
Un poco andante, malinconico  
(♩ = 54)

re I    II $\frac{6\sharp}{4}$     I    II $\frac{6\sharp}{4}$     do I  
dorian    III $\frac{5-4}{3b}$     III $\frac{5-4}{3b}$     re II $\frac{7\sharp}{4}$   
 $\frac{do y}{mi \beta}$

Example 6. *Vieux mendiant*, measures 63-69, violin and piano

### 3. Conclusions

In terms of what has been pointed out in the present study, we can appreciate again the wealth of Enescu's modal inspiration which – founded on the modal melodic expressiveness – exploits all the resources of the modal linearism and the latent polyphony to give the musical discourse a polyedric modal dimension, of high sensitivity and freshness, representative as an essence of Romanian folkloric musicality set in instrumental interpretative formulas of Western origin.

### References

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