Bulletin of the *Transilvania* University of Braşov Series VIII: Performing Arts • Vol. 11 (60) No. 2 - 2018

Concerto No.1 for Violin and Orchestra in A Minor op.99 from Dmitri Sostakovici

Maria Cristina BOSTAN¹

Abstract: In Concerto no. 1 for violin and orchestra, the soloist is facing a very difficult page, hich emphasizes all the resources of the instrument, especially when the violin is accompanied by an extensive orchestral ensemble. The score provides, through its structural unity, a wide range of symphonic and concerto elements, as well as content of the forms included in it.

Concerto no.1 for violin and orchestra in A minor op.99, has a quadripartite structure and unfolds in an atypical succession of the traditional concerto genre: the first part Moderato-Nocturna, the second part Scherzo (Allegro), the third part Passacaglia (Andante) and the fourth part Burlesque (Allegro con Brio).

Keywords: Concerto, Passacaglia, Scherzo, Burlesque, violin.

1. General historical presentation

Concerto no.1 for violin and orchestra in A minor op.99, has a quadripartite structure and unfolds in an atypical succession of the traditional concerto genre: the first part Moderato-Nocturna, the second part Scherzo (Allegro), the third part Passacaglia (Andante) and the fourth part Burlesque (Allegro con Brio), lasting almost 40 minutes.

The four movements are marked by the atmosphere full of anguish of the main theme. The orchestra is composed of the strings compartment (strings quintet), piccolo flute (flute III), 2 flutes, 2 oboes, English horn (oboe III), 2 clarinets in B, bass clarinet in B (clarinet III in B), 2 legatos, contrabassoon (bassoon III), four horns (in F), tuba, timpani, tambourine, tam-tam, xylophone, celestas, two harps. A characteristic of the concert is its tonal instability. The merger of the symphonic and the concerto genres is made by combining instrumental virtuosity with

¹ Dept. of Musical Pedagogy, *Transilvania* University of Braşov, Romania.

symphonic writing and the involvement of both the solo violin and the orchestral ensemble in expressing the themes.

The first part, *Moderato-Nocturna*, has a free-form structure with fantasy type elements, which marks a great tonal instability. Its entire development is a comprehensive internalized recitative, in the style of the lyrical improvisation, with a contrapuntal writing and it is focused on rendering the main idea. The title of *Nocturna* does not remind one of the romantic genre, but it rather suggests the metamorphosis of the musical idea by comparing it to all the musical and psychological parameters. By means of its entire atmosphere, the *Nocturna* in the first part also refers to the musical idea of Arnold Schönberg's *Transfigured Night* or to Alban Berg's *Concerto for violin and orchestra*.

2. Formal aspects of The Concerto

After a brief *introduction* of *four bars*, the violin takes over the theme from the low strings ensemble, perfectly integrating itself to the symphonic discourse. The slow movement of the first part covers a broad melodic structure, without strong contrasts. The theme in part one has, by drawing up the melodic-rhythmic melodic line (chromaticism, leaps over intervals, descending and then ascending, rhythmic repetitions), a well-supported inner tension. Although the A minor tonality is placed at the beginning, harmony marks the dissolution of the operational centres. The musical substance in the low string ensemble is found in the music conduct of the violin:



The theme retains its features and the rhythm is modified. The duple meter at the beginning of the solo violin theme will be alternated with the triple one (3/4 and 3/2), the rhythm being imposed due to the obstinacy of the repeated formulas. In the beginning, the melodic leaps of chromatic intervals are carried out in the medium register, to continue in the acute one. The musical material expressed on the violin is not set on any sound centre. The solo violin score is very difficult, the composer requiring the instrument to perform on all registers:



Ambitus of the solo score is very wide:



Starting from the 78th bar, the violin expresses, with a sourdine, the theme that would become the core of the music material, beginning with B flat from the fourth octave:



There are *three episodes* based on the same musical idea: the first episode, representing the exposition and the rendering of the entire orchestral and solo compartment (*Moderato - a tempo*, bars 1-97); the second episode (*a tempo - Tempo I*, bars 98-140), in which both the solo violin and the instrumental ensemble contribute to the thematic effort, to the metamorphosis and the dynamization of the theme (here, the contrabassoon is in the foreground, along with other wind instruments in wood and violins, violas) and the third episode, where the solo violin returns to the foreground, accompanied by the strings and the harp, with short interventions from the bass clarinet and the contrabassoon. Each episode of the exposition and the rendering of the musical idea leads to accumulating tension in bars 37-50, 50-65, the return to the internalized feature of the theme occurring in bars 73-97.

The generic musical idea develops on a sinuous melodic line with descending tendencies on the ostinato dotted rhythm and a compound duple meter. The melodic solution of the tension is still descending. The first step comprises a descending alteration within the orchestral discourse. The introduction of the tuba (pianissimo, bar 98) marks the dynamization of the first musical idea (with tremolo on the timpani and tam-tam). The thematic motif develops following the line of the chromatic elements in alternative bars (4/4 - 3/2). Starting with bar 98, the violin continues the thematic rendering of the melodic-rhythmic theme.

The composition style of the first part (as well as of the entire concerto) can be distinguished through the development processes of the theme supported in the foreground by the solo instrument:



The oppressive and sombre suggestion of the musical material, with an austere feature, is reminiscent of the construction of the theme in *Symphony No.10*, which precedes the concert, but also of the *Symphony No. 11*, which continues the philosophical-existential issues found in them. The continuous development of the musical material is structured based on the variational treatment.

The episode *a tempo – Meno-mosso tempo* I marks this inner dynamization and metamorphosis of the musical idea for all the instrumental compartments and for the solo violin.

The orchestra is involved in supporting the musical idea, rendering it through augmentation and dynamization, the violin being integrated to the symphonic discourse, in a dialogue with the instruments parties — the clarinets, the bassoon and the contrabassoon together with the horns.

The low strings take over the thematic idea, supporting the discourse of the solo violin. At the end of the first episode (*a tempo* bars 107-110) the wind instruments remind of the basic idea configuration.

From the moment it passes to *Meno mosso* (bar 111), the solo violin takes the lead in complementarity with the strings (violins 1, 2 and the violas) in the same rhythm divided into triolets, on the pedals of the low strings and the woodwinds (bars 116 -125). The pedal is often found in strings ensembles, before *Meno mosso*.

The last episode brings back the internalized atmosphere, resuming the primary role of the violin, which is accompanied by the pedals of the strings and of the brass wind instruments, as well as the sound effects of the harp and the *clusters* interpreted by the strings (as in the first episode, at the beginning of the musical idea development) . The harp comes to the foreground at the end of the first part. On the E⁵ sound in *pp morendo* of the solo violin, the harp and the celesta express a final motif of the original idea (augmented), being supported by the strings, the timpani and the tam-tam. The last chord of the strings brings back the A minor tonality.

Without offering a demonstrative page of violin virtuosity, Şostakovici requires the best of the technical and expressive potential of the solo instrument, using numerous methods of high technical difficulty: great leaps over intervals and registers, sourdine in small nuances and difficult violin positions, chromaticisms and great nuances in the acute register:



The directions regarding the tempo and the expression are recorded accurately. The Moderato tempo is limited by the Meno-mosso, so that Tempo I could come back (bar 141) at the end of the first part. The dynamic palette is very rich and complex, but the composer prefers the sourdine in the violin score throughout the development of the musical idea, even in times of dynamic growth.

The entire development of the first part is marked by the quasi improvised conducting of the solo violin on the generic musical theme, while being offered a discrete contrapuntal accompaniment by the orchestral ensemble, on groups of instruments.

The second part, *Scherzo (Allegro)* in B-flat minor, has a free-form sonata structure in polyphonic writing. It brings a strong contrast to the first part. The composer draws up the first theme from the original motif of the first part:



In the *exposition section*, the theme starts on flutes and bass clarinet (bars 1-47) on the accented octaves of the solo violin in triple meter (3/8), (B flat minor tonality). Starting with bar 32, the violin takes over the first theme and develops it:



The slightly grotesque general theme of the *Scherzo* is interpreted in staccato and legato, in semiquavers passages. The ambitus of the initial theme is wide (B-flat, great octave - D flat, third octave), being amplified by the solo violin and the low strings, which take over and develop the theme:



The violin is accompanied by the woodwind compartment (flute, bass clarinet, then oboe, English horn, contrabassoon, clarinets, bassoons). After the *glissando* of the solo violin (bars 91-97) and the semiquavers repetitions in *tremollo*, the low strings (cellos and double basses) bring back the original theme (F minor). Theme I is then expressed by the cellos and the double basses (measures 99-106), transposed into a fourth, in the grave register (great octave and contra octave) in *forte*, preparing its comeback on the solo violin, this time in *ff* (bar 108), in the initial version. After the exposition of the first episode of the main thematic group (woodwind, solo violin, low strings) during which an increasing tension of the musical expression is accumulated, the low strings interpret, on the variation exposition of theme I on the violin, a repetitive melodic-rhythmic motif which, by reversing the chromatic intervals, anticipates the introduction of the second thematic group, built on the *monogram motif*:



The second musical episode (five sharps near the key signature, meant to anticipate the reversal in the motif of the *DSHC* – *DESCH* monogram and the violin improvisation), is developed mainly through a strong nuance based on the *DESCH*

motif (*D sharp - E - C sharp - B natural*, a motif that can be met also in *Symphony no.10* and in the *String quartet no.8*). This thematic motif, which represents the monogram of the composer's name and, at the same time, the second thematic group, is introduced by the woodwinds (bar 135), in long notes, then in an augmented rhythm, maintaining the triple meter.

The rendering of the motif (oboe, clarinet, bassoon) prepares the introduction of the sound monogram *DESCH* (bar 135) with a rhythmic diminution (bar 149).

The DESCH motif is interpreted by the solo violin between bars 162-182 on the *staccato* of the violins and violas. In bar 199, the original theme, metamorphosed by rhythmic augmentation (bars 199-206) and superimposed on the reversal in the monogram motif, is also expressed by the solo violin (bars 199-206) and then by the woodwinds (oboe, English horn, bassoon, contrabassoon -bars 207-210). The reversal of the monogram motif is rendered—on the double notes of the violin — by the woodwinds (oboe, English horn, bassoon) and the strings (violins, viola, cello) and then by the low strings (bars 240-243).



The third thematic group is confirmed by the woodwind ensemble (piccolo, flute, oboe, English horn, clarinet 1 and 2) and xylophone, in unison (bars 256-271). The theme is taken over by the solo violin (bar 272) and rendered in bars 316-321. The third thematic group has a dancing, cheerful, ironic and humorous feature, being expressed by the woodwinds (piccolo) and xylophone, on the harmonic and rhythmic accompaniment of the bassoon, contrabassoon, horns, timpani, tambourine and strings (E minor tonality). The introduction of the piccolo flute and the tambourine is prepared four bars before confirming the third thematic group. The orchestral ensemble influences, in ff, the melodic-rhythmic feature of the third thematic group, consisting of two symmetrical periods of four phrases, each made up of 4 bars (bars 256-271). A special nuance is given by the xylophone, the timpani, the tambourine and the piccolo.

The ambitus of the third thematic group is much wider (C flat in the 4th octave down to F in contra octave). The solo violin takes over the theme with the contrapuntal accompaniment of the clarinets and the strings (violins 1 and 2, violas). In the development of the third thematic group on the solo violin (bar 288), a melodic-rhythmic motif typical to Şostakovici is included (which can also be seen

in Concerto no. 1 for piano and orchestra, the third part and in Concerto no.2 for piano and orchestra, the first part):



The transposition of the third thematic group on the violin, from ff to f and from the acute register to the medium and grave register by measuring the dynamic and reducing the rhythm prepares the transition to the next section (bar 329).

The *development section - Allegro*, begins with the generic theme on the solo violin, in the original tonality (again 5 flats on the key signature), according to the melodic-rhythmic configuration, in the medium and grave register:

The violin is accompanied by the bassoon and the contrabassoon, gradually adding the oboe, the violas and the cellos, and then the horn, the clarinet, the flute, the bass clarinet and the piccolo, followed by the strings. The first thematic cell will be brought back by the bassoon, the violin and then by the oboe.

The theme is interpreted in *staccato* and *legato*, in semiquavers passages. The composer renders the three thematic groups using the instruments ensemble in a varied manner: from a small group (solo violin, bassoon, contrabassoon and low strings) to individual solo instruments and then to the wide ensemble. The *development* suggests the atmosphere of a chamber ensemble which is amplified, preparing the return of the first thematic group and also confirming the concise, limited *reprise* (bar 509):



At the same time, the violin expresses the reversal of the monogram motif (B flat – G natural - C - B flat), being doubled on the sixth, on a duple rhythm.

Within the *reprise*, the original theme is interpreted by the entire orchestral ensemble, in *ff* (triple meter).

Theme I will be taken over in fff by the solo violin with the accompaniment of the timpani. The motif of the reversal in the sound monogram of Şostakovici's name can be distinguished on the bass clarinet within the ensemble. The semiquavers passages in crescendo and tremolo on the violin and the wind

instruments prepare the return of the dancing theme on the solo violin, in the B flat major tonality (bar 546), again in *Poco più mosso*.

Along with the third thematic group, the monogram theme is rendered (on low strings, then on the clarinet, bassoon, viola, cello, double bass) on the strings and the wind instruments, preparing the introduction of the solo violin, which would express the monogram motif, in fff, in the acute register:



The motif precipitates the development towards the coda. The original thematic motif returns in the coda, on the woodwinds (by emphasizing the piccolo flute) and on the strings and ends, quite abruptly, the second part, in ff. The symphonic elements of the concerto impose the solo violin in the second part as well. The solo instrument score is deliberately brilliant, the violin emphasizing the great virtuosity elements, accompanied by the frenzy of the fast tempo, the ample dynamic and the rhythmic richness.

The difficulty of the orchestral score should not be overlooked either, the composer particularly insisting on the woodwind instruments nuance.

The third part, Passacaglia - Andante (F minor), is based on a theme that translates a deep emotional, yet internalized, noble state, built on the rhythm of the ostinato model, specific to the Baroque genre. The development of the theme, in great leaps over intervals and simple rhythm in triple meter, renders the same grief and nostalgia present in Symphony no.10 and the trio with the piano.

The Passacaglia is drawn up on the exposition of the subject and its development in seven variations, where the subject-theme will pass from the string instruments compartment to the wind instruments, as well as to ensemble made up of the wind instruments and the low strings, accompanied by the timpani. The theme specific to the Passacaglia is introduced at the beginning by the string ensemble, the timpani and the horn. The crotchet rests have a great significance in expressing the feature of the theme. In carrying out the variations, the composer brings a diversity of voices which overlap on the ostinato theme, each variation imposing its melodic configuration.

The subject of the *Passacaglia* is drawn up on a simple melodic line with a wide ambitus (from a *major second* interval to a *major ninth*). The ambitus of the theme is wider than the one in the Baroque period. The subject-theme is rendered

in ff nuance by the low strings (cello and double bass). The counter theme (the signal-theme) overlaps the subject-theme and it is expressed by the horns in ff.

From this theme of the horns, the solo violin will develop its own theme which will suffer variations in rendering the other instruments as well. From the rhythmic point of view, the counter theme combines the exceptional triolets divisions with notes repeated in arpeggios.

The culminating point of the variational development marks the introduction of the solo *cadence*. Şostakovici assigns a long *cadence* to the solo instrument score, very difficult from the technical point of view and which appears as a standalone part.

The cadence (bars 168-248) develops based on the thematic material, with technical elements of high difficulty: double notes, leaps over sixths and chords, in opposing registers, octaves. The theme of the *DESCH monogram* is brought back between bars 243-245, in chords. All the themes are rendered during the development of the cadence moment and the motif of the third thematic group can be heard in bar 263.

The repeated notes and the quints and octaves *glissandos* end the solo instrument moment and make the transition towards the last part.

It has to be emphasized that, in the third part, the treatment of the orchestral ensemble is progressive, starting from instruments compartments and going to the entire ensemble (without piccolo, harp and celesta). The solo violin, although distinct, is perfectly integrated into the discourse of the ensemble.

Part four, *Burlesque - Allegro con brio* (A minor) has a jovial and cheerful feature, contrasting strongly with *Passacaglia*. The *Burlesque* is structured as a *rondo* with *sonata* elements in a free, original and inventive treatment.

The exposition begins with the introduction of the chorus (main theme) - A, on the following instruments: xylophone, bassoon - 1 + 2, clarinet - 1 + 2, English horn, flute and piccolo flute.

The strings sustain the pedal in staccato semiquavers and in counterpoints (A minor). The transition is made by rendering the thematic motifs (bar 29); the solo violin is in dialogue with the clarinet 1 (bar 30) in an imitative style (in canon). The imitative dialogue, alert and with a dancing feature goes up to bar 47. The harmonic support is made by the strings, which ensure the accompaniment in a contrapuntal rhythm of quavers.

The main theme, rhythmic, with a dancing feature, in duple meter is rendered at the beginning by the wind instruments compartment, then accompanied by the strings group. It is imposed by the melodic configuration of the leaps over intervals (fourths and quints). The dotted rhythm and the melody with leaps over chromatic intervals create the impression of a folklore dancing song with

oriental inflections. The simple feature of the theme releases a great deal of energy and strength.

The dancing theme is imposed both by its melodic-rhythmic configuration with oriental intonations and by the instruments, combining the winds (with the piccolo in the foreground) with the xylophone. The tuba and the horns offer contrapuntal harmonic accompaniment, together with the strings emphasizes, within the musical discourse, the ascending alteration of the fourth step, but also the descending alteration on the second step (B flat), in relation with E flat (the descending fifth step), which show the modal feature of the theme. The violin takes over the discourse (bar 29) with the descended second step(B flat) and ascending fourth step, the melody emphasizing a variation of the Dorian mode on A. The discourse of the violin develops in imitative dialogue (canon) with clarinet 1 (bar 30). The imitative dialogue between the solo violin and the clarinet 1 goes on up to bar 47. This keeps the same manner of attack on the violin, which combines staccato with legato. The first couplet – B belongs to the solo violin as well (bar 49), sustained then by the flute and the clarinet on the chords in pizzicato of the strings. The chorus - A1-returns on the solo violin in bar 64, also in A; the orchestra is gradually amplified. The theme of the chorus is rendered by the violin in dialogue with the bassoon (bars 73-75; 80-85) and the wind instruments (wood and brass) make the transition to the new episode in ff.

The second couplet - C – is confirmed by the solo violin. The theme has a modal feature, with resonances of the Russian music and the violin expresses, in forte, empathically, a simple, isorhythmic melodic line. The wind instruments take over the theme of the couplet C (bar 106), also in forte, but in legato. The violin interprets improvisation passages full of virtuosity on the theme of the wind instruments and the alternation of the strings and the wind instruments with the continuous thematic rendering of the solo violin mark the return of the chorus.

The chorus- A_1 - (bar 133) – begins on the solo violin (in A) accompanied by the timpani and the strings (ostinato on counterpoints).

The first couplet – B is brought back in bar 148, which continues the violin scope on the counterpoints of the strings in alternating dialogue with the wind instruments, a dialogue where the melodic-rhythmic elements of the *couplet C* can also be found. The timpani and the strings, in counterpoints, prepare the introduction of the wind instruments, which express the theme together with the xylophone (piccolo, flutes, oboes, English horn, clarinets, bassoons). The slightly grotesque theme is rendered in unison (upper octave - piccolo), a common process in the composer's concerto and symphonic, but also chamber music writing (Concertino, Concerto no. 2 for piano).

Couplet D coincides with the *development* section, the theme being rendered by the cellos (1 + 2) and the double basses, in the *piano* nuance (bars 198-215), on the *forte* and *staccato* (*sff*) signals of the horns. The horns mark the beginning of the developments and of the thematic rendering episode. The solo violin takes over the rendering of the third couplet theme (D) from the low strings, with the accompaniment of the violins 1 and 2 (bars 215-231), the violins being in turn divided into *pizzicato* (bar 232). The thematic rendering occurs in the metrics as well, the duple meter alternating with the triple meter. The theme of the *Passacaglia* is expresse there again, in *forte* on the clarinet, horn and xylophone (bar 239), in the acute register and in the imitative style.

The solo violin interprets passages full of virtuosity, with an ascending tendency, on the quavers unison of the violins 1 and 2. The theme of the *Passacaglia* echoes up to bar 248; a short transition of the wind instruments and of the strings brings back the theme of the *chorus - A*.

It is the moment of the *reprise* (bar 257), where the melody of the *chorus* regains its original configuration and the triple meter. The composer combines the thematic elements of the *chorus* – A with those of the *couplet B*. The low strings accompany the difficult melodic-rhythmic leaps of the solo violin, the harmonic pedal returning to the tuba, the bassoon, and then to the contrabassoon and the clarinet, with an alternating attack and theme motifs expressed on the flute. The change in the meter modifies the theme accents, providing it a more dancing and joyful feature. The rendering of the theme on the solo violin leaves space for the intonations of the woodwinds and for the pedals on the long sounds of the horns. The triple meter is maintained until the rhythmic dynamization (specific to Şostakovici's style - bar 287). The return to the duple meter (bar 287) coincides with the gradual dynamization of the entire orchestra and of the solo instrument. The new section, *Presto*, brings a variation rendered by rhythmic diminution and increase in the tempo of the *Passacaglia* theme:



The solo violin imposes the theme on the "G" string with a stroke of the bow on the bridge (checking the pressure on the string and having the effect of a sound without *vibrato*, staccato with "nipped", "cut" harmonies, but also full and musical). The wind instruments bring back the theme of *couplet D* in *ff*, on the *pizzicato* and counterpoint chords of the strings, preparing the return of theme

B.As a final signal, the augmented theme of the *Passacaglia* is expressed on the horn 1, in the original tonality (bar 337) and the end is resolved on the initial thematic motif, now interpreted by the entire ensemble, in *ff*, by repeating, in semiquavers, the sound C sharp on the violin (first and third octave), the third step comprising an ascending alteration which marks the final modulation to its homonymous major.

Presto will also be the moment to re-confirm the theme of the Passacaglia by the solo violin (bar 299, on the G string), metrically metamorphosed, rhythmically reduced and transposed. The third couplet - D (bar 319) returns with the rendered theme, in fortissimo, on the woodwinds (clarinets, oboes, flute and piccolo). The chords in pizzicato of the strings, the thematic motifs of the wind instruments and the glissando of the solo violin bring back the theme of the second couplet - C. The violin interprets the couplet B theme on real sounds.

3. Conclusions

The unison of the orchestral ensemble (bar 349), based on the thematic elements from the beginning of the final part - Burlesque (ff) - brings the final culmination.

The violin technical elements are very complex, the solo violin having a brief pause at the beginning of couplet D. The technical processes are multiple, from double strings, chords, glissando to leaps over harmonic intervals, octaves, staccato, passages full of virtuosity, flageolets...

The orchestral ensemble is presented in full at the beginning and the end of the part. The orchestral sounds emphasize the Burlesque feature through the melodic-rhythmic intonations, through the dynamic and the unison in the acute registers of the piccolo flute and of the xylophone and through the emphasis on the thematic motif on the contrabassoon and tuba and the sounds rendered in glissando on the horns.

The diagram of the fourth part is the following:

Exposition	Development	Reprise
A - B - A - C - A - B	- D	- A - D - B

In Concerto no. 1 for violin and orchestra, the soloist is facing a very difficult page, which emphasizes all the resources of the instrument, especially when the violin is accompanied by an extensive orchestral ensemble. The score provides, through its structural unity, a wide range of symphonic and concerto elements, as well as content of the forms included in it.

References

Barenboim, Daniel. 2015. A Life In Music. București: Humanitas.

Firca, Liliana Clemansa. 2002. *Modernity and Advangard in the Music of the XX-th Century (1900-1940).* București: Editura Fundației Culturale Române.

Seehans, Laurens. 1991. *Dmitri Schostakovitsch, Leben und Werk*. Wilhelmshaven. Wolkow, Solomon. 1989. *Die Memoir*. Hamburg.

***. 1990. New Oxford History of Music (vol. 7). Oxford, U.K.

***. 1995. The New Grove of Music and Musicians (vol. 17), 1995. Oxford, U.K.