

## **Transformations of Romanian traditional songs in Constantin Arvinte’s choral creation**

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**Abstract:** *Born in Moldova, raised in the world of the Romanian village, Constantin Arvinte, since childhood, loved the popular song. As a result of artistic maturity, Constantin Arvinte will collect and preserve the Romanian folklore from all parts of the country, he will work on the harmonic - polyphonic gems of the folk song, which, as a conductor, brings them to the light of the show. At the same time he creates himself melodies in folkloric character, which he ornaments choral or instrumental. He continues thereby the tradition of the composers who built the Romanian school of composition. Understanding the ideological communion between the Romanian musical folklore and the psaltic songs, Constantin Arvinte promotes, as a musical expression, the modalism in his creation. We exemplify the statements with the stylistic analysis of the work “Trecui dealu’ la Băiuţ” [“I passed the hill to Băiuţ”].*

Keywords: *folklore, conductor, composer, modalism, chorus.*

### **1. Introduction**

The enclothing of folk songs in the forms of cult musical art is one of the fundamental features of the National School of Composition. The connection of the Romanian musical composition to folklore, started in the 18th century and consolidated during the 19th and 20th centuries, a particularly complex process in terms of changes of the musical language, which continues even today, occurs concurrently with the awareness of national identity at all levels and takes place in all the historical provinces of Romania. The affirmation of the national component of our musical creation marks, with the specific means, the definitive detachment from any kind of cultural interference from the Eastern and Southeastern Europe. Finding its own way through the creative valorization of folklore, the Romanian music, served both by composers, musicologists and ethnomusicologists, interpreters and pedagogues, solidly builds its distinct personality in the context of European values.

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Over time, along with the transformations and enrichment of the aesthetic expression methods, the absorption of folklore in the cult creation, regardless of musical forms and genres, has an unprecedented diversification as amplitude, unique in the artistic world of Europe through its sustained growth. Moreover, the composer's quests, in their endeavor to "descend" to the ancestral sources of folk song, led to the appearance, alongside the actual musical creation, of a national musicology school, which, especially in the twentieth century, sits on a solid scientific foundation and it is located at the forefront of contemporary music science. Names like Constantin Brăiloiu or George Breazul are spoken with respect on all the meridians of the West and the East.

This momentum in scientific research has been corroborated in many cases with musical composition, and there are many situations where brand composers have undertaken their own collections and musical folk research that we have capitalized in creation.

This is the case of Constantin Arvinte <sup>2</sup> who has served with all his creative power the national music.

The specificity of our musical folklore is, as a whole, well known. Melodic modalism, syncretism of singing and poetry, rhythmic systems generated by the pregnancy of Romanian vocalism in melodic construction – whether a song is performed vocally or instrumentally, this vocalism is present and has its decisive imprint on the musical discourse – the latent harmonic relations born of modal functionality, genres and forms of musical constructions, that give them a distinctive aesthetic appearance, capable of conveying the most delicate human feelings, still carry out researches and deepenings, so that the material within reach of the composers is continually increased.

Within this framework is circumscribed, with his entire creative personality, Maestro Constantin Arvinte. The Romanian music owes him folklore collections, cult processing of folk music for choral groups of all kinds and for instrumental ensembles, from peasants and folk instrumental orchestra to symphonic orchestras.

Constantin Arvinte does not stop here. He filters the folklore and writes works in the defining character of the folk song. Thus, Maestro Arvinte supports the point expressed by Ștefan Niculescu as early as the 1980: *„I assert the rise of Romanian music to its highest point, because there never existed as it does today, such an avalanche of works with stylistic orientations so various, belonging to all*

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<sup>2</sup> Constantin Arvinte. Born in 1926 (Voinești-Iași), the Maestro remained in the history of Romanian music as a conductor, composer and folklorist. After finishing his studies, he will dedicate himself entirely to the promotion of national musical values. He left as heritage to the national art scene music, vocal-symphonic music, chamber music and fanfare works, but especially works for all kinds of choirs. We recall only *Hăulita oltenescă* (1966), *Triptic maramureșean* (1968), *Ciuta* (1978), *Coborât-a, coborâtu'* (1985), *Diptic buzoian* (1986), over 30 carols and star songs (1970-2017), religious songs (1990-2017). He has carried on folklore collections in Argeș, Maramureș, Moldova, Dobrogea. He has been awarded with important titles both in the country and abroad.

generations of composers, of a certain professional level. The Romanian musical creation in the last years, framed in the musical thinking of our century and in the continuation of the great local traditions, began to propose original solutions in the universal context of culture (Niculescu, 1980, 342).

But Constantin Arvinte has a musical stylistic feature that differentiates him from the others: the accessibility of his musical discourse. His works give the image of every Romanian's *ego*. The melody is simple. We do not mean the simplicity empty of content, but the elaborate simplicity, carefully constructed, to touch the listener. Harmony, polyphony, the coral or orchestral arrangement and the construction of the musical form are in the same sensitive sense.

In this study we quote such an example from the Maestro's creation. It is a choral piece for mixed formations that amazed European musicians since 1976 when, in France, has won the Second Prize in the Composition Contest in Tours, "Trecui dealu' la Băiuț" ["I passed the hill to Băiuț"].

The *a capella* choral work for mixed choir "Trecui dealu' la Băiuț" ["I passed the hill to Băiuț"] valorizes a folk song from Maramureș. The song has a strophic character, quality respected also by the composer. There are not literary verses, but melodic verses delimited by the presence of the proper regular refrain "A dui daina, a dui daina", but also by the melodic line with verse replacement "A ti-ir li-ir lir li-a", which becomes a second refrain.

The song itself, arrayed for chorus by the composer, has the following structure:

Tre-cui dea-lu' la Bă iuț, — A dui dai-na, a dui dai-na, Cu mân-ca-re la dră-guț,  
 A dui dai-na, a dui dai-na, A ti-ir li-ir lir li-a, A ti-ir li-ir lir li-a,

Ex. 1. "Trecui dealu' la Băiuț" ["I passed the hill to Băiuț"], section A

The configuration of the song is:

A – B (refrain 1) – A – B (refrain 1) – C (refrain 2) – C (refrain 2)

All the melodic rows cadence on the finale *E* of Dorian (Doric) mode, in which the song is conceived. Ambitus is in a quint ( $E^1 - B^1$ ). The musical scale is diatonic, the melody is loose ornamented. From a rhythmic point of view, each melodic line consists of two formulas made by two times each (dipiric). The refrains are regular. The verses are catalectic octosyllabic, the first refrain is acatalectic octosyllabic, the

second is hexasyllabic acatalectic, but by dividing the eights in two sixteens, it reaches an octosyllabic pattern, the syllables *tir* and *lir* becoming *ti-ir* and *li-ir*, the vowel *i* becoming double.

The composer arrays harmonic and polyphonic the work by using the Dorian (Doric) mode, with the constitutive sound *C sharp*, which generates the high sexte interval built on the final sound *E*.

The work is a theme with variations and corresponds to the five melodic verses of the folk song.

**The theme.** The soprano sings the melodic line straightforward, while the alto performs an accompaniment on the final *E*. The second refrain of the folk song is accompanied, dividing the alto's score, by the downward singing of the superior tetracord of the Dorian (Doric) mode.

Li ia, Li ia,  
Li - ir, li - ia, Li - ir, li - ia,

Ex. 2. “Trecui dealu’ la Băiuț” [“I passed the hill to Băiuț”], section A

**Variation I.** The sound discourse widens as ambitus and timbrality through the appearance of the tenor and bass voices along with the feminine ones. The theme is successively sung by soprano and alto. The second level of the musical embroidery, that of harmonic and polyphonic support of the melodic line, consists of the same tetracord intoned *in stretto* by tenor and bass, either starting from the fifth level of the musical mode, *B*, either from the first level, *E*.

2.De mă'n-trea - bă oa - re - ca - re, ă dui dai na, ă dui dai na  
Ce'i duc ba - dii de mân - ca - re ă dui dai na, ă dui dai na  
2.De mă'n-trea - bă oa - re - ca - re Ce'i duc ba - dii de mân - ca - re  
2.De mă'n-trea - bă Ce'i duc ba - di

Ex. 3. “Trecui dealu’ la Băiuț” [“I passed the hill to Băiuț”], section B

**Variation II.** This variation preserves the division of the choral ensemble into two sound levels, that of the melody sung by soprano, with the participation, as a support with harmonic of the melodic rows into parallel tierces of alto (not during the refrains, when this voice is positioned with a accompaniment on final *E*), while

tenor and bass, which forms the second sound level, perform rhythmic-melodic embroideries based on the tetracords of the musical mode.

Ex. 4. “Trecui dealu’ la Băiuț” [“I passed the hill to Băiuț”], section C

**Variation III.** The organization of the sound discourse in two planes continues, the melodic one, of soprano supported by the interventions of alto, but also by tenor and bass, which perform the reversed motif of the theme, sustaining themselves in parallel tierces, preserving, however, the characteristics of Dorian (Doric) mode. The sonority is thus amplified.

**Variation IV.** The sonority of the ensemble keeps amplifying, the melodic level (soprano-alto) preserves primordially, while the male voices, with *in stretto* entrances, perform fragments of the theme, but melodically reversed, or even complete melodic lines at bass, during the second refrain.

Ex. 5. “Trecui dealu’ la Băiuț” [“I passed the hill to Băiuț”], section E

The author enlarges each variation with completions of cadence that resume the last sounds of the second refrain (see tenor and bass at the end of the fourth variation, measures 1 and 2 of the first system).

**The theme.** Respecting the pattern of theme with variations, the composer resumes the theme performed by soprano and supported by alto with the accompaniment on the final, but also with the same superior tetracord of the Doric, where, as a passing note, shows up also the downward chromatising of the sixth level (*C sharp – C natural*).

The last three measures have a cadence, concluding role. All four voices are participating. Surprisingly, the composer, in the final accord, chromatises by rising the third level, which becomes *G sharp*. In this way, a picardial cadence, of tonal origin, is executed.

Another particularity of the cadence is given by the soprano's unexpected glissando, in the last measure.

Ex. 6. “Trecui dealu’ la Băiuț” [“I passed the hill to Băiuț”], section F (Coda)

Therefore, the work respects the principles of the theme with variations in form:

*Theme – Variation 1 – Variation 2 – Variation 3 – Variation 4 – Theme*

The musicality of the melodic line as well as the harmonic-polyphonic inventiveness of the composer gives the conductor the opportunity to develop a musical discourse marked by a suave feeling (the author himself writes at the beginning of the play as an indication, the word *suave*), lyricism that eliminates the possible monotony generated by variations that don’t bring harmonious or timbral or rhythmic novelties.

The beauty of this choral miniature was rewarded with the 2nd prize at the “Ex aequo” Tours-France Contest in 1976.

This exceptional choral work through the harmonic-polyphonic and architectural texture is one of the most precious documents regarding the

compositional valorization in a cult music language of a popular song dressed in the coat of cult music. The desire of setting folklore at the base of the Romanian musical school imposed the necessity of collecting and the scientific research regarding the folk songs. This creed animated Constantin Arvinte. Folklore researcher, conductor and composer, the nonagenarian maestro Constantin Arvinte followed faithfully the line opened by Theodor T. Burada, Gavriil Musicescu, Iacob Mureșianu, Dimitrie Georgescu Kiriac, Constantin Brăiloiu, George Breazul and others, until nowadays. To these remarkable collectors and scholars of musical folklore were added in time composers who gave to our national school of creation "the light" of cult art based on the tradition of folk song.

From the stack of composers who have customized our school of musical creation by permanent referring to the folk song, we mention only a few names: Paul Constantinescu, Mihail Jora or, more recently, Myriam Marbe, Ioan D. Chirescu, Dan Buciu, Alexandru Pașcanu, Ștefan Niculescu, Dragoș Alexandrescu, Irina Odăgescu, Valentin Timaru, Achim Stoia, Vasile Spătărelu and Sabin Pautza. Among the prominent representatives with a strong creative and interpretative personality figure is Constantin Arvinte, as evidenced by the previous stylistically analyzed example.

As a synthesis of the conception of Constantin Arvinte regarding the connection of the cult musical creation to folklore, as evidenced by the play "Trecui dealu' la Băiuț", we emphasize some ideas with conclusive value.

Contemporary musical world unanimously agrees with the thesis, phrased for the first time by Bela Bartok, in the preface to the collection of carols from Bihor, a book published in Bucharest in 1910, at the recommendation of D. G. Kiriac, according to which folkloric *impulses* must become "the native language" of the composer. Here is the first and perhaps the most significant stylistic feature in the creation of Constantin Arvinte. As Tiberiu Olah (Olah, 1974, 4-6) also states, *harmonizing a song is the process of searching for a sound environment at least equivalent to it as expressive force*.

In other words, the composer ought to search and highlight on an aesthetical basis the latent component of harmony that results from the folk melody as an archetype. In *Trecui dealu' la Băiuț* and in the other choral, chamber, instrumental or vocal creations, of which we mentioned a few in the first part of this study, Constantin Arvinte follows firmly this principle. And when we say "latent harmony" we do not mean strictly the verticality of the sound, but we extend the principle to the polyphonic structure of the musical discourse.

We go back to the example of "Trecui dealu' la Băiuț". The melody is simple, it stretches over a perfect quintet (diatonic pentacord). The harmonic-polyphonic handling makes spatiality and semantically extends the folk song, without completely respecting the principles of tonal harmony.

Constantin Arvinte, as a conductor, for many years, of a folk orchestra, feels and writes not on the basis of some rules extracted from textbooks of harmony, but

looks for the sounds of the authentic peasant taraf, whether it relates to a coral instrument or uses the orchestra. Constantin Arvinte rejects any kind of distortion of popular singing through childish, as school harmonizations.

In folk-based cult music, there are no “recipes”, composing patterns, there are no limits regarding the degree of musical transformation of folkloric material.

Constantin Arvinte is penetrated in his creation by the inexhaustible Romanian musical folklore. The Maestro emphasized in his writings some special ways of transfiguring the folk song as he created his own language, his own vision on the Romanian musical folklore heritage.

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