

## Stylistic influences in the choral works of Irina Odăgescu

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**Abstract:** *Irina Odăgescu capitalizes in her choral works on some of the ideas and principles belonging to the Romanian folklore, such as modalism, popular rhythmic inflexions, intonations and popular melodic figures. At the same time, she proves herself to be a composer anchored in reality, who has affiliated herself with the aesthetic orientations of modern music, and who will contribute to the fame of Romanian music abroad, through the novelties brought to the language of music centered on the expression of strong emotional experiences. In the present paper we will characterize her compositional style, and highlight through eloquent examples new expressional means used in the choral creation (spoken sounds, whispered sounds, cries, sounds and tremors, sliding sounds, clusters, unsolved dissonances, sound breaks), as well as exemplifying its place amongst the modern stylistic orientations (dodecaphonic technique).*

Keywords: *choral music, stylistics, style, language*

### 1. Introduction

Out of the large number of composers that represent the second half of the 20th century, and have conceived through talent and diligence significant works of Romanian choral literature, we find an outstanding exponent of the Bucharest School of Composition in Irina Odăgescu Țuțuianu (1937).

After graduating from the Conservatory in 1963, the composer continues her training at various modern music courses held in Europe's major musical centers (Weimar, Darmstadt), and meets with several composers, such as Yannis Xenakis, Karlheinz Stockhausen, György Ligeti, Mauricio Kagel (Sârbu 1990, 48).

### 2. Incursion in Odăgescu's choral works

We count among her creations about 80 choral, vocal-symphonic, symphonic, chamber, instrumental, and ballet works, some of which are award winning pieces.

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The choral works of Irina Odăgescu – as well as those of other composers, including Ștefan Niculescu, Felicia Donceanu, Vasile Spătărelu, Cornel Țăranu, Carmen Petra-Basacopol, Doru Popovici, Sabin Păutza, Dan Buciu etc. – present themselves from a thematic point of view, as part of the lyrical-contemplative aesthetic aspect (Georgescu 1998, 65), using elements belonging to the Romanian folklore, such as modalism, popular rhythmic cells, intervals and melodic figures. The works belonging to this category carry the audience into an ambience of nostalgia and dreams.

It is important to identify in Odăgescu's choral works fundamental themes of human life, such as: life distinguished through ideals (*Pacea lumii/World peace, Despre pace/About peace, De pace-i însetat pământul/Earth's thirsting for peace*), life and love (*De doi/Two, 5 cântece de nuntă/5 Wedding Songs*), attachment to the motherland (*Pe nimb de vulturi/On the eagle of the eagles, Țării mele/My country, Numele patriei/The name of the motherland*), love for God (*Tatăl nostru/Our Father*), all put in songs that not only emphasize but also complete through great creative qualities the message transmitted by their respective texts. The song blends with the text in an organic way, making it impossible to analyse them separately. Often, the use of certain expressive elements of music converges with the needs pertaining to the message of the text.

The exploration of the native folk background is visible in the use of folk instruments, such as a semantron (*Ballad for women's choir, reciters and percussion*), bellharp, zongora (*De dor și de voie bună/Good and Joyful, 5cântece de nuntă/5th wedding cycle*). This exploration can also be seen through the use of quintuple or septuple meter (*Cântând plaiul Mioriței/Singing the Miorița Plain, Marea inimă a țării/Great Heart of the Country*) and modal harmonies (*De doi/Two, Rădăcini străbune/Root Ancestors, Cântând plaiul Mioriței/Singing the Miorița Plain, Rugul pâinii/Bread Pyre, Iia Românească/Romanian peasant blouse*).

### 3. Modern means of expression in the choral creation of Irina Odăgescu

Among the means of expression used to highlight the large number of meanings and the depth of the messages expressed through the choral pieces, there are:

- reciting, speaking, murmuring, whispering, shouting, whistling – when using non-music and non-text;
- singing, pendulum, waving, sliding, dripping, jerking, chopping, mute – for the vocal parts;
- general pause (GP) – psychological pause, an emptiness of sound that has the function of deepening certain meanings of words or lyrics.

Regarding the graphics used by Odăgescu, we notice that they contain conventional and unconventional signs, which are accompanied by explanations

and indications in the legend. Out of these, we will exemplify some of the modern signs used in *Rugul pâinii/Bread Pyre*:

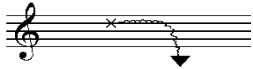
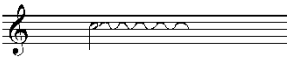

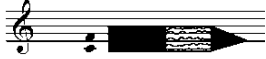

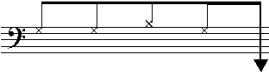
Instructions for interpreters	The sign used
Whispered or spoken sound, which is swiped to the lowest sound.	
A held and trembled sound.	
Several tilt and trembled sounds with variable heights ascending-descending a few times, and stopping on a cluster approximating the sounds indicated on the portative (depending on the number of chanters).	
Cluster between do-fa sounds, then the same tremulous sounds that join together in a single sound.	
A single sound that turns into a cluster, then returns to the same sound.	
Sounds whispered or spoken approximately at the same height at which they are written, sliding to the indicated place, and then descending to the gravest sound.	

Table 1. *Unconventional graphic signs used in „Rugul Pâinii” (Bread pyre)*

#### 4. Stylistic influences in the choral creation of Irina Odăgescu

The attraction towards the new means of musical expression is also evident in the choral poem entitled *Oglindire/Mirroring*, written on Mariana Dumitrescu's lyrics and dedicated to the *Madrigal* choir.

When composing the theme at the beginning of the piece, which is based on a scale of 11 sounds of the total chromaticity, a Bartók-typical chromatic mode (Popovici 2002, 44), Odăgescu used the dodecaphonic technique as a treatment method:

parlando

*mp* cresc. poco

T II Ca să mă a - flu a - cum\_ În lu - mi - ni - le soa - re - lui, \_\_\_ Cu su - fle - tul a - tăt de

B II Ca să mă a - flu a - cum În lu - mi - ni - le soa - re - lui, \_\_\_ Cu su - fle - tul a - tăt de

T lim - pe - de Si ne - ted, Că - te în - ve - li - suri am a - run - cat pe drum,

B lim - pe - de Si ne - ted, Că - te în - ve - li - suri am a - run - cat pe drum, etc.

Fig. 1. First theme

The composer suggests a modal Byzantine chant, with a step-progress generally based on seconds (minor, major or enlarged). We can identify Byzantine subtleties like ison, unison, and modern means of expression, such as the cluster:

S 1 A - cum

S 2 A - cum

A 1 A - cum

A 2 A - cum

T 1 A - cum

T 2 A - cum

B 1 A - cum

B 2 A - cum

Fig. 2. Cluster

While it begins with an octave progress of male voices, this specific section of the piece ends with a parallel run, rendered this time by the female voices and characterized by a range based on small seconds and chromatisms:

The musical score for four voices (S1, S2, A1, A2) shows a parallel run. The lyrics are: Că-te în-ve-li-suri am a-run-cat pe drum. The music is in 3/4 time and features a melodic line with small seconds and chromatisms.

Fig. 3. *The end of the first section*

The climax of the piece is reached in the phase, in which the voices split into 11, stopping on a cluster, followed by a moment of great effect – a general pause:

The musical score for 11 voices (S1, S2, A1, A2, T1, T2, B1, B2) shows a climax. The lyrics are: veri, Că-te a-veri, \_\_\_. The score includes tempo markings: poco rall., pesante, a tempo, and G.P. The music is in 3/4 time and features a melodic line with small seconds and chromatisms.

Fig. 4. *Climax of the piece*

In another composition – *Numele patriei/The name of the motherland*, a diatonic work, Irina Odăgescu combines the modal type modality (which is specific for the first section) with the tonal type one (specific for the next part). The first part is

based on a modal scale – frigidian, followed by the next section which is written in *Si major*.

In measure 38 alto and bass voices evolve in parallel octaves on different pedals, while the soprano and tenor exhibit a theme based on fifths and sevenths interval jumps:

38

S  
doi - nã al - bas - trã, cer de li - ber - ta - te, \_\_\_\_\_

A  
doi - nã li - ber - ta - te, \_\_\_\_\_

T  
doi - nã al - bas - trã, cer de li - ber - ta - te, \_\_\_\_\_

B  
doi - nã li - ber - ta - te, \_\_\_\_\_ etc.

Fig. 5. Theme from „Numele patriei”

Interestingly, we find a similar theme of clear Romanian folk origin in the *Manifest pentru pacea lumii/Choral Manifesto for World Peace* :

S  
A-veti gri-jã, a - veti gri-jã, oa-meni! A - veti gri-jã, a - veti gri-jã, oa-meni!

A  
A-veti gri-jã, a - veti gri-jã, oa-meni! A - veti gri-jã, a - veti gri-jã, oa-meni!

T  
N \_\_\_\_\_

B  
N \_\_\_\_\_ etc.

Fig. 6. Beginning of „Manifest pentru pacea lumii”

These intervals are specific to a Romanian folk instrument – a type of alpenhorn, which emits a series of harmonics of a fundamental sound. The fifth and seventh intervals are also found in the theme of *Despre pace/About peace*:

The image shows a musical score for a choral piece. It consists of two staves. The top staff is labeled 'Cor' (Chorus) and starts with a measure number '5'. The music is in treble clef and features a complex, asymmetrical rhythm with measures of 3/4, 2/4, 3/4, and 2/4. The dynamic marking is *mf* *hăulit*. The lyrics are: 'Oa-meni mari voi știți ce-n - seamă pa - cea pentru noi cei mici'. The bottom staff is in bass clef and has a dynamic marking of *mp*. The lyrics are: 'u - pentru noi cei etc.'.

Fig. 7. Theme from „Despre pace”

The Romanian folklore was an important source of inspiration for the rhythmic plan. The *aksak* rhythm, specific to many Balkan peoples, is preferred by Irina Odăgescu in the pieces in which she is working on topics specific to the Romanian people (*lia românească/Romanian peasant blouse*, *La ivit de zori/In the break of dawn*). We also find in *Cântând plaiul Mioriței/Singing the Miorița Plain* an asymmetrical rhythm, in which the measure of  $\frac{3}{8}$  alternates with that of  $\frac{2}{8}$ , realizing a horizontal polymetry (Giuleanu 2015, 236):

The image shows a musical score for a choral piece with two parts: Soprano (S.) and Alto (A.). Both parts are in treble clef and feature a complex, asymmetrical rhythm with measures of 3/8 and 2/8. The dynamic marking is *mf*. The lyrics are: 'Ne-am născut în ani de floa - re Pe-a-le mi-o-ri - tei pla-iuri etc.'.

Fig. 8. Alternation of asymmetrical measures

## 5. Conclusions

Irina Odăgescu is one of the Romanian composers who combines in her creation archaic elements of folk or of Byzantine style with modern means of expression. The composer's opinion on compositional techniques is: "[...] I used a composition technique that allowed me to express the most varied affective states, especially in the field of vocal-symphonic music and choral, in which modal chant (which tends towards the infinite melody) often alternates with ample, polyphonic and harmonic deployments (textures, terraces, blocks, sounds). Personally, I plead for a new expression of music in content and form, with deep roots in the incomparable treasure of the Romanian folk song, a music enriched as much as possible with the

new conquests of means of expression and serving one purpose, that of a truly emotional experience" (Odăgescu 2003, 17).

The sound solutions suggested by the composer Irina Odăgescu, which have been exposed in the above examples, are testament to the personal ethos of the composer, which is based on solid compositional principles, combined with distinctive features of her personality, such as creativity, vitality, ingenuity, sensitivity.

### References

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