

THE DISSIDENCE OF MELODY IN ANATOL VIERU'S OEUVRE. CASE STUDY: THE QUOTATION OF THE "FRÈRE JACQUES"¹ SONG

OLGUȚA LUPU²

SUMMARY. Melody (in the traditional sense of a hummable horizontal structure that is relatively easy to remember) faced a kind of censorship in the last century, being almost barred from the world of highbrow music. For post-WWII Romanian composers this sense of duress manifested itself in two different ways. On the one hand, the modes, dogmas and canons of contemporary classical music pushed melody towards a prohibited area. On the other hand, the Communist regime established a symbiotic relationship between melody and the propaganda message/text, which allowed the intelligentsia to imagine the act of refusing singability as a kind of separation from official ideology. Yet, despite these unfortunate circumstances, melody still remains one of the most efficient means of individualizing, of personalizing a musical structure. Perhaps more than for any of his peers, the longing for melody forced Vieru to find viable solutions to accommodate the somewhat clandestine passenger, while still remaining highly innovative. The work chosen for the case study is *Narațiune II* [*Narrative II*] for saxophone and orchestra (1985), in which Vieru creates a multi-layered dialogue through the insertion of the *Frère Jacques* song.

Keywords: melody, *Frère Jacques*, modern music, Anatol Vieru, quotation

“You know, melody has yet to be liberated”, Vieru told Dan Dediu in 1998³ about a week before his death. Indeed melody (in the traditional sense of a hummable horizontal structure that is relatively easy to

¹ The Romanian language version of the present study, entitled „Dizidența melodiei în creația lui Anatol Vieru”, was published in the volume *Repere în muzica românească* [*Landmarks in Romanian Music*]: Anatol Vieru, Cristina Rădulescu-Pășcu, Dorel Pașcu-Rădulescu, editor Olguța Lupu, Ed. Muzicală, București, 2016, p. 44-51.

² National University of Music Bucharest, Professor, olguta.lupu@unmb.ro.

³ According to composer Dan Dediu’s statement on the *Sunday Matinee* show – “Anatol Vieru și lupta cu inerția” [“Anatol Vieru and the Struggle against Inertia”], <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R52ODqrJzZ8>, accessed in December 17 2017.

remember) faced a kind of censorship in the last century, being almost barred from the world of highbrow music. For post-WWII Romanian composers this sense of duress manifested itself in two different ways. On the one hand, the modes, dogmas and canons of contemporary classical music pushed melody towards the taboo, stigmatizing it as an infantile product of a bygone age. On the other hand, the Communist regime established a symbiotic relationship between melody and the propaganda message/text, which allowed the intelligentsia to imagine the act of refusing singability as a kind of separation from official ideology.

Yet, despite these unfortunate circumstances, melody still remains one of the most efficient means of individualizing, of personalizing a musical structure. Perhaps more than for any of his peers, the longing for melody forced Vieru to find viable solutions to accommodate the somewhat clandestine passenger, while still remaining highly innovative. Vieru as such, preserved melody either through his own melodic drawings (intensely lyrical or poignant) or through the appropriation of already existing melodies, belonging to children's folklore or to classical music.⁴

An Outline of Melodic Typologies in Vieru's Oeuvre

Vieru employs in his works two types of melodies: those that are written by himself or those that are quoted.

A typology of the melodies written by Vieru is difficult to establish, but certain characteristics can be identified, such as a preoccupation for symmetry or for the recovery and integration of traditional sonorities.

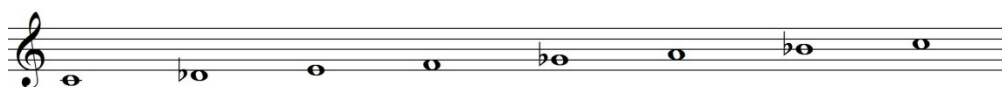
In his *Concert pentru flaut* [*Flute Concerto*] (1958), for instance, the theme that grounds the entire opus in four movements has a spiral-like symmetry which makes it easily recognizable – even hummable – although it is constructed as a twelve-tone series.⁵ The theme in the first part of the *Concert pentru violină* [*Violin Concerto*] is a heptatonic, whose intervallic is gradually and symmetrically augmented, creating another version of the spiral form. In the *Simfonia concertantă* [*Sinfonia concertante*] for cello and

⁴ In this sense, I think Vieru's closeness to Russian culture was perhaps significant. In the Russian cultural space, melody remained important – and not only due to ideology – in the works of composers such as Prokofiev, Shostakovich or Khachaturian – Vieru's composition teacher in 1951-1954, when he studied at the Moscow Conservatory), in a period in which it was repudiated in the West.

⁵ Olguța Lupu, „De-a v-ați ascunselea între serial și modal în creația concertantă a lui Anatol Vieru” [“Hide and Seek between the Serial and the Modal in Anatol Vieru's Concerto Works”], in the volume „Congresul Internațional de Muzicologie” [“International Musicology Congress”], 3rd ed., Timișoara, Ed. Eurostampa, 2016, p. 161-168 (<https://www.ceeol.com/search/article-detail?id=479640>).

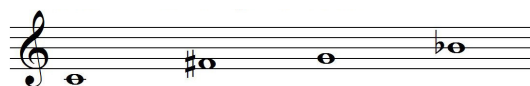
orchestra (1987), the theme which permeates the entire work (playing an important role in parts I, II, and V) is folk inspired and grounded in a double chromatic Locrian-Dorian heptatonic mode, with a raised 3rd degree, which once again suggests the idea of symmetry (1-3-1-1-3-1-(2), (E.g.1).

E.g.1



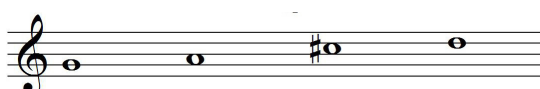
Similar echoes of traditional music are also found in earlier works (the theme of the *Concert pentru violoncel* [*Cello Concerto*] (1962) is a tetratonic mode, with a major fourth and a minor seventh – an essentialized variant of the Lydian-Mixolydian mode, also known as acoustic 1 – E.g. 2), as well as in later ones [in *Symphony no. 5*, the theme of the second part, entitled *Colinde, colinde* [*Carols, Carols*], is a Lydian tetratonic in *Romanian folk character*, as Enescu would call it – (E.g. 3).

E.g. 2



tetratonic scale in the Concerto for cello

E.g. 3



tetratonic scale in the 5th Symphony, 2nd mvt.

Along the same lines of recovering and reintegrating traditional structures, one must also note Vieru's preference for the employment of major and minor chords, which places his work, in the opinion of musicologist Harry Halbreich, among the *New Consonantism* style⁶. Sometimes Vieru renders these structures horizontal, creating melodies via

⁶ A. Vieru, *The Book of Modes. From Modes to Musical Time* (second part). Ed. Muzicală, 1993, p. 238.

the juxtaposing and rhythmizing of (complete or elliptical) arpeggios, as is the case with the third part of *Symphony no. 5* (E.g.4).

E.g. 4



The other category of melodies employed by Vieru is that of quotations or allusions. The composer is, as such, consistent in terms of his own beliefs regarding melody, while also capitalizing on the larger tendency of incorporating quotations, which became popular in Western music in the 1960s and which was conceptually reified with the emergence of the theory of intertextuality (Julia Kristeva⁷, Michel Foucault⁸, Roland Barthes⁹, Harold Bloom¹⁰), according to which „[T]out texte se construit comme mosaïque de citations, tout texte est absorption et transformation d'un autre texte”¹¹; “the text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture”¹².

The musical quotations Vieru incorporates are generally recognizable.¹³ “However, no matter how familiar the quotation would be to us, its reception shall be made in a context different from the original, which will open the way to *otherness*. Therefore, any quotation will be a hypostatization of the couple *familiarity-otherness*.” Însă, oricât de familiar ne-ar fi citatul, receptarea sa se va face într-un context diferit de cel original, ceea ce va crea premisele *alterității*. Prin urmare, orice citat va fi o ipostaziere a cuplului *familiaritate-alteritate*¹⁴. What is more, the conscious,

⁷ The term was used for the first time by Julia Kristeva, in the essay “Le Mot, le dialogue et le roman”, 1966, republished in J. Kristeva, *Séméiotiké : recherches pour une sémanalyse*, Seuil, Paris, 1969.

⁸ Michel Foucault: “What is An Author?”, conference presented to the French Society of Philosophy in February 22 1969.

⁹ Roland Barthes: “The Death of the Author” (1968), in *Image - Music - Text*. Ed. and transl. by Stephen Heath. New York: Hill and Wang, 1977, p. 142-148.

¹⁰ Harold Bloom: *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (1973, Oxford University Press, Oxford), *A Map of Misreading* (1975, Oxford University Press, New York).

¹¹ J. Kristeva, “Le mot, le dialogue et le roman”, in *Séméiotiké: recherches pour une sémanalyse*, p. 85.

¹² R. Barthes, p. 146.

¹³ There are sometimes instances where the composer alludes to a seemingly recognizable musical structure, but which lacks the length and expressivity necessary for it to be clearly identifiable.

¹⁴ Olguța Lupu, “The Quotation in Tiberiu Olah’s Sinfonia Giocosa (!?)”, in *Studia Universitatis Babeș-Bolyai, Musica*, nr.1/2016, p. 269.

intentional insertion of the quotation forces it to assume its double nature, that of both a *strictly musical structure* and an *ensemble of cultural associations and significations*. Connections and relations are formed between the quotation and the work, that can range from assertion (the quotation represents the work, supports its meaning, resonates with it) to denial (the quotation is deformed, parodied, placed in a divergent context) or problematization (reflection, debate, and taking into discussion – the most germinating attitude in the defamiliarization process)¹⁵.

Among the quotations Vieru employs, a great number of them belong to the area of traditional music, particularly to children's folklore – which introduces a mixture of playfulness, purity, ingenuity and nostalgia. In *Jocuri* [Games] for piano and orchestra (1963), Vieru inserts, in the *Joc de copii* [Children's Game] section, the song *Paparuda* [Dodola], in a version that is pulverized and fragmented, but still identifiable in terms of sound. In *Scoica* [The Clam] (1981), initially entitled *Monografia satului Sârbova* [The Sârbova Village Monograph], Vieru quotes 70 melodies from the Ursu collection; although the melodies appear in their original version, they are in fact "hidden" through the overlapping of a maximum of 15 voices and through an extremely low intensity (*pppp sul tasto*), which, as Vieru himself notes¹⁶, results in *white noise*, within which one can, at times, discern disparate fragments; other times, though, a melody is foregrounded through a change in intensity (*forte*). And in the *Simfonia concertantă* [Sinfonia concertante] for cello and orchestra (1987), we find, in the third part, rhythmic-melodic fragments which allude to traditional children songs such as the bitonic *Lună, lună nouă, Melc, melc codobelc* or *Sorcova veselă*.

The classical musical quotations are selected from a period that runs the gamut from the Baroque to the contemporary world. *Musical Museum* (1968) for cembalo and orchestra uses Bach's *Prelude in C Major* from the WTK I as both its starting and reference point. In *Sita lui Eratostene* [The Sieve of Eratosthenes] (1969), conceived of as a "comedy of prime numbers",¹⁷ each prime number is attributed a musical structure.

¹⁵ Olgața Lupu, "The Quotation in Tiberiu Olah's Sinfonia Giocosa (!?)", in *Studia Universitatis Babeș-Bolyai, Musica*, nr.1/2016, p. 269.

¹⁶ A. Vieru, p. 178.

¹⁷ Anatol Vieru, p. 215-217. By employing the algorithm of the sieve of Eratosthenes, the sequence of integers is converted into the sequence of the multiples of prime numbers (for example, the numbers 4, 8, 12, 16 etc. are considered reappearances of 2). Vieru allocates 3 to 4 seconds to each number, and the impact of the associated musical structure is inversely proportional with the number of appearances of each respective prime number. With regards to the numbers that are associated with quotations, each time one of their multiples appears, the quoted work continues its development. As the author remarked, the work was criticized for its "Dada" discourse and for its "separation between macro- and micro-structure."

For the prime numbers from 11 to 37, Vieru associates quotations extracted from the *Moonlight Sonata* by Beethoven (for no. 11), *Gypsy Melodies* by Sarasate (for no. 13), the *Clarinet Concerto* by Mozart (for no. 17), Beethoven's *Trio* in c minor (for no. 19), *Partita* in G for cello solo by Bach (for no. 23), and then continues with fragments from his own work or from that of his contemporaries. In *Ecran/Screen* (1970), after the golden section, we find fragments from the *Poem of Ecstasy* by Scriabin¹⁸ (Vieru was a great admirer of the Russian composer). And *Țara de piatră* [*The Stone Land*] employs melodies from his own works: two from the *Miorița* oratorio and one from *Rezonanțe Bacovia* [*Bacovia Resonance*]¹⁹.

Case Study: the Quotation of the *Frère Jacques* Song

The work we will look at more closely is *Narațiune II* [*Narrative II*] for saxophone and orchestra (1985), in which Vieru creates a multi-layered dialogue between the present and the past through the insertion of the *Frère Jacques* song.

The song is quoted multiple times. On its first appearance (E.g. 5) it is performed thrice: on the trumpet (m. 35-38), again on the trumpet – in a *stretto* dialogue and in an inversed version with the piccolo flute (m. 39-43) – and, already noticeable altered, on the solo saxophone (m. 44-50, E.g. 6²⁰).

E.g. 5



E.g. 6



¹⁸ A. Vieru, p. 218.

¹⁹ A. Vieru, p. 220.

²⁰ In the score, most notes have accidentals that indicate playing approximately 1/4 tone higher.

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The quotation is then performed in a fragmentary manner, altered by the introduction of the Lydian fourth (m.162, 167 – E.g. 7, see also E.g. 11).

E.g. 7



We then find another complete appearance, in which its development is altered through rhythmic augmentation and intervallic condensation, with the song's intervals being transformed into microtones (m. 170-180, E.g. 8).

E.g. 8



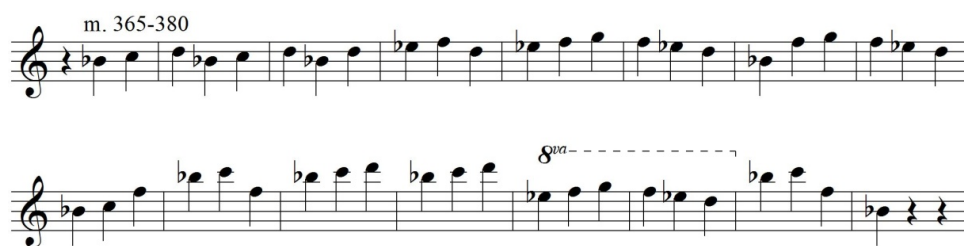
A new appearance still renders the quotation in a fragmentary manner (m. 185-190). The quotation continues to be pulverized in samples, generally characterized by the same intervallic condensation (m. 219-220, 225-227, 281-287). In its second to last appearance, the quotation – of which only the beginning is performed – appears to be absorbed into the rhythmic pulsation which characterizes the work's B section (m. 301-303, E.g. 9).

E.g. 9



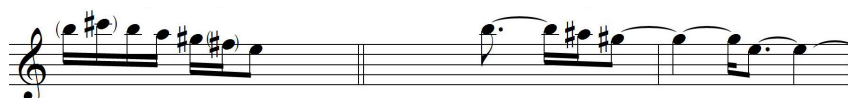
In the end, its last performance – preceded by the appearance of an altered fragment (in which the major fourth²¹ is inserted, m. 358-359) and of an inversed fragment (m. 362-365, cb.) – brings back the entire quotation in its original intervallic version, but with a uniform rhythm of quarter notes (m. 365-380, E.g. 10), which is reminiscent of the invention with a uniform rhythm of eights in *Wozzeck* by Berg.

E.g. 10



The fragment altered by the introduction of the Lydian fourth reappears, meteorically, on the soloist instrument in m.393-395 (E.g. 11: left - the original version, with perfect fourth; right - the modified version, with augmented fourth).

E.g. 11



It is only retroactively that the analyst realizes that the altered fragment of the traditional song was already embedded in the 13 sound ostinato type structure, on which Vieru insists even at the beginning of the work (m. 7, 11-14, 16, 19, 23, 25 etc. – E.g. 12).

²¹ This is sometimes referred to as the Bihor fourth, due to its preponderance in the region.

E.g. 12



I believe that *Narațiune II* [*Narrative II*] represents a point of convergence for many rare characteristics, which transforms it into a singular work. Firstly, it is a work grounded in melody – an ancient form of musical organization, albeit one that was employed with reservation in certain decades of the 20th century. Secondly, Vieru employs not a melody of his own creation, but quotes a song that is extremely well-known in Europe, and which awakens a mixture of emotions and thoughts that suggest the world of childhood (nostalgia, ingenuity, and the spirit of playfulness). A network of correlations is thus engendered, which, for the expert music lover, is also enriched by the reversal of meaning which Mahler operates in *Symphony no. 1*, where the song (changed from major to minor) gains sullen, even tragic connotations. Vieru, as such, plays with our memory, with the help of music – what he considers “a form of the impossible: to go back in time, while only moving forward in real time”.²²

This time, moreover, Vieru does not employ multiple quotations (as he does in other works), but only a single one, which thus becomes the essence, the through-line which gives meaning to the work (*Musical Museum* is the only other work in his oeuvre where we encounter a similar situation). But the quoted melody in *Narrative II* is not only a musical structure, but also has an associated text, which is distinguished by its satirical content, which is non-standard for a children’s song. With regards to the content of the text and the origin of the song, a number of different opinions have been expressed, from possible links to a famous surgeon monk (Frère Jacques Beaulieu, 1651–1720)²³ or possible connections to the too comfortable life-style of the Jacobin monks²⁴, to the claim that the song was written by Rameau.²⁵

²² A. Vieru, p. 280. Another form of this game could be the insistent employment of the major-minor chord (strings, m. 6-13,15-28, 30-31 etc., then in an arpeggiated form at the guitar, m. 58-69, 93-97 etc., then again at strings, m. 366-400, 409-end).

²³ A hypothesis asserted by E. Bourdin *Un célèbre lithotomiste franc-comtois : Jacques Baulot dit Frère Jacques (1651-1720)* (Besançon, 1917), recently researched – but unconfirmed – by J.P. Ganem and C.C. Carson (*Frère Jacques Beaulieu: from rogue lithotomist to nursery rhyme character*, J Urol. 1999 Apr; 161(4), p. 1067-9).

²⁴ Martine David, A. Marie Delrieu, *Refrains d'enfants, histoire de 60 chansons populaires*, Herscher, 1988.

²⁵ Asserted by Sylvie Bouissou, author of the consistent monograph *Jean-Philippe Rameau*, Ed. Fayard, 2014.

On the other hand, I believe that, in the context of the Communist regime of the period, the text gains significations that transcend the satirical and enter the realm of the outright subversive. The text becomes a sort of difficult to trace look alike for the banned song *Deșteaptă-te, române*²⁶ [*Awaken, Romanian*], spoken – mentally, of course – not in Romanian, but in French, a widely spoken language, which allowed for the hidden meaning to be decrypted by any listener. If *Praznicul calicilor* [*Paupers' Wake*] had failed in this regard, due to the text being too explicit to fool the censors, who promptly banned the opera after its debut²⁷, it seems that an apparently innocent “story” (*Narrative II*) managed to prevail.

But what is the meaning behind the transformations undergone by the quoted song? Let us first try to reunite them into a unitary progression, since, as Vieru says, „in non-background music (that is, one oriented, purposefully constructed), every moment is the sum of the previous moments”²⁸. What results is a process of alteration with tinges of the tragical and the grotesque, through intervallic compression, on the one hand, and through the replacement of the perfect fourth with the augmented fourth, on the other (possibly an intentional adaptation of the French song to specifically Romanian intonations). Paradoxically, the final recovery of the initial intervallic structure, due to rhythmic uniformization, represents not a reinvigoration, a rapprochement with the original profile, but a lifeless flattening of it. The curvature of the transformations is, as such, depressing – a possible musical image of oppression, of dehumanization, and of a profound lack of hope. The quotation then becomes a means of raising questions.

I would claim that *Narrative II* is a doubly dissident work. On the one hand, dissidence resides in the fact that the part of the main character is

²⁶ The text of the two songs is quite similar: *Awaken, Romanian/From the sleep of death; Are you sleeping/Brother John?* etc.

²⁷ Although finished in 1980, the opera debuted on June 24 1984, after the composer had accepted to change the title to *Pedeapsa* [*The Punishment*] and to make various “adjustments” requested by the censors (Maria Bâscă, doctoral thesis, Bucharest, National University of Music, 2006, coord. Octavian Lazăr Cosma: p. 94, 96; O.L. Cosma, “Fața necunoscută a lui Ianus: Anatol Vieru – creația de operă” [“Janus’ Unknown Face: Anatol Vieru’s Opera Works”], rev. *Muzica*, 1/1991, p. 61). After the debut, though, the work was banned (Ioana Marghita, “Aspecte ale comicului în creația lirică a lui Anatol Vieru” [“Aspects of the Comedic in Anatol Vieru’s Lyrical Works”], in Musicology Symposium, UNMB, April 15 2016), and was only performed after 1989. Despite the regime’s opposition, Vieru’s preoccupations continued along these lines. The composer went on to write three satirical mini-operas in 1982-1984, inspired by the works of I.L. Caragiale (*Telegrame* [*Telegrams*], *Temă cu variațiuni* [*Theme with Variations*], *Un pedagog de școală nouă* [*A New School Pedagogue*]). *Narrative II*, which debuted in 1985, is situated in proximity to these opera works and borrows, in my opinion, their subversive character.

²⁸ A. Vieru, p. 280.

given to a simple, traditional song, thus defying the avant-garde modernist movement, and its allergy to such initiatives. At the same time, the modern and innovative manner by which the quotation is incorporated also defies the type of mass music cultivated by the Communist regime. On the other hand, the more profound layer of dissidence involves the extra-musical, textual message of the quotation, of awakening from lethargy, which is enabled precisely by the simplicity of the quoted melody and the manner in which it is transformed. The grotesque and tragic alterations that the quotation undergoes throughout the work thus come to be perceived with painful awareness. Vieru proves, as such, that he is a master of the art of dissimulation through music, an art which he might have learned from Prokofiev²⁹ and Shostakovich³⁰. And he also offers us, today, testimony of an intellectual kind of resistance, one which was discrete and almost Apollonian, but which could be adequately decrypted by listeners and which could, above all else, grant the composer a rare kind of dignity and human beauty.

Translated into English by Dragoş Manea

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²⁹ As D. Jaffé indicates in the volume *Sergey Prokofiev* (London, Phaidon, 1998, p. 172), the second movement of the Sonata No. 7 for piano by Prokofiev, a work that was awarded the Stalin prize, contains a quite clear allusion to the Schumann's lied „Wehmut”/„Sadness”, from „Liederkreis”, Op. 39.

³⁰ See the utilisation of the DSCH motif in the Symphony No. 10 or in the Quatuor No. 8 by Shostakovich, as a possible symbol of the resistance by withdrawing in his inner universe.

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