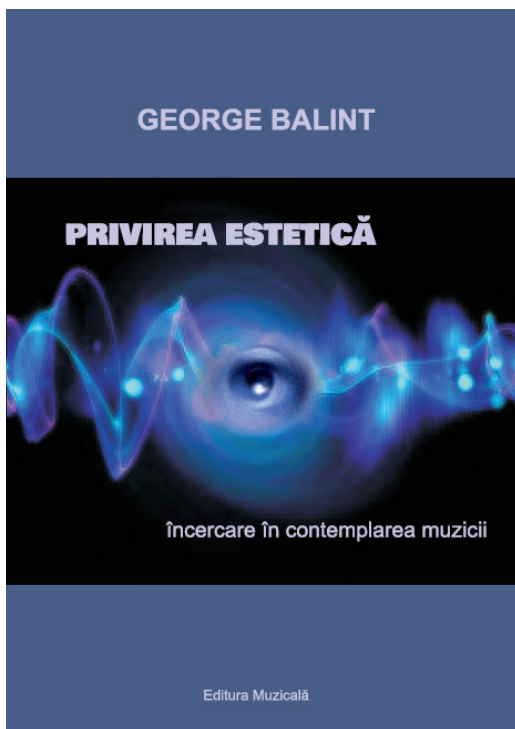


BOOK REVIEWS

**“THE MUSIC IN THE SILENT SOUND”:
George Balint, *Privirea estetică: încercare în contemplarea muzicii*
[*The Aesthetic Gaze: Attempt at Contemplating Music*],
Bucharest: Editura Muzicală, 2018, 177 p., ISBN 978-973-42-1029-9**

Through an inspired and extremely concise title, professor George Balint brings together the actors of the critical process, watching them from the back of the concert hall: the critic (the aesthetic gaze), the audience (attempt at contemplating) and the performer (the music). Through these essays of musical exegesis and hermeneutics, the author substitutes himself for each of them: as a professor and editor-in-chief of the *Actualitatea muzicală* journal of the Composers' Union – for the critic; as a conductor and composer – for the performer; and, finally, as a publicist and essayist – for the audience.

I must first point out that the idea of the musical visual is not a new one; for example, the concept of *musica universalis* – “the music of the spheres” comes from Antiquity, from Pythagoras to Boethius, then to Kepler, etc. Nevertheless, George Balint's investigation into this area is welcomed, even if the author modestly describes it as an adage in essay format, which in certain places resembles a treatise (p. 5), while the book is, according to him, a narrative text, at times meditative (focusing on the imaginary), at others active (tending towards objectivation).



The book counts 177 pages and is structured in two parts. At the risk of launching a hermetic text, I will review the titles and subtitles of the book. Hermeticism is a sign that the author has kept himself within the generous boundaries of essayistic exoticism, but also that – as the old saying goes – “strong essences are kept in small bottles”, and thus, the book – without claiming to be an extensive treatise on musical aesthetics – proposes some *grana* for tomorrow's harvest. Perhaps my readers will convince themselves of this after reading one more book on musical aesthetics.

The first part of the book, entitled “*Specificul privirii estetice*” [The Specific Nature of the Aesthetic Gaze], has ten chapters, preceded by an introduction that includes an explanatory note on the term “aesthetics”, as well as a commentary note on Kant's *Critique of the Power of Judgement*.

After understanding the character types (*the performative* and *the contemplative*), the conditions of the aesthetic gaze (*the emergence of the interest, imagining the object that must be enveloped by the gaze, mentally contouring the image using the circle*) and the types of aesthetic gaze (*descriptive, symbolic*) (Ch. I), the reader is engaged in the process of contemplation (*the reason for revealing the centre, the expression of the interval, the sense of the interval: remoteness, closeness, the trajectory of the aesthetic gaze: direction and evolution*) (Ch. II) and in the dialogue of the aesthetic gaze (through *initiating* and *edifying questions* and their adequate answers) (Ch. III), attaining four levels of sound perception (Ch. IV – see the analysis below). Then, through the investigation of musical aesthetics (Ch. V), the reader is led to understand the stages of the generic man (*natural – oneiric – cultural – wise – spiritual*: Ch. VI), elaborated upon in the context of a duality of culture (between *subject* and *object*: Ch. VII), to then learn about the orientation of the aesthetic gaze (with the *characters of orientation of the aesthetic gaze: ordinary and elevated* and *the layout of the musical object*), which enables him to make an *aesthetic commentary on Ravel's “Boléro”*: Ch. VIII). Finally, through cadence and contrast as basic aspects in the interpretation of musical form (Ch. IX), the reader arrives at directions, knots and horizons in the expression of the musical work (Ch. X - see the analysis below).

The second part of the book, entitled “*Trei aspecte vesele ale esteticii de contrast în muzică*” [Three Joyful Aspects of Contrast Aesthetics in Music], begins with a suggestive motto uttered by Frosch, the character of the third act of the operetta *Die Fledermaus [The Bat]* by Johann Strauss: “Jolly prison this, sir!” This part is limited to the elaboration of three characters of musical aesthetics: “the Ludic” (Ch. I), “the Comic” (Ch. II) and “the Carnavalesque” (Ch. III). The book ends with a concluding synthesis in which the author provides a table of highlights and features of the aesthetic categories subsumed under ‘joy’.

A detailed analysis of the book would require a proper study. In this review, however, I will confine my remarks to a few things that have stirred my curiosity and for which it deserves attention.

(1) The author analyses and classifies the ITHD acronym characteristic of the musical sound (I – intensity, T – timbre, H – harmonic pitch, D – duration), using pairs of extremes, based on the Hegelian scheme of thesis/antithesis/synthesis. For example, in Chapter III, subchapter B, dealing with possible answers to the interrogation of the aesthetic gaze, for a physical perspective of the aesthetic gaze the author uses antagonistic terms such as:

- *inaudible/audible* or *opaque/resonant* (for intensity [I]),
- *dense/rarefied* or *compact/aerated* (for timbrality [T]),
- *thick/thin* or *high/low* (for pitch [H]),
- *continuous/discontinuous* (for duration [D]).

The same ITHD coordinates are analysed from three other perspectives: imaginative, technical and characterial (pp. 31-35). For the ITHD tetrad, the author then characterizes the *beautiful/ugly* dyad as follows: I – *shouted/whispered*; T – *noisy/melodious*; H – *dark/bright*; D – *temporal/spatial*. For each of these terms, the author provides multiple lexical correspondences.

(2) In terms of perception, the author distinguishes and differentiates between four types of relationship with the sound: *hearing, impression, audition, listening*, while objectually regarding the sound as – *ordinary, musical, structured* and *sublimated*, which creates a “sound image” at the level of the *body, soul, mind* and *consciousness* (see Chapter IV, p. 39 and following). From a metaphysical standpoint, the author distinguishes a fifth level of contemplating the sound: based on sensory hearing (sound), emotional impression (mood), intellectual hearing (structure/report) and listening to consciousness (sense/interval). Considering it as a stage of perception through *contemplation*, the author qualifies it by the attribute *spiritual* (p. 41). This aspect thus outlines the title of the book: *Privirea estetică: încercare în contemplarea muzicii* [The Aesthetic Gaze: Attempt at Contemplating Music].

(3) The textual structure includes an exemplifying comment: an aesthetic gaze on Ravel’s *Boléro*, along with other comments whereby George Balint applies his theoretical framework to certain praxeological points of view.

(4) To involve as many readers as possible in his analytical journey, the author calls upon major figures of the Greek and Christian pantheon such as Theos, Thanatos, Logos, Eros and Chronos (see Ch. X, p. 83 and following).

Depending on Eros, Logos and Chronos, he derives the artistic-interpretative functions of *experience*, *conception* and *fulfilment*, generically proper to the *listener*, *composer* and *instrument player*, and thus defines three landmarks of the aesthetics of the musical object: *the aesthetics of melodicality* through filters of reflection (regarding the sense) in the line of eros; *the aesthetics of conception* through filters of analysis (regarding form) in the line of logos; and *the aesthetics of the face*, through filters of description (regarding the face) in the line of chronos (p. 89).

(5) Grounded in the realm of the philosophy of experimental music, George Balint binds himself to borrow, adapt or create terms that the Romanian dictionary does not use – or, in any case, to which musical dictionaries do not ascribe meanings that are specific to the musical field: *arime* (absence of rhymes), *clipúri* (ideas appear and disappear instantly, in infinitesimal sizes which the author calls *clipúri* – p. 47), *timbrometrii* (distinguishing a colour in relation with the instrumental metrics of the musical movement – p. 74), *dezinențe* (orientation towards the moment of cadence – p. 78), *jocularitate* (imponderable motricity – p. 160) etc.

(6) In addition, the book also approaches other fields related to musical aesthetics. Thus, the reader can learn about the three historic “revolutions” – Cognitive, Agricultural and Scientific (p. 9), or about the eight types of temperament – passionate, choleric, sentimental, nervous, phlegmatic, sanguineous, apathetic and amorphous), about the famous Trickster (p. 76), or about the differences between “contrast aesthetics” and the homogeneity of the environment (p. 97), between “game” and “play” (p. 104) etc.

(7) The images are also worth noting. From the musical examples from Ravel’s *Bolero* (p. 72, 75), from Mozart’s *Piano Sonata No. 16 in C major K. 545* (p. 112), and from George Balint’s *Ludic Scenes for ‘Trio Contrasts’ (flute, percussion, piano) and orchestra* (p. 113), to John Cage’s “definitions” of *Musicircus* (p. 156), or to the text diagrams referring to the constitutiveness of the generic man (p. 51), or to those directions, knots and horizons in the expression of the musical work (p.88), then to the registers of the joyful play and its degenerative condensations (p.175), but also to the exhaustive synthetic picture entitled “*Repere și trăsături ale categoriilor estetice subsumate veseliei*” [Highlights and Features of the Aesthetic Categories Subsumed under ‘Joy’] (p.164), everything it marked by an extraordinary concision.

(8) Last but not least, it is worth noting that George Balint is familiar with musicologists, theorists, music historians, composers and conductors such as Lully, Pergolesi, Gluck, Rossini, Donizetti, Berlioz, Verdi, Offenbach, Strauss, Saint-Saëns, Puccini, Albéniz, Schenker, Ravel, Ansermet, Tippett, Shostakovich, Messiaen, Cage, Britten, Xenakis, Nono, Berio, Boulez, Stockhausen, Ashley, Schnittke, Arvo Pärt, T. Riley, La Monte Young, Steve

Reich, Ph. Glass, Corigliano, Ferneyhough, J. Rea, Finnissy, J. Adams, Trojahn, Rihm, von Bose, D. Mawer, and, from Romania, with Ștefan Niculescu, Alexandru Leahu, Sorin Lerescu, Liviu Dănceanu, Dan Dediu, Irinel Anghel, Ștefan Firca, Ioana Margita etc. He also quotes authors (philosophers, historians, literati, aestheticians etc.) such as Sloterdijk, Moutsopoulos, Liiceanu, V. Morar, Yuval Noah Harari, E. Dissanayake, Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, Baumgarten, Hegel, Wolff, Kant, Schopenhauer, Schlegel, J.P. Richter, Cassirer, Bergson, Croce, Hartmann, Ralea, Noica, Foucault, Eco, Kristeva, Jean-Marc Defays, Tudor Vianu, Mihail Bahtin, Anatol Gavrilov, George Lakoff, Jung, Freud, Hans Eysenck, G. Heymans, E. D. Wiersma, Rene Le Senne, Gaston Berger, Kurt Koffka, Rabelais, Carlo Goldoni, Samuel Beckett, Paul Valéry, Johan Huizinga, Marcel Duchamp, I.L. Caragiale, Arkon Daraul, Louis de Funès. He also mentions ancient sources such as those of Hesiod, Sophocles, Aristophanes, Hippocrates, Galen, Plato, or Aristotle.

Nil peccant oculi si animus oculis imperat – “The eyes commit no sin if the mind controls the eyes”, said Publilius Syrus in *Sententiae*, 415. I believe that behind the contemplation of music, there are in George Balint's case many years of hard work, which justifiably allows the “mind to control the eyes.” And it could be no other way, for, according to Schopenhauer, “Music is an unconscious exercise in metaphysics in which the mind does not know it is philosophizing”. And one more thing: according to Nietzsche, “only as an aesthetic phenomenon can existence and the world be justified.”

Therefore, dear reader, do not forget to prepare your aesthetic gaze to distinguish “the music in the silent sound”, by reading George Balint's book.

CRISTINA ȘUTEU

Translated from Romanian by Marcella Gabriela MAGDA

