

Ancient Greek Myths in Romanian Opera. Pascal Bentoiu's *Jertfirea Ifigeniei* [The Sacrifice of Iphigenia]

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Abstract: Romanian composers' interest in Greek mythology begins with Enescu's peerless masterpiece – lyrical tragedy *Oedipe* (1921-1931). The realist-postromantic artistic concept is materialised in the insoluble link between text and music, in the original synthesis of the most expressive compositional means recorded in the tradition of the genre and the openness towards acutely modern elements of musical language. The Romanian opera composed in the knowledge of George Enescu's score, which premiered in Bucharest in 1958, reflect an additional interest in mythological subject-matter in the poetic form of the ancient tragedies signed by Euripides, Aeschylus and Sophocles. Significant Romanian musical works written in the avant-garde period of 1960 to 1980 – Doru Popovici's opera *Prometeu*, Aurel Stroe's *Oedipus at Colonus*, *Oresteia I – Agamemnon*, *Oresteia II – The Choephoroi*, *Oresteia III – The Eumenides*, Pascal Bentoiu's *The Sacrifice of Iphigenia* – to which titles of the contemporary art of the stage are added – Cornel Țăranu's *Oreste & Oedip* – propose new philosophical and artistic interpretations of the original myths. At the same time, the mentioned works represent reference points of the multiple and radical transformation of the opera genre in Romanian culture. Emphasising the epic character, a heightened chamber dimension and the alternative extrapolation of the elements in the syncretic complex, developing new modes of performance, of sonic and video transmission – are features of the new style of opera associated to the powerful and simple subject-matter of ancient tragedy. In this sense, radio opera *The Sacrifice of Iphigenia* (1968) is a significant step in the metamorphosis of the genre, its novel artistic value being confirmed by an important international distinction offered to composer Pascal Bentoiu – *Prix Italia* of the Italian Radio and Television Broadcasting Company in Rome. The poetic quality of the text quoted from the masterpiece of ancient theatre, Euripides' *Iphigenia in Aulis*, the hymnic-oratory character of the music, the economy and expressive capacity of the compositional means configured in the relationship between voice, organ, percussion, electro-acoustic means – can be associated in interpreting the universal major theme: the necessity of virgin sacrifice in the process of durable construction.

Keywords: Greek mythology, opera genre, Romanian composers, radio opera, electro-acoustic means.

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Motto:

“The main role of the myth is to reveal the exemplary models of all significant human rites and activities”

Mircea Eliade

1. Introduction. Myths, tragedy and opera development

The artistic use of Ancient Greek myths in European culture is well-known. Moreover, the development of Western European self-consciousness has been supported by continuation of the culture of old Hellas due to specific features adopted from Greek art and theatre in its neoclassical and modern replicas. We think of the reflection of pure humanity, with its force and weaknesses, the dual existential-symbolic relations between immanence and transcendence, rationality and irrationality, and above all, the irreconcilable contradiction of man's heroic struggle against fatality.

The force and the sublime of the Greek tragedy also marked the emergence of the opera genre in Europe, a fact that even today requires a brief comment. Not being the main subject, Greek mythology provided key moments in the evolution of lyrical theatre. So, if the myth of Orpheus had been the founding myth of opera around the year 1600, the degree of interpenetration of tragedy with music grew into the structure of the new performance genre – *musical tragedy* – created by French composers (mainly, Jean-Baptiste Lully) being stimulated by great contemporary neoclassical playwrights – Racine and Corneille. Therefore, it is not accidental that Chr.W. Gluck reformed the opera genre by using the model of artistic syncretism, topics and structure of Greek tragedy.

If other genres developed in the 18th and 19th centuries – such as *opera seria* (used mostly by Roman mythology), *opéra-ballet*, *opéra comique*, *grand opéra* – rarely made use of Greek mythology topics, the interest for the force of feelings, the ambiguity of the mythical epic expressed sometimes allegorically came back in the next neoclassical wave of the 20th century.

Reviewing critically theatre and modern opera, with tortuous narrative and heavy psychological portrays, Claude Debussy suggested a solution: „would it be possible to remember the Greeks? Wasn't it precisely from Euripides, Sophocles, Aeschylus that we found the simple human feelings, with such a natural tragic feeling that these could be understood by most and less refined souls?” (Debussy, 1965, p. 95). History agreed with him, and so in the first decades of the 20th century, opera with classical subject matter flourished again, the renewed aesthetic-musical visions varying between expressionist psychological intensities and symbolic neoclassical abstractions. The exacerbation of fatal experiences (*Elektra* by Richard Strauss), objective distancing and formalization of communication (*Oedipus Rex* by Igor Stravinsky) in the opera of the first half of the 20th century cannot be

understood without considering the reflection in artistic life of theatrical creations on such topics in Germany by Hugo von Hofmannstahl and in France by Jean Cocteau.

The mythological topics had been saving factors for the opera genre during the time of avant-garde from 1950 to 1970, a source for generating ideas, channelling and influence of epic theatre of Bertolt Brecht. Opera-oratorio, opera-pantomime and especially chamber opera was the environment for testing all new ideas: text extrapolation (theatre music, spoken opera), music extrapolation (instrumental theatre), extrapolation of interpretation (*happening*) and sources and scenography (multimedia). Great mythological narratives also adopt postmodern means of expression marked by the recovery of traditions, rebirth of ritual art, mixture of artistic styles and genres from modern musical theatre.

2. Greek Ancient Myths in Romanian opera

In Romanian music, as in any other cultures in Southern and Eastern Europe, the opera genre has been from its first creations – the beginning of the 20th century – the most eloquent for expressing the national specificity, the main subjects showing figures and glorious moments of Romanian history. Only in moments of artistic peak we discover the call of creators to myths of Ancient Greece reflecting a transnational thinking and ascent to major universal ideas. By their symbolic and generalizing nature of the subject, mastery and originality of composition, a few scores have been internationally recognized. We refer mainly to lyrical tragedy *Oedipe* by George Enescu (1931), chamber operas comprised in the trilogy *Orestia* by Aurel Stroe (1977; 1981; 1985), and the chamber opera by Cornel Țăranu (2000). The work we will be focusing on in the second half of our presentation, *The Sacrifice of Iphigenia* by Pascal Bentoiu (1968), is included into this selection by the novelty of radio opera genre, efficiency of its means of expression (including the electro-acoustic ones) in creating entirely sound-based colour and drama.

2.1. Opera *Oedipe* by George Enescu – East-West musical synthesis

The opera *Oedipe* by George Enescu stands for an age and a creator – both at their peak of development. As a top achievement of European realist opera – developed on Aristotelian poetics – Enescu's *Oedipe* cumulates in a personal manner French lyric tragedy, including its state of Grand Opéra, Wagnerian musical drama as a form of total art (*Gesamtkunstwerk*), Italian *Verismo* – to which are added signs of belonging to an old cultural layer that unites South-Eastern Europe. Modal language with various shades and levels of ambiguity, oases of microtonal music and simulated improvisation, moments of Byzantine sacred music, interpreted before excessively as signs of

Romanian culture, represent a broader space and an older background that integrate into his enormous musical synthesis.

In what regards the aesthetics of achieving the musical expression by means of a metaphor, the main feature of traditional drama genres, it is promoted by Enescu by combining historical and recent paradigms of musical language with personal artistic shaping that will enter for good into the treasury of sound symbols. The mastering and osmosis of all means occurred at a time when post-Romantic and early modern language reached its complexity and the humanist-Christian interpretation of the text could be put on stage only by a creator such as Enescu. Historically, the continuation of line followed by Oedipus became impossible. Both the age that replaced the model of synthesis with extrapolations, *abstractions* and simplifications and a creator of such value as Enescu are gone!

2.2. Opera of French Influence

We find the influence of the French neoclassical school, its cult for Greek ancient tragedy also in the works of other Romanian composers, graduates of *Schola Cantorum* in Paris and belonging to Enescu's circle. We refer to Dimitrie Cuclin, the author of two scores of musical theatre – *Agamemnon* (1922), *Meleagridele* (1958) that have never been performed, and to Marcel Mihailovici, composer of the opera *Phèdre* (1949), staged by European theatres but not recognized by *the musicology* of the genre.

The titles suggest the interest of musicians for integrating folklore melodies into modern European language and especially their interest for universal topics at a time when the main direction of Romanian culture, and music implicitly, was towards nationalist topics. The two names may be therefore associated with the names of great inter-war intellectuals, the authors of dramatic texts inspired by Greek mythology, such as Nicolae Iorga, Mircea Eliade or Radu Stanca, for whom history, specificity, national colour did not contradict the founding myths of European culture. And that without mentioning the first European research on myth conducted by Mircea Eliade¹.

2.3. Avant-garde, politics and Romanian Opera

The cultural openness, some authors' aspiration towards universal values and the search for an alternative to *proletarian* and later nationalist policy promoted by the communist regime in Romania seem to be the background for the adoption of mythical topics in works written after 1950. For example, in the

¹ We refer to *Traité d'histoire des religions*, Paris, 1949 and to *Aspects du mythe*, Gallimard, Paris, 1963.

opera *Prometheus*, 1958 (on a text by Victor Eftimiu²), Doru Popovici was one of the first avant-garde composers expressing the drama of the narrative, the prevalence of tragic feelings in serial-dodecaphonic language coloured by Romanian Romanian musical patterns. Opera acquires the significance of a real heroic act in this historic context realizing an important step in modernizing the composition technique.

The Romanian opera composed after the 1958 premiere in Bucharest of the lyric tragedy *Oedipe* by George Enescu reflects the genre metamorphosis. Dramatic expressiveness in music is linked with general artistic visions – surrealism, abstractionism, archetypal current, with trends in dramatic art – epic theatre, the theatre of the absurd, total theatre, with avant-garde musical techniques – integral serialization, texture, improvised music, polystylism and also with new types of performance, staging, sound and video transmission (opera/ concert dramatic music/ radio opera). In what follows, we will provide a few examples of aesthetic and stylistic diversity in creating the ancient myth.

Chronologically, the first title is the *Sacrifice of Iphigenia* by Pascal Benteiu (1968), a radio opera imagined as a sensitive recreation of the atmosphere from Greek tragedy. Its typology and structure follow the text written by Euripides, and its evocative, narrative, hymnal and only secondary dramatic nature. The text is declaimed in theatrical manner, with various shades, from lamentation to outcry, and simple singing, mostly monodic vocalizations, and the final *glissando* being the only sign of personal drama. Instrumental section – reduced to organ and percussion – creates a symbolic sonic, sometimes illustrative, metaphor anticipating and reverberating the meaning of the word.

Then, the opera creations of Liviu Glodeanu appeared – an extremely talented and gifted creator, the author of concert dramatic music, *Ulysses and the opera-ballet-pantomime* with the same title. More promoted because of its subject, the opera-oratorio *Zamolxe*, 1969 (God of Thracians), uses the initial ritual function of ancient tragedy attributing to the choir the main role and exploring with a completely formalized technique the means of mass effects that had been experimented earlier by Xenakis and the Polish avant-garde. We discover here huge textures with random inserts, dynamic or compact sound blocks. And if we add the Stravinskyan ascendancy from the sections of Dionysian outbursts, we have the entire sound imagination of Thracian primitivism in the vision of Liviu Glodeanu. „a harsh music [...] full of energy and colour”. (Vieru, 1994, p. 277)

The Closed City Trilogy or *Orestias* of Aurel Stroe – considered justly masterpieces of new music and extensively treated by Romanian musicology

² Victor Eftimiu (1889-1972) was an Aromanian writer, translator and playwright with mythological subject

but first of all explained by the composer himself – are chamber operas that use with an amazing fantasy the expressive-structural elements of musical and instrumental theatre. Stroe creates the score as a “free counterpoint compared to the ancient text” setting only “at some points – key relations consonant with it. [...] The real meeting – states the author – does not occur as the analogy between the dramatic action and musical language but at a deeper level of structural isomorphisms. [...] Where the decrepitude of the city is expressed, the musical form itself wishes to be decrepit, it is not satisfied just to illustrate its weakness, it gets involved in destroying itself.” (Stroe, 1983, pp. 26-27). In *Orestia II* (1977), for example, the alternation and overlapping of the 4 tuning systems (European twelve-tone equal temperament, Harmonics series, Pythagorean tuning, Indian system of *raga*), representing the same number of incompatible cultures is the core of the opera structural rupture intended by the author as a metaphor for the epic meaning of the text.

The subtitle *The Closed City Trilogy* may be deciphered in terms of its political meaning as a symbol of the author’s revolt against communist ideology, the cultural isolation of Romanians.

After Stroe’s operas, in which the reflection on history and science mingle with the daring experiment, after his departure from Romania (1985), Greek mythology did not appear in the creations of Romanian composers. Only in 2000, Cornel Țăranu composes the chamber opera *Orestes & Oedipus* (on a libretto by Olivier Apert), with the mention „opera-theatre”. Post-modern inter-textuality defines the author’s vision by uniting the two myths of Greek antiquity, harmonizing neoclassical musical and avant-garde theatres and fixed instrumental forms with cited fragments.

3. Radio opera *Sacrifice of Iphigenia* by Pascal Bentoiu

Approaching topics belonging to ancient Greek literature is not accidental for Pascal Bentoiu. His high-school and early youth education reflect his deeper penetration into the knowledge of classical tragedy by making translations and readings in the Greek language. Biographical testimonies support this idea presenting data on his periods of study of ancient Greek language and literature, the most significant period being that between 1950 and 1953, that he spent in an atmosphere of constraint of severe military service.³ He saved himself by reading the classics, among which also *The Iliad*. (Bentoiu, 2006, p. 264). In later years, cultural accumulation had been associated with compositional experience. Decisive was the intellectual friendship and collaboration with Alexandru Mircea Pop, a translator of ancient Greek plays into Romanian, and with theatre director Vlad Mugur, at whose

³ Out of political reasons, the composer was forced to do military service for three years (1950-1953) at the General Directorate Work Service.

request Benteiu wrote the stage music for the performance *Orestia*, 1964 and *Iphigenia in Aulis*, 1966.

The *Sacrifice of Iphigenia* was ordered in the summer of 1968 for the contest *Prix Italia*, the competition that promoted composers and famous modern creations. The event stimulated the author in assimilating the means of expression specific to electro-acoustic music of the time used by the Romanian radio, especially in theatre and dramatized prose. The repertoire of possible technical operations was quite limited and included the deformation and amplification of the recorded sound, mixing and overlapping of sound layers, adding the naturalistic and acoustic effects. Using these means with moderation and integrating them into scores of sombre and carefully developed writing, Benteiu states a compositional vision based on highly expressive sensitive sound suggestion of time, space and the ritualistic-dramatic character of tragedy. His creation is differentiated from other works presented over time at *Prix Italia*. We refer here, for example, to traditional sonority of post-Romantic opera *Iphigenia* (1950) by Ildebrando Pizzetti or to the mostly electronic acute modernity of *Elektra* (1960) by Henri Pousseur.

3.1. Timbre semantics and dramaturgy

The libretto (achieved in collaboration with translator Alexandru Mircea Pop) is the key to understanding the score. The author opted for the essentialization of the narrative choosing key tragedy fragments with a varied role – epic, poetic and axiomatic – and the reduction of sound characters to the dramatic triangle Agamemnon – Iphigenia – Choir. So, instrumental sonority dominates the work. The text recited by a variety of techniques and monodic singing (rarely 2 voices) alternates with the sections that continue, complete and amplify the meaning of the word.

From the first audition, the listener can enter the atmosphere of the ancient tragedy, without being obliged to understand all the meanders of the narrative. The craft of Benteiu to evoke the time of the events, Greek culture and the atemporality of the myth through timbre sonority seems today to be natural. Still, at the level of composition experience of the 1960s, his merit is outstanding. He chose the organ maybe not to evoke the ancient instrument but as a bearer of the melody, drama and its function within the requiem. Also, the frequent use of the acute register provides the suggestion of old Euro-Asian wind instruments (the legendary aulos). The crystalline sonority of the melodic percussion creates the image of purity, immateriality, celestial character of the Olympian wedding. The gong, tam-tam, *piatti*, tambourine, etc. reveal the textual suggestions of Greek antiquity participating together in a ritual procession with a wide range of rhythmic percussion. The significance of vocal timbres that we have already mentioned may be observed in this slide.

Actor voice – Agamemnon Actress voice – Iphigenia	Theatrical set-up in choosing the main characters
Solo soprano – Iphigenia; timbre colour	Ancient monody, purity of expression
Choir: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rhythmic recitation • <i>Sprechstimme/Sprechgesang</i> • Monodic singing or 2 voices 	Ancient tragedy: narrative, ritual, participatory character

Table 1 Functions of vocal timbres

Organ	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • harmony, drama, requiem • old Euro-Asian wind instruments (aulos) • ancient instrument
Melodic percussion: Xylofon Glockenspiel Vibrafon	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • purity • immateriality • celestial character
Rhythmic percussion: Timpani, Piatti sospesi, Gong, Tam-tam, Tambourine, Woodblock, Temple block, Tom-Tom, Bongos Gran cassa, Triangle, Claves, Maracas, Wind machine Piano (as a percussion instrument)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Archaic ritual • Related Ancient instruments • Reverberation in time and space

Table 2 Functions of instrumental timbres

The knowledge and art of Pascal Bentoiu appears again in the creation of timbre playwriting in the alternative development of narrative functions, dramatic and ritual characters. Table 3 shows the first part of the opera ended in the golden ratio of the work, we may note the evolution in the alternation of dramatic poetics. We also observe a consequence in the association of the **organ – narration – and dramatic or poetic expressiveness**, on the one hand, and **percussion – axiomatic text – and ritual character**, on the other hand.

Sections	Narrative/dramatic moment	Dominant timbre	Musical texture. Sound Effects
I	Motto: mythical time, drama prediction	Agamemnon	Recitation

	The contemplation the of great Aegean fleet (narration – dramatic melody)	Female choir	Rhythmic recitation Multi-vocal recitation Collective random recitation
		Organ	Poliphony – homophony Diatonic modalism (ancient Greek modes) Axial tonal-chromatic system (Bartók): E-B flat
II	Horror of fratricidal war (axiomatic text – ritual)	Percussion	Punctualist polyphony Controlled improvisation
		Choir	Harmonic <i>Sprechgesang</i>
		Electro-acoustic means	Mix of acoustic effects and levels
III	Virginal purity and the illusion of the wedding (Narration – poetic melody) <i>(attacca)</i>	Soprano voice	Vocalize – diatonic
		Choir	Melodic recitative
		Organ	Non-functional harmonic evolutions – archaic
IV	Instrumental interlude (Ceremonial suggestion, interrupted, destroyed, deconstructed ritual)	Percussion Organ	Obsessive alternation between the two structures
V	Disgust towards human weakness overwhelmed by the power of fate (axiomatic – ritualic text)	Choir	Multivocal rhythmic recitation
		Organ	Imitative polyphonic writing Diatonic modalism – chromatically dense
		Percussion	Stressing by cymbals and gongs
		Electro-acoustic means	Recurrent mixing of two sound surfaces
VI	Evocation of Olympian party of the symbolic wedding (narration-poetic melody)	Choir Organ	Diatonic monody Harmonization in 2 voices Collective improvisational <i>Sprechstimme</i>

VII	Sentence pronouncing (axiomatic – ritualic text) (<i>Sectio aurea</i>)	Percussion Harpichord	Imitative writing Poliphony of ostinatos
		Actor's voice (Agamemnon)	Sentence outcry
		Electro-acoustic means	Reverberated, distorted voice, mixed with its copy for the echo effect

Table 3 Part I: semantics and dramaturgy

In the 2nd part, the ritual of sacrifice is suggested by repetitive elements and the reverberating signals of percussion overlapped with a short text having a symbolic value and the monologue of Iphigenia is declaimed and sung in the dramatic environment of rich harmonies of the organ. Speechless (wordless) musical moments are placed at extreme points, heart-breaking through their dramatic force.

Sections	Narrative / dramatic moment	Dominant timbre	Music texture. Sound Effects
VIII	The culmination of the tragic feeling	Soprano voice Organ	Solo and accompanied vocalisation Dodecaphonic serialism
IX	The ritual of sacrifice (Axiomatic text – ritual)	Percussion	Repetitive elements Reverberated sound signals
		Choir	Collective improvisational <i>Sprechstimme</i>
		Electro-acoustic means	Mixing percussion with the choir in the 5 th section.
X	Heartbreaking acceptance of the sacrifice (Tragic poetic text – dramatic melody)	Organ	Tonal-modal temporal and unstable sonority Instrumental virtuosity in ample figurations and chords Illustrative sound effects
		Iphigenia: Reciting and singing voice	Heroine's monologue – free recitation Overlapping of singing voice – reciting voice (heart and mind)

		Choir	Choir <i>Glissando</i> – horror outcry
XI	The emptiness of death – eternity – legend	Wind machine (Aeoliphone) Organ Percussion	Ambiguous diatonic modalism The figuration continues suggesting eternity. Sounds of cymbals, gong and tam-tam

Table 4 Part II: semantics and dramaturgy

3.2. Harmonic and polyphonic design

Pascal Bentoiu's harmonic and polyphonic writing techniques reflect the balance between the intentions of evocation and revival of the myth. If in the melodic line there prevail the two main Greek modes, Dorian and Phrygian modes, the harmonization, the functionality of chord chaining and the polyphonic distribution reflect the modern chromatism developed in the manner of Bartók. The chromatic mobility of scale degrees (steps), the parallelism of chords, their elliptical or amplified structure create a sonority that is recognized today as belonging to the East European creations. It is important that Bentoiu is not satisfied only with the expression and colour of harmony but creates a system of tonal relation to augmented fourth, as in axial tonality (Beloïu, 1969, p.14), stated earlier among two accords, on **E** and **B flat**, consistently transposed (Figures 1a., 1b., 1c.). Not being stuck in the created system should also be noted. Therefore, the culmination of the tragic feeling, after becoming aware of the irreversible road to death of Iphigenia, lies in the serial-dodecaphonic sound organization.

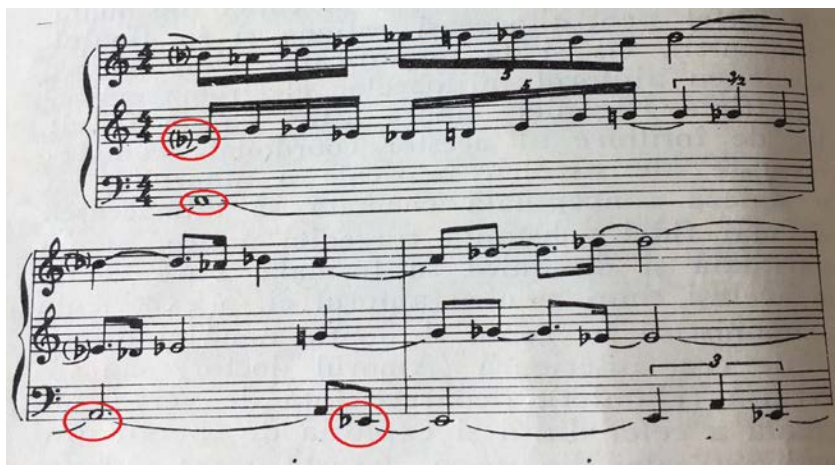


Fig. 1a Section I, reference 5, mm. 8-10



Fig. 1b Section I, reference 8, mm. 11-13

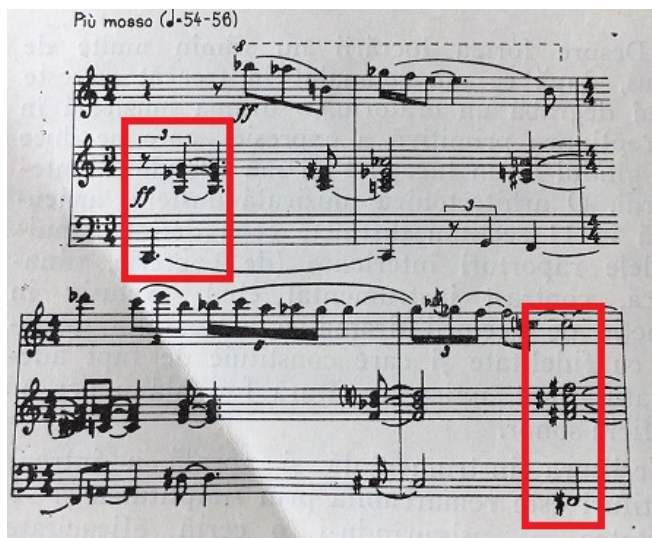


Fig. 1c Section V, reference 4, mm. 1-2

The polyphonic writing plays an important role in this score concentrating the rigour, sobriety and dynamism of the sound image. Free, imitative, canonical, punctual, the polyphony of writing is linked in some moments with highly modern imitative or improvisational techniques in the 1960s (Fig. 2).

The image shows two systems of handwritten musical notation. The first system consists of six staves for voices (I-V) and a Clavier. The second system also consists of six staves for voices (I-V) and a Clavier. The notation includes various musical symbols such as clefs, notes, rests, and dynamic markings. Key markings include '7. ten', 'Gong (vrai)', 'ad lib. mano', 'pizz. cresc.', and '7. ten'. There are also performance instructions like '(1)', '(2)', '(3)', and '(4)'.

Fig. 2 Section VII, 4, mm. 5-7; reference 5, mm. 1-3

In trying to select the moments of maximum expressiveness, we draw attention to the culmination of the work (section VII). The axiomatic text, representing the pronouncement of the sentence, is recited in *Sprechstimme* collectively by the choir, then an outcry of Agamemnon as a final conviction. It is a section of a dramatic ritual in which the percussion participates in a polyphonic and repetitive writing of great effect. Impressive is also the end of the work in which the last words of Iphigenia, the execution and the desert of eternity after death, are grouped together. We once again notice the artistic instinct and the dramatic ability of the author. Before death, silence and breathlessness are absolute (five seconds of emptiness). Then follows a harmonic *crescendo* of the organ and gong *in tremolo* and the outcry in horror of the choir through a plurivocal *glissando*.

Voca

Corni

Organi

Cori

Organi

IV
Maximal
de vânt

Organi

(singat de groazii)

ff AH!!

ff AH!!

(5^a gol - asteptare)

ppp

ff

(cca 8^a crestarea)

(cca 4^a maximal)

Ossia: Song mare, pe aceleasi nuante dinamice

ppp

(cca 11^a-12^a descoperarea)

3^a suzita - apoi incepe sa bata vi realizata cu mijloacele ordinare (m. de

10-12^a vintul singur, crescind data mf - apoi, in mixaj, un urmasor

Vintul va exista sub primale 7 mase dupa care este scos din mixaj.

XI

Grave (♩ = 42-44)

Fig. 3 Section X, the end

4. Conclusions

After this study, we understand more clearly the role of the Greek mythology and tragedy in the development of the opera genre. An absolute model of beginning and configuring the French musical tragedy, the myth represented a strong impetus of extreme artistic visions in the first decades of

the 20th century, an inspiring idea for the need to express abstraction and ambiguity of the avant-garde after 1950 and the source of total theatre nowadays. The myth was the generator of the most diverse philosophies and interpretations: moral, humanist, Christian, political, social, ritual-magical, scientific. Although more difficult to adapt to the opera genre, subject to public success (see the absence of the topic in the Romantic opera), the mythology as an opera topic saved the genre both from the derisive and frivolity of fashionable topics and the danger of accentuating the nationalism of each culture. Consequently, we can mention few masterpieces, among which titles of Romanian operas: first *Oedipus* by George Enescu. Undoubtedly the operas of Romanian composers composed after 1950 expressed both the desire of some authors of high cultural and moral standing to avoid the directions and topics recommended politically and the incentive to experiment the newest means of sound expression at the crossroads of the theatrical and general artistic creation of the time.

Listening to the opera *The Sacrifice of Iphigenia* by Pascal Bentoiu, after almost 50 years from its creation, we discover the arguments of the jury that awarded *the Prize of Italian Radio and TV*: the elegance of sombre writing, rigour of structuring, measure between the abstract and the symbolic, the suggested and the expressed, temporality and atemporality.

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