

Four Centuries of Lied with Grigore Constantinescu *Review*¹

LOREDANA IAȚEȘEN

“George Enescu” National University of Arts Iași
ROMÂNIA*

Abstract: Grigore Constantinescu has a unique value in the Romanian musical journalism, a warm yet firm musical pen, a unitary and recognizable style, by surprising the audience continuously through novelty argued with nobility. And if today’s young musicologists often ask themselves: are there consistent, high quality books that contain information with immediate reference to the famous triad of *history-style-language*, they only have to have the time and patience to read and especially to understand the fascinating trajectory of certain genres, revealed by Grigore Constantinescu so close to each of our souls, in the books *Four Centuries of Opera* and *Four Centuries of Lied*.

Keywords: music history, *opera* genre, *lied* genre, musical language.

Vocal music research in all its aspects has been a constant concern of Grigore Constantinescu. He is a passionate musicologist with an impressive career who published hundreds of pages of various genres: encyclopedias, music history books, monographs, critical reviews. An overview of the titles of some of his books reveals the vocation of the monographer Grigore Constantinescu. A meticulous author, who has listened to numerous recordings, has been constantly informed, has read enormously, has systematized documents to write ample works that capture the personality of certain composers², performing artists³ or even genres. We refer more precisely to certain publications of encyclopedic dimensions and consistency: *Patru secole de operă Istorie și stiluri, Personalități creatoare, Capodopere, Repertorii*

¹ Grigore Constantinescu, *Patru secole de lied. Miniatura vocală acompaniată. Genul liedului și variantele sale* [Four Centuries of Lied, Vocal Miniature with Accompaniment, The Lied Genre and its Variants]. București: Editura Muzicală, 2016.

* iatesenloredana@yahoo.com

² *Giuseppe Verdi*, Editura Didactică și Pedagogică, București, 2009; *Gaetano Donizetti*, Editura Didactică și Pedagogică, București, 2013.

³ *Margareta Metaxa, o voce a Operei Române* [Margareta Metaxa, a Voice of the Romanian Opera], Editura Muzicală, București, 1987; *Dorin Teodorescu – Imaginile unui destin (Dorin Teodorescu – The Images of a Destiny)*, Editura Uniunii Criticilor Muzicali, București, 2003; *Iulia Buciuceanu, un portret liric în dialog* [Iulia Buciuceanu, a Lyrical Portrait in Dialog], Fundația *George Constantin*, București, 2011; *Emilia Petrescu, Regina cântului vocal-concertant* [Emilia Petrescu, the Queen of Singing and Concerto], Editura Muzicală, București, 2014.

[Four Centuries of Opera, History and Styles, Creative Personalities, Masterpieces, Repertoires] (Editura Națională a Operei, București, 2014) and *Patru secole de lied Miniatura vocală acompaniată Genul liedului și variantele sale* [Four Centuries of Lied, Vocal Miniature with Accompaniment, The Lied Genre and its Variants] (Editura Muzicală, București, 2016). The reading of these volumes plunges the reader into an intense scientific and cultural approach, due to the diversity of literary, aesthetic-philosophical and musical issues, on the lengthy evolution of genres of the utmost importance in the history of musical art.

When referring to the last book, *Four Centuries of Lied* (2016), it is impossible not to ask ourselves: what world literature models did Grigore Constantinescu rely on for the completion of a musical approach of such magnitude? When browsing through some important books belonging to the international bibliography⁴, one is surprised to discover that the work of the Romanian musicologist, of encyclopedic stature and value, is a single author's creation, not a collective project or an anthology of texts. Moreover, Grigore Constantinescu has conducted research that goes beyond the traditional approach of the genre in encyclopedias, materialized in the definition of the historical background, the general classification of the style, the enumeration of some significant representatives and opera. The book has twelve chapters: 'Prologue', "Definition and Evolution of the Lied in the 17th-18th Centuries", "Great Classics", "Lied Autonomy in the 19th Century", "Great Romantics", "The 20th Century. The Modern Age. Perspectives and Accomplishments in the Austrian-German Lied", "Perspectives and Accomplishments in Italian Romantic and Modern Vocal Miniature", "Young National Cultures", "Russian Romantic and Modern Vocal Miniature", "French Romantic and Modern Melody", "American Trends and Tendencies", "Romanian Vocal Chamber Music", to which "Epilogue by Ruxandra Donose", "Selective Name Index" and "Selective References" are added. Throughout these chapters, the researcher thoroughly deals with the issues of the genre, from the diversity of the *Volksong* / *Kunstlied* concepts in the sequence of the first historical stages, to the particular aspects of the text-music correspondences in different cultures of the Western European academic tradition, to the innovative concepts in dealing with the genre of the 20th-21st centuries.

As the author points out from the beginning, the book was published within the *Ialomița always and forever* project, on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the *Ionel Perlea* National Lied Festival and Contest in 2016. A prestigious contest in the organization of which he undertook the role of mentor. A significant and motivating detail for musicologist Grigore

⁴ *The Cambridge Companion to the Lied* edited by James Parsons, Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004; Hélène Cao et Hélène Boisson. *Anthologie du lied, édition bilingue*, Paris, Éditions Buchet/Chastel, coll. « Musique », 2010.

Constantinescu, who responds to the emotional challenge, resulting in a 517 page-long research.

One of the basic arguments supporting the analysis of the lied genre was the detailed comment on the poetic sources. I refer here not only to the vastness of the themes and topics in relation to various musics but also and especially to the identification of the author with the cultural, philosophical and literary environment of the analyzed epochs. Whereas in the previous monographs devoted to the composers interested in this genre the authors' remarks were particularly focused on the importance of sound, often at the expense of the poetic source, in this case, the problematization of the phenomenon follows the reverse route. Direct or symbolic message reception from potential readers is deep, consistent with the whole conceptual content of the ideas deduced from the content of the reference texts. Moreover, the analytical, aesthetic-philosophical and psychological comments on the literary sources of some recently evaluated musical cultures (Denmark, Finland, Norway, Sweden, the Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary, Belgium) is unprecedented. The text reveals the author's ability to systematize many pages of documentary value, mostly unknown to Romanian readers, the musical correspondences of which he also outlines. Thus, by emphasizing the importance of poetic meanings, the lied as a genre exceeds the *mundane* concept. It is dealt with and understood as a living phenomenon, with a history based on arguments related to fascinating collaborations between poets and composers, regardless of chronological classifications, ideology or other circumstances.

In his sound-related comments, Grigore Constantinescu's musicological vision is revealed from the very beginning, in the prologue: "From the point of view of the genre, the notion and the structure of the lied itself corresponds as a poetic and musical style to certain successive compositional changes and accumulations of the periods in the history of music" (Constantinescu, 2016, p. 9). Thus, from the concept of lied as a *minnesang*, to the vocal-instrumental miniature of the 21st century, the author sheds light on certain features of operas created by first-hand or lesser-known composers. He focuses on the perception of the peculiarities of various musics from several viewpoints: the relationship between the composers and the styles of their time, the reception of the composers in the reference periods, the place and role of the lied in the musicians' composition work, the relevance of some biographical aspects of the composers. Also, the close relationships between the composers and literati of the time influenced individual creative choices and lead to various miniature approaches. An approach that was materialized in the general or the in-depth analysis (stylistic, semantic, hermeneutic) of numerous music scores. Moreover, the researcher devotes true musicological studies to a series of valuable musicians (Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Franz Schubert, Robert

Schumann, Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy, Johannes Brahms, Hugo Wolf, Richard Strauss, Gustav Mahler, Modest Mussorgsky, Gabriel Fauré, Claude Debussy, Maurice Ravel, Francis Poulenc, George Enescu, Nicolae Coman). These are done in detail, in relation to the composers' various conceptions of building their own sound thinking systems, which they explain differently, depending on the relevance of some musical and extra-musical elements. The result is the detection and understanding of subtleties in the psychology of each act of creation. Grigore Constantinescu is equally serious when he draws attention to the personality of partly known artists, who have made their views known in the musical literature of the genre: Johann Friedrich Reichardt, Carl Friedrich Zelter, Louis Spohr, Carl Loewe, Heinrich Marschner, Otto Nicolai are some of the composers grouped in the subchapter entitled *Weber and the Austro-German Generation at the Beginning of Romanticism*. Representatives of the "young national cultures" (Constantinescu, 2016, p.241) are also referred to here, being appreciated rather and especially for their contribution to the symphonic and concerto genres, than for their accomplishments in the miniature genre. We refer here to Johann Peter Emilius Hartmann, Niels Gade (Denmark); Jan Sibelius (Finland); Franz Berwald, Ture Rangström, Carl Wilhelm Eugen Stenhammar (Sweden); Ludvig Mathias Lindeman (Norway); Bedřich Smetana, Zdeněk Fibich, Antonin Dvořák, Leoš Janáček, Bohuslav Martinu, Erich Wolfgang Korngold (the Czech Republic); Frederic Chopin, Stanislaw Moniuszko, Karol Szymanowski, Witold Lutoslawski, Krzysztof Eugeniusz Penderecki (Poland); Ferenc Erkel, Ernő Dohnányi, Béla Bartók, Zoltán Kodály, László Lajtha, Joseph Kosma (Hungary); André Modest Grétry, César Franck, Guillaume Lekeu (Belgium); Felipe Pedrell, Isaac Albéniz, Enrique Granados, Joaquín Nin, Manuel de Falla, Jesús Guridi Bidaola, Federico Mompou, Roberto Gerhard, Xavier Montsalvatge (Spain). They contributed through the musical-poetic value of some of their opuses to the maturation of the style of some prestigious composers or to the identification of general language and expression traits. The author analyzes them with the same passion, whether their music was successful at their time or not. The researcher believes that critical reception is necessary given the problematization in the contemporary world of creative values or attempts of the past centuries, so that the reader is given the opportunity to gather information and shape his/her own opinions, selections, systematizations concerning the relevance of certain styles, creative attitudes, opuses. Here may be mentioned, for example, the succinct manner of characterizing the style of the 20th century Hungarian composer Joseph Kosma, an author of French melodies with a delicate expression, whose pieces have been rarely performed or analyzed. "The fluidity of form, the sense of unity of meaning gives a quality unmatched in the music of the time, with a certain parallelism with Poulenc's melodies, echoes from the works of previous composers who cultivated the same beauty ideal,

which influenced him indirectly, through the creations of Gounod, Massenet, Fauré or Ravel” (Constantinescu, 2016, p. 271).

In the construction of the texts, Grigore Constantinescu is not a radical author. He does not point to singular interpretations of meanings, to deformed receptions. Thus each fragment, word or phrase, due to its richness of cultural and musical meanings, becomes an invitation addressed to the reader, to meditate and to open him/herself to other possible areas of research.

The achievement of a complete picture of the four-centuries-old vocal-instrumental miniature is due to the exquisite musician and impressive man of culture Grigore Constantinescu, who was careful about the organization and systematization of data, sensitive to their beautiful, coherent and accessible disclosure, and balanced in the objective evaluation of the historical, cultural and artistic realities and, above all, recognized by the uniqueness of his elevated approach on the specialty issue, a perfect blend of musicology and literature. These are features disclosed not only by the book reviewed here. Regardless of the musical genre in which he expresses himself (monograph, dictionary or reviews), Grigore Constantinescu has a unique value in the Romanian musical journalism, a warm yet firm musical pen, a unitary and recognizable style, by surprising the audience continuously through novelty argued with nobility. And if today’s young musicologists often ask themselves: are there consistent, high quality books that contain information with immediate reference to the famous triad of *history-style-language*, they only have to have the time and patience to read and especially to understand the fascinating trajectory of certain genres, revealed by Grigore Constantinescu so close to each of our souls, in the books *Four Centuries of Opera* and *Four Centuries of Lied*.