

## **Innovative Aspects of the Modern Concerto (extravagant compositional models of the 20<sup>th</sup> century)**

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**Abstract:** The instrumental concerto remains one of the most appreciated genres – both by the general public and by virtuoso interpreters – all throughout its existence, including the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The century of acute modernity saw a re-evaluation of all the musical forms and genres, resulting in novel challenges, solved in unexpected ways by the great composers of the time. This paper aims to provide a summary of the evolution of the concerto in the music of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, highlighting certain elements of originality, extravagant compositions which go beyond the principles of musical creation.

**Keywords:** *concerto*, modernity, virtuosity, time, genre.

### **1. Introduction**

The instrumental *concerto* remains one of the most appreciated genres – both by the general public and by virtuoso interpreters – all throughout its existence, including the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The century of acute modernity saw a re-evaluation of all the musical forms and genres, resulting in novel challenges, solved in unexpected ways by the great composers of the time. This paper aims to provide a summary of the evolution of the concerto in the music of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, highlighting certain elements of originality, extravagant compositions which go beyond the principles of musical creation.

We would like to mention here the *Concerto for piano for left hand* by Maurice Ravel, *Trauermusik for viola and string orchestra* by Paul Hindemith, the Concerto for oboe and orchestra by Richard Strass, and Ebony Concerto for clarinet and jazz band by I. Stravinsky, A. Berg's concerto for piano, violin and 13 wind instruments, the Concerto for nine instruments by A. Webern, the Concertos for harpsichord and organ by F. Poulenc, Concerto for piano, trumpet and string orchestra by D. Shostakovich, *Concerti grossi* by A. Schnittke, *Concerto for chamber orchestra* by G. Ligeti, or *Domaines for clarinet and six instruments* by P. Boulez.

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## 2. Extravagant compositional models of the concert in the twentieth century

The concerto which avoids the soloist presence is represented in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century by Michael Tippett, the author of *Concerto for double string orchestra*, which prefaces the great subsequent achievements in this genre that replaces the soloist with the orchestra (and its various divisions): Ernest Bloch was the author of a *Concerto grosso for string orchestra and piano obbligato* in the same period, exploiting a Baroque vision that seemed long outdated.

Stravinsky's *Concerto for piano* (1923) was composed for a specific formation and dedicated to its soloist. The three parts (written following the quick-slow-quick formula) bring to the forefront a form of blues in the second part, in F minor. The blues as a genre belongs to the African-American spirit of the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which subsequently evolved towards jazz, rhythm and blues, and rock-and-roll. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, more and more compositions will resort to forms belonging to jazz.

A. Berg's composition (*Concerto for piano, violin and 13 wind instruments*, 1923-25) has a first part dedicated to the piano and the wind instruments, while A. Webern's *Concerto for nine instruments* (1931-34) brings the piano in the orchestral formation, integrating it into a symphonic conception.

Another original case of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is represented by the concertos composed by Francis Poulenc (1899-1963), pianist and composer with a unique style, marked by the simplicity of his vision: it is visible in his *Concerto for organ, timpani and strings in G minor FP 93*, which became one of the most frequently performed in this genre for this instrument in the post-Baroque period (from a narrow perspective of the genre). On the other hand, the *Concerto champêtre for harpsichord and orchestra FP 49* (1927-28) by F. Poulenc benefits from a very ample perspective at the level of the orchestral timbre, including three sections.

The list of the concertos for orchestra is very long and includes opera such as: *Concerto for Orchestra Op. 38* by Paul Hindemith (1925), *Concerto for Orchestra* by Zoltán Kodály (1939-40), and *Concerto for Orchestra* by Béla Bartók (1943), *Concerto for Orchestra* by Witold Lutosławski (1950-54), *Concerto for Orchestra* by Leonard Bernstein (1986-89), but also *Concerto for Orchestra* by Magnus Lindberg (composed entirely in the third millennium). Composers who wrote especially for string orchestra include A. Vivaldi (*Concerto for Strings in G major, RV 151, Concerto alla rustica*, 1730) and I. Stravinsky (*Concerto in D*, 1946), while for the chamber orchestra there are: *Concerto for Piano and Violin with 13 Wind Instruments* (1923-25) by Alban Berg, and *Chamber Concerto for 13 instruments* (1969-70) by György Ligeti.

Among the concertos for orchestra (without soloist) signed by P. Hindemith or M. Tippett, Bartók's is a concerto masterpiece in five parts (out of which the second part, 'Giocco delle coppie', is the richest from the point of view of the orchestral dynamics). M. Tippett is the author of two masterpieces: *Concerto for Orchestra* (1962-1863) and *Concerto for Double String Orchestra* (1938-1839). *The Concerto for the double orchestra* is full of polyrhythm energy, under Bartók and Stravinsky's influence, but also of the Renaissance (which is the source of the antiphonic influences). The sonata form of the first part (*Allegro con brio*) is followed by the most beautiful composition of the great English contemporary composer, then by a fugue and a final part of the rondo – synthetic type.

The image displays a musical score for M. Tippett's *Double concerto for orchestra, Allegro con brio*. The score is presented in two systems, (a) and (b), with a double bar line between them. System (a) features two staves: (a) Orchestra 1, which includes Violins I, II, and Viola, and (b) Orchestra 2, which includes Viola, Violoncello, and Double Bass. System (b) features two staves: (b) Orchestra 1, which includes Violins I and II, and (b) Orchestra 2, which includes Violins I, II, and Viola. The tempo is marked 'Allegro con brio' with a metronome marking of quarter note = c.138. Dynamics include *f marcato*, *f espr.*, *ff*, and *f*. The score is written in 8/8 time and includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings.

Fig. 1 M. Tippett, *Double concerto for orchestra, Allegro con brio*

P. Hindemith composed *Concerto for Orchestra op. 38* (1925) in four parts (*Mit Kraft, mäßig schnelle Viertel, ohne Pathos und stets lebendig, Sehr schnelle Halbe, Marsch für Holzbläser: Nicht zu langsame Viertel, Basso*

*ostinato: Schnelle Viertel*), exceeding the tripartite tradition of the Classical-Romantic genre.

There is also the more restrained vision of the concerto called **CONCERTINO**: Arthur Honegger composed the *Concertino for piano and orchestra H. 55* (1924), made up of a single movement which includes three internal sections. Out of the three concertos, the first is the previously mentioned composition, followed by *Concerto for cello and orchestra in C major* and, 20 years later, by *Concerto da camera for flute, English horn and strings*.

The Romanian school for this genre is also represented by Anatol Vieru with *Concerto for orchestra* (1954-55), as well as by Dinu Lipatti's *Concertino in classical style for piano and orchestra op. 3* (1936), which is one of the most valuable compositions of the first half of the last century, becoming part of the European repertory from 1951 when it was posthumously published in Vienna. The three sections in G major were dedicated to the teacher who had trained his interpretation style for the piano, Florica Musicescu. Very synthetised, it includes, in addition to the soloist instrument, 2 oboes, 2 bassoons, timpani and string orchestra.

Fig. 2 D. Lipatti, *Concertino în classical style op. 3, Allegro maestoso*

Unusual combinations of timbres are present in the music of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, especially when we consider the strictly soloist compositions: such a Neo-Baroque combination is illustrated by the *Concerto for piano, trumpet and string orchestra in C minor op. 35* by D. Shostakovich, exploiting the more avant-garde possibilities of the century he lived in. Shostakovich started from the idea of a concert for trumpet but he obtained the reverse – that is a concert for piano with solo trumpet. In 1933, the Concerto was considered more a

double concerto than a concerto for piano, because the balance between the two soloist instruments is truly remarkable (despite the fact that in the first part the piano imposes the rhythm). Perhaps because of this timbre flexibility, the author chose to compose a later version for two pianos. The Introduction (*Allegro moderato*) announces part I (technically difficult), followed by *Lento*, *Moderato* and *Allegro con brio* (often thought of as one formal unit, finishing with a difficult tempo).



Fig. 3 D. Shostakovich, *Concerto for piano, trumpet and string orchestra in C minor op. 35*, Part I, *Allegro moderato*

However, the elements which make the concert more unusual consist of the moments of parody, referring to L. van Beethoven's *Sonata "Appassionata"*, to *Sonata for piano in D major* by J. Haydn, to other popular songs or to personal works (scene music for Hamlet op. 32a, *The Golden Age* ballet, the opera *Christopher Columbus*).

The concert symphony (with soloist) is another version related to the concerto genre, which can be discussed among the extravagant situations: in the case of Benjamin Britten, the author of *Symphony for violoncello and orchestra op. 68* (1963) it must be mentioned that the composition was dedicated to the most important instrumentalist of the violoncello at that time, Mstislav Rostropovich. The four movements represent a model of synthesis between the soloist elements and the orchestral ones; the *cadenza* of the solo instrument is found in the last two sections of the symphony (*Adagio – cadenza ad lib*, *Passacaglia: Andante allegro*).



Fig. 4 B. Britten, *Cello Symphony op. 68*, Part I, *Allegro maestoso*

The *Chamber Concerto* composed by György Ligeti in 1969 is part of the same category of the genres associated with the concerto, including the *Romanian Concerto for small orchestra* in 1951 (which has four parts: *Larghetto*, *Allegro vivace*, *Adagio ma non troppo*, *Presto poco sostenuto*). Ten years after its composition, after 1990, he worked on a revised version, published subsequently, although its interpretation was forbidden for a long time. A particular feature of the proposed orchestration is the fact that, out of the three horns used, the third one has to be placed at a distance from the others in order to create the echo effect.

Fig. 5 G. Ligeti, *Romanian concerto*, Part I, *Andantino*

As a collector and researcher passionate about Romanian folkloric music even as a teenager, Ligeti used all of these sonorous memories in a concerto, which tries to render the beauty of the Romanian ethnic music, implementing the same technique in his creation as that of George Enescu: transforming the popular ethos into a modern manner, in a personal vision which bears the mark of his melodic invention in the folkloric spirit.

“The first two movements are different from the last two, the composition was, in fact, initially dedicated to an ensemble similar to the brass band.” (Keller, 1951, p. 34) Part I (*Andantino*) was inspired by a ballad created previously by the same composer, followed without a pause by the second part (a rapid dance, activated by solo segments for certain instruments, supported by the percussion). The last two sections gain in maturity: the third proposes the symbol of the calls intoned by alphorns (represented by two horns), which is marked at the end of the final section as well.

The neoclassical and Neo-Romantic tendencies also influenced the creation of the most modern century: Schoenberg recovered the material for his *Concerto for violoncello* (1932) from the Baroque period, while R. Strauss attempted to recover the classic in his second *Concerto for horn* (1942) or in the *Concerto for oboe* (1945). A. Schoenberg’s *Concerto for violoncello* was written in three parts before WWII, and the *Concerto for oboe and orchestra* by de R. Strauss is composed in D major, under opus number *AV 144 TrV 292* and dates from 1945, one of his last compositions (the three parts are *Allegro moderato*, *Andante* and *Vivace-Allegro*).

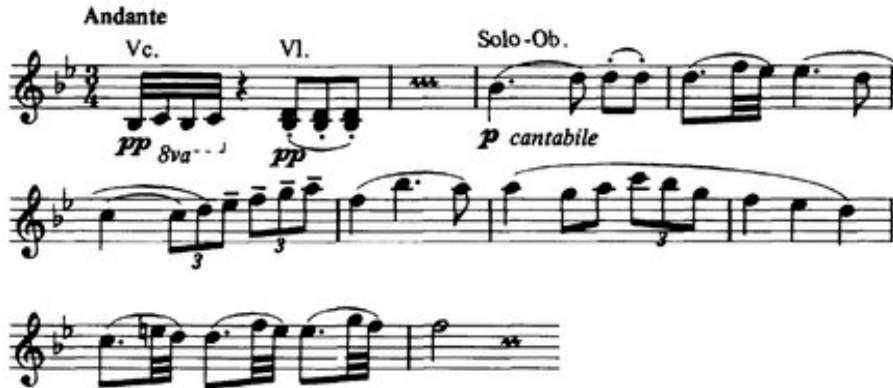


Fig. 6 R. Strauss, *Concerto for Oboe and Orchestra*, Part II, general score, mm. 1-10

Out of the two concertos dedicated to the horn by R. Strauss, the latter is composed in E flat major (*TrV* 283) in 1942, and is probably the most frequently played and recorded concerto for horn of its time. Dedicated to his father, the Concerto preserves a subtle connection to his first concerto for horn (an opus of his youth) especially from the point of view of its classical tripartite structure.



Fig. 7 R. Strauss, *Concerto for horn and orchestra no. 2*, Part I, *Allegro*, mm. 1-6

The melodic pattern of the theme illustrated in the first part highlights features of his style, materialised in melodic lines, which are grandiose, ample and chromatic, mobile from a tonal and harmonic perspective, integrated in an original orchestration that is creative, rich and unpredictable.

Among the concertos of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there are also compositions which are NOT called concerto, but contain a similar discourse, with rich soloist parts for instruments or groups of instruments, as we can find in *Movements for piano and orchestra* (1958-59) by I. Stravinsky, or in P. Boulez's *Domaines for clarinet and six instruments* (1961-68).

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Pierre Boulez himself said, talking about new structures which may emerge in the acutely modern conceptions of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: “Il se produit encore une confusion entre l’expose des structures resultants obtenues par un ensemble determine de precedes d’engendrement ou de combinaison, et l’investigation que suppose l’etude reelle despre procedes eux-memes, de l’ensemble de leurs caracteres: effets et causes sont allegrement echanges. L’expose de tells structures peut etre fort bien vu, avec perspicacite meme, presente clairement et intelligemment.” [There is still confusion between the presentation of the resulting structures obtained by a determined set of processes of generation or of combination, and the investigation which supposes the real study of the processes themselves, of the set of their characteristics: effects and causes are cheerfully exchanged. The presentation of such structures can be seen very well, even with insight, depicted clearly and intelligently.] (Boulez, 1963, pp. 12-13)

*The Movements for Piano and Orchestra* by Igor Stravinsky reveal a pointillist conception of the musical discourse, made up of apparently unrelated elements, which, nevertheless, make up a unitary sonorous line in the five parts belonging to “its tutelary period of serial music” (Gardner, 2011, p. 223). The chamber ensemble, which accompanies the soloist, is centred around the presence of the piano, the one which intones the first statement of the theme, which is subsequently fragmented and developed in smaller sections through different compositional counterpoint techniques (especially Klangfarbenmelodie).

### 3. Conclusions

The traditional instrumental concert leaves the well-known frames practiced until the 20<sup>th</sup> century, investigating territories, where it intersects with other genres, in which it takes over from other musical forms, embodying various semantic characters among the most unusual: “No musical genre has had a more chequered critical history than the concerto but has simultaneously retained as consistently prominent a place in the affections of the concert-going public. Historically speaking, concertos have had a more polarizing effect than any other kind of musical work. The inherent virtues of a wide range of concertos are now of course taken for granted – and such works are as firmly entrenched as their symphonic counterparts in both critical and performance canons – but established concertos even today inspire widely diverging responses” (Keefe, 2005, p. 2).



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