

***Ancestrality* – a fundamental concept in the works of the Romanian composer Tudor Chiriac**

ALIONA PACIURCA, PhD Student
 “George Enescu” National University of Arts Iași
 ROMANIA *

Abstract: Originally from the Republic of Moldova, the composer Tudor Chiriac built his entire work of art on several key concepts such as *ancestrality*, *identity*, “*music from notes*” (a concept that belongs to him), *ethos*, *modernity*, *tradition*, etc., which we find both in his music and in his reflections, musical principles and beliefs assumed over time. Tudor Chiriac achieved in his creation what he set out to do, regardless of the public's preferences or other opinions, an aspect that emphasizes once again his compositional “belief”, from which he did not abdicate. In this study we aim to highlight the technical and expressive means by which the author capitalises on the concept of *ancestrality* in the work *Doinatoriu – Opus Sacrum Dacicum*: from generating a new musical genre to exploring matrix symbols of Romanian culture. Connected to the universal ancestral inheritances, but especially to those belonging to the Romanian geographical space, the composer stands out by the originality of the musical construction, of the particular timbre associations, as well as through a unique ideational conception. Concerned especially with the meaning of the music he writes, the author explores sounds particularly “alive” and fresh in the context of Romanian musical culture, meant to complete his compositional vision, as well as to strengthen the perspective of the musical aesthetics he has adopted over time.

Keywords: *ancestrality*, *composer*, *identity*, *tradition*, *ethos*.

1. Introduction

The last 30 years have represented for the Romanian society a period of continuous transition, both socio-political and cultural. The democratic boom after 1989 manifested itself in all spheres of life. Political freedom and cultural openness marked a new era of search, rediscovery, renewal, resurrection, etc., which symbolizes, in fact, the return to a normality based and built on real models and values, on freedom of expression and on the identification of common ideals in the current context of globalization.

However, the need to express one's identity is becoming more and more acute. This aspect is mainly reflected in culture, implicitly in music. Thus, concepts such as *ancestrality* return to the attention of current musicological research, as they shed light on a new side of the revaluation of *sui-generis* resources. In order to discern the musical creations that express the most

* alionapaciurca@yahoo.com

conclusive compositional vision of the authors that resonate with the principle of *ancestrality*, it is necessary to make some semantic clarifications in connection with this term.

The Explanatory Dictionary of the Romanian Language (DEX) defines the notion of *ancestral* as something “transmitted by heredity, ancient; which comes from ancient times”; Vasile Breban adds to the above as something “coming from more distant ascendants; ancesto” (Breban, 1992, p. 47). Starting from these definitions we will do an exercise of imagination and judgment outside the first and raw meaning of this term, trying to “see” beyond words. *Ancestrality* evokes everything we have inherited (no matter what path), exists today, and is to be passed on. So, it is all about defeating time and not undergoing substantial changes, but rather reinterpretations, adaptations, new perspectives. In fact, the basic characteristic of *ancestrality* is timelessness, and history has shown us that what endures in time is the essence and the “zero point” from which we started and which we will always have as a benchmark.

By virtue of personal beliefs regarding the inexhaustible capacity of exploring new meanings related to the creative potential based on the concept of *ancestrality*, we will approach the meaning and symbolism of this notion through the prism of the creative aesthetics of the composer Tudor Chiriac. In fact, a subject chosen from the desire to highlight some works left in a shadow cone in the context of the “explosion of musical avant-garde” at the end of the last century.

We selected for this study the work *Doinatoriu – Opus Sacrum Dacicum*, synthesizing some representative elements that highlight the concept of *ancestrality*. The work was written for: soloist (High Priestess/contralto), choir (*Sopranos, Alti, Tenors, Bassi*), panpipes, percussion (toaca¹, church bell, vibraphone) and organ.

Although I am still in the early stages of an elaborate research on the creation of the composer Tudor Chiriac, I will assume the statement to consider the work *Doinatoriu – Opus Sacrum Dacicum* as edifying in terms of the ancestral substratum taken to another level, sublimated and enhanced through his unique, personal conception. This awareness and perception also come from knowing and experiencing a reality from a period of deep socio-cultural tumult, on the background of imposing an ideology foreign to Romanian spirituality and consciousness.

2. *Doinatoriu* – a superior Romanian musical genre

We will start from the meaning and symbolism of the title of this work, that was not chosen at random. In his book *Romanian Music of Ancestral*

¹ Autophone percussion instrument.

Filiation, Tudor Chiriac pays special attention to *the process of becoming*² Romanian classical music: “The postulate about the possibility of establishing Romanian music in its own cult genres is based on the realistic idea that a phenomenon, once it appears, develops from its inferior to the superior forms” (Chiriac, 2006, p. 79). The following axiom was expressed by the author himself, who observed and noticed the results of the evolution of music in general and in particular, in the cultural context of other nations, as well as a result of the ethnomusicologist Constantin Brăiloiu’s statements: “As far as I am concerned, I persist in believing that the form in which the Romanian superior musical genre will take shape will have nothing in common with the German symphonic discipline. My confidence in the future of the Romanian superior musical genre [...] therefore remains unwavering” (Brăiloiu, 1974, p. 189)/

Therefore, knowing the Romanian compositional reality of the second half of the twentieth century, but also of other nations who managed to create classical music in their own musical genres³, the author expressed himself through music as dictated by his destiny as a creator, assuming the inheritance of the millennial tradition of the culture to which it belongs. The composer shapes from the “archetypal genes” (Chiriac, 2019, p. 2) of *doina*, which he considers the “Romanian musical *adagio*” (Chiriac, 2019, p. 24), cultivated through the musical tradition of this land, a new genre of music – *doinatoriu* – belonging to the Romanian academic music of ancestral filiation. In this work, the composer “aims to achieve a deep synthesis between music and poetry, philosophy and pragmatics, human and divine, time and eternity” (Chiriac, 2019, p. 11). We notice that beyond the conception with a deep semantic load, the author raises the problem of materializing the idea launched by Constantin Brăiloiu, namely the constitution of the Romanian music of ancestral filiation in its own genres.

The second part of the title – *Opus Sacrum Dacicum* – has a double meaning. On the one hand, it wants to suggest the circular architecture of the work, an aspect that we will develop further. On the other hand, this completion highlights the spiritual side of the work, which is rooted in the phenomenon of *sacredness* identified in the symbols, traditions, ancestral beliefs of this Romanian geographical space.

2.1. The architectonic form

The work is structured in nine parts, respectively: *The Being*, *The Spring*, *The Star*, *The Last Sleep*, *The Face*, *The Resurrection*, *Eminescu*, *The Doina*,

² The composer Tudor Chiriac was guided in his creation by the principle of *the music becoming laws*, taken from philosophy, according to the Hegelian dialectic.

³ Eloquent examples are the Arab-Islamic cultures, especially the Mughals, who, by cultivating genres from the professional creation of the people, have developed new cult genres of music. The compositional achievements of the representatives of the Azerbaijani culture, Fykret Amirov or Javanshir Guliyev are indisputable testimonies in this respect.

Dacian. Following the selection of the thematic material and the relationship of the ideational and musical conception, a circular architecture resulted around the central part (*The Face*), thus outlining several concentric circles, which had at diametrically opposite poles two parts of the work, respectively: the part I (*The Being*) – part IX (*Dacian*); part II (*The Spring*) – part VIII (*The Doina*); part III (*The Star*) – part VII (*Eminescu*); part IV (*The Last Sleep*) – part VI (*The Resurrection*). We emphasize the fact that this circular structure and the relation of the parts two by two is revealed not only by the ideational concept, but also by the musical material by the presence of thematic-tonal replays and by the correspondence of the tono-modal centers. Conceived in this way, the structure of the *Doinatoriu* has similarities with the shape of the great Dacian sanctuaries, an aspect also reported by the composer in his semantic code, mentioning that this coincidence was not premeditated.

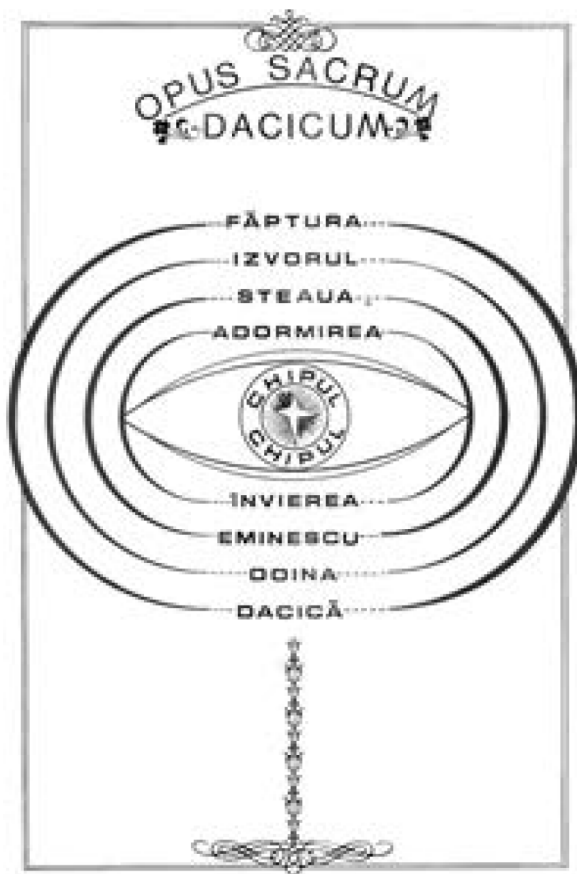


Fig. 1 Structure of *Doinatoriu*



Fig. 2 The Dacian circular sanctuary from Sarmizegetusa

2.1.1. The circle – an ancestral symbol

The circle is one of the most important symbols of humanity. “Its circular shape and concentric structure reflect the shape of the outer universe and the meaning of inner perfection. Focusing on its form and content is a way of praying and meditation, ultimately leading to being one with the world.” (Adkinson, 2009, p. 562) “It is the symbol of perfection, of homogeneity, of immutable and eternal movement that has neither beginning nor end. [...] It is also the symbol of time, of eternal rebirth, rendered iconographically by the image of the snake biting its tail (Ouroboros).” (Evseev, 2007, p. 118) Most peoples of the world attribute to the circle the function of defence. In the Romanian tradition and spirituality we find innumerable examples in which the symbolism of the circle is concretized, through which it is invested with different magical, apotropaic functions. *The ring, the earring, the belt, the hora dance, the carol* (related to the idea of the surrounding procession) are just a few representations of this kind. An additional reason why the composer resorted to such a construction connected to the symbols of the ancestral tradition meant to consolidate his ideational conception. And, as mentioned above, the analogy of the structure of the *Doinatoriu* with the architecture of the great Dacian sanctuaries determined him to complete the title with the phrase *Opus Sacrum Dacicum*. Like these mysterious, complex sanctuaries that express wisdom and a deep knowledge of the ancestral mysteries, of the divine laws, the music of the *Doinatoriu* materializes this condition, awakening in the listener the feeling of belonging, of returning HOME.

2.2. Ancestrality through the prism of Sacredness

Doinatoriu – Opus Sacrum Dacicum was conceived “as a **ritual**⁴ to commemorate the heroes and martyrs on both shores of the Prut” (Chiriac, 2019, p. 1). That is why the composer evokes both the history of the nation and its spirituality, approached as a global phenomenon of perception of divinity, both in terms of the ancestral beliefs of the world and current religions. Through such an approach, the *Doinatoriu* becomes the Romanian version of the universal sacred genres, such as the Catholic Mass or the oratory with the narrator, with the mention that the work includes both elements of religious origin (either from the Christian-Orthodox or from the Catholic one) and lay elements (arising from historical realities). “The work has a character of extended synthesis, similar to Christian ecumenism: the *Prologue* is conceived after the pattern of the *Sacred Hymns* (pre-Christian) from Pythagora's times, the organ, as a musical instrument, is an attribute specific to the Catholic Church, and some of the phrases from the Narrator's part are taken from the Orthodox Christian rite. The basis of this ‘ecumenism’, though, remains the Romanian **people's belief**.” (Chiriac, 2019, p. 3)

2.2.1. Ancestral musical timbres

The sermon pronounced by the narrator (the High Priestess) is always accompanied by the sound of the church bell, the significance of which we will explain in the following. According to René Guénon's *Dictionary of Symbols* (Pănculescu, 2001, p. 62), universally the sound of church bells or simple bells has purifying powers, removing evil influences. That is why this sonority has been taken over by most religions, cultures in the world, with subtle variations in its symbolism. “In Christianity the sound of bells is, on the one hand, the voice of the House of God, the Church, her calling and exhortation to pray and hear the Word of the Holy Book, and, on the other hand, the sound of bells calls for divine grace or, in case of danger, divine protection – so it is about communication between Heaven and Earth in both directions.” (Pănculescu, 2001, p. 62) The sonority of the bell is associated with the primordial vibration, and in the context of the *Doinatoriu* the primordality is related to the origin of the nation: “*In the name of the Grandparents. / Of Grandchildren and Great-Grandchildren. / And of our survival through Spirit*” (lyrics from the *Prologue* of the work *Doinatoriu – Opus Sacrum Dacicum*).

Another very suggestive instrument from a spiritual point of view is *toaca*. The composer uses it at the beginning and at the end of the work,

⁴ Religious ceremony with folkloric implications, which takes place, according to certain rules, in important moments in the life of the community; magical act with folkloric implications, having as object the orientation of an occult, evil or beneficial force, towards a determined action, according to certain rules, etc. (cf. <https://www.dex.ro/ritual>, accessed on 22.10.2020).

highlighting once again the circular construction of the work, as well as the inclusion in certain ritual rules. Although very close in significance to the bell, the *toaca*⁵ is distinguished primarily by its more limited spreading area (only in the area of Balkan Orthodoxy), by its sonority, of course, but also by some nuanced interpretations of its symbolism, specific to the Romanian space. The pre-Christian origin of this instrument is intuited, keeping the purpose of its ancestral use – to drive away evil spirits. “In the beliefs of Romanians, there is a time of day, when it is said that ‘the angel beat the *toaca* in the sky’ marking the end of the night and the dominion of evil spirits and the beginning of ‘pure’ time, when all spells and hallucinations fall apart.” (Evseev, 2007, p. 602)

3. *Doinatoriu – Opus Sacrum Dacicum: symbols*

In part I – *The Being* (*lecta* part) – there appears for the first time the symbol of the *mother* that we meet during the work in multiple hypostases, thus becoming the central symbol. Carl Gustav Jung considers the “mother” as one of the most important archetypal symbols due to the multitude of meanings it generates. In his turn, Tudor Chiriac uses in this first part the symbol of the *mother* with the meanings the *Birth-Giving Mother*, *Universal Mother*, *Mother-Faith*. The music is closely related to the poetic message, together concretizing the idea of this first part, of conscience of faith. The author chooses the organ as the protagonist instrument of the whole *opus*, exploiting the innumerable timbre availabilities in an ingenious orchestration and of great expressive and semantic impact.

In the *cantata* section of *The Being* there takes place the constitution of the first *doina* (Doina I), where the symbol of *destiny* prevails, and in this case of the Bessarabian destiny until 1989. “*On the green mountain veil, / With the grass up to the knees, / Three shepherds climb, / With the sheep after them. // The oldest are good cousins, / The youngest is a stranger, / They keep moving him up and down / With his sheep at the spring, / Planning to kill him*”. We notice an analogy of the lyrics with the famous ballad *The Little Ewe*. The author appeals to the symbolism of *The Little Ewe* as a component part of our spirituality and as an element present in our tradition for several centuries already.

The second part – *The Spring* – symbolizes permanence, continuity, eternity, and in this case, all these characteristics are attributed to the *people* (of a nation). In the *lecta* part, the profile of the *people*, of steadfastness, of force is outlined by the musical discourse of the organ that starts from the lower register and in only a few measures crosses a great *ambitus*, gradually highlighting several timbre colours close to those of the shepherd's pipe and

⁵ Represents a great maple wooden deal (“softer” wood). The height of the sound is determined by the power of the attack and of the place where it is hit by the hammers: on the center of the instrument or on its edges.

kaval. This is how the author prepares the generation of the second *doina* (Doina II), in the *cantata* section, in which the protagonist becomes the mixed choir, as if having wished to outline even more the idea of the *people* (of a nation).

In the third part – *The Star* – the organ brings back the theme of Doina I, respectively the symbol of the *mother*, this time in association with the meaning of the guiding star. Here it seems that the recitative is the one that has the role of accompanist, and the organ plays with sober nobility the theme displayed in the first part, surprising us from time to time not only with the change of registers and timbre colours, but also with the change of the tonal-modal centers.

In the fourth part – *The Last Sleep* – it is important to emphasize that the text belongs to the greatest Bessarabian poet, Grigore Vieru, who composed this poem on the night his mother left this world. Of course, the composer took over the lyrics by extrapolating their primary meaning by associating the words Mother-Homeland. It is a very inspired choice to express *despair* – the symbol of this part. The message of the text was amplified by music, through very special timbre associations: vocal soloist, *nai* (pan flute), vibraphone and orchestra. A *glissando* of the *nai* (pan flute) in the low register as a thousand words (!), in association with the voice that “says” a *doina* of mourning on a “sound canvas” created by the murmur of the mixed choir, with small flashes of the vibraphone, makes us think of a real vigil procession, but at an oversized level.

The fifth part – *The Face* – is the only one that has no match in the architecture of the *Doinatoriu*, but is the perfect representation of a coexisting circle in itself, due to the recurrence of the verses, as in the example of Mihai Eminescu's poem *Gloss*: “*Far away I do not run like the river / That whoever forgets falls apart / With the dew of the ear under my eyelids / I return to what is holy and close to me / To your golden face mother / And my soul flows like wheat*”⁶. The musical discourse itself is nothing but a harmonic figuration in a continuous movement, as in *Prelude no. 1* of the first volume of Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier*. It is the most representative part of the subject in question – *ancestrality* – as it invokes the symbol of *memory*. Also for semantic purposes, the composer achieves a timbre differentiation with a spacing effect between the first and the second articulation.

In the sixth part – *The Resurrection* – the symbol evoked by the composer is *the wake*. It is the moment when the sublime, the sacred are intensely experienced, through the respect given to the holy things (not from an ecclesiastical point of view), in this case to the Faith, Mother, Homeland. As mentioned above, this part is correlated with *The Spring* (second part), that is,

⁶ And the resumption of the lyrics, in the opposite direction, from the last to the first.

from a musical point of view, we find in the discourse the theme of Doina II, which supports a profound transformation at the level of several technical parameters.

In the seventh part – *Eminescu* – as the title suggests, is present the symbol of *the Star* – as the great poet was named – emblematic exponent of the spirituality and value of the Romanian artistic creation. The recitative is conceived as a moment in the Orthodox Christian procession (which is also found in Catholic procession), when the community repeats in chorus the prayer said by the priest (for example before Holy Communion, the Sacraments of Holy Marriage or Holy Baptism). It is a moment of utmost importance, similar to an incantation by which the one who utters those words assumes them and promises to respect them. Musically, after this sermon (as the author himself calls it), the organ comes back in the centre of attention, processing the pre-existing thematic material in parts I and III (Doina I).

The eighth part – *Doina* – has the greatest emotional impact, due to a different dramaturgy from the other parts. The famous *Doina* on Mihai Eminescu's verses was musically conceived as a work that could exist as well independently, although from a semantic point of view it completes the *Doinatoriu*, giving it a very special symbol – that of *anathema*. “*Doina* represents an equivalence of the part *Confutatis maledictis* from the Catholic Mass, which is translated in Romanian: *Reject the cursed*, and it has a clear address – *mancurtism*.” (Chiriac, 2019, p. 11)

The ninth part – *Dacian* – is intended for the symbol of *sacrifice*, the same one we find in the ballad *The Master builder Manole*, that is, the sacrifice in the name of creation. The Doina I theme is amplified to a *tutti* for the organ, realizing the denouement of the entire musical dramaturgy.

“Born in the spirit of honouring the sacred, in Christian faith, and extending the **sacredness** regardfully and respectfully towards the ancestors, the *Doinatoriu* is constituted in a work which has symbolic dimensions that exceed the usual ones.” (Chiriac, 2019, p. 11)

3. Conclusions

With complex musical thinking and through the scientific approach of the musical phenomenon, the composer Tudor Chiriac accesses universality by elevating and cultivating the Romanian ethos. Notions such as *ancestrality*, *tradition*, *modernity*, *ethos*, etc. are indispensable in his thoughts and creation, connected to the realities specific to the period in which he composed and activated. *Doinatoriu – Opus Sacrum Dacicum* is an eloquent example of the materialization of music in which both the melos specific to the Romanian ancestral culture and the inventiveness, the originality of the artistic expression, transpire. Amplified also by a text that abounds in symbols and meanings, the work goes beyond the dials of a pre-existing structure and significance, but

especially inspired by other geographical areas, thus constituting a new musical genre belonging to academic music of Romanian ancestral filiation.

References

- Adkinson, R. (2009). *Simboluri sacre. Popoare, religii, mistere* [Sacred symbols. Peoples, religions, mysteries]. București: Editura ART.
- Brăiloiu, C. (1974). *Opere, III*. București: Editura Muzicală a Uniunii Compozitorilor.
- Breban, V. (1992). *Dicționar general al limbii române* [General dictionary of the Romanian language]. București: Editura Enciclopedică.
- Chiriac, T. (2006). *Muzica românească de filiație ancestrală* [Romanian music of ancestral filiation]. Iași: Editura Artes.
- Chiriac, T. (2014). *Semantica muzicii. Principii fundamentale* [The semantics of music. Fundamental principles]. Iași: Editura Artes.
- Chiriac, T. (2019). *Doinatoriu – Opus Sacrum Dacicum*. Iași: Editura Artes.
- Duțică, Gh. (2016). *Orizonturi componistice românești* [Romanian compositional horizons]. București: Editura Muzicală.
- Evseev, I. (2007). *Enciclopedia simbolurilor religioase și arhetipurilor culturale* [Encyclopedia of religious symbols and cultural archetypes]. Timișoara: Editura Înviearea.
- Lovinescu, V. (1996). *Dacia hiperboreană* [Hyperborean Dacia]. București: Editura Rosmarin.
- Pănculescu, C. (2001). *Taina Kogaionului. Muntele Sacru al Dacilor* [The Mystery of Kogaionon. The Sacred Mountain of the Dacians]. București: Editura Ștefan.
- Roxin, D. (2012). *Spiritul dacic renaște* [The Dacian spirit is reborn]. București: Editura Vidia.
- Sandu-Dediu, V. (2002). *Muzica românească între 1944-2000* [Romanian music between 1944-2000]. București: Editura Muzicală.
- Săvescu, N. (2012). *Noi nu suntem urmașii Romei* [We are not the descendants of Rome], I. Buzău: Editura Teocora.