Studies

# Voices of Edification Calls for Salvation – an Oratorio (Pilgrims to Saint Parascheva) by Viorel Munteanu

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*Abstract:* After the glorious reception of *Voices of Putna* – a key contribution to the genre – Viorel Munteanu makes now a new "offering of sound and letter", a "different" sort of eulogy for the Orthodox Byzantine monody, meaning to encourage us to embark on the difficult journey of salvation together with the endless train of "pilgrims to Saint Parascheva". It is, thus, a daring compositional effort that will be spiritually experienced by both its creator and its public, from the first contact with the graceful resonance of the title to the last shimmer of sound at the end of the final scene. If one considers the Orthodox art and its spirit, Viorel Munteanu's Oratorio for *Saint Parascheva* is more than a creative act; it is an **act of faith**, of hope and of love, "a prayer to", and "joy in", Jesus Christ; it is living tradition and self-giving truth, by which we partake to one of the most memorable unions of Christian experiences and symbols.

*Keywords:* oratorio, Viorel Munteanu, Byzantine monody of the Orthodox rite, symphonic architecture, dramaturgy, heterophony.

The perfect embodiment of human Beauty is the saint. (Diaconescu, 2009, I, p. 142)

Beginning without Beginning to Begin with ... (Mircea, 2006, p. 434)

Ex. 1 Introduction (see Appendix)

The Oratorio – An Offering of Sound and Letter...

Unending revelation, above and beyond space and time, or the world or history... Unseen, unshaken and immeasurable is the faith of the martyrs of Christ. (Diaconescu, 2009, I, p. 93)



Fig. 1 The Melogram of Saint Parascheva

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The Oratorio – "An Akathist Hymn" of Cosmic Reverberations...

... piety lives and grows around the life of a **holy person**, picked out of the pages of the calendar, so that we may have a model, a source for our deification.

(Tudor, 1942, pp. 8-9, *apud* Diaconescu, 2009, II, p. 62)

Fig. 2 Global Chronology (Macroform) (see Appendix)

### Interpretations...

#### Memorial of the Saints (Scene I)

I am Who I am. And because I am, I go further toward The One that I have always been. I am born now, at this moment equal to Eternity, through which I am – and I become – since ever. (Mircea, 2006, p. 434)

The deep meanings of this "beginning of the world" support the symbolic tapestry of the word that has risen to heavens, calling and glorifying incessantly, humbly hoping and giving thanks... When I talk to You, I am facing You, and, for that only I would consider it good for me, [...] as the very act of praying to You is reward enough for me<sup>1</sup>.

Words speak of deeds and tongues praise miracles (I.6.)

Following the principle of iteration by double concatenation (Triptych 1+ Triptych  $2^2$ ), the architecture of the first section – a true Liturgy scaled down to the time of the oratorio – gravitates around the couple **Prayer – Glory** (*alias* Supplication –Fulfilment).

...of Prayer<sup>3</sup> (Triptych 1)



<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Guillaume de Saint-Thierry (Mircea, 2006, p. 330).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> See: Fig. 3a + 3b.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> I.1. *Tatăl nostru* (Our Father) + I.3. *Rugăciune* (Prayer) + I.5. *Împărate ceresc* (Heavenly King).

Our Father (I.1.)

For the eyes of the Lord gaze upon the righteous and His ears listen to their prayers.

(Peter 3:12.)

The Hesychast silence is gently ruffled by the tolling of bells, by the playing of the semantron and the movement of the censer, drops of pure sewn gradually in **the monody; the Journey has begun**...

Ex. 2 Our Father (I.1.), mm. 1-47 (see Appendix)

It is the time for the churchly chants.

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. (I.1.)

The soloists and the united choirs (the Children's, the Mixed, the Byzantine) – a host of humble and devoted pilgrims – accept communion with the few instruments, for the brotherhood of the Word and of the incantation rising to heavens. These simple mixes of timbre have an impressive effect, as the employment of the entire vocal-symphonic apparatus points to a superb and recognizable metaphor of communion, deeply rooted in the early Church.

The heavens... the Kingdom of God, the consubstantial Holy Trinity that we worship and glorify!

Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. (I.1.)

A prayer to begin with, a founding prayer, contemplation, mystery and transcendence...

Anton Pann's famed monody has semantic virtues set in ,,the letter" of modal intonations still expressive after so much time. Thus, during the diatonic ascetism of sound we feel the fiboras at work as they offer experience and meanings, as for example the dualism induced by the ascending luminosity of the VI<sup>th</sup> step of the Dorian mode (**B**) and the nostalgic shadow of the return/descending of the melodic gradient by means of the Aeolian alternative of the same step (**B flat**).

The reflective solemnity of the *first prayer* (extracted out of time, meaning not an illusory escape, but a much-desired moment for the incarnation of the Self "in the image and likeness" of the Triune Being) will not be without dramatic inflections. This is the case with cadential "nodes", where the sound of step VII

 $-\mathbf{C}\operatorname{sharp}^4 - (\operatorname{subsemitonium modi}$  in Tone 5) is met with a symmetrical reply in the sound of the step II  $-\mathbf{E}\operatorname{flat}^5 - (\operatorname{a}\operatorname{Phrygian} \operatorname{reference})$ , generating one of the most impressive dissonances (diminished third). Actually, this tensional microstructure of a *quasi*-idiomatic character would underscore the placing of the *finalis* (**D**) in a tower of perfect consonances - a symbolic expression of remaking the sublime harmony between man and his Creator.

# Prayer (I.3.)

Icon in words, icon of the Word...

Eminescu, who was given the gift of the words, sings a sacrificial hymn for the release of the logos to the infinite of the pure essences:

Choosing you for our Queen, We kneel, and beg you. [...] Please listen to our grievance, Thou Sovereign of angels... (Poetry by Mihai Eminescu)



Ex. 3 Prayer<sup>6</sup> (I.3.), mm. 1-9

We let ourselves go and enter in spirit through the wide-open door of the prayer, abandoning ourselves, together with the soloists and the mixed choir, to the psalmody of Tone 2 (bichromatic). An apparently soothing music, *under the venerated gaze of the All-Graceful One*, which, in reality, covers anxieties and existential obstacles hard to overcome without divine help.

Raise us and rescue us From the wave that's upon us. Be our strengthening shield And our protective wall.

(Poetry by Mihai Eminescu)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Mixed Choir, Soprano, Scene I.1., m. 43.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Byzantine Choir, Scene I.1., m. 45.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Poetry by Mihai Eminescu.



Music – eternally comforting – joins the prayer, as if wishing to paint with sound the brilliant portrait of the *All- Unblemished one*. Veiled in the aureola of sainthood, the psalmody is sewn from diatonic and (disjunctive-) chromatic threads, the latter – originated by the oscillation of steps II ( $\mathbf{F} - \mathbf{F}$  sharp) and IV ( $\mathbf{D}$  sharp –  $\mathbf{D}$  flat) – creating subtle melodic torsions in the microcellular space of the diminished third and fourth. Through resonance, the concluding-cadential moment fuses the same sound matter in dissonant geometric-type verticals (6-2-6), harmonic tensions that will dissolve immediately in the light of the consonant purity of the final chords.

Appear to us from the dark, As light most pure, and clear, O All-Unblemished Mother And ever Virgin, Mary! (Poetry by Mihai Eminescu)

Ex. 5 Prayer (I.3.), mm. 32-42 (see Appendix)

### Heavenly King (I.5.)

The symbolic triptych of prayer ends (in symmetry) by returning to the epic-dramatic center of the *Father - Treasury of Blessings* and *The Giver of Life*:

O Heavenly King, the Comforter, the Spirit of Truth, Who art everywhere and fillest all things. (I.5.)

An apotheosis of pleading through *self-abadonment* and *spiritual improvement*, this prayer represents a mirrored return of some of the core ideas of the Lord's Prayer, *Our Father*.

come and abide in us, and cleanse us from every impurity, and save our souls, O Good One. (I.5.)



Ex. 6 *Heavenly King*<sup>7</sup> (I.5.), mm. 1-25

Sustained by the extended ison on the lower strings, the monody *Heavenly King* (Tone 6/bichromatic on **D**) given to the Byzantine choir will encounter the modulatory principle of the "wheel". Semantically, transcending the original structure ("after ambitus") of the mode will induce a state of illumination, which corresponds to the "diatonicizing" of the second tetrachord. But in the elevated register of the immanent ethos, this structural mutation accepted, in principle, by the modal canon, is in accordance – *here and now!* – with the profoundly spiritual sense of the expression: *Giver of Life*.

...of Glory (Triptych 2)



# The Lord is God! (I.2.)

Let every breath praise the Lord! Confession and witness of faith...

> Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord. (I.2.)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Monody by Ion Popescu-Pasărea.

The Byzantine Choir enters the stage as forerunner to the collective characters, singing a monody with symbolical identity.

Come praise together the greatness of Creation and together still to say: I shall remember Your name from generation to generation! (I.2.)



Ex. 7 *The Lord is God*<sup>8</sup> (I.2.), mm. 20-28

We reach here a first stage of sound rarefication, even though, especially when set in contrast with the previous *tutti* moment, the monodic purity (rigorously preserved!) will not lack a certain vertical consistency. Thus, intermittently, the line of the choir will be intersected by the delicate interventions of a group made of vibraphone, bells, harp and piano, and, during the moments of cadential stasis short melodic complements, entrusted to the wind instruments, will be used. The final conclusion belongs however to a different group (trumpets and trombones), which take up again, in a short harmonic fragment, the beginning of the monody.

# Bless the Lord, O my soul (I.4.)

The living God revealed Himself to us so that mankind should believe in Him In Everything that comes from Him and by Him, to the end of time...

Love and joy without margins, songs of praise and gratitude to *the Heavenly King...* unifying semantic constants of the "triptych" dedicated to the *Glory of* God, bridges between new stylistic registers...

We have here a true change of spatial-temporal paradigm, as the entire coral-orchestral mass is put into gear – an expression of the concentration of all the collective energies (soloists, mixed choir, Byzantine choir, orchestra) – allowing for that spiritual moment when "diachrony" and "synchrony" would meet.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> The Paraklesis and Akathist of Venerable Saint Parascheva.



Ex. 8 Bless the Lord, O my soul (I.4.), mm. 1-13

It is not about unison, but about (*quasi*-isochronic) isorhythm, born in the proximity of the *giusto*-syllabic-type rhythmicity. In this temporal matrix a melodic line will evolve, defined by the wealth of the generating sound resources: modal variables derived from the application of the modulatory principle of the "wheel"<sup>9</sup>, segments featuring pentachords placed in virtual "scordatura" (polymodal chromatics on a common *finalis*: Lydian-Mixolydian+chromatic 3+ Aeolian), even a change of the modal center, preserving the original structure (Aeolian  $\mathbf{C} \rightarrow$  Aeolian  $\mathbf{G}$ ).





This sound frenzy gathers harmonic consistency within a homophonic writing echoing the verticalization of certain elements of melodic horizontality – an expression of the "meeting" of different, apparently opposable syntactic conditions. Another aspect of the vertical writing is that of the "heterophonic incidence", meaning the free, if not arbitrary, play between plurivocal and monovocal/unison. Given the (predictable) rhythm periodicity, the sound effect is truly momentous<sup>10</sup>.

#### Today the souls of those on earth (I.6.)

Unseen, unshaken and immeasurable is the faith of the martyrs of Christ. (Diaconescu, 2009, II, p. 93)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> We can observe that the modulatory principle of the "wheel" has a significat role to play in the modal/melodic context of the oratorio.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Scene I.4., mm. 7-13.

The imminence of transcendence (Today...),

The mystery of transcendence (...the heavenly gates are open...)

In praise of transcendence (And Lord's abode is shown to us)

The ancient phrase of the chanter  $^{11}$  – drops of wax falling of the Holy Light – wins the hearts of all the faithful with their icon-like demeanour. It is a community that has become communion through the mindful and heartfelt participation of all the soloists, the choirs and the orchestra.



Ex. 9 Today the souls of those on earth  $^{12}$  (I.6.), mm. 1-11

#### Apotheosis of Glory in Remembrance of the Saints...

A monody line (Tone 2 on G) – divided (by its tetrachords) between the chromatic and the diatonic – will wander (antiphonically) from one group to the other or it will rise along the line of the harmonic, the heterophonic, the "polyphonic". Untroubled, the peace of expression is defined by dualism, the chromatic passages (characterized by the augmented second) becoming a lamenting echo to an ageless psalmody, whereas the diatonic elusions, closer to our days, tell of the much desired, peaceful oases.

So we call our Savior saying Glory to You, O Christ our Lord, For through them you have given peace to the faithful. (I.6.)

# Holy Circle. The Lord Has Said; Man's Search (Scenes II-III)

Scene II – *Holy Circle*<sup>13</sup> and Scene III *The Lord Has Said*<sup>14</sup> are semantically complementary in that they reflect essentially man's **search** for the One who is **the Way, the Truth and the Life**.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> In reference to Ștefănache Popescu's song.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> Monody by Ștefănache Popescu.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> II.1. Liturgy; II.2. Holy circle; II.3. John's self-laceration in the wilderness; II.4. The Way of the Cross; II.5. In the name of the Lord.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> III.1. In Search of Man; III.2. The Cross of the Christ; III.3. Lord's Answer.

From the existential agony supported by the paradoxes of the otherworldly faith (*Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!*) (Mark 9:24), to the saving enlightenment of the *Sacrifice on the Cross*, one opens one's heart – following Jesus' guidance of Peter in the Garden of Gethsemane, preparing oneself, through love and good deeds, for the encounter with *the Holy and Godly Mystery of the Resurrection*.

In the general dramaturgy of the oratorio, Scenes II and III incorporate the entire symbolistic of the sacrificial *Way of the Covenant*, a path walked by the saints, including our protecting Mother, the venerable *Saint Parascheva* (Scene IV).

The poetic-musical synthesis I propose here constitutes itself in what may be called a **binding semantic** and refers to the texts that lay at the foundation of the eight sections (see notes 77-78). Therefore, verses that define a certain context may be met – through analogies, references and linguistic symmetries – in the virtual, fully coherent milieu of certain poetical structures (contexts) semantically highly relevant<sup>15</sup>.

# Liturgy (II.1.)

The light removes its golden, clear veil, And from atop the mountains puts on the starry mantle To worship a mystery forever brought to life some more... (II.1.) (Poems by George Popa)

A new start as a rising again by means of a holy descend inspired by monody, a ray of humble light shining through colorful stained glass...



Ex. 10 Liturgy<sup>16</sup> (II.1.), mm. 15-35

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> Scene and section will be specified between brackets.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> Poems by George Popa.

Multi-coloured also is the sound matter from which the melancholic speaking of the flute, and then of the mezzo-soprano, is fabricated: a "rotating" mode, with variable tetrachords/pentachords attuned to Tone 7 diatonic (*Varis* mode) on **B**.

Liturgy... We join the long isons of the lower strings in order to "go out of time" toward that *beyond* of prayer and of the redeeming sacrifice.

# Holy Circle (II.2.)

Which new dress will fit me better past Amen? (II.2.)

We move in a circle, in *a Holy Circle*, on the path of the Faith that is a *Way* of the Cross (II.4) – a repeatable Golgotha of self-laceration between two margins – human divine (II.2.).

We live... we dream... we die... Deceived by a wicked serpent... We aim for heaven... we reach it not... (III.1.)

(Poems by Rev. Constantin Sturzu)

Doubt overcomes us, the absurd is harassing us, we cannot see past the limit, we feel crushed between walls: there is disarray, a troubling hesitation in between *this side* and *the Other*, between *Now* and *Then*. Where is the narrow opening we could sneak through, or the bridge we could *cross*? Music itself is caught in interrogation, bringing about a duality that characterizes its very core.





Ex. 11 Holy Circle (II.2.), mm. 4-24

On the one hand, there is the oscillating modal milieu, with its accumulation of chromatic-diatonic intonating structures:



Fig. 5

On the other hand (but as a result of the first phenomenon), we have tetrachordal-pentachordal conjunctions of a bi- and polymodal extension, derived from the (direct or virtual) action of the moveable steps. These will favor the building of microcellular structures characterized by the same dual condition. In fact, we see the opposing relation between the original form (**O**) and the inverted form (**I**) of four generative entities: *alpha, beta, gamma, delta*.



The generation by (mirror) symmetry and, after that, the permutational mobility of this intonating syntagmata indicate the composer's affinity with the pre-erial technique, applied here to a milieu of an austere modalism, both in letter and spirit. While supremely brave, this act is entirely justifiable from an aesthetic-

stylistic perspective, as such an option helps towards reaching one of the most expressive and relevant areas of the dilemmatic, interrogative rhetoric.

# John's self-laceration in the wilderness (II.3.) Man's search (III.1.)

We are walking uphill on the sacrificial path on the Way of a Holy Search, but make little progress, as we are *removed from men and heavens* (II.2), feeling the hardships born out of the original fall:

Why?... Why?... Why?... Is there a reason ... or a remedy... for comfort? Any answer.... to appease... in disguise? (III.1.)

(Poems by Rev. Constantin Sturzu)



Ex. 12 John self-laceration in the wilderness<sup>17</sup> (II.3.), mm. 5-13

Where are You, Elohim? Troubled and half-heartedly we are wandering, We are seeking You among the specters of the night. (II.3.)

(Poems by Lucian Blaga)

We seek the glory of God, we are attracted by the magnetism of the Call (*Gazing to the farthermost margins, We no longer know the way back*), but we hesitate as humans of the earth...

Elohim!

Where are You, Elohim?? (II.3.)

(Poems by Lucian Blaga)

As it is in the semantic center of the two scenes, the interrogative tension, the rhetoric of the dilemma and of the search are represented by a variety of structural stances. We may make a note of several of these:

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> Poems by Lucian Blaga.

• Interpolation of general **pauses**; ascentional sequences.



Ex. 13 Man's search <sup>18</sup> (III.1.), mm. 6-10

• A concentration of the intonation on a pivotal sound of the higher register  $(G^2)$ ; a tensioning of the final cadence through the diminished third: **F sharp** –**B** flat (varying segment from Saint Parascheva's *Melogram*).



Ex. 14 Man's Search (III.1.), mm. 29-36

## The Covenant of Saint Parascheva (Scene IV)

... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:14)

*The Covenant of Saint Parascheva* constitutes the semantic and dramaturgic center of the oratorio.

The Reception of the Word (Scene IV.1) represents the moment of "selfabandonment", after a long and heart-breaking call of the Voice of He who rejuvenates hearts. It is renewal and illumination, rebirth and a new beginning and, above all, a sacrificial act at the start of the Journey, following in His footsteps. We need to renounce not what we have but what we are<sup>19</sup>. Only then, the natural fall (...But who will see with clayish eyes/ The unseen Bridegroom?)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> *Poems* by Rev. Constantin Sturzu.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> Paul Evdokimov (Diaconescu, 2009, II, p. 22).

will be followed by the move to a transcendental order (*I shall call Him and He will come/ In the city as well as in the wilderness*).

Therefore, *Give me a Word. A Word to edify me*!<sup>20</sup>. And the *uttering word* of Saint Parascheva (the prayer) was answered to by the *Word Incarnate* (Jesus Christ).



O Lord, Jesus Christ,

You are the lightest of dawns. (Carol on our Lord's Entry into Jerusalem)

Ready for the Liturgy, the music humbly takes a step back as we, while listening to the discreet dialogue between the churchly chants (carol on Lord's Entry

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> Rev. Constantin Galeriu (Arachelian, 1993, p. 6).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> Poems by Rev. Constantin Sturzu.

into Jerusalem, ex. 15) and the chants coming to us from old manuscripts (*Codex Caioni*) share in the atmosphere created by the children's choir and the soloist that plays the role of Saint Parascheva herself. The associated instrumental groups (tuned and untubed percussion instruments, harp, strings and piano) cover the rhetoric register of the background, doubling/multiplying subtly the delicate sonorities of the vocal firmament. This ambiance of diatonic purity is addressed in general *piano*, which strengthens the expressiveness of the polyphonic/heterophonic reflections and moreover of the diatonic *clusters* that give color to modal cadences.

However, holiness – the rising above, the transcending of the fallen, hesitant and transient humankind – requires ascetic effort, breaking up with the world and the worldly cares. For this, holiness necessitates the experiencing of the desert or the wilderness, that calls for the deliverance from passions (*No one can comfort me*,/*I appease the longing and here it is again!*), that is the breaking down of the most menacing wall that separates humankind from the Creator.

In the wilderness (Scene IV.2.), Saint Parascheva purifies herself not only because of "the simple choice grounded on the covenant, but by the fact that she is introduced in God's communion through Jesus Christ, the holy High Priest (Hebrews 7: 26)" (Bria, 1993, p. 344).



Ex. 16 In the wilderness (IV.2.), mm. 5-8

"The Reception of the Word" (Listen, Parascheva!/Listen to what Lord says!) – mediated here by the voice of the priest – happens in an austere musical background, of a discursive neutrality, through a non-developmental music that institutes itself a semantic aureola for the several words uttered by the Priest and, at the end, by Saint Parascheva.

We have here essentially an instrumental texture of a medium density entrusted initially to the strings and later broadened (briefly) by a group made of flute, oboe, bassoon, and a few percussion instruments. This sound area has a pedal center (G) and is constituted from a modal (plurimelodic) material, disposed mostly permutatively. Beside the two voices that have the primary role of the section in question, one may also note the solo flute that initiates an intermittent commentary (ex. 16).

The return from the wilderness is driven by the image of the Transfiguration and the hope for salvation (*It is your last journey... as you will be dead, you will rise again!*). This triumph over one's self and nature brings about a world of love and of glory to God. This is why the last two sections of Scene IV cannot be seen but as perfectly complementary.

Fuelled by the power of faith and the meanings of the redeeming truth, Evghenie Humulescu's monody (Scene IV.3) – entrusted to the soprano and the string section – becomes the absolute expression of love and gratitude for the All-Giving and All-Graceful God:

I shall love You, Lord, my strength, The Lord is my steadfastness, my refuge and my Rescuer. (IV.3.)



Ex. 17 I shall love You<sup>22</sup> (IV.3.), mm. 6-23

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> Monody by Evghenie Humulescu.

Enlighted by the heavenly rays of divine kindness, Saint Parascheva reaches in holiness "the highest plane of humanity" [Preotul Dumitru Stăniloa ie (Dumitrescu, 1993, p. 11], which, from a Christian perspective, leads to a paradoxical "abyss of humility" [Preotul Dumitru Stăniloa ie (Dumitrescu, 1993, p. 11].

Receive, O Lord, my body As a grain of wheat sown in the ground. Be my name forgotten, And may I die as a foreigner... (IV.4.)

(*Poeme* de Pr. Constantin Sturzu)

After the soprano's prayer, words quietly give way to the "non-words" blended in music. Thus, the end of Scene IV (*The Covenant of Saint Parascheva*) creates a significant contrast, materialized in an orchestral *tutti* organized in separate sections.

It is a climactic-conclusive moment whose "voices" merge in the dense globality of a bichromatic mode on G (Tone 6, transposed) with moveable steps (IV, V and VII).

The dualism of the modal steps induces a rhetoric of the double connotation, extrapolated on the level of the vertical syntax by connecting two discrete spheres: 1. a (short) melody wearing a Byzantine fragrance, projected as a foreground in the acute register (flute, oboe, violin 1 div.), promoting the integrality of the aforementioned mode; 2. a melodic line of a repetitive type (clarinet and viola), opposable as structure and register position, but set on a hemitonic pentatonic scale within an octave-repeating scale extracted from the main mode.

The two spheres annex separate rhetoric registers: the first - of the spiritual amplitude and of holiness; the second - of humility and of *wisdom*.

Ex. 18 Receive, O Lord, my body<sup>23</sup> (IV.4.), mm. 28-32 (see Appendix)

The Veneration of the Pilgrims (Scene V)

**The veneration of the pilgrims** – a spiritual act in thankfulness to God, /.../ ascetical act and offering of gratitude/.../search and experience of the sacred sense of our existence.

(His Beatitude Daniel, Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church)

*The pilgrimage* and *the veneration* – *the astonishing arches of the cupola meant to keep vigil over the last act of the "call for salvation".* 

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> Poems by Rev. Constantin Sturzu.

The fifth and last scene of the oratorio is a corollary scene. While communicating a different dramaturgic perspective by means of moving the focal point from the odyssee of St. Parascheva's sanctification to the collective perception of the multitude of pilgrims, this ample section of the oratorio – comprised of no less than twelve subsections – can certainly be considered a synthesis.

By establishing a **similarity relationship** between the sections of Scene Five, on the one hand, and between these and the sections of Scenes I, II, III and IV, on the other hand, one may expose a network of "resonances" and strategic correspondencies, which fortify, both structurally and semantically, the entire **symphonic** frame of the oratorio.

#### Fig. 7 (see Appendix)

Following this synoptic evaluation, we may deduce that the **semantic dimension** of the oratorio plays a decisive role in the construction of the global chronology, acting as a true **generator of musical macroform**.

To return to the corollary character of Scene V – which is conferred, crucially, by the synthesis grounded in analogies and thematic correspondencies – we may note that there are two planes of relationship.

The first plane is comprised of the exact perimeter of Scene V and refers to the symmetric alternation (following the principle of the *rondo*: couplet-refrain) of two thematic triads:

#### Semantic Plane I

- Pilgrims alongside you: V.2.  $\rightarrow$  V.7. $\rightarrow$  V.10.
- *The Troparion of our Venerable Mother Parascheva* (with title variants)  $V.3. \rightarrow V.6. \rightarrow V.9.$

The second plane is of macrostructural scope and refers to the circulation within the global chronology of binder themes that create "remote" correspondences between the different sections of the oratorio.

#### Semantic Plane II

Bless the Lord, O my soul (with title variants) (I.2.)→I.4.→II.5.→V.8.
The Cross of Christ (The Way of the Cross) (II.4.)→III.2.→V.8bis

Fig. 9 (see Appendix)

Along the same line, we may discern - in rhetorical key (*initium-finalis*) - a third semantic plane; we refer to the perfect symmetry between the first and the last sections of the oratorio, which are related due to the *Our Father* and *Holy God* prayers belonging to the same (semantic) class.

#### Semantic Plane III

Fig. 10 (see Appendix)

Thus, the unifying experience of the pilgrimage will fold analogously in the unifying experience of the final scene. An apotheosis scene, the quintessence of the entire oratorio, this edifice of amplitude will rise on the foundation of a temporal architecture of cyclic symmetry, following the model of a *rondo* with two refrains. If scenes I-IV lived in the sphere of the concept of **establishment** - by the novelty of the appearance of each section – scene V is being edified by virtue of the concept of **re-establishment** - by the iterative character of the invocation / translation of certain antecedent sections (as the function of the recapitulation). As I have already pointed out, the phenomenon is active both in a narrow plane (Scene V) and in an extended plane (Scenes I-IV).

A first perspective concerns the triple intermittence of the duo of refrains, consisting of the sections:  $V.2.\rightarrow V.7.\rightarrow V.10$ . (*Pilgrims alongside you*) și V.3.  $\rightarrow V.6.\rightarrow V.9$ . (*The Troparion of our Venerable Mother Parascheva*).

#### Shield of faith, dew of victory.

The triad of refrains: *Pilgrims with you* (Semantic Plane I) begins with section V.2. (of the "establishment") that imparts a lot of light, joy, hope and love. It is a hymn of glory from the depths of each pilgrim's self, a spiritual message bathed in the sounds of Tone 3 (a Mixolydian, centered on C, with a movable VII<sup>th</sup> step). The common aspiration towards ascension and transcendence manifests itself in all the splendor of the modal harmonies entrusted to the mixed choir amplified by the penetrating voice of the solo tenor.



Ex. 19 Pilgrims alongside you (V.2.), mm. 1-8

The other two sections: V.7. and V.10. (of "re-establishment") are slightly "deformed" resonances in the sense that V.7. swells up to the tristrophic (A-B-A) by the insertion of a median segment that wanders into the range of Tone 2–while V.10., although responding to the frame analogy, translates all its sound material onto  $\mathbf{F}$ .

Venerable Mother Parascheva, pray for us. (Sîrbu et al., 2011)

Within the same semantic plane (I), the second triad of refrains performs "in tandem": *the Troparion of our Venerable Mother Parascheva* (with title variants).



Ex. 20 The Troparion of our Venerable Mother Parascheva (Sîrbu et al., 2011) (V.9.), mm. 4-32

It is in prayer that we find the holy bliss of our spirit.

(Blessed Archimandrite Sophrony)

The pilgrims, the collective character of the oratorio, demand the prevalence of vocality, as the three moments (V.3., V.6 and V.9.), are divided, sometimes antiphonically between the Byzantine choir, the mixed choir and the group of soloists (also mixed). The monody increases with each exposition, the last section (the "re-establishment") being different from the other two, both by the expansion of the temporal interval and by the spiritual elevation of the word: *In you, O venerable Mother Parascheva, the faitful image of God shone forth, for you carried your cross and followed Christ* (V.9.).

The whole scene is the intensely personalized expression of the *worship in* spirit and truth, that pleases the Father. Thus, from the onset (section V.1.), we come into contact with the cosmic dimension of holiness, as the heavens, the whole universe is vibrating at the sign of salvation by sacrifice: Holy Parascheva / The Heavens speak of you.

Symbolically, the first musical gesture is related to the emblematic melogram (varied and transposed here on  $\mathbf{F}$ ), with the first four sounds linked in a cruciform motif. Not at all by accident, this statement/message of superessential

purity and quintessence, of the *resurrection in the spirit*, is entrusted to the children's choir, irradiated by discrete modal harmonies supported by harp, celesta, and strings.



Ex. 21 The Heavens speak of you<sup>24</sup> (V.1.), mm. 1-8

After a short *intermezzo* (similarly diatonic) which, through the voices of the mixed choir, quotes the melody of a beautiful Romanian carol, the choir of children (alongside the mixed and the Byzantine choirs) will gently slide, according to the "wheel" principle, into another (micro) modal area (of the chromatic variety, this time) to extol a song of praise and thanksgiving: *Glory to You, Christ our God, Glory to You*!

Recalling the (macro) architectural principle of the rondo, we will observe the rigorous (symmetrical) mode in which the iterative duo of the refrains frames the six couplets: V.1., V.4., V.5., V.8., V.8bis and V.11.

This ingenious musical dramaturgy emphasizes the articulation of pregnant thematic entities (refrains and couplets) which, based on a relational strategy (conjunctions and disjunctions), ensure the structural coherence and the semantic relevance of the entire tableaux.

In the context of the *quasi*-linear continuity of the sound narrative, the occurrence of a monodic **cadence** meets all the expectations of contrast and difference, constituting a necessary change of paradigm in favour of the cyclic (or spiral) time, generated in principle by the very temporal structure of the *rondo*. It is exactly what the *Prayer of the Protopsaltis* offers, after performing the first couple of refrains (V.4.).

*Rejoice, O All-gracious Parascheva!* (From the *Akathist* of Venerable Saint Parascheva)



<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> *Poetry by* Rev. Sever Negrescu.



Ex. 22 The Prayer of the Protopsaltis (Frimu, 2011) (V.4.) – Cadence (fragment)

It is a chant resurfaced from old scripts, a wonderful, unmatched uttering in the grace of creation ... The voice of the melody penetrates into our soul, heart and mind, like the love of God.

The authentic monodic in the authentic modal matrix: a polychromatic fabric of diatonic and chromatic micro-zones, a melismatics that is amplified microintervallically, an unwavering oscillatory motion maintained by the mobility of the steps, a true polymodal microcosm "bordered" only by the ambit of the decima terza entrusted to the soloist. And above all, there is the ison – for accompaniment, chorusing - reflecting in the simplest and most profound form the dramaturgy of consonant-dissonant incidences of the bivocal vertical.

In the spirit of the permanent "syntax modulation" (in this case, the transition from monody to homophony), but also of the variation of the sound densities and of the timbre volumes, the section that follows this moment of maximum inner depth (V.5.) keeps the same semantic and expressive register.

# *Vigil lamp in Moldavia...* Venerable Saint Parascheva – "ladder to heaven", light to keep watch and vigil

Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of man comes. (Matthew 25:13)

*Vigil lamp in Moldavia*... Children's Choir only and a fragment from the from *The Song of Princess Lupu*. Two essential connections: with an age, with an era. A passage full of beauty and candour, like the light of truth and love, whose glow descends from the radiant face of Jesus surrounded by His saints.

After the double refrain constituted by the conjunction of sections V.6.-V.7., we reach the **Semantic Plane II**, that of the macrostructural recourses, of the connections with the anteriority of scenes I-IV, in the sense of those "reestablishments" of events or sound contexts with an anticipated semantic identity.

It is a "counterpoint" of the "remote" analogies and correspondences, of the link between the different sections of the oratorio; it is an argument of the symphonic projection that defines the macroform of the genre.

The chronology of Scene V contains two such connections.

First (V.8.) – Bless the Lord, O my soul (with title variants) – resonates with sections of the first two scenes: (I.2.)  $\rightarrow$  I.4.  $\rightarrow$  II.5.( $\rightarrow$  V.8.); the second (V.8bis) – The Cross of the Christ (The Way of the Cross) – gathers together quasi-conclusively similar or identical sections of Scenes II and III: (II.4.) $\rightarrow$ III.2.( $\rightarrow$  V.8bis).

The poetics of the macrotemporal symmetries will culminate in the semantic analogy relationship between the well-known  $Holy \ God$  - the penultimate section of the oratorio (V.11.) - and the Lord's prayer *Our Father* (I.1.) that opens the movingly beautiful sound universe of this uplifting spiritual *edification*.

# ... and a different sort of exegesis

Religious music in academic attire occupies a discrete register within the environment of contemporary composition. This statement is justified by the richness of genres and cultured forms, by the variety of composing techniques and, generally, by all the elements of language that work together toward the realization of an artistic vision born out of the revelatory crux of the evangelic message.

A retrospective overview of this musical genre will make it clear that the semantic focus of the majority of compositions on Christian themes has centered on the Gospel narrative telling the story of the *Passion, Death and Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.* From this derived chiefly two types of musical works – or, better said, of compositional options: the first, based on the Gospel narrative taken as a whole; the second, meaning to employ the same text partially or fragmentary. Among the most common themes are: the *Last Supper*, the *Garden of Gethsemane, Our Lord's Seven Words on the Cross*, the *Passion Week* (that gave birth to the musical genre of *passion* in the West and elsewhere) etc.

After the glorious reception of *Voices of Putna* – a key contribution to the genre – Viorel Munteanu makes now a new "offering of sound and letter", a "different" sort of eulogy for the Orthodox Byzantine monody, meaning to

encourage us to embark on the difficult journey of salvation together with the endless train of "pilgrims to Saint Parascheva". It is, thus, a daring compositional effort that will be spiritually experienced by both its creator and its public, from the first contact with the graceful resonance of the title to the last shimmer of sound at the end of the final scene.

The Byzantine monody of the Orthodox rite aims at making apparent, or – if I may dare to use the term – at being an "incarnation" of, the Divine Beauty, possessing as such all its attributes. Starting from original sources, Viorel Munteanu shares in those "revelatory" forms of music, whose spiritual gravity tells, in the most sensible and authentic way, the story of the wondrous "paradox" of the antinomic, substantial-nonsubstantial relationship between mankind and the Creator.

Viorel Munteanu approaches with love, most humbly and in awe this music dressed as it were in monastic habit, which sings the praises of the hesychast way of life and the apophatic knowledge. It is only by this that he manages to cross the boundaries of space and time which have been holding him captive, in order to reach the absolute truth of "inwardness" and the archetypal essentiality of these humble churchly chants.

One may observe here an **affinity** with, and moreover a **fidelity** to, the Holy Orthodox Tradition (in general, and chiefly to the musical one) which leads, above all, to a certain sobriety of expression. Indeed, it is sobriety, not (extreme) austerity, since the composer – wisely, discreetly and elegantly, means not to renounce the identity conferred by his spiritual – that is, beyond the one properly temporal - appertaining (and adherence) to the aesthetic and stylistic values of the  $20^{\text{th}}$  and  $21^{\text{st}}$  century music.

How does Viorel Munteanu solve, however, the paradox of "conciliating the irreconcilable", that is, of the "opposition" between the **rigor** of tradition (founded on the uniqueness of dogma) and the **freedom** of creation (founded on the diversity of norms)? I believe that he found an answer precisely in the Orthodox tradition, whose spirit always stays **alive** and **resourceful**: 'In Orthodox Christianity, the originality is received only insofar it grows naturally from what has preceded it. The evolution from what is in existence to what is new and sometimes original cannot be a breakup, an unusual or shocking resolution, but a fruitful and organic growth instead. [...] The genuine innovation has its inception in the secure ground of tradition, thus becoming part of the Holy Tradition. As such, the endless and complex relationship between tradition, creation, renewal and diversity, which is the focus of the dogmatic, liturgical and pastoral Orthodox theology, is a dependable starting point in the effort to understand the difficult matter of innovation' (Diaconescu, 2009, II, pp. 250-251).

This creative spirit, born out of the living experience of tradition, guided Viorel Munteanu toward an original arranging of the musical forms and structures, conveying a truly **astonishing** and **spiritually improving** music.

One is impressed, thus, by the **symphonic architecture** of the five tableaux that piece together no less than thirty-three sections; the **poetic texture** of the epic, dramatic narrative, depicting its growths and decays, interrogations and responses, anxieties and appeasements, asceticism and transcendence; the **complexity** of the orchestral-vocal arrangement: the three choirs, the group of soloists, the fine-tuned orchestra and, last but not least, the hesychast accompaniment of liturgical instruments (bells, censer, semantron); the **dramaturgy** of volumes resulted from the continuous variation of the elements of the triad: solo-group-all; moreover, and above all, one is impressed by the **transfiguring power** of the "voices of edification" – voices and instruments reunited in a unique heterophonic tapestry, which represents a new level of complexity in the plurivocal (vertical) treatment of the monody of the Byzantine Orthodox rite.

It is without a doubt that Viorel Muteanu's heterophonic technique is **innovative** and **prospective** as far as the vertical syntax is concerned. Innovative, that is, for it displays no stylistic predeterminations, and prospective, because it is (ontologically) "open", and thus predisposed to change.

In the score of the oratorio, the composer employs a distinctive, original, even visionary manner of creating a monodic-dissipative/multiplicative polyphonic (super-)structure, wherein the entity that is revealed by means of many voices constitutes itself every now and again as a **collective character**. Under these circumstances, the heterophony becomes a generative syntax with **double functionality**: a **structural** one (indicating a new stage of the organogenesis of the phenomenon), and a **semantic** one (fashioning an intrinsically musical, dramaturgic basis for the collective character, by means of alternating the "many" and "the one").

If one considers the Orthodox art and its spirit, Viorel Munteanu's Oratorio for *Saint Parascheva* is more than a creative act; it is an **act of faith**, of hope and of love, "a prayer to", and "joy in", Jesus Christ; it is living tradition and self-giving truth, by which we partake to one of the most memorable unions of Christian experiences and symbols.

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# APPENDIX



Ex. 1 Introduction



Fig. 2 Global Chronology (Macroform)



Ex. 2 Our Father (I.1.), mm. 1-47



Ex. 5 Prayer (I.3.), mm. 32-42



Ex. 18 Receive, O Lord, my body (IV.4.), mm. 28-32



Fig. 7

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Fig. 9



Fig. 10