

Syntaxes and metro-rhythmic categories in Viorel Munteanu's *Concerto for flute and string orchestra*

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Abstract: the piece by composer Viorel Munteanu reveals the symbiosis between past musical ages and modernity, between established compositional techniques (of the string orchestra) and contemporary sound emission processes (the solo flute). The syntaxes of past trends in music, polyphony and homophony, as well as modern treatments of rhythm, such as polyrhythm, coexist felicitously and result in a type of musical thought that, although anchored in the past, looks forward to the future. Rhythm can be considered from various metric perspectives, especially in the faster parts of the concerto. Rhythmic layers are present both vertically (polyrhythms) and horizontally (polyphons of rhythms); the cross of the two variants is of particular interest. The *aksak* rhythm, characteristic of the Balkan area, may come as a surprise as it briefly occurs in Part III; this unexpected element brings an inspired change of horizon, followed by a return to the previous *giusto* expression. The form of the last part, *Rondo*, can also be discussed from a modern perspective, rooted in the past; it could actually be placed within in the Rondo-Sonata pattern; however, its sound contour does not belong to the tonal sphere, but rather to a form of extended modalism. The soloist instrument merges with the string orchestra and emerges from it, in a discourse that clearly bears the mark of the composer’s creative personality. The most successful element of the work is its expressiveness, the way in which the compositional and technical means are subordinated to the aesthetic message that Viorel Munteanu intends to transmit to the public.

Keywords: syntax, polyphony, homophony, rhythm, polyrhythm.

1. Introduction

An important personality among contemporary Romanian composers, Viorel Munteanu is the author of an impressive work, which includes various genres, from pieces dedicated to soloist instruments to symphonic opuses of great magnitude. Among his concerto creations, the Concerto for flute and string orchestra is remarkable; it bears the subtitle *Shadows and Geneses*; the author dedicated it to “Professor and flutist Dorel Baicu Simion” (Munteanu, 2009, dedication page). The four movements of the work have symbolic names, reminiscent of past ages in music: Baroque (Ist movement, *Preludio* and IIIrd movement, *Ballata*) and Classicism (IInd movement, *Sonata* and IVth movement, *Rondo*). “The music of this concert gives me the opportunity to

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confess my fascinating connection with *Ethos*, with modes and harmonies, with musical syntaxes, with the wonderful sound forms as they returned to my soul and mind, and continuously rephrased as I updated them. As my *Shadows* and *Geneses* are almost constant sources of inspiration, they are themes forever born and reborn from my own inner evolution.” (Munteanu, 2009, p. III)

2. Objective and subjective opinions

The initial form is only apparently simple, as Viorel Munteanu is a composer who favours syntheses, long-polished musical ideas, layered depths. To prove that, the dedication page where there are also the titles of the parts, includes the melogram, in other words the sound matrix, the initial creative impulse, the initiatory sign, the urge of the creative labour.

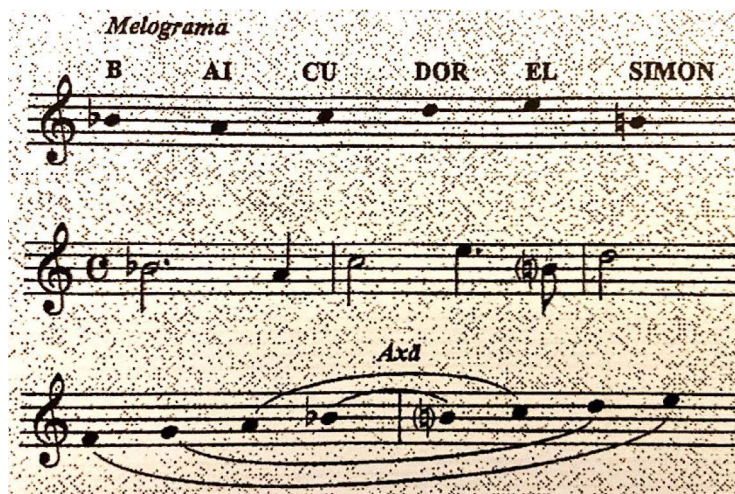


Fig. 1 Melogram (Munteanu, 2009, dedication page)

The concert reveals a unity-in-diversity approach, a modern musical discourse, which highlights the flute's agility and musical qualities, as well as sound capabilities correlated with the discoveries of the twentieth century; the discourse is built on the pillars of compositional techniques of the past, whose generative power is still very active. In the odd slow movements *Preludio* and *Ballata*, Viorel Munteanu uses an orchestral ensemble characteristic of the Baroque. A concertino group stands out from the string section: a first violin, a second violin, a viola and a cello as soloist instruments detach themselves and become more prominent – through prolonged sounds, sometimes through individual passages of high technical difficulty, and subsequently merge with the others. The synthesis between ages in music and compositional syntaxes he proposes several means of expression. In the slow parts whose name and orchestral organization have been discussed above, the musical syntax is mostly

reminiscent of the monody than of the polyphony type, while the fast parts, reminiscent of classicism, observing its forms, seem to have a musical discourse dominated by imitation and canon. All this music material is permeated by leitmotifs and even a variational spirit, as the melogram is a leitmotif subsequently processed in many ways, which Viorel Munteanu skilfully uses.

No reference has been made to rhythm and meter so far; the reason is that, in the analysis of the score, these two musical categories are revealed after all the others have been, although they are in no way secondary. Once more, the slow parts of the concerto place these parameters within certain limits, especially the meter; meter is simple and consists of binary and ternary measures, also infrequently heterogeneous measures, as well as sequences of such measures. The rhythm of the respective parts is much more vivid, with many exceptional rhythmic formulas, resulting from combinations of the tie with the rhythmic dot and various manners of attack, accents and tenutos to be found in both the score of the soloist flute and of the string orchestra. The IIIrd movement has a leitmotif, a rhythmic imprint that I dare call a “rhythmogram”:

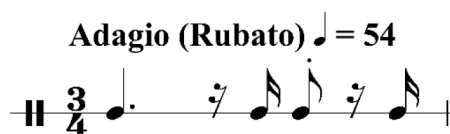


Fig. 2 Rhythmogram of IIIrd movement

Even if the primarily focus is on the melodic dimension, the simple and multiple, short and long appoggiaturas acquire rhythmic meanings in Viorel Munteanu’s piece, thus adding new gist to the general expressiveness. The following example is proof of this idea:

6 Adagio (Rubato) ♩ = 54

Fig. 3 Excerpt from the IIIrd movement, solo flute and the viola section

Allegro ma no troppo ♩ = 90

73

Fl. solo

V. 1

V. 2

Vc.

Cb.

80

Fl. solo

V. 1

V. 2

Vc.

Cb.

Fig. 4 Excerpt from IInd movement, mm. 54-85

The impression that this fragment leaves is that of the *aksak* rhythm, the limp being obvious, in an oscillating sequence that generally uses the 2+2 and 2+3 patterns. Why does the composer choose to use this metric, specifically the transition from a crotchet to the semiquaver, when it is very clear that the pulsation is given by the value of quaver? I cannot venture an answer, I can only note that there is no indication of the correspondence of the metric unit in the score. In order for the tempo to preserve the composer's intentions, this situation requires the performers (flautist, conductor and orchestra) to look for a metric unit that they consider unifying (a common denominator) for the entire sequence, and this can be none other than the quaver. Therefore, I consider that the following metric profile greatly simplifies the initial understanding and interpretation of the fragment, especially since it does not alter the rhythm in any way.

80

Fl. solo

V. 1

V. 2

V.le.

Vc.

Cb.

poco f

div.

f

unis.

ff

sf

fviolento

ord.

poco f

sfz

Fig. 5 Excerpt from IInd movement, mm. 54-85, with the quaver as common denominator

It is obvious then how, as a unit, the quaver visually facilitates the reading of the passage and contributes to a better reception of the meter system, and even helps to clarify the rhythm itself. But perhaps this is the composer's actual intention, that this rhythm should not be "revealed" at a first reading (research), but rather be spun in "protective" metric layers; the likely motivation is the choice as a(n) (almost) constant numerator of the metric fractions (2 and 2), not that of the denominator (4 and 16). In the sometimes irregular sequence of 2/4 and 2/16 (4/8 and 1/8 in the version I envisaged) a measure of 1/4 (2/8 in my version) occurs once, so that towards the end of the passage Viorel Munteanu himself writes two 5/8 measures. I admit that the latter measures have raised my biggest questions and have led me to look deeper into the metric and then into the rhythm system, because the concert is entitled *Shadows and Geneses...* This is the way I think the previous passage can be re-written, so that the metric component reveals from the start a clear, exuberant rhythmic contour, limping first on one leg (2+3), then on the other (3+2).

Un poco più mosso ♩ = 100

54

(2+3)

(2+3)

Fl. solo

V. 1

V. 2

V.le.

Vc.

Cb.

subito p

p

pizz

arco

col legno

ord.

col legno

p

60

(2+3) *flanz.* *ord.*

Fl. solo

V. 1 *mp pizz* *arco* *mf*

V. 2 *mp pizz* *arco col legno* *ord.* *mf*

V-le. *p* *mp pizz* *arco*

Vc. *mp pizz* *arco* *mf*

Cb. *mp pizz* *arco* *mf*

mp *mf*

Allegro ma no troppo ♩ = 90

66

(2+3)

Fl. solo

V. 1 *div.* *poco f* *div.* *f* *fp* *cresc.* *div. poco f*

V. 2 *poco f* *f* *fp* *cresc.* *poco f*

V-le. *poco f* *f* *fp* *cresc.* *poco f*

Vc. *poco f* *f* *col legno* *ord.* *poco f*

Cb. *poco f* *f* *fp* *cresc.* *poco f*

71

(3+2)

Fl. solo *unis.*

V. 1 *f* *ff*

V. 2 *f* *ff* *sf*

V-le. *f* *ff* *f violetto*

Vc. *f* *ff* *sf*

Cb. *sfz* *ff* *sf*

Fig. 6 Excerpt from IInd movement, mm. 54-85, the metre and rhythm are slightly modified

This intervention on rhythm may suggest a slightly different aesthetic message, an altered ethos, but this is an entirely different point, not to be discussed here. At the end of the IInd movement, the composer introduces a fragment reminiscent of the *aksak* rhythm, an allusion to a sound encountered earlier.

As early as the title, Viorel Munteanu declares that the form of the IVth movement of his Concerto for flute and string orchestra is that of rondo, but I believe that the statement may be subject to debate. At first glance, the

architecture of the piece is as follows: A (bars 1-22), B (bars 23-32), a (bars 33-48), C (bars 49-80), B (bars 81-90), a (bars 91-107), D (slower tempo, bars 108-166; extended section, with thematic reminiscences from C), A (return to the original tempo, bars 167-180), B (bars 181-190), A (bars 191-205), C (bars 206-229), A (bars 230-final). On an in-depth study, the structure can be thought of in at least two other formats. Thus, we can imagine three large sections, corresponding to an extended lied form **A** (A B A C B A) **B** (the D above) **A'** (A B A C A). We can think of the same three large sections under the umbrella of the sonata form, with exposition (A B A C B a), Development (d above) and Reprise (A B A C A). Even if it is not conceived as a piece conceived in a tonal manner, I think that the most appropriate formal classification of this part is as a Rondo-Sonata, because section C, on the Recapitulation, is almost the same. In the Exposition, section C has 32 bars, and actually consists of a theme of 16 bars for the flute, which is repeated identically by the cellos in the next 16 bars. In the Recapitulation, the flute's 16-bar line is played by the first violins, with exactly the same rhythm path and the melody fully transposed to the descending major sixth; all the expression marks are observed. Next, the cellos take over the theme again, which they no longer perform entirely, so that their fragment becomes a kind of bridge to the last repetition of A. If we turn to classicist thinking and consider the musical mutation, then the name *Rondo-Sonata* is fully justified. Below the reader can find the comparison between theme C in the Exposition and theme C in the Recapitulation, where an almost complete similarity between them can be noted:

Flute, bar. 49

Fl. solo
poco f, marcato

Violin I, bar. 246
sul G al talone
mf marcato

Fl. solo
ben f

Violin I
sul D

The image shows a musical score for two instruments: Flute solo (Fl.) and Violin I (V. I.). Both parts are in 3/4 time. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The flute part is marked 'solo' and the violin part is marked 'sul G'. The two parts are presented in an overlapping manner to show transposition. The flute part starts with a melodic line that is transposed up from the violin part. The violin part starts with a similar melodic line but in a lower register. The two parts are written on staves that are vertically offset for clarity.

Fig. 7 Theme C in the Exposition, in the flute part, versus C in the Reprise, in the violin I part (presented in overlap, to identify the transposition)

Of the whole concert, the final *Rondo* is the section where the rhythm – meter union is particularly varied; it unfolds and folds up like a fan; polyphony and its techniques are skilfully joined to this “fan”, so that the impression is that the Rondo(-Sonata) form is only a pretext, a factor subordinated to the composer’s imagination and combinatorial fantasy with regard to the above-mentioned elements.

I think that the *geneses* of the title are in abundance here, and I will try to bring arguments to this claim. First, the past-present symbiosis is constant, especially since the classical form of Rondo(-Sonata), expressed through a discourse characterized by the polyphony of instrumental voices, is reminiscent of glorious past ages. The rhythm–meter pair is what connects the piece into contemporary postmodernity; the composer’s originality in this respect is revealed especially by the multiple polyrhythms and the manner in which they are framed within the meter systems. In the IVth movement of the *Concerto for flute and string orchestra Shadows and Geneses*, Viorel Munteanu simplifies the metric contour, reducing it to an inconstant alternation of 2/4 and 3/4 measures. In the 249 beats the binary values and their normal divisions dominate authoritatively, as the Triplet is a *rara avis*, actually the only element that occurs rather late, only at bar 121 in section (D) that is no longer repeated until the end.

Reading the above phrases can lead to the impression of a simple, good, transparent music, whose sole purpose is to follow an ascending path, with a climax towards the end, which will bring about the audience’s moment of satisfaction. Nothing could be further from the truth! The simultaneous use of different rhythms, the luxuriant changes in the manner of the attack, the abundant constant and variable dynamics, the auditory unpredictable slurs are in sharp contrast with the crotchets, quavers and semiquavers in the score. In the following section I will offer an in-depth analysis of two of the essential elements that make up the structure of the end part, as it rests rather on polyphony and polyrhythm than on form. At the very beginning, a counterpoint exposition is placed as a *ritornello*; this is rather in the form of a Subject-Response than that of a generous theme A, as would have been expected. The meticulous manner in which the composer presents the notation of all his intentions is remarkable.

The musical score for V. 2 and V-le. in 2/4 time shows a thematic and polyphonic introduction. The V. 2 part (treble clef) features Motif 1 on the beat and Motif 2 related to Motive 1. The V-le. part (bass clef) features Motif 1 on the upbeat, starting on D, slightly different, and Motive 2 varied. Annotations include 'Motif 1, on beat', 'Motif 1, upbeat, starting on D, slightly different', 'Motif 2, related to Motive 1', 'Motif 2, varied', and 'Fragment from Motif 1, transposed to F'.

Fig. 8 Orchestral, thematic and polyphonic introduction (IVth movement, mm. 1-9)

In the bars above, imitation plays a key role, completed by a discreet and inspired *crusis* – *anacrusis* playful combination and a conceptual crossover, all achieved with an impressive economy of means. The way the values are grouped denotes the composer's polyrhythmic vision, his impressive combinatorial imagination. The polyphonic matrix of the whole part can be clearly observed in the first 7 bars, in the second violin and the viola.

The musical score for V. 2 and V-le. in 2/4 time shows imitations, crosses, and the *crusis-anacrusis* playful combination. The V. 2 part (treble clef) features Initial Motif on beat exposure on G, Motivic fragment 2, Initial Motif on upbeat exposure on D, and Inversion, mirror image of expression marks. The V-le. part (bass clef) features Initial Motif on upbeat exposure on D, slightly different, Motivic fragment 1, slightly different, and Imitation, slightly different. Annotations include 'Initial Motif, on beat exposal on G', 'Motivic fragment 2', 'Initial Motif, upbeat exposure on D', 'Inversion, mirror image of expression marks', 'Motivic fragment 1', 'SUBJECT', 'ANSWER', 'Initial Motif, upbeat exposure on D, slightly different', 'Motivic fragment 1, slightly different', 'Imitation, slightly different', and 'COUNTERSUBJECT'.

Fig. 9 Imitations, crosses, the *crusis-anacrusis* playful combination (IVth movement, mm. 1-7)

In the beginning of the final part of the concert a deep polyphonic thinking is evident, in which the musical matter, once created, is processed and unfolds in strands. The musical concept is dual, the rather dissonant melody of the beginning can be interpreted both as a subject in an imitative exposition as well as the A(I) theme of the Rondo(-Sonata). Once the soloist flute starts performing, all becomes clear as we see how the beginning takes on a poignant thematic role, in the sense of a monody associated with melodic-rhythmic chord paths.

The B of the Rondo (the 2nd theme of the Sonata) begins at bar 23; from this point on the flute's path is especially accompanied by the 1st violin; the two instruments begin a dialogue in which imitation also introduces canon elements; this technique is present in the following sections in its strict way. The original

motif – the incipit – is once more part of the musical material, but the lines are now rather gradual, while the jumps are less widely present.

Fig. 10 The **B** element of the *Rondo*, mm. 23-32, flute and violin I

I wonder if in bar 25, in 1st violin, the fourth quaver is somehow not in the natural and only some typo may have resulted in the failed addition of the alteration ... The previous example clearly reveals how the compositional labour relies on the two-voice imitative polyphony, accompanied only by the cello, whose performance is more discreet, also polyphonic and imitative; it is the cello that provides the musical foundation through the register in which it evolves.

The return of the A turns the imitation into a strictly observed canon form, but only in terms of sounds, because the rhythm undergoes changes; the slurs and articulations differ and this slightly decreases the auditory sensation of the canon. The flute is mainly in a dialogue with the first violins, but at the end of the fragment, in a final sentence, it enters the canon and the second violins as well. The lower strings are placed in a rather neutral area, which aims to ensure the sound foundation, like the cello did earlier.

The image shows a musical score for the first return of the A section, measures 36-46. The score is in 2/4 time and features a Flute solo, Violins I and II, Viola, Violoncello, Violone, and Contrabass. The Flute solo is marked 'Fragment 1' and 'Canon'. The Viola part is marked 'f poco sost.'. The Violone part is marked 'f' and 'pizz'. The Contrabass part is marked 'f' and 'arco'. The score is divided into two systems, with the second system starting at measure 41 and marked 'Fragment 2'. The second system features an 'Upbeat Canon' and a 'Continued Canon'.

Fig. 11 The first return of the A, mm. 36-46

The researcher of the score can see how Viorel Munteanu continues to group the note values, especially the quavers, in ways that do not always have anything to do with the measure. All these graphic connections come to life at a lively, very diverse, pace whose momentum is enhanced by the manners of attack, which are few as such but whose combinations are among the most varied. More than the polyphony of sounds, the polyphony of rhythms stands out; if we focus on the vertical axis, this polyphony of rhythms can be heard as

a polyrhythm. It is proof of special ingenuity, which starts from the maximal use of the possibilities of a musical material with chromatic melodic properties, (*Shadows*), rich in germinating energies (*Geneses*).

Next is Section C, whose thematic aspects have been discussed above and which has been presented in Fig. 07 the upper staff, the melody of 16 bars of the flute respectively; this is subsequently repeated identically by the cellos. The lines that accompany the theme, presented first by the flute, then by the cellos, are created so that polyphony (imitations) and homophony (chord structures) succeed each other several times in fragments consisting of a few bars.

Fig. 12 Fragment of theme C (mm. 57-63), the accompaniment only, presenting one of the homophony-polyphony-homophony alternations

Up to this point, we have already highlighted the ingenuity, the creative imagination that Viorel Munteanu proves in the IVth movement of his *Concerto* for flute and string orchestra. The composer does not bring any novelty up to the last bars, but only combines what he has already imagined. From this point of

view, he treats the flute and orchestral sections as horizontal lines, which he transfers vertically so that their combination differs from one section of the form to the other. As we have seen, the C in the Recapitulation differs from the C in the Exposition through the transposition to the descending major sixth of the melody, but also through the permutation of the horizontal lines from one instrument to the other. This implies the processing of the musical material which takes us back in time, towards the Baroque and Classicism, and which the composer uses without reservation throughout the piece.

3. Conclusions

Musicologist Paula Bălan writes about the entire creation of the Iasi-born composer: “Viorel Munteanu is undoubtedly the counterpoint musician dedicated to the path of ingenious multi-melodic variations that lead his inspired motifs of folkloric origins, or Byzantine tone, to superb developments whose inner tension goes beyond the frame of the genre he approached” (Balan, *apud* Munteanu, 2009, p. VI).

The “Concert for flute and string orchestra *Shadows and Geneses*” by Viorel Munteanu is a synthesis of various techniques, the intersection of syntaxes, the evidence of modern take of music’s past; it is not only a valuable piece, but also a proof that modernity and post-modernity in musical creation (*Geneses*) can only evolve by ingeniously resorting to a more or less distant past (*Shadows*). I believe that this balanced view of the musical phenomenon in particular, of the artistic and aesthetic phenomenon in general, constitutes the optimal view of the complex mechanism of contemporary art and society.

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