

Musical idioms in Șerban Marcu's *Toccatas*

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Abstract: The present research focuses on the *toccatas* in a contemporary stylistic context, as a revival of the Baroque *toccatas* in the creation of a Romanian composer from Cluj-Napoca, Șerban Marcu. He is a representative of the mature school of composition, studying under the tutorship of the celebrated Romanian composer Cornel Țăranu. His style unveils a series of constant traits, such as the programmatic feature and the preference towards musical forms and genres pertaining to the Western musical tradition, among them the madrigal, the song, the *bagatella*, the variations, the suite, the étude, the tone poem, the ballet or even the opera. He wrote five *toccatas* over the span of a decade. The *toccatas* – understood both as a musical genre and a composing technique – is to be found in his output either as a movement in a mini-suite (*Free Preview*, 2008), or as an autonomous work, written for solo instruments as the piano (*Toccatina*, 2017), the organ (*Balkan Toccatas*, 2018), as well as for various chamber ensembles, each featuring, among other instruments, the piano (*tocCaTa brevissima*, 2014, *Toccatas impaziente*, 2018). The analysis unfolds by taking as focal point a series of keywords that have circumscribed the term *toccatas* within the musicological literature. These core concepts are further placed in relationship with various techniques – neo-baroque as well as modern ones – which are to be identified in Șerban Marcu's output of *toccatas*. The analytical procedures focus on highlighting the tradition/innovation binomial and are layered by taking into discussion the parameters of the musical discourse, namely the form, the musical language, the idiomatic instrumental writing, the compositional techniques, as well as aesthetic aspects such as the playfulness, the comic, the irony, the bizarre, the caricature and the paraphrase.

Keywords: *toccatas*, tradition/innovation, Șerban Marcu, idiomatic, comic.

1. Introduction

The *toccatas* is one of the first musical instrumental genres emerging and developing in its own right, alongside the *praeludium*, both terms being interchangeable for the first period of their existence therefore revealing common characteristics. During the 16th century, the *toccatas* was initially intended to be performed on the organ, bearing meanings deeply rooted in its original function, as a display of improvisation skills and virtuosity, as well as innovative solutions translated into both technical and harmonic invention. Beginning with the first great organ *toccatas* composers, Andrea Gabrieli and

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Claudio Merulo, along the imaginary line of development traced by Girolamo Frescobaldi, Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck, Jakob Froberger, Dietrich Buxtehude and Alessandro Scarlatti and culminating with the creation of Johann Sebastian Bach, each of the aforementioned composers adds value and new features to the genre, leaving their more or less quantitative and qualitative mark on its development.

Across the centuries, the defining feature of the *toccata*, namely virtuosity, has eventually contributed to the emergence and development of various related musical genres as the *etude* and the *capriccio*, baring similar functions to the *toccata*, peaking once again during the 20th century: nowadays, young composers rethink and value the *toccata* as a revered genre of the past, encouraged by the remarkable piano *toccatas* of the past century, such as those written by Debussy, Ravel and Prokofiev.

We will further analyse the way composer Șerban Marcu places his creative invention in relationship to tradition, along with modern, innovative features of his style, in his quest to reinvest a baroque musical genre such as the *toccata*.

2. A short history of the *toccata*

The first use of the term *toccata* (it. *toccare*, to touch) occurred in 1536 (G. A. Casteliono's collection named *Intabolatura de leuto de diversi autori*). The first instrument that composers wrote *toccatas* for was the lute, but soon keyboard instruments (primarily the organ) took over. The first publication of a collection, along with *ricercari* and *canzoni* for organ composed by Sperindio Bertoldo dates back to 1591 (*Tocate ricercari et canzoni francese intavolate per sonar d'organo*). By that time, the term already referred to instrumental, improvised introductions to other works. These works were either intended to orient the ear towards the main key of the next piece, or to warm-up the performer, using chords and figurations that would be reworked during the main piece that followed. The term was, at this point of its evolution, a synonym of *ricercar*, *preambulum*, *tastar de corde* (Taruskin, 2008, vol. 2, p. 40).

In most general terms, the *toccata* is described in the *Oxford Dictionary of Music* (Kennedy & Rutherford-Johnson, ed. *online*, 2002) as displaying two main features: *rapidity* and *delicacy*.

In order to review briefly the evolution of the *toccata*, let us refer to the main composer of *toccatas* from the early Baroque, namely Girolamo Frescobaldi: in the description of his *toccatas*, the revered musicologist Richard Taruskin considers the cultural context of the time, placing Frescobaldi as the most stellar composer and organist at the *St. Peter's Basilica* in Rome (the epicentre of Catholicism) for four decades. Within this time span the *toccata* has been the main mobile of counter-reformation, both in regard to its features as a musical genre and its sacred function. According to Taruskin, Frescobaldi's

toccata encompasses the following traits: it is *flamboyant, theatrical* (developing both musical and dramatic virtues), *innovative, open-ended*, “*vividly over-the-top*”, “*a dazzling bag of tricks*”, and even *whimsical, unpredictable, striking* (2008, vol. 2, pp. 35-37).

As for the inner configuration of Frescobaldi’s *toccata*, it unfolds either as an alternation of melodic figurations and chord successions (following Merulo’s pattern of the *toccata*) (Meier, 1977, ed. *online*), or as an alternation of improvisation-shaped sections and polyphonic-imitative interludes. Lalage Cochrane highlights the spectacular unfolding of the rhythmic complexity in Frescobaldi’s *toccatas* as well as the first *toccatas* ever written on a pedal (Latham (ed.), 2011, ed. *online*), while Anthony Newcomb refers to their monumentality and rhetorical content (1984, ed. *online*).

Fundamentally, the *toccata* remains even after Frescobaldi’s time, i.e. a musical genre revealing a free and open form (Frescobaldi himself recommended in the preface of his *Primo libro d’intavolatura* (1615), the performance of the *toccata* segments in whatever order the performer prefers); consequently, the style of the early Baroque *toccata* would paradoxically generate continuity inside discontinuity” (Taruskin, vol. 2, p. 41), featuring a contrast of textures, tempos and modulation on one hand, and sending into the background the motivic unfolding in favour of the figuration of the musical flow. The improvisational aspect of the *toccata*, at least during the Baroque, turns this musical genre into a veritable real-time capture on stage of the creative frenzy. It seems like it was shaped by the composer directly on the keyboard, and not by merely imitating the freedom and outburst of his improvisational flow.

The next generation of organist-composers, Michelangelo Rossi, Jakob Froberger and Dietrich Buxtehude to name but a few, are the representatives of the middle Baroque; by means of their creations they add to the *toccata* new stylistic and expressive features: *bizarre* (through bold modulations and rich sinuosities of the melodic excursion), *stupefying*, showpiece, fancy, elegant, and also catchy, or even, as in the case of chromatic *toccatas* (*toccate di durrezze e ligature*, performed during the Catholic masses during the transformation of the Holy bread and wine), *contemplative, reflexive* (Taruskin, vol. 2, p. 44), even *irrational and mystic*.

During the late Baroque, Johann Sebastian Bach exhibited unequalled and unique mastery and technique in composing his *toccatas*. Already at this stage of the evolution of the *toccata*, it is mainly coupled with a *ricercare* or, later, a fugue, and sometimes with a prelude, such in the *Toccatà and fugue in D minor*. Bach also writes harpsichord *toccatas* structured in several movements (Kennedy & Rutgerford-Johnson, 2012, ed. *online*). As early as 1707, he unveils one of his most innovative and bold *toccatas*: the *Toccatà in F major*, BWV 540; the nature of his invention is two-fold: on the one hand, the harmonic non-conformism and the fine balance between consonance and dissonance, on the

other hand, the musical dramaturgy of the work, by postponing time and again the resolution of the tension and finding the most striking solutions in restoring consonance. In Bach's compositional concept, tonality is the main mobile in constructing dramaturgy. The work is also a refined example of pedal and manuals virtuosity (Taruskin, vol. 2, p. 208).

The Classical period, as well as the Romanticism, witnesses a weakening of the *toccata's* vigour in terms of the quality and quantity of the output. The most widely known example of a classical *toccata* is the one written by Muzio Clementi; in the Romantic period, the *Toccata in C major*, op. 7, by Robert Schumann is to be followed by similar works by French organist-composers such as Louis Vierne and Charles-Marie Widor.

Along the fine line of evolution of the *toccata*, beginning with Andrea Gabrieli and Claudio Merulo and followed by Girolamo Frescobaldi, Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck, Jakob Froberger, Dietrich Buxtehude and Alessandro Scarlatti, culminating with Johann Sebastian Bach, the genre crosses the centuries up to the modern times. During the 20th century, its inner value and wide possibilities would be eventually rediscovered by great composers of the day, such as Claude Debussy (in his suite *Pour le piano*), Maurice Ravel (in his *Le tombeau de Couperin*), Sergei Prokofiev (the *Toccata* for piano op. 11), and in the Romanian output, George Enescu (*Toccata* from the *Suite for piano* op. 10), Paul Constantinescu (his *Toccata* for piano also known as *Dance from Dobrodja*), Sigismund Toduță (in his neo-classical *Prelude-Choral-Toccata* for piano) and Dan Voiculescu (*Toccata chromatica*, *Toccata prima* to the *Toccata quarta*).

The modern style of the Twentieth century inherits from the Baroque *toccata* certain defining elements of the genre, either by following Frescobaldi's style displayed in his two volumes of *toccatas* and in *Fiori musicali*, or Bach's model, taken from his organ and also organ *toccatas*. The modern touch of the genre reveals itself with great vigour in such compositional traits as the repeated sound or chord, using the alternation of hands, like in Prokofiev, Ravel, Constantinescu or Toduță *toccatas*, the fast tempo and unexpected and sudden dynamic shifts, the leaps over registers, the *rondeau* form (most typically A B A B A or the shortened A B A featuring a B section of lyrical, meditative atmosphere aiming to change abruptly the general flow of the discourse), the final musical gesture, full of brilliance and technical skill and the preference towards sequential, motivic rather than figural discourse. The *toccata* seems also to be preferred as last movement in orchestral multi-movement works. (Kennedy & Rutherford-Johnson, ed. *online*).

3. The *toccata* in the output of Șerban Marcu¹

Considering his stylistic features, his academic tuition and his lineage through his professor of composition, Professor Cornel Țăranu, PhD, Șerban Marcu belongs to the Transylvanian school of composition, which holds as its core values a profound reverence towards the Western tradition in composition, the severity of the style and the frequent reference to the traditional Transylvanian folklore. In this cultural and stylistic landscape, Șerban Marcu takes his personal creative concept from his preference towards the Western musical genres, combining traditional manners of discourse with a modern, articulated and organic musical language related to neo-impressionism and neo-modalism. His creative ideas are often linked to or nourished by programmatic contents and shaped in quasi-traditional forms and genres.

In Șerban Marcu's creation, a representative of the mature generation of nationally acclaimed contemporary Romanian composers, the *toccata* plays a key role, constantly reoccurring in his area of interest, either as a genre itself, or just as a technique of composition in other works. Such instances can be traced in his chamber opera *The Lesson* (2003, libretto reworked after Eugène Ionesco) in the mini-aria of the Teacher where his exasperation towards the dullness of his student reaches the peak), his ballet *Arahneea* (2006), during the epic confrontation between Arachne and Athena, as well in his chamber symphony *Acteon* (2007), during the episode of the main character being chased and dismembered by his own hunting dogs. Hence, we could easily draw the conclusion that the composer often uses the technique of the *toccata* in close relation to an external programmatic content which is closely linked to as well as beautifully suitable to.



Fig. 1 Șerban Marcu, composer (n. 1977, Brașov)

¹ Born in 1977 in Brașov (Romania), Șerban Marcu studied piano and theoretical studies at the Arts High School in his native town. During a composition masterclass held by the Romanian composer and Professor Dan Voiculescu, PhD, he discovered his creative talent, which he further nourished at the *Gheorghe Dima* Music Academy in Cluj-Napoca (Romania) under the tutorship of the acclaimed academician, composer and Professor Cornel Țăranu, PhD. He follows in a line of tradition in musical composition in Transylvania, beginning with Marțian Negrea and continued by his disciple Sigismund Toduță who, in his turn, is revered as the head of the Transylvanian school of composition for many decades during the second half of the Twentieth century and tutored disciples as Cornel Țăranu, Dan Voiculescu, Adrian Pop, all of them nationally acclaimed composers. Șerban Marcu currently holds the position of Associate Professor PhD of harmony and composition at the institution he academically graduated from.

The *toccatà* is to be found in Marcu's output five times in the span of a decade, either as a movement in a mini-suite (*Free Preview*, 2008), or as a stand-alone work, usually written for solo instruments or chamber ensembles, reaching from solo piano (*Toccatina*, 2017) or organ (*Balkan Toccatà*, 2018) to the trio consisting of violin, clarinet and piano (*tocCaTa brevissima*, 2014 and *Toccatà impaziente*, 2018).

His first *toccatà* was composed in 2007 and belongs to an instrumental mini-suite called *Free Preview*, as the third movement, along with other caricature-like renderings of traditional genres such as: *Preludio*, *Adagio*, *Marcia funebre*, *Capriccio*, *Berceuse*, *Etude*, *Aria*, *Finale*. *Free Preview* features a chamber ensemble of flute, violin, cello and piano. However, the third movement, *Toccatà*, features the piano as solo instrument, followed by flageolets in the string instruments, linking the *toccatà* to the *Marcia funebre*. The title of the mini-suite refers to the 30 seconds of playing the music for free, namely those samples that music sites are providing for free in order to persuade the client to buy the full version of the performance. Consequently, the mini-caricatures are often ending abruptly, symbolically inviting the audience to pay for the full version.

The *toccatà* is shaped in a one-instance furious and expansive musical flow, spanning over 19 bars and exploring one single composing technique: the alternation of dissonant vertical gestures (either chords or harmonic intervals) in the right and left hand. The discourse unfolds rapidly in alternations of chromatic mixtures of perfect harmonic fourths and chord combinations of seconds and thirds, also comprising perfect fourths. The harmonic interval between the two layers of the discourse comprises a major seventh. The *Toccatà* bears no resemblance at all to the Baroque model, apart from its high level of difficulty, being stylistically more akin to the modern concept of the genre. The expression designation is *mecanico*, the rhythmical pattern being the isochronous flow of sixteenths. However, the meter is pending between alternations of 4/4 and 7/8, or sometimes of 4/4 and 5/8. This inconsequence of metric patterns generates a voluntary unbalance regarding the periodicity of accents which relates to the aesthetic category of playfulness, but also to the satirical expression. As the *Toccatà* unfolds, the density of the accents increases gradually, in a deafening frenzy. The general expression of the work resembles that of a furious child who takes revenge on the keyboard of a piano, not even knowing how to play the instrument. This symbolic image is also suggested by the idiomatic position on the keyboard of the two hands of the performer, which catches only the gesture of slapping the keys with the palms of a child's hand. If it were to assign to this *toccatà* adjectives that used to define the genre in the past, they would be *vividly over-the-top*, *brilliant*, but also *caricature-like*:



Fig. 2 Șerban Marcu, *Free preview*, p. 3, *Toccata*, mm. 26-27

The second *toccata*, in chronological order, is also related to the aesthetic world of the playfulness and humour. It is called *tocCaTa brevissima* and it was composed and performed in 2014, during an anniversary concert dedicated to Cornel Țăranu, his beloved composition professor. The concert also featured works of other disciples of the maestro, each related in a way or another to the personality of the celebrated composer. The title, written in small caps, highlights in large caps just two letters, namely the initial letters of the composer’s name (C and T).

Stylistically, this *toccata* refers also to the modern features of the genre. It is a “musical joke” featuring the violin, the clarinet and the piano, highly miniature-like (hardly two-minute in duration) and unfolding in one-shaped musical flow. It mostly uses the technique of the one sound repetition, continuously changing its timber and register, in fact a rhythmical isochronous pedal on the sound “C” (as in “Cornel”), which the ear is struggling to catch, like in a whimsical race, in different ranges and sonorities; this pedal is asymmetrically interrupted by dissonant chords in *sforzando* and *staccato*. The metric pattern is here, as well as in the previous *toccata*, fluctuant, alternating “serious” bars like 4/4, 2/4, 3/4 and capricious ones like 7/8, 5/8, 3/8, in a surprising and unexpected turmoil of accents. Little by little, these chords that apparently are not related in any way, build up a melody through a process of accumulation gradually unveiled in front of the audience: the widely known *Happy birthday to you* song. Again, if it were to designate epithets to this *toccata*, maybe the most suitable would be *catchy*, *unexpected*, but most of all, *a dazzling bag of tricks*:



Fig. 3 Şerban Marcu, *tocCaTa brevissima*, mm. 72-77

Şerban Marcu's third *toccatina* is in fact a *Toccatina* for piano written in 2017. It is a stand-alone work, holding a pedagogical scope. This *toccatina* brings upfront several novelties compared to the previous *toccatas*, such as the alternation of the motivic and figural musical discourse, the **A B A_v** form, as well as a content which relates to a subtle folkloric layer. Under the tempo *Allegro scherzoso* (MM = 100), a dazzling metric structure lies hidden, seemingly escaping any repetitive and predictable pattern; however, symmetry and the inner logic of the meter and rhythm reside paradoxically in the varied repetition of figures, enabling memorisation.

The pianistic writing is highly idiomatic, comfortable, even ergonomically suited to children's hands. Although its musical language seems difficult to understand and assimilate by children, as it is constructed by combining different modal scale segments, sometimes phrygian, sometimes mixolydian, adding *ajoutées* in a neo-prokofievian style, the inner symmetries and repetitions, as well as the neo-baroque approach – the inversion of melodic layers or the repetition of the same melodic line an octave lower – makes the work seem much more difficult than it really is, and also more brilliantly spectacular in relationship to the objective level of virtuosity it requires.

The score is a *bizarre* but *catchy* mixture of baroque techniques, modalism, an endless play on accents in alternation of divisive and additive metrical structures, subtle folklore and Prokofiev like humour, the latter radical, extreme combination making it seem strange:

B)

Fig. 4-5 Şerban Marcu, *Toccatina*, mm. 1-3 (A), respectively mm. 26-29 (B)

The most recent two *toccatas* are, at the same time, the most masterfully and scholarly constructed ones. They have been both written in 2018 and entitled *Toccatina impaziente* for violin, clarinet and piano and *Balkan Toccatina* for organ, respectively.

Toccatina impaziente cites two well-known songs written by Franz Schubert: *Ungeduld* and *Ständchen*, as the work was first performed in a recital dedicated to Schubert during the *Timsonia* Contemporary Music Festival (2018, Timișoara, Romania).

Prevalently evoked during the *toccatina* is *Ungeduld*, especially in the first and last sections. The composer adopts the metric and rhythmic structure, accompaniment patterns in the piano part (the isochronous pedal) and rhythmic-melodic percussive gestures, and reshapes a fiery love song into a satirical and comic paraphrase:

Fig. 6-7 Fr. Schubert, quote 1, *Ungeduld* / Marcu, paraphrase, mm. 19-21

1. Rin - den ein, ich grub es gern in je - den Kie - sel - stein, ich
 2. jun - gen Star, bis daß er sprach die Wor - te rein und klar, bis
 3. hau - chen ein, ich möcht es säu - seln durch den re - gen Hain; o,
 4. Au - gen stehn, auf mei - nen Wan - gen müßt man's bren - nen sehn, zu

Fig. 8-9 Fr. Schubert, quote 2, *Ungeduld* / Marcu, paraphrase, mm. 58-60

Fig. 10-11 Fr. Schubert, quote 3, *Ungeduld* / Marcu, paraphrase, mm. 84-86

The middle section of the *toccata* reworks the accompaniment pattern from *Ständchen*, in the most subtle way, using *ostinato*, but changes the register towards the upper range in a caricature-like manner.

Toccata impaziente is shaped in an **A B A** form providing a striking contrast between the sections. Unlike the *Toccatina*, where the contrast between **A** and **B** sections is built up by merely changing the melodic material, the shift from **A** to **B** occurs in this *toccata* by changing the tempo objectivity into a suggestion of atemporality, by replacing the rhythmic pedal with chord clusters and by employing a contrasting timber.

It is an elaborated, complex, extended *toccata* (unfolding over five minutes) which uses a masterful contrapuntal writing of imitative dialogues divided into four layers: the violin, the clarinet and the left hand of the piano score are melodic layers, while the right hand of the piano score provides the

accompaniment. Moreover, the play of shifting registers in the right hand of the piano, as well as the rhythmic pedal taken from the Schubertian model, are exceptionally well suited to be reworked in a *toccata* manner and have been very inventively, efficiently and ingeniously used in the paraphrase. It is both *extravagant* and *flamboyant* through its outburst of dialogues between instruments, *vividly over-the-top*, but at the same time *invigorating*, *unpredictable*, abounding in contrasts. *Toccata impaziente* is a veritable *tour de force* for the performing instrumentalists in terms of virtuosity and synchronization.

The most recently composed and performed *toccata* in Șerban Marcu's creation is called *Balkan Toccata* (2018). It was commissioned by a renowned Romanian organist and professor, Ursula Philippi, an undisputed technical and interpretative master of the organ. She performed the first audition on the organ at the *Black Church* in Brașov (Romania). The work is scored for two manuals and pedal board and it revolves around a rhythmic isochronous pedal on the note "C":

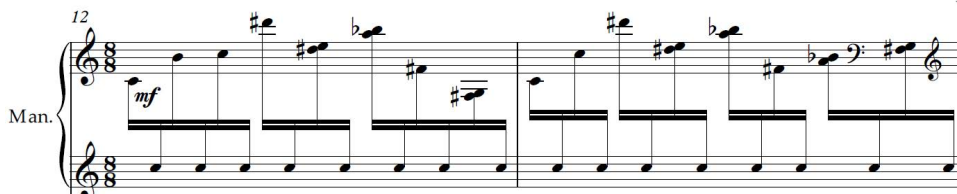


Fig. 12 Șerban Marcu, *Balkan Toccata*, mm. 12-13

Unlike the previous *toccatas*, *Balkan Toccata* is structured according to constructive principles such as symmetry, inversion and recurrence, figural transformation. Moreover, it leans rather towards gradation instead of contrasts. The structure is binary, the second section of the form being a free recurrence of the first to which the inversion of the registers is being added.

The Balkanic atmosphere is rendered by the use of two chromatic modes, both having "C" as fundamental note, and "F#" as a gravity point, but exhibiting different configurations of tones and semitones, as well as different placements of the augmented second, as follows:

C-----*d sharp*-*e*-*F sharp*-*g*-*a*-*b flat*---*C*
C--*d*--*e flat*-----*F sharp*-*g*---*b flat*-*b*-*C*

Fig. 13 modal scales

In close connection to the two modes, both sections of the *toccata* are shaped in a symmetrical manner, the first beginning in *C* and ending in *F sharp*, and the second beginning in *F sharp* and ending in *C*.

The metric and rhythmic patterns also add to the Balkanic sound, in spite of the fact that the composer does not use alternative or additive rhythms and meters. Instead, he just gathers musical events closer and closer thus disrupting the rhythmical pedal by eliminating one sixteenth every bar and reversed. Furthermore, he adds to this horizontal/temporal “crowding” of events, a vertical/harmonic one, by the gradual raise of the harmonic complexity.

The culmination occurs in measure 37, where the pedal shifts from the pedal board to the manuals, on held chords of superposed fourths, in both right and left hands, in converging semitones one towards the other, while the pedal board takes over the figuration, formerly stated at the manuals. This melodic line, repeated sequentially and chromatically ascending, is played by both feet of the performer and it is also, as in the previous examples, very idiomatically composed, using apparent polyphony and alternation of the feet, seemingly difficult but in fact imprinting an appearance of virtuosity higher than its objective level of difficulty:

Fig. 14 Şerban Marcu, *Balkan Toccata*, incipit section **B**, mm. 40-41

Beginning with bar 41, the layers are inverted, and at the same time, the recurrence begins: the pedal is not a chord construct anymore, but a simple held sound on the note “C” which refers to the beginning of the work, while in the right-hand manual, the formerly exposed melodic material in the pedal board is again inverted and contrapuntally accompanied by the left hand.

It is a masterfully conceived and written *toccata*, demanding a high level of difficulty, using elements of musical dramaturgy in the most accurate neo-Bach manner.

4. Conclusions

The baroque legacy in Şerban Marcu’s *toccatas* reveals itself rather in a subtle, and not demonstrative manner in *Toccata impaziente*, *Toccatina* and most of all in *Balkan Toccata*: the composer makes use of the imitative suggestion, multi-layered polyphony or dialogues, inversion of melodic strata, *ostinato*, pedal, sequences, figuration, apparent polyphony, alternation of chord successions and melodic improvisational figuration, as well as the sonority of the organ using idiomatic melodic writing for the pedal board.

The Twentieth century legacy consists, in its turn, in such elements of composing such as the repeated and isochronous sound/chord, striking dynamic contrasts, the spectacular final musical gesture, the slow middle section (*Toccata impaziente*), the figural transformation technique (*Balkan Toccata*), constructive principles generating discourse and form (inversion, recurrence, symmetry, as in *Balkan Toccata*, or accumulation/dissolution, constructing/deconstructing, as in *tocCaTa brevissima* and *Balkan Toccata*).

There is a certain number of very personal composing reflexes present in Șerban Marcu's *toccatas*: the isochronous rhythmic pedal, the construction and deconstruction of musical ideas (see *Happy Birthday to You!*, *Balkan Toccata*, *Toccata Impaziente*), the external programmatic impulse of creativity (see Schubert, Țăranu), the fine balance between contrast and gradation, the surprise element. Moreover, the recurrence of the *toccata* in Șerban Marcu's creation is deeply intertwined with the spirit of reassessing forms and genres of the past, as well as with aesthetic concepts like playfulness and humour.

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