

## Pascal Bentoiu – *Eminesciana III*.

### A “Concerto for orchestra” or the dissimulation of a symphony?

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#### Abstract

The neoclassical stylistic orientation generated a synthetic compositional concept where the architectonic structures and the musical genres belonging to the Western European tradition merged with the new serial, modal or serial-modal grammars developed during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. By definition a compositional “hybrid”, the *concerto for orchestra* – established by Bartók's model as well as by Petrassi's cycle of eight fundamental works – caught quite early the eye of the Romanian composers. In this respect, Pascal Bentoiu was one of those who highlighted the symphonic dimension of the genre from the standpoint of the modal-serial lexis.

**Key words:** *modal-serial matrix, poetic-philosophic rhetoric, symmetry, spectralism, texture, concerto, symphony*

Due to a compositional concept of merging various symphonic genres, the place of this opus in Pascal Bentoiu's entire oeuvre is an exceptional one. “I have always said to myself that I do not wish in any way to write a *Symphony n<sup>o</sup> 9*”, confessed the composer. “/.../ And yet there is such an opus n<sup>o</sup> 9: it is *Eminesciana III*, op. 23, written at the end of 1976, right after *Symphony n<sup>o</sup> 3*, which is much like a **one movement-symphony in terms of dimensions and problematic** (our boldface). /.../ I had initially conceived the work as a symphonic poem, a sort of an older correspondent of my younger *Luceafăr* (they are two decades apart). /.../ Eventually, it became /.../ a *Concerto for orchestra*. **It is not more a concerto for orchestra than it is a symphonic poem or, à la rigueur, even a symphony** (our boldface)<sup>1</sup>.

Chronologically, *Eminesciana III* appears as the third work related to Eminescu's poetic universe, the first being the symphonic poem *Luceafărul*, op. 7 (later known as *Eminesciana I*), and the second being *Sonetele* op. 8 (later *Eminesciana II*).

The music's semantic area has its source in Mihai Eminescu's *Third Epistle (Scrisoarea a III-a)*. Far from the temptations of a narrow programmatism, dictated by a possible epic trajectory of the sonorous discourse, Bentoiu conceives a music of poetic-philosophic gist, induced by the affective resonances of Eminescu's verse.

Such an approach did not mean eluding a certain lyrical-dramatic source; on the contrary, by attracting the general in an area of musical particular, the composer laid out a *sui generis* dramaturgy, integrating into an infinite sonorous

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<sup>1</sup> Pascal Bentoiu, OPT SIMFONII ȘI UN POEM (EIGHT SYMPHONIES AND ONE POEM) (Bucharest: UNMB, 2007), p. 135.

flow a couple of “forces” corresponding – at the level of the structural-semantic analogies – to the antagonistic binomial Baiazid-Mircea from the famous *Third Epistle (Scrisoarea a III-a)*.

Essentially, as Pascal Bentoïu underlines, “the conflict within the literary poem (only the historic part, naturally) was translated into a confrontation between an atonal (serial) world and a modal, or multi-modal one. The serial envisages the invading element, the modal – the peaceful, indigenous one; their clash will lead to the former's elimination from the musical setting, with mere traces of it surviving into the final section”<sup>2</sup>.

In agreement with the composer's vision and in virtue of several lexical and syntactic arguments which we shall develop later on, we plead for a subdivision of the work into four great sections.

### SECTION “A” (bars 1-90)

*Eminesciana III* opens on the background of a tam-tam pedal with a **serial** monodic formula (A/T, bars 5-19) in the lower register of the double basses. This register displays the total chromatic twice in the relationship **original** (bars 5-14) – **recurrence** (bars 15-19).

The musical score for Section "A" (bars 1-90) is presented in three systems. Each system consists of two staves: the upper staff for Tam-tam (T-tam) and the lower staff for Double Bass (Cb.).

- System 1 (Bars 1-4):** The T-tam part begins with a tempo marking of  $\text{♩} = \text{cca } 48$  and a dynamic marking of *ppp*. The Cb. part is silent.
- System 2 (Bars 5-14):** The T-tam part features a wavy line above the staff, indicating a tremolo or sustained sound. The Cb. part plays a chromatic scale. A dynamic marking of *(ppp)* is present.
- System 3 (Bars 15-19):** The T-tam part continues with a wavy line. The Cb. part plays a chromatic scale. The section concludes with a *pochiss.* marking.

<sup>2</sup> P. Bentoïu – *op. cit.*, p. 135-136.



Fig. no. 1 bars 5-19, Theme

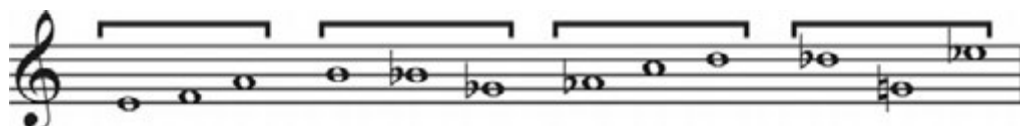


Fig. no. 2 The Structure of the series

In the semantic key of the “invasion” – with which it is symbolically associated –, this sonorous magma will be amplified incessantly according to a principle of polyphonic-imitative accumulation / stratification.

The typical means of advancing consists in progressively engaging the instruments in a virtually multivocal canonical *stretto* whose density has a **rarefaction threshold** at minimum two ( $Av/Tv1$ , bars 19-30) and a **congestion threshold** at maximum seven ( $Av5/Tv5+T$  orig.  $\rightarrow Av6$ , bars 70-81; 82-90).

The process of **polyphonic accumulation** undergoes successive levels of complexity that engage initially ( $Av/Tv \rightarrow Av3/Tv3$ , bars 20-65) the string section (low  $\rightarrow$  high pitch) – with additionally chromatic *strettos* (entries at the semitone/minor ninth) – and later the brass section having a significant role of structural and colourful counterpoise ( $Av4/Tv4 \rightarrow Av6/Tv3$ , bars 64-90).

Thus, on the background of **agglomerating** the sonorous surface by juxtaposing/overlapping the many rhythmical variants of the thematic formula (structures  $Tv4-Tv17$ ), the trumpets, trombones and tuba will play three times the **original** formula of the series, while the horns will render simultaneously the **recurrence** of the series twice (both layouts on the structure  $Tv3$ ).

Let us note that the first section of the work (A) edifies its own **dynamism** by articulating the processes of polyphonic **multi-layering** (identifiable on the simultaneity axis) with the **transformational** processes (able to be integrated to the successiveness axis), intensified once the multivocal density of cardinal 7 ( $Av5$ ) has been reached. In this respect, the **limit density** modulo 12 achieved in the last two subsections ( $Av5$ ,  $Av6$ ), that dominating “saturation” which the composer speaks of, has a double genesis, of lexis and syntax at the same time. Let us follow several of the original theme's 17 variants:

**Theme**

Cb. Musical notation for the Cb. part of the Theme. It consists of two staves in 3/4 time. The first staff begins with a whole rest, followed by a series of eighth and quarter notes. The second staff continues the melody with various note values and rests.

**Tv2**

Cb. Musical notation for the Tv2 part. It consists of two staves in 3/4 time. The first staff features a melodic line with eighth and quarter notes. The second staff provides a harmonic accompaniment with eighth and quarter notes.

**Tv4**

Cb. Musical notation for the Tv4 part. It consists of one staff in 3/4 time, featuring a continuous eighth-note pattern with frequent triplets indicated by the number '3' below the notes.

**Tv7**

Vni II Musical notation for the Tv7 part. It consists of one staff in 3/4 time, featuring a continuous eighth-note pattern with frequent triplets indicated by the number '3' below the notes.

**Tv10**

Vle Musical notation for the Tv10 part. It consists of one staff in 3/4 time, featuring a continuous eighth-note pattern with frequent quintuplets indicated by the number '5' below the notes.

**Tv13**

Vlc. Musical notation for the Tv13 part. It consists of one staff in 3/4 time, featuring a continuous eighth-note pattern with frequent triplets indicated by the number '3' below the notes.

**Tv15**

Vlc. Musical notation for the Tv15 part. It consists of one staff in 3/4 time, featuring a continuous eighth-note pattern with frequent sextuplets indicated by the number '6' below the notes.

## Tv17



Fig. no. 3

## SECTION “B” (bars 90-155)

There are poetic-philosophic as well as musical syntactic reasons that demand the exit from the serial obsession of the first section by a shift of emphasis into the area of the **polymodal** chromaticism. Associated with the woodwinds (left “backstage” up until now), this sonorous surface takes the shape of a **textured** arborescent mass where the intonational and rhythmical personality of the individual lines is “sacrificed” in favour of an expressive **global effect**.

Fig. no. 4 bars 100-102

Instituted as a **dynamic level**, the primordial edifice outlined along a non-linear temporal trajectory, in the manner of *parlando-rubato*, receives the counterpoise of a **static level** by constantly associating a complex pedal point dispersed in terms of register within the subdivided group of the violins and the violas. Introduced in the pointillist style, by a diagonal of successive attacks and multi-layered according to the criterion of vertical conjunction of perfect fifths, the structure of this polychord has a density of cardinality 10, very close to the total chromatic (elision **G** and **F sharp / G flat**).

Once it has been configured, this quasi-evolving sonorous context (woodwinds + high-pitched strings) correlates the dramaturgic functionality of the continuity level to the development of new sonorous events. Thus,

subsection B1 (bars 103-114) imposes as a **detail phenomenon** a modal melody/T3 (doric A, shifting 3<sup>rd</sup> step, C-C sharp), in harmonic sounds, entrusted to the cello (which has been kept silent up to now).

Fig. no. 5 , bars 103-114

The **archetypal gist** of the new melodic level is induced by multiple structural features, such as: the mode's diatonic transparency of a pentatonic substratum, the *tulnic*<sup>3</sup> sonority due to the permutational play of the harmonics, the ample, evoking, narrative rhythm.

Besides, the significance of this theme within the general rhetoric of the symphonic discourse is underlined by its **(poly)timbral re-dimensioning**, the subsection B1v/T3v (bars 115-132) being polarised by the orchestral amplification of the one-voice stage initially rendered by the cello (see the vertical addition of the violas to the octave, of the two flutes to the pitch of the cellos and of a great many violins).

According to a principle of architectonic symmetry, the next subsection, Bv (bars 133-144, intimately connected to its antecedents: B1, B1v) reflects **analogically** the structure of subsection B (bars 90-102).

However, the amplitude of the sonorous mass kept obsessively during no less than 138 bars is surprisingly **annihilated** at bar 139 by an extremely contrasting phenomenon, a quasi-general suspension jammed by a soft pedal in **C sharp** in the low register of the contrabassoon, horns and tuba. From this moment on, the sonority is diluted, becomes ambiguous, the entire sonorous edifice goes more in the direction of a transition rather than a conclusion. Thus, the pluri-modal texture of the woodwinds is reduced to the mere monody of flute 1 (bars 140-145), and the polychord / five-sound chord of the strings is completely eliminated.

To relatively compensate this sudden rarefaction, the accompaniment on **C sharp** of the brass in low register (bars 138-139) will initiate the first impulse of a new vertical accumulation with a global effect that, by means of a concentrated attack polyphony, will coagulate the total chromatic in a **cluster**

<sup>3</sup> *Tulnic*: a traditional Romanian wind instrument in the shape of a long cone made from willow or linden bark and used for calls or signals.

polychord (bar 145) that has become a pedal point. Reiterating the first section of the work, the building of this isomorphic mass is instantly doubled by the re-occurrence of the **series**, both **direct** (T1/A, bars 144-146) as well as **recurrent** (bars 147-150). In this heavy atmosphere, the far away echo of the flutes that croon bits of melody symbolising that “earthly deity”, subsection B2 (bars 144-155), acquires the role of a dramaturgic connector and anticipates, at the same time, all the following evolutions.

## SECTION “C” (bars 154-377)

An essential argument in favour of the symphonic organicity is the continuity, from one section to the other, of the main elements edifying the sonorous dramaturgy. With all the changes in quality – inherent to the evolving chronology –, we witness the generalisation of a **triadic principle** (established and perpetuated in the previous sections) of structuring the sonorous levels.

From this view point, the most extended section of the entire opus appears as a heterogeneous sonorous surface, structured on the simultaneity of **three distinct levels** which develop two types of **vertical synthesis**:

<b>Sonorous Level</b>	<b>Timbral Distribution</b>	<b>Organisational System</b>	<b>Syntax Type</b>
I	Woodwinds+ alto sax+ soli: Vl, Vla, Vlc.	Modal	Monody (polytimbral)
II	Brass	Serial	Homophony
III	String	Serial	Non-imitative Polyphony

**Table 1**

The sonorous reality of the score, sketched in the table above, reflects the specificity of the merger of the sonorous levels under the impact of a double synthesis:

- **Synthesis I** (lexis) consists in overlapping the **modal** organisation (Level I) and the **serial** organisation (Levels II+III);
- **Synthesis II** (syntax) consists in overlapping polytimbral **monody** (Level I), **homophony** (Level II) and non-imitative **polyphony** (Level III);

Moreover, as one can notice, there is a clear will to **render the whole structure instrumental**, each sonorous level being customised from a **timbral** view point by constant association with a particular orchestral partition.

As we shall see next, the complex image of the sonorous edifice developed in Section **C** will be governed by the simultaneous evolution of three

sonorous “characters” clearly defined, integrated into the dramaturgic discourse along the lines of the prolonged action of the fixed-mobile complementarity (a generic temporal dualism forecast as early as the beginning of the work).

Hence, the dynamic trajectory in continuous evolution – seen as the **foreground** of the entire section – is traversed by a melodic flow of to over 200 bars (a sort of *panta rhei* in modal key) entrusted to the woodwinds which are joined by an alto saxophone and a group of strings made up of violin, viola and cello. The mobility of the steps, the overlap of the modal features and especially **the cadential polarizations** along this immense polytimbral monody with a *doina*<sup>4</sup>-like character marks a total of 17 articulations (C1 – C17) having progressive degrees of complexity.

In this context, we note the existence of a monodic segment connecting sections **B** and **C** having modal resonances and even cellular-motivic items taken from the **Doric theme** performed by the cello in the previous section. Although it no longer has the initial subtlety and refinement, this instance (connections C3+C4) epitomizes the phenomenon of **continuity** of the sonorous matter aforementioned.



**Fig. no. 6** R 16→17, bars 189-212

If we were to define in just a few words the immense monodic peroration performed in unison within section **C**, the appropriate phrases would be: **dynamic** amplification, **timbral** accumulation and, last but not least, **rhythmical** development / congestion.

Related to this genuine modal *cantus firmus* that evolves on the same non-linear temporal co-ordinates in *parlando-rubato* (launched in the previous sections), **levels II** and **III** develop antagonistically, displaying a sonorous matter organised **serially**.

Even though they share this, the two surfaces are individualised at the

<sup>4</sup> *Doina*: A Romanian folk song marked by deep emotions and feelings, especially melancholy and longing.



level of the vertical **syntax**, thus experiencing an obvious **contrast**.

To this purpose, the brass section (**sonorous level II**, embodying the “invading” character in the composer's view) attaches the **static** element in the form of an exclusive **homophony** based upon mainly four-sound structures. The strategy of chord succession implies, according to Bentoiu, the existence of “pre-established paths of exhausting the series' forms and transpositions (24 ascending forms of the series x 3 chords + 24 descending forms of the series x 3 chords)”<sup>5</sup>.

The image displays two systems of musical notation for a brass section. The first system includes parts for Cor (Cornets), Tr. (Trumpets), Trb. (Trumpets), and Tuba. Dynamics include *molto f*, *con sord.*, *poco sf*, *mf*, and *sord.*. The second system continues the notation with dynamics such as *poco f*, *pp*, *f*, and *mf*. There are also markings for *a2* and *pp* throughout the score.

Fig. no. 7 R 29<sup>4</sup>, bars 351-361

This level of the musical discourse generally follows the path of a collective *crescendo*. Although it is perceived as a *continuum*, this sonorous level somewhat manages the long durations in the manner of a **polyphony of attacks** dilated on a *macro* scale, a phenomenon that generates a subtle play of harmonic densities induced by the alternation **sound-rest**.

A second type of sonorous *continuum* is built at the strings level in the shape of “sonorous webs” set complementarily as a melodic slant: two ascending and two descending paths. This **level III** promoting consistently the serial order, attaches the **dynamic** element in the shape of a polyphonic wave with a figurative profile, generically subordinated to the *pianissimo* well until the end of section C.

<sup>5</sup> P. Bentoiu, op. cit., p. 138.

By analogy with **level II** of the brass, the next excerpt means to clear up a certain “setting” of sculpting the sonorous space, as **the mirror symmetry** becomes, generically speaking, the active principle of “geometrisation” of the entire multivocal edifice played by the entire string section.

The image shows a musical score for strings, labeled 'Fig. no. 8 R 20+3, bars 237-246'. The score is arranged in a system with seven staves. From top to bottom, the staves are: Vni I (Violin I, parts 1-5), Vni II (Violin II, parts 1-3), Vle (Viola, parts 1-3), Vlc. (Violoncello, parts 1,2 and 3-5), and Cb. (Contrabasso, parts 1,2 and 3-5). The music is written in a complex, rhythmic style with many slurs and ties, indicating a dense and intricate texture. The key signature has one flat (B-flat), and the time signature is 4/4.

**Fig. no. 8** R 20<sup>+</sup>3, bars 237-246

The final connection – C17 (bars 370-377) – is in semantic order an apotheosis of victory, and in structural order a resolution of the “conflict” between modal and serial. The *cantus firmus*-melody of **level I** is sublimated in a trill, the strings' movement in level III withdraws in a pedal point on **G**, and the brass section (level II) emits “*bucium*<sup>6</sup>-like calls” which are actually arpeggiated tetrachords inserted in an imitative micro-polyphony propelled repetitively.

## **SECTION “D”** (bars 380-433)

As we have already demonstrated, *Eminesciana III* by Pascal Bentoiu – also dubbed *Concerto for orchestra* – holds genuine symphonic qualities; another argument for the organicity of this work is the ending itself conceived as a synthetic overview of the whole.

A first edifying element in this respect is the expressive **clarinet solo** (subsection D/d-d1, bars 381-396) that is brought back into the foreground, being semantically assimilated to that “earthly divinity” (T2, section B) and played now in the hieratic ambiance of the flageolets and string tremolos with an ample pedal point on **D** (double basses).

<sup>6</sup> *Bucium*: a traditional Romanian wind instrument resembling the *tulnic*, made from metal, willow or linden bark and used particularly by shepherds for calls or signals.

Fig. no. 9 R 35, bars 407-411

This plane surface, defined as a **modal-gravitational** area with a **spectral** nuance, supports the replay of the clarinet theme by the violins as there is a subtle re-occurrence of that well-known **serial** opposition formulated in the very beginning of the work (T1/A). Entrusted this time to the muted brass associated to a group of *archi soli*, the serial theme undergoes a process of **deconstruction** (by discontinuity), being displayed dispersively at the horizontal as well as the vertical levels (subsection D1/d-d1, bars 397-406).

The summarising approach which has become rather predictable culminates with the outburst of the polymodal branchings in section B – intensely evoked in this final stage of the work. However, the reiteration does not refer to the mechanics of copying the previous structures, since one of the major differences is **the soloist emancipation of the strings**, engaged in a sonorous texture which reminds us of Enescu.

The paradox of completing the complex and painstaking symphonic enterprise that is *Eminesciana III* in an oboe solo vanishes with the reflections on this multifaceted musical opus.



Fig. no. 10 R 36<sup>-1</sup>, bars 413-426

Indeed, the extent to which various instruments or sections were given **solo** parts denotes the deliberate **concerto** character of the music, justifying unequivocally the merger of different genres. On the grounds of the arguments made so far, perhaps the dilemma with respect to the genre identity of this work would be found in the rhetorical interrogation: a **sinfonia concertante** or a **concerto for orchestra**?

Going back to the incantation of the solo oboe, let us underline the existence of an expression of contemplation and appeasement occurring quite naturally after the tumultuous atmosphere when the tectonic forces clashed in sections A, B and C, by evoking that monodic thread of ancient Romanian origin spun here in the diatonic transparency of a **C Lydian** kept also as a cadential opportunity for the end of the section and of the work (bars 430-433, R 38<sup>+3</sup>, p. 92/PG).

The concluding segment (D3, bars 413-426) of the work recalls several key moments of the musical discourse in a visionary synthesis that implies the merger of the three generative intonational systems: **modal-diatonic** (Lydian C, solo oboe doubled by the flute), **serial** (*archi soli*/violin, viola, cello) and **spectral** (harmonics in the background, the entire string sections).

Due to its **semantic** content – given by the acuteness of the composer's poetic-philosophic reflection –, to the originality of the compositional **concept** – as defined by the prerogatives of the sonorous lexical and syntactical synthesis – to the gist of the sonorous structure – served by the transparency and the refinement of the musical writing and, last but not least, due to the artistry and diversity of the timbral play, Pascal Bentoiu's *Eminesciana III* remains a touchstone in the Romanian compositional output.

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