

Interpretative and theoretical landmark in the *Modal Liturgy* by Achim Stoia

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Abstract

In march 1937, Achim Stoia is writing a *Liturgy* for mixed choir, monumental by its construction and its complex vocal appliance, with a diatonic tono-modal harmony with major-minor intonations and a harmonic - polyphonic writing that presents the imitations and stretto entrances, the pedals and the accompaniment taken from the byzantine music, and also a metric that combines the binary structures with the third ones.

The popular modal universe that crates the expressive *Liturgy*, combined with an expressive and complex harmonic feeling that gives its uniqueness and the own value only to those creations meant to persist all over the ages.

A particularity of the composer Achim Stoia that help him create monumental sound compositions is that the *Liturgy* treats the vocal lines similar to the instrumental ones, and the melodic speech result from the harmonic blend and not from the horizontal development on the melody, as it happens in the liturgical compositions of other authors of religious choral music, and the endings are always composed expansive on major arrangements.

The musical language complexity comes around the interpretative creation act requires various execution techniques, starting from the *legato* sung manner in the seraphic canticles (*The Cherubic Hymn*), reaching subtle sonorities by *poco staccato* or *cvasi-recitative* (*Holly God*) and ending with a *detachee* suppleness split from the baroque music scene in complex canticles (*We may receive the King of all, Holy, holy, holy, Lord Sabaoth*).

The *Modal Liturgy* of Achim Stoia is in the Romanian musical consciousness a perfection model regarding the harmonic and modal language richness but also as mode of sound construction based on polyphonic principle take from the great Dutch polyphonists technique.

Key words: *Achim Stoia, Liturgy, religious choral music, modal music, choral music, polyphonic music, Romanian composers, Modal Liturgy, byzantine music.*

The composer, the teacher and the conductor Achim Stoia was born in 1910 at Sibiu. He graduated the Conservatoire in Bucharest and Paris and established in Iasi between 1943 and 1973 when he passed to eternity. He became teacher of theory – solfeggios and tune, and after a while Rector of Iasi Conservatoire. The composer conducted the "Moldova" Philharmonic Orchestra Iasi between 1948 and 1961 and was its director between 1950 an 1959.

Among his most important choral compositions we can remember: *Zece colinde* (*Ten carols*) for mixed choir (1937), *Trei cântece de nuntă* (*Three wedding songs*) (1955), *Triptic coral* (*Choral triptych*) (1968) and others. He wrote lieder, the most of them by popular lyrics and symphonic as *Trei jocuri din Ardeal* (*Three dances from Ardeal*) (1947), six suites such as *Suita a II-a și Suita a III-a* (*Second and Third Symphonic Suite*), *Suita a IV-a Sibiana* (*The*

Fourth Sibeian Suite), *Suita a VI-a Ardelenească* (the *Sixth Transylvanian Suite*) and *Rapsodia I Moldovenească* (*The Moldavian Rhapsody*)¹.

Among his religious compositions, the author wrote in March 1973 a *Liturgy* for mixed choir composition is monumental by its construction and its vocal appliance on four to eight voices. It is special by its diatonic modal-tune, its major-minor intonations and its polyphonic-tune writing that presents the reproductions and the entrances in *stretto*, the pedals and the accompaniment taken from the byzantine music and also a metric that combines the binary with the ternary in deployments of 2/4, 3/4, 4/4 and 5/4.

A composer's important peculiarity is that in this writing treats the vocal lines similar to the instrumental ones. Also, the melodically speech results from the harmonic connections and not from the horizontal deployment of the melody, as it happens in the liturgical compositions of other composers of religious choral music. The endings are expansive built on major intonations.

The liturgy contains a *Ectenia mare* (*Big Litany*) where the harmonic writing is omnipresent and the melodic lines have a real recitative character.

Handwritten musical score for a liturgical piece, featuring vocal lines and piano accompaniment. The lyrics are in Romanian: "Doamne mi-lu-e-ște. Doamne mi-lu-e-ște. Păca-sfântă Nașcătoare de Dumnezeu, mântuie-ște-ne pre noi. Ți-e Doamne. A-min." The score includes a "Recit." marking and circled numbers 4 and 5.

In *Antifoanele I și II* (the first and the secondary *Antiphons*), the composer uses a harmonic-counterpoint language, with imitations and *stretto* entrances and also a modal harmony with the ending in both cases on *Sol major*, albeit the beginning speech is, in the first case on *Re minor* and in the second case on *Mi minor*.

Handwritten musical score for a liturgical piece, featuring three vocal parts (Soprano, Alto, Tenor) and piano accompaniment. The lyrics are in Romanian: "Binecuvîntea-șă su-fla-te al meu pre Domnul și toa-te cele din fă- Binecuvîntea-șă sufla-te al meu, și toa-te din fă- Bine-cu-vin- tea-șă sufla-te al meu, și toa-te cele din fă- Binecuvîntea-șă".

¹ http://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Achim_Stoia

Sfinte Dumnezeule (Holy God), *Heruvicul* (the Cherubic Hymn) and *Ca pre împăratul* (As the emperor) are compositions with strong sonorities for seven voices, with polyphonic melodic lines undertaken from one voice to another, with canon evolution and *stretto* imitations.

The canticle *Sfinte Dumnezeule, Sfinte tare, Sfinte fără de moarte miluiește-ne pre noi* (Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal, have mercy on us) is sung in the Liturgy before the *Holy Gospel's* reading and it is intoned three times in a row. Thereupon is sang the *Apolis Glory... and now*, and then resume the end of the canticle *Holy Immortal, bless us*. After a short intervention of the priest on the *Powerful* text is resuming once again the canticle *da capo al fine*.

In the Liturgy written by Achm Stoia, the canticle *Holy God* remains the same, except that every repetition is thought by the composer in a different way, keeping every time the same melodic line. The canticle's pattern is structured as follows:

A (Do – Mi)	-	B (Sol - Sol)	-	A (Sol - Si)
a(m.1-9) – a1(m.9-17) – a2(m.17-25)		b(m.26) – a1 _v (27-31)		a2 _v (m. 32-40)

Written for seven mixed voices, the composition reveal an expansive harmony, very expressive, with inflections starting from the ionic mode on *Do* in the first musical phrase *a*, and reaching *Sol* key note in the second phrase *a1*, *Mi* in the third phrase *a2*, again in *Sol* in section B and in the last phrase *a2_v*, cadence at the end, *Si*.

Although the tempo is not indicated by the author in the score, at the beginning of the canticle, it must be placed, similar to an *Andante*, in order that the low values be easily sung and the speech be cursively led.

The metric is binary, framed in the beginning in a 2/4 beat and in a 4/4 beat towards the end, excepting *the apolis* that is not framed in beat to keep the rhythm and the speech accents, the singing technique used being quasi-recitative.

The composition is not adopted from the Byzantine music practice and neither is written in this style. It has a laic style with classical sonority, very expressive and possible to be song by its melodic current.

The first phrase *a* is intonated at the female voices, *alto*, *sopran II* and *sopran I*, starting from *Do* tonic, to a gradual entrance every two measures of each voice on *Do's* arpeggio, starting from *alto* voice and reaching the end of the phrase on *Sol* tonic.



The melody contains two melodic motifs (*m1* & *m2*). The first one is intonated at *alto* in the first four beats and the second continued at the 1st soprano in the next four beats. The entrance of the second soprano in the third beat of the third *mi* makes nothing else than conferring overall an expansive sonority to the melodic speech and creating the pass to the motif intoning from soprano I.

The rhythm is mostly structured in eighth and quarter values, with a general quarter pulsation that records to the musical speech a kind of necessary fluency to express the vocal ensemble.

Due to the musicality of the melodic line and to the upward modulation from *do* to *sol*, the general sonority acquires a brightness and transparent color that must be revealed in the musical phrase interpretation.

The second phrase *a₁* is distributed for the male voices, bass, first and second tenor, identical to the one for female voices, only that the tonal plan consists here on *Sol* tonic and the interpretation manner is nothing different than the previous phrase.



The third musical phrase a_2 is written for all the seven voices distributing the melody for female voices like in the first phrase, but keeping the musical speech in *sol* with cadence this time on *mi* and accompaniment at the male voices. Every vocal part is divided in two voices, first and second tenor and baritone-bass.

The image shows a musical score for seven voices. The lyrics are in Romanian: "sânta țară de munte, milu-ște-ne pre noi." The score is written on seven staves. The top three staves are for female voices (Soprano, Alto, Tenor), and the bottom four staves are for male voices (Tenor, Baritone, Bass) and accompaniment. The music is in a key with one sharp (F#) and a 4/4 time signature. The lyrics are: "sânta țară de munte, milu-ște-ne pre noi." The score is written in a traditional musical notation style with notes, rests, and lyrics.

The difference between the previous phrases consist in the expansive dynamic that can be thought as a culmination of the first A period and the rhythm's change in the first syllables of the expression *bless us*, that are transformed from eights to sixties. In the interpretation, those low values should not change the character of the phrase. There must be performed soft, with air attack, in *legato* and with much delicacy and musical pressure to the following eighth values.

The dynamic of the musical speech it's realizing both by adding all the four male voices in accompaniment and by realizing a dynamic in steps starting by the *mp* tone, in the same time with the gradual entrance from the female voices.

The second section *B* is divided in two musical phrases. The first one, *b*, is metrically free with a modal harmonic speech on the mixolidic *sol*, and the second $a1_v$ is the arguing of the second musical motif $m2$ accompanied at the male voices with an harmonic speech that continues to the *sol* tonic but changing the ionian mode and an recitative character accompaniment at the female voices.

In the interpretation, all this musical development must be intoned on *legato* in a slightly tone of *mf* conduction the voices on suspended and soft emission cursively in the musical expression of the *b* phrase given by the

syllable articulation similar to the current speaking and supporting on the pronounced syllable from the words *Slavă Ta-tă-lui, Fi-u-lui, Sfân-tu-lui Duh, ve-cii ve-ci-lor* (*Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit*). Besides, those aspects are indicated by the composer using accents, but there are not exactly accentuations than underlies of the sound and syllable.



The execution rhythm should not be rigid but elastic and tight on the speech's rhythm, with a slow accent on the first syllable of the word *Glory* and following a cursively execution.

The emission and the sound color must be as natural as possible, with impost sounds on round and suspended position, placing the vocals in the same vertical opening of the mouth.

In the first phrase *al*, the principal voice that affirms the melody is the first tenor, all the others being accompaniment voices.



The choral speech is two planes structured, the first homophonous with the melody from the first tenor harmonic accompanied of the three male voices, second tenor, the baritone and the bass, and the second, in counterpoint to the

first un, where the female voices develop an modal harmonic speech in sound blocs with recitative character.

It's very important that in the general male voices speech the descendent line of the bass be very well heard, completing the first tenor ascending line, realizing this way an range choral speech with an expansive sound that crowns the whole representation in a emotionally expressive culmination. For this reason it's necessary that the bass descendent way from *sol* to *mi* be sung in a big sustaining in the same tone with the one from the fist tenor.

The female choir's musical plan is totally different of the male voices one by it's harmonic writing that evolve in sound blocs in a recitative character structure on constant values of eights and with a different song manner by it's execution in *poco staccato* of the eights values, in contrast to the quarters that have to be sung on support.

To the general overlap of the two sound planes to not confuse each other must be kept a clear dynamic, and the tone rigorous, without fluctuations, except the end that must be executed in the same way for all the choral voices.

The last section of the present composition A ($a2_v$) is the resumption of the send phrase *a2* but argued, in another tempo – *poco Adagio e Maestoso*, with a metric framed in a measure of 4/4 and an enriched harmony and a *Si* tonic cadence in the end.

The interpretation problems are similar to the third phrase and that they rest valid also for this last section of the canticle *Holly God*.

Innul Heruvic (The *Cherubic*), written also for a seven voices choir is structured on a Lydian manner with a *mi* tonic, a melodic that results from the modal connections and the baroque melodic lines blend, with a harmonic-

polyphonic treatment of the choral speech, items of accompaniment and pedals, imitations and *stretto* entrances and also according blocks in the end with a binary metric in 4/4 measures and an *Adagio* placed tempo, similar to the one from the ecclesiastical practice.

The composition has a two-party form with successions of phrases defined by cadences, as follows:

A (Mi – Sol #) : Av (Mi – Mi)
 a (m.1-9)-a1(m.9-14) –a2(m.15-23)-a3(m.23-35) : a_v(m.36-45)-a1_v(m.45-50)-a4(m.51-63)

Melodically, the canticle consists in large scale lines similar to baroque melodic lines with different kind of vocalizations, starting from the big value ones of quarters and half to slow values of eights that appear all over the composition.

The construction manner of the choral speech is based on a combination between the harmonic treatment and the polyphonic one. The modal diatonic harmony, very complete overall, shows from the vertical connections of the musical arrangements where on a Lydian manner written on *mi* tonic, the composer weaves a real scourge connection avalanche where the secondary steps are prevailing, in full arrangements of seventh and none, with frequent delays that result from the seventh and none extension, in moving steps an chromatic sections that bring color and make deeper the expressivity of some words from the canticle lyrics. Also, the harmony's beauty consists in the enrichment of the section notes, of the superior, inferior or even double embroidery in the musical phrases ending cadences. Every second, third or quarter connections are very often but also the major-minor intonations and the enharmonic.

The free polyphonic writing consists in the melodic vocal lines overlap that are blending in a melodic-rhythmic complementary that produces dialogues on similar or not melodic motifs, *stretto* entrances, melodic scenes and imitations taken from a voice to another.

The modal polyphony result from the melodic lines horizontal speech and from its overlap but also from imitation of the motif heads on perfect quarter interval (measures 17-19, 23-26).

Rhythmically, the composition is structured in eight, quarter, half and large notes values, without exceptional formulae that can make problems, but hard realizing in terms of support especially than the tempo is slow, even at times enlarged. The execution manner being on *legato* with well sustained sounds, all the notes values must be song on all their time, sometimes even longer, depending of the interpretative requirements.

Regarding the tempo, the canticle is song usually in a slow moving of *Adagio*, as it is also checked by the composer, especially if it is song in the

church in the Divine Liturgy. If the canticle is represented in a concert, than it can be song a bit moved and more cursively without changing the character and the expressivity, and all that to do not dally very much the musical speech and to do not risk to make the canticle static.

The dynamic fits in the slow shades of *p-mp* parameters for that the priest prayers be heard, but also because it's a sacrament prayer, seraphic that remembers of Seraphim and Cherubim.

In the general execution must be followed that in the first phrase *a*, the attack of the first sound be soft and on the air, in a slow shade of *pp*, conduction the voices on air and cursively on quarter values, especially at the tenor and alto, with a delay melodic tension on seventies and none, attacking precisely rhythmically every *stretto* entrances, but with intonated sounds on soft voice and attack sustaining the auftakt on eighties or quarters and in the end of the phrase a slow placing at the first tenor.

A musical score for a vocal ensemble, consisting of six staves. The top five staves are for voices (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass, and another voice part), and the bottom staff is for the basso continuo. The lyrics are: "Ca - ri pre He - ru - vimi, pre He ru - vimi". The music is in a slow, expressive style with long notes and ties. A section marked 'A' is indicated at the bottom of the score.

A musical score for a vocal ensemble, consisting of six staves. The top five staves are for voices (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass, and another voice part), and the bottom staff is for the basso continuo. The lyrics are: "pre He - ru - vimi, vimi, pre He - ru - vimi, pre He - ru - vimi, He - ru - vimi pre He - ru - vimi, vimi, pre He - ru - vimi." The music continues the slow, expressive style with long notes and ties. A section marked 'A' is indicated at the bottom of the score.

In the first phrase, a_1 the alto's melody and the first soprano's blend must be placed in the principal plan, the entrances on auftakt on quarter values but especially on eightsies must be sustained on air and the tension be conduced to the following musical note, all the imitations on the melodic descendent cell must be heard in the secondary plan, but rhythmically precise and with a soft voice of *legato*. The end of the phrase must be placed in a transparent sonority to all the seven voices, by realizing a *tenuto* in a decreased arrangement of *double do hash* and a discreet delay to the final un.

Cu tai-nă, cu tai-nă în
 Cu tai-nă, cu tai-nă, tai-nă
 Cu tai-nă, cu taină, cu tai-
 cu taină în-chipe-im - Cu taină în-chi-
 Cu taină închipe-im, tai-nă, tai-nă, cu
 Cu tai-nă, tai-nă în
 Cu tai-nă în

chi-pe-im
 Cu tai-nă în-chipe-im.
 nă în-chipe-im.
 im închipe-im
 tai-nă în-chipe-im.
 chipe-im, în-chipe-im.
 chi-pe-im

In the next phrase a_2 development it appears in the first two measures an according sonority that must be executed with a soft attack in *pp* shade on the first sound, conduction the melodic speech on *legato* and sustaining the sounds and emphasizing the baritone melodic motif from the sixteen measure, with soft

The last phrase of the composition – *a4*, has the character of a *code* and and it's arrangin voices on an expressive melodic counterpoint presented a *alto*. The end is blending in a descendent chromatic scene on a *diminuendo e perduto* sonority.

The image shows a handwritten musical score for a canticle. It consists of several staves of music with lyrics written below. The lyrics are in Romanian and include the phrase "Toată gloria s'o lepădăm" (All glory we give up). The score includes dynamic markings such as "dim. e perdo." and a section labeled "A" at the bottom. The music is written in a style typical of 20th-century liturgical music, with complex polyphonic textures.

The canticle *Ca pre împăratul* (*We may receive the King of all*) from the Divine Liturgy written by Achim Stoia is a composition with a complex sonority, written for seven voices on a harmonic-polyphonic musical speech, where is presented the tenet between the tow choirs, the female and the male one, with imitations an stretto entrances, with baroque melodic lines where the voice is treated similar to instruments.

The structured form is in a singular big section where are succeeding three musical phrases, by the following scheme:

A (Mi-Mi)
a (m.1-7) – b (m.7-20) – c(m.21-28)

The harmonic is tono-modal with the tonic on *Mi major*, with successions of arrangements in accompaniment of the tenet realizing voices, were prevail the scourge connections I-IV-I-II-I, with modulations at the major homonymous of the third step *major hash sol* in the end of the first phrase *a*, then at *Si Major* in the end of the second phrase *b*, where the modulation it's evolving ascending on quarter or descending on quint – *Sol Hash – Do Hash – Sol Hash – Do Hash – Fa Hash – Si – Mi*. In the last phrase *c* with *stretto* entrances from quint to quint *mi – si - fa hash – do hash – sol hash*.

The musical speech polyphonic treatment consists in realizing a tenet strict at eight between the two choirs, the one of female voices and the one of

The whole polyphonic construction must be song very rhythmical precise ant with clear entrances, accenting in attack the first sound and then it's retirement, with a execution in *detachee* of the melodic lines with a clear syllables articulation and sustaining the melodic tension until the final sound of every musical motif.

The last canticle of the Divine Liturgy is *Sfânt, Sfânt, Sfânt Domnul Savaoth* (*Holy, holy, holy, Lord Savaoth*) written for a double choir on eight voices, in third measure of 6/8, with a vocal-instrumental baroque writing, thought as a concert with a middle part in 3/4 written in placed tempo, the sung manner being kept like in the previous canticle.

Moderato e
Maestoso.

Sfânt, sfânt, sfânt e Dom-nul Sa-va-ot, Sa-va-ot

Sfânt, sfânt, sfânt e Dom-nul Savaot, Sa-va-ot, Dom-nul

Sfânt, sfânt, sfânt e Dom-nul Sa-va-ot, Sa-va-ot

Sfânt, sfânt, sfânt e Dom-nul Sava-ot

Sfânt, sfânt, sfânt e Dom-nul Sava-ot

The *Modal Liturgy* of Achim Stoia is in the Romanian musical consciousness a perfection model regarding the harmonic and modal language richness but also as mode of sound construction based on polyphonic principle take from the great Dutch polyphonists technique.