

Some of Vladimir Axionov's musicological outlook on Gheorghe Neaga's compositions

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Abstract: Artistic figure of the composer Gheorghe Neaga is an elaborate and indispensable phenomenon for the autochthonous musical art. Among those who offered to the posterity important musicological researches is found Vladimir Axionov. His investigations – whose object of study is the symphony and symphonic music genres, the evolution or periodization of the autochthonous symphonic music, folklorism and the influence of folklore on the composing techniques, the problem of style, etc. – remain fundamental for the national musicology, and the frequent analysis of the opuses of the composer Gheorghe Neaga in virtually all his studies – separately or together with the research of the compositions of other authors – shows the important role that Neaga's compositional repertoire plays in the creative processes performed in the local music and in its many trends. However, in almost all investigations signed by Vladimir Axionov – it addresses repeatedly different problems of the history and theory of music – musicologist found masterly examples from the work of Gheorghe Neaga, proposing them up as a model for subsequent musicological researches. Therefore, this article contains some findings of musicologist on various lines of research based on Neaga's opuses, as three symphonies, vocal symphony *Perpetuum Mobile*, suite for orchestra, symphonic poem *Danco*, violin concertos, *Quartet No. 1* – all considered samples both for each genre separately and for all autochthonous musical art.

Keywords: compositic repertoire, scientific research, articles, publications, musicology.

1. Introduction

Gheorghe Neaga is among exponents of proving the historicity of the autochthonous music school, being a composer which demonstrates through his whole musical work, the possibility of creating representative works under a constant attachment to the idea of the national art. His artistic figure is a special phenomenon, so his works indicates a representative creator profile, marked primarily by a free use of the musical language, varied techniques of composition and diversifying resources of musical expression, used not as an end in itself but as a prerequisite to formulate original artistic conceptions. Each opus signed by Gheorghe Neaga can be perceived individually as a work

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with distinctive features, whether the author continued compositional traditions, whether it tended to implement techniques to renew the music.

Symphonic, vocal-symphonic, instrumental or vocal chamber music, his works represent a cell of the national cultural heritage, a fact reported and demonstrated through the researches of the musicology from Moldova, signed by authors like A. Abramovici, I. Miliutina, E. Cletinici, Z. Stolear, E. Tkaci, V. Axionov, S. Țircunova, T. Berezovicova, P. Rotaru, V. Mircos, O. Vlaicu, N. Kozlova, etc. Fundamental, comprehensive, scientific or popular science, generalizing or chronological, they have as objects of study either violinist, composer and teacher Gheorghe Neaga's activity, either one or more of his works investigated separately or together with other composers's works.

This article can be considered a synthesis study of some visions on the Neaga's repertoire behaved by musicologist, researcher and scientist Vladimir Axionov. Fundamental pillar of the autochthonous musicology, he signed more than one hundred scientific works published in the country and abroad (in Great Britain, Belarus, Romania, Russia, etc.), took part into many national and international conferences, seminars, symposiums, and his research was awarded many times by the *Union of Composers and Musicologists of Moldova*.

Clearly concerned with certain periods in the history of music, with composition and performing repertoires, but also with other categories of primary importance in the art study, the musicologist dedicated a large part of his writings to the activity of the local authors of instrumental music. Among them there is Gheorghe Neaga, whose creations are examined either together with those of other composers in extensive scientific works¹ and in articles included in specialised publications², either separately in a few studies³ exclusively dedicated to the author, deemed, from a musicological point of view, landmarks. Somehow or another, the fact is that the frequent analysis of

¹ Such as *Tendințe stilistice în creația componistică din Republica Moldova (muzica instrumentală)* [Stylistic trends in the composing creation in Moldova (instrumental music)], *Simfonia din Moldova: evoluția istorică, varietățile de gen* [Symphony in Moldova: Historical evolution, genre varieties], *Arta muzicală din Republica Moldova: istorie și modernitate* [Musical art in Moldova: history and modernity], etc.

² Such as *Cercetări de muzicologie* [Musicology Research], *Arta* [Art], *Anuar științific* [Scientific Year-Book], *Știința* [Science], *Artes, Învățământul artistic – dimensiuni culturale* [Artistic education – Cultural dimensions], *Viața muzicală a Basarabiei în secolul XX* [Basarabia's musical life in the 20th Century], *Folclorul muzical din Moldova și creația componistică* [Musical Folklore in Moldova and composing creation], *Pagini de muzicologie* [Musicology Pages], etc.

³ Among these there is the biographic publication *Gheorghe Neaga: 70 de ani de la nașterea compozitorului* [Gheorghe Neaga: 70 Years from the composer's birth] and the fundamental analytical study *Третья симфония Г. Няги: композиционно-драматургические особенности, трактовка жанра* [Third Symphony by G. Neaga: compositional and dramatic features, interpretation of the genre].

Neaga's works in virtually all the musicologist's writings show the importance of the repertoire signed by Gheorghe Neaga in the continuity of the creative process and in outlining certain trends in the local compositions.

2. Some stylistic points of view

The history and theory of musical styles occupy a vast space in the researcher Vladimir Axionov's writings, and the fundamental study in this respect is the monograph *Tendințe stilistice în creația componistică din Moldova (muzica instrumentală)* [Stylistic trends in the composing creation in Moldova (instrumental music)]. Among the examples proposed by the author there are compositions signed by Gheorghe Neaga, whose creation "proves the use of poly-stylistic phenomena"⁴ (Axionov, 2006, p. 109). The author of the the investigation supports that "the axiological evaluation of the style depends on the artistic predilections of the composers, performers and audience" (Axionov, 2006, p. 170), because "in the music of the 20th century, together with the mono-stylistic and monovalent orientations in terms of genre that we can appreciate as rare cases, the fusion, interpenetration, synthesis of the various stylistic trends and species are predominant." (Axionov, 2006, p. 174).

In another study of stylistics – *Exponential folcloric în spectrul stilistic al muzicii instrumentale a compozitorilor din Moldova* [The folkloric exponent in the stylistic spectrum of instrumental music of the composers from Moldova] – the musicologist indicates, from the perspective of the historical periodization, the changes occurred with the modifications caused by certain socio-cultural events in the functionality of the popular music taken over by composers through various compositional processes. Vladimir Axionov points out that in the late 1950s the "identification of the popular character of the musical work with its purely external similitude with certain folklore phenomena was rejected. This does not mean that the quotation and processing of popular songs was generally abandoned, but the methods in question no longer remain prevalent. *Symphony No. 2* by Gheorghe Neaga (...) and the symphonic poem *Danco* by the same author" (Axionov, 1998, p. 81) can serve as proof of the above-mentioned processes.

Other creations mentioned in the same article are Neaga's instrumental concerts – where we can notice "new interpretations of the genre, of the compositional structure and of the timbral palette" (Axionov, 1998, p. 82) – and *Symphony No. 3*, for which the researcher indicates Post-Romantic and Post-Impressionist composing principles, thus "using some speeds, cells and processes coming from the folk music, Gheorghe Neaga developed then within the complex sound structures, whose essence is far from the ethnic context" (Axionov, 1998, p. 82).

⁴ All quotations from this text are translated from Romanian, except one from page 6, which is translated from Russian.

Whereas the musical folklore implies the function of a bridge between popular archetypes and compositional ones. In the case of *Symphony No. 2* and of the symphonic poem *Danco*, “the popular element reproduces the ethno-folkloric context of and becomes, at the same time, an essential component of the artistic content, subordinated to the symphonic conception” (Axionov, *Evoluția...*, 1993, p. 59). In relation to the vocal symphony *Perpetuum Mobile*, Vladimir Axionov underlines that “the function of carrier of the national stylistic elements is fulfilled not only by the music (of folk origin), but also by the poetry” (Axionov, 2006, p. 66), more specifically by G. Dumitriu’s lyrics.

Moreover, Vladimir Axionov refutes the impossibility of including the monodic structure of the vocal popular song into the symphonic instrumental music, explaining that “the degree of organic inclusion of the popular motif into the fabric of the composer’s symphonic depends on the composer’s skill to detect “the hidden harmony” and “the hidden counterpoint” in an absolutely monodic song, to use the effect of the “polyphonic monody” in the structure of the symphonic creation, which allows for achieving the “monodic polyphony” as a result of duplicating the melodic voice based on thickened timbre mixes” (Axionov, *Realizarea...*, 2013, p. 63). In order to exemplify the principle of plurivocal monody, the author proposes the first part of *Symphony No. 2*, which shows a thickening mixture of the melodic core of the outlawry song *Bate-i, Doamne, pe ciocoi*.

Another idea says that the instrumental creation and the fiddle traditions have multiple influences on professional music. “The processes of the popular violin interpretative art (...) mainly contributed to the development of the genre of concert for violin” (Axionov, *Utilizarea...*, 2013, p. 61), in this case, among the names of several local composers listed by Vladimir Axionov as authors of opuses for violin in the concert genre, we can also find Gheorghe Neaga. “It is necessary to distinguish the influence of the fiddle traditions at different levels of the symphonic composition works, taking into account their proportions. (...) The effect of variability depends on the general context, on which they exert their influence. The intensity of the nuanced contrast of the elements of instrumental folk music becomes all the more vigorous that fewer elements are employed throughout the entire composition” (Axionov, *Utilizarea...*, 2013, p. 62). Thus, in the third part of *Symphony No. 3* sound allusions to songs interpreted by a folk music band are outlined based on a philisophical nature.

Also *Symphony No. 3*, as well as *No. 2*, highlight another facet of the stylistic mixture: putting face to face, in a manifestly grotesque way, indigenous musical elements and Western ones. “Obtaining a certain special artistic effect, composers sometimes emphasize in particular the process of confronting folk and non-folk elements in the same musical work” (Axionov, 2006, p. 81). It is also important to underline that “combining elements of folk origin with neoclassical ones is widespread in Bessarabia composers’ creation from the second half of the 20th century” (Axionov, 2006, p. 126), this process undergoes

an amplification especially after George Enescu's death, which is the historical period in which there are "certain attempts to restore and modernize the West European model of pre-classical suite" (Axionov, 2006, p. 133). And that trend is noticed, as emphasized by the researcher, in Neaga's works as, including *Suită pentru orchestră de cameră* [Suite for Chamber Orchestra], *Arie* [Aria], *Bolero and Allegro*.

As we know, the general trends of the musical phenomena in the second half of the 20th century are directed towards losing the traditional gravity and support centres. Thus, a process of interaction of the canonical means of creating musical opuses with the innovating ones takes place, resulting in a capitalization and a revaluation not only of the musical language, but also of the whole arsenal used to create an "artistic" product. However, "the symphony as musical-philosophical genre could not be isolated and from the social life and from the whole cultural and artistic climate of that epoch" (Axionov, 2012, p. 70).

The musicologist Vladimir Axionov said that "the phenomenon specific to the musical neoclassicism became elements composing the multi-aspectual stylistic palette of *Symphony No. 2* by Gheorghe Neaga. The gradually ascending melodic figures at the beginning of the development compartment in the first part of the Gheorghe Neaga's symphony resemble those previously used on an extensive manner by composers of the Baroque era (*allegri concertanti* form the instrumental works signed by Vivaldi, Bach, Händel); nevertheless, the researchers of Neaga's music are absolutely right to notice that Neaga never resorted directly to such sources, but took into account this manner of transposing them, proposed by Shostakovich (*Symphony No. 11*)" (Axionov, 2006, p. 141).

Thus, *Symphony No. 2* of the composer from Chisinau comes to be viewed as a model of dramatic, monumental symphony. "The dramaturgical peak of Neaga's symphony (the second part) recalls associations not only with the pre-classical sarabands and passacaglias, but also, and especially with the symphonic passacaglias signed by Shostakovici (*Symphonies No. 8* and *No. 9*) and Honegger (*Symphony No. 2*). We should mention especially the influence of architectonic principles used by Shostakovici (previously introduced by Mahler) on the first part of Neaga's *Symphony. Symphonies No. 5* and *No. 7* by Shostakovici are proof of a certain review of the dramaturgical functions fulfilled by the compartments of the sonata form. The dramaturgical opposition created is situated between the exhibition and the development of the form of sonata, replacing the canonical contrast between the primary and secondary theme within the exhibition. This trend can be noticed in the dramaturgical outlines of the first part of *Symphony No. 2* by Gheorghe Neaga" (Axionov, 2006, p. 142).

Another stylistic phenomenon started by Berlioz and continued by Mahler, Berg, Shostakovich and other western and eastern composers, "consist

of the propensity to create grotesque images, exposing the evil by a hypertrophied emphasis of the trivial, monstrous, ugly matters. (...) Various versions of the bivalent *scherzo*, used to express, on the one hand, the effect of the “artistic game”, and on the other hand – the actual unmasking of the evil bearers” (Axionov, 2006, p. 143) can be found in *Quartet No. 1* and *Symphony No. 3* signed by Gheorghe Neaga.

A further facet of the revaluation of arts in the second half of the 20th century is the avant-garde, followed by neo- and post avant-garde. In this epoch the art of the Western European countries and of the U.S.A. was placed with all gratitude at the disposal of the representatives who laid the foundations of rules that contravened the traditional multi-century old ones. In a local context, in the epoch immediately following the lifting of the Iron Curtain “among the representatives of the elderly generation of composers, the propensity for the graphic music proves” (Axionov, 2006, p. 165) and Gheorghe Neaga, in whose works “the linear exposure, the inventive contraposition of sound lines and layers are predominant” (Axionov, 2006, p. 165).

3. Some exposures on symphonic opuses

Vladimir Axionov’s preferences for the research of the symphonic music genres are evident in almost all his studies, “because the symphonic creation shows more distinctively the temporal and spatial principles of the existence of large-scale musical phenomena. This area of the composing creation synthesizes the most important features of the musical language and architectonics, which become apparent in polyphonic, multi-timbral, voluminous, sound condition” (Axionov, *Privire generală...*, 1993, p. 41). However, evidence of this fact is the repeated recording of the three symphonies written by Gheorghe Neaga, the vocal symphony *Perpetuum Mobile*, the suite for orchestra, and the symphonic poem *Danco*. The above mentioned scientific article is also dedicated to *Symphony No. 3*, and in the conclusion of this article, after a detailed analysis of architectural structure, of all elements of the musical language and of the themes of the work, the author concludes: “Gheorghe Neaga’s *Third Symphony* represents a remarkable phenomenon of the Moldovan contemporary symphonic music. This indicates not only the composer’s compositional evolution, but also a continuation of the fruitful development of the genre of symphony in Moldova”⁵ (Аксенов, 1988, p. 41). Moreover, in the same study, Vladimir Axionov also makes reference to the second symphony composed by Neaga (a creation awarded the State Prize of Moldova in 1967), highlighting by means of the comparative methods the course of the evolution of Gheorghe Neaga’s compositional thinking between the years when the two symphonic opuses were written.

⁵ Translation from Russian.

In another scientific publication – *Contribuții la studierea simfoniei din a doua jumătate a secolului XX* [Contributions to the study of the symphony in the second half of the 20th century] – Vladimir Axionov highlights the trends that influence the character of the links of the symphony to other musical genres or to outsiders of art. However, “the key to the recognition of the specificity of the genres of symphonic music remains the analysis of their internal structure. (...) Depending on the type of the content we are highlighting, in general, two groups of symphonies by composers from Moldova. The first group is dominated by objective artistic images: nature, people’s life in its various manifestations. (...) Sometimes, folk songs are landmarks for the identification of heroic popular movements” (Axionov, 1992, p. 58), through the examples being found the song *Bate-i, Doamne, pe ciocoi*, from *Symphony No. 2* by Gheorghe Neaga. At the same time, on the other hand the researcher highlights another facet of symphonies, since “the second group of works emphasizes psychological processes” (Axionov, 1992, p. 59), one of the creations involving an intense subjective character being Neaga’s *Third symphony*, which reflects strongly individualized trends.

In an attempt to systematize somewhat symphonic opuses, musicologist says that “an important means of musical embodiment of the ideas, artistic images is the process of generalization through genre. Sometimes, the semantics of the musical genres dominating the themes of the symphony determines the actual semantics of the symphony” (Axionov, 1992, p. 59). In this context, Vladimir Axionov indicates two categories of creations in which the key-position would be occupied either by de signs of dance, movement music genres, or of the cantabile music. As an example the latter, the author of the study also mentions the third part of *Symphony No. 2* by Gheorghe Neaga - *Lento maestoso* - which is the dramatic centre of the work.

Another dimension of systematization above protrudes “analyzing the relationships of the individual forms in relation to the typical compositional structures” (Axionov, 1992, p. 60). The list of the examples related to the category of individual architectonic structures also includes Neaga’s vocal symphony *Perpetuum Mobile* – a work consisting of thirteen miniature parts, which are grouped with each other, indicating a second grade level of musical form, and also *Symphony No. 3*, within which the structure of the sonata interacts with complex tripartite form, or, “the group of the single-part symphonies clearly highlights the interaction of different constructive principles, the tendency to combine forms, including free structures” (Axionov, 1992, p. 61).

Two other compositions proposed by the musicologist are *Symphony No. 1* in the case of the cyclic quadripartite structure with slow music in the second, and *Symphony No. 2*, in which lyricism is concentrated in the third part. Moreover, “the quadripartite structure of the cycle, announced by the author, is often combined with other structures characteristic of the second level”

(Axionov, 1992, p. 61), as the first part of the *Second* and *Third Symphonies* by Gheorghe Neaga could be perceived as sections of a possible tripartite for composed, and their ends could conventionally be considered an epilogue.

Another important sentence says that “the coexistence of the canonical and non-canonical phenomena is obvious. At one end we can find works that reveal a rigid understanding by the authors of the fact that the symphony is a sonata cycle for a large symphony orchestra. (...) At the other end we can find operas, called symphonies, which is characterized by a free treatment of the interpretative formation and of the musical structure” (Axionov, 1994, p. 16). Opposition of these phenomena confirms composers’ tendency to deny to some extent the traditional musical structures and to follow altered paths with the purpose of an extension typical for the evolution strategies. “A special place is occupied by the symphonies with vocal elements situate located in the transitional space between the the vocal music and instrumental-symphonic music genres, demonstrating various forms of relationship between poetry and music” (Axionov, 1992, p. 62). In this context, Vladimir Axionov indicates two varieties of the symphony with vocal elements: the monumental one, with oratorio and cantata elements, and the one that is closer to the chamber music, mentioned by one of the “chronic symphonies” (according to Vladimir Axionov) – the vocal symphony *Perpetuum Mobile* by Gheorghe Neaga.

4. Conclusions

Thanks to autochthonous musicology, the repeated approach of the various matters present in the history and theory of music – some of which are described hereinabove – and the exemplification of the works signed by Gheorghe Neaga does not end here. Although the studies initiated by the musicologist Vladimir Axionov – along with those of other autochthonous researchers – remain fundamental, their value being one undeniable, there is also the problem of the insufficiency of the scientific resolution of a number of concerns in the musical art. And whereas Gheorghe Neaga’s compositional repertoire represents one of the matters with an interrogational nature in the local culture perimeter – fact consented by musicologist, researcher and scientist Vladimir Axionov too – an exegetic study in this respect would lead to the culmination of the recovery of an important part of a truly essential domain in the autochthonous cultural and artistic existence and perpetuation.

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