

# Liviu Dănceanu – Reflection of music vs Music of reflection

LAURA OTILIA VASILIU

University of Arts “George Enescu” Iași  
ROMANIA\*

**Abstract:** This study is an introduction to the works of Liviu Dănceanu, a renowned theoretician and practitioner of Romanian music during the last three decades. Liviu Dănceanu was born in 1954 in Roman, he graduated the National University of Music from Bucharest (1980) in the composition class of Ștefan Niculescu. His work includes more than 150 musical works, 20 volumes of musical philosophy and hermeneutics, numerous articles. As manager and conductor of the *Archaeus* ensemble, founded in 1985, he has held a rich concert life abroad. He won numerous awards in composition, among which: “Studium de Toulouse Prize”, 1986, The Award of the Romanian Academy, 1989, awards of UCMR, 1988, 1990, 1994, 2001, 2004, 2006, ACIN award (for film music, 1988). His compositions have been ordered by festivals, musical associations or orchestras worldwide. If at first superficial glance, his work is centered mostly on the creation, interpretation and reflection of musicology, its more attentive reception presents the unity of his artistic manifestations, a permanent contemplation of the world, human condition, the philosophy of art and the fate of music.

**Keywords:** musical epistemology, avant-garde, texture, aleatoricism, musical aesthetics, *Archaeus*

## 1. Introduction

Liviu Dănceanu<sup>1</sup>'s reception by the Romanian musical world lies under the sign of contradiction and paradox. Even though he is a musician with an impressive body of work – composer of over 150 opera, organiser and conductor of over 600 concerts of the *Archaeus* ensemble, author of 20 volumes, numerous articles, studies – even if his opera often appear on posters of modern music concerts in the country and abroad, reviews of his music are rarely published. Undoubtedly, the composer, musicologist and conductor

---

\* otiliastrug@yahoo.com

<sup>1</sup> Liviu Dănceanu specialised at the International Seminar of Composition in Kasimierz-Dolni (1984) where he studied with Xenakis, Kotonski and Paul Patterson. In addition, he made study trips to Paris, London, Prague, Tallin, Warsaw, Moscow. He had been the director of important festivals of new music (“Modern Music Days – Bacău” since 1986, “International Week of Modern Music” in Bucharest, 1992-1996; 2001-2002; “Archaeus festival” in Bucharest, since 1998). Liviu Dănceanu holds a PhD in Musicology and is a Professor at the National University of Music in Bucharest.

Liviu Dănceanu has not been promoted by critics but has asserted himself through sensitivity and the originality of his “musical” voices.

Valentina Sandu Dediu (2002, pp. 195-200) provides a clear image of composer Liviu Dănceanu’s position in the recent history of Romanian music. The author integrates Dănceanu into the group of composers that developed their technique by means of partially random heterophonic textures (alongside Costin Cazaban, Liana Alexandru, Călin Ioachimescu, Adrian Iorgulescu, Doina Rotaru, Violeta Dinescu, etc. – born from 1946 to 1958) while also making use of earlier generations’ techniques: spectral music with an ethos of incantation, being interested in defining some archetypes with different ways of integrating indeterminacy, minimalism or electroacoustic music (Nicolae Brânduș, Lucian Meșianu, Mihai Moldovan, Octavian Nemescu, Costin Miereanu, composers born from 1935 to 1945).

Starting from the image of a person gifted for music, literature and philosophy, we may see his abnegation, patience, sacrifice in pursuing his path by means of a polyphonic reflection upon each moment of his becoming. We witness the composer rushing to conquer the new music by assimilating creatively all avant-garde in fashion in the 80s. As a conductor, he interpreted his own scores and the scores of several modern and other composers as a way of developing his knowledge of music. In counterpoint, the aesthete looks for meanings by varied and comprehensive reading and by building his style as a learned essayist and poet of musicology.

## **2. 1978-1985. Composition versus Musicology**

From the beginning, his work had been marked by the synchronisation of ways of expression and articulation. In composition, in the class of Professor Ștefan Niculescu and immediately afterwards, Dănceanu reveals a special propensity for assimilating contemporary vocabulary, from textural writing to different forms of indeterminacy, later from using natural resonance to an openness towards instrumental theatre. It is important for the style that developed itself in the 90s that the critics of the time saw the author’s inclination towards compositional formulas drawn from tradition as doubled by his “interest for musical ontology” and only partially by his interest in experimenting with new sounds. (Crețu, 1985, p. 16).

From the early compositions, we will discuss poem for orchestra *Angulus ridet*, op. 7 (1981) and the first composition from the *quasi* series: *Quasisimfonia*, op. 13 (1984).

***Angulus ridet***. The title is explained by the text being sung (voice) by the instrumentalists of the ensemble – a fragment from an ode by Horace. “Ille terrarum mihi omnes angulus ridet” [This spot smiles at me more than any other on earth]. The poem “may be viewed as *ars componistica* – says the author. The opus belongs to a period when I was contemplating on the act of creation from an ontological perspective and during which I imagined and

investigated the formal-generative principle: the passage of works from the subsistence of some structures to having an essential existence starting from an accidental one” (Crețu, 1985, p. 20). The compositional strategy is revealed in the first section – **A**. According to directions in the scores, the 7 fragments may be played in any order. We may though notice great differences among them in terms of temporal extension, orchestration, writing: **A1** – attack - diatonic orchestral *cluster*; **A2** – *glissando* airy texture; **A3** – rhythmic insertion of untunable persussion; **A4** – medium density; texture **A5** – rhythmic attacks; **A6** – pointilism; **A7** – textural accumulation, pedals. Looking at the composer’s work as a whole, we may notice the expressiveness testing of several structures, types of writing, timbral components, effects – a compendium of contemporary music whose analytical, specific and synthetic aspects are found in drama.



Fig. 1 Liviu Dănceanu, *Angulus Ridet*, op. 7 – poem for orchestra

*Quasisinfonia*, op. 13 (1984) has been perceived as a succession of pedal structures connected in a disjunct, conjunct and nested manner, also positioned as to build a sinuous and arched drama. It starts from a rhythmic

impulse and returns to it. A sequence of colors, degrees of density, fundamental sound alternation are the actors of the narration, euphony taken to the border of sterile beauty that seems to be the author's direction, his creative goal. The author uses with aesthetic awareness the spectral, repetitive and textural heterophonic virtues of writers. The audition is supported by the diversity of sonic impulses and also by a coherent pattern marked by comebacks to symmetrical points.

His musicological debut that took place at the same time (1982) with an analytical study of Ștefan Niculescu's 2nd *Symphony* (cited since then in all studies about the great author) reveals a true scholar having solid knowledge of musical technique and a rigorous, systematic and synthetic style – musicological qualities confirmed in his later studies that showed a preference for articles featuring portraits of artists. It is a genre promoted by Dănceanu, to which he added the literary-reflexive style. The sharpness of observation and virtues of his new narrative style were revealed with articulated eloquence in describing Doina Rotaru's compositional attitude through freedom of expression and a flexible non-formalized technique (Dănceanu, 1983, pp. 13-16).

COMPOSITION	MUSICOLOGY
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• structuralism and music formalization – <i>Rocada lui Ianus</i>, op. 2, 1978</li> <li>• Instrumental theatre – <i>Allegory, Septet for brass instruments</i>, op. 3, 1979</li> <li>• extension of sound sources – <i>Archeus for violin and tape</i>, op. 5, 1981</li> <li>• heterophony textures, elements of indeterminacy – <i>In memoriam Lucian Blaga for a capella choir</i>, op. 6, 1981</li> <li>• in order of fragments, the principle of archetype, using the voice of instrumentalists – <i>Angulus ridet</i>, op. 7, 1981</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• exploring the world of higher harmonics – <i>To peace</i>, op. 10, poem for deep voice and piano (Nichita Stănescu), 1982</li> <li>• sharp indeterminacy, suggestion of music under structuring – <i>Ossie, trio for oboe, clarinet and bassoon</i>, op. 9, 1982</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>2nd Symphony by Ștefan Niculescu</i>, 1982</li> <li>• <i>Medallion – Doru Popovici</i>, 1982</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• new sonorities/traditional forms in reconsidered patterns – <i>Quasifuga</i>, op. 11, 1983</li> <li>• instrumental theatre – <i>Quasiconcerto for clarinet and ensemble</i>, op. 12</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Myriam Marbe – Portrait</i>, 1983</li> <li>• <i>Liana Alexandra</i>, 1983</li> <li>• <i>Șerban Nichifor</i>, 1983</li> <li>• <i>Doina Nemțeanu-Rotaru</i>, 1983</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Adrian Rațiu</i>, 1984</li> <li>• <i>Oratio II by Călin Ioachimescu</i>, 1984</li> </ul>

Table 1 Liviu Dănceanu – period 1978-1984. Music composition vs Musicology<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Retrieved from <http://www.liviudanceanu-archaeus.ro/scores.html>

### 3. 1985 – 1989. *Archaeus* experience

Setting up the ensemble *Archaeus* (1985) proved to be the focal point of Liviu Dănceanu's creative destiny. The name is symbolic, reflecting the author's earlier thoughts on the origin of the artistic and musical act. Understood as the essence of all things, the prototype of all things and beings, as a vital force, the archetype receives basic virtues of creation from the abstract world and brings them into concrete existence under the pressure of the impulse of creation and interpretation. "The archetype principle" is that of gradual configuration of the form from the fundamental sound and the flashing appearances. It dominated Dănceanu's aesthetics, who owed this idea to Constantin Noica (present in the commentary to the posthumous novel of the same title by Mihai Eminescu). By getting involved into the professional interpretation of modern music (for 4 years and a half up to 1990, he had 56 concerts in Romania), Liviu Dănceanu embarked on the adventure of understanding new composition that had an impact on his personal style, which underwent several successive experiments inspired by the scores of the time and by the instrumental practice of his ensemble.

FLORILEGIUM, op. 17– 18 instrumental voices (1985)

PROTOCANTUS, op. 18 – 5 performers (1985)

QUASIPOSTLUDIUM (ADDENDA), op. 19 – guitar (1985)

GLASS-MUSIK, op. 20 – 5 performers (1985)

QUASITOCATA, op. 21 – string(s) and tape (1985)

RHYMES FOR ARCHAEUS, op. 22 – 2-8 performers (1986)

ENTRATA, op. 23 – clarinet (1986)

DUETTO, op. 24 – violin and cello (1986)

ARIA 1, op. 25 – percussion (1986)

ARIA 2, op. 26 – bassoon and tape (1986)

TERZETTO, op. 27 – bassoon, violin and cello (1986)

ARIA 3, op. 28 – piano (1986)

QUARTETTO, op. 29 – no. 1 – clarinet, bassoon, violin and cello (1986)

QUINTETTO, op. 29 – no. 2 – clarinet, bassoon, percussion, violin and cello (1986)

ARIA 4, op. 30 – violin (1986)

SESTETTO, op. 31 – clarinet, bassoon, percussion, piano, violin and cello (1986)

ARIA 5, op. 32 – cello (1986)

SEPTETTO, op. 33 – clarinet, bassoon, percussion, piano, guitar, violin and cello
ARIA 6, op. 34 – guitar (1986)
ARIA 7, op. 35 – mandolin (1986)
OCTETTO, op. 36 – clarinet, bassoon, percussion, piano, guitar, mandolin, violin and cello (1986)
ARIA 8, op. 37 – clarinet (1986)
QUASIOPERA, op. 38 musical action in two acts for 8 players (1986)
THE FORREST SINGS, op. 39 – film music (1987)
THE SONG OF WOOD, op. 40, no. 1 – film music (1987)
THE SONG OF METAL, op. 40, no. 2 – film music (1987)
MUSIC TOYS, op. 41, no. 1 – film music (1988)
THE ORGAN, op. 41, no. 2 – film music (1988)
STAIRS, op. 42, no. 1 – film music (1988)
MUSICAL PICNIC, op. 42, no. 2 – film music (1988)
THE PIANO, op. 42, no. 3 – film music (1989)
THE INCURSION, op. 43, no. 1 – film music (1989)
PLANS OF ATTACK, op. 43, no. 2 – film music (1989)

Table 2 Liviu Dănceanu – Musical creation 1985-1989

*Quasiopera*, op. 38 (fig. 2) opens a series of new experimental works; it was composed in 1986. It is a creation without words for 8 instrumentalists playing instrumental theatre and using their voices. A parable of human existence, *Quasiopera* was written on 24 numbers and 5 genre types: instrumental solos (arias, fig. 3); recitative for 3-7 singers, ensembles for 2-8 instrumentalists, choirs for 6-8 voices, and introductory song for clarinet solo. It suggests unusual ways of sound production, original ways of sonic creation. Extra musical sources – stones clanging, gongs immersed in water, sirens made by the author – are combined with traditional sources – Romanian, Indian, African folklore (Stoenescu, 1988).

#### **4. Retrievals I (1988-1994). Byzantine music**

The change of regime in Romania found Dănceanu discovering Byzantine music. Starting with 1988, *Archaeus* launched a new stylistic line, interposing in concerts works by Dimitrie Suceveanu, Domețian Vlahul, Nectarie Frimu, Macarie Ieromonahul, Anton Pann (the adapted instrumental version/subtly arranged by the conductor). New sound and spiritual ambience

inspired the composer's creative style (*Chinonic* for chamber orchestra, 1994), saving the Byzantine paradigm in the personal archive of sound and expressive symbols, with returns in various combinations of style in works such as *5' of Millenium*, op. 98 (2005), *Hexaih*, op. 147 (2012).

*Prologo*  
(tape - music)

1) sintetizator (de obicei marciã sau model de fabricã)!

2) se schimbã programul sintetizatorului

Fig. 2 Liviu Dănceanu, *Quasiopera*, op. 38, *Prologo*

nr. 7: *Aria 2, op. 26*

Fig. 3 Liviu Dănceanu, *Quasiopera*, op. 38, *Aria 2*

### 5. Retrievals II (from 1995). Composition – interpretation – musicology

A combination of creative and interpretative interests led to a new direction beginning with 1992, when the *Archaeus* ensemble was launched worldwide in contemporary music festivals. The composition orders received from organising institutions or musical ensembles such as *Musica Nova* (Alicante), *Composers Concordance* (New York), *DePaul University*



(Chicago), *Cleveland Chamber Symphony*, *Concorde* (Dublin) were proof of composer Liviu Dănceanu's international recognition. During that period, the musician discovered a world of sound art existing alongside postmodernism, focused on the recovery and/or reintegration of tradition. The experience of the West was the impulse to imagine musical narrations illustrating a diachrony of styles. Therefore, cycle *History* (*History 1*, op. 71 – bassoon, cello and tape, 1997; *History 2*, op. 77 – oboe, clarinet, bassoon, percussion, piano, violin, 1999; *History-Rhapsody*, op. 75 – orchestra, 1999) continued with similar opera that dominated the composer's latest 10 years.

Liviu Dănceanu  
(1998)

History 2\*, op. 75  
for chamber ensemble

*Praeludium* [5]

[5]

[10]

[15]

6 (D=152)

\*) This work was commissioned by "Sesiomusica Festival '78" - Galati, 1976

Fig. 4 Liviu Dănceanu, *History 2*, op. 75, *Praeludium*

*History 2*, op. 75 (1998) was written for a chamber ensemble made of oboe, clarinet, bassoon, keyboards, violin, cello, and a wide range of percussion instruments (fig. 4). The work was created as a history of musical genre/styles, “rewritten” using modern perspective or vocabulary. The progress of its stages – **Prelude; Organum; Motetus; Canon; Choral; Menuetto; Impromptus; Textures; Musique repetitive; Postludium** – shows us the reconsidered form, personal reflection and interpretation of historically acknowledged styles.

At the end of the 90s, Liviu Dănceanu started a period of summarizing, achievements and innovation of his conception of music. *Eseuri implozive (alpha)* [Implosive essays (alpha)], 1998; *Eseuri implozive (beta)* [Implosive essays (beta)], 2001; *Introducere în epistemologia muzicii* [Introduction to the epistemology of music], 2003; *Cartea cu dansuri* [The book of dances], 2004; *Eseuri implozive (gamma)* [Implosive essays (gamma)], 2005; *Anotimpurile muzicii. Primăvara* [Seasons of music. Spring], 2006; *Atelier 04-08* [Workshop 04-08], 2008; *Apocalipsa muzicii savante* [The apocalypse of scholarly music], 2009; *Jurnal parțial sonor* [Partially audible diary], 2009; *Jurnal de citit ascultând muzică* [Diary to read while listening to music], 2009; *Seminarii în cheia Do* [C-Key Seminars], 2009; *De Musicae Natura*, 2012 – are just a few titles.

The paper *Introducere în epistemologia muzicii* [Introduction to the epistemology of music] (Dănceanu, 2003) is to be noted as the author suggests a new theory of musical knowledge, mainly structural-systemic, reflexive-phenomenological and only implicitly stylistic. Along the special couples of notions structuring the organization of music, we may observe the way in which Liviu Dănceanu arranges the history of music. The author establishes 5 stages: 1. *Initial phase*, pre-historic dominated by natural sonic expression; 2. *Synthetic phase*, the co-existence of several worlds that regulated themselves based on a paradigmatic mythological model; *Subordination phase* dominant, from the poliphony of Renaissance to Romanticism; 4. *Atomization phase*, language overlap characterized by anarchy (20<sup>th</sup> century); 5. *Maturity phase*, the interplay and mixture of styles (modern period).

## 6. Conclusions

“Music is only one road among others” said Xenakis. For Dănceanu, it remained the road he chose. His great bet was development through knowledge, creation and expression. The emphasized features of his art and musical studies about specific cultural features enhance the bet while he sets himself apart from a world that sometimes brings him sorrow. “Willingly or not, we are all pensioners in a reservation of modern music. Composers (may be more numerous than ever), performers (histrionic or authentic), a public (as to fit at the last supper); a rare type of artist, bizarre or just exotic populating

what we optimistically call – a reservation, pessimistically – a ghetto or neutrally – a barrack.” (Dănceanu, 2003, p. 127)

The creation and the musicology of Liviu Dănceanu are built in a highly elevated cultural space shaping a world in itself, a world of new designs and considerations of the practices and musical events recorded in history. Therefore, he develops a new theory of the art of sound (*Introduction to musical epistemology*) or rebuilds old genres through a series of *quasi* compositions. “Vector-based development of musical history” appears in compositions such as the *History* cycle or becomes a topic of intense debate in the study *Scholarly music and the end of its history*. By experiencing and assimilating the avant-garde, Dănceanu goes beyond it at the same time keeping its vocabulary and ways of expression in order to fight by means of sound and word for the cultural, aesthetic and ethical values of modern musical art.

## References

- Crețu, V. (1985). Liviu Dănceanu. *Muzica*, 3/1985, 16-21.
- Dănceanu, L. (2012). *De Musicae Natura*. București: Editura Universității Naționale de Muzică.
- Dănceanu, L. (2007). Muzica savantă și sfârșitul istoriei sale. În Rădulescu, A. (coord.), *Estetica muzicală. Un altfel de manual* (63-124). București: Editura Universității Naționale de Muzică.
- Dănceanu, L. (2007), Încercare în naratologia muzicală. În Rădulescu, A. (coord.), *Estetica muzicală. Un altfel de manual* (342-366). București: Editura Universității Naționale de Muzică.
- Dănceanu, L. (2003). *Introducere în epistemologia muzicii*. București: Editura Muzicală.
- Dănceanu, L. (1984). Adrian Rațiu – Portrait. *Muzica*, 1/1984, 41-49.
- Dănceanu, L. (1983). Doina Nemțeanu Rotaru. *Muzica*, 12/1983, 13-16.
- Dănceanu, L. (1983). Șerban Nichifor. *Muzica*, 12/1983, 17-21.
- Dănceanu, L. (1983). Liana Alexandra. *Muzica*, 11/1983, 8-12.
- Dănceanu, L. (1982). *Simfonia a II-a* de Ștefan Niculescu. *Muzica*, 4/1982, 15-21.
- Georgescu, C. D. (2015). Contribuția generațiilor vârstnice la împlinirea muzicii românești. *Muzica*, 3-4/2015, 30-42.
- Popovici, F. (1988). *Marea Unire – Concert pentru percuție, instrument solist și orchestră* de Liviu Dănceanu. *Muzica*, 12/1988, 19-20.
- Sandu-Dediu, V. (2002). *Muzica românească între 1944 – 2000*. București: Editura Muzicală.
- Stoenescu, M. (1988). *Quasiopera* de Liviu Dănceanu. *Muzica*, 6/1988, 12-15.