

Iconic Images in the Aurel Stroe's Concertos

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Abstract: Among the original images which distinguish Aurel Stroe's creation from a stylistic point of view the most representative are: "sonorous objects", "the dissipative fugue", "the matrix-chord", "the separate evolution", "the carnival", "the secret harmony". The esthetic explication of these concepts integrated in the musical discourse and their connection with the sonorous expressive level offer multiple satisfactions to those who study in depth Aurel Stroe's musical creation.

Keywords: iconic, concerts, discourse

1. Introduction

*"Pensive, with my hands behind my back/
I walk along the railroad/The straightest road/Possible.
From behind, at great speed/A train is approaching/
Which has never heard of me
This train – as Old Zeno is my witness/Will never reach me,
Because I will always be ahead of it/Ahead of things that do not think.
Or even if brutally/It will run me over,
There will always be a man/Who will walk in front of it
Pensive/And with his hand behind his back.
Like I am now/In front of the dark monster
Which is approaching at a terrifying speed
And which will never reach me/Never".*

(Sorescu, *The Road*) (my translation)

The Romanian modern school of creation was supported at the beginning by George Enescu, Paul Constantinescu and Mihail Jora, then by classical names at national level such as Anatol Vieru, Tiberiu Olah, Ștefan Niculescu and Aurel Stroe. This is the context in which the great Romanian composer Aurel Stroe worked until he went abroad, where he found the peace and concentration necessary to carry on his complex activity. In one of his numerous publications, Iosif Sava lists the personality of Aurel Stroe among the composers who fought against the communist regime (Sava, 1998, p. 57), through his work *Orestia II*¹.

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¹ In the same spirit of opposition against the dictatorship we can also mention Anatol Vieru's *Pedeapsa* [The Punishment].

The three creations which mark the end of his career, dated 1990-2001 are *Concert for violin and a soloist ensemble*, *Concert for saxophone and big band* and *Concert for harmonica and soloist ensemble*. They offer a unitary perspective over the stylistic features of Aurel Stroe's symphonic composition in the final years of his career, which represent the peak of his creative maturity. The specificity of *his symphonic creation* can be highlighted by extracting and analyzing certain iconic images in his creation, given that his entire composition art is based on revolutionary creative concepts in the music history such as the composition including several incommensurate cultural paradigms, or the complex polyphony at the level of the instruments in the symphonic ensemble.

2. Iconic images

Among the original images which distinguish Aurel Stroe's creation from a stylistic point of view the most representative are: "sonorous objects", "the dissipative fugue", "the matrix-chord", "the separate evolution", "the carnival", "the secret harmony". The esthetic explication of these concepts integrated in the musical discourse and their connection with the sonorous expressive level offer multiple satisfactions to those who study in depth Aurel Stroe's musical creation.

The *The Concert for Saxophone and Big Orchestra "Prairie, Prières"* was finished in Mannheim on 5 May 1993, located chronologically in the middle of the three works of the same genre highlighted in this paper. It represents the expression of a new perspective on concert symphonic music in the musical art of the 20th century. The concert is impressive through its technical and stylistic features, but especially through the inner atmosphere it creates and to which it gives a sonorous shape.

We notice the general architecture, made up of five parts, representing a number of multiple correspondences, both spiritual and of another nature: "the vegetal and animal world is dominated by the pentagonal symmetry of gold, based on a dynamic periodicity (on the structuring of the increasing pulsations of a logarithmic spiral), different from the hexagonal symmetry (which reflects an inert, simplistic equilibrium)" (Solomon, 1986, p. 69). The musical form, its architectural construction, does not refer strictly to the shape of the construction, but it also involves the concrete consequences generated by a certain interior formatting within the work of art ("the shape of a thing is an incontrollable reality, it can be perceived, but it cannot be measured or weighted" (Boutot, 1996, p. 5). The author signaled the fact that this is rather a concert symphony for saxophone and big orchestra.

The first iconic element which draws our attention is the cosmogonic one ("... des formes naissent dans un milieu homogene..." [shapes are born in a homogenous environment (my translation)] – a new esthetic common place as

compared to the previous perspective expressed in the introduction, defining the same intention of technically and expressively coagulating the implications of a certain musical structure), with a first subsection, *Multimobile – Prairie I – Le Carnaval d’arlequin – Prairie II*. The term “multimobile” denotes the superposition of several mobile sections, ensuring a maximally complex superpositional polyphony, which requires an investigation of the terms intertextuality, polyphony and superpositional complexity.

A complex musical score for a symphony, featuring multiple staves for various instruments. The score is written in 3/4 time and includes a key signature of one flat. The instruments listed are: FL. 1, FL. 2, OB. 1 (two parts), OB. 2 (two parts), 2 CLAR. sib, FG. 1, FG. 2, Cmi. 1, Cmi. 2, Perc. IV, and Perc. V. The score is characterized by dense, overlapping musical lines, particularly in the woodwind and string sections, illustrating the concept of 'multiphonics' mentioned in the caption. The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, dynamics (e.g., 'p', 'f'), and articulation marks.

Fig. 1 Multiphonics

The mobile sections are each of them “signed” by certain melodic and rhythmical archetypes which define them. It is the archetype which supports, from the point of view of the internal energy, each of these routes that, given their diversity, need a spiritual substance to coagulate them, able to ensure the functioning of each individual mobile section. The multimobiles reveal an

aesthetic analysis of the detail which creates – collectively – a unitary well-organized universe.

The image displays two systems of musical notation for the piece 'Multimobile'. The first system covers the dynamic range from *cres.* to *do*, and the second system covers from *poco* to *poco*. Each system includes staves for Vln. I, Vln. II, Vla., Cell., and Bass. The notation features wavy lines representing melodic movement and specific dynamic markings. The first system includes the instruction 'otez les sourdines individuellement' (remove the mutes individually) for each instrument. The second system includes the instruction '1 min 30'' at the top right.

Fig. 2 Multimobile

In the same category of music phenomena as the mobile sections we also find the lines with “separate evolution” at the end of the Concert for soloist harmonica (postlude); the mobile section performed by the cello (Giusto) creates at that moment the separation of the musical discourse on several levels, with no connection among them.

Linguistically, we are reminded of the Vauquois’s “context-independent grammar” researched as: a paradoxical discipline which aims at making grammar notions more efficient outside the preconceptions imposed by the context. Such an extra-musical model demonstrates that the modern claims concerning the independence of multiple levels present within the same work of art are both possible and manageable.

Aurel Stroe illustrates in the first concert section the cosmogonic idea of defining the being as a “homogenous core”; if homogeneity is totally suggested by the agreement of eighteen voices, then the interior conflicts and tectonic movements in the evolution of the being are rendered plastically by the four overlapping layers of mobile sections resulting from the natural superposition of the four scores of the bow instruments.

After their ample diversification, in the last segment before the following program section, the mobile sections are regrouped into a multimobile complex. At this moment the author requests “gommer doucement les derniers elements – “les survivants” – du multimobile” [“gently delete the last – surviving – elements of the multimobile” (my translation)].

We can see the composer himself resorting to metaphorical, symbolic descriptions of certain concrete musical realities. The second subsection, *Prairie I* can afford a comparative analysis of the expositive process (manifest in *Prairie I*) and the reprise one in *Prairie II*. The third subsection, *Le carnaval d’arlequin* belongs to the comical area, of the reverse symbol, whose meaning is distorted; the Harlequin is another way of dissimulating expressiveness by converting it to a different area: the opposite one.

The second part brings forth the idea of rarefaction (*Rarefaction du multimobile*): in fact, an inner development, an implosion of the first subsection of the first part (“Multimobile”), in the sense of researching their concealed universe, of severing the implicit ties among the elements which form the multimobile, so as to allow the access to the substratum reality of the work of art. It contains the “secret harmony” – a musical fragment which enciphers the sonorous archetypes of the entire work of art: in fact, it is a choir piece for eight voices, with two harmonic layers with a temporal delay of one and a half lines. Each chord structure, along with the immediately following one and its complementary one, make up an ascending scale which subsumes all the sounds in the major or minor sixth (C-A sharp, D-B, E flat – C flat, E sharp – C, F-D, G flat – E flat).

II. FUGUE DISSIPATIVE

ALLEGRO GIOVIALE
♩ = 120 TEMPO GIUSTO 1

The score is divided into three systems. The first system includes Arpa, Violas, and Basses. The second system includes Arpa, Vln., and Bass. The third system includes Acc., Clar. Basso (sb), Perc. I, Perc. II, Arpa, Violon, Violon, Cellos, and Basses. The score features various dynamics such as *ff*, *mf*, *f*, *f* *sonoro*, and *p*. It includes performance instructions like *pizz.*, *arco*, and *rit.*. A section marked 'A' is indicated by a box around the first staff of the third system. The piece concludes with the instruction *S = 2/4 ; R = 2/4 ; C = 3/4 ; G = 3/4 ; V = 3/4*.

Fig. 3 Fugue dissipative

The “secret harmony” is a symbol for a secondary level, with profound meanings, which are not revealed in the concrete layer of the sonorous work of

art. “The symbolism marks the explosion of language into something else than itself” (Ricoeur, 1999, p. 67). The secret harmony results more from the degradation of the choral pieces in the first part of the concerts, degradation which affects firstly the metro-rhythmic effort (which is the cause of the mismatch between the two levels).

The third part presents another iconic image of his creation, maybe the most beautiful, the most profound and plastic one: *Ascension vers une melodie lontaine*: the descending scale is readjusted by a systematic ascending effort – not only at the sonorous level... “Une melodie lontaine” is the symbol of the interior ideal² (Plato, 1995, p. 52). The melody is represented only as an ideal, it is not explicitly present in the work.

Through the programmatic discourse, we find in the fourth part *Un reste non assimilé*: “(...Ondines)”, which resumes the discourse of bow instruments (cello and contrabass), the only ones that survived the rarefication that affected all the mobile parts in the deep structure, eliminating them from the acoustic space. We obtain three overlapping levels. And the last part refers to *Un dernier reste* (in fact, a soloist intervention of the soprano saxophone), through which the concert becomes a monologue, an inarticulate musical manifestation. This phenomenon of the *Rest* reminds us of a modern modality to finish the musical discourse – open creation.

3. Conclusions

The humanity and discretion that stem from each of Aurel Stroe’s compositions made him a solitary personality in the history of Romanian music, a man who avoided the public exploitation of his person, an artist who only promoted ideas through his music, and not his creation as such³ (Noica, 1991, p. 228). This is because “a man’s personality is the object of faith, not of knowledge...” (Ionescu, 1995, p. 47) (my translation).

The man Aurel Stroe always supported the artist fully manifest through interior qualities – the guarantee of the artistic value of the products created by the artist’s spirituality. In the absence of this interior foundation of his creation, his music would not have the depth we notice each time we listen to it. J. W. Goethe noted, in his writings: “if the proportion of the personality’s interior harmony disappears, even the special qualities can be darkened, suspended or erased” (Goethe, 1972, p. 36).

² „Am iubit lucruri tot mai înalte, lăsând mereu în urmă ceea ce până atunci iubisem atât de mult și acum ne găsim în fața unei frumuseți pe care am dorit-o dar, în nici un sens omenesc al cuvântului, n-o putem avea”. [We have loved higher things, always leaving behind what we had loved so much before, and now we are in front of a beauty we have always wanted but which we cannot have in any human sense of the word. – my translation] (Plato, 1995, p. 52).

³ „Tragicul românesc nu e prin explozie, e prin implozie. De aceea nu se discerne, ca tragic” [The Romanian tragic spirit is not an explosion, but an implosion. This is why it cannot be seen as tragic.] (Noica, 1991, p. 228).

It is also important to mention the way Romanian spirituality is reflected in Aurel Stroe's musical creation, because we can claim he infuses in them a deep substratum – difficult to notice at first sight, complicated to detect in the complexity of the message conveyed – of profound Romanian spirit and culture, and, in a broader sense, of humanism in general.

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